



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

The News & Observer

Can Hurricanes' Jesperi Kotkaniemi realize full potential? After 'reset,' he thinks so

By Chip Alexander

Jesperi Kotkaniemi played his 400th career game Tuesday, and what a 400 games it has been in the NHL.

The Finnish center was the third pick of the 2018 NHL draft by Montreal, just behind Andrei Svechnikov of the Carolina Hurricanes, and made his NHL debut at 18. He has played for a Stanley Cup. He was the source of a contentious offer sheet that caused a war of words — in English and French — between the Hurricanes and Canadiens.

Since coming to the Hurricanes in 2021, Kotkaniemi has been enigmatic in the sense that he appears to have all the tools with his size and skill to be a top-six forward in the NHL. He has that look to him, but hasn't fully proven it on the ice, where it counts.

Kotkaniemi is 24, still a young guy. Monday, after Canes practice, he and defenseman Brent Burns were tussling on the ice like a kid brother going after his big brother, as the two smiled and grappled.

But fun aside, Kotkaniemi's seventh season in the NHL could be the most important. The Hurricanes are depending on him. Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour wants to have faith in him, depend on him, have him be an impactful player for this team this season.

Kotkaniemi, who has prototypical size for a center at 6-3 and 203 pounds, needs to do more than look the part. He needs to be the part, and Brind'Amour again is giving him that chance as the Canes' second-line center.

"I tried to have a good summer and work hard," Kotkaniemi said of his preparation. "I tried to reset, mostly. Last year was a tough year and I wanted to get back at it and get a little stronger and hopefully get a little more speed in my skating.

"I wanted to start with a clean (slate) this year. I wanted to get off to a good start and hopefully keep that going."

The Hurricanes' first game was not what anyone wanted. On opening night, the Canes were beaten 4-1 by the Tampa Bay Lightning at the Lenovo Center, their spotty play causing Brind'Amour to say, "I honestly didn't know what I was watching."

Kotkaniemi said the Canes were "too cute" much of the opener Friday and did not play their style of game. Nothing much worked for Carolina as the Lightning's special teams excelled.

"We didn't get much grind time in their end," Kotkaniemi said. "We were just whacking the puck in the neutral zone."

Things were a lot better Tuesday. The Canes came to play against the New Jersey Devils, Kotkaniemi getting in an early hit on the Devils' Brenden Dillon along the boards. He was engaged, helped get the crowd engaged.

With the score tied 1-1 in the second period, Kotkaniemi fought for the puck in the corner in the Devils' zone with Ondrej Palat and Jonas Siegenthaler, and got it to Martin Necas. Defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere, open at the top of the slot, took a pass from Necas and buried a shot for the lead.

The Canes continued to grind, and won their first game of the season as rookie forward Jackson Blake notched his first NHL goal and Sebastian Aho and Seth Jarvis each scored. Kotkaniemi's assist was his first point of the season.

In a way, the past six seasons have flown by for Kotkaniemi, known as "KK" on the team. He was on the Habs team that reached the Cup Final in 2021 before being beaten by the Lightning. He then agreed to the Hurricanes' offer sheet, two years after the Habs tried that same bold approach with Aho.

The Canes kept Aho, matching his offer sheet. The Canadiens let Kotkaniemi walk, the Canes gleefully trolling the Habs in French on social media. Kotkaniemi later signed an eight-year, \$38.56 million contact extension with Carolina, and had 18 goals and 43 points in his second season with the Canes.

But last year was a step back for him (27 points). He had one point, an assist, in 11 playoff games and has been underwhelming with three goals and 10 points in 40 playoff games with the Canes.

"Everything didn't fall into place for me last year," he said. "You get those once in a while. I'm trying to forget that and just focus on this year."

Canes captain Jordan Staal is among those who believe a more seasoned Kotkaniemi will have a solid season, saying, "He's starting to find his way. I think this is going to be a big year for him, to see what he can do."

The Canes' schedule has them on the road for six games, starting Friday in Pittsburgh, and they will not play again in Raleigh until Oct. 31. Kotkaniemi's approach is that it's good to get the road trip West over early.

"You're still fresh and travel doesn't bother you that much, so I don't mind knocking it out," he said.

Kotkaniemi said he would take his iPad along and watch some shows — he recently finished "The Menendez Brothers" on Netflix and said he plans to see the NBA series "Starting 5" on the trip.

"I really didn't know much about the Menendez brothers before that show," he said.

Kotkaniemi said he has not seen but has interest in "Faceoff: Inside the NHL" being shown on Prime.

After 400 games in the NHL, he knows something about that.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

The Athletic

2020 NHL re-draft: Tim Stützle, Jake Sanderson give Ottawa one-two punch

By Corey Pronman

In the final part of our series looking back at recent draft classes and seeing how my order of those players has changed, we conclude with the 2020 NHL Draft. With the most time between now and then of the four classes we've done, we would expect a lot to change and a lot more firm answers to be coming on who the real players are.

Tier 1: Elite NHL Player

Tim Stützle

There was a clear top three going into the 2020 draft, led by Alexis Lafrenière and then a debate for second best between Quinton Byfield and Tim Stützle. In the years since the draft, all three remain excellent players who project to have long, productive NHL careers. Stützle has separated from the pack though. He is such an elite skater, with a ton of natural skill and offensive instincts to go with a strong compete level. He looks like a true long-term star forward.

Tier 2: NHL All-Stars

Jake Sanderson

Alexis Lafrenière

It was a banner draft for Ottawa, as they picked the top two players in the draft in Stützle and Jake Sanderson. Sanderson may not be an ideal PP1 type of defenseman, but he's shown more offense early on in the NHL than some of his bigger backers could have hoped for to go with his great skating and defending.

Lafrenière had his best NHL season to date including a great playoff run for the Rangers. His so-so skating held him back initially as he needed time to gain strength and adjust to NHL pace, but now that he has, his elite skill and hockey sense can take over.

Tier 3: Bubble star and top of lineup

Alexander Nikishin

Seth Jarvis

This was a great draft for Carolina. Their first-round pick Seth Jarvis developed well into an important part of their lineup. He's small, but full of speed and energy, has very good offensive skills and can play in the hard areas of the ice despite his size. Alexander Nikishin has yet to play an NHL game, but given his dominance in the KHL, I'm more than comfortable rating him this highly. His toolkit is unique given his big frame to go with strong mobility, skill and a highly physical brand of hockey. He has every trait you want in an NHL defenseman and when he does eventually come over, I expect him to have a long and productive career.

Tier 4: Top of lineup player

Lucas Raymond

Quinton Byfield

Anton Lundell

Brock Faber

Jack Quinn

Anton Lundell isn't the flashiest player in the world, but he has a Stanley Cup and has played real minutes on a contender in recent years. The debate in his draft year was how much offense he would have as his skating and skill didn't truly stand out, but he always played up levels and excelled. He has shown enough offense versus men to go with his strong two-way play to look like a legit big-minute NHL center.

Brock Faber is one of the biggest risers from this age group, as he's become a true top-pair defenseman in the NHL who just got paid a lot of money. He's an excellent skater and competitor, whose offensive output was way higher than expected in the NHL than what he had shown as an amateur.

Tier 5: Bubble top and middle lineup

Marco Rossi

Braden Schneider

Yaroslav Askarov

Dawson Mercer

JJ Peterka

Jamie Drysdale

Kaiden Guhle

JJ Peterka has been very good as a pro. He's a highly skilled winger who skates well and can score, but his compete has allowed him to hold his own versus NHL defenders despite his size. Jamie Drysdale's stock has fallen a bit after he was so highly touted in his draft year. He's still the elite skater we saw in junior, but the offense hasn't come in the NHL as hoped even if he does move the puck well.

Tier 6: Middle of the lineup player

Connor Zary

Cole Perfetti

Luke Evangelista

Shakir Mukhamadullin

Ridly Greig

Mason Lohrei



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Justin Barron

Lukas Reichel

Dylan Holloway

Tyson Foerster

Philadelphia

Jake Neighbours

Hendrix Lapierre

Will Cuyllé

Luke Evangelista and Mason Lohrei were both picked in the second round but have looked quite good as pros and could have significant NHL careers. Evangelista fell due to his size and skating, but he's shown to have legit NHL skill and sense on top of playing hard and getting to the hard areas to create offense. Lohrei was a re-entry defenseman who tantalized due to his skill in a big frame, but there were concerns over his skating and defending. He's shown himself to be not only skilled but very skilled, so he's been able to overcome those skating concerns by just how many plays he makes with the puck.

Tier 7: Projected to play NHL games

Mavrik Bourque

Isaak Phillips

Alex Laferriere

Yegor Chinakhov

Matt Rempe

Devon Levi

Thomas Bordeleau

Marat Khusnutdinov

Nils Åman

Tyler Kleven

Brendan Brisson

Alexander Holtz

Aatu Jämsen

Leevi Meriläinen

Drew Commesso

Alexander Holtz has been one of the bigger letdowns so far from this draft. He was a very exciting player to watch due to his skill level and ability to score goals from range. He could pull you out of your seat, but his game lacked pace and he plays too much on the perimeter. The result was his skill didn't translate to the NHL like some hoped it would.

Tier 8: Has a chance to play games

Topi Niemelä

Emil Andrae

Ronan Seeley

Samuel Knazko

Daemon Hunt

Ian Moore

Jérémie Poirier

Alex Jefferies

Mikael Pyyhtiä

Luke Tuch

Emil Heineman

Riley Duran

Danil Gushchin

Maxim Groshev

Joel Blomqvist

Ryan Tverberg

Jack Finley

Vasily Ponomarev

Wyatt Kaiser

Matt Kessel

William Wallinder

Yan Kuznetsov

Lukas Cormier

Justin Sourdif

Sean Farrell

Brett Berard

Landon Slaggert

Jackson Hallum

Dylan Peterson

Yegor Sokolov

Nico Daws

Hugo Ollas

Rémi Poirier

Luke Prokop

William Dufour

Roby Järventie

Sam Colangelo

Bogdan Trineyev

Maksim Berezkin



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Sizing up the NHL: Analyzing 2024-25 teams by age, height, weight and nationality

By James Mirtle

It's been a few years since I've pulled this data together, and it's fair to say things have shifted a bit in the NHL.

The league is slightly older, taller and thicker than three years back. There are also now more American players than ever, as they approach 30 percent of the NHL for the first time.

I've broken this all down team by team, as we've done here at The Athletic in the past. Included here is any player who played a game as of Monday night, as well as any backup goaltender that had sat on the bench by that point in time. Not included are any players out due to injury in this period.

All told, this analysis includes nearly 700 players, 66 of which are goalies, and information pulled from NHL.com.

NHL average age this season: 28.3

Analysis: Last year's runners-up, and a team many have pegged to go deep this season, the Oilers are the NHL's oldest club.

As of later this week, Edmonton will have only two players under 25 (Vasily Podkolzin and Ty Emberson) and 13 players who are 30 or older, including Corey Perry and Derek Ryan, who are both among the 10 oldest players in the NHL this season.

Nashville also became surprisingly old by bringing in a veteran free-agent crew including Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault, Luke Schenn, Ryan O'Reilly and Gustav Nyquist the past two summers.

On the other side of things, the struggling Sabres are incredibly young, with nine players who are 23 or younger and only one player in his 30s (Jason Zucker).

Most of the league's youngest teams are rebuilding right now, although it's very interesting to see Boston and Colorado down there. Part of that is they don't have a lot of older players pulling up the average: Brad Marchand is the only Bruin older than 32 and the Avs have only three players older than 30.

Surprisingly, there isn't a single player in the NHL over 40 years old right now, although three big-name players will get there by season's end. And there are only nine teenagers in the league this season, led by baby-faced Flyers rookie Jett Luchanko, who was born in August of 2006, meaning there are quite a few players (e.g. Sidney Crosby) who have been playing longer than he's been alive.

10 oldest players in the NHL this season

1. Marc-Andre Fleury, MIN, 39.9 years old
2. Ryan Suter, STL, 39.7
3. Brent Burns, CAR, 39.6
4. Corey Perry, EDM, 39.4
5. Alex Ovechkin, WSH, 39.1
6. Jonathan Quick, NYR, 38.7
7. Evgeni Malkin, PIT, 38.2

8. Derek Ryan, EDM, 37.8

9. Trevor Lewis, LAK, 37.8

10. Jack Johnson, CBJ, 37.8

10 youngest players in the NHL this season

1. Jett Luchanko, PHI, 18.2 years old

2. Macklin Celebrini, SJS, 18.3

3. Connor Bedard, CHI, 19.3

4. Zach Benson, BUF, 19.4

5. Will Smith, SJS, 19.6

6. Calum Ritchie, COL, 19.7

7. Leo Carlsson, ANA, 19.8

8. Matvei Michkov, PHI, 19.9

9. Samuel Honzek, CGY, 19.9

10. Adam Fantilli, CBJ, 20.0

NHL average height this season: 73.6 inches

Analysis: The league is creeping up on an average height of 6-foot-2, as teams continue to value length — especially in goal. The average netminder this season tops 6-3, the continuation of a trend where taller and taller athletes are getting the crease. (Exhibit A: Maple Leafs rookie Dennis Hildeby, all 6-foot-7 of him.)

I had to double-check the Bruins number to make sure it was right, as Boston really towers over everyone here, with a full half inch in height above the second-place team. No, I didn't accidentally include Zdeno Chara; bringing in 6-6 Nikita Zadorov and Riley Tuftte means the Bruins now have a remarkable 16 players listed at 6-3 or above. Even with Marchand bringing down the average, that's a tall team.

Vegas and Washington have long been near the top of this list; the Leafs, meanwhile, have been climbing this list under new management (and having two giants in goal doesn't hurt).

On the other side of things, Colorado has 12 players listed between 5-10 and 6 feet tall, surpassed only by the Kraken with 13. Jamie Oleksiak must be getting things off the top shelf in that dressing room.

10 tallest players in the NHL this season

1. Matt Rempe, NYR, 81 inches (6-foot-9)
2. Adam Klapka, CGY, 80
3. Tyler Myers, VAN, 80
4. Dennis Hildeby, TOR, 79
5. Mads Søgaard, OTT, 79
6. Ivan Fedotov, PHI, 79
7. Vincent Desharnais, VAN, 79
8. Jamie Oleksiak, SEA, 79
9. Victor Hedman, TBL, 79



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

10. Twenty players tied at 6-foot-6, including Jake Oettinger and Owen Power

10 shortest players in the NHL this season

1. Logan Stankoven, DAL, 68 inches (5-foot-8)
2. Daniil Gushchin, SJS, 68
3. Bobby Brink, PHI, 68
4. Cole Caufield, MTL, 68
5. Alex DeBrincat, DET, 68
6. Colin Blackwell, DAL, 68
7. Cameron Atkinson, TBL, 68
8. Mats Zuccarello, MIN, 68
9. Thirteen players tied at 5-foot-9, including Lane Hutson and Seamus Casey

NHL average weight this season: 201.1 lbs

Analysis: There's the Leafs again, this time at the top of the list. New netminder Anthony Stolarz being the heaviest goalie in the league is part of it, but the other factor is Matthew Knies just, well, eating his way into the power forward role (he's up to 227 pounds as a sophomore, with more room to grow).

Toronto has only four players listed under 199 pounds right now. And they'll get even heavier and taller once Jani Hakanpää is ready to return from a knee injury

On the lighter side, the Canucks make a surprise appearance here despite having a lot of big boys on the back end in Tyler Myers, Vincent Desharnais, Derek Forbort and Carson Soucy. Led by 165-pounder Conor Garland, Vancouver has 12 players listed at under 195 pounds, including lanky goalie Kevin Lankinen (yes, pun intended), Elias Pettersson and Quinn Hughes.

10 heaviest players in the NHL this season

1. Jamie Oleksiak, SEA, 257 pounds
2. Matt Rempe, NYR, 255
3. Nikita Zadorov, BOS, 248
4. Nicolas Hague, VGK, 245
5. Victor Hedman, TBL, 245
6. Anthony Stolarz, TOR, 243
7. Adam Edström, NYR, 241
8. Arber Xhekaj, MTL, 240
9. Alex Ovechkin, WSH, 238
10. Austin Watson, DET, 238

10 lightest players in the NHL this season

1. Lane Hutson, MTL, 162
2. Seamus Casey, NJD, 162
3. Logan Stankoven, DAL, 165
4. Danil Gushchin, SJS, 165
5. Conor Garland, VAN, 165

6. Jared Spurgeon, MIN, 166

7. Dustin Wolf, CGY, 166

8. Albert Johansson, DET, 168

9. Bobby Brink, PHI, 169

10. Zach Benson, BUF, 170

NHL averages this season: Canadian 41.2%, American 28.6%, European 30.2%

Analysis: The rise of USA Hockey keeps showing up in this number, year after year.

Twenty years ago, only around 15 percent of NHL players were American. A decade ago, that had jumped to 23 percent. Now it's up again, this time approaching the level of all of the European nations combined.

That growth is obviously coming at the expense of Canadian players, which is happening for a couple of reasons.

No. 1 is simply population size, as the U.S. has nine times the people power. But the other big thing impacting this is simply participation in hockey. U.S. markets like Pittsburgh, Chicago, California, St. Louis, Washington D.C. and others have exploded over the last decade or two, offering more competition for spots in the pro game.

Minor hockey enrollment in Canada, meanwhile, has been stagnant for some time, in part due to cost reasons.

These trends are probably worth deeper analysis at some point later this season, especially as we ramp up for the return of international play with the NHL 4 Nations Face-Off in February and the Olympics in 2026. If you have suggestions on future stories that would look at how the demographics of the league have changed, let us know in the comments.

NHL averages this season: First-rounders 42.6%, Rounds 2+ 46.1%, Undrafted 11.3%

Analysis: I haven't done this type of analysis before, so I don't have historical comparables to look at, but I did find it interesting just to pull out the overall numbers.

The fact that nearly 43 percent of players are picked in the first round of the NHL Draft is telling, as is the realization more than 10 percent of the league wasn't drafted at all.

There are a lot of different ways to build a team in this league.

One thing that stood out with this part of the data is just how different goaltenders are. Only 9 percent of those in the league were drafted in the first round, as teams are often reluctant to use high picks on them. More than 15 percent of goalies weren't drafted at all, a group that includes recent Stanley Cup winner Sergei Bobrovsky and Alexandar Georgiev.

There were also a lot more mid- and late-round hits with netminders, with an incredible 20 percent of them picked in the fifth, sixth or seventh round. Only 10 percent of defensemen, by comparison, were found in those later rounds. There's probably a fuller analysis that could be done on this data as part of one of our upcoming draft packages, as there's a lot to unpack here.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024



Preview: October 18 at Pittsburgh

By Peter Dewar

When: Friday, October 18

Odds at Time of Publishing, via Fanatics Sportsbook: Canes -155

Canes Record: 1-1-0 (2 Points, 8th - Metropolitan Division)

Canes Last Game: 4-2 W over the New Jersey Devils on Tuesday, October 15

Penguins Record: 3-2-0 (6 Points, 3rd - Metropolitan Division)

Penguins Last Game: 6-5 OTW over the Buffalo Sabres on Wednesday, October 16

Last Game...

Led by a pair of second-period strikes and Jackson Blake's first NHL goal in the third, the Canes earned their first win of the 2024-25 regular season with a 4-2 victory over the New Jersey Devils on Tuesday.

Pyotr Kochetkov turned aside 23 of 25 shots to pick up the win between the pipes in his regular-season debut.

In Net...

As usual, Rod Brind'Amour did not name a starter during media availability after Thursday's practice. Frederik Andersen appeared on opening night while Pyotr Kochetkov picked up the win on Tuesday, setting up a potential rotation that could see Andersen return to the crease tonight should Brind'Amour elect to continue the pattern. As the Canes kick off the front end of a back-to-back, it seems safe to expect the goalie who doesn't go tonight to get the nod in St. Louis on Saturday.

Milestone Watch...

Jesper Kotkaniemi is two assists away from 100 NHL assists

Jordan Martinook is two points shy of 200 NHL points

Shayne Gostisbehere is two goals away from 100 NHL goals

Martin Necas is three goals shy of 100 NHL/Hurricanes goals

First Of Many...

Jackson Blake scored his first NHL goal on Tuesday vs. New Jersey, which also happened to be the game-winner. He is the 18th skater in franchise history to score his first NHL goal and have it be the game-winning goal.

The only other active Hurricane to accomplish this feat with Carolina was Andrei Svechnikov, who scored the game-winning goal vs. the New York Rangers (10/7/18).

Fantastic Finns...

Sebastian Aho and Jesperi Kotkaniemi both hit milestones in Tuesday's game vs. New Jersey.

Aho recorded his first goal of the season in his 600th NHL/Hurricanes game Tuesday, becoming the 11th player to reach 600 games with the franchise and the third among active players.

Kotkaniemi recorded his 100th point as a Carolina Hurricane while skating in his 400th NHL game Tuesday vs. New Jersey and is now two assists away from registering his 100th NHL assist. He currently sits 10th among active Hurricanes in points as a Hurricane, two points from passing Jesper Fast.

Hitting The Road...

Friday's game vs. Pittsburgh starts a season-long six-game road trip from 10/18 to 10/28.

In 2023-24, the Canes posted a 25-23-3 record away from home, ranking tied for sixth in the league in road points percentage (.646%).

Carolina posted the top road power play percentage (30.8%), had the second-highest road penalty kill percentage (85.4%) and allowed the fewest shots against per game (27.17) last year.

With Rod Brind'Amour behind the bench (2018-19-present), the Canes have posted the second-highest road points percentage with .626 behind only Boston with .656.

On The Other Side...

Pittsburgh enters the contest with wins in back-to-back games, including a rollercoaster 6-5 OT victory over Buffalo on Wednesday.

Sidney Crosby (3pts) and Evgeni Malkin (4pts) led the way and each climbed to new milestones in the win, with Crosby becoming the 10th player in NHL history to reach 1,600 points and his Russian counterpart posting his 500th NHL goal.

Malkin is currently tied for the league lead in scoring with 11 points (2g, 9a).

Injury Updates

Forward Jesper Fast was ruled out for the 2024-25 season in August after having neck surgery.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Defenseman Riley Stillman (lower-body injury) has worked in a no-contact sweater since training camp started on September 19.

What Are We Wearing?

The team will be wearing their white sweaters. To view the team's full 2024-25 uniform schedule, [click here](#).

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes are back in action in St. Louis tomorrow to wrap up the back-to-back against the Blues.

Next Game: Saturday, October 19 at St. Louis

Next Home Game: Thursday, October 31 | HALLOWEEN NIGHT



NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, fantasy pickup for each team - ESPN

By Sean Allen, Victoria Matiash

Sean Allen is a fantasy analyst for ESPN.com. He was the 2008 and 2009 Fantasy Sports Writers Association Hockey Writer of the Year. You can tweet him [@seanard](#).

There is still quite a bit of the 2024-25 NHL season left to be played. But after a week and change in the books, there are some clear early risers (and fallers) on our rankings of all 32 clubs.

But beyond the new 1-32 list, do you need some help with your fantasy hockey roster? If so, you're in luck, because Sean Allen and Victoria Matiash have provided a waiver wire target from each team.

Keep in mind that it's not too late to play ESPN fantasy hockey this season. Sign up for free and start playing today!

How we rank: A panel of ESPN hockey commentators, analysts, reporters and editors sends in a 1-32 poll based on the games through Wednesday, which generates our master list here.

Note: Previous ranking for each team refers to the previous edition, published Oct. 7. Points percentages are through Thursday's games.

1. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 80.0%

Logan Stankoven, F (68.8% available, 1.9 FPPG, 7.6 fantasy points): The rookie is contributing from wherever coach Pete DeBoer plunks him in the lineup, be it on the top unit or elsewhere. Through his first four games, the versatile youngster provided an assist on goals by five different teammates, including one on the power play.

Next seven days: vs. EDM (Oct. 19), @ BUF (Oct. 22), @ BOS (Oct. 24)

2. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 87.5%

Will Cuyllé, F (98.5% available, 2.3 FPPG, 7.0 fantasy points): Reilly Smith would be the only other likely available place to look, but there's more potential in Cuyllé getting enough minutes to earn a fantasy-relevant amount of hits

and shots. It looks like this third line will get enough 5-on-5 minutes to do the job.

Next seven days: @ TOR (Oct. 19), @ MTL (Oct. 22), vs. FLA (Oct. 24)

3. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 75.0%

Anthony Stolarz, G (66.9% available, 13.8 FPPG, 4.6 fantasy points): With a head start on an injured Joseph Woll, Stolarz is doing his best to create some early separation for the crease-share lead. A permanent 60-40 share is more than enough for fantasy stardom on this winning team.

Next seven days: vs. NYR (Oct. 19), vs. TB (Oct. 21), @ CBJ (Oct. 22), vs. STL (Oct. 24)

4. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 58.3%

Anton Lundell, F (93.3% available, 2.0 FPPG, 7.8 fantasy points): With Aleksander Barkov to miss at least the rest of the month, Lundell is a top-line center for the Cats with Sam Reinhart on his wing. It's not a shock he has four points in three games since Barkov was hurt.

Next seven days: vs. VGK (Oct. 19), vs. MIN (Oct. 22), @ NYR (Oct. 24)

5. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 71.4%

Jake Allen, G (88.5% available, 16.4 FPPG, 8.2 fantasy points): Early returns suggest this will be a beneficial arrangement between Allen and Jacob Markstrom this season. Even with a 40% crease share, it looks like Allen is worth having on daily-lineup rosters.

