CAROLINA HURRICANES
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Canes drop fourth consecutive game, lose to Maple Leafs 4-0

BY CHIP ALEXANDER
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RALEIGH

The Carolina Hurricanes are beginning to run out of answers. Canes coach Bill Peters didn't have much to say, or wanted to say, Sunday after a 4-0 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs at PNC Arena. The Canes' players were somber after a fourth straight loss.

Yes, Leafs rookie Auston Matthews scored his 28th goal with the kind of move – hooked from behind, falling, still getting off the shot – befitting the No. 1 pick of the 2016 NHL draft.

Yes, goalie Curtis McElhinney, a waiver-wire pickup last month from Columbus, had some high-quality saves among his 37 saves, forward Connor Brown scored twice with bursts of speed down the slot and defenseman Jake Gardiner had a goal and two assists.

But this loss stung the Canes. After their mandated bye week, they had pointed to a five-game homestand as an opportunity to reel off some wins and get back into reasonable playoff contention in the NHL's Eastern Conference.

And then they lost 2-1 in overtime to the Colorado Avalanche, the worst team in the league.

And then they lost to the Leafs, a team they’re chasing in the Eastern Conference, in a game Sunday that had a must-win feel — at least for the Canes — to it.

With 29 games remaining in the regular season, the Canes had hope. But there was more of a pessimistic vibe in the locker room Sunday after the loss dropped them to 24-23-8 and last in the Eastern Conference.

“It’s frustrating,” Canes forward Jeff Skinner said. “Everyone knows where we are. We need to find ways to win games, to get results.”

That takes effort from everyone in the lineup and Peters didn’t think he got that Sunday.

“I didn’t think we had enough fire,” he said in a postgame news conference with unusually brief answers from the coach.

[Box score, game recap and stats]

Blues claim Rattie off waivers from Canes

From staff reports

The St. Louis Blues on Sunday claimed forward Ty Rattie off waivers from the Carolina Hurricanes, bringing back a player the Blues placed on waivers Jan. 4.

The Canes claimed Rattie off waivers and had him in the lineup the next night against the Blues. He played five games for the Canes — the last Jan. 23 against Washington — and had two assists.

After a scoreless first period, the Leafs took the lead on Brown’s first goal and then the move from Matthews that will be shown repeatedly in NHL video highlights. Despite being hooked from behind by Canes forward Phil Di Giuseppe and then falling forward, Matthews got off a backhander that got through goalie Cam Ward.

“Great individual effort and a great goal,” Canes center Jordan Staal said.

It was the kind of moment that could help Matthews win the Calder Trophy as the NHL's top rookie, although the Leafs have another rookie forward in Mitch Marner who could be a finalist along with forward Patrik Laine of Winnipeg. Marner missed Sunday’s game, and the Leafs' 6-3 loss Saturday against Ottawa, with an injury.

While the Canes and the crowd of 10,004 had to be impressed by Matthews’ goal, Peters believed the Leafs’ third was bigger. Gardiner, who had a plus-4 game, winged a long shot from the left point six minutes into the third period that Ward couldn’t track.

“I thought we sagged, definitely,” Peters said.

Brown’s second goal, a near repeat of the first, ended the night for Ward, who was relieved by Eddie Lack.

The Canes had some good looks on power plays — Justin Faulk hitting the post in the second period — and the line of Skinner, center Teuvo Teravainen and Di Giuseppe combined for 18 shots. But Skinner and Di Giuseppe were on the ice for three Leafs goals and Teravainen for two.

The Canes now have seven teams between them and the second wild-card spot. Peters said he believes his team is capable of a turnaround, of something like an eight-game win streak, which could be their only saving grace at this point.

“We know we’ve got a lot of hockey left,” Skinner said. “You’ve got to stay with it and keep working. We’re in a little bit of funk now, but you’ve got to find ways to get out of it. The only way to do that is to do it yourself. You can’t sit around and wait for things to break your way.”
Earlier this season, the Canes claimed forward Martin Frk off waivers from the Detroit Red Wings. They later decided to put Frk back on waivers and the Red Wings quickly took him back.

The Blues assigned Rattie to the Chicago Wolves of the AHL.

Only a month ago, Hurricanes were knocking at playoffs’ door – DeCook

BY LUKE DECOCK
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RALEIGH

Hard to believe it was only a month ago the Carolina Hurricanes went into Columbus with a chance to move into the eighth playoff spot with a win: Jan. 17, 2017. That will go down as the high-water mark of the season. It seems like not that long ago, and it seems like forever ago.

“It’s not fun when you’re falling in the standings,” Hurricanes forward Jeff Skinner said. “Time doesn’t really go by quickly.”

The Hurricanes lost that night. Ever since, it’s all slipped away, game by game, loss by gut-wrenching loss. If their playoff hopes weren’t extinguished that night – and a better team, a playoff team, would have taken that chance by the throat and never looked back – they’re effectively finished now.

After they were only able to manage a point against the NHL’s worst team Friday in an overtime loss to the Colorado Avalanche, they couldn’t even manage a goal Sunday against a goalie who was on waivers six weeks ago – Curtis McElhinney, the latest in a long line of backup goalies the Hurricanes have faced this season.

So while this 4-0 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs is merely the latest slump in a 3-8-1 skid since the Hurricanes were close enough to the playoffs to sense them, there was also a sense of finality about it. Coming off their union-mandated off week, the Hurricanes had a chance to make up some ground against a goalie who was on waivers six weeks ago – Curtis McElhinney, the latest in a long line of backup goalies the Hurricanes have faced this season.

Scant consolation.

How different it would be if the Hurricanes had been able to get over the line in Columbus, looking down on the teams chasing them instead of up at the many mountains to cross. Too many, now.

With the trade deadline less than two weeks away, it’s time to dump what’s dumpable. Give Ron Hainsey, the NHL’s all-time record-holder with 890 games played without a playoff appearance, a shot at the postseason he won’t get here. It doesn’t really matter what you can get for him. Just get something. Same goes for Jay McClement and Viktor Stalberg (the latter actually one of the Hurricanes’ better players of late). No reason to hold on to expiring contracts now. Convert them into assets, however minimal those assets may be.

This group has shown it’s not postseason-capable, not now anyway. Maybe it will be next year, if suitable reinforcements are obtained, and many are needed. They could have used some during this skid, when the Hurricanes have had too many no-shows.

“‘We’re not a team that can lean on a few players,” Jordan Staal said Sunday. “Everyone needs to play, and play well, for us to win.”

Victor Rask, in the first year of a six-year contract extension, hasn’t had a point in that 3-8-1 stretch. Same goes for Derek Ryan, a healthy scratch Sunday. Lee Stempniak has one goal in that span, Skinner and Teuvo Teravainen three points each. The third pairing of Noah Hanifin and Klas Dahlbeck was an unmitigated disaster Sunday.

Still, the Hurricanes had enough talent to get into the conversation. Just not enough to stay there. There are still 27 games to go, but after Sunday they’ll each mean less and less. Their season peaked a month ago. It’s just a matter of waiting for the end now.

Canes recall Di Giuseppe from Checkers

From staff reports

The Carolina Hurricanes on Sunday recalled forward Phil Di Giuseppe from the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League.

Di Giuseppe, 23, was expected to be in the Canes’ lineup Sunday against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Di Giuseppe has one goal and one assist in 18 games this season with the Hurricanes. He is tied for fourth among Checkers skaters in scoring this season with 10 goals and 10 assists in 33 games.
In must-win game, Hurricanes come up flat in 4-0 loss to Toronto

Journeyman goalie Curtis McElhinney blanks Carolina

RALEIGH — It had the feel of a do-or-die game for the Carolina Hurricanes. After a 4-0 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs on Sunday at PNC Arena, their playoff hopes look dead.

Connor Brown scored Toronto’s first and final goals on nearly identical plays, a deja vu moment in the latest loss of what has been a deja vu season for the Hurricanes.

“A lot of the goals, when you look at, there’s a common theme,” Hurricanes coach Bill Peters said. “I think we got skated a little bit and lost body position.”

Carolina kept their faint playoff hopes alive for a while, but it now looks like the team is headed to an eighth straight season without a playoff appearance. GM Ron Francis will likely begin shopping the few role players he has on expiring contracts and start looking to 2017-18.

A glance at the standings shows Carolina (24-23-8) tied with Dallas for the third fewest points in the NHL, and even the points percentage standings — which favor the Hurricanes because they have games in hand on the entire league — have them 13th in the Eastern Conference.

“This was a big game. We knew that coming in to it,” forward Jeff Skinner said. “We know we have a lot of hockey left. You gotta stay with it, you gotta keep working. For us, we’re in a little bit of a funk now, but you gotta find ways to get out of it. And the only way that’s going to happen is if you do it yourself. You can’t really sort of sit around and wait for things to break your way.”

The Hurricanes outshot the Leafs 15-6 in the first period, but neither team could find the back of the net in the opening frame. Toronto didn’t take long in the second to strike first and seize control of the game.

Maple Leafs center Tyler Bozak zipped a rink-wide pass through the neutral zone to James van Riemsdyk, who feathered a pass to Brown for a redirection past Cam Ward (20 saves) to make it 1-0 just 67 seconds into the second period.

Toronto (27-20-11) stretched their lead to two in the middle of the period on rookie phenom Autson Matthews’ 28th goal of the season.

Matthews got a step on Carolina’s Phil Di Giuseppe, powered to the net and fought through a delayed penalty to slide the puck through Ward to make it 2-0.

Carolina had three power plays in the game but couldn’t beat Curtis McElhinney — who was a waiver claim by Toronto on Jan. 10 from Columbus — coming closest when Justin Faulk rang the post with the man-advantage.

“It’s 2-0 and I didn’t think it should’ve been 2-0,” Peters said. “I think we should’ve been on the board. So if you’re on the board, you’re going into a period of hockey with a one-goal game. That’s what it’s all about. I don’t like the way we responded to the third goal that they scored, right? I thought we sagged, definitely.”

That deathblow came from Toronto defenseman Jake Gardiner, whose wrist shot from the point 6:10 into the third extended the lead to 3-0.

Brown then got a second goal similar to his first, redirecting another van Riemsdyk pass behind Ward to make it 4-0 with less than 12 minutes remaining. Shortly thereafter, Ward went to the bench in favor of backup Eddie Lack.

Toronto quickly got one past Lack, but the hockey gods showed some mercy when the goal was waived off due to incidental contact.

Peters has long said Carolina needed a big win streak to enter the playoff picture — and said he still believes his team has it in them.

“I don’t think you can hope that that’s going to happen, right? You’ve got to make that happen,” he said.

Jordan Staal’s old team, the Penguins, come to town Tuesday — and a reminder of the last time he reached the postseason.

“You start letting those thoughts creep in, nothing good comes from that,” Staal said of seemingly another lost season.

Notes: The line of Victor Rask centering Brock McGinn and Lee Stempniak was relegated to fourth line duty, with the Jay McClement line earning more ice time. … Phil Di Giuseppe played his first NHL game since Dec. 10 after being recalled from Charlotte. He finished with a game-high seven shots on goal, which matched his career high. … McElhinney’s shutout, the fifth of his career, was his first this Jan. 2, 2014. … Gardiner finished plus-4 on the night and registered his first three-point night of his career. He had one four-point game previously. … Di Giuseppe and Skinner were both minus-3. … Teuvo Teravainen won 13 of 18 faceoffs.
Hurricanes look for turnaround against Maple Leafs

Posted 5:09 p.m. yesterday
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The Carolina Hurricanes couldn't have picked a worse time for their offense to hit the skids.

After battling back into playoff contention in the Eastern Conference last month, the Hurricanes have now lost three straight heading into Sunday night's game against Toronto -- one of a handful of teams Carolina is chasing for a final wildcard spot.

The Hurricanes, seven points out of a playoff spot with 28 games remaining, have scored just three total goals in the recent losing streak -- including losses to the two worst defensive teams in the league -- Dallas and Colorado. Carolina also got shut out at Washington.

Two players in particular who were producing earlier -- Victor Rask and Derek Ryan -- have gone stone cold, each without a point in the last 12 games. And while Jeff Skinner did register the team's lone goal in a 2-1 overtime loss Friday night to Colorado to start a five-game homestand, the team's leading scorer has just three points over that same 12-game span.

"Not starting with the puck very much," Peters said of Rask's slump. "That line is getting dominated on faceoffs a little bit and when that happens that means you are defending, and when you're defending it's tough. I would recommend starting with the puck.

"We'll look at it again to see if we need to make any line changes but eventually those guys aren't getting it done and aren't generating as much as they should," Peters added. "The guys need to step up. That would be the best solution with the problem we have with a lack of offense."

Peters expected the worst as far as his team's timing coming off the NHL's mandatory five-day break, and it unfolded in front of his eyes against the Avalanche -- the worst team in the league.

The Hurricanes have just a Saturday practice to try and get some rhythm back.

"It was rough. Lots of pucks in our feet, lots of turnovers," Peters said.

Skinner said the offensive problems cut deeper than rust from a few days off.

"Having four lines that can play is a must when you get into a situation like this so you share the work load," Skinner said. "We probably need to hang on to pucks more in the offensive end to create more zone time."

Carolina beat Toronto 2-1 in late November, but the Maple Leafs are a different team these days with three of their star rookies -- Mitchel Marner, Auston Matthews and William Nylander -- combining for 57 goals and 132 total points.

Still, the Maple Leafs have sputtered at times recently, holding a 3-4-2 record this month after Saturday night's 6-3 home loss to the Ottawa Senators.

Maybe the Hurricanes' offensive woes can receive a boost against a Toronto team that has allowed five or more goals in four of the last nine games.

"We're a work in progress," Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock said. "We'll try to get better and we'll keep working on that."

The Maple Leafs haven't strung much together recently, so consistency is something to be addressed.

"That's part of being a good pro is bringing it every night," Babcock said. "There isn't anything about tricks (for games on back-to-back nights). It's real simple, you've got to win on a nightly basis if you want to be in playoffs."

CREDITS

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Recap: Hurricanes Shut Out by Maple Leafs

by Michael Smith @MSmithCanes / CarolinaHurricanes.com
February 19th, 2017

Analysis from Raleigh

Life after the bye week has not been kind to the Carolina Hurricanes. After dropping a 2-1 overtime decision to the Colorado Avalanche on Friday, the Hurricanes were shut out 4-0 by the Toronto Maple Leafs, who currently occupy the second wild card spot in the Eastern Conference. Curtis McElhinney posted 37 saves in his first shutout with the Leafs and fifth of his career.

"It's not good enough from everyone," Jordan Staal said. "There's no real excuse tonight."

The Hurricanes had the advantage in shots and scoring chances for much of the night, but this recent four-game stretch has been plagued by the team's inability to finish. The Canes have scored just three goals in their last four games and have been shut out twice while notching a 0-3-1 record following three straight wins coming out of the All-Star break.

"I thought we were fine after 20. After 40 we could have been on the board, but we weren't," head coach Bill Peters said. "The third one took a lot of wind out of our sails."

"It's frustrating. It cost us the game. Everyone knows where we are, but we need to find ways to win games and get results," Jeff Skinner said. "It's not enough to just out-chance or out-shoot teams. You need to find ways to capitalize on your opportunities. Right now we're not doing a good enough job."

Now, the Canes face an even more uphill climb in the standings, as they find themselves in last place in the Eastern Conference with 27 games remaining.

"You've got to stay with it," Peters said. "You're doing something right if you're generating quality chances."

After a scoreless first period, the Maple Leafs tallied two goals in the second period to take a two-goal lead into the intermission. Still, the Hurricanes were a shot away from getting right back in it. Then Toronto added two quick tallies in the third, and that was that.

"It's been a few games now of the puck not going in and getting good looks," Staal said. "We just needed one in the third, and there was nothing really there. It was unfortunate."

"A lot of the goals, if you look at it, there's a common theme. I think we got skated a little bit and lost body position," Peters said. "I don't like the way we responded to the third goal they scored. I thought we sagged, definitely."

Eddie Lack replaced Cam Ward in net for the latter half of the third period. Lack has started one game since returning from a pair of concussions, and with the score at 4-0, tonight allowed an opportunity for him to face shots in a game scenario. Lack stopped all seven shots he faced in his relief appearance.

In order to keep their playoff hopes alive, the Hurricanes are going to need to string together a significant winning streak. They host the Pittsburgh Penguins on Tuesday in their third game of this five-game homestand.

"We're going to come back with a better effort in the next game," Staal said. "[Pittsburgh is a] good team and a good test for us."

"We've got a lot of hockey left. You've got to stay with it and keep working," Skinner said. "We're in a little bit of a funk now, but you've got to find ways to get out of it. The only way that's going to happen is if you do it yourself. You can't sit around and wait for things to break your way. We have to work for our chances and breaks."
Curtis McElhinney, Maple Leafs shut out Hurricanes

Toronto goalie makes 37 saves, Connor Brown scores twice in win at Carolina

by Kurt Dusterberg / NHL.com Correspondent

February 19th, 2017

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Curtis McElhinney made 37 saves, and Connor Brown scored twice to help the Toronto Maple Leafs to a 4-0 win against the Carolina Hurricanes at PNC Arena on Sunday.

McElhinney, making his fifth start for Toronto since being claimed on waivers from the Columbus Blue Jackets on Jan. 10, earned his fifth career shutout with a variety of outstanding saves, particularly in the first two periods.

Jake Gardiner had a goal and two assists, and James van Riemsdyk had two assists for Toronto (27-20-11), which avoided a three-game losing streak and moved one point ahead of the Florida Panthers for third place in the Atlantic Division.

The Maple Leafs were coming off a 6-3 home loss to the Ottawa Senators on Saturday.

"Just a good team win, starting with our goalie who played a heck of a game," said Gardiner, who was plus-4. "Back-to-backs haven't been our strong suit and we proved ourselves and went out there and won."

Carolina (24-23-8) has lost four straight (0-3-1).

Brown gave the Maple Leafs a 1-0 lead at 1:07 of the second period with his 13th of the season. Brown won a race to the net against Noah Hanifin to redirect van Riemsdyk's pass from the left boards.

Auston Matthews made it 2-0 at 9:53 with a highlight-reel goal. Matthews carried the puck off from the offensive and held off Phillip Di Giuseppe before losing his balance and backhanding the puck between Cam Ward's legs.

"You just try to make the best play you can," said Matthews, who has 28 goals. "I had a good amount of speed going into it to carry me to the net, then I just tried to sneak it in there. A pretty lucky play, I guess."

Gardiner made it 3-0 with a wrist shot from the left point through a screen at 6:10 of the third period.

Brown's second of the game was almost a replica of his first, when he drove the net and took a pass from van Riemsdyk for a 4-0 lead at 8:09.

Eddie Lack relieved Ward in goal with 10:58 remaining. Ward allowed four goals on 24 shots. Lack made seven saves.

"We had a few chances and couldn't get one," Hurricanes forward Lee Stempniak said. "We let the frustration get to us. Once it was 4-0, we sort of stopped playing and lost our identity. It turned out to be a pretty embarrassing end of the game for us."

Goal of the game

Brown's second goal began with an end-to-end rush where he beat three defenders before finishing a give-and-go with van Riemsdyk.

Save of the game

With 9:50 left in the second period, McElhinney fought off Teuvo Teravainen in the low slot before stopping Jeff Skinner's backhand, a rebound by Di Giuseppe and finally another backhand from Skinner.

Highlight of the game

Matthews goal will be replayed again and again. Gardiner started the play behind the Toronto net, taking a peek up ice before sending a long pass up the boards. "I just saw a line change from [Carolina], and when you see Auston Matthews breaking, you just try to give him the puck," Gardiner said. "That was impressive. Just the strength while he was falling to score that goal."

Unsung performance of the game

Toronto gave up 31 shots through two periods, but held Carolina to six shots in the third with active sticks in the defensive zone.

They said it

"Sometimes that's the way back-to-backs work out. Carolina is a team that like to throw a lot of pucks on net. For the most part the guys were doing a good job in front, in terms of taking sticks away. If guys are just banging pucks into my pads, that's fine because they don't have enough time to lift it up and over me. That's the most important thing."

-- Maple Leafs goaltender Curtis McElhinney

"I thought we were fine through 20 [minutes] and then through 40. I thought we could have been on the board, but we weren't. And then the third [goal] took a lot of the wind out of our sails."

-- Hurricanes coach Bill Peters

Need to know

Toronto is 5-8-1 in the second game of back-to-backs. ... McElhinney's hadn't had a shutout since Jan. 2, 2014, with the Columbus Blue Jackets. ... Di Giuseppe, promoted from Charlotte of the American Hockey League on Sunday, had a game-high seven shots. ... Skinner tied Hurricanes general
Brown, Matthews power Maple Leafs past Hurricanes 4-0

By KYLE GLASER, Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Carolina’s Phil Di Giuseppe did everything he could to stop Auston Matthews from getting to the net, going so far as to hook the young Toronto rookie down to the ice.

It didn’t matter.

Matthews still found a way to put the puck in the back of the net.

Matthews had a highlight-reel goal on a backhander as he was twirling down to the ice, Connor Brown scored twice, and the Maple Leafs beat the Hurricanes 4-0 on Sunday night.

“When you’re getting hooked like that, to No. 1, keep your balance and, (No.) 2, find the puck and be able to push it,” Brown said of Matthews, “he’s an elite goal scorer for a reason.”

Jake Gardiner added a goal and two assists, James van Riemsdyk had two assists and Curtis McElhinney made 37 saves for the Maple Leafs to earn his first shutout since January 2014.

Toronto snapped a two-game skid and jumped into the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference with the win.

Cam Ward made 20 saves for Carolina before being pulled with 10:58 remaining in the third period.

Eddie Lack made seven saves in relief for the Hurricanes, who are winless in their last four games (0-3-1).

“We had no fire tonight,” Carolina coach Bill Peters said. “None.”

NOTES: Mitch Marner missed his second straight game with an upper-body injury for Toronto. He entered the day tied for the team lead with 48 points. … Toronto’s Nazem Kadri and Leo Komarov each had an assist to extend their point streaks to four games. … The Hurricanes recalled Di Giuseppe from Charlotte of the AHL earlier in the day. … Jeff Skinner played his 472nd game for Carolina, tying him with Ron Francis for 10th all-time in games played for the franchise since it relocated in 1997. … The Hurricanes lost for the first time in seven games wearing their black alternate jerseys this season.

UP NEXT

Maple Leafs: Host Winnipeg on Tuesday.
Hurricanes: Host Pittsburgh on Tuesday.
About Last Night: Carolina Hurricanes Get Steamrolled

Two duds on home ice in two crucial games this weekend. The Hurricanes sure don’t seem like they want to play in late April.

by Peter Dewar@pdewar18  Feb 20, 2017, 8:00am EST

There aren’t many positive words to analyze and describe the Carolina Hurricanes’ play as of late. Losing to the Avalanche on Friday served as yet another hit to Carolina’s playoff chances in the congested Eastern Conference, and last night’s shutout defeat at the hands of the Toronto Maple Leafs all but deflated their hopes. Let’s talk about why that is.

Lack of effort/resolve/desire/everything

Surprisingly enough, the Hurricanes were carrying the play for parts of the first period and a half, peppering Curtis McElhinney with 31 shots through two periods to Toronto’s 21. They even ended up winning the shot count 37-31 at the end of the game.

But despite the shot advantage, the Hurricanes were easily outclassed and outworked by a far hungrier Leafs squad. Connor Brown’s opening goal in the second period didn’t seem like a back-breaker, but Auston Matthews’ sure did.

To give credit where it’s due: that’s the product of hard work and pure talent on behalf of an incredible player in Matthews. And while this goal simply changed the “1” to a “2” on the scoreboard, the heavy effect it had on Carolina’s bench was representative of far more than just another goal against.

The atrocity of a third period featured a Canes team that looked like they wanted to be anywhere but on that ice—a far cry from the dominance they’ve shown in PNC Arena this season. The final two Leafs goals came while Toronto was focusing on a trap strategy, clogging the neutral zone and just dumping the puck back in. Carolina managed just six shots in the final stanza, while giving up 10 to the defensive-minded Leafs.

Look at Connor Brown’s second goal, and notice how easily he darts past Justin Faulk. Notice also how effortlessly James van Riemsdyk floats a pass to him.

There’s no urgency from Carolina in that clip. Justin Faulk is content to let Brown take an unattended lane to the net, and after hounding Brown through the neutral zone, Victor Rask stops short at the blue line to cover what I’m guessing (hoping) was a trailing defenseman. Neither star player showed any strong sense of will to get the puck back.

The loss makes for a now four-game winless streak, and the Hurricanes look lost. Head Coach Bill Peters’ postgame comments are showing more and more frustration. The scorers are supremely failing to do their jobs. Cam Ward, for as confident and reliable as he was on Friday, was as shaky as can be facing Auston Matthews and Co.

In the “old days,” this type of continued effort (or lack thereof) would constitute a bag skate, Herb Brooks style. We saw these same Leafs go through it earlier this year; their coach Mike Babcock had no issue expressing his displeasure through grueling skating drills, and his team has responded since then. Perhaps there is still something for Bill Peters to pick up from his former mentor.

So...playoffs? Trades?

Of course, mathematical elimination has yet to become a reality, but with the way some other teams are heating up and the lack of available playoff berths, it may be time to come to terms with the reality of the situation at hand.

Carolina is now last in the Eastern Conference, albeit nine points back of—guess who—Toronto for the second wild-card position. They still have games in hand on most teams ahead of them, but those mean very little if they do not become wins. And they mean even less when the teams ahead are still putting up W’s.

So, with the trade deadline looming, it seems that GM Ron Francis’ job may be getting easier. There is still time for the Canes to sort of make it interesting, but probably not enough so to make a blockbuster deal worth it (sorry, Duchene fans). But even without a legitimate playoff push, the end of this season could be fascinating in itself.

“C”

Following last season’s trade deadline, Jeff Skinner stepped up in a big way to help fill the cavernous shoes of Eric Staal. He earned an “A” on his jersey for his efforts, and came out with the same intensity at the start of this season.

Depending on what happens at the deadline, could it be time for Skinner or another player to step up and take an even higher honor? Peters and Francis have noted that they will not name a captain again until there is a clear leader, and depending on what happens at the deadline, the Hurricanes could be forcing the issue.

Any kind of turnaround for the Hurricanes is going to start with a massive win, and they have a chance to do that in their next game.

A date with the Penguins looms for Tuesday night, and the 7-1 beatdown they brought with them at the end of January will still be fresh in the minds of the Canes players and coaches. The team’s preparation today and tomorrow will be very telling of where they want this season to go from here.
Recap: Offensively struggling Hurricanes shut out by McElhinney, Leafs

The less said, the better, so we won't waste too much of your time here.

by Justin Lape@LankyLape  Feb 19, 2017, 10:07pm EST

The Carolina Hurricanes continued their recent stretch of bad play as they were shut out by the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-0 on Sunday night. The Hurricanes are now 3-6-1 over their last ten games.

The two teams traded many chances in the first period. The Hurricanes pestered Leafs goalie Curtis McElhinney with 15 shots in the period but he stood tall in net. The Hurricanes’ best chance of the period was a heavy slap-shot by defensemen Noah Hanifin with around five minutes left in the period. The Leafs almost squeaked one past Hurricanes goalie Cam Ward but he shut the door with a big save with around three minutes remaining in the period. The teams remained scoreless at the conclusion of the first.

Toronto got on the board early in the first period to break the scoreless tie. James Van Riemsdyk fed Connor Brown with a beautiful saucer pass which was then tipped over Cam Ward’s glove for the first goal of the game. Auston Matthews gave the visitors a two-goal lead after a highlight reel goal in which he was pulled down on a breakaway by Phil Di Giuseppe.

Despite registering 31 shots through two periods, the Hurricanes remained scoreless.

Toronto would extend their lead to three goals in the third period after a sloppy play by Phil Di Giuseppe in the Hurricanes defensive zone. Nazem Kadri set up Jake Gardiner at the point who bombed a shot past Ward. Connor Brown would put another goal to put his team up 4-0. Cam Ward was replaced by Eddie Lack after Brown’s second goal of the night. Curtis McElhinney would secure the shutout stopping all 37 shots he saw.

This was the second of three meetings between the Hurricanes and Leafs this season. The two teams will face off against each other in their final meeting of the season on March 11th. The Hurricanes’ next game is Tuesday at home against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Behind Enemy Lines: Maple Leafs’ Calder Hopefuls Come to Raleigh

The young Maple Leafs come in to Raleigh off of back to back losses and look to rebound against the Canes.

by Zeke Lukow  Feb 19, 2017, 4:38pm EST

The Toronto Maple Leafs entered this week in a playoff position. However, after two straight losses, they sit one point behind Boston for the final wild card position.

The Leafs lost their last two games by a combined 11-5 score. Much like the Canes, the Maple Leafs are a young team which can lead to results like these. Frederik Andersen has had a good season earning a .914 Sv%, but early in the season, the Leafs struggled to find a viable backup.

This came to an end with the Leafs claimed Curtis McElhinney off of the waivers from the Blue Jackets. McElhinney has a higher save percentage (.924) and a lower GAA (2.52) than Andersen.

The Leafs have been led by their new young core. The Leafs forwards are led by Mitch Marner (out injured tonight), Auston Matthews, and William Nylander who are 20 years old or younger. All three players have 40 points.

Defensively the team is led by two alternate captains, Morgan Rielly and Matt Hunwick. Rielly is 22 years old in his fourth year with the team. Rielly isn’t just a leader in the locker room he has been effective on the ice as well He has 22 points (2g, 19a).

Offensively the team is led by Mitch Marner and Auston Matthews who both joined the team this season. Both Marner and Matthews have 48 points coming into today’s contest. Matthews leads the team with 27 goals and Marner leads the team with 33 assists. Both players are competing for both the rookie goal and point championships.

These additions offensively have paid off. Toronto has been dangerous all season, their 176 goals for is 6th best in the league. Toronto has been winning the even strength play with a 51.5 gf% which shows that they are on the plus side five on five.

This young offense will now match up against one of the league’s best young defenses in the Carolina Hurricanes. The Canes won the first meeting of the year way back in November by a score of 2-1. Much has changed since then and both teams now look to end multi-game losing streaks.

Game Notes:

- The Canes are 6-0-1 in their last seven home games against the Leafs dating back to 2011. This game marks the first of two games between these teams at PNC this season.

- The Carolina Hurricanes league-leading penalty kill unit will have their hands full tonight. The Leafs league-leading power play unit is better on the road (28%) than they are at home (18.9%).

- Despite having a +8 goal differential, the Leafs have only a 50.5% Corsi for percentage. The Canes are a better possession team and have a 51.9% Corsi for Percentage.

- This game is the second of a five-game homestand for the Canes. The Canes have a 17-6-2 home record. The Leafs have been relatively successful on the road with a 12-10-7 record.
Hurricanes shut out 4-0 by Leafs

By Peter Koutroumpis2/19/2017

RALEIGH, N.C. – The Carolina Hurricanes just could not beat goaltender Curtis McElhinney and as a result, suffered a 4-0 loss at the hands of the Toronto Maple Leafs at PNC Arena on Sunday.

It wasn’t for a lack of shot attempts as McElhinny made 37 saves and earned his fifth career shutout and first of the season.

Carolina rifled 53 total shots (16 missed) toward the Leafs net throughout the game, but the 31 combined that Toronto put on goaltenders Cam Ward and Eddie Lack found space to bulge the twine.

“We were in the game and Wardo’s makin’ some good stops for us,” forward Jeff Skinner said. “Then, somehow we give up too many Grade-A’s and they find ways to capitalize on their chances, and we don’t find a way to capitalize on ours.”

Connor Brown’s two goals, along with singles from Auston Matthews and defenseman Jake Gardiner provided the Leafs the offense to avenge a 2-1 Hurricanes win in Toronto back on Nov. 22nd.

More importantly at this point in the season, the Leafs took a valuable two points and placed it in their column in the NHL Eastern Conference wildcard race.

Hurricanes head coach Bill Peters kept his responses very simple on the loss which followed a 2-1 shortfall to Colorado in overtime on Friday.

“A lot of the goals had a common theme,” he said. “We got outskated a little bit and lost body position.”

Following a scoreless first period during which Carolina outshot the Leafs by a 15-9 margin, Brown and Matthews scored during the first 10 minutes of the second.

Getting ahead of Hurricanes defenseman Noah Hanifin, Brown redirected a James Van Riemsdyk saucer pass over Ward’s shoulder at the 1:07 mark.

Approaching the midpoint of the period, Matthews found space to drive down the left boards with recently recalled Hurricanes forward Phil Di Giuseppe trailing with stick and hands around him.

Matthews scored his 28th of the season, maintaining control of the puck long enough while airborne to backhand it through Ward’s pad after being hooked by Di Giuseppe.

The goal tied Matthews for first amongst all rookies with Winnipeg’s Patrik Laine.

The closest a shot came to beating McElhinney was a point blast from Carolina defenseman Justin Faulk that hit the post with eight minutes remaining in the period.

Toronto carried its 2-0 lead into the third.

Gardiner scored his eighth of the season with a shot from the left point that beat Ward short to his stick side as he struggled to get eyes on the puck with multiple bodies in front of him.

Two minutes later, Brown scored his second, the result of a give-and-go with another return saucer pass from Van Riemsdyk that he managed to put past Ward.

Lack then came in at that point, and faced seven shots for the remaining 10:58, stopping all of them, but with no productive offensive support coming from Carolina’s forwards.

“I thought we were fine after 20 and then through 40, I thought we could’ve been on the board and we weren’t,” Peters said.

“Then the third one took a lot of the wind out of our sails.”

“It’s a game that we needed to win,” Jordan Staal added. “We worked hard for the first two periods. I thought we had a lot of chances, but we just needed one in the third. There was really nothing there in the third.”
In Milwaukee for the second time in three nights, the Checkers saw another lead evaporate, but were able to salvage a point in the standings with a 5-4 overtime loss to the Admirals.

Charlotte wasted no time putting themselves on the board, with Lucas Wallmark firing a one-time feed from Valentin Zykov home just 19 seconds after puck drop. That would kick off a back-and-forth affair between the two squads, with the Checkers twice extending their lead to two goals through the first forty minutes of play. The Admirals wouldn’t quit, however, and quick strikes to end the second and start the third pulled them even with the home team as the contest headed down the stretch.

