

NEW JERSEY DEVILS
PRINT AND ELECTRONIC NEWS CLIPS
DECEMBER 31, 2014

Upbeat Devils hoping to ride new momentum

By **TOM GULITTI**
STAFF WRITER

NEWARK - The mood in the Devils' locker room and on the ice for their practice Tuesday was definitely lifted, spirited, optimistic.

That's what one complete effort that resulted in a win can do for a team that hasn't had enough of them this season. There also was a resolve, however, not to be satisfied with doing it just once.

The Devils need all they did right in Monday's 3-1 win over Pittsburgh to carry over to tonight's game in Detroit. Otherwise, they'll be right back where they were before they beat the Penguins, which was in the middle of a season headed nowhere.

"I think I mentioned that," general manager and interim head coach Lou Lamoriello said. "You have to dwell on the things that you did well, certainly, and then just sustain that and look at the things that possibly didn't go right and you maybe got away with."

The Devils (13-18-7) will be looking to win consecutive games for the first time since Nov. 11

against Minnesota, 3-1, and Nov. 14 at Washington, 1-0. They are just 5-11-5 since then, which leaves them nine points out of a playoff spot and likely headed for their third consecutive season of failing to qualify for the postseason.

Unless they finally string together some consistent efforts, and most importantly, some wins.

"We have to," defenseman Andy Greene said. "It was one game. Unless we follow that up with a good string of games here, what does that matter? We've just got to make sure we come out with the same type of effort and try to play the game we did [Monday]."

Center Scott Gomez, one of two current Devils (along with Patrik Elias, who is out with the mumps) who were part of the team's Stanley Cup days, remember those clubs' veterans saying, "Feel good, it's a win, but it's right back to business."

Tuesday's business was an intense practice in which co-coaches Scott Stevens, the captain of those Devils' Stanley Cup teams, and Adam Oates continued to im-

plement the systemic changes they're making from what the team did under Pete DeBoer, who was fired Friday.

Monday's victory provided proof that those changes can work and can be, they hope, something to build on.

"If anything, it shows that's the way we've got to play," Gomez said. "We're kidding ourselves if we think that if we don't give that effort [they're going to win]. Guys were taking the body. Guys were hitting. That's the way it's got to be."

BRIEFS: RW Martin Havlat, who's been out with the flu, accompanied the team to Detroit after returning to practice for the first time since he last played Dec. 21. ... With C Stephen Gionta sidelined indefinitely with a fractured hand, the Devils called up RW Mike Sislo. ... Gionta and C Jacob Josefson were placed on injured reserve. Although Josefson remains ill, Lamoriello said again "it looks like" he doesn't have the mumps and it could be a similar flu virus to the one that sidelined Havlat.

Devils at Red Wings

Today, 7:30 p.m.

TV: MSG Plus 2, MSG Plus (in progress at 8 p.m.). Radio: WFAN-AM 660/FM 101.9



Story line: The Devils (13-18-7) are coming off a 3-1 win over Pittsburgh on Monday and looking to win consecutive games for the first time since Nov. 11 (3-1 vs. Minnesota) and Nov. 14 (1-0 at Washington). They are 0-1-1 against the Red Wings (19-9-9) this season, including a 4-2 loss Nov. 7 at Joe Louis Arena.

NHL

DEVILS

Boucher sharp in AHL but Sislo gets the call-up instead

By Rich Chere

NJ Advance Media for The Star-Ledger

With Stephen Gionta out for an extended period with a broken hand, suffered when he blocked a Kris Letang shot during Monday night's game against the Pittsburgh Penguins, the Devils called up Mike Sislo from their Albany (AHL) affiliate.

Why didn't they call up Reid Boucher, who has started scoring goals and is looking more like the player the Devils expected when they drafted him 99th overall (the 4th round) in the 2011 NHL entry draft? Why Sislo?

"He's another penalty killer," GM/coach Lou Lamoriello explained. "With Gio out, he's killed a lot of penalties and also has been here. He has speed."

On Monday it was Joe Whitney and Stefan Matteau who got promoted. Not Boucher.

"He's got a couple of goals. We've got to get him playing consistently," Lamoriello said of Boucher. "We brought him up and down a couple times and maybe when he wasn't playing as well as he should have been."

"Right now Whitney, in that same role, is the best player there. So you've got to reward the players who are doing well. But there's no question he'll (Boucher) be an NHL player. He is scoring. He's playing better. Hopefully he gets himself back here quick."

Boucher has 16 points (9 goals, 7 assists) in 26 games for Albany and is minus-2.

Whitney has 27 points (11 goals, 16 assists) in 30 AHL games.

Whitney, Matteau, Sislo and Tim Sestito, all call-ups, will make the trip to Detroit for the New Year's Eve game against the Red Wings at Joe Louis Arena.

Martin Havlat, who practiced Tuesday after missing three games because of illness that was not the mumps, said he would make the trip but did not know if he would play.

"I was happy to be on the ice. I'm ready to go on the trip," Havlat said.

The veteran winger joked about the Devils' coaching change: "A few things have happened since I played my last game."

Cory Schneider will start in goal against the Red Wings.

There was no update on how long Gionta will be out.

"He's going to see the doctor tomorrow morning. They usually wait 24-48 hours," said Lamoriello, who pointed out: "We saw the X-ray."

Jacob Josefson, now an injured reserve, remains ill.

"He's still sick but there's no conclusion as to the mumps. Right now it looks like it's not," Lamoriello noted. "It's similar to what Havlat had. Hopefully that is the case. We don't know any more than that. He's dealing with the doctor every day."

The Devils will try to build on their 3-1 win over the Penguins.

"You have to dwell on the things that you did right and just sustain that. Then look at the things that didn't go right," Lamoriello said after watching practice from the bench.

Tuesday, December 30, 2014

Devils' informal Dec. 26 practice could face scrutiny from NHL

The Devils could be hearing from the NHL – if they haven't already – after some of their players held an informal practice on Dec. 26 on their Prudential Center practice rink.

A source said more than two thirds of the Devils' players were on the ice for the informal practice, which did not include any members of the coaching staff.

Multiple Devils' players confirmed there was an informal skate Friday. One said “not that many” players went on the ice, though, and, “obviously, there were no coaches.”

Head coach Pete DeBoer and assistant coach Dave Barr were fired earlier in the day.

Another Devils' player indicated some players who didn't skate used the team facilities Friday to work out off the ice.

Dec. 26 is a mandated day off by the collective bargaining agreement as part of the NHL's three-day Christmas break. If any Devils official was involved in organizing or encouraging the informal practice, this might be considered a violation of the CBA and could result in a fine for the organization.

So far, it doesn't appear the Devils did anything illegal or are in any trouble with the NHL. A league spokesperson confirmed that the NHL is looking into “a few” teams that held informal Dec. 26 practices, but said it is “unclear if any were more than captain's skates, which wouldn't be prohibited.”

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said via email there was “nothing I know of on the Devils.”

A source said the Rangers were among the teams already questioned about their Dec. 26 activities and were not found to have done anything illegal.

These “captain's skates” are under closer scrutiny by the league, however, after it was revealed the Anaheim Ducks held an informal practice on Dec. 26 at their practice facility, arranged by captain Ryan Getzlaf. According to the Los Angeles Times, Getzlaf paid to rent the ice time and hired a local coach to run the practice.

In a statement, Ducks GM Bob Murray confirmed the NHL is investigating the practice and maintained that Getzlaf acted on his own to organize the practice and without any direction from the team. Murray also said no team officials were present. If the NHL finds that Getzlaf was instructed by any team official to organize the practice, the Ducks would likely be fined.

There is no indication that any team officials were involved in the Devils' informal practice, but with it taking place in Prudential Center it seems likely at least some were in the building at the time. GM Lou Lamoriello's office has a window that overlooks the practice rink

Without acknowledging that any took place, Lamoriello said any skate on Dec. 26 would have been player organized.

"That would be their prerogative if they wanted to do that," he said.

Lamoriello said he was not "aware of" any investigation by the league into the Devils' informal practice.

Dec. 26 became part of the NHL's Christmas break as part of the CBA that was ratified following the 2012-13 lockout. Previously, the Christmas break covered only Dec. 24 and Dec. 25.

The NHL fined the Edmonton Oilers an undisclosed amount in 2001 for holding a practice on Christmas Day.

Posted by Tom Gulitti on 12/30 at 11:11 PM

<http://fireandice.northjersey.com/fire-ice-1.174987/devils-informal-dec-26-practice-could-face-scrutiny-from-nhl-1.1183403>

Tuesday, December 30, 2014

Havlat headed to Detroit with Devils, relieved he didn't have mumps; Why Boucher wasn't recalled

On the bright side, Martin Havlat did not have the mumps. The Devils forward still was pretty sick for a few days, though, causing him to miss three more games so far in a season in which he again had bad luck with his health.

"It is what it is," Havlat said. "I got sick and it's been a while, actually, since I've been that sick. It took some time, but it's nice to be back with the boys."

Havlat has missed a total of 16 games due to various injuries and illness this season. Today's practice was his first with the team since he last played on Dec. 21 against Washington. He had been skating on his own since Saturday with Patrik Elias, who did have the mumps, joining him on Sunday and Monday.

"It was the first time with the boys today," Havlat said. "It's nice to be not alone again. I've been skating with Patty. So, it's been better the last couple days every day."

After talking it over with the coaches and trainer following today's practice, Havlat said he will accompany the team to Detroit for its game there Wednesday night. He doesn't know yet if he'll play against the Red Wings.

Devils GM and interim coach Lou Lamoriello said the plan "as of right now" was for left wings Joe Whitney and Stefan Matteau also to go on the trip after they were called up Monday.

"The way things go, you never know who's going to turn up not feeling well," Lamoriello said.

Havlat admitted he was worried he too had the mumps when the first started feeling ill because Elias was also sick.

"I got it at the same time as Patty, basically, and with (2-year-old daughter Tereza) at home and another one on the way, it's always (a concern)," Havlat said. "I was trying to stay away from them a little more than usual."

Havlat did not have the same symptoms as Elias, who had swelling in the glands in this upper neck, but it still was a relief when he was told he definitely did not have the mumps.

"You read some bad stuff what can happen," Havlat said. "So, at least that was good news. It was the regular flu, whatever I had, some kind of virus."

Havlat acknowledged, "a few things happened since I played the last game."

Head coach Pete DeBoer was fired on Friday and the Lamoriello stepped behind the bench with co-coaches Scott Stevens and Adam Oates.

“It was nice to be on the ice with the boys, get some drills and get the puck on the stick,” Havlat said. “So, we’ll see how it’s going to be tomorrow.”

The Devils are still thinking that center Jacob Josefson’s illness is similar to Havlat’s and not the mumps. Josefson remained off the ice today for the third day in a row since and was placed on injured reserve, which makes him unavailable to play until next Tuesday against Buffalo.

“He’s still sick, but there’s no conclusion as to the mumps,” Lamoriello said. “Right now, it looks like it’s not. It’s similar to what Havlat had, so, hopefully, that’s the case. But, we don’t know any more than that.”

Lamoriello said Josefson is “dealing with the doctor every day”, but did not answer directly when asked if Josefson has been tested for the mumps.

Lamoriello said center Stephen Gionta will have his broken hand examined by the doctor on Wednesday, so the team won’t know until after that how much time he will miss.

“They usually wait 24-48 hours before,” Lamoriello said.

Lamoriello explained that Mike Sislo was recalled because he’s “another penalty killer” to replace Gionta.

“With Gio out, he’s killed a lot of penalties and also has been here and has speed,” Lamoriello said. “Whereas the other players that we have in that role is a little different.”

Left wing Reid Boucher, who has been up twice previously this season, has been hot lately with Albany with four goals and two assists in his last six games.

When I asked Lamoriello why Boucher was not called up, he replied, “He’s got a couple goals and we’ve got to get him playing consistently well. We brought him up and down a couple of times maybe when he wasn’t playing as well as he should have and right now Whitney in that same role is the best player there, so you’ve got to reward the players who are doing well at that time.

“But, there’s no question he’ll be an NHL player. But he is scoring, he’s playing better and, hopefully, he gets himself back here quick.”

Cory Schneider will make his fourth consecutive start in net Wednesday.

There appears to be a good chance rookie Keith Kinkaid will start one of the back-to-back home games against Montreal on Friday and Philadelphia on Saturday. Kinkaid hasn't played since earning his first NHL win in a 3-2 shootout victory over Tampa Bay on Dec. 20.

The Devils now have eight players on injured reserve with Josefson and Gionta joining the list today. Elias, Havlat, Michael Ryder (mumps), Damon Severson (fractured left ankle), Bryce Salvador (lower body) and Ryane Clowe (suspected concussion) are also on IR.

Posted by Tom Gulitti on 12/30 at 02:01 PM

<http://fireandice.northjersey.com/fire-ice-1.174987/havlat-headed-to-detroit-with-devils-relieved-he-didn-t-have-mumps-why-boucher-wasn-t-recalled-1.1183306>

Tuesday, December 30, 2014

Devils place Gionta, Josefson on IR; Sislo called up; Havlat practicing; Henrique back to center

The Devils placed centers Stephen Gionta and Jacob Josefson on injured reserve today and called up right wing Mike Sislo from Albany of the AHL.

Gionta broke his hand blocking a shot in the second period of the Devils' 3-1 win Monday night over Pittsburgh. Josefson has been ill the last three days. He was placed on IR retroactive to his last game Saturday against the Rangers, but will have to miss at least three more games with the team playing Wednesday in Detroit, Friday at home against Montreal and Saturday at home against Philadelphia.

Devils GM and interim coach Lou Lamoriello said Monday that there were no indications yet that Josefson has the mumps, but it's clear the team is taking a cautious approach with him with the virus going through their organization. The Devils have had five confirmed cases of the mumps, including forward Patrik Elias and Michael Ryder, who both remain out.

Elias has been skating on his own.

Sislo, who is wearing No. 34, is on the ice for today's practice as is Martin Havlat, who is working his way back from the flu.

With Gionta out indefinitely, Adam Henrique has moved from left wing back to center and is practicing today on a line with Tuomo Ruutu and Steve Bernier. Sislo is skating on a line with Mike Cammalleri and Travis Zajac.

Dainius Zubrus has taken Henrique's spot at left wing on the line with Scott Gomez and Jaromir Jagr.

Havlat is one of five players on the fourth line with Tim Sestito, Jordin Tootoo, Joe Whitney and Stefan Matteau.

Lamoriello is again watching practice from the bench.

Also here watching today is left wing Ryane Clowe, who has been out since Nov. 6 with a suspected concussion.

Here is the breakdown of the Devils' players practicing today:

Forwards: Dainius Zubrus-Scott Gomez-Jaromir Jagr; Mike Cammalleri-Travis Zajac-Mike Sislo; Tuomo Ruutu-Adam Henrique-Steve Bernier; Joe Whitney/Martin Havlat-Tim Sestito-Jordin Tootoo/Stefan Matteau.

Defensemen: Andy Greene-Peter Harrold; Jon Merrill-Marek Zidlicky; Eric Gelinias-Adam Larsson; Seth Helgeson.

Goaltenders: Cory Schneider, Keith Kinkaid.

Posted by Tom Gulitti on 12/30 at 12:01 PM

<http://fireandice.northjersey.com/fire-ice-1.174987/devils-place-gionta-josefson-on-ir-sislo-called-up-havlat-practicing-henrique-back-to-center-1.1183258>

Tuesday, December 30, 2014

Devils putting in the hard work to make sure turnaround doesn't end at one game again

Near the end of today's practice at Prudential Center, the Devils went to one end of the rink to work again on their 3-on-3 play down low.

At one point, center Scott Gomez and defenseman Eric Gelinas got in a heated battle in the left corner. Shoves escalated to crosschecks and one semi-vicious slash from Gomez before the players calmly skated away from each other at the end of their turn in the drill.

"That kind of brought back the old days," Gomez said afterward.

One of two current Devils that won a Stanley Cup with the team – Patrik Elias, who is recovering from the mumps, is the other – Gomez remembers doing similar against then captain Scott Stevens "back in the day." Today, Stevens was the co-coach that was directing that drill.

"As intimidating as Scotty was, you knew he wasn't going to take you out 100 percent (in practice)," Gomez said. "But, when you went against guys like Bobby (Holik) and Scotty, they wanted that. Scotty would actually get mad at you if you weren't hitting him.

"He would also give you one just to let you know. He used to love that. He was so big and strong that you could give him that extra shot and he wouldn't even feel it."

Now, Stevens is encouraging his players, in particular the defensemen that he is coaching, to practice the same way.

"Gelly, he could manhandle me," Gomez said of the 6-foot-4, 215-pound Gelinas. "But, it's good for both guys. Scotty Stevens, he wants that. He's got to play that way. ... That's the one thing, I think, the young D are definitely going to get something out of. One thing about Scotty, I remember Bobby Holik said it: he was our hardest practice guy. For Bobby Holik to say that, that's one thing. That guy was our hardest worker."

There is a clear sense of re-commitment among the Devils' players following the firing of head coach Pete DeBoer last Friday. They know what can happen next after the head coach is fired if there isn't improvement, particularly for a team having the kind of season they are.

"We put ourselves in a bad position and we have to (come together)," defenseman Andy Greene said. "You talk about having pride. This is our job. We've got to make sure we come out with a good effort and once they fire the coach who knows what's going to be next? Next could be guys leaving, guys getting traded. That's the next step. So, we've got to make sure we're ready and playing well."

The mood in the Devils' locker room and on the ice for their practice today was definitely lifted, spirited, optimistic. That's what one complete effort that resulted in a win can do for a team that hasn't had enough of them this season.

There was also a resolve, however, not to be satisfied with doing it just once.

The Devils need all they did right in Monday's 3-1 win over Pittsburgh to carry over to Wednesday night's game in Detroit. Otherwise, they'll be right back where they were before they beat the Penguins, which was in the middle of a season headed nowhere.

"I think I mentioned that," general manager and interim head coach Lou Lamoriello said. "You have to dwell on the things that you did well, certainly, and then just sustain that and look at the things that possibly didn't go right and you maybe got away with."

The Devils (13-18-7) will be looking to win consecutive games for the first time since Nov. 11 against Minnesota (3-1) and Nov. 14 at Washington (1-0). They are just 5-11-5 since then, which leaves them nine points out of a playoff spot and likely headed for their third season in a row of failing to qualify for the postseason.

Unless, they finally string together some consistent efforts and, most importantly, some wins.

"We have to," Greene said. "It was one game. Unless we follow that up with a good string of games here, what does that matter? We've just got to make sure we come out with the same type of effort and try to play the game we did (Monday)."

Gomez remembers those the Cup-winning clubs' veterans saying, "Feel good, it's a win, but it's right back to business."

Tuesday's business was an intense practice in which Stevens and co-coach Adam Oates continued to implement the systemic changes they are making from what the team did under DeBoer.

They've simplified their approach in the defensive zone and returned to playing more of a patient, tight-checking game in the neutral zone – which was a key in slowing down the Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin for most of Monday's game. They're also stressing carrying the puck into the offensive zone more.

"Pete is an outstanding coach. I owe that guy so much just for helping me get my confidence," Gomez said. "But, when a coach gets fired, you've got to change something. I've been in other situations where the guy gets fired and nothing changes. Then, what was the point? So, you've got to give someone a different look."

"It wasn't working and it (stinks) that one guy's got to take the fall, but we're all in this business and we know that. So, here's the new look."

With the changes going on, there's a lot of direction between the coaches and the players, but also between the players themselves.

"It was tough to do it with the way everything happened right after Christmas," Greene said. "We had basically eight hours until our first game (a 3-1 loss to the Rangers Saturday). They gave us as much information as possible and we tried to digest it. We did some good things in the Rangers' game and had another practice after that and another morning skate and we played a good game after that.

"We had another good practice today. So, you just build off it and guys get more comfortable and play well."

And Monday's victory provided proof that those changes can work.

"That's the way we've got to play," Gomez said. "We're kidding ourselves if we think that if we don't give that effort (they're going to win). Guys were taking the body. Guys were hitting. That's the way it's got to be. Hey, we've got to build on something and that's important, but we're not satisfied by any means.

"We know the task at hand. We've got to go in there tomorrow against a great team, but if we play like that that, that's the staple we need to show that that's what you're going to get every night and give ourselves our chance."

Posted by Tom Gulitti on 12/30 at 04:40 PM

<http://fireandice.northjersey.com/fire-ice-1.174987/devils-putting-in-the-hard-work-to-make-sure-turnaround-doesn-t-end-at-one-game-again-1.1183338>



Why didn't the Devils call Reid Boucher up from Albany (AHL)?

New Jersey Devils vs. Winnipeg Jets 10.30.14

Devils center Stephen Gionta (11) suffered a broken hand when he was hit by a shot during Monday night's game against the Pittsburgh Penguins. (Saed Hindash | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com By **Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com**

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on December 30, 2014 at 12:33 PM, updated December 30, 2014 at 1:58 PM

NEWARK — With Stephen Gionta out for an extended period with a broken hand, suffered when he blocked a Kris Letang shot during Monday night's game against the Pittsburgh Penguins, the **Devils** called up Mike Sislo from their Albany (AHL) affiliate.

Why didn't they call up Reid Boucher, who has started scoring goals and is looking more like the player the Devils expected when they drafted him 99th overall (the 4th round) in the 2011 NHL entry draft? Why Sislo?

"He's another penalty killer," GM/coach Lou Lamoriello explained. "With Gio out, he's killed a lot of penalties and also has been here. He has speed."

On Monday it was Joe Whitney and Stefan Matteau who got promoted. Not Boucher.

"He's got a couple of goals. We've got to get him playing consistently," Lamoriello said of Boucher. "We brought him up and down a couple times and maybe when he wasn't playing as well as he should have been.

"Right now Whitney, in that same role, is the best player there. So you've got to reward the players who are doing well. But there's no question he'll (Boucher) be an NHL player. He is scoring. He's playing better. Hopefully he gets himself back here quick."

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Martin Havlat, who practiced Tuesday after missing three games because of illness that was not the mumps, said he would make the trip but did not know if he would play.

"I was happy to be on the ice. I'm ready to go on the trip," Havlat said.

The veteran winger joked about the Devils' coaching change: "A few things have happened since I played my last game."

Cory Schneider will start in goal against the Red Wings.

As for Gionta, **there was no update** on how long he will be out.

"He's going to see the doctor tomorrow morning. They usually wait 24-48 hours," said Lamoriello, who pointed out: "We saw the X-ray."

Jacob Josefson, now on injured reserve, remains ill.

"He's still sick but there's no conclusion as to the mumps. Right now it looks like it's not," Lamoriello noted. "It's similar to what Havlat had. Hopefully that is the case. We don't know any more than that. He's dealing with the doctor every day."

The Devils will try to build on their 3-1 win over the Penguins.

"You have to dwell on the things that you did right and just sustain that. Then look at the things that didn't go right," Lamoriello said after watching practice from the bench.

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Did Martin Brodeur, former Devils goaltender, make his final start for the St. Louis Blues?

NHL: Colorado Avalanche at St. Louis Blues

Dec 29, 2014; St. Louis, MO, USA; St. Louis Blues goalie Martin Brodeur (30) makes a glove save against the Colorado Avalanche during the third period at Scottrade Center. The St. Louis Blues defeat the Colorado Avalanche 3-0. Mandatory Credit: Jasen Vinlove-USA TODAY Sports (*Jasen Vinlove*)

Charles Curtis | For NJ Advance Media By **Charles Curtis | For NJ Advance Media**

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on December 30, 2014 at 1:24 PM, updated December 30, 2014 at 2:16 PM

Former **Devils** netminder Martin Brodeur earned his 125th shutout of his incredible career on Monday night and his first for the St. Louis Blues.

But could it have been his final game for the Blues and, perhaps, the last contest in his NHL career?

Here's why we ask: Starting goaltender Brian Elliot is coming back from injury this week.

There's a crowded crease in St. Louis now that Brian Elliott has been activated from injured reserve.

— Chris Johnston (@reporterchris) **December 30, 2014**

That means the Blues likely have to choose if they want to hang on to Brodeur or Jake Allen, who was the starter while Elliott was out and who won 11 of his 19 games this season. You'd assume St. Louis would hang on to the younger player they drafted instead of the 42-year-old Brodeur, or the Blues can hang on to all three. There was some speculation the latter when the Blues waived forward Magnus Paajarvi on Monday.

Paajarvi on waivers likely means **#stlblues** will keep three goalies for the time being. Spot opens room to keep Brodeur when Elliott returns.

— Lou Korac (@lkorac10) **December 29, 2014**

Here's what Brodeur said after his shutout, **via the St. Louis Post-Dispatch**:

"I'm enjoying every moment of it. Whenever the decision will be made, hopefully I'll be the first to know and I'll be happy or disappointed one way or the other. It's been a great ride. If that's my last game, it's not a bad one to leave on."

We'll probably find out if his NHL career continues to be extended this week.

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Martin Havlat returns to practice with Devils; Mike Sislo recalled

New Jersey Devils vs. Philadelphia Flyers 10.9.14

Winger Martin Havlat was back on the ice with the Devils Tuesday after missing three games because of illness. (Saed Hindash | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com By **Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com**

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on December 30, 2014 at 11:42 AM, updated December 30, 2014 at 12:32 PM

NEWARK — Martin Havlat, who missed the last three games because of illness that turned out not to be the mumps, returned to practice with the Devils Tuesday at AmeriHealth Pavilion.

With center Stephen Gionta sidelined by **a broken hand**, the Devils recalled forward Mike Sislo from Albany (AHL). Sislo was given No. 34.

Gionta and Jacob Josefson (ill) were put on injured reserve. Gionta was put on IR retroactive to Dec. 29 and Josefson retroactive to Dec. 27.

Ryane Clowe (concussion) watched practice from the bench area.

The Devils, coming off a **3-1 victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins** Monday night at Prudential Center, face the Detroit Red Wings Wednesday night at Joe Louis Arena.

Devils GM/coach Lou Lamoriello watches practice from the bench. (Rich Chere/NJ Advance Media)

Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

Devils' practice lines:

Zubrus-Gomez-Jagr

Cammalleri-Zajac-Sislo

Ruutu-Henrique-Bernier

Matteau-Whitney-Havlat-Sestito-Tootoo

Defense:

Greene-Harrold

Merrill-Zidlicky

Gelinas-Larsson

Helgeson

Goalies:

Schneider

Kinkaid

GM/coach Lou Lamoriello watched practice from the bench. Scott Stevens, Adam Oates, Tommy Albelin, Mike Foligno and Chris Terreri were all on the ice.

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POLL: Who should be the Devils' next captain?

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Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com By **Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com**

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on December 30, 2014 at 9:00 AM, updated December 30, 2014 at 9:19 AM

NEWARK — **Devils** captain Bryce Salvador has missed 23 games with an undisclosed lower body injury.

The veteran defenseman watched the Devils' morning skate on Monday, but coach/GM Lou Lamoriello said Salvador is not yet ready to begin skating.

"Obviously we would love to have Sal here. We need Sal as a leader," alternate captain Andy Greene said. "At the same time, we have guys in this room that have been there and gone through certain things. Obviously Sal is a big part of this team and we miss him, but a lot of other guys have to step up and give their say."

Salvador is in the final season of his contract that pays him \$3.25 million. He will become an unrestricted free agent after this season and it seems unlikely the Devils will re-sign him at age 39.

So who should be the Devils' next captain?

Center Travis Zajac has worn an 'A' this season and forward Adam Henrique is viewed as a potential future captain. Henrique will be 25 in February. Zajac turns 30 in May.

While those are the top two candidates, there are others. Mike Cammalleri will have four more years remaining on his contract. He is a leader on the ice and respected in the dressing room.

And what about Greene? He has been a vital player for the Devils and has worn an 'A' as an alternate captain.

Patrik Elias isn't likely to want the captaincy, which was taken away from him by Brent Sutter.

Even if the Devils decided to bring Jaromir Jagr back for another season and he was receptive, he would not be in the running to be captain.

So to whom would you give the C?

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Devils' bizarre coaching experiment won't work for long, Jeremy Roenick predicts

Lou Lamoriello, Adam Oates, Scott Stevens

New Devils coaches Scott Stevens (left), Lou Lamoriello (center) and Adam Oates (right) confer during the third period of Monday night's 3-1 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins. (AP Photo/Bill Kostroun)

Randy Miller | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com By **Randy Miller | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com**

Email the author | Follow on Twitter

on December 30, 2014 at 8:30 AM, updated December 30, 2014 at 9:05 AM

PHOENIX — NBC Sports hockey analyst Jeremy Roenick is intrigued that the **Devils** are trying to save their dying season with a three-headed coaching monster.

Short-term, the former nine-time All-Star center thinks having **Lou Lamoriello, Adam Oates and Scott Stevens all calling the shots** could ignite better play from a club heavy on older veterans and light on impact players.

Long-term, Roenick sees this unusual experiment of having a Hall of Fame exec and **two Hall of Fame players** all in charge having no chance to be a success.

"You need one guy who's going to be the voice," Roenick told NJ.com on Monday in a phone interview from his home in San Diego. "You need one guy who is gonna take the heat for the losses, for the system. They need to get somebody in there to be the head man."

So far, the Devils have split two their first two games **since Pete DeBoer's firing last Friday** — the day after Christmas — led to Lamoriello coming up with an original replacement plan.

In addition to being team president and general manager, **Lamoriello now is behind the bench to oversee** his two new co-coaches who had Hall of Fame playing career — former defense great Stevens for the blueliners and once-upon-a-time playmaking center great Oates for the forwards.

"It's very unique without question," Roenick said. "If you look at the guys that they have behind the bench, if you wanted to try to jumpstart a hockey team and have a team wake up and maybe playing a little harder, I don't know if there are three better guys in that organization to do it."

NBC Sports hockey analyst Jeremy Roenick, celebrating a goal he scored playing for the Flyers in a 2204 playoff game, isn't a big fan of the Devils having three coaches. (AP Photo/Adrian Wyld)

Randy Miller | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

"You have Adam Oates, who has one of the best hockey minds and was one of best playmakers who saw the ice ... If you're one of the forwards, you should be listening to Adam Oates. If you're a defenseman, was there a

more intimidating and tougher player than Scott Stevens? So if I'm a defenseman, I'm listening to Scott Stevens. Then you have the big voice coming over in Lou. To me, it's actually not a bad idea, not a bad plan. But you have to get somebody in there as quickly as you can to try to bring everyone together and keep everything together."

What surprised Roenick most about this arrangement is Lamoriello, who previously had named himself head coach for 50 games in 2005-06 and three games in 2006-07, is doing it again with a twist at age 72.

"To me, it seems that Lou is trying to send a message to have a sense of urgency," Roenick said. "But there's always someone who is the head of the helm and I don't think Lou is the kind of guy who wants to be at the helm. Obviously, coaching is a very, very intense job. It's a very time-consuming job. Lou has other things that he needs to worry about rather than figuring out systems."

Lamoriello's biggest concern, Roenick suggests, should be building a better roster to give the Devils, who missed the playoffs two years in a row, a better shot at becoming a contender again.

"I don't think it's the coaching there that's the problem," Roenick said. "It's the roster, the players. They're too old. They're too old of a hockey team. **That's on Lou.**

"He's leaned on the same guys for so long that it's time to time to start changing up the players. And the scouting staff has to start doing a little better job scouting. But there's no question in my mind that Lou will straighten it out because he's been one of the best GMs for the longest time. He'll straighten it out."

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 **ESPN.com:** NHL

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ESPN

Tuesday, December 30, 2014

Stephen Gionta has broken hand

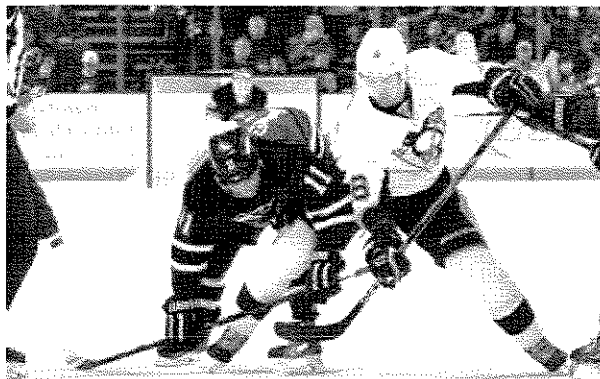
ESPN.com news services

New Jersey Devils center Stephen Gionta will be sidelined indefinitely after he suffered a broken hand against Pittsburgh on Monday night, coach Lou Lamoriello said.

Gionta suffered the injury while blocking a shot by Kris Letang during the second period of the Devils' 3-1 victory against the Penguins.

"He blocked a shot. Broken hand," Lamoriello told reporters after the game. "He'll see a specialist and then we'll determine what the results are. The X-rays showed a break."

Gionta, in his fifth season with New Jersey, has three goals and three assists this season. He has 32 points in 165 career games.



Stephen Gionta has three goals and three assists for the Devils this season.



MELROSE MINUTE

Melrose Minute: Restructured Devils at a crossroads

Tuesday, 12.30.2014 / 11:25 AM

By Barry Melrose - NHL Network Analyst / [Melrose Minute](#)

After a 3-1 win Monday against the Pittsburgh Penguins, I suppose you could say the New Jersey Devils' latest coaching experiment is off to a 1-1-0 start. It will be interesting to see what happens with the arrangement set up by general manager Lou Lamoriello, who brought on Scott Stevens and Adam Oates as defensive and offensive assistants, respectively, after firing coach Peter DeBoer on Friday. I've never really seen anything like this before, but I think if you look at the history of Lou, a guy who hasn't been afraid to make bold or unorthodox news, it's not that crazy.

Obviously, with Lamoriello himself on the bench, it's clear he's the ultimate authority now, and on some level that makes sense. The Devils are not a good team right now and they're at an organizational crossroads. Lamoriello needs to know which players to keep in the fold and build around and which ones should be sent off for draft picks at the trade deadline, and as he's said, there's no better place to find out about a player than on the bench. He's right on that point. You can't as easily learn about your player from the press box. You can't see what he's saying or how he responds in good times and bad times.

In many ways, this has Lou written all over it. DeBoer was an unusual hire in that he wasn't a regular part of the Devils family beforehand. Lamoriello hires guys he knows. Jacques Lemaire, Larry Robinson, John MacLean, Scott Stevens, Adam Oates, all of these guys have left the Devils and been brought back in. That should make Lou's job a little easier because at least in some terms, he knows the guys he's dealing with. What he has to decide now is where to take the team. Can they rebound and challenge for a playoff spot next season -- or even this season? Or with names like Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel floating around in the draft pool is it time for a full-on rebuild? Do the Devils want Kirk Muller? Or do they want Mario Lemieux?

JUNIORS MINTED

Speaking of McDavid and Eichel, if you haven't been watching the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship, you ought to do yourself a favor and tune in. Not only have Eichel and McDavid looked like everything we've heard so far, the games have just been awesome. The United States and Canada are each undefeated through three games, and with their impending showdown Wednesday (4 p.m. ET, NHLN-US, NHL.com) to determine the top team in Group A, this tournament will only get more interesting.

Obviously, junior hockey is much bigger in Canada than in the United States. The World Juniors is a major event north of the border every winter, but I always tell people the bang for the buck in junior hockey is unbelievable. In the NHL you're seeing the best players in the world, but if you don't live near a team or only have so much to spend, the juniors are great entertainment, and you're seeing players that are only a year or two away from the big time.

These really are the future Sidney Crosbys and Vladimir Tarasenkos of the world, and if you look at past World Junior rosters they're dotted with solid NHL players and major superstars. I remember the first World Junior tournament and how Canada got a lot of ink because of some kid on the team named Gretzky. It's a treat to see the stars before they're stars, and the action is unbelievable.

SHINING STARS


I know I've talked about the Dallas Stars a lot this year, about how great Tyler Seguin has been and about how the team has generally been a disappointment. If I'm going to heap criticism on them, though, I can't short-change them when times are good, and right now we're not giving enough love to the team in Texas. The Stars are finally becoming the team we envisioned at the start of the year.

Obviously, Seguin is still great, but now they're getting great goaltending, the defense has cut opponent scoring down and they're still very exciting to watch. On Saturday they really took it to a very good St. Louis Blues team. Two nights later all they did was defeat the New York Rangers, who were the hottest team in the League on an eight-game winning streak. Overall Dallas is 7-2-0 in its past nine games.

The one drawback is Dallas' poor start may already have doomed it. The Stars dropped a lot of important points in the standings in the first third of the season, and that could come back to bite them. This is a team that made the Stanley Cup Playoffs last season and looked good doing it. Then they added a player like Jason Spezza. I think many of us expected a little more than we've gotten, and that may mean in the tough Western Conference Dallas won't get enough struggling teams above it to crack the top eight. All the Stars can do right now, though, is win, and that's

what they're doing. I think this team is finally showing us who they really are. We'll just have to see if there's any time left in the hourglass.

Red Wings try to build intensity in practice after loss

 By George Sipple, Detroit Free Press 2:26 p.m. EST December 30, 2014

Also, defenseman Xavier Ouellet called up to fill in for injured Jakub Kindl



(Photo: Rick Osentoski, USA TODAY Sports)

The Detroit Red Wings haven't competed hard enough over the past two games, so they prepared for a tough practice at Joe Louis Arena today.

"Today, we tried to get after it a little bit, (get) the intensity up and get working," said defenseman Jonathan Ericsson.

The Wings didn't work hard enough from the start Monday night [in Boston and went on to lose, 5-2 \(/story/sports/nhl/red-wings/2014/12/29/detroit-red-wings-bruins/21022587/\)](#) against the Bruins. Coach Mike Babcock also wasn't happy with the way the team performed in a 3-2 overtime win over the Senators on Sunday.

"We're trying, and everyone is preparing themselves before the game," Ericsson said.

Defenseman Kyle Quincey said "compete level" is one thing any team can control.

"Some teams are more skilled than you, some teams maybe have better goaltending on separate nights, but you can compete always as hard or harder than each team," Quincey said. "That's the one thing we can control and that was the message today."

Was it a more intense practice than usual?

"Oh yeah," Quincey said. "Just more intense and the message was clear. Our compete level has to be better."



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[Riley Sheahan's growth a boon for Detroit Red Wings](#)

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Quincey said slow starts have been a concern and "that's an emphasis going into" Wednesday's game against the New Jersey Devils. He said the team isn't worried.

"We know we have to be better," Quincey said. "The message today -- if that sinks in, we'll be fine."

Babcock said the Wings can't seem to get started on the road.

"It's not good enough to be unprepared to do your job," Babcock said after Tuesday's practice.

There are times during a season where teams get complacent.

"It happens every year, but the reality is you can't cheat the system," Babcock said. "It's consistent. Life is exactly the same thing.

"All you have to do is look around at your profession. You know who does their job every day and does it well and who is cheating the system. In our league, what they do is they post standings when you cheat the system. You end up with lots of Ls."

NOTEBOOK: Babcock called New Jersey Devils forward Jaromir Jagr "the modern day Gordie Howe." Jagr, who turns 43 on Feb. 15, has 21 points for the Devils. ... Babcock said defenseman Xavier Ouellet will be called up from Grand Rapids and will be in the lineup against the Devils. Jakub Kindl was injured during Sunday's practice and is going on injured reserve. ... Goaltender Jonas Gustavsson (shoulder) took part in the team practice on Tuesday but it's unclear when he'll be able to play in the game.

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Riley Sheahan's growth a boon for Detroit Red Wings

By Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press 12:44 a.m. EST December 30, 2014



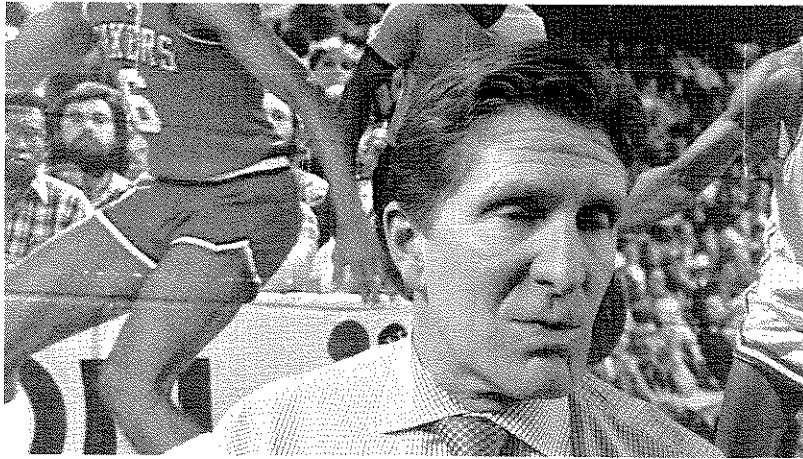
(Photo: Paul Sancya AP)

BOSTON — Half a year after he held his own against Bruins center David Krejci in the playoffs, Riley Sheahan has afforded all sorts of benefits for the Red Wings.

He provided a screen that helped Tomas Tatar score in Monday's otherwise stinker of a 5-2 loss to the Bruins at TD Garden.

Sheahan's growth, coupled with a healthy Darren Helm and a steadfast Luke Glendening, has made it possible, for one, to play Henrik Zetterberg and Pavel Datsyuk together. Then there's the fact coach Mike Babcock is comfortable playing Sheahan against the opponent's best center, which makes rolling four lines that much easier. Plus there's Sheahan's size — at 6-foot-3, 220-plus pounds, he is the team's biggest middle man.

Add that up, and "what he has is, he has a skill set, he can make plays, he's a big body, he's intelligent defensively," Babcock said Monday. "Does he have enough pace to be a second-line center in the NHL every day? We'll find out."



Mike Babcock is upset after 5-2 loss to Bruins. Video by Helene St. James/DFP

Sheahan, 23, has been a factor since joining the Wings halfway through last season, arriving from the minors to man one of the many spots opened by injuries to regulars. With Zetterberg ailing as the playoffs began, Sheahan emerged as the second-line center, and while he had no points in the five-game series against Boston, counterpart Krejci had just two assists.

That Sheahan checked Krejci is no surprise to teammates, because "he's strong on the puck, he can make plays, he just does so many things well," Justin Abdelkader said. "I think he was counted on more in Grand Rapids and at Notre Dame to play as a defensive forward, and now he's kind of brought his offensive game, and he's grown into that role, where he can play any way you want. It's really good to see."

Sheahan had 17 points after 36 games, proof that, whereas last season he was extra cautious not to get scored on, this year there's confidence to do more.

"I think I've done a good job using my body," Sheahan said, "but I can still do more in holding onto the puck a little more, and try to make plays. That's one thing I need to focus more on, and maybe a few tweaks in my skating, moving side to side and crossing over, a quick first step, that kind of stuff."

Sheahan's determination hasn't gone unnoticed by fellow big forward Johan Franzen. "The last few weeks," Franzen said, "I've seen a lot more breakaway speed, like he's been attacking the last defenseman and getting around him and creating really good opportunities for himself. So he's been doing really good."

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Wings endure hard practice after weak effort in Boston



Ted Kulfan, The Detroit News

6:18 a.m. EST December 31, 2014



(Photo: Charles Krupa / Associated Press)

Detroit — They were expecting to have a lively, spirited practice after Monday's loss and the Red Wings got what they expected.

The word most often used was "intense," with a lot of skating and a few compete drills, all to get across the message that the effort displayed in the last two games, but particularly Monday's 5-2 loss in Boston, wasn't acceptable.

"The message was clear," Kyle Quincey said. "The compete level has to be better."

The Red Wings have an opportunity to demonstrate the message has gotten across tonight when the New Jersey Devils visit for the traditional New Year's Eve game at Joe Louis Arena.

"It happens during the course of a year and you have to just make sure that those (stretches) are short," Henrik Zetterberg said. "We've had a few games here where we haven't been happy with the way we've performed. The good thing is we have a chance to make it better."

Zetterberg was adamant in saying the team understands what needs to be fixed.

"We know we're good when we do the right stuff," Zetterberg said "We just have to go out and execute. When you execute it's a lot easier to be in the right spots and it's easier to work.

"I don't think we've tried to make a big deal out of it. You don't want to overthink and overpanic."

A good start might go a long way to addressing the problems the Red Wings have had.

The Red Wings haven't been pleased with the starts to the last three games, although they won the first two, the second primarily because of Jimmy Howard's goaltending.

But in Boston, a poor start put the Wings into a hole they never fully climbed out of.

"It's not good enough to be unprepared to do your job," coach Mike Babcock said. "The reality is you can't cheat the system."

Babcock singled out himself, the coaching staff, and the leadership group for not doing enough in Boston, and needing to get the Red Wings more prepared than they've been recently.

"No one was happy about how we started the game (in Boston), and in Ottawa," Zetterberg said. "It's tough to win games in this league if you're having those type of starts. We have to be better prepared in here and be ready for games. Not start playing after 20 or 30 minutes.

"We worked ourself into the game the second half of the (game in Boston). We played good. It was just the start that has to be better."

Devilish scheme

New Jersey arrives with a newly-minted three-headed coaching staff, headed by general manager **Lou Lamoriello**, who is temporarily overseeing co-coaches **Adam Oates** and **Scott Stevens**.

The unique structure was implemented after Lamorello fired former Plymouth Whalers coach **Pete DeBoer** on Friday after the Devils had struggled to 13th in the Eastern Conference.

Babcock feels the Devils have the people in charge to turn things around.

"Lou is looking after the program as he always has," Babcock said. "He's been one of the great general managers for a long, long time. He obviously wasn't happy with how things were going."

To stop the Devils, Babcock thinks it's vital to contain forward **Jaromir Jagr**, 42, who continues to defy age (21 points, 15 assists).

"Modern day **Gordie Howe**," Babcock said. "It's the truth. He's still an unbelievable player at the age he's at."

Personnel update

Jakub Kindl (sprained elbow) was placed on the short-term, seven-day injured list and **Xavier Ouellet** was recalled from Grand Rapids. Babcock said Ouellet, who has one goal and one assist in nine games this season with the Red Wings, with a plus-3 rating, would be dressed against the Devils.

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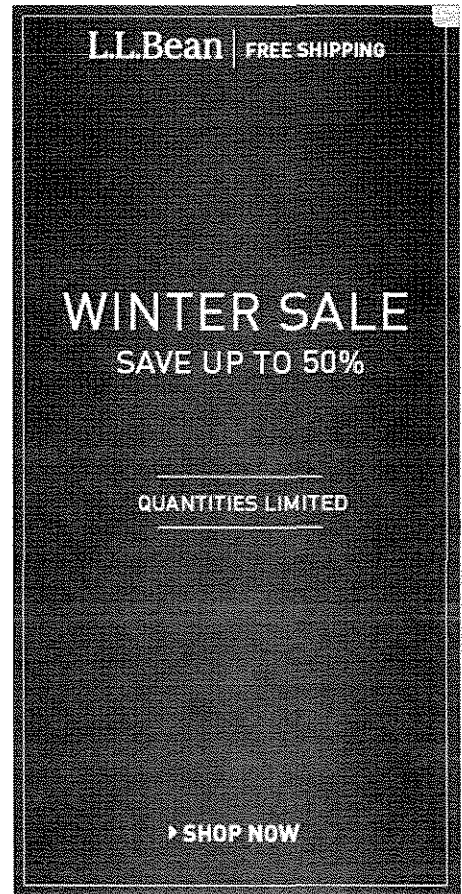
Devils at Red Wings

Faceoff: 7:30 Wednesday, Joe Louis Arena, Detroit

TV/radio: FSD/97.1

Outlook: The Red Wings won the previous meeting in a shootout. ... The Devils are 2-5-3 in their last 10 games, forcing the ouster of coach **Pete DeBoer**. ... One bright spot is the power play, which ranks eighth in the league.

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Wings outgunned by ornery Bruins in 5-2 loss



Ted Kuffan, The Detroit News

5:57 a.m. EST December 30, 2014



(Photo: Charles Krupa / Associated Press)

Boston — That's two times this season now the Red Wings have had the misfortune of playing Boston after the Bruins suffered tough losses the game before.

Each time, the Red Wings have been on the losing side. Monday it was 5-2.

The Bruins were coming off being embarrassed 6-2 in Columbus Saturday and looked in this game like a team intent on wiping that loss out of their memory.

They surely were, while the Red Wings started off poorly for the third consecutive game and never could fully recover.

"They won all the battles and competed way harder," coach Mike Babcock said. "This road trip Howie (goalie Jimmy Howard) kept us in the game and gave us a chance in Ottawa (Red Wings rallying for a 3-2 overtime win) and kept us in the game (Monday).

"As a group and coaching staff you pride yourself on having your team ready — no good. Leadership group — no good. Individually, not good enough.

"It's really simple for me. Either you're working in the game or practice. We'll work. That is unacceptable."

Never mind the Bruins were without star forwards Patrice Bergeron and Milan Lucic, both out with undisclosed injuries.

The Bruins were the better team for most of the evening, in what was a disappointing Red Wings loss, allowing the Bruins a season-high 45 shots on net.

"We didn't play well enough," said Niklas Kronwall. "We kept losing battles and if you keep doing that, you're not going to touch the puck. Once we did have the puck, we didn't execute.

"There was a lot of chasing."

The Red Wings (19-9-9, 47 points) saw their modest two-game win streak end, while the Bruins (19-15-3, 41 points) crept closer to the leaders in the Atlantic Division race.

Seth Griffith's power-play goal in the third period restored a two-goal Bruins lead.

Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara got control of the puck near the boards and fed David Krejci, who drew the Red Wings to him while carrying the puck to the edge of the circle.

Krejci found Griffith near the slot, and he created a bit, then snapped a shot from the circle past Howard for his sixth goal, at 5:11.

An empty-net goal by Chris Kelly at 17:34 clinched things.

"We just didn't have it going from the start," Howard said. "None of us, myself included. We knew they were going to come out hard, and they won every battle in front of the net.

"No surprise what the score was."

Justin Abdelkaer and Tomas Tatar (power play) scored Red Wings goals.

Gregory Campbell and Carl Soderberg scored late first-period goals for Boston to snap a 1-1 tie.

On a delayed penalty, the Bruins took control of the puck in the Red Wings zone and got the puck to Torey Krug (Livonia/Michigan State) on the point.

Krug unleashed a shot that Howard stopped, but the Bruins maintained control around the crease. Finally, Campbell put back the rebound, giving the Bruins a 2-1 lead.

It didn't take long for the Bruins to make it 3-1.

Only 1:13 after Campbell scored Eriksson slipped past Brendan Smith behind the net to get the puck, and found Soderberg alone in front, who had gotten past Brian Lashoff. Soderberg slid the puck past Howard for his seventh goal, at 17:25.

The Red Wings thought they had a goal late in the first period from Tatar, but video determined it was no goal, his stick deflecting the puck above the height of the crossbar.

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Ex-Wolverine Luke Glendening endorses Jim Harbaugh hire



Ted Kulfan, The Detroit News

1:30 a.m. EST December 30, 2014



(Photo: David Guralnick / Detroit News)

Boston — Jim Harbaugh's anticipated arrival at Michigan is dominating the sports news back home, as well as in the Red Wings' locker room at TD Garden.

Former Wolverine Luke Glendening thinks it was the perfect hire.

"It's exciting for them to get a Michigan guy in there," said Glendening, who hasn't had many opportunities to brag about college football, with Michigan State alums Justin Abdelkader and Drew Miller as teammates. "Brady Hoke, I thought he did a good job when he was there; he's a great man, that's for sure. But things didn't work out."

Glendening was in the U-M hockey program from 2008-12 and was an avid football fan, attending "as many games as I could in the beginning of the season.

"They were always fun to watch and the crowds are great," Glendening said. "I'm sure this will (sustain that type of atmosphere)."

Most Wolverines fans had Harbaugh as their only choice to coach the team, largely because of his background at the school, and his success in turning around both college and NFL programs.

The hope among Wolverines fans, like Glendening, is that Harbaugh will do the same in Ann Arbor.

"His experience in the NFL is huge," Glendening said. "I don't know a ton about football but I think he'll do a great job."

Banged up Bruins

The Boston Bruins are going through the exact same thing the Red Wings endured last season.

The Bruins have been struck with injuries all season, and Monday they found out they'll be without forwards Patrice Bergeron and Milan Lucic against the Red Wings.