Next seven days: vs. WSH (Oct. 19), vs. TB (Oct. 22), @ DET (Oct. 24)

6. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 14



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Points percentage: 100.0%

Gabriel Vilardi, F (86.7% available, 0.8 FPPG, 2.5 fantasy points): As long as he remains a fixture on the Jets' top line and power play with Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor, Vilardi will put up impressive scoring numbers in short order -- just as he did last season, when not out injured.

Next seven days: vs. SJ (Oct. 18), vs. PIT (Oct. 20), @ STL (Oct. 22), @ SEA (Oct. 24)

7. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 60.0%

Ilya Samsonov, G (48.3% available, 6.4 FPPG, 6.4 fantasy points): You can bet your bottom casino chip Samsonov intends to challenge Adin Hill for the starter's gig with one of the better teams in the West. Including preseason play, the former Leaf and Capital has performed well to this point.

Next seven days: @ FLA (Oct. 19), vs. LA (Oct. 22)

8. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 60.0%

Pavel Zacha, F (71.0% available, 1.1 FPPG, 4.6 fantasy points): Zacha held on to his role as linemate to David Pastrnak, splitting faceoff duties on the top line with Elias Lindholm. What really juices him for fantasy is that he also stays with them both when the Bruins go on the power play.

Next seven days: @ UTAH (Oct. 19), @ NSH (Oct. 22), vs. DAL (Oct. 24)

9. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 100.0%

J.J. Moser, D (96.1% available, 2.1 FPPG, 2.1 fantasy points): Victor Hedman's new defense partner plays a physical game and will be due a ton of ice time thanks to his running mate. The blocked shot statistics should help keep him on the fringes of roster-worthy.

Next seven days: @ OTT (Oct. 19), @ TOR (Oct. 21), @ NJ (Oct. 22), vs. MIN (Oct. 24)

10. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 40.0%

Viktor Arvidsson, F (51.5% available, 0.6 FPPG, 2.4 fantasy points): No, it hasn't been a great start, but fresh on-ice chemistry often isn't forged overnight. As long as coach Kris Knoblauch is sticking with Arvidsson in his top six, fantasy managers in deeper leagues should do the same. The production will come.

Next seven days: @ DAL (Oct. 19), vs. CAR (Oct. 22)

11. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 50.0

Shayne Gostisbehere, D (68.4% available, 1.4 FPPG, 1.4 fantasy points): It's only two games, but 20 minutes of average ice time is above expectations. We knew Gostisbehere could steal power-play time, but the added counting minutes is huge for his fantasy output

Next seven days: @ PIT (Oct. 18), @ STL (Oct. 19), @ EDM (Oct. 22), @ CGY (Oct. 24)

12. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 75.0%

Jake Middleton, D (77.7% available, 2.9 FPPG, 11.5 fantasy points): The Wild blueliner is worth his fantasy salt in any league that rewards hits and blocked shots. Brock Faber's top-pairing partner can also be counted on for pitching in on the production side enough to average 2.0 FPPG.

Next seven days: @ CBJ (Oct. 19), @ FLA (Oct. 22), @ TB (Oct. 24)

13. Utah Hockey Club

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 70.0%

Barrett Hayton, F (65.4% available, 2.7 FPPG, 13.3 fantasy points): Clayton Keller's center has earned at least one point in all five games to launch 2024-25, comprising four goals and two assists. Unlike Keller and winger Dylan Guenther, Hayton remains available in more than half of ESPN fantasy leagues. For now.

Next seven days: vs. BOS (Oct. 19), vs. OTT (Oct. 22), vs. COL (Oct. 24)

14. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 100.0%

Jonathan Huberdeau, F (41.9% available, 3.2 FPPG, 12.7 fantasy points): The Flames' trio of Huberdeau, Martin Pospisil and Anthony Mantha have combined for 15 points through four games. Of those three, Huberdeau is the only member of the club's top power play.

Next seven days: @ SEA (Oct. 19), vs. PIT (Oct. 22), vs. CAR (Oct. 24)

15. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 60.0%

Joel Blomqvist, G (98.6% available, 8.8 FPPG, 2.9 fantasy points): This is becoming less and less speculative. The pump is primed for a hostile takeover of the crease by the talented, young netminder. Tristan Jarry has been shaky and Alex Nedeljkovic is injured. More solid starts could force the Pens' hand.

Next seven days: vs. CAR (Oct. 18), @ WPG (Oct. 20), @ CGY (Oct. 22)

16. Los Angeles Kings



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 60.0%

Brandt Clarke, D (82.6% available, 2.4 FPPG, 9.5 fantasy points): Filling in for Drew Doughty on the Kings' No. 1 power play, the eighth overall draft selection (2021) has three assists with the extra skater, plus another at even strength, though four games. Doughty isn't expected back until late December at the earliest.

Next seven days: @ ANA (Oct. 20), @ VGK (Oct. 22), vs. SJ (Oct. 24)

17. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 0.0%

Casey Mittelstadt, F (68.3% available, 2.5 FPPG, 9.8 fantasy points): The Colorado center has more goals than Nathan MacKinnon. That trend won't last, but a temporary spot on the top power-play unit ensures Mittelstadt will continue to produce with the extra skater. Then more at even strength once Valeri Nichushkin, Artturi Lehkonen and others are back in the mix.

Next seven days: vs. ANA (Oct. 18), @ SJ (Oct. 20), @ SEA (Oct. 22), @ UTAH (Oct. 24)

18. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 50.0%

Maxim Tsyplov, F (97.3% available, 1.5 FPPG, 4.4 fantasy points): Though Anthony Duclair is another tempting option, the unknown upside of Tsyplov is admittedly intriguing. Especially with the Isles giving him ample ice time (17:39 per game) and power-play time (3:04).

Next seven days: vs. MTL (Oct. 19), vs. DET (Oct. 22)

19. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 10

Points percentage: 50.0%

Jake DeBrusk, F (60.0% available, 1.8 FPPG, 5.5 fantasy points): Any fantasy manager who believes Elias Pettersson will soon return to form should also anticipate solid numbers from his new winger. DeBrusk has 70-point potential alongside Pettersson when the center hits his best level.

Next seven days: @ PHI (Oct. 19), @ CHI (Oct. 22)

20. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 50.0%

Josh Norris, F (87.1% available, 3.4 FPPG, 10.2 fantasy points): Off to a hot start, Norris is making us forget the injury-riddled recent seasons we've endured. As is the theme for early season fantasy targets, he's fueling his stats with power-play opportunities.

Next seven days: vs. TB (Oct. 19), @ UTAH (Oct. 22)

21. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 0.0%

Gustav Nyquist, F (74.2% available, 0.4 FPPG, 1.1 fantasy points): Give it a minute. Nyquist registered only four points in his first month with the Predators last season, then wrapped up with 75 total. As long as the veteran winger sticks on a scoring line with Filip Forsberg and Ryan O'Reilly, we'll see an uptick in production soon.

Next seven days: vs. DET (Oct. 19), vs. BOS (Oct. 22)

22. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 60.0%

Jordan Eberle, F (88.0% available, 2.6 FPPG, 10.0 fantasy points): The Kraken's new captain is off to a hot start, potting three goals and an assist through his first four contests. A gig on a new-look power play -- including Vegas export Chandler Stephenson -- offers additional fantasy promise

Next seven days: vs. CGY (Oct. 19), vs. COL (Oct. 22), vs. WPG (Oct. 24)

23. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 66.7%

Tom Wilson, F (74.0% available, 4.2 FPPG, 4.2 fantasy points): This is still Tom "Bodycheck" Wilson we are talking about. The Caps have an upgraded top six, and he's still a major part of it. He should be rostered in more leagues.

Next seven days: @ NJ (Oct. 19), @ PHI (Oct. 22), vs. PHI (Oct. 23)

24. St. Louis Blue

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 60.0%

Philip Broberg, D (92.0% available, 1.7 FPPG, 6.9 fantasy points): Heading into Thursday's tilt with the Islanders, the eighth overall draft selection (2019) has pitched in a point per game through four. A regular top-four role and spot on the secondary power play should result in a breakout season from the former Oiler.

Next seven days: vs. CAR (Oct. 19), vs. WPG (Oct. 22), @ TOR (Oct. 24)

25. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 37.5%

Jamie Drysdale, D (93.1% available, 1.6 FPPG, 3.2 fantasy points): A healthy Drysdale came in with the quarterback job on the power play, supplanting Cam York despite York's success last season. This Flyers' power play was brutal in 2023-24, but the talent has been upgraded thanks to rookie Matvei Michkov.

Next seven days: vs. VAN (Oct. 19), vs. WSH (Oct. 22), @ WSH (Oct. 23)

26. Buffalo Sabres



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 25.0%

Owen Power, D (67.5% available, 1.4 FPPG, 5.4 fantasy points): While we could make an argument for Power or his defense partner Bowen Byram, Power is the one getting blue-line time on the first unit for the power play alongside Rasmus Dahlin.

Next seven days: @ CHI (Oct. 19), vs. DAL (Oct. 22)

27. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 25.0%

J.T. Compher, F (93.4% available, 1.6 FPPG, 4.9 fantasy points): It might not last because it's currently at the expense of both Alex DeBrincat and Vladimir Tarasenko, but Compher is rolling on the top power-play unit. It's his only access to ice time with Dylan Larkin, which is key in Detroit.

Next seven days: @ NSH (Oct. 19), @ NYI (Oct. 22), vs. NJ (Oct. 24)

28. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 40.0%

Kirby Dach, F (93.8% available, 1.3 FPPG, 5.1 fantasy points): The Habs are light on fantasy options beyond the top line, but Dach joins them on the power play. He has had plenty of power-play time, averaging 4:31 across the first four games.

Next seven days: @ NYI (Oct. 19), vs. NYR (Oct. 22)

29. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 66.7%

Lukas Dostal, G (86.6% available, 7.1 FPPG, 14.2 fantasy points): One shutout win against the Sharks and a lively hard-fought victory over a spunky Utah bunch suggests the Ducks' current No. 1 could serve as a viable option in the deepest of fantasy leagues. At least until John Gibson

(appendectomy) returns, and when the matchup makes sense.

Next seven days: @ COL (Oct. 18), vs. LA (Oct. 20), vs. SJ (Oct. 22)

30. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 50.0%

Kent Johnson, F (94.9% available, 3.0 FPPG, 6.1 fantasy points): The skill has been there all along, so it's no surprise that 20:12 of ice time per game in the early stages of the season has teased out results. Ice time and power-play time are the keys to his success, and he's getting both

Next seven days: vs. MIN (Oct. 19), vs. TOR (Oct. 22)

31. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 50.0%

Alec Martinez, D (96.4% available, 2.3 FPPG, 9.0 fantasy points): The veteran defenseman is back to his shot-blocking ways, ranking third in the league early on. Martinez finished with 165 blocks last season, despite playing only 55 games. He also pitches in more points than the typical high-end shot-blocking defender.

Next seven days: vs. BUF (Oct. 19), vs. VAN (Oct. 22)

32. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 25.0%

Jake Walman, D (87.1% available, 2.0 FPPG, 6.0 fantasy points): The Sharks defender is eager to both shoot on net and block a good number of opposing shots. He's also pegged to provide a hearty serving of time on ice, including quality minutes on the club's No. 1 power play.

Next seven days: @ WPG (Oct. 18), vs. COL (Oct. 20), @ ANA (Oct. 22), @ LA (Oct. 24)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

The Hockey News

Brendan Lemieux Reassigned to AHL

By Ryan Henkel

The 28-year-old forward cleared waivers and has been assigned to the Chicago Wolves.

The Carolina Hurricanes have announced that forward Brendan Lemieux has cleared waivers and has subsequently been reassigned to the Chicago Wolves.

Lemieux, 28, played in just 32 games for the Canes last season and had three goals, five points and 71 hits primarily as the 13th forward.

Despite that lack of playing time, the physical winger signed a one-year, \$775,000 contract extension with the Hurricanes last season, but it seems like he's found himself as the odd-man out.

The Hurricanes are currently pushed right up close to the salary cap limit and so they're trying to shed as much as space as they can to accrue more for the trade deadline.

Hurricanes Embark On Season-Long Road Trip

By Ryan Henkel

The Carolina Hurricanes have taken flight for what will be the longest road trip of the season.

The Canes hit the road following practice on Thursday, Oct. 17 and won't be back until Oct. 29 (next home game won't be until Oct. 31).

Carolina will play six games over that span starting with a back-to-back against the Pittsburgh Penguins (Friday, Oct. 18) and the St. Louis Blue (Saturday, Oct. 19).

From there, the Canes will head up to Canada where they'll take on the Edmonton Oilers, Calgary Flames.

Then they'll swoop back into America quickly to take on the Seattle Kraken before heading back into Canada to face the Vancouver Canucks.

The Hurricanes typically start their season with their longest road trip every year due to the NC State Fair which takes place in mid to late October.

It would be (and has been before) a logistical nightmare to have home games while the fair is in town due the proximity of the fairgrounds to the arena and the sheer volume of traffic that it produces.

After the reassignment of Brendan Lemieux to the AHL, the Hurricanes will be traveling with just 18 players which is a bit unusual for a long road trip, although having their affiliate in Chicago, a major travel hub, mitigates that problem.

"Right now, it's fine," said Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour on the smaller traveling party. "We'll see what happens. Obviously if we get nicked up a little bit then I think that strategy will change a little bit."

Any road trip is difficult because players and staff are constantly traveling and away from their homes and families.

"It's hard on anybody that has a job where you're away for a long time," Brind'Amour said. "But we wouldn't do it if we didn't love it."

But while the time apart from family is difficult, the emergence of modern technology like FaceTime helps with that a bit.

"I'm one of these guys who bashes technology and social media and this and that, but there's a lot of benefits to the technology because it feels like even though you're miles away, it feels like you're right there," Brind'Amour said. "That's the grace of technology."

The early road trip also allows time for a new group to bond.

"That's how you sell it," Brind'Amour said on the benefit of a long road trip. "Everybody says the same things, but yes, that's part of it. But I think more so, you can just focus on hockey. There really is no distractions and we're all together. At this time of year, everyone's more excited to have long road trips than in January and February where your season starts to drag a little."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

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Articles from outlets covering the Hurricanes' upcoming opponents and league-wide news

1324481 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins activate goalie Alex Nedeljkovic from IR, assign him to AHL for conditioning

Justin Guerriero2-3 minutes 10/17/2024

The Pittsburgh Penguins activated goalie Alex Nedeljkovic from injured reserve Thursday morning, assigning him to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League on a conditioning loan.

Nedeljkovic suffered an undisclosed injury during the preseason and began the year on injured reserve.

The 28-year-old has been on the ice in practice for the Penguins but has not participated in any of the club's usual drills, line rushes or special teams work.

Nedeljkovic was signed to a two-year extension in June worth \$2.5 million annually.

Last season for the Penguins, he went 18-7-7 with a 2.97 goals-against average and .902 save percentage, effectively taking over as the No. 1 goalie during the stretch run.

When Nedeljkovic is ready to return to the NHL, the Penguins will have a tricky goaltending decision on their hands.

Starter Tristan Jarry has been ineffective this season, going 1-1 with a 5.47 GAA and .833 save percentage. Meanwhile, rookie Joel Blomqvist has performed capably, going 2-1 with a 2.86 GAA and .913 save percentage.

Keeping three goalies on the NHL roster is unusual, though Blomqvist's \$886,667 cap hit might make it more bearable.

Nedeljkovic played one game on a conditioning assignment with Wilkes-Barre/Scranton as he recovered from an injury last season, and it was memorable. He became the first AHL goalie to score two career goals when he found the net during a 4-2 victory over the Providence Bruins on Nov. 17.

Wilkes-Barre/Scranton's next game is Friday evening at home vs. the Lehigh Valley Phantoms.

Note: The Penguins had a scheduled off day Thursday.

Justin Guerriero

Tribune Review LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324482 Pittsburgh Penguins

Featuring high drama, assist from Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin's 500th goal was unforgettable

Justin Guerriero6-7 minutes 10/17/2024

Evgeni Malkin couldn't have asked for a much better 500th career goal.

Or a crazier game for it to happen in.

Without a doubt, the Penguins' 6-5 overtime victory against the Buffalo Sabres on Wednesday at PPG Paints Arena, highlighted by Malkin's milestone, won't soon be forgotten.

"I don't want to lose this game tonight," Malkin said afterward. "It's worse when you score and you celebrate, the fans probably are celebrating, but we lost. Crazy game. I'm glad we won (and got) two points. The score in overtime — finally. We deserved two points."

Over his 19-year NHL career, Malkin has had a knack for producing exotic goals.

Whether by accelerating through the neutral zone and slicing through defensemen to score, ripping off-balance backhanders or flexing his powerful slap shot, Malkin has produced no shortage of highlight-reel scores.

Stylistically, goal No. 500 for Malkin will assume a prominent place among his best.

With 16 minutes, 34 seconds left in regulation, Malkin scored past Buffalo's Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen while sprawled out on his back, having successfully tapped in his own rebound.

Fittingly, the lone assist on Malkin's score was collected by longtime teammate Sidney Crosby.

"I'll have a great memory of that," Crosby said. "I had a front-row seat watching him do it. Just really happy for him. I know how hard it is to get to that number and how long and how well he's been doing it for. That's a great achievement. I'm proud of him."

Malkin became the 48th player in NHL history to score 500 goals and the third member of the Penguins franchise to do so, along with Crosby and Mario Lemieux.

The Magnitogorsk, Russia, native also became only the second Russian player to reach that plateau, joining Alexander Ovechkin.

The sequence that led to Malkin's score was vintage Crosby.

TAKE A BOW, MR. 500 ????.pic.twitter.com/YRtMwi4pMf

— Pittsburgh Penguins (@penguins) October 17, 2024



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Battling Sabres defenseman Mattias Samuelsson behind the net, Crosby, back turned to Malkin, flipped an accurate pass to his teammate as Malkin cut toward the net for a shot on goal.

Falling down after his initial shot, which Luukkonen stopped, Malkin slid across the edge of the crease, where fortuitously, the loose puck found his stick.

Sliding on the ice on his back, Malkin managed to whack the puck in.

That Crosby notched the only assist on the goal was yet another memorable moment for the teammates who have brought three Stanley Cup championships to Pittsburgh since first taking the ice together in 2006-07.

In February 2022, when Crosby scored his 500th goal, it was Malkin who set him up on the power play.

As Malkin closed in on 500, Crosby hoped to be the one to lend a hand.

"I wanted to find a way, and sometimes, it doesn't work out that way," Crosby said. "Obviously, we don't play together on a line that often. But I was hoping I'd have an opportunity to try to find him and it worked out.

"He set me up so nice there for my 500th. I was hoping I could return the favor. His was a little more work than mine. Just a beautiful goal. Huge goal for us, too, in the game."

Malkin's goal was the 140th that Crosby assisted on, by far the most of any of Malkin's teammates over the years.

It also gave the Penguins, who navigated through a rough start that saw starting goaltender Tristan Jarry yanked in favor of Joel Blomqvist, a 4-3 lead in the third period.

The go-ahead score brought the entire Penguins bench onto the ice to celebrate.

"I thought Geno's goal and Sid being a part of it was appropriate, given the years that they've played together," said coach Mike Sullivan. "It was a pretty emotional moment for our whole team. You could see the raw emotion when our guys were going over the boards."

Wednesday's thrilling game belonged to Malkin, who added two assists to his 500th goal and continues to lead the league with 11 points so far this year (two goals, nine assists).

Crosby also finished with a pair of assists as well as his first goal of the season, a power-play game-winner at 1:38 of overtime.

SIDNEY CROSBY, OUR OVERTIME HERO!
pic.twitter.com/3JueoKyW4p

— Pittsburgh Penguins (@penguins) October 17, 2024

Assisting on Bryan Rust's power-play goal in the first period gave Crosby a big milestone of his own, as he became the 10th player in NHL history to reach 1,600 points.

By the end of the night, Crosby had reached 1,602.

With all Crosby and Malkin have accomplished together, participating in another milestone moment with one another made for a special experience.

"This is a great story," Malkin said. "I don't know how it worked, but I'm the only assist to him on (his) 500(th) goal. He's the only assist to me — it's crazy. Sometimes I don't understand how it works. This is a great story for me and to him. We probably deserve to share this night together.

"I'm glad he scored 1,600 points. ... He deserves every point. He's a leader, captain — he works every practice. He's not scored the last couple games, but he deserved the overtime goal and each point."

Notes: The Penguins activated goalie Alex Nedeljkovic from injured reserve Thursday morning, assigning him to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League on a conditioning loan. ... The club had a scheduled off-day Thursday.

Justin Guerriero

Tribune Review LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324483 Pittsburgh Penguins

Jesse Puljujarvi, Drew O'Connor among Penguins bottom six providing increased scoring support

Cameron Hoover 6-8 minutes 10/17/2024

Sidney Crosby's overtime winner against the Sabres on Wednesday night was his first goal of the season — and the longest it's taken the captain to get on the score sheet since a six-game drought to start the 2018-19 season.

In previous years, this may have been a real problem for the Penguins, who have generally relied on scoring from Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and the top two lines to keep them afloat while the bottom six grinds away and plays a more defensive game. This year, though, has been different. Ten of Pittsburgh's 20 goals this season have come from the bottom two lines or a defenseman.

"It's crucial if you want to have success into the spring and summer," third-line center Lars Eller said. "You need everybody to do something, add something to the team. I think, right now, one of the reasons we're getting some wins is because of that."

After a 6-0 shellacking at the hands of the Rangers to open the season, the Penguins have won three of four and are trending upward. It's not as though Crosby has played poorly thus far — he's still over a point per game — but the goals hadn't shown up until he jammed home Erik Karlsson's pass at the far post to beat Buffalo.

Malkin is off to one of his best starts ever. His 11 points are his most through a season's first five games throughout his now-19-year career. But only two of those 11 points have come from Malkin lighting the lamp — an empty-netter to finish off Montreal and the 500th of his career Wednesday night against Buffalo.

The Penguins, though, almost prefer it this way. Crosby and Malkin might not be scoring goals in bunches, but right now, they don't have to. Coach Mike Sullivan pointed to that balanced score sheet as a potential boon for his team's stars.

"It spreads the burden of trying to score every night. It spreads it around," Sullivan said. "It takes a little bit of pressure off those guys. When you can get contributions offensively throughout your lineup, whether it be the four lines or even on the blue line, I just think if you're gonna contend, it's required."

The Penguins also got a couple of slick goals from bottom-sixers Wednesday night.

With the team down 3-1, a flurry of penalties resulted in a four-on-three power play for Buffalo. Noel Acciari made a great play at his own blue line, stripping Dylan Cozens of the puck and dumping it off to Drew O'Connor. The pair carried the puck into their zone on a two-on-one, and O'Connor rifled a laser past Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen's short side for the team's first short-handed tally of the year.

"We have a lot of good players up and down the lineup," O'Connor said. "We have guys that can score, guys that can play defensive roles and chip in offensively. I think we have guys that are capable of scoring, and I think you've seen that early on."

Jesse Puljujarvi was a healthy scratch Saturday night in Toronto. Still, he's responded since returning to the lineup with an assist Monday in Montreal and a beautiful goal Wednesday against the Sabres. He handled a bouncing pass from Eller, settled the puck down in front of Luukkonen and chipped a nifty backhand into the top corner for his first goal of the year.

Puljujarvi looks much more comfortable skating this season after being hampered last year by the remnants of a double hip surgery that put his future in the sport in doubt. If he can continue to contribute and inch closer to his potential, the 26-year-old former fourth-overall pick could be a bright spot for the Penguins.

"I thought the goal was a goalscorer's goal, and he's had a few of them," Sullivan said. "I do think the fact that he's had a full year and offseason time frame where he's had an opportunity to continue to build strength, I do think that has helped him, without a doubt. I think his skating is



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

stronger. He's faster. He's more powerful. ... And I'm sure his confidence is building because of all those things."

Kris Letang has two goals from the blue line, and Erik Karlsson and Marcus Pettersson have one apiece. O'Connor, Eller and Kevin Hayes each have two tallies, and Puljujarvi has one.

And even though they play on the top two lines, Anthony Beauvillier and Rickard Rakell factor into this equation, too. Beauvillier, a surprise addition to Crosby's wing on the top line, scored twice in the team's first win of the year in Detroit. And Rakell, coming off of an unproductive season he and the team would like to forget, has scored in three straight games, the first time he's done so for the Penguins.

It all adds up to a much more dangerous lineup for Sullivan to play with — and one the Sisyphian Crosby hasn't needed to singlehandedly push up the mountain so far this year. If the Penguins want to get back to the playoffs after two seasons away, this will need to continue.

"We've been pleased with the production we're getting from throughout the lineup but the bottom six in particular," Sullivan said. "These guys are still bringing a conscientious game, and they've been able to contribute offensively with some goals that give us a chance to win. That's gonna allow us to build a chemistry that we need to build in order to become the team we hope to become."

Around the boards

On Thursday, the Penguins activated goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic from injured reserve and assigned him to the team's AHL affiliate in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton on a conditioning loan. Nedeljkovic left the Penguins' preseason game in Detroit on Sept. 30 with a lower-body injury and hasn't played in a game this season, but it looks like his return is growing closer.

It will be interesting to see how president of hockey operations Kyle Dubas manages his goaltender situation. Tristan Jarry was pulled Wednesday night in favor of Joel Blomqvist, who stopped 26 of 28 shots to keep the Penguins in the game. Jarry allowed three goals on his first five shots, including an awful giveaway to Tage Thompson to dig the team into a hole just 43 seconds into the contest.

Post Gazette LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324484 Pittsburgh Penguins

Paul Zeise's mailbag: Will Penguins' Tristan Jarry become the worst contract in Pittsburgh sports history?

Paul Zeise 5-7 minutes 10/17/2024

Welcome to Paul Zeise's weekly mailbag, where the Post-Gazette columnist and radio host of KDKA-AM and 93.7 The Fan answers your questions about sports, life and everything in between. If you want to ask a question, tweet him @PaulZeise or email him at pzeise@post-gazette.com.

Let's get started:

Xavier: Do you think Tristan Jarry's current deal is among the worst contracts in Pittsburgh sports history?

Zeise: Well, that is actually a very good question. Clearly, the Jason Kendall contract and the Jose Tabata contract are in the running. Donte Moncrief was relatively cheap but was still a terrible signing. However, Jarry has a chance to be the worst of them all because he was given a contract even while significant questions were still looming about him. I mean, the reality is he should have gotten a one-year prove-it deal, but instead, he got a long-term deal. And I just don't think he will ever be the guy. I just don't. As such, I think it will be difficult for the Penguins to get their money out of the deal. I mean, it is entirely possible he is not the starting goalie anymore, and the season is five games old or something.

Amy: Do you think what Evgeni Malkin is doing is sustainable?

Zeise: Do I think Malkin will average almost two points per game for the entire season? No. But I think he will be productive if he is healthy. He has been good when he has been healthy, but that has been an issue at

his age and in recent years. His playing through injuries in his mid-30s is much different than playing through injuries at 25. I expect Malkin to have a good season, but that doesn't change my thoughts on whether or not they should have moved on from him. I'll give you a hint: they should have.

Marty: Why do you think Justin Fields should still be the Steelers starting quarterback? They essentially have no passing game. I can't come up with a single reason why it doesn't make sense to give Russell Wilson a try.

Zeise: I have yet to hear someone tell me what Fields has done wrong. If there is no passing game, it is because the Steelers have chosen to be ultra-conservative on offense. He wins, his legs are a valuable weapon, and he clearly has the respect of his teammates. I could make a powerful case that he is their best player on offense. And given that, I am not sure why you wouldn't want him to continue until he proves he can't handle it or is overwhelmed.

David: Do you have any insights into Roman Wilson's attitude or maturity? I wonder about a world where an undrafted rookie gets a helmet, and a healthy third-round draft pick does not. The company line is: "He's out of shape after an injury and needs to learn the offense."

Zeise: He seems like a good person, mature, hard-working, etc. There are no "character" issues, and he isn't being held back because of anything other than the fact that he got hurt in training camp and fell behind. I expect him to see his workload increase almost weekly. I am not sure he will ever be a star, but I think he can become a viable NFL receiver who regularly produces results.

Kurt: I agree that Coach Tomlin has a lifetime contract, and I like him from what I know about him as a person and for a large but diminishing part as a coach. This brings me to Mr. Rooney, whom I also like and respect. And who seems to be immune from criticism. Shouldn't he bear some blame for his team's performance, as he seems to fail to hold Tomlin accountable for it?

Zeise: Art Rooney has probably been criticized more in recent years than ever. And it has been deserved because he has been unable to guide the Steelers out of this run of not winning in the playoffs. Sure, it comes down to coaching and players making plays, but he is the big dog at the top of the pyramid, so it falls on his shoulders to get it right. At some point, he might have to make the difficult decision to move on from Mike Tomlin, and I just don't think he will.

John: Watching Mike Tomlin on the sidelines, he seems disengaged. At times, he looks lost. The defense is overrated. The offense is ... I don't know? It's more than the wide receivers. Also, I've grown weary of the running game's 2 yards and a cloud of dust. Is it the backs or the line? This team took a tremendous hit with the failure of the Pickett draft pick. Wow! How long will that take to recover from? It looks like this team will be locked in mediocrity for a while. Making the playoffs seems like the bar and nothing more. Does Rooney have a handle on this?

Zeise: Well, you threw a lot of questions at me, so let me try to make it as brief as possible. The offense is a work in progress because I think the offensive line has been makeshift, the skill position players are just ordinary, and the scheme and philosophy are rooted in the Stone Age. And Najee Harris is coming off his best game, so maybe the run game will get going now. They drafted Kenny Pickett for the right reasons and in the wrong position, and they will need to make another run at a quarterback if Fields doesn't work out. And Rooney will do what he always does — claim that they are close and that he trusts his people to figure it out and get back to winning Super Bowls!

Post Gazette LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324485 Pittsburgh Penguins

Joe Starkey: Crosby-Malkin-Letang — one of the greatest sports stories ever told

Joe Starkey 5-6 minutes 10/17/2024



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

When I was young and watching all the Buffalo sports teams lose in much the same gut-splitting fashion the Sabres lost Wednesday night at PPG Paints Arena, one of the books that captured my imagination was called "Strange But True Football Stories."

It told of Tom Dempsey, born with half a right foot and fitted with a specially-made shoe, kicking a 63-yard field goal to win a game.

It told of the Cumberland College football team losing a 220-0 squeaker to Georgia Tech.

It told of a man named Jim Marshall running 66 yards the wrong way with a football (long before Diontae Johnson came along) and a man named Tommy Lewis leaping off the sidelines to make a tackle in the 1954 Cotton Bowl.

I couldn't help but think of that book as I sat in front of my television Wednesday night, watching one of the wackiest, wildest games in Penguins history. And that's saying something.

This was a game we'll never forget — and for me, it wasn't one play in particular, although Malkin scoring goal No. 500 from his keister could certainly find a place in "Strange But True Hockey Stories." It was far more than that.

It was a tragicomedy that turned into a classic, which also works as a description of the Penguins' entire franchise history.

You had star power flashing all over the place, Hall of Famers left and right combining on highlight-reel goals. You had the Penguins running around like headless horsemen half the night, like the Harlem Globetrotters accidentally losing to the Washington Generals. You had the Sabres springing for more odd-man breaks than a pre-game warmup. You had angry fans booing goaltender Tristan Jarry off the ice and cheering a precocious young goalie named Joel Blomqvist who just might be the next big thing around here.

Cheers and tears by the bucket-full, baby. That is Penguins hockey. That is Penguins history. I half expected the team to declare bankruptcy in the middle of the second period.

But they never leave you bored, do they?

This, truly, is a unique franchise in American sports history. And the story that stands out above all in watching that game Wednesday was the miracle that is Malkin, Sidney Crosby and Kris Letang.

How are they still playing together, and not just playing but still performing as central characters?

All of sports history, not to mention the physics of growing old, would tell you that two of the three, at least, should be done by now. Go look at the longest tenures by one player with one team in any sport, and most of them are slightly more than 20 years. All three of these guys might get there!

Malkin leads the league in scoring. Crosby — who tallied his 1,600th point Wednesday and of course assisted on Malkin's milestone goal — again last year was voted by colleagues as the best all-around player in the world. Letang has three points in five games and still logs more than 23 minutes a night. Think of what they have overcome. Letang survived two strokes. Crosby lost a chunk of his prime on account of concussions. Malkin has beaten two major knee surgeries.

Last October, when the trio began their 18th season together, they passed New York Yankees legends Derek Jeter, Mariano Rivera and Jorge Posada as the longest-tenured trio of teammates in major North American professional sports history.

I would imagine a lot of us measure a series of major life events against the careers of Crosby, Malkin and Letang. I wasn't even married when the Penguins drafted them. Now I have a 16-year-old daughter learning to drive (not fun). I went back and re-read some of the stories and timelines around the Penguins winning the lottery for Crosby and saw this little nugget from the year 2005: "Feb. 14: YouTube, an American online video sharing and social media platform, was launched ..."

YouTube hadn't been invented yet!

Then think of how they all got here — Crosby on a 6.25% chance in the draft lottery, Malkin smuggled from Finland after fleeing his Russian team, Letang arriving in the third round of the draft, one of the greatest picks in Penguins history.

All of that was happening when the Penguins played in a building that no longer exists. When these three and others joined forces, we wondered what the future held. We wondered if they could win a championship. They did. They won three. They grew up together. They grew old together — they are now a combined 109.

And they're still playing hockey. Still combining for magical goals. Still winning crazy games.

What a story.

Post Gazette LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324486 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins Activate Nedeljkovic, Buy Time with Decision

Dan Kingerski2-3 minutes 10/17/2024

The Pittsburgh Penguins activated goalie Alex Nedeljkovic from the injured reserve list Thursday morning, but that's not the end of rookie Joel Blomqvist's NHL run.

The Penguins assigned Nedeljkovic to the AHL on a conditioning assignment, given that he missed several preseason games with a lower-body injury that he suffered against the Detroit Red Wings on Sept. 30.

The move will also buy Penguins GM Kyle Dubas and coach Mike Sullivan to sort through an increasingly complicated goaltending situation. Starter Tristan Jarry has not been sharp and was pulled in the first period from the Penguins' 6-5 overtime win over the Buffalo Sabres Wednesday. Blomqvist relieved Jarry at 8:27 of the first period and earned the win in relief when the Penguins overcame a 3-1 deficit.

Blomqvist has a .913 save percentage in three appearances, including two starts in the first five games this season. Conversely, Jarry has a 5.47 goals-against-average and a meager .833 save percentage.

The standard term of a conditioning assignment is 14 days, though the team can shorten it at its discretion.

Pittsburgh Hockey Now LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324487 Pittsburgh Penguins

Kingerski: Penguins Officially Have a Jarry Problem

Dan Kingerski7-9 minutes 10/17/2024

On an unforgettable night in which the Pittsburgh Penguins superstars Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin reached historic milestones, goalie Tristan Jarry had a night that would hammer at even the most obtuse goalie's confidence.

Jarry will be the only one trying to forget it.

Just 43 seconds into the 6-5 overtime win against the Buffalo Sabres on Wednesday, Buffalo center Tage Thompson immediately stuffed Jarry's behind-the-net giveaway into the net. Whoops. The home fans, who were already predisposed to wanting the kid, 22-year-old Joel Blomqvist, in the net, began to groan.

Three minutes into the game, defenseman Erik Karlsson didn't make much of an effort on a puck right behind him, and Jordan Greenway had an unobstructed path to Jarry, who recoiled into the net rather than challenging the oncoming danger.

Absolutely terrible defense. Then the tough situation became impossible as Jarry allowed a second goal, just getting a piece of Greenway's shot to the glove side. If that tally were the only goal allowed, the sentiment would have focused on Karlsson's inexplicable matador defense. Still, it was not the only goal allowed, and the fan's drumbeat for Jarry's ouster had already begun. It only grew louder as the deficit widened.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

"It was just a tough start for a whole team. Quite honestly, it wasn't even close to our best game out there," coach Mike Sullivan said. "We just felt like, given the way the game started, it was the right thing to make the switch. I think Tristan was a victim of that (start) to a certain extent. He was also part of that to a certain extent."

Mocking cheers for simple saves and merely playing the puck followed. The home crowd had already decided they were done with Jarry.

Jarry again sagged deep into the net after another mistake-filled Penguins sequence in the offensive zone resulted in a Buffalo two-on-one. JJ Peterka whistled a shot past Jarry that hit the twine and exited just as quickly as it entered.

That was three goals in 11:33, and the apple of the fans' eye, Joel Blomqvist, entered.

The Penguins and coach Mike Sullivan now have a full-blown situation as goalie Alex Nedeljkovic took work during and after the morning skate on Wednesday. He'll soon be ready for the team to activate him from injured reserve, and the Penguins will have three goalies, but their presumptive No. 1 is in a free fall that stretches back to last season.

Let's not forget the biggest problem. On July 1, 2023, Jarry signed a five-year, \$26.88 million deal. There have been various credible reports of the Penguins listening or softly making him available on the NHL trade block for the past couple of seasons. Alas, Jarry's trade value has evaporated with the rising heat of each benching.

In 12 months, Jarry has gone from being mentioned as a candidate for the 2026 Canadian Olympic team to a freefall, placing him on track not for the national team but for the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins of the AHL.

When Nedeljkovic is ready, can the Penguins really afford to demote Blomqvist—clearly one of their two best goalies—to WBS? Just 12 hours earlier, that seemed a fait accompli. Rewind to last Sunday—Sullivan bristled at Pittsburgh Hockey Now's question about the message to Jarry by starting Blomqvist against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Saturday, which was Blomqvist's second straight start.

Jarry earned the win Monday, making numerous difficult saves against the Montreal Canadiens at Centre Bell. He seemed to have plugged the situation, but 48 hours later, it exploded like dropping a pack of Mentos into a two-liter bottle of Coke.

Jarry was not available after the Monday or Wednesday games. However, on Wednesday, Blomqvist couldn't hide his excitement at helping the team on a night no one will forget. It's just his second season in North America, and the young goalie had the best season in the house watching a pair of legends do their cape-wearing hero thing one more time.

"I felt pretty good in this game (that) I had a chance to play," said Blomqvist. "And I think it comes just from the everyday work you do in practice. I work hard and get a good feel in practice. I think that's the key."

For the record, his first name is pronounced Yo-El, even though many around the team simply call him Joel. It seems that proper pronunciation will become a necessary bit of information very soon. In three appearances, including two starts, Blomqvist has a 2-1-0 record and a .913 save percentage.

Ordinarily, a starting goalie having a couple of bad games to begin a season wouldn't make headlines. But Jarry is different. He was essentially landed on the goalie-watch list last season when Sullivan tapped Nedeljkovic for the final 13.5 games, for most of which Jarry was healthy and able to play.

The Penguins went on an 8-1-3 tear with Nedeljkovic before losing the meaningless final game of the season against the New York Islanders. Nedeljkovic appeared in the final 14 games of the season after relieving Jarry against the Dallas Stars on March 22.

New season, clean slate? Nope. The carryover has been palpable, and if Sullivan says we're overthinking it, no, Sullivan's actions speak louder than the PPG Paints Arena crowd. Jarry has finished only two of his four starts dating back to last season while riding the bench in 15 of the last 18 games, also dating back to last season, which is another stinging indictment.

Jarry faceplanted against the New York Rangers in the first game of the season. He gave up a few stoppable goals before finding his groove in the second and third periods of a 6-0 loss. He likely would have been pulled if not for Sullivan saving Blomqvist for the game the following night against Detroit.

If Jarry had not been a spectator for the most important games last season, this story would be at the beginning, if it existed at all. But last season happened, and the wound has festered.

Sullivan will likely downplay any further questions about the situation; he has no choice but to begin a salvage operation for Jarry's lost confidence because Jarry's trade value has most likely crossed into negative territory, meaning it would take Penguins GM Kyle Dubas's inclusion of additional assets to move him.

Returning to the Stanley Cup Playoffs after a two-year absence remains the goal, and the Penguins learned the hard lesson last season that games in October and November indeed matter. Another couple of wins in early-season contests that got away would have changed their fate. The team knows it can't punt away games now, assuming they'll make up the ground later. The NHL standings are too close, and the team is no longer significantly better than everyone else.

Jarry remains perhaps the most talented goalie of the three netminders, but stopping pucks is the job, and he's at war with the position. Conversely, Blomqvist's performances have declared him ready to play in the NHL.

Big-picture issues complicate the matter, but the bottom line is the Penguins, Sullivan, and Dubas now have a Jarry problem.

Pittsburgh Hockey Now LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324503 St Louis Blues

Blues win goaltenders' duel 1-0 against Islanders in overtime

Matthew DeFranks 26-32 minutes

While the current iterations may have a bit of a different feel to them, it should be no surprise that the Blues and Islanders played a low-scoring game in their first meeting of the season on Thursday night.

Jake Neighbours scored the game-winning goal for St. Louis with 2:56 remaining in overtime, securing a 1-0 win for the Blues on a feed from Philip Broberg.

Joel Hofer made 34 saves in his second start of the season, and first one in a week. Ilya Sorokin kept the Blues at bay by making 29 saves of his own.

The Blues and Islanders have shifted slightly from their concurrent days as lockdown, physical teams but combined for 10 total goals in their two games last season.

The Blues continue their four-game homestand on Saturday when they host the Hurricanes.

Finding chances

In their first game of the season back on the same line, Robert Thomas and Jordan Kyrou generated a fair amount of chances on Thursday night. Through two periods, Kyrou had five shots on goal, and that doesn't include the handful that he passed up.

In the first period, Kyrou set up two Blues potential opportunities with plays in the neutral zone. Moments after Hofer completed a risky breakout pass to Philip Broberg, Kyrou connected on a cross-ice feed with a teammate in transition. Later on, Kyrou dangled around an Islander in the neutral zone to create space, but he couldn't get a shot off later in the possession.

Kyrou, who entered the game leading the Blues with six points in four games, had four shots on goal in the second period.

Brayden Schenn had probably the best chance for the Blues with 8:01 left in the second period, outwaiting Ilya Sorokin but then ringing the post.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Bo Horvat hit two posts in 11 seconds during the second for the Islanders.

Pierre-Olivier Joseph was playing in just his second game of the season on Thursday night, and he made sure his name would have some numbers behind it in the box score. Joseph had three shot attempts in the first period and two more in the second to lead all Blues defensemen through the opening 40 minutes.

Joseph had two shots blocked in a 10-second span in the first period on the first extended zone time by the Blues on Thursday, and his shot on goal late in the third period set up a rebound opportunity for Alexey Toropchenko.

That first-period burst by St. Louis was set up by Zack Bolduc's physical play along the boards. When Bolduc hit Kyle MacLean along the side boards in the Islanders zone, it set up the type of possession the Blues lacked in the first period.

As for Joseph, he got his name in the box score in a different way in the second period when he was whistled for high-sticking at 8:11. That penalty came about three minutes after his brother, Mathieu Joseph, was called for hooking at 5:02.

The Blues killed both penalties.

Odd bounces

Twice in the opening five minutes did a weird carom almost cost the Blues. On two Islander dump-ins toward the corner with the Zamboni tunnel, Hofer left the net to play the puck below the goal line. But the puck took an unexpected ricochet toward the unmanned slot.

There were no New York players there to take advantage.

Hofer, a goaltender who likes to handle the puck, was burned by a play last season in Florida when a goal took an odd bounce off the curved glass by the Panthers bench.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324504 St Louis Blues

With parents in town, defenseman Pierre-Olivier Joseph reenters Blues lineup

Matthew DeFranks5-6 minutes

On Tuesday night, the Joseph brothers arrived in style.

Mathieu and Pierre-Olivier Joseph wore matching custom suits — white and gold stripes on a navy field with peak lapels — for what could have been their first NHL home game playing together on the same team.

The two brothers played together in Vegas last week, but against the Wild, P.O Joseph was scratched. On Thursday, though, the Josephs played together in St. Louis — and did so with their parents, France and Frantzi, in attendance.

"It's one for the memory book, for sure," P.O Joseph said before the game. "It's something we've dreamed about for so long, and we're excited about it. At the end of the day, we're a 23-man family in here. Doesn't matter who is playing with who, we just want to play good and get the W tonight."

P.O Joseph was to be in the lineup Thursday against the Islanders with Nick Leddy sidelined with a lower-body injury. Ryan Suter ascended to the top pair with Colton Parayko, allowing a spot on the third pair for Joseph to fill.

Blues coach Drew Bannister labeled Leddy as day-to-day.

P.O Joseph signed over the summer with the Blues, partially to play with his brother, and has served as the team's No. 7 defenseman in the first week of the season. He replaced Matthew Kessel in the lineup last week against the Golden Knights but was a healthy scratch in three of the first four games.

"Last game I played, I wasn't really myself," Joseph said. "I just want to keep it simple at first and slowly build my game around these guys, get some chemistry with these guys, get the respect and trust from these guys when I'm on the ice with them."

Bannister: "His overall camp was really good for us. His exhibition games were good. We want to get him back in there, his ability to skate, his length and move pucks, that's something that I think, defending-wise, we've got to be able to kill plays."

In the game against the Golden Knights, the Josephs became the seventh set of brothers to play for the Blues at the same time.

And so they commemorated the occasion with suits from Montreal-based Glorius Custom that read "Blues Brothers" under the collar and featured pictures of blues and jazz history on the inner lining. The jackets also featured motivational sayings stitched in there: "Get It Done" on P.O's and "Everything Happens for a Reason" on Mathieu's, according to a Instagram post.

The brothers also live together in St. Louis and are hosting their parents this week.

"That's the main reason why we got a bigger place, for them to come and stay with us," P.O Joseph said. "Don't need a hotel room or anything like that. It's just nice to have family around and talk about life."

Injury updates

Leddy was not on the ice for the Blues' optional morning skate on Thursday, one day after he missed Wednesday's practice. Leddy has not skated with the team since Tuesday's game against the Wild.

Forward Alexandre Texier (upper body) was on the ice for morning skate but missed his fourth straight game.

"He's getting better," Bannister said. "He's close. I would put him as day-to-day. He's going to be out tonight. We'll see how he feels tomorrow. He's getting close."

Forward Oskar Sundqvist (knee surgery) was also on the ice Thursday morning, but Bannister previously targeted later in the homestand for the veteran to make his season debut.

Goaltender Joel Hofer started Thursday against the Islanders, his second start of the season and first since last week in San Jose. Jordan Binnington started the home opener against Minnesota.

"Get him in the net here, give Binner a little bit of rest," Bannister said. "Then we'll reset in two days and get going. We'll find out there. A lot of this is preplanned. Obviously, plans can change, but right now, we want to stick with the plan."

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324505 St Louis Blues

Game Day: Nathan Walker out as Kasperi Kapanen draws in for Blues vs. Islanders

Matthew DeFranks2-3 minutes

Blues forward Nathan Walker was a healthy scratch on Thursday, replaced by Kasperi Kapanen on the fourth line.

Walker played the first four games of the Blues season on a line with Alexey Toropchenko and Radek Faksa, while Kapanen was scratched for the home opener Tuesday vs. the Wild.

Defenseman Nick Leddy will not play against the Islanders as he deals with a lower-body injury. Ryan Suter will take his spot on the top pairing with Colton Parayko, while Pierre-Olivier Joseph will skate on the bottom pairing with Matthew Kessel.

Projected Blues lineup vs. Islanders at 7 p.m. Thursday

Brandon Saad — Robert Thomas — Jordan Kyrro

Zack Bolduc — Pavel Buchnevich — Jake Neighbours



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Dylan Holloway — Brayden Schenn — Mathieu Joseph

Alexey Toropchenko — Radek Faksa — Kasperii Kapanen

Ryan Suter — Colton Parayko

Philip Broberg — Justin Faulk

Pierre-Olivier Joseph — Matthew Kessel

Joel Hofer

Jordan Binnington

Scratches: Nathan Walker, Scott Perunovich, Nick Leddy (lower-body).

Injured or injured non-roster: Alexandre Texier (upper-body), Oskar Sundqvist (knee surgery), Torey Krug (ankle surgery), Simon Robertsson (upper-body), Adam Jiricek (knee surgery).

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324506 St Louis Blues

Blues' Jordan Kyrrou, Robert Thomas back on No. 1 line: 'They need to be top players'

Jeremy Rutherford8-10 minutes 10/17/2024

ST. LOUIS — Well after St. Louis Blues practice ended Wednesday, Jordan Kyrrou and Pavel Buchnevich were the last two players sitting at their locker stalls, about 10 feet apart.

Kyrrou, his hair as long as it's ever been in his Blues' career, and Buchnevich, his stare as stoic as it's ever been, had been chatting for several minutes when The Athletic walked up to ask Kyrrou a few questions.

As is often the case in these situations, the interview started with an icebreaker: "Jordan, do you like playing with Pavel?" And as is also often the case, that was followed by a player pointedly pumping his teammate's tires: "I love playing with Buchy! He's an elite centerman. Pavel Datsyuk-like."

One day after the Blues' 4-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild, the players were loose. They've played four games this season, and they're 2-2. It's still too early to start drawing too many conclusions.

But after falling behind opponents by multiple goals in all four games, it's apparent that the Blues must start scoring earlier. They're having to play catch-up, and while that worked in comeback victories over the Seattle Kraken and San Jose Sharks, it's not a sustainable way to win, as evidenced by consecutive losses to the Vegas Golden Knights and the Wild.

So on Wednesday, not far from where Kyrrou and Buchnevich were chatting, there were new line combinations on the smart board at the front of the locker room. When the club hosts the New York Islanders on Thursday at Enterprise, it appears that Kyrrou will be reunited with Robert Thomas, while Buchnevich will have Jake Neighbours on his line.

"(Thomas and Kyrrou) have had chemistry in the past, and I feel they are two players that we need to get going, and they need to be top players for us," Blues coach Drew Bannister said. "This is a way to get them an opportunity to get on track and start playing some real good hockey for us, because we need them if we're going to have some success."

