



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 15, 2026

The News & Observer

Svechnikov's two goals help Hurricanes surge to 4-2 victory over Capitals

By: Chip Alexander

Raleigh

Life without Jordan Staal isn't going to be easy for the Carolina Hurricanes (Shopping Cart IconShop Canes Fan Gear).

The Canes have lost their captain for a month, maybe two. They've lost their best defensive center, best faceoff man, one of their best – if not the best – penalty killers.

Against the Philadelphia Flyers on Sunday, it didn't matter. The Canes won big. Against the Washington Capitals on Tuesday, it was a lot tougher.

The Hurricanes took a 4-2 victory over the Caps at Lenovo Center as forward Andrei Svechnikov had a pair of goals and an assist, running their winning streak to six games.

Svechnikov's second goal, on a power play with 6:04 left in regulation, gave the Canes the lead and proved to be the game-winner. But the winger, named the game's first star, was quick to note the absence that will be felt without No. 11, Staal, who has suffered a partial calf muscle tear.

"Obviously it's a big loss," Svechnikov said. "He's our 'Sheriff.' He's a huge part of what we do, and it's going to be hard to play without him, with the penalty kills and all the five-on-five stuff, playing against the best lines.

"We've just got to stick with our game and play our game. Whatever happens, happens. But obviously it's a big loss for us."

The Canes (6-1-1) have played the first eight games without winger Seth Jarvis, who continues to work his way back from offseason shoulder surgery and is close to a return.

Now, Staal is gone. And forward Taylor Hall left Tuesday's game with an upper-body injury in the second period.

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour did not have an update on Hall's condition but said it "doesn't look good."

The Canes, set to make a five-game Western road trip, on Wednesday recalled forward Bradley Nadeau from the Chicago Wolves of the AHL.

"That happens in this league," Brind'Amour said of the injuries. "You've got to deal with it. That's the only thing you can do. Everybody goes through it."

Goalie Pyotr Kochetkov earned his fourth win of the season, and his 20 saves included some timely ones early in the game as the Canes fought through a slow start.

Canes center Sebastian Aho continued his offensive tear, picking up a pair of assists to extend his point streak to seven games.

Svechnikov nearly had hats flying in the final minutes of the game. After the Caps pulled goalie Logan Thompson for an extra attacker, Svechnikov zoomed down ice after the puck as Canes fans rose and cheered, expecting the hat trick.

Unable to get a shot on net, Svechnikov spotted Mark Jankowski open and got him the puck for an easy score.

"He's been great," Brind'Amour said of Svechnikov. "This is the kind of player that we all know he's capable of being. He's been on a hot stretch to start the year, and we've needed it with the guys we've lost."

For Jankowski, it was his fifth goal in the past five games. The center has been moved into Staal's spot between Nikolaj Ehlers and Jordan Martinook, and also has been used in penalty killing and on the power play.

Told he had big shoes to fill, Jankowski smiled and said, "Conn Smythe shoes to fill."

Staal was named the Conn Smythe Trophy winner after the Canes' torrid run to the Stanley Cup. If Brind'Amour had to pick one player he would not want to play without, it likely would be Staal.

"We'll do it by committee," Jankowski said. "Not one guy can do it."

The Canes took time in the first period to recognize the Caps' Alexander Ovechkin, who will retire after this season. The man they call "Ovi" and the "Great 8" was drafted in the arena in 2004 and the NHL's all-time goal scorer was making his last scheduled appearance in Raleigh, barring a return for the playoffs.

The two teams traded goals, glares, hard shoves and penalties in the first two periods. Boone Jenner and Justin Holl scored, twice giving the Caps the lead. Svechnikov and Eric Robinson answered for Carolina – Robinson's goal with 1:11 left in the second for a 2-2 tie.

Washington scored first after a three-on-one rush into the zone. Kochetkov stopped Jenner's first shot, but the Caps retrieved the puck and Boone found the net with a second chance.

Brind'Amour was steamed late in the period after Nicolas Deslauriers was called for cross-checking and then Svechnikov was sent to the box for unsportsmanlike conduct. But the Canes penalty killers got the job done.

Holl, making his debut for the Caps, scored his first goal of the season – and 15th of his career – in the second for a 2-1 lead. But the Canes had more offensive mojo in the period to pressure goalie Logan Thompson.



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Svechnikov attacked a rebound and knocked a loose puck past Thompson. Cap coach Spencer Carbery challenged for goaltender interference but the call was upheld on review.

With the second period winding down, Robinson put a shot on net from the left circle, the puck catching the stick of Caps defenseman Martin Fehervary in front and getting through Thompson.



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NORTH STATE JOURNAL

Svechnikov scores twice as Hurricanes' spoil Ovechkin's Raleigh finale

RALEIGH — It may have been Alexander Ovechkin's final regular season game at Lenovo Center, but the night belonged to his countryman.

Hurricanes winger Andrei Svechnikov scored twice, including a go-ahead power play goal on a spinning backhand with just over six minutes left in regulation, to lead Carolina to a 4-2 win over the visiting Capitals on Tuesday in Raleigh.

"He's been great," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said of Svechnikov, who is tied for the team lead with six goals and has 11 points through eight games. "This is kind of the player that we all know he is capable of, and we're just seeing it now for a long stretch to start the year."

Svechnikov got the go-ahead goal seven seconds after Washington's Justin Sourdif went to the box for tripping. After the Capitals won the faceoff at the start of Carolina's power play, Nikolaj Ehlers won a battle in the corner and zipped a pass to Svechnikov alone in front.

Svechnikov took the puck from his forehand and shifted it to his backhand before spinning counterclockwise in front of Washington goalie Logan Thompson (31 saves). Svechnikov then elevated the puck over Thompson's blocker for his sixth goal of the season.

"(Ehlers) made a nice play," Svechnikov said, "and I just kind of had to finish it."

Svechnikov then assisted on Mark Jankowski's empty-net goal — his fifth straight game scoring — to extend Carolina's winning streak to six.

"Just the whole team's kind of playing real good hockey right now," Jankowski said. "So everyone's reaping the benefits. Luckily, I've gotten a few that have gone past the goalie."

The Hurricanes, who lost in their second game of the season to the Capitals, were again on their heels against Washington at the start.

After Pyotr Kochetkov (20 saves) stopped Washington center Boone Jenner on a 3-on-1, Jenner lingered next to the net and eventually got the puck back, squeezing a shot past the Carolina goalie's leg for a 1-0 Capitals lead just before the midway point of the opening period.

Washington controlled much of the first period, but Carolina's penalty kill — even without Jordan Staal, who will miss 1-2 months with a partially torn calf — was able to kill off consecutive penalties, including 14 seconds of 5-on-3, to keep the advantage at one.

Jankowski slid into Staal's spot centering Ehlers and Jordan Martinook and filled his role as the team's top penalty-killing forward, playing 2:25 shorthanded as the Hurricanes went 2 for 2 on the kill.

"It's nice to see guys who actually get that chance take advantage of it," Brind'Amour said of Jankowski, "and we need it, obviously, with who we've got out of the lineup."

That list grew Tuesday when Taylor Hall didn't emerge from the locker room to start the second period. He returned for a power play early in the middle frame, but he exited after 11 seconds and did not play the rest of the night. The team characterized it as an upper-body injury, but Brind'Amour did not have an update following the game.

"That doesn't look good either," he said. "This is what happens in this league. You have to deal with it. That's the only thing you can do. Everyone goes through it, it's just tough when it kind of piles on."

Carolina had to twice erase a deficit in the second period.

First, the Hurricanes tied the game at 3:58 when Svechnikov scored his fifth goal of the season off a rebound. Sebastian Aho and William Carrier picked up assists, with Aho extending his point streak to seven games. He is tied for the league lead with 13 points.

The tie on the scoreboard was short-lived as defenseman Justin Holl, making his Capitals debut, fired a shot through traffic that found the back of the net at 6:39 to reestablish Washington's lead at 2-1.

But then the Hurricanes started tipping the ice in their favor.

Eric Robinson's centering pass hit the stick of Washington defenseman Martin Fehervary and deflected past Thompson to even the score with 71 seconds remaining in the second period as Carolina took over the game.

"It wasn't a great start, but we kind of flipped over and stuck with our game, went on the forecheck a little more, went after those pucks and just spent more time in their zone," Svechnikov said.

And his second goal of the night propelled the Hurricanes onto their six-game State Fair road trip on a high note.

"We got six in a row, so let's make it, whatever — 10, 15," Svechnikov said. "That'd be awesome."



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Notes: Staal (calf injury) and Juuso Valimaki (healthy) did not play for Carolina. ... Kochetkov won his fourth straight game to start the season with a .911 save percentage and 1.73 goals-against average. ... Ovechkin was held without a point.

... Ryan Leonard had two assists for the Capitals. ... The Hurricanes recalled rookie Bradley Nadeau from AHL Chicago after the game.



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Canes Recall Nadeau From Chicago

Forward led Wolves in goals in 2025-26 with 27-29-56 in 52 regular-season games

By Canes PR

October 14, 2026

RALEIGH, N.C. - Eric Tulsky, General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has recalled forward Bradley Nadeau from the Chicago Wolves of the American Hockey League (AHL).

About Bradley Nadeau:

The 20-year-old has recorded one goal in four games with Chicago in 2026-27.

He appeared in 12 games with the Hurricanes in 2025-26, scoring three goals.

The 5'11, 180-pound forward posted 56 points (27g, 29a) with a plus-16 rating in 52 regular season games for the

Wolves in 2025-26 to lead the club in goals, game-winning goals (5) and power-play goals (7).

He helped Chicago reach the 2026 Calder Cup Final with 17 points (7g, 10a) in 21 playoff appearances.

The St-Francois de Madawaska, N.B., native was named to the AHL's All-Rookie Team in 2024-25, ranking first among AHL rookies in points (58), goals (32) and game-winning goals (7).

He has totaled 115 points (60g, 55a) in 120 career AHL games with Chicago.

Prior to turning professional, he registered 46 points (19g, 27a) in 37 NCAA games during his freshman season with the University of Maine, and was named a 2023-24 Hockey East Second Team All-Star and to Hockey East's All-Rookie Team.

Nadeau was selected by the Hurricanes in the first round, 30th overall, of the 2023 NHL Draft and has recorded four points (3g, 1a) in 15 NHL games with Carolina.



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Hurricanes' Taylor Hall exits vs. Capitals with upper-body injury

By: Sportsnet Staff

Veteran forward Taylor Hall left Tuesday's game against the Washington Capitals early due to an upper-body injury and has been ruled out, the team announced.

The 34-year-old left the Hurricanes bench during the second period but briefly took part in a power-play shift before immediately exiting back down the tunnel. When the injury exactly occurred has yet to be determined.

He left the game after 4:17 of time on ice and one hit.

Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour said that the injury "doesn't look good" post-game.

The former Hart Trophy winner was an integral part of Carolina's Cup run last season and had gotten off to a solid start in 2026-27. Hall entered Tuesday with three goals and two assists through seven appearances.



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Hurricanes Winning Streak Could Be Hiding Serious Roster Issue

By: Nestor Quixtan

The Carolina Hurricanes could be dealing with a much larger roster issue given the current run on injuries.

The Carolina Hurricanes could be dealing with a much larger roster issue given the current run on injuries. Getty

The Carolina Hurricanes have won six straight games, and their latest victory over the Washington Capitals showed why they remain one of the NHL's most dangerous teams.

