

The tenacity of Tanev

21-year-old's calm, cool demeanour is best asset

By Ben Kuzma, The Province February 9, 2011

Chris Tanev lost one previous defence partner Monday and nearly another one Tuesday.

When Andrew Alberts had a practice puck deflect off his stick and strike him in the throat, the Canucks feared the worst.

After all, they lost Keith Ballard to a right knee sprain Monday and their depth on the back end has suddenly become more shallow with Lee Sweatt suffering a hairline foot fracture in practice Saturday.

They couldn't afford to lose Alberts, too.

"I just couldn't breathe for a moment," said Alberts. "It was a scary moment and I just had to catch my wind, but I'm fine."

The silver lining in all this is Tanev.

Scratched with the return of Alberts from a shoulder injury Monday against the Ottawa Senators, it appeared the rookie would take the satisfaction of eight impressive NHL games and return to the Manitoba Moose.

But he's back and nobody is blinking at the prospect of another 13 minutes tonight against the Anaheim Ducks.

The 21-year-old college free agent was playing Junior A in Ontario two seasons ago before fast tracking through the Rochester Institute of Technology and the Moose.

"He's been very dependable and making the high-percentage plays," said Canucks coach Alain Vigneault.

"And he knows he's going to have to take a hit to make a play to make that good first pass and he doesn't shy away from that. Everything we've seen is telling us with the right work and attitude he has a chance to play on a regular basis down the road."

It's the calm demeanour of Tanev that's most noticeable. He seldom makes a bad play and when he does has the speed and tenacity to strip players off the puck as though he's been in the league for years.

"I've surprised myself a little bit and this is a dream come true, but the game is so controlled and it's easier than I thought playing with the Sedins and Ballard," said the Torontonion, a late bloomer who grew six inches in one year.

How can a kid so new to the league look so good?

"A very seamless transition from his first game and he just kept getting better," said Ballard. "He's not overly physical and has to use his positioning and a good stick. I've tried to help him feel comfortable and talking to him about guys on the other team, their tendencies and what we want to do in the neutral zone."

As much as the Canucks have been beset by injury on the back end, the dominoes have fallen the right way.

Sami Salo's offseason Achilles rupture meant Kevin Bieksa didn't have to become a salary cap casualty.

Back surgery for Alex Edler meant Salo can return to face the Calgary Flames on Saturday without cap complications.

It also meant the Canucks did their homework because they learned last year you can't have enough NHL-calibre blueliners.

"We've gone through it now for two years now where we didn't have enough NHL quality defencemen to either keep us in the playoff race or make us better," said Canucks general manager Mike Gillis.

"The severity of Sami's injury can't be overstated. I never looked at it that way that it creates an opportunity for us. We would have done things differently in summer and dealt with consequences later and we knew they [injuries] would come. We were unsure about who and where and when. But we knew they would come."

MRI results reveal Ballard sidelined 3-4 weeks with mild knee sprain

By benkuzma Tue, Feb 8 2011

Keith Ballard allowed himself a brief chuckle Tuesday at photographic evidence that suggested the bendable blueliner looked like Gumby or a flexible gymnast auditioning for Cirque du Soleil.

After suffering a right knee sprain Monday in a positioning battle with Milan Michalek — a struggle that suggested a slew-foot by the Ottawa Senators winger even though he said that wasn't his intention — the hard-luck Vancouver Canucks defenceman was trying to attach some humour to a serious situation. Magnetic resonance imaging results Tuesday revealed that Ballard will be sidelined three to four weeks with a mild knee sprain. Nothing to laugh about.

"I didn't think I could bend like that," Ballard said after seeing a picture of his right knee bent under his body while falling to the ice on his first shift. "I'm not the most flexible person. It's pretty impressive. I don't think bodies are supposed to move like that.

"The knee feels better than yesterday and there's not much pain. Right now, I can walk. If I was to do anything else, who knows? I'm pretty hesitant on saying anything until the MRI because you get thinking one way or the other and the MRI may show something different. Until we get it done, I don't think there's any reason to speculate."

The real speculation surrounds the hit.

As much as there was some debate as to Michalek's intentions, Canucks general manager Mike Gillis was frank in his summation of a deliberate slew-foot. They have become commonplace and there's no place in the game for the action because they often lead to serious injury.

"I don't agree with that kind of boydcheck or interaction and in my opinion it was [a slew-foot]," said Gillis. "I didn't believe the puck was anywhere nearby and I didn't think it was an NHL quality play."

General managers have made progress with Rule 48 to eliminate blind-side hits to the head, but the practice of kicking an opposing player's feet out from under him hasn't been properly addressed.

"The league deals with these issues and I'm going to stay out of it," added Gillis. "You can put it on the [GMs] agenda, but that's a type of play that players really frown upon and I think it's up to them to police it."

Part of what's in play is that the opposition targets the Canucks' back end. They chip pucks in, chase down the defence and try to muscle them off pucks and create turnovers. Ballard has no problem with all that and wasn't willing to throw Michalek under the bus without a close look at the replay. But at its worst, it's no way to play the game.

"It's the same as a head shot or any of that stuff," said Ballard. "Dirty plays cause injury and I'm not saying specifically that this was a dirty play. I have to see it. I have to see it slowed down to be able to tell if he kicked me or pulled me down or whatever or kicked my feet out. That's when you kind of see things. Tough to judge when you're going that fast."

Kevin Bieksa maintains that defencemen are put in enough precarious body positions with forecheckers bearing down on them. Being deliberately thrown to the ice and prone to injury suggests that rules need to be changed and that suspensions should be in order.

"How are we going to eliminate slew-foots and set an example with somebody?," asked Bieksa. "Give him three games, give him four games. It's dangerous because throwing someone off balance most of the time he's landing on his back with no way to protect himself."

Ballard didn't miss a game the previous three seasons before being acquired by the Canucks in June. After offseason hip surgery, he missed five games with a concussion and was a healthy scratch for four road games in early November while struggling to find his game and ice time. But through it all he never complained and he won't now.

"There's nothing I can do about it," said Ballard, who was averaging 16 minutes of average ice time, but had stepped to as much as 24 minutes on Jan. 26 against Nashville with Alex Edler lost to lower-back surgery. "I have to have a good attitude, put in the work and not miss a beat and try to fit in."

The Canucks must now pair rookie Chris Tanev with Andrew Alberts tonight against the Anaheim Ducks and hope that Sami Salo's three-game long-term injury relief conditioning stint with the Manitoba Moose after an offseason Achilles rupture ended successfully Tuesday with a pointless outing in a 4-1 loss at Wilkes-Barre/Scranton. That will make him available to face the Calgary Flames on Saturday. The Canucks won't recall a defenceman and won't change the way they approach the game.

"We put a lot of pressure on our defence to retrieve pucks and to move it quickly and participate in offence," added Gillis. "They skate a lot and when you play that way, guys get tired and that's when you get an injury. When they do that they're going to be a risk, but it's a style of play that we think is successful."

OF NOTE — Andrew Alberts had a deflected practice puck hit him in the throat Tuesday. He was winded but carried on. Roberto Luongo missed the session with the flu and will back up as Cory Schneider gets a scheduled start against the Ducks. Centre Alex Bolduc has been re-assigned to the Moose.

Canucks' and Ducks' backup netminders enjoying the spotlight tonight

By Jim Jamieson, The Province February 9, 2011 7:00 AM

It's the battle of the backups tonight when the Ducks call.

Cory Schneider will start for the Canucks as scheduled, but Curtis McElhinney will be in net for the second straight game due to the "lightheadedness" of usual starter Jonas Hiller the past week or so.

Hiller was one reason Anaheim had a 10-4 record during Ryan Getzlaf's injury absence.

Hiller had his first day back on the ice here Tuesday since allowing three goals on 10 shots in 11 minutes of playing time before being pulled in a 4-3 loss to San Jose on Feb. 2.

"It was all right, it was good to be back on the ice, but I still didn't feel 100 per cent," said Hiller, who has gone on injured reserve.

"We'll have to see how it develops tonight. I'm definitely feeling better, but I still feel a little off."

Hiller said it's hard to explain how he feels, although it's not believed to be concussion related.

"Probably light-headed," he said. "It's just doesn't seem to be right around me. We're still trying to figure out what it's from."

Hiller rejected the idea that his condition is related to taking a shot on the mask at the All-Star Game on Jan. 30.

"I don't think so, because the next few days after that I felt all right," he said. "The tough part is not knowing. If you know something is hurt you know how to take care of it. Right now, it's just I'm not right and it's tough to find out what it's from."

The Ducks have called up Timo Pielmeier from the AHL, and he'll back up McElhinney for the second straight game.

Canucks Gameday, Vancouver goes Duck hunting

By Jim Jamieson, The Province February 9, 2011 7:16 AM

Ducks (29-21-4) at Canucks (35-10-9), 7 p.m., Rogers Arena

TV: SNET, Radio: TEAM 1040 am

THE SETUP

The Canucks:

Vancouver is coming off a 4-2 victory over Ottawa, but made some uncharacteristic errors in letting the Senators back into the game after taking a 3-0 lead in the second.

The Ducks:

In a 3-0 win at Colorado on Saturday, young star Corey Petty scored all three.

THREE THINGS TO WATCH

1 All of a sudden the loads of defensive depth GM Mike Gillis stockpiled in the offseason is being challenged. With Keith Ballard out (knee), rookie Chris Tanev gets back in, while Nos. 7 and 8 defencemen Andrew Alberts and Aaron Rome will keep playing.

2 Ducks captain Ryan Getzlaf is expected to return after missing 14 games with nasal fractures. They went 10-4 without him, making his return all the more dangerous.

3 Canucks rookie Cody Hodgson has been auditioning at the fourth-line centre spot. Based on Alex Bolduc's assignment to the minors Tuesday; it appears the job is now his to lose.

BY THE NUMBERS

3: Winger Corey Perry's hat trick in Colorado is the first time in Ducks history that a player scored all three goals in a victory.

LEADERBOARD

vancouver canucks

GOALS 31 KESLER

assists 54 H. SEDIN

POINTS 69 D. SEDIN

PIM 63 BIEKSA

IN NET 9-2-2 SCHNEIDER

2.25 GAA / .926 SV%

ANAHEIM DUCKS

GOALS 28 PERRY

assists 35 VISNOVSKY

POINTS 56 PERRY

PIM 118 PARROS

IN NET 4-5-1 MCELHINNEY 2.76 GAA / .916 SV%

INJURIES

CANUCKS: Alex Edler (back surgery); D Keith Ballard (knee); D Lee Sweatt (foot).

Who's laughing now, suckers?

A few thoughts and observations as BC Place gets its new roof, which better be the best roof in the history of roofs ...

The Province February 9, 2011 7:00 AM

On the surface, the plus-minus statistic seems like a good idea. If a player's on the ice for more goals scored than allowed then that player is doing his job, right?

Where you run into problems with plus-minus is when you have a good player on a horrible team (or an average player on a great team).

Take Daniel Alfredsson on the Senators (who are horrible). We can all agree that Alfie's a good player, even if he's not in his prime anymore.

At the very least, he's not one of the worst players in the NHL. Yet only seven skaters in the league are "worse" than his minus-19.

Moreover, two of those seven are all-stars (Phil Kessel and Erik Karlsson), two are first overall draft picks (Chris Phillips and John Tavares), and one recently signed a \$100-million contract (Ilya Kovalchuk).

Sure, a few of those guys could tighten up defensively, but plusminus doesn't really reflect their true value.

In Kevin Bieksa's case, however, plus-minus is a very telling statistic.

Last year, Bieksa finished minus-5 on a good team. This year, he's plus-23 on a good team. The common denominator being the good team.

A pessimist might say that Bieksa's only reaping the rewards of skating alongside Dan Hamhuis, but that would be unfair.

Bieksa hasn't so much rediscovered his game as he's learned a better way to play it, i.e. without running around in his own end like the puck was about to explode and kill everyone if it wasn't cleared the next second.

A sense of urgency is one thing; running yourself out of position is another.

Another criticism of Biekša was that he had a tendency to jump into the rush at inopportune moments.

What it all boiled down to was a player forcing the play to the point that it snapped back and slapped him in the face.

No longer. Patience is the new weapon in Biekša's arsenal. Be in the right place and good things will come your way. Kind of like going to the bar and standing outside the women's washroom, except less creepy.

It's no coincidence that viewers at home are seeing a lot less of the following scene playing out on their TVs: Roberto Luongo sprawled on the ice, the puck in the net, and Biekša skating into the frame a half-second later looking skyward like he just missed the bus as it was pulling away.

You know that look.

So far in 2010-11, Biekša has played 53 games and been on the ice for 42 goals against.

Last season, he played 55 games and was on the ice for 62 goals against.

That's a fairly significant improvement, assuming he's not on the ice or 20 goals against versus Anaheim tonight and Calgary on Saturday.

But perhaps most impressive is how he handled himself when things weren't going so well. Because things really weren't going well.

Not only has Biekša suffered through two debilitating injuries when an opponent's skate cut into his leg and did serious damage, he's also spent considerable time as Vancouver's most valuable whipping boy.

To illustrate how bad it got: Back in October, we wrote what we thought was a very obvious satirical story about a crazed Canucks fan who had dedicated his entire life to bashing Biekša on the Internet. We don't pretend to be Jonathan Swift when it comes to satire, but we thought it was a good way to show how abusive fans could get, especially online.

Granted, no fan could be this abusive. This guy was a complete whack job. Except apparently we didn't make him crazy enough, because a lot of people thought the story was real.

Some athletes don't take fan and media criticism well (see: Kessel.) But Biekša took it like a champ. He didn't blame anyone. He didn't sulk. He didn't ask for a change of scenery. He just found a way to get better.

Gillis: Play that injured Ballard a 'violation of the rules'

By Gordon McIntyre Tue, Feb 8 2011

Mike Gillis isn't happy with the play that took down Keith Ballard on Monday night.

Speaking on the TEAM 1040, he said Milan Michalek's take-down of Ballard in the first three minutes of the Canucks' 4-2 win over Ottawa at Rogers Arena was not a fair hockey play.

"The play, in my opinion, was a violation of the rules, one that is not a highly respected play at this level," the Canucks GM said. "The puck wasn't near Keith when it happened and I'm not happy."

Ballard will undergo an MRI shortly, but according to reports citing people close to the defenceman, it may not be as bad as it initially looked. Ballard's right leg buckled under him at an unnatural angle after Michalek's slew-foot.

Optimistically, Ballard may return in four weeks if it's a sprain or a tear that doesn't require major surgery.

Surviving the defenceman death trap

Injuries on defence have been a pain this season, but haven't stopped team's surge

By Iain MacIntyre, Vancouver Sun February 9, 2011

Halfway through Tuesday's Vancouver Canucks practice, Alex Burrows' shot rode up Andrew Alberts' stick as if it were a launch ramp and drilled the defenceman in the throat. Then two amazing things happened. As Alberts lay face down, his harsh coughs and desperate wheezing audible amid the sudden hush, coach Alain Vigneault re-started practice with a drill at the opposite end of the ice. And Alberts got up. The latter seemed a small miracle, given the rate of injury for Canucks defencemen the last month.

Four seasons ago, fearing swelling that could close his windpipe, Canucks star Roberto Luongo was sent to hospital in Montreal after being struck in the throat by a shot. Tuesday, Alberts didn't even go to the dressing room. He sat on the bench for a couple of minutes practising breathing, his karaoke career in jeopardy, then rejoined teammates.

"We know that goalies are a little fragile and need extra attention," defenceman Kevin Bieksa said. "And Andrew's a big, tough defenceman. He probably had the green light to go to the dressing room and call it a day, but it takes a lot to get him out of there."

Last month, it took a separated shoulder to take Alberts out of the lineup for eight games. The game before Alberts was hurt, defenceman Aaron Rome went down with a sprained knee. A week later, top defenceman Alex Edler had back surgery. Monday, Keith Ballard put his leg on backwards when slew-footed by Ottawa Senator Milan Michalek, suffering a knee sprain that will keep him out 3-4 weeks.

A lot of injuries have taken a lot of Canuck defencemen out of the lineup this National Hockey League season.

Seven Canucks have played all 54 games and none of them is a defenceman.

The eight blue-liners who started the season in Vancouver have all missed games for medical reasons -Edler's injury being the most serious, Bieksa's one-game absence due to the flu the least.

A ninth defenceman, key veteran Sami Salo, hasn't played since rupturing an Achilles tendon in July.

Ballard has already been out of the lineup this season due to a concussion and the flu. He hadn't missed a game in three seasons before joining the Canucks last summer.

So cursed seems the Canucks' blue-line that one of the recent emergency fillins, Lee Sweatt, is now out with a foot injury suffered in practice.

This isn't so much a goalie graveyard, as former general manager Brian Burke claimed years ago, as a defenceman death trap.

Chris Tanev, the other recent minor-league call-up, better wear bubble wrap to tonight's game against the Anaheim Ducks.

"We've gone through it for two years now where we didn't have enough NHL-quality defencemen to either keep us in the playoff race or make the team better and get us through tough patches," GM Mike Gillis said Tuesday. "And now we feel like we do. And it's going to be tested.

"It's not unlike other teams; everyone's going through injury issues. It just seems with our style of play, defencemen tend to get injured and we have to have enough of them."

The 10 the Canucks have used this season may not be enough. Salo will be No. 11 if he plays Saturday against the Calgary Flames.

"Every year we suffer injuries; what's better this year is our depth -and better in terms of nice surprises," associate coach Rick Bowness said, referring to Tanev and Sweatt. "The depth has been tested and the depth has responded."

But the depth has been aided, ironically, by the sequence of injuries and salaries of players affected.

Last summer's acquisition of Ballard and Dan Hamhuis put the Canucks millions over the \$59.4-million salary cap.

Had Salo not been injured in summer training, Biekša probably would have been traded before the season. Had Edler's injury not created a timely cap-hole, the Canucks may have had to trade a significant player to get Salo back on the roster.

Edler plans to be back before the playoffs. Ballard, according to Gillis, should be back at least a month before the Stanley Cup tournament begins.

"It probably looked worse than it was," Ballard said of his right-leg contortion. "It looked pretty bad, though. I didn't think I could bend like that. I'm not the most flexible person, so it's pretty impressive."

But not nearly as impressive as this: the Canucks lead the NHL and haven't yet iced their best defence. They could open the playoffs with a super six of Edler, Salo, Hamhuis, Biekša, Christian Ehrhoff and Ballard, with Alberts and Rome in reserve. At the start of last summer, that was financially impossible.

"There's never a good time for an injury, but the way you put it, it sounds like there is," Biekša said. "I think it's assumed now over the course of a season, defencemen are going to go down and get hurt. Yeah, you'd like them not to overlap each other, especially the long, significant ones. I guess we've been fortunate that way."

Gillis said: "I've never looked at it that way -that people getting injured have somehow created an opportunity for us."

But injuries -and the salary-cap savings they generated -enabled the Canucks to retain all their defencemen.

"Yeah, but we [could] have done things differently," Gillis said. "In the summer, we went out to get the best players we could possibly get and we were going to deal with the consequences later. And we knew consequences would come. We were unsure about who and how and when, but we knew they would come."

Penalty killers take pride in streak

Biekса says confidence and preparation are behind special team's success

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun February 9, 2011

Very good for most of the season, the Vancouver Canucks' penalty kill has been absolutely sublime in recent games.

The Canucks have killed off 31 straight opposition power plays over the last seven games and defenceman Kevin Biekса thinks he knows why.

He says it comes down to being confident and well prepared.

"I think the PK is much like the power play," Biekса said Tuesday.

"It's got a lot to do with confidence. When you start getting on a little bit of a streak, you feel like you can't be scored on. Same with the power play, every time you get out there you feel like you are going to get chances and score goals."

The Canucks also have never worked harder off the ice on their penalty-kill, which is now ranked fourth best in the NHL with an efficiency rate of 85.6 per cent.

"I think we go over PK technical stuff probably as much or more than anybody else in the league," Biekса said. "We are constantly dissecting film and looking at how other teams PK."

They also dissect their own work on the penalty-kill.

"There's a lot of attention to the little details," Biekса said.

"Like, where's your stick, is it in the wrong lane? What side of your body is your stick on? It makes a huge difference. We watch our film now and you stop it and you can see what every guy is thinking. Right now our reads are going well."

DIRTY PLAY: Canuck general manager Mike Gillis wasn't happy about the hit by Ottawa winger Milan Michalek that injured Vancouver defenceman Keith Ballard on Monday night.

"I don't agree with that type of bodycheck or interaction and in my opinion it was [a slew-foot]," Gillis said. "I didn't think the puck was anywhere nearby. I didn't think it was an NHL quality play."

Gillis also said it's incumbent on players to keep such plays out of the game.

"I think that's the type of play that players themselves really frown upon," he said. "And I think it is up to them to police it."

Biekša agreed there's no place for slew-footing in the game, but wasn't sure Michalek did it intentionally.

"Stuff like that happens all the time," he said.

"I'm sure Michalek didn't intend to hurt him. He just wanted a little more leverage to try to throw him down."

But Biekša said the league should get involved in blatant cases of slew-footing and treat them the way it does head shots.

"Give them three or four games. Slew-foots are a dangerous thing because you are throwing a guy off balance and most times he is landing on his back with no way to protect himself. So it is definitely a dangerous part of the game."

Michalek maintained it was an accident and said he was sick when he saw a photo that graphically showed Ballard's right leg bent inside out.

"He went to hit me and then we kind of collided," Michalek told the Ottawa Citizen.

"Then I was falling down and I grabbed him, kind of. I think his leg got stuck in the ice, and I think he fell on his leg, sat on it. It's always bad. I didn't want to hurt him. It's always bad when somebody gets injured."

Michalek felt particularly bad because he was remembering back to the injury he suffered last spring, which led to reconstructive surgery on his left knee.

"I don't wish that on anybody," he said. "It's a hard injury, and that's why I felt so bad for him."

NICE TIMING: If Roberto Luongo was going to get the flu, now is probably as good a time as any.

Luongo, who became ill with flu-like symptoms after Monday night's 4-2 win over the Ottawa Senators and missed Tuesday's practice, was already scheduled to have tonight off as Cory Schneider gets the start against the Anaheim Ducks. Luongo should be ready for the team's next game, Saturday night at home against the Calgary Flames.

Schneider, who takes an impressive 9-2-2 record into tonight's game, has only seen limited action against Anaheim.

He played one period of cleanup duty after Andrew Raycroft was yanked in a game on Oct. 30, 2009. Schneider surrendered three goals on 12 shots in a 7-2 Vancouver loss.

"[Corey] Perry, [Ryan] Getzlaf and [Bobby] Ryan are probably one of the best lines in the league and they have good secondary scoring with some veteran guys who have been around a while and know how to put the puck in the net," Schneider said.

"It's hard to focus on just one player or one line."

The Canucks have split their two meetings with the Ducks this season. They lost 4-3 in Anaheim on Oct. 13 and then beat the Ducks 5-4 in a shootout on Dec. 8 at Rogers Arena.

MOOSE CALL: The Canucks sent centre Alex Bolduc to Manitoba on Tuesday. Bolduc, out since Jan. 14 with a shoulder injury, has lost his fourthline centre job to rookie Cody Hodgson.

The Canucks seem intent on giving Hodgson every opportunity to keep the job and stick long-term with the team.

Although the Canucks hope he can develop into a second or third-line centre, Hodgson said he's used to having to play a strong defensive game similar to that demanded by a fourthline NHL player.

"I think in junior that's normally the way I played," Hodgson said. "[Coach] Stan Butler ran a pretty tight ship in Brampton. Later on we were more offensively-minded, but the first two years we were really defensively conscious."

Hodgson is the ninth different player the Canucks have used as a fourth-line centre this season.

Keith Ballard limping, Canucks GM Mike Gillis fuming

MATTHEW SEKERES

Vancouver— From Wednesday's Globe and Mail

Mike Gillis said it is up to the NHL to decide if Ottawa Senators winger Milan Michalek should be disciplined, but the Vancouver Canucks general manager was clear Tuesday with his assessment of an alleged slew-foot on defenceman Keith Ballard.

The Canucks rearguard had his right leg bend in an unnatural way after getting tangled with Michalek in the first period of a 4-2 victory over the Senators on Monday. Ballard's knee and ankle were pinned down by his own body weight as the players, locked by leg and arm, tumbled dangerously to the ice.

"I saw it as a play that, in my opinion, was a violation of the rules, and one that is not a highly respected play in this league, and at this level," Gillis said. "The puck wasn't near Keith when it happened. And I certainly disagree with that style of play."

Asked if he would call the league about the matter, Gillis replied: "It's up to them if they want to look at those kind of plays ... I don't look to influence them, but I didn't think it was a fair hockey play."

Ballard, 28, underwent a magnetic resonance imaging exam Tuesday, which revealed a sprained knee. He is expected to miss a minimum of three weeks.

The six-year NHL veteran was limping around Rogers Arena and talking to reporters Tuesday, which was probably a good sign. After all, the injury looked heinous, with season- or career-ending capacity.

“The knee feels better than yesterday and there’s not much pain,” Ballard said. “Right now, I can walk. If I was to do anything else, who knows? I’m pretty hesitant on saying anything until the MRI because you get thinking one way or the other and the MRI may show something different.”

Ballard is likely to be replaced by rookie Chris Tanev for Wednesday’s home game against the Anaheim Ducks.

Tanev was a healthy scratch against the Senators, and was the logical candidate to be demoted to the minors later this week, when Sami Salo is expected to join the NHL team.

Salo has been rehabilitating a ruptured Achilles tendon, and was scheduled to play his third minor-league game Tuesday.

CANUCKS' BALLARD OUT 3-4 WEEKS WITH MILD KNEE SPRAIN

TSN.CA STAFF

Another game, another injury for the depleted Vancouver Canucks' defence core.

But speaking with cautious optimism, Keith Ballard doesn't think the right leg injury suffered Monday night against Ottawa was as severe as it originally looked.

"It was stiff this morning, (which is) to be expected," said Ballard, "After sleeping last night, it stiffened up. I've been here for a few hours today, doing treatment, and it's helped quite a bit. It wasn't bad. It's been pretty good. Kind of by the way it felt, I think it's kind of better than I expected. It feels better."

Late Tuesday night Canucks General Manager Mike Gillis announced through twitter that Ballard's MRI showed a mild knee sprain and he's expected to miss 3-4 weeks.

