

Magic hats brimming with promise

Once thought boring, twins are now pulling fans out of seats on nightly basis

By Jason Botchford January 27, 2010

Every time this season you think you've seen them do it all, the Sedins do something you thought you'd never see.

Like turn Brad Lukowich into a goal scorer. You witness it, and can't help but wonder: What can't they do?

The list is getting smaller by the day.

"It's been ridiculous," admired Ryan Kesler, who said he hasn't yet thought about trying to stop them during the Olympics.

Like the rest of us, he tries to avoid nightmares.

For the opposition, the Sedins have been just that. Twin Terminators who have been destroying the NHL for 30 games. Like machines, they have been relentless, piling up points at a blinding pace.

No longer should you be shocked at what they've done this year. It's what they are capable of which is going to blow you away.

Consider that Daniel Sedin has missed 35 per cent of the season but ended Monday's game in the top 25 in NHL scoring. Take note, that since Daniel returned from his broken foot, Henrik has averaged 1.73 points per game for 30 games. Apply that to an 82-game schedule and it's 142 points.

The numbers are numbing, and hard for many to understand. Consider the possibility that both Henrik and Daniel could be running away and hiding in the Art Ross trophy race if Daniel had never broken his foot.

"If, If, If, and it's an interesting if," Daniel said. "Injuries are a part of it though and you have to deal with it. But you never know what we would be doing right now if I didn't get hurt."

We have a good idea. Daniel has 48 points right now, the same number he had a year ago. One key difference -- he's played 16 fewer games. This just does not happen in the NHL. Players don't normally make quantum leaps when they turn 29. Not like this. Especially without increased ice time, which, for some reason, the Sedins have still not been afforded. (In fact, the Sedins' ice time is down slightly this year).

A year ago, Henrik had 46 points. Today, he has 76. To fans, it looks like it's all happening so fast. But it hasn't felt that way.

"Everything is slowing down," Daniel said. "The game slows down. You look to make plays instead of just trying to get rid of the puck. You look for tape-to-tape passes.

"It does feel different. The last few years, we had been really consistent. Consistent at a point a game, maybe get two points in a game or two. Then we'd have a few games off. But right now we seem to be getting three goals a game."

They aren't just scoring. They are doing it in breathtaking ways. They are dragging you to the edge of your seat and doing it multiple times a game. Once labelled boring and predictable, they are now vivid, creative and mesmerizing.

Certainly, Alex Burrows has helped. But even his remarkable success can't answer the most obvious question: How is this happening?

"It's tough to explain," Daniel said. "I think it's mostly mental. Physically, it's tough to get better every summer. We try to do the same things but we only get this much better after each summer (Daniel uses his finger and thumb to show an inch)."

That's how it looks. They are two or three steps ahead of their opponents. They've learned to exploit defences in new and fascinating ways. It's been "Even if I have a bad first period, or a bad first half of a game, I know the chances are going to come," Daniel said. "That makes you relaxed out there. Because we know when we get those chances we are going to put some pucks in."

It's not just the goals, it's their importance. No duo in the league has more game winners. Daniel is tied for second in the NHL with six. Henrik is tied for eighth with five.

"Those are the goals you want to get, those are the goals that mean the most," Daniel said.

Can it continue? Will Henrik win the Art Ross? He should be considered the favourite now and the upcoming road trip should help. Six of their next seven games are against Eastern Conference teams which they've devoured

"We know we have to keep it going," Henrik said. "It's not the same kind of game when you play the Eastern teams. It's more open. It's more back and forth. If you play against Northwest teams you rarely get odd-numbered chances. Maybe you get two a game. Against the East, you get three or four every period."

Sports comment: It's time for Canucks to end boycott of CBC

By Jason Botchford, The Province January 27, 2010

The Canucks aren't the first team to freeze out the CBC, and they won't be the last.

But they've done their damage. They've driven the stake right through the heart of the controversial Ron MacLean piece on Alex Burrows and it's time to end the cold war.

That's what the Washington Capitals did. The Caps, victimized by Hockey Night in Canada in last year's playoffs, snubbed the CBC for a game and then moved on.

The Capitals' grievance was more serious than the Canucks'. The CBC, while filming the Caps dressing room before a playoff game with the Pittsburgh Penguins, inadvertently caught head coach Bruce Boudreau's "keys to the game." They were written on a white board in the dressing room.

Innocent enough mistake for a CBC cameraman, but one that Hockey Night compounded into an issue when it aired and dissected the keys — shown as a still photo — in a segment which included MacLean. It was a breach of trust. In response, the Caps refused to provide anyone from the organization for interviews for a game.

Message sent, punishment received.

The same can be said for the Canucks' recent head-to-head with MacLean. Good luck finding a reasonable person who will defend MacLean. Even broadcasters at his own network have thrown him under the bus, going on record by admonishing his one-sided segment on Burrows. Even MacLean himself has come out and admitted he was biased and never intended his piece to be a balanced look at the story.

So, we're all on board. He may not say he's sorry, but MacLean is if he has an ounce of ethics. And he does. MacLean's reputation and credibility have taken a hit. Now, it's time to stop hitting.

