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Winnipeg Jets

Jets selling game-used equipment this weekend
SPORT-SCAN, INC.  941-284-4129
Bruce Boudreau won't say which goalie will start for Ducks

By Lance Pugmire
7:05 PM PDT, April 30, 2014

The Ducks' goalie who will start the second-round playoff series at Honda Center this week is known by Bruce Boudreau, but the coach is declining to reveal his identity.

Jonas Hiller was the primary regular-season starter for the Western Conference's top-seeded team, but his 6-9-3 record to end the campaign swayed Boudreau to start 20-win rookie Frederik Andersen in all six games of the victorious first-round playoff series against the Dallas Stars.

Andersen was pulled from Game 4, returned to win Game 5, then was hooked again after giving up four goals on 12 shots in Game 6. Hiller came in and stopped all 12 shots he faced Sunday, and the Ducks rallied to an overtime victory.

Now?
"That's not tough, I think I've got it handled," Boudreau said. "I don't know if it's the right decision. We'll see."

Boudreau said he won't publicly name the starter because "sometimes, I just play the game. Make [the opponent] work harder to find out things."

Rest vs. reward
Clinching their series Sunday instead of battling through a taxing seventh game, as the Kings and San Jose Sharks did Wednesday night, was an appreciated break, most Ducks players said.

The time off is allowing centers Ryan Getzlaf (upper body) and Mathieu Perreault (lower body), forward Matt Beleskey (lower body) and defenseman Hampus Lindholm (neck) to recover from first-round injuries. Each expects to be ready to play Game 1.

But Boudreau said his team needs to be on guard for what his 2011 Washington Capitals suffered through. They sat and waited for Game 7 winner Tampa Bay, and proceeded to get swept.

"You call [home ice and rest] advantages, but the Game 7 high … [Tampa Bay] played like it was Game 7 in the first two games of the series and we played like they were the first two games, and we never caught up," Boudreau said.

As far as their next opponent, the Ducks responded from a nine-round shootout loss to the Kings in their first meeting Dec. 3 to sweep the next four games, and they clinched the Pacific Division over San Jose on April 9 to finish 2-2-1 against the Sharks.
SAN JOSE – Two years ago, the Kings won the first three games of every playoff series, then lifted the Stanley Cup. Perhaps they’re just trying to make things more interesting this time.

The NHL now has its fourth “reverse sweep” in history. The Kings overcame a Game 7 deficit and a swarming, about-to-score-anytime San Jose attack, scored five consecutive goals and ended the Sharks’ season with a 5-1 victory at SAP Center to end the first-round series.

“This is pretty incredible,” said Kings captain Dustin Brown, who scored the first of two empty-net goals late in the third period to clinch the game. The Kings will now face the Ducks in the second round, in the first playoff meeting of Southern California’s two teams. Game 1 is Saturday at Honda Center.

The Kings have joined the 1942 Toronto Maple Leafs, the 1975 New York Islanders and the 2010 Philadelphia Flyers as the only teams (out of 177) to complete the rally from a 3-0 series deficit.

A week ago, per historical precedent, the Kings had a 1.7 percent chance of winning the series. There’s history, and then there’s jaw-dropping history.

After dropping the series’ first three games, the Kings outscored the Sharks, 18-5.

“This is something I think we’re all going to remember for the rest of our lives, but we’re not done,” defenseman Drew Doughty said.

Doughty’s power-play goal tied the game five minutes into the second period, and Anze Kopitar scored a back-breaking go-ahead goal with 1:21 remaining in the second period. Tyler Toffoli’s goal 4:40 into the third period gave the Kings a 3-1 lead and the Kings dominated most the final 20 minutes.

The Sharks scored 17 goals in the first three games, then five goals in the last four games. The Kings can thank goalie Jonathan Quick, who made 39 saves in Game 7.

Usually strong, Quick turned marvelous in the last three games, when he allowed two goals on 96 shots. Quick also led the Kings’ penalty-kill unit, which went 6 for 6 in Game 7.

“They fixed their problems,” Sharks coach Todd McLellan said of the Kings. “We didn’t. Our problems got progressively worse as we went along.”

Not surprisingly, the first period of the winner-take-all game was tight, with a lot of neutral-zone banging and crashing and icing calls, caused by both teams trying for an early knockout goal.

After the first scoreless first period of the series – one with only one penalty – the second period couldn’t have been any more different. The first five minutes included a goal and three penalties.

The Sharks got early momentum when defenseman Matt Irwin scored 28 seconds into the second period. Irwin, in the lineup only because of an injury to Marc-Edouard Vlasic, controlled the puck at the top of the right circle, shot through traffic and cleanly beat Quick, who never saw the puck.

San Jose had a stellar chance to build momentum when the Kings’ Slava Voynov took an interference penalty 38 seconds after Irwin’s goal, but the Sharks didn’t score. That would become a theme.

The Sharks had four second-period power plays, including 12 shots on goal, but none of them beat Quick, who made a handful of terrific saves and bought the Kings some time to take the lead.

Doughty tied it, 1-1, at the 4:57 mark, after a scramble in front of goalie Antti Niemi. Jeff Carter tipped the puck back to Doughty, who ripped a one-time goal from the middle of the left circle.

The Kings then killed three consecutive San Jose power plays over a 10-minute span, one of which included the highlight save of the series. San Jose’s Patrick Marleau shot from point-blank range to the right of the net, but Quick’s glove shot up and snatched the puck just before it crossed the line.

Just 31 seconds after the end of another failed San Jose power play, the Kings took a 2-1 lead.

Justin Williams held the puck in the Sharks’ zone, near the right boards, then found Anze Kopitar in the slot. Kopitar, with far more free space than he should have been allowed, put a quick backhand move on Niemi from close range, then tucked the puck into the net with 1.21 remaining in the period.

The dagger came 4:40 into the third period. Tanner Pearson made a nice spin move in the Sharks’ zone, then found fellow rookie Tyler Toffoli with a quick pass. Toffoli, from fairly tight angle to the left of the net, roofed a shot past Niemi for his third goal of the series to put the Kings up, 3-1.
First goal comes at perfect time for Ducks' Rakell

BY ERIC STEPHENS / STAFF WRITER
Published: April 30, 2014 Updated: 9:59 p.m.

ANAHEIM – The first goal is the hardest. Maybe not in all cases, but it sure seemed that way to Rickard Rakell.

Twenty-one games are not an eternity but Rakell wondered when the moment would come where he would raise his stick in the air to celebrate a goal he scored in the NHL.

In deflecting in Francois Beauchemin’s shot during Game 5 against Dallas, Rakell became the first Ducks player to score his first NHL goal in the postseason.

“That almost makes it even better,” Rakell said. “I’ve been telling guys try to shoot at me because I can’t put it in myself. That was good. It was just what Beauch did. Had a great shot from the point. I’m happy it went off me and in.”

The goal was an important one as it came immediately after Jamie Benn’s shorthanded score and gave the Ducks a 2-1 lead they never relinquished. It also represented a breakthrough.

Rakell, 20, is playing a fourth-line role for the Ducks but the center has offensive skill that he has shown on the international stage for Sweden and in the minors with the Ducks’ American Hockey League affiliate in Norfolk (Va.).

There were “over 50” text messages that greeted Rakell when he turned on his cell phone after Game 5. And the phone calls were enough that he had to shut his phone off in order to get some sleep.

But the moment was bittersweet. Rakell’s parents have always tuned in his games dating to his days in junior hockey with the Ontario Hockey League’s Plymouth Whalers but his father did not see Game 5.

The reason: The elder was coaching at a tennis camp in Turkey.

“It was on my dad’s birthday,” Rakell said. “This was the first game he wasn’t able to see in my four years (in North America). The first game he couldn’t see and I scored. Kind of funny, actually.”

Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau put Rakell in for Game 4 against the Stars and has liked enough of what he has seen to keep him in the lineup.

“He’s a young guy and he’s going to make mistakes,” Boudreau said. “But he’s got top-end speed. He can make plays at top ends. He’s not afraid. He’ll take the body. He’ll go to the front of the net.”

There are growing pains for every player who breaks into the league. Rakell, whom the Ducks are very high on, has had his and likely will have more.

“He’ll make defensive mistakes but those are things that every young player has or does,” Boudreau said. “We just keep working with him and working with him. And hopefully, I know within a very short time, he’s going to get it.”

SCOUT TEAM

The Ducks had personnel in San Jose on a scouting mission for Game 7 of the Kings-Sharks series. Often in front of the television when it isn’t a game night, Boudreau was certainly an interested observer.

“As coaches, you’re always trying to dissect things,” Boudreau said. “But at the same time, you don’t want to over-complicate it. We’ve played each team five times. Other than the execution or the work ethic, I don’t think too much is going to change.

“A lot of times, it just comes down to how hard you work and how well you execute the system that you’re playing.”

Defendersen Ben Lovejoy isn’t a big fan of the long layoff as the Ducks will not have played since Sunday.

“I think that personally I was hoping the (Kings-Sharks) series would end last game because I hate having this week of practice,” Lovejoy said. “I think that no matter who we’re going to be playing, they’re going to be coming in with a successful Game 7 mentality.
Make No Mistake: History Favors the Bruins Over the Canadiens

Jerard Fagerberg
@JGFagerberg
Boston.com Correspondent
April 30, 2014 10:34 AM

Don’t let the ghost stories scare you.

On the eve of the conference semifinals Game 1 against the Montreal Canadiens, many Bruins fans are sweating a 34th postseason matchup with the bleu, blanc, et rouge. Many have cited the Habs’ momentum coming off a triumphant four-game sweep of the Tampa Bay Lightning as well as their historical success in the 33 previous extracurricular meetings between these two teams as causes for panic, but none of this matters. Even with their 24 wins over the Bruins, Canadiens are still the underdog.

If we're defining this matchup on history, let it be recent history.

Yes, the Montreal Canadiens made mincemeat of the Lightning in four games, dicing Yzerman's boys in four straight. How does their series sweep compare to the Bruins trouncing the Red Wings in four consecutive? Both opponents were banged-up - with the Wings missing Henrik Zetterberg for four games and Jimmy Howard for two and the Bolts going in sans Vezina nominee Ben Bishop. It might be worth noting that three of Montreal's wins came by a single goal, but at least they didn’t cough up a loss. The Canadiens managed 16 goals, two more than the Bruins in one less game.

Though the two matchups may look qualitatively similar, there are two aspects that give the Bruins a definite edge in this year’s playoff play: goaltending and special teams.

Let’s start with goaltending. Tuukka Rask, the Bruins’ own Vezina candidate, has been on point since the conclusion of the regular season. Via ESPN:

Carey Price (2.33 GAA, .904 SV%) will need to be better if he hopes to outduel Rask (1.16 GA, .961 SV%, 1 SO), who has proven to be a game-breaker in the first round.

On the man advantage, the B’s boast a 37.5 percent success rate (6 for 16), more than doubling the Habs' 15.4 percent (2 for 13). Montreal has also forfeited a shorthanded goal and only killed 71.4 percent of their penalties (though they scored a shorty in the process). Boston's 90 percent PK rate is best in the East, and their powerplay units are surging out of their defeat of Detroit, which makes the special teams matchup a clear win for the Black and Gold, especially with four of the possible seven faceoffs taking place at the TD Garden.

The Ghosts of the Montreal Forum are a myth. They've long since been exorcised, when the 1987-88 Bruins took down the Habs' indomitable 18-series streak. Hell, the Montreal Forum hasn’t existed for nearly 16 years. It's been 21 years since its former tenets skated a championship lap with Lord Stanley's prize, and they haven’t been back to the Cup finals since.

The Bruins, on the other hand, have won seven of the last 11 playoff battles between the Original Six rivals, including the last two. They took home the Cup in 2010-11, coming just two wins shy of repeating in 2012-13. They haven’t missed the postseason since Claude Julien took over in 2007.

So put away your Ouija Boards. Tell your young priest and old priest to take the next two weeks off. The Bruins have proven this year – and for the last 10 years – that they’re the better team.

History be damned.

Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated that the Bruins won the Stanley Cup in 2011-12. This has been updated to 2010-11.
Eastern Conference Semifinal Matchups are Set

Jeff Pini
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Boston.com Staff

With the New York Rangers win over the Philadelphia Flyers in Game 7 of their first round playoff series, both matchups for the 2014 Eastern Conference Semifinals are now set.

The series to determine the Atlantic Division’s representative in the conference final will get underway Thursday night, as the Bruins and Canadiens meet in the playoffs for the 34th time.

The Bruins dispatched the Detroit Red Wings in five games to clinch their spot in the second round, while the Canadiens swept the Tampa Bay Lightning to earn a second round berth for the first time since 2010. The Bruins have home-ice throughout the series, hosting Games 1, 2, 5, and 7, while Games 3, 4, and 6 will take place at the Bell Centre in Montreal.

These two teams last met in the playoffs in the 2011 quarterfinals, when the Bruins won Game 7 on an overtime goal by Nathan Horton on their way to winning their first Stanley Cup championship in 39 years.

The Metropolitan Division’s conference final participant will be either the Rangers or the Pittsburgh Penguins. It took six games for the Penguins to get past the Columbus Blue Jackets in the first round, while the Rangers survived the only seven-game series in the Eastern Conference’s opening round.

The Penguins will host Games 1, 2, 5, and 7 in the series and the Rangers will have home-ice for Games 3, 4, and 6.

The Penguins and Rangers last met in the playoffs in 2008, when Pittsburgh took down New York in five games on their way to the Stanley Cup Final, which they lost to the Red Wings.

Boston Globe LOADED: 05.01.2014
First 40 Minutes of Rangers-Flyers Game 7 Shows two Very Different Teams

Jeff Pini
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Through two periods in the Game 7 that will decide who will face the Pittsburgh Penguins in the second round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, it has been a tale of two different goaltenders: one who is leading his team with timely stops, the other who is being let down by his defense.

Henrik Lundquist of the New York Rangers has been sensational, stopping all of the 16 shots he has faced and his offense has made the most of their chances. The Rangers defense in front of him has played strong as well, blocking 17 shots and made sure to clean up any rebounds that have gotten through to the New York net.

Steve Mason of the Philadelphia Flyers has also been good, but he is the only reason the Flyers are still in this game. The Flyers’ netminder has saved 26 of the 28 shots that have come his way, but the Rangers have also been able to walk into the Flyers zone uncontested and have moved the puck well around a Philadelphia defense that seems content to watch the action in front of them.

Both Rangers goals scored in the period came with the Flyers’ either being out of position or letting the Rangers rush the net uncontested, leaving their goaltender out to dry, as seen in these GIFs produced by @myregularface:

so both Rangers goals were pretty similar.... on Twitpic

The Flyers offense, which actually led in shots 11-10 after the first period, has also fallen asleep, unable to get any fluid rhythm going in the Rangers’ zone, despite being given two power plays in the period to the Rangers’ zero. New York outshot Philadelphia 18-5 in the second period.

Flyers’ coach Craig Berube face after the second New York goal in the second period summed up exactly how he felt about his team’s play so far, displayed in another GIF courtesy of @myregularface:

Berube reaction to the Rangers second goal, for @MikeDarnay on Twitpic

The Flyers will need to do something drastic in the intermission to get their mindset back into this game in the final 20 minutes if they hope to extend their season past tonight’s winner-take-all with the Rangers.

Boston Globe LOADED: 05.01.2014
At 42 years young and an NHL career spanning 1,473 games, Jaromir Jagr has been through just about everything a player can in the league, but don’t think he’s stopping anytime soon.

The two-time Stanley Cup champion and former Bruin re-signed with the New Jersey Devils for the 2014-15 season, the team announced on Wednesday. The details of his one-year contract were not released.

Jagr was named the most valuable player on the Devils this season, leading the team in assists with 43, points with 67, and plus-minus with a +16, while finishing second on the team in goals with 24.

Jagr has won five Art Ross Trophies in his NHL career, and won the Hart Trophy as NHL MVP in 1998-99. Along with fellow Penguins legend Mario Lemieux, he helped lead Pittsburgh to back-to-back Stanley Cups in 1991 and 1992, his first two years in the league.

Jagr was acquired by the Bruins from the Dallas Stars at the trade deadline in 2013 and played 11 regular season games for the B’s, scoring two goals and seven assists, eventually finding a home on the Bruins’ second line with Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand.

He didn’t score any goals in the playoffs for the B’s, but did assist on 10 scores. After the Bruins swept his former Pittsburgh club to win the 2013 Eastern Conference championship, Jagr set the league record for most seasons between Stanley Cup Final appearances, going 21 years between trips to the Final.

On Tuesday, one day before his re-signing, it was announced Jagr was named a finalist for the 2013-14 Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, given the NHL player who best exemplifies perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.

Boston Globe LOADED: 05.01.2014
Bruins winger Brad Marchand returns to practice

Wednesday, April 30, 2014
Steve Conroy

Brad Marchand, who sounded like he was battling an illness of some sort, was back at practice today in his usual spot on the line with Patrice Bergeron and Reilly Smith, which dropped Daniel Paille into his regular slot on the fourth line with Gregory Campbell and Shawn Thornton.

While Marchand sounded a bit hoarse when speaking to reporters after practice, he wasn’t about to explain Tuesday’s absence.

"Just felt like taking the day off," he said. "Called Claude (Julien) and said I'm not coming in. He's a good guy like that."

Sniffles or not, Marchand sounded like he was ready to get going for Round 2 against the Montreal Canadiens, which begins tomorrow night at the Garden (7:30). And he's ready to renew his personal rivalry with defenseman P.K. Subban. He said he and his Bruins teammates have to stay disciplined.

"He's one of the top D-men in the league. He plays an all-around game, he's very physical and he's really good with the puck," said Marchand. "We're not going to treat him differently from any other player. We just have to play our game and whenever we do have a chance to hit him, we want to hit him. We can't get sucked into his game, but that's what he does. He gets guys off their game so we can't allow ourselves to get sucked in like that."

While neither team really needs any more rest, Julien said Game 1 is coming a little quicker than anticipated.

"We had to make some adjustments (in preparation). At first, it looked like maybe a Friday, maybe Saturday (start). There was a lot of that talk, but there was never any talk about Thursday," said Julien. "You plan accordingly and then you find out last night that you have to move a little quicker. That's just part of making adjustments as you go along."

While Dennis Seidenberg continued practicing with the team, abstaining for battle drills, Chris Kelly remained off the ice. He has not skated since hurting his back on April 8 in Minnesota and his return to the lineup does not appear to be at all close.

Boston Herald LOADED: 05.01.2014
Five keys to a Bruins victory against the Habs

Thursday, May 1, 2014

Stephen Harris

1. Power play must remain plugged in
When the Bruins and Canadiens met in 2011, the B’s became the first NHL team ever to win a seven-game series without scoring a power-play goal (21 chances). It’s a very different story this time around as the Boston power play is coming off a 6-for-16 effort in Round 1. Games that were so close in ’11 (three decided in OT), may be settled earlier by the Bruins’ special teams.

2. Better play from third line
Both teams have strong third lines that could play key roles. For the Habs, center Lars Eller and wingers Brian Gionta and Rene Bourque led the team with 6-5—11 totals in the first-round sweep of Tampa Bay. For the B’s, Carl Soderberg, Loui Eriksson and Justin Florek produced a modest 2-2—4.

3. Forecheck must come to forefront
The Canadiens rely heavily on four defensemen: P.K. Subban (average 26:05 ice time), Andrei Markov (27:09), Josh Gorges (23:20) and Alexei Emelin (23:59). Constant contact from Boston forecheckers can wear them down over a long series.

4. Rask needs to be great
The Red Wings rarely tested Tuukka Rask (4-1-0, 1.16, .961), but he figures to be far busier in this round. Rask hasn’t had great success vs. Montreal this season (or in his career, for that matter), but needs to outplay Carey Price (4-0-0, 2.33, .904).

5. Play hard ... between the whistles
To beat the Canadiens, the Bruins have to play with plenty of passion — even hatred. But they can’t be goaded into dumb penalties by Subban, Emelin, Brendan Gallagher or others. The frequent mayhem between these teams is fun to watch, but it won’t help the B’s.

Boston Herald LOADED: 05.01.2014
Milan Lucic lives for this stuff

Thursday, May 1, 2014
Steve Conroy

Milan Lucic will embark tonight on what could be two weeks of hand-to-hand combat and a test of wills against Montreal Canadiens defenseman Alexei Emelin.

And as he smiled in anticipation of it all yesterday, Lucic looked like a kid on Christmas Eve.

He’s been here before, he knows the drill and these mano-a-mano confrontations are what he likes about his sport.

“Him being a right D-man and me being a left wing, by the forces of nature we end up meeting out there on the ice,” Lucic said after practice at the Garden. “He’s a guy that plays physical and doesn’t shy away in the first four games we’ve played throughout the season. You don’t expect that to change heading into the playoffs. That’s what makes rivalries rivalries and playoffs great, because you have battles within the game, games within the games. I know that’s one of the things a lot people are looking at, that battle. You know he’s going to be game, you know he’s going to be physical and you just have to be prepared for that.”

Lucic inadvertently ended the 6-foot-2, 224-pound Emelin’s season last year when, just before the playoffs on April 6, Emelin stepped up for one of his patented big hits in the neutral zone. The 6-3, 235-pound Lucic was a little too much weight for Emelin and his knee buckled on impact, knocking him out for the rest of the season, which ended quickly for the Habs in the first round.

In the four meetings this season, the two have engaged in their ongoing battle, especially in the last two games. On March 12 at the Bell Centre, they led their respective teams in hits as the B’s recorded their lone win in the season series. Lucic had five hits, Emelin four and they were mostly against each other. Lucic also scored a goal in the 4-1 win.

In the March 24 game at the Garden in which the Habs snapped the B’s 12-game win streak, things took a nasty turn. Emelin upended Lucic on a low but legal check early in the game, prompting Lucic to label Emelin “chicken” after the game for not standing up and bearing the brunt of the hit.

Emelin has just three goals this season, but two came against the Bruins, including the Canadiens’ lone regulation tally on March 24.

This current passion play is reminiscent of Lucic’s feud with former Montreal defenseman Mike Komisarek early in his career.

“It definitely brings up that old battle, for sure,” Lucic said. “That was a lot of a fun to be a part of and I’m sure this one will be as well.”

Asked if he truly hated the Canadiens, Lucic chuckled.

“Yeah, I do. If you asked them the same question I’m sure they’d give you the same answer, that they hate us,” he said. “It’s just natural for me, being here for seven years now and just being part of this organization, you just naturally learn to hate the Montreal Canadiens with the battles that we’ve had against them over the last couple of years. It’s definitely made you hate them.

“And this being the first time we’ve met them outside of the first round I think it’s definitely going to go up another level.”

But it will be Lucic’s task to harness his emotions and not put himself in the penalty box, or worse. In a 2008-09 sweep of Montreal, he served a one-game suspension for a cross-check to the head of Maxim Lapierre.

If the Bruins get mad, they need to take it out on their opponent via the forecheck, not with a punch after the whistle.

“That’s what’s given us the most success, by not crossing that line and staying within ourselves and playing our game, being physical and playing that heavy type of game,” Lucic said. “It’s worked for us in the past and it’s worked for us throughout the year. That’s what our main focus is, going out and establish ourselves within the series. But I don’t think you have to cross any lines in order to intimidate anyone.”
In his 16 NHL seasons in Calgary, the biggest rivalry Jarome Iginla experienced was between the Flames and the Edmonton Oilers.

On the surface, the "Battle of Alberta" is nowhere near as heated as the rivalry between the Bruins and Montreal Canadiens. Iginla will get his true first taste of the historic hatred in tonight's Game 1 of the Eastern Conference second-round series.

The 36-year-old winger said he has never felt any ill will toward the Habs, but he is looking forward to trying to end their season.

"I don't really know what to expect," Iginla said yesterday at B's practice. "I haven't experienced the playoffs between the two teams. I know that there's that history and both buildings will be electric. But to be honest, to me, they're in the way of where we want to go. My focus is just going to try and find ways to beat them. It's not going to be personal from my point of view, it's just trying to beat them, end their season and keep ours going."

For a player in his 17th season, Iginla has experienced a few firsts in his first year with the Bruins.

With the Flames, Iginla was the leader on and off the ice. He was also the go-to man for interviews. In his first full season out of Calgary, and after finishing 2012-13 with the Pittsburgh Penguins, Iginla has been able to step back a bit. With guys like defenseman &deno Chara, center Patrice Bergeron and forward Chris Kelly on the B's, Iginla doesn't have to be "the guy" when it comes to speaking with the media.

"It's been a lot of fun as far as interviews and stuff there's definitely a few more days off," Iginla said. "It's just been great to be in the locker room with these guys and to learn from different guys and be a part of the group. It's been a fun year. We've had success and it's great to be here in the second round, and we want to keep going."

After putting up 61 points (30 goals, 31 assists) in the regular season, Iginla had four points (two goals, two assists) in five first-round playoff games against the Detroit Red Wings.

Iginla admits he's never been in an intense rivalry like he's about to experience. When he was with the Flames, he never faced the Oilers in the postseason. The closest he got to a heated playoff series was when Calgary took on the Vancouver Canucks in 2004.

"But not anything with a history of these two teams that has gone back, I don't know, 100 years," Iginla said. "I look forward to it. It's pretty cool to be a part of. It'll be interesting to see and see how things unfold."

Boston Herald LOADED: 05.01.2014
Bruins-Canadiens playoff matchups

Thursday, May 1, 2014
Steve Conroy

If you are of a certain age and grew up rooting for the Bruins, then all rationality goes out the window when discussing their rivalry with the Canadiens. The scars of 1971 run deep (not to mention a few other years), so there is no such thing as a comfort level when entering a series with Montreal, even though Zdeno Chara and Max Pacioretty have nothing to do with Bobby Orr and Jean Beliveau.

That's why you can give the Bruins the edge in just about every category and at the end feel that, yes, it is very possible for the Canadiens to steal this series.

But the feeling here is that the B's, clear favorites, will not be weighed down by the lofty expectations or spoofed by the ghosts. They are not only the better team, two trips to the Finals over three years have made this team the most mentally tough squad outside of the Blackhawks.

It will not be easy. There will be sweaty palms in New England for the next two weeks. A flat screen or two might get tossed out the window. But the Bruins will prevail. This is their time.

Then again, so was 1971.

Here's a look at the matchup:

FORWARDS

BRUINS
Milan Lucic David Krejci Jarome Iginla
Brad Marchand Patrice Bergeron Reilly Smith
Justin Florek Carl Soderberg Loui Eriksson
Daniel Paille Gregory Campbell Shawn Thornton

CANADIENS
Max Pacioretty David Desharnais Thomas Vanek
Brandon Prust Tomas Plekanec Brendan Gallagher
Rene Bourque Lars Eller Brian Gionta
Dale Weise Daniel Briere
Travis Moen
Michael Bournival

SKINNY: A sense of dread came over many Bruins fans at the trade deadline when the Habs landed Vanek, a Bruins killer who has 30-32—62 totals in 55 career games against the B's. His line, with rising star Pacioretty and diminutive Desharnais, can be explosive. Plekanec is a good two-way center who can frustrate Krejci and Bourque had three goals in the Habs' four-game sweep of the Lightning. If Alex Galchenyuk can return from a knee injury, which is a possibility, it might put the Habs over the top in this category.

Meanwhile, the B's four-line attack was one of their hallmarks on their march to the Presidents' Trophy. They keep grinding and forechecking until the opposition makes key mistakes. Witness Johan Franzen's Game 5 giveaway to Torey Krug that just about ended the first round. The return of Daniel Paille should raise the fourth line's energy level, though the unit did perform well with Jordan Caron. He'll also help the PK. Smith's performance against Detroit showed he's up for the postseason task. One thing the B's — and not just Marchand — have to do better is cash in on their scoring chances. They left a few too many goals out on the ice against Detroit.

EDGE:
Bruins
DEFENSE

BRUINS
Zdeno Chara Dougie Hamilton
Matt Bartkowski Johnny Boychuk
Torey Krug Kevan Miller

CANADIENS
Andrei Markov Alexei Emelin
Josh Gorges P.K. Subban

FRANCIS BOUILLON MIKE WEAVER

SKINNY: Emelin suffered a season-ending knee injury last April when he tried to check Milan Lucic and the Habs limped their way to a first-round defeat. They are a different team with him in there, but he and Markov can be worn down over the course of a long series. Emelin's running battle with Lucic will be an ongoing storyline. Both Markov and chief Bruins antagonist Subban are excellent offensive players and decent defenders. Gorges is a solid character player, as is Bouillon. The undersized Weaver can be had at times, but he had a good first round (plus-5).

Chara, meanwhile, earned his sixth Norris Trophy nomination for good reason, and his partner, Hamilton, has been keeping the promise of his pedigree. Boychuk has developed into a reliable second pair man. In the Wings series, Krug not only provided offensive pop from the back end, but defensively was able to move the puck quickly out of danger. Miller is more than just a third pair man, often stepping up to play big, late shifts with Chara.

EDGE:
Bruins
GOALIE

BRUINS
Tuukka Rask
Chad Johnson

CANADIENS
Carey Price

PETER BUĐAJ

SKINNY: Rask is the favorite for the Vezina Trophy, but Price was very much in the conversation before missing time after the Olympics. Rask's career mark against the Habs has been bad, with a record of 3-10-3, a 2.63 GAA and .908 save percentage. But while he was 1-2-1 against Montreal this season, he was much better, posting a 1.95 GAA and .932 save percentage. Price has a 17-8-3-1 career record against the B's with a 2.50 GAA and .919 save percentage. Rask, who has yet to play Montreal in a playoff series, was terrific in the first round against Detroit (1.16 GAA, .961), with his only loss coming in a 1-0 Game 1 decision. While the Habs swept Tampa Bay, Price was not nearly as airtight. He had a .904 save percentage and a 2.33 GAA. If Price falters badly, backup Budaj has played well against the B's (5-2-0-1 career mark, 2-1 this season).

EDGE:
Bruins

SPECIAL TEAMS

SKINNY: We are living in Bizarro World. The Bruins had one of the best power plays in the regular season (third overall, 21.7 percent) and are tops in the playoffs thus far (37.5 percent). Meanwhile, the Habs' man-advantage has been barely average. They finished 19th in the regular season (17.2 percent) and are ninth in the playoffs at 15.4 percent.

On the penalty kill, the Habs (fourth, 85.1 percent kill rate) were better than the B's (eighth, 83.6) in the regular season, but Boston killed off 90 percent in the first round (third), while the Habs were at 71.4 percent (15th). In the season series, both PKs were strong, with the B's cashing in once in 13 attempts and the Habs scoring twice in 17 chances.

EDGE:
Bruins

COACHES
BRUINS
Claude Julien

CANADIENS
Michel Therrien

SKINNY: A Therrien-coached Habs team upset a heavily favored Bruins team in 2002 before he was axed the next season and replaced by the up-and-coming Julien, whose Habs would stun an even more heavily favored Bruins team in 2004. Therrien would take a talent-laden Penguins team to the Stanley Cup Finals in 2008, but wasn’t allowed to finish the job, getting fired the next year and having to watch Dan Bylsma get the Pens over the hump. He was surprisingly rehired by Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin last year and got the Habs to the playoffs before the team imploded against Ottawa in the first round. He’s had some battles with his players throughout the year, including with Subban, and we’ll see if that element rears its head when the Habs face some adversity. Julien, meanwhile, has a Cup and a second trip to the Finals on his resume. He’s widely regarded as one of the top coaches in the league.

EDGE:
Bruins

THE PICK
Bruins in 7:
There’s a rule that says it has to go seven, isn’t there?

REGULAR SEASON STATISTICS
BOSTON MONTREAL
Home record31-7-3 23-12-6
Road record23-13-5 23-15-3
Goals per game3.15 (3rd) 2.55 (21st)
Goals against per game2.08 (2nd) 2.45 (8th)
Power play21.7%, (3rd) 17.2% (19th)
Penalty kill83.6% (8th) 85.1% (4th)
Blocked shots1,491 (1st) 1,051 (21st)
Hits2,008 (12th) 1,722 (20th)
Giveaways608 (20th) 646 (13th)
Takeaways552 (14th) 446 (27th)
Faceoffs51.6% (8th) 49.6% (17th)
Plus/minusplus-80 (1st) plus-3 (14th)
PIMs per game10.8 (15th) 13 (26th)
Major penalties46 (28th) 43 (26th)
Minor penalties292 (12th) 331 (25th)

Boston Herald LOADED: 05.01.2014
Tuukka Rask’s overall numbers against the Montreal Canadiens are, well, very unRask-like.

Over his career, Rask has gone an unsightly 3-10-3 against the Habs with a .906 save percentage and a 2.63 goals-against average — well below his career norm.

In terms of the bottom line, that trend continued this season with Rask posting a 1-2-1 record. But Rask was better against Montreal than his record indicates. He posted a .932 save percentage and a 1.95 GAA, both of which were actually better than his overall Vezina Trophy-worthy marks of .930 and 2.04.

Do those numbers give him any extra confidence going against the Habs?

“Yeah, I guess so,” Rask said with the shrug of a player ever-confident in his abilities. “I think it’s just been that I’ve had some tough games against them. But I’ve had some good games against them, too. There just haven’t been the wins. I just try to do my job. We lose games, 2-1, 3-2, it happens. And maybe we haven’t been at our best against them in the past, but I think this year we got better and better.”

Rask’s best game against the Habs was in the B’s lone victory in Montreal, when he stopped 35-36 shots in the 4-1 March 12 win.

While prepping for his first playoff series against the Canadiens, he knows what he’s up against, especially in Montreal.

“I know what it’s like playing there,” Rask said. “And as a team we always get caught in the hype and the crowd is great. And then they have the tendency to get the power plays. And if they get the early lead, you’re pretty much screwed. So I think if you survive that, I think you’re in good shape. But I always like the atmosphere there despite my record.”

The Bruins face one of the league’s top goalies in Carey Price, who was battling for the Vezina Trophy before he suffered a lower-body injury at the Olympics. That head-to-head rivalry doesn’t matter much to Rask.

“It’s good for the fans and good for the media,” Rask said. “I know him a little bit. A great guy, a great goalie. But it’s not like we can score on each other, so we just try to stop the puck.”

Marchand back at it

Brad Marchand, who sounded as though he had been battling an illness, was back at practice yesterday in his usual spot on the line with Patrice Bergeron and Reilly Smith, dropping Daniel Paille into his regular slot on the fourth line with Gregory Campbell and Shawn Thornton.

While Marchand sounded a bit hoarse when speaking to reporters after practice, he wasn’t about to explain Tuesday’s absence.

“Just felt like taking the day off,” he said. “Called (coach) Claude (Julien) and said I’m not coming in. He’s a good guy like that.”

It was the first time Marchand spoke to reporters since the B’s Game 5 victory over the Red Wings in which he was called for two roughing penalties in the third period, both of which smacked of reputation calls. Did he feel like a marked man?

“Definitely, especially on the second one,” Marchand said. “It was a push and you don’t see too many penalties called on that, even in peewee. It was tough, but that’s the reputation I’ve built for myself and I just have to play through that. The biggest thing is I have to walk away from things I don’t need to be a part of.”

The league’s officials seem to have a lower tolerance for a lot of the agitating fouls this playoff season, the most obvious of which was Colorado’s Gabriel Landeskog getting called for giving Minnesota goalie Darcy Kuemper a snow shower late in the third period of a one-goal contest in Game 5 of that series, a ridiculous call considering the circumstances.

“Definitely, especially on the second one,” Marchand said. “It was a push and you don’t see too many penalties called on that, even in peewee. It was tough, but that’s the reputation I’ve built for myself and I just have to play through that. The biggest thing is I have to walk away from things I don’t need to be a part of.”

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BROSSARD, Quebec — The Canadiens have been very careful not to engage in a war of words with the Bruins leading into the second-round series that begins tonight at the Garden.

Chances are they will be chirping away on the ice when the series starts.

“You don’t ever want to give your opponent motivation,” Montreal defenseman Josh Gorges said this week, “so you gotta watch what you say because being here long enough I know that you guys (media) will ask questions to try and get us to say something where you’ll take part of it and only print that one part of it to make us sound like we’re trash-talking the other team or we think we’re better than we are.

“Whatever it may be, you gotta be cautious of what you’re being asked and how you may answer it.”

Gorges pointed out that, on paper and in terms of accomplishments, the Canadiens aren’t in a position to trash-talk the Bruins.

“There’s nothing for us to really say that should give them any bulletin-board material,” Gorges said. “They’ve won a Stanley Cup in the last four years, were there again last year and they’re the Presidents’ Trophy winners. But we haven’t accomplished any of that so we’re trying to surpass the top team.

“This is the best team in the NHL. So we know what challenge lies ahead of us. It’s going to be tough, it’s going to be hard and we gotta focus on ourselves and what makes us good.”

Yet the Bruins made no efforts to hide their dislike for their longtime rivals.

“I hated Boston when I was in Montreal, and I hate Montreal now that I’m in Boston,” said Bruins coach Claude Julien when asked about the rivalry between the two clubs.

Julien, of course, took over for current Montreal coach Michel Therrien and coached the Canadiens from 2002-06. He has established himself as one of the elite NHL coaches since taking over the Bruins bench for the 2007-08 season.

Yesterday, Therrien was asked about how open the Bruins have been with their hatred.

“We’re focusing on us,” Therrien said. “For me it’s not about the Bruins, it’s about the moment and preparing ourselves for the first game of the second round.”

Therrien was then asked twice if he hates the Bruins.

“I have no comment,” he said after not answering the first time.
The gospel, according to Claude Julien, says there are no big games for the Bruins, no special opponents, no challenges that demand any extraordinary effort. There is only the next game, the next chance to execute The System.

That's the goal game after game for all 18 skaters: Do your job, work hard, play smart, and the wins will take care of themselves. Stay away from the emotional highs and lows. One opponent is the same as any other. We don't worry about what the other team does, only about what we want to do.

The mindset has a track record of success, and it's the approach many players were describing yesterday about tonight's opening game in the 34th playoff series between the B's and Montreal Canadiens.

The name on the opponent's sweaters really doesn't matter, the Bruins said. It's just another game.

Yeah, right. Like anybody actually believes that.

Sorry, it might not be team doctrine, but there is every reason to believe something mighty special could unfold as these two talented teams, who share hatred for each other, collide in the coming days. Who can imagine what bizarre twists and turns this series might take?

Is it really going to be just another playoff matchup, no different than playing Tampa Bay or Columbus?

“For us, we have to take it as (just) another game,” B’s center David Krejci said yesterday. “Obviously we know the media are bigger, there are more people in the room and people talk about it more. We’re aware of that. But on the other hand, we have to stay focused on the job we have to do. You don’t get emotions too high. Then you start taking stupid penalties, and it can cost you a game. You really have to prepare yourself for the job you have to do. Winning is not going to be easy. The intensity is going to be high on both sides. . . So I just try to go out there, stay calm and play the game the right way.”

Staying calm sometimes gets difficult for the Bruins against the Canadiens, who have proven a difficult matchup recently, winning six of the past seven regular-season meetings. And, of course, the majority of the history in this 85-year-old rivalry has favored Montreal, which has won 24 of the 33 postseason series and 102 of 170 playoff games.

The Bruins posted an NHL-leading 117 points this season, and the Canadiens weren’t half bad with 100. Though Montreal won 3-of-4 regular-season meetings, the B’s are favored in the series by oddsmakers.

“They’ve been giving us a hard time this year,” Krejci said. “For some reason, they know how to play against us. Same story as Detroit (which) finished eighth, but they played well against us (this season). The Canadiens are not exactly the same team but pretty similar. It was good preparation for us.

“But we go into the series and it’s 0-0. No one has any advantage. We just go out there and try to win the first game.”

Krejci said the Bruins were a trifle surprised by the news late Tuesday that the series would open tonight.

“It’s better. I like it this way,” he said. “We don’t have to sit and wait for what’s going to happen. We can start preparing ourselves for (tonight). It’s always better to play hockey than to practice.”

As the Bruins prepared for the Canadiens, you can bet puck management was stressed — the importance of avoiding careless, rushed passes that lead to turnovers. This is Hockey 101, but the Habs are a team that plays surprisingly strong defense and loves to wait patiently for turnovers, then counterattack hard.

In the frenzied, high-pressure atmosphere of the Bell Centre, cool and calculated puck management is easier said than done.

“If you give a team a chance, they’re going to try to shove it down your throat,” B’s defenseman Johnny Boychuk said. “We just want to do the same
Ken King says nothing has changed.
He still considers Glens Falls, N.Y., a suitable location for the Calgary Flames’ top affiliate.
"The top candidate right now," the Flames president said, via text, Wednesday night, "but not the only one."
A report early in the day, however, had suggested the deal is done.
"There’s nothing to confirm," maintained King, "but we are considering it."
WNYT-TV NewsChannel 13, citing unnamed sources, insists that an agreement in principle is in place between the city and the organization. The official announcement, apparently, would arrive next week, pending approval of the American Hockey League.
For city and team, it would appear to be a nice fit.
The Flames — whose agreement with Abbotsford was terminated on April 14 — are looking for a market for their AHL franchise.
And Glens Falls needs to find a tenant for the Civic Center.
The city had been home to the Adirondack Phantoms, but, after five seasons, they’re pulling up stakes and heading for Allentown, Penn.
Geographically, Glens Falls, in upstate New York, is ideal.
Abbotsford had stood as the lone AHL outpost in the Pacific time zone. Contrast that to the road life of the Phantoms, who — get this — spent only 13 nights in hotels this past winter.
“One of the challenges we had, notwithstanding the economics, was the team travel,” King said two weeks ago. “The (Heat) has played really well, but they’re up against massive travel, substantially fewer practice opportunities. So that’s one of the criteria — can you get in a location that’s efficient for travel? And can you put yourself in a city that’s the kind of place you’d want to be with young men that are developing to proceed to the NHL?”
Report: Calgary Flames moving AHL club to New York

By RANDY SPORTAK, Calgary Sun

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The city of Glens Falls, N.Y., has an arena in need of a minor-league hockey tenant.

The Calgary Flames need a home for their top affiliate.

It appears the obvious marriage is readying to take place.

The Flames are finalizing a deal to move their AHL club to the central New York city, reported WNYT on Wednesday, which also said a deal will be announced next week.

Flames president Ken King said via e-mail: “Considering it among others.”

Glens Falls was home to the Adirondack Phantoms for the past five seasons, but the Philadelphia Flyers are moving their AHL team next season to Allentown, Penn.

The Flames affiliate has been the Abbotsford Heat since 2009, but the B.C. city terminated the agreement a few weeks ago, citing losses of more than $7 million over the five years, and paid $5.5 million to sever ties.

The Heat trail 2-1 to the Grand Rapids Griffins in the best-of-five opening-round AHL playoffs.

While Abbotsford’s proximity to Calgary was a benefit to the Flames in terms of recalling players, it was for difficult logistics and resulted in high costs. The AHL city nearest to Abbotsford was Oklahoma City, which made for lengthy road trips and lost practice time to develop the team’s prospects.

Glens Falls is in close proximity to many AHL teams, including five other teams in New York state — in Utica, Binghampton, Rochester, Syracuse and Albany — and seven teams in New England.

The Phantoms reportedly spent a mere 13 nights in hotels all of last season.

Since restarting their own farm team on a full-time basis in ‘05, the Flames have put their top prospects in Omaha for two seasons and in Moline, Ill., for another couple of seasons.

Glens Falls was also home to the Adirondack Red Wings, the top club of the Detroit Red Wings, from 1979 through ’99.

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 05.01.2014
It was hardly a surprise that Manny Malhotra was the Carolina Hurricanes' nominee this season for the 2014 Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy.

Nor should it be a surprise he's among the three finalists for the annual award.

The NHL announced Wednesday that Malhotra, New Jersey Devils forward Jaromir Jagr and New York Rangers forward Dominic Moore were the finalists. The winner will be announced June 24 during the NHL Awards in Las Vegas.

The Masterton Trophy is awarded to the NHL player who best demonstrates perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey. Malhotra, whose career appeared in jeopardy because of a serious eye injury, was nominated by the Carolina chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers’ Association (PHWA).

The winner is selected from a poll of the 30 chapters of the PHWA at the end of the regular season and a $2,500 grant from the PHWA is awarded annually to the Bill Masterton Scholarship Fund, based in Bloomington, Minn., in the name of the winner.

Malhotra, 33, went into the 2013-2014 season without a team and many believed his vision problems -- he was hit in the left eye by a deflected puck in March 2011 -- had ended his career. But the center earned a professional tryout with the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL, then signed an NHL contract with the Hurricanes on Oct. 31 and played 69 games.

Malhotra served as an alternate captain for the Canes, providing veteran leadership. He closed the season with seven goals and six assists, and finished second in the NHL in face-off win percentage at 59.4 percent.

Asked his definition of perseverance, Malhotra said, "For me, it's maintaining focus on your goal regardless of what the naysayers say or anyone says. It's about believing in yourself, believing in your goal and continuing to strive towards that and not allowing any outside factors to deter you from your goal."

Ron Francis, the Canes' new general manager, was a Masterton finalist in 2002.
Quenneville: 'No preferences' on Hawks' next opponent

By Chris Hine, Tribune reporter
12:29 PM CDT, April 30, 2014

After two days off, the Blackhawks returned to practice Wednesday at Johnny's IceHouse. Many will plop themselves on their couches this evening to watch Game 7 of the Avalanche-Wild series to learn their next opponent.

Which begs the question, will they be rooting for either team?

"No," coach Joel Quenneville said. "No preferences here. We'll see what happens."

Quenneville gave the politically correct answer though the Hawks do have a motive to cheer for the Wild, if only because that would mean home-ice advantage in the next round. It likely would mean a Friday start to the series at the United Center.

An Avalanche victory means the team will be leaving for Denver after practice Thursday. The Avalanche also had the Hawks' number during the regular season, beating them in four of five matchups.

Should the Hawks face the Avalanche, the altitude would present some problems as well.

"We want to make sure with shift lengths, we have to go shorter, make better changes," Quenneville said. "Matchups can be trickier and there will be different challenges as we move along there."

Winger Bryan Bickell said he'll be watching the game and checking in on the two other Game 7 matchups with his two dogs.

" Whoever we play, we're excited and just looking forward to getting back to the games," Bickell said.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 05.01.2014
Rested and ready, the Blackhawks now know who they will face in the second round of the playoffs.

They will square off against the Wild in a best-of-seven series beginning Friday night at the United Center. Game 2 will be Sunday afternoon at the UC before the series shifts to Minnesota for Games 3 and 4.

The Wild advanced after defeating the Avalanche 5-4 in overtime Wednesday night in Game 7 of that series. The Hawks have been waiting to learn their second-round opponent since dispatching the Blues in six games.

During the regular season, the Wild took three of five against the Hawks but finished nine points behind them in the Central Division so the defending Stanley Cup champions hold home-ice advantage.

“It’s always nice to have home ice,” Hawks goaltender Corey Crawford said. “Our building definitely plays a factor in a series, just like it did in the first one. We love playing here in Chicago. Our crowd is loud (and) it definitely gives us some momentum throughout a game.

The Hawks had two full days off after taking Game 6 against the Blues on Sunday and were back at practice Wednesday.

“It (was) nice to rest,” Crawford said. “The most important thing is the mental break. We had two days of rest … and now we’re getting back into a practice and back into the swing of things.”
Kris Versteeg hopeful for another chance

By Chris Hine, Chicago Tribune reporter

7:55 PM CDT, April 30, 2014

It was understandable that Kris Versteeg was upset he didn't play in Game 6 of the Blackhawks' series against the Blues.

After skating with the fourth line as a part of warm-ups, it came as a surprise when his name was listed among the scratches, with coach Joel Quenneville opting for Joakim Nordstrom instead.

The winger didn't hide his disappointment after Wednesday's practice and in his usual mild-mannered tone admitted his pride took a hard check. He vowed to do better in the Hawks' next series.

"Every time you get a chance to pull on a jersey, it's an honor. I know that after missing a full season," said Versteeg, who suffered a season-ending knee injury with the Panthers in 2012-13. "It's something special."

Quenneville is looking for Versteeg to be special. Toward the end of the Blues series, Quenneville tightened up his rotations and leaned heavily on his top three lines. Versteeg was back practicing with the fourth line Wednesday and the Hawks certainly could use a boost from their back end. Versteeg said he and Quenneville discussed his scratch, with the coach saying Versteeg needed to play with more pace.

Versteeg says he got the message.

"You just have to have gut check time and find a way to help when you can," he said.

Should Versteeg get the call to play in Game 1 of the Hawks' next series, he said he will have a little extra motivation, but he has to be careful to harness it.

"You have to watch how fired up you get because you don't want to do anything stupid," Versteeg said. "But hopefully it helps me in a positive way."

Versteeg started the previous series just fine, notching two assists in the first two games. But he failed to generate much offense over the next three, tallying just two shots.

Perhaps Versteeg can take solace from the situation Dave Bolland found himself in last season. Bolland was in the doghouse early in the playoffs but rebounded from that to score one of the most important rebounds in Hawks history with the winning goal in the clinching Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Final.

"I know I can still play," Versteeg said. "When I'm playing good I can be a help to the team. Right now it's just about getting back to that, finding your way, reaching deep down. ..."
A two-week mourning period. That's what Wolves general manager Wendell Young calls the time it takes for a veteran player to accept his NHL career might be over when he is sent to the AHL.

That period stretched to more than a month for Wolves defenseman Joe Corvo, who joined the team March 5 on loan from the Senators.

After 11 seasons in the NHL playing for five organizations, the 36-year-old Corvo was back with the Wolves, his team during the NHL lockout of 2004-05. This time, though, the circumstances were different — he was now closer to the end of his playing career than the beginning.

In mid-April, coach John Anderson questioned whether Corvo's heart was still in the game.

"I (had) to do some self-reflecting and figure out whether I wanted to continue," Corvo said.

The two met to discuss the Oak Park native's commitment to the team. Anderson told Corvo he understood how he felt, having gone through a similar experience when his own NHL career ended in 1989.

"He struggled with liking hockey again," said Anderson, who wound up playing another five seasons of pro hockey before retiring. "He still had the bitterness in his mouth. "You feel like you never want to play hockey again. The difference between me and him was that I had a whole summer to think about it. He came here right away."

The two agreed to meet again after that weekend's games. Anderson said Corvo played so well that weekend they haven't needed to revisit the topic.

Corvo had become a ghost with the Senators. He had been a healthy scratch since Jan. 11 as the NHL trade deadline approached. Corvo could see he didn't figure in the Senators' plans, so he told his agent to explore his options during the break for the Winter Olympics.

"I was getting tired of bag skating and conditioning," Corvo said.

Rather than sending him to their AHL affiliate in Binghamton, N.Y., the Senators agreed to loan him to the Wolves for undisclosed financial considerations.

"We talked to Ottawa and their management about it and we came to an agreement on how to get him here," Young said. "Ottawa did the right thing. He didn't want to go to Binghamton to finish his contract."

Corvo's desire to bring his wife, Angela, and their sons, Cameron, 9, and Maddux, 8, to Chicago drove his desire to come to the Wolves. He didn't even realize the team was doing well and had so much potential.

"I was looking at getting my family home and just move on with life," he said. "It just turned out it's a great team, great guys. It's the perfect situation."

Corvo was attractive to the Wolves because of his experience and his ability to quarterback the power play, an area in which the team has struggled all season.

His AHL season debut came March 8, nearly two months after his final game with Ottawa.

Then, after playing one game at Allstate Arena, a nagging groin injury compounded his emotional struggle.

It kept him sidelined for eight games, another setback in what was turning into a lost season.

"You basically have to sit and just let it heal," Corvo said then. "And I don't really have time for that."

As the injury healed, Corvo came to terms with his situation and the likelihood his NHL career had ended. He has indicated he would like to return to the Wolves next season but hasn't given much thought to the future beyond the Calder Cup playoffs.

Game 3 of the best-of-five series between the Wolves and Rochester Americans is Thursday at Allstate Arena. The teams split their games in Rochester last weekend.

Thursday will mark Corvo's 11th consecutive game in the lineup.

In that stretch, the Wolves rallied to win the Midwest Division on the season's last day, winning their final four games to pass Grand Rapids, and he compiled all four of his assists in that span, though he has yet to register a postseason point.

"As small as it may seem, the third period of that last game in Rochester I felt probably the best I've felt since I've been here," he said. "So I'll try to carry that effort into the home games here."

It appears Corvo's mourning period has ended.
Chicago Blackhawks come alive killing penalties

By Chris Kuc, Chicago Tribune reporter
11:02 PM CDT, April 30, 2014

Michal Handzus' description of the Blackhawks' penalty killing during the early portion of the regular season started with "really bad" and continued until the veteran center finally settled on "horrible."

Lately, however, it has been a work of art and was a major contributor in the Hawks' vanquishing of the Blues in the first round of the NHL playoffs when the defending champions killed off 27 of 29 power plays for a league-leading 93.1 percent success rate over the six-game series.

Just how big an impact can strong penalty killing have for a team with Stanley Cup aspirations?

When the Hawks won their first Cup in 49 years in 2010, their penalty kill finished fourth among the 16 teams in the postseason at 83.3 percent. During their run to the Cup last season, they were third at 90.8 percent. In the two first-round losses sandwiched between championships, the Hawks were tied for 11th in '11 (77.8 percent) and finished 12th in '12 (79.0).

"In the NHL, it's all about special teams," Handzus said Wednesday after the Hawks returned to practice following two days off. "I feel the PK is sometimes even more important than power plays because if you give up a goal, then you have to score one. If you don't give one up, then you can score five-on-five."

The Hawks boast the top three players in short-handed ice time during the first round. Defenseman Niklas Hjalmarsson's average of 5 minutes, 16 seconds led the league, followed by Handzus, who led all forwards at 5:04, and defenseman Duncan Keith, who was third at 4:47. Marcus Kruger was sixth at 4:22.

The personnel on the two penalty killing units has remained mostly consistent throughout the season, even when it ranked 29th in the league at 71.8 percent in December. It gradually improved and finished tied for 19th at 81.7.

Handzus said the difference between then and now is the units finally began to mesh.

"At the beginning, we weren't playing as a unit," Handzus said. "We had three guys going one way and one guy another way and that's when breakdowns happen and when goals happen. Now we play as a four-man unit."

The player most important on any Hawks penalty kill agreed.

"Everyone's on the same page," said goaltender Corey Crawford, who has a 1.98 goals-against average and .935 save percentage during the playoffs. "Our guys are coming up with some pretty big blocks at key times and that's what you need to be successful. … There are huge momentum swings in the playoffs when you take a penalty and then you get it back … when you kill it."

In addition to the contributions of Handzus, Hjalmarsson and Keith, other killers stepping up — or laying down to block shots — include Marcus Kruger, Johnny Oduya, Brent Seabrook, Marian Hossa, Jonathan Toews and Ben Smith.

"Everyone really, if you go down the list … (they) are willing to sacrifice and block a lot of shots," Smith said. "And we've been pretty good on the forecheck and getting (opponents) to unload the puck coming into the zone. That helps too. It's always nice when your special teams units get hot."

Added coach Joel Quenneville: "I don't think we changed too much (with) the style. The guys took it upon their shoulders that they're proud of those important minutes."
Brandon Bollig played all of 110 seconds in the Blackhawks’ Game 6 victory Sunday against the St. Louis Blues. Michal Handzus played nearly seven minutes on the penalty kill but less than four at even strength. And Kris Versteeg watched the game in a coat and tie.

That trio made up the Hawks’ fourth line at practice Wednesday. And if the Hawks are planning to make another deep run in the Stanley Cup playoffs, they’ll need more than just a few token shifts from that unit each night. The ability to send wave after wave of fresh players over the boards has been a major factor in the Hawks’ two recent Cup runs.

“Anytime you can roll four lines and you have short shifts, it gets everyone involved, everyone in the game, everyone a lot of rest,” center Ben Smith said. “That’s the main thing — just keeping guys in the game, keeping guys involved and making sure everyone’s ready to go, especially as the series moves on into Games 4, 5 and 6. That’s big.”

Of course, it’s kind of Smith’s fault that the Hawks have gone to a three-line rotation in the first place. Had he not fared so well every time he got a look at second-line center, he probably still would be the right wing on the Hawks’ go-to shutdown line, with Bollig and Marcus Kruger. But Smith’s well-earned ascension has forced coach Joel Quenneville to shuffle other people around. Kruger now is centering Brandon Saad and Andrew Shaw on the third line, which likely will get the bulk of the defensive-zone draws.

So instead of having three scoring lines and a checking line, as the Hawks did for much of the regular season, they have two scoring lines and a checking line, plus a little-used fourth line.

Quenneville said it partly had to do with matchups against the Blues’ three-line rotation and partly had to do with the fact that the Hawks were short-handed so often. But Bollig, Handzus and Versteeg know it’s up to them to prove they deserve more minutes by playing well in the few they get.

“You definitely want your minutes to stay up, but first things first, and that’s winning,” Bollig said. “So, obviously, there’s zero complaints. But you also want to be a bigger factor in the game. We need to play a simple game and play well in our zone, then hopefully create offense from that. . . . You’ve got to start with what you get and try to earn more.”

Versteeg is a bit of a wild card. A more offensive-minded player, he has spent most of the season bouncing around the top three lines. Quenneville said he scratched him for Game 6 because he wanted to see him play faster and more directly. Versteeg called it “gut-check time.”

Versteeg knows he and his new linemates can be difference-makers if they can earn more minutes.

“It’s always important to use as many guys as you can because you’re playing every other day and the grind of the playoffs is so huge,” he said. “So I think when all four lines can factor in, it definitely helps the long-term success of the team.”

That all said, Quenneville never has been shy about shaking things up. By the middle of the first period of the second round, Smith might find himself back on the fourth line, with Handzus back on the second. Versteeg back on the third and all four lines rolling like they were in the regular season.

“Q will make those decisions; he’s done a great job so far,” Smith said. “We sometimes don’t understand, but we trust that he’s got a plan. He’s proved time after time that he knows what he’s doing.”
Ask anyone on the Blackhawks if they planned to watch Wednesday night’s game between Colorado and Minnesota, and man they were all in, including Bryan Bickell, who planned on having a viewing party from his couch with his two dogs at his side.

Those players who did watch caught a Wild one. Minnesota’s Nino Niederreiter scored his second goal of the game 5:02 into overtime and Ilya Bryzgalov made a big save filling in for an injured Darcy Kuemper, leading the Wild to a 5-4 win over the Colorado Avalanche in Game 7 on Wednesday night.

The Wild will play the Hawks at 8:30 Friday night at the UC. Game 2 will be at the UC at 2 p.m. Sunday, Game 3 will be at 8 p.m. Tuesday in Minnesota. Game 4 will be Friday in Minnesota, and Games 5-7 are TBD.

Of course, ask the Hawks which team they were rooting for, and suddenly their lips were sealed.

"No preferences here," coach Joel Quenneville said.

"I'm not going to comment on that," goalie Corey Crawford said.

"Just let it play out and we're going to get what we're going to get," Michal Handzus said.

Ok, then, how about contrasting the two teams?

"One's very defensive (Minnesota) and one's good on the transition game (Colorado)," Andrew Shaw said.

"Colorado is great offensively -- they have a lot of skill guys, a lot of speed," Handzus said. "Minnesota has more of a team game; they play with more structure and more defensively."

"Well, it's going to be intense," Quenneville said. "With Minnesota there's not a lot of room. Colorado has a great attack.

"It's more how we play that we focus on. You make some adjustments to what opponents are doing, but it's reinforcing how we play on a daily basis."

Leadership 101:

On more than one occasion during the St. Louis series, Hawks captain Jonathan Toews gushed about the leadership shown by goalie Corey Crawford for shouldering much of the blame for the Hawks' losses in their first two games -- even though his teammates didn't think that was necessary.

"He's been everything we've needed him to be and more," Ben Smith said.

"He was incredible," Kris Versteeg added. "He was a little too hard on himself in Games 1 and 2, I thought."

But just because he stood up and took the blame, it doesn't mean Crawford's vying for more of a leadership role on the team.

"There are leaders in here. I don't really need to step up and be one of those guys," he said. "We have guys who know how to do that."

He said it:

"Always something with shift lengths; have to go shorter. Need better changes, matchups can be trickier -- different challenges as you go along."

-- Joel Quenneville on adjustments needed when playing in the altitude of Denver.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 05.01.2014
Chastened Versteeg ready to skate again

By Mike Spellman

Being a healthy scratch is never an easy pill to swallow for an NHL player, and it’s especially tough when you’re a healthy scratch for a playoff game.

Just ask veteran Blackhawks forward Kris Versteeg, who was scratched for what turned out to be a series-clinching Game 6 against St. Louis on Sunday after playing in the first five games of the series.

“Yeah, that’s obviously tough,” Versteeg admitted after practice Wednesday at Johnny’s IceHouse. “I’d be lying to you if you say that you don’t want to be out there helping the team.

“It’s something that you don’t want to be, but if it is, it is, and you understand why the coaches do it. You just have to have gut-check time and find a way to help the team.”

Versteeg, who had 2 assists but only 6 shots on goal in five games against St. Louis and also saw his ice time dip as the series went on, was asked if he was given a reason why he was scratched Sunday.

“I understand why, but that’s just between us,” he said. “Just keep playing hard and hopefully find a way to get a couple of pucks in the net.”

Hawks coach Joel Quenneville was a little more open about what he’s hoping to see from his 27-year-old winger as the playoffs progress.

“We’re looking for more speed, more directness in attack, more straight ahead -- kind of complementary to how our team plays,” Quenneville said. “I think he was coming on at the end of the year and we’re going to need him as we go along here.”

The good news for Versteeg, who was replaced in the lineup in Game 6 by Joakim Nordstrom, was that he was back out on a regular line at practice Wednesday, skating alongside Michal Handzus and Brandon Bollig.

“Well, I know I can still play,” said Versteeg who had 10 goals and 19 assists in 63 games with the Hawks during the regular season. “When I’m playing good I can be a help to the team.

“Right now it’s just about getting back to that, finding your way, reaching deep down -- gut check time, you know? Hopefully when you get your chance you come through for the guys.”

When he does get back in the lineup against either Minnesota or Colorado, Versteeg said he’ll have to fight the urge to do too much too soon.

“I think you have to watch how fired up you get because you don’t want to go out there and do anything stupid,” he said. “But you hopefully it helps me in a positive way and I just keep building from there.

“Just keep trying to play. You have to play simple. I think it’s about being reliable.”

After playing only 10 games with Florida before undergoing season-ending knee surgery, Versteeg understands how precious each and every game is -- particularly in the playoffs.

“I know every time you get the chance to pull on an NHL jersey, it’s something special,” he said. “It’s something you always want to do.”

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 05.01.2014
Blackhawks rested and ready as they await opponent

Tracey Myers
April 30, 2014, 2:45 pm

Bryan Bickell will be like many of the Blackhawks tonight: glued to the television, watching the Colorado-Minnesota game.

"I'll be watching, on the couch with my two dogs," Bickell said with a grin. "But whoever we play, we're excited and looking forward to getting back in games."

The Blackhawks hit the ice on Wednesday for the first time since their Game 6 victory over the St. Louis Blues on Sunday. They resumed practice still uncertain of their second-round opponent; that will be decided tonight. If Colorado wins, the Blackhawks will head there tomorrow to get acclimated to the higher altitude and thinner air. If it's the Wild, the Blackhawks will have home-ice advantage. In both cases, dates and times of the series are to be determined.

No matter which team they play, however, the Blackhawks are feeling refreshed and ready to roll.

"It's good not to think about hockey for a couple of days and rest up and relax," Corey Crawford said. "The most important thing is the mental break. We can't control (who we play). It's just a matter of controlling what you can. We had two days of rest so we did that and now we're getting back into a practice and back into the swing of things."

The first practice back wasn't the zippiest the Blackhawks have had. Coach Joel Quenneville expects it to be more intense tomorrow. What he doesn't expect is the Blackhawks to lose momentum they built off that first-round triumph over the Blues.

"I don't think you lose it. Both teams have it in a new series," Quenneville said. "For sure, the team that wins tonight will be sky high and excited about starting the series. It's not like we've been off that long, and you know how hard and challenging it was. That last series should give us excitement in our game as well and getting off to a better start than the first series; it's what we've talked about."

Brandon Bollig said there are positives and negatives to the rest-vs.-momentum argument.

"Obviously we get a couple days to rest and they might not, whoever we play. They get to stay in the swing of things. But we also get to rest our bodies," he said. "There are positives and negatives. I don't think there's necessarily a bad way of going about it. I think it's nice for us to get a couple days rest and let guys kind of heal the little nagging injuries if they have them."

The Blackhawks will play the waiting game for a few more hours. Regardless of their opponent, however, they want to be playing their game, their way from the start.

"That was a good test for us to come out of that series," Bickell said. "Last year against Minnesota, I don't want to say we coasted but we weren't playing good hockey. Then we played Detroit and got our hands handed to us. To come out of that (St. Louis) series, we have confidence."
Wild ride continues: Blackhawks draw Minnesota in second-round

Tracey Myers
April 30, 2014, 11:30 pm

The Blackhawks weren’t at their best when they faced the Minnesota Wild in last season’s Western Conference quarterfinal. Nevertheless, their depth and multiple scoring options helped them dispatch Minnesota in five games.

Now, with the Wild coming off a thrilling first-round decision, the two teams will face off again.

The Blackhawks will host the Wild at 8:30 p.m. Friday after Minnesota dispatched the Colorado Avalanche 5-4 in overtime of Game 7 on Wednesday night. The Blackhawks, who have the higher seed of the two, get home-ice advantage for the series.

Game 2 will be Sunday at 2 p.m. Minnesota will host Game 3 on Tuesday at 8 p.m., with Game 4 there on May 9. The if-necessary games are as follows: Game 5 in Chicago on May 11, Game 6 at Wild on May 13 and Game 7 in Chicago on May 15. Times for Games 4-7 have yet to be determined.

This Wild-Blackhawks series started auspiciously last spring. Wild goaltender Niklas Backstrom pulled up with an injury in Game 1 warmups but Josh Harding played well in relief. Well, the Wild were doing the goaltending switcheroo again this spring – twice. Darcy Kuemper replaced a struggling Ilya Bryzgalov in Game 2 and started the final four contests of the series. Then Kuemper, who was apparently injured, was replaced by Bryzgalov late in Game 7, with the Avs up 4-3.

Minnesota erased four one-goal deficits through regulation to push it to overtime before Nino Niederreiter won it 5:02 into overtime.

Zach Parise has also been pivotal for the Wild, as he had at least one point in every first-round game against Colorado.

Here's the complete schedule for Blackhawks-Wild:

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Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.01.2014
Kris Versteeg isn’t used to this.

The Blackhawks forward was a healthy scratch just once before in his NHL career, in early November when he was still with the Florida Panthers. On Sunday he was there again, watching from somewhere in the United Center while his teammates played and won Game 6 and eliminated the St. Louis Blues.

It was tough to take.

“T’d be lying to you if you say that you don’t want to be out there helping the team,” Versteeg said following Wednesday’s practice. “Every time you get a chance to pull on a jersey, it’s an honor. I know that by missing a full season last year. So I know every time you get the chance to pull on an NHL jersey, it’s something special. It’s something you always want to do.”

Versteeg might get the chance to do it again when the Blackhawks start their second-round series later this week. Versteeg was back among the forward lines on Wednesday, skating at right wing on the fourth line with Brandon Bollig and Michal Handzus. Versteeg was among the lines during Sunday’s warmup, too, before coach Joel Quenneville sat him in favor of Joakim Nordstrom.

While Versteeg said he understood why he was out of the lineup, he didn’t want to discuss it. Quenneville said what the Blackhawks needed from Versteeg.

“We’re looking for more speed, more directness in the attack, (playing) more straight ahead, kind of complimentary to how our team plays,” he said of Versteeg. “He certainly has some experience in his game. I think he was coming on at the end of the (regular season), and we’re going to need him as we go along here.”

Versteeg talked of his struggles in St. Louis. He said the same happened in the spring of 2010, when he had a quiet first round against the Nashville Predators. His game picked up from then on out, however, and he was a key contributor to the rest of the Blackhawks’ Stanley Cup run.

“I know I can still play,” Versteeg said. “When I’m playing good I can be a help to the team. Right now it’s just about getting back to that, finding your way, reaching deep down — gut check time, you know. Hopefully when you get your chance you come through for the guys.”

Versteeg isn’t used to the healthy scratch. He knows he has to improve to keep from experiencing it again.

“I think you have to watch how fired up you get because you don’t want to go out there and do anything stupid. But hopefully it helps me in a positive way, and I just keep building from there,” he said. “You have to play simple. I think it’s about being reliable.”
After putting his team through a morning skate at the Pepsi Center, Minnesota Wild coach Mike Yeo said Wednesday night's Game 7 against the Avalanche will provide the finishing touches to a budding rivalry.

"I believe that we're not going away and I know they're not going away too," Yeo said. "This is a very skilled team that we're playing against and they have a lot of youth over there. You can see that the two teams have a lot of similarities in a lot of ways. (The Avs) count on their young players and just sort of the steps they've taken (are similar to ours)."

Minnesota and Colorado are first-year opponents in the new-look Central Division, and the new NHL playoff format demands that two of the division's top three teams open in the playoffs. The Avs-Wild and Chicago-St. Louis series featured all four Central Division playoff teams.

"I would expect that the way that our division is lined up, how important every division game is, how close every game was that we've played against these guys this year — not only in the regular season but obviously through these playoffs too — certainly it's a budding rivalry," Yeo said.

Minnesota and Colorado have been longtime rivals in college hockey, with the University of Denver, Colorado College and Air Force playing against the University of Minnesota, Minnesota-Duluth, St. Cloud State and others for decades.
Patrick Roy glad to have Avs playing host in decisive Game 7 vs. Wild

By Mike Chambers
The Denver Post
Posted: 04/30/2014 12:18:54 PM MDT
Updated: 04/30/2014 01:58:17 PM MDT

Avalanche coach Patrick Roy and his players seemed confident and poised after Wednesday's Game 7 morning skate at the Pepsi Center. The Minnesota Wild skated after the Avs, and the teams will reconvene at the arena in the afternoon and further prepare for one of the NHL's three Game 7's of the night.

Roy played in 13 Game 7's in his Hall of Fame career, the final one against the Wild in 2003.

"I had to check this morning to realize I had 13," Roy said. "And I didn't have much success on the road (so) I'm pretty happy that we have the game at home. It would be tough for me to sell it to my players if we were on the road. You want to have Game 7 at home."

Roy confirmed that rookie Joey Hishon will rejoin the lineup after being a healthy scratch in Game 6. Hishon will play in his third career NHL game, centering the third line with wingers Max Talbot and Jamie McGinn.

Forward Brad Malone will be scratched for the first time in the series.

McGinn, who has an assortment of minor injuries, did not participate in the morning skate. Fourth-line winger Cody McLeod, however, appeared in his first gameday skate since Game 1.
Avalanche-Wild Game 7 update from morning skates

By Mike Chambers
The Denver Post

Cody McLeod, Colorado Avalanche, Game 7, Mike Chambers, Minnesota Wild, Nathan MacKinnon, NHL, Patrick Roy, Paul Stastny

Game 7 on Wednesday night between the Minnesota Wild and Avalanche at the Pepsi Center will be the middle game of the NHL’s first Game 7 tripleheader in 11 years. According to NBC Sports Network, viewership this month is up 126 percent from April last year, and no doubt Wednesday night’s games will blow that percentage up even more.

Our online reports from the Avalanche and Wild morning skates are posted. The Avs piece looks at a coach Patrick Roy “selling” his players on Game 7 and confirmation that rookie Joey Hishon will rejoin the lineup and center Max Talbot and Jamie McGinn on the third line. As Talbot told me, if the Avs had more scoring from the third (or fourth) line this series would probably be over and we’d be talking Chicago. More on that online and in Thursday’s paper.

The Wild piece focuses on a “budding rivalry” between Colorado and Minnesota.

Denver Post: LOADED: 05.01.2014
Wild coach Mike Yeo believes his team and Avs are building a rivalry

By Adrian Dater and Mike Chambers
The Denver Post
Posted: 05/01/2014 12:01:00 AM MDT
Updated: 05/01/2014 01:18:59 AM MDT

Minnesota Wild coach Mike Yeo said his team and the Avalanche are developing a nice rivalry, and he wouldn't be surprised if his team met Colorado in the playoffs in the future.

"I believe that we're not going away, and I know they're not going away," Yeo said. "This is a very skilled team that we're playing against, and they have a lot of youth over there. You can see that the two teams have a lot of similarities in a lot of ways. (The Avs) count on their young players. The steps they've taken (are similar to ours)."

Minnesota and Colorado are first-year opponents in the new-look Central Division.

"I would expect that the way that our division is lined up, how important every division game is, how close every game was that we've played against these guys this year — not only in the regular season but obviously through these playoffs too — certainly it's a budding rivalry," Yeo said.

WATCH: Patrick Roy proud of Avalanche even after Game 7 loss to the Minnesota Wild

Mitchell on mend. John Mitchell, who hadn't skated during this series because of a concussion, did for the first time Wednesday morning. He might have played if the Avs had advanced to the second round.

Alex Tanguay also continued to skate with the team and probably could have played in the postseason had Colorado moved on. His original four-month rehabilitation prognosis coincided with a late May return, but there was no firm timetable.

Tanguay looked fast and agile on his skates. He had hip surgery in February.

Playoff loot. How much extra money did the Avalanche put into its coffers for each playoff game? While the figures are kept private, somewhere from $1 million to $1.5 million is a likely number. Over the four games at the Pepsi Center in this series, an extra $5 million to $6 million is now part of the Kroenke Sports war chest.

Footnotes. With Joey Hishon returning to the lineup for Game 7, Brad Malone was a healthy scratch, along with Paul Carey and Reto Berra. ... Max Talbot seemed unfazed by the pressure the morning of Game 7, and why not? He is a genuine Stanley Cup Game 7 hero, having scored Pittsburgh's only two goals in a 2-1 victory at Detroit that won the 2009 Stanley Cup. 

Defenseman Jan Hejda, coach Patrick Roy said, has been playing with a previously undisclosed injury — two broken fingers. Hejda could have a hand/finger injury, which might explain why he had trouble holding on to his stick in the series. ... The Wild made one lineup change from Game 6, adding forward Stephane Veilleux in place of Justin Fontaine. Veilleux played in Games 1 and 2 but was a healthy scratch in the next four games. ... Forwards Mike Rupp and Matt Cooke were Minnesota's most experienced Game 7 players — combining for 13 full-series finales, but neither played. Rupp was scratched and Cooke suspended.
The lone, lonely teardrop sat under his right eye, rounded, not unlike a puck rested behind the red goal line.

There are few things in sports more heart-wrenching than a season-ending losing locker room, and as such, there are thus few things more heartbreakingly heart-wrenching than that last guy to take off his uniform. And there was Colorado's Ryan O'Reilly, at the corner locker stall, his sweaty head buried in his hands, frozen.

"We didn't become a team at the toughest times," O'Reilly finally said.

Maybe it'll be Saturday. Sunday, perhaps. It will take a couple days to get all peachy about the season — a dream regular season here in this revitalized hockey town, where younger brothers now get to enjoy the burgundy-and-blue success like the hand-me-down stories they hear from their older brothers. Right now, in this vacuum, is failure. They failed. Why not us? Why not Minnesota, who played with Avalanche grit the past few days, winning a Game 6 then coming back from trailing four different times in Game 7 — on the road — before netting the game-winner. The regular season was a success. The season was a success. But dang it, the postseason was a tease.

Coach Patrick Roy, after the 5-4 overtime loss to Minnesota, was asked about the Wild's wild comebacks. Was that them rising to the moment or Colorado faltering?

"It was a mix of both," Roy said. "When you have more experience in the playoffs, you know how to win those big games. In those two goals, our neutral zone forecheck was good all night long and all of a sudden we started making mistakes here and there. And they took advantage of it. This was a team that went through that last year (in a playoff series) against Chicago. It's a learning process and next year in the playoffs our guys might be a little more calm in those situations and react differently."

Before the playoffs, I wrote about the Avs skipping steps. You've got to lose in the playoffs to win in the playoffs, right? The Avs showed some characteristics that they could, but in a Game 7, Semyon Varlamov was no longer Varly (more Reto Berra at times) and the Avs were not cohesive, playing "up-ice," if you will.

"It's an empty feeling," said Nathan MacKinnon, the wunderkind, who blamed himself for poor defense on the game-tying goal.

Did the Avs really lose this series in Games 3-4? They were like a junior varsity out there those nights. Some frat guys took more shots the night of Game 4 than the Avs did.

"On the road, we didn't show up to play," O'Reilly said softly from his locker, still in uniform and pads. "You can't win a cup if you don't win on the road, and our performance was embarrassing on the road. It's something we have to learn, I don't know if it's being young and inexperienced. ..."

I guess that's what they were when it mattered most. Late Wednesday, they were young and inexperienced, not youthful and in-the-moment.

But I suppose this is why we love sports — why we live through these things. It takes experiencing these painful moments that makes us appreciate the big wins properly.

