

NEW JERSEY DEVILS NEWSPAPER CLIPS

SEPTEMBER 30, 2013

DEVILS

Zubrus: We'll be Cup contenders

Veteran forward says roster is 'well-packed,' even without Kovalchuk

By Rich Chere
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

During a three-year span from 2008 to 2010, Dainius Zubrus felt the Devils had several squads that could have made a serious run at the Stanley Cup.

For various reasons, it never happened.

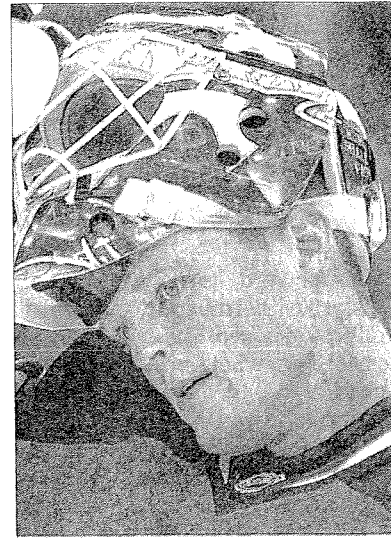
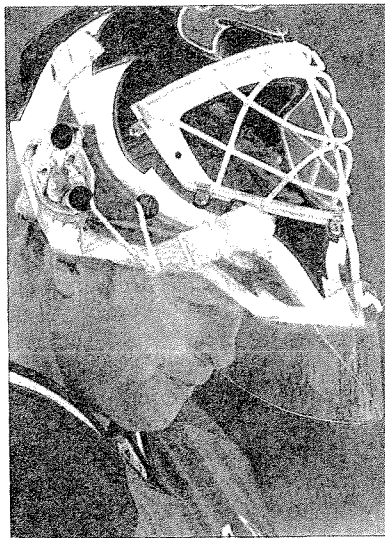
"To be honest, out of the six years I've been here, there were definitely years I thought we were there. We had some good teams," Zubrus recalled. "Unfortunately, I think those years we lost in the first round."

Now, with so many people writing the Devils off this season, Zubrus senses something special building. It is a different team without Ilya Kovalchuk, not to mention the departure of Zach Parise two summers ago, but there is a sense that this Devils bunch could be overachievers.

Legitimate Cup contenders, Zubrus predicted.

"I think we're very well-packed. I think we're a very good team," he said. "I do believe we're better than last year. The year we went to the Finals a couple of years ago I thought we were definitely a good team, but now we're a little different."

Most important, he said, is the goaltending tandem of Martin



PHOTOS BY SAED HINDASH/THE STAR-LEDGER

Martin Brodeur, left, and newcomer Cory Schneider, right, will share the goaltending duties for the Devils this season.

Brodeur and Cory Schneider.

"For us to win, obviously everybody needs to play at their best. That's an easy answer, but it's true. Everybody has to do their jobs," Zubrus said. "With the goaltending we see right now — Marty being Marty and Schneids coming in — starting from them on out, I think we have a very good lineup. When we play our pace and our hockey, I think we match against anybody very well."

That lineup will be finalized by 3 p.m. today, when the Devils submit their 23-man roster.

Right winger Cam Janssen was

placed on waivers yesterday. If he clears at noon today, he can be sent to Albany.

That would leave two more cuts, with goalie Keith Kinkaid having been assigned to the AHL club Saturday.

The team has eight defensemen right now, including rookie Alex Urbom.

There are 16 forwards, including Janssen.

Urbom, Stephen Gionta and Adam Larsson all have two-way contracts. Only Larsson would not be required to clear waivers.

Janssen is waived by Devils

Team's roster still
two over the limit

By **TOM GULITTI**
STAFF WRITER

The Devils placed Cam Janssen on waivers Sunday, likely signaling that the 29-year-old right wing will be sent to Albany of the AHL before NHL teams have to trim their rosters to 23 players by 3 p.m. today.

Any player who requires waivers to be sent down had to be put on them Sunday to clear (or be claimed by another team) at noon today and be eligible to be sent down before 3 p.m.



JANSSEN

The Devils have 26 players on their roster after trading left wing Krys Barch to Florida and assigning goaltender Keith

Kinkaid to Albany on Saturday. Assuming Janssen is sent down, they'd still have to find a way to cut two more players today.

Rather than trade away another player, Devils GM Lou Lamoriello might choose to temporarily demote a player who doesn't need to clear waivers (defenseman Adam Larsson is the only exempt player left on the roster) to get down to the 23-player limit today. He could then try to sneak another player through waivers after other teams have set their season-opening rosters and recall the waiver-exempt player before Thursday's opener in Pittsburgh.

Placing a player on injured reserve to start the season might also be a possibility. Forward Patrik Elias has been nursing a mysterious injury and has not skated since Tuesday's preseason game in Philadelphia.

Email: gulitti@northjersey.com

Hockey Spoken Here

Capital Region and NHL hockey
By Pete Dougherty

Devils waive Janssen, likely indicating his return to Albany

Sunday, September 29, 2013 *by:*Pete Dougherty, Staff writer

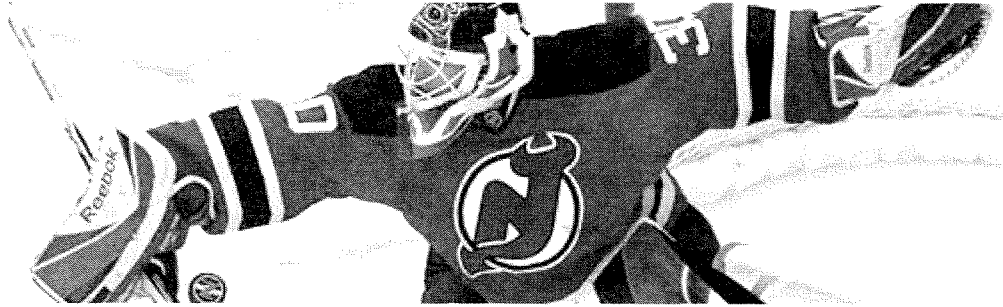
The New Jersey Devils have placed forward Cam Janssen on waivers, a prelude to his likely return to Albany.

New Jersey also has reassigned goaltender Keith Kinkaid to Albany but still must make two additional roster moves to get to the 23-player limit before 3 p.m. Monday.

If Janssen, who played 36 games for the A-Devils last season, goes unclaimed by noon Monday, he can be assigned to Albany as the NHL Devils try to reach the roster limit.

Janssen is one of four New Jersey plays on a two-way contract, which means his NHL and AHL salaries are for different amounts. The others on two-way contracts, according to the Bergen Record's [Fire & Ice blog](#), are forward Stephen Gionta and defensemen Alexander Urbom and Adam Larsson.

<http://blog.timesunion.com/hockey/devils-waive-janssen-likely-indicating-his-return-to-albany/16275/>



Sunday, September 29, 2013

Devils place right wing Cam Janssen on waivers; need to make more moves to get to 23-player limit

The Devils placed right wing Cam Janssen on waivers today, signaling that he'll likely begin the season in the AHL with Albany if he's not claimed by another team.

Teams have until 3 p.m. Monday to get down to the NHL's 23-player roster limit. Any player that needs to be put through waivers to be sent down had to be put on waivers today (at noon) to clear waivers at noon Monday (or be claimed by another team) and be off the roster by 3 p.m. Monday.

The Devils still have 26 players on their roster after trading left wing Krys Barch to Florida and assigning goaltender Keith Kinkaid to Albany on Saturday.

Assuming Janssen gets sent down, they'd still have to find a way to cut two more players.

Janssen is on a two-way-contract that pays \$550,000 in the NHL and \$105,000 in the AHL. Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello said Wednesday he was "not comfortable" with having a player on a one-way contract (same salary in the NHL and in the minors) playing in the AHL.

Center Stephen Gionta and defensemen Alex Urbom and Adam Larsson are the only other players still on the roster with two-way contracts. Gionta and Urbom would have to pass through waivers to be sent down. Larsson would not. In fact, he's the only player left on the roster who is exempt from waivers.

Other than moving another player via trade, another avenue the Devils might choose, which Lamoriello has used in the past, is to temporarily send down a player that doesn't need to clear waivers (Larsson) to get down to the 23-player limit by 3 p.m. Monday. Then, they'd try to sneak another player through waivers after other teams have set their season-opening rosters and then recall the waiver-exempt player before Thursday's regular season opener in Pittsburgh.

The Devils did this last season, sending Mattias Tedenby, who was exempt from waivers at the time, down for one day so they could put Bobby Butler through waivers after other teams' rosters were set. Butler cleared waivers on the day of the Devils' first game and Tedenby was recalled in time to play that night.

Placing a player on injured reserve to start the season might also be a possibility. Patrik Elias has been nursing a mysterious injury and has not skated since Tuesday's preseason game in Philadelphia.

Janssen, 29, played just four NHL games last season, spending most of it with Albany of the AHL. He has played in 312 career NHL games, registering three goals, eight assists and 752 penalty minutes.

The 26 players remaining on the Devils training camp roster:

Forwards (16): Jaromir Jagr, Ryane Clowe, Patrik Elias, Damien Brunner, Rostislav Olesz, Adam Henrique, Michael Ryder, Dainius Zubrus, Mattias Tedenby, Stephen Gionta, Jacob Josefson, Steve Bernier, Travis Zajac, Ryan Carter, Andrei Loktionov, Cam Janssen.

Defensemen (8): Andy Greene, Adam Larsson, Bryce Salvador, Marek Zidlicky, Anton Volchenkov, Mark Fayne, Peter Harrold, Alex Urbom.

Goaltenders (2): Martin Brodeur, Cory Schneider.

Waiver exempt: Larsson.

On waivers today: Janssen.

Two-way contracts: Gionta, Janssen, Urbom, Larsson.

The Devils have the day off today. They are scheduled to be back at practice Monday morning.

Posted by Tom Gulitti on 09/29 at 11:45 AM

- See more at:

http://blogs.northjersey.com/blogs/fireice/comments/devils_place_right_wing_cam_janssen_on_waiver_need_to_make_more_moves_to_get_to_23-player_limit/#sthash.wqr9fnYD.dpuf

Devils put Cam Janssen on waivers; Dainius Zubrus calls team 'well-packed'

Cam-Janssen-Hindash.JPG

The Devils put Cam Janssen on waivers today. *(Saed Hindash/The Star-Ledger)*

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger By **Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger**

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on September 29, 2013 at 2:07 PM, updated September 29, 2013 at 11:41 PM

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Devils' Patrik Elias unsure if he'll play in opener; Krys Barch traded to Florida

Krys-Barch-Bennett.JPG

Former Devils winger Krys Barch after one of his three fights on Sept. 19 against the Islanders. *(Bruce Bennett/Getty Images)*

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger By **Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger**

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on September 28, 2013 at 2:18 PM, updated September 29, 2013 at 2:14 PM

It has been a cautious preseason for Devils forward Patrik Elias, who played in only two of the team's six exhibition games while periodically sitting out practices to rest a sore groin.

But now the 37-year-old Elias isn't sure he'll be able to play in Thursday night's regular season opener in Pittsburgh because of a different, unspecified injury.

"I guess we'll see after the weekend. We have a day off tomorrow, so that's a couple days of rest again," said Elias, who sat out today's practice but worked out off-ice. "It depends on how I feel on the ice again Monday or Tuesday, whenever I'm ready to practice again."

Elias was in good spirits and joked that he is nursing a "mysterious" injury.

"My groin is fine," he said. "I was a little sore after the Philly game, so I'm just being cautious," Elias said.

General manager Lou Lamoriello said of the injury: "Nothing to be alarmed about."

Lamoriello trimmed his roster to 26 players today when he assigned goalie Keith Kinkaid to Albany (AHL) and traded winger Krys Barch to the Florida Panthers along with their seventh pick in the 2015 entry draft for minor league center Scott Timmins and Florida's sixth pick in 2014.

The Devils had previously acquired the seventh-round pick in 2015 from the St. Louis Blues in last season's trade for Matt D'Agostini.

Barch, the 6-1, 220-pound enforcer, played 22 games for the Devils last season and had no points with 44 penalty minutes. He had signed with the Devils as a free agent in July of 2012 after playing 41 games for the Panthers in 2011-12.

Lamoriello, who must make three more cuts to get his roster down to 23 by 3 p.m. Monday, said the trade does not necessarily mean fighting winger Cam Janssen will make the team.

"There are no decisions on anything. We're not concerned about toughness with our team right now," Lamoriello said.

Lamoriello said the Barch trade was made partially because of "what we see in camp and for our roster."

Jaromir Jagr, who skated in today's first session, did not take part in the power play drills afterwards.

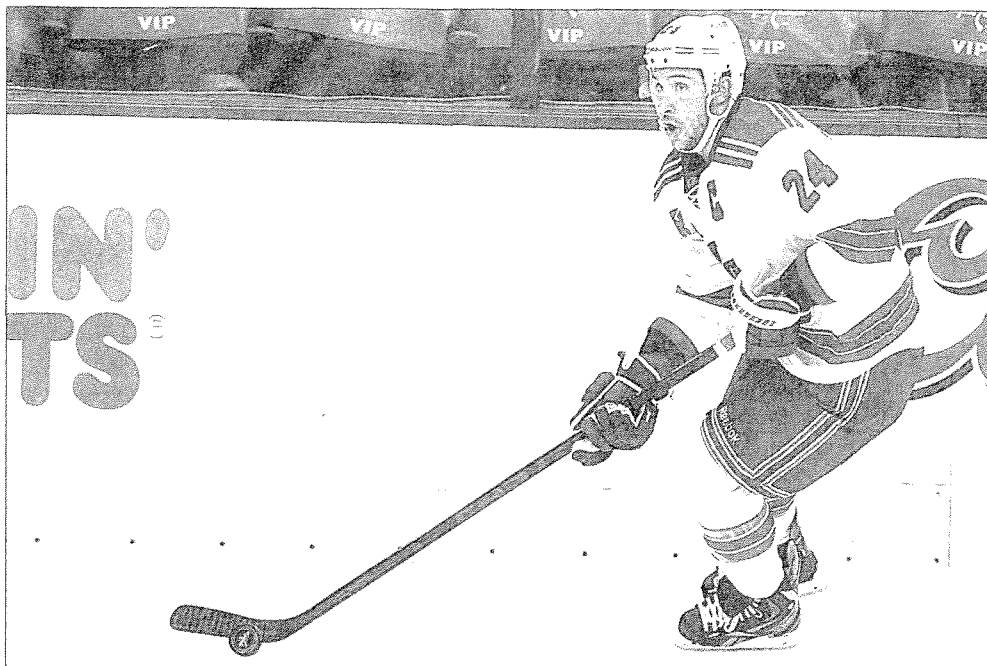
"I just wanted to be careful," Jagr explained.

The 41-year-old right wing, who skated with Dainius Zubrus and Andrei Loktionov, had been sidelined for most of camp with a hip/groin issue. He said he wouldn't classify today as a setback.

Timmins, 24, is 5-11, 191 pounds centerman who had been playing for the San Antonio Rampage (AHL). In 24 career NHL games with the Panthers (five last season) he had one goal and no assists with 12 penalty minutes.

The Hamilton, Ont., native was drafted in the sixth round (165th overall) by the Panthers in the 2009 entry draft.

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ryan Callahan could be ready by Rangers' second game, Oct. 7 at Los Angeles.

Rangers likely without Callahan for opener

By **ANDREW GROSS**
STAFF WRITER

GREENBURGH, N.Y. — The Rangers set their roster for Thursday's season-opener at Phoenix. But that likely will be a temporary configuration with captain Ryan Callahan nearing a return from off-season shoulder surgery.

"As of right now, I'd rule myself out for the first one," Callahan said after Sunday's practice. "We'll see how it goes day to day with contact and how it reacts to that."

Meanwhile, the Rangers will place Carl Hagelin, also recovering from a torn labrum in his left shoulder, on long-term injured reserve to get under the \$64.3 million salary cap. The left wing will have to miss the first 10 games.

Including Callahan, the Rangers roster remains at 24 players, one over the NHL maximum, after forwards Chris Kreider, Marek Hrivik, Oscar Lindberg, Brandon Mashinter and

Darroll Powe, and defensemen Stu Bickel and Conor Allen were re-assigned to Hartford (AHL).

Powe, Bickel and Mashinter must pass through waivers by noon today in order to be assigned to the Wolf Pack.

While Kreider, the team's 2009 first-round pick, and promising prospects Hrivik and Lindberg were re-assigned, coach Alain Vigneault elected to keep Swedish prospect Jesper Fast and J.T. Miller, the Rangers' first-round pick in 2011 who had two goals and two assists in 26 NHL games last season.

Even with Fast and Miller set to play as wings on the third or fourth lines, Vigneault has five centers on the roster, including Derek Stepan, who practiced with the team for the first time since agreeing to a two-year, \$6.15 million deal Thursday.

So, for now, Brad Richards is on Stepan's left wing.

The top line will be completed by Rick Nash, who missed Sunday's practice after being hit on the foot with a puck dur-

ing Friday's 4-1 loss to the Kings in Las Vegas.

"I don't anticipate it being a big deal," said Richards, adding he occasionally played wing with the Lightning and Stars. "We've all done it during our careers, played different positions."

Callahan, who was cleared for contact this Thursday, can be placed on IR to start the season and still be eligible for the Rangers' second game, Oct. 7 at Los Angeles.

"Basically, what we're doing is holding him back, we need seven to 14 days to make sure he's all right," said Vigneault, adding Callahan has lobbied to play. "He's tried everything but I would say it's a real safe bet for Game 1 he's not going to be there."

BRIEF: Henrik Lundqvist said there is nothing new to report on a contract extension but expected "discussions before we leave for Phoenix." The franchise goalie has said he probably would not negotiate during the season.



JEFF McINTOSH/THE CANADIAN PRESS, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Forward Chris Kreider, left, was demoted to the Rangers' affiliate in Hartford.

Kreider Will Begin Season in Minors

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

GREENBURGH, N.Y. — Their preseason over, the Rangers on Sunday trimmed their roster to 24 players, and there were a few surprises.

Forward Chris Kreider was sent down to the Hartford Wolfpack, the team's top minor league affiliate, having not quite convinced Coach Alain Vigneault that he is ready for the N.H.L. Many believed that under Vigneault, Kreider would receive a more sympathetic hearing than he had under John Tortorella, who was thought to be impatient with Kreider's defensive lapses.

Kreider did not look great on the Rangers' brutal preseason trip (four games in five nights in Alberta, British Columbia and Nevada, all defeats, by a combined score of 18-5). But then, few players did. Kreider, a 22-year-old wing, will start the season in the American Hockey League, still waiting to fulfill the promise of his professional debut in the 2012 playoffs, when he scored five goals for the Rangers.

"As much as I believe that he's real close and probably could play at our level right now, he needs to play big minutes and good minutes," Vigneault said of Kreider after the Rangers practiced here Sunday afternoon. "I felt with our group right now, I wasn't going to be able to give him those minutes."

Two other young forwards survived the cut and will be available for the opener Thursday in Phoenix — J. T. Miller, who made his debut with the Rangers last season, and Jesper Fast, a speedy Swede who has yet to play a regular-season game in the N.H.L. Fast, 21, was smiling broadly after practice. He still had not had the chance to tell his family back home.

"It's a big day; the N.H.L. is what you dream about as a little kid," Fast said. "This was the first step, to make the team, and now I have to prove myself to stay here."

The Rangers cut the veteran utility forward Darroll Powe, who had no points in 34

games last season. If no N.H.L. team claims him by Monday, he will join Hartford.

Another surprise was that Brad Richards, usually a center, practiced on the left wing Sunday. His linemates were center Derek Stepan, practicing with the Rangers for the first time since signing a contract last week, and right wing Ryan Callahan, who is nearly recovered from off-season shoulder surgery. Richards may stay on the left wing, Vigneault said.

"We have five N.H.L. centermen," he said. "I think Brad is comfortable at any position. He's an experienced player."

Richards, who has not played wing since joining the Rangers before the 2011-12 season, said he could not remember the last time he played the position.

"It's been a while," said Richards, who would skate the flank on a line with Stepan and Rick Nash. "Hopefully, we can get something going. If it works, we're staying. And if we're staying, it means it's working."

Callahan said he did not expect to play on opening night but may return sometime during the Rangers' nine-game trip to start the season.

Vigneault said that wing Carl Hagelin will be placed on the 10-game inactive list, dropping the Rangers to 23 players and keeping them under the salary cap. Hagelin, who is recovering from shoulder surgery, skated in a noncontact sweater Sunday.

SLAP SHOTS

Goalie HENRIK LUNDQVIST, who is expansive on every subject he is asked about, was tight-lipped Sunday about the dragging talks on his contract extension with the Rangers. "I have nothing new to report," said Lundqvist, who is entering the final year of his deal. Reminded that he had said that he had wanted the issue resolved before the season started to avoid distractions, Lundqvist said, "We still have a few days."

Rangers set to roll

BY PAT LEONARD
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

BRAD RICHARDS has moved to the wing. Jesper Fast made the roster. Chris Kreider didn't. Injured captain Ryan Callahan said he's almost ready to play, while Carl Hagelin will miss the first 10 games.

The Rangers on Sunday cut down to their 23-man opening day roster of 14 forwards, seven defensemen and two goalies, revealing first-year coach Alain Vigneault's plan for his team's season-opening, 11-day West-Coast road trip beginning Thursday night in Phoenix.

Here is how the dominoes fell:

At practice in Greenburgh, Vigneault practiced Richards on the left wing of center Derek Stepan, who the coach said "looked real good" in his first practice since re-signing on Thursday. Rick Nash will play right wing on that line, though he did not practice Sunday after taking a shot off his foot in Friday's preseason finale in Las Vegas.

"We've still got two guys out, and you've got three centers (Richards, Stepan and Derick Brassard) that want to play in offensive situations," said Richards, who played wing on occasion in Tampa Bay and Dallas. "I'm playing with Rick and Step, so hopefully we can get something going. If it works, that means we're staying, and if we're staying, that means it's working."

Due to injuries to Callahan and Hagelin, the biggest battles in camp occurred on the wings.

The Blueshirts kept 2010 sixth-round pick Fast, 2011 first-rounder J.T. Miller and veteran bruiser Arron Asham over Kreider, versatile penalty-killer Darroll Powe — who will be exposed on waivers until noon Monday — and promising young Slovak Marek Hrivik.

"As much as I believe that (Kreider) is real close and probably could play at our level right now, he needs to play big minutes and good minutes," Vigneault said of demoting the 2012 postseason darling to the AHL's Hartford Wolf



Center Brad Richards will wing it on left of Derek Stepan and Rick Nash as Rangers go west to begin 2013-14 season. Andrew Theodorakis/ News

Pack.

Meanwhile, Fast — a wide-eyed 21-year-old who didn't play like either in preseason — had an ear-to-ear smile when asked if he had expected to make the team.

"No, of course not," said Fast, whose right-handed shot helped his case with Callahan temporarily sidelined, per Vigneault. "My goal was to make the team when I came here for training camp, but I knew it was going to be hard. We had some injuries here, so that opened some spots."

Rounding out the 14 forwards are the second line of Benoit Pouliot, Derick Brassard and Mats Zuccarello, as well as veteran centers Dominic Moore and Brian Boyle and wingers Taylor Pyatt and Derek Dorsett.

On defense, Justin Falk beat out Stu Bickel and Conor Allen for the seventh spot, though Vigneault praised Allen, who likely will be a

midseason call-up. Falk will back up the top six of Ryan McDonagh, Dan Girardi, Marc Staal, Michael Del Zotto, Anton Stralman and John Moore, with Henrik Lundqvist and Martin Biron in net.

Hagelin (offseason shoulder surgery) will go on the long-term injury list to start the season, which makes him ineligible until an Oct. 29 visit to Long Island. But Callahan, who underwent the same surgery, is so close to healthy that it appears, without setbacks, he should be ready for the Rangers' second game Oct. 7 in Los Angeles.

"Basically right now what we're doing right now is holding him back," Vigneault said. "He wants to play. He thinks he can play. But our doctors cleared him for contact (last Thursday). We need seven to 14 days to make sure he's alright. That should be obviously in the time frame of that first road trip."

Rangers' Stepan joins camp

By BRETT CYRGALIS

The Rangers roster began to take full shape on Sunday, and for the first time since training camp opened, that roster included Derek Stepan.

The presumptive first-line center took part in a practice that lasted more than an hour days after signing his two-year, \$6.15 million deal. He centered a line with Brad Richards on the left — yes, that Brad Richards, who won a Conn Smythe trophy as a center — and Ryan Callahan on the right — yes, that Ryan Callahan, who still is recovering from off-season shoulder surgery but had been cleared for contact on Thursday.

“It’s been awhile, to be back in the swing of things was something I was very happy with,” said Stepan, whose Rangers will open

the season Thursday against the Coyotes in Phoenix, part of a season-opening nine-game road trip. “My biggest objective is just to get back and be ready for Thursday.”

Stepan returned to a team that is quite different than it was during the latter part of the preseason, which finished on Friday night in Las Vegas. For one, Richards is playing on the wing for the first time in a long time. Coming off the worst season of his career, when he almost had his contract bought out by the team, Richards is willing to do anything to gain some traction early.

“Hopefully we can get something going,” Richards said. “If it works, it means we’re staying, and if we’re staying, it means it’s working. And vice versa.”

Callahan ruled himself out for Game 1, as he still

has to wait and see how his shoulder reacts to contact, a timetable that new coach Alain Vigneault said could be between seven and 14 days. Taking that wing spot on the top line will be Rick Nash, who sat out Sunday’s practice to rest after taking a shot in the foot during the team’s 4-1 loss to the Kings in Vegas.

Vigneault and general manager Glen Sather reduced the roster to 24 players [15 forwards, seven defensemen, two goalies], most notably sending Chris Kreider back to AHL Hartford where they hope he can play big minutes and improve.

“I thought Chris had a good camp, but at the end of the day, when we made the assessments who should stay here in what role, we came to the conclusion that he’s a real

young player and he needs to play,” Vigneault said.

Forward J.T. Miller stayed on the team, as did young winger, Jesper Fast, while the seventh defenseman spot was given to Justin Falk. So now some days of practice lie ahead before this group heads out west to see what they’re made of.

“I know I have the support of the guys on the team and the coaching staff so I’m not too worried about proving anything to anyone in here,” Stepan said. “I’m just doing my best to get ready.”

► Goalie Henrik Lundqvist said there was “no news” concerning the negotiations for his contract extension, which he previously stated he wanted done before the start of the season.

bcyrgalis@nypost.com

Rangers: Ryan Callahan likely out for Game 1 - NorthJersey.com

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

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North Jersey Media Group Inc.

NY Rangers cut down to 23 on roster, new coach Alain Vigneault unveils plans in practice

Brad Richards plays left wing on line with Derek Stepan at center and Rick Nash on the right side.

By Pat Leonard / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Monday, September 30, 2013, 12:28 AM



Andrew Theodorakis/New York Daily News

Center Brad Richards will wing it on left of Derek Stepan and Rick Nash as Rangers go west to begin 2013-14 season.

Brad Richards has moved to the wing. Jesper Fast made the roster. Chris Kreider didn't. Injured captain Ryan Callahan said he's almost ready to play, while Carl Hagelin will miss the first 10 games.

The Rangers on Sunday cut down to their 23-man opening day roster of 14 forwards, seven defensemen and two goalies, revealing first-year coach Alain Vigneault's plan for his team's season-opening, 11-day West-Coast road trip beginning Thursday night in Phoenix.

Here is how the dominoes fell:

At practice in Greenburgh, Vigneault practiced Richards on the left wing of center Derek Stepan, who the coach said "looked real good" in his first practice since re-signing on Thursday. Rick Nash will play right wing on that line, though he did not practice Sunday after taking a shot off his foot in Friday's preseason finale in Las Vegas.

“We’ve still got two guys out, and you’ve got three centers (Richards, Stepan and Derick Brassard) that want to play in offensive situations,” said Richards, who played wing on occasion in Tampa Bay and Dallas. “I’m playing with Rick and Step, so hopefully we can get something going. If it works, that means we’re staying, and if we’re staying, that means it’s working.”

Due to injuries to Callahan and Hagelin, the biggest battles in camp occurred on the wings.

The Blueshirts kept 2010 sixth-round pick Fast, 2011 first-rounder J.T. Miller and veteran bruiser Arron Asham over Kreider, versatile penalty-killer Darroll Powe — who will be exposed on waivers until noon Monday — and promising young Slovak Marek Hrivik.

“As much as I believe that (Kreider) is real close and probably could play at our level right now, he needs to play big minutes and good minutes,” Vigneault said of demoting the 2012 postseason darling to the AHL’s Hartford Wolf Pack.

Meanwhile, Fast — a wide-eyed 21-year-old who didn’t play like either in preseason — had an ear-to-ear smile when asked if he had expected to make the team.

“No, of course not,” said Fast, whose righthanded shot helped his case with Callahan temporarily sidelined, per Vigneault. “My goal was to make the team when I came here for training camp, but I knew it was going to be hard. We had some injuries here, so that opened some spots.”

Rounding out the 14 forwards are the second line of Benoit Pouliot, Derick Brassard and Mats Zuccarello, as well as veteran centers Dominic Moore and Brian Boyle and wingers Taylor Pyatt and Derek Dorsett.

On defense, Justin Falk beat out Stu Bickel and Conor Allen for the seventh spot, though Vigneault praised Allen, who likely will be a midseason call-up. Falk will back up the top six of Ryan McDonagh, Dan Girardi, Marc Staal, Michael Del Zotto, Anton Stralman and John Moore, with Henrik Lundqvist and Martin Biron in net.

Hagelin (offseason shoulder surgery) will go on the long-term injury list to start the season, which makes him ineligible until an Oct. 29 visit to Long Island. But Callahan, who underwent the same surgery, is so close to healthy that it appears, without setbacks, he should be ready for the Rangers’ second game Oct. 7 in Los Angeles.

“Basically right now what we’re doing right now is holding him back,” Vigneault said. “He wants to play. He thinks he can play. But our doctors cleared him for contact (last Thursday). We need seven to 14 days to make sure he’s alright. That should be obviously in the time frame of that first road trip.”

Read more: <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/hockey/rangers/rangers-cut-roster-23-set-roll-article-1.1471391#ixzz2gNU8TuwM>

Recently signed Stepan joins Rangers camp

By [Brett Cyrgalis](#)

September 29, 2013 | 8:06pm



Former holdout Derek Stepan is back with the Rangers.

Photo: Anthony Causi

The Rangers roster began to take full shape on Sunday, and for the first time since training camp opened, that roster included Derek Stepan.

The presumptive first-line center took part in a practice that lasted more than an hour days after signing his two-year, \$6.15 million deal. He centered a line with Brad Richards on the left — yes, that Brad Richards, who won a Conn Smythe trophy as a center — and Ryan Callahan on the right — yes, that Ryan Callahan, who still is recovering from offseason shoulder surgery but had been cleared for contact on Thursday.

“It’s been awhile, to be back in the swing of things was something I was very happy with,” said Stepan, whose Rangers will open the season Thursday against the Coyotes in Phoenix, part of a season-opening nine-game road trip. “My biggest objective is just to get back and be ready for Thursday.”

Stepan returned to a team that is quite different than it was during the latter part of the preseason, which finished on Friday night in Las Vegas. For one, Richards is playing on the wing for the first time in a long time. Coming off the worst season of his career, when he almost had his contract bought out by the team, Richards is willing to do anything to gain some traction early.

“Hopefully we can get something going,” Richards said. “If it works, it means we’re staying, and if we’re staying, it means it’s working. And vice versa.”

Callahan ruled himself out for Game 1, as he still has to wait and see how his shoulder reacts to contact, a timetable that new coach Alain Vigneault said could be between seven and 14 days. Taking that wing spot on the top line will be Rick Nash, who sat out Sunday's practice to rest after taking a shot in the foot during the team's 4-1 loss to the Kings in Vegas.

So Vigneault has a bit of a stockpile of centers, and the result was Richards on the wing — for now.

“With Derek coming back, at the end of the day that gives us five NHL centermen,” said Vigneault, who also has Derick Brassard, Brian Boyle and Dominic Moore up the middle. “That’s probably something, moving forward here, that we’re going to use one of those guys on the wing. I think Brad is comfortable at any position. He’s an experienced player, a player that just wants to come in and contribute.”