Neither side could pot the go-ahead goal for the remainder of regulation though, and the game would extend to overtime. The Admirals came out firing in the extra frame, ripping a shot off the crossbar mere seconds in, and the winner would shortly follow, as Adam Payerl struck for the second time on a slick deke to the short side less than a minute in.

UP NEXT
The Checkers will return home to prepare for a six-game home stand starting Friday against Cleveland.

NOTES
Tonight ended the Checkers’ final three-in-three of the season, with the team going 1-1-1. They are now 53-36-13 all time in three-in-threes ... This was the third overtime game between the Checkers and Admirals this season and the third Admirals win ... Charlotte is now 4-4 in games ending in overtime this season ... Lucas Wallmark’s goal 19 seconds in was the fastest to open a game and period by a Checker this season ... Andrew Miller and Valentin Zykov both set career highs with three points each ... With three points tonight, Milwaukee’s Frederick Gaudreau has eight points in five games against Charlotte this season ... Valentin Zykov extended his goal streak to three games, matching the longest by a Checker this season ... Andrey Nestrasil recorded an assist for the third straight game and Andrew Poturalski extended his point streak to six games ... Tonight was Andrew Miller’s 200th AHL game ... Forwards Patrick Dwyer, Kyle Hagel, Sergey Tolchinsky and Brendan Woods and goaltender Michael Leighton missed the game due to injury ... Defenseman Kevin Raine was a healthy extra.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES
NEWS CLIPPINGS • Feb. 20, 2017

1048486 Toronto Maple Leafs
Leafs blow back into playoff spot by shutting out Hurricanes
By MARK ZWOLINSKI
Sun., Feb. 19, 2017
RALEIGH, N.C.—The Leafs' post-game dressing room Sunday night was full of shared laughs and good vibes.

Jake Gardiner had a goal and three points. Connor Brown scored a pair of goals off precision passes from James van Riemsdyk. Auston Matthews scored another milestone goal. And the Leafs won a must-win game for their playoff hopes.

And behind it all was backup goalie Curtis McElhinney.

"He was huge," Brown said, after McElhinney stopped 37 shots to move the Leafs back up the Eastern Conference playoff ladder. "Any time you get stops like that to start the game, it's huge . . . we got our legs under us after that and got the ball rolling.

McElhinney made point-blank stops on Elias Lindholm and Klas Dahlbeck early in a first period in which Toronto was outshot 15-6. And with their run of slow starts lately, there were some grateful teammates in the locker room.

"He's been a great pickup for us," Gardiner said about McElhinney, who is now 3-3 with the Leafs since being claimed off waivers from Columbus last month.

McElhinney's role as a backup has been steadily increasing, with the Leafs needing him more and more down the stretch to allow for some down time for the heavily worked Frederik Andersen.

McElhinney did not get the desired result in a loss to Columbus — his former team — earlier in the week, which left him disappointed on an emotional night for him and his family.

The puck from Sunday’s shutout — his first as a Leaf, and fifth in his career — will go to his kids, he said.

"I like to spread them out," McElhinney said, joking about the timing of his shutouts (the last which came in early 2014). "I thought we battled hard in front of the net, we got better as the game went along, but our guys did a good job in front of the net. We had trouble with that against Ottawa (in a loss on home ice Saturday night).

With McElhinney turning in a flawless performance, Toronto bagged two key points that vaulted them back into the second wild-card berth in the Eastern Conference.

"Number one is you are pushing the starting goalie, and he (McElhinney) does that with his workouts and his leadership . . . so that's real positive . . . but these were two real important points for us tonight," Leafs coach Mike Babcock said.

"When things are going bad, you want to stop it as quick as you can. I thought (Leafs centre Tyler) Bozak was really competitive tonight, and (Morgan Rielly and Nikita Zaitsev) had bounce back-games . . . Jake (Gardiner) had three points, so it was a good game from our guys."

Toronto responded to McElhinney's first period with a new look in the second. Brown scored off a flip feed from van Riemsdyk at 1:07 of the second, while Matthews popped his 28th goal of the season at the 9:53 mark to change the momentum.

"This is as much a must-win game for us as we've had all season," Leafs centre Nazem Kadri said prior to the game.

Toronto's win also marked a hard-to-come-by victory in the second game of back-to-back sets. The club has posted a 9-3-2 first-game record, and is now 5-8-1 in the second.

The scene now shifts to Toronto for three big home games this week before a three-game swing through the tough Pacific Division next week.

Matthews' goal put him back in a tie with Winnipeg’s Patrik Laine for the goal lead among NHL rookies. Laine picked up two assists in an important Winnipeg win Sunday, and sits three points ahead of Matthews in the overall rookie scoring race. The two rookies — chosen first and second overall in the NHL draft last June — meet in Toronto Tuesday in what should be great hockey theatre.

Matthews' goal was another thing of beauty from the 19-year-old phenom; he was hooked to the ice from behind but still managed to control his body and stick enough to tuck a backhander past Carolina goalie Cam Ward.

Matthews is one of just six teenagers with 28 goals since 2005. The others: Sidney Crosby (twice), Steven Stamkos, Jeff Skinner, Jordan Staal, and Laine.

Toronto Star LOADED: 02.20.2017
1048487 Toronto Maple Leafs
Leafs take huge must-win over Hurricanes
BY TERRY KOSHAN, TORONTO SUN
FIRST POSTED: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017 09:50 PM EST | UPDATED: MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2017 12:06 AM EST
RALEIGH, N.C. — Curtis McElhinny won’t win any awards for skating into the crease and doing his job.

One can imagine, however, he was a popular guy among his Maple Leafs teammates on the flight home Sunday night.

McElhinney was terrific, turning aside all 37 shots on goal as the Leafs beat a listless group of Carolina Hurricanes 4-0.

In a game the Leafs figured they no choice but to win after losing a night earlier at home against Ottawa, Auston Matthews scored another eye-popping goal and Connor Brown had a pair as Toronto improved to 5-8-1 in the second game of back-to-back sets.

"You want to win every game and when he is in there, you want to have the opportunity," Leafs coach Mike Babcock said of McElhinney.

“I thought it was real important points for us, because when things go bad you want to stop them as fast as you possibly can. We lost a big game at home (Saturday night)."

Importantly, the Leafs have 65 points, moving them into third place in the Atlantic Division (prior to the Boston Bruins’ game in San Jose). At worst, the Leafs, who won for the fourth time in nine games, would be in the second wild-card spot at the conclusion of games on Sunday.

McElhinney improved to 3-3-0 as a Leaf since Toronto claimed him off waivers from Columbus on Jan. 10, and recorded his first shutout (and fifth of his career) since January 2, 2014, when he blanked Arizona (then Phoenix) while playing for Columbus.

"It’s pretty clearly laid out for me," McElhinney said of his role with the Leafs.

"It feels good (to get the shutout). I’ve been spreading them out a little bit but it feels nice either way.

"I think every opportunity I get is an opportunity to prove (his worth), so it feels nice either way."

The Leafs had 31 shots on Carolina goalies Cam Ward and Eddie Lack, who came in after the fourth Toronto goal.

A sparse crowd saw the Leafs, playing for the second consecutive game without Mitch Marner (shoulder), improve to 13-10-7 on the road.

Announced attendance was 10,004, but there were empty rows upon empty rows throughout the building.
To sum up: call it a Hockey Weekend in Canada, and what a weekend it was. Enough to play the Senators in a twilight event in Ottawa Sunday, let’s frenzy. Who’s in, who’s out – who knows until the second week of April. Daily basis, teams figure to pop in and out of that Atlantic third place tenuous hold on third place, tied with Boston at 64 points. On an almost Boston Bruins for the final wild card spot. The Florida Panthers had a Philadelphia Flyers and New Jersey Devils were within four points of the Florida Panthers, setting the stage for a heated battle. The wild card race alone is going to be insane. At the start of play how things shake out. Season, know this much: there will not be a repeat of last spring when no playoff group or on the fringe (Calgary, Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver). Canadian teams are in the news. They are surging (Edmonton, Ottawa), there hasn’t been a Hockey Day in Canada quite like it. Matthew’s 28th of the season, putting him six back of rookie lead with 28 goals, and the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday night at the Air Canada Centre. The Leafs opened the scoring at 1:07 of the second when Brown went to the net, ignored the check of Noah Hanifin and re-directed a James van Riemsdyk pass into the net behind Ward. Stops on Joakim Nordstrom and Jeff Skinner were among McElhinney’s toughest saves in the middle period. Gardiner scored in the third period on a shot from the point, giving him eight goals on the season. Brown scored his second less than two minutes later, also on a re-direct on a pass from van Riemsdyk. During the first period, McElhinney gave his teammates a chance to find their legs, stopping all 15 Carolina shots. Next up for the Leafs are Patrik Laine, who is tied with Matthews for the rookie lead with 28 goals, and the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday night at the Air Canada Centre. “All these games heading into this part of the season are must-wins,” Matthews said. “It’s a really tight race, in our division, in our conference. All these games are important.”

Matthews scored a highlight-reel goal in the second period, giving the Leafs a 2-0 lead at 9:53. After taking a pass from Jake Gardiner, Matthews burst toward the net and as he was being tripped by Phillip Di Giuseppe, managed to deke to his backhand and slip the puck between the legs of Ward. It was vintage Matthews, never mind that the 19-year-old was playing in just his 58th game in the NHL. The goal was Matthews’ 28th of the season, putting him six back of Wendel Clark’s Leafs rookie record of 34. “Unbelievable play by Gards to get me the puck off the rim,” Matthews said. “Just trying to make the best play you can. I had a good amount of speed going into it to carry me to the net and just tried to sneak it in there. Pretty lucky play.”

As for the play of McElhinney?

“It was huge,” Matthews said. “He played unbelievable, he made a lot of big saves. When the momentum switched to them, he stood tall and he was huge for us. It's a big two points for us.”

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Toronto Sun LOADED: 02.20.2017 1048488 Toronto Maple Leafs

Canadian NHL teams surging as playoff race heats up WAYNE SCANLAN, POSTMEDIA NETWORK

FIRST POSTED: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017 10:13 PM EST | UPDATED: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017 10:21 PM EST

There hasn’t been a Hockey Day in Canada quite like it. Canadian teams are in the news. They are surging (Edmonton, Ottawa), or failing off a cliff (Montreal). Canadian teams are in the mix of the playoff group or on the fringe (Calgary, Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver).

No matter what happens down the home stretch of this 2016-17 NHL season, know this much: there will not be a repeat of last spring when no Canadian-based clubs reached the Stanley Cup playoffs. This season promises as many as three to four, possibly more, qualifiers depending how things shake out.

The wild card race alone is going to be insane. At the start of play Sunday, five teams – Toronto, the New York Islanders, Buffalo Sabres, Philadelphia Flyers and New Jersey Devils were within four points of the Boston Bruins for the final wild card spot. The Florida Panthers had a tenuous hold on third place, tied with Boston at 64 points. On an almost daily basis, teams figure to pop in and out of that Atlantic third place position and second wild card spot.

Who’s in, who’s out – who knows until the second week of April. What happened over the last couple of days was just fodder for the frenzy.

Forget ‘Hockey Day.’ With the Jets hanging around this time zone long enough to play the Senators in a twilight event in Ottawa Sunday, let’s call it a Hockey Weekend in Canada, and what a weekend it was.

To sum up:

* The Oilers beat the powerhouse Chicago Blackhawks 3-1 to reach 72 points on the season, the most of any Canadian team, although the Senators are just two back of Edmonton with two games in hand. Led by the life-giving talent of Connor McDavid, the Oilers are at last showing signs of the promise expected of them over the past decade.

* The Jets, who have had their scuffles, completed the Canadian sweep through Montreal and Ottawa, and now face Toronto. The Jets took down the Canadiens in Claude Julien’s head coaching debut behind the Montreal bench, so now the Habs get to sit around helplessly while the Senators eye first place in the Atlantic Division during Montreal’s bye week.

Whatever ails the Habs — and it may be as simple as the players on the roster — Julien is going to need time to turn that ship around. Good thing he got general manager Marc Bergevin to provide Julien a five-year contract.

* The Senators, only now getting some attention around the league for their remarkable season, set themselves up for a shot at first place by beating the Maple Leafs 6-3 in Toronto, on the heels of a 3-0 win in New Jersey. Dads trip karma strikes again. The only thing that could have been better than Saturday’s wild game, full of momentum swings and emotional moments, would have been for the game to be staged in Ottawa. What were the NHL and CBC thinking?

On the occasion of Canada’s sesquicentennial, there were 150 games of shinny staged on the Rideau Canal Saturday (and just in the nick of time before the great February thaw that closed the skateway Sunday morning). Yet, that event was not enough to make Ottawa a host city for CBC’s Hockey Day in Canada, nor even the host venue for Saturday’s latest round in the Battle of Ontario.

THEY SHALL OVERCOME

The Senators ability to rebound in Toronto after letting a 2-0 lead get away is symbolic of what has been going on with this group. They find ways, they are resilient, they have a belief in getting the job done like we haven’t seen around here since they made that ridiculous charge to the playoffs in 2015.

No miracle needed this spring, but adversity is at hand. Had new head coach Guy Boucher known that he would have to get through an entire season without the services of veteran winger Clarke MacArthur, on top of two months minus starting goaltender Craig Anderson, he might not have mentioned anything about playoff aspirations.

Now comes another Bobby Ryan finger injury, a head hit to Mark Stone, and a Mike Hoffman injury – health issues that were probably overdue by now. No miracle needed this spring, but adversity is at hand. Had new head coach Guy Boucher known that he would have to get through an entire season without the services of veteran winger Clarke MacArthur, on top of two months minus starting goaltender Craig Anderson, he might not have mentioned anything about playoff aspirations.

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The Boston Bruins are in the second wild-card spot with 64 points, while the Leafs are one point ahead of the New York Islanders and the Buffalo Sabres. The Bruins, Isles and Sabres all play on Sunday.

Leafs coach Mike Babcock confirmed that Curtis McElhinney will start in goal versus the Hurricanes, who will counter with Cam Ward.

Otherwise, there will be no lineup changes for the visitors.

Toronto is 4-8-1 in the second game of back-to-back sets. Babcock won’t settle for any excuses.

“To me, just be mentally strong and play right,” Babcock said. “We don’t have to entertain anybody here tonight, we just have to play well without the puck. Dig in mentally. You have lots of energy, there is no problem, just get out there and play.”

“They’re a team in need of wins. We’re a team in need of wins. It should be two desperate teams.”

The Leafs have fallen into a rut overall, going 3-6-2 in 11 games since shutting out Detroit on Jan. 25.

Several players are in the midst of slumps. Zach Hyman has two points in 12 games, Connor Brown has three points in 15 games and James van Riemsdyk has one point in seven games.

Kadri had similar thoughts to his coach.

“Right now we have to be desperate for these two points,” Kadri said. “This is as much of a must-win as it can be for us.”

Toronto Sun LOADED: 02.20.2017

1048490 Toronto Maple Leafs

Connor Brown, Auston Matthews power Maple Leafs past Hurricanes 4-0

Terry Koshan, Postmedia News | February 19, 2017 | Last Updated: Feb 20 1:27 AM ET

RALEIGH, N.C. — Nazem Kadri summed up the reality for the Maple Leafs late Sunday afternoon, a couple of hours before the club met the Carolina Hurricanes at the PNC Arena.

“We have to be desperate for these two points,” Kadri said. “This is as much of a must-win as it can be for us.”

Stellar goaltending provided by Curtis McElhinney, another eye-popping goal by Auston Matthews and a pair by Connor Brown ensured the Leafs ended a three-game losing streak.

The Leafs won for the fourth time in nine games and improved to 5-8-1 in the second game of back-to-back sets.

Importantly, the Leafs have 65 points, moving them into third place in the Atlantic Division (prior to the Boston Bruins’ game in San Jose). At worst, the Leafs would be in the second wild-card spot at the conclusion of games on Sunday.

McElhinney improved to 3-3-0 as a Leaf since Toronto claimed him off waivers from Columbus on Jan. 10, and recorded his first shutout (and fifth of his career) since January 2, 2014, when he blanked Arizona (then Phoenix) while playing for Columbus.

In total, McElhinney made 37 saves. The Leafs had 31 shots on Carolina goalies Cam Ward and Eddie Lack, who came in after the fourth Toronto goal.

A sparse crowd saw the Leafs, playing for the second consecutive game without Mitch Marner (shoulder), improve to 13-10-7 on the road.

“To me, just be mentally strong and play right,” coach Mike Babcock before the game, referring to the Leafs’ woes in the latter half of back to backs.

“We don’t have to entertain anybody here tonight, we just have to play well without the puck. Dig in mentally. You have lots of energy, there is no problem, just get out there and play.”

Announced attendance was 10,004, but there were empty rows upon empty rows throughout the building.

Matthews scored a highlight-reel goal in the second period, giving the Leafs a 2-0 lead at 9:53. After taking a pass from Jake Gardiner, Matthews burst toward the net and as he was being tripped by Phillip Di Giuseppe, managed to deke to his backhand and slip the puck between the legs of Hurricanes netminder Cam Ward.

