

DF: Welcome to the Canucks Army Podcast. My name is Dmitri Filipovic, and sitting across from me is a special guest. I've been trying to get him on the podcast for a while now, and now that things have died down a little bit with the Canucks and hockey in general, he's finally found some time to join me. Dan Murphy, from Sportsnet.

DM: Thanks for having me on. It's fun to finally be on.

DF: You know, I just asked you before we started recording what you wanted to talk about and you said "whatever you want", so I guess we should start with the draft. I mean, I feel like that kind of seems like a logical decision. How much do you think that Jim Benning had to do with actual draft selections themselves, because obviously he was brought into the loop rather late in the process. I imagine the scouts work on all their scouting reports and filing reports and whatnot and coming up with decisions for months before Benning obviously came in in June.

DM: I'm going to guess he had a hand in it, but not a huge hand in it. I mean, I just look at the first selection and I think it's easier to be safe when you have a higher pick than I think if the Canucks, say, their first pick was at 25. I think when you have a scouting background you might have ideas who might be a better pick at that time. I think it might have been a year to be a little more hands-off, especially with that first pick in Virtanen. A lot of people saw it as being safe, but that's not a bad way to go when picking that high in the draft.

DF: And, you know, Virtanen is a guy we've been focusing on a lot at Canucks Army, obviously. We were kind of critical of the pick because we thought maybe William Nylander or someone might have had more upside, but we've come around to the fact that Virtanen... he shoots really hard, he skates really fast, he's a big kid, he's also a local boy. The Cam Neely things are kind of silly, but there's a lot to like there in terms of the prospect himself.

DM: And it's funny because I think a lot of people have always complained that the Canucks don't look in their own backyard. Right? For just... players, right? I mean, we heard "meat and potatoes", and I don't know if that's exactly what he meant to say...

DF: That was probably taken out of context.

DM: ...but I mean you see the player that they took, and also when they have the rankings in terms of meanness and nastiness and edge, he's right at the top. That's not a bad thing to have. I mean, Zack Kassian is kind of a local favorite already without doing a ton, because that's kind of the style he plays. He's big, he shoots, he's mean, he's a little unpredictable. They always say you rarely get a chance to trade for those players, you have to draft them. I don't know enough about these kids to say whether or not I really like the pick, but when it gets close to the draft you start reading up on them, and I kinda like what I *read* having not seen Virtanen play all that much.

DF: I'm in the same boat. I don't even pretend to be a prospect expert...

DM: Me too.

DF: ...so it's basically I'm taking everyone for their word. Yeah, that's honestly as much as I wanted to cover on the draft, because I feel that's not our area of expertise, but we can talk about free agency a lot more and the first big signing was the Ryan Miller signing. First, did you like that, or...?

DM: I guess I look at it two ways. It was clear they couldn't go into the season with Lack and Markstrom. You couldn't do that.

DF: You couldn't sell it.

DM: No. You needed a fallback position. So, the two ways they could have gone is kind of a 1 and a 1a... say it was Hiller was the guy they decided to go after. Then you have two guys that are basically... you know, not that Hiller would have made a ton more money, but you could say, OK, well, Lack is playing better, let's play him the bulk of the starts. I liked that idea for Lack, because Lack's not 22 or 23, he's a little bit older.

DF: All the grooming stuff is kind of silly to me because by the time Ryan Miller's contract expires, Lack's 30 years old.

DM: Exactly. So, the way they went... I heard they weren't high on Hiller, so maybe that wasn't a viable option for them. And the other thing you have to look at is when you put yourself as a fan's perspective you say "God, I'd love if they tanked and they got McDavid next year". And fans could say "I could handle one more year, they finished 26th last year". It'd be kind of fun to have what you haven't had for a long time, and maybe a chance at the number one overall pick. But you can't look in the eyes of the twins, or Kevin Bieksa, or these guys who've been here for a long time and still want to win and still want to have a chance to make the playoffs, and say "guys, we're going with Lack and Markstrom, and if Lack can't carry the ball for 50 games, we're kinda screwed".

DF: Right.

DM: And so, in that sense, I don't mind the Miller signing, but I just don't know what Miller is anymore. I mean, was he pretty good on a very bad Buffalo team? Then he goes to St. Louis and you read all about how the styles are different and he didn't face many shots, and maybe that's why he underperformed there. What I think you can say is that he's been better than average for a long time...

DF: Yeah, he's been above league average.

DM: ...so I think that that will give the team confidence that they do have a guy who's been around a long time and is not a one-year wonder. I do feel a little bit for Lack, although when you think about, when Lack was signed to his contract extension, he probably believed that Luongo was gonna still be here. So, he got it for a little bit, and it was only taken away from him after 20-30 games, and he seems to be the kinda kid that's not gonna bother him that much. So, you never know, what if next year, or this year, Miller's not playing great. Who's to say they can't give Lack a bunch of starts in a row?

DF: Another goalie controversy in Vancouver!

DM: Right? Yeah, but you know what, in the grand scheme of things, if you have a controversy, that means one of two things: Lack's playing very well, or Miller's not playing great.

DF: It's tough, because I didn't like the third year they gave [Miller]. That's what I liked about the Hiller contract a lot more. If they gave Ryan Miller even \$6.5M for two years or something, I would have been a lot happier with that. It's just kind of curious to me, because I'm not sure what the direction of team is right

now. I think that last year is basically the worst case scenario, and unless they actually are planning on playing Gaunce and Horvat and Shinkaruk, you know, playing these young guys, I think that they are kind of poised for that again, which would be my big concern. I love the Radim Vrbata signing a lot, and I think he could score 30 goals realistically with the Sedins next year, but other than that, I don't really see what's changed here.

DM: Well, I know you guys cover this a lot more, but weren't the Canucks still a pretty good possession team last year?

DF: They were, they were.