Sunday was also the day Vigneault and general manager Glen Sather reduced the roster to 24 players [15 forwards, seven defensemen, two goalies], most notably sending Chris Kreider back to AHL Hartford where they hope he can play big minutes and improve.

“I thought Chris had a good camp, but at the end of the day, when we made the assessments who should stay here in what role, we came to the conclusion that he’s a real young player and he needs to play,” Vigneault said. “As much as I believe he’s real close and he probably could play at our level right now, he needs to play big minutes and good minutes and I felt with our group right now I wasn’t going to be able to give him those minutes.”

Forward J.T. Miller stayed on the team, as did young wing Jesper Fast, while the seventh defenseman spot was given to Justin Falk. So now some days of practice lie ahead before this group — including Stepan — heads out west to see what they’re made of.

“I know I have the support of the guys on the team and the coaching staff so I’m not too worried about proving anything to anyone in here,” Stepan said. “I’m just doing my best to get ready.”

Goalie Henrik Lundqvist said there was “no news” concerning the negotiations for his contract extension, which he previously stated he wanted done before the start of the season.

“You can get back to me,” he said. “We’ll have discussions before we leave for Phoenix.”

<http://nypost.com/2013/09/29/recently-signed-stepan-joins-rangers-camp/>

The New York Times

September 29, 2013

Kreider Will Begin Season in Minors for Rangers

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

GREENBURGH, N.Y. — Their preseason over, the Rangers on Sunday trimmed their roster to 24 players, and there were a few surprises.

Forward Chris Kreider was sent down to the Hartford Wolfpack, the team's top minor league affiliate, having not quite convinced Coach Alain Vigneault that he is ready for the N.H.L. Many believed that under Vigneault, Kreider would receive a more sympathetic hearing than he had under John Tortorella, who was thought to be impatient with Kreider's defensive lapses.

Kreider did not look great on the Rangers' brutal preseason trip (four games in five nights in Alberta, British Columbia and Nevada, all defeats, by a combined score of 18-5). But then, few players did. Kreider, a 22-year-old wing, will start the season in the American Hockey League, still waiting to fulfill the promise of his professional debut in the 2012 playoffs, when he scored five goals for the Rangers.

"As much as I believe that he's real close and probably could play at our level right now, he needs to play big minutes and good minutes," Vigneault said of Kreider after the Rangers practiced here Sunday afternoon. "I felt with our group right now, I wasn't going to be able to give him those minutes."

Two other young forwards survived the cut and will be available for the opener Thursday in Phoenix — J. T. Miller, who made his debut with the Rangers last season, and Jesper Fast, a speedy Swede who has yet to play a regular-season game in the N.H.L. Fast, 21, was smiling broadly after practice. He still had not had the chance to tell his family back home.

"It's a big day; the N.H.L. is what you dream about as a little kid," Fast said. "This was the first step, to make the team, and now I have to prove myself to stay here."

The Rangers cut the veteran utility forward Darroll Powe, who had no points in 34 games last season. If no N.H.L. team claims him by Monday, he will join Hartford.

Another surprise was that Brad Richards, usually a center, practiced on the left wing Sunday. His linemates were center Derek Stepan, practicing with the Rangers for the first time since signing a contract last week, and right wing Ryan Callahan, who is nearly recovered from

off-season shoulder surgery. Richards may stay on the left wing, Vigneault said.

“We have five N.H.L. centermen,” he said. “I think Brad is comfortable at any position. He’s an experienced player.”

Richards, who has not played wing since joining the Rangers before the 2011-12 season, said he could not remember the last time he played the position.

“It’s been a while,” said Richards, who would skate the flank on a line with Stepan and Rick Nash. “Hopefully, we can get something going. If it works, we’re staying. And if we’re staying, it means it’s working.”

Callahan said he did not expect to play on opening night but may return sometime during the Rangers’ nine-game trip to start the season.

Vigneault said that wing Carl Hagelin will be placed on the 10-game inactive list, dropping the Rangers to 23 players and keeping them under the salary cap. Hagelin, who is recovering from shoulder surgery, skated in a noncontact sweater Sunday.

SLAP SHOTS

Goalie Henrik Lundqvist, who is expansive on every subject he is asked about, was tight-lipped Sunday about the dragging talks on his contract extension with the Rangers. “I have nothing new to report,” said Lundqvist, who is entering the final year of his deal. Reminded that he had said that he had wanted the issue resolved before the season started to avoid distractions, Lundqvist said, “We still have a few days.”

Islanders beat Senators 4-1 to sweep SS series

Sunday September 29, 2013, 11:04 PM

Associated Press

[Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) — Riley Wetmore and Ryan Strome scored first-period goals to lead the New York Islanders to a 4-1 victory over Ottawa and a sweep of a split-squad series against the Senators on Sunday night that closed out the NHL preseason.

Ryan Pulock and Brock Nelson added second-period goals to give New York a 4-0 lead. Evgeni Nabokov stopped 14 of 15 shots through two periods and Ken Reiter made 11 saves in the third period.

Jean-Gabriel Pageau scored for Ottawa and Craig Anderson stopped 19 shots.

The Islanders won 5-2 in the first split-squad game in Barrie earlier Sunday.

The regular season begins Tuesday.

- See more at: http://www.northjersey.com/sports/225743541_Islanders_beat_Senators_4-1_to_sweep_SS_series.html#sthash.NzS5tIGU.dpuf

Olympic-sized focus this year

NHL stars are wearing two hats

By **ANDREW GROSS**
STAFF WRITER

The off-season preparations proceeded as usual for Evgeni Malkin, who is entering his eighth NHL season.

Except back home in Russia, nobody asked him about the Penguins' upcoming season. Not with his native country hosting the Winter Olympics in Sochi.

"I have the whole summer in Russia," said Malkin, who grew up in Magnitogorsk. "Everyone called me – friends, media. Just questions about Sochi, always. I feel, right now, pressure for the team, for me, for everyone."

So as much as the prospective Olympians try to focus on the NHL season, which opens Tuesday, the Winter Games loom large.

The NHL will pause its regular season from Feb. 9-26 – the Olympic tournament runs Feb. 12-23 – to allow its players to participate, marking the fifth straight Games dating to Nagano in 1998 that the league has done so.

There is a real question as to whether that arrangement continues for the 2018 Winter Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, or whether the preseason World Cup of Hockey is revived. The NHL has expressed financial concerns, logistical concerns about the Games airing live in early morning hours and worries about its players getting hurt in the international competition.

But before an agreement was reached with the league for NHL participation in these Games, the players were adamant that they should be allowed to play. The Capitals' Alex Ovechkin, who was an Olympic torchbearer Sunday, said he would leave to play for Russia even if the NHL did not allow participation – and Capitals owner Ted Leonsis said he would have permitted his captain to go.

"Maybe just a little bit," Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews, a member of Team Canada's gold-medal squad in 2010, said about his

mind wandering to the Olympics.

"But I don't think guys can focus on it too much," Toews added. "They've got to focus on playing well and helping their team win. The more success they have with their club team, the better chance they have to make the team to represent their country at the Olympics."

The final rosters for the 12 participating nations will be set in December, and the teams' hierarchies will base their decisions on how the prospective Olympians play during the first three months of the NHL season.

Rangers center Derek Stepan, who ended a lengthy contract impasse by signing a two-year deal worth \$6.15 million Thursday to ensure he will not miss the start of the regular season, acknowledged his likely first-time Olympic participation with Team USA was part of the motivation to cut a deal.

"Obviously it's in the back of my mind as a goal and just to be invited to the orientation camp was exciting," said Oilers right wing Jordan Eberle, who was among 47 players invited to Team Canada's camp Aug. 25-28 in Calgary. "For me, it's going to be maintaining my focus on Edmonton and having a good start and helping them win some games. That will translate into hopefully having a shot at the Olympic team."

Team Canada defeated Team USA, 3-2, in overtime to win the gold in 2010.

"It's obviously in the back of your mind but you block it out and just play. I'm a Vancouver Canuck right now," said center Ryan Kesler, who grew up in Livonia, Mich., and is expected to be on Team USA's roster for a second straight Olympics.

"Obviously, there's a sour taste in our mouths," Kesler quickly added of Sidney Crosby's golden goal against Ryan Miller.

"We're not going over there for second place, third place. We're going over to win gold."

Not that Kesler is thinking about it too much.

Talk of Dynasty Adds to Buzz Surrounding Young Blackhawks

By BEN STRAUSS

CHICAGO — On the first day of Chicago Blackhawks training camp, the questions came hard and fast. They were not about line pairings or the familiar early-season talk of expectations. These queries were larger in scope, more historical in perspective: Are the Blackhawks a budding dynasty?

Chicago's Stanley Cup championship in June was its second in four years, and the Blackhawks are the only team with two championships in the salary cap era. A year ago, they opened the season with an N.H.L.-record 24-game point streak and posted an .802 winning percentage, the third best in league history.

The nucleus and most of that roster's spare parts return this season, led by a talented group still considered young by league standards. The annual Hart Trophy contenders Patrick Kane, 24, and Jonathan Toews, 25, are signed through the next two seasons. The blue-line stalwarts Duncan Keith, 30, and Brent Seabrook, 28, are already signed to long-term deals.

"Hopefully we can go win another one," Kane said. "That's not trying to prove yourself as a dynasty; we just want to play well. But, sure, you get excited looking around the locker room because it's almost the same team as we had last year."

Dynasty or not, all summer and throughout training camp, the hype surrounding Chicago has reached a low roar. Justin Bieber posted a picture on Twitter from the Blackhawks' locker room during a trip to Chicago; a commercial in which Kane shows off his stick handling was an Internet sensation; the W.W.E. wrestler Phillip Jack Brooks, known as CM Punk, wore a Keith jersey one night.

Recently, General Manager Stan Bowman declared that Toews and Kane would "be here forever." Sports Illustrated then put Kane's picture on its cover — the magazine's fourth Blackhawks cover this year — and picked Chicago to repeat as Stanley Cup champions.

"Obviously when you win a championship, the expectations get raised for the team, the players — but also for the organization as well," Keith said.

What makes the Blackhawks' run stand out is how hockey's landscape has changed with the economics of the salary cap. This year's cap, governed by a new collective bargaining agreement, fell to \$64.3 million. Still, the Blackhawks navigated the change well, losing only a couple of key pieces — forwards Viktor Stålberg and Dave Boland, who scored the Cup-clinching goal.

Much of the Blackhawks' talent is home-grown. Toews and Kane were draft picks. Last season, Brandon Saad, 20, was a key

contributor, and goaltender Corey Crawford, 28, stepped in three seasons ago after Antti Niemi was lost to free agency. Crawford signed a long-term deal in the off-season.

There is more help on the way, should Chicago need it. Hockey Prospectus ranked the farm system in the league's top 10, highlighting forwards Teuvo Teravainen and Brandon Pirri. And Toews and Kane might still have untapped potential.

"These guys still got a ways to go where they're still going to be improving," Coach Joel Quenneville said. "I watch Kaner out here in practice, and he looks quicker, he looks stronger. Johnny's at that same place."

Scotty Bowman, Stan's father and a senior adviser for Chicago, knows a thing or two about dynasties. He coached the Montreal Canadiens to five Stanley Cups during the 1970s, including four in a row (his 1977 and 1978 teams are the only two to have higher winning percentages than last year's Blackhawks), and won another four Cups with the Pittsburgh Penguins and the Detroit Red Wings.

He cited health as a key to what the team has achieved, singling out Sidney Crosby as an example of how talent can be derailed by injuries.

"You can't predict it and you can't bargain for it when your top guys get hurt," he said.

As for how the current Blackhawks stack against some of the great teams he coached, Scotty Bowman was skeptical, noting that his Canadiens teams had double-digit Hall of Famers.

"To have that many Hall of Famers is really something," Bowman said. "And to do it for a decade is a long, long time. There's a core, but I just don't know if you can do it for that long in today's game."

The Blackhawks open the season Tuesday night in Chicago against the Washington Capitals. A banner will be raised, and later this season rings will be handed out. The first hurdle is ensuring there is no Cup hangover, as there was in 2010-11, when the Blackhawks got off to a slow start and squeaked into the playoffs. Quenneville said the focus had not been avoiding a slow start, but replicating the energy from last year's opening month.

Players insisted that despite the attention and the buzz, their attention, as much as possible, remains firmly on the schedule's next game.

"It's flattering to hear, and obviously you've done something good if they call you a dynasty," defenseman Niklas Hjalmarsson said. "Maybe after your career when you think back on what you accomplished, you might be really proud of it. But now you just live day by day."

Leafs place D Liles on waivers

Sunday September 29, 2013, 11:37 PM

Associated Press

[Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

TORONTO (AP) — The Toronto Maple Leafs have placed defenseman John-Michael Liles on waivers as their opening-night roster begins to come into focus.

Liles's departure seemed certain after Cody Franson signed with Toronto. If he's not claimed by another NHL team, Liles could be assigned to the AHL's Toronto Marlies.

The 32-year-old has a \$3.875 million salary-cap hit. If he's sent to the minors, \$925,000 of that would come off the Leafs' cap under the new collective bargaining agreement.

In addition to Liles, the Leafs put forwards Trevor Smith and Troy Bodie, defenseman T.J. Brennan and Korbinian Holzer, and goaltender Drew MacIntyre on waivers with the intention of sending them to the AHL. They sent Jamie Devane, Jerry D'Amigo, Andrew MacWilliam, Josh Leivo, Spencer Abbott, David Broll, Stuart Percy and Greg McKegg to the Marlies, leaving 22 players on the roster.

Those moves make it likely that 19-year-old defenseman Morgan Rielly will be on the team to start the regular season.

"I think Morgan Rielly's very close," coach Randy Carlyle said. "To say that, unequivocally, he's ready to play in the NHL is a tough question to ask and a tougher question to answer at this point. We know he's played very well for our hockey club, he's a talented young man and he's only going to get better. Those are the tough decisions that you're faced with."

Right-winger David Clarkson's 10-game suspension, and enforcer Frazer McLaren's broken finger make things tougher. The Leafs must be under the \$64.3-million salary cap by the roster deadline of 5 p.m. Monday, and Clarkson's \$5.25-million hit will continue to count.

- See more at:

http://www.northjersey.com/sports/225743751_Leafs_place_D_Liles_on_waivers.html#sthash.ZFcs8TE8.dpuf

Maple Leafs send Colborne to Flames for pick

Sunday September 29, 2013, 4:06 PM

Associated Press

[Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

TORONTO (AP) — The Toronto Maple Leafs traded center Joe Colborne to the Calgary Flames on Saturday night for a fourth-round pick next year.

The 23-year-old Colborne, a first-round pick in 2008, had a goal and five assists in 16 career games for the Maple Leafs. Last season, the former University of Denver player was scoreless in five games for the Maple Leafs and had 14 goals and 28 assists in 65 games for the American Hockey League's Toronto Marlies.

- See more at:

http://www.northjersey.com/sports/225721971_Maple_Leafs_send_Colborne_to_Flames_for_pick.html#sthash.OtJ5Cos8.dpuf

Boyle scores 2 PP goals as Sharks beat Ducks, 6-5

Sunday September 29, 2013, 5:05 PM

Associated Press

[Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Dan Boyle scored two power-play goals, Joe Pavelski and Patrick Marleau each had a goal and an assist, and the San Jose Sharks beat the Anaheim Ducks 6-5 Saturday night in the teams' preseason finale.

Marleau, Pavelski and Jason Demers scored in the first period and Tommy Wingels had three assists for the Sharks, who outshot the Ducks 39-18. Boyle's second goal proved to be the game-winner as Anaheim closed the scoring on Saku Koivu's goal with 2:47 remaining.

Dustin Penner and Kyle Palmieri scored 14 seconds apart in the third period for the Ducks and Andrew Cogliano scored a highlight goal on a spin move while falling down in the first.

San Jose scored five times on its first 22 shots on Jonas Hiller, who finished with 33 saves. Antti Niemi made 13 saves for San Jose.

- See more at:

http://www.northjersey.com/sports/225725921_Boyle_scores_2_PP_goals_as_Sharks_beat_Ducks_6-5.html#sthash.4ULL3Ayn.dpuf

Landeskog scores 2 in 2nd as Avalanche beat Kings

Sunday September 29, 2013, 6:05 PM

BY ADAM SOBOLESKI

Associated Press

[Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Gabriel Landeskog scored twice in the second period, rallying the Colorado Avalanche to a 3-2 win over the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday night.

