

NHL

Continued from B1

Fans won't be able to watch in person at the beginning except in a handful of U.S. Sun Belt markets. Tampa Bay on Saturday reversed course on beginning the season with a limited capacity of 3,800 in the arena that's also hosting the NBA's Toronto Raptors, citing the recent rise of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in the area.

Teams will play every division rival at least eight times, often consecutively like a baseball-style schedule.

That includes a never-before-seen all-Canadian North Division because of border restrictions. Four teams from each of the four divisions make the playoffs and play it out until there are four left in conten-

tion for the Cup by the start of summer.

"It's going to be a wacky year playing teams back-to-backs and playing the same team kind of repetitively," Washington defenseman John Carlson said.

"It's going to be different than anything we've dealt with." Far different than completing the 2019-20 season in quarantined bubbles in Canada with Tampa Bay winning it all. Being out in the world means coaches in masks behind the bench, no venturing outside the hotel and arena on the road, and six months of pure hockey in the hopes of avoiding the kind of teamwide outbreaks that have already hit the Stars and have others on edge.

"You don't want to bring the virus into the locker room, and if it is, you want to do your

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— John Carlson, Washington Capitals defenseman

job of eliminating it as soon as possible," St. Louis forward Brayden Schenn said. "I think the team that at the end of the day is going to be the smartest off ice is going to have the best chance to win because I think that's going to limit players going down with the virus."

The schedule and protocols were designed with that in mind. If they work and most if not all games go on as scheduled, it could improve the quality of play.

"Not having to travel (as much), just kind of getting settled in one place and playing a

team a couple times could kind of increase the rivalry aspect," three-time Cup-winning Pittsburgh captain Sidney Crosby said. "The product will probably be the best it can be."

Much of that depends on goaltending, with each team likely relying on more than just its starter given the condensed schedule. Coaching will also be different.

"You're familiar with your opponent: you maybe have just played them a couple times, and you play them another two-game set, you can approach it like it's a little bit of a playoff

series," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said.

Just as the temperature tends to rise over the course of a playoff series, players expect to be just a little bit madder on the ice this year because contempt will build over mini-series and the season as a whole.

"It's going to get heated," said Corey Perry, who joined Montreal after reaching the final with Dallas. "In the regular season, people tend to forget a little bit what happened the game before. But this, there's going to be back-to-backs or a day in between and guys won't forget. And those are the fun games to be a part of."

It likely won't be the same lineup every night, either, given virus cases with players tested daily, and the usual wear and tear of injuries. Because of quar-

antine measures, each team will have a taxi squad of four to six players and must have three goalies available at all times.

"If ever we were going to need depth at all positions, it's going to be this year," Philadelphia coach Alain Vigneault said.

Similar to the 48-game season in 2013 because of the lockdown, a slow start could be the difference between even some Cup contenders making it and falling short.

That's why Vegas GM Kelly McCrimmon likened this into jumping right in the second half of the season.

"There's no excuse not to be ready to go here," Edmonton captain Connor McDavid said. "We've had lots of time to prepare both on and off the ice, both mentally and physically."

Mutual Funds

For the week ending Friday, January 8, 2021

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Summary table with columns: DOW, NYSE, NASDAQ, S&P 500, RUSSELL 2000, WILSHIRE 5000. Values: 31,097.97, 14,966.83, 13,201.97, 3,824.68, 2,091.66, 40,386.08.

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