

## ALL TALK, FEW TRADES BEFORE NHL'S EXPANSION ROSTER FREEZE

**LAS VEGAS:** Mike Smith went from Arizona to Calgary and a couple of defensemen traded places as NHL teams made last-minute moves before the Vegas expansion draft roster freeze.

None of those defensemen came from the Minnesota Wild, Ottawa Senators or Anaheim Ducks, leaving big questions with the Vegas Golden Knights poised to acquire some serious talent in their expansion draft window from Sunday through Wednesday. General manager George McPhee's phone was already ringing Saturday afternoon as his 30 colleagues did their best to shuffle the deck and protect themselves.

"With the expansion process upcoming, it forces you to make some decisions," Coyotes GM John Chayka said. From Saturday afternoon through Thursday morning, after Vegas makes its picks, the rest of the teams can't make trades with each other. The freeze and submission of protected lists, which

are released Sunday morning at 10 am EDT, created something of a trade-deadline situation as GMs had a lot of discussions and looked to make the pieces work.

"It had all the feelings of a trade deadline, but there was conditions," Flames GM Brad Treliving said by phone. "There's lots of chatter, but there's lots of teams in the bucket of not being able to do anything without impacting what their list is."

The Flames solidified their goaltending situation by getting the 35-year-old Smith from the Coyotes for a conditional pick and a prospect, taking advantage of their ability to protect a goalie that most other teams in the market didn't have the luxury of doing.

### ADVANTAGE

"That's really one of the things we wanted to leverage," Treliving said. "Having the ability to have a

spot to protect someone, if all the other boxes were checked, there certainly was an advantage."

The Montreal Canadiens recouped a third-round pick from the Buffalo Sabres for 24-year-old defenseman Nathan Beaulieu, who has a connection to Vegas coach Gerard Gallant and would've been left exposed in the expansion draft. The San Jose Sharks got second- and fourth-round picks for Mirco Mueller and a fifth-rounder, a safeguard against losing a 22-year-old defenseman for nothing.

But trades that didn't happen before the freeze stood out even more, most notably the Wild not dealing Matt Dumba, Marco Scandella or Jonas Brodin, and the Senators not moving Marc Methot or Dion Phaneuf. That puts those teams and the Anaheim Ducks in position to work out a deal with Vegas, which could prove costly.

"It was a rigid market," Treliving said. "You had a number of teams that had expansion issues that

they were trying to deal with." The Winnipeg Jets solved an expansion issue even as they didn't make a trade as Toby Enstrom agreed to waive his no-movement clause before the deadline Friday, allowing them to protect their other three top defensemen: Dustin Byfuglien, Jacob Trouba and Tyler Myers. Enstrom's Sweden-based agent, Kalle Boden, said in an email that his client waived his no-move as a favor to the Jets and "wants to stay" in Winnipeg.

The Golden Knights said Saturday night they were very pleased with the expansion draft process so far and have "indicated that they will give all 30 clubs every opportunity to keep their rosters intact if they'd like." McPhee is willing to negotiate with any and all teams willing to give up something to keep a certain player.

That means even though the rest of the league is on a freeze, the trade talk is just heating up with Vegas. —AP

### TENNIS

## KERBER SCRAMBLES FOR WIMBLEDON BOOST

**BIRMINGHAM:** Angelique Kerber's chances of clinging to a small lead at the top of the world rankings may hinge on the quality of her performances at the Birmingham WTA grass court event starting today.

They may also have a crucial bearing on Kerber's ability to challenge for the title at Wimbledon which begins in a fortnight's time, as she makes the often tricky transition from clay to grass courts at the \$800,000 Premier level event.

The signs do not appear good for the 29-year-old Poland-born German, even though she has been number one much of the time since September.

She has yet to capture a title this year and

none of her 21 wins in 11 tournaments have been against a top 20 opponent.

Nevertheless Kerber is significantly more effective on grass than on clay, and won her first title on the speedier, lower-bouncing surface in Birmingham two years ago. She went on to reach the Wimbledon final last year.

Another good run at the tranquil, tree-lined Edgbaston Priory Club, with its leafy affluence and well-manicured courts, may be within her capacity, and if so it could work wonders for wavering confidence.

Although Kerber often says that protecting a ranking and coping with pressure are issues she tries to keep from her mind, there is little doubt that a few wins and some lengthy court

time would be very timely. "I always look forward to grass," she emphasises. "And I really like playing here."

Kerber comes into the event still smarting from becoming the first top seed to lose in the opening round at Roland Garros. She has also landed a potentially difficult draw.

Her opener is against Lucie Safarova, the 2015 French Open finalist from the Czech Republic, and there is a possible quarter-final against the fifth seeded Kristina Mladenovic, the French woman who spectacularly halted Garbine Muguruza's French Open title defence.