Ryan O'Reilly started Los Angeles' comeback from two goals down at 8:11 of the second period. Landeskog tied at 2-2 with 7:02 remaining in the period, beating Mathieu Garon on the first shot he faced after replacing Ben Scrivens. Landeskog got the tiebreaker with 3:54 remaining, knocking in a rebound from just in front of the goal.

Jean-Sebastien Giguere made 23 saves for the Avalanche (3-3-0).

Mike Richards scored twice for Los Angeles, putting the Kings (3-3-1) on the scoreboard with 3:22 left in the first and doubling the lead 14 seconds into the second period. Scrivens had 17 saves and Garon finished with nine.

With 15 seconds left in the game, the Kings' Azne Kopitar had one final chance to tie with a loose puck just right of the net, but couldn't get a good shot off.

Andre Benoit had two assists for Colorado.

Kings captain Dustin Brown returned from a hamstring injury. Brown, who did not start, made his first appearance less than two minutes into the game. He had 18 goals and 11 assists last season.

- See more at:

http://www.northjersey.com/sports/225727921_Landeskog_scores_2_in_2nd_as_Avalanche_beat_Kings.html#sthash.GqtUhtT6.dpuf

Canucks acquire Dalpe, Welsh from Hurricanes

Sunday September 29, 2013, 5:36 PM

Associated Press

[Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — The Vancouver Canucks acquired right wing Zac Dalpe and center Jeremy Welsh from the Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday night for right wing Kellan Tochkin and a fourth-round pick next year.

Dalpe split last season between the Hurricanes and Charlotte Checkers of the AHL. He had a goal and two assists in 10 games with Carolina. Welsh had an assist in five games for the Hurricanes last season.

Tochkin spent last season with Missouri of the Central Hockey League.

- See more at:

http://www.northjersey.com/sports/225727801_Canucks_acquire_Dalpe_Welsh_from_Hurricanes.html#sthash.qd7dkS7i.dpuf

 **[PRINT]** **ESPN.com: NHL**

[\[Print without images\]](#)



Sunday, September 29, 2013

Ducks acquire Mathieu Perreault

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. -- The [Anaheim Ducks](#) have acquired center [Mathieu Perreault](#) from the [Washington Capitals](#) in exchange for minor leaguer [John Mitchell](#) and a fourth-round pick in next year's draft.

The teams announced the deal Sunday.

Perreault has played in 159 games with the Capitals, scoring 70 points with a plus-17 rating. He has won 51.2 percent of his faceoffs.

Perreault began his career in Washington playing for Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau, who also coached Perreault in the AHL.

Perreault will be a restricted free agent after the season, but could find a solid role in Anaheim. He will compete for playing time at center with [Nick Bonino](#), [Peter Holland](#) and [Saku Koivu](#).

Mitchell is a left wing who spent last season with the Ducks' AHL affiliate in Norfolk.

 **ESPN.com: NHL**

[\[Print without images\]](#)



Sunday, September 29, 2013

Kings release Mathieu Garon

Associated Press

EL SEGUNDO, Calif. -- The Los Angeles Kings released goalie Mathieu Garon and loaned right wing Tyler Toffoli to their AHL affiliate in Manchester on Sunday.

The Kings also loaned center Linden Vey and left wing Tanner Pearson to Manchester.

Garon joined the Kings for a training camp tryout, but failed to beat out Ben Scrivens for the backup job behind Jonathan Quick. Garon played for Los Angeles from 2005-07 during an 11-year NHL career with six teams.

The 21-year-old Toffoli played in 10 regular-season games last season, scoring five points in his first career NHL action. He also appeared in 12 playoff contests, scoring six points while the Kings reached the Western Conference finals.

Pearson appeared in one playoff game for the Kings last season, making his NHL debut. Vey also is among Los Angeles' top prospects, but has yet to play in an NHL game.

The moves leave the Kings with 13 forwards on their roster. Los Angeles opens the regular season Thursday at Minnesota.

 **[PRINT]** ESPN.com: NHL

[\[Print without images\]](#)



Sunday, September 29, 2013

Jannik Hansen gets 4-year extension

Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia -- Forward [Jannik Hansen](#) and the [Vancouver Canucks](#) have agreed to a four-year contract extension.

The 27-year-old from Denmark had 10 goals and 17 assists in 47 games for Vancouver last season.

Hansen has 50 goals and 81 assists in 318 career games, all of them with the Canucks. He was selected by Vancouver in the seventh round of the 2004 draft.

He has also appeared in 58 career playoff games, with five goals and nine assists.

30 in 15: Blackhawks confident they can repeat

Monday, 09.30.2013 / 3:00 AM / 2013-2014 Season Preview

By Dan Rosen - NHL.com Senior Writer

NHL.com continues its preview of the 2013-14 season, which will include in-depth looks at all 30 teams throughout September.

They were on the ropes, one loss from being wiped out of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, from erasing all the goodwill they built up in a record-setting regular season.

The Detroit Red Wings had a 3-1 series lead against the Chicago Blackhawks in the Western Conference Semifinals in May. They also had Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews frustrated, boiling over like a pot of water that's been on the stove too long.

Things were ugly for the Blackhawks; but only two nights later they managed to stay alive, and two nights after that they found themselves needing one win to pull off what once seemed like an improbable comeback.

The Blackhawks finished the job with an overtime win in Game 7 at United Center on May 29. They would play 11 more games, win eight of them and raise the Stanley Cup in Boston. The championship banner goes up in United Center on Tuesday, right next to the one the Blackhawks raised in 2010.

"If we didn't believe in ourselves before then, that was really our moment," Toews told NHL.com earlier this month. "To come back from a 3-1 deficit against the Red Wings, that is when we knew we could come back from anything."

The Blackhawks' belief in their own invincibility is a feeling that could carry them through another Cup run this season and right into the discussion as the NHL's first salary-cap era dynasty.

They are already the first team to win the Stanley Cup twice since the salary cap came into play eight years ago. Their roster was gutted around the core after they won in 2010, but the Blackhawks return all but four players who played at least one game for them in the Stanley Cup Playoffs last season.

They are favored to become the first team since the Red Wings in 1997-98 to repeat as Stanley Cup champions. They see no reason why they can't do it.

"We're tough to beat," Toews said. "A lot of things have to go wrong for us to lose in a playoff series. If we can keep leading that same way, find that same belief and will to win, then there is no reason we can't find ourselves back in the Stanley Cup Final and competing for the Stanley Cup again."

Here's a breakdown for how they're going to go about trying to do it:

FORWARDS

Toews and Patrick Kane should start the season together, making up two-thirds of Chicago's top line. The third guy should be the same guy who found a starring role with Toews and Kane last spring.

Bryan Bickell, Chicago's 6-foot-4, 233-pound left wing, was a breakout star in the playoffs and the Blackhawks rewarded him with a four-year, \$16 million contract before he could hit the free-agent market. Bickell, who was second on the team with nine goals and 17 points in the playoffs, now has to prove he can be a top-six forward for the long haul.

The only reason Quenneville separated Bickell, Toews and Kane early in the Stanley Cup Final is because Bickell had a Grade 2 knee sprain, an injury that typically keeps a player out for three-to-four weeks. But Bickell didn't miss any time and by Game 4 against the Boston Bruins was back to playing well and back with Toews and Kane: He scored the game-tying goal late in Game 6 against the Bruins.

"There's going to be more pressure," Bickell said. "They're going to rely on me more. I feel [last season's] playoffs I took a big step in the way I need to play and the consistency level I need to bring, but I feel I can bring that every night. I know what it takes now, what they want, and hopefully I can just bring it."

The bigger question marks are on the second line.

It appears that the line will be the same as it was in the playoffs last season with Michal Handzus between right wing Marian Hossa and left wing Patrick Sharp. However, Hossa is still questionable for opening night after missing most of the preseason with a shoulder injury and Handzus was not his coach's first choice to be the second-line center.

Quenneville was hoping that Brandon Saad or Brandon Pirri would win the job in training camp, but it didn't happen.

Saad, in his second season after being a Calder Trophy finalist last season (27 points in 46 games), was given the first crack, but he didn't look comfortable and was moved back to left wing, his natural position.

Pirri, who led the American Hockey League in scoring last season with 75 points in 76 games, missed the first half of training camp with an injury, a setback too great to overcome.

So Quenneville is again turning to Handzus, who he called the safe option in an interview with NHL.com during the summer. Handzus is 36 and had 11 points in 23 playoff games last season despite playing with a myriad of injuries, including a bad wrist and a bum knee, both of which kept him out of the early part of the preseason schedule as well.

While the experiment with Saad appears to be over for now, Quenneville said he could go back to it at any time. There's also still a good chance Pirri could get a chance to win the second-line center job during the season. For now, Handzus will be keeping the spot warm.

"If you play well, they're going to keep you there," Handzus told reporters last week.

It appears as though Andrew Shaw will center Saad and Jimmy Hayes on the third line.

Shaw had 15 points in 48 regular-season games. He had nine points, including five goals, in 23 playoff games playing primarily as the third-line center.

Hayes, who is 6-foot-6 and 221 pounds, was a breakout star in training camp. He spent the summer in the gym and appears to have gotten stronger and leaner. It has translated to him being faster and more dangerous in offensive situations. Hayes is the replacement for Viktor Stalberg, who signed a four-year contract with the Nashville Predators during the summer.

"I'm excited for the whole opportunity in general, just having a chance to make this team and having a chance to get going on the right foot here to get my NHL career started here," Hayes told NHL.com. "The opportunity has been given to me and now I just need to run with it."

It's looking like Marcus Kruger, Ben Smith and Brandon Bollig will make up the fourth line. Kruger and Smith will likely be Chicago's top penalty-killing duo to start the season. The Blackhawks need to replace the shorthanded minutes that Michael Frolik played and Smith is the guy who gets the chance to do it at the start of the season.

DEFENSEMEN

The Blackhawks are carrying eight defensemen to start the season, but their top-six is set and the pairs shouldn't be any different than they were at the end of last season.

Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook will again make up the top pair. The second pair will be Swedes Johnny Oduya and Niklas Hjalmarsson, who signed a five-year contract extension earlier this month. The third pair will be Michal Rozsival with Nick Leddy. Sheldon Brookbank and Michael Kostka are the extra defensemen as Quenneville prefers to carry eight to start the season.

The only real question marks here are on the third pair.

After a strong regular season, in which Leddy had 18 points and a plus-15 rating in 48 games, he was basically benched for the last three games of the Stanley Cup Final. Leddy played a combined 12:55 in the three games as Quenneville shortened his lineup to go with five defensemen, giving the struggling Leddy only an odd shift here and there.

Leddy, who is still considered a promising young defenseman despite having played a combined 212 regular-season and playoff games, has to show he can rebound from his poor finish to last season. The Blackhawks gave him a two-year contract during the summer, but that was after Leddy was basically benched despite being in the lineup for Games 4-6 of the Final.

"Everybody has got pride, they want to play, they want to do well and contribute in a meaningful way," Quenneville said. "Whether it's a motivator or not, I mean, that's where we're at and that's where we are today. Take advantage of the situation and show us that you deserve more and earn more and I expect that."

Quenneville challenged Rozsival at the end of last season to play bigger minutes because of Leddy's struggles. Rozsival proved he could handle the extra responsibility; that's why the Blackhawks signed him to a two-year, \$4.4 million contract.

He's 35 years old and hungry for more.

"When you get to the end of the year you want to be called a Stanley Cup champion again. It's the best motivation you have," Rozsival told the Chicago Tribune. "If you think about it, anything short of being a Stanley Cup champion then you're selling yourself short. It's such a great feeling, you want to experience it again and again."

GOALIES

The Blackhawks are starting the season with an obvious No. 1 goalie for the first time since Nikolai Khabibulin was the top goalie 2007-08.

Corey Crawford has been Chicago's top goalie since 2010-11, but he was constantly looking over his shoulder during

the past two seasons, first at Marty Turco and then at Ray Emery. Let's also not forget that Crawford had to be the guy who replaced Antti Niemi, who in 2010 helped bring Chicago its first Stanley Cup championship in 49 years.

Crawford won his job security by winning the Stanley Cup last season. He signed a six-year contract extension during the summer, and the Blackhawks can finally say with certainty that they have their No. 1 guy.

Crawford is coming off a regular season in which he won 19 games with a 1.94 goals-against average and .926 save percentage. He was better in the playoffs with 16 wins, a 1.84 GAA and .932 save percentage.

He'll start this season with a chance to win a roster spot on Canada's Olympic team. Crawford was one of five goalies at Canada's Olympic orientation camp in August.

"There's no reason that he can't [make the Olympic team]," Keith told NHL.com. "Everybody saw what he was able to do for us."

Ironically, Khabibulin is the guy behind Crawford now. He returns to Chicago after playing the past four seasons in Edmonton. Khabibulin was Chicago's pre-championship goalie from 2005-09, winning 90 games with a .903 save percentage and 2.81 GAA.

"Khabibulin coming in gives us the reassurance of a guy who is really experienced, knowledgeable," Quenneville said. "I can see him being a good working partner with [Crawford] because he's a real student of the game. He's excited being back in Chicago. They've been around each other as goaltenders so there is some familiarity there. I just think it'd be a nice tandem at this stage."

RELATED NEWS:

30 in 15: Hayes aims to emulate Bickell's success

Monday, 09.30.2013 / 3:00 AM / 2013-2014 Season Preview

By Dan Rosen - NHL.com Senior Writer

NHL.com continues its preview of the 2013-14 season, which will include in-depth looks at all 30 teams throughout September.

Jimmy Hayes saw Bryan Bickell become an overnight sensation during the Chicago Blackhawks' run to the Stanley Cup last spring. It gave him an idea of what his future in the NHL could be like as a threatening presence up front, one with skill to match his brawn and speed to match his power.

"[Bickell] has evolved into a power forward," Hayes told NHL.com. "He's a big guy who has a ton of skill. I know the way he played throughout the playoffs, finishing his checks and just being hard to play against it made him effective and successful, it triggered me to try to develop that game for myself."

Hayes will be given the chance early this season to show he's done it. He gave himself the tools to earn that chance during the summer by training hard on his lower body and working on his skating to become leaner, more powerful and ultimately faster and more dangerous.

Instead of being a lumbering 6-foot-6, 225-pound right wing, Hayes is now a tantalizing 6-foot-6, 220-pound right wing. He's just as blue collar as ever and he'll certainly throw his weight around on the ice, but now he's able to keep up in the Blackhawks high-octane, up-tempo, intense offense in the same way that Bickell showed he could last season.

Hayes, who has had two short stints with the Blackhawks over the past two seasons, playing in a total of 41 games and scoring 13 points, will likely get his chance on the third line with Andrew Shaw and Brandon Saad.

"I think the package is there and we'll look to put it together," coach Joel Quenneville said.

The Blackhawks were saying the same thing about Bickell in 2010, when he was a black ace during Chicago's Stanley Cup run. He had to get leaner, faster and more powerful in his legs to skate and keep up in Chicago's aggressive system.

Bickell worked at it, got his chance to be a full-time NHL player in 2010-11 and finally put it all together late last season to earn a starring role on the top line alongside Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews. He's part of the core in Chicago now.

Hayes hopes he's following a similar path. He could be Bickell 2.0.

"He's got all the tools," Kane, one of Hayes' closest friends on the team, said. "He's skilled and I think the biggest difference with him now is he's really kind of come into his own and is figuring out that he can be a good player and that he deserves to be in the NHL. I'm sure it's an exciting time for him."

Hayes said the biggest difference he feels is in his balance. It's a result of the lower-body workouts and skating regimen he went through over the summer. Now he's staying upright as he battles for the puck along the boards and tries to gain position in front of the net.

"My balance, working with the skating coach here and the power in my legs has brought my whole skating in general together so I can be more efficient," Hayes said.

He knew he had to be if he wanted to hang with the Blackhawks.

"I know I've shown moments where I can fly down the wing and play hard, but I have to make sure I'm consistent and I can do that every night," Hayes said. "I think my fitness in general and lighter weight helped me become a more powerful skater. Now I'm trying to use my speed to my advantage."

He's using it so he can take advantage of his opportunity.

