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OBSERVATIONS:

* STEVE YZERMAN has evolved as a most interesting Mystery Man since stepping down as the Lightning's *major domo*. While still on the Tampa Bay payroll -- and doing behind-the-scenes work for the front-runners -- his future remains a source of compelling speculation.



This much is certain; wherever Stevie Y winds up, his work in Florida has left the Bolts in astonishingly good shape. Which is another way of saying that Jon Cooper's sextet is the favorite to win the Stanley Cup.

* TED LINDSAY'S eulogies have been long and thoroughly well-deserved. One item overlooked by most was the fact that Lindsay -- as a Junior at St. Michael's College in Toronto -- normally would have been scooped up by the Maple Leafs. But when Ted and teammate Gus Mortson were scouted by the Leafs in a St. Mike's game, Lindsay appeared to be a weak skater while Mortson was about 40 percent better on the blades. Gus later revealed that on the day of the game he had his skates sharpened by the NHL Leafs blade expert. Lindsay's were done by a semi-competent skate guy and, hence, looked clumsy in the game. Ergo: Mortson was signed by Conn Smythe while Lindsay wound up -- with a better skate job the next time around -- inked by Jack Adams in Detroit.

Lindsay was also widely hailed for his working attempting to form "The First" NHL Players'

Association but failed and paid a price for it. However, we have documents proving that four members of the Rangers 1940 Cup-winning team had previously organized a stickhandlers union. Art Coulter, Alex Shibicky and the Colville Brothers, Neil and Mac were the officers.

Coulter was president and early NHLer, Gerry Gerand, was prime organizer and secretary of the group in 1941 and we own a letter -- with letterhead -- that was distributed to NHL players. The organization was supported by journalists but the onset of America's entry into World War II spurred enlistments on both sides of the border. Shibicky and the Colvilles wound up in the Canadian Army, while Coulter joined the U.S. Coast Guard. By war's end, Coulter had retired and the others lasted only a year or two. Meanwhile, their union idea was forgotten.

GOSSIP: As interim coach, **Marc Crawford** has had the lineup-decimated **Senators** playing up-beat hockey. Although "**Crow**" originally was not considered as a full-time Sens head coach for 2019-20, that idea could change if **Ottawa** maintains hustling -- and occasional winning -- game through the homestretch. ... Seems to us there should be no reason why **Alain Vigneault** should not be a finalist for the **Ottawa** gig. ... The defending champion **Capitals** have yet to visit the **White House** but may do so before the season ends. Talks between team officials and the President reportedly still are ongoing about selecting a date.

OTTAWA SENATORS – THE STORM BEFORE THE CALM

To say that the Sens had a rough season, on and off the ice, would be an understatement. Despite the turmoil, there is hope for the future. TFR's Alan Greenberg takes an in-depth look at their situation.

Early in my working career, a boss said to me: "Think of every problem as an opportunity." Unfortunately, this astute advice came moments before he fired me but the advice has stuck for a lifetime.

The Ottawa Senators will have plenty of opportunities. Could anything else possibly go wrong with this team?

The rebuild will take time but the potential for improvement is there.

Interim coach Marc Crawford has taken over a team going nowhere this year and in a rebuild status. It seems a lifetime ago, but it has only been two years since the Sens, under Guy Boucher, were one double-overtime goal away from playing for the Stanley Cup.

When a coach whose contract is up anyway, is fired with a month to go in the season and his team dead last in the NHL it's more of a message than a strategic move. Boucher is a good coach but didn't have a chance to rebuild given the loss of star players Erik Karlsson and Mike Hoffman before this season (at bargain basement prices) and the recent losses of Mark Stone, Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel. Word around the league is that Boucher lost touch with the players and never seriously addressed the team's weaknesses. Special teams and team defense are among the worst in the NHL.

Compound the player losses with the many off-ice distractions and you have a recipe for disaster. The Karlsson/Hoffman debacle, owner Eugene Melnyk's tenuous relationship with Ottawa fans, the regrettable incident involving assistant GM Randy Lee, the serious illness of the wife of goalie Craig Anderson, the passing of former GM Bryan Murray, players' candid conversations being recorded by a limo driver and last but not least, the new arena deal going belly-up were all distractions..

With the deadline deals, Ottawa had lost its top five scorers from last season. In the post-trade deadline lineup, the leading goal-scorer is rookie Brady Tkachuk with 15 and the top point-getter is rookie defenseman Thomas Chabot. It does not look like the team will finish with a single 20-goal scorer.