Teams have little recourse when they feel unfairly treated by the media. The Canucks thought there should be repercussions and served notice Saturday, withholding their players from CBC interviews. Paired with Alain Vigneault's performance on After Hours, they proved they will go to the wall to defend their players.

This week, the team has decided to leave the CBC and its executive sports director Scott Moore twisting in the wind.

The Canucks wouldn't confirm Tuesday whether they will lift the boycott for Saturday's Hockey Day in Canada game in Toronto. But they will after meeting with Moore this week.

That's because it's the right thing to do. To continue a boycott is to enter a slippery slope of media confrontation where the fans ultimately are the ones who suffer.

It's the Canucks' fans who really want to see their players interviewed during games, especially big ones like this Saturday when the Canucks will face off against the loathed Toronto Maple Leafs.

Last Saturday, Canucks fans across the country were deprived. Watching Hockey Night, they missed a chance to hear the Canucks talk about a huge win against a despised rival. There were all sorts of colourful quotes viewers missed out on. It shouldn't happen again. The Canucks have made their point.

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Olympic snub helped light fire under Samuelsson

By Jim Jamieson, The Province January 27, 2010

While Mikael Samuelsson won't back down from the acrimonious remarks he made after being snubbed by the Swedish Olympic team in late December, you get the feeling the door is open a tiny crack if head coach Bengt-Ake Gustafsson asks him to be a replacement in the next couple of weeks.

Sweden named its team on Dec. 27 and the Vancouver Canucks' winger was one of the surprise omissions. Samuelsson, a member of the Tre Kronor gold-medal winning team in 2006, suggested following the Dec. 27 game in Calgary that the Swedish hockey brass should do something that is anatomically impossible.

Samuelsson, who extended his goal drought to 14 games in that contest, has been on a tear since. In the subsequent 13 games, he's scored eight goals. He now has 18 on the season, which puts him on pace for 28 -five more than his career best in 2005-06.

Did the snub light a fire under the irascible Swede?

"It's not all a coincidence," Samuelsson, 33, agreed. "I was p---ed and I still feel that way. I said what I think and I still think that. Obviously, I have something to prove. I want to play good hockey and I want to prove it to guys that I can."

Like other countries, Sweden can make changes to its roster up to Feb. 15. Fredrik Modin, for example, has been injured much of the season and has just one goal and one assist in 17 games.

Would Samuelsson reconsider, if Gustafsson comes calling?

"I haven't had the question so I'm not going to comment on it," said Samuelsson. "If the question comes I've got to have a good think about it and see what happens."

Samuelsson said he has already made plans to "go somewhere sunny" for the 14-day Olympic break with his wife and young son and daughter.

Did he buy cancellation insurance?

"Right now, I'm not thinking about that," he said. "I'm not in the team so I have nothing to think about. I'm thinking about the Canucks and trying to do the best I can for this team."

Samuelsson acknowledged that transitioning from Detroit's pure puck possession to Vancouver's sometimes chip-and-chase approach has taken him some time.

"I got off to a good start, but there was a not good stretch of about 15 games," he said. "I started to worry about how things were going here, but it's a new organization and things are going to be different. Now, I feel comfortable here."

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Three things to watch

The Province January 27, 2010

1 Backes on the Olympics

First an offer sheet from the Canucks, now trade rumours: David Backes says it's nice to feel wanted. "Hopefully the people of Vancouver will still like me come Olympic time," said the Blues forward. "I can't imagine the buzz that's going to be around it, not just the Olympics but the hockey events." Backes is questionable for tonight with an upper-body injury, but has his fingers crossed. "With a little adrenalin, a lot of things are possible."

2 Backes on Team USA teammate Kes

One of Backes's Team USA teammates, of course, will be Ryan Kesler, a player Backes puts in the same league as Dallas super pest Steve Ott and a couple of annoying Blues, B.J. Crombeen and Brad Winchester. "Those guys, you love to hate them when they're on the other team," said Backes. "But when they're on your team, they're great teammates, guys who battle for you. When we wear the red, white and blue we'll be fighting for the same cause."

3 Blues keep blowing big leads

The Blues have three times this season blown three-goals leads and lost, including a New Year's Eve affair at St. Louis in which the Canucks stormed back and won in OT. In fact, the Blues have the NHL's worst winning percentage when leading after two periods (.652). "We've played great games for the first 40, but 40 minutes doesn't win you games," Backes said. "Those (blown-lead losses) sting you as much as getting blown out 8-0."

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Sydor a shoulda coulda, woulda

How does Schneider deal look now?

By Ben Kuzma, The Province January 27, 2010

In a perfect world, the Vancouver Canucks would have passed on Mathieu Schneider last summer and signed Darryl Sydor to a free-agent contract.

Schneider's fallout with the organization and demotion to the Manitoba Moose -- coupled with injuries to Kevin Bieksa (ankle surgery), Willie Mitchell (concussion) and Sami Salo (groin) -- has brought Sydor back into focus. The St. Louis Blues veteran acknowledged Tuesday that he had offseason talks with the Canucks and, as a pending unrestricted free agent, might still be on the radar.