But there is a problem brewing beneath the surface, and the winning streak might be masking just how much work lies ahead for the coaching staff.

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Carolina defeated Washington 4-2 on Tuesday, overcoming another difficult contest to extend its run. Andrei Svechnikov led the way with two goals and an assist, while Pyotr Kochetkov stopped 20 shots. The Hurricanes found a way to get the job done despite losing another forward, Taylor Hall, to an upper-body injury during the game.

That came after the club announced that captain Jordan Staal would miss one to two months with a torn calf muscle.

The loss of Hall is another tough blow to the club that's already playing without Seth Jarvis.

Staal handles difficult defensive matchups, takes important faceoffs and anchors the penalty kill. Hall, meanwhile, gives Carolina another option in its top six and brings valuable experience to a forward group already missing a key contributor.

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The Hurricanes are winning anyway. The question is whether they can keep doing so without compromising the very things that make them so difficult to play against.

Hurricanes Must Find a Way to Replace Jordan Staal's Defensive Work

Replacing Staal is about much more than finding someone to center the third line. The captain routinely takes on the opposition's toughest assignments, allowing Carolina's more offensively gifted forwards to work in more favorable situations.

That is a luxury the Hurricanes no longer have.

Mark Jankowski has already stepped into Staal's spot between Nikolaj Ehlers and Jordan Martinook, and he has given the coaching staff plenty to like. He scored in Sunday's win over Philadelphia and found the net again against Washington, extending his productive start to the season.

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Still, asking Jankowski to replace Staal's entire workload would be a tall order. Staal led Carolina's forwards in shorthanded ice time per game and had taken more faceoffs than anyone else on the roster before his injury.

Jesper Kotkaniemi could also be asked to shoulder more responsibility down the middle, while the remaining forwards will need to share the defensive burden. Rod Brind'Amour has already acknowledged that replacing Staal will require a collective effort.

The danger is that these adjustments eventually catch up with Carolina. If Aho and the other top offensive players start taking on more difficult matchups, the Hurricanes could lose some of the freedom that has helped fuel their winning streak.

Taylor Hall's Absence Could Force a Change to Carolina's Top Six

Hall's injury creates a different problem. Whereas Staal's absence forces Carolina to redistribute defensive responsibilities, losing Hall could leave the team short of options in its top six.

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The veteran forward has three goals and five points through eight games, providing the kind of secondary scoring that can make a deep lineup even more dangerous. Plus, there's no denying the crucial role he played during Carolina's championship run last season.

Hall left Tuesday's game after playing just 4:17, and Brind'Amour's postgame assessment was hardly encouraging. The coach said the injury "doesn't look good," but Hall's timeline is not yet clear. It would be premature to assume he will miss a specific number of games.

If he is sidelined for an extended period, Carolina could look to move a player such as Ehlers or Jackson Blake into a different role, or give a younger forward an opportunity to earn more minutes. The team recalled Bradley Nadeau from the AHL on Wednesday, giving it another option up front.

The Hurricanes have enough depth to absorb one injury. Two key forwards missing time, with Jarvis still out, is whole new ballgame.

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Carolina's winning streak is proof that its depth and system can withstand adversity. But the next test is whether Brind'Amour can keep the lineup balanced without overloading the players who remain healthy. The Hurricanes are off to a terrific start. They just cannot afford to let that success disguise a growing roster problem.



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Carolina Hurricanes Announce Interesting Alexander Nikishin Decision After Capitals Game

By: TJ French

The Carolina Hurricanes won their sixth consecutive NHL game on Tuesday evening with a 3-2 win over the Washington Capitals.

After the Capitals game, the Hurricanes' transactions page was a busy one for a few different reasons.

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First, Jordan Staal and Taylor Hall have both suffered injuries, which will test the depth of the Canes' forward group.

Another interesting pop-up on the PuckPedia.com transactions page involved Alexander Nikishin, who has been 'holding out' while waiting for a new contract.

More NHL on Heavy: Carolina Hurricanes Announce Roster News After Capitals Game

Alexander Nikishin Lands On Injured, Non-Roster List

It's a weird roster designation, but Alexander Nikishin popped up on the NHL transactions tracker with the following statement:

"Nikishin (contract dispute) is on the Carolina Hurricanes' injured, non-roster list, per the NHL media site Wednesday."

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Very notably, the Hurricanes have been working on trying to find a trade partner to offload Nikishin, but there hasn't been any traction in the last several weeks, and I guess it was finally time for the Hurricanes to make an official roster move with their 24 y/o defenceman.



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The Hockey News

Hurricanes Flip Script On Capitals; Extend Win Streak To Six

By: Ryan Henkel

The Carolina Hurricanes look like world beaters as of late, and you know, that's to be expected from the defending Stanley Cup champions.

The Canes defeated the Washington Capitals 4-2 to extend their win streak to six games and it was again a full-team effort that pushed them over the edge.

Here are five takeaways from the win:

The Hurricanes and Capitals were playing things pretty even through the first 30 minutes, with Washington perhaps having the better share of looks overall, but the Canes completely flipped the script after that.

Shots in the game were 15-14 Washington halfway through by the end of the game, the Hurricanes had a 35-22 advantage in that department.

In terms of total 5v5 shot share, Carolina outchanced the Capitals 43-15 through the final two periods, scoring all four of their goals in that span too.

It was a really impressive showing for the Hurricanes, especially considering that Washington is a very talented team who beat the Canes just two weeks earlier and also the fact that Carolina was dealing with an additional two injury blows, including one midgame.

"I just thought after the [first] intermission, we regrouped and the guys came out with a real good game after that," said Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour.

"We just had to get to our game," said Mark Jankowski. "It was a slow start. We didn't really start on time there. But once we got to our game, we're getting pucks behind them, we're spending more time in the O-zone, less in the D-zone. So once we were able to get to our game, it felt like we turned it a little bit."

The loss of Jordan Staal isn't a small one for the Hurricanes.

The veteran captain is an integral part of the team's identity from his role as a shutdown center, to the heavy game he plays, to the faceoff wins, to his spot on the top power play and penalty kill.

He does everything for Carolina and there's really no replacing that impact.

However, Mark Jankowski is doing his best to fill those big shoes.

"Conn Smythe shoes to fill," Jankowski said. "We fill that by committee. Not one guy is going to do what Jordo can do, and obviously, it's a big loss for us on and off the ice."

Jankowski is slotting in as the third line center alongside Nikolaj Ehlers and Jordan Martinook, taking shifts on the top

penalty kill (he led all forwards in shorthanded ice time on Tuesday) and was out there for the final defensive zone faceoff with the team defending a one-goal lead.

He's getting trusted with a big boost in responsibilities and so far, he's been handling them admirably.

"You talk about making the most of your opportunity," Brind'Amour said. "I feel like this guy just from Day 1, he said, 'Okay. It's a new team,' and kind of reinvented himself a little bit. He's done nothing but play well. It's nice to see guys who actually get that chance take advantage of it and we need it obviously with who we've got out of the lineup."

Oh and on top of all that, he's also scored five goals in five straight games.

"I've gotten a few that have gone past the goalie," Jankowski said. "A lot of these goals, my linemates are making great plays, and I've just got the job to put it in."

Goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov is off to a tremendous start to his 2026-27 season.

The 27-year-old is 4-0-0 to start the year, posting a 0.911 save percentage and 1.73 goals against average in that span.

What makes it even more impressive is that these are Kochetkov's first NHL games since December of last year.

The Russian netminder underwent hip surgery last season and so he hadn't seen actual NHL action in nearly 10 months.

However, he's jumped right back into things and looks like a guy that can be counted on night in and night out.

"There's another guy that we have a lot of high hopes for," Brind'Amour said. "Injuries and things have kind of hampered that a little, but the talent is there and we're certainly seeing it these last few games. That's the most important position. If we can get that play out of him, we'll be in good shape."

His game against Washington was really good, making 20 of 22 saves, and I thought his rebound control was perhaps one of his most impressive attributes in the win.

But his best moment was by far the save on Ilya Protas late in the first period. With the Hurricanes on a 5v3 penalty kill, Kochetkov got across to hold his post on the Washington forward and kept multiple speared at attempts from getting across the goal line.

"Big save there at the end of the first period," said winger Andrei Svechnikov. "If they had scored that one it would have gone a different way, but just big saves all over the ice. He's just going to keep doing that."

PK keeps it out! ❌ What a massive, shorthanded, late-period stop from Pyotr Kochetkov.



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After winning six games in a row, the Carolina Hurricanes sit at the top of league standings with 13 points. They rank second overall in terms of points percentage (0.812).

It's been a full team effort up and down the lineup, with guys chipping in on every line, a near perfect penalty kill and wins from both netminders, but the top guys have been especially noticeable for Carolina.

With a two-goal, three-point night on Tuesday, Andrei Svechnikov moved into a tie for the fifth most goals in the league (6) and the eighth most points (11).

Sebastian Aho also picked up two assists on the evening, putting him third in the entire league for points (13).

Pyotr Kochetkov is tied for second in total wins by a goalie (4) and the team's penalty kill ranks second in the league as well (93.3%).

So all in all, things are going pretty well for the champs.

Veteran forward Taylor Hall exited Tuesday's game early, taking his last shift in the second period before being ruled out due to an upper-body injury.

Hall didn't initially come out for the second period and his shift was only an 11 second spin after hopping onto the ice for an offensive zone faceoff while Carolina was on the power play.

After losing the draw and seeing the puck cleared down, Hall went straight to the bench and looked to be in obvious discomfort.

While there was no definite play that injured him, he did take a good amount of contact by a hit from Justin Sourdif with a little over five minutes to go in the first period.

Hall played out that shift and even took another a little bit later, but both were fairly short lived.

Rod Brind'Amour didn't have an update on Hall after the game, but said that it "didn't look good."

Carolina is already down two forwards in Seth Jarvis and Jordan Staal, so losing another top-nine forward would certainly be a blow for the team.

"It sucks to see injuries, no matter who it is but you kind of have to have that next-man-up mentality a little bit," said Jackson Blake. "[Jordan Staal and Taylor Hall] are two key players for our team, but we can't use it as an excuse or anything. We've got to go out there and still compete and try to win."

As a final note, this was Alex Ovechkin's last game in Lenovo Center, as the Washington Capitals captain announced that this will be his final year in the NHL.

Ovie has long been a thorn in the side of Hurricanes fans and he certainly liked scoring in Raleigh, having scored 33 goals and 59 points across 49 games on the road against Carolina, more than any other opponent.

But the crowd at Lenovo Center did give him a standing ovation during a stoppage in play, a nod to all the battles they have had and the impact he has made on the game.

"Always nice to play Ovie," Svechnikov said. "Just what a legend. Especially for me as a Russian guy to play against him. It's a special moment every time we end up on the ice together."



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'It's Next-Man-Up Mentality': Andrei Svechnikov, Jackson Blake, Mark Jankowski, Rod Brind'Amour On Comeback Win Over Capitals

By: Ryan Henkel

On what turned the game: I give the guys credit. We were sluggish there to start and Washington was good, obviously. I thought Kooch kept us in it. That was a huge play there at 5v3. Close to a goal and able to survive that whole incident, which don't know how it should even be like that, but that's another discussion. Then I just thought after the intermission, we regrouped and the guys came out with a real good game after that.

