Anaheim Ducks
655385 Ducks’ goalie Viktor Fasth stymies Avalanche, 3-0
655386 Fasth’s act hit on road, too
655387 Ducks not impressed with their fast start
655388 Ducks pick up defenseman Lovejoy in trade
655389 Final: Ducks 3, Avalanche 0

Boston Bruins
655390 Brad Marchand sidelined against Canadiens
655391 Bruins beat Canadiens, 2-1
655392 Brad Marchand out, Ryan Spooner in
655393 Game 9: Bruins at Canadiens preview
655394 Jamie Tardif’s itinerary hits hotbeds
655395 Shawn Thornton rating to go
655396 Bruins find right mix
655397 Bruins make switch, come up with win
655398 Bruins edge Habs, 2-1
655399 Marchand out, Spooner to make debut as Bruins tackle Habs

Buffalo Sabres
655400 Regier says any change to Sabres won’t include Ruff
655401 Sabres notebook: Faceoffs get extra attention in practice
655402 Ruff: ‘We need to win now’
655403 Darcy on possible changes: ‘It won’t be the coach’
655404 Miller by the numbers: Four straight four-goal games for the first time since ’06
655405 Ruff: ‘We need to win now’ (with post-practice audio)
655406 Day off shelled, defense thin at practice

Calgary Flames
655407 Irving ready to seize the opportunity as Flames’ starter
655408 Johnson: Kiprusoff’s day-to-day tag should ease the fears of Flames fans somewhat
655409 Older and wiser Taylor knows what to expect, unlike in his NHL debut nearly five years ago
655410 Behind the Taylor signing: How the Flames front office sprung into action
655411 Game Day: Flames at Blue Jackets
655412 Several Flames announcements made by Jay Feaster while in Columbus
655413 Flames’ Taylor gets another NHL crack
655414 Flames’ Irving gets big chance to be go-to goalie
655415 Flames’ Miikka Kiprusoff needs support in goal crease
655416 Calgary Flames sign Abbotsford Heat goalie Danny Taylor to two way deal after Miikka Kiprusoff injury

Chicago Blackhaws
655417 Thursday’s matchup: Blackhaws at Coyotes
655418 Day of reckoning for Coyotes’ Torres
655419 Will Hossa, Hawks see a ‘new’ Torres?

Colorado Avalanche
655420 Ryan O’Reilly saga could see offer sheet come from Avalanche rival
655421 Aps appear listless in 3-0 home loss to Anaheim Ducks
655422 David Jones returns to Colorado Avalanche lineup against Anaheim

Columbus Blue Jackets
655423 Jackets demote Johansen to minors
655424 Blue Jackets notebook: Dubinsky is fined $10,000 but avoids suspension
655425 Blue Jackets, Flames at a glance

Dallas Stars
655426 Heika: In a must-win game, Stars rise to the occasion behind Jaromir Jagr’s clutch performance
655427 Oilers were a familiar foe for several young Stars
655428 Stars bench defenseman Goligoski; ‘Alex needs to get back to Alex’s level’
655430 Stars-Oilers, 9 p.m.; Will Edmonton’s highly drafted talent take over?

Detroit Red Wings
655431 Red Wings need to think outside the penalty box
655432 Man ordered: Stop selling memorabilia tied to Wings’ Pavel Datsyuk; trial date set
655433 Red Wings recognize penalties are a major problem
655434 Red Wings’ Jimmy Howard rests, will get relief one of these days
655435 Reeling Red Wings gearing up for another showdown with Blues
655436 Judge orders retailer to stop trading on Datsyuk’s name, likeness
655437 Red Wings powerless again in loss to Flames
655438 Red Wings taking too many penalties, and doing a poor job of killing them
655439 Red Wings’ Jan Mursak starts practicing with team, hoping to return in a couple of weeks
655440 Red Wings give Jimmy Howard a break in practice; Mike Babcock still contemplating starter for Thursday
655441 Detroit Red Wings need to score more goals

Edmonton Oilers
655442 Tail: Stauffer’s always ‘on’ with Oilers
655443 Oilers’ Arcobello makes a big entrance to the NHL
655444 Nugent-Hopkins joins injury brigade
655445 Arcobello pinchhitting for Oilers centre Nugent-Hopkins in first NHL game
655446 Time for Tambellini to get pro-active again for an NHL centre
655447 Oilers can’t use excuses — and they aren’t — despite weirdly centre-depleted lineup
655448 And down goes another Oiler centre…Anton Lander
655449 Nugent-Hopkins joins injury brigade
655450 Arcobello pinchhitting for Oilers centre Nugent-Hopkins in first NHL game
655451 Sam Gagner the lone starting centre still standing for the Edmonton Oilers
655452 Jaromir Jagr provides veteran presence to Dallas Stars
655453 Dallas Stars beat Edmonton Oilers repeats recurring theme
655454 Injuries pave the way for Mark Arcobello to join the Edmonton Oilers
655455 Dallas Stars’ Jamie Benn developing chemistry with linemate Jaromir Jagr
655456 Ryan Nugent-Hopkins’ shoulder injury means Edmonton Oilers’ injury train grows by one
655457 20 Questions with Edmonton Oiler Ryan Smyth

Florida Panthers
655458 Big games become the norm for Florida Panthers in lockout-shortened season
655459 Panthers hope to reap benefits from working overtime
655460 Preview: Panthers vs. Flyers, 7 p.m. Thursday

Los Angeles Kings
655461 Kings make player moves, say more could come
655462 February 6 practice quotes: Andrew Campbell
655463 Loktionov to New Jersey
655464 February 6 practice quotes: Rob Scuderi
655465 February 6 practice quotes: Darryl Sutter
655466 Campbell to Kings; Bodnarchuk to Manchester
655467 Waking up with the Kings: February 6
Minnesota Wild
655468 Wild rookie Coyle: Upward bound ... in a hurry
655469 Canuck's Schroeder thrilled to be home
655470 Preview: Vancouver at Wild
655471 Wild breaks up top line for the first time
655472 Minnesota Wild: For Jordan Schroeder, a special homecoming
655473 Minnesota Wild like what they see of Mike Rupp, starting with his size
655474 Minnesota Wild: For Charlie Coyle's family, home debut will have to do
655475 Minnesota Wild: Rookie Charlie Coyle replaces Dany Heatley on top line for a day

Montreal Canadiens
655476 Dave Stubbs: Not a classic matchup
655477 Lack of execution hurt Habs: Therrien
655478 Bruins rally for 2-1 win over Habs
655479 About last night ...
655480 Galchenyuk wins Molson Cup for January
655481 New outdoor rink brings back memories for GM Bergevin

New Jersey Devils
655483 Preview: Devils vs. L.A. Kings
655484 Nick Spaling's diary: End of road trip means its time to set up apartment
655485 Nashville Predators find wins in line tinkering
655486 Josh Cooper's hat trick
655487 Western Conference update
655488 Nashville Predators' Kevin Klein stays out of box with skill, savvy
655489 Predators' newest tough guy finds a new way to agitate

New York Islanders
655490 Devils acquire center Andrei Loktionov from Los Angeles Kings
655491 Coach Pete DeBoer: Devils getting closer to peak form
655492 Devils are winning, so Ilya Kovalchuk's scoring slump isn't a concern

New York Rangers
655493 Tavares Plans to Take the Islanders Back to the Top
655494 Struggling Rangers stay true to identity
655495 Islanders need to be desperate against Rangers
655496 Tortorella, in a Mellow Mood
655497 John Tortorella not afraid to make changes to NY Rangers lineup after a 3-1 loss to the Devils
655498 Struggling Rangers stay true to identity
655499 NHL: Rangers playing too 'careful'
655500 Chris Kreider adjusting quickly to NHL and Big Apple
655501 Islanders at Rangers tonight
655502 Tortorella explains "scared" and takes some blame for the power play

NHL
655503 Pat Hickey: Sabres GM Regier has seen it all

Ottawa Senators
655504 Post-game report: Quotes, notes and numbers
655505 Ottawa Senators NHL game day vs. Carolina Hurricanes
655506 Ottawa Senators defensemen Mike Lundin returns to practice after breaking finger in off-season
655507 Ottawa Senators captain Daniel Alfredsson likes what he sees out of teammate Jakob Silfverberg
655508 Ottawa Senators defenceman Erik Karlsson sporting new look this season
655509 Ottawa Senators defensemen Erik Karlsson adding more to his game this season

Philadelphia Flyers
655510 Flyers' Simmonds feels fine after practice, but return to action remains unknown
655511 Flyers' Wayne Simmonds feels fine after practice, but return to action remains unknown
655512 NHL power rankings: Philadelphia Flyers stay at No.17 spot
655513 His wrists healthy, Claude Giroux wishes his game was the same
655514 Flyers defensemen Kimmo Timonen in talks for extension
655515 Timonen, Flyers near pact
655516 Simmonds back at practice
655517 Giroux motivation for Rinaldo fight
655518 Simmonds: No grudge with Erskine
655519 Flyers scoOP: Foster has healthy respect for his former team
655520 Timonen likely to get contract extension
655521 Sources: Flyers close to extension with Timonen
655522 Flyers' Simmonds practices; return date uncertain
655523 Flyers' left-wing look integral in stifling Lightning
655524 Flyers Notes: Bryzgalov won't share preparation secret
655525 Flyers: Simmonds eyes return to lineup

Phoenix Coyotes
655526 Ray Whitney says league, not Don Maloney, made call not to meet contract expectations
655527 Phoenix Coyotes face tougher foes ahead in Chicago Blackhaws, San Jose Sharks

Pittsburgh Penguins
655528 Starkey: About those quiet Consol crowds
655529 Capitals' Ovechkin in mysterious slide
655530 Pens trade Lovejoy to Anaheim, recall Upper St. Clair's Reese
655531 So far so good for two Penguins rookies
655532 Penguins recall Reese after trading Lovejoy
655533 Penguins shake up defense by trading Lovejoy, recalling Reese

St Louis Blues
655534 BLUES VS. DETROIT
655535 Blues deal with identity crisis while preparing for Detroit
655536 Hitchcock uses Blues' past-meltdown practice to teach
655537 Blues try to regroup after defensive meltdown

Tampa Bay Lightning
655538 Tampa Bay Lightning expecting more low-scoring games
655539 Tampa Bay Lightning start road trip with loss to Flyers
655540 Reality hits Lightning; Stamkos birthday milestone
655541 Preview: Lightning at Devils

Toronto Maple Leafs
655542 Leafs and Jets both pushing to rebuild on the fly
655543 Carlyle: Prickly to prodigal son

Vancouver Canucks
655544 Canucks' Keith Ballard makes all the little plays
655545 Canucks' Cory Schneider makes return to the nets
655546 Kesler: Range of motion better, but shoulder strength 'isn't there at all'
655547 Wild juggle lines, trade for giant, hold players only meeting to avoid collapse
The Ducks’ winning streak climbed to four games Wednesday as rookie goaltender Viktor Fasth continued his unexpected dominance in a 3-0 victory at Colorado.

Fasth, who began the abbreviated season as a likely seldom-used backup to Jonas Hiller, is 4-0 as a starter after keeping the Avalanche scoreless on 31 shots.

"The most important thing is a win and a good start to the trip," Fasth said. "It's special to get a shutout, a nice little bonus. I'm just trying to do my best."

Opening a six-game trip that will feature stops at St. Louis, Chicago and Detroit over 11 days, the Ducks charged to a 2-0 first-period lead en route to becoming 3-0-1 on the road.

Defenseman Sheldon Souray, after scoring the deciding goal Monday to hand San Jose its first loss, fired a shot from the blue line past goaltender Semyon Varlamov 6 minutes 20 seconds into the game.

The assist by Ryan Getzlaf extended the center’s scoring streak to five games.

"We are finding good chemistry and settling into our roles," Souray said.

Saku Koivu scored a goal in his second game in a row, getting a tap-in on a five-on-three advantage with 4:18 left in the first period.

"It's a good start," Koivu said. "I'm still surprised, but I'm enjoying it."

Fasth, a 30-year-old rookie from Sweden, was awarded with his first back-to-back start after limiting high-powered San Jose to one goal with 25 saves in Monday's triumph.

"He's playing really, really well," Coach Bruce Boudreau said. "Our goalie stole a victory for us. He played great."

In lifting the Ducks atop the Pacific Division, Fasth became the first NHL goaltender over age 30 to win his first four games. He is the first since San Jose's Nolan Schaefer in 2005 to debut with four straight victories.

Asked about Fasth’s role on the depth chart, Boudreau said, "It doesn't hurt, and if he keeps playing like that. . . Hiller will be playing soon, and doing the same thing, I hope."

Defenseman Francois Beauchemin, playing in his 500th game, extended the lead to 3-0 nearly midway through the second period.

During the game, the Ducks announced they acquired fifth-year defensemen Ben Lovejoy from the Pittsburgh Penguins in exchange for a fifth-round pick in the 2014 NHL draft.

The 6-foot-2, 215-pound Lovejoy, 28, is scoreless this season. His best season was 2010-11, when he had 17 points (three goals).

Earlier Wednesday, the Ducks moved Jordan Hendry to Norfolk, their minor league affiliate.

Pugmire reported from Los Angeles.
The Ducks (7-1-1) won their fourth in a row to start their six-game trip in style. Fasth, 30, became the first NHL goalie to win his first four games since Nolan Schaefer did it for San Jose in 2005.

Fasth again gave credit to the “guys battling in front of me.”

“They make it much easier for me to play back there,” he said. “I’m really enjoying playing for these guys. They’re incredible in front of me.”

Sheldon Souray gave Fasth the only margin he would need by scoring in his third consecutive game. Saku Koivu also added a first-period goal and Francois Beauchemin celebrated his 500th career game by ripping in a one-timer in the second.

Souray and Beauchemin have emerged as the Ducks’ shutdown pair on defense while also combining for six goals and a plus-13 in the first nine games.

“It’s always a plus,” Beauchemin said of the goals. “Shelly’s got obviously one of the hardest shots in the league. We’re playing well together.”

Fasth’s strong work earned him consecutive starts for the first time. Jonas Hiller figures to play when the Ducks have two sets of games on back-to-back nights upcoming but the Swede looks as if he is not ready to give up the net.

The decision on who to play is becoming harder for Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau. Or easier.

“He’s not making it neither,” Boudreau said. “He’s giving me confidence that I never knew I would have in him.”

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655387 Anaheim Ducks

Ducks not impressed with their fast start

By ERIC STEPHENS / ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER
DENVER – Surprising starts are often a good storyline early in a season and the Ducks are beginning to gain some attention in the hockey world for theirs.

If the Ducks had their druthers, they would prefer to stay off the radar for a while.

Article Tab: Free-agent pickup Ryan Getzlaf, left, is one of the catalysts for the Ducks’ hot start this season, but the players aren’t letting it go to their heads. “I don’t think they’re going to get caught up in it,” Coach Bruce Boudreau said.

“We’ve got to be a little sneaky here,” said Teemu Selanne, who has nine points in the first eight games. “That’s good. We don’t need that kind of pressure for ourselves.”

You would have to look far and wide beyond their faithful to find those who saw the Ducks as a playoff team after their 13th-place finish in the Western Conference last season.

But offseason acquisitions Daniel Winnik and Sheldon Souray have made an immediate impact while young forwards Kyle Palmieri and Nick Bonino are adding production and deepening their lineup past their stars.

The key, as they began a telling six-game trip, is not to rest on what they’ve accomplished to this point.

“The team’s playing well but we try to remind each that there’s no time to get satisfied,” Selanne said. “You just have to keep pushing and stay hungry and just try to reach another level.

“We can do it. That’s why we want to push ourselves.”

The Ducks’ position on the West Coast and their lack of regular exposure on national television often make it difficult for them to becoming the talking point of the NHL.

Once the lockout ended in mid-January, the focus on the Ducks centered on the status of potential unrestricted free agents Ryan Getzlaf and Corey Perry. But the talk now is about their best start since 2006-07 and a potential battle between Jonas Hiller and Viktor Fasth in goal.

“Don’t think they’re going to get caught up in it,” Coach Bruce Boudreau said. “About the only way to temper it is by losing. And I don’t want to do that. We don’t mind flying under the radar and just being a good, solid team.

“But we’d certainly love to win every game we play. It just so happens that attention comes with it.”

Selanne said it is on the team’s leaders to do the pushing.

“I think there’s still another level to reach,” he said. “Obviously, as a team, we’re playing well. When it comes to structure and game plan and system, I think we’re doing a good job.

“But I think every line can do a little better. I don’t think we’re still running on all cylinders.”

DEFENSEMAN ADDED

With Cam Fowler now on injured reserve because of an apparent head injury, the Ducks boosted their depth on defense by acquiring Ben Lovejoy from Pittsburgh for a 2014 fifth-round draft pick.

Lovejoy, who’ll turn 29 on Feb. 20, spent his first four-plus NHL seasons with the Penguins and played in 98 games. He appeared in three with Pittsburgh this season, recording no points and a minus-2 rating.

“We’ve liked Ben for a number of years and are happy to have him,” Ducks general manager Bob Murray said. “With the schedule in the West this season, we think we may need 10 or 11 defensemen when it’s all said and done.”

Fowler, who was injured Saturday when hit by the Kings’ Jarret Stoll, will miss the upcoming games this weekend at Dallas and St. Louis. The Ducks remain hopeful he will rejoin them next week.

LYDMAN SICK

Toni Lydman sat out Wednesday’s game because of flu symptoms and Jordan Hendry took his place in the lineup after the Ducks recalled the defenseman from Norfolk (AHL). Hendry played in the season opener in Vancouver before being sent down.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 02.07.2013
655388 Anaheim Ducks

Ducks pick up defenseman Lovejoy in trade

February 6th, 2013, 11:38 pm by Eric Stephens, Staff writer

DENVER — Not content with the current rotation of defensemen in the organization, the Ducks added to their depth on the blue line on Wednesday by acquiring Ben Lovejoy from the Pittsburgh Penguins for a 2014 fifth-round draft pick.

Lovejoy, 28, played in just three games for the Penguins this season and had been a healthy scratch as of late. The former three-year player at Dartmouth has played in 98 games with Pittsburgh over four-plus NHL seasons, compiling four goals and 21 assists along with 63 penalty minutes.

“With the schedule in the West this season, we think we may need 10 or 11 defensemen when it’s all said and done.”

Lovejoy is expected to meet up with the Ducks in Dallas on Thursday and be available for their game Friday against the Stars. Cam Fowler is currently on injured reserve with an upper-body injury and has already missed two games.

Fowler will also miss the upcoming games against Dallas and St. Louis but the Ducks are hoping that he will be able to join them next week for the remainder of their six-game road trip. He suffered an apparent head injury Saturday when he was drilled into the boards by Kings center Jarret Stoll.

Toni Lydman sat out his second game this season due to flu symptoms he incurred Wednesday morning. Jordan Hendry was recalled from Norfolk of the AHL and played in the Ducks’ 3-0 win over Colorado. Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau said he expected Lydman to be available for Friday’s game.
Marchand in the third period against Toronto. alongside Patrice Bergeron and Tyler Seguin. Campbell also filled in for Gregory Campbell replaced Marchand on the second line Wednesday night Marchand during a Bruins-Canadiens double-overtime game. Pacioretty Garden. On April 23, 2011, an injured Max Pacioretty took a swipe at against Montreal. On Oct. 27, 2011, Marchand fought P.K. Subban at TD Marchand has two goals and three assists in 15 regular-season games ice time.

Buffalo last Thursday. He has taken only 10 shots and is averaging 16:21 of Marchand has been one of the team's offensive dynamos. Through eight seasons, also is the first to win his first four NHL games since Nolan Schaefer did it for San Jose in 2005. He became the first netminder 30 years of age or older to win his first four as no other had won more than two.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 02.07.2013 655390 Boston Bruins

Brad Marchand sidelined against Canadiens

By Fluto Shinzawa
Globe Staff / February 6, 2013

MONTREAL — One of the accelerants of the Bruins-Canadiens firestorm was missing Wednesday night. Brad Marchand missed his first game of the season because of an undisclosed injury. Marchand was injured in the second period of Saturday’s 1-0 win in Toronto. He practiced at the Bell Centre Tuesday, but the left wing didn’t participate in Wednesday’s morning skate.

“We’re going to keep our fingers crossed that he’s in next game,” coach Claude Julien said. “He’s that close. It’s a matter of days here. It’s not as serious as most injuries, except that we’re being extra cautious early on in the season.”

Marchand has been one of the team’s offensive dynamos. Through eight games, Marchand had a team-leading five goals, including two against Buffalo last Thursday. He has taken only 10 shots and is averaging 16:21 of ice time.

Marchand has two goals and three assists in 15 regular-season games against Montreal. On Oct. 27, 2011, Marchand fought P.K. Subban at TD Garden. On April 23, 2011, an injured Max Pacioretty took a swipe at Marchand during a Bruins-Canadiens double-overtime game. Pacioretty cracked that the game was longer than Marchand’s nose.

Gregory Campbell replaced Marchand on the second line Wednesday night alongside Patrice Bergeron and Tyler Seguin. Campbell also filled in for Marchand in the third period against Toronto.

Spooner makes debut

Ryan Spooner made his NHL debut, centering the fourth line between Lane MacDermid and Jamie Tardif.

Spooner was recalled Monday, and practiced with the Bruins Tuesday.

“Pretty nervous to start,” Spooner said. “But after I got my first shift under my belt, I felt pretty good.”

Spooner skated eight shifts for 5:29 of playing time, including on the No. 2 power-play unit. On the Bruins’ first power play, he manned the point.

Spooner and his fourth-line mates forced Subban to take a hooking penalty on a first-period shift.

“I told them to go out there, play like they play anywhere else, and have some fun doing it,” Julien said of the young fourth line. “Don’t be afraid to make mistakes. Just play on your toes. They did just that. They did such a great job, they allowed us to have a power play with hard work.”

Taken with the 45th pick in the 2010 draft, he is a skilled and speedy center who can shoot as well as dish the puck.

In Providence, Spooner had nine goals and 21 assists in 35 games.

Spooner has three goals and 11 assists in his last 12 games for Providence.

“To start the year, I was kind of unfamiliar with a bunch of things,” said Spooner. “Once I settled down, I kind of got used to everything. That made a big difference.”

Job well done

Marchand and Daniel Paille are two of the Bruins’ six regular penalty-killing forwards. So with both unavailable, Julien had to lean heavily on Bergeron, Campbell, Rich Peverley, and Chris Kelly.

The Bruins killed four of five Montreal power plays. The Canadiens’ only power-play goal appeared to skim off Peverley’s stick, three seconds before the end of a Milan Lucic high-sticking penalty. Peverley led Boston forwards with 5:00 of shorthanded ice time.

The Canadiens entered the game with the NHL’s ninth-best power play, scoring on 11 of 46 chances (23.9 percent).

“Unbelievable,” Julien said of the effort of the penalty-killing forwards. “You know how good Montreal’s power play is. We were three seconds away from being perfect again tonight. You’ve got to give those guys credit. We hope to have Paille next game. If we can get some penalty killers back, it will help take the load off those guys. They were great.”

Olympics a year away

One year from now, the 2014 Winter Games will take place in Sochi, Russia. The NHL is expected to release its players to participate in the Olympics. Bergeron (Canada), Lucic (Canada), Krejci (Czech Republic), Dennis Seidenberg (Germany), Zdeno Chara (Slovakia), and Tuukka Rask (Finland) could be among the players getting calls. “It’s always an honor to be representing your country,” said Chara. “It’s such a special event. It’s always such a neat experience to be at that kind of sports event.” . . . Ex-Bruin Tomas Kaberle was a healthy scratch for the Canadians. He has just one assist in six games while averaging 13:44 of ice time. Kaberle has one more year ($4.25 million cap hit) remaining on his contract and can be bought out after this season . . . Krejci led all forwards with 20:14 of ice time . . . The Bruins had just two shots in 6:19 of power-play time . . . Aaron Johnson was Boston’s healthy scratch.

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655391 Boston Bruins

Bruins beat Canadiens, 2-1

By Fluto Shinzawa

MONTREAL — For most of this young season, the No. 1 line of Milan Lucic, David Krejci, and Nathan Horton has been the Bruins' most
dangerous. Krejci has been the team’s most consistent forward. Lucic and Horton have skated hard and punished opponents.

But for two periods on Wednesday night at the Bell Centre, the line just didn’t have it. Lucic and Horton didn’t skate with their usual pace. And Tyler Seguin, the No. 2 right wing, had zero shots through 40 minutes.

So during the second intermission, with his team trailing, 1-0, coach Claude Julien switched Horton and Seguin. He received instant results.

The line of Lucic, Krejci, and Seguin scored goals on their first two shifts. The Bruins survived a late hooking penalty on Krejci to claim a 2-1, come-from-behind win before 21,273.

“There’s going to be some nights when things aren’t going so well,” Julien said. “We all know the Krejci line has been awesome for us. Tonight, they didn’t seem to be able to generate much. I said, ‘Why not move guys around here and give a little spark?’ It worked out. Guys responded well.”

The Bruins had only four shots in the first period, and didn’t put a single puck on Canadiens goalie Carey Price during two first-period power plays. Montreal’s shutdown defensive pair of Andrei Markov and Alexei Emelin smothered Krejci’s line. For 40 minutes, the Canadiens resembled last season’s Rangers, plugging every shooting lane and stepping in front of shots.

At the other end, Tuukka Rask was putting on a clinic. He was beaten by a power-play slapper by P.K. Subban in the second period that appeared to tick off Rich Peverley’s blade, but in the first, when Montreal pushed hardest, Rask turned back a handful of Grade-A chances.

“We knew they were going to be coming at us,” Rask said. “They had a lot of chances. But luckily we got out of that, then stuck with it the rest of the game.”

The Canadiens were buzzing. Lars Eller had the best first-period chance halfway through when he got behind Zdeno Chara and Johnny Boychuk for a breakaway. Rask calmly kicked away Eller’s bid with his right pad.

“We were pretty lucky that it was a close game,” Seguin said. “Obviously, Tooks played a huge game there. We weren’t playing like we were prepared for a first-place game. Luckily, we showed our character in the third and got the 2 points.”

On the first shift of the third period, Seguin kicked off the rally. He had entered with only one goal in eight games — an empty-netter, at that.

Seguin’s forechecking led to his second goal. He applied heavy heat on Emelin. In turn, the defenseman rimmed a puck around the boards that Krejci picked off in the right corner.

As Seguin curled and headed toward the net, Krejci bought his new right wing some time, floating into the corner and pulling Markov and Emelin toward him. It was all the room Seguin needed. Krejci found Seguin going to the net, and the 21-year-old responded with the tying strike just 14 seconds into the third.

“I feel like I’ve been playing decently well,” Seguin said. “Definitely could still do better. I’m getting my shots and my opportunities. A couple goals called back, a couple knobs. Things weren’t going in. But happily I snuck one in there in the third.”

The threesome struck again on their next shift. Seguin took an outlet pass from Boychuk at the Boston blue line. He hurtled through the neutral zone to back up Markov and Emelin, then dished to Lucic on his left.

At the same time, Krejci sprinted past a backchecking Tomas Plekanec.

Lucic spotted Krejci, who crashed the net and was in the right spot for Lucic’s pass, tipping the puck past Price (21 saves) at 2:05 to give the Bruins a 2-1 lead.

“We didn’t have much offense going in the first two,” Krejci said. “Tooks kept us in the game in the first, especially, so many times. In the third, we came out hard. Just one of those things that the puck finds the stick.

“The stick finds the back of the net. I was happy for those two goals. It was a really big game for us tonight.”

The Bruins are now in first place in the Eastern Conference, a point ahead of Pittsburgh. They have 3 points on the Canadiens. All thanks to a lineup tweak and a comeback win.

The new lines may not last. Brad Marchand could return by this weekend, either against Tampa Bay or Buffalo. Lucic, Krejci, and Horton could be back together.

But this is a 48-game sprint. Coaches must pull the lineup trigger quicker than usual. Julien and the Bruins showed that desperation can create results.

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655392 Boston Bruins

By Fluto Shinzawa, Globe Staff

Brad Marchand will not play tonight because of an undisclosed injury. Marchand was injured in the second period of Saturday’s 1-0 win over Toronto. Marchand practiced yesterday at the Bell Centre. Marchand is considered day-to-day.

“We’re going to keep our fingers crossed that he’s in next game,” Claude Julien said. “He’s that close. It’s a matter of days here. It’s not as serious as most injuries, except that we’re being extra cautious early on in the season.”

Gregory Campbell will skate in Marchand’s spot on the second line. Ryan Spooner will make his NHL debut. Spooner will center Lane MacDermid and Jamie Tardif.

“I’m a little nervous now,” Spooner said. “But I think it’s mostly just excitement. I’ve been waiting a long time for this. I’m extremely happy I get a chance to play.”

Tonight’s expected lineup:

Milan Lucic-David Krejci-Nathan Horton
Gregory Campbell-Patrice Bergeron-Tyler Seguin
Chris Bourque-Chris Kelly-Rich Peverley
Lane MacDermid-Ryan Spooner-Jamie Tardif
Zdeno Chara-Johnny Boychuk
Dennis Seidenberg-Dougie Hamilton
Adam McQuaid-Andrew Ference
Tuukka Rask
Anton Khudobin

Boston Globe LOADED: 02.07.2013
655393 Boston Bruins

Game 9: Bruins at Canadiens preview

Fluto Shinzawa

MONTREAL – Good morning from the Bell Centre, where the Bruins will face off against the Canadiens for the first time this season.

Montreal is off to a hot start. The Canadiens are 6-2-0 overall and 5-1-0 at home.

Brad Marchand practiced Tuesday after missing practice on Monday. Marchand was injured in the second period of Saturday’s 1-0 win over Toronto. For now, we’ll assume Marchand will play tonight.

Daniel Paille (eye/head) and Shawn Thornton (concussion) will not play.

Neither traveled to Montreal.

Puck drop: 7:30 p.m.

TV/radio info: NBC Sports Network (Mike Emrick, Pierre McGuire), 98.5
The Sports Hub (Dave Goucher, Bob Beers)
With Brad Marchand out, Ryan Spooner made his NHL debut last night centering a fourth line between Tardif and MacDermid.

Spooner grew up in Ontario as a Habs fan.

“I can remember watching (Bruins-Canadiens) games and there have been a bunch of fights and that kind of stuff. They seem to be really good games and I’m excited to be a part of it now,” said Spooner. . .

Coach Claude Julien said that Marchand, who suffered an upper body injury when he crashed into the end boards in Toronto, shouldn’t be out too much longer.

“He’s doing well. Again, we’re going to hold him back and we’re going to keep our fingers crossed that he’s in the next game. He’s that close. It’s a matter of days. It’s not as serious as most injuries but I’ll go back to what I’ve said a million times already. We’re being extra cautious early on in the season,” said Julien.

Gregory Campbell moved up to take Marchand’s spot on the left wing with Patrice Bergeron and Tyler Seguin.

Daniel Paille (eye) and Shawn Thornton (concussion) did not travel here.

Bourke at ease

After scoring his first goal for the Bruins, the game’s only goal Saturday night, Chris Bourque was feeling a little lighter when he was headed to the rink yesterday.

“Obviously you’re not thinking about it every day, thinking, ‘I’d really like to get one tonight.’ (But) there’s not as much pressure to get that first one out of the way,” Bourque said. “It was a big relief when it went in, for sure.”

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655395 Boston Bruins

Shawn Thornton raring to go

Tom Layman

Symptom-free and raring to go — that’s the way Bruins forward Shawn Thornton described himself yesterday nearly a week after suffering a concussion in a fight with Buffalo’s John Scott.

Thornton was hundreds of miles from his Bruins’ teammates as they took on the Montreal Canadiens last night. And if everything goes well with the team doctors upon their return, he believes that he will be back on the ice sooner rather than later.

“The noggin feels pretty good,” Thornton said at a Gillette promotion outside the Prudential Center. “I skated the last three days. I rode the bike on Sunday and I’m symptom-free right now, so I will re-evaluate with the medical staff when they get back from Montreal (today) and go from there.”

Thornton said he didn’t have any major symptoms, like sensitivity to light or uneasiness on his feet, but he could tell that something was different after getting peppered with a series of right hands from the 6-foot-8 Scott in the first period of the Bruins’ 7-4 loss on Jan. 31.

“I knew when I got hit behind the ear my legs went from out from under me and I was kind of climbing to my feet while the game was still going on,” Thornton said. “I was moving the best I could and I knew I was going to be out for a little bit. But when I came back, I wasn’t totally sure I was going to be able to return to the game.”

NHL protocol states that a player suspected of suffering a concussion must be removed from the game and examined by the team physician. Thornton was initially reported to be out 7-to-10 days, and he said he has just tried to gauge how he felt every day since suffering the injury. He put no timetable on his return.

“You just go by how you feel, for myself anyway,” Thornton said. “I was actually going stir-crazy (on Saturday), so I was out walking up and down Newbury Street getting some fresh air. I felt good since then, so I asked if I could ride the bike on Sunday and get things going. So yeah, I feel good.”

It’s no secret that Thornton, who said that he has been in more than 300 fights since his time in the minors, is the man that the Bruins go to when an “issue” needs to be dealt with on the ice.

MONTREAL — With the injuries that precipitated his call-up from Providence of the AHL all believed to be short-term, Jamie Tardif’s stay with the Bruins will most likely be brief.

But if that is indeed the case, he can say he got to play in two of the most hockey-mad cities in the world. The 28-year-old made his long awaited debut Saturday in Toronto against his hometown Maple Leafs and last night his second game was against the Montreal Canadiens in the Bell Centre.

“I think it was as expected. It was a long wait and playing in Toronto, I’m not going to lie, I was anxious and nervous and whatnot,” said Tardif. “I had just over five minutes of ice time (5:03) and I felt more comfortable. I would have liked to have settled down a little bit and do some of the things that got me here. But for a first game, I was quite pleased and I’m looking forward to (last night)."

He didn’t exactly get to savor his first NHL shift. Before he broke a sweat, linemate Lane MacDermid dropped the gloves with Mark Fraser.

“Yeah, I think my first shift lasted six seconds,” Tardif said, “but, hey, you’ve got to do what you’ve got to do. It was a good fight.”

It is hard not to root for a guy like Tardif. Undrafted, he began his pro career with Toledo of the East Coast Hockey League. After a year in the ECHL, he worked his way up to the AHL, where he’s spent seven-plus years, mostly with Grand Rapids. In this his second year in Providence, he finally got the call to the NHL.

“At the end of the day, what’s really helped me down the road is that I started at the bottom in my pro career,” Tardif said. “I started in the (ECHL) and had to work my way up every step of the way.”

Spooner steps in

Records: Bruins 6-1-1, Canadiens 6-2-0

Projected Bruins lineup:
Milan Lucic-David Krejci-Nathan Horton
Brad Marchand-Patrice Bergeron-Tyler Seguin
Chris Bourque-Chris Kelly-Rich Peverley
Lane MacDermid-Gregory Campbell-Jamie Tardif
Zdeno Chara-Johnny Boychuk
Dennis Seidenberg-Dougie Hamilton
Adam McQuaid-Andrew Ference
Tuukka Rask
Anton Khudobin

Healthy scratches: Aaron Johnson, Ryan Spooner

Storylines: Ryan Spooner is with the team on emergency recall. Spooner will play if Marchand is unable to go. Spooner has yet to appear in an NHL game … The Bruins are 14 for 14 on the penalty kill on the road … Brandon Prust could be looking to scrap. The ex-Ranger has 46 penalty minutes. Prust and Milan Lucic tangled last year … Ex-Bruin Petteri Nokelainen is on injured reserve for the Canadiens … Dave Jackson and Kevin Pollock will be the referees. Derek Amell and Tim Nowak will be the linesmen.

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655394 Boston Bruins

Jamie Tardif’s itinerary hits hotbeds

Steve Conroy

Shawn Thornton raring to go

Tom Layman

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It’s no secret that Thornton, who said that he has been in more than 300 fights since his time in the minors, is the man that the Bruins go to when an “issue” needs to be dealt with on the ice.
The bad blood with Buffalo was brewing for an entire year after Milan Lucic trucked Sabres goalie Ryan Miller outside of his crease. In the offseason, the Sabres brought in Scott, most likely with the Bruins game circled on their calendar.

The whole TD Garden knew the fight was coming, including Thornton.

“I knew it was going to happen,” said Thornton. “I was thinking about it all day. The anxiety is going and to square off with somebody that is 6-8, 270 isn’t easy for someone when you are 7 inches shorter.

“My thought process going in was to try and get in tight as quick as possible and try to decline the reach advantage as much as possible. But I missed my grab, he backed off and it was good by him. Like I said, you do it enough, it’s going to happen once and a while.”

No Bruins player came to his defense that night, and those outside the organization had questions as to why someone like Zdeno Chara or Lucic didn’t step to the forefront to take on the much bigger Scott. Thornton shrugged off the idea that someone should have avenged the fight that night, and had an emphatic answer for the questioning.

“No. No, definitely not,” he said. “You win some and you lose some. We fought like men and he got the better of me. There’s been many a time where I’ve gotten the better of other guys and nobody came to avenge that afterwards.

“It’s part of it and it’s unfortunate that it went that bad, but listen I’m fine. I’m a big boy. I don’t expect anyone to have to take care of it after.”

It might come soon enough, though, as the Bruins and Sabres tussle on the ice again on Sunday in Buffalo.

Boston Herald LOADED: 02.07.2013
655396  Boston Bruins

Bruins find right mix

Steve Conroy

MONTREAL — Not much was working for the Bruins through the first two periods last night against the Canadiens. They had survived a potentially disastrous first period, thanks largely to Tuukka Rask. And though they played better in the second period, there was still nothing much doing offensively.

Down 1-0 heading into the third and having scored just one goal in their previous five periods, the B’s needed to change it up somehow. Coach Claude Julien did just that, switching right wingers on the top two lines, moving the previously snakebitten Tyler Seguin to the David Krejci-Milan Lucic line and putting Nathan Horton with Patrice Bergeron and Gregory Campbell.

The result? Two goals from the Krejci line — the equalizer from Seguin and winner from Krejci — on its first two shifts of the period and a 2-1 victory over the resurgent Habs at the Bell Centre.

“There are going to be some nights when we aren’t going as well and we all know that Krejci line’s been awesome for us,” said Julien, playing the game without regulars Brad Marchand, Daniel Paille and Shawn Thornton.

“Tonight they didn’t seem able to create much and I said ‘Why don’t we move guys around here and give them a little spark.’ And it worked out.”

It was a strange game with a lot of odd bounces, most of which went the Bruins way, as the Habs had several chances that never amounted to a shot on net.

On one play in the second period, Tomas Plekanec had a clean breakaway but couldn’t settle the puck and wound up knockout it into the corner. In the first period, Dougie Hamilton saved a goal after Plekanec had faked an aggressive Rask and nearly put the puck into the opening on the shortsde. But Hamilton scooted in behind Rask and thwarted Plekanec at the post. On another first period sequence, Colby Armstrong had the open backdoor, but Chris Bourque applied just enough of a backcheck to make him steer it wide.

But while he had some help, Rask was excellent in his own right, making 11 of his 20 saves in the first period, including a breakaway stop on Lars Eller.

Rask didn’t have much of a chance on the Habs’ goal. With four seconds left on the first of Lucic’s two penalties, P.K. Subban’s right point shot went off Rich Peverley’s stick and beat Rask over the shoulder at 10:53 of the second.

But the B’s were in striking distance to start the third and, before the Habs knew what they were dealing with, the rejiggered Krejci line struck. Seguin, who had just an empty net goal on the season, tied the game 14 seconds into the third, backhanding a feed from Krejci past Carey Price.

On its next shift, the line scored off the rush, with Seguin carrying the puck through the middle and passing to Lucic on the left wing. Lucic in turn zipped a pass over to Krejci on the right side. Krejci, who like Seguin was barreling toward the net, had a nice tap-in to give the B’s their first lead of the night.

“Call it a spark, call it a different mindset,” said Seguin of his new line’s sudden success. “I think anyone who has played this game knows that it’s probably 70 percent mindset, so we went out there with a little spark in us like coach said he thought would happen and it worked out.”

The B’s didn’t create a whole lot as the period wore on and played quite a bit in their own zone, willing for the most part just to chip, but the Habs did not get the chances they enjoyed at the start of the game.

Subban took a penalty with 1:02 left that sent the fans for the exits and, though Krejci would take a penalty of his own with 34 seconds left, the B’s nailed down the quality win in the first of four meetings against their chief rivals.

Boston Herald LOADED: 02.07.2013
655397  Boston Bruins

Bruins make switch, come up with win

Thursday, February 7, 2013 -- Steve Conroy

MONTREAL--The Bruins captured the first of four games against the Montreal Canadiens tonight at the Bell Centre, thanks to a little lineup tweak by coach Claude Julien.

Down 1-0 going into the third period, Julien switched out his right wings on the top two lines, putting Tyler Seguin with David Krejci and Milan Lucic and then Nathan Horton with Patrice Bergeron and Gregory Campbell.

It produced two goals from the new Krejci line in the first 2:05 of the third period and 2-1 victory.

“There are going to be some nights when we aren’t going as well and we all know that that Krejci line’s been awesome for us,” said Julien, playing the game without regulars Brad Marchand, Daniel Paille and Shawn Thornton.

“Tonight they didn’t seem able to create much and I said ‘Why don’t we move guys around here and give them a little spark.’ And it worked out.”

The B’s were in position to win the game because of an excellent outing by goalie Tuukka Rask, who made 20 saves, 11 of them in the first period.

“We wanted to come out hard and match their first period because we knew they were going to be coming at us,” said Rask. “We didn’t, they got a lot of chances, but we luckily we got out of that with a 0-0 game and we stuck with it for the rest of the game.”

The Bruins are off until Saturday when the Tampa Bay Lightning will be in town for a scheduled matinee at the Garden, which will most likely be played despite the forecast for a blizzard. The Bolts are playing in New Jersey on Thursday and should be able to get into Boston after the game.

With the condensed schedule, it might be difficult to find another date that’s amenable for both teams.

Boston Herald LOADED: 02.07.2013
655398  Boston Bruins

Bruins edge Habs, 2-1
Montreal — Brad Marchand will miss tonight's battle for first place in the Northeast Division against the Montreal Canadiens with the upper body injury he suffered in the Bruins' 1-0 win over the Maple Leafs on Saturday.

Marchand made the trip and practiced with the team on Tuesday, but did not take part in this morning's skate and coach Claude Julien confirmed he’d be out for tonight.

"But he's doing well," Julien said. "Again, we're going to hold him back and we're going to keep our fingers crossed that he's in the next game. He's that close. It's a matter of days. It's not as serious as most injuries but I'll go back to what I've said a million times already: We're being extra cautious early on in the season."

With Marchand out, Gregory Campbell will take his spot on the left wing with Patrice Bergeron and Tyler Seguin. The fourth line will be made up of Lane MacDermid, Ryan Spooner and Jamie Tardif. It will be the 28-year-old Tardif's second NHL game and the 21-year-old Spooner's NHL debut. There's actually a lot of new blood in the rivalry on both sides. Dougie Hamilton and Chris Bourque are playing their first Montreal games for the B's and, on the other side, rookies Alex Galchenyuk and Brendan Gallagher will play the B's for the first time. Also, tough guy Brandon Prust, who has had his go-rounds with the B's as a member of the Rangers, will be playing his first game against the B's as a Canadien.

"I guess all I can say is they'll figure it out quick enough," said Julien with a smile.

Spooner, who had followed in the footsteps of his father as a Habs fan growing up, was thrilled to be making his debut at the Bell Centre.

"I can remember watching (Boston-Montreal) games and there have been a bunch of fights and that kind of stuff. They seem to be really good games and I'm excited to be a part of it now," said Spooner.

And for the veterans of the rivalry, it never gets old.

"As much as the fans like these rivalry games, so do we as players, as coaches," said Julien. "It's certainly an easy game to get motivated for and excited about. This is a great building to play in, as much as ours is. Whenever there's a game between the two teams, no matter where it is, there's a lot of electricity in the air."

It will be Tuukka Rask against Carey Price, with a 7:30 puck drop.

The Buffalo Sabres are just 3-6-1 and there's a chance by the time tonight's game against Montreal in First Niagara Center is over they could be last overall in the NHL.

Just 1-6-1 in their last eight games, it seems there's no way the Sabres can keep the status quo going unless their fortunes change quickly. So does that mean possible player moves or perhaps even the firing of longtime coach Lindy Ruff?

"It won't be the coach," General Manager Darcy Regier told The Buffalo News early Wednesday evening.

Ruff was hired on July 21, 1997, and is the second-longest tenured coach in the four major professional sports leagues, behind only Gregg Popovich of the NBA's San Antonio Spurs (who was hired in 1996).

But discontent with Ruff is clearly growing among a fan base quick to point out his team hasn't won a playoff series since 2007 and hasn't even qualified for the postseason in three of the last five seasons.

Ruff addressed the topic of his job security head-on Wednesday when asked about it by The News after practice in First Niagara Center.

"I think you're always concerned," he said. "My job is to keep the morale up. The hope for the team has been real good. The guys have been positive. They've been upbeat. They dug in, tried to come back" in Tuesday's 4-3 loss in Ottawa, "tried to fight through the adversity.

"So you've got to give them credit for digging in but I understand the other side of it too. We need to win games. We need to win them now."

Ruff, whose contract is believed to have another two years to run after this season, said he talked to Sabres owner Terry Pegula on Wednesday morning but that's not unusual as Pegula talks regularly with his coach and GM. What was Wednesday's message? Ruff wouldn't give any specifics.

"We talked hockey," the coach said.
Since Ruff’s hiring, there have been 170 coaching changes in the NHL and two of them (Dan Bylsma in Pittsburgh in 2009 and Darryl Sutter in Los Angeles last year) resulted in a team winning the Stanley Cup the same season.

Ruff has 568 wins, second only to New York Islanders legend Al Arbour in wins with a single franchise. Arbour won 740 games and four Stanley Cups for the Islanders from 1973-1994 (and won his retirement game in 2007). Ruff, who has taken the Sabres to four Eastern Conference finals and a trip to the 1999 Stanley Cup final, has the most wins in NHL history for a coach with his first team.

The Sabres were supposed to be off Wednesday but Ruff got the players to agree to come downtown for a video session and an on-ice practice that lasted nearly an hour. Afterward, players scoffed at the notion a coaching change might be in the offing.

“That’s not something we’re going to have to worry about. We’re trying to get ourselves to play some hockey,” goaltender Ryan Miller said. “This is the team we have, these are the coaches we have. We’re not going to look at it like it might happen or a what-if kind of situation right now.

“It’s definitely not lost on us that we need to play better hockey. But I don’t think now is the time to start panicking. It’s time to keep building. We have to climb out of a hole. We can’t dig ourselves deeper by talking about Lindy or us as players and how effective we’re being. We all can be effective.”

“We just have to focus on what we have to do to get back on track,” added captain Jason Pominville. “We’re not that far off. We’ve cut down on” odd-man rush chances, “which was a big issue early on.”

As for a change in coaches, Pominville said, “That’s up to management. We have to worry about what we have to do and that’s win a game. Hopefully it snowballs from then on.”

After winning the first two games of the shortened NHL season, the Sabres’ problems have mushroomed. Chief among them is the fact they have given up an NHL-worst 37 goals in 10 games.

“That’s not a good place to be,” Regier said. “The confidence I do have is in this team to turn this around, in Lindy’s ability and in our ability to rectify that and that’s because I think one of the areas Lindy as a coach is extremely strong in is defensive play. Offensively, we’re fine.” (The Sabres are third in the East, sixth overall with 30 goals.)

“But defensively we have work to do. And when you think of where we are defensively, if I had a coach to pick to shore that up, Lindy is the guy. And it’s not just all on Lindy by any means. We have to work together to get this turned around.”

The Sabres entered Wednesday’s games last in the Northeast Division, 14th in the Eastern Conference and 27th in the NHL. If they lose tonight to the Islanders, they’ll fall to 30th in the league.

The Buffalo Sabres continue to be the NHL’s worst faceoff team by a considerable margin so they spent a good deal of time on that area at practice Wednesday in First Niagara Center. But coach Lindy Ruff added a twist to the drill: He let the offensive team win the draw and forced the defensive team into quick coverage mode.

If they didn’t cover the shooters in time, they did push-ups on the ice. And that included the goalies. Jason Pominville quickly fired shots off the first two draws and a team that included Ryan Miller dropped and hit the ice.

“If you lose the draw clean, my point today was it’s almost impossible to get in the shot lane,” Ruff said. “Pommer proved it on the first one. Then he proved it again on the second one. ... The center man can’t lose it clean at all costs because it doesn’t give me that one second to get in the lane.”

The Sabres got destroyed in the circle in Tuesday night’s loss at Ottawa, 37-15, and are winning just 41.3 percent of their draws for the season, a stat compounded by their troubles on assignments. No other team entered Wednesday at less than 45.3 and 20 teams had won at least 49 percent.

“We chased the puck 70 percent of the time because we didn’t win a draw,” Ruff said. “That’s a big deficit to come back from. We get it 30 percent of the time, they get it 70 percent. That’s hard hockey. Our faceoffs have to get better.”

Cody Hodgson went 8-10 on draws against the Senators – while the rest of the team was just 7-27. Steve Ott leads the team at 48.8 percent.

“You’re always putting yourself in a hard position when you’re chasing the puck after you lose a draw,” said Ott, who shifts from wing to take many faceoffs. “… It can save you 15-20 seconds at the start of a shift. When you’re constantly chasing, by the third period you’re going to be a lot more tired.”

The Sabres were scheduled to have Wednesday off but Ruff asked the team’s leadership to change the schedule and practice lasted nearly an hour.

Under the new collective bargaining agreement between the league and NHL Players Association, teams are to get two days off a month at home and two on the road and they must be planned in advance. They cannot be changed “absent compelling circumstances,” and it’s assumed that a mere slump does not qualify.

“We don’t need a day off right now,” Ott said. “We need to focus on things that will improve our club. Collectively we all wanted to come in and skate and get something out of today.”

“For us, it’s education. I don’t think it’s a punishment day,” said Miller.

In an email to The News Wednesday evening, NHLPA director of communications Jonathan Weatherdon said the group is reviewing the matter.

General Manager Darcy Regier said the team could conceivably send struggling backup goaltender Jhonas Enroth on a conditioning assignment to Rochester to get some work but is not currently planning that move. Enroth is 0-2 this season and his loss Tuesday in Ottawa kept him winless since Nov. 26, 2011.

“We will keep him here to work with goaltending coach Jim Corsi,” Regier said. “We know Jhonas can play and we saw how he has played in the past. His save percentage last season was very respectable [917] and we still think he’s a good young goalie.”

The Sabres had just five defensemen in practice Wednesday as Mike Weber sat out for a maintenance day while Christian Ehrhoff (undetermined muscle), Andrej Sekera (ankle) and Robyn Regehr (ankle) also sat. Ruff said Ehrhoff is doubtful for tonight’s game against Montreal. Regehr and Sekera are not ready to play either.

Patrick Kaleta returned to practice after suffering his latest neck injury last week against Toronto and being hospitalized overnight. He could play this weekend.

Asked if he was ready to go, Kaleta said, “That’s a bad question because I’m available whenever the coaches need me, no matter what the case may be. ... If they need me and think I benefit the lineup, I’ll do whatever it takes.”

Buffalo News LOADED: 02.07.2013

655401 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres notebook: Faceoffs get extra attention in practice

By Mike Harrington
Ruff: ‘We need to win now’

By Mike Harrington

The Sabres practiced for nearly an hour this afternoon in First Niagara Center on what was supposed to be a day off. Coach Lindy Ruff approached team leadership and they agreed (at 3-6-1, what could they really say?).

“For us, it’s education,” said goalie Ryan Miller. “I don’t think it’s a punishment day. It’s not a you-guys-need-to-wake-up day. We need to learn, spend some time in the classroom so to speak.”

(6:30 p.m. update – As I mentioned earlier today, the new CBA seems to say teams can’t do this sort of thing. A PA spokesman just e-mailed me to say the association is reviewing the matter).

The Montreal Canadiens are here Thursday, the Sabres travel to Long Island Saturday and host Boston Sunday. They’re 14th in the East and could be last overall in the NHL based on other results as soon as tomorrow night.

Ruff said he chatted with owner Terry Pegula Wednesday morning – saying only “we talked hockey” – and admitted he knows what the fanbase is saying. And what might be said if these next three games go poorly for his team?

“We need to win games,” the coach said. “We need to win them now.”

“It’s definitely not lost on us that we need to play better hockey. But I don’t think now is the time to start panicking,” said Miller. “It’s time to keep building.”

--- The Sabres spent much of practice working on coverage on faceoffs after they’re lost, which the team is doing 59 percent of the time. At one point, if the defending team gave up a shot, all of its players had to do pushups -- including the goalies.

“We chased the puck 70 percent of the time last night because we didn’t win a draw,” Ruff said of the 4-3 loss in Ottawa. “That’s a big deficit to come back from because we’ve got to try to defend and get it away. We get it 30 percent of the time, they get it 70 percent. That’s hard hockey. Our faceoffs have to get better.”

---Ruff said the team will try to find backup goalie Jhonas Enroth -- who hasn’t won in nearly 15 months -- extra work in practice and before games.

“He’s got to work his way out of it. It’s like a goal scorer. They need that one game to feed off.”

Recapping the injuries:

Mike Weber (undisclosed): Ruff said it was a “maintenance” day, which usually means the player is available the next game.

Christian Ehrhoff (undisclosed muscle): Did not skate Wednesday, doubtful for Thursday.

Andrei Sekera (bone bruise in ankle): Still not skating but able to exercise and improving.

Robyn Regher (ankle): Skated hard on his own for about 20 minutes before practice.

Patrick Kaleta (neck): Skated as an extra forward but said he was ready to play tomorrow if needed. Ruff said Kaleta may not yet even be cleared for contact. “He always wants to play. That’s a good thing. Give him credit,” Ruff said.

By Mike Harrington

I spoke earlier this evening to General Manager Darcy Regier and asked him the following question: If things go poorly this weekend, how much will you be forced into big change, whether it’s players or the coach?

Regier’s answer: “It won’t be the coach.”

Regier said he’s been pondering the trade market but it remains “soft” (there have basically been no big deals yet). He said there’s a few moves the team can make with players from Rochester but that it’s mostly on this group of players to a) get healthy and b) play up to its capabilities.

The Sabres certainly aren’t doing that when you consider they've lost their first two games against Philadelphia and Ottawa in the next five days.

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By Mike Harrington

The Sabres practiced for nearly an hour this afternoon in First Niagara Center on what was supposed to be a day off. Coach Lindy Ruff approached team leadership and they agreed (at 3-6-1, what could they really say?).

"For us, it's education," said goalie Ryan Miller. "I don't think it's a punishment day. It's not a you-guys-need-to-wake-up day. We need to learn, spend some time in the classroom so to speak."

(6:30 p.m. update -- As I mentioned earlier today, the new CBA seems to say teams can't do this sort of thing. A PA spokesman just e-mailed me to say the association is reviewing the matter).

The Montreal Canadiens are here Thursday, the Sabres travel to Long Island Saturday and host Boston Sunday. They're 14th in the East and could be last overall in the NHL based on other results as soon as tomorrow night.

Ruff said he chatted with owner Terry Pegula Wednesday morning -- saying only "we talked hockey" -- and admitted he knows what the fanbase is saying. And what might be said if these next three games go poorly for his team?

"We need to win games," the coach said. "We need to win them now."

"It's definitely not lost on us that we need to play better hockey. But I don't think now is the time to start panicking," said Miller. "It's time to keep building."---The Sabres spent much of practice working on coverage on faceoffs after they're lost, which the team is doing 59 percent of the time. At one point, if the defending team gave up a shot, all of its players had to do pushups -- including the goalies.

"We chased the puck 70 percent of the time last night because we didn't win a draw," Ruff said of the 4-3 loss in Ottawa. "That's a big deficit to come back from because we've got to try to defend and get it away. We get it 30 percent of the time, they get it 70 percent. That's hard hockey. Our faceoffs have to get better."

---Ruff said the team will try to find backup goalie Jhonas Enroth -- who hasn't won in nearly 15 months -- extra work in practice and before games. "He's got to work his way out of it. It's like a goal scorer. They need that one game to feed off."

Recapping the injuries:
Mike Weber (undisclosed): Ruff said it was a "maintenance" day, which usually means the player is available the next game.

Christian Ehrhoff (undisclosed muscle): Did not skate Wednesday, doubtful for Thursday.

Andrej Sekera (bone bruise in ankle): Still not skating but able to exercise and improving.

Robyn Regehr (ankle): Skated hard on his own for about 20 minutes prior to the practice.

Patrick Kaleta (neck): Skated as an extra forward but said he was ready to play tomorrow if needed. Ruff said Kaleta may not yet even be cleared for contact. "He always wants to play. That's a good thing. Give him credit," Ruff said.

By Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald February 6, 2013

COLUMBUS — When Leland Irving got into action last winter, Miikka Kiprusoff was never far away. The Finn was around the rink — before games, during intermissions, after games. The one unexpected absentee is defensemen Mike Weber so there are only five D on the ice. We'll have to find out Weber's status after practice.

Not now.

Not Thursday.

It's Irving, in tandem with Danny Taylor, against the Columbus Blue Jackets. And, yes, according to the young man, it will be different not having the Calgary Flames' star goalie in the vicinity.

"I never played at this level without Kip there," Irving said after Wednesday afternoon's workout at Nationwide Arena. "He's such a calm personality, I think maybe that must rub off on me during the games. But Danny's a great guy, too. Very calm. I'm confident I'll be able to get the job done either way.

"I know I can play at this level."---Irving — at 24 years of age, with eight notches on his NHL belt — is showing signs of being ready for prime time.

With Kiprusoff felled by injury Tuesday — lower body, day to day — the 24-year-old had been plopped onto the hot seat at Joe Louis Arena. He was poised. And perfect. Six shots, six saves, in the Flames' 4-1 victory.

"I was impressed by how comfortable I felt early," said Irving, who was presented with the team's firefighter hat for his heroics. "I was able to (feel the way I like to feel) when I'm in a game, which, to be honest, I haven't had in a while. I struggled to find it in Abbotsford. This faster pace allows me to really bear down and play."

And make no mistake, that 20-minute dunk in Detroit helps going forward.

"It could have been the best-case scenario — just to be thrown in there," said Irving. "Right in the heat of a game, get a taste of some NHL speed, without much time to think or let myself get in the way."

Recaps the injuries:

Ellis-Kaleta
Drew-Foligno-Ennis-Stafford
Foligno-Grigorenko-Hecht
Scott-McCormick-Gerbe

Day off shelved, defense thin at practice

By Mike Harrington

The Sabres have hit the ice for practice in First Niagara Center -- a practice that was not on their schedule. The team had posted today as a day off and informed the media as such but is now holding a normal workout.

"We have inquired with the NHLPA about the practice. Under the new CBA, teams have to have two days off a month at home and two on the road and they must be planned in advance. They cannot be changed "absent compelling circumstances" and it's assumed that a mere slump like the 1-6-1 abyss the team is currently is would not qualify. Stay tuned for more on that.)

Robyn Regehr (ankle) skated on his own for about 20 minutes prior to the practice. Pat Kaleta is also back working out with the team as an extra forward. The injured Andrej Sekera and Christian Ehrhoff are not on the ice.

The the discrepancies about.
That Kiprusoff is that good. That the backups are that bad. That the team lets down without No. 34 in net.

The current crew insists that nothing will change with Irving getting starts.

“Everything we’ve been doing is geared to being good defensively and moving the puck out of our end as quickly as we can — so all that’s the same,” said Lee Stempniak. “No matter who’s in net, you try to play the same way. We have complete confidence in both of them.”

