CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The News&Observer

‘We lived to fight another day’: Jordan Staal sets the tone for Hurricanes’ comeback

By Chip Alexander

New York

Evgeny Kuznetsov joked that Jordan Staal predicted he was going to score Monday, maybe do his version of the birdman celebration, arm flaps and all.

Staal wasn’t so sure of that after the game, but smiled and said, “There’s been a lot of guys telling me I was going to score for a while.”

And he did. And a big score it would be.

The Carolina Hurricanes, with 20 minutes separating them from a disappointing end to their season, to their Stanley Cup hopes, needed someone to step up and deliver in Game 5 of the Stanley Cup playoff series against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

Staal led the way as the Canes scored four times in the third period for a 4-1 victory that has the Rangers now leading 3-2 in the Eastern Conference semifinal series and Game 6 set for PNC Arena on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, Canes coach Rod Brind’Amour was asked about Staal, about being the captain, about the tone Staal sets for the rest of the team each day.

“We take a lot of pride in how we play and he’s the kind of go-to on all that, how you handle yourself, how you prepare every game,” Brind’Amour said. “He’s at the top of the food chain.”

So with the Canes trailing 1-0 after two periods Monday, with Rangers goalie Igor Shesterlin putting together an elite effort in net, and celebrities being shown on the big Garden scoreboard — Wayne Gretzky, Will Arnett, those kind of folks — and everyone having a grand old time, Staal scored.

The Rangers had snuffed out a Canes power play to begin the third period. Again, New York had been the better team on special teams, getting a shorthanded goal from their captain, Jacob Trouba, in the second period. All was in order.

Then, Staal struck.

Coming off the bench on a change and taking a cross-ice lead pass from defenseman Dmitry Orlov, the big center skated past defenseman Braden Schneider, faked a forehand shot and used his long reach to get off a backhander. Staal had his first goal of the playoffs and Shesterkin had been beaten for the first time Monday.

“Just an incredible play by him,” Canes forward Jordan Martinook said. “The whole game he was leading us. That’s what the captain does. Everyone jumped on his back.”

Added forward Martin Necas: “He’s a warrior. He leads the way. He’s so strong and he showed it there.”

And so it all turned — the momentum, the game, the series.

Kuznetsov, who didn’t predict a goal of his own, scored on a rebound as the Rangers’ Artemi Panarin flailed at him from behind. Martinook scored from the slot off a Martin Necas pass after a Jack Drury forecheck. Suddenly Shesterkin was catching it from all directions.

“No one was hanging their heads,” Staal said. “We knew we had to have our best period, and we did. We’re fighting for our lives and the boys showed up.”

Rangers coach Peter Laviolette pulled Shesterkin early for a sixth attacker but that didn’t help or generate anything. Necas grabbed the puck and gave it a fling down ice into an empty net.

Before long, the Hurricanes were packing up for the trip back to Raleigh and some more hockey business — Game 6. No handshakes after this game. They play on.

“That arena is going to be buzzing,” Necas said.

After the Hurricanes lost the first three games to the Rangers, several of the Canes players mentioned the “belief in the room” and said they could claw their way back into the series. It wasn’t idle chatter.

Forget that just four NHL teams have come back from a 3-0 deficit to win a playoff series. Forget that the Rangers, the Metro Division winners, had the home-ice advantage. Forget they had Shesterkin, one of the NHL’s best.

The Canes had that belief. They won Game 4 at home, refusing to be swept. They’ve won at the Garden, and in impressive fashion.

“We trusted our game and it ended up paying off,” Staal said. “And we lived to fight another day.”

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Hurricanes surge past Rangers in the third period, force Game 6 in Raleigh with 4-1 win

By Chip Alexander

New York

The Carolina Hurricanes still have plenty of fight in them.

Trailing the New York Rangers by a goal entering the final period of Game 5, being shut down by Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin, the Hurricanes ignited for four goals in the third for a 4-1 victory at Madison Square Garden.

After losing the first three games of the second-round series, taken to the brink of elimination in the Stanley Cup playoffs, the Canes now have won the last two and forced a Game 6. That game will be played Thursday at PNC Arena in Raleigh.

:"We're fighting for our lives," captain Jordan Staal said.

Staal tied the score 1-1 early in the third for the Canes, and Evgeny Kuznetsov made it 2-1. When Jordan Martinook scored from the low slot, it was 3-1 with 10:04 left in regulation.

Just like that, the Madison Square Garden crowd, so lively much of the night, sat in stunned silence.

Rangers coach Peter Laviolette pulled Shesterkin early for an extra attacker but Martin Necas swept the puck the length of the ice for an empty-net goal for a 4-1 lead.

Canes goalie Frederik Andersen, given the start in Game 5, allowed a shorthanded goal to Jacob Trouba in the second period but that was that. Andersen finished with 20 saves as the Rangers mustered just six shots in each of the final twp periods, leading to some boos in the Garden.

Staal's goal, on a strong move to the net, came when the Canes captain came off the bench and beat Shesterkin by going forehand to backhand at 3:33 of the third.

Kuznetsov then scored on a rebound of a Brady Skjei shot at 6:39 of the third, breaking into his birdman celebration. His goal also made up for a careless slashing penalty late in the first period.

Martinook ripped a shot from the slot. After Jack Drury's forechecking hustle, Martin Necas pass into the slot where Martinook avoided Drury and got off the shot.

Jacob Trouba's shorthanded goal in the second period pushed the Rangers into a 1-0 lead in Game 5 as New York sought to close out the second-round Eastern Conference series.

After blocking a Sebastian Aho shot on the Canes' first power play of the game, Trouba grabbed the puck and was off on a two-on-one in transition. The Rangers captain beat Andersen to the blocker side at 6:23 for New York's second shorthanded score of the series.

The Canes had a second power play soon after their first as Adam Fox was called for holding, but the Rangers' penalty killers again outworked the Canes.

Carolina for the third straight game kept the Rangers without a power-play goal. New York was 0-3 Monday,

First period scoreless

Both Andersen and Shesterkin were tested in the opening period. Neither allowed a goal, although both teams had their chances — the Canes had 10 shots and the Rangers nine, forcing the Canes' Andersen and Shesterkin to be quick, sharp.

Andersen's best stop might have been on a tip by the Rangers' Chris Kreider, always dangerous on redirections around the crease. Shesterkin's best save came on a breakaway by the Canes' Jake Guentzel, although he also made a good stop on a Staal tip off the rush 16 seconds into the game.

The first period was played at even strength until 1:55 was left and Kuznetsov called for slashing, The period ended with five seconds left on the Rangers' power play, the Canes' Teuvo Teravainen teaming with Sebastian Aho for a shorthanded chance.

Andersen the pick

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour again was coy Monday when asked about the starter. Andersen was in the "starter's crease" in the morning skate at Madison Square Garden. Andersen also was the first goaltender off the ice.

But Brind'Amour went no further than to say "maybe" when asked if Andersen would start.

When the teams came out for the pregame warmup, Andersen led out the Canes. He started Game 4 in Raleigh, stopping 22 of 25 shots and was the winner as the Canes, trailing 0-3 in the series, took a 4-3 victory in the elimination game.

The Hurricanes held a rare morning skate at the Garden on Monday, although only for 15 or so minutes, just enough to limber up and work up a sweat.

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The Athletic

2024 NHL Mock Draft: Levshunov to Blackhawks, Dickinson to Blue Jackets? How Round 1 will shake out

By Corey Pronman

It is NHL Draft season right now, and our readers should prepare for all kinds of big boards, mock drafts and debates in the coming weeks ahead of the 2024 NHL Draft.

Today I give my first projection for the first round. At this stage, many teams have not had their amateur meetings and don't even have a list formed, so there isn't great intel out there on who may take who. Thus for this mock, it's more about giving our readers an idea of the range I think prospects are going to go in and trying to find fits for needs and team philosophies.

1. San Jose Sharks: Macklin Celebrini, C, Boston University-Hockey East

Celebrini is the consensus No. 1 pick. The Sharks GM has basically said that's who they're taking. We can move on.

2. Chicago Blackhawks: Artyom Levshunov, RHD, Michigan State-Big Ten

Our colleague Scott Powers believes it's down to Levshunov or SKA winger Ivan Demidov for Chicago. Both are great prospects, but history has shown if it's close the NHL team often will lean to the big defenseman over the smaller winger.

At No. 2, should Blackhawks draft Demidov, Levshunov or neither?

3. Anaheim Ducks: Anton Silayev, LHD, Torpedo-KHL

Anaheim is sitting in a great position because of how talented their group of young forwards are and the collection of high-end defense prospects at the top of this draft. Whether it's Levshunov, Silayev or Sam Dickinson, the Ducks are in a great spot to leave with a big, mobile defenseman. Silayev as a huge and mean defender fits in very well with the kind of team GM Pat Verbeek wants to build. The league thinks if they go forward it would be for Cayden Lindstrom.

4. Columbus Blue Jackets: Sam Dickinson, LHD, London-OHL

The Blue Jackets could go in a few different directions. They've added forwards and defensemen high in the draft in recent years although if I had to pick a need for them it would be more defensive depth. Silayev or Dickinson feel like ideal adds for them for that reason based on need and best player available. They're not in such a bind on defense though that this pick could easily be Ivan Demidov or Cayden Lindstrom up front.

Ivan Demidov is considered a top forward in the 2024 draft. (Maksim Konstantinov/ SOPA Images / LightRocket via Getty Images)

5. Montreal Canadiens: Ivan Demidov, LW, SKA-KHL

The draft breaking this way would be ideal for the Canadiens, who many in the league believe want to add a forward in this draft. They would have their pick of Demidov, Cayden Lindstrom, Beckett Sennecke and others. Demidov is considered the second-best forward in the draft by many and would fit a need for the Habs.

6. NHL Utah: Cayden Lindstrom, C, Medicine Hat-WHL

Utah has targeted premium athletes in recent drafts and Lindstrom fits that profile in spades. He's huge, fast and highly physical while being able to provide some offense. Lindstrom or Dickinson fits their profile.

7. Ottawa Senators: Zayne Parekh, RHD, Saginaw-OHL

The Senators have a massive need to add a premium puck-mover and if the draft goes like this they would have their pick between Parekh and Zeev Buium. Parekh could have a lot of success next to someone like Jake Sanderson for the next decade.

8. Seattle Kraken: Zeev Buium, LHD, Denver-NCHC

The Kraken are in a similar position to Ottawa where in an ideal world, they would add a defenseman and they could be in a prime position to do so. Buium or Parekh would make a lot of sense for their organization and add a lot of skill to their team.

9. Calgary Flames: Konsta Helenius, C, Jukurit-Liiga

The Flames have drafted a lot of wingers high in recent years so any center or defenseman would be ideal for their pick. It's tempting to slot in Tij Iginla here for obvious reasons, but they really need someone like Helenius, Carter Yakemchuk or Buium/Parekh in their organization.

10. New Jersey Devils: Beckett Sennecke, RW, Oshawa-OHL

Sennecke is a fast riser right now in the draft after a great OHL playoff. He's 6-2, can skate and is one of the most skilled players in the class. Some in the league think he has a chance to go higher than where I have him currently slotted. New Jersey has a ton of young talent at center and defense so they can afford to take a super talented winger, especially one who has some size.

11. Buffalo Sabres: Berkly Catton, C, Spokane-WHL

I feel a little off projecting another small forward being picked by the Sabres this high, but they've shown no hesitancy to draft smaller players, especially when they are super talented. Catton has every tool except size. I could see Helenius or Iginla as an option here as well.

12. Philadelphia Flyers: Carter Yakemchuk, RHD, Calgary-WHL

Yakemchuk has a wide range of opinions within teams, some have him as their No. 1 defenseman, some as their 6th or 7th ranked blueliner. That said the big-time skill and upside fit the profile Philadelphia would be likely to target. Catton and Iginla make a lot of sense here as well.

13. Minnesota Wild: Tij Iginla, LW, Kelowna-WHL

Iginla is a riser within teams so I could see him be long gone by 13. If he is here he checks the skill and compete boxes Bill Guerin would be looking for. Michael Brandsegg Nygard or Adam Jiricek make sense for the Wild as well.

14. San Jose Sharks: Adam Jiricek, RHD, Plzen-Czechia

This would be an ideal scenario for the Sharks to walk away with a potential top-four defenseman in Jiricek to go with Celebrini given how badly their system needs top blue-line prospects.

15. Detroit Red Wings: Michael Brandsegg-Nygard, RW, Mora-Allsvenskan

When I think Detroit, I think compete types and Brandsegg Nygard has that in spades. Jett Luchanko, Cole Beaudoin and Igor Chernyshov also fit here with Detroit feeling like a floor for Iginla.

16. St. Louis Blues: Stian Solberg, LHD, Valerenga-Norway

Solberg had a great playoff and opening to his World Championships for Norway. He ticks a lot of boxes NHL teams seek in his size, mobility and physicality and his offensive game has developed. He's the kind of defenseman the Blues would like to target and need in their pipeline.

17. Washington Capitals: Cole Eiserman, LW, U.S. NTDP-USHL

Eiserman has been a point of debate all season but I still expect him to be a top-20 pick. Ideally, the Capitals would add a center or defenseman here but Eiserman's offense would be too much to pass up at No. 17.

18. New York Islanders: Jett Luchanko, C, Guelph-OHL

Luchanko's stock has been going sharply upward in the second half of the season into a likely mid-first due to his speed, compete and playmaking. He gives some needed center depth to the Islanders system.

19. Vegas Golden Knights: Trevor Connelly, LW, Tri-City-USHL

Connelly's eventual landing spot will be one of the most interesting parts of draft weekend. Vegas is one of the spots some speculate he could land at because they are not afraid to take risks or take on bad PR.

20. Chicago Blackhawks: Igor Chernyshov, RW, Dynamo Moscow-KHL

Teams have Chernyshov rated a bit higher than this on talent but because he is Russian, I could see him get to around the 20 spot. His size, speed, skill and compete could be highly intriguing to Chicago.

21. Los Angeles Kings: Liam Greentree, LW, Windsor-OHL

Greentree's stock was rising all season and then went in the other direction following a so-so U18 worlds. He's still a big winger with a ton of skill and he'll likely go in the 20s even though scouts have concerns about the pace of his game.

22. Nashville Predators: Dominik Badinka, RHD, Malmo-SHL

Badinka impressed scouts with his second-half play in Sweden. He's a big, mobile right-shot who showed enough puck play versus men to make you think he can make passes in the NHL. He would provide a big boost to Nashville's system which is light on defensemen.

23. Toronto Maple Leafs: Yegor Surin, C, Yaroslavl-MHL

Surin had a big postseason in Russia and I think has played his way into the first round due to being a hyper-competitive forward who can score as well. He fits what Toronto has looked for in recent drafts.

24. Anaheim Ducks: Charlie Elick, RHD, Brandon-WHL

I presume the Ducks will want to continue to get bigger and heavier, and adding a punishing defender like Elick at No. 24 to go with Silayev at No. 3 would make their future blue line a lot harder to play against. EJ Emery makes a lot of sense here for similar reasons as well.

25. Colorado Avalanche: Nikita Artamonov, LW, Torpedo-KHL

Artamonov had a very good season in the KHL and could be a late first/early second due to how high his skill level is. In a thin Colorado system, he would vault right toward the top in terms of offensive abilities and playmaking.

26. Ottawa Senators: Cole Beaudoin, C, Barrie-OHL

Beaudoin's name is buzzing in scout circles after a great U18 worlds where he displayed a super likable style of play with his size and high-end compete. I expect his name to be called comfortably into round one as he looks like an all-day third-line center in the NHL with a chance to be more.

27. Montreal Canadiens: Sacha Boisvert, C, Muskegon-USHL

Boisvert had a strong year in the USHL. As a 6-2 center who can skate and has some offense, he would provide some essential center depth to the Habs pipeline.

28. Carolina Hurricanes: Michael Hage, C, Chicago-USHL

Hage is a highly talented forward with the speed and high-end skill to take over a shift and would fit the profile of the type of player Carolina tends to target. He was one of the top forwards in the USHL last season.

29. Calgary Flames: Dean Letourneau, C, St. Andrew's College-Ontario High School

Letourneau is one of the most interesting prospects in this year's class. He's a 6-6 center who skates well for a big man and has legit offensive abilities. Someone is going to gamble on that type of talent, and with two first-rounders, Calgary takes the swing in this projection.

30. Philadelphia Flyers: EJ Emery, RHD, U.S. NTDP-USHL

Emery had a strong end to his season at the U18 worlds. He scored zero goals on the season, but he's a big, mobile, high-impact defenseman that Philly can project to make a lot of stops.

31. Dallas Stars: Sam O'Reilly, C, London-OHL

O'Reilly has played a big role in London's strong season and playoff run. He's not the flashiest player, but he does a lot well. He plays with pace, works hard and has good offensive touch while projecting as a pro center.

32. New York Rangers: Linus Eriksson, C, Djurgarden-Allsvenskan

Eriksson wouldn't be the sexiest first-round pick, but he's a 200-foot center who has shown well versus men this season and has good offensive traits as well. The Rangers could use some quality depth down the middle and he would help.

How did so many NHL teams miss on Gustav Forsling? Inside the rise of the Panthers' 'Greek God'

By Michael Russo

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Gustav Forsling is a cautionary tale for NHL teams. Don't give up on young defensemen too early

If you do, you might have to watch from afar as they grow into a player like Forsling, who Florida Panthers teammates say is as steady as anyone they've seen and has a body like Adonis.

The Vancouver Canucks liked Forsling but discarded him after he led all defensemen in scoring in the 2015 world juniors, sending his rights to the Chicago Blackhawks for Adam Clendening, who they felt was closer to contributing.

The Blackhawks gave up on him after just 122 games and three seasons, sending him to the Carolina Hurricanes along with Anton Forsberg for Calvin de Haan and a forward who wound up playing nine NHL games.

The Hurricanes, who had a full allotment of NHL defensemen during the shortened training camp before the pandemic-shortened 2020-21 season, never even gave him a chance, trying to sneak Forsling through waivers before the Panthers snatched him up.

And now, here we are three years and four months since that last move, and Forsling has gone from the scrap heap to the top of the heap, playing big minutes for the Panthers in the playoffs two months after signing an eight-year contract that will kick in next season when he's 28 — at what sure looks like it will be the bargain sum of $46 million ($5.75 million per season).

"He's a really great story in the NHL, and I can't really tell it because I don't understand all of it," Panthers coach Paul Maurice said.

Luckily for Maurice, who deploys Forsling, 27, on a defense pair with veteran Aaron Ekblad, 28, the Panthers' front office had plenty of inside intel on Forsling before he was placed on waivers in January 2021.

Their head coach at the time, Joel Quenneville, and one of their assistants at the time, Ulf Samuelsson, had known Forsling from his Chicago days, when he was taken under the wing his rookie year by Swedish countryman Niklas Hjalmarsson. They gave their endorsement.

That was just for starters. Panthers senior adviser Rick Dudley had previously been the Hurricanes' senior vice president of hockey operations, and then-Panthers assistant GM Paul Krepelka (now senior VP of hockey operations) had previously been Carolina's VP of hockey operations. They, too, were each banging their fists to "get this guy," Panthers general manager Bill Zito told The Athletic.

"Within the comment part of all of our scouting reports and evaluations of him … it's all in there," Zito said. "They were just glowing."

Forsling had actually first gotten on Zito's radar when he was still assistant GM in Columbus.

"We had a scout, Blake Geoffrion — I've always got to give him credit because he was the first guy I remember talking about him," Zito said. "It just never really happened there. But then we had so much familiarity with Gustav within our organization once he went on waivers."

Zito didn't want to disclose too much inside baseball, but like well-run front offices should, the Panthers scoured teams' depth charts before that 2021 half-season and had a feeling the Hurricanes would choose to keep Jake Bean over Forsling out of training camp.

The Panthers gave Forsling a shot, and in his first season, he scored 17 points in 43 games and was plus-17. In the three seasons since, Forsling has averaged 11 goals and 39 points. This season, he also led the league with a plus-56 rating, bringing him to plus-133 in the four seasons with the Panthers, the best mark in team history and second in the NHL over that span:

Beyond the basic numbers, Forsling's analytics show that the Panthers create more shots and scoring chances when he's on the ice, and score at a higher clip relative to his teammates. A lot of that stems from his steady defensive presence, which helps keep Florida out of its own zone. He's an aggressive defender at the blue line and uses his size and positioning to keep opponents to the outside in transition to break up scoring opportunities.

"He just doesn't make mistakes," Maurice said. "He kills more plays than anybody on our team, and he does it without being overly physical."

This is why Zito was perfectly comfortable awarding Forsling eight years of stability.

"He's a guy that doesn't rest," Zito said. "(John Tortorella) has a saying with players that get paid. 'It's gotten good to him. He's got his money.' Trust me, with Gus, he'll never be one of those guys where it's 'gotten good.'"

Forsling was a late bloomer physically.

Now, he's a physical specimen.

“You should see this guy walking around with his shirt off,” veteran Kyle Okposo said. “He’s like a statue. Truly, he’s a sculpture.”

Added Ekblad, “His body, he’s like a mythical Greek God.”

When the world largely shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, Forsling returned to his small southern Swedish hometown of Linköping. He went home from March to December “and took advantage of the long, long layoff.”

“I put in a lot of work in the gym and on the ice, so I think that really helped,” he said. “I knew if I got the chance with Carolina, I was going to be ready.”

He never envisioned it would be with Florida instead.

Now, Forsling is the Panthers’ perennial fitness champ. Zito and Maurice take pride in the Panthers being a physically fit team, and Maurice said Forsling “is our fittest athlete.”

At the team’s annual fitness testing, Zito said, everybody else is competing for second place.

“I remember we were once talking about the testing beforehand, and I made a comment to Gus, ‘A couple of guys here, they’re going to take a run at you this year,’” Zito said. “He looked at me and without cracking a smile goes, ‘Not a chance.’

“I was like, ‘OK, this guy, it’s on.’ And guess what? It wasn’t even close. The second-place guy could be a decathlete or something, and he’d be lapped by Gus.”

Forsling has always taken care of his body but credits veteran Patric Hornqvist for really teaching him how to work out and eat when he got to Florida.

“I really enjoy working out and working hard, so it just comes natural to me to be honest — but I probably needed to eat better,” Forsling said … as he held an arugula salad he was taking from the Panthers practice facility for lunch. “Patric’s a mentor to me and has helped me a lot on and off the ice. But the working out, it’s just me. I’ve got a trainer back home who sets up the program for me during the summers, and my old team lets me work out there and skate there.”

Because of his fitness level, Maurice deploys him in every key situation for the Panthers.

“He was a late bloomer, but it wasn’t from a lack of work ethic,” Maurice said. “He’s our most elite athlete. Our fittest man. A powerful, strong, huge tank. Heavy … and fast.”

On the ice, Forsling is smooth at almost everything.

It’s been impressive to watch during these playoffs, especially the past three games after a rough opening game alongside Ekblad “where we had a look-in-the-mirror moment,” Ekblad said, likely due to the long layoff between the first and second rounds.

Forsling can hammer the puck, makes a great first pass, is an elite skater and kills plays with his feet and stick.

“Without the puck, he’s probably got one of the best sticks in the world,” veteran Panthers defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson said.

Take his bounce-back Game 2 performance: Not only did Florida have a 26-15 shot-attempt edge in Forsling’s minutes, but the quality of the Bruins’ chances was a lowly 0.6 expected goals for, according to Natural Stat Trick. That gap was even greater in Game 3, when Boston only attempted six shots to the Panthers’ 27 with Forsling on the ice, worth an expected goal value of 0.05. Same story in Game 4.

And this despite facing a hefty serving of David Pastrnak throughout the series.

Forsling’s durability has also been notable. He plays through anything, Panthers players say.

“Now that he’s locked up for eight years, we can gush about him a little bit,” Okposo said. “I remember when I got traded here (from Buffalo), I talked to (Sam Reinhart) on everybody and everything, and I asked, ‘Who’s this Forsling guy?’ Reino just said, ‘Wait until you get a look at this guy. He does everything well.’ And he is everything as advertised. I love being on the ice with him because he just kills plays. You’re coming back in your zone in a panic because the other team’s about to get a scoring chance, and next thing you know, he shuts the plays down.

“He never ever, ever, ever puts you in a bad spot as a winger, as a forward. He’s been just absolutely phenomenal.”

Ekblad has never seen anything like it.

“His career has been on that upward trajectory so quickly,” Ekblad said. “I compare him to (Sergei Bobrovsky) in a sense where his preparation is key … whether that’s watching video, or his body in general being absolutely perfect.

“The consistency in how he prepares his body every day is second to none, so he’s going to be able to play for a long time.”

Maurice said Forsling had to get the details of his game perfect to stay in the NHL. He bought himself time with his work ethic, Maurice said, and the timing for the rest coming together was perfect for the Panthers — right when they got him.

That’s what impresses Ekman-Larsson, who is 18 games short of 1,000. After flaming out with three organizations, many players would have given up on the NHL dream.

But Forsling hung in there and, Ekman-Larsson said, “worked his way up and stuck with it and believed in himself and got a very good chance here to prove he’s a very good hockey player.”

Forsling said he never would have surrendered. While he’s not a self-promoter, he has a quiet, inner confidence. He always envisioned himself in this position where he’d be a top player on his NHL team armed with a stable, lucrative contract. He modeled his game with the Blackhawks after Hjalmarsson, saying, “That’s the kind of guy I wanted to be, but I knew it would be hard to get to that point.”

Ekblad was the No. 1 pick by the Panthers in 2014. He has 676 regular-season and 49 playoff games under his belt

He knows not every defenseman develops at the same rate, and Forsling — with 397 regular-season and 46 playoff games under his belt — is a perfect example of that

“I think we’re all in a sense a little bit victim to circumstance and usage and stuff like that,” Ekblad said. “He maybe didn’t

just get the opportunities that, say, I got. Teams gave up on him. It took a little bit longer for someone to notice him and give him those opportunities. But once he was given the opportunity to shine, he was able to show what he could do.

"You just need someone to believe in you. That's the cautionary thought: Believe in the player, give him a chance, give him a true chance."

With Rangers struggling, Hurricanes are testing New York's winning formula

By Peter Baugh

NEW YORK — After multiple goals this postseason, Artemi Panarin has whipped his stick through the air like a baseball bat in celebration. Monday evening, he found himself making a similar motion, just for different reasons. After the Carolina Hurricanes' Evgeny Kuznetsov beat Panarin for a rebound and sent the puck flying into the net for the go-ahead goal, the New York Rangers' star smashed his stick into the glass in anger.

Kuznetsov's goal stood as the game winner — a frustrating moment on a frustrating night for the Rangers, who lost 4-1 in Game 5. New York entered the third period with the lead after a Jacob Trouba short-handed tally, then proceeded to give up four unanswered goals. Suddenly, the Rangers' 3-0 series lead is 3-2 with the series shifting back to Raleigh.

"They wanted it more in the third," Vincent Trocheck said.

"There were a lot of issues tonight," added a frustrated Peter Laviolette, who said the team's issues went beyond the final period.

Throughout the season, New York has relied on an elite power play and five-on-five production from the line of Panarin, Trocheck and right wing Alexis Lafrenière. When that hasn't been enough, goaltender Igor Shesterkin has often been there to bail out the team. That was enough for the Rangers to win the Presidents' Trophy, set a franchise record for regular-season wins and jump out to a 7-0 start in the playoffs. Suddenly, though, Carolina is testing New York's winning formula.

Panarin has no points and a minus-5 rating in two games since his overtime winner in Game 3. Trocheck hasn't added to the scoresheet in that span either, and Lafrenière's lone goal came on a shift with Chris Kreider and Mika Zibanejad.

The Rangers still had 59 percent of the expected goal share with the Panarin-Trocheck-Lafrenière line on the ice in Game 5, according to Natural Stat Trick, but Carolina led in scoring chances and high-danger chances in that span. One of the Hurricanes' most dangerous chances, a Jake Guentzel breakaway saved by Shesterkin, happened with them on the ice.

"When you give them the puck, it's not easy to cover them," said Martin Necas, who played more than five minutes against the Panarin line in Game 5. "Once you keep the puck on your sticks, they're not as good defensively. That's how you've got to play against them, and that's what we're doing."

Panarin's skating did draw an apparent hooking penalty on Jalen Chatfield shortly before Kuznetsov's goal, but the officials didn't call it. Each team got three power plays, and New York's unit looked far from as dominant as it was earlier in the series. On the Rangers' first power play, which came after a Kuznetsov slash, Zibanejad got a solid look on a pass off the rush, but that was about it. The Hurricanes generated more chances in those two minutes, with Teuvo Teravainen getting a dangerous shot from the wing.

Carolina goaltender Frederik Andersen had to make only five saves in New York's six minutes of power-play time.

"We've just got to execute better on our entries," Trocheck said. "I don't think they changed out much on their forecheck."

The unit, which scored four power-play goals in the first two games of the series, now has gone eight tries without a goal.

"(The Hurricanes are) aggressive in what they do," Laviolette said. "We've got to move things a little quicker."

Carolina knows that to beat New York, it has to beat Shesterkin. The goalie was far from the Rangers' biggest issue Monday — he saved more goals than expected, according to Natural Stat Trick — but the Rangers allowed too many dangerous chances in front of him, and Carolina eventually broke through. Jordan Staal got around Braden Schneider on Carolina's first goal early in the third, and Panarin wasn't in position to prevent Kuznetsov's rebound goal. Then Trouba turned a puck over behind the net midway through the third, allowing Necas to feed Jordan Martinook in the slot.

New York didn't put its goalie in position to steal the game, as he did in Game 2, and Carolina took advantage.

"Anytime you don't play up to your capabilities, you get concerned about that," Laviolette said. "But I also know that this group has had games like that before, and they've responded."

The task will be harder in Carolina, where Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour will have control over the last change. He can select matchups and perhaps lean on his Guentzel–Sebastian Aho–Andrei Svechnikov line against Panarin's trio.

Still, the Rangers are not in a position to panic. If they win one of their next two games, they're on to the Eastern Conference final. Carolina adjusted when New York jumped to a series lead, and now it's Laviolette's and his players' turn.

"At the beginning of the year, if you told me we'd be 3-2 against the second-best team in the league and (had) an opportunity to close it out, it's a pretty good spot to be in," Kreider said. "Just go down there and be better, be more detailed, work for each other and find a way to win a game."

To do that, the Rangers will need to get back to what earned them the No. 1 overall seed — far from what they showed Monday night.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

As adversity finally finds the New York Rangers, can they find their game?

By Mark Lazerus

NEW YORK — Vincent Trocheck stood in Filip Chytil's vacant stall, his voice quiet, his responses brief. No, he didn't think things snowballed on the Rangers. No, he didn't think the Carolina Hurricanes are doing anything different on their penalty kill. No, he doesn't think being home or on the road makes much of a difference.

Just over his right shoulder, affixed to a narrow wall between stalls, was a wooden cutout of the Stanley Cup, with 16 puck-sized holes carved out, one for each victory it takes to win a championship, to achieve hockey immortality. There were seven pucks nestled in place, with nine empty slots remaining. The same amount there were after Game 4. The same amount there were after Game 3. The march to the Cup has come to a sudden standstill.

The New York Rangers were 20 minutes from the Eastern Conference final entering the third period of Monday night's Game 5. Ten minutes later, they were down 3-1, getting booed back to Raleigh by the Madison Square Garden faithful, eventually losing 4-1 to the resurgent, resurrected Hurricanes.

Now there were no histrionics in the Rangers dressing room afterward. No overturned tables, no fiery defiance, no wailing or gnashing of teeth or rending of garments. It was quiet and mostly empty, the comments from Trocheck, Jacob Trouba and Mika Zibanejad all calm and reasonable. A standard post-loss room.

How the Hurricanes rallied to force a Game 6 with the Rangers: 5 takeaways

But make no mistake: After obliterating the overmatched Washington Capitals and winning three straight nail-biters to open this second-round series, adversity has finally found the Rangers.

How will they respond?

"With our best," Trocheck said.

They'd better. Because they certainly didn't in Game 5.

New York's power play was disjointed and ineffective. The defense was flat-footed and outmuscled. The scorers were hesitant and pass-happy. At five-on-five, Carolina had 13 high-danger scoring chances to New York's five (only one of which came in the second or third periods). Igor Shesterkin was brilliant through two — when a Seth Jarvis pass on a power-play rush in the first minute of the third period bounced off Trouba and still somehow found Shesterkin's pad, you had to wonder if it was just his night — and when he's on, he can mask some of the Rangers' modest warts. But then Shesterkin got undressed by, of all people, Jordan Staal for the equalizer at 3:33 of the third, and was then beaten cleanly by Evgeny Kuznetsov and Jordan Martinook. In the biggest period of the season, the Rangers wilted, and were blown away by the Hurricanes.

Peter Laviolette said that's not his Rangers, that it wasn't "a reflection of who we were for the majority of the year." He's right, of course. New York won the Presidents' Trophy as the league's best team in the regular season. But the fact that these lesser Rangers — these off-brand Rangers, this shadow of the Rangers — showed up in a playoff game? In a closeout game? At the Garden?

It's a concern. And Laviolette wasn't pretending otherwise.

"Any time you don't play up to your capabilities, you get concerned about that, yeah," Laviolette said. "But I also know this group has had games like that before and they responded. There's accountability that goes with that from them."

Momentum in hockey is a funny thing. It absolutely exists within a game — a big save or a big kill or a big hit can completely reverse the energy between two teams. Staal's shockingly beautiful move at the net, using every bit of his 6-4 frame to nudge a backhander around Shesterkin, was proof. Just like that, the Rangers fell apart. And just like that, the Hurricanes took over.

But any NHLer will tell you that momentum does not, in fact, exist from game to game. Whether you won the previous game in a laugher or lost it in double-overtime has absolutely no bearing on the next game. By the time the puck drops for the opening faceoff, whatever happened in the previous game or games is ancient history, irrelevant. Professional athletes don't get to this level by stewing on the past, by freaking out about a loss, by panicking. They live in the present. They move on. With an extra day off until Thursday's Game 6 in Raleigh, Game 5 will be a distant memory. The Rangers might cruise to an anticlimactic win in Game 6, or the Hurricanes might force a fateful Game 7 back at the Garden. What happened Monday night won't be the reason, either way.

But hope is a funny thing, too. It grows like a weed, spreads like a virus. And you could see that in the visitors dressing room following Monday's morning skate.

"There's life, right?" Hurricanes defenseman Jaccob Slavin said. "Your backs are against the wall down 3-0, and you're doing whatever you can to stay alive. Now you've got a little bit of life in you. But you've still got to do whatever you can to stay alive. So it's the same mindset — desperation, leaving everything out there, because tomorrow isn't guaranteed."

The Rangers could stand to find a little of that desperation — desperation to put away the pesky Hurricanes, desperation to avoid a winner-take-all Game 7. They sure didn't seem to have any of it in Game 5. Both teams looked a little tense, a little nervous for most of the game. But Staal's goal seemed to pull the release valve on the Hurricanes, who seized the moment and the in-game momentum. Shesterkin has a way of demoralizing opponents, and watching Staal beat him in such grand fashion seemed to give the Hurricanes a little more of that life, a little more of that belief. They went on the attack, and the Rangers were helpless to respond.

"When you're going into the third period, you realize it could be the last period of this year," Kuznetsov said. "You don't want to have that feeling. I'm so grateful that we were able to come back and win the game."

The Rangers are right not to despair, of course. They're still up 3-2 in the series. They're still in the more enviable position, by far. They were the best team in the league all

season, and had been the best team in the playoffs until now. And for them, tomorrow is guaranteed. As Trouba said after the game, the Rangers earned themselves “a couple cracks at it” by going up 3-0, like a golfer who only needs to three-putt on the 18th green in order to win a tournament. You miss that first putt, and you’re not sweating it. But come up a few feet short on that second putt, and all of a sudden you’re feeling the pressure. Now, the next one isn’t exactly a must, but you sure as hell don’t want to miss it and give your opponent new life.

That’s Game 6 for the Rangers — a real knee-knocker, a test of skill, of character, of fortitude.

Don’t leave it short.

“I don’t think we thought this was going to be a cakewalk,” Trouba said. “We lost two, face a little adversity. We’ll see what we’re made of going down to Carolina for Game 6.”

How the Hurricanes rallied to force a Game 6 with the Rangers: 5 takeaways

By Arthur Staple

NEW YORK — The Rangers aren’t making this easy on themselves.

Evgeny Kuznetsov’s rebound goal at 6:39 of the third period was part of a four-goal outburst in the final frame. Carolina’s 4-1 win sent this second-round series back to Raleigh for Thursday’s Game 6.

Jacob Trouba’s shorthanded goal in the second period was the lone goal in an evenly played first 40 minutes and the Rangers killed off an early Carolina third-period power play to put the finish line of the series within sight. But Jordan Staal, Carolina’s captain, made a move around Braden Schneider and then another one around Igor Shesterkin to tie the game 3:33 into the third.

On the eventual winner, Brady Skjei let loose a big drive that Shesterkin turned aside. But Kuznetsov beat Artemi Panarin to the rebound for his second goal in as many games to give Carolina the lead. Jordan Martinook added another at 9:56 and the Canes left the Garden crowd stunned, hoping to return here for what would be an improbable Game 7 on Saturday.

Down 1-0 and on the brink of elimination, the Hurricanes scored three unanswered in the third period

Canes plumbers come to play again

It wasn’t Carolina’s big-name guys but instead a collection of wily old vets who helped the Canes stay alive. Staal, playing in his 141st career playoff game, made the play on the first Carolina goal, driving the net for a nice move around Shesterkin when his Hurricanes had been going side to side and looking for space most of the night.

And Kuznetsov, firmly entrenched as the fourth-line center this postseason, came up with another big goal as he did in opening the Game 4 scoring. It’s no coincidence that Staal and Kuznetsov are the only two Canes players with Stanley Cup rings.

Martinook, who had a huge goal in Carolina’s comeback to beat the Islanders in Game 2, then sealed it.

Jacob Trouba rebounds

Trouba had what you could generously describe as a tough Game 4 when he was on for all four Carolina goals and got caught roaming the neutral zone before Sebastian Aho’s goal made it 3-1 late in the first period on Saturday.

But the Rangers didn’t name him captain before last season for nothing. In a Game 5 that required more defensive-zone fortitude than offensive flair, Trouba was much steadier. He even found time to throw a big open-ice hit in the opening period, knocking down Jack Drury to roars from the Garden crowd.

But the real roars came in the second on Carolina’s first power play of the game. He blocked an Aho one-timer at the top of the right circle, chipped it around Aho after the Canes center slipped and started a two-on-one with Barclay Goodrow. Brady Skjei played the pass and Seth Jarvis raced back, but Trouba still snapped one low past Andersen’s right pad for the Rangers’ second shorthanded goal of the series and fourth in nine playoff games.

It was also just the second goal by a Rangers defenseman in the postseason — and they’ve both come shorthanded, with K’Andre Miller’s shorty coming in Game 2 against the Caps.

Lazerus: Game 4 thriller plants seed of hope in Hurricanes, seed of doubt in Rangers

A rare collapse

The Rangers were 34-3-2 when leading after two periods in the regular season. But strange things happen in the pressure of the playoffs, especially with the opponent facing elimination.

The Rangers had done a lot of good things to thwart Carolina through 40 minutes, including 21 shot blocks and making sure they had a forward covering the weak side whenever the Canes threw a puck on Shesterkin. That’s a staple of Carolina’s offense.

But the one time the Canes beat the Rangers to a weak-side rebound it cost them. Panarin didn’t have position on Kuznetsov and the game turned.

Heading back to Raleigh for Thursday’s Game 6 signifies a potentially bigger collapse, of course.

Special teams

The Rangers’ shorthanded goal was the only special-teams marker of Game 5 and it seemed to be a good omen, given that Carolina’s power play dropped to 1-for-20 for the series. But it was the Rangers’ 0-for-3 night on the power play that also stood out — the Rangers had five shots on Freddie Andersen on their three opportunities but nothing terribly dangerous.

With some special-teams momentum on the PK the last two games, Carolina might be starting to feel itself a little bit. That can counteract whatever power-play failures Carolina has had so far.

Filip Chytil skates, Matt Rempe plays

There was some good news on Monday morning in the form of Filip Chytil being back on the ice with his teammates at the Rangers morning skate. He skated without restrictions after missing Game 4 with what the Rangers termed an illness but he stayed on the ice at the team's practice facility for extra work, essentially ruling him out for Game 5.

It was still encouraging given Chytil's concussion history and worries that his return to action in Game 3 might have produced some delayed symptoms that arose the next morning.

Jonny Brodzinski got most of the morning reps with Jimmy Vesey and Goodrow in the spot Brodzinski played in Game 4, but it was fan favorite Matt Rempe who got the call on Monday, eliciting cheers from the Garden crowd every time he stepped on the ice. Which, as expected, was rarely, but Rempe acquitted himself well once again in Game 5.

Blake Wheeler also shed his no-contact red sweater for the first time as a full participant on Monday morning.

"Everybody was out there for practice," Peter Laviolette said. "That's a real positive thing."

NORTH STATE JOURNAL

Category 5: 'Dog fight' op tap for Game 5 of Hurricanes-Rangers

By Cory Lavalette

Rangers forward Alex Wennberg looks to pass the puck while chased by Hurricanes forward Jordan Martinook during Game 4 of their series Saturday at PNC Arena. (Karl B. DeBlaker / AP Photo)

NEW YORK — The Hurricanes will look to take another step in their comeback effort against the Rangers on Monday at Madison Square Garden when the teams meet in Game 5 of their second round series. New York leads the series 3-1 and will take a second crack at eliminating Carolina.

1. Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour was noncommittal about who would start in net for Game 5, though Frederik Andersen was in the visiting starter's crease and first off the ice after Monday's morning skate.

"Maybe," Brind'Amour said when I asked if Andersen would be the starter.

The coach said Sunday that he would see how Andersen and Pyotr Kochetkov felt, consult with goaltending coach Paul Schonfelder and make a decision. So how is the final decision made?

"A lot goes into it now just because. obviously, that's the No. 1 concern, 'OK, how are you feeling?'" Brind'Amour said. "And then (we) had a good rotation going, do we go back to that just based on that was when we had our most success. There's been a lot of discussions."

Andersen allowed a total of eight goals on 54 shots in Games 1 and 2 at MSG, taking the loss in both, but had been 6-2-0 in eight regular season appearances at The Garden.

Jordan Martinook said Sunday the team was comfortable with whoever got the nod.

"It doesn't really matter which guy's in there," he said. "We have full faith in whichever one is in between the pipes. You look at Kooch, his Game 3 was pretty incredible. And Freddie made some big stops last night and big ones at key moments, and I feel like that's kind of what you need in those games, that if it goes the other way then you're chasing even more."

The Rangers will certainly go back to Igor Shesterkin, who is 13-4 in his career at home in the postseason. Carolina did put a chink in Shesterkin's armor in Game 4, becoming the first team in 30 playoff games to score more than three goals on the New York goalie.

"It's always nice to get four on a good goalie, but he's a good goalie for a reason," captain Jordan Staal said after Monday's morning skate. "I'm sure he's gonna come back with a better effort, so we're gonna have to try to find a way to do it again and create as much offense as we can against a good goalie.

2. Evgeny Kuznetsov was a healthy extra in Game 2 but returned for Game 3 and then opened the scoring in Game 4. He wasn't ready to talk about being scratched — "It's a probably conversation for another day," he said Sunday — but he certainly seemed ready for another do-or-die game.

"All I want to say, it's just going to be a dog fight tomorrow," he said Sunday at PNC Arena. "There is one bowl of food and two dogs (are) going to compete (with) each other.

"And they know that they don't want to come back here. They know it's going to be hell here. And they want to finish out there, and what we're trying to do, we're just trying to put the pressure on them a little bit. … It's just about compete and then the dog fight."

3. Much was made of the Hurricanes finally scoring on the power play in Game 4, but Carolina's penalty kill was also important.

Sure, it only had to kill one penalty, but it was an important one. With the Hurricanes up 3-1 in the first period, Staal was called for tripping with 2:30 left in the opening frame. A Rangers goal would likely sap the momentum Carolina built in the first period, and attempting the kill without Staal made it even tougher.

But the Hurricanes responded by denying zone entries and looking more like the PK that ranked first in the NHL in the regular season than the one that had allowed seven goals on 24 chances before Game 4.

“I felt like that kill last night was probably our best one,” Martinook said. “We had pressure and we were on it. I think that was just the intensity of the game. … It was a big, big moment in the game for us to be able to get that killed off in the way we did.”

4. Staal, who watching from the box, agreed the one kill in Game 4 was key.

“(Sebastian Aho) did a great job of winning that first draw,” Staal said, “and then once you get it out of the zone, we did a good job of keeping it out of the offensive zone for them. And that’s what a good PK does is just limit their chances at the net, and it starts with a big win by Fish and we were able to keep them from any zone time at all, and it was nice to see.”

The Carolina captain would of course prefer the Hurricanes stay out of the box altogether on Monday night.

“That would be nice,” he said. “It’s easier said than done. The refs may have a different say in that. There’s going to be penalties, so if we’re gonna want to pull this off, it’s always a key part of big wins.”

Brind’Amour agreed the PK can build momentum, though he too would prefer his team limit the number of chances.

“We’ve seen in this series where they get a good kill and what it does,” Brind’Amour said. “Those are crucial times of the game for both teams. That’s been kind of the series, it keeps getting boiled down to that because the two teams are pretty evenly matched, I think.”

5. After a combined 28 power plays in the first three games of the series, Game 4 had only three. Brind’Amour wasn’t ready to say the referees were limiting their calls as the series advances.

“You just don’t know game to game how it’s gonna be called, what’s gonna transpire,” he said. “So I don’t really know what to say on that. We could see 10 tonight. We just gotta be ready either way.”

I asked Brind’Amour if he checks who is officiating the game — for Game 5, it’s Dan O’Rourke and Francois St. Laurent — to determine which way it could go.

“Yes and no,” he said. “I think some guys have a tendency to call more stuff, some guys let it play out. But at this stage of the season, these are the top guys and they have a good feel for letting the boys play.”

According to ScoutingTheRefs.com, O’Rourke and St. Laurent were 22nd and 21st, respectively, in power play opportunities per game during the regular season with the number of chances each way being right near 50-50 (51% edge for the home team by O’Rourke, 49.2% for St. Laurent).

The Hurricanes were 3-0-0 this season in regular season games officiated by O’Rourke and 6-0-1 in games involving St. Laurent. The Rangers had similar success: 2-1-0 with O’Rourke and 4-0-0 with St. Laurent.

Neither have officiated in this series, but St. Laurent was on for Game 2 against the Islanders — a 5-3 Carolina win that included 126 penalties, most in the game’s final minute.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

Recap: Canes Pull Off Shocking Comeback, Force Game 6

By Walt Ruff

NEW YORK - The Carolina Hurricanes scored four goals in the third period on Monday, coming from behind to take a 4-1 victory over the New York Rangers in Game 5.

Recap: Hurricanes at Rangers 5.13.24

Came Out Firing...

With both teams understanding the magnitude of the contest, the two sides came out firing, leading to a fast and furious start to the night. Forcing Frederik Andersen and Igor Shesterkin to make crucial stops early, both clubs combined for 11 shots before the game's first media timeout.

Things would settle down a bit following the commercial break, as the teams would then go over eight minutes without another shot.

When the chances picked back up, Carolina continued testing Shesterkin, and there was plenty to be encouraged by, despite not finding the back of the net.

More Special Teams Struggles...

While the first period was more chance-for-chance in spurts than anything, the second period was filled with feistiness and penalties.

Killing off a carryover penalty on Evgeny Kuznetsov, Carolina's penalty kill then had a second successful try after Dmitry Orlov was tagged for a roughing call.

With plenty to feel good about, especially given New York's accomplishments on the power play earlier in the series, it felt like just about everything that needed to be was rolling in the direction of the visitors.

In the seconds following their second kill, they were then headed to their first power play of the game. However, disaster struck.

For the second time this series, the Rangers took a shorthanded goal.

Blueshirts Captain Jacob Trouba worked in on a two-on-one and picked his spot, igniting the MSG crowd and claiming the game's first goal.

Not Dead Yet...

With just 20 minutes separating the Canes from elimination, Rod Brind'Amour's group flexed their resiliency once again.

3:33 into the frame Captain Jordan Staal got the scoring frenzy started, taking a masterful cross-ice pass from Orlov and using his reach to tuck one backhand past Shesterkin.

Giving his team a spark, it took just 3:06 more to find the go-ahead goal.

A crashing Kuznetsov beat Artemi Panarin to the rebound of a Brady Skjei shot, quickly catapulting Carolina to their first lead of the night.

Remaining on the throttle, three minutes later, the Canes' advantage became 3-1.

Sticking to their identity, the forecheck disrupted New York behind their own net. A combination effort from Jack Drury and Martin Necas led to a puck popping free in the slot, one Jordan Martinook would pump home.

Completely silencing "The World's Most Famous Arena", all that was left between Martinook's second of the postseason and the final horn was a Necas empty netter.

Stunning the Presidents' Trophy winners, Game 6 in Raleigh is now set for Thursday.

They Said It...

Rod Brind'Amour summarizing the third period...

"Finally some things - I don't know if it's breaks or whatever you want to call it - went our way. There's a high-level desperation with our game in the third period, but we had to. I just think we got a few bounces, finally."

Jordan Staal on the team continuing their belief, despite being down going into the final 20 minutes...

"We didn't hate our game. We were rolling into a power play. We trusted our game and it ended up paying off. We live to fight another day. No one was hanging any heads. We knew we had to have our best period and we did.

Jordan Martinook describing the post-game jubilation from the locker room...

"You're just happy. We're fighting for our lives every game. We gave ourselves a chance to play another game. We gave ourselves another chance to come back here. I think we were just pumped for each other and enjoying the moment. Enjoying the boost the win gives you. Then we have to regroup and get ready to give everything that we've got for Game 6."

What's Next?

The Canes are scheduled to be off on Tuesday. They'll return to practice on Wednesday before then hosting Game 6 on Thursday at PNC Arena.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

Hurricanes rally past Rangers in Game 5 to avoid elimination

By David Satriano

NEW YORK -- The Carolina Hurricanes scored four goals in the third period and avoided elimination again with a 4-1 win against the New York Rangers in Game 5 of the Eastern Conference Second Round at Madison Square Garden on Monday.

Carolina, which has won two straight, trails the best-of-7 series 3-2. Game 6 will be in Raleigh, North Carolina, on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; MAX, truTV, TNT, SNO, SNE, SN360, TVAS, CNC).

Martin Necas had a goal and an assist, and Jordan Staal, Evgeny Kuznetsov and Jordan Martinook scored for the Hurricanes, the No. 2 seed from the Metropolitan Division. Frederik Andersen made 20 saves.

"We trusted our game. It ended up being enough and we live to fight another day," Staal said. "… We knew we had to have our best period and we did, and going to have another huge challenge going back home in a couple days. We're fighting for our lives. The boys showed up and it showed."

Jacob Trouba scored, and Igor Shesterkin made 24 saves for the Rangers, the No. 1 seed from the Metropolitan, who lost at home for the first time in the postseason (4-1).

"Obviously, you want to close out a series, but we put ourselves in a position that we get a couple cracks at it," Trouba said. "We've played good games in Carolina. We know we can play in that building. We'll go down there and bring a better game.

CAR@NYR R2, Gm5: Staal reaches out and slips in a backhand to tie the game

The Hurricanes trailed 1-0 entering the third before scoring three times in a span of 6:23.

Staal tied the game 1-1 at 3:33, skating around Rangers defenseman Braden Schneider in the left face-off circle and tucking a backhand around Shesterkin's outstretched left pad. The goal came off cross-ice pass from Dmitry Orlov, who opted to hold the puck at the blue line and find Staal rather than dumping it in the zone.

"Just an incredible play by [Staal]," Martinook said. "I felt the whole game he was leading us. When you got a guy that does it the same way every night and just plays the same style and in your face, hard, everyone wants to jump on, that's what your captain does. He was incredible tonight, everyone jumped on his back. He led us for sure."

Kuznetsov gave Carolina a 2-1 lead at 6:39 when he put in a rebound below the right circle after Shesterkin knocked down Brady Skjei's shot.

"I'm just so grateful to be part of that," Kuznetsov said. "It's kind of one of those when you're you know, going into the third period, you realize that could be the last period this year and you don't want to have that feeling, so I'm so grateful that we were able to come back and win the game."

CAR@NYR R2, Gm5: Kuznetsov crashes the net and grabs the lead

Martinook increased the lead to 3-1 at 9:56 with a snap shot in the slot after Necas' pass from behind the net deflected to him off Jack Drury's stick.

"We just weren't very good in our approach today," Rangers coach Peter Laviolette said. "There was a lot of issues tonight. We'll go back and look at it and try to correct those issues. … This group has always responded when we haven't played to our potential."

Necas scored an empty-net goal with 3:31 remaining for the 4-1 final.

"Yeah, I mean, that was huge," Necas said of the third period. "Starting with our captain. Jordan made a great play on the goal, same with 'Orly'. ... We believe. We believe in this locker room and, you know, game by game. You don't think about winning two in a row, three and row, four in a row, but it's about the next one and we're happy to go back to PNC."

Trouba gave the Rangers a 1-0 lead with a short-handed goal at 6:23 of the second period. He blocked a shot by Sebastian Aho, creating a 2-on-1 with Barclay Goodrow, before scoring with a wrist shot from the right circle.

The Rangers had 21 shots in the game, their fewest in the playoffs this season, and just 12 shots after the first period.

"They played well in the third and we just didn't give it enough," Rangers forward Vincent Trocheck said. "They wanted it more."

The Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers have never forced a Game 7 and are 0-6 in playoff series when trailing 3-0.

"Obviously, there was a high level of desperation with our game in the third," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "… But I felt like it was business as usual. We had to win a period. Didn't matter how, we were going to get it done. It wasn't like we were dead. And you're one shot away, so that's how they approached it."

NOTES: Trouba's goal was his second playoff goal with the Rangers (39 games), and his first since May 11, 2022. … Rangers forward Mika Zibanejad had his playoff point and assist streaks end at eight games (three goals, 10 assists). … The Rangers lost for the first time in six games at home in the playoffs against the Hurricanes. … The Hurricanes were 0-for-3 on the power-play and are 1-for-20 in the series after finishing with the second-best power play during the regular season (26.9 percent).

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hurricanes win game 5

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Jordan Staal and Evgeny Kuznetsov scored 3:06 apart in the third period, and the Carolina Hurricanes got four goals in the third for a 4-1 win over the New York Rangers in Game 5 of the second-round playoff series on Monday night, staving off elimination for the second straight game.

Jordan Martinook and Martin Necas also scored in the Hurricanes' big third period, and Frederik Andersen — starting for the fourth time in five games in this series and ninth time in 10 games in the postseason — had 20 saves.

Jacob Trouba scored a short-handed goal and Igor Shesterkin stopped 24 shots for New York, which has lost two straight after taking a 3-0 series lead.

Game 6 is Thursday night in Raleigh, North Carolina.

STARS 5, AVALANCHE 1

DENVER (AP) — Wyatt Johnston scored twice on the eve of his 21st birthday as Dallas pushed Colorado to the brink of elimination Monday night with a 5-1 win in Game 4 that came hours after Avalanche standout Valeri Nichushkin was suspended for at least six months.

Johnston had shorthanded and power-play goals for the Stars, who grabbed a 3-1 lead in the second-round, best-of-seven series. Dallas can close it out at home in Game 5 on Wednesday.

Miro Heiskanen and Evgenii Dadonov also scored, while Sam Steel added a late empty-net goal. Jake Oettinger made 24 saves.

Hurricanes score 4 in third period, rally to beat Rangers 4-1 in Game 5 to avoid elimination

By Vin A. Cherwoo

NEW YORK (AP) — Trailing by a goal with 20 minutes to go and their season on the line, the Carolina Hurricanes weren't discouraged. They knew they could turn the game around.

Jordan Staal and Evgeny Kuznetsov scored 3:06 apart early in the third period, and the Hurricanes got four goals in the period for a 4-1 win over the New York Rangers in Game 5 of the second-round playoff series on Monday night, staving off elimination for the second straight game.

"There was no panic, we understood what the situation was," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amoiur said. "It wasn't like we were dead. ... You were one shot away, and that's the way they approached it."

Jordan Martinook and Martin Necas also scored in the Hurricanes' big third period, and Frederik Andersen — starting for the fourth time in five games in this series and ninth time in 10 games in the postseason — had 20 saves.

"No one was definitely hanging any heads," Staal said, "We knew we had to have our best period, and we did. We're going to have another huge challenge going back home in a couple of days. ... We're fighting for our lives and the boys showed up and it showed."

Jacob Trouba scored a short-handed goal and Igor Shesterkin stopped 24 shots for New York, which has lost two straight after taking a 3-0 series lead.

"One game at a time," Rangers forward Chris Kreider said. "If you had told me it would be 3-2 against the second-best team in the league with an opportunity to close it out, that's a pretty good spot to be in. We'll just go down there and play better, be more detailed. Find a way to win."

New York coach Peter Laviolette was also displeased with the result.

"Got some time here before the next game, but clearly we got do a lot of things better," he said. "There were a lot of issues tonight. We'll go back and look at it and we'll try to correct those issues."

Game 6 is Thursday night in Raleigh, North Carolina.

The Hurricanes won despite going 0 for 3 on the power play to fall to 1 for 20 in this series while giving up a short-handed goal for the second time.

"We're fighting for our lives every game," Martinook said. "We gave ourselves a chance to play another game and hopefully give ourselves a chance to come back here (for a deciding Game 7)."

Staal tied it 1-1 at 3:33 as he got a pass from Dmitry Orlov, skated around one Rangers defender in the left circle, came in on Shesterkin and beat him with a backhanded shot that went around the leg of the sprawled goalie. It was Staal's first goal of the playoffs.

"Just an incredible play by him," Martinook said. "He was incredible tonight. Everybody jumped on his back. He led us for sure."

Kuznetsov then gave the Hurricanes the lead as he knocked in the rebound of Brady Skjei's shot from the right side for his fourth of the postseason.

Martinook made it 3-1 just before the midpoint of the period. Necas sent a centering pass from the end boards, and the

puck went off Jack Drury's stick to Martinook, and he quickly sent a shot that beat Shesterkin.

"He got a little piece of it and calmed it down, so I guess I got to thank him," Martinook said with a smile.

The Rangers pulled Shesterkin for an extra skater with 3:44 to go, but Necas sent a long shot that went into the empty net 15 seconds later.

The Rangers got a power play when Orlov was called for roughing at 3:47 of the second period. Shortly after the penalty expired, New York's Jack Roslovic was whistled for tripping, putting Carolina's struggling power play on the advantage. However, it was the Rangers who broke through.

Trouba blocked a shot by Sebastian Aho, skated up the ice on 2-on-1 rush and fired a shot from the right circle that beat Andersen at 6:23. It was his first goal of the playoffs and the Rangers' fourth short-handed tally.

The Hurricanes got another power play at the midpoint of the period, but didn't get a shot on goal during the advantage. Shesterkin then denied Drury's point-blank try with 6 minutes to go in the second.

Carolina had a 10-9 advantage on shots on goal in a scoreless and fast-paced first period. Both teams had chances and the goalies had to make several nice saves.

Rangers rookie sensation Matt Rempe was back in the starting lineup after sitting out Games 3 and 4.

ESPN

Rangers fail to close out Hurricanes in Game 5 at home

By Greg Wyshynski

New York Rangers captain Jacob Trouba said their failure to close out the Carolina Hurricanes at home in Game 5 presents an important character test for his team.

"I don't think we thought this was going to be a cakewalk," Trouba said after the Rangers' 4-1 loss on Monday night, which narrowed New York's series lead to 3-2. "We've lost two games [in a row]. We're facing a little adversity. We'll see what we're made of going down to Carolina for Game 6."

The Rangers entered the third period with a 1-0 lead thanks to Trouba's short-handed goal in the second frame. But the desperate Hurricanes took over the game by scoring three goals in 6:23.

Jordan Staal evened the score with his first goal of the playoffs. Just 3:06 later, Evgeny Kuznetsov netted his fourth of the postseason to give Carolina the lead. Jordan Martinook added a critical third goal before Martin Necas sealed the win with an empty-netter.

"It kind of snowballed quick on us. This was a bad period," Trouba said. "It's different than a regular season, where you feel bad all night and tomorrow you wake up and you're upset. You got to turn the page quick."

His teammate, Vincent Trocheck, didn't see the third period the same way.

"I don't know if I'm going to say something snowballed tonight," he said. "They scored a couple goals in the third. It's a seven-game series against a team that was three points behind us in the regular season. We knew it wasn't going to be easy."

Coach Peter Laviolette also didn't believe the third period was the reason New York dropped Game 5.

"It was more than the third period. We weren't sharp. We gave up way too many chances in the first period and then it died off after that," he said.

The Rangers' power play, which scored 10 goals in five games during a recent stretch against Washington and Carolina, went scoreless for a third straight game, the unit's longest dry spell since March.

Meanwhile, Carolina scored three goals at even strength against New York goaltender Igor Shesterkin, marking the first time Shesterkin allowed three goals in the third period of a playoff game.

Hurricanes captain Staal said the team is starting to feel like itself again.

"Yeah, obviously wins help. But we really believe we had some good games [to start the series], but we had some mistakes, especially with the special teams, and that's gotten a lot better," he said. "I think our 5-on-5 game has been really good and it's coming together more and more.

"Wins are nice. We've got to just keep fighting."

Staal has played in 146 playoff games during his NHL career and has seen how hard it is to finish an opponent.

"Game 5s are tough, especially when you're at home. You don't want to go back on the road and you want to close it out," he said. "But we gave it all we got, we found a way to get a win and we're going to have to do it all over again."

Trouba took an optimistic approach to the Game 5 loss: Since the Rangers won the first three games of the series, there was some margin for error.

"Obviously we want to close out series, but we put ourselves in a position that we get a couple cracks at it," he said. "We played good games in Carolina. We know we can play in that building, and we'll go down there and bring a better game."

Game 6 is Thursday night in Raleigh.

Young NHL stars who are leveling up in Stanley Cup playoffs

By Neil Paine

The Stanley Cup playoffs are no place for the fresh-faced and inexperienced -- or so the conventional wisdom goes. Because one ill-timed mistake can often send a team spiraling toward elimination, coaches tend to lean on players they can trust in big moments, which often correlates with being a veteran who has seen it all before and knows how to handle the pressure.

That can make it difficult for young players to earn a bigger role when the postseason lights get brighter. It's probably not a coincidence that zero of the remaining teams in this year's stacked playoff field ranked among the 10 youngest by average age during the 2023-24 regular season, while four of the 11 oldest squads are still skating toward the Cup. But despite this, some kids are still using these playoffs as a springboard for greater things and producing beyond their years.

To identify the youngsters who are stepping up big in the games that matter the most, we looked for players under the age of 25 this season (as of Jan. 31) who have never had a regular season of 15 or more goals above replacement (GAR) in their careers before. Why 15? Generally speaking, it's the marker of a good season. The Carolina Hurricanes' Andrei Svechnikov, for instance, has a 15.6 GAR season under his 24-year-old belt -- as does the Dallas Stars' Thomas Harley (22) -- so neither are eligible despite being young players who have big responsibilities for their respective playoff teams.

Instead, we'll focus on nine players (listed youngest to oldest) who haven't quite achieved that level of regular-season success yet, but are playing important roles for Cup-chasing teams.

Wyatt Johnston, C, Dallas Stars

Age: 20 (May 14, 2003)

Best regular season: 14.5 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 10 GP | 5 G | 3 A | 8 P | +0 | 20:05 TOI/G

Johnston just sneaks onto our list, by virtue of posting 14.5 GAR this season, during which he scored 32 goals for a Dallas team that had no shortage of scoring threats. (Eight Stars scored at least 20, which trailed only the 2021-22 St. Louis Blues among teams since the 2005 lockout.) But Johnston is one of the surprisingly few Stars who have carried that momentum over to the playoffs; he's one of only four Dallas players with three or more goals, and his five goals represent nearly 20% of the entire team's total. Playing with a combination of talented linemates -- he has been centering Jamie Benn and Joe Pavelski recently -- Johnston will get chances to snipe home more goals; his big challenge will be to give more at the defensive end, where he was on the ice for multiple goals against in Colorado's Game 1 comeback last week.

They said it: "What a player. He still can't get in the casino and play cards, he's not old enough, it's unbelievable. One of the great young players, the next generation of stars of this league." -- Stars coach Peter DeBoer

Logan Stankoven, C, Dallas Stars

Age: 21 (Feb. 26, 2003)

Best regular season: 3.1 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 10 GP | 2 G | 2 A | 4 P | +3 | 15:10 TOI/G

Johnston isn't the Stars' only precocious young contributor this postseason. After recording a pair of assists in Round 1 against Vegas, Stankoven has two goals in the Colorado series -- both coming in Dallas' critical Game 3 win Saturday night. (He kicked off the Stars' scoring to begin the game, then later fired home an empty-netter.) The 21-year-old winger is playing so well that he is logging minutes on the Stars' top line with Jason Robertson and Roope Hintz, showcasing how far he has already come since getting his first NHL goal (naturally, off a Johnston assist) in February.

They said it: "We get enough scoring. What he's bringing us, all the intangibles, the energy, the relentless puck pursuit, the battles, the setting up other guys, making plays -- that stuff alone has earned him the opportunities he's got." -- DeBoer

Arturs Silovs, G, Vancouver Canucks

Age: 22 (March 22, 2001)

Best regular season: 0.8 GAR (2022-23)

Playoff stats: 6 GP | 4-2-0 | .908 SV% | +1.1 GSAA

Stanley Cup playoffs 2024

Pressed into mid-playoff emergency duty because of injuries to Vezina Trophy candidate Thatcher Demko and backup Casey DeSmith, Silovs has the unenviable task of carrying the netminding load for a team that has real Stanley Cup aspirations. Prior to a few weeks ago, Silovs had started only nine total games in his two-year NHL career, with zero coming in the playoffs. But with the exception of a weak outing in Game 1 of the second round against Edmonton -- which Vancouver won anyway in a furious comeback -- the young Latvian has mostly been solid, even recording his first career shutout (regular-season or playoffs) in the Round 1 clincher versus Nashville and stopping 42 of 45 shots from the high-powered Oilers while backstopping Vancouver to a 2-1 series lead on Sunday night.

They said it: "You just have to be always ready. A lot of things happen in life, like [an] accident, someone gets hurt, right? And you just have to be ready to embrace your moment." -- Silovs

Dylan Holloway, C, Edmonton Oilers

Age: 22 (Sept. 23, 2001)

Best regular season: 1.1 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 8 GP | 2 G | 0 A | 2 P | -1 | 9:32 TOI/G

The speedy Holloway, who was taken 14th overall in the 2020 draft, has yet to make a big regular-season splash for Edmonton, netting 9 goals and 9 assists in 89 career games. But in the playoffs, Holloway found himself tied for third on the Oilers with a pair of goals in the first round against the L.A. Kings. (Remarkably, he buried more pucks than Connor McDavid in that series.) In a span of a few weeks, Holloway went from potentially not making the playoff roster to earning time on the third line with Ryan McLeod and Corey Perry -- a crucial unit for an Edmonton team that has a lot of top-line talent but needs contributions from its depth players.

They said it: "He is in a great spot right now, playing well, and he's not thinking out there. You can tell the difference in just the time I've been here. In the beginning, I thought he was thinking maybe a little too much, but now he is trusting his instincts." -- Oilers teammate Mattias Ekholm

Anton Lundell, C, Florida Panthers

Age: 22 (Oct. 3, 2001)

Best regular season: 10.3 GAR (2021-22)

Playoff stats: 9 GP | 1 G | 6 A | 7 P | +1 | 16:51 TOI/G

Lundell burst onto the scene a few years ago, when the then-20-year-old scored 18 goals with 26 assists and a plus-33 plus/minus for the 2021-22 Panthers squad that posted the best record in hockey. Though he hasn't quite replicated that level of play in the past few seasons, Lundell has been one of Florida's most important players this postseason -- whether he's centering a line with Matthew Tkachuk (the team's most talented player) and Carter Verhaeghe (the team's best clutch performer), as he did early in Round 2 against the Boston Bruins, or notching a goal and an assist to help Florida erase a two-goal deficit in Game 4 and take a 3-1 series lead.

They said it: "I always love responsibility. I want to play as good as I can and just do as much as I can. I know I can play big minutes. I know I can be a big player on the team, and I want to be a big player for when we need a goal, or we need to defend. Be an all-around player. But I'm just trying to do everything I can to help the team to win." -- Lundell

Alexis Lafrenière, LW, New York Rangers

Age: 22 (Oct. 11, 2001)

Best regular season: 11.2 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 8 G | 4 G | 6 A | 10 P | +1 | 15:45 TOI/G

The 2020 No. 1 draft pick hasn't turned into a star the way many had expected, but he made significant progress this regular season with career highs in goals (28) and points (57). And now, he's averaging more than a point per game in the playoffs on the Rangers' productive second line with Artemi Panarin and Vincent Trocheck. Panarin leads all playoff scorers with four game-winning goals, but Lafrenière has assists on three of those scores; he has also scored a team-high four goals in the Carolina series so far. The Rangers would not be 7-1 in the playoffs and among the Stanley Cup favorites without Lafrenière's improved play.

They said it: "Coming into the league at a young age in New York is not the easiest of roles to be put in. He's confident. He's having fun. I think that's when he's at his best. He honestly is a kid at heart. That's a compliment." -- Rangers captain Jacob Trouba

Mason Lohrei, D, Boston Bruins

Age: 23 (Jan. 17, 2001)

Best regular season: 2.8 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 9 GP | 1 G | 3 A | 4 P | +0 | 18:04 TOI/G

Lohrei is far from a household name, as the 2020 second-round pick spent most of the 2023-24 regular season bouncing back and forth between the NHL and AHL. But he has dressed for nine of Boston's 11 playoff contests so far, averaging 18 minutes a night while chipping four points. He has been shielded from bad situations -- 72.5% of his non-neutral-zone shifts that started on a faceoff have been in the offensive zone -- as we might expect from a rookie with fewer than 50 career NHL games, but he's playing his role well and giving the Bruins solid minutes on a back line that sorely lacks depth.

They said it: "The sky's the limit for him. He's got an extremely high ceiling. His potential is off the charts. I try to help him whenever I can, like I do for every guy and they do in turn for me. But that's all him. He's worked real hard and he deserves to be here." -- Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy

K'Andre Miller, D, New York Rangers

Age: 24 (Jan. 21, 2000)

Best regular season: 12.3 GAR (2022-23)

Playoff stats: 8 GP | 1 G | 1 A | 2 P | +4 | 20:55 TOI/G

Despite his age, Miller has been a fixture on the Broadway blueline for a few years now, ever since being named to the All-Rookie team in 2020-21. But Miller took a step back statistically during the regular season, falling from career highs of 43 points and 12.3 GAR in 2022-23 to 30 and 8.0 this year, respectively, even as the Rangers claimed the Presidents' Trophy. In the playoffs, though, he has been arguably the most reliable member of a New York defense corps that needs more output. Miller leads all Rangers defensemen in goals -- he's actually their only goal scorer from the back line -- and plus/minus, despite being tasked with some of their most difficult defensive minutes (he has the team's lowest offensive zone start rate, at 28%).

