CAROLINA HURRICANES
NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 30, 2025

ESPN

NHL execs on Mikko Rantanen trade, next deadline deals to come - ESPN

By: Greg Wyshynski

Mikko Rantanen has been a member of the Carolina Hurricanes for nearly a week, but it's going to take a bit longer than that for the shock to subside.

Carolina stunned the NHL last Friday night by acquiring Rantanen from the Colorado Avalanche in a three-way deal that also sent Chicago Blackhawks winger Taylor Hall to the Hurricanes. Entering Wednesday night, Rantanen was tied for sixth in the NHL in scoring (65 points). Since the 2021-22 season, the 28-year-old winger was fifth with 365 points in 286 games, including back-to-back 100-point seasons.

The NHL simply does not see this level of offensive superstar traded within the regular season; nor does it see teams with designs on the Stanley Cup move on from foundational core players like Colorado did with Rantanen. But his contract demands, as a pending unrestricted free agent, created a significant impasse with the Avalanche, with whom he had played for 10 seasons.

Rantanen told ESPN on Tuesday that he still hasn't reached out to all the Avalanche teammates he wants to connect with. Both teams were right back in action in the aftermath of the trade, and Rantanen has been in a personal hurricane of reorienting his new life in Raleigh.

He knows players like Nathan MacKinnon have expressed their disappointment in seeing him traded. The feeling is mutual.

"I thought it was going to be an extension for sure. I can't lie about that," Rantanen said. "It was surprising because there was still some time to the deadline. I totally understand they didn't want to lose me for free. But it surprised me for sure. I didn't expect it at all."

Nor did the rest of the NHL, which is still processing one of the biggest blockbusters of the last decade. We spoke with several NHL executives, agents and players to get a sense of the trade's magnitude and the fallout that could impact more than just the teams involved.

Is this the right gamble for Carolina?

The Hurricanes were in New York when the Rantanen trade went down, with a game against the Islanders on the following evening. The players were at dinner when the news broke about Hall and then Rantanen. The tone and tenor of the meal quickly changed.

"We didn't know who was going the other way. We all tried to figure out who it was," center Jesperi Kotkaniemi said.

Kotkaniemi started getting texts from Finnish friends. "They're really pumped in Finland. They're able to watch the two best players now on the same team. So what could be better for them?" he said of Rantanen and center Sebastian Aho.

But then something else happened on social media: It was erroneously reported that Kotkaniemi himself would be sent to the Avalanche in the Rantanen trade.

On the surface, it made sense: He's a 24-year-old forward signed through 2029-30 at a reasonable cap hit ($4.82 million annually), but he was never part of the package for Rantanen. Still, his name was out there long enough for another wave of text messages to roll in about his own future, which made the situation a bit more intense for him.

"It was a very hectic 15 minutes there," he said.

It's been a hectic few weeks for Eric Tulsky, in his first season as Hurricanes general manager. The league was buzzing about Carolina being active in the trade market. Sources told ESPN that the Hurricanes and Vancouver Canucks had engaged in negotiations about forwards Elias Pettersson and J.T. Miller. The players' longstanding feud had finally reached a boiling point, and Vancouver was seeking to ship one or both of them out before the March 7 trade deadline.

Kotkaniemi and forward Jack Roslovic were discussed in the framework of a Miller trade. Martin Necas wasn't on the table for Miller, but might have been part of a deal for Pettersson.

Meanwhile, Carolina was also engaged in talks with the Avalanche for Rantanen, ones that tracked back to last summer.

Tulsky said last week that there was a desire for all parties to "get their best offers on the table" so the Hurricanes could decide which player to pursue. "Everybody had multiple offers. It was sort of time for everyone to figure out what they wanted to do, and this deal got done," he said. "It was a complicated dance."

When the music stopped, Rantanen and Hall were members of the Hurricanes.

The Avalanche picked up Carolina forwards Necas and Jack Drury, as well as a second-round pick in this year's draft and a fourth-rounder in 2026. Chicago acquired its 2025 third-rounder from Carolina for Hall, the rights to Swedish forward Nils Juntorp and 50% retention of Rantanen's $9.25 million salary cap hit. The Hurricanes ended up with Hall, a former Hart Trophy winner as league MVP, and Rantanen.

"Obviously, Carolina has been coveting a superstar and this is the way to get one," one agent said.

NHL executives were impressed with the boldness of the swing from Carolina.

"Good for them. Risk and reward," a general manager said. "They're giving up controllable assets for someone that you're not sure you can control. But they have the cap space to sign him. He's a great player who makes them a better team."

The executives we spoke with downplayed the notion that the Hurricanes might have started an "arms race" in the Eastern Conference among contenders. One general manager said that most teams have their own plans in mind for the NHL trade deadline for specific needs that won't be torn up because a rival made a blockbuster trade.

There were virtues to all three players the Hurricanes were considering. Miller and Pettersson were both signed with lengthy term. Miller seemed cut from a Rod Brind'Amour mold as a great, two-way player who's difficult to play against. (Depending on who you believe, he's also a bit difficult to play with as a teammate.) Pettersson has been underwhelming this season, but has incredible upside as a star offensive. In 2022-23, he had 103 points in 80 games for Vancouver.

But Rantanen's combination of size, skill and offensive consistency was too much for the Hurricanes to pass up. Especially when one considers his Stanley Cup Playoff success: Since 2019-20, Rantanen is fifth in postseason scoring, with 83 points in 63 games, including 28 goals.

Carolina has made the playoffs for six straight seasons, each time not producing enough offense to advance out of the conference. In that span, the Hurricanes have a .486 winning percentage in one-goal games.

The downside to acquiring Rantanen, potentially: They currently don't know if he'll be one-and-done in Raleigh, a superstar rental for a team that's yet to play for the Stanley Cup with Brind'Amour as their coach.

"Carolina will look stupid if they lose in the first round and he walks away to another team," an agent said. "But I think they're going to sign him. I think he'll like it there."

Did Colorado make the right call?

Nathan MacKinnon was already in a mood after the Avalanche lost to the Boston Bruins last Saturday.

"I wish I could have talked about this not right now," he said.

But this was the first opportunity for the media to ask Colorado's star center about losing his linemate and close friend Mikko Rantanen.

"Just sad, obviously. Losing Mikko ... really great friend for 10 years. Won a Cup together. I don't really know what happened," he said. "It's just unfortunate losing a great friend and a great teammate."

Rantanen was seeking a contract in the neighborhood of the eight-year extension Leon Draisaitl signed with the Edmonton Oilers in September. That deal carries an average annual value of $14 million. Both Rantanen and Draisaitl are represented by agent Andy Scott.

The winger has said he was willing to take less than market value to remain in Colorado, but it's unclear what that number actually looked like with regard to market value.

MacKinnon tried to stay out of Rantanen's business on a new contract. The ticking clock didn't bother him. He assumed it would play out much like Gabriel Landeskog's negotiations with the team did back in 2021, when the latter signed an eight-year, $56 million extension hours before free agency. But MacKinnon was wrong.

"I never thought in a million years he'd leave. It just sucks," he said.

But Rantanen's departure was something the Avalanche and GM Chris MacFarland believed was a possibility. The Avalanche and Hurricanes had been discussing Rantanen since last summer. Tulsky said the teams tabled "serious offers" for the winger during the past six to eight weeks. The Hurricanes were pushing hard to complete the trade in the past two weeks.

Others around the league knew it was a possibility too.

"I wasn't surprised. For me, it wasn't a secret," a GM said. "The potential was there because of their situation -- that he can't go over MacKinnon [in AAV] or whatever. And I know that Carolina wasn't the only team they were speaking with about Rantanen."

MacKinnon makes $12.6 million against the salary cap on a deal that runs through 2030-31. Before signing that deal in Sept. 2022, he talked about taking less than market value -- on a contract that made him the highest paid player in the league at the time -- in order to "win with the group." It's the same mindset exhibited by his friend and mentor Sidney Crosby with the Pittsburgh Penguins over Crosby's career.

But the contract that really influenced the Rantanen deal was one that hasn't been signed yet: Cale Makar's next deal, which will begin in 2027-28. Considered by some to be the best offensive defenseman since Bobby Orr, Makar could earn the largest NHL contract for a defenseman ever.

"I think they made a decision that you can have two players but not three players making more than $12 million per season," an agent said. "They knew, ballpark, the number for Cale Makar. So their decision was, 'We can have two, but not three. Who do we keep?'"

So MacFarland had a choice to make: Top-load his roster with three star players gobbling up a large percentage of the salary cap or break up their holy hockey trinity. MacFarland made it clear that in doing the latter, he was acknowledging the team didn't have championship depth and needed the flexibility to get it back.

"It's clear we are not deep enough. I think that you've got to be deep to go four rounds, and hopefully this is going to help that," MacFarland said. "Obviously Mikko is a superstar. You can't replace that. But he's a superstar that earned the right to be a free agent."

One agent was skeptical of the negotiation: "I don't feel they ever really were interested in signing him."

Another agent felt the Avalanche did what they had to do. "It was the right trade for Colorado, because they couldn't afford to pay Rantanen what he wanted within the context of their

salary structure. He didn't have full trade protection, so good move by them to trade him," they said.

MacFarland called it "a tough business decision" for the team. "It hurts, right. He's a homegrown talent. He's a superstar person. He's a superstar human being," he said.

Of course, there are other "business decisions" to think about in Denver or any NHL market.

"There's an argument to be made that keeping Rantanen makes sense because you're selling tickets. It doesn't really matter ultimately if you win the Cup, but you have to be good every year. That guy is going to allow you to make the playoffs every year," another general manager said. "But I could also make the argument that winning the Cup trumps everything else, and that winning it buys you a few seasons of a steady revenue stream no matter what your success is in those seasons."

MacFarland has made it clear that teams usually have to draft and develop players like Rantanen. "We're going to have to try and replace him in the aggregate; 50-goal scorers don't grow on trees," he said.

But what if he could be replaced?

"You could make the argument that Rantanen is a unicorn, and that you're not finding another player like that," a general manager said. "That said, what's your opportunity cost? Could you find another 100-point winger like that? What could you trade to find that?"

One agent believes the Avalanche could find that player because of MacKinnon.

"Something no one seems to be discussing: I think the Avalanche believe that MacKinnon was a big part of Rantanen's success, and that they would be able to put another guy with MacKinnon, pay him less and have comparable success," they said.

Right now that player is Necas, who was immediately placed with MacKinnon after the trade. The speedy winger led the Hurricanes in scoring this season and has another year on his contract at $6.5 million AAV.

MacFarland said it was important to have Necas and Drury, an "emerging player" down the lineup, under contract and "cost-controlled" beyond this season. He said the trade would allow the Avalanche to potentially make more moves before the March 7 deadline. Many sources are wondering if the Avalanche would target a center to play behind MacKinnon, with players like the Islanders' Brock Nelson in the conversation.

"I think we're always sort of looking to get better. Certainly, over the next few weeks that won't change. I think obviously there are a little more bullets in the draft-pick cupboard and some cap space," MacFarland said.

But no Mikko Rantanen any longer.

'What is Chicago doing?'

The Blackhawks' role in the Rantanen trade had observers around the NHL baffled.

"What the f--- is Chicago doing?" one NHL executive asked.

The Blackhawks retained half of Rantanen's salary and cap hit, while also trading Hall to the Hurricanes. For that, they received their own 2025 third-round draft pick that Carolina had acquired from Chicago at the 2024 draft.

In recent trades, a third-party team retaining 25% of a player's salary to facilitate a transaction has typically received a fourth-round pick. Chicago retaining that much cap space ($4.625 million) for 50% of a player's salary and including a veteran forward with Hall's abilities in a deal for only one third-round pick in return left many criticizing the return for the Blackhawks. But NHL insiders acknowledge there may have been some method to Chicago's perceived madness.

One aspect of the trade that hasn't gotten a lot of attention is the actual salaries for Rantanen and Hall this season. Rantanen's contract has a declining real-dollar value to where he was making only $6 million this season after having a base salary of $12 million in the first two years of the deal. Hall made $5.25 million this season. As one general manager noted, from a base salary perspective, the Blackhawks are paying slightly more for the rest of Rantanen's contract than they would have if Hall finished the season with them.

"Essentially, Chicago was asked to sell a little cap space with the money being the same. They get a third for Hall -- which to me is a little low -- but effectively that's what they're doing," one general manager said.

Davidson said that trading Hall was the logical move now because things frankly weren't going to get better for him in Chicago leading up to the trade deadline. "You run the risk of things like injury, the role was diminishing almost by the game, and it just wasn't heading towards a way that was going to maximize or enhance value," he said.

As one NHL agent put it: "I know Kyle Davidson's taking a lot of heat, but I don't think he probably was going to get much better for Taylor Hall than what he got."

There's no question it hasn't been the happiest season for Hall in Chicago. Former head coach Luke Richardson surprised him by making him a healthy scratch earlier this season. He had nine goals in 46 games. One NHL executive suggested that moving Hall out now could benefit the vibes inside Chicago's dressing room.

But moving him out now also means not having to use Chicago's last salary retention spot to move him later, which Davidson would undoubtedly have to do to make a trade work at the deadline. Now that slot is available for another deadline trade involving a player like forward Ryan Donato ($2 million AAV) or defenseman Alec Martinez ($4 million AAV), both of whom are unrestricted free agents after the season; or a more coveted player in forward Jason Dickinson, who has two years left at $4.25 million AAV.

Will Carolina sign Rantanen?

The Hurricanes now have the chance to do something no other team can do for Rantanen this offseason: Give him an eight-year contract. Per the NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement, everyone else can only go as high as seven years.

"Where is he going to go for seven years instead of the eight that Carolina can give him? If they're willing to go eight years

and $13 million annually, where else would he want to go that's good that can afford him?" one agent pondered.

Rantanen told me that the Hurricanes' ability to give him an eighth year will be a factor in his eventual free-agent decision. But those negotiations are a ways off. He's got other things to think about now.

"To be honest, I haven't had any chance to think about an extension, just trying to get into the group and try to play well," he said. "So I think we'll have to think about those situations in a couple weeks or so."

What's been interesting in chatting with sources about Rantanen and the Hurricanes is that the money doesn't seem to be a concern. Owner Tom Dundon is infamous for his tough negotiations on contracts for everyone from players to his own coaches. But the assumption is that the Hurricanes had a ballpark idea of what Rantanen is looking for on his next contract and were comfortable going there in negotiations.

Obviously, the Hurricanes faced a similar situation when they traded for Pittsburgh Penguins winger Jake Guentzel at the deadline last season and attempted to sign him to an extension, only to see the Tampa Bay Lightning ink him instead.

But Tulsky said the conditions are more favorable to keep Rantanen than they were for retaining Guentzel. Last season, the Hurricanes didn't have the cap flexibility to sign Guentzel and the other players they wanted. This offseason, Tulsky estimates the team could have between $35 million to $40 million in cap space.

"Our team situation is totally different right now," he said. "We don't feel nearly as constrained."

So if it's not the money and it's not the percentage of the salary cap, what is the make-or-break thing for Rantanen staying with the Hurricanes?

"I think they will ultimately sign him, unless he absolutely hates it there," one agent concluded.

Tulsky admitted that the Hurricanes' current approach to Rantanen is "more of a recruiting pitch than a negotiation in my mind." They have to sell him on the franchise, the system, the players on the roster and on the way and, most of all, spending the next eight years of his life in Raleigh.

Sebastian Aho has not affixed "Ambassador" to his name, but it might as well be there. He's been a friend and Finnish national team teammate for Rantanen throughout their lives. Aho has starred with Carolina since 2016-17. No one on the Hurricanes is better equipped to sell Rantanen on Raleigh and the franchise.

"I guess it's just about making him feel comfortable, making him feel welcome. I think that goes a long way," Aho said. "But obviously if he wants to go play a round of golf, I'm not saying no to that."

What if Rantanen goes to market?

There isn't yet certainty on the NHL's salary cap in the near term. Some projections have it jumping from $88 million to upwards of $97 million next season. From there, the sky's the limit.

One agent said that as the salary cap rises, some teams will claim they have an internal cap that only allows them to offer so much money to players. But after one or two huge contracts are handed out that elevate teams to the new ceiling, that dogma will go out the window.

"Competitiveness is going to kick in. GMs and owners are going to decide that they need to spend more to stay competitive," the agent said.

The opportunity has never been greater for a player like Rantanen to maximize his earning potential on the open market. Leon Draisaitl's contract with the Oilers was $112 million over eight years, or $14 million AAV.

"I think he'll get Draisaitl-like money as a UFA," one agent predicted.

"There are probably some good teams that might be willing to go seven years at $14 million annually to get him," another said.

Draisaitl's contract is one factor, but there's another winger potentially going to market this summer seeking a big contract: Mitch Marner of the Toronto Maple Leafs, who is in the last year of a six-year contract with a $10.903 million AAV.

As far as possible suitors, two of the NHL's richest franchises come to mind:

The New York Rangers continue to aggressively try to reshape their roster. They nearly completed a trade for Miller with the Canucks in recent weeks, with center Filip Chytil as the centerpiece. But salary retention and draft pick conditions were reported sticking points. If they're able to create the necessary space -- moving out a veteran like Chris Kreider or Mika Zibanejad -- Rantanen is the kind of shiny new toy the franchise finds hard to resist. Consider also that winger Artemi Panarin will be in the last year of his contract in 2025-26 at an $11,642,857 AAV.

The other team is already paying part of Rantanen's salary: The Chicago Blackhawks. They're expected to be in on every player they can this offseason in an attempt to quickly build a contender around young star Connor Bedard. The 19-year-old phenom has shown some discontent at dwelling in the Central Division cellar in the first two seasons of his NHL career. Putting a top five scorer like Rantanen on his wing would certainly put a smile on his face. Needless to say, Chicago has the money and the cap space to attempt it -- if not the competitive team that Rantanen might be compelled to join.

Then there's a wild card played recently by insider Andy Strickland, who is the rinkside reporter for the St. Louis Blues on FanDuel Sports Network. On his "Cam & Stick" podcast, Strickland said Rantanen will sign with the Edmonton Oilers this summer.

"They're going to be able to pay him and I think there would be some interest from him," he said, noting that Draisaitl and Rantanen share an agent. Strickland said the acquisition of Rantanen would also be an enticement for star Connor McDavid to re-sign, as he becomes an unrestricted free agent in summer 2026.

The magnitude of this trade, and the star quality of the player, lend themselves to this kind of speculation. The

Hurricanes have some advantages in seeking to keep Rantanen. But they won't be alone if he tests the market.

"Assuming he doesn't hate the system and the environment there, I think he signs with Carolina," one agent said. "If he doesn't care where he plays, all bets are off."

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Hall, Rantanen get first points in Canes 4-0 victory over Rangers

By: Aidan Carlson

With its 4-0 win over the New York Rangers in Madison Square Garden, the Carolina Hurricanes became the fourth team in NHL history to have four goalies record a shutout in a single season. The last team to do it was the 2002-2003 St. Louis Blues.

