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September 12, 2024**

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1st Ohio Battery / With Heavy Hearts, The Columbus Blue Jackets Are Set For Their First On-Ice Action Since The Passing Of Johnny Gaudreau

By Ed Francis- September 12, 2024

It's hard to think about hockey.

But outside of his friends and family, hockey was life for Johnny Gaudreau. It is the beautiful game that connected him with us; it was the vessel that gave the world the opportunity to see how remarkable of a human being he was.

And so, with the Gaudreau family in our hearts, let's talk about the upcoming prospects tournament:

The Columbus Blue Jackets are en route to Buffalo, New York to take part in the Prospects Challenge. It will be the first time that the Blue Jackets, who had played in the Traverse City (Mi.) Prospects Tournament since the infancy of the franchise, will take part in the challenge.

Other teams participating in the challenge include divisional rivals the Pittsburgh Penguins and New Jersey Devils, as well as the Atlantic Division's , Boston Bruins, Buffalo Sabres, and Ottawa Senators.

The Traverse City Tournament is down to just two teams this year: the Detroit Red Wings and the Dallas Stars. Those two teams will face off twice.

Columbus' first practice is set for Thursday, with the first game slated for Friday afternoon against the Sabres. Game two will come Saturday against the Bruins, and the third game is scheduled for Monday afternoon against the Senators.

One player to keep an eye on is defenseman Denton Mateychuk. He excelled in the tournament in 2023, so much so that the Blue Jackets took a hard look at keeping him in Columbus at the conclusion of the preseason. Instead, they opted to the now-20-year-old to back to the Moose Jaw Warriors of the Western Hockey League, where he had been since the 2019-20 season.

Mateychuk tore up the WHL in 2023-24, scoring 17 goals and adding 58 assists for a 75-point effort in just 52 games. With 11 goals and 19 assists in the Warriors' 20-game playoff run, the Manitoba native was named the 2024 WHL Playoffs Most Valuable Player. He did also play in four games with the AHL's Cleveland Monsters during their playoff run following the conclusion of Moose Jaw's season.

If Mateychuk dazzles again, it might be hard for the Blue Jackets to leave him outside of Nationwide Arena for much longer. The expectation is that he will start the season in Cleveland, but for how long may be a question that we start to answer in the coming days.

On the other side of the puck, there are a few players to keep a keen eye on: Gavin Brindley, James Malatesta, and Luca Del Bel Belluz. All three got a taste of the NHL in 2023-24, with Malatesta playing 11 games and Brindley and Del Bel Belluz making their debuts in the season finale. If any forwards will make the team who are playing in the tournament, it'll be from this trio.

Brindley was the second pick of the second round in the 2023 NHL Draft, and a teammate of Adam Fantilli at Michigan. In 40 games as a Wolverine, Brindley had 25 goals and 28 assists for an average of 1.32 points per game. Malatesta, taken in 2021 and part of the same draft class as Kent Johnson and Cole Sillinger, has a little more experience than the rest of his teammates in the big leagues: the 21-year-old played in 11 games with the Blue Jackets last season, scoring twice and adding a pair of assists.

Del Bel Belluz, who scored on his first shot in the NHL, will likely log heavy minutes in the challenge. The second-round pick from 2022 played in 58 games with the Monsters, scoring nine goals and adding 22 assists.

One player who won't suit up is fourth overall pick Cayden Lindstrom, who is being held out of the tournament as a precaution given his injury history.

Trent Vogelhuber, head coach of the Monsters, will coach the Blue Jackets for the entirety of the tournament.

Games will take place at The Rinks at LECOM Harborcenter, a practice facility for the Sabres.

The Athletic / How do you fix the NHL's boring regular season?

By James Mirtle- September 12, 2024

We put out a call for questions from all NHL subscribers here at The Athletic recently, and several themes came up multiple times in what you wanted to talk about.

One was the ongoing Mitch Marner saga in Toronto, something we can thankfully save for a different article. But another idea that jumped out, one that I think is worth discussing, was how the regular season is played-out or boring, an 82-game slog that a lot of fan bases don't seem to be looking forward to.

This has come up a lot in other leagues, especially in the NBA, which recently introduced an in-season tournament and postseason play-ins to make the season matter more.

But the discussion is certainly relevant to hockey right now. Perhaps more than ever.

One sample question:

"The NHL's goofy point and playoff system has made the regular season into a farce. Is there any talk of changing this heading into a new CBA? Are they aware of fans' lack of interest outside of their own team is largely because of this?"

Another, put more simply:

"How do you make the NHL more exciting during the regular season?"

In my experience, the league is relatively reluctant to even contemplate what it considers radical changes to things such as the point system, which is unfortunate. With so many games decided by 3-2 scores, or in overtime or shootouts, it just makes sense to reward teams for winning in regulation, creating some more separation in the standings for teams that win decisively more often.

I also like that a three-point system would devalue the shootout, which I think a lot of fans, players and coaches are checked out on at this point.

But the other thing I see that has devalued the regular season and made it boring for a lot of fans is just how meaningless the six-and-half-month grind is. Heading into this preseason, especially, it feels like there are a) no truly great teams, b) a dozen or more teams that feel like locks or near locks for the playoffs and c) a pretty sizable group that probably won't even sniff a playoff race this year.