Denver Post: LOADED: 05.01.2014
Avs' great season takes back seat to blowing chance to advance

By Terry Frei
The Denver Post
Posted: 05/01/2014 12:01:00 AM MDT
Updated: 05/01/2014 01:12:50 AM MDT

Despite the disappointment of a first-round playoff exit after the 5-4 overtime loss to the Minnesota Wild on Wednesday night, the Avalanche didn't just stage a remarkable turnaround this season, the first under coach Patrick Roy and with Joe Sakic atop the hockey hierarchy.

The Avs also kept raising expectations. Last fall, the most reasonable goal at the outset of the season seemed to be to return to the playoffs for the first time since 2010.

Then, when the Avalanche kept winning, it seemed realistic to assume by midseason that, barring a complete collapse, that coveted playoff berth was a given.

Then down the stretch, the race between Colorado and Chicago for second place in the Central Division and the home-ice advantage in what seemed to be the inevitable first-round matchup suddenly was transformed into something different. The St. Louis Blues collapsed, losing their last six, and Colorado suddenly was atop the division standings.

WATCH: Patrick Roy proud of Avalanche even after Game 7 loss to the Minnesota Wild

Then Colorado suddenly wasn’t so much the upstart entry in the playoffs as it was a favorite, facing the wild-card Minnesota Wild in the first round. And as happens (often) in the NHL, the “upset” came through.

“You come into the season, you want to win the Cup,” said Avalanche center Paul Stastny, who had one of the Avalanche's goals in the loss. "If you don't make it, you fall short of it. I don't know if you can say it tarnishes the year. I don't know if that's the right word.

"But tonight, what we did to teams all year kind of happened to us. Then in overtime, we had a couple of chances that were literally one inch away and could have gone our way, but didn’t.

"It's disappointing, but throughout the year, we stuck together as a team. We win as a team, and we lose as a team. We have to be proud of what these guys have done here.”

At his stall, Nathan MacKinnon was staring straight ahead.

"It's an empty feeling," the 18-year-old rookie forward said. "Being up by one with a couple of minutes left ... There are going to be a lot of guys losing some sleep over some plays tonight.

MacKinnon added: "We definitely have some regrets going into the summer. It tarnishes the year a lot, I think. We made some huge strides, coming from second to last to top five in the league, whatever it was, but I think we wanted to make a run here, and we had a chance twice to win the series — once in Game 6 and obviously tonight. It’s tough to describe exactly what went on. Coming back next year, it’s weird to say, but we have to wait until September to get things going again, which is going to be a long summer. Especially watching the playoffs is going to be tough.”

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Avalanche's Joey Hishon gets shot at key role for Avalanche in Game 7

By Mike Chambers
The Denver Post
Posted: 05/01/2014 12:01:00 AM MDT
Updated: 05/01/2014 01:19:20 AM MDT

In his third career NHL game Wednesday night, rookie center Joey Hishon was asked to play a key role for the Avalanche. Coach Patrick Roy was desperate for scoring outside of his top two lines and wanted Hishon — the Avs’ first-round draft pick in 2010 — to infuse some skill on the third line.

No pressure. Just a Game 7 in the honeymoon of his big-league career.

And Hishon delivered, making a beautiful pass to the seam that Jamie McGinn redirected for a first-period goal and a 2-1 Avs lead.

“Patrick is showing confidence in me, and I couldn’t ask for anything else,” Hishon said after the morning skate Wednesday at the Pepsi Center. “Coming in here, I just wanted him to think about keeping me in the lineup every day. That was my plan coming in, and I think I’ve done a pretty good job with that. ... I’m playing with two experienced guys, and I have to prove myself.”

Hishon played alongside wingers Max Talbot and Jamie McGinn. Talbot, 30, was in his fifth career NHL Game 7, the previous four with Pittsburgh, and the 25-year-old McGinn had gone the distance in an NHL playoff series in 2011 with San Jose.

WATCH: Patrick Roy proud of Avalanche even after Game 7 loss to the Minnesota Wild

“He brings some skills to the third line, for sure,” Talbot said of Hishon, who played in Games 4 and 5 before being scratched in Game 6. “In the playoffs, you need secondary scoring, and right now it hasn’t been there. We need some of that, and Joey is definitely a guy who can bring some offense.”

Talbot added the Avs might have previously clinched the series if the third and fourth lines had done a better job of scoring. Fourth-line winger Cody McLeod scored a shorthanded goal in Game 5, but only the top two lines had scored at even strength until McGinn’s goal no the Hishon assist.

McGinn had a goal in Game 1 while playing a front-line role before Matt Duchene returned from injury. McGinn was pushed down to the third line when Duchene returned Monday. The lines began the playoffs out of whack because of the injuries to Duchene and regular third-line center John Mitchell, who has not played in the postseason.

The Avs unquestionably missed Mitchell throughout the series. But Hishon was determined to make up for the absence in Game 7.

“It’s definitely very exciting, and you have to enjoy the moment and have fun with it,” Hishon said. “Since I got here, I’ve learned a lot. You become a student of the game. When I’m around these guys, you’re learning every day whether you’re on the ice or not.”

Denver Post: LOADED: 05.01.2014
In an arena stunned into silence by the shock of a 5-4 overtime loss that eliminated the Avalanche from the NHL playoffs, a tough, awkward question hung in the air: Is Semyon Varlamov a goalie Colorado can trust in a big game?

He was beaten at five minutes, two seconds into overtime on a hard shot by Minnesota’s Nino Niederreiter.

The crowd chanted “Varly! Varly! Varly!” to console him on a disappointing night.

“Nobody wants to lose in the first round,” Varlamov said.

Here’s the truth: He failed to glove a shot that would have kept the Avalanche alive. Four times, Colorado gave Varlamov a one-goal lead. Four times, Varlamov failed to hold it.

“Being up a goal four times and not being able to win is definitely disappointing,” Avalanche rookie Nathan MacKinnon said.

In the 2009 playoffs, while between the pipes for Washington, Varlamov was pulled after allowing four early goals in a Game 7 loss to Pittsburgh.

At the Winter Olympics in his homeland of Russia, Varlamov was pulled in a stunning 3-1 loss to Finland that eliminated the home country from medal contention.

On the eve of an elimination game against Minnesota, I asked Colorado forward Paul Stastny the first memory that came to mind of a Game 7 that left a lasting impression on him as a child, when his eyes were full of wonder for hockey.

“Detroit 7, Colorado 0,” said Stastny, without a second of hesitation.

Heck, that memory could scare a kid for life. The Game 7 Stastny remembers was the last night of the Avalanche dynasty. Detroit blew out Colorado to win the Western Conference finals in 2002. That was the beginning of the end for Patrick Roy, Joe Sakic and what had been the NHL’s most fearsome team for the better part of a decade.

“Well, growing up, what you remember about Game 7s are either the real nail-biters or the total blowouts,” said Stastny, whose blast from the slot gave Colorado a 3-2 lead early in the third period.

Nail-biter? The Avs and Wild gave the entire city of Denver a reason for a manicure.

There’s no trapping the butterflies in a Game 7. There’s no sense even trying. Avalanche veteran Max Talbot said. The tension a player feels in a Game 7 is indeed stuff of a kid’s dreams.

But the sense of calm a team takes on the ice in a Game 7 rests on the shoulders of the goaltender. Every save builds the faith in a home arena where palms are sweaty and hearts race with anxiety. Any sign of duress can spread through the rest of a goalie’s teammates.

So we hold this hockey truth to be self-evident: The most important player on the ice in a Game 7 is the goaltender.

"Of course," said Roy, one of the greatest goalies to make a big save in a big game.

On two hot teams, two talented teams, two fearless teams, the one distinct advantage the Avalanche seemed to have in Game 7 was between the pipes. Varlamov is a Vezina Trophy candidate. Darcy Kuemper looks as if he’s a country bumpkin fresh off the bus in the big city.

"It’s a team game, and everybody has an important role," Roy said. "But can't disagree that the goaltender plays a major role in a big Game 7, for sure."
Avalanche blows chances to advance, is ousted by Wild in Game 7

By Adrian Dater
The Denver Post
Posted: 04/30/2014 10:43:27 PM MDT
Updated: 05/01/2014 01:19:29 AM MDT

There could be no denying the Avs made hockey relevant in Denver again this season. A team that finished 29th in the NHL a year ago won the brutally tough Central Division.

Patrick Roy should be a favorite to win the Jack Adams Award for coach of the year, and Nathan MacKinnon is a shoo-in for rookie of the year, with Semyon Varlamov a finalist for the Vezina.

Bottom line: Bright days are ahead. They'll just have to wait awhile to get even better.

The Avalanche's remarkable season came to a crushing end Wednesday night in Game 7 of its first-round playoff series. The Minnesota Wild won 5-4 in overtime as the Avs were unable to maintain four-one-goal leads. Nino Niederreiter scored at 5:02 of overtime to send the Wild into the second round. The Avs had three golden chances to score in overtime.

"I don't have enough words to say how proud I am of our guys," Roy said after the game. Avalanche players, though, weren't feeling very proud after blowing four leads.

"I thought we had it there twice," forward Matt Duchene said. "It's heartbreaking."

Avalanche forward Ryan O'Reilly was equally devastated. "Home ice is great, a good thing to have. But who cares? You don't win a Cup. That's the only thing that matters. We had moments where we played like a Cup team but other times when we didn't look like we belonged at all."

It was the second time in two Game 7 meetings with the Wild in Denver that the Avs lost, the previous one coming in Roy's final game as a player in 2003.

"We couldn't hold the lead," said Jan Hejda, who played with two broken fingers in the series, including a thumb that had a pin in it. "We get the lead four times; we should have held on to it."

WATCH: Patrick Roy proud of Avalanche even after Game 7 loss to the Minnesota Wild

The Avs' last lead of the game, gained with 8:44 remaining in the third period on Erik Johnson's goal, failed to hold up as Wild defenseman Jared Spurgeon patiently waited for MacKinnon to overtake a sliding blocked-shot attempt and buried a shot to the far post with 2:27 left, sending the game to overtime.

Johnson's goal looked like it might finally be the one to hold up, as the building erupted with joy and the Avs played solid defense for the next few minutes. But unlike most of the regular season, Varlamov couldn't come up with the big saves when his team needed them most.

The Avs previously had a 3-2 third-period lead on Paul Stastny's goal, but that didn't last long as Niederreiter beat Varlamov with a wrist shot from the right circle just inside the left corner to tie the game in the third. When the puck went in, Roy buried his face in his hand for a couple of seconds, sensing perhaps that this was one blown single-goal lead too many for a Game 7.

Varlamov had a marvelous season but was shaky in both Games 6 and 7.

In the end, the Avalanche couldn't play with the puck for long enough. Game 7 mirrored too many in this series in that the Wild had more puck possession, more shots on goal and an overall greater margin for error because of it. The Avs skated on the right side of that fine line enough to get to overtime of Game 7, but it finally caught up with them.

The Avs never could separate themselves from the Wild in the series. In only one game of the series — the second — did they have more than a one-goal lead at any time.

"We've got to push ourselves over the summer to get better," Duchene said. "But we had a great season and have nothing to feel ashamed about. A lot of the old great Avs teams lost in the first round too. It happens. But there's something to be proud of here. We won the Central Division. But I don't think there's going to be one guy this summer who won't have motivation to get better."

In Game 7, every time the Avs took a lead, again and again, they seemed to let the Wild back in the game, going 22 minutes at one point between shots.

A turning point in this one came in the second period, when rookie Joey Hishon — who set up Colorado's second goal, by Jamie McGinn, for his first NHL point — accidentally high-sticked Zach Parise in the mouth at 5:25. The Avs killed off the Wild power play, but as Hishon was skating back onto the ice and into the Wild zone, veteran winger Dany Heatley jabbed home a loose puck and tied the game 2-2.

That seemed to hurt the Avs' spirit, and things sagged even more when they failed to capitalize on consecutive power plays later in the period. The Avs' power play was spotty throughout the series.

"It's a process. It's a learning process," Roy said. "At the end, unfortunately injuries were a factor. Losing a guy like (Tyson) Barrie and (John) Mitchell probably would have made the difference for us. But we don't want to use excuses like that. We got beat by a team that played well."

"One quality we had all year: We were never satisfied. Certainly not going to start tonight. It was a great experience all year. It was fun to be part of it. I didn't want to see it end. I just want to say thanks to them. They made it fun. It's hard to talk like this right now, because everyone knows how much I like to win, but it was a great year. Next year in the playoffs, I think guys will react a little more calm in those situations. The toughest part will be not coming back tomorrow, preparing for Chicago. I'm sure tomorrow's going to hurt more."

"As much as we dreamed about winning the Stanley Cup, we knew it would be tough. We aren't there yet. That hurts to say, but it's fact."

Three Stars
Nino Niederreiter
Scored the game-winner 5:02 into overtime. Still only 21 and considered a major disappointment in his days with the Islanders, the Wild winger had two goals and an assist.

P.A. Parenteau
Making his playoff debut at age 31, the Avalanche winger finished off his first series by assisting on goals by Paul Stastny and Erik Johnson in the third period.

Dany Heatley
Minnesota winger had a goal and two assists to finish a plus-three in the deciding game after being a healthy scratch early in the first-round series.

Roy, roy, roy
A daily sampling of Avalanche coach Patrick Roy during his team's playoff run:

On Wednesday, Roy was asked about how he might use his extensive Game 7 experience as a player in a pregame pep speech to his team.

"I had to check this morning, to realize I had 13 (Game 7s), but I didn't have too much success on the road (he was 0-3 on the road with the Avs). So I'm pretty happy that we have the game at home."

"It would be tough to sell it to my players if we would be on the road. You want to have Game 7 at home. We should be excited about it. This is part of the process of our team. This is great for our town too. Just walking the street, it's amazing to see the excitement that we have in this town."
The NHL hadn't seen a Game 7 triple-header in the past 10 years, and the Avalanche hadn't been a part of a Game 7 since 2003. Wednesday night was a big night for the league and its team from Colorado.

Avalanche vs. the Minnesota Wild, Game 7 at the Pepsi Center, with the winner moving on to play the Chicago Blackhawks in the Western Conference semifinals.

This is a new experience for Hockey Hall of Fame goalie Patrick Roy, the Avs' first-year coach. He will make his Game 7 bench debut after playing in 13 for Montreal and Colorado ending in 2003 with a Game 7 loss to Minnesota in Denver.

"I had to check this morning to realize I had 13," Roy said after the morning skate. "And I didn't have much success on the road (so) I'm pretty happy that we have the game at home. It would be tough for me to sell it to my players if we were on the road. You want to have Game 7 at home."
Avalanche-Wild Game 7 postgame: Avs ran out of miracles

By Adrian Date
The Denver Post
Adrian Date

The heart of the Avalanche beats on. But it needed the defibrillator paddles – again – Wednesday night.

Despite blowing four one-goal leads in Game 7 to the Minnesota Wild, the #WhyNotUs Avs got the all-important last goal of the game in overtime to beat the Wild 5-4 and advance to the second round against the Chicago Blackhawks.

The Avs won all four games at home in the series, but had to go to OT three times to do it and in the process may have taken a year or two off the lives of their fans from all the stress.

I’m sorry, Avs fans, that that piece of poetry never ran for the masses to see.

What a tough loss that was. It was as big a gut punch of a loss as you can get. Forget the “this is a young team, there will be other kicks at the can in the future” meme. This was a really tough loss for Avs fans to take, and trust me, it wasn’t any easier on the players in the locker room, as the above photo of Ryan O’Reilly shows.

Four one-goal leads in a Game 7 at home. Four blown one-goal leads. One great two-on-one chance in overtime, with Paul Stastny and Gabe Landeskog looking like they were ready to win this thing finally. One great breakup of the play by Ryan Suter, followed by a Dany Heatley (Dany Heatley) lead pass up the ice for an odd-man rush to Nino Niederreiter (Nino Niederreiter) for a game-winning OT goal.

It was all one big, cruel piece of irony for Avs fans in the end. The team that always found a way to win games like these just kept trying to find ways to lose the biggest one of all to this point – and succeeded.

I don’t want to get into a big rip job on the players on the team about this. I always thought what this team did during the regular season deserved major appreciation, and I won’t dump on it all after one OT loss in a Game 7.

But in the interest of breaking down why the Avs lost this series, we can come to a few conclusions:

- The only thing I disagreed with in Patrick Roy’s postgame press conference was his statement that this team was “never satisfied” as a team this season. But that just wasn’t true in Game 7. The Avs took four one-goal leads, and four times they got satisfied with that accomplishment and stopped doing the things that got them that lead.

If there is one thing that can fairly be criticized about the team in the series, it was that they played with little real killer instinct. Almost every time they got a goal in the series, they let up. They had one two-goal lead in the whole series, in Game 2. Hey, the Wild didn’t have many two-goal leads on the Avs either. But tonight? I mean, you get FOUR one-goal leads in a Game 7, including one with under 8 minutes left? You have to close that out. It just always seemed like the Avs were “satisfied” with their slim leads, and never were hungry enough to truly put the Wild away. That goes back to Game 6, too, when they came back from a 2-0 deficit on the road to tie it in the second period, only to kind of let up again. For this team, for any team, to be a champion, you have to stomp and kick and crush a team when you have it down and vulnerable. The Avs just didn’t do that.

- Semyon Varlamov. He didn’t make the big saves tonight. He didn’t make the big ones in Game 6. He had a great season, but he failed in the clutch in the end. It’s the hard truth. The Wild got a few softies tonight. Varlamov got four goals to work with and he could never make the big save. A great season for him feels empty tonight.

- Gabe Landeskog. Not nearly good enough in the final two games. For whatever reason, he just seemed slow and incapable of making even simple offensive plays, especially tonight. He was a minus-2 with one shot tonight in a Game 7. He just didn’t make any big plays at all in the final two games, and it hurt a lot.

- Injuries. Losing John Mitchell and Tyson Barrie was big. The power play finished the series at 12 percent. Losing Barrie not only hurt the PP. It hurt the Avs’ ability to get out of their zone easier with his speed and stick-handling. Now, Matt Cooke gets to play again in the next series.

Losing Mitchell meant the Avs never had a reliable third-line center in the series. Marc-Andre Cliche, I’m sorry to say, was terrible. Joey Hishon played tonight at third line, and had a great assist. And yet, Patrick Roy only played him 4 minutes, 36 seconds tonight, while Cliche played 16-plus minutes. Hishon never played in Game 6 either. I thought that was a mistake by Roy. Cliche never had a sniff offensively in the series and, frankly, wasn’t all that great defensively either. Roy was loyal to Cliche for being a good soldier in the regular season, but in the end it burned him. Cliche was a minus-3 and had two – TWO – shots on goal in the series despite playing a lot of minutes. Yet, it wasn’t all his fault. He’s a fourth-line guy who had to fill in for Mitchell. He was miscast.

No Matt Duchene until Game 6 obviously hurt.

Yet, let’s not make injuries the total focal point. The Wild had to play this series without their two original goalies on the season, Josh Harding and Niklas Backstrom. They had to play without Darcy Kuempel for the final few minutes of regulation and OT tonight too, while the Avs had their Vezina Trophy finalist in net.

It was a great season, though. I do believe this Avs team will be back and do better than this one too. They have too much young talent not to succeed. Give them another good D-man or two, maybe a little more size and toughness up front, and they’ll be there.

Terry Frei and I will document this season in book form soon. The final chapter won’t be a happy one. But it will still tell the story of a fairly remarkable team led by a coach who brought pride back to the Avalanche logo. Here’s your pre-order link to get it on Amazon.

Thanks to all the readers here on the blog this season.

Denver Post: LOADED: 05.01.2014
Blue Jackets in playoffs, injuries ignored by players

By Aaron Portzline The Columbus Dispatch • Wednesday April 30, 2014 5:57 AM

A broken right index finger, a separated right shoulder, a herniated disc, a bruised left hand, and an inch-long cut that required six stitches below a black-and-blue left eye.

That’s not the Blue Jackets’ list of injuries. That’s just the list of woes that right wing R.J. Umberger carries into the offseason.

“When you’re playing and you have a game the next night you’re able to push it aside,” Umberger said. “But when the season is over, and you don’t have a game to get ready for, you start to notice the pain maybe a little bit more.”

The Blue Jackets’ season ended in dramatic fashion on Monday. They scored three goals in five minutes late in the third period, but fell 4-3 to the Pittsburgh Penguins, losing their first-round playoff series in six games.

Yesterday, players gathered at Nationwide Arena to meet for the last time as presently constructed. Most received medical treatment, too.

During the season, and especially during the playoffs, injury updates and specifics become top-secret information.

But with no games to play until next fall, the Blue Jackets spoke freely yesterday.

Defenseman James Wisniewski suffered torn cartilage on the right side of his rib cage in Game 3, making it hard to push with his right arm and hard to reach quickly for the puck.

He did not miss a game, but he did miss part of Monday’s game because of a back injury when he slammed awkwardly into the corner after a collision with Pittsburgh’s Tanner Glass.

Or was it a back injury?

“My head didn’t feel that great,” Wisniewski said. “I said it was my back so I didn’t have to do the 20-minute protocol and go through the concussion process (and the quiet room).

“I didn’t feel like going in and talking to doctors for 20 minutes while that game was still going on.”

Rookie defenseman Ryan Murray blocked a shot in Game 3 — “It was a weird shot, not a very hard shot,” he said — and suffered a fractured right foot. He missed Game 4, but played in games 5 and 6 and limped about in a walking boot yesterday.

“It was pretty painful (playing with it),” Murray said. “You kind of get used to it, though.”

Defenseman Fedor Tyutin was walking slowly and stiffly, as if he’d ridden a horse to the rink.

He confirmed that he missed games 3 and 4 because of a concussion. Asked if he was better, Tyutin said, “Mostly.”

But he said his whole body was “pretty sore.”

Left wing Nick Foligno missed the first two games of the series while he recovered from a medial collateral ligament sprain in his left knee.

Asked before Game 4 if he was 100 percent healed, Foligno smiled and said: “I’m OK. I’ll be all right. I can play.”

General manager Jarmo Kekalainen said at least two players might require minor surgeries pending their exit physicals in the next couple of days.

“There’s no such thing as minor surgery if you’re the one going through it,” Kekalainen said. “But I don’t think any of our guys are looking at major procedures, anything that’s going to take a six-month recovery or anything like that.”

Umberger said he joked with his wife that the stitches under his left eye — caused by a puck in Game 4 — was such a “good look” for him that he’d consider getting a tattoo replica in the same spot when it healed.
Guiding the Blue Jackets through their two-year transition into playoff contenders has earned coach Todd Richards and his staff long-term contract extensions.

"I told the coaches that we, as an organization, would like to make a long-term commitment to the whole group of them, because they’ve earned it," general manager Jarmo Kekalainen said. “It will bring stability to the organization.”

Kekalainen and president of hockey operations John Davidson met with Richards and assistant coaches Craig Hartsburg, Dan Hinote and Ian Clark yesterday morning, hours after the Blue Jackets were eliminated from a first-round Stanley Cup playoff series with a 4-3 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins in Game 6.

Kekalainen and Davidson are impressed with what Richards and his staff have accomplished in the past two seasons, leading a team that had the worst record in the NHL in 2011-12 to the brink of the playoffs last season and to a franchise-record 93 points and the club’s first two playoff wins this season.

“We’ll talk to (Richards) and go through the process and try to get him under a long-term deal, and then get his assistants on board with contracts that are of the same length,” Kekalainen said.

Richards was signed to a one-year extension last June, extending his current contract through next season. Kekalainen would like to lock him up for longer.

“He sets the bar high,” Kekalainen said. “We get better every day. A big part of that is (Richards), with his insights and his planning, the day-to-day requirement for work ethic that he has established for players.

“We see it from inside the building, and people all around the NHL see it, too.”

The Blue Jackets are 85-70-16 since Richards replaced Scott Arniel halfway through the 2011-12 season, including 43-32-7 this season.

Dismal series

Defenceman James Wisniewski relished this regular season, he said, but his performance in the playoffs against the Penguins was one to forget.

Wisniewski had seven goals and 44 assists in 75 regular-season games, matching his career high for points in a season and setting a franchise record for points and assists by a defenseman.

“I don’t know what happened in the playoffs,” Wisniewski said. “I couldn’t get a bounce. Everything just went wrong. It’s been hard to sleep.”

Wisniewski took five minor penalties and struggled on the puck. Before yesterday’s games, 330 skaters had played in a first-round game. None had a worse plus-minus rating than Wisniewski (minus-7).

“It wasn’t a lack of effort, of the will or the want,” said Wisniewski, who suffered a rib injury in Game 3 and a head injury in Game 6. “It’s one of those things where it’s hard for you guys to see, but sometimes the puck is bouncing … just little stuff and it looks like, ‘What is that guy doing?’

“It just compounded and compounded, and then you’re squeezing your stick a little too tight and you start thinking, ‘Is it going to happen again?’”

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 05.01.2014
Michael Arace commentary: Task for Blue Jackets is to keep progressing

By Michael Arace The Columbus Dispatch  •  Wednesday April 30, 2014

5:13 AM

Center Ryan Johansen was the last man out of the locker room on Monday night, after the Blue Jackets were eliminated by the Pittsburgh Penguins in Game 6 of their first-round playoff series. One of the last things he said before he hung up his skates:

“I’m sure a lot of fans wish next season started next week. I do, too.”

This thrilling series is why they built the place, to marry a team to a city and its fans. The Jackets came back and won two games in overtime, one in Pittsburgh and one in Columbus. Nationwide Arena beamed like a middle-aged couple finally wed. The aim now is to improve on every anniversary and to get to the silver.

This task is in the hands of general manager Jarmo Kekalainen and his boss, John Davidson, president of hockey operations. They are spending the next few days sifting through injuries heretofore undisclosed and conducting exit interviews with players and coaches.

“It’s the start of next year,” Davidson said. “We’re going through the whole process and telling everyone our expectations for next season. We’ll talk about every aspect of our organization.”

Kekalainen and his hand-picked scouting staff are preparing for the draft, to be held in Philadelphia at the end of June. Free-agent season opens on July 1. Will the Jackets bring anyone in? Will they buy anyone out? What, exactly, do they want to tweak on their roster?

They have learned that the playoffs are played in increasingly higher revolutions. They must adapt.

“I come out of the last two games thinking: We’ve got to be able to play faster,” coach Todd Richards said. “Individuals (have to) play faster — but I think teams-wise, systems-wise, we’ve got to play faster. Because going forward, as each series goes on, speed’s going to pick up. It’s going to get faster and more intense. As a group, as an organization, we’ve got to get faster.”

The Jackets came out of the smash-mouth Western Conference, and the ultra-competitive Central Division, and it served them well in their first season in the East, and in the Metro. Yet in the end, they could not punish the Penguins to the desired degree because they could not catch Dan Bylsma’s team with enough frequency.

“They’re a great hockey team,” Richards said. “Dan has been there for a while. Their systems are in place. A lot of guys have played together for a long time, so there’s a chemistry there. They pushed the last two games, you could see it. They’ve won and they know what it takes to win, their backs were against the wall and they umped their game.”

The Jackets are the youngest team in the league on most nights — a shade over 26 years, on average, depending on their active roster. The Penguins are among the oldest and, it follows, the most experienced. It was a factor in the last two games of the series. The Penguins showed them another gear, with which the Jackets are unfamiliar.

“It’s just hard right now,” Kekalainen said as he went around the locker room on Monday night, shaking hands with players.

“But I’m proud of these guys,” he said.

He must be encouraged, too.

His fraternity-aged players — Boone Jenner, Ryan Murray, David Savard and Johansen — came off a terrific regular season and — with the exception of Murray, who played hurt — elevated their games in the playoffs.

His leaders — notably Jack Johnson and Brandon Dubinsky — showed the hearts of lions under the most intense conditions. Johnson led the team in scoring and landed the Jackets’ trademark hits in the series. Dubinsky’s defensive job on Sidney Crosby, who went goalless, forced Bylsma to reform his forward lines.

“We’ve taken a step forward two seasons in a row, which is good,” Davidson said. “It’s hard to take giant steps, but two steps are helpful. It has to continue. That is one message to our players.”

On that note, we end.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 05.01.2014
Brandon Dubinsky and company helped inspire hockey excitement during the Blue Jackets' playoff series.

The Penguins-Blue Jackets series is over and I'm home, mostly having caught up on my sleep and grudgingly having traded my skates for a lawnmower.

Just making sure you were still reading. I can't skate. I struggle to mow.

For the last two weeks, though, skates were my thing. My first hockey assignment was a pretty darn good one: The young, hungry Blue Jackets vs. one of the NHL's blue bloods, a Penguins team that won't be satisfied with anything less than kissing the Stanley Cup in June.

Before two weeks ago, I knew about the Stanley Cup. And that Mario Lemieux was co-owner of the Penguins. And how to get to Pittsburgh.

I won't say I was nervous or out of place, but one of the first things I remember is thinking how cold it was on the lower level of the arena.

Um, yeah.

HEATING UP THE ICE

Check out photos of the Columbus Blue Jackets Ice Girls. Which ones are your favorites?

Now, though? I'm hooked.

Can't wait for next year.

I have to brush up on my French, my left hook and my rulebook, but I come away thinking the Blue Jackets showed the hockey world they're better than most people thought. It was a wild series in which no lead was safe and nothing was predictable. I came in liking good drama and left liking good hockey.

I knew the game -- to an extent. And I'd followed the Blue Jackets -- to an extent. I'd covered summer press conferences, watched games on TV, followed feature articles and the standings and the playoff race. I knew the Blue Jackets hadn't been to the playoffs since 2009, and that was simply a happy to be there four-and-out.

I knew this time was different, but I didn't know how much different. And I knew playoff hockey was good, but I didn't know how good. I'd watched for years, but usually just casually.

"Hey! Sports on TV!"

I became one of Pavlov's dogs. From now on, though, I'm watching closely.

The game is fast. Plays -- and games -- turn in an instant. Whether it makes sense or not, the puck takes strange bounces. I didn't need to be a hockey expert to see that Sidney Crosby in the open ice was a sight to behold, and I came to know that he didn't have a stellar series.

CHARACTER AND HEART

This Blue Jackets team will leave a lasting legacy

In guys like Ryan Johansen, Cam Atkinson and Matt Calvert, I know the Blue Jackets have a nice core with plenty of room to grow. Johansen might some day be really special.

Nationwide Arena provided quite an environment. The whole city of Columbus seemed to embrace the Blue Jackets, too. The energy was real. The excitement was real. It was just really fun to be in there -- in both cities -- and soak it all in.

Take a second and look up Dancing Kevin. Just take my word for it.
The Stars will have an interesting dilemma this summer as they likely will target changes on defense, and yet seem to have 10 possible candidates to play defense already in house.

 Asked on Tuesday what the biggest need for the franchise is, both GM Jim Nill and coach Lindy Ruff said a top-level defenseman.

"Moving forward, it would be great to have a No. 1 or No. 2 defenseman, but there are 25 other teams that want the same thing," Nill said. "That's probably something we'll have to draft and develop. It's hard to find a true No. 1 defenseman."

While Ruff added: "We came a long way from the start of the year to the end of the year on the defending front, on what we gave up, the shots we gave up and the quality of chances we gave up. We made good strides. I still believe we are a big defender away from being a harder team to play against. I think we have some young guys that could easily step in there. [Patrik] Nemeth got a little bit of it. I have high hopes for other players in the organization as well that I've seen play."

The Stars have seven returning defensemen under contract and expect to sign restricted free agent Brenden Dillon (they Stars can match any offer, and restricted free agents rarely change teams).

Here is how that looks:

Sergei Gonchar _ $5.0 million
Alex Goligoski _ $4.6 million
Trevor Daley _ $3.3 million
Aaron Rome _ $1.5 million
Patrik Nemeth _ $763,333
Jordie Benn _ $700,000
Kevin Connauton _ $683,333
Brenden Dillon _ RFA who made $900,000 last season.

What's more, they have two youngsters in Jamie Oleksiak, 21, and John Klingberg, 21, who are close to being NHL ready. Oleksiak is playing in the AHL playoffs, while Klingberg is having hip surgery, but should be ready by training camp. Oleksiak is a big (6-7, 250) defenseman who the team would like to turn into a physical defender. Klingberg is a skilled player with a unique vision and is the only right-handed shot among the group.

Nill said his impression of the defense has changed this season, in large part because of the improved play of Goligoski and Daley.

"They grew as a group. They started as our weakness, and they ended up as one of our strengths," Nill said. "I know Daley and Goligoski in the past couple of years have really taken quite a beating, and to watch how their game matured, and to see them play against the other team's best players every night, really leading our team..If it wasn't for those two players, we wouldn't be where we're at. Then, you've got a player like Jordie Benn who came in as a sixth, seventh, eighth guy, and to see him develop into a top four defenseman, that's pretty impressive."

Nill said the fact that Ruff had to assess his defense and spent the first 20 or so games figuring out their strengths won't be an issue next season. He said the team has four or five players who are pretty solid in their spots. Still, the team has some issues. Do they keep Gonchar and Rome? Do they buy them out? Do they trade them? The guess here is they try to trade Gonchar and consider buying out Rome. Nill wasn't tipping his hand, but if you read between the lines, this team would like more right-handed defensemen. Ruff helped put together Canada's defense for the Olympics and there four lefties and four righties. He is on the record saying he prefers and even split Nill acknowledged that."It's something we need," Nill said. "We're lucky that we have Klingberg coming along, but whether he's ready or not for next year, we'll have to find out. But those guys are very valuable, they're hard to find, and that's something we need to add."

There are defensemen possibly available in trade. Alex Edler is 28 and 6-3, 215. Vancouver could be ready to move him after he was a league-worst minus-39 last season. But he is left-handed shot and makes $5 million a season for the next five years. Christian Ehrhoff and Tyler Myers might be available in Buffalo. Ehrhoff will be 32 in July. He's 6-2, 196 and a left shot and has a cap hit of $4 million for the next seven years (although his salary is cheaper than that). Myers is just 24, but he's on the hook for an average of $5.5 million for the next six years. He is a right-handed shot. And Dmitry Kulikov is 23 and a lefty. He had 19 points and was minus-26 last season.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 05.01.2014
The Dallas Stars just completed one of the most active and dramatic seasons since the franchise moved to the Metroplex. There have been plenty of winning seasons and a Stanley Cup championship in the past, but the 2013-14 season seemed to have a little bit of everything in it. Here are five defining moments:

Modano’s No. 9 hangs
In hindsight, plans for the March 8 ceremony retiring Modano’s No. 9 began when the mullet-coiffed teenager was drafted first overall by the Minnesota North Stars in 1988. Years later, Modano would own almost every Stars offensive record as well as become the greatest American-born player in NHL history. The ceremony to hang his jersey in the American Airlines Center rafters was almost the sole focus of the organization entering the season. Little did they know when the ceremony would roll around at the Stars would be right in the middle of the playoff hunt.

The Peverley incident
Hockey and the Stars were pushed to the forefront of national media attention late in the season for reasons no one in the organization would ever hope to see. On March 10, Peverley suffered a cardiac incident on the Stars’ bench. Players threw equipment onto the ice to stop play and allow doctors to pull Peverley into the hallway to resuscitate him. The game would be postponed to April. The resilient Peverley made a quick recovery in the hallway and stayed with the team in a moral support role that became a point of pride for the organization and fans.

Front office moves
Credit for this season’s success goes straight to the top, and the top was new general manager Jim Nill. In just a couple of months, Nill turned over the Stars’ front office and roster, putting together pieces that would push Dallas back into the playoffs. Out of all those moves, Nill said the one he believes was the best for the organization was bringing on head coach Lindy Ruff. Ruff changed his style of coaching slightly after spending 15 years with the Buffalo Sabres. Nill saw him become like a father figure or brother to what would become a very close-knit team. His up-tempo, forecheck-heavy style of play meshed perfectly with the young, speedy team Nill assembled.

Tyler Seguin trade
Jim Nill pulled off a Fourth of July blockbuster trade that rivaled any fireworks show in Dallas-Fort Worth, bringing rising star Tyler Seguin, along with Rich Peverley and Ryan Button, to Dallas while sending Loui Eriksson and three other players to Boston. Seguin would thrive in his new home, leading the Stars in scoring in the regular season with 84 points (37 goals and 47 assists), which was good for fourth in the NHL. The trade, making Seguin the Stars’ top-line center, also allowed forward Jamie Benn to move to his natural position of left wing, which developed into a lethal one-two punch.

Rebranding the team
Stars owner Tom Gaglardi, in his first full season, wanted the organization to make a new mark on the Metroplex. He spent much of his time developing a new logo and uniform for the franchise, which effectively hit the reset button after being in a tailspin for several years. The new uniform and logo was unveiled in a big-time event at the Winspear Opera House in downtown Dallas. Shortly after Stars fans learned of the new logo going on the front of his jersey, Benn learned the captain’s “C” would find a new home on the front of his jersey. Through the season, players and coaches alike raved about Benn’s development as the team’s leader.
Detroit Red Wings' Justin Abdelkader, Danny DeKeyser added to Team USA for world championship

3:01 PM, April 30, 2014
By Helene St. James

Danny DeKeyser will get a chance to further hone his worldly skills this spring.

USA Hockey said this afternoon that DeKeyser has been added to the national team that will compete at the International Ice Hockey Federation's world championship May 9-25 in Minsk, Belarus. DeKeyser joins fellow Detroit Red Wings teammate Justin Abdelkader on the squad.

DeKeyser is making his national team debut as a player. He was invited to last August's U.S. orientation camp, which was part of the run-up to forging a team for the Sochi Olympics. Abdelkader turned the Wings' early exit from the 2012 playoffs into a solid performance at the world championship in Helsinki and Stockholm, contributing one goal and three assists in eight games.

DeKeyser, 24, is coming off of a very strong rookie NHL season that saw him produce 23 points in 65 games, along with a plus-10 rating.

Coach Mike Babcock said he thought DeKeyser “faded a bit in the playoffs, but I thought he was still strong.” Babcock has been a vocal fan of DeKeyser since the defenseman joined the Wings out of Western Michigan a year ago, picking the Wings as his destination after being pursued by every team in the NHL. DeKeyser got into the lineup within days of practicing and looked at home thanks to his rangy skating and headsy play. He suffered a broken hand two games into the playoffs and ended up finishing the 2013 season helping Grand Rapids to the Calder Cup championship.

DeKeyser couldn't be sent to the Griffins this season without clearing waivers, so instead, he'll go compete against tons of other young NHL talent at worlds.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 05.01.2014
Mike Babcock is playing this smart, letting everyone know that he’s perfectly comfortable without a contract extension beyond next summer.

That inevitably will ignite that special “if you’re not for us, you’re against us” Detroit parochialism. But Babcock would be crazy to sign a new deal with the Red Wings now because, like everybody else, he can’t be sure what direction the Wings are headed following another abbreviated playoff spring.

It’s basically a message to general manager Ken Holland: Show me what you’ve got this summer.

Are they bold? Or are they boring?

The answer will tell everyone — especially Babcock — whether the Wings are a legitimate championship contender or merely interested in extending their league-high consecutive playoff streak to 24 years.

This season was Babcock’s best coaching performance. He should win NHL coach of the year, considering the inordinate rash of injuries that forced him to try assorted combinations of young, unproven talent. Everybody was well-versed in his success with veteran-laden teams. But Babcock proved this season he could develop young players like Gustav Nyquist, Tomas Tatar and Riley Sheahan — among others — seeing them gain confidence with each game, though they struggled mightily in the first-round playoff loss to Boston.

Babcock has all the leverage. He said Tuesday he doubts he’ll talk with the organization about a contract extension this summer. Babcock could be hockey’s most valuable free agent next summer. He remains a national hero in his native Canada, coaching the past two Olympic gold-medal champions.

Though certainly not a cause for panic, Babcock’s reticence nonetheless suggests the Wings are facing a potentially bigger transitional phase than most initially figured. Whereas Babcock feels comfortable working with a year remaining on his contract, that doesn’t alter the locker-room dynamic if the team struggles again next season and players consider Babcock a lame duck, counting the days until he’s free to offer his services elsewhere.

“I haven’t thought about going anywhere else,” Babcock said. “I can get a job. I’m not worried about that. I like it here. The owner’s great to me. Actually, the owner’s better than great to me here. And they do things right. They treat people right. The (general manager’s) a driven guy who can’t stand losing, and I like being around ultracompetitive people.”

Holland feels the heat. He should. It has been a “five-year drought,” as Babcock described the Wings’ failure to advance beyond the second round of the playoffs since 2009. Holland knows he must continually integrate young prospects into the regular lineup, but he also can’t fall deeply in love with every one of those kids. Hockey and baseball prospects are similar in that the greater value for most of the higher-ranked players is what they can get you in return on the trade market.

This could prove to be a very interesting summer in the NHL, with early rumblings that two superstars could be on the trading block — Nashville’s Shea Weber and Washington’s Alexander Ovechkin.

Nashville general manager David Poile told the Tennessean recently that he has no interest in trading the Predators’ captain, despite Weber’s monstrously front-loaded 14-year contract, which pays him $42 million in salary and bonuses over the next four years.

Weber would fit perfectly with the Wings — a bruising yet skilled, right-handed-shooting No. 1 defenseman with one of the harder shots in the game. That would look nice on the power play, wouldn’t it?

Such deals rarely occur because the asking price — Nashville probably would want at least a couple of young NHL-ready forwards and some No. 1 draft picks — might be too steep in the more cost-conscious NHL.
Difficult decisions loom for rebuilding Red Wings

Gregg Krupa

Detroit — These quiet weeks and months are among the most important for the Red Wings.

What Ken Holland and Mike Babcock are trying to finesse is among the most difficult things in the NHL. Rebuilding on the run is a delicate process.

There have been some missteps.

As the Avalanche are proving, sometimes it is tempting to bottom-out, collect some No. 1 draft choices and then reassert a challenge to the rest of the league.

The Red Wings are likely two years into a three- to five-year rebuilding process en route to playing in the Eastern Conference finals, let alone for a Stanley Cup.

As they start preparing for next season by traveling to Grand Rapids to watch the Griffins in the AHL playoffs, Holland and Babcock will formulate a plan. Expect it to involve quite a bit more of the same.

While it may continue to challenge the patience of some fans fretting about one playoff series victory in three seasons, the Red Wings will continue to emphasize development from within.

Some other possibilities, however, are growing, and they snuck every so lightly into end-of-the-season conversations.

Filling needs

Some veterans have played their last game as Red Wings, creating cap space.

A sizable group of young defensemen is gathering behind Danny DeKeyser and Brendan Smith, providing opportunity for trades.

Three goaltenders of NHL caliber — Jimmy Howard, Jonas Gustavsson and Petr Mrazek — also present interesting options.

The opportunities are welcome because the Red Wings absolutely need one or two more experienced defensemen proficient in moving the puck. Their inability to quickly launch their attack repeatedly costs them offense, as their vaunted transition game has lagged for two seasons.

And remaining in their zone for far too long has created problems that contributed considerably to Howard’s worst season.

They also need much more size and some of the qualities of deterrence that can keep the shavers off of the 35-year-old Pavel Datsyuk and the 33-year-old Henrik Zetterberg.

But which players go and which stay are difficult decisions.

Discarded last season, Valtteri Filppula never shot the puck better for the Lightning.

Stephen Weiss arrived, had a second consecutive injury-riddled year and left considerable doubts about his future.

Older players were retained, while Tomas Tatar started the season on the bench and Gustav Nyquist, Riley Sheahan and Tomas Jurco in Grand Rapids.

The Red Wings plainly prepared to have that good mixture of veterans and the young for the playoffs. With all the injuries, “the kids” got them there. But the need for veteran performers was painfully obvious against the Bruins.

“The one guy that wasn’t there that probably should have been here at the start of the season was Nyquist,” Holland said.

Young Calle Jarnkrok was traded for David Legwand. While Holland said the Red Wings might not have made the playoffs without Legwand as he scored at a pace that would have provided 15 goals in a full season, he provided no production in the playoffs, and Jarnkrok’s development will be worth monitoring.

“We’re going to have to be better throughout our lineup to have success,” said Babcock, who pronounced the absence from a conference final since 2009 “a five-year drought.”

“But I think a lot of that growth can be from within.”

Blue line options

Consider it nearly certain we will see Ryan Sproul, 21, a second-round pick in 2011, and Alexey Marchenko, 22, a selection in the seventh round, skating for the Red Wings regularly on defense as soon as the start of the season.

Consider it less likely, although not impossible, a free-agent, puck-moving blue liner like Joni Pitkanen of the Hurricanes, or more preferably, Matt Niskanen of the Penguins, will arrive, or that the Red Wings will acquire someone like Keith Yandle of the Coyotes or Victor Hedman from the Lightning via trade.

“No, is there a player or two prior to free agency, is there a trade or two as we head toward the NHL draft that we can make that can make us better?” Holland said. “We’ll explore.”

And that is where the finagle room comes in.

Two other defensive prospects, Xavier Ouellet, 20, a second-round pick in 2011, and Mattias Backman, 21, selected in the fifth round the same year, also are on the way, and Holland and the professional scouts begin to see an inventory of interchangeable parts.

“You know, it takes two to make a deal,” Holland said. “But we’ve got lots of kids.”

Success affects draft

As for the size and deterrence the Red Wings perennially lack, at least some size is being addressed; again, internally.

Several seasons ago, a determined effort began to draft larger. The results include forwards like the 6-foot-2, 220-pound Sheahan, 22, and 6-4, 190-pound Anthony Mantha, 19, the first-round pick in 2013, who may have the best goal-scoring skills in the organization.

But, Sheahan and Mantha clearly are more finesse than rugged.

Because the Red Wings continue to make the playoffs, they do not get a shot at 18- and 19-year-olds who can make a quick impact, like Nathan MacKinnon, 18, and Gabriel Landeskog, 21, who powered the Avalanche to an outstanding regular season.

“Nobody seems to have the appetite to want to miss the playoffs for four or five consecutive years to try to build up and replenish this core of players that you can building on and building around for 10 or 12 years,” Holland said.

“We’re not picking in the top five. We’re not getting Steve Yzerman.”

It all adds up to the need for some draft decisions.

“You can’t always be on top,” Babcock said. “But you can sure be going in the right direction, and we have to get things going in the right direction, again.

“I think we’ve got lots of pieces here.

“I think we’re going to be way younger than you’re used to. I think our veteran leadership is going to be Pav and Z. and Kroner (Niklas Kronwall), and we’re going to end up with a lot of kids on this team.”

Detroit News LOADED: 05.01.2014
USA's Justin Abdelkader, Danny DeKeyser among several Red Wings heading to World Championship

Ansar Khan

on April 30, 2014 at 3:03 PM, updated April 30, 2014 at 4:06 PM

DETROIT – Team USA’s Justin Abdelkader and Danny DeKeyser will be among several Detroit Red Wings heading to the World Championship in Minsk, Belarus.

Forwards Gustav Nyquist (Sweden) and Tomas Tatar (Slovakia) and defenseman Jakub Kindl (Czech Republic) also have committed to play for their respective nations. Jonas Gustavsson (Sweden) is considering it.

The 16-team tournament runs from May 9-25.

It will be Abdelkader’s second appearance in the event. He had a goal and three assists in eight games in 2012.

This will be DeKeyser’s first international tournament experience.

DeKeyser, 24, had four goals, 19 assists in 65 games during his rookie season. He averaged 21:38 in ice time and led the team’s defensemen with a plus-10 rating. He called it “a learning experience.”

“Just learned that an 82-game schedule is a grind,” DeKeyser said. “I didn’t even play 82 games and it was still a grind, so just have to be ready to play a lot, that many games next year.”

DeKeyser had no points and logged 23:11 per game in the five-game first-round playoff loss to the Boston Bruins.

“I thought he faded a bit in the playoffs, but I thought he was still strong,” coach Mike Babcock said.

The playoff series was a struggle for Nyquist and Tatar, neither of whom registered a point after a breakout regular season. Nyquist (48 points) led the team with 28 goals and Tatar (39 points) was second with 19.

“Obviously, it (playoffs) is a different game,” Tatar said. “Nobody did good in the series. It didn’t matter if you were a young guy or a veteran”

Jimmy Howard, who was on the U.S. Olympic team, has a good reason for not committing.

“My wife is eight months pregnant so she really doesn’t want me to be over in Belarus just in case anything happens,” Howard said. “I’ll be sticking around here for a while.”

Niklas Kronwall is participating for Sweden due to the birth of his first child last week.

Zetterberg, Datsyuk looking to recuperate

Henrik Zetterberg (Sweden) and Pavel Datsyuk (Russia) aren’t taking part in the Worlds due, in part, to injuries.

Zetterberg said his surgically repaired back was fine in the two playoffs games in which he played. But he issues with his foot.

“Still had some weakness down in my foot that we dealt with a little bit,” Zetterberg said. “That will come back (get better), but it’s tough to say when. It could’ve been a week, two weeks, a month, two months, we don’t really know when that will come back but it will come back and other than that I felt good.”

Datsyuk said he’ll have an MRI on his knee this week to determine if surgery is needed.

“I think it was a small problem, but it was fine,” Datsyuk said. “It looks like I’m OK.”

Michigan Live LOADED: 05.01.2014
Much of Red Wings' improvement must come from within, but some pieces need to be acquired

Ansar Khan
on April 30, 2014 at 6:04 AM, updated April 30, 2014 at 1:42 PM

DETROIT – The Detroit Red Wings take a lot of pride in their 23-year playoff streak, the longest current run in the four major sports. But they're not proud of how they've fared in the postseason lately. Coach Mike Babcock referred to it as a “five-year drought.”

The Red Wings haven't advanced past the second round since 2009.

"I'm proud we made the playoffs with all the adversity we faced with injuries, but nobody here wants to be taking team pictures in April," general manager Ken Holland said. “We certainly have have bigger hopes and aspirations. We want to go further in the playoffs.”

Said Babcock: “You can’t always be on top, but you can be going in the right direction, so we have to get things moving that way again.”

Players gathered for the team photo and cleaned out their lockers Tuesday, after getting ousted in five games by the Boston Bruins, the second time in three years they’ve bowed out in the opening round.

“We’re an organization that is not happy just to make the postseason. We want to be a contender and win the Cup,” captain Henrik Zetterberg said. “We haven’t been that the last few years and that’s something we want to change.”

The Red Wings feel they still have a good core of veterans with Zetterberg, Pavel Datsyuk, Johan Franzen, Niklas Kronwall and goaltender Jimmy Howard. Younger players who stepped up in a time of need – Gustav Nyquist, Tomas Tatar, Riley Sheahan, Tomas Jurco, Danny DeKeyser and Brendan Smith – will continue to grow.

Health is a key factor. It was a wasted season for second-line center Stephen Weiss, who didn’t play beyond early December due to a sports hernia. Top-pair defenseman Jonathan Ericsson missed the final four weeks and the entire playoff series with broken bones and a torn ligament in his finger. Zetterberg (back surgery) and Datsyuk (knee) both missed essentially half the season and weren’t at full strength in the playoffs.

“I think right now if you look at the roster we have a good team,” Zetterberg said. “Obviously, we have to add a few pieces.”

They need help up front and on defense. They could use a goal-scoring winger, preferably with size, and a right-handed shooting top-four defenseman. They’ll explore trades and a relatively thin free-agent market, but they’re counting on help from within.

The first thing we have to decide is how many of these young guys are ready to play on our team at the start of the season,” Holland said. “Times have changed in the National Hockey League in free agency. July 1 is a time for adding support players. Teams now sign the best players to long-term contracts; they don’t hit the market. I told the team this morning a lot of what we’re going to try to do has to be internal.”

Babcock expressed the same sentiment.

Ken Holland on Red Wings future General manager says the Red Wings have to get better.

“I think we have lots of pieces here,” Babcock said. “We’re going to be way younger than we used to be. Our veteran leadership will be Pav, Z and Kronner. And then we’re going to end up with a lot of kids on this team. I’m not certain going outside, unless you can get exactly what you’re looking for, is worth it when we have so much right here within.”

They still need some outside help. The salary cap rises to $71.1 million. The Red Wings are roughly $20 million under but need to sign restricted free agents Tatar, Sheahan and DeKeyser. That will leave them enough money to explore the market for a forward, a defenseman and a back-up goalie (they might re-sign Jonas Gustavsson).
Jonas Gustavsson open to re-signing with Red Wings, who like him as Jimmy Howard's backup.

DETROIT – Jonas Gustavsson and the Detroit Red Wings have been a good match for two seasons. Before long, they’ll begin talking about keeping that relationship intact.

Barring an offer from another team to be their No. 1 goaltender, Gustavsson wants to return for another season – and perhaps many more – with the Red Wings, who want to retain the unrestricted free agent as their backup behind Jimmy Howard.

They just have to reach an agreement.

“It’s been really fun, a great group of guys and I see a lot of potential here so yeah, I can see it,” Gustavsson said Tuesday after the Red Wings cleaned out their lockers following a first-round playoff loss to the Boston Bruins.

“I like it here. If they want me, at that point we would talk about what they want, terms and all that. But like I said, I like it here. I could absolutely see myself playing here for 10-15 more years because I had a lot of fun and as I said, a great group and a really good organization.”

After spending the first three seasons of his NHL career in Toronto, Gustavsson signed a two-year deal in 2012 to be Howard’s backup.

He batted injuries during both years in Detroit but proved to be a valuable commodity this season when Howard was sidelined with a bruised hand, sore knee and a couple of bouts with the flu.

After getting off to an 8-0-1 start, Gustavsson finished with a 16-5-4 record, 2.63 goals-against average and .907 save percentage in 27 appearances.

But he also battled injuries to his groin (three times), neck and shoulder, causing him to miss a total of 23 games.

Mike Babcock on Red Wings offseason Veteran coach says conditioning is a key for players who battled injuries

“It’s been a lot of injuries,” said Gustavsson, 29. “You don’t want to have those for yourself and for your team. You want to be out there to be able to be part of the team every day, every day of the season so of course that sets me back. That’s obviously something I’m going to keep working on, to prevent injuries like that.

“I felt like I found a way that was working for me at the end of the season so hopefully I can build on that. The groin felt really good for the second part of the season for the most part so that’s something I’m going to keep working on.

“That’s something I need for myself, too, because I want to be playing at a high level for a long time and I want to try to take the next step and that’s part of taking the next step.”

Gustavsson finished the season between the pipes after Howard came down with the flu shortly before Game 4 of the playoff series with the Bruins.

He didn’t learn he’d be replacing Howard until shortly before the opening faceoff of a 3-2 overtime loss in Game 4 – his NHL playoff debut, by the way – and he was also in net for the decisive 4-2 loss in Game 5.

Gustavsson had a 2.71 GAA and .917 save percentage in the playoffs.

Gustavsson said he didn’t know when negotiations with the Red Wings would begin and he doesn’t have a problem serving as Howard’s backup if he can’t land a job as another team’s No. 1 netminder.

“I’m just going to try to go where I can feel like I can take that next step. It could be here and if so, that’s great. And if nothing happens here then you look at other stuff.”

The Red Wings other options for Howard’s backup are to sign an unrestricted free agent or promote Petr Mrazek from Grand Rapids, where he led the Griffins to the Calder Cup last year and has them leading the Abbotsford Heat 2-0 in their first-round AHL series.

Mrazek played well during nine appearances with the Red Wings this season, posting a 2-4 record, 1.74 GAA, .927 save percentage and two shutouts.

But the Red Wings would prefer to have Mrazek spend another year in Grand Rapids before promoting him to the NHL fulltime.

“We believe we got a 60-game No. 1 goalie” in Howard, said general manager Ken Holland. “Is Petr Mrazek, as a 22-year-old, better off playing 15-18 games in the NHL or is he better off playing 65 games in the AHL for one more year?

“That’s the internal conversation we got to have.”

Michigan Live LOADED: 05.01.2014
Injuries hampered Gustavsson's time with Wings

By Chuck Pleiness, The Macomb Daily

Posted: 04/30/14, 6:05 PM EDT | Updated: 7 hrs ago

DETROIT >> Jonas Gustavsson's two seasons in Detroit seemed to be spent mainly on the trainer's table.

Battling injuries from groins to shoulders, Gustavsson appeared in just 34 regular-season games with the Wings over two seasons.

“I mean it's been a lot of injuries, you don’t want to have those for yourself and for your team,” Gustavsson said Tuesday during the Wings' locker cleanout at Joe Louis Arena. “You want to be out there to be able to be part of the team every day, every day of the season so of course that sets me back. I’m going to keep working on it to prevent injuries like that.”

Gustavsson has missed a total of 23 games on five separate occasions with three different types of injuries last season.

Groin injuries have been his Achilles heel since signing a free agent deal with the Wings.

Along with missing 18 games due to a groin injury this season, he appeared in just seven of the 48 games during the lockout-shortened year last season, making just four starts. He didn't play over the final 27 games of the season, which included the playoffs.

“I felt like I found a way that was working for me at the end of the season so hopefully I can build on that,” Gustavsson said. “The groin felt really good for the second part of the season for the most part so that’s something I’m going to keep working on and that’s something I need for myself too because I want to be playing at a high level for a long time and I want to try to take the next step and that’s part of taking the next step.”

When Gustavsson played, he played well this season, going 16-5-4 with a 2.63 goals-against average and a .907 save percentage. He appeared in the final two games of the playoffs, filling in for starter Jimmy Howard who was sidelined with the flu, and gave Detroit a chance.

Gustavsson has aspirations of perhaps being a No. 1 goalie somewhere, but could return to Detroit.

“I think every athlete wants to be as good as they can be and reach as high as they can, but that being said it's not like I can go out on the open market and demand a starting role somewhere because there are a lot of good goalies,” said Gustavsson, who missed the final two regular-season games after suffering a left shoulder injury in a 4-3 shootout loss to Pittsburgh. “You have to compete to get to that job. I would like to play a few more games that so I’m just going to try to go where I can feel like I can take that next step. It could be here and if so that’s great and if nothing happens here then you look at other stuff.”

The Wings' top goalie prospect is Petr Mrazek, who'll likely spend one more season in Grand Rapids in order to play in games instead of sitting on the bench as the backup in Detroit.

“We might,” Wings general manager Ken Holland said when asked if the team will need to search for a backup goalie next season. “We believe we have a 60-game No. 1 goalie. Is Petr Mrazek, as a 22-year-old, better off playing 15-18 games in the NHL or is he better off playing 65 games in the AHL for one more year? That’s the internal conversation we’ve got to have.”

Mrazek has played in 11 regular season games in parts of two years in Detroit going 3-5-0 with a 1.74 GAA and a save percentage of .927. Two of his wins were shutouts.

“Everybody is enamored with (Anthony) Mantha and Mrazek and the people that aren’t here,” Holland said. “Well, the people that are here now, we were enamored with those people three years ago. Now they’re here and (people) want to know who’s next. It’s human nature. That’s why I try to keep (prospects) out of here as long as possible because there’s big expectations when you play in the NHL; there’s passion; there’s emotion and when a player doesn’t live up to those expectations and that hope, people get down on them real fast.”

Belarus bound

Five Wings – Justin Abdelkader (United States), Danny DeKeyser (United States), Gustav Nyquist (Sweden), Tomas Tatar (Slovakia) and Jakub Kindl (Czech Republic) – will play for their countries at the World Championships in Minsk, Belarus, which begins on May 9.

Abdelkader also appeared for the United States in 2012. DeKeyser will make his international hockey debut.

Macomb Daily LOADED: 05.01.2014

Mrazek led the Griffins to the Calder Cup title last season.

"Whether (Petr) Mrazek plays here or Gustavsson plays here, Gus got half our wins this year," Wings coach Mike Babcock said. "The bottom line is if you're playing every day you have to earn the right to play every day. If you're a tandem that's what happens but the other guy has to earn the right to make that happen so we'll see what happens."

Macomb Daily LOADED: 05.01.2014
EDMONTON - For a symbolic move so grand as uprooting Wayne Gretzky from outside Rexall Place and moving him downtown, the official confirmation was decidedly prosaic.

At 5:13 p.m. Monday, Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson tweeted: “I have confirmed 4 sure that the Gretzky statue will be relocated when the new arena opens.”

Iveson was asked about the statue decision on Wednesday.

“That’s my understanding, that the Gretzky statue will move to the new building when the new building opens,” Iveson said.

The monument to Gretzky — in full uniform, arms aloft, holding the Stanley Cup — was installed beside the main entrance of Rexall Place in 1989, the year after his trade to the Los Angeles Kings touched off an intense and lengthy period of civic bereavement at the loss of the greatest player of his generation, some believe in NHL history.

Do you support the decision to move Wayne Gretzky’s statue from Rexall Place to the new downtown arena, Rogers Place?

Yes, the Gretzky statue belongs at the Oilers’ new home.No, the statue should stay where he and the Oilers played and won all those Stanley Cups.

The thought of moving his likeness from the arena where Gretzky helped the Oilers win four of their five Stanley Cups, back in the 1980s, ignited an emotional debate, which Iveson acknowledged in his comments on Wednesday.

“Citizens are really of two minds about this,” Iveson said. “I have heard from those who think it should be where he played, and that’s hallowed ground, and I understand that point of view.

“But most other people I have heard from think it should be where the team is because that’s where the active spirit of the Oilers and the new future that they’re going to create in the new building will reside. And one of the best ways to link to the heritage and the glory days is to make sure that statue is part of the plaza downtown, so I’m supportive of that.”

Back in 2012, Gretzky himself wisely chose to stay out of the discussion.

“I’m truly honoured the City of Edmonton chose to erect a statue in my honour, and I certainly respect their decision on whether or not to move it,” Gretzky told the Journal in a statement in 2012. “I’m behind whatever decision they make 100 per cent.”

The mini-furor over the disposition of the statue mirrored in microcosm the often contentious four-year negotiation between the City and Oilers owner Daryl Katz over funding the new arena, to be called Rogers Place, which is under construction at a site on 104 Ave. between 101 and 104 Streets.

The new building is scheduled to open in September 2016.

The statue wrangle sent proponents on both sides of the issue rummaging through clauses in the arena master agreement for the authority on which to base either moving the piece, or leaving it right where it is.

About a year ago, language was found in the agreement that indicated the city would allow Katz to transfer the statue to Rogers Place, installing it somewhere within the new complex, possibly on the Wintergarden pedestrian bridge over 104th Ave.

An Oilers spokesman said Wednesday said it is premature to speculate on precisely where the statue will be situated in the new arena complex.

It’s believed the iconic transfer also required the approval of Molson’s, which paid $75,000 for the bronze statue. The beer company, like Gretzky, was fine with the move.

“Whatever the city agrees to, we’re totally fine with that. It’s a statue of Wayne Gretzky, he played for the Oilers, so it makes sense for the statue to be where the Oilers are,” a Molson Coors Canada publicist told the Journal in April 2013.
Jovanovski snubbed by hockey writers for Masterton Trophy

By Harvey Fialkov Sun Sentinel
4:41 p.m. EDT, April 30, 2014

The three finalists for the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy came out a few hours ago and surprisingly Panthers defenseman Ed Jovanovski isn’t among them.

I totally understand Dominic Moore of the Rangers as the one-time Panther center played with a heavy heart this year after losing his wife, Katie, to liver cancer in January 2013. I also get Jaromir Jagr, who at 42, led the Devils with 67 points, but Manny Malhotra?

All Malhotra did was make it back into the NHL after signing a PTO with the Charlotte Checkers in October. Malhotra had a meager 13 points in 69 games. Really? Over Jovanovski, who at 37 is believed to be the first professional athlete in the four major team sports in the U.S. to make it back from major hip surgery, a technique called hip resurfacing or one step below a complete hip replacement.

Jovanovski might’ve slowed down but he still provided leadership on and off the ice, while only missing second games of back to backs since he came back in January after basically missing a season and a half. Jovo played in 37 games and had five points with a respectable minus-6 ice rating on a poor team.

While I would vote for Moore to win the award given to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey, I believe the snub to Jovanovski is appalling.

One player from each team is selected by the team’s local Professional Hockey Writers’ Association chapter. The selected writers then vote for their top three with the top three vote-getters designated as finalists. The winner will be announced at the annual NHL Awards show (NBCSN) on June 24.

Sun Sentinel LOADED: 05.01.2014
Kings simply had more bite than Sharks

By Helene Elliott
April 30, 2014

SAN JOSE — When there was every reason to give up, the Kings continued to fight.

When they had every excuse to moan about the San Jose Sharks being too fast and too big and too deadly at creating outnumbered rushes — all of which was true in the first three games of the teams’ first-round playoff series — the Kings fixed their problems instead of making them worse.

And now they’ve made history with a 5-1 victory over the perennially underachieving Sharks, winning the series in seven games and setting up a second-round matchup against the Ducks that will start Saturday in Anaheim.

No planes or time zone changes, but a stiff challenge for the Kings, who lost four of their five regular-season games against the Ducks.

"Travel is a lot easier," Kings goaltender Jonathan Quick said Wednesday, with a rare smile. "We’re looking forward to that. There’s a lot of things we have to prepare for, but travel’s not one of them."

Coach Darryl Sutter knew all along that what appeared to be the Kings’ darkest hour — the overtime loss in Game 3 that put them at a 3-0 series deficit — wasn’t the end, but the beginning of their chance to show what they were made of.

"It’s a tough hill," he said after that game, "and we won’t go quietly away, that’s for sure."

Now, they don’t have to go away at all. As only the fourth NHL team to win a best-of-seven series after losing the first three games, the Kings will go to Anaheim to meet the top-seeded Ducks, who completed a six-game victory over Dallas on Sunday.

Finally, the playoff series fans in Southern California have been waiting for, the first postseason matchup of the Kings and the team that owes its birth in large part to the hockey interest created when Wayne Gretzky wore a Kings uniform.

"I think it’s great for Southern California hockey to finally have this matchup," said Kings captain Dustin Brown, who scored the first of two empty-net goals and sent Sharks fans streaming out of SAP Center. "It will be fun."

The Kings got this far because they welcomed the pressure that always seems to overwhelm the Sharks, who finished one place and 11 points ahead of them in the Pacific Division this season. The Kings were strong mentally where the Sharks were fragile. They became positionally sound as the series went on, while the Sharks became more confused.

"One and two were a little out of character for us," Quick said of the first two games. "They kind of pushed that upon us. They forced us to make errors and mistakes and you’ve got to tip your cap to them on that. Games 3, 4, right on through, we got back to what we’re used to doing."

So did he, giving up only two goals in the final three games. But he had lots of company.

Center Anze Kopitar, durable defenseman Drew Doughty and clutch scorer Justin Williams all did their jobs. So did youngsters Tyler Toffoli (three goals) and Jake Muzzin. They compensated for losing stalwart defenseman Willie Mitchell to an injury in Game 6 and playing without him in Game 7, banding together in a fashion the Sharks might never learn.

San Jose’s big guns disappeared late in the series, as they usually do. Joe Thornton and Joe Pavelski were largely silent. Patrick Marleau had a few scoring chances early in Game 7 but became invisible later. That could cost Coach Todd McLellan and/or General Manager Doug Wilson their jobs, but how do you teach heart and determination?

The Kings had it all along. "That was a great feeling. Like we said from Game 4 on — or even Game 1 really — we believed in ourselves from the first game and even though it went down 3-0 we were never going to give up," Doughty said.

“We kind of sensed going into tonight’s game they were going to be a little nervous, they were going to kind of see what was going to happen. I felt they played a good game, but the third period was huge for us.”

In winning, the Kings joined the 1942 Toronto Maple Leafs, 1975 New York Islanders and 2010 Philadelphia Flyers in rallying to erase a 3-0 deficit. It’s not like winning the Stanley Cup, but it’s close — and it means the Kings keep alive their chances of hoisting that silver prize for the second time in three years.

“This is something I think we’re all going to remember for the rest of our lives,” Doughty said. “We’re not done yet though. We’re going to move on. ... That was an unbelievable feeling and great team effort.”

LA Times: LOADED: 05.01.2014
Los Angeles Kings

Kings complete historic comeback with 5-1 win over Sharks in Game 7

Lisa Dillman
April 30, 2014, 11:12 p.m.

SAN JOSE — Goodbye, Northern California. Hello, Southern California.

A playoff comeback for the ages was sealed in dramatic fashion by the Kings as they beat the San Jose Sharks, 5-1, on Wednesday in Game 7, becoming only the fourth team in NHL history to win a series after losing the first three games.

They will play their close neighbors, the Ducks, for the first time in the playoffs, the second round starting Saturday in Anaheim at 5 p.m. Finally, in the playoffs, can a legitimate rivalry truly start.

Not only did the Kings get there after dropping the first three games to the Sharks, but they were forced to win twice at SAP Center in San Jose, an often disconcerting arena for the Kings.

"History is for us when you look back and your career is done and when we look at stats," said Kings forward Justin Williams, who assisted on the game-winning goal, by Anze Kopitar at 18 minutes 39 seconds of the second period, which made it 2-1. "It's really not for us. ... Fortunately, for us, we had our game going in time that it wasn't too late. Four in row. We'll make a note not to do that again."

San Jose Coach Todd McLellan said his team was more competitive in last year's seven-game loss to the Kings than it was this year.

"We were a lot closer last year than we were this year," McLellan said. "We're kidding ourselves if we think we were closer this year, just because it went seven games."

"I don't know what it was, (outscored, 18-5) in the last four games. It wasn't even close. We had a core group of individuals that didn't get on the score sheet. Last year was a lot closer than it was this year."

Kings defenseman Drew Doughty thought the series started to shift in Game 3 at Staples Center when they lost in overtime.

"We felt like we could have kind of won that game," he said. "They kind of got a really lucky goal, they actually got two lucky goals that game. They got one really lucky one in overtime. Instead of seeing sorry for ourselves and taking it that way we were just more determined to get that back. We knew that eventually that some luck would start turning our way and it did."

Wednesday was the final hurdle of an amazing two weeks for the Kings.

Just call Game 7, the Comeback at the Cage, after the Kings fell behind by a goal early in the second period and the spirited crowd tried to pull the Sharks along for the ride. But the underachieving Sharks would end up going 0 for 6 on the power play.

The Cage is what Kings Coach Darryl Sutter called the arena in his unique style.

You can say the strength of the well-balanced Kings comes down to three players: goalie Jonathan Quick, defenseman Drew Doughty and Selke Trophy nominee Kopitar.

With the game on the line — the season veering this way, and then that way — they each made pivotal plays to keep the Kings in it and finally ahead for good.

Doughty scored the Kings’ first goal with a shot from the left circle, at 4:57 of the second period, tying it, 1-1, on the power play. His close friend, Sharks center Logan Couture had gone off for elbowing.

That dented the atmosphere, and Quick made perhaps the save of the series about midway through the second period, somehow stopping Patrick Marleau at the right post with a glove save after thwarting Joe Pavelski. The NHL’s situation room reviewed the play and the ruling was that there was no goal.

Kopitar’s goal displayed his two-way talents as he got the play started and finished it off with a backhander up high past Sharks goalie Antti Niemi, having taken a cross-ice pass from Williams. That made it 2-1, and the Kings took the air out of the building with a some slick work between Tanner Pearson and Tyler Toffoli at 4:40 of the third period, Toffoli making it 3-1.

By the third period, “Beat L.A.” sounded more like a plaintive request, rather than a rousing chant.

“It was a result of us staying together as a group of guys,” said Kings captain Dustin Brown, who scored an empty-net goal to make it 4-1. “When you've gone to the top of the mountain with the same group of guys it's a little bit easier when you're at the bottom to come up. That's what a lot of this team is about, our guys who have stuck together and played together for years and there's a belief system.”

Kings center Mike Richards is now part of two teams to have rallied from a 3-0 deficit to win a series. He was with the Philadelphia Flyers when they pulled off the feat against Boston in 2010. Kings teammate Jeff Carter was on that Flyers team, too, but did not play in that series. The other two teams to do it were the Toronto Maple Leafs and the New York Islanders.

Richards was asked by a CBC TV crew what that meant for him.

“I guess that I fall behind in series, 3-0, too much,” Richards said, smiling. Williams is 5-0 in Game 7s and has 10 points, five of them goals.

Earlier, he talked about the Kings playing their best at the most crucial junctures.

"That's when I feel our team plays best — when we have something to lose," Williams said. "We don't want to go home. We don't want an early summer. We enjoy playing when the weather start to get really hot."

It was 90 degrees shortly before game-time.

Williams almost foreshadowed Doughty becoming such a big factor. Doughty missed the last few games of the regular season because of an injured shoulder and got better as the series went along.

“'You underestimate adrenaline and will,' Williams said. 'Drew has all those things. He's not going to deter anything from him from being great.

"He's not [young]. He's had the experience of playing on the biggest stages of hockey.'"

Sutter was relieved to see the Kings come back from a 3-0 deficit, but the historical aspect of the achievement was lost on him.

"Well, I hope I don't have to do it again," he said. "It's hard. It is tough to do. Everybody talked about how we got our (butts) kicked in Games 1 and 2. We thought we played pretty good in Game 2. Game 3 was an overtime game which we could have won. We thought Game 6 could have been a clinching game for us....The history part doesn't mean ... that's no big deal to me at all."

LA Times: LOADED: 05.01.2014
Kings’ royal comeback sets up matchup with Ducks

BY RICH HAMMOND / STAFF WRITER
Published: April 30, 2014 Updated: 11:36 p.m.

SAN JOSE – Two years ago, the Kings won the first three games of every playoff series, then lifted the Stanley Cup. Perhaps they’re just trying to make things more interesting this time.

The NHL now has its fourth “reverse sweep” in history. The Kings overcame a Game 7 deficit and a swarming, about-to-score-anytime San Jose attack, scored five consecutive goals and ended the Sharks’ season with a 5-1 victory at SAP Center to end the first-round series.

“This is pretty incredible,” said Kings captain Dustin Brown, who scored the first of two empty-net goals late in the third period to clinch the game. The Kings will now face the Ducks in the second round, in the first playoff meeting of Southern California’s two teams. Game 1 is Saturday at Honda Center.

The Kings have joined the 1942 Toronto Maple Leafs, the 1975 New York Islanders and the 2010 Philadelphia Flyers as the only teams (out of 177) to complete the rally from a 3-0 series deficit.

A week ago, per historical precedent, the Kings had a 1.7 percent chance of winning the series. There’s history, and then there’s jaw-dropping history. After dropping the series’ first three games, the Kings outscored the Sharks, 18-5.

“This is something I think we’re all going to remember for the rest of our lives, but we’re not done,” defenseman Drew Doughty said.

Doughty’s power-play goal tied the game five minutes into the second period, and Anze Kopitar scored a back-breaking go-ahead goal with 1:21 remaining in the second period. Tyler Toffoli’s goal 4:40 into the third period gave the Kings a 3-1 lead and the Kings dominated most the final 20 minutes.

Some comebacks are tougher to dissect than others. This one is easy. The Sharks scored 17 goals in the first three games, then five goals in the last four games. The Kings can thank goalie Jonathan Quick, who made 39 saves in Game 7.

Usually strong, Quick turned marvelous in the last three games, when he allowed two goals on 96 shots. Quick also led the Kings’ penalty-kill unit, which went 6 for 6 in Game 7.

“They fixed their problems,” Sharks coach Todd McLellan said of the Kings. “We didn’t. Our problems got progressively worse as we went along.”

Not surprisingly, the first period of the winner-take-all game was tight, with a lot of neutral-zone banging and crashing and icing calls, caused by both teams trying for an early knockout goal.

After the first scoreless first period of the series – one with only one penalty – the second period couldn’t have been any more different. The first five minutes included a goal and three penalties.

The Sharks got early momentum when defenseman Matt Irwin scored 28 seconds into the second period. Irwin, in the lineup only because of an injury to Marc-Edouard Vlasic, controlled the puck at the top of the right circle, shot through traffic and cleanly beat Quick, who never saw the puck.

San Jose had a stellar chance to build momentum when the Kings’ Slava Voynov took an interference penalty 38 seconds after Irwin’s goal, but the Sharks didn’t score. That would become a theme.

The Sharks had four second-period power plays, including 12 shots on goal, but none of them beat Quick, who made a handful of terrific saves and bought the Kings some time to take the lead.

Doughty tied it, 1-1, at the 4:57 mark, after a scramble in front of goalie Antti Niemi. Jeff Carter tipped the puck back to Doughty, who ripped a one-time goal from the middle of the left circle.

The Kings then killed three consecutive San Jose power plays over a 10-minute span, one of which included the highlight save of the series. San Jose’s Patrick Marleau shot from point-blank range to the right of the net, but Quick’s glove shot up and snatched the puck just before it crossed the line.
Kings come all the way back to make a little history vs. Sharks

By Elliott Teaford, Daily Breeze
Posted: 04/30/14, 9:53 PM PDT | Updated: 57 secs ago

SAN JOSE — After the “Miracle on Manchester” and “Frenzy on Figueroa,” what do we call what the Kings accomplished while improbably rallying from a three-games-to-none deficit to defeat the San Jose Sharks in their first-round playoff series?

Whatever it’s ultimately dubbed, it figures to live in the Kings’ lore for generations, that much is certain. The Kings etched their names in the NHL history books with a 5-1 victory over the Sharks in Game 7 and a 4-3 series win Wednesday night at the SAP Center.