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30 in 15: Handzus, Leddy lead Hawks' minor concerns

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By Dan Rosen - NHL.com Senior Writer

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Another Stanley Cup championship banner will go up to the rafters inside United Center on Tuesday night. That makes two in the past four Octobers. There could be more to come.

The Chicago Blackhawks have all the ingredients to become the first team since the Edmonton Oilers (1987-90) to win the Stanley Cup at least three times in five seasons. They have the offense, defense, goaltending and experience to become the first NHL team since the Detroit Red Wings (1997-98) to repeat as champions.

Sixteen of the 19 guys who played in Chicago's Stanley Cup-clinching Game 6 victory in Boston on June 24 are back. Everybody from the Blackhawks' group of top-six forwards has returned. All six of their regular defensemen are back. Their starting goalie is back.

The guys who Chicago either traded away (Dave Bolland and Michael Frolik) or lost in free agency (Viktor Stalberg) have been replaced by players who have been biding their time either as healthy scratches or in the American Hockey League, waiting for the opportunity that has finally come their way.

Nikolai Khabibulin is the only veteran replacement. He was signed to take over the backup goalie duties from Ray Emery.

"The will to win it again will definitely be in place because we know the character these guys have and what they bring," Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville told NHL.com during the summer.

Quenneville knows the difference between talking about winning another Cup and actually doing it. The latter rarely happens once in a player's career let alone three times, but that's what the core players on this team can accomplish this season.

To do it, though, the Blackhawks will have to overcome a few hurdles, not the least of which is being the group that will be targeted by 29 teams that want what they have.

Here are three areas of intrigue in Chicago heading into the season:

1. Second line center

Quenneville hopes it doesn't become a revolving door of guys centering Marian Hossa and Patrick Sharp, but he was also hoping either Brandon Saad or Brandon Pirri would grab the job in training camp and run with it. That didn't happen, partly because of Saad's desire to be on the wing and partly because of an injury that cost Pirri the first half of training camp.

Quenneville is going with Michal Handzus in this spot to start the season. It's the safe move as Handzus had success playing between Hossa and Sharp in the Stanley Cup Playoffs last season. However, Handzus is 36 years old and coming off injuries to his wrist and knee. He wasn't acquired at the NHL trade deadline last season to be the No. 2 center, but that's what he's become and the Blackhawks have been no worse for it.

"He did such a good job for us last year in all those big games," Quenneville said. "The thing about Handzus, he can make plays, he can see plays, both sides of the puck his instincts are in the right spot. I think he quietly went about his business when he came here and his production was almost a point every other game, which [for the] role that he had was a very high number. He can take faceoffs, he's got a big body ... very useful."

If Handzus stays healthy and is playing well Quenneville will have no reason to replace him, but he hasn't ruled out trying out the Saad-to-center experiment again and there's a chance Pirri could get another chance to earn the No. 2 center job. Pirri led the American Hockey League in scoring last season with 75 points in 76 games. There's also a possibility that Andrew Shaw plays well enough in a third-line role to earn a promotion.

2. Nick Leddy's consistency, development and ice time

Chicago is carrying eight defensemen to start the season, but Leddy will be given every opportunity to earn all of his ice time back and probably more.

"Take advantage of the situation and show us that you deserve more and earn more," Quenneville said, "and I expect that."

Quenneville lost confidence in Leddy as the playoffs wore on last season to the point where he gave him less than five minutes of ice time per game over the final three games of the Stanley Cup Final. Leddy, who averaged more

than 17 minutes of ice time per game in the regular season, was stapled to the bench as Michal Rozsival started playing 20 minutes a game -- and playing well.

Rozsival was in a platoon with Sheldon Brookbank as Chicago's sixth defenseman for most of the season.

The Blackhawks, though, gave Leddy (and Rozsival) a two-year contract during the summer because they think his struggles in the playoffs last season are simply a blip in what will otherwise turn out to be a long and strong NHL career. Leddy won't turn 23 until March and he's already played in a combined 212 regular season and Stanley Cup Playoff games.

He had 18 points and a plus-15 rating in 48 regular season games last season. He had 37 points, including 34 assists, in 82 games the prior season.

3. Bryan Bickell and the pressure of expectations

The Blackhawks are paying Bryan Bickell \$16 million over the next four seasons because of what he did in the playoffs last spring, scoring nine goals in 23 games to become a bonafide top-six player.

Now Bickell has to pay back the Blackhawks by recreating his playoff success throughout an 82-game regular season.

Bickell, who also had nine goals in the regular season, will start the campaign on the top line with Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane. He doesn't need to be told that his job is to create space for them by driving the net so he can deflect pucks and score the so-called dirty goals. He did that for them in the playoffs last season and wound up the beneficiary.

"He's playing with a couple of guys that should be able to get him the puck too," Quenneville said. "We expect [Bickell's] production to be better than it's been."

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30 in 15: Bennett could add to Penguins' depth

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By Corey Masiasak - NHL.com Staff Writer

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If there was a list of the most enviable positions that were open for competition during this training camp, the place on the wing next to James Neal and Evgeni Malkin for the Pittsburgh Penguins had to be at or near the top of the list.

With apologies to the opening at center in Chicago between Patrick Sharp and Patrick Kane and the spot next to Ryan Getzlaf and Corey Perry in Anaheim, the chance to play with Malkin and Neal could represent a career-defining opportunity for either Jussi Jokinen or Beau Bennett.

Bennett was a slight favorite entering camp. Jokinen has been one of the Penguins' top performers during the preseason with a team-high four goals in only three games.

Even if Jokinen earns the job to start the season, Bennett could see time there eventually. He's also going to be counted on to provide some depth scoring beyond the team's stars.

"We have a few other possibilities, but Beau is a guy who I really took to as a player that could have an extremely good year," Penguins coach Dan Bylsma said. "He's got high hockey IQ, high hockey sense on the offensive side of the puck. He can really make plays."

Bennett was a first-round pick (No. 20) by the Penguins in the 2010 NHL Draft, and had a solid freshman season at the University of Denver. His sophomore campaign was short-circuited by injury, but he signed with the Penguins instead of returning for his junior year.

He began 2012-13 in the American Hockey League but ended up playing 26 games for the Penguins as a rookie and finished with three goals and 14 points. Bennett's skill was evident, and his passing ability could mesh well with a shooter like Neal and Malkin, who also posted huge goal totals.

"I think the thing with Beau was the couple of years he had at Denver he fought some injuries there. It was probably good timing for him, because no one really anticipated [the lockout]. You thought there was a chance for a lockout because there was no CBA in place, but he really took that opportunity to go to Wilkes-Barre and play against real quality competition," Penguins general manager Ray Shero said. "What we saw down there was just that he's got incredible hockey sense. He's a very, very smart player, and there's a great sense in and around the puck. He's strong on the puck and just the vision to make the plays."

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30 in 15: Jokinen provides versatility for Penguins

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By Wes Crosby - NHL.com Correspondent

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Jussi Jokinen's role within the Pittsburgh Penguins' lineup remains undetermined with just a few days remaining until they open their regular season.

And that is just how the Penguins want it.

The vagueness surrounding Jokinen's position makes Pittsburgh's opening-day line combinations, past that of Chris Kunitz-Sidney Crosby-Pascal Dupuis on the top line, difficult to predict. He will most likely spend the season cycling through several spots on three of Pittsburgh's lines, keeping opponents guessing entering each contest.

Jokinen, an eight-year veteran, has consistently adapted to his surroundings. That continued this preseason, as he played wing on two lines, while competing with second-year forward Beau Bennett for a spot next to Evgeni Malkin and James Neal.

"I think every guy wants to play on the first line," Jokinen said. "If you ask me, that's where every hockey player wants to play, on the first line or top six, and have offensive chances and play a little bit more."

The 30-year-old forward played alongside Malkin and Neal during the Penguins' preseason game Sept. 21 against the Columbus Blue Jackets and left the Consol Energy Center crowd energized despite Pittsburgh's 5-3 loss.

Facing a 3-0 deficit early in the second period, Jokinen scored three goals in 8:28 to tie the game with a natural hat trick. Even before his second-period outburst, Jokinen seemed to fit with Malkin and Neal - who finished with two assists each - creating several first-period scoring chances.

"I think some guys you just fit in with right away," Jokinen said. "Obviously, Geno [Malkin] and [Neal] have played together the last three or four years and I just tried to fit in. I think those two guys are great to play with.

"I think if you're playing with Brandon Sutter or [Tanner] Glass or [Craig] Adams, you have to be smart. They're all different kinds of players, so you need to be able to change your game a little bit."

Jokinen outperformed Bennett during the preseason, but the 21-year-old's upside makes Bennett the likely choice to play next to Malkin. This shouldn't be much of an issue, as Jokinen's versatility should allow him to fit in well within the bottom six.

The Finnish forward admitted he is most effective playing an up-tempo style, skating in open ice to create scoring chances - which has led to a bulk of his 357 points in 579 career games. But he is competent on checking lines, neutralizing the opposition's attack and controlling the puck until his team's top lines are prepared to step back on the ice.

"Jussi can play just about any position on the ice and any special teams position on the ice," Penguins coach Dan Bylsma said. "We haven't played him at center yet. We're not playing him at center yet because we want to see him on the wing. We have seen him on the wing with [Brandon] Sutter. He's a guy who's played with very skilled players throughout his career and has played very well in Dallas and Carolina.

"You put people in situations where you might see them throughout the year."

"He's smart and he can play against other teams' better players. He's good defensively, but he's got some pretty good vision and ability too, so he can go and play top-line minutes."

-- Penguins F Brandon Sutter on Jussi Jokinen

Jokinen was acquired from the Carolina Hurricanes on April 3 last season and helped maintain the Penguins' strong work in the faceoff circle - winning 55 percent, second on the team behind Joe Vitale - while Crosby recovered from a broken jaw. But he exceeded Pittsburgh's expectations by scoring 11 points (seven goals) in 10 April games.

"When I came in last year, Sid was going to be out the rest of the regular season, so I played pretty much the rest of the regular season and into the playoffs at center," Jokinen said. "I think this year, if everybody's healthy, I'm probably going to play wing and then if there are some injuries, maybe I'll play a little in the middle too.

"It's a long season and it depends on how healthy our team will be. But, [concerning] who I'm going to play with, there are a lot of good players on this team."

Brandon Sutter, Jokinen's teammate for four years in Carolina, will be the Penguins' third-line center entering the regular season for the second consecutive year. Jokinen's most logical destination, assuming Bennett earns the position on Malkin's line, would be on one of Sutter's wings. It is something Sutter would welcome.

"He can play a little bit of everything and me and him have played together in the past," Sutter said. "I think he's a good guy to play with. He's smart and he can play against other teams' better players. He's good defensively, but he's got some pretty good vision and ability too, so he can go and play top-line minutes.

"He's definitely a well-balanced player and he's a good guy to have in our lineup."

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By Corey Masisak - NHL.com Staff Writer

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Marc-Andre Fleury was already guaranteed to be the guy with the most pressure on him for the Pittsburgh Penguins this season, but Tomas Vokoun's absence could magnify it.

After back-to-back postseason flops, the goaltender who helped the Penguins to the Stanley Cup in 2009 returned to Pittsburgh for training camp despite the protestations of fans and critics who felt the team should go in a different direction.

General manager Ray Shero, coach Dan Bylsma and captain Sidney Crosby were all consistent in their support for Fleury, refusing to believe that he can't regain the form he has produced during the regular season the past three seasons.

"That's been the tough thing for Marc. It is difficult, because he's won a Stanley Cup and the way he played for us was incredible," Shero said. "He's had a lot of great games in the playoffs, but unfortunately since we've won the Cup I think what people remember especially is the Philly series where he didn't play particularly well at all a year ago. Certainly, this year against the Islanders after Game 1 where he had a shutout, in Games 2, 3 and 4 it wasn't good enough. We thought we could still win the series, and we were fortunate to be able to turn to Tomas Vokoun and Tomas ended up having a great playoffs."

When drafting a list of what to watch for in Pittsburgh this season, Fleury is the obvious choice at the top of the list.

1. Where does Fleury go from here?

Every time Fleury yields five goals on 22 shots during the 2013-14 season, his critics will point and say, 'I told you so.' Every time Fleury pitches a 38-save shutout, those same people will say it doesn't matter until the postseason.

That's the world Fleury is going to live in for the next six months. He's going to spend the time working on some technical things and trying to rebuild his confidence with a new goaltending coach. He's also going to have to play a lot of games, and while the Penguins will score bushels of goals, they're going to need Fleury to be consistent if they hope to win the new Metropolitan Division.

He doesn't need to be great, but solid and consistent would work for Pittsburgh. If that happens, he'll have another chance to exorcise some of those bad memories from the past two postseasons in the spring.

Fleury is young enough to put his struggles behind him and have a long and successful career. The 2013-14 season does look like something of a crossroads for him though.

"Our group has the back of Marc-Andre Fleury just as I think they do for Tomas Vokoun because it is a tight group," Shero said. "That is commendable, but in the end guys have to perform. You have to make decisions on popular players all the time. That is part of the job. We want to give Marc-Andre every opportunity to try and succeed."

2. What about Vokoun, and the backup role?

The reason Fleury is going to play a lot for the Penguins is they don't know when Vokoun will be able to play for them again. Vokoun is out indefinitely after having emergency surgery earlier this month because of a blood clot in his pelvis.

Vokoun is expected to meet with doctors in the coming days, and at that point a better timetable could be available. The veteran had an issue with a blood clot in April 2006 when he played with the Nashville Predators.

Jeff Zatkoff is expected to get the first chance to backup Fleury. Zatkoff had a 1.93 goals against average and .920 save percentage in the American Hockey League last season, but the 26-year-old has never appeared in an NHL game.

"Obviously it's unfortunate how it happened but it's an exciting situation for me," Zatkoff told NHL.com. "Obviously this is the opportunity I've been waiting on for a while now in my career and I feel the time I've spent in the minors has helped prepare me for it. I feel I'm ready."

3. Will the sting from the end of last season linger?

On paper, the Penguins remain one of the most talented teams in the League. The offense should continue to flourish, and the defense could improve with the return of Rob Scuderi and the potential for better depth with steps forward from young guys like Simon Despres and Robert Bortuzzo and mid-season callups like Brian Dumoulin and

Scott Harrington.

So beyond the goaltending, what else is there to be concerned with in Pittsburgh? Not much, obviously, but the Penguins will need to show they have put the four-game sweep by the Boston Bruins in the Eastern Conference Final behind them.

They can win the division and possibly earn the No. 1 seed in the East, but a slow start wouldn't be the ideal way to try and reach those goals.

"It is time to move on and take some positives from getting down to the final four," Shero said. "Twenty-six other teams would have loved to be in our situation, and realize and know that Boston was a really good team and a good opponent.

"The playoffs are tough, and there are good teams in the playoffs. Certainly we had hands full with the Islanders and Ottawa gave us a tough test, but Boston deserved to win and it is time to move on."

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By Corey Masisak - NHL.com Staff Writer

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The Pittsburgh Penguins have been a prohibitive favorite to win the Stanley Cup as each of the past two postseasons began.

They did not win, and the different but equally stunning ways they were ousted from the Stanley Cup Playoffs in 2012 and 2013 has left lingering questions about the prospects for the Penguins in 2013-14.

Pittsburgh is certainly expected to be among the top teams in the League during the regular season, though what happens in net could determine if the Penguins challenge for a division title and a Presidents' Trophy. The failures of the past two postseasons though could make people stop short of considering the Penguins a favorite to claim the Stanley Cup.

Whether it was poor defense and goaltending in 2012, an offensive outage against the Boston Bruins in 2013 or the questions about Marc-Andre Fleury from both postseasons, the Penguins have plenty to prove this season though some of the answers won't come into play until the spring.

FORWARDS

The top five forwards on the Penguins are the best top five in the League, but the team has to figure out who will supplement them and how to do a better job of that than last season.

Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, James Neal, Chris Kunitz and Pascal Dupuis combined for 87 goals and 211 points despite Crosby missing 12 games and Malkin 17. Kunitz and Dupuis will flank Crosby again this season, and either Beau Bennett or Jussi Jokinen will join Malkin and Neal on the second line.

Jokinen had seven goals and 11 points in 10 games after arriving in a trade from Carolina, spending much of that time as Crosby's replacement on the top line. He could spend time at any of the three forward positions and on any of the top three lines this season.