(Then you have a big chunk in the mushy middle that may eke out a playoff appearance but have no real shot to win.)

Surprises, in other words, feel relatively unlikely this season.

Let's look at the East, to start. How many teams feel very likely to claim one of the eight playoff spots? Six? Seven?

Florida, for one. The Rangers, Carolina, Toronto, Boston, Tampa, too, barring a massive run of injuries or something really unexpected. The Devils feel quite likely to rebound, as well, and get one of those spots, leaving one opening for a team such as the Islanders, Red Wings, Senators or Capitals to sneak in as an overmatched wild-card team.

The West doesn't offer much more intrigue. Edmonton, Dallas, Colorado and Vegas should easily make it. Nashville made a big splash in the offseason, and Vancouver and Winnipeg remain solid. Maybe one

of those seven will falter, but I have a hard time seeing more than that, given the various challengers below them in the standings have considerable flaws.

Perhaps this column will look silly come April, and we'll have a dramatic sea change in which surprise teams make the postseason. But that's hard to envision, looking at the rosters entering training camps next week. So what you're left with, for almost half of the NHL's fan bases, is a wait for the playoffs. It's basically a very extended preseason.

Or, in the case of rebuilding teams such as the Sharks, Ducks, Blue Jackets, Blackhawks and Canadiens, a long watch for progress from the young players and a hope that the results aren't quite as bleak.

To go back to the original questions, though, I have a few suggestions on how to "fix" the 1,312-game regular season in the future.

1. Scrap the division-heavy playoff format

This has obviously been talked about a lot, especially in divisions like the Atlantic, where we've had the same teams (Boston, Toronto, Florida and Tampa Bay) finish as the top four and face one another over and over and over.

Those four teams all rank among the top six league-wide over the past five seasons combined, which obviously exacerbates the staleness issue, but it's not the only division that runs into this. Teams are too often getting locked into that 2-3 hole in the division, sometimes as early as midseason, meaning all there is to play for over the final 30 games is home-ice advantage in Round 1.

Sometimes you end up with long stretches of games in which players are simply trying not to get hurt.

The easiest fix to start would be to go back to a 1-vs.-8 system. Make being the best club in the conference mean something again.

I also don't mind mixing in a short play-in using the Page playoff system that the NBA has adopted and that some Canadian fans might recognize from curling, where it's been a welcome mainstay for years at the national championships.

One of the biggest benefits of combining the 1-vs.-8 with a play-in is, more teams should have something to play for right up until the end of the season. Either you're playing to get a better seed or matchup throughout the playoffs, or so that you'll face a more tired team that's been through the play-in, or you're playing to avoid having to participate in the play-in yourself.

It would make mid-April a high point of the regular season, instead of the afterthought it often becomes for many markets.

2. Shorten the regular season

This one is always controversial, and the response is often that it will never happen for hockey-related revenue reasons. But if you're adding play-in games, international tournaments, more expansion teams and, potentially, an in-season tournament, there are some of your additional sources of revenue. Offset that by making the day-to-day product better.

Eighty-two games, plus eight in the preseason and up to 28 in the playoffs, is too many for a sport as physically demanding as hockey. And with the salary cap being tight, more and more teams are carrying short rosters over the course of the season, making fatigue a very real factor on a lot of nights. Fans simply aren't seeing players' best a lot of the time.

If you could pull the season back to 70 or even 75 games, you could eliminate a lot of the back-to-back situations happening around the league, games which are often schedule losses for whichever team is on the tired end of things.

It's not uncommon, for example, for a team to play at home on Saturday at 7 p.m., then head to the airport postgame, get into a road city at 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. on Sunday, then start a game at 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. game that same night on little rest.

The quality of play would rise considerably if the NHL scheduled almost no back-to-backs in which travel was involved. Something like the Toews Schedule should also be on the table.

3. Continue to reward skill and scoring

To its credit, the NHL has done a nice job of facilitating a rise in scoring the past few years.

And they've thankfully done it without just juicing power-play opportunities, like they did in 2005-06 as part of the new officiating standards.

But I think the right level of offense for the NHL is probably around 6.5 or 6.6 goals per game. They've climbed up to roughly 6.2 in recent seasons, as shooters have started to win the battle against goalies for the first time in a while, but there's more room for growth.

Auston Matthews pursuing a 50-in-50 chase is exciting and good for the game. So is players approaching 70 goals in a season or Connor McDavid topping 150 points.

And the more scoring there is, the more lead changes there are in games, which is naturally better for the product night to night. More scoring also results in fewer shootouts, which, as mentioned above, is a net win.

Guarding against ever going back to the Dead Puck Era has to be a priority, every season. Sorry to the goalie lovers.

Those are the most obvious, easy fixes for the regular season in my eyes. You can really see how other leagues are pushing to improve their product of late, with MLB shortening games as another recent example of a win that was a long time coming.

It's been many years since the NHL has innovated in some of these areas, and I think that's where some of the fan fatigue comes in in many markets. It really wouldn't be that hard to make the regular season matter more, dialing the value up of individual games while making the product more entertaining.