DM: So, it's easy to say "oh, man, they were 26th last year with Garrison and Kesler, and now they don't have either of those guys, they don't really have a second line, we don't know who's going to be on the first line, how could it get better?". But, really, last year was as bad as it's going to be. I don't believe the twins will have that bad of a year. There's no chance Burrows has that bad of a year. Right?

DF: [chuckles] Yeah.

DM: I'm going to kind of equate it, and it might not be quite proper, but... Remember when they traded Bertuzzi? You know, they were still supposed to be a good team. The locker room, he was a bit of a drain on the room at that time, they moved him away, and people were like "OK, let's embrace change; it might not be very good, but, I mean, it's a breath of fresh air". And then they went and won the division. I mean, Luongo was unconscious for eight months, and that's not going to happen again, but there's was a freshness, and I think the room feels that. I don't think it was that bad with Kesler, but it can be an emotional drain with a guy who doesn't want to be there, probably was a little sulky at the end of last year, he's constantly talking about this team's not going to win now, it's in a rebuild... To get that personality out of the room, that might be a breath of fresh air.

DF: Yeah.

DM: Plus, Tortorella wasn't easy. Some guys didn't like him, obviously.

DF: Obviously, whenever a guy's out the door, as we saw with Kesler just now, people love to share stories that they wouldn't have ever shared while the guy was still there. How much of all the Tortorella stuff do you think was actually true?

DM: I've heard different stories, and I'm not going to talk out of class, but what I heard was that... he was unreasonably... crazy at times. Like, the stupidest things would drive him off the wall. So, if little things would, can you imagine the bigger things when you finally lose it? When you saw him late in the season when a goal would go in, Sportsnet or whoever would cut to him, and the body language on the bench was just not what a coach has to be. I don't know how many times we heard throughout the year last year "I've got to realize which guys I can push, which guys I can't". He was saying that until the final game, so you know he never pulled the reins back. He probably went after Edler all the time, he went after Burrows all the time, he went after Hansen all the time, and it was more of a browbeating to try and get these guys to improve, which obviously didn't work. I think the one guy he did pull back on was Hamhuis, and that was early on, because he realized "this guy's not going to respond to this, and I can't lose him, he's one of our top two defensemen".

DF: Yep.

DM: So, I think there was a lot of stories that were true, but guys that I've talked to privately, like... The twins will never bash someone on the way out the door. Bieksa would never bash them. They'll say "listen, there's a coach, you do what the coach says, maybe it didn't work", but there are some guys that will bash him. I don't think there's a lot of guys that are gonna say mean things now that he's done, but it's clear something was off.

DF: I mean, it's clear by the fact we haven't heard any rumblings that any team is really interested in him in any coaching capacity at all, right? That's kind of telling that a guy's been on the market for this long now.

DM: He came in last year and he said "I want to learn, I want to have a better relationship with the media, and I want to learn from my mistakes in New York knowing that the players hated me when I got fired in the exit meetings". Well, he learned the media part, he was great. He was awesome for us. If there was nothing going on, you could go to his press conference, and you got a story. Somehow.

DF: The Desjardins press conference was also really good, too, and while I was listening to it, in the back of my mind I kept thinking about the Summer Summit last year, when Tortorella put on this great speech about how he was a different coach, how this was a youth movement... He said "youth movement" like it was a drinking game or something. He kept bringing up Horvat and whatnot, and how Kassian was going to be playing with the Sedins, and then none of this stuff happened.

DM: But, I mean, that's a couple years in a row now we've heard that, but once a coach gets behind the bench, he wants to win. I think that's why the Kassian thing this year is going to be very interesting, because for the first time... he's not a horse in the race for Benning or Desjardins. They didn't trade for him. And if the previous two coaches, who were under Gillis and Gillis obviously wanted the kid to do well because he traded Hodgson for him, they didn't want to play him in the top six, clearly, when everybody wants to see him in the top six... I think this year is going to be very interesting. Will he get a chance, or will another coach say... [sighs]

DF: But, what are we constituting as a chance? I'm not one of the people that wants to see him with the Sedins. I don't see that fit. I just wrote this about his two year deal that he just signed, and I think the size that he has, 6'3", 215, is both a blessing and a curse in this case because people see him and they think that he should be finishing around the net, and that he should be bullying people, but I think he's much more like a perimeter playmaker, wouldn't you say?

DM: Yeah.

DF: So, I'm not sure that him playing with Henrik Sedin is necessarily the best decision.

DM: Maybe he's better suited on the second line.

DF: Right, and looking at the depth chart, a fit with Burrows and Higgins, for example, would be something the team should really explore.

DM: Yeah, you have the danger when you have a guy that's that big and has a mean streak to try to push him into a role that's perhaps is not best suited to him. Right? We saw that with Bertuzzi, although

Bertuzzi did like it more in front of the net, but he was a playmaker, too, but he was very comfortable in front of the net taking hits and pushing off guys. So, you're right, but all that aside, there must be something there if the previous two coaches were reluctant to give him more minutes, and I don't know if that's a hockey thing, or an off-the-ice thing...

DF: I think it definitely is [a hockey thing], because when the puck's not on his stick, you can tell, he kind of looks lost at times. He's skating around, looking around, and that's when he gets himself into trouble, when he starts targeting guys' numbers, right?

DM: I think part of that was because Tortorella said "we need you to hammer people, we need you to finish your checks". He probably was trying to turn him into something...

DF: Unleash the beast!

DM: ...like, with, Dale Weise. Dale Weise totally thought "the only way I could make him happy is if I fought every shift". And that was the way Tortorella wanted him to play, and if you didn't play that way, then you weren't going to be in his good books, so maybe Desjardins sees him as a different type of player and maybe he gets a chance.

DF: So, pivoting off of Kassian, the other big RFA that's still on the board is Chris Tanev. It's been oddly quiet about him, right? He got injured toward the end of the year, and he kind of disappeared, and then his name started coming up a lot in trade rumors for the first overall pick to the Panthers, but we haven't necessarily heard much about negotiations or where he currently stands with the team. What's happening there? Do you have any idea?

DM: Yeah, I've talked to his agent Ross Gurney a couple of times, and I think that the negotiations won't be easy. I mean, now that Weber's signed, now that Kassian's signed, you start to see how much money's left in terms of what they can give to Vey and Tanev. Now, the word I was given is that they've talked, obviously they've turned down the qualifying offer, and negotiations have been difficult. Now, there's still a long time to go here, and maybe the team knows that arbitration's probably not best for Tanev, but they also don't want to alienate this kid that, likely, we all think of in the top four. Obviously, right? But arb could be difficult for him and his agent because a lot of times arbitration is goals, assists, ice time...

DF: Which he doesn't have a lot of.

DM: Exactly. I'm sure that's changing, though. People are going to use all the numbers to their advantage.

DF: So you think they actually are using advanced stats for...

DM: I guarantee it. I guarantee it. Agents that are smart now? Why wouldn't they? If your client doesn't have enough of a traditional...

DF: Yeah, if it's supporting your case, right?

DM: Yeah, and I'll bet they'll trot out the quotes from last year that Tortorella said how many times that he was the team's best defenseman. Well, that's one man's opinion, and maybe a crazy man, but you can't ignore it. Linden's no dummy. Benning's no dummy. They know this kid is young. Let's say they do end up

giving him \$2.5M. That's still not very expensive for a top four defenseman when they can say Deryk Engelland's worth \$3M.

DF: [laughs]

DM: Right? They'll figure out a number, I'm sure of it, because it's still a good opportunity for Tanev here and I don't think you want to give away a guy going into a second contract that can play a lot of minutes.

DF: And that has been developing. I mean, we did see a little bit of that offensive game start to emerge last year.

DM: I think they've pulled the reins back on him a bit, and said "you worry about your defensive side, and then maybe as you grow, we'll let you jump a little bit more".

DF: Correct me if I'm mistaken, but I feel like last summer, he took that one year deal with the thought that he'd play his way into more money...

DM: Because there wasn't any money last year, and they said they'll take the one year deal. Sorry, that's his third contract. That was the bridge deal. Yeah, I agree. I don't know what the number is for him.

DF: It's probably around three, I've heard.

DM: And how many years? Three years?

DF: That's the thing. That's what I'd be a little worried about, because he is young, but the way he plays and what we've seen from him so far, I'm worried about him breaking down.

DM: Because he never got injured forever, and then all of a sudden, the injuries started to pile up.

DF: But, he throws his body around with reckless abandon. I feel like that's kind of what makes him effective, so if you told him to stop blocking shots in these acrobatic manners, I wonder if his effectiveness would drop.

DM: The acrobatic manner might, again, have had something to do with Tortorella this year.

DF: Right? Stop throwing your face in the shooting lane.

DM: I can honestly say there's no one close on the Canucks who's taken more hard hits than Tanev. The guy's just been evaporated a number of times.

DF: So, the Canucks are going to have a few million dollars left. Benning came on and said they're basically done, the roster they have right now is what's going to be heading into training camp. Do you think that's true?

DM: I think that's probably true at this point.

DF: Isn't that a little concerning based on... who is going to score goals on this team?

DM: Well, that's the whole thing.

DF: Ryan Miller?

DM: [laughs] Yeah. Well, obviously, they tried to get Iginla, and I'm kind of glad they didn't.

DF: The third year was ridiculous.

DM: I had heard Vancouver wasn't impossible for him, but I don't think he was really interested at this point in his career in coming to Vancouver. Yeah, the whole thing is who is going to score goals? Maybe you leave a little cap, see what happens, see what starts, maybe you find somebody that's unhappy somewhere else, maybe wait to make a trade. Nice to have a bit of room, but I still don't know which young guys slot in where. Again, where are the young guys gonna play? Is Horvat gonna get a chance to center the fourth line?

DF: I think that's the plan right now.

DM: Yeah, but we've heard that's been the plan for... I don't think Shinkaruk's ready, I don't think Gaunce is probably ready.

DF: Well, luckily for Shinkaruk, he can go to the AHL and he can play for a while. I don't really think you want to send Horvat back to London. There's not much more he can learn there.

DM: So, let's say you hope Horvat scores 20. Is that fair?

DF: Yeah.

DM: And you hope Burrows gets back to 20. Is that fair?

DF: I think that's fair, yeah.

DM: And where did Kassian end up last year, 14?

DF: He was shooting a really high percentage, so he'll probably be around there.

DM: Say 15. And the twins are not going to have less.

DF: And you have the Boninos, the Veys...

DM: They're not going to be scoring goals at the 2011 rate, but I think they should be scoring more. And if just on the power play you get that percentage up 7 or 8 percent, what is that, a goal every two games on the power play? Somewhere in there? I don't even know.

DF: What was going on there? I feel like nobody really took the blame for the power play. I mean, obviously I think Tortorella sort of did, because stuff started coming out that he refused to practice it in practices. Glen Gulutzan was technically responsible for it, right?

DM: I don't know if he was, though. It seemed to me like Glen didn't... It was Sullivan and Torts, and I might be wrong, but seemingly Sullivan and Torts were fairly insulated and Glen was kind of like the third guy.

DF: Glen's my favorite, because the camera would sometimes pan to him on the bench and he'd be chewing gum and he kind of looks like he's in his own world, but apparently the players love him, from what I've heard.

DM: Yeah, I think he's had a good relationship with the players, I just don't think he was given much of a chance. We certainly think that Lidster's coming to be the right-hand man for Willie, so that makes Glen the third man, so I don't know exactly how it's going to pan out for him again this time. I don't think Willie's a hard ass, but I don't think he can have three back-patters. I don't know much about Lidster as a coach, but he's pretty straight.