On Mark Jankowski stepping up in Jordan Staal's absence: You talk about making the most of your opportunity. I feel like this guy just from Day 1, he said, "Okay. It's a new team," and kind of reinvented himself a little bit. He's done nothing but play well. It's nice to see guys who actually get that chance take advantage of it and we need it obviously with who we've got out of the lineup.

On Taylor Hall's status: Don't have [an update] yet, but that doesn't look good either. This is what happens in this league. You have to deal with it. That's the only thing you can do. Everyone goes through it, it's just tough when it kind of piles on.

On Andrei Svechnikov: He's been great. This is kind of the player that we all know he is capable of and we're just seeing it now for a long stretch to start the year. We've needed it, especially with the guys we have out. It's impressive.

On the flip from last time they played Washington: We have a high standard, so we expect to win every night and so when you don't, you're like "Eh." I wasn't disappointed. Those two teams we played at the start of the season are two of the better teams in the league and we were fine. We just didn't get the bounces. Tonight, we got a couple. I give the guys a lot of credit. They've been prepared and they know what it takes, especially with what's going on right now with all the guys out. We're finding ways to win and that's what you have to do.

On his confidence in the group: We're at a point where we're pretty confident in what works. We understand it. We also know when we down what works too. We can get back with our game. It's just a matter of getting to it, but it's not easy. If it was easy, everybody would be doing it. It's hard, but our guys dug in tonight and we got big plays at right times from guys and that's also what you need.

On the little detail plays: That's what it's all about. I can, off the top of my head without even going through the game, count like five of those. Slavo on a 2-on-1, 3-on-1 breaks up a play, Will when two D fall right near the end of the period and backchecks to break up the breakaway. There's all these little things that creep in that could have been that we've been finding ways to not let it happen. That's just kind of from the effort these guys have been giving.

On Pyotr Kochetkov: There's another guy that we have a lot of high hopes for. Injuries and things have kind of hampered that a little, but the talent is there and we're certainly seeing it these last few games. That's the most important position. If we can get that play out of him, we'll be in good shape.

On Kochetkov going for the empty netter: We all [wanted him to go for it]. It's one of those special things. We saw one the other night. They don't happen very often. He has the ability to do it and it was the right time. You're up by a couple, so green light. It's all good.

On the game: It's kind of been hard. We kind of lost Hallsy there and just playing shorthanded forwards. It's kind of hard, but we kind of just stuck with our game. Even though they're a really good team, we just stuck with our game and that's what happens.

On his power play goal: [Nikolaj Ehlers] made a nice play and I just kind of had to finish it.

On what changed halfway through the game: To be honest, it wasn't a great start, but we kind of flipped over and we kind of stuck with our game, went on the forecheck a little more, went after those pucks and just spent more time in their zone.

On how badly he wanted the hat trick: I wanted it to be honest, but it's okay. I'm happy Janky scored. Let's keep that streak going.

On what's been going right on the winning streak: Just sticking with our game. We have the best coaching staff in the world and we just need to do what they tell us and that's what's going to happen.

On Pyotr Kochetkov: Kooch, first period, big save there at the end. If they had scored that one it would have gone a different way, but just big saves all over the ice. He's just going to keep doing that.

On his unsportsmanlike penalty: He came to me and I just said to him, "Why didn't you call that?" It wasn't anything rude, but I kind of banged my stick, and that's why he called it, I guess. It's okay. It happens sometimes.

On the key to his goal scoring as of late: Good question, I gotta think about it. No key. Just playing my game, enjoying the game. Obviously Fishy, Will have been unbelievable. Grinding away every shift and playing in their zone every shift. Just so much fun and hopefully it's going to be that way. It's fun to play this way.

On if it was nice to score against Alex Ovechkin in his final visit to Lenovo Center: Maybe. Maybe a little extra. No, I don't want to say that. Always nice to play Ovie. Just what a legend. Especially for me as a Russian guy to play against him. It's a special moment every time we end up on the ice together. It's always fun.

On the upcoming road trip: We know we have a couple days off. Just relax and get back. We got six in a row, so let's make it whatever, 10, 15. That'd be awesome.

On having goals in five straight and what's been going right for that to happen: Just the whole team's kind of playing real good hockey right now. So everyone's reaping the benefits. Luckily, I've gotten a few that have gone past the goalie, and obviously Svech made a huge play there, just holding off two guys with one arm and sliding it over for an easy empty net.



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On taking on some of Jordan Staal's responsibilities: Conn Smythe shoes to fill. We fill that by committee. Not one guy is going to do what Jordo can do, and obviously, it's a big loss for us on and off the ice. So wish him all the best. But everyone, as a committee, can step up.

On embracing the opportunity: I have confidence and belief in my game and whatever the coach asks me to to help the team win, I feel like I can provide.

On taking over the game after a slow start: We just had to get to our game. You're right. It was a slow start. We didn't really start on time there. But once we got to our game, we're getting pucks behind them, we're spending more time in the O-zone, less in the D-zone. So once we were able to get to our game, it felt like we turned it a little bit.

On losing Taylor Hall to injury and the difficulty in playing a man down: Yeah, it's hard. You're playing with different linemates throughout the rest of that game, but we're used to that. That unfortunately happens sometimes in the game — things get lost and you kind of get shuffled around and stuff. But that's another big loss. Hopefully he's going to be okay. But yeah, everyone just kind of stepped up again.

On what's clicking during the six-game winning streak: We have all four line rolling, both goalies, everyone's playing well right now. So that's when we're at our best, I feel like, when we can roll four lines for 60 minutes and just kind of smother them and never take our foot off the gas. So I feel like we're doing that really well right now.

On being trusted by the coaching staff: It means a lot. It's something that I pride myself in and every day just trying to get a little bit better. Whether it's practice, whether it's a game, just trying to improve my game however I can and trying to prove to Rod and the coaching staff that they can trust me in any situation out there.

On if injuries are good to shake up the lineup: You never want to see guys go down, so that's that's the first thing. That's unfortunate. Hopefully, those guys are going to be okay. It's a long season, 84 games this year, and there's going to be adversity, whether it's at the beginning of the year, middle of the year, end of the year. So you've got to roll with the punches and just keep moving forward.

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SportScan

Articles from outlets covering the Hurricanes' upcoming opponents and league-wide news

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Carolina Hurricanes

Svechnikov's two goals help Hurricanes surge to 4-2 victory over Capitals

Chip Alexander

Hurricanes.

The Canes have lost their captain for a month, maybe two. They've lost their best defensive center, best faceoff man, one of their best – if not the best – penalty killers.

Against the Philadelphia Flyers on Sunday, it didn't matter. The Canes won big. Against the Washington Capitals on Tuesday, it was a lot tougher.

The Hurricanes took a 4-2 victory over the Caps at Lenovo Center as forward Andrei Svechnikov had a pair of goals and an assist, running their winning streak to six games.

Svechnikov's second goal, on a power play with 6:04 left in regulation, gave the Canes the lead and proved to be the game-winner. But the winger, named the game's first star, was quick to note the absence that will be felt without No. 11, Staal, who has suffered a partial calf muscle tear.

"Obviously it's a big loss," Svechnikov said. "He's our 'Sheriff.' He's a huge part of what we do, and it's going to be hard to play without him, with the penalty kills and all the five-on-five stuff, playing against the best lines.

"We've just got to stick with our game and play our game. Whatever happens, happens. But obviously it's a big loss for us."

The Canes (6-1-1) have played the first eight games without winger Seth Jarvis, who continues to work his way back from offseason shoulder surgery and is close to a return.

Now, Staal is gone. And forward Taylor Hall left Tuesday's game with an upper-body injury in the second period.

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour did not have an update on Hall's condition but said it "doesn't look good."

The Canes, set to make a five-game Western road trip, on Wednesday recalled forward Bradly Nadeau from the Chicago Wolves of the AHL.

"That happens in this league," Brind'Amour said of the injuries. "You've got to deal with it. That's the only thing you can do. Everybody goes through it."

Goalie Pyotr Kochetkov earned his fourth win of the season, and his 20 saves included some timely ones early in the game as the Canes fought through a slow start.

Canes center Sebastian Aho continued his offensive tear, picking up a pair of assists to extend his point streak to seven games.

Svechnikov nearly had hats flying in the final minutes of the game. After the Caps pulled goalie Logan Thompson for an extra attacker, Svechnikov zoomed down ice after the puck as Canes fans rose and cheered, expecting the hat trick.

Unable to get a shot on net, Svechnikov spotted Mark Jankowski open and got him the puck for an easy score.

"He's been great," Brind'Amour said of Svechnikov. "This is the kind of player that we all know he's capable of being. He's been on a hot stretch to start the year, and we've needed it with the guys we've lost."

For Jankowski, it was his fifth goal in the past five games. The center has been moved into Staal's spot between Nikolaj Ehlers and Jordan Martinook, and also has been used in penalty killing and on the power play.

Told he had big shoes to fill, Jankowski smiled and said, "Conn Smythe shoes to fill."

Staal was named the Conn Smythe Trophy winner after the Canes' torrid run to the Stanley Cup. If Brind'Amour had to pick one player he would not want to play without, it likely would be Staal.

"We'll do it by committee," Jankowski said. "Not one guy can do it."

The Canes took time in the first period to recognize the Caps' Alexander Ovechkin, who will retire after this season. The man they call "Ovi" and the "Great 8" was drafted in the arena in 2004 and the NHL's all-time goal scorer was making his last scheduled appearance in Raleigh, barring a return for the playoffs.

The two teams traded goals, glares, hard shoves and penalties in the first two periods. Boone Jenner and Justin Holl scored, twice giving the Caps the lead. Svechnikov and Eric Robinson answered for Carolina – Robinson's goal with 1:11 left in the second for a 2-2 tie.

Washington scored first after a three-on-one rush into the zone. Kochetkov stopped Jenner's first shot, but the Caps retrieved the puck and Boone found the net with a second chance.

Brind'Amour was steamed late in the period after Nicolas Deslauriers was called for cross-checking and then Svechnikov was sent to the box for unsportsmanlike conduct. But the Canes penalty killers got the job done.

Holl, making his debut for the Caps, scored his first goal of the season – and 15th of his career – in the second for a 2-1 lead. But the Canes had more offensive mojo in the period to pressure goalie Logan Thompson.

Svechnikov attacked a rebound and knocked a loose puck past Thompson. Cap coach Spencer Carbery challenged for goaltender interference but the call was upheld on review.

With the second period winding down, Robinson put a shot on net from the left circle, the puck catching the stick of Caps defenseman Martin Fehervary in front and getting through Thompson.

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The Athletic / The future of Frozen Frenzy? Why it's here to stay, and what the NHL might tweak

By Pierre LeBrun

The NHL's Frozen Frenzy is definitely here to stay, but not necessarily in the form we saw Tuesday.

For the fourth consecutive year, all 32 teams played in the one-night event, with television start times staggered in 15-minute intervals from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. ET.

That element itself — staggered starts — could be modified. Do we really need an 11 p.m. ET game to cap off the night, just to keep the games staggered? That's a conversation the league will have internally.

But I will say, even as an older dude who is cynical about many things the NHL does, I have grown to enjoy the concept.

The NHL agrees.

"We felt it was a complete success," Steve Mayer, the president of NHL content and events, told The Athletic on Wednesday. "We'd love to do it more. There are (regional TV) rights issues that preclude us from doing that, but at the end of the day, this is a great way to showcase the NHL."

