

BETTER TIMES AHEAD FOR SENATORS

Is the hockey world ready for the Ottawa Senators to become a powerhouse? No? Would you settle for contender?

General manager Pierre Dorion may not have been No. 1 as far as winning the NHL off-season goes, but he wasn't far off. And on close inspection of the Senators' depth chart, it's apparent the Canadian capital team is poised to snap a streak of five straight seasons of missing the playoffs.

To start with, Ottawa coach D.J. Smith guided an improving team last year, when they finished ahead of six other NHL teams with 73 points, good for seventh place (of eight) in the Atlantic Division. But the Senators showed promise with its strong base of young offensive stars Brady Tkachuk, Tim Stutzle, Josh Norris and Drake Batherson. But wow!, what an off-season the Senators had. For starters, Alex DeBrincat, just 24 years old, arrived in a trade for draft picks from the tanking Chicago Blackhawks, who seem intent on being so bad that their chances of winning Connor Bedard in next year's draft are greatly enhanced. All DeBrincat has done in his five-year career is score 140 goals, including 41 last season with the Hawks. Arriving as a free agent in July was grizzled veteran Claude Giroux, a longtime Philadelphia Flyer, who is only 73 points away from 1,000 for his career. Giroux will provide leadership to the Senators youth along with tremendous offensive skill, especially on the powerplay. One of two first-round draft picks the team had in 2020, Ridley Greig, was one of the stalwarts on Canada's world junior hockey team this year and could crack the Senators' roster this fall. Defensively, the Sens have high hopes for their other 2020 first-round pick, Jake Sanderson, who missed most of last year with an injury. He joins blueline stalwarts Thomas Chabot, Artem Zub and young Erik Brannstrom, who was acquired in the Mark Stone deal with Vegas a couple of years ago. Dorion then bolstered the team's goaltending by picking up veteran Cam Talbot, who will compete with Anton Forsberg for minutes between the pipes.

Columbus Blue Jackets (adding Johnny Gaudreau), Carolina Hurricanes (Max Pacioretty and Brent Burns) and Detroit Red Wings (Andrew Copp, David Perron and Dominik Kubalik) also had productive, roster-improving off-seasons, but the Senators may have done the most to improve their chances at playoff or Stanley Cup contention.

Ottawa puts its new-look squad on display Oct. 13 in Buffalo and then plays in Toronto Oct. 15 before settling in at home for five consecutive games. A 7-0 start would certainly open a few eyes around the NHL and maybe even spark some celebratory horn-honking on the streets of Ottawa.

- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**, via Twitter, on stationary-bicycle maker Peleton company being in financial trouble: "For some reason the company is just spinning its wheels and not going anywhere."
- European pro golfer **Eddie Pepperill**, no fan of the LIV golf tour, on Twitter: "LIV airlines. Though it may look like it seats 150 people, it in fact seats only 48 due to the size of their egos."
- **Producer Soph**, on Twitter: "Can I make a suggestion? Team Homan/Fleury = Team Heury. Heury hard."
- Former NFL quarterback **Sage Rosenfels**, on Twitter, in a back-handed reference to former team-mate **Brett Favre**, currently embroiled in a controversy over misuse of public funds in Mississippi: "Since retirement, I have been lucky to avoid stealing millions of dollars from the poorest people in my state."
- Columnist **Norman Chad**, on Twitter: "QB **Tom Brady** added to Tampa Bay Buccaneers 'injury report Friday with injury to his right ring finger after **Giselle** reportedly attempted to remove his wedding band."
- Super sarcasm from comedy guy **Brad Dickson** of Omaha, referencing the Nebraska Cornhuskers' coaching job: "Folks who don't want to hire **Urban Meyer** are misguided types who put character, ethics and morality above wins and losses. I feel sorry for them."
- Headline at theonion.com: "**Aaron Rodgers** Downplays Rough Start As Normal Ups And Downs Of Massive Global Conspiracy"
- **Scott Ostler** of the San Francisco Chronicle: "If MLB hitters have walk-up songs, they should also be required to have slink-back songs for when they strike out, songs to be chosen by the opposing team's pitching staff. Some possibilities: 'Smoke Gets In Your Eyes,' 'I'm Missing You,' 'Heat of the Moment,' 'Walk Away, Renee' and 'Blue Bayou' (blew by you)."
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com, after archaeologists in Georgia found a 1.8 million-year-old human tooth: "They believe this cements the region as home to Europe's earliest prehistoric hockey team."
- **Bob Molinaro** of pilotonline.com (Hampton Va.) on the **Aaron Judge** vs. **Shohei Ohtani** MVP argument: "For what it's worth, **Babe Ruth** didn't win the 1927 MVP after hitting 60 home runs. His teammate **Lou Gehrig** did." *Care to comment? Email brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca*