



STUDENTS HAVE BALL WITH LAVAL ROCKET PLAYERS

Laval Rocket centre Daniel Audette plays ball hockey with Grade 6 students at Gardenvue Elementary School in St-Laurent on Monday. Audette was joined by teammates Charlie Lindgren, Michael McCarron and Xavier Ouellette, along with Roch Carrier, author of The Hockey Sweater, as part of the American Hockey League team's community outreach program. ALLEN MCINNIS

Rookie Kotkaniemi made best of rest

Healthy scratch in two road-trip games says it was good to have a 'little break'

STU COWAN

It has been quite a journey so far for Jesperi Kotkaniemi since the Canadiens selected him with the No. 3 overall pick at last June's NHL Draft. "I need to write a book about that," Kotkaniemi said with a smile after practice Monday in Brossard as the Canadiens prepared to face the Detroit Red Wings Tuesday night at the Bell Centre (7:30 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN 690 Radio). "It's been a long ride this year. Things

have been going pretty fast." Canadiens coach Claude Julien decided to slow things down for the 18-year-old last week when he made Kotkaniemi a healthy scratch for back-to-back games in Los Angeles and San Jose. Kotkaniemi returned to the lineup for Friday night's 8-2 loss to the Anaheim Ducks and was minus-3. Kotkaniemi has had an impressive rookie season with 11-21-32 totals in 67 games and a plus-4 rating. But all 11 of his goals have been scored at the Bell Centre and Ju-

lien decided to give the teenager a rest in California. Kotkaniemi has been going almost non-stop since last June's draft, taking part in the Canadiens' evaluation camp, rookie camp and NHL Rookie Show-down tournament, followed by training camp, preseason games and the regular season.

"I think the coach knows what he's doing and I trust him," Kotkaniemi said. "I think he just tried to rest me. I think he saw that I haven't been my best in the last few weeks. I think it was good to have a little break."

Did Kotkaniemi feel rested after the two-game break? "Yeah, definitely," he said, before adding with a smile. "And a little bored."

When asked when was the last time he had a week off, Kotkaniemi smiled again and said: "Probably when I was 10. Not too often."

Playing in California with the three-hour time difference was another learning experience for Kotkaniemi during his rookie NHL season.

"It was a little weird the first few days," he said. "Now I'm struggling (with the time change) here. It's hard going to bed."

The Canadiens fell out of a playoff spot after going 1-2 on their California road trip, and on Monday the sportsclubstats.com website had their chances of making the postseason listed at 42.6 per cent. There are only 13 games remaining in the regular season and it's going to be important for Kotkaniemi — who has only two assists in his last six games — and other key Canadiens players to pick up their games down the stretch.

Max Domi, the Canadiens' leading scorer with 22-38-60 totals, has only one assist in his last five games. Jonathan Drouin, who is second in scoring with 17-33-50 totals, has only four assists in the last 13 games — all coming in an 8-1 win over the Red Wings on Feb. 26.

"I think we just need to go back to what we were doing well," Kotkaniemi said. "Working hard and being a competitive team. We just need to find that again."

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Former Als head coach to helm Tampa XFL team

DAN RALPH

Marc Trestman has come full circle. Last week, the former Alouettes head coach was named the head coach/GM of the XFL's Tampa Bay franchise. For Trestman, it's a return to the state where he began his coaching career in 1981 as a volunteer assistant at the University of Miami and two years later was admitted to the bar.

In fact, when XFL commissioner Oliver Luck approached Trestman about joining the league, Trestman said his preference was Tampa Bay due to his familiarity with the area. "I went to school here, I know the area," Trestman said during a telephone interview. "I took the bar exam a couple of miles from the stadium, I've recruited the area so I have some familiarity here."

"I chose Tampa because this is a football state, football is the biggest thing here from high school up."

The XFL is scheduled to begin in 2020 with teams also in Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, St. Louis, Seattle and Washington. But what also sold Trestman on the league were wrestling guru Vince McMahon's financial commitment, having sufficient time to set up shop and Luck's experience in startup ventures and integrity.

Luck, a former NFL quarterback and father of Indianapolis Colts starter Andrew Luck, served as NFL Europe's president (1996-2000). McMahon is reportedly prepared to spend more than US\$500 million in the XFL's first three seasons.

The XFL originally operated for one season in 2001. It was a mix of wrestling and football with then-WWF personalities like Jesse Ventura, Jim Ross and Jerry Lawler providing on-air commentary.

Games began with players participating in a dash downfield for a loose ball instead of the traditional coin toss and kickoff. Players wore whatever they wanted on the back of their jerseys, the most memorable being Las Vegas running back Rod Smart donning "He Hate Me."

This time around, Trestman said the league is more about football with maybe a CFL twist.

"The clock is going to be faster like it is in the CFL, they're trying to speed up the game," Trestman said. "I think you've got to look hard at some of the CFL things because it does make football ex-

citing and they were always well thought out."

Trestman spent seven years in Canada, compiling a 72-54 regular-season record with Montreal (2008-12) and Toronto (2017-18), the Alouettes' post being Trestman's first as a head coach. He reached four Grey Cups, winning three, and his teams finished atop the East Division five times.

His CFL tenure ended Nov. 3 following Toronto's season-ending 24-9 loss in Ottawa. It wasn't the first time Trestman had been fired during a well-travelled coaching career that's spanned the CFL, NFL and NCAA. But his dismissal



Marc Trestman

came via 2 a.m. phone call hours after the game.

"When you're in the football business, that's a business that if you get caught up in all the other stuff it just takes your heart out of it," Trestman said. "My heart's always going to be in it regardless."

When the XFL begins play, it will become the second spring league along with the Alliance of American Football. But Trestman doesn't see the two circuits as direct competitors.

"Well, here's how I look at it," said Trestman, 63, who underwent double-hip replacement in January and was walking without assistance after five days. "First of all, it's being played in different areas. The Alliance is playing in smaller markets, relatively speaking, compared to the XFL being in big-market cities."

And while Trestman is part of a new league, his job remains the same.

"I use football as a toolbox to teach people how to be better leaders and teammates and in some cases fathers and husbands," he said. "That's what I do ... I'll coach anybody who's willing to be coached."

The Canadian Press



"It's been a long ride this year," says Jesperi Kotkaniemi. "Things have been going pretty fast." ALLEN MCINNIS

ON THE TUBE

10 a.m. — **SPFL Soccer:** Kilmarnock at St. Mirren, SNWL.  
Noon — **Basketball:** ACC Tournament (Teams TBA), TSN2.  
1 p.m. — **Cycling:** Paris-Nice (Stage 3), SNI.  
2 p.m. — **Tennis:** BNP Paribas Open, TSN1.

2:30 p.m. — **Basketball:** ACC Tournament (Teams TBA), TSN2.  
5 p.m. — **Tennis:** BNP Paribas Open, RDS2.  
7 p.m. — **Hockey:** Washington at Pittsburgh, SNI, TVA Sports.  
7:30 p.m. — **Hockey:** Detroit at Montreal, TSN2, RDS.  
8 p.m. — **Basketball:** L.A. Lakers at Chicago, SNI; Milwaukee at New Orleans, RDS2.  
8:30 p.m. — **Tennis:** BNP Paribas Open, TSN1, TSN4, TSN5.  
10 p.m. — **Hockey:** Nashville at Anaheim, SNI.  
10:30 p.m. — **Basketball:** Minnesota at Denver, SNI, Tennis: BNP Paribas Open, RDS2.

Schedule subject to change