#stlblues practice lineup:

Saad-Thomas-Kyrrou

Bolduc-Buchnevich-Neighbours

Holloway-Schenn-Joseph

Toropchenko-Faksa-Kapanen

Extras: Texier-Walker-Sundqvist

Suter-Parayko

Broberg-Faulk

Joseph-Kessel

Perunovich

*Leddy not skating

Binnington

Hofer

— Jeremy Rutherford (@jprutherford) October 16, 2024

There's a couple of things to be clear on here:

- Kyrrou has already been "going," with two goals and six points in the four games, and he could've had another goal Tuesday if not for a referee blowing a play dead when the puck was still loose.

- It's not just Thomas who is off to a slow start, statistically. The offense as a whole is lagging, which is why the Blues have found themselves trailing so often.

The Blues ranked 19th in the NHL in goals per game (3.00) through Tuesday night, and a majority of those came in the second and third periods when they were forced to fight back. They have a combined 41 shots on goal in the first period this season and just two goals.

Meanwhile, they were ranked 14th in shots per game (28.8) through Tuesday, and a lot of those were one-and-dones. They are spending just 42.1 percent of their time with the puck in the offensive zone (75th percentile, per NHL Edge player tracking).

"We're shooting, and then no one is at the net, so there's no one to recover the puck," Kyrrou said.

And the initial shots themselves aren't effective. According to Natural Stat Trick, the Blues have scored three high-danger goals on 39 higher-danger chances (7.7 percent).

"We're getting shots, but we need better quality," Thomas said. "We need high-grade chances and dangerous chances. Yeah, volume is good, but we need to find a way to get better shots."

So now Bannister is expected to put Kyrrou and Thomas back together on the top line. They've played about 15 minutes of five-on-five time together this season and have 14 scoring chances for and two against, including five high-danger chances for and none against.

"We've had a lot of success in the past," Thomas said. "You go through stretches where it doesn't work, but I think if you look at the overall sample, we've had a lot of chances and a lot of success."

Thomas does have four points (one goal) in four games, but he hasn't been as effective as in the past.

"I think he's still trying to find his game offensively," Bannister said. "For him, we've tried different combinations, which probably is not easy as a centerman when you're having different wingers every second and third game. It doesn't seem to be going in the net for him right now, but I don't foresee moving forward that there's going to be an issue. For him, the focus has to be away from the puck, making sure that his details away from the puck will give him more opportunities offensively."

Thomas admitted that the revolving door on his wings — Dylan Holloway, Brandon Saad, Buchnevich, Neighbours, Schenn and Kyrrou — have been a lot.

"It's hard," he said. "Plays happen quick and you need to know where guys are, so yeah, it takes a little bit of time to get used to guys."

The most success Thomas has had this season has been with Kyrrou and Buchnevich.

Bannister hasn't played them together at the start of games, but he's found points in games — after an offensive-zone faceoff or a specials-teams sequence, for instance — to get them on the ice to take advantage of a situation.

In parts of four games this season (13:09 of five-on-five ice time), the Buchnevich-Thomas-Kyrrou line has 10 shots for and four against, and they have an expected goal-share of 85.14 percent, per Natural Stat Trick. They have one goal for and none against.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

"Every time we've been out there, we've created a lot of chances," Thomas said. "We've only scored one goal, but I think if you look at the chances we've created, it's been really good. We're a line that's had a lot of success, especially last year, so it's nice to get out there in those situations."

Bannister was asked Wednesday if it's been tempting to use that line more often.

"It's tempting in situations, but I know for the team as a whole, it's best to have Buchy in the middle for us to have success long-term," he said.

Some Blues fans believe that playing Buchnevich on the wing is crucial to creating more offense, but the reality is that other players need to generate more than they are now for the goals to come.

Neighbours, who had 27 goals last season, has no points after four games.

"I think Jakey has been playing well, but even for Jakey, I think he could be a little bit more direct in the way he plays and be a little bit harder around the net," Bannister said.

Schenn has just one point — a goal, which was the overtime game-winner in San Jose — and Zack Bolduc has just one assist.

In fact, of the Blues' top-six point producers, three are defensemen: Justin Faulk (four points), Philip Broberg (four) and Colton Parayko (two).

The team has a lot more speed this season, but it's not maximizing it in a way that creates offense.

"Our transition game has got to get better — getting the puck up quick, getting it into our forwards' hands at full speed," Bannister said. "That's just quick puck movement, quick decisions, especially when our D have it on their stick — not looking to slow the game down."

"We have to get our transition game going here. Our back end skates really well. We want them involved in our breakouts, and we want them involved on entries and we want them involved in offense. So getting up the ice quick, with our forwards and our D working together, is going to be important for us."

It's only been four games, but the Blues are playing a lot of catch-up — literally.

"Guys are still trying to find their chemistry for sure and sometimes it takes longer than we'd like," Kyrrou said.

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1324442 Edmonton Oilers

Player grades: Connor McDavid (finally) on fire, as Edmonton Oilers throttle Nashville Predators 4-2

David Staples • Edmonton Journal

Published Oct 17, 2024

The top line and the rest of the Oilers finally looked like the Oilers of the 2024 playoffs.

The score was a fair and accurate reflection of the play, as Edmonton had 20 Grade A shots to 12 for the Preds, with the subset of the most dangerous 5-alarm shots 11 to five for the Oil.

Cult of Hockey game grades player grades

Connor McDavid, 8. McDavid finally looked like Connor Effin McDavid this game. He charged in for a brilliant early breakaway shot. A moment later he won the puck late in the first and took a pass to burst into the slot for a 5-alarm backhander. He made a sleek deke and scored, putting it upstairs where momma keeps the cookies, as the legendary Edmonton skills coach Jim Fleming likes to say. Excellent hustle from him and

Hyman on the empty-net goal. Contributions/mistakes on Grade A shots (GAS): Even Strength +8/-3; Special Teams 2/1

Leon Draisaitl, 9. Huge bounce back game for #29. He led the team with 12 major contributions to Grade A shots, an outstanding total. He got going as the game went along, feeding off of McDavid's fine play perhaps. He found McD charging into the slot for a wicked shot in the first. Clever pass on McDavid's late second period goal. Ripped his Executioner's Shot on net early in the third. Deft pass to send in Bouchard in the third on two dangerous shots. GAS: ES +8/-0; ST 4/1

Zach Hyman, 8. Great game even if he had no points. He made a swift pass to send in McDavid for a break-in shot on the game's first shift. Early Grade A jam play on the power play. Excellent hustle to extinguish an icing call, then set the screen on an Ekholm point blast. Almost scored on a one-timer off a brilliant Bouchard stretch/Draisaitl drop/McDavid seam-passing play in the second. Almost scored again on a deflected pass late in the second. His hustle drew a power play in the third, then he drilled a slotter on goal off a Draisaitl blocked shot. GAS: ES +6/-1; ST 4/0

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, 4. He's one step and one read behind his usual level of play. He found some chemistry late in the game with Arvidsson and Janmark. GAS: ES +0/-0; ST 0/0

Viktor Arvidsson, 7. Best player on his line. Slid laterally and wrapped the puck hard on net for an early Grade A shot. He helped keep the puck in the Nashville end on Edmonton's second goal. He set up Janmark for a break-in chance in the third. GAS: ES +3/-0; ST 0/0

Vasili Podkolzin, 6. His fierce body check led to Arvidsson's early Grade A. A few shifts later he passed out for Derek Ryan's one-timer. He blasted Lauzon into the boards on a hard hit, clipping the Pred with his stick and earning four minutes in penalties. GAS: ES +2/-0; ST 0/0

Jeff Skinner, 7. He slithered a sneaky backhander on net early in the second that Henrique jammed on net. He found the right spot at the time in front of the net to slide in Edmonton's second goal. He's got a knack for that, it seems. GAS: ES +2/-0; ST 0/0

Adam Henrique, 7. A game defined by his smarts and hard work. He worked well with Skinner and Brown to create some dangerous shot. Gutsy shot block in the third. GAS: ES +1/-0; ST 0/0

Connor Brown, 7. He's picking up right at the high level of play he demonstrated in the playoffs. Battled with fortitude and made a key early PK clearance, then did the same on Podkolzin's second period penalty. He should have played the shot, not the pass, in allowing a point shot on Nashville's first goal. GAS: ES +1/-1; ST 0/1

Mattias Janmark, 6. His second effort led to a Nashville turnover on Kulak's goal. Got it done down the stretch. GAS: ES +1/-0; ST 0/1

Derek Ryan, 7. He launched a first period slot harpoon but Sauros blocked it. He won a battle kicking off the Virtuous Cycle on Kulak's goal. He won a crucial battle in a desperate moment half-way through the third to help clear Edmonton's zone. GAS: ES +2/-1; ST 0/0

Corey Perry, 6. He went swift and determinedly to the net early on, drawing the game's first penalty. Gutsy power move to take the puck to the front of the net on Edmonton's second goal.

GAS: ES +2/-0; ST 0/0

Evan Bouchard, 8. He was more of his old offensive dream machine self this game. His stretch pass set up #97 for the game's first 5-alarm. Caught sleepy-headed on Cole Smith's first period breakaway. Made a high-wire deke at the blueline to kick off the gorgeous sequence of a late first period McD 5-alarm. Great stretch pass on Hyman's second period PP harpoon. His keep-in led to Hyman's 5-alarm shot late in the second. He moved up smartly to break in for two Grade As half-way through the third. GAS: ES +8/-2; ST 1/1



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Mattias Ekholm, 6. High event game. His n-zone failure also contributed to Smith's breakaway. Made a solid play to keep the puck in the offensive end on Skinner's goal. He blocked a Stamkos bazooka on the PK, earning the respect of every beer league d-man in Edmonton. His hard slapper set up McDavid's late second period goal. GAS: ES +4/-4; ST 0/0

Darnell Nurse, 7. Generally solid. He got stick-checked and lost the puck, kicking off the dread Sequence of Pain on Nashville's first goal. He then engaged in some lovely team building, standing up for Podkolzin against the massive Michael McCarron, bashing the brute in the back of the neck a few times. He moved in to slam the puck on net leading up to Skinner's goal. GAS: ES +2/-3; ST 0/0

Troy Stecher, 6. Two solid games paired with Nurse, two wins for the Oilers. Who knew? Stecher failed to take out Forsberg's stick on Nashville's first goal, the Californian play (an outside shot tipped in by a forward, named for the brilliant Brett Burns-Joe Pavelski combo). Such a tipped shot is a difficult stop for any d-man, but it's still a defensive break down.

GAS: ES +0/-0; ST 0/0

Ty Emberson, 6. His best game as an Oiler. Seems to be calming down with the puck. He got sucked into the corner, making him the primary culprit on a pass out for Tommy Novak's power play one-timer in the first. He and Kulak made an ill-advised choice to shift off the ice on an Edmonton clearance, leading to Nashville's second goal. Not good. But it was his only super uggo play. GAS: ES +0/-2; ST 0/1

Brett Kulak, 7. Two goals, one big gaffe. He blocked a first period power play one-timer, a welcome event. His hard point shot found its way in through multiple screens for Edmonton's first goal. Also caught out on the bad line change on Nashville's second goal. Scored his second on an empty-net snipe. GAS: ES +1/-0; ST 0/1

Calvin Pickard, 8. Came up big when needed, which was often. Smartly soaked up Novak's early power play harpoon, then thwarted Cole Smith's breakaway. No chance on The Californian. He thwarted Stamkos and Marchessault on dangerous PP shots late in the second, no chance on the PP goal. He blocked Jankowski's slotter early in the third, then McCarron in close, then Jankowski's sneaky deflection, then a dangerous Marchessault slippery slider shot. He got obviously high-sticked in the face with four minutes left, but mystery of all mysteries, no penalty was called. Made a great save on O'Reilly with just under two minutes left.

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1324443 Edmonton Oilers

It's a streak! Oilers make it two in a row with win in Nashville

Robert Tychkowski

Published Oct 17, 2024

If the underachieving Edmonton Oilers could have hand picked Thursday night's opponent from any team in the league it would have been the Nashville Predators.

Loading...

They've been part-owner of the Nashville franchise for years, going 11-1-2 in their last 14 meetings, a run in which Connor McDavid (33) and Leon Draisaitl (37) combined for an astounding 70 points.

And, for a cherry on top, the Predators were in a slump, winless through their first three games of the season.

So it was pretty much Guaranteed Win Night with the 1-3 Oilers looking to win their second in a row after an 0-3 start of their own.

Turns out there was nothing automatic about it as the Oilers had to survive the final frantic seconds of a hard-fought 4-2 victory that wasn't sealed until Brett Kulak's second goal of the night hit the back of an empty net.

"It's always fun scoring goals, but it's more fun when the team builds the kind of game we did," said Kulak, who had just three goals all of last season, and three the year before that. "It feels like we're getting our game back on track. We started the season slow, and it sucks, but to play the way we did to start the road trip is awesome. That's what I'm most excited about."

The secondary guys led the way again, with Kulak scoring Edmonton's first and fourth goals and Jeff Skinner banging in their second. It was the same thing early in the Philadelphia game, with Adam Henrique and Connor Brown keeping the Oilers alive long enough to pull out a win.

"It's nice to see him get those goals," head coach Kris Knoblauch said of his third pairing defenceman. "The first one was an outstanding shot and the second was just an empty netter but the bench was cheering for him."

"Any time you see those role guys (get on the score sheet) everyone gets excited to see them have that success."

- Connor McDavid scored his first goal of the season with 91 seconds left in the second to make it 3-2 Edmonton. But the top of the roster is still looking for answers, and goals. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins has one assist on the year while Zach Hyman and Viktor Arvidsson are still looking for their first point.

- Goalie Stuart Skinner played well in the win over Philadelphia, stopping 27 of 30 shots in a 4-3 win, so it was a bit of surprise that Calvin Pickard got the start on Thursday, especially with the two road games spaced out nicely and a two-day break at the end of the trip. But they want to lighten Skinner's workload and have faith in their backup, and with good cause. Pickard was up for the task, stopping 25 of 27 shots in the win.

"Obviously, his first game wasn't his best (five goals on 20 shots against Chicago)," said Knoblauch. "But we know that he's always responded and had an outstanding season last year. We have a lot of confidence in him."

- With the shots 24-10 Edmonton and everything going their way late in the second period, the penalty kill units had to step in and kill a Vasily Podkolzin double-minor for high-sticking. And 3:25 later, the Predators tied the game 2-2. It was a valiant effort, but it's also the eighth power-play goal against in the first five games. The power play, meanwhile, went 0-for-4 on the night and is 0-for-8 in the last two games.

"I think our PP is going to start to click," said Jeff Skinner. "When you start seeing signs of hemming them in and getting opportunities it's a matter of time before pucks start going in for us."

- Despite making the biggest splash in the NHL's off-season, landing forwards Steve Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault and defenceman Brady Skjei, the Predators are in a bad early-season funk, sitting 0-4 and outscored 18-8 through the first two weeks of the season.

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1324444 Edmonton Oilers

Digging into Edmonton Oilers' unusual "4-6-7" rotation on their beleaguered blueline



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Bruce McCurdy • Edmonton Journal

Published Oct 17, 2024

After a dispiriting home stand, Edmonton Oilers take their show on the road tonight for the first time this 2024-25 NHL season. The Oil convincingly lost their first three games in regulation, and were on the verge of dropping the fourth against Philadelphia before their big guns delivered the late tying goal followed by the overtime winner to salvage two points from the four-game set. Which isn't great, but still beats the heck out of the alternative that was staring them in the face at the last TV timeout on Tuesday.

That late comeback, featuring some gritty team play to overcome 2-0 and 3-2 deficits, broke the goose egg in the W column and provided something to build on. The next step comes tonight in Nashville, where the Oil will meet the Predators at 6pm MDT.

One of the big questions facing Edmonton's coaching staff remains the deployment of the defensive corps, and specifically who among the various six-figure candidates will step up to play alongside Darnell Nurse in the second pairing.

How it started

Let's go back to the first day of training camp, when I wrote this post describing its most important battle, specifically, who would replace the traded Cody Ceci at 2RD. Not just Ceci, but two other options who played for stretches on Nurse's right side during the long playoff run, namely Vincent Desharnais and Philip Broberg. Both departed over the summer as free agents. Yet a fourth playoff partner, Brett Kulak, remains in Edmonton, but is back on the left side in the third pairing after struggling on his off side.

Leading to this scenario, described in the linked article:

What we know for sure is that the four returnees can be written in pen, with Mattias Ekholm, Darnell Nurse, and Brett Kulak continuing to lock down the left side and Evan Bouchard the top righty without a throw.

So far, the coaching staff has stuck to that template, with Ekholm-Bouchard the undisputed first pairing, Nurse-Player X on the second, and Kulak-Player Y on the third. With one of the candidates mentioned in the original post, Joshua Brown, having been optioned to Bakersfield, the identities of X and Y have rotated among three other newcomers, Ty Emberson, Travis Dermott, and Troy Stecher,

Typically such rotations happen on the third pairing, with the d-men ranking 5-6-7 on the depth chart sliding in and out of the line-up. But in Edmonton, that rotation has become a somewhat unusual 4-6-7, with Kulak locked into the #5 role.

How it's going

D TOI by game thru 4 GP

This table breaks down the ice time logged by each rearguard during the four games to date, listed in order of average ice time. The first pairing (orange background) has remained constant, while the second (yellow) and third pairs (green) along with the press box slot (grey) have changed on a nightly basis.

The numbers themselves tell us that coaches Kris Knoblauch and Paul Coffey have been increasingly reliant on a Big Three of Bouchard, Ekholm and Nurse, with all of them north of 20 minutes per game. Ceci used to be the fourth guy at that level, but in his absence the other alternatives have been logging in the 15-17 minute range, consistent with their past history in each case.

Of those three candidates, it is Stecher's star that is currently on the rise. After spending the first two games watching from above, he was inserted into the third pairing in Game 3 and then on the second in the most recent contest a.k.a. "the win". His ice time was limited, in part due to the five minutes he spent in the penalty box after going to bat for netminder Stuart Skinner, but for most of the night he was Nurse's partner, with decent results including a 1-0 goal share.

Emberson got the first crack at that spot but struggled mightily in a 20-minute debut, dropped to the third pairing, then the pressbox, then back to the third pair where he played just over 10 minutes on Tuesday. Dermott got promoted to that second pair in the third period of Game 1, stayed there for 2 games, but found himself in the press box for the most recent game. He will remain there tonight.

D TOI summary thru 4 GP

Digging a little deeper into deployment, it becomes clear that Ekholm-Bouchard are getting first-pairing minutes at even strength, while each has logged 4 minutes a night on special teams. Nurse has been deployed quite a bit less at evens, but he too has been a 4-minute-a-night contributor to special teams.

The right-most columns clarify that Bouchard has gotten most of the odd-man minutes on the powerplay, while Ekholm and Nurse have done so on the PK, primarily as a duo. No real surprises there, outside of the split of those PK minutes. Against Philly, Ekholm played a whopping 8:30 and Nurse 7:10 of the 11:47 Edmonton was shorthanded.

Of the newcomers, Dermott (7 periods with Nurse) has gotten the most even-strength minutes but virtually nothing on either special team. Kulak, Emberson and Stecher are a notch lower, each in the 13-14 minute range at evens and 1.5-2 minutes on special teams, almost entirely the PK.

Early results are not promising, especially on that penalty kill unit. Ekholm and Nurse have been burned for 4 GA in about 13 minutes of action, while Kulak — who rarely played on that unit last season — has already been lit up for 4 GA in just 8 minutes. Emberson's results of 2 GA in 4 minutes are similarly poor. Far too early with far too tiny a sample size to draw too many conclusions other than one obvious one: that unit needs to be a whole lot better.

So too does the entire group at even strength. Not surprising that the Ekholm-Bouchard pair which has primarily been deployed with the Connor McDavid line has produced excellent underlying numbers — 68% Corsi, 65% expected goals — but they've managed just a 40% goal share to this early point. Bouchard has been struggling mightily to get his shots through, credited with 7 shots on net compared to a startling 28 that have been blocked, by far the most in the NHL. But he did manage to slide into open ice to score Edmonton's biggest goal of the early season on Tuesday. That late game-tying goal was effectively worth 1.5 standings points, 1 outright for forcing overtime with a 50% chance at securing the second.

Nurse missed the first 6 preseason games, and only now has his workload begun to reach normal levels. As was the case in 2023-24, he's playing barely 20% of his minutes with McDavid, but this time around he's doing so without the security blanket of a regular partner of proven top-4 pedigree.

The fact remains that no matter who he lines up with, Nurse will be a member of a \$10 million pairing, and clearly the onus is on the veteran to carry a heavy share of the load. He had his best performance of the young season in the win on Tuesday, and will get a second game with the same partner in Nashville tonight.

Tonight's line-up

Gaame 5 at NSH, 2024-10-17



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Not too surprising that Knoblach will be going with the exact same lines and pairings as beat the Flyers. The first line remains stacked with Edmonton's three best offensive forwards, while the middle six is pretty balanced to the point that some observers are suggesting that the Jeff Skinner – Adam Henrique – Connor Brown trio should be listed above that of Vasily Podkolzin – Ryan Nugent-Hopkins – Viktor Arvidsson. All six players played in the range of 9-11 minutes at even strength last game.

The only change will be between the pipes, where Calvin Pickard gets his second start of the young season. He'll be looking to bounce back from a tough game against Chicago in which he yielded 5 goals on just 20 shots.

As is always the case when these two teams meet, especially in the Music City, the focus will be on Leon Draisaitl who has hammered the Preds senseless for the last several years.

Leon Draisaitl has 23 goals and 37 points in his last 14 games v. Nashville. Ridiculous.

Only two other players, in the last 100 years, have scored 23 goals in a 14-game stretch v. one team.

Tonight's opponent

The Predators are one of four playoff teams who currently lie at the bottom of the Western Conference standings along with Vancouver, Edmonton and Colorado. They are 0-3-0 with just 6 goals scored, 14 allowed.

No surprise to find veteran Filip Forsberg atop the scoring list with 3 points in 3 games, while veterans Ryan O'Reilly and UFA signing Jonathan Marchessault each have 2. Their other celebrated addition, 500-goal man Steven Stamkos, has yet to find the scoresheet.

Another player to watch is captain Roman Josi, an annual Norris Trophy candidate who really drives play from the back end though an uncharacteristic 0-1-1, -3 to this early point.

Star goaltender Juuse Saros is expected, though not confirmed, to get the start. Recently signed to a rich extension through 2033, he's had a tough start to the current season, including a 7-3 beatdown by Seattle right in Nashville on Tuesday. No doubt he and the Preds will be determined, indeed desperate, to turn things around against the Oilers tonight.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324534 Websites

The Athletic / OHL aware of report alleging sexual assault by former players, will cooperate if police investigate

By Chris Johnston and Pierre LeBrun

Oct 17, 2024

The Ontario Hockey League is aware of a report alleging eight former players sexually assaulted a woman in 2014, and the league will cooperate with any corresponding police investigation, the OHL said Thursday in a statement.

The report from Rick Westhead detailing the alleged incident aired Wednesday on CTV's "W5" program. It included an interview with a woman who alleged the players sexually assaulted her in November 2014 at one of the player's billet homes.

The OHL has issued a statement regarding allegations in a CTV Report filed on Wednesday. pic.twitter.com/MRZ4m0nCN4

— Ontario Hockey League (@OHLHockey) October 17, 2024

The woman — whose identity was protected by CTV — said she was 22 at the time of the incident. She said the player who invited her over to the billet house took her to a bathroom and initiated sexual acts before the other players — who ranged in age from 16 to 19 — joined in. The woman didn't attempt to report the incident to police until earlier this year.

"We learned about it yesterday when the news story was released," OHL commissioner Bryan Crawford said Thursday. "They had not been in contact with us about it prior. It wasn't something that anyone in our league or with our teams had been aware of. So we're learning about it as everyone else is. Obviously, we take it incredibly seriously."

"It takes a lot for someone to come forward that has been a victim of sexual violence and our job is to take that seriously and cooperate with any investigations that occur as we move forward. We're a bit in the dark of any of the other circumstances that have been reported."

According to the report, the woman attempted to file a police report earlier this year but was given different answers as to which department was responsible for handling the case. Per the report, Ontario Provincial Police said that policy was not followed to ensure that the woman was connected to the correct jurisdiction for her to make a report.

"We can confirm that the civilian call-taker provided the victim with the contact information for the police service of jurisdiction to facilitate their report. However, standard operating procedures state that the call-taker should have personally connected the caller to the police service of jurisdiction, and remained on the line until the call-taker could confirm that a report was being initiated," OPP spokeswoman Gosia Puzio wrote in an email to W5.

In the statement, the OHL said it takes allegations of this nature "very seriously" but added it had no prior knowledge of the alleged sexual assault before Wednesday.

"The OHL recognizes the courage required for victims of sexual assault to come forward with their experiences, and would always desire to see justice served and perpetrators held to account," the league said.

When reached for comment, an NHL spokesperson said, "The NHL is deeply troubled by any accusation of this nature. We have no information beyond what was in the media report from last night."

Crawford continued by discussing ways in which the league can offer players resources to be educated.

"We talk about the things that we can control and what we've been doing and investing in for nearly a decade when it comes to our ONSIDE program and these sorts of educational programs that we've put in place for our players and for our teams that have sought to address these sorts of issues so that we're developing outstanding young people and community leaders. That's ultimately our top priority. We were completely shocked like everybody."