Drew Doughty (power play), Anze Kopitar, Tyler Toffoli, Dustin Brown and Tanner Pearson scored for the Kings, who advanced to play the Ducks in the second round. Game 1 of the first playoff meeting between the erstwhile rivals is Saturday at the Honda Center.

It figures to take, what, maybe a nanosecond to bring to a boil?

“I think a lot of people were hoping this was going to happen, including the players,” Doughty said. “I think we’re really looking forward to this opportunity against Anaheim. I think they can’t wait to meet us as well.

“It’s going to be a hard-fought series. Fans are going to be great in both buildings.”

It might be the only way to top the Kings’ incredible first-round rally over the Sharks. The Kings joined the 1942 Toronto Maple Leafs, 1975 New York Islanders and 2010 Philadelphia Flyers as the only teams to rally from a 3-0 deficit to win a best-of-7 series.

The Sharks won the first three games, including Game 3 in overtime at Staples Center. The Kings won the next three, including Game 6 on Monday at Staples. All things considered, a Game 7 was to be expected since these teams also went the distance in a series last year.

How they got to this point was a surprise.

Or was it?

“We were down 3-0 in the series, which was obviously not where we wanted to be, but we never thought we were done,” Brown said. “I think what happened was that in the first two games we were very uncharacteristic. We gave more odd-man rushes than we did in the last month.

“We cleaned it up. We got better. That was the biggest thing. We got better every game.”

After playing the first scoreless first period of the series, the Kings watched as the Sharks took a 1-0 lead only 28 seconds into the second period. defenseman Matt Irwin, filling in for the injured Marc-Edouard Vlasic, whistled a shot through traffic and into the back of the net past Jonathan Quick.

The Sharks didn’t score again and couldn’t keep the Kings from scoring. Doughty tied it with a power-play goal, his first of the playoffs. Kopitar put them ahead to stay. Toffoli padded the lead early in the third period and Brown and Pearson sealed it with empty-net goals.

“We were a lot closer last year than this year,” San Jose coach Todd McLellan said when asked about losing a second consecutive seven-game series to the Kings. “We’re kidding ourselves if we think it was close this year. We had a core group of guys who couldn’t get onto the scoresheet.”

McLellan didn’t name names in his postgame press conference, but Joe Thornton had only two goals and one assist and Logan Couture added one goal and two assists. The Kings shut out the Sharks in Game 5 and held them to a goal in each of the final two games.

The Kings’ best players, on the other hand, were their best players.

“We’re resilient, we have a lot of heart and it comes right from the top all the way to the bottom,” Doughty said. “We played very bad in the first two games of the series. Game 3 could have gone either way.
Defensive man Matt Greene returns to Kings lineup for Game 7

By Elliott Teaford, Daily Breeze
Posted: 04/30/14, 9:45 PM PDT

SAN JOSE >> With veteran defenseman Willie Mitchell sidelined by an unspecified injury for Game 7 of their first-round playoff series against the Sharks on Wednesday at the SAP Center, the Kings turned for help to veteran defenseman Matt Greene.

Each player could be described as a gritty, defense-first stalwart whose resume is long on experience. Each could be counted on to provide a steady game on the ice and calm, cool leadership in the dressing room. Each could be viewed as a key link in the Kings’ chain.

The difference in the two was evident in one quick glance at the statistics going into Game 7, however. Mitchell had an assist and a plus/minus defensive rating of plus-1 in six games before he was injured Monday; Greene was scoreless with a minus-4 rating in one game.

The Kings recalled defenseman Jeff Schultz from their American Hockey League team in Manchester, N.H., on Wednesday and could have put him in their lineup against the Sharks. Kings coach Darryl Sutter decided to play Greene instead.

Asked what Greene could bring the lineup, Sutter said, “Same as Willie.”

Said Greene: “It’s always fun to play a high-stakes game like this. I want to come in and help out. Just have to establish our game and get a good forecheck and turn pucks over. Did a good job of that in Game 5. Play good defense and play a good team game.”

San Jose coach Todd McLellan went back to Antti Niemi as his starting goaltender for Game 7 after pulling him from Games 4 and 5 and then giving backup Alex Stalock his first playoff start in Game 6. Niemi was refreshed and re-invigorated, according to McLellan.

“I think the break was good for ‘Nemo,’” McLellan said, referring to Niemi by his nickname. “He got a chance to work on some things in his game that the goaltending coach wanted to work on. He got a chance to rest. Our team did need a change heading into Game 6 in L.A.

“Unfortunately, we had to pull him twice, but that wasn’t all on Nemo’s shoulders. It’s pretty evident and pretty obvious and I hope I’ve made that clear. But moving forward with Nemo, we want to give Nemo an opportunity.”

Niemi didn’t wish to comment when asked before the game if he was the starter, but when reporters told him teammate Joe Thornton had already spoiled the surprise, he agreed to speak in general terms about his return to the net.

“I got a couple extra practice days between, maybe work on some stuff,” Niemi said. “Either way, having a day off from the game, not being so focused, maybe that’s a good a good thing, too. The Game 6 skate, I felt very good. I felt good (Tuesday) on the ice. I felt very good for a period of time.”

Of his benching for Monday’s game, he said, “I don’t think it matters.”

Kings defenseman Drew Doughty had this to say of his approach to Wednesday:

“You treat this Game 7 as if it is the Olympic gold medal game or the Stanley Cup Final. For me, personally, I need to have an unbelievable game for our team to win (Wednesday).

“I need my ‘A’ game. I need to do everything right, I need to play well defensively. I need to chip in on the offense. I need to dominate on special teams, so that’s just how I look at it.”

LA Daily News: LOADED: 05.01.2014
San Jose Sharks to start Antti Niemi in goal for Game 7 vs. L.A. Kings

By The Associated Press
Posted: 04/30/14, 1:53 PM PDT |

SAN JOSE — Antti Niemi will be back in goal for the San Jose Sharks in Game 7 of their first-round series against the Los Angeles Kings.

Coach Todd McLellan said after the pregame skate Wednesday that Niemi will start as the Sharks try to avoid becoming the fourth NHL team to lose a best-of-seven series after winning the first three games.

Niemi started the first five games of the series before rookie Alex Stalock replaced him to start a 4-1 loss in Game 6 to the Kings.

Both teams will also be without an injured defenseman with Marc-Edouard Vlasic missing his second straight game for San Jose and Willie Mitchell missing his first for Los Angeles. Matt Irwin will play for the Sharks and Matt Greene will dress for the Kings.
Here’s the obligatory reminder that Justin Williams is very good in Game 7s. How good? He has five goals and nine points in the four decisive games he has been a part of, dating back to the 2003 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

In my weekly LAKings.com feature, I consulted with Darryl Sutter and several players about Justin Williams’ on and off-ice characteristics that allow the veteran winger to step up in important games.

Most of the Kings will tell you that past production is exactly that – accomplishments from days that have little bearing on tonight’s game. But if you ask any man in the room, like Quick they’ll be eager to spout the intangibles that the 32-year-old forward brings to a team that has played in 44 playoff games since 2012, the most out of any National Hockey League team.

“He doesn’t get a lot of credit for what he does for our team,” Drew Doughty said. “Justin is an unbelievable player. He’s a great guy in the room. He’s got the experience. He’s a good leader and a lot of little things – like getting under the other team’s skin – he’s really good at that. He gets guys rattled and you can see guys taking liberty at him.”

From LAKings.com: Game 7 Will

Also, from today’s morning skate:

Justin Williams, on the atmosphere around the team:

I think anytime you put two proud teams against the wall – win or go home – you’re going to get a heck of a hockey game, and that’s certainly what we expect tonight, is everything that everybody has left in their tank and for the right to move on.

Williams, on what Los Angeles has to do to excel:

We certainly can’t do what we did the first two games here, which was let them have a great start and let them carry the play for most of the game. I’m sure they’re pushing as much as we’re pushing on a great start to the game, and hopefully getting the first goal and not looking back.

Williams, on seeming to “embrace” pressure, and his approach to big games:

I don’t think I’m comfortable talking personal stuff right now. I think everybody on this team, regardless of who scores goals or makes saves, it’s everybody working towards the same goal, and everybody, I feel on this team, has the ability to rise to the occasion instead of wilting. I expect a great game for our team.

Williams, on the “trust factor” within Los Angeles’ locker room:

Yeah, I mean, I dont really think there’s much more to elaborate on what you just said. Exactly. I look around my room here, and it feels like it oozes confidence. It’s something that you can’t really touch. It’s like an intangible, and I feel that when push comes to shove, these guys are going to show up, and we’re going to show up, and we’re going to make a difference and win a big game.
Matt Greene will draw into the lineup for Willie Mitchell, who did not return to Game 5 after suffering an injury during what appeared to be an awkward fall in the second period while killing a two-man advantage.

Darryl Sutter confirmed the lineup adjustment following the team’s morning skate, which Mitchell did not take part in.

“Obviously he’s not playing tonight,” the Kings coach said. “Hopefully there’s a chance that if there’s some sort of miracle that we can win tonight, that we could get him back again this year.”

Greene, who was a minus-four in Los Angeles’ Game 2 loss, skated alongside Alec Martinez, his defensive partner from the 2012 Stanley Cup run.

“You’ve got to keep yourself ready, and that’s it,” said Greene. “Just be ready to go on when called upon, and this is nothing different, so just be ready to go.”

Jeff Schultz, whose recall was made official earlier on Wednesday, took part in the morning skate but is not expected to play tonight.

Sutter clarified what Greene will be able to provide for the Kings in this winner-take-all game, saying that the veteran defenseman brings “a lot of what Willie brings, except he shoots right.”

Line rushes at the morning skate:

Gaborik – Kopitar – Brown
Pearson – Carter – Toffoli
King – Stoll – Williams
Clifford – Richards – Lewis
Nolan
Muzzin – Doughty
Regehr – Voynov
Martinez – Greene
Schultz
Quick
Jones

Tonight’s referees are Dave Jackson and Dan O’Rourke. The linesmen are Brian Murphy and Jonny Murray.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 05.01.2014
More from San Jose – Niemi in net, no Vlasic

Posted by JonRosen

A quick update following San Jose’s morning skate:

-Todd McLellan confirmed what Joe Thornton had said to the media during his press scrum. Antti Niemi will start in goal tonight after Alex Stalock started Game 6.

“We’re a confident group still,” Thornton said. “Even though we’ve lost three in a row, we still feel like a confident group. Nemo has got some rest and he’ll be ready for tonight. We’re an easy going group. We feel good. When we’re loose, we feel we can beat anybody. Yesterday was a good practice to get everybody upbeat again, and I think we did that. Today, all the guys came in with smiles on their face and look forward to battling hard tonight.

-McLellan also confirmed that Marc-Edouard Vlasic will miss his second consecutive game due to what was announced as an upper-body injury.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 05.01.2014
- Los Angeles became the fourth team to win a best of seven playoff series after losing the first three games, joining the 1942 Toronto Maple Leafs (over Detroit in the Stanley Cup Final), the 1975 New York Islanders (over Pittsburgh in an NHL quarterfinal) and the 2010 Philadelphia Flyers (over Boston in the 2010 Eastern Conference semifinals). Mike Richards and Jeff Carter are the only players in NHL history to have accomplished the feat twice, though Carter was injured during Philadelphia's series against Boston and did not participate.

- The Kings improved to 10-10 all-time against the Sharks in the playoffs, a mark that includes a road record of 4-6. The Kings are 98-129 all-time in the playoffs and 42-77 on the road.

- Los Angeles is 5-4 all-time in Game 7s, going 2-1 at home and 3-3 on the road. They won a road Game 7 for the first time since a 5-4 win at Toronto in the Campbell Conference Final on May 29, 1993.

- The only other time in franchise history that the Kings advanced to the Second Round in three straight years was 1989-1991.

- Mike Richards, Justin Williams and Marian Gaborik improved to 5-0 in Game 7s.

- Justin Williams has five goals and 10 points over five Game 7s. He has four goals and six points (4-2-6) in the last four games.

- Darryl Sutter improved to 5-3 in Game 7s.

- The Kings held the lead for 189:10 of the series, the Sharks held the lead for 107:30 of the series, and the games were tied for 110:07.

- The teams combined for 628 hits in the series.

- Los Angeles is 6-20 (30.0%) on the power play over the last five games.

- Anze Kopitar has points in eight straight playoff games (5-7=12) and nine straight games overall (8-7=15), dating back to the regular season.

- Jonathan Quick has stopped 99 of 101 shots over the last 188:24 since Joe Pavelski's Game 4 power play goal.

- The Kings are 7-1 in their last eight playoff series. They have played 45 playoff games since 2012, the most in the NHL over that span.

- Jake Muzzin was on the ice for only one goal against during the entire series.

- James Sheppard finished with a game-high nine hits.

- Joe Pavelski attempted 14 shots, 11 of which were on goal

- Mike Richards led the Kings with eight shots on goal.

- Los Angeles attempted 60 shots (30 on goal, 16 blocked, 14 missed). San Jose attempted 75 shots (40 on goal, 23 blocked, 12 missed).


The Kings are not scheduled to practice at Toyota Sports Center on Thursday, May 1. The next practice will take place at Toyota Sports Center on Friday, May 2.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 05.01.2014
Wild-Avs one of three Game 7s tonight; Veilleux playing

Blog Post by: Michael Russo

UPDATED BOTTOM

Good day from the Pepsi Center. I'll be on KFAN at 4:55 p.m. CT and on KARE-11 at 6:20 p.m. CT.

Tonight is the final night of the first round with three Game 7s -- the fifth time in NHL history and the first time since April 22, 2003, that three or more Game 7s will be contested on the same day. On that day, some guy named Andrew Brunette beat some guy named Patrick Roy to advance some team named the Wild to the second round.

Flyers-Rangers, Wild-Avalanche, Kings-Sharks tonight.

The opening round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs now has yielded three or more Game 7s in four consecutive postseasons:

2014: 3, TBD
2013: 3, Home Teams: 1-2
2012: 3, Home Teams: 1-2
2011: 4, Home Teams: 3-1

* Since 2003-04, there have been a total of 22 Game 7s in the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Home teams are 10-12 in those contests.
* According to the Elias Sports Bureau, home teams are 90-59 (.604) all-time in Game 7s contested in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.
* Elias also says that the team that scores first in a Game 7 holds a 111-38 (.745) all-time record.
* Thirty-seven of the 149 all-time Game 7s have required overtime. Home teams are 19-18 (.514) in those contests.

The Wild will make one lineup change tonight. Stephane Veilleux will play for Justin Fontaine, who was on the ice for the Game 5 overtime winner and had a tough Game 6.

Why Veilleux?

Cue Mike Yeo: "Speed, speed on the forecheck, speed to pressure, veteran, penalty kill and bring some jam into the game."

Asked if he'll have to dial down the guy they call, "Tornado," Yeo said, "He's wound up for exhibition games, so we'll have to keep an eye on that for sure."

The Wild's penalty kill was exposed last game by the return of Matt Duchene. The Wild didn't play nearly big enough or fast enough in Game 5 here, so the thought is to change it up. Veilleux adds energy, speed and has even scored a couple goals since the Olympics.

He'll start the game on the fourth line with Kyle Brodziak and Cody McCormick.

"I don't know if I'll be able to nap," Veilleux said. "It'll be important to control the emotions in a good, positive way. Be there for my teammates in whatever situation there needs to be. Pretty excited. Tonight it's all about the team, all about the win."

Yeo will likely start with Zach Parise-Mikko Koivu-Charlie Coyle; Nino Niederreiter-Mikael Granlund-Jason Pominville (good line early in the season); Matt Moulson-Erik Haula-Dany Heatley. I am worried about the speed on the wings, but Moulson and Pominville haven't played well together and Heatley has played well the past three games. If the Wild wins tonight, I bet you Heatley will be a big part of it. I just have this feeling.

Expect Yeo to do a lot of line juggling tonight. Like Game 6, he'll see who's going and judge how the game is unfolding and maybe change things up based on matchups and feel.

"I'm comfortable with either [Koivu or Granlund]," Parise saud. "Had [good chemistry with Mikko]. Had some chemistry with Granlund and Pominville. To me it doesn't matter. We could start the game one way and second shift it could be changed. [Yeo] did a good job [last game]. Good feel for the bench. You can tell when some guys are going or some guys are looking good together and he made good in-game adjustments."

The Wild made a bunch of different changes to change up the bad Denver vibe.

"Subtle changes," Yeo said, before adding with a laugh. "OK, pretty much everything."

They changed their flight time yesterday, changed the way they practiced, the team meal time changed and instead of going into the restaurant, they got a private room, the bus times were changed today from 12:30 and 12:45 to 12:27 and 12:47 and every player's locker stall is different.

"Some superstitious guys in here," Parise said.

They didn't sacrifice a live chicken ... that I know of.

Yeo brought the whole team here, including Josh Harding, scratch Mike Rupp and suspended Matt Cooke. Rupp and Cooke have combined to play in 13 Game 7s, so perhaps they can talk to some teammates and help lighten the mood.

The Avs are making one change, too. Joey Hishon, the 17th pick in the 2010 draft, will be back in the lineup and center the third line with Max Talbot and Jamie McGinn. Brad Malone comes out and Marc-Andre Cliche goes to the fourth line. The Avs don't have a point from their third or fourth line at even-strength, so this deepens them because Hishon has skills and Matt Duchene now centers the second line with Ryan O'Reilly and P.A. Parenteau.

I'll be doing a notebook lead tomorrow on Ryan Suter's pregame routine of playing football with assistant equipment trainer Matt Benz.

Star Tribune LOADED: 05.01.2014
DENVER — They were castoffs, of different sorts, traded because they held little value for their previous teams.

Nino Niederreiter, 21, was a bust with the New York Islanders, given a second chance by the Wild, which saw size and a slapshot.

Ilya Bryzgalov, 33, had played for four other teams, becoming part laughingstock and part irritant in Philadelphia, but the Wild needed a goalie at the trading deadline, and the goofy goalie was very available.

Wednesday night in Denver, the bust and the journeyman combined to make the winning plays as the Wild beat the Avalanche 5-4 in overtime of Game 7 of a series almost as confounding as it was thrilling.

Nothing that happened over the past two weeks could have been expected, and the Wild’s 5-4 victory on Wednesday night at Pepsi Center confounded even more than everything else that happened in this seven-game, four-overtime series.

What seems like months ago, the series began in Colorado with Bryzgalov in goal.

Deep into Game 7, five games after he had been benched, the series ended in Colorado with the prodigal goaltender back between the pipes.

Was Bryzgalov’s forced return the most unpredictable aspect of this series? Or was it Dany Heatley, Niederreiter and Jared Spurgeon scoring tying goals as a dramatic Game 7 became a dramatic Game 7-plus? None of the three had scored before Game 7.

Game 7 reprised the tumultuous series, with the Wild being victimized by a bad call that cost it a goal, and with the Wild repeatedly staving off elimination.

For most of the series, the Wild dominated the puck and appeared to be the superior team, and that would have been cold comfort had it lost.

Instead, four times it came back to tie the score, with Spurgeon’s goal late in the third period sending it to overtime, and when, for the second time, Niederreiter ripped a shot past Avalanche goalie Semyon Varlamov, you could hear only the sounds of silence in Pepsi Center.

“Nino’s got himself in some trouble now,” Yeo said. “He’s raised the bar. We’re going to expect that now.”

The Wild had not won a playoff series in 11 years.

Think about what we’ve been missing.

There are purer sports, and certainly there are more popular sports, but there might not be another sport that makes you believe, from the moment the game begins, that the next play could decide the game, or series.

Niederreiter should not have been the star Wednesday night, not in a series in which Zach Parise asserted himself, and Nathan MacKinnon starred, and so many veteran Wild players stepped forward. But he was the star, unleashing a wicked shot that it appears only his coaches and teammates knew about.

“This is something we can build off of,” Yeo said. “But we know we have more work to do. We’ve got a busy night ahead of us tonight. We have to get re-set and refocused for that next task.”

Bryzgalov should not have been the star Wednesday night. He had started Game 1, and helped the Wild blow a two-goal lead and lose in overtime, and he had been benched in Game 2, giving way to a young goalie who had faltered late in the season and been waylaid by a concussion.

“If only we had some experience dealing with this,” Yeo said, with a smile.

Friday night, Bryzgalov likely will face the defending champs in the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

What the Wild proved in seven games was that it can play playoff-style hockey; that Zach Parise and Ryan Suter are ideal leaders for a developing young team; that Yeo can put a team in position to defeat a statistically superior opponent; and that young players such as Mikael Granlund and Charlie Coyle can elevate their games in the playoff crucible.

More important Wednesday, Bryzgalov was ready to play, and Niederreiter was ready to rip.
Minnesota Wild

Nino the OT hero as the Wild moves on to meet Chicago in 2nd round; Kuemper injured

Posted by: Michael Russo

Nino Niederreiter’s in big, big trouble now.

One game after Mike Yeo said he watched Niederreiter take his game to another level, Niederreiter raised that bar to new heights by scoring his first two career playoff goals and assisting on another ginormous goal to lift the Wild to a 5-4 overtime victory over the Colorado Avalanche and hoist his team into the second round for the first time in 11 years.

The Wild now advances to play the defending Cup champ Chicago Blackhawks in the conference semifinals. They beat the Wild in five games last year and are playing great hockey right now. But the Wild is a different team right now and had the edge during the season series.

The Wild will have to enjoy the day, then reset and refocus, Yeo said. The Wild’s on the way to the Windy City right this moment. It has Thursday off and will be on the ice at the United Center on Friday morning for the first time.

Yeo didn’t have an update on Kuemper postgame. He said Kuemper wanted to keep going, keep battling, but it was clear he couldn’t any longer.

Niederreiter, the fifth overall pick in the 2010 draft, was acquired last June from the Islanders for Cal Clutterbuck.

The Wild is the first team in NHL history to score four tying goals and win a Game 7, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

So many unsung heroes tonight.

Heatley, scratched in Games 1 and 2, scored a tying goal and had two assists. Outstanding.

Brodziak, a goat in Game 1 and scratched in Game 3, was elevated back up to the third line with Niederreiter and Heatley, provided great play all night and had three assists.

The biggest question coming out of this game is Kuemper’s health.

In the second period tonight, Matt Duchene collided with Kuemper behind the net. Kuemper fell and his head hit Ryan Suter’s knee. He looked shaken up but stayed in the game. The Stastny and Johnson goals probably should have been stopped. With 8:13 left, Suter went over to Kuemper to talk to him. He skated to the bench, talked to Yeo and Ilya Bryzgalov stood up and finally entered the game after athletic therapist Don Fuller pulled Kuemper.

Kuemper missed the final seven regular-season games and couldn’t start Games 1 and 2 of this series with a concussion. I think he had a relapse and Bryzgalov will likely start Game 1 of the Chicago series (John Curry served as backup in overtime).

From Elias:

The winning goaltender for Minnesota in its Game 7 victory at Colorado was Ilya Bryzgalov, who faced only one shot on goal after he relieved injured starter Darcy Kuemper with 8:13 remaining in the third period. The only other seventh game in NHL playoff history in which the winning goaltender did not start the game was Edmonton’s 7-4 victory in the decisive game of the 1984 Smythe Division Final against Calgary. Grand Fuhr recorded the win for the Oilers after replacing starter Andy Moog, who allowed three goals in the first 26 minutes of the game.

Suter also made a series-saving save perhaps when he dropped to his belly shortly before Niederreiter’s winner to stop Gabriel Landeskog’s 2-on-1 pass to Stastny alone in the slot.

Yeo didn’t have an update on Kuemper postgame. He said Kuemper wanted to keep going, keep battling, but it was clear he couldn’t any longer.

“If only we had any experience dealing with this,” Yeo said sarcastically. Zach Parise jokingly called the goalie carousel and a “never-ending circus.”

Yeo said, “We’re fortunate we got good depth in that position and it shouldn’t change anything for us.”

Yeo talked a lot postgame about the growth and maturity of his players and he’s starting to “feel the soul” of his team. Parise said the same stuff postgame, about how this is why he came to Minnesota, and how we’re seeing the growth of the Granlunds and Coyles and Ninos and Haulas and Brodins and Scandellas right in front of our eyes.

Just a roller coaster of a series and a roller coaster of a game. Mikko Koivu, Heatley and Niederreiter all scored their first goal of the series.

The Blackhawks will be quite the challenge. They’re playing better than they’ve played all year, they’re not just skilled, but they compete so hard and they just rallied against St. Louis after being down 2-0 in the first-round series.

“We’ve got more confidence [than when we played them in last year’s playoffs, we’ve got more momentum],” Yeo said.

But there will be challenges. Chicago is rested and the series opens Friday, meaning the Wild coaches are in the air right now preparing. Oh, yes, that’s right. The Wild, for a 2-day trip to Denver, packed for 5 days, you know, just in case the team had to immediately go to Chicago. A certain beat writer did the same.

The Wild’s on the way to the Windy City right this moment. It has Thursday off and will be on the ice at the United Center on Friday morning for the first time.

The Wild will have to enjoy the day, then reset and refocus, Yeo said.

For more quotes, read the gamer and my Twitter account. I’ve got to get some shut-eye. Flying to Minnesota in the morning, then onto Chicago. No...
practice Thursday. I’ll talk to you at some point, but as you can imagine, I’ll have to accelerate a series preview into Friday’s paper, so I’ll be in and out of communication with you.

I’ll be on KFAN at 9 a.m.

Here’s some quotes courtesy of Avs PR.

**AVANLACE PLAYERS**

**Colorado G Semyon Varlamov**

On Minnesota’s Win: “It’s not easy to win against a good team, like I said. I mean, I think they played well against us the whole series.”

On The Season: “I think we started the season really well and I think we just kept doing well all season long. We won the division, you know, that’s a big deal for us, but nobody wants to lose in the First Round. I think the whole organization and coaching staff and the guys did a great job.”

**Colorado C Paul Stastny**

On The Highs And Lows Going Into Overtime: “When you get excited about goals, I don’t think it is really over. They ended up scoring a couple of goals elbow in, post in. They were just unbelievable shots. You’ve got to tip your hats off to them. The goalie had no chance. I think we kept battling back, and then they would battle back throughout all seven games. I think going into overtime was a coin toss. They capitalized on their chance.”

**Colorado C Matt Duchene**

On If Minnesota Had More Jump: “No, not at all. It was a back and forth game and very evenly played. I thought we came out really well in the third period. I think we are going to have to learn here and see what we can take away from this. At the end of the game like that when we need to clamp it down, we’ve got to execute even better with the puck and without it, we have to be sharp. You don’t let your heart race too much and you have to stay in control and get it done. It’s too bad we couldn’t get it done, but we were right there. We got the lead, I think, pretty much all game. Their only lead was the one that wins the game. It’s disappointing.”

On The Organization Taking Huge Steps: “Absolutely. We should be very proud of ourselves. That’s a good hockey team over there. They are going to play every team tough, no matter who they are playing against. I know Chicago (Blackhawks) are going to have their hands full with them. They have some veteran guys and won some big games. We are young. It’s tough to win with the little experience we have. It was a great one to help us go forward.”

**MINNESOTA PLAYERS**

**Minnesota RW Nino Niederreiter**

On Getting The Winning Goal: “I mean, obviously it feels great. It still feels kind of unreal but at the end of the day, we got the win, we got the result we wanted.”

On Building On His Confidence From Game 6: “I felt great. I mean, obviously I had a chance to play some minutes that night. There was not many penalties going on so it kind of helped my game and I just had to refocus and I knew there was going to be another big one tonight.”

**Minnesota D Ryan Suter**

On The Team’s Resiliency Tonight: “The guys did great. You know, we stuck with it. It would have been easy to cash it in, throw in the towel, but this group did something special tonight. Whenever our backs are against the wall, we’ve come out swinging and that’s a good character to have.”

On Moving On To The Next Round: “Yeah head to Chicago and refocus. I mean, we haven’t done anything. We’ve won the series, which was a battle. You know, they’re a very good team, Colorado was. They got a lot of power, a lot of firepower, great coach, great goaltender so it was a big challenge and it took seven games and overtime and we stuck with it and it says! a lot about our group.”

**Minnesota LW Matt Moulson**

On The Team’s Performance Tonight: “We had to battle for every inch and obviously, they’re a great team and they kept coming. Sometimes you get a bounce here or there and you know, Nino had a great shot, wasn’t sure if it was in, but it was a heck of a shot.”

On The Team’s Resiliency: “I think we’ve showed that down the stretch. You know, getting into the playoffs we had some big games down a goal going into the third and we knew we had to win and I think our game plan was to stick to our game no matter what happens and try to stay even-keeled mentally and I think this whole team did a great job of that tonight.”

**AVANLACE HEAD COACH PATRICK ROY**

On What He Said To The Team After The Game: “I haven’t talked to them yet, but—I don’t go in dressing rooms after games, but I guess I have mixed feelings. There is a side of me that is very disappointed because I thought that we could have won that game. But, there is a side of me that is very proud of our players. I love the way we were all year. We compete, and tonight was another good example of how our guys have been playing, I don’t have enough words to say how proud I am of our players.”

On II There Is A Silver Lining To Losing Game 7: “Yeah, but it’s a process and it’s a learning process. At the end, unfortunately injuries were a factor—losing a guy like (Colorado D Tyson) Barrie and a guy like (Colorado C John) Mitchell would have probably made the difference for us and (Colorado C Matt Duchene) Dutchy coming late, but these are not the excuses we want to use. A team is a team and we played like this all year. We always found a way to go through adversity in a great way, and we got beat by a team that played really well, a team that was well coached and a team that probably deserved to win as much as we did.”

On The Players Saying They Weren’t Happy With A Moral Victory To The Season: “Absolutely (that’s what you want to hear from your players)—all year we were never satisfied, and certainly we are not going to start tonight. It was a great experience this year. It was fun for me to be part of it, and one thing we are all proud of is to see the Avs back on top. I think that should motivate us to have another good year next year and prepare ourselves really well over the summer. Seeing our fans be excited about the team makes me so happy, and to see our fans coming back to the building—it was electric out there. It was fun to be part of it, and I didn’t want to see it ending—that’s how fun it was. I had goose bumps when I see them at the start of the game, at the start of overtime, start of the third period. I just want to say thanks to them, thanks for making it fun—they’re a big part of it, and so are the players. Like I said, the players gave everything they have, and it’s a great season for us. It’s hard to talk like this right now because everyone knows how much I love to win, but at the same time we have to admit that was a heck of a year.”

On If It Says More About Minnesota Or Colorado That Minnesota Tied It After Colorado Scored First On The First Four Goals: “It was a mix of both. When you learn how to win—when you have more experience in the playoffs, then you start to know how to win those big games and on those two goals our neutral zone forecheck had been good all night long, and then we started making some mistakes here and there and they took advantage of it. This is a team that went through that last year with Chicago—they got beat four straight by Chicago or five, I can’t remember. It’s a learning process and I think next year in the playoffs our guys might be a little more calm in those situations and react differently.”

Also from Elias: Niederreiter is the third player in NHL history whose first two postseason goals came in the seventh game of one playoff series. The other players to do that were the Penguins’ Jiri Hrdina in 1991 against New Jersey and the Devils’ Adam Henrique in 2012 versus Florida. Hrdina and Henrique, like Niederreiter, also scored the winning goal in that Game 7, with Henrique doing so in double-overtime.

Star Tribune LOADED: 05.01.2014
Hard-fought seven-game series brings out animosity

Article by: MICHAEL KELLY, Special to the Star Tribune

DENVER — Midway through Game 5 of the Wild-Avalanche playoff series, familiarity seemed to breed contempt when Gabriel Landeskog and Mikko Koivu battled for the puck along the boards in the Colorado end.

Once the puck worked free, Landeskog, the Avalanche captain, held on to Koivu’s stick and the Wild center gave him a shove to the face. Then as Koivu skated toward the puck Landeskog jumped on Koivu’s back and landed a few punches to the back of his head.

The result was a matching minor for roughing, and the Avalanche scored on the ensuing four-on-four on its way to a 4-3 overtime win and a 3-2 series lead.

That was Saturday, but it feels like a lifetime ago now. By the morning of Wednesday’s Game 7, the teams had seen enough of each other to last all summer.

“I was thinking about it driving here [Wednesday] morning,” Landeskog said. “Seven games against the same team, that’s a lot of games. Especially in a row. You develop, I wouldn’t say hatred, but it’s a rivalry.”

Things were somewhat testy early in Game 7. Avalanche forward Jamie McGinn was in the net, blocking the path of goaltender Darcy Kuemper on Colorado’s first goal. In the second, Avalanche center Matt Duchene nearly checked Kuemper behind the net, drawing the ire of the Wild.

As the game moved into the third period the teams were more cautious and held their tempers in check. Instead of big hits there were big goals, including Wild defenseman Jared Spurgeon’s tying one with 2:27 left that sent the game into overtime tied 4-4, where Nino Niederreiter scored at 5:02 to win it.

The Wild and Avalanche don’t have the history of Detroit-Colorado, but it is a definite budding rivalry. The teams had met in the playoffs twice before this spring, with each winning a series. Considering how chippy this seven-game series became, and with both being in the Central Division, plenty of battles are ahead.

“The way our divisions are lined up, how important every division game is, how close every game was not only through the regular season but the playoffs, too, certainly it’s a budding rivalry,” Wild coach Mike Yeo said.

The regular season is important, but rivalries are built in the playoffs, and this series has jump-started a good one. There were questionable calls and non-calls, plenty of scraps after the whistle and Wild forward Matt Cooke’s knee-to-knee hit on Colorado’s Tyson Barrie that sidelined the Avalanche’s best offensive defenseman for four weeks and got Cooke a seven-game suspension.

It’s safe to say the players are sick of each other after seven games. Wild forward Zach Parise agrees.

“You definitely respect them as players and how good they are and how good of a team they have, but the longer the series goes there’s always those games within a game,” he said. “You do have hatred, or whatever is the right word, but you have animosity that’s built up for the first six games.

By the morning of Game 7, Landeskog was ready to say goodbye until next season.

“I’ll be sick and tired of seeing Parise, [Mikael] Granlund and Koivu after this series,” Landeskog said. “It feels like a lifetime we’ve been playing against those guys.”

Star Tribune LOADED: 05.01.2014
We celebrate the arrival of a Game 7 in hockey because it promises a momentous ending to an escalation of drama and cultivated hatred.

The Wild’s first Game 7 in 11 years offers more: A glimpse into a future of renewed hostilities.

In the summer of 2012, Wild owner Craig Leipold signed Zach Parise and Ryan Suter to create these kinds of moments. With Parise and Suter locked into 10-year contracts with eight years remaining, and young players like Mikael Granlund and Charlie Coyle maturing before our eyes, Wednesday’s Game 7 against Colorado promises to be the first of many against the young lions of the new NHL Central division.

"I think it’s two teams that are definitely going in the right direction, with a lot of really good young players," Parise said. "There are going to be a lot of good games between the teams in the next little while."

The Wild is set up to win, with a host of young players filling in around its stars. The Avalanche features some of the best young players in hockey, including the irrepressible Nathan MacKinnon.

The arrival of Parise and Suter alone might have made the Wild dangerous in the Eastern Conference. In the Western Conference, and particularly in the Central division, they will need lots of help to survive these budding rivalries.

"I think we’ve done well from where this team was three years ago, to last year making the playoffs, to this year," Suter said. "We’ve gone through a lot of adversity, and to have the resilience to continue to battle…We were out of the playoffs and we battled back into it.

"This series, when you lose two games on the road to start, and you come back and win two at home, then lose a tough one and push it to a Game 7, those are the growing things for an organization. It’s trending in the right direction."

After a slump-ridden season, Coyle has scored three playoff goals _ two more than he scored between Jan. 12 and March 22.

After a slow start to the season, Granlund has impressed in the Olympics, down the stretch of the regular season, and in the playoffs, where he has produced four points, a spectacular game-winning goal and a surprising tough streak on defense and around the boards.

MacKinnon, the 18-year-old wunderkind, has matched Parise with 10 playoff points, and 21-year-old Gabriel Landeskog has produced four points and developed a feud with Minnesota captain Mikko Koivu.

"When you’re playing in games that mean this much and you’re playing the roles that they have, once you get a taste of it, you want to make sure that you’re always giving yourself a chance to get back there. " Wild coach Mike Yeo said of his young players. "Most importantly, to learn how to go out and perform and enjoy these moments, that’s real important for our group."

The teams have played 10 times this season. Seven have been decided by one goal, and five have gone to overtime.

"I believe that we’re not going away and I know that they’re not going away, too," Wild coach Mike Yeo said. "This is a very skilled team that we’re playing against, and they’ve got a lot of youth over there. You can see that the two teams have a lot of similarities, in a lot of ways - in the way they count on their young players, and the steps that they’ve taken.

"I would expect that, the way our division is lined up and with how important every division game is, how close every game was that we played against these guys ever year, it’s a budding rivalry, that’s for sure.”

Star Tribune LOADED: 05.01.2014
Minnesota Wild

Wild notes: Suter gets pregame kicks tossing the football

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO, Star Tribune

DENVER – As more than a dozen teammates kick a soccer ball around in a game of hacky sack before every game, Wild defenseman Ryan Suter is off to the side playing catch with assistant equipment manager Matt Benz.

“We’re normally competing for real estate with the soccer players,” said Benz, laughing.

Every player has a pregame warm-up routine. Some run, some stretch, some play soccer.

Suter throws the football.

“Just something different to do,” Suter said before the Wild’s 5-4 victory over the Avalanche on Wednesday night. “I started in Nashville where me and [David] Legwand would toss it around. Then [Patric] Hornqvist and [Shea] Weber started in. Here, it’s just me and Benzy.”

Suter loves football and is a big — excuse him — Green Bay Packers fan. As a kid, Suter played running back in youth leagues.

“I was too embarrassed to call the plays,” Suter said. “I was too shy when I was younger to play quarterback.”

Suter, the Norris Trophy runner-up last season, averaged a league-leading 29 minutes, 24 seconds a game this past regular season. Before every game, Suter will throw with Benz before the team meeting and right afterward. They have set plays, run audibles, the works.

Benz, who used to play defensive back at Hill-Murray “because I couldn’t catch,” wears Packers gloves because “Ryan has such a great arm.”

“It’s hard for me to hang on,” Benz said. “He throws pretty hard. I’m not quite the athlete he is. We just do it until he feels right. He’ll go, ‘Last one,’ and we’ll be done.”

Niederreiter on a roll

After playing his best game in weeks during Game 6, Nino Niederreiter began Wednesday’s game on the third line with Erik Haula and Dany Heatley. Niederreiter was a physical, offensive threat Monday.

“I saw him take his game to another level,” Yeo said.

On Wednesday, Niederreiter raised it another level. He scored two goals, including the overtime winner, and set up the tying goal by Jared Spurgeon late in the third period.

Heatley had a goal and two assists in the game, and Kyle Brodziak set up three goals.

Yeo began Game 7 with Zach Parise playing with Mikael Granlund and Jason Pominville again, while Matt Moulson skated with Mikko Koivu and Charlie Coyle.

Koivu scored a goal, but Parise, who had four points in Game 6, was held off the scoresheet.

“I’m comfortable with either [Koivu or Granlund],” Parise said. “To me it doesn’t matter. We could start the game one way and second shift it could be switched. [Yeo] did a good job [in Game 6]. He had a good feel for the bench last game. You can tell when some guys are going or some guys are looking good together and he made good in-game adjustments.”

No longer idle

Left wing sparkplug Stephane Veilleux, scratched in Games 3, 4, 5 and 6, drew into Wednesday’s Game 7 in place of Justin Fontaine.

“I don’t know if I’ll be able to nap [in the afternoon],” the fired-up Veilleux said after the morning skate. “It’ll be important to control the emotions in a good, positive way. Be there for my teammates in whatever situation there needs to be.”

Veilleux started the game on the fourth line with Kyle Brodziak and Cody McCormick and played to bring speed, energy, experience and “jam,” coach Mike Yeo said. Veilleux is also a penalty killer. The Wild gave up its first power-play goal (with a goalie in net) in Game 6.

Asked if he worried Veilleux might be too amped up, Yeo kidded, “He’s wound up for exhibition games, so we’ll have to keep an eye on that for sure.”

Remembering his idols

Young Avalanche star Matt Duchene grew up an Avalanche fan and said he used to pretend he was Joe Sakic or Peter Forsberg in Game 7s on his driveway.

“Those were my two favorite players growing up,” Duchene said. “To be able to play for the Avs now is a dream come true. To play in a Game 7 is that much more special. The ’01 Stanley Cup, I remember every moment of that Game 7.

“I was 10 years old sitting on the couch and when [Alex Tanguay] scored, I had a big bowl of popcorn in my lap, I jumped up and it went everywhere.”

Etc.

• Third goalie John Curry served as Ilya Bryzgalov’s overtime backup after Darcy Kuemper left the game injured in the third period.

Star Tribune LOADED: 05.01.2014
Game 7 recap: Wild 5, Colorado 4 (OT)

MICHAEL RUSSO

Game 7 recap
Star Tribune’s three stars
1. Nino Niederreiter, Wild: Scored two goals, including the overtime winner, and set up Jared Spurgeon’s tying goal to force OT.
2. P.A. Parenteau, Avalanche: Set up Colorado’s two third-period goals.
3. Jared Spurgeon, Wild: Game-tying goal on a patient play turned the momentum in the Wild’s favor.

Turning point
Wild starting goalie Darcy Kuemper left the game in the third period and his team behind 4-3. The Wild dominated the rest of the way, and backup Ilya Bryzgalov never faced a serious threat.

By the numbers
16 Career playoff goals and 60 points in 71 games for Dany Heatley.
10-13 Home team in Game 7s since 2003-04.
38 of 150 Game 7s went to overtime (home teams 19-19).
17 Consecutive Game 7s won by the team that scored the first goal, a streak that was broken in this game, as the Avs got the first goal.

Star Tribune LOADED: 05.01.2014
The Wild has only looked lost in two situations in this series: when Nathan MacKinnon has the puck and a full head of steam ... or when Colorado gets some forechecking momentum in the Wild's offensive zone and Minnesota just doesn't get a clear it desperately needs.

We'd say these scenarios have accounted for roughly 80 percent of Colorado's 4-on-4, 5-on-5 and 6-on-5 goals in the series.

To that end, we don't believe Game 7 has to be the best game the Wild has played in this series in order for the road team to prevail. But we do think it will have to be the tightest -- not tight as in breezers in a bunch, tight as in lock it down. Pucks need to be cleared. MacKinnon and co. need to have their space closed down.

When that happens, the Wild is very much the better team. When it fails to do this, Colorado gets the life it needs to steal momentum and games.

Remember, the Avs have only led with 90 seconds to play in one of six games. Four other times, Minnesota had the lead; the other, Game 3, was tied.

The game Minnesota needs to play involves poised relentlessness. Colorado's weakest link, clearly, has been its blueliners, so the forecheck needs to remain aggressive. But the play needs to be just as dogged in the other zone, too. There will be 8 to 10 times in this game when the Wild has a good chance to clear a puck out of danger. There cannot be costly turnovers or too-fancy plays in these cases.

Having watched all six games, we think the Wild has the ability to play this type of air-tight game. Ryan Suter, who has been good but also victimized by mistakes, will have his best game of the series. Minnesota will score first and slowly choke the air out of the building. And in the end, if it follows the formula we think the Wild needs, it'll be a 3-1 win and on to Chicago.

Star Tribune LOADED: 05.01.2014
DENVER -- The Stanley Cup playoffs are like one continuous loop filled with inter-generational connections and decades-old story lines. We can't just view them as a self-contained entity each year. There always is context and historical tie-ins.

For example, it was almost exactly 29 years ago today -- May 2, 1985 -- that the Quebec Nordiques and Montreal Canadiens wrapped up one of their typically contentious playoff series. The Nordiques won Game 7 in overtime, 3-2, at the Forum in Montreal to capture the division finals. That was huge in the province of Quebec.

The winning goal was scored by the great Peter Stastny, who skated on a line with his brothers Anton and Marian. North Stars fans will remember the trio lighting up the scoreboard at Met Center on most visits.

The Nordiques eventually moved to Denver and became the Colorado Avalanche. And these days the Avalanche are anchored by Peter's son, Paul Stastny, also a center.

Before Game 7 on Tuesday, Paul was asked about his favorite players when he was growing up. The answer seemed obvious. But the response was not.

"I think when I was younger there was a couple guys I looked up to," he said. "There was (Joe) Sakic, who was always a guy I liked. And (Alexander) Mogilny was always a favorite of mine."

"When you're playing on a pond you're always a different player. And when you lose as one guy then you just go to the next round and become a new player," he added with a laugh.

Yes, but didn't he want to be his dad or one of his uncles during pond games?

"No," he said. "They were retired and I couldn't pick him. I had to pick an active player."

Another connection from that 1985 Game 7: It was Jacques Lemaire's last game as coach of the Canadiens as he was promptly fired after the loss to Quebec. He later returned to coaching with the New Jersey Devils and, of course, the Wild.

And 80 miles east of Montreal, there was a 19-year-old kid leading the Sherbrooke Canadiens to the American Hockey League championship. Patrick Roy would take over in net for the Canadiens the next season and lead them to the Stanley Cup.

Flash forward to 2003 and Roy has four Stanley Cup rings in his possession. He skated out to tend goal in Game 7 of the Avs' first-round series against the Wild. It would be Roy's last NHL game as the Wild beat Colorado 3-2 in overtime on a goal by Andrew Brunette. It was an anti-climactic end to a spectacular career.

"I think I've heard that a couple of times," Wild coach Mike Yeo noted. Eleven years later, Roy was asked about a revenge factor against the Wild.

"No, no," he insisted. "What would revenge do to me anyway? I had my runs. I think the team I was on, we were a bit tired. You think about the year before and we played 21 (playoff) games in 44 days. We had a great run. I think mentally we were not as hungry. I'm not saying we didn't want to win. But I think we had our moment, and sometime you just do not play with the same edge. And in playoffs that edge makes a huge difference."

The Wild and Avalanche likely will see a lot of each other in the years to come. Both teams are on the upswing and could repeatedly square off in playoff series.

"I believe that we're not going away and I know that they are not going away, too," Yeo said.

We could be looking back to this series for tie-ins and story lines for years to come.

Pioneer Press LOADED: 05.01.2014
DENVER -- As a teammate ribbed Nathan MacKinnon about his neon-orange sneakers in the Colorado Avalanche dressing room Tuesday, the term "hero" didn’t spring to mind.

Heroes could wear neon-orange sneakers, I suppose. There’s no hero dress code.

Let’s remember, though, these guys are hockey heroes, not real-world heroes. The latter is reserved for doctors, soldiers, good parents. Definitely good parents.

So when a hero emerges from Game 7 at Pepsi Center, he’ll be a hockey hero. And that’s cool, too. Because from late Wednesday night until his career is over, he will forever be tied to the deciding game of a riveting series between the Avalanche and Wild.

As a bonus, he gets an addition to his surname:

Max Talbot, hero of Game 7, for example.

"I have four (Game 7s) of my own," said Talbot, hero of a Game 7. Talbot got his new title by scoring the game-winner in Game 7 of the 2009 Stanley Cup finals.

"I feel like the excitement is a little bigger. The stage is bigger. And you remember those games," Talbot said. "I won in Game 5s, Game 6s. But when I lost in a Game 7, I feel like it's bigger."

Talbot was an unlikely candidate to emerge as hero of a Game 7. On a Penguins roster with the likes of Evgeni Malkin and Sidney Crosby, Talbot was a role guy.

"It can be anybody," he said.

If the Avalanche win, it could be Jamie McGinn. It could be Cody McLeod. It could be one of the big guns -- Gabriel Landeskog or Paul Stastny. It could be MacKinnon, whose playoff performance has changed the way we should view the future of the franchise.

It could be Talbot, again.

It could be the goalie, Semyon Varlamov, whose big-game nerves have been tested in world championships, Olympics and NHL playoffs. For the Wild, it could be goalie Darcy Kuemper, who really hasn’t been tested and is playing in his first playoff series. Avs coach Patrick Roy believes the key player in a Game 7 is the goalie.

"Of course it is," he said.

Whoever it is, it will be someone.

"You cannot win a Stanley Cup without winning a Game 7," Roy said. "The players are going to learn how to play a Game 7. How good is this?"

If the Avs win, it will probably be someone new. Among the players who will be on the ice Wednesday, Talbot is the only one who has played in a Game 7.

That would be an alarming fact if this Avs season didn’t seem like one long Game 7. Their penchant for stealing wins from the jaws of defeat has built a gaudy confidence in close games. During the regular season, their record in one-goal games was 28-4-8, the best mark in the NHL.

"How great have we been when we’re down a goal, or 6-on-5?" Talbot said. "In these key moments we always reacted well. That’s how I’d like our team to react (in Game 7). We’ve been liking the pressure this year."

Roy suggested the Game 7 hero could be a player who throws his body across the ice to block a shot or the guy who finishes a hard check.

If the Avs win, here is one man’s hunch: it will be Ryan O’Reilly or Matt Duchene, whose on-ice chemistry in Game 6 didn’t skip a beat, even after Duchene’s four-week absence.

"I thought he played outstanding," Roy said.
Six days after Christian Folin made his NHL debut last month, he was back in school at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell.

The 23-year-old sophomore from Sweden returned to his second-year history and law classes as if nothing had changed.

But he won't return to Lowell for the fall semester. The defenseman was the most highly courted college player eligible to sign with an NHL team this spring, and he chose the Wild.

Because Folin signed March 31, 3-1/2 weeks after the NHL trade deadline, he is not eligible to be on the Wild's playoff roster, so he's back at Lowell to finish out the semester, living in the dorm with some of his hockey buddies.

"It's a suite, though, so it's not that bad," Folin said of his living arrangements. "I really wish I could've lived off campus, though, because I think it would've been helpful for the future."

And what a future he appears to have with the Wild.

He will get a chance in training camp to make the opening-night roster for the 2014-15 season, and general manager Chuck Fletcher admitted signing Folin reduced the likelihood the team would acquire another defenseman during the offseason.

In many ways, Folin is what the Wild lack on the blue line.

At 6 feet 3 inches and 215 pounds, the right-handed shooter is bigger than every defenseman on the roster except Clayton Stoner, who is 6-4, 216 pounds.

"We think he fits perfectly into our defensive (scheme) going forward," Fletcher said. "He's kind of what we need. We need a little more size, we need a guy who can shoot the puck, and it's hard to find right-shot defensemen."

Folin made his NHL debut in the Wild's second-to-last regular-season game, a 4-2 victory over the St. Louis Blues on April 10. He had an assist and was plus-3 in nearly 20 minutes of ice time.

The past two weeks, he has been watching the Wild's playoff games on TV.

"It was really interesting to see how much (faster) the pace got and how much more physical the game got," Folin said of the playoffs. "It was pretty cool to watch the games, especially now that I've been in there and I know how they play. I've just been trying to look at the game and try to learn as much as I can for next year."

Minnesota has five defensemen under contract scheduled to open next season in the NHL. If Folin impresses during training camp, he likely will secure a roster spot.

Before leaving to join the Wild after the college hockey season, Folin told his professors he would be away from school for a couple weeks. While his teachers understood, there have been no free passes, and he's busy making up the work he missed. And finals are next week.

"I missed two weeks of really important school so I had to go back to finish that out," said Folin, a political science major. "I have a lot of papers to hand in. It's a busy time of the year."

Pioneer Press LOADED: 05.01.2014
Minnesota Wild's Clayton Stoner has been a hit during playoffs

By Chad Graff Posted: 04/30/2014 12:01:00 AM CDT

After suffering a lower-body injury on his second shift of Game 1 last year in the Wild's opening-round playoff series against the Chicago Blackhawks, defenseman Clayton Stoner watched the rest of the series from the stands.

So this year, as the Wild prepped for a do-or-die Game 7, Stoner was happy just to be able to play.

"It's a disappointing way to experience the playoffs for the first time," Stoner said. "This one is going a lot better, and a win (in Game 7 on Wednesday night) would make it that much more special."

As Wild coach Mike Yeo prepared a video for his players to watch before Wednesday's game, he was reminded of how physical Stoner has been this series.

The Wild have a skilled set of defensemen, but most of them aren't big hitters. Stoner, for one, has provided his share of heavy knocks, and he led the Wild in penalty minutes with 20 through the first six games.

"He's delivered some big hits, but with that I think we all have to be very impressed with his poise with the puck," Yeo said. "He's been able to take two or three strides, make a poised play and allow us to get the puck out of the zone. I've been real pleased with his defensive game, his physicality, and for him to go out and execute the way he has. He's not making flashy plays, he's not making brilliant plays, but he's making steady plays."

An unrestricted free agent this summer, Stoner, at 6 feet 4, 216 pounds, is a player the Wild would like to keep. Free agency has been in the back of his mind for much of the season, "but by this time, you're having too much fun to really worry about it," he said. "You're just enjoying the process."
Wild, Avalanche can feel a rivalry starting to bloom

By Chad Graff Posted: 04/30/2014 12:01:00 AM

DENVER -- As the playoff series between the Minnesota Wild and Colorado Avalanche was set to come to an end Wednesday night with the decisive Game 7, players from both teams said they can't wait to see what comes of this budding rivalry.

The Wild and Avs could be laying the foundation for a strong rivalry for years to come with their intense playoff battle the past two weeks.

As rivals in the recently-re-aligned Central division of the Western Conference, the teams will meet at least four times a season.

Though evenly matched, the teams have gotten to this point with completely different styles of play. The Avalanche are an offensive team that scores goals in bunches. The Wild are a defensive team that prides itself on a strong structured game.

The similarity is that both teams rely heavily on young players, something that bodes well for a rivalry down the road.

"These two teams have a lot of similarities in a lot of ways -- the way that they count on their young players, and sort of the steps that they've taken," Wild coach Mike Yeo said.

As the series comes to an end, there's a mutual respect between the teams.

"It's been a great series," Avs alternate captain Cody McLeod said. "Both teams have battled hard. They're not fans of us, and we're not fans of them, but you have respect for them. They played hard, and we played hard."

It's something Avalanche captain Gabriel Landeskog said he was thinking about on his drive to the rink Wednesday morning.

After spending two weeks beating each other up, the Wild and Avs were about to shake hands and move on -- one group to the golf course, the other to a second-round series against the defending Stanley Cup champion Chicago Blackhawks.

"I'm sick and tired of seeing (Zach) Parise and (Mikael) Granlund and (Mikko) Koivu and those guys," Landeskog said. "It feels like a lifetime I've been playing against those guys, but those match-ups are fun.

"You develop, I wouldn't say hatred, but it's a rivalry. You hit a certain player a number of times every game, they come after you and it becomes this game within the game. That's what makes it so exciting."

While most players get to put the rivalry away for a while after Game 7, Avalanche defenseman Erik Johnson will have no such escape since he will return home to Minnesota in the offseason. And the former Gophers star who grew up in Bloomington doesn't know what to expect next.

"It'll be tough either way," Johnson said. "If we win, people won't be too happy. If we don't win, I'm sure people are still going to give me some grief for things that happened in the series anyway. Win or lose, I'm sure I'll be hearing about it this summer. Maybe (I'll) just sell my house and stay up at my lake (cabin) up north all summer ... stay out of the city."

Follow Chad Graff at twitter.com/ChadGraff.

Pioneer Press LOADED: 05.01.2014
Minnesota Wild

Wild 5, Avalanche 4 (OT): Nino Niederreiter's goal wins Game 7 for Minnesota

By Chad Graff Posted: 05/01/2014 12:01:00 AM CDT

DENVER -- The Wild's objective was long stated and well known.

They didn't back down from it in late December when the season was falling apart, and they didn't back down from it when their series against the heavily favored, Central Division champion Colorado Avalanche began.

Finally, 89 games after the season opened on Oct. 3, the realization of the Wild's much-discussed goal came with a 5-4 victory over the Avalanche in Game 7 of their opening-round playoff series.

Nino Niederreiter entered Wild lore when he scored 5:02 into overtime to send the Wild into the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

The Wild earned their first playoff series victory since 2003.

"That was absolutely amazing," said Kyle Brodziak, who assisted on the game-winner.

Colorado Avalanche goalie Semyon Varlamov lets the winning goal slip past the stick of Minnesota Wild right wing Nino Niederreiter as Kyle Brodziak, "That was a crazy series. It was a lot of fun to be a part of. We fought hard for that one. Had a bit of adversity to go through, but we're just thankful we were able to get the win."

The Wild stormed off the bench and leaped into one another's arms.

The Wild, who stated their seasonlong objective in training camp after getting eliminated in five games last year by the Chicago Blackhawks, now get another crack at the Blackhawks, who went on to win the Stanley Cup.

Their second-round matchup begins Friday in Chicago.

"This is definitely something we can say, 'Let's keep building off this,'" coach Mike Yeo said. "But let's also say, 'Let's not stop here. Let's keep going.'"

As the attention turns to another series in which the Wild will be the underdog, it's hard to imagine a scenario in which Yeo, who is in the final year of his contract, isn't offered an extension.

During intermission before the overtime Wednesday, players said they kept repeating a phrase to one another: "Someone is about to become a hero."

Niederreiter was the hero, with a hard wrist shot.

"It still feels kind of unreal," Niederreiter said. "It happened so quickly, and I wasn't sure whether it went in. Obviously, everybody came to celebrate, and it just felt great."

Once again, the Wild played their best hockey with their backs against the wall. For the second time in three days, they won an elimination game.

Niederreiter's overtime goal gave the Wild their first lead. He and Kyle Brodziak entered the zone on a two-on-one rush, and Niederreiter fired the puck past Avs goalie Semyon Varlamov.

The Wild erased four deficits in the game, alternating goals with the Avalanche.

With 2:27 to play, Minnesota defenseman Jared Spurgeon fired a shot past Varlamov for the goal that forced overtime.

Four of the seven games in the series went to overtime. Each team won two.

"We had a good feeling (heading to overtime) because of the fact that we had stuck with it," Wild defenseman Ryan Suter said. "It was exciting."

Ilya Bryzgalov was the Wild's goalie in overtime after Darcy Kuemper exited with an apparent injury with 8:13 remaining in the third period.

Spurgeon's tying goal came after Erik Johnson of Bloomington put the Avs up 4-3 with less than nine minutes remaining in the third.

The Avs' first goal was the most frustrating for the Wild.

After Nick Holden put the puck into the net, referee Wes McCauley waved his arms to the side as if to rule no goal due to the apparent goalie interference that prevented Kuemper from getting to the puck. But after a delay, the Avalanche were awarded a goal and a 1-0 lead.

In a statement, the league said the goal was originally waved off "as a reaction to a potential infraction for high-sticking the puck.

Minnesota Wild goalie Darcy Kuemper, bottom, lets the puck slip past for a Colorado Avalanche goal by Jamie McGinn in the first period.

Minnesota Wild goalie Darcy Kuemper, bottom, lets the puck slip past for a Colorado Avalanche goal by Jamie McGinn in the first period. (JpgJack Dempsey))

" No explanation was offered for the apparent goalie interference.

Still -- as they've done throughout the season -- the Wild came back with resolve. They played their best hockey when things were toughest.

At the end of the game, the teams filed through the customary handshake line. As Wild players reached the end of the line, they turned and hugged one another before skating off the ice with wide smiles.

"This was huge," captain Mikko Koivu said. "It means a lot not just for the organization, but for the fans. They deserve it. They've always supported us, and there's been ups and downs. I'm very happy for our group and the organization -- but also for the fans."

Pioneer Press LOADED: 05.01.2014
Tom Powers: Wild’s Game 7 triumph one for the memory vault

By Tom Powers

DENVER -- They say that these Game 7s are so special, so intense that every little detail is committed to memory. But I don't buy it. In fact, it was all too much. It was sensory overload. After so many repeated gasps people begin to hyperventilate. They're unlikely to remember they were even at the arena on Wednesday night. The brain goes into self-defense mode and blocks it all out. Otherwise the heart will begin to palpitate dangerously.

"Whew," said Mikko Koivu. "It was tense playing in it, too."

Right now, all I can remember is the noise, the tension and, finally, Nino Niederreiter scoring on a two on one in overtime. And then everybody was shaking hands and the Wild were very, very happy.

Colorado Avalanche goalie Semyon Varlamov lets the winning goal slip past off the stick of Minnesota Wild right wing Nino Niederreiter as Kyle Brodziak, This was one of the all-timers as the Wild came back four times from one-goal deficits before finally getting their only lead of the night, at the end. Four times. There were stretches earlier this season when one goal seemed like a mountain to climb. A steep mountain, one that was encased in fog and populated by dangerous head-butting rams.

"Yeah, I do remember that," said Ryan Suter. "Earlier on in the year we had a tough time coming back. We'd get down and we'd kind of throw in the towel. And then towards the end of the year we started believing that we had the firepower to come back. We did that tonight."

"Yeah, you'd think that one goal was it," Zach Parise said, recalling the early part of the season. "It's different now. And we kind of felt like that the whole series, too. At times we'd find ourselves down and we always felt pretty comfortable that we could come back. Tonight it was repeatedly."

"In a way, this game kind of reflected the series," said Mike Yeo. "We continually had to battle back."

My goodness, supposedly years from now people will be able to recall a particularly great save by Semyon Varlamov or an especially creative move by Mikael Granlund. I just don't see how unless they have the whole thing on video. Everyone's system should have been in a state of shock after that one. It was an unbelievable game.

Of course it was going to be close. Of course it was going to go into overtime. The way this series has gone, it couldn't have unfolded any other way. Game after game has been a coin flip. And both teams had a legitimate right to declare they didn't get what they deserved.

Clearly it wasn't just another game. Despite the best efforts of both coaches to corral the emotions, this was just flat-out different than what we've seen to this point.

Meanwhile, there were aircraft in Denver and Chicago that didn't know which way to point. Late into the night the pilots were awaiting word.

Nino Niederreiter of the Minnesota Wild controls the puck as Nathan MacKinnon #29 of the Colorado Avalanche, Erik Haula #56 of the Minnesota Wild and

Nino Niederreiter of the Minnesota Wild controls the puck as Nathan MacKinnon #29 of the Colorado Avalanche, Erik Haula #56 of the Minnesota Wild and Gabriel Landeskog #92 of the Colorado Avalanche pursue the play. (JpgDoug Pensinger/Jpg

Were the Wild headed to Chicago or home? Were the Blackhawks headed to Denver or were they staying home? It all hinged on Game 7 at Pepsi Center. And somewhere, tens of thousands of dollars of hotel rooms were going to go vacant from last minute cancellations.

It's difficult to imagine the pressure involved here. But we could get at least get an idea by what was unfolding on the ice. There were a few jitters at the start. Then both sides sort of clamped down and tightened and tightened the screw. They put waves of pressure on each other hoping the other side would crack. Yet every time the Avs inched ahead, the Wild answered.

"I thought we kind of grew as a team as the series went on," said Koivu. "But great series I thought."

Heart-pounding.

Tied after two periods, tied after three periods and the stress ratcheted up ever higher as the game careened forward. All this and the season came down to overtime in Game 7.

There were maybe a dozen heroes. Jared Spurgeon, Dany Heatley, Koivu, of course Niederreiter and, heck, I can't remember. My ears are ringing and my head hurts.

There will be time to try to dissect it all later. Right now, everybody take a breath.
BOSTON — The second-round playoff series between the Canadiens and Boston Bruins came into sharp focus at 8 p.m. Tuesday. That’s when the Canadiens learned the Eastern Conference semifinal series would open at the TD Garden Thursday night (7:30 p.m., CBC, RDS, TSN Radio 690) with Game 2 set for Saturday. It will be the first action for the Canadiens since completing a four-game sweep of the Tampa Bay Lightning on April 22.

“I think it’s good to start tomorrow,” veteran defenceman Francis Bouillon said after the Canadiens practised at the Bell Sports Complex in Brossard Wednesday morning before flying to Boston. “It was a long break. It was a good break for us, but now it’s time to go. It was funny to watch the other games and you feel that you’re not in the playoffs anymore. The focus is there, everyone looks sharp on the ice and we’re ready to play.”

Said defenceman Mike Weaver, who experienced the Montreal-Boston rivalry in two regular-season games: “We’ve known that we were going to play Boston for a while, but everything has come into focus. This is why you work so hard in the summer, to be ready for games like these.”

It took a while for the schedule for this series to come together. Games 3 and 4 in Montreal were easy, because the Bell Centre is booked for concerts next Monday and Wednesday, and that left Tuesday and Thursday available.

Figuring out the first two games in Boston was more challenging.

NBC and the NHL wanted a game Thursday night, but they might have preferred to kick off the second round with the New York Rangers facing Sidney Crosby and the Pittsburgh Penguins. That possibility disappeared when the Philadelphia Flyers took the Rangers to a Game 7 Wednesday night.

The Bruins were looking at a Friday night-Sunday afternoon start to the series. There was concern a Thursday night game would not leave much time to set up the Northeastern University graduation ceremonies Friday morning at the TD Gardens. There still exists the possibility that an overtime game Thursday night would put a lot of pressure on the work crew charged with the overnight turnaround.

When the Canadiens left for Boston Wednesday afternoon, the NHL still hadn’t confirmed the afternoon start for Game 2 Saturday. RDS, which televises all Canadiens games, reported Saturday’s game would be a 12:30 p.m. start. Overtime in Game 2 would create a problem for NBC, which has coverage of the Kentucky Derby beginning at 4 p.m. If the game goes past that time, coverage will move to the NBC Sports Network.

The series will bring together two of the top goaltenders in the NHL — the Canadiens’ Carey Price and Vezina Trophy finalist Tuukka Rask.

“Tuus is a really good goalie,” Price said. “He’s well deserving of the Vezina nomination. But the bottom line is I’m not going to score on him and he’s not going to score on me. I just have to worry about stopping pucks. You can’t be concerned about what anyone else is doing.”

While there is excitement in both cities over the 34th playoff series between these teams, Price downplayed the rivalry.

“It doesn’t mean anything more than any other team,” the goaltender said. “They’re a good hockey team and it’s going to be a challenge for me, but I’ve said it before — I prepare the same way for every team.”

Price did concede that the Montreal-Boston rivalry means more to the fans when he said he expected both rinks to be “loud — and obnoxious.”

The goalie also trotted out the cliché about taking the series one game at a time when he cautioned: “We can’t win the series in Game 1.”

The simple series preview has the Canadiens’ speed matched up against the Bruins’ size and strength. But Canadiens coach Michel Therrien noted that the Bruins also have some speed and he feels the Canadiens’ smaller players play big.
Montreal Canadiens

Team dentist keeps Canadiens smiling

By Brenda Branswell, THE GAZETTE April 30, 2014 4:48 PM

If any teeth get sacrificed in a bruising playoff series between the Canadiens and Boston Bruins, Jean-François Desjardins will be standing by at the Bell Centre ready to help.

Just as speed is a key part of the Canadiens’ game, it’s also important in Desjardins’s work as the Canadiens dentist when a problem pops up during a game.

Dealing with emergencies is part of the job’s appeal for Desjardins, who said he likes that kind of dentistry.

“It’s like you have three seconds to make a decision and you have like five minutes to fix it because (the player) needs to go back on,” he said.

“When a player is injured, all the lines are messed up so they want the players (back on the ice) as fast as possible.”

There’s no dentist’s chair at the Bell Centre and if major work is required it’s done at Desjardins’s dental office in Montreal after the game or the next morning.

Most of the time they do stitches during the games, Desjardins said. If a player’s tooth is broken, usually the lip is cut, he said. He’ll stitch up the lip to stop the bleeding. (Players can’t play if they’re bleeding.) He might remove part of a broken tooth so that a player doesn’t swallow it.

It’s really to stabilize things so they can play safely, he said.

Desjardins started doing dental work for the Canadiens in 1999. Unlike David Mulder, the Canadiens’ chief surgeon whose name and face are familiar to many Habs fans, Desjardins isn’t a household name. NHL team doctors sometimes tend to injured players on the ice. But when Desjardins is called into service during a game, he does his work in the Canadiens’ or the visiting team’s clinic.

Teeth are a common casualty in pro hockey. Most of the time it’s a stick, a puck or an elbow that’s the culprit, according to Desjardins.

In one of the “duel” videos posted on the Canadiens website, Thomas Vanek and Mike Weaver tried to figure out the identity of the Hab they’d each been assigned in a game of ‘Guess Who?’

“Does your person have a tooth missing?” Vanek asked Weaver.

“I think we all have teeth missing,” Weaver said.

Goaltenders are usually the exception, Desjardins suggested, because they wear full facial protection.

But that wasn’t enough to protect either starting goaltender last spring during the Canadiens-Ottawa Senators playoff series. Television cameras showed Carey Price skating over to the Habs bench after a collision in front of his net and calmly handing over parts of two teeth to an athletic therapist. Ottawa goaltender Craig Anderson lost a front tooth during the same series when a slapshot hit his mask.

When players’ teeth break they’re usually broken sideways within the bone, Desjardins said.

“It’s always bad,” he said. “It’s rare that it’s easy to fix. It’s always a complex situation: Should we extract or try to keep the teeth for another 10 years?

“So we often do a crown, but we tell the players it won’t last like 20 years. But when your career is over we’ll have all this extracted and do an implant.”

The aim is a solution that won’t be a problem to fix if the tooth breaks again. A dental implant is very hard to remove if it breaks within the bone, Desjardins said. So they try and wait until after a player retires to put in an implant.

Most games don’t involve dental work. Desjardins said he’s busier outside the games. He sees a lot of Canadiens players and their families for regular dental checkups and emergencies and treats all the Habs for work-related dental problems.

He also treats players from visiting teams. Since teams on the road typically leave for their next destination right after a game, visiting players go see Desjardins in Montreal if they had a dental problem in their previous game.

Desjardins also provides players with custom-made mouthguards. There’s always a rush at the beginning of the season to make them, he said.

“I can put more thickness where it’s needed and less where they don’t need it,” he said, adding if they’re too thick, they’re uncomfortable for the players.

One of the things he loves about the job is that you really feel part of the Canadiens family, Desjardins said.

“They make you feel you’re important and you have a reason to be there.”

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The Canadiens and Boston Bruins will square off for the 34th time in the NHL playoffs and the bad blood was already flowing before Game 1 of their Eastern Conference semifinal series.

In a Boston Herald column, Stephen Harris described the Canadiens’ P.K. Subban as “despicably villainous” and teammate Alexei Emelin as “a dangerous foe” and “a guy who may be trying deliberately to hurt people.”

“Do we need this crap?” columnist Jack Todd says on this week’s HI/O Show.

Todd is joined by Mike Boone — who live blogs every Canadiens game on HI/O — and sports editor/host Stu Cowan to set the stage for the much-anticipated series and give their predictions.

The Canadiens have won 24 of the first 33 series between the teams, but Boston has won seven of the last 11 playoff meetings, including the last two.
Bring on the Bruins! Habs head to Boston for Game 1

Posted by Stu Cowan

The Canadiens-Bruins series hasn't started yet, but the cheap shots are flying already.

In a Boston Herald column, Stephen Harris described the Canadiens' P.K. Subban as "despically villainous" and teammate Alexei Emelin as "a dangerous foe" and "a guy who may be trying deliberately to hurt people."

The Canadiens practised Wednesday morning in Brossard before flying to Boston for Game 1 of the Eastern Conference semifinal series Thursday night (7:30 p.m., CBC, RDS, TSN Radio 690). Alex Galchenyuk, who suffered a lower-body injury (knee) in Chicago on April 9, skated briefly Wednesday morning for the first time since being injured.

Canadiens coach Michel Therrien told reporters after practice that any lineup changes for Game 1 will be announced on Thursday in Boston.

The NHL only announced late Tuesday night that Game 1 of the series would be played Thursday. After Wednesday's practice, the Canadiens' Max Pacioretty was asked if it was difficult learning so late about the date for Game 1.

"We found out last night," Pacioretty said, "and for myself, personally, I like it a little bit better that way. Now it's a little bit less time to think and just jumping right back into the action. I've said it a bunch of times, I think that's when I play my best hockey is when I'm not thinking and this can help that."

As for the Canadiens-Bruins rivalry, Pacioretty said it's "always fun" playing against Boston.

"It's definitely a physical game, but we know the way we want to play to make it successful," Pacioretty said. "They play a completely different style of game than us and we can't get caught up in that. We've got to stick to the game that made us successful in the first round. And if we do that, I think we're staying away from the stuff after the whistles."

The Canadiens had a 3-1 record against the Bruins this season and are 6-2 over the past two seasons with Michel Therrien as coach. Pacioretty said discipline has been the key to the Habs' success against Boston.

"They're a big team, they like to play real physical," Pacioretty said. "Obviously, we want to play physical, but when we just worry about our game and don't let the stuff after the whistle affect us. When we walk away from that and stay disciplined, I think we've had good opportunities to win games against them. And obviously they're going to be smart, too, in the playoffs. Obviously, they're not going to be taking as many penalties as if it was just a regular game. But we've just got to focus on our game and not worry about them."

Here's how the lines and defence pairings looked at practice:

Pacioretty-Desharnais-Vanek
Prust-Plekanec-Gallagher
Bourque-Eller -Gionta
Moen-Briere-Weise
Bournival-White-Parros
Gorges-Subban
Markov-Emelin
Bouillon-Weaver
Tinordi-Murray

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 05.01.2014
Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens eager for Bruins series to start

By Brenda Branswell, THE GAZETTE April 30, 2014

BOSTON — With an eight-day gap between the Canadiens’ playoff series, it sounded like Game 1 against the Boston Bruins couldn’t come fast enough for Brendan Gallagher.

“I’m excited to get going right away,” Gallagher said after the Canadiens practice Wednesday morning before the team left for Boston.

“I think we’ve been off for long enough. I think our bodies are healed. We’re more than ready to go and I’m sure they’re feeling the same way. So the earlier we start the better.”

Gallagher said he didn’t think rust would be an issue for the Canadiens, who swept the Tampa Bay Lightning in their best-of seven first-round series over a week ago.

“I think we did a good job this week of preparing ourselves and really getting that focus level back to where it needs to be,” he said.

The Canadiens staged a simulated game day on Monday with a morning skate and a two-period scrimmage that evening at the Bell Centre.

“It was competitive,” Gallagher said. “It was fast. It was what we needed.”

Max Pacioretty also said he thought it was beneficial.

“For a week there we were practising getting our bodies ready to working hard in the morning and then at night we were kind of just relaxing,” he said.

“So just getting back into the game-day routine and waking up our nervous system at night I think should help us out.”

The schedule for Game 1 Thursday night between the Canadiens and Bruins landed with short notice, but Pacioretty didn’t seem to mind.

“I like it a little bit better that way,” he said. “Now it’s a little bit less time to think and just jumping right back into the action.

“I’ve said it a bunch of times — I think that’s when I play my best hockey is when I’m not thinking and this can help that.”

The Canadiens expect a game that will be difficult to play, “but mentally we’re ready for that,” coach Michel Therrien said.

The Canadiens won three of four games against the Bruins during the regular season, but Gallagher acknowledged that’s irrelevant.

“It’s the first team to win four games now,” he said.

“Usually, whenever we play them it is a very emotional game,” Gallagher added.

“When you’re on the losing side, regardless if it’s us or them, you’re going to be upset. You’re probably going to let the emotions get the better of you.

“So that’s going to be a big key in the series. We’ve talked about it. We’ve got to keep our emotions in check and they’re going to try and do the same thing. And just keep your head in the right place and have that focus level where it needs to be.”

Gallagher said he expected a fast pace in Game 1 with both teams looking to set the tone for the series.

“Game 1 is usually a very emotional game,” he said. “It’s going to be physical. It’s going to be intense. We’re going to have to be ready for the battle. But I think our group is up for the job.”

The Canadiens always have fun playing against the Bruins, Pacioretty said.

“It’s definitely a physical game, but we know the way we want to play to make it successful,” he added. “They play a completely different style of game than us and we can’t get caught up in that. We’ve got to stick to the game that made us successful in the first round. And if we do that, I think we’re staying away from the stuff after the whistles.”

Asked why he thought the Canadiens have had success against the Bruins, Pacioretty said he thought it was because of discipline.
BOSTON - There is no good blood between the Canadiens and the Boston Bruins. There hasn't been a nice drop spilled over 33 playoff series dating to the first, in 1929, and it's unlikely there will be any pleasant plasma over the next two weeks, or less.

These clubs have faced each other 170 times in the post-season, the Habs having won 102 games and lost 68. They've won 24 of the series, dropping nine; they've scored 511 goals and surrendered 420.

The statistics will change Thursday night, as they will throughout the next week. And the taste that these clubs have for one another will not get any sweeter.

The Canadiens-Bruins Eastern Conference semifinal doesn't need any promotion. No Don King, no Vince McMahon, no Dana White. This is not a pot that needs stirring. No need to stoke the fires of two fan bases that are near spontaneous combustion before the first puck is dropped.

But you'll find plenty of poking being done now with pointy sticks, needless as it is. And some of it is downright hilarious.

You'll find barbed wire on the Canadiens fence, a little in the mainstream media, but much more in the Twitterverse and on the web; check out the Habs Eyes on the Prize website for some glorious Bruins trashing, including a feature ranking "the most despicable Bruins of all time."

"All time" covers a lot, but that Eddie Shore — "old-time hockey!" — doesn't figure at all in this exercise gravely disappoints me.