Crawford, who GM Pierre Dorian said will be a candidate for the job, has been around the block a few times (1,151 games coached for four prior NHL teams) and has no illusions about being guaranteed the job or even about being around when his contract ends after this season. His job for the remainder of the season is to change the losing culture and help some of Ottawa's promising youngsters to develop. "This is a changing dynamic for our group. We want (our guys) to recognize that



they've got something to play for each and every time we put on the uniform."

He is assisted by newly hired former Sen Chris Kelly. Kelly is not that far removed from his playing days and likely will be a good liaison with the players.

Crawford was not phased by his first coaching victory with Ottawa, a 3-2 squeaker in Florida.

"To the younger Marc Crawford, it might have meant a little bit more but I've got a better perspective on things right now," he said. "I was really happy for Chris Kelly because that's his first win as a coach. He's a really smart guy and he's been a nice addition to our group."

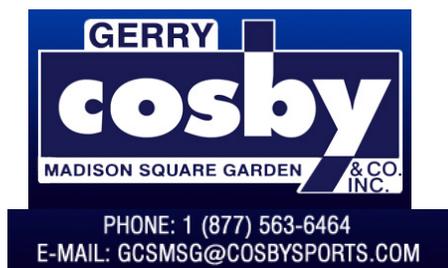
Erik Brannstrom, received in the Stone trade, is a potential star. The current Sens lineup features three of their own first-round selections in Chabot as well as Colin White and Tkachuk. Two other first-rounders: center Logan Brown is in the AHL, and defenseman Jacob Bernard-Docker at University of North Dakota.

In fairness to Dorian, it was unlikely that he would have been able to re-sign pending unrestricted free agent Stone. He received value in return with Brannstrom, Oscar Lindberg and a second round pick in 2020. Likewise the Duchene and Dzingel trades netted them a pair of second round picks and two conditional first-round selections. Altogether, the Sens have 17 picks in the first three rounds over the next three drafts even though they lose the Jack Hughes sweepstakes because their first pick of 2019 went to Colorado in the Matt Duchene-Kyle Turris trade.

Dorian has publicly announced that a coaching search is on and said they will be looking for a teacher, listener, communicator and tactician. All of this, as well as the Senators' limited budget, points to the college or minor league ranks and likely a coach with no prior NHL experience.

Crawford is a veteran coach with a realistic approach. He prefers now to focus on the job at hand: "Right now one of the jobs we've been entrusted with is to refocus the energy and refocus the commitment."

As to the future, he feels it will eventually be bright. He sees a lot of promise in the youngsters on the roster today who have been thrust into more responsibility by all of the personnel losses. "We've known all along there are great kids. Chabot's going to be a leader on this team and Tkachuk is going to be outstanding. White, (Rudolfs) Balcers, (Christian) Wolanin, (Christian) Jaros. All these kids are great kids and the future is bright for the Senators. Our responsibility is to make sure that we help this process along."



BOND BETWEEN NCAA HOCKEY ALUMNI REMAINS STRONG IN THE NHL

Players who advance to the NHL via college hockey share a special bond, says TFR's Justin Birnbaum:

John Hayden and Dylan Sikura stick together in the Blackhawks dressing room, but it's not because they share the same taste in pizza.

Hayden, who grew up in Connecticut and attended Yale University, will stand by New Haven style pizza, Frank Pepe's specifically. Despite spending time in New England playing for Northeastern University, Sikura just isn't "too big of a pizza guy to be honest."

While Hayden and Sikura's food choices differ, their bond stems from similar experiences playing college hockey in the Northeast.

"I know the college guys all stick together around here," Sikura said.

Starting a professional career is an adjustment for young players. They walk into a new dressing room as strangers. Collegiate experience offers a familiarity just from knowing who they've played with and against. College prospects tend to be older and come from a completely different mindset – going to class every day and playing a shorter, 34-game schedule. The commonality offers former college players the opportunity to start friendships quicker and find comfort in a new environment.

As Blackhawks draftees, Hayden and Sikura's paths crossed for the first time when Northeastern took on Yale in New Haven during the 2017 season. Both remember the game vividly, not just because each of the pair scored for their respective teams. After Hayden's Bulldog's defeated Sikura's Huskies, the two made a point to say hello as they were both aware they could end up in Chicago after college.

"For things to materialize and for us to be sitting in this locker room next to each other...yeah, its special," Hayden said.

That game ended up being a "dagger" in Northeastern's season, but Sikura holds no animosity towards his teammate. Instead, Sikura takes solace in having been a part of what he thinks is the better college rivalry, the Beanpot – an annual tournament among the four major college hockey schools in Boston.

Hayden disagrees, calling the Harvard-Yale tradition "a little bit stronger," but did experience the Beanpot when the Blackhawks were in Boston to play the Bruins.

"I think [Hayden's] a little jealous of the Beanpot because he could have been a part of it," Sikura said. "I think there's some good rivalries across college hockey and I'm happy to be a part of some of those."

Even though Drake Caggiula played college hockey just under 1900 miles west of Boston, he still has an affinity for his fellow NCAA veterans in the dressing room. Caggiula coincidentally knew Sikura long before their college days as division rivals in the OJHL. Caggiula for the Stouffville Spirit and Sikura for the Aurora Tigers. When Caggiula starred for the University of North Dakota, he had the chance to compete against his long-time adversary once again when the Fighting Hawks defeated the Huskies in the 2016 NCAA regionals.



Because of the long-standing relationship with Sikura and the presence of a few friends on Northeastern, Caggiula kept tabs on the Huskies. When they reunited as teammates this season, Caggiula and Sikura gravitated towards each other.

"There's a bond between all the college guys and it doesn't matter what school you played at," Caggiula said. "If you went to the NCAA, there's a little bit of a brotherhood in that and I think that allows it to be easier for guys when they come into the league."

HOCKEY FLICK ODD MAN RUSH IN POST-PRODUCTION

Based on the book of the same name, Odd Man Rush details the story of Bill Keenan and his journey from a young child with big dreams to a skater at Harvard University and all the way to pro leagues across Europe. Here is more on Keenan's story and information about the film:

Classic hockey movies are few and far between. There are the classics, like *Slapshot* and *The Mighty Ducks*; newer flicks like *Goon*; and now, you can add *Odd Man Rush* to the list of puck films.

Shooting in Clinton, New York recently wrapped up for the film based on Bill Keenan's memoir of the same name, subtitled "*A Harvard Kid's Hockey Odyssey from Central Park to Somewhere in Sweden—with Stops along the Way.*"

Growing up in New York, Keenan was youth hockey teammates with Jonathan Quick; at Harvard, he skated alongside Alex Kilorn and others under famed coach Ted Donato. After spending his life chasing the NHL dream, Keenan's career was prematurely hindered by injuries, which led him to seek ice time far from home -- in countries like Sweden, Finland, Germany and Belgium.

The hockey ties run deep both on- and off-screen. *Odd Man Rush* is being executive produced by Howard Baldwin, a renowned hockey executive who won a Stanley Cup as co-owner of the Penguins in 1992. He was a mainstay in the group that lobbied for an expansion team in San Jose and has served as partial owner for the North Stars and Hartford Whalers in the past.

Slater Brothers Entertainment is co-producing the film. Grant and Todd Slater are the sons of Terry, the longtime head coach at Colgate University. Terry also appeared behind the bench for teams in the defunct World Hockey Association and International Hockey League. Wayne Gretzky's son Trevor and Mario Lemieux's daughter Alexa even appear in the film in minor supporting roles.

Even the setting is rich in hockey history, as Clinton is one of the smallest, most passionate hockey towns. The small village previously played host to the minor-league team Clinton Comets, and is also the hometown of Hamilton College. The Hamilton Continentals call Sage Rink their home arena, which is the oldest indoor collegiate rink in the country. Clinton was named Kraft Hockeyville in 2018, which entailed an NHL preseason game in September as well as a \$100,000 rink renovation.

Odd Man Rush will premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in September of 2019.

METROPOLITAN RIVETERS TWO VICTORIES AWAY FROM DEFENDING THEIR ISOBEL CUP CHAMPIONSHIP

The NWHL Metropolitan Riveters won their first Isobel Cup title last year and are closing in on a repeat. Our Leo Scaglione, Jr., has the story.

Two more wins.

That's all the Metropolitan Riveters need to defend their Isobel Cup championship after they eliminated the Connecticut Whale with a 5-2 victory in a play-in game on January 7 at RWJ Barnabas Health Hockey House in Newark.

The top two reasons why the Riveters, who went 4-12-0 this season and finished in fourth place, prevailed was because of a 24-save performance by goaltender Katie Fitzgerald and the club's perfect penalty killing unit, which killed off all five Whale power plays.

"At the end of the day, you can't win without solid goaltending," Riveters head coach Randy Velischek said. "She was the difference in the game. She made huge saves on power play opportunities. Our penalty killers were also key because we spent most of the second period in the box. Special teams and goaltending are the difference in playoff hockey, and it was shown again in this game."

