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LEAFS IMMEDIATE CUP THREATS WITH TAVARES SIGNING

OK, they can start working on that 2019 Stanley Cup parade route in Toronto. Start on Yonge and Dundas, over to Queen Street, take a left turn on Tavares Road ... What? They haven't named a street after John Tavares yet? Wasn't that part of the contract? Seven years, \$77 million, dinner once a week at Doug Ford's, a tribute song from Drake, the tip of the CN Tower being reshaped into a 'T' for Tavares, and the renaming of Bay Street to Tavares Road. That was the deal. Read the contract's fine print. It was Canada Day on July 1, but the fireworks weren't limited to colourful late-night sky explosions. There were hockey fireworks too, none more explosive than the signing by Toronto Maple Leafs of Tavares, the first superstar free agent to leave his original team since Scott Niedermayer bolted from New Jersey to Anaheim in 2005. What happened in Mickey Mouse Land? The Ducks won a cup in Niedermayer's second year with the club, that's all.

Leafs' fans won't have the patience to wait for Tavares' second year with the team to win the Cup. Toronto racked up the third-highest point total in the Eastern Conference last year (tying the 105 points earned by Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals) and the addition of Tavares should mean at least three or four more victories. Why not 82-0? OK, then 80-2.

Tavares was believed to be considering either a return to his Islanders, or else the San Jose Sharks or the Leafs. Toronto fans couldn't believe their good fortune when the 27-year-old sniper, who has 272 goals and 621 points in his nine NHL seasons, chose the Leafs, saying it was a boyhood dream for the Mississauga native to play for his hometown team.

The Leafs are solid in goal with Frederick Andersen and up front, with their star players all having youth on their side, but their defence needs some work. General manager Kyle Dubas and team president Brendan Shanahan will obviously be getting down to work with Coach Mike Babcock to solidify that defensive unit.

The addition of Tavares gives the Leafs two superstars at centre — Auston Matthews is the other, of course — and 30-goal man Nazem Kadri centres the third line. No team in the NHL can match that strength down the middle.

The Leafs, undoubtedly 'Canada's team', have thousands more joyous fans today than they had on June 30, when Tavares was in limbo. Now that he's out of limbo and into the Leafs' lineup, there will be no satisfaction until that Stanley Cup parade winds its way down Tavares Road.

- **Randy Turner** of the Winnipeg Free Press, on Twitter: "I could be mistaken, but the problem with Tavares signing in Toronto is that I fear the Leafs will now get a disproportionate amount of attention from the national media."
- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**, after 63-year-old golfer **Greg Norman** posed nude in the ESPN Magazine body issue: "The caption under the photo is 'This should get those punks off my lawn.'"
- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "University of Michigan researchers have designed a computer that is smaller than a grain of rice. The screen is so tiny, we hear, that even the Orioles' playoff chances won't fit on it."
- **Danny Woodhead** on Twitter, after **DeMarcus Cousins** signed with Golden State: "Sources: **Sidney Crosby**, **Roger Federer**, **Mike Trout**, and **Dustin Johnson** are all expected to sign with the Warriors. **Bill Belichick** also expected to be one of Kerr's assistants."
- **Scott Ostler** of the San Francisco Chronicle: "Soccer fans wonder, if Senegal and Japan had had an equal number of yellow cards, what would the next tie-breaker have been? Answer: The team with the best haircuts advances."
- Comedy writer **Jim Barach**: "**Graeme McDowell** had to withdraw from a British Open qualifier when Air France lost his clubs. Their promise to deliver the clubs on time turned from 'oui' to 'IOU.'"
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "The CFL Eskimos are talking with the Inuit about changing their team name, which reportedly means 'eaters of raw meat.' I always thought it meant 'eliminate Bombers from playoffs.'"
- Another one from **Currie**: "Reuters reports an India ATM stopped working because a rat got in and ate thousands of dollars in cash before choking. Probably how the Cleveland Cavaliers feel about **JR Smith**."
- **Janice Hough** of leftcoastsportsbabe.com: "**Jenrry Mejia** has been reinstated by MLB two years after being given a lifetime ban for PEDs. Because playing for the Mets is punishment enough?"
- **Dwight Perry** again: "Authorities in Manitoba have dropped marijuana charges against Saskatchewan Roughriders receiver **Duron Carter**. Apparently the instant-replay booth ruled he didn't have possession."
- Syndicated columnist **Norman Chad**, on the U.S. failing to qualify for the World Cup: "If it is any consolation, we also stink in math, civil rights, education, gun control, supporting the arts, climate-change awareness, electoral security and cable news." *Care to comment? Email brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca*