



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 8, 2025

# The News & Observer

## 'A unique experience': Four Carolina Hurricanes ready for NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off

By: Chip Alexander

Sebastian Aho, Mikko Rantanen, Seth Jarvis and Jaccob Slavin are headed to the 4 Nations Face-Off to play more hockey next week.

Andrei Svechnikov is headed to the Bahamas, to heal up and relax. Others on the Carolina Hurricanes plan to do the same, several seeking out sunny beaches and warm weather.

For the Hurricanes, the two-week break surrounding the international showcase event comes 56 games into their NHL schedule. The grind has been relentless and a half-dozen of the Canes recently have dealt with illnesses.

The Hurricanes are hoping to still be playing hockey in June, deep into the Stanley Cup playoffs. Which begs the question: would the players, given their druthers, prefer to represent their countries in the 4 Nations or have the time off?

"Hopefully, I'll be happy to play a hundred or so games this year," said Jarvis, who will compete for Team Canada. "I could care less about getting the rest. This is something I would never pass up, the chance to play for your country."

Dec 3, 2024; Raleigh, North Carolina, USA; aCarolina Hurricanes center Seth Jarvis (24) reacts during the warmups before the game against the Seattle Kraken t Lenovo Center. James Guillory-Imagn Images

Dec 3, 2024; Raleigh, North Carolina, USA; aCarolina Hurricanes center Seth Jarvis (24) reacts during the warmups before the game against the Seattle Kraken t Lenovo Center. James Guillory-Imagn Images James Guillory James Guillory-Imagn Images

Jarvis said it should be easy to "flip the switch" and put on a jersey bearing the Maple Leaf, calling it "super special." He has talked about tearing up in first telling his family about his selection, and has joked about facing off against the likes of Aho, quipping, "I'll kill Fishy."

The 4 Nations Face-off will have teams from Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States playing in Montreal and Boston in an event that begins Feb. 12. The championship game will be held at Boston's TD Garden on Feb. 20.

Canada and Sweden will kick off the event Wednesday in Montreal. The next day will have Finland and Team USA going at it at the Bell Centre.

Aho and Rantanen were two of the first six players named to Team Finland. The Canes' trade with the Colorado Avalanche has since made them NHL teammates before

going to the 4 Nations, and they also have been named alternate captains for Finland in the competition.

"It's a best on best tournament and it's always an honor to play for Team Finland," Rantanen said this week. "For the new generation, we haven't had a tournament like this since 2016, so we have a lot of new (Finnish) faces playing for the first time, which is good."

Carolina Hurricanes right wing Mikko Rantanen (96) and Chicago Blackhawks defenseman Nolan Allan (42) battle for the puck during the third period at Lenovo Center.

Carolina Hurricanes right wing Mikko Rantanen (96) and Chicago Blackhawks defenseman Nolan Allan (42) battle for the puck during the third period at Lenovo Center. James Guillory Imagn Images

The 2016 World Cup was held in Toronto in September, just as NHL teams were gearing up for the start of the 2016-17 season. Teams from Czechia and Russia joined Finland, Sweden, Canada and the U.S. in the event, which also included a Team Europe and a Team North America in filling out the tournament field.

Aho, then 19, was on Team Finland along with then-Canes teammate Teuvo Teravainen, who is also on the 4 Nations roster. Team Canada won the gold medal as Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby was named MVP.

The 4 Nations Face-Off could help set the national rosters for the 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy, when NHL players will participate for the first time since the 2014 Sochi Games.

As Rantanen put it, "This could be a good warmup for next year, for the competition and in getting used to having a long break."

The IIHF has banned Russia and Belarus from world competition in 2025-26, although the International Olympic Committee could alter that ruling for the Olympics. That could affect such players as the Canes' Svechnikov, Dmitry Orlov and Pyotr Kochetkov.

"It's a huge event," Svechnikov said of the 4 Nations. "For me, as a Russian guy, we always want to play a World Cup or Olympic Games. I would like to be going to the 4 Nations and to be able to play for Russia, but it's fine."

Svechnikov said the Canes had seemingly been playing every other day, certainly in January, adding, "It's been hard and it will be huge for us to get away from the hockey and relax your mind and everything else."

The Hurricanes' first post-break game will be Feb. 22 in Toronto, and the next home game Feb. 27 against the Buffalo Sabres.



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Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour checks the scoreboard during the Hurricanes' game against Anaheim on Sunday, January 12, 2025 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour checks the scoreboard during the Hurricanes' game against Anaheim on Sunday, January 12, 2025 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett [rwillett@newsobserver.com](mailto:rwillett@newsobserver.com)

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour has said he has mixed emotions about the 4 Nations event, noting the risk of injury but at the same time realizing the importance and thrill of representing your country.

"It means a lot, and it's a nice refresher to change things up and add a little spice during the season when it gets Groundhog Day-ish," he said.

Slavin, who leads the Canes in ice time per game, said a long break from hockey would be helpful at this stage of the season, but playing for Team USA was worth it.

"It's a unique experience," the defenseman said. "It doesn't happen all the time so you give up 10 or 12 days, hopefully 12 days until the (4 Nations) final. You just want to have fun with it."

Including defending against Aho, Rantanen and Jarvis?

"It'll all be in fun out there," he said, smiling. "We're going to have a good time."

## 4 Nations Face-Off schedule

Montreal Bell Centre

Wednesday, Feb. 12 – Canada vs Sweden, 8 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 13 – USA vs Finland, 8 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 15 – Finland vs Sweden, 1 p.m.

USA vs Canada, 8 p.m.

Boston TD Garden

Monday, Feb. 17 – Canada vs Finland, 1 p.m.

Sweden vs USA, 8 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 20 – championship game, 8 p.m.

## 4 Nations Format

Each team plays three tournament games in a round-robin. Three points are awarded for a win in regulation, 2 points for an overtime/shootout win, one point for a loss in overtime/shootout.

The two teams with the best record/points advance to the championship game.



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## The Athletic

### Mikko Rantanen is off to a slow start with the Hurricanes: Is it time to panic?

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH, N.C. — We're five games into the Mikko Rantanen era with the Carolina Hurricanes, and panic among the fan base has already set in.

Since being acquired Jan. 24 in a shocking trade that brought him and Taylor Hall to the Hurricanes and shipped out Martin Necas, Jack Drury and draft picks, Rantanen has one goal and one assist in six games, and he's been unable to pull Carolina's power play out of its funk.

Is Rantanen a poor fit? Does coach Rod Brind'Amour's system stifle skilled players? Would anything fix the Hurricanes' ailing power play? Was Rantanen riding Nathan MacKinnon's coattails in Colorado?

Let's dive in.

Rantanen in red

In six games since the trade, the Hurricanes are 2-3-1 with 12 goals (2.00 per game) for and 14 against (2.33). Before the deal, Carolina averaged 3.37 goals per game and allowed 2.76.

Since the trade, Carolina's power play is 0 for 12 (currently 19.6 percent for the season), and the Hurricanes are averaging 29.3 shots on goal, compared to 32.1 before the acquisition of Rantanen and Hall.

With assistance from NaturalStatTrick, let's look a touch deeper.

The line of Sebastian Aho centering Rantanen and rookie Jackson Blake outscored opponents 2-1 at five-on-five in the first five games. Those numbers aren't "dominant first line-esque," but the details tell a different story.

The trio had 66.04 percent of shot attempts at five-on-five, outshot the opposition 26-14 and outchanced them 33-13 (including 13-8 in high-danger chances).

On Thursday in Minnesota, Brind'Amour juggled the lines, and Rantanen played primarily with Aho and Seth Jarvis. The line finished the game with five-on-five advantages in shot attempts (17-8), shots on goal (7-4) and scoring chances (7-3), and the trio was even in high-danger chances (1-1). They neither scored nor allowed a goal.

In the six games since the trade, Rantanen's 21 shots on goal are the most of any Hurricanes player, and 15 came at five-on-five. His five-on-five shooting percentage is 6.7 percent, compared to 13.38 percent during his 10 seasons with the Avalanche. Rantanen has also hit the post twice and the crossbar once in six games with Carolina, and a Blake power-play goal against Winnipeg on Tuesday was

overturned by review when it was determined Rantanen had interfered with Jets goalie Eric Comrie.

Looking back

The Hurricanes also made a big midseason addition last year, trading for Jake Guentzel at the trade deadline. Guentzel's time in Carolina — other than the team's inability to re-sign him — is widely considered a success.

In 17 regular-season games with Carolina, Guentzel finished with eight goals and 25 points. At five-on-five before the playoffs, Guentzel had three goals and 10 points, plus he had one goal and nine points on the power play. Half of his eight regular-season goals with the Hurricanes were empty-netters.

At five-on-five, Guentzel's shooting percentage was 7.69 percent — it was 13.84 percent during eight seasons in Pittsburgh and is 13.33 this season with Tampa Bay.

Guentzel's power-play numbers with Carolina, meanwhile, seem unsustainable in hindsight.

In Guentzel's 17 regular-season games, Carolina was 15 of 52 (28.8 percent), and the team was 26.9 percent for the entire season. While those numbers don't seem out of whack, this one does: He was on the ice for 17.4 power-play goals per 60 minutes, more than double the 7.7 he had with the Penguins during his career and still well above the 10.3 he has with Tampa Bay through 51 games this season.

Let's also peek at Guentzel's first six games with the Hurricanes.

Despite the trade being made March 7, Guentzel didn't debut until March 12 due to an injury. That surely gave Guentzel more time to get settled — personally and professionally — than Rantanen had, though he also had rust to knock off.

Guentzel had two goals and eight points in his first six games with Carolina, with one goal and five points coming at five-on-five. He had 18 shots on goal, with 13 coming at five-on-five.

Guentzel didn't exclusively play with one line upon first joining the Hurricanes, instead slotting with Necas and Evgeny Kuznetsov his first 2 1/2 games before moving to a line with Aho and Jarvis.

Overall, when Guentzel was on the ice in his first six games, his Corsi For percentage was 58.52 and Carolina outshot opponents 54-40 and outchanced them 51-30, including 18-9 in high-danger opportunities.

Carolina's offense was clicking before Guentzel entered the lineup, scoring at least three goals and averaging 4.17 goals



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in the five games prior, and that continued after the 1-0 loss to the Rangers in his debut. The Hurricanes scored 29 goals in their next six games (4.83) and averaged 3.71 per game during Guentzel's regular-season games with Carolina.

The Hurricanes' power play was also 4 for 17 in Guentzel's first six games with the team, though it's worth noting it didn't score on the first seven chances. The team was 5-0-1 in those games.

Other forwards acquired by the Hurricanes during the season in the Brind'Amour era had mixed starts to their tenures in Carolina.

Vincent Trocheck, traded for at the 2020 deadline, played seven games with the Hurricanes — registering a goal and an assist, neither at five-on-five — before the league shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He was on the ice for just one five-on-five goal and six against, and underlying numbers skewed in favor of the opponents in those games.

Max Domi, acquired at the 2022 deadline in a three-team trade, had a better start with Carolina. In his first six games after being traded, he had three assists (all at five-on-five), his on-ice five-on-five goal differential was 4-1, and his underlying numbers were good, though not great. He finished that regular season with two goals and seven points in 19 games, though his tenure will likely be remembered for his two-goal, one-assist Game 7 win against the Bruins in the first round.

Neither Trocheck nor Domi, however, bring the pedigree of Rantanen or Guentzel.

Riding shotgun to Nate

There's no denying that anyone who plays alongside MacKinnon is going to benefit from it, and Rantanen surely did. With an assist from NaturalStatTrick, here's a look.

Since the start of the 2022-23 season at five-on-five together, Rantanen and MacKinnon had a 56.78 Corsi For percentage, 55.22 percent expected goals percentage, 55.89 shots for percentage and 59.55 goals for percentage, and they outchanced opponents 59.11 percent of the time and 53.77 in high-danger opportunities.

Rantanen's numbers dipped without MacKinnon: 45.92 percent Corsi, 45.78 percent expected goals, 46.90 shots for percentage, 45.92 goals for percentage, 49.01 percent scoring chances and 43.58 percent high-danger chances. MacKinnon's numbers, meanwhile, stayed about the same.

That hasn't always been true. From 2019-20 through 2021-22, Rantanen's underlying numbers were better without MacKinnon than MacKinnon's were without Rantanen — though both were still at their best when together.

I suppose one could say Rantanen's play has dipped the last two-plus seasons, but it's hard to make that argument when he had 273 all-situations points in 211 games. The next closest Avalanche forward behind MacKinnon (331 points in 208 games) is Valeri Nichushkin, with 117 in 128 games.

Rantanen's 67 five-on-five assists during that time are the same as Artturi Lehkonen, the No. 3 forward, had in points. Rantanen also added 66 goals, just five fewer than MacKinnon.

What we've learned

Things clearly haven't gone great for the Hurricanes since the trade. The team has struggled to score, the power play has been nonexistent and Rantanen hasn't been able to produce on the scoresheet.

Is there cause for concern? Sure — Carolina not only traded away important pieces in Necas and Drury to land Rantanen and Hall, but there are no assurances either will re-sign after this season, especially if things don't turn around.

Here's the thing, though: They should. Like any team over the course of an 82-game season, the Hurricanes are in a rut now, squeezing the stick harder and harder with each passing low-scoring game. But you'd be hard-pressed to find a team that hasn't scored one or fewer goals in consecutive games this season.

The top-scoring Jets have twice, as have the Lightning — they're third in goals per game but had three straight games in January with just one goal. The Capitals, second in scoring, have avoided it, but the high-flying Oilers have been blanked four times, and the Panthers were shut out in consecutive games two different times.

The Hurricanes have not had consecutive games like this all season until now, and the team is still in the top 10 in the NHL in scoring. The same can be said for Rantanen, who won't continue to convert at half the rate he has in the past.

The power play, on the other hand, has fallen on hard times after an early hot start, and it didn't get any help Tuesday when the aforementioned Blake goal was taken off the board. The team is undoubtedly hoping that as Rantanen finds his footing, he will also boost the ailing power play.

The power play also needs more from the quarterback of the top unit. Shayne Gostisbehere was elite at the start of the year, with 17 power-play points in the season's first 27 games. Since then, he had one power-play point on Dec. 17, went dry the next four games, got hurt and missed eight games, and he has zero power-play points and two all-situations assists in the dozen games since returning.

Brent Burns moved to the No. 1 unit two games ago, but he has just one power-play point this season, albeit in more than a minute less ice time per game than last season.

Carolina has one more game — Saturday at home against Utah — before the 12-day break surrounding the 4 Nations Face-Off. That could be an opportunity for Aho and Rantanen — alternate captains for Team Finland — to continue working on their chemistry.

It could also be a long time to consider whether the Hurricanes made the right move at all.



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## NHL 2024-25 midseason predictions: Fan picks for Stanley Cup winner, awards and more

By: James Mirtle, Shayna Goldman, Jesse Granger, Sean Gentile

By Sean Gentile, Shayna Goldman, Jesse Granger and James Mirtle

Is 2025 the year for Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and the Edmonton Oilers? Plenty of The Athletic's NHL readers seem to think so.

We asked you for your thoughts on the top contenders for the Stanley Cup, the leading candidates to win individual awards and some of the league's biggest disappointments, and more than 2,500 of you filled out a 12-question ballot.