(Categories in this ranking divide 16 players among cheap-shot artists, divers, traitors and Habs killers.)

So turn your gaze, if you dare, to Boston, where the Canadiens are cannon-fodder for writers and commentators who cover the Bruins.

On Wednesday, Boston Herald columnist Stephen Harris began innocently enough, writing that for Boston to succeed against Montreal, they must "play with emotion, play Bruins hockey. But don't be dumb and don't be suckered into unnecessary penalties."

And then Harris not-so-subtly weighed in on Canadiens defenceman Alexei Emelin.

He wrote of Emelin's "low-bridge hip check" of Boston's Milan Lucic on March 24, which in fact was a clean, open-ice hit that was not penalized. The crushing check stood out so boldly because the hip-check is a mostly forgotten art, a sensational throwback to Original Six hockey.

A carry-over from that March game for Lucic, Harris wrote, "is the knowledge that Emelin can be a dangerous foe. Not merely a cheap-shot hitter like, for instance, Pittsburgh Penguins defenceman Brooks Orpik, but dangerous — a guy who may be trying deliberately to hurt people."

Subban, he suggested with less elaboration, is "despicably villainous."

That, you'll admit, is soaring praise from the other side. When I think of "despicably villainous," I think of Superman's arch-enemy Lex Luthor, or perhaps Aardvark Ratnik or Riff Raff, the nemeses of cartoon heroes Stupor Duck and Underdog, respectively.

Sadly, Subban wasn't speaking to the media after Wednesday's Brossard practice, thus unable to share with us the villain he believes is the most despicable.

Joe Haggerty, who writes for Comcast SportsNet New England, checked in Wednesday with a story on Bruins' David Krejci, and how the Boston centre is prepared for what could be an epic battle between himself and Montreal's Tomas Plekanec.

A Canadiens-Bruins series, Hags wrote, is an "Original Six hate-fest," and for Krejci it will get "a little down and dirty when lined up against countryman Plekanec."

"Krejci has never been a fan of the sneaky stickwork employed by the Habs, and gets into his fair share of duelling slashes during the Boston/Montreal games."

You could think that "sneaky stickwork" used in a sentence by anyone who covers serial nutcracker Milan Lucic would be a little tricky.

Whatever.

(In a separate piece Wednesday, Haggerty fenced entertainingly with the Eyes on the Prize bloggers about embellishment and the latter's charge that the Bruins are masters of the art. This is sure to be an "Oh yeah?" and a "See, I told you!" slapfest throughout the series.)

None of this is to carve my colleagues Harris or Haggerty, journalists who serve their markets faithfully and often do so with flair. I just hope they're not peaking too soon, the series not yet even underway. Pace yourself, boys.

The Canadiens, meanwhile, are simply happy that the puck will finally be dropped. The Habs will have been idle for eight days since their four-game sweep of Tampa; the Bruins will have cooled their heels for four days.

Veteran defenceman Francis Bouillon grinned when I suggested to him that this break is the Canadiens' fault for having knocked off Tampa in a quick four games.

"Enough of the practice, it's time to play," Bouillon said. "It's pretty funny when you watch all the other games for a week and a half and you feel that you're not there anymore."

"We're well prepared. We had time to see a few things, a few guys had a few things to heal. We're ready to go. Everybody's healthy. It's going to be important to not change anything and not play (the Bruins') game. We just have to play how we had success all year long."

Players on both sides view this storied rivalry through different eyes. If Lucic admits that he does, indeed, "hate" the Canadiens, Habs goalie Carey Price was taking a different road.

"I don't think hate is a good word," Price said. "Competitive is a better one."

"Both rinks are going to be loud and probably obnoxious," Price said of the atmosphere ahead. "We've been in this situation before. That's what makes this game so much fun — living in the moment."

"We're focusing on us," Canadiens coach Michel Therrien said. "That's my only comment. For me, it's not about the Bruins, it's about the moment, preparing yourself today for the first game."

For at least the next four games, there will be dubious penalties called and there will be crimes unseen. In Boston, Subban will be vilified by Bruins fans, just as Boston captain Zdeno Chara will be roasted in the Bell Centre.

At 6-foot-9, literally and figuratively, Chara will be the lightning rod for the Canadiens. He wrote of Emelin's "low-bridge hip check" of Boston's Milan Lucic on March 24, which in fact was a clean, open-ice hit that was not penalized. The crushing check stood out so boldly because the hip-check is a mostly forgotten art, a sensational throwback to Original Six hockey.

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At 6-foot-9, literally and figuratively, Chara will be the lightning rod for the Canadiens. Given his checkered history against the Canadiens. On the Boston side, much of this series is expected to orbit around Chara, Lucic and the unique Brad Marchand, for whom you'd call an exterminator if he turned up in your house.

"We know it's going to be a battle, it's going to be loud and the fans will be passionate," Chara told the Toronto Sun's Mike Zeisberger in the final lead-up.

"We are all aware of the history, too. These are two Original Six teams. People's parents and grandparents watched these two teams play. The tradition cannot be ignored."

And no matter which jersey you wear or the team that's in your heart, that's the honest truth, from eh to Big Z. Montreal Gazette LOADED: 05.01.2014
Barry Trotz stays busy without NHL job

Josh Cooper, jcooper2@tennessean.com 9:59 p.m. CDT April 30, 2014

Barry Trotz feels an intriguing sense of freedom.
At a time of year when he would normally be doing exit interviews with players and having long meetings with management, the former Predators coach is involved in other things.

He runs errands. He takes his son Nolan out to play some baseball. He went to the Grand Prix of Alabama last weekend.

Is there time for hockey? Maybe at night, when playoff games are on television.

"I don't think I've had this much energy in a while," said Trotz, who was fired by the Predators on April 14. "Every year you need a couple of weeks to energize as a coach and get back at it. I got it now."

Trotz said he hasn't interviewed for any job openings — Washington and Florida are the only other NHL teams with head-coaching vacancies. He did say Predators general manager David Poile has fielded calls from other teams about Trotz's availability.

Since Trotz is still technically a Predators employee until June 30 when his contract runs out, teams need permission to talk to him. He said he won't focus on his next possible coaching job until mid-May, when the job market will probably heat up.

"It's mostly noise right now, but David has reached out and said that there has been some teams just asking about me. I don't know those specifics," Trotz said. "I have not done any interviews and I didn't expect to do any until the middle of May. It's always about a month before the draft."

Trotz's next team could still be in the playoffs, of course. If squads with high expectations — such as Minnesota, Pittsburgh or even San Jose — fail to advance beyond the second round, he could be an option.

Trotz said he's not watching the playoffs to see who wins and where he could land. He's still watching from more of a coach's perspective.

"You make mental notes," he said. "You're a coach, so you make mental notes from matchups, to who steps up in the playoffs to who doesn't, different types of players."

When most coaches are fired, they tend to get out of town quickly and avoid former colleagues. But not Trotz, who said he sometimes watches games with Predators assistant Lane Lambert. He also said he talks with Poile a couple of times per week.

"We have a friendship," Trotz said. "He has reached out to me to see if there's anything he can do for me."

But until he finds a new job — which many around the league believe will happen this offseason — Trotz will continue being a father, husband and repairman at his Brentwood home.

"I have a list of stuff I need to do during the day. I try to do a couple of hours of professional stuff, be it hockey stuff I haven't gotten to the last little while, husband stuff, everything to repairing stuff around the house that I neglected around the winter," he said. "Around the afternoon it's back to trying to help out with my son with swimming lessons and being a dad."

Tennessean LOADED: 05.01.2014
Jaromir Jagr said he always believed Devils were contenders, so he wanted to stay

By Rich Chere on April 30, 2014

Jaromir Jagr said he feels the Devils are contenders even though they missed the playoffs and he saw no reason to test the free agency market.

The 42-year-old winger signed a one-year contract with the Devils for a base salary of $3.5 million with bonuses that could bring it to $5.5 million.

"I think both sides wanted to do it quickly. Lou (Lamoriello) wanted to do it so he knew what direction he wanted to go and I didn't mind it at all," Jagr said Wednesday on a conference call with reporters. "There was no reason to change clubs because I was happy. No reason to do it.

"Two things could happen with free agency: Maybe there would be more teams (interested) and I would get more money. But if I'm happy somewhere, there's no reason to change."

Jagr said at the end of this past season he knows he is running out of time to win another Stanley Cup, but he feels the Devils are legitimate contenders.

"I always thought like that," he said. "We made a lot of mistakes during the season. I felt we were able to play very good against the good teams. We lost a lot of points against teams that didn't make the playoffs," he explained.

"It's so tough to get those points later on in the season. It's tough. It's too much pressure. We have to learn from that."

Although he wanted to stay with the Devils, Jagr said he preferred another one-year contract.

"I want to play as long as I can. I love the game, but I like a one-year deal," he said. "I'm comfortable with that. You never know. The worst deal you can have is when some guy who has a long contract and all of a sudden something goes wrong. What is going to happen next? It's tough to move (trade) guys like that. (One year) is good for everybody."

What does he like about the Devils and New Jersey?

"I'm happy and I play my best hockey when I'm happy," he said. "We had a good group of guys, which is important, and I was getting the ice time I like. I like to play a lot. I don't get tired much."

Coach Pete DeBoer is a factor.

"The team we have, we don't have any great superstars or goal-scorers. But the system we play gives us a chance to compete against anybody and beat anybody," Jagr said. "It gives you extra confidence. When you follow the system, you don't really have to be great or hope that the team we're playing against has a bad night to beat them.

"Maybe that's just my feeling, but everything is about feeling. Feelings are important."

What would he like to accomplish next season?

"I'd like to score more goals," Jagr said. He repeated that he'd like to remain with two regular linemates to build chemistry, which is what DeBoer gave him most of last season.

Jagr commented on being one of three finalists for the Masterton Trophy. "It means a lot. Especially with our writers. They're very picky and they picked me, so I'm very happy about it," Jagr joked.

He added, seriously: "I just have a love for the sport, I guess."

Star Ledger LOADED: 05.01.2014
New Jersey Devils

Devils’ Jaromir Jagr wasn’t interested in testing free agent market

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger on April 30, 2014

The Devils made it official Wednesday that they have re-signed right winger Jaromir Jagr for next season.

The deal will pay Jagr a base salary of $3.5 million with player bonuses (games-played) that could bring it to $5.5 million.

"I think he feels that he really liked it there. He respects the organization and his teammates. This year they did not make the playoffs but they were pretty close and he liked the idea of being there another year," agent Petr Svoboda said.

Why would Jagr not want to test the free agent market?

"He’s the kind of guy that when he likes a situation, he didn’t really want to know what was out there," Svoboda explained. "He was very happy with where he was. When we started talks with Lou (Lamoriello), Jags was very much involved. Both parties decided now was the time to do it."

Lamoriello said Jagr let it be known he wanted to stay and preferred to avoid the free agency process.

"He certainly was a player we felt could be an asset to our team, but he had to feel that way. In the exit interview he said he really would like to come back and he’d like to get it done before he leaves rather than go through what he’s gone through the last few summers," Lamoriello revealed.

"If he had to go through (free agency) he would still be interested, but he said he’d prefer to (re-sign now)."

Jagr and the Devils agreed to terms right after the season, but details had to be worked out because the 42-year-old winger will play in the world championships and the team wanted to be protected.

Jagr led the Devils this past season with 43 assists and 67 points, while finishing second with 24 goals in 2013-14. He also led the club with six game-winning tallies, 231 shots on goal and a plus-16 mark.

Lamoriello said he believes Jagr can have another strong season.

"We certainly feel that way and the reason is if you take the number of his age out of the equation and you look at the shape he’s in and the amount he’s worked out and the way he approaches the game, I don’t know why not," Lamoriello said.

"We didn’t expect (Jagr’s stats this season). He was used in a different role than he was used before, a first or second line situation. Only time will tell if he can do it again. We feel he can or we would not have gone this route."

The 6-3, 230-pound Czech has career totals of 705 goals and 1,050 assists for 1,755 points and 1,005 penalty minutes in 1,473 career regular-season appearances over 20 seasons with Pittsburgh, Washington, the Rangers, Philadelphia, Dallas, Boston and the Devils. A member of the Penguins’ 1991 and 1992 Stanley Cup Championship teams, he has 78 goals and 121 assists for 199 points and 159 penalty minutes in 202 career playoff contests.

Jagr ranks 20th all-time in games played, seventh in goals, eighth in assists, sixth in points (tie), and is the league’s all-time leader with 124 game-winning goals, including 18 overtime scores. Among current NHL players, he ranks first in games played, goals, assists and points. Born February 15, 1972 in Kladno, Czech Republic, he was the recipient of the 1998-99 Hart Memorial Trophy as the player adjudged most valuable to his team, and is a five-time winner of the Art Ross Trophy as the league’s scoring champion. Jagr was named to the NHL’s First All-Star Team seven times, the 1996-97 Second All-Star Team and the 1990-91 All-Rookie Team, while appearing in nine NHL All-Star Games. He was Pittsburgh’s first choice and fifth overall selection of the 1990 NHL entry draft.

Star Ledger LOADED: 05.01.2014
Devils’ Jaromir Jagr named finalist for NHL’s Masterton Trophy

Rich Chere on April 30, 2014

Devils winger Jaromir Jagr, who has agreed to a one-year contract to return to the club for another season, is one of three finalists for the 2013-14 Masterton Memorial Trophy.

Dominic Moore of the Rangers and Manny Malhotra of the Carolina Hurricanes are the other two finalists for the Masterton, which is awarded “to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey,”

Ken Daneyko is the only Devils’ player to win the Masterton. He won it in 1999-2000. Glenn (Chico) Resch won it in 1981-82, the season before the Colorado Rockies were purchased by John McMullen and moved to New Jersey.

A $2,500 grant from the Professional Hockey Writers’ Association (PHWA) is awarded annually to the Bill Masterton Scholarship Fund, based in Bloomington, Minn., in the name of the Masterton Trophy winner.

Each local chapter of the PHWA submitted nominations for the Masterton Trophy at the conclusion of the regular season and the top three vote-getters were designated as finalists. The winner will be announced June 24, during the 2014 NHL Awards from Encore Theater at Wynn Las Vegas. The 2014 NHL Awards will be broadcast by NBCSN in the United States and CBC in Canada.

The finalists:

Jagr

His unwavering dedication to the game has allowed him to continue playing at high level when most players his age are retired. The Devils named the 42-year-old right winger team MVP in 2013-14 after he led the club in assists (43), points (67), plus-minus (+16), game-winning goals (six) and shots (231). Admired throughout the League for his rigorous training regimen, Jagr credits working hard in practices to avoiding fatigue, allowing him to stay fresh and maintain an advantage over opponents late in games.

Malhotra

Malhotra, 33, was the Vancouver Canucks’ Masterton nominee in 2011-12 after returning from a serious eye injury suffered the season before. Refusing to believe his NHL career was over last fall, Malhotra signed a professional tryout agreement with the Charlotte Checkers, Carolina’s American Hockey League affiliate, on Oct. 3 and signed as a free agent with the Hurricanes four weeks later. He appeared in 69 regular-season games, assumed a leadership role in serving as an alternate captain and ranked second among all NHL players in face-off percentage (59.4%).

Moore

Moore, 33, returned to the NHL this season after taking a leave of absence from the League in the spring of 2012 in order to care for his wife, Katie, after she had been diagnosed with a rare form of liver cancer. Katie passed away at the age of 32 in January of 2013. Moore thereafter established the Katie Moore Foundation (katiemoore.org), dedicated to helping patients and families with rare cancers through research, advocacy and community. He resumed his career as an integral part of a Rangers team that earned 96 points and a second-place finish in the Metropolitan Division.

The Masterton Trophy was presented by the NHL Writers’ Association in 1968 to commemorate the late Bill Masterton, a player with the Minnesota North Stars who exhibited a high degree the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey and who died on January 15, 1968.
Jaromir Jagr had no interest in exploring the free agent market this summer. That’s why, only two and a half weeks after the Devils’ season ended, the 42-year-old future Hall of Famer has already signed with the team for next season.

Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello and Jagr’s agent, Petr Svoboda, had touched base during the season and agreed to begin negotiations after the season was over. The deal was done earlier this week and was officially announced by the Devils today.

“Both sides wanted to do it quickly,” Jagr said in a conference call with the media. “I think Lou wanted to do it because he wanted to know what kind direction he wants to go, I guess. I didn’t mind it at all. I told you after the season I was happy there and I have no reason to change clubs because I was happy. There’s no reason to do it.”

“Say I would go to free agency, what would happen? Two things would happen: Maybe there would be more teams, I would get more money, but no one is going to guarantee me I would be happy somewhere else. Nobody is going to guarantee I’m going to be happy next year here, but I think it’s a bigger percentage than to just go somewhere else. That’s my opinion. If I’m happy somewhere and I feel like the other side is kind of interested, there’s no reason to change.”

Jagr’s contract is a one-year deal with a base salary of $3.5 million. As with his 2013-14 contract, Jagr can earn an additional $2 million from games-played bonuses.

Although it is only a one-year contract, that doesn’t mean 2014-15 will be Jagr’s final one. Jagr still plans to play for as long as he can, but said the one-year deal made the most sense.

“I want to play the longest I can,” he said. “I told you guys that. I love the game and as I long as I work hard there’s always a chance to be able to play. I like a one-year deal and I was comfortable with that. The worst thing that can happen some older guys have a long contract and all the sudden goes wrong and what’s going to happen next? A guy’s got two years left. It’s tough to move guys like that. This way, it’s good for everybody.”

Jagr, who led the Devils with 67 points (24 goals, 43 assists) in 82 games in 2013-14, said he believes they will be playoff contenders next season despite failing to qualify this season. That also contributed to his thinking about wanting to stay.

“I always thought like that,” he said. “I felt like we were able to play very good against the good teams. We lost a lot of points against teams who didn’t make the playoffs and if you’re a good enough team you should grab those points. Otherwise, it’s so tough to get those points later on in the season. We got in the situation that we had to win almost every game to get in the playoffs and it’s tough. It’s too much pressure. We have to learn from that.”

Jagr also likes the system the Devils play under head coach Pete DeBoer. DeBoer also gave Jagr the first-line minutes he enjoyed (he averaged 19:09 per game).

“I felt like the team we had, we don’t have really great superstars or goal scorers, but I think the system we play gives our team a chance to compete against anybody and beat anybody,” Jagr said. “So, it kind of gives you extra confidence when you follow the system. You don’t have to be great, you don’t have to hope the team you play against – if they are more talented – they have a bad night to beat them. I felt if we really work hard and follow the system we have a chance every night.”

Overall, Jagr said it’s “a few small things together” that makes him happy playing for the Devils.

“I know myself when I’m happy and I play my best hockey when I’m happy,” he said. “There’s a lot more things to make me happy. I don’t want to name everything, but we had a good group of guys. That’s very important. I was getting the ice time I really like. I like to play a lot. I don’t get tired much, so I really enjoy it.”

And, as he said after the season ended, he believes he can play even better next season.

“I’d truly like to score more goals,” he said. “I said that because that’s what I feel. I don’t just say something to satisfy people. I’m saying how I feel. So, when I said that, that’s the way I feel. I feel that when you play with guys together, there’s a better chance to play better as a line and it happens for everybody, not just for me. The hockey is too quick right now and it’s easier to play with somebody you who know where he’s going to be. Because you can’t see him all the time, so you have to kind of sense where he’s going to be. That’s how I get more confidence. Not only me, but my linemates and our team.”

**

Jagr was named today as one of the finalists for the Masterton Trophy for perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey. Rangers center Dominic Moore and Carolina Hurricanes center Manny Malhotra are the other two finalists.

The local chapters of the Professional Hockey Writers Association submitted nominations for the Masterton (one from each of the 30 NHL teams) at the conclusion of the regular season and the top three vote getters were designated as the finalists.

“It means a lot, especially (being nominated by) our writers,” Jagr said. “They’re very picky, so if they picked me I’m very happy about it. … The two (other finalists) they had kind of tough (situations) and they were coming back. I love the sport, so I didn’t have to achieve anything. I just followed the love for the sport, I guess.”

Jagr’s $3.5 million base salary is all that will count against the Devils’ salary cap to start the 2014-15 season. The $2 million in 2014-15 games-played bonuses goes into the bonus cushion that would carry over to the 2015-16 season if needed.

However, Jagr has $2 million in games-played bonus money from this season that will count against the team’s 2014-15 cap.
It's official: Devils re-sign Jaromir Jagr

Staff

As expected, the Devils announced today they have re-signed right wing Jaromir Jagr.

The deal includes a base salary of $3.5 million with games played bonuses that would raise the total value to $5.5 million. The contract is structured similarly to the one-year deal that Jagr had with the Devils last season. That one included a $2 million base salary and $2 million in games-played bonuses that paid him $250,000 for every five games played, beginning at the 10-game mark and ending at 45 games.

Jagr, 42, ended up playing in all 82 regular season games.

The $3.5 million base salary is all that counts against the salary cap next season, his $2 million in bonuses from this season, which went into the bonus cushion for 2013-14, will also count against the cap in 2014-15.

Jagr's agent, Petr Svoboda, said negotiations were not complicated because both sides were interested in getting a deal done.

"Jaromir wanted to be here next season and he had no question his mind that he wanted to be back with the Devils and the Devils expressed that they wanted him back so after that there wasn't really that much to talk about," Svoboda said.

Jagr led the Devils in 2013-14 with 67 points (24 goals, 43 assists) in 82 games. He also led the team with six game-winning goals, 231 shots on goal and a plus-16 mark.

The future Hall of Famer is tied with Steve Yzerman for sixth place in NHL history with 1,755 career points. He ranks seventh in NHL history with 705 career goals and eighth with 1,050 assists in 1,473 regular season games over 20 seasons.

Bergen Record LOADED: 05.01.2014
Devils' Jaromir Jagr named finalist for Masterton Trophy

Staff

Devils right wing Jaromir Jagr was named today as one of the three finalists for the Masterton Trophy, which is awarded annually "to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey."

Rangers center Dominic Moore and Carolina Hurricanes center Manny Malhotra were also named as finalists for the Masterton. The winner will be announced on June 24 at the NHL Awards ceremony in Las Vegas.

A $2,500 grant from the Professional Hockey Writers’ Association (PHWA) is awarded annually to the Bill Masterton Scholarship Fund, based in Bloomington, Minn., in the name of the Masterton Trophy winner. The local chapters of the PHWA submitted nominations for the Masterton (one from each of the 30 NHL teams) at the conclusion of the regular season and the top three vote getters were designated as the finalists.

The Devils are expected to announce later today that they have re-signed Jagr, a potential unrestricted free agent, to a one-year contract. The future Hall of Famer's dedication to and love of the game is still strong as his rigorous training regimen allowed him to continue to compete at a high level at age 42. He was voted the Devils' most valuable player by his teammates after leading the team in assists (43), points (67), plus-minus (+16), game-winning goals (six) and shots (231).

Jagr would be first Masterton winner older than 40. Henri Richard (1973-74), Steve Yzerman (2002-03) and Ian Laperriere (2010-11) are currently the oldest to win it at age 37.

Ken Daneyko is the only Devil to have captured the Masterton Trophy, winning it in 1999-2000. Chico Resch won the Masterton in 1981-82 as a member of the Colorado Rockies (which moved to New Jersey and became the Devils the following season).

Here are the bios provided by the NHL on the other two finalists:

Malhotra, 33, was the Vancouver Canucks’ Masterton nominee in 2011-12 after returning from a serious eye injury suffered the season before. Refusing to believe his NHL career was over last fall, Malhotra signed a professional tryout agreement with the Charlotte Checkers, Carolina’s American Hockey League affiliate, on Oct. 3 and signed as a free agent with the Hurricanes four weeks later.

He appeared in 69 regular-season games, assumed a leadership role in serving as an alternate captain and ranked second among all NHL players in face-off percentage (59 percent).

Moore, 33, returned to the NHL this season after taking a leave of absence from the league in the spring of 2012 in order to care for his wife, Katie, after she was diagnosed with a rare form of liver cancer. Katie passed away on Jan. 7, 2013 at the age of 32. Moore thereafter established the Katie Moore Foundation (katiemoore.org), dedicated to helping patients and families with rare cancers through research, advocacy and community.

Moore resumed his NHL career with the Rangers this season, helping them finish in second place in the Metropolitan Division with 96 points.

Bergen Record LOADED: 05.01.2014
Jaromir Jagr signs on for another season with Devils

By Zach Braziller April 30, 2014 | 3:50pm

Jaromir Jagr didn’t lose a step at the age of 42, so the veteran forward is coming back for a 23rd NHL season, agreeing to a one-year with the Devils on Wednesday, the team announced.

The contract is reported to be in $5 million-$6 million range for Jagr, one of the best free-agent signings of the summer. He led the Devils in scoring with 67 points (43 assists, 24 goals) and ranked 27th in the league. He appeared in all 82 games, in addition to playing for the Czech Republic at the Winter Olympics in Sochi.

“…” I want to play the longest I can,” Jagr said on a conference call Wednesday. “I love the game, … I know myself. I’m happy [here]. I play the best hockey when I’m happy.”

It could be a record-breaking season for the former Ranger. Jagr sits sixth on the NHL’s all-time points leaderboard with 1,755. He needs just 17 more to pass Marcel Dionne for fifth and 44 to move into fourth, past Ron Francis. He leads active players in games played, goals, assists and points.

New York Post LOADED: 05.01.2014
Ex-Rangers coach Mike Keenan leads Metallurg to first Kontinental Hockey League title

Keenan lead the Blueshirts to the Stanley Cup in 1994. Metallurg beat Lev Prague 7-4 Wednesday in Game 7 of the Gagarin Cup.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS Wednesday, April 30, 2014, 3:02 PM

Russian team Metallurg Magnitogorsk won the Kontinental Hockey League championship for the first time, beating Czech team Lev Prague 7-4 Wednesday in Game 7 of the Gagarin Cup.

Metallurg is coached by Mike Keenan, the Canadian who coached the New York Rangers to the Stanley Cup in 1994.

The result prevents Lev from becoming the first non-Russian team to win the eight-country KHL, widely considered the strongest hockey league outside the NHL.

Metallurg was a three-time champion of the old Russian Super League before the KHL started play in 2008, but was playing in the Gagarin Cup for the first time.

New York Daily News LOADED: 05.01.2014
NY Rangers Daniel Carcillo helps spark Game 7 win with goal

Physical winger, once an enemy of the Blueshirts, scores first goal of Game 7 and helps Rangers advance.

BY Stephen Lorenzo Thursday, May 1, 2014, 1:30 AM

As time crept closer to a decisive Game 7 at Madison Square Garden, one of the many unanswered questions for the Rangers involved who would suit up on the team's fourth line in their do-or-die matchup with the Flyers. As it turns out, Alain Vigneault chose wisely.

Daniel Carcillo sparked the Rangers on Wednesday night with the first of two New York goals in the second period, helping the Blueshirts advance past Philadelphia, the instigator's old team.

Vigneault elected to go with Carcillo, a veteran and a former Stanley Cup champion, rather than 21-year-old speedster J.T. Miller in the electric MSG atmosphere.

"I just felt in a Game 7 like this I'd rather go with experience," Vigneault said. "He had been in those situations before. He came up and did a good job, obviously scored that big first goal for us."

The Rangers second period did not begin well, after the team was penalized 39 seconds into the frame for having too many men on the ice. After serving the penalty, Carcillo was sprung from the box at 2:39 and later found an opening in the offensive zone. Rangers winger Mats Zuccarello then seemed to wave a magic wand and fire the puck backhanded from the right faceoff circle where it found a path through the legs of two Philadelphia defenders, right to the stick of a primed Carcillo for a tip-in past Flyers goaltender Steve Mason at 3:06.

"It was a backhanded pass, off the wall, spin-o-rama between two guys' legs right on my tape. It went in, but it was a special play by a really good player," Carcillo said referring to Zuccarello. "(The goal) was huge, especially at home. You get the crowd into it and the first period there wasn't much going on, but I thought they were in their end a lot... Mason played great, we could have had four or five and he kept them in there. So getting the first one was important."

As the Rangers move on to their second consecutive Keystone State opponent in the Penguins, Carcillo will likely continue to be juggled in the lineup. But by now, the veteran knows his role and will be prepared to collect the next time Vigneault calls his number.

"You just put in the work and skate when you can," he said. "Mentally, you've just got to stay sharp. You've got to know you might go in and you've got to be ready."

Read more: http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/hockey/rangers/carcillo-helps-spark-rangers-spark-article-1.1775045#ixzz30SMWbcc4

New York Daily News LOADED: 05.01.2014
NY Rangers won’t get much of a break before facing off with rested Penguins

It is a cruel scheduling trick by the NHL, a league that is rushing through the playoffs as if it wants this season to end as quickly as possible. The Sochi Olympics set back the timetable, and now it’s a race to get this thing done, darn it.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

This is the Trojan horse offered the Rangers, as a gift for their big Game 7 victory over Philly: After playing three playoff games in four nights, they next get on Friday a rested Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and the division-winning Penguins, who also happen to own the home-ice advantage.

“It’ll be a quick exhale, then off to Pittsburgh tomorrow,” Brad Richards said, after Wednesday’s 2-1 win over the Flyers. “That’s the playoffs. You don’t dwell on losses and you don’t cherish wins. But I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

It is a cruel scheduling trick by the NHL, a league that is rushing through the playoffs as if it wants this season to end as quickly as possible. The Sochi Olympics set back the timetable, and now it’s a race to get this thing done, darn it. Hardly seems fair. Then again, the Penguins won the Metropolitan Division and polished off Columbus in six games. They’ve earned the vacation. The Rangers? They would surely be losing Game 8 to the Flyers if given the opportunity.

Fortunately, the first-round series ended on an odd number, after literally spinning on a brilliant move from Mats Zuccarello. His second-period assist was magical, sprung from some ancient Norse instinct. Zuccarello, the Rangers’ most inventive gnat, spun 180 degrees in the right corner and blindly backhanded a perfect pass to Daniel Carcillo. Somehow, the puck threaded a pair of Philly defensemen and hit the tape on Carcillo’s stick in stride as he skated in from the left side of the cage.

“I saw him at first and sort of knew he was there,” Zuccarello said. “I was just lucky it got through.”

Carcillo said this was more than luck. “A special play” from Zuccarello, he called it. To his credit, Carcillo did not mess up the moment. He beat stubborn Steve Mason, as the Rangers broke a scoreless tie at 3:06 of the period.

NYC PAPERS OUT. Social media use restricted to low res file max 184 x 128 pixels and 72 dpi Corey Sipkin/New York Daily News This makes four, seven-game victories for the Rangers in the last three years, as they live life dangling from a 100-foot cliff. Right then you knew this series was going to follow the same pattern as so many others these past few years. The Rangers never gave up the lead and captured yet another first rounder, four games to three. They are now 6-0 in Game 7s played at the Garden, which speaks more to their comfort level than to the crowd’s mid-level energy.

There was another nifty pass play later in that decisive second period, at 11:46, not quite as impossible, from Derick Brassard to Benoit Pouliot for a two-goal lead. Then the Rangers hung on, inelegantly. This game, unlike many of the others in this series, was light and unpredictable. Most of the first round had been a paradox, a bunch of one-sided games split evenly.

This makes four, seven-game victories for the Rangers in the last three years, as they live life dangling from a 100-foot cliff. It is no way to win a Stanley Cup, yet it is certainly a way to keep fans entertained and make a ton of money for James Dolan.

“It was a great series,” Alain Vigneault said. “Four games in six nights, it was a big grind for both sides. We’re battle-tested and ready for the next series. On paper, Pittsburgh’s one of the best teams in the league. They were 15, 20 points ahead of us in the regular season. We’re going to have our hands full.”

You know the Penguins can score, even though Crosby hasn’t. He’s been the Rick Nash of the Penguins – way, way overdue. You also know that Marc-Andre Fleury is famously inconsistent. This next series, in other words, can go either way. Knowing the Rangers, it may go seven games, slowing down that NHL schedule again.

“Pittsburgh’s been Pittsburgh for a long time,” Richards said. “We know what to expect. They have a lot of high-end talent and most of them have won a Cup.”

There are some obvious problems that require repairing for the Rangers. Nash and the power play can’t buy a goal. Henrik Lundqvist is still not quite Henrik Lundqvist, appearing shaky and quite fortunate at times. He gave up a relatively soft goal to Jason Akeson in the third period and had some trouble covering up the puck on earlier scrambles in front of the net.

The playoffs will not wait for the Rangers to steady themselves. The Garden did its job on Wednesday, won another Game 7. It can only host Games 3, 4 and 6 in the next round.

That might not be enough.

New York Daily News LOADED: 05.01.2014
The Blueshirts will turn around immediately and fly to Pittsburgh on Thursday to open a second-round series against Sidney Crosby and Co. on Friday at 7 p.m. at CONSOL Energy Center.

BY Pat Leonard

Down with the Flyers and on to the Penguins, with ice in the Rangers’ veins.

Alain Vigneault’s squad played with passion and resolve. It also finally displayed its top-end skill while rising to the occasion in Game 7 at the Garden on Wednesday night, eliminating Philadelphia with a 2-1 victory.

“The boys came to play,” Vigneault said with a smirk.

Mats Zuccarello and Derick Brassard, two top playmakers who had been quiet in this first-round series, set up goals by Dan Carcillo and Benoit Pouliot, respectively, fewer than nine minutes apart in the second period.

“Alain Vigneault’s squad played with passion and resolve. It also finally displayed its top-end skill while rising to the occasion in Game 7 at the Garden on Wednesday night, eliminating Philadelphia with a 2-1 victory.”

“An 82-game season came down to one game tonight,” Nash said, “and we played desperate.”

New York Daily News LOADED: 05.01.2014
Best hockey night ever? Three thrilling Game 7s on tap

By David Satriano April 30, 2014 | 2:56pm

For the first time since April 22, 2003, there will be three Game 7s on the same night. It's win or go home. Here's a guide to an evening that's as good as it gets in hockey:

Wild at Avalanche
9:30, CNBC

The setup: The home team has held serve in every game. But the Wild held late leads in Games 1 and 5 on the road before the Avalanche tied each game with their goalie pulled and won in overtime. Minnesota is looking to win a playoff series for the first time since 2003, and Colorado hasn't advanced past the first round since 2008.

Everyone's talked about 18-year old Nathan MacKinnon, and rightfully so. He's been a force for Colorado. But so has Zach Parise of the Wild, who is tied with MacKinnon for the playoff lead with 10 points. Parise had four points in Game 6 as the Wild won, 5-2.

Strange but true: In 2003, the Wild and Avalanche played in Game 7 in the first round of the playoffs. The Wild won in Denver, 3-2 in overtime. Current Avs coach Patrick Roy was the team's goalie then and you can bet he still has nightmares about that one and would love revenge in his first series as a head coach.

Players to watch: For the Avalanche, MacKinnon has been the big story, but let's not forget Paul Stastny, who leads the team with four goals. He has a game-tying and game-winning goal in the series. The Wild's Jason Pominville — on a scoring streak of four games — knows how to score big goals with 26 career game-winners, including five this season.

Prediction: MacKinnon only gets two points, but the Avalanche hang on for a 4-3 win, setting up a date with the defending champion Blackhawks.

Kings at Sharks
10:00, NBCSN

The setup: Many thought this would be the best series of the first round and would go the distance. Well, it has, and we could see history. The Kings are trying to become the fourth hockey team to come back from a 3-0 series deficit, a feat most recently achieved by the Flyers in 2010. LA still has the core of the team that won the Stanley Cup in 2012.

Players to watch: The spotlight is always on the goalies, so Jonathan Quick will be key for the Kings. The Sharks haven't announced a starter yet, but Antii Niemi — who did not play in Game 6 — is the team's starter and won the Cup in 2010 with the Blackhawks, so expect him to be in between the pipes. Jeff Carter has played well in recent playoff games, and Patrick Marleau leads the Sharks with seven points.

Prediction: The Sharks are notorious for choking in the playoffs, but this is why you play the whole season to get that Game 7 at home. San Jose went 29-7-5 at SAP Center during the regular season and has won two of the three home games in this series. They've had three bad games in a row, but expect them to get on the board early and win this one handily. 5-2 Sharks win and advance to face the Ducks.

Flyers at Rangers
7:00, MSG
Rangers ready for Game 7: ‘The greatest thing about what we do’

By Brett Cyrgalis April 30, 2014 | 2:48pm

Brad Richards stood in the locker room by his lonesome, fiddling with the tape on his three game sticks. Martin St. Louis gave short and focused answers. Even the Rangers’ vanilla coach, Alain Vigneault, had a bit of animation in his voice.

The hours leading up to Wednesday night’s first-round Game 7 against the Flyers at the Garden were pregnant with anticipation.

“There’s no other feeling in your life that is going to duplicate what a day like this is, and what it means when you win, especially on home ice in a Game 7,” Richards said. “These opportunities only come around so often, and that’s what we mean by embracing it.

“There’s going to be some day when this whole team will be retired and sitting back and wishing we had another day like this, where you could get ready for a big game in front of a sold-out Madison Square Garden in a must-win game,” the alternate captain continued. “This is the greatest thing about what we do.”

The Blueshirts were coming off a disappointing performance in a 5-2 drubbing in Game 6 on Tuesday night in Philadelphia, a Wayne Simmonds hat trick accentuating the Rangers’ worst performance of this postseason, by far. Goalie Henrik Lundqvist was pulled to start the third period, his team already down 4-0, and the Rangers’ power play poured salt on the wound in going 0-for-5, now goalless in its past 20 attempts.

“You try to forget about games like last night,” St. Louis said, “and not nitpick it and just go right back at it.”

Vigneault would not disclose any lineup changes, nor discuss any strategic changes he might be thinking about. Up front, he has to choose between Jesper Fast, Dan Carcillo and J.T. Miller for one forward position, and there is a slim chance Raphael Diaz could be an option on defense in hopes of bolstering the beleaguered man-advantage.

Yet at this point, it seems strategy and lineup changes mean a lot less than the ideals of will and determination.

“Whatever has happened in the past is behind us,” Vigneault said. “It’s one game and it’s winner-take-all. It’s fair to say that whoever’s top players play the best is who is going to win this game. So, we’ve got some good players, this is a great opportunity. Game 7, it doesn’t get a lot better than this. We’re going to be ready.”

The fans at the Garden have not exactly been overwhelming in the three games, but two of those started at noon on Sundays, the first one being Easter. Having home-ice advantage is always thought to mean most when a series gets to this decisive game – just ask John Tortorella – and now the Rangers have it due to their second-place finish in the Metropolitan Division, two points ahead of the Flyers.

“It definitely helps,” Richards said. “We’d rather be home in Game 7, but it doesn’t mean you win.”

No, it doesn’t. The winner of the game will face the Penguins in the second round, starting in Pittsburgh, most likely on Friday night. The Flyers didn’t skate Wednesday morning, but there is little question they are just as eager as the Rangers.

“Really, you could have dropped the puck this morning at 9 [a.m.] and we would have been ready, and I’m sure they would’ve been,” Richards said. “It’s a fun day, so we just want to get going.”

Rangers fourth-line center Dominic Moore was announced as a finalist for the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, given each year “to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.”

Moore’s wife, Katie, died of a rare liver cancer in January 2013, and he didn’t play for all of last season’s lockout-shortened campaign before signing a one-year, $1 million deal with the Rangers this summer.

The other finalists are two former Rangers: Jaromir Jagr of the Devils and Manny Malhotra of the Hurricanes. The winner will be announced at the NHL Awards ceremony on June 24 in Las Vegas.

New York Post LOADED: 05.01.2014
Lineup change is latest one-win wonder

By Brett Cyrgalis April 30, 2014 | 6:15am

PHILADELPHIA — Here’s how it seems to work: Alain Vigneault makes a lineup change, and the Rangers win the first game then lose the second.

That pattern has followed suit again for Tuesday night’s 5-2 loss to the Flyers, tying this best-of-seven contest and forcing a decisive Game 7 back at the Garden on Wednesday.

It was the second consecutive game rookie forward J.T. Miller played and the team lost — just as it lost in the second game Jesper Fast played (Game 2) and the second game Dan Carcillo played (Game 4), leaving the Rangers coach with an interesting decision to make for Game 7.

In the absence of top-six forward Chris Kreider — who is assumed to still be unavailable after now missing 15 straight games following left-hand surgery on March 28 — Vigneault had a lineup decision to make when the series began.

In Game 1, he kept 22-year-old Fast in lineup after playing the season’s final three games, and Fast collected an assist in his postseason debut, a game the Rangers won, 4-1. He played in Game 2, and they lost, 4-2.

In Game 3, the first in Philadelphia, Vigneault replaced Fast with former Flyers instigator Carcillo — who subsequently went out and scored a goal in a 4-1 win. Carcillo played again in Game 4, and the Rangers lost, 2-1.

Then in Game 5 back at the Garden, Carcillo came out for the 21-year-old Miller, who notched an assist in his own playoff debut, a 4-2 Rangers win.

As Miller remained in for a second straight game on Tuesday, he played a total of 12:00, got an assist on a meaningless late-game goal — and the team still lost.

With top-four defenseman Nicklas Grossman out for the rest of the postseason after an ankle injury suffered in Game 4, the Flyers went with 25-year-old defenseman Erik Gustafsson over Hal Gill, the lumbering veteran who played in Game 5. The decision paid off.

Gustafsson scored on a second-period breakaway after coming out of the penalty box, his second career postseason goal.

“I made a bad read on the breakaway,” said Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist, who came out to play the puck before retreating and having Gustafsson beat him five-hole. “You don’t want to analyze it too much.”
With Flyers dispatched, Rangers have chance to make run

By Mark Cannizzaro May 1, 2014 | 2:15am

Maybe now that they have disposed of the aggravating and agitating Flyers — who always seem like an annoying sibling rival to them because of the teams’ familiarity with each other and their geographic proximity — it will liberate the Rangers to bigger and better things in these NHL playoffs.

May be now the Rangers make a real consistent, concerted run in this postseason — a run at a first Stanley Cup in 20 years — instead of acting like a car that sometimes starts at the first turn of the key and sometimes doesn’t, the way they looked too often in the Philadelphia series.

Perhaps Wednesday night’s 2-1 now-we-can-exhale win over the Flyers in Game 7 at the Garden propels the Rangers in their next series — against the Penguins, who will be favored to win, having finished with 13 more points in the regular season and with the home-ice edge.

There is not a Rangers fan alive who would not agree that a loss in this Philadelphia series would have rendered this season an essential waste of more than seven months. They fired their coach, the irascible John Tortorella, after last season for not getting them to the Stanley Cup and replaced him with Alain Vigneault, a coach whose demeanor is so calm he sometimes appears catatonic.

A one-and-done postseason would have been beyond distasteful for hungry Rangers fans, who might have preferred they hadn’t made the playoffs, instead of losing to the Flyers with home-ice advantage and Henrik Lundqvist in net.

“If you lose in the first round, it definitely feels like a waste of a year to play 82 games and not move on,” forward Dan Carcillo said after scoring the Rangers’ first goal Wednesday night. “Everyone wants to make a run. That’s what we’re here for. That’s why you play the 82.”

Carcillo, a former Flyer who won a Stanley Cup with the Blackhawks last season and was acquired by the Rangers in January, said he “knew” the Philadelphia series “was going to be tough and I figured it was going to go to seven games.”

“It just came down to one hockey game,” he said.

One hockey game that had such a major impact on how this season is viewed.

“Losing in the first round, it’s like you make the playoffs but you don’t really get to enjoy the playoffs,” center Brad Richards said. “Now we’re in the middle of it and we’re in the battle. This is when it gets real fun. This was a great accomplishment. We won’t rest on it too much, but this is big.”

Asked when the focus shifts to Pittsburgh, Richards, speaking at about 10:30 p.m., said, “Probably by midnight.”

“Go home, get some food, talk about this a little, get some sleep and get back to work,” he said. “It’s hard to believe, but Philly is out of our minds now, and we’ve got to think about Pittsburgh.”

Should we expect to see a better, looser, more liberated and offensively potent Rangers team against Pittsburgh than we saw against Philly?

“Usually, with the teams that keep going, that’s what happens — they get better,” Richards said. “That’s our goal. Each playoff round you’ve got to raise the level. The next series is going to be faster, it’s going to be more intense. Hopefully, we’ll set the bar in the first game and try to get [the Penguins] to our level. That’s your goal in each game and each series.”

The Rangers do not depart this Philadelphia series and embark on the next round against Pittsburgh without issues that need resolving.

They cannot sweep away the fact their power play was 3-for-29 against the Flyers, including 0-for-the-last-21.

They cannot ignore the fact Rick Nash (one goal in 19 playoff games as a Ranger) cannot buy a goal — even if he had James Dolan’s debit card and ATM code.

They also cannot pretend they haven’t noticed their novice handling of prosperity, having lost an NHL-record 11 consecutive games when leading in a playoff series, dating to 2009. The Rangers with a series lead are like a college kid with his first credit card — carelessly spending without realizing there’s a bill that needs to be paid at the end of the month.

All of that said, though, perhaps the Rangers can clean up those blemishes now that they have dispensed of the pesky Flyers and released themselves of that pressure of not being bounced from the first round.

“For sure, this was a real important game for us,” Mats Zuccarello, who assisted on the Carcillo goal, said. “Everyone in here knows we are a good team and if we play the right way we can beat anyone. If we want to win a Stanley Cup, we had to get through the first round.”

And so they did.

Now let’s see where this takes them, how deep they can take this playoff run, how special they can make this season now that the first round and the Flyers are out of the way.

New York Post LOADED: 05.01.2014
The second period was the Rangers undoing in Game 6 at Philadelphia, a 20-minute stretch of unraveling that looked as if it might doom them to a one-and-done playoff run.

But one night later, in Game 7 at Madison Square Garden, the Rangers owned the second period, thanks very much in part to a player making the most of a second chance — Dan Carcillo.

One night after the Rangers allowed three goals in the second period to the Flyers at Wells Fargo Center, falling behind 4-0 in what ended in a 5-2 loss, the Rangers seized control of Game 7 and the series climax in their 2-1 win Wednesday, and it started with a massive Carcillo goal at 3:06 of the period.

Carcillo, who was activated for Games 3 and 4 after sitting out the first two of the series but was benched in favor of J.T. Miller in Games 5 and 6, one-timed a beautiful back-handed cross by Mats Zuccarello past Flyers goalie Steve Mason for a 1-0 lead.

Carcillo called the Zuccarello pass “just a great play by a good hockey player.”

After a scoreless first period that raised the nervous tension in the home building a few levels, the Carcillo goal seemed to liberate the Rangers, who got instant energy from it, and awaken the Garden, which pretty much rocked the rest of the game after it was nervously quiet in the first period.

“First goals are huge in Game 7s — not as much in the rest of the series — but in Game 7 when you get first goal at home it gets the crowd into it and you feel the building come alive,” said Brad Richards, who centered the line on which Carcillo played. “Even when we weren’t scoring in that second period [the fans] were behind us. It just felt like we had another gear in the second period, and a lot of that was getting that first goal.”

Carcillo, clearly unhappy about sitting out the previous two games, said he found out he was playing when he arrived at the Garden before the game. When he was activated for Game 3, Carcillo scored a goal in Game 3 in Philadelphia, where he used to play.

“I just felt that in a Game 7 I’d rather go with experience,” Vigneault said. “He has been in these situations before. He came and did a good job, scored that big first goal for us.”

Carcillo said sitting out “it not easy, it will never be easy … you never get used to it.”

Now, because of Carcillo’s flair for the dramatic in the big moments, it looks like it might be difficult for Vigneault to get him out of the lineup.

“I’ve always liked the big stage,” Carcillo said. “When I was younger, the more people watching I played harder.”

“Whenever you’re in and out [of the lineup], when you’re in you try to do something to stay in, whether it be offensively or bringing a lot of energy. That’s just what I was trying to do every time I was in this series.”

Carcillo’s teammates were not surprised at his contribution.

“He’s won the Stanley Cup before,” Zuccarello said of Carcillo, who was on the champion Blackhawks last season. “He’s one of those guys you look to for experience in the locker room and he’s a guy that steps up every time he’s on the ice. That was a great finish ‘Carce.’

Rangers defenseman Dan Girardi called the Carcillo goal “huge.”

“He gets inserted into the lineup and makes a difference right away,” Girardi said. “He’s that type of player that can make a big play, make a big hit or score a goal. He was big for us.”
Rangers’ McDonagh: Discipline key vs. Penguins

By Brett Cyrgalis

The Rangers still were relishing their 2-1 win over the Flyers in Game 7 of their first-round playoff series on Wednesday night at the Garden, but the inevitable questions about their upcoming opponent arose.

That opponent being the Penguins, who ran away with the Metropolitan Division with 109 points, 13 more than the second-place Rangers, and then beat their first-round foes, the Blue Jackets, in six games.

“It’s there for you — you understand what their lineup has,” said No. 1 defenseman Ryan McDonagh, still trying to round into form after missing the final five games of the regular season with a left shoulder injury. “It’s depth, it’s skating D-men, mobile, smart guys that have been together for a while. Good chemistry.

“We’ve got to really be sharp again, maintain our discipline and our structure.”

Rangers fourth-line center Dominic Moore was announced as a finalist for the Bill Masterton Memorial Award, voted on annually by each chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers Association and given “to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.”

Moore’s wife, Katie, died of a rare liver cancer in January of 2013, and he decided to sit out all of last season’s lockout-shortened campaign. This summer, he returned to sign a one-year, $1 million deal with the Rangers, who originally drafted him out of Harvard in 2003.

The other finalists were both former Rangers: Jaromir Jagr of the Devils and Manny Malhotra of the Hurricanes.

The winner will be announced at the NHL Awards on June 24 in Las Vegas.

A man in a Henrik Lundqvist jersey won a two-year lease on a new Lexus by making a half-ice shot through a puck-sized hole during the second intermission.

The Rangers’ power play got only one opportunity on Wednesday, and failed to score for the 21st consecutive time. The unit hasn’t scored since early in Game 2.

“The key is poise,” Brad Richards said before the game. “I think [in Game 6, a 5-2 loss] we just pressed too hard and we were shooting pucks when the other guys were expecting to set up, and when we wanted to set up, the other four guys were expecting a shot. I think we just gripped it a little to tight and tried to make it happen in the first 30 seconds of the power play instead of being patient.”

New York Post LOADED: 05.01.2014
New York Rangers

With series on line, Lundqvist is King

By Larry Brooks May 1, 2014

Danger was knocking on the Rangers’ door for nearly the entire final 20 minutes of Game 7, but Henrik Lundqvist simply refused to open it no matter how insistent the Flyers became.

Two-nothing for New York after two periods had become 2-1 only 4:32 into the third Wednesday night. The King knew what was coming.

“When they scored that goal, I knew it was going to be intense,” an emotionally drained Lundqvist said. “It was nerve-wracking, but exciting.

“I looked at this as very special.”

The Flyers sent nine shots Lundqvist’s way in the final 15-plus minutes, with big bodies converging in front. None got by the goaltender, who made perhaps his most challenging save against Michael Raffl alone in front at the 10-minute mark of the period.

“I wouldn’t say I thought we were in control, because all it takes is one bounce, the game is so fast,” Lundqvist said after the 2-1 victory that sent the Rangers into Round Two against the Penguins that begins in Pittsburgh on Friday. “I didn’t feel relaxed, but I did feel confident.

“We believe in each other. A large part of having success is trust.”

The Rangers trust Lundqvist. That’s as much a part of the team’s mantra as whistle-to-whistle.

“We needed Henrik to do some things when we had the lead and were scrambling around there trying to protect it,” Brad Richards said. “You’ve got to figure he’s going to make a big save or two.

“You could tell that he was on and that’s what you need to close out a series.”

Lundqvist has closed out four series over the last three years, every one coming with a standout Game 7 performance. There was 2-1 over Ottawa at the Garden in Round One in 2012, 2-1 over Washington at the Garden in Round Two in 2012, 5-0 over the Caps in Washington in Round One last year, and now 2-1 at the Garden over Philadelphia.

If you’re scoring at home, you’re not only doing better than the opposition against Lundqvist in Game 7’s, you’ve calculated Lundqvist’s GAA is 0.75 over those four showdown matches. The save pct. is .973.

Yet Lundqvist said that he did not derive positive reinforcement from the past as he prepared for this Game 7. Perhaps that had something to do with the fact that he’d been yanked 24 hours earlier after allowing four goals on 23 shots in a 5-2 Game 6 defeat in Philadelphia.

“It was different last year when I was coming off a [1-0] shutout in Game 6 and feeling really good about myself,” the goaltender said. “Coming into this, I was more mad than anything that we didn’t get the win [in Game 6].

“I knew I had to match [Steve] Mason’s play. He kept them in the game in the second period. In a perfect world, it would have been [more than 2-0].”

The Rangers still haven’t played their best game, not even close to it, but this Game 7 victory reflected the poise, discipline and resourcefulness that have come to define the Rangers. There was a heightened sense of urgency, of that there was no doubt from the outset when Rick Nash started throwing his body around.

Nash did not score, and will thus go into the Pittsburgh series without a goal in these playoffs and with one in 19 playoff games as a Ranger. But Big 61 was involved on essentially every even-strength shift for which he was on.

The winger, who was credited with 11 hits in 65 games during the regular season and two in the first six matches of this series, had five hits in 17:44 in Game 7, including three in the first period. Nash dived to get his stick on a Kimmo Timonen shot with 4:35 to go.

Nothing went in, but Nash was all in.

“In Game 7 you have to bring your best,” he said. “We won and that’s all that matters.”

Mike Richter didn’t have the career in New York that Eddie Giacomin did, but Richter won a Cup, so even as Eddie … Eddie … Eddie will always be the People’s Choice, Richter will always be revered for his part in 1994. Mark Messier may have guaranteed it, but it was Richter who signed, sealed and delivered it.

And no matter how many franchise records Lundqvist sets, his résumé will be incomplete without a Stanley Cup championship. For now, though, he is the champion of Game 7. That’s not nothing.

“It’s inspiring to play a game like this; you have to enjoy it,” Lundqvist said. “You play so many games … if you can’t enjoy a game like this, you need to think again.

“The final seconds, with that adrenaline, I get the kind of rush that I don’t get with anything else that I do in life.”

Twelve more wins and Lundqvist will experience the best rush yet.

New York Post LOADED: 05.01.2014
Rangers beat Flyers in Game 7, Penguins up next

By Brett Cyrgalis

The poster is about 4 feet tall and 3 feet wide, and it has been hanging in the Rangers’ locker room now for over a week.

A vacant cutout of the Stanley Cup takes up most of the frame. “Above and Beyond” is written above it. “EARN IT” is in all capitals below. The background is a montage of great moments from the Rangers season.

And now, after Wednesday night’s thrilling 2-1 win over the Flyers at the Garden in Game 7 of this first-round series, the four pieces that make up the foundation of the Cup are in place.

“It’s what you play for,” said Martin St. Louis, one of only three players on the roster who has raised the Cup. “You play for this time of year, and to keep going is great.”

With the Rangers’ fourth consecutive Game 7 win in the past three seasons — their sixth Game 7 win at the Garden, keeping them undefeated in these decisive games on home ice — the next step is getting on a plane to head to Pittsburgh, where the Penguins await, poised and ready to play host for Game 1 of the second round on Friday night.

“Seven games or five games, teams are so close now,” said Brad Richards, the alternate captain who lifted the Cup with St. Louis in Tampa in 2004. “They’re a good team, they played us hard, and it took seven. It doesn’t really matter.”

No, it doesn’t matter how the Rangers got to this spot, not as much as it has in years past. On their way to the conference finals two seasons ago, Richards and his teammates played a hard-edged and draining style under coach John Tortorella and eventually burned out.

This is not that team.

Though they blocked 22 shots on Wednesday — none more impressive than the two from Anton Stralman followed by another from St. Louis on a crucial penalty kill midway through the second period with the Rangers desperately holding onto a 1-0 lead — this team is predicated on speed and skill rather than sheer will and sacrifice.

A clear example came less than a minute after that penalty ended, as Benoit Pouliot burst from the box and sped past Zac Rinaldo, tipping in a great cross-ice pass from Derick Brassard to give the Rangers what would turn out to be the game-winning goal.

“We played a really good second,” Richards said of the period when the Rangers outshot the Flyers 18-5 and established the two-goal cushion, the first goal coming from Dan Carcillo on a seeing-eye pass from Mats Zuccarello 3:06 in. “We just kept the pace up, short shifts, everybody involved. We killed a couple penalties, buried some goals.”

The Flyers didn’t fold up the tent, either. Instead, rookie winger Jason Akeson cut the lead to 2-1 just over four minutes into the third when he had his initial shot blocked by Marc Staal, but then corralled the rebound and beat Henrik Lundqvist blocker side.

“You try not to think too much about the Game 7 situation, you try to focus on the things that’s going to help you help the team — stopping the puck,” said Lundqvist, who finished with 26 saves and now has a career record of 4-1 in Game 7s. “When they scored that goal, I knew it was going to be an intense game.”

Intense, but the Rangers shut the door and now they’re on to the second round for the third consecutive year. What sits in front of them is a Penguins team that can match their skill a lot more closely than the Flyers, and a team with the pedigree Philadelphia desperately lacked.

“You don’t dwell on losses and you don’t cherish wins too much in the playoffs,” Richards said. “We’ll talk about this for the next hour, get some rest, then get back to work with a new challenge.”

A new challenge, indeed. That poster still has 12 remaining pieces to be filled.

New York Post LOADED: 05.01.2014
Vigneault makes it clear it’s about the Rangers’ best players playing well; Kreider skates again

Neither the Rangers nor the Flyers held a morning skate today prior to tonight’s Game 7 at Madison Square Garden, which is logical since the Flyers’ 5-2 win in Game 6 was than 24 hours earlier.

But Chris Kreider did go on the ice by himself (with some mini orange cones set up on the lines to mark his skating lanes. Kreider, recovering to surgery to his left hand, showed some signs of practice as he continued to mainly concentrate on conditioning skating. He did stickhandle some and even took some (very) soft shots. Obviously, he’s not ready to return to the lineup but perhaps it’s not a stretch to suggest he’d make at some point in the second round if the Rangers advance with a win tonight to face the Penguins.

And in order to advance, coach Alain Vigneault made it very clear what needed to happen.

“I think it’s fair to say that whoever’s top players perform the best is probably the team that is going to win this game,” Vigneault said. “We’ve got some good players.”

Specifically on two of them:

- Rick Nash, without a goal in the series: “Rick is trying his best right now. He’s looking for holes. He’s protecting the puck. He got a couple of good looks last night. Nothing he can do about the first six (games). He’s got to focus on tonight.

- Ryan McDonagh, scoreless and off defensively as well, not looking like the player he was before injuring his left shoulder: “He’s obviously been our best defensemen all year. He’s played some good hockey so far in this series but I do believe that there’s another level. He needs to find that tonight for us.”

As for the power play, Vigneault simply said, “Execute,” while both Brad Richards and Marty St. Louis talked about having poise. Richards said there were times in in the 5-2 Game 6 loss that the point men on the power play, him included, where, “we just pressed too hard and we were shooting pucks when the other four guys were expecting a set up and when we wanted a set up, the other four guys were expecting a shot. I think we gripped it a little too tight and make it all happen in the first 30 seconds of a power play instead of being patient.”

Richards also offered this eloquent description of what Game 7 is like for players: “There’s no other feeling in your life that’s going to duplicate what a day like this is and what it means when you win, especially on home ice in Game 7. There’s no other way you can think about it or try to do something recreational. But to do it in front of your home crowd in Game 7, how important it is. These opportunities only come around so often and that’s what we mean by embracing it. There’s going to be someday when this whole team is retired and sitting back and wishing we had another day like this where you can get ready for a big game in front of a sold-out crowd at Madison Square Garden in a must-win game. This is the greatest thing about what we do.”
Dom Moore, Jagr, Malhotra the Masterton finalists

As has been widely expected since Dominic Moore was named as the Rangers’ nominee for the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy in a vote of the New York Rangers’ chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers’ Association, he was named as one of three finalists this morning by the NHL.

Ex-Rangers Jaromir Jagr (Devils) and Manny Malhotra (Hurricanes) are the other two finalists.

All three perfectly exemplify what the award stands for: The NHL player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship, and dedication to ice hockey.

Here are the bios on all three players, as provided by the league:

- Moore, 33, returned to the NHL this season after taking a leave of absence from the League in the spring of 2012 in order to care for his wife, Katie, after she had been diagnosed with a rare form of liver cancer. Katie passed away at the age of 32 in January of 2013. Moore thereafter established the Katie Moore Foundation (katiemoore.org), dedicated to helping patients and families with rare cancers through research, advocacy and community. He resumed his career as an integral part of a Rangers team that earned 96 points and a second-place finish in the Metropolitan Division.

- Jagr’s unwavering dedication to the game has allowed him to continue playing at high level when most players his age are retired. The Devils named the 42-year-old right wing team MVP in 2013-14 after he led the club in assists (43), points (67), plus-minus (+16), game-winning goals (six) and shots (231). Admired throughout the League for his rigorous training regimen, Jagr credits working hard in practices to avoiding fatigue, allowing him to stay fresh and maintain an advantage over opponents late in games.

- Malhotra, 33, was the Vancouver Canucks’ Masterton nominee in 2011-12 after returning from a serious eye injury suffered the season before. Refusing to believe his NHL career was over last fall, Malhotra signed a professional tryout agreement with the Charlotte Checkers, Carolina’s American Hockey League affiliate, on Oct. 3 and signed as a free agent with the Hurricanes four weeks later. He appeared in 69 regular-season games, assumed a leadership role in serving as an alternate captain and ranked second among all NHL players in face-off percentage (59.4%).
The Rangers wanted to put their 5-2 loss to the Flyers in Game 6 – setting up tonight’s Game 7 at Madison Square Garden in their Eastern Conference first-round series – in the proverbial rear-view mirror as quickly as possible.

For further review purposes, here’s the game story from today’s Record.

And here’s Tom Guliti’s take on Wayne Simmonds’ hat trick and the Flyers’ special teams’ play.

Yet the Rangers simply just can’t throw this one away: the improvements must come off what went wrong Tuesday night. For one, as much discussed, the Rangers power play/Flyers penalty kill is decidedly tilted toward the Flyers, who have killed off 20 straight Rangers’ man advantage chances.

Meanwhile, the Flyers have scored six of their 15 goals in the series on the power play, a ridiculous 31.6 percent success rate against a Rangers’ penalty kill that was a strength in the regular season. Also, that means 40 percent of the Flyers goals have come with the man advantage, meaning the Rangers are clearly winning the even-strength battle and must concentrate on not putting the Flyers a man up unnecessarily tonight.

At the same time, it’s going to be very interesting to see whether coach Alain Vigneault keeps the lineup the same or inserts Dan Carcillo back in for a little more energy. J.T. Miller was very good in Game 5 in his NHL playoff debut. It’s a stretch to say any Ranger was very good Tuesday night.

“I don’t think it’s challenging at all,” defenseman Marc Staal said of the quick turnaround from Game 6 in order for the Rangers to fix what ails them. “We wake up and it’s a Game 7. Loser goes home and winner takes it all. There’s nothing better than playing in those Game 7s. We have to wake up and start fresh.

“They have a pretty good power play, they’re moving around and they’re moving pretty quick,” Staal added. “We’re used to pressuring them a lot and not giving them a lot of time. I think they’re making some skilled plays when they’re giving themselves some opportunities to make some plays and they’re making them. We have to tighten up our penalty kill. First of all we have to stay out of the box and we have to try to play a perfect game on the ice and not give the referee a reason to call us on anything.”


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During their playoff stretch, the most common answer for why it was important to earn home-ice advantage in the first round was the possibility of playing a Game 7 at Madison Square Garden.

The Rangers, of course, are 5-0 in franchise history in Game 7s at the Garden – the wins against the Senators and Capitals in 2012, the wins against the Devils and Canucks en route to the Stanley Cup in 1994 and a win over the Devils in 1992.

“Both teams are in the same boat,” Marty St. Louis said. “They have to travel back to New York and get ready for the game. We fight for home ice all year and the game is in our building.”

Home ice will mean little though if the Rangers cannot shore up their special teams play and their best offensive players don’t contribute.

It sounds like a broken record calling out Rick Nash – who was more aggressive in taking his big body to the net in Game 6 than he had been previously. But Nash is still without a goal in the series and still stuck on just one playoff goal for the Rangers in 18 postseason games for them since arriving from Columbus, where he had just one playoff goal in four games during his nine-year tenure as a Blue Jacket.

So maybe tonight will be the night for Nash.

It may be too late for the Rangers if it’s not.

“Game 7s are what brings the best out in people,” Brad Richards said. “It’ll be a hard-fought battle. We’re going home. We’ve had success in Game 7s, especially a lot of guys in this room. That’s why we battled hard right to the end to get home ice.”

Also, the Rangers simply need Henrik Lundqvist to be better than Steve Mason, which, on paper, should be a given.

But Mason was strong in Game 6. In fact, there’s every reason to believe the Rangers should have led after the first period, or at least pulled even after Simmonds’ power play goal.

But Mason’s 13 first-period saves ultimately proved to be a huge difference in the game, even if he was giving up some rebounds early. The Rangers, with 36 shots, still were not getting enough second- and third-chance opportunities.

“It was impressive to see,” Flyers captain Claude Giroux said of Mason’s Game 6. “He’s been doing it all year and for him to kind of do it in Game 6 like this, it’s great. He was our leader the way he played, his attitude. It was great to watch him work hard.”

“Obviously he played real well,” Vigneault added. “He had a real good period in the first. He gave his team a chance to come out of there one goal ahead. He’s a good goaltender. We’ve got good goaltender also and we’ll be ready.”

No morning skate today for the Rangers, just a team meeting at the Garden and then, at 7:08 or so, puck drop for Game 7.

“Game 7 at home – I hope we can enjoy it;” Lundqvist said. “It starts with playing a strong game. That’s when you really enjoy it and you have success at home. We’re going back home to play a much better game and respond the right way.”

Lastly, from the Rangers on Game 6:

- Four of the Rangers’ last six playoff series have gone to seven games. The Blueshirts have a 6-5 record in Game 7s in franchise history, including a 5-0 record in Game 7s at Madison Square Garden.

- The Blueshirts recorded 36 shots on goal in the contest, as 17 of 18 skaters registered at least one, and 10 skaters were credited with at least two. The Rangers have registered at least 30 shots on goal in four of the six games in the series.

- Carl Hagelin tallied a goal, led all skaters with a playoff career-high, seven shots on goal, and was credited with two takeaways in 14:50 of ice time. The Rangers forward is tied for the team lead in goals (two) and tied for third on the team in points (four) in the playoffs.

- Mats Zuccarello registered a goal, recorded three blocked shots in 16:54 of ice time. Zuccarello is tied for the team lead in goals (two), and ranks third in shots on goal (15) in the playoffs.

- Anton Stralman recorded an assist and was credited with two hits in 17:39 of ice time The Rangers defensemen is tied for third on the team in plus/minus rating (plus-three) in the playoffs.

- Carl Hagelin tallied an assist, posted a plus-one rating, and was credited with three hits in 12:00 of ice time. The Rangers forward is tied for fourth on the team in assists (two) and sixth in points (three) in the playoffs.

- J.T. Miller tallied an assist, posted a plus-one rating, and was credited with three hits in 12:00 of ice time. The Rangers forward has recorded a point in each of his first two NHL playoff games, and is tied for second on the team in plus/minus rating (plus-two) in the playoffs.

- Dan Girardi was credited with two hits and two blocked shots in 18:03 of ice time. Girardi skated in his 70th career playoff game, becoming the eighth Ranger to play in 70 playoff contests with the team. The Rangers defensemen is tied with Mark Messier and Jeff Beukeboom for sixth on the...
Blueshirts’ all-time playoff games played list. Girardi leads the team in blocked shots (16) and is tied for the team lead in hits (20) in the playoffs.

- Henrik Lundqvist made 19 saves in the contest, and now has a 3-3 record in the playoffs. The Rangers goalie appeared in his 73rd career playoff game, including his 72nd consecutive playoff contest, moving into sole possession of 26th place on the NHL’s all-time playoff appearances list. Lundqvist is four games shy of passing Mike Richter for first on the Rangers’ all-time playoff appearances list.

- Cam Talbot stopped all five shots he faced in his NHL playoff debut.

And from the Flyers:

- The Flyers will participate in the 16th Game 7 in their history. They are 9-6 all time. They will be trying to complete a comeback from a 3-2 deficit for just the fourth time in their history.

- The Flyers have won their last three Game 7 situations, one at home (2011 ECQF vs. Buffalo) and two on the road (2010 ECSF at Boston and 2008 ECQF at Washington). They have won four of their last five dating back to the 2003 ECQF, a 6-1 Game 7 win at home vs. Toronto. The one Game 7 loss in that timeframe was the 2004 Eastern Conference Finals at Tampa Bay (2-1), which was also the last series the Flyers have played in before this one where neither team has won consecutive games.

- This is only the third series between the Flyers and Rangers to go the distance and only the second seven-game series to do so. The Flyers won a Game 7 4-3 at the Spectrum on May 5, 1974 en route to their first Stanley Cup. They lost a five-game Patrick Division Semifinal to the Rangers in 1986, with the Rangers taking a 5-2 win at the Spectrum on April 15 of that year.

- The Flyers are 1-1 when facing elimination at Madison Square Garden. They lost the third game of a three-game preliminary round series there by a 9-3 score on April 9, 1983 and won Game 4 of the aforementioned 1986 Patrick Division Semifinal on April 14, 1986 (7-1) before dropping the subsequent Game 5 at the Spectrum the next day. This will be the first Game 7 the Flyers have ever played at MSG.

- This is the first Flyers playoff series to reach six games without requiring overtime since the 2000 Eastern Conference Finals vs. New Jersey, which the Flyers lost in seven games. It’s just the eighth Flyers playoff series all-time to reach at least six games without an overtime.

- Wayne Simmonds recorded his first career playoff hat trick, scoring his three goals on a team-high six shots. He had five more attempts that didn’t reach the net – two that were blocked and three that missed.

- The last Flyer to record a hat trick vs. the Rangers (regular season) was Simon Gagne on December 30, 2009. Eric Lindros had a hat trick in Game 3 the last time these teams met in the playoffs back in 1997.

- The Rangers outshot the Flyers 36-29, marking the fifth straight game in this series that the winning team has been out-shot.

- The Flyers were 5-for-5 on the penalty kill tonight, marking the fourth consecutive game they’ve been perfect on the PK. They have killed off 20 consecutive shorthanded situations dating back to Game 2 of the series.

Bergen Record LOADED: 05.01.2014
Rangers-Pens schedule and head-to-head results

Posted by Andrew Gross

The NHL, now that the first round is completed, has released its second round schedule.

For the Rangers, it’s not a great schedule. After completing their first-round series with three games in four days against the Flyers, they’ll start with three games in four days against the Penguins. That includes back-to-back games in separate cities. Game 2 will be Sunday at 7:30 at the Consol Energy Center and Game 3 will be at the Garden on Monday at 7:30.

That’s called brutal. Especially since it’s the second straight round where only the Rangers and their opponent have back-to-back games scheduled. Also, the Rangers, coming off a Game 7 at home must travel to Pittsburgh to start three in four games on Friday. Meanwhile, the Kings, coming off a thrilling rally from a 3-0 series deficit to the San Jose Sharks, don’t open until Saturday and they’re facing Anaheim, which is just a traffic-filled drive down the freeway.

Here’s the full schedule with TV:

Game 1: Friday at Pittsburgh, 7 p.m., NBC Sports Network
Game 2: Sunday at Pittsburgh, 7:30, NBCSN
Game 3: Monday at Madison Square Garden, 7:30, NBCSN
Game 4: May 7 at MSG, 7:30, NBCSN
* Game 5: May 9 at Pittsburgh, TBD, TV TBA
* Game 6: May 11 at MSG, TBD, TV TBA
* Game 7: May 13 at Pittsburgh, TBD, TV TBA

The other series plus how the Rangers and Penguins fared head-to-head is below...

Rangers-Penguins head-to-head:

Nov. 6, Rangers 5-1 at Madison Square Garden: Five different Rangers scored and the Penguins were just 1 for 6 on the power play. Henrik Lundqvist made a brilliant stick save on Sidney Crosby 20 seconds into the game and a left-toe stop on Crosby at the right post on the Penguins’ first power play.

Dec. 18, Penguins 4-3 (shootout) at MSG: Brandon Sutter netted the lone goal in a five-round shootout, spoiling the Rangers’ comeback effort as they rallied from a two-goal deficit to force overtime on Derick Brassard’s power-play goal at 18:14 of the third period. The injury-depleted Penguins dressed seven call-ups from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL).

Jan. 3, Penguins 5-2 at Pittsburgh: The Rangers trailed 4-0 after two periods, prompting a closed-door meeting after the game. Ex-captain Ryan Callahan returned to the Rangers’ lineup after a nine-game absence due to a knee injury but the Rangers lost Derek Dorsett to a broken fibula, prompting general manager Glen Sather to acquire Dan Carcillo from the Kings the next day.

Feb. 7, Rangers 4-3 (shootout) at Pittsburgh: The Rangers went into the Olympic break on a good note as Brad Richards had the decisive shootout goal after the Penguins’ James Neal tied it with 2:56 left in regulation. The Rangers took 41 shots and Benoit Pouliot had two goals.

The other division final series:

Bruins-Canadiens

Blackhawks-Wild

Ducks-Kings

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Bergen Record LOADED: 05.01.2014
You can forgive the Rangers for not breaking out the champagne after their 2-1 win over the Flyers in Game 7 of their Eastern Conference first round series Wednesday night at Madison Square Garden; there’s not much time to get ready for their Metropolitan Division final against the Penguins.

The Rangers and Flyers finished their series with back to back Games 6 and 7 and three games in four nights after the series started with four games in nine days.

Now, the Rangers are apparently set to open the second round Friday at Pittsburgh with Game 2 on Sunday. Then, the series shifts back to New York for Games 3 and 4 on Monday and Wednesday. So that would be four games in six days and, combined with the end of this just-concluded series, seven games in 10 days.

"It’s right back to what we’ve been doing," Brad Richards said. "It’s kind of on autopilot when we play every second night. It was a weird series, the first four games were spread out so far, I think that’s why it took so long to feel like a playoff series. The last three games, it did feel like a playoff series. Now you’re in it and it’s fun.”

Here’s the game story from The Record.

If the Rangers insisted, as they did prior to each of the seven games against the Flyers that they needed to be better than the previous game, well, that counts double against the Penguins. The Penguins, who ran away with the division title despite a slew of injuries, are a much more talented team than the Flyers and, yes, with Sidney Crosby an Evgeni Malkin, than the Rangers as well.

The Rangers going 3 for 29 on the power play, as they did against the Penguins to go 5 for 21 on the power play, as the Flyers did in seven games, simply won’t cut it.

Even at even strength, which the Rangers owned for almost all of the series against the Flyers, they nearly lost a two-goal lead late tonight.

"We are a desperate team," Rick Nash said. "An 82-game season came down to one game tonight for both teams and we played desperate. We stayed out of the penalty box. We stuck to our system."

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Among the encouraging signs for the Rangers heading into round two - among them Henrik Lundqvist’s play tonight and the Benoit Pouliot-Derick Brassard-Mats Zuccarello line again looking like the team’s top line, as was the case for most of the second half of the season, was Nash being assertive in heading to the net tonight.

He had a team-high five shots and was also credited with five hits. Very much involved in the game as opposed to other games in the series where he was content to play on the outside and, thus, not make much of an impact.

"It seems like the back door was working," Nash said. "A couple of those were back door plays. We have the offensive zone and that was the difference. We won, that’s all that matters and we are moving on and we’ll enjoy that tonight.”

Nash said winning and advancing was more important to him than scoring goals.

But the Rangers will certainly need production from him against the Penguins.

Coach Alain Vigneault also has an interesting choice for Friday’s Game 1. Dan Carcillo scored his second goal in three playoff games for the Rangers as he logged 11:32.

Still, as Vigneault said the other day, he knows J.T. Miller brings more skill to the lineup and that might be what’s needed against the Penguins, at least until Chris Kreider returns to the lineup (and the condensed round two schedule might not help in that regard as Kreider will be hard pressed to get in practice time with his teammates as he nears a return).

But for Game 7, Carcillo was the clear choice for Vigneault.

“In Game 7 like this, I would rather go with experience and (Carcillo) had been in those situations before,” Vigneault said. “He came up and did a good job, obviously scored that big goal for us.”

The Rangers do not practice on Thursday, instead just flying to Pittsburgh.

Lastly, from the Rangers:

- New York has posted a 6-0 record in Game 7s at Madison Square Garden in franchise history. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the Rangers are the only NHL team to be undefeated at home in Game 7 with a minimum of three Games 7 at home. The Rangers have won each of their last three Game 7s at home by a 2-1 score, and four of their last five at home, dating back to Game 7 of the Eastern Conference Finals on May 27, 1994 vs. New Jersey. Each of the last five Game 7s at MSG has been decided by one goal.