"There was some contact in the summer and they were looking for a veteran defenceman but after that [Schneider] signing, it kind of closed the door," said Sydor. "I never signed until I went to St. Louis on a tryout. I just went in there and every practice was like a Game 7 and I tried to prove myself. Things worked out."

Sydor, 37, signed a one-year, \$1-million-US deal, while Schneider, 40, signed for the same term at \$1.5 million plus a \$1-million bonus that's being paid out in the AHL. The Blues were just four points shy of a playoff spot Tuesday, but needed to leapfrog five teams. If Blues president John Davidson goes into selling mode before the Olympic roster freeze or the March 3 trade deadline, the Canucks could pursue Sydor.

"We'll see where it goes," said Davidson. "He [Sydor] has been real good and speaks his piece. It's very important for our young players to hear because he backs it up. As far as the trade deadline, it's too early to tell. We plan on making the playoffs and we have no plan to do that [trade players]."

Sydor has seven points in 35 games and has sat out more than he'd like to bring along young blueliners.

"I understand my role and I understand what it takes to win," he added. "I obviously want to play and I can't see them [Blues] moving anybody right now, but you can never doubt it."

Meanwhile, the Blues never considered trading David Backes to the Canucks.

Recent speculation suggested the club would part with the core player for minor-league goaltender Cory Schneider. The Canucks did tender a three-year, \$7.5-million-US offer sheet for the centre on July 1, 2008, but it was quickly matched by the Blues.

"David Backes is a Blue -- simply put," stressed Davidson. "He's a very important player for us and we have no interest in that [trade]. He's a legitimate power forward who can play wing or centre. He can score and is powerful enough to play in the face of people, which you need."

After 31 goals and 54 points last season, Backes has struggled with just 10 goals and 27 points through 49 games. He's nursing an upper-body injury from a cross-check he took in the chest on Jan. 20 at Montreal, and didn't skate Tuesday. He may play tonight.

OF NOTE: Salo skated on his own Tuesday and may play Saturday in Toronto where the Canucks open an eight-game road trip.

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Payne knows reality of being an NHL coach

Depends only on wins in here and now

By Gordon McIntyre, The Province January 27, 2010

Being named 'interim' head coach of the St. Louis Blues, Davis Payne could look at it from several angles.

Is the interim part a noose hanging over his head?

A brass ring to grab? Neither, it seems.

"It doesn't bother me in the least," Payne, at 39 the second-youngest coach in the NHL, said after the Blues skated at GM Place on Tuesday.

"As long as I've got the whistle I'm going to coach this team the best way I know how. And I think we all understand -- we're all temporary in this business."

Andy Murray, who coached the Blues for parts of four seasons plus the Kings for six years before that, surely understands.

Murray was fired by Blues president John Davidson after the Canucks stormed back from a 3-0 deficit to win 4-3 in overtime at St. Louis on New Year's Eve.

That's three times now the Blues have blown 3-0 leads and lost, most recently on Saturday against Anaheim, prompting one wag to suggest the club fire Murray again.

After Payne took over, they stumbled to an 0-2-1 start to January, but since are 6-2-1, invoking wishful thinking that the club can repeat its stretch run of last season when St. Louis had the best record from the all-star break (24-8-6) heading into the playoffs.

"We're not quite as far back as we were last year when we began that run," goalie Chris Mason said, "but the West is so tight."

Murray has a reputation of being a good motivator in the short-term -- think boot-camp sergeant -- but a too-demanding coach whose players tune him out over time.

He arrived in St. Louis when the team could barely attract 6,000 fans to a game; 19,000 is a regular home crowd nowadays.

"We have good memories of Andy being here, but we needed change," Davidson said. "There's nothing negative about it, it's just reality, it's evolution."

"Our situation is that no matter what happens, playoffs or not, we have to improve, especially with our young players because they're the cornerstone for us going forward and we needed to see more."

Despite the Canucks' 4-0 sweep in the first round of playoffs last spring, the series was tight.

The Blues were picked as one of the NHL's up-and-coming teams, so the sputtering start came as a surprise to many.

"We didn't come at this season with the same amount of work we put into the last half of last year," Mason said. "Every game then we competed and we left everything out there, played with playoff intensity the last 40 games."

"We definitely didn't start the season that way. As a team I think we felt it was going to be easier than it is, we didn't realize how hard we played the second half."

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Proving his points after Olympic snub

**Since being told he didn't fit into Sweden's plans,
Samuelsson has fashioned his finest form**

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun January 27, 2010

The bad news came two days after Christmas and as all of Sweden quickly learned, Mikael Samuelsson did not take it particularly well.

Exactly one month later, Samuelsson is still quietly seething about being left off his home country's Olympic team, which for the Vancouver Canucks isn't such a bad thing.

Samuelsson seems to have channelled his anger in a positive way onto the ice. The 33-year-old winger has been playing perhaps his best hockey of the season since telling national coach Bengt-Ake Gustafsson and the rest of the Swedish hockey program to "go [bleep] themselves" in one of the more memorable sound bites of the season.

"It's not only a coincidence," Samuelsson said Tuesday, acknowledging for the first time that he has been motivated by the Swedish snub. "I was pissed and I'm still like, not upset, but I said what I think and I still think that. Obviously, I had something to prove, I guess ... I want to play good hockey and I want to prove to guys that I can."

He has certainly built a good case for himself in the past month. Samuelsson has played 14 games since getting the bad news on Dec. 27 in Calgary. He has eight goals and 12 points in that stretch. The previous 16 games he had one goal and four assists.

Samuelsson insists he doesn't spend much time thinking about the Olympic snub.

"Really, I don't," he said. "I'm not there, so I think about the Canucks and try to do the best every night here."

Monday night, he played a key role in Vancouver's 3-2 win over the Buffalo Sabres. He scored a brilliant second-period goal, undressing Sabres defenceman Henrik Tallinder before beating Buffalo goalie Ryan Miller with a backhand shot.

The goal was his 18th of the season, which is just one less than he had last season with the Detroit Red Wings. He is on pace to easily surpass his career high of 23 goals scored during the 2005-06 season.

Samuelsson seems to be developing some good chemistry with linemates Ryan Kesler and Mason Raymond.

"I think we find every day there is a small improvement," he said.

"We have been playing together consistently for a while now and we are feeling more comfortable with one another," added Kesler. "I know he is a shooter and I know Mase is a shooter, so I know I have to be the playmaker on the line and just go to the net and let them do their thing."

Samuelsson leads the team with 159 shots and subscribes to the theory that if you don't shoot, you don't score. He credits Nick Fotiu, his first minor league pro coach, with instilling in him that shoot-first, pass-second philosophy.

"That guy taught me a lot that year in the minors," Samuelsson said. "He told me if you are going to score you have to shoot the puck. He's right about that."

His current coach, Alain Vigneault, likes the lunch-bucket mentality that Samuelsson brings to the rink.

"There is one thing you get from Mikael on a nightly basis and that's a real solid effort," Vigneault said. "He is a real hard-working player that tries his best every night ... he made a great play [Monday night] on that goal and lately he has been able to capitalize a little bit more on all his shots and the scoring chances he is getting."

Although Samuelsson initially said he wouldn't accept a late Olympic invitation as an injury replacement and has planned a family vacation "some place warm" during the Games, he didn't rule it out completely on Tuesday.

"I haven't got a question [offer to play] so I am not going to do any comment on it," he said. "If the question comes, I've got to have a good think about it and see what happens."

Such an offer is a real possibility as Peter Forsberg just returned to the MoDo lineup in the Swedish Elite League after a lengthy injury and remains a question mark for the Olympics.

Samuelsson took the high road when asked about Fredrik Modin, the Columbus forward who is on the Swedish team despite having just two points this season.

"I think he is a good player," he said. "He has been good and I think he can still bring it. I am not going to call any guys out. Absolutely not. That's just wrong. That's not his fault he got picked or whatever ... I am not going to stand here and say he deserves to or not. Good for him, I say."

And if there is any doubt, Samuelsson let it be known that he will be rooting for Sweden come the Olympics.

"Oh, absolutely," he said.

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Canucks, CBC to bury the hatchet

By Elliott Pap, Vancouver Sun January 27, 2010

The Vancouver Canucks and Hockey Night In Canada officials are expected to resolve their differences over the phone sometime this week.

It was originally thought the parties would meet face-to-face Friday in Toronto with the Canucks there to play the Maple Leafs on Saturday. However, the CBC people will themselves be on the road Friday setting up for their big Hockey Day In Canada extravaganza that airs Saturday.

The Canucks and Hockey Night have been at odds since host Ron MacLean's one-sided piece Jan. 16 on the Alex Burrows-Stephane Auger incident. In retaliation, Canucks president and GM Mike Gillis told his players to turn down all HNIC interview requests last Saturday.

"There is a meeting, apparently, but I'm not paying a whole lot of attention to it," Gillis said Tuesday.

Asked if he hoped to have the matter resolved before Saturday, Gillis replied: "I don't hope to do anything."

Burrows insisted the entire incident is behind the players and that he wouldn't mind doing interviews on Hockey Night this Saturday.

"I would, for sure," Burrows said. "We have a big game in Toronto. Let them see what we're all about. Let them see how good of a team we are."

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Making memories together again

Baumgartner and Lukowich proudly wear their Blazers in Vancouver

By Iain MacIntyre, Vancouver Sun January 27, 2010

Each season since 1996, when they left behind junior hockey in Kamloops to embark on their National Hockey League adventure, Brad Lukowich and Nolan Baumgartner have checked to see where the other is playing and when they might meet.

Neither imagined it would be in Vancouver as 33-year-old teammates on the Canucks' blue-line.

"We have good memories," Baumgartner said Tuesday. "We won a couple of cups together. We reminisce all the time when we're together. Other guys tell us to cut the cord."

"Yeah, they give it to us," Lukowich said. "What can you say? Jealousy sucks."