The Athletic LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324535 Websites

The Athletic / Seven NHL players under the most pressure to prove their value in 2024-25

By Harman Dayal

Oct 17, 2024

An NHL player's response to pressure can mean the difference between rising as a hero or becoming a fan base's whipping boy.

Pressure is scary because of the stakes, but every athlete should relish it. Pressure is a privilege — it's reserved for those who are either paid a lot of money and/or play on a team with hopes of a deep playoff run. Unless you want to be a forgotten footnote in the history book of the thousands of players who have suited up in the NHL, you'll have to shoulder the weight of scrutiny and expectations at some point and perform under it.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Every year, there's no shortage of players under the microscope. In this article, we examined seven of the most intriguing names at the outset of the 2024-25 season. The players on this list are in different situations — some of them have boat anchor contracts and need to show a baseline level of competency on contending teams, one is a franchise-level star that needs to bounce back and there are a couple of blue-chip young players facing the heat to break out. What these players share in common is high expectations to prove their worth because of the ramifications their performance could have on their team or the future of their careers.

We're going to exclude Mitch Marner from this list because his future has been analyzed plenty already.

Darnell Nurse, Edmonton Oilers

Only seven NHL defensemen have a higher cap hit than Darnell Nurse's \$9.25 million annual average value. Nurse's contract is an albatross — there's no realistic way for him to come close to living up to that deal — but that's not even the bar that he's expected to live up to at this point. Oilers fans would be thrilled if Nurse could consistently perform at the level of a competent second-pair defenseman.

Nurse stretches where he looks like a bona fide top-four defender — he's got a well-built 6-foot-4 frame and is a strong skater — but his poor hockey IQ leaves him prone to big mistakes and he struggles to break the puck out.

Most frustratingly, he's played some of his worst hockey in the playoffs when the stakes are highest.

Last spring, the Oilers controlled 43.7 percent of expected goals and were outscored 24-15 with Nurse on the ice at five-on-five. In the second round against Vegas in 2023, the Nurse and Cody Ceci were outscored 6-1 at five-on-five. That same pair was outscored 6-2 against Colorado in the 2022 Western Conference final, though it should be noted that Nurse was playing through a torn hip flexor at the time.

The Oilers have no choice but to continue leaning on Nurse to play crucial minutes in the playoffs because the blue line lacks other viable second-pair candidates. He's under even more pressure to perform and drive the second pair now because Edmonton has to saddle him with a subpar partner like Troy Stecher, Travis Dermott or Ty Emberson, at least until the club is able to make a midseason trade upgrade.

Edmonton needs Nurse to be a serviceable top-four player rather than a liability, especially come playoff time.

Alexandar Georgiev, Colorado Avalanche

The Avalanche proved that all they need is average goaltending when they won the Stanley Cup in 2022. That year, Darcy Kuemper was battling through an eye injury and posted a .902 save percentage in the playoffs, with Colorado's elite group of forwards and defensemen able to do the heavy lifting.

Alexandar Georgiev looked capable of hitting that level when he first arrived as Colorado's starter. He started a whopping 62 games and pitched an impressive .919 save percentage, finishing seventh in Vezina Trophy voting in the process.

However, it's been all downhill since then.

Georgiev slipped to a .897 save percentage last year during both the regular season and playoffs. He was pulled in his first two starts this season and didn't fare much better in his third outing, surrendering five goals on 36 shots against the Islanders on Monday. He gave up four goals on 24 shots against the Bruins on Wednesday night too, bringing his save percentage to .800 through four games. The heat is also ratcheting up on him following the club's Kaapo Kahkonen waiver claim.

Colorado is still a scary team on paper, but its skater group isn't as deep as 2022. The Avs can't prop up subpar goaltending to the extent that they perhaps could have in the past. Not only is Georgiev at risk of losing the starter's job, but a bad year would also cost him millions on his next contract because he's a pending unrestricted free agent.

The 28-year-old netminder needs to step up both for the sake of Colorado's contention chances and his individual earnings/NHL future.

Dylan Cozens, Buffalo Sabres

It's been 13 seasons since Buffalo last made the playoffs. Sabres fans are sick of being told they have a promising core or an elite prospect pipeline; they want meaningful on-ice progress.

The biggest reason the Sabres regressed last year, following a breakout 2022-23 season where they finished one point back of the playoffs, is that their offense fell off a cliff. Buffalo fell from being the league's third-highest goal-scoring team in 2022-23 to ranking 23rd in goals for last year.

The Sabres won't surge back up the standings until their top forwards return to the level they showed two seasons ago, starting with Tage Thompson and Dylan Cozens.

Cozens, 23, exploded for 31 goals and 68 points in 2022-23 but dropped to 47 points last season. He's also yet to develop into an above-average two-way driver, at least according to the underlying numbers. There's extra pressure for him to reach his potential as a high-end top-six center because he's got six years left at a \$7.1 million cap hit.

Cozens hasn't registered a single point through five games. He needs to come alive as a key offensive driver if the Sabres have any shot of climbing out of their early season hole.

Jacob Trouba, New York Rangers

Trouba is in a similar situation as Nurse: He's never going to live up to his monster cap hit (\$8 million), but he needs to play at a serviceable top-four level rather than being a liability.

The Rangers captain decisively lost his matchups last year, controlling less than a 50 percent share of shot attempts and scoring chances, while being outscored 55-44 at five-on-five. He was playing through a broken ankle late in the season but it healed by the playoffs. Trouba was a major detriment in the postseason; he couldn't move the puck, made costly defensive mistakes and was routinely hemmed in his own zone.

New York's core is older (Artemi Panarin, Chris Kreider, Mika Zibanejad and Vincent Trocheck are all over 30) and with the franchise facing a massive cap crunch next summer, this is one of this group's final cracks at contending for the Stanley Cup. Trouba needs to be a competent No. 4/5 contributor for the Rangers to be a solid enough five-on-five team during non-Adam Fox minutes.

There are critical ramifications beyond this season, too. By next summer, Trouba will only have one year left on his contract. The Rangers will desperately need to clear cap room to keep their core together and moving Trouba, who will have a 12-team no-trade list at that point, should be a key part of that game plan, even if it requires salary retention or tossing in some trade sweeteners. Trouba's play this year will have a major impact on how many teams will be interested in him in the offseason and where he could ultimately land.

Elias Pettersson, Vancouver Canucks

If you're outside the Vancouver market, you might not understand why Pettersson would belong on a list like this. After all, this is a player that scored 89 points last season (ninth among all centers) and 102 points the year before. He's an elite player and in a completely different stratosphere than most of the other names on this list.

Pettersson is still going to be under the microscope this season for a few reasons, however.

Firstly, he faded down the stretch and was a huge disappointment in the playoffs last season. He only scored seven goals in 33 games from the All-Star break until the end of the regular season (and only two of those seven goals were against playoff-bound teams) and followed it up with just one goal in 13 playoff games. That lack of playoff production was especially costly because Pettersson was freed up to play softer middle-six minutes since J.T. Miller and Elias Lindholm were handling the toughest head-to-head matchups. Vancouver's Swedish star revealed he was battling a knee injury from January onward, so that's important context, but it doesn't completely explain why he looked so lost on the big stage.

Secondly, Pettersson is entering the first season of an eight-year, \$11.6 million AAV extension. He should have no problem living up to that contract if he can continue being a 90-100-point center, but after his disappointing second-half play, fans aren't going to have much patience if he has a slow start.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Last year, he was stuck with inferior wingers like Ilya Mikheyev on his line. But after a busy offseason where the club substantially upgraded its winger depth, headlined by the Jake DeBrusk signing, the "Pettersson doesn't have any help" argument isn't going to cut it as a justification for his underwhelming play anymore.

Pettersson's had a quiet start with just one point in three games. He hasn't scored a five-on-five goal since Mar 5 against the Kings. He needs to get going soon and bounce back in the playoffs, otherwise, he's going to become a target of criticism for Canucks fans.

Trevor Zegras, Anaheim Ducks

The Ducks have an impressive collection of under-24 forwards in Leo Carlsson, Mason McTavish, Trevor Zegras and Cutter Gauthier. Anaheim's path to evolving from a perennial bottom-five team to an exciting, competitive young squad on the rise requires some of these players to develop into stars.

Entering his fifth season in the NHL, Zegras is under the most pressure out of that bunch to take a significant step forward because of his age (23) and experience. The dynamic, creative playmaking forward looked like a future first-liner when he broke out with 61 points in 75 games as a 20-year-old sophomore. He stagnated the following year and struggled with just 15 points in 31 games during an injury-riddled campaign last season.

Zegras' name has surfaced in the trade rumor mill at various points over the last year. His defensive game has come under criticism at times, although watching him play last season, his work rate and defensive commitment looked miles better than earlier in his career. It's especially frustrating that he hasn't hit his ceiling yet because he has the elite hockey sense, highlight-reel puck skills and outrageous creativity to be a point-per-game producer.

Zegras has one year left on his contract after this season. He's also been shifted to the wing because of Carlsson and McTavish's arrivals. That matters because if he profiles as a winger long-term he becomes less of an essential piece for the Ducks. Zegras needs to show meaningful progress this year and next, otherwise, his future in Anaheim could be up in the air.

Chandler Stephenson, Seattle Kraken

When the July 1 free-agent frenzy begins, there are always a few contracts that roll in and make you go "How did that guy get that much money?" Chandler Stephenson is a good player but his seven-year, \$43.75 million signing (\$6.25 million AAV) in Seattle certainly falls under that category.

The speedy 30-year-old center twice hit the 65-point range in Vegas, but he fell to 51 points last season and had a miserable first-round playoff series. Stephenson's defensive metrics also fell off a cliff — he surrendered five-on-five scoring chances and expected goals against at the worst rate of all Vegas forwards in 2023-24. He also has to prove he can be a legitimate top-six caliber player now that he no longer has Mark Stone on his wing to be the main driver.

Stephenson's impact will play a pivotal part in determining whether the Kraken can score enough to make the playoffs this season. If he struggles, and this ends up looking like an albatross contract, it'll be another strike against GM Ron Francis, who will be on the hot seat if the club underperforms again.

Honorable mentions: PL Dubois, Jesperi Kotkaniemi, Philip Broberg, Jamie Drysdale, Lukas Reichel, Timo Meier,

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

1324536 Websites

The Athletic / Sizing up the NHL: Analyzing 2024-25 teams by age, height, weight and nationality

By James Mirtle

Oct 17, 2024

It's been a few years since I've pulled this data together, and it's fair to say things have shifted a bit in the NHL.

The league is slightly older, taller and thicker than three years back. There are also now more American players than ever, as they approach 30 percent of the NHL for the first time.

I've broken this all down team by team, as we've done here at The Athletic in the past. Included here is any player who played a game as of Monday night, as well as any backup goaltender that had sat on the bench by that point in time. Not included are any players out due to injury in this period.

All told, this analysis includes nearly 700 players, 66 of which are goalies, and information pulled from NHL.com.

NHL average age this season: 28.3

Analysis: Last year's runners-up, and a team many have pegged to go deep this season, the Oilers are the NHL's oldest club.

As of later this week, Edmonton will have only two players under 25 (Vasily Podkolzin and Ty Emberson) and 13 players who are 30 or older, including Corey Perry and Derek Ryan, who are both among the 10 oldest players in the NHL this season.

Nashville also became surprisingly old by bringing in a veteran free-agent crew including Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault, Luke Schenn, Ryan O'Reilly and Gustav Nyquist the past two summers.

On the other side of things, the struggling Sabres are incredibly young, with nine players who are 23 or younger and only one player in his 30s (Jason Zucker).

Most of the league's youngest teams are rebuilding right now, although it's very interesting to see Boston and Colorado down there. Part of that is they don't have a lot of older players pulling up the average: Brad Marchand is the only Bruin older than 32 and the Avs have only three players older than 30.

Surprisingly, there isn't a single player in the NHL over 40 years old right now, although three big-name players will get there by season's end. And there are only nine teenagers in the league this season, led by baby-faced Flyers rookie Jett Luchanko, who was born in August of 2006, meaning there are quite a few players (e.g. Sidney Crosby) who have been playing longer than he's been alive.

10 oldest players in the NHL this season

1. Marc-Andre Fleury, MIN, 39.9 years old
2. Ryan Suter, STL, 39.7
3. Brent Burns, CAR, 39.6
4. Corey Perry, EDM, 39.4
5. Alex Ovechkin, WSH, 39.1
6. Jonathan Quick, NYR, 38.7
7. Evgeni Malkin, PIT, 38.2
8. Derek Ryan, EDM, 37.8
9. Trevor Lewis, LAK, 37.8
10. Jack Johnson, CBJ, 37.8

10 youngest players in the NHL this season

1. Jett Luchanko, PHI, 18.2 years old
2. Macklin Celebrini, SJS, 18.3
3. Connor Bedard, CHI, 19.3
4. Zach Benson, BUF, 19.4
5. Will Smith, SJS, 19.6
6. Calum Ritchie, COL, 19.7
7. Leo Carlsson, ANA, 19.8
8. Matvei Michkov, PHI, 19.9
9. Samuel Honzek, CGY, 19.9
10. Adam Fantilli, CBJ, 20.0

NHL average height this season: 73.6 inches

Analysis: The league is creeping up on an average height of 6-foot-2, as teams continue to value length — especially in goal. The average netminder this season tops 6-3, the continuation of a trend where taller and taller athletes are getting the crease. (Exhibit A: Maple Leafs rookie Dennis Hildeby, all 6-foot-7 of him.)

I had to double-check the Bruins number to make sure it was right, as Boston really towers over everyone here, with a full half inch in height above the second-place team. No, I didn't accidentally include Zdeno Chara; bringing in 6-6 Nikita Zadorov and Riley Tuftte means the Bruins now have a remarkable 16 players listed at 6-3 or above. Even with Marchand bringing down the average, that's a tall team.

Vegas and Washington have long been near the top of this list; the Leafs, meanwhile, have been climbing this list under new management (and having two giants in goal doesn't hurt).

On the other side of things, Colorado has 12 players listed between 5-10 and 6 feet tall, surpassed only by the Kraken with 13. Jamie Oleksiak must be getting things off the top shelf in that dressing room.

10 tallest players in the NHL this season

1. Matt Rempe, NYR, 81 inches (6-foot-9)
2. Adam Klapka, CGY, 80
3. Tyler Myers, VAN, 80
4. Dennis Hildeby, TOR, 79
5. Mads Søgaard, OTT, 79
6. Ivan Fedotov, PHI, 79
7. Vincent Desharnais, VAN, 79
8. Jamie Oleksiak, SEA, 79
9. Victor Hedman, TBL, 79
10. Twenty players tied at 6-foot-6, including Jake Oettinger and Owen Power

10 shortest players in the NHL this season

1. Logan Stankoven, DAL, 68 inches (5-foot-8)
2. Daniil Gushchin, SJS, 68
3. Bobby Brink, PHI, 68
4. Cole Caufield, MTL, 68
5. Alex DeBrincat, DET, 68
6. Colin Blackwell, DAL, 68
7. Cameron Atkinson, TBL, 68
8. Mats Zuccarello, MIN, 68
9. Thirteen players tied at 5-foot-9, including Lane Hutson and Seamus Casey



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

NHL average weight this season: 201.1 lbs

Analysis: There's the Leafs again, this time at the top of the list. New netminder Anthony Stolarz being the heaviest goalie in the league is part of it, but the other factor is Matthew Knies just, well, eating his way into the power forward role (he's up to 227 pounds as a sophomore, with more room to grow).

Toronto has only four players listed under 199 pounds right now. And they'll get even heavier and taller once Jani Hakanpää is ready to return from a knee injury.

On the lighter side, the Canucks make a surprise appearance here despite having a lot of big boys on the back end in Tyler Myers, Vincent Desharnais, Derek Forbort and Carson Soucy. Led by 165-pounder Conor Garland, Vancouver has 12 players listed at under 195 pounds, including lanky goalie Kevin Lankinen (yes, pun intended), Elias Pettersson and Quinn Hughes.

10 heaviest players in the NHL this season

1. Jamie Oleksiak, SEA, 257 pounds
2. Matt Rempe, NYR, 255
3. Nikita Zadorov, BOS, 248
4. Nicolas Hague, VGK, 245
5. Victor Hedman, TBL, 245
6. Anthony Stolarz, TOR, 243
7. Adam Edström, NYR, 241
8. Arber Xhekaj, MTL, 240
9. Alex Ovechkin, WSH, 238
10. Austin Watson, DET, 238

10 lightest players in the NHL this season

1. Lane Hutson, MTL, 162
2. Seamus Casey, NJD, 162
3. Logan Stankoven, DAL, 165
4. Danil Gushchin, SJS, 165
5. Conor Garland, VAN, 165
6. Jared Spurgeon, MIN, 166
7. Dustin Wolf, CGY, 166
8. Albert Johansson, DET, 168
9. Bobby Brink, PHI, 169
10. Zach Benson, BUF, 170

NHL averages this season: Canadian 41.2%, American 28.6%, European 30.2%

Analysis: The rise of USA Hockey keeps showing up in this number, year after year.

Twenty years ago, only around 15 percent of NHL players were American. A decade ago, that had jumped to 23 percent. Now it's up again, this time approaching the level of all of the European nations combined.

That growth is obviously coming at the expense of Canadian players, which is happening for a couple of reasons.

No. 1 is simply population size, as the U.S. has nine times the people power. But the other big thing impacting this is simply participation in hockey. U.S. markets like Pittsburgh, Chicago, California, St. Louis, Washington D.C. and others have exploded over the last decade or two, offering more competition for spots in the pro game.

Minor hockey enrollment in Canada, meanwhile, has been stagnant for some time, in part due to cost reasons.

These trends are probably worth deeper analysis at some point later this season, especially as we ramp up for the return of international play with the NHL 4 Nations Face-Off in February and the Olympics in 2026. If you have suggestions on future stories that would look at how the demographics of the league have changed, let us know in the comments.

NHL averages this season: First-rounders 42.6%, Rounds 2+ 46.1%, Undrafted 11.3%

Analysis: I haven't done this type of analysis before, so I don't have historical comparables to look at, but I did find it interesting just to pull out the overall numbers.

The fact that nearly 43 percent of players are picked in the first round of the NHL Draft is telling, as is the realization more than 10 percent of the league wasn't drafted at all.

There are a lot of different ways to build a team in this league.

One thing that stood out with this part of the data is just how different goaltenders are. Only 9 percent of those in the league were drafted in the first round, as teams are often reluctant to use high picks on them. More than 15 percent of goalies weren't drafted at all, a group that includes recent Stanley Cup winner Sergei Bobrovsky and Alexandar Georgiev.

There were also a lot more mid- and late-round hits with netminders, with an incredible 20 percent of them picked in the fifth, sixth or seventh round. Only 10 percent of defensemen, by comparison, were found in those later rounds.

There's probably a fuller analysis that could be done on this data as part of one of our upcoming draft packages, as there's a lot to unpack here.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324537 Websites

The Athletic / 2021 NHL re-draft: Luke Hughes, Matty Beniers, Wyatt Johnston lead the class

Corey Pronman

Oct 17, 2024

This is the third part of our series looking back at recent NHL Draft classes and at how my ordering of those players would change. The 2021 draft was a very difficult one to scout. Leagues were paused across the world, with many teams relying purely on underage viewings or sparse draft-season viewings. How this class ages will be very interesting, and to date, the results have been rather chaotic. Players eligible for this exercise had to be drafted in the draft class mentioned, regardless of their first year of eligibility.

Tier 1: Bubble elite and All-Star

1

Luke Hughes

D

4

New Jersey

The toolkit Luke Hughes has is rather special. He's an elite skater with size, who scored nearly 50 points as a rookie in the NHL. His defending and pure hockey sense are not the most inspiring elements of his play, but he has game-breaking abilities and his pure athleticism should allow him to be a sufficient pro defender. He projects as a true No. 1 defenseman.

Tier 2: NHL All-Stars

2



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Matty Beniers

C

2

Seattle

3

Wyatt Johnston

C

23

Dallas

Matty Beniers took a step back this season offensively after winning the Calder last year, but I'm still a big believer in his long-term potential. He checks all the boxes between his skill, hockey sense, work ethic and ability to play at an NHL pace. He's not full of highlight reels, but he looks like a longtime big-minutes NHL center who will score and play tough minutes.

Wyatt Johnston has emerged as a premier young center in the NHL, especially after his recent playoff performance. He has a ton of skill, vision and natural scoring ability. He is super creative and is a highly competitive center who can play both ways despite being an average skater.

Tier 3: Bubble star and top of lineup

4

Mason McTavish

C

3

Anaheim

5

Owen Power

D

1

Buffalo

Mason McTavish and Owen Power are both excellent players at premium positions. McTavish has a lot of skill and a great motor, whereas Power is extremely mobile for a massive defenseman and can create offense, too. I don't think either will be a major point producer, but they can play big minutes in all situations.

Tier 4: Top-of-lineup player

6

Logan Stankoven

RW

47

Dallas

7

Dylan Guenther

RW

9

Utah

8

Matthew Knies

LW

57

Toronto

Logan Stankoven rockets up the boards after a great rookie pro season between the AHL and NHL with Dallas. He's very small, but otherwise checks every other box, often with emphasis. He has the speed and tenacity you'd want in a small forward who could have a long career, given how offensively talented he is.

Dylan Guenther and Matthew Knies also became important players for their NHL clubs this season. Guenther has always had all the tools, between his size, speed, skill and especially his shot. Knies' stock has risen a lot since his draft year when scouts questioned his skating and hockey sense. He's still not very fast, but he's shown much more offensive touch than some thought he would and, with his frame and high-end compete, has an excellent power game.

Tier 5: Bubble top and middle lineup

9

Brandt Clarke

D

8

Los Angeles

10

Simon Edvinsson

D

6

Detroit

11

Kent Johnson

LW

5

Columbus

12

Jesper Wallstedt

G

20

Minnesota

13

William Eklund

LW

7

San Jose

Jesper Wallstedt versus Sebastian Cossa was a major debate during their draft year. Wallstedt seemed to be clearly in the lead for a couple of years post-draft, but Cossa closed the gap this past season. Wallstedt has been a more consistent and productive pro with notably superior hockey sense, but Cossa's natural athleticism is several notches stronger so it will be interesting to see who becomes better in five years.

Tier 6: Middle-of-the-lineup player

14

Cole Sillinger

C

12

Columbus

15



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Caedan Bankier

C

86

Minnesota

16

Vincent Iorio

D

55

Washington

17

Logan Mailloux

D

31

Montreal

18

JJ Moser

D

60

Tampa Bay

19

Olen Zellweger

D

34

Anaheim

20

Matt Coronato

RW

13

Calgary

21

Brennan Othmann

LW

16

New York Rangers

22

Aaty Raty

C

52

Vancouver

23

Colton Dach

C

62

Chicago

24

Sebastian Cossa

G

15

Detroit

Cole Sillinger has a lot of NHL games after making Columbus at 18 years old. I'm unsure of his long-term projection, though. He has very good puck skills and plays with a lot of bite. I don't see his playmaking as a major asset, though, and he's an average-sized/average-skating forward. Despite his early success, his projection for me is as a third-line center; a highly likable one.

The depth of this draft could end up being an issue. Most players had abbreviated seasons or didn't play at all due to COVID-19 lockdowns. This age group was never the best to begin with, but it's interesting in that context to see how few legit players came out of this class. When you look at how many 'middle-of-the-lineup' players or better I project from this class, it's by far the least between the 2020-2024 classes.

