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Newsday / The Gaudreau brothers left a legacy at Boston College and beyond

By The Associated Press- September 9, 2024

Flowers, sticks, bags of Skittles and bottles of purple Gatorade make up a vigil outside Conte Forum, the home rink for “Johnny Hockey” when he and his brother played at Boston College, together, for one season.

A decade later, the deaths of John and Matthew Gaudreau have hit home in the BC hockey community where they made such an indelible impact. They will be laid to rest at a funeral service Monday outside Philadelphia, but their impact on the school in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, will not soon be forgotten, along with everything they did from New Jersey to Calgary to Columbus and beyond.

“Everybody knows how gifted they were on ice, especially Johnny — an all-world type of Olympic player and college All-Star — but both players brought so much excitement to our locker room and to the dormitories and just the academic environment of BC,” former coach Jerry York said. “They left tremendous impressions on all of us. We’ll miss the hockey exploits they always had with us but more important how they were as young guys.”

John was 31 and Matthew 29 when they were struck and killed the night of Aug. 29 while riding bicycles in their home state of New Jersey by a suspected drunken driver on the eve of their sister Katie’s wedding. Grief spread the following morning.

“We go into the gym and everyone’s got a pit in their stomach,” said Cutter Gauthier, who helped BC reach the Frozen Four final this past spring before making his NHL debut with Anaheim. “He obviously had a huge legacy at Boston College. ... To see that, it’s really heartbreaking.”

The eldest Gaudreau brother was a point-a-game player as a freshman when he and the Eagles won the national title in 2012. The Calgary Flames, who drafted him a year earlier in the fourth round as an undersized prospect with plenty of talent, tried that summer and the next to convince the family John was ready to turn pro.

Then-Flames general manager Jay Feaster knew as soon as Matthew committed to BC that there was no chance of getting John to Calgary before the brothers got the chance to play together. That season was Gaudreau’s best, leading the country with 36 goals, 44 assists and 80 points, and earning the Hobey Baker Award as the NCAA’s top player.

“He was someone that I grew up watching,” said Macklin Celebrini, the 2023 Hobey Baker winner at Boston University and the No. 1 NHL draft pick by San Jose. “It’s a tragedy. You never really expect something like that to happen, and even if you don’t really know him that well, it hits you hard.”

BC coach Greg Brown said everyone around the program has been in a fog since learning of the news. That extends to BC alumni, too.

“You just don’t get over things like this,” said Kevin Stevens, who played there in the 1980s before a lengthy pro career in the NHL. “This is going to affect a lot of people, and myself, for a long time.”

Will Smith grew up in Massachusetts a self-professed “BC superfan” and said Gaudreau was his idol. Asked what John meant to the school, Smith responded, “Everything.”

“Even his nickname, ‘Johnny Hockey,’ it’s something that will live on forever,” Smith said this week at the NHLPA rookie showcase. “He was a really special player for that program.”

Smith, now with the Sharks, got the chance to play alongside Gaudreau with the U.S. at the world championships in Prague earlier this year and learned as much off the ice as on it.

“He was always making us laugh,” Smith said. “The one day we went golfing — a little BC group — it was Kevin Hayes, Johnny, Ryan Leonard and myself. It was just a day we went out there, played golf and it was one of those days I’ll remember.”

BC associate coach Mike Ayers remembered an interaction long after Gaudreau turned pro and became an NHL star, seeing him inexplicably stopping and starting his car on campus — in order to play “Pokémon GO” on his phone.

“That was him. That was just his way of having fun,” Ayers said. “He was just a happy-go-lucky kid.”

Since their deaths, Ayers has been talking more about how John and Matthew handled themselves outside hockey than what they did in the sport they loved.

“Matty was a leading scorer here his senior year,” Ayers said. “He was a big-time player for us, and obviously Johnny had a million accolades, but you would never know it by seeing them or interacting with them. They were just down-to-earth good people.”

The hockey spoke for itself. Lane Hutson, a Montreal prospect who played the past two seasons at Boston University said of Gaudreau, “Every time he touched the puck, it was a highlight reel.”