DF: Right, that's what I've heard as well. It's going to be interesting to see what happens with Travis Green down in Utica, because he did take down what is, I imagine, a better deal, right? Getting to the NHL in any capacity is probably the dream, so, but I'm sure the Canucks told him he's in the future plans in some capacity.

DM: Or maybe he thought he's still better off to be a head coach at that level, and maybe it's not the Canucks that give him his chance. Because if it's two more years in Utica, maybe he gets a job somewhere else, because if guys do a good job down there now, guys do get jobs.

DF: It's true, yeah, we're seeing it.

DM: I mean, Blashill was talked to... Not talked to. Five or six teams asked the Wings and they said no.

DF: And then they gave him that contract extension.

DM: And it's generally believed that he'll just take over for Babcock.

DF: Well, it's a good backup plan, right? The shelf life on these coaches is so short. We're seeing with the Canucks right now that you can't really have no backup plan. One final thing I wanted to ask you... I was at the draft. I was scheduled to talk to either Benning or Linden, and then they made the two trades right before the draft, and then it was a media circus around them, so I didn't get to ask them any questions, unfortunately. How progressive do you think they are going to be, and add Desjardins into this mix, in terms of application of advanced stats? Linden hasn't shot it down by any means, but he admitted as much that he wasn't too fluent in the speak, and then when he was asked again about it, he said something like "I'm downloading all of the data", which...

DM: I think most teams now are. He's a pretty progressive guy, and Gilman's still involved, and he's always been a proponent for such things. I don't know how many teams in the league take them super serious, but I think it's on the rise quite a bit, and I think you'd be crazy not to at this point because I think if you look at the track record... and this is where it hasn't been around for a long time, and even with the way they're collected, and it's probably not perfect...

DF: But I don't think anyone claims it is, right?

DM: No, no, but even if it's not perfect, it still bears fruit with what people are saying, so you can't ignore it.

DF: That's... kind of interesting and good to hear. [laughs]

DM: But, even though I say that... some teams, and we've talked about it and I think at some point this would be a good podcast, at some point there are still some players that are awful when it comes to advanced stats but still get jobs, and I think Tanner Glass is a guy, right?

DF: He got three years!

DM: Three years. And sometimes, possession-wise, yes, obviously the numbers bear that he's the worst guy in the league, [unintelligible], I don't even know what it was. But, sometimes being a great teammate, being a guy that won't complain when all you get are defensive-zone starts, being a guy that will fight every once in a while, being a guy that everybody loves means something. And that's the "eye test" sometimes, and sometimes it's better to have a guy even as bad as the numbers suggest... and you're only paying him a million and a half, not Deryk Engelland making \$3M, but sometimes GMs and coaches still would rather have these guys because they feel it's of greater benefit to the dressing room than having a guy that might be fifty spots higher on the possession list than Glass, but is a bit of a wild card in terms of the room.

DF: Yeah, I think you see it all around the league. I mean, even the guys you'd see as the smartest... an example I've been using lately is Ken Hitchcock in St. Louis. He's said some really, really progressive things about shot blocking, for example, like "we don't want to have large shot blocking totals, because that means we don't have the puck", and that's exactly right on what we've been saying. But then he plays someone like a Brenden Morrow or a Ryan Reaves instead of a Magnus Paajarvi when their problem is scoring, and you're wondering... what's happening here? And, like, all of these guys have one or two players that they just feel more comfortable with in the lineup for whatever reason, and I think that the key is to limit the importance of those guys. If they start shooting up the depth chart, then I think that's when you start to get into trouble, like when a second-line guy.

DM: I think the truth is probably a little closer than a lot of these things. Like, Benoît Pouliot getting \$5M a year, who's been a great advanced stats guy, but in two years, are we going to be saying "I can't believe they gave this guy \$5M a year"? Because being a good possession guy on the Rangers might not necessarily mean you might be a good possession guy on the Oilers. You have to take into consideration a lot of this stuff.

DF: Well, that's the thing. I mean, they gave Mark Fayne a big deal, too, and I like both of those signings, but, and Mike Santorelli is an example of this, but maybe he's not the best example because he only wound up getting 1 year, \$1.5M... you want to find the next Mike Santorelli, you don't want to pay Mike Santorelli for what he did, right? That's where the advanced stats come in handy, where you can find the market inefficiencies, and find the Benoît Pouliot who was paying for pocket change last year. You don't want to be paying him \$5M a year.

DM: But, I'm not saying this to beat up on the Oilers, because, I mean, teams overpay in free agency, and the Oilers have to over-overpay because it's tough for them to attract free agents, especially with their bid.

DF: And we see it with the Islanders, and the Panthers...

DM: So I'm not going to beat up the Oilers for paying a little more, because that's what they have to do.

DF: All right. Well, I think that's going to be good for your first appearance on the podcast.

DM: I didn't go too much off the rails. Next time, we'll try to be a little more...

DF: No, for sure. Maybe we can have a longer debate about "good team guys" versus... People can follow you @sportsnetmurph. What have you got on tap for the next few weeks?

DM: I've got Rogers Cup tennis in August, play-by-play, second court, men. So that'll be good. And then, just kind of prospects next week, and then take a little bit of time off. So, just around for the summer waiting for all the kick up come late September.

DF: Now that we've mentioned Mike Santorelli, one last thing... Do you have any inside knowledge on whether the Canucks were also offering him that, or...?

DM: I don't know what the number they were offering...

DF: Did they offer him a deal?

DM: I know they were in talks, but once they signed Vrbata to the \$5M, then they decided it was...

DF: That was kind of a little fishy to me, because I couldn't believe that...

DM: It wasn't one or the other.

DF: Well, if the Canucks offered him the same deal, I figured he would have stayed here.

DM: Maybe they weren't offering that much.

DF: Right, exactly. Well, Dan, thanks a lot for joining us, and we'll make sure to have you on again soon.

DM: You got it.

DF: Welcome to the Canucks Army Podcast. My name is Dmitri Filipovic, and sitting across from me is a special guest. I've been trying to get him on the podcast for a while now, and now that things have died down a little bit with the Canucks and hockey in general, he's finally found some time to join me. Dan Murphy, from Sportsnet.

DM: Thanks for having me on. It's fun to finally be on.

DF: You know, I just asked you before we started recording what you wanted to talk about and you said "whatever you want", so I guess we should start with the draft. I mean, I feel like that kind of seems like a logical decision. How much do you think that Jim Benning had to do with actual draft selections themselves, because obviously he was brought into the loop rather late in the process. I imagine the scouts work on all their scouting reports and filing reports and whatnot and coming up with decisions for months before Benning obviously came in in June.

DM: I'm going to guess he had a hand in it, but not a huge hand in it. I mean, I just look at the first selection and I think it's easier to be safe when you have a higher pick than I think if the Canucks, say, their first pick was at 25. I think when you have a scouting background you might have ideas who might be a better pick at that time. I think it might have been a year to be a little more hands-off, especially with that first pick in Virtanen. A lot of people saw it as being safe, but that's not a bad way to go when picking that high in the draft.

DF: And, you know, Virtanen is a guy we've been focusing on a lot at Canucks Army, obviously. We were kind of critical of the pick because we thought maybe William Nylander or someone might have had more upside, but we've come around to the fact that Virtanen... he shoots really hard, he skates really fast, he's a big kid, he's also a local boy. The Cam Neely things are kind of silly, but there's a lot to like there in terms of the prospect himself.

DM: And it's funny because I think a lot of people have always complained that the Canucks don't look in their own backyard. Right? For just... players, right? I mean, we heard "meat and potatoes", and I don't know if that's exactly what he meant to say...

DF: That was probably taken out of context.

DM: ...but I mean you see the player that they took, and also when they have the rankings in terms of meanness and nastiness and edge, he's right at the top. That's not a bad thing to have. I mean, Zack Kassian is kind of a local favorite already without doing a ton, because that's kind of the style he plays. He's big, he shoots, he's mean, he's a little unpredictable. They always say you rarely get a chance to trade for those players, you have to draft them. I don't know enough about these kids to say whether or not I really like the pick, but when it gets close to the draft you start reading up on them, and I kinda like what I *read* having not seen Virtanen play all that much.

DF: I'm in the same boat. I don't even pretend to be a prospect expert...

DM: Me too.

DF: ...so it's basically I'm taking everyone for their word. Yeah, that's honestly as much as I wanted to cover on the draft, because I feel that's not our area of expertise, but we can talk about free agency a lot more and the first big signing was the Ryan Miller signing. First, did you like that, or...?

DM: I guess I look at it two ways. It was clear they couldn't go into the season with Lack and Markstrom. You couldn't do that.

DF: You couldn't sell it.

DM: No. You needed a fallback position. So, the two ways they could have gone is kind of a 1 and a 1a... say it was Hiller was the guy they decided to go after. Then you have two guys that are basically... you know, not that Hiller would have made a ton more money, but you could say, OK, well, Lack is playing better, let's play him the bulk of the starts. I liked that idea for Lack, because Lack's not 22 or 23, he's a little bit older.

DF: All the grooming stuff is kind of silly to me because by the time Ryan Miller's contract expires, Lack's 30 years old.

DM: Exactly. So, the way they went... I heard they weren't high on Hiller, so maybe that wasn't a viable option for them. And the other thing you have to look at is when you put yourself as a fan's perspective you say "God, I'd love if they tanked and they got McDavid next year". And fans could say "I could handle one more year, they finished 26th last year". It'd be kind of fun to have what you haven't had for a long time, and maybe a chance at the number one overall pick. But you can't look in the eyes of the twins, or Kevin Bieksa, or these guys who've been here for a long time and still want to win and still want to have a chance to make the playoffs, and say "guys, we're going with Lack and Markstrom, and if Lack can't carry the ball for 50 games, we're kinda screwed".

DF: Right.

DM: And so, in that sense, I don't mind the Miller signing, but I just don't know what Miller is anymore. I mean, was he pretty good on a very bad Buffalo team? Then he goes to St. Louis and you read all about how the styles are different and he didn't face many shots, and maybe that's why he underperformed there. What I think you can say is that he's been better than average for a long time...

DF: Yeah, he's been above league average.

DM: ...so I think that that will give the team confidence that they do have a guy who's been around a long time and is not a one-year wonder. I do feel a little bit for Lack, although when you think about, when Lack was signed to his contract extension, he probably believed that Luongo was gonna still be here. So, he got it for a little bit, and it was only taken away from him after 20-30 games, and he seems to be the kinda kid that's not gonna bother him that much. So, you never know, what if next year, or this year, Miller's not playing great. Who's to say they can't give Lack a bunch of starts in a row?

DF: Another goalie controversy in Vancouver!

DM: Right? Yeah, but you know what, in the grand scheme of things, if you have a controversy, that means one of two things: Lack's playing very well, or Miller's not playing great.

DF: It's tough, because I didn't like the third year they gave [Miller]. That's what I liked about the Hiller contract a lot more. If they gave Ryan Miller even \$6.5M for two years or something, I would have been a lot happier with that. It's just kind of curious to me, because I'm not sure what the direction of team is right now. I think that last year is basically the worst case scenario, and unless they actually are planning on playing Gaunce and Horvat and Shinkaruk, you know, playing these young guys, I think that they are kind of poised for that again, which would be my big concern. I love the Radim Vrbata signing a lot, and I think he could score 30 goals realistically with the Sedins next year, but other than that, I don't really see what's changed here.

DM: Well, I know you guys cover this a lot more, but weren't the Canucks still a pretty good possession team last year?

DF: They were, they were.

DM: So, it's easy to say "oh, man, they were 26th last year with Garrison and Kesler, and now they don't have either of those guys, they don't really have a second line, we don't know who's going to be on the

first line, how could it get better?". But, really, last year was as bad as it's going to be. I don't believe the twins will have that bad of a year. There's no chance Burrows has that bad of a year. Right?

DF: [chuckles] Yeah.

DM: I'm going to kind of equate it, and it might not be quite proper, but... Remember when they traded Bertuzzi? You know, they were still supposed to be a good team. The locker room, he was a bit of a drain on the room at that time, they moved him away, and people were like "OK, let's embrace change; it might not be very good, but, I mean, it's a breath of fresh air". And then they went and won the division. I mean, Luongo was unconscious for eight months, and that's not going to happen again, but there's was a freshness, and I think the room feels that. I don't think it was that bad with Kesler, but it can be an emotional drain with a guy who doesn't want to be there, probably was a little sulky at the end of last year, he's constantly talking about this team's not going to win now, it's in a rebuild... To get that personality out of the room, that might be a breath of fresh air.

DF: Yeah.

DM: Plus, Tortorella wasn't easy. Some guys didn't like him, obviously.

DF: Obviously, whenever a guy's out the door, as we saw with Kesler just now, people love to share stories that they wouldn't have ever shared while the guy was still there. How much of all the Tortorella stuff do you think was actually true?

DM: I've heard different stories, and I'm not going to talk out of class, but what I heard was that... he was unreasonably... crazy at times. Like, the stupidest things would drive him off the wall. So, if little things would, can you imagine the bigger things when you finally lose it? When you saw him late in the season when a goal would go in, Sportsnet or whoever would cut to him, and the body language on the bench was just not what a coach has to be. I don't know how many times we heard throughout the year last year "I've got to realize which guys I can push, which guys I can't". He was saying that until the final game, so you know he never pulled the reins back. He probably went after Edler all the time, he went after Burrows all the time, he went after Hansen all the time, and it was more of a browbeating to try and get these guys to improve, which obviously didn't work. I think the one guy he did pull back on was Hamhuis, and that was early on, because he realized "this guy's not going respond to this, and I can't lose him, he's one of our top two defensemen".

DF: Yep.

DM: So, I think there was a lot of stories that were true, but guys that I've talked to privately, like... The twins will never bash someone on the way out the door. Bieksa would never bash them. They'll say "listen, there's a coach, you do what the coach says, maybe it didn't work", but there are some guys that will bash him. I don't think there's a lot of guys that are gonna say mean things now that he's done, but it's clear something was off.

DF: I mean, it's clear by the fact we haven't heard any rumblings that any team is really interested in him in any coaching capacity at all, right? That's kind of telling that a guy's been on the market for this long now.

DM: He came in last year and he said "I want to learn, I want to have a better relationship with the media, and I want to learn from my mistakes in New York knowing that the players hated me when I got fired in the exit meetings". Well, he learned the media part, he was great. He was awesome for us. If there was nothing going on, you could go to his press conference, and you got a story. Somehow.

DF: The Desjardins press conference was also really good, too, and while I was listening to it, in the back of my mind I kept thinking about the Summer Summit last year, when Tortorella put on this great speech about how he was a different coach, how this was a youth movement... He said "youth movement" like it was a drinking game or something. He kept bringing up Horvat and whatnot, and how Kassian was going to be playing with the Sedins, and then none of this stuff happened.

DM: But, I mean, that's a couple years in a row now we've heard that, but once a coach gets behind the bench, he wants to win. I think that's why the Kassian thing this year is going to be very interesting, because for the first time... he's not a horse in the race for Benning or Desjardins. They didn't trade for him. And if the previous two coaches, who were under Gillis and Gillis obviously wanted the kid to do well because he traded Hodgson for him, they didn't want to play him in the top six, clearly, when everybody wants to see him in the top six... I think this year is going to be very interesting. Will he get a chance, or will another coach say... [sighs]

DF: But, what are we constituting as a chance? I'm not one of the people that wants to see him with the Sedins. I don't see that fit. I just wrote this about his two year deal that he just signed, and I think the size that he has, 6'3", 215, is both a blessing and a curse in this case because people see him and they think that he should be finishing around the net, and that he should be bullying people, but I think he's much more like a perimeter playmaker, wouldn't you say?

DM: Yeah.

DF: So, I'm not sure that him playing with Henrik Sedin is necessarily the best decision.

DM: Maybe he's better suited on the second line.

DF: Right, and looking at the depth chart, a fit with Burrows and Higgins, for example, would be something the team should really explore.

DM: Yeah, you have the danger when you have a guy that's that big and has a mean streak to try to push him into a role that's perhaps is not best suited to him. Right? We saw that with Bertuzzi, although Bertuzzi did like it more in front of the net, but he was a playmaker, too, but he was very comfortable in front of the net taking hits and pushing off guys. So, you're right, but all that aside, there must be something there if the previous two coaches were reluctant to give him more minutes, and I don't know if that's a hockey thing, or an off-the-ice thing...

DF: I think it definitely is [a hockey thing], because when the puck's not on his stick, you can tell, he kind of looks lost at times. He's skating around, looking around, and that's when he gets himself into trouble, when he starts targeting guys' numbers, right?

DM: I think part of that was because Tortorella said "we need you to hammer people, we need you to finish your checks". He probably was trying to turn him into something...

DF: Unleash the beast!

DM: ...like, with, Dale Weise. Dale Weise totally thought "the only way I could make him happy is if I fought every shift". And that was the way Tortorella wanted him to play, and if you didn't play that way, then you weren't going to be in his good books, so maybe Desjardins sees him as a different type of player and maybe he gets a chance.

DF: So, pivoting off of Kassian, the other big RFA that's still on the board is Chris Tanev. It's been oddly quiet about him, right? He got injured toward the end of the year, and he kind of disappeared, and then his name started coming up a lot in trade rumors for the first overall pick to the Panthers, but we haven't necessarily heard much about negotiations or where he currently stands with the team. What's happening there? Do you have any idea?