The defencemen were teammates for three seasons during the Kamloops Blazers' junior dynasty and won Memorial Cups under Don Hay in 1994 and 1995.

Baumgartner was the mobile, all-around defenceman who was drafted 10th overall by the Washington Capitals and projected to star in the NHL. Lukowich was a gritty fourth-round pick of the New York Islanders who was going to have to scrap for everything he got out of pro hockey.

Nearly 16 years later, Baumgartner has only 133 NHL games on his resume while Lukowich has played 648, owns a Stanley Cup ring and went 11 years between minor-league assignments.

But only a month ago, it seemed possible neither would get another NHL game.

Too expensive to keep as a depth player on a Canucks team wedged up against the salary cap, Lukowich was loaned to the Dallas Stars' AHL farm team in Austin, Tex., where he was expected to earn all of his \$1.8-million-US salary.

And Baumgartner, well down the depth chart, had already experimented with a transition to coaching with the Canucks' minor-league team in Winnipeg.

Then the Canucks divorced themselves from pricey spare-part Mathieu Schneider, hours before defenceman Kevin Bieksa went down with a months-long leg injury. Then Willie Mitchell banged his head. Then Sami Salo, well, you know, it's Sami.

Lukowich was recalled Jan. 2, Baumgartner on Friday.

Suddenly, a couple of old friends from junior who in December were ninth and 10th on Vancouver's blue-line depth chart -- and that's probably being generous -- are regulars on a Canuck team trying to win its sixth straight tonight against the St. Louis Blues.

Lukowich scored the game-winner, his first NHL goal since 2007, in Monday's 3-2 victory against the Buffalo Sabres. Baumgartner spent the past two games partnering Alex Edler and playing often against the opposition's key forwards. Think these old warriors are enjoying this?

"They have tremendous passion for the game; that's why they've survived this long," Canucks assistant coach Rick Bowness, who runs the blue-line, said after Monday's practice. "They know their strengths and they know their weaknesses, and they know how to play to their strengths. You tie those three things together and you survive.

"That passion extends their career and makes them very valuable to organizations. We entrust them to show young players how to bring that passion, bring that work ethic every day. Their attitude and passion give them a longer career."

It must seem especially long to Baumgartner, whose trail through the NHL has had more 180-degree turns than the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Only once has the Calgarian played more than 14 NHL games in a season. That was in 2005-06, when a 70-game campaign in Vancouver earned Baumgartner a two-year, \$2.4-million contract from Philadelphia. The Flyers dropped him after six games.

"I've been through everything I think can be thrown at a guy," Baumgartner said. "I signed a good deal -- a one-way contract -- and thought my foot was in the door. Then it wasn't. You just keep working hard.

"I'm doing something that I love and get paid for it. I'm at the rink for two hours today. It's an unbelievable job, if you want to call it that. This is all I know. I like being down there [in the minors] and trying to show the young guys how to be professional, on and off the ice."

He has also helped coach the Moose, taking an assistant's role under Winnipeg boss Scott Arniel during injuries this season and last.

"He's a legend in Manitoba," Lukowich, who is from Cranbrook, said. "He's Bomber. He's Mr. Steady. I always look every year: Where's Bomber this year? Absolutely, I admire him."

Both players harbour a biting sense of humour.

Baumgartner won't admit it, but his uniform choice of No. 44 is probably a poke in the ribs of blustery ex-teammate Todd Bertuzzi, who provided no shortage of material for those fond of standup comedy.

"We had some pretty good pranks in Kamloops," Lukowich said. "I sat right at the front of the bus and Bomber was back a little farther. We had pretty good sessions. We had some amazing times back in junior."

And at least one amazing time together in the NHL.

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Blues advise rivals to back off on Backes

St. Louis president says forward isn't going anywhere as team focuses on playoff drive

By Elliott Pap, Vancouver Sun January 27, 2010

While the talk sounded good to Vancouver Canucks fans -- David Backes maybe coming to the Left Coast in a trade -- it didn't impress St. Louis Blues president John Davidson.

"We have no interest in that," Davidson stated Tuesday while his Blues went through an optional workout at GM Place.

"David Backes is a Blue, simply put. He's a very important player for us. He's a legitimate, genuine power forward who can play the wing, or centre ice. He can score and he's powerful enough to play in the face of people, which you need.

"We plan on making the playoffs," Davidson added. "So we're not going to take our team and speculate that we're going to move people or anything like that because we have no plan to do that."

The Canucks, of course, have liked the 6-3, 220-pound Backes since July 1, 2008, when they tendered him a three-year, \$7.5 million offer sheet. The Blues quickly matched and Backes proceeded to have an outstanding 31-goal season. This season, the big Minnesotan is stuck on 10 goals and he's currently injured. He's missed three games with an upper-body problem and is questionable for tonight's game against the Canucks.

"Backes was really, really good before this nick that he has," Davidson said. "He's a slow starter but he wasn't struggling before he got hurt. He was very much on top of his game."

The 25-year-old Backes seemed to find the trade gossip amusing.