To share and break down the results, we brought in NHL senior writers James Mirtle and Sean Gentile, analytics know-it-all Shayna Goldman and goaltending expert Jesse Granger.

(Note: Some fan comments have been edited for length and clarity.)

You can find our staff's season predictions from October here and awards predictions here. You can find our predictions from November here, December here and January here.

"I picked the Stars to win at the season's start, but the Mikko Rantanen trade has changed that."

"I don't think there's one team head and shoulders above anyone for Stanley Cup favorites. Could be anyone this year."

Gentile: The fact that the Panthers are stuck in the "other" group is a testament to how uneven they've been this season. I think they'll be fine, for the record.

Goldman: I feel like Colorado didn't get enough credit for revamping its entire goalie situation. But after the Rantanen trade, it makes a lot of sense to see its stock drop (despite how well Martin Necas is fitting in). It will be really interesting to see what they do in the weeks leading up to the deadline.

Granger: The Jets' reputation as playoff underperformers is showing up here in a big way. Winnipeg has inarguably been the best team in the league to this point. They're scoring the most goals, have the best goalie by a wide margin and are on another eight-game heater. Yet, it's hard to blame the 89.3 percent of fans who placed their vote elsewhere.

Mirtle: I'm with the "could be anyone" voter ... this is going to be a wild postseason.

Gentile: Given how much you folks like the Western Conference, this makes plenty of sense. Someone from the East would have to make it far enough to lose, and the Hurricanes just added a superstar to the mix.

Granger: West Coast bias for the win!

Goldman: The Canes are the one team that really fixed its (original) fatal flaw, so that separation makes sense in both categories from the other Eastern Conference teams.

Mirtle: A 51 percent chance of making the final is quite an endorsement of Carolina. Meanwhile, the Capitals have been the hottest team in the league of late and still haven't earned

a lot of traction, even with Logan Thompson, who is a big advantage if he keeps playing the way he has.

Gentile: Feels like too large of a gap between Chicago and San Jose. Both teams are brutal, of course, but I think the Sharks' goaltending might give them the edge in the tank battle.

Goldman: Even with the Sharks' goaltending situation, it feels like they are doing a better job of staying in some games ... I'm sticking with the Blackhawks.

Granger: If the Sharks continue to give Yaroslav Askarov a bigger share of the starts, San Jose's goalie situation might feel different in a few weeks.

Mirtle: Someone thinks the Rangers are going to concede a nearly 20-point lead with less than 30 games to go? They could play the Hartford Wolf Pack roster and that's not happening. Or are they just mad at their team? And who's under "and more" here!?

Editor: Every club in the league except the Avalanche and Lightning received at least one vote. Probably from rival fans who just hate the teams.

"Look at the struggles in Nashville after it added big pieces to its roster, only to see the team sputter."

"The Sabres continue to underperform and disappoint."

"The Rangers quit for six weeks and tried to save their season once it was too late."

Gentile: The Preds are a disappointment, for sure, but their depth issues at center were always going to be a problem. I saw a team that could make the playoffs, but beyond that, eh. The Rangers have gotten their act together, to an extent, but it's still hard to pick anyone else.

Goldman: The Predators were the trendy answer to open the season, but the two problem children of the NHL, the Canucks and Rangers, should be leading this race.

Granger: I agree with you both, and the results at the top, but at the same time I can't help but feel like in truth, no one is more disappointed than fans of the Sabres. Maybe next year?

Mirtle: Maybe if we called it the biggest perennial trainwreck the Sabres would win something?

"The best surprise is between Washington and Columbus."

"Honorable mention to the Flames, who are a big surprise too, but I don't think anyone had Washington leading the league at any point this season."

"I wanted to vote Washington for best surprise, but it's hard to beat Columbus with all it's been through and how low its expectations were for the season."

Gentile: The Caps were a playoff team that added a bunch of legitimate pieces in the offseason. The Blue Jackets, on paper, seemed like one of the few worst teams in the league. Come on.

Goldman: The least surprising part is that the Blue Jackets have morphed back into the Broken Jackets. But if they can





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power through all of these injuries, they're going to emerge as the true No. 1 here.

Granger: The Blue Jackets have been a revelation. It's not just that they're winning more games than we expected, but it's how they're doing it. Columbus is one of the more exciting teams to watch and can fill the net with pucks at a rate I don't think anyone saw coming.

Mirtle: How is Calgary not getting more love here? I saw a lot of folks had them bottom five coming into the season, and they have a real shot at the playoffs.

"Kirill Kaprizov would have won the Hart had he not gotten injured."

"Kaprizov would be the Hart winner if he weren't injured so much this year."

"If Draisaitl doesn't win the Hart, it'll be a travesty."

"Zach Werenski is the engine for the most surprising team in years, the Blue Jackets. ... By the truest definition of the Hart, he is the most valuable player for a team picked to finish near the bottom of the league."

"Hellebuyck should win the Hart but I don't think the writers will give it to a goalie."

"Goaltending is such an underappreciated position. If Hellebuyck keeps up this level of play and doesn't win the Hart ... I don't think a goalie will ever win it again."

Gentile: This would be as good a season as any for a defenseman to win the Hart. Unfortunately, that's illegal.

Goldman: The Kaprizov points are so true because he was leading this race earlier this season. Draisaitl is the guy, but this is Quinn Hughes erasure.

Granger: I'm encouraged to see Hellebuyck with the third-most votes, but it's still not enough. He's the best player at the most important position, and he's putting up historically great numbers.

Mirtle: Nathan MacKinnon has been a one-man show a lot of nights lately for Colorado and leads the league in scoring, so if the voters are going to stay anti-non-forwards, he makes a ton of sense — if he can keep it up without Rantanen.

Gentile: Mark Scheifele is right behind Draisaitl and William Nylander in goals and couldn't even sniff the top 10. Tough break. I don't disagree, but it's a tough break.

Goldman: The fact that Scheifele and Kyle Connor play together definitely hurts their case — it makes the line better that there are two scoring threats, but it's a lot tougher to win this race when you're not the bona fide scorer of that line.

Granger: It's hard to disagree with the voters here. It's Draisaitl's to lose.

Mirtle: Nylander is second in goals before Friday's matchups and wayyy down the list. What really stands out about his season is who he's played with: Some of his top linemates include Max Domi, Max Pacioretty and Pontus Holmberg, who have combined for 10 goals. Maybe we need some sort of award for scoring 50-plus because you have no one to pass to?

"When will the Norris be split into an offensive and defensive award?"

"NHL needs a defensive defenseman award to separate the offensive Norris winner from defensemen who are great at defense."

"A shame shutdown defenseman get overlooked."

"They need a new award for best defensive defenseman."

"I think the Norris Trophy winner is a complete toss-up. At the moment, Makar has more offensive production than Hughes, but it flip-flops depending on the night. ... Werenski is a serious dark horse here as well."

"Werenski is my runner-up candidate for the Norris, but I can't vote for him over Hughes."

"Werenski plays tougher minutes than the other Norris contenders."

Gentile: Brutal category here. Hughes is my guy, at the moment, and I would've liked to see a few more votes for Werenski, but I can't argue with any of it. Any of the three could win, and it'd be deserved.

Goldman: The top three are spot on, but Werenski deserves more credit here.

Granger: This is the most entertaining of the trophy races this season, with three superstars who appear to be neck and neck.

Mirtle: Appreciate the love for a potential Rod Langway Award. Let's keep up the complaining!

go-deeper

GO DEEPER

Mirtle: Why the NHL needs a new award to better recognize defensemen

"Aleksander Barkov appears to have taken over Patrice Bergeron's crown as year-over-year Selke favorite."

"It kills me to vote for Barkov or any Panther to win ... but seems like a done deal."

"I'm not an Oilers fan but people need to realize that Draisaitl is playing amazing defensive hockey while scoring at an amazing rate ... he needs to get Selke votes."

Gentile: Barkov won this outright despite, like, 20 other plays getting votes. Sounds right.

Goldman: Even if Reinhart deserves more hype in this race, he will never get it over Barkov because he plays wing.

Granger: The fact that "other" came in second place by a good margin tells you how subjective this trophy is, and why Barkov will likely get the nod due to reputation. Not that he doesn't deserve it, but that's how this award typically goes.

Mirtle: I feel like Anze Kopitar's incredible season, as the fifth oldest forward in the league, deserves more of a shoutout. He should be right in the thick of this one. (By the way, did you know that he's 23rd in all-time scoring adjusted for era?)

"Logan Thompson deserves a better fate than second for the Vezina, but that's likely where he'll end up."

Gentile: Thompson is playing for second here, but that \$35.1 million contract is a nice consolation prize.



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Goldman: It's Hellebuyck's to lose, but this isn't the only award he should be getting a lot of votes for.

Granger: Thompson has been brilliant. He's posted a save percentage of .940 or higher in more than half of his starts, which is ridiculous, but he just doesn't play enough to keep up with Hellebuyck, who is on his own planet right now.

Mirtle: Third and fourth in goals saved above expected entering Friday's matchups? Mackenzie Blackwood in Colorado and Lukas Dostal in Anaheim. Just saying!

"What Spencer Carbery is doing with the Capitals lineup is spectacular and completely deserving of recognition."

"Carbery oversaw the integration of even more pieces and it's all come together, so far, in Washington. One of the biggest reasons he deserves the Jack Adams."

"Carbery should be a lock for Jack Adams. Not sure there even needs to be a vote at this point."

"If Dean Evason doesn't get Jack Adams for what he's doing in Columbus this season, it should go to Carbery in Washington. Both are doing incredible in their respective cities."

"Love what Carbery has done in Washington this year, but if the Blue Jackets manage to squeeze in (the playoffs), how do you not give it to Evason?"

Gentile: Carbery should be the wire-to-wire pick here, and he should've gotten more votes last year, too.

Goldman: Carbery definitely could have won this last year. But I think there is a really good conversation to have about him versus Evason, considering just how well the Blue Jackets have played this season.

Granger: I agree Carbery is the pick here, but I do appreciate some fans throwing votes on Rod Brind'Amour. When it comes to this award, he's a victim of his consistency and longevity. His teams are always so good, I think we take his contributions for granted.

Mirtle: I propose we get "The Carburetor" to stick as a nickname. He's certainly found the right mix in Washington. (And Toronto's power play has yet to recover without him.)

"Lane Hutson should be a close runner-up for the Calder!"

"Hutson deserves the Calder ... amazing talent."

"If Hutson doesn't win the Calder, it will be a scandal."

"Hutson is overrated by Canadiens fans."

"Macklin Celebrini will win the Calder but Dustin Wolf SHOULD win."

"I think Wolf deserves the Calder, but Celebrini will win it."

"Celebrini is the real deal."

"Celebrini is damn impressive this year, but you can't ignore what Hutson is doing in Montreal."

"Matvei Michkov has already been going through a bit of a rookie wall which I believe Hutson and Celebrini will both hit soon and their play will fall off down the stretch, whereas Michkov will be used to dealing with it and has adapted to playing through the pain so to speak."

Gentile: Certainly seems like Hutson peaked a bit too early.

Settling the great NHL U23 prospect debate: Should Hutson, Bedard rank higher?

Goldman: Goalies never get the hype they deserve against forwards. I'm not disagreeing with Celebrini as the No. 1 pick, I just think Wolf is right up there with him.

Granger: Wolf has lived up to all of the hype, and then some. His 19 goals saved above expected are the fifth most by a goalie 23 years old or younger since Evolving-Hockey started tracking the stat in 2007.

Mirtle: Wolf is also sixth in the entire NHL in goals saved above expected before Friday's matchups, ahead of a bunch of the biggest names in the game. Celebrini is 56th in points per game among forwards before Friday's matchups; Hutson is 45th in ice time among D before Friday's matchups. This one should be wayyy closer than this, especially if Wolf continues to start more frequently and Calgary makes the postseason. But what a rookie class this year. They've all been so fun to watch.



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## Carolina Hurricanes offensive struggles continue in 2-1 loss to Minnesota Wild

By: Colby Trotter

In acquiring superstar right wing Mikko Rantanen, the Carolina Hurricanes hoped he'd provide the scoring punch the team had been missing in the playoffs the last few seasons. Rantanen is on pace for his third straight 40-plus-goal season but has yet to provide the offensive firepower the Hurricanes traded for.

Since his arrival, the Canes are 2-3-1 and have scored two goals or less in five of those games. Rantanen hasn't helped a struggling power play either. Since the calendar turned to 2025, the Hurricanes have converted two of their 46 power play chances and haven't scored one since Rantanen entered the lineup. The result is the Hurricanes' second three-game losing streak of the season after their offensive struggles continued in a 2-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild at Xcel Energy Center.

"We've got to capitalize, myself included," said right wing Jackson Blake. "I've got to find ways to put it in the net. We've only scored one goal in the last two games. That's not going to win you very many hockey games."

When looking at the stat sheet, this seems like a game the Hurricanes should've won or at least scored more than one goal. The Canes outshot the Wild 38-24, won nearly 60% of the faceoffs and held Minnesota 0-for-3 on the power play. But in hockey, most of the time, it's about who capitalizes on their chances, not who has the most.

That was the story in the first period. The Hurricanes controlled play most of the opening frame but one poor shift gave the Wild a 1-0 lead despite Carolina outshooting them 15-7 in the first 20 minutes.

Early in the first period, Wild defenseman Zach Bogosian cleared the puck from his own zone, and Canes defenseman Dmitry Orlov tried to stop the puck but missed. Orlov's whiff allowed Minnesota center Marco Rossi to speed into Carolina's zone while Minnesota center Yakov Trenin got behind the defense. Rossi put a pass right on the tape of Trenin's stick and he had a one-on-one with goaltender Pyotr Kocketov. Trenin faked one way and went the other to give the Wild a 1-0 lead.

"I think we could've battled a little harder on that part to get a little second and third effort," Blake said. "They're so quick off of the rush. They had a lot of 2-on-1s and 3-on-2s tonight. We just can't give those up."

In the second period, Carolina had a prime opportunity to snatch the momentum back and tie the game up. With just under eight minutes left in the period, Minnesota defenseman Brock Faber was called for holding Blake on a breakaway, giving Blake a penalty shot.

On the attempt, Blake slowly made his way toward Minnesota goaltender Filip Gustavsson and had him beat with a fake shot but lost control of the puck, allowing Gustavsson to cover the puck before Blake could put one in the back of the net.

While Gustavsson most likely would've been beaten if Blake hadn't lost the puck, he was on top of his game most of the night, stopping 37 of 38 shots with the only goal allowed coming when Carolina had an extra attacker. In the middle frame, Canes goaltender Frederik Andersen went save for save with Gustavsson as neither side scored.

But 49 seconds into the third period, the Wild doubled up its lead on what ended up being the game-winning goal. From just above the blue line, Minnesota defenseman Jared Spurgeon ripped a shot toward the net that center Vinnie Hinostroza tipped. Hinostroza's tip careened off the right post and as Andersen tried to cover up the loose puck, he pushed it into the net, giving the Wild a 2-0 lead.

As they did in the first period after the Wild scored, the Hurricanes controlled the tempo, outshooting Minnesota 13-7 but the only time they could find the back of the net was when they put an extra attacker on the ice. With just under three minutes to go, center Seth Jarvis from just below the goal line made a no-look pass to center Sebastian Aho who ripped a shot past Gustavsson from the slot to make it 2-1.