It was vintage Matthews, never mind that the 19-year-old was playing in just his 58th game in the NHL.

The goal was Matthews’ 28th of the season, putting him six back of Wendel Clark’s Leafs rookie record of 34.

Coincidentally, 28 goals also is the total scored by Winnipeg Jets rookie Patrik Laine. The Leafs play host to Laine and the Jets on Tuesday to begin a three-game home stand.

The hockey gods couldn’t have set up the showdown between the terrific freshmen any better.

The Leafs opened the scoring at 1:07 of the second when Brown went to the net, ignored the stick of Noah Hanifin and re-directed a James van Riemsdyk pass into the net behind Ward.

Along the way, McElhinney was excellent. Stops on Joakim Nordstrom and Jeff Skinner were among his toughest saves in the middle period.

Gardiner scored in the third period on a shot from the point, giving him eight goals on the season.

Brown scored his second less than two minutes later, also on a re-direct on a pass from van Riemsdyk.

During the first period, McElhinney gave his teammates a chance to find their legs, stopping all 15 Carolina shots that made it to the net.

It was clear McElhinney was in a zone when he made a point-blank save on Elias Lindholm before the four-minute mark; later, Hanifin was open in the slot but could not beat the Leafs goaltender.

It helped that Justin Faulk hit the post during a Hurricanes power play, something that happened again in the second period.

Toronto’s best chance came when Ward handed the puck to Josh Leivo and then had to recover to stop the Leafs forward, who has been sharp since returning to the lineup six games ago.

National Post LOADED: 02.20.2017

1048491 Toronto Maple Leafs

‘My wife thinks I look like a fool’: Hockey writer watches NHL game in breathtaking virtual reality

Michael Traikos | February 19, 2017 6:33 PM ET

Vancouver Canucks goaltender Ryan Miller’s mask is knocked off by a shot from the Calgary Flames on Feb. 18.

My wife thinks I look like a fool.

Sadly, this is nothing new. I’m the guy who shovels snow in my shorts, who has mustard stains on every dress shirt. But on this particular Saturday night, my foolishness is not because I’ve swapped my jeans for pyjama pants, while keeping on the sweater I had been wearing all day. No, it’s because of what’s on my face.

Sportsnet has teamed with Molson Canadian and given away 350,000 pairs of cardboard VR glasses inside cases of beer. Under the working theory that nothing bad has ever come out of a case of beer, I’ve decided to give the new technology a try.

And so here I am, clutching a cardboard box to my face as I bounce my shot from the Calgary Flames on Feb. 18.

To my left and to my right are fans who spent close to $400 per ticket to care. From my vantage point, I feel like the smartest person inside the couch. I can hear my wife laughing in the background. But I don’t care. From my vantage point, I feel like the smartest person inside Vancouver’s Rogers Arena for a hockey game between the Canucks and Flames.

To my left and to my right are fans who spent close to $400 per ticket to sit in the first row, right behind the goalie. But I got in for free — and the view is breathtaking, if a bit nauseating.

By sliding my iPhone inside a pair of virtual reality glasses, the in-arena view is breathtaking, if a bit nauseating.
towards the scoreboard. With my headphones plugged in, I become lost in the action.

Up close, hockey is a dizzying game. Everything moves at a breakneck speed. Even the simplest plays are filled with suspense. On a routine dump-in, goaltender Ryan Miller shouts ‘Wheel! Wheel! Wheel!’ at defenseman Chris Tanev, who has a forechecker on his back. He’s going to get caught, I think, and I brace myself for the impending contact.

When I take off the glasses, my wife is laughing again.

Hockey has had a somewhat complicated relationship with technology. Remember the glowing puck that Fox Sports introduced in the late 1990s? You might wish you didn’t. How about the 3D games that were supposed to make it feel like the players were skating in your family room? Yeah, that never really worked.

But not everything has been a failure. The ref cam has given viewers a unique window into the on-ice experience, enhancing replays and translating just how skilled players are to the hockey fan at home. With the advent of HD and now 4K televisions, there are even fewer reasons to actually buy a ticket to the game.

The VR experience is another keyhole into previously uncharted territory. Using three cameras — one at centre ice and one behind each net — the technology gives viewers a 360-degree look from a unique vantage point.

“We’re giving another opportunity for a person who cannot attend the game to feel like they’re at the game,” Rob Corte, vice-president of Sportsnet and NHL production, told me. “When you take part in this experience, you’ll be able to take in the sights and the sounds like you’re in the arena.

“We’re always looking for different ways and things to present to the consumer. In the end, the consumer makes the decision. With 3D, everyone was excited about it, but what we found was it wasn’t for everybody. For live-sporting broadcasts, it just didn’t work and the general population wasn’t too enthusiastic about it.”

Rogers, which broadcasted the Canucks-Flames game on Saturday night in virtual reality, will have five more VR broadcasts this season. It’s a bit gimmicky. I cannot imagine watching a game like this with a group of people — much less by myself.

Staring at a phone that is inches away from your face is tough on the eyes. During whiskies, I needed to put the VR glasses down and close my eyes.

And while it looks like you’re actually at the game, some things are obviously missing. You are essentially a fly on the wall. You can’t virtually high five the fans next to you after a goal or even talk to the people around you. Yelling at the ref is just plain weird. And good luck virtually ordering a beer (I tried. My wife told me to get off my lazy butt and grab one myself).

“You’re going to have some things that hit and some things that don’t, but we’re going to continue to push,” said Corte, who admitted that Rogers probably doesn’t need to rely on gimmicks such as VR broadcasts as much as they did a year ago when no Canadian teams qualified for the playoffs.

“We would try and progress anyway, but you’re right. The success of the teams has a lot to do with the success and the number of viewers that you get.”

I can hear my wife laughing in the background, but I don’t care how I must look right now. All I can concentrate on is that Calgary’s Marc Giordano just tied the game with 5.6 seconds remaining in the third period on a shot that came flying straight at me out of nowhere.

Now it’s overtime and even though my eyes are dry, I can’t risk blinking. There’s a turnover! The Canucks charge up the ice. Tanev passes to Daniel Sedin, who passes it back to Tanev. My head moves shakes from side to side to follow the action.

Tanev’s in alone. He shoots. He scores!

Everyone around me is going ballistic. The noise of the crowd, mixed in with the fans pounding on the glass and the steady goal horn, makes it feel like I’m in the middle of a fireworks display in a thunderstorm. I’m on my feet, too, soaking it all in.

The best part: with the game over, I don’t have to file out of the arena and fight traffic to get home. All I have to do is take off my glasses.

Now, if they could only figure out a way for me to order that beer.

National Post LOADED: 02.20.2017

1048468 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins notebook: Fatigue evident in loss to Red Wings

JONATHAN BOMBULIE | Sunday, Feb. 19, 2017, 7:45 p.m.

Updated 7 hours ago

Counting the regular season and playoffs, the Penguins have played 108 games in the last calendar year.

On Sunday afternoon, for one of the first times, it looked like it.

On the ice for the fourth time in six days, they fell 5-2 to the Detroit Red Wings.

This season, the Penguins have averaged 34 shots on goal and 59 shot attempts per game. On Sunday, those totals were 28 and 46.

“We’re doing everything we can, everything within our power. We’re trying to give them enough rest. We’ve got a great strength and conditioning staff that advises us on the types of practices we run and how we try to prepare these guys to play,” coach Mike Sullivan said.

“Every team goes through it. We’re no different than any other team. Our challenge is we have to find ways to be successful.”

They’ll get no sympathy from the Red Wings, of course, who beat Washington, 3-2, in a shootout Saturday afternoon before traveling to Pittsburgh for Sunday’s game.

“They outcompeted us,” winger Tom Kuhnhackl said. “If you look at them, they played not even 20 hours ago. They had an afternoon game yesterday. You would think we would have more juice than them, but they just outbattled us.”

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

Coming into Sunday’s game, only eight of the Penguins’ remaining 24 games were against teams holding down playoff positions.

A soft schedule will benefit the Penguins, of course, only if they win their games. They can count losses to Detroit and Arizona, teams that have flirted with last place in their respective conferences most of this season, among their last five outings.

“We have a high expectation of ourselves,” Sullivan said. “We’d like to go out and dominate every game if we could, but the reality is the other team is trying to win, too, and there are good teams in this league.

“We have a lot of respect for this league. I don’t hold a lot of stock in the standings. I just think there’s so much parity in this league. Every team is good. There’s a fine line between winning and losing each and every night no matter who your opponent is.”

INJURY REPORT

Of the team’s injured players, Sullivan said winger Conor Sheary (upper body) continues skating on his own. He said defenseman Justin Schultz (concussion) and winger Bryan Rust (upper body) are “status quo.”

DOLING OUT ICE TIME

Since Olli Maatta (hand) and Schultz went out with injuries Thursday, the defencemen who filled in for them — Chad Ruhwedel, Steve Oleksy and Cameron Gaunce — have played an average of about 13 minutes.

Moving forward, Sullivan could try to ramp up the ice time for the depth defencemen as they feel more comfortable or continue to count on them for a dozen solid minutes or so while leaving the team’s more experienced players on the blue line to do the heavy lifting.

“I think it’s going to be a little bit of both, depending on how the game plays out and the circumstances,” Sullivan said. “They’re certainly guys we think are capable. We know we can put them on the ice and they can play. That just speaks to the depth of our organization, that we have people we can plug in that can play and we have a confidence level in them that they can get the job done. We believe in those guys.”
CELEBRATING 1,000

The Penguins honored Sidney Crosby for reaching 1,000 career points before the game. His teammates presented him with a gold stick in the locker room. Owner Mario Lemieux gave him a plaque in an on-ice ceremony.

Tribune Review LOADED: 02.20.2017
1048469 Pittsburgh Penguins

Red Wings end Penguins’ 9-game regulation unbeaten streak

JONATHAN BOMBULIE | Sunday, Feb. 19, 2017, 6:10 p.m.

Updated 7 hours ago

At the end of his first shift of the game, after his breakaway attempt was knocked away by the left arm of goalie Petr Mrazek, Phil Kessel returned to the bench and shook his head in disgust so vigorously it looked like he was in danger of suffering a neck injury.

It was that kind of afternoon for the Penguins.

Steve Ott scored a tiebreaking goal in the second period, and Mrazek made it stand up, leading the Detroit Red Wings to a 5-2 victory at PPG Paints Arena. The win pulled the Red Wings out of last place in the Eastern Conference.

The win pulled the Red Wings out of last place in the Eastern Conference.

“I think we've just got to execute. It comes down to that,” captain Sidney Crosby said. "We didn't do a good job of executing five-on-five or on our power play. They were a little more desperate, it seemed like, with the way they played.”

Kessel wasn't the only Penguins player shaking his head after this one. Starting with a first period that included incessant whistles and 36 faceoffs, it was a game that couldn't have been any fun to play.

The Penguins weren't outshot, outrunched or outpossessed in any significant way, but they fell behind 2-1 anyway because Detroit did a much better job of capitalizing on mistakes.

Midway through the first, just as Detroit picked off an Evgeni Malkin pass at the offensive blue line, the defenseman who would have been in position to clean up the mess, Cameron Gaunce, lost his footing. It led to a breakaway goal for defenseman Nick Jensen.

Later, Riley Sheahan intercepted a Letang pass and centered to Ott in the high slot for a backhand goal.

“A couple of the goals that they got, they didn't have to work hard enough for,” coach Mike Sullivan said. "When our team is at its best, we certainly make it hard on our opponents to generate scoring chances and/or goals.”

The first three minutes of the third period brought more of the same.

Less than 30 seconds in, a Jake Guentzel turnover in the defensive zone led to a Tomas Tatar goal. About two minutes later, Thomas Vanek picked up a wayward pass in the neutral zone and scored from the high slot to make it 4-1.

“Both those saves, I probably need to make those saves as well,” goalie Matt Murray said. “We definitely can’t afford to get scored on early in the third like that.”

The Penguins got a short-handed goal from Tom Kuhnhackl in the first period and one from Crosby seven seconds after Vanek scored in the third, but those moments were rare compared to the times they saw good scoring chances swallowed up by Mrazek.

The power play was especially impotent, managing three shots on four chances.

“It was a microcosm of our whole game,” Sullivan said. “The game was a struggle, and the power play struggled as a result. When we go through that process, we talked about simplifying the game and trying to establish a shot and see if we couldn’t generate some offense off of a rebound. That’s what I saw. I thought it was a microcosm of our overall game.”

If that wasn’t irritating enough, the Penguins also had to deal with Detroit’s pesky physicality. In the first period, Ott crunched Letang with a late hit into the boards just before scoring his goal. In the second, Crosby got into a slashing match with Anthony Mantha.

“That’s not an excuse. That should have nothing to do with your mindset,” Murray said. “You just play. Maybe we let that get the best of us tonight. That really shouldn’t matter in the grand scheme of things.”

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1048470 Pittsburgh Penguins

Defensive miscues costly Sunday in loss against Detroit

February 20, 2017 12:00 AM

By Jason Mackey / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

It started with Steve Ott's backhander late in the first period and continued with two quick goals for the Red Wings early in the third that put this one away.

A major factor in the Penguins’ 5-2 loss Sunday at PPG Paints Arena:

They made life entirely too easy on the Red Wings.

“A couple of goals that they got, they didn’t have to work hard enough for,” Penguins coach Mike Sullivan said. “When our team is at its best, we certainly make it hard on our opponents to generate scoring chances and/or goals. I thought we gave them a couple tonight where they didn’t have to work very hard for their opportunities.”

Take Ott’s goal. He was afforded a day and a half in the right circle.

Or Tomas Tatar’s marker 27 seconds into the third, the eventual game-winner. Brian Dumoulin got twisted around. Kris Letang found himself in no man’s land. Nobody pressures Tatar.

When Thomas Vanek scored at 2:16 of the third to make it 4-1, Letang and Trevor Daley simply drifted backward. Nobody stepped up on Vanek. Gaps were too big.

“I don’t know,” defenseman Ian Cole said when asked about pinpointing the Penguins’ defensive problems. “I’ll look at the game tape and figure that out. I’m not going to pass any judgement yet. It’s a long season. Everyone’s fatigued. We need to find ways to defend and play hard through that.”

Another contributing factor Sunday was poor puck management, something Sullivan continually cites when it comes to making the Penguins harder to play against.

An Evgeni Malkin turnover led to the first Detroit goal. Then Jake Guentzel committed a turnover before Tatar’s goal. An ill-advised outlet pass from Letang was picked off easily by Vanek.

It was hardly the type of smart, puck-possession game the Penguins are used to playing.

“We’re so effective when we’re playing below the top of the circles in their end and possess the puck and hanging onto it,” Matt Cullen said. “We didn’t have any sort of presence down there. We gave them plenty of opportunity in our end. It was symptomatic of our entire game.”

Start me up

Numerous stoppages in play made it tough to develop any sort of rhythm. The game featured 75 faceoffs, well above the Penguins’ season average of 63.5.

To make matters worse, the Penguins went 34-41 on faceoffs, a 45-percent success rate.

Kuhnhackl finds score sheet

Doubtful he frames the puck or anything, but Tom Kuhnhackl’s shorthanded goal at 14:09 of the first period certainly didn’t hurt his confidence.

It was his first goal since Dec. 8 and third in 2016-17, a difficult sophomore season for Kuhnhackl, who has been in and out of the lineup routinely either because of injury and inconsistency.

But, while the goal was nice, Kuhnhackl was more frustrated with his inability to convert a shorthanded breakaway at 8:35 of the third period, his shot sailing wide.
A steep drop

Clark said. "The Penguins are still popular here. And while the prices are
"The novelty of a stadium game has taken a hit, but it's still an event," team that remains as high as ever.
conquered, a credit to some aggressive marketing and interest in the
It's presented a challenge for the Penguins, but one they've actually
concept is done."
"Once they overexposed — if that's what we want to call it — then the
The problem has occurred because the NHL basically got too big for its
blueches.
After staging just five games in four years between 2008-11 — starting
with the Penguins trucking up to Buffalo to play the Sabres at Ralph
Wilson Stadium — there have been 15 over the past four.
It's led to an over-saturation of the market, zapping any shred of
uniqueness. Stadium Series games have cropped up. The NHL has
vacated the original, New Year's Day Winter Classic date.

By Jason Mackey / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

1048471 Pittsburgh Penguins

Does the NHL have too many outdoor games?