Defensemen Zdeno Chara and Adam McQuaid, and forwards David Krejci and Brad Marchand, are other key Bruins who've missed varying amounts of time, Chara and Krejci being significant losses.

"It's tough, it's one of those things you have to fight through adversity," Brendan Smith said. "We went through it last year and know how it felt.

"We started beating teams and finding our identity late in the year. We scratched and clawed for wins and they'll do the same. It's tough to lose guys like that (Bergeron, Lucic), especially your big boys, but at the end of the day you can't take anyone lightly."

Ice chips

Jakub Kindl (upper body) is out for Monday night's game, with Brian Lashoff back in the lineup. Kindl hurt himself during Sunday's practice.

... Bruins coach Claude Julien feels there is a budding rivalry between the teams since the Red Wings were placed in the Eastern Conference.

"We always have good games against each other and they're not dirty games," Julien said. "They're hard games. Again, they're for the most part close games. There's no doubt that there's mutual respect that exists between both teams and I feel there's a rivalry, maybe not our top rivalry, but there's a rivalry there for sure."

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Detroit Red Wings increase intensity in practice following consecutive poor performances

Justin Abdelkader 12-29-14

Boston Bruins defenseman Matt Bartkowski tries to clear Red Wings forward Justin Abdelkader from the crease. *(The Associated Press)*

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

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on December 30, 2014 at 6:31 PM, updated December 30, 2014 at 7:23 PM

"I wouldn't say we're worried; we have to be better. I think if today's message sinks in we'll be fine." -- Kyle Quincey

DETROIT - The Detroit Red Wings were prepared for a more intense practice on Tuesday, a day after coach Mike Babcock criticized their compete level and work ethic in a 5-2 loss to the Boston Bruins.

Team captain Henrik Zetterberg called it a good, fun practice.

"A lot of energy and a lot of skating," Zetterberg said. "You need that sometimes just to hit the restart button."

The Red Wings need to regroup. They've played catch-up hockey the past three games (leading for only 8:20 during that stretch). They showed little spark in Saturday's 3-2 overtime victory at Ottawa, which goaltender Jimmy Howard essentially stole. And Babcock referred to Monday's performance as a big-time disappointment.

"We can't seem to get started on the road at all," Babcock said. "That responsibility lies with me but also with our leadership group and our whole room. It's not good enough to be unprepared to do your job."

Said defenseman Kyle Quincey: "Some teams are more skilled than you and other teams maybe have better goaltending on certain nights, but you can compete as hard or harder than the other team. That was the message today."

The Red Wings close out the calendar year Wednesday against the New Jersey Devils at Joe Louis Arena, renewing their traditional New Year's Eve game that didn't take place the past two seasons due to the lockout and the Winter Classic.

At 19-9-9, Detroit is only three points behind the Eastern Conference-leading Tampa Bay Lightning, so this is far from a crisis.

Still, the slow starts and lack of urgency doesn't sit well with Babcock. He wants his team to do a better job

boxing out at their net and attacking the opposition's net while winning more races and battles for the puck.

"I think it happens every year, but the reality is you can't cheat the system," Babcock said. "When you cheat the system you end up with lots of L's. So it's straightforward, we've got to be way better."

Zetterberg termed it more of a challenge than a concern. He said the leadership group is trying not to make a big deal out of it. It happens over the course of a season.

"You don't want to over-think and over-panic," Zetterberg said. "We know we're good when we do the right stuff. We just got to execute. When you execute it's easier to be in the right spot and when you're in the right spot it's easier to work. So it's not just that you have to skate, you have to use your brain, too."

Said defenseman Jonathan Ericsson: "It's not from lack of preparation, physically or mentally, because everyone is doing more (to prepare) now than in the past."

It's not just a matter of working harder, they must execute better.

"Once we have the puck, where does the puck end up after that?" Zetterberg said. "A lot of times we have the puck and all of a sudden they have the puck. That creates momentum for them and spending a lot of time in our own end. It just takes a lot of energy out of us."

They're going to need a lot of energy over the next two months, with 17 out of 23 games on the road starting Saturday at Vancouver.

"We know what's coming up here," Zetterberg said. "We have a tough stretch with a lot of road games and we have to be better if we want to be in the race."

The team is confident in its abilities.

"I wouldn't say we're worried; we have to be better," Quincey said. "I think if today's message sinks in we'll be fine."

Gustavsson practices, no time frame

Goaltender Jonas Gustavsson on Tuesday practiced with the team for the first time since suffering a dislocated shoulder on Nov. 5.

Gustavsson, who's been on the ice for a few weeks, working out before and after practices, had no specific time frame for his return, saying he's week to week.

"I still have some work to do on the shoulder," Gustavsson said. "This is the first time I actually took part in some drills. Even though it was a few shots it was still fun to be part of the team practice for a little bit."

He added, "I know the last part of it is supposed to be the longest, that's when the healing process slows down a little bit. I feel like I'm getting stronger, but I don't feel I'm where I want to be with my range of motion."

Jagr: Modern Day Gordie

Babcock paid quite a compliment to Jaromir Jagr, who might be making his final appearance at Joe Louis Arena Wednesday with the Devils.

"They've got the modern day Gordie Howe in Jagr on their team," Babcock said. "It's the truth, he's still an unbelievable player at the age he's at."

Jagr, 42, is tied for the team lead with 21 points (including six goals). He's likely to be dealt before the March 2 trade deadline, since the Devils are going nowhere.

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Red Wings recall defenseman Xavier Ouellet, place Jakub Kindl (sprained elbow) on short-term IR

Red Wings vs. Philadelphia Flyers 11-26-14

Defenseman Xavier Ouellet, defending Philadelphia Flyers right wing Wayne Simmonds, has a plus-3 rating with Detroit this season. (*The Associated Press*)

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By **Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com**

Follow on Twitter

on December 30, 2014 at 1:38 PM, updated December 30, 2014 at 2:04 PM

DETROIT -- The Detroit Red Wings have recalled defenseman Xavier Ouellet from the Grand Rapids Griffins and placed Jakub Kindl on short-term injured reserve with a sprained elbow.

Ouellet will be in the lineup Wednesday against the New Jersey Devils at Joe Louis Arena (7:30 p.m., Fox Sports Detroit) and will accompany the team on its three-game road trip to Western Canada that starts Saturday in Vancouver.

Ouellet, a good puck-mover who's solid defensively, has appeared in nine games for the Red Wings this season (one goal, one assist, plus-3 rating). He's not in Detroit permanently due to the lack of a roster spot when everyone is healthy.

Kindl injured his elbow in practice Sunday. He was on the ice today before practice, testing it.

The Red Wings went through a short (35 minutes) but high-paced and intense practice today. The message from coach Mike Babcock was they didn't work hard enough during what he labeled **an embarrassing 5-2 loss to the Boston Bruins** Monday at TD Garden.

Here are the lines and defense pairs they skated with:

Henrik Zetterberg-Pavel Datsyuk-Justin Abdelkader

Tomas Tatar-Riley Sheahan-Tomas Jurco

Johan Franzen-Darren Helm-Gustav Nyquist

Drew Miller-Luke Glendening-Stephen Weiss

Joakim Andersson and Daniel Cleary rotated in.

On defense:

Jonathan Ericsson-Niklas Kronwall

Danny DeKeyser-Kyle Quincey

Brendan Smith-Brian Lashoff

In goal:

Jimmy Howard

Petr Mrazek

Jonas Gustavsson

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Red Wings' Mike Babcock vows team will work harder after getting embarrassed by Bruins

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on December 30, 2014 at 1:01 AM, updated December 30, 2014 at 9:39 AM

"We're grown men; we should know how to prepare. We got to be better than this. Not good." -- Mike Babcock

BOSTON - The Boston Bruins were depleted by injuries and have been scuffling the past month. They were whipped in their previous game and were bound to battle back with a better effort at home Monday.

The Detroit Red Wings knew this and vowed to be prepared and start on time.

Instead, they were flat from the start and chased the puck most of the night, resulting in what coach Mike Babcock described as an embarrassing, ridiculous and unacceptable performance **in a 5-2 loss at TD Garden.**

The Red Wings (19-9-9) yielded season highs in goals and shots (45).

"As a group and as a coaching staff we pride ourselves in preparation and having our team ready," Babcock said.

"No good. Leadership group, no good. Individually, no good. Not good enough. No way. It's real simple for me: You're either going to work in the games or you're going to work in practice, but we're going to work. That is unacceptable."

It sounds like they will have an interesting practice Tuesday at Joe Louis Arena as they prepare to host the New Jersey Devils on Wednesday.

"It's like anything; if you're humbled and embarrassed by the way you play you do something about it," Babcock said. "I can tell you I am, because that's ridiculous."

The Bruins, coming off a 6-2 loss Saturday in Columbus and missing two key forwards, Patrice Bergeron and Milan Lucic, jumped all over the Red Wings in the first period, outshooting them 19-12 and taking a 3-1 lead.

"We just didn't have it going from the beginning, none of us, myself included," Red Wings goaltender Jimmy Howard said. "I'm more than capable of stealing a game for the team and carrying that workload, but tonight just wasn't meant to be.

"We knew they were going to be angry, the way they got handled the other night in Columbus. Everyone was

talking around here in Boston that they were going to come at us hard and they won every battle in front of the net, theirs and ours. It's no surprise what the score was."

The score would have been much worse if not for Howard.

"He can't be standing on his head every night," Niklas Kronwall said. "I thought he couldn't do much more than he did. He kept us in the game long enough. I thought Howie was outstanding again tonight. The rest of us got to be better than that."

The Red Wings hung around for a while in a bid to win their third game in a row when trailing after two periods. They had some good chances to tie it early in the third period before Seth Griffith's power-play goal at 5:11 gave Boston a 4-2 lead and basically squashed the comeback bid. Chris Kelly's empty-net goal with 2:26 remaining sealed it.

"You can't play catch-up hockey, it's ridiculous," Babcock said. "We're grown men; we should know how to prepare. We got to be better than this. Not good."

Tomas Tatar's power-play goal at 15:10 of the second cut Boston's lead to 3-2.

"I think we worked ourselves into the game," Red Wings captain Henrik Zetterberg said. "The second half of this game we played OK, but the hole was a little too big tonight."

The Bruins put the Red Wings on their heels immediately after the opening faceoff. Reilly Smith scored at 2:44.

The Red Wings tied it at 11:21 on Justin Abdelkader's no-look backhand shot past Tuukka Rask.

But the Bruins re-established control by getting goals from Gregory Campbell at 16:12 and Carl Soderberg at 17:25.

"They won all the battles, all the races, they competed way harder than us," Babcock said. "Howie kept us in the game and gave us a chance in Ottawa (Saturday). Howie kept us in the game when we were down one goal in the third tonight."

Babcock said his team knew it was "going to have a tiger by the tail" and had to compete hard. But they didn't do it.

"With our structure the way it is, if we don't have puck pressure they're going to end up doing that to you," Babcock said. "So if we're not going to work hard, we got to change the way we play. But I think what we'll do is we'll choose to work hard."

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Bruins 5, Red Wings 2: Injury-depleted Boston applies heavy pressure on Detroit, Jimmy Howard

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on December 29, 2014 at 9:43 PM, updated December 30, 2014 at 2:46 AM

BOSTON - The Detroit Red Wings had won two games in a row when trailing after two periods.

But playing catch-up hockey finally caught up to the Red Wings on Monday. They were flat early and couldn't fully recover, losing 5-2 to the depleted Boston Bruins at TD Garden.

Despite missing key injured forwards Patrice Bergeron and Milan Lucic, the Bruins applied a lot of pressure in the offensive zone and put 45 shots on goal, including 19 in a dominant first period.

Justin Abdelkader and Tomas Tatar scored for the Red Wings, who fell to 19-9-9. The Bruins improved to 19-15-3.

Trailing 3-2, the Red Wings had some good opportunities to tie it in the first few minutes of the third period. But a hooking penalty to Brian Lashoff proved costly as Seth Griffith scored on the power play at 5:11 to give the Bruins a two-goal cushion. Griffith took a pass from David Krejci and fired a shot from the faceoff circle that beat Jimmy Howard high on the glove side.

The Red Wings registered no shots during a power play with five minutes remaining. Chris Kelly scored into an empty net with 2:26 to play to seal the win.

Tuukka Rask made 28 saves for the Bruins, who rebounded after a 6-2 loss at Columbus on Saturday.

After being dominated in the first period, the Red Wings pushed back a little in the second, outshooting Boston 12-11.

They scored the only goal of the period, from Tatar on the power play at 15:10. It was his 15th goal, tying him for the team lead with Gustav Nyquist.

The Bruins outskated and outworked the Red Wings by a wide margin in the first period. They were hard to handle around the net, outshooting the Red Wings 19-12 to take a 3-1 lead.

Boston scored twice in a span of 1:13 to snap a 1-1 tie.

Gregory Campbell banged in a rebound at 16:12 during a delayed penalty on Tomas Jurco. The Bruins did a good job of maintaining possession in the offensive zone. At one point, Carl Soderberg, lying flat on the ice, poked the puck to Torey Krug to keep the play alive.

Soderberg made it 3-1 at 17:25. Loui Eriksson grabbed the rebound of a shot by Kevan Miller behind the net and passed to Soderberg on the other side, who fired it in before Howard could get across.

The Red Wings thought they had cut the lead to 3-2 on a goal by Tatar with 1:02 to play. The referees initially signaled a goal but reversed their call after huddling.

The play was reviewed by the league office, where officials determined that Tatar's stick was above the height of the crossbar when he made contact with the puck, after a fluttering shot from Niklas Kronwall.

The Red Wings appeared to get their legs back when Abdelkader scored on a no-look backhand shot at 11:21 to tie it at 1-1. It was his ninth goal. The Red Wings were 7-0-0 coming into the game when Abdelkader scores.

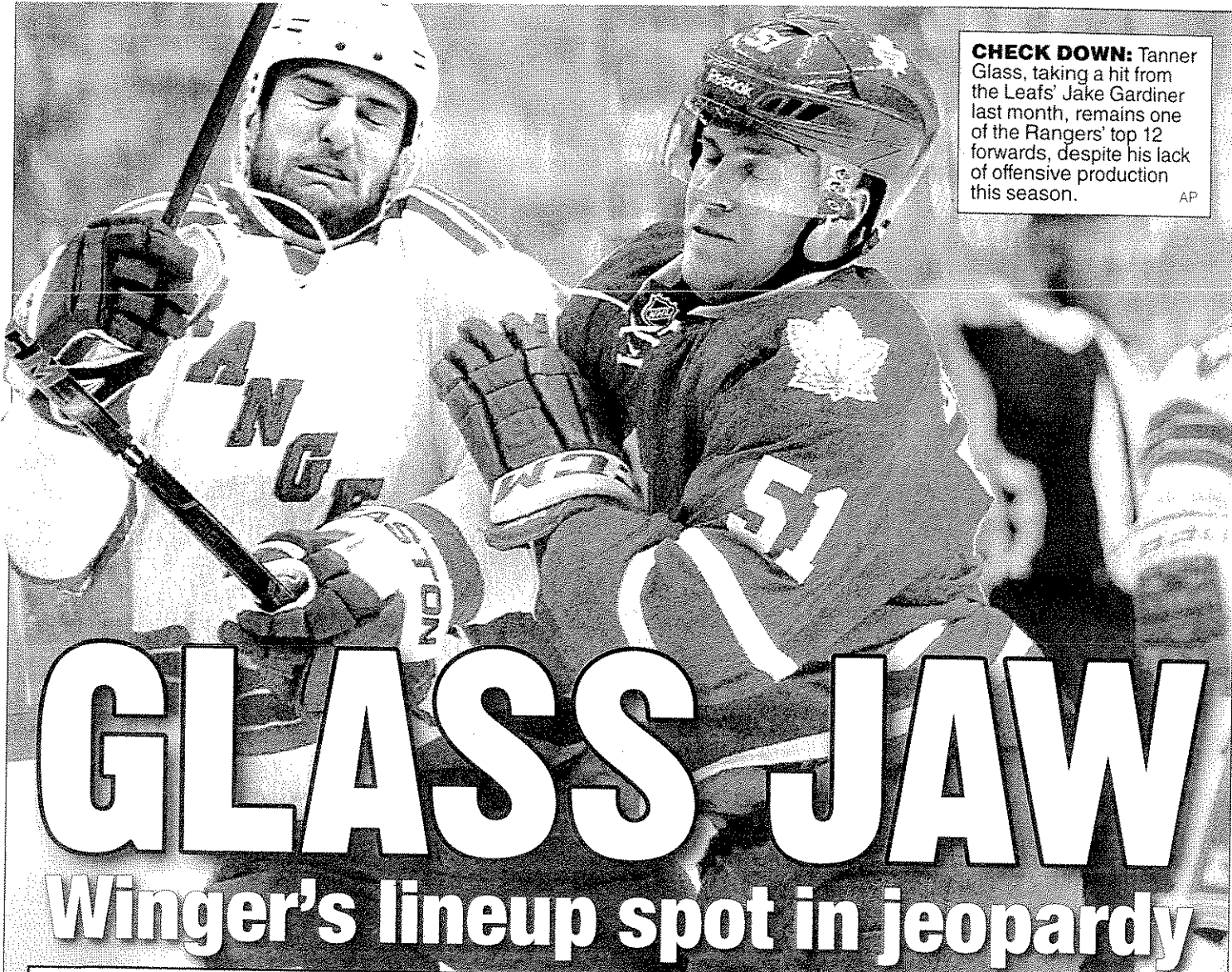
Reilly Smith had opened the scoring at 2:44 on a blast from the point through a screen. Dougie Hamilton's work behind the net enabled him to get the puck to Smith.

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CHECK DOWN: Tanner Glass, taking a hit from the Leafs' Jake Gardiner last month, remains one of the Rangers' top 12 forwards, despite his lack of offensive production this season. AP



GLASS JAW

Winger's lineup spot in jeopardy

By BRETT CYRGALLIS

FARMERS BRANCH, Texas — "I knew it was coming eventually," Tanner Glass said, a tired smile across his face.

What the Rangers' rugged forward knew was the questions about his place in the lineup were inevitable, and all the more pressing after a game like Monday night, when he took two bad penalties en route to a 3-2 loss to the Stars in Dallas that ended the Blueshirts' eight-game winning streak.

"If you're having up-and-down games, and your play starts to have waves to it, ebbs and flows, then you've put yourself in danger of coming out of the lineup," Glass said after Tuesday's practice. "So you try to be consistent, try to make yourself useful to the team every night. But when you have a night like [Monday] night, when I probably hurt the team more than I helped, it's not a lot of fun."

It would still be somewhat surprising if Glass weren't in the lineup for Wednesday's game against the Panthers in Sunrise, Fla., the Rangers' annual New

Year's Eve visit there. For one reason or another, coach Alain Vigneault has seemingly set aside roster spots for Glass and veteran Lee Stempniak, even if he's not willing to concede that's the case.

"I would say [Glass] brings an element of physicality that we don't have a lot of," Vigneault said when asked a direct question about Glass' role on the team. "Like what I said about Lee, he's got to earn his regular spot on the team, like anybody else."

It's true Glass is one of the few physical players on the Rangers (19-11-4), an element of their game that seems to be lacking. Although Monday's game got chippy at times, the Blueshirts recorded only 15 total hits, the team-leader being 5-foot-5 Mats Zuccarello.

So both Glass and Vigneault have found ways to quantify the player's worth, which is another way of bringing eyes away from

his stat line of zero goals, one assist, and a team-worst (by far) minus-12 rating through 29 games.

"For me, I measure my game on different things than goals, assists and even plus-minus, but it's easy to say that when you have a few numbers," Glass said. "When I look at my season so far, it's

tough to ignore the zero goals, minus-double-digits now. But at the same time, I try not to focus on that stuff, and be positive. And I do know

that I impact that game in other ways that other guys don't."

So the rotating lineup spot has seemingly come down to J.T. Miller and Jesper Fast, and is a battle for the role of right wing on the fourth line. With Miller, Vigneault has a mercurial talent. In Fast, he has a player who is defensively responsible and offensively absent.

To choose between them, and then Glass and Stempniak — not

to mention when and if Anthony Duclair comes back from World Juniors — is the puzzle the coach deals with every night.

"There is a tough balancing act there that you have to do," Vigneault said. "The most important thing at that time is that game, and those two points that are up for grabs. But also, when you look at the big picture and the 82 games and the decisions you make and where a player is now and where a player might be, that might improve your team."

"So those are the balancing acts that you have to do. The roles that players have on the team, also, and who are you playing against? Do you need a more skilled lineup, do you need a quicker lineup, a grittier lineup? That's what you try to do. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't."

Glass, 31, came in on a three-year, \$4.35 million deal, and he knows his performance is starting to muddy the immediate evaluation of his signing.

"I've been in this role for seven years now," Glass said. "It's part of the job."

bcyrgalls@nypost.com

Wednesday
RANGERS
AT PANTHERS
 6 p.m.
 MSG2
 WOR
 (710 AM)

Gimpy Girardi may sit

By BRETT CYRGALIS

FARMERS BRANCH, Texas — Dan Girardi seemed fine late Monday night, not so much Tuesday afternoon.

The Rangers defenseman had taken a puck to the ankle during the 3-2 loss to the Stars in Dallas, and he finished the game without missing a shift. Afterward, he was bruised but said he felt OK.

RANGERS NOTES

He then was the only player to miss Tuesday's practice, limping badly. Even though he said it was "all good," his status for Wednesday against the Panthers in Sunrise, Fla., is in question.

"Tough for me to give you a percentage," coach Alain Vigneault said. "Game-time decision. His ankle is a little swollen from that shot. So we'll see how he reacts overnight, and to the flight. Our training staff is pretty positive that he'll be able to go and so is he, so we'll see how he is [Wednesday] morning."

➤ Vigneault said **Henrik Lundqvist** will get the start in nets, his fourth start in a row and ninth in the past 10 games. He had his personal seven-game winning streak snapped on Monday, while the Rangers' eight-game winning streak was broken.

➤ Maybe captain **Ryan McDonagh** isn't playing up to his standard on a nightly basis, but he said it wasn't because of any lingering physical issue.

Having missed 11 games earlier in the season due to a separated shoulder, McDonagh was asked if he were dealing with any pain.

"No," he answered. Asked if he were dealing with any bumps and bruises, like most players are at this time of year, he said, "No, I'm feeling good."

➤ Defenseman **John Moore** played his second straight game Monday after being a healthy scratch for the previous four. Vigneault wasn't exactly enamored with his performance.

"Sometimes the decisions Johnny makes — some led to Grade-A opportunities for us, and the counter side to that was some decisions with the puck led to some Grade-A opportunities for them," Vigneault said. "So you saw the mix of both worlds."



NHL awards watch: Is Rangers' Rick Nash a legitimate MVP candidate?

St Louis Blues v New York Rangers

Left winger Rick Nash has helped keep the Rangers in the playoff race. (Bruce Bennett/Getty Images)

Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com By **Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com**

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on December 30, 2014 at 11:29 PM, updated December 31, 2014 at 7:24 AM

Rick Nash's struggle to score during the 2014 Stanley Cup playoffs was a running theme. Although the **Rangers** got to the Stanley Cup Final, some believe it might have been a different outcome had Nash been a factor **against the Los Angeles Kings**.

In Game 5, Nash had **a chance to score in overtime** with an open net, but couldn't bury it. That play summed up his postseason.

He has rebounded this season with 23 goals in 34 games so far. Few are mentioning him for the Hart Trophy as MVP, but if he is the reason the Rangers make the playoffs, that could change.

Here's how NJ.com sees the NHL awards race so far:

HART TROPHY (MVP)

1. Patrick Kane, Chicago (18-22-40, 5 game-winning goals, 37 games): The marquee matchup in this year's Winter Classic will be Kane vs. Alex Ovechkin. His five game-winning goals are tied for the league lead and he is plus-11 as the heart of a powerful Blackhawks squad.
2. Rick Nash, New York Rangers (23-13-36, 3 power play goals, 34 games). He's kept the Rangers in the playoff race with his scoring and plays against many of the top opposing lines. Interestingly, Nash claims his complete game was better last season.
3. Steven Stamkos, Tampa Bay (20-18-38, 6 power play goals, 38 games): His 20th goal of the season was the game-winner to cap a Lightning comeback against the Maple Leafs. That sums him up.

NORRIS TROPHY (Top defenseman)

1. Duncan Keith, Chicago (6-17-23, plus-14, 36 games): With teammate Brent Seabrook, they form as dynamic a pair of defensemen as there is in the NHL right now. Keith is sixth in scoring among Blackhawks players and logs 26 minutes a game doing the hard work.
2. Mark Giordano, Calgary (10-25-35, plus-17, 38 games): His 35 points lead all defensemen. The Flames'

31-year-old captain called defense partner T.J. Brodie the best player on the team but Giordano is the top man on a club with three players in the top 16 in scoring among D-men.

3. Shea Weber, Nashville (8-17-25, plus-13 in 36 games). The Predators are among the NHL's best in keeping their goals-against down. Two reasons: Weber and goalie Pekka Rinne. Weber averages 26:30 per game in ice time.

VEZINA TROPHY (Top goaltender)

1. Pekka Rinne, Nashville (24-6-2, 1.88 GAA, .934 save pct.): In a battle of the Central Division's powers, Rinne lost to the Blackhawks in overtime. He isn't perfect, but he's been the league's best in goal so far.

2. Marc-Andre Fleury, Pittsburgh (19-6-3, 2.16 GAA, .927 save percentage): His six shutouts lead the NHL. If the Penguins are able to weather their recent problems, Fleury will be one of the key reasons. He's won a Stanley Cup and an Olympic gold medal, but never a Vezina.

3. Carey Price, Montreal (20-9-1, 2.19 GAA, .928 save percentage): The Canadiens' most important player this season, he got off to a slow start and has reminded everyone why he was such a loss when he got hurt in the playoffs last spring. The Habs went seven straight games in which they allowed two goals or less.

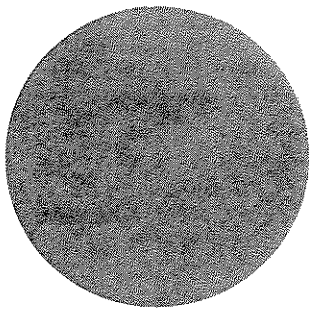
CALDER TROPHY (Rookie of the Year)

1. Filip Forsberg, Nashville (14-21-35, plus-22, 36 games): He's got four game-winning goals and three on the power play. Forsberg isn't afraid to shoot the puck. He leads all rookies with 115 shots. That's 32 more than anyone else.