They said it: "I think one of the biggest things we've talked about is not being satisfied but realizing that we have accomplished a lot this year." -- Miller

Jack Drury, C, Carolina Hurricanes

Age: 24 (Feb. 3, 2000)

Best regular season: 4.2 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 9 GP | 1 G | 2 A | 3 P | +4 | 13:27 TOI/G

The son of Ted Drury and nephew of Chris Drury (who played in 135 playoff games in his NHL career), Jack is compiling his own postseason résumé for the Hurricanes. His plus-4 plus/minus is currently tied for fourth on the team behind Brady Skjei, Jake Guentzel and Brent Burns, and his three points includes the game-winner that put the New York Islanders away in Round 1 of the playoffs. He's up against a Rangers team that his uncle helped assemble as general manager -- and facing a 3-1 deficit at that -- but a spark from the Drury-Martin Necas-Jordan Martinook line, which hasn't scored since Game 1, would be a good start on the comeback trail.

They said it: "I've liked his year. ... Every time you put him there, good things happen. We know what we're getting. You're getting that consistent effort, and he can make plays. This time of year, it's all about that. That consistency. At the end of the day, he's earned the ice time." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SPORTSNET

Playoff Takeaways: Hurricanes stave off elimination again with second win

By Kristina Rutherford

The Carolina Hurricanes are still alive, and the New York Rangers — who opened this post-season with seven straight wins — now find themselves riding a two-game losing streak.

Facing elimination in their second-round Eastern Conference series, Carolina won their second straight on Monday at Madison Square Garden, quieting the crowd of New Yorkers with a come-from-behind 4-1 win thanks to three unanswered goals in the third period, plus the cherry-on-top empty-netter.

Carolina's comeback was spurred by captain Jordan Staal, who tied things up in the final frame with his first goal of the series, and opened the floodgates against New York and their super steady goaltender, Igor Shesterkin.

Game 5 was high stakes: The Rangers trying to earn a trip to the Eastern Conference Final at home, the Hurricanes attempting to stave off elimination with their backs against the wall.

"It's going to be a dog fight," Carolina forward Evgeny Kuznetsov told Sportsnet host Shawn McKenzie, before the game. "There's one bowl of food and two dogs."

Here are our takeaways from Game 5, which saw Kuznetsov pot the dog fight winner:

Stanley Cup Playoffs Round 2: Rangers vs. Hurricanes

Keep up with the latest news and analysis as the New York Rangers battle the Carolina Hurricanes in Round 2 of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Full coverage

Short-handed Rangers strike again

This game was scoreless and pretty even until 6:23 into the second period, when New York got on the board.

Carolina had just killed a penalty when they drew one themselves, and Rangers winger Jack Roslovic headed to the box for two minutes for tripping Dmitry Orlov.

For the fourth time this post-season, the Rangers scored while a man down. After blocking a shot, Jacob Trouba earned himself a two-on-one, and fired the puck over Frederik Andersen's right pad to give New York the 1-0 lead. It was Trouba's first goal in 41 games, and it got the crowd at MSG roaring.

Captain Staal leads comeback efforts

Jordan Staal had no goals in the series heading into Game 5, but the captain had been buzzing and generating chances. He was one of many Hurricanes who couln't beat Shesterkin.

But Staal made one heck of a play to find the back of the net, tying things up in the third period.

He got a pass from Orlov just outside the blueline, then drove down the left wing, made a power move around Braden Schneider, and tucked the backhand past a sprawled Shesterkin.

Hurricanes' Staal displays sweet hands and finishes on the backhand

It was 1-1, 3:33 into the third period, and the Hurricanes were right back in it.

Kuznetsov takes flight again

Earlier in this game, Evgeny Kuznetsov took his second offensive penalty of the series — and then the goal-scorer did what he often does, and totally redeemed himself in the process.

Three minutes after Staal tied things up, Kuznetsov jumped on a Brady Skjei rebound to score his third in his past five games, giving Carolina the lead with a goal that stood up as the winner.

His celebration was fitting of a winning goal, that signature bird wing-flapping, with a single leg in the air, for a very quiet crowd at MSG.

After the game, Kuznetsov's celebrations continued — he was dancing in his team's dressing room.

Floodgates opened

It was all Carolina after that.

Jordan Martinook, who scored Carolina's third of the third off a Martin Necas pass that eventually found him in the slot, fired the puck over Shesterkin's blocker.

It was Necas who added the empty-netter.

The Great One comes out to MSG

Among the famous fans who were hoping to see the Rangers clinch a berth to the conference finals at home was none other than Wayne Gretzky. No. 99 retired as a Ranger in 1999 after three seasons with the team, and helped lead them to the Eastern Conference final in 1997.

Gretzky was shown on the arena's big screen in the first period and fans went appropriately bananas for the man who rewrote the NHL's record books and retired in this very building 25 years ago. Just like that night, Gretzky blew kisses to the crowd.

Carolina finally rewarded against ever-steady Igor

The difference so often in this series that saw every game other than Monday's decided by one goal, and two decided in OT, has been the Rangers goalie. No goaltender in the post-season has made more saves per game to this point than the 28-year-old Shesterkin.

Carolina out-shot New York once again on Monday, as they have in every game, and for the second straight game, they were actually rewarded for their efforts.

The series heads back to Raleigh for Game 6, with New York leading 3-2.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SB NATION CANES COUNTRY

Stanley Cup Playoffs Round 2 Game 5 Recap: Hurricanes 4, Rangers 1

By albhood

Carolina Hurricanes v New York Rangers - Game Five

The last time the final horn sounded in Madison Square Garden in this series, cheers were raining down on the ice as the Rangers had taken a 2-0 lead in the series thanks to an OT winner.

On Monday, the horn echoed around the walls of a nearly empty building, only punctured by a few boos of the fans hoping to celebrate a series win.

The Hurricanes are looking to do something few have done in hockey before, and they took the second step by defeating New York 4-1 on Monday Night. What was once a 3-0 Rangers series lead has been chopped to 3-2, and Game 6 will be back in Raleigh.

The game started in a different manner than Saturday's Game 5 win. The Rangers started with an urgency they failed to have in the last game, and the Hurricanes had to withstand a strong push from the Rangers to get up early. Rod Brind'Amour once again went with Frederik Andersen in net, and despite the doubts with wear and tear (including from this author), Andersen stood strong in the first. shutting out the Rangers.

After the initial push the Canes had a few chances themselves, but had to withstand a New York Rangers Power Play with 1:55 left in the first as Evgeny Kuznetsov committed a slashing penalty that evoked his untimely penalty in Game 1. Unlike that game, though, the Canes held off the Rangers through that one and then in an ensuing power play when Dmitry Orlov committed a pretty clear trip. The Canes Penalty Kill, a weakness to start the series, had arrived.

Unfortunately the Power Play is still mostly missing in action. Shortly after they killed off the Orlov penalty, the Canes had their own chance when Jack Roslovic tripped Orlov, however, a miscommunication near the blue line created a collision, a turnover, a two on one, and Jacob Trouba burried a one time shot by Freddie to give the Rangers a 1-0 lead. The rest of the second period passed with the Canes feebly trying to beat the Rangers' Igor Shesterkin, but he stood tall. It wasn't that tough for him as the Canes just couldn't muster any offense up close.

With 20 minutes left in their season, the Canes once again wasted a power play, however, they used the momentum to build a game. The Rangers played tight defense trying to protect the lead and relying on Shesterkin, however, The Captain finally put a crack in the dam. He took advantage of a great pass, and just charged to the net, putting it past Igor to knot the game at one just 3:33 into the third.

Throughout the series the Canes have been the much better five on five team, and it showed in the third. With the momentum on their side, the Canes just kept pushing. The Rangers only got about two shots on Freddie in about 20 minutes of game action, never getting any traction on their power play, and really not spending a lot of time in the offensive zone at five on five. A mere three minutes after the Staal score, Kuznetsov hit the Rangers with the game winner and the bird took flight again.

MSG was stunned, as were the Rangers, and it showed in yet another three minutes as Jordan Martinook decided to have a Marty Party and make it 3-1

It was effectively over at that point. Andrei Svechnikov had a momentarily brain lapse and threw the puck out of play for one last penalty, but the Rangers couldn't get any traction on it whatsoever. By the end, the New York fans—expecting a party—had quickly turned into booing the Blueshirts. It was so loud that both play-by-play man Sean McDonough and color commentator Ray Ferraro were stunned at just how quickly the crowd turned.

New York tried pulling the goalie early, and quickly paid.

> WE GOT A GAME 6 ON THURSDAY
> pic.twitter.com/H0egdaoSyz
>
> — B/R Open Ice (@BR_OpenIce) May 14, 2024

MSG had already mostly emptied out by this point but this really sent fans to the exit. The Canes are halfway to completing the near impossible, and the seed of doubt that had been planted on Saturday is showing signs of growing with the Rangers.

Andersen had arguably his best game of the series, stopping 20 of 21 shots, and with the extra day off before Game 6, it sure looks like he's going to be the guy the rest of the series no matter what.

Raleighwood is going to be hopping on Thursday. Game 6 will be at 7 PM on TNT.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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TECHNICIAN

Four third period goals propel Hurricanes past Rangers in Game 5

By Preston Sinclair

For the second straight game, it was do or die for the Carolina Hurricanes. After allowing their second short-handed goal of the series in the second period, it felt like the team would be packing up their bags and dusting off their golf clubs. However, a dominant four-goal third period secured the team's 4-1 road win over the New York Rangers in Game 5.

Just over three minutes into the third period, captain and center Jordan Staal received the puck at the blue line and skated past defenseman Braden Schneider, then went forehand-backhand to tuck the puck past Rangers goaltender Igor Shesterkin.

“The whole game he was leading us, and when you got a guy that does it the same way every night, just plays the same style, in your face, hard — everyone wants to jump on,” said left wing Jordan Martinook. “That's what your captain does”.

When the puck hit the ice for Game 5 at Madison Square Garden, the pace was fast and the game had a good flow. Both teams had several scoring chances, but neither was able to convert. Center Jake Guentzel had the best chance of the first 20 minutes when he had a breakaway but Shesterkin shut it down.

The Hurricanes came out in the second period and showed their desperation as they were all over New York early. Just after the team killed off a Rangers power play in the period, center Jack Drury blocked two straight shots and defenseman Dmitry Orlov drew a tripping penalty.

Carolina headed to its first power play of the game with all the momentum, but yet again, the man advantage opportunity was a failure and allowed a goal to defenseman Jacob Trouba, who slung a shot past goaltender Frederik Andersen on the 2-on-1. The quiet Madison Square Garden suddenly erupted, and like previous games, the Hurricanes had a rough second period.

Forty minutes had passed, and just 20 minutes remained. The team needed at least one goal in the remaining period, or their season would be over, and they managed to get four.

“I just felt like it was business as usual,” said head coach Rod Brind’Amour. “We got to win a period. Didn’t really matter how we were gonna get it done. That’s kind of the sense I got when I went in to talk to the guys. There’s no panic, they understand the situation, you’re one shot away and that was the way they approached it.”

The team opened the final period with 1:51 of power play time, but yet again, the man advantage failed and the Rangers managed to kill off another penalty.

Staal got the scoring started for Carolina. Orlov sent a cross-ice pass to Staal, who made no mistake with the puck and deceived Shesterkin with his deke.

“There’s been a lot of guys telling me I was gonna score,” said Staal. “I told them after the game, better late than never.”

Center Evgeny Kuznetsov made a 200-foot play by starting in his own zone and skating all the way to the front of the Rangers' net, beating left-wing Artemi Panarin to the loose puck and giving Carolina its first lead of the night.

The Hurricanes had silenced the Rangers and Madison Square Garden with their dominant five-on-five play but weren’t finished. The forecheck of center Jack Drury led to a turnover that found the stick of center Martin Necas who found a lone Martinook in the slot. Martinook sent the puck over Shesterkin’s blocker and into the net for the team's third goal.

The game was capped off as Necas sent the puck the length of the ice and into an empty Rangers net.

With three goals in just over six minutes, Carolina ensured there would be at least one more game played in PNC Arena this postseason.

Brind'Amour turned back to Andersen in yet another elimination game. He proved that the head coach made the correct decision, stopping 20 out of 21 shots faced, and looking composed from the start. Andersen was calm and stood his ground, making challenging saves throughout the game.

“[Andersen had] a couple of big saves at crucial times, that's what goaltending you need to keep you in the game,” Brind’Amour said. “They go up by two, that’s gonna be tough. He kept us in there.”

The Hurricanes have completely shifted the momentum of the series with two straight wins. The team has a chance to win on home ice and force a game seven to try and make their mark in history.

The series will return to PNC Arena for Game 6 on Thursday, May 16, with puck drop at 7 p.m.

CAROLINA HURRICANES
NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

The Hockey News

Evgeny Kuznetsov, Jordan Staal, Jordan Martinook, Dmitry Orlov, Martin Necas and Rod Brind'Amour on Game 5 Win: 'We believe'

Ryan Henkel

The Carolina Hurricanes forced Game 6 against the New York Rangers with a 4-1 win Monday night at Madison Square Garden.

The Canes scored four goals in the third period en route to the win with Jordan Staal, Evgeny Kuznetsov, Jordan Martinook and Martin Necas all lighting the lamp.

Frederik Andersen stopped 20 shots in the win.

After the game, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour along with Kuznetsov, Staal, Martinook, Necas and Dmitry Orlov spoke with the media in New York. Here's what they had to say:

Rod Brind'Amour

On Jordan Staal: You and I talk about him all year and have for many years. But I just love that people get to see, in that game, what he can do and what he means to us because that was vintage Jordan Staal there. Pretty impressive performance by him.

On the third period success: I think finally some things are... I don't know if it's breaks or whatever you want to call it, it went our way. Obviously there's a high level of desperation with our game and in the third we had to be. But O just think we got a few bounces finally.

On the belief in the team building with each win: It's been there all along. I mean, I said it earlier. I've liked the way we've played in this series every game. Obviously there's things in it that you'd like to be better at but just the mindset and how we approach games and how hard we've worked. We talk about leadership and probably overdo it in how much we talk about it, but it's just so important to the mindset of the group and that comes from the guys in there.

On the importance of experienced leadership: When you look at the additions we made, that was a big factor. Guys that have been there before and understand what it takes. They understand the ups and downs and understand how hard it is to win and how hard it is to win a playoff game, let alone the whole thing. We added a little bit of that and I think it's really helped.

On Evgeny Kuznetsov: He's got that ability, right? Just silky smooth and has a great offensive feel, there's no doubt about it.

On the demeanor in the locker room after the shorthanded goal: I'm not in the rooms between the periods, really, but I just felt like it was just business as usual. We just have to win a period. Didn't really matter how we were going to get it done. That's the kind of sense I got when I went in to talk to the guys. There was no panic. They understood the situation. It wasn't like we were dead, we did pretty well and we were one shot away. That was the way they approached it.

On Frederik Andersen: It wasn't a ton of work, which is good on our part that we didn't allow that, but obviously a couple of big saves at crucial times. That's what you need from goaltending. To keep you in the game. They go up by two, that's going to be tough. He kept us in there.

On blueline: That's the backbone of our group. They're just elite players and I think that's how we've built this team. From the backend out. You saw it tonight. I thought they were exceptional.

On forcing another game at home: Look, we're in survival mode. We all understand that. I'm just proud of the group. They gave us another day. They bought us another day and really that's how we've approached this and how we have to. For our fans it's great. They deserve to see another game and that's what we gave them.

Evgeny Kuznetsov

On the third period: That was phenomenal. We were trying hard for two periods and the puck doesn't go in. [Shesterkin] was playing well. I'm just so grateful to be a part of that. It's one of those, going into the third period and you realize it could be the last period of the season and you don't want to have that feeling. I'm so grateful that we were able to come back and win the game.

On Jordan Staal getting the scoring started: He called it before the game actually that he was going to score today. He said he was going to do the 'Bird' but he didn't. He's too nice.

On if he feels pressure has shifted to Rangers: I don't know. It's not on me to decide who has pressure or not. It's two beautiful teams that are competing against each other. It's a dog fight now. What we're trying to do over the last four days is living day-by-day and do what's best available with the opportunity. I'm so grateful to have these moments.

On the importance of experience: I don't know. I just felt a little bit uncomfortable before the third period. My thoughts that this could be the last period, but I'm so grateful that we were able to comeback. It's good for the hockey, good for everybody to see these two beautiful teams compete against each other.

On Igor Shesterkin: At this stage, there are no bad goalies at all and I feel like in the whole league there are no bad goalies. But Igor, he's a beautiful person and a beautiful goalie. The crowd feeds off of him and he's one of the main focuses for us that we have to go through.

On the team's mentality: I feel like we never give up. It's one of those where you can go down and look eye to eye with your teammates. It was a good third period and I learned a lot about this group.

Jordan Staal

On talking to Kuznetsov about scoring before the game: There's been a lot of guys telling me I was going to score for a while, so I've been telling them after the game, it's better late than never. Obviously Kuzy's been great for us. We were chatting about scoring goals as usual, but a big goal from him. He's been good for us and scoring big goals. It was nice.

On heading into the third period trailing: We didn't hate our game and we were rolling into a power play. We trusted our game and it ended up paying off and we live to fight another day. Nobody was hanging any heads. We knew we had to have our best period and we did. We're going to have another huge challenge heading home in a few days here. We're fighting for our lives and the boys showed up.

On the importance of leadership and experience: It doesn't hurt. Playoffs is tough. It's hard mentally. There's ups and downs and times where you have to battle through stuff that's just not going your way and you have to just stay with the consistency of your game. We've done that really well. Obviously better lately than we had at the start, but we still played some good hockey throughout this whole series and we're starting to get some bounces. We're fighting for the next day and it's been fun to see the boys just giving it all they've got.

On pressure: There's a lot of pressure on both sides, obviously. When you're fighting for your life, it could be one mistake and that could be the difference and the end of your season. We were calm with our fingernails and obviously Game 5s are tough, especially in their home. You don't want to go back on the road and you want to close it out, but we gave it all we got and we got a win. And we're going to have to do it all over again. We're fighting for our lives and that's really about it.

On the belief in the room: Wins help. Obviously we really did believe we had some good games going from the start, but we had some mistakes obviously, especially with the special teams and that's gotten a lot better and we've learned from those mistakes. I think our game 5v5 has been really good. Been solid and it's kind of coming together more and more. Wins are nice, but we just have to keep fighting. That's it.

Jordan Martinook

On Jordan Staal: Just an incredible play by him. I felt like the whole game he was leading us. When you got a guy that does it the same way every night and just plays the same style and is in their face hard, everybody wants to jump on it. That's what your captain does. He was incredible tonight. Everybody jumped on his back and he led us for sure.

On the boost from a successful penalty kill: Obviously we want to kill penalties off, but I feel like the bench after you kill one off, especially when you're blocking shots and guys are selling out, it definitely gives the bench a boost. You look at that next shift after a penalty kill, it usually creates momentum and a lot of the playoffs is momentum swings and you want to just try and ride your swings as long as you can. Kills have been really big for us the last two.

On Jack Drury: His blocks on the penalty kill, those were humongous. I told him, 'I'll take you to the bench' and he didn't want no part of that. He had a great game tonight. I was like don't touch it, don't touch it, but he got a little piece of [my goal] and calmed it down, so I guess I have to thank him.

On the feelings after the game: You're just happy. We're fighting for our lives every game and we gave ourselves the chance to play another game and gave ourselves a chance to hopefully come back here. I think everybody's just pumped for each other and are just enjoying the moment and enjoying the boost that a win gives you. We have to regroup and get ready to give it everything we've got for Game 6.

On Frederik Andersen: Freddie was big, made some big saves. I felt like for the third period, we did a really good job in front of him. It didn't feel like we were giving up a ton and everybody was clearing the net and getting back hard. I feel like when our team is playing well, it's about team defense and I think everybody knows that. What I said to the guys after, I felt like we held them back pretty good. Watch the third, learn some things and get ready to go again.

Dmitry Orlov

On the play to Jordan Staal for his goal: It's not about my pass. Overall, Jordo had time and he just went to the net and made a nice goal. On my decision, I just saw that I had some time. My guy got away from me and they got a bad change I would say and we converted. The third period, we played pretty good and that's why we won today.

On the depth scoring: Right now, we need everybody and it doesn't matter who's going to step up in the big moments. If we play as a team, that's most important. So we got two wins in a row and right now it's good. We'll get rest a little bit and refocus for another game because it's big for us like the other two. We'll have to focus on the one game coming up and hopefully it' going to be good.

On the mindset heading into the third period with the season on the line: Just to keep focused on the game and period. Not think about that. For sure, it's going to be coming in your mind, but when you're out there, you're not thinking. You're just trying to play as hard as you can and helping each other. Just believing in yourself.

On heading back home for Game 6: It's great. We're going to play at home with our crowd. They're going to be pumped us, but for us we don't have to change anything. Just play every shift like it's the last shift and just leave everything there to make sure we do not feel bad and sorry for ourselves.

On his decision to not dump the puck in but rather pass to Staal: Sometimes you have to play hockey and use your instincts. Not just simplify sometimes. I made a good read and he scored. It was a huge goal for us.

On the team's ability to comeback: We've done it all season. When you're under pressure, it shows if the team is good or not and we showed today. But we just need to rest and get ready for next game. It's not going to be easy. It's going to be even harder. Both teams are going to play hard.

Martin Necas

On the third period: That was huge. Starting with our cap, Jordo, he made a great play on the goal. Started with Orly. Just a smart play. We believe. We believe in this locker room, Game-by-game. We don't think about winning two in a row, three in a row, four in a row. It's about the next one and we're happy to go back to PNC.

On the 5v5 scoring: It's quite embarrassing to be minus one in the series on the power play. That can't happen, but we showed how strong we are here in this locker room and how much we believe. We're really willing to do the stuff. That was huge.

On Jordan Staal: He leads the way. He's a warrior. He's a defensive machine and he's just so strong and he showed it right there.

On the mindset heading into the third period: Hopefully get one on the power play at the beginning and then go. But it didn't happen. We had some good looks there, but then Jordo scored, then Kuzy and we were just rolling.

On slowing down the Artemi Panarin line: Just play with the puck more than them, When you give them the puck, it's not easy to cover them, but once you keep the puck on your sticks, they're not as good defensively, so that's kind of how you have to play against them and that's what we've been doing.

On Staal keeping it loose at morning skate: You don't see that very often from him, so it's good. He's a leader, scored a huge goal there for us tonight, but we're not satisfied. We're coming back home to PNC and our rink's going to be buzzing and we're excited for that.

On the importance of experience: I feel like it's a big part. I felt like we got down 3-0 so quick, we didn't even know what happened and then we started playing our game. We've been good. Freddie made some big saves there. They had a couple of rush chances there in the second. We've got experience in this locker room and it's good.

B/R BLEACHER REPORT

Rangers' 'Meltdown' Stuns NHL Fans as Hurricanes Extend Series with Game 5 Win

By Doric Sam

The New York Rangers looked to be on their way to a trip to the Eastern Conference Finals through two periods in Monday's Game 5 against the Carolina Hurricanes. Unfortunately, a massive collapse in the third period extended the second-round series.

The Rangers allowed four goals in the third period on their way to a 4-1 loss in front of a disappointed home crowd at Madison Square Garden. New York held a 1-0 lead through two periods on a goal by Jacob Trouba and appeared to be in control until things fell apart in the final frame, allowing Carolina to cut the series lead to 3-2 and force a Game 6.

Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin had 18 saves through the first two periods before the Hurricanes started wreaking havoc on him. Jordan Staal tied the game less than four minutes into the third period with a nifty move to beat the two-time All-Star. Evgeny Kuznetsov followed three minutes later by putting the puck in the back of the net off a rebound to give Carolina the lead.

Jordan Martinook extended the lead by converting in front of the net. Shesterkin was put on the bench with 3:44 left in the period, and Martin Necas scored an empty-netter to send fans to the exits.

Fans on social media weren't happy either, as the Rangers were called out for their disappointing collapse on Monday:

> Brandon @BrandonBets__
>
> Absolute meltdown from the Rangers
>
> Ryan Mead @OhRyanMead
>
> I don't think this period could have gone much worse.
>
> Charlie @CharlieF3795
>
> This is an all time meltdown by the Rangers.
>
> Ed Gary's Burner @Burner1Ed
>
> Meltdown at MSG Jesus Rangers
>
> Mets @UncleStevieMets
>
> Omg meltdown by the Rangers.
>
> Patrick F @Patrick_DF3
>
> The Rangers are having a meltdown!
>
> Eric Slater @ericsslater
>
> Total Rangers meltdown in the 3rd period. My goodness.
>
> B/R Open Ice @BR_OpenIce
>
> WE GOT A GAME 6 ON THURSDAY

After narrowly losing Game 4 on Saturday, everything was set up for the Rangers to close things out on Monday. The home crowd was juiced up, and Shesterkin played brilliantly through two periods. However, New York's offense failed to show up, whereas Carolina's exploded in the third period

The Rangers will try to regroup and close out the series when they face the Hurricanes in Game 6 in Raleigh on Thursday.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

Forbes

Carolina Hurricanes Halt The Second-Round Coronation For The New York Rangers

By Larry Fleisher

The vibe did not necessarily emit the brashness of Kevin Millar's famous "Don't let us win one" line of Oct. 17, 2004 a day after the Red Sox were handed a 19-8 loss to the Yankees to fall behind three games to none in the ALCS.

Instead, the mood inside the fairly crowded visiting locker room at Madison Square Garden was a quiet display of confidence by the Carolina Hurricanes, who are halfway to achieving what those Red Sox did against the Yankees 20 years ago.

It is easy to be confident after winning an elimination game in the fashion the Hurricanes did. It was scoreless after one, a one-goal game through 40 minutes and by the final buzzer it was a 4-1 win for the Hurricanes, who scored their three goals rather easily in a span of 6:23.

What the Hurricanes achieved was easy to see coming as long as they kept the deficit at one, especially since they prevented a potent power play from consistently doing anything of note. They also limited the likes of Artemi Panarin, Mika Zibanejad and Chris Kreider from doing anything offensively that would be mentioned on the telecast or written down by anyone taking notes for whatever reason.

"We trusted our game. It ended up being enough and we live to fight another day," Staal said. "We knew we had to have our best period and we did, and going to have another huge challenge going back home in a couple days. We're fighting for our lives. The boys showed up and it showed."

"You're just happy. We're fighting for our lives every game," Jordan Martinook said after he scored to essentially seal matters. "We gave ourselves a chance to play another game. We gave ourselves another chance to come back here. I think we were just pumped for each other and enjoying the moment. Enjoying the boost the win gives you. Then we have to regroup and get ready to give everything that we've got for Game 6."

Staal was at the podium because his slick move and subsequent backhander created a sense of uh-oh for anyone who might not have seen it coming and was counting down the minutes to a coronation for the Rangers advancing to the conference finals. Martinook joined Staal at the podium because of a defensive turnover led to him scoring the third goal of the barrage assured the series would continue.

Both players were there after Rangers' coach Peter Laviolette basically said he saw what was coming based on what he witnessed during the opening 40 minutes.

"It just wasn't the night that we were looking to have," Laviolette said with a visibly disappointed tone. "It was more than the third period."

Among the things Laviolette was likely alluding to included a power play that rarely produced any good looks or sustained passing sequences and suddenly is 0-for-8 since Game 2.

"The details weren't there for us, and they were for them," Chris Kreider said after being on the ice for three goals. "They do the simple things. Over time, those are going to eventually lead to chances and results."

The achievement by the Red Sox is slightly more frequent in the NHL. There are four out of the 209 teams to fall behind by this deficit to come back and one of those were the 2010 Flyers, who lost the first three in overtime to the Bruins, won a seventh game in Boston and reached the Stanley Cup final while being coached by Laviolette.

"Any time you don't play up to your capabilities, you get concerned about that, yeah," Laviolette said. "But I also know this group has had games like that before and they responded. There's accountability that goes with that from them."

Now the Rangers and Hurricanes get two days before their next encounter. The Rangers will find out if they can respond properly while the Hurricanes will get a chance to see if the confidence emitting from the bowels of Madison Square Garden will translate into another sound performance.

"When you're going into the third period, you realize it could be the last period of this year," Kuznetsov said. "You don't want to have that feeling. I'm so grateful that we were able to come back and win the game."

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

Matt Rempe's physical Rangers return not enough to spur Game 5 win

By Dan Martin

Matt Rempe was back in the Rangers' lineup for Game 5 after being benched in both Game 3 and 4 of their playoff series against Carolina

He made his presence felt with his physicality, but it wasn't enough in the decisive third period as the Rangers collapsed in a 4-1 loss at Madison Square Garden to extend the series.

Although Rempe took the league by storm earlier in the season, he found his ice time slipping even against the Capitals in the first round of the playoffs.

Rangers center Matt Rempe exchanges words with Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Brent Burns in the second period. 3

Rangers center Matt Rempe exchanges words with Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Brent Burns in the second period. JASON SZENES FOR THE NEW YORK POST

That continued in the first two games against Carolina before he didn't play the next two games.

But with the series back at the Garden on Monday — and with the Rangers having a chance to advance to the Eastern Conference Final — Rempe returned to action.

At the team's morning skate on Monday, Rempe said coach Peter Laviolette told him not to be discouraged by his lack of ice time.

"Conversations have been great," Rempe said. "Just [Laviolette] telling me, 'Don't read into it. Don't think too much and stuff like that; just keep working.' "

That is what Rempe did on Monday. He spent 6:01 on the ice.

He used his physicality to make his presence felt and jawed with Tony DeAngelo, but the Rangers couldn't produce enough chances and then were dominated in the final period.

Whether Rempe remains in the lineup for Game 6 will be one of the decisions Laviolette will have to make as the Rangers try to shake off back-to-back losses after they opened the playoffs with seven straight wins.

"I've been used to my minutes," Rempe said prior to the game. "I think I've been pretty consistent here. … If I haven't had a shift in a while, all the more reason to try to make an impact on your shift. I get my minutes and I've got to make the most of those minutes. I'm super happy to get those minutes. It's an honor. When I do that, I know my game, I know what I'm going to do. And it's not like if I was playing more, I'm not going to take a shift off. I'm going to go do everything I can every single shift I get."

What do you think? Be the first to comment.

The 6-foot-8 $^{1}/_{2}$ Rempe appeared in 17 games during the regular season and has played in six playoff games this postseason.

He had 71 penalty minutes, three ejections and a four-game suspension during the regular season.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

Brady Skjei working to keep Hurricanes alive in playoffs

By Dan Martin

Brady Skjei doesn't care how many power-play goals he has in his playoff career, just that he was able to get one when it mattered most in Carolina's win over his former team to keep its season alive in the Game 4 victory over the Rangers.

"I'm not worried about numbers,'' Skjei said after the Hurricanes' morning skate on Monday at Madison Square Garden in advance of Game 5. "I'm just trying to help the team win in any way I can. It doesn't matter how it happens or who it's against."

Skjei's power-play goal Saturday was his first ever in a postseason career that had spanned 74 games.

It was also Carolina's first goal with the man-advantage in 17 tries in the series.

But the 30-year-old defenseman has plenty of history with the Rangers, having spent the first four-plus seasons of his career with the organization after being drafted by the team in the first round in 2012.

He was shipped to Carolina in exchange for a first-round pick in 2020 and has now spent four-plus seasons with the Hurricanes.

Skjei's decisive goal in Carolina in Game 4 — after the Rangers had erased a two-goal deficit and seemed poised to finish off a four-game sweep — certainly won't endear him to his former fans at the Garden.

"We know how hard this place is to play in,'' said Skjei, who entered Game 5 having scored points in three straight games. "I know how crazy it can get in here, but we've played and won in intense places before."

But in this particular Eastern Conference playoff rivalry, neither team has typically fared well on the road.

Dating back to their seven-game series in 2022, the road team has won just twice: The Rangers clinched the series win in Game 7 at Carolina in '22 and then beat the Hurricanes at Carolina in Game 3 of this series.

What do you think? Post a comment.

"At this point, we're going day by day," Skjei said. "Literally. We've had that mindset and it doesn't matter if we're at home or on the road."

TODAY'S LINKS

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1312446 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes surge past Rangers in the third period, force Game 6 in Raleigh with 4-1 win

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

UPDATED MAY 14, 2024 12:27 AM

The Carolina Hurricanes will play at least one more game.

Trailing the New York Rangers by a goal entering the final period of Game 5, being shut down by Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin, the Hurricanes ignited for four goals in the third for a 4-1 victory.

After losing the first three games of the second-round series, taken to the brink of elimination in the Stanley Cup playoffs, the Canes now have won the last two and forced a Game 6. That game will be played Thursday at PNC Arena in Raleigh.

Jordan Staal tied the score 1-1 early in the third for the Canes, and Evgeny Kuznetsov made it 2-1. When Jordan Martinook scored from the low slot, it was 3-1 with 10:04 left in regulation.

Just like that, the Madison Square Garden crowd, so lively much of the night, sat in stunned silence.

Rangers coach Peter Laviolette pulled Shesterkin early for an extra attacker but Martin Necas swept the puck the length of the ice for an empty-net goal for a 4-1 lead.

Canes goalie Frederik Andersen, given the start in Game 5, allowed a shorthanded goal to Jacob Trouba in the second period but that was that. Andersen finished with 20 saves as the Rangers mustered just six shots in each of the final twp periods, leading to some boos in the Garden.

Staal's goal, on a strong move to the net, came when the Canes captain came off the bench and beat Shesterkin by going forehand to backhand at 3:33 of the third.

Kuznetsov then scored on a rebound of a Brady Skjei shot at 6:39 of the third, breaking into his birdman celebration. His goal also made up for a careless slashing penalty late in the first period.

Martinook ripped a shot from the slot. After Jack Drury's forechecking hustle, Martin Necas pass into the slot where Martinook avoided Drury and got off the shot.

Jacob Trouba's shorthanded goal in the second period pushed the Rangers into a 1-0 lead in Game 5 as New York sought to close out the second-round Eastern Conference series.

After blocking a Sebastian Aho shot on the Canes' first power play of the game, Trouba grabbed the puck and was off on a two-on-one in transition. The Rangers captain beat Andersen to the blocker side at 6:23 for New York's second shorthanded score of the series.

The Canes had a second power play soon after their first as Adam Fox was called for holding, but the Rangers' penalty killers again outworked the Canes.

Carolina for the third straight game kept the Rangers without a power-play goal. New York was 0-3 Monday,

FIRST PERIOD SCORELESS

Both Andersen and Shesterkin were tested in the opening period. Neither allowed a goal, although both teams had their chances — the Canes had 10 shots and the Rangers nine, forcing the Canes' Andersen and Shesterkin to be quick, sharp.

Andersen's best stop might have been on a tip by the Rangers' Chris Kreider, always dangerous on redirections around the crease. Shesterkin's best save came on a breakaway by the Canes' Jake Guentzel, although he also made a good stop on a Staal tip off the rush 16 seconds into the game.

The first period was played at even strength until 1:55 was left and Kuznetsov called for slashing, The period ended with five seconds left on the Rangers' power play, the Canes' Teuvo Teravainen teaming with Sebastian Aho for a shorthanded chance.

ANDERSEN THE PICK

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour again was coy Monday when asked about the starter. Andersen was in the "starter's crease" in the morning skate at Madison Square Garden. Andersen also was the first goaltender off the ice.

But Brind'Amour went no further than to say "maybe" when asked if Andersen would start.

When the teams came out for the pregame warmup, Andersen led out the Canes. He started Game 4 in Raleigh, stopping 22 of 25 shots and was the winner as the Canes, trailing 0-3 in the series, took a 4-3 victory in the elimination game.

The Hurricanes held a rare morning skate at the Garden on Monday, although only for 15 or so minutes, just enough to limber up and work up a sweat.

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1312447 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes 'live to fight another day'

May 13, 2024 Cory Lavalette

NEW YORK — Outside "The World's Most Famous Arena" is a poster of Pearl Jam lead singer Eddie Vedder with the quote, "You ain't nothin' until you play Madison Square Garden."

After the Carolina Hurricanes, on their sixth try, finally won the franchise's first playoff game at MSG, beating the New York Rangers 4-1 Monday, the motto for the teams' second round matchup may as well be, "It ain't a series until you win at Madison Square Garden."

The Hurricanes turned a one-goal deficit and a seemingly looming shutout for Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin into a two-goal lead in just 6:22 of game time in the third period, getting goals from Jordan Staal, Evgeny Kuznetsov and Jordan Martinook to shock the Rangers and send the series back to Raleigh for a Game 6 on Thursday.

"It's two beautiful teams that (are) competing against each other," Kuznetsov said, "and it's a dogfight now."

After losing the series' first three games, the Hurricanes followed up their thrilling win Sunday at PNC Arena with a feverish comeback on the Rangers' home ice.

Now the Presidents' Trophy winners, who won their first seven games of the postseason, will have to trudge back to Raleigh with the series back on its logical track — a 3-2 New York series lead with the Rangers having had three games at home. Carolina is only halfway toward becoming the fifth team in NHL history to erase a 3-0 series deficit and win a best-of-seven matchup, but the pressure has shifted squarely onto the shoulders of Peter Laviolette's team.

"Any time you don't play up to your capabilities, you get concerned about that," the former Hurricanes-turned-Rangers coach said. "But I also know that this group has had games like that before, and they responded. There's accountability that goes with that from themselves."

When New York defenseman Jacob Trouba scored a shorthanded goal at 6:23 of the second period, it felt like Carolina's power play — and Shesterkin — would be the death of the Hurricanes.

Instead, after mostly relying on their top line in the first four games of the series, the Hurricanes got one goal after another from their complementary players to keep their season alive.

First it was the captain, Staal, who took advantage of a weary Braden Schneider — and a brilliant pass from Dmitry Orlov — to power his way to the goal mouth and backhand a shot past Shesterkin's left pad to tie the game at 3:33 of the third period.

"I just love people get to see, in that game, what he can do and what he means to this team," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Because that was vintage Jordan Staal there."

It was Staal's second point of the postseason and his first goal, but it came at the biggest moment of the season.

"There's been a lot of guys telling me I'm gonna score," Staal said. "I told them after the game, 'It's better late than never."

Martinook, Staal's frequent linemate over the past six seasons, said it wasn't just Staal's goal that inspired him and his teammates.

"The whole game he was leading us," Martinook said, "and when you got a guy that does it the same way every night, just plays the same style, in your face, hard — everyone wants to jump on, and that's what your captain does."

The mood of the game quickly changed, and it wasn't long before Carolina took the lead.

Just over three minutes after Staal's equalizer, Frederik Andersen (20 saves) made a pad save that defenseman Tony DeAngelo quickly cleared, and the Hurricanes headed up ice.

Stefan Noesen passed left to Jesperi Kotkaniemi, who dropped the puck back to Brady Skjei for a one-timer. Kuznetsov fought off Artemi Panarin and fired in the rebound to silence the MSG crowd at 6:39.

"He's got that ability, right?" Brind'Amour said. "Just silky smooth and has a great offensive feel, there's no doubt about it."

Then Martinook, who had to basically fight off teammate Jack Drury to get off a shot from Martin Necas' centering feed, also scored to put a dagger in the Rangers with 10:04 left in the game.

"Don't touch it! Don't touch it!" Martinook said he yelled to Drury as Necas' centering pass came from behind the net and into the slot. Drury — whose gutsy pair of blocks helped kill off New York's final power play opportunity of the game — did get a piece of the puck, but Martinook was still able to snap home his shot.

"He got a little piece of it and calmed it down," Martinook said.

Carolina didn't even need Necas' empty-net goal with 3:31 left to calm the home crowd, which was streaming toward the exits as Necas' long-range bid found the center of the empty New York net, surely wondering if they'd be back inside Madison Square Garden on Saturday for a Game 7.

The Hurricanes aren't quite there yet — there will be two off days before Thursday's Game 6 at PNC Arena — but what four days ago seemed like "nothin'" is now something.

"We trusted our game and ended up paying off," Staal said. "And we live to fight another day."

Notes: Both teams went 0 for 3 on the power play. … The Hurricanes are 6-0 in playoff games all time when Drury, who had two assists, registers a point. … Carolina won just 17 of 51 faceoffs.

North State Journal LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312448 Carolina Hurricanes

Category 5: 'Dog fight' op tap for Game 5 of Hurricanes-Rangers

May 13, 2024 Cory Lavalette

NEW YORK — The Hurricanes will look to take another step in their comeback effort against the Rangers on Monday at Madison Square Garden when the teams meet in Game 5 of their second round series. New York leads the series 3-1 and will take a second crack at eliminating Carolina.

1. Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour was noncommittal about who would start in net for Game 5, though Frederik Andersen was in the visiting starter's crease and first off the ice after Monday's morning skate.

"Maybe," Brind'Amour said when I asked if Andersen would be the starter.

The coach said Sunday that he would see how Andersen and Pyotr Kochetkov felt, consult with goaltending coach Paul Schonfelder and make a decision. So how is the final decision made?

"A lot goes into it now just because. obviously, that's the No. 1 concern, 'OK, how are you feeling?'" Brind'Amour said. "And then (we) had a good rotation going, do we go back to that just based on that was when we had our most success. There's been a lot of discussions."

Andersen allowed a total of eight goals on 54 shots in Games 1 and 2 at MSG, taking the loss in both, but had been 6-2-0 in eight regular season appearances at The Garden.

Jordan Martinook said Sunday the team was comfortable with whoever got the nod.

"It doesn't really matter which guy's in there," he said. "We have full faith in whichever one is in between the pipes. You look at Kooch, his Game 3 was pretty incredible. And Freddie made some big stops last night and big ones at key moments, and I feel like that's kind of what you need in those games, that if it goes the other way then you're chasing even more."

The Rangers will certainly go back to Igor Shesterkin, who is 13-4 in his career at home in the postseason. Carolina did put a chink in Shesterkin's armor in Game 4, becoming the first team in 30 playoff games to score more than three goals on the New York goalie.

"It's always nice to get four on a good goalie, but he's a good goalie for a reason," captain Jordan Staal said after Monday's morning skate. "I'm sure he's gonna come back with a better effort, so we're gonna have to try to find a way to do it again and create as much offense as we can against a good goalie.

2. Evgeny Kuznetsov was a healthy extra in Game 2 but returned for Game 3 and then opened the scoring in Game 4. He wasn't ready to talk about being scratched — "It's a probably conversation for another day," he said Sunday — but he certainly seemed ready for another do-or-die game.

"All I want to say, it's just going to be a dog fight tomorrow," he said Sunday at PNC Arena. "There is one bowl of food and two dogs (are) going to compete (with) each other.

"And they know that they don't want to come back here. They know it's going to be hell here. And they want to finish out there, and what we're trying to do, we're just trying to put the pressure on them a little bit. … It's just about compete and then the dog fight."

3. Much was made of the Hurricanes finally scoring on the power play in Game 4, but Carolina's penalty kill was also important.

Sure, it only had to kill one penalty, but it was an important one. With the Hurricanes up 3-1 in the first period, Staal was called for tripping with 2:30 left in the opening frame. A Rangers goal would likely sap the momentum Carolina built in the first period, and attempting the kill without Staal made it even tougher.

But the Hurricanes responded by denying zone entries and looking more like the PK that ranked first in the NHL in the regular season than the one that had allowed seven goals on 24 chances before Game 4.

“I felt like that kill last night was probably our best one,” Martinook said. “We had pressure and we were on it. I think that was just the intensity of the game. … It was a big, big moment in the game for us to be able to get that killed off in the way we did.”

4. Staal, who watching from the box, agreed the one kill in Game 4 was key.

“(Sebastian Aho) did a great job of winning that first draw,” Staal said, “and then once you get it out of the zone, we did a good job of keeping it out of the offensive zone for them. And that’s what a good PK does is just limit their chances at the net, and it starts with a big win by Fish and we were able to keep them from any zone time at all, and it was nice to see.”

The Carolina captain would of course prefer the Hurricanes stay out of the box altogether on Monday night.

“That would be nice,” he said. “It’s easier said than done. The refs may have a different say in that. There’s going to be penalties, so if we’re gonna want to pull this off, it’s always a key part of big wins.”

Brind’Amour agreed the PK can build momentum, though he too would prefer his team limit the number of chances.

“We’ve seen in this series where they get a good kill and what it does,” Brind’Amour said. “Those are crucial times of the game for both teams. That’s been kind of the series, it keeps getting boiled down to that because the two teams are pretty evenly matched, I think.”

5. After a combined 28 power plays in the first three games of the series, Game 4 had only three. Brind’Amour wasn’t ready to say the referees were limiting their calls as the series advances.

“You just don’t know game to game how it’s gonna be called, what’s gonna transpire,” he said. “So I don’t really know what to say on that. We could see 10 tonight. We just gotta be ready either way.”

I asked Brind’Amour if he checks who is officiating the game — for Game 5, it’s Dan O’Rourke and Francois St. Laurent — to determine which way it could go.

“Yes and no,” he said. “I think some guys have a tendency to call more stuff, some guys let it play out. But at this stage of the season, these are the top guys and they have a good feel for letting the boys play.”

According to ScoutingTheRefs.com, O’Rourke and St. Laurent were 22nd and 21st, respectively, in power play opportunities per game during the regular season with the number of chances each way being right near 50-50 (51% edge for the home team by O’Rourke, 49.2% for St. Laurent).

The Hurricanes were 3-0-0 this season in regular season games officiated by O’Rourke and 6-0-1 in games involving St. Laurent. The Rangers had similar success: 2-1-0 with O’Rourke and 4-0-0 with St. Laurent.

Neither have officiated in this series, but St. Laurent was on for Game 2 against the Islanders — a 5-3 Carolina win that included 126 penalties, most in the game’s final minute.

North State Journal LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312449 Carolina Hurricanes

With Rangers struggling, Hurricanes are testing New York’s winning formula

Peter Baugh6-7 minutes 5/14/2024

NEW YORK — After multiple goals this postseason, Artemi Panarin has whipped his stick through the air like a baseball bat in celebration. Monday evening, he found himself making a similar motion, just for very different reasons. After Carolina’s Evgeny Kuznetsov beat Panarin for a rebound and sent the puck flying into the net for the go-ahead goal, the Rangers star smashed his stick into the glass in anger.

Kuznetsov’s goal stood as the game-winner — a frustrating moment in a frustrating night for the Rangers, who lost 4-1 in Game 5. New York entered the third period with the lead after a Jacob Trouba short-handed tally, then proceeded to give up four unanswered goals. Suddenly, the Rangers’ 3-0 series lead is 3-2 with the series shifting back to Raleigh.

“They wanted it more in the third,” Vincent Trocheck said postgame.

“There were a lot of issues tonight,” added a frustrated Peter Laviolette, who said the team’s issues went beyond just the final period.

Throughout the season, New York has relied on an elite power play, along with five-on-five production from the line of Panarin, center Vincent Trocheck and right wing Alexis Lafrenière. When that hasn’t been enough, goaltender Igor Shesterkin has often been there to bail the team out. That was enough for the Rangers to win the Presidents’ Trophy, set a franchise record for regular season wins and jump out to a 7-0 start in the playoffs. Suddenly, though, Carolina is testing New York’s winning formula.

Panarin has no points and a minus-5 rating in two games since his overtime winner in Game 3. Trocheck hasn’t added to the score sheet in that span, either, and Lafrenière’s lone goal came when taking a shift with Chris Kreider and Mika Zibanejad.

The Rangers still had 59 percent of the expected goal share with the Panarin-Trocheck-Lafrenière line on the ice in Game 5, according to Natural Stat Trick, but Carolina led in scoring chances and high-danger chances in that span. One of the Hurricanes’ most dangerous chances, a Jake Guentzel breakaway saved by Shesterkin, happened with them on the ice.

“When you give them the puck, it’s not easy to cover them,” said Martin Necas, who played more than five minutes against the Panarin line in Game 5. “Once you keep the puck on your sticks, they’re not as good defensively. That’s how you’ve got to play against them, and that’s what we’re doing.”

Panarin’s skating did draw an apparent hooking penalty on Jalen Chatfield shortly before Kuznetsov’s goal, but the officials didn’t call it. Each team got three power plays in the game, and New York’s unit looked far from as dominant as it was earlier in the series. On the Rangers’ first power play, which came after a Kuznetsov slash, Zibanejad got a solid look on a pass off the rush, but that was about it. The Hurricanes generated more chances in that two-minute span, with Teuvo Teravainen getting a dangerous shot from the wing.

In total, Carolina goaltender Frederik Andersen had to make only five saves in New York’s six minutes of power-play time.

“We’ve just got to execute better on our entries,” Trocheck said. “I don’t think they changed out much on their forecheck.”

The unit, which scored four power-play goals in the first two games of the series, now has gone eight tries without a goal.

“(The Hurricanes are) aggressive in what they do,” Laviolette said. “We’ve got to move things a little quicker.”

The Hurricanes know that to beat New York, they have to beat Shesterkin. The goalie was far from the Rangers’ biggest issue Monday — he saved more goals than expected, according to Natural Stat Trick — but the Rangers allowed too many dangerous chances in front of him, and Carolina eventually broke through. Jordan Staal got around Braden Schneider on Carolina’s first goal early in the third, and Panarin wasn’t in position to prevent Kuznetsov’s rebound goal. Then Trouba turned a puck over behind the net midway through the third, allowing Necas to feed Jordan Martinook in the slot.

New York didn’t put its goalie in position to steal a game, as he did in Game 2, and Carolina took advantage.

“Any time you don’t play up to your capabilities, you get concerned about that,” Laviolette said. “But I also know that this group has had games like that before, and they’ve responded.”

The task will be harder in Carolina, where Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour will have control over last change. He can select matchups and perhaps lean on his Guentzel-Sebastian Aho-Andrei Svechnikov line against Panarin's trio.

Still, the Rangers are not in a position to panic. If they win one of their next two games, they're on to the Eastern Conference final. Carolina adjusted when New York jumped to a series lead, and now it's Laviolette and his players' turn.

"At the beginning of the year, if you told me we'd be 3-2 against the second-best team in the league and (had) an opportunity to close it out, it's a pretty good spot to be in," Kreider said. "Just go down there and be better, be more detailed, work for each other and find a way to win a game."

To do that, the Rangers will need to get back to what earned them the No. 1 overall seed — far from what they showed Monday night.

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1312450 Carolina Hurricanes

Lazerus: As adversity finally finds the Rangers, can they find their game?

Mark Lazerus7-9 minutes 5/14/2024

NEW YORK — Vincent Trocheck stood in Filip Chytil's vacant stall, his voice quiet, his responses brief. No, he didn't think things snowballed on the Rangers. No, he didn't think the Carolina Hurricanes are doing anything different on their penalty kill. No, he doesn't think being home or on the road makes much of a difference.

Just over his right shoulder, affixed to a narrow wall between stalls, was a wooden cutout of the Stanley Cup, with 16 puck-sized holes carved out, one for each victory it takes to win a championship, to achieve hockey immortality. There were seven pucks nestled in place, with nine empty slots remaining. The same amount there were after Game 4. The same amount there were after Game 3. The march to the Cup has come to a sudden standstill.

The New York Rangers were 20 minutes from the Eastern Conference final entering the third period of Monday night's Game 5. Ten minutes later, they were down 3-1, getting booed back to Raleigh by the Madison Square Garden faithful, eventually losing 4-1 to the resurgent, resurrected Hurricanes.

Now there were no histrionics in the Rangers dressing room afterward. No overturned tables, no fiery defiance, no wailing or gnashing of teeth or rending of garments. It was quiet and mostly empty, the comments from Trocheck, Jacob Trouba and Mika Zibanejad all calm and reasonable. A standard post-loss room.

But make no mistake: After obliterating the overmatched Washington Capitals and winning three straight nail-biters to open this second-round series, adversity has finally found the Rangers.

How will they respond?

"With our best," Trocheck said.

They'd better. Because they certainly didn't in Game 5.

New York's power play was disjointed and ineffective. The defense was flat-footed and outmuscled. The scorers were hesitant and pass-happy. At five-on-five, Carolina had 13 high-danger scoring chances to New York's five (only one of which came in the second or third periods). Igor Shesterkin was brilliant through two — when a Seth Jarvis pass on a power-play rush in the first minute of the third period bounced off Trouba and still somehow found Shesterkin's pad, you had to wonder if it was just his night — and when he's on, he can mask some of the Rangers' modest warts. But then Shesterkin got undressed by, of all people, Jordan Staal for the equalizer at 3:33 of the third, and was then beaten cleanly by Evgeny Kuznetsov and Jordan Martinook. In the biggest period of the season, the Rangers wilted, and were blown away by the Hurricanes.

Peter Laviolette said that's not his Rangers, that it wasn't "a reflection of who we were for the majority of the year." He's right, of course. New York won the Presidents' Trophy as the league's best team in the regular season. But the fact that these lesser Rangers — these off-brand Rangers, this shadow of the Rangers — showed up in a playoff game? In a closeout game? At the Garden?

It's a concern. And Laviolette wasn't pretending otherwise.

"Any time you don't play up to your capabilities, you get concerned about that, yeah," Laviolette said. "But I also know this group has had games like that before and they responded. There's accountability that goes with that from them."

Momentum in hockey is a funny thing. It absolutely exists within a game — a big save or a big kill or a big hit can completely reverse the energy between two teams. Staal's shockingly beautiful move at the net, using every bit of his 6-4 frame to nudge a backhander around Shesterkin, was proof. Just like that, the Rangers fell apart. And just like that, the Hurricanes took over.

But any NHLer will tell you that momentum does not, in fact, exist from game to game. Whether you won the previous game in a laugher or lost it in double-overtime has absolutely no bearing on the next game. By the time the puck drops for the opening faceoff, whatever happened in the previous game or games is ancient history, irrelevant. Professional athletes don't get to this level by stewing on the past, by freaking out about a loss, by panicking. They live in the present. They move on. With an extra day off until Thursday's Game 6 in Raleigh, Game 5 will be a distant memory. The Rangers might cruise to an anticlimactic win in Game 6, or the Hurricanes might force a fateful Game 7 back at the Garden. What happened Monday night won't be the reason, either way.

But hope is a funny thing, too. It grows like a weed, spreads like a virus. And you could see that in the visitors dressing room following Monday's morning skate.

"There's life, right?" Hurricanes defenseman Jaccob Slavin said. "Your backs are against the wall down 3-0, and you're doing whatever you can to stay alive. Now you've got a little bit of life in you. But you've still got to do whatever you can to stay alive. So it's the same mindset — desperation, leaving everything out there, because tomorrow isn't guaranteed."

The Rangers could stand to find a little of that desperation — desperation to put away the pesky Hurricanes, desperation to avoid a winner-take-all Game 7. They sure didn't seem to have any of it in Game 5. Both teams looked a little tense, a little nervous for most of the game. But Staal's goal seemed to pull the release valve on the Hurricanes, who seized the moment and the in-game momentum. Shesterkin has a way of demoralizing opponents, and watching Staal beat him in such grand fashion seemed to give the Hurricanes a little more of that life, a little more of that belief. They went on the attack, and the Rangers were helpless to respond.

"When you're going into the third period, you realize it could be the last period of this year," Kuznetsov said. "You don't want to have that feeling. I'm so grateful that we were able to come back and win the game."

The Rangers are right not to despair, of course. They're still up 3-2 in the series. They're still in the more enviable position, by far. They were the best team in the league all season, and had been the best team in the playoffs until now. And for them, tomorrow is guaranteed. As Trouba said after the game, the Rangers earned themselves "a couple cracks at it" by going up 3-0, like a golfer who only needs to three-putt on the 18th green in order to win a tournament. You miss that first putt, and you're not sweating it. But come up a few feet short on that second putt, and all of a sudden you're feeling the pressure. Now, the next one isn't exactly a must, but you sure as hell don't want to miss it and give your opponent new life.

That's Game 6 for the Rangers — a real knee-knocker, a test of skill, of character, of fortitude.

Don't leave it short.

"I don't think we thought this was going to be a cakewalk," Trouba said. "We lost two, face a little adversity. We'll see what we're made of going down to Carolina for Game 6."

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

1312451 Carolina Hurricanes

How the Hurricanes rallied to force a Game 6 with the Rangers: 5 takeaways

Arthur Staple6-7 minutes 5/14/2024

NEW YORK — The Rangers aren't making this easy on themselves.

Evgeny Kuznetsov's rebound goal at 6:39 of the third period was part of a four-goal outburst in the final frame. Carolina's 4-1 win sent this second-round series back to Raleigh for Thursday's Game 6.

Jacob Trouba's shorthanded goal in the second period was the lone goal in an evenly played first 40 minutes and the Rangers killed off an early Carolina third-period power play to put the finish line of the series within sight. But Jordan Staal, Carolina's captain, made a move around Braden Schneider and then another one around Igor Shesterkin to tie the game 3:33 into the third.

On the eventual winner, Brady Skjei let loose a big drive that Shesterkin turned aside. But Kuznetsov beat Artemi Panarin to the rebound for his second goal in as many games to give Carolina the lead. Jordan Martinook added another at 9:56 and the Canes left the Garden crowd stunned, hoping to return here for what would be an improbable Game 7 on Saturday.

Canes plumbers come to play again

It wasn't Carolina's big-name guys but instead a collection of wily old vets who helped the Canes stay alive. Staal, playing in his 141st career playoff game, made the play on the first Carolina goal, driving the net for a nice move around Shesterkin when his Hurricanes had been going side to side and looking for space most of the night.

And Kuznetsov, firmly entrenched as the fourth-line center this postseason, came up with another big goal as he did in opening the Game 4 scoring. It's no coincidence that Staal and Kuznetsov are the only two Canes players with Stanley Cup rings.

Martinook, who had a huge goal in Carolina's comeback to beat the Islanders in Game 2, then sealed it.

Jacob Trouba rebounds

Trouba had what you could generously describe as a tough Game 4 when he was on for all four Carolina goals and got caught roaming the neutral zone before Sebastian Aho's goal made it 3-1 late in the first period on Saturday.

But the Rangers didn't name him captain prior to last season for nothing. In a Game 5 that required more defensive-zone fortitude than offensive flair, Trouba was much steadier. He even found time to throw a big open-ice hit in the opening period, knocking down Jack Drury to roars from the Garden crowd.

But the real roars came in the second on Carolina's first power play of the game. He blocked an Aho one-timer at the top of the right circle, chipped it around Aho after the Canes center slipped and started a two-on-one with Barclay Goodrow. Brady Skjei played the pass and Seth Jarvis raced back, but Trouba still snapped one low past Andersen's right pad for the Rangers' second shorthanded goal of the series and fourth in nine playoff games.

It was also just the second goal by a Rangers defenseman in the postseason — and they've both come shorthanded, with K'Andre Miller's shorty coming in Game 2 against the Caps.

Lazerus: Game 4 thriller plants seed of hope in Hurricanes, seed of doubt in Rangers

A rare collapse

The Rangers were 34-3-2 when leading after two periods in the regular season. But strange things happen in the pressure of the playoffs, especially with the opponent facing elimination.

The Rangers had done a lot of good things to thwart Carolina through 40 minutes, including 21 shot blocks and making sure they had a forward covering the weak side whenever the Canes threw a puck on Shesterkin. That's a staple of Carolina's offense.

But the one time the Canes beat the Rangers to a weak-side rebound it cost them. Panarin didn't have position on Kuznetsov and the game turned.

Heading back to Raleigh for Thursday's Game 6 signifies a potentially bigger collapse, of course.

Special teams

The Rangers' shorthanded goal was the only special-teams marker of Game 5 and it seemed to be a good omen, given that Carolina's power play dropped to 1-for-20 for the series. But it was the Rangers' 0-for-3 night on the power play that also stood out — the Rangers had five shots on Freddie Andersen on their three opportunities but nothing terribly dangerous.

With some special-teams momentum on the PK the last two games, Carolina might be starting to feel itself a little bit. That can counteract whatever power-play failures Carolina has had so far.

Filip Chytil skates, Matt Rempe plays

There was some good news on Monday morning in the form of Filip Chytil being back on the ice with his teammates at the Rangers morning skate. He skated without restrictions after missing Game 4 with what the Rangers termed an illness but he stayed on the ice at the team's practice facility for extra work, essentially ruling him out for Game 5.

It was still encouraging given Chytil's concussion history and worries that his return to action in Game 3 might have produced some delayed symptoms that arose the next morning.

Jonny Brodzinski got most of the morning reps with Jimmy Vesey and Goodrow in the spot Brodzinski played in Game 4, but it was fan favorite Matt Rempe who got the call on Monday, eliciting cheers from the Garden crowd every time he stepped on the ice. Which, as expected, was rarely, but Rempe acquitted himself well once again in Game 5.

Blake Wheeler also shed his no-contact red sweater for the first time as a full participant on Monday morning.

"Everybody was out there for practice," Peter Laviolette said. "That's a real positive thing."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312452 Carolina Hurricanes

NHL Playoffs expert picks: Avs look to rediscover offense vs. Stars, Rangers look to close out Canes

Andrew DeWitt4-5 minutes 5/13/2024

The Colorado Avalanche looked frustrated Saturday night. The Stars held a 2-1 advantage going into the third period in a game where Colorado dominated time in the offensive zone and shot attempts. Colorado led in shots 23-12, and it felt like they carried play throughout most of the night except for those two late goals in each period.

But Dallas turned Saturday's game into a mud pit, clogging up the middle of the ice and frustrating the high-flying Avalanche. Dallas eventually scored two empty-net goals to make the 4-1 margin make the game look less competitive than it actually was. Saturday's third period was the first time this postseason that Colorado didn't score a third-period goal.

The loss leaves the Avalanche with a pile of questions. Sure, they won the 2022 Stanley Cup and still have one of the most talented rosters left in the Stanley Cup Playoffs. But they've exited in the first or second round in five of the past six seasons.

Avs-Stars is scheduled for 9:30 p.m. ET Monday.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

First up, the New York Rangers will look to close out the Carolina Hurricanes at home. More on that game below.

Odds are from BetMGM and update live. Buy tickets to see your favorite team on StubHub.

Carolina Hurricanes at New York Rangers — Game 5

How to WATCH: 7 p.m. ET on ESPN

Rangers lead series 3-1

Series odds:

Carolina battled back with a 4-3 win in Game 4 on home ice to extend this series to at least five games. Despite playing on the road at Madison Square Garden, the Hurricanes are a small favorite in this game.

This series has been closer than the score indicates. One can even argue that Carolina has been a little unlucky in this series to be down 3-1. Using MoneyPuck's deserve-to-win meter, Carolina has an expected win percentage of 56.7 percent in Game 1, 66.2 percent in Game 3, and 67.3 percent in Game 4. Only in Game 2 did the Rangers have a better-expected outcome than Carolina.

Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin has allowed only 19 goals in eight games so far in the 2024 Stanley Cup Playoffs. He's currently the favorite to win the Conn Smythe Trophy for playoffs MVP.

Jake Guentzel, Stefan Noesen and Seth Jarvis lead the Hurricanes with four goals apiece in the playoffs. Sebastian Aho leads the team with seven assists and 10 points.

The Athletic's Mark Lazerus pointed out that the roles flipped in Game 4 for both of these teams. The doubts started to creep in for the Rangers, and the Hurricanes have a little belief that maybe they can come back from a 3-0 deficit in the series.

Dallas Stars at Colorado Avalanche — Game 4

How to WATCH: 9:30 p.m. ET on ESPN

Stars lead 2-1

Series odds: Avalanche -115, Stars -105

Colorado had the NHL's best home record (31-9-1) during the regular season, and Saturday's loss in Game 3 at home was their first loss at Ball Arena during these playoffs. The Stars were the NHL's best road team (26-10-5). Dallas is 3-1 during these playoffs on the road.

Colorado forward Valeri Nichushkin had his seven-game goal streak snapped in Saturday's 4-1 loss. He tied for an NHL record with goals in seven straight games to start the playoffs, a record he now holds with Buffalo's Pat LaFontaine from 1992.

Stars goalie Jake Oettinger had his best performance of the second round in Game 3 after posting a stellar first round against Vegas. He made 28 saves, including several key stops on power plays, to help the Stars take the 2-1 series lead.

Dallas forward Logan Stankoven opened up the scoring for Dallas and also scored an empty-net goal. The two goals were first and second career playoff goals in his 10th playoff game. He only scored six goals in 24 regular-season games this year.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312453 Carolina Hurricanes

10 New York Rangers road trip observations: Panarin line struggles in Game 4, special teams battle

Peter Baugh8-11 minutes 5/13/2024

RALEIGH, N.C. — After the celebratory mob dispersed following Artemi Panarin's Game 3 overtime winner, several of the New York Rangers, including Chris Kreider and K'Andre Miller, sprinted off the ice, shouting with glee. They looked as if they were fifth graders leaving for school summer break, not hockey players who had just gone through a grueling game that lasted nearly 62 minutes.

Two nights later, the Rangers trudged through the same tunnel, heads down. There wasn't jump in the players' steps or smiles on their faces. They had missed a chance to close out the series, losing 4-3 in Game 4 after a late goal by Brady Skjei, an ex-New York defenseman.

The emotional swings of a playoff series are stark, and the Rangers experienced both ends of the spectrum in Raleigh. In total, a split was a solid outcome for New York, even if the trip south ended on a sour note. The Rangers lead the series 3-1 and play Monday at home with another chance to win the series.

"You always want to close it out as fast as you can," captain Jacob Trouba said. "Going back home we're going to have a pretty rambunctious crowd, but it's going to be a fun game to play. Obviously attention goes to Game 5."

First, let's look back. Here are 10 observations from the road portion of the Rangers series.

1. The PNC Arena atmosphere was excellent. The Carolina Hurricanes' crowd was loud and engaged throughout the two games there, but there were enough Rangers supporters to make a dent in its noise, which led to a fun dynamic. At times the fan bases had interacting chants trying to one-up each other. For example, when New York fans chanted Igor Shesterkin's first name, the Carolina crowd interjected "sucks!" in the pauses.

The arena was deafening whenever the Hurricanes scored a big goal. It's hard to say which goal got the bigger roar: Andrei Svechnikov's game-tying goal in Game 3 or Skjei's go-ahead tally in Game 4.

2. All four games have gone to the team that won the special teams battle. The Hurricanes had failed to score on their first 16 power plays — perhaps the main reason the Rangers are up in the series — but Skjei finally broke the Rangers' penalty-killing streak late in the third period of Game 4. His slap shot from the point got through traffic and beat Shesterkin.

The goal doesn't change how effective the Rangers penalty kill has been. It was a well-executed play by Carolina, and it came at a bad time for New York.

"He hammered it," Laviolette said. "It had eyes. It was a top-corner shot."

Added Trouba: "I don't think (it was) necessarily a massive breakdown by the PK. Just a good shot sometimes. Tip your cap."

3. After giving the Rangers 11 combined power plays in Games 2 and 3, the Hurricanes mostly stayed out of the box Sunday. Carolina didn't give the Rangers a single power play after Jordan Staal tripped Mika Zibanejad in the first period. Vincent Trocheck and Brent Burns got matching roughing minors late in the second, so there was four-on-four play for two minutes, but neither team had another power play until Ryan Lindgren tripped Jordan Martinook in the third.

"The whole series we've been trying to limit penalties knowing their power play is what it is," Skjei said. "Throughout the series, we've wanted to try to play whistle to whistle. That's definitely been a focus of ours this series and going forward."

4. Though Alexis Lafrenière had a strong night, scoring his fourth goal of the playoffs, the Rangers' second line (Artemi Panarin-Vincent Trocheck-Lafrenière) struggled as a whole. Many of their minutes at five-on-five came against the Hurricanes' top line (Jake Guentzel-Sebastian Aho-Andrei Svechnikov) and those did not go well. Panarin finished with a minus-3 rating, and Trocheck was minus-2. Lafrenière's goal didn't come with either Panarin or Trocheck on the ice; he was taking a shift with Zibanejad and Chris Kreider when he bounced a puck off Frederik Andersen and in.

The Rangers often trade scoring chances with the Panarin line on the ice, and that's generally not a bad formula given how dangerous all three players are offensively. But as Laviolette said after Game 4, the Rangers allowed "pretty noisy" chances in the first period. The Panarin-Trocheck-Lafrenière trio was on for many of them. In 9:39 of five-on-five ice time together in Game 4, the three got outshot 6-2 and had only 23.98 percent of the expected goal share, according to Natural Stat Trick.

“We could’ve been a little bit tighter with what we’re doing, whether it was puck decisions or the coverage a little quicker to close,” Laviolette said. “There were looks going both ways. We just didn’t capitalize on as many as they did.”

Fortunately for the Rangers’ coach, he will have last change when the series shifts back to New York. He can have more control over matchups for Panarin-Trocheck-Lafrenière and can perhaps avoid having them on the ice as much against Aho’s line.

5. Arthur Staple delved into how the Erik Gustafsson-Trouba pair struggled in his postgame takeaways, and the numbers back that up. Carolina had more than twice the shot attempts as the Rangers with them on the ice, per Natural Stat Trick.

Despite a trying night, Trouba almost made a big offensive play with the game tied in the third. He cut to the net, and Kaapo Kakko wired him a backdoor pass. Unfortunately for the Rangers, Andersen halted the defenseman’s shot.

6. Speaking of Kakko, Game 4 was perhaps his best game of the series. He made a pinpoint pass to assist Will Cuylle’s first career playoff goal and set Alex Wennberg up on a two-on-one look. The center’s shot hit the post.

The Cuylle-Wennberg-Kakko line did a good job controlling possession, as it has most of the postseason. The group finally got rewarded with Cuylle’s goal.

7. Wennberg has been a strong deadline addition, even if he hasn’t brought much offensive production. He stabilized the third-line center position upon arrival, and the Rangers’ center depth has been a strength in the postseason.

“For me to come into a team like this, they asked me to do this role, and it fits like a glove,” Wennberg said. “Right away it felt like a good fit.”

8. Emotions have carried over between plays throughout the series. Trocheck, who was on the Hurricanes from 2020-22, took a cross-check from Aho in Game 3, then celebrated in his former teammate’s face when Lafrenière scored moments later. Aho didn’t say much when asked about the sequence the next day.

“It’s hockey,” he said.

Earlier that game, a scrum broke out by Carolina’s net after Barclay Goodrow tried to poke a puck away from Pyotr Kochetkov and skated to the edge of his crease. The play resulted in Jimmy Vesey and Dmitry Orlov getting matching roughing penalties and Goodrow and Jesperi Kotkaniemi each earning unsportsmanlike penalties.

“That’s playoffs,” said Kotkaniemi, who looked ready to drop the gloves with Vesey before the officials split them up. “Both teams really want to win. That’s the reason why everything happens.”

Aside from Burns’ and Trocheck’s matching roughing minors, Game 4 was far more subdued in terms of after-the-whistle activity.

9. Laviolette spoke with NHL.com’s Dan Rosen before the team left Raleigh and said Filip Chytil (illness) is feeling better. The team hopes he can be an option for Game 5.

The Rangers have not clarified whether Chytil’s illness is related to his previous concussion issues. The forward’s long-term health needs to be the priority in this situation; the team should be wary of taking any risks.

10. Evgeni Kuznetsov set the scene for Game 5 well while meeting with Carolina media before leaving for New York.

“One bowl of food and two dogs competing with each other,” he said via Pat Welter of WRAL. “They know it’ll be hell to come back here. We want to put the pressure on them.”

