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Bruins at the crossroads of grappling with failure and learning from collapse

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During his season-ending media availability, **Nick Foligno** had just been asked if dealing with the Florida Panthers' forecheck felt like a "fire drill."

Then, the fire alarm at Warrior Ice Arena began going off. Fitting.

It eventually ceased after **David Pastrnak**, **Jeremy Swayman** and others tried to trudge through their media scrums.

Once breakup day had officially wrapped up, the elevators weren't working, likely because of the building's emergency response system from a half hour earlier.

It's just been that type of week around the Boston Bruins.

"I think we have to look honestly in the mirror and realize we didn't get the job done," Foligno said. "I think that's the way you move forward. You take it on the chin, you reflect, remember this feeling and put it toward how it's going to allow you to become better from it. I mean, it's been a really emotional few days for every guy, you know, with everything that's at stake here and what we felt like we have with this group."

"I think it'll take some time where you start to see the bright side of things, if there ever is."

Charlie Coyle just wishes he could wake up and it would all be over.

"It feels like a nightmare, to be honest, and you just wish it would end," Coyle said. "You just replay stuff over and over in your head. You know, we could have closed it out here and we could have closed it out there. But it's how it happened, and it's unfortunate. You wish you could go back, but you can't. The only thing you can do now is we learn from it and grow from it."

The Panthers are battling the Toronto Maple Leafs in Game 1 of the second round Tuesday night. It should have been the Bruins, who had chance after chance to close out the first-round series. They had a lead with a minute to go in Game 7, even after squandering chances to close it out in Games 5 and 6.

"It should've been over long before that [Florida tied it late in Game 7], you know what I mean?" **Brad Marchand** said. "We dropped the ball with a minute left in Game 7, but it should've been done in Game 5, and we had opportunities in Game 6 to close out and we had multiple leads. Them tying it up in Game 7 with a minute left, yeah that sucks, but it's the ones before that I kind of look at, and those are the ones that sting more."

In the end, they're left picking up the pieces from the historic season gone horribly wrong at the worst time after self-inflicted wounds continually ended up in the back of their net.

"I mean, really look at the difference of, you know, our turnovers to their success and scoring goals off of some of our plays. They made us pay, and we didn't, right?" Foligno said. "You know, we go up 3-1 in the series, you've got to find a way to put the nail in the coffin. For whatever reason all year long, we've been that team that has done that, and we didn't adjust. So you gotta give them credit first, then look at the ways you can improve."

"Guys, I don't think anyone has an answer. Otherwise – I'm sure you've heard this comment before – but if we did, we probably would have fixed it and be playing tonight. So you know, it's a hard one for everybody in the room, but we know that we didn't get the job done, and there's no excuse for that. You know, the fans aren't going to want to hear some excuse of, 'Oh, this happened and that happened.' We didn't get the job done. So we all have to take it on the chin and realize that it's not acceptable. This group definitely expected more of ourselves and you know, that's going to be the hardest thing that, you know, taking that into the summer."

Step aside, **Giannis Antetokounmpo**, the Bruins are looking at their season as a failure, going down as the latest dominant regular season group to bow out at the hands of a bottom seed. Foligno, Marchand and **Taylor Hall** brought up the F-word in particular.

They know the wheels fell off the bus.

"It's hard to put into words what went wrong or where it went wrong. It's just the ultimate disappointment now," a despondent **Charlie McAvoy** said, acknowledging the expectations that such a deep team fell short of. "It's probably the hardest part. You know how good you were. I mean shit, you know, records and all the guys and character in this room. It's just tough. Tough to be out."

"We won a lot of games, and it really feels like it doesn't matter, to be honest. I don't know. Like it always is, either you're a winner or you're a loser. This one was different. We had a team that was really special and really good. Every year we've had good teams, but this just feels like [it was different]."

But with failure comes the chance to respond. The Tampa Bay Lightning did, winning two straight Stanley Cups and making three finals in a row. The Panthers just did after squandering the top overall seed last postseason. Of any positives to take, the B's feel it offers a chance to learn.