While the ending was exactly what the Riveters wanted, the beginning of the contest was far from it.

The Whale struck first 5:03 into the game when Emily Fluke received a pass in the slot from Katerina Mrazova and squeaked a shot past Fitzgerald to capitalize on a two-on-one rush.

"I definitely wanted that one back," said Fitzgerald, who was the 2018 Isobel Cup Playoffs MVP. "It was a bit odd. It was not the start we wanted to jump out to but luckily all the forwards and defenders picked me up after that."

That they did. The Riveters responded less than four and a half minutes later when Courtney Burke skated out from behind the Whale net with the puck and fired home the equalizer from the slot.

Unfortunately for Fitzgerald, the individual highlight of the night occurred in the latter half of the opening period at her expense when Mrazova, after using a variety of dazzling stickhandling moves to maintain possession of the puck while being defended by Kiira Dossdall, roofed a backhand shot over Fitzgerald's left shoulder.

"That was a hell of a move on her part," Fitzgerald said. "She was tangled up with [Dossdall] like a pretzel, and then went top shelf. I was like, 'Hey, I'm going to be on ESPN, on the wrong side.'"

Again, the Whale lead didn't last, as last season's MVP Alexa Gruschow just over three minutes later converted a one-timer from the left circle after receiving a pass from Jenny Ryan.

And after both teams combined for nine penalties in the middle period without a goal being scored, the Riveters controlled play in the final frame.

First, Audra Richards from the left point evaded two defenders and cruised to the bottom of the left circle where she scored 2:35 into the third to give the Riveters a 3-2 lead. Then, Gruschow buried her second goal of the night, via a backhand on

a breakaway which started in the neutral zone, with 3:37 remaining in regulation to give the Riveters some breathing room.

"I took a look at where the goaltender (Erin O'Neil) was, where she was standing and where her angle was, and I thought she was cheating a bit to one side," Gruschow explained of her breakaway goal. "That's why I pulled it to my backhand. Usually, you don't have that much time to think, but tonight I took a quick look at her and I saw a little more net on one side, so I ended up going to that side, and it worked."

Richards, who in the regular season didn't register an assist but scored eight goals – six of which came against Connecticut -- sealed the win with an empty-net marker, her second goal of the game, with 16 seconds left on the clock.

Next up for the semifinal bound Riveters is a trip to Minnesota, where they'll face the Whitecaps, who swept the four-game season series with the Riveters this campaign en route to a first-place record of 12-4-0.

One note, though, is all of those contests took place in October.

"There's a lot of confidence in [the Riveters] locker room right now," Velischek said. "There's confidence in our goaltending, and the way we move the puck around on our power play has improved. We've improved in a lot of areas. We are better defensively and we'll be ready for them and whatever they throw at us."

One of the weapons in the Whitecaps' arsenal is ace forward Kendall Coyne Schofield, who was one of the brightest stars at the 2019 NHL All-Star Skills after she shined in the fastest skater competition.

Naturally, the Riveters know that in order to win and advance to the Isobel Cup final, they will have to fight fire with fire – or in this case, speed with speed.

"The Whitecaps are fast, so we have to come out with the fastest hockey we've ever played," Richards said. "Speed is key in this game. You have Kendall Coyne Schofield on the team, you have Allie Thunstrom on the Whitecaps, and they are detrimental if they get loose."

One bonus the Riveters have on their side is the experience of last year's victorious playoff run.

"Last year definitely gave us a lot of confidence," Fitzgerald said. "That playoff game my first year (in 2017) was a disappointment for us. We learned from that. We gripped our sticks a bit tight. We didn't really play our game, got too caught up in the emotion and the nerves. Being able to be in high-pressure situations and high-pressure games last year and coming up with a win and knowing that we can battle through it really helped us, especially [against Connecticut], having to come back and knowing that we could do it. You only have so many playoff games in an NWHL career with them being one-and-dones instead of series, so you take whatever experience you can get and gain a little more confidence each time."

And all the Riveters need to retain possession of the NWHL crown is two more one-and-done victories.

The semifinal game between the Riveters and Whitecaps will take place on Friday, March 15 (8 pm ET) at TRIA Rink in St. Paul. The winner will advance to the final, where they'll play the Buffalo Beauts on Sunday, March 17 (2 pm ET) at TRIA Rink.