The Blue Jackets will soon form their own impression.

Because even for a gent with one career win, there is no sneaking into a rink as an unknown commodity.

“This is the NHL,” said Irving. “They’ve got video. All sorts of guys have seen you play. There’s guys over there that I’ve played with at times, I have no doubt. But it doesn’t matter — it’s just me against the puck.”

His temperament seems ideal, doesn’t it? Smiling and relaxed after Tuesday’s game. Smiling and relaxed after Wednesday’s practice.

“I sit next to him in the locker-room in Calgary and on the road,” said Chris Butler. “It’s the same way every day. Very happy-go-lucky. Very easygoing. Very nice. Easy to get along with. Quiet guy. Loves coming to the rink. Always out there early. Stays late. Very mature for a guy his age. It shows in his game, the calm and the poise he has.”

General manager Jay Feaster, for one, is not losing sleep over Irving’s sudden (and possibly frequent) deployment.

Because for a player this isn’t something to fear. It’s something to embrace.

“He’s been preparing and working hard for a long time,” said Feaster. “Sometimes you need the door to open. And once the door opens, it’s incumbent upon the athlete to kick that door in. That’s what he has right now — a tremendous opportunity.

“He’s a proud young man, a competitive young man. I’m confident he’s going to handle this the right way. I’m a big believer in opportunity. The 20-year veteran started one day as a rookie who never played a game.”

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 02.07.2013

655408 Calgary Flames

Johnson: Kiprusoff’s day-to-day tag should ease the fears of Flames fans somewhat

Still, as much as this team leans on its workhorse goalie, observers will be waiting with bated breath for his return from injury

By George Johnson, Calgary Herald February 6, 2013

How the Calgary Flames will deal without having goalie Miikka Kiprusoff — who suffered a ‘lower-body injury’ on Tuesday — will go a long way to determining their fate this season.

The plaintive wailing, hand-wringing and teeth-gnashing sense of doomshad despair that the “lower-body” ailment suffered by the meal-ticket goaltender on Tuesday in Motor City induced around here the past day and a half or so only serves to reinforce how much, at 36, he continues to goaltender on Tuesday in Motor City induced around here the past day and

One day, Calgarians are aware, life will have to go on without Kiprusoff.

Tuesday, they feared “that day” had finally come.

Forty-one games left on the docket, already ground to make up in the playoff chase and speculatively NO Kiprusoff around to plug the leaks? Impossible. Unthinkable.

Why, at the very thought people hereabouts had already inwardly steel themselves for a fourth consecutive springtime of no playoff hockey.

Well, in the span of 12 hours or so, “that day” they’d long feared has been changed to “day-to-day.”

“It’s good to know,” admitted defenceman Chris Butler. “It is a relief knowing that it’s hopefully going to be something short-term rather long-term, especially with this short and condensed season.”

So Leland Irving, quickly upgraded from Abbotsford leper to Calgary saviour, starts tonight in Columbus and, quite likely, Saturday in Vancouver, too. Danny Taylor of the Heat has been hastily signed on to caddy for the man who caddied for him in the minors, adding a nice touch of irony to all the angst.

Quite honestly, even before the injury, Columbus always seemed the most opportune slot to slide the kid from Barhead in, anyway. As shockingly poor as Calgary’s record in Ohio may be, the Jackets aren’t the Vancouver Canucks or even the Lidstrom-less Detroit Red Wings. These days, they don’t even have Rick Nash to roll over, rub the sleep from his eyes and turn a game on its ear every now and again.

If ever Kiprusoff was going to get a night off ...

The conspiracy theorists among us will doubtless mull darkly about a broad-based, orchestrated coverup, convinced that the franchise’s all-time wins leader is dinged far worse than anyone is letting on, hinting that the signing of Taylor coupled with the good news on the No. 34 front is nothing more than a clever ruse to buy some time until GM Jay Feaster can swing a deal for a higher-profile puck-stopper with a few more NHL miles on his odometer.

But on Wednesday morn, there were a few sightings of the silent Finn in the event-level bowels of Nationwide Arena. And, yes, he was reportedly moving about, getting from place to place, without the aid of cane, cast, chair or gurney. Hobbling a bit, but hardly incapacitated.

“Obviously, you’re concerned,” understated Lee Stempniak. “I think you just take Kipper for granted sometimes, how consistent he is, how many games he plays, how durable he is. It’s definitely a bit different not having him back there, but we have a lot of confidence in Leland.

“Hopefully, it’s not too long with Kip being out.”

It can’t be.

No date has been targeted, or even hinted at, for the maestro’s return. The usual no details were provided. “Lower-body” could mean groin, knee or the unlikely event that he’s grown Creature of the Black Lagoon-like webbed feet. But the fact that he hasn’t already hustled back to Calgary, lined up to see a specialist, or worse, is massively encouraging.

“In the second period, I felt some discomfort in the lower-body area,” ‘said’ Kiprusoff, via one of those official club “statements” that make athletes sound as if they’re fresh off a turn doing Shakespeare in the Park. “During the intermission it was decided that I not return to play.

“I really believe that this is a short-term injury and over the next days I’ll work toward being ready as soon as possible.”

In the full understanding that as soon as possible can’t be soon enough.

“Day-to-day”, of course, is as nebulous a prognosis as it gets.

But in this case it sure beats the alternative.

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655409 Calgary Flames

Older and wiser Taylor knows what to expect, unlike in his NHL debut nearly five years ago
Flames ink Abbotsford goalie to a two-way deal to backup Leland Irving while Miikka Kiprusoff mends

By Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald February 6, 2013

COLUMBUS — Danny Taylor had been just sitting there, minding his own business — nearly to his detriment. Because, during the second intermission of a matinee, with the Los Angeles Kings down 5-1 to the Dallas Stars, coach Marc Crawford began addressing his downtrodden troops.

“He rattled off a bunch of things that we had to start doing better and in between he goes, ‘Yeah, Taylor, you’re going to go in there,’ ” he recalled. “I heard him, but didn’t really. I had to look to my left and right, ‘Did he say what I think he said?’ I just wasn’t ready, with how old I was (21).”

The maturity level off the ice just wasn’t there. Looking back on it now, I learned a lot from it.”

Taking over for Erik Ersberg, he did manage to block eight pucks, allowing goals to Jere Lehtinen and Niklas Hagman. (Michael Cammalleri, on behalf of the Kings, authored the final tally to make it 7-2.)

“I just remember being in awe,” said Taylor. “Almost like you’re in a movie — you’re seeing it, but you’re not really into it.”

Those 20 minutes, which represent the sum total of his National Hockey League experience, occurred relatively recently — March 29, 2008. But not to Taylor.

He’s grown up and he’s ready.

“Coming back into it, I know what to expect,” said Taylor, who signed a deal — one-year, two-way, worth $525,000 in the NHL, $80,000 in the American Hockey League — with the Calgary Flames. “My game’s really come a long way as far as my mental side. If my number’s called again, I’ll definitely be a lot more ready than I was before.”

After being drafted in the seventh round in 2004, the Plymouth, England-born netminder stayed busy — making stops in the ECHL (Bakersfield, Wheeling, Texas, Reading, Gwinnett), the AHL (Manchester, Syracuse, Springfield, Abbotsford), and the European circuit (Hamburg, Germany).

“It’s been a long journey,” said Taylor, “but I think from the last time I was in the NHL … I’m a different person. I’m married now, I have a child — a bit more of a family guy than kind of a young guy that came out of (the Ontario Hockey League). I definitely appreciate the opportunity that’s been given.”

The opportunity is straightforward enough.

Miikka Kiprusoff is day-to-day with a lower-body boo-boo. So Leland Irving needs a backup.

Enter Taylor, who had been enjoying a fantastic season in Abbotsford, among the AHL leaders in goals-against average and save percentage.

“Real exciting,” said the 26-year-old, “I’m trying to take every moment as it comes. Just try to go about my business the way I did in Abbotsford. And just do the job I came here to do.”

As a tribute to Heat goalie coach Jordan Sigalet, who, once upon a time, wore No. 57 for the Boston Bruins, Taylor wanted to don the same jersey number for the Flames.

Instead, he’ll make do with No. 41.

No matter.

He knows his game plan.

“Seize the moment,” said Taylor. “Be in the moment. I’ve worked long and hard. I’ve really simplified my game. So I just have to go out there, do my thing and be in the moment the best that I can.”

Taylor had actually been watching the Flames’ game live on television Tuesday.

“But before I started watching the third period, my agent called and told me that Kipper didn’t come out for the third,” said Taylor. “Right then, the heart started to get going again. I think my wife (Danielle) was more excited than I am. She was going off the rocker, excitement with the possibility of going up (to the NHL) again.”

“So it was a great night. Really exciting on the home front.”

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655410 Calgary Flames

Behind the Taylor signing: How the Flames front office sprung into action

Feaster and Weisbrod immediately went to work on Tuesday once Kiprusoff went down

By Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald February 6, 2013

COLUMBUS — Miikka Kiprusoff, with a second-period squawk, unwittingly starts the toppling of dominoes.

“I was on the ice when Kip tweaked his whatever-it-was — I heard him yelp,” said Calgary Flames defenceman Chris Butler. “It’s surprising when you hear anybody. It’s normally not a good thing.”

And the (off-ice) game is on.

While Leland Irving is holding the fort against the Detroit Red Wings, athletic therapist Morris Boyer texts the bad news to general manager Jay Feaster, who calls assistant general manager John Weisbrod, who negotiates a National Hockey League pact for Danny Taylor.

And just like that — the Flames land a new backup. Before the buzzer sounds.

When you have only two goalies under NHL contract in North America, losing one of them — in the middle of a game, in the middle of a trip — can certainly kick-start your evening’s work.

“You need to be prepared, you need to be ready,” Feaster said Wednesday at Nationwide Arena. “Literally, by the time the game ended, Weis had talked to Danny’s agent, and we were set to go as soon as we could get a contract out to him. That was all done (Tuesday) night. We were able to wrap it up before we went to bed here in Columbus.”

Beset by lower-body issues, Kiprusoff will be evaluated here, but Feaster doesn’t expect long-term implications.

No fool, he is keenly aware of the absence.

“Obviously, when you lose a player of that calibre,” said Feaster, “that’s a hole in your lineup and it’s a big hole. It’s a big hole in a very important position. But at the same time, we have a lot of confidence in Leland. From our perspective, it’s a team game. That’s how we’re going to proceed with this.

“We’re going to look to get wins, to pick up points, for whatever period of time Kipper is out.”

As far as hammering out a contract for Taylor, Feaster says it was a relatively smooth process.

Besides, if Taylor had decided to play 11th-hour hardball, the Flames simply — and swiftly — would have handed the paperwork to Barry Brust, the other half of Abbotsford’s netminding stable. The goalies are that close simply — and swiftly — would have handed the paper work to Barry Brust. 

Reasons — such as?

“As much as anything, what we talked about was style of play,” replied Feaster. “As John Weisbrod said, ‘This could have been a coin toss.’ At the end of the day, what it came down to, from a style perspective … Danny has a more conservative stop-the-puck (approach). Brusty’s game has a little bit more flair to it. And there’s certainly a lot more drama at times with Brusty — he roams out of the net and he likes to play the puck. Sometimes that gets him into a little bit of trouble.”
“And really when you get down to it . . . Troy Ward is the coach there and he is tasked with winning, and he rolls out Danny on a pretty regular basis. While it’s a 1 and 1A (setup) there, Danny has really seized that No. 1 job.”

But that’s not to say the Flames, with Kiprusoff sidelined day to day, didn’t contemplate other options — for instance, emergency recalls of Laurent Brossoit of the WHL Edmonton Oil Kings, of Jon Gillies of NCAA Providence. Or even an old-fashioned swap.

“We looked at a lot of different things,” said Feaster. “We know who’s on the market. We know what the market is as far as trade possibilities. That’s one of the things we do all the time.”

Feaster added that the team had started mulling in-house possibilities even before it flipped Henrik Karlsson to the Chicago Blackhawks for a seventh-round pick. So Taylor and Brust were always within grasp, contractually speaking.

“We felt confident about whichever decision we made — whichever player we decided to sign — we’d be able to sign them.”

C-NOTES: LW Sven Baertschi (hip flexor, week to week) has been placed on the injured reserve list . . . D Anton Babchuk (shoulder) will get game clearance soon, according to Feaster, possibly prior to Saturday’s match in Vancouver.

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655411 Calgary Flames

Game Day: Flames at Blue Jackets
Keep your eyes on Leland Irving and Fedor Tyutin

By SCOTT CRUICKSHANK, Calgary Herald February 6, 2013

Calgary Flames (2-3-2) at Columbus Blue Jackets (3-6-1)
5 p.m., Nationwide Arena
TV: Sportsnet West
Radio: FAN 960

The Flames
KEEP YOUR EYE ON Leland Irving

After a perfect third period in Detroit, youngster makes his ninth career appearance. Plenty of pressure for the 24-year-old (especially with the first-string drydocked).

The Depth chart
M. Cammalleri A. Tanguay J. Iginla
J. Hudler M. Stajan R. Cervenka
C. Glencross M. Backlund L. Stempieniak
S. Begin B. Jones B. Comeau
M. Giordano J. Bouwmeester
T.J. Brodie D. Wideman
C. Butler D. Smith
L. Irving
D. Taylor

The injuries
G Miikka Kiprusoff (lower body), D Anton Babchuk (shoulder), LW Sven Baertschi (hip flexor)

The JACkETS
KEEP YOUR EYE ON D FEDOR TYUTIN

On an outfit averaging 1.90 goals per game (the league’s worst offensive pace), the 29-year-old Russian has managed to accumulate a team-leading eight points.

The DEPTH CHART
R.J. Umberger A. Anisimov D. Dorsett
D. Brassard B. Dubinsky M. Foligno
C. Atkinson M. Letestu V. Prospal
C. Gillies D. MacKenzie J. Boll
J. Johnson J. Erixon
F. Tyutin N. Nikitin
N. Holden D. Savard
S. Bobrovsky
S. Mason

The injuries
D James Wisniewski (concussion), D John Moore (lower body), D Adrian Aucoin (lower body), D Ryan Murray (shoulder)

5 THINGS TO WATCH
1. HIT PARADE — The Flames have recorded the fewest hits in the NHL, only 111. Why? Because they’ve played the fewest games in the league? Because they’ve contested five of their seven dates in a building that is notoriously tough to collect statistical hits? (Some rinks, in contrast to the Scotiabank Saddledome, give credit for bare-minimum contact.) Or simply because they’re not a physical squad? All of the above likely.

Here are the bangers — Phoenix (278), Toronto (273), New York Rangers (262), Philadelphia (257), Pittsburgh (254). At the other end of the spectrum with the Flames are Edmonton (154), Detroit (149), Chicago (139).

Individually, the top checkers are Toronto’s Leo Komarov (39), Montreal’s Alexei Emelin (35), Buffalo’s Steve Ott (35). Leading the Flames is Tim Jackman with 12.

2. (NEARLY) AN APPLE A DAY — Calgary LW Alex Tanguay picked up career assist No. 501 in Tuesday’s game on a goal by RW Jarome Iginla. Ever wonder about the biggest beneficiaries of Tanguay’s feeds? Milan Hejduk (83 goals), Iginla (59), Joe Sakic (59), Peter Forsberg (18), Daymond Langkow (15), Chris Drury (13), Dion Phaneuf (10), Olli Jokinen (nine), David Moss (nine), Rob Blake (nine).

By the way, Tanguay is 126th in career assists. Ahead are Ivan Boldireff with 505 helpers, Lanny McDonald 506, John Tonelli 511.

Tanguay’s 742 points ties him with Mark Howe for 179th.

3. RUST BELT — No different than a scorer or a netminder, Calgary LW Steve Begin had been worried about his timing. He hadn’t fought in nearly three years — March 2010 against Brandon Prust — when he glided out for his first shift Tuesday. Out in short order was Detroit RW Jordin Tootoo, an old foe.

“... We looked at each other and he said, ‘Shall we do it now or later?’ “ said Begin. “I said, ‘We should do it now.’ That’s what happened. Two grown-up guys.”

Begin did well in the taffy-pull, but he was glad to get it over with: “I was pretty happy. I didn’t get killed. I was nervous about that one. I wanted to get the first one out of the way.”

Begin’s workload had been understandable given the Blue Jackets’ injury cluster, temporarily without the services of four regular rearguards.

The man isn’t picky. In 2009-10, in addition to Prust, Begin also took on Chris Neil and Jamal Mayers.

4. JACK BE NIMBLE — Saturday, Columbus D Jack Johnson set a club record with 34:13 of ice time in a win over Detroit. Tuesday, he soaked up another 34:13. “I’ve had nine months to get ready for this and that’s why you train in the summer,” said Johnson. “I feel great and I keep telling the coaches to keep putting me out, I guess.” Not surprisingly, with 28:38 of average ice time, Johnson tops the league. (Calgary D Dennis Wideman, at 25:04, is 20th.)
5. INS, OUTS, WHAT-HAVE-YOUS — In fairness to Calgary centres, who quite rightly have been hassled for faceoff hopelessness in recent years, the team has risen to No. 15, with a success rate of 50.0 per cent (221-221) . . . On another surprising front, the Flames remain the least-penalized team in the league, tagged with an average of only 8.3 minutes per night. Montreal, at 19.6, is the rowdiest. . . Yet another bright note, the Calgarians' power play has muscled into fifth spot. Yes, in the league. Operating at 26.7 per cent, the man-advantage unit takes a backseat to only St. Louis, Tampa, Edmonton and Ottawa. (Shhh — Flames penalty-killing is 29th).

By Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald February 6, 2013

COLUMBUS - Calgary Flames general manager Jay Feaster broke news on a number of fronts today at Nationwide Arena.

He informed the assembled media that:

Star goalie Miikka Kiprusoff, hurt Tuesday in Detroit, is considered day-to-day with lower-body issues. Still on the trip, Kiprusoff will be evaluated here in Columbus and again back home in Calgary.

The Flames, without a spare goalie on an NHL contract, signed Abbotsford netminder Danny Taylor. The one-time prospect of the Los Angeles Kings, Taylor is enjoying a fine season in the AHL. He’ll arrive in Columbus tonight and skate Thursday morning with the team.

Rookie left-winger Sven Baertschi, week to week with a hip flexor, has been placed on the injured reserve list. His prognosis hasn’t changed, but the move buys the Flames some roster flexibility.

Leland Irving, perfect in relief Tuesday, will start Thursday against the Blue Jackets.

By RANDY SPORTAK Calgary Sun

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It was 20 minutes of action Danny Taylor can’t forget.

And those 20 minutes have driven the newest Calgary Flames goalie to persevere towards another chance.

Late in the 2007-08 NHL season, Taylor — then 21 years old — lived the dream of playing in the bigs.

During an afternoon game with the Los Angeles Kings, he was serving as backup to Erik Esberg. The Kings were down 5-1 after two periods, and coach Marc Crawford addressed the team just before the third period.

“He rattled off a bunch of things we had to do and start doing better, and in between, (Crawford) said, ‘Taylor, you’re gonna go in there. I heard him but didn’t really and looked to my left and right, ‘Did he say what I think he said,’ ” Taylor recalled Wednesday evening upon joining the Flames in Ohio, just in time for Thursday night’s tilt against the host Columbus Blue Jackets (5 p.m., Sportsnet West).

“That gave me the impression I just wasn’t ready.”

He’s now the closest since then to again playing in the NHL, having signed a big-league contract with the Flames. Taylor, who has been outstanding this season for the AHL Abbotsford Heat, was signed and summoned to join the Flames to serve as backup to Leland Irving in the wake of Wednesday night’s injury suffered by Miikka Kiprusoff in Detroit.

“I always thought I could get back,” Taylor said. “I wasn’t questioning my skill. It was just a matter of putting it all together and finding the game that worked out for me. The coaches in Abbotsford have really simplified my game.”

Taylor, 26, credits Heat goalie coach Jordan Sigalet for so much. He’s a heck of a student, too, having, posted a 13-9-1 record with a 1.77 goals-against average and a .930 save percentage.

The reward was a contract, with a NHL salary of US$525,000.

Taylor was watching the Flames game in Detroit and was called by his agent when the third period started, having been alerted Kiprusoff was hurt and the Flames would need to sign or acquire a goalie.

“Right then, the heart started going,” Taylor said. “But I think my wife (Danielle) was more excited than I. She was going off the rocker, with the excitement of the possibility of going up again. It was a great night.”

In fact, just the latest in great events for the goalie who was born in Plymouth, England, but grew up in Ottawa.

On New Year’s Day, he and his wife celebrated the birth of their first child, son Hudson.

And now, Taylor is so close to creating a new — and hopefully better — NHL memory.

During his previous stint, he surrendered a pair of goals — one to Jere Lehtinen on the first shot he faced, which came on a breakaway, and the other to Niklas Hagman.

“You’re kinda in a movie,” Taylor recalled. “You’re seeing it, but you’re not really into it. Coming into it now, I really know what to expect. My game has really come a long way, as far as my mental side and my mental preparation, so I think if my number’s called again, I’ll definitely be a lot more ready.”

By RANDY SPORTAK Calgary Sun

The topper is his first NHL win, a 29-save outing in a 3-1 victory over the Vancouver Canucks on Dec. 23, 2011.

You want highs? For starters, the day he was chosen in the first round of the 2006 NHL Entry Draft ranks up there. Also, there are the times when he was the toast of the AHL, during some incredible winning streaks and performances.

The topper is his first NHL win, a 29-save outing in a 3-1 victory over the Vancouver Canucks on Dec. 23, 2011.

There have been lows, too. Maybe the worst being the first three months of this season when Irving struggled during his few chances with the AHL’s Abbotsford Heat and was relegated to third-string status in the minors.

So you could excuse Irving if he wanted to feel good about finally climbing a new mountain — being handed the reins of the Flames while veteran goaltender Miikka Kiprusoff is sidelined due to an undisclosed ‘lower-body’ injury.

You could excuse it, but it won’t happen.

“I take it in stride,” Irving said of the twists and turns in his career. “A lot of things are out of my control, and I can’t start worrying about that. Make each day count and try and get better every time I step on the ice.”

For now, he’s given a task nobody other than Kiprusoff has had since the second half of the 2003-04 regular season — being the starter of the Flames, beginning with Thursday’s tilt against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

It may be for a couple of games. It may be for a couple of weeks or more. Regardless, it’s a big challenge to fill the skates of an all-star, whose calling card, among other aspects, is playing at least 70 games every season.
If you want to talk about seizing the moment, though, Irving won’t engage.

“I can’t get too ahead of myself,” said Irving, 24. “I’ll be as prepared as I can be, give myself a chance to be the best I can be and give these guys a chance to win every night.

“I know I can play at this level. I just have to be able to do it consistently. I’m very early in my career and have some things to figure out, but all you can do is enjoy and make the most of every opportunity.”

Irving, who posted a 1-3-3 record during his NHL stints last season, took a step forward with a perfect third-period performance in Tuesday’s 4-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings.

Kiprusoff claimed the victory, but Irving held strong to close the door — and he earned more confidence among his teammates.

“That’s tough when you know Detroit is going to make the big push, and they did,” Flames defenceman Jay Bouwmeester said. “There was a lot of action in our end, and he made some big saves. Even the games he played last year, he played really well, other than that (9-0 loss) in Boston, which was a write-off for the whole team. But that one in Vancouver he won was big. That’s not an easy place to play.

“I wasn’t too worried. He’s the kind of guy who wants the opportunity to play and be a regular at this level. That’s good.

“It’s an opportunity for him, and he’s a good goalie. I hope he runs with it.”

The closest Irving came to relishing his first NHL action of this season was during the 2nd period of Tuesday’s 4-1 NHL win over the Detroit Red Wings.

“I was impressed how comfortable I felt early, to be able to get the way I know I like to feel in a game,” Irving said. “To be honest, I haven’t had that in a while. I struggled to find my game in Abbotsford.

“I think this faster pace allows me to really bear down and just play. I don’t let myself get in the way and over-think things.

“It’s me against the puck. I’m just gonna go out there, battle and have fun.”

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 02.07.2013

655415 Calgary Flames

Flames’ Miikka Kiprusoff needs support in goal crease

By RANDY SPORTAK Calgary Sun

COLUMBUS - Some of the names are easy to remember.

Curtis Joseph, Curtis McElhinney, Jamie McLennan …

Some are easy to forget.

Philippe Sauve, Brian Boucher, Matt Keetley …

Those are just a few of the goalkeepers who have served as the backup to Miikka Kiprusoff since he became a standout netminder for the Flames early in the 2003-04 season.

None of them, plus the handful of others along the way, ever showed the ability to be a No. 1 twine-minders in Calgary.

Frankly, none of them ever had the chance.

Kiprusoff’s abilities and durability were huge factors in keeping any threat at bay.

Likewise, the degrees of success seen from any of those other goalies were limited to non-existent.

With Kiprusoff out of action on a day-to-day basis — it could be a game, could be a week, could be more, nobody’s saying — the Flames and their faithful will finally get a taste of what life will be like without the workhorse standout.

First to be given the reins is 2006 first-round draft choice Leland Irving, starting with Wednesday’s clash with the Columbus Blue Jackets (5 p.m., Sportsnet West).

In a quirky twist of fate, Irving and Kiprusoff have something in common.

Until their big breaks, they were third-string goalies. Kiprusoff was that far down the depth chart with the San Jose Sharks before a trade brought him to Calgary.

Irving was No. 3 for the AHL Abbotsford Heat during the NHL lockout, which delayed the start of this season.

Don’t for a second think this is going to be some prediction that history will repeat itself.

The Flames roped the wind when they nabbed Kiprusoff out of the Sharks pressbox, and he became a franchise goalie. To expect Irving to have that kind of impact would be foolish.

However, the Flames could certainly use a good break in that Irving, or even newly signed AHL standout Danny Taylor, can somehow perform well enough to not only hold the fort during Kiprusoff’s absence but perhaps put the team in the playoff picture.

Stranger things have happened.

At least the Flames are staring at an opportunity to have a great read on one or both of the goalies in the system, especially Irving.

In a limited role last season, Irving posted a 1-3-3 NHL record. The only disastrous outing was his start in the infamous 9-0 rout at the hands of the Boston Bruins. And on that night, he was far from alone in struggling.

Otherwise, Irving was solid during his games, with big performances to earn a victory over the Vancouver Canucks and single points in games against the Florida Panthers, the Ottawa Senators and the Phoenix Coyotes.

Looking forward, though, the Flames are anticipating goalie Karri Ramo returning to the NHL next season, after four campaigns in the KHL.

Plus, with Laurent Brossoit in likely his final year of junior, Joni Ortio earning some stripes in Finland and Jonathan Gillies having a very strong freshman season at Providence College, the club has a few goaltenders at various stages in the pipeline.

All that means is it’s Irving’s best chance to show he belongs part of the NHL organization, and the best way would be to prove he’s indeed a big-league goalie.

Unlike so many others, he has the opportunity to show what he’s got without the knowledge Kiprusoff is simply being given a breather.

It’s up to Irving to prove he won’t just another in the long list of Kiprusoff’s caddies.

It’s an opportunity so many others never received.

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 02.07.2013

655416 Calgary Flames

Calgary Flames sign Abbotsford Heat goalie Danny Taylor to two way deal after Miikka Kiprusoff injury

By WES GILBERTSON Calgary Sun

Help has arrived.

With Miikka Kiprusoff listed as ‘day-to-day’ with a lower-body injury, the Calgary Flames signed netminder Danny Taylor to a one-year, two-way deal. He arrived in Ohio late Wednesday and will be the backup to Leland Irving for Thursday’s clash with the host Columbus Blue Jackets.

Not long after announcing the signing, Flames GM Jay Feaster told reporters in Columbus that Kiprusoff’s injury — suffered in the second period of Tuesday’s 4-1 NHL win over the Detroit Red Wings — is not believed to be serious.

While Taylor scored a new contract, it’s Irving that will be in the spotlight while the 36-year-old goaltender heals.
"When you lose a player of that calibre, that's a hole in your lineup, and it's a big hole. It's a big hole in a very important position," Feaster said. "At the same time, we have a lot of confidence in Leland.

"Everybody needs that opportunity. You sometimes need the door to open, and once the door opens, it's incumbent on the athlete to kick that door in. That's what (Irving) has right now, a tremendous opportunity.

"I'm confident he's going to handle this the right way. The 20-year veteran started one day as a rookie who had never played a game."

Ironically, Taylor wrestled the starting job away from Irving with the AHL’s Abbotsford Heat late last season.

Taylor, 26, has spent the past two winters with the Heat but was on an AHL-only deal with the Flames’ top affiliate.

That all changed after Kiprusoff’s injury left the Flames in need of another netminder.

"(Taylor) was excited. I said goodbye to him at 5:30 a.m. here at the rink (in Abbotsford, B.C.). He got in a cab and took off, and he was pretty pumped up to be where he was going," said Heat head coach Troy Ward. "He’s very deserving."

How long his NHL stay will last is uncertain.

Kiprusoff has been a workhorse for the Flames, appearing in at least 70 games in each of the past seven seasons. In fact, no NHL netminder has been in the crease as often since the 2004-05 lockout as the flexible Finn.

"In the second period, I felt some discomfort in the lower body area," Kiprusoff said Wednesday from Columbus, Ohio. "During the intermission, it was decided that I not return to play. I really believe that this is a short term injury and over the next days, I’ll work toward being ready as soon as possible."

Heading into Tuesday’s action in Detroit, the Flames were the only team that had not used its backup goalie so far this season.

That changed after two periods, with Irving called upon after Kiprusoff suffered a ‘lower-body’ injury. The 24-year-old backup stopped six shots, and Mark Giordano scored a late insurance goal in the Flames’ 4-1 win.

Kiprusoff was examined Wednesday in Columbus, and the team is optimistic he’ll be ready to go relatively soon.

"Based on talking to our medical staff, our trainers, we feel pretty good about it being day-to-day," Feaster said.

According to Feaster, the Flames checked out the trade market and also considered signing Heat goalie Barry Brust, the former Calgary Hitmen standout who represented the Heat in the AHL All-Star Game last week.

"For a lot of reasons, we felt Danny is the guy best suited for this role right now," Feaster said.

Born in Plymouth, England, and raised in Ottawa, Taylor’s only NHL action that had not used its backup goalie so far this season.

The 6-foot-1 goalie backstopped the Heat to Tuesday’s 3-2 win over the Rochester Americans. He is currently second in the AHL with a 1.77 goals-against average and fourth with a .930 save percentage.

"He’s very much ahead of most goalies in this league in his mental preparation and his ability to get himself ready to play and play on behalf of himself and his teammates. I think that’s one of his best strengths," Ward said. "Obviously, he’s a goalie that had a ton of success down here in Abbotsford at different time last year, and he’s been a huge part of our success this year. To be in the position we’re in — in first place in our division right now — Danny has been a big part of that."

"He just plays a simple game, and he manages the puck well. And the superior parts of his game are mental."

Taylor will earn US$525,000 at the NHL level.

To clear some room for the new addition, the Flames have moved left-winger Sven Baertschi (hip flexor) to injured reserve, retroactive to Jan. 26.

By Chris Kuc, Chicago Tribune reporter

Day of reckoning for Coyotes’ Torres

Hossa says it will be business as usual when Hawks face player who ended his season — but we’ll see

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Not long after delivering an illegal hit on Marian Hossa that sent the Blackhawks winger to the hospital with a severe concussion last spring, Raffi Torres called and told Hossa he planned to change his style of play.

"That's what he actually said, that he was going to have lots of time to work on his skills," Hossa said Tuesday before breaking into laughter. "So, we'll see, huh?"

Torres had plenty of time to work on other aspects of his game than the roughshod play that caused injuries and ill feelings throughout the league for years while the Coyotes winger served a 21-game suspension for the April 17 hit on Hossa during the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

On Thursday night at Jobing.com Arena, Torres will play his third game since the end of the suspension and will share the ice with Hossa for the first time since sending the Hawks veteran off on a stretcher.

"Whatever happens out there, happens out there," Torres said Wednesday after the Coyotes’ practice in Scottsdale, Ariz. "It's hockey — both teams are out to get the two points. We'll see how it pans out."

The suspension, which first was handed down at 25 games and later adjusted to 21, was Torres’ sixth fine or suspension during his career. He apparently has determined to make it his last.

"We have to protect the top players in the league and if it's going to take me thinking a little bit out there instead of running around with my head cut off, then that's what it's going to take," Torres, 31, said. "I need to keep playing. This is what I want to do. And if I want to keep playing in this league, I'm going to have change the way I play. I've done some of the right things over the summer and the first two games to do that."
Torres worked with Coyotes coach Dave Tippett to alter a style of play that has made him Public Enemy No. 1 with fans of many teams — and some players. “We talked a lot, looked at a lot of video and a lot of situations that we think we can help him out,” Tippett said. “He just has had some reckless in his game, and not just the one in the playoffs last year, but before that. So we’ve tried to show him instances where he has gone out of his way to deliver a hit that, if we take those out of his game, he still can be a very competitive player without the recklessness.” Torres appears intent on moving on from the latest black eye on his career that began with the Islanders in 2001-02 and has included stops with the Oilers, Blue Jackets, Sabres, Canucks and now Coyotes. “I was over it the day after they told me I got 25 games,” Torres said. “For the things that happen negative to you, there’s always a positive that comes out of it. I learned a lot about myself through these eight or nine months. I feel I can take on anything.” Whether Torres will have to take on a vengeful Hawks player or two during Thursday’s game remains to be seen. The subplot in the second meeting between the Western Conference rivals this season will be how Hossa and the Hawks retaliate against Torres — if at all. “Obviously, it’s a thing you don’t forget,” Hossa said. “But I’m not that type of player who will drop the gloves and fight. I’ll try to play my best and just play my regular game.” Added Hawks teammate Jamal Mayers: “We know it was a dirty hit. There’s no place for it in the game but our focus going into Thursday night is going to be the hockey game. We’re going to play between the whistles and we’ll see what happens.” The Hawks were in a similar situation Friday night when they took on the Canucks in Vancouver in the second game of their current six-stop trip. That contest was the first time Hawks defenseman Duncan Keith faced the Canucks after injuring winger Daniel Sedin with an elbow to the head late last season and drawing a five-game suspension. The Hawks stuck to business in the game, focusing on winning rather than retribution and pulled it off with a 2-1 shootout victory. “It’s kind of comparable history,” Hawks coach Joel Quenneville said. “You have to be smart and disciplined and stick together. Getting even is winning the hockey game.” Added Hossa: “I think it’s going to be just a normal game. I don’t expect anything. (But) we’ll see.” Chicago Tribune LOADED: 02.07.2013 655419 Chicago Blackhawks Will Hossa, Hawks see a ‘new’ Torres? By Tim Sassone Raffi Torres claims he is trying to change his ways. But talk is cheap. The skinny: The Hawks will be looking for their second win over the Coyotes. They beat them 6-4 in Glendale on Jan. 20 in the second game of the season behind 2 goals each from Dave Bolland and Marian Hossa. Ray Emery started that game and is expected to get the call again tonight. Emery has a .921 save percentage thanks to his 45-save performance at Calgary last Saturday. The Coyotes are 3-0-2 in their last five games despite goalie Mike Smith’s slow start (.887 save percentage). Season series: Hawks lead 1-0. Next: Nashville Predators at Bridgestone Arena, 7 p.m. Sunday. — Tim Sassone Torres and Marian Hossa will be on the same ice Thursday night for the first time since last April when Torres sent the Blackhawks star to the hospital on a stretcher with a hit in Game 3 of their first-round playoff series. The illegal hit earned Torres, who was not penalized on the play, a 25-game suspension that was later reduced to 21 by NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman after Torres and the players union appealed. He returned to the lineup only last Saturday for the Coyotes, vowing to be a different player than the one who ran around hunting heads. Like Pittsburgh’s Matt Cooke, who changed the way he played after numerous suspensions and dirty hits, Torres is trying to do the same thing. “It’s only been two games, but it is what it is,” Torres told reporters on Wednesday. “We have to protect the top players in the league and if it’s going to take me kind of thinking out there instead of running around with my head cut off, then that’s what it’s going to take.” “At the end of the day I need to keep playing, this is what I want to do, and if I want to keep playing in this league I’m going to have to change my way,” Torres didn’t have any regret in his voice when he talked about the hit on Hossa. “I was over it the day after they told me I got 25 games,” Torres said. “It’s not a big deal. I don’t think about it every day.” Since he broke into the NHL with the New York Islanders in 2001, Torres’ contributions have come from his combination of skill and physical presence. The problem for Torres is that some of his hits have led to suspensions and a reputation as a dirty player. Torres was suspended four games in 2011 for a hit to the head of Edmonton’s Jordan Eberle while playing for Vancouver and again for two games last season for charging Minnesota Wild defenseman Nate Prosser. Torres also launched himself into the head of the Blackhawks’ Brent Seabrook in the 2011 playoffs while with Vancouver that gave Seabrook a concussion. Torres wasn’t suspended for that play. Torres’ hit on Hossa came when he hurled himself into the Hawks forward and sent him sprawling to the ice. Hossa missed the remainder of the series. Torres’ eventual 21-game suspension was the longest for an on-ice offense since Islanders forward Chris Simon was banned 30 games for stomping on the ankle of Pittsburgh’s Jarro Ruutu in December 2007. League disciplinary Brendan Shanahan cited Torres’ discipline history as one of the factors in determining the length of the suspension. With the help of Coyotes coach Dave Tippett, Torres has searched for ways to maintain his ferocity, but not earn the suspensions that have come with it. “(It’s) just focusing on instead of going for the big hit, just kind of rubbing guys out and trying to take the puck at the same time,” Torres told the Associated Press. “He showed me a bunch of clips where I was thinking puck first and hit second and it worked out, where I got a lot of scoring chances out of it. It’s just a matter of me controlling my emotions throughout the game.” The Hawks (8-0-2) will be looking for their ninth win without a regulation loss. They rallied to beat San Jose 5-3 on Tuesday, taking advantage of a controversial play that went their way in the second period. It was at 8:48 when Andrew Desjardins hit Jamal Mayers in the open ice that appeared on replays to be clean. But Desjardins was handed a match penalty for hitting Mayers in the head. Even though Duncan Keith jumped in that appeared on replays to be clean. But Desjardins was handed a match penalty for hitting Mayers in the head. Even though Duncan Keith jumped in and earned 19 minutes in penalties, the Hawks got a power play for one minute when all was sorted out. The match penalty to Desjardins was quickly rescinded. “I thought there were other turning points in the game,” Sharks coach Todd McLellan said. “We were sloppy. We were stripped of the puck a number of times, which is disappointing. We were on the power play twice and took penalties. We were sharp enough to win? I don’t know. But (Desjardins’ hit) certainly was the turning point “At that point we were still in the game, and we had every opportunity to win. We probably should have been on a four-minute power play. That was a good hockey play. I think that’s what we all want to see (good hockey plays).” The Hawks, who fell behind 2-0 in the game’s first five minutes, got 2 goals from Patrick Kane and 1 each from Andrew Shaw, Marcus Kruger and Brandon Saad — his first in the NHL.
“I liked how we battled back,” Hawks coach Joel Quenneville said.

Defenseman Erik Johnson, who missed practice Tuesday because of a lower body injury, said, “I liked how we battled back.”

That is good news for a team that has been hurt by injuries.

Jones, who signed a four-year, $16 million contract over the summer, will be back in the lineup when the Avalanche and Anaheim Ducks drop the puck Wednesday night, with gritty forwards such as Gabriel Landeskog and Steve Downie sidelined and hard-nosed center Ryan O’Reilly sitting in Ontario waiting for a better contract offer.

The team was booed off the ice after the second period, trailing 3-0 on Ducks goals by Sheldon Souray (shot from the point that went 5-hole on Sem yon Varlamov), Saku Koivu (a 5-on-3 goal) and Francois Beauchemin, who blasted a shot by Varlamov after former Av Daniel Winnik got past Jan Hejda at the Colorado blue line and dished a nice cross-ice pass.

The Avs played soft, perimeter hockey in the first 40 minutes, mostly putting long, easy-to-stop shots on Ducks goalie Viktor Fasth. With gritty forwards such as Gabriel Landeskog and Steve Downie sidelined and hard-nosed center Ryan O’Reilly sitting in Ontario waiting for a better contract offer, the Avs’ net presence up front has been decimated.

The Avs came into the game averaging 2.3 goals a game, among the worst in the NHL. Forwarders such as David Jones and Jamie McGinn, two-thirds of one of their top two lines, are having trouble finding the back of the net.

“Hopes were raised Tuesday night among Avalanche fans about the Ryan O’Reilly saga could see offer sheet come from Avalanche rival.

By Adrian Dater The Denver Post

Hopes were raised Tuesday night among Avalanche fans about the Ryan O’Reilly contract standoff with the team, when it was reported by your humble correspondent that talks still were ongoing after a period of inactivity. Could a resolution finally be at hand?

Sorry, but it doesn’t look like it from what I’m hearing. Neither side appears willing to budge.

The Avs’ contract offers to their leading scorer from last season remain two years at $7 million or five years at about $17 million. While the differences on a two-year deal are much closer than a five-year deal (O’Reilly wants in the neighborhood of $25 million on that one), the Avs appear to have drawn a line in the sand with their offers.

With no softening of the O’Reilly camp’s stance, that would seem to leave only two possibilities: a trade or an offer sheet from another team.

One of the underreported aspects of this standoff is the growing possibility that another team could make O’Reilly a Group II free-agent offer sheet. There are many teams interested in making a deal for O’Reilly, but it’s unclear whether the Avs are considering moving him.

If they’re not — but another team really wants him — they are free to offer O’Reilly any contract they want. Then the Avs would have their hand forced; either they would have to match the offer or let him go and accept draft picks as compensation.

How many draft picks and in which rounds are dependent on what the average salary is with the new offer. For example, if O’Reilly’s new average salary were from $3,364,392 to $5,046,585, the Avs would receive a first- and a second-round pick from that team, should they not match the offer. If it were from $5,046,586 to $6,728,781, the Avs would get first-, second- and third-round picks in the next draft. Offers that are $6.7 million and higher would involve at least two first-round picks, and O’Reilly probably wouldn’t get anything that high.

If the Avs were to match an offer, they would be forbidden to trade O’Reilly for one year. Maybe the Avs are hoping for such an offer sheet. Depending on the team that makes an offer, they might get their hopes up of receiving a lottery draft pick as compensation. Or, if the draft compensation doesn’t look appetizing, they could just match the offer and get this thing over with.

Of course, the Avs have the power to get this thing over with at any time. It’s baffling that the Avs are being so stubborn over a player that would clearly benefit them. Just as it’s baffling they haven’t traded him by now for players that could benefit them.

How this story ends is anybody’s guess.

Adrian Dater

By Adrian Dater The Denver Post

A sparse crowd attended Wednesday night’s Avalanche game with the Anaheim Ducks. After the performance the Avs gave them, there isn’t likely to be a stampede to the Pepsi Center box offices to watch more games anytime soon.

In what was unquestionably their most listless performance of the season, the Avs were handily beaten by the Ducks 3-0 to fall to 4-6-0 during the 48-game season.

“We just didn’t have much energy,” Avs winger P.A. Parenteau said. “I don’t know why, but it felt that way all night. I know I wasn’t good enough. It was not a good game by me.”

The Avs’ bench seemed as lifeless as the crowd, but those players didn’t have the same excuse as the paying customers. Avs players all seemed to have their heads down most of the night, with little chatter among them.

It could be an interesting few days off between now and the team’s next game, Monday night against the Phoenix Coyotes. Fans started making a mass exit around the 10-minute mark of the third period, and the ones who remained did a lot of booing.

The team was booed off the ice after the second period, trailing 3-0 on Ducks goals by Sheldon Souray (shot from the point that went 5-hole on Sem yon Varlamov), Saku Koivu (a 5-on-3 goal) and Francois Beauchemin, who blasted a shot by Varlamov after former Av Daniel Winnik got past Jan Hejda at the Colorado blue line and dished a nice cross-ice pass.

The Avs played soft, perimeter hockey in the first 40 minutes, mostly putting long, easy-to-stop shots on Ducks goalie Viktor Fasth. With gritty forwards such as Gabriel Landeskog and Steve Downie sidelined and hard-nosed center Ryan O’Reilly sitting in Ontario waiting for a better contract offer, the Avs’ net presence up front has been decimated.

The Avs came into the game averaging 2.3 goals a game, among the worst in the NHL. Forwarders such as David Jones and Jamie McGinn, two-thirds of one of their top two lines, are having trouble finding the back of the net.

“It’s painful right now,” Avs center Matt Duchene said. “It’s the same story every night. We’re playing well 5-on-5, but we can’t seem to find a win in those games. We’ve got to figure out a way to score a goal. It’s the bottom line. We’ve been shut out three times in 10 games. That’s unacceptable.

That’s almost 50-percent of the games we’re getting shut out in. That’s a joke. We’ve got to figure it out here. We’ve got to bear down more in practice and try to make a few more plays every now and then. We’re just knitting the puck in all the time instead of trying to get inside and score a goal.”

It also hasn’t helped that Colorado has yet to get a goal from a defenseman — the only team in the league that can claim that dubious distinction. Erik Johnson, once known as an offensive defenseman, has one point in 10 games.

In fairness, the Avs did play a good third period, but by then the Ducks had pretty much backed off to play a dump-and-change game. Fasth had to make some tough saves, including a highway robbery stop on Jones in the second period.

“We got some chances, but couldn’t finish anything and we got behind early again and were chasing all night,” Milan Hejduk said. “It’s tough to play that way.”

If this were a normal season, a 4-6 start wouldn’t be anything to panic about. In a 48-game season? It’s getting closer to that time.

By Adrian Dater

The Denver Post

When the Avalanche and Anaheim Ducks drop the puck Wednesday night, the Avs’ David Jones will be among the players battling for its possession.

Jones, who signed a four-year, $16 million contract over the summer, will return to the Colorado lineup after missing two games with a knee injury.

That is good news for a team that has been hurt by injuries.

Defenseman Erik Johnson, who missed practice Tuesday because of a bruised foot, also will play for Colorado against a Ducks team that is off to a great start at 6-1-1.

By Adrian Dater

The Denver Post

David Jones returns to Colorado Avalanche lineup against Anaheim

By Adrian Dater

The Denver Post
Newcomer forward Aaron Palushaj, claimed off waivers Tuesday from Montreal, passed a physical and skated with the team Wednesday morning. He will skate during warm-ups, but will be a game-time decision. Avs coach Joe Sacco might want to give him a couple days of practice time before putting him in the lineup.

Semyon Varlamov will start in goal for the Avs (4-5-0).

In the Ryan O’Reilly holdout front, the Avs and the young center’s agents have been talking again. The parties talked Tuesday, but neither side chose to characterize how things went.

O’Reilly is the lone remaining big-impact restricted free agent unsigned in the NHL.

Adrian Dater

Denver Post: LOADED: 02.07.2013

655423 Columbus Blue Jackets

Jackets demote Johansen to minors

Second-year center has no goals in 10 games this season

By Shawn Mitchell

The Columbus Dispatch Thursday February 7, 2013 5:54 AM

The Blue Jackets, seemingly flush with underperforming forwards, singled out top prospect Ryan Johansen and demoted him to minor-league Springfield yesterday.

Johansen, with no goals and two assists in 10 games, has slowed after a strong start, general manager Scott Howson said.

“We think his play has tailed off,” Howson said. “He looks like he’s struggling offensively. This isn’t all about getting points, it’s about getting chances and making an impact offensively. I just think he’s struggling confidence-wise offensively. We decided to send him down to find his game.”

Plenty of other Blue Jackets are in search of their games. Top-line left winger R.J. Umberger has no goals and one assist. Brandon Dubinsky has yet to score a goal. Matt Calvert and Vinny Prospal have minus-8 ratings. Defenseman Fedor Tyutin leads the team with eight points, three more than top-scoring forward Artem Anisimov. The Blue Jackets (3-6-1) have 13 even-strength goals. But it’s Johansen — on a two-way, entry-level contract after being taken fourth overall in the 2010 draft — who will return to the American Hockey League, where he had 14 goals, 13 assists and a plus-11 rating in 34 games for Springfield during the NHL lockout.

He had a minus-5 rating for the Blue Jackets but led the team in faceoff percentage (50.8 percent) and won eight of nine draws on Tuesday during a 4-2 loss to Los Angeles.

Last season, Johansen had nine goals and 12 assists in 67 games. The Blue Jackets elected to keep him on the roster rather than return him to Portland of the Western Hockey League. Johansen, now 20, was too young to play in the AHL, so he spent the entire season with the last-place Jackets.

Coach Todd Richards said Johansen’s exposure to another losing environment had nothing to do with the decision and that his two-way contract wasn’t necessarily an enticement to return him to Springfield.

“We’ve talked with him, tried to help him out with his game and his game just wasn’t getting any better,” Richards said. “It’s gotten to the point where he’s got to get his game back so that’s why we reassigned him. We have to make Joey (Johansen) better. We’ve tried some different routes to get some consistency in his game and it wasn’t working. So now it’s ‘what’s the next option?’ ”

Richards said Johansen did not appear to be shocked when told of the decision, made jointly by the team’s hockey operations staff. He said Johansen was never guaranteed a roster spot but earned one based on his performance during training camp and kept it based on his play in the first four games of the season.

But he has gone downhill since a 4-0 loss at Colorado on Jan. 24, Richards said.

“It’s based on what’s best for Joey and what is best for us as a team,” he said. “When Joey has his ‘A’ game, he makes our team better, no question.”

The Blue Jackets often used Johansen on a wing last season but kept him at his natural center position this season, usually on a line with veteran Vinny Prospal. Richards replaced Johansen with center Mark Letestu during practice yesterday and shifted left winger Derek MacKenzie to Letestu’s spot in the center of the fourth line. Colton Gillies skated in MacKenzie’s old spot on the left wing.

The Blue Jackets planned to recall a forward from Springfield yesterday but did not after learning that Dubinsky was only fined and not suspended for a hit on Kings defenseman Rob Scuderi on Tuesday.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 02.07.2013

655424 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets notebook: Dubinsky is fined $10,000 but avoids suspension

By Aaron Portzline

The Columbus Dispatch Thursday February 7, 2013 5:19 AM

If it’s possible to be happy with a $10,000 fine, Blue Jackets center Brandon Dubinsky pulled it off yesterday.

Dubinsky emerged from a 30-minute hearing with the NHL for a hit Tuesday on Los Angeles Kings defenseman Rob Scuderi with a fine but no suspension. He will be in the lineup tonight against the Calgary Flames.

“You never know with these things,” Dubinsky said. “It’s a hard situation, a bad feeling to have. You’re sort of at the mercy of the league. It’s a helpless situation. I’m certainly happy with the outcome, and I’m glad the process is finished.”

Dubinsky dumped the puck behind Scuderi, and the two gave chase at 11:29 of the second period in the Kings’ 4-2 win. They met at the end boards, with Scuderi bending his knees deeply to hit the brakes just as Dubinsky planted his left forearm in Scuderi’s back — between the shoulder blades — and shoving forward.

Scuderi plowed face-first into the rail along the boards. He remained down on the ice a minute or so before heading to the dressing room with a swollen right eye. He was back on the ice before the second period ended.Dubinsky wasn’t so fortunate. He got a five-minute major for boarding and a game misconduct, along with a fight major when Mike Richards jumped him.

“It was bad enough having to watch the final 30 minutes of (Tuesday’s game),” Dubinsky said. “I can’t imagine missing a game with a suspension.”

Dubinsky said he did not reach out to Scuderi after the game, perhaps because he did not suffer a serious injury.

“People who know me understand that I’m not that kind of a player, and I hope he knows that,” Dubinsky said. “I apologize for hurting him or hitting him that way. It was never my intention for it to happen that way.”

Dubinsky said he has no intention of changing his playing style, nor do the Blue Jackets want him to. Part of his argument to NHL disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan was that he has never been punished.

“I’ve played over 400 games, had over 1,000 hits, and this is the first time I’ve ever had any supplemental disciplinary action,” Dubinsky said.

Kipper gimpy

The Flames will be without goaltender Mikka Kiprusoff indefinitely after he suffered a leg injury on Tuesday during a win at Detroit. Kiprusoff has played in 70-plus games for the Flames in seven straight seasons.
Jagr did just that on the game-winner, coming out of the corner and making a move that crossed up Oilers defenseman Ryan Whitney, before slipping a wrist shot through Edmonton goalie Devan Dubnyk at the 1:46 mark of overtime. The goal gave the Stars six points in the last four games and pushed them to 5-5-1 on the season.

“I tried to beat the guy one-on-one and shot it right away,” said Jagr, who played in the Czech Republic during the lockout. “I still have to get used to it -- the European rink is big and you have so much time. Here it is totally different, you have to shoot it right away.”

As impressive as the game-winner was, most Stars players were more impressed with his assist on Benn’s second-period goal. Jagr fought off a check, won a battle on the boards, and then slipped the puck to Benn, who swept it in from the slot.

“That play to Benn on the first goal, the guys on the bench were in awe,” coach Glen Gulutzan said. “He’s still surprising the way he can dominate.”

The Stars needed the plays to shake a pesky Oilers team that probably shouldn’t have been in the game. Edmonton started the game with three injured centers out of the lineup (Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Shawn Horcoff and Eric Belanger) and lost Anton Lander in the first period to a foot injury. Yet, Dallas was unable to capitalize.

The Stars took a 2-1 lead in the second period, but then were whistled for three third-period penalties and allowed the Oilers (4-3-3) to tie the score and earn a point in the standings. Dallas leads the NHL in opposition power plays (54), and it’s a problem that Gulutzan has been harping on.

“I like the win in overtime, but I didn’t like the response after those two goals,” he said. “We kept turning the puck over and putting the game in jeopardy. Until we realize that we are a team that has to grind out games, we are a team that even if it gets a little dicey out there, we have to continue to play a certain way -- we’re not going to get traction. So I didn’t like our response; I thought we turned way too many pucks over. We’ve got to learn to do a better job.”

For now, though, they will take the win, head home after a three-game road trip and continue to try to fight forward step by step.

“We know we can play better than this,” Benn said. “We have to keep focused on getting better.”

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 02.07.2013
655427 Dallas Stars

Oilers were a familiar foe for several young Stars

MIKE HEIKA Staff Writer
mheika at dallasnews.com
Published: 06 February 2013 11:27 PM

Several players on the Stars and Oilers already had met several times this season. Both teams have heavy call-ups from their AHL teams, and the Oklahoma City Barons and Texas Stars have met seven times this season.

Dallas players who played in the AHL during the lockout include Cody Eakin, Brenden Dillon, Jamie Oleksiak, Reilly Smith, Tomas Vincour and Antoine Roussel. Edmonton players who were with the Barons include Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle, Justin Schultz, Teemu Hartikainen, Anton Lander, and Mark Arcobello.

Asked if the familiarity of the players on the other side would make it easier, Oleksiak said yes.

“It’s the NHL, and it’s a different level, but it’s still nice to know the players,” Oleksiak said. “You have an idea what they are going to do, and that’s always helpful.”

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 02.07.2013
655428 Dallas Stars

Stars bench defensemen Goligoski; ‘Alex needs to get back to Alex’s level’
Goligoski said he understands he has been struggling and has had a talk with the coaches about the decision to scratch him.

“Alex needs to get back to Alex’s level. It’s pretty cut and dried,” coach Glen Gulutzan said.

Goligoski said he understands he has been struggling and has had a talk with the coaches about the decision to scratch him.

“Alex needs to get back to Alex’s level. It’s pretty cut and dried,” coach Glen Gulutzan said.

So sitting him out in favor of Philip Larsen was a big move.

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“Alex needs to get back to Alex’s level. It’s pretty cut and dried,” coach Glen Gulutzan said.

Gulutzan was asked if Larsen had learned anything by watching during his healthy scratches, and he gave an answer that might also apply to Goligoski.

“I think anyone can learn from watching,” he said. “It stings a little bit, and you should come back hungry. …We’ve got a lot of guys battling for a few spots, and this is the way it’s going to be for the rest of the year. We need guys to battle for position.”

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655430 Dallas Stars

Stars-Oilers, 9 p.m.; Will Edmonton’s highly drafted talent take over?

MIKE HEIKA Staff Writer Published: 06 February 2013 01:22 PM

The Edmonton Oilers have three players taken first overall in the NHL draft. Taylor Hall, Nail Yakupov and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins were each deemed the best player in his respective draft. Mix in Jordan Eberle (22nd overall) and Sam Gagner (sixth overall), and you have a heck of a group of skilled forwards.

And yet, the Oiler still have not been able to make this group work quite yet.

Edmonton is 4-3-2, but ranks 22nd in scoring at 2.33 goals per game. Gagner (the son of former Stars center Dave Gagner) leads the team with 10 points (3G, 7A), while Hall has nine points (2G, 7A) and Yakupov has seven (5G, 2A). Much of the scoring for the Oilers has been done on the power play. They rank third in power play goals at 12, so staying out of the box will be imperative for the Stars.

Dallas leads the NHL in times short-handed at 50 and the coaches have been cracking down on that issue. Their penalty kill has actually been decent at 84.0 percent, but they still have allowed eight power play goals, 14th most in the NHL.

Edmonton has made its living on special teams so far. It ranks fourth in power play success at 28.6 percent and fifth in penalty kill success at 88.6 percent.

Still, it has some of the same issues as the Stars. The Oilers give up way too many shots on goal, with 34.4 ranking last in the NHL. Their shot differential of minus-7.0 per game (27.4-34.4) is second worst only to Dallas’ minus-9.2. What’s more, they sit 29th in faceoff success at 45.3 percent and are coming off a game in which they won only 30 percent against Vancouver. With veterans Eric Belanger (foot) and Shawn Horcoff (hand) out, there has been much talk about fixing the faceoff issue. Read about that here.

Of course, the Stars are having their own problems at 46.4 percent (28th in the NHL), so this could be an interesting part of the game to watch tonight.

The Oilers are struggling on defense and will probably not have Mark Fistric in the lineup. The longtime Stars’ blueliner who was traded to Edmonton before the season, tried for a hard hip check in the Vancouver game and hit the boards. He is expected to be out with back pain.
The much-maligned Ryan Whitney is expected to be watched closely tonight on defense.

Maybe a more interesting player to watch will be Justin Schultz. The skilled defenseman never signed with Anaheim after being drafted by the Ducks, and was signed by the Oilers as a UFA last summer. He had a tremendous AHL season with Oklahoma City, rolling up 48 points (18G, 30A) in 34 games. Read about him here.

But maybe the player who has made the most difference for the Oilers this season is goalie Devan Dubnyk. Goaltending has been an issue for this team for years, and Dubnyk right now is off to a 4.56 GAA and .925 save percentage. He has struggled against the Stars, with a 0-3-0 career record, a 4.36 GAA and an .859 save percentage.

Here’s a discussion on Dubnyk’s play this season.

With the injuries to Horcoff and Fistric, the lines will likely change, but here is what they could look like based on what the Oilers ran out against Vancouver:

Taylor Hall-Ryan Nugent-Hopkins-Jordan Eberle
Ales Hemsky-Sam Gagner-Nail Yakupov
Ryan Smyth-Mark Arcobello-Lennart Petrell
Teemu Hartikainen-Anton Lander-Magnus Paajarvi
Ladislav Smid-Jeff Petry
Nick Schultz-Justin Schultz
Ryan Whitney-Corey Potter
Devan Dubnyk
Arcobello played well in OKC, and will probably make his NHL debut this game.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 02.07.2013
655431 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings need to think outside the penalty box

By Helene St. James

Defenseman Niklas Kronwall has skated ruts to the penalty box, and he knows it’s a problem.