"It's good to be wanted," he said, smiling. "I haven't heard directly from management but a few people in the press from St. Louis told me that John Davidson squashed that, but who knows? It's good to hear that support. Hopefully the people in Vancouver will still like me come Olympic time, too."

Fat chance of that with Backes wearing Team USA's red, white and blue. Canuck fans probably won't like Ryan Kesler or the Sedin twins either if they knock Canada out of a gold-medal position. But there are NHL games to be played before the Olympic Games and the Blues were only four points out of a playoff spot before Tuesday's action.

"I'm just trying to get healthy and get back in the lineup and contribute to a St. Louis Blues team that needs to have a last good 30 games to make a playoff push," said Backes. "We'll see what the morning skate feels like and, hopefully, I can pencil my way in. But we're not going to rush anything. I don't want to re-injure myself and be out an extended period."

The Blues, meanwhile, are 6-4-2 under new coach Davis Payne, who took over from Andy Murray on Jan. 2, two days after the Canucks came from behind to beat the Blues 4-3 in overtime. Payne is working under an "interim" tag and his fate will be decided by incoming GM Doug Armstrong.

"Interim doesn't bother me in the least," said Payne, 39. "As long as I have the whistle, I'm going to coach this team the best way I know how. I think we can all understand that interim is maybe a tag but we're all kind of temporary in this business. So if any of us start to look at ourselves with any sort of permanency, we're probably not doing ourselves that much of a favour, I guess."

Look for Payne to start Ty Conklin in goal against the Canucks after the Alaskan blanked Calgary 2-0 on Monday. Defenceman Carlo Colaiacovo is out with a lower-body injury.

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Mitchell won't head east until head clears

Concussion symptoms still bother blue-liner

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun January 27, 2010

Canucks defenceman Willie Mitchell is still experiencing symptoms from a concussion suffered in a Jan. 16 game and will not accompany the team when it leaves Thursday on an eight-game road trip.

"With concussions you never know how those things are going to turn around," Canucks coach Alain Vigneault said after Tuesday's practice at General Motors Place. "Willie is still not totally symptom-free ... and obviously we are not going to take any chances."

Mitchell suffered the injury when he was run into the end boards by Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin. There is a chance Mitchell could join the team at some point on its marathon trip, which makes stops in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Boston, Tampa, Florida, Columbus and Minnesota.

The news is better regarding fellow defenceman Sami Salo, who skated on his own before Tuesday's practice.

Salo suffered a groin injury in a game last Thursday night against Dallas. He won't play tonight, when the Canucks wrap up a four-game homestand against the St. Louis Blues. But Vigneault said Salo will accompany the team Thursday when it heads to Toronto for Saturday's game against the Maple Leafs.

"He is coming on the trip for sure," Vigneault said. "I'm not sure if he'll start in Toronto or maybe Montreal. We'll have to wait and see."

That means Manitoba call-up Nolan Baumgartner will at least start the trip with the Canucks.

HEAVY PACKING: There's a lot to pack for an eight-game road trip, but there's one thing in particular the Canucks would like to take with them when they head out on their magical mystery tour late Thursday morning.

They'd love to be carrying a six-game winning streak, which is exactly what they would have with a win over the Blues.

"Definitely, that would be the nicest thing to pack," said defenceman Christian Ehrhoff.

"Obviously we were stuck at four for a little bit, [Monday] we got over that hump to get to five, so we really want to keep it going and keep winning games," added winger Alex Burrows.

The last time the Canucks won six in a row was in March of 2007.

Ehrhoff figures he is going to require a rather large suitcase for the trip that starts in Eastern Canada, then heads to Florida before finishing in northern U.S.

"We need to pack a little bit of everything because we are going to the cold and the sun, so it is going to be a big suitcase," Ehrhoff said.

A REAL PLUS: Heading into Tuesday night's action, the Canucks had four of the top seven plus-minus players in the NHL. Burrows was second at plus-27, Ehrhoff was third at plus-25, Henrik Sedin was third at plus-25 and Daniel Sedin was tied for sixth at plus-23.

STREAK STUFF: Burrows carries a 12-game points streak into tonight's game. The franchise record is 15, which was set by Petr Nedved in 1992 and tied by Todd Bertuzzi in 2002.

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Last look before long trip

By HOSEA CHEUNG, QMI Agency

Take a nice, long look at the Canucks tonight when they host the St. Louis Blues, because fans won't see them at GM Place until Mar. 13.

Both injured defencemen Willie Mitchell (concussion) and Sami Salo (groin) did not practice with the team on Tuesday and won't play on Wednesday. Coach Alain Vigneault said Mitchell is still not symptom-free while Salo, who skated yesterday, could return this weekend.

Prior to Monday's games, four Canucks were in the top five NHL plus-minus leaders. Alex Burrows ranked second with +27, followed by Christian Ehrhoff at +26, Henrik Sedin +25, and Daniel Sedin +23.

With eight goals and 12 points since his Olympic snub, Mikael Samuelsson is a good replacement choice for Team Sweden if one of their original selections, such as the injured Peter Forsberg, can't play by the Feb. 15 final roster deadline. But Samuelsson said he already made vacation plans with his family during the Olympics.

"Right now I'm not thinking about that. I'm not in the team," he said. "If the question comes, I'll have a good think about it."

The Blues have solid representation on Team USA at the Olympics, with David Backes and Erik Johnson both named to the team, while defenceman Roman Polak will suit up for Czech Republic.

St. Louis has taken two of the three matchups this season but the Canucks won their last meeting 4-3 in overtime to close out 2009.

Usual Suspects

Focus shifts to MacLean's integrity

[Bruce Dowbiggin](#)

Published on Wednesday, Jan. 27, 2010

What started as a debate about Vancouver's Alex Burrows' integrity has now become a question of how to protect the integrity of broadcaster Ron MacLean, the CBC bingo caller who launched a one-sided takeout of the Canucks forward on the January 16 version of *Hockey Night In Canada*. Sources tell Usual Suspects that parties at both the Canucks and CBC now privately concede that MacLean was over the journalistic line for not allowing Burrows to defend himself on charges of diving and lying on his filibuster.

The question now is how does CBC placate the Canucks without publicly reprimanding its veteran host (something they are not offering to do at this moment)? Can it offer other concessions to satisfy the outrage in Vancouver?

The team boycotted CBC's coverage of their game against Chicago last Saturday to protest what it called bogus journalistic treatment for Burrows at the hands of Hockey Night's MacLean. With [NHL](#) vice-president Colin Campbell at this side, MacLean claimed Burrows could give Keanu Reeves a run for his money in the acting game, and that his word isn't worth an ice shaving either.

The Canucks said they hadn't been giving a fair hearing on the broadcast. Hence their boycott last Saturday in the doubleheader game. Reports Tuesday suggested that the Canucks are undecided about whether to extend their protest on Saturday (like they were going to get a word in around the avalanche of Maple Leafs melodrama) when CBC presents its annual Hockey Day In Canada extravaganza.

But sources tell Usual Suspects that while the Canucks doubt CBC will censure its host, they feel they've gotten Hockey Night's attention with their protest and don't need to extend the action indefinitely. They're not happy, but they will move on.

Still, don't expect an on-air duel between Vancouver GM Mike Gillis and MacLean Saturday – even though CBC had suggested such a forum. Instead, look for the Canucks to monitor how they're covered by the Toronto-biased HNIC crew before deciding on further action. The Canucks may also wrest some behind-the-scenes concessions from Hockey Night as CBC tries to make nice to avoid alienating its west-coast mandate.

And should MacLean decided to launch any further harpoons the Canucks' way, the organization is prepared to push back again in even stronger terms.

• Canucks, HNIC to meet

January 26, 2010

THE CANADIAN PRESS

VANCOUVER -- The [Vancouver Canucks](#) plan to meet with staff of the CBC's Hockey Night in Canada over its criticism of [Alex Burrows](#), general manager Mike Gillis said Tuesday.

Gillis wouldn't say what approach the Canucks will take after host Ron MacLean criticized the Canuck winger after he said NHL referee Stephane Auger was out to get him.

"I apologize but I really don't want to say what the factors are that we're considering," Gillis said as he watched the Canucks practise. "We're going to meet with them and we're going to see what their reaction is and go from there."

The Canucks have solidly backed Burrows and refused CBC interview requests during Saturday night's 5-1 win over the [Chicago Blackhawks](#) as a form of protest.

A team spokesman said the meeting is planned for Friday when the Canucks are in Toronto but might have to be conducted by phone.

HNIC staff would be in several remote locations because of the program's Hockey Day In Canada special that features three games involving Canadian teams.

The Canucks play the Maple Leafs in the first game of Vancouver's pre-Olympic eight-game, 18-day road trip.

Burrows, who is currently on a 12-game points streak, said Auger approached him during the warmup prior to a 3-2 loss to Nashville on Jan. 11.

The Vancouver forward said the official told him he would "get him back" for embarrassing Auger by embellishing a major penalty to Predator Jarred Smithson the last time the two clubs met.

Smithson also received a game misconduct which the league later rescinded.

In the Jan. 11 game, Burrows was called for diving, interference and unsportsmanlike conduct and assessed a 10-minute misconduct.

He was in the penalty box for interference and the Canucks down two men late in the game when the winning goal was scored.

MacLean took Burrows to task in a pre-game segment Jan. 16 and showed incidents of Burrows embellishing penalty calls, spearing, punching and trash-talking to an opponent.

The Gemini Award-winning commentator, who is a certified referee, said he doubted an NHL official would tell a player he wanted to exact revenge for duping him into a penalty.

Canuck coach Alain Vigneault defended his player when he appeared on the CBC's After Hours show following MacLean's comments and the Canucks' 6-2 win over Pittsburgh.

Burrows has said he appreciates the backing from team management and players but also wants to move on from the controversy.

