

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Kenny Albert

Brian Boucher

Keith Jones

John McGuinness

Moderator Jamie Palatini

Press Conference



just wanted to say, and obviously we're a little bit biased, but I think NBC has done such a remarkable job over the last 15 years presenting game to a U.S. audience, over 100 games per year.

The Vin Scully of hockey is "Doc" Emrick, the best analyst out there. The advent of the Winter Classic and Stadium Series Games, which NBC was such a big part of, which has meant so much to the league and the teams over the last 10 or 12 years. And also the introduction of the Inside the Glass position 15 years ago with Pierre initially.

I think that's really, when you think about it, that's led to about 50 jobs around the league. Every team has either a former player or a reporter inside the glass, the Canadian networks as well.

I think when the history books are written on the NBC era with the NHL over the last 15 years, the entire network has so much to be proud of.

BRIAN BOUCHER: Well said. I'm one of the beneficiaries of those 50 jobs with the Inside the Glass position being introduced by NBC. So I'm certainly grateful for that.

And I agree with you -- I think NBC has done a fantastic job over this time where they have the broadcasting rights and I've been extremely proud to be a part of this team since retiring.

You touched on a lot of the good stuff there, Kenny. What stands out to me in this series as well as the introduction of some younger guys in the playoffs and a chance for them to kind of shine and show who they are, and I think for Montreal last night, I think we saw a little bit of nerves from some of the young guys, although (indiscernible), Suzuki and Kotkaniemi did terrific last year in the bubble.

When you get to the Final it's a whole new ball game. And their first stab at the Stanley Cup Finals maybe didn't go the way they wanted, but certainly some talent in Montreal's lineup with guys like Suzuki, Caufield, Kotkaniemi, so looking forward to them bouncing back in Game 2.

And also when I think about this series, this is really the first goaltending matchup in over maybe six, seven years where we got two guys that I think we're going to see in the

JAMIE PALATINI: Thank you for joining our NBC Sports 2021 Stanley Cup Final media conference call. We'll be joined by our NHL on NBC commentators Kenny Albert, Brian Boucher and Keith Jones, as well as our coordinating producer John McGuinness.

It is certainly a unique season, a condensed schedule, but I think one thing that's stayed consistent that we all agree upon is the quality of the play on the ice that we've seen, especially through these playoffs. And we've been proud to bring it all to you on the networks of NBC.

To that point we'll start with brief remarks from our speakers.

JOHN MCGUINNESS: NBC, even though it's our final season, we're very psyched about the playoffs and the Stanley Cup Final. From our very first year when we took over we try to do our best and we think we've really pushed the production of the game forward.

We're going to finish up strong here in our final hurrah, as it would be, and we look forward to a seven-game series.

KENNY ALBERT: It was great to get underway last night here in Tampa. I think it was a closer game than the final score indicated, 2-1 in the third period before the Lightning scored the three late goals. I think Tampa is such a well-rounded team, not just the high-flying Lightning of four or five years ago. They really changed their identity following the loss to Columbus in 2019.

Then with Montreal, there's been something magical similar to their run in the Cup Final in '93. And just to piggyback off what John McGuinness just touched on, I



Hockey Hall of Fame going against one another.

And for two periods it looked like it was settling into what could have been a terrific goalie matchup, if not for Tampa Bay Lightning opening it up in the third period. But I think it's going to be a great goalie matchup in the next series. I'm looking forward to how it plays out.

I'm sure Montreal isn't happy with Game 1, but I'm sure they'll make adjustments to their game. I'm sure they'll be a lot more comfortable in Game 2. And if they can get out of Tampa with a split, I think that's all they were looking for when they came down here to begin with. Looking forward to a great series. Thank you.

KEITH JONES: I guess there's two things that really stand out to me about this series. Number one is as a kid I always enjoyed greatness watching teams like the New York Islanders and their Stanley Cup championship teams, the Edmonton Oilers after that. The Colorado Avalanche, the Detroit Red Wings. And Tampa is one of those teams that's looking like they're similar in many ways.