Ballard suffered the injury when he was tripped up from behind by Senators' forward Milan Michalek, a play that Gillis felt was dirty.

"I saw it as a play that in my opinion was a violation of the rules, one that is not a highly respected play at this level," Gillis told Vancouver radio station TEAM1040. "The puck wasn't near Keith when it happened, and I certainly disagree with that style of play."

The Canucks are already short-handed on the back end with Alex Edler out since having back surgery. The team is hoping to have him back once the playoffs start. The team has also been without Sami Salo all season, as he works his way back to the lineup after suffering an Achilles injury in the offseason.

In all, the Canucks have lost six blueliners at various times this year.

If that wasn't enough, the team also had a scare at practice Tuesday, as Andrew Alberts was hit in the throat by a puck in practice. Alberts remained on the ice for awhile before skating back to the bench under his own power.

"It feels like on the back end, there's always somebody hurt. And today, in practice, another injury, fortunately it wasn't anything serious," said Canucks defenceman Kevin Bieksa. "But, that's one of the strengths of this team, is being to able deal with injuries. If you're a good team you have to do that, because you're going to lose key guys throughout the course of the year."

The Canucks' back end was also weakened at practice, as goalie Roberto Luongo missed Tuesday's session with the flu. He'll be a backup for Cory Schneider Wednesday against Anaheim.

"They talked to me last week and said that, some point this week I would probably get the start and they told me before the game I'd be playing against Anaheim," Schneider said. "Lou, I don't think is feeling great, but it was planned before that."

Ducks are in a row now Getzy's back

And Getzlaf's glad of return to winners after injury

By Jim Jamieson, The Province February 9, 2011

Ryan Getzlaf is back.

But the way the Anaheim Ducks played without him, you'd think his 14-game absence after taking a puck off the crest of his brow was no biggie.

The team, led by budding star Corey Perry and excellent specials teams, rose to the occasion and the Ducks have put themselves in good position for a run to the playoffs.

With the big centre out, Anaheim rattled off a 10-4 record and -Vancouver Canucks take note - should be that much better with him back.

"It's feels good," said Getzlaf after the Ducks practised at Rogers Arena on Tuesday. "The last couple of days of practice we've been battling and everything felt great. I'm excited to play."

Getzlaf, 25, had a gruesome injury. Ducks rookie defenceman Cam Fowler tipped a shot from Shane Doan on Dec. 28 in Phoenix and the puck deflected up and hit him just above the bridge of the nose. The result was multiple sinus fractures. Getzlaf will have to wear a visor for the time being to protect the area.

But he said the biggest relief was seeing the team do well in his absence.

"It's made things a lot easier on me," he said. "When I'm up there watching and wishing I could be out there, at least my teammates are playing their hardest and winning games. We're in great position right now for a stretch run."

Perry has become a more complete player this season.

He's killing penalties as well as seeing his usual time on the power play and cutting down on the penalties. He's become a player who can carry a team on his back.

"He's been a real catalyst for us," said coach Randy Carlyle. "He's stepped up in the absence of [Getzlaf]. He's played huge minutes. His role is expanded and he's been exceeding expectations as an elite player."

Perry, tied for fourth in NHL goal scoring with Daniel Sedin, said he has concentrated on being more consistent:

"It's just going out every night and playing the same style of game, not trying to do too much and trying to cut down on the penalties. That's increased the ice time and confidence."

Saku Koivu, who took over the centre spot on the first-unit power play in Getzlaf's absence, said the Ducks took it as a challenge when their captain went down.

"I don't think we really changed our style, but when a top guy is out you try to play tighter defensively and more cautious about mistakes," he said.

"Now that he's back in the lineup we'll be that much better. We've got to focus on the things that made us successful in that stretch."

Getzlaf sees mandatory visors in players' future

Canucks head coach also believes everyone should wear one, but ego prevails for those who don't

By Ian Walker, Vancouver Sun February 9, 2011

The purple scar curls from the bridge of Ryan Getzlaf's nose to the middle of his forehead, veering off to the left like a fork in the road about one-third of the way up the gruesome four centimetre wound.

The 15 stitchmarks are plainly visible and it's hard not to try to count them, while talking with the Anaheim captain, who will return to the Ducks' lineup tonight against the Vancouver Canucks at Rogers Arena.

Getzlaf hasn't played since a Shane Doan wrist shot broke his face on Dec. 28.

The puck deflected off defenceman Cam Fowler's stick, rocketing up and striking the 6-4 220-pounder dead between the eyes. It's a scary image, until you start to think of what could have happened had the puck hit the Ducks star a few centimetres to the right or left. As a result of his

numerous facial and sinus fractures, Getzlaf will be required to wear a visor for the foreseeable future.

He doesn't deny that if he were wearing one against the Phoenix Coyotes that night, he probably would not have been forced to miss 14 games this season. Definitely, his forehead wouldn't resemble a road map.

"I think you'll see a day where eventually everyone's wearing visors," said Getzlaf, following Anaheim's practice at Rogers Arena on Tuesday. "It's hard to say how long before they grandfather it in, but we're kind of leaning toward that."

Well, yes and no.

Of the 647 NHL players polled by the Hockey News this season, 59 per cent wore a visor. That's the same percentage as last season, according to a story in the magazine's Jan. 3 edition.