Is October the best sports month?

Chris Branch

Mayer, the league's creative force, was on hand in Bristol, Conn., at ESPN headquarters, to experience the network's show covering Frozen Frenzy, which bounced around all the action on ESPN2.

So how will the Frenzy evolve?

Some things to consider as the league continues to tinker with it:

- Right now, it's really a U.S.-only event. In Canada, you need the NHL Center Ice package to watch the 16 games, and there is no show jumping from game to game. The league hopes to make the Frenzy available that way in both countries.
- One complication, as Mayer said, is that it's the one night a year that all the teams and networks sign off on any broadcast rights issues that are being infringed upon by the ESPN2 coverage. That's probably the No. 1 reason that Frozen Frenzy only happens once a year. It would not be easy to get everyone involved in regional TV rights issues to play ball more often.
- The next time all 32 teams play on the same day is the last day of the regular season, but that's not a Frozen Frenzy event. Start times won't be staggered (there's a flex-schedule option for that day, depending on the importance of the games in the playoff picture). But the question is, does the league ever foresee doing the all-32 Frozen Frenzy more than once a year, bearing in mind the regional TV rights issue? The answer is yes, it has been batted around, given how positive the response has been. There are pros and cons to be sure, but the overall internal view is that it's a great platform to capture the energy of the league.
- Is the date perfect? The MLB postseason is going on right now, but with all due respect to fans in Tampa, Fla., and Cleveland, whose teams played Game 2 of the American League Championship Series on Tuesday night, I don't think that competition mattered a whole lot. The NHL is always considering whether there's a better time of year to hold Frozen Frenzy, but the reality is you're always going up against something. I have no issue with it happening early in the season.
- As for the day of the week, one NHL team president, who requested anonymity to discuss league business that's not public, said that while he understands the league's reluctance to go on a Saturday because of college football, "I do think it's a tougher thing to execute on a Tuesday night." More on that in a moment.
- One thing I would tweak: advertise actual puck drop times instead of telecast start times. Hey, I work for a TV network (TSN). I understand

that networks want fans tuning in for pregame coverage. But on this particular night, telling fans when the actual puck drop is would help them engage and avoid confusion.

• Tuesday night also was an opportunity for the NHL's Hockey Fights Cancer initiative, and 12 of the 16 home teams had special moments in their arenas that were shown on the telecast with callouts to raise money. That's terrific.

• It's a night when the NHL hopes to welcome in more casual fans, to be sure. And it was a good showcase for the league, by any measure, including a Brady Tkachuk hat trick, Sidney Crosby scoring twice, Connor Bedard making his return, Connor McDavid getting four more points and offense galore from the Toronto Maple Leafs and Utah Mammoth.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Brady Tkachuk makes NHL history with natural hat trick with 3 assists from his brother

The goals, which all came on the power play, were also Brady Tkachuk's first goals for the Panthers.

"I thought it was great," Edmonton Oilers CEO and president of hockey operations Jeff Jackson said. "We were in L.A., as you know, so it was fun to be able to watch so many games before we played. Cool concept. We had a 7:30 p.m. PT start, which was OK."

The unsaid part there is that players generally don't like late, late starts. So the Oilers were happy it was only 7:30 for them. Later starts mess with player routines, which, again, is why I think the NHL will re-examine how rigid the staggered starts need to be.

And an 11:15 p.m. ET puck drop was far from ideal for Boston Bruins fans watching from home Tuesday.

"It's a great concept to have all teams play the same day, although tough for an East Coast team's fanbase to have an 11:15 p.m. Eastern puck drop," Bruins president Cam Neely said. "I heard plenty of complaints, for example, from our fans in New England. Maybe think of doing it all day on a Saturday after college football?"

The late puck drop also isn't ideal for fans in the arena.

"Despite starting an hour later than normal, attendance was slightly above original projections," San Jose Sharks president Jonathan Becher said. "As an occasional event to raise awareness, it works well. It may inconvenience East Coast fans of both teams too much to make it a regular feature."

Getting it right for all 32 teams and markets in one day won't ever be 100 percent.

"It's a fun concept," Dallas Stars president and CEO Brad Alberts said. "The start times can be a little weird for teams and fans, but I have no issue with the concept."

Added Los Angeles Kings president Luc Robitaille: "I like it. It's good for the game. Makes people talk. Should do it more all day (stagger it more throughout the day). It's fun for the fans."

Another NHL team president, who requested anonymity so he could be a little more critical, began his comment by saying it's a "great initiative."

But ...

"(It needs) better combined marketing," he said. "Better day of week."

Better combined marketing meaning teams, league and broadcast parameters — a more integrated plan — he argued. And another knock was Tuesday night as the day of the week.

This is all good feedback for the NHL as it continues to tweak Frozen Frenzy.

Is it perfect? Of course not. But there's definitely something here to continue to build.

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The Athletic / Elite athletes require mental toughness. Here's what that actually means

By Elise Devlin

This story is part of Peak, The Athletic's desk covering the mental side of sports. Sign up for Peak's newsletter here.

How do you describe mental toughness?

It's a slippery term; we know what we mean when we say it, but it is hard to define. And does it mean the same thing to every athlete?

For example, a tennis player has to manage the pressure of competing alone, while a baseball player faces long stretches between moments of action.

So, we asked eight athletes: How do you define mental toughness in your sport?

Natasha Cloud, WNBA: Admitting you're not OK

One day at practice, Cloud, a starting guard for the Chicago Sky, looked at her teammate, Courtney Vandersloot, and said, "I only have 20 percent for you today. I need you to pick up my other 80. I'm sorry I'm making you pick up my other 80, but I have to vocalize that I'm not OK today."

"That's what it means to be mentally tough," Cloud said. "Obviously, yes, put one foot in front of the other, left foot, right foot, breathe. But it's also being able to ask for help when you need it, feeling safe to ask for help when you need it, and understanding how much power comes in vulnerability."

That day, Cloud felt Vandersloot beside her throughout practice, louder and more encouraging than usual, which steadily pushed her toward where she needed to be.

Colin Wilson, NHL: Treating yourself with empathy

Wilson, a former NHL player for the Colorado Avalanche and Nashville Predators, used to think mental toughness meant never quitting. Looking back on his 11-year career, though, he wishes he had learned sooner that self-empathy is part of being mentally tough, too.

After eight years with the same team, Wilson was traded from Nashville to Colorado. On his first day, he showed up at the rink without knowing the gate code and stood outside with his bags, waiting for another player to let him in.

"It was just like I was a new kid at a new school, trying to figure out how I'm going to fit in," he said. "Everybody's already so close on the team, but you're trying to learn a new system."

Wilson called it "the worst year" of his career. What helped him get through it was giving himself some flexibility.

Should we be 'practicing' feeling nervous?

Elise Devlin

He thinks people have different "baselines," a level of physical and mental capacity that can shift depending on what's happening in their lives. Because everyone's baseline is different, he believes we have to give ourselves room to adjust.

For Wilson, that was harder mentally than physically. He knew how to push through a workout or grind through a game. The hard part was allowing himself to ease up when he needed to.

That season may have been the worst of his career from a performance standpoint, but it ended with what he considers the "best year-end meeting" of his career.

Head coach Joe Sakic sat him down and said, "Hey, the guys really like you in the locker room, and you are a joy to work with."

In a way, flexibility is what got him there.

"I was like, 'Oh, that's very nice because I was not great out there,'" Wilson said. "So at least he was flexible with me."

Cliff Floyd, MLB: Trusting yourself when results aren't there

A hitter can have a good at-bat and still walk back to the dugout 0-for-1. Do it 30 times, and the mental side of baseball becomes harder to separate from the results.

Cliff Floyd, who played 17 seasons in MLB — most notably for the Montreal Expos, Florida Marlins and New York Mets — said that's when mental toughness is needed.

Floyd said a hitter can study what he is doing wrong, work on it, feel good about the adjustment he made, walk to the plate with a good attitude and a sound plan — and still hit the ball directly to the second baseman for an out.

That is what Floyd said takes time to understand and develop: an at-bat's result doesn't always tell you whether you handled it correctly. But you have to keep trusting yourself.

"By year 7, 8, 9, you start saying: I did what I needed to do today. I worked my ass off," Floyd said. "I can ball this paper up today, throw it away and look forward to tomorrow. When you can do that, you've conquered mental toughness."

Mary Stoiana, tennis: Zoom in when things get difficult

On a hot, humid August night, Stoiana faced Oksana Selekhmeteva in the second round of qualifiers at the Cincinnati Open.

After winning the first set 6-0, Stoiana felt she had won the match.

By the third set, everything had changed. She was tired. The night suddenly felt late. And she caught herself thinking, "This could have and should have been done an hour ago."

That's when she tried to tap into what she calls a "blacked-out state," where she blocks everything out and zooms in on exactly what's in front of her.

She repeated to herself, "You got this." Stoiana kept her shoulders high, jumped up and down to reset her mind and body and held on to win the match.

For Stoiana, it was a real-life example of mental toughness.

"It's not easy, and I had to really fight through and stay tough to get through it," she said.

Stacey Copeland, boxer: Sisu

One Finnish word has completely changed former professional boxer Stacey Copeland's life. She has it plastered on her phone case and wears the word around her neck on a custom necklace.

To her, it defines mental toughness.

"Sisu" translates to the spirit with which you face adversity.

After Copeland retired from boxing, her "sisu" was tested when her best friend took her own life.

"That was one of those things that didn't make sense," Copeland said. "Why would you give a beautiful human being with just the most wonderful soul an illness so bad that it eventually takes them from us?"

Later, after she came out of the initial grief period, Copeland asked herself, "What is the sisu here?"

She decided to throw her friend the best possible celebration of life she could, organized a mural of her friend to be painted and reconnected with friends she hadn't seen in years.

"Beautiful things came from just the worst tragedy," Copeland said. "But it's an example of when I needed to know what sisu was."

Robert Turbin, NFL: Can you finish the final reps?

In college, Turbin, a former NFL player who spent most of his career with the Seattle Seahawks, said his Utah State team had to run grueling 110-yard sprints.



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Linemen had to do it in 15 seconds, linebackers in 14 and skill players like Turbin in 12.

They weren't allowed to bend over or put their hands on their knees, so when one player was exhausted, he leaned on someone less worn down.

"There were times I was the guy that was the shoulder, and there were times, even as a captain, I needed a shoulder," Turbin said. "Once you accomplish that and you know you can do it in your own mind, you keep trying to raise the stakes. Part of that is being in shape, but a huge part of it is establishing the mental fortitude."

The willingness to push through discomfort began in college but followed him through his eight seasons in the NFL, where he mostly played for the Seahawks and Indianapolis Colts. In the pros, dealing with pain became part of the job.

"That's a risk that you take because somebody else comes in and that somebody else may never, ever come off the field again," he said. "In football, you better have some of that mental toughness."

Jackson Suber, golf: Blocking out negative thoughts under stress

As a PGA Tour golfer, Suber sees mental toughness as learning how his body and mind respond as pressure builds.

To prepare, he pays attention to moments throughout the week when he feels a strong emotion. Maybe he comes home to his fiancé and dog and feels completely relaxed and happy, or maybe he reads something negative about himself and notices a spike of anxiety.

Instead of pushing those feelings away, he pays attention to what happens next. Does his chest tighten? Does his breathing change?

Over time, those reactions become information.

That awareness becomes especially valuable on the golf course, where he said stress can build quickly and he can't completely avoid it. A missed putt or a bad swing can trigger the same physical and emotional signals he's experienced off the green.

So he taught himself to recognize those signals early enough to respond rather than let them dictate the rest of the tournament.

"There's no way to completely block out stuff," he said, "but I think softening your response and how much certain things affect you is kind of where I put that definition."

Arch Manning, college football: Let your mistakes fuel you

To Arch Manning, the quarterback of the Texas Longhorns, Los Angeles Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford personifies mental toughness for one reason: He bounces back after mistakes.

Last season, Stafford was one of the NFL's best quarterbacks at scoring on a possession after turning the ball over.

Recently, he bounced back from a pick six by throwing a 48-yard touchdown pass on the very next drive in the Rams' game against the Denver Broncos.

"I think it's having that mentality of dealing with adversity, which I continue to get better at," Manning said. "You need that in sports."

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ESPN / 'Cars' nods abound in No. 95 Roger McQueen's NHL debut - ESPN

Greg Wyshynski

Roger McQueen made his NHL debut for the Anaheim Ducks on Tuesday night. He brought inevitable references to the Pixar classic "Cars" with him.

When McQueen was drafted 10th overall in 2025, the Ducks presented him with a No. 95 jersey -- a reference to the car number of Lightning McQueen, the Owen Wilson-voiced protagonist of the "Cars" movies. After he was selected, the McQueen family went to the 55th floor of The Ritz-Carlton in Los Angeles to board a helicopter and fly to Disneyland in nearby Anaheim, where Roger McQueen met Lightning McQueen.

McQueen got the call Monday night that he would be elevated from the AHL to play for the Ducks.

"I thought he got better in camp as he went along. He was one of those guys that would be pushing for a job," coach Joel Quenneville said of the center. "Roger's got some upside in what could be a really nice career."

On Tuesday night, before the Ducks' home game against Calgary Flames, McQueen took his customary rookie lap to start warmups -- wearing No. 95 and sans helmet -- while the arena speakers blared "Real Gone" by Sheryl Crow. While not a staple of arena rock playlists, it was wholly appropriate here: "Real Gone" is the opening track from the "Cars" soundtrack album and was featured in the film.

McQueen played 11:26 in his NHL debut with no points and a shot on goal. It wasn't a memorable night for the Ducks as they lost to the moribund Flames 4-2 in front of a sellout crowd.

One game down, many more to go for McQueen. When he was drafted, Roger's father Scott McQueen said that the "Cars" connection intensifies the spotlight on the young center as he begins his career.

"I think everybody kind of wants to fly under the radar and you know, and just play," Scott said via the CBC. "He wants to prove himself as a player and not so much, you know, as a Disney character."

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Dobes fighting for starter's crease after another frustrating loss

Eric Engels

Jakub Dobes slid too far over, exposing the back door of his crease on the first of four straight goals he'd end up wanting back by night's end.

This game against the Washington Capitals was meant to be a bounce back for him after allowing 11 goals combined in his last two starts and then being forced to watch Jacob Fowler take his net for three straight games. But it ended up being a step back for the goaltender, who's serving up early-season proof of how elusive consistency can be at his position.

Samuel Montembeault had it for two straight years before losing it completely and being unseated by Dobes last season. And now it's Dobes who's failing to fend off Fowler, following up a brilliant spring with a gloomy fall.

No goaltender stopped more expected goals from last trade deadline through three rounds of the playoffs than the 25-year-old Czech, but right now he looks as though he can't even make routine saves — like the ones the Capitals fed him through most of Wednesday's game.

It was a game the Montreal Canadiens completely dominated, holding the Capitals without a high-danger scoring chance at five-on-five through the first 48:54 before only allowing them two through the final 11:06.

Dobes saved those, and you couldn't fault him for not stopping the power-play goal Jordan Kyrrou scored from the middle of the slot to tie the game 1-1 in the first period.

But his over-aggression cost him on Ivan Miroshnichenko's back-door bank shot off Josh Anderson to tie the game 2-2 in the first period, and then again on two goals from Alex Tuch that bookmarked one from Justin Holl.

Dobes failed to properly track that shot from Holl.

Yes, it deflected off Canadiens forward Jake Evans' stick.

But Dobes was correct in not using that as an excuse when reporters caught up with him in the visiting locker room, because he knew that puck was tipped in high ice and barely changed course on its way to the net.

"It doesn't matter what it is," Dobes said. "It's a game of mistakes, a game of every second counts. Unfortunately, I felt pretty good in some situations, but still gave up five goals and the guys scored four, so I just need to save a couple of more for the guys."

It's what Dobes did through most of last season.

Even in games that got away from the Canadiens, he always seemed to come up with the extra saves they needed.

It's because Dobes is a fighter, and that part hasn't changed.

He's still battling on every shot, still fighting for every save.

But Dobes is also fighting the puck far too much, struggling to follow up last spring's heroics — and a near-perfect debut in the opening win of this season in Toronto — with anything resembling what's expected of him.

"We know what Dobes is capable of," said Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis, who has no choice but to turn back to Fowler while hoping goaltending coach Marco Marciano can get Dobes back on track.

Because he was off the rails Wednesday, in a game the Canadiens had no business losing.

They controlled 62 per cent of the shot attempts, 67 per cent of the expected goals, and generated 13 high-danger chances at five-on-five. Their penalty kill was staunch, but also unlucky on Kyrrou's goal and undone by Dobes' overplay on Miroshnichenko's. And their power play

was thwarted only by Capitals goaltender Charlie Lindgren, who made incredible saves before Tuch buried the first of his two goals.

You could tell Dobes was particularly frustrated after that no-look, shorthanded shot beat him clean under his glove.

"It's my job to be ready," he said. "It's just, I feel like I didn't really get any momentum to the guys, so we were just chasing the game. I feel like I need to be better as a teammate, as a goalie, and it sucks right now."

There's plenty of time to turn it around, and Dobes should know that just based on how last season started and ended for him.

Through the first two months of it, he hadn't done enough to displace Montembeault, who looked eerily similar to how Dobes has through his last three starts. But he then dialed in his game and took over while also fending off Fowler from mid-December onward.

It's relevant experience to draw from, and Dobes, who only has 82 games under his belt at this level, should be thankful for it.

But he needs to draw from it right now, with the starter's role slipping from his grasp and Fowler heating up.

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Sportsnet.ca / Where five struggling NHL teams land on the Panic Meter

Ryan Dixon

When an NHL team is swirling, all you can hope for is some promise to temper the panic.

On Tuesday night, Connor Bedard — playing as Chicago Blackhawks captain for the first time in his career — returned ahead of schedule from off-season surgery and, with one assist, helped the Hawks to their second win of the season.

Will it be smooth sailing for the Blackhawks from here? Perhaps not, but Bedard's presence is surely a reason for shaken Chicago fans to slowly back away from the ledge.

Of course, not every struggling team has a guy ready to step in who can counteract the crumminess.

With that in mind, we're checking the Panic Meter in five NHL cities to get a sense of how worried everyone should be. To be clear, we're not concerning ourselves with squads that courted misery. Difficult as they may be to watch night after night, the likes of the Vancouver Canucks and Calgary Flames are exactly where they want to be in the standings.

For teams with playoff hopes, however, early-season scuffles bring about a much different feeling. As such, let's examine the gauge on the Panic Meter for a handful of clubs.

It's almost as though getting waxed 7-0 on home ice by the Pittsburgh Penguins on opening night broke the Flyers. Even with the rebuilding Flames and Canucks in the league, the Flyers — still in search of their first win after eight outings — have the worst five-on-five goal differential (minus-15) in the NHL (thanks largely to that lopsided loss to Pittsburgh). Philly also has the worst expected goals percentage (34.5 per cent) to match according to Money puck.

The Flyers, recall, made the second round of the playoffs last spring and even if we all figured it would be a chore for them to again be among the East's top eight clubs, nobody thought they'd be buried by mid-October.

You could make a case the only Flyer who is performing the way the team hoped is newcomer Joseph Woll, who's basically personally responsible for pushing the team to extra time on two occasions and snagging single points in both those outings. Woll has a .914 save percentage in four contests and has received a grand total of six goals support in those games.

Only two Flyers — Christian Dvorak and Matvei Michkov — have more than one goal so far (both are at two) and the team has yet to tally more than two goals in a single game.

It's about as grim as it can get. The only "yeah but" you can offer is that despite making the playoffs last season, we all understood this team remained a work in progress.

Still, nobody could have imagined this much work had to be done.

We opened with one winless squad, so naturally it's time to discuss the other.

About all you can say for the Kings is at least they're only 0-for-5, as opposed to having whiffed in eight attempts like Philly.

The difference, though, is that while the Flyers are in some state of organizational build, Los Angeles is old as dirt with no hope on the horizon.

New coach Peter Laviolette was brought in to kickstart the offence, but only three teams — Philadelphia, Calgary and (surprisingly) Dallas — are averaging fewer than the Kings' 2.20 goals per game. L.A. began the year by putting up four goals in each of its first two outings, but has managed just one goal apiece in its past three showings. Making matters worse, the team is allowing a goal nearly half the time it's shorthanded (the penalty-kill is only effective 57.9 per cent of the time).

If you want to be extremely kind to the Kings, you could point out four of their games have come against teams — Colorado, Edmonton, Florida and Vegas — that could conceivably win the Stanley Cup.

Maybe when injured winger Kevin Fiala returns and the team gets used to Laviolette's teachings, the scoring will tick up. But if you were to make a list of teams going nowhere in the near- and long-term future, the Kings might land at No. 1.

If Bedard's return brought some calm to the Blackhawks, the Wednesday-morning news that Alex DeBrincat has inked a seven-year extension with the Wings must bring a glimmer of happiness to Detroit.

But one beam of sunlight isn't much to latch onto.

While one Michigander, in DeBrincat, is staying, it's still jarring to realize another — former captain Dylan Larkin — has asked out of his home-state team. Throw in the contract standoff with restricted free agent defenceman Simon Edvinsson and it's easy to lean into the worst fears — that the team is simply mismanaged — in Detroit.

On the ice, the Wings have one win in six tries despite five of those contests coming in their own building. Before the season, the Wings were the one Atlantic team you figured had no hope of making the playoffs and nothing that's happened so far would move you off that viewpoint.

It looks like it'll be 10 years and counting without post-season hockey in the Motor City and, quite honestly, a well-performed re-tool is probably in order.

The question is, does Detroit have the people in place to perform that task?

For all the stats we keep these days, the telling metric in Columbus might be how many times coach Rick Bowness puts them on blast.

After taking a torch to the team for its lack of effort at the end of last season, Bowness barely made it past Thanksgiving before laying into the Jackets again. Following Tuesday's 7-3 home-ice loss to the Panthers, the coach was throwing around the word "embarrassed" in relation to his team's performance.

Columbus is 2-3-0 out of the gate with four of those contests occurring at home. Like Detroit, much of the drama has come off the ice. To be fair, a couple of those situations came to a quality resolution, with the unhappy Kirill Marchenko shipped out for a good, young player in Matthew Knies, while top centre Adam Fantilli ended a summer-long negotiation by inking a new deal on the eve of the season.

That said, reining Norris Trophy winner Zach Werenski is anything but a sure bet to remain in Ohio long-term and the club — which has not made the playoffs in an 82-game season since 2019 — really could have used a hot start to the season with a home-heavy schedule.