They're great. And I think we all enjoy watching teams that are extremely well put together and have star talent that have a chance to win multiple Stanley Cups. So I think a lot of fans like watching Tampa perform.

And also I look back at being a young person watching hockey and I always loved the underdog as well. And the Montreal Canadiens are every bit of that. They've been since the playoffs started. They've become a terrific story. And they've got Tampa right where they want them.

Tampa is heavily favored after that first game. And that's right where the Canadiens like to be. I think it will make for an intriguing race to the finish.

I echo John McGuinness' thoughts; looks like this one could go seven, even though Tampa performed extremely well. And by the end of the game a lopsided victory by score, but as Kenny Albert said, it was a lot closer game than that.

So that's what I've got on the series so far. I'm looking forward to the rest of it.

JAMIE PALATINI: I think we can now open it up for questions from the press.

Q. This is for John. Could you explain exactly what the restrictions are going to be like for your crew in Montreal and exactly what the protocols are going to be?

JOHN MCGUINNESS: Sure. The Canadian government, as you probably know, is very restrictive on who can come in and out of the country. And we are sending our announce team up there along with most of our camera crew and a production truck on site.

And we'll be taking that feed with our announcers back to Tampa, actually, in our truck there. And the producer and director will be down in Tampa communicating with the announcers.

There's a lot of red tape that our announcers have to go through. There's quarantining. They can talk about it. But even in Tampa they're not allowed out of their hotel rooms.

The only places they can go to are the arena and their hotel room. And to put all of our crew through that was just logistically going to be a nightmare for us, to be honest with you. So that's our plan going into the Finals.

Q. How many people will you have in Montreal total?

JOHN MCGUINNESS: Can I get back with you an accurate number? Probably 50 or 60 people. But I just want to give you the right number.

Q. First question I've got for John and then Brian. John, when you look at obviously this being NBC's final Stanley Cup Final under this current deal before it moves on to another network, I wanted from your perspective, when you look at the legacy of what NBC did, Kenny touched on it -- from your perspective just what some of the things that NBC did that, with hockey coverage, that you think you'll continue to see those fingerprints moving forward. Brian, you talked about Inside the Glass role. Could you expand on that, too? See how that's evolved over the years.

JOHN MCGUINNESS: First, I think the credit has to go to Sam Flood, our executive producer, who is a hockey player. He used to play at Williams College. I don't know if he was any good or not. If you talked to him he'll give you a good tale about it.

He came up with the Inside the Glass position, so full credit goes to him for that. As Bouch and Kenny said, that's really opened up the game. We've heard some great things in between the benches and some firsthand information down there.

The Winter Classic, I think, is another example of us working together with the league from our programming department, the outdoor game stadium series, the All-Star Game, where it's now gone to a 3-on-3 format as opposed to kind of a shootout that nobody -- sort of lost its luster a

little bit. I think that kind of added some oomph to it.

So I think those would probably be the major things. We have also covered every playoff game with our announcers. We had an all-female crew production and announcers do a game recently. I'm very proud of that.

There's a lot of things that we did sort of behind the scenes, just with different camera angles and replays and super slow-mos and X-mos and trying to use the technology as much as we could. We had drones out at the outdoor game in Lake Tahoe.

Personally I wish ESPN and Turner success. And hopefully they'll push the envelope even further and make the games more enjoyable.

BRIAN BOUCHER: I think your question was how has it evolved. When this position was first introduced, I was still playing. And then I come in, I've been doing it now for six years.

It's a unique area to watch the game and try to analyze from. There are times when you miss things. It's fast down at ice level. And you can't pretend that you see everything.

I think you certainly see the game a lot better from upstairs with regards to how plays develop and whatnot. But you also get a different feel down at ice level for the temperature of the game, the speed of the game. And as John mentioned, sometimes you hear things that you would not hear when you're upstairs.

And I think it's just great to be part of a three-person broadcast in the sense that you get the perspective from upstairs, but you also get a different perspective downstairs and maybe the angles where there's traffic in front of the net or the angle coming down my side of the ice that I see, that the goalie would see and that the benches see. I think those are valuable things to highlight. I think it's benefited the broadcast in my opinion.

As I said, Kenny mentioned it, it added 50 jobs. I'm one of those guys that it added a job to. So I'm very grateful to be able to do it.

Q. A question about the Lightning and specifically about breaking point line against the Suzuki-Caufield-Toffoli line. What can that line do differently, what does that line need to do differently in this series to kind of, obviously, win that matchup or at least tolerate that matchup?

KEITH JONES: It's going to be a huge challenge.

Experience, obviously, is the advantage that the point line has. And talent is also at the top of the chart. So the mixture on that line of Palat with his physicality and his ability to win puck battles makes it challenging to try to slow them down. He's going to be able to retrieve pucks if they do turn them over. The creativity of Kucherov drives some of the best veteran checking players in the league nuts. So that's going to be a challenge.

And Brayden Point simply does it all and he does it at a high rate of speed, not just with quickness but he's really fast also. And so are his hands.

So a lot of what we're going to see from Cole Caufield in the next five years are things that Brayden Point excels at right now and has the experience to be able to know how to get it done at the biggest moments.

Looks like Caufield is going to have that type of career but it's a big ask for him right now to face up against that line.

If I was Montreal, I would look to try to get away from that matchup. It's a lot more difficult on the road. But for Luke Richardson, that will be one of the challenges for him, trying to get the nose line out there against point line as much as possible and try to disrupt Tampa's top line, which has been very difficult for every other opponent so far in the playoffs.

As for Suzuki, he's an extremely intelligent hockey player. I think that's going to benefit him in that type of matchup, but he'll be asked to play in his own end an awful lot.

I think it's obviously an advantage Tampa. And it's something, if I was Montreal, I would try to do some quick changes. I would try to avoid that matchup as much as possible.

BRIAN BOUCHER: The only thing I would add to that is maybe Richardson could get creative, too, and maybe mix up the centers. So maybe Suzuki goes with Gallagher and Lehtonen, and you put Danault with Toffoli in certain situations in case you get stuck. At least you have Danault out there to kind of help out. That could be another way that you do it. Or otherwise you just quick change as fast as possible.

But if you start doing that then you get out of the flow of the game too. It will be interesting to see how Richardson handles it. There's a problem here in Tampa no doubt about it. It's not going to get better really until they get to Montreal.

Maybe if it comes down to that, it's about digging in. The guys will have to make sure they manage the puck better

than they did because it led to offense for Tampa.

Q. For Kenny and Keith what will you remember most about the NBC's coverage of the NHL? And is there a specific moment or two, maybe it's a game or series, that stands out and why?

KENNY ALBERT: To me I've been affiliated with NBC since the 2002 Winter Olympics. Worked the last five. (Indiscernible) ice hockey at the Olympics. I guess my biggest memories, a couple. As far as things I would remember is women's gold medal game in Pyeongchang in 2018, (indiscernible) a remarkable moment to be part of.

I actually was in the building for the Crosby overtime goal and T.J. Oshie shootout against (indiscernible). I wasn't working those games, but I did have the opportunity to attend.

As far as the NHL being involved (indiscernible) deep into the playoffs through the Conference Final over the last eight years -- the LA-Chicago game in (indiscernible), which went to Game 7 in overtime, in the Western Conference Final. For me personally, as far as games that I called, that's certainly, probably the greatest memory on the NHL side. Also working Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final that year in LA when "Doc" Emrick had a personal family issue to attend to.

But also being involved in the outdoor game last year in Colorado Springs and many of these All-Star weekends as well and obviously the Stanley Cup Final this year. So from a personal standpoint, those would be the biggest moments.

But from the outside, games I was not involved in, watching all the Winter Classic games and the Stadium Series Games and Stanley Cup Final games through the years, called by Doc and Eddie and Pierre and Bouch and Jonesy. So many wonderful memories both in person and watching on television over the last 15 years.

KEITH JONES: I would add to what Kenny was saying, I think some of my fondest memories are when we would travel to the Stanley Cup Final and have the studio on site, something we missed the last couple of seasons, unfortunately. But that's really what brought everyone together, both game broadcasters and studio broadcasters. And not just from NBC but from around the NHL. That was always a highlight for me.

And I think of some of the seven-game Stanley Cup Finals series that we were lucky enough to be at. The one that stands out for me was the 2011 Boston Bruins seven-game series against the Vancouver Canucks, and the Bruins

winning that on the road in Vancouver and all the craziness that followed after that.

It was such an intense series that had so many different twists and turns. And looked like Vancouver was going to sweep them after they won the first two games and Boston dug in deep. And Tim Thomas came up with an incredible performance.

The Boston Bruins kind of willed their way to victory. That is one of the things that really stands out to me.

The other one was the run that the LA Kings made to win their first Stanley Cup in 2012, I believe. And I think they were the eighth seed when the playoff started. And by the time they won the Stanley Cup they looked like they were the best team in the NHL. It did not look like a fluke by any means. They just caught fire at the right time. Everything came together. And they would win another Stanley Cup a couple of years later.

So it's always been about the big events, the big moments. And nothing has been greater than attending a Stanley Cup Final and doing live studio shows with all the great fans of the NHL around.

KENNY ALBERT: (Indiscernible) the consecutive years in Nashville, Vegas and St. Louis, when those three teams went on crazy runs -- Nashville in 2017, Vegas in '18 and then St. Louis in '19 -- just the passion of the (indiscernible) in those cities and the great job that NBC did, Jonesy mentioned the studio show traveling during the Final. Some of those shows outdoors, outside the arena in Nashville with thousands of fans on the streets by Broadway. And then Vegas, (indiscernible) outside the arena and St. Louis.

And the NBC cameras and production folks were able to convey the excitement in those cities to the viewers watching at home. So I think that's something that I'll remember.

And then again from a personal standpoint, and Bouch was there and Pierre and Eddie, the bubble last year in Edmonton. Many of us were in either Toronto or Edmonton or both for 30, 40, 50, 60 days.

And it was such a unique experience to be part of with no fans in the building, all inside the bubble. I now I called around 30 games. I think Bouch probably did around 50 between the two cities, Toronto and Edmonton. We called two games in a day, we called three games in a day. Bouch had the five-overtime game involving Columbus and Tampa.

When I think back -- I almost forgot to mention the bubble, but for those of us who were there, it was such a unique experience calling games in the empty arena and being among the few to be a small part of it in person last year in Toronto and Edmonton.

Q. Keith, you mentioned about how captivating these storylines are in this matchup. Wonder if you could speak to just what we're watching here in terms of the postseason that Nikita Kucherov is having, coming off missing the entire regular season, leading everyone in points, and getting hurt in Game 6 and coming out and doing what he did last night in Game 1?

KEITH JONES: I would say we're witnessing some incredible performances from Kucherov. And I think it's at a time when a lot is made of superstar players not being around when the biggest games are happening, including the Stanley Cup Final.

It's pretty remarkable that Kucherov has gone through missing an entire regular season and has battled through the issues that would come with being in game condition to get to this point in the playoffs where he's taking hacks and whacks every night.

He's targeted on a nightly basis and he still finds a way to not just produce, but produce at an extremely high rate. It's been phenomenal to watch. And the way he snaps the puck around, whether he's passing it or shooting it, is kind of Patrick Kane-like to me. And Patrick Kane is the only other player that I can think of that missed an extended period of time prior to the playoffs.

I think he injured his collarbone going back a number of years ago and arrived just in time for the playoffs and helped the Chicago Blackhawks go on to win a Stanley Cup.

I think we're witnessing something very similar and equally as remarkable in what Kucherov is doing. And I don't think anyone should underestimate just how difficult that is to go through what he's been through and perform the way he has been. It's been a joy to watch.

Q. Keith, you touched on greatness earlier in your intro. If Tampa wins the Cup this year, with the type of roster they have and the young talent they have, do you think they have the makings of a team that can stay at the top and compete for a Cup for the next handful of years?

KEITH JONES: Without question. The way they've managed their cap. I know this year was a little unique with Kucherov being unavailable. But the fact that their

star players have taken team-friendly long-term contracts gives me hope that we have the real possibility of talking about a dynasty-type team.

And that seems remarkable under the cap restrictive systems that we see in pro sports, to think that we might have a chance to see a team win multiple Stanley Cups is really impressive.

It's something really to get behind and to enjoy watching, not just if you're a fan of the Tampa Bay Lightning, but a fan of the sport of hockey and a fan of watching greatness.

And I think back to other sports, including basketball, and I wasn't necessarily a huge fan, but I became one when I watched Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls do what they did.

And I think that attracts casual fans to watch a sport that otherwise they may not be watching. So I think we're lucky. I think we're lucky to have a team like Tampa and Montreal will do everything they can to try to keep them from winning consecutive Cups. But I think we could be talking about a team that's right back here next year and we'll be having the same conversation. They're that good; they're that deep; they're that well-managed under Steve Yzerman and Julian BriseBois.

Q. John, is there anything in particular you guys are adding from a production element standpoint just for the Final, be it cameras, graphics or audio elements?

JOHN MCGUINNESS: Not really, no. We're coming in with what we did last season and the season before that in terms of the number of cameras. We certainly haven't cut anything.

In my opening remarks I was trying to stress that we are going to put out a first-class product through the final shift of the game. And that's been Sam Flood and my edict since the beginning of the playoffs. And so far so good and we're just going to keep hammering it.

Q. From operations production standpoint, how have the playoffs gone for you guys so far up to last night, up to this point, what are some highlights and things that you're really proud of?

JOHN MCGUINNESS: Operationally, it's gone very well. The difficulty this year or the challenge this year was the games have been up in Canada and Montreal, having to take a feed from the host broadcaster, but we've been doing that for the last couple of seasons, and supplementing that with our announcers on site. So that was a bit of a challenge, but we got through that.

Overall, we're very happy with the way the playoffs have gone so far. We're looking forward to a long series here.

Q. Obviously Canada was guaranteed a team in the final four this year. Now it's down to the final two. How important do you think it is for this sport for Canadian hockey fans to finally have a team back in the Finals, particularly a team with this pedigree?

KEITH JONES: Yeah, it matters a lot. It's been a struggle for them to get back into position. I think Vancouver was there in 2011 and looked like they had a really legitimate chance to win.

And the Montreal Canadiens are a team that's not only popular in Montreal, but there's a lot of Canadian fans scattered throughout the country of Canada.

I think that's been a really rallying cry for them. I think it's a really important franchise, similar to the New York Yankees in baseball. And I think that there is a gigantic amount of interest in watching them play, and not just because they're Montreal, but because they're an underdog that's made an incredible run to get to the Stanley Cup Final and have continued to show that they're an extremely resilient team.

And you can be sure that Tampa is not taking them for granted here going into Game 2. But they're a great story. And they have some great veteran players that you have to cheer for, including Shea Weber and Carey Price. Add in Corey Perry and Eric Staal and you have a nice mixture of some guys that have had outstanding NHL careers. The last two guys I just mentioned have won Cups previously, but it's been a long time between those championships for them. And Weber and Price are both searching for their first.

So it would be an awesome thing if they could find a way to rally back in this series and knock off another team that's heavily favored in the Tampa Bay Lightning. I think the whole entire country of Canada is enjoying watching them go at it here and also under the circumstances, where a lot of Canadians are still not able to go about doing their things like we are here in the states, I think it's that much more important that Montreal has given them a lot to cheer about and things to look forward to and things to watch on television when they get some time to do that.

JAMIE PALATINI: Thank you, everybody.

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