2. Johnny Gaudreau, Calgary (12-18-30, plus-12, 37 games): The 21-year-old New Jersey native was the NHL's first star for the week ending Dec. 28. He had 5 goals during that week and was plus-5.

3. Michael Hutchinson, Winnipeg (9-3-2, 1.87 GAA, .937 save percentage): The Boston Bruins chose not to re-sign as a restricted free agent two summers ago and now he leads the NHL in save percentage. After 15 games, he could make Ondrej Pavelec the Jets' backup.

Johnny Gaudreau's natural hat trick:



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OVECHKIN BUCKLES DOWN ON, OFF THE ICE



"You can't do what you did previous years if you want to get success."

Alex Ovechkin

PHOTOS BY SCOTT BUREL, USA TODAY SPORTS

As he closes in on 30, Capitals star changes his lifestyle, playing style

Erik Brady
 @ByErikBrady
 USA TODAY Sports

WASHINGTON
 Alex Ovechkin's boyhood memories of hockey on frozen Russian lakes and ponds are like a snow globe, lightly shaken.

"Of course, every hockey player plays outdoors when they are young," he tells USA TODAY Sports. "Happy times with your friends."

Ovechkin looks to Thursday's Winter Classic between his Washington Capitals and the Chicago Blackhawks as a sort of Fountain of Youth on ice. He'll feel like a kid again — which, he'll be the first to tell you, he's not anymore. The Capitals captain and 2005-06 rookie of the year will be 30 be-

fore next season begins and talks like he's already there.

"Of course, you feel 30 years old," he says. "You're not young anymore. You have that kind of experience where you start thinking about what is going to be in the future. When I just came to the league, I didn't realize — Sergei Fedorov and Viktor Kozlov, they said, 'Just remember, when you hit 30 you are going to feel all your old bruises; you need to get more sleep, go to bed early.'"

"And I'm like, 'No way that is happening.' And right now, you start to realize you can't do those things you could do when you were 21 or 22. ... You can't do what you did previous years if you want to get success. If you want to stay in the same position where you are, you have to change your style of life."

INSIDE

Lesser lights often seize the spotlight, 4E

Sizing up the game, 4E

Where we'd like to see games, 7E

Ovechkin is changing not only his lifestyle — eating better and sleeping more — but also his style of play. Last season he led the league in goals with 51 but paired that with -35, near rock bottom of the NHL's plus-minus charts. This season he is in the top dozen in goals scored, with 17, and pairs that with a +7.

Plus-minus measures a player's goal differential when he's on the ice for even-strength or short-handed goals. It's a flawed, unforgiving statistic that offers an incomplete but important snapshot of a player's engagement at both ends of the ice. And that's the challenge first-year Capitals coach Barry Trotz presented to Ovechkin before this season.

"I think you can see it in that Alex is back deeper into the play (this season)," Capitals play-by-play voice Joe Beninati says. "Maybe not to the full extent where Coach wants him all the time, but a lot more of the time. And there is a willingness there." Trotz talked to Ovechkin about all that and offers a play-by-play of the conversation.

"I was very clear to him," Trotz says. "He wasn't happy being minus 35, and I said, 'There's only two ways to look at it. If you can get 85 or 86 goals next year, then it's OK to be minus 35. Or you can be at least an even player and get 51. And that's sort of my thought on that.'"

"And he said, 'I think I can do the 51 and even.' And I said, 'Well, I think that's probably a good decision on your part.' And I moved him back to left wing. I think he's more dynamic there. He's been more detailed defensively, more committed there."

▶ STORY CONTINUES ON 2D

GAME

Time, TV:
 Chicago at Washington, 1 a.m. ET, Thursday, NBC, subject to change

Forecast: Sunny, high 43, low 31

WINTER CLASSIC

System seeks playoff success

▶ CONTINUED FROM 1D

Ask Ovechkin about his current plus position, and he leaves out talk of more defensive accountability. "It's just the situation," he says, "just better luck."

His '35 last season placed him 884th among 886 NHL players. Vancouver Canucks defenseman Alexander Edler's '39 was dead last, earning him the unofficial Green Jacket for worst plus-minus. Ovechkin won the Maurice Richard Trophy — for a fourth time — as the leading goal scorer.

"Sometimes you score 50 goals but you're minus 30," Ovechkin says. "That's something interesting. And sometimes you just feel like, I didn't win the Green Jacket. I won the Maurice Richard Trophy and (almost) won the Green Jacket. It will be in history, and it will be fun."

'WILD CHILD'

So how did Trotz prevail on his star sniper to commit to back-checking more often?

The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind.

Here's more from Trotz about his conversation with Ovechkin.

"I told Alex he's a little bit of a 'wild child,' and he didn't know what that meant," Trotz says. "I told him some of the greatest, most iconic people in the world have been sort of wild children, didn't fit in the box, didn't always conform to society. And so I said, 'Do you know who Bob Dylan is?' And he said yeah. When Dylan was younger, a lot of people didn't understand him and he got criticized a lot. And now he is sort of the standard that we all hold."

"And I asked if he knew who Muhammad Ali is. He didn't fit in the box, didn't conform. He was very strong in his beliefs. And I said, 'You are like that. One thing you are is bluntly honest. You're out there, not afraid of anything.' And I said, 'That's you. Your legacy will be based on how well you did in this league individually. But if you can create a lot more team success and win a Cup, that is something that could be iconic. You're going to be in the Hall of Fame anyway, but wouldn't it be nice to be in there with a Cup?'"

Ovechkin very much wants that. Then again, who doesn't? "Everybody wants to win," Ovechkin says. "Sometimes you are on top of everybody. Sometimes luck is on your side. Sometimes you make a mistake and maybe a lucky bounce goes. One thing can change everything. It's the same with life."

The Capitals of the Ovechkin era have had a reputation for flying high in the regular season — they won the Presidents' Trophy in 2010 for best regular-season record — only to falter in the playoffs. This year's Capitals would barely make the playoffs if



Capitals coach Barry Trotz, with Alex Ovechkin, says of his star player, "He wants to get better. There's a big fire in him."

the season ended today, but Trotz thinks his system is better suited to postseason play.

"(Some of Ovechkin's teams) played loosely, played with not a lot of structure," Trotz says. "Fun to watch in the regular season, but when everybody took away their time and space and it got down to the playoff style of grind, they haven't had a lot of success."

"So what we're trying to with this group — it's not the same group — but we're trying to get a little balance so that we might not be as wide open and maybe even as entertaining at times but we have probably a balance in our game to, if we make the playoffs, allow us to do something."

Ovechkin says something similar: "We want to win, and we want to be in the playoffs, because in the playoffs it is different hockey."

MUTUAL ADMIRATION

Players, coaches and teams are judged by wins, losses and playoff performances. Coaches in Washington also are judged by how they handle the Great 8.

Trotz has heard this. "Yeah, I think perception is reality," he says. "Media have a way of getting their voice out there, without ever having played, without ever putting on the blades, never been in the room and understanding the game."

So far, Ovechkin and Trotz are a mutual admiration society. Ovechkin praises Trotz, calling him 100% different from other coaches. "We have a good relationship, and it's nice," he says.

How, exactly, is he different? "Just the mentality, the system, how he prepares for the games," Ovechkin says. "I'll say every coach is different. Every coach is a good

coach and a bad coach. If you play well, you think everything is fine. But if you didn't play well, you start blaming someone, and the first guy you are going to blame is going to be the coach, because you are never going to blame yourself. Sometimes we have to realize maybe it's your mistake."

Trotz calls Ovechkin a lightning rod, saying, "(He) takes all the blame for every loss, it seems, and all the glory for every win. That's not really him. He loves to be on a team. He loves to win. He wants to do all the right things, and he wants to get better. There's a big fire in him. People have said he is not coachable — he is very coachable."

Trotz has coached his star not only on getting back on defense but also on speed on offense.

"I wanted him to be more active on his blades," Trotz says. "What was happening was he was skating less and trying to be one-on-one at the far blue line, but he was actually easier to cover because he was standing still. I wanted to bring him back so there was more speed and separation. He's really hard to handle when he's moving. He's a 238-pound beast of a man who's got world-class skill."

Trotz says no matter how good a defenseman is there's fear when Ovechkin builds up speed.

"You're in a little bit of panic mode that he can dance around you, but he also can cut laterally and use you as a screen and he can take that wrist shot and score from the blue line," he says. "It's as dangerous and quick as any shot in the history of the game."

Capitals defenseman Brooks Orpik knows about that. He faced Ovechkin frequently as a member of the Pittsburgh Penguins.

"It's a lot easier on my body playing with him than against him," Orpik says.

Oh, and forget about plus-minus, Orpik advises.

"He scored 51 goals last year, and people said he had a bad year," Orpik says. "If he scores less and is more responsible defensively, they'll say he had a bad year again. Some people will never be happy."

"I think the most important thing is that you have the respect of your teammates and they know you're buying in to what the team is trying to achieve. And I think everyone is pleased with his effort and focus this year."

'IT IS WHAT IT IS'

Ovechkin is well known as a party boy who enjoys a good time. He says he's scaling back on that as he approaches 30. And he's planning on a tame New Year's Eve because the Blackhawks await.

"Just say 'Happy New Year' and go to bed," he says. "It's simple, but it is what it is."

That seems one of his favorite idioms, blending Russian fatalism with American ambivalence.

So what is his definition of "It is what it is"?

"You can't change it," he says. Then he pauses and amends: "You can't change the way it was before; you can only change in the future."

Ovechkin thinks a lot about the future these days. That's a natural consequence of age.

"I'm not going to be young all the time, and I realize it," he says. "So of course you start to think, like, what are you going to do after, when are you going to leave, when are you going to get kids and all that kind of stuff."

New Year's Eve in 2012, he

asked Russian tennis star Maria Kirilenko to marry him. This summer, she broke off their engagement. Does he have a current love interest?

"Yeah, of course," he says. "I'm the man, so of course I have interests, of course I have some relationship."

He offers no other details, only saying he looks forward, some day, to marriage and children. He even muses about what life will be like in 20 or 30 years.

"The world has changed totally, and I can't imagine when I am going to be like 50 or 60 what it's going to be," he says. "I never would have thought 15 years ago like you were going to check your e-mail, send a message, you're going to have your games and your music in one little thing."

If Dylan and Ali are American originals, Trotz thinks of Ovechkin as a Russian one.

"He broke the mold," Trotz says. "A lot of the Russian players, even a lot of European players, but especially the Russian forwards, were very talented but not really emotional. Played the game at a high skill level in a sort of quiet way. Then all of a sudden came this big man who played with so much outward enthusiasm."

You could even say he plays with the enthusiasm of a kid on a frozen pond with Moscow snow bluing the air. He's getting older, but anytime Ovechkin laces up to skate and shoot and throw his body around, he feels like a kid.

"Me, always," he says. "I always have a passion, because it is my favorite thing to do. I enjoy playing hockey, and I get paid. So it's not too bad."

And here he flashes his famous gap-toothed grin.

"Great life," he says.

Blackhawks' goal never changes



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USA TODAY Sports

CHICAGO When the Chicago Blackhawks went on a tear in late November, winning eight in a row and 11 of 12, they did so with what seemed like an added sense of urgency.

Not, however, for the reason you might think.

Yes, the Blackhawks could be victims of the salary cap again next summer. The hefty eight-year, \$84 million contracts for

Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane kick in. Brandon Saad and Jookim Nordstrom, youngsters who could be key players for years to come, will be due for raises. So, too, will veterans Michal Rozsival and Johnny Oduya.

Another year down the road, Brent Seabrook's and Kris Versteeg's contracts will be up.

But the Blackhawks, winners of two Stanley Cups in the last five years, aren't driven by the thought of this being their last chance to win it all.

"They're driven because it's their next chance to win it all."

"We expect every year to win. We recognize that's a tall order to pull that off, but you've got to set

your expectations high," Blackhawks general manager Stan Bowman said. "I don't know internally that it's any different this year than last year. We set up to win the Cup coming off the one in 2013 when we won."

"We came up a little short last year; we had a very good season, but it didn't end the way we wanted. When we started this year, the goal was, 'Let's go all the way again.' We've got to do a lot of work to get there, though. You can't just say, 'We want to win.' You have to put in the work."

After winning its first Stanley Cup in 49 years in 2010, Chicago



Jonathan Toews, left, and Patrick Kane make the 'Hawks hum.
BY GENE COSKI, U.S. TODAY SPORTS

▶ **STORY CONTINUES ON 2D**

'Hawks making all right moves

▶ CONTINUED FROM 10

was forced to purge its roster because of salary cap pressure. Play-off star Dustin Byfuglien was traded along with Versteeg, Andrew Ladd, Brent Sopel, Ben Eager and Colin Fraser. (Versteeg has since returned.) Starting goalie Antti Niemi and Adam Burish were allowed to walk.

Yet three years later, there the 'Hawks were, lifting the Cap.

"It seems like the organization continues to make good decisions and the right choices," said forward Patrick Sharp, one of the longest-tenured Blackhawks. "The organization finds a way to replace those players with quality NHLers, and we continue to win."

Of course, it helps that Chi-

ago's core is Kane and Toews.

Both are dynamic scorers, able to create shots seemingly out of nothing. Kane has an NHL-best five game-winning goals.

They're both expert passers, too, as dangerous when they're settling up someone else's shot as

when they're taking their own. Kane leads the Hawks in assists, with Toews right behind him.

Toews also is one of the best defending forwards in the league, with a Selke Trophy to prove it.

"Those two guys make everything go," Bowman said. "Any team would die to have one of

them, and we've got two."

There is more to the Blackhawks than Kane and Toews, however. More than Sharp and Marian Hossa, too.

A big reason Chicago was able to withstand the roster overhaul in 2010 — and a less severe one in 2013 — was because Bowman and his staff have made their development program a priority.

"There's always changes year to year, and in a lot of ways I do think that's good. You want some new blood," Bowman said.

When Andrew Shaw scored the winner in triple overtime to end an epic Game 1 of the 2013 Stanley Cup Final, he hadn't spent a full season in the NHL. Two years later, he's a staple in the Chicago lineup.

Ditto for Saad, who has emerged as a central figure in Chicago's offense in his second full season in the NHL.

"They're smart. They let players develop in the minors," Shaw said. "They draft well, have their core set of guys, and they've had success with it."

The Blackhawks reached the Western Conference finals last season, falling to the Los Angeles Kings in seven games. Despite keeping that team largely intact, Chicago began this season slowly.

"That first month of the season, I think everyone was trying to find a role within the team," Sharp said.

But when the Blackhawks headed west on the annual "circuit trip" — Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey take over the United Center for about 10 days every November — something clicked. They went 5-1.

That hot streak has continued, with Chicago dropping three games in the last month, one in a shootout in Columbus.

"I'm certainly glad that we got off to a good start so that we haven't dug a hole, but we've got to keep forging ahead," Bowman said. "What we did up to this point is somewhat irrelevant as we look at the rest of the season. We've put ourselves in a good place, which is important, but we've got to keep our foot on the gas and keep going."

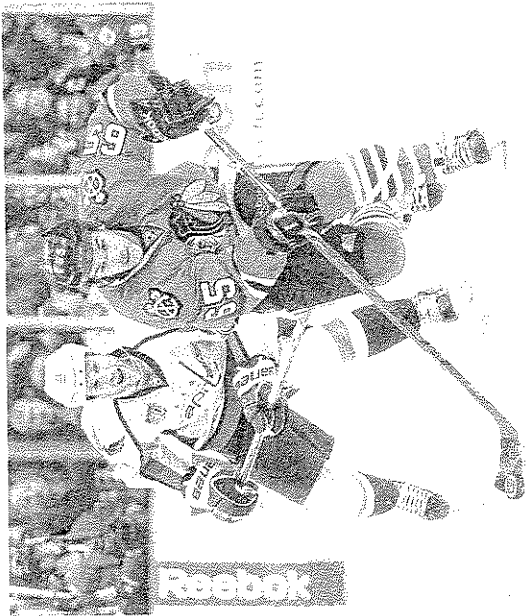
Because no matter how much — or how little — the roster changes, the Blackhawks' goal never does.

"That's why we're part of this," Bowman said. "We want to win."



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The Blackhawks' Andrew Shaw has come of age in a short time.
DUSTIN BYFUGLIEN/USA TODAY SPORTS

WINTER CLASSIC

NATIONALS PARK WELCOMES THE NHL

It took about two weeks to prepare the baseball stadium in Washington, D.C., for the league's seventh Winter Classic, where the host Capitals will face the Blackhawks on Thursday before a sellout crowd.



MARK ROSENBERG FOR USA TODAY SPORTS

Which player will rise up?

Kevin Allen

@ByKevinAllen
USA TODAY Sports

Winter Classic teams have plenty of big names, and this year is no exception.

But less-heralded players have a history of claiming starring roles in outdoor hockey. Five who could rise up when the Washington Capitals host the Chicago Blackhawks:

Defenseman Brent Seabrook (Chicago): Two-time Norris Trophy winner Duncan Keith is Chicago's most decorated defenseman, but Seabrook often shines in high-profile games.

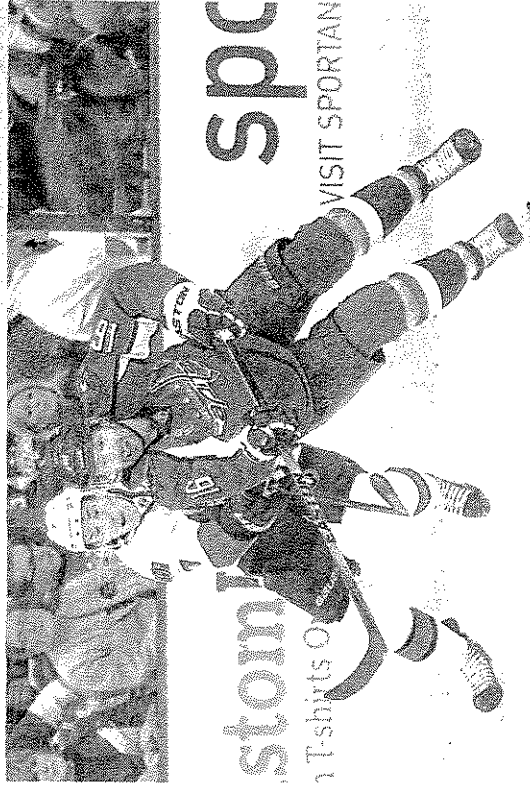
Teammate Patrick Sharp dubbed Seabrook "Mr. Overtime" during the Blackhawks' 2013 Stanley Cup run. He scored in overtime to beat the Detroit Red Wings in Game 7 of the conference final, then had a Game 4 OT goal in the Stanley Cup Final against the Boston Bruins.

Of Seabrook's 70 regular-season goals, 14 are game-winners.

Right wing Troy Brouwer (Washington): He won a Stanley Cup with the Blackhawks in 2010, then was traded to the Capitals in 2011.

Brouwer, 29, is in the prime of his career, seemingly en route to the first back-to-back 20-goal seasons in his career. He also has a history of delivering at opportune times, with 21.4% of his goals being game-winners.

Defenseman John Carlson (Washington): Carlson, 24, is among the NHL's most underrated



GEOFF BURKE, USA TODAY SPORTS

Eric Fehr's Winter Classic experience could come in handy.

defensemen. He's second on the Capitals with 85 shots and is the team's third-leading scorer.

When you think of Washington's offense, you think of Nicklas Backstrom and Alex Ovechkin. But Carlson is as important to the Capitals' scoring prowess as anyone except Ovechkin.

Three Washington defensemen (Mike Green, Matt Niskanen and Brooks Orpik) have higher salaries than Carlson, but he leads the team at 23 minutes, 16 seconds a game.

Left wing Eric Fehr (Washington): He's coming off a two-goal game against the Pittsburgh Penguins, and he has six goals in his last nine games.

This could be a physical game, and he's a big player with a history of Winter Classic production.

He scored twice when Washington beat the Penguins 3-1 in 2011.

Left wing Bryan Bickell (Chicago): With five goals this season, Bickell could use a big game as a launchpad toward a strong second half.

He makes \$4 million on a team that will have salary cap issues next season. His size and strength are important to the Blackhawks, but he hasn't produced offensively as he did during the 2013 Stanley Cup run.

Given the attention this game draws, the time might be right for Bickell to have a statement game.

Five unsung Classic heroes

Five unheralded players who had memorable days in past Winter Classics:

2010, Marco Sturm (Boston Bruins): The German forward never achieved significant NHL fame, even though he had 20 or more goals for seven consecutive seasons. But he earned headlines by scoring in overtime for a 2-1 win against the Philadelphia Flyers at Fenway Park.

2012, Mike Rupp (New York Rangers): Rupp scored four goals that season, but two came in the 3-2 win in Philadelphia. He celebrated the first goal with a salute near the Flyers bench, mocking Philadelphia's Jaromir Jagr, who uses that celebration.

2008 and 2009, Ty Conklin (Pittsburgh Penguins and Detroit Red Wings): The Alaska native, primarily a backup goalie during his career, started and won the first two Winter Classics.

2011, Eric Fehr (Washington Capitals): In a game featuring Alex Ovechkin, Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin, third-liner Eric Fehr managed to be the offensive star by scoring twice in a 3-1 win against Pittsburgh.

2014, Tyler Bozak (Toronto Maple Leafs): Bozak, in his second game back from a 12-game injury absence, scored a key third-period goal and the shootout winner to beat Detroit 3-2.

Kevin Allen

Can Capitals defense stop Blackhawks?

Increased defense spending in Washington last summer has transformed this year's Winter Classic into must-see television.

The Capitals paid top dollar to lure top coaching free agent Barry Trotz to town to fix the team's defensive shortcomings and shelled out more than \$68 million to sign defenseman Matt Niskanen and Brooks Orpik.

As a result, the Capitals are playing a style of hockey that could measure up effectively against the Chicago Blackhawks' dynamic transition game Thursday (1 p.m. ET, NBC).

How the teams stack up:

Offense: Chicago is averaging 3.03 goals a game, third best in the NHL. Washington is seventh at 2.89. Washington has the most dangerous scorer in Alex Ovechkin, while Chicago seems to have more scoring depth. Washington could trade goals with Chicago, but that's a dangerous game to play. **Advantage:** Blackhawks.

Defense: The Blackhawks give up 2.08 goals a game, best in the NHL. The Capitals rank 13th. With Duncan Keith, Brent Seabrook, Niklas Hjalmarsson and Johnny Oduya, Chicago has the NHL's best transition defense.

But the Capitals are buying into Trotz's defensive philosophy, and suddenly there is less time and space available for opposing forwards. **Advantage:** Blackhawks.

Goaltending: Chicago's Corey Crawford (14-6-2, 2.08 goals-against average, .921 save percentage) vs. Washington's Braden Holtby (16-8-6, 2.28, .920). Crawford is playing some of his best hockey, and Holtby has lost once in regulation in his last 12 decisions. **Advantage:** Even.

History: The visitors have won five of the first six Winter Clas-

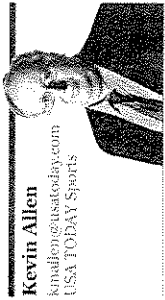
sics, the 2010 Boston Bruins being the lone exception. The home team has more distractions, such as family members coming to town and friends asking for tickets. **Advantage:** Blackhawks.

X factor: Ovechkin and his team have more to prove. The Caps want to show the hockey world they can be a factor in the postseason. A win in this showcase would be a small step. **Advantage:** Capitals.

Forecast: Blackhawks 5, Capitals 4 in OT.

Kevin Allen

Hockey on Frozen Tundra? Yes, please!



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Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews have played in NHL arenas where Gordie Howe, Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux once skated. They have played at Wrigley Field, where Babe Ruth once called his shot.

They played at Soldier Field, where Walter Payton and Dick Butkus dominated NFL games.

And before their careers are over, they might play on the Frozen Tundra at Lambeau Field.

Anyone who thinks the NHL is running out of intriguing venues for outdoor hockey isn't thinking outside the box. Venues that would be a good fit:

1. Boston: The NHL hasn't said where the 2016 Winter Classic will be held, but multiple reports list Boston as the favorite. The NHL played at Fenway Park in 2010, leading to speculation the league might look at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Mass.

The New England Patriots home holds about 69,000, compared with Fenway's 37,400. The revenue potential in Foxborough would be enticing.

the NHL undoubtedly hoped the team would improve and be a better national TV draw.

The Wild now have higher-profile players Zach Parise and Ryan Suter. They still lack a national footprint, but the state's love of hockey makes it a natural for a Stadium Series game.

4. Columbus: After the success of the Winter Classic at the Big House in Ann Arbor, Mich., the Horseshoe in Columbus, Ohio, should get a game.

If the Detroit Red Wings were the Columbus Blue Jackets' opponent, the NHL could tap into the Michigan-Ohio State rivalry. Ohio State's stadium seats nearly 105,000, which would produce a big NHL payday.

5. St. Louis: The Blues want an outdoor game, and Vladimir Tarasenko's emergence as a potential superstar makes their candidacy more attractive. Giving the Blues a game would be worth it just to hear coach Ken Hitchcock wax poetic about outdoor hockey.

6. Lambeau Field: The league will take care of NHL cities first, but this would be memorable. Playing an NHL game on the same field where Bart Starr led the Green Bay Packers to the NFL title in the Ice Bowl? That's just too good to pass up.

The nearby Blackhawk and Wild would be fitting opponents.

done deal that the 2016 Heritage Classic will be at Investors Group Field. The timing is good because coach Paul Maurice has the Jets headed in the right direction. Winnipeg fans deserve the game. They have been impressively devoted since the NHL returned.

8. Penn State campus: It would be a perfect place for the Pittsburgh Penguins and Philadelphia Flyers to take their rivalry to another level. Beaver Stadium holds 110,000-plus. Filled with Penguins fans and Flyers fans, it would be quite a spectacle.

Out of the box: How about Las Vegas? The NHL board of governors gave Bill Foley the go-ahead for a season-ticket drive to gauge interest in placing a team there. The NHL hasn't voted to expand but seems interested in Las Vegas. What better way to help an expansion team create attention than an outdoor game?

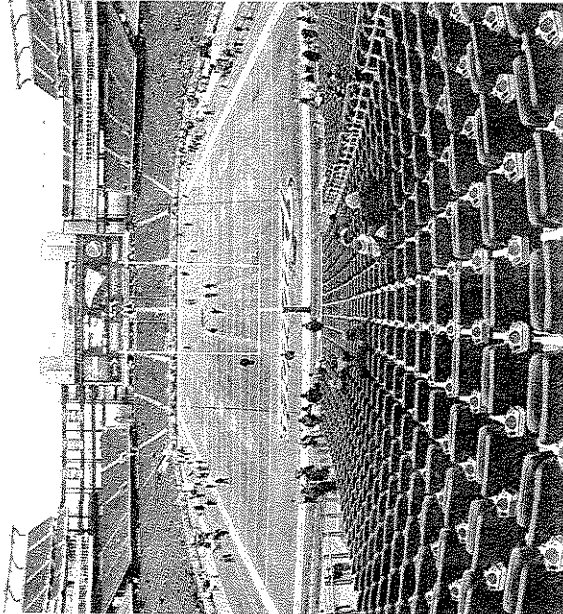
The NHL proved at Dodger Stadium it can create a competitive game at a warm-weather site. UNLV's Sam Boyd Stadium could work as a site.

Maybe Las Vegas could be an annual site. The NHL could pick a high-profile opponent and sell the game as a major event.



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@ByKevinAllen for breaking NHL news and commentary.



GREG AL COOPER/USA TODAY SPORTS

Gillette Stadium could be the site of the 2016 Winter Classic.

2. Colorado: The Avalanche are expected to land a Stadium Series game, probably at Coors Field during the 2015-16 season.

The stadium, with a capacity of about 50,000, will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2015. Playing outdoors at an elevation of 5,200 feet, with its thinner air, would add another element of intrigue.

3. Minnesota: The state appreciates hockey the way Texas loves football. The only reason the Wild haven't hosted a game is

WINTER CLASSIC

MOMENTS HEAT UP WINTER

Outdoor games have delivered lasting memories

Kevin Allen
@ByKevinAllen
USA TODAY Sports

The NHL's introduction of outdoor hockey in 2003 is one of pro sports' most novel marketing ideas over the last couple of decades. It has expanded the league's visibility while significantly growing revenue. Top moments in the NHL's outdoor hockey history:

1. Snow globe game: Pittsburgh Penguins captain Sidney Crosby turned the first Winter Classic into an instant classic by scoring the 2008 shootout winner against Buffalo Sabres goalie Ryan Miller.

A steady snowfall created a picturesque environment and established a television romance for what would become an annual event. It's fair to wonder if the game would have created such buzz in sunny conditions.

2. Fenway drama: In the third Winter Classic, Marco Sturm became an outdoor legend by scoring at 1:59 of overtime to lift the Boston Bruins to a 2-1 win against the Philadelphia Flyers.

The Fenway Park faithful revelled with the same level of enthusiasm they produce for a walk-off home run. Sturm said after the game that he nearly missed his first shift because he was looking around at the 37,000-plus fans.

3. Sealed with a KISS: When the band KISS performed at the game at Dodger Stadium, it confirmed how big an event outdoor hockey had become.

These outdoor events have a Super Bowl feel to them, and the Stadium Series game was a red-carpet event. Goalie Jonas Hiller made 36 saves, including stopping a penalty shot and making a breakaway save vs. the Los Angeles Kings' Anze Kopitar, to give the Anaheim Ducks a 3-0 victory.

4. Steckel's hit: No one fully understood the significance of Washington Capitals forward David Steckel's check to Crosby's head in the 2011 Winter Classic.

But Crosby eventually was diagnosed with post-concussion issues that lasted the remainder of that season. He was limited to 22 games the next season.

5. Wrigley jinx? Pavel Datsyuk might have scored the first wind-aided goal in NHL history to power the Detroit Red Wings to a 6-4 come-from-behind win against the Chicago Blackhawks in the 2009 Winter Classic. The Blackhawks led 3-1 at Wrigley Field, and then Detroit scored five unanswered goals.

6. Brodeur melts on ice: New Jersey Devils coach Peter DeBoer defused debate over



Snow falls as the Penguins' Sidney Crosby celebrates his game-winning shootout goal vs. the Sabres in the 2008 Winter Classic.



KISS performs Jan. 25 at Kings vs. Ducks at Dodger Stadium.

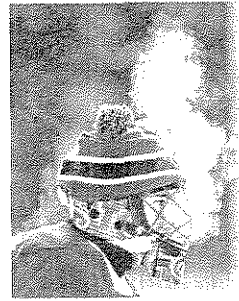
whether Martin Brodeur or Cory Schneider deserved a start at Yankee Stadium by saying it was an easy decision. Brodeur had accomplished too much in his NHL career to sit on the bench for such a historic game.

The goalie was cheered hearti-

ly as he left the dugout, but that was the highlight of his day. He gave up six New York Rangers goals — three of them on consecutive shots — and was pulled.

7. Frozen: The NHL love affair with outdoor hockey began at Edmonton's Commonwealth Stadium in the 2003 Heritage Classic, when the Montreal Canadiens defeated the Oilers 4-3 in brutal cold. The temperature was zero Fahrenheit, but it felt colder. The symbol of that game was Montreal goalie Jose Theodore wearing a knit cap over his mask.

8. Toews a winter storm: Weather is unpredictable at an



Jose Theodore fights the cold.

outdoor hockey game, but it's easy to forecast that Chicago's Jonathan Toews will thrive during inclement conditions.

With the temperature dipping to 13 degrees and snow falling, Toews posted two goals and one assist to lead the Blackhawks to a 5-1 win against the Penguins.

A symbol of the evening was Toews standing toe-to-toe jawing with Crosby. They had been on Team Canada a week before.

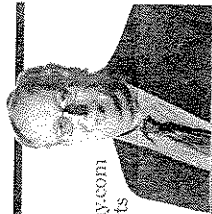
9. Tea time: Flyers coach Peter Laviolette usually doesn't reveal his goalie choice, but Ilya Bryzgalov told the news media he wasn't starting in 2012 at Citizens Bank Park. He said he'd bring a Thermos of tea to keep him warm on the bench. He later tweeted a photograph of the Thermos.

10. 'Kipper' at his best: Calgary Flames goalie Mikka Kupruseff turned in the NHL's top outdoor goaltending performance when he posted 39 saves in a 4-0 win against Montreal in the 2011 Heritage Classic.

He had experimented with what to wear in the cold. After trying a diver's wet suit in practice, he discarded that idea because he got too hot. He settled on more traditional clothing options and stayed warm enough, particularly in the second period, when he made 31 saves.

IF YOU GO, THEN YOU WILL KNOW

Seen in person, outdoor games are enchanting



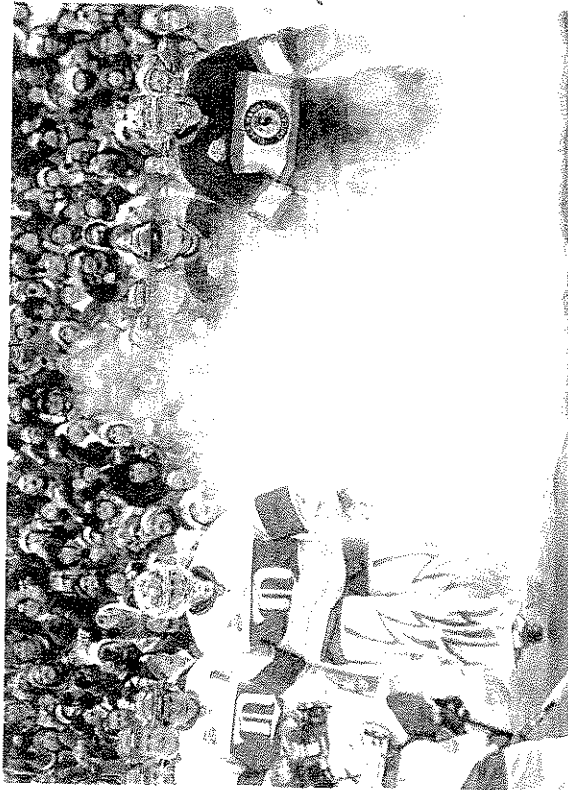
Kevin Allen
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USA TODAY Sports

Anyone who thinks the NHL's outdoor hockey concept has lost its charm probably has not seen a Winter Classic in person. This is an event where you have to be there to appreciate the romance.

The Winter Classic isn't a made-for-TV event. It's a made-to-be-there event.

Originally, it seemed like the Winter Classic's impact would come from the NHL, carving out its own television niche on New Year's Day. As soon as snow began falling at Ralph Wilson Stadium outside Buffalo during the first game Jan. 1, 2008, college football lost exclusive rights to the day.

Word spread on social media about the snow globe effect; by the time Pittsburgh Penguins star Sidney Crosby trudged through snow to score the winning shootout goal, 3.9 million had tuned in



Red Wings and Blackhawks players head to the hockey rink at Wrigley Field in Chicago for the 2009 Winter Classic.
TOM FUEEGE USA TODAY SPORTS

to NBC to see how players dealt with the elements.

The day after the game, most teams called the league to see if they could host the next one.

The following year, 4.4 million people tuned in to watch the Detroit Red Wings and Chicago Blackhawks play at Wrigley Field.

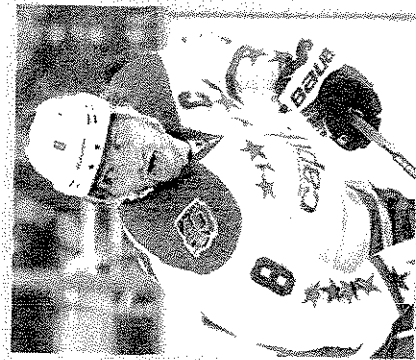
But anyone in the vicinity that day understood the Winter Classic became less about TV and more about being there.

When you were walking up to

the gate that day, there was a Super Bowl-like atmosphere. Every Winter Classic since has seemed like the annual festival of hockey.

Last season's game at the Big House in Ann Arbor, Mich., was played during a winter storm, and there still were roughly 100,000 fans in the stadium that day.

Critics say the NHL has made outdoor hockey less special by scheduling too many events other than the Winter Classic. Last season, the NHL also had four Stadi-



ALEX OVECHKIN BY USA TODAY SPORTS

WINTER CLASSIC PREVIEW

► All you need to know about game: **BONUS SECTION D**

um Series games and the Heritage Classic in Vancouver.

Was that overkill, or was the NHL meeting demand? More than 216,000 people attended the four Stadium Series games, suggesting it was the latter.

Nobody who attended the Los Angeles Kings-Anaheim Ducks game at Dodger Stadium, with KISS providing the musical entertainment, thought the NHL scheduled too many games.

Those who think outdoor hockey has run its course don't take into account how big these

games are in the host cities. The fan watching his sixth outdoor game on TV might feel like he has seen enough. But it is a far different experience in person. It's enchanting.

For many fans, outdoor hockey reminds them of their younger days when they skated on the pond or backyard rink. Players admit to being in awe as they look around the stadium before a game.

When you are watching and hearing the sounds of outdoor hockey, you don't care how many games have been played. All Washington Capitals fans will care about is this is the first outdoor game in the nation's capital.

Outdoor hockey has momentum. It hasn't been to Denver, Minnesota, St. Louis, Columbus, Winnipeg, Toronto or Montreal. The Dodger Stadium game proved the concept works in warm-weather cities.

Every big stadium is a potential site. And when you finish up all the possibilities, it will be time to go back to Wrigley Field or Fenway Park or Dodger Stadium.

We are a long way from being done with outdoor hockey.



FOLLOW COLUMNIST KEVIN ALLEN
@ByKevinAllen for commentary and breaking news on hockey.



BLACKHAWKS vs CAPITALS

NEW YEAR'S DAY 1ET

ANYTIME ANYWHERE.
LIVE EXTRA.

Sunshine could cast shadow on game

When the NHL's Winter Classic is held every January, the sun is never a welcome guest.

But sunny conditions, with 41-degree temperatures, are expected New Year's Day when the Washington Capitals entertain the Chicago Blackhawks at Nationals Park in the seventh Winter Classic (1 p.m. ET, NBC).

With the NHL's advanced ice-making technology, temperature is no concern. But the 2012 Winter Classic in Philadelphia and the first Stadium Series game in 2014 at Yankee Stadium were delayed because of glare issues.

"I don't think the ice conditions will be an issue for either team," NBC analyst Pierre McGuire said.

With the inaugural College Football Playoff games starting at 5:30 p.m. ET on ESPN, no one wants any form of delay.

NBC officials aren't concerned. "Whether it's snow, cold, fog or sun, weather is part of the charm of the Winter Classic," the network said in a statement to USA TODAY Sports. "(That) is why we have The Weather Channel's Jim Cantore as part of our broadcast team that day. We're used to deal-

ing with scheduling challenges for a variety of reasons for many of the sports we cover. We're confident Thursday's game will be another classic, regardless of when the puck is dropped."

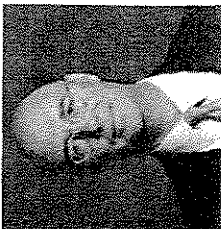
The Capitals have enough to worry about, because home teams are 1-5 in Winter Classics.

"I believe the home team has issues in these games because of distractions and the atmosphere is more neutral than partial, as it is more of a total league event," McGuire said.

Kevin Allen

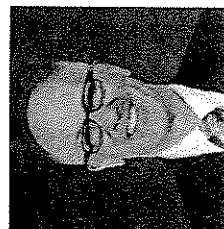
PIERRE MCGUIRE

The Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic is a destination for hockey fans and non-hockey fans. It's more than a hockey game. The Capitals are a huge part of Washington D.C.'s sports fabric, and you've got a great team in the Chicago Blackhawks. If we have the right conditions for this Winter Classic in Washington, it could be one of the more memorable games.

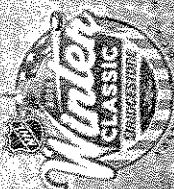


MIKE "DOC" EMRICK

We've had sun delays in Philadelphia, snow start-to-finish last year in Ann Arbor, rain-to-sleet-to-snow in Buffalo — and not only have the crews adjusted, but the players have played. You can see the players enjoy it when they are playing in it, and they sure enjoy talking about it when it's over with smiles on their faces.



THE NEW YEAR'S TRADITION RETURNS, HOCKEY OUTDOORS



Ovechkin arrival key to hockey growth in D.C. region

Tuesday, 12.30.2014 / 4:00 PM / 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic - Blackhawks vs. Capitals

By Corey Masisak - NHL.com Staff Writer

WASHINGTON -- On a balmy Sunday afternoon in Reston, Va., a couple dozen young hockey players are trying to wait patiently for the ice resurfacing machine to complete its duty. They're fidgety, anxious to get out on the ice.

This region's sporting culture long has been dominated by the professional football team, but at the same time these kids were bumping into each other and swaying in anticipation, that football team was slogging to the end of another disappointing season on the other side of the District of Columbia and these young athletes (and their parents) don't seem the least bit concerned.

Youth hockey has exploded in the D.C. region. The level of participation has increased because of several factors. The biggest was the arrival in America's capitol city of a Russian dynamo on skates who has altered the Washington Capitals' position in the marketplace and helped the growth of the sport in ways few probably could have imagined.

When Alex Ovechkin leads the Capitals against the Chicago Blackhawks in the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic at Nationals Park on Thursday, there will be hockey fans young and old in the baseball stadium who have embraced the sport and the franchise because of his presence.

"I think without a doubt, Alexander Ovechkin coming to the Washington Capitals has increased the amount of young hockey players in the area exponentially," said Dan Houck, Hockey Director for Team Maryland, one of two Tier I youth programs in the area. "I think he's had a tremendous impact."

There were fewer than 8,700 hockey players registered with USA Hockey in 1997-98 through the Potomac Valley Amateur Hockey Association, which is the region that covers Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. By 2011-12, the total was more than 19,000, according to registration totals provided by John Coleman, director of the PVAHA.

The increase has happened at all levels, including youth and adult hockey. Participation by young girls grew by more than 17 percent just last season. It hasn't all been Ovechkin, but he's played a part in some of the other factors as well.

Washington's rise to power in the NHL with former coach Bruce Boudreau, and the team's move into a new practice facility in Arlington, Va., were part of the impetus for a big spike. From 2008-09, the year after Boudreau arrived, Ovechkin scored 65 goals to win League MVP honors and the Capitals reached the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time in five years, to 2011-12, the number of registered players younger than 8 years old increased by nearly 63 percent.

USA Hockey has focused much of its efforts to expand the sport in this country on kids at the youngest age levels. The Capitals, in their part to help hockey in the area, have done the same and the region has become one of the fastest-growing in the nation.

"I grew up telling people in fifth or sixth grade that was I going to hockey practice and the response was, 'What is that? Where on earth around here do you go to play that? Why do you not play football or baseball?'" Matt Flynn, Manager of Events and Marketing for the Capitals, said.

Flynn and Peter Robinson, who grew up in the region playing hockey, head up the Capitals' efforts to impact the growing youth hockey community in the area.

"Are your parents Canadian?' That was one that I got a lot," said Robinson, the Capitals' Manager of Community Relations and Amateur Hockey.

"Now when you tell someone you play hockey and live in Reston, they ask, 'Which of the six rinks closest to you do you play in?' It is common knowledge now. You're not that weird kid who plays a sport no one else does. We really try to pump a lot of our efforts into the younger kids. There are the learn-to-play programs. In games you'll see Mites On Ice, which are the 7- and 8-year-olds, and the pre-game flag kids which are the next age group up. It's the little kids, trying to get them excited and keep them in the game, is where our efforts really go."

A HOCKEY SUPERNOVA ARRIVES IN D.C.



Everything changed for hockey in Washington because of a Ping-Pong ball. The Capitals had made a surprising run to the Stanley Cup Final in 1998, but the team aged and slid backwards from that point.

Enter Ovechkin, whom the Capitals chose with the first pick in the 2004 NHL Draft after winning the lottery. That phrase proved literal in more ways than one.

Ovechkin quickly became one of the best players in the NHL. More than that, he was one of the most entertaining, one of the most gregarious. He was a marketing dream, and a sports superhero for kids in the region.

"There was definitely a spike with [Ovechkin]," Robinson said of youth hockey participation. "It was kind of this 'Ovechkin Wave,' as people have referred to it. There were all these kids in the first year or two after he joined the team that started playing hockey. There was a huge jump and it was all because of Alex. We've seen this giant wave progress through the age groups. You can tell when they started and that there was an Ovechkin effect."

Parents became fans and wanted their kids to play hockey. Kids became fans and told their parents they wanted skates for their birthday instead of cleats or the newest pair of Air Jordans.

"We have over 800 kids who play in our program," said Kevin Burch, president of the Reston Raiders hockey club and a coach in the program for 15 years. "It used to be that we would be able to fill our program, but after Alex's first or second year we were using waiting lists a day or two into the registration process. We've seen a huge interest in the Learn To Play program and that has continued. The desire to play definitely increased rapidly."

Olie Kolzig helped the Capitals to the Stanley Cup Final in 1998 and also is partly responsible for the growth of youth hockey in the area, particularly the number of quality goaltenders who grew up emulating him.

Five of the 14 players from the area playing NCAA hockey are goaltenders, including Miami (Ohio) junior Jay Williams, whose parents had season tickets while Kolzig was patrolling the crease for the Capitals.

"I think there was a lot of excitement [in 1998]," Kolzig said. "It probably led a lot of kids to say, 'Ooh, I want to be a hockey player.' We were on TV a lot and there was so much excitement."

"Anytime you have a player like Alex Ovechkin who makes hockey the coolest sport in town, he single-handedly probably had the biggest influence on growing youth hockey in the area. There's no doubt it has gotten even bigger since he came."

Kids who are 10 years old now were born the year Washington drafted Ovechkin. Multiple youth coaches in the area said the level of talent noticeably is better in the younger age groups than it was a decade ago.

More of them are probably going to want to play on the wing and jump into the glass after they score goals, too.

"When we bought the team and I could find the original plans, we wanted to focus on helping to grow the game with young people," Capitals owner Ted Leonsis said. "We did that. We had lots of meetings with rink owners and managers. We had youth hockey coaches meeting with our coaches. We would recycle equipment and help fundraisers. We did a lot, but as the team got better and Alex exploded on the scene, all of a sudden it was, 'Hey,

we've got a really, really great player right here.' All of a sudden you'd see all these kids wearing No. 8 jerseys at the arena."

AN NHL TEAM ARRIVES IN NOVA



During the 2006-07 season, before Ovechkin and the Capitals began their ascent to title contender status in the following seasons, the team moved into a new practice facility on top of a shopping mall. Kettler Capitals Iceplex provided a home base for the organization and the team, and the dividends have extended to youth hockey.

Eight stories up in Arlington, at the Ballston Common Mall, are two ice sheets, a Capitals team store, a large pro shop and a central hub for the Northern Virginia hockey community.

"I think Kettler did put it over the top because at the time there wasn't any ice inside the beltway and Kettler became such a draw for D.C. and Northern Virginia," Leonsis said. "It still is the world-class, cool rink in the area, but it also didn't draw away from other places' business. We kind of expanded the market. We sold a lot of ice here, but the success of the Caps and Alex has sort of driven the business for everyone in the area. We've been spiraling up and I think the numbers speak for themselves."

Before Kettler opened, the Capitals practiced at Piney Orchard in Odenton, Md., which is closer to the Inner Harbor in Baltimore than the National Mall. Before that, they practiced a tiny rink in Mount Vernon, Va.

Flynn, a Reston resident, worked part-time in the pro shop at Piney Orchard because the Capitals were there. His morning commute was often two hours because of the area's rush-hour traffic.

"That building is old. It was dark. It was out of the way. At the time it served its purpose," Flynn said. "Being here [at Kettler], it is metro accessible. It is close to where they're playing [at Verizon Center]. The facilities are top notch. When we have an alumni player come back who used to be at those old places -- we just had [former Capitals goaltender] Al Jensen here -- he just goes, 'This is unbelievable. I'd have been in the Hall of Fame if we had facilities like this. We got dressed in a trailer [at Mount Vernon] and we had one exercise bike the whole team would share if anyone got up on time to use it.'"

All of Washington's practices at Kettler are open to the public. On a normal weekday there might be a couple hundred people sitting in the stands. On a weekend or school holiday, the main 1,200-seat rink is near capacity.

When the Capitals play the Philadelphia Flyers every other year at Kettler in a rookie game before the main training camp begins, fans have to show a free ticket to patronize a standing-room only rink.

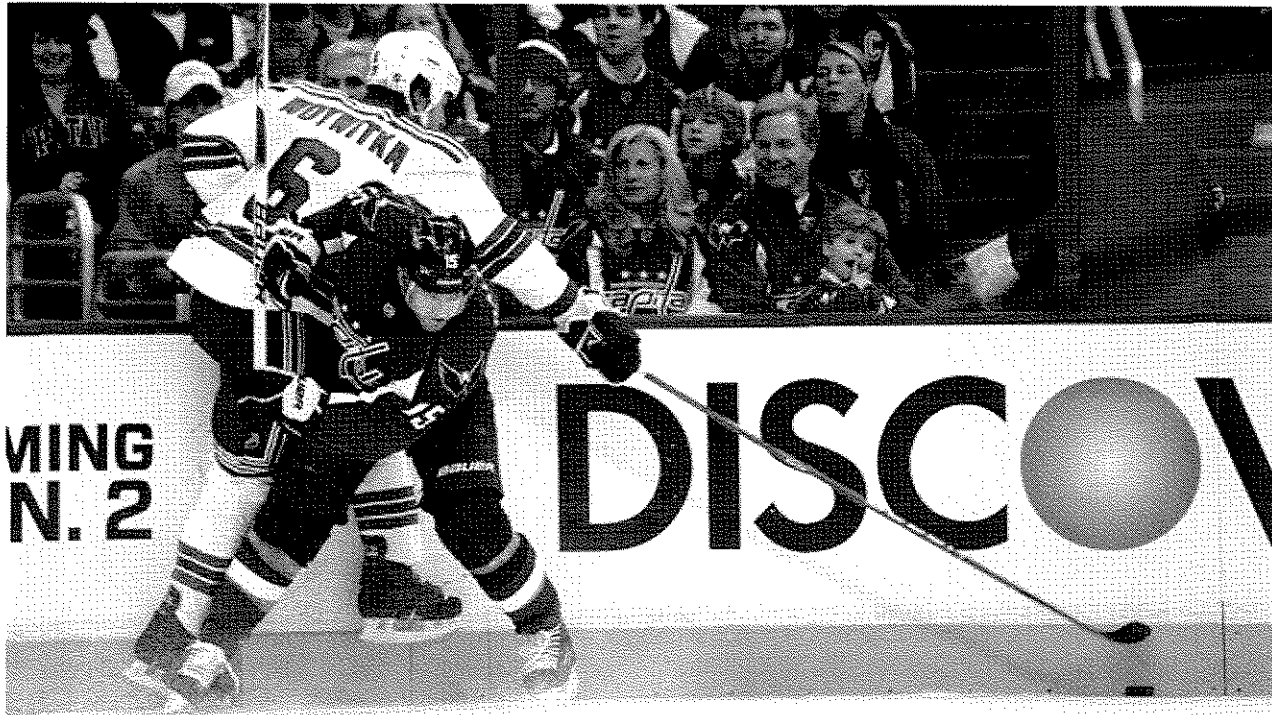
Players like Mike Knuble, Matt Hendricks and Jason Chimera have sons and daughters in the youth hockey program at Kettler and have helped out as coaches. Dan Jablonic, hockey director for the Washington Little Capitals, said Chimera was on the ice for a youth practice the morning after he broke his nose in a game earlier this season.

"I used to live downtown and we would drive out to Piney Orchard. It was about a 40-minute drive and it sort of seemed like you were away from everything," Capitals forward Brooks Laich said. "When we got to Kettler, we got a grade-A, top-of-the-line place to train and practice and develop as hockey players and as a team. It has really

brought everybody to within probably a five-mile radius of Kettler. Now with the proximity to the rink, fans will see guys at the grocery store or walking down the street. You'll see them at the Whole Foods in Clarendon or the Apple Store. Everyone is really close now. It makes it feel like a community.

"For a kid, I don't think there is anything better. Kids here are exposed to the game and to their heroes. Every day they have a chance to go and see their favorite players and get an autograph or take a picture with them. I'll never forget some great advice I was given as a young player. It was to never underestimate what impact just one meeting with a young child can have on his or her life."

ICE, ICE BABY



Jeff Halpern was the first locally raised and trained hockey player to reach the NHL. One of Kolzig's teammates with the Capitals, Mark Tinordi, had a son who spent plenty of time wandering around the Washington locker room as a kid, and Jarred Tinordi played for Team Maryland before becoming the region's first locally trained player to become a first-round NHL draft pick, when the Montreal Canadiens selected him with the 22nd pick of the 2010 NHL Draft.

William Nylander, currently playing for Sweden at the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship and a 2014 first-round pick (No. 8) by the Toronto Maple Leafs, played for Houck and Team Maryland while his father, Michael Nylander, spent four seasons with the Capitals.

The next locally trained first-round pick might be Graham McPhee. The son of former Washington general manager George McPhee, Graham plays with the United States National Team Development Program in Ann Arbor, Mich., after playing for Team Maryland and the famed Shattuck-St. Mary's prep school in Minnesota where Sidney Crosby and Jonathan Toews once roamed the halls. He's committed to play at Boston College beginning with the 2016-17 season.

Williams went undrafted after playing for the Reston Raiders and then in the United States Hockey League, but is currently a junior for Miami with a 12-2-0 record, a 1.66 goals-against average and a .923 save percentage for the No. 6 team in the country in both major NCAA polls.

Sam Anas, a sophomore forward at Quinnipiac, won the Tim Taylor Award as the NCAA rookie of the year as a freshman. He spent time with two area Tier I youth programs, the Little Capitals and Team Maryland, before going to college.

"I think hockey as a sport has grown, but there are a lot more programs dedicated to individual skill development," Burch said. "It used to be the local clubs kind of just did their thing, but there has definitely been an off-shoot of things like the kids who are out there [on the ice] with goalie training and specific skill development. The kids that have been coming into the game are more skilled because there is more opportunity. And in some cases, which is both good and bad, that it can be a year-round sport."

As the players who began playing hockey because of Ovechkin continue to matriculate, more elite players are sure to

come from the D.C. region.

At the 2013 WJC the United States team had four players, Brandon Saad, John Gibson, J.T. Miller and Vincent Trocheck, from the Pittsburgh area, an outburst of hockey talent that part of the country had never seen before. All four were born late in 1992 or in 1993, months after Mario Lemieux had led the Penguins to back-to-back Stanley Cup titles.

Given the huge increase in hockey players in the D.C. region similar to the early 1990s boom in Pittsburgh, there might be days like that coming in this part of the country.

"I think people used to think, 'Oh, you've got to go away from here to be a hockey player,' but it is not like that anymore," Jablonic said. "We've got enough quality programs in the area, and couple that with the fact that we have the best schools in the country, why would want to send your kid away when you can play high-level hockey and go to the best schools? That alternative is being presented and people are starting to understand that now."

In other areas of the country, one of the impediments for growth is the cost of doing business in the sport. The Washington region is one of the most affluent in the nation, so that's not a problem for many of the kids here.

The issue is not finding kids to play hockey, but rather finding a place for them to play. Registration numbers have leveled off the past couple of seasons, but it's not that interest has not waned, as the number of new players remains steady. There just aren't enough sheets of ice and time slots in the day to support another spike in participation.

"We definitely need more ice facilities in the area," Burch said. "We fill up our programs within a day and we're turning kids away. They're then going to one of the other facilities which are also maxed out. There are kids who want to play that can't because the resources are limited."

Burch said the Raiders are trying to work with the owners of SkateQuest in Reston to add a third sheet for the complex. The Capitals are involved with Fort Dupont, a rink in Washington, D.C., that is about to undertake an expansion process that will add a second sheet.

The interest, in part because of Ovechkin and the Capitals' involvement as well as USA Hockey's effort to grow the game through the American Development Model, has led to a surge in youth hockey in this area.

That has led to increases in lots of different ways. High school hockey has expanded incredibly. College hockey at the club level has expanded exponentially. Adult leagues are booming.

"I was at the Maryland prep championship game last year, and one of the league commissioners said, 'If you know anybody who has enough money to build a warehouse with like six sheets of ice and just basic locker rooms, you could sell the whole thing out for a year in 45 minutes,'" Flynn said. "There is such a need for more ice."

The Capitals, like many NHL teams in this country, have focused on helping produce more hockey players in the region because they've realized a hockey player for life is a hockey fan, and less likely to be fickle about the home team.

There are hockey roots in the region that weren't there 20 or 30 years ago. The Capitals have expanded their reach, whether it's through donating street hockey equipment to inner-city schools in Baltimore or welcoming kids from Virginia Beach and Richmond to participate in Mites On Ice.

"Obviously we can do more," Leonsis said. "One of the issues is real estate prices and convincing developers that an ice rink is the best use of real estate. We have a lot more to do because the growth was greater than any of us were expecting. It's also because it is such an expensive sport. And we've done a lot but we can do more in the inner city. Fort Dupont is a great example. I think over the next decade we'll be making bigger investments and more charitable work for underprivileged kids to be able to play more."

"We had this tagline of 'Building America's Hockey Capitol,' and while it was a marketing slogan we kind of believed it. We thought this was a great community, and we'd like to see more colleges playing hockey and more high schools playing hockey and keep upping the ante with helping to provide the means and the venues for kids who want to play the game to do so."

Beagle: Winter Classic excitement starting to set in

Tuesday, 12.30.2014 / 1:37 PM / 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic - Blackhawks vs. Capitals

By Jay Beagle - Washington Capitals

Washington Capitals forward Jay Beagle is about to play in his second Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic. Beagle suited up for the Capitals at Heinz Field in Pittsburgh in 2011, and he's expected to be in the lineup Thursday against the Chicago Blackhawks at Nationals Park.

Beagle agreed to offer up his opinions in blog form leading up to the main event.

We had an optional practice today, which was good for us because it gave guys who needed a breather a chance to take one, and guys who wanted the opportunity to skate a chance to get on the ice for a loose practice.

Now that practice is over I am going to head out to lunch with my family. We've been on the road quite a bit of late so it'll be good to get some downtime with them. I've got my mom and dad in town as well as my mother-in-law. They're not here for long, so I have to make the most of it.

For us as a team this is about shifting the focus to tomorrow, to the practice day at Nationals Park. This is about shifting the focus to the Winter Classic. It's one of those things we've been preparing for since the start of the season, but it hasn't been the focus because it was not the next game on our schedule. It is the next game on our schedule now.

When we get to the ballpark tomorrow that's when it will hit me. It'll definitely hit me when I'm out there for practice. But to be honest we just have to make sure we stay focused and get a good practice in because that's why we're there, and that's what is most important. After practice we can spend some quality time with the family on the ice during the family skate, but the practice has to be crisp and good, and we have to get our bearings.

I don't think we necessarily have to figure anything out because we constantly adjust to new ice surfaces with all the rinks we play in, but obviously this will be different being that we'll be outdoors so we'll have to see if there is any glare, wind, all of that kind of stuff. It's always different when you're skating outdoors so it's a matter of getting used to that.

The other thing that I think is important is keeping with the same routine and staying level-headed. I'm usually pretty good at that so I don't anticipate waking up tomorrow feeling all kinds of antsy about getting to the rink, or the ballpark in this case, for practice.

Certain things will hit you, like it'll be cool to be on the outdoor ice, but it has to be another practice. I never get too excited or antsy for anything, not even playoffs. I don't think I will be that way for the game either. I wasn't for the game in Pittsburgh in 2011.

Of course I'll be excited and filled with adrenaline, but it's not crazy. It can't be. That would be counterproductive for me.

Caps' Orpik (knee) questionable for Winter Classic

AP 4:12 p.m. EST December 30, 2014

ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — The Washington Capitals could be without defenseman Brooks Orpik for the Winter Classic on Thursday against the Chicago Blackhawks.

Orpik injured his right knee Monday night against the New York Islanders. Capitals coach Barry Trotz says Orpik's availability will be a game-time decision. Orpik says he was feeling better Tuesday, but the injury is more painful than previous knee problems.

He has played in three outdoors games with the Pittsburgh Penguins.

If Orpik isn't healthy, Nate Schmidt is expected to play and the Capitals could recall Steve Oleksy as a seventh defenseman.

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The advertisement features a smartphone displaying the teamsnap app interface, which includes a 'Practice' section and a 'vs Panthers' game entry. The background is dark with a football visible on the right side.

Blackhawks' Hossa may have Hall of Fame resume

AP 11:18 a.m. EST December 30, 2014



(Photo: The Associated Press)

Chicago Blackhawks veteran Marian Hossa is a role model in the locker room, where younger teammates revere him.

"It means I'm older," Hossa said. "I'm just glad I can still play."

His consistency at both ends of the ice helps make the Blackhawks perennial Stanley Cup contenders. The 35-year-old Hossa passed the 1,100-game mark this season. On a team led by Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane, Hossa is one of the NHL's best defensive forwards.

"He just flies on the backcheck. There's a lot of guys that skate a lot faster going forward than they do coming back to their own end, and he's not that way," Kane said. "He's so good at stripping the puck. He's also good in these one-on-one battles where more often than not you're going to see him coming away with the puck."

"He doesn't seem to get any older, either. He seems to get better and better each year."

This is Hossa's 16th full NHL season and he remains a key cog for the Blackhawks, who have won the Cup twice in the past five years and visit the Washington Capitals on Thursday in the Winter Classic. Hossa is averaging 0.64 points a game, the lowest since his rookie year with the Ottawa Senators, but his two-way game is responsible for preventing more than a few goals against.

Teammates past and present marvel at what Hossa can do in the defensive zone and without the puck.

"He's got that powerful stride that gets him back in the play easily," said former Blackhawks forward Jeremy Morin, who's now with the Columbus Blue Jackets. "And he can take the puck off your stick with ease. He's so strong on the stick and it's always in the right position. He can steal pucks with the best in the league, for sure."

That, Blackhawks winger Brandon Saad said, is how Hossa turns defense into offense. In 1,127 games, Hossa has 472 goals and 547 assists.

Hossa is 76th on the all-time points list, ahead of Hockey Hall of Famers Pat LaFontaine, Lanny McDonald and Maurice Richard. He's 52nd in goals, ahead of LaFontaine, Doug Gilmour and Pavel Bure, and third among active players.

His career numbers are similar to former Senators teammate Daniel Alfredsson, who retired earlier this month after putting up 426 goals and 682 assists in 1,178 games. But Hossa may be one of the most underrated players in the NHL.

"Maybe I would have more numbers but maybe some other teams wouldn't want me," Hossa said. "There's an advantage and disadvantage with that. Obviously, I'm happy how the outcome played out."

Hossa has two Stanley Cup rings and appeared in the final two other times. A five-time all-star, the Slovak winger with four Olympic appearances has a case for the Hall of Fame, even if it's not easy to quantify.

"I know (from) being around him and still dominating like he does, I think it's his 17th year, he's always been a great player," Saad said. "There's so many little things the guy does, it's incredible."

Hossa still has six seasons left on his contract at a cap hit of \$5.2 million, so he likely has plenty of time before the Hall of Fame question even comes up.

Hossa has been fortunate to avoid injuries throughout most of his career. The fewest games he played in a full season was 57 in 2009-10.

Hossa gets some practices off because of his age and experience, but that doesn't seem to detract from his play. Coach Joel Quenneville calls him a "great pro" and a player who reinforces what the staff wants out of the team.

"Defensively and offensively, he's got a great thought process," Quenneville said. "Game in, game out, you use him in all situations. He's a very useful player."

Before joining Chicago, Hossa was more than just a useful player for the Senators, Atlanta Thrashers, Pittsburgh Penguins and Detroit Red Wings.

"We definitely know how special of a player he is, whether he gets the recognition or not," Saad said. "It's pretty surreal to see a guy like that still playing and still doing as well as he's doing."

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EPIX captures Capitals, Blackhawks at Christmas

Tuesday, 12.30.2014 / 11:00 PM / 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic - Blackhawks vs. Capitals

By Dan Rosen - NHL.com Senior Writer

There are stops along the road to the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic that show the true identity and personality of the players and coaches involved. These are stops that go beyond hockey, off the ice, into their homes, their private lives.

Hockey players for the most part like to be seen as ordinary people who can do extraordinary things. Around Christmas their extraordinary gifts melt away as family life takes over and they become ordinary people doing ordinary things with holiday traditions that are no grander than those of the average working family.

The third episode of "EPIX Presents Road to the NHL Winter Classic" brings the viewer in touch with the people many of these athletes and coaches are away from the game.

The viewer got to spend Christmas with Chicago Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville and his family in Vail, Col., with Washington Capitals coach Barry Trotz and his family at their home in Clarendon, Va., with Joel Ward and his girlfriend in New York City, and with Troy Brouwer and his wife and 2-year-old daughter in their home. Blackhawks defenseman Niklas Hjalmarsson served as the viewer's host at his Swedish Christmas celebration.

In addition, Alex Ovechkin opened his home to the cameras, and we got a slice of his home life at a dinner prepared by his mother and attended by Capitals forward Evgeny Kuznetsov and his wife. We learn that Ovechkin calls his parents before every game just to hear their voices.

Quenneville and his wife, Elizabeth, bought a home in Vail a few years ago so it could be a gathering place for his family, including their kids Dylan, Lily and Anna. They have a tradition of going out for a Christmas Eve dinner and hitting the slopes on Christmas Day.

The Blackhawks coach jokes that it's like the Quennevilles meeting the Griswolds for Christmas.

Through the lens, though, EPIX successfully shows a different, softer, looser side of Quenneville as he spends the holiday with his family. He jokes about how he goes slow and steady on the slopes and is just worried about keeping up with his kids.

"He's always stopping to rest," Anna says of her dad, "and after he always needs an Advil because he's sore."

Trotz put his softer, family side on display earlier in the series when he was shown taking his wife, Kim, and son Nolan to the National Zoo. Christmas with the Trotzes was different because the entire family, including older kids Tiana, Tyson and Shalan, had flown in from Nashville to spend the holiday season with mom, dad and brother Nolan.

Barry and Kim make homemade pierogis and let Nolan open a few gifts on Christmas Eve. Barry jokes that he knows there will be coal in his stocking.

The Capitals played their final game before the holiday break against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden, so Ward stayed in New York with his girlfriend, Kathleen, for Christmas. They were shown people-watching and skating at Rockefeller Center.

Ward makes it a point to say that his time with Kathleen allows him to take the focus off of hockey, because the last thing she wants is for him to talk hockey in her ear all the time.

Brouwer talked about getting some downtime with his family as he made gingerbread cookies with his daughter. Hjalmarsson brought a taste of his heritage to Chicago with eight different types of herrings and meatballs serving as the featured attractions for the big gathering.

The settings of those Christmas celebrations were built around hard work at the rink.

The episode begins with the emotional win the Blackhawks got against the Toronto Maple Leafs one day after assistant equipment trainer Clint Reif died. Captain Jonathan Toews talked about disbelief, but the message was on moving on, moving forward.

Back in Washington, the Capitals just finished off a 2-1 win against the Ottawa Senators at Verizon Center, but Trotz isn't happy, telling his team in an expletive-laden postgame speech that how they played was not good enough.

Washington went to New York the next night and lost 4-2, but Trotz seemed happier as he told the Capitals, who trailed 3-0 in the first period, after the game that they showed what they can do when they put on the work boots.

"This is a team we are going to pass," Trotz says of the Rangers. "I'm going to tell you right now, we're going to pass them."

In dismissing the Capitals for the holiday break, Trotz leaves them one final message.

"I wish you guys a good Christmas, enjoy the time, and when we get back we're going to do something special," he said.

Quenneville had to dismiss Chicago for the break after a 5-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets. He admits after the game that the emotional roller coaster the Blackhawks were on following Reif's death might have caught up to them, but he tells them to throw the game in the garbage and come back fresh.

Each team put an exclamation point on its return from the holiday break with a big road win. Washington defeated the Pittsburgh Penguins 3-0; Chicago won 5-2 against the Colorado Avalanche.

The third episode ends with a story about how hockey players are mirror images of one another, of how winning is what unites them, of how no matter what they do or where they play, the game never changes. The story is told with visuals of the ongoing rink build at Nationals Park. The underlying meaning is clear -- the game will be taken outdoors Thursday, but the stakes remain the same as the pucks, sticks, helmets and skates the players will be wearing.

As the finish line on this road to the NHL Winter Classic nears, the people involved become even bigger to the story of the signature event on the League's regular-season calendar. The third episode of the EPIX series allows us to see them for who they truly are, stripped of the pads, the helmets and the competition that fuels them. It allows us to see ordinary people capable of doing extraordinary things living what amount to ordinary lives just like the rest of us.

Capitals' Orpik game-time decision for Winter Classic

Tuesday, 12.30.2014 / 1:57 PM / 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic - Blackhawks vs. Capitals

By Adam Vingan - NHL.com Correspondent

ARLINGTON, Va. – Washington Capitals defenseman Brooks Orpik will be a game-time decision for the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic on Thursday at Nationals Park.

Orpik left Washington's 4-3 overtime loss to the New York Islanders on Monday with a right knee injury after a third-period collision with Islanders forward Cal Clutterbuck. The 34-year-old had to be assisted to the locker room by defenseman John Carlson and forward Jason Chimera.

"I've hurt the knee before, so this one felt a little bit different," Orpik said. "A lot more painful than previous injuries, but the other injuries were a lot worse, so hopefully that's a good sign.

"It would be kind of disappointing to miss this one, but that's kind of up in the air right now."

The image of Orpik writhing on the ice had the Capitals fearing the worst, but their unease later gave way to cautious optimism.

"A lot better than I thought it would be when I first saw it," coach Barry Trotz said. "Obviously wearing a brace and all that, it really saved him. When he started walking on the plane yesterday with no limp, it was pretty encouraging."

Orpik, who signed a five-year, \$27.5 million contract with Washington on July 1, has stabilized the Capitals' previously tenuous defensive depth. He averages 21:58 of ice time per game, anchoring the penalty kill and serving as one half of Washington's shutdown pair with Carlson.

If Orpik, who is hoping to practice at Nationals Park on Wednesday, is unable to play against the Chicago Blackhawks, Trotz said the Capitals might recall defenseman Steve Oleksy from the Hershey Bears of the American Hockey League as insurance.

With more solidity on the back end this season, the Capitals' defensive corps is confident that they can somewhat mitigate his absence if necessary.

"We're going to try," defenseman Karl Alzner said. "He's probably our best defenseman, so it's hard to lose a guy like that, but [Nate Schmidt] and [Jack Hillen] have both been playing really good with their opportunities, so I think it's going to work out fine."

Trotz said that the magnitude of the NHL Winter Classic would not play into his decision regarding Orpik's status.

"Too important of a player with us to risk," Trotz said. "If we're not 100 percent sure, it's not going to happen."

Skating outside brings back memories for Bondra

Tuesday, 12.30.2014 / 5:47 PM

By Brian Compton - NHL.com Deputy Managing Editor / [2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic blog](#)

WASHINGTON -- Peter Bondra spent 14 seasons playing for the Washington Capitals and has watched them become part of the fabric of the community in this historic city.

So it was no surprise to see Bondra, 46, smiling ear to ear Tuesday, when he was able to skate on the fresh sheet of ice with a small gathering of former teammates and media members at Nationals Park, two days before the Capitals host the Chicago Blackhawks in the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic (1 p.m. ET; NBC, CBC, TVA Sports).

"I think it's a big event, especially for Washington," Bondra said. "D.C. has become a hockey town and they've got a great team. I mean, they've got Alex Ovechkin, so it's going to bring attention. Nationals Park, we're just a couple of blocks from the White House. This is going to be a really great festivity.

"You go to Verizon [Center] for a regular-season game, and it gets a lot of attention. People are excited about the upcoming Winter Classic. You see a lot of dark red colors in the building and Winter Classic colors. This means a lot. I'm very excited. As a hockey fan, you get to come here and watch Washington and Chicago? Wow. Two good teams. This is really becoming a holiday of hockey."

Much like every player who has participated in the Winter Classic festivities over the past seven years, Bondra began thinking about his childhood the moment he stepped on the ice at Nationals Park.

"Being out here, it reminds of being on the open ice, open ponds," said Bondra, who grew up in Lutsk, Ukraine. "You skated on pretty much anything that froze when I was young. It will be fun [Thursday]. I'm looking forward to it."

Not soon after taking a few strides, the hockey player in Bondra took over. He said he was impressed with the quality of the ice and that the Blackhawks and Capitals will feel the same way when they practice outdoors Wednesday.

"Even being out there today, I thought if I was in the game [Thursday], how would I prepare?" Bondra said. "The ice is really pretty quick. So if it's my first time, I wouldn't sharpen my skates as deep. I'd make it a little less hollow and make sure I'm not deep on the ice. But today it was pretty quick ice. I probably have to skate on it a couple of more times and make sure I have a pretty good feel for this ice. But overall, it's going to be a great experience."

Bondra last played in the NHL in 2006-07, when he had five goals and nine assists in 37 games for the Blackhawks. He was a two-time 50-goal scorer during his time in Washington and finished with 503 goals and 389 assists in 1,081 games for the Capitals, Ottawa Senators, Atlanta Thrashers and Blackhawks. He had 56 points (30 goals, 26 assists) in 80 Stanley Cup Playoff games and helped the Capitals reach the Stanley Cup Final in 1998.

Asked if he misses playing, Bondra said, "Of course. But today was really a gift. I was able to skate out here and break a sweat and have fun. I was able to see a couple of my old teammates. There was a couple of generations of Washington Capitals like Craig Laughlin, Alan May, Sylvain Cote ... it was good. Good to see those guys."

NHL to pay tribute to U.S. Armed Forces, Nation's Capital during festivities at 2015 NHL Winter Classic

Billy Idol, Gavin DeGraw, Lee Greenwood to perform at New Year's Day outdoor game

Tuesday, 12.30.2014 / 12:00 PM / 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic - Blackhawks vs. Capitals

NHL.com

NEW YORK – The 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic, the New Year's Day outdoor game between the Chicago Blackhawks and the Washington Capitals at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C. (1:00 p.m. ET, NBC, CBC, TVA), will pay tribute to the United States Armed Forces during pre-game and in-game festivities, which will feature an anthem ceremony with the Armed Forces Color Guard, the U.S. Army Chorus and U.S. Army Herald Trumpets, singers Master Sergeant Bob McDonald and Caleb Green, and the National Capital Region Eagles; a flyover by the D.C. Air National Guard, 113th Wing; and performances by punk pioneer and rock and roll icon Billy Idol, Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter Gavin DeGraw, and country music artist Lee Greenwood.

The décor and field design at Nationals Park for the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic will visually celebrate the city of Washington, D.C. The League will honor all five branches of the military throughout the day.

The full lineup of performances and special celebrations for the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic is being produced by IMG Productions, a global leader in sports, fashion and media.

Billy Idol – Pre-Game Performance

British rock star Billy Idol will open the game with a performance from the main stage at home plate before puck drop. Following his performance, Idol will be joined near the stage by more than 150 members of all five branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, who will be attending the game as honored guests of the NHL, for a special salute.

U.S. Anthem Ceremony

The Armed Forces Color Guard, made up of members of each of the five military branches; the U.S. Army Chorus and U.S. Army Herald Trumpets, members of the U.S. Army band "Pershing's Own"; Master Sergeant Bob McDonald and Caleb Green, anthem singers for the Washington Capitals; and members of the National Capital Region Eagles, a local military hockey club that will display the United States flag, will perform together during the U.S. national anthem.

The U.S. Army Chorus was established in 1956 as the vocal counterpart of the U.S. Army band "Pershing's Own" and is one of the nation's only professional men's choruses. The Army Chorus performs frequently at the White House, the Vice President's Residence, the U.S. Capitol and the State Department as well as for world leaders and dignitaries.

The U.S. Army Herald Trumpets is the official fanfare ensemble for the President of the United States. Founded in 1959 and patterned after traditional British "fanfare" trumpet ensembles, the U.S. Army Herald Trumpets was formed to add splendor to official military ceremonies. A performing element of the U.S. Army band "Pershing's Own" in Washington, D.C., the ensemble has performed for countless events of national and international significance.

Master Sergeant Bob McDonald has been singing at Capitals games since the 1992-93 season. As an active duty soldier, he also sings in the U.S. Army Chorus.

Master Sergeant Caleb B. Green III, a solo vocalist with the U.S. Army band, has sung at dozens of Capitals games since he was stationed in D.C. in 1999. The Hampton, Va., native sang at President Barack Obama's Inaugural Celebration at the Lincoln Memorial and also performs at Washington Redskins games.

The NCR Joint Military Hockey Team is the only military hockey team in the D.C. area – it is a combination of the old Fort Meade team and the old Quantico Marine Corps team. The team practices at the Tucker Road Ice Rink in Fort Washington, Md., and plays games at the Prince William Ice Center in Dale City, Va.

Auxiliary Rink

More than 20 children will take to the ice on an auxiliary rink at Nationals Park during pre-game and intermissions. Kids involved are from the local area, including hockey players from the Fort Dupont Ice Hockey Club – a member of the NHL's Hockey is for Everyone program – as well as kids from the Rooftop Hockey League with the Kettler Capitals Iceplex – a USA Hockey Model Association program.

Eight local boys and girls, between the ages of eight and 13 years old, will be a part of the player introductions at the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic as part of McDonalds' "In the Lineup" program.

Flyover by the Capital Guardians, 113th Wing D.C. Air National Guard

Immediately following the U.S. anthem, pilots from the D.C. Air National Guard's 113th Wing based at Joint Base Andrews, Md., will fly two F-16 Fighter Jets over Nationals Park in salute of the U.S. Armed Forces and to celebrate the start of the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic.

Known as the "Capital Guardians," the 1,200 Airmen-strong Wing is responsible for the air defense of the Nation's Capital Region – including the nation's capital. On Sept. 11, D.C. Guard fighter pilots were the first jets in the air over the Pentagon. The 113th Wing continues to perform a 24/7 alert mission at Andrews, always ready and able to protect the skies over the nation's capital.

Gavin DeGraw – First Intermission

Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter – and longtime hockey fan – Gavin DeGraw will take to the field during the first intermission for a set of his chart-topping hits.

DeGraw is not a stranger to the top of the charts. He broke through with the 2003 release of his debut album, *Chariot*, which sold more than 1 million copies, earned platinum certification and yielded three hit singles: "I Don't Want to Be," "Follow Through" and the title-track, "Chariot." DeGraw's self-titled second album debuted at No. 1 on the digital sales chart and at No. 7 on Billboard's Top 200 album chart in 2008, earning him his first Top 10 album. It spawned the hit singles "In Love with a Girl," which Billboard dubbed "a rocking homerun," and the gold-certified "We Belong Together." In 2009, DeGraw released *Free* as a gift to his die-hard fans clamoring for recorded versions of his live favorites. DeGraw released his third studio album, *Sweeter*, in September 2011. The album's first single, "Not Over You," co-written with OneRepublic's Ryan Tedder, reached No. 1 on the Hot AC charts, was a top 10 hit on Top 40 and was certified double platinum. DeGraw's acclaimed fourth studio album, *Make a Move*, was released in October 2013 to rave reviews. Shortly thereafter he was nominated for his first Grammy for "We Both Know," a song he co-wrote with Colbie Calliat for the 2013 film "Safe Haven."

FINEST HOUR: THE BEST OF GAVIN DEGRAW was released October 21 via RCA Records. The album features two new songs, including the new single "Fire" as well as his most renowned and notable hits to date.

Army General Mark A. Milley, the 21st and current Commanding General of the U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM), will be honored during the second period of the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic. A hockey star at Princeton University (Class of 1980), General Milley is the only NCAA Division I hockey player to become a four-star general. For the last 31 years, General Milley has held multiple command and staff positions in six Infantry Divisions and Special Forces, including two previous tours with the 10th Mountain Division. He will be joined by three Wounded Warriors at the game.

U.S. Army Chorus and Lee Greenwood – Second Intermission

During the game's second intermission, the U.S. Army Chorus will return to perform each branch's official service song – the Coast Guard's "Semper Paratus," the Air Force's "Official U.S. Air Force Song," the Navy's "Anchors Aweigh," the Marine Corps' "The Marine's Hymn" and the U.S. Army's "The Army Goes Rolling Along" – while active and veteran members of the U.S. military are recognized in the stands. Lee Greenwood then will give a rousing performance of his patriotic hit "God Bless the USA."

Greenwood is a country music icon with more than 30 albums to his credit, including his 2013 MCA-released album *ICON*. "God Bless the USA" has been voted the most recognizable patriotic song in America. Greenwood knows first-hand what it's like to have loved ones fighting for the freedom of all Americans as his father served in the Navy and the Merchant Marine in World War II. "God Bless the USA" is now part of the film for Homeland Security shown when swearing in new citizens to the United States.

"God Bless the USA" has been in the top five on the country singles charts three times (1991, 2001 and 2003), giving it the distinction of being the only song in any genre of music to achieve that feat. It also was No. 1 on the pop charts after Sept. 11.

Bridgestone Hockey Saves Initiative

Bridgestone, the title sponsor of the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic, will host members of the Hockey Saves programs in Chicago and Washington, D.C., at Nationals Park on Jan. 1. The charitable program, which supports war veterans who have been injured in the line of duty through organized hockey games and hockey-themed programs, has branches across the U.S.

For the latest on the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic, fans should follow the NHL on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and join the conversation by using the official hashtag #WinterClassic.

Surging Blackhawks make all the right moves

Nancy Armour, USA TODAY Sports 9:56 p.m. EST December 30, 2014



(Photo: Rick Osentoski, USA TODAY Sports)

When the Chicago Blackhawks went on a tear in late November, winning eight in a row and 11 of 12, they did so with what seemed like an added sense of urgency. [FULLSCREEN](#)

Not, however, for the reason you might think.

WINTER CLASSIC HOCKEY PREPARATIONS

Yes, the Blackhawks could be victims of the salary cap again next summer. The hefty eight-year, \$84 million contracts for Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane kick in. Brandon Saad and Joakim Nordstrom, youngsters who could be key players for years to come, will be due for raises. So, too, will veterans Michal Rozsival and Johnny Oduya.

Another year down the road, Brent Seabrook's and Kris Versteeg's contracts will be up.

But the Blackhawks, winners of two Stanley Cups in the last five years, aren't driven by the thought of this being their last chance to win it all.

They're driven because it's their next chance to win it all.



USA TODAY

[Power rankings: New No. 1 team, MVP](#)

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/2014/12/30/power-rankings-players-teams-chicago-blackhawks-tyler-seguin/21035071/>)

"We expect every year to win. We recognize that's a tall order to pull that off, but you've got to set your expectations high," Blackhawks general manager Stan Bowman said. "I don't know internally that it's any different this year than last year. We set up to win the Cup coming off the one in 2013 when we won.

"We came up a little short last year; we had a very good season, but it didn't end the way we wanted. When we started this year, the goal was, 'Let's go all the way again.' We've got to do a lot of work to get there, though. You can't just say, 'We want to win.' You have to put in the work to get there."

After winning its first Stanley Cup in 49 years in 2010, Chicago was forced to purge its roster because of salary cap pressure. Playoff star Dustin Byfuglien, who had three goals just in the Final, was traded along with Versteeg, Andrew Ladd, Brent Sopel, Ben Eager and Colin Fraser. (Versteeg has since returned.) Starting goalie Antti Niemi and Adam Burish were allowed to walk.



USA TODAY

[Outdoor NHL games haven't lost their momentum](#)

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2014/12/30/winter-classic-outdoor-hockey-still-has-charm/21072275/>)

Yet three years later, there the 'Hawks were, lifting the Cup.

"It seems like the organization continues to make good decisions and the right choices," said forward Patrick Sharp, one of the longest-tenured Blackhawks. "The organization finds a way to replace those players with quality NHLers, and we continue to win."

Of course, it helps that Chicago's core is Kane and Toews, two of the NHL's best players. Both are dynamic scorers, able to create shots seemingly out of nothing. And do it when the Hawks need it most, too. Kane has an NHL-best five game-winning goals.

They're both expert passers, too, as dangerous when they're setting up someone else's shot as when they're taking their own. Kane leads the 'Hawks in assists, with Toews right behind him.

Toews also is one of the best defending forwards in the league, with a Selke Trophy to prove it.

"Those two guys make everything go," Bowman said. "Any team would die to have one of them, and we've got two."

There is more to the Blackhawks (25-10-2 heading into Thursday's Winter Classic) than Kane and Toews, however. More than Sharp and Marian Hossa,

too.

A big reason Chicago was able to withstand the roster overhaul in 2010 — and a less severe one in 2013 — was because Bowman and his staff have made their development program a priority. Prospects are stockpiled and carefully groomed, ensuring there is always a fresh supply of young talent to fill whatever holes the Blackhawks have.

PHOTOS: Winter Classic rink preparations

"There's always changes year to year, and in a lot of ways I do think that's good. You want some new blood," Bowman said. "I think that's good to have some players that, even if you do go all the way, that weren't here to experience that. They want to be hungry, they want to know what it feels like to get to the ultimate."

When Andrew Shaw scored the winner in triple overtime to end an epic Game 1 of the 2013 Stanley Cup Final, he hadn't spent a full season in the NHL. Two years later, he's a staple in the Chicago lineup.

Ditto for Saad, who has emerged as a central figure in Chicago's offense in his second full season in the NHL.

"They're smart. They let players develop in the minors," Shaw said. "They draft well, have their core set of guys, and they've had success with it."

"They want winners and they find winners," Shaw added. "They go out and find them and bring them into the organization. Those are the types of players that are going to help you win championships."



USA TODAY

[Sunshine could create issue at Winter Classic](http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/blackhawks/2014/12/30/winter-classic-weather-sunshine-blackhawks-capitals/21079161/)

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/2014/12/30/winter-classic-weather-sunshine-blackhawks-capitals/21079161/>)

The Blackhawks reached the Western Conference finals last season, falling to the Los Angeles Kings in seven games. Despite keeping that team largely intact, Chicago began this season slowly.

"That first month of the season, I think everyone was trying to find a role within the team," Sharp said.

But when the Blackhawks headed west on the annual "circus trip" — Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey take over the United Center for about 10 days every November — something clicked. They went 5-1.

That hot streak has continued, with Chicago dropping three games in the last month, one in a shootout in Columbus.

"I'm certainly glad that we got off to a good start so that we haven't dug a hole, but we've got to keep forging ahead," Bowman said. "What we did up to this point is somewhat irrelevant as we look at the rest of the season. We've put ourselves in a good place, which is important, but we've got to keep our foot on the gas and keep going."

Because no matter how much — or how little — the roster changes, the Blackhawks' goal never does.

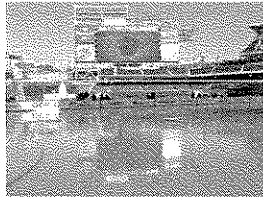
"That's why we're part of this," Bowman said. "We want to win."

PHOTOS: Winter Classic jerseys



Sunshine could create issue at Winter Classic

 **Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports** 8:45 p.m. EST December 30, 2014



(Photo: Susan Walsh, AP)

When the NHL's Winter Classic is held every January, the sun is never a welcome guest.

But sunny conditions, with 41 degree temperatures, are expected New Year's Day when the Washington Capitals entertain the Chicago Blackhawks at Nationals Park in the seventh Winter Classic (1 p.m. ET, NBC).

With the NHL's advanced ice-making technology, temperature is no concern. But the 2012 Winter Classic in Philadelphia and the first Stadium Series game in 2014 at Yankee Stadium were delayed because of glare issues.

"I don't think the ice conditions will be an issue for either team," NBC analyst Pierre McGuire said.

With the inaugural College Football Playoff games starting at 5:30 p.m. ET on ESPN, no one wants any form of delay.



USA TODAY

Outdoor NHL games haven't lost their momentum

[\(http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2014/12/30/winter-classic-outdoor-hockey-still-has-charm/21072275/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2014/12/30/winter-classic-outdoor-hockey-still-has-charm/21072275/)

NBC officials aren't concerned.

"Whether it's snow, cold, fog or sun, weather is part of the charm of the Winter Classic," the network said in a statement to USA TODAY Sports. "(That) is why we have The Weather Channel's Jim Cantore as part of our broadcast team that day. We're used to dealing with scheduling challenges for a variety of reasons for many of the sports we cover. We're confident Thursday's game will be another classic, regardless of when the puck is dropped."

The Capitals have enough to worry about, because home teams are 1-5 in Winter Classics.


"I believe the home team has issues in these games because of distractions and the atmosphere is more neutral than partial, as it is more of a total league event," McGuire said.

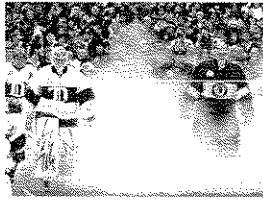
PHOTOS: Winter Classic rink preparations

[FULLSCREEN](#)

**WINTER CLASSIC RINK
PREPARATIONS**

Outdoor NHL games haven't lost their momentum

 **Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports** 8:12 p.m. EST December 30, 2014



(Photo: Tom Fluegge, USA TODAY Sports)

Anyone who believes the NHL's outdoor hockey concept has lost its charm probably has not seen a Winter Classic in person. [FULLSCREEN](#)

This is an event where you have to be there to appreciate the romance. **WINTER CLASSIC JERSEYS**

The Winter Classic isn't a made-for-TV event. It's a made-to-be-there event.

Originally, it seemed like the Winter Classic's impact would come from the NHL carving out its own television niche on New Year's Day. As soon as the snow started falling at Ralph Wilson Stadium outside Buffalo during the first game on Jan. 1, 2008, college football lost exclusive rights to New Year's Day television.

Word started to spread through social media about the snow globe effect at the game and by the time Pittsburgh Penguins star Sidney Crosby trudged through snow to score the winning shootout goal, 3.9 million had tuned in to NBC to see how players dealt with the elements.

The day after that game, most of the teams in the NHL called the league office to see if they could host the next one.



USA TODAY

[Power rankings: New No. 1 team, MVP](#)

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/2014/12/30/power-rankings-players-teams-chicago-blackhawks-tyler-seguin/21035071/>)

The following year, 4.4 million people tuned in to watch the Detroit Red Wings and Chicago Blackhawks play at Wrigley Field.

But anyone who was in the vicinity of Wrigley Field that day understood that the Winter Classic became less about TV and more about being there.

When you were walking up to the gate that day, there was a Super Bowl-like atmosphere. Every Winter Classic since then has seemed like the annual festival of hockey.

Last year's game at the Big House in Ann Arbor, Mich., was played during a winter storm and there still were roughly 100,000 fans in the stadium that day.

This is not an event that is losing momentum.

PHOTOS: Winter Classic rink preparations

Critics say the NHL has made outdoor hockey less special by scheduling too many events other than the Winter Classic. Last season, the NHL had the Winter Classic, four Stadium Series games, plus the Heritage Classic in Vancouver. [FULLSCREEN](#)

Was that overkill or was the NHL embracing supply and demand? The fact that more than 216,000 people attended the four Stadium Series games would suggest it was the latter. **WINTER CLASSIC RINK PREPARATIONS**

Nobody who attended the Los Angeles Kings-Anaheim Ducks game at Dodger Stadium, with KISS providing the musical entertainment, believed the NHL scheduled too many games.

Those who believe outdoor hockey has run its course don't take into account how big these games are in the host cities.

The fan watching his sixth outdoor game on television might feel like he has seen enough. But it is a far different experience when you are there in person. It's enchanting.

Players admit to being in awe as they look around the stadium before a game. In 2010, then-Boston Bruins forward Marco Sturm said he almost didn't jump over the boards for his first shift because he was gazing at the crowd.

For many fans, outdoor hockey reminds them of their younger days when they skated on the pond or lake or backyard rink.



FOR THE WIN

The best hockey goals of 2014

(<http://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/12/the-best-hockey-goals-of-2014>)

When you are watching and hearing the sounds of outdoor NHL hockey, you don't care how many games have already been played. All Washington Capitals fans will care about Thursday afternoon is that this is the first outdoor game in the nation's capital.

Outdoor hockey still has considerable momentum. Thirty NHL cities would love to host a game. We haven't been to Denver or Minnesota or St. Louis or Columbus or Winnipeg or Toronto or Montreal. The game at Dodger Stadium proved the concept works in warm-weather cities.

Every big stadium in America is a potential site for this event. And when you finish up all of the possibilities, it will be time to go back to Wrigley Field or Fenway Park or Dodger Stadium.

We are a long way from being done with outdoor hockey.

PHOTOS: Winter Classic jerseys



Canadiens grab shootout victory

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

P.A. Parenteau scored the winning shootout goal to lift the Montreal Canadiens over the Florida Panthers, 2-1, on Tuesday night in Sunrise, Fla.

Parenteau's shot glanced off the glove of Roberto Luongo and went into the net in the third round of the shootout. Jonathan Huberdeau missed on the ensuing attempt, and Montreal improved to 5-1 in shootouts.

The Canadiens have won four in a row — including three on the road — and seven of eight. Montreal owns a three-game winning streak against the Panthers.

Brendan Gallagher scored in regulation for Montreal, and Dustin Tokarski had 36 saves in his first start in 11 games. Nick Bjugstad scored Florida's goal.

Luongo stopped 33 shots for the Panthers, who lost at home for the first time in four games. The crowd of 19,614 was Florida's largest on home ice.

PREDATORS 3, BLUES 2 (at Nashville) — Shea Weber scored twice, the second time while his

NHL ROUNDUP

team was short-handed, to lead Nashville. Gabriel Bourque added a goal for the Predators, who have won two of three.

Chris Butler and T.J. Oshie scored for St. Louis, which lost for the fifth time in six games despite the return of No. 1 goalie Brian Elliott.

BLACKHAWKS RULE: Five Chicago Blackhawks players and Buffalo Sabres forward Zemgus Girgensons are poised to be selected by fans to play in the NHL All-Star Game at Columbus, Ohio.

With two days left before voting closes, Girgensons maintains his overall lead with more than 1.46 million, the NHL said.

In line for the final two forward spots are Chicago's Patrick Kane (1.07 million votes) and Jonathan Toews (1.06 million). Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby (704,792) is fourth. Chicago's Duncan Keith (1.04 million) and Brent Seabrook (875,868) lead defensemen. Blackhawks' Corey Crawford leads goalies with 955,385 votes.

Bergen
Record

Top Junior Stars Will Meet When U.S. Faces Canada

By MATT HIGGINS

MONTREAL — The offensive flair of Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel has caused scouts to refer to them as generational talents, hockey prospects who come along perhaps once every decade.

In advance of a preliminary round game between their national teams at the World Junior Championship on Wednesday, they have shown an aptitude for defense, too, as they have fended off a barrage of questions about an impending personal showdown.

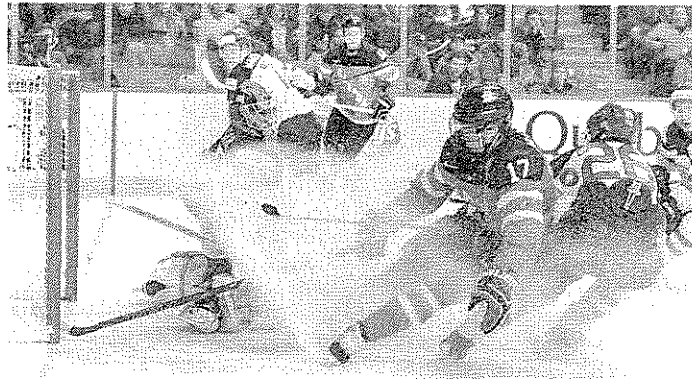
"It's nothing to do with me versus Connor in this game," Eichel, 18, of North Chelmsford, Mass., said after the United States defeated Slovakia, 3-0, on Monday night to improve to 3-0 in the tournament. "It's Team Canada versus Team U.S.A."

After practice Tuesday, McDavid, 17, of Richmond Hill, Ontario, was equally subdued.

"It's the U.S. versus Canada," he said. "It's not me versus him or anything like that."

Still, this meeting between McDavid and Eichel, who are expected to be the top two picks in the 2015 N.H.L. draft, has been highly anticipated since the start of the hockey season.

And little either player has done has tempered the anticipation. Both are swift skaters and dynamic scorers expected to make an immediate impact in the N.H.L. next season. Eichel, a freshman center for top-ranked Boston University, is tied for the N.C.A.A. scoring lead with 27 points. McDavid, also a center, racked up a staggering 51 points in 18 games for the Erie Otters of



MINAS PANAGIOTAKIS/GETTY IMAGES

Connor McDavid (17) unleashing a spray of ice on Monday during Canada's victory over Finland, the defending champion.

the Ontario Hockey League before breaking his right hand in a fight last month.

Canada Coach Benoit Groulx and United States Coach Mark Osiecki have been complimentary of the way their charges have held up under withering questioning.

"The media has been talking about Jack Eichel and Connor McDavid since Day 1, so I think they're used to it," Groulx said. "But Connor is a team player, and he thinks more about us winning than him versus Jack Eichel."

Results from the opening matchups of the tournament have added an extra dollop of drama to the game. Both teams are undefeated. Canada beat the defending champion, Finland, 4-1, on Monday and has outscored its opponents by 16-1 and sits in first place in Group A with 9 points. The United States, which beat Finland in a shootout, is second with 8 points, outscoring its opponents by 11-1.

Defense and goaltending for both teams have scarcely been tested. Still, Canada has elected to start goalie Eric Comrie against the Americans rather than Zach Fucale, who allowed his team's only goal of the tournament.

But neither Eichel nor McDavid has carried his team. McDavid has one goal and two assists, while Eichel, the American captain, has a goal and an assist.

The tournament has traditionally been a showcase for 19-year-olds, and that has held true this year for the United States and Canada. The player of the game for Canada on Monday was Sam Reinhart, the second overall pick in the 2014 draft by the Buffalo Sabres. Reinhart scored twice against Finland while playing on a line with Max Domi, a first-round pick of the Arizona Coyotes, and Anthony Duclair, who is on loan from the Rangers.

Domi, the son of the former N.H.L. player Tie Domi, is tied for

second on the team with 5 points.

For the United States, Dylan Larkin, a first-round pick of the Detroit Red Wings in 2014, has led the way with 5 points.

Wednesday's game is expected to be a big draw at the Bell Centre, a relief for the hosts as disappointing turnouts in Montreal and Toronto have elicited some soul searching in the Canadian news media.

In most games so far, it would have been possible to send a slap shot into the stands and not hit anyone. The reasons included high ticket prices and the competitive imbalance between the United States and Canada and the rest of their group.

"The crowd is going to be a big factor," Larkin said. "It's going to be a sea of red. We haven't been playing in front of that large of crowds that Canada has. The first few shifts when the nerves are going, we're going to have to play defensively."

Curtis Lazar, Canada's captain, said he anticipated the game would be an "all-out war."

In a city synonymous with hockey excellence, an expectant home crowd will place pressure on Canada to win, though the outcome will be meaningless in terms of advancing into the tournament quarterfinals. Canada has not won a gold medal at the world juniors since 2009; the United States won the event in 2010 and 2013.

Although Eichel and McDavid have refused to engage in a personal rivalry, the rivalry between the United States and Canada has emerged in comments recently.

"You love to beat them," Eichel said.

 **ESPN.com: NHL**

[Print without images] 

Tuesday, December 30, 2014

Ducks send Dany Heatley to AHL

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. -- Dany Heatley has been assigned to the Anaheim Ducks' AHL affiliate in Norfolk after the veteran NHL goal-scorer cleared waivers.

The Ducks announced the move Tuesday.

Heatley hasn't clicked with the NHL-leading Ducks, who signed him to a one-year, \$1 million deal in the offseason.

Heatley is scoreless in six games with a minus-3 rating in Anaheim while laboring on the ice and struggling with injuries, including a groin problem that required surgery.

The Ducks are the fifth NHL team for Heatley, who had two 50-goal seasons with the Ottawa Senators during a career that began in 2001. He turns 34 next month.

Heatley's minor-league assignment will allow him to work on returning to NHL fitness while the Ducks wait to see whether another team is interested in acquiring him.



Dany Heatley, a two-time 50-goal scorer, has no points in six games with Anaheim this season.

 **[PRINT]** **ESPN.com: NHL**

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Tuesday, December 30, 2014

Zemgus Girgensons still tops votes

Associated Press

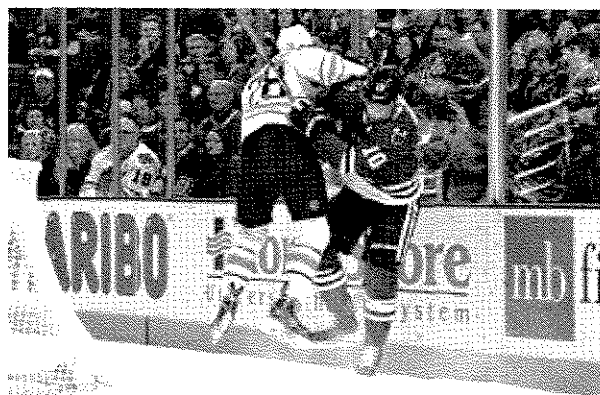
NEW YORK -- Five Chicago Blackhawks players and Buffalo Sabres forward Zemgus Girgensons are poised to be selected by fans to play in the NHL All-Star Game at Columbus, Ohio, next month.

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Chicago's Duncan Keith (1.04 million) and Brent Seabrook (875,868) lead defensemen. Blackhawks' Corey Crawford leads goalies with 955,385 votes, nearly 400,000 more than Montreal's Carey Price.



Zemgus Girgensons, left, tops All-Star balloting, outpacing the likes of Blackhawks stars Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews.

Matthews, Puljujarvi will be big stars of 2016 WJC

Tuesday, 12.30.2014 / 12:53 PM / 2015 World Junior Championship

By Arpon Basu - Managing Editor LNH.com

MONTREAL -- Much of the focus at the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship has been the showdown between the top two prospects for the 2015 NHL Draft, Connor McDavid of Canada and Jack Eichel of the United States.

The two will go head to head on New Year's Eve when Canada and the U.S. complete preliminary-round play in a showdown between the two top teams of Group A at Bell Centre (4 p.m. ET, NHLN-US, NHL.com).

However, flying well below that radar is the arrival on the big stage of two of the top prospects for the 2016 draft.

Forwards Auston Matthews of the United States and Jesse Puljujarvi of Finland have not looked the least bit out of place in a tournament that is generally unkind to players who are so far from their draft year.

A big reason why in both cases is their size; Matthews and Puljujarvi are built like players one or two years older than they are.

Matthews, 17, is listed at 6-foot and 198 pounds, Puljujarvi, 16, at 6-foot-3 and 196 pounds. Each of them has displayed speed, smarts and skills to go with that brawn.

It makes you wonder how each of them might look a year from now when they will be under the glare of the NHL draft spotlight, with the WJC being held in Puljujarvi's native Finland. They will be that much bigger, probably more skilled and definitely more dominant among their peers.

"It's kids like Matthews and Puljujarvi that maintain my faith in hockey," one NHL general manager said at the WJC this week.

While the 2014 tournament has been all about McDavid and Eichel, it is entirely possible it will be the same thing for Matthews and Puljujarvi a year from now.

Matthews, a native of Scottsdale, Ariz., has one goal, one assist and 11 shots on goal through three games for the U.S. But what has been most impressive has been Matthews' ability to play a 200-foot game. He's looked just as capable in his own end as he does in the offensive zone, where he can be a load to contain down low.

If there's one thing that jumps out about Matthews, it's that he doesn't necessarily jump out at you, at least not for the wrong reasons. There are no glaring errors, no poor positioning, none of the things you would expect from a player so young playing on such a large stage.