It may seem like a lot at first, but not when you take into account that all junior age players wear visors and that the NCAA requires its players wear full cages. Never mind, eye protection has been mandatory in the AHL since the beginning of the 2006-07 season, a decision made after 20-year-old defenceman Jordan Smith -a second-round draft pick of the Ducks no less -lost the vision in his left eye after being struck by a puck while playing for the Portland Pirates in February 2006.

"I know some guys that come up from the minors have been wearing it now in Manitoba or in junior that are a little bit more on the physical side and when they come to the NHL they take it off," said Canucks head coach Alain Vigneault.

"If it was up to me I would make sure that everyone would have it. They've all played with them throughout their lives so I don't think it's a big thing to have it to wear it for safety."

It seems ego motivates most players who drop their eyeprotection.

"In my line of work, it's not really an option," said tough guy Tanner Glass, one of only seven current Canucks not to wear a visor.

"I wouldn't wear one anyway. I'm old school, Don Cherry . Only Europeans and soft guys wear visors."

It wasn't too long ago that Glass's funny was the prevailing thought around the league. Thankfully -for parents, wives and children of NHLers -more and more of that type of thinking is going the way of the wooden stick. As recently as 10 years ago, only 15 per cent of NHLers wore a shield.

"I went without a visor for so long in the minors because people were saying French guys were not as tough or whatever," said Canucks' Alex Burrows, who now wears a visor.

"But I think the mentality has changed a lot over the past few years. Players are just smarter. Things happen so quick out there with sticks and pucks it only makes sense to wear one."

A fractured cheekbone forced Aaron Rome to "hide" behind a shield for the final three months of last season. Even he can't explain why he's playing without one this year.

"It's stupid, but ahhh ..." said Rome, a husband and father.

"I've been thinking of going back. It's just something . You ask a lot of players who don't wear them they sort of wish that they could, but it's just one of those things. It's all mental."

Mental. Good choice of word.

Getzlaf set to return as Ducks visit Canucks

February 9, 2011, at 11:16 AM ET

(Sports Network) - With the NHL-leading Canucks down yet another defenseman, the Ducks may be getting captain Ryan Getzlaf back at just the right time.

Getzlaf is expected to return from his six-week layoff this evening when his club continues a four-game road trip against Vancouver, winners of six in a row, at Rogers Arena.

Getzlaf has been out since suffering multiple nasal sinus fractures after taking a puck to the forehead in a win over Phoenix on Dec. 28. The 25-year-old had 13 goals and 24 assists in 40 games prior to the injury, but the Ducks managed to win 10 of 14 without him.

Head coach Randy Carlyle thinks Getzlaf's return will add more punch to a Ducks team that is currently seventh overall in the Western Conference.

"Now that he's back in the lineup, we think that gives us more depth in scoring," Carlyle told his team's website. "He's a big part of our team and is our captain. We know his compete level and conditioning level will be there. He's ready to go."

Adding Getzlaf back to an offensive mix that includes Corey Perry, Teemu Selanne, Bobby Ryan and Saku Koivu isn't good news for Vancouver's banged-up blueline.

With defenders Alexander Edler, Sami Salo and Lee Sweatt already out, the Canucks lost Keith Ballard for 3-to-4 weeks due to a right knee injury suffered early in Monday's 4-2 win over the Senators.

With Aaron Rome picking up 17 minutes worth of penalties due to a first-period fight, the Canucks were forced to play a large chunk of the game with just four defenders.

"I think it's tough for the D when they're playing with four back there and they're getting pressured as hard as they are," forward Ryan Kesler told Vancouver's website. "They did a good job, obviously going out there every other shift is pretty tiring for those guys. I thought they dealt with the adversity pretty well."

Two goals and three points by Mikael Samuelsson helped take the pressure off, as did goals from Kesler and Alex Burrows. Roberto Luongo added 31 saves for his NHL high-tying 26th win of the season.

Vancouver extended its winning streak to six straight games and is 6-0-3 in its last nine to up its NHL-leading point total to 79, four more than Philadelphia.

The Canucks have also won the first two contests of a four-game homestand and are 11-0-4 since their last home regulation loss on Dec. 5.

With Luongo battling the flu, Cory Schneider will get the start tonight, his first ever versus the Ducks. He has faced them once in relief.

Anaheim will also be without its No. 1 goaltender in Jonas Hiller, who sat out Saturday's 3-0 victory over Colorado with fatigue and lightheadedness. Hiller was placed on injured reserve Tuesday, but could return by week's end.

"It's tough to explain -- probably lightheadedness. It just doesn't seem to be right around me," said Hiller after going on IR. "It's tough to say. We're still trying to figure out what exactly is the problem. I think just getting some rest definitely already helps."

Curtis McElhinney stepped up and made 25 saves for his second career shutout, while Perry had all three goals for the second hat trick of his career. Anaheim has won five of seven and eight of its last 11.

Though the Ducks recently added goaltender Ray Emery, he isn't in game shape and was assigned to the American Hockey League. McElhinney will get the start tonight and will be backed up by Timo Pielmeier as the Ducks aim for a fourth straight road win.

McElhinney will hope this start versus the Canucks goes better than his last in a meeting at Vancouver on Dec. 8. Anaheim led by two goals midway through the third period before the netminder took a shot off his mask and collapsed to the ice. The Canucks scored on the rebound and McElhinney had to be helped off the ice while bleeding from his forehead.