If Kerber does make the final her opponent, according to the seedings, should be Elina Svitolina, who captured the Italian Open title last month and has prevailed in both her encounters with Kerber this year.

However two notable withdrawals after their French Open exertions are Simona Halep and Karolina Pliskova, and they are Kerber's closest rivals for the number one ranking.

Her capacity for taking advantage of these absences may depend on how well her fitness holds up, for adaptations in shot-making on grass which require a lower centre of gravity, can bring new physical stresses.

Kerber retired with a thigh strain against Eugenie Bouchard in the third round in Madrid last month. Meanwhile there will also be focus on Petra Kvitova, the trenchant left-hander who has twice been the champion at Wimbledon.

Grass is by far Kvitova's best surface and she should enjoy returning to it. However the most she will probably aspire to is continued rehabilitation from career-threatening hand injuries suffered during a horrendous knife attack by an intruder at her home last year.

The likeable Czech has been able to play only two matches this year, and even modest progress this week may earn sympathetic acclaim and hopes that, at the age of 27, she might yet resurrect her career. — AFP



Angelique Kerber

## POUILLE BOUNCES BACK TO WIN STUTTGART TITLE

**STUTTGART:** Frenchman Lucas Pouille came from a set down and needed a second set tie-break to beat Spain's Feliciano Lopez 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4, to claim the grass-court title at Stuttgart yesterday.

"That's my first title on grass," said the 23-year-old, who has now won three ATP Tour titles and sits 16th in the world rankings. "I had a tight match in the first round and from there I took it one match at a time," he added, looking back to his win over Jan-Lennard Struff in which he saved a match point.

Pouille suffered from the power of Lopez's serve early on but gradually got the measure of the 35-year-old, who faded towards the end of the third set.

It was his third final of the season after a

defeat to Jo-Wilfried Tsonga at Marseille and a victory over Aljaz Bedene in Budapest.

Meanwhile, Luxembourg's Gilles Muller downed towering Croat Ivo Karlovic yesterday to claim the title in 's-Hertogenbosch in a final with the oldest combined age for two players since 1976. Muller, 34, beat 38-year-old Karlovic 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/4) in a showdown of two of the game's biggest servers to lift his second tour-level trophy, following January's triumph in Sydney.

It was the oldest men's singles final since Ken Rosewall (42) and Ilie Nastase (30) went head-to-head in Hong Kong 41 years ago.

Muller smacked 22 aces to Karlovic's 19 with not a single break point for either player as the Luxembourgier atoned for last year's final defeat in the Netherlands to Nicolas Mahut.

He next heads to Queen's where he faces Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili in the opening round of the Wimbledon warm-up event.

Estonia's Anett Kontaveit scooped up her first WTA title after beating Natalia Vikhlyantseva of Russia 6-2, 6-3 in the women's final.

The 21-year-old from Tallinn, ranked 49th in the world, routed Vikhlyantseva, 20, in just 73 minutes to continue her strong 2017 form.

Kontaveit finished runner-up on clay in Biel in April and has also recorded wins over world number one Angelique Kerber and 2016 French Open champion Garbine Muguruza this season.

"I'm just so excited!" said Kontaveit. "It's been amazing for me, I had really tough matches and I'm so happy to be through them - to win the final, it's amazing." — AFP



**STUTTGART:** France's Lucas Pouille poses next to the winner's car, a Mercedes-Benz E 400 Cabrio 4 Matic, after defeating Spain's Feliciano Lopez (not in picture) in the final match at the ATP Mercedes Cup tennis tournament in Stuttgart, southwestern Germany, yesterday. — AFP



Andy Murray

## MURRAY IN SPOTLIGHT AS WIMBLEDON LOOMS

**LONDON:** Andy Murray says he has only a couple of years left at the top of men's tennis, but the world number one has no intention of relaxing just yet as he sets his sights on a third Wimbledon title.

While Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal have defied the ageing process to win Grand Slams into their 30s, Murray believes that is the exception rather than the norm.

With that in mind, the 30-year-old knows he must maximise his chances of adding to his haul of three Grand Slam crowns while he is at his peak. "My coach, Ivan Lendl, was still competitive at the top until he was about 32 but, generally, over the past 20 to 30 years, normally by early 30s is when players have struggled to stay at the top," Murray told the BBC.

"I know some of the players have been doing really well until their mid-30s recently, but that might not be the case with me. "Maybe the next couple of years are the last few where I have a chance to compete for the majors and the biggest tournaments."

Fortunately for Murray's hopes of more silverware, he heads into the grass-court campaign back in form after his run to the French Open semi-finals ended a frustrating period marred by problems with injuries and illness.

The Scot, who has battled shingles, an elbow injury and the flu in 2017, was beaten by Stan Wawrinka in five sets on the clay at Roland Garros. But Murray is confident he has rediscovered his rhythm in time to mount a strong defence of the Wimbledon crown he won for a second time last year.