- The Rangers are advancing to the second round of the playoffs for the third consecutive season. The Blueshirts are the only Eastern Conference team to reach the second round of the playoffs in each of the last three seasons. The last time the Rangers won a playoff series in at least three consecutive years was a four-year span from 1993-94 – 1996-97.

- Henrik Lundqvist made 26 saves to improve his record to 4-3 in the playoffs, including a 3-1 record at home. In five career Game 7s, Lundqvist is 4-1 with a 1.00 GAA, a .963 SV%, and one shutout. He has allowed two goals or fewer in all five games. In his last nine games when the Rangers have faced elimination, Lundqvist is 7-2 with a 1.43 GAA, a .951 SV%, and three shutouts, including 6-0 record with a 0.99 GAA, a .965 SV%, and two shutouts in six games at MSG when the Blueshirts have faced elimination. Lundqvist appeared in his 74th career playoff contest – his 73rd in a row – and is three games shy of passing Mike Richter for first on the team’s all-time playoff appearance list.

- Daniel Carcillo tallied the game’s first goal and recorded two shots on goal in 11:32 of ice time. Carcillo has registered five goals in eight career regular season and playoff games against the Flyers, including two goals in three games in the series.

- Benoit Pouliot registered the game-winning goal, posted a plus-one rating, recorded two shots on goal, and was credited with two blocked shots in 14:50 of ice time. The Rangers forward recorded points in consecutive games for the second time in the series (one goal, one assist), and the third time the playoffs in his career. The tally was Pouliot’s first career game-winning goal in postseason action. Pouliot has established single-season playoff career-highs in goals (two) and points (four). The Rangers forward tied for the team lead in goals and third in assists (two) and points in the first round.

- Mats Zuccarello recorded an assist, posted a plus-two rating, recorded two shots on goal, and was credited with two hits in 16:10 of ice time. The Rangers forward registered a point in four of seven games in the series (two goals, two assists). Zuccarello led for the team lead in goals, and third in assists and points in the first round. He also is tied for fourth on the team in shots on goal (17) and third in hits (21).

- Kevin Klein registered an assist, posted a plus-one rating, and was credited with two hits in 13:00 of ice time. Klein’s assist was his first playoff point as a Ranger. The Blueshirts defenseman ranks second on the team in plus-minus rating (plus-five), fourth in blocked shots (14), and second among defensemen in hits (12) in the playoffs.

- Derick Brassard recorded an assist, posted a plus-two rating, and won eight of 11 faceoffs (73%) in 14:17 of ice time. The Rangers forward has tallied a point in each of the two Game 7s he has played in NHL career (three assists). Brassard has recorded 10 points (two goals, eight assists) in nine career playoff games at MSG. The Rangers forward is tied for fourth on the team in assists (two) in the playoffs.

- Anton Stralman tallied an assist, was credited with two hits, and blocked three shots in 22:09 of ice time. Stralman has recorded an assist in
consecutive playoff games for the first time in his career (two assists), and has registered a point in consecutive playoff games for the first time since his first two career playoff contests on Apr. 12 – Apr. 14, 2012 vs. Ottawa. The Rangers defenseman is tied for third on the team in plus/minus rating (plus-three) and fourth in assists (two) in the playoffs.

- Dan Girardi was credited with a game-high five blocked shots and tied for the game-high with five hits in 22:15 of ice time. The Rangers defenseman leads the team in hits (25) and blocked shots (21) in the playoffs. Girardi skated in his 71st career playoff game, passing Mark Messier and Jeff Beukeboom for sole possession of sixth place on the team’s all-time playoff games played list.

And the last word from the Flyers:

“We didn’t initiate enough and play with enough aggressiveness as a team,” Flyers coach Craig Berube said. “I think that our game overall, we didn’t play our best hockey.”

- The Flyers go to 9-7 all-time in Game 7s. They lost their first Game 7 since the 2004 Eastern Conference Finals vs. Tampa Bay, after winning three straight since then.

- The Flyers killed off their only shorthanded situation in Game 7 and finished the series with 21 consecutive successful kills dating back to Game 2.

- Scott Hartnell led the Flyers with six shots on goal and had an additional three attempts blocked.

Bergen Record LOADED: 05.01.2014
Rangers center Dominic Moore was named one of three finalists for the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, which honors perseverance and dedication to hockey.

Moore, 33, left the sport to care for his wife, Katie, who was dying from a rare form of liver cancer, then signed with the Rangers, who drafted him in 2000, as a free agent last July.

Moore had six goals and 12 assists this season and has excelled on the penalty kill and in the faceoff circle.

The other finalists: Jaromir Jagr, 42, a former Ranger and Penguin and a certain Hall of Famer, is currently with the Devils, and Manny Malhotra, a Masterton nominee with the Canucks in 2012, who came back from a severe eye injury. He is currently with the Hurricanes.
Rangers need their top players to be better in next series against Penguins

April 30, 2014 11:44 PM By ARTHUR STAPLE

The Rangers' biggest names came up big in Game 7. So did some of the not-so-big names. It is the way this Rangers team is built, it seems, that they are not a product of their stars but more a product of their identity, a team that needs to collectively work hard or else they sag back.

They are moving on to face the Penguins, winning a first-round Game 7 for the third straight season, 2-1, Wednesday night over the Flyers. Some of the names have changed, but not the work ethic. When they swarm in waves of five-man units, the way they swarmed the Flyers in the deciding second period last night, they seem like world-beaters. It doesn't matter if it's Rick Nash or Daniel Carcillo, Ryan McDonagh or Anton Stralman.

"That's been the strength of this team all year, really," said McDonagh, who played his most forceful game of the series at just the right time. "Different guys step up at different times and we need all of it."

The Rangers needed McDonagh disrupting Flyer rushes in Game 7. They needed Henrik Lundqvist and his 10 third-period saves, most of them after the Flyers cut the Rangers lead in half and shortened the breaths of 18,000 strong at the Garden.

They needed Carcillo -- and in a way, they needed Alain Vigneault and his rather masterful lineup juggling; J.T. Miller acquitted himself well in his two games this series, but Vigneault went with Carcillo's experience and it paid off handsomely.

They certainly needed Nash, who didn't shy away from any hits or pucks in perhaps his best game as a Ranger, period. He still didn't score, and that made him 0-for-30 in shots for the series, but his defining moment may have been a diving shot-block on Mark Streit inside of five minutes to play last night.

"He made some real big defensive plays," Vigneault said, "and that's as important as scoring a goal."

The Rangers needed everyone, as they seemingly have throughout their grinding playoff runs of the past three seasons. It can be a double-edged sword, this all-for-one, one-for-all ethos -- the same reason the Rangers jumped ahead of the Flyers each step of this series cost them a chance to stomp out Philly.

They are a systemic team, one that needs to forecheck and skate and chip pucks and do all the other boring things that make fans roll their eyes and sportswriters reach for story lines.

"We just played simple, nobody tried to do too much," McDonagh said. "It's great to see everybody playing to their strengths."

They will need that and more beginning tomorrow. The Penguins have been a free-wheeling team in the postseason, playing to their strengths: Skill, skill and more skill. Fans on Long Island recall Marc-Andre Fleury's misadventures in the first round last year, plus a defense that had some holes.

The Rangers could exploit Pittsburgh's defense and goaltending. They were strong on the puck all throughout the Flyers series, thwarted primarily by Steve Mason and the Rangers' own special-teams shortcomings.

If they have it in them to beat Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and company, they will need more. More from Nash, who must put the puck in the net. More from Martin St. Louis, Brad Richards, Derek Stepan and the woeful power play, which went 0-for-21 to close this first round.

And more from Lundqvist, who must be the best goaltender in the next series by a long way.

More from everyone, in short. It's all for one with this Rangers team, or else it's all for nothing.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 05.01.2014
Dan Carcillo gives Rangers a big boost with first goal in Game 7

By MARK HERRMANN

Dan Carcillo seemed to symbolize the seething Rangers-Flyers rivalry. The former Flyer is the Rangers' in-your-face, under-your-skin guy who was in the lineup for what is euphemistically called "grit." What he gave them was something much different: a huge goal.

In that way, he symbolized this series that ended with the Rangers' 2-1 win in Game 7 Wednesday night at the Garden.

The expected animosity never did blossom. The hockey was more competitive than combative, with the pivotal play accomplished by Carcillo with his stick on the puck, not on someone's ribs.

He converted Mats Zuccarello's somewhat magical pass -- through the legs of two Flyers -- at 3:06 of the second period to break a scoreless tie.

There is no way to overstate the value of the first goal in a Game 7. Entering Wednesday night, according to the Elias Sports Bureau, the team that scored first in the past 16 NHL Game 7s won the game.

Carcillo was just happy to learn Wednesday morning that he would be in there, considering he had played in only Games 3 and 4. It did not take much to figure why he did dress, what with the Flyers having won Game 6, contentedly having raised the temperature with some "physical" play.

As Wayne Simmonds said, after scoring a hat trick and getting a game misconduct, "It's part of hockey, right? It's the way you want it to be."

That type of game is what Carcillo always has been known for -- just not in his own mind.

"I've always been able to play but sometimes you just get pigeonholed in a role. That's just the way it is," said the forward who was acquired from the Kings on Jan. 4. "It's tough to climb out of it. I've always been able to help out offensively. But it's nice to help and get that sort of validation for yourself and get that confidence moving forward."

Zuccarello said, "He's won the Stanley Cup before. He's one of those guys you look to for experience here in the locker room. He's one of the guys who steps up every time he's on the ice."

The goal-scorer was the first to acknowledge that Zuccarello did the skill work on the big play. "Backhand pass off the wall, spin around, through two guys' legs and right on my tape. It's good that it went in, but it was a special play by a really good player," Carcillo said.

But Carcillo had the instincts to be in the right place in the right time, and the skill to follow the puck through the maze of Flyers and poke it in. This time, he was a pest to the opposition because of a goal.

"This year, I've just been trying to play hockey where years before I was too caught up in the hitting," he said. "It feels good. I've always liked the big stage. I'm just glad I got the opportunity."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 05.01.2014
Rangers beat Flyers in Game 7 to advance to series against Penguins

By STEVE ZIPAY

Fueled by goals from Dan Carcillo and Benoit Pouliot in the second period last night, the Rangers defeated the Flyers, 2-1, and eliminated them from the Eastern Conference quarterfinals in the deciding Game 7 at Madison Square Garden.

For Henrik Lundqvist, it was a bit of redemption.

In Philadelphia on Tuesday, Lundqvist had been pulled after the second period, having allowed four goals on 23 shots as the Flyers won 5-2 to square this Stanley Cup series at three games each.

"Right away, I thought about this game, what was coming," Lundqvist said after he made 26 saves to help the Rangers eliminate the Flyers and move on to the second round of the playoffs against the Penguins in Pittsburgh starting tomorrow night.

On the train back from Philadelphia, Lundqvist recalled, "I was so disappointed, but at the same time, I was mad. You want to go out there today and play as good as you can. To play a Game 7 at home, that was the inspiration."

Inspired play in Game 7s is nothing new for Lundqvist, who is now 4-1 in those games with a 1.00 GAA and a .963 save percentage.

"We all knew that at some point they were going to have a push, and he would have to make the saves we needed," said coach Alain Vigneault. "We had a couple breakdowns in front of our net and he made some real big saves."

Lundqvist was really tested in the third, when Jason Akeson cut a 2-0 lead in half, nabbing a rebound of his blocked shot and beating Lundqvist far side at 4:32. He had to make 11 saves under pressure in the period.

At the other end, Steve Mason was impressive, making 31 stops, including 16 in the second period, when Carcillo and Pouliot scored on cross-ice passes to the left post for shots on which he had little chance.

"I thought it could have been 4 or 5 to nothing, but Mason made some great saves for them to keep it 2-0," said Marc Staal. "It was good that we did the opposite [of Tuesday, when they allowed three Flyers goals in the second]. We grabbed the momentum and took advantage of it. Philly's a very good team, they gave us all we could handle."

Rick Nash, who didn't score in the series, was more engaged and active from the start than in the previous games, and his low shot from the left circle on the first shift hit the post.

Both Rangers goals Wednesday night came after penalty-kills. Just 39 seconds into the second, the Rangers were caught with too many men on the ice, but the Flyers, who were 6 for 19 on the power play, couldn't convert.

Mats Zuccarello backhanded a pass through the slot to Carcillo, waiting near the left post, unguarded by Braydon Coburn, at 3:06. For Carcillo, who did not play in Games 5 or 6, it was his second goal in three games. Vigneault chose Carcillo's experience over youngster J.T. Miller.

Pouliot was sticked in the back by Kimmo Timonen and fell over Mason at 8:37 of the second, but was called for goaltender interference. Anton Stralman and Martin St. Louis blocked shots as the penalty expired, and at 11:46, Pouliot fired in Derick Brassard's cross-ice pass.

Playing the Penguins will be another major challenge. The Rangers are 0-4 against them in the playoffs. Granted, that goes back to the days of Mario Lemieux and Jaromir Jagr, but the current Penguins, led by Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin, put up 109 points and were 28-9-4 at CONSOL Energy Center.

"They have a lot of high-end talent," Brad Richards said. "It's going to be a battle. We know what to expect."
Don’t know if anybody went back and checked the first-round predictions contest results yet. I will get to that … eventually.

Thoughts:

1) As I wrote in the column, maybe you wonder what’s missing from this core group that’s been together three years now, that they can’t win games that aren’t Must-Wins. But, boy, you wonder how they can keep going to the well and winning when they’re facing elimination (7-2 now, with four straight Game 7 wins).

2) The schedule. It is just absolutely ridiculous, absurd, that the Rangers are going to have played six playoff games in nine days. Thanks NBC and Madison Square Garden and whoever sponsor’s name is on that Pittsburgh arena for the time being. Billy Joel and the Liberty 2, the Garden are more than partially responsible for this mess. And ya boys are partly responsible, too, for not closing out the Flyers earlier.

3) I honestly don’t give the Rangers much of a chance to beat the Penguins. Not unless Marc-Andre Fleury really implodes. And that certainly could happen. But the way the Rangers played in three of the games against the Flyers, they will be destroyed by the Penguins. Pittsburgh’s forwards and defense are miles better than the Flyers, and the Penguins are just as rough and rugged, maybe more so. I don’t see which Rangers forwards are gonna be able to tangle with Crosby and Malkin, not to mention Neal and Kunitz and Sutter (is he healthy?). But that’s for later on today and tomorrow.

4) Making the playoffs eight of nine years. Playing seven playoff rounds in three years. It ain’t the Stanley Cup, not even close, but there aren’t many teams or fanbases that wouldn’t trade places with you guys. Those great, loud fans in San Jose sure would today.

5) Daily Nash-O-Meter. Again, this is what infuriates fans about this guy. So freakin’ gifted. Such a dominant figure …. when he wants to be. Don’t anybody dare say Nash didn’t playing his hind quarters off in this game. He sure did. He had three very big hits. He made sensational defensive plays. He was dangerous all over the ice. I don’t care that he didn’t score. But he needs to play like that a lot more often. The top stars in the league do. He doesn’t. We saw it from him in Columbus one night. We saw it from him before the Olympics and for a while after. We saw it on that last shift of the Game 4 loss in Philly, when he did jack the first 58 minutes. Again, I thought Nash was better for some of this series, especially early, and then in Game 5, than most of you did. He didn’t score a goal, and that’s a major problem. But to me, it’s the dearth of nights like last night’s that’s most troublesome.

6) I’m going to level with you. If my team’s in a Game 7, I want Henrik Lundqvist in there. Last four Game 7s, three total goals against. But, I didn’t think he had to be spectacular in this one. He was terrific, don’t get me wrong. I just didn’t think he was fabulous throughout the series. And Steve Mason was fabulous, especially early in Game 6 and throughout Game 7 when the Rangers were as good as they were in Game 5. Crazy series.

7) Alain Vigneault-genius. On the eve of John Tortorella’s dismissal in Vancouver, AV made another minor move that came up acres. His lineup switch to Daniel Carcillo paid off big-time in Game 3, his switch to J.T. Miller was a roaring success in Game 5, and his move back to Carcillo in Game 7 ended up in the first goal of the game—and to that point, the teams that scored first had won 16 consecutive Game 7s. And, hey, AV used his timeout!

8) The Carcillo goal in Game 7 was the fourth in this series off what I call the “Jack in the Box” play, where a player jumps out of the penalty box and scores a goal. It was the third by the Rangers, the second by Carcillo. As @gafflar said on Twitter: “The box is Danny’s home base, he recharges in there.”

9) As was the case in Game 5, I’m not going to list all the guys who played well, because pretty much everybody did. The defense was superb, with a big bounce-back from Dan Girardi and Ryan McDonagh after a sub-par Game 6 (they tend to do that, come right back after a rare stinker), and yet another remarkably strong game for Marc Staal and Anton Stralman. And the Rangers’ top regular-season line of Mats Zuccarello-Derick Brassard-Benoit Pouliot played its best game of the series. All series, whether Carcillo, Jesper Fast or Miller was on their wing, I thought the Carl Hagelin-Brad Richards combo, Hagelin with his wheels, Richards with his puck skills, was the Rangers best of the top three, and of course, the fourth line just keeps on getting the job done, creating zone time and problems for the opponents. The Rangers are going to need scoring from all lines against the Ice Birds.

10) Sideshow Rinaldo=much, much offensive-zone hilarity and happiness for the Rangers throughout the series. Been going on for three years, actually. And he also took a stupid penalty. Fortunately for him, “stinks” isn’t a strong enough word for the Rangers power play. Maybe Torty can come back as an assistant to help out with that (sarcasm).

11) Going back to Mr. Offensive Zone Penalty, Pouliot. This time, for sure, it wasn’t his fault; he was shoved on top of Mason. Just another of the many dreadful calls throughout these playoffs, against all teams in all series. New game, new rulebook, Pouliot didn’t deserve a penalty. The Hockey Gods smiled with that eye-popping penalty kill—blocked shots by Staal and Dominic Moore, monstrous plays by Staal and McDonagh. Then the Hockey Gods smiled again, as Pouliot buried Brassard’s pass through two sets of Flyers skates, off a Sideshow Rinaldo turnover.

12) I didn’t see any Rangers fans gang up, 40 against 2, in any drunken brawls in this game for some reason. Oh, right, it wasn’t in Philadelphia. Click here to see Mr. Snider in his private suite for Game 7 at MSG, with his cute little Flyers pennants hanging from a string across the ceiling. And click here to see the Empire State Building all lit up in Blue and Red for the Rangers after the game.

13) How about the guy in the Lundqvist jersey who fired a puck from center ice through a hole the size of a golf ball to win a Lexus during the second intermission? The Garden, I must say, was loud all night long. The bridge popping penalty kill—blocked shots by Stralman and Dominic Moore, monstrous plays by Staal and McDonagh. Then the Hockey Gods smiled again, as Pouliot buried Brassard’s pass through two sets of Flyers skates, off a Sideshow Rinaldo turnover.

14) I don’t care which teams are on which sides, the post-series handshake line is one of the coolest things in hockey, in sports. Actually, it is one of the things that separates hockey and its playoffs from all the other sports. It’s even cooler when it’s two old rivals like these lining up in a show of sportsmanship and respect. And it reminds me how classless some of the Devils were once upon a time, skipping out on the handshake with the Rangers (1997, I think). And how classless Skid Crosby was, leaving Nick Lidstrom hanging to do a TV interview. If Rinaldo and Carcillo, if Derek Dorsett and Wayne Simmonds, Claude Giroux and Girardi, can shake hands at the end of that series, everybody ought to be able to do it. Almost everybody always does.

Rockland Journal News: LOADED: 05.01.2014
734291 New York Rangers

Game 7: Rangers 2, Flyers 1 … post-game notes & quotes

30 April 2014, 11:50 pm by Carp

Team notes:
- The Rangers defeated the Philadelphia Flyers, 2-1, tonight in Game 7 of the Metropolitan Division Semifinals at Madison Square Garden. The Blueshirts won the best-of-seven series, four games to three, and will play the Pittsburgh Penguins in the Metropolitan Division Finals.
- New York has posted a 6-0 record in Game 7s at Madison Square Garden in franchise history. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the Rangers are the only NHL team to be undefeated at home in Game 7 with a minimum of three Game 7s at home. The Rangers have won each of their last three Game 7s at home by a 2-1 score, and four of their last five at home, dating back to Game 7 of the Eastern Conference Finals on May 27, 1994 vs. New Jersey. Each of the last five Game 7s at MSG has been decided by one goal. New York has won seven of its last eight playoff series that have gone seven games.
- The Rangers are advancing to the second round of the playoffs for the third consecutive season. The Blueshirts are the only Eastern Conference team to reach the second round of the playoffs in each of the last three seasons. The last time the Rangers won a playoff series in at least three consecutive years was a four-year span from 1993-94 – 1996-97.
- The Blueshirts have won 12 of their last 17 playoff games at Madison Square Garden, dating back to a 2-1 victory in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference Quarterfinals on Apr. 26, 2012 vs. Ottawa. New York has won at least two playoff games at home in four of its last six playoff series, and three playoff games at home in three of its last five series.
- The Blueshirts have allowed two goals or fewer in 18 of their last 26 regular season and playoff games, and 20 of their last 27 regular season and playoff games at Madison Square Garden. New York has allowed 49 goals in their last 26 games (1.88 goals against per game) and 51 goals in their last 27 home games (1.89 goals against per game).
- The Rangers have won 11 of their last 12 regular season and playoff games against the Flyers at MSG. New York has outscores Philadelphia, 43-17, over the span. The Blueshirts have scored at least four goals in seven of the 12 contests, and have allowed two goals or fewer in all 11 victories over the span. The Rangers have allowed two goals or fewer in 19 of their last 24 regular season and playoff matchups with the Flyers.
- Eleven different Rangers recorded a goal in the series, while 17 different skaters tallied a point.
- The Rangers were credited with 32 hits in the game, as 13 different skaters had at least one. Dan Girardi, Rick Nash, and Marc Staal tied for the game-high with five apiece.
- New York was credited with 22 blocked shots in the contest, as four skaters blocked at least three shots.

Player notes:
- Henrik Lundqvist made 26 saves to improve his record to 4-3 in the playoffs, including a 3-1 record at home. In five career Game 7s, Lundqvist is 4-1 with a 1.00 GAA, a .963 SV%, and one shutout. He has allowed two goals or fewer in all five games. In his last nine games when the Rangers have faced elimination, Lundqvist is 7-2 with a 1.43 GAA, a .951 SV%, and three shutouts, including 6-0 record with a 0.98 GAA, a .965 SV%, and two shutouts in six games at MSG when the Blueshirts have faced elimination. Lundqvist appeared in his 74th career playoff contest – his 73rd in a row – and is three games shy of passing Mike Richter for first on the team’s all-time playoff appearances list.
- Daniel Carcillo tallied the game’s first goal and recorded two shots on goal in 11:32 of ice time. Carcillo has registered five goals in eight career regular season and playoff games against the Flyers, including two goals in three games in the series.
- Benoit Pouliot registered the game-winning goal, posted a plus-one rating, recorded two shots on goal, and was credited with two blocked shots in 14:50 of ice time. The Rangers forward recorded points in consecutive games for the second time in the series (one goal, one assist), and the third time the playoffs in his career. The tally was Pouliot’s first career game-winning goal in postseason action. Pouliot has established single-season playoff career-highs in goals (two) and points (four). The Rangers forward tied for the team lead in goals and third in assists (two) and points in the first round.
- Mats Zuccarello recorded an assist, posted a plus-two rating, recorded two shots on goal, and was credited with two hits in 16:10 of ice time. The Rangers forward registered a point in four of seven games in the series (two goals, two assists). Zuccarello tied for the team lead in goals, and third in assists and points in the first round. He also is tied for fourth on the team in shots on goal (17) and third in hits (21).
- Kevin Klein registered an assist, posted a plus-one rating, and was credited with two hits in 13:00 of ice time. Klein’s assist was his first playoff point as a Ranger. The Blueshirts defenseman ranks second on the team in plus-minus rating (plus-five), fourth in blocked shots (14), and second among defensemen in hits (12) in the playoffs.
- Derick Brassard recorded an assist, posted a plus-two rating, and won eight of 11 faceoffs (73%) in 14:17 of ice time. The Rangers forward has tallied a point in each of the two Game 7s he has played in NHL career (three assists). Brassard has recorded 10 points (two goals, eight assists) in nine career playoff games at MSG. The Rangers forward is tied for fourth on the team in assists (two) in the playoffs.
- Anton Stralman tallied an assist, was credited with two hits, and blocked three shots in 22:09 of ice time. Stralman has recorded an assist in consecutive playoff games for the first time in his career (two assists), and has registered a point in consecutive playoff games for the first time since his first two career playoff contests on Apr. 12 – Apr. 14, 2012 vs. Ottawa. The Rangers defensemen is tied for third on the team in plus-minus rating (plus-three) and fourth in assists (two) in the playoffs.
- Dan Girardi was credited with a game-high five blocked shots and tied for the game-high with five hits in 22:15 of ice time. The Rangers defensemen leads the team in hits (25) and blocked shots (21) in the playoffs. Girardi skated in his 71st career playoff game, passing Mark Messier and Jeff Beukeboom for sole possession of sixth place on the team’s all-time playoff games played list.

Quotebook:
Alain Vigneault on the series… “In Game 7 like this, I would rather go with experience and he (Daniel Carcillo) had been in those situations before. He came up and did a good job, obviously scored that big goal for us. That and the fact that we got great fan support tonight – they were behind us from start to finish and really helped us along. With four games in six nights it was a tough grind for both teams and they have some real quality players.”

Henrik Lundqvist on tonight’s game…”It is a relief and it’s a proud feeling too. We talked about it during the series, it doesn’t matter if you feel like you’re the better team, it’s about finding ways to win hockey games, and that’s what we did today. We played outstanding. We created so many chances and we played really smart. We knew they were going to push in the third and they came pretty hard, but the puck management was really good. It’s just exciting, that last minute is so intense and you’re nervous but at the same time you just want to see what’s going to happen next. The final second, that’s probably the best feeling.”

Mats Zuccarello on bouncing back after Game 6 to win the series… “Everyone was disappointed after yesterday (Game 6). We just wanted to come back and redeem ourselves and I think we did a good job today. It was a great win for us. It was a tough team we played. Philly is really good and it was seven tough games so it was a really good feeling.”

Rockland Journal News: LOADED: 05.01.2014
NEW YORK -- The tangible scoring affect may have been negligible, but Craig Berube’s gamble to swap players on his top two lines in an effort to ice a quicker lineup seemed to pay off.

Scott Hartnell moved to the second line with Brayden Schenn and Wayne Simmonds.

Michael Raffl rose from the fourth line to the top line with Claude Giroux and Jake Voracek.

Hartnell was still on the ice with Giroux for the first goal of the game. Simmonds caught Schenn’s miscue for the second goal, and they’ve been together most of the season. But the net result, Berube said, was a mix with a little more speed and spunk.

“I think it did give us jump,” Berube said. “But I went to those lines before and it was successful. I like the speed of Raffl on that top line; it’s just a faster line. I thought the Schenn line did a real good job on the (Dominic) Moore line. The Moore line has been an effective line for them - they’re physical and they skate well. I put Hartnell, Schenn and Simmonds together because it’s a big, strong line. They did a good job.”

Berube kept the initial changes close to his vest. He did not tip his hand in the morning skate - or even in the pre-game line rushes. Instead, he surprised Alain Vigneault in the first period.

The new combinations would have had a short leash, for sure, but they produced a lead after the first period and remained together when the rout was on. The risk was clear and defined, breaking up lines who have been together for the better part of six months in an elimination game.

Berube has said all along, though, that he would make decisions in the playoffs based on the moment, not the long-haul. The reward proved worth the risk.

> Expected lineup:

Raffl - Giroux - Voracek
Hartnell - B. Schenn - Simmonds
Akeson - Couturier - Read
Rinaldo - Lecavalier - Hall
Timonen - Coburn
MacDonald - Streit
L. Schenn - Gustafsson
Mason
Emery

> Home teams are a combined 2-4 in Game 7s in the first round in the last two years.

> 37 of the 149 all-time Game 7s have gone to overtime. Home teams are 19-18 in those games.

> Vinny Lecavalier played fewer minutes (9:28) than any other Flyers player, including Zac Rinaldo. Lecavalier was a non-factor in Game 6, the same as he has been most of the series. He was slow to pucks and the only Flyers forward without a hit in the game.

> The Flyers have killed off 20 consecutive Ranger power plays, dating back to Game 2.

“We couldn’t score, but we couldn’t do a lot of things,” New York’s Brad Richards said Tuesday night. “You never want to have those nights, but it wasn’t a lack of focus. We wanted to play well, we just didn’t execute in many areas tonight.”
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PHILADELPHIA FLYERS GAME SEVEN RESULTS

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Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 05.01.2014
Mason dazzling in defeat

Marc Narducci, Inquirer Staff Writer
Posted: Thursday, May 1, 2014, 1:08 AM

NEW YORK - Steve Mason allowed two second-period goals Wednesday night, and it may have been his best showing in the Flyers' first-round playoff series with the New York Rangers.

And that is saying something.

The Flyers goalie followed up a spectacular Game 6 with a sensational performance in Game 7, but his teammates couldn't quite follow his lead.

The team's season ended in a 2-1 loss to the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

"Mace played unbelievably to keep us in the game," Flyers captain Claude Giroux said.

The Rangers move on to face the Pittsburgh Penguins. The Flyers will dwell on the fact that they gave this game away in the second period, despite the play of Mason.

The goalie didn't start the first three games of the series and appeared in only 7 minutes, 15 seconds of Game 3 because of an upper-body injury. He finally disclosed the injury.

"It was a concussion," he said.

After a scoreless first period, the Rangers scored twice in the second, but they could have gone for nearly a touchdown had it not been for Mason.

"I tried to calm it down and make the saves that I was able to make and hoped to weather the storm, but they were able to capitalize on two chances, and that was all they needed," Mason said of the second period.

For the two goals, he couldn't be faulted. On the first, the puck went past Flyers defensemen Andrew MacDonald and Braydon Coburn before former Flyer Dan Carcillo scored from in front of the net.

The second was a great pass in the corner from Derick Brassard to Benoit Pouliot, who one-timed it in.

The Rangers outshot the Flyers, 18-5, in the second period, and many came from just in front of Mason.

Pick your favorite Mason save that period; they were plentiful.

There was the stop on a Rick Nash shorthanded break. Or the spectacular stop of a Martin St. Louis one-timer. Mason made a save of a St. Louis wraparound and Derek Stepan rebound.

He stoned Brian Boyle in front of the goal.

There were others.

"I thought it could have been four or five to nothing in the second period, but Mason made some great saves for them just to keep it at 2-0," Rangers defenseman Marc Staal said.

Mason's performance came on the heels of Tuesday's sensational effort in the Flyers' 5-2 win.

And Mason also stood on his head during Friday's 2-1 victory in Game 4 when he made 37 saves.

The Rangers were expected to have a serious advantage in goal with Henrik Lundqvist.

That never happened.

No doubt, Mason and the Flyers will look back at the second period of their final game and wonder how things could have been different.

"In the second period, they took it to us," Mason said. "We had trouble breaking out of our zone, and they had odd-man rushes, and we seemed to be spinning our wheels."
Berube and Mason not enough for Flyers

Mike Sielski, Inquirer Columnist
Posted: Thursday, May 1, 2014, 1:08 AM

NEW YORK - The coach and the goaltender had done all they could do.

Craig Berube had been shuffling and scheming since the eve of the Flyers' first-round series against the Rangers, changing strategies, changing lines, changing defensive pairings, changing goalies, searching for a matchup, a combination of players, something to overcome the intrinsic disadvantages that his team faced.

The Rangers were faster, more skilled, and better along the blue line, and here was Berube, in his first postseason as an NHL head coach, and after coaxing the Flyers out of an awful start and into the playoffs, after making all those moves, all he could do as the seconds bled away on the Rangers' 2-1 victory in Game 7 here Wednesday was chomp on a piece of blue gum, his face a stoic shield.

To his left along the visitors' bench at Madison Square Garden was Steve Mason, who had been pulled for an extra skater with 1 minute, 34 seconds left in regulation, who had been the only thing standing between the Flyers and a faster playoff exit. He had made 31 saves Wednesday night, somehow had been more spectacular in defeat than he had been in either of his two victories over the Rangers, and all he could do was watch as the Flyers, down and desperate, pressed Henrik Lundqvist for a tying goal that never came.

Berube and Mason. Step back for a moment from the wild ride of this Flyers season - the firing of Peter Laviolette, the promotion of Berube, the improvement into a playoff team, the effort they had to exert to stretch this series to seven games.

Give it all some distance and perspective, and it's easy to see that those two are the most valuable discoveries the franchise made. Berube and Mason. In the former, they have a promising head coach with less than a full season on the job, with room to grow. In the latter, they have the commodity they've lacked for so long: a bona fide No. 1 goaltender, the kind who can handle a 60-game workload during the regular season and steal a postseason round or two. Hell, he dam near did it against the Rangers.

That distance and perspective is of vital importance now, because we know what the Flyers' history is. If that history is any guide, the foremost fear of this offseason has to be that team chairman Ed Snider and the organization's player-personnel people will fall into the same pattern that has contributed to what will be a 40-year drought since the Flyers' last Stanley Cup.

General manager Paul Holmgren was smart to be re-

For their contributions over the season, these players and others were not difference-makers against the Rangers. So little came easy to the Flyers in this series, and twice more in Game 7, their opponents showed the value in building a team that can win - that can dominate a decisive period in an elimination game - without having to rely on jagged-edge play to do it.

Mats Zuccarello, all of 5-foot-7, threaded that gorgeous pass to Dan Carcillo for the Rangers' first goal, Pete-Maraviching the puck through the legs of both MacDonald and Braydon Coburn. More than eight minutes later, Derick Brassard delivered a similar pass to linemate Benoit Pouloit, and on neither sequence did Mason have a chance.

Those two goals stood up, despite the Flyers' third-period push. So there they were together at the end, watching the Rangers celebrate: Craig Berube and Steve Mason, the best things to come out of just another hard Flyers season.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 05.01.2014
When the blood flowed, it flowed because of mistakes.

Scott Hartnell, largely inconsequential in it.

right in front of his goal. Perhaps the Rangers were too startled to pounce on it.

Scott Hartnell, largely inconsequential in the series, was offside by a full stride 3-on-2 with 2:53 to play in the second.

When the blood flowed, it flowed because of mistakes.
ED BARKOWITZ, Daily News Staff Writer barkowe@phillynews.com

NEW YORK - Daniel Carcillo put his fingerprints on this series without even dropping his gloves.

The Rangers' expert agitator didn't get under the Flyers' skin with antics and yapping, but rather by scoring two gigantic goals in this series. Last night, in Game 7, he got the Rangers on the board.

It's not easy to be a difference-maker when you're a 10-minute player who was a healthy scratch for four of the seven games. But elimination games like these often bring out unlikely heroes. Where have you gone, Joffrey Lupul?

"In Game 7 like this, I would rather go with experience and [Carcillo] had been in those situations before," said Rangers coach Alain Vigneault, explaining Carcillo being active ahead of youngster J.T. Miller.

Carcillo and goal-scoring don't get into the same sentence very often, but the guy does have a sense of drama. That he did it against the Flyers (again) made his postgame smile even wider.

After Steve Mason frustrated New York's more accomplished scorers, especially Rick Nash, it was Carcillo who finally solved Mason in the second period and gave the Blueshirts that all-important first goal.

"That goal was huge. He gets inserted into the lineup and makes a difference right away," said New York defenseman Dan Girardi. "He's that type of player that can make a big play, a big goal or a big hit, and he was huge for us tonight."

" 'Mase' played great," Carcillo added. "We could have had four or five, but he kept them in [the game]."

Carcillo played for the Flyers from 2009-11 when he racked up 414 penalty minutes and scored an overtime goal during the 2010 playoff run. But the Flyers decided to cut ties following the 2010-11 season. Though he won a Cup in 2013 with the Blackhawks, he still remembers getting kicked to the curb by the Flyers. In their defense, they had younger players coming up through the ranks, namely Zac Rinaldo.

One of the lasting Images of this series will be after Carcillo scored his first goal of the series, in Game 3, a tally that ended up being the game-winner. He was mobbed by teammates along the Wells Fargo Center boards as fans saluted him Philly-style. The picture is not suitable for this publication because the digits the fans were holding up were not index fingers.

This time, he basked in the cheers of his own, newest fans. Carcillo, 29, has played for five teams in 8 years.

"Whether it's the Flyers or any other team, it's nice to contribute offensively and bring energy," he said, before allowing a wry smile. "And if it's an old team, that didn't qualify you [with a contract offer], maybe you try a little harder."

Lightning strikes

Rangers forward Brad Richards said the postseries handshake line was a little bittersweet when it came time for him to meet up with former teammate Vinny Lecavalier.

Lecavalier, Richards and prominent current Ranger Martin St. Louis were the nucleus of the Tampa Bay team that won the 2004 Stanley Cup. Oddly, that team beat the Flyers in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals.

"I'll be honest, it was very strange," said Richards, who is now 6-0 in his career in Game 7s. "I've known him since I was 14 years old and it was a dream come true to play in the NHL together. We've won some big things together and it was just strange to play all series against him. I know how much fun we had winning and how much he loves winning. It's tough to look good friends in the eye and know he's done."

Blue note
Flyers vs. Rangers: Game 7 recap

JAKE KAPLAN, Daily News Staff Writer kaplanj@phillynews.com

Posted: Thursday, May 1, 2014, 3:01 AM

Score: Rangers 2, Flyers 1

How it happened: The Rangers scored two goals in the second period and held on in the third to advance to the second round to play Pittsburgh.

Hero: Rangers’ defense. New York blocked 22 shots and held Philly to just 27 shots on goal.

Goat: Defenseman Braydon Coburn struggled throughout the series, particularly in last night’s game. He finished the series minus-6.

Home-ice advantage: The Rangers improved to 6-0 in Game 7s at Madison Square Garden. They are 7-5 all-time in Game 7s. The Flyers, meanwhile, fell to 9-7.

Carcillo strikes again: To the dismay of Philadelphia fans everywhere, ex-Flyer Dan Carcillo scored his second goal of the series early in the second period to give the Rangers a 1-0 lead. It was Carcillo’s fifth career goal against the Flyers in eight games, including the postseason. He also scored in Game 3.

On the board first: When the Rangers struck first in the second period, history was in their favor. Entering last night’s trio of Game 7s, the team that scored first in a Game 7 held a 111-38 record, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

The kid can play: Considering he entered the postseason with two regular-season games of experience, Jason Akeson played a great series. The 23-year-old right wing scored his second goal of the postseason early in the third period and finished with three points.

More PKs: Although it didn’t help them earn a win, the Flyers extended their streak of consecutive penalty kills to 21, a streak that dated to the orange and black’s Game 2 win at MSG.

Up next: While the Rangers advanced to play the Penguins, the offseason officially commenced for the Flyers. Next up is the free-agency interview window from June 25-30, in which teams can talk to available players, and the NHL draft on June 27-28 at the Wells Fargo Center. Free agency begins July 1. Kimmo Timonen and Ray Emery are among the Flyers’ unrestricted free agents.

Key stat: The Rangers outshot the Flyers by a blistering 18-5 in the second period and finished the series with a 221-179 edge.

Daily News’ three stars

1. Henrik Lundqvist, Rangers: Bounced back from a poor performance in Game 4 and stopped 26 of 27 shots.

2. Steve Mason, Flyers: Kept the Flyers in the game and finished with 31 saves on 33 shots.

3. Benoit Pouliot, Rangers: Scored what turned out to be the game-winning goal.
NEW YORK - It feels funny, trying to make a definitive point about anything given the events of the last 2 weeks. The Flyers were underdogs in their playoff series against the Rangers. The series took seven games to complete. The score in the seventh game was Rangers 2, Flyers 1, and the Flyers were pushing pretty hard in the third period to get the tying goal. It isn't as if they got blown out.

So you are left with impressions, mostly. And there is this picture that keeps repeating, if you try to remember back. It is hard to know what it might have looked like on television, but in the arena, it was there, again and again. It was the picture of a Rangers forward, forechecking aggressively, swooping in with speed, all arms and legs and closing speed, 50 feet way, then 20 feet, then 10 feet in a blink - and of the Flyers defenseman, doing his best to rescue the situation, to avoid the oncoming missile.

Usually, the defenseman did fine. But the play he was forced to make was often the safe one, back behind his net. The Rangers had a great advantage in zone time and overall puck possession for most of the series because of it. They swarmed the Flyers in the second period last night, the period when they got both of their goals.

As defenseman Luke Schenn said after the game, "One goal is the difference. We had a tough second period and that ended up being the difference tonight."

But here is the question: Why were the Rangers allowed to be so aggressive with that forecheck, so aggressive, so often? Again, you don't want to put too fine a point on this because the series did go to the limit and because the Flyers did have three wins and a significant number of excellent moments along the way.

But the Rangers had more. The reason was that swooping, punishing forecheck.

"I think the forecheck was outstanding, the way we put pressure on their 'D' and they had a lot of turnovers because of that," said Henrik Lundqvist, the Rangers' goaltender. "That is something we had the whole series. We put a lot of pressure on them. At the same time, we have to give them credit. They never gave up, even though we had a lot of puck possession. They always kept coming back and found a way to get back into games."

All true. There are no scapegoats here, and that is not the intention. But the reason the forecheck worked so well was that the Flyers' defense could not make the Rangers pay often enough on the counterattack. They did not get back to the pucks as quickly as you would hope, and they did not make enough of the kinds of passes out of their zone that would start the rush the other way and cause the Rangers to think twice about being so aggressive.

Braydon Coburn, who had a good season, saw his play deteriorate as the series wore on. So did Andrew MacDonald. Schenn, on the other hand, played some of the best, most mistake-free hockey of the year - and maybe of his career. Overall, though, the Flyers need to get better on defense - and, again, this is not a condemnation, just an observation in a series that went to the limit.

There are names, young names in the organization: Sam Morin, Robert Hagg, Shayne Gostisbehere, more. The expectation is for a transformation in coming years. But there is a here and now in the meantime. The Flyers are paying a lot of money to the defense they already have - and when you spend big free-agent money on veterans such as Vinny Lecavalier and Mark Streit, the message is not that this is some kind of a rebuilding project. The Flyers can talk about how proud they are of coming back from the 1-7 hole they dug this season, and that is true, but the words of Bill Parcells seem apt here. The words, "no medals for trying."

In the here and now, the defense wasn't quite enough. In that second period, when the Rangers so dominated, "we were just on our heels," Schenn said. "You have to give them credit - they played fast . . . Without [goalie Steve Mason] making big saves, we wouldn't even have been in it in the third period."
Mason knocks goaltending from the list of Flyers concerns

Sam Donnellon, Daily News Sports Columnist

NEW YORK - Among the past disappointments at this time of year, goaltending was almost always front and center. Even when the Flyers made the Stanley Cup finals four springs ago, their tag-team tandem of veteran goalies seemed a dam waiting to break, and when their luck ran out the following year, it ushered in what is now known as the Bryz error.

The list is nearly inexhaustible. There was Roman Cechmanek and Robert Esche and, if you want to go way back, Sean Burke, Garth Snow and, lest we forget, Jeff Hackett.

So here's your silver lining:

The Flyers have found a goalie they can trust. Not only in the daily grind of a regular schedule. In the heat of a hotly contested playoff series, when a big save at the right time can infuse adrenaline and a soft goal at the wrong time can drain it from your team, and from your building.

"That was my goal coming into the year," Mason said after the Flyers were eliminated, 2-1, in Game 7 by the Rangers. "Overall, I was proud of what was able to be accomplished. But when you come out on the losing end of a seven-game series, it leaves a sour taste in your mouth. But that's going to be enough motivation going forward to the summer time . . . to building with this group of guys we have.

"We have such a great core that I think the Philly fan base has something to really look forward to."

Mason gave the Flyers a chance to win last night, just as he had the previous night. He stopped 31 of 33 shots, many acrobatically. He might have even stolen this Game 7 with just a little more help from his defense and a bit more pressure from an offense that scored two or fewer goals in five of the seven games it played.

The Flyers' lone goal scorer last night was Jason Akeson, the Game 1 goat and Game 2 goal-scorer, who spent the entirety of his season playing in Glens Falls, N.Y.

Why? I don't know why.

But those are the issues of this offseason. Not the goaltender, and, really, when's the last time you could say that? They signed Ray Emery for $1.6 million last offseason, because they weren't sure what they had in Mason. They should be sure now.

"'Mase' is world-class," Akeson said. "And he's got a lot of hockey left in him."

Again, when's the last time you heard that about a Flyers goalie? Brian Boucher maybe, so maybe we need some repetition here. Except that Mason has already been through his personal trials, has already developed the practice habits and mental toughness that allowed him to reclaim his career in a place known for its impatience with goalies.

Here's another reason to believe. It's not a magic act with him. There's no unorthodoxy that could be exposed in the future, no questioning his fortitude. Last night he finally acknowledged what had been widely speculated, that he suffered a concussion in the second to last game of the season. What we didn't know was that he had headaches right up until the night before his first playoffs start, which means he really couldn't have been ready to start that Game 4.

Or shouldn't have. But it's another thing to like about him. He's a player, not a goaltender. He talks like a teammate, plays like a teammate, handles the puck so well, it often hides how much work needs to be done with that Flyers blue line if this team wants to jump from its current middle-of-the-pack status in the NHL to among the elite.

For all the talk about the Flyers' second-half surge, it should not be forgotten that the NHL's goofy, new playoff system featured four matchups of teams that had amassed more points than the Flyers or the Rangers.
Upon first, a streak that has now reached 17. Eastern Conference final against Tampa Bay. Their 2010 With the loss, the Flyers’ all
Everybody feels lousy, obviously.” Berube said. “I think that our game overall, we didn’t play our b
Akeson admitted it “was a tough way to go out,” something coach Craig
“New York, New York” filling a quiet locker room overflowing with disbelief. The Flyers ran out of time. The buzzer a
pucks cut through the crease with eyes on a tied Game 7. Jason Akeson cut New York’s
lead in half in the first 5 minutes of the period - and the Flyers had at least two pucks cut through the crease with eyes on a tied Game 7.
The Rangers squeaked into the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs with a 2-1 win last night in Game 7, to take the best-of-seven by the most scant of 4-3 margins.
One goal. One swing of the stick. One trickle of a few more inches through Lundqvist’s pads on the oh-so-many close calls in the third period. One bitter pill to swallow.
“Game 7. Lose. 2-1. It doesn’t get closer than that,” captain Claude Giroux said. “We did a good job staying in the battle. On our bench, we were positive that we were going to tie it up. We did get our chances. But it just didn’t go in.”
Once again down and out after a disastrous second period that saw the Flyers fall into a 2-0 hole when they were outshot, 18-5, by the Rangers, they somehow managed to turn the tide in the third. Jason Akeson cut New York’s lead in half in the first 5 minutes of the period - and the Flyers had at least two pucks cut through the crease with eyes on a tied Game 7.
The Rangers will open the Metropolitan Division final this weekend in Pittsburgh’s Consol Energy Center - the building where the Flyers swept their one, true rival this season. Pittsburgh certainly didn’t strike fear into anyone with its first-round performance against Columbus.
All of which leaves the Flyers wondering, like Mason staring into the Garden crowd. So many questions unanswered.
“I think we did think we were better than what we showed,” Luke Schenn said. “We definitely never made things easy on ourselves - or gave ourselves a cushion at all. We had to fight until the bitter end. It was a tribute to a lot of the guys and the character we have in here. At the end of the day, one goal is the difference between moving on. It’s an empty feeling.”
Slap shots
The Flyers killed off their only shorthanded attempt of Game 7, closing the series on a run of 21 consecutive penalties killed against the Rangers . . . Defenceman Kimmo Timonen, 39, might have played the final game of his NHL career. He left Madison Square Garden without speaking to reporters . . . Claude Giroux finished tied with New York’s Marty St. Louis and Derek Stepan for the lead in scoring with six points.
Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 05.01.2014
NEW YORK - There were no Flyers fans sitting along the glass for Dan Carcillo to gloat in front of on Wednesday night. Instead, it was a jubilant Madison Square Garden crowd ignited by Carcillo's go-ahead goal.

The Rangers tough guy spent three seasons wearing a Flyers sweater before the team let him go, failing to tender him a qualifying offer. Carcillo scored the first goal in New York's 2-1 victory over the Flyers in Game 7.

"Whether it's the Flyers or any other team, it's nice to be able to contribute offensively and bring energy," Carcillo said. "Especially if it's an old team that didn't qualify you, maybe you try a little harder."

It was his second goal of the series. The previous goal came in Game 3, when Carcillo capped a 4-1 win and celebrated in the faces of insulted Philadelphia fans - one of whom showed Carcillo his disapproval with two outstretched middle fingers.

On Wednesday, Carcillo's celebration was less confrontational. The goal was even more important.

"It was huge," Carcillo said. "Especially at home. Got the crowd into it. In the first period, there wasn't much going on."

With the teams in a scoreless second-period gridlock, Carcillo exited the penalty box after serving two minutes for the Rangers' having too many players on the ice. He skated for only 27 seconds when he broke the tie.

Rangers forward Mats Zuccarello whipped a behind-the-back pass that zoomed past the Flyers' Andrew MacDonald and Braydon Coburn. Carcillo slid to goalie Steve Mason's back side and tapped the puck into the net for a 1-0 lead.

"A special play by a really good player," Carcillo said of Zuccarello's pass.

Carcillo was a healthy scratch in the Flyers' Game 6 win, but he provided the Rangers with fresh legs in the second of back-to-back games. He also provided playoff experience: It was his 40th postseason game and his second Game 7 goal.

Flyers fans might remember the other one: It came in the third period of the Flyers' 2011 clinching victory over Buffalo.

"I've always liked the big stage," Carcillo said. "More people are watching."

That's the reason Rangers coach Alain Vigneault decided to dress Carcillo for just the third time this series.

"I just felt in a Game 7 like this, I'd rather go with experience," Vigneault said. "He had been in those situations before."

As the NHL has changed in recent seasons, so has Carcillo. He averaged 17.75 fights per season from 2007-08 through 2010-11, yet he has averaged only four fights in the last three seasons. This has been a deliberate change, and he admitted in past years he was "too caught up in hitting and just that side of the game."

Carcillo has spent time bruising the back of the net against the Flyers. Wednesday marked his fifth goal in seven games against his former team, including the postseason.

The Rangers went 19-9-3 in the 31 regular-season games he dressed after a Jan. 4 trade from Los Angeles and won two of the three postseason games he played in.

"When you're in, you try to do something to stay in," Carcillo said. "Whether it be offensively or bring a lot of energy, that's what I tried to do every time I was in this series."

Wednesday's goal will haunt the Flyers.

Carcillo laughed when asked about the lack of Flyers fans displaying their distaste at the Garden. It did not dampen his excitement.
NEW YORK - Flyers goalie Steve Mason was the best player in the series, but his teammates deserted him in the game-turning second period of Game 7 Wednesday night at Madison Square Garden.

The Rangers outshot the Flyers, 18-5, and scored two goals - not even Bernie Parent in his prime would have prevented them - as they built a 2-0 lead.

The Rangers came in swarms, and if it wasn't for Mason's acrobatics, it easily could have been 6-0.

Powerless play

The Flyers' power play was much more effective than New York's in the first six games of the series, but it led to their doom in Game 7.

The Flyers had two second-period power plays. Both times, they looked disorganized and managed just one shot - and the Rangers nearly scored a shorthanded goal on both occasions.

The Rangers gained momentum from the penalty kills and scored goals shortly after each one ended, taking a 2-0 lead. With the way the Rangers were blocking shots and denying the Flyers good scoring chances, that advantage felt insurmountable before Jason Akeson cut it to 2-1 with 15 minutes, 28 seconds left in regulation.

Carcillo strikes

Since NHL teams that scored first had won the last 16 Game 7s, the odds were in the Rangers' favor after ex-Flyer Dan Carcillo took a slick pass from Mats Zuccarello and scored early in the second period.

Flyers defenseman Braydon Coburn, who had another rough night, and Andrew MacDonald allowed the long pass to get through to Carcillo in front.

Carcillo scored just four goals in 57 regular-season games, but it was his second goal in three games in this series.

Killing more penalties

The Flyers' penalty kill continued to excel early in the game.

In the first period, after an ill-advised interference penalty on Carcillo, they killed their 21st consecutive penalty in the series. New York had no shots on its first power play as Sean Couturier and Matt Read made some nice reads and clears.

Nash comes close

Rick Nash has taken lots of criticism for his lack of production, but he nearly got a gift, courtesy of Coburn, with about four minutes remaining in the opening period.

Nash, who entered the night with just one goal in 18 playoff games in his Rangers career, scooped up a poor Coburn pass, but Mason turned aside his drive from the high slot.

NHL whiffs

The Rangers will be at a decided disadvantage because of the unfair playoff schedule the NHL handed the winner of their series.

No other first-round series had teams playing games on back-to-back nights. And no other series had teams playing the final three games in four nights.

But that's what the NHL dealt the Flyers and Rangers. Commissioner Gary Bettman brushed it off, saying New York and Philadelphia had an easier travel schedule than the other teams. That's not the case. It takes 1 hour, 22 minutes by train from one city to the other. It takes 49 minutes to fly from Pittsburgh to Columbus, the teams in the other Metropolitan semifinal.

In the Metro finals, Pittsburgh will host the first two games. If they are played on Friday and Sunday, as reported, it means the Rangers will be playing five games in eight nights.

Advantage, Penguins.

Breakaways

In the only lineup change for either team, Carcillo replaced J.T. Miller in the Rangers lineup. . . . Before the game, Flyers defenseman Kimmo Timonen said that his focus was on Game 7 and that he wasn't even thinking that it was potentially the last game of his superb career. Timonen, 39, will decide in the offseason whether he wants to continue playing.
NEW YORK - Ever since their franchise-worst 1-7 start, the Flyers became Team Catch-up.

It also happened in the playoffs. Three times they fell behind the New York Rangers in the series. Three times they caught up.

Wednesday night, in front of a frenzied enemy crowd at the World's Most Famous Arena, they ran out of comebacks.

New York Rangers 2, Flyers 1.

With the loss in Game 7 at rollicking Madison Square Garden, the Flyers' season ended like every one after 1975: without a Stanley Cup.

"Nobody in this locker room was ready to pack it in," said goalie Steve Mason, who was the game's best player but was betrayed by his defense in the second period. "It's tough to put into words right now what you feel. It's a long season and after one game - boom - it's over."

Outplayed for two periods, the Flyers came alive in the third, coming in waves at goalie Henrik Lundqvist.

Rookie Jason Akeson sliced the Rangers' lead to 2-1, slapping his own right-circle rebound past Lundqvist with 15 minutes, 28 seconds remaining in regulation. Akeson gathered the rebound after Marc Staal blocked his first shot.

The Flyers applied pressure on Lundqvist for the next several minutes but couldn't get the equalizer.

"It was like we were on the penalty kill there for a while," Rangers forward Brad Richards said of the Flyers' third-period push. "It was scratch and claw and do what you could" to prevent a goal.

New York dominated the second period, outshooting the Flyers by 18-5 and taking a 2-0 lead on goals by ex-Flyer Dan Carcillo and Benoit Pouliot.

The Flyers had trouble getting out of their own end for most of the second period.

"We were just on our heels," defenseman Luke Schenn said. "You have to give them credit. They played fast and they got the momentum there off the first goal, and they pretty much had the momentum after that for the remainder of the second period."

With about four minutes left in the second period, Claude Giroux had a golden chance to cut the deficit in half. Alone in front and staring at an open net, Giroux fired over the crossbar.

"I was trying to get away from their 'D,' and I'm not sure if he got his stick on it," Giroux said. "I shot up high because the goalie was low."

The Flyers are now 9-7 in Game 7s in franchise history. New York, which will face Pittsburgh in the Metropolitan Division finals, improved to 7-5 in Game 7s. The Rangers are 6-0 in seventh games at the Garden.

The Flyers had seven 20-goal scorers this season, but most of those players had subpar playoff performances, primarily because of New York's speed and gifted defense.

"We didn't initiate enough and play with enough aggressiveness," Flyers coach Craig Berube said. "...We didn't play our best hockey."

The Flyers did a lot of good things in a scoreless first period. They had just one giveaway (four fewer than New York) and won 13 of the 18 faceoffs. They also had an 11-10 shots edge, though the Rangers had the better chances.

But they fell apart in the second period, giving Mason little support. Mason was brilliant throughout the night and was the only reason the Flyers had a chance.
NEW YORK _ The Flyers appear loose, excited, and confident heading into Wednesday’s Game 7 showdown at Madison Square Garden.

“It never gets old,” veteran defenseman Timonen said a few hours before the decisive game against the New York Rangers. “It’s a big game, but at the same time, it’s a moment you have to enjoy. If you’re able to enjoy this moment, you’re going to be able to play your best.”

The Rangers are also feeling confident.

“There’s no other feeling in your life that is gonna duplicate what a day like this is and what it means when you win, especially on home ice in Game 7,” Rangers center Brad Richards told the New York Daily News. “Really, you could have dropped the puck this morning at nine and we would have been ready, and I’m sure they would have been. It’s a fun day. We just want to get going.”

The Rangers are 5-0 in Game 7s at Madison Square Garden.

The Flyers have a 9-6 record in Game 7s, New York is 6-5.

“I think you obviously have to control your emotions,” Flyers coach Craig Berube said, “but we want to have lots of energy; we want to play aggressive. It’s important to get skating right away in a game like this.”

Timonen, 39, said the key is to “play our game. We are a good team when we skate and forecheck. Don’t think too much. Go after these guys and go from there. We have to enjoy the moment…because you never know if you’ll ever get to this point.”

Playing in a Game 7 is “what you live for,” said winger Wayne Simmonds, who had a hat trick in the Flyers’ 5-2 win Tuesday. “When you’re young, you’re playing in your driveway, always imagining a Game 7 scenario. Now this is it. This is my first Game 7, so it should be nice.”

And how did his teams do in those imaginary games in his driveway?

“Always winning, obviously,” Simmonds said with a smile.

Meanwhile, Rangers coach Alain Vigneault seemed to be trying to ignite some of his key players, including Rick Nash, who is looking for his first goal in the series.

“I think it’s fair to say whoever’s top players perform the best is probably the team that’s gonna win this game,” Vigneault said.

Vigneault also appeared to be sending a wake-up call to star defenseman Ryan McDonagh, who has had a so-so series after returning from a shoulder injury.

“He’s played some good hockey so far in this series, but I do believe there’s another level,” Vigneault said. “He needs to find that tonight for us.”

Breakaways. Timonen said he was just focusing on Game 7 and not the fact that, if he decides to retire, it could be the final contest of his superb career….The Flyers have killed 20 straight penalties in the series….The Flyers are 6 for 19 (31.6 percent) on the power play, while the Rangers are 3 for 28 (10.7 percent)….Timonen: “Yesterday was a good step forward; now we have to take even a bigger step.” He added that “the guys are pretty happy and loose, so that’s a good sign.”

My pick: Rangers 3, Flyers 1. Henrik Lundqvist has been the second-best goalie in the series. He’s due to dominate a game.
Flyers need to give Mason some help

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer
Posted: Thursday, May 1, 2014, 4:08 AM

NEW YORK — In the series, Steve Mason outplayed the great Henrik Lundqvist, Rick Nash didn't score a goal for the Rangers, and the Flyers stopped New York's last 21 power plays.

How, then, did the Flyers lose the series in seven games?

Quite simply, they didn't have the puck enough, and didn't match the Rangers' speed or defensive excellence.

So GM Paul Holmgren — assuming he stays in the position and doesn't hand off the baton to Ron Hextall — has a rather substantial to-do list in the off-season.

The good news is that he Flyers discovered they have a goalie, Mason, who is good enough to take them on a Stanley Cup run.

The bad news: He doesn't have enough support.

The Rangers eliminated the Flyers, 2-1, in a tense Game 7 Wednesday at Madison Square Garden. The Flyers had one atrocious period — the second — and it cost them.

"We didn't initiate enough and play with enough aggressiveness," Flyers coach Craig Berube said. "...We didn't play our best hockey."

Excluding empty-net goals, the Flyers had just 14 goals in the seven games.

None of the goals were by Scott Hartnell, Brayden Schenn, Sean Couturier, or Michael Raffl. Vinny Lecavalier and Matt Read each had just one goal.

Paging, Matt Moulson? The speedy winger is among the potential free agents who could interest the Flyers.

Lecavalier, who played in just 10 shifts that covered 8:45 on Wednesday, wasn't the same player ever since he injured his back early in the season. The hope is that he returns to his pre-injury form. If not, the Flyers are paying way too much money for a past-his-prime fourth-line center.

Give the Flyers credit. They climbed out of a 1-7 hole and played very good hockey for a majority of the season. Berube, in his first season as a head coach, did a terrific job getting the most out of his players, but it is clear the Flyers need a No. 1 defenseman, a sniper winger, and more speed.

A lot more speed.

WHAT THEY SAID

Berube: "Everybody feels lousy, obviously. I'm proud of our players. They went through a lot this year. We were stuck in a hole for a while and they battled out of it. We stuck together and went to a Game 7."

Claude Giroux on the Flyers' third-period push: "We were positive we were going to tie it up."

Mason: "We have a tight-knit group, and we're going to be better for it next year."

Breakaways. Giroux, Martin St. Louis and Brad Richards shared the series lead with six points apiece. ...Lundqvist is now 4-1 with a 1.00 GAA and .963 save percentage in Game 7s. ...The Rangers blocked 22 shots, nine more than the Flyers. ...Hartnell had a game-high six shots. ...Luke Schenn and Raffl each had five hits. ...in eight career games in the regular season and playoffs, Dan Carcillo has five goals against the Flyers. Hard to believe, Harry
Coach, players predict a bright future

NEW YORK -- Considering the way the Flyers began the season, with a coaching change and a franchise-worst 1-7 mark, the final product doesn’t really deserve negative reviews.

Just making it to the playoffs was quite an accomplishment and then to take a tough New York Rangers team to a Game 7 was probably above and beyond expectations set in early November.

"Everyone feels lousy," coach Craig Berube said after Wednesday night’s season-ending 2-1 loss at Madison Square Garden. "But I’m proud of our players. They went through a lot this year.

"We were stuck in a hole for a while and they battled out of it, stuck together and went to a Game 7. I’m proud of them. They are a great bunch of guys and we have a whole lot of character in that locker room."

The future would appear to be bright.

Claude Giroux, 26, is just entering his prime years. Goaltender Steve Mason looks like a keeper. Young players such as Brayden Schenn and Sean Couturier continue to improve.

The only area that appears to need some work is defense, where 39-year-old Kimmo Timonen could be retiring and Braydon Coburn will be coming off one of the worst playoff series of his career.

"We have a lot of character in this room and for a young team I think it’s great," Giroux said. "This (loss to the Rangers) is only going to make us stronger.

"I think we do have to be proud of what we did. Last place and being able to come back -- everybody got back on the same page. We had a lot of fun doing it and making the playoffs. Right now it just stings a lot that we can’t be in the second round."

Mason came off a late-season injury to prove he can perform in big-time pressure situations. When you have goaltending, you’ve won half the battle.

"I think we can definitely be proud of what this group accomplished, considering the kind of start we had to the regular season," Mason said. "We put ourselves in a pretty big hole.

"The character that every single one of the guys in this locker room showed, to be able to battle back and find a way to get into the playoffs and force a Game 7 here ... this group is a lot of fun to play with and I’m looking forward to growing with them in the future."

Jake Voracek had a big year and looks like a fixture on the Giroux line.

"We lost in Game 7 against a very good team," Voracek said. "We have a lot of young guys with great veteran leadership."

Another bright spot for the future is rookie Jason Akeson, who had two goals in the playoffs after just two regular-season games in the NHL.

"At the beginning of the year, everyone went through a lot here," Akeson said. "To come this far, nobody expected that for the first part of the season. There was a lot of character in this room this year ... I’m sure we’ll be back."
A game effort, but defensive changes must be made

NEW YORK — Five floors below Bridge Loft I, Steve Mason had kept Paul Holmgren’s hockey team respectable against one of the worst barrages that a Flyers goaltender had seen in ages in the second period.

And in the glass press box booth that visiting general managers sit in at Madison Square Garden, the often stoic Flyers’ head of hockey operations had to be thinking what most of the people watching at the other end of the turnpike had been screaming at their televisions.

Where would this team be without Mason? And for that matter, what will be needed to make sure that this team doesn’t have to make its goaltender a human rubber dartboard if it wants to contend for deep trips into May or June.

A roller-coaster year ended disappointing fashion in Manhattan on Wednesday night as the Rangers posted a 2-1 win over the Flyers in Game 7 of the Metropolitan Division semifinals of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Doing autopsies on elimination night of any team can be a dangerous thing for any general manager or team to try and do. The emotions are raw. The mind can be clouded.

However, to take a step into legitimate contention, there are holes that Holmgren must fill this summer. And most of them involve a defensive unit that was poor Wednesday night, leaving Mason to take bullet after bullet.

Let’s start with the positives: The Flyers didn’t quit when they fell behind by two goals, playing a really good third period that allowed them to have legitimate shots to tie the game against Rangers goalkeeper Henrik Lundqvist. And Mason turned in the best playoff goaltending performance the Flyers had seen since Brian Boucher led Philadelphia to the Eastern Conference Finals in 2000.

It was the type of grit that they showed all season and one of the things that will likely provide solace to the orange and black masses. There is something to be said for character, and this group showed some when Craig Berube took over after a disastrous start to get them into playoff contention.

That’s all well and good but this team has had too many mental lapses at times over the years. And it was the defensive mistakes that are sending it home.

Playing at the defensive end of the ice is not just a two-man effort — it involves all five skaters. In Game 7, it was a complete defensive meltdown in the second period held together only by Mason. Forwards were left up ice way too much, but it was the inability to clear guys from the sweet spot in front of Mason that ended up behind him during the goals by Daniel Carcillo and Benoit Pouliot. And that ultimately falls on the defensemen.

“They ended up getting a chance shorthanded on (a Flyers power play) and we went back on our heels,” Berube said. “We didn’t do a very good job of making plays and getting the puck out of our end. We let them win the game in the second period.”

In this series, they came up into the play early and provided some offensive punch from the rush. But the inability to get pucks through from the blue line hurt and gave Lundqvist some comfort when his own game seemed to struggle.

And defensively, they were slow and clumsy. Kimmo Timonen has enjoyed a great career, but if this was the end for him — it was not exactly highlight reel stuff. And he didn’t even have the worst series of them all. Timonen’s lack of speed cost the Flyers an icing call that would have given them a final shot with 2.7 seconds left, all but insuring the game was over.

When asked if Timonen — a free agent — would return, Berube was diplomatic. “I hope so,” Berube said. “He’s still a good player. He played his heart out tonight.”

Braydon Coburn will draw the ire of many for his minus-6 showing in the playoffs and his long-term stats over the last three seasons are more than disturbing. He was a plus-15 in 2010-11 and a plus-10 in 2011-12. But last year, he was minus-6 after going minus-10 the previous year. That simply can’t happen.

It was Coburn who let Carcillo skate untouched up the left side of the ice into the slot.

“I know that he probably should have had him,” Berube said. “I’m sure there’s plays where he could have had somebody or done a better job. But I could go down the line with all the players. We win and lose as a team.’’

What Holmgren does from here to fix the defense will likely result in one of the Flyers’ 20-goal scorers — there were seven of them — having to leave. But having that much scoring depth allows for flexibility to fix the issues that exist. What hurts is the fact that there are some long-term contracts that will handcuff any ability to get cap room to make deals to fix the problem.

There were a lot of positives that took place this season and in this series. But the defensive problem is one that Holmgren must fix if they don’t want to end in the same spot again next year.
Mason excels but Flyers drop Game 7


Wayne Fish Staff writer

NEW YORK -- If only the Flyers’ position players performed half as well as Steve Mason did Wednesday night.

The Flyers’ goaltender was brilliant, even if his teammates were far less than that in a season-ending 2-1 loss to the Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

New York won the best-of-seven Metropolitan Division semifinal series 4-3 and advanced to play Pittsburgh in the division finals.

For the Flyers, it was a disappointing, frustrating way to end a season that showed such promise after a franchise-worst start.

Mason was under siege from the outset and the pressure only increased in the second period when the Rangers launched 18 shots and scored a pair of goals.

The Flyers finally woke up in the third period but the Rangers clamped down after a Jason Akeson goal at 4:32.

“It (the loss) hurts big time,” Mason said after stopping 31 of 33 shots. “It’s hard to put into words what you feel. It’s a long series and, in one game, boom, it’s pretty much over.”

“In the second period, they took it to us. We had trouble breaking out of our own zone. We seemed to be spinning our legs and nothing was happening.”

Claude Giroux said he was proud that his team remained competitive on a night when things just didn’t seem to be going the Flyers’ way.

“Game 7, lose 2-1, it doesn’t get closer than that,” Giroux said. “We did a good job staying in the battle. On the bench we were positive we were going to tie it up. We did get our chances, they just didn’t go in.”

Everything started to unravel in the second period.

Particularly vexing was a goal by ex-Flyer Daniel Carcillo to open the scoring at 3:06.

A New York bench minor for too many men at the 39-second mark had Carcillo going to the penalty box. After he jumped out, the Flyers were completely disorganized in their own end. Andrew MacDonald lost the puck and the Rangers’ Mats Zuccarello whirled and sent a puck from the right sideboards toward the net.

The pass went through MacDonald’s legs and then Braydon Coburn failed to pick up Carcillo at the far post.

Carcillo’s goal was just the beginning of the problems for the Flyers.

The Rangers continued to swarm Mason and finally got a second goal at 11:46. Benoit Pouliot got in behind defenseman Erik Gustafsson and tapped in Derick Brassard’s pass.

“I don’t think we played good enough in the second period to win the game,” Jake Voracek said. “We had a good push in the third period but it was too late.

“This is the worst feeling ever, to come so close, basically. Do or die, you lose that Game 7. We just have to make sure we learn from it and use it in the future.”

The Flyers played large stretches out of rhythm, committing a number of offsides and icing infractions. Their breakout, which had been so fluid in a 5-2 win in Game 6 on Tuesday night in Philadelphia, looked like a scrimmage at training camp up in Lake Placid last September.

“The second period tonight made the difference for sure,” Vinny Lecavalier said. “Mason really kept us in there. We just couldn’t get that second goal.”

Rookie Jason Akeson finally got the Flyers on the board at 4:32 of the third period when his shot from the right circle eluded Henrik Lundqvist.

“The bench was positive (after the goal),” Akeson said. “Everyone was giving their all, it’s a tough way to go out for sure, when you’re expecting to win.”

Added Mason: “Nobody in this locker room was ready to pack it in. The third period is the type of hockey we need to play on a more consistent basis to be successful.”

The Flyers are now 9-7 all-time in Game 7, while the Rangers improved to 6-0 all-time in Game 7 at MSG.

As for this series, coach Craig Berube only wishes his team had started off in the early games with the same aggression it showed in Game 6 and some of 7.

“I think that the first few games, we didn’t initiate enough or play with enough aggressiveness as a team,” he said. “I think that we would have had another win there maybe, but who knows? We didn’t play our best hockey early on in the series.”

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Simmonds always dreamed of playing a Game 7

NEW YORK — Growing up in Scarborough, Ont., Canada, Wayne Simmonds would play driveway hockey and allow himself to dream about the future.

The fantasy always involved a Game 7.

Wednesday night, that dream became a reality. The Flyers' leading scorer in both the regular season and the playoffs found himself in a win-or-go-home game against the New York Rangers.

"This is what you live for," Simmonds said at Madison Square Garden before the game. "When you're young and you're playing in your driveway, you're always imagining a Game 7 scenario.

"This is it. This is my first Game 7. So it should be nice."

The Flyers sounded like a loose bunch before the game and why not? Less than 24 hours back, they had just hung a convincing 5-2 loss on the Blueshirts.

"This is a big game but at the same time it's a moment you have to enjoy," said Kimmo Timonen, who added that he didn't want to think about the prospect of possibly playing the last game of his illustrious career.

"If you're able to enjoy this moment, you're going to play your best. Enjoy it because you never know if you will be back to this point."

Simmonds had a crazy good performance in Game 6, scoring his first career hat trick.

That made it possible to play a Game 7, just like he thought about as a kid in the driveway.

How did those dreams end?

"Always winning, obviously," Simmonds said. "You're never going to envision a scenario where you lose a Game 7. If you do, something's wrong with you, probably."

Penalty kill lethal

Going into Game 7, the Flyers had killed off 20 straight penalties. Those can be momentum changers.

"I think special teams have been a key to our whole season," Simmonds said. "Unfortunately, we're a team that takes too many penalties. Our penalty killers have had to be great all year long.

"We've had some slumps but at the end of the day we've always come out on the better side, I think."

Berube's take

Coach Craig Berube chose not to have a morning skate (seldom does with back-to-back games) but the team did have a meeting.

"The guys are focused," Berube said. "It's Game 7, it doesn't get much better than that."

New York coach Alain Vigneault had similar feelings.

"This is a great opportunity, Game 7," he said. "It doesn't get better than this. It's one game. It's winner take all. I think it's fair to say that whoever's top players perform the best is probably the team that's going to win this game."

Nash slump

The Rangers' Rick Nash continues to struggle in postseason play. He failed to score in the first six games of this series and going into Game 7 had just two goals in 22 playoff games.

"Rick is trying his best right now," Vigneault said. "He's looking for holes. He's protecting the puck. There's nothing he can do about the first six games, he's got to focus on tonight."

Burlington County Times LOADED: 05.01.2014
Flyers’ playoff run proves there’s a future with Mason

By Jack McCaffery, Delaware County Daily Times

NEW YORK — Just like every other season since 1975, the Flyers ended one Wednesday in frustration.

Unlike almost every one of those, though, they ended it with a definite go-to, big-time, championship-level, young and improving goalkeeper.

The Flyers did.

The Flyers.

“Steve Mason,” Jason Akeson said, “was world class.”

Even as the Flyers were falling, 2-1, to the New York Rangers in Game 7 of their first-round playoff series, Mason was spectacular Wednesday, snuffing 31 of 33 shots, plenty in acrobatic fashion. Though beaten twice in a second period dominated by the Rangers, Mason had given the Flyers a chance to win a second-round playoff opportunity … and a real reason to look ahead, not back.

There will be no goaltending controversy, catastrophe or competition when the Flyers next convene for training camp. At 26, Mason, the former Rookie of the Year, has surfaced among the NHL’s cream.

“That was my goal coming into the year,” he said, the postgame conversation having turned from the disappointment of losing the game. “Overall, I am proud of what was able to be accomplished. But in the end, when you come out on the losing end of a seven-game series, it leaves a sour taste in your mouth.

“That is going to be motivation going forward to the summertime.”

Mason did not play in the series until there were seven minutes left in Game 3. That’s because — he finally admitted late Wednesday — he had been concussed in the next-to-last regular-season game in Pittsburgh. That was when he was caught at the end of a three-body pileup that plopped him into the net, the back of his head crashing to the ice.

The Flyers felt they were fine with Ray Emery, who split the first two Rangers games, excelling in Game 2. But while Mason was dressed and proclaimed ready for Game 3, Craig Berube elected to remain with Emery, who surrendered all of the New York goals in a 4-1 loss.

But Wednesday, Mason punctured some of that controversy, revealing that even on the day before that game, he’d continued to experience illness caused by the concussion. At the minimum, it added some clarity to Berube’s much-questioned choice.

Asked when he began to be symptom-free, Mason said, “It was the night before I played my first game. I had some work done on the morning of Game 4 and I seemed to be good to go.”

Mason helped the Flyers win Game 4, and was at his best in Game 6, a 5-2 victory that reduced the series to a best-of-one. In that Game 7, he nearly made the Flyers winners on a night when they were outplayed.

“If it wouldn’t be for their great goaltending in the first two periods, where he was the difference,” Rangers coach Alain Vigneault said, “I think we probably would have been up by more than two.”

Mason finished the postseason with a 2-2 record, a 1.97 goals-against average and a .939 save percentage. In the regular season, he was 33-18-7 with a 2.50 goals-against average.

“He was great,” Berube said. “I think the goalies did their job. They did a great job for us and kept us in all of the games.”

At the minimum, that meant the Flyers would push into the offseason with the belief, not just the hope, that they could do that again.

“I think we can definitely be proud of what this group accomplished, considering what kind of start we had to the regular season,” Mason said. “We put ourselves in a pretty big hole. Every single one of the guys in this locker room showed the character to be able to battle back and find a way to get back into the playoffs and force a Game 7.

“I am just looking forward now to going in with this group of guys that we have. I think the Philly fan base has something to look forward to.”

For one rare time, that even includes a distinct, No. 1 goaltender.
NEW YORK — Because it sounded good, because that’s what was expected, the Flyers took their Game 7 opportunity in Madison Square Garden Wednesday and made it sound like it was their choice.

“When you’re young, and you are playing in your driveway,” Wayne Simmonds said, outside the locker room, before the game, “definitely, this is what you dream of.”

Such was the theme, as it had been between the Flyers winning Game 6 at home and losing Game 7, and their season, 2-1 Wednesday in Madison Square Garden.