“I'm not sure that's a good stat,” said head coach Rod Brind'Amour. “Oh boy, I don't want to do that again. I don't want to be on that list. That's a lot of stress on everybody. But it does say a little bit about the group, I think. We can figure it out. It's nice to have the top guys back, though.”

While goaltender Frederik Andersen got his first shutout of the season, the new faces got a pair of firsts as well. Left wing Taylor Hall and right wing Mikko Rantanen each earned their first point as a Cane on a right wing Andrei Svechnikov goal.

Taking control of a loose puck, Hall carried it into the offensive zone, slowed down at the faceoff dot, and fired a pass to the trailing Svechnikov. Carrying the puck into the slot, Svechnikov ripped a wrister past Rangers goaltender Igor Shesterkin 56 seconds into the game.

> Taylor Hall has his first point with the @Canes! 🧿 #NHLStats: https://t.co/ZGlL79tB45 pic.twitter.com/X0eJrftdrh
>
> — NHL (@NHL) January 29, 2025

Svechnikov scored his second late in the second period to double the Canes’ lead. Rantanen started the offensive rush after defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere axed a Rangers transition chance just seconds before. Connecting with right wing Jackson Blake, Rantanen made a slick pass to find Svechnikov in the slot.

“They're great players and those goals I was trying to be patient because I knew they were going to find me,” Svechnikov said.

Hall and Rantanen weren’t the only ones to earn their first points with a new team against the Rangers. This past Sunday, former Hurricane centers Martin Necas and Jack Drury also earned their first point with their new team — the Colorado Avalanche — against the Rangers in one of the strangest NHL coincidences in recent history.

It took less than three minutes into the third period for the Hurricanes to double their lead again. Just over a minute in, center Sebastian Aho quickly fired a shot on goal that had bounced around the zone and center Seth Jarvis posted up in the slot and fired in a pass from left wing Jordan Martinook.

A four-goal lead was already going to be hard to come back against for the Rangers, but the Hurricanes made it impossible in the final period, only giving up three shots on goal.

“We didn't let them get a sniff on coming back in this game,” Andersen said.

Another notable storyline was when it was announced that defenseman Riley Stillman would draw into the Hurricanes lineup for the first time this season. Signed in the summer, Stillman has been recalled from and sent down to the Chicago Wolves numerous times to serve as an extra in case a Cane couldn’t play. With center Jack Roslovic out with an illness, Stillman got his shot.

Wearing the number his dad — Corey Stillman — wore with the Canes nearly 17 years ago, Stillman set the tone early in his first appearance. Dropping the gloves six minutes in with Rangers center Sam Carrick, Stillman got the team going early with his physical presence.

The Hurricanes will look to extend their point streak to seven games when they return to Raleigh to take on the Chicago Blackhawks. Hall and Rantanen will make their home debuts with the Canes, starting at 7 p.m.

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The Hockey News

Carolina, Colorado Trade Pieces All Score First Points Against New York Rangers

By: Ryan Henkel

It was a bad few days to be the New York Rangers.

The Carolina Hurricanes and Colorado Avalanche (and Chicago Blackhawks too) pulled off a blockbuster trade on Friday night, as Mikko Rantanen and Taylor Hall were sent to Carolina and Martin Necas and Jack Drury wound up with Colorado.

While both teams acquired talented, high-level players, with no time to practice or even process much of what happened, all four players were suiting up in new threads for games the following day

So it was no surprise that none of the four wound up with any points and actually both Carolina and Colorado wound up losing their games on Saturday.

But just a bit of time to collect themselves was all those players needed apparently. That and getting to face the New York Rangers.

After their loss to the Boston Bruins on Saturday, the Avalanche were back on the ice Sunday to face the Rangers and the former Hurricanes were all over that game.

Drury was the first trade piece to get on the score sheet as he opened the scoring with a redirect goal, but it was Necas who really shined.

The speedy winger has looked like the perfect complement alongside Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar and he picked up two nice assists in the game as well.

The Avs won that game 5-4 with a last second go-ahead goal. Oh, and in the Avalanche's next game, once again Drury had a goal and Necas had two assists.

Turn to yesterday, and the Hurricanes came into MSG coming off of a 3-2 overtime loss to the New York Islanders, so they were ready to pounce.

Hall and Rantanen each found the scoresheet by setting up Andrei Svechnikov: Hall with a nice entry and good vision to find the Russian coming down the slot; Rantanen with an elite pass after getting Igor Shesterkin to bite.

It's clear that both players are bringing another level to Carolina and coach Rod Brind'Amour even touched on as much.

"There's a little transition going on here, but we get open ice with the players we've added and I think you're going to see a little more of that," Brind'Amour said.

It's safe to say both teams are really enjoying the players they've added and so far this seems like a win-win type of deal, so long as you're not the New York Rangers.

I just can't wait to see Nils Juntorp make his NHL debut in four years at MSG, because we all know what the outcome will be.

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https://www.espn.com/nhl/story/_/id/43615846/nhl-2024-25-mikko-rantanen-trade-avalanche-hurricanes-blackhawks-free-agency
https://www.technicianonline.com/sports/hall-rantanen-get-first-points-in-canes-4-0-victory-over-rangers/article_5b16b8ee-deda-11ef-9c3c-9b928307562c.html
https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/latest-news/carolina-colorado-trade-pieces-all-score-first-points-against-new-york-rangers

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1337787 Carolina Hurricanes

How rare is it for No. 1 picks like Taylor Hall to play for this many teams?

Sean McIndoe12-15 minutes 29/01/2025

Friday night's Mikko Rantanen blockbuster was such a monster trade that the inclusion of a Hart Trophy winner felt like a footnote. But there was Taylor Hall, heading to Carolina and his seventh NHL team.

That led to what I thought was an interesting question from a reader:

What's the record for most teams played for by a first-overall pick? Hall's gotta be getting close if he doesn't already have it, that's seven teams now

— Jay (@JRTW1206) January 25, 2025

Spoiler alert: Hall isn't in a league of his own… at least, not yet. And you might be surprised how many No. 1 picks ended up building resumes worthy of a journeyman.

Let's go back to the start of the entry draft era in 1979 and see how many top picks can compete with Hall's growing jersey collection.

Zero stops

We'll start our journey with a question: Has anyone ever been the first pick in the entry draft without ever making it to the NHL at all?

The short answer is no. The longer answer is that it did happen three times in the first five years of the amateur draft, which is what the league had from 1963 to 1978. Back then, players who'd already signed with teams weren't eligible, so the pool was much thinner, and top picks Claude Gauthier (1964), Andre Veilleux (1965) and Rick Pagnutti (1967) never made the big leagues.

But in the entry draft era? It's never happened, and short of some career-ending injury, it's hard to imagine that it ever could.

One stop

This is the outcome you're picturing when you imagine a first pick – the guy who becomes a lifer, retiring without ever playing with any other team. And as you'd expect, there are plenty of players in this category, including every pick dating back to 2013 plus other active players like Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin.

Obviously, any of those guys could theoretically play elsewhere before their career ends, so maybe you don't want to count them quite yet. That brings us to the list of retired first picks who only played for one team, and it's a smaller list than you might expect, not to mention a bit of a weird one.

The first name is the one you're already thinking of: Mario Lemieux. But that's it for the Hall of Famers, at least for now. One of the other three names is Ottawa's Chris Phillips, which you might have known if you paid attention to this post a few weeks back. Boston's Gord Kluzak had his career shortened by injury, but only ever played for the Bruins. And the only other name on the list is one that's often called a bust: Rick DiPietro, who spent all 11 of his NHL seasons with the Islanders (and remains on their payroll to this day).

That's it. Only four retired No. 1 picks spent their entire career with one team. So how many made just one other stop?

Two stops

The one-stop group was a short list, once we ruled out the active players. Believe it or not, this one is even shorter.

There are two active first picks who are on their second stop: John Tavares and Steven Stamkos. Among players who are retired, we find only two more names, and they cover both ends of the career success spectrum.

One of them is Mike Modano, who spent 20 seasons with the Minnesota North Stars and Dallas Stars, who for our purposes count as the same team. After that, he spent one year in Detroit, where he played for his good pal Mike Babcock. That wasn't exactly a storybook ending, but it didn't stop Modano from going into the Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility.

It's fair to say that Modano won't be joined in the Hall by our only other two-team pick. That would be Patrik Stefan, the 1999 top pick whose career lasted just seven seasons thanks to injuries and a lack of production. He spent the first six of those with the Atlanta Thrashers before spending one last year, somewhat ironically, in Modano's old stomping grounds in Dallas. Hey, at least that season gave us Stefan's most memorable NHL moment.

Just a few entries in, and I've already learned that first picks don't stick with their teams anywhere near as much as I would have assumed. Let's see how many three-timers we can find.

Three stops

The answer: Six, including one guy who's still active. Feel free to take a moment to see if you can figure out who they are.

We'll start with the active player, who's probably our easiest call. That would be Patrick Kane, who's gone from the Blackhawks to the Rangers to the Red Wings. It's possible that his tour of the Original Six might continue at some point down the line, but for now he's in some decent company.

There are two more names I'm betting most of you will get: Mats Sundin (Nordiques, Leafs and Canucks) and Rick Nash (Blue Jackets, Rangers and Bruins). Vincent Lecavalier is a bit trickier, going from the Lightning to the Flyers to a forgettable half-season with the Kings. And there's also Ed Jovanovski, who had stops with the Canucks and Coyotes in between beginning and ending his career with the Panthers.

There's one more player to go in this category, and we're back to the list of notable draft busts to find him. That would be Nail Yakupov, whose six-season NHL career was the shortest of any first pick in the entry draft era. He spent four of those in Edmonton before moving on to single seasons with the Avalanche and Blues.

Fun fact: If you let Yakupov combine his entire career total of 62 goals into one season, he'd still rank behind the best years of fellow No. 1 picks Mario Lemieux, Auston Matthews, Connor McDavid and Ovechkin. He'd have Stamkos beat by two goals, though.

Four stops

You'd think we'd start hitting some diminishing returns here, but nope – there are five more first picks in the four-team club, two of whom are still active.

The good news is that we're going to run at an 80 percent success rate for getting these guys into the Hall of Fame. Three are already there, with Joe Thornton (Bruins, Sharks, Leafs, Panthers), Eric Lindros (Flyers, Rangers, Leafs, Stars) and Dale Hawerchuk (Jets, Sabres, Blues, Flyers) sitting among the all-time greats. Marc-Andre Fleury is a near-lock to join them three years after he retires, and he's gone from the Penguins to the Knights to the Blackhawks to the Wild.

Our last name in this group may not be done moving around. Erik Johnson was the first pick in 2006 by the Blues. He also had stops in Colorado and Buffalo before his current stint in Philadelphia. He's not playing much for the Flyers these days and will be a UFA at the end of the year, so maybe he sets his sights on five-teamer status.

Five stops

Only two names here. Some of you might come up with Ilya Kovalchuk, who went from Atlanta to New Jersey in his first NHL stint and then covered off the Kings, Canadiens and Capitals in his brief comeback years later.

I'll be more impressed if you had Doug Wickenheiser. He was the Canadiens' somewhat infamous pick in 1980, when they passed over a

Quebec kid named Denis Savard. He lasted parts of four years in Montreal before heading on to stops with the Blues, Canucks, Rangers and Capitals. (He was also very briefly Hartford Whalers property during the 1987 waiver draft, but we're not counting that as he never actually played for them.)

So after seeing a somewhat surprising number of names show up among the three and four-team groups, we're down to just two here. Surely that means we don't have many names left, he said, ironically foreshadowing the next group.

Six stops

Six different teams for one player seems like a lot. For someone who was once so highly regarded that they went No. 1, it seems like too much. But this isn't going to be a short list.

Let's start with a Hall of Famer. Pierre Turgeon started with the Sabres, then went to the Islanders, Canadiens, Blues, Stars and Avalanche. Even weirder, at least to me, is that he played more games in St. Louis than anywhere else, even though I barely remember him there.

But OK, that's one guy. Let's stay in the 1980s to find a few more. We can start with Brian Lawton, the first pick in 1983 who managed to pack six different stops into a career that only lasted nine seasons. The last of those was the Sharks, who traded him to his seventh team, the Devils, in 1993 but he never played there. There's also Wendel Clark, who's listed as playing for six teams on Hockey Reference even though we all know he was only ever a Maple Leaf.

(A bit of side trivia: The trade that sent Clark from Toronto to Quebec for Sundin was the only time in NHL history that two first picks have been traded for each other. It was also the first time it had happened in major North American pro sports history, although it's since happened in the NBA and in the NFL.)

Moving onto the 1990s, we start with Owen Nolan, who went first in 1990 and spent 14 seasons in Quebec and San Jose before bouncing around Toronto, Phoenix, Calgary and Minnesota. Alexandre Daigle's NHL career lasted only 10 seasons, but he had enough time for stops in Ottawa, Philadelphia, Tampa, New York (Rangers), Pittsburgh and Minnesota. And there's another Senators first pick, Bryan Berard. He never played for Ottawa, but managed stops with the Islanders, Leafs, Rangers, Bruins, Blackhawks and Blue Jackets and then back to the Islanders, all in just 619 games over an injury-shortened career.

Add it up, and that's six players who were No. 1 picks and then played for six different teams. If we take out the active players, that means that six teams is our magic number – there are more first picks who played for six teams than any other number. A top pick playing for a half-dozen teams by the end of his career is more common than him playing for only one or two. That's… weird, right? I think it's very weird.

And we know it's not even the record because we still haven't got to our old pal Taylor Hall.

Seven stops

We know Hall slots in here. The question is whether anyone joins him. And yes, a pair of guys do.

The first is Joe Murphy, who became the first college player to go first when he was taken by Detroit in 1986. He went from the Wings to the Oilers in a 1989 blockbuster before further stops in Chicago, St. Louis, San Jose, Boston and Washington spelled the end of a troubled career. And there's also Roman Hamrlik, the top pick in 1992 who spent 20 years in the NHL while playing for the Lightning, Oilers, Islanders, Flames, Canadiens, Capitals and Rangers.

So no, Hall isn't the only first pick to ever play for seven different teams. And he doesn't hold the record because we still have one name left…

Eight stops

I'll pause here while you rack your brain to see if you can come up with the name. But it's a tough one, and you have to go way back.

The 1979 draft is often referred to as one of the best ever, partly because the age of eligibility was lowered by a year to create a double-cohort. Mike Gartner and Ray Bourque were top-10 picks, with fellow Hall of Famers Michel Goulet and Kevin Lowe going later in the first round. Mark Messier was picked in the second, and other stars who heard their name called that day include Glenn Anderson, Dale Hunter, Guy Carbonneau and Pelle Lindbergh, among many others.

But none of them went first. That honor belonged to London Knights defenseman Rob Ramage. He went to the Colorado Rockies, where he lasted three years before being dealt to the Blues. His most famous transaction came at the 1988 deadline, when St. Louis sent him to Calgary in the deal that landed them Brett Hull. Ramage won a Cup with the Flames, then went to Toronto where he became captain. From there it was on to Minnesota, Tampa, Montreal and finally Philadelphia.

Add it up, and that's eight teams – the record for most teams played for by a first pick. For now, at least, because at 33 years old and with plenty of apparent road ahead of him, Hall seems like a good bet to catch Ramage as soon as this summer. From there, who knows. Could double-digits be in play? We can't rule it out.

I'll leave you with some numbers. There have been 46 players taken No. 1 in the NHL entry draft, and by my math they've combined to play for 141 teams, an average of just over three each. But that's counting active players, including guys like Macklin Celebrini and Juraj Slafkovský whose careers have barely started. If we only look at players whose careers are over, that gives us 26 players who had stops with 108 teams, an average of 4.15 stops per player. And as we noted, the most common number of teams that shows up is six.

That's way higher than I would have expected, and it means that Hall's vagabond career path isn't as much of an outlier as you might assume. And it also means your dream of seeing Connor Bedard wind up on your favorite team isn't quite as far-fetched and you might think. (Just don't get too attached — he may not stay long.)

(Top photo of Hurricanes left winger Taylor Hall: Brad Penner / Imagn Images)

The Athletic LOADED: 01.30.2025

1337788 Chicago Blackhawks

Utah Hockey Club narrows the choice of a permanent name to 3 finalists — and it won't be the Yeti

John Coon2-3 minutes 29/01/2025

SALT LAKE CITY — The Utah Hockey Club has chosen three finalists for the permanent team name it will adopt beginning with the 2025-26 NHL season.

The franchise will use a final round of fan voting to decide among the Utah Mammoth, Utah Hockey Club and Utah Wasatch. Team officials backed away from including Yeti as a finalist after being unable to work out a co-existence agreement with Yeti Coolers to use the name in branding and merchandising.

"They have a unique trademark that allows them to prevent the use of the word Yeti or Yetis," Smith Entertainment Group executive Mike Maughan said. "They made a determination for the sake of their brand that they didn't want to enter into a coexistence."

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office earlier this month refused a request by the club, citing a "likelihood of confusion" with other notable brands using the name, such as Yeti Coolers. An email sent Wednesday by the Associated Press to Yeti Coolers LLC seeking comment was not immediately returned.

Fans in attendance at the next four home games, starting Wednesday night against Pittsburgh, will vote at designated iPad stations at the Delta Center to help decide the team's name and logo. It will unveil a first look

at designs for the logo, jerseys and branding associated with each choice.

Only fans in attendance will be allowed to vote at the Penguins game, against Columbus on Friday, St. Louis on Sunday and Philadelphia on Tuesday. The permanent team name and logo will be unveiled ahead of Utah's 2025-26 regular-season opener.

Wasatch filled the finalist spot originally intended for Yeti. Wasatch is a reference to the Wasatch Mountains, which run north to south along the east side of the Salt Lake Valley.

"We wanted to honor this idea people had for a mythical snow creature like the Yeti and bring a very Utah-centric approach to it," Maughan said. "Because we have the Wasatch Mountains, because we have the Wasatch Front, we have so many different iterations or ways we can do it. We wanted to honor the sentiment of one of those top names of the last iteration (of fan voting) while also including a Utah-centric version of it."

Originally

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1337789 Chicago Blackhawks

Blackhawks' Connor Murphy entering unknown future after two bouts with groin issue

Ben Pope4-5 minutes 29/01/2025

The official reason given for why defenseman Connor Murphy missed the Blackhawks' outdoor practice at Wrigley Field on Dec. 30 was "maintenance." But for the team's longest-tenured player to skip that special day, it stood to reason that he must be dealing with something significant.

It turns out that something is the same condition — or at least something "very similar" to it, Murphy said — that sidelined him for 38 games last season: osteitis pubis, a groin issue involving inflammation within the joint connecting the left and right pubic bones.

After playing 19:39 in the Winter Classic on Dec. 31, Murphy — who previously had hoped to play through the discomfort longer — knew he needed to take time off.