Carolina continued to push, looking for the equalizer with three more shots on goal, but Gustavsson stonewalled all of them, giving Minnesota a 2-1 win and handing the Hurricanes their third straight loss.

"Tough night," said head coach Rod Brind'Amour. "We definitely had enough opportunities to get more than one goal. Maybe we don't win the game, but we certainly deserved to get something out of that. That's kind of how it's gone for us this whole year, to be honest with you."

Next, the Hurricanes return to Raleigh to take on the Utah Hockey Club. Puck drop is set for 1 p.m. at Lenovo Center Saturday.





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# SportScan

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

1339179 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes made a big splash, but are they done? With deadline a month away, maybe not

Staff Report

5-7 minutes 07/02/2025

It's hard to imagine the Carolina Hurricanes making a bigger splash than the blockbuster trade for Mikko Rantanen — maybe they can invent a time machine and shove Wayne Gretzky into it? — but there is still a month to go until the trade deadline and anything is possible.

More likely, March 7 passes quietly, the Hurricanes having shot their shot in January with the most notable trade of the NHL season so far, and with very little cap space to spare after the addition of Rantanen and Taylor Hall.

But that doesn't mean the roster is set for the postseason, either. There are a couple reinforcements that should be coming from within the organization, one well known, the other not as much. There's still a potential need to add some veteran center depth after Jack Drury's departure in the Rantanen deal, and while Frederik Andersen has made a successful return from surgery, the Hurricanes are always one awkward lunge away from crisis.

Here's who's coming for certain: hockey-knowers have been talking about Russian defenseman Alexander Nikishin as one of the best players in the world outside the NHL, if not the best, for years. His contract is finally up at the end of this season, and whenever SKA St. Petersburg's season is over, the 23-year-old is expected to be signed and on a plane to Raleigh within hours.

He's big (6-foot-4, 215 pounds) with a mean streak, and nearly a point-per-game scorer in the KHL. You can't do any better than this in the third round, and the Hurricanes have been trying to get him to North America for two years. He'll provide instant quality on the left side whenever he gets here. At worst, the KHL playoffs end in late May, but Nikishin could be here before the NHL regular season ends if SKA goes quietly and quickly.

The anticipation surrounding Nikishin's eventual arrival has been building for years; he's expected to be a cornerstone of the blue line for a decade. But he could also have an immediate impact in the postseason if the Hurricanes need him, and it obviates the need to pursue any defensive depth at the deadline, with Ty Smith and Scott Morrow in the AHL as needed as well.

There's another defenseman in the system who's expected to be here as well, without any of the fanfare or hype surrounding Nikishin. Joel Nystrom was a seventh-round pick in 2019, a little guy — seven inches shorter than Nikishin — with big-time skills who has blossomed playing

against older, stronger players in his native Sweden. The Hurricanes signed him to an NHL deal last spring and loaned him back to Farjestad for this season; he too will be in North America by the end of April, if not sooner.

Nikishin (on the left) and Nystrom (on the right) are like deadline pickups on defense, which means the Hurricanes can focus on an upgrade at center if they decide they need one there.

There's one longshot wild card here. If the Hurricanes decide there's no chance they'll be able to re-sign Rantanen — and, keep in mind, they have the cap space to meet his demands and there's no obvious reason why he wouldn't want to stay — they could still potentially flip him before the deadline.

That was not the plan when they acquired him, and there's an argument to be made that even if the Hurricanes overpaid for a rental player, they have a better chance to win the Stanley Cup this year with him than in future years without him. The Hurricanes want Rantanen here.

But in a worst-case scenario, they could conceivably punt and still get something back for him. In his brief time as general manager, some of Eric Tulsky's moves have been predictable through the lens of publicly available analytics; his ability to think creatively to get deals done has been anything but.

In that respect, while there might not be anything as dramatic as the Rantanen deal left to pull off the deadline, Tulsky might not be done surprising, either.

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1339180 Carolina Hurricanes

'A unique experience': Four Carolina Hurricanes ready for NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off

Chip Alexander

9-11 minutes 07/02/2025

Sebastian Aho, Mikko Rantanen, Seth Jarvis and Jaccob Slavin are headed to the 4 Nations Face-Off to play more hockey next week.

Andrei Svechnikov is headed to the Bahamas, to heal up and relax. Others on the Carolina Hurricanes plan to do the same, several seeking out sunny beaches and warm weather.

For the Hurricanes, the two-week break surrounding the international showcase event comes 56 games into their NHL schedule. The grind has



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been relentless and a half-dozen of the Canes recently have dealt with illnesses.

The Hurricanes are hoping to still be playing hockey in June, deep into the Stanley Cup playoffs. Which begs the question: would the players, given their druthers, prefer to represent their countries in the 4 Nations or have the time off?

"Hopefully, I'll be happy to play a hundred or so games this year," said Jarvis, who will compete for Team Canada. "I could care less about getting the rest. This is something I would never pass up, the chance to play for your country."

Jarvis said it should be easy to "flip the switch" and put on a jersey bearing the Maple Leaf, calling it "super special." He has talked about tearing up in first telling his family about his selection, and has joked about facing off against the likes of Aho, quipping, "I'll kill Fishy."

The 4 Nations Face-off will have teams from Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States playing in Montreal and Boston in an event that begins Feb. 12. The championship game will be held at Boston's TD Garden on Feb. 20.

Canada and Sweden will kick off the event Wednesday in Montreal. The next day will have Finland and Team USA going at it at the Bell Centre.

Aho and Rantanen were two of the first six players named to Team Finland. The Canes' trade with the Colorado Avalanche has since made them NHL teammates before going to the 4 Nations, and they also have been named alternate captains for Finland in the competition.

"It's a best on best tournament and it's always an honor to play for Team Finland," Rantanen said this week. "For the new generation, we haven't had a tournament like this since 2016, so we have a lot of new (Finnish) faces playing for the first time, which is good."

The 2016 World Cup was held in Toronto in September, just as NHL teams were gearing up for the start of the 2016-17 season. Teams from Czechia and Russia joined Finland, Sweden, Canada and the U.S. in the event, which also included a Team Europe and a Team North America in filling out the tournament field.

Aho, then 19, was on Team Finland along with then-Canes teammate Teuvo Teravainen, who is also on the 4 Nations roster. Team Canada won the gold medal as Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby was named MVP.

The 4 Nations Face-Off could help set the national rosters for the 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy, when NHL players will participate for the first time since the 2014 Sochi Games.

As Rantanen put it, "This could be a good warmup for next year, for the competition and in getting used to having a long break."

The IIHF has banned Russia and Belarus from world competition in 2025-26, although the International Olympic Committee could alter that ruling for the Olympics. That could affect such players as the Canes' Svechnikov, Dmitry Orlov and Pyotr Kochetkov.

"It's a huge event," Svechnikov said of the 4 Nations. "For me, as a Russian guy, we always want to play a World Cup or Olympic Games. I would like to be going to the 4 Nations and to be able to play for Russia, but it's fine."

Svechnikov said the Canes had seemingly been playing every other day, certainly in January, adding, "It's been hard and it will be huge for us to get away from the hockey and relax your mind and everything else."

The Hurricanes' first post-break game will be Feb. 22 in Toronto, and the next home game Feb. 27 against the Buffalo Sabres.

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour has said he has mixed emotions about the 4 Nations event, noting the risk of injury but at the same time realizing the importance and thrill of representing your country.

"It means a lot, and it's a nice refresher to change things up and add a little spice during the season when it gets Groundhog Day-ish," he said.

Slavin, who leads the Canes in ice time per game, said a long break from hockey would be helpful at this stage of the season, but playing for Team USA was worth it.

"It's a unique experience," the defenseman said. "It doesn't happen all the time so you give up 10 or 12 days, hopefully 12 days until the (4 Nations) final. You just want to have fun with it."

Including defending against Aho, Rantanen and Jarvis?

"It'll all be in fun out there," he said, smiling. "We're going to have a good time."

4 Nations Face-Off schedule

Montreal Bell Centre

Wednesday, Feb. 12 – Canada vs Sweden, 8 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 13 – USA vs Finland, 8 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 15 – Finland vs Sweden, 1 p.m.

USA vs Canada, 8 p.m.

Boston TD Garden

Monday, Feb. 17 – Canada vs Finland, 1 p.m.

Sweden vs USA, 8 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 20 – championship game, 8 p.m.

4 Nations Format

Each team plays three tournament games in a round-robin. Three points are awarded for a win in regulation, 2 points for an overtime/shootout win, one point for a loss in overtime/shootout.

The two teams with the best record/points advance to the championship game.

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1339181 Carolina Hurricanes

Mikko Rantanen is off to a slow start with the Hurricanes: Is it time to panic?

Cory Lavalette

10-12 minutes 07/02/2025

RALEIGH, N.C. — We're five games into the Mikko Rantanen era with the Carolina Hurricanes, and panic among the fan base has already set in.

Since being acquired Jan. 24 in a shocking trade that brought him and Taylor Hall to the Hurricanes and shipped out Martin Necas, Jack Drury and draft picks, Rantanen has one goal and one assist in six games, and he's been unable to pull Carolina's power play out of its funk.

Is Rantanen a poor fit? Does coach Rod Brind'Amour's system stifle skilled players? Would anything fix the Hurricanes' ailing power play? Was Rantanen riding Nathan MacKinnon's coattails in Colorado?

Let's dive in.

Rantanen in red

In six games since the trade, the Hurricanes are 2-3-1 with 12 goals (2.00 per game) for and 14 against (2.33). Before the deal, Carolina averaged 3.37 goals per game and allowed 2.76.

Since the trade, Carolina's power play is 0 for 12 (currently 19.6 percent for the season), and the Hurricanes are averaging 29.3 shots on goal, compared to 32.1 before the acquisition of Rantanen and Hall.

With assistance from NaturalStatTrick, let's look a touch deeper.

The line of Sebastian Aho centering Rantanen and rookie Jackson Blake outscored opponents 2-1 at five-on-five in the first five games. Those numbers aren't "dominant first line-esque," but the details tell a different story.



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The trio had 66.04 percent of shot attempts at five-on-five, outshot the opposition 26-14 and outchanced them 33-13 (including 13-8 in high-danger chances).

On Thursday in Minnesota, Brind'Amour juggled the lines, and Rantanen played primarily with Aho and Seth Jarvis. The line finished the game with five-on-five advantages in shot attempts (17-8), shots on goal (7-4) and scoring chances (7-3), and the trio was even in high-danger chances (1-1). They neither scored nor allowed a goal.

In the six games since the trade, Rantanen's 21 shots on goal are the most of any Hurricanes player, and 15 came at five-on-five. His five-on-five shooting percentage is 6.7 percent, compared to 13.38 percent during his 10 seasons with the Avalanche. Rantanen has also hit the post twice and the crossbar once in six games with Carolina, and a Blake power-play goal against Winnipeg on Tuesday was overturned by review when it was determined Rantanen had interfered with Jets goalie Eric Comrie.

### Looking back

The Hurricanes also made a big midseason addition last year, trading for Jake Guentzel at the trade deadline. Guentzel's time in Carolina — other than the team's inability to re-sign him — is widely considered a success.

In 17 regular-season games with Carolina, Guentzel finished with eight goals and 25 points. At five-on-five before the playoffs, Guentzel had three goals and 10 points, plus he had one goal and nine points on the power play. Half of his eight regular-season goals with the Hurricanes were empty-netters.

At five-on-five, Guentzel's shooting percentage was 7.69 percent — it was 13.84 percent during eight seasons in Pittsburgh and is 13.33 this season with Tampa Bay.

Guentzel's power-play numbers with Carolina, meanwhile, seem unsustainable in hindsight.

In Guentzel's 17 regular-season games, Carolina was 15 of 52 (28.8 percent), and the team was 26.9 percent for the entire season. While those numbers don't seem out of whack, this one does: He was on the ice for 17.4 power-play goals per 60 minutes, more than double the 7.7 he had with the Penguins during his career and still well above the 10.3 he has with Tampa Bay through 51 games this season.

Let's also peek at Guentzel's first six games with the Hurricanes.

Despite the trade being made March 7, Guentzel didn't debut until March 12 due to an injury. That surely gave Guentzel more time to get settled — personally and professionally — than Rantanen had, though he also had rust to knock off.

Guentzel had two goals and eight points in his first six games with Carolina, with one goal and five points coming at five-on-five. He had 18 shots on goal, with 13 coming at five-on-five.

Guentzel didn't exclusively play with one line upon first joining the Hurricanes, instead slotting with Necas and Evgeny Kuznetsov his first 2 1/2 games before moving to a line with Aho and Jarvis.

Overall, when Guentzel was on the ice in his first six games, his Corsi For percentage was 58.52 and Carolina outshot opponents 54-40 and outchanced them 51-30, including 18-9 in high-danger opportunities.

Carolina's offense was clicking before Guentzel entered the lineup, scoring at least three goals and averaging 4.17 goals in the five games prior, and that continued after the 1-0 loss to the Rangers in his debut. The Hurricanes scored 29 goals in their next six games (4.83) and averaged 3.71 per game during Guentzel's regular-season games with Carolina.

The Hurricanes' power play was also 4 for 17 in Guentzel's first six games with the team, though it's worth noting it didn't score on the first seven chances. The team was 5-0-1 in those games.

Other forwards acquired by the Hurricanes during the season in the Brind'Amour era had mixed starts to their tenures in Carolina.

Vincent Trocheck, traded for at the 2020 deadline, played seven games with the Hurricanes — registering a goal and an assist, neither at five-on-five — before the league shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He was on the ice for just one five-on-five goal and six against, and underlying numbers skewed in favor of the opponents in those games.

Max Domi, acquired at the 2022 deadline in a three-team trade, had a better start with Carolina. In his first six games after being traded, he had three assists (all at five-on-five), his on-ice five-on-five goal differential was 4-1, and his underlying numbers were good, though not great. He finished that regular season with two goals and seven points in 19 games, though his tenure will likely be remembered for his two-goal, one-assist Game 7 win against the Bruins in the first round.

Neither Trocheck nor Domi, however, bring the pedigree of Rantanen or Guentzel.

### Riding shotgun to Nate

There's no denying that anyone who plays alongside MacKinnon is going to benefit from it, and Rantanen surely did. With an assist from NaturalStatTrick, here's a look.

Since the start of the 2022-23 season at five-on-five together, Rantanen and MacKinnon had a 56.78 Corsi For percentage, 55.22 percent expected goals percentage, 55.89 shots for percentage and 59.55 goals for percentage, and they outchanced opponents 59.11 percent of the time and 53.77 in high-danger opportunities.

Rantanen's numbers dipped without MacKinnon: 45.92 percent Corsi, 45.78 percent expected goals, 46.90 shots for percentage, 45.92 goals for percentage, 49.01 percent scoring chances and 43.58 percent high-danger chances. MacKinnon's numbers, meanwhile, stayed about the same.

That hasn't always been true. From 2019-20 through 2021-22, Rantanen's underlying numbers were better without MacKinnon than MacKinnon's were without Rantanen — though both were still at their best when together.

I suppose one could say Rantanen's play has dipped the last two-plus seasons, but it's hard to make that argument when he had 273 all-situations points in 211 games. The next closest Avalanche forward behind MacKinnon (331 points in 208 games) is Valeri Nichushkin, with 117 in 128 games.

Rantanen's 67 five-on-five assists during that time are the same as Artturi Lehkonen, the No. 3 forward, had in points. Rantanen also added 66 goals, just five fewer than MacKinnon.

### What we've learned

Things clearly haven't gone great for the Hurricanes since the trade. The team has struggled to score, the power play has been nonexistent and Rantanen hasn't been able to produce on the scoresheet.

Is there cause for concern? Sure — Carolina not only traded away important pieces in Necas and Drury to land Rantanen and Hall, but there are no assurances either will re-sign after this season, especially if things don't turn around.

Here's the thing, though: They should. Like any team over the course of an 82-game season, the Hurricanes are in a rut now, squeezing the stick harder and harder with each passing low-scoring game. But you'd be hard-pressed to find a team that hasn't scored one or fewer goals in consecutive games this season.

The top-scoring Jets have twice, as have the Lightning — they're third in goals per game but had three straight games in January with just one goal. The Capitals, second in scoring, have avoided it, but the high-flying Oilers have been blanked four times, and the Panthers were shut out in consecutive games two different times.

The Hurricanes have not had consecutive games like this all season until now, and the team is still in the top 10 in the NHL in scoring. The same can be said for Rantanen, who won't continue to convert at half the rate he has in the past.

The power play, on the other hand, has fallen on hard times after an early hot start, and it didn't get any help Tuesday when the aforementioned Blake goal was taken off the board. The team is undoubtedly hoping that as Rantanen finds his footing, he will also boost the ailing power play.

The power play also needs more from the quarterback of the top unit. Shayne Gostisbehere was elite at the start of the year, with 17 power-play points in the season's first 27 games. Since then, he had one power-play point on Dec. 17, went dry the next four games, got hurt and missed



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eight games, and he has zero power-play points and two all-situations assists in the dozen games since returning.

Brent Burns moved to the No. 1 unit two games ago, but he has just one power-play point this season, albeit in more than a minute less ice time per game than last season.

Carolina has one more game — Saturday at home against Utah — before the 12-day break surrounding the 4 Nations Face-Off. That could be an opportunity for Aho and Rantanen — alternate captains for Team Finland — to continue working on their chemistry.

It could also be a long time to consider whether the Hurricanes made the right move at all.

Cory Lavalette is a freelance writer covering the Carolina Hurricanes. He is senior editor for North State Journal, a statewide newspaper based in Raleigh covering North Carolina, and has written about the Hurricanes for several outlets since 2008. He is a graduate of Utica College (now Utica University) and has lived in the Triangle since 2000.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339269 Toronto Maple Leafs

Opinion | The Leafs' lack of depth scoring is a growing concern. The numbers tell the story

Feb. 7, 2025

By Bruce Arthur Columnist

So, Bobby McMann was talking about William Nylander the other night. Nylander had scored three goals, inching closer to his career high of 40, on a night where McMann added another to reach a career high of 16. McMann was metaphorically starry-eyed.

"I think that's what I've watched the most, how he kind of baits the goalie for a half-second," McMann said after a 6-3 win in Calgary. "He leans into it, but then holds it for a second just before he shoots. I think it throws a goalie off a little bit. So I think just the timing of when he releases the puck is something that I'm trying to pick up on."

Asking one leading Leafs goal scorer to talk about another is a common occurrence this season, and more and more as the season goes on. This Leafs team is the most top-heavy team anywhere near the playoffs, and if anything the trend is accelerating. Toronto's top six goal scorers are, in order: Nylander, John Tavares, Auston Matthews, Matthew Knies, Mitch Marner and McMann. They have combined for 126 goals out of 165 total. That is 76.4 per cent of their goals. As mentioned last week, while Tampa sits at 75 per cent no team anywhere near the playoff picture is higher.

And it's not clear there is an internal solution. Going into Thursday night's late game against the Kraken in Seattle, Toronto's top six had scored their last 18 goals over six games. The last time a non-top-six Leaf had scored was in a wild, "seven straight goals as the Habs collapsed" 7-3 win over Montreal on Jan. 18. Nick Robertson got a power-play goal, defenceman Oliver Ekman-Larsson got another, Steven Lorentz scored as part of the pile-on, and David Kämpf found an empty net.

But that was an oasis of depth scoring in what has become a desert. Since Jan. 1, the Leafs had scored 47 goals in 15 games and their top six had 39. That's 83 per cent. The other goal scorers since Jan. 1 were Robertson (twice), Ekman-Larsson (twice), Morgan Rielly, Kämpf, Lorentz and Jake McCabe. And of those goals, only four didn't include at least a point for the top six.

Toronto's big guns have generally kept firing, and if they don't there isn't anything else to rely on. Outside the top six, only Robertson had more than five goals, with eight. In Seattle, the Leafs started the game with the shot-shy Max Domi up with Matthews and Knies, Marner on a second line with Tavares and Nylander, and McMann on the third line with Pontus Holmberg and Robertson. There may be more combinations down the stretch.

Even presuming the main guys don't hit any slumps, it's hard to see who could rise. Sometimes shooting percentages cool and players heat back

up — team president Brendan Shanahan talks about how he would do that math in his head when the puck wasn't going in.

But Robertson, Rielly, Max Pacioretty, Lorentz and Kämpf are above their career shooting percentages, while Domi (nine goals last season), Holmberg (seven) and Ekman-Larsson (nine) are the notable players below. Last year's team included 21 goals from Tyler Bertuzzi and 10 from Calle Järnkrok, but Bertuzzi left in free agency and Järnkrok hasn't recovered from groin and hernia surgery in November. Outside of Matthews getting healthy enough to get back to a 60-goal pace — and he did have 10 goals in his last 15 games heading into Thursday night, a 54-goal pace — where's the upside?

It's not that being top-heavy is a death sentence; it just makes a run through four rounds of playoffs, even in what appears to be a soft Eastern Conference, much harder. No Cup champ in the past 10 years has been close to a 75 per cent mark for goals scored by their top six; only one, last year's Florida Panthers, went above the 60 per cent mark (at 65.3), while Tampa's 2020 team was right at 60 per cent. No Cup champ in the last 25 years has cracked 70 per cent, though Tampa in 2004 (69.8 per cent) and Carolina in 2001 (69.6) came very close.

And even that was in the dying days of the dead puck era. As Pacioretty mentioned before the Calgary win: "Teams have won by third lines beating the other team's third line in the playoffs, and using everybody." Even last year's Edmonton Oilers — who are, this year, a top-heavy team of their own — got 65 per cent of their regular-season goals from their top six, and 60 per cent in the playoffs.

So, barring a sustained return to health for Matthews, a hot streak from sources either likely or unlikely, or a surprising acquisition at the trade deadline, the Leafs will live and die based on their goaltending, their top defence pair and, above all, their stars. The pressure was always on, but it seems to be deepening by the day.

Toronto Star LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339270 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs goalie Anthony Stolarz returns to action and shows no sign of rust in win over Kraken. 'It's good to be back'

Feb. 7, 2025

By Ilyas Hussein Staff Reporter

The Maple Leafs were thrilled to see Anthony Stolarz back between the pipes for the first time in eight weeks.

He was riding a .953 save percentage in his last four starts before an injury on Dec. 12 required a procedure to remove a "pebble" from his knee. And he ranked top two in save percentage, goals-against average and goals saved above expected league-wide prior to going down.

"He was on fire. He single-handedly won games for us," Leafs forward William Nylander told reporters in Seattle on Thursday afternoon. "It's nice to have a guy like that back in the lineup. Hopefully, he's feeling good."

Stolarz showed no signs of rust in his return with 27 saves in a 3-1 win over the Kraken.

"I felt really good in there," said Stolarz, who improved his record to 10-5-2 on the season. "Coming back you kind of just want to have fun, start getting back into it a little bit, so that was my mindset coming into tonight and not worry too much about the results."

Stolarz had been medically cleared for more than a week and has been practising with the team since Jan. 24 but he opted to take a cautious approach, wanting more time to acclimate to game speed before making a return. That decision paid off.

He made three highlight-reel saves in the opening period, sprawling across his crease to stop Kraken forward Mitchell Stephens. His confidence carried into the second when he flashed the leather on Brandon Montour then smirked and nodded at his former Florida Panthers teammate.





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In the third, he dropped his stick — a move he says he learned from former goalie partner Sergei Bobrovsky — to make a point-blank stop on Shane Wright.

"It's good to be back," Stolarz said.

He was in the zone. The Leafs bench could sense it.

"We're comfortable with either one of those goalies in our net," Leafs forward Mitch Marner said of Stolarz and Joseph Woll. "He made some massive saves for us to keep that game how it was."

The Leafs will look to complete the sweep of the four-game western road trip Saturday in Vancouver.

A surprise ice breaker

Entering Thursday night's game, the Leafs' last 18 goals came exclusively from their top-six goal scorers: Nylander, John Tavares, Auston Matthews, Matthew Knies, Marner and Bobby McMann. That stretch dated back to their 7-3 win over Montreal on Jan. 18.

The man to break that streak? Defenceman Philippe Myers, who hadn't scored in the NHL since Nov. 17, 2022.

"It's really nice to see it go in," Myers told TSN between periods. "Happy to chip in offensively there ... Lucky to get a bounce there, but I'll take it."

It was an offensive bounce the Leafs needed from their blue line. Toronto ranks last in the league among goals from defencemen, with 12. And only one goal came from the back end in the last 13 games prior to Thursday.

High stick?

Matthew Knies tipped a puck past Seattle goaltender Joey Daccord for his 21st of the season but he didn't seem confident it would count.

Despite protests that Knies deflected it in with a high-stick, officials initially ruled it a goal.

The 22-year-old Leafs forward played coy during the celebration, sending Jake McCabe to fly by the bench first as the goal scorer. Yet, after a long review, the officials had no conclusive evidence to overturn the call.

"I was kind of trying to hide it a little bit. I know it was a questionable call," Knies smirked on the TV broadcast. "Luckily it stood."

'Best player in the league'

On his off-day in Calgary, Marner and a few teammates unwound in hot tubs at the spa.

But later that night Marner was hit with muscle spasms, forcing him to miss his first game of the season Tuesday night.

"I'm not sure how it really happened. It was just bizarre. It kind of felt to come on the night before the Calgary game," Marner told reporters in Seattle on Thursday afternoon. "It was just weird."

He didn't miss a beat in his return.

Marner notched his 500th NHL assist on Myers' opening goal, making him the fourth Leaf to hit that total. He's the third fastest active player to reach that mark, behind only Sidney Crosby and Connor McDavid.

"It's really cool. I don't normally want solo achievements in this league or enjoy them as much as maybe people should, so a lot of credit to the guys around me," said Marner, who lined up with Tavares and Nylander on Thursday. "It's pretty crazy."

Myers, without hesitation, dubbed Marner: "(The) best player in the league."

Why?

"He does everything," Myers said on the TV broadcast between periods. "He's fun to watch every night."

Toronto Star LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339271 Toronto Maple Leafs

LEAFS NOTES: To sweep their trip, Toronto has to beat Vancouver hex

Lance Hornby

Published Feb 07, 2025

The Maple Leafs must appear dull as dishwater in Delta as they arrived in British Columbia Friday, compared to the news-making Canucks.

But do not for a second believe the multi-distractions of trades, contracts, Quinn Hughes' health, Elias Pettersson's slump, internal intrigue and playoff positioning will veer Vancouver from its appointed task. They badly want to lay another beating on Toronto and its fans, who are sure to filter into Rogers Arena Saturday night.

Without counting the stinker the Leafs turned in a month ago when the road-weary Canucks won 3-0 with surprising ease, they'll be looking for an eighth straight win at home against Toronto and 11th in the past 12 meetings.

Craig Berube is hoping his team has both long and short memories, definitely to atone for getting booed off Bay St. in January, but remembering how well they've played this week. Saturday is a chance to not only take away the Canucks' bragging rights, but sweep the Leafs first ever four-game Western Canada road trip since Seattle was added to the schedule.

"That (loss) was awhile ago, but we do take stuff out of there," Berube told media after a quick practice at the University of British Columbia. "That was a low-event game for sure. We have to definitely create more. We weren't good enough."

With a 4 p.m. local puck drop, Berube didn't see the need to stay on the ice long and had kept Thursday's forward lines in place. That's Max Domi with Auston Matthews and Matthew Knies in a continuing attempt to get Domi in on some points and another mix of Mitch Marner, John Tavares and William Nylander to sort out what should be a dynamite trio.

"There were times when they had good situations set up (in Seattle) and didn't execute," Berube said of latter unit. "Puck execution the whole game was not great by us by any means. If they execute, the line could be very dangerous for sure."

Hughes (out the past few days with a lower body issue) and the Canucks rested Friday after their 2-1 overtime win in San Jose. This game is a homecoming for Leaf alternate captain Morgan Rielly, who has been playing better of late.

COMPARING APPLES AND ORANGES

Matthews continues to stay parked behind Darryl Sittler for second place in franchise goals (389 to 388), the captain at a season-worst five-game goal slump. When sent out Thursday with Seattle's net empty, he wound up in the penalty box, albeit with an iffy high-stick call.

But the apples are low-hanging for Matthews's picking, six assists the past three games. So there was a 'What, me worry?' look of bemusement when his lack of goals was brought up Friday.

"You want to play better, to score, but the opportunities are there, we're still producing as a line, the power play has been good and it's been a pretty good road trip so far. You want to end the road trip on a pretty good note against a good team."

PENNY FOR THE HALL

Leafs pro scout Mike Penny is among those being inducted into the British Columbia Hockey Hall of Fame in July.

Penny has been with the Leafs since the late Pat Quinn's days, in capacities such as director of player personnel. While with the Canucks, Penny put the wheels in motion to draft Pavel Bure. Also going into the B.C. hall are former NHLers Dan Hamhuis and Shawn Horcoff.

LOOSE LEAFS

Putting on his Team USA hat for next week's start of the 4 Nations Face-Off, Matthews says he's not spoken to future teammate Hughes about his condition. "I was really looking forward to the opportunity of playing with him. I don't know what the situation is, but it would be an unfortunate loss for us" ... Many Leafs got a giggle out of Matthew Knies' attempt to sell Jake McCabe as the scorer of Thursday's third goal, to throw off





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suspicion whether he himself deflected it with a high stick. Knies waited for McCabe to go first down the celebratory fist bump line. "Maybe he doesn't realize there's a thousand cameras no matter what happens," Matthews said. "But I appreciate the effort on that for sure" ... Friday was the 49th anniversary of Sittler's 10-point game against the Boston Bruins at Maple Leaf Gardens.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339272 Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs' William Nylander takes talents to video game realm with PlayStation

Mark Daniell

Published Feb 07, 2025

Before William Nylander hits the ice, he goes through a rigorous pre-game schedule that doesn't involve a video game controller. So, when the Toronto Maple Leafs forward hears that some team members of the Blue Jays baseball club use video games to scout on-field opponents, he looks genuinely surprised.

Most gamers love playing sports video games so they can live out their athletic fantasies in the virtual world. Turns out games like MLB The Show, NBA2K and NHL 25 can help give real-life players an assist when they suit up to play.

The 2025 4 Nations Face-Off is just days away, but Nylander, who will play for his beloved Sweden in the tournament, seems intrigued by the prospect of running through a few schemes on his Sony PlayStation before lacing up his skates.

"That's interesting. I never thought about doing that," he chuckles during a recent interview when I ask him about integrating NHL 25 into his game-day routine. "I'll have to give that a try."

Last month, Nylander, who has notched 33 goals and 22 assists for the Maple Leafs so far this season, joined the PlayStation Playmakers program, which has featured the likes of Toronto Raptors stars Scottie Barnes and RJ Barrett, Washington Mystics forward Aaliyah Edwards, basketball great LeBron James and Stranger Things star Finn Wolfhard, among others.

The program brings together notable names from the worlds of sport and culture to help PlayStation users "stay sharp, positive and at the top of their game."

To celebrate the partnership, Nylander appears alongside Toronto Sceptres forward Sarah Nurse in a new ad that shows the two local superstars engaging in a game of road hockey with a group of kids.

For the son of former NHLer Michael Nylander, gaming has been a way to stay in touch with friends all over the world. "Growing up, I played a lot of Call of Duty ... It was a way to connect with friends," the Calgary-born Swede says. "I've got friends in different places. Playing video games with them was always to keep connected."

Playing NHL 25 nowadays is a way he forges a bond with his younger cousins. "It's always fun to have them over (to his offseason home in Sweden). Or when I'm here (in Toronto), to get on and play some NHL with them," he smiles.

As he gets ready for the 4 Nations Face-Off next week, Nylander, 28, spoke to the Toronto Sun about how PlayStation plays a part in his life and his favourite moments as a Leaf.

Who's the biggest gamer in the clubhouse?

Probably Mitchy (Marner). Mitchy plays the most. But we have a couple of guys that play and they're all pretty good. The game we play the most is Call of Duty.

What do you think of your likeness in NHL 25?

It's awesome. I think they do an incredible job of facial stuff and everything is pretty on point there. They do a tremendous job.

Do you get on there and play with strangers?

Not so much. I don't really do that. But when you're playing Call of Duty, you're playing with your buddies and you're playing against strangers. That happens from time to time. But I haven't played NHL 25 against strangers.

So when you play Call of Duty, are you chirping the other players?

I'm not really a chirper. I let my buddies do the chirping. It's more fun listening to them.

Give me three emojis to describe your gameplay in NHL 25?

I'm bad with emojis, but I'm having a good time, so there would be a smiley face for sure.

You've been with Toronto for a decade. What's your favourite memory as a Leaf so far?

I would think it would be going all the way back to the draft and getting drafted is probably one of my favourite memories. Then, hopefully, there are some bigger memories that we'll create here in the city of Toronto.

Nylander draft pic

I always wonder what you guys do on your off-days.

A day-off is a sleep-in day. Get some rest. Wake up, have a nice breakfast or lunch. Have some sort of treatment. Depending on the day, I might jump on and play some video games with my buddies if everybody's available to play. Other than that, it's just take the dogs out for walks and get some rest.

I normally cover entertainment. We're in the midst of awards season. What's your favourite movie, favourite actor and the last thing you streamed?

I watched Severance and Silo and those are pretty cool shows. Movies ... Favourite actor ... I love Tom Hardy. The Dune movies are great with Zendaya and Timothee (Chalamet).

What music gets you hyped up before you hit the ice?

I'm a little bit all over the place with what I'm listening to right now. I listen to a lot of The Weeknd. I love The Weeknd. I love Drake. But I've been going old school and listening to Blink 182 and some 50 Cent. Then I love country, too. Country music has grown on me since coming over from Sweden.

I do love seeing what you guys are wearing when you make your way into Scotiabank Arena on game day. Who's got the best game-day fit?

Auston (Matthews). I think Auston has got some great, great style for sure.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339273 Toronto Maple Leafs

Morgan Rielly opens up about losing his swagger — and trying to find it again

Jonas Siegel

7-9 minutes 2/7/2025

SEATTLE — Mitch Marner is about to amble past Morgan Rielly in a corner of the Toronto Maple Leafs' temporary confines at Climate Pledge Arena. Before Marner walks through the door and out of the room, he gives Rielly a playful shove.

With a road trip's worth of stubble on his face and a navy Leafs ball cap on his head, Rielly grins.

The team's longest-serving player hasn't had much to smile about recently as he trudges through one of the more difficult seasons of his NHL career. January was particularly rough: Rielly was on the ice for 20 goals against in 13 games, including two or more on six occasions. He produced only four points at the other end. His ice time in one game —



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16:27 on Jan. 18 in Montreal — dropped to a level not seen since his earliest years as a Leaf.

The team was concerned by what they were seeing, albeit also optimistic. Rielly wasn't some soon-to-be 31-year-old in the midst of rapid physical decline. Rather, it seemed evident in his play that this was a struggle between the ears.

In other words, it was something that could be fixed.

The early days of February are proving encouraging. Rielly had one of his best nights of the season in Calgary earlier this week — he was on the ice for four Leafs goals and none against, the team dominating his five-on-five minutes — and followed that up with another engaged performance in Seattle, which included a direct-strike assist to Bobby McMann on a power play that Rielly himself drew for the Leafs.

Rielly now has points in three consecutive games, his first such streak since November.

Did Rielly feel like he was getting his swagger back?

"Yeah. Yeah," he paused, debating for a half-second whether to elaborate. "Yeah."

Then he did elaborate on what he's been going through in conversation with The Athletic, as well as his efforts to get out of it.

"I don't want to say it's all mental," said Rielly. "I feel like that gets overused."

It had more to do with mindset, he explained. Unlocking the right mindset again, that is.

"I think this whole time I've kinda felt like I wasn't that far off to get to where I wanted to be," Rielly said. "And I'm not saying I'm there now. I'm saying I'm just kinda working towards that."

"But yeah," he added. "I feel good. I've been feeling good. It's kind of a mindset. I feel like it's getting there."

What was the right mindset for Rielly? It was hard to explain, he said. "It's just everything about — like, you can't really tell yourself to be confident. But you can go out there and you try to perform in a way or do things that provide confidence."

Which for Rielly meant less overthinking and more plain old aggression, more playing to instincts. More being Morgan Rielly.

The Leafs believed Rielly, trying to minimize risk to suit the preferences of first-year head coach Craig Berube, had swung too far the other way, removing too much risk from his game and losing something essential in the process.

Rielly agreed with that assessment. "At times, I think so," he said. "But that's no one's fault but my own."

Berube urged him to "just be aggressive and use your abilities." Mistakes would happen.

Rielly has been trying to strike the right balance throughout his 12-year NHL career between taking chances and creating opportunities for offence, but not so recklessly that it costs his team at the other end.

This season, his first under Berube after five years under Sheldon Keefe and four-plus seasons before that under Mike Babcock, has arguably been the most challenging — what with Berube's risk-free desires as well as changes to the way the team defends under the new coach.

"There's lots of times where I try to be more defensive because that's good for the team. That's not always the way that it shakes out," Rielly said. "Your intentions don't always come out the right way. And I think at times, for me in particular, you just gotta go out and f—ing play and be confident and be aggressive and lean into your skill set and do what makes you who you are."

Which explains why Rielly is looking more like Rielly all of a sudden: more involved in the play, his legs constantly in motion, his eyes again scanning the ice for scoring opportunities. He's putting pucks on net again too — eight in the last three games after one shot, total, in the previous five.

"I think when I'm playing well — I've done a lot of reflecting over the years — but there are certain things that I'm doing that are common

trends for when I'm playing well and how I'm feeling," said Rielly, who sits 23 points back of Tomas Kaberle for second all-time among Leafs defencemen. "It's just a matter of having confidence, going out and playing and being aggressive. Trust your instincts is big. Trust your skill set. I'm not saying I've gotten everything figured out, but I feel like I'm getting to where I want to be."

Manifesting confidence proved particularly difficult last month when it seemed like just about any time Rielly took the ice, the puck was finding its way into the Leafs' net — sometimes because of Rielly, like when he lost a battle behind the net against Minnesota last week, sometimes not.

It felt like it was happening all the time.

"All the time," Rielly concurred.

He recalled similar stretches over a career that spans almost 900 games, but that didn't make it any easier to absorb when it was happening. He found counsel with teammates who had endured similar funks.

"It's a test — it's a real test," he said. "And I think that's how I view it. It's a test of character, a test of your will, and your willingness to stick with things and push through and work hard and not get down or not get discouraged."

"I mean, there were times I'd get in the car after games and I felt like I'm right there and I'm playing well and it's just not happening. And then there's other times where I don't feel quite as positive."

It wore on Rielly. The team could see it.

"I was working hard. I was determined to get out of it," Rielly said. "It was not a lack of investment on my part. But the harder you work sometimes isn't always the answer ... I think that probably happened to a certain degree."

Positivity is slowly seeping back in.

Rielly has been eyeing a positive spurt heading into the two-week break for the 4 Nations Face-Off. That would allow him the opportunity to reset "not (with) a clean slate, but you pick up after a break and you really get going."

Pick back up with confidence re-established.

"It's an important thing in any line of work," Rielly said. "You want to feel confident, and when you're confident things tend to feel a little bit easier, kinda come a little bit easier. And so for me, I know I'm prepared, I know that I'm healthy, and I know that I'm capable. It's just going out there and doing it."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339274 Utah Hockey Club

A Utah hockey captain hopes meditation — and a fresh perspective — can jump-start his season

By Belle Fraser

Feb. 7, 2025

Columbus, Ohio • When Lawson Crouse wakes up from a nap, he meditates.

The Utah Hockey Club forward goes through his breathing techniques and visualizes the kind of player he wants to be. A lot of it is positive thinking, Crouse said, and reciting mantras that soon turn into held beliefs.

That's been a little more difficult of late.

"When you go through streaks like this, that's the hardest part, trying to manufacture that feeling," Crouse said. "Hockey is a very mental game and I'm constantly working on the mental side of it. Just trying to stay positive with myself as much as I can."

Crouse, who is an associate captain for Utah, was a healthy scratch Tuesday against the Philadelphia Flyers. He re-entered the lineup in



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Thursday's 3-2 win over the Columbus Blue Jackets and scored his first goal since Jan. 23 to tie the game in the second period.

The 27-year-old was the first to agree with head coach André Tourigny's decision when he was told he was being held out earlier in the week. It's not something Crouse wanted, obviously, but he understood why.

"I hold myself to a higher level and standard. Ultimately they made the decision and that is the consequence for my actions," Crouse said. "I knew that right away. I told Bear (Tourigny) that right away. Obviously, it's unfortunate but I've got to play better. It's on me."

It has been a slower season in terms of production than what the team expects of Crouse and he expects of himself. The winger has 11 points (seven goals, four assists) through 53 games and one point in the last 14 games for Utah.

Comparatively, Crouse finished with 42 points (23 goals, 19 assists) through 81 games last season and has scored 20-plus goals in the last three years.

He is also the third highest-paid forward on Utah's roster, earning \$4.3 million a year after signing a five-year, \$21.5 million contract with the organization — formerly the Arizona Coyotes — in August 2022. He will be an unrestricted free agent ahead of the 2027-28 season but has some legitimate term left on the deal.

Crouse knows he has to elevate his play.

Before he can jump-start his scoring touch, though, Crouse is focused on doing the little things right too. He believes it will lead him to find the back of the net like his team needs.

"Just power. Using my speed, using my size, using my physicality. Winning battles. Just all of that stuff. Being hard on pucks. And then getting shots," Crouse said. "Getting to the dirty areas and creating opportunities. That's my game and in the past years, that's how I've scored a lot of goals. That's what I have to get back to."

Scratching a member of the leadership group who has been a big part of the team for the better part of eight years could be hard for a coach to do. But it's a lesson on accountability to the Utah room that everyone — no matter their standing — needs to pull their weight for the team to succeed.

"I think at the end of the day, there's always the player and the person. You can demand more from the player, but it's important to respect the person as well," Tourigny said. "The person is not in question. Their character is not in question — zero. It's performance. At the end of the day, we're in a business and the performance has to be there. There's a certain level of expectation and they have to meet that. But it's nothing personal."

When scratched on Tuesday, Crouse took the chance to watch the game from a different perspective, figuratively and literally, while in the stands at Delta Center. He embraced the learning lesson and honed in on areas of the game he felt he could improve.

"It's crazy when you watch up there — it looks like there's so much time and when you get on the ice it feels like there's a guy all over you," Crouse said. "I was just focusing on things like areas that I'm continuously in on the ice that I could maybe have an extra second to do this or that."

Crouse skated on the third line with Jack McBain and Josh Doan on Thursday in Columbus and the trio produced well.

With Crouse back in the lineup, Matias Maccelli was a healthy scratch for the second time this season. The forward has 17 points (eight goals, nine assists) in 51 games and has been working on his defensive play but was the odd one out as others have outperformed him on a nightly basis.

"I think at this point it's internal competition. That's the beauty of having more depth up front," Tourigny said. "In every role there's competition right now and we can go either way. I think it's good in a team where you have accountability, depth, internal competition."

The internal competition Tourigny talks about has pushed Crouse to dig deeper but not be too hard on himself. It's no help to dwell on the negatives. Instead, Crouse skates with the belief that things will start to click for him consistently. And when they do, Utah Hockey Club will be a better team.

"When you're playing your best hockey you're not thinking, you're just playing confident and everything is just coming natural. Obviously, when you go through stretches, you're playing a little bit more tense. Mentally you have to put yourself in a situation to play free," Crouse said. "I'm going to get going, I know I can. I believe in it. Just have to do it."

SALT LAKE TRIBUNE LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339275 Utah Hockey Club

Utah HC might have its toughest weekend of the season coming up

Brogan Houston

4-5 minutes 07/02/2025

Brogan Houston is an intern for the Deseret News. He covers the Utah Hockey Club and trending news.

The Utah Hockey Club seems to have its groove back.

In back-to-back games, Dylan Guenther potted last-minute overtime goals to seal the deal for Utah HC. He and his teammates look to keep the ball rolling over the weekend, though the challenge just got a bit heavier.

It had success against the Philadelphia Flyers and the Columbus Blue Jackets, who are both on the outside of the playoffs looking in at the time of writing. But now it has to do it against the top two teams in the Metropolitan Division.

Utah Hockey Club vs. Carolina Hurricanes

First up are the Carolina Hurricanes. Utah hosted Carolina in November — a game fans will remember as Karel Vejmelka's most dominant game of the season, stopping 49 of 50 shots en route to a 4-1 win.

What fans may not remember is the reason why 50 shots were able to get through to Vejmelka.

In the third period of the game, shortly after Utah scored three goals in less than three minutes, Michael Carcone threw a hard, clean hit on Tyson Jost.

Jost gave Carcone a tap with his stick as the two were rushing to get back into the play, signifying that he wanted to avenge himself with a fight. Carcone obliged immediately, spinning around, grabbing his guy and throwing punches.

But there was one problem: He grabbed the wrong guy.

Rather than fighting Jost, Carcone put a beating on a completely unsuspecting Jack Drury. It earned Carcone 17 minutes of penalties, seven of which were timed. Utah made matters worse by taking two more minor penalties before the end of the period.

That's 11 minutes' worth of shorthanded time in a 20-minute period, and Utah didn't allow a single goal.

Drury has since been traded to the Colorado Avalanche, so Carcone shouldn't have to worry about answering the bell on Saturday.