DM: Yeah, I've talked to his agent Ross Gurney a couple of times, and I think that the negotiations won't be easy. I mean, now that Weber's signed, now that Kassian's signed, you start to see how much money's left in terms of what they can give to Vey and Tanev. Now, the word I was given is that they've talked, obviously they've turned down the qualifying offer, and negotiations have been difficult. Now, there's still a long time to go here, and maybe the team knows that arbitration's probably not best for Tanev, but they also don't want to alienate this kid that, likely, we all think of in the top four. Obviously, right? But arb could be difficult for him and his agent because a lot of times arbitration is goals, assists, ice time...

DF: Which he doesn't have a lot of.

DM: Exactly. I'm sure that's changing, though. People are going to use all the numbers to their advantage.

DF: So you think they actually are using advanced stats for...

DM: I guarantee it. I guarantee it. Agents that are smart now? Why wouldn't they? If your client doesn't have enough of a traditional...

DF: Yeah, if it's supporting your case, right?

DM: Yeah, and I'll bet they'll trot out the quotes from last year that Tortorella said how many times that he was the team's best defenseman. Well, that's one man's opinion, and maybe a crazy man, but you can't ignore it. Linden's no dummy. Benning's no dummy. They know this kid is young. Let's say they do end up giving him \$2.5M. That's still not very expensive for a top four defensemen when they can say Deryk Engelland's worth \$3M.

DF: [laughs]

DM: Right? They'll figure out a number, I'm sure of it, because it's still a good opportunity for Tanev here and I don't think you want to give away a guy going into a second contract that can play a lot of minutes.

DF: And that has been developing. I mean, we did see a little bit of that offensive game start to emerge last year.

DM: I think they've pulled the reins back on him a bit, and said "you worry about your defensive side, and then maybe as you grow, we'll let you jump a little bit more".

DF: Correct me if I'm mistaken, but I feel like last summer, he took that one year deal with the thought that he'd play his way into more money...

DM: Because there wasn't any money last year, and they said they'll take the one year deal. Sorry, that's his third contract. That was the bridge deal. Yeah, I agree. I don't know what the number is for him.

DF: It's probably around three, I've heard.

DM: And how many years? Three years?

DF: That's the thing. That's what I'd be a little worried about, because he is young, but the way he plays and what we've seen from him so far, I'm worried about him breaking down.

DM: Because he never got injured forever, and then all of a sudden, the injuries started to pile up.

DF: But, he throws his body around with reckless abandon. I feel like that's kind of what makes him effective, so if you told him to stop blocking shots in these acrobatic manners, I wonder if his effectiveness would drop.

DM: The acrobatic manner might, again, have had something to do with Tortorella this year.

DF: Right? Stop throwing your face in the shooting lane.

DM: I can honestly say there's no one close on the Canucks who's taken more hard hits than Tanev. The guy's just been evaporated a number of times.

DF: So, the Canucks are going to have a few million dollars left. Benning came on and said they're basically done, the roster they have right now is what's going to be heading into training camp. Do you think that's true?

DM: I think that's probably true at this point.

DF: Isn't that a little concerning based on... who is going to score goals on this team?

DM: Well, that's the whole thing.

DF: Ryan Miller?

DM: [laughs] Yeah. Well, obviously, they tried to get Iginla, and I'm kind of glad they didn't.

DF: The third year was ridiculous.

DM: I had heard Vancouver wasn't impossible for him, but I don't think he was really interested at this point in his career in coming to Vancouver. Yeah, the whole thing is who is going to score goals? Maybe you leave a little cap, see what happens, see what starts, maybe you find somebody that's unhappy somewhere else, maybe wait to make a trade. Nice to have a bit of room, but I still don't know which

young guys slot in where. Again, where are the young guys gonna play? Is Horvat gonna get a chance to center the fourth line?

DF: I think that's the plan right now.

DM: Yeah, but we've heard that's been the plan for... I don't think Shinkaruk's ready, I don't think Gaunce is probably ready.

DF: Well, luckily for Shinkaruk, he can go to the AHL and he can play for a while. I don't really think you want to send Horvat back to London. There's not much more he can learn there.

DM: So, let's say you hope Horvat scores 20. Is that fair?

DF: Yeah.

DM: And you hope Burrows gets back to 20. Is that fair?

DF: I think that's fair, yeah.

DM: And where did Kassian end up last year, 14?

DF: He was shooting a really high percentage, so he'll probably be around there.

DM: Say 15. And the twins are not going to have less.

DF: And you have the Boninos, the Veys...

DM: They're not going to be scoring goals at the 2011 rate, but I think they should be scoring more. And if just on the power play you get that percentage up 7 or 8 percent, what is that, a goal every two games on the power play? Somewhere in there? I don't even know.

DF: What was going on there? I feel like nobody really took the blame for the power play. I mean, obviously I think Tortorella sort of did, because stuff started coming out that he refused to practice it in practices. Glen Gulutzan was technically responsible for it, right?

DM: I don't know if he was, though. It seemed to me like Glen didn't... It was Sullivan and Torts, and I might be wrong, but seemingly Sullivan and Torts were fairly insulated and Glen was kind of like the third guy.

DF: Glen's my favorite, because the camera would sometimes pan to him on the bench and he'd be chewing gum and he kind of looks like he's in his own world, but apparently the players love him, from what I've heard.

DM: Yeah, I think he's had a good relationship with the players, I just don't think he was given much of a chance. We certainly think that Lidster's coming to be the right-hand man for Willie, so that makes Glen the third man, so I don't know exactly how it's going to pan out for him again this time. I don't think Willie's a hard ass, but I don't think he can have three back-patters. I don't know much about Lidster as a coach, but he's pretty straight.

DF: Right, that's what I've heard as well. It's going to be interesting to see what happens with Travis Green down in Utica, because he did take down what is, I imagine, a better deal, right? Getting to the NHL in any capacity is probably the dream, so, but I'm sure the Canucks told him he's in the future plans in some capacity.

DM: Or maybe he thought he's still better off to be a head coach at that level, and maybe it's not the Canucks that give him his chance. Because if it's two more years in Utica, maybe he gets a job somewhere else, because if guys do a good job down there now, guys do get jobs.

DF: It's true, yeah, we're seeing it.

DM: I mean, Blashill was talked to... Not talked to. Five or six teams asked the Wings and they said no.

DF: And then they gave him that contract extension.

DM: And it's generally believed that he'll just take over for Babcock.

DF: Well, it's a good backup plan, right? The shelf life on these coaches is so short. We're seeing with the Canucks right now that you can't really have no backup plan. One final thing I wanted to ask you... I was at the draft. I was scheduled to talk to either Benning or Linden, and then they made the two trades right before the draft, and then it was a media circus around them, so I didn't get to ask them any questions, unfortunately. How progressive do you think they are going to be, and add Desjardins into this mix, in terms of application of advanced stats? Linden hasn't shot it down by any means, but he admitted as much that he wasn't too fluent in the speak, and then when he was asked again about it, he said something like "I'm downloading all of the data", which...

DM: I think most teams now are. He's a pretty progressive guy, and Gilman's still involved, and he's always been a proponent for such things. I don't know how many teams in the league take them super serious, but I think it's on the rise quite a bit, and I think you'd be crazy not to at this point because I think if you look at the track record... and this is where it hasn't been around for a long time, and even with the way they're collected, and it's probably not perfect...

DF: But I don't think anyone claims it is, right?

DM: No, no, but even if it's not perfect, it still bears fruit with what people are saying, so you can't ignore it.

DF: That's... kind of interesting and good to hear. [laughs]

DM: But, even though I say that... some teams, and we've talked about it and I think at some point this would be a good podcast, at some point there are still some players that are awful when it comes to advanced stats but still get jobs, and I think Tanner Glass is a guy, right?

DF: He got three years!

DM: Three years. And sometimes, possession-wise, yes, obviously the numbers bear that he's the worst guy in the league, [unintelligible], I don't even know what it was. But, sometimes being a great teammate, being a guy that won't complain when all you get are defensive-zone starts, being a guy that will fight

every once in a while, being a guy that everybody loves means something. And that's the "eye test" sometimes, and sometimes it's better to have a guy even as bad as the numbers suggest... and you're only paying him a million and a half, not Deryk Engelland making \$3M, but sometimes GMs and coaches still would rather have these guys because they feel it's of greater benefit to the dressing room than having a guy that might be fifty spots higher on the possession list than Glass, but is a bit of a wild card in terms of the room.

DF: Yeah, I think you see it all around the league. I mean, even the guys you'd see as the smartest... an example I've been using lately is Ken Hitchcock in St. Louis. He's said some really, really progressive things about shot blocking, for example, like "we don't want to have large shot blocking totals, because that means we don't have the puck", and that's exactly right on what we've been saying. But then he plays someone like a Brenden Morrow or a Ryan Reaves instead of a Magnus Paajarvi when their problem is scoring, and you're wondering... what's happening here? And, like, all of these guys have one or two players that they just feel more comfortable with in the lineup for whatever reason, and I think that the key is to limit the importance of those guys. If they start shooting up the depth chart, then I think that's when you start to get into trouble, like when a second-line guy.

DM: I think the truth is probably a little closer than a lot of these things. Like, Benoît Pouliot getting \$5M a year, who's been a great advanced stats guy, but in two years, are we going to be saying "I can't believe they gave this guy \$5M a year"? Because being a good possession guy on the Rangers might not necessarily mean you might be a good possession guy on the Oilers. You have to take into consideration a lot of this stuff.

DF: Well, that's the thing. I mean, they gave Mark Fayne a big deal, too, and I like both of those signings, but, and Mike Santorelli is an example of this, but maybe he's not the best example because he only wound up getting 1 year, \$1.5M... you want to find the next Mike Santorelli, you don't want to pay Mike Santorelli for what he did, right? That's where the advanced stats come in handy, where you can find the market inefficiencies, and find the Benoît Pouliot who was paying for pocket change last year. You don't want to be paying him \$5M a year.

DM: But, I'm not saying this to beat up on the Oilers, because, I mean, teams overpay in free agency, and the Oilers have to over-overpay because it's tough for them to attract free agents, especially with their bid.

DF: And we see it with the Islanders, and the Panthers...

DM: So I'm not going to beat up the Oilers for paying a little more, because that's what they have to do.

DF: All right. Well, I think that's going to be good for your first appearance on the podcast.

DM: I didn't go too much off the rails. Next time, we'll try to be a little more...

DF: No, for sure. Maybe we can have a longer debate about "good team guys" versus... People can follow you @sportsnetmurph. What have you got on tap for the next few weeks?

DM: I've got Rogers Cup tennis in August, play-by-play, second court, men. So that'll be good. And then, just kind of prospects next week, and then take a little bit of time off. So, just around for the summer waiting for all the kick up come late September.

DF: Now that we've mentioned Mike Santorelli, one last thing... Do you have any inside knowledge on whether the Canucks were also offering him that, or...?

DM: I don't know what the number they were offering...

DF: Did they offer him a deal?

DM: I know they were in talks, but once they signed Vrbata to the \$5M, then they decided it was...

DF: That was kind of a little fishy to me, because I couldn't believe that...

DM: It wasn't one or the other.

DF: Well, if the Canucks offered him the same deal, I figured he would have stayed here.

DM: Maybe they weren't offering that much.

DF: Right, exactly. Well, Dan, thanks a lot for joining us, and we'll make sure to have you on again soon.

DM: You got it.