"I was in a lot of pain," Murphy said Tuesday. "I was limping a lot off the ice. I knew it was a sign that it was time to get it better."

Murphy, 31, rested for a while, then gradually ramped up his activity. Four weeks later, he feels just about ready to return to the lineup.

But it's concerning that osteitis pubis is a recurring issue. After all, it's the same condition that has limited Sharks star Logan Couture to six games over the last two seasons and eventually might end Couture's career. Last spring, Murphy said he and Couture had commiserated and shared advice.

Murphy really doesn't know what the future holds on this front.

"Through [my] experience with injuries, [I] try to take it day by day and not let it inhibit you in the games," he said. "I just flip a switch and play hard, and whatever happens, happens. . . . I've been doing a lot of preventative stuff this year, so that's why I was very frustrated to have to miss time. I'll just continue to do that and try to find what works and take rests when I can."

Doctors can't say for certain he'll be able to play the rest of this season without disruptions, Murphy said, because it's impossible to know if a certain body position or impact in a game could aggravate it. Up to this point, however, his two absences because of osteitis pubis have resulted from gradual worsening, not aggravating incidents.

"[I relied on my] pain tolerance, dealing with it for a while, and it [was] eventually getting worse and worse," he said. "In the NHL, you're not going to sit out games . . . just from soreness. You're going to keep playing until you're in too much pain to keep going. That's what it got to."

Murphy's Hawks tenure has been plagued by injuries. He has made more than 58 appearances once (2022-23) in the last six seasons and has played in only 70% of the Hawks' games (381 of 542) since having back surgery in the summer in 2018.

"I've missed a lot of games in my career, which is always frustrating," he said, "especially when our team is struggling — like we've been the last few years. It's hard to miss time and not be a part of it, to go through it with the guys. I'm just grateful [this absence] wasn't as long as last year."

Murphy has been better analytically this season than the last few. He leads Hawks defensemen with a 45.7% scoring-chance ratio during his five-on-five shifts, during which the team only has been outscored by a manageable 31-26 margin. His 12 assists during five-on-five play (in only 38 games) already are the second-most of his career.

With one more year left on his contract after this season, Murphy once seemed like a dark-horse candidate to draw some trade-deadline interest, but this uncertainty could squash those chances.

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 01.30.2025

1337814 Los Angeles Kings

Drew Doughty returns, but Kings get shut out by Panthers

By ALANIS THAMES AP Sports Writer

SUNRISE, Fla. — The goal-starved Kings had a key contributor back in their lineup, but they still couldn't stop the bleeding.

Matthew Tkachuk had a goal and two assists, Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 30 shots for his second shutout of the season, and the Florida Panthers handed the Kings a 3-0 loss on Wednesday night, spoiling the season debut of veteran defenseman Drew Doughty.

Aleksander Barkov and Sam Bennett also scored for the Panthers, who entered the game a point back of Toronto for the top spot in the Atlantic Division and won for the fourth time in six games. It was the 46th career shutout for Bobrovsky.

Darcy Kuemper made 36 saves for the Kings, who have lost three straight and seven of their past nine games (2-6-1), scoring just 15 goals over that extended stretch and just 19 in their past 11 games. The game against the Panthers was the third stop of a five-game trip, with the Kings set to play at Tampa Bay on Thursday night.

Doughty, 35, played about 24 minutes in his season debut after missing the first 47 games because of a broken left ankle sustained during a preseason game against the Vegas Golden Knights on Sept. 25. He had three shots on goal, a hit and was minus-2 in 23:51 of ice time.

Bennett gave Florida a 1-0 lead 4:55 into the game when he scored from below the bottom of the left faceoff circle. He put a forehand shot over Kuemper and under the crossbar after taking a cross-slot pass from Tkachuk.

Defenseman Dmitry Kulikov, playing in his 1,000th career game, also earned an assist on the play.

Barkov netted a five-on-three power-play goal to make it 2-0 at 4:43 of the third period. He put in the rebound off the backboards of a shot by Tkachuk. The goal came five seconds after the Kings' Warren Foegele was called for high-sticking, with teammate Trevor Lewis already in the penalty box for tripping.

Tkachuk added an empty-net goal with 1:12 remaining.

The Kings' Alex Laferriere had an apparent goal waved off because of goaltender interference with 6:02 left in the first period. Lewis fell into Bobrovsky.

Barkov hit the goal post from the bottom of the right circle with five seconds left in the second period, and Bennett hit the goal post 6:37 into the third period.

Tkachuk recorded his seventh multi-assist game of the season. He's up to 31 assists on the season.

This was the second time in eight days the teams squared off. The Kings beat the Panthers, 2-1, last Wednesday at Crypto.com Arena.

Wednesday was the 899th career victory for Florida coach Paul Maurice. His next win will make him only the fourth NHL coach with 900 victories.

The Kings sent Samuel Helenius down to the AHL's Ontario Reign earlier on Wednesday.

UP NEXT

The Kings play at Tampa Bay on Thursday at 4 p.m. PT.

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1337815 Los Angeles Kings

Kings activate Drew Doughty for season debut in Florida

Andrew Knoll3-4 minutes 29/01/2025

Drew Doughty is back.

The Kings activated Doughty, who broke his ankle in the preseason and has not played a shift since, from injured reserve on Wednesday, just in time to face the defending champion Florida Panthers.

That's fitting, as Doughty has always strived to rise to the level of his competition, whether it was in the Stanley Cup Final or the gold-medal game of the Olympics.

Already one of the most decorated defensemen in hockey history, Doughty has been eager to add to his burgeoning trophy case through three years of non-competitive hockey and three more seasons in which the Kings qualified for the postseason, only to be eliminated in the first round.

Doughty had also been one of the most durable defenders in the NHL from his rookie year, in 2008-09, until the Kings returned to the playoffs in 2021-22. Then, two separate injuries, including a season-ending wrist surgery that cost him the chance to participate in a seven-game series against the Edmonton Oilers, sidelined Doughty. This season, he's again missed significant time, making his initial foray of the season at Game 48.

"When you don't play for that long, you start questioning how am I going to play when I return, and how am I going to feel when I return," Doughty told Kings media personality Zach Dooley on Sunday. "Doubt starts creeping into your mind, which is never a good thing, but as much as I have thought about that, I feel confident that I'm going to be as good as I've always been and I've done a lot of work to get ready for this point, so I'm excited."

Dooley tweeted from the morning skate in Florida that Doughty would be paired with Jacob Moverare initially, effectively placing him on the Kings' third defense pairing, but that he also took reps with the top power-play unit.

The Kings have been struggling on the power play and offensively overall, having scored two or fewer goals in nine of their past 10 games. Although their defensive game has excelled all season, Doughty could enliven the Kings' transition game as well as provide the vocal, emotional leadership that he has across his entire career.

While Doughty might be used in a tempered capacity initially, he has also said he would like to play in the upcoming 4 Nations Face-Off tournament if asked to fill in for an injured player and said that if he were only going to play a few minutes a game, he'd sooner wait until he was ready to go full blast.

"I know when I get out there, I'm going to be looking over my shoulder being like, 'I'm ready to go out for another shift,'" Doughty told Dooley. "So that's part of the reason they want me 100 percent ready to be able to have the minutes, to be able to play the way I need to play."

The Kings will also be in action Thursday, when they square off with the Lightning in Tampa Bay.

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1337816 Los Angeles Kings

REIGN FINAL – Reign 2, Eagles 4 – Ward, Sturm

Jared Shafran5-6 minutes 30/01/2025

The Colorado Eagles (22-12-3-2) jumped out to a lead by scoring three times during the second period and controlled the rest of the game on Wednesday night at Toyota Arena, defeating the Ontario Reign (24-15-1-1) by a 4-2 score.

Jack Studnicka had a goal and an assist for Ontario in a losing effort, while Taylor Ward was on the scoresheet for the fourth time in the past five games with an assist and Martin Chromiak found the back of the net for his seventh strike of the season.

Studnicka had the Reign off and running with a 1-0 lead just 26 seconds into the contest, scoring his 11th goal of the year off a feed from Ward with a quick shot that got past Colorado netminder Trent Minor.

Jacob MacDonald evened up the game for the Eagles at 12:43 of the opening period, putting home a loose rebound in front of the Reign net to make it 1-1.

Colorado then surged forward in the second half of the middle frame, scoring three times to enter the third with a 4-1 advantage. Jake Wise made it a 2-1 game with a goal on a breakaway opportunity at 11:48, before Calle Rosen scored during a delayed penalty at 16:20 and Nikita Prishchepov buried a shorthanded marker in the final minute at 19:28.

Ontario was only able to get one goal closer in the third, when Chromiak deflected home a shot by Studnicka in the final minute of play at 19:43. The goal came on the power play and had a second assist credited to Caleb Jones.

Chromiak's late strike was the lone power play tally of the contest for either club, with the Reign going 1-for-2 on the man-advantage while holding Colorado to a 0-for-2 mark.

Miner came away with the victory by stopping 24 shots for the Eagles, while Erik Portillo made the start and suffered the loss for Ontario with 21 stops. The Reign had a 26-25 edge in shots on goal during play.

Postgame reactions from Ward and head coach Marco Sturm are below –

Taylor Ward

On the difference in tonight's loss

I'm not exactly sure. I just don't think that we were 100% there. I mean that first 30 seconds was good, but after that, I thought that they carried the play. Especially in the second, we weren't good enough. So we'll dissect that, try to figure out where our key issues were and move on.

On Studnicka's goal and compete

It happened so fast, but I was coming down that side and Studs is so fast that I'm always kind of looking for him when we enter the ozone. He beat his guy to the net and it was an easy play. It's fun playing with him, because he's so fast, he gets up there so quick, and he wants to puck. He's an emotional guy. You love having that kind of guy on your team, especially on your line. He's emotionally involved in the game, which is what you want. He's been going good, and I think we've been, for the most part, going pretty good as a line, with the exception of tonight. But that happens and we'll move on and get ready for Friday.

On playing against TJ Tynan

It's weird. He's a great guy, a great friend of mine. It was cool playing out there against him. Well, it was cool being out there, but it's not very much fun when he's flying around the ozone. I got a little bit of a taste of the medicine that he's been giving other teams in our league for the last few years when he played here. Wish I could have shut him down a little bit more, but next time.

Marco Sturm

On his team's play in the loss

It was a tough night, for sure. If you're not engaged in the game, you can't win the hockey game. I think everyone was involved today and there was just no life. There was no energy. The compete level was not there. Like I said, if you're not engaged, it's going to be hard to win.

On when the Reign stopped playing their game

I think it started probably after 15 minutes in the first period. We had some turnovers, we didn't stick to our game, and it kind of carried over in a second period. We beat ourselves. The whole bench and everything else, it was just not us today. I always think those are big points, especially to leave at home against a good opponent. They're right with us. So that part kind of hurts.

On what went wrong overall

They all want to be pro, right? Part of being a pro is showing up every night. It doesn't matter if it's practice or a game. That's part of the program, part of something you signed up and wanted to do. Taking a night off, it's just not going to do. There's going to be changes next game and it's something we have to learn from. A lot of individuals today have to learn that too. There's no pointing fingers. It's on all of us today. It was just very disappointing.

Ontario will hit the road for a trip to Tucson this weekend, where they'll face-off with the Roadrunners on consecutive days beginning Friday at 6 p.m. PT.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 01.30.2025

1337817 Los Angeles Kings

FINAL - Kings 0, Panthers 3

Zach Dooley For LAKingsInsider.com7-8 minutes 30/01/2025

The LA Kings dropped their third consecutive game on the road, falling 3-0 against the Florida Panthers on Wednesday evening at Amerant Arena in Florida.

The Panthers opened the scoring just shy of five minutes into the game as forwards Matthew Tkachuk and Sam Bennett connected on a goal just outside the crease. After the Kings were unable to clear their defensive zone up the wall, the Panthers converted quickly with Tkachuk setting up Bennett with an empty net and the veteran forward converted for his 16th goal of the season and a 1-0 lead.

For the second straight game, the Kings conceded a 5-on-3 goal, with the Panthers capitalizing to take a two-goal lead. After an offensive-zone penalty from Trevor Lewis and a high-sticking call on Warren Foegele, Tkachuk's shot from the high slot went wide, but the puck kicked off the backboards directly to forward Aleksander Barkov, who buried from close range for his 12th goal of the season and a 2-0 lead.

Late in the game, the Kings capped things off with an empty-net goal from Tkachuk, his third point of the night, bringing us to the final of 3-0.

Hear from defenseman Drew Doughty, forward Warren Foegele and Head Coach Jim Hiller after tonight's defeat.

Drew Doughty

Warren Foegele

On tonight's game and if he got the type of game he expected

Back and forth, kind of similar to last time. It's a grind playing against these guys. They compete really hard for pucks, I played them a lot last year, so I'm pretty familiar with them. They're a team that just wins a lot of 50/50 puck battles, whether that's in the o-zone, neutral zone, d-zone and they win a lot of board battles. When you do that, you get possession of the puck and you're attacking more. So they're a good hockey club. The good thing is, quick turnaround for us and we'll go at Tampa tomorrow.

On the margin for error right now for this team, especially against Florida

I take accountability there. Taking a penalty on the kill with nine seconds left, that just hurts our team. Two games in a row where we give up another penalty on the kill, so it's hard to kill penalties when you're on a 5-on-3. I put our team in a bad spot there.

On the team's offensive output right now

It's for sure frustrating. We've talked about getting bodies to the net, pucks on net. I think one thing we could do a better job is just possessing the puck a little bit better. We don't always have to try to strike right away, let's try to wear them down and then try to get some looks. I found tonight, just too many, just one and dones and it's kind of been like that for a couple games right now. We have a couple good shifts where we're really wearing them down and I think we could do more of that and then we'll get more opportunities and stuff like that. So, it's a grind, and we'll get through it. Like I said, it's good that tomorrow is a quick turnaround.

Jim Hiller

On the game tonight, compared to the 2-1 win over Florida last week at home

I thought it was similar. I thought the difference was maybe they were a little fresher this time around and maybe we weren't as fresh. That would probably be the difference. They faster tonight than they were in LA. Still a good hockey game and they got us.

On his usage of Drew Doughty in his first game of the season

He looked fine. I mean, you don't know until the bullets start flying, and he was fine, it looked like he didn't miss a game to me. He was a little rusty, there was a couple, I think he bobbled it a couple times, but defensively, that's a special player, that can be able to come in and just do that after not playing. It's probably been close to nine months……it's impressive. There's a lot of things have been written and said about Drew but add that one to the list.

On not challenging the disallowed goal from Alex Laferriere

It was a tough one. Lewie went in, the guy didn't push him in, so did he trip him in? That would be a judgment call, but when the call on the ice [is a goal] you have to have some pretty firm evidence to overturn the call on the ice. So, I mean, had it been the other way, I would have liked to seen him call the goal and let them decide which way we're going. We just didn't feel there was enough there to warrent taking that risk.

On if he feels like he is getting short on options to turn around the team's offensive output

Well, I think a healthy Drew will help us that way, for sure. Some guys are getting some looks, some guys aren't. There's only so many things you can do. You've got to go out there and play hockey. They don't give you mwuch time and space, you get 30 shots, you get some really good looks, and it doesn't go in. We're not going to spend a whole lot of time talking about it. We've dried up right now, that's obvious, but we won't spend time dwelling on it. Just go out there and get ready to play the next game and make sure we're doing the things that lead to creating offense. Get in front of the goaltender is one of them. I think that's probably the best thing you can do.

On Brandt Clarke's healthy scratch in tonight's game

It's a tough, tough league for a young guy, you know what I mean? He's done great to get to this point, he finally got to be a healthy scratch, but he's played really well. This league will wear you down as a young player and this will give himself a reset. We'll see where it goes from here.

Notes –

• Defenseman Drew Doughty skated in his season debut, the 1,178th regular season contest of his career. In doing so, Doughty becomes the fourth skater and only defenseman in franchise play in 17 seasons for the Kings, joining Dave Taylor (17), Dustin Brown (18) and Anze Kopitar (19).

• Doughty becomes the 13th defenseman in league history to skate in 17 seasons for a single franchise. He joins Ray Bourque (BOS, 21), Dit Clapper (BOS, 20), Ken Daneyko (NJD, 20), Nicklas Lidstrom (DET, 20), Tim Horton (TOR, 20), Kris Letang (PIT, 19), Marc-Edouard Vlasic (SJS, 19), Adam Foote (COL, 17), Brian Leetch (NYR, 17), Chris Phillips (OTT, 17), Harry Howell (NYR, 17), and Larry Robinson (MTL, 17).

• Tonight's game marked Doughty's 24th career game against the Panthers, breaking a tie with Dustin Brown (23GP) for sole possession of the second most meetings in franchise history, behind only Anze Kopitar (28GP).

• Goaltender Darcy Kuemper made 36 saves on 38 shots faced tonight, his highest single-game total this season and the 50th game in his career that he has recorded 36 saves or more.

The Kings will not hold a morning skate tomorrow in Tampa Bay and will return to the ice tomorrow evening at Amalie Arena against the Lightning.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 01.30.2025

1337818 Los Angeles Kings

1/29 Preview - Doughty activated from IR, to debut tonight + Helenius to ONT, Expecting A Battle

Zach Dooley For LAKingsInsider.com8-10 minutes 29/01/2025

WHO: Los Angeles Kings (26-15-6) @ Florida Panthers (23-21-5)

WHAT: 2024-25 Regular-Season Game

WHEN: Wedbesday, January 29 @ 4:00 PM Pacific

WHERE: Amerant Bank Arena – Sunrise, FL

HOW TO FOLLOW: VIDEO: FanDuel Sports Network – AUDIO – ESPN LA App – TWITTER: @dooleylak & @lakings

TONIGHT'S MATCHUP: The Kings are still in search of their first victory of the roadtrip, visiting the defending Stanley Cup Champion Florida Panthers for Game 3 this evening.

HEAD-TO-HEAD: The Kings and Panthers squared off seven days ago in Los Angeles, with the Kings taking a 2-1 victory on home ice.

Forwards Adrian Kempe and Samuel Helenius scored in that game, with Kempe scoring the game-winning goal in the third period. Forward Kevin Fiala collected the primary assist on Kempe's tally, his fifth point (1-4-5) from five games played against the Panthers as a King.

In total, the Kings have points in seven straight games versus the Panthers, winning six of those seven games.

KINGS VITALS: The Kings held a full-team morning skate today at the Panthers' practice rink, after a full-team day off on Tuesday.

Goaltender Darcy Kuemper was off the ice first today for the Kings, pointing in his direction as the starter tonight between the pipes. Kuemper, who made 27 saves on 28 shots in the 2-1 victory over Florida last week, has a lifetime mark of 4-6-1 versus the Panthers, with a .914 save percentage and a 2.76 goals-against average.