This feels like a healthy discussion for mid-September, as we approach training camps next week. And I'm sure you'll have more suggestions for improvements in the comments here, too.

The Athletic / Each NHL team's most interesting prospect heading into the 2024-25 season

By Corey Pronman- September 12, 2024

NHL training camps open this week as rookie tournaments get underway across the NHL. Today, we take a look at one prospect on each team I think is the most interesting to watch during camp. "Most interesting" doesn't necessarily mean best, but it's a player I have a close focus on, particularly when it comes to making the team.

Anaheim Ducks: Tristan Luneau, 20, RHD

Luneau made the Ducks out of camp last season, though injuries limited his playing time. With full-time AHL duty as a real option, and Olen Zellweger's strong first pro season, it will be worth watching if Luneau can stick again, or if the Ducks want him to get reps in the minors. If he plays too well, he could force their hand. He has NHL-level puck play, but will need to show he can be reliable defensively.

Boston Bruins: Fabian Lysell, 21, RW

The Bruins have a thin system and need their few strong prospects to provide reinforcements. Lysell is a great skater with clear NHL skill. In his best games, he looks like a legit middle-six forward, but those best games can be inconsistent. He'll need to earn a coach's trust, but he can help Boston's scoring if he does.

Buffalo Sabres: Jiří Kulich, 20, LW

Kulich has been so good in the AHL over the last two years as a teenager. He is clearly knocking on the door, but Buffalo has a lot of average-sized scoring wingers competing for ice time. Kulich offers tempo and a complete level that could differentiate him, to go with his goal-scoring ability.

Calgary Flames: Samuel Honzek, 19, LW

Honzek didn't have the best season production-wise after being a top-20 pick by the Flames in 2023. The hope is that when he moves up levels, the speed he has for his size, to go with a strong enough interior game, will translate and help him create offense even if he's not the most dynamic with the puck. I don't expect him to make the Flames, but even as a young player, it would help his case in his first full NHL camp if he showed he belonged at the level.

Carolina Hurricanes: Bradly Nadeau, 19, RW

Nadeau had a good freshman season at Maine and signed with Carolina shortly thereafter. I wouldn't rule out the possibility he could make the Hurricanes, especially after he looked good for Team Canada's U20 team in the summer. Nadeau has a big-time shot, can skate and has skill. As a teenager, it will be an uphill climb for him to be a full-time NHL player right away, though.

Chicago Blackhawks: Artyom Levshunov, 18, RHD

The No. 2 pick in the most recent draft, although he was not considered the consensus No. 2 prospect in his class, Levshunov signed with Chicago shortly after the draft. Levshunov is a very talented defenseman with clear NHL skill and athleticism, and was excellent at Michigan State. He's likely ticketed for the AHL this season, but given how quickly he's adapted to higher levels in recent years, it will be interesting if he tempts Chicago into giving him some early NHL action.

Colorado Avalanche: Calum Ritchie, 19, C

In a very thin Colorado system, intrigue is hard to find, but Ritchie certainly qualifies. He had a great second half of the season in the OHL when he returned from injury, and is trending up as a prospect. I don't know if he will make Colorado, but he's their clear best pro prospect due to his size, skating and skill, and it wouldn't surprise me if they gave him a long look and maybe a couple of games out of camp.

Columbus Blue Jackets: Gavin Brindley, 19, RW

Brindley had a big year in college and at the world juniors before turning pro. Brindley's speed, compete and skill has always stood out, but he went in the second round in 2023 due to his very diminutive frame and teams' concerns over how his game will translate. His first NHL camp will be a chance for people to see how his game fares at the pro level. Could he translate to the NHL like Logan Stankoven did, or will his skill set not be special enough for his frame?

Mavrik Bourque attempts a shot against Edmonton's Stuart Skinner in Game 6 of the 2024 Western Conference Finals, his second appearance for Dallas.

Dallas Stars: Mavrik Bourque, 22, C

Bourque had a great season in the AHL as the top scorer in the league. He's a very skilled and intelligent forward who works hard, but will be hard-pressed to find regular ice time in a loaded Dallas forward group. Teammate Logan Stankoven got the call over him last season due to an edge on speed, which is Bourque's biggest issue.

Detroit Red Wings: Nate Danielson, 19, C

Danielson's WHL season wasn't amazing, but he ended on a very strong note after being traded to Portland, especially in the playoffs. He is a talented center with size, speed, skill and a strong two-way game. He's likely going to the AHL, but on a Detroit roster that needs more talent up front and especially down the middle, I could see Danielson make his status a debate during Red Wings camp.

Edmonton Oilers: Matt Savoie, 20, RW

Savoie was dealt for Ryan McLeod this summer. Savoie had a big final junior season, although his stock is notably down from where it was a few years ago. He may not be the most dynamic small player you'll ever see, but Savoie is very skilled, on top of having a lot of speed and a great motor too. He's arguably Edmonton's top forward prospect alongside Sam O'Reilly, and exactly how close to NHL-ready he is will be something to watch.