Tier 7: Projected to play NHL games

25

Zack Ostapchuk

C

39

Ottawa

26

Fedor Svechikov

C

19

Nashville

27

Ilya Safonov

C

172

Chicago

28

Ryker Evans

D

35

Seattle

29

Ryan Ufko

D

115

Nashville

30

Ethan Del Mastro

D

105

Chicago

31

Carson Lambos

D

26



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Minnesota	41
32	Oliver Kapanen
Nolan Allan	C
D	64
32	Montreal
Chicago	42
33	Zakhar Bardakov
Scott Morrow	C
D	203
40	New Jersey
Carolina	43
34	Shai Buium
Zack Bolduc	D
LW	36
17	Detroit
St. Louis	44
35	Ville Ottavainen
Mackie Samoskevich	D
RW	99
24	Seattle
Florida	45
36	Joshua Roy
Jackson Blake	RW
RW	150
109	Montreal
Carolina	46
37	Josh Doan
Tristan Broz	RW
C	37
58	Utah
Pittsburgh	47
38	Niko Huuhtanen
Carter Mazur	RW
RW	224
70	Tampa Bay
Detroit	48
39	Sam Lipkin
Chaz Lucius	LW
C	223
18	Utah
Winnipeg	49
40	Fabian Lysell
Ryan Winterton	RW
C	21
67	Boston
Seattle	Tier 8: Has a chance to play games



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

50	Daniil Chayka
Xavier Bourgault	D
C	38
22	Vegas
Ottawa	60
51	Isak Rosen
Ryder Korczak	RW
C	14
75	Buffalo
New York Rangers	61
52	Shane Lachance
Zach Dean	LW
C	186
30	Edmonton
St. Louis	62
53	Owen McLaughlin
Kirill Tankov	C
C	206
218	Philadelphia
Pittsburgh	63
54	Simon Robertsson
Sean Behrens	LW
D	71
61	St. Louis
Colorado	64
55	Tyler Boucher
Stanislav Svozil	RW
D	10
69	Ottawa
Columbus	65
56	Josh Bloom
Jack Peart	LW
D	95
54	Vancouver
Minnesota	66
57	William Stromgren
Corson Ceulemans	LW
D	45
25	Calgary
Columbus	67
58	Chase Stillman
Kirill Kirsanov	RW
D	29
84	New Jersey
Los Angeles	68
59	Ilya Fedotov



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

LW	128
43	Vegas
Utah	78
69	Emil Lilleberg
Nikita Chibrikov	D
RW	107
50	Tampa Bay
Winnipeg	79
70	Topias Vilen
Oskar Olausson	D
RW	129
28	New Jersey
Colorado	80
71	Tyson Hinds
Justin Robidas	D
C	76
147	Anaheim
Carolina	81
72	Nikita Novikov
Prokhor Poltapov	D
LW	188
33	Buffalo
Buffalo	82
73	Evgenii Kashnikov
Francesco Pinelli	D
C	199
42	San Jose
Los Angeles	83
74	Ville Koivunen
Brett Harrison	RW
C	51
85	Pittsburgh
Boston	84
75	Zachary L'Heureux
Jakub Brabenec	LW
C	27
102	Nashville
Vegas	85
76	Dmitri Rashevsky
Simon Knak	RW
RW	146
179	Winnipeg
Nashville	86
77	James Malatesta
Jakub Demek	LW
C	133



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Columbus	96
87	Matvey Petrov
Andre Gasseau	LW
LW	180
213	Edmonton
Boston	97
88	Danila Klimovich
Lucas Ciona	RW
LW	41
173	Vancouver
Calgary	The Athletic LOADED: 10.18.2024
89	1324538 Websites
Jaroslav Chmelar	
RW	ESPN / Ranking all 32 NHL goalie tandems for the 2024-25 season – ESPN
144	
New York Rangers	Greg Wyshynski
90	
Eetu Liukas	
LW	The Edmonton Oilers understand the importance of a dependable goalie tandem.
157	In the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs last season, the Oilers were trailing the Vancouver Canucks 2-1 heading into Game 4. They needed a spark. More importantly, starter Stuart Skinner needed a mental reset. So backup goalie Calvin Pickard entered the series for two games, going 1-1 and playing well. The Oilers rallied with two straight wins after Skinner returned in Game 6, and their starter was mentally locked in from that point all the way through Game 7 of the Cup Final.
New York Islanders	Whether it's the regular season or the postseason, today's NHL is such that teams have multiple goaltending options. Sometimes that means having a competent backup to give an overworked star goalie a breather. Sometimes that means having a goalie rotation that goes three netminders deep.
91	So which teams have the best goaltending depth?
Samu Tuomaala	These rankings were formulated through discussions with a variety of goalie experts -- coaches, analytics gurus, former players -- as well as through stats from sites like Evolving Hockey, Money Puck, Hockey Reference and Stathletes.
RW	Rosters are through Oct. 16. And keep in mind that these rankings are a combination of past performance and projections for the 2024-25 season.
46	Let the debates begin!
Philadelphia	32. Columbus Blue Jackets
92	Elvis Merzlikins, Daniil Tarasov
Jakub Malek	This duo had a bounce-back season after both finished in the bottom 10 in goals saved above replacement in 2022-23. Dean Evason's man-on-man defensive system was beneficial to the Minnesota Wild's defensive metrics during his time as head coach, but he was dealing with a different experience level with much of his personnel there vs. being in Columbus, which had the seventh-youngest roster in the NHL on opening night.
G	Merzlikins, 30, has three more years left on his contract at \$5.4 million annually. Tarasov, long considered the goalie of the future in Columbus, is entering his third full season and showed flashes of that potential in the second half of 2023-24.
100	
New Jersey	31. San Jose Sharks
93	Mackenzie Blackwood, Vitek Vanecek
Kirill Gerasimiyuk	The Sharks were originally higher in this ranking before they demoted Yaroslav Askarov to the AHL ahead of the season, where the former top Nashville prospect is already showboating after shutouts.
G	
152	
Florida	
94	
Tristan Lennox	
G	
93	
New York Islanders	
95	
Talyn Boyko	
G	
112	
New York Rangers	



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Yaroslav Askarov is up to his old shutout tricks 😊
pic.twitter.com/gl2BhEw6Te

— American Hockey League (@TheAHL) October 13, 2024

It won't be too long before Askarov takes his act to the NHL, but as it stands, the Sharks have a solid but unspectacular veteran goalie tandem that previously shared the crease with the 2022-23 Devils.

Blackwood, 27, has the greater potential to break out ... but alas, he's also the more breakable of the two.

"Blackwood has the talent to be Team Canada's starter. But not the health," one goaltending analyst said.

30. Anaheim Ducks

John Gibson, Lukas Dostal, James Reimer

The Ducks lost Gibson for at least the first month of the season after an appendectomy. Every season that passes brings Gibson closer to the end of his contract (summer 2027) and inches the salary cap higher to make his cap hit (\$6.4 million annually) more palatable for potential trading partners. Speculation about a Gibson trade feels like it has been going on since the Ducks were "Mighty" without a deal manifesting, partially because their 31-year-old starter has been in statistical decline for several seasons.

Dostal, 24, outplayed Gibson last season in a career-high 44 games and looks to build on that promise.

Reimer was a waiver claim when Gibson was lost at the end of training camp. He's a steady veteran hand in his 15th NHL season.

29. Calgary Flames

Dan Vladar, Dustin Wolf

With Jacob Markstrom now wearing Devils' red, the Flames turned their crease over to Vladar, a career backup, and Wolf, a promising 23-year-old who had 18 games of NHL experience entering this season.

"I'm still not sure he's an NHL guy now," one goalie analyst said of Wolf. "I think they're going to give him all the opportunity, but I'm not sure that he is a full-time NHL guy."

Inexperience and a down year for Vladar last season earned the Flames a low place in this ranking, but one goaltending analyst believes they have a high ceiling.

"They have a tandem that could make this ranking look very silly," the analyst said. "But it's also hard to argue that they belong anywhere else."

28. Chicago Blackhawks

Petr Mrazek, Arvid Soderblom, Laurent Brossoit

In his 13th NHL season, hockey fans know what they're getting from Mrazek at this point: average goaltending punctuated by a few weeks when he looks like Dominik Hasek. He played to three goals above expected last season for the rebuilding Blackhawks.

Söderblom ... did not, as he had a minus-17.7 goals saved above expected in 2023-24. Former Winnipeg Jets goalie Brossoit signed a two-year free agent deal but, unfortunately true to form, begins the season on the shelf after meniscus surgery.

Waiting in the wings: former Boston University star Drew Comness, 22, in his second season with the AHL Rockford IceHogs.

27. Philadelphia Flyers

Samuel Ersson, Ivan Fedotov

The Flyers believed they had finally found an answer to the goaltending questions that had vexed them for decades in Carter Hart, 25, last season. But he took leave from the team after 26 games, as one of four NHL players charged with sexual assault by London, Ontario, police following an investigation into Canada's 2018 world junior championship team. Hart is an unrestricted free agent.

Ersson took the crease and played 51 games for the Flyers last season, finishing with an .890 save percentage and a 23-19-7 record for coach John Tortorella.

Fedotov is a 6-foot-7 netminder, and finally arrived in the NHL at the end of last season after a circuitous journey that included a season of mandatory military service in Russia. It took him nine years between when he was drafted to when he debuted in the NHL. He turns 28 years old in November.

"It's a disadvantage," Marty Biron, a former NHL goaltender and studio analyst for the Buffalo Sabres, told ESPN. "You should be in your prime years and you still have to learn. If the Flyers are looking at it and saying they're going to spend a few years getting him to the level he needs to be at, well, all of a sudden he's 30 years old."

There was hope that Fedotov's arrival could give the Flyers another clear starter, but some are skeptical.

"Fedotov has agility challenges, and I don't love the way he reads plays," one goaltending analyst said.

"The Flyers are a giant question mark for me," another said.

There is another hope: Alexei Kolosov, a 22-year-old from Belarus, who finally reported to the Flyers after being discontent with his place on the depth chart. The talented netminder is currently at AHL Lehigh Valley, along with veteran Cal Petersen.

26. Detroit Red Wings

Cam Talbot, Alex Lyon

The goalie competition in Red Wings training camp was slightly more intense than "Squid Game," with several netminders vying for two jobs. In the end, it was Talbot and Lyon who secured the spots, with Ville Husso, in the last year of a three-year contract, sent through waivers to the AHL. Lyon played 44 games with a .904 save percentage last season for the Wings.

Talbot was given a two-year free agent contract after what appeared to be a strong comeback season with the Los Angeles Kings -- or so his .913 save percentage would indicate. A glance under the hood showed he had a minus-5.7 goals saved above expected for the Kings.

"Talbot's going to be interesting there," one goalie analyst said. "L.A. just makes a lot of guys look better than they actually are."

25. Seattle Kraken

Philipp Grubauer, Joey Daccord

Ranking the Kraken was a difficult task thanks to the sample size. Before last season, Daccord had played 19 games in his NHL career before appearing in 50 contests for Seattle last season, posting a stellar .916 save percentage and a 2.46 goals-against average while finishing on the plus side of goals saved above expected. Was that an aberration or did the 28-year-old unlock something?

Grubauer is more than halfway through that six-year contract he signed with the Kraken before their inaugural season. He hasn't finished with a save percentage above .900 in any of those three seasons, nor has he posted a positive goals saved above expected.

"Grubauer is a league-average goaltender at best," one goaltending analyst said.

24. Colorado Avalanche

Alexandar Georgiev, Kaapo Kahkonen, Justus Annunen

A recently retired NHL goaltender who submitted his ranking to ESPN had the Avalanche trio ranked last overall. Many of the others we surveyed had the Avs somewhere in the 15 to 20 area.

"Georgiev looks like a shell of himself, Annunen is an .800 goalie and I'm not sure what, if any, depth they have beyond him," the former netminder said.

One's mileage with the Mile High goaltending depends entirely on how one feels about Georgiev as the primary starter, and how far away one feels Annunen is from potentially usurping him. On the former point, Georgiev was a minus-7.4 goals saved above expected last season, which was a huge plummet from his 2022-23 metrics (12.8 goals saved above expected). His 0.83 wins above replacement ranked 23rd overall for goalie with at least 20 games played.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

He was better in the postseason for the Avalanche, specifically when he outdueled Connor Hellebuyck in Colorado's series win over Winnipeg.

Annunen is young (24) and inexperienced, with 18 NHL games entering this season. "They were clearly picking their spots with him last season, putting him in situations that were relatively easy," one goalie analyst said.

The question of whether the team has faith in Annunen playing a significantly higher chunk of the schedule or supplanting Georgiev if his struggles deepen was answered with the team's waiver claim on former Jets goalie Kähkönen. He arrives as a veteran insurance policy and to help steady what's been a chaotic crease for the Avs to start the 2024-25 season.

23. Montreal Canadiens

Sam Montembeault, Cayden Primeau

GM Kent Hughes smartly locked Montembeault into a new three-year contract at a \$3.15 million annual cap hit in the middle of last season. That price might have climbed for the 27-year-old goaltender, who posted a .903 save percentage and a .700 quality starts rate for the Canadiens last season.

"Montembeault had a strong start and then tailed off, which is understandable behind a team that played like Montreal did last season," one goaltending analyst said.

While Montembeault is one of the most underrated goalies in the NHL, our goalie experts believe that Primeau is also flying well under the radar.

"I like Montembeault, but Primeau really surprised me last year with how well he played," one goaltending analyst said of Primeau, who had a .910 save percentage in 23 games last season.

"Cayden took a massive step last season," another goalie expert said.

22. Buffalo Sabres

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, Devon Levi

The man they call "UPL" had his breakout season in 2023-24: a 27-22-4 record in 54 games, with a .910 save percentage and 10.2 goals saved above expected. That included five shutouts.

His performance was clutch for Buffalo after rookie Levi struggled early before finding his game: His final line included a .899 save percentage and 5.8 goals saved above expected.

"They like Levi a lot. It's tough sometimes for those guys that come right out of college. They gave him the crease last season and then he was down in [AHL] Rochester, where he did great, actually," said one goalie analyst, who also would like to see Levi eat into some of those UPL starts. "I think Levi is ready for the NHL but he has to play."

21. Edmonton Oilers

Stuart Skinner, Calvin Pickard

It's hard to ignore that vision of Skinner from last postseason: giving up two goals or fewer in 11 of his last 15 games through the Oilers' Game 7 loss in the Stanley Cup Final. He stepped up huge in critical spots for the Oilers, like when he stopped 33 of 34 shots to eliminate Dallas and 32 of 33 shots to spark the Edmonton rally in the Final.

But if you set aside those moments of playoff stardom and his undeniable charm -- we're talking about an NHL goalie who plays as Toad in postgame "Mario Kart" tournaments -- we're left with a player who posts pretty average numbers.

Skinner had a .905 save percentage in the regular season and a .901 in the postseason. According to StatSheet, he had a minus-8.5 goals saved above expected in the postseason and just 2.31 in the regular season. Some of the analysts we spoke with believe Skinner should have posted better numbers after Edmonton figured itself out defensively when Kris Knoblauch was hired.

"Skinner really found his game after the coaching change last season and the Oilers stopped giving up so much off the rush defensively," one analyst said.

Pickard was fine last season, with a .909 save percentage in 23 games after it was apparent Jack Campbell wasn't working out in Edmonton.

But this is Skinner's show. He's just good enough where the Oilers don't need to sweat about their goaltending if they play well in front of him. But can he repeat that glorious run again in next spring's playoffs?

20. Washington Capitals

Charlie Lindgren, Logan Thompson

The rise of Lindgren was an unexpected joy for the Capitals last season, as he played a career-high 50 games and posted a .911 save percentage behind coach Spencer Carbery's solid defensive system. That took him from a solid backup to Washington's starter, making Darcy Kuemper expendable.

"You can trust Charlie now. He's done it for two years," one goalie analyst said of Lindgren, who is in the last year of a three-year deal for the Caps.

With Kuemper having been traded to the Kings for Pierre-Luc Dubois, the Capitals turned to former Golden Knights goaltender Thompson, whom they acquired in a memorable draft weekend trade -- memorable because Thompson was doing an autograph session in Vegas as a member of the Knights moments after the news broke. (To his credit, he still made the appearance.)

Thompson is seeking a bounce-back season after his save percentage slipped from his breakout 2022-23 campaign to last season. He still went 25-14-5 for Vegas last season.

"Thompson is so cocky. He had a vibe to him, which I kind of thought was great," one goaltending analyst said. "One person in Vegas told me he wasn't very coachable, but I don't know if that's an issue."

19. Los Angeles Kings

Darcy Kuemper, David Rittich

Kuemper is GM Rob Blake's latest attempt to stabilize his goaltending in the post-Jonathan Quick era.

"If you get the Darcy of every other year in his career other than last year, they'll be fine," one goalie analyst said.

Kuemper's only season with the Capitals was a disaster, as he posted the lowest save percentage of his career (.890) and a terrible minus-15.6 goals saved above expected. He lost his gig to Charlie Lindgren, and the Kings acquired him in a "problem for problem" swap for center Pierre-Luc-Dubois.

"In theory, the Kings' defensive environment is always going to make their goaltending look good," one goaltending analyst said.

Rittich was the Kings' best goaltender last season, with 8.8 goals saved above expected and a sterling .921 save percentage in 24 games. He's earned the backup role in the NHL, with Pheonix Copley relegated to the AHL to start the season.

Perhaps Kuemper is the answer. Or perhaps it's like how one goalie analyst put it: "The Pacific Division looks like where good goaltending goes to die."

18. Pittsburgh Penguins

Tristan Jarry, Alex Nedeljkovic, Joel Blomqvist

Few Pittsburgh athletes have been more divisive over the past decade than Jarry. He has shown he can play upward of 56 games as a starter and be in the Vezina Trophy conversation. He's a goaltender who shows flashes of greatness, like he did in his six shutouts last season.

But his save percentage has declined for three straight seasons, he lost the crease to Nedeljkovic last season and might lose it to Blomqvist in 2024-25 with the way the 22-year-old has looked.

"Blomqvist is a legit prospect. A lot of teams are already kicking themselves for letting him fall to 52nd in the 2020 draft," one goaltending analyst said.

Still, there are those who believe in Jarry's abilities, even as the Penguins have been checking trade options for the 29-year-old.

"I think Jarry is due for a major bounce-back season," one goaltending analyst said.

17. Utah Hockey Club



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Connor Ingram, Karel Vejmelka

The NHL's newest team inherited some advantages from the former Arizona Coyotes: young scoring forwards, a slew of prospects and a fairly clean payroll contractually. But Utah also inherited Ingram, which means they inherited one of the most dependable goaltenders in the league.

Ingram, 27, put together two straight solid seasons, with .907 save percentages in both. He posted six shutouts in 2023-24 and 3.4 goals saved above expected, playing 23 more games year over year.

"They're a team that defends well and puts their goalies in a good situation," one goalie analyst said.

Vejmelka was one of those goalies who got a bunch of credit for keeping the Coyotes competitive in games, even if his own numbers weren't that stellar. But as Ingram thrived last season, Vejmelka struggled to a minus-3.6 goals saved above expected.

"Goaltending is cyclical. Vejmelka was fantastic two seasons ago and then the opposite last season," a Western Conference executive said. "We'll see if he cycles back."

16. Vegas Golden Knights

Adin Hill, Ilya Samsonov

After Hill backstopped the Golden Knights to their first Stanley Cup, Vegas rewarded him with a contract extension. The hockey world waited to see if he was a postseason fable or a veteran goalie who finally unlocked his game.

"He played the same way at the start of last season that he did during their Cup run, before the injuries hit," one goalie analyst said. "Adin Hill has tons of upside."

Injuries limited him to 35 games last season, which still ended up being a career high. He posted a .909 save percentage and it looked like the Golden Knights made the right call -- if Hill can remain healthy.

Samsonov is an upgrade over Logan Thompson, who had been a tandem starter for three seasons. He's looking to rebound from a stumble in Toronto last season (.890 save percentage), and coach Bruce Cassidy's 5-on-5 system could offer him that opportunity.

Akira Schmid, acquired from the Devils, is tending goal in the AHL.

15. Carolina Hurricanes

Frederik Andersen, Pyotr Kochetkov

Kochetkov nearly doubled his appearances year over year, posting a .911 save percentage in 42 games last season. The anticipation is that the 25-year-old is poised to take over the crease for the Hurricanes this season, as veteran teammate Andersen looks at free agency next summer and hasn't been a model of availability.

"Andersen is a question mark with injuries," one goalie analyst said.

Is Kochetkov ready to make a leap to elite status? Coach Rod Brind'amour's system should offer him a comfortable environment. But some still have questions about his overall play.

"The tools are all there for Kochetkov, but his underlying numbers make him a question mark," another goaltending analyst said. "There's potential, but also some uncertainty there."

14. Minnesota Wild

Marc-Andre Fleury, Filip Gustavsson, Jesper Wallstedt

The farewell tour for Fleury finds him as part of a trio in the Wild net, aka NHL King Ghidorah for you kaiju fans.

Fleury, who turns 40 in November, is in his 21st NHL season. His numbers declined significantly in 2023-24, which saw him play in 40 games, his lowest total in a full season since 2016-17 with the Penguins. Fleury went from a .908 save percentage down to .895 and had a whopping minus-11 goals saved above expected.

Gustavsson got the majority of the games (45) but was also underwater analytically (minus-7 goals saved above expected). But hey, now that he's a goal scorer perhaps it all evens out.

"Minnesota is such a tough one to figure out," a goaltending analyst said. "[Fleury's] been better than his numbers would indicate, but Gustavsson went from being solid two years ago to being underwater last season based on the analytics."

Wallstedt, 21, is the goalie of the future and projects to get a share of starts for the Wild as well this season. He had a .910 save percentage in 45 games in the AHL last season.

13. Ottawa Senators

Linus Ullmark, Anton Forsberg

Last season's goalie tandem ranking had the duo of Joonas Korpisalo and Forsberg ranked 15th overall, as it appeared the Senators had sufficiently addressed their netminding issues. And then they finished last in the NHL in team save percentage (.884).

Now, it appears they really, really sufficiently addressed their netminding issues by trading for Ullmark, who was half of the best tandem in the NHL with the Boston Bruins. Ullmark's numbers normalized after his preposterously good Vezina Trophy-winning 2022-23 season (40-6-1, .938 save percentage, 1.89 goals-against average). But his typical seasons have him around a .915 save percentage, which Ottawa would take every day of the week and twice on Sunday.

The reason this tandem isn't higher is Forsberg. He tore the MCL in both knees in 2023 and never really found his form after that. A groin injury took him out of action last season as well.

"Ullmark makes a huge difference. But Forsberg is a year removed from double knee injuries," a goalie analyst said. "I've always liked him, but he showed some signs of slowing down."

Forsberg was considered one of the best bargain goalies in the NHL from 2021-22 to 2022-23, including a 46-game campaign that saw him finish with a .917 save percentage. But he posted an .890 save percentage in 30 games last season.

"If he can bounce back, I like Forsberg as a backup more than a 1A," another goalie analyst said.

12. Toronto Maple Leafs

Joseph Woll, Anthony Stolarz

The Leafs revamped their goaltending again during the offseason, letting Ilya Samsonov and Martin Jones walk, handing the keys to the promising Woll and signing Stolarz off the Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers.

Woll looked great in limited action last season, with a .907 save percentage in 25 games and 7.9 goals saved above expected. His postseason numbers in three games were extraordinary: .964 save percentage and an 0.86 goals-against average before an injury cut his playoff run short in the Leafs' series loss to the Bruins.

"I think Woll is extremely talented, can be an NHL goaltender and a good one," one goaltending analyst said. "But they're going to need Stolarz to give him a lot of help in Year 1. I could see a 42 to 40 split in games if they're both healthy."

Therein lies the rub: If they're both healthy. Woll and Stolarz have been known to miss time with injuries during their pro careers.

"The problem with Woll? It's that old sports cliché: 'One of the greatest abilities is availability,'" one goaltending analyst said.

But if they're healthy? The Leafs could have a special tandem.

"If Woll and Stolarz could both get through a season healthy, you could put them in the top six," the goaltending analyst said. "But since Woll is already hurt, it's probably too late for that."

11. Nashville Predators

Juuse Saros, Scott Wedgewood

There was a decent spread of opinions on where the Predators should rank. Some had them higher. One former NHL goalie had them slightly lower than this, at No. 15. But given how solid Saros is as a starter, a placement just outside the top 10 seems about right.

"Saros had a down year last season and I still think he might be better than the next two starters on this list," one goalie analyst said.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Saros led the NHL in games played for the third straight season, but saw his numbers dip to a .906 save percentage after three straight campaigns of .918 or better. That was despite improvement in the Predators' even strength defensive metrics under new coach Andrew Brunette.

With a new eight-year contract starting next season, now would be the time for Saros to show last season was an anomaly while continuing to be one of the NHL's hardest working goaltenders.

"Wedgewood and Saros are good," another goalie analyst said.

Others see it differently.

"I see Wedgewood as a downgrade here," another said, in reference to former Predator Kevin Lankinen, now with Vancouver.

10. Boston Bruins

Jeremy Swayman, Joonas Korpisalo

The Bruins had the best goaltending tandem in hockey. Alas, they also had two goalies who both wanted to play around 55 games. So unless owner Jeremy Jacobs was going to convince the NHL board of governors to expand the season to 110 games, Boston had to ship one of them out. That goalie ended up being Ullmark to Ottawa, which meant the Boston crease now belongs to Swayman.

With this preseason contract drama settled, Swayman is now a solo artist. His first four seasons in the NHL have been outstanding, including a .916 save percentage in 44 games last season. While coach Jim Montgomery's defensive system yields solid results for the Bruins, the underlying numbers tell us that their goaltending has helped that system succeed more than the system has helped them. Swayman had 9.45 goals saved above expected last season.

That might not bode well for Korpisalo, who came over in the Ullmark trade. While there's no question Boston provides a more proactive defensive environment for him than Ottawa, he's going to have to regain his form to make this a successful tandem after a dud season with the Senators (.890 save percentage).

"Does Korpisalo look like the goalie he was two years ago or does he look like the goalie he was last season?" a goalie analyst pondered.

Brandon Bussi, 26, lurks in the AHL if the Bruins need him this season.

9. Vancouver Canucks

Thatcher Demko, Kevin Lankinen, Arturs Silovs

Two things can be true about Demko. The first thing is that when he's healthy, few goaltenders in the NHL can match the 28-year-old's abilities. He was second for the Vezina last season with a .918 save percentage in 51 games. The second thing is that "when healthy" is doing a lot of work here.

"I had been flip-flopping Vancouver and Winnipeg as the top goalie tandem for Canadian teams, but Demko's injury had me put the Canucks a little lower," a goaltending analyst said.

Kevin Woodley of InGoal Magazine and NHL.com told Sportsnet 650 last month that Demko is having an issue with the popliteus muscle, which is in the back of the knee and what he called a "small but significant stabilizing muscle" for an athlete.

When Demko comes back, whether he's impacted by this injury when he does come back ... it's all a mystery early in the season for Vancouver.

"There remains a lot of uncertainty about the injury," Woodley said.

Because of Demko's injury, Silovs played more postseason games (10) than he had played regular season games (9). The 23-year-old Latvian had his moments, but the Canucks signed free agent Lankinen to stabilize the crease until Demko returns.