While acknowledging the Stadium Series is a rung below the Winter
Classic in terms of prestige, the financial difference is striking.
Television ratings have also taken a hit.
In 2011, the Penguins and Capitals combined for a 22-percent increase
over the 2010 Winter Classic with a 2.3 rating and 4.5 million viewers.
The 2017 iteration between the Blackhawks and Blues drew a 1.54 rating
and 2.6 million viewers, the smallest audience for a Winter Classic on
NBC. Stadium Series ratings have generally been a tick lower.
A shrinking TV audience is certainly something the NHL would like to
correct, but it's also not the only factor at play, said Scott Bravold,
another RMU professor of sport management.
"These games are built around a whole series of events with alumni
games, high school games, college games, fan festivals, open skates,
practice sessions for kids, etcetera," Bravold said. "Some of those
ancillary events may be as important for the sport as the hockey game
itself."
'That never loses its novelty'
The Penguins wanted an outdoor game to celebrate their 50th
anniversary as a franchise and were not deterred by the challenge of
hosting a second game at the same venue, something that's happening
for the first time since 2008.
"We're in a little bit of uncharted territory, but we always try to bring
unique and big events to the city if we can, be that the World Cup
exhibition games, NCAA Frozen Four or a second NHL outdoor game," said
Penguins vice president of communications Tom McMillan. "It shows
off the city. It's a great showcase for the city. It's exciting for our fans to
have these unique events.
"I think this year in particular, as we were planning a couple years back
for the 50th anniversary, we wanted to have big events and thought it
would be great to have an outdoor game return to Pittsburgh. For all of
those reasons, we wanted this and continue to do so.
"We think it's good for the city and for the fan base and for our sponsors
to have these kinds of events and bring these games to Pittsburgh."

Penguins COO Travis Williams said Monday that 60,000 tickets had
been sold, and he was hopeful for a sellout.
One benefit, Williams pointed out, was the Stadium Series allowed for
something the 2011 game did not: ancillary events such as Robert Morris
playing Niagara on Jan. 26, youth hockey games or charity events for the
Mario Lemieux Foundation.
Those are the kinds of events Bravold said were so important.
"For us to be able to showcase and bring another major hockey event to
the city and showcase the sport of hockey, that never loses its novelty," Williams said. "It's something we look forward to."
The goal should remain a sellout, the experts agreed, and attaining
that has not been a problem, even as the number of people watching these
games nationally drops.
"The ratings don't bother me as much," Clark said. "For one, it's the NHL. It's a terrible game to watch on TV anyway.

The new consumption model of sport is being challenged. Traditional
ratings shouldn't be the sole criteria for evaluating whether something's
good or not."
So until people stop filling stadiums or ballparks, outdoor hockey
probably isn't going anywhere.
"A half-empty stadium would probably change the frequency with which
these games are held," Bravold said, later adding, "Tickets made have
sold slower, but 60,000 at $100 makes for a pretty impressive gate just
the same."
Why no switch?
An easy tweak in other markets has been switching venues.
It's unclear whether an outdoor game would ever make its way to PNC
Park, although Pirates VP of communications and broadcasting Brian
Warecki did confirm there were “exploratory” discussions about hosting a game back in 2011 and that the Pirates remain interested.

Boston and Chicago, the other two-time hosts, went from Fenway Park and Wrigley Field, respectively, to Gillette Stadium and Soldier Field, respectively.

The Penguins would be doing the opposite: leaving behind a 60,000 gate for only 35,000 or so tickets sold, a stark and costly drop for the NHL, which handles outdoor games, reimbursing the Penguins for a home game and keeping the rest.

Plus, the NHL appears pleased with the job that has been done at Heinz Field.

“There were a variety of factors that went into the decision to go back to Heinz Field for this game, not the least of which was overall satisfaction with our experience in 2011, and the productive and valuable working relationships we established at that time with stadium management,” NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly wrote in an email. “It was a good fit for us then, and we feel it will be just as good this time around.”

Dan Craig, senior director of facilities operations for the NHL, cited the template that has already been developed at Heinz – where to run piping, where the ice should sit to maximize viewing – as reasons why a return makes sense.

Williams said switching to PNC Park would have unnecessarily boxed out eager customers.

“We’ve already sold 60,000 seats, so we would have sold out PNC Park and then some,” Williams said. “We wanted to be able to bring it to as many fans as possible. Heinz Field is what made the most sense. They’ve hosted it before. They’re familiar with it. It was an easy decision for us.”

What do the players think?

They’re playing in it, right?

It’s pretty much split inside the Penguins dressing room among those who are fine with having multiple outdoor games on the schedule and those who’d like it to be one and done.

Matt Cullen, 40, might have the most interesting case. Despite having more than 1,300 games on his NHL resume, Cullen has somehow has never played in an outdoor game.

“I’ve always wanted to play in ones,” Cullen said. “They look so fun. I was really excited when I found out we had one this year. I’m really looking forward to it.”

As excited as he is, though, Cullen considers himself a traditionalist and would love to see the NHL scale back to one a year.

“I think it adds a lot more to it when it’s just the New Year’s game,” Cullen said. “I’m not complaining. I’m happy to play in it. But maybe if you did a couple games all in the same day, I think that New Year’s Day is a cool day for it.”

Eric Fehr is one of only a handful of players who took part in that 2011 game. Only Fehr, who scored twice, played for the Capitals.

Count him among the group who thinks one is enough.

“I feel like at times it can be overdone,” Mr. Fehr said. “I understand it’s a bit of a draw for the league to make some extra money or whatever, bring some more popularity to the game in the United States. I like it with one per year. Just make it extra special.”

“Before, I wanted to see the game, I wanted to watch it,” Marc-Andre Fleury said. “Now, I’ve seen enough. That’s me, though. I’m sure it’s exciting for fans to show up and go watch it live. It’s different than going to the rink. To play, I like it a lot.”

Many of the Penguins’ American-born college players got a taste of outdoor hockey in college — Nick Bonino at Boston University, Bryan Rust at Notre Dame, Brian Dumoulin at Boston College and Conor Sheary at UMass-Amherst.

Bonino played at Fenway Park and Dodger Stadium when he was with the Anaheim Ducks and loved it.

“Two totally different atmospheres but some of the coolest memories I have from the NHL,” Bonino said. “I’m sure this will be a fun one, too.”

Although he’s not American-born, this will be Carl Hagelin’s fifth outdoor game.

Hagelin used some simple logic to argue against having just one a year: The majority of players like them, and to appease the workforce, it’s going to take a long time doing one a season.

“Everyone wants to play in it, so you’re hoping it’s your team,” Hagelin said. “If you want everyone to play in it, you’re going to have to play more than one game a year. Hopefully it brings in some revenue for the league, which is always good. It’s a fun time.”

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1048472 Pittsburgh Penguins

Lowly Red Wings humble Penguins

February 19, 2017 9:21 PM

By Ron Cook / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

With 10 games remaining at PPG Paints Arena, the Penguins still have a chance to break the franchise record for fewest home regulation losses in a full 80-plus-game season. It was set at five in the 1974-75 season when the team’s stars were named Jean Pronovost, Pierre Larouche, Rick Kehoe and Vic Hadfield. The current club has lost four games.

That probably won’t come as much consolation to the crowd of 18,664 that paid big dollars Sunday to watch the Penguins get dominated by the Detroit Red Wings, 5-2.

Talk about lousy timing.

The Penguins’ previous home regulation losses were to Minnesota and the New York Rangers in November and St. Louis on Jan. 24. The loss to Detroit was the worst, by far. The Wild, Rangers and Blues are headed to the playoffs. The Red Wings came into the game in last place in the Eastern Conference standings and won’t make the postseason for the first time in 26 years.

This defeat was embarrassing.

“They were hungrier than us,” Tom Kuhnhackl said. “They out-battled us. They won more puck battles. They won more loose pucks. We just weren’t ready. That just can’t happen at home.”

Who saw this coming?

The Penguins had earned at least one point in 19 of their previous 20 home games (17-1-2) and were 51-11-5 at PPG Paints Arena, including the playoffs, going back to last season. This was their third game in four days and fourth in six days, but they still were the more rested team after a day off Saturday while the Red Wings stunned the first-place Washington Capitals, 3-2, in a shootout in Detroit.

Frans Nielsen, Justin Abdelkader and Andreas Athanasiou celebrate Nick Jensen’s goal for the Red Wings in the first period Sunday. (Matt Freed/Post-Gazette)

Making the one-sided loss even more shocking was that the Penguins came in with the NHL’s second-best power play at home and the Red Wings with the fifth-worst penalty kill on the road. So what happened? The Penguins had just three shots on goal on their four power plays. It was such a mess that the Red Wings had three great scoring chances on the same penalty kill in the second period.

“It had a lot of opportunity to be the difference,” Mike Sullivan said of his power play. “I think what I saw was a microcosm of our whole game. Obviously, the game was a struggle and the power play struggled as a result.”

The Penguins did manage a short-handed goal by Kuhnhackl in the first period for a 1-1 tie. All seemed right in the world at that moment. The Penguins were 21-1-3 in their past 25 games when they scored a shortie, 32-2-3 in their past 37 at home.

Then again, you know what they say about statistics.

None made a bit of difference on a day when it would have been a lot more fun being outside in the warm February sun.

It’s always realistic to think Matt Murray will steal a game for the Penguins, especially at home where he was 12-1-2. But he wasn’t nearly as good as Detroit goaltender Petr Mrazek, who made 24 saves. A
backhanded goal by Steve Ott that gave the Red Wings a 2-1 lead late in the first period seemed especially weak, at least by Murray's standards.

But Murray didn't get much help. A giveaway by Evgeni Malkin led to a 2-on-1 and a goal by Nick Jensen. Ott had all day to score his goal. Tomas Tatar made it 3-1 just 27 into the third period, cruising alone down the slot to complete a give-and-go with Henrik Zetterberg. Thomas Vanek made it 4-1 at 2:16 of the third when he skated alone into the slot as Trevor Daley and Kris Letang watched.

“I thought a couple of the goals that they got they didn’t have to work hard enough for,” Sullivan said. “When our team is at its best, we certainly make it hard for our opponents to generate scoring chances and/or goals. I felt we gave them a couple when they didn’t have to work very hard for their opportunities.”

Even the pace of play was lousy. There were 75 faceoffs in the game, including a mind-numbing 36 in a first period that never seemed as if it would end. The Penguins weren’t just awful. The game was awful.

But all was not lost for the disappointed fans, who comprised the Penguins’ 462nd consecutive sellout. At least they had a rare Mario Lemieux sighting. Lemieux was on the ice before the game to honor Sidney Crosby for Crosby’s 1,000th career point scored Thursday night against Winnipeg. The roar at that moment was the biggest of the game.

Crosby wishes it weren’t so.

“If you look at the whole game, we didn’t deserve this one,” he said. “One of those days.”

Keep telling yourself if you bought a ticket or watched on television.

One of those days …

If you say it enough, you actually might believe it.

Or not.

Post Gazette LOADED: 02.20.2017
1048473 Pittsburgh Penguins
Among many miscues in loss, Penguins point to power play as pitiful February 19, 2017 7:26 PM
By Dave Molinari / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

There was a lot for the Penguins to dislike about their 5-2 loss to Detroit on Sunday at PPG Paints Arena.

No surprise there, considering that they were beaten by a team that began the day 24 points behind them in the standings, and that had been compelled to play and travel the previous day, when the Penguins were off.

But when coach Mike Sullivan and his staff review the tape of this one — assuming they didn’t feed it directly into a shredder — the performance of their power play may be what prompts their most vigorous lunge for a bottle of antacid tablets.

It’s not just that the Penguins didn’t score on any of their four chances with the extra man; it’s how bad they looked in the process.

They consistently struggled to get into the Detroit end and, when they did finally make it, rarely generated any significant pressure on Red Wings goalie Petr Mrazek.

"[The power play] was awful," defenseman Kris Letang said. “Not in sync. Not doing anything good.”

Scott Wilson lunges for the puck in the first period Sunday. (Matt Freed/Post-Gazette)

Sullivan characterized the Penguins’ work with the man-advantage — they generated three shots on goal during eight minutes of power-play time — as “a microcosm of our whole game,” but that might have been an unduly generous description.

Fact is, it’s entirely possible that the lack of production from the power play was the biggest factor in their first regulation loss since the all-star break last month.

Consider that Detroit was protecting a 2-1 lead in the second period when defensemen Nick Jensen (12:50) and Xavier Ouellet (15:02) were assessed minor penalties just more than two minutes apart.

A goal on either of those power plays would have pulled the Penguins even and given them an opportunity to claim a couple of points with a strong third period.

Instead, the power play flamed out and Detroit ended up getting the winning goal from Tomas Tatar just 27 seconds into the final period.

Miserable as the Penguins’ work with the extra man was Sunday, it wasn’t all that less effective than it has been for several weeks.

The Penguins are 2-for-23 on the power play in their past eight games, and 1-for-13 in the past five.

A solid 4-0-3 record in the previous seven games helped to mask their power-play struggles, but those were on full display — probably even magnified — against the Red Wings.

"Today, all the way around, it wasn’t good, from the entries to the end zone," center Sidney Crosby said. "Once we’d get in, it didn’t feel like we executed very well.

"It would have been nice to give us a little boost. If we’re not going to score, at least get a little momentum.”

Actually, the Penguins’ power plays created quite a bit of momentum.

For Detroit.

"I thought it had a lot of opportunities to be the difference," Sullivan said. "The game was a struggle, and the power play struggled as a result."

On paper, the Penguins’ power play — especially the No. 1 unit of Crosby, Letang, Evgeni Malkin, Phil Kessel and Patric Hornqvist — is as imposing as any in the game. But its results during the past few weeks certainly don’t reflect that.

"We just have to start off by winning battles and focus on those little things," Crosby said. "The other stuff will follow, I think, as far as making plays. Everything else follows when you’re executing and winning battles."

Post Gazette LOADED: 02.20.2017
1048474 Pittsburgh Penguins
Penguins suffer 'just one of those days' in loss to last-place Detroit February 19, 2017 6:10 PM
By Sam Werner / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

This tends to be the time of year when an 82-game NHL season can start to wear on a team.

The Penguins would be no exception, now 20 games removed from their "bye week" in early January and still 28 games away from the start of the playoffs.

Playing their fourth game (plus two overtimes) in six days Sunday against Detroit, one subpar effort might be excusable — even against the last-place Red Wings.

But after the Penguins’ 5-2 loss at PPG Paints Arena, coach Mike Sullivan wanted to be clear that wasn’t the case.

"We have to find ways to have success through the process," Sullivan said. "I don’t look to those excuses, I don’t think any of us look to those excuses. We’re looking for solutions out there. We’ve got to find ways to be successful through these types of challenges in our schedule."

The Penguins didn’t have to look much further than the other bench for a lesson in how to overcome some scheduling hardships. The Red Wings played just 24 hours earlier in Washington, and still, according to winger Tom Kuhnhackl, "out-competed" the Penguins on Sunday afternoon.

"It’s just one of those games where we weren’t ready," Kuhnhackl said. "We probably thought they’d be a little tired after they played yesterday and had travel and all that kind of stuff. We just weren’t ready to play a full 60-minute game."

"If you look at the whole game, I think we didn’t deserve this one tonight," Penguins center Sidney Crosby said. (Matt Freed/Post-Gazette)
There were plenty of potentially frustrating elements within the game, too. The first period featured 36 whistles for stoppages of play, more than half of what the Penguins average in a full game. Red Wings goalie Petr Mrazek seemed to stand on his head for a couple of saves — notably on a Nick Bonino backhand midway through the second.

And, as in every game, there were some borderline officiating calls that could have gone either way.

“Some penalties we took, some penalties we were looking for,” captain Sidney Crosby said. “You look at all those different things, I think it just added up to one of those days. You still have to find a way to win games like that sometimes.”

Maybe it’s a credit to the Penguins that, heading into the third period, they were still very much in position to do just that, trailing just 2-1 after the second intermission.

That changed quickly, as Tomas Tatar and Tomas Vaneck tallied two goals in the first 2:18 of the third period to effectively put the game away.

“We just need to come out with a little bit more jump in the third,” goalie Matt Murray said. “We get scored on twice early in the third like that, it’s not going to be easy to come back from, especially when we’re already down. Both those saves, I need to make those saves as well. We definitely can’t afford to get scored on early in the third like that.”

Crosby tallied his league-leading 32nd goal of the season to cut the deficit to 4-2, but the Penguins couldn’t seriously threatne a comeback.

“Probably, if you look at the whole game, I think we didn’t deserve this one tonight,” Crosby said.

The Penguins have certainly shown they’re capable of playing better hockey this season, so it may be tempting to just write this game off, especially when they’ve now been outscored 11-6 in a pair of losses to the last-place Red Wings this season.

“I know the old adage of ‘Burn the tape and just move past it,’ but I think you can learn something from every game,” defenseman Ian Cole said. “You can watch the tape, you can learn something. We have to learn what’s going on moving forward and make adjustments in Carolina [Tuesday].”

The hurricanes are in last place in the Metropolitan Division, which, based on Sunday’s result, could present some issues for the Penguins.

Their schedule eases up a bit this week, though, with just Tuesday’s game in Carolina and then three days off before the Stadium Series game against the Flyers at Heinz Field Saturday.

Of course, that will also be the longest break the Penguins will have for the rest of the regular season.

“It’s a long season,” Cole said. “It’s long for everybody. Everyone’s tired, everyone’s fatigued. We need to find ways to battle through it.”

Post Gazette LOADED: 02.20.2017

1048453 Ottawa Senators

Senators lose Hoffman, Wingels and Stone to injury in loss to Jets

DARREN DESAULNIERS, THE CANADIAN PRESS 02.19.2017

OTTAWA - Ottawa coach Guy Boucher labelled his team's injury situation as a disaster.

The Senators failed to close in on Montreal for first place in the Atlantic Division after falling 3-2 to the Winnipeg Jets on Sunday.

Ottawa, which is already without forward Bobby Ryan because of an injured finger, also lost three more key forwards — Mike Hoffman, Tommy Wingels and Mark Stone — against Winnipeg.

Hoffman left in the first period with an undisclosed injury while Stone took an elbow to the head from Jacob Trouba seven minutes into the third period and didn’t return. Wingels also left in the third.

“At some point it felt like there was nobody on the bench, but a lot of character on our bench and our guys played to the end,” said Boucher, who couldn’t offer an update on any of the injuries. “I thought we deserved a much, much better fate.”

“IT doesn’t look good. We have to wait until tomorrow to be clear and precise but right now we could be losing quite a few guys.”

NHL Player Safety tweeted later Sunday that Trouba will have a hearing on Monday for an illegal check to the head on Stone.

Josh Morrissey scored the eventual winner early in the third period for Winnipeg.

Morrissey’s goal came at 2:33 when his wrist shot from the blue line eluded Mike Condon in the Ottawa goal to make it 3-1.

Dustin Byfuglien and Mathieu Perreault also scored for the Jets (28-29-5), who won their second straight game. Mark Scheifele and Patrik Laine each had two assists while Connor Hellebuyck made 32 saves.

Zack Smith pulled the Senators to within a goal when a redirected pass hit his skate and went in at 5:05 of the third. Ottawa thought it had tied the game in the dying seconds but a no-goal call stood as there was no conclusive evidence to overturn the ruling.

“From what we saw it went in. The guys that were there at the net said it did, but it was inconclusive so there’s not much you can do,” Smith said.

“It would have been nice to push that one to overtime because I like the way we were going towards the end.”

Stone had the other goal for the Senators (31-20-6), who also got two assists from Erik Karlsson and 17 saves from Condon.

The Jets were outshot 10-7 in the first period despite carrying most of the play. Six of Ottawa’s shots came in the final four minutes of the period.

Byfuglien opened the scoring just 69 seconds into the game with a shot that beat Condon from the face-off circle to his left.

Perreault gave the Jets a 2-0 lead with a swing-around backhand from the top of the crease that beat Condon at 12:28 of the first.

“It was great to get off to a good start and get that goal right away. To get a 2-0 lead on the road is a great way to start a game,” Jets captain Blake Wheeler said.

The Senators had some chances in the period but none better than a 2-on-1 that ended with Wingels missing an open net on a pass from Curtis Lazar.

Stone’s power-play goal at 5:10 was the only marker of the second period and it cut the Jets’ lead to 2-1. Stone took a pass from Karlsson and fired a quick shot from the slot over the left shoulder of Hellebuyck.

Notes: Ryan and Chris Neil were scratches for the Senators. Andrew Copp, Drew Stafford and Julian Melchiori were scratches for the Jets... Heading into action Sunday, Senators defenceman Mark Borowiecki led the NHL with 245 hits, 31 more than Matt Martin of the Maple Leafs, who is second...Jets forward Shawn Matthias turned 29 Sunday... The Jets have gone five straight games without a power-play goal and are 0-14 during that time...The Senators next game is Tuesday in New Jersey against the Devils while the Jets play the last game before their bye week Tuesday against the Maple Leafs in Toronto.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 02.20.2017

1048454 Ottawa Senators

Sens lose game, multiple players in physical affair against Jets

BRUCE GARRIOCH

Published on: February 19, 2017 | Last Updated: February 19, 2017 9:09 PM EST

The Ottawa Senators had a chance to move into a first-place tie in the Atlantic Division with the Montreal Canadiens.

And, at this rate, they’ll be lucky if they have anyone left standing.

The Senators dropped a controversial 3-2 decision to the Winnipeg Jets in front of a sellout of 19,288 at the Canadian Tire Centre Sunday and when the final buzzer sounded Ottawa had only eight healthy forwards on its bench.
The Senators felt they had tied it up in the dying seconds when Jean-Gabriel Pageau appeared to push the puck by Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck but after a review it was ruled inconclusive.

Already without winger Bobby Ryan, who could be out up to six weeks with a broken finger, the Senators finished without winger Mike Hoffman, who went to the dressing room with 2:55 in the first, didn't return after suffering a lower body injury and the club only had 11 forwards dressed.

Mark Stone, who had opened the scoring for Ottawa, left with just over 12 minutes left in the third after taking a hit to the head from Winnipeg's Jacob Trouba. He was only given two minutes for an illegal check to the head but coach Guy Boucher was sideways Trouba wasn't given a five-minute major.

Winger Tommy Wingels also departed late in the third after getting hit by Winnipeg's Dustin Byfuglien.

Boucher said the news wasn't good on any of them.

"Tough day with the loss of Bobby and then we lost another bunch of guys. At some point I felt, there was nobody on the bench," said a frustrated Boucher. "I can give you an update – it doesn't look good. We have to wait until tomorrow to be clear and precise about all these guys.

"Right now, we could be losing quite a few guys ... It looks like a disaster. We'll see tomorrow and maybe the disaster is not as bad as we think but you've got to be ready for anything." 

Only Zack Smith and Stone were able to beat Hellebuyck. While Patrik Laine and Mark Scheifele had two assists each, Josh Morrissey, Mathieu Perreault and Byfuglien did the scoring on Ottawa goalie Mike Condon.

Pageau thought he tied it at 19:56 and was surprised it wasn't a goal.

"From my angle, I pushed the puck and my full blade was in the net, I pushed the puck with my blade. It's hard. I guess they have better cameras. It was inconclusive so they couldn't find the puck but obviously I thought the puck was in for sure. It could have gotten us a point," Pageau said.

That just added insult to this loss and the Senators are going to have to recall players from Binghamton before they start a four-game road trip Tuesday against the New Jersey Devils.

Not long after the Jets took a 3-1 lead after a bad giveaway by Curtis Lazar on Morrissey's shot that bounced off defenceman Cody Ceci and by Condon at 2:33, Smith's 14th of the season brought his club to within a goal with 14:55 left in the game when he redirected it by Hellebuyck.

"That was a tough bounce (off Ceci). He blocks that nine times out of 10. The puck is going so fast, I think he tried to get out of the way. That's just a tough break. Sometimes they go your way. Sometimes they don't," Condon said.

The Senators felt they could have had a better start but that wasn't exactly the case. Only 1:09 into the game, they were trailing after Byfuglien fired a blast by Condon on the glove side to give the Jets a 1-0 lead.

"We didn't play a horrible game. They just had a better first period. We just couldn't find a way to put the puck in the net," said captain Erik Karlsson.

Well, the Senators may have, but in the end it didn't count and this was a loss that hurt in more ways than one.

Possible suspension?

The Senators can only hope the NHL throws the book at Jacob Trouba.
Senators eye first place in the Atlantic Division during Montreal’s bye week.

Whatever ails the Habs – and it may be as simple as the players on the roster – Julien is going to need time to turn that ship around. Good thing he got general manager Marc Bergevin to provide Julien a five-year contract.

* The Senators, only now getting some attention around the league for their remarkable season, set themselves up for a shot at first place by beating the Maple Leafs 6-3 in Toronto, on the heels of a 3-0 win in New Jersey. Dads trip karma strikes again. The only thing that could have been better than Saturday’s wild game, full of momentum swings and emotional moments, would have been for the game to be staged in Ottawa. What were the NHL and CBC thinking?

On the occasion of Canada’s sesquicentennial, there were 150 games of shinny staged on the Rideau Canal Saturday (and just in the nick of time before the great February thaw that closed the skateway Sunday morning). Yet, that event was not enough to make Ottawa a host city for CBC’s Hockey Day in Canada, nor even the host venue for Saturday’s latest round in the Battle of Ontario.

Tough loss, Sunday. Tougher losses if these injuries are long term.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 02.20.2017
1048457 Ottawa Senators

Bobby Ryan could be out three-to-six weeks

BRUCE GARRIOCH
Published on: February 19, 2017 | Last Updated: February 19, 2017 3:09 PM EST

If Bobby Ryan didn’t have bad luck, he’d have no luck at all.

The Senators winger may have broken the index finger on his right hand during the third period of the club’s 6-3 victory over the Toronto Maple Leafs Saturday night and he could be out three-to-six weeks.

Ryan, who missed five games earlier this year with a break in a different place to the same finger and had issues with a hand injury injury last season, is being re-examined by the Ottawa doctors but it doesn’t look good.

“He got a shot on the hand. He finished the game but he’s out indefinitely,” said coach Guy Boucher Sunday afternoon before facing the Winnipeg Jets at home. “It could be (broken). They’re checking today again but it could be (broken). He’ll be out for awhile.

“If it’s broken, we’re talking three-to-six weeks.”

Boucher said this is tough for Ryan because he was playing well and contributing. He has 12 goals and 12 assists for 24 points in 50 games this season and had three points in the club’s last two games.

“He was playing great. That’s the tough blow. He was doing really good,” Boucher said. “He’s a top-six guy, we’re already missing one of our top six guys since the beginning of the year (Clarke MacArthur) and we’re missing another one. Of course, it hurts.

“We have to ask players to play out of their chair and have to find a way like we did it all year.”

The Ottawa doctors wanted to confirm it’s broken, however, winger Curtis Lazar dressed in Ryan’s place against the Jets.

“I knew at the end it was hurting so I left him on the bench in the last few minutes,” said Boucher. “After everybody was happy, I had (athletic therapist) Gerry Townend and coming to talk to me and it was like, ‘Hello Gerry’.”

Given his history, this is difficult for Ryan.

“This comes at a bad moment. Let’s not kid ourselves. Our team is battling hard to make the playoffs, we desperately need him. He was playing really good. When you lose a guy that’s got the size, smarts and to play on any line, you don’t replace that,” said Boucher.

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before the great February thaw that closed the skateway Sunday morning). Yet, that event was not enough to make Ottawa a host city for CBC's Hockey Day in Canada, nor even the host venue for Saturday's latest round in the Battle of Ontario.

THEY SHALL OVERCOME

The Senators ability to rebound in Toronto after letting a 2-0 lead get away is symbolic of what has been going on with this group. They find ways, they are resilient, they have a belief in getting the job done like we haven't seen around here since they made that ridiculous charge to the playoffs in 2015.

No miracle needed this spring, but adversity is at hand. Had new head coach Guy Boucher known that he would have to get through an entire season without the services of veteran winger Clarke MacArthur, on top of two months minus starting goaltender Craig Anderson, he might not have mentioned anything about playoff aspirations.

Now comes another Bobby Ryan finger injury, a head hit to Mark Stone, and a Mike Hoffman injury – health issues that were probably overdue considering Ottawa's ability to ice a full roster (minus MacArthur) most nights.

Tough loss, Sunday. Tougher losses if these injuries are long term.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 02.20.2017

Sens left feeling cheated by denied Pageau goal

BY DON BRENNA,N, OTTAWA SUN

FIRST POSTED: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017 09:39 PM EST | UPDATED: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017 09:48 PM EST

The last time Jean-Gabriel Pageau held his breath during a review, the verdict came back negative and the Senators season ended shortly thereafter.

It was Sunday, April 26th, 2015, and an eventual series ending. Game 6 playoff loss to the Montreal Canadiens. A quick whistle by the referee denied what everyone else thought was an obvious Pageau goal, one that could have led to a Game 7 and who knows what else.

Pageau admitted that waiting for the final word Sunday felt the same way.

"Now that you remind me, yeah it does," he said. "It's kind of bad when you're pretty sure you scored and it gets turned around."

Inconclusive replays of the close in shot taken by Pageau and the scramble that followed in the last second of regulation time wiped out any hope the Senators had of at least getting into OT, and picking up one all important point.

"My blade was in the net, his glove was in the net, his pad was in the net," said Pageau. "So there was a lot of stuff to cover the puck. There was no call on the ice."

"It's probably the angle of camera they had. It's not like was an early whistle or anything. Maybe the ref was on the wrong side of the net. He was just trying to do his best. But I'm pretty sure that puck crossed the line, so it's unfortunate for us."

Winnipeg Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck adamantly stated the right decision was made.

"That was guaranteed out," he said. "My pad was there and he pushed my pad in, and I got my glove right behind it."

"I'm kind of confused as to why the crowd was getting into it."

Wishful thinking, probably.

The Senators will be doing a lot of that over the next few hours as they wait to hear the extent of injuries to Bobby Ryan (from Saturday's game) and then Mike Hoffman, Mark Stone and Tommy Wingels on Sunday.

Worst case scenario, if the Senators have lost all four players for an extended period of time, this could be remembered as the game that ended their season.

Just like the last time Pageau had what he thought was a goal denied.

STARTS AND STOPS: If you're into omens, you recognized the bad one that saw Zack Smith break his stick off the opening face-off ... The problem with using just 11 forwards is that you're left with 10 when one gets injured, nine when another goes down and eight when a third leaves the game. Freddy Claesson, who's business card lists him as the Senators seventh defenceman, played a couple of shifts up front and looked as out of place as you'd expect. He was on the ice for what turned out to be the winning goal, but the goat on that one was Curtis Lazar ... Mike Condon found out how hard Patrik Laine shoots the puck after a Dion Phaneuf giveaway near the midway mark of the first. Mark Borowiecki's similar discovery was in the second, when he was sent limping to the room after blocking a shot by the new Finnish Flash. Borowiecki only missed a couple of shifts ... Dustin Byfuglien is a dominant player, as he showed again on Sunday. He also gets away with a lot, but that was a pretty weak slashing call on him that cut short a Jets power play in the first.

BETWEEN PERIODS:

By now we can assume Chris Neil has boycotted 7-Elevens. Guy Boucher’s plan to use seven defenceman and 11 forwards made Neil a healthy scratch for the seventh time in the last 11 games ... Curious that Boucher wouldn’t see a need for Neil against a heavy Jets team that recorded 97 hits in its previous two games ... Also, would Jacob Trouba would have tried to make Mark Stone’s head off if Neil was around? ...

Trouba was not made available for media interviews following the game, so his side of the story remains untold. If he is not suspended by the league, it will be a shock. Somebody hits Sidney Crosby or Connor McDavid like that and they get the book thrown at them. Should be the same thing in this case.

C’EST WHAT?: Now we know Boucher is a Seinfeld fan. During his pre-game availability he did his best Newman impersonation when repeating how he addressed the team’s athletic therapist Saturday: "Hellooooo Gerry (Townend)."

You could tell there were a number of Jets fans in attendance when they belloved out ‘True North’ while singing the national anthem. It’s a staple at games in Winnipeg … Does Ottawa have any staples? Not really, eh?

BUTT ENDS: The Senators lost for two reasons. They’re best players were outplayed by Winnipeg’s best, and they were not good coming out of the gate. "They started a little bit better than we did and that ended up costing us in the end," said Erik Karlsson, who did turn in another dominant player, as he showed again on Sunday. He also gets away with a lot, but that was a pretty weak slashing call on him that cut short a Jets power play in the first.

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Ottawa Sun LOADED: 02.20.2017
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BAD-LUCK BOBBY: RYAN’S INJURIES

Nov. 29, 2014: Broken finger (two games)
Dec. 21, 2015: Hand injury (one game)
Nov. 18, 2016: Broken finger (two games)
Nov. 30, 2016: Hand injury (three games)
Feb. 19, 2017: Right index finger (indefinite)

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 02.20.2017

1048460 Ottawa Senators
Sens drop controversial decision to Jets
BY BRUCE GARROICH, OTTAWA SUN

FIRST POSTED: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017 08:48 PM EST | UPDATED: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017 09:23 PM EST

The Ottawa Senators missed a chance to move into a first-place tie in the Atlantic Divisions standings with the Montreal Canadiens.

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The Senators dropped a controversial 3-2 decision to the Winnipeg Jets in front of a sellout of 19,288 at the Canadian Tire Centre Sunday and when the final buzzer sounded Ottawa had only eight healthy forwards on its bench.

The Senators felt they had tied it up in the dying seconds when Jean-Gabriel Pageau appeared to push the puck by Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck but after a review it was ruled inconclusive.

Already without winger Bobby Ryan, who could be out up to six weeks with a broken finger, the Senators finished without winger Mike Hoffman, who went to the dressing room with 2:55 in the first, didn’t return after suffering a lower body injury and the club had 11 forwards dressed.

Mark Stone, who had opened the scoring for Ottawa, exited with just over 12 minutes left in the third after taking a hit to the head from Winnipeg’s Jacob Trouba. He was only given two minutes for an illegal check to the head but coach Guy Boucher was sideways Trouba wasn’t given a five-minute major.

Winger Tommy Wingels also departed late in the third after getting hit by Winnipeg’s Dustin Byfuglien.

Boucher said the news wasn’t good on any of them.

“Tough day with the loss of Bobby and then we lost another bunch of guys. At some point I felt, there was nobody on the bench,” said a frustrated Boucher. “I can give you an update... it doesn’t look good. We have to wait until tomorrow to be clear and precise about all these guys.

“Right now, we could be losing quite a few guys... It looks like a disaster. We’ll see tomorrow and maybe the disaster is not as bad as we think but you’ve got to be ready for anything.”

Only Zack Smith and Stone were able to beat Hellebuyck. While Patrik Laine and Mark Scheifele had two assists each, Josh Morrissey, Mathieu Perrault and Byfuglien did the scoring on Ottawa goalie Mike Condon.

Pageau thought he tied it at 19:56 and was surprised it wasn’t a goal.

“From my angle, I pushed the puck and my full blade was in the net, I pushed the puck with my blade. It’s hard. I guess they have better cameras. It was inconclusive so they couldn’t find the puck but obviously I thought the puck was in for sure. It could have gotten us a point,” Pageau said.

That just added insult to this loss and the Senators are going to have to recall players from Binghamton before they start a four-game road trip Tuesday against the New Jersey Devils.

Not long after the Jets took a 3-1 lead after a bad giveaway by Curtis Lazar on Morrissey’s shot that bounced off defenceman Cody Ceci and by Condon at 2:33, Smith’s 14th of the season brought his club to within a goal with 14:55 left in the game when he redirected it by Hellebuyck.

“That was a tough bounce (off Ceci). He blocks that nine times out of 10. The puck is going so fast, I think he tried to get out of the way. That’s just a tough break. Sometimes they go your way. Sometimes they don’t,” Condon said.

The Senators pulled to within a goal and trailed 2-1 after 40 minutes.

Following a listless first, the Senators got on the board thanks to Stone’s 22nd. He fired a shot from the slot by Hellebuyck at 5:10 of the second.

“That’s a (tough) loss. It just goes to show how the tough schedule is and back-to-back especially,” said Smith. “It’s tough to see guys leave mid-game. I think we did a good job sticking together, rallying and trying to pick up loose ends when guys went down.”

The first wasn’t exactly wide open, however, the Jets found their way. Perreault was left alone down low, he took feed from Mark Scheifele and beat Condon with a backhand on the stick side at 12:28 to give Winnipeg a two-goal lead.

The Senators hoped to a good start but that wasn’t exactly the case. Only 1:09 into the game, they were trailing after Byfuglien fired a blast by Condon on the glove side to give the Jets a 1-0 lead.

“We didn’t play a horrible game. They just had a better first period. We just couldn’t find a way to put the puck in the net,” said captain Erik Karlsson.

Well, the Senators may have, but in the end it didn’t count and this was a loss that hurt in more ways than one.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 02.20.2017

1048510 Websites
FOXSports.com / Watch Canucks defensemen score on a knuckle puck from center ice
Pete Blackburn
Feb 19, 2017 at 12:12p ET

It took the Canucks nearly 13 minutes to get their first shot on net against the Flames on Saturday night, but they made that first one count.

It took the Canucks nearly 13 minutes to get their first shot on net against the Flames on Saturday night, but they made that first one count.

Incredibly, it came from center ice. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

Vancouver defensemen Alex Edler decided enough was enough and unleashed a slapper from the red line that somehow found the back of the net. As you can see on the replays, the puck knuckled pretty hard on its flight towards Calgary goalie Brian Elliott, who made the mistake of not putting his body in front of it.

That goal would ultimately be the difference in the game as the Canucks won 2-1 in overtime. “Good things happen when you put the puck on net” might be an overused cliché in hockey but this is certainly one case in which it rings very, very true.

FOXSports.com LOADED: 02.20.2017

1048511 Websites
Monday February 20th, 2017
As the saying goes, Rome wasn’t built in a day.

A phrase typically deployed to maintain optimism, it is symbolic of the uphill battle and the process of building something significant. Over the past few seasons, the Sabres have been trying to find their rhythm and become a competitive team in the NHL.

Like any young player, though, he needed to acclimate himself with his new surroundings. Lending the rookie a helping hand, veteran forward Matt Moulson was ready for whatever the Buffalo rebuild threw his way when he inked his first season.

“You’re always trying to share that ‘wisdom’; so to speak, of being in the league, and seeing things and being through things,” says Moulson. “It’s more of helping when there are questions to be answered and sharing experiences.”

One example of that ‘wisdom’? Asset management.

“I remember the first road trip, Jack asked me what to pack,” says Moulson. “Simple things like that sometimes go a long way.”

Nearly two years after that 5-0 drubbing in Pittsburgh, the Sabres returned to PPG Paints Arena to face the Pens on March 29, 2016.

With goals from Moulson, Ryan O’Reilly and 23-year-old defenseman Jake McCabe - players that joined the team over the past few years - Buffalo jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the first period. It would surrender that advantage in the middle frame, giving up four unanswered goals and falling behind, 4-3. Undeterred, the Sabres netted the equalizer, as Zach Bogosian one-timed a Johan Larsson feed on the power play, just 2:13 into the third period. Though they ultimately lost in a shootout, the message was crystal clear: they were not going to be pushovers anymore.

All of those players joined the team over the past 3-4 seasons as part of the rebuild, bringing with them new perspectives and attitudes to a roster being made over.

“You always want to win,” says Moulson. “Everyone wants to win a Stanley Cup and wants to win every game, and when you don’t win those games, I think it’s a must to learn from that, or else you don’t grow and become better. I think that’s probably the biggest thing that you have to remember—you have to learn from things that you’re going through.”

Young players are constantly being challenged, not just in terms of reaching their potential, but to embrace new roles and adjust their games accordingly.

“You’ve gotta understand your role and what’s expected of you,” says McCabe, a second round pick of the Sabres in 2012. “Especially on a young team, we’re gonna have our growing pains for sure, but just have the confidence in yourself, bring the consistency every night and just grow as a player.”

That isn’t always an easy thing to do, especially when you’re used to playing a certain way your entire career.

“Each player is different,” says McCabe. “Certain guys are gonna have their same role, like Eichel and Sam Reinhart, two guys that are gonna be relied upon as a top-six forward. For a lot of young guys, like myself, you have to find your role. It does change a little bit, with the coaching staff and how they expect you to play and what they see you as. You’re just trying to stick around, make the team and force their hand. When you figure out what your role is, you really have to buy into it; otherwise you’ll find yourself in the minors pretty quick.”

As Reinhart—the No. 2 pick in 2014—notes, the key to finding consistency, regardless of one’s role, is to step onto the ice with an assertive mindset.

“You’re gonna get frustrated throughout the year,” he says. “You play 82 games; it’s not gonna go your way every night. I think the easiest way to stay with it and not get too frustrated is, if you have a bad night, more times than not, you’re playing the next night or the night after that. They come and go so fast that you can’t afford to stay frustrated. You’re gonna find that it could be one shift, one game, one period that gets your confidence back. You’ve gotta find that as much as possible when things aren’t going your way.”

That conviction is increasingly important for younger players as they navigate a new game. For many up-and-comers, the long-held belief that adjusting to the NHL level means leaving the flashy, freewheeling moves in juniors or college is being debunked.

Looking Out For No. 1: Jack Eichel is an NHL team changing talent

“It’s not that you step in and you can’t do the same things you’ve done in junior; a lot of it you can do,” he says. “It’s just learning how to do it. It’s obviously not the same ease as it would’ve been in junior, but a lot of it is confidence, just allowing yourself to know you still can play the same way, you still can have success, you still can make plays. Obviously, you’re gonna find that and lose it throughout the season. You’ve just gotta learn to keep that as long as you can and roll with it when it’s there.”
Now in his second season, Eichel has moved out of the Moulson residence and bunked up with fellow sophomore Reinhart, his roommate on the road and, more often than not, his linemate on the ice. While their connection is strong, becoming a more competitive hockey team will require more versatility, both from them and their teammates.

“As you play together more, you’re gonna know each other’s tendencies,” says Reinhart. “On forward lines, you’re constantly being jugged, constantly getting mixed up. We’ve gotta keep trying to find chemistry and stick with that a little more.”

Sabres head coach Dan Bylsma, the man responsible for putting those lines together has he’s proven himself to be an excellent bench boss. His players agree.

“Dan has evolved into understanding how to deal with younger guys, probably has a little more patience than he would’ve with his teams in Pittsburgh because they were in a ‘win now’ mentality, whereas we’re trying to develop,” says McCabe. “And, not to say that we’re not in a ‘win now’ mentality, either, but it’s getting to the point now where there’s not as much patience as there was before.”

Bylsma and his staff have embraced the Sabres’ young talents, giving them every opportunity to step in and play key roles from the get-go. That there are more kids trying to grab those roles each year and only 23 chairs breeds stronger competition.

Like their coach, the burgeoning Sabres believe now is the time to take things up a notch. “The growing pains are over with,” says McCabe. “[Bylsma] has a high level of expectation for our team, and it’s no different for us young guys. He has the confidence in us to make plays, and that’s what you need.”

Reinhart concurs. “We think we can be a lot better than we have been,” he says. “We put pressure on ourselves to get it done sooner than later, and I think that’s a good thing for us to have because we know we can have success now, but it’s gonna take a little more out of each and every one of us.”

Gionta explains that, if the Sabres are to move forward, they need to create a team culture and atmosphere that demands results, and the only true way to do that is to clinch a post-season berth. “Once you make the playoffs, you start to be a team that expects to make it every year,” he says.

Though there will be many highly-anticipated matchup between them in the future, Eichel and McDavid were not on the ice together on October 17, 2016.

Buffalo was facing Edmonton on the road in the team’s second game of the season. The Sabres had lost 4-1 to Montreal on opening night, and would be without Eichel for the next 44 days. Unfazed, they thrashed the Oilers 6-2 powered by O’Reilly’s four-point effort, a pair of goals from Gionta, another from Moulson and three helpers from 21-year-old defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen. As an added bonus, the Sabres held McDavid off the scoresheet.

There have been plenty of signs that the team is starting to turn a corner, including that win against the Oilers. There’s still a lot of work to be done, but the Sabres can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

“Last year, our expectation was to make the playoffs, but we understood that maybe it wasn’t the most realistic goal,” says McCabe. “Whereas this year, we know that we have a team capable of making the playoffs and making strides.”

In order to reach that goal, Buffalo’s younger players have latched onto their more senior colleagues for guidance and support.

The Sabres have a unique group of veterans that fit two predominant categories: those players considered long in the teeth (Gionta and Josh Gorges) and those not that far from having their wisdom teeth removed (O’Reilly, Bogosian, Kyle Okposo and Evander Kane).

The fact that several of them are familiar with rebuilds, be it in Colorado, with the Islanders or the Winnipeg Jets, and are relatively-close in age, is something that Reinhart says is extremely helpful.

“A lot of our veterans are from 25 to 26, and some of them have been in the league for seven years,” he says. “So, we’re a young group, but that experience out of those young guys goes a long way for someone like myself that’s in my second year. It makes it easy for us to jell together and, as we play together longer, we’ll have more success.”

O’Reilly, in particular, has been a central figure in terms of Reinhart’s development and adaptation to his new surroundings.

“For me, the first guy—as a lot of guys look at—is O’Reilly,” he says. “Coming in last year, I spent a lot of time with him, played with him quite a bit and learned from him, just the way he conducts himself, both on and off the ice. So, for me to learn from that and really get better because of him, spending hours after practice working with him on the ice, that’s gone a long way for my game.”

That’s not to say the older guys haven’t been just as helpful.

“Brian (Gionta) as a captain has been a great leader for us,” says McCabe. “He’s won a Stanley Cup, he’s been a captain on multiple teams now—with Montreal and us. He doesn’t speak up a ton, but when he does speak up, you listen to what he has to say because of the presence he has.”

Rome wasn’t built in a day, and the Sabres won’t be, either. Nonetheless, it’s been a spirited operation.

“The youthfulness keeps you young,” Gionta says.

Eyes wide on the elevator after the game, he remarked: “When they get another defenceman or two — look out.”

It was a conversation that came to mind Saturday night while watching Ottawa race ahead, fall behind, and ultimately beat the Maple Leafs 6-3 with the help of two empty-net goals.

The game was high on entertainment, swings of emotion, and intrigue. But it came with a heavy helping of disappointment for a Toronto team acutely aware of its diminishing place in the jam-packed standings, and an inability to lock down another third-period lead.

“We know what’s going on,” said defenceman Morgan Rielly. “That makes tonight that much tougher.”

It was Rielly who committed the error head coach Mike Babcock cited in his post-game press conference. He was skating the puck around his own goal shortly after William Nylander made it 3-2 and inexplicably fired it to an area where no teammates were stationed.

Erik Karlsson intercepted, Kyle Turris delivered a nice backhand pass into the middle, and Mike Hoffman scored with an all-world release.

Call it an unforced error.

“We made a big-time mistake on their tying goal where we had two guys in the corner, we had no pressure on us so we rimmed it around and gave it away,” said Babcock.

In a division where just 14 points separate first from last, and a playoff race where virtually every game involving an Eastern Conference team reshuffles the deck, it was one of those small errors in judgment that may have seemed more important than it really was.

Stepping back from the heat of the moment, the game itself was a reminder of a fundamental truth: this Leafs team still isn’t ready.

They have climbed to impressive heights and may still barge their way into the post-season. They can score with the best, and have great specialty teams, but the defensive holes are hard to ignore.

“We had ample, ample opportunity to win the game down the stretch,” said Babcock. “I think we can play way better though. I think we can play better structurally defensively, so we have to get better.”

Depending where you fixed your eyes, there were plenty of positives on display against the Sens. The Leafs were missing top scorer Mitch Marner on Saturday because of a minor shoulder ailment and needed to jumble some well-established forward lines as a result.
And on that side of the puck, you’d never have known the skilled rookie was out.

Josh Leivo was once again a revelation – sliding up alongside Nazem Kadri and Leo Komarov and repeatedly digging the puck off the wall deep in the offensive zone. He earned another assist, his sixth point in the last three games.

“I like the way Leivs plays,” said Kadri. “He’s a big body, he’s got skill, he can see the ice, he’s good on the forecheck. I really like his game the way it is – all he needed was a bit of confidence, maybe a couple shots to drop for him or a couple points to go his way.

“He’s really effective, especially down low.”

Nylander was reunited with centre Auston Matthews and Zach Hyman.

That trio heavily tilted the ice at even strength and Matthews found Nylander during a third-period power play to briefly put the Leafs ahead. There’s a pretty strong argument forming here that the Matthews-Nylander combo should stay together even when health returns.

They are dynamic together.

“We know where each other’s at,” said Matthews. “He was skating tonight, so that’s always a good sign when he’s skating because he’s making plays all over the ice.

“Not the result we wanted, but…”

But?

All was not lost. All will not be lost, regardless of what happens over the final 25 games of a rather charmed regular season in Toronto.

The Leafs are in a “funk” – as Kadri termed it – and facing another back-to-back situation with a visit to Carolina on Sunday. In the here and now it’s starting to look bleak, but there is still plenty of highway to negotiate before the playoff seedings are finalized.

That road ahead is all part of the process. That’s what this season is truly about.

“The reality is we’re all big boys, we can read the standings,” said Babcock. “You’ve got to win hockey games. What I just said to our team is we’re going to Carolina on a long weekend. Worry about this game.

“We haven’t been very good back-to-back, mentally we haven’t dug in. It’s too easy to get complacent, that can’t happen. And on that side of the puck, you’d never have known the skilled rookie was out.

No one else is going to. We need to find a way to compete harder and find a way to win.

“Not the result we wanted, but…”

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“We haven’t been very good back-to-back, mentally we haven’t dug in. So, we have to win a game. You can feel sorry for yourself if you want. No one else is going to. We need to find a way to compete harder and find a way to win.

“That’s all there is to it. It’s that simple.”

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1048513 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 10 takeaways from Hockey Day in Canada

Emily Sadler

February 19, 2017, 9:00 AM

KENORA, Ont. — “You’ve really got to come back in the summertime.”

We heard that phrase at least a dozen times throughout our four-day stay here in Kenora, Ont.

This year’s host of Scotiabank Hockey Day in Canada is perhaps best known for being a natural summer playground. Located about 200 km east of Winnipeg, cottagers flock to Lake of the Woods to fish, camp, and enjoy some of the finest sunsets in the nation.

But it became crystal clear as soon as we arrived on Wednesday afternoon that winter is a special time in this hockey-loving town.

Hockey Day signs adorned every storefront, team sweaters became everyday attire, and the iconic Kenora Thistles logo was never far away.

Hello out there, we’re on the air.

It’s #HockeyDay today. pic.twitter.com/NElw128Bbn6

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) February 18, 2017

While out on one of Kenora’s many stunning frozen bays on Thursday, Ron MacLean—like only Ron MacLean can—remarked, “Thistle be wonderful.”

And it really was.

There were so many great hockey stories to come out of Kenora this week. Here are some of our favourites, plus a few fun takeaways.

Kenora is a pond hockey paradise

When you’ve got as many lakes, ponds, bays and coves as Kenora, hockey is basically a part of everyday life during the winter months. (Lucky, we know.)

Nowhere was that more evident than on Black Sturgeon Lake, where Sportsnet set up the cameras near a clean sheet of ice for a Hockey Day shoot on Thursday.

Anyone up for a game of shinny? #HockeyDay pic.twitter.com/mRqGJuTuTaC

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) February 16, 2017

Add in blue skies, ice fishing, the Stanley Cup, and a pup named Mane, and you’ve got yourself a perfect day.

The #StanleyCup knows how to make an entrance. #HockeyDay pic.twitter.com/rsYMYJ6fjQ

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) February 16, 2017

Kroppy’s hockey spirit lives on

The theme of this year’s Hockey Day was tradition, so it’s only fitting that a new one was born this weekend in Kenora: the Kroppy Cup Pond Hockey Tournament.