Sometimes when he spoke, too. Pittsburgh's Rutger McGroarty, who went to Michigan, rewatched Gaudreau's Hobey Baker acceptance speech and has heard plenty about what he was like as a person from best friend Adam Fantilli, a teammate of John's with the Columbus Blue Jackets.

“The stuff that he said about him: just not one bad thing to say about the guy,” McGroarty said. “Just a smile on his face every day, coming in, laughing but also got to work.”

The games go on at BC. The school observed a moment of silence for the Gaudreau brothers — as well as Tony Voce, a former BC hockey player and Philadelphia Flyer who also died this summer — before Saturday's home football game against Duquesne.

The college season begins next month, as it does in the NHL and across the sport. The pain of the losses of the Gaudreaus will remain.

“It's going to be a tough one,” Stevens said. “That's a hard one. That's going to wear on us for a long time.”

[The Athletic / What your favorite penalty says about you, Hat Trick Fever and more: DGB Grab Bag](#)

By Sean McIndoe- September 7, 2024

The hockey world just went through an absolutely miserable week, probably one of its worst ever. That might make it a weird time to pull out the old Grab Bag gimmick. Or maybe not, because we could all probably use a laugh right now. Unfortunately you're stuck with me, so "laugh" might be asking too much, but maybe I can at least get a slightly louder than normal exhale out of you. Let's see if we can find a way to have some fun.

What your favorite NHL penalty says about you

You have a favorite NHL penalty. Yes you do, don't get in the way of a good premise. What you may not know is that your favorite penalty tells the world something important about you. Consult this list to find out what you're telling all of us every time you dive into the rulebook.

Puck over glass: People often describe you as "simple" and claim to love how straightforward you are, but also seem to spend a lot of time gathered in small groups talking about you.

Cross-checking: You sometimes feel like everyone is ignoring you even though you're right there in front of them.

Goaltender interference: Nobody understands you and you're convinced it's because they're just not trying hard enough.

Too many men: Your team is playing against the Bruins in a playoff series.

Embellishment: You are dramatic and annoying and nobody ever bothers calling you.

Fighting: You own every Don Cherry VHS tape, and still haven't forgiven Ron MacLean for betraying him.

Offside review: You can't watch a movie without constantly hitting pause, looking for any minor mistake in a scene and then rushing off to update the IMDB "Goofs" page.

Slashing: You often get into passionate arguments with people who prefer Eddie Van Halening.

Offensive pass interference: You are confused and have clicked on the wrong section of this site.

The five-minute major for hooking that's in the rulebook but goes decades without being called: Every album you own is vinyl and you make sure to tell everyone that.

Butt-ending: You are 8 years old.

You are not aware of the existence of any penalties in the NHL rulebook: You are a referee and it's the postseason.

The summer's three stars of comedy

We haven't done this since the spring, which means we have an entire summer's worth of NHL team social media accounts trying to be funny. Surely we can find three that succeeded. (Checks through four months of content.) Eh, close enough.

Weird NHL history

This week's weird history lesson is about the time some hockey players had a hand in changing how the Super Bowl works. (Thanks to reader Dan M. for sending in the suggestion.)

Our story begins back in 1992 at the Metrodome in Minneapolis, home of Super Bowl XXVI between Washington and Buffalo. With the Bills trailing big after two quarters, we head down to the field for the halftime show, at which point this happens:

Uh... yeah.

I can assure you kids out there, even by the standards of 1992, that was not good. And I say that as someone who thought this was the coolest thing ever.

It's also not what you're used to as a Super Bowl halftime show, which we'll get to in a minute. Instead of a big star or two essentially doing a mini-concert, this show was an old-school edition of "Here's some stuff the host city thinks is neat." Since we're in Minnesota, the neat stuff is "winter." Specifically, winter sports, which is where the hockey comes in. Around the 8:00 minute mark, you can see members of the 1980 Miracle on Ice team show up to give the show its emotional high point by half-heartedly waving some comically oversized sparklers around.