"Jussi is a guy who has played with some very good players in his career and done well with them," Penguins coach Dan Bylsma said. "He could help us by playing with a guy like Crosby, and he's definitely in the mix to be on that third line."

Either Jokinen or Bennett will slot next Brandon Sutter on the third line, and the third guy with that group could be Dustin Jeffrey, Matt D'Agostini or Chuck Kobasew, who is in camp on a tryout contract.

Joe Vitale and Craig Adams are likely to be staples on the fourth line, with either one of the guys mentioned above or Tanner Glass joining them most nights.

"You round out our team with Joe Vitale and Tanner Glass and Craig Adams," Bylsma said. "They are guys who play specific roles on our team. I really think for "Joey V" it is time for him to step up and really take a role on our team penalty-killing wise, faceoff wise. He's a guy who plays with so much speed and tenacity. He's going to be a factor on the third and fourth lines."

DEFENSEMEN

Kris Letang was a Norris Trophy finalist last season despite missing 13 games. His 38 points were tied for the most among defensemen in 2012-13. Letang is questionable for the start of the season because of a lower-body injury, but 80 points (only Nicklas Lidstrom has reached 80 points among defensemen since 1995-96) is not out of the question if he can stay healthy.

Letang's partner is likely to be the team's marquee offseason addition, Rob Scuderi. The veteran defensive defenseman left the team after winning the Cup in 2009, but returned after four years and another championship with the Los Angeles Kings.

"Rob did a great job in L.A.," general manager Ray Shero said. "He won a Cup out there. He proved again to be a real, good solid player. We know his character and leadership abilities in a quiet, unassuming way. We know Rob, and we were excited to have the opportunity to bring him back."

Paul Martin and Brooks Orpik are expected to be the team's second pairing again. Martin had a much better season in 2012-13 after struggling at times since arriving from New Jersey as a free agent. Both Martin and Orpik are candidates to make the United States Olympic team.

Who plays on the third pairing is a little tricky. Matt Niskanen is certainly this team's fifth-best defenseman, but the Penguins are also in a tight squeeze with the salary cap and he could be moved. Top prospects Olli Maatta and Derrick Pouliot have been impressive, but could both end up back with their junior teams.

Robert Bortuzzo does not have the pedigree of some of the other younger defensemen, but he's had a strong camp and could see regular playing time. Simon Despres is in danger of being sent to the AHL. Deryk Engelland will either be the sixth or seventh guy depending on the fate of the others mentioned here.

GOALIES

Both Shero and Bylsma expressed their faith in Marc-Andre Fleury after Tomas Vokoun replaced him during the 2013 playoffs. Now that Vokoun is out indefinitely because of a blood clot, the Penguins are going to lean on Fleury to be a workhorse again.

Fleury's regular-season numbers in the past few seasons are strong, but he's had well-documented problems in the postseason. The Penguins will score plenty of goals, and Scuderi should help improve the defense corps. So there's going to be plenty of pressure on Fleury to perform, even though he's unlikely to convince any of his critics anything until the playoffs.

"When people evaluate Marc-Andre Fleury, it is not so much the regular season as it is the playoffs," Shero said. "He's got to put himself in a position to get the net in the playoffs and dispel those notions. It is going to be up to him."

RELATED NEWS:

Seven things we learned during the preseason

Sunday, 09.29.2013 / 11:15 PM / 2013-2014 Season Preview

By Dan Rosen - NHL.com Senior Writer

Training camp and the preseason schedule give coaches ample time to figure out what type of teams they have, prospects a chance to impress and veterans a chance to work out the kinks.

That's all over now. The games start counting Tuesday night, but before they do try to decipher some of the knowledge we gained in the preseason.

Here are seven things we learned during the preseason:

1. PTOs can work -- The shrinking salary cap meant a lot of veteran NHL players who normally would have been able to sign guaranteed contracts in July or August instead had to go to training camp on a professional tryout contract. It turns out the PTO angle worked this summer: Several players who were on the verge of being unemployed found work, and teams were able to secure depth at bargain prices.

Mason Raymond went to training camp with the Toronto Maple Leafs and earned a one-year, \$1 million contract. He could start the season in Toronto's top six.

Damien Brunner signed a PTO with the New Jersey Devils midway through training camp and a few days later was given a two-year, \$5 million contract. He might start the season on New Jersey's top line.

Tim Thomas chose to stay away from the NHL for 15 months, but the Florida Panthers gave him a chance to return by signing him to a PTO after training camp began. Thomas waited for the Panthers' ownership change to be official before signing a one-year contract that could earn him up to \$4 million. He should be Florida's opening-night goalie and has a chance to make the Panthers one of the toughest teams to score on in the Eastern Conference.

Florida also gave PTOs to forward Brad Boyes and defenseman Tom Gilbert. Both veterans will be on the opening-night roster and should take the pressure off some of the younger prospects the Panthers are hoping to groom at the NHL level this season.

Florida wasn't done, though. Defenseman Ryan Whitney, who was released from his PTO with the St. Louis Blues on Friday, signed a deal with the Panthers on Sunday night.

"Very excited and honored to sign a contract with @FlaPanthers," Whitney said via his Twitter account (@ryanwhitney6). "Can't wait for season to start."

It should be noted that PTOs did not work for everybody. David Steckel (Minnesota Wild), Johan Hedberg (New York Rangers), Mathieu Garon (Los Angeles Kings) and Ian White (Winnipeg Jets) are among the players who were released from their PTOs before camp broke.

2. Best laid plans don't always work out -- Training camp and the preseason schedule have a way of weeding people out. Sometimes it's the people who general managers and coaches don't want to have to cut.

Such was the case in New York as the Rangers were hoping Chris Kreider would start the season on a line with Brad Richards and Rick Nash. Instead, Kreider is starting the season in Hartford with the Rangers' American Hockey League affiliate.

Kreider didn't do enough in camp to earn a roster spot and since he is still on his entry-level deal, he doesn't require waivers to go down to the minors.

Tyler Toffoli, Tanner Pearson and Linden Vey all had a chance to make the Kings' lineup, but fell short. The odds of L.A. keeping all three were slim, but instead the AHL's Manchester Monarchs are getting last season's top line back, at least for the time being.

The Toronto Maple Leafs were hoping to see growth from Joe Colborne, enough that they could start him at least on the wing in the bottom six. He didn't make it and instead of risking losing him on waivers, the Maple Leafs traded him to the Calgary Flames on Sunday for a conditional draft pick.

Tampa Bay Lightning fans were envisioning Jonathan Drouin, the No. 3 pick in this year's NHL Draft, on the top line with Steven Stamkos and Martin St. Louis. That still might happen, but not this season. The Lightning sent Drouin back to his junior team on Sunday. General manager Steve Yzerman is inclined to take his time with Drouin.

Chicago Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville was hoping Brandon Saad or Brandon Pirri would win the second line center job. It didn't happen, so 36-year-old Michal Handzus, Quenneville's safe pick, is starting the season between Patrick Sharp and Marian Hossa.

Saad is back on the left wing on the third line. Pirri, who was limited by an injury in training camp, is in the AHL.

Jason Zucker was supposed to have a role with the Minnesota Wild to start the season. He didn't make the team and was sent to the AHL on Sunday.

3. Patience, Morrow make the Blues better -- Blues general manager Doug Armstrong and coach Ken Hitchcock got to see what they had through four preseason games before deciding it wasn't quite enough. They convinced Brenden Morrow, who was biding his time as an unrestricted free agent, that the right opportunity for him was in St. Louis.

It should be a win-win for the Blues and Morrow, who signed a one-year, \$1.5 million contract on Sept. 23.

Armstrong, Hitchcock and Morrow are familiar with each other from their days together in Dallas. The Blues needed a guy like Morrow who can fill a role on their third line but can be bumped up to a top-six role if necessary.

Morrow has put a lot of miles on his skates during a 13-year career as a grinding forward, but he's 34 years old and clearly can still play. Morrow had 25 points in 44 games combined between Dallas and Pittsburgh last season, then chipped in four points in 14 Stanley Cup Playoff games.

Hitchcock won't ask him to play 20 minutes a game, but a reduced role should help Morrow stay healthy and extend his career while giving the Blues another guy who can be a net front presence on the ice and a leader in the dressing room.

Even better, the Blues are getting a motivated player.

4. Oilers' center depth getting tested -- The Edmonton Oilers are supposed to take a big step this season under first-year coach Dallas Eakins, but they'll have to start the season without their top two centers.

Eakins knew when he took the job that third-year center Ryan Nugent-Hopkins would be out to start the season, possibly through October or longer, but then Sam Gagner was whacked in the face by an Zack Kassian's stick. It broke his jaw and put him out of the lineup for what could be two months or longer.

Eakins had already shifted Taylor Hall from left wing to center for training camp, preparing him to start the season as the Oilers' top-line center, likely between David Perron and Jordan Eberle. Eberle had eight points in the preseason, Perron had six and Hall scored two goals.

The Oilers, though, don't have another No. 1 draft pick -- or anybody even close to being the kind of player Hall is -- to replace Gagner. Eakins instead has to choose from a lot that includes Boyd Gordon, Will Acton and Mark Arcobello.

Gordon was an underrated signing during the offseason, but the Oilers acquired him to be a third- or fourth-line center and a defensive-zone faceoff specialist. He's never been a top-six player in his NHL career.

Acton and Arcobello have combined to play in one NHL game. Arcobello suited up for the Oilers last season and played more than 18 minutes against the Dallas Stars on Feb. 6.

Eakins isn't choosing from an All-Star crew here, but the Oilers have to find a way to make due until Nugent-Hopkins is healthy enough to return. Then they have to hope they can stay afloat as they wait for Gagner.

5. No questions, it's Fleury's net -- Pittsburgh Penguins coach Dan Bylsma made it clear after last season that Marc-Andre Fleury would be the team's No. 1 goalie at the start of the season. He didn't waver at all in training camp, but Tomas Vokoun's absence because of emergency surgery to remove blood clots in his pelvis solidified it for Fleury, who despite a second straight forgettable postseason will be in net for the Penguins when they open the season Thursday against the New Jersey Devils.

Vokoun will be out for an undisclosed amount of time; as it stands now, 26-year-old rookie Jeff Zatkoff is going to be Fleury's backup. Penguins general manager Ray Shero is not inclined to look for a veteran backup such as Hedberg, Ilya Bryzgalov or Jose Theodore, at least not until he finds out more about Vokoun.

Regardless, it's Fleury's net.

Fleury had a rough preseason, posting a 2.64 goals-against average and .865 save percentage in three appearances, but the Penguins aren't concerned about what he did in the games that don't count. He has a history of success in the regular season (249 wins, 2.66 GAA and .910 save percentage in 467 appearances) and Pittsburgh is banking on it continuing.

6. Dallas has some rookies to watch -- The Dallas Stars went 5-0-2 in the preseason, in large part because rookies Alex Chiasson, Valeri Nichushkin and Colton Sceviour had major impacts. Dallas coach Lindy Ruff may be asking for a lot more from the rookies in the regular season, which for the Stars starts on Thursday at home against the Florida Panthers.

Chiasson and Nichushkin, Dallas' first-round pick this year (No. 10), had three goals apiece in the preseason and generally looked like they were ready to contribute to an offense that is supposed to be led by Tyler Seguin and Jamie Benn. Chiasson is 22 and at this stage may be able to handle top-six minutes better than the 18-year-old Nichushkin.

Chiasson had six goals in seven games after getting called up to the Stars late last season before being injured. He should start the season on the second line. Nichushkin, though, is the more electrifying player and will likely be on the third line.

Sceviour, who is 24, is starting the season in the American Hockey League, but he showed with four goals in the preseason that the Stars can call on him for offense when they need an extra jolt.

7. Rangers might be in deep trouble to start the season -- The good news is defenseman Marc Staal's right eye is healed enough that he can play with no restrictions. But the rest of the developments around the New York Rangers should be a cause for concern.

They will start the season without two of their top six forwards in Ryan Callahan and Carl Hagelin. Last season's leading scorer, Derek Stepan, did not play in a preseason game because he didn't sign his new two-year contract until this past Thursday. The Rangers start the season with nine straight road games because of ongoing renovations at Madison Square Garden. They won't play a home game until Oct. 28.

The Rangers just went on a long Western road trip that included four days of training camp and golfing in Banff, Alberta, followed by four games in five nights in four different cities last week. They went 0-4 and were outscored 18-5.

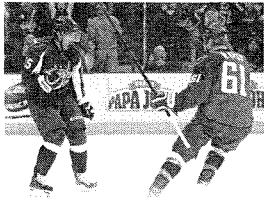
Granted, results in the preseason usually don't mean all that much. Lineups are usually mixed with veterans and prospects and coaches are tinkering with all kinds of line combinations, defensive pairs and special teams systems.

But with significant players missing from the lineup and a long road trip awaiting the Rangers starting Thursday in Glendale against the Phoenix Coyotes, there is reason for fans in the Big Apple to be worried.

RELATED NEWS:

Ducks acquire center Mathieu Perreault from Capitals

AP 8:11 p.m. EDT September 29, 2013



(Photo: Geoff Burke, USA TODAY Sports)

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ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — The Anaheim Ducks have acquired center Mathieu Perreault from the Washington Capitals in exchange for minor leaguer John Mitchell and a fourth-round pick in next year's draft.

The teams announced the deal Sunday.

Perreault has played in 159 games with the Capitals, scoring 70 points with a plus-17 rating. He has won 51.2% of his faceoffs.

Perreault began his career in Washington playing for Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau, who also coached Perreault in the American Hockey League.

MORE: Busy Sunday of NHL moves (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/2013/09/29/sunday-nhl-moves/2891563/>)

"Adding a young, quality center to the mix makes us that much deeper," Ducks general manager Bob Murray said in a statement. "I thought we needed some additional speed and scoring, and he is a feisty competitor. Having played under Bruce was also a factor in acquiring him, that's another positive. He makes us a better team today."

Perreault will be a restricted free agent after the season, but could find a solid role in Anaheim. He will compete for playing time at center with Nick Bonino, Peter Holland and Saku Koivu.

Mitchell is a left wing who spent last season with the Ducks' AHL affiliate in Norfolk.

PHOTOS: NHL preseason games

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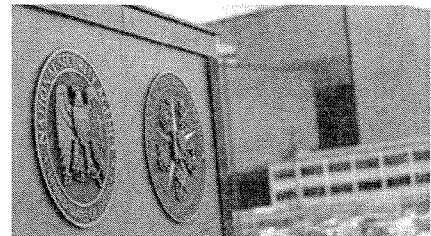
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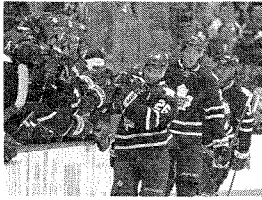


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Sep 27, 2013

NHL's busy Sunday: Who's leaving, staying?

Mike Brehm, USA TODAY Sports 8:55 p.m. EDT September 29, 2013



(Photo: Nick Turchiaro, USA TODAY Sports)

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John-Michael Liles is the odd man out on the Toronto Maple Leafs' defense and the Tampa Bay Lightning returned Jonathan Drouin to his junior team as NHL teams got their rosters in shape for the opening of the season.

Liles is making \$4.25 million this season as part of a four-year, \$15.5 million contract he signed before the 2012-13 season. He was put on waivers Sunday, not surprising because the Maple Leafs recently re-signed Cody Franson. The Maple Leafs would get \$925,000 in relief from his \$3.825 million cap hit if he isn't claimed

and he goes to the American Hockey League.

The Maple Leafs also waived defenseman T.J. Brennan, whom they signed as a free agent during the summer. Defenseman Morgan Rielly, 19, their top pick in 2012, is still on the roster.

Drouin was drafted third overall in June and had one assist and four shots in four preseason games. He will return to the Halifax (Nova Scotia) Mooseheads of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

MORE: NHL free agent tracker (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/2013/07/06/nhl-free-agent-tracker-2013-offseason/2495523/>)

He will be without his junior hockey center, Nathan MacKinnon, who was taken by the Colorado Avalanche with the No. 1 overall pick in June and will be on their opening roster.

Sending Drouin back might not be a bad thing for him. The Florida Panthers decided to give No. 3 overall 2011 pick Jonathan Huberdeau an extra year in juniors and he won NHL rookie of the year last season.