The Hurricanes will look to get back into a rhythm on Saturday. They've lost three games in a row and they've scored just one goal in their last two games. Superstar Mikko Rantanen, whom they acquired from the Avalanche in January, has just two points in six games with his new club.

If Saturday's game is even half as eventful as the two teams' last matchup was, fans are in for a treat.

Utah Hockey Club vs. Washington Capitals

Five days after their last game against the Hurricanes, Utah HC played host to the Washington Capitals. This time, it plays the Canes and Caps on back-to-back days.

The game drew league-wide attention when Jack McBain inadvertently collided with Alex Ovechkin, resulting in a fractured fibula for the latter.



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The injury paused Ovechkin's hunt for the all-time goal scoring record, but he was back in action just 40 days later and his pursuit of Wayne Gretzky is alive and well. He's currently on a four-game goal streak and needs just 16 more to pass the Great One.

That game as a whole was one that Utah would prefer to forget. It struggled to get anything going and ultimately lost 6-2 — tied for their biggest deficit ever.

The Capitals are in first place in the NHL. They have a record of 17-5-4 at home. They're 7-1-2 in their last 10 games. All that combined with the fact that Utah is playing on back-to-back mornings and traveling to a different state in between gives Washington a huge advantage on paper.

Deseret News LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339218 Montreal Canadiens

Time running out for Canadiens' playoff hopes

By Herb Zurkowsky

Updated February 07, 2025

The landscape changes quickly in professional sports, especially in the NHL's competitive Eastern Conference.

The Canadiens were in a playoff position slightly more than two weeks ago and hockey fans in Montreal were understandably giddy as all things appeared possible. But, now, it's as though the sky's falling in on this team following its recent five-game losing skid.

"It's very important to regulate and not be so reactionary," veteran defenceman Mike Matheson, one of the most astute players inside Montreal's dressing room, said Friday following an optional practice at the CN Sports Complex in Brossard. "Whether it's the stretch that we had where everyone was planning the (Stanley Cup) parade, we still had to regulate and keep working. We still had a lot to do to keep getting better.

"On the flip side, when everyone's tearing us to shreds, it's important to not get caught up in that, either."

The Canadiens (25-24-5) remain above .500 heading into their traditional Super Bowl weekend matinee games at the Bell Centre, beginning with Saturday's contest against the New Jersey Devils (1 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN Radio-690, 98.5 FM), followed by Sunday's clash against Tampa Bay.

Samuel Montembeault will be the starting goalie on Saturday, according to head coach Martin St. Louis, with rookie Jakub Dobes getting the call Sunday.

Those will be Montreal's final two games before the NHL's two-week break for the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament, held in Montreal and Boston, which involves Canada, the U.S., Sweden and Finland. Montembeault is one of three goalies on Canada's roster, with Patrik Laine and Joel Armia representing Finland.

Heading into NHL play Friday night, the Canadiens trailed Detroit by six points for the final wild-card berth. But that's only one part of the equation. There are also four other teams — Columbus, Boston, the New York Islanders and New York Rangers — standing in Montreal's way. It remains to be determined whether that's too big an obstacle to overcome, although 28 games are left to be played.

"It's very competitive for sure," Matheson admitted. "It's impressive that so many teams are playing well. I think it's exciting. It's good for the league. You don't want to be the team that just gets in because nobody else wanted to. We knew it wouldn't be easy coming into the season. That doesn't mean it scared us and changed what our goal is.

"Two weeks ago, were we allowed to say we can lose this one? It can't be more critical today than it was two weeks ago. That hasn't changed. Every game is just as important as the last."

The Canadiens have fared better this season against the Lightning than against the Devils, having twice defeated Tampa Bay, yet losing two against New Jersey, albeit one in overtime.

While St. Louis refused to address the Canadiens' recent losing streak, he has coached this team long enough to understand the oscillating emotions that captivate fans.

"I get it. We had a great run. But it's a hard league," he said. "It's very competitive, especially in the Eastern Conference. We're gonna fight. The focus right now is get back to the recipe that works.

"What drives urgency is the clock. If you have a paper due Tuesday, Monday is crucial. We have 28 games left. The closer you get to the deadline, it (increases the) urgency. During a long season, you have to create short-term goals. You have to stay on task and not think you have 82 games. The most important thing for us now is not to worry about the deadline. It's getting our game back, consistently. The recipe that works. It has fallen. We understand there's a deadline and there has to be urgency."

When the Canadiens are playing their best, according to St. Louis, they're swarming the opposition, connected in both the offensive and defensive zones and attack in waves. "We've gotten away from that a little bit," he said.

Considering the Canadiens were away in California for almost a week and spent much of Thursday flying cross-country, there was a surprisingly high turnout Friday for an optional practice — the players perhaps sensing the urgency of the team's scenario.

Laine, who has gone eight games without scoring, and Juraj Slafkovsky, with one goal in seven games, were among those who participated. Captain Nick Suzuki wasn't on the ice.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339219 Montreal Canadiens

Todd: As trade deadline looms, Canadiens GM Kent Hughes faces tough decisions

By Jack Todd Special to Montreal Gazette

February 07, 2025

Some sports clichés are simply vapid gobbledygook that mean nothing at all: "It is what it is."

Others are on point. "You're never as good as you look when you're winning, or as bad as you look when you're losing." That one has been around as long as I've been watching sports — but that doesn't make it untrue.

There is no clearer illustration of the way that old adage applies than this yo-yo Canadiens season.

It may be emotionally taxing for the fans, but for the club's brain trust (still the best, in my view, since Sam Pollock occupied the corner office at the old Forum) this Jekyll-and-Hyde edition of the Canadiens poses real quandaries as the league approaches the trade deadline four weeks away.

Is this team the Dr. Jekyll that put up a league-best 13-3-1 record between Dec. 17 and Jan. 21 — or the miserable Mr. Hyde version that reared its ugly head Jan. 23 in a 4-2 loss at Detroit and has since seen the club lose six times in seven games, with its sole win over the bottom-feeding San Jose Sharks? Or is it (the logical choice) somewhere in between?

Following this double-trouble Super Bowl weekend faceoff against the Devils and Lightning, the Canadiens have only six games between the Four Nations break and the trade deadline, which falls in the midst of the western swing to Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver and Seattle.

The weekend games against New Jersey and Tampa will thus weigh heavily on any decisions Jeff Gorton and Kent Hughes have to make. The Canadiens never figured to be buyers in any significant way, because you would have to go through life with rose-coloured glasses to believe this club was a serious Stanley Cup contender.





# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 8, 2025

Are they as bad as they looked during this 1-6 stretch? Wednesday night's game against the Kings is a case in point. Look at the 6-3 final score and you assume the Habs must have been awful — but they weren't.

The Kings came out hard in the first two minutes and created a half-dozen quality chances before going up 1-0, but the Canadiens battled back and kept battling. Rookie goaltender Jakub Dobes made save after save to keep them in it and they went into the third period down 2-1.

Even a Brandt Clarke goal 15 seconds into the period didn't seal it. The Canadiens came back with one from Alexandre Carrier, gave up another on a blistering shot by Kevin Fiala, recovered from that on a Logan Mailloux goal before another Fiala goal sealed it.

As they have in virtually every game, a core of veteran players helped lead the way. As some of the youngsters have appeared to tire, the "old" guys have propped up the side: Brendan Gallagher, Joel Armia, Jake Evans, Josh Anderson, David Savard, the unfairly maligned Mike Matheson and Christian Dvorak, who has been a key contributor through his best stretch as a Canadian.

Evans, Dvorak, Armia and Savard are on expiring contracts, Matheson has a single year remaining with a bargain \$4.875 million cap hit for a mobile, big-minutes defenceman, Anderson two seasons at \$5.5 million against the cap at Gallagher for two seasons at \$6.5 million.

As Pat Hickey points out, the cap is due to rise to \$95.5 million next year, then \$104 million and \$113.5 million. Hughes is an adroit GM, so if there are any among the UFAs he wants to retain, he should be able to find a way. Or he may elect to trade a David Savard and re-sign him during the off-season for his leadership, grit and heavy play.

Both Armia and Anderson have benefited from the man behind the bench. It took a stint in Laval for Armia to find his game with the help of Martin St. Louis, while Anderson remade himself as a hustling, penalty-killing, physical dynamo who can fight or score. Gallagher is having his best season in years.

Of the UFAs, Evans has to rank as the most likely to be retained. He's another Phillip Danault, valuable in so many ways. On the other hand, except for those burdened with heavy contracts, their play of late makes all the Canadiens veterans valuable trade commodities.

By now, we've seen enough of how Hughes operates to know how he will approach this. He won't lock himself into anything prematurely. He will be achingly thorough. He'll never make a deal just for the sake of making a deal. He'll listen to any proposal but he won't make a trade unless, in his view, it works for the Canadiens in every possible way. He'll put a premium on brains and character.

If Hughes makes a move, it will be something no one anticipated — like Justin Barron for Alexandre Carrier. Perversely, if the Canadiens lose both ends of the weekend doubleheader, it helps free Hughes to make whatever deals he wants to make without worrying about the standings.

Whatever unfolds between now and March 7, the future is promising. The organization is stacked with picks, prospects and young talent. And coming next fall, we have the arrival of the designated superstar:

Ivan Demidov.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339220 Montreal Canadiens

Hickey: Canadiens in good shape with salary cap rising over next 3 years

By Pat Hickey Special to Montreal Gazette

February 07, 2025

Cost certainty was the key term 20 years ago when NHL commissioner Gary Bettman brought the NHLPA to its knees and imposed the league's first salary cap.

Bettman cried poor. He claimed more than half the teams were losing money and the average salary topped \$1.4 million.

A hard cap was set at \$39 million after the NHL lost a full season to a lockout.

The cap, said Bettman, would provide cost certainty and allow small-market teams to compete and, as a bonus, the commish suggested that ticket prices might come down, which of course, they didn't.

Cost certainty was in the news again last week when Bettman announced that the cap would increase significantly over the next three seasons. He said revealing the cap for the next three seasons will allow general managers to plan for the future.

The cap, which currently stands at US\$88 million, will climb to US\$95.5 million next season with further jumps to US\$104 million and US\$113.5 million in succeeding years. That's a nearly 30 per cent increase over three years.

What does it mean?

For starters, Joe Fan will pick up part of the tab. Those increases are dependent on higher revenue across the league and that means a bump in ticket prices. Fans will also pay more to watch games on TV.

The NHL is looking to double its revenue from the Canadian TV rights and the increase will be passed on to subscribers. Rogers, whose national contract expires after next season, is in negotiations for a new deal and the cable provider offered a glimpse of the future when it partnered with Amazon for its Monday night package. A streaming service will be part of any new deal.

The new cap means that marquee players whose contracts expire in the next three years will cash in. Connor McDavid has one year left on his contract, which carries a cap hit of \$12.5 million. Even if he takes a hometown discount, he'll be probably be making at least \$16 million-\$17 million in his new deal.

He'll eclipse teammate Leon Draisaitl, who signed an eight-year deal last year and will be stuck at \$14 million, while Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon will be underpaid with a \$12.5 million cap hit through 2031.

Speaking of underpaid, the rich will get richer but the minimum salary remains at \$775,000 and the disparity between the top and the bottom should be on the agenda this month when the NHL and NHLPA begin negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement.

Juraj Slafkovsky, left, and Cole Caufield reach out to congratulate captain Nick Suzuki, who is skating by the Canadiens bench after scoring.

The Canadiens have locked up, from left to right, Juraj Slafkovsky (2033), Cole Caufield (2031) and Nick Suzuki (2030) for the foreseeable future with what look like very reasonable contracts. Christinne Muschi The Canadian Press

The Canadiens have locked up Nick Suzuki (2030), Cole Caufield (2031) and Juraj Slafkovsky (2033) for the foreseeable future with what look like very reasonable contracts and the cap increase will give GM Kent Hughes an opportunity to go shopping. It will be interesting to see what Lane Hutson commands in a long-term deal, which could be in play when he becomes a restricted free agent after next season.

The Canadiens and other big-market teams like the Maple Leafs and the Rangers welcome the cap increase, but there are some teams that may not be as happy.

The Winnipeg Jets have always been a cap team, but they may not be able to keep up because they have problems filling the smallest arena in the NHL, the 15,225-seat Canada Life Centre. The relocated Utah Hockey Club plays in the 16,000-seat Delta Centre, but many of those seats offer obstructed views and the team is averaging a little more than 11,000 fans a game.

Other teams that may struggle with an increased payroll are Ottawa, which is the least profitable team in the NHL, and Buffalo, San Jose and Columbus, which need winning squads to boost attendance.

Looking ahead: The Athletic's Scott Wheeler has been taking deep dives into each NHL team's prospect pool and he ranks the Canadiens at No. 3.

It's no surprise that Ivan Demidov tops the list. He has set a KHL U20 scoring record despite playing limited minutes for SKA St. Petersburg and he'll be in the Canadiens' top six next season.





# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Next on Wheeler's list are Boston College goaltender Jacob Fowler and defenceman David Reinbacher.

Fowler is a great college goalie, but I've cautioned in the past that it's premature to speculate on his future until he plays at the pro level.

We also need to see more of Reinbacher. His development was stalled when he suffered a knee injury in an exhibition game and required surgery. He has resumed skating with a non-contact jersey at Canadiens practices and could play some NHL games before the season ends. He could also make up for lost time by helping the Laval Rocket in their AHL playoff run.

Oh Canada: For the first time in a dozen years, Canada is not among the 16 nations competing in the final stages of the Davis Cup tennis competition.

Canada, which won the Cup in 2022, lost 3-2 to Hungary in a qualifying match held on the weekend at IGA Stadium. After losing the two opening singles Saturday, Canada rallied on Sunday. Veteran Vasek Pospisil, who was playing his last Davis Cup match, teamed with Liam Draxl to win the doubles and Montrealer Gabriel Diallo evened the series with a 6-1, 6-3 win over Fabian Marozsán. In the deciding match, Laval's Alexis Galarneau put up a spirited fight before losing to Marton Fucsovics, 7-6(8), 6-4.

The result would have been different if Canada had its best players, but Félix Auger-Aliassime and Denis Shapovalov both bailed on the team. Auger-Aliassime was in France, where he won the Open Occitanie for his second ATP Tour win this year. Shapovalov begged off because of an injury but recovered in time to play in the Dallas Open this week.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339221 Montreal Canadiens

If Canadiens want to stop losing teammates at the deadline, time to prove it this weekend

Arpon Basu

6-7 minutes 07/02/2025

At the beginning of the season, when Montreal Canadiens management was talking about the desire to play meaningful games, what they wanted to see was how their young team would respond to pressure and consequences.

Because these young players had never been in that environment before.

"There's a lot of unknown, so as we head into camp and into the season, we're going to learn more and more about our team," executive vice president of hockey operations Jeff Gorton said at the season-opening golf tournament, "and we'll know what kind of team we have."

The Canadiens' run from Dec. 17 to Jan. 16 — a month in which they were tied with the Edmonton Oilers for the NHL's best record at 11-2-1 — created that environment for the Canadiens. Those games were meaningful, yes, to erase a 4-9-2 start, but what they really accomplished was putting the Canadiens in the heart of a playoff race.

They created pressure and consequences, essentially.

And how the Canadiens have responded to that pressure and those consequences has not been ideal, to say the least. They went 2-4-1 from Jan 18 — the night of the unanswered seven goals by the Toronto Maple Leafs — to Jan. 30, making their three-game swing through California this week a crucial one.

And for an administration looking to learn about how their team would respond to that kind of environment, they could not have liked what they saw in California.

That trip was consequential. That trip had pressure. That trip had three winnable games in four days. That trip had the potential to vault the Canadiens right back into the thick of the Eastern Conference playoff race.

The Canadiens came home with one win, and an unconvincing win at that. Coach Martin St. Louis said recently the Canadiens were in a chase to the 4 Nations break, and they are limping to the finish line.

So, what have Gorton and Hughes learned through all of this? Anything? Was any of this worth it?

The Canadiens have an opportunity this weekend to prove that yes, it was worth it, and they are worth investing in by standing pat at the trade deadline. It makes this weekend's back-to-back at home that much more consequential, and the team should absolutely feel pressure to sweep the weekend against two far less beatable opponents in the New Jersey Devils and Tampa Bay Lightning.

"I think the last couple of seasons we obviously haven't won too many games, which has given us high draft picks. We've traded away guys at deadlines that got us more draft picks and prospects," captain Nick Suzuki said at the golf tournament. "I think in that way, we're pretty fully stocked in prospects and picks, so I think the position that we're in now is we're really trying to make the playoffs and show what kind of team we are."

Here's your chance to do that.

The Canadiens are not completely out of the race yet. These four points could at least keep them on the outer edges of that race. And, as a result, it could also at least make Gorton and Hughes think about the possibility of not selling off parts ahead of the March 7 trade deadline.

When Hughes gave his midseason press conference back on Jan. 8 — right in the middle of that hot stretch — he put the pressure squarely on his players to keep it up.

"We're happy we're playing much better than we were at the beginning of the season, but we've played 40 games and we're one game over .500. So I don't want to celebrate, either. We haven't accomplished anything yet," Hughes said that day. "So we want to see how we do in the games between now and the deadline and we'll make decisions based on that."

It should be noted Hughes mentioned the possibility of hanging on to his impending unrestricted free agents at the golf tournament in September. So this has always been on the table for his players

"As you kind of come out of that phase, we get to a point where maybe somebody's on an expiring contract and he's helping us win hockey games, so we're keeping him even though we could trade him for an asset," Hughes said back then. "Those are decisions, from a management perspective, that we have to evaluate."

It is entirely possible that evaluation has already been made as the Canadiens have failed to rise to this moment, that the results of this weekend's games ahead of the break for the 4 Nations Face-Off will have no influence on how Gorton and Hughes will approach the deadline. Hughes has been clear that the Canadiens have a plan for building a sustainable winner for years to come, and a plan like that shouldn't be affected by the results of two games.

But the Canadiens players have grown tired of watching beloved teammates walk out the door at this time of year, and the players that could be made available by Hughes ahead of the deadline — David Savard, Christian Dvorak, Jake Evans and Joel Armia — all qualify as beloved teammates. If Hughes were, for instance, to put Evans and Armia on the market as a package deal, the best penalty-killing forward duo in the NHL, who knows how rich of a price he could command?

If the Canadiens want to put an end to thought exercises such as that one, they have an opportunity in front of them right now. They have to sweep Super Bowl weekend. Nothing less.

These are meaningful games — they have pressure and consequences. And they are an opportunity for the Canadiens.

They will have to, as Suzuki said back in September, show what kind of team they are.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339287 Websites



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 8, 2025

The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: A new No. 1 emerges just in time for haiku week

Sean Gentile and Dom Luszczyzyn

Feb 7, 2025

Friends of the rankings

It's the time of year again

When we write haikus.

Laziness? No chance

Count syllables on fingers

That's really hard work.

Thirty-two poems

Some good, some great, some so-so

At least we had fun.

Sorry if you hate

Some whimsy with your hockey

Leave a comment: Boo!

At the very least

The rankings are still perfect

No debate, no notes.

1. Winnipeg Jets, 38-14-3

Last week: 3

Sean rank: 1

Dom rank: 1

Legit contenders?

Helle, power play, stars, depth

Jets are the real deal

2. Washington Capitals, 36-11-7

Last week: 1

Sean rank: 2

Dom rank: 2

The Great 8 goal chase

Another one, sixteen left

He's gonna do it

3. Edmonton Oilers, 34-16-4

Last week: 2

Sean rank: 3

Dom rank: 3

Make it 5 Nations

Because it's not best-on-best

Without the best: Drai

4. Dallas Stars, 34-18-1

Last week: 5

Sean rank: 4

Dom rank: 4

Trade shocks the nation

Don't fret, Dallas got their guy

Cody Ceci time

5. Toronto Maple Leafs, 33-19-2

Last week: 9

Sean rank: 6

Dom rank: 5

Last 76

Bobby McMann's got 30

There's your depth scoring

6. Florida Panthers, 33-20-3

Last week: 8

Sean rank: 5

Dom rank: 6

Ten games, seven dubs

Five goals, five games for Tkachuk

The champs hit the gas

7. Vegas Golden Knights, 32-17-6

Last week: 6

Sean rank: 8

Dom rank: 7

Four wins, 15 games

Blame bad luck, blame the goalies

Either way, not ideal

8. Carolina Hurricanes, 32-19-4

Last week: 4

Sean rank: 7

Dom rank: 8

Moose: Two points in six?

Yeah, but check out his Corsi

Welcome to Raleigh!

9. Minnesota Wild, 32-19-4

Last week: 7

Sean rank: 9

Dom rank: 10

"Ryan, it's Gary

Your appeal has been denied

Better luck next time"

10. Colorado Avalanche, 31-22-2

Last week: 12

Sean rank: 11

Dom rank: 9

Did they win that trade?



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Unlikely — but it's early,

And Necas fits right in

11. Detroit Red Wings, 28-21-5

Last week: 17

Sean rank: 10

Dom rank: 12

Yzerplan: Year 6

Look what a real coach can do!

Wow! What took so long?

12. Los Angeles Kings, 28-17-6

Last week: 11

Sean rank: 12

Dom rank: 14

Drew Doughty is back

Like a Call of Duty map

Just a bit rusty

13. Tampa Bay Lightning, 29-20-4

Last week: 15

Sean rank: 15

Dom rank: 11

Power-play Hagel?

Nah, let's use Darren Raddysh

Bold strategy, Coop

14. New York Islanders, 25-21-7

Last week: 19

Sean rank: 14

Dom rank: 13

The calendar flipped

And the Isles flipped a switch

Are they good? Maybe

15. Ottawa Senators, 29-22-4

Last week: 13

Sean rank: 13

Dom rank: 16

Atlantic battle

Sens lose two against Tampa

Back to the wildcard

16. New Jersey Devils, 30-20-6

Last week: 14

Sean rank: 17

Dom rank: 15

Post-holiday skid

Devils lose 12 of 19

Only getting worse

17. Vancouver Canucks, 25-18-11

Last week: 16

Sean rank: 16

Dom rank: 17

Marcus Pettersson

Two Elias Petterssons

Good luck John Shorthouse

18. Columbus Blue Jackets, 26-21-8

Last week: 10

Sean rank: 18

Dom rank: 19

Lumbus Miracle

Playoffs? They've got a real shot

Do it for Johnny

19. New York Rangers, 26-23-4

Last week: 20

Sean rank: 20

Dom rank: 18

Kreider: Three assists

As many as Dustin Wolf

And he's a goalie

20. Calgary Flames, 26-20-7

Last week: 18

Sean rank: 19

Dom rank: 21

The wheels are wobbling

Because good as Wolf may be,

He can't do it all

21. Boston Bruins, 27-23-6

Last week: 22

Sean rank: 21

Dom rank: 20

Boston paid Swayman

Buyer's remorse was looming

But he found his game

22. Montreal Canadiens, 25-24-5

Last week: 21

Sean rank: 22

Dom rank: 23

The future is bright

But a playoff spot this year?

Too big of an ask

23. Utah HC, 22-22-9

Last week: 23



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Sean rank: 23  
Dom rank: 22  
Utah can't Yeti  
But Yeti can Stanley Cup?  
League brand in shambles  
24. St. Louis Blues, 24-26-5  
Last week: 24  
Sean rank: 24  
Dom rank: 24  
12 seconds left, tied  
Is that Reinhart in the slot?  
12 seconds left, loss  
25. Anaheim Ducks, 23-24-6  
Last week: 27  
Sean rank: 26  
Dom rank: 26  
Last six games, five wins  
A bigger deal — six goals for  
Mason McTavish  
26. Philadelphia Flyers, 23-26-7  
Last week: 25  
Sean rank: 25  
Dom rank: 28  
Least-liked coach? No shock  
Torts gets the most from his guys  
Haters gonna hate  
27. Buffalo Sabres, 22-26-5  
Last week: 30  
Sean rank: 28  
Dom rank: 25  
Losing is one thing  
It's the Sabres, after all  
But they let Tage down  
28. Pittsburgh Penguins, 22-24-9  
Last week: 28  
Sean rank: 27  
Dom rank: 27  
Crosby's arm is sore?  
Time to see how much he cares  
About 4 Nations  
29. Seattle Kraken, 23-29-4  
Last week: 26  
Sean rank: 29  
Dom rank: 29

No starpower here  
Going nowhere fast with just  
Guy-Guy-Guy-Guy-Guy  
30. Nashville Predators, 18-27-7  
Last week: 29  
Sean rank: 30  
Dom rank: 30  
Five-win streak: Erased  
Five-game losing skid: Active  
Preds: Done like dinner  
31. Chicago Blackhawks, 16-31-6  
Last week: 31  
Sean rank: 31  
Dom rank: 31  
Franchise player? Check  
Elite pool of prospects? Check  
Wins? Check back next year  
32. San Jose Sharks, 15-35-6  
Last week: 32  
Sean rank: 32  
Dom rank: 32  
The Athletic LOADED: 02.08.2025  
  
1339288 Websites  
  
The Athletic / NHL trade board 6.0: Latest on the top targets heading into the 4 Nations break  
  
Chris Johnston  
Feb 7, 2025  
The Big Board has been decimated by a flurry of activity in recent weeks.  
No sooner can we get it posted before a move — or series of moves — sends us scrambling for another update.  
However, with a break for the 4 Nations Face-Off looming, there seems to be a general expectation that the trade activity will die down for a little bit here. Moves are still permitted during the Feb. 12 to 20 tournament, but there's a little less motivation to make them when your team isn't playing any games.  
In many ways, the trade market is still taking shape, particularly in the Eastern Conference, where a large cluster of teams continue to jockey for wild-card positioning.  
Just four weeks remain until the NHL's March 7 trade deadline.  
The Athletic LOADED: 02.08.2025  
  
1339289 Websites  
  
ESPN / Ranking the top 32 prospects for the 2025 NHL draft - ESPN



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 8, 2025

Rachel Doerrie

Feb 7, 2025

### Reactions

The dog days of the season are upon us and it's time for the first edition of the 2025 NHL draft rankings. Like last season, the first edition of the rankings are solely based on outputs from the draft model. There are no adjustments made for scouting, inputs from NHL scouts or executives and any other anecdotal information.

There were some changes made to the model from last season, as the model strives to consistently improve. The model weighs scoring statistics from the current season and the past season, league strength, team strength relative to league, tracking statistics (defensive, physical and transition play), age, size and injuries. The model weights changed, with less weight on the players' size and more weight on their tracking statistics, league strength and scoring statistics. The model factors for injuries, only in the number of games played as a function of the projection volatility. Matthew Schaefer and Roger McQueen have more volatile projections than Michael Misa and Porter Martone because they have missed significant time, leading to a smaller sample size.

Each player is projected in a category, with a confidence factor of how likely they are to reach that category. The most likely outcome becomes the category, which is combined with the confidence factor for a rating. Players are ranked based on their rating, which is the first edition of this year's rankings.

The forward categories are: elite player, top-line forward, top-six forward, impact forward, middle-six forward, bottom-six forward and NHL player.

The defensemen categories are: top-pair defenseman, top-four defenseman, impact defenseman and NHL defenseman.

The goaltender categories are: starting goaltender, platoon starter, backup goaltender and NHL goaltender.

Impact forwards and defensemen are players who are not consistently expected to play top-six or top-four minutes but are capable of stepping into those roles and performing admirably. Current NHL examples are Evan Rodrigues and Ivan Provorov.

There are players projected in higher categories that rank lower because the confidence factor is significantly less than players above them. For example, Cameron Schmidt is projected to be a top-six forward, with less than 50% confidence factor. Malcolm Spence is projected to be an impact forward with a more than 70% confidence factor. When combined, Spence's rating is higher than Schmidt's. This type of projection occurs mostly for players with high upside, but one or two of the model inputs fall below NHL range.

The first edition is to serve as a foundation to build the final rankings off, ensuring players are in the appropriate range regardless of industry opinion or scouting bias. The next edition of these rankings will account for scouting and industry opinion and with the wide-open nature of this particular class, there is sure to be some movement.

ESPN LOADED: 02.08.2025

1339290 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers must eliminate sloppiness from game after break

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — Cabo Wabo came to Rogers Place on Friday, as two teams playing their last game before the 4 Nations Face-Off break swam up to the centre-ice pool bar and ordered up one last faceoff before everybody goes to the resort.

Loose?

How about four goals in 2:34 of the first period loose?

This one had the structure of an igloo in July, and the goaltending of the Murray Bannerman Blackhawks, and ended in a 5-4 win for the Colorado Avalanche, the team that took advantage of an extra mistake or two presented to them by the Edmonton Oilers.

If it wasn't Evan Bouchard dropping a puck right on to a Colorado stick for an Avalanche shorty, it was Zach Hyman passing backwards late in a 4-4 game, catching all his teammates skating the wrong direction on Colorado's game-winning goal.

Fun? You bet.

Anything resembling the type of game that could win a Stanley Cup four months from now? Well, David Copperfield couldn't turn this Oilers performance into a win come April and May.

"Probably the most dangerous team off the rush, and we kept feeding that transition," said Hyman, minus-3 on a pointless night. "I take responsibility for the last one. I try to force it in. They make a play.

"Probably not the right time to do that against that line. They go and capitalize, and we lose the game."

Stuart Skinner was poor enough in the Oilers net in Period 1 that Calvin Pickard skated out the gate first to open Period 2. Skinner's save percentage in the first period this season is .879, either the cause or effect of an Oilers team that seems like it's been chasing games for a month or two.

Even Connor McDavid didn't have any jam, going minus-3 without a point, and mishandling more pucks on one night than he does in a month, normally.

McDavid is on his way to the 4 Nations Face-Off along with Mattias Ekholm and Viktor Arvidsson. The rest of the team is headed for warm weather, with the next team function a practice here in Edmonton a week from Tuesday.

Did the Oilers play like they had one foot on the WestJet Vacations charter?

"No," Hyman said. "But, obviously, the way we played seems like it.

"The mentality going in was to have a really good game to go into the break feeling good. Nobody was thinking about the break, but obviously that's not the performance that you would want to have."

Last season, regular season and playoffs combined, Edmonton played 107 games. That made Friday's game — No. 55 on the season — roughly a halfway point for a team with legitimate Stanley Cup aspirations.