The Athletic LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312519 New York Rangers

Hurricanes' Rod Brind'Amour offers one-word answer as possible goalie shakeup looms vs. Rangers

Dan Martin2-3 minutes 5/13/2024

Even after Frederik Andersen left the ice first during Carolina’s morning skate at Madison Square Garden, Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind’Amour said he wasn’t ready to announce a starting goalie for Monday’s Game 5 against the Rangers — a game his team has to win to keep its season alive.

Asked if Andersen would be back in goal, which is typically indicated by which goaltender skates off first at the skate, Brind’Amour would only say, “Maybe.”

Andersen started every game in the postseason for the Hurricanes prior to Game 3 against the Rangers, when Pyotr Kochetkov got the nod in a Rangers win that put Carolina in a 3-0 series hole.

Hurricanes goalie Pyotr Kochetkov saves a shot by the Rangers' Filip Chytil in Game 3 on May 9, 2024.

Andersen started again in Game 4 but had some shaky moments in Carolina’s first victory of the second-round playoff series.

Andersen was the primary starter when healthy during the regular season, but was sidelined for a stretch between November and March with a blood clotting issue.

That’s when Kochetkov emerged as another solid option.

Frederik Andersen (31) of the Carolina Hurricanes makes a save against the New York Rangers during the second period of Game 4 on May 11, 2024.

Brind’Amour said he was considering the fact that both have played well when given the opportunity.

“A lot goes into it now,’’ Brind’Amour said. “Obviously, that’s the number one concern: ‘How are you feeling?’ We had a good rotation going. Do we go back to that? There are a lot of discussions.”

Game 5 gets underway at 7 p.m.

New York Post LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312520 New York Rangers

How much are last-minute Rangers-Hurricanes Game 5 MSG tickets?

Matt Levy5-6 minutes 5/13/2024

The New York Rangers are so close they can almost taste it.

Currently up 3-1 against the Carolina Hurricanes, the Blueshirts are just one game away from their first trip to the NHL Eastern Conference Final since 2022.

In order to get there, Peter Laviolette’s team can clinch on their home ice when they meet Rod Brind’Amour’s club at New York City’s Madison Square Garden for Game 5 of their series on Monday, May 13.

As expected, tickets won’t be cheap to see Igor Shesterkin, Mika Zibanejad, Adam Fox, Will Cuylle and the recently returned Filip Chytil try to close things out.

At the time of publication, the lowest price we could find on tickets was $352 before fees on Vivid Seats.

100-level seats start at $566 before fees.

While these last-minute tickets may sound expensive, they are cheaper than they were at the outset of the series.

When our team last reported on prices, tickets for Game 5 started at $407 before fees on Vivid Seats.

For more information, our team has everything you need to know and more about the Rangers-Hurricanes series below.

All prices listed above are subject to fluctuation.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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New York Rangers playoff tickets 2024

A complete breakdown of all the best prices on tickets by section at Madison Square Garden for Game 5 can be found below.

Madison Square Garden sections	Ticket prices start at
Standing Room Only	$352
400-Level	$383
300-Level	$439
200-Level	$395
Madison Club	$1,583
100-Level	$566
Floor	$1,143

(Note: The New York Post confirmed all above prices at the publication time. All prices are in US dollars, subject to fluctuation and include additional fees at checkout.)

Vivid Seats is a verified secondary market ticketing platform, and prices may be higher or lower than face value, depending on demand.

They offer a 100% buyer guarantee that states your transaction will be safe and secure and your tickets will be delivered prior to the event.

All hypothetical later Rangers playoff rounds and Stanley Cup tickets can be found here.

About the Rangers-Hurricanes

Over the course of the regular season, the Rangers took two of three from the 'Canes.

In their first matchup, New York won 2-1 at MSG on Nov. 2, 2023, behind goals from Will Cuylle and Chris Kreider.

After that, the Hurricanes came roaring back with a commanding 6-1 victory on Jan. 2. Andrei Svechnikov led Carolina with a pair of goals.

The season series came to a close on March 12; the Rangers shut out the Hurricanes 1-0 that evening.

To advance to the second round of the playoffs, New York beat the eighth-seeded Washington Capitals in five games; Carolina quickly defeated the New York Islanders in five as well.

This second-round series saw the Rangers jump to a commanding 3-0 lead after a pair of overtime victories and a surprise return from Filip Chytil.

However, the team fell prey to the Hurricanes at their home PNC Arena on Saturday, May 11 behind a goal and assist from star Sebastian Aho.

How to watch the Rangers and Hurricanes on TV

Fans hoping to catch the Rangers and Hurricanes from the comfort of their own home are in luck.

All games will be broadcast on ESPN, ESPN2, ABC, TNT, and TBS — just make sure to check your local listings before tuning in. You can watch all of these channels and more with a DirecTV Stream subscription, which comes with a five-day free trial for new subscribers.

Looking for a bit more detail? Check out Decider's comprehensive NHL Playoff viewing guide.

New York Post LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312521 New York Rangers

Filip Chytil skates ahead of Game 5 in positive Rangers sign

Ethan Sears, Mollie Walker3-4 minutes 5/13/2024

The Rangers got some much-needed good news Monday morning before the evening's bad news.

After missing Game 4 due to what the team termed an "illness," Filip Chytil participated in the Blueshirts' morning skate ahead of their Game 5 loss to the Hurricanes.

"He practiced this morning," Rangers head coach Peter Laviolette said before the 4-1 defeat. "That's a real positive thing for our team. I'm going to keep any lineup decisions that I make to myself."

Filip Chytil missed Game 4.

Chytil, who was sidelined for over six months with a suspected concussion before making his return in Game 3 on Saturday in Raleigh, N.C., could not get back on the ice two mornings later. Laviolette was tight-lipped about Chytil's status, calling him a game-time decision, but the 24-year-old ultimately didn't dress.

Having Chytil back on the ice Monday morning was encouraging, but no further update was provided. The Czech was not made available to the media in the dressing room.

Given Chytil's injury history, and the fact that he missed time this year due to what is believed to be his fourth documented concussion, that is a red flag.

Blake Wheeler was also a full-contact participant for the first time Monday morning, having worn a red no-contact jersey prior.

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Neither Wheeler nor Chytil participated in top-nine line rushes, while Jonny Brodzinski continued to skate on the fourth unit and Alex Wennberg centered Will Cuylle and Kaapo Kakko.

The 6-foot-5 Wheeler took reps alongside the 6-foot-8 ½ Matt Rempe and the 6-foot-7 Adam Edstrom.

Entering Game 5 on Monday, the Rangers had scored power-play goals in five of their last seven games, as well as multiple power-play goals in four of eight playoff games this year.

The Blueshirts' 10 power-play goals rank second in the NHL behind Edmonton's 13.

The Hartford Wolf Pack, the Rangers' AHL affiliate, advanced to the Atlantic Division Finals of the Calder Cup Playoffs on Friday with a 2-1 overtime win over the Providence Bruins.

Jake Leschyshyn was credited with both the Wolf Pack's goals in the victory, including the OT winner.

They will now take on the Hershey Bears, the Washington Capitals' AHL affiliate, in a best-of-five series. It begins on Thursday at Giant Center in Hershey, Pa.

New York Post LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312522 New York Rangers

Best: From 3-0 to uh-oh for Rangers

By Neil Best

Updated May 13, 2024 11:00 pm4-5 minutes 5/14/2024

No, the Rangers would not trade places with the Hurricanes, who still need two victories to advance in the Stanley Cup playoffs to the Rangers' one.

But make no mistake: The Rangers are in legitimate trouble after their 4-1 loss to the Hurricanes on Monday night in Game 5 of a second-round series.

After four games that could have gone either way – two of which the Rangers won in overtime, one in double overtime – this was a stinker of a performance.

Coach Peter Laviolette did not let his team off the hook when it was over, saying after Carolina's four-goal third period, "It wasn't a reflection of who we were for the majority of the year. Tonight was not it for us."

Even when given a chance to at least praise his team's effort, Laviolette said only, "There were a lot of issues tonight. We'll go back and look at it and try to correct those issues."

Bad games happen, even to good teams. And, again, the Rangers get two more cracks at this. What makes their situation alarming is their opponent.

The Hurricanes finished third in the NHL with 111 points, only three behind the Rangers, who set a team record with 55 victories en route to 114 points.

Oddsmakers consistently have been skeptical of the Rangers in this series, even after they won the first three games. Maybe they knew something about these teams and this matchup.

Monday's game was evenly played through one period, although Laviolette was troubled by the number of chances the Rangers gave up even then.

When captain Jacob Trouba scored a shorthanded goal at 6:23 of the second period, it looked as if the Rangers might secure the clincher behind their usual formula of special teams play and goaltender Igor Shesterkin's excellence.

But Carolina had the Rangers on their heels early in the third, and soon were paid for their diligence, securing goals by Jordan Staal at 3:33, Evgeny Kuznetsov at 6:39 and Jordan Martinook at 9:56, all at even strength.

Martin Necas added an empty-netter at 16:29, and just like that, a series that had seen four three-goal games had a mini-blowout.

Vincent Trocheck objected to the term "snowballed" to describe the events of the last period, although he did say the Hurricanes "wanted it more in the third."

He also acknowledged the challenge at hand.

"It's a seven-game series against a team that was three points behind us in a record-breaking season," he said. "We knew it wasn't going to be easy."

How does he expect the Rangers to respond in Game 6 in Raleigh on Thursday night? "With our best," he said.

Trouba said, "Definitely something to learn on. I don't think we thought this was going to be a cakewalk. Lost two, face a little adversity. We'll see what we're made of going down to Carolina for Game 6."

The Rangers have been made of the right stuff all season and are a mature team that should be able to handle this circumstance.

But again: The Hurricanes are very good, and the Rangers are very much aware of what blowing a 3-0 series lead would mean. This is getting serious.

NHL teams are 205-4 all-time in winning a series after leading 3-0.

One of the four winners was Laviolette's 2009-10 Flyers, who came back against the Bruins in the second round and later reached the Cup Final.

So he knows it is possible. But anyone who watched Game 5 knows it is possible.

If the odds in these games are more or less even, the Rangers now are two lost coin flips away from elimination.

"I think this team has found a way to win games all year, gone through stretches of adversity and we found a way," Trouba said. "I don't think we were planning on winning every game in a row here throughout these playoffs."

Laviolette expressed confidence in his team's resilience, too. But he had nothing good to say about Game 5.

"We weren't sharp," he said.

As they prepared for Game 4 on Saturday, the Rangers had a chance to become the first team to start the playoffs with two four-game sweeps.

As they prepare for Game 6 on Thursday, making history no longer is the goal.

Avoiding disaster is.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312523 New York Rangers

Rangers stunned by Hurricanes in Game 5 loss at MSG

By Colin Stephenson

Updated May 14, 2024 2:10 am4-5 minutes 5/14/2024

Four NHL teams have come back from a three-games-to-none deficit to win a best-of-seven playoff series. The Rangers are going to have to really buckle down to make sure the Carolina Hurricanes don't become the fifth.

The Hurricanes, on the verge of being swept out of the playoffs going into the weekend, came to Madison Square Garden on Monday and rallied for four goals in the third period to overcome a one-goal deficit, stun the Rangers and quiet the Garden crowd with a 4-1 victory that kept their season alive for at least a few more days.

Carolina has won two straight games and is halfway to a stunning comeback from being down 3-0. The teams have a couple of days off before the series shifts to Raleigh, North Carolina, for Game 6 on Thursday night. The Rangers will try for the third time to close out the Hurricanes and advance to the Eastern Conference finals.

"Obviously, you want to close out the series, but we put ourselves in a position that we get a couple cracks at it,'' said the Rangers' Jacob Trouba, who scored his team's only goal, a shorthanded effort in the second period. "We've played good games in Carolina. We know we can play in that building. We'll go down there and bring a better game.''

The Rangers led 1-0 entering the third period, but the Hurricanes' Jordan Staal tied the score with a pretty backhand goal against Igor Shesterkin (24 saves) at 3:33 of the period. That was the first of three goals in 6 minutes and 23 seconds, a span that turned the game around.

Evgeny Kuznetsov got away from Artemi Panarin to bang in a rebound to put Carolina ahead 2-1 at 6:39, and a turnover behind the Rangers' net led to Jack Drury setting up Jordan Martinook in the slot to make it 3-1 at 9:56. Martin Necas added an empty-net goal at 16:29.

Trouba was willing to chalk up the loss to a bad third period, but coach Peter Laviolette wasn't.

"We weren't sharp tonight,'' he said. "We gave up way too many chances in the first period. It wasn't the night that we were looking for, so it was more than the third period.''

The Rangers held the edge in the first period, outhitting Carolina 14-6, but the shots on goal were even at 9-9. Shesterkin seemed to have the more difficult chances, including a breakaway by Jake Guentzel with 3:06 left in the period that the goalie kicked out with his left pad.

The Rangers scored in the second period with Adam Fox in the box serving a holding penalty. Trouba blocked a shot by Sebastian Aho in the left-wing circle, and as Aho fell down, Trouba collected the puck and was off on a two-on-one with Barclay Goodrow on his left. Instead of passing,

he fired a slap shot past Frederik Andersen (20 saves) at 6:23 for his first goal of the playoffs.

But then came the third period, and the Rangers crumbled.

Afterward, the Rangers clung to the narrative that momentum has not swung in the series. They insist momentum doesn't carry over from one game to the next.

"No,'' Chris Kreider said. "It's one game at a time. During the year, if you told me we'd be [up] 3-2 against the [third-] best team in the league, with an opportunity to close it out, it's a pretty good spot to be in. So go down there, be better, be more detailed, work for each other and find a way to win a game.''

Notes & quotes:

Forward Filip Chytil, who made a surprise return to the lineup in Game 3 after missing the final 72 games of the regular season and the first six games of the playoffs with a suspected concussion, participated in the morning skate Monday after missing Game 4 with what the team called an illness . . . Forward Blake Wheeler, who has been practicing with the team in a red non-contact jersey after making his way back from a lower-leg injury he suffered in February, skated in the morning in a regular white jersey, meaning he was cleared for full contact in practices . . . Matt Rempe entered the lineup after sitting out Games 3 and 4. He took the spot held by Jonny Brodzinski, who replaced Chytil in Game 4.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312524 New York Rangers

Hurricanes stun Rangers with dominant third period

By Andrew Gross

May 13, 2024 11:07 pm3-4 minutes 5/14/2024

Mika Zibanejad found it a bit of a leading question when he was asked if the Rangers played aggressively enough in the third period.

"I guess with that question you don't think so," Zibanejad said after the Hurricanes scored all of their goals in the final 20 minutes to stave off elimination for a second straight time in a 4-1 win in Game 5 of their second-round series on Monday night at Madison Square Garden.

"No, I would agree," Zibanejad quickly conceded. "I think we came up with a big [penalty] kill to start off the third. We probably wanted a little more offensive-zone time in the third, trying to create a little more chances. But they score and get momentum from that."

The Hurricanes were dominant in the third period in their five-game series win in the first round, outscoring the Islanders 10-1. But against the Rangers, the Hurricanes hadn't scored a third-period goal with their goalie on the ice since Game 1.

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour hasn't been displeased with his team's third-period efforts in this series, and he certainly liked the Game 5 results. According to NaturalStatTrick, the Hurricanes had a 4-1 edge in high-danger chances in the third period, part of a 13-5 advantage for the game, even though they outshot the Rangers by only 10-6 in the final 20 minutes.

"I think finally some breaks, or whatever you want to call it, just went our way," Brind'Amour said. "Obviously, there's a high level of desperation to our game."

The Rangers started the third period killing off the final 1:50 of Will Cuylle's tripping penalty, with just one shot getting through to Igor Shesterkin. Three others were blocked.

But Jordan Staal slipped past defenseman Braden Schneider to get to the crease and backhand a shot past Shesterkin to tie the score at 1-1 at 3:33 of the third period. Evgeny Kuznetsov, celebrating with his usual flapping bird flourish, skated past Artemi Panarin to knock in a rebound for what proved to be the winner at 6:39. Jordan Martinook, in the slot, gave the Hurricanes a two-goal edge at 9:56 before Martin Necas added an empty-netter.

"They played really well in the third and we just didn't give it enough," said a terse Vincent Trocheck, answering the same question posed to Zibanejad. "They wanted it more."

"They got a quick back-to-back," said Jacob Trouba, who scored the Rangers' lone goal on a shorthanded rush at 6:23 of the second period. "That's tough, but you've got to put a stop to that. We didn't do that. It's a bad period. I don't think we're going to sit here and break it down 100 times and try to fix a bunch of things. We played a bad period, but we've played a pretty consistently good game throughout the playoffs."

Rangers coach Peter Laviolette said his team's issues in Game 5 "went deeper" than being outscored 4-0 in the third period.

"I don't think we were sharp," he said.

Or aggressive enough while playing with the lead to enter the third period, leading question or not.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312525 New York Rangers

Rangers' Chytil sits again despite participating in morning skate

By Andrew Gross

Updated May 13, 2024 8:34 pm3-4 minutes 5/13/2024

Apparently, it wasn't a long-term illness for Filip Chytil.

And, more encouraging, it doesn't seem to be an "illness," the quotation marks representing a euphemism for ongoing symptoms for the concussion-prone forward.

Chytil was not in the lineup for a second straight game — coach Peter Laviolette reinserted fan fascination Matt Rempe — as the Rangers tried to close out the Hurricanes in Game 5 of their second-round series on Monday night at Madison Square Garden.

But Chytil was on the ice and a full participant in the Rangers' morning skate, a positive development after he was held out of the Rangers' 4-3 loss in Saturday's Game 4 in Raleigh, North Carolina, because of illness.

Perhaps it was just that.

"I think we've said that from the time he joined us on the ice, it's always good to see everyone," Mika Zibanejad said.

Chytil's morning-skate presence was a sigh of relief for his teammates.

"Yeah, for sure," defenseman Braden Schneider said. "You hate seeing guys when you don't know what's going on. But whenever they're back on the ice and back working, it's always a big boost. I thought he played a great game the other night."

"It's definitely a good thing," said Jonny Brodzinski, who exited the lineup for Rempe. "He's been through a whole lot this last year. Just to see him out there with us, I know he's smiling. He's just happy to be out on the rink with everybody."

Chytil, 24, who was selected 21st overall in 2017, was a surprise addition to the Rangers' lineup for their 3-2 overtime road win in Thursday's Game 3, logging 12:02 with one shot after missing the final 72 games of the regular season with a suspected — but never confirmed — concussion.

The natural center worked on third-line center Alex Wennberg's left wing along with Kaapo Kakko.

The Rangers ruled Chytil out for the season in January and he went back to Czechia to recover. But he returned to begin practicing again with the Rangers on April 12 without restrictions.

Given that Chytil is believed to have suffered multiple concussions in his six NHL seasons, missing Game 4 with the illness designation certainly raised a red flag.

Chytil worked as an extra during the morning-skate line drills and remained on the ice after the regulars headed off. Rempe also was not part of the line drills as Brodzinski, who drew into the Game 4 lineup for his first action in these playoffs, skated on the fourth line.

But only Rempe took pregame warmups.

Rempe played in the first six games of the playoffs but was on the ice for just 4:03 in the Rangers' 4-3 double-overtime win in Game 2 at the Garden.

Laviolette is clearly observing "Fight Club" rules: You do not talk about the lineup. So there's no hint on when Chytil might play again.

"We want everybody to be game-ready," Laviolette said. "Everybody was out there for practice this morning and that's a real positive thing for our team."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312526 New York Rangers

Best: Lafreniere a big reason Rangers' future is bright

By Neil Best

Updated May 13, 2024 7:04 pm4-5 minutes 5/13/2024

The Rangers are a win-now team. Every person in their organization understands that, and that is as it should be for a team with this kind of star power and payroll.

It is part of what has made their quick start on the road to their first Stanley Cup since 1994 both exciting and exacting.

But this process can continue no longer than another month or so, and even if the Rangers win the Cup, the NHL will insist come October that they start another season.

When that season begins, eight of the 12 forwards expected to dress on Monday night for Game 5 of a second-round playoff series against the Hurricanes will be at least 30 years old.

Hence the win-now thing.

But even though the Rangers rely heavily on veterans, a subplot in these playoffs is that they also have strong young talent ready to keep this thing going.

Exhibit A: Alexis Lafreniere, the previously much-worried-about No. 1 overall pick in the 2020 NHL Draft.

Lafreniere is in his fourth NHL season, but he still is only 22, and for much of this season and doubly so during the playoffs, a light seems to have gone on for him.

He arguably was the best skater on the team for the first four games of the Carolina series, and inarguably was just that in Game 4 on Saturday night.

Lafreniere cleverly banked in the tying goal off Carolina goaltender Frederik Andersen in the third period of what later became a 4-3 loss.

But to Rangers coach Peter Laviolette, that was a small reward for all that Lafreniere did.

"I thought he could have had three or four goals," Laviolette said. "You knew it was coming. I bumped him on the bench and said, 'It's coming.' So it's nice to continue to see him take steps in the playoffs and be a difference maker."

Lafreniere had four goals and six assists in the first eight playoff games after scoring a career-high 28 goals with a career-high 29 assists in the regular season.

What is going on there?

"My skating got a little better and it's more so I think just trying to get used to the pace of the game," Lafreniere told NHL.com before the team left Raleigh on Sunday after Game 4.

"If you think faster, you're going to move a little faster. The game is so fast right now you have to be able to move well."

Lafreniere is on his third coach in four seasons and seems to have clicked with Laviolette, the first to trust him with a regular top-six spot.

He has thrived on a line with Artemi Panarin and Vincent Trocheck.

Teammates have hailed what Lafreniere has done, including his contemporaries.

Take Will Cuylle, who is in his first season as a regular after making his NHL debut last year, is four months younger than Lafreniere and was drafted in the second round in 2020.

Cuylle said he began watching the Rangers closely after he was drafted, no one more closely than his draft classmate.

"I think he's just progressed more and more every year and just keeps impressing us," said Cuylle, who scored his first playoff goal in Game 4. "Even as this season has gone on, from the start of the year to now, he's so much better, and you can see it on the ice, his confidence, making plays with the puck."

Cuylle said that even though Lafreniere still is young, "He kind of feels like, not a veteran, but he's been here quite a while and he just keeps getting better and better. It's fun to watch."

Defenseman K'Andre Miller, 24, also is in his fourth season in the league, and is another member of the generation the Rangers hope can sustain their current success.

"Ever since I got here, we've had a good mixture of young guys and older guys who have been through the league and know how to do things around here," Miller told Newsday before Game 5.

"Obviously, we lean on those big guys, the older guys, to kind of show us the way. I think our younger guys kind of just grab onto the rope and do the same thing. So it's been fun."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312527 New York Rangers

Rangers looking for MSG crowd as a Game 5 boost

By Colin Stephenson

Updated May 13, 2024 3:55 pm4-5 minutes 5/13/2024

GREENBURGH — The comparisons to 1994 have been all over the internet this spring, with the Rangers and Knicks once again turning The World's Most Famous Arena into the center of the North American sports universe.

And as they prepared to play Game 5 of their second-round playoff series Monday against the Carolina Hurricanes at Madison Square Garden, the Rangers were certainly hoping to have one more '94 comparison go their way.

The '94 Rangers won their first seven playoff games before finally losing in Game 4 of the second round. Then they beat Washington in Game 5 at the Garden to win that series and advance to the Eastern Conference final. The 2024 Rangers won their first seven playoff games before losing in Game 4 of the second round. They enter Game 5 hoping for a win over Carolina that would send them on to the Eastern Conference final.

"It's kind of funny seeing the stuff that's similar, but at the end of the day, it's a completely different year, and you try not to read into it too much,'' defenseman Braden Schneider said at the morning skate. "You can't jinx anything. It's obviously cool, but I think we're playing some of our best hockey, and it's funny how it works.''

As disappointed as they were to lose Game 4 in Raleigh, North Carolina, on Saturday night, the Rangers are looking at Game 5 as a chance to win the series on home ice, in front of their fans. And it is something they were relishing.

“It's a great opportunity,’’ said Mika Zibanejad, who leads the team in scoring with 13 points, and who has recorded a point in all eight of the Rangers’ playoff games entering Monday. “We went to Carolina, and they were two tough games, and [we] come out of there with a chance to win the series at home. We're focusing on just one win. That's all it is.’’

And all the Rangers viewed playing in the Garden as being a real advantage for them in trying to close out the series.

“I mean when you've got 18,008 diehard fans supporting you, it feels like you’ve got an army behind you,’’ Chris Kreider said. “I think you can imagine what that probably feels like, what that does to your energy levels and your adrenaline.’’

“Well, you get that juice from the building right away,’’ coach Peter Laviolette said. “They're even noticeable down in Carolina. They've been noticeable on the road in almost every city we go, our fan base. But to get back in our building and get that real energy from the fans is important. You get the last [line] change. I think that's important too, with regard to matchups or where you might want to go with it."

The last line change was something Laviolette was able to take advantage of in Games 1 and 2 of the series, but not in Games 3 and 4.

In Game 4, the Rangers’ best line of Artemi Panarin, Vincent Trocheck and Alexis Lafreniere had trouble with the Hurricanes’ top line of Jake Guentzel, Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov. In Game 2, Laviolette was able to make an in-game adjustment and match the Kreider-Zibanejad-Jake Roslovic line against that group, and that seemed to work well for the Rangers.

Blake Wheeler cleared for contact

Forward Blake Wheeler, who has been practicing with the team in a red, non-contact jersey after making his way back from a lower leg injury he’d suffered in February, took part in the morning skate in a regular white jersey, meaning he was cleared for full contact in practices.

“It's really good,’’ Laviolette said of Wheeler’s change in status. “That's a long road [back from injury] and it's sometimes a lonely road, too. We're going about our business, and he's off in a different room doing his thing at different times. … You saw his enthusiasm the other night there on the OT goal [when Wheeler excitedly banged on the outside of the glass, from down at ice level, after Panarin’s goal won Game 3], like he just wanted to back on the inside, and be a part of that. It's nice to have him out there and available and good to go.’’

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312528 New York Rangers

With Rangers struggling, Hurricanes are testing New York’s winning formula

Peter Baugh6-7 minutes 5/14/2024

NEW YORK — After multiple goals this postseason, Artemi Panarin has whipped his stick through the air like a baseball bat in celebration. Monday evening, he found himself making a similar motion, just for different reasons. After the Carolina Hurricanes’ Evgeny Kuznetsov beat Panarin for a rebound and sent the puck flying into the net for the go-ahead goal, the New York Rangers’ star smashed his stick into the glass in anger.

Kuznetsov’s goal stood as the game winner — a frustrating moment on a frustrating night for the Rangers, who lost 4-1 in Game 5. New York entered the third period with the lead after a Jacob Trouba short-handed tally, then proceeded to give up four unanswered goals. Suddenly, the Rangers’ 3-0 series lead is 3-2 with the series shifting back to Raleigh.

“They wanted it more in the third,” Vincent Trocheck said.

“There were a lot of issues tonight,” added a frustrated Peter Laviolette, who said the team’s issues went beyond the final period.

Throughout the season, New York has relied on an elite power play and five-on-five production from the line of Panarin, Trocheck and right wing Alexis Lafrenière. When that hasn’t been enough, goaltender Igor Shesterkin has often been there to bail out the team. That was enough for the Rangers to win the Presidents’ Trophy, set a franchise record for regular-season wins and jump out to a 7-0 start in the playoffs. Suddenly, though, Carolina is testing New York’s winning formula.

Panarin has no points and a minus-5 rating in two games since his overtime winner in Game 3. Trocheck hasn’t added to the scoresheet in that span either, and Lafrenière’s lone goal came on a shift with Chris Kreider and Mika Zibanejad.

The Rangers still had 59 percent of the expected goal share with the Panarin-Trocheck-Lafrenière line on the ice in Game 5, according to Natural Stat Trick, but Carolina led in scoring chances and high-danger chances in that span. One of the Hurricanes’ most dangerous chances, a Jake Guentzel breakaway saved by Shesterkin, happened with them on the ice.

“When you give them the puck, it’s not easy to cover them,” said Martin Necas, who played more than five minutes against the Panarin line in Game 5. “Once you keep the puck on your sticks, they’re not as good defensively. That’s how you’ve got to play against them, and that’s what we’re doing.”

Panarin’s skating did draw an apparent hooking penalty on Jalen Chatfield shortly before Kuznetsov’s goal, but the officials didn’t call it. Each team got three power plays, and New York’s unit looked far from as dominant as it was earlier in the series. On the Rangers’ first power play, which came after a Kuznetsov slash, Zibanejad got a solid look on a pass off the rush, but that was about it. The Hurricanes generated more chances in those two minutes, with Teuvo Teravainen getting a dangerous shot from the wing.

Carolina goaltender Frederik Andersen had to make only five saves in New York’s six minutes of power-play time.

“We’ve just got to execute better on our entries,” Trocheck said. “I don’t think they changed out much on their forecheck.”

The unit, which scored four power-play goals in the first two games of the series, now has gone eight tries without a goal.

“(The Hurricanes are) aggressive in what they do,” Laviolette said. “We’ve got to move things a little quicker.”

Carolina knows that to beat New York, it has to beat Shesterkin. The goalie was far from the Rangers’ biggest issue Monday — he saved more goals than expected, according to Natural Stat Trick — but the Rangers allowed too many dangerous chances in front of him, and Carolina eventually broke through. Jordan Staal got around Braden Schneider on Carolina’s first goal early in the third, and Panarin wasn’t in position to prevent Kuznetsov’s rebound goal. Then Trouba turned a puck over behind the net midway through the third, allowing Necas to feed Jordan Martinook in the slot.

New York didn’t put its goalie in position to steal the game, as he did in Game 2, and Carolina took advantage.

“Anytime you don’t play up to your capabilities, you get concerned about that,” Laviolette said. “But I also know that this group has had games like that before, and they’ve responded.”

The task will be harder in Carolina, where Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour will have control over the last change. He can select matchups and perhaps lean on his Guentzel–Sebastian Aho–Andrei Svechnikov line against Panarin’s trio.

Still, the Rangers are not in a position to panic. If they win one of their next two games, they’re on to the Eastern Conference final. Carolina adjusted when New York jumped to a series lead, and now it’s Laviolette’s and his players’ turn.

“At the beginning of the year, if you told me we’d be 3-2 against the second-best team in the league and (had) an opportunity to close it out, it’s a pretty good spot to be in,” Kreider said. “Just go down there and be better, be more detailed, work for each other and find a way to win a game.”

To do that, the Rangers will need to get back to what earned them the No. 1 overall seed — far from what they showed Monday night.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312529 New York Rangers

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

Lazerus: As adversity finally finds the Rangers, can they find their game?

Mark Lazerus7-9 minutes 5/14/2024

NEW YORK — Vincent Trocheck stood in Filip Chytil's vacant stall, his voice quiet, his responses brief. No, he didn't think things snowballed on the Rangers. No, he didn't think the Carolina Hurricanes are doing anything different on their penalty kill. No, he doesn't think being home or on the road makes much of a difference.

Just over his right shoulder, affixed to a narrow wall between stalls, was a wooden cutout of the Stanley Cup, with 16 puck-sized holes carved out, one for each victory it takes to win a championship, to achieve hockey immortality. There were seven pucks nestled in place, with nine empty slots remaining. The same amount there were after Game 4. The same amount there were after Game 3. The march to the Cup has come to a sudden standstill.

The New York Rangers were 20 minutes from the Eastern Conference final entering the third period of Monday night's Game 5. Ten minutes later, they were down 3-1, getting booed back to Raleigh by the Madison Square Garden faithful, eventually losing 4-1 to the resurgent, resurrected Hurricanes.

Now there were no histrionics in the Rangers dressing room afterward. No overturned tables, no fiery defiance, no wailing or gnashing of teeth or rending of garments. It was quiet and mostly empty, the comments from Trocheck, Jacob Trouba and Mika Zibanejad all calm and reasonable. A standard post-loss room.

How the Hurricanes rallied to force a Game 6 with the Rangers: 5 takeaways

But make no mistake: After obliterating the overmatched Washington Capitals and winning three straight nail-biters to open this second-round series, adversity has finally found the Rangers.

How will they respond?

"With our best," Trocheck said.

They'd better. Because they certainly didn't in Game 5.

New York's power play was disjointed and ineffective. The defense was flat-footed and outmuscled. The scorers were hesitant and pass-happy. At five-on-five, Carolina had 13 high-danger scoring chances to New York's five (only one of which came in the second or third periods). Igor Shesterkin was brilliant through two — when a Seth Jarvis pass on a power-play rush in the first minute of the third period bounced off Trouba and still somehow found Shesterkin's pad, you had to wonder if it was just his night — and when he's on, he can mask some of the Rangers' modest warts. But then Shesterkin got undressed by, of all people, Jordan Staal for the equalizer at 3:33 of the third, and was then beaten cleanly by Evgeny Kuznetsov and Jordan Martinook. In the biggest period of the season, the Rangers wilted, and were blown away by the Hurricanes.

Peter Laviolette said that's not his Rangers, that it wasn't "a reflection of who we were for the majority of the year." He's right, of course. New York won the Presidents' Trophy as the league's best team in the regular season. But the fact that these lesser Rangers — these off-brand Rangers, this shadow of the Rangers — showed up in a playoff game? In a closeout game? At the Garden?

It's a concern. And Laviolette wasn't pretending otherwise.

"Any time you don't play up to your capabilities, you get concerned about that, yeah," Laviolette said. "But I also know this group has had games like that before and they responded. There's accountability that goes with that from them."

Momentum in hockey is a funny thing. It absolutely exists within a game — a big save or a big kill or a big hit can completely reverse the energy between two teams. Staal's shockingly beautiful move at the net, using every bit of his 6-4 frame to nudge a backhander around Shesterkin, was proof. Just like that, the Rangers fell apart. And just like that, the Hurricanes took over.

But any NHLer will tell you that momentum does not, in fact, exist from game to game. Whether you won the previous game in a laugher or lost it in double-overtime has absolutely no bearing on the next game. By the time the puck drops for the opening faceoff, whatever happened in the previous game or games is ancient history, irrelevant. Professional athletes don't get to this level by stewing on the past, by freaking out about a loss, by panicking. They live in the present. They move on. With an extra day off until Thursday's Game 6 in Raleigh, Game 5 will be a distant memory. The Rangers might cruise to an anticlimactic win in Game 6, or the Hurricanes might force a fateful Game 7 back at the Garden. What happened Monday night won't be the reason, either way.

But hope is a funny thing, too. It grows like a weed, spreads like a virus. And you could see that in the visitors dressing room following Monday's morning skate.

"There's life, right?" Hurricanes defenseman Jaccob Slavin said. "Your backs are against the wall down 3-0, and you're doing whatever you can to stay alive. Now you've got a little bit of life in you. But you've still got to do whatever you can to stay alive. So it's the same mindset — desperation, leaving everything out there, because tomorrow isn't guaranteed."

The Rangers could stand to find a little of that desperation — desperation to put away the pesky Hurricanes, desperation to avoid a winner-take-all Game 7. They sure didn't seem to have any of it in Game 5. Both teams looked a little tense, a little nervous for most of the game. But Staal's goal seemed to pull the release valve on the Hurricanes, who seized the moment and the in-game momentum. Shesterkin has a way of demoralizing opponents, and watching Staal beat him in such grand fashion seemed to give the Hurricanes a little more of that life, a little more of that belief. They went on the attack, and the Rangers were helpless to respond.

"When you're going into the third period, you realize it could be the last period of this year," Kuznetsov said. "You don't want to have that feeling. I'm so grateful that we were able to come back and win the game."

The Rangers are right not to despair, of course. They're still up 3-2 in the series. They're still in the more enviable position, by far. They were the best team in the league all season, and had been the best team in the playoffs until now. And for them, tomorrow is guaranteed. As Trouba said after the game, the Rangers earned themselves "a couple cracks at it" by going up 3-0, like a golfer who only needs to three-putt on the 18th green in order to win a tournament. You miss that first putt, and you're not sweating it. But come up a few feet short on that second putt, and all of a sudden you're feeling the pressure. Now, the next one isn't exactly a must, but you sure as hell don't want to miss it and give your opponent new life.