“If you would ask a lot of people at the start of the series what they wanted,” Brayden Schenn had said, “most people would’ve said, ‘A win in seven.' These two teams compete pretty hard out there and anything can happen in Game 7.”

And so it went, relentlessly, echoing from one corner of the room to the other and, by all means, from the microphone in front of Craig Berube.

“I don’t think it matters how you get to Game 7,” the head coach would proclaim. “We’re there.”

Not that the Flyers were satisfied with simply stretching their first-round playoff series to the snapping point, because nothing in their effort Wednesday hinted at complacency. Rather, they were active and thoughtful with the puck, attentive on defense, not quick to take unthinking penalties. They were ready for Game 7. They just lost. Henrik Lundqvist was ripe to steal one of the seven games, so he did. The Rangers were expected to block shots, and they did, with all of their body parts.

In what had been reduced to the one-game series, New York was better. Confusing?

Yet that was the Flyers’ problem: They never should have been twisted into that position. But for sins committed earlier, and for at least one decision that well could haunt Berube for what should be a productive coaching career, they were.

Two standings points. That’s all that had separated the Rangers and Flyers through 82 regular-season games. A point here, a point there, a shootout that did not end in a thud, a bad goal avoided. Yet because of that, Game 7 was played in the Garden, not the Wells Fargo Center. For that, the Rangers had the tiny benefit of the home crowd in a one-game series, and the significant edge that would come with Alain Vigneault having the last line change.

Two points.

And too many wasted opportunities to close that gap.

What would have happened had the Flyers not wasted the first three games of their season with Peter Laviolette as their coach? What would have happened had Paul Holmgren trusted his gut and made the difficult change in the offseason?

What would have happened had the Flyers not begun the season 1-7, in part because they were adjusting to Berube, who had no training camp?

Wouldn’t it have been different had they not arrived in late March, did the stare-down thing with the Rangers in a bubbling fight for second place in the Metro, and stumbled into a seven-game losing streak?

Considering the early-season coaching confusion and the late-season fatigue that came from climbing out of all that early trouble, the Flyers could have — no they should have — finished in second place, with its first-round comforts. And that’s what made Berube’s rationalization hollow.

It did matter, actually, how the Flyers wound up in Game 7 — at least that Game 7, in that spot, in that arena where they had just broken an eight-game losing streak. It mattered that they wasted so many chances on shootouts. It even mattered that in Game 3 of the series, Berube trusted Ray Emery, not Steve Mason. Had he played his $12 million goaltender for more than the final seven hopeless minutes that game, there may not have been that one final difficult excursion to Madison Square Garden.

“They are very good,” Kimmo Timonen said, “especially in their building.”

The Flyers should not have been in that building Wednesday. But they were. And that’s why they will be at their lockers later this week, packing equipment, waiting yet another year for their next Stanley Cup.

That’s why they will be doing something else that never was their choice.
Flyers' season ends in hostile Garden as Rangers take Game 7

By Rob Parent, Delaware County Daily Times

Posted: 04/30/14, 10:01 PM EDT | Updated: 1 min ago

NEW YORK — One bad power play seemed to sap the Flyers of their energy and their sense in the second period Wednesday night.

Missed outlet passes, lack of vision and lazy plays followed, and the Flyers went through a prolonged period of the chronic malady that dogged them all year — sleepwalking in the defensive zone.

By the time the chaos cleared, the New York Rangers had scored twice and outshot the Flyers 18-5 in that second period, and from there ... they had to hold on.

Jason Akason scored early in the third period and the Flyers spent the rest of the game threatening to get even, but they fell short because Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist stood tall amid a 2-1 victory at Madison Square Garden.

So ends the Flyers’ season, one that began as ugly as any in franchise history, improbably wound up in a first-round playoff against their nearest rival, and in a series that never lived up to its billing wound up right where the regular season foretold it would — with the Rangers a half-step ahead.

“I think we do have to be proud of what we did,” Claude Giroux said. “Last place, and being able to come back, and everybody getting back on the same page. We had a lot of fun doing it and make the playoffs. Right now it stings a little bit, not a little bit but a lot, that we can’t be in the second round.”

Those reservations are for the Rangers, who step toward Pittsburgh for their second-round itinerary. As for the Flyers, a summer not as long as last year’s should still be an active one. There are roster fixes to be made, especially defensively. But their forward core has shown this season that it is something to continue to build around rather than rebuild.

What’s more, as he proved for half of a playoff series that could have been very different had he played the entirety, they have a real No. 1 goalie in Steve Mason.

Despite a second period that had to seem like 20 minutes of recurring Ranger nightmares, Mason made 31 saves and only was beaten when not given any chance to make a save. Despite that, as they had so often through the year, the Flyers wound up blaming one period of no-brainer play for their stumble.

See you next fall.

"Everybody feels lousy, obviously," Craig Berube summarized. “I’m proud of our players. They went through a lot this year. We were stuck in a hole for a while and they battled out of it. We stuck together and went to a Game 7.”

Once there, it took only one dummblounding period to zap the season.

"In the second period they took it to us," Mason said. “We had trouble breaking out of our own zone. They had odd-man rushes and we seemed to be spinning our legs. That’s what happened. You look at the 60 minutes of the game and that second period is what really cost us.”

Although backup goalie Ray Emery had a very strong game in leading the Flyers to a win in Game 2, what also cost the Flyers over the long haul in the series was not having Mason for the first three games.

With the time for hockey secrets expired, Mason admitted that he indeed suffered a concussion in Pittsburgh on the eve of the regular season finale. “It wasn’t good for a long time there,” he said, then added he’d experienced symptoms “right up to the night before I played my first game.

“I had some work done the morning of Game 4,” Mason said, “and seemed to be good to go for that night.”

Easy to see why Berube seemed to be struggling with goaltender decisions then. But when Mason was finally greenlighted, there was no reason for Berube to keep his fingers crossed.

"To be honest,” Luke Schenn said, “without (Mason) making those big saves we probably wouldn’t have been in it in the third period. He was outstanding for us like he was all year.”

And now there is much work still to be done.

Afflicted with waves of whatever nausea New York gives them, the Flyers couldn’t handle the wave of Rangers pressure in the second period. That produced a pair of goals, the first one coming from a player that always seems to haunt them.

Former Flyer agitator Dan Carcillo, dressing for only his third game of the series, was on the scoring end of Mats Zuccarello’s brilliant backhand pass from a 90-degree angle, redirecting the puck past Steve Mason at 3:06 for a 1-0 lead.

Carcillo had four goals in 57 games during the season. He had two goals in three games in this series against one of his old teams.

Several minutes later, the Flyers again couldn’t seem to figure out how to clear the puck. Zac Rinaldo’s effort was particularly uninspired, and almost inevitably Derick Brassard issued a pass that Benoit Pouliot slammed home at 11:46 for 2-0.

“The Rangers got a goal there and they fed off it,” Luke Schenn said. “They were just feeding off the crowd. ... Same thing happened to us (Tuesday) night. Momentum. That’s playoff hockey. There’s momentum swings, just like we got back in it in the third period.”

They did just that for a while. Just 4:32 into the third period, a puck deflected back to Akason, who beat Lundqvist (26 saves) over the glove to halve the lead. That ignited the dormant Flyers forecheck, and Lundqvist had to be very good for the next several minutes of Flyers attacks.

Of course, he usually is good enough.

“What we did in that third period was the type of hockey we need to play on a more consistent basis to be more successful,” Mason said. “I think there’s a lot to be excited about at the end of the day, though.

“Overall, I’m proud of what we were able accomplish, but when you come out on the losing end of a seven-game series, it leaves a sour taste in your mouth. But that’s going to be enough motivation going forward into the summertime.”

Delaware County Times LOADED: 05.01.2014
NEW YORK — As is ritual, Kimmo Timonen sipped his coffee and surveyed the scene Wednesday before a do-or-don’t game for both the Flyers and the Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

Asked what he pondered at such moments, Timonen said, “I’m drinking coffee right now, that’s going through my mind.”

But there were other juices flowing through the Flyers’ 39-year-old defenseman, creative ones, some more emotional, too.

Timonen’s contract is expiring, and despite having had a healthy and usually competent season, he says he hasn’t made a decision as to whether he’d be interested in coming back for more.

While Timonen has long pondered a more permanent return to his native Finland, the Flyers remain interested in re-signing him, but at what monetary value?

Perhaps that is a question for the summer. And maybe not.

Timonen said he’d address that issue at some subsequent point. But now, on the brink of a seventh game in the first round against the Rangers, he didn’t see any clouds in his coffee that would move him to lean one way or another on that subject.

“That’s behind me,” Timonen said. “If I think about that then I’m going to miss the game. I have to put that behind me and focus on the game.”

That’s finally what the Flyers were able to do in Game 6, casting their curious hesitant play aside and beating the Rangers at almost every phase of the game in a series-leveling 5-2 win Tuesday night.

Now, back where the Rangers feel much more comfortable, the Flyers had to find a way to bring the preparation and performance they displayed in Game 6 with them to a place in which they had lost 10 of their previous 11 games here.

Quite the Garden spot in New York. So how could they make it a nice place to visit?

“Enjoy it; play our game,” Timonen said. “We are a good team when we skate and we forecheck and play aggressive and not think too much. Go after these guys and go from there.

“It seems like sometimes we think about too much and we’re not living in the moment. Then we’re in trouble. We just have to enjoy the moment and go out there and do our jobs.”

Kimmo Timonen might have some hard decisions to make in the coming days, weeks or months. He’s been around a long time, and he knows how to separate those decisions from the more important matters at hand.

He also knows how to seize the day when the time is right.

“Whenever happened in the past is behind us,” Vigneault said. “It’s one game and it’s winner-take-all. I think it’s fair to say that whoever’s top players perform the best is probably the team that is going to win this game.”

... Wayne Simmonds on playing a Game 7: “When you’re young and you’re playing in your driveway, definitely this is what you dream of. This is my first Game 7 and it doesn’t get better than this.”

Before the game, Rangers coach Alain Vigneault challenged his better players to perform up to their capabilities.

This is a Rangers team that through the first six games had seen star defenseman Ryan McDonagh not contribute at all offensively (no points, minus-2 rating), top forward Rick Nash underperform as usual (no goals, four assists), have goalie Henrik Lundqvist look very ordinary at times and was held down by a power play that was barely clicking at better than a 10 percent clip (3 for 28).

Add it all up and it was easy to conclude that although the Rangers have appeared to have the upper hand most of the time in this series ... they haven’t been good.
NEW YORK — Craig Berube was a Stanley Cup playoffs rookie at the beginning of the Flyers-Rangers series, his first as an NHL head coach. By the time it whipped into its seventh game, he'd already had the full range of experience.

He'd changed goalies. He'd dealt with injuries. He'd scrambled lines, attempting to work certain players out of slumps. He'd matched and countered and re-countered the Rangers' lines. He'd adjusted defensive pairings. He'd tried young players and old.

And whatever would happen Wednesday at Madison Square Garden, he figured he'd be most prepared for the next time.

"I like coaching," Berube said, as the series was about to go the distance. "And that is what I am doing. All that stuff goes into coaching. It's what you have to do as a coach — make adjustments, do certain things. Things happen. Injuries happen. We lost Nik Grossmann and had to put different people in the lineup.

"It's all part of it."

So it was, all of the personnel changes, all of the in-game maneuvers. But so, too, was the mental preparation, with Berube having maneuvered through the series never allowing the Flyers to sag into a two-game losing streak.

"Today, we just went over a few things and had a meeting," he said, as the teams prepared to play for the second time in as many nights. "I told them it's important that we get skating right away. It's two good teams, and you have to be ready from the start.

"I haven't done anything different, to be honest with you," he added. "Like I said, I try to keep it as normal as we can. It's a big game. I have to keep my emotions in check. The players do, too."

The Flyers started the series with a loss, but recovered and ultimately forced Game 7 with a 5-2 victory in Game 6, their best, to that point, in the playoffs. In it, Berube made multiple successful moves, including dressing Erik Gustafsson, who would score a goal.

By Wednesday, he was just ready for a series verdict.

"Thinking about the series before it started, I thought it would be a long one for sure," he said. "I thought the teams were fairly equal. We split during the regular season, home and home. So I thought looking at that side of it, it was going to be a long series."

The first, he'd hoped, in a no-longer-new coaching career.

Delaware County Times LOADED: 05.01.2014
PHILADELPHIA — It was the spring, and it was hockey, and the Flyers were three losses into a playoff series Tuesday. Craig Berube, for one, was not about to accept the usual.

He’d been aware of the situation since 1986, as a player, as an observer from afar, as the head coach since the third game of this season. And he’d seen it all. Mostly, though, he’d seen too many emotionless exits.

The Flyers have specialized in that ever since they began to stalk their third Stanley Cup in the middle 1970s. Every spring, all but one NHL team will be eliminated. But few can do it like the Flyers, who have been ousted by everything from blue-line goals, to goals that the fans and the goaltender never see, to defeats so lacking in urgency that the head coach could charge them with being in a “choking situation” and get away with it.

Send the Flyers into an elimination game, and chances are their captain will be concussed, their goaltender will be pulled, their chairman will blame the refs or the fans will boo the general manager — all on the same night, if necessary.

So what were the signs Tuesday that it would be any different in Game 6 of a first-round series against the New York Rangers? Weren’t the Flyers thoroughly outperformed a couple of days earlier in Madison Square Garden? Hadn’t they been sloppy in their end, too slow to make the proper pass, too inconsistent in everything?

Weren’t they ready to hustle over to Voorhees in a couple of days, rip the coach a little bit, then promise to return in August and try it all again?

Or was it possible to detect something different this time?

"It’s hard," Berube was saying, trying to gauge the pregame mood. "It’s real hard. I think the guys are focused. I haven’t gone into the locker room — or to practice or anything else — and said, ‘My team’s not focused,’ or ‘Our team is focused and is ready to play.’"

"It’s a hard thing to pick out."

So he wouldn’t wait for it. Instead, he would act. And because he did, the Flyers didn’t just win Game 6, 5-2, they so dominated it that it will be the Rangers who could themselves be shaken as the series reaches Game 7 Wednesday in the Garden.

Berube changed his defense, replacing Hal Gill and activating Erik Gustafsson. And Gustafsson would score a goal. He changed his lines, trying Claude Giroux with Michael Raffl, and later with Vinny Lecavalier. Giroux scored for the second consecutive game. After auditioning Brayden Schenn on the top line in Game 5, Tuesday he reunited him with Wayne Simmonds, who would score a hat trick.

Suddenly, everything Berube tried was working. But nothing worked more than his No. 1 demand: Don’t let the season end, not in that familiar manner.

"We need to get people in the battle more," he said. "I think we’ve made it too easy on the Rangers. You’ve got to skate and you’ve got to be more aggressive."

"They are a fast team, and I think we are worried about their speed a little too much."

Early Tuesday, the Flyers should have been more concerned with their play than what the Rangers were up to, turning the puck over nine times in the first period. But in the leading indicator that there was something different about them this spring, there they were, threatened by elimination … and with a goaltender able to dominate.

Whether by covering the goal line with his pads, snapping pucks out of the sky with his glove, denying rebounds or cutting down angles, Steve Mason was giving the Flyers the change-the-series-level goaltender they had historically lacked.
The Flyers staved off elimination by bullying the Rangers at home on Tuesday. Now they are gearing up for their 16th Game 7 in team history.

The only other time the Flyers and Rangers met in a Game 7 was in the 1974 semifinals. The Flyers won that deciding game at home and eventually collected their first Stanley Cup championship in that same playoff run.

The Flyers are 9-6 all time in Game 7s. They are 3-3 on the road in Game 7 scenarios and have won their last two Game 7s away from the Wells Fargo Center.

New York will be playing in its 12th Game 7. The Blueshirts have gone 6-5 in their previous 11 occasions but are a perfect 5-0 in Game 7s played at Madison Square Garden.

The Rangers have also won a seven-game series in the first round of the playoffs in each of the last two seasons. They beat the Ottawa Senators in 2012 and dispatched the Washington Capitals in 2013.

5. This and that
• Simmonds' hat trick in Game 6 was the first by a Flyer in the playoffs since Claude Giroux and Sean Couturier each scored three times in an 8-5 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins on April 13, 2012.
• Lundqvist is 3-1 with a .963 save percentage and 1.00 goals-against average in four career Game 7 starts.
• The Flyers have scored seven of their 15 goals in the series in the first period.
• Martin St. Louis, Brad Richards and Giroux each have two goals and four assists in the series.
• The winner of this series will take on Pittsburgh in the next round.
Berube on Game 7: ‘Give everything you've got’

Tim Panaccio
April 30, 2014, 11:30 am

FLYERS’ GAME 7 HISTORY
4/18/1968: PHI 1 vs STL 3 L
5/05/1974: PHI 4 vs NNY 3 W
5/13/1975: PHI 4 vs NYI 1 W
4/25/1976: PHI 7 vs TOR 3 W
4/26/1981: PHI 1 vs CGY 4 L
5/02/1987: PHI 5 vs NYI 1 W
5/31/1987: PHI 1 at EDM 3 L
4/16/1988: PHI 4 at WAS 5 (OT) L
4/29/1989: PHI 4 at PIT 1 W
5/26/2000: PHI 1 vs NJ 2 L
4/22/2003: PHI 6 vs TOR 1 W
5/22/2004: PHI 1 at TB 2 L
4/22/2008: PHI 3 at WAS 2 (OT) W
5/14/2010: PHI 4 at BOS 3 W
4/26/2011: PHI 5 vs BUF 2 W

There are only four survivors. Four players who last played on the Flyers in a Game 7.

And it was only as recent as 2011, when Claude Giroux, Scott Hartnell, Braydon Coburn and Kimmo Timonen played a Game 7 at Wells Fargo Center against Buffalo.

Coincidentally, they are also the same four survivors of the historic Game 7 against Boston in 2010 at TD Garden.

No one else on Craig Berube’s roster has experienced a Game 7 in a Flyers uniform.

The Flyers have never played a Game 7 at Madison Square Garden. Wednesday night, against the Rangers, they will.

“If we win Game 7, it’s going to feel even more special because it’s over there,” said team captain Claude Giroux. “We’ve got to take that as a motivation.”

Everyone treats Game 7s differently.

In 2004, coach Ken Hitchcock stared into a dressing room with a veteran group of players facing a final hurrah as Flyers that included Tony Amonte, Keith Primeau, Mark Recchi, John LeClair and Jeremy Roenick. It was a team so banged up it had Sami Kapanen on defense.

Hitchcock told them to “embrace the moment,” because they may never get another shot.

“Game 7s are a wonderful gift,” Hitchcock said. “You should feel proud to play in these kind of games.”

Tonight, it’s Craig Berube’s turn.

“I think it’s the same as [Game 6],” Berube replied, when asked what he’ll say to his players. “We need to come out and we need to be an aggressive hockey team [tonight] and play with a lot of passion and energy.

“Want to move on? You’ve got to give everything you got. Give everything you’ve got [tonight], everything. We can’t have anybody not giving everything they got every shift [tonight].”

Berube’s last Game 7 as a Flyer was the 2000 Eastern Conference finals against New Jersey. It would be the last game Eric Lindros ever played in a Flyers uniform after being crushed by Scott Stevens during the 2-1 loss.

Unlike the Boston series a few years ago, the Flyers didn’t rally from an 0-3 series deficit to force a Game 7 against the Rangers. It’s been back and forth the entire series.

“I don’t think it matters how you get to Game 7,” Berube said. “We’re there and that was our goal and we accomplished one goal and we’ve got to go in and accomplish another one and that’s the way we look at it.

“We all talked about getting to that game. We’re there now. So we’ve got to prepare ourselves to go win a game and that’s about it. I don’t think it matters how you get there.”

History is on the Flyers side. Sort of.

The Flyers have won their last three Game 7s – vs. Buffalo, vs. Boston, and vs. Washington in the 2008 Eastern Conference quarterfinals.

Interestingly, their 2004 Game 7 loss at Tampa Bay to John Tortorella’s Lightning, a series in which Vinny Lecavalier played, was also the last series the Flyers played in – until this one – in which neither team was able to win consecutive games.

That’s one streak the Flyers want to break tonight. That’s also one streak the Rangers want to keep going.

Young defenseeman Erik Gustafsson, who has the Flyers’ only goal in this series, is also the same four survivors of the historic Game 7 playing for the Rangers.

“It’s going to be unreal,” Gustafsson said. “I’ve been watching the games up there. It’s been pretty intense. The atmosphere has been unreal so I’m just going to try to soak that in as well and we’ve just got to come in and play a full 60-minute effort.”

Jakub Voracek has never played in a Game 7 in the NHL.

“It’s come down to the one game,” he said. “Obviously it’s been a long series. We won there before. We’ve just got to play the kind of game we did [in Game 6] and be good on the puck and be good on the power play. Hopefully we will get a win.”

Giroux and others have been saying all through this round how important it was for the Flyers to have faced so much adversity this season, going back to their 1-7 start, and their long climb back into the playoff picture.

They feel they’ve overcome odds and tonight’s game is just one more obstacle to deal with.

“They’re used to it,” Berube said. “Since I’ve taken over, they obviously had a tough start, it’s been an uphill climb the whole time.

“They’ve played a lot of hockey where their backs have been against the wall and they’re used to it. It’s in them they have good character, we’ve got the same test [tonight].”

At MSG

The Flyers are 1-1 when facing elimination at Madison Square Garden. They lost the third game of a three-game preliminary round series, 9-3, on April 9, 1983 and won Game 4 of the 1986 Patrick Division semifinal, 7-1, on April 14, 1986.

No overtime

This is the first Flyers playoff series to go six games without requiring overtime since the 2000 Eastern Conference Finals vs. New Jersey, which the Flyers lost in seven. It’s just the eighth Flyers playoff series all-time to go at least six games without an overtime.

Hat Trick

Wayne Simmonds had a hat trick in Game 6 (see story / montage). The last Flyer to record a hat trick against the Rangers (regular season) was Simon Gagne on Dec. 30, 2009. Eric Lindros had a hat trick in Game 3 the last time these teams met in the playoffs back in 1997, when the Flyers won the conference and then were swept by Detroit in the Stanley Cup Final.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.01.2014
Mason, fans share special moment in Flyers’ win

Tim Panaccio
April 30, 2014, 8:00 am

FLYERS-RANGERS SCHEDULE
Eastern Conference Quarterfinals
Flyers vs. Rangers
(Series tied, 3-3)
Game 1 at NYR: 4-1 Rangers
Game 2 at NYR: 4-2 Flyers
Game 3 at PHI: 4-1 Rangers
Game 4 at PHI: 2-1 Flyers
Game 5 at NYR: 4-2 Rangers
Game 6 at PHI: 5-2 Flyers
Game 7 at NYR: Wed., 7 p.m., CSN

His shutout ended on a tip-in goal from the Rangers’ Carl Hagelin with less than seven minutes to go.

Flyers goalie Steve Mason was a bit down after what had been one continuous, spectacular effort in a playoff game.

And then the fans picked him up.

“Mason, Mason,” they chanted louder and louder.

Finally, Mason raised his stick in acknowledgement amid a standing ovation.

Moments like that are few and far between in sports. They should be cherished.

“That are moments that send chills down your spine,” the 25-year-old goaltender said. “You have 20,000 people chanting your name. Those type of moments don’t happen too often. It’s kind of nice to take it in.

“They’re showing their appreciation. You pick up on it and acknowledge it. Those are the type of moments that when you are done playing, you can look back on and say they’re pretty special.”

Game 6 was pretty special for Mason, who gave the Flyers the kind of early saves that made all the difference in a 5-2 victory that sets up Wednesday’s Game 7 at Madison Square Garden (see story).

In the first five minutes of the game, Mason had to endure a firing range of Rangers shots. Four of them were actually off net, but the Flyers were having one mental meltdown in front of him after another (see 10 observations). The three saves he did make were nothing short of critical.

Before the period ended, he stopped both Rick Nash and Anton Stralman from point-blank range, just feet from the blue paint with the Flyers clutching a 1-0 lead (see highlights).

Momentum stops.

It was the engine that propelled the Flyers to victory, with a little help from Wayne Simmonds’ hat trick (see story).

“He’s done it time after time this year,” Simmonds said. “They came in waves and he made some huge saves for us. It allowed us to get our footing under us.

“We went from there. We got our offensive opportunities and we capitalized tonight. If it wasn’t for Mase, I don’t know if those chances would have happened.”

Exactly.
Flyers can't overcome 2nd period in Game 7 loss

Sarah Baicker
May 31, 2014, 12:15 am

NEW YORK – With their backs against the wall a day ago at the Wells Fargo Center, the Flyers came alive in the second period, scoring three goals and commanding control of the game to keep their playoff hopes alive.

But Wednesday night at Madison Square Garden, it was the second period that lost them the game. They all but fell apart entirely in the middle stanza of Game 7, giving up the only two goals the New York Rangers needed to win the game 2-1 (see story).

Largely because of what transpired in those 20 minutes, it is the Rangers, and not the Flyers, who will move on in the playoffs to face the Pittsburgh Penguins.

What a difference 24 hours can make.

“You look at the 60 minutes of the game, and the second period was what really cost us,” Steve Mason said.

The Flyers entered the period holding tight to the game’s momentum. They had a solid start in the first period -- stronger than any of the series’ preceding six games. They just couldn’t keep it going long enough.

The were outshot by the Rangers, 18-5, in the second period. Their overwhelming lead in faceoff wins evaporated. They had looked so strong during 5-on-5 play for the first time all series early on, but right from the start of the second period, they suddenly were outplayed at even strength.

“In the second period, they took it to us,” Mason said. “We had trouble breaking out of our own zone, they had odd-man rushes and we seemed to be spinning our legs and nothing was happening.”

The Flyers failed twice in the period to capitalize on power play opportunities. But more than that, they actually gave the Rangers shorthanded chances and seemed to fall flat when each man advantage expired.

That was certainly the case on Dan Carcillo’s goal that gave the Rangers the 1-0 lead.

“When they got that goal, it was after a power play that wasn’t very good,” coach Craig Berube said. “They ended up getting a chance shorthanded off it, and we kind of went back on our heels.

“We didn’t do a very good job in the second period of making plays and getting the puck out of our end and we let them win the game in the second period.”

The Rangers’ second goal, knocked home by Benoit Pouliot about eight minutes later, all but solidified the end of the Flyers’ season. It was as simple as that, Jakub Voracek said.

“They had a couple chances, they buried two goals,” he said. “They had a couple chances, we didn’t. It was a big difference.”

The Flyers’ second-period frustrations were perhaps best exemplified by the one solid chance they had to beat Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist with about four minutes left.

Claude Giroux had a perfect chance to best the Rangers’ goalie, teed up his shot … and sent the puck over the net.

“I was just trying to get away from the D,” Giroux said. “Not sure if he got his stick on it. Just trying to put it high because the goalie was low. I tried to shoot it high.”

He missed. The Rangers carried their 2-0 lead into the third period.

The Flyers’ late-game efforts weren’t enough. Though they were “positive” they would be able to tie the game up and force overtime in the third period, Giroux said, they simply couldn’t work past the 20 minutes of the game they threw away.
As bad as the second period was, the Flyers got back in the game when rookie Jason Akeson scored off his own blocked shot early in the third on Henrik Lundqvist to make it a nail-biter.

That goal gave the Flyers a shot of adrenaline. The Flyers began a push but the Rangers answered with stronger defense around Lundqvist.

“IT was all positive [on the bench],” Akeson said. “Everyone was giving it their all. It’s a tough way to go out, that’s for sure, when you’re expecting to win.”

That was the mindset because the Flyers had come back so many times before -- 11 comeback wins in the third period during the regular season. Not this time.

The game ended on a series of Rangers icings, one debatable with less than three ticks left on the clock that saw a faceoff at center ice instead of in the Rangers’ zone.

That didn’t lose the game or the series for the Flyers.

“Everyone feels lousy,” Berube said. “But I’m proud of my players. They went through a lot this year. We were stuck in a hole for a while and they battled out of it.

“Stuck together and went to a Game 7. I’m proud of them. They’re a great bunch of guys and there’s a lot of character in our locker room.”

Indeed, they did, climbing out of a 1-7 grave in October to resurrect their season and playoff chances by the end.

“It’s the worst feeling ever,” Voracek said. “You come so close, do or die and lose that critical Game 7. That’s hockey. We got to make sure and learn from it and use it in the future.”

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.01.2014
10 observations from Flyers-Rangers Game 7

Tim Panaccio
April 30, 2014, 9:45 pm

Zac Rinaldo checks Brad Richards into the boards during the Flyers' 2-1 loss to the Rangers in Game 7. (AP)

Ten observations from the Flyers' 2-1 loss to the New York Rangers in Game 7 of their first-round series (see Instant Replay).

1. The Flyers had a much better start Wednesday night than they did in Game 6 a day ago. Though the Rangers looked stronger too, the Flyers appeared more confident and aggressive on the puck -- something they largely failed to accomplish in games 1-5. The first 10 minutes of Game 7 were the best the Flyers have played at Madison Square Garden this series. And, for the record, those 10 minutes finally felt like playoff hockey.

2. Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist actually looked a bit shaky early on. He seemed unsure of where the puck was a handful of times in the first period, and gave up a number of dangerous rebounds. Lucky for him, though, the Rangers' defense was there to clean up in front of him.

3. Jason Akeson, considering his youth and NHL experience, has been among the smartest players on the ice all series. He plays hard and plays responsible, and that was the case once again Wednesday. When you think about it, his high-sticking double-minor in Game 1 was really his only error. He was validated by that huge third-period goal.

4. Oh, Zac Rinaldo. He just can't help himself, can he? The Flyers' feisty winger took an ill-advised interference call in the first period that could have been a big momentum changer for the Rangers. The Flyers' kill has been so good this series, though, and the game remained scoreless. But back to Rinaldo - he has such potential, and is a much more responsible player this season than last, but he's still a liability.

5. What is it about Dan Carcillo when facing his former team? The guy goes from a healthy scratch to scoring a key goal -- twice. He's got five goals in eight games against the Flyers.

6. The Flyers' power play, after looking sharp in Tuesday's win at the Wells Fargo Center, was once again off its game Wednesday night. In fact, on the Flyers' first two power plays of the night, it was Rangers players who had the better chances.

7. At one point, fans at Madison Square Garden chanted “cheesesteaks suck.” I mean, I’m not a big fan of the cheesesteak (don’t hate me!), but I know they’re Philly’s iconic food and I would defend them to the death. But I was amused! Probably the most original taunt I’ve ever heard at an NHL arena.

8. Two Flyers players who have largely struggled this series continued that trend in Game 7 in noticeable fashion: Brayden Schenn and Braydon Coburn. Coburn once again seemed panicky, sending passes at his teammates’ feet. Schenn struggled with effectiveness much of the series, too easily getting pushed off the puck or fumbling on shots.

9. Steve Mason, once again, led the Flyers. He did what he could to weather the Rangers’ second-period storm. The Rangers, after trailing in shots at the close of the first period, sent 18 shots on Mason, compared to the five the Flyers had on Lundqvist. He didn’t miss a step from Game 6 -- but he was the only Flyer who didn’t miss a step.

10. A heck of an effort by the Flyers in the closing minutes of this one ... but it wasn’t enough. And so, let’s end this with a question attached to an observation: After the Flyers' 0-3 start and their fired coach ... was the season a success or a failure?

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.01.2014
NEW YORK – This time, there was no third-period comeback. No heroics from the Flyers' big guns.

The goalie? Steve Mason did his best to single-handedly carry the Flyers in Game 7 against the Rangers. Without him? It would have been a blowout and not the 2-1 crushing loss that ended the Flyers' season Wednesday night at Madison Square Garden.

The Blueshirts will face the Penguins on Friday to start the Metropolitan Division Finals in Pittsburgh.

The Rangers had a 2-0 lead when Jason Akeson scored off his own blocked shot by Marc Staal for his second goal of the series that breathed life into the Flyers at 4:32 of the third period.

Goalie Henrik Lundqvist reacted to Akeson's first shot but was not set for the follow-up. That led to a strong push by the Flyers and several minutes when they nearly tied the game before the Rangers answered defensively to clear pucks out of their end.

Mason was simply unconscious in the second period with 16 saves on 18 shots, as the Rangers drew momentum off two failed Flyers power plays. The two goals in the second proved to be all Lundqvist would need in front of him.

The Rangers had won their previous three Game 7s, dating back to the spring of 2008.

Playoff history

The Flyers were 0 for 2 on the power play. They were brutal at the worst possible time.

The Flyers were very poor on the setup and indecisive on two second-period power plays. One shot on the first one; none on the second with several blocked shots.

The Rangers were 0 for 1 on the man advantage.

Second period

Benoit Pouliot made it 2-0 soon after the Flyers failed to score on their second power play on a laser cross-ice pass from Derick Brassard, who had a nice pass from Anton Stralman. It was a backbreaker of a goal. Zac Rinaldo had a failed cleating attempt, too.

Shorthanded chances

The Rangers had two of them. Mason bailed his team out with a save during the Flyers' first power play and also turned aside Ryan McDonagh on the Flyers' second power play.

Penalty kill

The Rangers killed off 21 straight Rangers power plays. The Flyers did a good job in the series collapsing down low to take away passes in the middle.

Faceoffs

The Flyers were very poor on the setup and indecisive on two second-period power plays. One shot on the first one; none on the second with several blocked shots.

The Rangers had won their previous three Game 7s, dating back to the spring of 2008.

Playoff history

The Rangers came into the game 5-0 lifetime in Game 7s at Madison Square Garden.

A first

This was the first time the Flyers and Rangers met in a Game 7 in this arena. Another first

The opening period was scoreless, the first time that happened in the series.

Fast start

Both teams came out skating hard. Rangers coach Alain Vigneault inserted Dan Carcillo in the lineup on Brad Richards' line for J.T. Miller to be an irritant. The Flyers led in shots, 10-7, and they were quality in nature through the first 14 minutes of play.

Mason's glove

He got a piece of Rick Nash's wide-open shot in the slot with 3:57 left in the first period off a Flyers turnover. He then followed it with a rebound save on Marty St. Louis within a millisecond.

Mason's pad

He had a couple in the game but his left pad stop on St. Louis soon after Carcillo's goal was priceless.

First goal

The Rangers struck first at 3:06 of the second period on another Carcillo goal out of the penalty box, but not directly tied to the penalty. He was serving a minor for too many men on the ice and was out for a while as the Rangers caused havoc in front of Mason, who had very little help from Andrew MacDonald and Braydon Coburn. Carcillo scored off a tip-in from a Mats Zuccarello shot. The last team to give up the first goal in a Game 7 and win were the Flyers in 2010 against Boston.

Scratches

Defenseman Hal Gill; forwards Jay Rosehill, Tye McGinn, Steve Downie (post-concussion syndrome), and Chris VandeVelde; goalie Cal Heeter.

Black Aces

Defensemen Brandon Manning, Oliver Lauridsen and Mark Alt; forwards Scott Laughton, Ben Holmstrom, Nick Cousins, Brandon Alderson, Petr Straka; goalie Yann Danis.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.01.2014
Mason's up to the task in goal in do-or-die Game 6

Anthony Coppola, CHL 10:04 a.m. EDT April 30, 2014

PHILADELPHIA – With 56 seconds left in the third period, 20,137 fans at Wells Fargo Center vibrated the walls with chants of "Mason, Mason, Mason."

The legion of orange-and-black faithful were recognizing Flyers goalie Steve Mason, who deserved to hear it from the crowd after Tuesday's must-have 5-2 victory over the Rangers in Game 6 of the Metropolitan Division semifinals.

Philadelphia's netminder was dynamite, making 34 saves — many of the spectacular variety — to help the Flyers reach tonight's decisive Game 7 against New York at Madison Square Garden. The victory was the second of Mason's postseason career and undoubtedly his most revered.

"Those are the moments that send chills down your spine, when you have 20,000 people chanting your name," said Mason, who responded to Philadelphia's fans with a lift of the stick. "Those type of moments don't happen too often so it's kind of nice to just to take it in. They're showing their appreciation and you throw the stick up in the air and acknowledge it. Those are the type of moments I think when you're done playing you can look back on and say they were pretty special."

Special is one of many adjectives that could be used to describe Mason's play Tuesday.

The five goals scored by the Flyers in Game 6 were more than Mason received in his previous two playoff starts, when Philadelphia managed just four goals combined while splitting Games 4 and 5. But if not for Mason, Philadelphia may not have had the chance to find its offensive groove in Tuesday's elimination game.

The Flyers could not get out of their own way in the defensive zone in the first period. Philadelphia committed nine giveaways in the opening 20 minutes, the majority coming inside its own blue line courtesy of relentless Rangers pressure.

Mason, though, would have an answer for all 13 New York shots in the opening period. The netminder's steadiness, coupled with the first of three Wayne Simmonds goals, gave the Flyers the momentum heading into the locker room after one.

"He's done it time after time this year," Simmonds said of Mason. "They came in waves and he made some huge saves for us and allowed us to get our footing under us."

"We went from there and we got our offensive opportunities and we capitalized tonight. But if it wasn't for Masey, I don't know if those chances would have happened."

The saves kept coming for Mason. The Flyers goalie made arguably his best stop by gloving a Benoit Pouliot offering with 6 minutes, 23 seconds left in the second period. Philadelphia was leading 2-0 and killing a Erik Gustafsson penalty when Pouliot raced through the left circle and tried to snap a wrister by Mason, who flashed his quick right hand to snare the shot.

Gustafsson lauded the play of Mason following the game and was particularly thankful of the save he made while watching from the sin bin.

"Yeah, I was pretty happy with that one," a laughing Gustafsson said.

Mason eventually lost the shutout bid on a wrist shot by Carl Hagelin from the right circle that found its way through a host of bodies with 6:34 to play in the third period. Rangers forward Mats Zuccarello added a garbage goal in the game's final minute that merely put a dent in Mason's sterling postseason numbers.

Mason's .938 save percentage is second only to Boston's Tuukka Rask (.961) while his 1.95 goals against average is third best among playoff goaltenders. The 25-year-old netminder, who before this season appeared in just four postseason games with Columbus in 2008-09, has unquestionably given Philadelphia a boost since returning from an upper-body injury that cost him starts in the first three games of this series.
FLYERS NOTES: Game 7 at MSG dream come true for Voracek

Dave Isaac, Courier-Post 10:02 a.m. EDT April 30, 2014

PHILADELPHIA – Jake Voracek had a good feeling when he woke up from his pregame nap. He packed his bag and took it to the rink, just in case the Flyers won and forced a Game 7.

With a 5-2 victory over the New York Rangers, the Flyers got on a train to Manhattan, where Voracek will play in his second ever Game 7.

"Game 7 in the Garden — when you're growing up, that's what you're dreaming of," the right wing said. "Just kind of 'go, have fun and hope you're on the winning side.'"

Last time he played in a Game 7, he was with the Halifax Mooseheads, and the game went double overtime. Voracek's team won. He's hoping to go 2-for-2.

"I was believing in ourselves that we would force a Game 7," Voracek said. "I think we were the better team today, which is a good sign for tomorrow as well."

With a Game 6 win, the Flyers sure made things interesting to make this series go the distance. The Flyers are 8-10 in Game 6 when trailing 3-2 and are 31-36 in elimination games. It also means the Rangers have lost an astounding 12 consecutive games when they have a series lead and have not won a series in fewer than seven games since 2008.

"I don't think it matters how you get to Game 7," coach Craig Berube said. "We're there, and that was our goal tonight. We accomplished one goal, and we gotta go and accomplish another one tomorrow. That's the way we look at it."

For being down in the series three times, the Flyers were rather cool, calm and collected in how they returned from the dead just like they did all season.

They're even cooler customers about moving on after a momentum-building Game 6 victory.

"You hop on the train and put it behind you," said Steve Mason, who was phenomenal in making 34 saves in Game 6. "I have a few episodes of 'Scandal' to catch up on."

• Simmonds on racism in sports: Wayne Simmonds has dealt with enough racism for one lifetime. He probably hoped not to be asked about Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling and his alleged racist comments.

And he probably wouldn't have been, especially in a playoff race, but Los Angeles Times columnist Sandy Banks penned a piece that made it relevant to the winger.

"Let the real estate magnate and Clippers owner take his millions and buy a hockey team," Banks wrote. "Then he won't have to worry about black superstars showing up for games on his girlfriend's arm."

Tell that to three black members of the Philadelphia Eagles who have shown up to Flyers games this week. In a predominantly white sport, Simmonds said, racism in hockey is just as rampant as any other sport.

"It's not subtle to me," Simmonds said. "I'm kind of a fly in a bucket of milk here. There's not too many guys, African-Americans, playing in the league."

• Grossmann out: Defenseman Nick Grossmann had surgery to repair tendon damage in his right ankle and will be out eight to 10 weeks.

Courier-Post LOADED: 05.01.2014
Game 7: Flyers — Rangers GAMEDAY

Dave Isaac, Courier-Post 8:33 a.m. EDT April 30, 2014

Today: Philadelphia Flyers at New York Rangers (series tied 3-3)
Site: Madison Square Garden
Time: 7 p.m.
TV: Comcast SportsNet (Jim Jackson, Bill Clement & Steve Coates)
Radio: 97.5 FM, The Fanatic (Tim Saunders & Chris Therien)

Series so far: Game 6 provided the Flyers' best effort thus far. They won 5-2 last night to force a Game 7.

FLYERS PROJECTED LINEUP
Forwards
12-Michael Raffl, 28-Claude Giroux (C), 93-Jake Voracek
19-Scott Hartnell (A), 10-Brayden Schenn, 17-Wayne Simmonds
24-Matt Read, 14-Sean Couturier, 42-Jason Akeson
36-Zac Rinaldo, 40-Vinny Lecavalier, 18-Adam Hall

Defensemen
44-Kimmo Timonen & 5-Braydon Coburn
47-Andrew MacDonald & 32-Mark Streit
26-Erik Gustafsson & 22-Luke Schenn

Goalie
35-Steve Mason

RANGERS PROJECTED LINEUP
Forwards
61-Rick Nash, 21-Derek Stepan, 26-Martim St. Louis
67-Benoit Pouliot, 16-Derick Brassard, 36-Mats Zuccarello
62-Carl Hagelin, 19-Brad Richards, 10-J.T. Miller
22-Brian Boyle, 28-Dominic Moore, 15-Derek Dorsett

Defensemen
27-Ryan McDonagh & 5-Dan Girardi
18-Marc Staal & 6-Anton Stralman
17-John Moore & 8-Kevin Klein

Goalie
30-Henrik Lundqvist

TOP SCORERS
Flyers: Claude Giroux (2-4-6); Wayne Simmonds (4-1-5); Jake Voracek (2-2-4); Mark Streit (1-2-3); Scott Hartnell (0-3-3); Brayden Schenn (0-3-3).
Rangers: Martin St. Louis (2-4-6); Brad Richards (2-4-6); Rick Nash (0-4-4); Derek Stepan (2-2-4); Carl Hagelin (2-2-4).

GOALIE STATS
Flyers: Steve Mason (4 games, 2-1, 1.95 GAA, .939 save percentage); Ray Emery (3 games, 1-2, 3.49 GAA, .888 save percentage).
Rangers: Henrik Lundqvist (6 games, 3-3, 2.31 GAA, .910 save percentage).

FLYERS NOTES
The Flyers are 9-6 in franchise history in Game 7 and are 1-1 in elimination games at Madison Square Garden. ... Wayne Simmonds’ hat trick was the first of his playoff career. ... The Flyers’ penalty kill has killed 20 consecutive penalties. ... In their three victories, the Flyers’ power play is 5-for-8. In three losses, it’s 1-for-11. ... Steve Mason has never won a game in Madison Square Garden. He is 0-2-1 in four career games there, only one a postseason contest.

RANGERS NOTES
New York is 5-0 in franchise history in Game 7’s at Madison Square Garden. ... New York has now lost 12 consecutive games when holding a series lead. ... Henrik Lundqvist has been pedestrian in this series so far. He’s got a 2.31 goals-against average and .910 save percentage. ... Carl Hagelin was the most-involved Ranger in Game 6. He had seven shots, a goal and two takeaways. ... New York outshot the Flyers 36-29 in Game 6. In each contest but Game 1, the losing team has outshot the winning team.

INJURIES
Flyers: D Chris Pronger is on injured reserve and will miss the entire season with post-concussion syndrome. ... D Nick Grossmann is out 8-10 weeks after having surgery to repair tendons on his right ankle.
Rangers: F Chris Kreider is out with a hand injury.

THE WEEK AHEAD
Thursday: TBA
Friday: TBA
Saturday: TBA
Sunday: TBA
Monday: TBA
Tuesday: TBA
Wednesday: TBA

Courier-Post LOADED: 05.01.2014
Seventh heaven

Dave Isaac, CHL 12:26 a.m. EDT April 30, 2014

PHILADELPHIA — Wayne Simmonds was quiet for most of the first five games against the New York Rangers, and everyone wearing orange and black had a feeling that wouldn’t last long.

“He was jumping everywhere,” captain Claude Giroux said. “He was strong on the puck. When Wayne wants to win the battle, he wins it, and he gives everyone in the room a little motivation to do the same.”

Simmonds was the leader Tuesday, netting a hat trick in a 5-2 win over the Rangers to force a Game 7 in New York tonight.

“Obviously it’s do or die. Win or we go home,” Simmonds said.

“We’re not ready to go home yet. We want to move on to the second round.”

Before the Flyers began pummeling the Rangers, things looked like they were on a familiar path.

As in most of the other games in this series, the Flyers immediately went into retreat mode in their own end. They turned the puck over multiple times, and the Rangers couldn’t capitalize.

Also like the other games, the Flyers were given an early power-play opportunity.

This time, Simmonds made sure they capitalized. He scored his first goal at 7:08 after his own shot went off the foot of Rangers defenseman Ryan McDonagh and Simmonds put home the rebound to beat Henrik Lundqvist 5-hole.

“I guess that’s becoming kind of my forte,” Simmonds said. “I actually had a great chance before the goal, too. (Giroux) gave me a great pass. I got the puck off my skate from (Scott Hartnell), and I just kept banging at it.”

The goal came after the Flyers made turnover after turnover in their own end. Goalie Steve Mason was phenomenal, making 34 saves — including 13 in the first period — and bailing the Flyers out when they needed him most.

“He had so many games like that,” winger Jake Voracek said. “He’s a very good goaltender. It was a huge game and a huge game for him, especially because when we were up 1-0 or 2-0, he came up with huge saves, which makes the difference in the playoffs.”

Simmonds struck again at 1:32 of the second period when Brayden Schenn tried to get a shot off, but McDonagh got a stick on him, and the errant puck was left for Simmonds and an empty Rangers net with Lundqvist out of position.

“The right wing got to the net better than he had all season, and it was thanks to aggressiveness the Flyers focused on heading into the game.”

“Chief (coach Craig Berube) really relayed that message to us,” Simmonds said. “I think we were, I don’t know if I want to say ‘scared,’ but we’re used to getting penalties, and sometimes when you’re overly aggressive the refs tend to put the arm up and you kind of shy away from physical play.”

Simmonds scored again with 4:41 left in the second period, again on the power play.

His third of the night marked the first Flyers playoff hat trick since Giroux and Sean Couturier each netted one against the Pittsburgh Penguins on April 13, 2012.

By the time the third period rolled around, the Flyers had chased Lundqvist, whom the Rangers decided to rest for the pivotal game in the series tonight in New York.

Carl Hagelin finally beat Mason late in the third period, but the Flyers and Rangers traded goals after that, when the game was out of reach. The Flyers made it feel like it was out of reach long before Hagelin scored.

“Our guys, they’re passionate,” Berube said. “They want to win, but they brought a little bit more tonight with aggressiveness and tenacity and the battles, staying in the battles, fighting for shots, blocking shots. That was all there, and you need that in the playoffs.”

Leading the way was Simmonds.

“We had layered screens,” Simmonds said. “We kept the pressure up. We had second chances and third chances and fourth chances. We just kept going and didn’t quit on plays. That was the difference.”
Timonen’s future with team unknown

Dave Isaac, CHL 12:04 a.m. EDT May 1, 2014

NEW YORK – Luke Schenn considers himself lucky to have learned from one of the best.

The Flyers defenseman was paired with Kimmo Timonen last season, his first time in orange and black after a draft-day trade sent him south from Toronto.

“Every game you wouldn’t believe what he does for the team as far as little things people probably don’t notice,” Schenn said. “I see him at the practice rink with two or three ice bags on him, and he doesn’t miss a beat out there.”

Wednesday night was another classic Timonen performance. He logged more than 20 minutes in Game 7, blocked three shots and fired three toward the New York Rangers net. He killed penalties, played the power play and led the Flyers’ defense.

Perhaps it was for the last time.

The 39-year-old Finn will be an unrestricted free agent this summer and has admittedly wavered on whether he’ll return to the NHL next season.

“That’s behind me,” Timonen said before the game. “If I think about it like that, I’m gonna miss the game. I have to put that behind me and focus on the game.”

After the game, Timonen left Madison Square Garden before reporters could speak with him. He talked this season about wanting to wait until the summer to make his decision but said he wanted to feel a long playoff run.

Seven games may not have been enough.

“I don’t know,” Flyers coach Craig Berube said. “I hope not. He’s still a good player, and he played his heart out tonight.”

Timonen has been in the league since 1998, won four Olympic medals, gone to the playoffs nine times, but never lifted the Stanley Cup.

“He competes night in, night out,” Schenn said. “He’s real consistent. He’s definitely one of the best defensemen that ever played that I could learn from.”

• Akeson’s performance gives him a leg up next season: Few players can say they have more playoff experience than regular-season experience.

Jason Akeson can.

He was one of the better forwards in the Metropolitan Division semifinal series against the Rangers and had a pair of goals and an assist in seven playoff games. He’s only played two regular-season games for the Flyers: the season finale this year and last.

“I mean, for sure it gave me some experience,” Akeson said after scoring the lone Flyers goal in a Game 7 loss. “Hopefully I can make an impact on these guys and stick around next year. That’s my plan going into next year and this summer, just working hard and making sure I’m in the best shape of my life.”

Akeson played well on a line with Sean Couturier and Matt Read in the series and proved he can play an NHL speed despite his small frame.

• Berube ‘proud’ after first run as coach: When he started three games into the season, Berube was put behind the 8-ball. He had a new system to implement with a team full of players who had just come out of a three-week training camp.

Comeback after comeback, the Flyers made a good run this season before finally falling in Game 7 against the Rangers. The season went at a mile a minute, and now that everything has slowed down, Berube can’t help but feel good about the season as a whole.

“Everyone feels lousy, but I’m proud of my players,” Berube said. “They went through a lot this year. We were stuck in a hole for a while, and they battled out of it. Stuck together and went to a Game 7. I’m proud of them. They’re a great bunch of guys, and there’s a lot of character in our locker room.”

Courier-Post LOADED: 05.01.2014
Flyers season ends in Game 7 loss

Dave Isaac, CHL 12:01 a.m. EDT May 1, 2014

NEW YORK – Steve Mason sat in a locker stall with one foot on the bench, the other on the ground. He wore a Flyers cap and a face with a blank look of disbelief that his season had ended.

The goalie was the last reason why.

Mason’s 31 saves against the New York Rangers kept the Flyers in the game. A late push from his teammates was too little too late and Game 7 ended with the Rangers winning 2-1.

“Nobody in this locker room was ready to pack it in,” Mason said. “It’s tough to put into words right now what you feel. It’s a long season. After one game, boom ... it’s over.”

The goalie only played in four games and changed this series because of an injury April 12 that he revealed Wednesday was a concussion. His symptoms kept him out of action until he dressed as a backup for Game 3.

“I still had them up until the night before I played my first game,” Mason said. “I had some work done the morning of Game 4 and I seemed to be good to go for that night.”

From his start in Game 4 to the final moments of Game 7, Mason was the best Flyer.

Not getting any help in the second period of the final game is mostly why the Flyers’ season is over.

Both teams played a tight first period that had many scoring chances, but no goals. In the second period the Flyers allowed two Rangers goals, both shortly after New York penalties had expired.

The Flyers, who were so good at comebacks this season, ran out of time and magic at Madison Square Garden.

A goal by rookie Jason Akeson at 4:32 of the third period gave the Flyers hope on the bench.

“It was all positive,” said Akeson, who got the rebound of his own blocked shot and beat Henrik Lundqvist far side. “Everyone was giving it their all. It’s a tough way to go out, that’s for sure, when you’re expecting to win.”

Once again, the Flyers dug themselves a hole too deep.

Just after a power play had expired, the Rangers got the puck in deep on the Flyers and a cross-ice pass went through two Flyers defenders and onto the stick of former Flyer Dan Carcillo, who scored his second of the series.

About eight minutes later, the same thing happened. Another failed power play, another instance of Rangers pressure, another backdoor goal, this one from Benoit Pouliot. Mason had no shot at stopping either one and was busy in the second period.

He made 16 saves in the middle stanza, many of them showstoppers. He had Martin St. Louis and Rick Nash looking to the heavens after point-blank chances.

It could have been a lot worse through 40 minutes if it weren’t for the goalie.

“I tried to calm it down and make the saves I was able to make,” Mason said. “I hoped to weather the storm, but they were able to capitalize on two good chances and that was all they needed.”

The Flyers did press, though. Claude Giroux had a prime chance to tie the game in the late stages of the second period when Lundqvist was down on the ice and the top of the net was open.

“I was just trying to get away from the D,” Giroux said. “I’m not sure if he got a stick on it. The goalie was low, so I tried to shoot it high. I don’t know if it hit the crossbar or not. It happened pretty quick.”

Akeson’s goal made the game seem not so far out of reach. The Flyers fired 11 pucks at Lundqvist in the third, but only one got by him.

New York held on for dear life and for the third consecutive year, they advance to the second round of the playoffs thanks to a Game 7 win.

“It’s the worst feeling ever,” Jake Voracek said. “We came so close, basically. Do or die and you lose that critical Game 7. It’s hockey. One team had to lose. Too bad it was us. You just have to learn from it and use it in the future.”

Game 7

1 2

Dan Carcillo and Benoit Pouliot each scored second-period goals to lift the Rangers to the series win.

It was the Flyers’ first Game 7 loss since 2004 against Tampa Bay.

The Rangers improved to 6-0 all-time in Game 7s at Madison Square Garden.

Courier-Post LOADED: 05.01.2014
Power play doesn’t help Flyers

Anthony Coppola, CHL 12 a.m. EDT May 1, 2014

NEW YORK – In a season fueled by against-all-odds comebacks, the Flyers finally ran out of gas.

The frustrating part for Philadelphia is that the chances were there in its 2-1 loss to the Rangers in Game 7 of the Metropolitan Division semifinals — particularly on the power play, where the overall numbers show the Flyers were one of the more dangerous teams in the postseason.

Just not on Wednesday night.

In a game that featured only three total power play opportunities, two of them went to Philadelphia in a second period that proved to be the difference in the contest. The Flyers, who in seven playoff games posted the second-best success rate with the man advantage at 28.6 percent, were blanked at Madison Square Garden in Game 7.

“Obviously we didn’t score on the power play; it’s a man advantage, and we didn’t (capitalize),” Philadelphia right wing Jake Voracek said. “Obviously you can say that was a critical moment. That’s four minutes of the play (with the advantage) that you get to score a goal, and we didn’t.”

While the power play greatly aided the Flyers at times during the seven-game series — Philadelphia was 5-for-8 on the man advantage in its three playoff wins — it betrayed them at the most inconvenient time on Wednesday.

With the game tied 0-0, the Flyers went up a man 39 seconds into the second period when the Rangers were hit with a too many men on the ice penalty. A chance to snag the lead there for the taking, Philadelphia mustered just one shot during the sequence.

Just under three minutes later, Dan Carcillo, a former Flyer turned Philadelphia villain, put New York ahead 1-0.

“Special teams are obviously very important, and they did a good job,” Flyers center Vinny Lecavalier said of the Rangers’ penalty kill. “They blocked a lot of shots, and they were very aggressive. They played well on the PK tonight.”

Philadelphia was again handed a chance to steal the momentum trailing 1-0 when New York forward Benoit Pouliot was nailed for interference at the 8:37 mark of the second period.

Again the Flyers sputtered, producing just one shot off the stick of defenseman Kimmo Timonen. Pouliot would make Philadelphia pay at 11:46 of the second period when his shot from inside the hashmarks beat a helpless Steve Mason for a 2-0 Rangers lead.

It was an unfortunate turn of events for the Flyers, who know all too well the power play is a fickle part of the game.

“I think we killed 20 straight of their power plays. I mean, sometimes it’s clicking, sometimes it doesn’t. It’s too bad,” Voracek said. “We had two opportunities today. Of course, if we scored on it, it would be a little bit different. I think it’s a little too early to get on it and look at it that way.”

Despite going just 1-for-13 on the power play in four playoff losses to the Rangers, Philadelphia coach Craig Berube felt it was unfair to pin his team’s fate on that statistic.

“You can’t look at it and blame it on the power play,” Berube said. “The power play overall was good. New York’s power play wasn’t as good (10.3 percent) and they won, so …”

While Berube’s assessment of special teams play as a whole throughout the series is accurate, one can’t help but think that the Flyers let a date with the Penguins in the Eastern Conference semifinals slip away at least in part because of Wednesday’s power play showing.
NEW YORK – All it takes is one mistake. In a Game 7 in the Stanley Cup playoffs, the margin of error is ridiculously slim.

The Flyers made a big one in the game's 44th minute. Then, they made a lot more.

Former Flyer Dan Carcillo capitalized with a back-door goal and from there, things snowballed worse and worse until the final buzzer with the scoreboard reading New York Rangers 2, Flyers 1.

Time of death: 9:44 p.m. The Flyers' season is over.

They lost their first Game 7 since May 22, 2004 against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The team full of comebacks, including returning from a series deficit three times against the Rangers, was tapped out of magic and ran out of time.

After a great first period, things fell apart for the Flyers in the second stanza. New York took a bench minor only 39 seconds into the period and the Flyers had nothing going on their power play.

In fact, Rick Nash matched the Flyers in shots on their own man advantage. Steve Mason came up huge with a shorthanded save and was called upon far too often.

As the penalty expired, the Rangers mounted pressure and a back-door pass eluded both Andrew MacDonald and Braydon Coburn. Carcillo banged it home on a one-timer, his second goal of the series.

The tally came just after Mason made two show-stopping saves. He made 31 in all in the final game and was the Flyers' best player by far. By the second intermission, it could have been 7-0 were it not for the goaltender.

After Carcillo's goal, the Flyers fell into the same traps they were victim to in the other three losses. They mishandled the puck in their own zone for turnovers galore, didn't skate well and lost battles for the puck.

Sprinkled in were more 10-bell saves from Mason to make it look like the Flyers were alive in a game they had no business being in.

They had another opportunity to get into the game with a penalty to Benoit Pouliot, but only got one shot on that power play, also. Again on the man advantage, they had to rely on Mason, who was forced to make another fantastic save on Ryan McDonagh.

When the Flyers got the puck back, they got pressure, but Anton Stralman and Martin St. Louis blocked back-to-back shots just after the penalty had expired.

On the next shift, Pouliot scored on another back-door pass to make it 2-0.

After a second goal, the Flyers looked even worse. They got hemmed in their own zone, made poor decisions with the puck and left Mason out to dry.

To end the second period, it was an all-out assault on Mason as the players looked like they had already headed to the locker room while their goalie continued making tough saves.

After 40 minutes, the game felt like it was over.

Jason Akeson had other plans.

The rookie had his shot blocked by Marc Staal, but got his own rebound and beat Henrik Lundqvist far side for his second goal of the series at 4:32 of the third period.

Then things got real interesting. The Flyers controlled the play and had the Rangers on their heels. Mason was barely tested, only five times in the third period.

For as much as the Flyers pushed, the Rangers held them at bay. With 2:19 left, a tired Rangers team was on the ice after an icing when New York coach Alain Vigneault decided to use his timeout.

New York got control of the game after the breather and kept chipping the puck out of its zone enough for the final buzzer to sound.

By virtue of winning Game 7 to advance to the second round for the third straight year, the Rangers also made it 17 consecutive NHL Game 7's in which the winning team scored the game's first goal.
Timonen not wondering if this is his last Game 7

Dave Isaac, Courier-Post 6:11 p.m. EDT April 30, 2014

NEW YORK — A veteran of 15 seasons and 1,092 regular-season games, Flyers defenseman Kimmo Timonen approached a group of reporters with his usual pregame java in hand. He didn’t need the extra caffeine before his fourth Game 7 and kept his thoughts simple.

"Drinking coffee, right now," Timonen quipped. "That's going through my mind right now. Anything else?"

How about whether your fourth Game 7 might be your last game period?

"No," the 39-year-old blueliner said, "that's behind me. If I think about it like that, I'm gonna miss the game. I have to put that behind me and focus on the game."

Heading into Wednesday night, Timonen was 3-0 in his Game 7 history, all with the Flyers. What's made him successful is what made the Flyers successful against the New York Rangers in Game 6: staying loose.

"You have to be like that," Timonen said. "If you get nervous right now, you're not gonna play your best. Enjoy this moment. You never know if you're ever gonna get to this point (again). Enjoy it and go out there and do your job."

Timonen has been in the league since 1998, won four Olympic medals, gone to the playoffs nine times, but never lifted the Stanley Cup. There's playoffs, there's Game 7 and then there's Game 7 at Madison Square Garden. Whether it's your first or fourth, it's always extraordinary.

"This is what you live for," Wayne Simmonds said. "When you're young, you're playing in your driveway, you're always imagining a Game 7 scenario. This is my first Game 7, so this should be nice."

Of course, Simmonds -- the Game 6 hero thanks to a hat trick -- always came off the driveway and into the house a winner.

"You're never gonna envision a scenario where you lose a Game 7," Simmonds said with a rare smile in a tense moment. "If you do that, something's wrong with you."

Whether it was years ago on a driveway in his hometown of Kuopio, Finland, in Philadelphia in 2011 or in Boston in 2010, Timonen loves it every time.

"No, it never gets old," said Timonen, who had six goals and 29 assists in 77 games this season. "You play 82 games. You play this sport for a reason. These are the moments. It's a big game, but at the same time, it's something you have to enjoy. If you're able to enjoy this moment, you're gonna play your best."

It's a message that Timonen brought to the dressing room before the puck dropped one last time against the Rangers this season.

"We've got a lot of vets in our room, a lot of guys who have played in the Stanley Cup finals and have played in Game 7's," Simmonds said. "I'm not gonna tell you what guys are saying, but they're definitely giving us a little bit of insight."

Berube preaches normalcy

Craig Berube played in three Game 7’s and won one of them. His first venture in coaching a Game 7 he tried to make just like any other.

"You talk about the same things you always talk about before a game, go over things, get 'em prepared," Berube said.

"I haven't done anything different, to be honest with you, just try to keep it as normal as you can. It's a big game, obviously. We all know that. I have to keep my emotions in check. The players do. We need to go out and play smart, but we need to play hard."

Captain Claude Giroux confirmed his first-year coach was the same before Game 7 as he was before regular-season Game 7.

"He's done a good job," Giroux said. "He's making sure we know what we have to do out there. It's a good job."

Penalty kill a big helper

Heading into Game 7, the Flyers had killed 20 consecutive Rangers power plays. It was a huge part of why they got to Game 7 in the first place.

"Unfortunately, we're a team that takes a lot of penalties," Simmonds said. "Our penalty kill has had to be great all year long and they've done that all year long for us. Our power play's been pretty good as well. We've had some slumps here and there, but at the end of the day we always come out on the better side, I think."
Coyotes’ Mike Ribeiro says he failed to find ‘groove’

Sarah McLellan, azcentral sports 6:30 p.m. MST April 30, 2014

It almost seems comical that after years of embracing the journeymen, the grinders and the lunch-pail workers, the Coyotes finally roped a prized free agent with an impressive offensive track record ... and he fizzled.

Mike Ribeiro’s output in Year 1 wasn’t only a disappointment in light of his four-year, $22 million contract handed out by the Coyotes last summer, but his 16 goals and 47 points also weren’t characteristic of a player hyped as a No. 1 center.

“There’s a certain compete level you have to have to play, and I think Mike got down on his game,” General Manager Don Maloney said. “Obviously, the coaches got down on him as well and it was a snowball and he couldn’t find his way out of it. We need to get his confidence back to a level where he’s a good player for us because he wasn’t.”

The Coyotes aren’t used to dishing out top dollar for an offensive performer — Ribeiro was a point-per-game player the previous season alongside Alex Ovechkin in Washington — so they also seemed unsure of how to spur him on once production didn’t match the price tag.

After a seven-game point streak in October, Ribeiro’s best stretch was 16 points in 15 games from early November to mid-December. He slowed down after that, managing 14 points up until the Olympic break and only five in 14 games once the NHL resumed.

“I think it was a lot of things,” Ribeiro said. “It’s not just about hockey but a lot of things. Never having my groove, never found it. It was just a hard season for me. I think it was one of my worst seasons. But … I don’t believe it can get worse. That’s a positive. Next year I can come here and have a better season.”

Coach Dave Tippett scratched Ribeiro twice in March in an attempt to ignite Ribeiro, but the tactic didn’t work. He also regularly shuffled Ribeiro’s wingers, but there was never enough chemistry for a line to stick.

“You think a guy at his age or Shane Doan’s age or Derek Morris’ age, they’d be confident,” Maloney said. “They know their game. (But) their confidence ebbs and flows, and I think Mike he got down on himself and his play and got in a rut and couldn’t get out of it.”

To maximize this investment, it’d probably be wise for the Coyotes to surround Ribeiro with the type of players with whom he’s been successful. Obviously, an Ovechkin isn’t lurking in the pipeline but it should be easier to find a Brenden Morrow or a Jere Lehtinen.

Both flanked Ribeiro in 2007-08 under Tippett in Dallas when Ribeiro amassed the best offensive season of his career — 27 goals and 83 points — with Morrow the brawny forechecker and Lehtinen the two-way specialist.

Still, before the Coyotes start to cater to Ribeiro’s style, they want to know he’s willing to offer up more.

“Before we get to the wingers, we gotta look in the mirror first,” Tippett said.

Appropriately, that figures to be Ribeiro’s off-season objective, too.

“I can be physically in better shape,” he said. “I think my main goal is to get in good shape and get ready for the season. If I work out maybe once in my career, maybe I can have a good season next year.”

Arizona Republic LOADED: 05.01.2014
By Jason Mackey
April 30, 2014 5:24 p.m.
Updated 21 minutes ago

Two days after they were unable to finish Monday’s Game 6 victory at Columbus, center Brandon Sutter and right wing Joe Vitale were back on the ice for practice.

Both joined winger Brian Gibbons, who left a Game 2 victory early after scoring a pair of goals, as the Penguins practiced Wednesday morning at Consol Energy Center.

Neither offered many details of the injuries, though Vitale’s was hard to miss: He and Blue Jackets left winger Blake Comeau collided knee-on-knee early in the third period.

“All I can say is I woke up today, and it felt great,” Vitale said. “Felt good enough to skate and felt good out there.”

“It was a scary blow,” he added. “It’s not a situation you want to find yourself in during the game — going knee-to-knee with anyone. It scared me at first.”

Vitale refuted the idea that he did it intentionally.

“It’s not the kind of player I am,” Vitale said. “Especially that time of the game, with what we’re looking forward to. I wouldn’t want to hurt anybody or hurt myself or put anyone in jeopardy. I think we just kind of got tangled and got mixed up in it. Freak accident. I hope he’s OK.”

Sutter was one of the Penguins’ most impactful players in the Columbus series. He had three goals, five points, was a plus-6 and won 50 percent of his faceoffs.

The only specifics Sutter would offer on his injury was that the first occurrence wasn’t when he turned awkwardly and went into the boards, trailed by Columbus forward Nick Foligno.

“The last shift wasn’t where I originally felt something,” Sutter said. “I definitely knew after that I wasn’t able to get back out there and be effective. I think it was probably better I didn’t go.”

Orpik remains out

One noticeable absence from practice was defenseman Brooks Orpik.

Orpik left a practice at Southpointe last Friday less than halfway through and was replaced for Games 5 and 6 by Robert Bortuzzo.

Coach Dan Bylsma offered no injury updates, other than to say, “Some of those people you saw today. Some of them you did not.”

Per team policy, the Penguins do not provide injury specifics during the playoffs.

Metallurg wins

Center Evgeni Malkin practiced but was not a visible presence in the Penguins locker room afterward.

Perhaps he was busy celebrating Metallurg Magnitogorsk’s first KHL Gagarin Cup title.

Malkin’s hometown team — which is led by former NHL coach Mike Keenan — defeated Lev Praha, 7-4, in Game 7 on Wednesday.

Keenan became the first North American coach to win a Gagarin Cup and Stanley Cup. He won the latter with the New York Rangers in 1993-94.

They’re fans, too

Bortuzzo said he would watch.

Same for fellow defenseman Matt Niskanen.
Breaking down the Penguins’ 2nd-round playoff matchup

By Jason Mackey
April 30, 2014 10:00 p.m.
Updated 4 hours ago

Not only did the Penguins avoid the Flyers — and the circus-like atmosphere that would accompany a second-round Stanley Cup playoff series with their bitter, in-state rivals — but they draw a favorable matchup in the Rangers.

The Penguins have dominated the Rangers in the postseason, winning 16 of 20 postseason games against them.

In four regular-season meetings in 2013-14, which the teams split, center Sidney Crosby and winger Chris Kunitz tied for the team lead with six points apiece. Kunitz led the way with three goals.

The four-game series was penalty-filled. This season, the Penguins and Rangers averaged 19.2 penalty minutes. That increased to 26.0 when the teams played each other.

Special teams went the Penguins’ way. They converted 5 of 14 power plays and killed 12 of the Rangers’ 15 chances. New York has experienced major problems on the penalty kill. Though they were third in the NHL during the regular season at 85.3 percent, they struggled against the Flyers.

Regular-season results
• The teams split four meetings, with each winning in the shootout. The Rangers outshot the Penguins, 133-118, in those games, but the Penguins converted on 5 of 14 (35.7 percent) power-play chances.

Leaders
Penguins
Goals: Evgeni Malkin, Brandon Sutter and Jussi Jokinen, 3
Assists: Paul Martin, 8
Points: Matt Niskanen and Martin, 8
Plus-minus: Martin, plus-7
Penalty minutes: Kris Letang, 10

Rangers
Goals: Brad Richards, Martin St. Louis, Carl Hagelin, Derek Stepan, Dominic Moore and Mats Zuccarello, Daniel Carcillo, Benoit Pouliot, 2
Assists: Richards, St. Louis and Rick Nash, 4
Points: St. Louis and Richards, 6
Plus-minus: Marc Staal, plus-6
Penalty minutes: Hagelin, 10

Goalies
Penguins•Marc-Andre Fleury: 4-2-2, .908 save percentage, 2.81 goals-against average
Rangers
Henrik Lundqvist: 4-3, .919, 2.11

Playoff history
• The last postseason meeting came in 2008 when center Evgeni Malkin and right wing Marian Hossa scored four goals apiece during a five-game victory in the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Big questions
Will Sid score?

Not exactly digging deep here by expecting the franchise center to score playoff goal No. 1. Still, that’s the predicament the Penguins are in. Crosby made plays and finished with six assists against Columbus. Yet this is a player with 111 career points in the playoffs, including 40 goals.

Will Flower bloom?

“There hasn’t been a day that’s gone by that I haven’t got a question in this room about it,” said Penguins coach Dan Bylsma on Wednesday, referencing goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury’s confidence. A first-round series win over Columbus did little to alleviate concerns over Fleury’s shakiness in the postseason.

Will Kreider play?

Left wing Chris Kreider (left hand) was handling a puck and taking shots Wednesday, according to the New York Daily News. Kreider had 17 goals and 37 points this season but hasn’t played since March 25.
Penguins to face Rangers in 2nd round

By Rob Rossi
April 30, 2014 9:51 p.m.
Updated 4 hours ago

The Rangers are coming ... and soon.

With a 2-1 victory over the Flyers on Wednesday night, the Rangers advanced to become the Penguins' next postseason opponent.

Tickets for Games 1 and 2 are available at Ticketmaster outlets and the arena box office.

The Penguins and Rangers have not met in the postseason since 2008, when the Penguins won a Round 2 matchup in five games. The Penguins never have lost in four postseason series against the Rangers, dropping only four of 20 games.

The Penguins and Rangers split four regular-season games. Each team earned a win in a shootout.

Tribune Review LOADED: 05.01.2014
Penguins efficient 5-on-5 play leading to postseason success

By Chris Adamski
April 30, 2014 7:27 p.m.
Updated 6 hours ago

It was special-teams play that earned the Penguins a 109-point regular season and Metropolitan Division title.

It was 5-on-5 play that won them their first playoff series.

After being not much better than average at even-strength during the regular season, the Penguins were at their best at it during the first round against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

"Toward end of the series, we started to feel a lot better with the way we were able to manage the puck and work it down low and get in on the forecheck," defenseman Paul Martin said. "When we sometimes get off our game is when our special teams are struggling, and we rely on that heavily. So for us, when we focus on beating teams 5-on-5 and playing well, it benefits our team."

It did against Columbus. The Penguins held a 12-7 goal edge when each team was at full strength.

During none of the series' six games were the Penguins outscored in such situations, and they "won" 5-on-5 play during four of the six. The Penguins held a 4-1 edge at even strength during victories in Games 5 and 6 to close out the series.

"I thought the whole series we didn't play too bad 5-on-5," defenseman Rob Scuderi said. "Certainly, there's things we need to improve on, but I thought in Games 5 and 6 for the majority of that time — except for the last 10 minutes in Game 6 — we really executed our gameplan to the fullest."

Over the final two games, the Penguins outshot the Blue Jackets, 64-37, at even strength, including a dominating 39-20 during a 3-1 victory in Game 5. Generally, the final desperate push by Columbus late in Game 6 aside, the Penguins controlled puck possession and worked their forecheck and cycle in the offensive zone.

The only game of the series in which the Penguins did not have more even-strength shots than the Blue Jackets was Game 4, when they built an early three-goal lead and allowed Columbus to storm back for a 4-3 overtime victory.

Taking away that game, the Penguins out-shot the Blue Jackets, 151-108 at even strength during the series.

That the Penguins' strength was at 5-on-5 was a turnaround from the regular season, when their 51.2 percentage of 5-on-5 goals scored in their games ranked a middling 13th in the NHL.

The Penguins scored seven more goals than their opponents throughout the regular season at 5-on-5 compared to a plus-23 differential in special teams situations.

Against Columbus, they were a minus-2 in special teams.

"I think special teams are going to become more and more important (as the playoffs go on)," captain Sidney Crosby said. "But that being said, usually in the playoffs, 5-on-5 is pretty even. Team are so tightly matched, you're not going to see a lot of room, and you're not going to see a ton of chances 5-on-5, so if you can get up 5-on-5 or be on the plus side, you're putting yourself in a good position."

Typically, the playoffs feature fewer power-play opportunities per game, a phenomenon that threatened to work against the Penguins after finishing the regular season with the NHL's top power play and No. 5 penalty kill. They were the only team to be top-five in both.

Even more troubling to the Penguins was they had a negative even-strength goal differential after the Olympic break.

In the first round, though, those concerns were allayed.
Had an interesting conversation this week with Penguins star Sidney Crosby.

"Are you healthy?" I asked.

"Yep," Crosby said.

"You wouldn't tell me if you aren't, would you?"

"Probably not."

Are you thinking what I'm thinking? That there has to be a reason Crosby failed to score a goal in six games in the Penguins' first-round playoff series against the Columbus Blue Jackets? If not injury, fatigue perhaps? Crosby played in 80 of 82 regular-season games, running away with the NHL scoring title with 36 goals, a league-best 68 assists and 104 points. He also played in six Olympic matches as captain of the Canadian team that won the gold medal. The six games against the Blue Jackets made it 92 Crosby has played in since October. He has to be at least a little bit tired, right?

"I feel fine," Crosby said, quickly dismissing that theory.

Crosby sounded just a bit offended by the perception that he somehow had a bad series against the Blue Jackets because he didn't score a goal. There are other ways to help the team, he said. He pointed out the Penguins won the Stanley Cup in 2009 by defeating the Detroit Red Wings in seven games in the final, a series in which he had just one goal.

"I don't evaluate my game based on the goals I score," Crosby said. "I thought it was better the last couple of games. I was able to create a little more. I look at scoring chances, not just for me but for the other guys. That's the creating I'm talking about. It doesn't matter to me who scores the goals."

Crosby had the first assist on Evgeni Malkin's power-play goal, which gave the Penguins an early 2-0 lead Monday night in Game 6. The team went on to eliminate the Blue Jackets with a 4-3 win. Crosby had six assists in the series, meaning he averaged a point a game. That's tremendous work for most NHL players, but not for Crosby, who came into these playoffs averaging 1.28 postseason points, most among active players.

Not that Crosby's teammates are complaining about his contributions. They pointed out his defensive work in Game 6, especially in the third period when he had to play nearly 9 minutes after injuries to centers Brandon Sutter and Joe Vitale. They also mentioned his faceoff work, especially in the defensive zone.