The New York Rangers, meanwhile, finalized their roster by placing Darroll Powe and Stu Bickel on waivers and sending Chris Kreider, among others, to their American Hockey League affiliate in Hartford. J.T. Miller and Jesper Fast have made the opening roster.

Offseason acquisitions Jeff Schultz (Los Angeles Kings), Philip Larsen (Edmonton Oilers), Adam Pardy (Winnipeg Jets) and Andrew Ebbett (Pittsburgh Penguins) were among the other players placed on waivers.

Also Sunday:

MORE: NHL transactions (<http://www.sportsnetwork.com/merge/tsnform.aspx?c=usatoday&page=nhl/stats/transactions2.aspx?sc=AD>)

-The Anaheim Ducks acquired center Mathieu Perreault from the Washington Capitals in exchange for forward John Mitchell and a fourth-round pick. Perreault, who played for Bruce Boudreau when the Ducks coach was in Washington, had 17 points in 39 games last season and 70 points in 159 career games. Mitchell will be sent to the AHL.

-The Detroit Red Wings, who were over the cap, placed center Cory Emmerton on waivers. They're also likely to place forward Darren Helm (groin muscle) on long-term injured reserve.

-The Vancouver Canucks signed winger Jannik Hansen to a four-year, \$10 million extension. He'll get annual pay of \$1.5 million, \$2.5 million, \$3 million and \$3 million. That includes a \$500,000 signing bonus every year.

-The Oilers named defenseman Andrew Ference captain. They had signed him as a free agent during the summer.

PHOTOS: NHL captains

-The Carolina Hurricanes placed forward Tuomo Ruutu on the injured list, retroactive to Sept. 21. The team said his lower-body injury is unrelated to last season's hip troubles.

-The Kings released goalie Mathieu Garon from his tryout agreement and loaned forward Tyler Toffoli to their AHL affiliate. He had played 12 games in

last spring's playoffs.

Full list of players on waivers

Nolan Yonkman, Anaheim; Nick Johnson, Boston; Alexander Sulzer, Buffalo; Blair Jones, Derek Smith, Ben Street, Calgary; Chris Terry, Carolina; Ryan Stanton, Chicago; Guillaume Desbiens, Colorado; Cory Emmerton, Detroit; Joey Crabb, Ryan Hamilton, Philip Larsen, Edmonton; Colby Robak, Florida; Jeff Schultz, Los Angeles; Cam Janssen, New Jersey; Joe Finley, New York Islanders; Darroll Powe, Stu Bickel, Brandon Mashinter, New York Rangers; Andrew Ebbett, Chris Conner, Pittsburgh; Bracken Kearns, John McCarthy, Matt Pelech, San Jose; Dana Tyrell, Mike Angelidis, Matt Taormina, Tampa Bay; John-Michael Liles, T.J. Brennan, Trevor Smith, Troy Bodie, Korbinian Holzer, Drew MacIntyre, Toronto; Joel Rechlicz, Washington; Adam Pardy, Patrice Cormier, Winnipeg.

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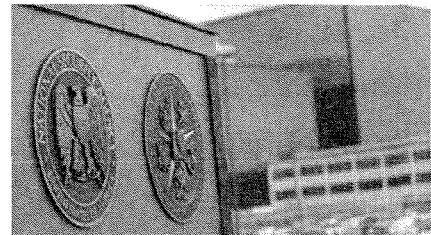
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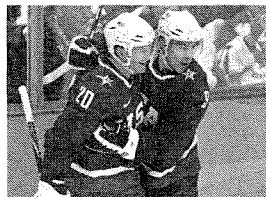


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Sep 27, 2013

Early primer on Olympic hockey teams

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports 6:08 p.m. EDT September 29, 2013



(Photo: Cris Bournocle, AFP/Getty Images)

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As the NHL season opens on Tuesday, the background battle will be for Olympic roster spots. USA TODAY Sports hockey columnist Kevin Allen gives an early primer for the 12 teams that will be participating in the Sochi Games in February:

USA

The most significant change in the U.S. program over the last 30 years is that a miracle is no longer required to win an Olympic medal.

Roughly one in five NHL players is an American, and the U.S. team is generally considered a medal threat in every international tournament. The world championships were the one place where the Americans hadn't been able to make strides, but they won a bronze last spring with a roster that didn't boast many top established players.

The Americans always have enough talent to be competitive.

Recent Olympic history: The Ryan Miller-led Americans were silver medalists in 2010 in Vancouver, and the Herb Brooks-coached Americans won silver in Salt Lake City in 2002.

Core players: Zach Parise and Ryan Suter (Minnesota Wild), Patrick Kane (Chicago Blackhawks), Dustin Brown (Los Angeles Kings), Ryan Callahan (New York Rangers), Jack Johnson (Columbus Blue Jackets).

MORE: [Atlantic Division preview \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2013/09/25/nhl-atlantic-division-capsules/2873191/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2013/09/25/nhl-atlantic-division-capsules/2873191/)

Goaltending options: Jonathan Quick (Kings), the 2012 Stanley Cup winner, is considered the best American goalie, but Miller played superbly in the 2010 silver medal run. Jimmy Howard (Detroit Red Wings), Cory Schneider (New Jersey Devils) and Craig Anderson (Ottawa Senators) could be in the mix. General manager David Poile has said it will come down to who is playing best in late December when the team is selected.

Coach: Dan Bylsma. The Pittsburgh Penguins coach lacks international experience, but he has proved to be a quick study in the NHL. The respected coach's positive approach seems like a good fit for this team.

Analysis: It's not too difficult to figure out the first 14 players. The Americans will go back to many of the 2010 players, but there will be new faces, such as Max Pacioretty (Montreal Canadiens) and maybe James van Riemsdyk (Toronto Maple Leafs). Because the tournament will be played on a wider ice surface, the Americans might find a spot for Keith Yandle (Phoenix Coyotes), a high-quality puck mover. Poile said he would look for skaters. Competition for the role-player positions will be keen.

Roster questions: Alex Galchenyuk (Canadiens), 19, was an offensive hero for the USA at the worlds. Will he develop enough over the first three months of the season to grab a roster spot? Brandon Saad (Blackhawks) is another young player whose development will be watched.

Strengths: Goaltenders, high-quality scorers on the wing, gritty competitors, effective defensemen.

Weaknesses: No true No. 1 center. The Americans miss the days when they had Mike Modano, Jeremy Roenick, Pat LaFontaine and Doug Weight.

Forecast: The USA is a B-plus team that could win a medal if it does A work for the length of this tournament.



Pittsburgh Penguin star Sidney Crosby scored the gold-medal-winning overtime goal in 2010. (Photo: H. Darr Beiser, USA TODAY Sports)

CANADA

A case can be made that Canada should be favored in every international hockey tournament based on overall talent and unwavering enthusiasm for the mission.

No country has more interest in hockey than Canada. Every Canadian player grows up with the double dream of wanting to winning a Stanley Cup and representing his country. Canadians put their hearts into these tournaments because they know the entire nation will be watching.

Recent Olympic history: The Canadians are the reigning Olympic champs, having defeated the USA for the 2010 gold medal in Vancouver. Canada and also won gold in Salt Lake City in 2002. Before then, the Canadians had not won a gold in hockey since 1952.

Core players: Sidney Crosby (Pittsburgh Penguins), who scored the gold-medal clinching overtime goal in 2010, Jonathan Toews and Duncan Keith (Blackhawks), Ryan Getzlaf and Corey Perry (Anaheim Ducks), Steven Stamkos (Tampa Bay Lightning), John Tavares (New York Islanders), Shea Weber (Nashville Predators), Eric Staal (Carolina Hurricanes) and Patrice Bergeron (Boston Bruins).

Goaltending options: The competition to be Canada's goalie is too close to call. If Roberto Luongo (Vancouver Canucks) plays well in October, November and December, why wouldn't Canada go back to him? He has an Olympic gold medal and two world championship golds in his trophy case. Carey Price (Canadiens) and Corey Crawford (Blackhawks) are the other prime contenders. Mike Smith (Coyotes) and Braden Holtby (Washington Capitals) are also in the mix.

MORE: [Metropolitan Division preview \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2013/09/23/nhl-metropolitan-division-capsules/2857959/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2013/09/23/nhl-metropolitan-division-capsules/2857959/)

Coach: Mike Babcock. The Red Wings coach won in Vancouver and has been invited back for the title defense.

Analysis: The Canadians have so much talent that terrific players will be left home. Premium forwards Matt Duchene, Jordan Eberle, Jordan Staal and Chris Kunitz are bubble players. Getzlaf, Eric Staal and Tavares likely will shift to wing. GM Steve Yzerman said a heavy emphasis will be placed on speed, which will help Taylor Hall (Edmonton Oilers). The defense, featuring Norris Trophy winner P.K. Subban (Canadiens) and Alex Pietrangelo (St. Louis Blues), will be overflowing with skill.

Roster question: Can the Canadians find room for NHL scoring champion Martin St. Louis? The smallish Tampa Bay winger didn't make the squad in Vancouver.

Strengths: No country can measure up to a center ice crew of Crosby, Stamkos, Toews and Bergeron. If anyone gets hurt, Staal moves back to center.

Weaknesses: The Canadians would love to have a bona fide superstar in net because they have stars at every other position.

Forecast: Canada has all-world fans to go with an all-world lineup. You'll see Canadian fans all over Sochi when Canada goes to the title game.

PHOTOS: Ovechkin carries Olympic torch

RUSSIA

The Russians face more pressure than any other athletes in the Olympic hockey tournament because they are playing in their homeland.

Odds makers have pegged them as the pre-tournament favorite. The Russian people expect them to win. For the Russians, any finish that doesn't include a gold medal might feel like a disappointment.

Recent Olympic history: The Russians have yet to win gold since the NHL began allowing its players to participate in the Olympics. They won a silver medal in 1998, losing to the Czech Republic in the championship game. The Russians won bronze in 2002.

Core players: Pavel Datsyuk (Red Wings), Ilya Kovalchuk (Kontinental Hockey League), Alex Ovechkin (Capitals), Evgeni Malkin (Penguins), Alexander Radulov (KHL), Alexander Semin (Hurricanes), Slava Voynov (Kings), Andrei Markov (Canadiens).

MORE: [Central Division preview \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2013/09/24/nhl-central-division-preview/2865541/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2013/09/24/nhl-central-division-preview/2865541/)

Goaltending options: Vezina Trophy winner Sergei Bobrovsky (Blue Jackets) seems to be the favorite as No. 1. But Semyon Varlamov (Colorado Avalanche) has a good reputation with Russian officials because he was strong in net in leading the Russians to a world championship in 2012. Evgeni Nabokov also is in the mix, along with KHL veterans Konstantin Barulin and Vasily Koshechkin.

Coach: Zinetula Bilyaletdinov. He was an assistant coach with the Coyotes and original Winnipeg Jets in the 1990s.

Analysis: This will be a very scary offensive team, and Russia's defense might be better than you think. Sergei Gonchar's best years might be behind him, but Voynov is a rising difference-maker. The Russians will have a handful of KHL players on the team, and that could include veteran defensemen Denis Denisov and Alexei Medvedev or others who will be very comfortable on the wider European ice surfaces.

Roster question: Are talented youngsters Vladimir Tarasenko (Blues) and Nail Yakupov (Edmonton Oilers) ready to compete on this big stage?

Strengths: The Russians should have the tournament's most dynamic offense.

Weaknesses: Will their goaltending be good enough? Goaltending seems to have been a question mark for Russia since Vladislav Tretiak retired.

Forecast: We could be looking at home-ice disadvantage. Enormous pressure will be heaped upon this team. The Russians seem ripe to be upset in the quarterfinals.



New York Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist was in net when Sweden won an Olympic gold medal in 2006. (Photo: Evan Siegle, USA TODAY Sports)

SWEDEN

Sweden has to be considered among the Olympic favorites, because it is the reigning world champion and boasts goalie Henrik Lundqvist.

Swedish hockey culture has become somewhat North Americanized. The Swedes know how to use their speed to take advantage of the wider European

ice sheet, but they also know how to thrive in a North American physical style of game.

Recent Olympic history: Sweden has one medal in the NHL era: gold in 2006. Mats Sundin, Daniel Alfredsson, Peter Forsberg, Nicklas Lidstrom and Lundqvist were on that team.

Core players: Lundqvist (Rangers); Erik Karlsson (Ottawa Senators); Daniel and Henrik Sedin, Alex Edler (Canucks); Alfredsson, Johan Franzen, Henrik Zetterberg and Niklas Kronwall (Red Wings); Oliver Ekman-Larsson (Coyotes); Nicklas Backstrom (Capitals).

Goaltending options: Lundqvist will be the most revered goalie in a strong field in Sochi. He is Sweden's No. 1. Jhonas Enroth (Sabres) was in net when Sweden won at worlds. Viktor Fasth (Anaheim Ducks) is in the mix.

MORE: [Pacific Division preview \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2013/09/24/nhl-pacific-division-preview/2866005/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/columnist/allen/2013/09/24/nhl-pacific-division-preview/2866005/)

Coach: Par Marts. He is the coach for the HV71 team in Sweden.

Analysis: With Henrik Sedin, Backstrom, and Alex Steen and Patrik Berglund (Blues) at center, the Swedes have a forward group that measures up nicely against any other country's. When a coach is looking at Gabriel Landeskog (Avalanche) and Loui Eriksson (Bruins) playing on his third line, he knows he has a deep roster. All of the Swedish defensemen move the puck slickly, and Karlsson is the world's top difference-maker in rushing the puck.

Roster question: Is there room for Niklas Hjalmarsson (Blackhawks) among the top six defensemen? He's highly respected around the NHL, but if he gets a spot, Victor Hedman (Lightning) or Tobias Enstrom (Winnipeg Jets) becomes No. 7. That doesn't make sense either. The Swedes are deep.

Strengths: The goaltending and defense are impressive. The Swedish defense could be Edler (suspended for the first two games), Karlsson, Kronwall, Enstrom, Ekman-Larsson and Hedman. Karlsson could be unstoppable on the big ice.

Weaknesses: Alfredsson's skills aren't what they once were. Franzen is inconsistent. Sweden's recent Olympic history is checkered, one strong tournament tucked in a poor body of work.

Forecast: The Swedes are a dark-horse candidate to bring home gold.



Anaheim Ducks star Teemu Selanne is looking to take part in his sixth Olympics. (Photo: Julie Jacobson, AP)

FINLAND

The Finns always are more competitive than the hockey world thinks they should be.

They are deep in net and boast enough quality NHL players to be a factor in Olympic tournaments. Since NHL players started participating at the Olympics in 1998, the Finns have placed heavy emphasis on bringing home a medal. They have been rewarded for their efforts.

Recent Olympic history: Finland is the only country that has claimed three medals in the NHL era: bronze in 1998, silver in 2006 and bronze in 2010.

Core players: Teemu Selanne (Ducks), 43, will be offered the opportunity to play in his sixth Olympics. Also: Mikko Koivu and Mikael Granlund (Wild), Saku Koivu (Ducks), Kimmo Timonen (Flyers), Tuomo Ruutu (Hurricanes) and Valtteri Filppula and Sami Salo (Lightning).

POWER RANKINGS: Predictions for Cup, awards winners (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/2013/09/25/nhl-preseason-power-rankings-vote/2862907/>)

Goaltending options: Finland's goaltending pool is too deep to project a No. 1. It probably will come down to Pekka Rinne (Predators) vs. Tuukka Rask (Bruins). But how can you count out Antti Niemi (San Jose Sharks) or Niklas Backstrom (Wild)?

Coach: Erkka Westerlund. The former national team player was coach of the 2006 silver medal team.