Here is how the team lined up during this morning's skate in Florida –

Turcotte – Kopitar – Kempe

Byfield – Laferriere

Moore – Danault – Foegele

Jeannot – Helenius – Thomas – Lewis

Anderson – Gavrikov

Edmundson – Spence

Moverare – Doughty

Englund – Clarke

Burroughs

Kuemper

Rittich

He's back!

Defenseman Drew Doughty will make his season debut tonight on the blueline. More on Doughty below.

Forward Kevin Fiala (illness) is a game-time decision tonight. Jim Hiller said he's not sure if the Kings will go 11/7 or 12/6 at this time, with Fiala's availability playing a role in that. To activate Doughty, the Kings assigned forward Samuel Helenius to the AHL's Ontario Reign earlier today.

Sounds like defenseman Brandt Clarke will be a scratch tonight for the first time this season with Doughty checking in.

PANTHERS VITALS: Florida has been up and down of late. They've split their last two games. They've won 5 of their last 10. They've won 9 of their last 18. 9-8-1 in total in that stretch.

Per Jameson Olive of FloridaPanthers.com, here's how the hosts lined up last time out against Vegas –

#FlaPanthers in warmups ℹ️

Tkachuk – Barkov – Reinhart

Luostarinen – Bennett – Samoskevich

Verhaeghe – Lundell – J. Boqvist

Greer – Nosek – Rodrigues

Forlsing – Ekblad

Mikkola – Kulikov

Balinskis – Schmidt

Knight ⚔️

Bobrovsky

— Jameson Olive (@JamesonCoop) January 27, 2025

Former Kings defenseman Tobias Bjornfot was in the lineup when these teams met in Los Angeles but was reassigned to AHL-Charlotte earlier this week.

Defenseman Aaron Ekblad returned to the Florida lineup on January 25 in San Jose and has skated in each of the last two games, after missing eight of the previous nine. The former first-overall draft pick had a goal and an assist in his return to action versus the Sharks.

Storyline Of The Day – DREW

Tonight's The Night!

Season debut for defenseman Drew Doughty. He'll start on a pair with Jacob Moverare and took PP1 reps today.

Kevin Fiala is a game-time decision (illness). Kings could go 12/6 or 11/7 depending on 22's availability. https://t.co/p3o7QVj87T

— Zach Dooley (@DooleyLAK) January 29, 2025

Today's the day!

Defenseman Drew Doughty will make his season debut this evening in Florida. Expecting Doughty to start his night on the third pairing, alongside Jacob Moverare, while taking back his role on the top power-play unit.

"It's been a long time, no question," Jim Hiller said this morning. "The guys have done a really good job in his absence, so we're proud of that d-core. We're optimistic. He hasn't played in a long time, so we don't want to over-play him, but we probably will, coaches tend to do that. We want to keep the expectations realistic for him, it's going to take him a little while to get back into form, but we're happy we're starting the process."

It's been a long and challenging process for Doughty. He probably felt he was ready to go in Columbus and Detroit, but with the long-term nature of his injury, there couldn't be enough caution used. Couldn't be a probably. Had to be 110 percent and right now, I think everyone feels that is the case.

Now comes the fun part and that's seeing Doughty in the game tonight. As noted, it's not going to be his usual role right off the bat. We won't see "leads the NHL in ice time" Drew Doughty tonight. That could come down the road, but it won't come tonight. The Kings have a plan to ease Doughty back into the game with a manageable role in the early stages.

"I think we have to be a little bit careful on the expectations," Hiller said. "It does add a different element now to the team, a good one in our mind, for sure, but it's different. Hopefully there's no adjustment period, but we all know there likely will be for everyone."

Doughty noted that he wasn't going to come back and play nine minutes. I don't think anyone expects that.

The expectation is that when he's back, he's back and able to go 15-20 as needed. I do think his minutes will be managed and monitored early. And, depending on how he looks, how he plays, how he feels, the Kings will manage and adjust things from there.

"I know when I get out there, I'm going to be looking over my shoulder being like I'm ready to go out for another shift," Doughty said. "That's part of the reason they want me 100 percent ready to be able to have the minutes, be able to play the way I need to play."

More from Doughty himself HERE, speaking for the first time since returning to practice. Will talk to him after the game as well, see how he plays and how he feels.

Then he's back. Might not play both games of the back-to-back this week, but we'll check in on that area tomorrow. For tonight, just good to see Doughty back in the mix.

3 To Watch For –

– Doughty's return comes at a time in the season when I think the Kings are in their most grinding stretch of hockey to date.

It happens to every team, but right now it's 20 of 24 days on the road, lots of games, lots of travel. Perhaps that's where Doughty can help on another level. He said that it is that point in the season when there is a natural lull. He's going to try his best to spark the group a bit.

"This is kind of the area of the season where guys are getting tired," he said. "We have 40 games left, and then once there are 20 games left before playoffs, you kind of get the energy back, but there's a little lull, usually, during the season. I'm going to come in and I'm going to be happy as could be, as excited as can be and bring a lot of energy to the boys."

Certainly can never accuse Doughty of not bringing energy to the team. Should come right now at a time when the Kings need it.

– The Kings are expecting another battle tonight, coming against a team they just played in a 2-1 game seven days prior.

Defenseman Joel Edmundson said he's going into tonight's game expecting the same type of contest. Forward Alex Turcotte said the same thing. A hard-fought, low-scoring game that mirrors a playoff game.

For the Kings, that's been the kind of game they're comfortable with. We know that two goals a night isn't going to cut it the rest of the season. More on the offensive issues HERE, but against a team like Florida, the intensity has to be there. The playoff mentality has to be there. That's how the Panthers play and the Kings matched that last week. Will need the same type of showing here tonight.

"I think that's the way both teams like to play," defenseman Mikey Anderson said this morning. "For as much skill they have, they're still very direct and play a bit of a grinding game too. We're expecting it should be pretty similar and a fun game to play in."

We saw that game last week and the expectation seems to be that we will see it again.

– Lastly, sharing a post from the Kings on Eisbaren Berlin player Tobias Eder.

Tobias played for the Kings-affiliated club in Germany but sadly passed away yesterday due to cancer at the age of 26. Eder was a huge part of the team's championship winning season in 2023-24 and represented Germany internationally. Really sad, man.

Kings and Panthers, 4 PM Pacific puck drop here in the Sunshine State. See if the Kings can get back on track in a tough building.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 01.30.2025

1337819 Los Angeles Kings

REIGN PREVIEW 1/29 – Ontario vs. Colorado

Jared Shafran7-8 minutes 29/01/2025

WHO: Ontario Reign (24-13-1-1) vs. Colorado Eagles (21-12-3-2)

WHAT: AHL REGULAR-SEASON GAME #40

WHEN: Wednesday, January 29 @ 7:00 PM Pacific

WHERE: Toyota Arena – Ontario, CA

HOW TO FOLLOW: VIDEO: KCAL+ / FloHockey – AUDIO: ESPN LA App / Reign Radio – TWITTER: @ShafReign & @OntarioReign

TODAY'S MATCHUP: The Ontario Reign are looking to continue their winning ways on Wednesdays and extend their recent run of success when they battle the Colorado Eagles this evening at Toyota Arena. Ontario has produced a 5-1-0 record on hump day this season, their highest points percentage on any single day of the week.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR: Three straight victories last week has Ontario holding second place in the Pacific Division standings with 50 points, while Colorado has hold of fifth with 47 points to its name. Anytime the Reign have scored first this year, they've had the upper hand, posting a 12-1-0-1 mark in the 14 games where they've taken an initial lead. Colorado is 17-5-2-1 from the 25 games this season where they've netted the opening goal. The two teams have very similar offensive outputs this year, with Colorado ranking fourth in the league with 129 goals in 38 games (3.39), while Ontario is sixth with 132 tallies in 39 outings (3.38). The Reign also average the third-most shots on goal per contest in the league (32.2), while the Eagles are seventh in the AHL on the defensive side of the puck, allowing just 2.74 goals per night.

LAST TIME OUT: Pheonix Copley turned out all 27 shots that came his way on Saturday night to lead the Ontario Reign to a 3-0 win over the Coachella Valley Firebirds at Toyota Arena. The victory gave Ontario a season series split with the Firebirds from eight games this year, with each team claiming four contests, and moved the Reign into sole possession of second place in the Pacific Division standings with 50 points.

HEAD-TO-HEAD: Each club came away with one win from the two previous meetings between Ontario and Colorado which took place on consecutive days Blue Arena in Loveland Nov. 15-16. The Reign won the first contest 5-3 before dropping the second battle by a 6-4 score the following night. Glenn Gawdin and Reilly Walsh both had two goals and an assist in the series, while Jeff Malott earned three assists for Ontario. TJ Tynan led the Eagles with three helpers in the two games. The Reign won just three games against the Eagles a year ago during the clubs' eight-game series, finishing with a 3-5-0 record including a 1-3-0 mark in Colorado. The Eagles outscored Ontario 36-30 in the series and held a slight shots-on-net advantage (245-242). Both sides scored eight times against the other on the man-advantage in the eight contests, with the Reign going 8-for-34 (23.5%) and Colorado finishing 8-for-30 (26.6%). Former Eagles forward Charles Hudon was one of Ontario's top scorers against Colorado last season, scoring eight points on five goals and three assists.

WINNING WITH WARD: Reign forward Taylor Ward moved the needle on the offensive end last week for the Reign, posting four points from his last four games while helping the club to a three-game winning streak. Ward scored a goal and an assist last Sunday in an overtime loss to Calgary before finding the back of the net two days later in a 6-1 win over the Wranglers. Most recently he netted his third goal from the last four outings and sixth tally of the year Saturday night during a 3-0 victory over Coachella Valley. The Kelowna, B.C. native has 14 points overall this season along with a plus-9 rating while playing in 35 contests. He is seven games away from his 200th career professional contest, all of which have come with Ontario, the seventh-most in team AHL history.

SCOUTING THE EAGLES: Forward Matthew Phillips is at the top of the team's scoring leaderboard this season with 30 points in 35 games on eight goals and 22 assists. Veteran forward Jayson Megna has also made a big impact with 28 points on 11 goals and 17 assists, while former Reign captain TJ Tynan has 26 points in 29 games on six goals and 20 helpers. Defender Jacob MacDonald leads the blueliners with 26 points from the back end on an even 13 goals and 13 assists through 35 games. Blueliner Wyatt Aamodt has just eight points in 37 games on a goal and seven assists but has managed to rack up a league-high plus-30 rating, which is +9 ahead of No. 2 on the list, Calgary's Yan Kuznetsov. In goal, Trent Minor has an impressive 2.51 goals-against average from 18 appearances, while Kevin Mandolese holds a team-best 0.910 save percentage in 12 contests and Adam Scheel has a 6-1-0 record in seven starts.

MILLAR MAKES IT HAPPEN: Rookie defenseman Jack Millar has been a bright spot for the team on the blueline this season, appearing in 34 of the club's 39 games and recording a team-high plus-19 rating. That number is third-highest among all AHL skaters and the right-shot defender has played in less games than anyone above him on the list. Millar has been in Ontario's lineup in each of the team's last 28 games dating back to Nov. 15 after starting the campaign by appearing in just six of the first 11 contests. Most recently, the native of Westminster, Colorado has earned assists in three straight games, all wins for Ontario, while totaling a combined rating of plus-5 in the victories. Millar signed with Ontario after finishing his collegiate career at Colorado College where he appeared in 134 games over four seasons and made his AHL debut on Apr. 21 of last season in his home state against the Eagles in Loveland.

SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST: The third period has been Ontario's best frame this season. The Reign have outscored opponents a combined 49-28 in the final period this year, netting more goals from the final frame than their totals from the first (36) and the second (42). They've backed up that year-long success in their latest four outings against Coachella Valley, Bakersfield and Calgary. First, they erased a 4-3 deficit with the lone goal of the frame last Sunday to force overtime while holding a 13-4 shot-on-goal advantage, then held the Wranglers quiet two nights later with just five shots allowed. On Friday, Ontario out-shot the Condors 12-8 in the third and Tyler Madden scored the only goal to force overtime in an eventual shootout win, while Saturday's shutout victory over the Firebirds featured just seven shots on goal for the visitors.

Reign Check Gameday Forecast

2024-25 Head-to-Head Schedule vs. Colorado:

Fri., Nov. 15 at Colorado, 5-3 W – Full Recap

Sat., Nov. 16 at Colorado, 4-6 L – Full Recap

Wed., Jan. 29 vs. Colorado, 7 p.m.

Fri., Feb. 28 at Colorado, 6:05 p.m.

Sat., Mar. 1 at Colorado, 6:05 p.m.

Sat., Mar. 29 vs. Colorado, 6 p.m.

Sun., Mar. 30 vs. Colorado, 3 p.m.

Wed., Apr. 16 vs. Colorado, 7 p.m.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 30, 2025

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 01.30.2025

1337913 Winnipeg Jets

Season-long success proves Jets are a legitimate contender

Ken Wiebe8-11 minutes 30/01/2025

BOSTON — They're not quite ready to present their case, but the evidence is mounting for the Winnipeg Jets.

When it comes to assessing things with 30 games left in the regular season, it's becoming easier to identify why this edition has staying power as a legitimate contender.

As the Jets prepare to face the Boston Bruins on Thursday at TD Garden, they sport a record of 35-14-3, which leaves them tied with the Washington Capitals for top spot in the NHL.

Gabriel Vilardi (right) already has 22 goals this season.

Since the Capitals hold two games in hand, they hold the edge in the chase for the Presidents' Trophy by virtue of points percentage, but there's plenty of time for that to be resolved.

Besides, the Jets are more interested in raising a different banner than the one awarded for regular-season success.

There will be ample time to figure if the Jets can exorcise their playoff demons, so let's take a closer look at how Winnipeg has become one of the teams to beat in the West.

By virtue of a historic 15-1 start, the Jets put themselves in position to enjoy breathing room that is extremely rare.

Things were clicking on all cylinders and expectations were on the rise.

The combination of coming back to earth and letting the standard slip — even if ever so slightly — left the Jets with a 3-7 record during those next 10 outings.

Cause for concern?

Not exactly, but the caution flag was up and it was up to the Jets to get back to doing what they do best.

There was always going to be a course correction coming, the key for the Jets was to see if they could push through the most difficult portion of the schedule and come out of that in relatively good shape.

Any concern a swoon was on the horizon or if the league had figured out how to neutralize the Jets attack has been quieted by a stretch of 17-6-3 since Dec. 4.

Rocking a winning percentage of .711 is tough to do, especially when the games are being more closely-contested.

That leaves the Jets with a .702 winning percentage for the campaign, a number that is only eclipsed by the Capitals (.730), who will be the Jets opponent on Saturday as this road trip concludes.

The level rises once the calendar flips and more will be required when March arrives.

David Zalubowski / The Associated Press files

Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck is having another Vezina Trophy-worthy season and should get consideration for the Hart Trophy as well.

David Zalubowski / The Associated Press files

Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck is having another Vezina Trophy-worthy season and should get consideration for the Hart Trophy as well.

However, there are plenty of reasons to believe the Jets should keep themselves in the mix, first and foremost, to sit atop the Central Division — where they currently hold an eight-point cushion over the Dallas Stars (who hold two games in hand but just lost top blue-liner Miro Heiskanen to a knee injury).

The willingness to commit to the structure is at the foundation of the Jets' success and that is in lockstep with the brilliance of goalie Connor Hellebuyck.

The combination of those things has the Jets sitting fourth in goals against so far.

Hellebuyck continues to make a case for Hart Trophy consideration, as the sheer numbers (40 starts, 31 wins, a 2.00 goals-against average and six shutouts) continue to leave many observers simply shaking their heads.

In 15 of those 40 starts, Hellebuyck has allowed zero or one goal against, in 11 others, he's given up two.

The Jets have one of the most prolific top lines in the NHL — with only Leon Draisaitl having more goals this season than Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele (29) — and Gabe Vilardi on pace to shatter his career-best (23) with 22 already notched.

Winnipeg has the top-ranked power play in the NHL, with an efficiency rating of 32.6 per cent, and that weapon has come in handy on numerous occasions this season.

Thanks to a recent surge, the Jets have moved back to the middle of the pack on the penalty kill (79.1 per cent), tied for 16th overall with the Florida Panthers.

Nikolaj Ehlers is having a tremendous season, averaging more than a point per game (45 in 43 games) and Josh Morrissey has himself firmly in the discussion for the Norris Trophy.

The Jets have shown their resourcefulness in playing without defenceman Dylan Samberg (for 23 games) and Ehlers (nine games) and have put together a four-game winning streak with captain Adam Lowry on the shelf and expected to remain there until after the 4 Nations Face-Off next month.

The Jets lead the league in goals with 184, which also means the supporting cast has been doing its part to chip in.

Once again, the numbers back that up as the Jets have three guys north of 20 goals and seven already in double digits, with Vladislav Namestnikov knocking on the door with nine.

Ethan Cairns / THE CANADIAN PRESS FILES

Jets' defenceman Dylan Samberg's value lies in his ability to excel in top-four minutes.

Ethan Cairns / THE CANADIAN PRESS FILES

Jets' defenceman Dylan Samberg's value lies in his ability to excel in top-four minutes.

According to NHL Edge stats, the Jets shooting percentage (12.5 per cent) is a full two points above the league average, and they've done an excellent job of burying high-danger chances, scoring 91 of their goals from the spot that is most dangerous on the ice.

Samberg's value has been evident all season long, with his ability to move up and excel in top-four minutes — and also during his extended absence with a broken foot.

He's a key cog on the penalty kill and his D-partner from his hometown of Hermantown, Minn., Neal Pionk, is having a great season beside him.

Dylan DeMelo remains a steadying force for Morrissey and has chipped in four assists during the past five games to get into an offensive groove.

The heaviest of the lifting is yet to come and there are certainly areas that require further improvement, as the search for cohesion on the second line and the competition for playing time on the third defensive pair is a work in progress.

The expectation is that Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff is going to provide some additional reinforcements via trade before the March 7 deadline arrives, which means there will be an adaptation of roles and new bodies to integrate into a winning formula.

Until that occurs, the Jets figure to keep striving to be better as they attack what is on the horizon.

“We’ll see what happens in April once we get there,” Jets head coach Scott Arniel said Tuesday morning. “This is all about building a brand and building a way we want to play consistently, so that when we know we hit those playoffs, we know what’s going to help us have success.”

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 01.30.2025

1337914 Winnipeg Jets

Jets put Barron on injured reserve

Ken Wiebe4-5 minutes 30/01/2025

BOSTON — Morgan Barron is the latest Winnipeg Jets player to be bitten by the injury bug.

The Winnipeg Jets forward was placed on injured reserve on Wednesday, according to Puck Pedia.

That would leave the Jets with only 12 healthy forwards, so it probably wasn’t a coincidence Parker Ford was scratched from the Manitoba Moose on Wednesday night.

An official recall of a forward isn’t expected until Thursday morning, since the Jets had already recalled Brad Lambert for the three-game road trip.

Ford, 24, is an energetic winger who was signed by the Jets to a two-year, entry-level contract in March of 2023 after finishing his four-year career with the Providence College Friars of the NCAA.

Ford, who was the co-captain of the Friars during his senior season, turned heads at his first NHL training camp in the fall of 2023 and was one of the last forwards cut by the Jets.

He has seven goals in his past nine American Hockey League games and is up to 11 goals and 17 points in 36 games this season.

Although he was recalled by the Jets for the final game of the 2023-24 campaign, Ford has yet to make his NHL debut and as someone who hails from Rhode Island, having an opportunity to suit up against the Boston Bruins on Thursday would certainly have special meaning for him and his family.

Ford, who shoots right-handed, had 18 goals and 41 points in 72 AHL games as a rookie pro last season.

The timing of the undisclosed injury is unfortunate for Barron, who was playing some of his best hockey of the season.

Barron, who played his college hockey at Cornell, has five goals and eight points in 52 games this season and is doing a solid job on both the fourth line and the penalty kill.

The Jets are already without captain Adam Lowry, who has missed the past four games with an upper-body injury and isn’t expected to return to the lineup until after the 4 Nations Face-Off in late February.

ken.wiebe@freepress.mb.ca

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 01.30.2025

1337915 Winnipeg Jets

JETS NOTES: No power, no problem, coming off a season first as they head into Boston

Paul Friesen

Some say what separates the Winnipeg Jets from most of the other good teams in the NHL is their power play.

Loading...

It was clicking at a historic, 33.3 percent clip going into their current road trip, a big part of why the Jets sit on top of the NHL’s Western Conference.

Tuesday in Montreal, that power play misfired like it hadn’t in two months, going 0-for-3.

Only three other times all season have the Jets had at least that many power plays and failed to make the other team pay: Nov. 29 in Vegas (0-for-3), six days earlier in Nashville (0-for-3) and Nov. 14 in Tampa (0-for-5).

The Jets lost all three of those games.

So Tuesday was a season first, as they beat the Habs, 4-1.

It’s just the latest chapter of a lesson the Jets have been learning of late: they can’t always count on their power play to bail them out.

The last couple of weeks it’s usually been because they hardly get any.

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On Tuesday they had three more than their opponent, just the second time all season Winnipeg hasn’t been shorthanded even once.

Those things tend to be more even in the playoffs, when in general the refs let a little more go.

After the win in Montreal head coach Scott Arniel wasn’t even asked about his team’s play with the extra man. It’s been so dependable, he probably won’t lose a wink of sleep over it going into Thursday’s game in Boston.

Barron joins injured list

It seems the injuries that finally stopped depleting the Jets blue line have taken another forward.

Morgan Barron has joined captain Adam Lowry on injured reserve, taking him out of the lineup for Thursday’s game in Boston.

The fourth-liner recorded 12:10 of ice time on 15 shifts in Tuesday’s 4-1 win in Montreal. He’s played all 52 games this season, registering five goals and three assists, with an average 10:27 of ice time.

Lowry remains on the shelf for a fourth straight game.

The Jets could insert prospect Brad Lambert against the Bruins, as he was a healthy scratch in Montreal, or call up another player from their AHL farm team and dress him.

They’ll likely call one up as insurance even if they don’t immediately play him.

Picking nits

His team may have won its fourth straight, but, coaches being coaches, there were things in Tuesday’s game for Arniel to pick nits off of.

Leaving goalie Connor Hellebuyck out to dry a few too many times while nursing a 3-1 lead in the third period, for instance.

“Yeah, we don’t ever want to do that,” Arniel said, post-game. “We didn’t want to put him in a position where he’s sitting point-blank on a breakaway, with a few from dead-centre, right in the middle of the ice. Those are really us taking our foot of the gas and not doing what we should have been doing.”

Hellebuyck didn’t buckle and the Jets slipped out of town with the two points.

Their slow start also stuck in the coach’s craw.

“We just had to make sure that we got to Jet hockey sooner than later,” he said. “We finally did.”

The Jets next face a Boston team coming off a 7-2 embarrassment at the hands of lowly Buffalo.

The stiffest test of this trip, though, comes in Washington two nights later, a clash of the top teams in each conference, both with 73 points – the Capitals accumulating them in two fewer games than the Jets have.

Long memories

I'll admit, at first I wasn't sure why Montreal fans were booing Mark Scheifele every time he got within sniffing distance of the puck on Tuesday.

Then I remembered: Scheifele's dirty playoff hit from FOUR YEARS AGO. It has to be the only NHL barn where No. 55 gets that kind of reception.

Turns out he got a kick out of it.

"Once in a while if there's no pressure on you, you hear it a little bit and you laugh a little bit," he said.

I guess feelings die hard in Montreal. Tuesday marked Scheifele's third visit since the incident.

Big, bad Bruin

The last time the Jets squared off with the Bruins, they delivered an 8-1 beat-down in Winnipeg back in December, the game in which Boston's Trent Frederic knocked Jets forward David Gustafsson out cold.

If the Jets have held onto that grudge, and with captain Adam Lowry out with an injury, the most likely person to cozy up to Frederic is defenceman Logan Stanley.

Emotions aside, Winnipeg is the clear favourite in this one.

The Bruins (25-21-6) are one of the lower scoring teams in the league, with bad special teams – a power play ranked 30th, penalty kill 25th – and a goal differential of minus-25, better only than Pittsburgh in the conference.

They should get a boost on the blue line with the expected return of defenceman Charlie McAvoy on Thursday.

Boston went 5-2-1 without their top D-man, but Tuesday's flop in Buffalo was just the latest example of a team that's been up and down all year, already costing one head coach (Jim Montgomery) his job.

They might be tied for third in their division, but they don't exactly have a tight grip on a playoff berth and could easily be outside of the wildcard spots in the East if they don't pick it up.

Dressed to the nines

A win over the Bruins would continue the Jets streak of nine wins every month this season.

Their record by month so far: 9-1 in October, 9-5 in November, 9-5-1 in December, 8-3-2 in January.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 01.30.2025

1337925 Websites

The Athletic / 'Are we live?' Chirps, laughs, old stories and Bruins legends star in NESN's alt-cast

By Fluto Shinzawa

WATERTOWN, Mass. — The four-page script for the Jan. 23 episode of NESN's "Unobstructed Views" says nothing about bashing David Krejci, one of that night's guests. That changes when host Andrew Raycroft, approximately an hour before the show starts, poses a question to colleagues and fellow ex-Boston Bruins Patrice Bergeron and Tuukka Rask inside the green room at NESN's Watertown studio.

"Have you seen Krech's commercial?"

In the spot — for Bluedrop Water, a water purification company in Easton — Krejci places a glass under an ice maker. The retired center, wearing a Bluedrop polo, raises the glass, looks at the camera and says dramatically, "That's some good ice."

Rask, Bergeron and Raycroft giggle as they watch the commercial. Raycroft proposes a pivot. During the second period of that night's Bruins-Ottawa Senators game, when Krejci joins the show remotely from his South Carolina home, his ex-teammates should ambush him with a clip and light him up.

"He's thinking he's just going to come in and have a nice, easy conversation," Rask says with a laugh. "And we're just going to hammer him right off the bat."

About 10 minutes into their chat, Raycroft mentions Krejci's acting career. Raycroft, Bergeron and Rask laugh. So does Krejci. Rask asks Krejci if he can install the system at his house. The chop-busting continues. Krejci good-naturedly repeats his four-word line.

Krejci, as his ex-teammates know best, gives as well as he takes. Rask asks Krejci if he knows he had good career production against the Senators.

"I had pretty good numbers against everyone, Tuukks," Krejci says with a smile, which triggers a round of laughter.

Krejci has a question of his own. He seems legitimately puzzled when he issues his query.

"So what do you guys do?" Krejci asks. "You guys just watch and do play-by-play?"

Alternative facts

"Unobstructed Views" runs once a month. It is NESN's version of the "ManningCast," ESPN's alternative broadcast of "Monday Night Football" featuring Eli and Peyton Manning.

Play-by-play announcer Judd Sirott and analyst Andy Brickley call the traditional version of a Bruins game on NESN. Simultaneously, in a broadcast airing on NESN Plus and NESN 360, Bergeron, Rask and Raycroft, wearing casual clothes, watch the same game off a monitor in Watertown and chat in a breezy manner. Occasionally, Raycroft turns to host Laura Stickells, whose duties include monitoring social media, to ask questions viewers have submitted.

For someone watching "Unobstructed Views," the game action occupies most of the screen. Instead of Sirott's and Brickley's audio, you hear Bergeron, Rask and Raycroft — they appear in iso-shots or a three-shot on the right side of the screen — speak during the game.

The show includes scripted segments. Before the game, Bergeron, Rask and Raycroft approach a whiteboard and predict their three stars. They are to place a magnet of their choice's face on the board. There is no magnet for Joonas Korpisalo, Rask's pick. Rask draws a stick figure and labels it "Korpi."

Tuukka Rask had to do his own illustrating for his player of the game. (Fluto Shinzawa / The Athletic)

Later, Stickells asks Bergeron to rank five Canadian players in order of greatness. Bergeron sticks Sidney Crosby, the first player Stickells mentions, in fourth place. Mario Lemieux gets top status.

But for the most part, it's Bergeron, Rask and Raycroft watching the game, offering their thoughts and stretching out their conversation.

"It's like sitting at a bar," says NESN chief operating officer Matt Volk, "listening to people have a conversation that you wish you could be a part of."

"Unobstructed Views" is meant to drive revenue. Coors Banquet and Jordan's Furniture sponsor the show.

It is also a marketing machine designed to promote the primary broadcast as well as other ventures. In the third period, NESN reporter Jahmai Webster and Golf Magazine director of social media Claire Rogers join the show to discuss TGL, the new golf league. Fenway Sports Group, NESN's parent company, owns Boston Common Golf, one of TGL's six teams.

The alt-cast allows NESN to serve a different audience, typically a younger one. A complementary channel like NESN Plus allows the provider to showcase ex-players' personalities and expand a traditional broadcast's boundaries. The alt-cast is better suited for storytelling, free of the pressure of describing what's happening in-game.

For example, Raycroft sees a first-period shot of Trent Frederic, in uniform against Ottawa after missing two previous games because of an illness. Raycroft asks Bergeron and Rask if they ever played sick. It tees up Rask to tell the story of how he was too sick to play in the Bruins' final 2015-16 regular-season game, also against the Senators. With Jonas Gustavsson in net, the Bruins lost 6-1 and missed the playoffs.

"It's a little bit less about what's going on on the ice in that very moment — not in a play-by-play way," Volk says. "Which opens up a different type of conversation that can appeal to many different audiences."

Rask describes how he was throwing up that day. But he leaves out the story's other layers.

Rask was so drained that when he skated out for warmups, he did not take a single shot. Earlier that week, he had been spotted at Duff's, one of his go-to neighborhood restaurants. Online and on sports radio, this exploded into how Rask had been pounding chicken wings and beer the night before the game.

Rask recalls all of this in the green room during first intermission. Sometimes the best stories don't get on the air.

Many of the best stories don't make it on the air for the Bruins' alt-cast. (Fluto Shinzawa / The Athletic)

Chirps all around

Rask is not above accepting abuse. In the green room, as the ex-Bruins joke about Krejci's commercial, Rask acknowledges he was in one too.

In a spot for The Long Drink, a Finnish alcoholic beverage, a shirtless Rask is sitting in a fake sauna. A woman lashes Rask's back with a bouquet of leaves. As she does, Rask turns to the camera and says, "Oh, so refreshing!"

Bergeron and Raycroft watch the commercial on a computer in disbelief.

"How bad is that?" Rask asks with a laugh.

This prompts Bergeron and Raycroft to recall their commercial in which they drive a Zamboni over the Zakim Bridge. The way Bergeron and Raycroft remember it, Joe Thornton and Nick Boynton were originally requested.

"It's because Joe wouldn't wake up to do it," Raycroft says of why he and Bergeron were selected. "We were the only ones. We were the young kids."

"They pitched it to Joe and Boynts," Bergeron concurs. "They're like, 'Hahahaha! Bergy and Razor will do it.'"

Bergeron was 18 when the commercial first aired. Raycroft was 23. For the ex-goalie, a future television career was not even a consideration.

"Not in a million years. Not at all," says Raycroft, now a regular NESN analyst, radio and TV guest and podcaster. "This was the last thing I thought I would ever do."

Raycroft is now 44. Bergeron is 39. Rask is 37. As the NESN pregame show mentions Jake Sanderson, Ottawa's 22-year-old defenseman, Rask wonders where time has gone.

"I'm like two years away from not knowing any of these guys," Rask says.

"You're also two years away from them not knowing who you are," Bergeron fires back, prompting laughter all around.

"How old do you think (Alex) Ovechkin feels?" Rask then asks of the 39-year-old chasing Wayne Gretzky's goal-scoring mark. "If he gets the (record) this year, he's done. I wouldn't be surprised if he gets it next year, he's going to retire after that game."

"That would be awesome," Raycroft answers. "That would be perfect for Ovi. He's got to be going so hard to get it done so he doesn't have to train all summer."

"I think if he needs one or two, he's not even going to work out," Rask says. "Power play, he's just going to stand there and hammer one-timers until he gets it."

This is the kind of chatter "Unobstructed Views" watchers enjoy, according to NESN feedback. But they also want Bergeron, Rask and Raycroft to discuss the game they're watching. The latter is harder than it seems.

Bergeron retired in 2023. Rask said goodbye the year earlier. They still have former teammates in uniform. Rask is also a team ambassador. Neither is comfortable with critique, which the scuffling Bruins deserve.

"We still have some really good friends on the team," Bergeron says. "You want them to do well. That's the main thing. You hope for a good game. You want them to perform and hopefully get that win."

As Bergeron, Rask and Raycroft watch that night's game, their conversation feels stretched at times. They are not going to rip apart their ex-teammates. They occasionally go quiet as they follow the on-ice action.

Krejci's second-period visit brings them to life.

Among other things, they discuss their performance in a December alumni game in which Krejci scored six first-period points. Krejci eased off afterward because of pain in his hips.

"We had to stand on the blue lines. Nobody told me. That was like 30 minutes long, all those guys getting introduced," Krejci recalls of warmups, which he claims initiated his hip discomfort. "'Bergy, 17-time Selke. Blah, blah, blah.' Fifteen minutes was just about Bergy. Then my hips were done."

Like his ex-teammates, Krejci is not comfortable commenting on this year's team. They ask him what he thinks. Krejci pauses, smiles, laughs awkwardly and says, "Are we live?"

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The Athletic / How rare is it for No. 1 picks like Taylor Hall to play for this many teams?

By Sean McIndoe

Friday night's Mikko Rantanen blockbuster was such a monster trade that the inclusion of a Hart Trophy winner felt like a footnote. But there was Taylor Hall, heading to Carolina and his seventh NHL team.

That led to what I thought was an interesting question from a reader:

What's the record for most teams played for by a first-overall pick? Hall's gotta be getting close if he doesn't already have it, that's seven teams now

— Jay (@JRTW1206) January 25, 2025

Spoiler alert: Hall isn't in a league of his own… at least, not yet. And you might be surprised how many No. 1 picks ended up building resumes worthy of a journeyman.

Let's go back to the start of the entry draft era in 1979 and see how many top picks can compete with Hall's growing jersey collection.

Zero stops

We'll start our journey with a question: Has anyone ever been the first pick in the entry draft without ever making it to the NHL at all?

The short answer is no. The longer answer is that it did happen three times in the first five years of the amateur draft, which is what the league had from 1963 to 1978. Back then, players who'd already signed with teams weren't eligible, so the pool was much thinner, and top picks Claude Gauthier (1964), Andre Veilleux (1965) and Rick Pagnutti (1967) never made the big leagues.

But in the entry draft era? It's never happened, and short of some career-ending injury, it's hard to imagine that it ever could.

One stop

This is the outcome you're picturing when you imagine a first pick – the guy who becomes a lifer, retiring without ever playing with any other

team. And as you'd expect, there are plenty of players in this category, including every pick dating back to 2013 plus other active players like Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin.

Obviously, any of those guys could theoretically play elsewhere before their career ends, so maybe you don't want to count them quite yet. That brings us to the list of retired first picks who only played for one team, and it's a smaller list than you might expect, not to mention a bit of a weird one.

The first name is the one you're already thinking of: Mario Lemieux. But that's it for the Hall of Famers, at least for now. One of the other three names is Ottawa's Chris Phillips, which you might have known if you paid attention to this post a few weeks back. Boston's Gord Kluzak had his career shortened by injury, but only ever played for the Bruins. And the only other name on the list is one that's often called a bust: Rick DiPietro, who spent all 11 of his NHL seasons with the Islanders (and remains on their payroll to this day).

That's it. Only four retired No. 1 picks spent their entire career with one team. So how many made just one other stop?

Two stops

The one-stop group was a short list, once we ruled out the active players. Believe it or not, this one is even shorter.

There are two active first picks who are on their second stop: John Tavares and Steven Stamkos. Among players who are retired, we find only two more names, and they cover both ends of the career success spectrum.

One of them is Mike Modano, who spent 20 seasons with the Minnesota North Stars and Dallas Stars, who for our purposes count as the same team. After that, he spent one year in Detroit, where he played for his good pal Mike Babcock. That wasn't exactly a storybook ending, but it didn't stop Modano from going into the Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility.

It's fair to say that Modano won't be joined in the Hall by our only other two-team pick. That would be Patrik Stefan, the 1999 top pick whose career lasted just seven seasons thanks to injuries and a lack of production. He spent the first six of those with the Atlanta Thrashers before spending one last year, somewhat ironically, in Modano's old stomping grounds in Dallas. Hey, at least that season gave us Stefan's most memorable NHL moment.

Just a few entries in, and I've already learned that first picks don't stick with their teams anywhere near as much as I would have assumed. Let's see how many three-timers we can find.

Three stops

The answer: Six, including one guy who's still active. Feel free to take a moment to see if you can figure out who they are.

We'll start with the active player, who's probably our easiest call. That would be Patrick Kane, who's gone from the Blackhawks to the Rangers to the Red Wings. It's possible that his tour of the Original Six might continue at some point down the line, but for now he's in some decent company.

There are two more names I'm betting most of you will get: Mats Sundin (Nordiques, Leafs and Canucks) and Rick Nash (Blue Jackets, Rangers and Bruins). Vincent Lecavalier is a bit trickier, going from the Lightning to the Flyers to a forgettable half-season with the Kings. And there's also Ed Jovanovski, who had stops with the Canucks and Coyotes in between beginning and ending his career with the Panthers.

There's one more player to go in this category, and we're back to the list of notable draft busts to find him. That would be Nail Yakupov, whose six-season NHL career was the shortest of any first pick in the entry draft era. He spent four of those in Edmonton before moving on to single seasons with the Avalanche and Blues.

Fun fact: If you let Yakupov combine his entire career total of 62 goals into one season, he'd still rank behind the best years of fellow No. 1 picks Mario Lemieux, Auston Matthews, Connor McDavid and Ovechkin. He'd have Stamkos beat by two goals, though.

Four stops

You'd think we'd start hitting some diminishing returns here, but nope – there are five more first picks in the four-team club, two of whom are still active.

The good news is that we're going to run at an 80 percent success rate for getting these guys into the Hall of Fame. Three are already there, with Joe Thornton (Bruins, Sharks, Leafs, Panthers), Eric Lindros (Flyers, Rangers, Leafs, Stars) and Dale Hawerchuk (Jets, Sabres, Blues, Flyers) sitting among the all-time greats. Marc-Andre Fleury is a near-lock to join them three years after he retires, and he's gone from the Penguins to the Knights to the Blackhawks to the Wild.

Our last name in this group may not be done moving around. Erik Johnson was the first pick in 2006 by the Blues. He also had stops in Colorado and Buffalo before his current stint in Philadelphia. He's not playing much for the Flyers these days and will be a UFA at the end of the year, so maybe he sets his sights on five-teamer status.

Five stops

Only two names here. Some of you might come up with Ilya Kovalchuk, who went from Atlanta to New Jersey in his first NHL stint and then covered off the Kings, Canadiens and Capitals in his brief comeback years later.

I'll be more impressed if you had Doug Wickenheiser. He was the Canadiens' somewhat infamous pick in 1980, when they passed over a Quebec kid named Denis Savard. He lasted parts of four years in Montreal before heading on to stops with the Blues, Canucks, Rangers and Capitals. (He was also very briefly Hartford Whalers property during the 1987 waiver draft, but we're not counting that as he never actually played for them.)

So after seeing a somewhat surprising number of names show up among the three and four-team groups, we're down to just two here. Surely that means we don't have many names left, he said, ironically foreshadowing the next group.

Six stops

Six different teams for one player seems like a lot. For someone who was once so highly regarded that they went No. 1, it seems like too much. But this isn't going to be a short list.

Let's start with a Hall of Famer. Pierre Turgeon started with the Sabres, then went to the Islanders, Canadiens, Blues, Stars and Avalanche. Even weirder, at least to me, is that he played more games in St. Louis than anywhere else, even though I barely remember him there.

But OK, that's one guy. Let's stay in the 1980s to find a few more. We can start with Brian Lawton, the first pick in 1983 who managed to pack six different stops into a career that only lasted nine seasons. The last of those was the Sharks, who traded him to his seventh team, the Devils, in 1993 but he never played there. There's also Wendel Clark, who's listed as playing for six teams on Hockey Reference even though we all know he was only ever a Maple Leaf.

(A bit of side trivia: The trade that sent Clark from Toronto to Quebec for Sundin was the only time in NHL history that two first picks have been traded for each other. It was also the first time it had happened in major North American pro sports history, although it's since happened in the NBA and in the NFL.)

Moving onto the 1990s, we start with Owen Nolan, who went first in 1990 and spent 14 seasons in Quebec and San Jose before bouncing around Toronto, Phoenix, Calgary and Minnesota. Alexandre Daigle's NHL career lasted only 10 seasons, but he had enough time for stops in Ottawa, Philadelphia, Tampa, New York (Rangers), Pittsburgh and Minnesota. And there's another Senators first pick, Bryan Berard. He never played for Ottawa, but managed stops with the Islanders, Leafs, Rangers, Bruins, Blackhawks and Blue Jackets and then back to the Islanders, all in just 619 games over an injury-shortened career.

Add it up, and that's six players who were No. 1 picks and then played for six different teams. If we take out the active players, that means that six teams is our magic number – there are more first picks who played for six teams than any other number. A top pick playing for a half-dozen teams by the end of his career is more common than him playing for only one or two. That's… weird, right? I think it's very weird.

And we know it's not even the record because we still haven't got to our old pal Taylor Hall.

Seven stops

We know Hall slots in here. The question is whether anyone joins him. And yes, a pair of guys do.

The first is Joe Murphy, who became the first college player to go first when he was taken by Detroit in 1986. He went from the Wings to the Oilers in a 1989 blockbuster before further stops in Chicago, St. Louis, San Jose, Boston and Washington spelled the end of a troubled career. And there's also Roman Hamrlik, the top pick in 1992 who spent 20 years in the NHL while playing for the Lightning, Oilers, Islanders, Flames, Canadiens, Capitals and Rangers.

So no, Hall isn't the only first pick to ever play for seven different teams. And he doesn't hold the record because we still have one name left…

Eight stops

I'll pause here while you rack your brain to see if you can come up with the name. But it's a tough one, and you have to go way back.

The 1979 draft is often referred to as one of the best ever, partly because the age of eligibility was lowered by a year to create a double-cohort. Mike Gartner and Ray Bourque were top-10 picks, with fellow Hall of Famers Michel Goulet and Kevin Lowe going later in the first round. Mark Messier was picked in the second, and other stars who heard their name called that day include Glenn Anderson, Dale Hunter, Guy Carbonneau and Pelle Lindbergh, among many others.

But none of them went first. That honor belonged to London Knights defenseman Rob Ramage. He went to the Colorado Rockies, where he lasted three years before being dealt to the Blues. His most famous transaction came at the 1988 deadline, when St. Louis sent him to Calgary in the deal that landed them Brett Hull. Ramage won a Cup with the Flames, then went to Toronto where he became captain. From there it was on to Minnesota, Tampa, Montreal and finally Philadelphia.

Add it up, and that's eight teams – the record for most teams played for by a first pick. For now, at least, because at 33 years old and with plenty of apparent road ahead of him, Hall seems like a good bet to catch Ramage as soon as this summer. From there, who knows. Could double-digits be in play? We can't rule it out.

I'll leave you with some numbers. There have been 46 players taken No. 1 in the NHL entry draft, and by my math they've combined to play for 141 teams, an average of just over three each. But that's counting active players, including guys like Macklin Celebrini and Juraj Slafkovský whose careers have barely started. If we only look at players whose careers are over, that gives us 26 players who had stops with 108 teams, an average of 4.15 stops per player. And as we noted, the most common number of teams that shows up is six.

That's way higher than I would have expected, and it means that Hall's vagabond career path isn't as much of an outlier as you might assume. And it also means your dream of seeing Connor Bedard wind up on your favorite team isn't quite as far-fetched and you might think. (Just don't get too attached — he may not stay long.)

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The Athletic / NHL rumblings: Will the Mikko Rantanen trade trigger an East arms race?

By Pierre LeBrun

The question was a rather simple one.

I reached out Tuesday to general managers for the other top Eastern Conference teams and asked them if Carolina's blockbuster trade would have a tangible impact on how they approach the March 7 trade deadline.

"I don't think so, I don't believe it does," replied Toronto Maple Leafs GM Brad Treliving.

"It doesn't really change anything for us," Chris Patrick, GM of the first-place Washington Capitals, said. "We will follow the same process we always do at this time of year, and if there are opportunities to improve our team, we will pursue them."

It was a quick "No" from Tampa Bay Lightning GM Julien BriseBois.

"For us, it doesn't change anything," Tom Fitzgerald, president of hockey operations and GM of the New Jersey Devils, said. "We go through a process on evaluating our team and identify the areas where we want to improve. We want to be intentional on adding the right piece or pieces while being cognizant of the cost and our future."

The defending Stanley Cup champions aren't going to deviate from their plan, either.

"We've spent the entire season on it: You look at your assets, you look at your standings, you look at your projections, you have your plan, and my plan is to put together the best possible team we can," Bill Zito, president of hockey operations and GM of the Florida Panthers, told The Athletic. "I can't get a better team now than I could a week ago, right?

"So, I just don't think keeping up with the Joneses is part of the equation for teams. We'll always do our best to get any players and pursue any situation that's going to give us the best chance to win. But I don't think it changes because everyone else is doing it. It's the same."

That's a pretty unanimous reaction.

A team can't let what another one does affect its game plan for the trade deadline. Knee-jerk reaction trades are dangerous. I've had some GMs over the years admit to me a certain trade was just that. And they regretted it later.

The reality is that all of those top teams, most of which have had their pro scouting meetings planning for the deadline, were already focused on the moves they want to make for the deadline before Carolina shocked the hockey world.

The Leafs are looking for a center and perhaps a third-pairing defenseman. That doesn't change.

Fitzgerald told me in a recent interview that the Devils are looking for a center.

The Panthers need a blue-line upgrade after their offseason defections.

The top-scoring Lightning also probably need a blue-line upgrade and are never shy to act at the deadline.

During his annual, in-season session in Tampa with Lightning beat media Monday, BriseBois was asked if anything was off the table ahead of March 7:

"We're trying to accomplish difficult, challenging, hard things here, and we can't limit ourselves in terms of what we're willing to do to accomplish those great things," he responded.

The surprising Capitals were the most aggressive team last offseason, acquiring via trade the likes of Pierre-Luc Dubois, Jakob Chychrun, Andrew Mangiapane and Logan Thompson, plus adding via free agency the likes of Matt Roy, Jakub Vrana, Taylor Raddysh and Brandon Duhaime.

So they've made a lot of roster changes already. But my sense is the Caps would like to add another top-nine winger before the deadline. Whether that's a second-line or third-line player depends on what the market makes possible. But I believe that's their stated need internally.

But again, that has nothing to do with reacting to what a divisional rival did. It's what the Caps have been thinking about for a while now.

Still, what I think Carolina's bold move also says is that the Hurricanes view the conference as there for the taking. Which I totally concur with.

Let's see how the other top Eastern teams react before the deadline.

NHL OK with Pietrangelo's 4 Nations pull-out

There were some eyebrows raised, to be sure, when it was announced Sunday that Alex Pietrangelo was pulling out of 4 Nations, needing to nurse to some ailments, and then proceeded that evening to play 24 minutes for the Golden Knights. Although I believe it is very much genuine that the veteran star blueliner hasn't been 100 percent.

Either way, the NHL is not concerned about the player's decision nor the optics for the 4 Nations tournament — that perhaps players want to bail on it.

"I don't think this is anything like All-Star," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told The Athletic on Monday morning. "(A) player has to do what's best for him and I have no problem with a decision that takes into account being healthy for his NHL club down the stretch."

Pietrangelo is a former Olympic champion and it's hard to fault him for not wanting to play in an event that's serving as an appetizer to the actual Olympics next year, especially when he's not fully healthy. His priority is to be in the best shape possible to help Vegas win a Stanley Cup. I totally get that.

Whether or not other players bail for similar reasons in the coming two weeks, we shall see.

For some players, there's a need to showcase themselves in best-on-best to help secure an Olympic spot in 12 months. For others, while they obviously want to play in the Olympics in Italy next February, if they're not 100 percent healthy the 4 Nations event doesn't carry enough weight to take that risk.

Who will replace Pietrangelo?

Team Canada management will take all the time it has before deciding and naming a replacement for Pietrangelo.

"The players are arriving Feb. 9, so if you're not naming your player by the 10th you're missing an opportunity for practice time," Team Canada 4 Nations GM Don Sweeney told The Athletic on Tuesday. "That's a precious time frame, so we'll be in front of that date."

First off, it's a tough loss indeed not having Pietrangelo.

"We respect his decision, his priorities are with his own health and with Vegas," Sweeney said. "He's had a lot of buzz in terms of why pull out if you're going to play 24 minutes, but he made it very, very clear to us this is something he's wanted to take care of (his ailments) and the break in the schedule affords him that opportunity.

"So you have to respect it. It's a big loss for us because he's an all-situation player with a lot of experience. He was justifiably named to the team and now we go about our business. As we've said all along, there were going to be some injuries and that we were going to have a tight group of (replacement) guys that we're going to consider depending on the type of player that we've lost."

Sweeney, as always has been the case in our Team Canada discussions, would not get into names as far as replacement options.

But I did ask about Drew Doughty, just because of how unique his situation is. What would Canada have to see from him once he's back to feel comfortable taking him so close to 4 Nations?

"Well, my understanding is that he's going to play soon," Sweeney said. "How many games he's able to play and how quickly he gets up to speed … (head coach Jon Cooper) will inevitably speak to coaches and see where the player is at. We'll follow up with (Kings GM) Rob Blake to have his input. We're going to do due diligence whether it's Drew or anybody else."

In his first media session since his preseason injury, Doughty over the weekend told L.A. media he was still holding out hope for 4 Nations and really wanted to play in it.

Team Canada has a group of D they are monitoring right now for the replacement spot. A right-shot D like Pietrangelo (and Doughty) is the most likely route.

Aside from Doughty, Evan Bouchard was one of the most glaring omissions on Dec. 4, so he's an obvious name. Dougie Hamilton and Noah Dobson also come to mind. But given the all-around role Pietrangelo would have played in that event, who Team Canada names may very well depend on the exact role they want that player to come in and play.

"You're spot on in terms of us identifying some players that can pick up some slack in some areas in which, with Petro, we would have valued his presence," Sweeney said. "These are all great players, and inevitably they're playing the lion's share of minutes on their current teams. So I don't think having role responsibility will be too foreign to them."

So, for example, if Canada ends up wanting more of a shutdown/penalty-kill guy, Leafs blueliner Chris Tanev would be a name to monitor. There are some who would take MacKenzie Weegar of the Flames for his overall game.

If it were me, I would take two-time Olympic champion Doughty as my top choice if I feel comfortable that he's up to speed. If not, I would go with Tanev for his shutdown capabilities. Just go look at this work on Jack Eichel in the first round last spring followed by his work on Nathan MacKinnon in the second round.

I know Oilers fans are upset Bouchard isn't on the team, and I really like the "Bouch Bomb." But Cale Makar is probably going to play 90 percent of the power-play minutes in that event.

NHL/NHLPA ready to move on without IIHF on 2028 World Cup

Interesting news was broken by TSN colleague Darren Dreger on Monday night via a tweet:

The NHL and NHLPA have advised the IIHF they intend on moving forward, at least for now, without IIHF involvement in the 2028 World Cup of Hockey. The NHL and PA are hoping to make an announcement on the 2028 WCH in some form at the upcoming Four Nations Faceoff.

— Darren Dreger (@DarrenDreger) January 27, 2025

One of the main issues appears to be the IIHF's reluctance to support a February World Cup, which is important for the NHL and NHLPA — running it at the same time in the NHL season that an Olympics would run.

Again, the idea starting with the Olympics next February is to have a full, best-on-best international hockey event every two years. Hence plans for a 2028 World Cup of Hockey, followed by the 2030 Olympics, etc.

But it also begs the question? If the NHL and NHLPA are planning a traditional World Cup with lots of countries represented, how will it have access to non-NHL players overseas if IIHF isn't part of it? How do countries like Switzerland and Czechia fill out their rosters beyond their NHL players?

We should get more answers from the league and NHLPA at the 4 Nations next month.

I would also say this: Just because the league says it is ready to move forward on a World Cup without the IIHF at this juncture, that doesn't mean things can't change. I've got a feeling there's still more to play out on this front between all parties.

But in the bigger picture, it does concern me. A permanent, best-on-best international calendar has been a fleeting reality for the best part of 25 years, for various reasons. The Olympic part of it appears settled for now.

Obviously, the plan right now is for the 2028 World Cup to bridge the gap, but it sure isn't smooth sailing getting there.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.30.2025

1337928 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 'A tough stretch': Maple Leafs' scoring struggles persist in third straight loss

Ryan Dixon

TORONTO — Toronto Maple Leafs fans got their last live look at the team for a while on Wednesday night. And what they saw surely felt too similar to the Leafs' recent disappointing outings for anybody's liking.

The Buds — who won't play at home again until Feb. 22 after the 4 Nations Face-Off break — lost their third straight contest to a Minnesota Wild squad playing without injured sniper Kirill Kaprizov at Scotiabank Arena. And, for the third consecutive outing, all the Leafs could manage was a single goal versus their opponent, dropping a 3-1 decision to the Wild.

To be sure, Toronto had its looks. Auston Matthews dragged and snapped one clean off the crossbar from the high slot in the first period; William Nylander — on the breakaway he seems to get every night — also zinged one off the bar about halfway through the game when the Leafs trailed 2-0. Toronto outshot Minnesota — just as it held the shot advantage in each of its past two L's — but still came up on the wrong end of the score.

"I thought there were some good things that we did offensively, it's just been tough sledding right now, tough to score," Matthews acknowledged. "They play a very good system, they really pack it in inside, so they make it hard on you. But I thought there were moments in the game where we did some good things offensively, just couldn't get the puck to go in."

For his part, Leafs coach Craig Berube agreed his charges were at least creating decent chances. Still, he sees some telltale signs of a club whose collective grip is a bit too tight right now.

"I think sometimes when you're not scoring and things aren't going in, you take a little extra second to shoot and try to get a little bit too cute," Berube said. "I'm not saying we got cute tonight, but [we weren't] quick enough.

"It's a tough stretch right now with scoring, that's the bottom line."

That overall sentiment certainly applies to the current plight of Leafs defenceman Morgan Rielly. The 30-year-old has basically been in a season-long funk, netting just a single tally in 37 contests since early November. The offensive struggles are one thing, but making matters worse on this night was the fact Rielly was bumped off the puck by Wild fourth-liner Jakub Lauko on the game-opening goal 7:07 into the affair. After stripping the Leafs blue-liner down low, Lauko hit Marat Khusnutdinov in the slot for a quick strike that had the Wild off and running and Toronto on the back foot.

Later in the first, Minnesota needed just four seconds to convert on a power play when Jared Spurgeon's point shot deflected off Matthews' outstretched stick past Toronto goalie Joseph Woll. Suddenly, a team that plays pretty tight defensively and was a stunning 18-5-3 on the road coming into Toronto had staked itself to a 2-0 advantage.

"We gave up the first goal; we got to win that battle down there below our goal line," Berube said of the score that put Minny out in front. "We had coverage in front, but I guess it just got through us; we've got to get to be better there. We're down 1-0, their power-play goal, we tip the puck in. That's a play [where] we got to block that shot, not with your stick."

When this Leafs team — which is currently without injured top-sixers John Tavares and Matthew Knies — is humming, digging out of an early hole is extremely doable. The way they're going right now, it's a different story. Nylander scored his 29th of the year 8:16 into the third to make it an interesting finish, but Marcus Foligno's empty-netter ensured there would be no stirring comeback and certainly no goal from Rielly that might help him start to put the pieces together.

"Can Morgan play better? Yes, he can," Berube said. "We all know that. He knows that, and he's trying to work through it right now. So again, like our team — it's a team game — that's not all on Morgan. Yes, he's a guy that we need offence from from the back end, and he's just got to stick with it, and we'll keep working at it, and we'll try to help as much as we can."

Ultimately, it's obviously up to No. 44 himself to find the best version of himself, and the veteran is trying to keep an even keel through a taxing time.