Florida Panthers: Spencer Knight, 23, G

Knight has been through a lot in recent years, with major highs a few years ago and a tough 2023-24 season, in which he was inconsistent at the AHL level, even though I thought he looked better than his mediocre numbers in games I watched. I do still believe in this player and think he can be a regular NHL goaltender. He's a clear NHL athlete with NHL-level hockey sense. Florida is paying him a lot of money to be in the AHL, and I expect him to get a long look.

Los Angeles Kings: Brandt Clarke, 21, RHD

Clarke had a highly productive first full pro season and seems set to begin the year with the Kings. He's a super-skilled and intelligent defender who projects to inject offense right away. The biggest question on Clarke from scouts who watched him in the AHL remains his defending and how he'll handle NHL speed coming at him.

Minnesota Wild: Caedan Bankier, 21, C

Bankier has a lot of intriguing NHL traits between his skating, skill and having a decent-sized frame down the middle. He didn't light it up in his first pro season, and I don't expect him to make the Wild, but it wouldn't surprise me if he had a good camp and put himself on the injury call-up shortlist.

Montreal Canadiens: Lane Hutson, 20, LHD

One of the most debated prospects in the scouting community the last few years has been the diminutive yet highly skilled Hutson, who dominated college hockey the last two seasons. He's small and not an elite skater, which has led his proponents in the league to compare him to Adam Fox and his detractors to say he will be on waivers in a few years. This will be his first pro camp to see how he fares versus men.

Nashville Predators: Fedor Svechkov, 21, C

Svechkov had a solid first season in North America, including a strong AHL playoff run. He's a well-rounded center, but the offense in his game may not blow you away. The No. 19 pick in 2021 is likely someone the Preds are hoping to get NHL dividends from soon, and it would be ideal if he pushed his way onto their roster.

New Jersey Devils: Seamus Casey, 20, RHD

Casey is in a difficult and fascinating position. He's a highly talented defenseman coming off a big season in college. He's also an offensively tilted defender in an organization with several of those already at the NHL level, and lacking size won't help his case. If he has an ordinary camp, it will be easy to relegate him to the AHL and look for a trade, but if he's lights-out it could create quite a conundrum for the Devils.

New York Islanders: Isaiah George, 20, LHD

George isn't a prospect who is going to land on a lot of highlight reels, but he's an excellent skater who can make a decent first pass. He played big minutes on London as they won the OHL championship. I don't expect him to make the Islanders, but given their thin options at the AHL level, it wouldn't surprise me if he could be a call-up option.

New York Rangers: Brennan Othmann, 21, LW

Othmann is the Rangers' clear best prospect at the AHL level, coming off a successful first pro season. He's a highly skilled and competitive winger, but the Rangers have a deep forward group, especially on the wing. Othmann will need to likely blow management away in order to find a way into their middle six.

Ottawa Senators: Tyler Kleven, 22, LHD

Kleven is 22 years old entering Ottawa's camp, and after a decent first pro season, he will be looking to play his way into full-time duty on the Senators. Kleven's path to doing so is by playing hard, breaking up a lot of passes and consistently getting the small things right.

Philadelphia Flyers: Matvei Michkov, 19, RW

To say all eyes will be on Michkov in camp is a bit of an understatement. His much- and earlier-than-anticipated arrival in North America will have Michkov under a microscope. His skill and hockey sense are off the charts, but much attention will be on how his game translates to playing against NHL defenders, given his frame and lack of great speed.

Pittsburgh Penguins: Owen Pickering, 20, LHD

Pickering's season started off on a concerning note, leading to a cut from Canada's U20 team, but his second half was much better. He's a big, mobile defenseman who can make a first pass and is one of the

few bright spots in the Penguins' pipeline. They need a young player to step up and help their roster, and he seems like the one with the best chance to do so.

St. Louis Blues: Dalibor Dvorský, 19, C

Dvorský is one of if not the top prospect for the Blues. He's a highly skilled center with a natural goal-scoring touch who had a big season in junior. He's at times dominated teenagers, and there is a chance he could make the jump to the NHL. He did struggle last year versus men in Sweden, in part due to his lack of speed, so it will be relevant to watch how he handles the transition to NHL pace.

San Jose Sharks: Will Smith, 19, C

Why am I singling out the 2023 No. 4 pick in Smith and not 2024 No. 1 pick Macklin Celebrini? I would be a little surprised if Celebrini shows signs he isn't NHL-ready. He's such a complete all-around player. Smith on the other hand, while having high-end skill and vision, has some off-puck tendencies that have worried scouts at times. I still think he can help the Sharks next season as a teenager, but I will be intrigued how he handles playing versus men.

Seattle Kraken: Shane Wright, 20, C

Much has been said about Wright in the past few years, and while he's no longer considered a can't-miss star prospect, he is coming off an excellent AHL season as a 19 year old. He has a lot of positives between his skill, skating and two-way details, and I expect him to be in the mix to make Seattle's team this season.

Tampa Bay Lightning: Conor Geekie, 20, C

To say Tampa is low on prospect talent is an understatement, hence their 32 of 32 ranking among NHL teams in U23 talent this season. Their all-in approach has left their system light, but the draft-day trade of Mikhail Sergachev netted them a legit young talent in Conor Geekie. They will need Geekie's help this season as a big and highly skilled forward, but Geekie will need to show he can handle the pace at the top level due to his iffy skating.

Toronto Maple Leafs: Easton Cowan, 19, LW

Cowan was lights-out good in the OHL last season as the best player in the regular season and playoffs. He's a super-competitive forward with good speed and hands. He's not that big, though, and there are questions on how much offense he will produce in the NHL despite his massive point totals last season. In that context, given Toronto can't send him to the AHL, their decision with Cowan will be interesting. Do they keep him around all season in the NHL? For a month? Or do they send him back to junior to predictably rip up the OHL again?

Vancouver Canucks: Aatu Raty, 21, C

Vancouver's first-rounders in Jonathan Lekkerimaki and Tom Willander are better prospects, but they need to get some NHL value out of Aatu Raty, who was a major part of the Bo Horvat deal. His skating isn't ideal, but he's a highly skilled playmaking center with size who was good in the AHL last year. The Canucks' forward group may be too good to crack out of camp, but ideally Raty plays well and shows he's ready if there's an injury.

Vegas Golden Knights: Matyas Sapovaliv, 20, C

Vegas has a thin system, especially at the AHL level, with most of their best prospects in other places. Sapovaliv is one of their more intriguing players at the pro level. He's a big center who didn't put up huge numbers in junior, but he has skill and can contribute at both ends. I could see the way he plays translate positively to the pro game, even though his skating is an issue.

Utah Hockey Club: Maveric Lamoureux, 20, RHD

Lamoureux looked very impressive this season in the QMJHL and was one of Canada's better players at the world juniors. He's a huge, mobile defenseman who plays very hard and showed some offense this season. I've often been burnt believing in QMJHL offensive production though, and have some hesitance on how his puck game will translate up levels. If he shows well during main camp and can even make a basic first pass reliably, he could push for NHL time quickly.

Washington Capitals: Vincent Iorio, 21, RHD

Iorio has won two championships at the AHL level and has gotten some NHL games. Even though his offensive numbers didn't take a step last season, I'm looking for him to take his game to the next level and push for regular NHL ice time. He's a big, mobile defenseman who can move the puck reliably even if he's not a true power-play type.

Winnipeg Jets: Brad Lambert, 20, C

Winnipeg needs some of their top prospects to push and help the big club, and Lambert seems the most likely candidate to do so. He was excellent in the AHL, helping reassure a lot of concerns that were building up about his game in recent years. He's a dynamic skater who can score versus men and could help the Jets this year.

The Athletic / NHL expansion, LTIR, Russians in the Olympics and renaming the Lady Byng: Bill Daly talks

By Michael Russo- September 12, 2024

LAS VEGAS — Fresh off what many considered one of the greatest NHL seasons, deputy commissioner Bill Daly addressed some of the hottest topics around the league Tuesday at the Encore, from expansion to long-term injured reserve to the Olympics.

Daly provided the latest on potential new franchises and an update on how the league is scrutinizing deferred compensation to prevent cap circumvention. He said the league's general managers are gaining an appetite to work with the NHL Players' Association on tweaking the LTIR loophole. He also said he can see a day when neck guards are mandatory in the NHL and that he's expecting the 2026 Olympics to be played without Russian NHL stars.

Here's Daly, in an extensive conversation with The Athletic, Canadian Press, Daily Faceoff, The Hockey News and The Score.

Where is the NHL on expansion?

I wouldn't say that we're in the expansion process. I wouldn't even say expansion is a priority. But I will say that our expansions into Las Vegas and Seattle, which were done separately, have both been very, very successful. And I think it's spurred interest around North America in other potential ownership groups and other potential cities.

We have seven teams in Canada, and we're really only in the 22 U.S. markets because we have three teams in the New York market and two teams in the L.A. market. And so that means we're at 22 U.S. markets when the other professional sports leagues are basically at 30, 31 markets. So that means there's market availability, which I think helps.

I know when I started this job, there was a real concern about talent dilution with expansion. ... Skill development and hockey development throughout the world, not just North America, has increased to such a point where I think we have plenty of players. I think we have very good players who could play in the National Hockey League. And so I don't think we have that kind of talent dilution ceiling either, at least imminently.

Besides potentially going back to Atlanta, there's a lot of belief that you'll go back to Arizona. How does the auction for land to build a potential new arena being canceled slow things down? Is there a plan to build an arena?

I don't think it slows down the potential expansion process because I think the process is kind of the same as (former Arizona Coyotes owner) Alex Meruelo would have had to deal with anyway. Having said that, it is a gating factor to go back to that market until we have definitive plans and progress on a state-of-the-art arena because right now that market doesn't have one that can house a hockey team. Whether that involves a renovation of an existing arena, I suppose that's always possible.

I would say if you're writing on a kind of clean slate, you'd love to have a hockey-specific arena that's designed for hockey or is predominantly for hockey. So we'll see how it plays out. Look, (commissioner Gary Bettman) and I like to joke that we've spent the last 20 years trying to preserve hockey in Arizona. And ultimately, we were unsuccessful with this iteration. Doesn't mean the next one won't be successful.

What was the league's perspective on the Carolina Hurricanes' deferred salary with Jaccob Slavin and Seth Jarvis? Did that come across your desk?

Oh, yeah. It came across my desk. I'm not going to go to the merits of deferred comp. I will say that deferred comp is specifically contemplated in the CBA and called for in the CBA that contracts can be structured this way.

There are some things about the cap system that cause some interpretation to have to happen, which we shared with Carolina in advance. We shared with the union in advance as to how we were interpreting the provisions. I'm not saying that I think deferred comp is the greatest mechanism in a system like we have and maybe in the future might be addressed in collective bargaining. But we're midterm now, so we kind of are where we are.

The league doesn't love the idea?

Yeah, it throws out of whack some of the other checks and balances we have in the CBA, which forces interpretations in terms of how we allow it and what's permissible and what's not permissible. The original deferred-comp rules were developed in a non-cap world as opposed to in the cap world, so they kind of were inherited, and so they probably need adjustment on some basis going forward.

Can it get to the point where it becomes cap circumvention?

It can be, sure.

Is that the fear?

That's a long-term big-picture fear, I suppose. It's less a micro-dynamic fear particularly because, as I said, we've had to make interpretations which I think will continue to be binding until we renegotiate over it.

We talk about LTIR all the time. Is there any more appetite for a playoff salary cap?

There are different ways to address that issue, and some of the ones that have been kind of thrown around in the media wouldn't necessarily be fair or the best way to approach it, I think, because of the way we do accrual accounting. So you can pick up an expensive contract at the end of its term and your cap only gets charged a certain amount. But all of a sudden if that \$1 million, say, you assume becomes \$5 million on Game 1 of the playoffs and you can't play that player as a result, I'm not sure that's a fair result because teams complied within the rules.

There are other ways to address that. I have heard now from all 32 general managers. I think the majority would like us to continue to consider making some kind of adjustment that would alleviate some of the concerns around that. That's what we'll look at, and that's what we'll discuss with the general managers before we discuss it with the Players' Association.

So you'd wait for the next CBA after the 2025-26 season or you can amend the CBA?

Well, you can always do an amendment before it, but you would have to agree to do the amendment before it. We've had preliminary talks with the Players' Association just so they're aware of the issue. They read about it, too. And I don't really know, quite frankly, what the players' view of it is. So it really would depend. I don't know what the receptiveness would be to try and address it. And it probably depends on how complicated the fix is.

Players have said they're testing out a couple neck guards here. The AHL mandated them this season. Is there a day coming when neck guards will be mandatory?

I hope so, on some basis. I think we're moving in that direction. It's really three different pieces of cut-resistant equipment we've seen the evolution of. We started with cut-resistant socks, and now the vast majority if not all the players are wearing cut-resistant materials around their sock area. And then the wrist guards, which was kind of a primary emphasis leading into last year. And they were mandatory in both the ECHL and AHL. And we got the union on board to strongly suggest the players use (them), or at least (consider it).

Look, they're the highest level of the game. NHL players don't want to be told necessarily what to do and what not to do, particularly when it could affect performance on some basis. So they're not going to jump into allowing us to make it mandatory. But I think they're protecting themselves better than they have in the past. We did propose a mandatory rule, but we clearly understand where the union is coming from and some of the difficulties they have with their constituents. It's a process.

If an AHL player is called up, he can take off his neck guard?

Yes.

What's the temperature in the relationship between the league and union, and what do you expect in the next CBA talks?

Certainly there are things we don't agree on. And there are things that we're going to want in the next CBA that they're going to resist to and probably vice versa.

But I don't see any of the contentiousness that I have seen in the past, particularly heading into the '04-05 but even the '12-13 negotiation. I think we all knew we had strong headwinds on (those).

Full steam ahead with the 2026 Olympics?

We haven't signed the final documents, but we're supposed to get together with the IOC and the IIHF around our Global Series games. Certainly from the NHL's perspective, I don't see any real gating issues from finalizing those documents. There may be more significant issues on the players' side, but I'll let them address that.

(Note: An NHLPA source, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the outstanding issue is travel and accommodations but that it should be rectified around Oct. 4-5 in Prague at the Global Games.)

What's the World Cup calendar look like after the 4 Nations?

We're 100 percent committed to doing it in the February time period. So, in part, that's why we're doing 4 Nations the way we're doing it. We have wanted to get to the leagues and the European clubs and federations early to let them know that's what we're focused on and committed to doing. There continue to be some organizations in Europe who are resistant to it. But I think at the end of the day we have enough time to make it happen. I think most of the players who play in Europe who would be good enough to make a World Cup team will have the ability to individually protect themselves contractually to be able to participate for the international teams. We're going to have '26 Olympics, '28 World Cup, '30 Olympics, '32 World Cup.

How many teams?

So we've historically had eight teams, and what we probably want to do is create a qualifying tournament for two of the eight teams. So in other words, four teams competing for the last two spots with the other six teams being invited.

If the political climate hasn't changed with Russia, have you dreamed up contingency plans?

Well, I mean, we haven't thought that far ahead because the situation is so dynamic. In large part we would see where the international community is with respect to Russian participation and competition. That won't be a determining factor for us, but it would be probably somewhat persuasive depending on what the situation is. I don't want to rule out anything. I don't want to rule in anything.