That's Game 6 for the Rangers — a real knee-knocker, a test of skill, of character, of fortitude.

Don't leave it short.

"I don't think we thought this was going to be a cakewalk," Trouba said. "We lost two, face a little adversity. We'll see what we're made of going down to Carolina for Game 6."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312530 New York Rangers

How the Hurricanes rallied to force a Game 6 with the Rangers: 5 takeaways

Arthur Staple6-7 minutes 5/14/2024

NEW YORK — The Rangers aren't making this easy on themselves.

Evgeny Kuznetsov's rebound goal at 6:39 of the third period was part of a four-goal outburst in the final frame. Carolina's 4-1 win sent this second-round series back to Raleigh for Thursday's Game 6.

Jacob Trouba's shorthanded goal in the second period was the lone goal in an evenly played first 40 minutes and the Rangers killed off an early Carolina third-period power play to put the finish line of the series within

sight. But Jordan Staal, Carolina's captain, made a move around Braden Schneider and then another one around Igor Shesterkin to tie the game 3:33 into the third.

On the eventual winner, Brady Skjei let loose a big drive that Shesterkin turned aside. But Kuznetsov beat Artemi Panarin to the rebound for his second goal in as many games to give Carolina the lead. Jordan Martinook added another at 9:56 and the Canes left the Garden crowd stunned, hoping to return here for what would be an improbable Game 7 on Saturday.

Canes plumbers come to play again

It wasn't Carolina's big-name guys but instead a collection of wily old vets who helped the Canes stay alive. Staal, playing in his 141st career playoff game, made the play on the first Carolina goal, driving the net for a nice move around Shesterkin when his Hurricanes had been going side to side and looking for space most of the night.

And Kuznetsov, firmly entrenched as the fourth-line center this postseason, came up with another big goal as he did in opening the Game 4 scoring. It's no coincidence that Staal and Kuznetsov are the only two Canes players with Stanley Cup rings.

Martinook, who had a huge goal in Carolina's comeback to beat the Islanders in Game 2, then sealed it.

Jacob Trouba rebounds

Trouba had what you could generously describe as a tough Game 4 when he was on for all four Carolina goals and got caught roaming the neutral zone before Sebastian Aho's goal made it 3-1 late in the first period on Saturday.

But the Rangers didn't name him captain before last season for nothing. In a Game 5 that required more defensive-zone fortitude than offensive flair, Trouba was much steadier. He even found time to throw a big open-ice hit in the opening period, knocking down Jack Drury to roars from the Garden crowd.

But the real roars came in the second on Carolina's first power play of the game. He blocked an Aho one-timer at the top of the right circle, chipped it around Aho after the Canes center slipped and started a two-on-one with Barclay Goodrow. Brady Skjei played the pass and Seth Jarvis raced back, but Trouba still snapped one low past Andersen's right pad for the Rangers' second shorthanded goal of the series and fourth in nine playoff games.

It was also just the second goal by a Rangers defenseman in the postseason — and they've both come shorthanded, with K'Andre Miller's shorty coming in Game 2 against the Caps.

A rare collapse

The Rangers were 34-3-2 when leading after two periods in the regular season. But strange things happen in the pressure of the playoffs, especially with the opponent facing elimination.

The Rangers had done a lot of good things to thwart Carolina through 40 minutes, including 21 shot blocks and making sure they had a forward covering the weak side whenever the Canes threw a puck on Shesterkin. That's a staple of Carolina's offense.

But the one time the Canes beat the Rangers to a weak-side rebound it cost them. Panarin didn't have position on Kuznetsov and the game turned.

Heading back to Raleigh for Thursday's Game 6 signifies a potentially bigger collapse, of course.

Special teams

The Rangers' shorthanded goal was the only special-teams marker of Game 5 and it seemed to be a good omen, given that Carolina's power play dropped to 1-for-20 for the series. But it was the Rangers' 0-for-3 night on the power play that also stood out — the Rangers had five shots on Freddie Andersen on their three opportunities but nothing terribly dangerous.

With some special-teams momentum on the PK the last two games, Carolina might be starting to feel itself a little bit. That can counteract whatever power-play failures Carolina has had so far.

Filip Chytil skates, Matt Rempe plays

There was some good news on Monday morning in the form of Filip Chytil being back on the ice with his teammates at the Rangers morning skate. He skated without restrictions after missing Game 4 with what the Rangers termed an illness but he stayed on the ice at the team's practice facility for extra work, essentially ruling him out for Game 5.

It was still encouraging given Chytil's concussion history and worries that his return to action in Game 3 might have produced some delayed symptoms that arose the next morning.

Jonny Brodzinski got most of the morning reps with Jimmy Vesey and Goodrow in the spot Brodzinski played in Game 4, but it was fan favorite Matt Rempe who got the call on Monday, eliciting cheers from the Garden crowd every time he stepped on the ice. Which, as expected, was rarely, but Rempe acquitted himself well once again in Game 5.

Blake Wheeler also shed his no-contact red sweater for the first time as a full participant on Monday morning.

"Everybody was out there for practice," Peter Laviolette said. "That's a real positive thing."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312531 New York Rangers

NHL Playoffs expert picks: Avs look to rediscover offense vs. Stars, Rangers look to close out Canes

Andrew DeWitt4-5 minutes 5/13/2024

The Colorado Avalanche looked frustrated Saturday night. The Stars held a 2-1 advantage going into the third period in a game where Colorado dominated time in the offensive zone and shot attempts. Colorado led in shots 23-12, and it felt like they carried play throughout most of the night except for those two late goals in each period.

But Dallas turned Saturday's game into a mud pit, clogging up the middle of the ice and frustrating the high-flying Avalanche. Dallas eventually scored two empty-net goals to make the 4-1 margin make the game look less competitive than it actually was. Saturday's third period was the first time this postseason that Colorado didn't score a third-period goal.

The loss leaves the Avalanche with a pile of questions. Sure, they won the 2022 Stanley Cup and still have one of the most talented rosters left in the Stanley Cup Playoffs. But they've exited in the first or second round in five of the past six seasons.

Avs-Stars is scheduled for 9:30 p.m. ET Monday.

First up, the New York Rangers will look to close out the Carolina Hurricanes at home. More on that game below.

Odds are from BetMGM and update live. Buy tickets to see your favorite team on StubHub.

Carolina Hurricanes at New York Rangers — Game 5

How to WATCH: 7 p.m. ET on ESPN

Rangers lead series 3-1

Series odds:

Carolina battled back with a 4-3 win in Game 4 on home ice to extend this series to at least five games. Despite playing on the road at Madison Square Garden, the Hurricanes are a small favorite in this game.

This series has been closer than the score indicates. One can even argue that Carolina has been a little unlucky in this series to be down 3-1. Using MoneyPuck's deserve-to-win meter, Carolina has an expected win percentage of 56.7 percent in Game 1, 66.2 percent in Game 3, and 67.3 percent in Game 4. Only in Game 2 did the Rangers have a better-expected outcome than Carolina.

Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin has allowed only 19 goals in eight games so far in the 2024 Stanley Cup Playoffs. He's currently the favorite to win the Conn Smythe Trophy for playoffs MVP.

Jake Guentzel, Stefan Noesen and Seth Jarvis lead the Hurricanes with four goals apiece in the playoffs. Sebastian Aho leads the team with seven assists and 10 points.

The Athletic's Mark Lazerus pointed out that the roles flipped in Game 4 for both of these teams. The doubts started to creep in for the Rangers, and the Hurricanes have a little belief that maybe they can come back from a 3-0 deficit in the series.

Dallas Stars at Colorado Avalanche — Game 4

How to WATCH: 9:30 p.m. ET on ESPN

Stars lead 2-1

Series odds: Avalanche -115, Stars -105

Colorado had the NHL's best home record (31-9-1) during the regular season, and Saturday's loss in Game 3 at home was their first loss at Ball Arena during these playoffs. The Stars were the NHL's best road team (26-10-5). Dallas is 3-1 during these playoffs on the road.

Colorado forward Valeri Nichushkin had his seven-game goal streak snapped in Saturday's 4-1 loss. He tied for an NHL record with goals in seven straight games to start the playoffs, a record he now holds with Buffalo's Pat LaFontaine from 1992.

Stars goalie Jake Oettinger had his best performance of the second round in Game 3 after posting a stellar first round against Vegas. He made 28 saves, including several key stops on power plays, to help the Stars take the 2-1 series lead.

Dallas forward Logan Stankoven opened up the scoring for Dallas and also scored an empty-net goal. The two goals were first and second career playoff goals in his 10th playoff game. He only scored six goals in 24 regular-season games this year.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312532 New York Rangers

10 New York Rangers road trip observations: Panarin line struggles in Game 4, special teams battle

Peter Baugh8-11 minutes 5/13/2024

RALEIGH, N.C. — After the celebratory mob dispersed following Artemi Panarin's Game 3 overtime winner, several of the New York Rangers, including Chris Kreider and K'Andre Miller, sprinted off the ice, shouting with glee. They looked as if they were fifth graders leaving for school summer break, not hockey players who had just gone through a grueling game that lasted nearly 62 minutes.

Two nights later, the Rangers trudged through the same tunnel, heads down. There wasn't jump in the players' steps or smiles on their faces. They had missed a chance to close out the series, losing 4-3 in Game 4 after a late goal by Brady Skjei, an ex-New York defenseman.

The emotional swings of a playoff series are stark, and the Rangers experienced both ends of the spectrum in Raleigh. In total, a split was a solid outcome for New York, even if the trip south ended on a sour note. The Rangers lead the series 3-1 and play Monday at home with another chance to win the series.

"You always want to close it out as fast as you can," captain Jacob Trouba said. "Going back home we're going to have a pretty rambunctious crowd, but it's going to be a fun game to play. Obviously attention goes to Game 5."

First, let's look back. Here are 10 observations from the road portion of the Rangers series.

1. The PNC Arena atmosphere was excellent. The Carolina Hurricanes' crowd was loud and engaged throughout the two games there, but there were enough Rangers supporters to make a dent in its noise, which led to a fun dynamic. At times the fan bases had interacting chants trying to one-up each other. For example, when New York fans chanted Igor Shesterkin's first name, the Carolina crowd interjected "sucks!" in the pauses.

The arena was deafening whenever the Hurricanes scored a big goal. It's hard to say which goal got the bigger roar: Andrei Svechnikov's game-tying goal in Game 3 or Skjei's go-ahead tally in Game 4.

2. All four games have gone to the team that won the special teams battle. The Hurricanes had failed to score on their first 16 power plays — perhaps the main reason the Rangers are up in the series — but Skjei finally broke the Rangers' penalty-killing streak late in the third period of Game 4. His slap shot from the point got through traffic and beat Shesterkin.

The goal doesn't change how effective the Rangers penalty kill has been. It was a well-executed play by Carolina, and it came at a bad time for New York.

"He hammered it," Laviolette said. "It had eyes. It was a top-corner shot."

Added Trouba: "I don't think (it was) necessarily a massive breakdown by the PK. Just a good shot sometimes. Tip your cap."

3. After giving the Rangers 11 combined power plays in Games 2 and 3, the Hurricanes mostly stayed out of the box Sunday. Carolina didn't give the Rangers a single power play after Jordan Staal tripped Mika Zibanejad in the first period. Vincent Trocheck and Brent Burns got matching roughing minors late in the second, so there was four-on-four play for two minutes, but neither team had another power play until Ryan Lindgren tripped Jordan Martinook in the third.

"The whole series we've been trying to limit penalties knowing their power play is what it is," Skjei said. "Throughout the series, we've wanted to try to play whistle to whistle. That's definitely been a focus of ours this series and going forward."

4. Though Alexis Lafrenière had a strong night, scoring his fourth goal of the playoffs, the Rangers' second line (Artemi Panarin-Vincent Trocheck-Lafrenière) struggled as a whole. Many of their minutes at five-on-five came against the Hurricanes' top line (Jake Guentzel-Sebastian Aho-Andrei Svechnikov) and those did not go well. Panarin finished with a minus-3 rating, and Trocheck was minus-2. Lafrenière's goal didn't come with either Panarin or Trocheck on the ice; he was taking a shift with Zibanejad and Chris Kreider when he bounced a puck off Frederik Andersen and in.

The Rangers often trade scoring chances with the Panarin line on the ice, and that's generally not a bad formula given how dangerous all three players are offensively. But as Laviolette said after Game 4, the Rangers allowed "pretty noisy" chances in the first period. The Panarin-Trocheck-Lafrenière trio was on for many of them. In 9:39 of five-on-five ice time together in Game 4, the three got outshot 6-2 and had only 23.98 percent of the expected goal share, according to Natural Stat Trick.

"We could've been a little bit tighter with what we're doing, whether it was puck decisions or the coverage a little quicker to close," Laviolette said. "There were looks going both ways. We just didn't capitalize on as many as they did."

Fortunately for the Rangers' coach, he will have last change when the series shifts back to New York. He can have more control over matchups for Panarin-Trocheck-Lafrenière and can perhaps avoid having them on the ice as much against Aho's line.

5. Arthur Staple delved into how the Erik Gustafsson-Trouba pair struggled in his postgame takeaways, and the numbers back that up. Carolina had more than twice the shot attempts as the Rangers with them on the ice, per Natural Stat Trick.

Despite a trying night, Trouba almost made a big offensive play with the game tied in the third. He cut to the net, and Kaapo Kakko wired him a backdoor pass. Unfortunately for the Rangers, Andersen halted the defenseman's shot.

6. Speaking of Kakko, Game 4 was perhaps his best game of the series. He made a pinpoint pass to assist Will Cuylle's first career playoff goal and set Alex Wennberg up on a two-on-one look. The center's shot hit the post.

The Cuylle-Wennberg-Kakko line did a good job controlling possession, as it has most of the postseason. The group finally got rewarded with Cuylle's goal.

7. Wennberg has been a strong deadline addition, even if he hasn't brought much offensive production. He stabilized the third-line center position upon arrival, and the Rangers' center depth has been a strength in the postseason.

"For me to come into a team like this, they asked me to do this role, and it fits like a glove," Wennberg said. "Right away it felt like a good fit."

8. Emotions have carried over between plays throughout the series. Trocheck, who was on the Hurricanes from 2020-22, took a cross-check from Aho in Game 3, then celebrated in his former teammate's face when Lafrenière scored moments later. Aho didn't say much when asked about the sequence the next day.

"It's hockey," he said.

Earlier that game, a scrum broke out by Carolina's net after Barclay Goodrow tried to poke a puck away from Pyotr Kochetkov and skated to the edge of his crease. The play resulted in Jimmy Vesey and Dmitry Orlov getting matching roughing penalties and Goodrow and Jesperi Kotkaniemi each earning unsportsmanlike penalties.

"That's playoffs," said Kotkaniemi, who looked ready to drop the gloves with Vesey before the officials split them up. "Both teams really want to win. That's the reason why everything happens."

Aside from Burns' and Trocheck's matching roughing minors, Game 4 was far more subdued in terms of after-the-whistle activity.

9. Laviolette spoke with NHL.com's Dan Rosen before the team left Raleigh and said Filip Chytil (illness) is feeling better. The team hopes he can be an option for Game 5.

The Rangers have not clarified whether Chytil's illness is related to his previous concussion issues. The forward's long-term health needs to be the priority in this situation; the team should be wary of taking any risks.

10. Evgeni Kuznetsov set the scene for Game 5 well while meeting with Carolina media before leaving for New York.

"One bowl of food and two dogs competing with each other," he said via Pat Welter of WRAL. "They know it'll be hell to come back here. We want to put the pressure on them."

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The Athletic / Why Berkly Catton's skating and work ethic make him one of the 2024 NHL Draft's best

Why Berkly Catton's skating and work ethic make him one of the 2024 NHL Draft's best

By Scott Wheeler

Jordan Trach has "had some good groups" work with him through Trach Power Skating in Saskatoon over the years.

His NHL clients have included names like Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Brayden Schenn, Ethan Bear, Jake DeBrusk, Braden Schneider and Connor Zary. He's got others, like Brayden Yager, Riley Heidt, Tanner Howe and Roger McQueen, on NHL paths.

And yet everyone from the area is always amazed at just how much one of his clients stands out above the rest.

That client is Berkly Catton.

Despite his 5-foot-10 and 170-pound list, Catton is a potential top-10 pick in the 2024 NHL Draft — and, uncommonly for a player that size, a center. NHL Central Scouting has him No. 8 on their list of North American skaters eligible for the draft. He was the No. 1 pick in the 2021 WHL Bantam Draft and has lived up to that billing.

At 16, he captained Canada Red to silver at the World Under-17 Hockey Challenge and was named to the tournament all-star team with 12 points in seven games.

At 17, he played as an underager at U18 worlds and captained Canada to Hlinka gold, leading the tournament in goals (8) and points (10) in five games.

This season, he wore the 'C' for a third time in his age group at the CHL/NHL Top Prospects Game and finished fourth in the WHL in points with 116 and third in goals with 54.

The skating has been at the center of all of that.

"His acceleration from slow speeds to high speeds is extremely good," Trach said on a recent phone call. "I think his top end is very good but his acceleration is another level. And I'm not saying from a dead stop to going, I'm saying from a gliding speed to a sprint. It's exceptional. And his ability to gain speed in tight areas 3-4 feet from the boards, spin out, and take a guy's hip and be gone, is also exceptional. He's shifty, he's able to turn in very tight areas and escape out of tough situations, but then secondly where he really pulls himself away is that pull-away speed, those first few steps coming out of movements."

Ask Trach when he began working with Catton and he laughs. It's been a long time. He guesses he was 7 or 8 years old.

He was also "a natural right off the start."

"He was always a smaller guy and his skating and his speed was always his strongest suit," Trach said. "It made working with him great because even at a young age you were able to start working on much more advanced things and the little parts of his skating as opposed to literally learning how to skate properly first."

Stefan Legein, his associate coach with Spokane this season, calls him an "incredible skater" not just without the puck but especially with it, which he says is even more important.

"He's got good separation speed but the edge work that he displays when he has the puck, he can really toy with guys and get them to come out of defensive zone coverage and get them to open up spots for his teammates or for himself to attack," Legein said. "It's really impressive to watch him move around the ice. He's able to build speed when he has the puck. He's able to change speeds and get on his outside edges and just really make guys do what he wants them to do with his feet."

Blaine Whyte, who founded Pro Sport Rehab and Fitness in Saskatoon and has trained Catton for a few years now, says the skating connects back to his athleticism.

In a group in the gym that also includes McQueen, Heidt and Yager, as well as Kevin Korchinski, he stands out in that way as well.

"He's fairly naturally powerful as a kid. His strength base just needs to increase, especially his leg strength and getting bigger through his legs will be important for him because that drives power. He's a very athletic kid, no question."

But there's another element, to Whyte, that stands out even above and beyond his speed and athleticism.

"He's one of those guys who just has this drive in him that's pretty unique," Whyte said, chuckling as if it were an understatement. "He's fairly small in stature but what he lacks in stature he makes up for in compete I think honestly. He's a very driven kid. And he's quick, for sure. But what stands out is how competitive he really is on and off the ice. He always wants to be lifting more and going harder than even he should be but that's just the way he is."

He saw that firsthand a few years ago when Catton was dealing with a "really significant" injury.

"He had a pretty major injury but he was just battling through it because that's just the way that he is. I think he has learned to step back a little when you need to. You definitely have to encourage him to rest," Whyte said. "But that's just the kind of drive that he has. He has had to figure out what's best for him. He has definitely had to deal with some stuff which is unfortunate but also a good thing at a young age because you've got to figure out how to deal with it."

Trach calls him an "amazing kid" who is driven by an "exceptional work ethic."

“I’ve never seen him cut anyone down to put himself ahead, he’s just willing to work harder than the next person to try to put himself ahead,” Trach said. “He has been salt of the earth to work with.”

But he’s also just “very, very serious.” Almost obsessively so. He’s the player who, when Trach is working with someone else, is at the back of the line in his own little space working on whatever he thinks he didn’t do well in the previous drill.

“When he’s on the ice he has always been game face even since he was a little kid. He always wants more. He’s never, ever satisfied. I heard a quote about how (Sidney) Crosby plays like there’s a league above the NHL that he wants to play in and that just seems to be what Berk is always doing,” Trach said. “He doesn’t have time to horse around. Every time that he’s on the ice is valuable time to get better. He does not want anyone to be better than him.”

This season was Legein’s first coaching him and he’s already prepared to call him a “special kid.” Legein, who ran Spokane’s power play this season, could see it in the way he saw the game.

Legein says he’s not your typical 17- or 18-year-old in that “there’s nothing that’s really a knock on him in any way.”

Good teammate? Check. Easy to talk to? Check. Hard on himself without ever putting that on anybody else? Check.

He just does everything the right way, according to Legein.

And that’s without getting into the actual on-ice talent of it all. Trach believes the rookie success had by Zach Benson, another “smaller, shifty guy” has helped his draft stock this year.

NHL Central Scouting describes his game as follows: “A highly intelligent player that generates a lot of scoring chances and leads his team in scoring. Has excellent vision to go along with his high-end skill set. NHL skater with an explosive first step that allows him to evade checking and pull away from defenders. Plays an up-tempo game and is very clever at controlling the pace of the play while creating time and space to make plays. Can contribute in all three zones with his smarts and awareness. More of a play maker than a scorer, but he has a good release and accurate shot to beat goalies.”

There were nights this season, Legein said, where he couldn’t help but sit back and enjoy the show.

He points to one weekend set against the top-ranked Prince George Cougars as one of the best examples. The Chiefs took three of four points, Catton played almost 30 minutes in both games, and he was the best player on the ice by a wide margin.

“The skills he has to execute what he sees, it’s pretty incredible. You don’t get the fortune of coaching too many kids like him in junior,” Legein said. “He’s dynamic enough to be a top-five (pick), he’s just a little small. He’s something to watch. He’s an elite player — like, elite player.”

Despite his size, Legein is also a big believer in Catton’s ability to stick at center in the NHL.

For starters, he won 53.4 percent of the 1,355 faceoffs he took this season, winning the seventh-most draws in the league.

“That’s just his compete level to just want the puck,” Legein said of his proficiency on draws. “He wants it bad and he knows he can get it off the draw so he really digs in. And that’s against 19-to-20-year-old first-line centers. He doesn’t get many shifts against guys who aren’t at the top of the league.”

But it starts with his skating and the way it opens up as a centerman, his ability to “use both sides of the rink and distribute and build speed.”

“He enamours you when he catches a puck low in the D-zone. And then to watch him come up the middle of the ice, it’s hard to say ‘let’s box him in by putting him up against the wall,’” Legein said. “His lateral mobility, his peripheral vision is incredible, so he can really draw defenders in, even when he’s in the neutral zone, when he’s in the middle of the ice. You start pairing him with some wingers who have some speed and power and can really shoot the puck and you’re probably going to get 8-10 chances a game with the way that he draws guys into him and can skate with it.”

Though his play away from the puck “still needs to come,” it is coming.

“There’s really not one guy who is as gifted as Berkly offensively and has the puck as much as he does who doesn’t need to work on his play away from the puck. But he’s committed to it, he wants to get better,” Legein said. “And he has tough matchups every night where there’s a lot going on for him down low. But he’s working hard at it and he’ll get better, and he’s continuing to get better because that’s just the kind of kid he is. He works on his deficiencies, he doesn’t just fall back on what he’s good at. People said he needed to work on his shot and he doubled down by having 54 goals this year. I trust that he’s going to do everything he needs to, to become the kind of player he wants to be.”

Some of that progress could be seen on Spokane’s penalty kill this year. Catton led the WHL with seven short-handed goals this past season.

“He’s playing in the future a little bit because he’s so cerebral. And then his stride, he breaks away from a guy and it’s game over,” Legein said.

Earlier this year, shortly after coming off the ice at the Avenir Centre where he’d just completed the CHL/NHL Top Prospects Game’s testing, Catton was grumbling about an edge on one of his blades that was bugging him.

He’d finished 16th among the 35 skaters tested — a group of the top prospects eligible for the draft — and top 10 in three of the 10 tests (third in transition agility, sixth in weave agility with a puck, and ninth in transition agility with a puck) but he called his results “not great.”

He expected more of himself. A lot more. To be the best at it.

“I’m kind of making excuses but it’s testing, it’s not a real game,” he said.

The twists and turns, he said, are supposed to be his bread and butter. He has honed them with Trach, and says he practically lives on the backyard rink his dad, Christopher, a teacher, builds in the winter (his mom Desrae is also a teacher and he wears No. 27 for her birthday). Growing up, his dad used to set up little courses for him to practice his turning and stopping. They were always out there.

He’s got the genes, too (his mom’s cousin is former longtime NHLer Cory Sarich). The oldest of three with two younger sisters, athletics runs in the family, with his youngest sister, 10, big into hockey and his other sister, a year younger than him, big into volleyball. When he’s not playing hockey, he’s playing wiffle ball, golf or basketball.

But he has worked and worked on his skating and he always expects it to be there for him.

He describes himself as smart, competitive, elusive, detailed and focused. When NHL scouts have asked him for a player he models his game after, he has used Jack Hughes: “He’s not the biggest guy but he plays with so much speed and he’s always pushing the pace and he’s a true competitor.”

The skating isn’t all that he is, though, either.

As the son of two teachers, school has always been a priority for him — and still is. “It’s always been get your school done and then hockey. That’s the way I was brought up,” he said.

When he was younger, he considered the NCAA path for that reason before eventually being pulled to Spokane.

Ask him for his scouting report and he says he’s more than meets the eye as a player.

“I think I’m also strong on the puck for my size and I don’t really lose many puck battles so I think that’s probably one of my stronger areas as well,” Catton said. “The defensive side has been something I’ve been wanting to work on. I think I’m becoming more of a 200-foot player but I think it’s just finding ways to get the puck more through the neutral zone and down low — just putting myself in a little better spots sometimes because I think when I do have the puck, I’m a really dangerous player.”

But he can’t help but come back to his skating, either.

“I find myself not getting pinned a lot just because of my agility,” he said, chuckling when reminded he’d just brought up his skating.

With reporting in Moncton, N.B.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2024

The Athletic / 2024 NHL Mock Draft: Levshunov to Blackhawks, Dickinson to Blue Jackets? How Round 1 will shake out

Corey Pronman

May 14, 2024

It is NHL Draft season right now, and our readers should prepare for all kinds of big boards, mock drafts and debates in the coming weeks ahead of the 2024 NHL Draft.

Today I give my first projection for the first round. At this stage, many teams have not had their amateur meetings and don't even have a list formed, so there isn't great intel out there on who may take who. Thus for this mock, it's more about giving our readers an idea of the range I think prospects are going to go in and trying to find fits for needs and team philosophies.

1. San Jose Sharks: Macklin Celebrini, C, Boston University-Hockey East

Celebrini is the consensus No. 1 pick. The Sharks GM has basically said that's who they're taking. We can move on.

2. Chicago Blackhawks: Artyom Levshunov, RHD, Michigan State-Big Ten

Our colleague Scott Powers believes it's down to Levshunov or SKA winger Ivan Demidov for Chicago. Both are great prospects, but history has shown if it's close the NHL team often will lean to the big defenseman over the smaller winger.

3. Anaheim Ducks: Anton Silayev, LHD, Torpedo-KHL

Anaheim is sitting in a great position because of how talented their group of young forwards are and the collection of high-end defense prospects at the top of this draft. Whether it's Levshunov, Silayev or Sam Dickinson, the Ducks are in a great spot to leave with a big, mobile defenseman. Silayev as a huge and mean defender fits in very well with the kind of team GM Pat Verbeek wants to build. The league thinks if they go forward it would be for Cayden Lindstrom.

4. Columbus Blue Jackets: Sam Dickinson, LHD, London-OHL

The Blue Jackets could go in a few different directions. They've added forwards and defensemen high in the draft in recent years although if I had to pick a need for them it would be more defensive depth. Silayev or Dickinson feel like ideal adds for them for that reason based on need and best player available. They're not in such a bind on defense though that this pick could easily be Ivan Demidov or Cayden Lindstrom up front.

5. Montreal Canadiens: Ivan Demidov, LW, SKA-KHL

The draft breaking this way would be ideal for the Canadiens, who many in the league believe want to add a forward in this draft. They would have their pick of Demidov, Cayden Lindstrom, Beckett Sennecke and others. Demidov is considered the second-best forward in the draft by many and would fit a need for the Habs.

6. NHL Utah: Cayden Lindstrom, C, Medicine Hat-WHL

Utah has targeted premium athletes in recent drafts and Lindstrom fits that profile in spades. He's huge, fast and highly physical while being able to provide some offense. Lindstrom or Dickinson fits their profile.

7. Ottawa Senators: Zayne Parekh, RHD, Saginaw-OHL

The Senators have a massive need to add a premium puck-mover and if the draft goes like this they would have their pick between Parekh and Zeev Buium. Parekh could have a lot of success next to someone like Jake Sanderson for the next decade.

8. Seattle Kraken: Zeev Buium, LHD, Denver-NCHC

The Kraken are in a similar position to Ottawa where in an ideal world, they would add a defenseman and they could be in a prime position to do so. Buium or Parekh would make a lot of sense for their organization and add a lot of skill to their team.

9. Calgary Flames: Konsta Helenius, C, Jukurit-Liiga

The Flames have drafted a lot of wingers high in recent years so any center or defenseman would be ideal for their pick. It's tempting to slot in Tij Iginla here for obvious reasons, but they really need someone like Helenius, Carter Yakemchuk or Buium/Parekh in their organization.

10. New Jersey Devils: Beckett Sennecke, RW, Oshawa-OHL

Sennecke is a fast riser right now in the draft after a great OHL playoff. He's 6-2, can skate and is one of the most skilled players in the class. Some in the league think he has a chance to go higher than where I have him currently slotted. New Jersey has a ton of young talent at center and defense so they can afford to take a super talented winger, especially one who has some size.

11. Buffalo Sabres: Berkly Catton, C, Spokane-WHL

I feel a little off projecting another small forward being picked by the Sabres this high, but they've shown no hesitancy to draft smaller players, especially when they are super talented. Catton has every tool except size. I could see Helenius or Iginla as an option here as well.

12. Philadelphia Flyers: Carter Yakemchuk, RHD, Calgary-WHL

Yakemchuk has a wide range of opinions within teams, some have him as their No. 1 defenseman, some as their 6th or 7th ranked blueliner. That said the big-time skill and upside fit the profile Philadelphia would be likely to target. Catton and Iginla make a lot of sense here as well.

13. Minnesota Wild: Tij Iginla, LW, Kelowna-WHL

Iginla is a riser within teams so I could see him be long gone by 13. If he is here he checks the skill and compete boxes Bill Guerin would be looking for. Michael Brandsegg Nygard or Adam Jiricek make sense for the Wild as well.

14. San Jose Sharks: Adam Jiricek, RHD, Plzen-Czechia

This would be an ideal scenario for the Sharks to walk away with a potential top-four defenseman in Jiricek to go with Celebrini given how badly their system needs top blue-line prospects.

15. Detroit Red Wings: Michael Brandsegg-Nygard, RW, Mora-Allsvenskan

When I think Detroit, I think compete types and Brandsegg Nygard has that in spades. Jett Luchanko, Cole Beaudoin and Igor Chernyshov also fit here with Detroit feeling like a floor for Iginla.

16. St. Louis Blues: Stian Solberg, LHD, Valerenga-Norway

Solberg had a great playoff and opening to his World Championships for Norway. He ticks a lot of boxes NHL teams seek in his size, mobility and physicality and his offensive game has developed. He's the kind of defenseman the Blues would like to target and need in their pipeline.

17. Washington Capitals: Cole Eiserman, LW, U.S. NTDP-USHL

Eiserman has been a point of debate all season but I still expect him to be a top-20 pick. Ideally, the Capitals would add a center or defenseman here but Eiserman's offense would be too much to pass up at No. 17.

18. New York Islanders: Jett Luchanko, C, Guelph-OHL

Luchanko's stock has been going sharply upward in the second half of the season into a likely mid-first due to his speed, compete and playmaking. He gives some needed center depth to the Islanders system.

19. Vegas Golden Knights: Trevor Connelly, LW, Tri-City-USHL

Connelly's eventual landing spot will be one of the most interesting parts of draft weekend. Vegas is one of the spots some speculate he could land at because they are not afraid to take risks or take on bad PR.

20. Chicago Blackhawks: Igor Chernyshov, RW, Dynamo Moscow-KHL

Teams have Chernyshov rated a bit higher than this on talent but because he is Russian, I could see him get to around the 20 spot. His size, speed, skill and compete could be highly intriguing to Chicago.

21. Los Angeles Kings: Liam Greentree, LW, Windsor-OHL

Greentree's stock was rising all season and then went in the other direction following a so-so U18 worlds. He's still a big winger with a ton of

skill and he'll likely go in the 20s even though scouts have concerns about the pace of his game.

22. Nashville Predators: Dominik Badinka, RHD, Malmo-SHL

Badinka impressed scouts with his second-half play in Sweden. He's a big, mobile right-shot who showed enough puck play versus men to make you think he can make passes in the NHL. He would provide a big boost to Nashville's system which is light on defensemen.

23. Toronto Maple Leafs: Yegor Surin, C, Yaroslavl-MHL

Surin had a big postseason in Russia and I think has played his way into the first round due to being a hyper-competitive forward who can score as well. He fits what Toronto has looked for in recent drafts.

24. Anaheim Ducks: Charlie Elick, RHD, Brandon-WHL

I presume the Ducks will want to continue to get bigger and heavier, and adding a punishing defender like Elick at No. 24 to go with Silayev at No. 3 would make their future blue line a lot harder to play against. EJ Emery makes a lot of sense here for similar reasons as well.

25. Colorado Avalanche: Nikita Artamonov, LW, Torpedo-KHL

Artamonov had a very good season in the KHL and could be a late first/early second due to how high his skill level is. In a thin Colorado system, he would vault right toward the top in terms of offensive abilities and playmaking.

26. Ottawa Senators: Cole Beaudoin, C, Barrie-OHL

Beaudoin's name is buzzing in scout circles after a great U18 worlds where he displayed a super likable style of play with his size and high-end compete. I expect his name to be called comfortably into round one as he looks like an all-day third-line center in the NHL with a chance to be more.

27. Montreal Canadiens: Sacha Boisvert, C, Muskegon-USHL

Boisvert had a strong year in the USHL. As a 6-2 center who can skate and has some offense, he would provide some essential center depth to the Habs pipeline.

28. Carolina Hurricanes: Michael Hage, C, Chicago-USHL

Hage is a highly talented forward with the speed and high-end skill to take over a shift and would fit the profile of the type of player Carolina tends to target. He was one of the top forwards in the USHL last season.

29. Calgary Flames: Dean Letourneau, C, St. Andrew's College-Ontario High School

Letourneau is one of the most interesting prospects in this year's class. He's a 6-6 center who skates well for a big man and has legit offensive abilities. Someone is going to gamble on that type of talent, and with two first-rounders, Calgary takes the swing in this projection.

30. Philadelphia Flyers: EJ Emery, RHD, U.S. NTDP-USHL

Emery had a strong end to his season at the U18 worlds. He scored zero goals on the season, but he's a big, mobile, high-impact defenseman that Philly can project to make a lot of stops.

31. Dallas Stars: Sam O'Reilly, C, London-OHL

O'Reilly has played a big role in London's strong season and playoff run. He's not the flashiest player, but he does a lot well. He plays with pace, works hard and has good offensive touch while projecting as a pro center.