"I think the biggest thing is you got to find in any failure, you know, it really only is a failure if you didn't learn from it," Foligno said. "Every guy I think is realizing that you got to work through the emotions of when you find a way to come out on the other side a better version of yourself. That's obviously when it's going to take for our group to move forward. I mean, you can use this as a springboard, and you can look at other teams that have gone through heartaches and heartbreaks, like we've gone through, and have become better, have become Stanley Cup champions because of it or better players are better versions of themselves. So that's the message in here"

Marchand said, "I think the worst thing you could do is not try to learn from it and not try to take out what we can from this year, our experiences and our failures. The year we won in 2011, the year before that, you know, Bruins were up in the series and up in Game 7 [against Philadelphia]. They learned from that. The next year they went out, it made them stronger and you know, they achieved it the next year. It's something that we can learn from and build upon. We won't be the first to say that we expected a lot more out of this run, and we expected to be playing into June. But that's not what was meant to be."

Jim Montgomery said during the series that he didn't feel his group was ready for the intensity of the playoffs right away. After the response in Games 3 and 4, the Bruins again failed to match Florida's desperation as **Matthew Tkachuk** in particular terrorized them throughout. On their way to the most infamous of history books, the B's lost three games in a row for just the second time in the entire season. They also lost three in a row at home for the first time.

After the talk about a poor run of form in March teaching the Bruins how to respond when they got socked in the mouth in the postseason, they had no notes to refer back to when it actually happened in the first round.

"I think from this situation, you got to obviously recognize that nothing is going to be given to you in the playoffs. It's hard hockey, regardless of who you're playing," **Brandon Carlo** said. "You have to come to play every night. Situations can be a little wild in the playoffs. You know, dropping three games in a row obviously, hurts us a lot, but you don't ever want to let that happen again. So learn how to move on from a game and just come out and play your game the next."

Unlike the dynastic Bolts, Boston won't have the luxury of returning essentially the same roster next season, whether it be due to the decisions awaiting aging pillars **Patrice Bergeron** and **David Krejci** or the looming salary cap crunch that will price out key depth.

For Bergeron and Krejci, this one is up there with the 2019 Game 7 loss at home to St. Louis.

"Yeah, for sure. It's very disappointing and frustrating and definitely on the same line," Bergeron said. "Disappointment, for sure."

Krejci said, "Yeah, I really thought this was the year. I've never played on a better team than this. If you look at the goalies, what a year they had. The best [defense] I've ever had. I've always played with good defensemen, but all of them altogether, it was insane. How deep we were at the forwards. ... It just ended the way it is."

Saddled with trying to compartmentalize falling short and turning the page to next season, the Bruins are stuck sitting idly by at home, watching teams that didn't set records or punch the NHL in the nose for an entire season, achieve what they set out to do.

"Every year when I go back, and I'm sitting in Colorado, and I'm watching somebody else, you know, accomplishing the goal that we want to accomplish, that's hard," Carlo said. "It'll always be hard, but especially with this group that we had, and the expectations we had."

More from breakup day...

Ullmark, others mum on injury statuses

Linus Ullmark exited Boston's second-to-last game of the regular season out of precaution. He was good to go for Game 1 of the playoffs. As the series wore on, Ullmark continued to look off. There was a report that he was sick earlier in the series before another yesterday stating he had a "debilitating" injury.

Ullmark wasn't 100 percent but did not divulge the extent of his issues.

"You know what? Here's the deal. We all go through things in life and we all go through things when it comes to playoff times. We all battle our own things, whether it's mentally or physically, we all have our stuff," Ullmark said. "Yeah, it's pretty evident that I didn't play the way that I wanted to. It wasn't as good as I wanted to be, unfortunately at the worst time possible. That's something I have to live with. ... You want to feel at your best when push comes to shove. When you're not, you just got to deal with it. That's the hand you've been dealt."

Ullmark, the Vezina favorite, posted a paltry .896 save percentage and 3.33 goals-against average in his six appearances in the series.

"Looking at it now, this is going to be one of those things that's going to haunt me. It is. God's honest truth," Ullmark said. "Being in a position that me and Sway are in as goalies when we are not good enough, it shows. It's very easy to see that. It's pretty evident. That's also the beauty of it. When you're on your A-game, that also shows."

Montgomery has assumed his share of criticism for not turning to Swayman sooner, whether because of whatever Ullmark had dealt with or that the goalie rotation was a clear recipe for success.