Does it look cool? No. But did it pull in monster TV ratings? Also no! Instead, this was the year the halftime show was so bad everyone flipped over to watch "In Living Color" instead, causing Super Bowl viewership to crater. As a result, the NFL and its broadcast partners panicked, eventually booking Michael Jackson for the 1993 game. That was the beginning of the now-ubiquitous trend of the star-driven halftime show — and the end of the "let's get some random local celebrities to try to dance" era.

And it wouldn't have happened without hockey. Or maybe it would have. The point I wanted to make is "In Living Color" ruled.

Obscure former player of the week

Monday was Labor Day, or Labour Day if you're up here in Canada, which means it's a good time to give some credit to the key players behind the NHLPA. Unfortunately for our purposes, not many of them were all that obscure — the original efforts back in the 1950s were primarily led to by two of the all-time greats, Ted Lindsay and Doug Harvey, while future presidents of the association would include legendary names like Ken Dryden, Bobby Clarke, Phil Esposito and Bryan Trottier.

But other players who played key roles weren't superstar names, which often meant they had more to risk. One such man was Leafs defenseman Jimmy Thomson, who earns this week's obscure player honors.

Thomson was a hard-nosed defensive defenseman who debuted with the Maple Leafs as a teenager in 1945-46. He quickly earned full-time status with the club, helping them to four Stanley Cups while earning second-team all-star honors in 1951 and 1952. That was despite a noted lack of scoring touch; he scored just 19 goals in a 13-season career.

That lack of goal-scoring eventually earned him a spot in the record book, one he still holds to this day. During the 1947-48 season, Thomson finished the year with zero goals and 29 assists, establishing the mark for the most points in a season without any goals scored. He'd take a run at this own mark a few years later, having 25 points in 1951-52, giving him not just top spot on the all-time list but also two of the top five. Mike Reilly took a serious run at the record in the shortened 2020-21, but finished just shy with no goals and 27 points.

Thomson also briefly served as Maple Leafs captain in 1956. But his more important contribution to the league came later that year, when he was one of the players at a secret meeting hosted by Lindsay that led to the formation of the NHLPA. As with some of the other players involved, Thomson's participation wasn't appreciated by his boss, Leafs owner Conn Smythe. That led to a falling out that spelled the end

of Thomson's time in Toronto; he'd head to Chicago to play one more season, and was out of the league entirely by 1958 at the age of 31.

Classic YouTube clip breakdown

The Oilers head into the season as the consensus favorites in the West, looking to repeat last year's deep playoff run that ended up falling just one game short of a championship. Today, let's head back to the 1980s, when the idea of a repeat meant something different for one of the greatest dynasties of all time.

(Thanks to longtime Grab Bag reader and aspiring sportswriter Bill B. for sending in this week's clip.)

It's April 18, 1986, and we're enjoying the first intermission of Game 1 of a second-round series between the Oilers and Flames. Our host is a baby-faced Chris Cuthbert, who reminds us that Edmonton is chasing what would be their third straight Stanley Cup win. While you might assume that sort of success would sell itself, the Oilers' marketing department has come up with a hot new idea to really get those tickets flying.

Our story begins with a young lady informing a caller that the Oilers have Hat Trick Fever. This is in fact true, as the 1980s Oilers were plagued by hat tricks. Luckily, a vaccine was developed in the early '90s and Edmonton didn't see a resurgence of the condition until Connor McDavid showed up.

We meet Mike Brennan, a marketing guy who is wearing a hat, just in case you haven't figured out where this is going. As a former marketing drone myself, I can't tell you how much I enjoyed watching Mike pull off the industry's favorite move: pretending something completely obvious and simple is actually incredibly creative. In this case, Mike tells us his entire department had to rack their brains to come up with a hockey slogan that had "something to do with three" and eventually came up with "hat trick." This is why Mike and his crew get paid the big bucks.

You just know there was one guy who wanted to go with "three stars" and is still mad about it to this day.

Next we meet Mark Hall, who must be an executive because he's wearing a suit but is too cool to mess up his hair with a hat. Call this guy the Vegas Golden Knights, because he's engaging in some cap circumvention, am I right folks?

Mark wants to be clear that any type of hat is acceptable, including bowlers, just in case you forget this clip is very old. But he and Mike are both extremely excited about how the campaign is taking off, with malls and schools jumping on the bandwagon.