Presenting the first-ever winners of the Kroppy Cup Memorial Pond Hockey Tournament. Congratulations! #HockeyDay pic.twitter.com/vHeKrX5eNO

— Scotia Hockey (@scotiahockey) February 18, 2017

Mention the name “Kroppy” here in Kenora, and you’ll get a warm smile and a story about his kindness in the community, especially when it came to his favourite game.

Len Kroiosity was a war veteran, an integral part of the Kenora community, and the most dedicated fan of the Winnipeg Jets.

Kroiosity died in September at age 98. To honour his remarkable impact on Kenora, the local Hockey Day planning committee planned the “Kroppy Cup,” which took place as a part of Saturday’s festivities.

Shout out to all our friends in Kenora taking part in #HockeyDay, and those playing in the Kroppy Cup! pic.twitter.com/KoQ09uSFxt

— Winnipeg Jets (@NHLJets) February 18, 2017

Despite some slushy conditions from mother nature, the tournament was a huge success — and a perfect way to remember Kenora’s Kroppy.

Good morning from Kenora. We are out on Lake of the Woods for the Kroppy Cup. #hockeydayincanada pic.twitter.com/3uWwAll6VV

— Ken Reid (@SNKenReid) February 18, 2017

The Alumni game is here to stay

Last year was the first edition of the Hockey Day NHL Alumni game, featuring former NHLers and Kamloops Blazers in a just-for-fun hockey showcase.

This year’s game was a true community event, as it saw local Kenora Thistles alumni hit the ice with the likes of Lanny McDonald, Darcy Tucker, Ron MacLean, Ken Reid, Mark Napier, and even Kenora native Mike Richards.

Teammates. #HockeyDay pic.twitter.com/dmdSzrHATK

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) February 17, 2017

The benches were crowded, lively, and home to some of the most old-school helmets and goalie masks we’ve ever seen.

In other words, it was a perfect night of hockey.
when you consider the facial hair is about as legendary as the man
Lanny McDonald gets asked about his moustache often—and rightly so,
Lanny's moustache has spanned four decades
Hometown pride at its best:
Brae secondary school during a school visit.
(We even tracked down his photo in his grade 10 yearbook at Beaver
sweaters adorn one of the wall of the local rink.
with kids, playing in the alumni game, and even taking part in the Kroppy
Richards was present at several community events, sharing Cup stories
brought the Cup home to Kenora before, during his time with the Los
The Olympic gold medalist and two-time Stanley Cup champion has
that.
Kenora is proud of its hockey legacy, and Mike Richards is a large part of
The story, as a whole, is pretty marvelous too. Take a look:

It was the perfect game plan, resulting in four points from Lentz and
countless memories for a hockey-loving kid and his family.

It's Kroppy.

Turns out, there was a bit of magic in the air in Kenora this weekend.
While talking to Nicole Lentz about her son's involvement in the Hockey
day festivities, Kroppy's name came up.

"He was our neighbour," she said. "We miss him so, so much."
The way Lentz spoke about Kropioski, it was immediately clear how big
an impact he'd had on the lives of Nicole and her three sons—not just as
a neighbour but as a friend, mentor and supporter.

"My boys couldn't have had a better cheerleader in hockey," said Lentz.
"I wish Kroppy could be here to see this whole weekend. He would
Lentz and her son, Dawson, believe that in some way, he was there.
While recounting the whirlwind of events from the week, explained Lentz,
it hit them.

"I finally know why this is all happening. It's Kroppy."
Kenora's hockey history runs deep
Over 100 years ago, the Kenora Thistles defeated the Montreal
Wanderers in two games to win the 1907 Stanley Cup, becoming the
smallest town to have ever claimed the Cup.

"The Thistles are the fastest hockeyists seen on local ice for many
seasons," the Montreal Herald wrote at the time. "Some of their work last
night was simply marvelous."
The story, as a whole, is pretty marvelous too. Take a look:
Kenora's own Mike Richards
Kenora is proud of its hockey legacy, and Mike Richards is a large part of
that.
The Olympic gold medalist and two-time Stanley Cup champion has
brought the Cup home to Kenora before, during his time with the Los
Angeles Kings, and he was able to do it once again this weekend.
Richards was present at several community events, sharing Cup stories
with kids, playing in the alumni game, and even taking part in the Kroppy
Cup.
The town named a street after their NHLer, and framed photos and
sweaters adorn one of the wall of the local rink.
(We even tracked down his photo in his grade 10 yearbook at Beaver
Brae secondary school during a school visit.)
Hometown pride at its best:
Lanny's moustache has spanned four decades
Lanny McDonald gets asked about his moustache often—and rightly so,
when you consider the facial hair is about as legendary as the man
himself.

43 years old. McDonald told students at Thursday's Beaver Brae school
visit that he started growing it in 1974—his rookie year.

It was 'back to school' for @RonMacLeanTHH and the #StanleyCup as
they paid a visit Beaver Brae Secondary in Kenora. #HockeyDay
pic.twitter.com/pJ7jJcLpLBX
— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) February 16, 2017

It's a unique 'stache, but McDonald says there's one player in the NHL
today who could rival it:

"I think it you look at Patrick Eaves in Dallas—underrated beard. Out
control," he told us during a Q&A later on Thursday, which also
happened to be his birthday. "If he shaved off the rest of the beard, I
think the moustache might be... he might be the guy."

It may be Lanny McDonald's birthday, but he's the one giving us with
some legendary moustache advice. #HockeyDay
pic.twitter.com/O28dKpItvGm
— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) February 16, 2017

Bryan Trottier is a guitar hero
Most hockey fans know Brian Trottier as one of the greatest centremen
to ever lace up a pair of skates. But the six-time Stanley Cup champion—
seven, including a win as a coach—is also an exceptional musician.

After leaving the bench of Thursday's alumni game, Trottier leapt to the
stage and put on a show along with Dave Bidini and the Bidini Band.
From hockey legend to music star, Bryan Trottier is keeping everyone
entertained in Kenora. #HockeyDay pic.twitter.com/hejmlAyEiz
— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) February 17, 2017

Kenora, you were wonderful
From start to finish, our time in Kenora was incredible. From the
wonderful hockey stories to the kind people who shared them with us,
Hockey Day in Canada 2017 was truly a success.
And while at least a few of us are likely already starting to plan our
summer return, we're all heading home feeling lucky to have experienced
this gorgeous hockey town in the prime of pond hockey time.

That's a wrap from us in Kenora! Thank you for an incredible
#HockeyDay week. #HockeyDayInCanada pic.twitter.com/PMQn0A0m
— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) February 19, 2017
Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.20.2017
1048514 Websites
TSN.CA / Matthews channels inner Ovechkin in Goal of Year candidate
By Frank Seravalli
Auston Matthews was inside Glendale Arena that night as a wide-eyed 8-
year-old to witness Alex Ovechkin twist on his back to score "The Goal"
that's remained seared in everyone's memory since 2006.
It was fitting then that Matthews scored the generational counterpart on
that year-old to witness Alex Ovechkin twist on his back to score "The Goal"
what's remained seared in everyone’s memory since 2006.
It was fitting then that Matthews scored the generational counterpart on
Sunday night with a masterful Goal of the Year candidate.
Matthews pulled into a tie with Winnipeg's Patrik Laine for the rookie goal
scoring lead with his 28th goal of the season - perhaps his prettiest as a
Maple Leaf.
A bear hug from Hurricanes forward Phil DiGiuseppe wasn't nearly
enough to haul him down after he flew into the Carolina zone on a long
stretch pass from Jake Gardiner.
Matthews harnessed his strength to fling off DiGiuseppe - and his stick -
and somehow managed to sneak the puck through Cam Ward's five-hole
as he fell to the ice. His celebration, after a goal of pure will, seemed to
say: "Get off me!"
The Leafs went on to win, 4-0, placing Toronto back in playoff position
after a recent surge from the Florida Panthers.
In a season with no shortage of highlights, Sunday's goal added an unforgettable moment to Matthews' reel. Seemingly every superstar rookie over the last decade has one.

Connor McDavid improbably reclaimed the Calder Trophy debate in his first game back from injury last February with a statement goal. Ovechkin's diving, jackknife put-back against the Coyotes also came as a rookie on Jan. 16, 2006.

Brian Boucher was in net for the Coyotes that night when Ovechkin scored the goal that fans still ask him about. He saw Matthews' reminiscent effort on Sunday night.

"I don't think it's quite in the same league as Ovechkin's, but it's still one heck of a play," said Boucher, now an analyst for NBC. "It's amazing how Matthews is able to keep the puck on his stick as he's twisted in mid-air. He's going to have to work on falling on his back if he wants to do The Ovechkin thing!"

Some 11 years later, Boucher isn't bothered by the Ovechkin goal that still makes the highlight shows.

"Not at all," Boucher said. "It's not like it was a slapper from the red line that went five-hole. It was an amazing play by an amazing player."

Auston Matthews goal/Alexander Ovechkin

In 2006, Matthews would have only been two years into his hockey craze. He was bitten by the hockey bug when he went to his first Coyotes game with his uncle, who was a season-ticket holder. He wasn't the only fan left slack-jawed in Arizona that night.

"It was unbelievable," Matthews said in November. "That was back when I think (Wayne) Gretzky was coaching. He was just looking up. He couldn't believe it. I think everybody in the stands - no one really cheered - they really couldn't get their heads wrapped around what just happened."

Matthews called it "one of the best goals ever."

"Just to see it in person is pretty special," he said.

In the last 10 seasons, only eight players have hit the 30-goal plateau as a rookie: Ovechkin (52), Sidney Crosby (39), Michael Grabner (34), Evgeni Malkin (33), Logan Couture (32), Bobby Ryan (31), Jeff Skinner (31) and Artemi Panarin (30).

Matthews and Laine are now deadlocked at 28 with a third of the season to play. They will face each other for the second time on Tuesday night at Air Canada Centre (7:30 p.m. on TSN4).

With Laine facing an uphill climb after missing eight games with a body injury for Toronto. He entered the day tied for the team lead with 48 points. ... Toronto's Nazem Kadri and Leo Komarov each had an assist to extend their point streaks to four games. ... The Hurricanes recalled Di Giuseppe from Charlotte of the AHL earlier in the day. ... Jeff Skinner played his 42nd game for Carolina, tying him with Ron Francis for 10th all-time in games played for the franchise since it relocated in 1997. ... The Hurricanes lost for the first time in seven games wearing their black alternate jerseys this season.

"We had no fire tonight," Carolina coach Bill Peters said. "None."

NOTES: Mitch Marner missed his second straight game with an upper-body injury for Toronto. He entered the day tied for the team lead with 48 points. ... Toronto's Nazem Kadri and Leo Komarov each had an assist to extend their point streaks to four games. ... The Hurricanes recalled Di Giuseppe from Charlotte of the AHL earlier in the day. ... Jeff Skinner played his 42nd game for Carolina, tying him with Ron Francis for 10th all-time in games played for the franchise since it relocated in 1997. ... The Hurricanes lost for the first time in seven games wearing their black alternate jerseys this season.

"When you're getting hooked like that, to No. 1, keep your balance and, (No.) 2, find the puck and be able to push it," Brown said of Matthews, "he's an elite goal scorer for a reason."

Jake Gardiner added a goal and two assists. James van Riemsdyk had two assists and Curtis McElhinney made 37 saves for the Maple Leafs to earn his first shutout since January 2014.

Toronto snapped a two-game skid and jumped into the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference with the win.

Brown opened the scoring 1:07 into the second period when he redirected a bouncing pass from van Riemsdyk over Carolina goalie Cam Ward's shoulder into the upper corner of the net, the first of two times they would connect in that fashion.

Matthews doubled Toronto's lead earlier in the period in jaw-dropping fashion. The 19-year-old wunderkind carried the puck in from the left side of the blue line toward the crease when Di Giuseppe hooked him, even losing his stick in the process. As Matthews' body turned away from the net as he began to spiral down, he flung his stick toward the net in midair and slid the loose puck between Ward's pads just before he hit the ice.

"I had a good amount of speed going into it to carry me to the net and then just tried to sneak it in there," Matthews said. "Pretty lucky play, I guess."

His teammates attributed it to something other than luck.

"Just the strength, while he was falling, to score that goal, that was pretty impressive," Gardner said.

Gardiner and Brown finished the scoring with goals 1:59 apart in the third period.

McElhinney earned his first shutout with the Maple Leafs, and the fifth of his career. He improved to 3-3 with Toronto since being claimed off waivers from Columbus last month.

"Right now, I feel pretty good in net and for the most part we're getting results," McElhinney said. "That's the most important thing."

Cam Ward made 20 saves for Carolina before being pulled with 10:58 remaining in the third period.

Eddie Lack made seven saves in relief for the Hurricanes, who are winless in their last four games (0-3-1).

"We had no fire tonight," Carolina coach Bill Peters said. "None."

By Kristen Shilton

Raleigh, North Carolina — The Maple Leafs desperately needed a win Sunday night, and they got a resounding one, blanking the Carolina Hurricanes 4-0. It was just their fourth win since the all-star break in late January but was enough to move them back into an Eastern Conference playoff spot. The Maple Leafs are now 27-20-11 on the season.

Takeaways

Bounce back (to back): Toronto had no time to stew over Saturday's 6-3 loss to Ottawa - they were just halfway through their 13th back-to-back of the season. With only four prior wins in the second game on consecutive nights, the Maple Leafs needed some quick confidence. By the second period they found it in Tyler Bozak's line. With Mitch Marner missing this weekend's games, Connor Brown has been filling in with the veterans. On Saturday they were one of Toronto's weakest lines, but a perfect pass from James van Riemsdyk set up Brown's opening score and from there the Maple Leafs' offence was clicking - including more
much-needed contributions from the old guard. Brown added another
goal in the third, assisted again by van Riemsdyk and Jake Gardiner, and
Gardiner previously scored off a point-blunt from Kadri and Komarov.
Three of Toronto’s four goals came off the rush, and although they were
up against the worst team in the Eastern Conference, it was a well-
balanced performance up front.

Stepping up: Without Marner in the lineup, Auston Matthews has come
up big for the Maple Leafs. He followed a two-point night on Saturday
with one of his best goals of the season – taking a stretch pass from
Gardiner. Matthews was hauled down while charging towards the net but
managed to get the puck through Cam Ward’s five-hole from his
backhand as he fell. The rookie saves his most exuberant celebrations
for those special goals, and he didn’t hold back after that one. Matthews
is now alone at the top of Toronto’s scoring leaderboard with 49 points
and ties Patrik Laine for the rookie goal scoring lead (28).

Holy, McElhinney: Sitting on a 5-2 loss to his former team – the
Columbus Blue Jackets – for several days had no ill effect on Curtis
McElhinney as he bounced back with a superb performance for the fifth
shutout of his career. Under siege early, McElhinney was steady, and
allowed Toronto the time they needed to find their game. After a goalless
first period, McElhinney finally got some support with a pair of goals –
and a little help from the iron - in the second, but he was incredible on
his own from start to finish. Carolina did a good job of getting bodies to
the net and looking for secondary scoring changes but McElhinney’s
rebound control was solid. He faced 31 shots in the first two periods
alone, stopping 37 by the end. Of the Maple Leafs five wins on the
second night of a back-to-back, three have come since January 11 with
McElhinney in the crease. It was his first shutout since Jan. 2, 2014.

Trouble spot: The great play of McElhinney masked a few issues for
Toronto, including major struggles in the faceoff dot. Carolina dominated
the Maple Leafs on draws, winning 61 per cent and putting themselves in
good position to challenge the netminder early and often. Coming off a
poor performance on Saturday, faceoff specialist Ben Smith didn’t fare
much better against the Hurricanes, winning just two of nine draws.

Next game: The Maple Leafs head home to welcome Laine and the
Winnipeg Jets into the Air Canada Centre on Tuesday.

1048517 Websites
TSN.CA / Leafs back in playoff spot after win in Raleigh
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RECAP: Blackhawks 5, Maple Leafs 4. The Blackhawks exploded for a four-goal first period and hung on from there to extend their win streak to four in a 5-4 win over Toronto. by Austin Siegel / blackhawks.com. The team's fourth win in a row moves the Blackhawks within four points of the final playoff spot in the Western Conference. A hot start for Chicago was crucial in silencing the Scotiabank Arena crowd and staking the Blackhawks to an early 4-0 lead. Postgame: Colliton. Postgame: Delia. Perlini would be the first to strike using a nifty move to lose a defender and beat Andersen glove side. Minutes later, Patrick Kane fed Dominik Kahun on an odd-man rush to give the Blackhawks a 3-0 lead against the Eastern Conference powerhouse. Sharks fall to Maple Leafs, dropping their fifth consecutive game at home. The San Jose Sharks welcomed the Toronto Maple Leafs to the HP Pavilion, in a game they just had to win but couldn't. The Sharks did just enough to lose versus a Maple Leaf team that had been red hot coming into the contest, having won four of their last five overall. The Sharks came into the game ice cold, scoring just one goal in the last three games. Maple Leaf head coach Ron Wilson, well known to Shark fans recorded his 600th win as a NHL head coach. Coach Todd McLellan would speak before the g...