Vancouver went on to tie the game and eventually win, 5-4, in a shootout for its third victory in the last four meetings as well as second straight and fifth in the last seven played at Rogers Arena

Ducks place goalie Jonas Hiller on injured reserve

L.A. sports

The Ducks announced late Tuesday that they had placed goaltender Jonas Hiller on injured reserve retroactive to last Thursday because of dizziness and fatigue. They recalled Timo Pielmeier from Elmira of the ECHL to back up Curtis McElhinney when they face the Canucks on Wednesday at Vancouver to open a three-game trip.

Hiller, who has played only part of one game since returning from the All-Star Game, complained of light-headedness last week and was unable to play at Colorado last Saturday. Tests found no abnormalities but he hasn't felt right since the All-Star Game in Raleigh, where he took two shots off his face mask.

Hiller, who ranks among the NHL's top 10 with 25 wins, a .925 save percentage and four shutouts, practiced Tuesday in Vancouver for the first time since he faced San Jose last Wednesday. However, a club spokesman said Hiller didn't feel 100% and was placed on injured reserve. He can be activated on Thursday.

The Ducks' trip continues Friday at Calgary and Sunday at Edmonton.

Earlier in the day, the Ducks assigned goalie Ray Emery to their American Hockey League farm team in Syracuse, N.Y., after he cleared waivers.

-- Helene Elliott

Ducks assign Emery, put Voros on waivers

The Orange County Register

Ray Emery cleared waivers Tuesday morning and was assigned to Ducks AHL affiliate Syracuse.

The Ducks signed Emery on Monday and had to expose him to the waiver wire before they assigned him to the minors. Emery is attempting a comeback after a career-threatening hip injury last year.

The Ducks also placed **Aaron Voros** on waivers. Teams have until 9 a.m. Wednesday morning to claim the winger, who had come off the injured reserve list on Jan.31 after a fractured orbital bone injury forced him to miss 21 games.

Voros has appeared in just 12 games for the Ducks this season and has 43 penalty minutes.

He was acquired from the New York Rangers with **Ryan Hillier** in exchange for **Steve Eminger** on July 9, 2010.

Ducks put Hiller on IR; McElhinney to start

The Orange County Register

A continued bout with fatigue and lightheadedness prompted the Ducks to put star goalie Jonas Hiller on injured reserve, but he is eligible to come off it Thursday and is only ruled out for Wednesday night's game at Vancouver.

Hiller took regular turns in net Tuesday in Vancouver during practice but is not well enough to be available to the club.

Ducks goalie Jonas Hiller continues to battle fatigue and lightheadness and will not play in Wednesday's game against Vancouver.

"It still doesn't feel 100 percent, but it was good to be back on the ice," Hiller was quoted as saying in Edmonton. "I guess we have to see how it develops tonight, if I still feel all right or what's going to happen. It seems all right right now, but I'm still not there."

The Ducks recalled Timo Pielmeier from Elmira of the ECHL to back up Curtis McElhinney for the second consecutive game.

Hiller was shut down the previous five days because of an unexplained case of fatigue shortly after his most recent start, against San Jose last week. He was scratched from starting Saturday's game at Colorado.

"The aura around him is a little bit concerning for everybody," Coach Randy Carlyle said. "But it seems like now he's on his way to recovery."

The Ducks are otherwise content to ride McElhinney, who is coming off his second career shutout and has stopped 42 of the past 43 shots.

"He's a great goalie," defenseman Andy Sutton said. "He's getting a chance to play and you see how good he is. He's phenomenal for us."

"We know Curtis. It's always great to have depth on the team. It's nice to know we have him when Jonas is out."

McElhinney likes the challenge of the increased role and he's basically picking up where he left off at the end of last season.

"I'll just continue to build on things that have been working for me so far," McElhinney said in Edmonton. "The last couple of games have gone well. The team's responding with me in net. Hopefully that will continue."

McElhinney hopes tonight's game doesn't mirror his last appearance at Rogers Arena on Dec.8, when he was hit in the mask by Christian Ehrhoff's slap shot and left the game with a gash on his head.

"It was a good game up until that point. It's a tough way to finish it," he said. "We'll see. I'm looking forward to getting back in there, though."

EMERY APPRECIATIVE

Ray Emery cleared waivers and was assigned to the Ducks' AHL affiliate in Syracuse, although he must get immigration paperwork straightened out to report.

Emery's next game will be his first in more than a year, and he said he needs adequate preparation in front of professional shooters.

But he was mostly appreciative of a comeback opportunity after he underwent major hip surgery last April that threatened his up-and-down career.

"It's kind of a continuous journey," Emery said on a conference call. "There have been some tests along the way. I learned from everything. I made a few mistakes and had a few setbacks. I wouldn't take it back.

"After going through something, the next time you know exactly how to take that situation. You can build on all those missteps. I'm really excited to be back. I definitely appreciate things more. I appreciate my body more, knowing that it's not always going to be there for me and having that scare of thinking I might have played my last game."

Emery, a Stanley Cup finalist goalie four years ago, signed a one-year, two-way deal Monday that will pay him \$105,000 with Syracuse

"I'm just excited to be back playing again," he said. "I realize I had a tough operation and been away from the game for a while. I felt Anaheim and their organization was a good spot for me to come back. They seemed interested. I'm just lucky to be back."

VOROS WAIVED

Aaron Voros was placed on waivers. Teams will have until 9 a.m. today to claim the winger, who was a healthy scratch 18 times this season and appeared in only 10 games before he suffered a fractured orbital bone injury Dec.21.

Staff writer Eric Stephens contributed to this report.