One goalie analyst felt that Lankinen has been underestimated. "Both of his years in Nashville, he had really good underlying numbers," the analyst said. "On a per shot basis, he might have outperformed Saros last season."

For what it's worth, one ex-NHL goaltender we surveyed had the Canucks ranked 17th overall as a tandem.

8. St. Louis Blues

Jordan Binnington, Joel Hofer

There might not be another goaltender in the NHL who elicits more reactions than Binnington.

After leading the Blues to a Stanley Cup championship in 2019 as a confident rookie, Binnington struggled to establishment himself as elite goalie based on traditional stats and perception -- many fans saw him as a goaltender just as likely to take a hot-headed penalty as he was to post a shutout. But those who watched the Blues with regularity swore he passed the eye test. And some in the goalie analytics community said a few metrics, relative to team performance, backed that up.

But even the haters had to tap their sticks for Binnington last season. He had a .913 save percentage and a quality starts ratio of .600, his highest since his rookie season. While his expected save percentage (.899) was right at the league average, his 14.9 goals saved above expected ranked him fourth overall.

"You can completely justify having St. Louis this high based on how Binnington and Hofer play relative to the team around them last season," a goalie analyst said.

Hofer's numbers were analogous to those put up by Binnington, and he topped the starter in some categories when averaged out on a per game basis. He appeared in 30 games last season.

"Hofer has a smaller sample size in the NHL, but his numbers compared well to Binnington's last season," another goalie analyst said.

7. Tampa Bay Lightning

Andrei Vasilevskiy, Jonas Johansson

For all the focus on signing Jake Guentzel instead of Steven Stamkos, and Mikhail Sergachev getting shipped to Utah, the Lightning's fate this season ultimately comes down to whether Andrei Vasilevskiy is Andrei Vasilevskiy again.

Vasilevskiy's save percentage declined for three straight seasons following the Bolts' last Stanley Cup win. He played a lot of hockey from 2019 to 2023. He also missed the start of last season after microdiscectomy surgery to address a lumbar disk herniation, and he wasn't the same for months after his return. Once considered the best goalie in the world, Vasilevskiy's .900 save percentage was below league average and he had a minus-11 goals saved above expected.

The assumption here is that Vasilevskiy returns to form and plays upward of 60 games for the Lightning, mitigating the impact of Johansson (.890 save percentage), a below-average backup whose best attribute is his cap hit (\$775,000).

"We can judge tandems, but it's about the No. 1 guy, most importantly," a goalie analyst said of the Lightning.

6. Dallas Stars

Jake Oettinger, Casey DeSmith

After finishing fifth for the Vezina in the 2022-23 regular season, Oettinger has had his ups and downs. He hit the wall in the 2023 playoffs, eventually finishing with a sub-.900 save percentage. Last season, he was limited to 54 games due to injury and finished with a .905 save percentage.

"Oettinger didn't have the strongest regular season last year for Dallas. Kind of flat," one goalie analyst said.

That said, he had a banger of a postseason with a .913 save percentage, despite facing Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl for six games in the conference finals.

Expectations couldn't be higher for Dallas this season, a team that's lost in consecutive conference finals. Oettinger is a big reason. Coming off a normal offseason and with better injury luck, he could win the Vezina for the first time.

He has a new backup in DeSmith, replacing Scott Wedgewood. As DeSmith showed in Pittsburgh, he understands the assignment, although his 2023-24 with the Canucks could have been better.

"DeSmith [exemplified] the law of diminishing returns in Vancouver. Started great, finished average," one goalie analyst said.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

5. Florida Panthers

Sergei Bobrovsky, Spencer Knight

Is there a more "the numbers don't matter" goalie in the NHL than Bobrovsky?

It doesn't matter if he's got a .901 save percentage and loses the crease toward the end of the regular season, or if he has a .915 save percentage and finishes third for the Vezina. Those situations played out over the past two seasons, and both times he backstopped the Panthers to the Stanley Cup Final, hoisting the trophy for the first time last season.

(Of course, the biggest example of "the numbers don't matter" might be his cap hit, which went from overpayment to justifiable cost over the span of two playoff runs.)

"Bob's difficult to define here," a goalie analyst said. "Look what he did in the regular season. Then look what he did in the postseason. There's no denying the latter."

Bobrovsky has a new primary backup this season in Knight, who moves up to replace new Leafs goalie Anthony Stolarz. His challenges off the ice have been well-documented. This is Knight's time to shine on the ice after years of preparation.

"We haven't seen Spencer in a while, but he has the potential to be better than a lot of the backups here," another goalie analyst said.

4. New York Islanders

Ilya Sorokin, Semyon Varlamov

Like other elite goaltenders in the top-10 tandems, Sorokin is also looking to bounce back from a down season. The 29-year-old posted a .908 save percentage last season, the first time in his career he's been lower than .918.

He was still well above average in goals saved above expected (7.7) and right at league average in expected save percentage (.899). His tandem mate Varlamov was even better: 9.0 goals saved above expected and a .901 expected save percentage.

"A lot of these other tandems have a starter and a backup. I think Varlamov can be a No. 1," a goaltending analyst said.

This tandem has been the bedrock of the Islanders since Sorokin's rookie season in 2020-21. Assuming Sorokin bounces back statistically, it belongs firmly in the top 10.

3. New Jersey Devils

Jacob Markstrom, Jake Allen

The Devils had a goaltending problem, watching their team save percentage drop from 10th in the NHL to 30th over the past two seasons. They allowed the first goal of the game 70% of the time last season. Even if they would dig out of that hole, porous goaltending would give the lead right back.

The first major solution to that problem was the trade that brought Allen from Montreal on March 8 -- too late to save that season, but a building block for this one. Step two was the long-anticipated trade with the Flames for Markstrom, a 15-year veteran expected to finally strengthen the weakest part of the Devils.

"Markstrom and Allen could be really good. Allen still has good games in him, and Markstrom is looking at this as his 'let's go!' season behind a contending team," one goalie analyst noted.

The analysts we spoke to all had the Devils in their top-five tandems. One former NHL goaltender had them second overall.

2. Winnipeg Jets

Connor Hellebuyck, Eric Comrie

It's hard to argue against the reigning Vezina winner. It's even harder to argue against the reigning Vezina winner when he was also sixth for the Hart Trophy last season, credited with getting his team to a 110-point season.

"Connor Hellebuyck is the reason why the Jets are here," one NHL goalie analyst said, in an understatement.

Hellebuyck does it all. He's played 60 games or more in each of the past three seasons. His save percentage was north of .920 over the past two campaigns. He led the NHL in goals saved above expected (22.6).

Returning as his backup is Comrie, who was his understudy in 2021-22 before signing with Buffalo, where he played two ill-fated seasons. Comrie had an .874 save percentage in 10 games last season.

"Comrie's season in Buffalo was absurd last season, but I really think he's a perfect fit in Winnipeg, where he's comfortable," another goalie analyst said.

It's all about Hellebuyck, and he's the best in the NHL at what he does. Whatever Comrie gives them is gravy. Although not having a better backup is what kept the Jets out of the top spot in the tandem ranking.

1. New York Rangers

Igor Shesterkin, Jonathan Quick

Our panel of experts agreed that the Rangers deserved the top spot in the goalie tandem ranking, now that the Bruins broke up the band.

Shesterkin is well-established as one of the top goaltenders in the NHL, even if he hasn't hit the heights of his Vezina-winning 2021-22 campaign again. He had a .912 save percentage last season in 55 games, although he had only 3.46 goals saved above expected. He's going to break the bank on his next contract for a reason: Few netminders in the NHL are even in the conversation with Shesterkin as far as ability to take over a game.

But the reason this tandem could be considered the NHL's best has to do with the 27 games Shesterkin didn't play. Quick, 38, was 18-6-2 last season for the Rangers, reviving his career after it looked like it might have reached its end with the Kings and Golden Knights in 2022-23. (Quick did win a third Stanley Cup ring with the Knights as a backup goalie.)

Quick's underlying numbers were better than Shesterkin's in some cases last season.

"If Jonathan Quick plays like he did last season, they absolutely deserve to be here," an NHL goalie analyst said.

That's a significant if given Quick's age and mileage, but the NHL should know better than to count him out by now.

ESPN LOADED: 10.18.2024

1324539 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks Takeaways: Best performance of year leads to gutsy OT win

Iain MacIntyre

The Vancouver Canucks' win in South Florida one year ago ignited their season.

Beating the Florida Panthers 5-3 in Game 5 launched the Canucks on a nine-game unbeaten streak that moved them towards the top of the National Hockey League and set the trajectory for their 50-win regular season.

They will hope that Thursday's gutsy 3-2 overtime win against the undermanned Stanley Cup champions does the same. In Game 4, the Canucks got their first win of this season when J.T. Miller took advantage of the Panthers in overtime and snapped a shot from his off-wing into the top corner at 2:09 to get Vancouver back to .500 at 1-1-2.

But even before Miller's powerful rush, it was the best performance by the Canucks so far. With the game tied 2-2, their best period was the third, when Brock Boeser was stopped three times on good scoring chances by Florida goalie Sergei Bobrovsky, who also stuffed Miller and Nils Aman on point-blank chances. Vancouver winger Nils Hoglander also hit a post.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

The Canucks outlit the Panthers 41-35 and had an 11-8 advantage on high-danger scoring chances, according to Natural Stat Trick.

Vancouver never trailed, taking a 1-0 lead on Teddy Blueger's first-period wraparound and going ahead 2-1 on Quinn Hughes' first goal of the season, at 6:30 of the second period. Missing stars Aleksander Barkov and Matthew Tkachuk, the Panthers tied the game 2-2 on Anton Lundell's power-play goal with one minute remaining in the middle frame.

Canuck goalie Kevin Lankinen stopped 26 of 28 shots, boosting his save percentage through two starts to .932.

"We've got some work to do, but thought there was some good stuff in there," Canuck coach Rick Tocchet told reporters in Florida. "There were times. . . we had good possession time, had some (scoring) chances. That's a championship team there, and they're missing some key guys. Winning one in overtime was nice.

"We've still got to clean some things up. When the other team makes a push, I think we've got to play a little more simple. But for the most part, you know, a hell of a goal for Millisly in overtime, so it's a big win for us."

The Canucks also had four points through their first four games last year. They were 2-2 before beating the Panthers.

"Just being able to find a way (to win), I think that's kind of what we've been missing to start the year," Blueger said. "Obviously, a couple close games early on. You know, the margin of victory is very, very small, the difference between winning and losing. So I think it's good for our team, good for character and morale, to just kind of find a way to get it done."

OUT-SMARTING IN OT

As Florida coach Paul Maurice rolled out three forwards and no defencemen for each overtime shift, the Canucks took advantage of the unconventional deployment when Hughes skated the puck into the Florida zone, forcing the Panthers to retreat, then turned back and hit a trailing Miller at speed.

Standing still, Panther centre Lundell had no chance to stop Miller at the blue line, and before Florida winger Sam Reinhart could get across the ice to cut off the Canuck, Miller zipped the puck past Bobrovsky.

"We always talk about, you know, Quinn trying to go up ice as far as he can to soften their gap," Miller told Sportsnet's Dan Murphy in a walk-off interview. "And I caught a forward there flat-footed. It doesn't always work. . . but it's nice to get this win for the guys today.

"Obviously, when you get to overtime, anything can happen. But I think it takes a little weight off the shoulders (and let's us) maybe relax and let's us play a little bit moving forward."

Miller's overtime game-winner was his 10th for the Canucks, moving him ahead of Brendan Morrison for second-place all-time in franchise history. Only Daniel Sedin (16) has scored more regular-season OT goals for Vancouver.

Halfway through their road trip, the Canucks visit the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday and the Chicago Blackhawks Tuesday.

CRASH KIEFER

Winger Kiefer Sherwood got the puck to the net before Blueger's wraparound goal, but the new Canuck's value to his team and impact on the game were better reflected by his hits total: the winger registered 10 in 12:57 of ice time. Sherwood constantly menaced Panther defencemen.

With 23 hits through his first four games with Vancouver, Sherwood is second in the NHL behind only Florida's Jonah Gadjovich, who has logged two more games but left Thursday's contest in the first period due to an injury. With Barkov and Tkachuk injured and ill, respectively, Florida started the game with only 11 forwards and played shorthanded up front.

Panther forwards Lundell (22:42), Reinhart (22:13), Carter Verhaeghe (22:14) and Evan Rodriguez (20:44) all logged in excess of 20 minutes of ice time.

MIGHTY QUINN

It was one of those games for Quinn Hughes that we are so accustomed to seeing, by the end of the regular season, we'll hardly remember it. For most defencemen on planet Earth, it would be the game of their lives.

Besides assisting on Miller's game-winner and scoring his first goal of the season on a second-period rocket, after Aman and Danton Heinen combined to win a faceoff and then screen Bobrovsky, Hughes set a career high with nine shots on target.

Shots were 20-9 for the Canucks with Hughes on the ice at even strength, and the Canuck captain posted a team-best expected goals-for of 65 per cent. Hughes tilted the ice towards the Florida end and played like a Norris Trophy winner.

LINEUP CHANGES

Aman returned to the Canuck lineup for Aatu Raty and was robbed by Bobrovsky halfway through the third period when Hughes set him up for a goalmouth redirect. That was the only change up front for Tocchet as Daniel Sprong was a healthy scratch a second straight game.

But the bigger lineup change for Vancouver was on defence, where minor-league callup Erik Brannstrom made his Canucks debut after the team announced that Derek Forbort had taken a leave of absence for personal reasons.

A takeback in the pre-season contract dump of Tucker Poolman to the Colorado Avalanche, Brannstrom gave the Canucks 12 competent minutes on the third pairing alongside Vincent Desharnais, who replaced Noah Juulsen after sitting out the last two games. Shots were 6-5 for the Panthers when Brannstrom was on the ice and, although under pressure at times, the Canucks' third pairing was not on for Florida's goals.

A mobile, puck-mover, Brannstrom played 266 games for the Ottawa Senators over parts of the last five seasons before the Avalanche signed him to a one-year, \$900,000 contract in free agency this summer.

The 25-year-old appears to have replaced Mark Friedman as Vancouver's eighth defenceman.

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1324540 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers Takeaways: Clutch Kulak, Pickard propel second straight win

Mark Spector

It's still not coming easily for the Edmonton Oilers, and the offence is not pouring in from the big boys. And that's absolutely all right for a team that learned long ago that 20 players will carry you a lot further than five or six ever could.

In a town where Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid have dominated for years, it was Brett Kulak who notched his first career two-goal game and backup Calvin Pickard who starred in net as the Nashville Predators made the Oilers earn their 4-2 win on Thursday.

The Oilers, who usually derive offence from their superstars and power play, got one goal from Connor McDavid but zilch from a power play that went 0-for-4.

Jeff Skinner got credit for a crease-crasher, and Kulak rifled one home from the point before his empty-netter sealed the first road win of the season. Suddenly, Edmonton has now won two straight.

"We kind of understand it's not always going to go perfect," explained Kulak. "We put a lot of pressure on ourselves to start the season. The first few games, we get so discouraged when it's not going perfect.

"But tonight we just stuck with the game plan, chipped away, and found a way to get the puck in the back of the net."

It was calm hockey by Edmonton against a desperate Nashville team that now sits at 0-4 in the Central, anchored to the bottom of the division next to 0-4 Colorado.

The only flaw? An Oilers power play that falls to one-for-13 after going scoreless in four attempts at Bridgestone Arena. It's still, as they say, a work in progress.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

"Our top unit have had some good looks," head coach Kris Knoblauch said. "It's only a matter of time before they're putting pucks in the net."

Winner Skinner

While Viktor Arvidsson awaits his first point as an Oiler, the other big free agent signing — Jeff Skinner — has found his groove already. He scored to extend his points streak to four games and has 2-2-4 on the season.

"He's been really good in the last three games," Knoblauch said. "Anytime a player comes to a new team, there's always a transition period of getting used to his role and your systems. New coach, new message... But his last three games have been what we anticipated.

"Not only scoring two key goals the last couple games, but also really good on the walls, getting pucks out. We're very happy with him."

His goal in Nashville was a product of going to the net front and looking for some luck. He got it in a mad scramble, when the puck ended up behind Juuse Saros off one of his defencemen.

"Someone slid and put it in, and I was just the last guy to touch it," smiled Skinner, who has found a home playing with centre Adam Henrique and Connor Brown. "I've felt better as it's gone along. I think guys have done a great job off the ice to just kind of (make me) feel welcome right away. There are a lot of guys in here that have been together for a while and have some great chemistry. I'm sliding in to play off some of those guys. It's going to be an adjustment."

Kulak and Pickard

Teams always play hard for their backup goalie and love it when a depth defenceman like Kulak finds the back of the net. His season-high is six goals back in 2018-19, so Kulak may be able to take a run at a career-high, with two already under his belt this season.

"The bench was cheering for him to go for that third one, but he was a little cautious (about) getting out of position," chuckled Knoblauch. "Anytime you see those role guys that don't necessarily get on the score sheet as much as other guys, you know, everyone gets excited to see them have that success."

The Oilers' defence is finding its footing, with Troy Stecher playing another solid game next to Darnell Nurse (one assist, plus-1 and a fight with Mike McCarron) and Ty Emberson finding his way next to the veteran Kulak on the third pairing. They played 14:28 and 17:09, respectively.

"We played our game all the way through," said Pickard, who was steady, making 25 saves. "They had a push at the end, we didn't waiver, and we got the result we deserved."

A pair of deflections beat Pickard in what was by far his best work of the young season.

Oil Spills — Edmonton is now 12-1-2 in its last 15 against Preds, with a plus-29 goals differential ... McDavid has a point in 15 straight games against Nashville ... Nurse took on McCarron, fighting to a draw in the Oilers' third scrap in the past two games. Nurse stepped up in defence of young Vasily Podkolzin ... Zach Hyman, still pointless on the season, had a game-high five shots on net. He's all around it but can't find goal No. 1 of the season ... Only two Oilers players did not register a shot on goal: Podkolzin and Perry, who was plus-2 and played his role to a tee again Thursday.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens can't let immature efforts become habits

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — It's a bit too early in the season for repetitive storylines, but here we are.

The Montreal Canadiens lost Game 5 of 82 the same way they dropped Games 2 and 4: Failing to execute the coach's game plan.

Martin St. Louis has been stressing for days about the deep game he wants his team to play. He re-emphasized its importance ahead of Thursday's matchup with a Los Angeles Kings team that was playing for the second time in as many nights; a Kings team that came to the Bell Centre with its confidence in a fragile state after having allowed 14 goals over its last two games. And St. Louis said he was "very disappointed" about the Canadiens not heeding his advice in what turned out to be a 4-1 loss.

The coach ended the night by saying, "I'm definitely proactive, and it's going to get fixed."

He's kept his top line of Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield and Juraj Slafkovsky together despite underwhelming results at five-on-five, and he hasn't touched his second one of Joel Armia, Kirby Dach and Alex Newhook despite them failing to generate any offence so far. He's also passed on chances to make changes on defence, where the Canadiens have had inconsistent performances from shift to shift, let alone from game to game.

But St. Louis's patience has probably run its course by now. Justifiably.

Even this early in the season.

St. Louis expects more from this group, and he should.

Sure, he brought up how young his team is as an explanation for the poor decision-making against the Kings.

"I think it's a bit of a sign of youth," he said before adding, "There's many moments where it's tempting to make a play and, when you're young, it's easy to get tempted."

But St. Louis also knows that this team, which is relatively unchanged from the one he coached a season ago, has accumulated enough experience to know what to do when a downtrodden opponent comes to town.

The players know, too.

They know they should've been establishing their forecheck early on against the Kings, essentially jabbing them as much as possible instead of swinging for knockout blows in the opening round, and they are as disappointed in themselves as their coach is for not doing it.

Captain Nick Suzuki called it "an immature effort."

After Jake Evans used the same word, we asked if it was the one the coach was using.

He said he hadn't heard St. Louis saying it, nor had he heard it coming from Suzuki.

"It's just the word that came to me," Evans said.

At least everyone's on the same page here. It's best to know the problem before trying to fix it.

St. Louis said the same thing Suzuki did before and after the game — about turning over pucks trying to force plays, about giving the Kings life when they should have been extinguishing it — and both expressed an urgent desire to solve the issue.

Evans said it best, leaving the youth factor out of his analysis.

"It's been quite a while for this rebuild now and it's time to step up and know to win in this league it's playing a simple game a lot of the time," he said. "Then, eventually, you can start taking advantage of teams. It's just something we've got to fix early here."

Evans's line with Brendan Gallagher and Josh Anderson has been trying to fix it from the start, leading by example from Game 1 through the end of the Kings contest.

You can't help but wonder if the other lines — specifically the top two — will remain intact after not following.

Jayden Struble, who was a healthy scratch for Thursday's game, will all but certainly draw in for Saturday's game against the New York Islanders. If not for Mike Matheson, who will be re-evaluated Friday morning after suffering an upper-body injury in the first period on Thursday, then probably for Arber Xhekaj.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Justin Barron picked up his game — and a beautiful goal to give the Canadiens a 1-0 lead 7:02 into the first period. Lane Hutson played 30:05 and did everything in his power to change the outcome. And David Savard, who was skating in his 800th game, had four shot attempts, two blocked shots, two hits, and probably played the best he has since the season started.

Now the Canadiens need to come together as a group and start playing the game that's expected of them.

"We didn't play to our identity, to our standards, whatever you will," said St. Louis. "One of our biggest strengths is our forecheck, and when you try to make plays at the blue line when it's not a three-on-two or a two-on-one, when we don't have the numerical advantage on the other side of a play, then you afford the other team to not have to defend itself, to not have to go retrieve pucks under pressure.

"There's nothing fun about chipping the puck in, but it's part of the recipe to increase your percentages of winning a game."

The Canadiens didn't do it and lost this one to fall to 2-3-0 on their season. They lost the other ones the same way and will continue losing if they don't adjust immediately.

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1324542 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / NHL Power Rankings: 32 scorers who need to ... start scoring

Ryan Dixon

Any kid can tell you October, with pumpkin pie and Halloween candy, is a month of treats. And with the annual arrival of a new NHL season each fall, any goal-scorer can tell you they sometimes have the patience of a toddler when it comes to getting that first cookie of the year.

Whether you're a Rocket Richard contender, a middle-sixer hoping to pop 20 or a D-man expected to deliver from the back end, Step 1 in the process is always netting that first goal. A couple games without a goal? Sure. But once it's nearly a handful, the pressure to get on the board mounts.

Heck, 385 NHL skaters are being outscored by Minnesota Wild goalie Filip Gustavsson right now.

So with grips getting a little tighter on the stick, we're using this week's power rankings as a way to identify one offence-oriented player on each squad who is still looking to bury his first biscuit of the season.

1. Dallas Stars (4-0-0) Logan Stankoven is off and running in his pursuit of the Calder Trophy with five assists through four games. The 21-year-old, though, has yet to thwack the twine.

2. Toronto Maple Leafs (3-1-0) It's been the second and third lines in Toronto doing the damage, with Auston Matthews scoring his first goal on Wednesday night and Mitch Marner also on one tally. Max Domi has five apples, but is still looking for his first goal.

3. New York Rangers (2-0-1) Eleven Rangers have already found the net, contributing to the Blueshirts' league-best 5.0 goals-per-game. Offensive force Adam Fox, however, is not one of them.

4. Winnipeg Jets (3-0-0) Gabe Vilardi scored at a 38-goal pace (22 in 47 games) in an injury-shortened season last year, so there was some hope he might hit the 30-goal barrier this time out. So far, he's 0-for-3. Nik Ehlers is also sitting on a goose egg for the perfect Jets.

5. Vegas Golden Knights (3-1-0) Only 10 defencemen had more goals than Noah Hanifin's 13 last season. The blue-liner is still in search of his first one this year.

6. New Jersey Devils (4-2-0) Some surprising names — Paul Cotter, rookie defenceman Seamus Casey — are at the top of the Devils goal-scoring charts. Dougie Hamilton has not converted in half a dozen games, though, and you know he'd love to get going after last season's injury-ravaged showing.

7. Tampa Bay Lightning (2-0-0) Tampa is one of three teams to have played only two games, so there hasn't been that much opportunity to get on the board. However, you know big UFA fish Jake Guentzel won't wait much longer for his first as a Bolt.

8. Florida Panthers (3-2-0) Carter Verhaeghe has a brand new \$56-million contract extension; what he doesn't have just yet is his first goal of the year.

9. Boston Bruins (3-2-0) The Bruins and Penguins are the only teams with an even dozen guys who've found the net. Believe it or not, though, captain Brad Marchand is not one of them in Boston.

10. Edmonton Oilers (1-3-0) Connor McDavid failing to find the net is part and parcel with Edmonton's sluggish start. Two years ago, he won the Rocket Richard with 64 goals. Last season, he had exactly half that many, with 32. Where will he land once he gets rolling this year?

11. Carolina Hurricanes (1-1-0) Through a couple games, Andrei Svechnikov has yet to bury.

12. Calgary Flames (4-0-0) Blake Coleman set a career high with 30 goals last year. He's still after No. 1 this season.

13. Minnesota Wild (2-0-2) Filip Gustavsson's one goal has him just one back of the team lead! So even though sophomore Brock Faber doesn't have one yet, he's still just two off the pace.