32. New York Rangers: Linus Eriksson, C, Djurgarden-Allsvenskan

Eriksson wouldn't be the sexiest first-round pick, but he's a 200-foot center who has shown well versus men this season and has good offensive traits as well. The Rangers could use some quality depth down the middle and he would help.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.14.2024

1312560 Websites

The Athletic / The 1 simple rule that explains goaltending in the NHL playoffs

By Sean McIndoe

Welcome to the NHL playoffs, where it's all about goaltending.

It really is that simple, right? Sure, we like to pile on the narratives, arguing about which rosters have the most talent or experience or heart, sprinkling in subplots about who knows how to win or who wants it more. But most of the time, that's just noise, and deep down we know it.

Want to know who's going to win a playoff series? Figure out who's going to get the better goaltending. There's your winner.

Of course, that leads to an obvious follow-up: How do we know who's actually going to get that better goaltending?

That's a tougher question, but it's one that shouldn't be all that difficult to figure out. After all, we're roughly four weeks into the postseason, meaning the 16 playoff teams have been handing the answer to us, one game at a time. If you're a fan, all you have to do is observe. The rule reveals itself as you go.

This stuff just isn't that complicated.

That's unusual for today's world, where we all tend to want easy answers and rarely get them. That's the beauty of playoff hockey, though — it's maybe the one piece of our modern lives where we can strip away the nuance and the equivocations and just explain everything in a single sentence.

Don't believe me? Let's start with the team that may be the story of the playoffs so far. The New York Rangers won the Presidents' Trophy as the regular season's best team, then rolled out to seven straight wins to start the playoffs. They're a win away from moving on to the conference finals for the second time in three years.

And who do the Rangers have in net? Only some guy named Igor Shesterkin, the 2022 Vezina Trophy winner. He's playing great, which means his team is winning, because the other team can't score. Simplistic, sure, but accurate.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender.

Nice and easy. Got an established Vezina candidate in goal? Then you're all set. Enjoy your long playoff run.

OK, I guess we should pause here to mention the exception that proves the rule. The Winnipeg Jets went into their series with home-ice advantage, and this year's Vezina sure thing, Connor Hellebuyck. They lost in five, with Hellebuyck getting shelled. It goes without saying that that won't work. Slumps happen, goalies can go cold, and sometimes the puck just doesn't bounce your way. We all know that, but I guess we have to mention it. The obvious caveat is obvious, and all that.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well.

Although, come to think of it, that didn't really work for the Nashville Predators. Juuse Saros was a Vezina finalist in 2022, losing out to Shesterkin, and is considered one of the best goalies in the league. In the first round, he held the Vancouver Canucks to just a single goal in half the games, allowing just a meager 12 goals in six starts. You can't ask for much more than that from your goalie, but it didn't help Nashville, which lost in six. Still, you can't blame Saros for that, because there's only so much a goalie can do.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee.

Well, I guess we should also mention the New York Islanders. That whole situation was weird, with a new coach who also doubled as one of the greatest goalies of all time. Patrick Roy took over a team that featured Ilya Sorokin, a guy who's often cited as the best goaltender in the entire league. It felt like a match made in heaven. But then the playoffs arrived, and Roy went with veteran Semyon Varlamov instead. He was fine, but the Islanders bowed out quickly. Would Sorokin have

been any better? Not necessarily, especially after an up-and-down season, but Roy might wish he'd given him a chance to find out.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy actually has to play.

I guess that wouldn't apply to Linus Ullmark, though. He was the Vezina winner in 2023, but we haven't seen much of him during this year's playoffs. So far, he's only made one start, which his team lost. But that's different, because the Boston Bruins have Jeremy Swayman, who might be even better and absolutely was on fire in the first round, so obviously you ride him while he's hot.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy has to actually play, unless you have somebody better.

Then again, Thatcher Demko isn't playing either, right? He's a Vezina finalist this year, and any hopes the Canucks had of a long playoff run rested solidly on his shoulders. Then he played one game and got hurt. His backup played two games and then he got hurt too. That meant that Arturs Silovs was the new starter, which was bad news because nobody outside Vancouver had ever even heard of the guy. That spelled an end to the Canucks' playoff hopes, except that it didn't, because Silovs has been fine.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy has to actually play, unless you have somebody better, although check to see if your unknown third-stringer is going to be good enough.

Like I said, guys, not that complicated.

I suppose we should clarify that when we're talking about Vezina-level goaltending, we're referring to the present tense, or at least the last few years. The Tampa Bay Lightning have Andrei Vasilevskiy, who was a Vezina finalist four years in a row, winning once. But that stretch ended in 2021, the same year he won the Conn Smythe Trophy. His numbers have declined every year since then, he was flat-out bad against Toronto in last year's loss and he missed time this year after offseason hip surgery. You obviously can't count on him in the playoffs anymore, and sure enough, the Lightning were out in five games. That wasn't hard to predict.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy has to actually play, unless you have somebody better, although check to see if your unknown third-stringer is going to be good enough, and also your guy can't have peaked years ago.

Of course, the Lightning lost to the Florida Panthers, which brings up the whole Sergei Bobrovsky conundrum. He won the Vezina twice, but the most recent came way back in 2017, and he'd been legitimately bad ever since signing a mega-deal in Florida in 2019. He'd lost his starting job to Alex Lyon by the time the playoffs arrived last year, only to gain it back and go on an all-time heater to almost single-handedly win the Cup. The Panthers have picked up where they left off this year, rolling through the first two rounds.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy has to actually play, unless you have somebody better, although check to see if your unknown third-stringer is going to be good enough, and also your guy can't have peaked years ago, although if he did then that's fine, too, if he suddenly gets good again.

Right. Look, maybe we're over-thinking this.

How about this: Don't get too worried about the history or the awards or the resume or anything else that's stuck in the past. Just watch the player once the playoffs start and the games actually matter, because it won't take long to figure out who has it and who doesn't. If he goes out there and gets shelled in Game 1, that's bad.

Right, Kings fans? They pinned their hopes on Cam Talbot, but by the time their first game of the postseason was over, they'd watched their net get filled up with seven goals, and we all knew they were screwed.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy has to actually play, unless you have somebody better, although check to see if your unknown third-stringer is going to be good enough, and also your guy can't have peaked years ago, although if he did then that's fine, too, if he suddenly gets really good again, as long as he doesn't get shelled in Game 1.

Wait, Alexandar Georgiev also gave up seven goals in an opening-game loss, and we all laughed at how screwed the Avalanche were. Then he outdueled Hellebuyck for the rest of the series. Damn it.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy has to actually play, unless you have somebody better, although check to see if your unknown third-stringer is going to be good enough, and also your guy can't have peaked years ago, although if he did then that's fine, too, if he suddenly gets really good again, as long as he doesn't get shelled in Game 1, which may or may not matter.

I hate it here.

OK, enough with the nonsense, we said we were going to keep it simple. If you want to keep the puck out of your own net, you need to get in front of the other team's shots. It's physics, right? Two objects can't occupy the same space at the same time, and the applies to pucks and goaltenders. So the bigger your goalie, the better he'll be. Who's the biggest goalie in the playoffs? That's right, the Dallas Stars' Jake Oettinger. And that guy rules.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy has to actually play, unless you have somebody better, although check to see if your unknown third-stringer is going to be good enough, and also your guy can't have peaked years ago, although if he did then that's fine, too, if he suddenly gets really good again, as long as he doesn't get shelled in Game 1, which may or may not matter, so when in doubt, just have a guy who's really big.

Then again, the second-biggest guy is the Carolina Hurricanes' Frederik Andersen, and he's been in and out of Playoff Freddie mode all postseason. He's been so inconsistent that with their season all but on the line, his team didn't even bother starting him in Game 3 against the Rangers, preferring to trust a kid with one playoff win in his entire career.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy has to actually play, unless you have somebody better, although check to see if your unknown third-stringer is going to be good enough, and also your guy can't have peaked years ago, although if he did then that's fine, too, if he suddenly gets really good again, as long as he doesn't get shelled in Game 1, which may or may not matter, so when in doubt just have a guy who's really big, although being big might not help.

OK, but hear me out: What if none of this even matters?

It's occurred to you, right? I mean, we've seen it play out over the years. The Vegas Golden Knights once had the Vezina winner, Marc-Andre Fleury, and they gave him away for nothing so that they could start Robin Lehner, but he hasn't played in years, so they've spent the last two seasons basically starting random guys, and it hasn't mattered because last year they won the Stanley Cup with Logan Thompson and Aiden Hill, and both of those guys stood on their head because this is all completely and utterly futile.

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy has to actually play, unless you have somebody better, although check to see if your unknown third-stringer is going to be good enough, and also your guy can't have peaked years ago, although if he did then that's fine, too, if he suddenly gets really good again, as long as he doesn't get shelled in Game 1, which may or may not matter, so when in doubt just have a guy who's really big, although being big might not help, so just pick a couple of castoffs and you'll be fine because none of this matters.

(Remembers that the Leafs went into this year's playoffs banking their season on a guy who'd been on waivers a few weeks ago, and that worked out exactly as well as everyone expected it to.)

So there's your one simple rule: Have a Vezina-caliber goaltender, who plays well, but that's not a guarantee, and obviously the guy has to actually play, unless you have somebody better, although check to see if your unknown third-stringer is going to be good enough, and also your guy can't have peaked years ago, although if he did then that's fine, too,

if he suddenly gets really good again, as long as he doesn't get shelled in Game 1, which may or may not matter, so when in doubt just have a guy who's really big, although being big might not help, so just pick a couple of castoffs and you'll be fine because none of this matters, except when it does and then it really really does and you're going to be completely screwed because you don't have goaltending.

Huh. It's a little wordy, isn't it?

That said, it's accurate. We've definitely nailed the spirit of the thing. If you want to know all there is to know about goaltending in the playoffs, there's your answer. It's the most important position in the sport, the one that determines the Cup winner every year, and now you know how it works. Great job, everyone, we've cracked the code.

What we haven't done is what we initially promised: Keep it simple. When I sat down to write this column, I was kind of hoping I could knock the whole thing out in a few hundred words, culminating in a dead-simple rule that would always be accurate. I think it's fair to say that I haven't done that … yet.

Then again, there's still one team we never got around to mentioning. So let's scrap everything we've done so far, go back to the drawing board, and close this out with the one thing that each and every hockey fan can agree on at playoff time.

So there's your one simple rule: The Edmonton Oilers will never have the right goaltending.

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The Athletic / How did so many NHL teams miss on Gustav Forsling? Inside the rise of the Panthers' 'Greek God'

By Michael Russo

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Gustav Forsling is a cautionary tale for NHL teams. Don't give up on young defensemen too early.

If you do, you might have to watch from afar as they grow into a player like Forsling, who Florida Panthers teammates say is as steady as anyone they've seen and has a body like Adonis.

The Vancouver Canucks liked Forsling but discarded him after he led all defensemen in scoring in the 2015 world juniors, sending his rights to the Chicago Blackhawks for Adam Clendening, who they felt was closer to contributing.

The Blackhawks gave up on him after just 122 games and three seasons, sending him to the Carolina Hurricanes along with Anton Forsberg for Calvin de Haan and a forward who wound up playing nine NHL games.

The Hurricanes, who had a full allotment of NHL defensemen during the shortened training camp before the pandemic-shortened 2020-21 season, never even gave him a chance, trying to sneak Forsling through waivers before the Panthers snatched him up.

And now, here we are three years and four months since that last move, and Forsling has gone from the scrap heap to the top of the heap, playing big minutes for the Panthers in the playoffs two months after signing an eight-year contract that will kick in next season when he's 28 — at what sure looks like it will be the bargain sum of $46 million ($5.75 million per season).

"He's a really great story in the NHL, and I can't really tell it because I don't understand all of it," Panthers coach Paul Maurice said.

Luckily for Maurice, who deploys Forsling, 27, on a defense pair with veteran Aaron Ekblad, 28, the Panthers' front office had plenty of inside intel on Forsling before he was placed on waivers in January 2021.

Their head coach at the time, Joel Quenneville, and one of their assistants at the time, Ulf Samuelsson, had known Forsling from his Chicago days, when he was taken under the wing his rookie year by Swedish countryman Niklas Hjalmarsson. They gave their endorsement.

That was just for starters. Panthers senior adviser Rick Dudley had previously been the Hurricanes' senior vice president of hockey operations, and then-Panthers assistant GM Paul Krepelka (now senior VP of hockey operations) had previously been Carolina's VP of hockey operations. They, too, were each banging their fists to "get this guy," Panthers general manager Bill Zito told The Athletic.

"Within the comment part of all of our scouting reports and evaluations of him … it's all in there," Zito said. "They were just glowing."

Forsling had actually first gotten on Zito's radar when he was still assistant GM in Columbus.

"We had a scout, Blake Geoffrion — I've always got to give him credit because he was the first guy I remember talking about him," Zito said. "It just never really happened there. But then we had so much familiarity with Gustav within our organization once he went on waivers."

Zito didn't want to disclose too much inside baseball, but like well-run front offices should, the Panthers scoured teams' depth charts before that 2021 half-season and had a feeling the Hurricanes would choose to keep Jake Bean over Forsling out of training camp.

The Panthers gave Forsling a shot, and in his first season, he scored 17 points in 43 games and was plus-17. In the three seasons since, Forsling has averaged 11 goals and 39 points. This season, he also led the league with a plus-56 rating, bringing him to plus-133 in the four seasons with the Panthers, the best mark in team history and second in the NHL over that span:

Beyond the basic numbers, Forsling's analytics show that the Panthers create more shots and scoring chances when he's on the ice, and score at a higher clip relative to his teammates. A lot of that stems from his steady defensive presence, which helps keep Florida out of its own zone. He's an aggressive defender at the blue line and uses his size and positioning to keep opponents to the outside in transition to break up scoring opportunities.

"He just doesn't make mistakes," Maurice said. "He kills more plays than anybody on our team, and he does it without being overly physical."

This is why Zito was perfectly comfortable awarding Forsling eight years of stability.

"He's a guy that doesn't rest," Zito said. "(John Tortorella) has a saying with players that get paid. 'It's gotten good to him. He's got his money.' Trust me, with Gus, he'll never be one of those guys where it's 'gotten good.'"

Forsling was a late bloomer physically.

Now, he's a physical specimen.

"You should see this guy walking around with his shirt off," veteran Kyle Okposo said. "He's like a statue. Truly, he's a sculpture."

Added Ekblad, "His body, he's like a mythical Greek God."

When the world largely shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, Forsling returned to his small southern Swedish hometown of Linköping. He went home from March to December "and took advantage of the long, long layoff."

"I put in a lot of work in the gym and on the ice, so I think that really helped," he said. "I knew if I got the chance with Carolina, I was going to be ready."

He never envisioned it would be with Florida instead.

Now, Forsling is the Panthers' perennial fitness champ. Zito and Maurice take pride in the Panthers being a physically fit team, and Maurice said Forsling "is our fittest athlete."

At the team's annual fitness testing, Zito said, everybody else is competing for second place.

"I remember we were once talking about the testing beforehand, and I made a comment to Gus, 'A couple of guys here, they're going to take a run at you this year,'" Zito said. "He looked at me and without cracking a smile goes, 'Not a chance.'

"I was like, 'OK, this guy, it's on.' And guess what? It wasn't even close. The second-place guy could be a decathlete or something, and he'd be lapped by Gus."

Forsling has always taken care of his body but credits veteran Patric Hornqvist for really teaching him how to work out and eat when he got to Florida.

“I really enjoy working out and working hard, so it just comes natural to me to be honest — but I probably needed to eat better,” Forsling said … as he held an arugula salad he was taking from the Panthers practice facility for lunch. “Patric’s a mentor to me and has helped me a lot on and off the ice. But the working out, it’s just me. I’ve got a trainer back home who sets up the program for me during the summers, and my old team lets me work out there and skate there.”

Because of his fitness level, Maurice deploys him in every key situation for the Panthers.

“He was a late bloomer, but it wasn’t from a lack of work ethic,” Maurice said. “He’s our most elite athlete. Our fittest man. A powerful, strong, huge tank. Heavy … and fast.”

On the ice, Forsling is smooth at almost everything.

It’s been impressive to watch during these playoffs, especially the past three games after a rough opening game alongside Ekblad “where we had a look-in-the-mirror moment,” Ekblad said, likely due to the long layoff between the first and second rounds.

Forsling can hammer the puck, makes a great first pass, is an elite skater and kills plays with his feet and stick.

“Without the puck, he’s probably got one of the best sticks in the world,” veteran Panthers defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson said.

Take his bounce-back Game 2 performance: Not only did Florida have a 26-15 shot-attempt edge in Forsling’s minutes, but the quality of the Bruins’ chances was a lowly 0.6 expected goals for, according to Natural Stat Trick. That gap was even greater in Game 3, when Boston only attempted six shots to the Panthers’ 27 with Forsling on the ice, worth an expected goal value of 0.05. Same story in Game 4.

And this despite facing a hefty serving of David Pastrnak throughout the series.

Forsling’s durability has also been notable. He plays through anything, Panthers players say.

“Now that he’s locked up for eight years, we can gush about him a little bit,” Okposo said. “I remember when I got traded here (from Buffalo), I talked to (Sam Reinhart) on everybody and everything, and I asked, ‘Who’s this Forsling guy?’ Reino just said, ‘Wait until you get a look at this guy. He does everything well.’ And he is everything as advertised. I love being on the ice with him because he just kills plays. You’re coming back in your zone in a panic because the other team’s about to get a scoring chance, and next thing you know, he shuts the plays down.

“He never ever, ever, ever puts you in a bad spot as a winger, as a forward. He’s been just absolutely phenomenal.”

Ekblad has never seen anything like it.

“His career has been on that upward trajectory so quickly,” Ekblad said. “I compare him to (Sergei Bobrovsky) in a sense where his preparation is key … whether that’s watching video, or his body in general being absolutely perfect.

“The consistency in how he prepares his body every day is second to none, so he’s going to be able to play for a long time.”

Maurice said Forsling had to get the details of his game perfect to stay in the NHL. He bought himself time with his work ethic, Maurice said, and the timing for the rest coming together was perfect for the Panthers — right when they got him.

That’s what impresses Ekman-Larsson, who is 18 games short of 1,000. After flaming out with three organizations, many players would have given up on the NHL dream.

But Forsling hung in there and, Ekman-Larsson said, “worked his way up and stuck with it and believed in himself and got a very good chance here to prove he’s a very good hockey player.”

Forsling said he never would have surrendered. While he’s not a self-promoter, he has a quiet, inner confidence. He always envisioned himself in this position where he’d be a top player on his NHL team armed with a stable, lucrative contract. He modeled his game with the Blackhawks after Hjalmarsson, saying, “That’s the kind of guy I wanted to be, but I knew it would be hard to get to that point.”

Ekblad was the No. 1 pick by the Panthers in 2014. He has 676 regular-season and 49 playoff games under his belt.

He knows not every defenseman develops at the same rate, and Forsling — with 397 regular-season and 46 playoff games under his belt — is a perfect example of that.

“I think we’re all in a sense a little bit victim to circumstance and usage and stuff like that,” Ekblad said. “He maybe didn’t just get the opportunities that, say, I got. Teams gave up on him. It took a little bit longer for someone to notice him and give him those opportunities. But once he was given the opportunity to shine, he was able to show what he could do.

“You just need someone to believe in you. That’s the cautionary thought: Believe in the player, give him a chance, give him a true chance.”

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1312562 Websites

ESPN / Young NHL stars who are leveling up in Stanley Cup playoffs - ESPN

Neil Paine

May 13, 2024, 01:37 PM

The Stanley Cup playoffs are no place for the fresh-faced and inexperienced -- or so the conventional wisdom goes. Because one ill-timed mistake can often send a team spiraling toward elimination, coaches tend to lean on players they can trust in big moments, which often correlates with being a veteran who has seen it all before and knows how to handle the pressure.

That can make it difficult for young players to earn a bigger role when the postseason lights get brighter. It's probably not a coincidence that zero of the remaining teams in this year's stacked playoff field ranked among the 10 youngest by average age during the 2023-24 regular season, while four of the 11 oldest squads are still skating toward the Cup. But despite this, some kids are still using these playoffs as a springboard for greater things and producing beyond their years.

To identify the youngsters who are stepping up big in the games that matter the most, we looked for players under the age of 25 this season (as of Jan. 31) who have never had a regular season of 15 or more goals above replacement (GAR) in their careers before. Why 15? Generally speaking, it's the marker of a good season. The Carolina Hurricanes' Andrei Svechnikov, for instance, has a 15.6 GAR season under his 24-year-old belt -- as does the Dallas Stars' Thomas Harley (22) -- so neither are eligible despite being young players who have big responsibilities for their respective playoff teams.

Instead, we'll focus on nine players (listed youngest to oldest) who haven't quite achieved that level of regular-season success yet, but are playing important roles for Cup-chasing teams.

Wyatt Johnston, C, Dallas Stars

Age: 20 (May 14, 2003)

Best regular season: 14.5 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 10 GP | 5 G | 3 A | 8 P | +0 | 20:05 TOI/G

Johnston just sneaks onto our list, by virtue of posting 14.5 GAR this season, during which he scored 32 goals for a Dallas team that had no shortage of scoring threats. (Eight Stars scored at least 20, which trailed only the 2021-22 St. Louis Blues among teams since the 2005 lockout.) But Johnston is one of the surprisingly few Stars who have carried that momentum over to the playoffs; he's one of only four Dallas players with three or more goals, and his five goals represent nearly 20% of the entire team's total. Playing with a combination of talented linemates -- he has been centering Jamie Benn and Joe Pavelski recently -- Johnston will get

chances to snipe home more goals; his big challenge will be to give more at the defensive end, where he was on the ice for multiple goals against in Colorado's Game 1 comeback last week.

They said it: "What a player. He still can't get in the casino and play cards, he's not old enough, it's unbelievable. One of the great young players, the next generation of stars of this league." -- Stars coach Peter DeBoer

Logan Stankoven, C, Dallas Stars

Age: 21 (Feb. 26, 2003)

Best regular season: 3.1 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 10 GP | 2 G | 2 A | 4 P | +3 | 15:10 TOI/G

Johnston isn't the Stars' only precocious young contributor this postseason. After recording a pair of assists in Round 1 against Vegas, Stankoven has two goals in the Colorado series -- both coming in Dallas' critical Game 3 win Saturday night. (He kicked off the Stars' scoring to begin the game, then later fired home an empty-netter.) The 21-year-old winger is playing so well that he is logging minutes on the Stars' top line with Jason Robertson and Roope Hintz, showcasing how far he has already come since getting his first NHL goal (naturally, off a Johnston assist) in February.

They said it: "We get enough scoring. What he's bringing us, all the intangibles, the energy, the relentless puck pursuit, the battles, the setting up other guys, making plays -- that stuff alone has earned him the opportunities he's got." -- DeBoer

Arturs Silovs, G, Vancouver Canucks

Age: 22 (March 22, 2001)

Best regular season: 0.8 GAR (2022-23)

Playoff stats: 6 GP | 4-2-0 | .908 SV% | +1.1 GSAA

Pressed into mid-playoff emergency duty because of injuries to Vezina Trophy candidate Thatcher Demko and backup Casey DeSmith, Silovs has the unenviable task of carrying the netminding load for a team that has real Stanley Cup aspirations. Prior to a few weeks ago, Silovs had started only nine total games in his two-year NHL career, with zero coming in the playoffs. But with the exception of a weak outing in Game 1 of the second round against Edmonton -- which Vancouver won anyway in a furious comeback -- the young Latvian has mostly been solid, even recording his first career shutout (regular-season or playoffs) in the Round 1 clincher versus Nashville and stopping 42 of 45 shots from the high-powered Oilers while backstopping Vancouver to a 2-1 series lead on Sunday night.

They said it: "You just have to be always ready. A lot of things happen in life, like [an] accident, someone gets hurt, right? And you just have to be ready to embrace your moment." -- Silovs

Dylan Holloway, C, Edmonton Oilers

Age: 22 (Sept. 23, 2001)

Best regular season: 1.1 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 8 GP | 2 G | 0 A | 2 P | -1 | 9:32 TOI/G

The speedy Holloway, who was taken 14th overall in the 2020 draft, has yet to make a big regular-season splash for Edmonton, netting 9 goals and 9 assists in 89 career games. But in the playoffs, Holloway found himself tied for third on the Oilers with a pair of goals in the first round against the L.A. Kings. (Remarkably, he buried more pucks than Connor McDavid in that series.) In a span of a few weeks, Holloway went from potentially not making the playoff roster to earning time on the third line with Ryan McLeod and Corey Perry -- a crucial unit for an Edmonton team that has a lot of top-line talent but needs contributions from its depth players.

They said it: "He is in a great spot right now, playing well, and he's not thinking out there. You can tell the difference in just the time I've been here. In the beginning, I thought he was thinking maybe a little too much, but now he is trusting his instincts." -- Oilers teammate Mattias Ekholm

Anton Lundell, C, Florida Panthers

Age: 22 (Oct. 3, 2001)

Best regular season: 10.3 GAR (2021-22)

Playoff stats: 9 GP | 1 G | 6 A | 7 P | +1 | 16:51 TOI/G

Lundell burst onto the scene a few years ago, when the then-20-year-old scored 18 goals with 26 assists and a plus-33 plus/minus for the 2021-22 Panthers squad that posted the best record in hockey. Though he hasn't quite replicated that level of play in the past few seasons, Lundell has been one of Florida's most important players this postseason -- whether he's centering a line with Matthew Tkachuk (the team's most talented player) and Carter Verhaeghe (the team's best clutch performer), as he did early in Round 2 against the Boston Bruins, or notching a goal and an assist to help Florida erase a two-goal deficit in Game 4 and take a 3-1 series lead.

They said it: "I always love responsibility. I want to play as good as I can and just do as much as I can. I know I can play big minutes. I know I can be a big player on the team, and I want to be a big player for when we need a goal, or we need to defend. Be an all-around player. But I'm just trying to do everything I can to help the team to win." -- Lundell

Alexis Lafrenière, LW, New York Rangers

Age: 22 (Oct. 11, 2001)

Best regular season: 11.2 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 8 G | 4 G | 6 A | 10 P | +1 | 15:45 TOI/G

The 2020 No. 1 draft pick hasn't turned into a star the way many had expected, but he made significant progress this regular season with career highs in goals (28) and points (57). And now, he's averaging more than a point per game in the playoffs on the Rangers' productive second line with Artemi Panarin and Vincent Trocheck. Panarin leads all playoff scorers with four game-winning goals, but Lafrenière has assists on three of those scores; he has also scored a team-high four goals in the Carolina series so far. The Rangers would not be 7-1 in the playoffs and among the Stanley Cup favorites without Lafrenière's improved play.

They said it: "Coming into the league at a young age in New York is not the easiest of roles to be put in. He's confident. He's having fun. I think that's when he's at his best. He honestly is a kid at heart. That's a compliment." -- Rangers captain Jacob Trouba

Mason Lohrei, D, Boston Bruins

Age: 23 (Jan. 17, 2001)

Best regular season: 2.8 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 9 GP | 1 G | 3 A | 4 P | +0 | 18:04 TOI/G

Lohrei is far from a household name, as the 2020 second-round pick spent most of the 2023-24 regular season bouncing back and forth between the NHL and AHL. But he has dressed for nine of Boston's 11 playoff contests so far, averaging 18 minutes a night while chipping four points. He has been shielded from bad situations -- 72.5% of his non-neutral-zone shifts that started on a faceoff have been in the offensive zone -- as we might expect from a rookie with fewer than 50 career NHL games, but he's playing his role well and giving the Bruins solid minutes on a back line that sorely lacks depth.

They said it: "The sky's the limit for him. He's got an extremely high ceiling. His potential is off the charts. I try to help him whenever I can, like I do for every guy and they do in turn for me. But that's all him. He's worked real hard and he deserves to be here." -- Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy

K'Andre Miller, D, New York Rangers

Age: 24 (Jan. 21, 2000)

Best regular season: 12.3 GAR (2022-23)

Playoff stats: 8 GP | 1 G | 1 A | 2 P | +4 | 20:55 TOI/G

Despite his age, Miller has been a fixture on the Broadway blueline for a few years now, ever since being named to the All-Rookie team in 2020-21. But Miller took a step back statistically during the regular season, falling from career highs of 43 points and 12.3 GAR in 2022-23 to 30 and 8.0 this year, respectively, even as the Rangers claimed the Presidents' Trophy. In the playoffs, though, he has been arguably the most reliable member of a New York defense corps that needs more output. Miller leads all Rangers defensemen in goals -- he's actually their only goal

scorer from the back line -- and plus/minus, despite being tasked with some of their most difficult defensive minutes (he has the team's lowest offensive zone start rate, at 28%).

They said it: "I think one of the biggest things we've talked about is not being satisfied but realizing that we have accomplished a lot this year." -- Miller

Jack Drury, C, Carolina Hurricanes

Age: 24 (Feb. 3, 2000)

Best regular season: 4.2 GAR (2023-24)

Playoff stats: 9 GP | 1 G | 2 A | 3 P | +4 | 13:27 TOI/G

The son of Ted Drury and nephew of Chris Drury (who played in 135 playoff games in his NHL career), Jack is compiling his own postseason résumé for the Hurricanes. His plus-4 plus/minus is currently tied for fourth on the team behind Brady Skjei, Jake Guentzel and Brent Burns, and his three points includes the game-winner that put the New York Islanders away in Round 1 of the playoffs. He's up against a Rangers team that his uncle helped assemble as general manager -- and facing a 3-1 deficit at that -- but a spark from the Drury-Martin Necas-Jordan Martinook line, which hasn't scored since Game 1, would be a good start on the comeback trail.

They said it: "I've liked his year. ... Every time you put him there, good things happen. We know what we're getting. You're getting that consistent effort, and he can make plays. This time of year, it's all about that. That consistency. At the end of the day, he's earned the ice time." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour

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Sportsnet.ca / Playoff Takeaways: Avalanche face tough road to rally vs. Stars

Eric Francis

Shoulders slumped, Nathan MacKinnon put his head down and exhaled deeply before making the long skate back to his bench as play resumed.

His attempt at a zone entry had just been stymied, as so many had throughout a first period in which his team needed a heroic effort from Alexandar Georgiev to limit the damage to a late Wyatt Johnston goal.

Outshot 16-2 by the Dallas Stars and horrifically outplayed on home ice, MacKinnon's body language said plenty about where things stood for the Colorado Avalanche then and where they stand now.

Earlier in the day the top-heavy hosts took two massive blows, losing leading scorer Valeri Nichushkin to a six-month suspension, and missing top-pair defenceman Devon Toews to illness.

Plenty to absorb on the heels of a Game 3 loss at home.

Things got worse early in the second when a Johnston power play goal was followed by a Miro Heiskanen strike en route to a 5-1 beating that makes it awfully hard to believe the Avs have anything left to throw at the deepest team in hockey.

At one point the shots were 22-4.

On Monday night Colorado's best player was its goalie, which still didn't give the reeling hosts a chance against a team with eight 20-goal scorers and an ability to shut down even the most dangerous of opponents.

As MacKinnon's latest show of frustration suggested, the Avalanche are running out of players and ideas on how to tackle the juggernaut Jim Nill has built.

Teams down 3-1 in NHL lore have come back just nine per cent of the time.

After what the Stars did to the Avs Monday to put them on the brink, it would seem the odds of a comeback now seem even longer than that.

The Avs learned of Nichushkin's sudden absence after morning skate when the 29-year-old Russian was placed in Stage 3 of the NHL/NHLPA Player Assistance Program.

He can't apply for reinstatement until November.

It's a massive blow as he was leading all Avalanche players with nine playoff goals, which included tying an NHL record with goals in each of his first seven outings this spring.

The news, which was officially released one hour before puck drop, was followed by confirmation Toews would also miss the game.

"We're not using that as an excuse," said Jared Bednar, whose postgame body language mirrored that of his beleaguered bunch.

"Today we lose a good player in Val, we add a good player in (Jonathan) Drouin, and he played well tonight.

"We looked frozen in the first period. We were not moving, we were not skating. We looked like we were exhausted and we should be the rested team right? Everything felt like it was a struggle tonight."

Toews was replaced by Caleb Jones, putting even more pressure on Cale Makar to help MacKinnon breathe new life into a team previously known for its comebacks.

Instead, Makar was the one who coughed up the puck behind his own net on a late first period power play that wound up with Johnston's shorthanded rebound beating Georgiev.

Johnston added a power play goal early in the second to become just the second player under age 21 in NHL lore to score on both special teams in the same playoff game.

The only other player ever to do that was Wayne Gretzky.

Johnston, who became legal drinking age in the U.S. while flying back to Dallas a few hours after the game, is now tied for fifth for the most playoff goals scored in NHL history before age 21.

Seven of his 11 playoff goals have come this spring, putting him behind Jaromir Jagr (14), Jordan Staal (13), Jeremy Roenick and Brent Sutter (12 apiece).

Johnston was responsible for eight of the Stars' 34 shots on goal and also added an assist on Sam Steel's empty netter, as the league's No. 1 road team all season demonstrated its ability to shut the door on any comeback attempt with its second-straight third period dominance in Denver.

The only bad news for the Stars came early in the second period when their top centre, Roope Hintz, left the game early following a stick check by Nathan MacKinnon that seemed to injure his right wrist.

Chris Tanev took a big hit from Ross Colton with four minutes remaining and remained on the bench for the balance of play. His status for Game 5 Wednesday in Dallas is unknown.

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Sportsnet.ca / Playoff Takeaways: Hurricanes stave off elimination again with second win

Kristina Rutherford

The Carolina Hurricanes are still alive, and the New York Rangers — who opened this post-season with seven straight wins — now find themselves riding a two-game losing streak.

Facing elimination in their second-round Eastern Conference series, Carolina won their second straight on Monday at Madison Square Garden, quieting the crowd of New Yorkers with a come-from-behind 4-1 win thanks to three unanswered goals in the third period, plus the cherry-on-top empty-netter.

Carolina's comeback was spurred by captain Jordan Staal, who tied things up in the final frame with his first goal of the series, and opened the floodgates against New York and their super steady goaltender, Igor Shesterkin.

Game 5 was high stakes: The Rangers trying to earn a trip to the Eastern Conference Final at home, the Hurricanes attempting to stave off elimination with their backs against the wall.

"It's going to be a dog fight," Carolina forward Evgeny Kuznetsov told Sportsnet host Shawn McKenzie, before the game. "There's one bowl of food and two dogs."

Here are our takeaways from Game 5, which saw Kuznetsov pot the dog fight winner:

Short-handed Rangers strike again

This game was scoreless and pretty even until 6:23 into the second period, when New York got on the board.

Carolina had just killed a penalty when they drew one themselves, and Rangers winger Jack Roslovic headed to the box for two minutes for tripping Dmitry Orlov.

For the fourth time this post-season, the Rangers scored while a man down. After blocking a shot, Jacob Trouba earned himself a two-on-one, and fired the puck over Frederik Andersen's right pad to give New York the 1-0 lead. It was Trouba's first goal in 41 games, and it got the crowd at MSG roaring.

Captain Staal leads comeback efforts

Jordan Staal had no goals in the series heading into Game 5, but the captain had been buzzing and generating chances. He was one of many Hurricanes who couln't beat Shesterkin.

But Staal made one heck of a play to find the back of the net, tying things up in the third period.

He got a pass from Orlov just outside the blueline, then drove down the left wing, made a power move around Braden Schneider, and tucked the backhand past a sprawled Shesterkin.

It was 1-1, 3:33 into the third period, and the Hurricanes were right back in it.

Kuznetsov takes flight again

Earlier in this game, Evgeny Kuznetsov took his second offensive penalty of the series — and then the goal-scorer did what he often does, and totally redeemed himself in the process.

Three minutes after Staal tied things up, Kuznetsov jumped on a Brady Skjei rebound to score his third in his past five games, giving Carolina the lead with a goal that stood up as the winner.

His celebration was fitting of a winning goal, that signature bird wing-flapping, with a single leg in the air, for a very quiet crowd at MSG.