The Red Wings head into St. Louis tonight having dropped two straight games, dousing the momentum stoked with an encouraging victory over the Blues last Friday.

That game started the Blues on a two-game losing streak, which is why, as coach Mike Babcock put it Wednesday, "We'll probably have a tiger by the tail, but we should be the same way."

The Wings want to be a disciplined tiger, though: Their average of 15.4 penalty minutes per game puts them near the bottom third of the NHL -- and makes it hard to win.

"It's tough to get momentum going," Kronwall said. "There's no doubt, we've made some huge mistakes that cost us. We've got to stay out of the box."

That holds true for no one more than Kronwall. Jordin Tootoo leads the team with 30 penalty minutes, but 20 of those are from fighting majors and 10 from a misconduct.

Of the ones who've left the Wings shorthanded, Kronwall has been in the box 20 minutes over nine games. Daniel Cleary is next, at 18.

"I think we haven't adjusted well to the new rules," Kronwall said. "They're cracking down on pretty much everything, and that's something for us players that we have to do a better job staying within the limits. Myself, I've taken way too many penalties, putting our team in trouble."

The Blues dinged the Wings for four power-play goals in the season opener, and St. Louis' power play still operates at a staggering 33.3%. The Wings' penalty kill has been sparcadic at best and, after allowing five goals over the past three games, has dropped below 70%.

"We've got to bear down a little bit more on our clears and make sure every puck goes 200 feet," Justin Abdelkader said. "They've got a good power play, so we don't want to put ourselves shorthanded too much. It's a tough place to play. We've got to be up to the task."

BRIEFLY: Babcock opted to have workhorse Jimmy Howard rest rather than practice. Babcock wasn't sure whether he'd start Howard tonight, but the only other option is Petr Mrazek. Backups Jonas Gustavsson (groin) and Joey MacDonald (back) are close but not ready yet.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 02.07.2013
655432 Detroit Red Wings

Man ordered: Stop selling memorabilia tied to Wings' Pavel Datsyuk; trial date set

By L.L. Brasier

A judge ordered an Oak Park man today to stop selling sports memorabilia featuring the name, image or jersey number of Red Wings star Pavel Datsyuk.

Oakland County Circuit Judge Martha Anderson issued the preliminary injunction against Terrance Sullivan, and his companies, Pasha Sportswear and Pasha.

Datsyuk, whose nickname is Pasha, is suing Sullivan, claiming Sullivan has been selling T-shirts and other items with his name or likeness without permission. Anderson allowed Sullivan to maintain a Facebook account about Pasha but ordered that he include a disclaimer that the page is not associated with the Red Wings forward.

She also set a trial date for Sept. 9. Datsyuk is seeking unspecified damages.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 02.07.2013
655433 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings recognize penalties are a major problem

By Helene St. James

The Detroit Red Wings rank 20th in the NHL in penalties, something they're eager to clean up -- especially as they head into St. Louis to take on the potent Blues on Thursday.

The Blues have a power play that operates at 33.3%, a wildly successful rate built partly on the four goals they scored on Detroit in the season opener.

The Wings are coming off an 4-1 loss Tuesday to Calgary, unable to recover after the Flames used a two-man advantage to take a 2-0 lead.

"They're calling it tight, and we've got to adjust to the newer rules and all the stick penalties that they're calling," Wings forward Justin Abdelkader said.

The NHL is cracking down on interference in many forms and, nearly 10 games into the season, coach Mike Babcock doesn't want to hear any excuses from his players.

"You don't go. 'Oh, that's an awful penalty,' " Babcock said. "When you put your free hand on somebody, you go in the box. Knock somebody's feet out from under them, you go to the box. Look after it. These are things we can control. The big thing for me is, when it's details and it's work ethic and things like that, things you can control, those things should never, ever happen."

Babcock said he'll use the same lineup as in Tuesday's game, except Todd Bertuzzi will start with Pavel Datsyuk and Valterri Filppula, and Tomas
Tatar, who was called up from Grand Rapids for the Calgary game, will be with Daniel Cleary and Justin Abdelkader at St. Louis.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 02.07.2013
655434 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings’ Jimmy Howard rests, will get relief one of these days

By Helene St. James

Here’s the daily rundown on Detroit Red Wings injuries.

Goaltender Jimmy Howard didn’t skate today, but that’s just because he needs a breather. Outside of one period, he has been the go-to guy in net all season.

In fact, he has played so much, coach Mike Babcock isn’t yet decided on whether Howard will start Thursday, when the Wings play St. Louis.

“He’s been in getting too much (work),” Babcock said. “He’s played great for us, but we’ve given up too much the last two nights. So, get him freshened up.”

Backup goaltender Jonas Gustavsson (groin) skated and said he’s feeling better but isn’t sure when he’ll be back. Forward Mikael Samuelsson (groin), who sits next to Gustavsson in the locker room, said his update “was the same as Jonas. Exactly the same.”

Backup goaltender No. 2 Joey MacDonald (back) is so close to being cleared from a back injury that he could do a back flip. At least figuratively. He expects to be cleared maybe as soon as Friday. If so, he could play against the Edmonton Oilers on Saturday or the Los Angeles Kings on Sunday.

“I’m just going to go day-by-day and make my decision on who’s starting tomorrow and then the same thing after that,” Babcock said.

If Babcock opts not to play Howard against the Blues, the only healthy option currently in the stable is Grand Rapids Griffins call-up Petr Mrazek.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 02.07.2013
655435 Detroit Red Wings

Reeling Red Wings gearing up for another showdown with Blues

By Ted Kulfan The Detroit News

Detroit — Reeling with two consecutive losses to the two worst teams in the Western Conference, the Red Wings now have to play one of the best.

The Red Wings visit St. Louis on Thursday, facing a Blues team that’ll likely be angry after a 6-1 loss Tuesday, at home, to Nashville.

“Obviously if it’s a talented team that’s come off the rails a little bit but we’ll probably have a tiger by the tail,” coach Mike Babcock said. “Bu we should be the same way.

“It’s two teams that need a win badly.”

The Wings have split two games with the Blues this season — an ugly 6-0 loss on opening night Jan. 19, and a 5-4 victory at home Feb. 1.

“So far, St. Louis is definitely the best team we’ve seen,” forward Henrik Zetterberg said. “They have four good lines, they work hard, and they play a good system.”

Howard gets a rest

Goalie Jimmy Howard, who has started all nine games this season, didn’t practice Wednesday as Petr Mrazek and Joey MacDonald handled the two nets.

“Just a breather,” Babcock said of not practicing Howard. “Get him freshened up.”

Babcock said he’ll decide on playing either Howard or Mrazek against the Blues while on the flight to St. Louis.

MacDonald, who is recovering from a bulging disc, is going to St. Louis, will take part in the morning skate, and is expected to be cleared Friday.

MacDonald said he could be ready to play either the two home weekend games Saturday (against Edmonton) or Sunday (against Los Angeles).

Babcock wouldn’t commit to which goalie is playing when this week — although he would like to give Howard a break soon.

“We’re just going day by day,” Babcock said. “We’ll make a decision and every day after. I’ll keep you posted.”

Ice chips

Forwards Mikael Samuelsson (groin) and Jan Mursak (shoulder), goalie Jonas Gustavsson (groin) and defenseman Carlo Colaiacovo (shoulder) all worked out after the regulars finished practicing.

None is expected to return by this weekend.

Detroit News LOADED: 02.07.2013
655436 Detroit Red Wings

Judge orders retailer to stop trading on Datsyuk’s name, likeness

By Mike Martindale The Detroit News

Pontiac — An Oak Park man was ordered Wednesday to stop selling any clothing or items containing the name, uniform number or likeness of Detroit Red Wings star Pavel Datsyuk without his permission.

Oakland Circuit Judge Martha D. Anderson issued a preliminary injunction after hearing arguments from attorneys for Datsyuk and for Terrance Sullivan and his businesses, Pasha LLC and Pasha Sportswear.

Datsyuk’s attorneys, who seek unspecified damages in a lawsuit against Sullivan and his companies, claim Sullivan’s actions have confused the public and harmed the hockey star.

Sullivan’s attorney, Kevin Stoops, told Anderson there have been emails between Sullivan and Datsyuk regarding product plans and manufacture dating back five years, and that he intends to file them in the case.

He said Sullivan and Datsyuk have known each other socially since 2008, about which time Sullivan proposed a line of sportswear involving the hockey star.

“This is not a bootleg operation,” said Stoops. “(Datsyuk) obtained T-shirts and passed them out to friends and family in Russia. … this has been a business relationship which unfortunately had to part — this happens every day.”

But Anderson said based on what she had seen so far immediate actions were warranted in the ongoing lawsuit.

“I want a specific disclaimer on (Pasha’s website) there is no connection or authorization by Datsyuk or the Red Wings,” Anderson told Stoops. She also ordered that she be provided sales record books for the company within seven days.

Datsyuk’s attorney, Jordan Bolton, stressed there was no contract between his client and Sullivan.

“Whatever delusions (Sullivan) had, they should have been eliminated with the cease-and-desist communications we sent or by this lawsuit,” said Bolton.

Anderson had issued a temporary restraining order against Sullivan. Attorneys for Datsyuk claim in the lawsuit that attorneys tried for months to get Sullivan to stop manufacturing and marketing red and white hockey jerseys and T-shirts containing Datsyuk’s name, his nickname “Pasha,” his uniform number “13” or phrases such as “moves like Datsyuk” or “You’ve been Datsyuked” on Facebook.
"Moves like Datsyuk" is a takeoff on the popular song "Moves Like Jagger" by Maroon 5.

The Wings forward did not attend Wednesday's hearing.

Drafted by the Detroit team in 1998, Datsyuk has been part of two Stanley Cup teams and received numerous individual honors, including five All-Star game selections, during his career.

His skill and dazzling athletic moves are frequently featured on NHL highlight videos and he has been recognized internationally as one of the premier skaters and stickhandlers in the game.

Detroit News LOADED: 02.07.2013

655437 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings powerless again in loss to Flames

By Ted Kulfan The Detroit News

Detroit — In previous seasons, the Red Wings would build an early cushion in the standings with victories and go from there.

That isn't happening this season.

Playing the struggling Flames on Tuesday, the Red Wings fell behind early and never recovered in a 4-1 loss.

After two victories in which the Red Wings appeared to be rounding into form, they've suffered two consecutive defeats against the two worst teams in the Western Conference while scoring three goals total.

In a shortened 48-game regular season, teams can't afford any sort of losing streaks. And those losses could accumulate for the Wings if they continue to play from behind.

"We have to continue to improve," coach Mike Babcock said. "We had opportunities but didn't capitalize. I didn't think we were terrible. But catch up hockey is losing hockey and you can't start from behind."

Johan Franzen (power play) had the Red Wings goal.

Jarome Iginla, Curtis Glencross (power play), Dennis Wideman and Mark Giordano (power play) scored to lead the Flames.

For Red Wings fans, the night's highlight might have been Red Wings forward Jordin Tootoo fighting Flames center Steve Begin in the first period.

Tootoo ended up with a bloodied face but earned a loud ovation from the sellout crowd for his fourth fight this season.

From there, the evening was pretty much a downer for the home crowd.

"We couldn't get out of the hole," Red Wings forward Henrik Zetterberg said. "They got that third one (goal) and killed our momentum we had and we couldn't find a way to get it back."

Calgary goaltender Miikka Kiprusoff (19 saves) played two periods before leaving with a lower body injury. Leland Irving relieved Kiprusoff and stopped all six shots he faced.

Kiprusoff was great in the first period, robbing Daniel Cleary on consecutive rebounds and Justin Abdelkader in the slot.

Kiprusoff collided with Franzen late in the second period and suffered what the Flames called a "lower-body injury."

Irving had played seven NHL games, none this season. But the Flames did a good job keeping the Red Wings to the outside in the final 20 minutes. Irving made a couple of glove saves early to calm himself, and the Flames withstood an early Red Wings charge.

"They kept us to the outside and we couldn't get inside pressure," Red Wings defenseman Niklas Kronwall said.

Said Babcock: "I still thought we had lots of opportunity around their net, but not at their net. I would have liked to have seen that intensity in the first period and you have a better chance of winning the game because you're not chasing."

Iginla put Calgary up 1-0 with his first goal this season.

Iginla got inside defenseman Niklas Kronwall near the crease and knocked in a rebound at 3 minutes 24 seconds, after a nice setup from Mike Cammalleri (Michigan).

With Jonathan Ericsson (interference) and Kyle Quincey (tripping) in the Red Wings penalty box, Cammalleri again made the key pass, finding Glencross alone in front, and Glencross scored his fourth goal, sliding the pass past Howard at 10:36.

Franzen cut the Flames lead to 2-1 with his third goal, on the power play, in the second period.

Kronwall made a nice play to keep the puck in the zone, and fed Zetterberg the puck.

Zetterberg found Franzen alone near the net, and Franzen converted a nice backhand shot over Kiprusoff's shoulder at 12:37.

The Red Wings had all the momentum at that point, controlling play and forcing Kiprusoff to make big saves.

After Howard stopped Iginla on a penalty shot at 13:12, it seemed only a matter of time before the Red Wings would tie the game and take charge.

But after each team failed on a power play attempt, Calgary's Wideman fired a long shot from the top of the slot that Howard was screened on, restoring Calgary's two-goal lead at 19:36, a devastating goal for the Wings to allow that late in the period.

Giordano's goal late in the third period sent the sellout crowd at Joe Louis Arena home.

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655438 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings taking too many penalties, and doing a poor job of killing them

By Ansar Khan | akhan1 at mlive.com

DETOUR — Undisciplined penalties and poor penalty killing have been a costly combination for the Detroit Red Wings.

The NHL informed clubs just before the season, via memo and video, of a crackdown on hooking, holding, interference and slashing. The Red Wings aren't adapting well to the new standards.

Detroit has been shorthanded 43 times, ninth-most in the league. That's an average of 4.78 times per game, up from last season's average of 3.34 times per game.

"When you put your free hand on somebody, you're going to the box," Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said Wednesday. "You knock someone's feet from under them, you're going to the box. So let's look after it.

"When it's details and work ethic, things we can control, those things should never, ever happen."

Babcock is particularly disturbed by needless offensive-zone penalties. His team took two in Tuesday's 4-1 loss to the Calgary Flames. He said the issue was addressed heading into Thursday's game at St. Louis.

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"Why would you shoot yourself in the foot?'' Babcock said. "You can say on a lot of those penalties, as a player, 'Oh, that's a cheap call.' You're in the box or you're not in the box, real simple to me. The bottom line is, you got an offensive-zone penalty.

"(Daniel Cleary) got two (Tuesday). We took a tough one (by Kyle Quincey) that put us down five-on-three. You're digging yourself out of a hole. We have to look after that."

Players no longer can get away with putting their sticks on an opponent's glove.

"Obviously, the rules are a little bit different, but that's no excuse," defenseman Niklas Kronwall said. "It's the same thing for everybody. We
and the rest of the guys need to do a better job of staying out of the box because it's costing us too much."

Kronwall leads the club with 10 minor penalties and Cleary has nine.

"Stick down, move your feet," Kronwall said. "We're shorting out the bench as far as who's playing on the PK and stuff like that."

Said forward Justin Abdelkader: "They're calling it tight and we got to adjust to the new rules, all the stick penalties."

The Red Wings ranked 28th in penalty killing (69.8 percent) before Wednesday's games. They have been particularly bad on the road (10-for-18 on kills, 55.6 percent).

"We need to be more organized," Kronwall said. "Sometimes, I think we're thinking too much instead of just going out there and staying on our toes, being aggressive. Sometimes, we're a step behind."

Said Abdelkader: "Just got to bear down a little bit more on our clears, make sure every puck goes 200 feet and we don't have any turnovers. And try to get in the shooting lanes and block shots."

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655439 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' Jan Mursak starts practicing with team, hoping to return in a couple of weeks

By Ansar Khan | akhan1 at mlive.com

DEtroit – Forward Jan Mursak is back on the ice with the Detroit Red Wings, but still a couple of weeks away from returning to action.

Mursak on Wednesday participated in his first full practice with the team since he suffered a collar bone/shoulder injury on a hit from David Backes in the season opener Jan. 19 in St. Louis.

"I felt pretty good," Mursak said. "I've been skating for a few days now on my own. My shoulder is getting better. I'm still a week or two away from being able to get some contact on that shoulder.

"Hopefully, it goes the same way as it did the last week and I'm back playing pretty soon."

The fast-skating right wing said he can do everything in practice, except take contact.

"I felt good shooting, passing and skating," he said.

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655440 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings give Jimmy Howard a break in practice; Mike Babcock still contemplating starter for Thursday

By Ansar Khan | akhan1 at mlive.com

on February 06, 2013 at 2:09 PM, updated February 06, 2013 at 3:05 PM

DEtroit – Detroit Red Wings goaltender Jimmy Howard, who has played every game this season, got a breather from practice on Wednesday, and coach Mike Babcock said he hasn't decided who will start in net Thursday in St. Louis (8 p.m., Fox Sports Detroit).

His only choices are Howard or rookie Petr Mrazek. Joey MacDonald (back) has been practicing for several days but hasn't been cleared to play. Jonas Gustavsson (groin) has skated on his own the past couple of days but would need a couple of full practices with the team before being able to play.

It would seem unlikely that Babcock would have Mrazek make his NHL debut in St. Louis, where the Red Wings lost 6-0 in their season opener on Jan. 19, but he said he's considering it.

“I always do that (decide on goalie) on the flight over,” Babcock said. “I haven’t got to it. So we’ll decide what we’re doing, and the same for the weekend. I’ll talk to Howie, see how he’s doing and then go from there.”

He added, "Obviously, (Howard) has been getting too much (work). He’s played great for us, but we’ve given up too much the last couple (games), so get him freshered up."

Babcock also reiterated that he hasn’t decided on his goaltending plans for the weekend home games, Saturday vs. Edmonton and Sunday vs. Los Angeles.

"We’re just going to go day-to-day and make my decision tomorrow on who’s starting tomorrow and the same thing every day after that," he said.

MacDonald, who hasn’t played since March 14, 2012, said he will see a back specialist on Friday, and if all goes well, he should be cleared. He believes he could be ready to play for the Red Wings on Saturday, if all goes well.

Asked if he would be hesitant to use MacDonald this weekend, Babcock said, "No, if he’s cleared, I wouldn’t be (hesitant) at all. Howie can’t play every night."

Wednesday was the first time MacDonald had a net to himself in practice. "There’s no pain sliding side-to-side like I had before, so I think it’s just getting back with the timing and stuff," MacDonald said. "Just waiting to get in there, and the way it is, Howie’s been riding it for a while and in a short season it’s tough to do, so he needs a break."

Asked about a possible conditioning stint with the Grand Rapids Griffins, MacDonald said, "It was mentioned, but it as mentioned for playing today in Grand Rapids. So that’s not going to happen, so who knows now? I know they’re on the road to Oklahoma (this weekend) and I won’t be going there. But we (the Red Wings) have a lot of games coming up, so somebody has to be ready to jump in there."

Gustavsson, who hasn’t dressed for a game since Jan. 21, skirted on his own before practice the last couple of days and called it a step in the right direction.

He will travel with the team to St. Louis, just to practice. He isn’t sure when he’ll be ready to play.

"First of all I got to be back to where I can do a full practice, and maybe a couple in a row, and then after that it’s just a matter of when you’re ready to play," Gustavsson said. "It’s really tough to speculate how many days from now that’s going to be. I feel positive today."

Babcock said he’ll go with the same lineup Thursday that he used in Tuesday’s 4-1 loss to Calgary, with the possible exception of the starting goalie. He said he’ll start the game with Tomas Tatar on the third line.

Here are the lines they skated with in practice Wednesday:

Johan Franzen-Henrik Zetterberg-Damienn Brunner
Valteri Filppula-Pavel Datsyuk-Todd Bertuzzi
Daniel Cleary-Justin Abdelkader-Tomas Tatar
Drew Miller-Cory Emmerton-Jordin Tootoo
Also: Patrick Eaves, Jan Mursak

Niklas Kronwall-Brian Lashoff
Kyle Quincey-Jonathan Ericsson
Kent Huskins-Ian White
Also: Jakub Kindl
Petr Mrazek
Joey MacDonald

Right wing Mikael Samuelsson, out since Jan. 22 with a groin injury, joined the team on the ice near the end of practice. He has skated by himself the past four days and hopes to being practicing soon.

"Can’t rush just it. I’ve done that in the past and it doesn’t work," Samuelsson said. "You come here, you really want to perform. I shouldn’t say I rushed it (before), but I really wanted to play right off the get-go and show what I can do."
EDMONTON — Bob Stauffer’s switch is always on.

But then that comes with his job as host of Oilers Now on 630 CHED Radio and as the team’s colour man.

His 14-hour day ended about 11 p.m. on Wednesday when he drove home after the Edmonton Oilers-Dallas Stars game at Rexall Place.

During his shift, Stauffer attended the Oilers’ morning skate, sat in on Ralph Krueger’s morning news conference, hosted a two-hour radio phone-in show, made mid-afternoon transportation arrangements to get his two children home from school, co-hosted the pre-game broadcast, did colour during the game and then chatted with coaches, players and scouts after the game.

“I’m ‘on’ all the time. There is no on-air act.

It doesn’t matter what you do in life ... the guys who work the hardest, are all-in and relentless are usually the most successful,” the 46-year-old says.

“I also am not a fan of guys who feel the need to drum up fake emotion when discussing topics on-air. Have an opinion, but make it a real one.”

There are times in his day when he turns social media.

“I do not read tweets when I am with my kids,” he says of daughter Torrie, 9, and son Hudson, 6.

Stauffer enjoys travelling with the Oilers, but cherishes every time he returns home.

“I am coming to terms with the reality that Torrie and Hudson are teaching me more about life than I will ever teach them.”

Yet, the Stauffer kids are learning from their father that hard work and being innovative can lead to success.

As a youngster, Stauffer lived in various parts of Edmonton: Greenfields, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Fultonvale, Duggam and Laurier Heights.

He played midget AA hockey for Ace Lang, of the South Side Athletic Club, as a 16 year old.

His linemate was Guy Gadowsky, who is now the head coach at Penn State.

Stauffer and Gadowsky tied for the team lead in scoring, tallying 43 points in 32 games. Stauffer had 100 more than penalty minutes that season, however.

“When I was 17, I came to terms with the fact that I wasn’t going to make it as a player. About that time, I will admit to looking up to broadcast booths and hoping that I could get there one day,” he says.

He had an ace up his sleeve, though. In elementary school, classmates noticed Stauffer had a photographic memory, something that has paid him dividends as a broadcaster who needs to quote statistics.

“I can tell you when interviewing a player, coach or GM, a reference to someone who played with them in the past almost always is received favourably,” he says.

In 1995, with help from friend John Sexsmith, Stauffer landed a statistician gig with Molstar productions, working with visiting teams coming through Edmonton.

It was there he noticed American networks were selling sponsorships for numerous parts of the games, such as player introductions, faceoffs and power plays.

In 1988, he bought the University of Alberta Golden Bears hockey and football rights and then sold broadcast sponsorships.

It worked well.

Then, in 2000, Stauffer increased his workload at U of A, when he was named sports information director.

His time as a statistician paid off a year later when he was asked to fill in for San Jose Sharks play-by-plan voice Dan Rusanowsky at a game in Denver.

The next year, Stauffer was contacted by former Team 1260 program director, Bryn Griffiths.

“He said, ‘If you can sell CIS hockey on a campus station, you can sell a sports talk show on a mainstream AM station.’ ”

He began hosting an afternoon show called Total Hockey in 2003, which eventually became Total Sports.

He then moved to CHED in August 2008.

“What matters is that the broadcasters are good, work hard and are fair,” he says.

His recall of stats is enviable. But there’s one memory that’s especially dear to him.

He remembers clearly when he was introduced to a woman named Kathleen.

“I knew within the first 15 minutes of our first date she would become my wife,” he says.

By Joanne Ireland,
EDMONTON - The story goes that when word of Mark Arcobello’s call-up to the Edmonton Oilers got around the locker-room of the Oklahoma City Barons, the players let loose a loud cheer.

And not just because another of their teammates was going to the NHL, but because it was the undrafted undersized overachieving forward who earned his way to the show.

“He worked hard to get to this point, and you’re excited every time you see players who weren’t drafted get up here,” said Jordan Eberle, who played with Arcobello for the Barons in the American Hockey League during the NHL lockout and will again on Wednesday against the Dallas Stars.

It will be the 24-year-old’s first NHL game.

“He’s a smart player. That’s probably the biggest thing that makes up for his size — much like Nuge when he first came in,” Eberle said. “He’s got great vision, he thinks the game well, he’s got a great shot, and he’s good in his d-zone.”

Arcobello, listed at a generous five-foot-nine, was pinch-hitting for Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (shoulder injury) against the Stars on a night when the Oilers were also without centres Shawn Horcoff (broken knuckle) and Eric Belanger (broken toes).

Arcobello said his first NHL game was more nerve-racking than any test he wrote while attending Yale University, where he majored in political science.

“I guess the most exciting things in life are pretty nerve-racking at first,” he said. “(But) I’ve been waiting for this for a long time.

“You do what you can and sometimes some things just aren’t up to you. I’m just happy I’ve got this opportunity. It’s been something I’ve been working for.”

Determination is what propelled Arcobello from Yale to the ECHL and eventually to a two-year contract with the Oilers. Always, he told himself he’d get his shot in the NHL.

When the Oilers called up Arcobello, Oilers head coach Ralph Krueger said it was because he was the best of the Barons forwards and not only because he’s contributed 35 points in 42 AHL games. It was also because his defensive game has been good enough that he was also playing with the Barons’ penalty-killers.

During the four years he spent at Yale, Arcobello, who hails from Connecticut, played against Krueger’s son, Justin, who was attending Cornell.

“When you’re a smaller player, you had better be very, very smart to make up for that disadvantage, especially with the defensive battles,” Krueger said. “We feel comfortable with him.”

“I have confidence in my abilities,” said Arcobello. “I’ve done well at other levels. I’ve played with a few guys in this room before. There might be a bit of an adjustment period, but I think I’ll be all right.

“Seeing my hard work payoff is something I’m proud of. I started in the east coast three years ago and I’ve been working my way up. It’s nice I’m getting the chance now.”

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655444 Edmonton Oilers

Nugent-Hopkins joins injury brigade

Jim Matheson

Edmonton Oilers’ coach Ralph Krueger swears, although I didn’t see a bibile in sight so he could put his hand on one, that Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is only banged up which is why he won’t play against the Dallas Stars Wednesday night. He does admit that, yes, it is another shoulder thing like last season, but he says there’s no cause for panic in the streets.

It’s like the cop on the street at a traffic accident when people stop to rubber-neck.

“Just move along folks, nothing to see here. Just a fender-bender.”

I guess we’ll see. Last season, Taylor Hall played with a bad shoulder for months until they said he needed surgery. This RNH situation has to be of some concern considering what Hall went through, right? Or are we just being alarmist? I might be a little worried considering RNH had all last summer to get his body healthy after the two shoulder problems last season and also did some strengthening exercises and a bunch of tests this past December before he got the green light to play for Canada at the world junior in Ufa. It was supposed to be all hunky-dory, and now he’s missing games. But, maybe we’re blowing this out of proportion.

“Ryan is sore. Just precautionary. We could see him back Saturday (in Detroit),” said Krueger, saying the kid could have played if, say, it was game one of the playoffs, not game 10 of the 48-game regular-season.

So, here’s the body count for Coach Krueger:

Shawn Horcoff (busted knuckle) out.

*Eric Belanger (broken toes) out.

*Nou RNH (body soreness) out.

That’s three of the top four centres with Sam Gagner the last man standing on two good legs. With the captain and the other veteran Belanger missing, they obviously didn’t need Nugent-Hopkins taking this one off against the Stars. But he’s their meal ticket and you don’t mess around with a supposed small injury that might turn into a big injury. He got rocked late in the 3-2 loss to Vancouver Monday night.

“Yes, it’s the shoulder, but it’s a different situation. It’s short-term not the same as last time,” said Krueger.

Nugent-Hopkins first hurt the left shoulder in his rookie season when he stumbled in Chicago and slid into the boards right in early January, 2012. He missed games from Jan. 2 to Feb. 4. He came back, played against Detroit, scoring the shootout winner, but hurt the shoulder again Feb. 6 against the Maple Leafs. He missed 19 more days. He wound up missing 20 of their 82 games, losing the rookie of the year award to Gabriel Landeskog, in large part because of his time on the shelf.

He played in Oklahoma City during the lockout but in early December, he needed some rehab and exercises for the shoulder. He went through some testing, and it was deemed strong enough to play in Ufa. He’s averaged 21.16 in his first nine league games. He’s yet to score — more about bad luck, good goalies and hands that aren’t quite as soft as last season when he popped 18 goals. Not the shoulder. He has five assists.

With RNH out, little farmhand centre Mark Arcobello, generously listed at 5’9″, will take his spot between Jordan Eberle and Taylor Hall. No place for a nervous person, obviously. Then again, a lot of minor-leaguers with offensive ability get called up and they get thrown on a fourth line with pluggers. Arcobello is getting the shot of his life in his first NHL game. He’s getting the A listers, not the role players on his wings. He played with Eberle and Hall in OKCity, too, when Nugent-Hopkins was at the world junior. Different league, same inimies.

Obviously, the Oilers knew Tuesday that RNH might not play against Dallas. They brought up the offensive-minded Arcobello, not the fourth-line PK guy Chris VandeVelde. “What’s so good about Mark is his cleverness. He sees the game so well,” said Krueger, who has a soft spot for the buck-the-odds small guy who wasn’t a high draft pick (99th overall in 2009 out of Yale U).

He could see about 20 minutes ice-time against Dallas. He figures to see the powerplay, as well.

Gagner will stay with Ales Hemsky and Nail Yakupov. Ryan Smyth will move into the middle on the third line with Lennart Petrell and Darcy Hordichuk. The Nordic Line—Swedes Anton Lander and Magnus Paajarvi and Finn Teemu Hartikainen—will work as the fourth line with Hartikainen seeing some powerplay time.

Defenceman Mark Fistric won’t play against his old Dallas teammates. He bruised his tailbone when he lined up Canucks’ rookie Jordan Schroeder with a hit and missed. He slammed into the boards. “I’ve been told it’s like somebody falling off a truck onto the cement. That’s the jolt he took,” said Krueger.

Ryan Whitney will be back in the lineup, playing with Corey Potter. Whitney was a healthy scratch against the Canucks. Big news then, but really no bigger than the Stars who are sitting blueliner Alex Goligoski against the Oilers. Goligoski was acquired from Pittsburgh last season for winger
James Neal and defenceman Matt Niskanen. Neal turned into a first team NHL all-star with 40 goals. He’s on Sidney Crosby’s wing this season.

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655445 Edmonton Oilers

Arcobello pinchhitting for Oilers centre Nugent-Hopkins in first NHL game

Joanne Ireland

Not only is Mark Arcobello about to step out for his first NHL game, he’s going to do so with Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle.

Arcobello will pinch hit for Ryan Nugent-Hopkins against the Dallas Stars tonight while Ryan Smyth plays centre between Darcy Hordichuk and Lennart Pettrell. Both Edmonton Oilers captains Shawn Horcoff (busted knuckle) and faceoff specialist Eric Belanger (broken toes) are out of the lineup.

Nugent-Hopkins left the overtime session of Monday’s game against the Vancouver Canucks with a shoulder issue and will be kept out of the lineup. He is expected back for Saturday’s game against the Detroit Red Wings.

“This is something you dream about so I’m really excited,” said Arcobello, whose first call after the call up from the Oklahoma City Barons was to his parents. “Hallsie has the speed, Ebs has the creativity. I just need to add what I can.”

Arcobello filled in for Nugent-Hopkins when he left the Oklahoma City Barons during the lockout to play for Canada at the world juniors.

He left the Barons with 35 points in 42 games.

“He is a smart player, which probably makes up for his size – much like Nuge when he first came in,” said Eberle. “He’s got great vision, he thinks the game well and he’s got a great shot.

“We had a lot of chemistry with him in the AHL and he’s a great player. He deserves to be up here.”

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655446 Edmonton Oilers

Time for Tambellini to get pro-active again for an NHL centre

Jim Matheson

Edmonton Oilers’ GM Steve Tambellini moved quickly to get defenceman Mark Fistric from Dallas a few days into training camp after the lockout ended, in part because Theo Peckham had a sore hip and wasn’t in the proper shape. He surprised most of the NHL, getting the abrasive blueliner for an average price, a third-round pick.

He was applauded for his pro-active approach, not even waiting until the season started.

Now it’s time to get cracking for a depth centre, even if Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (shoulder) might be back Saturday after missing Wednesday’s game and Eric Belanger (broken toes) might give it a shot Sunday in Columbus, which may be overly optimistic because he’s limping around with a running shoe that’s bigger than his street shoes to get his swollen toes in the footwear.

I know Tambellini is dealing from a position of semi-weakness in a trade scenario with Anton Lander leaving the rink on crutches Wednesday after he took a shot off his foot very early in the 3-2 OT loss to the Stars, and Shawn Horcoff out for a month with a busted knuckle on his right hand. But, the Oilers have to have more depth at the centre ice position. You can’t play NHL games with three centres, and one of those is a winger Ryan Smyth, even as well as he played against the Stars, and the other is Mark Arcobello, who had his NHL coming-out party, getting his first game. The best available centre to the Oilers’ bench Wednesday night was TSN TV analyst Ray Ferraro, but Ferraro, who played 1,258 NHL games is 48. He’s not volunteering. He likes his TV gig.

“I looked over at Lander on the bench (after he got hit) and he was shaking his leg (trying to will the pain away). It’s amazing to see all these injuries happening to one group,” said Ferraro.

Lander may only have a bone bruise, not a break. He had an x-ray and they didn’t find a fracture, according to Krueger. But, you never know with these sorts of things. Often, a couple of days later when the swelling goes down, new pictures show a break. Whatever, he’s out, like all the other centres are out, except Sam Gagner.

They may have to wrap him in bubble wrap with orders to go nowhere near an opposing player winding up for a shot. “Yeah, the puck seems to be our enemy right now, not the opposition,” joked Krueger.

Maybe Gagner has to put on those old fibre-glass foot-guards. “Maybe my dad (former NHL Dave) has some hanging around,” kidded Gagner.

The going rate for available players in trade has been set: it’s a fifth-round draft pick, off the two deals Wednesday for expendable guys. Pittsburgh dealt defenceman Ben Lovejoy, who was plowed into the boards by ex Oiler forward Colin McDonald in an Islanders’ game a week or so ago, to Anaheim for a fifth-rounder, and New Jersey grabbed Kings’ forward Andrei Loktionov for the same price.

So if the Oilers are looking for a stop-gap centre, that’s a small price to pay to try and get big Dave Steckel out of Toronto or old face Marty Reasoner in Long Island or Swede Tom Wandell in Dallas, a healthy scratch against the Oilers. Steckel is close to a 60 percent face-off guy in his career but he’s in Leafs’ coach Randy Carlyle’s doghouse. He doesn’t play, Reasoner, who has had two stints with the Oilers, is a support player with the Isles and a 52 percent face-off winner. Wandell isn’t strong on face-offs but he has played over 200 games.

Or maybe they do contact Jason Arnott’s brother agent Wade as a free-agent possibility. Wade says his brother’s knee is fine even though the Rangers failed him at a physical when they wanted to sign him. Maybe the Oilers doctors would see something different. Maybe they see if Brendan Morrison is available, another free-agent.

Whatever way they want to go, Tambellini has to act. Doesn’t matter what players come back and when. The Oilers are painfully thin of centres in their organization, but Krueger isn’t imposing his boss to get help, yet.

“Let’s see how these injuries turn out first,” said Krueger. “Right now, Horcoff is the only long-term injury,” said Krueger. Horcoff was playing soccer with the players outside the dressing room before the game with a bandage on his right hand, so we know his feet are fine, but not his hands.

He had the blender out against the Stars. Fortunately, there weren’t a lot of face-offs, only 42 in total through the 62 minutes so they weren’t terribly exposed there. They used six different guys on draws, including Taylor Hall (five times) and Ales Hemsky once. Gagner took the most 15 and had a better night than the horror show against the Canucks Monday when he was 3-15. He won six out of 15 this time. Arcobello only won three of 10. Hall won three of his five and Smyth was 4-5 on the night.

“Ryan did an amazing job filling a hole, going up against Jamie Benn’s line an awful lot. We ask him to be a versatile player but to do what he did was special,” said Krueger.

With all the injury moving parts, Krueger will wait until late Thursday before deciding what to do with Arcobello. Maybe they bring up a defensive centre Chris VandeVelde instead. But, they need an experienced NHL centre, not call-ups from the minors, especially in a short season where they can’t afford to wait.

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655447 Edmonton Oilers

Oilers can’t use excuses — and they aren’t — despite weirdly centre-depleted lineup
Teemu Hartikainen and others have a more glittering chance to expand
their roles a bit and demonstrate their versatility and ability to close out games.

“We’ve got to find a way to win four-on-four,” said Eberle, referring to the Oilers four overtime or shootout losses, including the last two straight in OT.

“Those are huge points, especially when everything’s always so tight (in the standings).

“It’s (current situation) an opportunity for a lot of guys. I mean, we’re playing three lines and guys are going to get a lot of minutes they may not be used to.

“I thought, for the most part, the guys ran with it and played pretty well. And that’s a positive.”

That it is. Now about that pesky issue of not merely being gritty, not just battling back, but finding a way to win.

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65548  Edmonton Oilers

And down goes another Oiler centre...Anton Lander

Jim Matheson

Edmonton Oilers centre Anton Lander stopped a shot early in the first period Wednesday and was seen on crutches under the stands, presumably after having his foot examined. No word on the severity of the injury, whether it’s broken or badly bruised but he obviously can’t put any weight on his foot.

Lander joins fellow centres Shawn Horcoff (busted knuckle on right hand), Eric Belanger (broken toes on right foot) and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (shoulder soreness), who didn’t dress for the game against the Dallas Stars.

With all the injuries, coach Ralph Krueger got the blender out for centres.

With centres Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (sore shoulder), Shawn Horcoff (broken knuckle), Eric Belanger (broken toes) and Anton Lander (foot injury suffered early in the first period) all out, the Oilers might wallow in self-pity or lean on an easy injury crutch. But they didn’t.

“We had a lot of guys step up in the absence of a lot of guys,” said Eberle, who played with Hall on left wing, as usual, and call-up Mark Arcobello where Nugent-Hopkins would normally be. “We’ve got to find a way to battle through it (rush of injuries).

“It’s tough losing. You get so close and you don’t get rewarded.”

On that tying goal, it was Hall who won the faceoff in the Dallas zone, chipping it to Hemsky, who dished a perfect pass to defenceman Schultz, who hammered a slap shot past Dallas goalie Kari Lehtonen at 7:36 of the third period.

That stood up until Jagr’s brilliant solo effort at 1:46 of overtime ended things. The veteran beat defenceman Ryan Whitney in the corner, walked toward the net and ripped a great shot past Dubnyk. It would be facile to find fault, but this was vintage Jagar, pure and simple.

Still, Whitney had an uninspired game for a player who was a healthy scratch in the Oilers loss to Vancouver on Monday night, benched in favor of Mark Fistric. In keeping with the Oilers injury nightmare, Fistric was injured early in the game against the Canucks, so back came Whitney from the press box on Wednesday night.

More than a few other Oilers were inspired. Defenceman Ladislav Smid blocked an eye-popping nine shots in the game, on a night the Oilers blocked 21 of them to 12 for the Stars.

Gagner, no dynamo in the faceoff circle, historically, won six and lost nine, a 40 per cent success rate, an uptick, by his standards. The rest of Gagner’s game was superb as he and linemates Hemsky and Yakupov had more than a few dangerous moments, apart from the spectacular shift that produced Hemsky’s fourth goal of the season.

Teemu Hartikainen and Magnus Paajarvi were skating and banging, going to the tough areas. Hartikainen was screening Lehtonen on Justin Schultz’s third period.

Ryan Smyth delivered a solid, if workmanlike game at centre, filling in for Horcoff as the third-line centre. If it’s basic that a team must collectively lift
to the tough areas. Hartikainen was screening Lehtonen on Justin Schultz’s
tying goal in the third period.

Jim Matheson

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Lander joins fellow centres Shawn Horcoff (busted knuckle on right hand), Eric Belanger (broken toes on right foot) and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (shoulder soreness), who didn’t dress for the game against the Dallas Stars.

With all the injuries, coach Ralph Krueger got the blender out for centres.

With centres Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (sore shoulder), Shawn Horcoff (busted knuckle on right hand), Eric Belanger (broken toes on right foot) and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (shoulder soreness), who didn’t dress for the game against the Dallas Stars.

With all the injuries, coach Ralph Krueger got the blender out for centres.

He was left with only Sam Gagner, who got an assist on Ales Hemsky’s second-period goal to run his league-high point streak to 10 games, call-up Mark Arcobello, playing his first NHL game, and Ryan Smyth, normally a winger who started the game as the third-line centre.

GM Steve Tambellini is going to have to work the phones now to acquire an NHL centre from somewhere.

Former Oilers’ first-round draft Jason Arnott failed his physical when the Rangers wanted to sign him but the free-agent who played last year in St. Louis is sitting in Dallas waiting for a call. His agent brother Wade says his knee is fine, but that would be a matter for the Oilers’ doctors if they were interested in him. Some of the names out there: Toronto centre Dave Steckel, one of the best face-off men in the league but a slow skater, former Oiler Marty Reasoner, who’s playing on Long Island and Tom Wandell, who was a Dallas scratch Wednesday.

The Oilers do have one other centre on their farm team, defensive specialist Chris VandeVeide, but he’s only played 22 NHL games and that would leave the farm club with virtually no centres to fill out their roster.

Lander was originally recalled from the American League Oklahoma City Barons last week when Horcoff had a strained neck after a wallop by Phoenix captain Shane Doan. In his first three games he had averaged 12 1/2 minutes work.

Horcoff stopped a shot in the second period against Vancouver Canucks Monday and is out at least a month. He was playing soccer outside the dressing room with his hand bandaged Wednesday before the game, but he can’t hold a stick, so he’s out.

Belanger was hit by an Erik Johnson shot in the first period in Denver last Saturday afternoon. He is on injured reserve, and will be back as soon as he can get his foot in a skate boot with some protection. Maybe in a week or so.

Nugent-Hopkins didn’t skate Wednesday morning and coach Ralph Kreuger said he had soreness in his shoulder after taking a hit against the Canucks. He felt he might play in Detroit Saturday. With RNH out and
Horcoff out, they recalled farmhand Mark Arcobello to play with Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle Wednesday.

Lander started the game on a line with fellow Swede Magnus Paajarvi and Finn Teemu Hartikainen. He tried to gut it out after taking the shot but only played 75 seconds over three shifts.

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655449 Edmonton Oilers

Nugent-Hopkins joins injury brigade

Jim Matheson

Edmonton Oilers’ coach Ralph Krueger swears, although I didn’t see a bible in sight so he could put his hand on one, that Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is only banged up which is why he won’t play against the Dallas Stars Wednesday night. He does admit that, yes, it is another shoulder thing like last season, but he says there’s no cause for panic in the streets.

It’s like the cop on the street at a traffic accident when people stop to rubber-neck.

“Just move along folks, nothing to see here. Just a fender-bender.”

I guess we’ll see. Last season, Taylor Hall played with a bad shoulder for months until they said he needed surgery. This RNH situation has to be of some concern considering what Hall went through, right? Or are we just being alarmists? I might be a little worried considering RNH had all last summer to get his body healthy after the two shoulder problems last season and also did some strengthening exercises and a bunch of tests this past December before he got the green light to play for Canada at the world junior in Ufa. It was supposed to be all hunky-dory, and now he’s missing games. But, maybe we’re blowing this out of proportion.

“Ryan is sore. Just precautionary. We could see him back Saturday (in Detroit),” said Krueger, saying the kid could have played if, say, it was game one of the playoffs, not game 10 of the 48-game regular-season.

So, here’s the body count for Coach Krueger:

Shawn Horcoff (busted knuckle) out.

*Eric Belanger (broken toes) out.

*Now RNH (body soreness) out.

That’s three of the top four centres with Sam Gagner the last man standing whose first call after the call up from the Oklahoma City Barons was to his parents. “Hallsie has the speed, Ebs has the creativity. I just need to add what I can.”

Nugent-Hopkins first hurt the left shoulder in his rookie season when he stumbled in Chicago and slid into the boards right in early January, 2012. He missed games from Jan. 2 to Feb. 4. He came back, played against Detroit, scoring the shootout winner, but hurt the shoulder again Feb. 6 against the Maple Leafs. He missed 19 more days. He wound up missing 20 of their 82 games, losing the rookie of the year award to Gabriel Landeskog, in large part because of his time on the shelf.

He played in Oklahoma City during the lockout but in early December, he needed some rehab and exercises for the shoulder. He went through some testing, and it was deemed strong enough to play in Ufa. He’s averaged 21.16 in his first nine league games. He’s yet to score—more about bad luck, good goallies and hands that aren’t quite as soft as last season when he popped 18 goals. Not the shoulder, He has five assists.

With RNH out, little farmhand centre Mark Arcobello, generously listed at 5’9”, will take his spot between Jordan Eberle and Taylor Hall. No place for a nervous person, obviously. Then again, a lot of minor-leaguers with offensive ability get called up and they get thrown on a fourth line with pluggers. Arcobello is getting the shot of his life in his first NHL game. He’s getting the A listers, not the role players on his wings. He played with Eberle and Hall in OKCity, too, when Nugent-Hopkins was at the world junior. Different league, same linemates.

Obviously, the Oilers knew Tuesday that RNH might not play against Dallas. They brought up the offensive-minded Arcobello, not the fourth-line PK guy Chris VandeVelde. “What’s so good about Mark is his cleverness. He sees the game so well,” said Krueger, who has a soft spot for the buck-the-odds small guy who wasn’t a high draft pick (99th overall in 2009 out of Yale U).

He could see about 20 minutes ice-time against Dallas. He figures to see the powerplay, as well.

Gagner will stay with Ales Hemsky and Nail Yakupov. Ryan Smyth will move into the middle on the third line with Lennart Petrell and Darcy Hordichuk. The Nordic Line—Swedes Anton Lander and Magnus Paajarvi and Finn Teemu Hartikainen—will work as the fourth line with Hartikainen seeing some powerplay time.

Defenceman Mark Fistric won’t play against his old Dallas teammates. He bruised his tailbone when he lined up Canucks’ rookie Jordan Schroeder with a hit and missed. He slammed into the boards. “I’ve been told it’s like somebody falling off a truck onto the cement. That’s the jolt he took,” said Krueger.

Ryan Whitney will be back in the lineup, playing with Corey Potter. Whitney was a healthy scratch against the Canucks. Big news then, but really no bigger than the Stars who are sitting blueliner Alex Goligoski against the Oilers. Goligoski was acquired from Pittsburgh last season for winger James Neal and defenceman Matt Niskanen. Neal turned into a first team NHL all-star with 40 goals. He’s on Sidney Crosby’s wing this season.

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655450 Edmonton Oilers

Arcobello pinchhitting for Oilers centre Nugent-Hopkins in first NHL game

Joanne Ireland

Not only is Mark Arcobello about to step out for his first NHL game, he’s going to do so with Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle.

Arcobello will pinch hit for Ryan Nugent-Hopkins against the Dallas Stars tonight while Ryan Smyth plays centre between Darcy Hordichuk and Lennart Petrell. Both Edmonton Oilers captain Shawn Horcoff (busted knuckle) and faceoff specialist Eric Belanger (broken toes) are out of the lineup.

Nugent-Hopkins left the overtime session of Monday’s game against the Vancouver Canucks with a shoulder issue and will be kept out of the lineup. He is expected back for Saturday’s game against the Detroit Red Wings.

“This is something you dream about so I’m really excited,” said Arcobello, whose first call after the call up from the Oklahoma City Barons was to his parents. “Hallsie has the speed, Ebs has the creativity. I just need to add what I can.”

Arcobello filled in for Nugent-Hopkins when he left the Oklahoma City Barons during the lockout to play for Canada at the world juniors.

He left the Barons with 35 points in 42 games.

“He is a smart player, which probably makes up for his size — much like Nuge when he first came in,” said Eberle. “He’s got great vision, he thinks the game well and he’s got a great shot.

“We had a lot of chemistry with him in the AHL and he’s a great player. He deserves to be up here.”

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655451 Edmonton Oilers
Sam Gagner the lone starting centre still standing for the Edmonton Oilers

By Terry Jones

EDMONTON - Don't be surprised if Sam Gagner shows up in Detroit Saturday looking like the Michelin Man.

The Edmonton Oilers’ last healthy centre will likely consider showing up to play the Red Wings wearing chain mail, a hazmat suit or wrapping himself in foam packing peanuts, bubble wrap and all the columns I’ve ever written saying anything bad about him.

It’s at the point where Gagner must have survivor’s guilt.

If it weren’t enough to lose captain Shawn Horcoff for half a season with a freak knuckle injury, Eric Belanger with two broken toes and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins with a sore shoulder, call-up centre Anton Lander took a shot in the foot early in the first period last night and was on crutches before the Oilers made it back to the dressing room.

“Right now the puck is our enemy, not the opponent,” said coach Ralph Krueger.

If this team hadn’t lost 286, 346, 225, 531, 286 and 246 man game to injuries in each of the last six seasons in which they’ve missed the playoffs, you’d say this is unbelievable.

What is unbelievable is that the injuries are coming not long after the enemy — the puck — is dropped.

“Belanger, Horcoff and now Lander have all happened very early in the hockey game,” said Krueger.

In the end the Oilers managed to get the game to overtime where it wasn’t all the donut lines (no centres) that cost them the two points as it was Ryan Whitney getting back in the lineup and imploding yet again.

“It was a one-on-one coming out of the corner,” said Krueger of Jaromir Jagr’s overtime winner in a game in which Taylor Hall and Ales Hemsky played outstanding games, stepping up in a situation which demanded it.

“I’m proud of the effort. It just makes that loss more disappointing,” said Krueger, who was at least able to report that it appears nothing is broken in Jagr’s right hand or fingers.

“My skates are still fitting right,” said Jagr, a one-time NHL leading scorer.

“I think there are different ways you talk to different players and I think that sometimes it’s tough not to be in awe of the Czech native.

“I think I’d be lying to anyone if I said I wasn’t,” Gulutzan said. “I grew up watching him play as well and to see a player of that calibre on the ice, just to watch his subtleties, just to watch on the ice what he does and what he can do, is pretty neat.

“The first time in he practised in Dallas and our practice rink was full, we knew we had a special player. I think for all of us, it was kind of neat.”

Regardless, Gulutzan, 41, is the one calling the shots and there may be a kind of mentality and mindset he has."
Mark Fistric went out for a quick skate with the Oilers Wednesday morning, but was still not healthy enough to get into the lineup against his former club.

Fistric hurt his back Monday slamming into the boards attempting a hip-check on Vancouver Canucks rookie Jordan Schroeder.

“Our physiotherapist said it would be like falling off the top of a truck on your rear end,” said Oilers head coach Ralph Krueger.

“It’s just kind of a jolt. It’s a strain on the back region, so we’re certain it’s only going to be a couple of days.”

Fistric will be making the road trip with the Oilers this weekend. He could be ready to go up against the Detroit Red Wings Saturday.

Junior memoirs

Coming back to Edmonton is always special to Tomas Vincour.

The Dallas Stars centre began his North American adventure in the city as a member of the Edmonton Oil Kings.

Vincour didn’t speak a word of English when he arrived in Edmonton, but went on to have an excellent junior career.

“It’s always nice to come back here, I have lot of friends here and there are so many familiar faces,” said Vincour. “It’s always nice to come back to where I basically grew up in my junior career.”

Heading into Wednesday’s game Vincour has a goal in five games with the Stars this season.

According to his head coach, he’s still a work in progress.

“You just want to try and get better and improve every day as the season goes on,” Vincour said. “Especially now that the season is so short, if you don’t have a good start, it’ll be tough to get those points later in the year. We’re focusing on every game and every game is like a playoff game for us.”

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655453 Edmonton Oilers

Dallas Stars beat Edmonton Oilers repeats recurring theme

By Robert Tychkowski

EDMONTON - Dallas does Dubie?

No matter what the title, no matter who the goalie, we’ve seen the movie before: the Dallas Stars over the Edmonton Oilers.

You can set your watch by the regularly-scheduled beatings — since moving to Texas the Stars are 53-12-7 against Edmonton — but this one was especially cruel.

Down three injured centres when the game started, and a fourth a few minutes after the opening faceoff, the severely short-staffed Oilers put up a tremendous fight Wednesday at Rexall Place, only to lose 3-2 when Jaromir Jagr slid the winner past Devan Dubnyk in overtime.

A heartbreaking end to a valiant effort? Forget that, says Jordan Eberle, this is a game they should have won.

“We found a way to overcome it, we found a way to score a power-play goal and tie it up,” he said. “Even though we’re missing a lot of guys up the middle we found a way to make up for it and battle our way back. That’s a positive.

“But we have to find a way to win four-on-four in overtime. We found a way to tie it, but we have to find a way to win it.”

He’s right. Down four centres and playing a team they never beat, it was Edmonton’s to lose.

Unfortunately, they lost it.

“We’ve had some tough luck around here with the injuries, it’s tough to keep losing these guys, but we’re not going to look at it as an excuse,” said defenceman Justin Schultz. “Everyone here is capable of playing big minutes. You have to find a way to win and we didn’t.”

It looked like a sure thing for Dallas before the puck even dropped, with Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Shawn Horcoff and Eric Belanger already out with injuries. And it went from bad to worse early in the game when Anton Lander left with a foot injury.

He was seen hobbling into the X-ray room on crutches.

Basically, Fate is Zac Rinaldo and the Oilers centres are BJ Crombeen.

Enough already.

“We have to find a way to battle through it,” said Eberle. “Every team goes through this.”

Well, maybe not THIS. Four centres in the last three games?

“It’s crazy,” said Dubnyk. “Guys are sacrificing and blocking shots ... weird accidents.”

Yet Edmonton managed to make a game out of it, jumping out to a 1-0 lead on Ales Hemsky’s second period goal and then, after Jamie Benn and Derek Roy had given Dallas the lead, tying it 2-2 midway through the third on a power-play goal from Schultz.

But Dallas, as is almost alway the case against Edmonton, was one goal better.

“We did a good job coming back and put on a good push in the third on got it to overtime, which is good to see,” said Dubnyk. “But we obviously want to start getting two points. And we’ll find a way.”

NUGE UPDATE: Nugent-Hopkins has been having all kinds of trouble with the shoulder. He missed a month, came back for two games, took a pretty minor bump and was out again for seven more games.

He also had the shoulder looked at earlier this year before departing for the World Junior Championships.

But head coach Ralph Krueger swears it’s not a big deal.

“He’s sore,” said Krueger, who is optimistic the 19-year-old sophomore will play Saturday in Detroit. “It’s short-term for sure. It’s more just being smart ... we don’t want to force a player of his calibre into a situation where he’s not 100%.”

HIGH TOP: At six-foot-seven, defenceman Jamie Oleksiak is the tallest player to ever play for the Stars. He’s third tallest in the NHL, behind six-foot-nine Zdeno Chara and six-foot-eight John Scott.

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655454 Edmonton Oilers

Injuries pave the way for Mark Arcobello to join the Edmonton Oilers

By Robert Tychkowski

EDMONTON - No Nuge is good news for Mark Arcobello.

When Ryan Nugent-Hopkins became the third Oilers centre to be injured in the last two games, completing a hard-luck hat-trick that saw Eric Belanger crack two toes on Saturday and Shawn Horcoff crush a knuckle on Monday, it meant Arcobello was finally getting a break, too.

With the Edmonton desperately needing reinforcement up the middle, the Oilers placed a call to Oklahoma City to let the 24-year-old centre know he was about to play his very first NHL game.

“It’s something you dream about when you’re a little kid,” said the Connecticut product and Yale grad, who put up 39 points in 43 AHL games this year and spent some time between Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle during the lockout. “I’ve been waiting for it a long time.”
Head coach Ralph Krueger called Arcobello the obvious choice. "He’s earned it," Krueger said of the call-up. "He really earned it by working extremely hard the last couple of seasons in Oklahoma City and becoming an elite player in the American League."

But at 5-foot-9 and 165 pounds, promotions to the NHL don’t come easy. Guys like Arcobello have to be smarter and faster and work harder than 6-foot-1, 200 pounds if they want to make it in the pros.

So he is, and he does.

"He’s smart, he reads the game so very well," said Krueger. "When you’re a smaller player you better be very, very smart to make up for that disadvantage, especially in the defensive battles."

It’s been a long wait and long road (most of it accompanied by the soundtrack “you’re too small”) but finally lining it up in the NHL - for however long he’s up here - is something they’ll never be able to take away.

"To see your hard work pay off is something I’m proud of," he said. "I started out in the East Coast league three years ago and now I’m working my way up.

"I’m happy I got the opportunity. It’s been something I’ve been working for my whole career."

He’s always believed he can play in this league.

"I have confidence in my abilities," he said. "I’ve done well at other levels. I’ve played with a few guys in this locker room before (in OKC). I think there might be a bit of an adjustment period but I’ve done it at other levels before so I think I’ll be all right."

Krueger isn’t betting against him. The Oilers coach is actually quite familiar with the Arcobello; he knew him when he was nobody.

"It’s a special story because he played against my son for four years in a row, he was at Yale and my son was at Cornell," said Krueger. "I watched Mark Arcobello on many, many occasions and respect the kind of player he is."

It was a popular decision in OKC, where teammates have watched him beat the odds for three years.

"I heard they were cheering in the dressing room when they heard it in the dressing room," said Krueger. "The room erupted when they heard it because they really feel he deserves this."

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By Derek Van Diest

EDMONTON - Jamie Benn was anxious to get back on the ice this season, but had to wait a little longer than most.

The Dallas Stars winger was involved in a contract dispute at the start of the season, which took a couple of weeks into the shortened campaign to resolve.

"I always knew it was going to get done sooner or later," Benn said prior to facing the Oilers Wednesday night. "But it was tough, it seemed like it dragged on a little longer than I thought it would. But I was happy the Dallas Stars organization believed in me and I’m happy to be a Star for five more years."

Benn, 23, and the Stars came to terms on a five-year, $26.25-million contract with both sides understanding the urgency heading into the season.

After sitting out half the year due to the lockout, the last thing Benn wanted was any extended time off.

"For sure, you don’t have too much time to mess around with a short season," Benn said. "It’s tough watching the guys battle while I’m sitting at home on the couch. But I’m happy to be a part of it now."

The Stars went five games without Benn, losing three of them. In the five games since he’s been back, Benn has gone on to score two goals and add a pair of assists.

"There were anxious moments for the whole coaching staff when Jamie was not here," said Stars head coach Glen Gulutzan. "I think we muffled it pretty good by not saying much, but we certainly needed him back. The game against Colorado (Monday) was the first time we had him and Derek Roy in our lineup at the same time.

"To go any longer to go without Jamie would have hurt our club, no question about it. You can’t have a guy of that nature not in your lineup for a long period of time."

Benn makes up a third of the Stars top line with Brendan Morrow and Jaromir Jagr, who signed as a free agent in the off-season.

Jagr has been a positive addition to the club and has already had a strong influence on Benn, who is expected to be the face of the organization for years to come.

"Yeah for sure, Jaromir has helped me out a lot so far," Benn said. "He’s a pretty talkative guy and he lets me know what he wants out there and I do the same. We’re trying to feed off each other."

"He talks to me a lot about supporting the puck and where to be in certain situations. He wants you to be available all the time and it’s about reading off each other."

Jagr, who is over a week away from his 41st birthday, went into the game against the Oilers as the Stars co-leading scorer with two goals and four assists on the season.

Benn is developing a good chemistry with the veteran, giving the Stars a potent top line.

"I’m feeling pretty good right now and starting to figure it out with our linemates," Benn said. "We’re just going to try to keep moving forward and try to get better every game."

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Ryan Nugent-Hopkins’ shoulder injury means Edmonton Oilers’ injury train grows by one

By Robert Tychkowski

No Nuge is bad news for the Edmonton Oilers.

With pivots Shawn Horcoff and Eric Belanger already injured, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins became the latest centre iced Wednesday.

Nugent-Hopkins is once again having shoulder problems and won’t be available for tonight’s home game with the Dallas Stars (4-5-1).

“He’s sore,” said head coach Ralph Krueger, who is optimistic the 19-year-old sophomore will play Saturday in Detroit. "It’s short-term for sure. It’s more just being smart... we don’t want to force a player of his calibre into a situation where he’s not 100 per cent."

In Nugent-Hopkins’ place, the Oilers (4-3-2) giving Mark Arcobello his first National Hockey League start. He was called up on the strength of 39 points in 43 games this year and did spend some time between Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle during the lockout.

“There’s some synergy there, they were possibly the best line in the American Hockey League for a period,” said Krueger. "It makes it easier for Mark coming in here today."

As easy as it can be when you’re dealing with the enormity of your first night in the show.
"It's something you dream about when you're a little kid, I'm really excited for my first NHL game," he said. "But the most exciting things in life are pretty nerve-racking at first. I'm ready for this, I've been waiting for it a long time."

Krueger is actually quite familiar with the 24-year-old; he knew him when he was nobody.

"It's a special story because he played against my son for four years in a row, he was at Yale and my son was at Cornell," said Krueger. "I watched Mark Arcobello on many, many occasions and respect the kind of player he is.

"He's earned it. He really earned it by working extremely hard the last couple of seasons in Oklahoma City and becoming an elite player in the American League."

It was a popular decision in OKC, where teammates have watched the 5-foot-9, 165 pounder battle for three years.

"I heard they were cheering in the dressing room when they heard it in the dressing room," said Krueger. "The room erupted when they heard it because they really feel he deserves this."

So, Edmonton's centres tonight will be a rookie playing his first game, Sam Gagner, converted left winger Ryan Smyth and Anton Lander, who has 59 career NHL game. Not exactly Murderer's Row.

"That's one of the critical positions in the way our game is structured and it will certainly test our ability to play defence," said Krueger. "When the centres are out you need to pick it up as a group defensively.

"Offensively I believe we can keep going on the same track as we've been, it's more penalty killing, face-offs, the game without the puck where we need to be strong."

Dallas coach Glen Gulutzan is hoping Edmonton's loss in his gain, but isn't counting anything yet.

"We were in that situation a couple of weeks ago, where we didn't have Jaromir Jagr, Jamie Benn or Derek Roy in our lineup, we had Ray Whitney playing on one leg, and we eked out some victories.

"You're glad (Edmonton is depleted) in one way, but you know that other guys step up, that's why it's the best league in the world."

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655457  Edmonton Oilers

20 Questions with Edmonton Oiler Ryan Smyth

Staff

Alberta-born NHLer in second stint as forward with the Edmonton Oilers.
1. It's Sunday morning, what are you having for breakfast?
   Whatever my beautiful wife makes me.
2. If you didn't do what you do for a living, what would you be?
   A professional skier.
3. Who's your hero?
   Wayne Gretzky
4. Last book you couldn't put down?
   Major League Dad by Tim Burke
5. Who was your childhood celebrity crush?
   Alyssa Milano
6. What's playing in your iPod (CD, cassette or eight-track) right now?
   Lay 'Em Down by Need to Breathe
7. If you could see one concert, what would it be?
   Garth Brooks
8. What's the best thing about Edmonton?
   Not only the fact that two (three come June) of our kids were born here but the fact that it's a safe place to raise a family and a great community.
9. What's your weirdest habit?
   Watching people drink Slurpees in the winter time!
10. What's your biggest pet peeve?
    Bad drivers
11. What's your fast-food guilty pleasure?
    McDonalds
12. What was your most embarrassing moment?
    When I got my teeth knocked out in the playoffs, I stormed down the hallway to the dressing room and slammed the door in anger not knowing that an usher was behind the door... I ended up hitting her with the door and breaking her wrist. I felt really bad...
13. Which person, alive or dead, would you like to have dinner with?
    Jesus
14. What's your favourite vacation destination?
   Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan... OK, really Hawaii or Bermuda
15. What is your favourite TV show?
   Sports Centre
16. What's your dream car?
   64 1/2-convertible Mustang
17. If you could have one super power, what would it be?
   To be able to appear somewhere without having to travel.
18. What's the one thing you haven't done that you'd love to do?
   Other than win a Stanley Cup... Play golf at Augusta
19. If we're buying, you're having....
   Steak, lobster and a REALLY nice bottle of red
20. What are your words to live by?
   Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:15, 16

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 02.07.2013

655458  Florida Panthers

Big games become the norm for Florida Panthers in lockout-shortened season

With an abbreviated schedule, the Panthers — whose two-game win streak ended Tuesday — know each game has added weight.

By David Larkins

Special to The Miami Herald

WINNIPEG, Manitoba -- In this lockout-shortened 48-game NHL season, every game seems to have just a bit more weight to it.

The losses hit just a bit harder, and every win feels like a corner turned.

And so here the Panthers find themselves hovering somewhere in the middle of those two opposites, looking to put a frustrating 3-2 overtime loss Tuesday to the Winnipeg Jets in the rearview mirror while knowing full well
what lies ahead could very well be — even just nine games into the campaign — season defining.

A miserable 1-5-0 start to the season was soothed slightly by back-to-back wins last Thursday and Sunday, but Tuesday was another setback.

Thursday the Panthers will be in Philadelphia to take on the Flyers, never an easy task but perhaps a bit less daunting considering Philly’s unimpressive 4-6-0 start. Saturday it’s off to Washington for a Southeast Division clash with the Capitals, themselves mired in a 2-7-1 start that has them in the division basement.

“Every game is that way this year,” Panthers coach Kevin Dineen said of placing heightened importance on any games. “Philly’s the next one, then we’ve got Washington after that in Washington, so I think we’re all — coaches and players across the league — putting a major priority on every single game.”

Winger Kris Versteeg said the Panthers gained confidence from back-to-back wins over Winnipeg and Buffalo last week, but the bigger boost comes from seeing his team getting healthy.

Center Marcel Goc recently returned from an injury and played in his third game Tuesday night, and center Stephen Weiss, the team’s second-leading scorer last season, has appeared in only five of the team’s nine games.

“With regards to the health of our team, it’s always nice to get wingers back but … I think any team in the league will attest that when you get your centermen back, and you have guys like Weisser and Goc come back, that helps out more than anything,” Versteeg said.

The Panthers were the better team for the first half of Tuesday’s defeat, twice holding one-goal leads before letting the Jets, and their raucous faithful, back in the game in the second period and into the third.

Defenseman Erik Gudbranson was in Winnipeg but he sat out Tuesday and still has yet to play this season after offseason shoulder surgery. Dineen was noncommittal about the status of the former first-round pick for the rest of the trip.

“We’ve been happy with the way our ‘D’ have been going,” Dineen said. “It’s like everything else: We’re not looking to make changes just to make changes. We’ll give [Gudbranson] a good skate [Wednesday] and see where he is for Thursday.”

Scott Clemmensen made his third appearance of the season in Winnipeg and stopped 18 of the 21 shots he faced. Dineen didn’t sound overly wowed by Clemmensen’s effort but did say the team in front of him didn’t bail him out much either.

“I thought he was all right,” Dineen said. “I think he would have liked to have the shot off the wing back [the Jets’ first goal] and we had our opportunities to try and score, and we didn’t have much help from the...
Dubinsky. captain Dustin Brown took issue with the league's decision not to suspend Scuderi said it was the league's job to determine discipline. His teammate, forwards would do it in this league."

"Bark's worse than the bite," he said. "Looks worse than it is. I'm OK. ... I have not seen the hit yet. I know that it probably wasn't the way 95% of people who know me understand that I'm not that kind of player and I hope that they're not going to judge me by what happened the other night," Dubinsky told the Columbus Dispatch.

"People who know me understand that I'm not that kind of player and I hope that they're not going to judge me by what happened the other night," Dubinsky told the Columbus Dispatch. "I apologize for hurting him or hitting him that way. It was never my intention for it to happen that way."

Scuderi, who said Tuesday he felt it was kind of "open season" on some defensemen, said he did not have any lingering effects from the hit.

"Bark's worse than the bite," he said. "Looks worse than it is. I'm OK. ... I have not seen the hit yet. I know that it probably wasn't the way 95% of forwards would do it in this league."

Scuderi said it was the league's job to determine discipline. His teammate, captain Dustin Brown took issue with the league's decision not to suspend Dubinsky.

Kings on Thursday night

At Nashville

When: 5 PST.

Where: Bridgestone Arena, Nashville.

On the Air: TV: Fox Sports West; Radio: 1150.

Record vs. Predators: 0-0-1.

Update: Odd stat of the day. Nashville defenseman Shea Weber, who had 49 points last season, remains without a point after nine games. Twenty-two shots on goal ... no points.

LA Times: LOADED: 02.07.2013

February 6 practice quotes: Andrew Campbell

Posted by JonRosen on 6 February 2013, 4:32 pm

Andrew Campbell took part in his first practice with the Kings at Bridgestone Arena today, and considering his size and the attributes he brings as a stay-at-home defenseman with a long reach, it wouldn't be a major surprise if he made his NHL debut against Nashville Thursday evening, as the team is looking to gain a sense of what the former third round pick can provide.

On his first practice:

"It's exciting, obviously -- my first call-up here. I'm just trying to enjoy it all and do all the work I can and just get better." On where he was when he found out he had been promoted:

"I was at the grocery store, and I got a call from Hubie, our team personnel guy, so it was pretty exciting."

On who he called when he heard the news:

"They asked me to keep it quiet for a while, just because of the whole process. But I called my mom and dad. I had to let them know. They've been so important to me over the years, so I let them know right away."

On his attributes as a defenseman:

"I'm just a pretty defensive guy. I like to take care of my own end, make the first pass and be gritty, compete hard and be tough to play against." On relationship with players who have come through L.A.'s system:

"I lived for a full year with Kinger, Noley and Muzz. We all lived in a house together. The four of us are pretty familiar with each other. I played with Marty, played with Wiske, played with Bernie. I'm trying to think of whom else. I worked out with Cliffy in the summer before, so I have a lot of familiarity with a lot of guys."

On how the Monarchs coaching staff has prepared players to transition to the NHL:

"They've done a lot of work on making sure that the system is the same system that's being worked on up here. PK, five-on-five, they try to do everything the same so it's a seamless transition when you bump up."

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 02.07.2013

655462 Los Angeles Kings

February 6 practice quotes: Andrew Campbell

Posted by JonRosen on 6 February 2013, 3:32 pm

Loktionov to New Jersey

Kings make player moves, say more could come

The team trades Andrei Loktionov to New Jersey, calls up Andrew Campbell from the minors and sends Andrew Bodnarchuk back.

By Lisa Dillman

February 6, 2013, 7:07 p.m.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Kings defenseman Rob Scuderi's eye still looked awful, and the contrite player who inflicted the damage, Brandon Dubinsky of Columbus, found his wallet $10,000 lighter.

That was the backdrop to several other developments. Kings Coach Darryl Sutter called out his young defense following Wednesday's practice here. And, unrelated, Kings General Manager Dean Lombardi made his second trade since the lockout ended, sending the once-promising Andrei Loktionov to New Jersey for a fifth-round draft pick in 2013.

Just another quiet day for the Stanley Cup champions.

There were indications of other moves. Sutter did more than hint at the potential adjustments if the defense didn't raise its level. Sutter hit that point when asked about 25-year-old defenseman Andrew Campbell, who was called up earlier in the day from the minors in Manchester, N.H.; defenseman Andrew Bodnarchuk was sent back.

"Hey, we need [Jake] Muzzin and [Alec] Martinez and [Davis] Drewiske to be a lot better players for us," Sutter said. "Otherwise we're gonna look at other players. That's the way I see it."

What could be the precursor to a bigger move was the small deal between the Stanley Cup finalists. In fact, it was the first trade between Lombardi and one of his early mentors, Lou Lamoriello of the Devils, since Lombardi joined the Kings in 2006.

With the Kings' logjam at center, there was no fit for Loktionov. They tried to move him last season with minimal interest, and his agent, Igor Larionov, had been wanting a new location for his client for a long time.

Loktionov had three goals and seven points in 39 games with the Kings last season, and his status was reinforced when they did not invite him to training camp after the lockout ended.

"You've got the issue that after his contract is up he could go back to Russia," Lombardi said. "You just try to make the best deal you can."

The Kings have won three times in eight games this season, including Tuesday night at Columbus. Escaping serious injury against the Blue Jackets was Scuderi, who was hit from behind into the end boards by Andrew Bodnarchuk in the second period.

Dubinsky had a telephone hearing with the league and was fined $10,000 — the maximum allowed in the new contract — and was not suspended. He had never been suspended in his career.

"People who know me understand that I'm not that kind of player and I hope he knows that," Dubinsky told the Columbus Dispatch. "I apologize for hurting him or hitting him that way. It was never my intention for it to happen that way."

Scuderi, who said Tuesday he felt it was kind of "open season" on some defensemen, said he did not have any lingering effects from the hit.

"Bark's worse than the bite," he said. "Looks worse than it is. I'm OK. ... I have not seen the hit yet. I know that it probably wasn't the way 95% of forwards would do it in this league."

Scuderi said it was the league's job to determine discipline. His teammate, captain Dustin Brown took issue with the league's decision not to suspend Dubinsky.

"I thought it was an awful hit," Brown said. "I don't know what to say to that, really. I guess I disagree. It's a dangerous play. That same play probably happens 10 times a game but it's just a rub-out, not a finishing check. The D [defense] get their face in the glass quite a bit with the new rules."
Andrei Loktionov is a New Jersey Devil. The Los Angeles Kings traded the center to New Jersey in exchange for a fifth round pick in the 2013 NHL Draft. This ends the Los Angeles career of a player selected in the fifth round of 2008, and who had requested a trade, according to several reports between September and January. Loktionov appeared in 59 games over parts of three seasons in L.A., recording 14 points (7-7=14). He auditioned for and was eventually passed over in a role to replace a concussed Kyle Clifford in the playoffs a season ago and appeared in two games against Vancouver in the first round without accumulating as many as 10 minutes of ice time between the two games. He will be assigned to AHL-Albany, per the Devils.

Loktionov has an appealing amount of skill that hasn’t yet translated consistently to the NHL level. Though he has the reputation of being a responsible forward, he’s not exactly a bottom six type, and with Anze Kopitar (signed through 2016) and Mike Richards (signed through 2020) manning the top two center spots, along with the off-season extensions of Jarret Stoll (through 2015) and Colin Fraser (through 2014), there simply wasn’t any place for Loktionov to earn a role.

His most promising campaign was his 20-year old season of 2010-11, when he recorded seven points in 19 games before an assignment to Manchester in which he injured his shoulder when it appeared he might be on the verge of a call-up. Since then, he hasn’t been able to stick in L.A.

Loktionov had a brief role on a line alongside Dustin Brown and Mike Richards in the first half of last season. ’They’re good players. They can find me anywhere. I just have to leave my stick on the ice and open up,” he said at the time. Unfortunately, it wasn’t quite that easy.

February 6 practice quotes: Rob Scuderi

Columbus Blue Jackets forward Brandon Dubinsky avoided suspension for his hit Tuesday night on Rob Scuderi but was hit with a $10,000 fine, the maximum for first time offenders under the new collective bargaining agreement.

There was no concussion – Scuderi suffered a black eye and some upper body numbness – and was able to practice at full speed under normal circumstances with the team at Bridgestone Arena in Nashville on Wednesday afternoon.

On how he’s feeling:

”I’m fine. The bark’s worse than the bite. It looks worse than it is. But I’m OK.”

On what he remembers about the play:

”I just remember turning to go get the loose puck. He chipped it in, I turned to get a loose puck and tried to get it over behind the net to my partner. I remember everything. I know I got hit pretty much from behind. It didn’t feel that great, but after a couple of moments, you gather yourself. I felt OK.”

On whether he had to follow any concussion protocols:

”They asked me. The trainers are pretty diligent about what their responsibilities are. They were on me and made sure I was OK and followed whatever protocol they needed to. No worse for wear. No lingering effects.”

On whether he’s seen a replay of the hit:

”I have not seen the hit yet… But I know that it probably wasn’t the way 95% of forwards would do it in this league.”

On Dubinsky being fined $10,000 by the league:

”I said last night, that’s always been the league’s decision. It’s not my job to hand out the discipline. It’s theirs.”

On whether he plans on watching a replay of the hit:

”If I see it, I see it. It’s not like I’m going to go on YouTube and go check it out. But if I happen to see it during the course of video or plays or something else, it’s not like I’m not going to look at it.”

On whether anything was done Tuesday night to take care of the swelling:

”Not really. I know when I came back during the second period it was still pretty puffy in the bottom, so I couldn’t see all the way down. But I had an ice pack on it between the second and third period, and it really helped a lot. It just knocked down the swelling. It was OK. It fortunately didn’t swell shut, it was puffy, but like I said, it was OK, and by the third period, I was fine.”

On whether there was pain in his shoulder after the hit:

”I guess the trainers technically call it a stinger. Kind of your neck and down your shoulder goes numb for a little bit. But like I said, after a few minutes, you take a few deep breaths, and you’re able to regain yourself and feel OK.”

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 02.07.2013

February 6 practice quotes: Darryl Sutter

On what Slava Voynov is doing well:

”He’s doing a really good job defending, meaning [he’s] getting in and out of battles well, moving pucks well. He’s clearly been our best player at it from back there. That’s what he’s good at. He’s not doing anything different or any better. He’s doing it. It’s what we need the other players to do.”

On what allowed the Kings to win a road game Tuesday night:

”Every team has different strengths and weaknesses, and as long as the players know what they are, you try and work around it. Probably the biggest play in the game last night was Dubinsky leaving the game and not coming back, and Richie leaving for 19 [minutes] and coming back. That’s probably the biggest difference of the game. The strength of our team should be the strength of our centermen. And it’s not necessary that it’s been yet, but it should be. The strength of their team, a big part, was getting Dubinsky and Anisimov this summer – two centermen. So you lose one for half the game – it’s pretty significant.”

On the team getting closer to where it needs to be:

”We’re learning a lot about them, quite honest, because it’s a totally different group. You’re playing four defensemen that aren’t used to situations they’re in. Quite honest, it’s very similar to the team we played last night, what they’re doing. There’s a lot of growth there and a lot of little areas that you’d have preferred to have two or three more weeks with. It’s a challenge.”

On what he heard about Andrew Campbell from Manchester:

”Not much. Just want a bigger guy. [We’ll take a look at him. That’s all. He hasn’t played much. He’s missed a lot of hockey this year. See what his practice pace is like. That’s the biggest difference. Andrew Bodnarchuk was a really good little defenseman. Hey, we need Muzzin and Martinez and Dreweiske to be a hell of a lot better players for us, otherwise we’re going to look at other players. That’s the way I see it.”

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 02.07.2013

February 6 practice quotes: Rob Scuderi

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 02.07.2013

February 6 practice quotes: Darryl Sutter

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 02.07.2013
The Kings recalled 6’4, 206 pound defenseman Andrew Campbell from AHL-Manchester on Wednesday, assigning defenseman Andrew Bodnarchuk to Manchester.

NHL.com

Campbell had six assists in 27 games for the Monarchs, including a plus-11 rating that led Manchester defensemen. He was a third round draft pick by Los Angeles in 2008 and is a veteran of 325 AHL games.

Campbell was a teammate of Jake Muzzin’s with the OHL’s Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds, where he also played alongside Wayne Simmonds, Jiri Tlusty and Andrew Desjardins. He provides a sizeable, left-shooting option on the Kings’ blueline.

Bodnarchuk, who appeared in five games with Boston in 2009-10, did not appear in a game with the Kings.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 02.07.2013
655467 Los Angeles Kings

Waking up with the Kings: February 6

Posted by JonRosen on 6 February 2013, 6:56 am

Several notes I took during the Kings’ 4-2 win over the Blue Jackets Tuesday evening:

- Slava Voynov was excellent for the second consecutive game. His second period laser beam from inside the right point served as the game winner, and was clearly the right decision after it appeared there was a thought process over whether he should approach the puck and fire off a shot or drop back defensively. That slight hesitation allowed Vinny Prospal and Nick Holden to move into Steve Mason’s line of sight as screens, and I’m not sure if the right-catching goaltender ever really got a good view of the pinpoint shot. He’s also been keeping his shots low on the power play, increasing the potential for tips, deflections, and juicy rebounds. There were several Voynov point shots that were deflected just wide – Jarret Stoll had a piece of one – and because of a less-than-borderline call on a shaky incidental contact assessment in the first period, he was denied another point.

- Mike Richards may have played his best game of the season. Obviously, his third period insurance goal and his fight with Brandon Dubinsky caught the most attention, but his ability to get back while maintaining a point on the power play and get down on the ice to disrupt a Columbus shorthanded two-on-one attempt in the second period made life easier for Jonathan Quick. Jeff Carter scored a goal on that power play just over a minute later.

- Though he is still developing his play deep behind the goal line – and has made significant strides over the past year – I don’t worry much at all over Drew Doughty’s play on the Blue Jackets’ goal that tied the game at two in the third period laser beam from inside the right point served as the game winner, and the team achieved exactly what it had set out to do – open the road trip with two points.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 02.07.2013
655468 Minnesota Wild

Wild rookie Coyle: Upward bound ... in a hurry

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO , Star Tribune

Charlie Coyle walked into the dressing room Wednesday morning and had no clue that all it took was one game for him to catapult to right wing on the Wild’s first line.

“I didn’t see it until guys started making jokes,” Coyle said, laughing, after practicing Wednesday alongside Zach Parise and Mikko Koivu. “[Matt] Cullen was like, ‘Oh, just one game and you’re already off our line.’ I just thought they were joking and I looked [at the board] and was like, ‘Oh.’”

Coyle, 20, replaced slumping goal-scorer Dany Heatley, 32, on the line. Although coach Mike Yeo said there were no guarantees Wednesday’s line maneuvering would filter into Thursday’s game against the Vancouver Canucks, it would be a surprise if it didn’t.

With urgency needed and losses magnified in this shortened season, Yeo is desperately trying to find the right line mixes.

Coyle had a solid NHL debut Monday at Phoenix, and the Wild’s top line has had trouble generating chances since a shootout loss Jan. 27 at St. Louis.

Heatley, in particular, has no points in the past three games and one goal and one assist in the past six games. Heatley, who has scored 353 goals (138 on the power play), uses his shot total as a measuring stick as to how he’s performing, and he has only eight during that span.

Still, Heatley said, “I don’t feel like I’m fighting it. We haven’t won in our last few. [Yeo] talked about making a change I think last week. I wouldn’t say it was unexpected and I’m playing with two real creative guys now [in Cullen and Pierre-Marc Bouchard], so hopefully we can get something done.”

Three of Heatley’s four goals have come from the goal mouth, so Yeo said, “We have to find a way to get him there and find a way to get pucks there when he is there.”

Yeo said Coyle looked good at times with Parise and Koivu on Wednesday and “nervous” at other times.

“He just has to remember why he’s there,” Yeo said.

Coyle, whose family is expected to attend his home debut after having their flight canceled to Phoenix on Monday, should bring size, hard work, quality wall play and a net presence to the line.

“I’m always watching every little thing [Parise and Koivu] do,” Coyle said. “They’re such good examples on and off the ice. They’re obviously great players. They’re not just skilled, but they work hard. I’m not going to change anything in my game and we’ll see if we click.”

Parise is impressed with the San Jose Sharks 2010 first-round pick.

“He had a really good game in Phoenix,” Parise said. “He plays smart, he’s big, he protects the puck well. I think he’ll fit in really well with us. You always want to try different looks. I think it’ll be good.”

Newly acquired Mike Rupp will make his Wild debut Thursday. He practiced on the fourth line with Zenon Konopka and Torrey Mitchell and already met expectations.

“He’s big,” Yeo said jokingly about the 6-5 forward. “He didn’t shrink at all.”

Devin Setoguchi and Mikael Granlund rotated spots on the third line with Kyle Brodziak and Cal Clutterbuck.

One forward will have to come out, but Yeo said the Thursday lineup hasn’t been finalized. It’s not an easy decision because Setoguchi and Granlund, two players Yeo challenged in Phoenix, seemed to respond.

“We have to sort it out,” Yeo said.
After the Wild's second consecutive loss Monday evened its record at 4-4-1, the Wild held a 25-minute player-only meeting. It knows it hasn't been good enough.

With seven of the next nine games against division foes, Parise said, "The urgency is now and the urgency should have been there for a little bit. These are big games. These really will dictate where we're going to go from here on out. "We've had good meetings, a good practice. I think we'll get things going."

Star Tribune LOADED: 02.07.2013
655469 Minneapolis Wild

Canucks' Schroeder thrilled to be home

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO , Star Tribune

In the lobby of St. Thomas Academy ice arena, there's a giant picture of alum Jordan Schroeder.

As luck would have it, the Vancouver Canucks team bus rolled up to the front door for practice, not the back door by the locker rooms. So one by one, Schroeder's teammates got to see the Canucks rookie's portrait hanging in, as a few joked, "the house that Jordan Schroeder built."

Schroeder felt tremendous pride when he was able to return to his Mendota Heights high school as a real-life NHLer Wednesday.

"That's where it all started for me back in eighth grade," Schroeder said after his high school coaches, Tom and Greg Vannelli, watched him practice in a Canucks sweater. "It brought back a lot of memories. It was a good feeling just knowing that you worked so hard for so long and made it to the NHL.

"But it doesn't stop. I've got to keep working and driving forward."

It has been a long road to the NHL for the 2009 first-round pick. But Thursday night in front of family and friends, the 22-year-old who grew up in Lakeville will play the Wild at Xcel Energy Center. He won a state title as a freshman in 2006 and scored his first collegiate goal with the Gophers in the same barn.

"I know this is going to be a real special thrill for Jordan. He's waited for this a long time," said Canucks coach Alain Vigneault, before adding with a chuckle, "He told me his dad [John] bought a box, so I better play him, I guess."

Schroeder spent parts of four seasons in the minors, but he has two assists in seven games with the Canucks and is centering a line with Mason Raymond and Jannik Hansen.

The 5-8 forward has impressed Vigneault with his fearless style and defense.

"Any player of that size has to play with a little bit of jam, a little bit of grit, otherwise you won't survive in this league," Vigneault said. "Not just in my system, on any team in the league, if you can't play defense, you can't play. Every game, the fine line between a win and a loss is so narrow, the players have to know they have to do with and without the puck and once they know that, sometimes the skill comes out."

"Jordan is dependable and has skill. Now he's got to find his room on the ice and hopefully get more chances and bury those chances."

History rules

Despite the Canucks riding a three-game winning streak and Roberto Luongo having the third-best goals-against average in the NHL (1.53), Cory Schneider gets the nod in goal against the Wild.

"Can't overthink things. Trust the coin," Vigneault said.

Or history. Luongo has shut out the Wild in three consecutive games, but he hasn't played at Xcel Energy Center since Oct. 19, 2010. He has been pulled in three consecutive starts in St. Paul and is 3-9-2 career at the X with a 3.56 goals-against average.

"I've had a few bad games here, but it's nothing specific about this building. One day I'll play here again," Luongo said, laughing.

Etc.

• Wild defenseman Jared Spurgeon (foot) didn't practice Wednesday and will miss his seventh game in a row. He continues to be day-to-day.

• On 6-5, 243-pound Mike Rupp making his Wild debut, Vigneault said, "We're not going to focus our game plan on Rupp. Those are role players playing seven, eight minutes a game. They've got some great players there we're going to focus on before him."

Star Tribune LOADED: 02.07.2013
655470 Minneapolis Wild

Preview: Vancouver at Wild

Preview: The Wild, which has lost two in a row, has won two in a row at home. This is the beginning of a key juncture in the Wild's schedule. Seven of its next nine games are against Northwest Division opponents. The Canuck have won three in a row and were 1-2 in St. Paul last year.

Players to watch: Wild C Kyle Brodziak has no points, 11 shots and is minus-6 in the past eight games. RW Dany Heatley has eight shots in his past six games (one goal, one assist) after 14 shots his first three games (three goals, one assist). LW Zach Parise is tied for seventh in the NHL with six goals, five on the road. .... Canucks F Henrik Sedin has 55 points in 68 games against the Wild. He is first all time with 46 assists and second in points against Minnesota. Brother Daniel Sedin is third all time with 52 points in 64 games.

Numbers: The Wild has scored 20 goals in nine games (2.22 goals per game, 26th in the NHL). ... The Canucks are 1-0-3-0 in their past five games on the power play and have killed off only 76.9 percent of power plays.

Injuries: Wild D Jared Spurgeon (foot) is out. Canucks C Ryan Kesler (shoulder, wrist) and RW David Booth (groin) are out.

MICHAEL RUSSO
Star Tribune LOADED: 02.07.2013
655471 Minnesota Wild

Wild breaks up top line for the first time

Posted by: Michael Russo under Wild practice Updated: February 6, 2013 - 3:17 PM

Wild coach Mike Yeo unveiled new lines at Wednesday's practice.

Dany Heatley, who has no points in his past three games and eight shots in his past six, was taken off the first line and placed on the second with Zach Parise and Mikko Koivu. He won a state title as a freshman in 2006 and scored his first collegiate goal with the Gophers in the same barn.

"I don't feel like I'm fighting it," Heatley said. "I'm playing with two real creative guys, so hopefully we can get something done."
Coyle said he got some funny jabs from Cullen that he was already removed from his line and he has "dreamed of playing at Xcel since I came here" from San Jose.

Kyle Brodziak and Cal Clutterbuck remain the staple of the third line, but Devin Setoguchi and Mikael Granlund were rotating spots as the other wing. My guess says Granlund is the odd man out.

Torrey Mitchell, despite arguably being the best forward on the ice at Phoenix, was back to the fourth line with Zenon Konopka and Mike Rupp, who will make his Wild debut against the Canucks.

But Yeo said the final lineup hasn't been decided.

Yeo on his expectations for Rupp: "He already met one. He's big. He didn't shrink at all."

Niklas Backstrom will obviously be in goal.

The big question is who tends goal for Vancouver -- Roberto Luongo or Cory Schneider. Luongo has taken the nets for the Canucks lately, but he was pulled in his past three starts at the X and is so bad there, he didn't even make a start in St. Paul last season. However, Luongo overall has shut out the Wild in three consecutive games.

Schneider gets the start.

Said Alain Vigneault: "Can't overthink it. Trust the coin."

Jordan Schroeder plays his first-ever NHL game at the X. He has appeared to found a home. He also got to practice at St. Thomas Academy, where he starred in high school. First collegiate goal at the X with the Gophers: "Hope to make some new memories."

Star Tribune LOADED: 02.07.2013

Minnesota Wild: For Jordan Schroeder, a special homecoming

By Ben Goessling

It's hardly rare these days for a former Minnesota high school star to return to his home state, either as a member of the Wild or playing for an opposing team. But Jordan Schroeder's trip back to the Twin Cities on Wednesday, Feb. 6, had an interesting twist. And for that, he can thank Lady Gaga.

The Vancouver Canucks forward, who won a state championship as a ninth-grader at St. Thomas Academy, skated on his old high school rink Thursday in Mendota Heights, as both the Wild and Canucks were bumped of the last players to leave the arena as a group of current Cadets hockey players filed in to watch the final few minutes of Vancouver's practice.

Schroeder has plenty of memories at the Xcel Energy Center, too; he won his state title there and scored his first goal for the Gophers there in 2008. Vancouver took Schroeder in the first round of the 2009 draft, and he turned pro after two seasons at Minnesota.

The 5-foot-9 forward has cracked the Canucks' lineup for the first time this season, producing two assists in seven games with Ryan Kesler recovering from shoulder and wrist surgeries. He knows he could be headed back to his home state, either as a member of the Wild or playing for an opposing team. First collegiate goal at the X with the Gophers: "Hope to make some new memories."

Two days after the Wild traded for forward Mike Rupp, they got a chance to see him on the ice for the first time during practice at St. Thomas Arena on Wednesday, Feb. 6. Coach Mike Yeo said Rupp will be in the lineup for the Wild's game on Thursday, Feb. 7, against the Vancouver Canucks.

Yeo coached Rupp in 2009-10 when both were with the Pittsburgh Penguins, and the Wild acquired the 6-foot-5 forward for the toughness he could add to their checking lines. Asked what his expectations were for the 33-year-old forward, Yeo said, "Well, he's already met one: He's big. He didn't shrink at all."

"He's a guy that for as big as he is, he moves well," Yeo said. "He's got speed to get it in there on the forecheck and speed to get there and hit and play a physical game, but he's also got some hands. He's also got the ability to get shots off and play in the offensive zone, so that's what we're looking for."

Rupp skated with Zenon Konopka and Torrey Mitchell on Wednesday, and while Yeo said the Wild's lines could be in flux headed into Thursday's game, it seems likely that Rupp will stay with Mitchell and Konopka as the Wild look for some energy on the forecheck.

"The best thing we can do is to pour the pucks in the offensive zone," Rupp said. "When you're doing that, it keeps a lot of dangerous guys from getting chances against you. That's our plan, to get down there. I'd love to play a lot of the game tomorrow below the hash marks, and whoever's in net, hopefully we can get some pressure on them."

Pioneer Press LOADED: 02.07.2013

655474 Minnesota Wild

By Ben Goessling

Minnesota Wild: Rookie Charlie Coyle replaces Dany Heatley on top line for a day

Charlie Coyle's family wasn't able to make it to his NHL debut in Phoenix on Monday, Feb. 4, but it stands to reason he'll give them an even better show on Thursday, Feb. 7, in St. Paul.

Coyle was skating on the Wild's top line Wednesday, playing with Mikko Koivu and Zach Parise as coach Mike Yeo sought to get Dany Heatley out of a funk and add some life to a Wild lineup that has scored two goals in its past two games.

The 20-year-old Coyle played only 12:44 in his first game, but he had two shots and added a physical presence to the Wild's second line. He likely will see a bigger role against the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday, and even though Yeo said he hadn't decided if he would keep Coyle with Koivu and Parise on Thursday, it's clear the Wild thought enough of Coyle's performance against Phoenix to give him a bigger chance.

"There were some times when I thought it looked good (in practice)," Yeo said. "There were some times when I thought Charlie looked a little bit nervous, which is understandable, playing with two guys like that. He just has to remember why he's there."

The former first-round draft pick, who came to Minnesota in the trade that sent Brent Burns to San Jose in July 2011, had 44 points in 24 games in Houston as he kept himself among the Wild's top forward prospects. If the Wild do keep him on their first line, Coyle could complement Parise and Koivu's relentless approaches to the game.

"They put us together for a reason," Coyle said.

"We'll see how it goes out there. I'm not going to change anything in my game. I'll keep playing my game, and we'll see if we click."

Pioneer Press LOADED: 02.07.2013

655475 Minnesota Wild

By Ben Goessling

Minnesota Wild like what they see of Mike Rupp, starting with his size
With so many new faces and so little time to prepare for the NHL’s lockout-truncated season, the Wild knew they could be at a disadvantage early as players got comfortable.

But the reality of the NHL’s 48-game schedule is that while the Wild want to keep from panicking, they don’t have the luxury of time — which is why a day before starting a crucial nine-game stretch, it certainly appeared they were headed for a shakeup.

Coach Mike Yeo moved Dany Heatley off the top line for the Wild’s practice on Wednesday, Feb. 6, putting rookie forward Charlie Coyle with Mikko Koivu and Zach Parise. Yeo also had Mikael Granlund and Devin Setoguchi alternating on the third line, which could mean one of the struggling forwards will sit out Thursday, Feb. 7, against the Vancouver Canucks.

Though Yeo said the changes were just for practice, it’s hard to see the Wild not using some of them against Vancouver.

They certainly have reason to explore a new look after scoring just two goals combined in a pair of West Coast losses. Those defeats, against Anaheim and Phoenix, dropped the Wild to 4-4-1 as they prepare for seven Northwest Division matchups in their next nine games. They’ll hit the quarter pole of the shortened season Monday, so moves that normally would be forestalled in a full season are happening now.

“…” (Yeo) talked about making a change, I think, last week,” Heatley said. “I wouldn’t say it was unexpected. I’m playing with two real creative guys, so hopefully we can get something going.”

There is an inherent danger in putting too much stock in new lines for a hockey team; lineups can change several shifts into a game, and Yeo wouldn’t guarantee Wednesday that the Wild would use their prospective lineup against the Canucks.

And though it’s possible a winning streak, or more changes, could be just around the corner, the Wild don’t have the luxury of waiting for things to fall into place.

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Thanking doctors with an Oscar-winner’s list, Geoffrion made it clear he wasn’t in the building to announce his retirement. He’ll be meeting Canadiens doctors Thursday to plan the next step in his recovery, no timeline set for his return to the ice.

“I’m getting better every day,” said the 25-year-old, who’s watched every Habs game at home in Chicago. “I know in my heart I’ll come back from this. I’ll do whatever I have to do to come back to play the game. I miss the game dearly.”

This was the 718th contest between the Canadiens and Bruins. The first between the two, a 4-3 Canadiens victory at the Boston Arena on Dec. 8, 1924, gave “5,000 Boston hockey fans the best exhibition of the Canadian game on record here,” a wire-service report read the following morning.

What followed 717 games later wasn’t classic fare, not with missed chances and the spectacularly bungled breakaway opportunity afforded Tomas Plekanec.

In search of what would have been his team-leading fifth goal, Plekanec broke in alone on Rask early in the second period, then outfought himself when he almost passed the puck into the corner.

With a thin smile, he later considered the attempt by saying: “My hands or my thinking were too quick, (my thinking) quicker than my hands. I tried to deke, get on my forehand, and I lost the puck. It’s not something I’m proud of but it happens. There are worse things.”

Tweeted Boston Globe writer Kevin Paul Dupont, watching at home: “Plekanec with tricky forehand dish to Téo’s girlfriend on that breakaway.”

Colby Armstrong, the only Canadiens regular without a point after nine games, had a couple of golden opportunities, both evaporating in his hands. If we’re not at the snakebit stage yet, you’ll forgive Armstrong if he can hear the hissing.

We’ll get better hockey from these two clubs, three more games on the schedule.

You suspect — even hope — there’ll be an old-west reckoning before these two great rivals have finished their business.

If there’s a hockey god, they’re just sizing each other up for the playoffs.

By Pat Hickey,

MONTREAL — Canadiens head coach Michel Therrien said he wasn’t disheartened by his team’s 2-1 loss to the Boston Bruins Wednesday night.

“They’re the Boston Bruins,” he said. “They’re a good team and they don’t give you a lot out there. I thought we played well, but there were some times that we didn’t execute and that hurt us.”

The Canadiens took a 1-0 lead into the third period, but a line change by Boston head coach Claude Julien provided the Bruins with a spark and they scored two quick goals.

“We weren’t getting any scoring chances in the first two periods so I thought we would change things up,” said Julien, who sent Tyler Seguin out with Milan Lucic and David Krejci. Seguin tied the score at the 14-second mark on a pass from Krejci, who scored the game-winner at 2:05.

“The first goal, there was a little miscommunication and the second goal we got caught up in the forecheck in the neutral zone and we had a 3-on-2 coming back,” said Tomas Plekanec, who was a step behind Krejci as he crashed the net and redirected a pass from Lucic for the second goal.

“When you give up two quick goals like that in the third period, it takes the momentum away,” said captain Brian Gionta. “I don’t think we were outclassed. I don’t think we’ll be outclassed by any team. We just didn’t play our best game.”

The game was seen in some quarters as a test for the Canadiens and Plekanec was asked if the Canadiens received a passing grade.

“We lost the game so obviously we didn’t. I thought we played a good first period, but then we let it slip away. I thought we stopped skating, stopped moving our feet and they picked it up. We didn’t get enough shots on goal. They also blocked a lot of shots.”

Boston blocked 24 shots to 12 for the Canadiens, but Montreal did collect more hits than the big, bad Bruins with 31 to Boston’s 26.

“We had some breakaways in the first period and we didn’t score,” added Plekanec, who had one of those breakaways but lost control of the puck before he reached goaltender Tuukka Rask.

“My head was quicker than my hands,” Plekanec said. “I tried to deke him and go to my forehand and the puck got away.”

Julien noted that the Canadiens had a chance to tie the score in the third period, but David Desharnais missed an open net.

P.K. Subban scored the lone Canadiens goal on a power play in the second period, but Therrien said the Canadiens didn’t play well in the second period despite taking the lead.

Subban said the Canadiens were aware that the Bruins would pose a threat as the game went on.

“We spoke about it in the room between periods,” Subban said. “They hadn’t played a game since Saturday and we knew they would get stronger as the game went on.”

The goal was the first for Subban since he rejoined the team last week, but he said he didn’t want to talk about his individual play. He said he thought the team did a good job on the forecheck, but “we have to do it more consistently. I think we’ve played well to this point, but we’re still learning about what kind of team we’re going to be.”

The Canadiens are back in action Thursday night when they play the Sabres in Buffalo and Therrien has some lineup changes to contemplate. Look for Peter Budaj to get another shot in goal, but it might be difficult to get Ryan White back in the lineup because Lars Eller played well against the Bruins. He had only one shot on goal but he had three hits, two takeaways, two blocked shots and won six of his nine faceoffs.

By Pat Hickey,

The skinny: David Krejci had a goal and an assist early in the third period as the Bruins rallied to beat the Canadiens 2-1 at the Bell Centre Wednesday night. Krejci set up Tyler Seguin for the tying goal at the 14-second mark of the period and then beat Tomas Plekanec to the net to redirect a pass by Milan Lucic at 2:05.

The puck stops here: Tuukka Rask made 22 saves to improve his lifetime record against the Canadiens to 2-6-1. Carey Price stopped 21 shots and his record dropped to 6-2 on the season.

P.K. connects: Defenceman P.K. Subban scored on a power play at 10:53 of the second period for his first goal of the season. Andrei Markov picked up an assist to maintain his point-a-game pace with nine points.

Pleky comes up empty: Plekanec pulled Tuukka Rask out of the crease early in the first period but Dougie Hamilton, the Bruins’ rookie defenceman, reached in with his stick to make the save. Plekanec had a breakaway early in the second period but lost control of the puck as he zeroed in on Rask.

They’re No. 1: The win moved the Bruins into first place in the Eastern Conference with 15 points on a 7-1-1 record. The Canadiens fell to 6-3-0.

Something special: For what it’s worth, the Canadiens won the special teams battle. They scored once on five opportunities while the Bruins went 0-for-4.
Slow starts: Gregory Campbell had Boston’s first shot of the game at 11:25 of the first period. And it was the Canadiens who went cold to start the second period with Rene Bourque taking Montreal’s first shot on the power play at 10:53.

Fast start: The Bruins need only 14 seconds in the third period to tie the game on a goal by Seguin. He beat Price with a backhander after taking a pass from Krejci.

A first for everything: Brendan Gallagher, all 5-foot-8 of him, received a two-minute penalty for roughing. It was his first NHL penalty and he may have jinxed himself on Tuesday when he said: “I can’t believe I haven’t had a penalty. I’ve never gone seven games without a penalty.”

Geoffrion eyes return: Blake Geoffrion was back in the Bell Centre for the first time since he suffered a fractured skull on Nov. 9 while playing for the Hamilton Bulldogs. Geoffrion, who is in town to see doctors, said he hopes to resume his career.

Red carpet treatment: Rookie Alex Galchenyuk was selected once as the first star of the game (Jan. 22 against Florida), and once as the second star (Jan. 29 against Winnipeg). He finished ahead of teammates Brendan Gallagher and goaltender Carey Price in the voting which is based on the nightly three-star selections.

What’s next: The Canadiens play the second game of a back-to-back series Thursday in Buffalo (7 p.m., TSN, RDS, TSN-690 Radio). On Saturday they get a chance to avenge their season-opening loss to Toronto when the Maple Leafs return to the Bell Centre (7 p.m., CBC, RDS, TSN-690 Radio).

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 02.07.2013

655479 Montreal Canadiens

About last night …

Posted by Mike Boone

Could your Montreal Canadiens – with a few bounces and more opportune shooting – have won the game?

Absolutely.

Were they deprived of a W because of sub-par performances by a few key players?

Perhaps.

But there’s a tendency, in these parts, to assess games purely on the basis of how well or poorly our heroes perform.

We tend to forget the opponent can be capable of playing good hockey.

For the final 40 minutes of Wednesday night’s game, Boston played really good hockey.

The visitors stayed close, then took the game over with two goals early in the third period. After that, the Canadiens had to chase the game. And the Bruins were not about to let them mount a comeback.

Yes, the Canadiens’ no-longer-top line continues to struggle.

Yes, the Flying Freshmen were mostly grounded.

And yes, it’s probably a different game if Lars Eller and Tomas Plekanec score on their respective breakaways, or if Colby Armstrong and David Desharnais bury excellent chances.

But as much as we hate them, let’s give the visitors some props, shall we?

Boston played a textbook road game and deserved to win.

They took everything the Canadiens had to offer in the first period – the Bruins didn’t get their first shot on goal till the game was 12 minutes old – and patiently hung in, confident that hard work, toughness and the confidence borne of recent success would prevail.

One of the teams on Bell Centre ice last night is the Beast of the East and a bona-fide Stanley Cup contender.

The other is a work in progress.

Progress will be gauged in Buffalo on Thursday night and back at the Bell Centre on Saturday, where the Canadiens will play their third game in four nights against the perennially pesky Leafs.

We can pick apart some failblesses:

• Alexei Emelin added six hits to his league-leading total. But he had no clue on the Tyler Seguin goal that made it 1-1; and as a puck-mover and point shooter, Emelin is not the second coming of Bobby Orr … or Dougie Hamilton.

• Erik Cole had one shot on goal. And his bull-rushes down the wing did not trouble the Boston defence.

• Alex Galchenyuk won 1-7 on faceoffs. David Desharnais was 7-14.

• The power-play, which had been superb in the Canadiens’ first eight games, produced P.K. Subban’s first goal of the season. But Boston’s penalty-kill was superb, pressuring the Canadiens into hurried passes that produced little sustained pressure. Michel Therrien’s in-game adjustment was to reunite Andrei Markov and Raphael Diaz on the first wave, after Markov and Subban struggled as a pairing. But the Canadiens’ PP problems were down low, where the forwards infrequently troubled Tuuka Rask.

Bright spots?

Rene Bourque was the Canadiens’ best skater. He used his size well and won numerous puck battles along the boards in the Bruins’ end. Bourque, Plekanec and Brian Gionta were easily the Number 1 line.

The problem was the other three units.

But again, it’s not like the Canadiens were playing the Little Sisters of the Poor. The Bruins are two seasons removed from a Stanley Cup. They have emerging stars in Seguin and Hamilton, a goaltender who’s not making anyone pine for Tim Thomas and a core of veterans – led by Patrice Bergeron and Zdeno Chara – who know how to win.

The Canadiens had a chance to take over first place in the Eastern Conference. That didn’t happen, and the schedule is about to get tougher.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 02.07.2013

655480 Montreal Canadiens

Galchenyuk wins Molson Cup for January

Posted by Stu Cowan

The Canadiens announced on Wednesday afternoon that rookie Alex Galchenyuk is the Molson Cup winner for the month of January.

Galchenyuk was selected once as the first star of the game (Jan. 22 against Florida), and once as the second star (Jan. 29 against Winnipeg). He finished ahead of teammates Brendan Gallagher and Carey Price.

The 18-year-old Galchenyuk, selected with the No. 3 overall pick at last year’s NHL entry draft, appeared in six games in January, recording five points (one goal, four assists) and a plus-3. He served four penalty minutes while playing an average of 12:24 per game.

Galchenyuk will be presented with the Molson Cup during a ceremony before Wednesday’s game against the Boston Bruins at the Bell Centre (7:30 p.m., TSN, RDS, TSN-690 Radio).

Are you afraid of a hockey CRASH?

The anticipation for this game has me really keyed up. This is the fist game where that total hockey adrenalin has taken over my body… no ifs/whys/or buts.

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In fact it has me so into hockey that I started having this awful waking nightmare.

Has the thought crossed your mind? If HABS doesn’t make the playoffs (I am betting they will) that you will suffer the biggest hockey crash ever. There just isn’t enough hockey in a 48 game schedule to avert that crash if we dont make the playoff.
The Canadiens officially opened the last of five outdoor refrigerated rinks in less-advantaged areas of Montreal on Tuesday, a $1.4-million project built by the Montreal Canadiens Children’s Foundation as part of its Bleu Blanc Bouge program to promote healthy lifestyles for children.

The newest rink is in Notre Dame de Grâce, where former Canadien Sergio Momesso (now a commentator on TSN 690 Radio) grew up, and not far from Point St. Charles, where Canadiens GM Marc Bergevin grew up.

Bergevin said the new outdoor rink brought back memories, but “this is a lot nicer than what we had growing up.”

Bergevin and Momesso used to play against each other as kids in minor hockey games at N.D.G.’s Doug Harvey Arena. Momesso played for the N.D.G. Maroons and Bergevin was with the Ville Émard Hurricanes.

“He never won a game in here when I played, I’ll tell you that,” Bergevin joked.

When Momesso said he heard Bergevin make a similar crack: “I said: ‘Well, it wasn’t because of you, I said it was because of a guy named Mario Lemieux who was a pretty good player.’ And we both started laughing.”

Lemieux also played for the Hurricanes.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 02.07.2013

655482 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens make Claude Julien look like a genius

Staff

MONTREAL — The evening started with Montreal Canadiens goaltender Carey Price taking a shot in a place that would have him in the soprano section of the Habs’ glee club.

It came off the stick of teammate Lars Eller in the warmup.

Price sprawled onto his stomach after the shot in The Place No Man Wants To Be Hit, got up and left the ice.

The males who witnessed it had a group cringe in the Bell Centre.

That’s the way it started.

It ended with the Habs singing the Boston Bruins blues after a 2-1 B’s victory.

A much-anticipated game between two teams riding high in the standings — the Habs were a surprise while the Bruins were not — it lacked much in the way of pop through 40 minutes. Things got interesting in the third.

Anybody paying attention would have given the first star to Bruins coach Claude Julien.

With his team down 1-0 entering the third, Julien shook up his lines. It seemed to work, if you consider two goals in the first two minutes of the third by the new line of David Krejci, Tyler Seguin and Milan Lucic to be working.

That was enough for the win and the Bruins (7-1-1) jumped into first place in the Eastern Conference ahead of the Pittsburgh Penguins with a game in hand.

The loss snapped the Habs (6-3-0) home winning streak at five games.

With his power play struggling and not much going on at even strength, Julien opted for the shaking up the lines dodge (keep in mind the Bruins have pretty much had the same lines, apart from injuries and the occasional shakeup, since they won the Stanley Cup a couple of years ago).

Julien dropped Nathan Horton from the first unit and replaced him with Seguin, who had just one goal this season and that was into an empty net.

So a dozen seconds into the third, Krejci takes the puck deep to Price’s left and finds Seguin behind Montreal defenceman Alexei Emelin and Seguin tips the puck behind Price.

Next shift for that line, on about as nice a piece of five-man passing you will see in Gary Bettman’s NHL, the Bruins went 190 feet, with Krejci tipping in a pass from Lucic to give the Bruins the lead.

It was a beautiful goal started by Bruins captain Zdeno Chara, who is off to a Norris Trophy type of start this season, calmly moving the puck away from two Canadiens forecheckers to partner Johnny Boychuk, who hit Seguin in stride at the Bruins blueline. He carried to the Habs’ line where he fed it wide to Lucic.

The goal once again came at the expense of the Canadiens line of Tomas Plekanec, Brian Gionta and Rene Bourque.

Pretty good coaching there by Julien to shake up the lines and then get that line back out against the unit it had victimized for the first goal.

The only goal of the first two periods came off the stick of Canadiens defenceman P.K. Subban during a Canadiens power play.

Well, that’s half right.

After taking a cross-ice pass from veteran defenceman Andrei “General” Markov, Subban fired a shot at the Bruins net that deflected off the stick of Bruins penalty killer Rich Peverley and up over the shoulder of Bruins goaltender Tuukka Rask.

The goal came with Bruins hulking winger Milan Lucic in the box for high-sticking Markov.

It was the first power-play goal the Bruins had given up on the road this season. With their two successful kills earlier in the game, the Bruins had held the opposition scoreless in the power play in the first 16 man advantage situations they had on the road this season.

Montreal Sun LOADED: 02.07.2013

655483 Nashville Predators

Preview: Predators vs. L.A. Kings

Written by Josh Cooper

The Tennessean

• When: 7 p.m. today
• Where: Bridgestone Arena
• TV/radio: Fox TN/102.5-FM
• Hat trick: 1. In their past nine games against the Kings, the Predators are 3-6-0. 2. Tonight’s contest is Nashville’s first at home in more than two weeks. 3. Both the Predators and Kings are two of the lesser offensive teams in the Western Conference. Los Angeles ranks 21st in the NHL in goals per game, and the Predators are 28th.
• Injuries: Predators F Patric Hornqvist (knee) is out. Kings D Matt Greene (back) and D Willie Mitchell (knee) are out.
• Next for Predators: 7 p.m. Saturday at Minnesota.

Tennessean LOADED: 02.07.2013
Nick Spaling’s diary: End of road trip means it’s time to set up apartment

By Josh Cooper

The Tennessean

It’s good to be home after our seven-game, 15-day road trip. Tuesday night was my second night in my apartment. I haven’t even gotten all my furniture delivered yet.

I got most of my stuff delivered when I was on the road. My furniture was in storage, and it was there when I got back. I had to sign a lease right before we left.

I was staying with Roman Josi because we live beside each other. When I got back, I moved next door.

When we were gone, I got the movers to move everything in. But I still didn’t have anything in the main room, so they’re delivering that Wednesday.

The good part about being on the road is that I think you’re almost forced to spend time together. You have no choice. You have team meals, plane rides — your whole time on the road is spent with guys on the team. It’s good to start a year in such a short season to have a road trip at the start, to get guys together quick.

My favorite meal was our big team dinner at Boa Steakhouse in Santa Monica. The steak, one of those Kobe beef steaks, I usually wouldn’t eat one on my own, but it was a team dinner. I think guys enjoyed that meal.

“With the Predators getting last change at home, they’re the team that has to adjust. “On the road it’s not as big a deal to me,” Trotz said. “It might be a little different at home, in terms of the matches when I’m trying to chase a match.”

Hornqvist update: Forward Patric Hornqvist (sprained knee) has done some weightlifting drills and ridden the exercise bike, Trotz said.

The coach said he hopes the goal-scoring ace will be able to “get on the ice pretty shortly.”

Hornqvist suffered the injury on Jan. 26 at Anaheim. The Predators said he would miss three to four weeks.

Clune’s puck: Forward Paul Gaustad said he erred on the side of caution when he picked up Rich Clune’s goal-scoring puck against the Blues on Tuesday.

Gaustad said he had an inkling that it was Clune’s first NHL goal, but he wasn’t positive.

The puck likely would have been lost at some point later in the game, and Clune, who had indeed scored his first NHL goal, wouldn’t have the memento.

“I’m happy for him, and hopefully that was one of many,” Gaustad said. “I wasn’t exactly sure, but better safe than sorry I guess.”

Back in Bridgestone: The Predators skated in Bridgestone Arena on Wednesday for the first time since Jan. 21.

“It’ll take us a period or two to feel back at home here,” Trotz said. “That was one of the reasons I wanted to come out and have a short practice today.”

No points: Weber downplayed the fact that through nine games he hasn’t picked up a point.

“We’re winning games,” he said, “so it doesn’t matter.”

Weber is one of six players on the roster without a point.

“We’re getting used to it,” Trotz said. “It serves a number of different purposes.”

Because of the odd number, forwards and defensemen have to be more attentive on the bench. Since they aren’t going out in the same groups each shift, they have to listen closely to the coaching staff to hear if their names are called.

It takes a little bit of timing and getting used to,” defenseman Ryan Ellis said, “but everyone has it down by now.”

The groupings also have given the Predators a power-play boost going into tonight’s game against the Los Angeles Kings at Bridgestone Arena.

Before the Predators went to seven defensemen, they used forward Sergei Kostitsyn on the point on the man-advantage. At times, they double-shifted defenseman Shea Weber.

Now they can use Blum, who has some offensive upside, to help out with the second power play pair. In a 6-1 win at St. Louis on Tuesday, the Predators snapped an 0-for-17 streak on the power play.

“The first game was kind of helter-skelter,” Ellis said. “For the most part we’re getting it down, and if we continue it, we’re doing well with it.”

Although the defense may get more rest than the forwards, players credited the coaching staff for doing a good job figuring out how to roll the lines.

“It can be definitely less rest,” forward Nick Spaling said. “But it all depends on how the rotations are going and how the game progresses.”

There is a chance that the Predators might shift to a more conventional lineup now that they’re back home.

On the road they had first change, and throwing out different line combinations hurt the opponent’s ability to match since it didn’t know how to prepare for different lines every shift.

With the Predators getting last change at home, they’re the team that has to adjust.

Nashville Predators find wins in line tinkering

Written by Josh Cooper

The Tennessean

TODAY’S GAME

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The common joke about a Barry Trotz-coached team says that you can write his lines in pencil.

He’s been known to tinker with his forward trios and defensive pairs throughout his tenure with the Predators.

Recently he’s added a new wrinkle to line combinations by using seven defensemen and 11 forwards. The odd-numbered groupings have led to guesswork, patchwork and wins.

Since they added Jnonathon Blum as the seventh defenseman, the Predators (4-2-3) have won two straight, playing their two best games of the season.

“We’re getting used to it,” Trotz said. “It serves a number of different purposes.”

Because of the odd number, forwards and defensemen have to be more attentive on the bench. Since they aren’t going out in the same groups each shift, they have to listen closely to the coaching staff to hear if their names are called.

The Tennessean LOADED: 02.07.2013

655484 Nashville Predators

Weber is one of six players on the roster without a point.

“We’re winning games,” he said, “so it doesn’t matter.”

Weber is one of six players on the roster without a point.

The coach said he hopes the goal-scoring ace will be able to “get on the ice pretty shortly.”

Hornqvist update: Forward Patric Hornqvist (sprained knee) has done some weightlifting drills and ridden the exercise bike, Trotz said.

The coach said he hopes the goal-scoring ace will be able to “get on the ice pretty shortly.”

Hornqvist suffered the injury on Jan. 26 at Anaheim. The Predators said he would miss three to four weeks.

Clune’s puck: Forward Paul Gaustad said he erred on the side of caution when he picked up Rich Clune’s goal-scoring puck against the Blues on Tuesday.

Gaustad said he had an inkling that it was Clune’s first NHL goal, but he wasn’t positive.

The puck likely would have been lost at some point later in the game, and Clune, who had indeed scored his first NHL goal, wouldn’t have the memento.

“I’m happy for him, and hopefully that was one of many,” Gaustad said. “I wasn’t exactly sure, but better safe than sorry I guess.”

Back in Bridgestone: The Predators skated in Bridgestone Arena on Wednesday for the first time since Jan. 21.

“It’ll take us a period or two to feel back at home here,” Trotz said. “That was one of the reasons I wanted to come out and have a short practice today.”

No points: Weber downplayed the fact that through nine games he hasn’t picked up a point.

“We’re winning games,” he said, “so it doesn’t matter.”

Weber is one of six players on the roster without a point.

The Tennessean LOADED: 02.07.2013

655486 Nashville Predators

Josh Cooper's hat trick

Written by Josh Cooper

The Tennessean
The Predators have rediscovered their identity as a stout defensive team. Although last year's squad was one of the most successful regular-season teams in Predators history, it had some deficiencies in its own end. It was ranked 10th in the NHL in goals allowed per game. This team seems to have corrected that issue. Nashville has allowed two goals per game on average this season, and as of Wednesday's games, that was good enough for second in the NHL. In their past three games, they've allowed just three goals total. In that span, they're 3-0-0.

Is it time to worry about Shea Weber's lack of production? Sort of, but not really. Last season, Weber didn't score his first goal until his 10th game. He had only three points through nine games, and he still was a finalist for the Norris Trophy. The difference is that Ryan Suter was his defensive partner last season. With Suter gone, there are more questions about Weber. Also, the 14-year, $110 million contract has magnified Weber's problems. He and Scott Hannan have played well together, however. Weber ranks seventh in the NHL with 27:03 of ice time and matches up against the opposition's top lines. But you'd have to think that in a game in which Nashville scored six goals, such as its 6-1 win over St. Louis, he'd at least get a point.

3) The Predators have finished a third of their road games and find themselves in the Western Conference top eight. Granted, there's still a ways to go, but Nashville's 4-2-1 record on its seven-game, 15-day, cross-country trek sets the Predators up well for later. They will have a lot of home games coming up, and they haven't had a losing record at Bridgestone Arena since 2000-01.

For the first time in two weeks, we will not discuss the San Jose Sharks in our Western Conference rundown. That's what happens when you lose three straight. But there are a few other teams that caught our attention in the past week:

Vancouver Canucks (5-2-2)
What a soap opera they have brewing in Vancouver. First the Canucks wanted to trade veteran goaltender Roberto Luongo in the offseason and let Cory Schneider start in goal. Now, Luongo appears to be the best option. Despite this distraction — and with Ryan Kesler still out of the lineup after offseason shoulder surgery — the Canucks have continued to win.

Calgary Flames (2-3-2)
The Flames have the fewest points in the West, but they've also played the fewest games. Still, if they can't gain traction, they could be a team to watch because future Hockey Hall of Fame forward Jarome Iginla is in the final year of his contract and could be trade bait.

Minnesota Wild (4-4-1)
The team that made the biggest splash in the offseason is excellent at home, with a 4-1-0 record. But it has some problems on the road with a 0-3-1 mark. Although free agent forward Zach Parise has paid dividends with 10 points in nine games, former Predators defenseman Ryan Suter has only four points and is a minus-7.

Detroit Red Wings (4-4-1)
Through 10 games, the Red Wings have a minus-5 goal differential. Forwards Henrik Zetterberg and Pavel Datsyuk have been excellent as usual, averaging more than a point per game, but the defense has been off. The Red Wings rank 24th in goals allowed per contest.

Colorado Avalanche (4-6-0)
Injuries and contract issues have stalled what should have been a breakout year for the young Avalanche. Captain Gabriel Landeskog (head injury) is out indefinitely. And Colorado hasn't come to terms with emerging power forward Ryan O'Reilly.
Rich Clune will do almost whatever it takes to irritate an opponent, even if it’s one of the last things anyone would expect from him.

Take Tuesday’s game at St. Louis as an example.

Maybe it is just coincidence that the Nashville Predators rolled to a 6-1 victory in a game that included his first career goal. Or maybe, the fact that he slammed home a rebound and made it 2-0 midway through the first period so unnerved the Blues that they never recovered.

It was, after all, the first career NHL goal for the 25-year-old forward.

“There’s no reason why I can’t provide that kind of secondary scoring,” he said. “I think this team needs me to be physical and be responsible in my own end and get the other team off their game. One of the best ways to get under another team’s skin is to put the puck in the net and kind of show you can do that.

“But I’m not going out and judging my game by whether I scored or not. My game is rated on how hard I work and how physical I am.”

Since Nashville claimed him off waivers from the Los Angeles Kings just prior to the start of the season, Clune initiated in typical fashion much more often than not.

None of the Predators averages less ice time per contest (5:36) and he was scratched for the opener, but his 22 hits and 19 penalty minutes lead the team into Thursday’s game against his former franchise (7 p.m., Bridgestone Arena). He had three fights in his first four games with just one shot on goal and no points.

“I’ve turned away from as many fights as I’ve been in,” he said. “There’s a time and a place for it. I think I have an understanding of when it needs to happen. Sometimes I’ll fight for no reason. Sometimes there will be a reason. … I look for it but I don’t worry about it. If it happens, it happens. If it doesn’t, it doesn’t.”

It has not happened in the last three games. In fact, he has not been assessed any penalty minutes in those contests — all Nashville victories — but has managed two shots and, of course, the goal.

Not coincidentally, he set a season-high with 7:17 of ice time in Tuesday’s victory over the Blues.

“He’s a player who’s not afraid of anything,” coach Barry Trotz said. “He plays with energy. He’s a good skater. Really, from that standpoint, I said ‘You’re not going to make the team just fighting every day. I want you to be a guy that I can put on.’ ”

He’s already proved that he’s a guy who will stand up for his teammates.

“The only thing I care about is the respect of my teammates,” he said. “As a hockey player, the only thing you should really be concerned about is your teammates and your coaches and if they respect you.

“For as much as I agitate and get under the other teams’ skin, I’ll stand up for my own teammates and I’ll back it up. It wears thin if you don’t answer the bell, and that’s not who I am.”

Nashville City Paper LOADED: 02.07.2013

655490 New Jersey Devils

Devils acquire center Andrei Loktionov from Los Angeles Kings

By Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

on February 06, 2013 at 7:01 PM, updated February 06, 2013 at 7:15 PM

The Devils today acquired center Andrei Loktionov from the Los Angeles Kings in exchange for a fifth round draft pick in 2013.

Loktionov was assigned to the Devils’ AHL affiliate in Albany, N.Y.

The 22-year-old native of Voskresensk, Russia split the past three seasons with the Kings and Manchester (AHL). The 5-11, 180-pound forward was the Kings’ seventh pick (123rd overall in the fifth round) of the 2008 entry draft.

Loktionov was a member of the 2008-09 Windsor (OHL) team that won the Memorial Cup. Adam Henrique was also on that team. Devils prospect Harry Young, who has played for Albany, Trenton (ECHL) and Kalamazoo (ECHL) was also on that team.

In 59 career NHL games Loktionov has 14 points (seven goals, seven assists) with four penalty minutes.

This season Loktionov had 22 points (seven goals, 15 assists) in 22 AHL games for Manchester.

Star Ledger LOADED: 02.07.2013

655492 New Jersey Devils

Coaches Pete DeBoer: Devils getting closer to peak form

By Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

on February 06, 2013 at 4:26 PM, updated February 06, 2013 at 4:48 PM

Devils coach Pete DeBoer isn’t completely satisfied.

A 5-1-3 start is comforting, but he thinks this team has a lot more potential.

“I would say we’re getting closer,” DeBoer explained today. “The game in Long Island and the game in Boston have been our two best team games so far. They’ve been 1-0 and 1-1 games. We’re heading in that direction but I wouldn’t put the Rangers game last night in that category. We got a little sloppy in some areas at different points and thankfully it didn’t bite us.”

The Devils face the 6-3-0 Tampa Bay Lightning tomorrow night at Prudential Center.

“They’re dangerous,” DeBoer said. “This is a tough week for us against some of the elite teams in the league. A lot like Pittsburgh, if you turn the puck over and make bad decisions they can make you pay very quickly.”

After the victory over the Rangers, DeBoer said defenseman Andy Greene is playing his best hockey since the coach arrived.

“I think of the word assertive,” DeBoer said. “I find he’s very assertive on the ice right now. He’s not waiting for things to happen. He’s there and he’s using his hockey sense to make sure he’s there before the other guys gets there or the puck is moved there.”

The defense pairing of Greene and Adam Larsson has been strong, but DeBoer is never far from making changes.

“We’re just moving some pairs around. There is no rhyme or reason to it. We have discussions about it and try guys together. We put them together and we’ve won two in a row. We’ll stick with that until it stops working,” DeBoer said.

“They complement each other. But they’re not Gretzky-Kurri yet.”

Henrik Tallinder and Peter Harrold have been the recent scratches on D.

“With eight defensemen here and with injuries, everybody is going to have an opportunity to play with everybody,” DeBoer said of his pairings. “I think as we get closer to the playoffs we might start looking at some more concrete pairings and lines. But for me it’s too early for that.”

Just nine players skated today in an optional practice. DeBoer did not go on the ice.

The players were Ilya Kovalchuk, Marek Zidlicky, Tallinder, Stefan Matteau, Harrold, Krys Barch, Bobby Butler, Mathieu Darche and goalie Johan Hedberg.

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655492 New Jersey Devils

Devils are winning, so Ilya Kovalchuk’s scoring slump isn’t a concern

By Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

on February 06, 2013 at 4:13 PM, updated February 06, 2013 at 4:20 PM

The Devils have won three in a row and four of their last five games.

“We’re just moving some pairs around. There is no rhyme or reason to it. We have discussions about it and try guys together. We put them together and we’ve won two in a row. We’ll stick with that until it stops working,” DeBoer said.

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655492 New Jersey Devils

Devils are winning, so Ilya Kovalchuk’s scoring slump isn’t a concern
on February 06, 2013 at 4:12 PM, updated February 06, 2013 at 4:39 PM

There will be times this season when Ilya Kovalchuk carries the Devils almost by himself.

This is not one of those times.

Kovalchuk has been scoreless in the last five games and has only two goals in nine games this season. That would be 18 goals in a normal 82-game season and 10.6 over this shortened 48-game schedule.

“I think I can produce more, that’s for sure,” Kovalchuk said today. “But overall we’re playing well and the team is doing good so it doesn’t really matter. It’s all about the team. If we were struggling it would be a different story. Right now it doesn’t matter. Clarke and Patty’s line (Patrik Elias-Adam Henrique-David Clarkson) is doing really well.”

The Devils, who host the Tampa Bay Lightning tomorrow night at Prudential Center, are 5-1-3. Kovalchuk is contributing to the club’s early-season success, if not in the way most expect.

“That’s the bottom line. I’m not worried about Kovy,” coach Pete DeBoer said. “Kovy is on board and he’s doing a lot of little things the right way and it’s helping us win games. He’s on the ice all the time and he’s getting chances. Those are eventually going to go in for him.”

DeBoer has to remind Kovalchuk, who scored 37 goals last season, that points aren’t solely how he is judged.

“Yes, you do. He’s a great player who, a lot of times, measures his game on point production. Like all great players do,” DeBoer explained. “I don’t think that tells the whole story. He’s killing penalties for us. His work in his own end has been very good. He’s been back checking very hard for us. He’s doing a lot of things away from the puck that are leading to our success. He can’t just measure himself on points.”

Kovalchuk averaged 24:26 per game in ice time last season. This year he is averaging 26:08.

“The reason we’re winning is the guy is on the ice 26 minutes a game,” DeBoer suggested. “He’s having an impact in a lot of different areas rather than just on the scoreboard.”

That number will eventually come down.

“It’s more than we would like,” DeBoer said. “I think when we got to the point in the playoffs last year where we were rolling four lines he was around the 20-22 minute mark, which I think he can handle. We haven’t gotten ourselves to that spot yet.”

It isn’t a problem for the 29-year-old right winger.

“I like to play a lot. It doesn’t bother me at all,” Kovalchuk said. “It’s even better when you’re always in the game. I like to play when we’re short-handed, too. Pete trusts me and I try to do my best there. I think it helps you defensively.”

Even when the Devils had an optional practice today and most players decided to stay off the ice, Kovalchuk skated.

“I drove for 40 minutes. We had a quick meeting. My kid is still in school so I have nothing to do at home,” he said with a grin.

It seemed possible that Kovalchuk would have an edge on most players because he played in Russia’s KHL during the NHL lockout.

“It’s tough to say. It’s a little different with the bigger rinks there and it’s a different game,” he said. “You have to adjust a little bit, but that’s not why I have only five points.”

Did playing in Russia have an impact?

“I think only positive,” DeBoer said. “He’s in great game shape. He can handle the minutes load we’re giving him without a real fatigue setting in. I don’t believe that would’ve been possible had he not played the 30 games he played over there.”

Although both player and coach downplay his lack of scoring, Kovalchuk’s body language tells a story. And some might suggest that his familiar end-to-end rushes have been fewer.

“It’s only nine games so far. I play as the game goes,” Kovalchuk explained. “Sometimes you have an advantage when they’re changing and you have the puck behind the net so you go full speed. If there are five guys back you

don’t want to turn the puck over. Sometimes you have to make the simple play.”

DeBoer sees the occasional frustration surface.

“He takes a lot of personal pressure for us to win and for him to score. When you’re winning, 1-0, or losing, 2-1, like we did in Boston, he takes that personally,” the coach said. “For me you can’t lose sight of all the other good things he’s doing. The goals will come.”

Few would doubt that.

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655493 New York Islanders

Tavares Plans to Take the Islanders Back to the Top

By TOM PEDULLA

Published: February 6, 2013

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — It says everything about the makeup of Islanders center John Tavares that he believes they can reach the playoffs for the first time in six seasons, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

“If that’s not what we’re thinking and playing for, we shouldn’t be here,” said Tavares, 22, the first overall pick in the 2009 N.H.L. entry draft. “That’s our goal. It’s always going to be our goal.”

How realistic that aim may be could become clearer after the lightly regarded Islanders (4-4-1) play the highly regarded but slow-starting Rangers (4-5) Thursday night for the first time this season.

Even if the Islanders sustain their third consecutive defeat, do not expect that to discourage Tavares.

“He wants to win the Stanley Cup with the Islanders,” said left wing Matt Mousson, a close friend and linemate of Tavares. “He’s not the type of guy who bails ship. He wants to win here.”

Tavares demonstrated that by signing a six-year extension worth $33 million last September, even though the Islanders last won a playoff series in 1993 and play in Nassau Coliseum, a hopelessly outdated arena.

Tavares said it was a “no-brainer” when he decided to make a long-term commitment to the Islanders a month before the team announced it would move to Barclays Center in Brooklyn in 2015.

“I want to try to be part of bringing back the Islanders to what they once were,” he said. “To be a part of that would be an awesome thing to do with these guys.”

The Islanders packed star power — think Denis Potvin, Mike Bossy and Bryan Trottier, among others — when they hoisted the Stanley Cup four consecutive seasons from 1980-83. And now, in Tavares, they have the perfect player to build around.

“I think he can be one of the best players in the world,” Islanders Coach Jack Capuano said. “He takes a lot of pride in his conditioning, in his skating. He’s always working on his skills. He’s just a perfectionist in how he wants to get things done.”

Tavares addressed his only significant weakness by improving his skating last season, and he reached the All-Star Game for the first time. He has four goals and seven assists through nine games after producing gains each of his first three years. His point total increased from 54 in 2009-10 to 10.6 over this shortened 48-game schedule.

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Tavares addressed his only significant weakness by improving his skating last season, and he reached the All-Star Game for the first time. He has four goals and seven assists through nine games after producing gains each of his first three years. His point total increased from 54 in 2009-10 to 81 last season, when he recorded 31 goals and 50 assists. During the lockout, he played for Bern in Switzerland, collecting 17 goals and 25 assists in 28 games. (He is still in the top 10 in scoring in the Swiss league this season.) According to Tavares, he spent much of the off-season refining his shooting.

“Most of the lethal goal-scorers today are guys who get off their shot really quick,” he said. “I tried to work on my release a lot and shoot from every angle and position.”

Tavares already compares to elite players in his ability to raise the level of teammates.
"I coached Gretzky, so I’ve seen the greatest passer ever to play,” Barry Melrose, an ESPN analyst, said. “The great passers see guys and it’s like the old saying, it’s almost like he’s got eyes in the back of his head. John will make passes where you wonder how he saw the guy open.”

Moulson, 29, and Tavares are from Mississauga, Ontario. They began honing their skills together when Tavares was 13 or 14. As well as the two know each other, Moulson is still amazed by Tavares’s ability to understand what will happen on the ice before it occurs.

“Some of the great players, they see the game in slow motion,” Moulson said. “He definitely anticipates plays. He sees what he wants to do two or three plays down the road.”

Moulson has learned the best results come when he simply follows his center’s lead.

“He creates; I just read off him,” Moulson said. “It’s impossible to predict what he is going to do every time because he pulls some things out of his hat that I would never think of.”

What draws Moulson to Tavares most has nothing to do with shooting or passing. It has everything to do with loyalty and friendship. He and his wife, Alicia, chose Tavares to be the godfather of their 6-month-old daughter, Mila.

Melrose said he believed Tavares was just beginning to fulfill his potential.

“With his vision and his shot and the way he reads plays,” Melrose said, "the sky is the limit for this kid.”


Struggling Rangers stay true to identity

By BRETT CYRGALIS

Brooks on There are problems aplenty, and issues that have to be resolved for the 4-5-0 Rangers, but redefining their identity is not one of them.

Though there has been an exchange for more skill players on this season’s team than the squad that made a run to the Eastern Conference finals last season, there is no abandoning the hard-nosed, grind-it-out style that has been the central theme since John Tortorella took over as coach in 2009.

“It’s obviously different because there’s different players, but I don’t think the identity changed,” speedy winger Carl Hagelin said. “That’s the way we are and that’s the way we want to play. So I don’t think we’re focusing too much on that.”

What has been the focus as the team prepares to play host to the Islanders (4-4-1) Thursday night at the Garden are all the deficiencies that have had Tortorella publicly irked. And none are more infuriating than the team’s lack of mental toughness and its inconsistency throughout the lineup.

It led him to make some drastic statements after Tuesday night’s 3-1 loss to the Devils in Newark, saying “we have some guys that look scared to me, and tentative.”

Wednesday, the coach might have been softer in demeanor, but not in his ideals. When asked if it was safe to say he had talked to the unnamed players with whom he was displeased, Tortorella had a rare moment of transparency.

“It’s very safe to say,” the coach said, smiling. “We’re a 4-5 hockey club, I don’t want to turn this into a criticizing of the players when we lose.

“I don’t want us to test the waters, and I think as we’ve gone through it here, we’ve tested the waters instead of trying to make a difference. That’s what I mean by being tentative and scared. Try to make a difference, don’t look for someone else and don’t give your problems to someone else. I think we’ll get better for it.”

Trading grinders like Brandon Dubinsky and Artem Anisimov for a skill power forward like Rick Nash has changed the dynamic of the team in terms of personnel available at certain times. By pairing Nash with two other superstars in Brad Richards and Marian Gaborik, Tortorella had established a top-heavy lineup that was getting little support from the lines below it.

He blew that line up at the end of Tuesday’s game, putting Richards between rookie Chris Kreider and 19-year-old J.T. Miller, making his NHL debut. They became one of the team’s best lines in the third period, with skill and speed and no definitive physical presence — very different from what was seen most of last season.

“I’m trying to stay away from criticizing too much because it doesn’t help them,” Tortorella said. “We need to do it together, and until we do, we’re in a jam. And we don’t have a lot of time to continue to work ourselves out of it. We’ve got to try to get it straightened out.”

Though Richards took Wednesday’s optional practice off, Nash and Gabourik were both in blue jerseys while Derek Stepan, who had centered them in the third period, was back in white between Hagelin and Taylor Pyatt. It would not be entirely shocking if captain Ryan Callahan played Thursday night after missing the past three games with a partially separated left shoulder. He has spent the past three days on the ice practicing, and Wednesday took some contact for the first time. He just has to wait to see how it reacts this morning.

“It feels good,” Callahan said. “There are no limitations and I’m taking full shots.”

There was not an update on defenseman Dan Girardi, who missed Tuesday’s game with an undisclosed lower-body injury, and whom the team is listing “day-to-day.” Tortorella would not divulge whether he could be ready for Thursday night.

New York Post LOADED: 02.07.2013

Islanders need to be desperate against Rangers

By ARTHUR STAPLE arthur.staple at newsday.com

The Islanders briefly mingled with the teams at the top of the Atlantic Division after beating the Devils a week ago, the 5-4 overtime win in Newark capping a 3-1-1 road trip and a 4-2-1 start.

Just seven days later the Islanders are facing the possibility of dropping into the division basement if they lost to the Rangers in regulation Thursday at Madison Square Garden.

A few things would have to happen for that to materialize, including the Flyers taking two points off the Panthers in Philadelphia, but regardless, the Islanders can ill afford a three-game losing streak.

“We’re desperate, we’ve lost two in a row so we have to understand that we have to be desperate,” John Tavares said. “Against the Rangers, it’s an emotional game, no matter what else is going on.”

The Islanders have been inconsistent. They won games on their road trip buoyed by superb special-teams play, but they let games in Boston and Winnipeg slip away late with some shoddy even-strength work.

In losses to the Devils and Pens at home, the Isles’ special-teams work betrayed them, going 0-for-14 on the power play but doing enough solid work at five-on-five to earn those 14 power plays in the first place. The Islanders also surrendered power-play goals in both games after allowing one in the first seven games.

“We have to score on the power play,” Mark Streit said. “We have five great players on the ice and we need to be better.”

Notes & quotes: Defenseman Lubomir Visnovsky arrived in the U.S. last night and was due to take a physical Thursday. He will join the team for practice Friday and could play Saturday against the Sabres at the Coliseum. . . . Forward Josh Bailey (knee) won’t be activated for Thursday night’s game but should be ready for Saturday.
Tortorella, in a Mellower Mood

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

GREENBURGH, N.Y. — It doesn’t happen often, but a kinder, gentler John Tortorella emerged after practice here Wednesday afternoon, as he tempered the paint-peeling criticism he leveled at his Rangers after a 3-1 loss to the Devils on Tuesday night.

“We have some guys that look scared to me, and tentative,” Tortorella said immediately after the defeat at Newark. But on Wednesday, Tortorella softened that criticism considerably and even did something he rarely does: accept some personal responsibility for the Rangers’ inconsistencies.

“I’m not trying to threaten them,” Tortorella said at the Rangers’ practice rink here. “Not to pound my chest, you know, and be this guy who’s a heavy.”

Tortorella was responding to a question about whether he was assessing the way he was coaching the Rangers’ ineffective power play. He accepted the question with an even temper and expounded on the answer, using it to put forth a more forgiving view of his players in general.

“We’re a 4-5 hockey club,” Tortorella said. “I don’t want to turn this into a criticizing of the players when we lose — that’s not what I’m trying to do. But I don’t want us to be — and maybe ‘scared’ was the wrong word — and maybe it was the right word. You can say it 10 different ways.”

He added: “We’re testing the waters instead of trying to make a difference — that’s what I mean by being ‘tentative’ and ‘scared’ and all that. Trying to make a difference — don’t look to someone else, and don’t give your problems to someone else. I think we’ll get better for it. Yeah, we just finished our tape, and it’s right there, so hopefully that’ll help. That’s what I’m trying to do.”

On Tuesday, Tortorella said that the rookies J.T. Miller and Chris Kreider played well enough that “they’re probably going to take some people’s jobs.” He was asked about that Wednesday.

“I don’t want to do it with this group because I think it’s a good group of guys — I’m not trying to threaten them,” he said. “Certainly I’m not putting all the onus on the players — we have to help them along the way here. And I’m trying to stay away from criticizing so much because it really doesn’t help them. We need to do it together, and until we do, we’re in a jam. We’re in a jam, and we don’t have a lot of time to continue to work ourselves out of it.”

Tortorella said he “always” looked at how good a job he and his coaching staff were doing with the players.

“We need to take responsibility along with them — we’re doing it together, just like we do all our concepts,” he said. “I’m in constant conversation with our guys, how we get this straightened out. Are we giving you too much? Are we not giving you enough? Are there too many options? All that stuff comes into play.”

SLAP SHOTS Tortorella said he did not know if defenseman Dan Girardi would return to play the Islanders at Madison Square Garden on Thursday. Girardi sat out Tuesday’s loss with an undisclosed injury, only the third time he has missed since starting his Rangers and N.H.L. career in 2006-7. “I have no updates,” Tortorella said.


655497 New York Rangers

John Tortorella not afraid to make changes to NY Rangers lineup after a 3-1 loss to the Devils

Tortorella said players ’know they are’ after referring to some as ‘tentative and scared’ after Tuesday’s loss to the Devils

By Peter Botte / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Wednesday, February 6, 2013, 10:56 PM

John Tortorella hasn’t publicly disclosed which Rangers he was referring to when he charged that some appeared “tentative and scared” in Tuesday’s 3-1 loss to the Devils.

But as the Blueshirts coach admitted following an optional practice Wednesday in Greenburgh, “It’s very safe to say” those players know who they are.

“We’re a four-and-five hockey club, and I don’t want to turn this into a criticizing of the players when we lose,” Tortorella said. “That’s not what I’m trying to do . . . . Maybe scared was the wrong word, or maybe it was the right word. You can say it 10 different ways.”

“That’s what I mean by being tentative and scared and all that. Try to make a difference. Don’t look to someone else, and don’t give your problems to someone else.”

Tortorella also had suggested that young forwards Chris Kreider, who scored the Rangers’ lone goal, and J.T. Miller — a former first-round pick who was impressive in his N.H.L. debut against the Devils — “are going to probably take some people’s jobs” if the inconsistency continues.

Ryan Callahan (shoulder) practiced without a non-contact jersey, and the team captain wouldn’t completely rule out playing as early as Thursday’s home game against the Islanders.

“Hopefully some people get healthy and hopefully the kids keep on playing better, but there are different things you can do,” Tortorella said of possible lineup changes. “I’m not trying to threaten them. If I have 23 men on the roster and I have them all healthy, three guys are going to sit out. It does not always have to be the same people.”

Tortorella reiterated that the condensed 48-game schedule doesn’t allow him to afford slumping players time to “work through it all.” He also continues to look for answers for an N.H.L.-worst power play, which has connected for just three goals in 36 chances.

“Always. We need to take responsibility, along with them,” Tortorella said.

The Rangers, meanwhile, offered no update on defenseman Dan Girardi, who didn’t practice after sitting out Tuesday’s game with an undisclosed injury.

“I don’t think we’re playing mean enough at times, passionate enough in our own zone,” said Ryan McDonagh, Girardi’s regular partner. “That’s where we’ve always been our best. Last year, we were so hard to play against in our own zone. I think at times we show we can do that, but at times when we’re letting down, teams are taking advantage.”


655498 New York Rangers

Struggling Rangers stay true to identity

By BRETT CYRGALIS

Brooks on There are problems aplenty, and issues that have to be resolved for the 4-5-0 Rangers, but redefining their identity is not one of them.

Though there has been an exchange for more skill players on this season’s team than the squad that made a run to the Eastern Conference finals last season, there is no abandoning the hard-nosed, grind-it-out style that has been the central theme since John Tortorella took over as coach in 2009.

“It’s obviously different because there’s different players, but I don’t think the identity changed,” speedy winger Carl Hagelin said. “That’s the way we are and that’s the way we want to play. So I don’t think we’re focusing too much on that.”

What has been the focus as the team prepares to play host to the Islanders (4-4-1) Thursday night at the Garden are all the deficiencies that have had Tortorella publicly irked. And none are more infuriating than the team’s lack of mental toughness and its inconsistency throughout the lineup.

It led him to make some drastic statements after Tuesday night’s 3-1 loss to the Devils in Newark, saying “we have some guys that look scared to me, and tentative.”
Wednesday, the coach might have been softer in demeanor, but not in his ideals. When asked if it was safe to say he had talked to the unnamed players with whom he was displeased, Tortorella had a rare moment of transparency.

"It's very safe to say," the coach said, smiling. "We're a 4-5 hockey club, I don't want to turn this into a criticizing of the players when we lose.

"I don't want us to test the waters, and I think as we've gone through it here, we've tested the waters instead of trying to make a difference. That's what I mean by being tentative and scared. Try to make a difference, don't look for someone else and don't give your problems to someone else. I think we'll get better for it.

Trading grinders like Brandon Dubinsky and Artem Anisimov for a skill power forward like Rick Nash has changed the dynamic of the team in terms of personnel available at certain times. By pairing Nash with two other superstars in Brad Richards and Marian Gaborik, Tortorella had established a top-heavy lineup that was getting little support from the lines below it.

He blew that line up at the end of Tuesday's game, putting Richards between rookie Chris Kreider and 19-year-old J.T. Miller, making his NHL debut. They became one of the team's best lines in the third period, with skill and speed and no definitive physical presence — very different from what was seen most of last season.

"I'm trying to stay away from criticizing too much because it doesn't help them," Tortorella said. "We need to do it together, and until we do, we're in a jam. And we don't have a lot of time to continue to work ourselves out of it. We've got to try to get it straightened out."

Though Richards took Wednesday's optional practice off, Nash and Gaborsik were both in blue jerseys while Derek Stepan, who had centered them in the third period, was back in white between Hagelin and Taylor Pyatt. It would not be entirely shocking if captain Ryan Callahan played Thursday night after missing the past three games with a partially separated left shoulder. He has spent the past three days on the ice practicing, and Wednesday took some contact for the first time. He just has to wait to see how it reacts this morning.

"It feels good," Callahan said. "There are no limitations and I'm taking full shots."

There was not an update on defenseman Dan Girardi, who missed Tuesday's game with an undisclosed lower-body injury. and whom the team is listing "day-to-day." Tortorella would not divulge whether he could be ready for Thursday night.

New York Post LOADED: 02.07.2013

655499 New York Rangers

NHL: Rangers playing too 'careful'

By ANDREW GROSS

STAFF WRITER

The Record

GREENBURGH, N.Y. — Inconsistency best defines the Rangers so far in this lockout-shortened season.

They have won consecutive games just once heading into tonight's game with the Islanders at Madison Square Garden, which follows Tuesday's 3-1 loss to the Devils. Ranking last in the NHL with a 3-for-35 power play — 0-for-5 against the Devils — is a key reason.

And coach John Tortorella knows time is running out to correct that.

"We need some really good players to make some really good plays and we're not getting really good plays from our really good players consistently enough," Tortorella said after Wednesday's optional practice. "We [the coaching staff] need to take responsibility along with them. Certainly I'm not putting all the onus on the players.

"We need to do it together and, until we do, we're in a jam," he said. "We've got to try to get it straightened out."

How is the question. So far, Tortorella admits, he's still searching for the correct answer.

"We're having constant conversations with our guys on how to get this straightened out," Tortorella said. "Are we giving too much? Are we not giving you enough? Are there too many options? We're trying to get this figured out to where there's a flow to it."

After Tuesday's loss, Tortorella bemoaned that some of his players were playing "tentative and scared," threatening the jobs of those who continue to do so. "I'll tell you right now, I'm not waiting. We have some guys that are very tentative, very careful, and we don't play careful hockey," he said.

Tortorella clarified his statements Wednesday, saying with a 23-man roster, three players obviously sit, but they don't have to be the same players each game. And players won't receive the same playing time from game to game — based on their performances.

"I don't want to turn this into criticizing the players when we lose," Tortorella said. "But I don't want us to test the waters. We've tested the waters instead of trying to make a difference. That's what I mean by being tentative and scared. Try to make a difference. Don't look for someone else and don't give your problems to someone else."

Among the forwards, Brian Boyle, who started Tuesday's game as the third-line left wing, stayed on the bench for nearly a 14-minute stretch in the third period. And line mate Arron Asham received just one shift in the third period.

"You expect a lot of yourself as an individual and as a team," said Boyle, declining to comment when asked for reaction to Tortorella's "tentative and scared" comment. "We had confidence as a group to start. Now we need to find it again. We need to get back to doing it every night."

Defensive Ryan McDonagh said the Rangers are still searching for that mind-set of "playing hard for each other."

"I don't think we're playing mean enough at times or passionate enough in our end zone," McDonagh said. "Last year, we were so hard to play against in our zone."

BRIEFS: Captain Ryan Callahan (left shoulder) participated in contact drills for the second straight day, but said that doesn't mean his timetable for returning has been accelerated. He was ruled out for 10 to 14 days on Jan. 30. On that schedule, he could return for Sunday's home game against the Lightning, though he wouldn't rule out tonight's game.

Bergen Record LOADED: 02.07.2013

655500 New York Rangers

Chris Kreider adjusting quickly to NHL and Big Apple

By STEVE ZIPAY steve.zipay at newsday.com

He is a gifted 21-year-old from Massachusetts, smart enough to speak some Russian, respect coaches and be cautious with the media. As a Ranger, Chris Kreider never will declare that he's the straw that stirs the drink. On off-days, you might find him near his Manhattan hotel, lunching at Chipotle.

But if the Rangers are to find the recipe for success this year, Chris Kreider must be in the mix.

In a season when the Rangers have scored the fewest goals in the East and the roller-coaster record looks like a social media abbreviation gone awry -- LLWLWWLWL -- Kreider isn't to blame. He played through the first three games with a painful bone chip in his right ankle suffered on Jan. 5 from a blocked shot in the AHL, rehabbed, and in his return in a 3-1 loss to the Devils on Monday, scored the team's lone goal on a laser over Martin Brodeur's shoulder.

"It's a lot better than I've felt in a while," Kreider said.

During the first three games, there were only glimpses of the speed and impressive release that scouts praised when the 6-3, 226-pound winger was chosen 19th overall in the 2009 draft and when he scored five goals in 18 playoff games right out of Boston College last spring.
Whether he was aware of the severity of the injury or not, coach John Tortorella critiqued his defense, benched him against the Flyers on Jan. 24, and hinted that he might need more seasoning in Hartford, where he played 33 games during the lockout.

To his credit, Kreider simply addressed the topic by saying that he trusted the organization to do what was right for his development. After an MRI revealed the chip, he stayed off ice, treated and strengthened the ankle, and watched games he missed from press row, another learning experience.

Kreider realized that while on ice, the pace was so fast that everybody looked like Wayne Gretzky. But watching from above, the big picture emerged. “I saw that you have some time [with the puck],” he said. “You saw where your support is.”

Just as he is becoming used to the rhythm of the NHL, Kreider is adjusting to New York. “I haven’t been able to get out much because of the ankle,” he said, “and I’m focusing on hockey. I’ve been in TriBeCa. That reminds me of some parts of Boston, but Boston is a much smaller city. I hope I’ll be able to explore more in the future.”

With his mobility back, more games like Tuesday’s won’t hurt his chances. Racing down the left side, he collected a pass from Brad Richards, looked at the net and beat Brodeur between his right shoulder and the crossbar at 6:28 of the third period for his first regular-season goal. “I closed my eyes and shot. I’m serious,” he said. “I didn’t know it went in at first. I thought he made the save. It would’ve meant something had we won, but we didn’t.”

Kreider and prospect J.T. Miller, 19, who made his Rangers debut, were twice singled out by Tortorella, first postgame, when he warned underperforming players that the youngsters were putting their jobs in jeopardy.

Then at a briefing Wednesday, Tortorella went into detail. Miller, he said, “had a big body on the puck, he banged, he was confident with the puck, made some good plays. I thought Kreider did the same things.”

Tortorella shrugged off a suggestion that Kreider’s extra jump came from a stronger ankle. “Iah, I just thought he played good,” he said. “I hope he does it again.” Tortorella turned, then added with a grin, “And again.”

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2013: Tomorrow is the first of four meetings this season, and the first of two meetings at Madison Square Garden.

Last Season: New York was 4-1-1 overall (3-0-0 mark at home; 1-1-1 mark on the road). Five of their six meetings were decided by two goals or less, including two contests that required extra time. The Rangers out-scored the Islanders, 20-14, including a 16-9 advantage after the first period. The Blueshirts’ power play was 5-25 (20.0%), led by Brad Richards’ two power play goals. Marian Gaborik led the team with five goals and seven points in the season series, while Henrik Lundqvist was 3-1-0 with a 1.97 GAA, .929 Sv% and one shutout, while Martin Biron was 1-0-1 with a 2.41 GAA and .906 Sv%.

The Blueshirts enter the contest with a seven-game winning streak against the Islanders at Madison Square Garden, having out-scored the Islanders, 31-10, during the streak.

The Rangers have registered at least one point in 13 of their last 16 games against the Islanders, posting a record of 11-3-2 over the span dating back to a 5-2 win on Dec. 17, 2009, at Long Island.

New York are tied for 15th in the NHL with a 3-2-0 (6 pts) record at home; Long Island ranks fifth in the NHL with a 3-1-1 (7 pts) mark on the road.

The Rangers are 1-4-0 vs. the Atlantic Division this season; the Islanders are 2-3-0 vs. the Atlantic Division this season.


Long Island lists no former Rangers on their roster.

INDIVIDUAL CAREER LEADERS vs. ISLANDERS:

Henrik Lundqvist — 41 GP, 24-11-5, 2.18 GAA, 4 SO
Martin Biron — 28 GP, 21-4-1-1, 2.03 GAA, 2 SO
Marian Gaborik — 27 GP, 19-14-33
Brad Richards — 36 GP, 13-20-33
Ryan Callahan — 30 GP, 7-13-20
Dan Girardi — 36 GP, 3-7-10

SPECIAL TEAMS:

Power Play: The Rangers did not tally a goal in five power play attempts (9:51) on Tuesday at New Jersey. New York ranks 30th overall (3-35, 8.6%) and is tied for 19th at home (20-26, 76.9%). The Rangers are 4-5-0 (8 pts). The Rangers are 1-4-0 in three-on-five situations (last –1/29 vs. PHI), and 0-0 (0:00) when four-on-five.

Penalty Killing: The Blueshirts surrendered one goal to the Devils in four attempts (4:49) on Tuesday at New Jersey. New York is tied for 18th overall (32-41, 78.0%) and is tied for 19th at home (20-26, 76.9%). The Rangers are 2-2 (3:12) in three-on-five situations (last –1/29 vs. PHI), and 2-2 (1:57) when three-on-four (last –1/31 vs. PIT). Shorthanded goals allowed (1): 1/20 vs. PIT (Nash).

Four-on-Four: New York did not skate in a four-on-four situation on Tuesday at New Jersey, and are now minus-1 in eight four-on-four situations (7:49) this season. Four-on-four goals for (1): 1/23 vs. BOS (Gaborik). Four-on-four goals allowed (2): 1/20 vs. PIT (Letang); 1/23 vs. BOS (Horton).

EARLY ADVANTAGE

The Rangers are undefeated when scoring the first goal this season, posting a record of 2-0-0 in those contests, compared to 2-5-0 when allowing the game’s first goal. The Blueshirts have posted a 2-0-0 mark when leading after the first and second periods.

SHOOTING GALLERY

The Blueshirts have posted a record of 3-1-0 when out-shooting their opponents, which is tied for fifth in the NHL. The Rangers are 1-4-0 when being out-shot by their opponent.

A BROADWAY HIT

The Rangers rank third in the league in hits (262) this season. Brian Boyle leads the Rangers and is tied for fifth in the NHL with 33 hits, while Rangers captain Ryan Callahan was tied for second in the league in hits (27) at the time of his injury on Jan. 29.
NEW FACES
The Blueshirts have had eight players make their Rangers debut this season – Jeff Halpern, Rick Nash, Taylor Pyatt, Brandon Segal, Arron Asham, Benn Ferriero, Darroll Powe and J.T. Miller, Halpern, Nash (assist), Pyatt and Segal debuted in the season-opener on Jan. 19 at Boston, while Asham made his debut with the team on Jan. 20 against Pittsburgh. Ferriero debuted with the team on Jan. 26 vs. Toronto, following his trade from Pittsburgh in exchange for Chad Kolarik on Jan. 24. In addition, Chris Kreider made his NHL regular season debut on Jan. 19 after skating in 18 playoff contests with the Rangers last season, and Matt Gilroy made his season debut on Jan. 31 vs. PIT after previously skating in 127 career regular season games with the Rangers from 2009-10 to 2010-11. Darroll Powe and J.T. Miller both made their debut on Tuesday at New Jersey. Miller, who was also making his NHL debut, was originally selected by the Rangers as a first round choice, 15th overall, in the 2011 NHL Entry Draft. Powe was acquired from Minnesota, along with Nick Palmieri, in exchange for Mike Rupp on Monday.

GABY’S TRICK
Marian Gaborik posted his 14th career hat trick and, fifth as a Ranger, in a 4-3 overtime win against the Boston Bruins on Jan. 23 at Madison Square Garden. He moved into a tie with Adam Graves, Andy Bathgate and Ron Duguay for 10th on the Rangers’ all-time hat trick list and, according to the Elias Sports Bureau, is now tied with Dallas’ Jaromir Jagr for second most career hat tricks among active NHL players. Gaborik’s game-winning goal 0:27 into overtime was his seventh tally and eighth point in the last six games against Boston.

MILESTONES IN SIGHT:
Michael Del Zotto — 5 points from 100th NHL career
Steve Eminger — 4 points from 100th NHL career
Matt Gilroy — 3 games from 200th NHL career

MILESTONES RECENTLY ACHIEVED:
Ryan Callahan — 200th career NHL point (1/29 vs. PHI)
J.T. Miller — 1st career NHL game (2/5 at NJD)
Chris Kreider — 1st career regular season NHL goal/point (2/5 at NJD)

INJURIES:
Michael Sauer (concussion, 12/5/11) — 9
Ryan Callahan (shoulder, 1/29) — 3
Dan Girardi (injured, 2/2) — 1

Total Man-Games Lost: 19

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655502 New York Rangers

Tortorella explains “scared” and takes some blame for the power play

By Rick Carpiniello
GREENBURGH – Those players to whom Rangers coach John Tortorella was referring when he said they’re playing scared and tentative know who they are. The 4-5 Rangers, a day after a 3-1 loss to the Devils (which, if there is such a thing, might have been their best loss of the season) had an optional practice on Monday while Tortorella held a video conference at the Garden for the Rangers’ first practice since their first-round exit from the Stanley Cup playoffs. He spoke about the team’s laboured 3-2 win over Ottawa, the fact that they have yet to win a game of any length since the series went to 7 games, and how they can turn it around.

“We’re a 4-5 hockey club,” Tortorella said after the video meeting. “Maybe scared was the wrong word; maybe it was the right word. You can say it 10 different ways. I don’t want us to test the waters. I think … we’re testing the waters instead of trying to make a difference. That’s what I mean about being tentative and scared and all of that. Try to make a difference.

“We just finished our tape and it’s right there. So hopefully that will help. That’s what I’m trying to do, to try to help. But it certainly has to be brought up in a conversation.”

Those in the conversation were almost certainly Michael Del Zotto, Marian Gaborik, Brad Richards and Brian Boyle, all of whom were woeful in New Jersey.

Ryan Callahan (shoulder) could return as early as tonight. Defenseman Dan Girardi (banged up) may not.

Tortorella also took some blame for the (3 for 35) power play, which has been bad almost annually since Wayne Gretzky retired in 1999, and for all four of Tortorella’s seasons. He was asked if he self-assesses his coaching of the power play.

“Always,” Tortorella said. “We need to take responsibility along with them. We’re doing it with them, just like we do all our concepts. So, yeah, we’re trying to find and have a constant conversation with our guys: how do we get this straightened out? Are we giving you too much? Are we not giving you enough? Are there too many options?

“Certainly I’m not putting all the onus on the players.”

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655503 NHL

Pat Hickey: Sabres GM Regier has seen it all

By Pat Hickey,

MONTREAL — When Darcy Regier looks back at his career, he feels fortunate to be in his 16th season as general manager of the Buffalo Sabres.

“It’s a long time and I don’t feel it’s something you can ever take for granted because of the nature of this business,” Regier said. “I view myself as being fortunate, grateful. I’ll keep working at it.”

There are other National Hockey League GMs with longer tenures. Lou Lamoriello has been in New Jersey since 1987 and Jim Rutherford had a three-year head start on Regier when he was hired to run the Hartford Whalers before their move to Carolina. Detroit’s Ken Holland and Washington’s George McPhee are also in their 16th seasons with the same club.

What sets Regier apart is that he has worked with the same head coach for 16 years and there are few GMs who have had to deal with as much turmoil.

Regier is a firm believer in the theory that if you hire the right person, there’s no need to make a change. That’s not to say he is opposed to change. He believes it’s important for individuals to change.

“The emphasis is on you have to change,” Regier said. “He has to change, I have to change. Communication between the GM and coach is important and you have to have the hard conversations and you have to be willing to change.”

Regier said one major change in his position is the willingness to rely on others.

“I think the days of trying to do things by yourself, whether as a general manager or as a coach, I don’t know whether they ever existed, but they don’t exist now,” Regier said. “For someone in my position, it has to do with the nature of this business.”

Regier has had lots of practise developing a relationship with owners because he has dealt with four different ones.

Northrop Knox hired Regier in 1997 when the team was in disarray. Regier replaced John Muckler, who had a running battle with head coach Ted Nolan, who in turn had issues with star goaltender Dominik Hasek. Nolan, who won coach-of-the-year honours in 1997, had a year remaining on his contract, but Regier balked at offering him a long-term deal. That opened the door for Ruff, who had been a popular captain of the team.

The Sabres were losing money and the Knox family sold the team to TV entrepreneur John Rigas in 1998. A year later, the Sabres went to the Stanley Cup final, but lost to the Dallas Stars in six games. Folks in Buffalo had to use a second mortgage on their homes to pay the bills.

Still, Regier feels fortunate, grateful. I’ll keep working at it.”

Regier said one major change in his position is the willingness to rely on others.

“Certainly I’m not putting all the onus on the players.”

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655503 NHL

Pat Hickey: Sabres GM Regier has seen it all

By Pat Hickey,
The Sabres fortunes on the ice have — as is the case with most teams — been cyclical. There was the Stanley Cup final and three other appearances in the conference final, but the team has also missed the playoffs six times.

The Sabres went through a major crisis in 2002 when Rigas was indicted and later convicted of fraud. The NHL took over operation of the franchise until it was bought in 2003 by billionaire B. Thomas Golisano.

“I thought that if Tom Golisano hadn’t bought the team, there was a possibility it would go under,” Regier said.

Golisano, who is known for his philanthropic work in western New York, saw the purchase of the Sabres as a civic duty rather than a business opportunity. He brought stability to the franchise, but Regier had to deal with a tight budget. The team lost players like Danny Brière and Chris Drury to free agency because they couldn’t match offers from other teams and were forced to trade Brian Campbell.

Golisano put the Sabres on the block two years after he moved to Florida to escape high taxes in New York and to spend more time working on his relationship with former women’s tennis star Monica Seles. He sold the team to Terry Pegula, a rabid hockey fan who made billions in the energy sector.

Pegula, who is also bankrolling a new Division I hockey program at Penn State, has loosened the purse strings, but that has brought its own challenges.

“The challenge for me now is to have the resources and spend them wisely vs. not having the resources and having decisions made for you,” Regier said. “You can get caught on long-term contracts and the value you place on a player becomes a big deal.”

Regier said the landscape has changed in his tenure.

“I think you have to deal with players differently than when I started,” he said. “You don’t have clout. It’s more about relationships. You have to talk more to your players. You have to use education more than the hammer. You have to know the value of players. You have to become better at measuring that because of the salary cap.”

The uncertainty over where the cap will be in coming seasons is a concern.

“The teams that are in real tough positions have the two buyouts that will give them a fair amount of relief and then it’s going to be the good management going forward,” Regier said. “The contracts being done now can’t be done in light of what the cap is now, it has to be based on what the cap will be next year and the years after.”

One of the questions coming out of the lockout was what teams would do with their top junior prospects and whether they would a burn a year of an entry-level deal on a shortened season. The Canadians decided to keep No. 3 overall draft pick Alex Galchenyuk, while the Sabres held on to Mikhail Grigorenko, who was the 12th overall pick from the Quebec Remparts.

“If we had been making this decision in September, he would have been back in juniors,” Regier said. “The strides he made in Quebec — and this is a credit to Patrick Roy — between the beginning of the season and before the world junior championship and then the confidence from the world juniors made the difference. You don’t keep an 18-year-old, but you have the benefit of another half season and the experience of the world juniors. The hardest point is the contract, but we have to pay him down the line.”

At first glance, Buffalo’s decaying downtown makes it one of the least attractive venues in the NHL, but Regier noted the city’s suburbs are a magnet for current and former players.

“We traded for a defenceman a while back and I couldn’t get him to return my calls all summer and he wouldn’t return Lindy Ruff’s calls all summer long,” Regier recalled. “It’s perception more than anything else, but now he’s retired and he’s living in Buffalo. And there are a lot of those stories.

“The hard part is to get them here; the hard part isn’t to keep them here. I can think of only one player, a Russian player, who didn’t want to play here.”

Montreal Gazette

Post-game report: Quotes, notes and numbers

by Ken Warren

Of course, it wasn’t going to be easy.

While the Ottawa Senators kicked off their four-game homestand by knocking off the Buffalo Sabres Tuesday, they needed to dive in front of pucks in the final seconds — and they received a lucky bounce or two — to preserve a victory which seemed to be well in hand when they led 4-1 in the second period.

The Senators found countless positives in the win, which improved their record to 6-3-1.

Even though right winger Jakob Silfverberg left the ice favouring his hand or arm after blocking a shot late in the game, resulting in fears that he may have suffered a major injury, Senators coach Paul MacLean said after the game that “he’s fine.”

WHAT THEY SAID

“I thought Peter Regin was very good tonight, Stephane Da Costa played very well for us. (Erik) Karlsson, I thought, was outstanding in the game. Mark Borowiecki had his best game to this point. Patrick Wiercioch was fine. Andre Benoit was fine. The team, as a group, really showed a good work ethic and we stuck to the structure of our team.” — Senators coach Paul MacLean, when asked about which players stood out.

“We did a better job of getting the puck to the net and getting some opportunities and playing not as tentative offensively.” — MacLean, on creating scoring chances.

“We’ve got to find the right guys to put on the ice after we score a goal. The experiment is not working with what we’re doing. The shifts right after goals, for and against, are always real important and the last two (games), we get the lead and then within 20 or 30 seconds, they’ve got the game tied up, so we’ve got to do a much better job of being focussed at those times in the games. Those are big shifts that we can maintain momentum or give momentum back.” — On the Sabres’ first goal Tuesday, 21 seconds after Erik Karlsson’s power play goal, Chris Neil, Colin Greening, Peter Regin, Chris Phillips and Andre Benoit were on the ice for the Senators. On the Sabres second goal, 57 seconds after Chris Neil scored, the Senators skaters were Marc Methot, Erik Karlsson, Jim O’Brien, Erik Condra and Stephane Da Costa.

“Of course, it has been awhile. I had high expectations for myself coming into this season. It has been a long time and maybe the timing has been a little off and it took a more time than I was hoping or expecting.” — Peter Regin on registering his first two points of the season.

“Everybody is going to go through (bad) stretches, but you’ve got to keep working. The coaching staff knows what comes with it and we have to make sure we stay on top of it and focus on what we need to do to get goals and not just say, ‘okay, I need to score goals today’, because then you just play tighter and make wrong decisions.” — Daniel Alfredsson on the Senators breaking their offensive funk.

“Once it got 4-3, I thought we did a really good job of keeping them to the outside and doing the right things defensively and holding on to the puck offensively and that was nice to see.” — Alfredsson on preserving the lead late in the game.

“There was a lot of stuff going on out there. At the end of the day, we got our guys out there that are willing to pay the price, they’re putting their bodies on the line, making the big blocks and not afraid to get in front of the net” — Senators goaltender Craig Anderson.

“I think it hit him in the back. I don’t know. I was swimming.” — Anderson on whether defenceman Andre Benoit blocked a shot headed for the open net in the final minute.

THE NUMBERS

31:36: Erik Karlsson’s ice time
37-15: Senators faceoff record (Kyle Turris went 12-3)
5: Hits from Mark Borowiecki and Mika Zibanejad
2: Assists from Peter Regin, his first points of the season

565504 Ottawa Senators

1096
1: Shots from league-leading scorer Thomas Vanek
-1: Vanek’s +/- rating
0-for-4: Sabres power play
1-for-2: Senators power play
20: Saves by Craig Anderson
20: Saves by Jhonas Enroth

Ottawa Senators LOADED: 02.07.2013

655505 Ottawa Senators

Ottawa Senators NHL gameday vs. Carolina Hurricanes

By Don Brennan

Senators gameday - Sens Vs. Canes, Feb. 7 (pdf)
Carolina Hurricanes (4-4-0) at Ottawa Senators (6-3-1)
Thursday, 7:30 p.m., Scotiabank Place
TV: Sportsnet East
Radio: Team 1200, CJFO-FM 94.5 (French)

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senators: PP 27.3% (4th), PK 90.9% (3rd)
Hurricanes: PP 15.0% (22nd), PK 73.7% (24th)

LAST FIVE

OTT 4, BUF 3
MTL 2, OTT 1
CAR 1, OTT 0
OTT 5, MTL 1
OTT 3, WSH 2

Carolina (3-2-0)
CAR 4, TOR 1
PHI 5, CAR 3
CAR 1, OTT 0
BOS 5, CAR 3
CAR 3, BUF 1

SENIORS ROSTER

Goalies
Craig Anderson
Ben Bishop
Defence
Marc Methot-Erik Karlsson
Chris Phillips-Sergei Gonchar
Patrick Wiercioch-Andre Benoit
Forwards
Mika Zibanejad-Kyle Turris-Daniel Alfredsson
Milan Michalek-Zack Smith-Jakob Silfverberg
Colin Greening-Peter Regin-Chris Neil
Jim O'Brien-Stephane Da Costa-Erik Condra
Hot: Karlsson, Anderson, Regin
Cold: Michalek, O'Brien, Smith

HURRICANES ROSTER

Goalies
Cam Ward
Dan Ellis
Defence
Joni Pitkanen-Jamie McBain
Joe Corvo-Justin Faulk
Jay Harrison-Bobby Sguinetti
Forwards
Jiri Tlusty-Eric Staal-Alexander Semin
Jeff Skinner-Jordan Staal-Pat Dwyer
Drayson Bowman-Jussi Jokinen-Chad Larose
Tim Wallace-Tim Brent-Kevin Westgarth
Hot: E. Staal, Skinner, J. Staal
Cold: Tlusty, Bowman, Jokinen

INJURIES

Ottawa
C Jason Spezza (back)
LW Guillaume Latendresse (upper body)
D Jared Cowen (hip)
Carolina
C Tuomo Ruutu (hip)

THURSDAY’s MATCHUP

Forwards: Canes
Big guns on fire
Defence: Senators
Bingo callups making coach’s decisions difficult
Goaltending: Senators
Anderson has allowed as many as three goals just once
Power play: Senators
Ottawa well ahead in rankings
Penalty killing: Senators
See power play description

Coaching: Senators
Ottawa now 3-2 without Spezza
Overall: Senators
4-0-1 at Scotiabank Place

PLUS

Senators have best goals against average (1.80) in the NHL ... Anderson has the best save percentage in the league at .956 ... Senators have allowed just three second-period goals and four third-period goals this season ... Stepping into first line role, Mika Zibanejad set up Daniel Alfredsson's goal Tuesday and now has three points (1 G) in five games ... Kyle Turris leads the Senators in faceoff wins, with 90. He has also worked his percentage to 51.7% ... Senators are 2-0 when leading after one period and 3-0 when tied after one period ....Senators are 372-291-80-46 in 769 all-time home games ...
Despite shutting out the Senators last Friday in Raleigh, Dan Ellis is likely to watch this one from the Canes bench. In beating Toronto 4-1 Tuesday, Cam Ward had his best game of the season, coach Kirk Muller said Wednesday ... Senators lost 2-1 to the Canes the last time they visited Scotiabank Place (Mar. 3, 2012). Jason Spezza was the only Senator to beat Ward, who made 38 saves. Brandon Sutter and Tuomo Ruutu scored on Anderson, who made 29 stops ... Senators are 33-4-1-3 all time against Carolina ... They are 21-16-4-2 against the Canes in games played in Ottawa.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 02.07.2013

Ottawa Senators defenceman Mike Lundin returns to practice after breaking finger in off-season

By Don Brennan

Remember when the Senators really needed a defenceman?

Suddenly, they have too many.

The day after commending all three Binghamton callups -- Andre Benoit, Mark Borowiecki and Patrick Wiercioch -- for their play in a much-needed 4-3 win over the Buffalo Sabres, Senators coach Paul MacLean announced that two more blue-liners will be available for Thursday's game against the Carolina Hurricanes.

Veteran Sergei Gonchar will return from a bout with the flu, and Mike Lundin is finally "available" after missing the first 10 games with a broken finger.

"It's a nice puzzle to have," MacLean said of the excessive number. "We're going to sort that out as we move forward. Right now, we're going to keep eight. We know we can't keep that number the way it is, we're going to have to make some decisions down the road."

Lundin, who was signed as in a free agent in the off-season, practised with the team Wednesday. MacLean said he wants to let the 28-year-old "get his legs under him" and see how he does.

What exactly does that mean?

"He did play in Sweden during the lockout and has skated extensively here for the last (few) weeks," said MacLean. "Whether it translates in him playing sooner than later ... we are going to give him every consideration to get him in the lineup as soon as we can."

Lundin is the type of defenceman who prefers to go a whole game without getting noticed. He's not a point-getter -- he has four goals and 31 assists in 241 NHL games -- but he's smart, and a good skater.

So far, he's just been able to watch his new team, and he likes what he sees.

"Looks like a fun way to play," said the native of Burnsville, Minn. "They go, Lundin is finally "available" after missing the first 10 games with a broken finger.

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"Looks like a fun way to play," said the native of Burnsville, Minn. "They go, they fast, they don't like to spend a lot of time in the D-zone, and just get it moving forward."

"I hope I'm ready. I feel ready. I've been able to skate. It's just a finger."

So to get Gonchar and Lundin in, which two do you take out? Benoit has shown, especially of late, why he's constantly referred to as Binghamton's best all-around player. He's played very well for MacLean. Wiercioch's four assists are no fluke -- he has shown he's a great playmaker. Borowiecki provides the muscle the Senators don't have enough of on the back end.

MacLean said the Kanata product played his best game against the Sabres.

Lundin smiled when asked if he's ready to battle for a spot among the Top 6.

"Yeah, always," he said. "Everyone's playing for a job all the time. They're definitely good players, they've been playing well. So I'm going to have to fight to get a spot in this lineup."

MINUS

Ottawa Senators captain Daniel Alfredsson likes what he sees out of teammate Jakob Silfverberg

By Don Brennan

The sight of Jakob Silfverberg in obvious pain after throwing himself in front of a slapshot during the dying seconds of Tuesday's win over the Buffalo Sabres led to an assumption the Senators injury list was about to grow by one.

Move over Jason Spezza, Jared Cowen and Guillaume Latendresse. Here comes the rookie Swede.

How much would losing Silfverberg have hurt the Senators?

"He's just a very smart player," said captain Daniel Alfredsson. "To go along with his offensive instincts, I think he's got one of the best shots in the league."

"If I was a kid, I would definitely study how he shoots the puck."

Alas, Silfverberg wound up with only a bruised knuckle -- not a broken knuckle like that suffered by Edmonton Oilers captain Shawn Horcoff -- on his left hand.

"He's sore," said Alfredsson. "But it's nothing a Swedish Viking can't handle."

Silfverberg said the shot "numbed" his hand.

"I couldn't really feel it," he said. "I got pretty scared that something was broken. But it wasn't, so I'm very fortunate."

No doubt he earned himself a few more fans with the way he finished the shift with no stick and his left arm dangling at his side.

"It was tough to play," said Silfverberg. "Obviously you've got to do what you can do when you're out there. I tried to finish the shift, tried to pick up the guy and stay with him, but obviously I couldn't use my left hand as I wanted to. I tried to do my best."

NOT JUST A BATTERED FACE

Decisions like these are why MacLean makes the big bucks.

Odds and ends

Craig Anderson, who will make his seventh consecutive start for the Senators Thursday, is now listed by Bodog as a 13/2 favorite to claim the Hart Trophy as the NHL's most valuable player - the same odds as last year's winner, Evgeny Malkin. Tops on the list are Sidney Crosby (4/1), Steven Stamkos (4/1), Thomas Vanek (11/2) and Marleau (6/1) ... Many thought the acquisitions of Jordan Staal and Alexander Semin would give the Canes a boost this season. Well they have been better, of late. Since losing the first two games by a combined score of 9-2 to the Florida teams, Carolina has gone on a 4-2-2 run. "We've been playing some pretty good hockey," coach Kirk Muller said Wednesday after putting his troops through practice at Scotiabank Place. "We're getting back to our identity and starting to be a little more consistent. The team is coming together pretty good."

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 02.07.2013
Silfverberg now has two blocked shots to his credit this season. The first, you may remember, was in Tampa, when in taking a shot off his shin pads he sent the puck into the neutral zone, where Latendresse picked it up for a breakaway that became a penalty shot.

"I think I've always been a pretty good shot blocker, as soon as I started playing," said Silfverberg. "I like to block shots. I think that's part of the reason I get a couple of shots on me, because I like it."

While he has just two goals, Silfverberg is fast becoming an important part of the team. Not to be overlooked in the latest incident was that Silfverberg was on the ice protecting a one-goal lead in the last minute, a definite sign of confidence shown in him by coach Paul MacLean.

"It's part of the game that shows tremendous amount of commitment to your teammates," MacLean said of shot blocking. "It was the right thing for him to do in that situation. He came through it all right, so let's do it again next time."

Silfverberg is expected to be in the lineup against Thursday against the Carolina Hurricanes.

"Obviously, I can still feel that something happened (Tuesday)," he said, "but it shouldn't be a problem at all."

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 02.07.2013

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All Erik Karlsson did last season was lead NHL defencemen in scoring by 25 points.

This year, he could wind up being the top scoring blue-liner in two leagues.

Yup, a pair of scoring titles in the same season.

It's probably safe to say that's never been done before, right?

Karlsson, who played 30 games for Jokerit in Finland's SM-Liga during the lockout, has what looks to be an insurmountable lead among all defencemen in one of Europe's strongest loops. The 34 points he amassed before Christmas remains 11 more than Teemu Aalto has in 49 games for Tappara Tampere.

Aalto has only 11 more games to make up the difference.

Now, the fourth-year Senator is no lock to repeat as the NHL's top scoring rearguard in this shortened season. But few would bet against him, either.

In Tuesday's 4-3 win over the Buffalo Sabres, Karlsson notched his fourth goal of the season, tying him with Montreal's Andre Markov for the league lead for defenceman Combined with his four assists, it leaves Karlsson just four behind the pace-setter in points, Winnipeg's Tobias Enstrom.

Oh, and then there's the defensive play Karlsson's been giving the Senators through 10 games this season. Asked Wednesday how much the defending Norris Trophy winner has improved in his own zone from last season, Senators coach Paul MacLean was succinct.

"I think he's improving," MacLean said of the 22-year old known simply as 'Karl' among friends. "He hasn't gotten worse, that's for sure. I think the defensive part of his game, he learns more about it all the time."

"I'd say he could be the best player in the league," added MacLean. "We haven't seen all the teams, but I know that if you have the puck all the time, you don't have to defend. Quite often he has the puck -- so he doesn't have to defend."

One thing is for sure -- nobody controls the tempo of a game the way the speedy Karlsson does from the Senators' back end. And but a very few are relied on more than the Senators do their No. 65.

Against the Sabres, Karlsson logged 31:15 of ice time, which was actually a bit of a break from the 32:08 he worked in Sunday's 2-1 loss to the Habs. Only twice did he play more than 31 minutes in 2011-12 - when he was on for 32:44 during a 3-1 loss to St. Louis Feb. 7 and the 32:39 he saw in an overtime win over New Jersey Jan. 2.

"I feel great," Karlsson said Wednesday at Scotiabank Place. "I feel I can play more, if I can. Got to limit it somewhere, but as long as my body feels good, I don't have issues playing a lot of minutes."

Karlsson played more than 30 minutes seven times last year, including once in the playoffs. He eclipsed the 30-minute mark twice in 2010-11 and just once the previous season, as a rookie - when he played 40:38 of a triple overtime playoff victory over Pittsburgh.

"We're just 10 games in, there's still 38 to go plus some more, hopefully," said Karlsson. "You've just got to try and take care of your body every day, stay in shape and go from there."

Karlsson and Daniel Alfredsson were given Wednesday off to rest, while their teammates practised in preparation for Thursday's visit by the Carolina Hurricanes.

"I ran a bit today, did some things in the gym," said Karlsson. "Just to keep the body in check. And got a nice massage."

Contributing to Karlsson's added workload is the penalty killing responsibilities he has inherited.

"If they get a lot of pressure, it gets pretty tough," he said of short-handed situations. "There's lots of standing around as well. You just make reads, try to figure out what's going on out there. But 5-on-5 is probably the most difficult and most exhausting part of the game."

Darling ahead of the play in anticipation of a breakaway pass would also wear a guy out, but with the way Karlsson can fly MacLean has to give him the green light.

"Every once in a while you've got to improvise," Karlsson said with a smile. "You've got to be there for a teammate, wherever that is on the ice."

Karlsson doesn't believe he's yet played his best hockey this season, which also bodes well for the Senators if true.
"Experience has a little bit to do with it, obviously," he said. "I'm just trying to figure out things every day. There's always situations out there when you don't really know what to do, and you have to think a little more. Defensive zone (play), I've been working on ever since I got in the league, and I'm going to keep working on it until I get out of it."

Minutemen

A look at the players leading the league in average ice time this season:

1. Jack Johnson (Columbus): 28:38
2. Drew Doughty (Los Angeles): 28:20
3. Erik Karlsson (Senators): 28:18
4. Dion Phaneuf (Toronto): 27:34
5. Ryan Suter (Minnesota): 27:31

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 02.07.2013

655510 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers' Wayne Simmonds feels fine after practice, but return to action remains unknown

Marc Narducci

Flyers right wing Wayne Simmonds was wearing a yellow jersey with the hope it will soon turn orange.

Simmonds participated at his first practice Wednesday since suffering a concussion during Friday's 3-2 loss in Washington. The yellow jersey signals no contact.

Simmonds skated freely at the Skate Zone in Voorhees and was optimistic afterward.

"I felt fine," he said.

Whether it's fine enough to return to action is in the hands of the team's medical staff. What is important to Simmonds is that he has skated twice since the injury, and both times he came away encouraged.

This was his first practice since the injury, but he also skated Sunday. Simmonds suffered his injury when Washington's John Erskine elbowed him in the face. Erskine was not called for a penalty but later was issued a three-game suspension.

Erskine also reached out to Simmonds.

"John texted, and I obviously appreciate the text," Simmonds said. "I don't think he meant to get me in the head. It was a reactionary thing, and we are all hockey players, and things happen quickly out there on the ice."

When asked about a return, Simmonds said everything was up to the medical staff, and he will just follow the instructions. He didn't want to speculate on a time line.

His return to practice was a welcome sight to his teammates.

"He was looking good, and it was good to see him," forward Claude Giroux said.

Simmonds has two goals and three assists in eight games and is a plus-one in the plus/minus ratings. He also leads the team with 27 penalty minutes.

The Flyers said Wednesday night that Simmonds remained day-to-day, but it would be surprising if he played Thursday at the Wells Fargo Center against the Florida Panthers.

Coming off Tuesday's tough, 2-1 win over Tampa Bay, the Flyers have to get up to play a Panthers team that they soundly defeated, 7-1, on Jan. 26 and is 3-5-1. Yet Flyers coach Peter Laviolette anticipates no letdown.

"I think you are always looking for consistency, and the opponent shouldn't matter. With the place we are at right now, we need to win games and are at the bottom of the pack, and we need to move up the standings," said Laviolette, whose team was 4-6 and 12th in the Eastern Conference entering Wednesday's action.

The Flyers will sign veteran defenseman Kimmo Timonen to a one-year, $6 million extension in the next few days, a league source confirmed Wednesday night. Timonen, who will turn 38 next month, would have been eligible to become an unrestricted free agent in July.

The signing is somewhat surprising because it would mean the Flyers have already committed about $62.1 million on just 19 players - including the injured Chris Pronger - toward next year's $64.3 million cap. They will also have an option of using an amnesty buyout on up to two players.


655511 Philadelphia Flyers

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655512 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL power rankings: Philadelphia Flyers stay at No.17 spot

Deanna Vasso

The Western Conference teams remain on top this week, as the Chicago Blackhawks and the San Jose Sharks continue to battle for the top seed in the Western Conference. Western teams have been more aggressive this season as they have forced 15 games to overtime shootouts, while only three games in the Eastern Conference have faced shootout rounds.

Injuries and adjusting to a grueling shortened season are still wearing on some teams like the Philadelphia Flyers and the Washington Capitals. While other teams like the Buffalo Sabres and the Los Angeles Kings have talented individual players, the overall effort from the team prevents them from being at the top of their divisions.

1. Chicago Blackhawks (8-0-2) Last week: 1
With a near perfect record and having yet to lose in regulation, the Blackhawks remain No. 1. Backup goalie Ray Emery is proving that he is just as viable an option as Corey Crawford.

2. San Jose Sharks (7-2-1) Last week: 2
The Sharks are famous for choking when the playoffs start, so the shortened season may work in their favor, especially if left winger Patrick Marleau continues to lead the league in goals.

3. Boston Bruins (7-1-1) Last week: 4
The Bruins have a pretty solid team all around, and are 3-1 in their last four games.

4. Pittsburgh Penguins (7-3-0) Last Week: 5
Chris Kunitz impressed in the Pens’ 6-3 win over the Capitals last Wednesday, scoring four goals after coming off an illness, and achieving his third career hat trick. The thing that has the Pens off to such a fast start is their diversity of goal scorers.

5. Tampa Bay Lightning (6-3-0) Last week: 7
Steven Stamkos and Martin St. Louis gel so well together it’s no surprise that they remain among the top point producers in the league.

6. St. Louis Blues (6-3-0) Last week: 3
Rookie Vladimir Tarasenko had a great debut, and he’s really showing his talents early on through his persistence to always be at the net either as the goal scorer or as a capable setup man.

7. Ottawa Senators (6-3-1) Last week: 8
With Jason Spezza out indefinitely, Kyle Turris moved to the top line with Daniel Alfredsson and Milan Michalek. The Sens won 5-1 the first time the line was used last Wednesday against the Canadiens.

8. Anaheim Ducks (7-1-1) Last week: 10
The Ducks have solid goaltending in both Jonas Hiller and Viktor Fasth, and it is confirmed by them being 4-0 in their last four games.

9. Montreal Canadiens (6-3-0) Last week: 11
After another two wins, the Canadiens jump up two more spots. They were threatened to lose power forward Max Pacioretty for awhile when he had an emergency appendectomy, but he pulled through in record time and went on to help the Habs win 2-1 against the Senators on Sunday.

10. New Jersey Devils (5-1-3) Last week: 9
The Devils are good at forcing an overtime period, but they just can’t seem to finish with an overtime win. Is veteran goalie Marty Brodeur finally showing his age?

11. Vancouver Canucks (5-2-2) Last week: 15
Robert Luongo’s game has significantly improved this week, and the NHL has noticed too as he was given the third star of the week. The Canucks as a whole have also improved as they won their last three games.

12. Detroit Red Wings (4-4-1) Last Week: 12
Pavel Datsyuk and Henrik Zetterberg anchor the offense, but filling the holes in the defense is still the team’s biggest problem as they lost their last two out of three games.

13. New York Rangers (4-5-0) Last week: 6
The Rangers drop again, mostly due to Henrik Lundqvist making some miscues in the net. The Rangers needed to make some changes which was why they traded Mike Rupp to the Minnesota Wild in exchange for Darrell Powe and Nick Palmieri from the Wild’s AHL affiliate, the Houston Aeros.

14. Dallas Stars (5-5-1) Last week: 16
The Stars move up after going 3-1 since re-signing restricted free agent Jamie Benn. Veteran Jaromir Jagr also seems to be pulling himself out of his sluggish rut as he continues to lead the team in points (six).

15. New York Islanders (4-4-1) Last week: 21
The Islanders try to turn a corner this season, but it will be hard as they are 1-2 after three games. They may be 4-1 when they play Pittsburgh, but the Penguins sought revenge on them on Tuesday night by beating them 4-2.

16. Minnesota Wild (4-4-1) Last week: 13
Signing unrestricted free agent Zach Parise was the best thing that ever happened to the Wild, but the rest of the team needs to pull their weight if they actually want a chance at the cup, especially after dropping their last two games.

17. PHILADELPHIA FLYERS (4-6-0) Last week: 17
The Flyers are trying to turn it around after some disappointing losses. Ilya Bryzgalov remains hot, and it looks like Claude Giroux might have found his line as he is meshing well with rookie Tye McGinn.

18. Winnipeg Jets (4-4-1) Last week: 14
The Jets momentum didn’t last long as they lost two out of their last three games this week. Tobias Enstrom still comes out strong by getting a lot of ice time and continuing to set up his teammates as he leads the team in assists (ten) and points (12).

19. Buffalo Sabres (3-6-1) Last week: 19
Thomas Vanek leads the NHL in points (19), so naturally one would assume that the Sabres would be higher in the rankings, but they’ve lost their last three games, so the defense and goal tending clearly need work.

20. Nashville Predators (4-2-3) Last Week: 18
We had high hopes for the Preds early on, but they just don’t seem like the team who went to the playoffs last season. They are 3-0 in their last three games, so they can only improve from here on out.

21. Carolina Hurricanes (4-4-0) Last week: 23
The Hurricanes biggest problem is their inability to score on the powerplay. The Staal brothers are starting to live up to expectations as the ‘Canes have managed to win their last two out of three match-ups.

22. Los Angeles Kings (3-3-2) Last week: 20
Simon Gagne and Justin Williams attempt to get the team on the scoreboard, but their efforts have yet to pay off, especially since the Kings have dropped their last three games in a row.

23. Colorado Avalanche (4-6-0) Last week: 24
Without captain Gabriel Landeskog, the Avalanche are attempting to hold it together. With another two more wins they seem to be capable as P.A. Parenteau has stepped in as the top goal scorer with seven goals and leads the team with nine points.

24. Washington Capitals (2-7-1) Last week: 22
Remember when the Ovech-trick commercial came out and Alexander Ovechkin was the star of the league? Having lost their last two out of three
games, the Caps need to remind him, because it seems the superstar and the rest of the team forgot they play hockey for a living.

25. Edmonton Oilers (4-3-3) Last week: 25

Right now the Oilers are lucking out with all the talented youth in their roster and the league is finally starting to pay attention to Sam Gagner who leads with 11 points and Nail Yakupov who leads in goals (five). Could this be the year they get out of their decade long funk?

26. Phoenix Coyotes (4-4-2) Last week: 27

Journeyman Chad Johnson was a huge help in net for the 'Yotes during Mike Smith’s injury. Offensively the team needs to be better but Radim Vrbata is a key point leader for the team, as they won two more games.

27. Florida Panthers (3-5-1) Last week: 28

Tomas Fleischmann and Brian Campbell try to turn around this team as the go 2-1 in the last three games, but the team's poor goaltending will continue to weigh them down.

28. Toronto Maple Leafs (5-5-0) Last week: 26

It’s not surprising that the Leafs move down drop their last two out of three games. James Van Riemsdyk is starting to help them recover with his six goals while Phil Kessel continues to struggle.

29. Columbus Blue Jackets (3-6-1) Last week: 29

The Blue Jackets won another game, but they also lost another two, so they’ll stay at the bottom of the rankings.

30. Calgary Flames (2-3-2) Last week: 30

The Flames remain a flop and have one of the worst records in the league, especially after two more losses. So it’s no wonder that Jarome Iginla’s name is floating around in the trade rumors.


655513 Philadelphia Flyers

His wrists healthy, Claude Giroux wishes his game was the same

FRANK SERAVALLI,

TOM SESTITO, the Flyers’ Tuesday night hero who chipped in with his first NHL goals in more than two calendar years, joked in the locker room on Wednesday that he leads the league in two categories: shooting percentage and faceoff win percentage.

He’s riding a perfect 100 percent in both.

But he’s taken only two shots and one draw.

A few stalls away, Claude Giroux also leads the NHL in a statistical category. It just might not be the one you would come to expect: total number of faceoffs taken (242). He is 25th in faceoff win percent (55.4) among those with 50 draws taken.

Giroux won 75 percent of his faceoffs on Tuesday against Tampa Bay, and the rest of his teammates won a combined 25 percent.

For a player who had offseason surgery to repair fractures in both wrists, those are impressive numbers. He was even attacked three times with slashes on one shift by Tampa Bay’s B.J. Crombeen on Jan. 27, which sparked Crombeen’s fight with Zac Rinaldo on Tuesday night, and the wrists held up fine.

"Knock on wood, I’ve never really had a problem [since surgery]," Giroux said. "I went into the boards a couple times and rolled my wrist, but other than that, it’s been fine. I wasn’t sure how the process was going to go, but it went very well, and I had good doctors, so that made it a lot easier."

For Giroux, the faceoff circle is where the impressive numbers end. He’s had a rough start to the season, as coach Peter Laviolette has tried numerous combinations to fill to voids left by Scott Hartnell (broken foot) and Jaromir Jagr (free agency) on the Flyers’ first line.

Coming off a 93-point season, the best by a Flyer since Eric Lindros in 1998-99, Giroux has three goals and three assists in 10 games. His six points have him in a tie for 90th in the NHL. He does not hide his disappointment.

Giroux did not have a single shot on goal on Tuesday, the third time that's happened this season already. It happened only once in 87 games last season, including playoffs.

"It's been up and down," Giroux said. "Personally, I think I can play better. It's just a process right now. We're getting everyone on the same system. There's a lot of hockey left to play."

Giroux, who finished fourth in Hart Trophy voting, started the season with the third-worst odds (13-2) to win the MVP in Las Vegas. He wasn't even on the board on Wednesday, according to Bovada.lv.

He isn’t the only one off to a rough start. Former MVP Henrik Sedin, of Vancouver, who had 81 points last season, and Toronto’s Phil Kessel, who finished with 82, haven't scored a single goal.

When it’s all said and done, though, Giroux thinks he would rather lead in only one statistical category.

"What do you think?" Giroux asked with a smile on his face. "The standings would be fun."

Simmonds close

Wayne Simmonds returned to practice Wednesday for the first time since suffering a concussion Friday in Washington. He was wearing a yellow, non-contact jersey, but remains a possibility to return to the lineup Thursday against Florida, when the Flyers attempt to string together their first three-game winning streak of the season.

Officially, Simmonds is listed by the Flyers as “day-to-day.” He said he hasn’t once suffered from a headache since being targeted by an errant elbow from Capitals defenseman John Erskine.

“I think everything went well today,” Simmonds said. “I feel good today, especially. I really don’t know what’s going to happen. We’ll have to see, I honestly couldn’t tell you whether I can play or not; it’s for the medical staff to decide. It’s obviously a tough thing and you don’t want to push it.”

Simmonds has missed two straight games, his first as a Flyer, with the first concussion of his career. He would not be the only Flyer to return quickly from a concussion diagnosis; Giroux missed only four games last season with his first.

"I've taken a lot of punches, I get hit in the head a lot," Simmonds said. "But this is the first time I've officially been diagnosed with one."

Slap shots

Ilya Bryzgalov got the day off from practice . . . The Flyers will not hold a pregame skate Thursday . . . All three members of the Panthers’ coaching staff - head coach Kevin Dineen (former captain), assistant Gord Murphy (former defenseman) and assistant Craig Ramsey (former head coach) - have ties to the Flyers . . . Florida is 2-0-1 in its last three games.


655514 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers defenseman Kimmo Timonen in talks for extension

Frank Seravalli

VETERAN Kimmo Timonen may be close to signing a 1-year contract extension with the Flyers, but no deal has been completed, according to general manager Paul Holmgren.

"We have had talks, but no deal is in place," Holmgren said in a text message, confirming the discussions with Chicago-based agent Bill Zito.

Multiple reports pegged Timonen's extension at $6 million, which would make him the 16th-highest paid defenseman in the NHL at age 38. That's an interesting figure, since Timonen has been slowed by injuries over the years and the salary cap will shrink by $5.9 million to $64.3 million. He
earns a prorated $3 million this year, in the final season of his 6-year, $38 million deal.

Timonen, who did not respond to a message left by the Daily News, has 183 assists, 211 points and two All-Star appearances over 407 games with the Flyers.

He acknowledged it was tough to find motivation during the 113-day lockout to stay in shape, but he has wanted to represent his native Finland in one more Olympics. He could get that chance next February in Sochi, Russia.


Timonen, Flyers near pact

Sam Carchidi,

The Flyers will sign veteran defenseman Kimmo Timonen to a one-year, $6 million extension in the next few days, a league source confirmed Wednesday night.

Timonen, who will turn 38 next month, would have been eligible to become an unrestricted free agent in July. He has a $6.3 million cap hit this season.

The signing is somewhat surprising because it would mean the Flyers have already committed about $62.1 million on just 19 players -- including the injured Chris Pronger -- toward next year's $64.3 million cap.

Excluding Pronger, they will have about $23 million committed to seven defensemen for 2013-14.

They will also have an option of using an amnesty buyout on up to two players.


Simmonds back at practice

Frank Seravalli

Flyers forward Wayne Simmonds returned to practice on Wednesday for the first time since sustaining a concussion last Friday in Washington.

Simmonds, 24, was wearing a yellow non-contact jersey but still participated in most drills.

“I think everything went well today,” Simmonds said. “I feel good today, especially. I really don’t know what’s going to happen. We’ll have to see, I honestly couldn’t tell you whether I can play or not, it’s for the medical staff to decide. It’s obviously a touchy thing and you don’t want to push it.”

He is officially listed by the Flyers as “day-to-day,” meaning he could be a possibility for Thursday’s game against Florida as the Flyers try to string together their first 3-game win streak of the season.

Simmonds said this is his first career concussion. He’s been headache-free the “entire time,” and said he wasn’t sure whether he needed to test it with contact in a practice first.

Simmonds has missed two straight games with the concussion, his first games missed since joining the Flyers before last season. Washington’s John Erskine was suspended 3 games for his elbow to Simmonds’ head and sacrificed nearly $25,000 in pay.

Erskine sent a text message to Simmonds apologizing for the play.

“I’m happy he did that,” Simmonds said. “I don’t think it was intended to hurt me. If I thought it was, I would have said something. He’s a big, strong, stay-at-home d-man, I don’t think I’ve ever seen him try to hurt someone. He knew he had gotten caught (in a bad position), we were going on a 3-on-1 the other way. Sometimes, things happen fast in hockey. It’s a fast-paced game. You can’t be mad at him for it. It’s not really a big deal to me, it’s a hockey play.”


Giroux motivation for Rinaldo fight

Frank Seravalli

The first rule of “Fight Club” is that you do not talk about Fight Club.

Zac Rinaldo kept to that rule on Tuesday night, refusing to talk about his motivation for the beatdown he put on Tampa Bay’s B.J. Crombeen during first period fisticuffs.

Still, an elated Tom Sestito - who netted his first NHL goals in 776 days - couldn’t help but be proud of Rinaldo’s effort to protect his teammates.

“What (Crombeen) did to ‘G’ (Claude Giroux) last game, he had something coming to him,” Sestito said. “We weren’t going to do it dirty. He answered the bell and good for Zac. It was just a great fight.”

Apparently, Crombeen had been a hot topic in the Flyers’ dressing room after their 5-1 loss in Tampa Bay on Jan. 27.

Not long after Vincent Lecavalier’s first period fight in that game, Crombeen attacked the wrists of Flyers captain Claude Giroux with three deliberate slashes all in the same shift. That didn’t go unnoticed.

Giroux, of course, had offseason surgery to repair fractures on both wrists, which he said came from Sidney Crosby during last year’s epic first round playoff series.

Rinaldo did not play in that game. When asked, he wouldn’t offer any insight into why the fight started. It ended, though, with Crombeen dazed and confused, barely able to skate off the ice under his own power after Rinaldo finished him with a few hard rights.

“I didn’t play down in Tampa, and to be honest with you, I had no idea what happened down in Tampa,” Rinaldo said. “I watched them from way up in the press box and no one really talked to me about it. It was just a hockey fight.

“He asked me, actually. We bumped each other’s shoulders and he’s like ‘we’re going?’ and I was like ‘yeah’ and it happened.”

Crombeen did not return to the game for “precautionary” reasons. Tampa Bay coach Guy Boucher said Crombeen could have returned, as he was riding a stationary bike and passed all tests, but they decided to hold him out.

Danny Briere said Rinaldo’s fight definitely gave the Flyers the early momentum. Peter Laviolette said it provided a “huge bolt of energy.” The 19,616 fans packed into the Wells Fargo Center roared when Rinaldo connected with Crombeen’s face flush and sent him to the ice seeing stars.

Crombeen hinted after the game, in a passive-aggressive way, that Rinaldo couldn’t help but be proud of Rinaldo’s effort to protect his teammates.

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Crombeen hinted after the game, in a passive-aggressive way, that Rinaldo broke the NHL’s ultimate “Fight Club” rule by throwing punches after he had already went down.

“Typically when I’ve gotten into fights with guys in that position, you stop throwing,” Crombeen said. “I mean, guys fight different ways, so I’m not really going to say if it was dirty or not. I mean, if you’re fighting, you’re fighting. You’re putting yourself in that situation, and you know the consequences.”

Crombeen, in his 69th career NHL fight, made the mistake of continue to tug at Rinaldo when he fell to one knee.

Rinaldo said he had no regrets.

“I hit him until he was down,” Rinaldo explained. “I’m not going to hit nobody, no matter who they are or what they’ve done, I’ll never hit someone when they’re down, I hit him until he was down and I made sure he was down. That was it.”

Perhaps even feeling a little guilty, Rinaldo asked referee Kelly Sutherland whether he had crossed the line.
"I kind of felt bad, if maybe I didn’t stop myself, but I’m pretty sure I did," Rinaldo said, with a bandage covering a cut on the bridge of his nose. "He said, ‘No, you’re good. It was fine, you him hit right before he went down, you made him fall down.’

"So many things are going through your mind while you’re fighting, it’s a fight."

Rinaldo’s extra shots may have provoked Lecavalier to take an extra swing at Max Talbot during their third period fight. In his second fight in as many games against the Flyers, Lecavalier appeared to connect with Talbot’s face while he was laying flat on the ice on his back.

It’s a shame these two teams don’t meet again until March 18. There’s plenty of bad blood to go around.

655518 Philadelphia Flyers

Simmonds: No grudge with Erskine

By Wayne Fish

VOORHEES — Wayne Simmonds said a penalty should have been called on the play that left him with a concussion but that he harbors no ill will toward Washington defenseman John Erskine for the hit he delivered in last Friday night’s game.

Simmonds, who took part in his first practice with a no-contact jersey Wednesday, basically said that Erskine’s hit, in his opinion, was not premeditated and sounded satisfied with the three-game suspension.

"He (Erskine) sent me a text message apologizing for what had happened," Simmonds said after the practice. "I’m happy he did that, obviously, I don’t think he intended to hurt me. I’ve watched him play, he’s a big, strong, stay-at-home d-man. He plays physical and I’ve never seen him intentionally try to hurt someone."

Simmonds, who said this is the first confirmed diagnosis concussion of his hockey career, remains listed as day to day and possible for Thursday night’s home game against Florida.

Erskine and Simmonds were racing for a loose puck when Erskine stuck out his right elbow, connecting with Simmonds’ face.

Simmonds said he understands the dynamic of the play, that Erskine feared Simmonds would get around him, so he acted instinctively.

"He knew he had gotten caught," Simmonds said. "Sometimes things happen in hockey. You can’t be mad at anybody for it."

"It’s hockey. Stuff happens. It’s not really a big deal to me. If I had thought he did it intentionally, maybe I would have said something. It’s a game of inches. That’s how you play the game. Unfortunately, that happened."

That said, when Erskine was allowed to complete the game, the later suspension didn’t help the Flyers’ cause anyway. The Flyers won’t be playing the Caps in any of the games Erskine is suspended for.

Simmonds said he’s not in favor of a system to rectify the refs’ oversight.

"I don’t know if replay is the right way," he said. "There are four officials on the ice, I’m pretty sure a linesman can make that call. The puck was in the vicinity when I had got hit. It is what it is, you can’t dwell on it now. It’s a quick game, it’s fast for the officials. It should have been at least a two-minute call but you can’t complain."

The Flyers want to make sure that Simmonds is healthy before going back into action.

“Everything went well today, so we’ll just have to see what happens,” Simmonds said. “No headaches, I feel pretty good. I really don’t know what’s going to happen so we’ll see what’s going on.”

“I was headache-free the whole time.”

Rinaldo confident

Zac Rinaldo is enjoying a pretty good season in the fight department. In addition to decking Tampa’s B.J. Crombeen, he’s also beaten up Washington’s Matt Hendricks.

After the 2-1 win over Tampa, coach Peter Laviolette said the fight had a huge impact on the game.

Rinaldo said he’s not doing anything different training-wise.

“I don’t want to get too cocky,” said Rinaldo. “If I get punched, I get punched. It’s hockey. It happens.”

Bottom line is, Rinaldo is pro-active and in the big picture, it doesn’t matter if he wins or loses, as long as he has the backs of his teammates.

“It makes me feel honored,” Rinaldo said of Laviolette’s comments. “It can be anybody, a player, Peter. It’s a good honor.”

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655519 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers sCOOP: Foster has healthy respect for his former team

By ROB PARENT

VOORHEES, N.J. — Kurtis Foster only played one season with the Tampa Bay Lightning, but you get the idea he wishes it had been more.

Foster’s stock with his new team, the Flyers, has risen in the past week. After a few early roster hits, he’s become a regular No. 5 defenseman and a fixture on the second power play unit, scoring a goal on a man-advantage in the Flyers’ 5-3 win over the Carolina Hurricanes Saturday.

But Foster still carries much admiration for the Lightning, who are off to a fast start and strode into Wells Fargo Center Tuesday night with a 6-2 record, good for the lead in the Southeast Division. Tampa Bay entered the game tops in the NHL with a 36.1 percent success ratio on the power play and a league-leading 39 goals overall through only eight games.

It was a challenge that the admiring Foster was ready to take on.

“When you have a (Steven) Stamkos, a (Marty) St. Louis and (Ryan) Malone on one line, and come back with Vinny (Lecavalier) and (Ted) Purcell and the young kid (Cory) Conacher, that’s six world-class players there,” said Foster, who played in Tampa in 2009-10. “That can hurt you. And adding (Sami) Salo and Matty Carle, from here, on defense, that adds to their puck moving ability. They’re a young team that’s playing really well right now. When you have everybody going at the same time, that leads to a lot of goals.”

Stamkos got 60 of them a season ago, and through eight games in this shortened campaign had 7 goals and 16 points. And while Lecavalier, the 32-year-old team captain, has been the go-to star for nearly 15 years in Tampa, Foster still thinks the man that makes the Lightning go more than any other is 37-year-old Marty St. Louis. The diminutive winger who went from an undrafted minor leaguer to an unlikely star now in his 12th Lightning season:

All 5-9 of him — in skates, of course.

“The thing I learned the most from Marty is just his drive for the game,” Foster said. “He’s one of the hardest working guys at practice every day. I think he knows to stay in this league when he was younger, he had to do that, being a smaller guy. Now that he’s created the aura of himself, you’d think he’d take a day off and he really doesn’t.

“I went there coming off my leg injury and not knowing where my career was going to go,” added Foster, who broke his left femur while with Minnesota in 2008. “Marty really pushed me every day in practice and in games to make better plays and expect more out of myself.”

Foster was out with an undisclosed injured one game and was a healthy scratch in two others this season. But he’s played in five of the past six Flyers games, and said he thinks it just took some time for Laviolette to know him.

“Coming here, being a new guy, I didn’t know Lav very well and he didn’t know me,” Foster said. “I had to find my niche.”
The goal he scored to get the Flyers off on the right foot against Carolina might have helped.

“It felt pretty good,” Foster said. “To score my first goal as a Flyer was pretty awesome. You hear that horn go off a lot as a visitor, and it’s never fun because you know it’s getting the home team going. So it’s nice to be on the other side of that and know that it’s getting the crowd into it and get my teammates going.”

NOTES: Laviolette on line changes: “With Danny (Briere) being out, (Scott) Hartnell going out, (Wayne) Simmonds going out, it’s been tough,” Laviolette said. “Having a guy like Mike Knuble, you have to see where he fits in, and having Tye (McGinn) come up, you have to see where he fits in. There hasn’t been an opportunity to find something we like and have it remain stable.” ... Speaking of Simmonds, he’s still day-to-day with a concussion.

Timonen likely to get contract extension

posted by Rob Parent

The Flyers are expected to reach an agreement this week on a contract extension for defenseman Kimmo Timonen. Reports put the one-year extension in the $6 million range.

In a text message to the Daily Times early Wednesday evening, Flyers general manager Paul Holmgren indicated nothing was official on a Timonen contract, but the veteran defenseman, who turns 38 next month, has been known to be talking to the team about re-upping.

Part of the talks with the Flyers have likely centered around Timonen’s interest in playing for Finland in the 2014 Olympic Games in Soshi, Russia. The NHL and its players union have expressed interest in competing there.

Timonen, who had signed a six-year, $37.8 million free agent deal with the Flyers in 2007, has a $6.3 million cap hit this season.

An announcement is expected before the end of the week.

Sources: Flyers close to extension with Timonen

VOORHEES, N.J. -- Wayne Simmonds, recovering from a concussion, was back on the ice Wednesday at Skate Zone, but wearing the “no contact” yellow jersey.

Since this is the first time the lanky winger has skated since taking an elbow to the face from Washington’s John Erskine last Friday, it remains to be seen whether Simmonds will play Thursday against Florida without having at least one full contact practice.

Simmonds suspects he has been concussed before, but this was his first official diagnosis, he said.

“I take a lot of punches,” he said. “I get hit in the head a lot.”

The NHL protocol for a first concussion during a season is seven days. That would be the first period of the Panthers game.

“I felt pretty good; everything went well, we’ll see what happens,” Simmonds said, adding he has no concussion symptoms. “I feel good today. I really don’t know what will happen.”

It’s significant to note that he has been headache free the entire time, even though he struck his head on the ice.

Erskine received a three-game suspension, but to his credit, texted Simmonds to apologize for the hit.

Simmonds said on Saturday that he felt Erskine stuck his elbow up in reaction to seeing that he was going to get around the Caps’ defenseman for a 3-on-1 break up the ice.

“He apologized for what happened and I’m happy he did that,” Simmonds said. “I don’t think he intended to hurt me. I’ve watched him play. He’s a big, strong, stay-at-home D-man and he plays physical and I’ve never seen him intentionally try to hurt someone.

“He knew he had gotten caught and we were on a 3-on-1 the other way. Sometimes, things happen in hockey. It’s a fast game.”

Erskine was not penalized on the play. Simmonds said, at the very least, it was worthy of a minor.

And obviously, given the suspension, the NHL concurred.

Loose pucks

Tommy Sestito had two goals on just two shots against Tampa Bay. “I lead the league in shooting percentage and scoring percentage – 100 percent,”
Sestito kidded. ... Sad to say, something is amiss when Sestito catapults to tied for second in scoring on the club with two goals. ... Claude Giroux leads the NHL in faceoff percentage among those who’ve taken more than 230 draws at 55.4 percent. He’s taken more draws than anyone – 242. ... Zac Rinaldo says “nothing has changed” in his approach to the game this season. His first period fight with B.J. Crombeen electrified the crowd and changed the complexion of the game. “I don’t want to get too cocky,” he said. “You get punched, you get punched. It’s hockey. That’s the way it happens. I’m not going to get too up and say I’ll win every fight because I don’t.”

“You know, I have no idea,” he said. “I only have to be responsible for my job. We can talk about my game. I stay away from the judgment.”

Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers Notes: Bryzgalov won’t share preparation secret

Sarah Baicker

Ilya Bryzgalov has been the Flyers’ best, most consistent player through each of the nine games he’s played in 2013.

But if that’s got anything to do with the way he’s getting himself mentally prepared, we won’t be hearing about it.

“I can’t tell you,” Bryzgalov said after Tuesday’s 2-1 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning (see story). “Because you wouldn’t believe me.”

Nonetheless, Bryzgalov was stellar yet again against the Lightning, stopping 21 of the 22 shots he faced, and keeping the Bolts silenced through almost 50 minutes of play. Bryzgalov was calm and focused through the entire game, coming up with key saves a few times against center Steven Stamkos, who has averaged a point a game against the Flyers in his career.

During a brief injury scare in the third period — a collision with Lightning center Cory Conacher — it was as if the air were sucked out of the Wells Fargo Center. Losing Bryzgalov would be a huge blow to an already injury-riddled team.

“It was my ankle,” Bryzgalov said. “It was hit and twisted. I felt sharp pains for a short amount of time and I had to stretch my ankle in my skates, but it was fine.”

It’s been a rocky start to the season for Bryzgalov, but not because of the way he’s played. He’s been the Cliff Lee of the Flyers, giving his team the chance to win but not getting any offensive support.

But if the Flyers can find a way to jump-start their goal scoring, Bryzgalov’s success will make them a much greater threat than they’ve been through 10 games this season.

“Bryz was solid again [Tuesday night],” Danny Briere said. “He looks comfortable, he looks in control. Nothing fazes him at this point. It’s good to see. I said this morning, if he keeps playing the same way, we’re going to be a dangerous team. And a game like tonight, a lot of offensive power on their side, and he more than did the job against them.”

‘I regret nothing’

Zac Rinaldo’s fight against Lightning winger B.J. Crombeen sent the game’s sellout crowd to its feet. The fans only got louder once they realized a perfectly landed punch had knocked Crombeen out cold.

Crombeen was kept out of the rest of the game as a precaution, but afterward hinted that maybe Rinaldo had continued to hit him well after he should have stopped, after he’d gone down to the ice.

According to Rinaldo, however, that’s not the case.

“I hit him ‘til he was down,” Rinaldo said. “I’m not going to hit nobody, no matter who they are, or what they’ve done, I’ll never hit someone when they’re down. I’ll hit him ‘til he’s down, I made sure he was down, and that was it.”

Wearing a hoodie pulled close over his eyes -- almost like a boxer might -- Rinaldo added he even checked in with referee Kelly Sutherland to make sure he stopped himself from needlessly pounding his opponent.

Sutherland said he had, according to Rinaldo. That’s a good thing, considering his mind was blank at the time.

“So many things are going through your mind when you’re fighting,” Rinaldo said. “It’s a fight! You ever been to a fight? It’s crazy. You don’t know what you’re thinking.”

Loose pucks
Ray Whitney says league, not Don Maloney, made call not to meet contract expectations

By Sarah McLellan

Even with a broken foot that will sideline him for at least a month, Dallas Stars winger Ray Whitney was with the team, bouncing from city-to-city on Dallas’ recent three-game road trip.

It’s the only lifestyle the 40-year-old knows as the league’s most prominent nomad, playing for eight different teams in his 20-plus-year career.

So really, it wasn’t a surprise when Whitney left the Coyotes as a free agent this past summer to sign a two-year deal worth $6million with the Stars — especially considering the reason for this divorce was a familiar one.

“I wasn’t going to take a hometown discount just because,” said Whitney, who was the Coyotes’ leading scorer last season. He earned $6million in two years with the team.

“The discount that they wanted me to take was a lot bigger than one might think. It was basically the same contract I played on, and I thought I’d earned more, money-wise. It was the same, structured differently, but the money was about the same. There was no raise.”

General Manager Don Maloney wouldn’t divulge the specifics of what the Coyotes offered to Whitney other than to say it was a two-year contract that was a “significantly under-market deal for a 77-point scorer.

“We were certainly looking for the Coyotes special,” Maloney said. “We would have been thrilled had he taken it, and, to his credit and the way he played, he got himself a very, very lucrative deal. I have no hard feelings.”

But Whitney questioned whether or not Maloney was allowed to meet his contract expectations.

“No having an owner, trying to go to the National Hockey League to get approval on a contract like I got, which I’m assuming Don has to do, it’s not necessarily Don saying no. It’s Don fighting to get the dollar where he wants it, but it’s the league saying, ‘We’re not giving a 40-year-old a two-year contract.’”

Whitney said. “Bill Daly and those guys aren’t really out here on a day-to-day basis watching games. They’re just saying, ‘He’s 40, and we’re not giving it to him.’ I would guess.”

Maloney said that wasn’t the case nor has it ever been since the league started regulating the team’s budget almost four years ago.

“That was a complete misunderstanding on Ray’s part,” Maloney said. “The league, they have never objected to anything we’ve done on a contract.”

The Stars were the first to express interest in Whitney once free agency began July 1. Ten minutes later, the Tampa Bay Lightning called. But immediately after hearing the Stars’ offer, Whitney knew that would be the one he took.

“They gave me a bonus knowing there was a lockout, so I got that on top of it where club policy here apparently is there are no bonuses.” Whitney said.

Maloney confirmed it is club policy to not issue signing bonuses. The team made an exception when they re-signed captain Shane Doan to a four-year contract.

Regardless, this separation wasn’t a bitter one. Whitney and his family are still fond of the area. They have a home in the same neighborhood as Doan, Derek Morris and former Coyotes player Adrian Aucoin, and Whitney plans to retire there when he’s done playing.

He’s optimistic the Coyotes will still be here when that happens.

“Personally, this is my own opinion, as long as Gary’s (Bettman) still commissioner of the National Hockey League there’s going to be a team here,” he said. “I just don’t see that changing.”

For more on Whitney, go to mclellan.azcentral.com.

Arizona Republic LOADED: 02.07.2013

655527 Phoenix Coyotes

Phoenix Coyotes face tougher foes ahead in Chicago Blackhawks, San Jose Sharks

By Bob McManaman

We’ve seen how the Coyotes have responded against some of the NHL’s lesser talent — they’ve earned points in five consecutive games against Nashville, Edmonton, Dallas and Minnesota — but just how will they stack up against the league’s elite?

After Thursday night’s game against the visiting Chicago Blackhawks (8-0-2), they go on the road to face the San Jose Sharks (7-2-1) on Saturday night.
“It’s huge,” goalie Mike Smith said Wednesday following the team’s first full practice in a week. “We weren’t playing our best hockey when Chicago came to our building last game (a 6-4 loss on Jan.20) and as of late we’ve played more like the hockey we’re capable of.”

Coach Dave Tippett called the game “a great test for us,” but added, “I like the way our team’s been playing and it should be a great game.”

Phoenix is seeking its third straight win and in its past two, held Dallas and Minnesota to without a single shot on goal for stretches of 17 and 15 minutes, respectively.

“We just have to play our game and play good, defensively, and grind it out,” defenseman Zbynek Michalek said. “It’s definitely going to be two tough games, but if we play our style we should be fine.”

Raffi’s rematch

Forward Raffi Torres will be skating against the Blackhawks for the first time since his big hit on Chicago’s Marian Hossa in the second round of the playoffs last season, which a hefty suspension from the league.

Torres, who has since apologized to Hossa over the phone, isn’t expecting any real on-ice drama or any form of over-the-top payback.

“At the end of the day, it’s hockey,” he said. “Whatever happens out there, happens. Both teams are out to get two points, so we’ll see how it pans out.”

... I’m not going to veer off of what I have to do out there; just go out there and play hard and do some stuff to try and help out the team.”

This will be Torres’ third game back for the Coyotes since serving his 21-game suspension for the hit, which originally was set at 25 games.

No damage

One of the best saves from Monday’s 2-1 victory over Minnesota didn’t come from Smith, but from Michalek’s face during the final minute of play.

He was forced to leave the game after taking a shot from the point off his left cheek, but two days later, it wasn’t even noticeable.

“I didn’t even see when the D-man shot the puck,” Michalek said. “I was standing in front of the net and there were so many bodies in front. I didn’t have time to react and it just hit me. Fortunately, I was lucky enough where it didn’t do any damage.”

Smith’s new ‘do

It’s something between a mullet and a Mohawk — call it a “Mull-Hawk” — but Smith was sporting a new haircut.

“Just a change of mentality,” he said. “Gotta act a little more professional. It was getting a little long, so, time for a change. It was getting a little hot out there.”

Smith said his teammates mostly approved, but Tippett had this to say when asked about it later: “Whoever cut it, he should have paid him an extra $20 to cut the rest of it. ... It looked like he must have been late to a meeting or something.”

Ice chips

The reason the Coyotes recalled defenseman Chris Summers from Portland of the AHL and reassigned defenseman David Rundblad to the Pirates was because Phoenix needed another left-handed shot from the point, Tippett said Wednesday.

The Coyotes are without two lefty defensemen, Dave Schlemko (shoulder) and Rusty Klesla (lower-body injury). Klesla is still on IR and won’t be taken off until he’s back in the lineup, which could happen Thursday, while Schlemko hasn’t been moved to IR but will be shortly.

Schlemko’s injury is “very similar to Matt Lombardi,” General Manager Don Maloney said. “It was the best possible diagnosis for us.”

The active roster is at 22, keeping one spot open on purpose. “It’s just trying to run as lean as we can to give ourselves extra flexibility if we acquire somebody,” Maloney said, adding that no trades were imminent.

Schlemko’s injury: “Tippett had an extended conversation with captain Shane Doan on the ice following practice, but said it was nothing out of the ordinary.

“I like to know what’s going on,” Tippett said. “You’ve got to keep in touch with your team, you know? Doaner and I have good chats now and then.”

Arizona Republic LOADED: 02.07.2013

655528   Pittsburgh Penguins

Starkey: About those quiet Consol crowds

By Joe Starkey

Credit the Penguins for addressing some issues and altering the early course of their season.

Coach Dan Bylsma made the first move after a dreadful loss to the Islanders nine days ago. Instead of stubbornly sticking with a failed power-play design, he took James Neal off the point. The new alignment is sensible and effective so far.

General manager Ray Shero went next, alertly plucking winger Zach Boychuk off waivers. Perhaps most importantly, the team clearly decided that preventing goals should be objective No. 1 and that offense, with a roster this talented, will take care of itself.

The result is four straight wins in which the Penguins have allowed a total of six goals.

So what do we complain about now?

Well, there is one issue: those solemn crowds at the ironically named Consol Energy Center. The masses targeted this topic on Day 1 and haven’t let go.

Seems the only time the place gets energized is when the Penguins are doing wonderful things on the ice. Otherwise, it’s a library.

“Quiet, please! Hockey game in progress.”

I don’t mind, actually, because I enjoy the sounds of the game — pucks hitting tape, skates carving ice. I don’t need constant yelling at a sporting event. I find Penguins crowds to be eminently knowledgeable, if rather subdued. And that makes them similar to many traditional Canadian hockey crowds.

I just wish the constant scoreboard pleas for more noise would stop.

If Jimi Hendrix’s “Fire” song and Gene Hackman’s “Hoosiers” speech don’t work, nothing will. Yet fans are bombarded with ear-splitting music (we’re still playing Gary Glitter?!, power-play appeals (“Come on, make it loud, the Penguins are on the POWERBALL POWER PLAY!”), a “Live Decibel Tracker,” a “Get Loud Meter” and scoreboard commands such as “Scream!” “Loud!” or “Everybody Clap Your Hands!”

They don’t want to, OK?

The topic has inspired some spirited debate. I took special note of the atmosphere early in the Jan. 29 Islanders game because so many people had complained about the crowd at the opener.

I didn’t mind the environment at the opener. It was electric for introductions. Then a hockey game happened. Sure, it wasn’t especially boisterous even before the Leafs took the lead, but so what? The real point was that people filled the building after the NHL’s unconscionable 113-day lockout.

I paid closer attention in the Islanders game and tweeted out a question near the end of the first period: What does this game sound like on TV?

Among the litany of responses:

“Crickets”

“Like a Monday night game at PNC Park”

“Dead silent”

“Quiet, very quiet”

“Silent”

“Like a tomb”

“Like a golf tourney”

“Quiet, please! Hockey game in progress.”

“I paid closer attention in the Islanders game and tweeted out a question near the end of the first period: What does this game sound like on TV? Among the litany of responses:
“Like a candlelight vigil”

For a better feel, I made my way to the Captain Morgan Club on the lower level, opposite the benches. An enthusiastic woman next to me had abandoned her seat and was standing in the club so that she could, you know, cheer.

This was before the Islanders took a commanding lead.

Jay Farmerie, 60, said he has been a season-ticket holder for most of the Penguins’ history, starting in 1967. He claims the Consol crowds are much more subdued than the old Igleo crowds.

“I think it’s just the cost of tickets,” Farmerie said. “It’s more of a business crowd.”

Other theories abound: the acoustics are different; fans are spoiled; etc. Critics will tell you the team’s intra-squad scrimmage played to a raucous gathering.

OK, but that crowd was skewed younger and got in for free. The reality is that somebody has to pay for tickets, and that somebody will be who they are.

The important fact is that people continue to show up in record numbers. They fill the place, to the tune of 257 consecutive sellouts.

Yes, it’s a middle- and upper-class crowd that isn’t especially loud and is taken out of games pretty easily. Times have changed, here and elsewhere.

Deal with it.

Tribune Review LOADED: 02.07.2013
655529 Pittsburgh Penguins

Capitals’ Ovechkin in mysterious slide

Josh Yohe

When the Washington Capitals visit Consol Energy Center on Thursday, winger Alex Ovechkin as usual will draw plenty of attention, with his trademark bursts of speed, a heavy shot and flashy persona.

The first overall pick of the 2004 NHL Entry Draft still looks like a rock star. He just doesn’t produce like one anymore.

“It’s not an effort problem,” said goaltender Tomas Vokoun, who played in Washington last season. “He can still fly, still has a laser beam of a shot. But I know the numbers aren’t the same. I don’t know if this is the permanent Ovechkin now or not.”

Ovechkin was at his best from 2007-08 through 2009-10. During those three seasons, he averaged 57 goals, peaking at 65. He produced 1.51 points per game during the 2009-10 season, scoring 109 points despite missing 10 games.

Ovechkin has never been the same since.

His goal total dropped from 50 to 32 in the 2010-11 season, despite playing seven more games. He bumped his goal total back to 38 the following season but produced a career-low 65 points.

“I really believe he just tries to do too much on the ice right now,” said Penguins defenseman Kris Letang, who often is on the ice against Ovechkin when the teams play. “He needs (center Nicklas) Backstrom.”

Ovechkin and Backstrom were once regular linemates but no longer skate together.

“I’m surprised they aren’t playing together,” Letang said. “They complete each other. One is a passer. One is a shooter. They used to have so much success together.”

Those who face Ovechkin regularly are convinced that whatever is causing his scoring slump is not physical.

“I still see the speed,” said right wing Craig Adams. “I still see the power, the shot. I don’t see anything different in his game. I don’t have an explanation for why his numbers are down.”

Some players who competed in the Kontinental Hockey League in Russia during the lockout are struggling to make the transition from those larger international ice surfaces to those in NHL arenas. Penguins center Evgeni Malkin has scored two goals in 10 games and has acknowledged difficulty in the adjustment.

Malkin, though, still has produced 12 points in 10 games.

“I still think Ovi will get it going,” said Islanders center Keith Aucoin, who spent time in the Capitals’ system from 2008-2012. “But yeah, his numbers are down. Not really sure why.”

Ovechkin’s five points in 10 games — three were secondary assists, the other two were power-play goals — are puzzling to the Washington captain.

“It has kind of embarrassed me,” he said. “But it is what it is.”

Vokoun suggested that Ovechkin set the bar so high so early in his career that it was unrealistic to think he could maintain that pace.

“The level he once was at was incredible,” Vokoun said. “I don’t know if anyone will ever score 65 goals again. Defenses keep getting better. The game keeps getting harder. I don’t know where he goes from here.”

Tribune Review LOADED: 02.07.2013
655530 Pittsburgh Penguins

Pens trade Lovejoy to Anaheim, recall Upper St. Clair’s Reese

By Rob Rossi

The Penguins on Wednesday traded defenseman Ben Lovejoy to the Anaheim Ducks for a fifth-round pick in the 2014 NHL Entry Draft.

Lovejoy, 28, appeared in three games this season and had not scored. He has four goals and 21 assists in 98 career games.

He was one of eight defensemen the Penguins brought into training camp and kept on the roster when the regular season began. However, Lovejoy seemed to fall out of favor with the coaching staff because of a few mistakes that cost the team a couple of games late last season.

Also, the emergence of rookie Simon Despres, previously the organization’s top overall prospect, and recently Robert Bortuzzo made Lovejoy expendable.

General manager Ray Shero was not available for comment but did not favor carrying eight defensemen through the duration of the truncated season.

Of the current defensemen on the roster, only Despres would not have to clear waivers to be assigned to the AHL.

The Penguins recalled defenseman Dylan Reese, formerly of Upper St. Clair, from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton. Reese has three goals and 12 assists in 39 AHL games this season.

Tribune Review LOADED: 02.07.2013
655531 Pittsburgh Penguins

So far so good for two Penguins rookies

By Shelly Anderson

In the statistics compiled by the NHL, there are two Penguins with an asterisk next to their name — Simon Despres and Robert Bortuzzo.

They are the only rookies playing for the Penguins. Both are defensemen, which could be seen as impressive because they have cracked the lineup in an organization deep at defense or as a weakness because it can put a target on their backs.
"Both of them continue to make strides and go through growth," said Penguins assistant Todd Reirden, who oversees the defense and coached Bortuzzo for Wilkes-Barre/Scranton in the American Hockey League. "They've both had a real positive impact on our defense."

The only other NHL team dressing two rookie defensemen with any regularity is the New York Islanders with Patrick Wiercioch and Mark Borowiecki.

There's no assurance Despres and Bortuzzo will dress for the home game tonight against Washington, although at least one should because Matt Niskanen remains out with what is believed to be an ankle injury.

Despres has been filling in for Niskanen in a pairing with Kris Letang. Bortuzzo lately had supplanted Ben Lovejoy in the lineup and has been paired with Deryk Engelland. Lovejoy was traded to Anaheim Thursday night, but the Penguins recalled defenseman Dylan Reese, meaning they still have eight defensemen.

Despres, 21 and a first-round draft pick in 2009, has two goals, four points and a plus-minus rating of plus-4 in eight games -- he played the first three, sat out two and has been in the lineup since.

Bortuzzo, 23 and a third-round pick in 2007, has a goal, three points and is plus-2 in four games. He might be something of a good-luck charm. After being a healthy scratch the first six games, he has played in the past four, which happens to coincide with the Penguins' current winning streak.

"I think it's just great getting wins with this team," Bortuzzo said. "It's a great collection of guys. To be a part of winning hockey, a winning culture is something that is exciting to me."

Despres is the better known and stronger offensive force of the two. He could have been sent back to Wilkes-Barre after the short training camp last month without having to clear waivers, but instead the Penguins tried to send Brian Strait back to the AHL. He was claimed off waivers by the Islanders.

"It's a good time," Despres said of sticking in the NHL. "To play hockey for a living is the best thing in the world."

Despres played in 18 NHL games (plus three in the playoffs) before this season; Bortuzzo, six.

Both played for Wilkes-Barre during the NHL lockout earlier this season.

Despres had four goals, seven points and was a minus-5 in 27 AHL games. Bortuzzo had a goal, three points and was a plus-2 in 28 games.

Each has had one bumpy NHL game this season.

For Despres, it was the 6-3 win Sunday at Washington. Particularly early in the game, the Capitals forecheckers challenged him for position, for the puck and physically. At one point, star winger Alex Ovechkin dumped Despres to the ice. He finished with no shots, an even plus-minus and one hit.

Washington could employ the same tactics tonight. Despres isn't worried.

"They're bigger, stronger, faster" in the NHL, he said. "You've just got to execute, keep it simple."

"I still think I'm skating good, making passes."

He bounced back to score a goal Tuesday in a 4-2 road win against the Islanders.

Bortuzzo's subpar game was his first this NHL season, a 3-0 win against the Rangers last Thursday in New York.

"A little bit of settling in in the first game in New York," he said. "I hadn't played at this level in a long time and hadn't played a full-on contact hockey game for three weeks. But I feel like I can play my game, and things will work themselves out from there."

That's if they remain in the lineup for the Penguins, who did not practice Wednesday.

It's not just Reese who could eat into their game appearances.

Niskanen is expected to be out at least another week. When he is taken off of injured reserve, the Penguins will have to reduce their roster by one after adding winger Zach Boychuk on waivers.

The Penguins will have to make a decision or two, meaning the two rookie defensemen could be auditioning for one job.

In Reirden's assessment, Despres and Bortuzzo have handled the pressure of playing on the road and sometimes being matched against opponents' best offensive players. The Penguins have played seven of 10 games on the road, where opponents have had the advantage in making personnel changes and getting preferred matchups.

"I've been happy with how they've handled some pretty tough matchups and how they've responded," Reirden said.

Post Gazette LOADED: 02.07.2013

655532 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins recall Reese after trading Lovejoy

Staff

The Penguins made two changes on defense Wednesday, trading Ben Lovejoy, pictured, to Anaheim for a fifth-round pick in the 2014 draft and recalling Dylan Reese from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton. Lovejoy, 28, signed as a free agent in 2007, had four goals, 25 points in 98 games with the Penguins. But he had played sparingly this season and was a healthy scratch the past four games. Reese, 28 and an Upper St. Clair native, signed with the Penguins last summer.

Post Gazette LOADED: 02.07.2013

655533 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins shake up defense by trading Lovejoy, recalling Reese

By Shelly Anderson

The Penguins made two changes on their defense Wednesday, trading Ben Lovejoy to Anaheim for a fifth-round pick in the 2014 draft and recalling Dylan Reese from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League.

Lovejoy, 28, signed as a free agent in 2007 after playing at Dartmouth, had four goals, 25 points in 98 games with the Penguins. But he had played sparingly in just three games this season and was a healthy scratch the past four games.

Reese, 28 and an Upper St. Clair native, signed with the Penguins last summer. He had three goals, 15 points in 39 points for Wilkes-Barre. He previously had three goals, 17 points in 39 games with the New York Islanders after a college career at Harvard.

Post Gazette LOADED: 02.07.2013

655534 St Louis Blues

BLUES VS. DETROIT

Print 4 hours ago • By DAN O'NEILL doneill at post-dispatch.com

BLUES VS. DETROIT

When • 7 tonight
Where • Scottrade Center
TV, radio • FSM; KMOX (1120 AM)
Blues • The Blues are coming off a horrific 6-1 loss to Nashville on Tuesday, the team's first home loss of the season. Since Ken Hitchcock
took over the coaching duties early last season, the Blues have the best home record in the NHL. The team won the Jennings Trophy for allowing the fewest goals against last season, but this season is trending in a different direction. With Jaroslav Halak nursing a groin injury, Brian Elliott got the start against Nashville and was clipped for four goals in 11 shots. Elliott led the league in GAA (1.56) and save percentage (.940) last season. This season, his GAA is 2.95 and SP is .874. Penalty-killing has been a problem for the Blues. They rank 25th in that department, killing 73.7 percent of their penalties and allowing 10 power play goals against.

Red Wings • After beating the Blues last Friday — thanks in part to a phantom match penalty called on David Backes — the Red Wings have lost two in a row, including an ugly 4-1 defeat at home to the lowly Calgary Flames. At one point or another, Detroit has had more than half of its blue-line corps go down with injuries. The Red Wings have scored a goal in the first period in only two of nine games. They’ve been outscored 9-3 in the opening 20 minutes. The team also is not getting much offense from secondary lines. The third and fourth lines for the Red Wings have combined for no goals and one assist. Henrik Zetterberg leads the team in scoring with 13 points.