The road to Wimbledon begins across west London at the Queen's Club next week, when Murray will be aiming to win the grass-court event for a third successive year and sixth time in total.

First up for Murray in the opening round is British number four Aljaz Bedene.

### POUNDING

Murray beat Bedene in the second round at Queen's last year and if he wins again he will face either 2010 Queen's champion Sam Querrey or another Briton-wild card Cameron Norrie in the last 16.

He is seeded to face France's Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in the quarter-finals and former US Open champion Marin Cilic in the semi-finals, with a potential final against second seed Stan Wawrinka.

Winning at Queen's would be the ideal Wimbledon preparation for Murray, but he knows he must find a way to avoid the fitness issues that have troubled him this year.

"Most of the players are travelling with physios now, spending a lot more time working in the gym to protect their bodies from the kind of pounding you give it on the court as well," he said.

"I don't know how long I'm going to be playing for any more. I want to make the most of every tournament I compete in."

"If I'm going to be away from my family, I'm not going to do that and not do my best."

Wawrinka opens his Queen's campaign against Spanish veteran Feliciano Lopez, while Milos Raonic, beaten by Murray in the Queen's and Wimbledon finals last year, starts against Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis.

Grigor Dimitrov, the 2014 Queen's champion, is the only player other than Murray to have won the tournament in the last four years and the Bulgarian takes on Ryan Harrison of the United States in the first round.

Former Wimbledon finalist Tomas Berdych will look to pull out of his current slump against Steve Darcis.

Cilic, who won Queen's in 2013 and was runner-up a year later, opens against big-serving American John Isner. — AFP

## 76ERS, CELTICS AGREE ON TRADE FOR NUMBER ONE PICK

**BOSTON:** Philadelphia and Boston have agreed in principle on a trade where the 76ers would acquire the chance to take Markelle Fultz with the No. 1 pick in Thursday's NBA Draft, a person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press.

The Celtics will get the No. 3 pick, plus an additional first-rounder in either 2018 or 2019, according to the person who spoke on condition of anonymity Saturday night because the trade has not been formally approved by the league. The agreement between the Celtics and 76ers was struck not long after Fultz worked out for Philadelphia on Saturday evening.

Once the trade goes through, Philadelphia will own the NBA's No. 1 selection for the second straight season. Fultz - donning a Philadelphia cap as he arrived at the team's practice facility - visited the 76ers in a hastily arranged get-to-know-you session, with the workout and meeting with team officials on his itinerary. That visit was essentially the final hurdle to clear before Boston and Philadelphia could decide to actually consummate the trade.

"I don't really pay attention to everything that's going on," Fultz said. "I'm truly blessed to be in this position. Whatever happens, I'm looking forward to taking my talents to wherever I go." Barring any other changes before Thursday, the first four spots in this year's draft order would mirror the first-four from last year: Philadelphia at No. 1, the Los Angeles Lakers at No. 2, Boston at No. 3 and Phoenix at No. 4.

Fultz's rise to stardom has been rapid. In 2014, he was playing junior varsity basketball in high school. Barely three years later, he's almost certainly going to become the No. 1 pick in the NBA draft - and if he gets to

start his pro career by calling Philadelphia his new home, he'll be living roughly a 2 1/2-hour drive from his hometown of Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

"It would be pretty cool. Just being with a young team," Fultz said. "The upside of it would be crazy. I'm close to home, so a lot of my family can come out and just show love. This city has great fans."

The 6-foot-4 guard averaged 23.2 points, 5.7 rebounds and 5.9 assists in 25 games during his lone college season at Washington, excelling on a team that finished 9-22 and lost its final 13 games. Fultz led the Pac-12 in scoring and finished No. 6 among all Division I players, and was the top freshman scorer in the country. Over the past 10 seasons, only two other freshmen had a better scoring average in college: Kevin Durant for Texas in 2006-07, and Michael Beasley for Kansas State in 2007-08.

Durant and Beasley were both No. 2 draft picks. Fultz is apparently going to get taken one spot better. "I'll do whatever it takes to help any team I go to win," Fultz said.

Philadelphia had the No. 1 draft spot three previous times, taking Doug Collins in 1973, Allen Iverson in 1996 and Ben Simmons a year ago.

The 76ers have a top-three pick for the fourth straight year: No. 3 Joel Embiid in 2014, No. 3 Jahliil Okafor in 2015 and Simmons in 2016. But with Fultz, Philadelphia - which has asked its fans to endure some very dismal stretches and "Trust The Process" for the past few years - would likely expect to turn a real corner toward respectability again.

Philadelphia went 28-54 this past season, after winning 19, 18 and 10 games respectively in the previous three seasons. — AP