When will the IOC make an official decision on whether Russia can participate in the 2026 Olympics?

People are assuming, really, it's kind of already been made unless there's a drastic change in the course of events. The Summer Olympics, they did not allow Russian team participation, unlike some of the other models that they've adopted in the past. So I would expect that same rule will apply.

Alex Ovechkin is 42 goals from passing Wayne Gretzky for the all-time goals mark. What does it mean for the league to have that potentially happen this season?

It's on the top of our list in terms of potential events that we want to promote and make sure don't slip under the radar screen. And some people have kind of suggested that because Alex is Russian that somehow this should be marginalized in some way. We couldn't disagree more with that. He's been a terrific ambassador for our game for 20 years now, and his enthusiasm for the game and passion for the game is infectious. And he's done a lot to lift the tide for the league and for all players during his tenure.

Still no revealing injuries despite the uptick in gambling?

I don't think it'll change, certainly in the near future. We've received no pushback at all from any of our sportsbook entities on our current injury reporting practices. Our general managers are very vested in the current state of affairs. So from my perspective, there's really no reason to change the rule.

Still a decentralized draft for 2025, correct?

Our current intention continues to be to move forward in a decentralized draft. There's really been no movement to change that direction. So I would expect that next year we'll do it the way (the GMs) want us to do it.

There will still be a host city, correct?

It'll be a smaller event.

Some have suggested renaming the Lady Byng Trophy after the late Johnny Gaudreau. What is the process to rename a trophy?

Anything that is done in that vein — and that's not the first time I've heard that suggestion with respect to some of the other great all-time players — we would go to the general managers probably first, and we probably would need board approval second. I don't think any of those ideas have been raised from time to time. I would say they've been kicked around from time to time. Never really gained a whole lot of traction. So I wouldn't want to handicap what the prospects of the change in trophy names would look like.

[Sportsnet.ca](https://www.sportsnet.ca) / 'A friend for life': Flames' Rasmus Andersson cherishes Gaudreau memories, friendship

By Eric Francis- September 12, 2024

CALGARY – The first time Rasmus Andersson met Johnny Gaudreau, he worried the fun would never end.

As Flames hopefuls, Andersson and Andrew Mangiapane had stayed in Calgary after Flames development camp for a week of power skating that coincided with the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth.

“We didn't even know what Stampede was,” smiled Andersson, one day after returning from Gaudreau’s funeral.

“It's this party downtown, you know, a festival kind of thing. We were like, ‘All right, we're down. Development camp's over, like, sure, we'll go.’

“We got introduced to Johnny, and then we went out with Johnny every day for a week. We got home at 3 a.m. and had power skating at 6:30 a.m.

“Mang and I went home and took a nap and woke up (to Gaudreau’s phone call.)”

Johnny wanted to rinse and repeat.

“I looked at Mang and was like, ‘Wow, Johnny calling again,’” he chuckled.

“Mang said, ‘Well, we gotta go - it's Johnny.’ I'm like, ‘Alright, we're going then.’”

From honorary Calgarians to instant locals.

Flames' Huberdeau: Gaudreau's legacy in Calgary 'will go on and on'

From wide-eyed rookies to two-stepping with a superstar, they formed a bond so tight their last time together came this summer when Andersson and Gaudreau were best men at Mangiapane’s wedding.

In light of Gaudreau’s passing alongside his brother when a suspected drunk driver hit them while they cycled on Aug. 29, it’s a memory Andersson will cherish even more.

“I'm really glad we got the chance to hang out at Mangy’s wedding,” said the Flames’ 27-year-old defenceman, who is four years younger than Gaudreau.

“We didn’t really know Mangy’s buddies from his hometown too well, so me and Johnny didn't leave our sides, unless we slept, for 72 hours.”

At breakfast with their wives the day before the wedding, they picked up where they left off at that first Stampede together.

“Me and John looked at each other like, ‘Oh, it's 11 a.m., what time's the bar open?’” beamed Andersson, 27, so happy he flew in from Sweden for the affair.

“I say, ‘Could we possibly get a beer?’ and he goes, ‘Yeah, of course.’ So we were sitting there until 5 p.m. just drinking beers and having fun.”

Ryan Leslie reflects on the infectious spirit of Johnny Gaudreau

Andersson spent four years sitting next to Gaudreau on the charter flights, playing cards with Elias Lindholm and Sean Monahan.

While confined to hotels during Covid, Andersson, Gaudreau, Mangiapane and Buddy Robinson all bought computers and congregated in Johnny's spacious hotel room.

"We sat and gamed for, like, nine hours straight, and Johnny would order some food," he laughed.

"He tricked Mang that he had a thing in his contract that he had to have a suite in every hotel, and Mangy would always play that card, so he would order room service too."

"I'll always think about our good times we had together, like those.

"He was the most humble guy there was. Quiet guy in the room but once you really got to know him, you'd see the real side. And once you got to know him, you had a friend for life."

No one who ever played with him will forget Gaudreau's pre-skate routine, which was as quick as his hands.

"We're all sitting in the dressing room, 20 minutes before the practice starts, getting dressed, and he'd show up two minutes before," Andersson said.