"I think that everyone that works in this —like you guys, it's very easy, and also something that everybody does when things aren't going the way they want to is that they're trying to find a scapegoat. Right now, everybody is going at different directions. They're going at Monty, they're going up top, they're going at me, they're going at different people. That's not what we're about," Ullmark said. "We lose as a team, we win as a team. We've done that through the whole season. We try to do it as well now in the playoffs as well. Unfortunately, we lost four games in this series. That cost us to not go on to the second round, and that's what it is. That's human nature."

"Trying to find a scapegoat when things turn to shit. It's natural, but it's also not the right thing to do. I do love Monty. He's been great for us all season long. I have full faith in him and whatever decisions he makes out there. He's one of the best coaches, if not the best coach that I've had."

Krejci missed Games 3 and 4 with an upper-body injury. He was out the last six games of the regular season with an ailment. No. 46 was a step behind the even-strength play. He did not look right, but like Ullmark, did not get into what plagued him.

"I don't want to say what I had or, you know. I wish I was 100% for all seven games," Krejci said. "Unfortunately, that wasn't, that wasn't the issue, so. I'm happy I came back for Game 6, Game 7."

Foligno, Hall, **Hampus Lindholm** and **Derek Forbort** were among those to deal with injuries, bumps or bruises at the end of the regular season. All said they felt good.

Aside from Bergeron revealing after Game 7 he had a herniated disc in his back, all but one Bruins skater revealed an injury they dealt with. Pastrnak injured his shoulder on the first shift of the series after going through the whole season with a clean bill of health. He said he was getting closer to fully healthy for the second round.

"This sport you can't be healthy every time," Pastrnak said at Warrior Ice Arena. "But it's definitely painful to not be able to give your 100 percent and play my game for the series, especially after the year I had and I've been healthy and I know what I can do when I'm healthy. It sucks."

No updates on Bergeron or Krejci's futures

Neither center said they've had enough time to make a definitive call on what lies ahead.

"I want to get away from this because everything's really raw right now. I don't want to make any decision that I am going to regret," Krejci said. "I just got to get away from everything and really clear my head. Think some things over. Figure it out."

Bergeron said, "It's too early right now to even make a settled decision. I want to make sure that I make the right call and we make the right call as a family. I don't know how long it's going to take."

Krejci was away from his family for most of the season as they were at their offseason home in South Carolina. He said it was a challenging year, personally. After spending last season playing in his native Czech Republic, Krejci said this time it's just down to the Bruins or retirement.

Bergeron said he didn't know if he would have called it a career if the Bruins had indeed won the Cup.

Their decisions last offseason dragged into August. Krejci said he wants to make his decision soon, while Bergeron hopes to have one before July.

Pending free agents would like to stay

Tyler Bertuzzi, **Tomas Nosek**, **Garnet Hathaway**, **Dmitry Orlov**, **Connor Clifton** and Foligno are among the upcoming unrestricted free agents. All acknowledged it is early in the process to consider new deals.

The Bruins have just under \$5 million in cap space to fit in any of the above they might re-sign, possible returns of Bergeron or Krejci, new acquisitions and restricted free agents like Swayman and **Trent Frederic**. The UFAs know the reality of the situation.

The deadline additions, Bertuzzi, Hathaway and Orlov — who at 32, acknowledged this is likely his last contract — said they haven't had time to think about their next moves yet, but the conversations will pick up.

Nosek, Clifton and Foligno each expressed their desire to hopefully remain in the fold while understanding the complexity of today's cap world.

"That's probably the most emotional part too is you know, not really knowing what's going to happen here. It's no secret I love it here," Foligno said.

Swayman and Frederic both left their situations up to their agents and **Don Sweeney**. Both said they want to be Bruins for a long time.

Bergeron a Selke finalist, again

No. 37 was named a finalist for the Frank J. Selke Trophy for the 12th consecutive season Tuesday.

He won his record-setting fifth last season and is in prime position to add a sixth to his collection. Although not the only factors in his case, Bergeron led the league in face-off wins (1,043) and win percentage (61.1 — minimum 1,000 face-offs). Boston had a plus-28 scoring differential with him on the ice at 5-on-5. They were plus-37 at even strength.