"I feel good, despite numbers and whatnot," he said. "So it's a battle right now, just trying to compete and play the best I can. That's what we're all trying to do; that's what we're here to do, and I think we all put a lot of pressure on ourselves to perform. I'm no different. We're all striving to be the best we can be, and when it's not going your way, you do everything you can to change that. It starts with hard work and being a good teammate and committing to what's going on and just staying focused."

Remaining on task might actually get a little easier for the Leafs — who were overtaken by Florida for first place in the Atlantic Division on Wednesday night — as they head out for a four-game road trip that begins Saturday night against the Oilers.

"I don't think we've really been on a road trip longer than three or four days this year," said Matthews, whose club plays 11 of its next 13 contests away from home. "It'll be good to get on the road and get together as a team. I think those are always the best moments to bond. Especially when you're going through adversity like this, it's the perfect time."

We'll know soon enough if it's the perfect solution for some goal-scoring struggles, too.

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1337929 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Demko's best game puts Canucks back in playoff spot

Iain MacIntyre

Amid one of the franchise's darkest moments, the Vancouver Canucks have played their way back into the light of the playoff race.

In a season of turmoil and drama unseen on the West Coast since Mike Keenan showed up in the late 1990s with a mandate to blow up the team, the Canucks won their third straight game Wednesday, 3-1 against the Nashville Predators, to re-claim the final wild-card playoff spot in the National Hockey League's Western Conference.

J.T. Miller or Elias Pettersson could be gone tomorrow, but they're still playing hard for the Canucks, who are suddenly on their longest winning streak since Nov. 7 and just four points below the Colorado Avalanche and Los Angeles Kings in the playoff ladder.

At 23-17-10, the Canucks have as many points this season as the Tampa Bay Lightning and Boston Bruins, and own the fourth-best road record (14-7-4) in the NHL. All this amid the dysfunction of a dressing room apparently broken by the Miller-Pettersson rift, which Canucks president Jim Rutherford publicly confirmed on Tuesday while adding the organization will trade one or both stars because the team can't overcome the current divide.

But it won on Wednesday, just as it did Monday in St. Louis (5-2) and Saturday at home against the Washington Capitals (2-1). And while the performance in Nashville was the least impressive of the three for the Canucks, it was probably the best game of the season for goalie Thatcher Demko.

The All-Star has struggled mightily since his return in December from a knee injury that took eight months to conquer.

Demko stopped 31 of 32 Nashville shots, including a five-star, point-blank save on Zachary L'Heuroux late in the third period.

Pettersson drove a Tre Kronor line of fellow Swedes Nils Hoglander and Linus Karlsson that generated five-on-five goals for Vancouver before Pius Suter capped the win with an empty-net goal with 19 seconds remaining.

Hoglander scored beautifully on a rush at 7:11 of the first period, and Karlsson broke a 1-1 tie by converting Tyler Myers' laser pass through traffic at 1:28 of the second for the 25-year-old rookie's first NHL goal.

Defenceman Quinn Hughes, continuing to play at the level of the gods, assisted on both goals and now has 58 points in 46 games to lead all NHL blue-liners.

The Canucks will try to sweep their three-game road trip Friday against the Dallas Stars before returning home to face the media — and the Detroit Red Wings — on Sunday.

MILLER'S TALE

It is impossible to pretend the "noise" doesn't exist when it is being amplified by the team president, but Miller declined to comment Wednesday morning when asked about Rutherford's remarks the previous day.

"I don't have one," Miller said of his reaction. "I'm not commenting on this."

Silence is probably a pretty good strategy on this dressing-room issue, albeit about three months too late.

On the ice, Miller had one of his least effective games in the last two weeks. He struggled to drive play and made some key mistakes, including a turnover inside the Nashville blue line that led to a shorthanded breakaway in the third period for Gustav Nyquist. But Miller also led the Canucks with five hits and won a key faceoff in the final minute.

For the game, Canucks centres won only 18 of 50 draws, with Miller doing the best at 7-8. At 58 per cent for the season, Miller is the only Vancouver pivot significantly above .500 on faceoffs, which are a tactical issue the team will have to grapple with if efforts to trade him are successful.

TOCCHET'S CHOICE

Coach Rick Tocchet made the hard decision to play Demko ahead of Kevin Lankinen, who we said in this space on Monday deserved a run of starts after badly outplaying the struggling No. 1. Lankinen stopped 56 of 59 shots in wins against Washington and St. Louis and spent the last two seasons in Nashville, so starting against the Predators would have meant a lot to him.

But the Canucks, obviously, are still trying to get Demko going and last season's Vezina Trophy runner-up re-paid Tocchet's risky choice with an outstanding performance. After losing four of his previous five starts in regulation (and lugging an .867 save rate into Wednesday), Demko wasn't impressive only for the saves he was making, but how efficiently and confidently he appeared to be playing, tracking pucks and mostly controlling rebounds.

Tommy Novak was the only Predator to beat Demko, and he did it with his skate, dragging a foot to steer in a first-period rebound while being checked by Suter. Demko stopped the final 25 shots he faced and was Vancouver's best player as his team was being outshot 19-9 over the final two periods.

THE JOSHUA TREE

After missing 11 games with a leg injury when Canucks teammate Teddy Blueger knocked Predators defenceman Roman Josi into him from behind during a Jan. 3 game in Vancouver, winger Dakota Joshua returned to the Vancouver lineup to resume his comeback from testicular cancer.

Joshua missed the first month of the season after undergoing surgery in September to remove a tumour. So, any game is a good game for Joshua. He survived his first game back, registering two hits in 11:48 of ice time while skating on the fourth line with Blueger and Phil Di Giuseppe. Defenceman Max Sasson came out of Tocchet's lineup.

On defence, Noah Juulsen replaced callup Elias Pettersson (D-Petey) after missing six games with an undisclosed injury.

QUOTEBOOK

Thatcher Demko: "I kind of needed that one. It felt good to be on the winning side here, and, you know, feel like myself a little bit again. It always feels good when you win. Yeah, a lot to build off. I think we've been doing some good things. So it's really just paying attention to detail, knowing our identity as a team, playing as five all three zones. . . just the cliche stuff."

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1337930 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Utah fans to vote on three potential names for NHL team

Elliotte Friedman

We are down to three.

Starting tonight, Utah's NHL fans can vote on three potential names — and two logos — for their new team: Utah Hockey Club, Utah Mammoth and a new entry, Utah Wasatch, representing the mountain range to the north and east of Salt Lake City.

"We engaged with the Yeti Cooler Company," Smith Entertainment Group executive Mike Maughan said Wednesday. "They have a unique and strong trademark on 'Yeti' and 'Yetis' on clothing or other licensed gear… We were not able to come to a coexistence agreement."

The USPTO also rejected Mammoth and Hockey Club, which is weird because the latter is so similar to many Major League Soccer team names. But Maughan said while issues in those two cases were expected, "None of them are insurmountable."

"There are always issues, unless (you pick) a brand new name."

The voting will be done by fans who attend Utah's next four home games, beginning tonight (Pittsburgh) through Feb. 4 (Philadelphia). Stations will be set up around Delta Center to select a name and logo, not yet publicly revealed for copyright protection. Asked if he was worried someone would take a photo and leak details, Maughan pointed to Utah Jazz redesigns that stayed private while going through a similar process, adding, "We have faith in the community… to do this in a respectful way."

There are only two logos instead of three because "Hockey Club" and "Wasatch" would have the same outcome: a mythical snow creature, "fierce and appropriate for an NHL team," Maughan said.

He reiterated that the winning choices will not be announced during this season. It has been rumoured that the reveal could come when Utah makes its 2025 first-round draft pick. Maughan — with a smile — refused to make any such commitment.

Whatever the case, it is important to Utah owners Ryan and Ashley Smith that fans select the name and logo. "Whether this is the final part of the process or there is to be one more (vote), is to be determined," Maughan said.

The "Hockey Club" idea is growing on me, although I might be in the minority (podcast listeners were displeased with my take on this one). But we'll see how the Utahns feel. Their team, their vote.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.30.2025

1337931 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 'That's his baby': Why Tanev should join Team Canada for 4 Nations Face-Off

Luke Fox

TORONTO — Chris Tanev won't be campaigning for the job opening, but everyone else in the Toronto Maple Leafs' dressing room will be happy to write him a reference letter.

Hockey Canada has a slew of ready and willing options to sub in at right defence now that Alex Pietrangelo has pulled out of the 4 Nations Face-Off, citing an ailment.

But, according to Craig Berube, who has coached both men, Tanev checks the boxes.

"He'd be a great fit," Berube said Wednesday. "I mean, looking at their lineup and everything, and what Tanny brings, Petro brings a lot of that too.

"With the penalty killing and the shutdown stuff — Tanny, that's his baby. He's very good at that role, so it would probably be a good fit for him."

Canada's other replacement candidates — MacKenzie Weegar, Dougie Hamilton, Evan Bouchard, Aaron Ekblad, and a soon-to-be-healthy Drew Doughty — all have their merits.

We'd be foolish to suggest that any one of those right-shot workhorses would be a bad pick.

But the selflessness, quiet leadership, and commitment to the unglamorous aspects of the game make Tanev an ideal choice. That the undrafted 35-year-old has already played for, and endeared himself to,

three fervent Canadian markets only enhances his status as an easy-to-root-for figure.

To say nothing of Tanev's willingness to literally throw his face in front of oncoming pucks and leaguewide reputation as a favourite teammate.

(We're partial to the golden résumé of Doughty, too, but are a touch concerned about his ability to match the pace of NHL forwards revving at midseason speed.)

"The way he plays defensively, PKing and blocking shots, has a lot of value," says teammate William Nylander, who will suit up for Team Sweden. "I think that sometimes goes underappreciated. What he does every night is just incredible.

"He doesn't say much. But some games he'll be a little pissed off coming into the locker record after a period or whatever, telling us to step up defensively. I think that's good."

Tanev ranks third leaguewide with 132 blocks. He skates 20 minutes a night, always head-to-head against the opposition's top line. He makes every partner better. And he's a significant reason for the Leafs' year-over-year improvement on the penalty kill — from 23rd to 12th overall.

Most impressive, though, is that despite stating a career-high 74.6 per cent of his shifts in the defensive zone and getting no power-play time, Tanev has chipped in 13 assists and leads all Toronto skaters with a plus-18 rating.

"He means a lot to this team overall, just the calmness he brings on the ice with the puck and obviously what he does defensively," says Team Canada's Mitch Marner. "I mean, he plays against the best people every night, usually starts in the D zone, and is always up for the challenge. Eats a lot of pucks as well."

Tanev himself downplays his candidacy, which is on brand for one of the humblest players you'll meet.

When pressed, however, he'll acknowledge that representing his country would be a dream and that he has already has a conversation with Leafs GM Brad Treliving about the possibility.

"Whatever happens, happens," said Tanev, after learning of Pietrangelo's decision. "Just focused on here (with the Leafs) right now and setting ourselves up the last five games before the break.

"(Team Canada) is not really what I'm focused on. The day-to-day stuff here is extremely important to me, just trying to get ourselves to where we need to be."

Tanev is saying all the right things. His actions speak louder.

In Toronto's six games against Team Canada GM Don Sweeney's Bruins and Team Canada coach Jon Cooper's Lightning, Tanev went plus-9, put up five points, and his Leafs have gone 5-0-1.

"From my perspective, he's a huge part in us winning games," raves Bobby McMann.

"Blocking shots, good sticks, always being in front of their guys, and then making that great first pass. I think that's always overlooked as a huge skill in this league. So, I think it's definitely a big consideration (for Canada)."

Sure, Tanev doesn't have a Cup ring. He doesn't have as long of a history with Hockey Canada as some of the other replacement options. But the one time he did wear the Red and White, at the 2016 IIHF world championship, he did fly home with a gold medal.

What Tanev brings is certainty and dependability. A sharp mind and veins of ice. A heart on the sleeve and a body in the lane.

"Very professional. Very consistent," Berube says. "I get the same thing every night from him. He's got great composure with the puck too. Like, he makes a lot of little plays out there that maybe go unnoticed a lot of times. But you know you're getting the same guy every night."

Not only would Tanev be the safest pick. He might be the smartest.

And most Canadian.

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1337932 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / From builders to buyers? Teams that have changed their trade outlook

Justin Bourne

In the NHL, as in life, things do not always go as planned.

For example, the Pittsburgh Penguins missed the playoffs by three points last season. They then ran back basically the same star-laden team, added some additional pieces in hopes of getting back to the playoffs, yet find themselves just a breath out of dead stinkin' last in the East. The Seattle Kraken did something similar, signing Chandler Stephenson and Brandon Montour (for many, many dollars) to push them over the hump, but they're no better than last year. It happens.

But with the insane amount of parity in the NHL this season, there's been a new twist on "things don't always go as planned" for a few teams: some saw this as a rebuild, retool, recalibrate year, but they've suddenly got a shot to make the playoffs with just 30 games to go.

This group fascinates me.

Real Kyper and Bourne

Real Kyper and Bourne

Nick Kypreos and Justin Bourne talk all things hockey with some of the biggest names in the game. Watch live every weekday on Sportsnet and Sportsnet+ — or listen live on Sportsnet 590 The FAN — from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. ET.

Full episode

To understand how they exist, you've just got to look at the cluster of teams within four points of the Eastern Conference wild card spot. You've got a few tiers of teams in that group.

First, you've got the teams that have clearly been a disappointment. That would be the New York Rangers, who won last season's Presidents' Trophy, yet only recently battled back above .500. That would also be the Boston Bruins, who last season had 109 points, yet wake up Wednesday morning ninth in the East by points percentage. They've opened the door for everyone else.

Then you've got the teams that expected to be in the fight, but haven't taken a step (and in fact, have tripped on their own skate laces). Detroit finished the 2023-24 season tied for the final playoff spot with 91 points, and this season find themselves on pace for…a whopping 87. Last year the Islanders were one of two teams to make the post-season with a negative goal differential, then they did absolutely nothing in the off-season and, weird, they're on pace to finish with about the same goal differential, just well outside the playoffs this time.

Which leaves the "Wait, we're in the playoff race??" teams.

Let's go through the four of them – five if you stretch the definition – and evaluate what the heck they should do with this surprising opportunity.

No team embodies this better than the Flames. They had just recently moved on from Jacob Markstrom and Andrew Mangiapane, clearly signalling a transition and a new chapter for the C of Red. They made way for the young guys, hoping for them to gain valuable experience, likely with the intent of selling off a few pieces at the deadline. But lo, they find themselves peering into February -- with a fairly soft schedule ahead -- from inside the playoff cut line.

A lot has gone right. Dustin Wolf has emerged as not just a Calder Trophy candidate but as a goalie who looks to be among the league's best for years to come (goalie analysts such as Steve Valiquette praise him as the real deal). They've gotten good seasons from the vets they do have, their young guys have shown great potential, and they have one binding thread as a team: they work like hell, particularly on the forecheck. It's a competitive group, so if you don't show up against them, you'll lose.

Now, if they were worse off in the standings would they consider trading Rasmus Andersson? Would they try to unload Nazem Kadri's contract? Maybe.

But they're five points behind the Avs with three games in hand to catch wild card spot number one. And they're three points behind the Kings for the Pacific's three seed. Behind Calgary there's only the dumpster fire that is the current Canucks, a St. Louis Blues team that's well back (five points and two more games played), and I guess Utah? But really it's "stay ahead of the Canucks and you're in."

The Flames are 29th in goals for per game. They have nine draft picks this year, including five in the first two rounds, and nine picks the following year, too (We should note that if they don't finish bottom 10 in the league, they'll give up their own first-rounder to Montreal this year to complete the Sean Monahan trade). They have salary cap space for days. Would it be the worst thing to reward the team with another guy who can shoot it in the net, particularly if they've got some term?

Craig Conroy has a decision to make, as they're not going to win the Cup. But putting your young talent in the playoffs has value too, and could give this franchise something to build on.

Heading into this season, it was hard to see any of the usual suspects in the Atlantic being significantly worse. Florida, Toronto, and Tampa Bay still had loads of talent, and Boston wasn't going to just evaporate. Combine that with expectations being higher for Ottawa, Detroit and heck, Buffalo, and it seemed like the Habs were destined for the basement, or at least a few stairs up from it.

But 50 games into the season, following the successful additions of Alexandre Carrier, rookie Lane Hutson, and Patrik Laine, the Habs are two points out of playoffs. It seemed like a year they were dead set on getting another high pick, but if they wanted to flip the script – which is always tempting – you could see them hanging around the post-season fight. They're not particularly bad from top to bottom when healthy, and numerous players have taken a step forward.

The best thing for this franchise long-term is probably to sell and pick high again. But when you get to this point, and people tell you that you should "reward the players" for putting themselves in the post-season fight, it has to be awfully tough to consider cutting out the knees of the group.

What's better for a team with 21 picks over the next two years: more assets, or meaningful game experience? One is tangible, the other isn't. But you can make a fair case that at this point of the Habs' rebuild, they matter equally.

We've had their GM Danny Briere and President Keith Jones on Real Kyper and Bourne in the past few weeks, and both have said they don't see their team as a contender. They're a seller, they're not good enough. But they're also 6-3-1 in their past 10 and three points outside the playoffs as of today.

Whoops.

This is a team that had zero designs on the post-season, has gotten the league's dead worst goaltending (a combined .875 save percentage), and yet is somehow just a few points from a playoff spot. It's not a mystery how you could get a whole lot better by improving at one position (goalie), and they've also got a whack of draft picks, including six in the first two rounds of 2025.

I know they want to bottom out and do worse, but unfortunately(?), they've got a pretty decent team that's winning a bit too often for that. Which may say more about the rest of the league than it does the Flyers. But still, hat-tip to John Tortorella for taking a team with no expectations that's getting terrible goaltending into the playoff picture this season.

The Blue Jackets finished 16th out of 16 in the East last year, made very few changes except to fire their coach, tragically lost their best offensive talent in Johnny Gaudreau, and yet find themselves tied in points for the second wild card of Wednesday.

All this despite getting the sixth-worst goaltending in the league while having the cheapest payroll in the NHL (Monahan is their top earning forward at 5.5 million per, no other forward makes over $4 million). Speaking of great coaching staffs: what a job they've done in Columbus.

They're not quite as asset-rich as the above teams, and likely could use a superstar more than any of them, meaning they'd love a high draft pick. But what are you supposed to do? Pull the ripcord on the parachute while you're absolutely flying at 7-2-1 in their past 10, while names like Kirill Marchenko and Dmitri Voronkov are becoming must-know names?

They're in the playoff hunt, and fully embody the scrappy underdog feel their city can probably connect with among bigger NHL cities. They might just add, and see if they can't squeeze their way into a first round playoff series.

And finally,

The Utah Not Yetis

It's not entirely clear to me what they thought they'd be this season, but a lot of people hyped them up for a team with one forward earning more than $6 million a year. They did make some off-season adds in hopes of contending, so I don't fully see them as a part of the above class (they're also six points out), but they do have plenty to trade in terms of prospects and picks, so if they wanted to go in, I think they could make a push.

