

# Laviolette Has Good Choices to Make With Lapierre and McMichael

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By [Matthew Shea](#)



*Connor McMichael (Caps Outsider)*

The Capitals opened up the season with 3 out of 4 points, showing promise in efficiency, spreading the puck and certainly on defense. But with Nicklas Backstrom out due to a [hip injury](#), Coach **Peter Laviolette** has the opportunity to see what the Caps' future will look like. In the past two outings, Laviolette gave rookie **Hendrix Lapierre** the start in which he performed well. The 19-year-old scored a goal in Wednesday's opener and seemed to fit in on the third line alongside **T.J. Oshie** and **Conor Sheary**.

"Lapi did some good things out on the ice [on Saturday]. There's things that we'll go back today and we'll show him and try to get better," Laviolette said during a press conference on Monday.

Heading into Tuesday's matchup with the Colorado Avalanche, it seems that Laviolette will continue to test the waters and examine the potential of each offensive option. This time, he's giving 20-year-old forward **Connor McMichael** a spot.

"We obviously have a void that we need to fill for a little bit," Laviolette said. "[Lapierre and McMichael] are natural centermen. They're both here. They're both young. This is their real first opportunity in and out of games, so we want to take a look at both of them and get an evaluation on where they're both at."

"It's a good sign that I'm skating with [Oshie and Sheary]," said McMichael at Monday's press conference. "I thought we had a pretty good practice today, so if I do get in tomorrow I'll be ecstatic. I'm excited."

McMichael did play one regular season game with the Caps last season but didn't record any points. However, a start this season would give him the chance to make a stronger impression and have a longer impact with the team.

By evaluating both of the young forwards, Laviolette is giving each player a deserved chance and setting the Caps up for success by allowing the team to see which player can better fill the gap currently and possibly contribute down the line if needed.

Laviolette has also seemed to make a decision regarding the goaltender situation, but remains open to testing the waters there as well.

"At some point we're going to put [**Ilya Samsonov**] in. With regard to the goaltending, we're looking for great goaltending, and I think we've gotten that. I think Vitek, I said from leaving camp that Vitek, to me, got the nod because of what he did and the first two games he hasn't disappointed," said Laviolette.

Vanecek is currently making a great case to be starting netminder. So far he has only allowed three goals in the past two games, saving 45 of 48 shots directed at the net for an impressive save

percentage of .938. It is critical play from Vanecek that has allowed the team to get off to a good start and kept the Caps in the game on Saturday. Despite the overtime loss, Vanecek has proven to be a strong backbone and able to make all the important saves to give the team a chance every night.

There has also been movement on the defensive end with Laviolette testing pairings that have worked to the Caps' favor thus far. The addition of rookie **Martin Fehervary** in the first defensive pairing alongside John Carlson has been promising.

Drafted as the Capitals second round pick back in 2018, Fehervary has shown tremendous speed and skill. The defenseman played six games for the Caps during the 2019-20 season but has ultimately broken through and is making an impact now, asserting himself as a strong force on defense and working well with veteran Carlson.

"I feel really good alongside [**John Carlson**]. He's a great player obviously. He helps me a lot," said Fehervary of icemate Carlson during a press conference on Saturday.

Laviolette will have other options on defense as well after the signing of defenseman **Dennis Cholowski** from the Seattle Kraken. Cholowski played his last three seasons in Detroit, gaining 27 points (10g, 17a) during his time as a Red Wing before being selected by the Kraken. "Right now he just joined our team, he sits down, he goes through the system. He watches offensively what we're trying to do, defensively what we're trying to do...Right now, the defense, the six guys we have going, we're not going to make a move on that yet," said Laviolette of Cholowski joining the team and the current defensive situation in Monday's press conference.

Cholowski spent Monday's practice as an extra defensive pairing and will continue to be under Laviolette's experimentation. But, the 6' 2", 23-year-old defenseman could become an asset to the team if there becomes a need on the defensive end this season.

“It’s exciting,” said Cholowski of joining Washington during a press conference on Saturday. “Obviously this team is established and has been top of the league for ten plus years, so it’s really exciting to be here for sure.”

As the Caps continue their first truly normal season under coach Laviolette, there will be various testing when it comes to finding players that can fill key offensive and defensive roles as well as continued evaluation over the netminder situation.

Caps fans can expect to see multiple short-term changes throughout the season as Laviolette looks to garner a good sense of the best lineup moving forward. This starts with McMichael possibly coming in on Tuesday and players like Cholowski and Samsonov maybe getting a chance down the line this season to come in and prove their worth.