Injuries • Blues: G Jaroslav Halak (groin), out. Red Wings: F Jan Mursak (collarbone), D Carlo Colaiacovo (shoulder), F Mikael Samuelsson (groin), G Joey MacDonald (back), F Jonas Gustavsson (groin), F Darren Helm (back), D Brendan Smith, (shoulder), out.

Dan O’Neill
St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 02.07.2013
655535 St Louis Blues

Blues deal with identity crisis while preparing for Detroit

4 hours ago • By DAN O’NEILL doneilll at post-dispatch.com

Nine games into a new season, the Blues have an identity crisis. Known for hard hats, thick boots and attention to detail, the Blues have been missing in action. The conscientious team has been replaced by an imposter, recognized for short cuts, silly chances and shifts off.

The latter group showed up Tuesday, starting a long home stand with a long, absorbing a 6-1 beatdown. If it had been a golf tournament, the Note would have been considered a non-competing marker.

Time was, in professional hockey, where such a performance would land the perpetrators in practice hell. They would spend the next day in a “bag skate,” hockey’s equivalent to water-boarding, a place where off-days go to die.

But Ken Hitchcock is not a proponent of corporal punishment, at least not for his hockey team. And these are not “bag skate” times. The Blues do not have more than a day between games for the next two weeks. A bag skate today could lead to a body bag down the road.

Hitchcock is more interested in repairing than reprimanding. The Blues have lost their identity, and they need to find it quickly.

“You might win a game or two based on skill. But at the end of the day, if you don’t have the details of checking, you’re not going to win anything. I think we proved that yesterday.”

The proof was in the plastering. The Blues were off to an impressive start, 6-1, allowing fewer shots than a temperament meeting, smothering teams in Jennings Trophy fashion. But something happened on the way to the punch-clock, something that erupted Tuesday night.

“Little things that, at the end of the day, end up being big things,” Hitchcock explained. “We stopped paying attention to some of the little things that matter and it’s ended up biting us. … Hockey gods are going to make us pay, so we’re going to have to check like crazy and then have to battle through to get back on the right page of things.

“I think any time you see a team having to re-engage in the mind-set of checking and managing the puck properly, it doesn’t happen overnight.”

Cracks in the foundation have materialized here and there. They were cuffed with come-from-behind wins in Nashville and Dallas. But the cracks became more prevalent at Detroit on Friday, where the Blues fell behind 2-0 and eventually lost 5-3.

That game also is known as the “Match Game,” not because Gene Rayburn did the play-by-play, but because David Backes received a match penalty that sparked Detroit’s winning goal. The major penalty was rescinded the next day by the NHL; the outcome was not.

Those foundation fractures turned became deep fissures Tuesday. Nashville, playing a seventh consecutive road game, showed more jump, more gumption and more attention to detail. The guys in blue, coming off three days of rest, starting a four-game home stand, were impersonators.

And with a chance to rescind last Friday’s result while hosting Detroit at 7 tonight, the Blues’ practice Wednesday was purposeful, not punitive.

“It was a real good practice,” Patrik Berglund said. “It was a tough practice, which we deserved, but it was a practice to get us going for everything we can do to win (tonight).”

“We learned a lesson (Tuesday) night. We weren’t ready to play from the beginning, and that’s something obviously we need to change. We were too comfortable out there, and that’s not how we play our game.”

To elaborate, Berglund added: “We had been winning every game at home, so far. I think we were light on the puck in the corners and we didn’t win the battles. We have to be better. It’s good to be light on your feet, particularly if you’re a dancer. It’s not good to be light on the puck. It is even worse to be light and loose with the puck, which has happened too often in recent games.

Goaltending has not been able to spell-check the errors. In Detroit, Jaroslav Halak and Brian Elliott combined to yield five goals on 26 shots. Against Nashville, Elliott allowed four on 11 shots before giving way to Jake Allen. The rookie couldn’t stop the hemorrhaging, allowing two more goals on six shots.

Elliott has a 2.95 goals-against average and a.874 save percentage, both well off his league-leading numbers (1.56, .940) of last season. The puck has not been bouncing — or deflecting — in a friendly manner thus far. But Elliott isn’t looking for excuses.

“You work hard for your bounces and (opponents) work hard for theirs,” Elliott said. “It’s about outworking the other team, and that’s when the bounces start going the other way.”

Visiting Detroit also has experienced turbulence since the “Match Game,” losing two straight. The Blues would do well to rediscover their identity tonight. “We’ll see if we can get it stopped and get back on track,” Hitchcock added.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 02.07.2013
655536 St Louis Blues

Hitchcock uses Blues’ post-meltdown practice to teach

DAN O’NEILL doneilll at post-dispatch.com

Blues coach Ken Hitchcock put his team through a fast-paced, 40-minute practice on Wednesday. With his team coming off a 6-1 beating at home on Wednesday, the session wasn’t about punishment. It was about the classroom.

“There’s limited time to teach,” Hitchcock said. “This was a great teaching practice. It was not long, but it was fast and furious. I think we’re going to come with a good mindset moving forward now.”

There are some coaches who might put their team through hell after a five-goal loss, conducting a skating session that would have men crawling back to their lockers. Hitchcock is not a believer in that parochial approach.
And even if he was, the Blues do not have more than one day between games for the next two weeks. A coach can ill-afford to abuse his roster on an off day, if the roster is to have anything left for the schedule ahead.

“I don’t think we can afford to do that with a short schedule,” David Perron said, referring to an especially-demanding practice. “Plus there’s no reason.”

In other words, the Blues know they were non-competing markers on Tuesday.

“Last night against Nashville was a learning experience,” defenseman Barret Jackman said. “We can compete better and we can execute a lot better, and that’s the learning experience we can have when we play Detroit tomorrow.”

Like the Blues, the Red Wings will come to town in a rut. After getting a win against the Blues last Friday – otherwise known as the Match Penalty That Never Happened Game - the Red Menace has lost two in a row, including a 4-1 clunker at home against lowly Calgary.

Goaltender Jaroslav Halak did not practice. But he is improving after suffering a groin muscle injury at Detroit last Friday. Or, as Hitchcock put it.

“He’s shuffling around the deck a little bit, but he hasn’t opened up the lawn chair yet,” Hitchcock said.

Hitchcock indicated rookie Jaden Schwartz, a healthy scratch on Tuesday, will be back in the lineup against Detroit tomorrow. However, Hitchcock had not decided on who was coming out, or other lineup tweaks.

Blues netminder Brian Elliott is not a big believer in “bad bounces.” Elliott has had some lately, which helps explain his unsightly .874 save percentage. Elliott had a .940 SP last year, tops in the league.

But he’s not looking for excuses. “You do work hard for your bounces and they work hard for theirs,” Elliott said. “It’s about out-working the other team and that’s when the bounces start going the other way.”

Defenseman Wade Redden’s next game will be his 1,000th in the NHL. Redden will have a large contingency on hand to see his milestone game Tuesday. Although one was an empty-netter in Friday’s 5-3 loss at Detroit.

A year ago, Halak and Elliott were two of the best goaltenders in the NHL and won the Jennings Trophy for posting the lowest goals-against average. The Blues’ tight defense contributed mightily to their impressive stat totals, which included a franchise record 15 shutouts.

The numbers aren’t as good for Blues goalies this season and save percentage has seen the most dramatic decline.

Halak (3-0, 2.10 goals-against average) has dropped from a .926 save percentage last season to .889 this year. Elliott (3-3, 2.95) has dropped even further, going from .940 last season to .874 now.

“IT’s not going to happen overnight,” Hitchcock said. “We can play better in that position. We can defend better, too.”

Goaltending was far from the only problem Tuesday for the Blues. Blues captain David Backes said the team’s competitive level was nowhere near where it needed to be.

“It’s disappointing, no question,” Backes said. “I think it’s a case of feeling too good about ourselves after eight games, being at home where maybe some of us thought that we play well at home regardless. The preparation wasn’t there.”

In the midst of a four-game homestand in a 48-game schedule, the Blues cannot afford any prolonged slumps.

“You know it’s going to be a playoff-type game any time you’re playing within the Central,” Blues winger Chris Stewart said. “Every game’s crucial and it’s a four-point game at the end of the day. Those losses definitely sting a little more than the other ones.”

The Blues were already pointing to Thursday’s return bout against the Detroit Red Wings even before the Nashville game. They were none too pleased with the phantom match penalty called against Backes that led to Detroit’s game-winning power-play goal.

Backes picked up the penalty for what the official felt was a hit by Backes to the head of Red Wings defenseman Kent Huskins. But video replays showed Backes’ hard hit actually caught Huskins in the shoulder and chest instead.

The penalty was later rescinded by the NHL, removing the threat of a fine or suspension.

Mix in the 6-1 annihilation at home at the hands of Central Division rival Nashville and the Blues should have more than enough emotion tonight when facing the Red Wings.

“Disappointing but it’s not the end of the world,” Backes said of Tuesday’s loss. “We’ve got to learn from it and come back against a Red Wing team that we owe a little bit.

“It’s hopefully a lesson learned that there’s no nights off. There’s no taking it easy.”

Notes

Thursday’s game with be the 1,000th in the NHL for veteran Blues defenseman Wade Redden.

In two games against Detroit this season, the Blues are 6-for-10 on the power play. They lead the NHL in power-play percentage at 33.3 percent (12-for-36).

Read more here: http://www.bnd.com/2013/02/06/2486057/blues-try-to-regroup-after-defensive.html#storylink=cpy

Belleville News-Democrat LOADED: 02.07.2013

655538 Tampa Bay Lightning
Tampa Bay Lightning expecting more low-scoring games

By ERIK ERLENDSSON | The Tampa Tribune

NEWARK, N.J. --

At some point waves come to a crest before ultimately crashing down. Perhaps in some way that is what the Lightning are experiencing heading into tonight's game at New Jersey. The offense was coming so fast and furious (37 goals through seven games) in the first two-plus weeks of the season, many wondered if that pace could be sustained.

But since scoring five or more goals in four straight games, capped with an eight-goal outburst against Winnipeg on Friday, Tampa Bay has scored just three goals in the past two games, both losses.

"That's what I was scared of because I have seen it so many times throughout the course of my hockey career as a player and as a coach. Those big scoring games don't help you at all," Lightning head coach Guy Boucher said.

"They are fun, but they don't help you because you get the feeling you are very powerful offensively and things are going to come. And then it scares the opponent even more. The opponent is absolutely at their best defensively and have numbers back all the time and don't give you an inch."

Even though the expectation is that goals will be more difficult to come by, it doesn't make it easy to deal with when the opportunities are less frequent. That means Tampa Bay is going to have to go back to a patient, aggressive approach to find a way to win the close games.

"You can't expect to score five goals every night," captain Vinny Lecavalier said. "You have to expect tight games and if you look at the (numbers), games are tight. They are 2-1 or 3-2 all the time. So we just have to get back to doing the things that we were doing, play more in the (offensive) zone than we have in the past two games."

Certainly the past two opponents — Philadelphia and the New York Rangers — have been able to hem Tampa Bay into its defensive zone more than some of the previous opponents. And with the offensive talent Tampa Bay possesses up front, the more time the Lightning spend on the attack, the odds increase that a goal will be scored.

But at the same time, there have been chances generated that have not been capitalized on.

Steven Stamkos had a one-timer in the slot on Tuesday against Philadelphia, while Cory Conacher had another opportunity on a rebound that was earmarked for the back of the net before Ilya Bryzgalov reached back and swatted the puck over the crossbar.

Against the Rangers on Saturday, there were a handful of odd-man opportunities that could have swung the game in Tampa Bay's favor.

So while the pucks have not been going in with the frequency they did in the first two weeks, there have been quality opportunities.

"We haven't been playing great, but we haven't been playing (bad) either. We've been giving ourselves a chance to win," Stamkos said. "I think we had those two-on-ones we could have scored on against the Rangers, and we are not getting as many power play chances as we were before, either, so we are not creating those opportunities for ourselves so we have to find a way to get back to that."

Perhaps the difference now is teams are almost three weeks into the abbreviated season and they have figured out who they are and who they are facing. That might explain why the past two games have been more low-scoring and tight-checking.

With no real training camp and no preseason games to fine tune things, perhaps teams are starting to find their comfort zone.

"This is what it is now. They have figured out who they are and what they are, including us," Boucher said. "These are going to be tight, tight playoff games and any team can beat any other team. It becomes who plays better defensively and who doesn't sabotage themselves."

One way Tampa Bay has hurt itself is not generating enough shots on goal, particularly in Tuesday's loss at Philadelphia. Tampa Bay only put 22 shots on net. Moreover, during a late power play when the Lightning spent nearly the first 90 seconds in the Flyers' zone, they failed to get a shot on net, instead keeping the puck on the outside without generating movement.

"We have to find a way to create momentum and get the puck on net instead of looking for perfect plays," right wing Marty St. Louis. "We have to try to turn the table a little bit. And I feel that the last two games we didn't get to do that until the third period. ... We just have to be better."

LIGHTNING AT DEVILS

WHEN: Tonight, 7
WHERE: Prudential Center, Newark, N.J.
TV/RADIO: Sun Sports/970 AM

INJURIES: Lightning — D Mattias Ohlund (knee), out. Devils — none reported.

ALL-TIME SERIES: Tampa Bay is 23-43-13

NEED TO KNOW: Tampa Bay is 2-5-3 in the past 10 trips to New Jersey. ... The Devils entered Wednesday ranked seventh overall in penalty kill, 39- for-45 (86.7 percent); ... C Steven Stamkos has nine goals and 17 points in 16 career games against New Jersey. ... The Devils entered Wednesday having allowed 20 goals, fourth-fewest allowed in the league. ... The Lightning lead the league with 40 goals. ... Devils G Martin Brodeur is 36-16-7 all time vs. Tampa Bay with a 2.11 goals-against average. ... Bolts G Anders Lindback is set to start.

Erik Erlendsson

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 02.07.2013
655539 Tampa Bay Lightning

Tampa Bay Lightning start road trip with loss to Flyers

By ERIK ERLENDSSON | The Tampa Tribune

PHILADELPHIA --

By Tampa Bay-Philadelphia standards, Tuesday's tilt was rather tame.

No wild, high-scoring affair. No controversial stall tactics were installed by either team. And other than a couple of fights that had a couple of extra punches, it was a mild night of hockey.

But for the Lightning, it was another road loss as Tampa Bay fell 2-1 to the Flyers to start a four-game road trip. It is the second road loss in three away from home for the Lightning, which have now dropped two games in a row to fall to 6-3 on the season.

Tom Sestito scored twice for Philadelphia while Benoit Pouliot had the only goal for Tampa Bay, which came into the game averaging nearly five goals per game. Ilya Bryzgalov stopped 20 shots for Philadelphia while Anders Lindback stopped 22 for the Lightning.

Things heated up early in the first period when B.J. Crombeen and Zac Rinaldo engaged in fight at 6:19 that left Crombeen a bit unsteady as he went to the bench after Rinaldo landed more blows to Crombeen's face after he was already down on a knee in a defenseless position.

The two sides then traded fruitless power play opportunities shortly after the fight before Lindback had to make the first difficult save of the night, getting his left pad out to stop a redirect chance by Danny Briere at 13:50. At the other end, Ilya Bryzgalov was matching Lindback in the Flyers' net stopping Steven Stamkos in the slot at 16:52.
Tampa Bay had a carry over power play to start the second period, but despite some quality zone time in the Flyers zone the Lightning, which had been 8-for-16 in the previous five games, came away empty handed.

Philadelphia then took the lead on an innocent entry play that Tampa Bay had covered, but during a line change at the Flyers bench, Tom Sestito was able to come down the left wing side uncovered and take a pass from Claude Giroux. Sestito came in on Lindback all alone and was able to deke to a backhand and put the puck under the goaltender’s arm 4:25 into the second.

Tampa Bay, a traditionally strong third period team that came into Tuesday outscoring its opposition 17-7 on the season, came out strong once again dictating play and spending a lot of time in the Philadelphia zone. But Bryzgalov continued to hold the highest scoring team in the league at bay, making a stop on a Cor Conacher tip that Bryzgalov was able to push over the top of the crossbar with his glove.

The Lightning were finally able to break through midway through the period as a reshuffled third line had Tom Pyatt and Teddy Purcell working behind the net before Purcell was able to backhand a pass to a wide open Pouliot in the slot to tie the game at 9:30.

But Philadelphia answered right back as the Lightning were caught with too many forwards down low in the offensive zone leading to a 3-on-2 break for the Flyers. And once again it was Sestito who finished off the play with the same move he used to beat Lindback earlier in the game, slipping a puck through the five-hole this team for a 2-1 lead at 12:36.

Off the faceoff Vinny Lecavalier, who did not have a fight in nearly four years, went at it with Max Talbot, Lecavalier’s second fight against the Flyers this season after he fought Luke Schenn on Jan. 27 in Tampa.

The Lightning had a late power play chance with Mike Knuble in the penalty box for slashing with 4:50 left. But despite spending most of the first 90 seconds in the Philadelphia zone with the puck, the once sizzling power play fizzled out with a chance to tie the game late.

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 02.07.2013

655540 Tampa Bay Lightning

Reality hits Lightning; Stamkos birthday milestone

By Damian Cristodero, Times Staff Writer

NEWARK, N.J. — The Lightning has lost two straight one-goal games to foes determined to forecheck, swarm in the defensive zone and play physically.

In other words, as coach Guy Boucher has preached since training camp: This is not going to be easy.

For a time it seemed almost too easy. Tampa Bay started 6-1-0 with a league-best 37 goals. Since then it has three goals total in losses to the Rangers and Flyers, and third-period mistakes that cost games.

"You have to go out and earn it every night, and I don't think we've done that the last two games," right wing Marty St. Louis said Wednesday. "Did we play bad? No. Did we go out and try to earn the win? No, we didn't.

"It's not for lack of effort, but we have to be better."

That's quite a different tone from the team’s rip-roaring start, during which it benefited from what St. Louis called a “perfect storm.” The Lightning played six of its first eight games at home. Three teams were playing the second of back-to-back games. The Lightning faced three backup goalies, got 35 power-play chances and scored on 13.

But against the Rangers and Flyers, the intensity and level of play were raised, and the Lightning didn't quite measure up.

In both games, third-period gaffes led to winning goals. Tuesday against the Flyers, right wing Pierre-Cedric Labrie got caught in the offensive zone, sparking a Philadelphia three-on-two that defensemen Keith Aulie and Brian Lee did not defend well and goalie Anders Lindback failed to stop.

"Not awful mistakes," Boucher said, "but mistakes that a team makes when not mature enough to deal with those tight games."

Tampa Bay also had a season-low 22 shots, went 0-for-4 with two shots on the power play and did not bury scoring chances.

This isn’t to put it all on the Lightning. As Boucher said, "There's an opponent on the other side, and they're good, too."

Still, "we have to be a team that is comfortable with a 1-0, 1-1, 2-2 games. As we go along, that's what it's going to be."

A few more shots on goal wouldn’t hurt. Tampa Bay has been outshot in five of nine games and all three on the road. Center Steven Stamkos said players "have been guilty of making an extra play or an extra pass." That hasn’t helped a road power play that is 1-13.

"Our power play is good when we have movement and we have shots," Boucher said. "When we have no movement, we have no shots. You can stay in there for two minutes if you want and pass to each other while the other guys are reading the newspapers, they're ain't going to be no goals."

Perhaps the worst thing for the Lightning was the 8-3 rout of the Jets on Feb. 1. That kind of game is fun, Boucher said, but dangerous because "you can get the feeling you're very powerful offensively and things are going to come."

Not that it necessarily happened to Tampa Bay.

"We know we're not going to score five, six, seven goals a game," Aulie said.

But the team hasn't won since, and things won't get easier against the Devils tonight.

"There's no panic, but there's urgency," Stamkos said. "We have to find a way to win these close one-goal games. It’s more indicative of playoff hockey."

And that kind of hockey never is easy.

CROMBEEN UPDATE: Right wing B.J. Crombeen, who left Tuesday's game after his first-period fight with the Flyers' Zac Rinaldo, is cleared to play. It was unclear if he would be in the lineup against the Devils.

St. Petersburgh Times LOADED: 02.07.2013

655541 Tampa Bay Lightning

Preview: Lightning at Devils

By Damian Cristodero, Times Staff Writer

Tonight

Lightning at Devils

When/where: 7; Prudential Center, Newark, N.J.

TV/radio: Sun Sports; 970-AM

Key stats: The Lightning entered Wednesday with the league’s No. 2 power play at 32.5 percent despite being 1-for-13 (7.7 percent) on the road. … Devils G Martin Brodeur is 36-16-2 with five ties in 61 games against the Lightning, with a 2.11 goals-against average and .917 save percentage. … Tampa Bay had a league-most five players with double-digit points entering Wednesday. … New Jersey is one of four teams without a regulation home loss.

St. Petersburgh Times LOADED: 02.07.2013

655542 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs and Jets both pushing to rebuild on the fly

JAMES MIRTLE

WINNIPEG — The Globe and Mail
It is a line out of some poor, tortured Toronto Maple Leafs fan's long-forgotten fantasy.


But there they were on Tuesday night in Winnipeg, filling out the third line of the reborn Jets as they took on (and eventually beat in overtime) the lowly Florida Panthers.

That curious combination of Leafs castoffs is a new one, and given their production, it may not stick. This is a trio that has just two goals and five points between them after nine games played, decided meagre production for their $7.5-million (all currency U.S.) combined salaries.

“We didn’t score,” Ponikarovsky said of the three playing together, five years after they were all member of the dismal 2007-08 Leafs, “but it was pretty good.”

Welcome to Year 2 of the NHL’s return to Winnipeg, where the roster is very much in transition and veteran bodies like these three former Leafs – all pending unrestricted free agents and all 29 to 32 years old – are merely passing through.

And what exactly these Jets are transitioning to is very much up in the air.

Much like the Leafs, who they’ll face here on Thursday night, Winnipeg is a young group stuck in a cluster of teams in the low end of the Eastern Conference’s mediocre bottom half.

As is the case with all of them, with a few breaks their way – a shootout win here, a surprise 20-goal man there – they could make the playoffs. In most plausible scenarios, however, they’re likely to be on the outside looking in, yet again.

After a debut season a year ago where they finished 11th in the East and four points up on Toronto, the Jets have gutted out a .500 record which is again based largely on their ability to win at the raucous MTS Centre.

The Leafs, meanwhile, can’t seem to win at all in the increasingly quiet confines of home.

Neither franchise is poised to contend for a Stanley Cup in the near term, nor do they appear to have any interest in taking the Edmonton Oilers’ intended route – being bad in order to get good – to the top.

“I think there’s always a win-now mentality,” Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff said on Wednesday, hours after announcing Mark Scheifele, the team’s 2011 first-rounder, was being sent back to junior. “You never say I’m going to try to win tomorrow.

“But at the same token, you’re not going to win at all costs. You’re not going to throw the future out the window here for the sake of just trying to do something short term.”

It’s a mantra that sounds a lot like what former Leafs GM Brian Burke preached, and one that’s been in place in various organizations around the league for years – especially in Canadian cities, where the pressure to do well is constant, even in seemingly bulletproof markets like Toronto and a still rejigging Winnipeg.

The danger is that you end up like a franchise like the Calgary Flames, with an older roster that perpetually finishes just outside of the postseason.

That can be what “a win-now mentality” brings, in the wrong hands.

In Winnipeg, the core they’ve decided to lock up and try to win with revolves around Evander Kane, Andrew Ladd, Dustin Byfuglien, Toby Enstrom and Toby Enstrom and John-Michael Liles in that boat. IHL/AHL’s Manitoba Moose, cutting his coaching teeth in Winnipeg. He also spent stints as the team’s president and GM.

Once he hung up his skates, he spent six seasons as the bench boss of the IHL/AHL’s Manitoba Moose, cutting his coaching teeth in Winnipeg. He also spent stints as the team’s president and GM.

In the process, he became one of the most recognizable sporting figures in the entire province.

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In Winnipeg, the core they’ve decided to lock up and try to win with revolves around Evander Kane, Andrew Ladd, Dustin Byfuglien, Toby Enstrom and Ondrej Pavelec, all of whom are signed beyond 2014-15.

In Toronto, it’s less clear who they will lean on, with only Mikhail Grabovski, Joffrey Lupul, James Van Riemsdyk and John-Michael Liles in that boat and tough decisions to be made on Phil Kessel and Dion Phaneuf in the next 12 months.

There’s certainly a heated debate to be had which franchise is closer to the end goal. These are incomplete rosters, with holes at most positions and a prospect base that doesn’t look like that of a team that’s finished out of the postseason with regularity.

Can either of these teams rise up from being 80- to 85-point ones year after year to become a 100-point contender in the next few years?

Or is this unrelenting push to win now the wrong way to go in a league where superstar talent is so hard to come by?

Stuck in the middle
On Thursday, Carlyle will coach an NHL game in Winnipeg for the first time. He knows the MTS Centre inside out from his days with the Moose. Only this time, he'll be occupying the visitors bench and dressing room, not the home side.

Last season, after the Jets made their long-awaited NHL resurrection, Carlyle was poised to return to Winnipeg to coach, this time as the bench boss of the Anaheim Ducks. It was going to be a homecoming of sorts for him. But before he got that opportunity, he was fired.

Now he’s the coach of the Maple Leafs. And this time, he’ll have his day in the Winnipeg sun, albeit as coach of the opposing team.

“Tanev also is plus-four. And Ballard have been the Canucks’ most consistent defensive pairing. Their partnership is unchanged since the start of the season, and Tanev and Ballard have become so dependable as a third pairing, Vigneault no longer worries about his defence matchups. It wasn’t impossible for Ballard to fulfil.

On a good team, he is not a top-four blue-liner who will play 22-24 minutes a night. His strong skating cannot drive the attack and his competitiveness doesn’t change anyone’s game plan. What Keith Ballard turned out to be, besides a great teammate, is a steady National Hockey League defenceman.

His greatest fault is that the Panthers overpaid when they signed him to a six-year, $25.2-million US contract in 2009, and Gillis overpaid to get him a year later. And those two transactions created an expectation that was impossible for Ballard to fulfil.

After trying to be a player he is not, he is finally the player he needs to be for the Canucks.

“Part of the problem is I just was never really sure what I was supposed to do,” Ballard said Wednesday.

“I spent so much time last year on the mental side of things, working with a sports psychologist, because until I came here I never had any adversity in hockey. Going back to five years old, I just went out and played and didn’t worry about anything.

“Tanev was an interesting player. He arrived from Florida still recovering from hip surgery and soon played himself out of coach Alain Vigneault’s lineup.

Last season, after regaining some confidence and reliability, Ballard suffered a concussion in February and missed the final 29 games of the regular season.

Since his trade, people have wondered how the team might get rid of him and his contract. But Ballard is still here and not only playing, but playing his best hockey as a Canuck.

He and third-year pro Chris Tanev have become so dependable as a third pairing, Vigneault no longer worries about his defence matchups. It wasn’t by accident Ballard and Tanev were on the ice in the final minute of overtime on Tuesday, when Tanev’s first NHL goal beat the Edmonton Oilers 3-2.

Ballard hasn’t registered a point in nine games – his keep-in helped set up Tanev’s winner – but he co-leads the Canucks at plus-four. And his average ice time of 17:10 is more than Ballard logged in all but a handful of the 47 games he played last season.

“What he has stopped doing is chasing the game all over the ice,” Canuck associate coach Rick Bowness said. “So now the game comes to him and he’s in control.”

Bowness, an assistant coach in Phoenix when Ballard began his NHL career with the Coyotes, remembers the defenceman when he was a third-year pro Chris Tanev have become so dependable as a third pairing, Vigneault no longer worries about his defence matchups. It wasn’t by accident Ballard and Tanev were on the ice in the final minute of overtime on Tuesday, when Tanev’s first NHL goal beat the Edmonton Oilers 3-2.

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Bowness, an assistant coach in Phoenix when Ballard began his NHL career with the Coyotes, remembers the defenceman when he was a minor-league prospect during the 2004-05 lockout.

“I’ve known Keith a long time,” Bowness said. “What I remember from Keith ... we saw an earnest kid who wanted to learn and wanted to work and wanted to do well. You never forget those guys. You know deep in their heart, they really want to do well. And you want to see them do well. I’ve got a lot of time for people like that.”

Bowness said Ballard, an 11th-overall draft pick in 2002 who was traded twice before playing in the NHL, also tried to do too much in Phoenix before learning to play within himself. The same thing has happened with the Canucks, he said.

Tanev and Ballard are an interesting pair. Tanev, who was never drafted, hardly says a word and his game is equally understated.

Ballard is one of the most talkative guys on the team and is known on the ice, as much as anything, for periodically catapulting opposing wingers with his hip check.

Their partnership is unchanged since the start of the season, and Tanev and Ballard have been the Canucks’ most consistent defensive pairing. Tanev also is plus-four.
“He’s calm and patient and I’m a bit more abrasive, so there are some complimentary strengths there,” Ballard said. “But we communicate so well, on the ice and off the ice. Every morning after a game we’ll sit down at a computer and watch our shifts together and talk about little plays.”

That’s what Ballard is: a little-play defenceman. There’s nothing wrong with that. Thirty little plays a game will keep him in the NHL another eight years.

“My game fell apart for a year and it was a battle to get all that back,” Ballard said. “Last year, I focused on building my foundation back — being reliable and consistent and using my strengths. But I was very conservative last year. I wasn’t playing to just not make mistakes, but I wasn’t playing to make things happen. This year, we talked about taking that next step.”

Forward.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 02.07.2013

ST. PAUL, Minn. — It’s just like old times for Cory Schneider, who gets to play Thursday night in Minnesota because Roberto Luongo never wins here.

For sure, nobody thought Schneider’s “new” job with the Vancouver Canucks would be like his old one.

The goaltender, who was supposed to be the National Hockey League’s No. 1 netminder this season, will start for the first time in 11 days when Schneider takes back the crease against the Minnesota Wild.

“Every game is big this year and it hasn’t been that different from the past few years where I might not have played in a little while and I had to jump in and be effective,” Schneider said Wednesday after practice. “I’ve got to carry that attitude for tomorrow night’s game. You can’t really waste an opportunity. Every opportunity you get is a big one. I just want to get back in there and try to get in some kind of rhythm.”

Schneider appeared to be getting into a rhythm when he was dropped in favour of Luongo after losing 4-1 to the San Jose Sharks on Jan. 27.

Schneider was awful in the NHL season-opener eight days earlier.

But after surrendering five goals in 14 shots in a 7-3 loss to the Anaheim Ducks, Schneider went 2-1 in his next three starts while posting a goals-against average of 1.95 and save rate of .931.

But that wasn’t good enough to keep out Luongo, who is 3-0-2 this season and among league leaders with a 1.53 GAA and .940 save percentage.

Canuck coach Alain Vigneault’s decision to go back to Schneider tonight is far less surprising than his choice the last four games of Luongo because the latter has been hooked from his last three starts in Minnesota while posting a 7.68 average.

“As far as I’m concerned, nothing changes for me,” Luongo said. “Just keep working hard and be ready when it’s my turn.”

“(Cory) is the type of guy who gets ready to play, no matter what. It doesn’t matter if it’s been four games, two games or 10, he’s the type of guy who works hard in practice and when you do that you tend to be ready when it’s your turn to play.”

Reminded of the gap between starts for Schneider, Vigneault said: “It’s no different than what he’s done in the past. It’s the exact same scenario.”

Exactly. No one expected this.

“I felt it was getting there,” Schneider said of his form before losing the net to Luongo. “I try to carry that from the game into the practices. You just have to pretend it hasn’t been a week-and-a-half, only a night or two.”

ICE CHIPS: Recovering from wrist and shoulder surgeries, Ryan Kesler had his second full practice with the Canucks but still has no target for a return to playing … The practice in suburban Mendota Heights was especially rigorous. It followed a travel day Tuesday and the Canucks' rookie dinner that night … Chris Tanev, who scored the overtime winner Monday in Edmonton, got a big chunk of the dinner tab. “I came back to Earth in a hurry,” he said. … Canucks will be on Hockey Night in Canada Saturday when they host the Calgary Flames at 7 p.m.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 02.07.2013

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Ryan Kesler didn’t sound like he’s close to returning to the lineup.

As much as Alain Vigneault marvelled at how good the Vancouver Canucks centre looked Wednesday in his second practice after being medically cleared for light contact following offseason left shoulder and wrist surgeries, the former Selke Trophy winner offered a more reserved assessment.

“I’ve had a couple of good days of practice and I’m just going from there,” said Kesler. “There are areas out there where I don’t feel comfortable, so there’s no timeline at all. Until I feel that comfort level and feel I can step in and contribute the way I can, I’ll be playing then.”

“The wrist gets achy once in a while, but nothing out of the ordinary. The shoulder is the biggest thing. I have to make sure it’s 100 per cent and the range of motion is there, but strength isn’t there at all. Once we get home, I’m really going to hammer that and take it day by day.”

Last season, Kesler was cleared for light contact after summer surgery to repair a torn labrum in his hip and he returned to the lineup in just 14 days. He laboured through a season and struggled to score 22 goals before having the shoulder surgery May 8 and the wrist procedure June 27.

“I made the mistake before and I won’t make it again,” he stressed.

Vigneault seemed more hopeful, although he understands Kesler has yet to be medically cleared to play.

“To me, he looks real good on the ice and doing everything out there that a player can possibly do,” said the Canucks coach. “I’m not sure exactly where they are on the medical side. I don’t get involved until a player comes to me and the medical staff has cleared him to play. I don’t know what to tell you. On the ice, it doesn’t look like baby steps. It looks like leaps and bounds.”

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 02.07.2013

Wild juggle lines, trade for giant, hold players only meeting to avoid collapse

By Ben Kuzma

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Dany Heatley is a lot like what we’ve come to expect from the Minnesota Wild.

After 14 shots and three goals in his first three outings, the winger didn’t have more than two in his next six games and has scored just once in that span. And while great things are expected with the offseason additions of free agents Ryan Suter and Zach Parise, the Wild have already held a closed door players-only meeting, have yet to win on the road and are juggling their lines. They’re also 26th in scoring with 2.22 per game.

On Wednesday, Heatley was dropped down to the second line with Matt Cullen and Pierre-Marc Bouchard while rookie Charlie Coyle joined the top unit of Mikko Koivu and Parise.

“I don’t feel like I’m fighting it,” said Heatley. “I wouldn’t say it (line change) is unexpected, but I’m playing with two real creative guys and hopefully we can get something going. A lot of it is the power play and when it’s not
Schneider. “I put a lot of pressure on myself and I’m just going to carry that.”

“You never want to be the guy who kind of halts the momentum,” said Schneider. “You have that meeting in an 82-game year, too,” stressed Heatley. “After the additions we’ve made, we feel like we have a real good team here. I believe there’s urgency with the short season because in the last 15 or 20 games you’re not going to move much in the standings up or down. These next 20 are huge for us.”

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 02.07.2013

655548 Vancouver Canucks

Canucks: Schneider get the call against Wild

By Ben Kuzma, The Province February 6, 2013

ST. PAUL, Minn. — For Roberto Luongo, it’s been the “Exit” Energy Center. So the decision to start Cory Schneider on Thursday was easy for Alain Vigneault.

No controversy. No coin flip.

No comment.

“Can’t over-think things,” said the Vancouver Canucks coach. “It’s a lot like the other decisions. I didn’t get into the reasoning behind it and I’m not going to get into this one either.”

One reason is Luongo has been outstanding against the Minnesota Wild in Vancouver and out of sorts here in Minnesota. He blanked the Wild in his last three Rogers Arena starts, and has a home shutout streak against them of 195:23. At the Xcel Energy Center, he’s been pulled from his last three starts, and has a .700 goals-against average and .873 saves percentage.

“Strength isn’t there” for Kesler, but Vigneault says he ‘looks real good’

By Ben Kuzma, The Province February 6, 2013

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Ryan Kesler didn’t sound like he’s close to returning to the lineup.

As much as Alain Vigneault marvelled at how good the Vancouver Canucks centre looked Wednesday — taking part in his second practice after being medically cleared for light contact following offseason left shoulder and wrist surgeries — the former Selke Trophy winner offered a more reserved assessment.

“I’ve had a couple of good days of practice and I’m just going from there,” said Kesler. “There are areas out there where I don’t feel comfortable, so there’s no timeline at all. Until I feel that comfort level and feel I can step in and contribute the way I can, I’ll be playing then.”

“The wrist gets achy once in a while, but nothing out of the ordinary. The shoulder is the biggest thing. I have to make sure it’s 100-per-cent and the range of motion is there, but strength isn’t there at all. Once we get home, I’m really going to hammer that and take it day by day.”

Last season, Kesler was cleared for light contact after summer surgery to repair a torn labrum in his hip and returned to the lineup in just 14 days. He laboured through stiffness and soreness and struggled to score 22 goals.

“I made the mistake before and I won’t make it again,” he stressed. Vigneault seemed more hopeful, although he understands Kesler has yet to be medically cleared to play.

“To me, he looks real good on the ice and doing everything out there that a player should be doing,” said the Canucks coach. “I’m not sure exactly where they are on the medical side. I don’t get involved until a player comes to me and the medical staff has cleared him to play. I don’t know what to tell you. On the ice, it doesn’t look like baby steps. It looks like leaps and bounds.”

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 02.07.2013

655550 Vancouver Canucks

Gallagher: Heatley takes bump from Wild’s top line in stride as they prepare to host Canucks
Dany Heatley is so familiar with the plight of the NHL goal scorer that he treated Wednesday’s move by coach Mike Yeo to take him off the top line of the Minnesota Wild as though it happened every day.

It’s not that Heatley doesn’t care. Far from it. He’s trained like a maniac the entire summer to recover from arthroscopic knee surgery, to make sure he can get back to being one of the elite goal scorers in the game. Last year he scored a disappointing 24 goals in his first season with the Wild since being acquired from San Jose in a trade for Martin Havlat.

But he’s seen it all before and knows that Yeo, while one of his biggest supporters, has the job of getting more out of this team and that seeking solutions is not only his job — it’s part of Heatley’s mandate as well.

“You know, when a team isn’t scoring — and we haven’t been lately — you’ve got to shake things up,” he said of his likely appearance on a line with Pierre-Marc Bouchard and Matt Cullen in the looming first matchup with the Vancouver Canucks this season.

He had been skating with Mikko Koivu and Zach Parise.

“That’s the way it goes and I’m sure there will be more changes before the season is over.”

Heatley owns a place on Okanagan Lake and spends his summers there. So, given the length of the lockout, he should probably now be officially listed as a B.C. resident, although his tax accountant may have something to say about that.

“It was a little longer than anyone wanted, but it was a great summer and once the lockout started I was able to practise with the West Side Warriors there, so I think that really helped me,” said Heatley.

Unlike many of the Canucks who ran their own comfortable workouts at UBC, he had the benefit of somebody blowing a whistle every now and again.

He got off to a rocket start and it looked as if he was going to get back to the pace of his huge 50-goal-scoring years, playing once again with an elite centre as he did with both Jason Spezza in Ottawa and Joe Thornton in San Jose.

But as everyone watching Western Conference hockey these days knows, numbers like that are nothing more than a memory for anyone, let alone a guy who’s 32.

Realistically these days, four goals and six points at this stage are more than respectable. But Heatley is expecting and wanting more out of himself, given the team’s offseason upgrades.

“Suits (Ryan Suter) has come in, played a ton of minutes for us (27:31) and has been a huge lift on the power play,” says Heatley, who admits he’s had enough chances for many more goals.

“Zach is a great two-way guy, at home at either end of the ice and down low jamming the net. These guys have been great for our team.

“The expectations here are high and that’s good for anyone. It brings out the best in you. The fans have always been great here, we had lots of sellouts last year, but this year everyone is really excited and it’s up to us to deliver.”

At this time last year the Wild were pretty much the talk of the league. They were on their way to first place in the conference after 30 games, at which time they ran into a few injuries and proceeded to drop so far in the standings they were looking up at the likes of Calgary and Colorado when it was all over.

Koivu and Bourchard were the key guys to go down, and as Heatley explains: “We had some guys get hurt, but it was more than that. Earlier we were playing great defensive hockey, but as the season went along we tended to get away from that and ... we ended up with a lot of guys who had been in the minors and we couldn’t get anything going or get back to that way we had been playing.”

And with those key guys down, the power play finished 27th in the league, which was one of the main factors hurting Heatley’s production. He had scored more power-play goals (138) than any other player since he came into the league in 2001.

Doubtless they are hoping things work in reverse this year, a slow start perhaps to be expected for a team making this many changes up front.

Problem is, there’s no time for slow starts this season — and being outside looking in on the playoff picture, with a couple of very good teams behind them in the standings at the moment, the time for Minny to get going is now.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 02.07.2013

655551 Washington Capitals

By Tony Gallagher, The Province February 6, 2013

The Washington Capitals face their most heated rival, the Pittsburgh Penguins, for the second time in five days Thursday. But as players prepared to travel to Western Pennsylvania, the usual excitement over the matchup was replaced by a serious, somber tone in practice. For the NHL-worst Capitals, the only focus is on rebuilding fortitude after a dreadful 2-7-1 start.

Mental mistakes, a lack of offensive production and too many soft goals against are among the woes that have cost the Capitals on what seems to be a nightly basis. But there’s not one single issue that players could pinpoint Wednesday as the root of their troubles.

“Our confidence is a little low right now,” said top center Nicklas Backstrom, who has one goal and eight points in 10 games. “We need to get a win to get our confidence back.”

To earn a victory and help shift the momentum surrounding this team, though, the Capitals need quite a few things to start coming together, according to players.

They need more consistent scoring — Washington is the only team in the NHL that hasn’t scored four goals in a game. Goals need to come from every corner of the lineup, beginning with star left wing Alex Ovechkin. The team captain has just two goals, neither at even strength.

“We’re good in a lot of areas, but not great,” said veteran forward Jason Chimera, who singled himself out for not scoring a goal yet this season. “You’ve got to look at yourself in the mirror, that’s the biggest thing. You can’t go and look at one thing and say, ‘This is our problem.’ Obviously, we’ve got a lot of problems the way we are. We’re playing good, but not good enough.”

Secondary scorers such as Chimera, Wojtek Wolski (two goals) and Marcus Johansson, who recorded his first goal of the year in Tuesday’s 3-2 loss to Toronto, need to contribute more as well.

“We struggle when we don’t score on our chances, and that leads to us letting in easy goals and easy chances,” Johansson said. “We want to score, we want to play good hockey, but then we let up two easy goals the other way, it’s tough.”

The Capitals simply need to be tougher to play against, center Jay Beagle said, driving to the net and making life difficult for their opponent.

“Play a way harder game,” Beagle said. “Make it hard on the opposition throughout the whole game and not let them have those two- or three-minute breaks where we almost let off.”

With players still struggling at times to grasp their assignments under Coach Adam Oates, opponents have capitalized on Washington’s missteps. There has also been miscommunication between defensemen and netminders, and occasionally lackluster goaltending from both Michal Neuvirth and Braden Holtby.

It’s not just a matter of the errors, but the Capitals’ reaction to them. Washington has struggled to regain its poise in a game after a bad shift, allowing a quality chance or soft goal.

“It’s deflated us quite a bit. We’ve got to stay with it. It’s been tough since Day One,” Mike Green said. “We can’t get down. As soon as we drop our heads or momentum it’s tough to battle back. We need these points right now. It’s important and crucial; we don’t have time to worry about that stuff.”

Oates reiterated Wednesday that he believes the way the Capitals are playing is “the way to do it,” and said he’s seen a tremendous amount of
progress in the team’s performance since the earliest games of the season. To Oates, it’s a matter of fixing the details of the game.

“You can pinpoint a lot of little things that we might be in a little different situation if we executed better on those,” Oates said. “We have a lot of time left to fix those and get on a roll and play better and keep it going.”

While the Capitals know they must remain positive, fend off frustration and find ways to move forward, they understand that time and other teams are rapidly passing them by in this lockout-shortened season.

“Playing well is not enough. We go to win games,” Chimera said. “Unfortunately, you don’t get prizes for just too close. Too close only counts in horseshoes, I think. That’s what you get points for. They don’t count here. You got to get wins, somehow.”

Washington Post LOADED: 02.07.2013
655552 Washington Capitals

One-timers: Capitals searching for answers

Posted by Katie Carrera on February 6, 2013 at 9:50 am

With 48 games in 99 days, there’s not a lot of time to digest what happened in any single contest. So as we churn through this compressed Capitals season, I’ll be rounding up my thoughts and analysis of each game here.

>>Tuesday night’s 3-2 loss to Toronto, combined with Calgary’s 4-1 win over Detroit, gives the Capitals sole possession of last place in the NHL. There’s no way to make that sound any better, no matter how many positives anyone can point to.

“It’s incredibly frustrating. We’re not getting any results right now,” Karl Alzner said. "It seems every game we have one or two human-error goals, not ones that we should let in or allow them to even have a chance. And every time we do, it seems to be killing us. I’m very frustrated. I still feel like we play good hockey, just never good enough to win, though, and it’s about time we get over that hump.”

Alzner zeroes in on the crux of things quite well. No matter how well the Capitals may play, they’ve only done enough to win twice. They’re falling behind in the Eastern Conference and as the preventable mistakes continue to pile up, patience wears thin.

“I’ve never experienced a start to a season like this before, so it’s very frustrating to me and I’m always asking ‘Why?’ but we all like what we’re doing out there,” Alzner said. “I think if you ask a lot of teams, I don’t think it’s super easy to play against us, but we allow easy ones and that’s when you run out of patience, when you keep letting in a couple of soft ones.”

>>Speaking of preventable mistakes, there may be no better example than the miscommunication between Tom Poti and Michal Neuvirth that led to James van Riemsdyk’s first goal of the night.

John Carlson’s shot went high and wide, rimmed around the glass and all the way back to behind the Capitals’ net, where Neuvirth settled the puck. When Poti approached, Neuvirth left the puck for him, but the defenseman thought the goaltender was going to play it.

“We have to be sharper there. It’s a tough play,” Poti said. “It’s a tough way to go down 1-0.”

ads not by this site

Neuvirth was asked whose responsibility it was on the play: “It’s tough to say; definitely if the D wants the puck from me, they usually go to the corner.”

Asked how the play behind the net should have developed, Coach Adam Oates didn’t place blame on either player exclusively.

“That’s a difficult one,” Oates said. “I think Tom normally would scatter, but because he had so much time he was coming back to get it, and I think Neuvy just trapped himself a little bit there.”

>>Marcus Johansson scored on the power play late in the opening frame, the first of two power-play goals the Capitals would score against the Maple Leafs. Mike Ribeiro recorded the other in the third period and both goals came off a moving, fluid power play.

But not even Johansson’s first goal since Mar. 29 of last year could detract from the mood at hand in the postgame dressing room.

“We got to believe in what we’re doing. We got to believe that we’ll get better and keep working on it,” Johansson said. “I think everyone is frustrated. I mean, we’re not winning games. That’s what we’re here for and that’s what everybody wants to do. And of course it’s frustrating and tough, but we’ve got to battle through it and find a way to win the games.”

>>Neuvirth has bailed out his teammates quite a few times this season when missed assignments or defensive miscommunications lead to odd-man rushes or good chances for the opposition. He did the same Tuesday night at times.

But he also was part of the flub that caused the first goal, and he admitted after the game he saw Korbinian Holzer’s shot that went in for the third the whole way.

“I had it. I saw it the whole way you know it hits some stick or something and it’s a big goal for them,” Neuvirth said. “I couldn’t believe that that one went in.”

Sure Holzer’s shot from the point changed direction when it was tipped by Jason Chimera’s stick at the top of the circle, but when a redirection is that far out, goaltenders have the time to adjust.

The Capitals needed Neuvirth to make that save, just like they needed Braden Holtby to stop either the third and/or fourth Pittsburgh goals Sunday afternoon.

Washington Post LOADED: 02.07.2013
655553 Washington Capitals

Coach Adam Oates shuffles lines again

Posted by Katie Carrera on February 6, 2013 at 11:31 am

In the previous four games, the Capitals have started the contests with three different sets of forward line combinations. Wednesday morning, Coach Adam Oates brought out another configuration.

Marcus Johansson, who started Tuesday’s 3-2 loss to Toronto on the third line but finished skating with Alex Ovechkin and Mike Ribeiro, is on the left wing with Nicklas Backstrom and Troy Brouwer on the first line.

Jack Hillen (upper body) and Brooks Laich (groin) were both on the ice this afternoon.

The Capitals needed Neuvirth to make that save, just like they needed Braden Holtby to stop either the third and/or fourth Pittsburgh goals Sunday afternoon.

Here’s what the lineup looks like today in practice:

Forwards
Johansson-Backstrom-Brouwer
Wolski-Ribeiro-Ovechkin
Chimera-Crabb-Ward
Hendricks-Beagle-Fehr/Perreault

Defense
Alzner-Green
Poti-Carlson
Schultz-Kundratek
Erskine-Hamrlik

Goalt: Neuvirth, Holtby

Washington Post LOADED: 02.07.2013
655554 Washington Capitals

Jay Beagle: ‘I don’t know if we have to sacrifice a cow’
There are a lot of things going wrong for the league-worst Capitals these days. In addition to the lack of goals (Washington is the only team that hasn’t scored four goals once this season) and mental mistakes, there’s some plain bad luck.

Jay Beagle was asked if he’s ever experienced a stretch like this before. He hasn’t, and after 10 games, the Capitals grinder wondered if the team should take some unorthodox steps to change their luck a bit.

“I’ve never actually seen the puck bounce, and it’s not all bounces, but there’s a lot of bounces that aren’t going our way,” Beagle said. “I don’t know if we have to sacrifice a cow or something. I don’t know what we have to do.”

Someone suggested perhaps he should start small rather than with a cow.

“No! I’m starting big,” Beagle joked. “There’s no time for starting small.”

Beagle was then informed that a dead mouse was found in the media workroom at the Capitals practice facility Wednesday morning.

“Good,” Beagle replied. “Let’s start with that.”

By Stephen Whyno

The Washington Times
Wednesday, February 6, 2013

The Washington Capitals are off to one of the worst starts in franchise history, but coach Adam Oates isn’t standing pat. He changed up his lines again Wednesday in preparation for Thursday night’s game against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

This time Marcus Johansson joined Nicklas Backstrom and Troy Brouwer on one line, while Alex Ovechkin remained on right wing alongside Wojtek Wolski and Mike Ribeiro.

“It’s a constant shuffle and you’re always trying to find chemistry,” Oates said.

Just 10 games into his tenure, Oates is still trying to find the right combinations. Earlier, he tried Ovechkin with Joey Crabb and Jay Beagle and has mixed and matched plenty.

Brouwer said most players have a good idea of how to play with a variety of teammates, so the day-to-day changes aren’t an issue. But Oates has made plenty of in-game changes to find a “spark.”

“What gets difficult is when you start changing lines in the middle of the game because you don’t have time to talk about it and go over what you’re expecting out of each other,” Brouwer said. “Every team does it, every coach does it, when you’re losing, the lines seem to be changing more often.”

Johansson earned a promotion Wednesday after scoring his first goal of the season in the 3-2 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs. It has been an up-and-down time for the 22-year-old forward, who has gone from the top line with Ovechkin and Backstrom to healthy scratch to everything in between.

“Maybe starting him with Nick and Ovi at the beginning of the season might’ve been a wrong decision, I don’t know. It might’ve been too much,” Oates said. “But just to give him a fresh approach.”

One thing will stay the same: The Caps will go back to goaltender Michal Neuvirth despite an uneven performance against Toronto.

“He’s played pretty good and we need a goalie to have a good game, and I think it’s gonna be Michal,” Oates said.

Since HBO’s “24/7,” when Penguins coach Dan Bylsma said Neuvirth had a “shaky” glove, Neuvirth is 2-0-1 with two shutouts, a 1.32 goals-against average and .954 save percentage vs. Pittsburgh.

Beagle seeks sacrifice

Jay Beagle wants to do his best impression of Pedro Cerrano from “Major League.” The Caps center would do just about anything right now to start the bounces going the other way.

“There are a lot of bounces that aren’t going our way,” Beagle said. “I don’t know if we have to sacrifice a cow or something. I don’t know what we have to do.”

Ex-Caps right wing Mike Knuble once vowed to sacrifice a goat to cure a scoring slump. Since dead animals were the subject of conversation, Beagle reacted well to news that there was a dead mouse in the media room at the team’s practice facility.

“Good,” he said. “Let’s start with that.”

Why not a goat? Why not start small? The Caps are 2-7-1, and the season is almost a quarter of the way over.

“No, I’m starting big,” Beagle said. “There’s no time for starting small. It’s big.”

Hamrlik ‘working hard’

Oates praised defenseman Tom Poti’s play in the Maple Leafs game, and it looks like the same six will play on the blue line against the Penguins.

That means 39-year-old Roman Hamrlik is expected to be a healthy scratch for the eighth straight game. Oates said that Hamrlik will “get his chance,” but cited the play of the defensemen in the lineup more than anything the veteran needs to do.

“I felt good, pretty good, the first three games I played,” Hamrlik said. “I don’t know what to say.”

Hamrlik could struggle when he returns to the lineup if he spends several weeks out. But for now all he can do is practice patience.

“Obviously just keep working, keep working hard in the practices,” Hamrlik said. “It’s new system and I’m in the same track. Stay positive and keep working hard and hopefully I’m gonna get a chance to play again.”

By Stephen Whyno

The Washington Times
Wednesday, February 6, 2013

The question posed to several Washington Capitals players drew plenty of uncertainty. What is the biggest problem with this team right now?

At 2-7-1 and dead last in the NHL, it’s impossible to pinpoint one thing that has gone wrong.

“We’re not scoring enough to win games, I think, and we’re letting too many goals in,” forward Marcus Johansson said. “That’s the biggest problem: We’re not winning games.”

Simply put, the Caps have lost a lot early under new coach Adam Oates. They’ve played poorly and lost and played well and lost.

“Playing well is not enough. We got to win games,” left wing Jason Chimera said. “Unfortunately you don’t get prizes for just too close. Too close only counts in horseshoes, I think. That’s what you get points for. They don’t count here. You got to get wins somehow. You got to get better goaltending, you got to get better play from our top guys, I got to chip in a little more.”
Even as Oates said that "the way we're playing, I think, is the way to do it," the results haven't followed.

The reasons for the underachieving start are plentiful.

"I don't think there's one big gaping problem, but I think there's a couple little things that are really hurting us," defenseman Karl Alzner said. "I think that our [power play and penalty kill] haven't been very good. ... And I think that some of the little mental errors that we're making, it doesn't seem like we're getting the same thing for. A lot of it's just going against." That was the most common answer among more than a half-dozen players asked about the Caps' biggest problem. Right wing Troy Brouwer cited "mental lapses." Right wing Joey Crabb pointed to "little costly mistakes that aren't from a poor system or poor effort."

"It's pretty simple in my mind," goaltender Braden Holtby said. "We've been playing solid games, it's just those little mental mistakes, those little things during a game, and we're all guilty of it, that are making the big difference. Those are the things that the best players in the league and the world never make because their mental game is stronger."

Even after 10 games full of mental errors, Caps players see the issues as easily correctable. Right wing Joel Ward said, "it's about being sharp."

"It feels like when we make mistakes they end up in our net. It's not a lot of system errors," forward Matt Hendricks said. "I think it's a lot of human error. Mistakes that happen in a game, goals are scored because of mistakes and if you can limit your mistakes to two or three times a game, it's pretty good."

Hendricks, unprompted, invoked ex-coach Dale Hunter's refrain of "It was a hockey play." The hockey bounces aren't going the Caps' way, but it's not a valid excuse.

"We've got to create our own luck," Crabb said. "A lot of times those bounces happen to good teams and they don't let it affect them. We've got to be one of those teams and just, if you're working hard and you're playing good, you're creating your own luck."

What the Caps haven't been creating is a whole lot of offense. Through Tuesday, they ranked 24th in the NHL in goals per game at 2.30. They're the only team in the league that hasn't scored four or more goals in a game.

"We get scored on and we're chasing from behind," Brouwer said. "We haven't been able to score more than three goals in a game, so that means we have to try and keep the other team to one or two. We can't win games as a result."

Given that Holtby and Michal Neuvirth have had their own lapses — and defensemen, too — there have been plenty of deflating moments.

"It always hurts giving up easy goals," Johansson said. "It's tough, but we all know we got it in us to play, to score goals and to make plays."

The onus is on the offense to pick it up. And Chimera was quick to shoulder responsibility as much as captain Alex Ovechkin or center Nicklas Backstrom.

"You're not going to automatically just score by pressing a button," said Ward, who has a team-high four goals. "I think it's just going back to mental issues of just being detailed. Once you're kind of detailed in your [game], you'll get chances to score. It's just a matter of executing."

Part of executing is forcing teams to play a certain way. The Caps haven't dictated play nearly enough.

"I do know just from talking to my linemates that we've got to try to create more as a team at the net and try to, overall, play a way harder game, make it hard on the opposition throughout the whole game and not let them have those two- or three-minute breaks where we almost let off," center Jay Beagle said. "That's where we get in trouble, I think."

Trouble awaits for the Caps when they visit the Atlantic Division-leading Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday night as the beginning of a stretch of four in five on the road. It's a stretch that could put this team in a playoff position or push them deeper into this pit.

But Oates' message to his players has been positive. And that has not wavered.

"You can pinpoint a lot of little things that we might be in a little different situation if we executed better on those," he said. "We have a lot of time left to fix those and get on a roll and play better and keep it going. Hopefully for them, the leaders, the core guys, that they can help the ship go correctly, you know? Back on it."

There's still plenty to do to get to that point.

"You can't go and look at one thing and say this is our problem," Chimera said. "Obviously we've got a lot of problems the way we are."

Washington Capitals
In a shortened season, bad start is a disaster for Capitals
Brian McNally Staff writer - sports
The Washington Examiner

At bottom of the NHL, Washington looks for answers
The Capitals have climbed out of holes before. But the most consistent of Washington's pro sports franchises finally may have given itself too big a challenge.

With a 2-7-1 record and the fewest points among the NHL's 30 teams, the Caps are in trouble. And thanks to a four-month lockdown, the shortened 48-game regular season provides no margin for error.

The search for answers already has begun. The goaltending must be better, defensive miscues limited, special teams stabilized and the forwards' production level increased. It's not that Washington is bad in all of those categories, but the Caps aren't playing at a high level anywhere on the ice, either.

"We're OK in a lot of areas, and OK is not good enough," forward Jason Chimera said. "I think we're playing good. But it's not a game of 'too close.' You go to have two points. You got to have wins. And that's the bottom line. Playing good is not good enough anymore."

Canvass the Washington locker room, and multiple players will say the team is better than its record indicates. The Caps have lost four times by a 3-2 score, after all. Even a 6-3 loss at Tampa Bay in the season opener Jan. 19 was a tie game entering the third period and a one-goal game with less than seven minutes left.

"It seems like one game it's penalty kill, one game it's power play, one game it's a couple mental errors, one game it's bounces," defenseman Karl Alzner said.

There's no question players are still adjusting to new coach Adam Oates, who employs a system far different than the conservative approach used by Dale Hunter last season. And Hunter took over Nov. 728, 2011, from Bruce Boudreau, who had ingrained his own methods over the previous four years. For a team in that position, a six-day training camp was a hindrance.

"It's always tough when you have a new coach and you have three times in less than a year they changed the psychology of the team, how they play," said former Washington goalie Tomas Vokoun, now with the Pittsburgh Penguins. "It took us at least 20 games to change [with] Dale to get kind of in grasp with the new system. And without training camp, they were already a step behind."