Instead, we're hearing more rants from a cranky coach.

Chicago Blackhawks 6.5/10

The Panic Meter was much higher when the Hawks were 0-3-0 out of the gate — outscored 15-5 — and playing with the understanding that Bedard might not see his first game of the year until November. At that point, it felt like Chicago could be dead and buried by Halloween.

Certainly Bedard's return in a 5-3 win over the Penguins on Tuesday calms things down a little and allows us to focus on some positives, like rookie Roman Kansterov bagging a pair of goals in that game while fellow freshman Anton Frondell has a team-leading six points in seven contests.

Still, there was lots of leap talk in Illinois entering the campaign and, at 2-5-0, the Hawks need to get going to make that a reality.

Perhaps the new captain — surrounded by a pair of promising rooks — can turn the conversation back to something that requires a Hope Meter in Chicago.

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Sportsnet.ca / How early-season goalie market impacts potential Hellebuyck trade

Jeff Hamilton

WINNIPEG — The Winnipeg Jets have done a superb job of blocking out the distraction of their franchise goaltender's trade holdout.

Winning will do that.

The Jets' 4-1-1 start has afforded general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff and his staff the opportunity to take a deep breath. Had Winnipeg stumbled out of the gate, questions surrounding Connor Hellebuyck would have only intensified. Eventually, the outside noise would take its toll inside the locker room.

But as we enter the third week of the NHL schedule, we find ourselves in a holding pattern. There is some chatter about Hellebuyck potentially returning to the team, while a few NHL clubs with slow starts have reportedly shown interest in an upgrade in net.

Most likely, Hellebuyck is traded, and life in Winnipeg without the three-time Vezina and Hart Trophy winner officially begins in earnest.

So, what does a trade for Hellebuyck actually look like?

It starts with acknowledging who holds the cards. The 33-year-old has five more years on his contract at an \$8.5-million cap hit — and a full no-move clause.

Combine that with the reality of the NHL goalie market favouring buyers, even for the best netminders in the world. Then add in the Jets front office operating in compete-now mode that requires a premium return, and suddenly, a simple hockey trade seems anything but.

Further complicating matters, there is no public list of approved destinations. What we do know is the Michigan native prefers a playoff-bound team that, most importantly, is based in the U.S.

The Carolina Hurricanes and Buffalo Sabres have dominated the rumour mill.

As the defending Stanley Cup Champions — having finally broken through the crowded Eastern Conference for the first time since 2006 — Carolina wants to keep the good times rolling. The organization has a reputation for being stingy with top assets, but that philosophy appears to be shifting under general manager Eric Tolsky, who has bucked that trend since taking over in 2024.

The Jets and Sabres, who are stocked with promising young players and prospects, were rumoured to have a deal nearing completion during June's NHL draft. But ask people around the Jets organization, and being "close" is in the eye of the beholder.

It certainly doesn't hurt Winnipeg's leverage that both Carolina and Buffalo have underwhelmed in net so far this season. Starters Brandon Bussi and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen are posting a save percentage of .871 and .850, respectively — ranking 45th and 52nd among NHL goalies.

That slow-start phenomenon extends well beyond the current front-runners, creating a desperation market of teams suddenly window-shopping for an upgrade.

The Utah Mammoth and San Jose Sharks fit the bill. So do the L.A. Kings, who have recently entered the mix after getting underwhelming results from the tandem of Darcy Kuemper and Anton Forsberg.

Then there are the teams in panic mode. The New York Rangers are dealing with a major crease conundrum after losing Igor Shesterkin to a season-ending upper-body injury, threatening to derail their Stanley Cup aspirations. The Florida Panthers, who were considered Hellebuyck's ideal trade partner and have shown interest in the past, lost Jacob Markstrom during Monday's game against Buffalo. Head coach Paul Maurice, who coached Hellebuyck in Winnipeg, said the injury isn't serious, but it's still something to keep an eye on.

Edmonton is considered a dark horse owing to their own struggles between the pipes. But it's hard to imagine Hellebuyck waving for a Canadian market — even for a club that's made it to the Stanley Cup Final in two of the last three seasons.

While teams waver on whether to add a game-changing, yet aging, goaltender, it's important to understand the Jets dictate the asking price. Though the exact package remains fluid, Winnipeg has clear roster holes to fill.

Initially, it was believed any return for Hellebuyck had to include an established goalie. While that still might be the case, the emergence of the Stuart Skinner and Clay Stevenson tandem could alter those plans.

Skinner has meshed seamlessly with his new teammates and captured the hearts of the fan base, who have serenaded the 27-year-old with "Stuuu" chants even during routine saves. Stevenson was a late addition, plucked from the waiver wire as training camp rosters were finalized, but he brings an AHL resume that screams future NHL regular.

It is a small sample size, to be sure, but strong goaltending has allowed Cheveldayoff to remain patient. That isn't even factoring in that the Jets appear to be galvanized by Hellebuyck's holdout, motivated to play a structured, defensive-minded game in front of their new duo.

Because the Jets are steadfast in their belief they can return to the Presidents' Trophy-winning form of 2024-25, Cheveldayoff has been openly reluctant to consider a trade built on future assets. High draft picks might shore up the club's pipeline, but the organization is hunting for pieces that can compete right now.

A nearly unbeaten record through six games only strengthens that resolve. Given that, a top-six left-winger with offensive upside is likely to headline any return to Winnipeg.

That said, any regression in the crease could drastically alter those plans. That is what makes the waiting game both exhausting and vital to the process.

There are also massive salary-cap implications to take into consideration. Hellebuyck's full no-movement clause already complicates the process, but what about players coming back the other way who also have trade protection?

Given Winnipeg is regularly on the modified no-trade lists of elite NHLers, Cheveldayoff has to acutely consider just how plausible a trade actually is. Even players limited to a five-team, no-trade list could be off limits for Winnipeg.

If that drastically shrinks the market, the Jets might be forced to retain part of Hellebuyck's \$8.5-million annual salary, or take on another team's high-priced, underperforming contract in order to make the money work. While that might seem like standard NHL business, don't be surprised if Winnipeg scoffs at the idea of taking on a bad contract just to facilitate a trade for their franchise player.

The question at this juncture is just how long can this standoff go on for?

Cheveldayoff has faced this situation before — albeit not as publicly — and has always faced a disgruntled player with patience and poise. Jacob Trouba, Patrik Laine, Evander Kane and Pierre-Luc Dubois all asked for trades, with each garnering a solid return for Winnipeg, one that allowed the team to continue to compete in the tough Central Division.

By all accounts, Cheveldayoff appears to be taking the same approach with Hellebuyck. And if the Jets keep winning, there's potential this could play out for some time.

While Cheveldayoff can afford to wait, there will be buyers up against the clock. While it's still too early to make any drastic decisions, the runway to American Thanksgiving — when teams have the potential to reach full panic-mode if their club is still struggling — is getting shorter by the day.

Indeed, it's often said that the teams in a playoff spot by late November have significantly better odds of making the post-season compared to those that aren't. While there are certainly exceptions to the rule, this would be the nearest timeframe where communication with the Jets could see a notable uptick.

If a rival general manager doesn't blink by then, the NHL trade deadline in early March could prove to be the trigger point. By then, teams will



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have accrued daily cap space, allowing them to absorb Hellebuyck's salary with far fewer roster adjustments. That should widen the net of potential trade partners, while increasing the odds of a bidding war.

Of course, Cheveldayoff isn't operating in a vacuum. The waiting game only benefits the Jets GM if his team continues to secure points.

What this ultimately boils down to is a game of chicken.

Hellebuyck has the leverage, as trade partners can only work with the pieces and salary cap space they have and Cheveldayoff owns the main asset. Patience is a virtue and something Cheveldayoff has always leaned on as a negotiation tactic — but when the Stanley Cup is your goal, time is something the Jets simply can't afford to waste.

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Sportsnet.ca / In wake of Chris Tanev injury, Maple Leafs can't wait to add defenceman

Justin Bourne

Heading into this season the Maple Leafs' defence was a couple things: it was better than the season prior, and it was also not good enough.

It was better, because Chris Tanev's return alone was an upgrade over the steady reps substitutes like Philippe Myers were getting, while the addition of Darren Raddysh gave the Leafs another good right shot who could man the power play, to boot.

The defence being "not good enough" is more a reference to Toronto's league-wide ranking if you were to poll GMs around the NHL about how this blue line compares to others. I doubt many would think this group is "bad", but I think it's fair to say that not many would rank them in the top half of the league.

I figured, if healthy, Toronto's blue line -- which seemed almost entirely comprised of second-pair level of players -- could be good enough to help the Leafs return to the playoffs, but I think we all knew they wouldn't get through the year healthy. No team does. And when injuries hit, who the heck knows where they planned to turn, as they seemed to have about four decent No. 7 defencemen. Now, just seven games into the season, with some good and exciting things happening with the team, the back-end has quickly highlighted itself as a capital-p Problem.

Tanev got hurt on what looked like a nothing play, spurring fears that it could be something related to the neck/whiplash-type injury he sustained early the season before (though details of the actual injury haven't been shared). Oliver Ekman-Larsson has missed skates for "maintenance," which implied some nagging injury, and he hasn't looked particularly great when he has been out there.

Morgan Rielly's defending struggles haven't gone away, Raddysh has had to adjust to a new team and system, and Jake McCabe has been shovelled the Leafs' heaviest lift with D-zone starts and top-line matchups. Troy Stecher's given them all they could ask for and more. He's seventh on the team in ice time per game, which is one of those "damning with faint praise" statements.

I like Stecher fine, but he just shouldn't be this important to any team's success on a daily basis.

Now, by having to swap out Tanev for Nick Blankenburg, the Leafs don't even have enough bodies to fill clearly defined roles within their six. Raddysh will now have to kill penalties and eat tougher minutes with McCabe, while Stecher takes second pair reps with Rielly. Cue the drop on Real Kyper and Bourne of Brad May saying "Well it's not good".

In Utah the Leafs dressed seven defencemen, as Marshall Rifai got in, a toolsy low-end NHL blue liner who's been put in a tough spot, knowing his shifts will be few and far between. He wants to impress, but at the same time he's the type of player who's doing well when you don't notice him, which creates a conflict. He looks nervous, and justifiably so.

Unfortunately, the Leafs don't have time to let things "play out." Ben Danford is supposed to help defensively, but he won't step in as a 20-year-old and move the needle for them in any meaningful way yet. We could go through all the options here (Dakota Mermis?), but take my word for it that, internally, they just don't have a solution.

They're saying the right things about "next man up," and the forward group is good enough to score and win some games, but the Atlantic Division -- heck, the league -- is just too good for the Leafs to slowly learn a lesson they're going to be taught if they don't make a change: this D-corps isn't going to be good or deep enough to make the playoffs without an upgrade or two.

As of Wednesday only one team in the Atlantic is below a .500 points percentage, and all of the Bruins, Senators, Lightning, Panthers, Sabres, and Canadiens are realistically playoff-level teams. Add in the Leafs and that's seven teams in one division who think they're good enough to be

in. The Leafs have to be realistic about how high the bar is that they're trying to clear.

And so, we're at the "now what" part of the conversation, where we've recognized the Leafs don't have it internally, so they have to look outside the organization, and make a trade.

The Pittsburgh Penguins recently swung two trades for depth defencemen, but the Leafs need a higher level than the type of easy acquisitions that tend to happen in mid-October. And, given how few quality draft picks and prospects they have to offer, Toronto has to be sure they're getting what they're after when they do pull the trigger. As much as it would be nice to wait until the trade deadline to see if more high-quality defencemen become available, it could be too late by then. Maybe you can't make the playoffs in the first quarter of the season, but you can sure fall out of the race. Playing three elite Western Conference teams on the road helped highlight that to hang with the best, Toronto needs this upgrade sooner than later.

Names being floated out there include Zach Whitecloud, who's a hard-nosed middle-pair defenceman who would improve the team's physicality. While stylistically different, Rasmus Ristolainen probably slots in somewhere similar to Whitecloud. While both of them would help the Leafs compared to what they've got now, neither guy is some elite puck-mover who would eat big minutes and significantly move the needle.

And so, this is what lays at the feet of John Chayka, and in turn, head coach Jim Hiller.

Chayka is calling GMs and finding out what's available for them to even consider, and until then, Hiller has to help out his defencemen through overall team structure. The Leafs, with this much firepower -- and, oh buddy, do they once again have firepower -- are going to help by outscoring their issues on some nights. There are some under-talented teams out there they should make short work of. And even when they fall behind, they can always get back into a game.

But to build something sustainably good, something that can hold up for long stretches of play against good opponents, Toronto's next step has to be an addition on the back-end. I know it, you know it, and they know it, it's just a matter of who's out there, and how much it will cost.

As long as Tanev is out, it will feel like a race against the clock to find a solution, with each win buying them time before it gets truly desperate. The forwards will be playing the opposition every night, but until the Leafs get stronger on the back end, they'll have to overcome a different kind of challenge, too.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers face new reality as Alberta's time change brings challenges

Mark Spector

LOS ANGELES — Well, Oilers fan. We hope you enjoyed that California road trip, with its 8 or 8:30 p.m. Edmonton start times.

Because from here on in, nine is going to have to be fine. And they might even do you dirty with the odd 9:30.

When the clocks don't change on Nov. 1, for the first time in our collective lifetime, our favourite winter pastime — watching our local National Hockey League team — will change as well.

Game time changes at home. Games in California and Seattle (but not in Vancouver) start an hour later than they used to.

A couple of 9 o'clock starts for Saturday Night Hockey games in Edmonton. And a bunch of Saturday afternoon matinees that we never used to get, a welcome spin-off from a provincial policy that was announced in late April, and likely caught the NHL schedule maker by surprise.

"The league had obviously begun the scheduling process when that happened," said Oilers assistant general manager Bill Scott. "and at the end of the day, TV ends up dictating our game times anyhow.

"Whether it's Toronto or Montreal that they want on in prime time, we're going to be (scheduled) in different slots. Then, it's how many Canadian teams are playing that night? Where are they geographically?

"We give TV our requests on when we would like to have our start times, but television ends up dictating it."

So, what are going to notice the most when the time change doesn't happen on Nov. 1?

- The Oilers have two 9 p.m. starts at home, both Saturdays — Nov. 7 v. Vancouver, and March 6 v. Chicago — but five road games where fans will have to wait until at least 9:08 Edmonton time for puck drop.

- There are 11 games — five at home, six on the road — with start times of 8 or 8:30 p.m. MT

- Here's a switch: Four Saturday games at Rogers Place, two at 2 p.m. and two at 2:30 p.m., start times that are unheard of for the Oilers on a Saturday.

Just so you know, players, the training staff, sports writers... We all love day games.

No morning skate, one trip to the rink, and home for dinner with the family.

But a team's financial department hates day games, especially on a Saturday.

Why? Because people don't eat and drink nearly as much for a day game as they would on a Saturday night.

Sure, more kids can come to a Saturday afternoon game. But kids don't have money, and kids don't buy \$20 beers.

It's the 9 p.m. starts that have the Oilers organization maneuvering to make sure they get their sleep cycles in order. Because hockey people are creatures of habit, and this is something altogether new.

"It's different," mused Oilers centre Jason Dickinson. "You've got to adjust your preparation, change your nap time... Everything gets pushed back a little bit, and the day just feels soooo long. At the end of the day, the preparation is still the same. It's just the time on the clock that's different."

"You have to move everything back a little bit," said Trent Frederic.

"Maybe go to bed a little bit later the night before, take your nap a little bit later. I haven't done a 9 o'clock start before, so maybe it will be a little

trial and error on the first one. But I think I'm just going to move the clocks back and get my head thinking that when I wake up from my nap I'll do the same routine, so the time doesn't even matter."

The macro issue of the changing time zone affects the Oilers' travel — especially the decision on whether to fly home from a road trip immediately after the final game. You don't want to arrive home at 3 a.m. MT, have your players get to bed at 4 a.m. MT, and then get woken up by the kids at 8 a.m. MT.

The Oilers are looking at their schedule and asking themselves: Maybe we should just stay over, get a proper sleep, and fly home the next day?

"With California, we never flew home after a game, anyways. We lose the hour, and then it's a three- to three-and-a-half-hour flight. You were getting in too late," explains Scott. "The trips where it plays a factor now are, you're in St. Louis: It's supposed to be a one-hour time difference. You're supposed to gain an hour (coming home). Now, you don't gain an hour, but it's a four-hour flight back.

"Before, we'd fly home and get in at two o'clock, 2:30 M.T. in the morning. Now you're getting at three, 3:30 M.T. in the morning. That's not great," he said. "And if it's Philly (ET), now you're only grabbing back one hour instead of two. You come home from Colorado, it used to be the same time. Now you lose an hour. (East of Edmonton) is where it's had more of an influence, I would say."

So, it's a trade-off.

More of the day games that players love, but a few later nights — and an extra few days on the road that you didn't have in years past.

Of course, Mike Babcock isn't falling over himself looking for excuses.

Just tell him when the game starts, and get the heck out of his way.

"To me, all that's noise or outside stuff that doesn't even matter," Babcock said. "You've got to eat a meal, and you've got to have a nap, and you've got to get ready to play. You've got to be ready to go (no matter) timing.

"Every team in the league does it. So get used to it."

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers learning to win the hard way with newfound defensive prowess

Mark Spector

LOS ANGELES — It was, as Devon Levi so eloquently stated, “a great bad game.”

The Edmonton Oilers took a 3-0 lead into the first intermission, then used their newfound defensive prowess to turn the final 40 minutes into garbage time in a 4-1 win over the Los Angeles Kings. The win capped a perfect three-game California swing, and the 5-0-1 Oilers remain the National Hockey League’s only team without a regulation loss this season.

“Honestly, it’s pretty impressive how we’re able to score ballistically, and also play a really solid defensive game,” said Oilers goalie Devon Levi, who made a career-high 39 saves, most of the casual variety. “I know the message that Babs sent is that we have better. I mean, if that’s our bad game, that’s a great game.”

“That’s a great bad game.”

The Kings outshot Edmonton 29-10 over the final two periods, and 40-17 on the game. But somehow L.A. never really threatened the Oilers’ fifth straight regulation win in this young season, despite long stretches of possession.

“I thought they had good chances. But they didn’t have Grade A’s, two-on-ones,” said head coach Mike Babcock. “I didn’t think at any time we were fantastic tonight, but McDavid and the big boys were great. The goalie was fantastic. We just swept three games on the road and 4-0 on the road, so life’s good.”

There is definitely something happening here, to a team that has never really had a hard, defensive spine in its regular-season arsenal.

An early 3-0 lead like this always seemed to devolve into a comeback — or the genuine threat of one — for the run ‘n’ gun Oilers of yore. But on a Tuesday night in Los Angeles, they looked like they could have held the Kings off for another 20 minutes, if they’d been asked to.

Connor McDavid celebrated his 800th NHL game with his 33rd career three-point period, scoring on a breakaway and adding two primary assists in Period 1. He assisted on Vasily Podkolzin’s second goal, and empty netter, for a four-point evening, as McDavid torched the Kings in this building for the umpteenth time in his career.

We’ve seen that before, of that there is no doubt.

What we haven’t seen is an Oilers team with this kind of defensive backbone at this stage of the season. A backbone, ironically, that might just remind of those hardened 2012 and 2014 Stanley Cup champion Kings — after a few more months of drilling down on Babcock’s systems.

From the press box we’ve seen a team that defends hard and takes time and space away much more quickly than it ever has before. What does McDavid see from ice level?

“I see a team that’s upbeat. I see a team that’s energetic,” said the early-season Art Ross leader, with 17 points in six games. “It’s got speed. It’s aggressive. Wins a lot of puck battles. Those are all great things, and if you do those things night after night, you’re going to put together some wins.”

We’ve watched this team win the firewagon, 5-4 games ever since McDavid was a rookie. But the mission this season is to learn how to win the hard way during the regular season, so that it is ingrained come playoff time.

So far we’re seeing much evidence to the positive.

“We’re comfortable in a lot of different situations,” McDavid said. “We’ve won games 9-7. We’ve come back in games and gotten points. Saturday was a bit of a low event game (3-1 win at San Jose), and we’re comfortable in that too.”

“This team’s building its identity, building its structure. We’re still trying to figure things out as we go, and I think we’re only going to get better and better.”

It’s a different look than he’s ever seen here, at this point in a season.

“Certainly,” nodded McDavid.

On this night Evan Bouchard calmly collected a pair of second assists to run his totals to 6-8-14 on the season. Perhaps more impressively, Bouchard has been on the ice for 17 even-strength goals for this season, and just two against.

We’re not sure he’s made a mistake yet, so close-to-perfect has his game become.

Podkolzin hit the seven-goal plateau in just his sixth game, on a line with McDavid and Leon Draisaitl (1-1-2), and it strikes us that McDavid and Draisaitl have played side by side all season long. Most times, they’d have been taken apart by now.

“When we get Nuge, Hymes and Savoie back, maybe that’s different,” Babcock said of the injured Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Matt Savoie and Zach Hyman, who we expect to return on Thursday versus Utah. “Maybe on a night where you’re not playing great, maybe we can move something around. Right now, there’s not a lot of moves.”

A coach is never happy, it just comes with the vocation.

But for a guy installing a new system, with an entire second line on the Injured List and a handful of new players coming out of an abbreviated pre-season, Babcock won’t complain about a .917 start. Or the fact that his team is picking up his systems fairly well.

“I didn’t love this tonight by any means,” he said. “But our big boys were great, our back end was really solid, and I thought our goaltender was good. I didn’t think our two, three, and four lines were as good as they have been, for whatever reason. But we’re in a good spot for the injuries we have.”

“We’re going to start getting some players back, and we’re going to get way deeper and way harder to play against.”

For the Oilers, “hard to play against” used to mean 97, 29 and crew sifting seven past your netminder.

It’s starting to mean something else in Edmonton now, and that could be seismic.

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Sportsnet.ca / Buium's struggles continue for Canucks as losses pile up

Iain MacIntyre

ELMONT, N.Y. — From the moment he arrived with the Vancouver Canucks, Zeev Buium said his plan was to write his own story and not try to be another version of the superstar player he was traded for.

But it seems at times like he can't get out of Quinn Hughes' shadow and just play like Zeev Buium.

Dropped to the third defence pairing on Tuesday — and from the power play entirely — as Canucks coach Manny Malhotra tried to ease some of the pressure and burden on the struggling 20-year-old, Buium still made a critical turnover on the New York Islanders' second goal and was screening his goalie when Kyle Palmieri scored the winner in the third period of a 3-2 victory over Vancouver.