"It has taken the city by storm," our reporter lies, as we cut to a shot of two guys wearing Loyal Order of Water Buffalo Lodge hats while they watch their team chase a Stanley Cup. That part isn't all that interesting, I just wanted to be the first hockey writer in a few decades to write "Buffalo" and "Stanley Cup" in the same sentence.

"I think I saw Mark Messier wearing a bishop's hat." Look, don't make fun, mid-'80s Messier still hadn't embraced the whole "play bald" thing and he was trying out his options. It's still not the worst thing he ever wore.

We also get a shot of a local bank, where all the employees are happily wearing Oiler visors while presumably working on whatever loans Peter Pocklington has defaulted on that day.

We're asked to wonder about what would happen "if an Oiler ever scored three goals in one game," which is kind of a weird question considering that happened pretty much once a week back then. No really, I looked it up, the next Oilers hat trick after this story aired took six whole days.

Our story ends with a random dig at the Islanders, and then a group shot of the marketing department, at which point Chris informs us the Oilers are trailing. They'd go on to lose both the game and, more memorably, the series, due to Hat Trick Fever mutating into a far more dangerous strain called Score Into Your Own Net Influenza.

As a fun footnote, while Hat Trick Fever is mostly forgotten today, it did have a significant impact on NHL history. The Flames and their fans got tired of hearing about the Oilers' hats and retaliated with a campaign of their own for this series, encouraging their fans to go monochrome in what would become "The C of Red." That lasted only a few years, but that was long enough for it to be hijacked by Jets fans into the Winnipeg Whiteout, which remains one of hockey's coolest traditions. And indirectly, it's all because the Oilers marketing department asked people to wear hats.

The Athletic / Drysdale over Gauthier? Yakemchuk over Demidov? Answering your top NHL prospect questions

By Corey Pronman- September 7, 2024

What are the main reasons for the changes on prospects since your draft list? — Jim B.

The only change I made that I'm aware of was moving Ivan Demidov up two to three spots. I assumed all season he was 5 feet 11, which was his unofficial measurement from Central Scouting. Then I stood next to him at the Gold Star camp, and he was notably taller than that, so I made a mild adjustment.

Why are goalies so hard to evaluate compared to other positions? — David G.

The biggest issue for me is often playing time/sample size. If a goalie gets 40-60 games a year, I feel fairly confident about the player, but that's so rare nowadays at any level. So often, just like with an injured skater, you're doing more guessing than usual on the talent level and hockey sense.

Thomas Harley just aged out from the U-23 ranking. He broke through last season and scored a bunch of nice goals. Great production from a then-22-year-old D, but he's often rated a bit lower than his production would suggest. How does he compare to Jake Sanderson? In what tier would you have put him if he were eligible for your rankings? — Zacharias L.

I'm a big Harley fan. Their puck games are probably similar. Harley is a good skater, but he's not as dynamic as Sanderson with his feet. He's a bit bigger, and Sanderson plays a bit harder. Sanderson is better, but it's not that big of a gap.

What made you rank Jamie Drysdale ahead of Cutter Gauthier when, at the time of the trade, you said Cutter was "the best player of the two currently"? — Scott M.

I watched a lot of Cutter in the spring, and his hockey sense continued to concern me. It also feels like he's destined for the wing. If I thought he was a center, I would probably move him ahead of Drysdale. At the time of the trade, I projected him as a center.

Carter Yakemchuk over Demidov, really? — Tyler N.

I don't see why that's so controversial. They went two spots between each other in the same draft a few months ago. More than one NHL team had it that way going into the draft, and several had Demidov way ahead. I had my leanings, and we'll find out in five years who was right, but both are tremendous talents. Yakemchuk is a big defenseman with dynamic skill and good enough mobility, and his defense is average now. Demidov is an off-the-charts skilled winger with an awkward skating stride and a good motor. I prefer one player type mildly over the other.

Why do you think Zeev Buium fell so much this year? You and Scott Wheeler seem to think highly of him, so it was strange to see him fall to the Minnesota Wild, especially considering he's supposed to be good at both ends of the ice. — Kyle J.

Whenever something like that happens — meaning a guy goes way beyond where I projected him — I check to make sure I didn't miss something major on his medicals or character. That wasn't the case with Buium. As one NHL executive said to me about it, "Big defensemen always get picked higher." Teams just gravitated more to players like Anton Silayev, Sam Dickinson and Yakemchuk for their two-way pro potential. Zeev was a good enough college defender, but the concern with some teams is how he will defend in the NHL given his barely 6-0 frame. I think he'll be fine in that regard, but not everyone agreed. We'll see who ends up right.

Who's the best skating prospect you've ever seen who did not make it? — Sam S.

Liam Foudy comes to mind, if we're considering him a miss.

What do you take into consideration for ranking skating? To illustrate: Lane Hutson is quick in tight and can break ankles in the offensive zone but isn't going to burn anyone up the ice or get back on a backcheck. On the opposite spectrum you can take a straight-line ripper like Josh Anderson who has no one-on-one moves in tight but with space can beat anyone on the outside. Who's the better skater? — Michael S.

Speed, edge work and natural athleticism all come into play when I'm doing my skating ratings. At the end of the day, player evaluation in any sport is a combination of natural athletic tools plus specific skills relevant to the sport plus work ethic. Anderson can get by with some average skills because he's extremely athletic. Hutson is not athletic. He skates well, but he's tiny, so it doesn't matter if I rate his feet 5/10 or 6/10; he needs to score 60 points to help an NHL team unless his feet are a 9/10.

Do you feel bad for what you did? — Robert A.

I probably shouldn't have put that extra mayo on, but sometimes you have to indulge and treat yourself.

I keep hearing the KHL is the second-best league after the NHL. Is it? Why or why not? How do you rank other global leagues for competitiveness and development? Many thanks! — Kevin B.

It used to be the second-best league, but since the invasion of Ukraine and the lack of imports going into the league, it's hurt its quality a bit, although it is steadily getting more imports again. SHL would be No. 3, and then either the AHL, NLA or Liiga. Liiga's quality has dipped notably in recent years.

How does Gavin McKenna compare to recently drafted prospects? — Erik S.

A better-skating, more consistent Trevor Zegras is what I've thought of watching him, although his consistency isn't a major selling point. He has Zegras' skill with a lot more pace.

Who are the early choices for fastest/best skaters in the draft? Which of those players have the potential to be selected in the first round? — Edward S.

Cullen Potter is the best skater in the age group. Cameron Schmidt and James Hagens are elite skaters, too. Hagens is in the No. 1 overall race. Schmidt and Potter have hockey sense and size concerns that could make them fringe in the first round.

You mentioned how Demidov's skating mechanics are "awkward but powerful" and expressed concerns about his ability to translate his style of play to the NHL (in part due to the skating, as I understand it). Do you know of any similar players drafted in the past who had similar skating and (1) had issues adapting due to the skating and never lived up to their projection and (2) had similar awkward skating but corrected the stride and later thrived in the NHL? Or any other comparable you found enlightening? — Raphael D.

I asked that question to a lot of NHL scouts in the lead-up to the draft. The names I heard that were convincing were Jeff Skinner, Lucas Raymond and Kevin Fiala. I'd argue Demidov is better than them at the same age, though.

Last year, you ranked Frank Nazar a "middle-of-the-lineup player" and No. 5 on the Chicago Blackhawks' list despite a rough freshman year because of "his history." You suggested he could have a nice comeback year and merit that ranking. This year, he's not a "middle-of-the-lineup player" and dropped to No. 14. What about his sophomore year told you that he not only failed to live up to his history but also declined? — Ted M.

He's a tough evaluation. I basically gave him a mulligan for his freshman year because of his health. I love his skating and compete, but my questions are about whether he's going to have good or very good offense as a pro. One thing I debated this year was comparing him to Gavin Brindley, who was a teammate of his at Michigan and the world juniors. I'm not convinced Brindley will be a massive NHL scorer, probably a middle-six wing, but he outscored/outplayed Nazar in school and at the world juniors. I haven't seen as much skill/playmaking in college as I did when he was in junior. Maybe I'm wrong, but it's concerning for me at that size.

How much time does it take to create the whole U-23 list and team? Do you have help? I feel like it's a huge ask for one guy. — William P.

I usually start the process around late spring before the draft, and it's about two to three months of dedicated work. We ask a lot of our editors in the summer when they should be at the cabin. I also rely a lot on my network of hockey sources to help fill in the gaps on some of the midrange names in the team pieces.

Why is Jacob Fowler much lower on your goalie prospect ranking list than the one produced by Scott Wheeler, who tagged him as a future starter and the third-best goalie prospect in the NHL? You see him as a backup with a chance to be more, and he isn't on your top goalie prospect list. I know goaltending is complicated, but there seem to be vastly different perspectives here. — Cedric S.

Wheeler is more deferential than I am when it comes to goalies without elite athletic traits (size, lateral quickness). Fowler was incredible when I watched him in college last season, but so was fellow Habs prospect Cayden Primeau.

Do you think L.J. Mooney can be like a Zach Benson or Logan Stankoven? I'm kind of worried about his frame being weighed in at 143 pounds. — Zach O.

He will be fascinating to watch. There are three very talented shrimps in the upcoming draft: Mooney, Schmidt and Adam Benak. They are all dynamic, but they will need to be so competitive and score in buckets to convince an NHL coach to play them. Mooney's engine is probably the best of the three, giving him a chance to be like Stankoven, although I'm not sure he has that level of offense yet.

What have you learned over the years doing this under-23 list? How have your criteria for players changed over time? Do you notice any differences between your evaluative criteria and the scouts you talk to? — Vern C.

Probably the biggest difference is less stressing over stats and performance and more emphasis on the players' traits and how they project over the next five years.

ESPN / Gaudreau, trades, CBA among hot topics at NHLPA rookie event

By Greg Wyshynski- September 7, 2024

ARLINGTON, Va. -- Johnny Gaudreau was Will Smith's hockey idol.

The 19-year-old San Jose Sharks forward was a Boston College superfan before attending the school where Gaudreau became an NCAA legend. Gaudreau's presence was everywhere when Smith played at BC, from the record books to the trophy cases inside the Eagles' arena. Now, the Columbus Blue Jackets star is being remembered inside Conte Forum with flowers and memorial tributes.

Johnny Gaudreau, 31, and his brother, Matthew, 29, were killed on Aug. 29 by a suspected drunken driver while riding their bikes in New Jersey. It's a tragedy that continues to reverberate through the hockey world -- including among the young players at the NHLPA rookie showcase in Arlington who grew up watching the All-Star winger make magic on the ice.

"He meant everything. Even his nickname: Johnny Hockey. It's something that'll live on forever," Smith said. "It's tragic news. It's really tough right now."

Gaudreau went from Smith's hockey idol to his teammate on the U.S. national team at the IIHF world championships in Czechia earlier this year. Smith recalled one memorable moment when a contingent of Boston College players -- including Gaudreau, Kevin Hayes and Ryan Leonard -- played a round of golf together on an off day.

"He was always making us laugh. It was one of those days I'll always remember," Smith said.

Smith's new teammate Macklin Celebrini, the No. 1 pick in the 2024 NHL draft, never met Gaudreau but still felt the magnitude of his loss.

"You never really expect something like that to happen. And when it does ... even if you don't really know him that well, it definitely it hits you hard. He was someone that I grew up watching as a player," he said. "With him and Matthew, it's just a tragedy what happened."

Celebrini attended Boston University, the archrival of Gaudreau's Boston College. So did Montreal Canadiens rookie defenseman Lane Hutson, who was also a Gaudreau fan.

"Every time he touched the puck, it was a highlight reel. He was a really special talent and special guy," Hutson said. "At the end of the day, there's a rivalry, but you put that aside. It's a saddening loss."

Players around the NHL are processing the tragedy in the days leading up to training camp. The NHLPA said it sent a memo to Columbus players offering counseling services to any player who might need them.

"It's a really sad situation. The loss of two young lives. I think there's a lot of players still in shock," said Marty Walsh, executive director of the NHLPA. "I mean, this ripples through every team, every locker room. It ripples through Boston College. I think we just have to be there as best we can for the family. We just have to be there when they need us."

Anaheim Ducks rookie Cutter Gauthier, Smith's teammate at Boston College, remembered how news of the tragedy hit hard among the players.

"On the day it happened, and we went to the gym and everyone's got a pit in their stomach. It's just an awful day. It still just sucks," Gauthier said. "He had a huge legacy at Boston College, being one of three guys who won the Hobey Baker and just carrying a legacy. It's just really heartbreaking."

Rutger McGroarty rewatched Gaudreau's Hobey Baker acceptance speech online after his death. "I mean, it's Johnny Hockey. The stuff said about him, not one bad thing was said about the guy," he said. "Just a smile on his face every day. Coming in, laughing. But he also got to work."

McGroarty noted that Montreal Canadiens forward Cole Caufield changed his number to No. 13 this season in tribute to Gaudreau.

"He had such an impact on smaller guys [like Caufield], proving that he could do it all," McGroarty said. "He had a great career. God rest his soul."

The NHLPA rookie showcase was the first time many players had a chance to put on their teams' jerseys.

For Cutter Gauthier, that meant donning the Ducks' new sweaters in vibrant orange with a classic "Mighty Ducks" logo on the front.

"I think they're sweet. I like them a lot. I think they did a good job with the logo," said Gauthier, admiring the jersey.

There's a certain amount of irony to Cutter Gauthier ending up draped in orange as an NHL player.

He was drafted fifth by the Philadelphia Flyers in the 2022 NHL draft, wearing an orange Flyers jersey as he expressed his excitement about joining the franchise.

But the Flyers ended up trading Gauthier to the Ducks in early January for defenseman Jamie Drysdale and a second-round selection in the 2025 NHL draft. It had become apparent that, in the words of Comcast Spectacor chairman Dan Hilferty, "his mind was made up that he didn't want to be in Philadelphia."

The reaction to his decision from some fans was lamentable. Gauthier claimed there were death threats made among the hundreds of messages he received. Fans showed up in Flyers jerseys to his Boston College games. Hilferty himself offered a vitriolic farewell, saying, "I don't really feel bad for Cutter when he comes to Philadelphia. It's going to be a rough ride here and he earned it."

And yet here was Gauthier this week, still wearing orange.

"Yeah, all-orange too, after they switched jerseys," he said of the Ducks' new look. "But no issues against the orange. It looks good."

The Ducks are scheduled to visit the Flyers on Jan. 11, 2025. From the moment the trade happened, Gauthier has been asked about that first visit to Philadelphia.

"It'll be a fun game. Obviously, lots of excitement and lots of buzz around it. I'm not really too worried about it. Just go out there and play my game and do my thing and we'll see what happens," he said.

He doesn't feel the controversy with the Flyers will impact his rookie season with the Ducks.

"I don't think that [situation] has any pressure on me whatsoever," he said. "Things didn't work out. I'm excited to be a Duck now and move forward with them and hopefully do whatever I can to help them win."

While it wasn't nearly as contentious, Rutger McGroarty made a similar decision with the team that drafted him.

The Winnipeg Jets selected him 14th in the 2022 NHL draft, but he declined to sign with the team after citing concerns about his "development path" with the franchise. The Jets decided to trade McGroarty and found a fit with the Pittsburgh Penguins in August in exchange for forward prospect Brayden Yager.

That's not to say there wasn't backlash from fans toward McGroarty on social media.

"Yeah, I won't dive too deep into that, but there is some stuff for sure. I'll go scroll through Instagram and something pops up. It's there. It's always going to be there. You just have to live with it, learn from it, and just kind of move on," he said. "But when I got to Pittsburgh, I got some really nice messages from some fans and I feel like they're excited, so it was really cool to see that."

Those fan interactions are part of being a pro athlete. So is having private talks with a team suddenly become public information, which was another learning experience for McGroarty.

"The media does such a good job finding stuff out," he said to reporters. "I mean, for me, I'm happy that it was in the middle of the summer instead of during the season. When everything came out at first it caught me off guard a little bit, but it happens. It's where we live in nowadays. It didn't bother me too much."