14. Utah Hockey Club (3-1-1) Nick Schmaltz and Logan Cooley have combined for 11 points in five games, but neither has scored a goal yet.

15. Pittsburgh Penguins (3-2-0) After getting blanked by the Rangers on opening night, the Penguins have been finding the net as a team, with 20 goals in four games. Michael Bunting — in his first full year with the squad — has yet to get in on the party, though.

16. St. Louis Blues (2-2-0) Jake Neighbours had a 27-goal breakout last season, so he'd surely like to get off the schneid this October.

17. Vancouver Canucks (0-1-2) Quinn Hughes and newcomer Jake DeBrusk are in search of their first goals, but — with just one assist through three games — being goalless is likely weighing heaviest on Elias Pettersson right now.

18. Philadelphia Flyers (1-1-1) After back-to-back seasons of 27 and 28 goals, it sure feels like 30 is in reach for Owen Tippett. But he's got to find that first one.

19. Seattle Kraken (2-2-0) Big UFA signing Chandler Stephenson does more than provide offence, but won't want to wait much longer for his first Kraken goal.

20. Ottawa Senators (2-1-0) If this is the year Brady Tkachuk scores 40, he better get going.

21. Los Angeles Kings (1-1-2) We all see big things for Quinton Byfield, but it hasn't come together quite yet through four games.

22. Colorado Avalanche (0-4-0) Depth is a huge problem in Colorado, so it would be great to see somebody such as Logan O'Connor start kicking in a goal here and there.

23. New York Islanders (1-1-1) The Isles offence has been all or nothing through three games; they were blanked in Dallas, but put up four against Utah and hung six on Colorado. Noah Dobson, following a huge 70-point year, has yet to find the range.

24. Montreal Canadiens (2-2-0) Nick Suzuki set a new career high with 33 goals last season. The Habs would love to see him getting rolling this fall.

25. Anaheim Ducks (2-1-0) Remember Frank Vatrano's scorching start last season? He had a hat trick in his second game and nine goals by his ninth. He's still looking for that first tally this year.

26. Washington Capitals (1-1-0) It's been only two goalless games, so let's not write off the idea of Alex Ovechkin taking aim at Wayne Gretzky's all-time mark this season.

27. Detroit Red Wings (1-2-0) After inking his huge contract before the season, Lucas Raymond would surely like to find the net and get on with it.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

28. Chicago Blackhawks (1-2-1) Tyler Bertuzzi is still in search of his first Chicago goal.

29. Nashville Predators (0-3-0) Oh, boy. It's not fair to pin this bad start on the new guys, but let's just say it will help things if Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault can start scoring.

30. Columbus Blue Jackets (1-2-0) Damon Severson is off to a nice start in Year 2 with Columbus, recording one assist in all three games. The only thing that would make it better is his first goal.

31. Buffalo Sabres (1-3-1) New captain Rasmus Dahlin has just a single assist — and no goals — through this rocky start.

32. San Jose Sharks (0-1-2) Rookie centre Will Smith is seeing fewer than 13 minutes a night and still awaiting his first big-league goal.

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1324543 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Comrie rejoins Jets looking to restart career behind Hellebuyck

Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — Eric Comrie is a prime example of the old 'student of the game' cliché.

Many will overlook the characterization, chalking it up as another buzzword — like a 'good 200-foot game,' or a 'full 60-minute effort' — that coaches spew. But ask Comrie to analyze a hockey play and you'll understand why calls himself a "hockey nerd."

Following Saturday's practice, the Winnipeg Jets goaltender was asked to break down the intricacies behind two goals scored during his team's first two games. First, he described how Mason Appleton's goal against the Oilers' Stuart Skinner in the season-opener was an excellent shot — right below the glove, above the pad — and all the more lethal given that a cross-slot pass created it. Then, he contextualized how a goal Connor Hellebuyck surrendered to the Blackhawks' Ryan Donato was a hard save to make.

"When you're coming down the wing like that, you're changing the angle without knowing it because you're skating toward the goalie and you're really expecting, as a lefty, (for the puck) to go far side," Comrie explained. "That's the easier shot as a lefty. For him to hit that low blocker shot, that's a special shot to be able to hit that area. It's a small window to hit. It's a really good shot and it's really hard (to save) because the angle changes so much for every single stride that he takes, it's getting exponentially bigger and bigger. You're creating a lot more angle to score on with that shot."

The Jets are hoping Comrie — who inked a two-year, \$1.65-million contract this summer — can rebound as Hellebuyck's understudy after a disappointing two-year stretch with the Buffalo Sabres. It's a gamble, not just because of Comrie's recent track record but also because giving him the job out of camp led to Kaapo Kahkonen, who has a more padded NHL resume, being scooped up off waivers by the Colorado Avalanche. And with Hellebuyck being a near-lock to represent Team USA at the 4 Nations Cup, the Jets need stability at the backup position more than ever.

"We've got some interesting back-to-backs. We've got some interesting four (games) in six night (stretches) on some of these road trips coming, so we'll have to handle that, obviously with (Comrie) in mind," head coach Scott Arniel said.

The ingredients are there for Comrie, who returns to Winnipeg for what is technically his fourth stint with the club (if you count the two times he was re-claimed off waivers), to succeed.

"I think the biggest thing is that he had a great relationship in the past, both with (Hellebuyck) and with (Jets goaltending coach Wade Flaherty)," Arniel said.

Those bonds are a big reason why Comrie wanted to return to Winnipeg.

"Wade Flaherty's one of the best goalies coaches in the NHL and Connor Hellebuyck is the best goalie in the NHL," the 29-year-old said. "For myself, to be around that every single day, it's a special thing."

Comrie's best stretch of NHL action was with Winnipeg during the 2021-22 season. In 19 games, he posted a .920 save percentage and ranked second in Goals Saved Above Expected per 60 minutes (0.603) among goalies who played at least 15 games, according to MoneyPuck.com.

Stylistically, Comrie is similar to Hellebuyck. He doesn't boast high-end athleticism — contrary to Kahkonen, who is more of a typical butterfly goalie — but he relies on his instincts to read shooters and react accordingly to make saves. As he showed three seasons ago, Comrie can be a dependable backup when in control.

His time with the Sabres didn't go as well.

While Comrie was, statistically, one of the NHL's worst goaltenders throughout the 2022-23 and 2023-24 seasons, he battled a pair of lower-body injuries and was hung out to dry most nights in Buffalo.

Flaherty and the Jets have a track record of revitalizing backups, the prime example being Laurent Brossoit. After posting a .913 save percentage in 54 games with Winnipeg between the 2018-19 and 2020-21 seasons, Brossoit's save percentage dropped down to .906 in 35 games with the Vegas Golden Knights over the next two seasons. Brossoit, like Comrie, promptly re-joined the Jets and went on to have a bounceback year, posting a .927 save percentage in 23 starts last year.

All hail Helly

While the Jets try to stabilize the backup role, Hellebuyck has looked dialed in to start the season.

The reigning Vezina Trophy winner was named the NHL's second star of the week after posting an astounding .976 save percentage, 0.66 goals against average and one shutout through Winnipeg's first three games.

"I think the way I'm seeing the game is mid-season form right now," Hellebuyck said Thursday. "Things are just clicking. I've got a really good read on the game and mentally, I'm not overthinking."

How Stanley's inevitable return impacts lineup

Logan Stanley shed his yellow no-contact sweater at Jets practice on Thursday.

Stanley had knee surgery in late September and was anticipated to miss a minimum of four weeks. The Jets will have 23 healthy skaters once the six-foot-seven blueliner is cleared to play but Arniel stated during camp that the team was aiming to have a 22-man roster. Having just one extra forward and defenceman would allow general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff to accrue cap space, providing him more room to add players later in the season.

Running a 22-man roster would likely mean that either Haydn Fleury or Dylan Coghlan would be placed on waivers. Coghlan is more likely to be the odd man out as Fleury will probably still rotate on the blue line even once Stanley returns.

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1324544 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why the Maple Leafs healthy-scratched Max Pacioretty

Luke Fox

TORONTO — Craig Berube is a simple coach with simple explanations and simple expectations.

So, Coach, why was Max Pacioretty — a six-time 30-goal man — healthy-scratched Wednesday after consecutive Toronto Maple Leafs wins and three days between games to rest his 35-year-old muscles?

"That's just a decision I made. That's it," Berube said.

OK. So, what message does the press box assignment send to the veteran?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

"There's no message," Berube said.

"We have extra players, and not everybody can play every night. That's the bottom line. He's been fine when he's played, but I gotta make decisions as a coach. And I'm going to make those decisions (based on) what I think is best for the team."

Speak to those who have skated for Berube in past, many of whom ended up drinking champagne from the same trophy as him, and you won't be surprised how the coach is handling these early player demotions in Toronto.

Berube doesn't do public deep dives into his reasoning — mostly because his lineup decisions do simply boil down to winning the game in front of him — and he is loath to bury an athlete publicly.

That said, Berube is swiftly trying to establish a standard and style of play in his first month on the job.

And if that comes as a reality check to guys who are coming in high off new raises (Bobby McMann, Timothy Liljegren) or might hope to get by on long résumés (Pacioretty, Ryan Reaves), well, the new boss has been quick to establish a meritocracy.

To keep third-line defencemen and bottom-six wingers battling for their minutes and special-teams personnel fighting for their spot (see: Morgan Rielly's bump to PP2).

In short, the coach sees what the fans see, what the players themselves see.

And in the case of Pacioretty, the inexpensive, offensively-minded left winger hasn't played awful by any means. He has hardly made himself indispensable, either — as evidenced by Toronto's 6-2 win over the Kings without him.

That's a function of Pacioretty having "a lot to prove" as the oldest player on Toronto's roster and coming off multiple Achilles injuries and of the Maple Leafs having more than a dozen NHL-level forwards at their disposal.

Hey, Pacioretty could have chosen an easier path to time on ice. (Fellow scoring left wing James van Riemsdyk landed in rebuilding Columbus, for example.) But he signed with a deep squad that is trying to contend for a Stanley Cup.

We'd argue that there is a message being sent to all Leafs on the fringes: "Fine," as Berube puts it, no longer guarantees a regular shift in this town.

"You know, it's been a lot. It's never easy to change teams. And under these circumstances, even more so," Pacioretty said, candidly, after pouring in a notable amount of extra work at Tuesday's practice.

"I liked my first game. Second game was pretty good. Didn't like my last game. So, I want to start trending in the right direction and try to build some games together. But at the same time, I've mentioned before that it's going to be some different roles and different ways to try to help the team win. And I'm excited about doing that."

Failing to register a shot and taking a penalty in Saturday's home-opener win over Pittsburgh, Pacioretty saw his ice-time limited to under 11 minutes and his temporary PP1 promotion (in the absence of an ill John Tavares) snatched by young Matthew Knies mid-game.

The improving Knies has taken an early stranglehold of the top-line left wing spot, and Pacioretty is ill-suited as a fourth-line grinder.

If he is to carve his niche as a Maple Leaf (and trigger his 10- and 35-game bonuses), it must be as a responsible, middle-six scoring threat off the flank — a role that McMann, Nick Robertson and (soon) Calle Järnkrok are vying for as well.

"Holding on to pucks is my is my strongest skill, and it hasn't really been there for me, for whatever reason, since I've come back," Pacioretty said. "Even last year (in Washington), when I was playing at my best, I was hanging on to pucks in a physical way and wearing down a D-man and making the other team come back to the red and stop. And for whatever reason, it hasn't been there yet. But I know it'll come."

If/when glimmers of vintage Pacioretty do shine, they'll be the product of hard work and, uh, maximizing his six-foot-two, 217-pound frame.

"He's big," Berube says. "It's important we have a guy that can get the shot off and also be heavy inside, around the net."

To that end, Pacioretty has been taking advantage of the Leafs' abundant performance and development staff on off-days, which he says was "definitely" a selling point when making his decision in free agency.

"When you don't play for so long, and you just jump right into action, it's like you completely neglect all that stuff. And then this summer, I focused more on my body and my overall general health," Pacioretty explains.

"Now, when I get out there with the skills coaches, skating with Patty [O'Sullivan] and shooting, you realize that a lot of my tendencies are kinda gone from compensation patterns and whatnot. So, working on building those back up. And it's fun. I've always enjoyed this.

"So much access to so many good tools here to be able to improve your game, and I want to always improve my game. No matter what."

No matter what, Pacioretty's scratch Saturday won't be his last as a Leaf. (Hey, managing the load of a 35-year-old isn't the worst idea.) And no matter what, he won't be the last Leafs forward asked to take a seat and reflect.

A roster-slash-cap crunch looms in November, when Järnkrok, Connor Dewar, and Jani Hakanpää can all shift from LTIR to the roster.

That means everyone without an established role is on notice and should be battling to be more than fine.

To adapt and stay roster-relevant.

For Pacioretty, that even means picking up new tricks, like trying to borrow some puck-protection techniques from William Nylander.

"It's a different way from what I'm used to — and that shows how much the game has changed," Pacioretty says. "When I watch Willy do his cutbacks, it's unlike anything I've ever seen when it comes to protecting the puck. And I'm sending videos of it to my kids, saying, 'This is how you guys have to do it. Don't do it like me.'"

"A lot less contact, I would say. But they're obviously much quicker than me, much better on their edges. That's, coincidentally, an area I'm working on with the skating coaches. It's a technique thing. Skating has changed a lot since I was a kid, since I came into the league.

"So, I'm trying to pick up some of their habits."

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TSN.CA / Mark Masters: Ekman-Larsson navigating traffic well on and off the ice in Toronto | TSN

Mark Masters SPORTSCENTRE

The Maple Leafs held an optional practice at Ford Performance Centre on Thursday.

It's been a smooth start to the season for Oliver Ekman-Larsson, who leads the Leafs in ice time through four games.

"Obviously, feeling comfortable coming here," the 33-year-old defenceman said. "The guys have been very helpful, so I'm feeling comfortable."

So comfortable that he's unbothered by the city's notorious gridlock traffic.

"I don't mind it," he said with a laugh. "It's kind of nice to put on some tunes in the car and relax a little bit."

What's he listen to?

"Just Swedish tunes," the native of Karlskrona, Sweden said with a grin. "I'll send you my playlist."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

Ekman-Larsson, who signed a four-year deal in the summer after winning a Stanley Cup with the Florida Panthers, is navigating the traffic well on the ice too. Among the Leafs, only Auston Matthews (19) has fired more shots on net than Ekman-Larsson (15). He picked up an assist, his third of the season, in Wednesday's 6-2 win over the Los Angeles Kings.

"He had a real good year last year," head coach Craig Berube pointed out. "Obviously, they won the Cup. A lot of confidence coming in this year. He's been a good player for a long time in this league. He knows how to play the game. He's played really well for us right from camp."

Ekman-Larsson is meshing nicely with Jake McCabe and contributing to both special teams units. He was promoted to the top power-play unit during Saturday's game against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

You add it all up and Ekman-Larsson is averaging 21 minutes and 50 seconds of ice time per game, which is 42 seconds more than McCabe, who is second on the team.

"He's a player that's played a lot of minutes in this league at times," Berube stressed. "Right now, he's an all-situational guy for us."

OEL finishes that check pic.twitter.com/CHiDPaUset

— Omar (@TicTacTOMar) October 17, 2024

Ekman-Larsson produced 32 points in 80 regular season games last year while averaging 18 minutes and 24 seconds of ice time. That number dipped to 15 minutes and 27 seconds during 24 playoff games.

But, as Berube highlighted, Ekman-Larsson has logged big ice time totals over the years. His career average is 22 minutes and 45 seconds.

"He's an outstanding player," said defenceman Morgan Rielly, who led the team in average ice time last season (23:44). "He has been for a really long time. He's a guy whose game I've looked up to. He brings a lot to the table. So to add a guy like that during the off-season after a great year last year, we're very lucky."

The feeling is mutual.

"I'm just having fun," Ekman Larsson said. "And we're having fun as a group of guys, and I think that pays off on the ice."

Ekman-Larsson feeling comfortable in Toronto ... even with the traffic Oliver Ekman-Larsson leads the Leafs in ice-time this season, and only Auston Matthews has fired more shots on net. The 33-year old defenceman is feeling so comfortable in Toronto right now that even the city's notorious gridlock traffic isn't bothering him. Mark Masters has more.

The Leafs held an optional practice on Thursday with most of the regulars staying off the ice. But Matthews was back out there only hours after scoring his first goal of the season.

"He's out on the ice working on his shot, working on his game, so I think that says a lot about him," said Ekman-Larsson.

Matthews piled up plenty of chances before finally breaking through on Wednesday and the reigning Rocket Richard Trophy winner showed off his persistence on the play that led to his goal. Matthews initially whiffed on an attempt, but quickly recovered, eluded former Selke Trophy winner Anze Kopitar, and sniped a patented wrist shot past David Rittich.

The puck was in and out of the net in a blink of an eye. Matthews celebrated enthusiastically.

"It's good to see one fall," the new captain said. "A little bit of a weight lifted off your shoulders."

"Everybody wants to score," said Berube with a small smile. "I even wanted to score."

Berube produced 61 goals in his 1,054 game career. Matthews is now up to 369 tallies in 566 games.

"He's our goal scorer, one of them, and [I'm] sure it eats at him that he's not producing with good opportunities," Berube continued. "I looked at his first three games and his shot chart, and they're very good. I mean, right there, just weren't going in. And even early on in that game [Wednesday] on the PP, he had a great opportunity right away. So, we knew it was going to come and it's really good to see him get one."

The Leafs are now expecting the floodgates to open.

"You love to see it," winger Bobby McMann said. "All the boys are smiling. You love to see that for him because you know there's a lot more coming."

Matthews scored in consecutive games 26 times last season en route to 69 goals.

Leafs Ice Chips: Weight off his shoulders, Matthews builds momentum The Maple Leafs held an optional practice on Thursday and most of the regulars stayed off the ice, except for Auston Matthews who was out there putting in extra work after breaking through with his first goal of the season on Wednesday night against the Kings. Mark Masters has more.

After starting the season 0/11 on the power play, the Leafs finally converted on a couple chances against the Kings. Must be nice to relieve some of the stress after a slow start, right?

"Stress? What do you mean? Putting words in my mouth," said Matthews with a grin. "Yeah, it's always good to get that going. Obviously, it wasn't great the first couple of games, trying to find it a bit, so any time you see the puck go in on the power play a couple times you can take that momentum and continue to build off of it."

William Nylander scored the first power-play goal late in the second period while John Tavares added one late in the third period. Matthews assisted on both.

"It's always nice to get that first and second one and kind of get the pressure off a little bit," Ekman-Larsson said.

The team dedicated significant practice time to special teams leading into the game, but Tavares missed Monday's workout and Nylander was absent on Tuesday as both dealt with an illness.

There is a new assistant coach working with the power-play units this year in Marc Savard, but the forward personnel is unchanged on the top group.

"They attacked and shot," Berube said. "We could have had one on the first PP. Auston had a great opportunity. We had a couple of real good opportunities that didn't click. But I thought they stayed with it. They had way better movement and puck play overall. I think the one in the second period wasn't very good. Couldn't get set up and create some zone time, but overall, I thought our special teams won us the game, and our goalie."

The Leafs killed off all four Kings power plays. It's the first time the Leafs have won the special teams battle this season.

'Putting words in my mouth': Matthews wasn't stressed about Leafs' PPThe Maple Leafs finally scored on the power play on Wednesday night against the Kings after starting the season 0-11 with the man advantage. The players and head coach Craig Berube commented on finally breaking the drought.

Anthony Stolarz stopped 32 of 34 shots to earn a second straight win.

"He was solid in the game," Berube said. "Had to fight through a lot of traffic. That team goes to the net hard. They shoot a lot of pucks from the points, so I thought he did a good job."

Asked about the best part of his performance, Stolarz highlighted the ability to fight through traffic.

"A very big team," the 30-year-old observed. "Getting a lot of guys and bodies in front, they tried those tips off to the side ... I was able to kind of see the puck well and just try to eat it up when I could."

Stolarz handles the chaos in front pic.twitter.com/xw5VQuHhBs

— Omar (@TicTacTOMar) October 17, 2024

Stolarz has posted a sparkling .940 save percentage through three regular season games. He was also locked in during the pre-season with a .964 save percentage in three appearances.

"As a goalie, you can kind of control the game," the 6-foot-6 New Jersey native said. "It's just about going out there, being calm, cool and



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 18, 2024

collected, and playing my game. I'm obviously a bigger guy so I'm able to play a little deeper so that kind of helps. But I also think I'm extremely agile as well. So it's just a good combination."

His new teammates certainly agree.

"He's a big body, uses his size well, cuts off the angles," McMann said. "I know in practice there's not really any net to shoot at when I'm shooting on him. He just stays composed all the time and it seems like he's always got the puck in front of him."

Stolarz is expected to make a third straight start on Saturday against the New York Rangers.

Injured goalie Joseph Woll hit the ice for a fourth straight day as he works his way back from what the team has termed "lower body tightness."

"He's doing well," Berube said. "Keep him going here. We'll see where he's at tomorrow."

It's possible Woll joins the team for practice on Friday. He hasn't participated in a practice since the regular season began.

'Extremely agile' Stolarz looking in control in Leafs' crease Anthony Stolarz is 2-1 to start his Maple Leafs career with a 1.70 GAA and .940 save percentage. The 6'6" goaltender put on another impressive display against the Kings on Wednesday night, stopping 32 of 34 shots against.

Both Stolarz and Berube highlighted the team's overall defensive effort.

"The mindset, more than anything, is there with the checking side of things," Berube said. "We're pretty tight on people. We're not giving up odd-man rushes. We've got to continue to stress that."

The Leafs have allowed just seven goals and only four at even strength. Toronto's goal differential is plus-seven, which is the best mark for the franchise through four games since the 1999-00 season.

"Lots of good trends," Rielly said. "Defensively, I think the team has bought into a certain structure. Everyone seems to be checking well and taking that, obviously, very seriously. It's about being able to continue doing it over the course of a long season and onward after that."

Berube is far from satisfied. He is urging his players to tighten up even more with challenging games against the Rangers and Tampa Bay Lightning on deck.

"We were in our end too much last night," the coach said. "We let them come at us a little bit too much. We didn't get up enough and in the neutral zone well enough. But, in saying that, we were good at our net and we were good in the slot area, keeping them outside. They shot a lot of pucks from the point."

Berube took a timeout after the Kings pulled to within 5-2 in the third period.

"It was a feel thing for me last night," he said. "I didn't like what we were doing. I just wanted to get a break there and bring everybody in and talk a little bit about getting the intensity level up more than anything. They were pushing hard. I thought they pushed hard in the second period too. Our intensity wasn't good enough."

Berube acknowledges part of that is human nature considering the Leafs had built a 5-0 lead.

"We were soft a little bit on pucks and things like that," he said. "They were taking advantage of it. I wanted to call a timeout and kind of get everybody dialled in again."

Domino's That's Hockey: Who deserves the most credit for the Maple Leafs' hot start? After dropping their season opener in Montreal, the Maple Leafs have rattled off three consecutive wins to sit atop the Atlantic Division. Who deserves the most credit for Toronto's hot start? TSN Hockey analyst Frankie Corrado joins Domino's That's Hockey to discuss.

The Leafs outscored the Kings 3-0 when the line of McMann, Max Domi and Nylander was on the ice.

"We got a lot of speed, creating a lot of chances," Nylander noted. "Third period that kind of died down a little bit but, I mean, that's what happens when you have a lead. I think we're playing great and love the chemistry that we have."

"They created a lot from chipping it in and getting it back," said Ekman-Larsson. "I really like their energy that they brought to the team, and that's the way we have to play to be successful."

"We were just skating," McMann added. "We were just hard on pucks, pushing their D back, trying to get first touch a lot."

McMann scored a pair of goals. Domi assisted on the first one and Nylander made a beautiful pass to spring him on a breakaway for the second tally.

"It was perfect," said McMann, who also lay three hits. "Right where I wanted it, as he usually does. It was a great play and there's lots more where that came from, from him."

McMann has now scored three goals in three games since being a healthy scratch on opening night in Montreal.

"Just trusting that it's part of the process and it's part of the game," McMann said of his mindset after the benching. "There's guys that are playing well, there's a lot of good players on this team and maybe some guys fit better in certain scenarios than others and just knowing that my opportunity would come."

Domi has produced consecutive two-assist games since moving to centre.

"One of those guys that can play anywhere," said Rielly. "Maybe he's a little underrated in that aspect. I thought he was outstanding."

McMann doubles down as Domi's middle move sparks second-line surge After scoring twice against the Kings, Bobby McMann now has three goals in three games. McMann and William Nylander have been playing on a line centered by Max Domi and the trio is building good chemistry and has found success early in the season.

Veteran winger Max Pacioretty sat as a healthy scratch on Wednesday night.

"We have extra players," said Berube. "Not everybody can play every night. That is the bottom line. He has been fine when he has played, but I have to make decisions as a coach. I am going to make those decisions based on what is best for the team."

Leafs lines in Wednesday's game:

Knies - Matthews - Marnier

McMann - Domi - Nylander

Holmberg - Tavares - Robertson

Lorentz - Kampf - Reaves

Rielly - Tanev

Ekman-Larsson - McCabe

Benoit - Liljegren

Stolarz starts

Hildeby

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