It was the Canucks' fifth straight loss.

Buium finished minus-two over 16:32 of ice time that was a season-low by 3 ½ minutes. Through eight games, the fleet, talented blue-liner from San Diego has one assist and is minus-six, and his 38-per-cent shot share and expected goals-for at five on five are among the lowest on the Canucks.

"I think over the course of playing hockey since I was four, I've definitely been through stretches like this," Buium said. "But I've just got to stay positive and stick with it. I mean, (losing) definitely makes it harder.

"You know, you want to help the team win. And when you're on the receiving end of getting scored on or whatever, obviously it doesn't feel good. For me, it happened. You can't go back in time and change anything and just kind of have to move forward and hope for the next shift, the next opportunity."

Working up the side boards in his zone, Buium badly missed teammate Jake DeBrusk with a 15-foot pass that was intercepted by Matthew Schaefer and relayed to Islander Matias Maccelli, who had time and space in front of the Canucks' net to pick his spot short-side on goalie Leevi Merilainen to make it 2-0 at 15:50 of the first period.

Vancouver played an excellent second period and rallied with goals from Max Sasson and Brock Boeser. But Palmieri scored the winner at 5:38 of the third period from the remnants of a four-on-three rush. As the Canucks collapsed around their net, both Buium and Drew O'Connor were standing in Merilainen's sightline as Palmieri's shot went past the goalie's glove.

To be clear, there were many more things that contributed to the Canucks' loss than a costly turnover by the sophomore defenceman.

The Canucks also failed to get the puck out of their zone on the Islanders' first goal, and a re-jigged power play, which featured Jonathan Lekkerimäki on the top unit ahead of Marco Rossi, failed to generate much of anything on a pair of early advantages when the game was scoreless.

And although the Canucks pushed admirably at the end, and were physically invested in the battle, they were still badly outshot and outplayed in the third period for a third straight game. New York outshot them 19-8, pushing Vancouver's shot deficit against the Islanders, New York Rangers and New Jersey Devils to 41-16 over the final 20 minutes.

But with virtually no margin for error, when so much must go right for the rebuilding Canucks to win games at this stage, it's impossible to overlook the struggles of Buium, the newly-named alternate captain and owner of a \$75-million-US contract extension signed in September.

"I'm not worried about any of that, to be honest," he said. "I want to do better as a player, and right now I think I have a lot more to give. I'm just trying to find it. I mean, it's hard sometimes. I think some shifts are good, some shifts kind of go sideways, so I'm just trying to find some sort of consistency where I feel like. . . I'm doing the right thing. I'm just trying to find that."

"I think that's one of the things that makes him so good is that he is hard on himself," Malhotra said. "He wants to be better. So for us, it's a matter of taming expectations and making sure he's focused on the things that we need him to get better at. But he's driven and motivated to be better, and that's why he's in the position he is."

On his costly turnover, Buium said: "Just a weird angle off the wall, and it kind of came off my blade weird. Those are the plays that, you know, you make nine times out of 10. And the one you don't make ends up being in your net. Like I said, you can't dwell on it the rest of the game; you've just got to move forward."

Latest episode

Buium had a new defence partner in Luke Schenn, who has helped mentor numerous young NHL defencemen, including Hughes.

"I just basically (said) 'Keep going, let's not focus on what just happened,'" Schenn said of his conversation at the bench with Buium. "OK, mistakes are going to happen. Yeah, we're just working through things. At the end of the day, what are you going to do? Dwell on mistakes? I just told him to keep playing, keep moving his feet. I actually thought, you know, he made some really good plays on the breakouts and was moving. You've just got to keep grinding. Just keep working through it; there's really no other option."

Now 0-4 on their road trip, the Canucks travel Wednesday to Florida to play the Panthers on Thursday before ending their odyssey Saturday against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

"A lot of positive takeaways," Malhotra said after his team's best game of the trip. "Being able to come back from a 2-0 deficit and just kind of staying with the process was a positive. Coming out of the second period (tied 2-2), obviously we would have loved to have come away with at least a point. But again, more lessons learned. It's that one shift off or that one lost puck battle that's the difference right now."

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TSN.CA / Stolarz, Maple Leafs too leaky in high-scoring loss to Mammoth

Luke Fox

SALT LAKE CITY — Three points against three of the best in the West.

Surely, that should constitute a satisfactory road trip for a bottom-five team dinged by an important injury, led by a new coach installing a new playbook, and composed of so many players still getting to know each other's nicknames?

Three out of six is good enough, right?

"No, no, no, no," Jim Hiller said.

Yes, the Toronto Maple Leafs rallied and pressed late in Tuesday's 5-4 loss to a dangerous and improving Utah Mammoth squad. But no, it wasn't enough to earn a point. Nor please the bench.

"Because we want to win. I mean, we could have got five points. So, when you say, 'Are we good with three?' No, not really. If you would have said, 'Are you happy to (get) five?' I would have said, 'Absolutely.' It's just the way it works. Just got to get points. Could have made this a great trip. In the end, it's OK."

The Maple Leafs were so disengaged and so sloppy last season that plenty of observers might see OK as the new great.

But it's refreshing that Hiller's expectations remain high.

And, heck, as a 2025-26 mid-season casualty — fired by the L.A. Kings with a pedestrian 24-21-14 record — Hiller knows well that OK doesn't cut it in a league flush with average.

Speedy and opportunistic, the Mammoth jumped all over their visitors early, scoring five goals on 16 shots in two periods against Anthony Stolarz, each one off the rush. All of them at even strength.

This is a team defence issue that picks at a scab from last season, when Chris Tanev (out with an undisclosed upper-body injury) was barely available and the goalies were asked to turn away high-danger looks on the regular.

Even coming into Salt Lake City on two days' rest and riding a mile high after doubling up the Avalanche, the Maple Leafs were slower out the gate, shooting themselves in the foot with leaky turnovers and a lack of discipline in the neutral zone.

"There's a mental warfare out there every game. That's hockey. When you can have your lines connected like our lines have been so far, it makes it really tough," Utah coach André Tourigny said.

"Because you cannot get your head out of water. We keep them in deep water. We keep applying pressure, pressure... till it breaks."

Fourth-liner Daniil But set the tone by breaking Morgan Rielly's gap, dancing him at the blue line and sniping short-side in the first period.

"He made a good play. Obviously, that's on me," swallowed Rielly, a minus-2.

But it was Utah's four-goal second period that downed the Leafs.

Dylan Guenther beat Stolarz far side from distance, and defenceman MacKenzie Weegar stuffed a puck through his massive body with just 40 seconds remaining in the frame, off a D-zone draw no less.

A classic backbreaker.

"I put us in a tough situation. Probably want two or three of those goals back," Stolarz said, pointing the finger at himself. "I know I've got better and will be better in the future."

He'll need to be.

He'll also need help from some irresponsible forwards and mismatched defence pairings.

"They scored five rush goals, right? So, that's not just Anthony. That's different people making mistakes prior to getting to him. Yeah, there's probably a couple he wants back, but that happens," said Hiller in his most critical post-game presser to date.

"Second period, no good. That's three second periods on this trip that were no good."

The long change in Period 2 requires smart, connected line changes. Speed helps.

The Maple Leafs — though blessed with impactful special teams, elite game-breakers, and some impressive resilience — generally appeared the slower and less organized side against Vegas, Colorado, and Utah.

"They're a fast team. They have a lot of offensive skill players who can make plays, and they got a couple guys that can shoot the puck," Stolarz said. "It's your job as a goalie to make a timely save, and that was something that I really didn't do until the third period, and just kind of put us in a deep hole."

Comeback wins are a blast. They thrill and bond and make for great quotes. But they are not a sustainable recipe for success, as Toronto's two-goal third period effort proved on this night.

"We pushed a little bit harder, played with some urgency," Jack Roslovic said. "But we have to manufacture that urgency when it's 0-0 as well. So, it's good to see fight back. But at the same time, manufacturing that from the get-go is going to be important."

Stolarz vowed to study the film. Roslovic promised the skaters would clean up the "little mishaps" that cost them three points. And Rielly knows there is another level to reach after a .500 roadie.

The glass is half full. The glass is half empty.

"It's all right," Rielly said of the trip. "But we leave here not feeling great about it."

- Operating in a barn built for the Jazz, the Mammoth must have the steepest seating in the league, creating intensity with fans hollering right on top of the players.

The Delta Center's upper-north end zone was redesigned over the summer with new terrace-style seating that offers a nearly vertical view, and more than 1,500 full-view seats were added for hockey games. Owner Ryan Smith's grand plan is to upgrade nearly every seat in the rink.

Already looks better — and sounds louder.

"Playing in that rink is truly special. I feel like every game has been sold out, if not close to it," Logan Cooley says.

"Our fans are super passionate, super supportive. They all just love being at the games and having fun. You see the jumbotron; they're always laughing, giggling, just having a great time. That what we enjoy — trying to make people's day."

- For all their defensive question marks, the Maple Leafs just shutout the NHL's second-best power-play and now own the No. 1 penalty kill in the league (95.8 per cent).

"It always starts with the goaltenders," Hiller said. "Our goalies have been really sharp there, but we've had guys blocking shots, winning faceoffs. The D have done a nice job not giving up a lot of little rebounds or plays in tight. They've had some looks from outside, but none of those little tap-ins, cross-creasers. But that's a collective effort."

Starting with PK coach John Gruden and GM John Chayka, who added all four of Toronto's most-used forwards on the PK: Colton Sissons, Teddy Blueger, Brandon Duhaime and Nick Paul.

- Despite Gavin McKenna's contributions to a top power-play unit that struck twice in Denver and helped the Leafs swipe a win, new dad (again) John Tavares resumed his usual spot in Utah. He sniped a power-play beauty and set up Matthews for a man-advantage strike.

"Gavin did a good job. And just like other situations in the game, Gavin will get put in and then pulled back a little bit," Hiller explained.



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"We're talking about John Tavares. It's a pretty easy decision to get John back in there. He's had a great career. Still a great goal scorer. So, that wasn't a hard one at all."

- The Leafs jetted to a resort in picturesque Park City following Saturday's big win in Colorado and enjoyed a full Sunday off in the wilderness. Some guys just relaxed and watched football, but 15 or so players went on a flyfishing excursion, snagging (and releasing) brook trout and whitefish.

"Not gonna say I caught the biggest fish, but I did catch the biggest fish — in my group," Darren Raddysh smiles. "It was a whitefish. I think Colt had one as well. It was fun. Never did that before."

"It's just like throw (your line) up the river, let it flow down, and go back. It was kinda different. It was cool. A little bit different fishing than in Ontario."

- Paul spoke to inspiration for his charity initiative, which will see him donate \$150 in support of youth mental health for every point he registers (already \$600 and counting this season).

"When I was younger, I had a friend (Lucas, Grade 9) take his life by suicide, and it stuck with me and impacted me. And I knew if I was ever going to be able to have a voice and do something to help that cause, it's something I want to do. So, I started Points by Paul. I've been doing it for a long time now and just bringing it here with Toronto and joined Jack.org. So excited for this year," said Paul, who believes teammates need to support each other off the ice.

"Everyone's got each other's back. I think it's a really tight group. We all have one goal in mind, and that's winning and continuously getting better every single day. And I think we're just a room where if you're going through something or if you're struggling, there's guys here to pick you up."

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