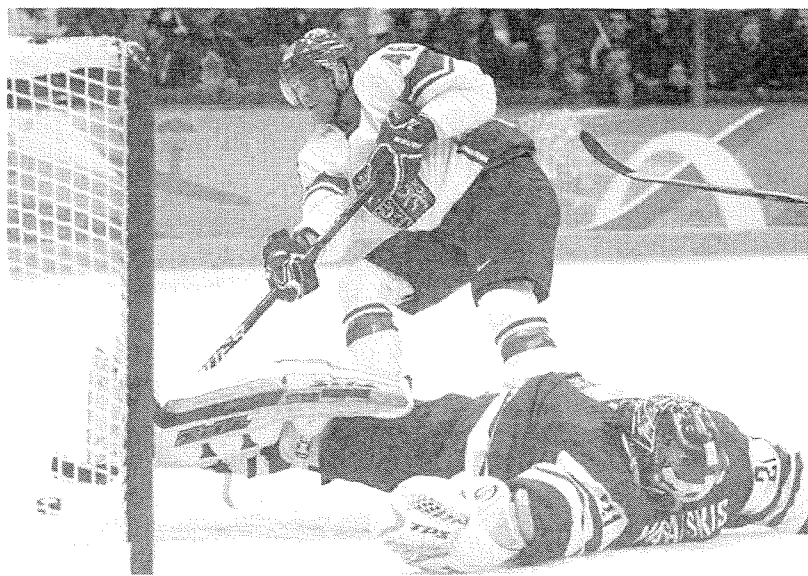
Analysis: A key for Finland will be whether Granlund is ready to light it up offensively against NHL competition. He's going to be a crowd-pleaser, but it might not be this season. The Finns also will need a strong offensive series out of Mikko Koivu and Filppula. But equally important will be the play of less-heralded Finns such as Lauri Korpikoski (Phoenix Coyotes), Ville Leino (Sabres) and Sean Bergenheim (Florida Panthers).

Roster question: Is there enough room for highly regarded Panthers center prospect Aleksander Barkov? He has a good chance to end up on Finland's team.

Strengths: Other countries are envious of the Finns' goaltending depth.

Weaknesses: Selanne, Saku Koivu, Timonen and Salo are in the late stages of their careers. This team's NHL cast seems less impressive than in the past. Remember the days of Jari Kurri, Esa Tikkanen, Jere Lehtinen, Teppo Numminen, Jyrki Lumme and others?

Forecast: The Finns' bid for a medal seems like it will fall short. But that probably was said before the three tournaments in which they did medal.



Boston Bruins forward David Krejci, playing for the Czech Republic, has a reputation for coming up big in big games. (Photo: Kyle Terada, USA TODAY Sports)

CZECH REPUBLIC

Choosing the Czech Republic's best player today is a matter of debate, but there's no doubt Devils right wing Jaromir Jagr, 41, remains the face of Czech hockey.

Jagr played a significant role in helping the Czech Republic win a gold medal in 1998. Sixteen years later, Jagr, barring injury, he'll be an important player for the Czech team when the Olympics are in Sochi.

The Czech program is perceived to be in decline, but the potential Olympic roster shows considerable talent.

Recent Olympic history: The Czechs won gold in 1998 and bronze in 2006.

Core players: David Krejci (Bruins), Patrik Elias, Marek Zidlicky and Jagr (Devils), Jakub Voracek (Flyers), Tomas Plekanec (Canadiens), Tomas Fleischmann (Panthers) and Milan Michalek (Senators).

Goaltending options: Ondrej Pavelec (Jets) is the top candidate. Tomas Vokoun (Penguins), Michal Neuvirth (Capitals) and Petr Mrazek (Red Wings) are other possible choices.

MORE: [Top U.S. prospects for 2014 draft \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/2013/09/27/top-american-prospects-to-watch-2014-nhl-draft/2883575/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/2013/09/27/top-american-prospects-to-watch-2014-nhl-draft/2883575/)

Coach: Alois Hadamczik. He coached the team to the bronze medal in 2006.

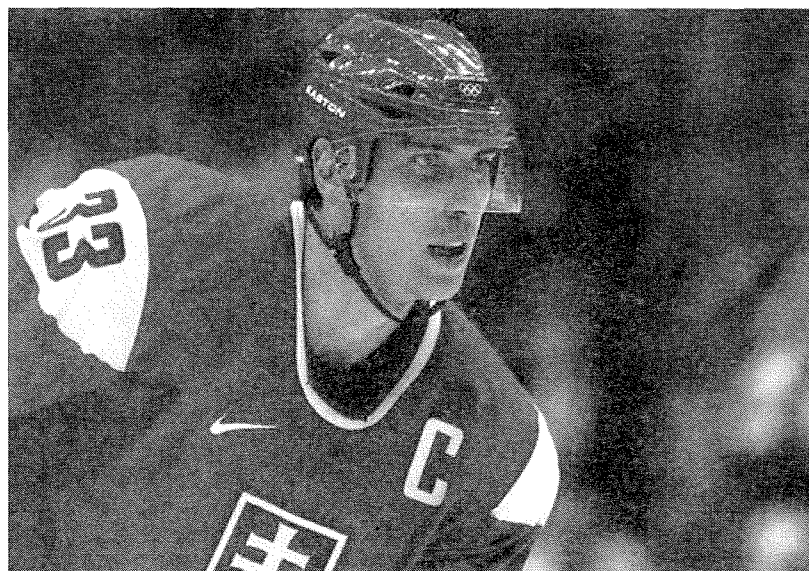
Analysis: The Czechs' center group includes Krejci, Elias, Plekanec and Martin Hanzal (Coyotes). That's a proven foursome. Krejci increases his production in important games. When you also have Voracek, Michalek, Fleischmann, Jagr and others on the wing, the Czechs have to be considered a factor in the medal race. Jagr is an emotional player, particularly during international competition. He will get the Czech passions stirred up.

Roster question: Are there enough quality defensemen? The rise of Jakub Kindl (Red Wings) last season helps. Michal Rozsival (Blackhawks) played well during his team's title run. Rostislav Klesla and Zbynek Michalek (Coyotes), plus Roman Polak (Blues), are solid.

Strengths: If you play sloppy defense against the Czechs, they can make you pay. The Czechs can score.

Weaknesses: The Czechs lack an elite-level No. 1 defenseman, and goaltending is a question mark.

Forecast: The Czechs have enough talent to be dangerous and not quite enough to be considered a medal favorite.



Slovakia, led by Boston Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara, finished fourth in 2010. (Photo: Jerry Lai, USA TODAY Sports)

THE OTHER SIX

The fact that Slovakia (2012) and Switzerland (2013) have won silver medals in the last two world championships is a reminder that other countries are expanding their ability to compete on the international stage.

A look at the other competitors in Sochi:

Slovakia

No one in the hockey world would be stunned if Slovakia was in the medal hunt. Led by Zdeno Chara (Bruins), Marian Hossa (Blackhawks) and others, the Slovaks can present problems at both ends of the ice. Slovakia lost to Finland in the bronze medal game in Vancouver.

Core players: Chara, Hossa, Marian Gaborik (Blue Jackets), Jaroslav Halak (Blues), Michal Handzus (Blackhawks) and Andrej Sekera (Hurricanes).

Switzerland

Don't forget that the Swiss upset Canada in the 2006 Games in Torino and took the eventual champion Canadians to a shootout before losing in Vancouver in 2010. With Jonas Hiller (Anaheim Ducks) in net, the Swiss can be a scary opponent.

Core players: Mark Streit (Flyers), Roman Josi (Predators), Raphael Diaz (Canadiens), Nino Niederreiter (Wild), Luca Sbisa (Ducks), Sven Baertschi (Calgary Flames), Damien Brunner (Devils) and Yannick Weber (Canucks).

Austria

Although Austria has some top players, it doesn't yet have the depth to be competitive against NHL-laden teams.

Core players: Thomas Vanek (Sabres) and Michael Grabner (Islanders).

Slovenia

The country has one exceptional player in Anze Kopitar (Kings).

Core players: Former NHL player Jan Mursak should be on the team. He is playing in the Kontinental Hockey League.

Latvia

Kaspars Daugavins was the only Latvian to play in the NHL last season, and he has signed in Switzerland. Arturs Kulda (Jets) is coming back to North America this season after playing in the KHL.

Core players: Sabres first-round pick Zemgus Girgensons, 19, could make the team. Former NHL defenseman Oskars Bartulis is Latvian.

Norway

Mats Zuccarello (Rangers) is the only Norwegian who played in the NHL last season.

Core players: Former NHL player Ole-Kristian Tollefsen will be one of the team's leaders.

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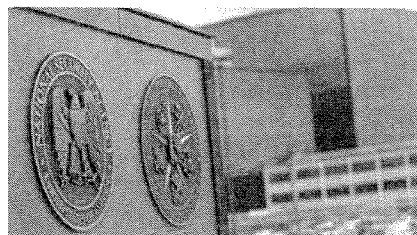
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Sep 27, 2013

Sixers staying put, Josh Harris assures



76ers owner Josh Harris. (Matt Rourke/AP file photo)

Keith Pompey, *Inquirer* Staff Writer

Posted: Monday, September 30, 2013, 2:01 AM

The Inquirer

Managing owner Josh Harris reiterated Sunday that the 76ers are not moving to North Jersey.

"My answer to the fans is I love the Sixers in Philly. I'm committed to it," Harris said during his state-of-the-Sixers news conference.

Harris' keeping the franchise in Philadelphia isn't a surprise to people who know the billionaire businessman. They will tell you the surprising thing is that he's on board with the Sixers' tanking this season.

"I want immediate results and immediate upside," he said. "But I think that the reality of professional sports is that things don't change overnight."

The things that will allow Harris to keep his sanity during what will be a trying season are his offseason moves that were geared to bring a championship to Philadelphia in a few seasons.

Gone are coach Doug Collins, general manager Tony DiLeo, and team president Rod Thorn. Added were coach Brett Brown, general manager Sam Hinkie, and chief executive officer Scott O'Neil.

"These are people that are 'A' players," Harris said of Brown, Hinkie, and O'Neil. "So I feel very, very excited about those moves. And then you have to work on obviously putting pieces in place on the court.

"That doesn't happen overnight. It happens over time."

The Sixers have only six players with more than two years of NBA experience and are expected to challenge for this season's worst record. Yet no one in the team's front office is complaining.

The franchise could have two lottery picks in the 2014 draft and about \$36 million to lure free agents next summer.

"And we continue to talk broadly about analytics, sports science, health-fitness nutrition," said Harris, noting the things the Sixers are now incorporating.

"So these are edges, over time, that are going to make us competitive, make us win," he said. "I'm very confident we are going to get there."

And if the Sixers do get there, he reiterated they will do it as the Philadelphia 76ers, not the Newark Sixers.

Harris and business partner David Blitzer bought the NHL's New Jersey Devils and the lease to the Prudential Center for \$320 million in August. With that came the speculation that they would attempt to move the Sixers into the Newark arena or sell the team.

"I'm totally focused on the Sixers and won't change one iota how driven I am to make this team a championship team," said Harris, who has family ties to both Philadelphia and Newark.

He said he is prepared to do that through the draft or free agency, or via trades. Harris said trading for Andrew Bynum last summer proved that the Sixers will spend money and be aggressive when they see the opportunity.

The 7-footer came to Philadelphia from the Los Angeles Lakers in a four-team trade last summer. He made \$16.9 million despite missing all of last season with chronic knee injuries before signing with the Cleveland Cavaliers in the summer.

"I still believe you have to measure decisions and not outcomes," Harris said. "In sports, there's an element of randomness. Going for Andrew Bynum was the right decision because it is very tough to get a player of that caliber."

So don't be surprised if the Sixers try another blockbuster trade down the road.

"Like I said, we are big boys," Harris said, "and we will do it again if we see the right opportunity."

Read more at

http://www.philly.com/philly/sports/sixers/20130930_Sixers_staying_put_Josh_Harris_assures.html#BQmFh6370JSCyb4v.99

The Selling of the American Dream, Meadowlands-style

Posted on Sunday, September 29, 2013 2:34 pm

by John Brennan

The long-stalled American Dream Meadowlands project, formerly known as Xanadu, may be revived soon with the help of a publicly-issued bond package worth up to \$800M.

Colleague Christopher Maag and I have the story in The Record today.

Site seems to be struggling today and I'm off anyway, but will have more on this on Monday.

- See more at: <http://blog.northjersey.com/meadowlandsmatters/6733/the-selling-of-the-american-dream-meadowlands-style/#more-6733>

WEEKEND TRANSACTIONS

HOCKEY

NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE

Chicago Blackhawks: Assigned F Kyle Beach to HV71 (Sweden). Recalled G Antti Raanta from Rockford (AHL). Assigned F Jeremy Morin, F Brandon Pirri and G Antti Raanta to Rockford (AHL).

Columbus Blue Jackets: Assigned Fs Michael Chaput, Ryan Craig and Jack Skille; D Cody Goloubef, Ilari Melart and Will Weber; and Gs Mike McKenna and Jeremy Smith to Springfield (AHL).

Dallas Stars: Assigned G Christopher Nilstorp, C Travis Morin and RW Colton Sceviour to Texas (AHL). Assigned D Jyrki Jokipakka, D Patrik Nemeth, D Jamie Oleksiak, RW Brett Ritchie, RW Austin Smith, D Maxime Fortunus and RW Matej Stransky to Texas (AHL).

Detroit Red Wings: Assigned Fs Mitch Callahan, Luke Glendening, Calle Jankrok, Tomas Jurco, Teemu Pulkkinen and Riley Sheahan; D Adam Almqvist, Xavier Ouellet and Ryan Sproul; and G Jared Coreau to Grand Rapids (AHL). Released F Jeff Hoggan

and D Nathan Paetsch from professional tryout agreements. Placed F Willie Coetzee and Landon Ferraro and D Nick Jensen on injured reserve. Agreed to terms with G Jake Paterson on a three-year entry-level contract.

Florida Panthers: Acquired RW Krys Barch and a 2015 seventh-round draft pick from New Jersey for C Scott Timmins and a 2014 sixth-round draft pick. Loaned F Bobby Butler to San Antonio (AHL).

Los Angeles Kings: Loaned RW Tyler Toffoli, C Linden Vey and LW Tanner Pearson to Manchester (AHL). Announced F Luke Gazdic was claimed off waivers by Edmonton.

Nashville Predators: Assigned F Taylor Beck, G Marek Mazanec and D Joe Piskula to Milwaukee (AHL).

NHL: Reduced Phoenix F Paul Bissonnette's suspension from 10 games to three (3) games for his conduct in leaving his team's bench to join an altercation during a preseason game on September 15, 2013.

ISLANDERS: Agreed to terms with F Ryan Pulock on a three-year entry-level contract. Loaned F Jason Clark, D Marc Cantin and D Andrey Pedan to Bridgeport (AHL). Released F Greg Miller, D Mike Dalhuisen, D Mike Keenan and D Dallas Jackson from their tryout contracts.

RANGERS: Assigned Fs Marek Hrivik, Chris Kreider, Oscar Lindberg, Brandon Mashinter, Darroll Powe, D Conor Allen and D Stu Bickel to Hartford (AHL).

Phoenix Coyotes: Assigned LW Max Domi to London (OHL).

Tampa Bay Lightning: Assigned LW Mike Angelidis, RW J.T. Brown, RW Brett Connolly, D J.P. Cote, D Dmitry Korobov, RW Nikita Kucherov, D Matt Taormina and RW Dana Tyrell to Syracuse (AHL); LW Jonathan Drouin to Halifax (QMJHL) and G Kristers Gudlevskis to Florida (ECHL).

Toronto Maple Leafs: Traded C Joe Colborne to the Calgary Flames for a 2014 fourth-round pick.

Vancouver Canucks: Agreed to terms with RW Jannik Hansen on a four-year contract extension. Acquired RW Zac Dalpe and C Jeremy Welsh from the Carolina Hurricanes for RW Kellan Tochkin and a 2014 fourth-round draft pick.

Washington Capitals: Acquired a 2014 fourth-round draft pick and F John Mitchell from Anaheim for F Mathieu Perreault. Assigned Mitchell to Hershey (AHL).

AMERICAN HOCKEY LEAGUE

Bridgeport Sound Tigers: Assigned D Mathieu Coderre-Gagnon, D Nathan Deck, D Sean Escobedo, F Ryan Hayes, F Nick Larson, G Parker Milner, D Shawn Mortin-Boutin, D Landon Olsanski and F Ben Rosen to Stockton (AHL). Signed F Brayden Irwin and F Sean Wiles to training camp tryout agreements.

Hamilton Bulldogs: Released Fs Andre Morrisette, Trevor Bruess, David Laliberte and Chad Wiseman; and D Pierre Durepos and Matt Lashoffsix. Assigned G Peter Delmas to Orlando (ECHL).

San Antonio Rampage: Reassigned F Philippe Lefebvre to Cincinnati (ECHL).

COLLEGE

Arizona: Announced men's assistant basketball coach Emanuel Richardson is taking a leave of absence.

Southern California: Fired football coach Lane Kiffin.