"We always thought he had a one-clip on his equipment, because he was that quick, and he was on the ice.

"No tape, no nothing, he looked like a high schooler playing hockey with his style. Then he'd go out and dangle you in practice.

"I remember I accidentally hit him one time in practice. He did not talk to me for, like, 10 days. I'm like, 'John, it's been like, nine days now.'

"He's like, 'never hit me again.'"

Johnny Gaudreau leaves lasting legacy in Calgary and around NHL

It's tough to imagine anything has hit harder in Andersson's life than Gaudreau's death.

"Me and Johnny would always call each other when we had a few drinks and chirp each other," said Andersson.

"I'll miss those phone calls, that's for sure."

Asked if he'll dedicate the season in some way to his pal, Andersson said he has yet to figure out how he will honour Gaudreau this season.

"I haven't really gotten that far yet, I've just been trying to get by (Monday's funeral)," said Andersson, who joined Blake Coleman, Mikael Backlund and a few others on a private flight to the service in Pennsylvania.

"He's always going to be by my side.

"I'll try to figure something out, that's for sure - he's too close a friend.

"I'm glad we went and had that final farewell. It was tough. But we're always going to be here for the Gaudreau family, that's for sure."

[Sportsnet.ca / NHL pushing for mic'd-up moments with 'more real' docuseries on deck](#)

By Luke Fox- September 12, 2024

HENDERSON, NV -- Fan access. Player personality. Behind-the-scenes footage. More reality.

The NHL realizes it may be trailing some of the other major sports in these departments. And after seeing what quality, behind-the-scenes docuseries have done to promote sports such as F1 racing, golf, tennis and football, the league figured it was time for hockey to "get on that bus," as deputy commissioner Bill Daly put it Wednesday.

"It introduced a new side of the game to a new set of fans, right?" Daly told Elliotte Friedman and Kyle Bukauskas during a taping of the 32 Thoughts: The Podcast. "And that's the goal always — to expand the fan base and make points of connection for people not necessarily tuning in to watch hockey every day."

So, the NHL pitched its Players' Association on the forthcoming Amazon docuseries, which will debut with a splash on Sept. 23. The idea being that these episodes — which feature stars such as Connor McDavid, William Nylander and David Pastrnak — would be rawer and more lightly edited than past NHL all-access projects.

Plus, Amazon Prime and Box to Box Films (Formula 1: Drive to Survive, Full Swing, Break Point) wanted autonomy to produce the series, which promises to be decidedly more player-centric than team-centric (see All or Nothing: Toronto Maple Leafs).

The players, many of whom are fans of Box to Box's catalogue, were in favour of granting more access.

"I think it will look less scripted and more real than the fans have ever seen before," Daly said.

The individual teams "really had no say" in the editing process, Daly notes, though the NHL itself did view the episodes before they hit the streaming service later this month.

(Nylander was mic'd up for the memorable glove-tossing moment of Toronto's Game 4 in the Bruins series, for example. We wonder: Does that scene avoid Amazon's cutting-room floor?)

This movement to invite fans closer to the action goes beyond a one-off deal with Amazon Prime. Last season, the league fired off a memo to its clubs to get on board with micing up players and coaches more often. As a whole, Daly said, the teams are "much more willing" to be around a hot microphone.

Still, there's another level to reach. More personality to reveal.

Nazem Kadri gets mic'd up at Heritage Classic, chirps Evander Kane and celebrates goal

"I mean, we're not there yet. There are still pockets of the league that are very traditional and have very traditional ways and are very resistant to kind of opening up that type of access," Daly said. "But we're clearly moving in the right direction."

The league will continue to push its general managers and coaches to (a) encourage their players to flex their individual personalities and (b) incorporate mics in game nights and capture the raw emotions of the game.

So much so, the topic will "for sure" be on the agenda in October when the league holds its GM and coaches meeting.

"Coach buy-in is critical," Daly said.

One-Timers

- The NHL plans to participate in an international best-on-best tournament every other February: Olympics in 2026 and 2030, World Cups in 2028 and 2032.

"We're still looking to lock down the Olympics, but I'm assuming that's going to happen," Daly said.

A play-in tournament is being planned for the final two spots of the eight-team World Cup. That qualifying round could be part of the main February tournament or be staged toward the end of the preceding off-season.

Why return of best-on-best international hockey is so crucial for NHL

- Daly says the league is aware of the perceived advantage no-tax states have in a salary-cap world but is still weighing if it's "a serious enough issue that needs to be addressed" and is wary of "unintended consequences" a cap adjustment based on tax laws could have.

Still, some teams view it as an advantage for clubs like Tampa, Florida, Dallas, Nashville, et al.

"There's chatter this summer for sure," Daly said. "We hear from clubs."

- Daly on educating players about the risks of gambling: "I would say it's an increased point of emphasis. We still think we're in an OK place. By and large, the players understand the importance of maintaining the integrity of our competition."

- Now that the revenues have recovered from the pandemic, another salary cap bump is expected for 2025-26. An even larger jump could be in store come 2026-27.

Have the NHL and PA discussed smoothing out the ceiling's rise to prevent a dramatic spike?

"Not yet," Daly said. "How you calculate the cap going forward is going to be an important issue."