But that excuse won't last much longer, players say. While young goalmies Braden Holtby and Michal Neuvirth have struggled with consistency and the defensemen in front of them have been shaky at times, it is on star players such as Alex Ovechkin to produce. So far he has just five points -- two goals and three assists.

"It's not like we're waiting on Ovi to lead the charge and score four or five goals in one game," Chimera said. "We got to do it individually. You can't look to one person. One person doesn't win you a Stanley Cup."

The Caps have been in this position before. An 0-6-2 stretch in December 2010 knocked the reigning Presidents' Trophy winners into seventh place in the Eastern Conference. They rallied that season to win the Southeast Division. Last year a 5-9-1 skid cost Boudreau his job. As late as Feb. 20, Washington was in 10th place in the Eastern Conference and out of the playoff picture. And even after this rough start to 2013, entering Thursday's
game in Pittsburgh the Caps are still just four points out of a postseason spot with 38 games left.

"It's not like we don't have the character in this room to get the job done," defenseman Mike Green said. "It's just a matter of us addressing and figuring out what we need to do to pull out of it."

Washington Examiner LOADED: 02.07.2013

655559 Winnipeg Jets

Jets want stronger Scheifele, ship rookie back to junior

By: Tim Campbell

HE tried his hardest but the bottom line on Mark Scheifele's quest to stick with the Winnipeg Jets for the lockout-shortened NHL season was twofold.

His strength for NHL competition was an ongoing concern and he didn't have enough trust from his coach.

On Wednesday, Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff, head coach Claude Noel and assistant GM Craig Heisinger called in the 19-year-old centre -- used mostly as a right-winger while he was here this time -- and told him for a second straight season he'd be going back to his junior team, the Barrie Colts and coach Dale Hawerchuk.

While the Colts' already good chances in the Ontario Hockey League picture were good, they got a huge boost.

Scheifele was said to be deeply disappointed on Wednesday, but he did post on his Twitter account: "Thanks to the Winnipeg Jets organization and to all the Jets fans for all the support, good luck to the @NHLJets for the rest of the season."

The team said it wouldn't make Scheifele available for further comment on Wednesday.

Cheveldayoff told reporters later in the day that the first-round pick of 2011, seventh overall, took the news like a pro.

"We met late into last night as a management staff ... then Claude and Zinger and myself met with Mark this morning and explained it to him," he said. "I would assume there's a level of disappointment because like anything you want to play at the highest level as fast you possibly can but he certainly understood it."

Cheveldayoff has mentioned this before, that prospects can improve at many things but that strength will come on its own schedule. At one point, Cheveldayoff said Scheifele's skating and skills are NHL-calibre.

"Playing him on the wing what we told him was that we're looking to see from a strength perspective how he was going to be able to last over a long period of time," the GM said.

He also said stringing the matter along was not a good idea.

Scheifele had played four of the team's nine games this season, without a point. Had he reached a sixth game played, the first year of his entry-level contract would have taken effect.

Cheveldayoff said Wednesday he didn't want to hear the comparisons between Scheifele and others from the 2011 draft who have played NHL games or contributed to their teams.

He pointed out that this is Scheifele's third year of junior hockey.

"A lot of players who have moved on, it was going to be their fourth year," he said. "At the end of the day, the fact that you don't rush a player shouldn't be looked at as a negative in any way, shape or form."

Cheveldayoff said the Jets put value in leadership experiences that Scheifele may gain more of this season.

"Too many times a lot of 18-year-old and 19-year-old kids get plucked out of junior when they're not ready, when they're just starting to become leaders and they don't get that opportunity and they're just starting to be a leader on their team," he said. "When he goes back to junior it's going to be his responsibility to handle that on his team.... four or five years from now when he's a real leader on this team, he's going to have the experience to draw back upon."

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 02.07.2013

655559 Winnipeg Jets

Jets 3- Panthers 2 OT

By: Staff Writer

★★ Bryan Little, C, Wpg.: Potted the winner in OT, going topshelf over Scott Clemmensen on a smart feed by Zach Redmond with the Jets on the man advantage.

★★ Zach Redmond, D, Wpg.: Keeps getting better and better with each shift. Picked up two assists in just his third NHL game. Makes smart decisions, doesn't panic and will be difficult to take out of the lineup now.

★★★ Mike Weaver, D, Fla.: Battled from the opening draw to the final horn. Finished with just over 24 minutes of ice time and registered four hits and three blocked shots.

SUMMARY
FIRST-PERIOD SCORING
1. Florida, Huberdeau 3 (Shore, Weaver) 18:12

Penalties — Mueller Fla (tripping)
8:56, Enstrom Wpg (hooking) 9:54.

SECOND-PERIOD SCORING
2. Winnipeg, Wheeler 4 (Enstrom) 2:28

3. Florida, Fleischmann 3 (Campbell, Versteeg) 3:52 4. Winnipeg, Stuart 1 (Redmond, Burmistrov) 12:21

Penalty — Versteeg Fla (holding) 17:30.

THIRD-PERIOD SCORING

No scoring.

Penalties — Slater Wpg (hooking)
9:08, Weiss Fla (tripping) 14:59.

OVERTIME SCORING

5. Winnipeg, Little 2 (Redmond, Hainsey) 4:44 (pp) Penalty — Kuba Fla (tripping) 2:50.

Shots on goal by
Florida 7 5 6 1 — 19
Winnipeg 3 14 2 2 — 21

Goal — Florida: Clemmensen (L,0- 1-1);
Winnipeg: Pavelec (W,3-4-1).

Power plays (goals-chances) — Florida: 0-2;
Winnipeg: 1-4.

Referees — Dennis LaRue, Dean Morton. Linesmen — Darren Gibbs, Vaughan Rody.

Attendance — 15,004 (15,004).

POINT OF ATTACK:

The Jets entered Tuesday's game having generated the most points by defencemen in the NHL and got five more last night courtesy of Mark Stuart (1G) Zach Redmond (2A), Toby Enstrom (1A) and Ron Hainsey (1A).

MILESTONE WATCH:

Blake Wheeler's second-period goal was the 200th point in his NHL career. Wheeler now has 78 career goals and 122 assists in 333 NHL games.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 02.07.2013
WINNIPEG -- The Winnipeg Jets have decided centre Mark Scheifele will not stay with them for the rest of the season.

The team announced this morning that it is sending the 19-year-old back to the Barrie Colts of the OHL.

Scheifele, the seventh overall pick of the 2011 draft, played four out of the first nine games for the team, joining them in mid-January after the lockout ended. He had no points.

To that point, the Kitchener, Ont., native had 22 goals and 49 points in 30 games for the Colts.

Last season, the Jets signed Scheifele to an entry-level contract during training camp. He played seven NHL games then before being sent back to his junior team.

Winnipeg Jets LOADED 02.07.2013

Zach Bogosian could be back soon for Winnipeg Jets

By Ken Wiebe Winnipeg Sun

The Winnipeg Jets have a vacancy on their 23-man roster, but don't have any plans for an immediate call-up.

On a day when the Jets returned forward Mark Scheifele to the Barrie Colts of the Ontario Hockey League, general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff made it sound like the spot might soon be filled by defenceman Zach Bogosian, who is progressing after undergoing off-season wrist surgery.

"Not right now. Obviously, there's a couple of different roster decisions that we hope are on the horizon," said Cheveldayoff. "Hopefully, Zach Bogosian is going to be ready at some point and time here.

"He'll start skating with the team in short order, said Cheveldayoff. "Hopefully, Zach Bogosian is going to be ready at some point and time here.

Based on the fact the Jets aren't recalling another blue-liner as insurance, Dustin Byfuglien's return from a mysterious lower-body injury could come either Thursday against the Toronto Maple Leafs or Saturday against the Ottawa Senators.

The injuries opened the door for rookies Zach Redmond and Paul Postma to take on a larger role.

"You try to look for the silver linings in the different situations we're faced with right now," said Cheveldayoff. "You have to turn to some people to step their games up. The fact two young players, in Redmond and Postma, have been able to fill minutes, contribute and play well, it's a nice thing to be able to see.

Winnipeg Jets LOADED 02.07.2013

Toronto Maple Leafs coach Randy Carlyle makes long-awaited return to Winnipeg to face Jets

By Ken Wiebe Winnipeg Sun

Now that he's caught up with a few old friends and checked out a couple of familiar places, Randy Carlyle is ready to embrace a new role when the Toronto Maple Leafs visit the Winnipeg Jets on Thursday at MTS Centre.

"Now that I'm the enemy, it's a little different story when you come back into this area," said Carlyle, who held court with reporters for more than 15 minutes on Thursday. "It was really nice to go around a couple of the local establishments with a few friends of mine. I enjoyed my time and it's a special place for my family and I. It's always nice to come back."

Although Carlyle, the former Jets' defenceman and longtime head coach and general manager of the Manitoba Moose, made it clear that this was a business trip for him and the Maple Leafs, you can be sure he's going to take some time to soak in the atmosphere inside MTS Centre.

"I heard they boo people here, maybe they'll boo me. I don't know," said Carlyle. "My job is to coach the team. The emotion part of it is just a sidebar at this point."

Carlyle was scheduled to come back in December of 2011, but was fired before Teemu Selanne made his well-chronicled return with the Anaheim Ducks.

"Something got in the way last year," said Carlyle. "I actually had a conversation with (Jets assistant GM) Craig Heisinger about 10 days before the event happened and I said, 'the way things keep going, I might be sitting beside you in the press box'.

"When the Ducks traveled to Manitoba, it just so happened that I went fishing."

Carlyle remains true to his core beliefs, but admitted that he's changed since his days behind the bench with the Moose.

"For sure, if you quit evolving then you get cast away or you're put by the wayside," said Carlyle. "You have to learn from all the experiences you've had. From my first couple of forays into the coaching fraternity, there are things I did that I'm not proud of. You don't see any more of those things. I'm a much calmer individual."

Carlyle isn't the only one in for a homecoming as the Maple Leafs roster includes a trio of Manitobans: goalie James Reimer of Morweena and forwards Colton Orr and Frazer McLaren of Winnipeg.

Winnipeg Jets LOADED 02.07.2013

Mark Scheifele had too much working against him, says Hawerchuk

By Paul Friesen Winnipeg Sun

When Barrie Colts head coach Dale Hawerchuk sent Mark Scheifele packing for the NHL when the lockout ended, he told the kid he didn't want to see him back.

The Ontario Hockey League team had a sendoff for the 19-year-old, too, including a trio of Manitobans: goalie James Reimer of Morweena and forwards Colton Orr and Frazer McLaren of Winnipeg.

The Ontario Hockey League team had a sendoff for the 19-year-old, too, including a trio of Manitobans: goalie James Reimer of Morweena and forwards Colton Orr and Frazer McLaren of Winnipeg.

Mark Scheifele had too much working against him, says Hawerchuk

By Paul Friesen Winnipeg Sun

When Barrie Colts head coach Dale Hawerchuk sent Mark Scheifele packing for the NHL when the lockout ended, he told the kid he didn't want to see him back.

The Ontario Hockey League team had a sendoff for the 19-year-old, too, assuming he'd stick with the Winnipeg Jets in his second crack at the NHL.

So what happened?

After banishing Scheifele to the press box for five of the last six games, the Jets have sent him back to junior, whisking him off to the airport Wednesday before making the move public so he didn't have to face questions from the media.

Just as well, because the kid never really stood a chance.

"He was in a tough circumstance," Hawerchuk said from Barrie, Wednesday. "A shortened season, the pressure to win every night — it's always a lot easier to go with guys that have mileage up there already."

Strike 1 against Scheifele was the lack of pre-season games, where he could have got the ice time and top-six forward opportunities he needed.

The lockout also cut his tryout window in half, to five games.

Strike 2, the presence of highly-paid centre Olli Jokinen, to go along with highly-paid centre Nik Antropov.
“They’ve got some pretty good top-six type forwards there,” Hawerchuk said. “You’ve got a lot of guys you’re paying big bucks to. You’re not going to start sitting them out. You say, ‘Hey, we could wait a year and have an extra year on his contract.’”

Then there’s Alexander Burmistrov, another centre who paid some dues in the minors this season. The Jets need to get a solid read on Burmistrov, a 21-year-old playing out the last year of his entry-level contract.

That left mainly fourth-line duties for Scheifele, on the wing, which is like trying to fit a square piece of crystal into a round hole — with a sledgehammer.

Fair? Hardly.

“He needs to get into a spot where he’s playing with highly skilled guys who see the ice and think the way he does,” Hawerchuk, the former Jets great, said. “He’s not going to be a fourth-line guy. If that’s what he turns out to be then you could say it didn’t turn out the way you thought.”

Which brings us to Strike 3: Scheifele’s performance.

If he’d managed to overcome all of the above and still stand out, he’d be finding permanent digs in the ‘Peg.

Struggling to compete against stronger players, his line was four games, no points — and way too much time in the press box.

The only other pointless Jet is James Wright, a waiver wire pickup.

Scheifele is no waiver wire pickup. He’s the first-ever player drafted by the new Jets, who went a little off the board to take him seventh overall.

“I don’t have to stand here and say, ‘Hey, look, our first-rounder is playing in the NHL,’” GM Kevin Cheveldayoff said. “I’m not going to sit here and say to Claude (Noel), ‘Claude, you’ve got to play this guy on this line and this many minutes on this night.’ When he’s ready he’s going to be able to do that on his own.”

He’s not ready.

He’s in a no-man’s land: too good for junior, not good enough for the NHL.

There’s a place for players like that. The AHL. But you can’t decimate the junior leagues by sending teenagers there.

Is Scheifele a can’t-miss, sure-fire NHLer?

Not sure.

For now, he remains just another 19-year-old playing with his peers, dreaming the dream.

“I don’t see this guy regressing at all,” Hawerchuk said. “He’s only going to get better. And this is only going to make his hunger to make it that much more.”

Maybe next year.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 02.07.2013

655564  Winnipeg Jets

Jets send Scheifele back to OHL

By Ken Wiebe Winnipeg Sun

There is sure to be some debate about whether Mark Scheifele got a real opportunity to show what he can do during his second audition for the Winnipeg Jets.

Playing mostly in a checking role and used primarily as a winger instead of his natural position of centre, you could argue the deck was stacked against him.

News that the Jets chose to reassign the seventh overall pick to the Barrie Colts of the Ontario Hockey League on Wednesday wasn’t met with a great deal of surprise.

After all, Scheifele had been a healthy scratch in five of the past six games and recorded no points in four games with the Jets this season.

But that doesn’t mean the Jets didn’t wrestle with the decision to keep him around.

“The easy thing would have been just to say, ‘Let’s just let him stay here and play, and see how it goes,’” said Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff. “But the ‘see how it goes’ is kind of the unknown that you don’t want to have happen with a young player like this. The opportunity for him to go back, be a leader, continue to grow both on the game side and the strength side... we feel strongly about.”

Scheifele, 19, showed much more poise with the puck compared to last fall and has improved his skating, but he needs to continue to pack on some muscle before he’s ready to be a key contributor.

“At some point and time, the physical side of his body is going to be catching up with the skill side of his body,” said Cheveldayoff.

Cheveldayoff left no doubt as to what position Scheifele would be playing once he establishes himself as an NHL regular.

“We see him as a centre, there’s no question there,” said Cheveldayoff. “We need to find a way when he does come here on a regular basis to make sure there’s opportunities for him to play in the proper space.”

It’s not like the Jets have lost faith in Scheifele’s potential either.

“The fact you don’t rush players shouldn’t be looked at as a negative in any way, shape or form,” said Cheveldayoff. “Every challenge that he’s had in front of him, he’s met. He has a bright future with us here.”

Scheifele, who has 22 goals and 49 points in 30 games with the Colts this season, was not available for comment but took to Twitter to thank the Jets and their fans for their support.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 02.07.2013

655565  Websites

Rumblings: Third referee, Caps looking, Wild changes

By Pierre LeBrun

The NHL rescinded a pair of Rule 48 match penalties over the past week, and it makes you wonder what else can be done to help the refs on the ice get the call right the first time.

Unlike most people, I’m not singling out the refs. The game is faster than ever. Trying to identify illegal checks to the head at that speed isn’t going to be an exact science.

Let’s also be fair to say that the refs are trying to protect the players -- hits to the head have been a huge topic over the past five years -- so they have been perhaps a little too aggressive this season, but the intent is the right one.

Yes, David Backes’ match penalty Friday in Detroit was bogus, and so was Andrew Desjardins’ penalty Tuesday night. Neither hit was to the head.

The NHL, for sure. Third referee, Caps looking, Wild changes.
Another idea that’s already finding new life after being bandied about in years past is the merit of a coach’s challenge, where a coach could ask for a penalty to be reviewed. Two NHL head coaches reached out to me this week and suggested it’s time to renew that debate.

I don’t mind it but prefer the first idea. My fear with the coach’s challenge is that coaches would want to challenge anything near the end of a game out of desperation. The first idea involves a neutral person.

Caps looking?

So what do you do if you’re the 2-7-1 Washington Capitals?

Well, you start working the phones.

Sources around the league indicate that indeed Caps GM George McPhee has begun to do just that.

That doesn’t mean anything will materialize -- the trade market hasn’t really got buzzing yet with teams too eager to move parts -- but at the very least, the word on the street is that McPhee is inquiring to see what’s out there.

If he does do anything, I’m guessing he deals from his blue-line depth to pick up a forward who can help bolster a sagging offense that is producing just 2.3 goals per game (24th in the NHL as of Wednesday morning).

There was lots of buzz over the weekend when Vancouver’s one-two front-office punch of Mike Gillis and Laurence Gilman showed up in Washington for a game against Pittsburgh. But my understanding is that the Caps aren’t interested in Roberto Luongo, as his contract is too much to take on.

I think the hope in Washington is that Caps netminders Michal Neuvirth and Braden Holtby can snap out of it on their own. Given how well Holtby played last season, that’s not an unfounded desire.

Three things need to happen for the Caps to get going:

1. Get more saves from their goalies.
2. Get Alex Ovechkin to wake up.

Laich was at practice again Wednesday. Although it’s not clear when he’ll be back, it shouldn’t be too much longer. He’s one of those glue guys in this lineup, and his return should have a nice impact.

Wild changes

One of the NHL’s top lines early in the season has been altered, with Dany Heatley removed from Minnesota’s No. 1 unit Wednesday in practice.

Heatley skated on the second line with Matt Cullen and Pierre-Marc Bouchard, while rookie Charlie Coyle got the big promotion with the big dogs Mikko Koivu and Zach Parise.

I applaud the move by coach Mike Yeo because his team has been way too reliant on the top unit early in this season. Yeo cautioned to local media Wednesday that these moves weren’t written in stone, but I’m betting come Thursday’s game against the Vancouver Canucks he goes with these changes.

The Wild need to get production from other lines, so this might balance out the scoring a little. Of course, the move is also happening because Heatley has struggled. Perhaps new linemates will get him going again.

Winger Devin Setoguchi (zero goals in nine games) and highly touted rookie Mikael Granlund (one goal in nine games) both began the season on the second line but struggled mightily.

Since scoring a career-high 31 goals in 2008-09 in San Jose, the 26-year-old Setoguchi hasn’t been able to get back to that plateau, putting up 20 goals in 2009-10, 22 goals in 2010-11 in his final season in San Jose and 19 goals last season with the Wild.

It makes you wonder if the Wild wouldn’t be willing to move him. But I was told Wednesday that the team isn’t ready to do that yet. They need to score goals and view him as part of that solution whenever he gets his game back on track.

ESPN /
ESPN LOADED: 02.07.2013
655566 Websites

Depth paying off for flying Ducks

By Pierre LeBrun

So raise your hand if you aren’t a fan of the Anaheim Ducks but had them making the playoffs this season.

Right, thought so.

Certainly not this guy.

And while a lot of hockey remains to be played in this shortened season, somehow lost under the radar nationally has been Anaheim’s surprisingly excellent 6-1-1 start.

Where to start with this batch of darling Ducks? You’ve got Francois Beauchemin and Sheldon Souray playing their best hockey in half a decade, youngsters Kyle Palmieri and Nick Bonino finding their stride, the Ducks actually rolling four lines and a goalie named Viktor Fasth looking like Pelle Lindbergh.

All of this, and 2010-11 Hart Trophy winner Corey Perry has yet to find his offensive groove (1 goal).

“We’re playing as a team, that’s the biggest thing,” Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau told ESPN.com Tuesday. “It’s fun when you watch a team win and the players are all excited. I think the mixture of youth and veteran players is pretty good right now.”

Said an executive from a Western Conference team: “First of all, Gabby’s a good coach. And there’s an awful lot of experience on that team when you’re talking about [Ryan] Getzlaf, [Corey] Perry, [Saku] Koivu, [Teemu] Selanne and Souray. I’m not that surprised by their start. It wasn’t that long ago the Anaheim Ducks were one of the teams to beat in the Western Conference. They’re real physical and talented and they’re obviously going right now, that’s for sure.”

The Ducks begin a six-game road trip Wednesday night in Colorado that will be a huge early-season test, which is even more reason why they needed to bank those 13 points in the standings.

An intriguing emerging subplot that will no doubt play out on this road trip is, just who will be in goal from night to night? Jonas Hiller has been entrenched as the No. 1 goalie for the four seasons before this year but the unheralded Fasth, a 30-year-old who played in the Swedish elite league the past few years, is getting a chance as well.

“He keeps reminding me of Dwayne Roloson,” Boudreau said of Fasth, who was undrafted by the NHL and signed by the Ducks as a free agent in May. “Rollei never got to the NHL until he was 30 and then had a great NHL career. I didn’t know what this guy was going to be. He went to Norfolk for three games because he had never played North American hockey before and he did tremendous. He’s been really good since he’s been here. It makes for a really good goalie tandem.

You can read into it that Boudreau is ready to give Fasth a real shot at earning starts if he keeps playing well. So far he’s 3-0-0 with a .946 save percentage and 1.30 goals-against average and Hiller is 3-1-1 with a 3.54 GAA and .871 save percentage.

Just don’t call it a goalie controversy.

“I don’t know if anything’s brewing. Fasth is playing really good, Hilly’s playing really good in spots but not so well in the others,” said Boudreau. “It took a while for Hilly to find his game last year but when he did, from January on, he was almost impossible to beat. So when you have another goalie playing well until Hilly finds his groove ... if you have two guys, you don’t have to worry in goal. I think we play 27 games in 46 nights after this road trip here. We can just go one goalie one night and one goalie the other. That’s the ideal situation. But we’ll play to win and whoever is playing the best will play.”

Regardless of who’s in goal, there’s an improved blue line playing in front of them. Ducks GM Bob Murray was second-guessed by many when he added Souray and Bryan Allen last summer, but they’ve been real solid early on.

“The key this summer was that we wanted to be bigger on defense and we did that with Sheldon Souray and Bryan Allen, for sure,” Beauchemin told ESPN.com Tuesday. “Both are real solid and physical.”
And then there’s Beauchemin himself, leading the Ducks in ice time at 23:01 minutes per game.

When I suggested to him that it’s the best I’ve seen him play in a few years, Beauchemin cut in and went further.

"In my opinion, probably my best hockey since the [2007] Stanley Cup," said the 32-year-old blueliner.

"I'm not sure really why," he added. "I had shoulder surgery last May and had a lot of time to rehab. The months off during the lockout helped me out to get back from that. I worked out hard. I feel really good both in the offensive end and the defensive end. I've always liked the challenge of playing against the other team's top players. Sheldon Souray and I have been getting that matchup the last few games and it’s been fun."

Boudreau said he held video sessions with Beauchemin after the first two games because he didn’t feel those were good ones on the defenseman's part.

Since then?

"The last six games, he's been just outstanding, where I've really noticed a difference," said the Ducks coach.

Up front, Anaheim is a different team. For years the knock on the Ducks is that they were too top-heavy with their reliance on their top two lines led by Perry, Ryan Getzlaf, Bobby Ryan and the ageless Teemu Selanne. So far this season the third and fourth lines are contributing, particularly the third unit of Saku Koivu between Andrew Cogliano and newcomer Daniel Winnik (another winner of a move by Murray last summer).

What you have, finally, is balance up front.

"Absolutely," said Beauchemin. "When you have players on your third and fourth lines bringing some offense, it's always a huge plus. We missed that kind of depth the last few years. Our third line this year has been really, really good. They do their job defensively but also spend a lot of time in the offensive zone."

"I think you can't win unless you roll four lines," added Boudreau.

Part of that depth up front includes contributions from youngsters such as Palmieri (4 goals), Bonino (3 goals) and Emerson Etem (2 assists in four games).

"And we're putting them in real positions -- Etem was out there with two minutes to go the other night. Bonino is out there on penalty killing, Palmieri is being used on the power play," said Boudreau. "When we've had [Rickard] Rakell in the lineup or [Devante] Smith-Pelly, we've had no issues using them either. All those young guys are going to be good players. But you can only learn by playing them and letting them make mistakes and hoping the mistakes don't cost you."

Lurking in the shadows, however, of this great tale so far in Anaheim are two gigantic business decisions.

Perry and Getzlaf will be unrestricted free agents in July. The fact that the Ducks could be sitting in a playoff spot ahead of the April 3 trade deadline makes all of this even more complex a decision if both players aren't yet signed. Just look last season at New Jersey with Zach Parise and Nashville with Ryan Suter. Both were playoff-bound, so the teams stood pat despite the uncertainty of their contract futures.

Keeping the Perry/Getzlaf contract situations as a minimum distraction will be paramount for the Ducks all season long.

"Since the beginning of the season nobody is talking about that in the dressing room," said Beauchemin. "We're focused only on the task at hand. It hasn't been a distraction for anybody. When Corey and Ryan decide to negotiate or to sign, that's their decision. But we're just focused on what we need to do to win and what we need to do on the ice. We're not focused on anything else."

Boudreau, for one, said it has never come up in his discussions with Perry and Getzlaf.

"I don't approach it at all," said Boudreau. "I haven't talked to them about anything concerning that. I've never talked to any potential unrestricted free agents about anything. They're pros. And I know one thing: There's not too many guys that care more than both of these guys."
Columbus demotes ’10 first-rounder Johansen to AHL

Mike Halford

On Wednesday, the Blue Jackets sent center Ryan Johansen to AHL Springfield.

Johansen, 20, was the Columbus’ first-round pick — fourth overall — at the 2010 NHL Entry Draft. The former Portland Winter Hawks standout debuted for the Blue Jackets last season, scoring 9G-12A-21PTS in 87 games, and had two assists through 10 games this season.

It’s unclear exactly why the Jackets made this move.

Johansen was averaging over 15 minutes per contest and, in last night’s 4-2 loss to Los Angeles, played 16:18 and went 8-for-9 in the faceoff circle (granted, he finished minus-2 on the night.)

Here’s more, from Aaron Portzline of the Columbus Dispatch:

This isn’t the first time Columbus has come under, ahem, “scrutiny” for its handling of young prospects.

Derick Brassard, the club’s first-round pick in 2006, appeared to be at loggerheads with the organization during the 2011-12 season when player agent Alan Walsh posted a tirade on Twitter aimed at then-Columbus head coach Scott Amiel.

The club also made some waves prior to the season when it decided not to keep prospects Boone Jenner and Tim Erixon up with the parent club, dispatching Jenner to the OHL and Erixon to Springfield.

Erixon was later recalled to the NHL after a rash of injuries to Columbus’ defense.

Update: More, from Portzline...

Johansen played 16:43 against the Avs in a 4-0 loss, finished minus-2, had three shots on goal and went 12-for-21 in the faceoff circle.

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655569 Websites

Flyers’ Sestito: Crombeen “had something coming to him” after slashing Giroux

Mike Halford

Philadelphia Flyers forward Tom Sestito has added fuel to a pretty healthy fire in the wake of Tuesday’s 2-1 win over Tampa Bay.

Last night’s contest featured a pair of fights — Max Talbot vs. Vincent Lecavalier, Zac Rinaldo vs. BJ Crombeen — with the latter resulting in a devastating knockout in favor of Rinaldo.

Afterward, Sestito said Crombeen had it coming.

“What [Crombeen] did to ‘G’ [Claude Giroux] last game, he had something coming to him,” Sestito told the Philadelphia Daily News. “We weren’t going to do it dirty. He answered the bell and good for Zac. It was just a great fight.”

Here’s more, from the Daily News:

Apparently, Crombeen had been a hot topic in the Flyers’ dressing room after their 5-1 loss in Tampa Bay on Jan. 27.

Not long after Vincent Lecavalier’s first period fight in that game, Crombeen attacked the wrists of Giroux with three deliberate slashes all in the same shift. That didn’t go unnoticed.

Giroux, of course, had offseason surgery to repair fractures on both wrists, which he said came from Sidney Crosby during last year’s epic first round playoff series.

The problem, of course, is that many have criticized Rinaldo for hitting Crombeen late — or at least while he was on his way down to the ice — which appeared to exacerbate the damage (Crombeen was dazed, wobbly and didn’t return to the contest.)

“Typically when I’ve gotten into fights with guys in that position, you stop throwing,” Crombeen said after the game. “I mean, guys fight different ways, so I’m not really going to say if it was dirty or not.”

When asked about the fight, Rinaldo said he finished it properly.

“I hit him until he was down,” Rinaldo told reporters. “I’m not going to hit nobody no matter who they are or what they done, I’ll never hit someone when they’re down. I hit him until he was down. I made sure he was down and that was it.

“I kind of felt bad in case I didn’t stop myself, but I’m pretty sure I did.”

The issue now, of course, will be optics. Sestito essentially said the Flyers had a score to settle with Crombeen, and Rinaldo went out and settled it in a pretty violent manner.

That could be construed as premeditation, something the NHL doesn’t take lightly, especially after the Todd Bertuzzi-Steve Moore incident of 2004.

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655570 Websites

Blues’ Halak (groin) wants to return to practice Friday

Mike Halford

Having missed the last four games and currently on injured reserve, Jaroslav Halak is anxious to get back into action.

And it might happen sooner rather than later.

Halak will reportedly try to return to practice on Friday, according to Jeremy Rutherford of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

The Slovak netminder was seen walking around the Blues’ locker room on Tuesday without any noticeable pain, which had to be a welcome sight for teammates and head coach Ken Hitchcock.

Halak, 27, was a big part of St. Louis’ 6-1-0 start to the year — he went 3-0-0 and recorded shutouts against the Red Wings and Predators. But Halak tweaked his groin during last Friday’s game against Detroit and was forced out of action, eventually landing on IR. In his place, the Blues turned to ordinarily trusty backup Brian Elliott, who has been anything but.

Elliott has a 3-3 record with a .874 save percentage and 2.95 GAA, and was yanked in Tuesday’s 6-1 loss to Nashville after allowing four goals on 11 shots.

To make matters worse, the hook forced 22-year-old AHL call-up Jake Allen into his NHL debut, and he responded with an equally shaky performance — two goals on eight shots in 31 minutes of action.

Hitchcock said he hasn’t been pleased with his team’s goaltending this year, but also warned that any turnaround won’t just rely on the guy between the pipes, and that any turnaround won’t be quick.

“It’s not going to happen overnight,” Hitchcock said. “We can play better in that position. We can defend better, too.”

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655571 Websites

Simmonds says he “can’t be mad” at Erskine for elbow
Mike Halford

Wayne Simmonds harbors no ill will towards the guy that concussed him.

That was the word out of Philadelphia on Wednesday as Simmonds returned to practice in a non-contract capacity and, following the skate, told the Philadelphia Daily News he didn’t think Capitals defenseman John Erskine intentionally tried to hurt him with this elbow:

“I don’t think it was intended to hurt me,” Simmonds explained. “If I thought it was, I would have said something. He’s a big, strong, stay-at-home d-man, I don’t think I’ve ever seen him try to hurt someone.”

Simmonds said the concussion was the first of his career and says he’s been headache free “the entire time.”

As for Erskine, he was suspended three games for the elbow — a decision he disagreed with — and later texted Simmonds an apology.

Simmonds was glad to hear from Erskine, and reiterated he wasn’t upset.

“[Erskine] knew he had gotten caught, we were going on a 3-on-1 the other way,” he said. “Sometimes, things happen fast in hockey. It’s a fast-paced game.”

“You can’t be mad at him for it. It’s not really a big deal to me, it’s a hockey game.”

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655572 Websites

Stars make Goligoski, their highest-paid defenseman, a healthy scratch

Mike Halford

Some eyebrow-raising news out of Dallas on Wednesday as the Stars announced defenseman Alex Goligoski would be a healthy scratch for this evening’s game against the Oilers.

Goligoski, 27, was the central figure in the trade that sent James Neal and Matt Niskanen to Pittsburgh in 2011.

Last year he led all Stars defensemen in scoring (9G-21A-30PTS) while averaging close to 23 minutes per game, and in January of 2012, inked a four-year contract extension worth $18.4 million — an annual cap hit of $4.6 million, making him Dallas’ highest-paid defenseman.

It’s unclear why Goligoski has been made a healthy scratch.

He leads all Dallas skaters this year in average time on ice (22:15) and, despite his sub par production, still leads all Stars blueliners in points (three).

He has a plus-2 rating and, just three games ago, played a season-high 25:24 in a 4-3 shootout win over Phoenix.

Here’s Goligoski speaking to reporters following Monday’s 3-2 win over Colorado:

Seemed like everything was fine there.

As for replacements, sounds as though Philip Larsen and Aaron Rome will draw in on defense tonight for Dallas.

Update: Mike Heika of the Dallas Morning News spoke with Stars head coach Glen Gulutzan about the decision to make Goligoski a healthy scratch.

“Alex needs to get back to Alex’s level. It’s pretty cut and dried,” Gulutzan said.

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655573 Websites

Wild coach Yeo splits up Parise-Koivu-Heatley line

Mike Halford

Wednesday was a double-edged sword kind of day for Mike Yeo.

The Minnesota head coach decided to split up his top line of Zach Parise, Mikko Koivu and Dany Heatley — a move designed to balance out his forward units, but a potentially dangerous one given, you know, that line is the only one producing.

Rookie Charlie Coyle has been promoted to play right wing alongside Parise and Koivu while Heatley has been dropped to the second line with center Matt Cullen and left wing Pierre-Marc Bouchard.

“I think he’ll fit in really well with us,” Parise said of Coyle. “And you get Butch with Heatley, he should be a good setup man for Heater.”

Heatley has been the weak link of the top line for the last few contests — one goal and eight shots in his last six games — so it’s not surprising Yeo decided to move him. Parise’s been on fire (6G-4A-10PTS) and Koivu’s nearly a point-a-game player (2G-6A-8PTS), meaning they’ll stay put.

Heatley said he’s not worried about the “demotion” and is looking forward to playing with Cullen and Bouchard.

“I don’t feel like I’m fighting it,” he explained. “I’m playing with two real creative guys, so hopefully we can get something done.”

However this shakes out, it’s clear Yeo needs to do something to get some production outside of his big three.

The Wild’s fourth- and fifth-leading scorers are defensemen (Tom Gilbert, Ryan Suter) while Cullen, Mikael Granlund, Cal Clutterbuck, Devin Setoguchi and Torrey Mitchell have combined to score just three goals thus far.

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655574 Websites

Jets send ’11 first-rounder Scheifele back to junior

Mike Halford

In surprising news, the Winnipeg Jets have sent Mark Scheifele — their first-round pick, 7th overall at the 2011 Draft — back to his junior club in OHL Barrie.

It’s a newsworthy development on a number of fronts.

One, Scheifele made the Jets out of training camp and has been with the club for three weeks. While he’s only played in four games this year and therefore still eligible to be returned to junior, most NHL clubs made the decision to reassign their prospects a while ago (see here and here and here).

Two, it makes you wonder what Winnipeg was waiting for.

Scheifele had been a healthy scratch on a number of occasions and wasn’t a major factor in the games he did play in, going scoreless in four contests while averaging just over 11 minutes a night.

But in his last game — Friday’s 8-3 loss to Tampa Bay — Scheifele played a career-high 16:47 and managed to finish with an even rating despite the fact Winnipeg allowed five even-strength goals (Blake Wheeler finished minus-3 and played less than Scheifele.)

This marks the second time in as many seasons that the Jets have re-assigned Scheifele to junior.

In 2011-12, he appeared in seven games with the club before being sent back to Barrie, but was later called up to the AHL playoffs with the St. John’s IceCaps, playing in 10 games while notching one assist.

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655575 Websites
The Calgary Flames have inked AHL Abbotsford netminder Danny Taylor to a one-year, two-way deal worth $525,000.

Taylor, 26, joined the Flames organization last season and posted stellar numbers for the Heat — 17-10-3, 2.21 GAA, .927 save percentage — and has been equally solid (if not better) this season, posting a 1.77 GAA (2nd best in the AHL) and .930 save percentage (4th best).

Los Angeles' seventh-round pick at the 2004 Entry Draft, Taylor appeared in one contest for the Kings — a 7-2 loss to Dallas in 2008, in which he replaced Erik Ersberg in the third period and allowed two goals on 10 shots.

That remains his lone NHL appearance.

Taylor will head to Columbus to join the Flames (they play the Blue Jackets on Thursday) and serve as Leland Irving's backup for an undetermined length of time.

Irving ascended to the No. 1 gig when Miikka Kiprusoff was injured during Tuesday's 4-1 win in Detroit — the veteran Finnish netminder left the game after the second period, having suffered a lower-body injury after getting tangled with Wings forward Johan Franzen.

Update: Kiprusoff has officially been ruled out of Thursday's game in Columbus, with TSN’s Aaron Ward hearing the injury is MCL/knee-related.

Despite goal drought, Seguin feels “like I've been playing great”

Tyler Seguin has just one goal through eight games this season — an empty-netter, no less.

But that doesn’t mean the Bruins sniper feels he’s playing poorly.

“I feel like I’ve been playing great,” Seguin told ESPN Boston. “I feel like I'm playing a great two-way game. Against the Leafs last game, I thought I was playing my best game so far this year.”

Seguin is referring to Saturday’s 1-0 defeat of Toronto, in which he fired a game-high six shots on goal in just over 16 minutes of ice time.

Putting pucks on net hasn’t been a problem for Seguin this year — he has 27 through eight games — but getting them past a goalie has been.

His lone marker on the year came with Cam Ward pulled from the Carolina net in a 5-3 win back on Jan. 28, meaning he now has just four goals in his last 18 regular-season contests, dating back to the end of 2011-12.

Not that it’s especially worried about it.

“Sometimes they’re going in and sometimes they’re not, and that’s just how the game goes,” he said. “Right now, the puck’s not going in, but I’m trying not to think about it too much. I’m just playing the best I can.”

“Whether I’m scoring right now or I’m not scoring right now, I still say that I’ve been playing really well.”

For the flip side to this argument, here’s CSNNE.com’s Michael Felger and Gary Tanguay discussing Seguin’s goal-scoring slump:

The growing contingent of Sabres fans calling for the head of long-time head coach Lindy Ruff won’t be getting its wish anytime soon.

Per the Buffalo News, general manager Darcy Regier says that any changes he makes to his struggling team won’t involve the man behind the bench.

“It won’t be the coach,” said Regier, who maintains the Sabres need to be better defensively to improve their 3-6-1 record.

“Offensively, we’re fine,” he said. “But defensively we have work to do.

“And when you think of where we are defensively, If I had a coach to pick to shore that up, Lindy is the guy.”

To Canucks coach Alain Vigneault, it looks like Ryan Kesler has already recovered by “leaps and bounds” from offseason wrist and back surgeries.

Kesler, on the other hand, is sounding a more conservative tone.

“I’ve had a couple of good days of practice and I’m just going from there,” Kesler said today in Minnesota, per The Province.

“There are areas out there where I don’t feel comfortable, so there’s no timeline at all. Until I feel that comfort level and feel I can step in and contribute the way I can, I’ll be playing then.”

It’s not the first time the organization’s optimism has been contrasted by Kesler’s caution. In the summer, general manager Mike Gillis claimed the 2011 Selke Trophy winner was “slightly ahead” of schedule in his recovery — a claim that was quickly refuted by Kesler’s agent.

It’s clear the 28-year-old center is concerned about coming back too soon, as he believes he did last season following offseason hip surgery.

“I made the mistake before and I won’t make it again,” he said.

The last time Raffi Torres faced the Blackhawks, he became Chicago’s “Public Enemy No. 1” for, in the NHL’s words, “launching himself to deliver a late hit to the head” of Marian Hossa.

Torres received a 25-game suspension (later reduced to 21 games) for the play and has since promised to change his ways.

Tomorrow at Jobing.com Arena, he’ll share the ice with Hossa — who was badly concussed as a result of the hit — and the Blackhawks for the first since the Apr. 17 incident.

So, does Torres expect Chicago to pay him any special attention?

“Whatever happens out there, happens out there,” says Torres on facing Blackhawks
And what about the commitment he made to clean up his act? How’s that going?

“We have to protect the top players in the league,” he said. “If it’s going to take me thinking out there instead of running around with my head cut off, then that’s what it’s going to take. If I want to keep playing in this league, I’m going to have to change the way [I play].”

Hossa, meanwhile, is downplaying tomorrow’s game.

“I don’t care,” he said Tuesday, per ESPNChicago.com. “It’s a thing you don’t forget. Like I said, you know I move the page, and it’s another season. I just try to focus on my game.

“It’s just another game. … I think it’s going to be a normal game. I don’t expect anything.”

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655580 Websites

Trade: Devils get Loktionov from Kings for fifth-round pick

Jason Brough

The New Jersey Devils have acquired forward Andrei Loktionov from Los Angeles for a fifth-round pick in the 2013 draft.

Loktionov was drafted 123rd overall in 2008 by the Kings and has 14 points (7 G, 7 A) in 59 career games. The 22-year-old has been with AHL Manchester this season, where he has 22 points in 37 games. The Devils say he’ll be sent directly to their AHL affiliate in Albany.

Of note, Loktionov spent the 2008-09 season with OHL Windsor, where one of his teammates was Devils forward Adam Henrique. The Spitfires — who also featured current NHLers Taylor Hall and Ryan Ellis — won the Memorial Cup that year.

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655581 Websites

Lindy Ruff states the obvious: “We need to win games”

Jason Brough

The longest-tenured head coach in the NHL is feeling the heat.

“We need to win games,” Lindy Ruff said Wednesday, the day after his Sabres lost 4-3 in Ottawa.

“We need to win them now.”

He’s right. Buffalo has dropped seven of its last eight games since winning the first two of the season. The Sabres’ 3-6-1 record is better than only one (Washington, 2-7-1) in the Eastern Conference.

Thomas Vanek, Jason Pominville and Cody Hodgson can’t do everything.

Among the struggling Sabres…

Defenseman Tyler Myers is a minus-7 with just one assist, his average ice time having fallen to 20:03 from the 22:29 he logged last season. The 2010 rookie of the year may be in the first year of a seven-year, $36.5 million contract, but his play hasn’t been close to the level that garnered him that deal.

Goalie Ryan Miller has surrendered four goals in each of his last four games.

Former 30-goal scorer Drew Stafford hasn’t scored yet.

As for Ruff, he’s been Buffalo’s coach since 1997; however, if he can’t get his team into the playoffs, it’s hard to picture him back next season.

The Sabres host Montreal Thursday.
Dubinsky fined $10K for boarding Scuderi

Jason Brough

The NHL has fined Blue Jackets forward Brandon Dubinsky $10,000 for boarding Kings defenseman Rob Scuderi during the second period of Tuesday’s game in Columbus.

The fine is the maximum allowed under the new CBA. The money goes to the Players’ Emergency Assistance Fund.

Dubinsky was assessed a major penalty and game misconduct for the hit.

The Kings won the game, 4-2.

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655585 Websites

Nugent-Hopkins (sore shoulder) out tonight, expected back Saturday

Jason Brough

Oilers center Ryan Nugent-Hopkins will miss tonight’s home game against Dallas with a sore shoulder.

Per Sportnets’s Gene Principe, Nugent-Hopkins was hurt Monday in overtime versus Vancouver. The sore shoulder is not, however, the same shoulder that caused the 19-year-old trouble last season, according to coach Ralph Krueger.

One unidentified Oiler told Principe, “I know Nuge has been having some issues with his shoulders but it’s not serious."

The news is sure to resurrect the topic of whether Nugent-Hopkins, who the Oilers list at 6-foot-1, 185 pounds, has the build to stay healthy in the NHL.

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655586 Websites

Marchand (upper body) out versus Habs

Jason Brough

Tonight’s “Rivalry Night” game between the Bruins and Canadiens in Montreal will be missing a key element of the present-day rivalry.

Per CSNNE.com, Boston forward Brad Marchand is still feeling the effects of crashing into the boards Saturday in Toronto and won’t play at the Bell Centre.

Marchand leads the B’s with five goals, so his absence presents a challenge for his teammates.

It also means he’ll have to wait to mix it up again with Habs defenseman PK Subban, which is unfortunate from an entertainment perspective.

As for the severity of Marchand’s injury, it doesn’t sound like it will keep him out of the lineup for long.

“He won’t play tonight,” said Bruins coach Claude Julien. “But he’s doing well. We’ll hold him back and we’ll keep our fingers crossed that he’s in next game. He’s that close. It’s just a matter of days here. It’s not as serious as most injuries, but — as I’ve said a million times — we’re being extra cautious early in the season.”

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655587 Websites

Injured Blake Geoffrion still hoping for comeback

Mike Brehm

Blake Geoffrion’s trade to Montreal nearly a year ago was big news because grandfather Bernie “Boom Boom” Geoffrion and great-grandfather Howie Morenz were legends in Canadiens uniforms.

But a scary injury that he suffered in the American Hockey League during the lockout has prevented Geoffrion from playing for the Canadiens or anywhere this season.

As he prepared to visit a doctor on Thursday to plan the next phase of his recovery from a depressed skull fracture, he met with the Montreal news media on Wednesday to ensure them that he was not retiring and was still planning a comeback.

“I’m doing everything I can to get back,” he said.

Geoffrion, playing for the Hamilton (Ontario) Bulldogs at the time, was hit hard on Nov. 9 by Syracuse (N.Y.) Crunch defenseman J.P. Cote and as he fell, his head hit Cote’s skate. He left the ice on his power but was taken to the hospital, went into convulsions after his arrival and had a piece of his skull removed and replaced by a metal plate.

He had suffered multiple concussions before that incident and didn’t want to specify any lingering symptoms from the injury.

Geoffrion had a chance on Wednesday to visit with Canadiens players, who are off to a strong start after the team finished last in the Eastern Conference in 2011-12. He hopes to be part of that scene again - at some point.

“I miss the game of hockey,” he said. “It's unbelievable. I can’t wait to get back.”

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655588 Websites

Fasth leads Ducks to 3-0 win over Avalanche

AP

DENVER — Viktor Fasth has quickly gone from unknown in the net to unbelievable. Given the way he’s playing, the backup is making a strong case for even more playing time.

Fasth stopped 31 shots for his first NHL shutout and Francois Beauchemin scored in his 500th career game, lifting the surging Anaheim Ducks to a 3-0 win over the Colorado Avalanche on Wednesday night.

In just a short time — four starts, to be exact — Fasth has earned the trust of his teammates and his coach.

“He’s giving me confidence that I never knew I’d have in him when he came over,” said Anaheim coach Bruce Boudreau, whose team won its fourth straight game. “It’s a great, pleasant surprise that Viktor has come over and played so well.”

SUMMARY: DUCKS 3, AVALANCHE 0

The 30-year-old Fasth has certainly been quite a find for the Ducks since he signed as a free agent during the offseason. According to the Ducks, Fasth is the first goaltender in NHL history over the age of 30 to win his first four games.

Fasth stymied the struggling Avalanche with one sprawling save after another to help Anaheim start a six-game road swing on a good note.

"Vik's really on the puck, making it easy on us,” Beauchemin said. “If it wasn't for him, there was no way we would've won that game."

The Avalanche players were in a sour mood after the game as they were shut out for a third time this season. That especially didn’t sit too well with Matt Duchene.
Seguin and Krejci score, lift Bruins to win

Boston Bruins coach Claude Julien mixed up his lines for the third period, and the move immediately paid off.

Julien moved rising star Tyler Seguin onto a unit with David Krejci and Milan Lucic and it produced the tying and winning goals on its first two shifts as the Bruins beat the Montreal Canadiens 2-1 on Wednesday night.

"We needed to create more scoring chances because we didn't have many in the first two periods, so we tweaked the lines a bit and the guys responded well," said Julien as the Bruins improved to 7-1-1 and maintained their hold on first place in the Northeast Division.

"That Krejci line's been awesome for us but (Wednesday) they weren't able to generate much, so I said, 'Let's move guys around here and give them a little spark,' and it worked out," Julien said. "Look at Siggy driving the net on that first goal."

SUMMARY: BRUINS 2, CANADIENS 1

Seguin sneaked in front to take a pass from Krejci and lift it over Carey Price to tie the game only 14 seconds into the third period.

The speedy young center then slipped the puck to the left wing on a rush and Lucic fed it in front. The onrushing Krejci got there just before Montreal center Tomas Plekanec and tipped it in at 2:05.

P.K. Subban scored his first of the season on a second period power play for Montreal, which was shut down by Tuukka Rask while outshooting Boston 11-4 in the first.

The Canadiens' (6-3-0) five-game home winning streak was snapped.

"We played well in the first period, but starting in the second we kind of backed up," said defenseman Andrei Markov, who picked up his ninth point in nine games. "We stopped playing our game."

Boston outshot Montreal 23-22.

The Canadiens play Thursday night in Buffalo before facing the Toronto Maple Leafs on Saturday night at the Bell Centre.

Julien called it the best game so far this season for Rask, who has built a 6-1-1 record as the starter while veteran Tim Thomas is on a self-assigned sabbatical.

Rask stopped Lars Eiller on a breakaway 10 minutes into the game, and got a break in the second when Plekanec was in alone but lost control of the puck and shot it into the corner rather than at the net.

"He's had the right attitude," Julien said of his goaltender. "With the high expectations, he's just doing his job."

"He's a normal goaltender, which might be a surprise to a lot of people," he said. "But he's so easy going. There are no issues."

The Krejci, Lucic and Nathan Horton line has been Boston's best this season while Seguin went into the game in a slump with only one goal in nine games. "We stopped playing our game."

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The Krejci, Lucic and Nathan Horton line has been Boston's best this season while Seguin went into the game in a slump with only one goal in the first eight games.

"I was feeling snake bitten, but I'm glad one went in and we pulled this one out," Seguin said. "I feel I've been playing decently."

"I had a couple of goals called back. Things weren't going in. But we got it going in the third," he added.

The Canadiens did not allow the Bruins a shot on goal until the game was more than 11 minutes in, but solid saves from Rask kept it scoreless.

Subban broke the deadlock at 10:53 of the second with Lucic serving a high-sticking penalty.

The flamboyant defenseman took a pass from Markov and saw his point shot go off Rich Peverley's stick and past Rask. It was Subban's first goal and third point in three games since he ended a holdout by signing a two-year contract.

The goal drew big applause from the Bell Centre crowd as Subban did the leg-lifted "Joel" pose in celebration.

It ended Boston's string of 16 straight penalty kills to start the season.

NOTES: Price left the ice in a hurry during pregame warmups after he was hit in the groin area by Lars Eller's shot, but was OK to play. ... Prospect Blake Geoffrion, who fractured his skull in an AHL game at the Bell Centre during the lockout, says he feels better and will be examined by a doctor in Montreal on Thursday to see when he can resume training. ... Montreal
scratched Tomas Kaberle, Ryan White and Yannick Weber. ... Boston was without Brad Marchand, Shawn Thornton and Daniel Paille because of injuries.

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Ducks acquire defenseman from the Penguins

Mike Brehm

The Anaheim Ducks acquired depth defenseman Ben Lovejoy from the Pittsburgh Penguins for a fifth-round pick in the 2014 draft.

Lovejoy had played his entire pro career for the Penguins organization, suiting up for a career-best 47 NHL games in 2010-11 with three goals, 17 points and a plus-11 rating.

Last year, he was limited to 34 games because of injuries and coach's decisions. His career totals are 25 points in 98 games.

This season, he had played in only three games because of the emergence of Simon Depres, getting no points and averaging a little more than 13 minutes a game. He was checked hard in the boards in a Jan. 29 game, earning New York Islanders forward Colin McDonald a two-game suspension. Lovejoy quickly got up and finished the game, but that was the last one he played for Pittsburgh.

Lovejoy also had a key part in one segment in HBO's 24/7 lead-up to the Winter Classic when prankster teammates moved furniture from his hotel room into the hallway. His response was, "We're going to find out who did it and probably do nothing about it."

The Ducks beefed up on defense during the offseason and are off to a strong start, but as the injury to Cam Fowler (day-to-day with an upper body injury) shows, blue-line depth is always appreciated. The Ducks had liked him for a few years.

The deal was the second one of the day.

Earlier, the New Jersey Devils acquired center Andrei Loktionov from the Los Angeles Kings in exchange for a 2013 fifth-rounder. He had 14 points in 59 career games and will be assigned to the Devils' American Hockey League affiliate.

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Short on time, Minnesota Wild shake up their offense

Devin Setoguchi and Mikael Granlund rotated spots on the third line with center Kyle Brodziak and Cal Clutterbuck. New acquisition Mike Rupp was on the fourth line with Torrey Mitchell and Zenon Konopka.

TRADE: Wild, Rangers pull off swap

Rupp, who came in a trade with the New York Rangers, will make his Wild debut against the Canucks.

"I'm just a complementary guy. There are a lot of good things going here," Rupp said. "This team is headed in the right direction. I'm excited to be a part of it and contribute in any way. Obviously, my game is to play physical. I'm going to try to come in here and help this team win hockey games any way I can."

Yeo joked that the 6-5, 245-pound Rupp already met one of his expectations: that he's big.

"For as big as he is, he moves well. He's got speed to get it in there on the forecheck and speed to get there and hit and play a physical game, but he's also got some hands," Yeo said. "He's also got the ability to get shots off and play in the offensive zone, so that's what we're looking for."

By calling up Coyle, trading Darroll Powe for Rupp and demoting Setoguchi and Granlund from the second line, the Wild have shown they're not willing to simply wait for one of the deepest group of forwards the franchise has had to produce.

From owner Craig Leipold to general manager Chuck Fletcher to Yeo and his staff, there's a demand of success that's hanging heavier over this team than before.

"Normally we've played nine games and you have more time to sort things out, but you don't have as much time," Yeo said. "So certainly it magnifies things. We just have to make sure that we're doing whatever we can to find the best mix to put the best product on the ice."

The Wild have scored only 21 goals in nine games.

"After the additions we've made, we feel we have a real good team in here. I believe there is urgency with that short season. We talked about it the other day: The last 15-20 games, you're not going to move very much in the standings, up or down," Heatley said. "These next 20 are huge for us."

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Things to know about Wednesday's NHL games

Mike Brehm,

Former NHL coach Jacques Demers had been behind the bench for rivalry games before 1992 but says they paled in comparison to a Montreal Canadiens-Boston Bruins matchup.

"As soon as I became coach of the Montreal Canadiens, I felt the tension of that rivalry even before the game started," he says. "I knew a week before that Boston was coming into town."

"Even though the players have changed, there's actually a hatred between the two teams."

If familiarity breeds contempt, the Original Six teams have that down.

Wednesday's game in Montreal will be their 718th regular-season meeting, the most played between two NHL teams.

Rivalries are built in the playoffs, where the Bruins and Canadiens have met 33 times, with Montreal winning 24. But the Bruins knocked off the Canadiens in the first round on their way to the 2011 Stanley Cup.

"They had battles in the playoffs," Demers says. "They had confrontations where the best played against the best."

Wednesday's matchup is important because the Canadiens trail the Bruins by one point in the Northeast Division standings. The Bruins will be without top-six winger Brad Marchand, who appeared to injure his shoulder when
he fell into the boards during Saturday's game against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

What has led Montreal's resurgence from last season's 15th-place finish in the Eastern Conference. The Canadiens changed general managers to Marc Bergevin and brought back Michel Therrien as coach. They have added ruggedness with Brandon Prust and Colby Armstrong, and healthy defenseman Andrei Markov has helped restore the power play.

"When you came into the Bell Centre last season, you as a visiting team were up 1-0," Demers says. "Now, Michel Therrien has changed that. Teams now come into the Bell Centre knowing they better bring their best game if they want to beat Montreal."

What else to know about Wednesday night's game:

- Edmonton Oilers forward Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is missing the game against the Dallas Stars because of an upper body injury. He was hurt near the end of the Vancouver game but could be back by Saturday.

- Colorado Avalanche has claimed Aaron Palushaj off waivers from the Canadiens, but it will be a game-time decision on whether he faces the Anaheim Ducks.

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Blue Jackets' Brandon Dubinsky fined $10,000

Kevin Allen

Columbus Blue Jackets forward Brandon Dubinsky was fined the maximum $10,000 for a boarding incident against Los Angeles Kings defenseman Rob Scuderi on Tuesday.

Dubinsky, who had a phone hearing Wednesday afternoon, checked Scuderi from behind into the boards in the second period, but the defenseman was not seriously injured on the play. He returned to the game and played more than 22 minutes.

Although Scuderi was clearly vulnerable on the play, Dubinsky appeared to try to make some effort to roll off the check. However, he did make head contact. The fact that he had no previous supplemental discipline history probably saved him from receiving a one-game suspension.

Kings center Mike Richards immediately instigated a fight with Dubinsky in retaliation for the hit. Richards received an instigator penalty in addition to a fighting major and a misconduct. Dubinsky received an additional 15 minutes for the fight.

The NHL increased the amount it could fine players under the new collective-bargaining agreement, up from $2,500. The money goes to the Players' Emergency Assistance Fund.

Brendan Shanahan, the league's supplemental discipline czar, has previously suspended three players this season: the Philadelphia Flyers' Brayden Schenn, the New York Islanders' Colin McDonald and Washington Capitals' John Erskine.

Dubinsky's $10,000 loss is more than the forfeited pay of Schenn and McDonald from their suspensions. But a one-game suspension would have cost Dubinsky more than $45,000.

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Mike Brehm,

For the second time in a week, an NHL on-ice official erroneously called a match penalty on a player, only to have it rescinded later.

And for the second time, it proved to be a game-turner.

This time, San Jose Sharks player Andrew Desjardins leveled Chicago Blackhawks forward Jamal Mayers with a clean shoulder-to-shoulder hit during the second period with the score tied 3-3. Blackhawks defenseman Duncan Keith reacted and fought Desjardins. He received an additional four minutes in the fight for instigating and being an instigator while wearing a visor. But because Desjardins got the five minutes for the hit to the head, instead of the Sharks being on a power play, there was four-on-four play.

"It was a terrible call," Sharks coach Todd McLellan told reporters after the game, according to The Associated Press. "I don't know if we're going to come back or not but at that point we're still in the game and we should have been on a four-minute power play. That's a good hockey hit, but the linesman called it. No one else saw it."

There's no guarantee that the Sharks would have scored on the power play, but Blackhawks winger Patrick Kane did score during the four-on-four. The match penalty was rescinded after the game.

"The way the linesman saw it on the ice, he was convinced it was a major penalty. Unfortunately, he was wrong," supervisor of officials Mick McGeough told a pool reporter, according to the AP. "It's been overruled, taken care of by the league and Brendan Shanahan and the safety committee, and there are no more issues right now."

Last week's match penalty had a more direct impact on the game.

St. Louis Blues captain David Backes hit Detroit Red Wings defenseman Kent Huskins with a hard but clean shoulder-to-chest check. Huskins' head snapped back from the force of impact and a referee behind the play, noticing that, called a hit to the head penalty.

MORE: Rough go for captains

Backes was ejected and the Red Wings were given a five-minute power play with a little more than 10 minutes left in the game. The Blues had to kill it off without one of their better penalty killers.

Pavel Datsyuk broke a tie during the power play and the Red Wings went on to win.

The match penalty was rescinded later.

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