Like Gauthier, McGroarty is happy how it all turned out. The NHLPA showcase was his first time in a Penguins jersey -- albeit one that didn't have his name or number on it yet. He praised the organization's championship history. He called GM Kyle Dubas "an incredible hockey mind" after having talked with him this summer. And, of course, he's "pumped" to become a teammate of Sidney Crosby's.

"Obviously I'm an American. I love the USA. But that golden goal he scored [in the 2010 Olympics]? That's so cool. It gives you chills when you watch it to this day," he said. "I mean, who isn't a Sid guy?"

The "Doan Family Curse"

The NHLPA rookie showcase was also the first time Josh Doan wore a jersey with "UTAH" emblazoned across the chest, as a charter member of the NHL's newest team.

"It's a once-in-lifetime opportunity to play with the new organization. You can get that vibe that it's going to be a hockey city," Doan said. "Obviously to get a chance to play in my first game in the same jersey that my dad wore was super special. But there's an exciting opportunity in Utah."

That's the bittersweet part for Doan: The beginning of the Utah Hockey Club meant the end of the Arizona Coyotes.

Arizona is the team he grew up cheering for as a young fan, where his father, Shane, spent his 21-year NHL career. It's the franchise that drafted him 37th in 2021, with whom he made his NHL debut for 11 games last season.

"I was a fan from day one of the Coyotes. If you lose your hometown team, it's never going to be easy, no matter what sport it is," he said. "It's a new opportunity for me and that's kind of how we're taking it. It's exciting. It's an opportunity that my dad had at the beginning of his career, so it's crazy how that worked out."

Hockey can be a sport of weird coincidences, and the Doan family is no exception. Shane Doan debuted with the Winnipeg Jets in 1995-96, playing one season before the franchise relocated to Phoenix. Josh Doan made his debut for the Arizona Coyotes last season, and the team was then sold to Smith Entertainment Group and moved to Salt Lake City for the 2024-25 season.

"We've seen a couple of things out there about how our family has cursed a couple teams. That if I have a kid then no one should draft him. Stuff like that," Josh Doan said. "To have that kind of start off my NHL career is really funny and definitely a unique experience."

Also unique: joining a team that doesn't have a name yet.

Doan defended it as a matter of bad timing.

"A lot of people put a little heat on our organization for not having the name ready, but it was such a bang-bang thing where there was no way to really get anything sorted out besides have the Utah Hockey Club for the first year," he said. "As players, we don't mind it. The jerseys are nice. It's got the 'UTAH' on it. We like it and we'll have fun with it."

Utah's new team will have a name before too long, with heavy speculation in hockey circles that "Yeti" will be the eventual moniker.

That would be fine by Doan: He cast his vote for "Yeti" in the online poll for the team's new name.

"Yeti would be pretty cool. It's Utah, the mountains and everything. That would be probably my top choice," he said.

Latest on CBA talks

The collective bargaining agreement between the NHL and the NHLPA expires at the end of the 2025-26 season. This will be the first CBA negotiated by Marty Walsh, who replaced Don Fehr as executive director in 2023.

"When you think about collective bargaining, it never really stops. It's always constantly, always going," Walsh said. "But we haven't done into any major conversations with anyone yet. We're still processing it. It's still a bit early."

Walsh acknowledges that the NHL is coming off a blockbuster season in terms of attendance, TV viewership, revenues and a Stanley Cup Final that went seven games. Prior to and early on in the 2024-25 season, Walsh and his team will tour all 32 franchises to get player opinions on what they want out of the next CBA.

"We'll be talking to players about the agreement coming down the road and how we lay down the foundation for that agreement," he said.

If recently signed contracts are any indication, players and agents have the next CBA talks on their minds. TSN noted recently that the multiyear contracts with term extending into the 2026-27 regular season have a sharp rise in signing bonus activity at the moment the CBA expires.

Walsh said he's not concerned by that trend.

"No, not at all. That's the beauty about this is: It's certainly not my first collective bargain agreement," he said. "I've done many of them, whether I've been involved myself from the beginning to the end, or I've been asked to come in and help resolve issues. So there'll be a process."