St Louis Blues Sportscan:

499847 St Louis Blues

St. Louis Blues at Vancouver Canucks: Preview

01/27/2010

WHEN — 9 tonight

WHERE — GM Place

TV, RADIO — Fox Sports Midwest, KMOX (1120)

MORE BLUES

TICKETS: Go here and find games under “upcoming events”

BLUES PREVIEW — The Blues will look to improve to 5-0 this season when playing in western Canada. The club defeated Calgary 2-0 Monday after wins earlier this season over Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary.

CANUCKS PREVIEW — Vancouver enters tonight's game on a five-game winning streak. The Canucks' Henrik Sedin is atop the NHL scoring race with 76 points, six more than Washington's Alexander Ovechkin going into Tuesday night.

WHAT TO WATCH — After pitching a shutout, Blues goalie Ty Conklin is expected to remain in net tonight against Vancouver. Conklin is 2-0 with a 1.46 goals-against average and a .958 save percentage in his last two games.

INJURIES — Blues — C David Backes (upper body), questionable; D Carlo Colaiacovo (lower body) and LW D.J. King (hand), out; Canucks — D Sami Salo (groin), doubtful; D Willie Mitchell (concussion), D Kevin Bieksa (ankle) and C Alexandre Bolduc (shoulder), out.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED 01.27.2010

499848 St Louis Blues

St. Louis Blues' T.J. Oshie thrives as middle man

By JEREMY RUTHERFORD

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

01/27/2010

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — In nearly 24 minutes of ice time Monday in Calgary, the Blues' T.J. Oshie had no goals, no assists, and didn't even register a shot on goal. He also lost seven of his 13 face-off attempts.

And yet ...

“He was the best player on the ice — for both teams,” Blues President John Davidson said. “It's very interesting how a player that doesn't get a goal or an assist can have as much of an impact on the game. That was really good to watch.”

Davidson took in the Blues' 2-0 victory over the Flames from the press box. The view from the team's bench, though, wasn't any different.

“Oshie's game last night, without getting on the score sheet, is probably as effective a game as you can draw up,” Blues coach Davis Payne said.

A move to center, a position where Oshie thrived at the University of North Dakota, was one reason for his constant visibility Monday. But there are other factors — an Olympic snub, a coaching change and the Blues' postseason aspirations — playing a role in the emergence of the second-year forward.

“I'm very happy with (Monday's) game, even though I didn't get on the board,” Oshie said. “But all that matters right now are wins. Everyone has that mindset — it's wins first.”

The Blues are in 13th place in the Western Conference, but they are just four points out of a playoff spot. They'll have a chance to make up some of that ground tonight when they face the Vancouver Canucks at GM Place.

After Monday's win over Calgary, the Blues are 6-4-2 since Payne replaced Andy Murray on Jan. 2. Oshie said the coaching change has given some players a new lease, although he wouldn't say that directly about himself.

“It's a new guy calling the shots, a new coach making the lines and putting people in certain situations on the ice,” Oshie said. “Everyone has been all over (Patrik Berglund) this year and look at how he's handled the puck the last couple of games ... it's just a fresh start for everyone.”

A day before the coaching change, Oshie was left off Team USA's roster for the Olympic tournament Feb. 16-28 in Vancouver. He admitted that it was difficult not to be included on a team that includes fellow Blues David Backes and Erik Johnson.

"I wanted to make it, obviously," he said. "Everyone wants to play in the Olympics. You only have a couple of big dreams and that's one of them. It kind of put some fuel on the fire for me. I'm just trying to prove that I want to be there."

Prior to the unveiling of the U.S. roster, Oshie was on a season-high, five-game stretch without a point. Since then, he has posted a point in seven of 12 games, including three goals and five assists.

"I'm just kind of feeling it right now," said Oshie, who has 10 goals and 27 points in 48 games. "My legs are feeling great. I'm at a different position, center, so I'm around the puck a lot more. I'm just playing hard, just doing what I can."

Oshie, who's playing center to compensate for the loss of David Backes, might have played his best game of the season Monday.

"He was poised, controlled, strong," Payne said. "He allowed us to buy enough time to get to the outlet position, and all of a sudden we were coming out of our zone clean."

Added goalie Ty Conklin: "The way he gets back into plays on the defensive side, tracks down rushes ... his play away from the puck for a young guy ... there's not too many young guys who play with the experience level he has."

In the second period Monday, with the game still scoreless, Calgary entered the offensive zone on a 3-on-1 rush. Oshie was chasing the play, and after Conklin made an initial stop on Jarome Iginla, the puck lay loose in front of the net.

As Curtis Glencross went to backhand the puck into an open net, Oshie lifted his stick and prevented a shot. With the rubber still loose, Olli Jokinen looked to tap the puck in. But as Oshie skated through the crease, he dragged the puck with his right skate, taking away Jokinen's scoring chance.

"He took away two goals," Davidson said.

Asked about it Monday, Oshie said matter-of-factly: "It's fun being able to battle in our zone."

With that skill and attitude, it may be tough for the Blues to move Oshie from center when Backes returns. Payne was noncommittal Tuesday.

"We saw some great play that kind of expands our options," Payne said. "So we'll look at all of them and make the best decision."

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED 01.27.2010