"It's a big adjustment, but you just have to go out there and not think about how young you are," Matthews said. "You just have to think everyone's a hockey player out there and just play your game."

Matthews has done that and improved throughout the tournament after a rough start in his first game against Finland, where he inadvertently re-directed Finland's only goal into the U.S. net and took a pair of bad penalties in the third period of a game tied 1-1, one the United States would go on to win 2-1 in a shootout.

As the tournament has progressed, Matthews has become one of U.S. coach Mark Osiecki's most important forwards.

"I think he's mature where he understands his game," Osiecki said. "He understands shift by shift if he's had a good shift, a poor shift. He's able to channel it in the right direction and not get frustrated. For a young kid to have the ability to not get too frustrated with himself and be able to understand the objective of his next shift, he really has a good handle on where he's at as a player."

Matthews, who got hooked on hockey at a young age while attending Arizona Coyotes games, already has been identified as one of the top prospects for the 2016 draft; he's getting a crash course in what that will be like at the WJC. Not only is Matthews witnessing the scrutiny surrounding Eichel, he has a front-row seat to what it might be like for him a year from now.

"I've been rooming with Jack, so he's definitely been a good guy to talk to, just seeing what he goes through every day with the media and stuff like that," Matthews said. "It's just how he keeps his head on straight and focuses on what needs to be done on the ice. I know the rest will take care of itself."

While Matthews has been remarkable in the way he has seamlessly fit in, Puljujarvi has been impossible to ignore on a Finland team that has struggled to score. He has been a magnet for the puck and appears to produce a scoring chance on nearly every shift thanks to his blazing speed through the neutral zone.

In Finland's 2-1 loss to Slovakia, Puljujarvi had a team-high six shots on goal and at least as many grade-A scoring chances. Every time he touched the puck, something exciting appears to happen.

Through three games, Puljujarvi has no points but has leads Finland with 18 shots on goal and has shown a knack for

being at the right place at the right time on a remarkably consistent basis.

"This is the best possible opportunity to show what I can do," Puljujarvi said through an interpreter this week on his appearance at the WJC. "But I can't be satisfied if the team doesn't win and I don't score."

Puljujarvi is from Tornio in northern Finland, approximately 450 miles north of Helsinki, at the northern tip of the Gulf of Bothnia. He made his debut in Liiga, Finland's top professional league, this season with Karpat; he has three goals and one assist in 12 games.

"His laugh is amazing. He's typical northern Finland people; they're always happy," said Finland captain Artturi Lehkonen (Montreal Canadiens). "He's a big guy and he has a tremendous shot. I knew he would fit right in because it's a small rink and he's a big player, he can compete. He's been playing well but I know that he's frustrated also because he hasn't scored."

Puljujarvi is the sixth player to make the Finland U-20 national team as a 16-year-old, following retired NHL players Reijo Ruotsalainen and Janne Niinimaa, and Mikael Granlund of the Minnesota Wild, Olli Maatta of the Pittsburgh Penguins and Aleksander Barkov of the Florida Panthers.

That's a pretty distinguished list, and Puljujarvi has shown there's no reason he shouldn't be on it.

"He's going to be a star," the same NHL GM said after watching Puljujarvi play against Canada on Monday. "This was my first viewing of him, and usually I tell my scouts not to tell me anything on the underage kids, I just want to watch them. After his second shift I turned to my scout and said, 'Who is that?' He was incredible."

Someone else who got his first taste of Puljujarvi this week was United States defenseman Noah Hanifin, who is slotted right behind McDavid and Eichel on most 2015 draft projections.

"I didn't really know him when we were playing him, but I saw him play against Slovakia and he played very well," Hanifin said. "He's a good kid too."

"Auston's obviously got some competition."

While that competition remains in the shadows of McDavid and Eichel, it may not be the case a year from now when a similar show at the WJC will have Matthews and Puljujarvi as its star players.

Group A top spot at stake for Canada, United States

Tuesday, 12.30.2014 / 12:35 PM / 2015 World Junior Championship

By Mike G. Morreale - NHL.com Staff Writer

MONTREAL -- Canada and the United States each has heard its anthem played and had its flag raised following three successive victories at the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship.

Only one team will make it four straight on New Year's Eve when the North American rivals play Wednesday for top honors in Group A in the most anticipated match of preliminary-round play of the tournament at Bell Centre in Montreal (4 p.m. ET, NHLN-US, NHL.com).

Canada is the top seed in Group A with three regulation victories and nine points. The United States, with two regulation wins and one shootout win for eight points is second, but a win of any kind Wednesday would allow them to pass Canada for first place.

The winner and top seed in Group A will play a quarterfinal-round game against the fourth place team in Group B on Friday. The loser will earn the second seed and play the third-seeded team from Group B on Friday.

"When you play with the puck most of the time you're not in trouble, and when you look at both teams, we're two teams that make good plays with the puck," Canada coach Benoit Groulx said. "We're both puck-possession teams and we have a lot of strength on both teams. We can skate, we can make plays with the puck, we can control the puck, we have smart players.

"When you look at the matchup it's pretty even, so it's going to be interesting to see how it plays out."

The last time the United States beat Canada in preliminary-round action was Dec. 31, 1998, a 5-2 victory in Winnipeg. The last three wins for the U.S. against Canada have come in the playoff round. That includes wins in the gold-medal game in 2004 (4-3) and 2010 (6-5 in overtime); the U.S. also beat Canada 5-1 in the semifinals in 2013.

Canada leads the all-time series 28-3-1-6 and has outscored the United States 170-112; there also have been three ties. Of the 17 games since 2000, 11 have been decided by one goal and five have required overtime; twice the game has gone to a shootout. There was a 1-1 tie in 2000.

The game will feature plenty of intriguing storylines, starting with the head-to-head matchup of two of the top prospects for the 2015 NHL Draft, Canada's Connor McDavid (one goal, three points, 10 shots on goal) and Jack Eichel (one goal, two points, 14 shots) of the United States.

"I'm pretty excited," Eichel said. "It's always a lot of fun when you play Canada; it's always a battle. So we know it's going to be a tough 60 minutes; they're not going to hand it over to us. But we're really excited. New Year's Eve, you watch this game growing up, so getting to participate in it at the Bell Centre, it's going to be a great show."

Eichel, who serves as captain of the United States, isn't too concerned over the media-induced rivalry between him and McDavid.

"He's a good player but I'm not too worried about him right now, and I'm sure he's not too worried about me," Eichel said. "There's a lot bigger battle going on here. It's the United States versus Canada for the top seed in our bracket. I'm not worried about a 1-on-1 battle."

Each team also features a balanced scoring attack. Canada has 11 players with at least one goal, and five with at least two. Nicolas Petan (Winnipeg Jets) leads Canada with six points (one goal, five assists) and Max Domi (Arizona Coyotes), who has two goals, five points and a plus-4 rating, has been a tower of strength at both ends.

The United States has gotten goals from eight players, including a team-leading three goals and five points from center Dylan Larkin (Detroit Red Wings). Larkin seemed to have good chemistry with Sonny Milano (Columbus Blue Jackets) and Hudson Fasching (Buffalo Sabres) in a 3-0 victory against Slovakia on Monday.

"They're a fast team and we're a fast team, so it should be a good game and I'm looking forward to it," Larkin said of facing Canada.

The only regular linemate alongside Eichel on the top line through three games has been right wing Alex Tuch (Minnesota Wild). U.S. coach Mark Osiecki has had Chase De Leo (Winnipeg Jets), Milano and Tyler Motte (Chicago Blackhawks) play left wing on Eichel's line in the opening three games.

"Canada is tremendously deep up front, in goal and on defense," Osiecki said. "We need to show discipline, stay out of the [penalty] box, and will need to roll four lines."

Staying out of the box certainly would bode well for the United States. Through three games Canada ranks first on the power-play (50.0 percent) with five goals on 10 chances. They also have killed off 11 opposing power plays.

McDavid has played much of the tournament alongside Nick Ritchie (Anaheim Ducks) and Canada captain Curtis Lazar (Ottawa Senators).

"It's going to be a lot of fun; it's a New Year's Eve tradition now," Lazar said of playing the United States. "They've got a great team over there that we've seen throughout the tournament, but we feel we're up to the task. It's going to be two good teams going at it and hopefully we can put on a show for these fans."

Canada and the United States have benefitted from sound defensive play and solid goaltending. Canada has outscored the opposition 16-1 backed by goaltenders Zachary Fucale (Montreal Canadiens) and Eric Comrie (Winnipeg Jets). Fucale was in goal for wins against Slovakia (8-0) and Finland (4-1), and has a 0.50 goals-against average and .975 save percentage; Hockey Canada announced Tuesday that Comrie would be in goal against the United States.

"It's obviously a classic," Fucale said of the rivalry against the United States. "Every year we wait for that game. It's going to be a great game, there's no doubt about it. There's a lot of rivalry between these two countries, so we're excited about it."

The U.S. has outscored its opponents 11-1 behind Thatcher Demko (Vancouver Canucks) and Brandon Halverson (New York Rangers). Demko (0.48 GAA, .978 save percentage) backstopped wins against Finland (2-1 in a shootout) and Slovakia (3-0).

Ducks assign forward Heatley to Norfolk of AHL

Tuesday, 12.30.2014 / 2:55 PM / News

NHL.com

The Anaheim Ducks on Tuesday assigned forward Dany Heatley to their American Hockey League affiliate in Norfolk.

Signed to a one-year, \$1 million contract by the Ducks on July 9, Heatley, 33, was sidelined by a groin injury for much of the season. He didn't score a point in six games and was minus-3.

A two-time 50-goal scorer for the Ottawa Senators, Heatley has 372 goals and 791 points in 869 NHL games.

Ducks send veteran scorer Dany Heatley to AHL

AP 3:18 p.m. EST December 30, 2014

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Dany Heatley has been assigned to the Anaheim Ducks' AHL affiliate in Norfolk after the veteran NHL goal-scorer cleared waivers.

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Heatley hasn't clicked with the NHL-leading Ducks, who signed him to a one-year, \$1 million deal in the offseason.

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Sabres Girgensons, 5 'Hawks lead NHL All-Star vote

AP 2:53 p.m. EST December 30, 2014



(Photo: The Associated Press)

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 **PRINT** ESPN.com: NHL

[Print without images] 

Wednesday, December 31, 2014

Report: Panthers sign Nick Bjugstad

ESPN.com news services

The Florida Panthers have signed center Nick Bjugstad to a six-year deal, according to a report Tuesday.

Bjugstad, who leads the Panthers with 13 goals this season, will receive \$4.1 million annually, the Miami Herald reported, citing team sources.

He was scheduled to be a restricted free agent after this season.

The 22-year-old Bjugstad scored the Panthers' lone goal in a 2-1 shootout loss to Montreal on Tuesday night. He also has eight assists, giving him 21 points this season, and 94 shots on goal.

As a rookie last season, Bjugstad had 16 goals and 38 points to lead the Panthers in scoring.



Nick Bjugstad (27) led the Panthers in scoring with 38 points as a rookie last season.

Year in review: 14 most memorable people of 2014

Wednesday, 12.31.2014 / 3:00 AM / NHL Insider

By Dan Rosen - NHL.com Senior Writer

There were unforgettable events and memorable moments across the hockey world in 2014, from "The Big House" to Bolshoy Ice Dome, New York to Los Angeles, Montreal to Boston, Toronto, Chicago, and so many other places.

Here are the 14 people who were front and center in those events, seemingly ordinary people doing extraordinary things, making them the most memorable people in the hockey world in 2014:

Sidney Crosby, Pittsburgh Penguins/Canada

Crosby had the best year for a player who didn't win the Stanley Cup, or even get past the second round in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

He captained Canada to a gold medal at the 2014 Sochi Olympics, waiting until the most important moment of the tournament, the gold-medal game, to make his biggest imprint. Crosby scored the goal that gave Canada a 2-0 lead against Sweden, all but clinching their second straight Olympic gold.

He cleaned up at the 2014 NHL Awards show by taking home the Hart Trophy, Ted Lindsay Award and the Art Ross Trophy for leading the League with 104 points, 17 more than anybody else. He received 128 of a possible 137 first-place votes for the Hart Trophy.

The playoffs did not go as planned for Crosby as he and the Penguins were knocked out by the New York Rangers in the Eastern Conference Second Round. Crosby was limited to one goal in 13 playoff games, but it was revealed later that he was playing with a wrist injury. Crosby refused to use the injury as an excuse.

He started the 2014-15 season on fire with nine points in the first four games. His production has waned as the Penguins' injuries have mounted, but Crosby still has 38 points in 33 games.

Jean Beliveau, Montreal Canadiens

Beliveau was revered across the NHL for decades because of his poise, charisma, class and ability to lead and win. His name is on the Stanley Cup a record 17 times -- 10 times as a player for the Montreal Canadiens and seven more times as a Canadiens executive.

He captured the attention and commanded the respect of the hockey community in death as much as he did in life. Beliveau's death Dec. 2 at the age of 83 prompted a state of international mourning throughout the hockey community.

His funeral Dec. 10 at Mary Queen of the World Cathedral in Montreal was a national event in Canada attended by numerous dignitaries, including the current prime minister, two former prime ministers, the Quebec premier, the mayor of Montreal and 40-50 former teammates, many who have been inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

An estimated 1,500 people were inside the cathedral with countless more watching on video monitors outside. The Canadiens honored Beliveau by placing his No. 4 over his customary seat in Bell Centre, a seat that will remain empty for the remainder of the season.

Brendan Shanahan, Toronto Maple Leafs

A 600-goal scorer, three-time Stanley Cup champion turned League disciplinarian, Shanahan left his job in charge of the NHL Department of Player Safety to run the Toronto Maple Leafs as president and alternate governor, bringing his cachet and high profile to a position at the top of the NHL's most talked about and publicized team in the League's biggest market.

Shanahan left behind a department he helped build at the NHL to go to a team he grew up rooting for as a kid from the Toronto suburb of Mimico, Ontario. He has made progressive changes, implementing an analytics department run by 28-year-old assistant general manager Kyle Dubas, who Shanahan hired in July.

Anze Kopitar, Los Angeles Kings/Slovenia

Reaching the quarterfinals at the Olympics was to Slovenia what winning the Stanley Cup was to the Kings in 2014. Kopitar helped fuel both achievements.

He was the face of Slovenia's stunning story of success in the Olympics.

Slovenia never had played in the men's Olympic ice hockey tournament before qualifying to compete in Sochi, but they quickly turned into one of the best stories of the event.

Slovenia lost 5-2 to Russia in its first game but stunned Slovakia 3-1 in its second game of the preliminary round. It

lost 5-1 to the United States but beat Austria 4-0 in the qualification round to advance to the quarterfinals, where Slovenia lost 3-0 to Sweden.

Months later Kopitar was one of the faces of the Kings' historic championship run. He finished the Stanley Cup Playoffs as the leading scorer with 26 points in 26 games, going head to head and winning battles against some of the other top centers in the League, such as Joe Thornton, Ryan Getzlaf and Jonathan Toews.

Mike Babcock, Detroit Red Wings/Canada

Babcock's year started at Michigan Stadium in the 2014 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic. His presence in the national spotlight only grew at the Olympics in Sochi, where for the second consecutive time he coached Canada to a gold medal.

Babcock's approach in Sochi was to win from the goal out. No team was as stingy as Canada, which allowed three goals in six games en route to winning the gold medal.


Babcock then got the injury-riddled and young Red Wings into the playoffs for a 23rd consecutive season. Detroit had 418 man-games lost last season, second in the League behind the Pittsburgh Penguins. Babcock finished second in the voting for the Jack Adams Award.

Since last season Babcock's contract with the Red Wings has been a hot topic. He is coaching in the final year of his contract and there is all kinds of speculation about his future, whether he will re-sign with the Red Wings or become a free agent.

Babcock also won his 500th game this season. He reached the milestone in 895 games, second all-time to Scotty Bowman (825). And the Red Wings are on target for a 24th consecutive playoff berth.

Alec Martinez, Los Angeles Kings

Martinez scored arguably the two most important goals in the 2014 Stanley Cup Playoffs. He scored them both in overtime, adding to the drama of a year he and the Kings never will forget.

Martinez capped the Western Conference Final against the Chicago Blackhawks by scoring the series-clinching goal on a wrist shot from the point through traffic and off a deflection 5:47 into overtime of Game 7 at United Center **(WATCH)** .

He didn't score again until he clinched the Kings second Stanley Cup championship in three years with his rebound goal off a 3-on-2 rush at 14:43 of the second overtime in Game 5 against the New York Rangers.

Martinez finished the playoffs tied for seventh on the Kings in goals (five) and tied for 11th in points (10) while playing the 10th-most minutes (432:09). It was an otherwise average postseason for a depth defenseman, but he made it unforgettable with two timely goals.

He did enough to earn a raise from the Kings in the form of a six-year, \$24 million contract extension he signed in early December. Martinez has been making \$1.1 million per season on a two-year contract that will expire at the end of this season.

Dean Lombardi, Los Angeles Kings

Lombardi's roster once again was good enough to win the Stanley Cup, Los Angeles' second in three seasons. And just like he did during the 2011-12 season, when the Kings won their first Stanley Cup, Lombardi, the Kings general manager, pulled off an impactful in-season trade.

He acquired Marian Gaborik from the Columbus Blue Jackets for Matt Frattin and two draft picks on March 5. Gaborik teamed with Kopitar to form one of the best one-two combinations in the League during the playoffs.

Gaborik led the playoffs with 14 goals, including six against the Ducks in the second round. Lombardi signed Gaborik to a seven-year contract June 25, less than a week before he could become an unrestricted free agent.

P.K. Subban, Montreal Canadiens/Canada

Subban didn't win any individual awards and he was a bit player for Canada in the Olympics, but his profile as the NHL's leading crossover superstar with appeal among fans of hockey, entertainment and fashion alike grew by leaps and bounds.

Subban's glitz and personality was on full display at the 2014 NHL Awards show, where he wore an orange suit while working the red carpet for NHL Network. Most of the NHL stars there wore black, blue or gray.

The average ALS Ice Bucket Challenge video from NHL players involved a small bucket of water and a smartphone; Subban's featured a dump truck full of ice water and a live television shoot on a morning talk show in Toronto.

He was seen interviewing his peers and Hollywood stars, mingling in the fashion world, snapping photos with basketball legend Magic Johnson and dining with tennis champion Novak Djokovic. But Subban's play on the ice equally was as impressive and appealing.

Subban had 53 points in 82 games in 2013-14 and helped the Canadiens reach the Eastern Conference Final. He signed an eight-year, \$72 million contract extension in early August and has started this season where he left off, with 23 points through his first 36 games.

Patrick Roy, Colorado Avalanche

Roy put himself and the Avalanche back on the map with a remarkable 2013-14 season. Colorado finished with 112 points to win the Central Division after finishing 29th in the League standings and earning the No. 1 pick in the 2013 NHL Draft the prior season.

The Avalanche lost a heartbreaking seven-game series to the Minnesota Wild in the Western Conference First Round, but Roy was named the Jack Adams Award winner as NHL coach of the year in June. Roy received 68 of 95 first-place votes, was named on 89 ballots and had 399 voting points, 236 more than Babcock.

Dan Craig, NHL

Craig, the NHL Facilities Operations Director, had one of the most stressful years of anybody in the game. He was in charge of building five rinks for games in six non-NHL venues, one of which was in Southern California.

The League went big in 2014 with the Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic at Michigan Stadium, the Tim Hortons Heritage Classic at BC Place in Vancouver, and four Coors Light NHL Stadium Series games at Yankee Stadium (two), Dodger Stadium and Soldier Field. Craig was in charge of the rink build and the ice at all of them, and they played to rave reviews.

In between all of that Craig had to oversee the 30 normal rinks in the NHL as part of his regular job. He's currently at Nationals Park in Washington putting the final touches on the rink for the 2015 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic on Thursday.

Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel

When was the last time two prospects from different countries caught the attention and were guaranteed to be the top two picks at the upcoming NHL draft the way Canadian center Connor McDavid and American center Jack Eichel have this year?

McDavid and Eichel have captured the imagination of fans of struggling teams such as the Edmonton Oilers, Carolina Hurricanes and Buffalo Sabres. They are considered franchise-changing prospects, and they'll only get bigger in 2015.

It can be argued that there haven't been two prospects as highly touted as them in the same draft since Russians Alex Ovechkin and Evgeni Malkin in 2004.

Henrik Lundqvist, New York Rangers/Sweden

Lundqvist led the Rangers to the Stanley Cup Final and Sweden into the gold-medal game at the Olympics. He didn't win the Cup or the gold medal, but he wasn't at fault for either loss.

He had a .927 save percentage and 2.14 goals-against average in 25 playoff games, including a .923 save percentage and 2.46 GAA in the Cup Final against the Kings. He had a 1.50 GAA and .943 save percentage in the Olympics. Sweden lost 3-0 to Canada in the gold-medal game.

Lundqvist also became the Rangers' all-time leader in wins (325) and shutouts (55) in 2014.

Shannon Szabados, Canada

Szabados led Canada to its fourth consecutive Olympic women's hockey gold medal by allowing three goals on 62 shots in her three games in Sochi. She finished with a 0.96 GAA and .954 save percentage. She made 27 saves in Canada's 3-2 overtime win against the United States in the gold-medal game.

She also became a groundbreaker for women's hockey by signing with the Columbus Cottonmouths of the Southern Professional Hockey League on March 7. She became the first female goalie to win an SPHL game Nov. 21, when she made 34 saves in a 5-4 win against the Fayetteville FireAntz.

According to the SPHL, Szabados became the first female player in history to win a player of the week award in a men's professional hockey league when she was honored by the SPHL on Dec. 2 for going 2-0 with a 1.49 GAA and .963 save percentage. This season she has five wins, a 3.28 GAA and .907 save percentage in nine games.



George Strombouloupoulos, Sportsnet

Strombouloupoulos replaced Ron MacLean as the host of "Hockey Night in Canada" this season, making him the new face of hockey in Canada as Sportsnet took over the Canadian national broadcast rights.

The acclaimed talk show host has brought his unique interviewing style and national following, including nearly 600,000 followers on Twitter, to anchor Sportsnet's coverage of the NHL.

Red Wings put D Jakub Kindl on injured list

AP 10:36 p.m. EST December 30, 2014

DETROIT (AP) — The Detroit Red Wings have put defenseman Jakub Kindl on the injured list because of an elbow problem.

Detroit recalled defenseman Xavier Ouellet from Grand Rapids of the AHL on Tuesday.

Ouellet has played in nine games this season with the Red Wings, recording his first NHL point on Nov. 22 at Toronto. He scored his first NHL goal six days later at New Jersey. He has eight points in 21 games with Grand Rapids.

The Red Wings host New Jersey on Wednesday night.

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Blue Jackets place Atkinson on injured list

AP 5:27 p.m. EST December 30, 2014

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The Columbus Blue Jackets have placed right wing Cam Atkinson on injured reserve retroactive to Dec. 27 and recalled center Sean Collins from their American Hockey League affiliate in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Atkinson sustained an upper-body injury Saturday against Boston and is expected to miss a week or two. He had eight goals and six assists in 33 games with the Blue Jackets this season.

Collins was scoreless in two games with Columbus earlier this season. He has 10 goals and nine assists in 28 games at Springfield.

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15 in '15: NJ sports fans' wish list for the new year

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Steve Politi | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com By **Steve Politi | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com**

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on December 31, 2014 at 6:00 AM, updated December 31, 2014 at 7:06 AM

Let's start here: 2015 has to be a better sports year than 2014. Right?

Right??

Please say it does, because 2014 was kind of the pits. Oh, there were notable exceptions, including the eight wins for the Rutgers football team in the inaugural Big Ten season and the Rangers' fun run to the Stanley Cup Finals. But mostly ...

We had two baseball teams miss the postseason, and two football teams miss the postseason, and one hockey team miss the postseason. We had the best pitcher on both the Mets and Yankees roster sidelined with serious arm issues. And while it sure was great watching Derek Jeter get that walkoff hit to end his career at Yankee Stadium, it just means we'll never see him play again.

Oh, and then there the scandals, from the Ray Rice affair to the Sayreville hazing arrests, it just seemed like there was always something bad in the sports pages.

Well, let's try to forget all that now. The calendar finally turns to 2015, and here's hoping our year comes up with more Odell Beckham Jr. miracle catches and fewer moments like a broken Victor Cruz screaming on the turf.

So scroll through the gallery above to see the 15 wishes for New Jersey sports fans in 2015. Happy New Year, everyone. It has to be better. Right?

Mobile users please click here to view the complete gallery.

Steve Politi may be reached at spoliti@njadvancemedia.com. Follow him on Twitter [@StevePoliti](https://twitter.com/StevePoliti). Find **NJ.com on Facebook**.

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Ramsey drops second straight

Rams fall to St. Joseph (Met.)

By JJ CONRAD
STAFF WRITER

ICE HOCKEY

WAYNE — For the first time since December 2011, Ramsey hockey is in the midst of a losing streak after its second straight loss Tuesday night, as the Rams were shut out, 1-0, for the second time in as many nights.

With the visible frustration levels mounting with each scoreless shift — and the time without a goal now sitting at 102 minutes and 39 seconds — Ramsey fell to St. Joseph (Metuchen), 1-0, in the Ice Vault Holiday tournament finale.

Like in the Rams' 1-0 loss to Morristown on Monday, the Rams had ample opportunities to find the net.

Though it's still December, Ramsey's inability to score against its upper-echelon opponents has become an area of concern in the past two games.

"We're starting to feel a little snake-bit," Ramsey coach Bob Toy said. "We've got to start finding

ways to get the puck to the front of the net with tougher support. We're not getting there with enough determination right now to create second and third scoring chances."

Ramsey and St. Joseph both went scoreless in the first 15 minutes, with the Falcons (8-1) outshooting the Rams, 9-8, in the opening period.

Ramsey controlled play in the second period, even while fighting off two penalties, and generated arguably its best look of the night on a 2-on-1 with Alex Whelan and Nick Botta, though Botta's shot — off a picture-perfect pass from Whelan — ricocheted hard off the right post.

Minutes later, Ramsey surrendered the game's lone goal, when Reece Young got one past Rams goalie Tyler Harmon to put the Falcons up, 1-0, with 4:26 to go in the period.