"I saw a lot of good things from him," forward Craig Adams said.

There also were Crosby's six points. Their value should not be overlooked.

"He's an assist machine," linemate Chris Kunitz said of Crosby. "He's sharing the puck and putting it everywhere. He knows it's a team game. He's giving it up for other guys. I'm sure he's not concerned about what's on the score sheet."

That's mostly true, but not quite 100 percent true.

Crosby acknowledged he wants to score goals. "I work hard to try to produce. It's not ideal when I don't get goals."

He also acknowledged the goals come much harder in the postseason. The Blue Jackets' Brandon Dubinsky and Jack Johnson did a wonderful checking him the entire series.

"It's tough because the playoffs are tight. But you can't use that as an excuse. You still have to find a way to produce."

We have to take Crosby's word that he's neither injured nor fatigued. But this we know for sure: There's nothing wrong with his sense of humor. He thought he should have been given an assist Monday night on Malkin's first goal, which gave the Penguins a 1-0 lead. He was strong fighting for the puck on the boards in the Columbus zone, eventually getting it to Kunitz, who got it to Malkin alone in front of Blue Jackets goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky.

"Geez, it's hard enough getting points in the playoffs. They don't have to take one away from me," Crosby said, grinning.

It was easy for everyone to smile in the locker room after their clinching win. It also was easy for the players to predict many goals ahead for Crosby, who hasn't scored in 11 postseason games, going back to Game 4 of the Ottawa series a year ago. They had made a similar prediction about Malkin, who ended a nine-game goal drought with his hat trick in Game 6 against the Blue Jackets.

"You know how bad he wanted to score," Penguins winger James Neal said of Malkin. "He got that first one off his back and he took over the game. We need that from him. Sid's going to have a breakout game, just the same."

Clearly, Crosby was pleased by that thought.

"Hopefully, I'm saving 'em for the next round," he said, not looking or sounding the least bit hurt or tired.
Somewhat surprisingly, forwards Brandon Sutter and Joe Vitale practiced with the Penguins Wednesday at Consol Energy Center, less than 48 hours after they got hurt in the clinching Game 6 win against Columbus.

Sutter was limping badly Monday night as he left the game, a 4-3 win. Vitale was slumped on the ice for a few minutes after he had a knee-on-knee collision with Blue Jackets winger Blake Comeau.

“Hopefully, seeing them on the ice is an indication that they’re good” for Round 2, Penguins coach Dan Bylsma said.

Sutter left the game after a run-in with Columbus winger Nick Foligno along the boards, but he said the injury actually occurred earlier in the game. “Not going to talk about it too much,” Sutter said, alluding to the secrecy that shrouds injury details in the playoffs. “All I can say is it felt pretty good [at practice], I’m happy with the way it’s gone the past two days. Shouldn’t be a problem going forward.”

Sutter had a strong first-round series against Columbus, with three goals, two assists and strong defensive work. He credited his experience a year ago, his first time in the NHL playoffs. “That first go-round with it is a different level,” he said. “Last year was a fun experience, … That experience definitely helps. You get a chance to come here your second time at it, you know what to expect a bit more and are a little better prepared for it.”

Vitale initially seemed to have what could be a long-term knee injury. “The way Joe was injured and left the ice, you worried,” Bylsma said. As it turned out, the Penguins’ flight home Monday night was delayed several hours, and, by the time the team boarded, Vitale was feeling better. “It was a little bit of a scare when it happened,” Vitale said. “I’m taking it one day at a time. All I can say is I woke up [Wednesday], and it felt great. It felt good enough to skate, and it felt good out there.”

The only player missing from practice Wednesday was defenseman Brooks Orpik, who sat out the final two games of Round 1 because of an unspecified injury.

Fatigue factor

The Penguins didn’t learn their second-round opponent until Wednesday night, but they knew that regardless of whether it was Philadelphia or the New York Rangers, they would be facing a team that could be more tired than them.

The Flyers and Rangers’ Game 7 Wednesday was their second game in as many nights and their fourth in six days. The Penguins played three games in that same stretch and have been off since Monday night.

At the other end of the spectrum is Montreal, which opens its series against Boston tonight after being off the past eight days after a sweep of Tampa Bay.

“I think we’re in a good situation,” winger James Neal said. “We had a good day off [Tuesday] to recharge, refresh and come back for a good practice. It’s good to get out there, enjoy yourself, have some good pace to practice. The guys are feeling good.”

It didn’t bother them that they practiced without knowing their next opponent. “I think for us, it’s more important to focus on yourself,” defenseman Rob Scuderi said. “If you’re taking the game to them, what they do is minimized.”

Improvement pleases Bylsma

In retrospect, Bylsma said, the Penguins didn’t hit their playoff stride until later in the Columbus series. He attributes that to the fact that the Penguins were fairly well looked into a division title and the No. 2 seed in the Eastern Conference and didn’t have to scratch and claw in the stretch run for a playoff spot or positioning.

“We were in our spot, on top in the Metro Division, for a long time,” Bylsma said. “I don’t think we had [to push] like a Columbus team and like some other teams that were [playing] maybe 15 or 20 games of playoff [-style] hockey and driving and pushing for every point in the regular season.

“We won hockey games, but we hadn’t gotten to that [desperate] type of play from our group. We heard the word, ‘passion,’ and I don’t think there’s any guy in that [locker] room that wasn’t ready and willing to win a Stanley Cup right from the start of the playoffs, but how you have to play and the price you have to pay on the ice, that’s another level. … I thought Game 5 and 6 were our best in that regard by all year long.”
A look at the Eastern Conference semifinals: Boston Bruins vs. Montreal Canadiens

Season series: Canadiens, 3-1.

Difference makers: Boston’s Tuukka Rask, a finalist for the Vezina Trophy as the NHL’s top goalie, compiled the league’s best goals-against average (1.16) and save percentage (.961) in Round 1. Canadiens defenseman P.K. Subban absorbs more abuse from fans on the road than almost anyone in the league and has proven capable of making game-altering plays. Usually, for the better.

Special teams: Boston converted 6 of 16 power plays in Round 1 — hulking defenseman Zdeno Chara, who now sets up around the opponent’s net, was the only Bruins player to score two — while allowing two goals in 20 short-handed situations. The Bruins’ penalty-killers are on a 53-for-56 roll in their past 15 playoff games. Although the Canadiens swept Tampa Bay in Round 1, they didn’t do it with dominant special teams. Montreal’s penalty-kill (71.4 percent) is the lowest-rated of any team still in the playoffs and its power play (15.4 percent) was lackluster against the Lightning after ending the regular season in an 0-for-23 slump.

Noteworthy: The Bruins and Canadiens are meeting in the playoffs for the 34th time, most of any North American pro teams. Montreal has won 24 of 33. … The Canadiens and Detroit, which lost to Boston in five games in Round 1, were the only teams to beat the Bruins more than twice in the regular season. … Boston gave up six goals to the Red Wings, tying the team record for the fewest allowed in a series of five or more games. … Canadiens RW Brendan Gallagher had three goals in the four games against Tampa Bay. … C David Krejci was the only Boston player to record at least one point while having a negative plus-minus rating (minus-1) in Round 1. … Montreal, which has not played since April 22, outscored Tampa Bay, 13-7, in 5-on-5 play. … Boston looks to be the deepest, most-balanced team in the Eastern Conference, if not the entire league.

Who will win: Bruins in six.
Robert Bortuzzo finally made his way off the ice about 45 minutes after the formal portion of the Penguins' morning skate at Nationwide Arena eight days ago had ended.

He sat down in his locker-stall, sweating profusely after going through a demanding workout with a handful of other players scheduled to be healthy scratches for Game 4 of the Penguins' opening-round playoff series against Columbus.

Bortuzzo knew by then that he wouldn't be dressing against the Blue Jackets that evening. What he couldn't know was when — or even if — he would be called upon to play again.

Could have been the next game. Could have been the next series. Could have been next season. The uncertainty, though, didn't seem to faze him.

"There are a couple of us here who know anything could happen, that we could be in if there are injuries or whatnot," he said. "We want to be ready."

Turned out, Bortuzzo was. And didn't have to wait long to prove it.

Bortuzzo was added to the lineup for Game 5, when it was determined defenseman Brooks Orpik would be unable to play because of an undisclosed injury, and remained there for the series-clincher Monday in Columbus.

He averaged 20 shifts and 13 minutes of ice time in his two appearances, and finished with a plus-minus rating of plus-1. By any measure, that was a pretty solid payback for the time and effort he had invested in keeping himself prepared to play.

"I didn't think I was doing it for no reason," Bortuzzo said after practice Wednesday at Consol Energy Center. "Everyone knows what this time of year brings. … I was thrown in there pretty quick and thought we were able to do some good things."

Although Bortuzzo wasn't a difference-maker against the Blue Jackets, neither was he a liability. Which, realistically, has to be the primary objective of any healthy player who is placed in suspended animation until being summoned back to work, usually on short notice.

"The pace in the playoffs is so fast, and, when you haven't played in a few games, it's important that you're ready to get your feet moving and be able to play at that faster pace," said winger Taylor Pyatt, who has yet to appear in these playoffs. "You just try to stay sharp, mentally and physically."

Most of the healthy scratches spend game nights in the press box, but they're not just spectators with a strong rooting interest.

"You obviously want to keep … your mind sharp, so we're watching all of the games pretty [closely]," Bortuzzo said. "Even keeping up with some video and stuff that we do here. You just want to be as ready as possible."

Unlike Bortuzzo and Pyatt, goalie Jeff Zatkoff dressed for every game in Round 1, although he has yet to face a playoff shot.

Because, as Marc-Andre Fleury's backup, he must be prepared to enter the game with little or no warning — there's the constant danger of an injury, and the possibility that coach Dan Bylsma will decide his team would be best served by replacing his starter — Zatkoff's extra workouts have even more urgency than those of guys such as Bortuzzo, Pyatt and Deryk Engelland.

Although Zatkoff hasn't been in a game since April 13 and might not get into another until training camp, it also is conceivable circumstances could force him into action just seconds into the Round 2 opener.

"It puts a little more emphasis on my pregame approach and my practices," he said. "My practices are my games right now, so [the emphasis is on] good details, good practices."
Penguins to face Rangers in Round 2 of Stanley Cup playoffs

May 1, 2014 12:03 AM

By Shelly Anderson / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Two nights after the Penguins clinched a spot in Round 2 of the Stanley Cup playoffs, their opponent was determined.

The Penguins will face the New York Rangers, who advanced by beating Philadelphia, 2-1, Wednesday night in Game 7 of their first-round series.

The full schedule was not immediately released, but the first two games will be at Consol Energy Center, with the opener set for Friday night, according to The Associated Press.

The Rangers finished second to the Penguins in the Metropolitan Division this season, but they were a distant 13 points back.

In the first round of 1989, they swept New York in four games. In the second round of 1992, they won in six games en route to their second Stanley Cup title in a row.

In the second round of 1996, they won in five games. And in the second round of 2008, they won in five games on their way to the Cup final.

The Penguins were 2-1-1 against the Rangers, including three meetings in the second round.

In those four games, Penguins winger Chris Kunitz had three goals, three assists, center Sidney Crosby had a goal and five assists, forward Jussi Jokinen had two goals and two assists, and defenseman Matt Niskanen had three assists.

For the Rangers in the four regular-season meetings, winger Benoit Pouliot had two goals and an assist; center Brad Richards and defenseman Ryan McDonagh each had two goals; winger Mats Zuccarello had a goal and three assists; and center Derick Brassard had a goal and two assists.

Pouliot played a key role Wednesday night in the Rangers’ Game 7 victory at Madison Square Garden, scoring the winning goal at 11:46 of the second period. Daniel Carcillo scored the Rangers’ other goal and rookie Jason Akeson made it 2-1 when he scored for the Flyers at 3:32 of the third period.

The Rangers shook off a 5-2 thrashing Tuesday night in Philadelphia and improved to 6-0 in Game 7s at Madison Square Garden.

Henrik Lundqvist made 26 saves and protected the one-goal lead at 7:25 when he made an awkward save against Flyers captain Claude Giroux.

The Rangers mobbed Lundqvist after the final buzzer, while the Flyers consoled their goalie Steve Mason.

Mason, who didn’t start until Game 4 because of injury, was sharp in stopping 31 shots, but he couldn’t will his club to a complete comeback after the Flyers fell into a 3-2 series hole. The Flyers dropped to 9-7 in Game 7s after winning their previous three.

No team won consecutive games in the series. The Rangers, who finished two points ahead of Philadelphia in the regular season, made the most of their home-ice advantage by taking three of the four games in the Garden.

Carcillo, re-inserted into the Game 7 lineup, scored the all-important first goal 3:06 into the second off a pass from Zuccarello.

Zuccarello threaded the puck with a behind-the-back feed from near the right circle between the legs of Flyers defensemen Andrew MacDonald and Braydon Coburn to Carcillo for the redirection into the net.

It was the second goal of the series for Carcillo, who played for just the third time in the series and the first at home. Carcillo had come out of the penalty box less than a minute earlier after serving a penalty for too many men on the ice.
Sharks starting Antti Niemi in goal in Game 7 against Kings

David Pollak
04/30/2014 01:06:48 PM PDT

SAN JOSE -- Sharks coach Todd McLellan is going back to Antti Niemi as his starting goalie for Game 7 against the Los Angeles Kings.

Niemi was pulled from Games 4 and 5 after giving up eight goals on 45 shots in both efforts. Backup netminder Alex Stalock was in goal for Game 6, a 4-1 loss that brought the series to its dramatic finale Wednesday night at the SAP Center.

"I think a break was good for Nemo," McLellan said. "He got a chance to work on some things in his game that the goaltending coaches wanted to work. He got a little chance to rest."

The coach added that he felt the Sharks "needed a change heading into game 6, heading into L.A. Unfortunately we had to pull him twice and that wasn't all on Nemo's shoulders. It's pretty evident and pretty obvious. I hope I made that clear."

Moving forward, McLellan added, Niemi was getting the opportunity as part of the core group of players the Sharks have relied on all season.

Niemi said he put the extra time between games to good use in practices and missing Game 6 should not have any effect on his confidence.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 05.01.2014
SAN JOSE -- As each successive Sharks power play fizzled to its fruitless conclusion Wednesday night, fans at SAP Center grumbled a little louder.

By the final one -- the one that left the Sharks 0 for 6 with a man-advantage -- the crowd let loose with some boos. They'd seen enough of these not-very special teams.

The players understood their frustration.

"The power play has to be a difference," center Joe Pavelski said after the Los Angeles Kings captured the series with a 5-1 victory in the decisive Game 7.

Instead, Sharks squandered their best chances to rescue this series by going 0 for their 16 power over the final three games. Their last power-play goal came way back in Game 4, when Pavelski drove one home in the third period.

Since? San Jose went 0 for 5 in Game 5, 0 for 5 in Game 6 and 0 for 6 in Game 7.

In a dressing room full of glassy-eyes and stunned stares Wednesday, the Sharks struggled to explain how the power play went so terribly wrong.

Speaking in general about an offense that vanished down the stretch, center Joe Thornton simply tipped his cap to the Kings.

"I think their defense just swallowed us up to be honest with you," he said. "They just played real tight defensively, and their goaltender got hot like he usually does this time of the year."

Pavelski recalled how earlier in the series, the Sharks power play provided a spark. They scored at least one special-teams goal in each of their three victories.

And at times Wednesday, the Sharks looked crisp with a man advantage. They moved the puck well, got some decent shots, and Patrick Marleau came within a millimeter or so of giving the Sharks a 2-1 lead in the second period.

But it was all for naught. In all, the Sharks had 11:29 of power-play time and took 14 shots during that stretch but couldn't finish the job.

"Obviously, they tightened things up defensively," Marleau said. "We had opportunities. We just couldn't put it in, and (goalie Jonathan) Quick was really good. He made some really good saves."

Quick's best save of the night came midway through the second period when Marleau, from just outside the net, tried to cram the puck through a small window on Quick's glove side.

But the goalie thrust his left hand out to snare the puck out of the air just in time. An officials' review confirmed that Quick's glove save came just before the puck crossed the goal line.

Kings defenseman Drew Doughty said there was no secret to his team's penalty-killing prowess.

"Just hard work, blocking shots and Quickie played great," he said.

The Sharks went 0 for 4 on the power play in the second period alone. They had two more chances in the final period, but by then the general excitement that followed a power play had lost its charm. Fans grumbled early and often, and it was so quiet inside the normally raucous building that you could hear lone, plaintive cries of: "Shoot it!" The Sharks' final chance came at 14:58 of the third period, with the team still within reach at 3-1. Instead, it was one final taste of frustration.

"We had some good chances, we just didn't get it in," Thornton said. "It's a tough pill to swallow."

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 05.01.2014
SAN JOSE -- What do you do after the worst debacle in the history of your franchise?

The Sharks went to the handshake line.

That is part of hockey tradition, whether you win a series, or lose a series, or lose a series in the most disturbing and unpardonable way possible.

In this case, the Sharks were forced to congratulate the Los Angeles Kings for coming back from a three-games-to-none deficit to win a best-of-seven series as the men in teal leaked away every pint of that advantage -- something that had happened just three previous times in the 97-year history of the National Hockey League.

"It's hard to put into words," said Joe Pavelski, the Sharks winger, trying to explain how he felt after his team blew a lead that should not have been blown. "It's really tough."

There is no use piling on the Sharks at this point. They looked sad enough in that handshake line. They looked even sadder in the dressing room when, with no standing to make excuses, none of them tried. They know their reputation as underachievers who lack the killer instinct to ever win a championship.

"I don't usually agree with it," said Patrick Marleau, another Sharks veteran. "But you do something like this ... and it's not easy to take."

The final score Wednesday night was 5-1, burnished by two empty-net goals in the final three minutes that rubbed in the humiliation. It was difficult to remember that early in second period, the Sharks had actually been ahead on the scoreboard with an excellent chance to destroy their demons and move on to the next playoff round.

That occurred when defenseman Matt Irwin fired a puck past Los Angeles goalie Jonathan Quick to give the Sharks a 1-0 lead just 28 seconds after the first intermission, with the SAP Center crowd in vocal boombox mode and ready to hound the Kings into mental errors. This was the vaunted home-ice advantage that some believed would help decide a Game 7.

On the ice, the Sharks didn't get the memo. The first Kings' goal occurred after a questionable penalty call against Sharks forward Logan Couture for elbowing. His childhood friend, L.A. defenseman Drew Doughty, scored a power-play goal 13 seconds later to tie the game.

A bad break. But the game was still up for grabs. The crowd was still roaring. The roar was sustained through three more Sharks power plays -- none of which yielded goals. And then, with 1:21 left in the period, the Kings victimized the Sharks the same way they had been victimizing the Sharks in all four final games of the series. Los Angeles took advantage of bad defensive positioning or effort by the Sharks to generate an odd-man rush and score.

Specifically in this case, the Kings' Anze Kopitar beat Sharks rookie Matt Nieto down the ice and no one else picked up Kopitar -- so he had plenty of space to flip a backhanded puck past Sharks goalie Antti Niemi. The score was 2-1. It might as well have been 10-1, the way the Kings play defense when they are ahead. Another goal near the start of the third period made the task even more insurmountable.

"We were awful off the rush," said Sharks coach Todd McLellan, in candid disgust after the loss. "We were never able to fix it."

McLellan called the Kings' goals "very defendable" and admitted the series loss was "the low point since I've been here."

He's been on the job for six years -- all of them uniformly good in the regular season (including this one, in which the Sharks finished with the NHL's fifth-best record) and almost always a busted-balloon of expectations in the postseason.

Of course, the Kings realized that, as well. After they won Game 5 here Saturday, you had the feeling the Los Angeles players were almost expecting a collapse in Game 6 and Game 7.

"We kind of sensed going into tonight's game they were going to be a little nervous," Doughty said, "that they were going to kind of see what was going to happen. I felt they played a good game. But the third period was huge for us."

Only the third period? What about all the periods after the Sharks' Game 3 victory that put them in prime position to clinch?

Full marks to the Kings, who persevered and refused to believe they were finished. But the Sharks, whose offensive stars fizzled in the final three games, were equal contributors to the result. And so the franchise must endure another summer of soul searching after a disappointing playoff thud.

"They all hurt," Pavelski said. "This one probably hurts the worst."

It should.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 05.01.2014
SAN JOSE -- Nobody tried to sugarcoat it.

The Sharks had just earned a spot on the wrong side of NHL history, dropping a 5-1 decision Wednesday night to the Los Angeles Kings and becoming only the fourth team ever to lose a seven-game playoff series after winning the first three.

On a franchise that has long had the reputation of being playoff failures even after reaching the Western Conference finals in successive years, this was the worst yet.

"Every year you lose is pretty low, but this one is a type of series that will rip your heart out," Logan Couture said. "It hurts. It's going to be a long summer thinking about this one and what we let slip away."

San Jose Sharks' Patrick Marleau (12), San Jose Sharks' Logan Couture (39) and San Jose Sharks' Justin Braun (61) skate to the bench

San Jose Sharks' Patrick Marleau (12), San Jose Sharks' Logan Couture (39) and San Jose Sharks' Justin Braun (61) skate to the bench after Los Angeles Kings' Anze Kopitar (11) scored a goal in the second period in Game 7 of an NHL first-round playoff series at the SAP Center on Wednesday, April 30, 2014. (Nhat V. Meyer/Bay Area News Group) (Nhat V. Meyer)

Captain Joe Thornton called the loss "just a tough pill to swallow" and didn't challenge the suggestion that even after years of playoff disappointments, this was the worst.

"It's just very, very tough right now," he said.

This game was not all that different from the three losses that preceded it, as San Jose's top players could not find their way onto the scoresheet and the Sharks special teams were anything but special.

Defenseman Matt Irwin -- playing only because top defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic was injured -- scored the Sharks' lone goal on Kings netminder Jonathan Quick.

At the other end of the ice, the Kings got goals from Drew Doughty, Anze Kopitar and Tyler Toffoli off Antti Niemi, who was back in net after being benched in Game 6. Dustin Brown and Tanner Pearson added empty-net goals.

It was the second straight spring that San Jose's playoff dreams died with a Game 7 loss to its most bitter rival, and the defeat once again raises questions about the team's makeup from the top on down.

"You don't win, that's what happens. You've got to answer those questions," said Dan Boyle, who becomes an unrestricted free agent July 1 and might have played his final game as a Shark.

In addition to starting Niemi, coach Todd McLellan reverted back to the lines that were successful at the start of the series, moving Joe Pavelski back alongside Thornton and Brent Burns while reinserting Mike Brown into the lineup on the fourth line with Raffi Torres and Andrew Desjardins.

For a while, it seemed to be getting the Sharks back on track, as they outshot the Kings 14-9 in the first period and needed only 28 seconds of the second to take a 1-0 lead when Irwin snapped off a 49-foot shot that beat Quick through traffic.

It was the first time since Game 1 that San Jose got the game's first goal, but at 4:57 and with Couture in the penalty box after a questionable elbowing call, Los Angeles evened it up when Doughty slipped behind the Sharks defense and lifted a shot over Niemi to make it 3-1.

The Sharks will do their annual post-mortem over the next few weeks, but McLellan didn't shy away from his role in the exit.

"When I look at it, I look at it as they fixed their problems, we didn't. Our problems got progressively worse as we went along," he said, adding later: "I'm in charge, I'm responsible for the group that performs on the ice. I have to accept that responsibility."

INSIDE

S.J. squanders power-play chances; L.A. could see Sharks were shaken.

BAD COMPANY

The Sharks became fourth team in NHL playoff history to lose a series after leading 3-0. Here's their company:

Year Round RESULT
2014 Conf. quarterfinals Los Angeles def. Sharks
2010 Conf. semifinals Philadelphia def. Boston
1975 Quarterfinals N.Y. Islanders def. Pittsburgh
1942 Cup finals Toronto def. Detroit
San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 05.01.2014
SAN JOSE -- The Kings knew where the high pressure system would settle
Wednesday night in SAP Center.

"Directly over the Sharks bench.

"We sensed that they'd be a little nervous," Kings defenseman Drew Doughty
said after a series-clinching 5-1 victory.

From Doughty's perspective, the turning point was Anze Kopitar's goal late in
the second period that gave the Kings a 2-1 lead.

"You could see their emotion went down," he said.

But the turning point in the historic series -- the Kings became the fourth team
to advance after losing the first three games -- was their overtime loss in
Game 3.

"We felt we could have won," Doughty said. "They got a really, really lucky
goal in overtime (by Patrick Marleau).

"Instead of feeling sorry for ourselves, we were more determined."

The Kings dominated the final four games, outscoring the Sharks 18-5. They
got clutch goals from their frontline players, smothered the Sharks' primary
scorers, killed off penalty after penalty and got stellar goaltending from
Jonathan Quick.

"It wasn't one thing," forward Justin Williams said. "It was mostly attitude. We
were responsible for our own demise. We had nowhere to look but in the
mirror."

Doughty called the historic comeback an "unbelievable feeling" and credited
general manager Dean Lombardi for putting together a roster full of gritty
players.

"We've got a lot of heart; the guys want to win," he said. "That's how Dean
built the team, and it showed."

Coach Darryl Sutter wasn't quite as effusive about coming back from the
three-games-to-none deficit.

"The history part is no big deal," he said. "We're trying to win a series against
a team that had home ice and was ahead of us all year -- and we finally
captured them."

Goaltender Antti Niemi was back in net for the Sharks after a one-game
benching.

Coach Todd McLellan made the decision before the morning skate to use
Niemi instead of Alex Stalock, who started Game 6.

The Sharks "needed a change heading into Game 6," McLellan said.

"I think a break was good for Nemo. He got a chance to work on some things
in his game. ... He got a little chance to rest."

Marc-Edouard Vlasic, the Sharks' top defenseman, remained out because of
a head injury suffered in Game 5. The Kings were without defenseman Willie
Mitchell, injured in Game 6.
Welcome, Sharks, to the lowest moment in franchise history.

The Sharks have had other flameouts. They’ve been frustrating, anemic, puzzling, underachieving - often all on the same shift. Almost always in the playoffs.

"There's been a lot of low points," said Patrick Marleau, who's been around for most of them and knows what people say about the Sharks at this time of year.

"I don't usually agree with it," Marleau said. "But you do something like this and it's not easy to take."

Because Wednesday night was the absolute nadir. There is no description for it other than the cruelest: a terrible choke job - one of the worst in NHL history.

Before Wednesday night's 5-1 cherry on the top of the Sharks' complete collapse, only three hockey teams had blown a 3-0 series lead, one in 1942, one in 1975 and the Boston Bruins four years ago. By that pattern, we shouldn't have had to witness such a brutal collapse for another three decades or so.

Instead, the Sharks became the fourth team to reach the lowest level of ignominy, blowing a series in epic fashion.

"They all hurt, but this one probably looks the worst," Joe Pavelski said.

That it did. The Sharks lost Game 7 in the same ways that they lost the previous three games: looking flat, lackluster, failing to score on the power play, failing to grab the momentum, getting very little production from their biggest, highest-paid names.

"The guys on the power play are our go-to guys. We didn't produce for the last four games and their guys did," Logan Couture said. "That's the difference."

This was the second consecutive year the Sharks lost Game 7 to the Kings, but unlike last year, this game was played on San Jose's home ice. And unlike last year, they had four chances to close out the series and couldn't do it.

"We won't go away quietly, that's for sure," Kings coach Darryl Sutter had warned after his team lost Game 3.

Prescient.

While the Kings' best players skated with confidence, nobody stepped up for the Sharks. Maybe they didn't realize the game was being played on the 20th anniversary of Jamie Baker's winning goal in Game 7 in Detroit, a shot that shocked the hockey world.

The Sharks, as Marleau has heard so often, are perennial playoff underachievers. But nothing before has been this brutal. The Sharks outscored the Kings 17-8 in the first three games and then lost their aggressiveness. Of the four losses, the two worst came on the Sharks' home ice. The Sharks went 0-15 on the power play in their final three games.

Once again, the Sharks succeeded in smothering their crowd and home ice advantage. After taking a 1-0 lead 28 seconds into the second period on a goal by Matt Irwin (playing only because of the injury to Marc-Edouard Vlasic), the Sharks went into a shell. By the fourth lifeless power play, the fans were booing. So it was no surprise that as the period was winding down, the Kings' big guns converted on an odd-man rush: Justin Williams to Anze Kopitar to give the Kings a 2-1 lead.

"Game over," head coach Todd McLellan said.

The Kings scored again early in the third period to make it 3-1. The rest was just Ice Capades and two empty-netters.
Sharks join other historic losers as Kings win Game 7

Ross McKeon

11:58 pm, Wednesday, April 30, 2014

Apr 30, 2014; San Jose, CA, USA; Los Angeles Kings right wing Dustin Brown (23) checks San Jose Sharks center Logan Couture (39) during the second period in game seven of the first round of the 2014 Stanley Cup Playoffs at SAP Center at San Jose. Mandatory Credit: Kyle Terada-USA TODAY Sports

Just call them the Kings of the comeback.

The Sharks could be called other names, most of them unprintable.

Los Angeles became only the fourth team in NHL history to win a Stanley Cup playoff series after dropping the first three games with a 5-1 win Wednesday at SAP Center.

"Obviously, we don't want to hear that kind of stuff, but what can we say?" Sharks defenseman Brad Stuart said. "We're on the wrong side of history tonight, so it's hard to argue."

Sharks forward Logan Couture added, "It's so disappointing we went up 3-0 and didn't have the killer instinct to finish it off."

A stifling penalty kill combined with timely goals to end the second period and start the third enabled the Kings to cap their fourth straight win in the Western Conference quarterfinal series. Meanwhile, San Jose saw a second consecutive season end at the hand of the Kings in a series that went seven games.

"We're kidding ourselves if we think we were closer this year just because it went seven games," Sharks coach Todd McLellan said. The scoring "was 16-5 in the last four games. We had a core group of individuals who didn't get on the score sheet. Last year was a lot closer than it was this year."

The Kings, who joined the 1942 Maple Leafs, 1975 Islanders and 2010 Flyers with the ultimate comebacks, advance to meet the Ducks in an all-Southern California second-round matchup that will start Saturday in Anaheim.

"We let the city down, we let the fans down. It's not a good feeling," Stuart said.

"There have been a lot of low points, and this is definitely one of them," Sharks forward Patrick Marleau added. "You don't usually agree with it, then we do something like this, it's not easy to take it."

Forward Tyler Toffoli scored 4:40 into the third to give the Kings a two-goal lead at 3-1 before Dustin Brown and Tanner Pearson added empty-net goals.

San Jose finished the series with 15 straight failed power plays, going 0-for-6 in Game 7.

"Special teams went in their favor the last few games, and that was the difference," Stuart said. "They held us down on the power play, and we allowed too many goals on their power play."

The Sharks had a golden opportunity in the second period with 7:43 of power-play time, and managed 12 shots during four man-advantage chances. But they came up empty during a 1-1 game, and the Kings capitalized.

Anze Kopitar was all alone in the slot to roof a centering feed from Justin Williams over Antti Niemi at 18:39 for the tie-breaking goal. San Jose defensemen Justin Braun and Stuart followed the Kings' skaters behind the goal line, and rookie Matt Nieto was a step behind Kopitar.

"Tonight we weren't that bad until we gave up an outnumbered rush and that's it, game over," McLellan said.

Matt Irwin gave the hosts a 1-0 lead 28 seconds into the second period when his wrist shot from the top of the right circle beat Los Angeles goalie Jonathan Quick. But the Kings tied it on defenseman Drew Doughty's power-play goal at 4:57.

"They fixed their problems, we didn't," McLellan said. "Our problems got progressively worse as we went along. We were awful off the rush and awful around our net. Every day we came to the rink we tried to stress that ... and we were never able to fix it."

Sharks vs. Kings

Game 1: Sharks 6, Kings 3
Game 2: Sharks 7, Kings 2
Game 3: Sharks 4, Kings 3, OT
Game 4: Kings 6, Sharks 3
Game 5: Kings 3, Sharks 0
Game 6: Kings 4, Sharks 1
Wednesday: Kings 5, Sharks 1
Sharks aim to dispel doubt, regain momentum

Ross McKeon
11:43 pm, Tuesday, April 29, 2014

The Sharks and Kings have arrived exactly where most expected them to be before the start of their playoff series. The route taken to Game 7, however, no one saw coming.

Wednesday's winner will travel to Anaheim to face the rested Ducks in the Western Conference semifinals. It'll be either a Los Angeles team having won four straight, making history along the way, or a San Jose team that pulled itself together to avenge a seven-game series loss to these same Kings last spring.

Leave it to Darryl Sutter to simplify it, as only the Los Angeles and former Sharks coach can.

"There's really no difference if you're down three or up three, (it's) still about closing it out," Sutter said. "Somebody is going to win Game 7, somebody is going to lose."

The Kings are the ninth NHL team to force a deciding game after losing the first three. They aim to join the 1942 Maple Leafs, the 1975 Islanders and the 2010 Flyers to advance after falling into an 0-3 hole.

Current Kings forwards Jeff Carter and Mike Richards played for the Philadelphia team that rallied over Boston four postseasons ago. The Kings are 4-4 all-time in Game 7, last winning one on the road at Toronto to reach the 1993 Stanley Cup Final.

San Jose is looking to avoid losing a Game 7 at home for the first time. In 2011, the Sharks also raced out to a 3-0 lead on Detroit before using Game 7 to close out the Red Wings 3-2 in Round 2. And they doused the Calgary Flames 5-3 in Game 7 of an opening-round series in 2008. Overall, San Jose is 5-3 in Game 7.

As for the here and now, the onus rests on the Sharks to block out doubt that has certainly crept into their minds. San Jose scored 17 goals in taking a 3-0 lead. But the Sharks have solved Kings goalie Jonathan Quick since for only one goal over the last 128:24.

And San Jose is again looking for its top players to lead the way.

"We need a Game 7 performance from everybody," Sharks coach Todd McLellan said. "Our big guys are going to have to find a way to get on the board at some point. We have done it before and can do it again."

Top forwards Joe Thornton, Patrick Marleau, Joe Pavelski and Brent Burns have combined the last three games to score one goal, produce two assists, stand at a minus-13 and put 42 shots on goal.

Second in the league with 65 assists during the regular season, Thornton has one in the series. Over the past three games, Thornton, linemate Burns and second-line center Couture are scoreless, a minus-9 and with 25 shots. They've also combined for an uncharacteristic 36 penalty minutes in the series. Couture dropped the gloves late in Game 6 for only his second fight in 352 career games.

"It's one game, series on the line," Couture said. "We've got to play desperate. They've played desperate the last three games. It's a seven-game series for a reason."

McLellan has a decision to make in goal. He went in Game 6 to Alex Stalock, who matched Quick for two periods before surrendering three goals in a span of 2:46 late in the third as the Kings won 4-1. Four-year starter Antti Niemi is 3-2 in the series despite a 3.90 goals-against average and an .882 save percentage.

Defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic's health remains a concern. He did not play Monday after leaving Saturday's Game 5 late in the first period with a head injury courtesy of Jarret Stoll, who was assessed a roughing minor. San Jose employed Matt Irwin in Game 6 (minus-1 in 18:43), and adjusted two of the three defense pairings as a result.

The Kings lost defenseman Willie Mitchell to a leg injury midway through Game 6. Playing with Alec Martinez on the team's third defense pair, Mitchell has averaged 18:56 of ice time per game in the series. Los Angeles could plug physical Matt Greene into Mitchell's spot.

Otherwise, the visitors don't figure to tinker with what has been a winning lineup since Sutter put Dustin Brown with top-liners Anze Kopitar and Marian Gaborik while dropping Justin Williams alongside Dwight King and Stoll. Known for his playoff success, Williams has scored four goals since the change and has nine in 19 playoff games against San Jose.

"The biggest change is they went from their sloppy play and got back to their type of game," McLellan said. "It's a tough type of game to beat, obviously, for us, and we'll have to do a better job in Game 7."

Who gets the call?

Both Sharks goalies have seen significant playing time against the Kings. But regular backup Alex Stalock (right) has better numbers thus far, having allowed one-quarter as many goals while playing a little less than half as much as Antti Niemi.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stalock</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niemi</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.90*</td>
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* worst of any goalie in the playoffs

Turnaround

In only one of the first six games, San Jose's Game 3 overtime win, has the winning margin been less than three goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Games 1-3</th>
<th>Games 4-6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharks goals</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings goals</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sharks vs. Kings

Game 1: Sharks 6, Kings 3
Game 2: Sharks 7, Kings 2
Game 3: Sharks 4, Kings 3, OT
Game 4: Kings 6, Sharks 3
Game 5: Kings 3, Sharks 0
Game 6: Kings 4, Sharks 1

Wednesday: at SAP Center, 7 p.m. CSNCA

Radio: 98.5, 102.1

Game 7 outcomes

The Sharks have won five of the eight Game 7s in franchise history, including the two played in San Jose:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Opponent</th>
<th>Round</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-28-13</td>
<td>at Los Angeles</td>
<td>West semis</td>
<td>2-1, L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-12-11</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>West semis</td>
<td>3-2, W</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-22-08</td>
<td>Calgary</td>
<td>West quarters</td>
<td>5-3, W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-15-02</td>
<td>at Colorado</td>
<td>West semis</td>
<td>1-0, L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-25-00</td>
<td>at St. Louis</td>
<td>West quarters</td>
<td>3-1, W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-19-95</td>
<td>at Calgary West quarters</td>
<td>5-4, W (2 OT)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-14-94</td>
<td>at Toronto West semis</td>
<td>4-2, L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-30-94</td>
<td>at Detroit West quarters</td>
<td>3-2, W</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Rare rallies

Only three times in NHL history has a team rallied from down 3-0 in a series to win it:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Round</th>
<th>Teams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>East semis</td>
<td>Flyers def. Bruins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Quarterfinals</td>
<td>Islanders def. Penguins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1942 Cup finals Maple Leafs def. Red Wings

Strong start, good finish

Four times the Sharks have taken a 3-0 lead in a series; they have won all four.

San Francisco Chronicle LOADED: 05.01.2014

When copying make sure you get the writers name at the bottom of articles
SAN JOSE – While the Kings’ top players have been surging, the opposite can be said for the Sharks’ big guns, several of which have been missing in action lately as the team prepares for Game 7 on Wednesday night.

Forward Brent Burns is scoreless in the last three games, and has just one even-strength point in the series other than a Game 1 empty-net goal. Captain Joe Thornton has not found the scoresheet since Game 3, and after finishing second in the league in assists, has just one helper through three games with a -4 rating. His only even-strength point of the series was his goal to open Game 1.

Joe Pavelski, the league’s third-leading goal scorer, has two goals and six points in the series but has been unable to finish on some prime chances lately. He has just one combined shot on goal in the last two games. Patrick Marleau scored the overtime winner in Game 3, and after getting eight shots on goal in Game 4, he was as bad as anyone on the Sharks’ side in a team-wide lackluster Game 5 performance. Marleau was credited with a game-high four giveaways to go with five shots that missed the net in the 3-0 home loss.

Finally, Logan Couture, arguably the most consistent Sharks forward in terms off night-in night-out effort, has zero points in the last four games, getting shut down primarily by Selke finalist Anze Kopitar’s line.

The players that are counted on to lead the Sharks will have to show up if the team is to advance to the second round.

“We all know that,” Couture said. “We all know we’re counted on to score goals, to produce, and if we do we help our team. If we don’t, we don’t help our team. A lot of us are proud players. We want to help our team as best as we can tonight. We’re going to do whatever we can to fight for our lives.”

Marleau said: “We’re a team. Everybody has got their role and everybody has got to play it.”

Todd McLellan pointed out on Tuesday that there has been a tipping of the scales from the beginning of the series when it comes to the top players on both sides.

“When I look at this series, our core, our high end players if you will, got the better of theirs in the first two to three games and it certainly has swung in their favor now,” McLellan said. “The series as a whole is created that way so we get an opportunity to settle it all here in Game 7. For us, we believe in that group, and if we want to have success it has to go through our core. They have to find ways to elevate their play and carry the team, and everybody else has to follow them.”

The power play is one area that could use some polish. In Game 6, a lengthy five-on-three chance in the second period was wasted. Minutes later, the Sharks failed to take advantage of Drew Doughty’s high-sticking minor.

San Jose scored one power play goal in each of the first four games, but is a combined 0-for-9 in the last two.

“We’ve had some good looks, we just haven’t put it in,” Thornton said. “It’s going to be there [Wednesday]. We have a confident group. We’re confident with the five guys we put out there that we can change the game and score some goals.”

McLellan agreed with the captain the power play hasn’t been an issue lately, and the deciding game will likely come down to five-on-five play.

“I think this series will be won five-on-five, I really do,” McLellan said. “I think the five-on-five play is of the utmost importance probably to both teams.”

If that’s the case, the Sharks’ top forwards are probably going to have to be the ones to get it done, and they will have to get the better of guys like Kopitar, Marian Gaborik, Jeff Carter and Justin Williams for the first time since early in the series.

“It’s always one of those things where you’ve got to perform, and we haven’t been up to par with that the last few games,” Pavelski said. “It’s on us.”
Thornton: 'We worked all 82 games for home ice in this situation'

April 30, 2014, 11:15 am

Antti Niemi

INSIDE THE MATCHUP

- The Kings beat the Sharks, 4-1, on Monday, sending their series vs. the Sharks to a Game 7 for the second straight postseason. Los Angeles defeated San Jose, 2-1, at Staples Center in Game 7 of the 2013 Conference Semifinals, before getting bounced by the Blackhawks, 4-1, in the Conference Finals.

- Anze Kopitar had two goals and an assist in Game 6, and has now tallied at least one point in all six games of this matchup. Kopitar, who had just three points (2g, 1a) in five games during the 2013-14 regular season against the Sharks, has eight points (3g, 5a) in the first six tilts of this series.

- Justin Williams also had three points (2g, 1a) in Monday's win, garnering first-star honors for his performance, and giving him four goals in his last three skates overall. Williams has played in four Game 7s all-time, and has nine points (5g, 4a) in those contests -- the same total of Game 7 points as all other current Kings combined.

- Patrick Marleau is one of six different Sharks who have exactly one Game 7 goal during their respective careers. Marleau had seven points (3g, 4a) in the first four tilts of this matchup, but has been held pointless in the last two contests.

The Kings (50.0) and Sharks (43.7) have combined to average 93.7 hits per game in this matchup -- most of any two opponents in any postseason series since the 2006 playoffs.

- Los Angeles and San Jose are playing their 20th playoff game since 2011 tonight -- the most by any two opponents over the last 3+ postseasons (Sharks are 10-9 in the prior 19 meetings).

- Los Angeles has played in eight Game 7s all-time, skating off with series wins in four of those matchups. San Jose is 5-3 all-time in Game 7s.

Programming note: Coverage of Game 7 between the Kings and Sharks begins tonight at 6:30 p.m. with Sharks Pregame Live on Comcast SportsNet California (Channel locations)

SAN JOSE -- Sharks goalie Antti Niemi will be back in the net for Game 7 on Wednesday night against Los Angeles.

Niemi was chased in games four and five for Alex Stalock, who played all of Game 6 in Los Angeles, a 4-1 Kings win tying the first-round series at three games apiece.

"I think the break was good for Nemo. He got a chance to work on some things in his game that the goaltending coaches wanted to work [on]," Todd McLellan said. "He got a little chance to rest. Our team needed a change heading into Game 6 in L.A.

"We unfortunately had to pull him twice. That wasn’t all on Nemo’s shoulders, it’s pretty evident and pretty obvious. I hope I’ve made that clear. But, moving forward with Nemo, we want to give Nemo an opportunity."

Niemi was asked how he could use the removal from the starting lineup for a game to his advantage.

"I got a couple extra practice days in between, maybe work on some stuff. Either way, having a day off from the game, not being so focused, maybe that’s a good thing, too," he said.

"Nemo has got some rest, and he’ll be ready for tonight," Joe Thornton said.

Niemi was in net for the Sharks in their previous Game 7 at home against Detroit in 2011, making 38 saves in a 3-2 win. A Stanley Cup winner with Chicago in 2010, he has plenty of big game experience to draw upon.

"It’s always a different situation, but of course it gives me a little bit of extra confidence," he said. "But, it’s more about what’s happening today, and we’ve got to be ready to go.

"I’ve got to think about my own game, and be ready to go early. Do the same things to get ready as I do every day. I feel good to go."
Justin Williams scored a controversial goal in the third period and Anze Kopitar added two more as the Kings pulled away late to win Game 6 at Staples Center on Monday night, 4-1. James Sheppard scored the only goal for San Jose, tying the game in the second period. Alex Stalock allowed four goals on 30 shots in his first career playoff start, taking the loss. The Sharks have played with a lead for just one minute and 32 seconds since the start of Game 3.

The winner of the Sharks-Kings series will face the Anaheim Ducks on the road to start the second round. Anaheim beat Dallas, four games to two, in its first round series.

Playoff series notes
The Sharks are 5-3 all-time in Game 7. Los Angeles is 4-4, including a win over the Sharks in last year's second round.

This will be San Jose's third Game 7 at home. They won the previous two vs. Detroit on May 12, 2011 and Calgary on April 22, 2008.

The Kings are trying to become just the fourth NHL team to ever erase a 3-0 series hole, joining the 1942 Maple Leafs, 1975 Islanders and 2010 Flyers.

Keep an eye on…
Sharks: Brent Burns. After three points in the first three games of the series, Burns has gone cold. He skated for just 14 minutes and 14 seconds in Game 6, and is on a lengthy list of top players for the Sharks that have simply been outplayed by the Kings' best players for the last three games. Burns has just one even-strength point in the series other than an empty net goal, assisting on a Joe Thornton goal in Game 1.

Kings: Justin Williams. The veteran winger has five goals and four assists in four career Game 7 appearances, including scoring two against the Sharks last year as the Kings advanced. Williams, who has four goals in the series, has helped his teams go a perfect 4-0 in Game 7s.

Vitals
Sharks
Goals per game: 3.50 (T – 2nd)
Goals-against per game: 3.50 (T -13th)
Power play: 15.4 percent (10th)
Penalty kill: 76.2 percent (11th)
Kings
Goals per game: 3.50 (T – 2nd)
Goals-against per game: 3.50 (T -13th)
Power play: 23.8 percent (6th)
Penalty kill: 84.6 percent (8th)
Probable lines
Sharks
Tomas Hertl – Joe Thornton – Brent Burns
Patrick Marleau – Logan Couture – Matt Nieto
Marty Havlat – Joe Pavelski – Tommy Wingels
James Sheppard – Andrew Desjardins – Raffi Torres
Matt Irwin – Dan Boyle
Brad Stuart – Justin Braun
Scott Hannan – Jason Demers
Antti Niemi (confirmed)
Alex Stalock
Kings
Marian Gaborik – Anze Kopitar – Dustin Brown
Tanner Pearson – Jeff Carter – Tyler Toffoli
Dwight King – Jarret Stoll – Justin Williams
Kyle Clifford – Mike Richards – Trevor Lewis
Jake Muzzin – Drew Doughty
Robyn Regehr – Slava Voynov
Matt Greene – Alec Martinez
Jonathan Quick (confirmed starter)
Martin Jones
Injuries/Scratches
Sharks: Marc-Edouard Vlasic (upper body) and Adam Burish (fractured left hand) are out.
Kings: Willie Mitchell (lower body) is out.
Quoteable
"We understand what’s at stake. … There was the possibility the series was going to go to seven. We probably didn't think it was going to get there this way, but we're here now and guys will be ready to play." – Joe Pavelski

Burning question
Who do the Sharks need to step up and lead the way in Game 7? Leave your answer in the comments section below.

Tags:
NHL, SAN JOSE Sharks, Top Stories, Kevin Kurz, LOS ANGELES KINGS, 2014 sharks playoffs 1

Kevin Kurz
Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.01.2014
Rewind: Sharks dubious reputation grows after latest failure

April 30, 2014, 11:30 pm
Kevin Kurz

SAN JOSE – Only Patrick Marleau has been around for each and every one of the Sharks’ disappointing playoff runs, now spanning a full decade. He’s well aware of the team’s reputation that it doesn’t have what it takes to make a serious run at the franchise’s first-ever Stanley Cup.

After San Jose’s historic collapse in which they blew a three games to none lead against the Los Angeles Kings, not even Marleau could argue with the naysayers.

“You don’t usually agree with it, but then you do something like this, and it’s not easy to take,” Marleau said.

Brad Stuart added: “We obviously don’t want to hear that kind of stuff, but what are we going to say? We were on the wrong side of history tonight. It’s tough for us to argue with anything that’s said. We let ourselves down, we let the fans down, we let everybody in our organization down. It’s not a good feeling.”

The performances of the top players at the tail end of the series only adds fuel to the fire. Marleau, Joe Thornton, Joe Pavelski, Logan Couture and Brent Burns combined for a grand total of one goal and two assists over the four defeats. None of them found the scoresheet at all in the final three games, as the Sharks got just two goals from James Sheppard and Matt Irwin.

The Sharks outscored Los Angeles 17-8 in the first three games. What changed?

“I look at it as they fixed their problems, we didn’t,” Todd McLellan said. “Our problems got progressively worse as we went along. We were awful off the rush…. Every day we came to the rink and we tried to stress that about giving outnumbered rushes. We were never able to fix it. It’s frustrating, because during the year we were pretty good in those areas.”

The winning goal in Game 7 came just that way. Justin Williams got some room and skated the puck into the zone before finding Anze Kopitar cutting to the net. Kopitar made no mistake in faking Antti Niemi out of his skates to give the Kings a 2-1 lead.

“He made a nice move, and we weren’t able to pick him up,” said Stuart, who was unable to prevent Williams’ pass to the slot.

Just like they did in Game 6, the Sharks sagged after falling behind. Tyler Toffoli’s goal at 4:40 of the third period basically put the game away, as the Sharks’ offense remained dormant thanks in major part to a power play that finished 0-6 on the night and 0-15 in the final three games.

“They just played real tight defensively and their goaltender got hot, like he usually does this time of the year,” Thornton said.

Dan Boyle said: “The power play didn’t get it done. It certainly won us some games early in the series and we had some chances. But if you don’t put the puck in the net, it doesn’t matter how many chances you get.”

While the Sharks seemed to play progressively worse after taking a 3-0 series lead, the Kings showed they are still a legitimate Stanley Cup contender as they head into the second round against the Ducks. Their early series struggles are now a distant memory.

The Sharks, though, considered themselves contenders, too, with a roster that looked like it could do some postseason damage as it got healthy at just the right time. No one would have been surprised to see the evenly matched Sharks and Kings go the full seven games before the series started, but the way it progressed was hard to take in the Sharks’ dressing room after the game.

Thornton was particularly emotional, and seemed to get choked up when discussing his team’s latest failure.

“It’s just so disappointing. It’s just very, very tough right now,” he said.
April 30, 2014, 11:15 pm

Ray Ratto

SAN JOSE — On a night that demanded self-loathing on an almost galactic scale, the San Jose Sharks accepted their fate with a greater willingness than any would have thought.

On the ice, that was absolutely true. In losing Game 7 of this Western Conference quarterfinal series to the Los Angeles Kings, 5-1, they became the fourth team in NHL history to take a 3-0 lead in games and lose the series. Their collapse was indeed the most monumental of them all, as they were outscored 18-5 in the final four games — and those scores were generous assessments of the real imbalance between the two teams. They deserved to own this disaster, and they will deserve the fallout that is to come.

But it was the postgame self-assessment where they excelled, in fact the only time all night they excelled — in abject self-flagellation. They were devastated, ashamed, angry, humiliated, and painfully self-aware of just how revolting this collapse was. And they deserved every insult they could hurl down upon themselves. They know what their reputation as playoff lightweights are, and now they have no way to respond other than with the killing phrase, “You’re right.”

“Every loss is pretty bad,” said Logan Couture, one of the many missing core performers in the final four games, “but this one is different. I’m supposed to be one of the players we count on, and I didn’t perform the way I wanted to. This one hurts a lot more. I’ll spend every day of the summer thinking about this one.”

“There have been lots of lows, but this was definitely one of the worst,” said Patrick Marleau, the team’s longest-serving player and someone for whom self-examination has never been a public thing. “What other people say . . . well, I don’t usually agree with it, but when you do something like this, well, it’s not easy to take.”

And head coach Todd McLellan was even more pointed than that as he poked angrily at the cold ashes of the worst good season this team has ever had.

“There have been a lot of good moments in this franchise,” he said with disgust commingled with anger in his mouth, “but this is as low as it’s been for me. That’s an easy one to answer.

“The difference is this. They (the Kings) fixed their problems, and ours got progressively worse. We were awful off the rush, and as much as we worked on it, we didn’t get any better at it.

“(Another) problem we ran into was getting them to understand that those 6-3, 7-2 games (at the beginning of the series) weren’t going to keep coming. They’re too good a team for that. This isn’t like last year (when the Sharks also lost to the Kings in seven games). That series was a lot closer than this one was. They were the better team. That was quite evident.”

The details of Game 7 were not all that compelling. They did nothing with four second-period power plays. They gave up a late second period goal to Anze Kopitar and an early third-period score to Tyler Toffoli. Their mild gamble on Antti Niemi in goal did not hurt them, because the failures were comprehensive and across the board.

They were just as McLellan said — awful.

So how do they rise from this? Better yet, DO they rise from this? The 1943 Red Wings won the Stanley Cup after the 1942 version lost to Toronto. The 1975 Penguins who lost to the New York Islanders won two playoff series in the next 16 years before discovering Mario Lemieux. The 2011 Bruins won the Cup the year after heimliching their 2010 series with Philadelphia.

But this team is nowhere near Boston’s. The central core of this team went missing with the kill shot ready to be applied. The goaltending was wobbly, and the defense was wobblier once Marc-Edouard Vlasic got hurt. And though this was not a failure of coaching — the players have to eat all four courses of this — one has to wonder about McLellan’s future.
San Jose Sharks

Instant Replay: Sharks’ collapse complete with Game 7 loss

April 30, 2014, 8:45 pm

Kevin Kurz

SAN JOSE – Outside, it was the hottest day of the year in San Jose. Inside SAP Center, it was perhaps the coldest night in franchise history.

The Sharks lost 5-1 to the Los Angeles Kings on Wednesday, becoming just the fourth team in NHL history to lose a best-of-seven series after winning the first three games.

The Kings will play the Anaheim Ducks in the second round.

A late second period goal by Anze Kopitar gave the Kings their first lead of the night, and one that would not be relinquished.

On an odd-man rush, Brad Stuart was unable to prevent a pass from Justin Williams to an open Kopitar in the slot, and the Kings’ top scorer made a move to his backhand before flipping in his fourth goal with just 1:21 left before intermission.

Kopitar recorded at least one point in each of the seven games.

Tyler Toffoli extended the lead to 3-1 at 4:40 of the third period. The play began with Tanner Pearson driving hard up the wall and slamming on the breaks with Justin Braun defending. Toffoli got open on Stuart and went high glove over Antti Niemi for his third goal of the series.

Dustin Brown and Pearson, respectively, scored empty net goals to cap the scoring.

The Sharks fell to 5-4 all-time in a deciding seventh game, and 2-1 at home.

The Sharks got the lead they were desperately looking for with a second period goal by Matt Irwin, shortly off the opening draw. Playing in just his second game of the series, the defenseman directed a shot from high in the zone past Jonathan Quick, who looked to be screened by James Sheppard just 28 seconds into the middle frame.

Los Angeles tied it on a power play at 4:57 with Logan Couture off for elbowing Jake Muzzin. Drew Doughty went high past Niemi after a scrum in front of the Sharks’ net, his first of the series, tying it up.

Prior to Kopitar’s go-ahead goal, the Sharks failed to convert on three minor penalties to the Kings. Their best chance came when Patrick Marleau found a Joe Pavelski rebound just off to the side of the net, but the Jonathan Quick got his glove in the way just in time to deny the Sharks’ all-time leading scorer midway through regulation and with the game still tied 1-1. A brief video review confirmed the puck never crossed the goal line.

San Jose was 0-for-6 on the power play, including a late third period chance when they trailed, 3-1.

The Kings joined the 1942 Maple Leafs, 1975 Islanders and 2010 Flyers as the only teams to come back from a 0-3 series hole.

Special teams

The Sharks were 0-for-15 on the power play over the final three games of the series after failing on all six attempts in Game 7.

Los Angeles was 1-for-3, and 6-for-20 since Game 3.

In goal

Niemi returned to the net after Alex Stalock played all of Game 6, allowing three goals on 28 shots. He had been chased by Los Angeles in games four and five.

Niemi fell to 1-2 in his career in a Game 7, all with San Jose, including last season’s second round defeat to the Kings.

Quick allowed just two goals total over the final three games, after surrendering 19 in the first four. He made 39 saves on 40 shots.

Lineup
The Blues cleaned out their lockers today at the Ice Zone in Hazelwood, saying their good-byes to each other for the offseason. Several players talked about their their health, their regrets, what went wrong and the future of the club. Here's a sampling of those interviews...

**Jeremy Rutherford**

"I guess the bottom line is there's plenty of time to recover now unfortunately. We would have pushed through whatever we had to ... to keep playing. There's a few bumps and bruises on every guy after a long season. I wish we were still acquiring more of them than letting them heal."

On injuries being a factor in his play:

"I don't know if I was as effective as I would have been if I was full strength. But again, we've got to deal with those just like every team probably had injuries that they were playing through. Together as a collective group, we need to get the job done and it wasn't to be obviously in Round 1, and we got to have these year-end meetings already."

On GM Doug Armstrong and head coach Ken Hitchcock saying the team lacked a killer instinct:

"That's obviously what you'd like to see happen when you've got a team down 2-0 and you get a pretty close game in Game 3 and then an overtime game in Game 4 and then another overtime game in Game 5. It's been said a lot in sports that stepping on the throat — that final blow — is a lot of times the toughest one to administer. It's still too fresh to probably come out of their with good lessons we're going to learn from another heart-breaking experiences. But hopefully that's one of the things that we can start to acquire ... that sour taste becomes so sour that you want to give that final blow as soon as you can and abruptly and definitively as possible."

On expecting any significant changes:

"That's Doug and the front office, their decisions to make. It was a heck of a series and in a tight series like that, if you get a couple of finishes on a couple of plays ... or if our power play figures out a way to produce or you win that special teams battle. Again, do we need to turn this thing upside down and start over. I don't think that's the case in my personal opinion, not that that matters. For me, we've got a lot of great character guys in here that are good friends that love to be around each other and love to go to battle with each other. Correct, we didn't get the job done, but I think we'll learn lessons and be better coming out the other side."

On the lack of success by the power-play unit the last couple of postseasons:

"I think it was good three years ago against San Jose, in Round 1, and carried us through that first round. But past that, it has been stifled a lot. All year we've got a shot-based power play with a guy in front and traffic finding rebounds. Against Chicago, they blocked so many shots that it never even made it to the hashmarks to even start a rebound, chaos, or a little play in front. They were clearing pucks and we were working on our breakout more than trying to dig around the goalie to put pucks in. If I had the answer, I would have fixed it and we would have won the series. But having a little bit more versatility and showing different looks, I think, wouldn't allow them to stay in those shot lanes and block those shots. You get them a little uncertain about what's coming next and maybe a few lanes or plays open up. But that's a lot easier to say than to implement and do. I'm sure that will be an area of focus going into next year. When teams are blocking shots or are in lanes against us, we've got to find different ways to get pucks into the areas where we're going to score from."

**T.J. Oshie**

On this year being a step back following the first-round loss:

"It feels like a big letdown, I don't know if it's a step back. But it's hard, it's so early, it's so fresh that it's hard to really ... we're still all in a little bit of shock and awe, I think, that we're not coming to the rink and practicing still. I think everyone feels the same way. No one feels worse than the players do: the coaches, the general manager, the fans ... no one feels worse about losing out than the players do. It's hard, it's hard to talk about."

On offensive problems in the postseason:

"Obviously we're not there offensively, where we need to be to win games. Bottom line is, guys like me and 'Backs' and 'Steener,' we have to lead the charge. Even if other people weren't scoring, that means we have to score more. So I think a lot of it falls on us three to lead the charge in the offensive department and everywhere else on the ice."

**Jaden Schwartz**

On expecting bigger roles for himself and Vladimir Tarasenko next season:

"I'm excited to get back again. I want to come and play a big part on this team. I feel like I've learned a lot this year. I know he did, too. I think it gives you a little more confidence maybe coming into next year. I'm going to work hard coming in here next year. I want to be a big part of this team. I played pretty well this season. There's always things you can improve on and things I can learn. I was pretty happy with the way the the regular season went. As the season went on, I felt like my role got bigger and I kind of wanted to keep that momentum going into next year."

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"The Blues took steps backwards this year. For guys like us to be in that same position, we're going to have to change and do something about it ... win two more games and win the series, close the series out and we didn't do it. It's disappointing and it falls on our shoulders."

On understanding the fans' frustrations:

"I don't hold anything against them for that. They're entitled to being upset about this. Of course we are too. For them on the outside looking in, it's hard because they just have to go through it every year and have been waiting a long time. We obviously want to be the ones to change that and give them what we know they deserve and to really kind of under-perform this year, it hurts."

**Ryan Miller**

On whether the criticism he faced after the series bothers him:

"You're the goaltender, you're going to take a lot of the focus of everything. Just the way everything worked out, the trade and the mood around this making a step forward ... it's pretty much inevitable unless we had won the Stanley Cup there was going to be a lot of criticism. I knew what to expect coming in and I'll take my share of the blame. I could have played better, but it is what it is."

On his interest in re-signing with the Blues:

"I don't close any avenues with anybody, especially in this kind of profession. I'm just trying to make my best impression wherever I'm at. I know it didn't work out in this playoff series; I think it's a good group here and it's up to management to make decisions about my situation going forward. I really didn't know a lot about the city coming in here. I had visited a few times when I was younger just to play hockey — you know you're kind of in, then you're out. I spent some time here and got to know a few people. I love the area and it's nice. It's funny how a different part of the world unfolds and opens up for you. Good people, very passionate ... and as (ticked) off as they probably are at me right now, it's good. It shows they're sports fans and they're committed to their team. They have passion, they have pride, it's the kind of people you want to play for. If it works out that management wants me back, if it works out I'm back here, that's the kind of people you want to play for. I hope they would appreciate the effort I try and bring and I hope they continue to support the Blues because they have a great group of guys here. I know that people wanted it to be better this year and we wanted it to be better ... this team is going to be better."

**David Backes**

On injuries being a factor in his play:

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"I don't know if I was as effective as I would have been if I was full strength. But again, we've got to deal with those just like every team probably had injuries that they were playing through. Together as a collective group, we need to get the job done and it wasn't to be obviously in Round 1, and we got to have these year-end meetings already."

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On injuries being a factor in his play:
Blues coach Ken Hitchcock met with the media Tuesday at Scottrade Center. Here’s a transcript of that conversation ...

Hitchcock’s opening remarks: "To the fans, to the people that fill the building and fill the airwaves, we’re disappointed. We’re disappointed in the outcome. We’re disappointed in a number of things that happened in this playoff series. But you know what, after I finish talking to you folks, it’s going to be on with the grind and find a way to help us get these guys to the next level. I think there was some significant things on the team side that really improved. We lost to a hell of a hockey club. The way we lost, and I’m open to discuss that later, really hurts a lot and I think it has a familiar tone from last year to this year that we’re going to have to deal with moving forward. I’m open to discuss that with everybody else. Right now, it’s kind of still a little raw, a little disappointing ... so the reflection phase is not there yet.”

Q: After last season, you talked about needing an extra 5-10 percent from players. Did you get it in the regular season, but not the postseason?

Hitchcock: “You measure your team based on significant opponents from a coaching standpoint. When you win the games you’re supposed to win, that’s the preparation that the players do. When you have an opponent that you’re either better than, more mature than, you win those games ... you’ve done a good job in not letting points slip. But you measure your team against significant opponents. So teams that are in the same echelon as you, you measure your team against that and then you really measure your team in the playoffs.

"The playoffs tell you everything as a coach. They tell you everything about yourself, they tell you everything about your players, they tell you everything about how close you are ... what you need to do better, what you've done well ... they tell you everything. But also the in-season games against significant opponents tell you the same story, too. We had a hell of a year offensively from a lot of guys — career year.

"But in saying that, everybody's going to talk about the loss in Game 6, and they’re going to talk about the loss in Game 6 in Los Angeles and in Chicago. The series wasn’t lost in Game 6. Sure, we played our best period of hockey in the whole series in the second period in Chicago, but that wasn’t where we lost the series. And it wasn’t where we lost the series in Los Angeles. We lost the series in (Games) 3, 4 and 5. When we had the opportunity, we had in both series, had pushed out significant players who were very frustrated in the opposition. They were pushed out of the series and they weren’t entering the series yet. That bought them time to come into the series in both instances and that’s what happened. Players that weren’t entered in (the series) or hadn’t entered the series against Chicago came in in (Games) 5 and 6. We had frustrated them, eliminated them, whatever, but they came into the series.

"We weren’t able to create the gap in Games 3 and 4 and win on the road, which you have to do in the playoffs. That’s the killer instinct that you need to have. We weren’t able to do it in either series, and it hurts. That’s everybody’s responsibility ... mine, Doug’s, players, other coaches, everybody. And that’s the part that hurts ... is that we couldn’t apply the killer instinct when we needed to in (Games) 3 and 4 in both years, and that’s something you’ve got to have a hard look at. But it’s also the games against significant opponents during the year that you have to look at and obviously other aspects of your game, whether it’s special teams or whatever.

Q: Why do you believe the team, specifically the top players, haven’t been able to execute in the playoffs as they have in the regular season?

Hitchcock: "I don’t look at it from top players ... blah, blah, blah ... this guy needed to do this, this needed to do that. It’s a push, it’s a team push. We win as a team and we lose as a team, especially as coaches. Like I don’t want to get into we needed more from this guy or we needed more from that guy. We needed to open the wound. We opened the wound by the way we played. We played really well to start the playoffs and we had our foot on their throat with the way we played in Game 3 and we couldn’t squeeze. We couldn’t get the goal and when we had them emotionally pushed out ... the games in three and four gave them the life that allowed other players who were very frustrated by our checking to enter the series. They ended up coming through at the end for them. We had done a great job, but we couldn’t push through and get the goal, get the lead or whatever after playing well and they got more wind in their sails. To me, Game 6 is a little bit of a microcosm of what went on. You push, you push and you push and then they wake up after the second period and they look in their locker room and say, ‘Holy smokes, it’s still tied here. We might as well go win it.’ And then people you have not heard from in the series score big goals. And end of series. It’s the collective push for me as a coach. It’s not just the playoffs, it’s the measure of significant opponents that is the next level for me. That’s why you wake up and you grind. You get up and you start grinding. You don’t grind on. We need this or we need that. ‘That’s the general manager’s job. My job is to find more from the group that I’m given. So you find ways and you try to create an atmosphere to even get more from your team. Who’s on your team, who plays, who they do ... look we put two guys that were just leaving the game last year, (Jaden) Schwartz and (Vladimir) Tarasenko, they’re significant players for us. There’s a lot of really great pieces here that have really emerged as good players now, but we’ve got to help them along and find a way to push through when you’re sitting in a series like that. You just can’t live on playing well. You’ve got to have time when it’s the killer instinct and you’ve got to put the foot right on the throat — I keep saying that — but when it’s time to put it on, you’ve got to put it on and we didn’t. We let two teams, two really good teams ... we let em off the hook. And when they got off the hook, then they started to play and the people that we had boxed out came into the game.”

Q: When you’re assessing things, and you didn’t have enough push, do you look at your coaching staff? Do you have to consider changes?

Hitchcock: “I look at everything, I look at everything. I look at the job that I’ve done. I look at prep, I look at personnel, I look at the way we play them, I look at coaches, I look at everything. We’re in the winning business. I look at everything. I just don’t look at it today. I look at it a week from now or I evaluate it and I get as much information, but the first thing I look at is me. What do I need to do to help this thing along. It’s different ... nothing to take away from other teams in the playoffs ... but it’s different when you play teams who are Cup winners. You get such an immediate evaluation of your own group that it’s really black and white. There’s no gray area, there’s no hiding, there’s no mystique, there’s no nothing. It’s just straight black and white. You get a great evaluation. So unfortunately we’ve got these two great evaluations based on significant opponents. Boy, when you get a couple teams in the prime of their careers who know how to win, you really have to push them out because if you just push them up to the wall and you don’t get them through, they’re going to come back on you and that’s what both teams did. What was eerily similar wasn’t the scores of the game, but the players that were frustrated in L.A. and then came back to beat us and then the players that were really frustrated in Chicago and then came back to beat us ... that’s what was similar to me. We had done a great job in pushing people out that we thought maybe we could take advantage of or at least neutralize. But they came back in the series. We allowed them back in and they became players in the series.”

Q: Obviously Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews and Duncan Keith stepped up. Are you comfortable with your group being able to step up?

Hitchcock: “I’m not getting into personnel. I’m not getting into Player X, Player Y.”

Q: But as a group ... are you comfortable with your group to be able to step up?

Hitchcock: "We had (111) points and what we did really well all year quite frankly was we had the lead a lot and we are really tough with the lead. Nobody gets in our pocket when we’ve got the lead. We know how to play, we’ve got great structure, guys buy in ... all that stuff. But we’re like a lot of teams emerging here trying to get better here. You need to have a different type of team to chase games and that’s not how we’re build, to chase hockey games. We’re built to close you down and close you down hard. We’re built a certain way here and we’ve got personnel here to do that way. But like I said, the 1-0 game is a perfect microcosm of the playoffs for me for two years now. You chase it so hard, but if we had a 1-0 lead and had them chase us, it would be a different story.”

Q: Before the playoffs began, you said that you didn’t view the power play to be as critical to postseason success as other areas of the game. After seeing this series unfold, does that change your opinion?

Hitchcock: “I think when you look at it on paper, you say, ‘Well gee, if we could have scored here, if we could have scored there’ ...” (Game 6) was tied going into the third period on the road. I don’t care what the score was, 1-1, 2-2, 4-4, doesn’t matter. But we made mistakes when the game was on the line, we made mistakes defensively. Like I said, Game 6 doesn’t matter what
the score is, it's tied and if you're a road team, that's exactly where you want it… that chance, that opportunity. Yeah we would have liked to score on the power play and we would have liked to be better and all that stuff, but at the end of the day, we made two big errors to give it to 3-1. The fourth and fifth goals don't matter to me, they don't count. We were pressing taking chances. But we made two big errors when the game was on the line. We made an error in Game 5 here when the game was on the line. That's a concern. That's the questions that you ask of your players: Why are we pressing in that area? What are we thinking? Those are the questions that we've got to look at the video and live with all summer because those are the critical points of games. Those are the details that have been in our game for three years now that have given us a chance to have a great record. Those checking details have allowed our offense to get better and better, but I thought -- yeah, our power play could have been better and we would have liked to score goals — but even saying that, we needed to check better in some areas, too.”

Q: With regard to the power play, do you plan to stick with what you've done, or will you change your approach?

Hitchcock: “I don't know. I'm not there right now. I haven't started figuring out stuff like that yet. Just not there yet.”

Q: How much of a watershed moment was losing David Backes late in Game 2?

Hitchcock: “Everybody loses guys. I saw things from some of their key players, I knew how hurt they were because I saw them and have coached them before. When they were jumping out of the way like they were jumping out of the way, they were banged up. So they had players who were almost down for the count, too. That's just the way it goes. That's the playoffs.”

Q: What's the process now for you?

Hitchcock: “I need to process. I need to, no offense, but get away from you (media) folks. I need to process and figure out … I think moving forward I’ll go over all the significant games from this season. I’ll look at all of our games against Anaheim, Los Angeles and Chicago, San Jose (and) get some real evaluation on that, then obviously look at the playoff stuff, too. Those would be the games I'd look at to see what's there and what we need to change. I think you have to be careful evaluating one aspect … I think you've got to be careful when you evaluate one aspect of your game because there's a whole encompassing thing. Just because your power play has a tough two or three games, you still have to win the game. Maybe your (penalty kill) has had a rough go for a game, you still have to win the hockey game. There's all the pick-me-ups that go, but I think once you look at the way you've played against significant opponents, you get a really good evaluation of what part you need to help along.”

Q: When you talk about killer instinct, isn't that something that needs to come from within a player?

Hitchcock: “No, it's developed.”

Q: So is there anything you can do as a coaching staff do to help?

Hitchcock: “Yep, there is. It's not pretty at times, but you can do that. That's developed, that's not God-given, that's developed from within your group.”

Q: What can you do to address the team's poor starts to games?

Hitchcock: “That goes to the killer part. There's a reason for that and we need to talk about that, too. If you're going to start the fight, you need to know you can finish it. You know what I mean? That's just the confidence that goes within the group that has to come from us. It's really, really important that we develop that mindset. That just enhances your team that you're willing to go a little bit deeper. It's that killer instinct. If you just look at some of the other NHL playoff games, a game is on the line and it's the same four guys that step up. We've got to develop that mindset with guys that we think can make a difference, give them the trust and confidence that they can do that stuff.”

Q: Where is your interest level in continuing to coach?

Hitchcock: “You mean am I too old? I love living here, I love working here, I love working with Doug (Armstrong). That's something he and I will talk about. We've made a home here. We've made significant progress here. I know it doesn't feel like progress to people right now, but it is. I've only been here three years, so I see the progress. I know the debris of years of getting close and being frustrated and then building it. But I see the level of improvement here, it's incredible. I see the level some of the younger players have improved at. I know Doug wants to bring in a couple more, which is great with us. If they think they're ready, then it's our job to get them playing and up and running just like we did with (Jaden Schwartz) and Vlad (Tarasenko). But there's a real high level of commitment here by the fans and by the players. We've just got to help it along and enhance it, improve it. I mean it's really tough, it's really tough to go through what you're going through right now, but from an evaluation standpoint, you get just a true evaluation of ... there's just no gray area. It is what it is. It's tough to go through, but there's just no gray area on evaluation now. I know exactly what's needed from a play standpoint and you know we've just got to find a way to move it forward.”

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Blues still experiencing "shock" following end of season

Jeremy Rutherford

Several Blues had trouble even uttering responses to reporters’ questions Wednesday when the club cleaned out its lockers, officially ending the 2013-14 season.

The players still don’t have many of the answers as to why they failed to perform in their first-round playoff loss to Chicago. But that’s not why it was difficult to find the words.

"It's so fresh that it's really hard to look back on and reflect right now," forward T.J. Oshie said. "The shock is still kind of there of why we're not there."

The Blues were left trying to explain for the second consecutive postseason how they squandered a 2-0 lead in a best-of-seven series. One year after falling apart against Los Angeles, history repeated itself against the Blackhawks.

"Not that we made excuses last year, but we took steps last year," Blues defensemen Kevin Shattenkirk said. "This year, we took steps backwards. For guys like us to be in that same position, if we’re going to learn from it, we’re going to have to change and do something about it — win more games and win the series, close the series out and we didn’t do it. It’s disappointing and it falls on our shoulders."

Fans want answers, and the Blues were doing their best to try to provide them.

How did a club that was ranked No. 1 in the NHL in goals per game, averaging as many as 3.6 per game at one point in the season, slip so dramatically late in the year?

"There’s ebbs and flows that go with scoring," Blues captain David Backes said. "Sometimes it seems like you can’t miss and that was maybe our first 30-35 games of the year. It was hitting the post and going in. For whatever reason, those things seemed to even themselves out over the course of time and late in the season we weren’t scoring at the (same) rate. Whether that’s bounces or us not making our own luck ... we just didn’t do a good enough job."

The Blues scored 14 goals in their six-game series against Chicago. Six of those goals came from either fourth-line forwards or defensemen.

"Bottom line is, guys like me and (Backes) and (Alexander Steen), we have to perform this year, it hurts," Oshie said. "If other people weren’t scoring, that means we have to score more. So I think a lot of it falls on us three to lead the charge in the offensive department."

The power play again hampered the offense in the postseason. The unit went two for 29, and in the Blues’ last three series losses — against the Blackhawks this postseason and the Kings the past two years — they are a combined four for 63 on the man-advantage.

"It was good three years ago against San Jose, and carried us through that first round," Backes said. "But past that, it has been stifled a lot. All year we’ve got a shot-based power play with a guy in front and traffic finding rebounds. Against Chicago, they blocked so many shots that it never even made it to the hash-marks to even start a rebound, or a little play in front.

"If I had the answer, I would have fixed it and we would have won the series. But having a little bit more versatility and showing different looks, I think, wouldn’t allow them to stay in those shot lanes and block those shots. You get them a little uncertain about what’s coming next and maybe a few lanes. But that’s a lot easier to say than to implement and do."

A defensive core that received high praise for its depth and transition ability again proved passive and less physical in the playoffs, an assessment that Blues general manager Doug Armstrong called "fair."

"The defense probably could have played better," defenseman Barret Jackman said. "But it’s a collective thing, the forwards and (defensemen) working together ... the continuity with holdsup and things like that. If you’re playing well, it doesn’t matter if you’re physical or not."

Meanwhile, goaltender Ryan Miller took his share of criticism following a series in which he posted an .897 save percentage.

