

## NHL STARS: 'M' STANDS FOR MARVELLOUS

October might just be the busiest time on the year's sports calendar, with the National Hockey League opening up, baseball playoffs starting, the CFL and NFL in full swing, junior hockey nicely under way, school and university sports going full steam and the world's best soccer teams gearing up for the quadrennial World Cup.

But this is Canada, and it's hockey season, so here are 14 questions and/or observations about the NHL on the eve of its 106th season:

- There are 26 letters in the alphabet, but how coincidental is it that the names of the best four players in the NHL begin with the letter M? (Alphabetically: MacKinnon, Makar, Matthews and McDavid.)
  - Have injuries and age finally caught up with Hall of Fame-bound Carey Price?
  - Breakout star of 2022-23? Jack Hughes of New Jersey Devils.
  - If last year's playoffs are used as a measuring stick, **Jake Oettinger** of the Dallas Stars is the best goaltender in the league.
  - Is Jordan Kyrou really the fastest skater in the league, based on last year's Skills' Competition? Maybe, but the fastest and dangliest with the puck is still Connor McDavid.
  - Do fired coaches just fall off the face of the earth? Hey, Dave Tippett, where did you go?
  - To heck with Mom's orders: It's only fitting that brothers Matthew and Brady Tkachuk drop the gloves and go at it this year.
  - Is it logical to assume the NHL's trophy engraver can put Makar's name on the James Norris trophy for oh, the next 10 years or so?
  - Will fans of the Arizona Coyotes feel cheated about having to watch their team play home games in a 5,000-seat arena on the Arizona State University campus for at least the next three seasons, or will they care?
  - Putting an optimistic spin on it, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman says, "Think about the 5,000 people, the type of intimate experience they are going to have."
  - In the category of best player few people know, we present Moritz Seider, the Red Wing defenceman who was chosen unanimously as rookie of the year last season.
  - Speaking of rookies, Cole Caufield's stat line from last year was amazing: Under coach Dominique Ducharme, Caufield had one goal and eight points in 30 games; under replacement coach Marty St. Louis, he exploded for 22 goals and 13 assists in 37 games.
  - Will Johnny Gaudreau of Columbus outscore Jonathan Huberdeau of the Flames this season? You better believe Flames' fans will be taking note.
  - Cue the countdown: Alex Ovechkin needs only 22 goals to surpass No. 2 Gordie Howe on the all-time NHL goal-scoring list. He's currently 114 behind No. 1 Wayne Gretzky. The only thing that might stop him from beating Howe is conscription.
  - **Club Pro Guy**, on Twitter: "The guy I hired to play the bagpipes at our member/guest back in June has passed away. Feels good to get that invoice off my desk."
  - **Bob Molinaro** of [pilotonline.com](http://pilotonline.com) (Hampton, Va.): "**LeBron James** headlines a new ownership group that is buying an expansion franchise in Major League Pickleball. Is this LeBron's idea of a dill-icious opportunity?"
  - **Jack Finarelli** of [sportscurmudgeon.com](http://sportscurmudgeon.com): "**Doug Pederson** has won as many games as the Jags head coach as **Urban Meyer** did last year, and it only took him until the last week of September to do it. Would I be wrong to think that the Jags are undergoing 'Urban Renewal' this season?"
  - Headline at the onion.com: "**Brett Favre** defends use of state welfare money to build shelter for homeless volleyballs."
  - **RJ Currie** of [sportsdeke.com](http://sportsdeke.com): "Cincinnati QB **Joe Burrow**, when asked about wearing the white Bengals uniform, said he didn't really care: 'I'll play in trash bags.' This prompted Ottawa Redblacks fans to say 'Why didn't we think of that?'"
  - Another one from Currie: "Saskatchewan backup quarterback **Jake Dolegala** was arrested and charged with DUI for operating a vehicle while legally intoxicated. Another Rider drive this season that ended badly."
  - **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "**Floyd Mayweather** made a reported \$20 million for stopping **Mikuru Asakura** at the end of the second round in an exhibition fight in Japan. Good pay if you can get it: That pencils out to \$200 million an hour."
  - Mavericks fan **Kirk Henderson**, via Twitter, translating after the Lakers' oft-injured **Anthony Davis** said he'll play with a chip on his shoulder this season: "Report: **Anthony Davis** to miss 4-6 weeks with chip on shoulder."
  - **Geoff O'Neil**, via Twitter, what a difference 21 years makes: "There were 5,273 Blockbuster video locations in operation the last time the Mariners made the playoffs."
  - Eagles centre **Jason Kelce**, via Twitter, on the NFL's Pro Bowl skills contests: "Please tell me there's a hot dog eating competition for OL/DL!"
  - **Mike Bianchi** of the Orlando Sentinel, on Florida's three once-downtrodden teams — the Jaguars, Bucs and Dolphins — all leading their divisions: "Traditional NFL highbrows are now feeling like how movie snobs would feel if Larry, Moe and Curly won the Academy Award for 'The Three Stooges Meet Hercules.'"
- Care to comment? Email [brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca](mailto:brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca)*