After the game, Kuznetsov's celebrations continued — he was dancing in his team's dressing room.

Floodgates opened

It was all Carolina after that.

Jordan Martinook, who scored Carolina's third of the third off a Martin Necas pass that eventually found him in the slot, fired the puck over Shesterkin's blocker.

It was Necas who added the empty-netter.

The Great One comes out to MSG

Among the famous fans who were hoping to see the Rangers clinch a berth to the conference finals at home was none other than Wayne Gretzky. No. 99 retired as a Ranger in 1999 after three seasons with the team, and helped lead them to the Eastern Conference final in 1997.

Gretzky was shown on the arena's big screen in the first period and fans went appropriately bananas for the man who rewrote the NHL's record books and retired in this very building 25 years ago. Just like that night, Gretzky blew kisses to the crowd.

Carolina finally rewarded against ever-steady Igor

The difference so often in this series that saw every game other than Monday's decided by one goal, and two decided in OT, has been the Rangers goalie. No goaltender in the post-season has made more saves per game to this point than the 28-year-old Shesterkin.

Carolina out-shot New York once again on Monday, as they have in every game, and for the second straight game, they were actually rewarded for their efforts.

The series heads back to Raleigh for Game 6, with New York leading 3-2.

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Sportsnet.ca / Though Soucy will be missed, Canucks' defence can withstand one-game suspension

Iain MacIntyre

EDMONTON — The last time Carson Soucy was suspended for hitting someone named Conor in the head, it barely registered around the National Hockey League.

It was during the 2021 pandemic season in Arizona, which literally instead of just figuratively had no fans, when Soucy was playing for the Minnesota Wild and was assessed a major penalty for elbowing Coyote Conor Garland.

The NHL suspended Soucy for one game. Even Garland, now Soucy's teammate on the Vancouver Canucks, barely remembers the incident.

Soucy's cross-check to the throat Sunday night on Edmonton Oilers megastar Connor McDavid was a little different.

At the end of a full-throttle playoff game, part of the swirl of a fierce all-Canadian series that has the Canucks leading the prohibitively-favoured Oilers after Vancouver's 4-3 win on Sunday, Soucy's cross-check during a scrum after the final buzzer was the talk of the country on Monday.

The NHL Department of Player Safety's hearing and subsequent judgement of a one-game suspension received more legal debate than the first of Donald Trump's criminal trials in the U.S.

Soucy, a second-pairing defenceman who has been frequently matched against McDavid and fellow megastar Leon Drainsaitl, will miss Game 4 on Tuesday. Fortunately, McDavid declared himself fine on Monday and the Oilers, truly, should have much bigger concerns that avenging one dangerous play in a series that has been filled with them — both ways.

"If you can see after," Soucy told reporters earlier Monday of the post-buzzer skirmish, "(I am) kind of just almost apologizing, like I said, that I didn't mean to get him up that high. He obviously was pretty fired up because it looks bad, obviously, probably felt bad. But ultimately, I was just like, 'Hey, there was no intent to get you up that high.' Just emotions run high in those scrums at the end of the game."

After McDavid escalated the scrum with a two-handed slash across Soucy's legs in response to a shove, Canuck defenceman Nikita Zadorov cross-checked the Oiler from behind. McDavid's head lowered as he fell forward, causing Soucy's subsequent cross-check to contact the NHL's best player in the neck and face instead of his chest.

The league announced Monday morning a $5,000 fine to Zadorov and a phone hearing with Soucy, a prerequisite to suspension. The one-game ban Soucy received for elbowing Garland three years ago is the only other suspension of his seven-season professional career.

Cross-checked in the head during Sunday's scrum by Oiler Zach Hyman, who received no supplementary discipline from the NHL, Zadorov declined Monday to speak to reporters.

"Forty days of silence," he claimed. "Or maybe one day."

But Soucy faced the media and was ready to face the consequences of his actions.

“Ultimately, it's up to them,” he said a couple of hours before the NHL ruled against him. “I respect their decision.

“Like I said, there was just no intent to get him up that high. Whatever happened that split-second was just kind of unfortunate.

“Yeah, it would suck (to be suspended) at this time, in a tight series like this, in a physical series. I know guys will step up if that is the case. But, yeah, it sucks having to watch your team.”

With Canucks Nation still howling about McDavid’s unpenalized high stick that punctured Vancouver captain Quinn Hughes’ cheek in Game 2, in which McDavid and Draisaitl each registered four points in a 4-3 Edmonton win, the Soucy incident and the NHL Department of Player Safety’s intervention brings back uncomfortable memories of the 2011 Stanley Cup Final.

The Canucks were halfway to what would have been the franchise’s only Stanley Cup when defenceman Aaron Rome stepped up in the neutral zone early in Game 3 and knocked out Boston Bruin forward Nathan Horton with a shoulder to the head. The hit was two seconds late.

The NHL, whose player-safety department was then overseen by the father of Bruin fourth-liner Gregory Campbell, innovatively suspended Rome for the remainder of the championship series. The Canucks were already without injured top-pairing defenceman Dan Hamhuis.

The incident was the turning point in the final, a catapult for the Bruins, who battered and bullied the Canucks, mostly with impunity, for the rest of their seven-game win. Some reporters, including from this country, derided the Canucks as “whiners” and “fakers” and called them the most dislikable team in Canada.

But the Canucks allowed themselves to become victims in that series. That won’t happen against the Oilers, regardless of how this mesmerizing Stanley Cup quarterfinal ends.

The Canucks may miss Soucy, even if abrasive Noah Juulsen is a capable seventh defenceman ready to go into the lineup. But they will not be bullied or physically overpowered as the team was 13 years ago.

They’re leading the Oilers 2-1 with their third-string goalie, Arturs Silovs, so missing a second-pairing defenceman from an otherwise healthy blue line for one game isn’t going to buckle them mentally.

The Canucks have been the more physical team, and the more intimidating one in front of their goal. Everyone can see now why general manager Patrik Allvin rebuilt the Vancouver defence the way he did, signing free agents Soucy (six-foot-five and 208 pounds) and Ian Cole (6'1, 225) and trading for Zadorov (6'6, 248) to join Tyler Myers (6'8, 229), the only other blue-line holdover besides Hughes.

“I don't think anyone's saying they want to play our D-core,” Canuck winger Conor Garland said. “They're big and they're (physical) and then, obviously, we have a freak in Huggy (Hughes) who can beat you with his feet and is a top player in the world. We're fortunate to have a really good crew back there that does it all. It's fun having those guys on your side.”

As an aside, it’s also fun for people in Vancouver to see how things have changed in Boston. Bruins captain Brad Marchand, who famously used Daniel Sedin’s head as a punching back in 2011 “because I felt like it” and is one of the dirtiest and most-suspended players of his generation, is out after eating a sucker punch from Florida Panther Sam Bennett. By the way, Bennett’s action was not deemed suspension-worthy by NHL Player Safety.

“I think what we're building here is very good,” Canuck centre Elias Pettersson said. “Whatever happens, we back each other up. I think that's been a successful thing with what we have been doing all year. I think it shows that we care about each other.”

“To be on the winning side of things, it brings you closer,” winger Dakota Joshua said. “It brings that band-of-brothers mentality. Everybody's got each other's back. That's the way we're rolling.”

Despite widespread predictions of a walkover for the Oilers against the Canucks, their only path to victory at the moment seems to be their lethal power play.

But Vancouver is not only a fast and physical team under coach Rick Tocchet, they’re a disciplined one, too. They are focussed on defending, protecting the middle of the ice, winning puck battles and finishing checks. They are excellent defensively.

“There's a lot at stake,” Tocchet said Monday. “You know, there's a lot of passion out there. There's a lot of different things going (on) out there. It's heated, and that's what makes for good, playoff hockey. This whole series — great skill, great hits, you know, some unfortunate incidents that happen, and that's what playoff hockey is all about.

“This sort of experience that we're getting — how to deal with a tough loss, how to deal with a game that you don't play well or a game that you win that everybody's excited about, how do you get back to Earth? — these are the experiences where you've got to live it. You can tell players and you can tell them stories (about playoffs). . . but they've got to live it, they've got to taste it, they've got to feel it.”

Tocchet called the Soucy-McDavid incident unfortunate and unintended. Juulsen described Soucy as “the nicest guy on the team.”

The Canucks aren’t going to change how they play.

“It's going to get harder,” Tocchet said of the series. “It never gets easy. It's always harder. You may as well think every game is going to be even harder and harder and harder, and embrace that part. Because it's never easier. Ever.”

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Sportsnet.ca / Ice Tilt: When the Canucks are OK with Oilers controlling play

Justin Bourne

Football’s “prevent” defence is often referenced in other sports, having found itself tied to the running joke that all it does is “prevent you from winning.”

The idea is simple: late in games the leading team eliminates the possibility of big plays downfield by backing their defence off and keeping the game in front of their defending players. They may allow some plays underneath, but are content taking away the possibility of “home run”-type plays behind them. The defence encourages “successful” plays of smaller yardages that run the clock, forces the offence to use their timeouts, and essentially tries to bleed them of their time before they can piece their way downfield.

The gag that the prevent defence “prevents you from winning” comes from the fact that sometimes the offensive team can bite off chunks of 15-20 yards in successive plays “underneath” the ultra-passive defence, and find itself in scoring territory fairly quickly.

As John Tortorella once said about hockey: “safe is death.” And sometimes – like when your opponent has an elite offence - it certainly can be.

But in truth, football’s prevent defence is more like the drop play on NHL power plays: everybody hates watching it so when it fails they highlight it. But teams keep doing it because it works more often than any other commonly used strategy to date.

It’s with this in mind I bring to you the latest update on Ice Tilt, a metric that uses NHL EDGE IQ data to show us where the players are on the rink over a rolling period of two minutes to highlight in-game momentum. Where has the actual hockey been played on the rink over the course of a game? And what does that tell us about that game?

The Edmonton Oilers have heavily controlled the tilt in their series versus the Vancouver Canucks, yet find themselves trailing in the series two games to one.

How does that happen?

Hockey’s version of the “prevent” is simple. When you’re forechecking or defending in the neutral zone and a 50/50 puck pops loose, you simply

back off rather than race at it and risk getting beat clean. You allow your opponent to get to it, but you stay between them and your own net. You're OK with them having the puck, but you're not OK with them having an odd-man rush or fast break of any kind, so you stop taking risks.

When you're in the defensive zone, that means you're OK with your opponent having the puck out by the yellow paint, but the second they start to come into the danger areas, your team acts like the slot is a hornet nest and attacks aggressively.

Let's take a look at the teams that have controlled the Ice Tilt in their series so far. You'll see that three of the trailing teams have controlled tilt as they chase games, with Florida being the outlier, both winning the series and leading in time with tilt.

The percentage on the bars simply refers to how deep past the centre red line the players have been during their "tilt," so a higher percentage past centre means they're closer to the offensive net. (If half the rink is 50 per cent, I like to add that to the total. The average player on Edmonton has been 57.91 per cent of the way up the rink from their own net, for example.)

As mentioned, Florida is the only team in the second round that both controls tilt and is ahead in their series. It's worth noting, though, that the Panthers were chasing the scoreboard for a lot of Game 4 before coming back, tying it, and eventually winning the game. Even with that Ice Tilt help they have controlled their series against the Bruins, and are prohibitive favourites to finish the job quickly.

What we're talking about here, with losing teams having tilt, is a concept that's been accepted in advanced analytics for a long time: score effects. Teams change how they play based on the scoreboard.

I've seen Canucks fans upset at the notion that they're fluking their way to victories based on the difference in goaltending, rather than just strategically playing to their leads, and they have a point.

In the third period of Game 3 in the Canucks-Oilers series, tilt swung heavily in favour of Edmonton and the rolling average of tilt over two minute chunks only swung in Vancouver's favour for seven seconds of the period, leaving 19:53 for the Oilers. That led to a third period shot count of 22-3. Looking at where the centre red line is here, you can see the third period isn't exactly a tennis match of back-and-forth play.

This is where I loop it back to the concept of "prevent" defence. At even strength I've seen "high danger chances" recorded as either 1-1 or 2-1 Edmonton in that third period, which is staggering considering where the players were located.

If you're the Vancouver Canucks, is that not exactly the desired outcome? You trust that your goalie can handle the lower danger stuff from distance (at this point every goalie in the NHL should be able to confidently do that) and the rest of the job is keeping the other team's high danger chances down.

You can quibble with the logic – many fans will say "just go score yourself and put the game out of reach," and I'm fine with having that philosophical debate. But as of right now, Ice Tilt really highlights the degree to which NHL coaches disagree with that line of thinking, and prefer to pack it in with a lead.

Teams that are trailing a game open it up and chase the score. Teams leading want to take away the deep touchdown pass and keep the opposing offence in front of them.

This just goes to show how important early leads are. The Oilers are one of the best offensive teams in the NHL, but when the Canucks pack it in in front of Arturs Silovs, the surprising Latvian suddenly looks like prime Patrick Roy, and scoring at 5-on-5 becomes an uphill climb, even with the ice tilted the right direction.

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Sportsnet.ca / Can Oilers break same vicious cycle that has sunk them before?

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — "It's at least 90 per cent mental. Maybe more."

Stuart Skinner was talking about:

A — The issues in his game.

B — Surviving a playoff series between two Western Canadian rivals.

C — Avoiding the urge to delete your X account.

D — Connor McDavid's crosscheck survival strategy.

Here we are, folks, at the midway point of this fantastic, emotional series. A social media spectacle that has taken over our country in all rinks West of Moose Jaw, a rivalry that will spill over to the golf courses and beaches of the Okanagan this summer.

Stress?

My wife has burned through a box of church candles — and her team is down, two games to one. Even the Big Guy isn't playing ball.

Skinner stiffed the post-game media for the first time in his NHL career — for which he apologized on Tuesday — and his coach Kris Knoblauch awoke after Game 3 as a clone of Todd McLellan.

Or Dave Tippett. Or Jay Woodcroft.

You know, one of those old Oilers coaches who fell into the trap of playing two players nearly half the game while the bottom half of his roster ate popcorn and bought 50/50 tickets all night long.

Inside his own head, Knoblauch knows you can't win a playoff series by playing the McDavid line as much as he is. But his team has been trailing for most of the past two games, and, well, "You've got an offensive zone faceoff, with Draisaitl, McDavid. and Hyman sitting on the bench. It's pretty tough not to say, 'You guys go out for that faceoff.'

"Hopefully the temptation is alleviated with a two- or three-goal lead."

It's always been a chicken and egg thing here in Edmonton, a fowl scenario that a deeper roster was supposed to alleviate.

You want that lead so you can play the depth guys more, but the quickest way to that lead is to play McDavid's line. So the depth guys languish, don't get much ice time, and when they do they aren't so productive because they have barely broken a sweat.

So the coach says, "Well, I'm not getting any Bottom 6 goals. Better call on Connor."

It's a vicious cycle, not unlike the one churning between Skinner's ears right now. His game melted down a year ago in Round 2, was supposed to be more consistent this time around, and so far is not.

"To be super honest, I don't think it's anything technical," Skinner said. "I think it's just me being able to find saves at key times, and I haven't been able to do that."

The guy at the other end arrived at the party five minutes ago, and Arturs Silovs has established himself as the best goalie in this series thus far. Meanwhile, Skinner has watched his career playoff save percentage plummet to .818, a damning assessment of his post-season work through two springs.

"The numbers don't lie. They're saying what they say — well, they lie a little bit — but it is what it is," he allowed. "Do I feel like I'm playing at those numbers? A little bit. Have some good goals gone in? Yeah. Have some bad goals going in? Yes."

Knoblauch won't say who starts in Game 4, but it's likely a coin flip between Skinner and backup Calvin Pickard. Jack Campbell is not in the picture — he's the No. 3 in case of injury.

Skinner promises his 'A' game is sooooo close to arriving.

"As close as one per cent… and we could be laughing here, talking about how great I am," he chuckled. "I've got to be able to find that one per cent, that one more save."

The good news is, he's been here before. The bad news is, there are few signs — at least externally — that he is any better for it.

"I'm very grateful for those experiences," Skinner said, "so I'm not an absolute mess right now."

Speaking of messes, McDavid took a wicked Nikita Zadorov crosscheck in the back ($5,000 fine), and a toothsome Carson Soucy crosscheck in the face (one-game suspension) within about a half-second of each other after the Game 3 final buzzer.

The next morning he was chipper and — to his credit — did not waste any words complaining about the mugging.

"It's a tough game. They've got big d-men that make it hard on you," McDavid reasoned. "They play a physical brand of hockey and it's fun to be a part of. It's fun."

It didn't look like fun, we mentioned.

"It's a fun series to be a part of," he stressed. "Two Canadian teams going at it, a lot of passion. It's just part of a heated series."

Of all the people around this series from an Edmonton perspective — the goalie, the fans, the coach, the guy who sells church candles — McDavid seems the least stressed of all.

The best player, the most pressure, the least stress.

"We've got all the faith in the world," McDavid said. "Stu has always bounced back well, our group has always bounced back well, and I would expect Stu and our group to respond."

Chilled out.

Just like the rest of us, right?

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Sportsnet.ca / Where do Maple Leafs and captain John Tavares go from here?

Luke Fox

TORONTO — John Tavares was only 48 hours removed from another gutting early playoff exit, the sixth lost season of his seven-year commitment to his hometown Toronto Maple Leafs, when his phone rang.

From one first-overall pick to another, Rick Nash was inviting Tavares to swap his blue Maple Leaf for a red one, to jet to Prague and captain his country's bid for repeat gold at the IIHF World Championship.

Tavares says accepting the honour "made sense" for many reasons, where the most senior member of the squad is now leading an intriguing roster that features, among others, phenom Connor Bedard, ex-teammate Michael Bunting, and Leafs villain Ridly Greig.

Interviewed by the broadcast Sunday after setting up Dylan Cozens' game-winning goal over Denmark, Tavares didn't elaborate on his reasons for bolting overseas to play more hockey when his fellow star Maple Leafs teammates declined.

But we can imagine them:

• Tavares will be 34 when the puck drops on the final season of his current contract. Chances to represent his country are dwindling, and if he has any aspirations of making the bottom-six cut for 2025's Four Nations Face-Off, answering the bell for Hockey Canada can't hurt. Further, Tavares has high respect for repaying the sport that has given him so much. Hence, his policy to never decline an all-star invite.

• The man is a rink rat who refuses to succumb to Father Time without a fight. If he wasn't repping his country in games of consequence, he'd probably be punching the clock at Ford Performance Centre, working on his acceleration and snap snot anyway. Summer is long for first-round victims. Taraves is seizing an opportunity to get energized by young talent and try to capture gold in a beautiful city.

• Tavares has won world junior gold (twice), Olympic gold, a World Cup gold, and even Spengler Cup gold. A world championship would complete the set. He's been to the worlds three times previously (2010, 2011, 2012) and never finished higher than fifth, despite Tavares himself putting up 30 points over 24 games.

• Finally: If you were the captain of the Maple Leafs and lived smack in High Park, wouldn't you be happy to get outta town right now, too? The noise quiets and the pain dulls when you're six time zones away.

"The realization that it's over, it's very difficult to accept and hard to deal with," Tavares said last week, between packing up and shipping out. "Just one shot away..."

As Tavares made his way to Europe, Leafs president Brendan Shanahan gave a non-endorsement of his position on Toronto's 2024-25 roster.

Asked directly Friday if he would approach Tavares (and Mitch Marner) about waiving his no-move clause, Shanahan said: "Everything is on the table. We will discuss everything. I don't think it serves the Toronto Maple Leafs in any fashion to discuss those things prematurely, to discuss those individuals prematurely."

The Maple Leafs are nearing a crossroads with the 81st highest scorer in the history of the NHL.

While Tavares maintains he hasn't given much thought into signing an extension with the team he famously chose in free agency — something he'll become eligible for on Canada Day — the player himself has managed the spotlight well and shown zero inclination of wanting out of Toronto.

Tavares and wife Aryne are raising three young children in the city. He is close to the necessary support of extended family. He has benefitted from multiple outside endorsement deals. And he did score the clinching goal of the one series the Leafs have won since ex-GM Kyle Dubas backed up the Brink's truck with $77 million.

"I love playing here. It's a remarkable place to play," Tavares said. "And when I committed here six years ago, obviously I saw a tremendous amount of talent and an amazing hockey market and organization that's fully committed to winning and doing whatever it can — and I still feel that way.

"Whether it's [facing] defensive teams, physical teams, whatever's required, I think we've certainly shown a lot of growth in those areas. Obviously, we still got to overcome some of the hurdles to get the job done — and that's on us and on myself. But I think we're right there."

Ah, there's the rub.

The Maple Leafs brass — finally! — has stopped fooling itself into believing this roster is right there. Which is why a trade (or two) from the core is being considered.

Tavares will be paid his final signing bonus installment on July 1, a whopping $7.04 million direct deposit. His base salary for 2024-25 will be just $910,000, making the centre an enticing target for any franchise that enjoys saving real dollars and has cap space to spare.

(Just spit-balling: Chicago, Anaheim, Columbus, San Jose, and nearby Buffalo could all make it work. Further, if they're out of the playoff picture come trade deadline, Tavares would make a wonderful rental chip.)

Point is, Tavares would not be a "salary dump" in a hypothetical trade; the Leafs wouldn't need to attach a sweetener, the way they did for Patrick Marleau did in 2019.

The question is twofold: Would Tavares, who holds the hammer here, be willing to waive his power and accept a trade, realizing the Leafs won't be in any rush to re-sign him?

(Sidebar: Would Shanahan dare make things prickly by stripping Tavares's C and handing it to Auston Matthews? Because Tavares already freely acknowledges that Matthews is the club's driver, does such symbolism even matter?)

And just as interesting but less discussed: Can the Leafs actually improve by dealing Tavares?

While Tavares isn't the emotional leader many fans are craving and his effectiveness is in decline, he's still an elite faceoff man (59.3 per cent) and incredibly durable (80 games played). He's a respected, low-maintenance teammate whose work ethic flies off the charts, and his production — 29 goals, 65 points — will be difficult to replace.

Compare Tavares's output to the high end of centres set to hit unrestricted free agency.

Matt Duchene, 33, scored 25 goals and 65 points. Sean Monahan had 26 goals and 59 points. Chandler Stephenson put up 16 goals and 35 points. And Elias Lindholm notched 15 goals and 44 points in a down year. They'll all be gunning for multi-year contracts.

In our opinion, the Leafs desperately need to add a middle-six centre even if they keep Tavares; it was a hole left unfilled at the trade deadline. Shed Tavares, and they'll need two.

GM Brad Treliving cannot simply expediate the end of the Tavares era without a plan to backfill his meaningful minutes.

At the same time, Matthews and William Nylander are playing the best hockey of their lives. Toronto can't simply afford to run it back — essentially run out the clock — with both Tavares and Marner and burn another year of their superstars' prime.

We knew Tavares would lose a step as this seven-year commitment winded down.

Shanahan's bet was that the captain's decline would be more digestible with a banner in the rafters.

Now, it's getting uncomfortable for both sides.

How uncomfortable? We're about to find out.

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Sportsnet.ca / One off-season question facing each NHL team eliminated in Round 1

Rory Boylen

As the second round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs go on, we aren't far away from another four teams having their seasons end, after which they'll be asking tough questions about what went wrong and how to come back stronger in 2024-25.

Their off-seasons will arrive after having more success than the 16 teams that didn't qualify for the playoffs at all, and we explored what decisions the also-rans will be wrestling with now.

But before we move on to the conference finals, today we're taking one last look back at the first round of the playoffs, with an eye on the teams that had their seasons come to an abrupt end. What might their summers look like, and what are the tough question they are having to answer?

Tampa Bay Lightning: What becomes of Steven Stamkos, and how quickly will Victor Hedman get signed?

When the Lightning exited the playoffs, there was some question if Steven Stamkos had played his final game with the team. After all, the start of the season began with him airing a grievance over lack of contract extension talks last summer, when he was first eligible to sign.

But after his seventh 40-goal season concluded, Stamkos added five goals in five playoff games and reminded everyone that — even at age 34 — he's running strong. Stamkos hasn't played a full season in which he finished short of a point per game since 2015-16.

After the elimination everyone was saying the right things, with GM Julien BriseBois claiming that he was "very hopeful" to get a deal done soon, and Stamkos commenting that he was excited to talk soon. But what do you give a player who will turn 35 mid-way through next season in both dollars and term? And what other factors could be at play?

Stamkos may be the only pressing free agent the Lightning have to resolve, but crucially Victor Hedman has one more year left on his contract and can sign an extension as of July 1 — the day Stamkos would become UFA eligible. Hedman is currently Tampa's second-highest paid defenceman at $7.875 million, with Mikhail Sergachev at $8.5.

And though Hedman is also still running strong, he too is getting up in age for a professional hockey player and will turn 34 midway through next season. Now Tampa must balance a desire to reward and keep the core that was won them Stanley Cups with the fact that group is getting older now and the team hasn't won a playoff round in two years.

Lightning GM BriseBois 'very hopeful' to re-sign Stamkos soon

Toronto Maple Leafs: Who can they move from the core?

It didn't have to be this way. After the Maple Leafs finally won a playoff round last season, only to swiftly get eliminated in five games by the Florida Panthers, leadership could have identified that still wasn't good enough and moved on from pieces of the core. Instead, president Brendan Shanahan's move was to replace the GM, which gave replacement Brad Treliving one month to make key decisions. It just wasn't enough time to work with.

Now, Mitch Marner has a no-move clause that his contract lacked a year ago, while William Nylander similarly had an NMC included in 2023-24, the final season of his last contract. Nylander has since signed an extension making his trade candidacy a long shot, while Marner would have full control of any move the Leafs would have in mind for him.

Everyone knows there has to be change and that since-fired head coach Sheldon Keefe can't be the only one held responsible for another first round loss. The core has to return with a different, and at management's year end press conference they made it clear that the model of spending huge amounts on a small number of players atop the roster didn't work. It's a nice idea, but given all the NMCs at play and expiring contracts, how will Treliving navigate this difficult summer?

All eyes on Shanahan, now feeling pressure he's never felt before

Washington Capitals: Where will they find more goals?

It turned out that Charlie Lindgren was one of the better surprises of this NHL season, playing 50 games with a .911 save percentage and an X-Factor in getting the Caps back to the playoffs. They weren't the best defensive team by any means, but the real problem area for the Capitals was actually their offence.

Washington was 28th in goals-per-game, averaging just 2.63 per game this regular season. Alex Ovechkin was having a subpar goal scoring season by his standards for most of the year, but went on a tear near the end and finished as the team leader with 31 anyway. But only he, Dylan Strome (28) and Anthony Mantha (20), who was traded away at the deadline, hit the 20-goal mark.

The Capitals may have gotten into the playoffs, but they did it with a dreadful minus-37 goal differential. And, once there, they averaged just 1.75 goals per game — better than only the Toronto Maple Leafs in Round 1.

Capitals GM Brian MacLellan said that while he hopes to see some internal improvement from players such as Hendrix Lapierre, Connor McMichael and Aliaksei Protas, he'd have to look at external options as well. With the salary cap going up, it will provide a little more room to acquire players and the GM also suggested some of the draft capital Washington had accumulated could be used in trade.

"We're going to look outside, too, I think trades and free agency, we need to add something in that area," MacLellan said. "We need to get a little more skill, more goals.

"I think we have more flexibility going forward here. We'll see what the market is."

NY Islanders: Can they get any traction in getting out of the muck?

Any Lou Lamoriello team is hard to get a read on and these Islanders have been an enigma. When it was looking like they weren't really serious Cup contenders after two surprise Round 3 appearances were followed by missing the post-season completely, Lamoriello kept going and paid a hefty price to get Bo Horvat. Consistently capped out, these

Islanders will have nine players on next year's roster making at least $5 million.

The big question right after the Islanders were eliminated by Carolina in five games this playoff season was if Lamoriello would be back at all. Today, his return (and Patrick Roy's behind the bench) is about all we know for sure about what's next for these Islanders, who seem to be caught in the NHL's mushy middle.

The Islanders have certainly had success under Lamoriello, but that has given way to the muddiness of the past three years and not a lot in the way of cap space to wiggle out of it. Lamoriello also values loyalty and so big, sweeping changes are unlikely anyway.

However, if the coach wants to play an uptempo game that leans offence, but the roster was constructed to grind out games and series, where does that leave the Islanders?

Los Angeles Kings: Who's the next coach and how do they get the most out of Pierre-Luc Dubois?

While Elliotte Friedman reports there is some momentum towards the Kings keeping Jim Hiller behind the bench and removing the interim tag, it would be hard to imagine the Kings running back a 1-3-1 system without much change to the roster. There is offensive skill in this roster and some of GM Rob Blake's recent years have been spent acquiring the likes of Kevin Fiala and Viktor Arvidsson to do just that, to say nothing of the blossoming talent of second-overall pick Quinton Byfield.

And then there's the little matter of Pierre-Luc Dubois' massive contract, which started with a thud. While on paper it may make some sense to consider buying out Dubois before Year 2 begins in July, Blake said he didn't intend to do so and rather would be seeking ways to bring out his best again.

Whether that means changing the system away from the 1-3-1 (to help not only Dubois, but the whole roster) or perhaps moving Dubois to the wing, the Kings are having to think long and hard about how they play as a team and how to not have Dubois' contract linger as a stinker.

'I know I can do better': Dubois talks inconsistency with Kings

Nashville: Is Yaroslav Askarov ready for full time No. 1 duty?

The 11th-overall pick in 2020, Yaroslav Askarov has spent the past two seasons in the AHL where he's been one of the top goalies and this season finished fifth in GAA and second in both wins and shutouts. He's quite possibly the best goalie outside of the NHL right now. He had one NHL start this past season, a 27-save, 3-2 shootout win over Washington.

It seems like Askarov is ready for the NHL and he will be 22 by the time next season begins. But is he ready to take on the full No. 1 starter's job?

If Predators GM Barry Trotz thinks Askarov is, then Juuse Saros suddenly becomes a more likely trade candidate and the kind of player who could return to Nashville a player or two that would help in other roster areas of need. It would also save money at the position, with Askarov still on his ELC and one year from needing it to be extended.

Winnipeg Jets: What to do with Nikolaj Ehlers?

The Jets are rather loyal to their productive players who aren't seeking a way out of town and Ehlers is certainly one of those. The ninth-overall draft pick way back in 2014, Ehlers has been a staple on Jets teams for nearly a decade now with pretty consistent production.

But in Ehlers you have a player who often puts up very strong "per minute" numbers while never getting top-line minutes. This season, for instance, Ehlers' 25 goals and 61 points — both near career highs — but averaged 15:52 of ice time per game, seventh among all Jets forwards. Meantime, at 5-on-5, Ehlers ranked fourth on the team in goals per 60 minutes and second in primary assists per 60.

Now he has one year remaining on his contract at $6 million and would be eligible to extend on July 1. But how will the Jets handle a middle-six player? Ehlers managed just two assists in the five-game playoff-series loss to Colorado this spring and has never been a big post-season contributor for them with just seven points in his past 16 playoff games going back to 2020. Is the play then to seek out a trade for Ehlers, or play out his contract and consider the possibility he leaves for nothing next summer?

Vegas Golden Knights: Will they re-sign Jonathan Marchessault?

The Golden Knights are known for their bold moves and the cavalier way they manoeuvre around the salary cap and they're one of the most active teams in the league. So, when they won their first Stanley Cup last season, only six original Golden Knights remained on the roster, despite the fact the team has always been a contender.

Of those original expansion draft players, Jonathan Marchessault is the most productive and he finished as their leading goal scorer (42) and point-getter (69) this season after driving their playoff run and winning the Conn Smythe a year ago. Vegas was able to largely bring back the same roster that won the Cup, but after a few in-season trades they'll have to make tougher choices this time around.

Trade acquisition Noah Hanifin will start a new, long-term contract next season after playing on a double-retention bargain. His new $7.35 million AAV will mostly replace Alec Martinez's likely departing contract. The Golden Knights will also have to figure out what to do with their other UFAs, including another trade deadline pickup Anthony Mantha, and two other original Knights in Chandler Stephenson and William Carrier.

The fact is Vegas won't be able to keep all of these players. Marchessault's deal figures to come with the largest cap hit, with a raise expected from his $5 million.

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TSN.CA / Nurse-Ceci pairing remains a major problem for Oilers

Travis Yost

Entering the Stanley Cup Playoffs, it was the Connor McDavid-led Edmonton Oilers who carried the shortest odds of ending Canada's Stanley Cup drought.

Fast forward three weeks, and the Oilers find themselves in a distressed position, trailing the division-rival Vancouver Canucks 2-1 as the road team in the series.

Despite lengthy stretches of high-calibre play in the second round (including Game 3, where the Oilers outshot the Canucks 45 to 18), the margin of error for Kris Knoblauch's team has been greatly reduced.

This may be the last meaningful juncture for Knoblauch to tinker with his lineup. If Edmonton is going to salvage this series and season, I return to a critical recommendation: The team must split up the ghastly defensive pairing of Darnell Nurse and Cody Ceci.

Nurse and Ceci have not been spared scrutiny over the years as the two veteran blueliners were spliced together and thrown into touch minutes. The gambit here is simple: if this duo can survive, the premium minutes for the more capable puck-carriers and transition players – like Mattias Ekholm and Evan Bouchard – can feast in their minutes.

The problem is you need this pair to survive. They are not surviving.

Though this is a long-running problem, let's put the spotlight on the immediate three games played against Vancouver and study the minutes with and without the Nurse-Ceci pairing on the ice.

At even strength, they have already played 50 minutes together head-to-head with the Canucks and have been outscored 5-1 (-4) in the process. Notably, the Oilers have outscored the Canucks 6-3 (+3) with them off the ice.

But this isn't just about weak goaltending or poor shooting luck when they are on the ice – expected goal rates on both sides of the ice are grim and in line with the results Knoblauch's team is realizing:

Nurse and Ceci's matchups are scattered across Vancouver's top three lines – the most common opponents they have faced so far include Conor Garland, Elias Lindholm, and Dakota Joshua. Quality forwards, but still a cut below the likes of Elias Pettersson and company. But Nurse and Ceci still aren't winning these minutes.

One of the critical issues when you watch Nurse and Ceci is that they are the polar opposite of a pairing you'd want to play behind Edmonton's blistering offence. They are both uncomfortable playing with the puck in recovery and transition sequences, and can become turnover machines against good forechecks. Relatedly, they appear more comfortable behind the run of play, off the puck and defending shooting lanes.

Not only does such a strategy lend itself to keeping the puck in your own defensive zone, it also throttles the offensive production of the forwards they play with to a meaningful degree.

And though Edmonton is getting meaningful outperformance when they are off the ice, it isn't meaningful enough, in part because Nurse and Ceci play such heavy minutes. So heavy that their usage at even strength over the course of these playoffs is indiscernible from the team's top pair – Ekholm's 144 minutes of usage, for example, are just three minutes (effectively four total shifts) ahead of Nurse and Ceci.

I would be remiss to not acknowledge there are other areas to look at across the Oilers lineup with respect to underperformance. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, a meaningful middle-six forward for this team, has been a total no-show in the series. And goaltender Stuart Skinner, who was sterling in the opening round against Los Angeles, has let in several bad goals versus the Canucks.

But this is already an Oilers team thin on forward depth, and there's no reasonable second option in net behind Skinner. Knoblauch needs to bet on a performance rebound in these areas the rest of the way.

What I'm sure Knoblauch cannot bet on is the rest of the Oilers lineup being so dominant it renders the performance of the Nurse-Ceci pairing moot. The Oilers are already winning these minutes to a significant degree and are still down in the series.

It's worth keeping an eye on the blueline heading into Game 4. I suspect the Oilers brain trust are seeing this the same way, and with last change in their favour, now is the time to make the change.

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