"You’re the goaltender, you’re going to take a lot of the focus of everything," Miller said. "Just the way everything worked out, the trade and the mood around this making a step forward. ... It’s pretty much inevitable unless we had won the Stanley Cup there was going to be a lot of criticism. I knew what to expect coming in and I’ll take my share of the blame. I could have played better, but it is what it is."

On Tuesday, Armstrong and head coach Ken Hitchcock said the Blues overall lacked a killer instinct. The players didn’t disagree.

"It’s been said a lot in sports that stepping on the throat — that final blow — is a lot of times the toughest one to administer," Backes said. "But hopefully that’s one of the things that we can start to acquire."

But which players will be back to get another chance?

"Army’s a guy who’s going to make changes to try to put the best team forward, the best playoff team forward," Shattenkirk said. "Whatever they may be, we’re going to have to wait and see."

The biggest question surrounds Miller, who again Wednesday voiced an interest in returning. He will be an unrestricted free agent.

"I have to have more discussion with management on where they’re at with everything," Miller said. "It’s not something we’re going to do two or three days after we lost. It’s something where you kind of want to get away from the situation a few weeks probably. I’m sure they’ll want to have something — an answer on their side — before the (NHL draft June 27-28). That being said, I liked my time here and am open to staying. I think it’s a solid organization from the top down. We’ll just see what happens."

Any news made by the Blues now will be off the ice. With the locker room doors closing Wednesday, the season is complete, and that is shocking to many fans.

"They’re entitled to being upset about this," Shattenkirk said. "For them on the outside looking in, it’s hard because they just have to go through it every year and have been waiting a long time. We obviously want to be the ones to change that and give them what we know they deserve. And to really kind of under-perform this year, it hurts."

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Make sure articles are from this paper and not other newspapers or websites.
ST. LOUIS — The bitter reality of sparkling clean lockers following another first-round playoff loss is how the St. Louis Blues closed their book on the 2013-14 season.

It happened in 2013, too.

Of course 29 out of 30 teams finish short of their goal of winning the Stanley Cup, but the Blues’ first-round loss to the Chicago Blackhawks seemed to carry a bit more extra weight in the frustration department.

"It’s so fresh that it’s really hard to look back on and reflect right now," Blues forward T.J. Oshie said. "The shock is still kind of there of why we’re not there..."

Blues General Manager Doug Armstrong and coach Ken Hitchcock each discussed what they perceived as the team’s lack of killer instinct after being unable to close out teams despite building 2-0 series leads against the Los Angeles Kings and Chicago Blackhawks.

"That’s obviously what you’d like to see happen when you’ve got a team down 2-0 and you get a pretty close game in Game 3 and then an overtime game in Game 4 and then another overtime game in Game 5," Blues captain David Backes said. "It’s been said a lot in sports that stepping on the throat -- that final blow -- is a lot of times the toughest one to administer."

Blues players, coaches and management felt the team had taken a step forward last spring despite the first-round loss to L.A.

That feeling is no longer present.

"It’s still too fresh to probably come out of their with good lessons we’re going to learn from another heart-breaking experience," Backes said. "But hopefully that’s one of the things that we can start to acquire...that sour taste becomes so sour that you want to give that final blow as soon as you can and abruptly and definitely as possible."

Expected to be the difference-maker at playoff time, Blues goaltender Ryan Miller was under extreme pressure after being acquired from the Buffalo Sabres.

While Miller played well at times, his 2-4 record, 2.70 goals-against average and .897 save percentage were not enough to get the Blues into the second round.

"You’re the goaltender, you’re going to take a lot of the focus of everything," Miller said. "Just the way everything worked out, the trade and the mood around this making a step forward...it’s pretty much inevitable unless we had won the Stanley Cup there was going to be a lot of criticism.

"I knew what to expect coming in and I’ll take my share of the blame. I could have played better, but it is what it is."

Miller, 34, is eligible to become an unrestricted free agent July 1. Has he had any early contract discussions with the Blues?

"Yeah, I don't close any avenues with anybody, especially in this kind of profession. I'm just trying to make my best impression wherever I'm at," he said. "I know it didn't work out in this playoff series. I think it's a good group here and it's up to management to make decisions about my situation going forward."

Miller seems open to discuss a potential return with the Blues, but on Tuesday Armstrong said top goaltending prospect Jake Allen will definitely be with the team next season.

Blues backup goalie Brian Elliott is also eligible to become an unrestricted free agent, so Armstrong’s first major decision of the offseason will be how he wants to handle the goalies.

"I have to have more discussion with management on where they're at with everything," Miller said. "It's not something we're going to do two or three days after we lost. It's something where you kind of want to get away from the situation by a few weeks probably.

"I'm sure they'll want to have something...an answer on their side, before the draft. It's more directed towards Doug (Armstrong) and the coaching staff and how they kind of see this team being built. That being said, I liked my time here. (I'm) open to staying. I think it's a solid organization from the top down. We'll just see what happens."

Blues defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk had trouble finding positives amidst the debris of another first-round loss.

"Not that we made excuses last year, but we took steps last year, I think, and this year, we took steps backwards," Shattenkirk said. "For guys like us to be in that same position, if we're going to learn from it, we're going to have to change and do something about it...win two more games and win the series, close the series out and we didn't do it. It's disappointing and it falls on our shoulders."

"It's tough. We don't want to go through this again to be honest."

Oshie believes the team’s nucleus has what it takes to be successful in the playoffs. The reality remains that while the Blues have been among the top five most successful regular-season teams in the NHL over the past three seasons, it hasn’t translated into success in the playoffs.

"It feels like a big letdown," Oshie said. "I don’t know if it’s a step back. We’re still all in a little bit of shock and awe, I think, that we’re not coming to the rink and practicing still.

"It’s hard...I think everyone feels the same way. No one feels worse than the players do: the coaches, the general manager, the fans...no one feels worse about losing out than the players do. It’s hard, it’s hard to talk about."

Defenseman Barret Jackman, the longest tenured Blue and professional athlete in St. Louis, has seen more than his share of disappointments.

"It takes a few days to sink in," Jackman said. "But when you’re packing your bag and saying good-bye to everybody for the summer, it’s tough. We felt that we had the team that was built for a long playoff run and after six games we’re done and licking our wounds, looking at what we need to do for the next year to be in a better position."

Belleville News-Democrat LOADED: 05.01.2014
Hitchcock: Blues must find a way to get it done

NORM SANDERS
April 30, 2014

In each of the last two years, the St. Louis Blues held 2-0 leads in their first-round playoff series against Los Angeles and Chicago, only to lose four straight each time.

It's a bothersome trend that Blues management, coaching staff and players would like to see discontinued immediately.

"There's a lot of really great pieces here that have really emerged as good players now, but we've got to help them along and find a way to push through when you're sitting in a series like that," Hitchcock said. "You just can't live on playing well, you've got to have time when it's the killer instinct and you've got to put your foot right on the throat.

"When it's time to put it on, you've got to put it on -- and we didn't. We let two really good teams ... we let them off the hook. And when they got off the hook, then they started to play and the people we had boxed out (earlier in the series) came into the game."

How does Hitchcock describe this killer instinct he'd like the Blues to have?

"When you've got your foot on their throat, step. I don't know any other way to describe it. The end result is you've to go further. Further in every aspect of your game: checking, special teams, scoring ...you've just got to go further. It's hard to do, but you've got to do it."

Why does Hitchcock feel the Blues have had trouble following up their regular-season success in the playoffs?

"I don't look at it as top players ... it's a push, it's a team push ... we win as a team and we lose as a team. We needed to open the wound, we opened the wound by the way we played. We played really well to start the playoffs and we had our foot on their throat with the way we played in Game 3 and we couldn't squeeze.

"We had done a great job, but we couldn't push through and get the goal or get the lead after playing well and they got more wind in their sails."

Hitchcock expressed concern about key defensive mistakes made at crucial times along with the power play (2-for-29 in the series):

"When you look at it on paper, you say well, gee, we could have scored here, we could have scored there. The game (6) was tied going into the third period on the road. I don't care what the score was, 1-1, 2-2, 4-4, it doesn't matter.

"We made mistakes with the game on the line, we made mistakes defensively ... we would have liked to score on the power play ... at the end of the day, we made two big errors to get it to 3-1. The fourth and fifth goals to me don't count, we were pressing and taking chances. We made two big errors when the game was on the line."

Hitchcock on another painful first-round loss:

"It hurts ... that's everybody's responsibility, mine, Doug's, players, other coaches, everybody. That's the part that hurts. We couldn't apply the killer instinct when we needed to in (Games) 3 and 4 in both years -- and that's something you've got to have a hard look at."

Were there any similarities between the playoff losses to the Blackhawks and Kings, other than an ability to build on 2-0 leads?

"When you get a couple teams in the prime of their career that know how to win, you really have to push them out. Because if you just push them up tot he wall and you don't get them through, they're going to come back on you - and that's what both teams did."

The Blues seem unable to execute as well offensively in the playoffs as they do during the regular season.

"Collectively, that's part of the job. We increased our scoring a lot this year, but we have to find a way to increase our scoring in significant games. Significant games mean you get checked harder, you get played harder, you get dealt with much harder. You've still got to find a way to do it."
Malone pleads not guilty to cocaine, DUI charges

Damian Cristodero
Wednesday, April 30, 2014 9:35pm

Lightning left wing Ryan Malone has pleaded not guilty to DUI and cocaine possession charges stemming from an April 12 arrest in Tampa. That case is ongoing, but on Wednesday the state in Hillsborough County court dismissed a charge of driving with a suspended license connected to an April 8 traffic stop, also in Tampa.

Malone was not in court but represented by Tampa attorney Wes Trombley. Malone, 34, is being evaluated by a substance abuse and behavioral health program run jointly by the league and players association. No trial date has been set for the cocaine and DUI charges that could bring maximum prison time of five years and six months, respectively.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 05.01.2014
In celebrating the 10th anniversary of a Stanley Cup triumph, members of the 2003-04 Tampa Bay Lightning have had a few occasions to get together this season.

There was a reunion a while back. There was an unveiling of a bronze statue of team captain Dave Andreychuk hoisting the chalice in April. And somewhere along the way, before the club was eliminated from the playoffs last week, members of the 2003-04 squad got together to watch some archival video of their seven-game triumph over the Calgary Flames.

What they saw resembled a different sport.

“When you watch the games now, you sit there and you say, ‘That’s a penalty now. That’s a penalty now. That’s a penalty now,’” former defenceman Jassen Cullimore was saying this week. “You can’t go a minute or two without seeing something that didn’t get called (in 2004) that would be a penalty now. The clutching and grabbing, even the hitting. You had an opportunity of about two seconds after a guy got rid of the puck where you could hit him. Now you can’t do that. As a defenceman, you can’t do much.”

For all the cracking down on obstruction and the shaving down of goalie equipment, offence hasn’t exactly expanded exponentially in the decade since the Lightning won their title. The league averaged 5.1 goals a game in 2003-04; this past regular season it managed 5.3 a game. But anyone who has watched these NHL playoffs knows there’s something different about today’s version of the game and the one in which the Lightning were the last team standing. Heading into Wednesday’s trio of first-round Game 7s, there’d been 10 instances in which a team had come back from a multi-goal deficit to win a playoff game.

That’s an anomaly, to be sure. In the previous eight post-seasons there’d been an average of 3.5 such comebacks in the first round. A decade ago, in 2003-04, there were precisely two such turnabouts in the opening best-of-sevens, all of this according to numbers provided by Randy Robles of the Elias Sports Bureau.

Certainly that Lightning-Flames final was as short on combustibility as it was long on predictability. The team that scored first won every game of the final in 2004. This post-season, heading into Wednesday, the team that has scored first was still winning the majority of games — about 67 per cent. But the thrilling exceptions had provided the assumption that no lead is safe, no game is over until the final horn. It’s a happy development, to be sure.

What’s going on? There are plenty of theories to go around. Certainly there’s more parity than ever. The fact that so many series went deep speaks to the lack of competitive separation in the salary-cap era.

The league’s younger, too. Perhaps the CHL once had a monopoly on the teenage-style mistakes that led to squandered leads and zany finishes. But now that the formula for NHL success requires contributors on entry-level contracts, more teams have more inexperienced hands on deck in big moments.

And there’s this, too: teams with leads, especially multi-goal leads, treat puck possession like the plague. Never mind that it doesn’t make logical sense that a team that’s built an advantage with offence-driving aggression would abandon that style for a more conservative approach. Sometimes logic doesn’t prevail in the moment.

“You look around the playoffs and look at the other games — teams are down 2-0 all the time, 3-0, and teams are coming back,” Andrew Cogliano, the GTA-bred forward for the Anaheim Ducks, told reporters this week. “You start putting a little pressure, teams get nervous.”

Cogliano, of course, was speaking after the Ducks, down 4-2 to the Dallas Stars in the closing moments of a Game 6, scored a pair of goals to tie it before winning in overtime to advance to the second round. In doing so, the Ducks became just the second club in NHL history to clinch a playoff series in a game it trailed by two goals in the final three minutes of regulation. Maple Leaf fans know the first team: it was the Bruins, almost a year ago, in Game 7.

“"I think when teams get behind they play a lot differently. They really attack. They're hell-bent for election. They just go,” said Scotty Bowman, the NHL coaching great, now the senior adviser of hockey operations for the Chicago Blackhawks. “And that confuses teams. Because there’s not a lot of teams that play a straight-out offensive game right from the get-go... The one team's attacking and the other team goes into a bit of a shell. They want to protect the lead. But it's hard to defend in your own end now. The defencemen have got to be careful.”

Indeed, as Cullimore said, when that's a penalty and that's a penalty and that's a penalty — certainly it makes a late-game lockdown difficult to engineer. A dying-minutes surge is all the more likely. May there be more in the offing.

It’s possible we’ve seen the height of the drama. It’s probable this spring has given us a glorious blip. The NHL’s first round is often its best round. Last post-season, for instance, there were six multi-goal comebacks in the first round and just two in the remaining three. The bruising, gruelling quest for the Cup can steal the legs and the life from the best of athletes. So far, though, it’s been a pleasure to witness the bounce.
NHL playoffs: Habs-Bruins more than a rivalry, it’s a hate-a-thon: DiManno

Rosie DiManno

Wed Apr 30 2014

BOSTON—To borrow from the late comic George Carlin, the forecast for Game 2 of the NHL Eastern Conference playoff between Boston and Montreal is . . . icy and dark.

No, wait. Maybe icy and blue skies.

Definitely a hostile front moving in from the north, though, pressure rising.

With 24 hours to go before the opening faceoff here of Game 1 in the conference semifinal, the NHL had yet to announce when Game 2 of the hotly anticipated series would be played. Rumours and tweets — and tweet take-backs — were rampant but formal disclosure absent.

Officially, it was TBA: To be announced.

On the Bruins website it was TBD: To be determined.

Probably by NBC.

To B or not to B — OK, that was not the question. The Bruins will most assuredly be hosting the Canadiens down on Causeway St. (100 Legends Way, technically) for Games 1 and 2, the 34th time these storied clubs have met in the post-season since 1929. But the league was being Three Shell Monte about the scheduling, no doubt at the “pending” behest of the network broadcaster, which has the Kentucky Derby on tap Saturday — they’re off, precisely, at 6:24 p.m. — and purportedly would like to air some Boston-Montreal hockey as an appetizer, Game 2 canapé. Except there’s no guarantee that the match would be OT-free and out of the way in time, even with the 12:30 start — 12:30! — that was being bandied about: Hockey Brunch in Canada.

Further clouding the picture: Northeastern University’s commencement, slated for the Garden and starting early Friday morning, as in 8:30 a.m. early, when students are to begin assembling. So the set-up crews will be attacking the arena before Thursday night’s crowd has even left the building, stinky jock straps giving way to graduation robes and mortarboards.

Really, it all makes the league look kind of bushy, hockey always bringing up the rear among pro sports in the U.S., the afterthought, though at least the NHL has no nincompoop dodging racist owner among its franchise fraternity. (Notice we said owner, not blathering TV idiot.)

That would be the other playoffs currently underway, in a sport where Zdeno Chara would be considered a shrimp.

In these playoffs, the Boston-Montreal tilt is widely viewed as the marquee event of the second round, though — as of this writing, check watch, check ESPN — the first-round boogie had yet to conclude and perhaps the really indelible series of Springtime ’14 has unfolded out in California, comeback-olé, between Anaheim and San Jose, which most of us haven’t seen, more’s the pity.

You may have forgotten all about the Habs, the lone post-season entrant from north of the 49th Parallel, and out of sight, out of mind for the past nine days, since sweeping aside the Tampa Bay Lightning. Such was their state of hockey stasis that coach Michel Therrien imposed a simulated game on his troops Tuesday, right down to pre- and post-game rituals but minus the national anthem. Meanwhile, media in both cities have had to fill an awful lot of newspaper space with speculation and rehash. Fortunately there were other sports matters to preoccupy the masses.

As for these two outfits, theirs is a history rich in rivalry and heraldry, largely skewed in Montreal’s favour, if not lately. The Canadiens have won 24 of the previous 33 series, 102 out of 170 games, most notably in the era of The Streak — 18 consecutive playoff triumphs between 1946 and 1987, including a half-dozen Stanley Cup finals. But Boston has the edge in their 11 series since 1988, taking seven of them. The numbers all start to blur. Memorably, however, the Habs defeated the Bruins in seven games in the 2008 Eastern Conference quarter-finals.

That’s the thing. For all their post-season exposure to one another, these clubs haven’t played outside the first round since 1992, when the Bruins swept Montreal in the division finals. The drama, if not the rivalry, might have suffered for that early-decisions element.

This time ‘round, the Canadiens will have their hands full with the President’s Trophy victors, Boston a Cup finalist last year — Toronto fans will not want to revisit last year — and a Cup champion in 2011, eliminating Montreal en route. They are, as always, the brassy, bruising, ball-busting Bruins.

Clearly the favourites in this series, despite regular-season results, with Montreal winning three out of four (one in a shootout), including two at the Garden. Yet it’s the Bruins who have been talking bundle-of-hate trash in recent days while the Canadiens prefer to remain above the mousy fray.

Claude Julien, Boston bench boss since 2007 and behind the Montreal banc for their seven-game playoff win over Boston in ‘04, got the malice ball rolling earlier this week. “I hated Boston when I was in Montreal and now I hate Montreal because I’m in Boston.”

It really is that simple, apparently.

“As a coach, you don’t have to do much of a pep talk when it comes to playing each other. It’s more about controlled emotions.”

As in staying disciplined and out of the penalty box, thus denying the smaller, speedier Canadiens their power-play oomph — the only stat where they’re anywhere near comparable with the Bruins this season. Not that Montreal showed off those chops in dumping the Bolts in four: merely 2-0-1 on the PP.

The Bruins were certainly leading with their no-fear-and-loathing after practice Wednesday.

“You just naturally learn to hate the Montreal Canadiens,” said Milan Lucic, pointing out that he’s seven-years-a-Bruin and the animosity is bred deep in the bone. “The battles that we’ve had with them over the last couple of years — it’s definitely made you hate them. And I think this being the first time meeting them outside the first round, it’s definitely going to go up another level.”

Earlier, Lucic had also pronounced thusly: “A lot of hatred between the teams, the fans, the cities, when it comes to this kind of rivalry.”

That’s the kind of stuff emanating from the Bruins’ locker room.

Meanwhile . . . in Montreal.

Goalie Carey Price — you know, the guy with the Olympic gold medal, unlike Tuukka Rask, Vezina Trophy finalist — preferred to take the pacifist view.

“I don’t think hate is a very good word.

“That’s not very nice.”

He was smiling slyly, though. Because we all know where nice guys finish.
Maple Leafs close in on big decisions, including determination on coach Randy Carlyle’s future

Terry Koshan

Wednesday, April 30, 2014 06:52 PM EDT

Changes, apparently, are on the way for the Maple Leafs.

Tim Leiweke, the president and CEO of Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment, said during the Tim and Sid show on Sportsnet 590 The Fan on Wednesday afternoon that Leafs president Brendan Shanahan is close to finishing his appraisal of the hockey team.

And Leiweke was not willing to say that coach Randy Carlyle will return in 2014-15.

"Well, that’s Shanny’s decision," Leiweke said. "And that’s (general manager) Dave Nonis’ decision and the two of them are spending a lot of time together."

Leiweke mentioned a couple of times that decisions will be made, and presumably announced, soon.

“They are going to involve every aspect of the organization,” Leiweke said.

Leiweke was asked if any Leaf was untradeable.

“My opinion does not matter, but I will give you my opinion,” Leiweke said. “No one is untradeable. Now, that does not mean a damn thing. What I know is this. Brendan is meeting with each guy one on one. Brendan and Dave are spending a long time talking about how do we get better.

“There are decisions coming soon. I know where these guys are at on their decision-making, we’re not there yet, but they are getting there. We will not lack in our ability to make tough decisions around here. I promise you.”

That doesn’t sound good for Carlyle or, perhaps, members of the front office.

To change a coach is the easiest move, considering there’s a large amount of money tied up in the Leafs’ core of vital players in a salary-cap world that doesn’t necessarily allow for quick fixes via trade.

The Leafs got back to the playoffs last spring after nothing since 2004, and six weeks ago appeared headed for a return date with the National Hockey League’s post-season.

But an eight-game losing streak, with every loss coming in regulation, killed the chances of that happening. The downfall from the upper echelon of the Eastern Conference to a final finish of 12th with a 38-36-8 record was swift, and led to immediate speculation that Carlyle would be let go.

Yet 16 days after the news conference to introduce Shanahan, there has been relative quiet around the hockey team.

“I’m very comfortable we are heading in a direction where we are never going to have to go through this sort of thing again because I won’t let it happen,” Leiweke said.

“It’s just unacceptable. Shanny not only feels the same way I do, but I see the way he is going about this and it gives me a lot of comfort we’re about to make the right decisions in a lot of different areas soon. You will see decisions on our part in the near future based on the work he has done, the intelligence and the information he is now digesting. I love the fact he is very analytical on how he is approaching this and what he thinks is wrong and how we fix it.”

If it’s decided a new voice is needed behind the bench, there are plenty of potential candidates, including Barry Trotz, Peter Laviolette and Kevin Dineen, among others.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 05.01.2014
Why the wait? It was more than two weeks ago that Randy Carlyle, in his end-of-season news conference, was asked whether he would be returning as the head coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Philadelphia Flyers and New York Rangers fans brawl in stands during Game 6

“‘I’m here today,’” was his answer.

Today, his future is not any clearer. Carlyle is still here, but no one is saying if he will be back tomorrow.

For now, the Leafs are either waiting to decide — or waiting to announce — what might be their most important off-season decision.

It could be that new president Brendan Shanahan has already determined that Carlyle is going to be fired, but the Leafs are do not want to say anything because it might detract from the Toronto Raptors’ playoff run. It could be that the Leafs are waiting for the Stanley Cup playoffs to end out of respect for commissioner Gary Bettman, who had his pocket-picked when MLSE president Tim Leiweke hired Shanahan out of the league’s office. It could also be that the Leafs are waiting for a new candidate to emerge out of the ashes of the next set of playoff eliminations.

Or maybe the Leafs still don’t know what they are going to do with Carlyle.

“It gives me a lot of comfort that we’re going to make the right decisions in a lot of different areas soon,” Leiweke told the FAN 590 on Wednesday. “So you will see decisions on our part in the near future based on the work he’s done and the intelligence and the information that he is now digesting.”

When asked if Carlyle was coming back, Leiweke said it was up to Shanahan and general manager Dave Nonis.

On the day that he was officially announced as the new team president, Shanahan was careful about what he said about the Leafs head coach. “I have a lot of respect for Randy Carlyle,” Shanahan said. “I think Randy’s a good hockey coach, I’ll say that. But beyond that, I have to go up and talk to Dave [Nonis] and talk to him about Randy and the entire staff.”

It was not exactly a vote of confidence. But it was also not pink slip. Instead it was a way of buying more time.

In the meantime, the Nashville Predators parted ways with Barry Trotz, Washington dismissed Adam Oates and Florida released interim head coach Peter Horacek. But Carlyle, along with Vancouver’s John Tortorella and Carolina’s Kirk Muller, remain in coaching limbo.

It would not be surprising if Carlyle is coaching the Leafs again next season. Nor would it surprise anyone if the team goes in another direction.

For now, it appears that Shanahan is waiting for the dust to settle, which is the smart thing to do even if it is potentially bad for Carlyle.

The list of available coaches is a long one, filled with re-treads (Peter Laviolette and Ron Wilson), rookies (Grand Rapids Griffins coach Jeff Blashill) and wild cards (Mike Keenan, who just won the KHL championship).

If the San Jose Sharks, who on Monday were trying not to lose a best-of-seven series in which they blew a 3-0 lead, failed to advance out of the first round then Todd McLellan might be on the market. The same could be true of Pittsburgh’s Dan Bylsma, who might have to get the Penguins into the conference final or more to hang onto his job.

Would any of those two coaches be better than Carlyle? Or rather, would they be a better fit for the hockey team as it is presently assembled?

If Shanahan honestly believes in Carlyle, who has won a Stanley Cup, then maybe he gives him some more rope. If not, the longer this goes on, the chances of Carlyle finding work with another team will likely decrease.

If he does come back for the final year of his contract, it will have to come with stipulations. Maybe Shanahan forces Carlyle to change two of his assistant coaches, as was done previously with Ron Wilson. Maybe he insists that Carlyle get with the times and say goodbye to the role of the fourth-line enforcer.

If one more chance doesn’t work, other coaches could be available a year from now. Like, say, Detroit Red Wings head coach Mike Babcock, who just so happens to be in the final season of his contract.
Alex Ovechkin an enduring enigma for Caps’ next leaders

By Brian McNally

Washington Capitals

Wednesday, April 30, 2014

It was the most important question when Adam Oates was hired two years ago to coach the Capitals and it remains so today with the organization in flux — its general manager position now open, its coach fired.

What, exactly, does Washington do with star winger Alex Ovechkin? He is its highest-paid player, the face of the franchise and remains an elite goal scorer. But while he led the NHL with 51 goals this season, Ovechkin also finished a career-worst minus-35.

That stat is flawed because it lacks context: Who was on the ice with Ovechkin when the opponent scored, how did the goalies perform behind him? But it still isn’t good and has already been used by Ovechkin’s critics to show that Washington can’t win a Stanley Cup if the team is built around him.

That’s not a stance his former general manager publicly agreed with this week.

“If you’re asking me if we can win with [Ovechkin], I believed we could win with him,” George McPhee said on Monday at his goodbye press conference.

Ovechkin has seven years left on a 13-year contract signed in 2008. He will make $16 million next season, the first time his salary rises after six years at $9 million. That built-in raise bumps him to the fifth-highest paid player in the NHL.

The salary cap hit on the contract is $9.538 million, which remains the sport’s highest. Ovechkin turns 29 in September. The Caps’ next general manager has options if he decides a full rebuild is in order.

Ovechkin’s modified no-trade clause doesn’t begin until July 1, according to the website CapGeek.com. At that point he can list 10 teams he will not go to and update that list every September until the end of the contract. But prior to that, any team in the league is in play. Not that Ovechkin is asking to leave.

“That’s why I signed [a long contract],” Ovechkin said at breakdown day on April 14 before the organizational changes. “I feel comfortable, I love the fans, I love the city. This organization gave me a lot and I want to bring [a Stanley] Cup here.”

Trading its star player would be a radical departure. On Saturday Washington owner Ted Leonsis insisted that his executives “are deeply empowered” to make the changes they deem necessary to fix the club, but said only that he and team president Dick Patrick would listen to any proposal.

“I’m not the general manager,” Leonsis said. “So if a general manager comes with something, we would listen to the general manager. But I’m not the general manager.”

That doesn’t sound like an owner intent on seeing his franchise player moved. What Leonsis did say is that his team has the resources to win a Stanley Cup. Indeed, the Caps have been near the NHL’s salary-cap ceiling for years, including this season’s $64.3 million limit. That is expected to rise to above $70 million for next year.

McPhee noted that he left his successor with few long-term commitments other than Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom’s contracts. While 20 current players who finished this past season on the 23-man roster are under contract already for next year, that number drops to eight for the 2015-16 season with another four being restricted free agents. That gives financial flexibility to the new GM, who can quickly turn over his lineup without necessarily needing to resort to trades.

“The last two seasons showed us that we need to improve,” Leonsis said.

“That’s what it came down to that where Dick and I said ‘We have to make that gut check. Do we have to change?’ And where do you start? You start with the coach and the general manager. And that’s literally all this has come to.”

Assuming Ovechkin remains part of the new front office’s plans, the trick is putting the pieces in place to maximize his skill set. Oates helped reinvigorated Ovechkin’s game at even strength by switching him to right wing two years ago.

His coaching staff also helped fix a once-vaunted power play that had dipped to 18th in the NHL in 2011-12, but rebounded to best in the league each of the past two seasons. Those changes helped Ovechkin score 83 goals in 126 games under Oates, 40 of those on the power play.

The challenge for the next coaching staff is to keep that momentum going, earn enough of Ovechkin’s trust to make him at least a passable presence in his own end and hope the new GM finds a way to improve Washington’s blueline depth, which was a glaring weakness in 2013-14.

“The criticism goes unfairly,” Patrick said. “[It is] tilted towards him when we’re not winning because people are saying ‘Well, you’ve got Alex Ovechkin, how come you haven’t won a Cup?’ It does take a team. It takes 20 guys. But how can be unhappy with what Alex Ovechkin’s accomplished and continues to accomplish in the National Hockey League?”

Washington Times LOADED: 05.01.2014
Jets selling game-used equipment this weekend

Posted: 04/30/2014 4:32 PM

Staff

I game-used hockey equipment is your thing, the Winnipeg Jets have a deal for you this weekend.

The Jets announced today they’ll be putting on sale this weekend their supply of sticks, helmets, gloves, skates & socks, used by players like Andrew Ladd, Blake Wheeler and Dustin Byfuglien. All available gear will be marked down between 25 and 50 per cent.

The game-used equipment will be on sale only at the team’s merchandise store at the MTS Centre. Store hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 05.01.2014
Ex-Canuck Malhotra deserves to win Masterton Trophy

We see that Manny Malhotra is one of the three finalists for the NHL’s Masterton Trophy, the one that goes “to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.”

It’s hard to imagine Malhotra, the former Canuck, not winning — though Dominic Moore, who took a leave of absence from the game and subsequently tragically lost his wife to cancer last year, would also be a fine choice.

The third finalist, Jaromir Jagr, had an amazing season, leading the Devils in scoring as a 42-year-old, but this shouldn’t be a service award.

Malhotra, who was shut down by former Canucks GM Mike Gillis early in the 2012-13 season on the grounds that the effects of the eye injury he suffered two years earlier were putting him in danger on the ice, didn’t agree and worked on making a comeback.

Malhotra didn’t get much interest on the free agent market and had to prove himself by signing a professional tryout agreement with the Charlotte Checkers, Carolina’s AHL affiliate, on Oct. 3. He signed as a free agent with the Hurricanes four weeks later. Always a consummate leader, Malhotra was named alternate captain. The checking centre and face-off ace appeared in 69 games (7-6-13) and was second in the NHL in face-off percentage (59.4%). He also played by far the toughest minutes on the Canes’ roster, taking face-offs 59.7 per cent of the time in the defensive zone, the third highest in the NHL.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 05.01.2014
Manny Malhotra bounced back nicely with the Carolina Hurricanes after an eye injury in 2011 and being shut down by the Canucks two years later.

He's still a finalist at this point, but to Manny Malhotra it feels like a win.

The former Canuck was named on Wednesday as one of three finalists for the NHL's Masterton Trophy, which goes “to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.”

The other finalists are: age-defying marvel Jaromir Jagr, who led the Devils in scoring this season at age 42; and Dominic Moore, 33, who took a leave from the NHL in 2012 to care for his cancer-stricken wife, Katie, who passed away in January of 2013. Moore resumed his career with the Rangers this season.

The winner will be announced at the NHL awards ceremony on June 24 in Las Vegas.

Malhotra, 33, who suffered a serious eye injury when hit by a puck in March of 2011, was shut down early in the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season when former Canucks GM Mike Gillis deemed that he was putting himself at risk on the ice due to the reduced vision in the eye.

Malhotra proved he could overcome the doubts — his own and those of prospective NHL employers — to make it all the way back to the Bigs. He played 69 games this season with the Carolina Hurricanes.

"It means a lot," said Malhotra on Thursday in a phone interview from Raleigh, N.C., where he'll stay until the end of May before returning to his Vancouver home.

"Starting last year when the team shut me down has been very high and very low.

"Getting that opportunity and playing this year and getting back to where I felt good and then to be a finalist means a lot to me, especially considering the company of the other guys nominated and past winners. I'm just happy I was able to get back to doing what I knew I could do."

Malhotra filled a similar role to what he played in Vancouver in 2010-11 prior to the late-season eye injury.

The checking centre was second in the NHL in faceoff percentage (59.4 per cent). He also played by far the toughest minutes on the Canes' roster, taking faceoffs 59.7 per cent of the time in the defensive zone, the third highest in the NHL.

Last summer it appeared that Malhotra’s NHL career might be finished when he got no contract offers.

"During those nine games I played (in 2012-13) I felt more confident on the ice," said Malhotra. "But after being shut down you go over and over in your mind, 'How did I really feel out there?' The more I thought about it, I knew I felt good. And over the summer working with a skating coach and training with guys, I had that confidence even more. At that point, I knew I felt like myself again."

It finally amounted to accepting a professional tryout contract in early October with AHL Charlotte, Carolina’s farm team.

"There was never an issue in my mind about playing. I always knew I wanted to play and I could play again," he said. "But the question was whether I would be given the opportunity after what was said about my health and the way some people viewed it.

"I was wondering if that had scared off everybody. Once camp started and then exhibition games, I started wondering. It weighs on you quite heavily, so when that opportunity came with Charlotte I was itching to take it."

Four weeks later, Malhotra signed a one-year free agent deal with the Hurricanes, but he left his mark in Charlotte. In a well reported story, Malhotra helped a young rookie named Brendan Woods recover a family heirloom — a religious medal from his grandfather — he'd lost in a team paintball competition. Malhotra bought a metal detector and the two eventually found the medal.

Malhotra shrugged it off.

"My family wasn't here in Charlotte with me, so I had a lot of time on my hands," Malhotra said. "Knowing how special it was to him, I just wanted to do something to help him out. We made an adventure out of it and it worked out well."

Malhotra has moved on from the frustration he felt when he was shut down by the Canucks and holds no hard feelings. He now realizes that a comeback with a team other than Vancouver was the best route. He also feels he's made the necessary adjustments to his reduced vision.

"For me, it's a non-issue now," Malhotra said. "I'm comfortable with what I see and how I am out there. I spoke with Bryan Berard (who also suffered a serious eye injury) though this whole process. He told me that eventually you just get back to feeling normal. But, more the point, he knew he had to leave Toronto because they'd always see him as having that eye injury. He needed that clean slate in New York."

"I think that really helped me with Carolina, that (the injury) was talked about early on, but after a while I was just another guy coming into the locker-room."

Malhotra is still waiting for things to settle in Carolina after Jim Rutherford retired as GM and Ron Francis took over. He knows he wants to keep playing, whether it's in Carolina or not.

"I'm treating this summer like any other," he said. "It wasn't a season to come back and just show I could do it and then I'm done. I want to win a championship in this league and I feel like I can still contribute."

"I want to play until I no longer enjoy coming to the rink, the training, being with the guys."

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 05.01.2014
These two teams meet in the playoffs for the second straight postseason, although there's a much different feel about this Minnesota Wild team than a season ago, when they backed into the postseason and were easy pickings for a Chicago Blackhawks team that dispatched them in five games. This time, the Blackhawks are humming, coming off four straight wins against the St. Louis Blues after dropping the first two games in emotional overtime losses, and they have shown no early signs of the dreaded Stanley Cup hangover. The Wild, meanwhile, dropped the first two against the Colorado Avalanche, trailed 3-2 in the series and then in Game 7 had to erase four different one-goal deficits before winning in overtime on Nino Niederreiter's wicked wrist shot. In other words, this is a team that's got tons of heart.

Blackhawks: Team offense

The Blackhawks are absolutely cooking offensively. After dropping the first two games of the opening-round series against the Blues, the Blackhawks moved into high gear, outscoring the Blues 14-6 in the final four games while averaging 3.33 goals per game through the six-game set against one of the top defensive teams in the NHL. Six players scored more than once in the series, 12 players had at least one goal and they were perfect in games in which they scored first (and 0-for-2 in games they did not). Perhaps most impressive is that the team's best players are already in peak form early in the playoffs. Patrick Kane has three goals, Duncan Keith is tied for the team lead with seven points, Brent Seabrook has six points, even though he was suspended for half the first-round series for his vicious hit on David Backes, and all captain Jonathan Toews has done is score three game winners. On the other side of the puck, the Blackhawks have been at the top of their game killing penalties, allowing just two power-play goals in 29 opportunities. In short, the Blackhawks are rolling, and that's a scary thing for the Wild.

Wild: Goaltending

What a wacky team these Wild are when it comes to goaltending. Ilya Bryzgalov was ordinary at best as the Wild fell behind 2-0 in the series, allowing eight goals and turning in an .822 save percentage. Bryzgalov, picked up from the Edmonton Oilers at the trade deadline, was replaced by rookie Darcy Kuemper, who had been injured, and Kuemper led the Wild back into the series with three wins in four games. But Kuemper was hurt in the third period of Game 7, forcing Bryzgalov back into the net, and he shut down the Avs the rest of the way, though he was not severely tested. I can't imagine Bryzgalov can put together enough quality starts for the Wild to have a shot at defeating the Blackhawks, which means the team's hopes rest with the ability of Kuemper to get back into playing shape. But if history has told us anything, we haven't likely seen the last of Bryzgalov.

Hero In Waiting

Blackhawks: Patrick Sharp

It was an unusually pedestrian start to the playoffs for Patrick Sharp, who led the Blackhawks during the regular season with 34 goals, 76 points and 10 power-play goals (tied with Kane). Sharp managed to collect just one goal and zero assists in six games, although his lone goal was a huge one in Game 6, in which he managed to slide the puck past Blues netminder Ryan Miller in spite of being high-sticked in the face on a breakaway. Sharp's reputation in recent years has been that of the consummate money player. It's why he was named to Canada's Olympic team and it's why he was in the playoff MVP discussion last spring, when he had 10 goals and 16 points as the Blackhawks won their second Stanley Cup in four seasons. Sharp will make his presence known sooner than later.

Wild: Zach Parise

Lots of folks took turns stepping forward for the Wild in the first round, from Niederreiter, who had two goals in Game 7, to Erik Haula to Charlie Coyle, who tied for the team lead with three goals, and even former sniper Dany Heatley, who had five points. But for us, a tip of the hat to Zach Parise, who was a force, leading the team with 10 points. Last spring was a disappointing turn for Parise, who had just one point -- a goal -- in his first playoff appearance since signing that monster deal in the summer of 2012. His leadership will be key to the Wild hanging in against the defending champs in much the same way that Toews is so crucial to the Blackhawks' on-ice identity.

Fatal Flaw

Blackhawks: Fatigue

OK, so the Blackhawks blew a lead late in Games 1 and 2, but that seems like a million years ago, no? And their power play was fairly tepid, scoring three times on 20 chances against the Blues. But for us, if there is a flaw with this team that could reveal itself, it is fatigue. In 2013, they eased into the postseason with a workmanlike five-game series victory over the Wild and then fell behind against the Detroit Red Wings in the second round before ramping things up. How much did the first round against the Blues take out of the Blackhawks? Maybe they hit their prime earlier, but what if emotional/physical fatigue becomes a factor sooner than later? And what if sooner means in this series? Just saying.

Wild: Drive

Well, if Kuemper can't go and Bryzgalov can't get his act together, this series will get over in a hurry. But if the Wild goaltending is respectable, the question will be the Wild's mindset after such a grueling series against the Avs. Last season, this team was happy to get into the playoffs -- and it looked like it. Are they happy just to be in the second round? It'll be up to the strong leadership core of Parise, Ryan Suter, Mikko Koivu, Matt Moulson et al to keep the emotional level in the right place. It won't be an easy task.

Prediction

It says here the Wild are going to be a mighty thorn in the side of the Blackhawks, especially if they can keep getting balanced scoring and their strong penalty kill continues (they allowed just three goals on 25 chances). We wish we had the chutzpah to pick them to pull off the upset, but the Blackhawks have too much going on for the Wild, from a refocused Corey Crawford in net to their big guns firing.
Rangers: Zuccarello’s line to force the Rangers was especially effective when paired with Paul Martin after Brooks Orpik left in a brief benching, Letang returned to form as the series moved along. He smoothed...Penguins: Kris Letang imperative Nash start scoring that Rangers from advancing to the second round. But we’re guessing it’s more Pens, Nash’s lack of goal scoring (he had four assists) didn’t keep the...in 2002-03. As with Crosby, Nash does other things, although, given that he doesn’t play center, those mitigating plays are fewer. Like Crosby with the Pens, Nash’s lack of goal scoring (he had four assists) didn’t keep the Rangers from advancing to the second round. But we’re guessing it’s more imperative Nash start scoring than Crosby.

Hero In Waiting
Penguins: Kris Letang Things didn’t start out all that well in the first round for last season’s Norris Trophy nominee Letang. And, no doubt, it’s been a tough season for the smooth-skating Letang, whose career was suddenly thrown into doubt when he suffered a stroke. But after a couple of shaky games to start that resulted in a brief benching, Letang returned to form as the series moved along. He was especially effective when paired with Paul Martin after Brooks Orpik left with an injury. He’ll still have to control his temper, and while, he has at least temporarily lost his spot on the top power-play unit, Letang has the tools to become an important figure in a series that figures to turn on the Pens’ ability to force the Rangers to open up.

Rangers: Zuccarello’s line
How good is the Rangers’ forward unit of Derick Brassard, Mats Zuccarello and Benoit Pouliot? Well, pretty darned good. Even though Brad Richards and Martin St. Louis led the Rangers in the first round with six points apiece, this unit of Brassard, Zuccarello and Pouliot might well have been the team’s most consistent group from start to finish and, in fact, produced the game’s winning goal in Game 7. Pouliot has been especially impressive and might be playing the best hockey of his career. Pretty good for a guy who was long been considered a bust after having been selected with the fourth-overall pick in 2005 by the Minnesota Wild. That kind of continued production will be important because the Rangers will be in tough to keep up offensively with the Penguins.

Fatal Flaw
Penguins: Sloppy defense
If you polled 100 people, Penguins fans or not, and asked them what the team’s fatal flaw is, we’re guessing 90 or so would point to netminder Marc-Andre Fleury. We don’t think so. First of all, Fleury was the team’s most consistent player in the six-game series with the Blue Jackets. Yeah, he melted down a bit in Game 4 but was pretty darned good otherwise. Of greater concern is the Penguins’ propensity to lose their marbles defensively. Defensive-zone turnovers and turnovers in the neutral zone, sometimes precipitated by careless, cutey passes, the kind that very talented teams make because they think they can do stuff like that with impunity, are something the Pens can’t afford against a Rangers team that has the speed and skill to take advantage of those kinds of mistakes.

Rangers: Inconsistency
Can the Rangers find enough consistency in their game to stay with a Penguins team that can be a serious handful? The series with the Flyers was a study in contrasts for the Rangers: one night, tight defensively and opportunistic offensively, on their heels and disorganized the next. The fact the Rangers were able to rebound from a horrific performance in Game 6 in Philadelphia to get a win in Game 7 was impressive, but they went 0-for-13 on the power play on the road against Philadelphia and were just 3-for-29 overall. They’ll have to be better more often to keep pace with the Penguins.

Penguins in 6
ESPN LOADED: 05.01.2014
The Sharks held an optional morning skate and didn't show line rushes, so there's no telling exactly how they will line up for Game 7. The important question as always will be whether Joe Pavelski starts on Joe Thornton's left side or centers the third line. He might do a bit of both during the game depending on the score and specific situations.

Just guessing, but here's how the forward lines could shape up:

Joe Pavelski-Joe Thornton-Brent Burns
Patrick Marleau-Logan Couture-Matt Nieto
Tomas Hertl-James Sheppard-Tommy Wingels
Raffi Torres-Andrew Desjardins-Martin Havlat/Mike Brown

Meanwhile, injured defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic was once again ruled out by McLellan.

Oh, and McLellan got a haircut.

"Lots of it off. Tried to cut all the gray out," deadpanned the Sharks coach.

Just like Tuesday at practice, the Sharks were a loose bunch at the morning skate. It's just their nature, regardless of the pressured situation at hand.

"It's the way the room has always been," Pavelski said after the morning optional. "We have fun. Guys like playing the game here. We know the situation isn't ideal, you know, to give up a [series] lead like that. But we still got another opportunity, and we believe that we worked all year for that home ice in case we were in a position like this against them. It's about getting the job done, and I like our chances moving forward."

Doughty is the man

When it comes to big games, few players look forward to stepping up in clutch moments more than Kings blueliner Drew Doughty. As he showed in both the 2010 and 2014 Olympics and the 2012 Stanley Cup run, he loves the big stage.

And on Wednesday morning, Doughty had his game face on.

"You treat this Game 7 as if it is the Olympic gold-medal game or the Stanley Cup finals," Doughty said. "For me personally, I need to have an unbelievable game for our team to win tonight. I need my A-game. I need to do everything right. I need to play well defensively, I need to chip in on the offense, I need to dominate on special teams, so that's just how I look at it."

How do you not like this guy?

Creating a forecheck

A big key for the Sharks in Game 7 is to create a better forecheck and force more turnovers from the NHL's best defensive team.

"The first couple of games, and I'm sure Darryl [Sutter] would tell you, and I don't have to speak for their team, but they gave up a very large amount of outnumbered rushes and we were able to advantage of that," said McLellan.

"Since Game 3, perhaps, we haven't seen that. We've tried to create them, obviously, but they're a very good, stingy defensive team. That's gone away from us.

"If it presents itself, we have to be bear down in those situations. If we do get some scoring opportunities, the way their team has played and the way their goaltender has played, we have to bear down. But our offense has been anemic the last 2-3 games. We need to have the puck more. We need to establish a forecheck better. We can't be one-and-out. Our game is predicated on spending extra time in the offensive zone, shooting the puck and getting it back. It's going to take more than that initial shot to beat Jonathan Quick the way he's playing."
SAN JOSE, Calif. -- The implications of Wednesday's Game 7 (6:30 p.m., Prime Ticket) between the Kings and the Sharks has vastly different meanings for each team.

For the Kings, it only continues to build up an already stellar resume, highlighted by their 2012 Stanley Cup. They defeated the Sharks in seven games last year, and they'll prove once again that they are the superior team in the rivalry if they can secure the victory.

But for the Sharks, it's a much different story.

Their playoff history was once a rich one but when the Kings took over as the dominant Western Conference postseason team, the Sharks faltered. The perennial favorites haven't been favored much in the postseason, as they have failed to advance to the conference finals since 2011.

"I've been here for six years and I've been hearing it for six," said Sharks' defenseman Dan Boyle. "Some guys have been hearing it longer. It certainly gets old and it gets pretty tiring. You've just got to go out there and do it. Talking about it isn't going to do anything. You've got to go out there and do it and I'm looking forward to the opportunity tonight."

Only one of those teams' messages will matter after Wednesday night.

"Everybody is working toward the same goal," said Kings' forward Justin Williams. "Everybody on this team, I feel, has the ability to rise to the occasion instead of wilt."

"This is fun. Everyone's going to talk about how we got to this point, but at this point it really doesn't matter," Boyle said. "We're in Game 7 and we've got to move a hockey game to move on and we're at home. So you're right, this is fun and we've got to channel the energy the right way."

Other morning skate notes:

-- The first goal in Game 7 is going to be the most crucial. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the team that has scored first in the last 16 game 7s has won the decisive game.

"We certainly can't do what we did the first two games we did here, which was let them have a great start and let them carry the puck for most of the game," Williams said. "I'm sure they're pushing just as much as they're pushing to have a great start to their game. Hopefully having the first goal and not looking back."

McLellan confirms Niemi back in net. Worked on some things with goaltender coach the last few days.

-- Abbey Mastracco (@AbbeyMastracco) April 30, 2014

Anti Niemi is back in the net for San Jose and defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic is still out. For the Kings, defenseman Willie Mitchell will not play. Matt Greene, who played in Games 1 and 2 of the series, will take his place.

Kings' defenseman Drew Doughty's childhood friend, Logan Couture, said that as good as he's seen Doughty play in this series, it's not the best he's ever seen him in action.

"I think the best I saw Drew play was in the Olympics this year," Couture said. "I think he was one of the best players in the world at that time."

Luckily for the Kings, this game has the feel of an Olympic gold-medal matchup, according to Doughty.

"You treat this Game 7 as if it is the Olympic gold medal game or the Stanley Cup finals," Doughty said. "For me personally, I need to have an unbelievable game for our team to win tonight. I need my A-game, I need to
EL SEGUNDO, Calif. — Drew Doughty was so excited Monday night he barely even slept.

He has practiced for this moment for years, first with his friends in the driveway of his London, Ontario, his childhood home, always pretending to be scoring the winning goal in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Finals. Then later, he practiced by playing actual Game 7s with the LA Kings in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Except none of the previous game 7s have been as big as the one Doughty is anxiously awaiting.

"I'm excited about the position we put ourselves in," Doughty said. "But we're not done."

The Kings will attempt to make history by becoming just the fourth team in NHL history to come back from a 3-0 series deficit to win a Stanley Cup Playoff series on Wednesday night, starting at 6:30 p.m. on Prime Ticket.

"We just want to win so bad," Doughty said. "We just don't give up. We never let the media or anyone else tell us that we can't do something. We believe in each other and in ourselves."

Dustin Brown misinterpreted, sparks controversy

VIEW MORE

The Sharks might have the home-ice advantage but are juggling goaltenders and are without their top defenseman in Marc-Edouard Vlasic. The Kings hold two distinct advantages, with the first being their goaltender Jonathan Quick.

Thus far in the playoffs, 25 different goalies have been used. But the Kings have used only one.

But it's been Justin Williams who has been the biggest difference-making in the turnaround, finding a playoff edge that a year ago earned him the nickname "Mr. Game 7."

The playoff veteran has four goals and five points in the postseason and he's scored them in the most important moments.

"He loves this time and he loves the pressure situations. He seems to just embrace it," said forward Mike Richards. "He's just a competitor. He's not the biggest guy, I don't want to say skinny but he's a smaller guy and he fights every battle. It doesn't matter how small he is or how big the other person is for a guy as competitive as he is."

There's not much Williams hasn't done. L.A.'s forechecking game has been drastically improved in the last three games and he's been an integral part of that as well as containing the San Jose forecheck and on the penalty kill.

VIDEO: NHL Live takes a look back at some of the greatest Game 7's in history. Including the @LAKings in 1993. http://t.co/iMRDH1BSCX

— Kings Vision (@KingsVision) April 29, 2014

"He doesn't get a lot credit for what he does for our team," Doughty said. "He's does a lot of little things, like getting under the other team's skin. He's really good at that, he gets guys rattled and you can see guys taking liberty at him."

It's almost as if the Kings are at their best when no one expects anything from them. They're the team that builds up expectations and promptly crushes them before building them back up even higher.

"It's not the most conventional way to win a series," Richards said. "But you've got to win in different ways and we've put ourselves in a position to move on to the next round but we have to be ready."

Fueled by unlikely luck, momentum and the "Beat L.A." chants in the "Cage," the Kings have one more shot to make history this season.
game. One shot by Pavelski. Another. And then Patrick Marleau, pouncing through the second. The Sharks get their first sustained pressu
That's the game, right there. Scratch that

• Jonathan Quick: The Save.

Some thoughts in the aftermath of this historic series:

But for now it's just about a perennially disappointing team that found a new adjustment and found the will to win where so many before them had fallen. Eventually, that's the way it'll be told.

The story should be about a resilient Los Angeles club that made adjustments and found the will to win where so many before them had fallen short. Eventually, that's the way it'll be told.

But for now it's just about a perennially disappointing team that found a new way to prove it wasn't nearly as good as everyone thought.

Some thoughts in the aftermath of this historic series:

• Jonathan Quick: The Save.
NEW YORK – The New York Rangers are alive and still kicking thanks to a player who has often been one of their healthy scratches. Against a club that was bigger and grittier, Daniel Carcillo, a former Flyer with Flyer-like snarl, helped New York eliminate Philadelphia, 2-1, in a seventh game that was not for the weak-kneed. Carcillo, the game’s unlikely first star, gave the Rangers just enough pugnacity that they often lack, and for the second time in the series scored a key goal. That, along with New York’s other virtues — puck-moving defense and superior goaltending — prevailed in a series that was a toss-up until the final whistle.

“Huge,” Ranger forward Brad Richards said of Carcillo’s contribution. “In a series like this where one bounce can make it go either way, a guy like that can be the difference-maker. He was.”

In fact, the difference was a dominant second period in which New York scored the first two goals of the game on similar backdoor plays that exposed a weak Flyers defense. Once Philadelphia cut the margin to 2-1 and began to play with greater urgency, Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist closed the door, turning back 26 of 27 shots. Lundqvist did not need to be spectacular, because the Flyers didn’t challenge him enough to force him into game-saving heroics, but he made stops from various angles with the calm of a former Vezina Trophy winner.

Here are some salient points from the game and what they mean for New York’s next series and Philadelphia’s next season:

- **After a scoreless first period, Philadelphia twice gouged up its defensive coverage, allowing New York to pot the pair of decisive goals.** On Carcillo’s tally that put New York ahead, 1-0, Mats Zuccarello slid a long pass from the corner that eluded a sleepy Flyer defense before finding Carcillo alone in front of the net. Both Andrew MacDonald and Braden Coburn had a chance to cut off the pass, but New York’s defense was spectacular, because the Flyers didn’t challenge him enough to force him into game-saving heroics, but he made stops from various angles with the calm of a former Vezina Trophy winner.

- **Rangers power forward Rick Nash did not score in the series and has just one goal in his last 13 contests overall. He did record a team-high five shots and had some strong puck-possession shifts that kept the Flyers in their zone while eating up valuable minutes, but his finish isn’t what it used to be. Nash doesn’t turn 30 until June, but he already has 336 NHL career goals. New York will need his production while eating up valuable minutes, but his finish isn’t what it used to be. Nash doesn’t turn 30 until June, but he already has 336 NHL career goals. New York will need his production while eating up valuable minutes.”

- **Rangers power forward Rick Nash did not score in the series and has just one goal in his last 13 contests overall.** He did record a team-high five shots and had some strong puck-possession shifts that kept the Flyers in their zone while eating up valuable minutes, but his finish isn’t what it used to be. Nash doesn’t turn 30 until June, but he already has 336 NHL career goals. New York will need his production while eating up valuable minutes.

- **New York burned Philadelphia again with a pass from the right corner for its second goal at 11:36 of the second period.** After a Flyers giveaway, New York’s Anton Stralman kept the puck in at the right point and moved it down towards the right corner. Forward Derick Brassard collected it in the corner and sent a pass that two Flyers again could not intercept. This time Coburn and Erik Gustafsson failed to take it or a player, leaving the pass in the slot for another backdoor conversion. Benoit Pouliot jumped into the slot, took the pass and beat Steve Mason, just as Flyer Zac Rinaldo was diving back to the ice (in vain) to mark Pouliot. “In the second period, they took it to us,” said Mason, who turned back 31 shots. “We had trouble breaking out of our own zone. They had odd-man rushes and we seemed to be spinning our legs.”

- **Here is one of the issues the Flyers faced against New York that they must address during the offseason: their defense doesn’t give them enough at either end. **It doesn’t move the puck as well as, say, the Rangers, and it doesn’t consistently take care of Philadelphia’s own end. The Flyers expected more from Dan Girardi and Ryan McDonough, New York’s mobile defense pair that frustrated the Flyers captain partly by being physical with him, cutting off his lanes and getting sticks in front of his passes and shots.

- **Rangers forward Brad Richards said of Carcillo’s contribution.** “In a series like this where one bounce can make it go either way, a guy like that can be the difference-maker. He was.”

- **The Rangers are 7-5 in seventh games of playoff series, and six of six at Madison Square Garden.** No other NHL team is unbeaten in deciding home playoff games with that many wins.Brad Richards is 6-0 in seventh games, including the one that propelled the Tampa Bay Lightning, his former team, to the Stanley Cup in 2004.

### CNN/Sports Illustrated LOADED: 05.01.2014
DENVER — Game 7. The words have a certain charge, don’t they? They’re all nail-biting and screaming, cowbells and pom-poms, clenching every muscle in one’s seat or on one’s couch. Game 7’s are moments only the best teams have the privilege of experiencing (unless, of course, they’re the Atlanta Hawks), but sometimes these gifts from the sports gods don’t quite live up to their billing.

Sometimes, Game 7 can be empty. Take a miraculous shebang of a Game 6, and it can seem like the other guys are out of it, or maybe there’s been an injury, or maybe one team simply comes out flat.

Wednesday night in Denver was none of those things, not a one. Avalanche-Wild was the definition of Game 7, and when Minnesota bested Colorado, 5-4 in overtime on a Nino Niederreiter wrister, the life sucked was out of the Pepsi Center as only it can after one of these games, when tens of thousands of fans and one team must go home — for good.

Let’s start, however nonsensically, at the beginning of the third period, because that’s when what truly matters began. Tied 2-2, the game had been back-and-forth up to that moment: Avs, Wild, Avs, Wild. No team ever accrued more than a one-goal lead, and there was no shortage of those plays that make breathing an afterthought, the breakaways and scrums around the nets, those moments when ohmygoshwhereisthepuck.

So yes, the third period, in which the teams matched each other goal-for-goal. First, Colorado center Paul Stasny 2:55 into the period, to give the Avalanche a 3-2 lead. Next came the Wild’s right wing Niederreiter, and it almost seemed as if it was predetermined, because the scoring and the tension weren’t going to end with more than 13 minutes to go.

“We battled, battled back and dealt with adversity,” Wild coach Mike Yeo said of his team’s constant fight from behind. “It’s tough. You keep battling back.”

“The way that we dealt with this series, the way we continued to fight, to get to this game, showed the growth and maturity of our players,” he continued. “You really start to get a feel of the soul of your team.”

Really, this was like a game of smaller games — score, score, tie, repeat — and that’s what a Game 7 should be. It should be the cry of Aaaaaaah followed by Oh, that building crescendo of a cheer, over and over, because the tension of this contest didn’t peak once, or even twice. Game 7 should be skaters shadowing each other so close their limbs get tangled and they splatter on the ice. It should be players playing, maybe a little too hard, maybe a little too fast, and Wednesday was all of that.

After scoring a goal to put the Avalanche up 4-3 halfway through the third, Colorado defenseman Erik Johnson smiled and yelled, his grin wider than that of any fan in the crowd, and with just more than eight minutes remaining, this crazy inkling that that might be it began to build. Johnson smiled like a guy who’d just scored a series-clinching goal, except that six minutes later, Jared Spurgeon tied the game at 4.

Game 7 has no place for smiles.

Game 7 is for exhales, and Colorado had proven all season that it doesn’t exhale first, that it will pull its goalie and play like a pack of maniacs, that it will win at all costs. It’s almost become an assumption, and then Wednesday happened. Then Patrick Roy’s heart attack-inducing kids brought on the worst kind: a loss.

There were no cheers, not after Niederreiter’s second goal of the night slipped through Colorado goalie Semyon Varlamov’s legs. The cheers were all in Minnesota, where fans hadn’t seen their team win a playoff series in 11 years, and the sound of a handful of men jumping a barrier onto the ice don’t register over the quiet shuffling of so many feet.

A Game 7 ends with elation and with deflation. It ends in extremes. The Wild congregate on the ice in a team-wide hug. Avalanche center Ryan O’Reilly cries in the dressing room.

But the best of these games end with pride from both sides, because a good game is a good game, and two teams can be great. This thing came down to a flick of the wrist and a twitch of the limb. It would have been hard to ask for more.

“I have mixed feelings,” Roy said, later conceding that his team simply wasn’t ready to win a Stanley Cup. “There’s a side of me that’s very disappointed…but there’s also a side of me that’s truly proud of our players.”

And then there was Yeo, just as proud, but looking forward. “Let’s not stop here,” he said, and his team will train and hope for another Game 7 — although perhaps one with a smaller serving of drama than this.
Over the next few hours, 120 players will walk into a dressing room ahead of a Game 7 showdown and wonder, “Is this my night?”  

This is the stuff that every player dreams about from the moment he first picks up a stick. Everything on the line, everyone watching, no tomorrow. Someone has to be a hero. Why not me?  

It’s not always the player we expect who ends up carving his name into hockey history, but that’s the beauty of Game 7. It could be anyone.  

Here are six players ready to make this moment his own:  

New York Rangers: Martin St. Louis  

Last-minute NHL trade deadline acquisitions are flaming out all over the place (Ryan Miller Blues jerseys, 50 percent off in St. Louis!), so it would be nice if someone stepped up and proved that a bold strike at the deadline can still pay dividends. St. Louis has alternated between good and invisible in this series, but he has the composure born of big-game experience to seize this opportunity and lead the Blueshirts into the second round.  

Philadelphia Flyers: Steve Mason  

For the first time since, oh, Kate Smith was a playoff regular at the Spectrum, the Flyers are winning games because of their goalie rather than in spite of him. Mason has posted a 1.95 GAA and a .939 save percentage in four games since coming back from injury, getting the better of New York’s Henrik Lundqvist and leading Philadelphia to a deciding Game 7. One more grand effort is hardly a stretch.  

Colorado Avalanche: Nathan MacKinnon  

The Calder Trophy favorite was a non-factor in Minnesota, but now that the series has returned to Denver, it’s time for Big Game Nate to take charge. MacKinnon, who always seems to inflate his performance to match the size of the stage, has 10 points to show for his three home dates in this series, including the OT winner in Game 5. This kid is feeling it right now.  

Minnesota Wild: Jason Pominville  

A 30-goal scorer during the regular season, Pominville has been held to one empty-netter in this series. With 18 shots (third on the team), he’s been involved—he just hasn’t had the puck luck. That could change tonight, especially if he keeps his feet moving. He’s dynamite off the rush.  

San Jose Sharks: Antti Niemi  

Was going to go with Brent Burns here (27 shots, second in the NHL), but now that we know that Niemi is starting, this one falls squarely on his shoulders. There’s more than just a second round date with the Ducks at stake here. Coach Todd McLellan’s job is rumored to be on the line, so going with a struggling goalie who currently ranks 14th out of 15 playoff netminders in both GAA and save percentage means Niemi, who won the Stanley Cup with Chicago in 2010, needs to reward his faith with a superlative performance. It would help if Niemi makes a couple of big stops off the hop and prevents the Kings from getting the early lead that makes them so dangerous.  

Los Angeles Kings: Justin Williams  

Who else? Williams has played in four Game 7s, and is the first player in NHL history to score a goal in each of his first four such appearances (5-4-9 totals). He’s really shown some jump since being moved off the top line to the third alongside Jarret Stoll, scoring four times in those three games including twice in Game 6. No reason that ball can’t keep rolling.
Websites

By Allan Muir

Where will you be for Game 7 tonight?

Most of us will have to settle for watching the action from a bar stool or a random red couch a trusty sofa. But if money’s no object—and you happen to be in the neighborhood of one of the three arenas in question—there are still tickets to be had that’ll get you in the building and give you bragging rights in perpetuity if history just happens to unfold in front of you.

The guys over at Seatgeek.com offered us some insight into what it will cost if you’re determined to be there in person. Surprisingly, these prices aren’t exactly outrageous.

Philadelphia at New York

With a median listing price of $329 and cheap seats going for $186, this game is the most expensive of the evening…but it’s still a lot cheaper than the last Game 7 the Rangers hosted back in 2012. The main reason is the quick turnaround from Game 6 last night in Philadelphia which, according to Seatgeek, has prevented much hype from being built around tonight’s deciding game at New York’s refurbished Madison Square Garden. There were three days between Games 6 and 7 against the Ottawa Senators in 2012, and in that time the median listing price for Game 7 at MSG increased 18 percent, from $356 to $419. The Blueshirts had also won Game 6 in Ottawa to force Game 7, which boosted demand for tickets to the finale. Losing last night in Philly has put a crimp in the courage (and free spending) of Rangers fans.

Minnesota at Colorado

The median price for a perch in Pepsi Center is set at $200, with tickets starting at $78.

Los Angeles at San Jose

The median listing for a stool in the Shark Tank is $173, with places to park your posterior starting at $90.

The Seatgeek guys note that each of the three home teams is coming off a Game 6 thumping on the road, and those losses have done a William H. Macy on ticket prices.

In New York, the median price has dropped 29 percent from $426 to $329 since Monday morning. In Colorado, it’s fallen 19 percent from $237 to $200. In San Jose, the median price dipped 23 percent from $212 to $173.

Two of the three games—Flyers at Rangers and Kings at Sharks—involve teams with core fan bases that dwell within driving distance of their opponent’s arena, which opens the door to significant support for the visitors. Seatgeek says 72 percent of ticket shoppers for Flyers-Rangers have come from the NYC metro area compared to just seven percent from Philly. Kings fans, though, are digging deep to (hopefull) witness history. So far, 56 percent of ticket buyers for Game 7 in San Jose are from the Bay Area, but 21 percent are from Los Angeles.

CNN/Sports Illustrated LOADED: 05.01.2014
By Allan Muir

An annotated guide to this morning's must-read hockey stories:

• For the first time since 2003, the NHL will play three Game 7s in one night. Rory Boylen offers his predictions for what lies ahead.

• Here are our picks for possible heroes in tonight's seventh games, and a little visual stroll through some of the greatest climatic battles in NHL postseason history.

• Where are you watching your team play Game 7 tonight? Michael Rand weighs the pros and cons of home viewing, sports bars and being in the building.

• Here’s something you don’t see everyday: Philadelphia sports fans responding unkindly to supporters of visiting teams. I am shocked. Shocked!

• The Flyers wouldn’t be in a position to win their series with the Rangers if not for Steve Mason.

• Larry Brooks of the New York Post says it’s time for the low-key Rangers to man up if they want to avoid a Game 7 disaster.

• It’s not the most conventional way to take a series, but Los Angeles center Mike Richards says the NHL playoffs require that teams find different ways to win.

• Ken Campbell writes that the jobs of coach Todd McLellan and GM Doug Wilson could be on the line if the Sharks fall in Game 7 tonight.

• If he wants to get paid this summer, UFA-to-be Paul Stastny needs to perform like a money player in tonight's Game 7 showdown with the Wild.

• The stage is set for Minnesota’s Zach Parise and Colorado’s Nathan MacKinnon to put their stamps on this series with a dominant Game 7 performance.

• The Canadiens took an unusual step to work off the rust ahead of their second-round series with the Boston Bruins.

• Steve Buckley worries that the long layoff for Boston and Montreal hurts both the teams and the fans.

• Not sure I would call P.K. Subban “despically villainous” but hey, these are the playoffs.

• Tracey Myers examines the challenges presented by the Wild and Avalanche from the perspective of the Blackhawks. Chicago awaits the winner of tonight’s Game 7.

• Let’s just go ahead and consider every coach in the NHL as being employed on an interim basis since Mike Babcock does not want to talk about an extension beyond next season in Detroit. You can count the teams on one hand that wouldn’t dump their coaches tomorrow for the chance to bring the NHL’s best on board.

• Perhaps clinging a bit too tightly to the glories of days gone by, Pavel Datsyuk and Henrik Zetterberg say it is Stanley Cup or bust for the Red Wings. So…bust then?

• St. Louis general manager Doug Armstrong answered questions about Ryan Miller, Jake Allen and what lies ahead for the Blues in his season-ending press conference.

• The Columbus Blue Jackets took a significant step forward this year. The task now? Keep pressing forward. As the Islanders proved this season, that’s not always as easy as it seems.

• The Florida Panthers fired interim coach Peter Horachek yesterday, and speculation is already starting that his former boss might be his replacement.

• Tony Gallagher says new Canucks president Trevor Linden needs to unveil his plan to revive the franchise soon. If he has a plan, that is.
No. 1 Boston Bruins vs. No. 2 Montreal Canadiens

Story line: No NHL playoff rivalry has more legs than this one. This will be the 34th time these two teams meet in the postseason. The Canadiens lead the series 24-9.

Goaltenders: Boston’s Tuukka Rask (5-1, 1.16 goals-against average and .961 save percentage) vs. Montreal’s Carey Price (4-0, 2.33, .904). This could be billed as the NHL’s best goalie this season vs. the Olympic gold medalist. We can assume three goals should win most, if not all, of the games in this series.

Focal point: Boston’s overall defensive play could make it challenging for the Canadiens to score. Thomas Vanek and Tomas Plekanec are the offensive keys for Montreal.

Season series: 3-1 Montreal with one victory coming in a shootout. The Canadiens outscored Boston 9-7.

What the Bruins want to do: 1. Continue to hate on opposing forwards. The Detroit Red Wings didn’t often get good looks at the net in the first round. The Bruins forced everyone to the outside. 2. Pay strict attention to detail. The Bruins do the little things better, particularly in the faceoff circle and on special teams. They are more physical than the Canadiens. 3. Play a patient, efficient game. The Bruins are at their best when they don’t deviate from the script. When they fall behind, they usually remain poised.

MORE: Blue Jackets earn respect

What the Canadiens want do: 1. Make this series about Montreal’s goaltending and defense, instead of Boston’s skilled defensemen. Montreal has some skilled defensemen in Andrei Markov and P.K. Subban and some highly competitive ones in Alexei Emelin and Josh Gorges. 2. Don’t allow this to become a special teams battle. The Bruins’ power play is clicking at 37.5% and Canadians’ penalty killing is a disappointing 71.4%. 3. Populate the shooting lanes. Montreal was the NHL’s No. 1 shot-blocking team in the regular season, and the Canadiens are at their best when they are inside opponents’ heads about when to shoot.

Forecast: The Bruins played suffocating defense in the first round and if that trend continues, they will eliminate Montreal in six games.

USA TODAY LOADED: 05.01.2014
Trophy for the league's best goalie. Tuukka Rask of the Bruins was one of the finalists for this season’s Vezina Trophy for the league’s best goalie. Tuukka Rask of the Bruins was not nominated. Carey Price of the Canadiens was not. Yet it is hard to imagine either team wanting anyone else to guard its net. Both are athletic, technically flawless and routinely outstanding. Both have shown they rise to the moment. In the Sochi Olympics, Rask was excellent; his Finnish team—which didn’t have him for the semifinals because of the flu—wasn’t good enough. Price, on a better team, was better.

In this series, if goaltending seems the difference, it probably won’t truly be that way. It will be because those in front of Rask and Price were weak enough or strong enough to make it seem so.

More interesting may be what happens on defense. Few players have been more important to a team than Zdeno Chara has been since he came to the Bruins eight years ago. On defense, on offense, he is never less than very good. He can handle anything—physically, psychologically—and his teammates and opponents know it. He is a presence. He cannot be defeated.

The Canadiens’ P.K. Subban is a presence of a different sort. Chara doesn’t seem around until you need him to be; Subban is everywhere. After some in-and-out seasons, there is little he can’t do. He will not be defeated either. If he messing up, he seems without embarrassment. He simply tries again.

For the Canadiens to win, there may need to be a changing of the guard. Chara is 37, Subban 24. If the Canadiens can avoid being run over by the bigger Bruins; if they can continue to look quick, not small, they may make an older Chara look less overwhelming.

Every great competitor needs a great opponent. Ali needed Frazier; Nicklaus needed Palmer; Federer needs Nadal. Each forces the best out of the other. The Canadiens need the Bruins, and the Bruins need the Canadiens. Each will put the other to the test.

After 89 seasons and 895 regular-season games going head-to-head, these teams don’t hate each other. Nor do their fans. One team, the Canadiens, celebrates skill (and admires toughness). The other, the Bruins, celebrates toughness (and admires skill). The truth is that if Canadiens fans weren’t Canadiens fans, they might be Bruins fans. And vice versa.

That’s why Canadiens players and fans, and Bruins players and fans, crave this matchup. Why there is nothing like a Bruins-Canadiens series.

—Ken Dryden is an author, former Canadian Parliament member and Hall of Fame former goaltender for the Montreal Canadiens.

Wall Street Journal LOADED: 05.01.2014
By Nicholas J. Cotsonika 4 hours ago Yahoo Sports

NEW YORK — For Henrik Lundqvist, the story of Game 7 did not begin in the third period Wednesday night, when he held off the Philadelphia Flyers and secured a 2-1 victory for the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden. It began in the third period Tuesday night, when he sat on the bench at Wells Fargo Center, beaten, angry.

Lundqvist had allowed four goals on 23 shots through two periods, and he had been pulled for only the third time in 73 playoff appearances — for the first time in five years. He looked ahead as the Rangers finished their 5-2 loss. He used those 20 minutes to rest his body and reset his mind.

“Right away, I kind of just forgot about that game,” Lundqvist said. “I started thinking in my head about what was coming.”

Lundqvist did not want it to come to a Game 7, not again, no matter his history of success, no matter the romance of MSG. But here it was. At least he had been through it before — four times before, in fact, three in the previous two years. He steeled himself for the stakes and tension. He embraced the experience and opportunity.

If you listened closely after Game 6, you could hear disgust in Lundqvist’s voice. Steve Mason had outplayed him twice in the series after returning from a concussion. “They did pretty much everything better than us,” Lundqvist said then, “even the goaltending.” He didn’t say “including the goaltending.” He said “even the goaltending.”

“I was more mad than anything,” Lundqvist said. “I didn’t get the win. I knew I had to match Mason’s play.”

Through 40 minutes of Game 7, Mason was the first star. The Rangers took a 2-0 lead in the second period when Dan Carcillo and Benoit Pouliot banged home beautiful passes, plays on which Mason had no chance. But the Rangers could have made it 3-0 or 4-0 or 5-0. They outshot the Flyers, 18-5, even though they killed two penalties.

Mason stoned Martin St-Louis and Derek Stepan and Carl Hagelin, flashing his glove, flying across the crease, sticking out his pads. Lundqvist got a little lucky, meanwhile, when he sprawled on the ice, left the top of the net open and saw Claude Giroux fire the puck over the bar.

Then, 4:32 into the third, Jason Akeson cut the Rangers’ lead to 2-1. He fired from the right circle. His shot was blocked by defenseman Marc Staal, but in a blur, he swiped the rebound past Lundqvist on the far side. Uh-oh.

“Obviously when they scored that goal, I knew it was going to be an intense game,” Lundqvist said. “They got some confidence. They kept coming pretty hard. It was nerve-wracking, but it was exciting.”

Here was the whole season — the bad scheduled, the rough start, the transition to new coach Alain Vigneault, the eventual improvement, the post-Olympic adjustment, the stretch run, everything — riding on one goal lead. Lundqvist knew how much of it was out of his hands.

“All it takes is a bad bounce,” Lundqvist said. “Even though you feel like it’s under control, the game is so fast. All it takes is it to hit someone or a skate or a leg, and it’s in. I didn’t feel relaxed, but I still felt confident in how we were playing.”

Lundqvist did all he could, which was all he could do. The Flyers outshot the Rangers in the third, 11-5. But Lundqvist handled a knuckelball from a driving Giroux and covered up. He covered up another puck with Sean Couturier falling on top of him. He stoned Michael Raffl in close. The Rangers never took a penalty; it just seemed liked it. They blocked shots like John Tortorella was still their coach.

“We basically killed it off, it was like a PK there for a while,” said Rangers center Brad Richards. “It took a while tonight, to be honest. A lot of clock watching. A lot of icings and whistles.”

A lot of saves. Then finally the horn blew, and the Rangers and Lundqvist had done it again. The Rangers are 6-0 all-time in Game 7s at Madison Square Garden — 4-0 in the past three years. Lundqvist is 4-1 in Game 7s with a 1.00 goals-against average, a .963 save percentage and one shutout.

Over the last nine times the Rangers have faced elimination, Lundqvist is 7-2 with a 1.43 GAA, a .951 SP and three shutouts — including 6-0 with a 0.98 GAA, a .965 SP and two shutouts at MSG.

This is why they call him King, and this is the biggest reason the Rangers have a chance to beat the Pittsburgh Penguins in the second round. The Penguins have better superstars in Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin. They have a much better power play. But the Rangers are a better possession team, with a forecheck that causes turnovers against teams with shaky defense corps, like the Flyers and Penguins. They have a strong PK. And they have the clear advantage in goal with Lundqvist.

If it goes to a Game 7, whom would you rather have? Marc-Andre Fleury? This is what Lundqvist does. This is what the Rangers do. Even if they wish they didn’t. They haven’t won a series in less than seven games since 2008.

“If this is the only way, we’ll take it,” Lundqvist said with a laugh. “I think we’d all rather do it faster. But when it comes down to it, to win games like this, it’s something that we’ll remember. It’s inspiring to go out and play a game like this with the pressure and excitement. It’s all on the line. You have to enjoy it. You play so many games that if you don’t value a game like this, I think you need to think again.”

YAHOO.COM LOADED: 05.01.2014

[Watch: Wild win wild one, beat Avs in Game 7 overtime]