They're more likely an off-season flip-the-lever and chase big UFAs type team than one poised to make a real push this season though. But we'll include them just because if they wanted to get weird (first year in the league!) it's an option.

NHL owners all want to make the playoffs and generate that additional revenue. But they also want sustainability, and they want deep playoff runs, so they'd prefer to make zoomed out decisions based on the long term.

I think the team most likely to buy from the above is Calgary, and the team most likely to sell is Philly. But you don't want to get caught in the mushy middle forever either, just getting in and losing, so these management teams have some big decisions on their hands.

Entering the year "playoffs" barely seemed a consideration for any of these teams, but the way the standings are shaking out is forcing some harder decisions in a way their fans must love.

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1337933 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' depth takes another big hit with Kaiden Guhle's injury

Eric Engels

BROSSARD, Que.— It was the first thing Nick Suzuki pointed to when we asked him what led to his team's most successful run of the season—a 16-8-2 hike up the Eastern Conference standings, which gave the Canadiens the seventh-best points percentage in the NHL from Nov. 15 through Jan. 14.

"I think just the depth," he said after the team lost 4-1 to the Winnipeg Jets and extended its current winless streak to three games.

It was what we thought he'd say.

If you look back through that 26-game stretch that saw the Canadiens mostly overwhelm their opponents with waves of 200-foot hockey from all four lines and all three defence pairings, that depth was obviously the main ingredient to their success. If you didn't see any of it and just listened to head coach Martin St. Louis constantly say he didn't have to worry much about matchups in games that saw the Canadiens facing off against the strongest and deepest teams in the league, you'd know.

But that strength was weakened up front when Emil Heineman was hit by a car in Utah on Jan. 13, and it took a devastating blow on the back end Tuesday when Kaiden Guhle hobbled off the ice unable to place any weight on his right leg.

Wednesday's announcement from the Canadiens—that Guhle suffered a laceration to his quadriceps muscle and underwent surgery to repair it—was very unwelcome news. It was brutal for Guhle, who's already suffered his fair share of injuries since debuting in 2022 and is now dealing with another that will keep him out indefinitely, and it was brutal for the team.

We're talking about a player who plays top minutes against top opposition, a player who's chipped in four goals and 14 points despite largely defensive deployment through his 44 games, a player who plays

a key role on the sixth-best penalty kill in the NHL, and a 23-year-old player that teammates were referring to as a standard bearer prior to Tuesday's game.

"He shows up every night," said Alex Carrier. "He plays hard, he's physical, good stick, and everyone loves him in the room. He's a younger guy, but he's so mature. He brings the standard up for the whole team every night, so you want to keep up with him and show up as well."

When Lane Hutson said, "(Guhle) is a really important piece for our team," it was another way of saying Guhle's not one that can be replaced by any single player.

It's a big problem, and a similar one to the one the Canadiens have faced without Heineman—even if both players play such different roles.

The Canadiens have gone 2-3-1 in the rookie's absence, and their substandard performance in some of those games has obviously been a result of St. Louis not being able to roll his four lines the way he did when Heineman was healthy.

He hasn't played Michael Pezzetta more than 7:01 in any single game since, and rotating different forwards into place while Pezzetta has sat on the bench has disrupted flow and execution and reduced the energy the Canadiens have needed to sustain their best effort through an entire game.

That energy reserve was already depleted by the compressed post-Christmas schedule the Canadiens had, and flow and execution were already affected by only being able to hold two practices in two weeks.

Now St. Louis is looking at less depth and balance on defence, where he'll have to trust that Jayden Struble can prove reliable in an insulated role on the bottom pair and that Arber Xhekaj can take on many more minutes than he's played on average over the last couple of months.

Both players believe they can.

After being recalled from his conditioning loan and participating in Wednesday's practice, Struble—who was scratched through most of the Canadiens' most successful run of play— noted he was better equipped to play the way he needs to in a reduced role.

And after a rocky start to the season, Xhekaj feels he's found the confidence and stability to remain as effective in an elevated role playing (playing closer to 18 minutes per game) as he has been in a reduced one (playing closer to 12 minutes per game).

"I've had a good stick, good gap, I've been closing plays and keeping guys in front of me," he said, "and I think I've built a little bit of trust here, and I think that's how I was able to elevate my game."

St. Louis appears comfortable leaning on Xhekaj more, too, as he said the player has "had a nice progression" and lauded his defensive improvement and the maturity with which he's approached his role as an enforcer of sorts for the Canadiens.

But we don't see St. Louis deploying Xhekaj as a strict replacement for Guhle, and we wonder how distributing extra responsibility to his top three defencemen—Carrier, Hutson, Mike Matheson—might detract from the depth factor that's been so pivotal to the team's success.

Just how much is yet to be determined, but it's fair to say that even the smallest effect puts the Canadiens in pure survival mode for the next six games to be played before the 12-day break for the 4 Nations Face-Off.

St. Louis knows.

"I think it's a chase to the break and trying to find a way to get some points in these games, and that break I think is going to benefit us with some of the bumps and bruises that we have," St. Louis said. "I think it's game by game right now, and of course, it hurts that we lost Emil, and now we lose Guhle. I think it's part of a season. But you just have to stay the course and keep working on the things we have to work on. You talk about next man up, it's pretty much what it is. And you feel like with the culture and the collective game that is not always perfect but is in a much better place than it has been—whether we're getting results or not—and I think it could help get us to the break."

If it does, perhaps it incentivizes management to help fill some of the holes injuries created on the Canadiens' depth chart. If St. Louis and the players can navigate these challenges to remain in the mix—they're currently three points out of third place in the Atlantic Division and two points out of the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference—maybe a trade (or two) comes down the pike and helps restore the depth that carried them to success over those two months that preceded the skid they're currently on.

Getting Heineman back in February will help, too, with his rehab scheduled to end either just before or during the break.

But until then, we're going to see what else the Canadiens can lean on to win games and bank points.

Dobes facing Wild for Fleury's last game at Bell Centre

It'll be a reunion of sorts for the young goaltender and an idol of his, as Jakub Dobes looks to avenge his first NHL loss while Marc-Andre Fleury hopes to avoid one in his last NHL game in his home province.

"This summer, we skated together for the first time, so I met him," said Dobes. "It's kind of funny; he's probably going to retire soon and be a Hall of Famer, and he took his time to give me advice during the skate and we took a picture. I still have the picture, and now we will play against each other Thursday, so that's pretty awesome."

What did Dobes take from his brief time around the 40-year-old, Stanley-Cup winning goaltender who hails from Sorel, Que?

"Just the competing, tracking, and we worked a lot on movements from east to west," the 23-year-old said. "Just watching him practice, and how hard he tries even though he's getting older, was impressive. It was a good skate."

It'll be an emotional one on Thursday for Fleury, who is 12-6-3 in 21 regular-season games at the Bell Centre.

St. Louis believes he'll surely get the send-off he deserves from fans in attendance.

"I think Fleury means a lot to the people of Quebec," the coach said. "I'm sure he's an idol of many young players, and rightfully so. What he's accomplished throughout his career, the amount games he got to play, the success he's had, the championships he's won, and how he's conducted himself…They talk about him being one of the best goalies ever, and I think he's in that category. I don't know him very well, but what I've heard a lot is he's such a great human. It's not a surprise that he's found success, because I think it starts there."

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Sportsnet.ca / How Quinn Hughes is keeping tempestuous Canucks in the playoff race

Adam Vingan

Soap opera writers searching for inspiration would be smart to tune into this Vancouver Canucks season.

All the ingredients of a gripping drama — infighting, high stakes, compelling characters — are there. And yet despite it all, the Canucks are still hanging around the playoff race in the Western Conference.

That would not be possible without Quinn Hughes. The Canucks captain has kept his team afloat with outstanding play from the back end. Hughes told Sportsnet's Iain MacIntyre that he is playing "some of the best" hockey of his career, which is underselling it. The defenceman is putting up bigger numbers than he did last season, when he won the Norris Trophy by an overwhelming margin.

Canucks coach Rick Tocchet recently was asked about the possibility of Hughes' teammates deferring to him too much.

"You don't stop playing because you play with a great player. That's asinine," Tocchet told reporters. "You want to use that great player to your advantage. You have a great player, you should embrace the fact that (you) get to play with this player. 'How can I be better for this guy and the team?'"

In fairness, the Canucks have every reason to get the puck to Hughes as often as they can. He is the ultimate offensive catalyst and in his own stratosphere when it comes to having the puck on his stick. (Hughes has a nearly 23-minute lead in total possession time this season.)

Those talents were on full display during Vancouver's 5-2 win against the St. Louis Blues on Monday. Early in the first period, Hughes created an odd-man rush by banking a loose puck off the boards to himself. He capped off the scoring play with a precise pass to Conor Garland, finding the tiniest sliver of space underneath the outstretched legs of Blues defenceman Ryan Suter.

Hughes' second assist — a stretch pass that set up J.T. Miller's second-period breakaway goal — made him the seventh-fastest defenceman in NHL history to record 100 career multi-point games. (Hughes' 179 stretch-pass completions lead the league.)

There is an immense difference between Vancouver's performance when Hughes is on the ice versus when he is not. All of the Canucks' key offensive metrics plummet anytime he gets a breather. They have outscored opponents 49-34 at 5-on-5 during Hughes' minutes. Without him, they have been outscored 62-43.

The Canucks' expected goal percentage at 5-on-5 drops 12 points from 56.4 per cent to 44.4 per cent when Hughes is off the ice — the eighth-largest difference in the league. These are the seven players ahead of him: Columbus linemates Sean Monahan (19.7-point drop) and Kirill Marchenko (16.1-point drop); Tampa Bay linemates Anthony Cirelli (14.3-point drop) and Brandon Hagel (13.1-point drop); Edmonton's Mattias Ekholm (12.8-point drop); New Jersey's Jack Hughes (12.3-point drop); and Colorado's Cale Makar (12.2-point drop).

Tocchet praised Hughes last weekend for consistently attacking the slot, which is something he wants his forwards to emulate instead of looking for low-to-high plays.

Canucks forwards rank 30th at the position in scoring chances (17.5) and 32nd in slot shots on net (10.6) per game. Their 94 combined slot goals are tied for 24th.

"I don't know if it's a confidence thing," Tocchet told reporters. "It's on us coaches. We've got to keep preaching it. We've got to practice it. … We've got to really, really harp (on) that more than ever, because these last 30, 40 games, it's interior stuff. It's getting stuff to the net. It's having a guy on your back (when you're trying to score)."

The Canucks' win against the Blues on Monday was their second in a row — the first time in two months that they have won consecutive games. Hughes told MacIntyre that he feels he bears some responsibility for the turmoil that has swirled inside the Canucks' dressing room and seeped on to the ice this season, which is what a captain would say.

If not for Hughes, however, it is safe to guess that the Canucks would be in much worse shape in the standings. He is authoring an MVP-worthy season.

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TSN.CA / Leafs' Tanev makes compelling case for Team Canada

Mark Masters

The Maple Leafs and Minnesota Wild held optional skates at Scotiabank Arena on Wednesday.

With Vegas Golden Knights defenceman Alex Pietrangelo bowing out of the 4 Nations Face-Off, Team Canada is suddenly looking for another right-shot rearguard who can soak up some tough minutes. The Leafs believe Chris Tanev is the right man for the job.

"He'd be a great fit," said head coach Craig Berube, who won a Stanley Cup with Pietrangelo in St. Louis. "Looking at their lineup and what Tanny brings, Pietro brings a lot of it, too, with the penalty killing and shutdown stuff. That is Tanny's baby. He is very good at both of those things. He would probably be a good fit for them."

Tanev is in contention, per TSN Hockey Insider Pierre LeBrun. But Team Canada is also watching to see how Olympic champion Drew Doughty looks as he returns to the Los Angeles Kings lineup. Doughty has been sidelined since suffering a fractured ankle in September, but will make his season debut on Wednesday.

If Doughty struggles to get up to speed, the door may be open for Tanev to play for Team Canada for the second time and first time since the 2016 World Championship.

"The way he plays defensively and, you know, PK-ing, blocking shots, adds a lot of value, [and] I think sometimes goes under appreciated," said Leafs winger William Nylander, who will play for Team Sweden next month. "What he does every night is just incredible."

Tanev is third in the NHL in blocked shots. He often starts shifts in his own end and is regularly matched against the best players on the other side. Despite that, he still leads the Leafs at plus-18.

"He's a huge part in us winning games," said winger Bobby McMann. "Blocking shots, good sticks, always being in front of their guys, and then making that great first pass. I think that's always overlooked as a huge skill in this league."

The 35-year-old blueliner is a big reason why the Leafs have survived a rash of injuries to lead the Atlantic Division through 50 games. The Toronto native is providing leadership along with his gritty game.

"He doesn't say much," Nylander noted. "But some games he'll be a little pissed off coming into the locker record after a period or whatever, telling us to step up defensively. I think that's good."

"Not necessarily a rah-rah type," said McMann. "But he's always seeing the game from maybe the defensive side of it and seeing maybe what the forwards could do better, where we can be. He's definitely vocal in bringing those sorts of things up, and strategic-wise how can we maybe get pucks into the zone easier and things like that."

Tanev helped the Dallas Stars reach the Western Conference final last season before signing on with his hometown team. He downplayed the 4 Nations opportunity during a media session on Tuesday saying he wants to keep his focus on the Leafs.

Tanev's no-nonsense, low-maintenance approach makes him a coach's dream.

"Very professional, very consistent," Berube said. "I get the same thing every night from him. He's got great composure with the puck too. Like, he makes a lot of little plays out there that maybe go unnoticed a lot of times. You know you're getting the same guy every night."

ContentId(1.2243577): Leafs lobby for Tanev's inclusion in Team Canada

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The Leafs currently have four players going to the 4 Nations Face-Off, with American centre Auston Matthews, Canadian winger Mitch Marner and Finnish defenceman Jani Hakanpää joining Nylander.

The tournament opens with Canada taking on Sweden on Feb. 12 in Montreal.

"Telling Matty that we might drop the gloves," Nylander joked.

Anticipation is growing with the return of best-on-best hockey just around the corner. Team Sweden already has a group chat going. Well, sort of.

"I think somebody set up a team chat," Nylander said. "Nobody said anything."

ContentId(1.2243564): Nylander jokes he might drop the gloves with Matthews at 4 Nations Face-Off

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The Leafs have held a series of community events recently. A group from Make-A-Wish Canada visited Scotiabank Arena during last Wednesday's game against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

"When the kids came into our locker room after the Columbus game that was pretty cool," said winger Nick Robertson. "One of them related to me because their son was a NICU [neonatal intensive care unit] baby and they had my jersey on, so it was pretty cool."

Robertson was born 10-to-12 weeks premature on Sept. 11, 2001.

On Monday, the team held its annual outdoor practice.

"You just realize how committed the fans are – especially Monday," Robertson said. "It's cold out and for them to show up like that, it means a lot."

Wednesday will be Toronto's final home game until Feb. 22. The team is about to embark on a four-game road trip prior to the break.

"We know that we don't have a lot of home games coming up," said McMann. "A lot of big road trips. It's always exciting to play at home. We love it. It's always a different energy at home. I think it will be a little bit more energy and little more special being the last one for a bit."

The Leafs only have one home game in February. After Wednesday's game, Toronto will play 11 of its next 13 games on the road.

"Want to take advantage of our crowd and finish up strong at home here," Robertson said.

Berube is warning his players to avoid the inclination to put on a show for the fans.

"Sometimes I think at home your players want to make plays and probably try things they shouldn't a lot of times, instead of just playing a boring game," Berube said. "Take what they give you. That's what I said this morning to our guys, 'Just take what they give you.' We don't want to beat ourselves here. Just take what they give you. They're going to protect in the middle of the ice all night. They're going to do a good job of it. We've got to play behind them. We've got to work for our chances in the offensive zone and get in the inside as much as possible and get pucks there."

The Wild are 18-5-3 on the road this season. No team in the NHL has gained as many points away from home as the Wild.

"We clearly understand the identity that we need to play with and on the road we've been very committed to that," said coach John Hynes. "From the start, we're ready to start games and we make good decisions to set our game up to give us the best chance to win."

ContentId(1.2243617): Leafs Ice Chips: Different energy expected in final home game before break

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The Leafs have scored just two goals in the past two games.

"We've been creating a lot and, you know, having O-zone possession and stuff," Nylander said. "So, it's all good."

With his usual centre John Tavares currently sidelined with a lower-body injury, Nylander is playing with Pontus Holmberg.

"He's holding onto pucks, you know, finding me in areas, playing good defensively as well," Nylander said. "So, yeah, it's been nice."

"He can hold the puck really well so that helps me," Holmberg said. "More time in the offensive zone."

Nylander is tied for fifth in the NHL with 28 goals this season.

"When you're playing with a guy like William Nylander, you get him to puck, like, he's going to do his thing," Berube said. "And he's one of the best I've seen in the league at hanging on to pucks and, you know, cutting back and creating space for himself. He doesn't need help. He needs you to get to the net."

Holmberg has produced just two goals and five assists this season, but Berube believes the 25-year-old has the skill to complement a star.

"I believe there's a lot more offence there with him," Berube said. "It's about just honing that in a little bit more and more of a confidence thing, I think, with him. He doesn't want to make a mistake, and he's got to kind of change his mindset and be more aggressive, because there's ability there. I do see ability. So, I see more in him than what we're getting."

Playing beside his countryman may help. Holmberg struggled to pick up English upon arriving in North America following a Swedish Hockey League championship run in 2021 with the Vaxjo Lakers.

"I only speak Swedish to him," Nylander said.

"It's good for me," said Holmberg. "It can help me to talk Swedish. But it's fine, I understand English."

ContentId(1.2243575): Nylander, Holmberg enjoying Swedish connection in hopes of unlocking Pontus' offence

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With Matthew Knies out with an upper-body issue, McMann has moved up to the top line with Matthews and Marner.

"I notice that they see everything," he said. "They always know what's happening."

What are the in-game conversations like?

"It's always coming back to the bench and little things here and there," McMann said. "Like, call for the puck there or try to open up there or trust that they'll get the puck. That's the biggest thing I've learned is that I don't need to go and support them all the time because obviously they're exceptional players and can make plays in tight spaces. So, it's just finding the open ice."

McMann scored Toronto's only goal during Saturday's 2-1 loss in Ottawa.

ContentId(1.2243576): 'Just take what they give you': Leafs hoping to turn zone time into goals vs. Wild

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Projected Leafs lineup for Wednesday's game:

McMann - Matthews - Marner

Domi - Holmberg - Nylander

Pacioretty - Minten - Robertson

Lorentz - Kampf - Reaves

Rielly - McCabe

Ekman-Larsson - Tanev

Benoit - Myers

Woll starts

Murray

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