MAPLE LEAFS DO THEIR PART TO PROMOTE “YOU CAN PLAY”

All 31 NHL teams participate in the You Can Play initiative, which supports and embraces diversity throughout the sport of hockey. TFR’s Brad Smith was on the scene in Toronto for the Maple Leafs’ special ‘You Can Play’ game.



As the quote goes, “Not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere.” On You Can Play night, we celebrate that while not everyone can be a hockey player, a hockey player can come from anyone.

The You Can Play campaign was launched in 2012 by its three co-founders: Patrick Burke, Brian Kitts and Glenn Witman. Patrick Burke was a scout for the Philadelphia Flyers and son of former Toronto Maple Leafs G.M. Brian Burke; Brian Kitts and Glenn Witman are both from GForce Sports.

“The end goal of our project is that we’re completely useless,” said Patrick Burke. “We want the day to come when it’s not a story when an athlete comes out, when athletes are only judged by how they can help their teams win.”

It should not matter about size, gender, background, race, religion, or anything else. It should not even depend on your physical abilities or challenges -- hockey comes in all shapes and sizes. Nothing should stop anyone from the opportunity to play this great game and benefit from all that hockey has to offer. It builds teamwork, responsibility, respect for yourself and others, and builds good self esteem.

Zach Hyman is the Maple Leafs’ ambassador for “Hockey is for Everyone,” taking over for former teammate James van Riemsdyk.

“It doesn’t matter what your sexual orientation is or how you identify yourself,” Hyman said. “If you want to do something, go out and do it. You shouldn’t be restricted by how you feel and you how you identify yourself. Hockey has really come a long way in that.”

Leafs head coach Mike Babcock commented on the purpose behind this great campaign,

“We live in a city – one of the greatest cities in the world, to say the least – and everybody here is welcome and everyone here is a part and it doesn’t matter what you think or what you believe,” Babcock said. “It’s an equal opportunity place, like no place I’ve ever been. The Leafs are that way as well and I think it’s a fantastic thing.”

We all share the same passion for the game. That unites us to-

gether. Under the equipment, we are all players; we are all the same. As the You Can Play campaign slogan states: if you can play, you can play.

“Being a hockey player, I think it’s important that the league recognized how important this movement is, and they do,” Hyman said. “The guys in this locker room do. It’s not just one night, it’s an ‘every night’ thing.”

THE GAME THEY’LL NEVER FORGET: SARA CIVIAN

In the latest installment of TFR’s newest segment, “The Game They’ll Never Forget,” Matthew Blittner collected the fondest memories from respected reporter, Sara Civian, who covers the Hurricanes for *The Athletic*.

Sara Civian has been covering Carolina since the fall of 2018 and made the journey down south after spending time covering the Bruins for *WEEI*.

CIVIAN: “Game 7 in round-one of the playoffs last season; Toronto versus Boston. Jake Debrusk was somebody I had been high on since he came into the league and he broke out with two goals. Then he just grabbed the ‘B’ on his chest and was like, ‘Hey I’m here, I’m going to be a big-time player.’ And he’s been great ever since. That was just a really exciting thing and it was cool to see somebody that I thought was going to be good really perform and break out like that. Hopefully the best is yet to come.”

MORE GOSSIP: Steve Simmons (*Toronto Sun*) shared these thoughts: “With salary and bonus adding up to \$15.9 million for **Auston Matthews** next season, that means he will be paid almost \$7 million more than **Crosby**, almost \$6 million more than **Ovechkin**. Between them, four Stanley Cup wins, three Conn Smythes, five Hart trophies. **Matthews** said he doesn’t like to compare himself to anyone but if there’s a place for him to go as a young star, he might want to start by emulating **Crosby**.” ... **Vin Godlesky**, who refereed the “Yellow Sunday” 1988 (**Don Koharski vs. Jim Schoenfeld**) **Devils-Bruins** playoff imbroglio, is retiring after a long and illustrious run as a **New Jersey** off-ice official. **Paul MacInnis** and **Jim Sullivan** were the others working with **Vin** on that fateful Mother’s Day, 1988. ... Journeyman **Ottawa** winger **Brian Gibbons** has the dubious distinction of having two of his head coaches fired within three weeks. **Gibbons** was with **Anaheim** when **Randy Carlyle** was fired on February 10th. He came to **Ottawa** in exchange for **Patrick Sieloff** at the trade deadline. Less than a week later his new coach, **Guy Boucher**, was fired. “We had a coaching change my last week in **Anaheim** and then the first week here. It’s part of the business. You can’t control that. You just go out and control how hard you work and try to play the right way.”