Their game has waned over the past little while, though the Oilers have still managed to win enough to go into the break at worst in a tie atop the Pacific with Vegas: the Golden Knights trail Edmonton by two points but play in Boston on Saturday.

"I didn't love our game the last couple of nights," admitted Leon Draisaitl, who scored twice to reach the 40-goal plateau for the sixth time in his career. "Maybe it is a little bit of fatigue kicking in, or mentally we weren't as sharp as we needed to be. I think the break is coming at the right time, for once. Obviously (we need to) get back to playing collective good hockey when we come back."

As the Oilers scatter for some sun and sand — a 5-2-1 record in the eight-game segment leading into the rest, and a divisional lead with 27 games left in the season — they can't be displeased with their lot.

There are a few questions — some would say in goal, though we don't see any procurement at that position with the trade deadline ahead — but there have been far more answers.

New defenceman John Klingberg was not their worst blueliner Friday, and he looks like he could alter the deadline strategy somewhat. And Jeff





# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Skinner had another strong game on Draisaitl's flank, another option emerging today that wasn't there even a month ago.

"It was always the goal to be up there, lead the division, win the division. That'll be a fight until the end, we know that. This was always the game-plan for us in here," said Draisaitl, who had some props for the persevering Jeff Skinner.

"Maybe he needed to learn how to be in a winning environment, play that type of hockey, and what it takes," the Oilers assistant captain said. "His ice time has been limited at times, and that's really hard if you're a skilled player. If you're not getting the looks and not feeling the way you normally feel, that's a tough adjustment.

"But he's done a great job with it ... I'm looking forward to continuing to build some chemistry with him. Hopefully there is some more, and we can create a great line."

**OIL SPILLS** — The Oilers have not swept a season series vs. the Avalanche since 2016-17 ... Edmonton has won 14 of its last 19 home games (earned a point in 15 of 19) ... Draisaitl's 40 goals are his most through 55 games in his career. With two goals in this game, he becomes the fourth active skater to record 40-plus goals in at least six seasons.

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Sportsnet.ca / Real Kyper's Trade Board 3.0: Setting up for a memorable deadline

Nick Kypreos

Here's a new one I've never experienced in 25 years that I've covered the NHL trade deadline for Sportsnet: A player who gets traded and doesn't come off the trade board.

That's exactly where I'm telling you we're at with star winger Mikko Rantanen. Presently on his second NHL team in Carolina after Colorado moved him on Jan. 25, don't sleep on this guy moving yet again on what may be one of the more memorable NHL trade deadlines in recent history.

With Rantanen and J.T. Miller already in different uniforms, we are currently experiencing a pro sports trade world that's getting more and more unpredictable by the day -- and this goes beyond the NHL. Just over the weekend we saw a blockbuster trade in the NBA that sent megastar Luka Doncic to Los Angeles. If these game-changing deals involving massive contract implications have done anything so far, it's caused every pro team to take another look in the mirror when it comes to re-evaluating their top assets.

All together, this just may end up being one of the most memorable pro sports trading seasons we've ever seen. And that's why we won't take too many players off my latest NHL trade board going into the 4 Nations break next week.

Despite so many teams still in a playoff hunt we've learned that some teams are starting to run out of patience. That includes Seattle's Ron Francis, who's constantly getting calls about his defencemen, and St. Louis' Doug Armstrong, who's thinking about accumulating more young assets for when Alex Steen takes over the GM job in 2026. We hear that multiple Blues players could be moved if Armstrong feels the time and offers are right to pull the chute this season.

In Vancouver we don't expect to hear Elias Pettersson's name in play for now, so he'll come off the board this time. But he is far from safe until his no-move clause clicks in July 1. I won't hesitate to put him back on if his consistency struggles continue long after Miller is gone.

As the 4 Nations Face-Off begins next week, let's keep in mind that there isn't a trade freeze, despite pressure to not upstage Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews and a huge event for the league.

Given what we've seen across the landscape so far, if a trade did come down during the two-week tournament, how surprised would we really be?

He appeared on last month's trade board and although Mikko Rantanen was dealt to the Carolina Hurricanes, I hear it's not a given that he won't be traded again if Carolina can't get him signed to a long term deal.

Going into the 4 Nations break, it appears Carolina is no closer to signing him than Colorado was. While Carolina is prepared to make offers they think will entice Rantanen to stay, many who are watching closely feel they will fall short at the end. Carolina can't really afford to give up Martin Necas and two draft picks for another guy who walks to UFA, after trading for Jake Guentzel only to have him leave last year.

Carolina owner Tom Dundon doesn't want to get burned that way again, so he's basically got a month to sign him. If that doesn't happen by March 7, look for potential Mikko Rantanen fireworks to start up all over again.

The Bruins have a big decision to make and it may entirely depend on where they sit in the standings as we approach March 7. Right now the team is out of a playoff spot, 11th in the East by points percentage and 13th in the conference by goal differential.

Marchand is still second on the team in goals and points and remains an intriguing name to watch. Until we have a clearer idea of Boston's legitimacy to compete, this situation will remain open-ended. Term remains a question here, with some in the organization believing the 36-year-old should be on a year-to-year contract, while Marchand seeks greater commitment. Not a lot has changed here since the last update, and it doesn't appear contract talks are heating up.

The Panthers will also have a decision to make on Sam Bennett, though unlike Boston their playoff spot is assured. Florida's calculation is different: keep the player as a potential own rental, or recoup assets for him -- possibly to flip in another deal?

For now, it's the status quo on Bennett and it's another situation we're monitoring closely. If the Rantanen trade (another pending UFA) did anything, it gave Florida more to think about through the 4 Nations, where Bennett will be competing with Team Canada.

There is no replacing exactly what Bennett brings in the playoffs and it would be tough to move him with the club eyeing another deep post-season run, but if they get an offer that can help protect a little of the future, they'll explore it.

Still a long shot trade candidate this season, the most important factor in getting a Seth Jones trade completed is figuring out how much of his contract will be retained by the Blackhawks. Jones makes \$9.5 million against the cap and is in only the third year of an eight-year deal that expires after the 2029-30 season.

That's a lot of money for Chicago to hold on to for a long period of time, but with the news last week that the salary cap will rise to \$95.5 million next season, then \$104 million in 2026-27 and \$113.5 million in 2027-28, the burden of retention becomes less significant and this factor could make Jones a more attractive trade asset for the Blackhawks.

Chicago doesn't have to worry about money as much as some other teams, and the most expensive salary years in Jones' deal will have passed by the end of this season. Including signing bonuses, Jones is due to earn \$10.5 million next season, \$8 million in 2026-27, and \$7.5 million for the final three years of this contract.

But, again, this isn't just a salary dump and it would require the Hawks getting a top young asset or two for them to make the deal. But, if Chicago can get off the contract and another team feels it's getting decent value on a reduced AAV for Jones, this could happen. And Jones could use a fresh start.



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From everything I've gathered, Chicago has had legitimate talks with the Dallas Stars about Jones. We'll have a better understanding where it leads through the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Just like Seth Jones' contract seemed untradable, Erik Karlsson was in the same boat, but the economic conditions are changing. Retention will also have to come into play here, but Karlsson only has two more years left on his contract compared to Jones' five.

Ottawa as a potential landing spot is intriguing. They're looking to add another top four defenceman and there's some thought to bringing him home again. But it would take a big financial commitment by ownership to do it and management's belief he won't disrupt the growing chemistry led by Jake Sanderson. If those hurdles clear, the Sens would have to make the deal and retention worthwhile for the Penguins, who are seeking young and controllable assets.

Even a four-game winning streak can't turn the Sabres back into playoff hopefuls, and the team will be facing some hard decisions this summer. But first, the trade deadline, where opponents are circling around some of Buffalo's better young players, including Dylan Cozens.

He remains very much out there, with at least half a dozen teams interested in him, if not more than that. Cozens is two years removed from scoring 31 goals and though he's facing the prospect of declining offensive numbers in back-to-back seasons, the 23-year-old (turning 24 on Sunday) still oozes potential.

In the second year of a seven-year contract, Cozens also comes with cost certainty as the salary cap skyrockets to new heights. Plenty of teams are in the market for a young centre who can play on one of the top two lines and, instead of aiming at a rental, teams will be enticed by the fact Cozens is locked in at a \$7.1 million cap hit through the 2029-30 season. If he finds his production from 2022-23 again (31 goals, 68 points) Cozens will become extremely valuable on this contract. Buffalo needs to tread carefully.

A dynamic defenceman on offence, Byram is on track to surpass his career-best totals in goals and points this season -- his 25 even strength points are tied for ninth among all blueliners in the league (along with Erik Karlsson, Victor Hedman and teammate Rasmus Dahlin).

The Sabres acquired Byram just last season from Colorado, sending Casey Mittelstadt the other way and, at the moment, appear to have won that swap. But as Buffalo stares down another massively disappointing and lost season, they'll have to consider many things from here and one of them will be on Byram, who is set to be an RFA this summer.

With three years of RFA eligibility left, Byram could still double his \$3.85 million cap hit on an extension and Buffalo may not be in a position to give him that money unless they free up some room on the back end.

Byram isn't the only Sabres defenceman out there. Mattias Samuelsson, who missed Tuesday's game, is as well. He is signed at a \$4.285 million deal through 2029-30.

The Sabres have a lot on the table to consider, but the feeling is that if they could move Samuelsson, they could turn around and re-sign Byram instead of trading him. It might be a one or the other situation.

Not much has changed on Brock Boeser from the last update and the Canucks aren't in any better shape to keep him as an own-rental for the upcoming playoffs. They're in a battle with Calgary just to get the second wild card right now.

While the J.T. Miller trade means Elias Pettersson comes off our trade board this time as the Canucks give him an opportunity to show he'll thrive in the new environment, there's no indication the team has changed its mind on approaching an \$8 million AAV extension for Boeser. A 40-goal scorer just last season, Boeser has 17 in 47 games in 2024-25 and the Canucks are still far more likely to trade him out rather than keep him on. This team is looking to re-shape itself somewhat.

The Canucks will be considering many things over the next month, and the path they take will be dictated by how everyone on the team

responds following the J.T. Miller trade. But if they look to sell more, defenceman Carson Soucy could be available.

A 6-foot-5, 208-pound left shot defenceman, Soucy is a physical player, second on the Canucks in blocked shots, and relied upon for key penalty kill minutes. If you're a playoff team looking for a depth defender on your third pairing, you could do worse than Soucy, who comes with the added value of having one more season left on his contract at a \$3.25 million AAV.

Of course, Vancouver is still in the playoff mix here and, even with the acquisition of Marcus Pettersson and rise of young Elias Pettersson from prospect to the big team's back end, they don't have a ton of great depth at the position. Soucy also has a full no-trade clause this season and will be in complete control. Next season that trade protection is reduced to a 12-team list.

The 29-year-old winger is in the final season of his current contract, but signed a six-year extension in July that will begin in 2025-26. At that time, Buchnevich will switch from the 12-team no-trade clause he currently has, to a full no-trade clause and an \$8 million cap hit.

But the fact is the Blues are eight points out of the playoffs after missing them by six points last season and this lack of growth means GM Doug Armstrong is not a happy camper. He's looking to change up what he can and Buchnevich won't be the only player he considers moving (more on that below).

The fact Buchnevich has a contract perhaps makes him more valuable on the trade market, but though this is a player who can score 30 goals in a season, or approach it, he's notched just 11 goals in 53 games this season. When his new contract kicks in, Buchnevich will be 30 years old.

Armstrong wants to unload an \$8 million salary and while it may be Buchnevich, Jordan Kyrour is out there, too. Making \$8.125 million through 2030-31, Kyrour doesn't have any trade protection yet, but a full no-trade clause will be introduced in July.

Kyrour is a great young player, still just 26. But Armstrong wants to change things up because this team hasn't been good enough to break through. Armstrong made a commitment to give the team to Kyrour and Robert Thomas and it just hasn't worked out.

The Blues are not taking calls on Thomas, but they are on Kyrour. There's a tough decision ahead.

Further on the Blues, a lot of eyes will be on what Armstrong does with his blue line, another area of potential upheaval. Three defencemen -- Justin Faulk, Torey Krug (injured for the season) and Colton Parayko -- are making \$6.5 million against the cap and they all have no-trade clauses. This will make it harder to make something work, but Armstrong is looking at all his options to shake up his roster.

Faulk may be the easiest to convince to waive his no-trade clause because it would give him a chance to play in the Stanley Cup Playoffs again, given he's missed them so often in his career. He reached the post-season once in eight years with Carolina, then in his first three years with St. Louis, but has only been past the first round two times. Faulk has played 38 post-season games in his career and could be looking for more.

Faulk makes \$6.5 million against the cap on a contract that through the 2026-27 season, but what could make this easier for an acquiring team is that Faulk is owed just \$4.5 million in actual salary in the final two years of his deal. Where this could get complicated is where he'd waive for, and how Armstrong and a trade partner could make the salary cap money in, money out work.

If it's not Faulk who moves, it could be Parayko. Between Faulk, Parayko and the injured Krug, though, Rutherford has to find a way to get rid of some of this money either now, or in the summer through any means necessary.

No real indication that Doug Armstrong wants to shock his fan base just yet by trading his captain, but that hasn't stopped multiple teams from calling on Brayden Schenn, particularly the past few weeks.



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This name is as intriguing as it gets moving forward. As one NHL scout described to me "this guy is as close to Sam Bennett as there is potentially available."

Despite his age (33), term (three more years at \$6.5 million) and no-trade clause, if the stars align and Armstrong convinces him to move on to a contender, the Blues GM would want a king's ransom for him. If he gets it, he'll have to weigh out the pros and cons of retaining enough salary to close out any potential deal.

Two years removed from a 65-point breakout season, injuries have slowed Zegras, who has produced at a roughly 40-point pace ever since. Zegras started this season with 10 points in his first 24 games before a knee injury sidelined him for a month and a half. Since returning to the Ducks' lineup on Jan. 21, Zegras has five points in seven games.

Signed for one more season past this one at a \$5.75 million AAV, Zegras will still be an arbitration eligible RFA when his deal expires.

At one time this 23-year-old was a star on the upswing, but with his scoring way down his trade value has sunk too and he hasn't done anything to win over GM Pat Verbeek. The most difficult part of this trade scenario is the Ducks and a partner agreeing on Zegras' worth but, if he does get moved, I don't think he'll bring in what Anaheim had hoped.

Though the Ducks are still asking for a high price to move Gibson, the 31-year-old is giving his potential suitors plenty to think about. Gibson posted a .918 save percentage in January, started February with a 26-save, 2-1 win over the Dallas Stars, and is second among all NHL starting goaltenders in Goals Saved Above Expected Per 60 Minutes Played, according to Money Puck (behind Logan Thompson, ahead of Connor Hellebuyck).

Making \$6.4 million against the salary cap for another two seasons past this one, Gibson has been the topic of trade speculation for years, but as he puts together one of his best seasons in some time, the Ducks may want to take the opportunity to sell high while they can. The most pressing question here is: how big is the buyer market for a goalie?

With \$9.5 million committed to Charlie McAvoy, \$6.5 million committed to Hampus Lindholm and \$5 million to Nikita Zadorov already, all on long-term contracts, the Bruins are heavily invested on the back end already. They'll have a tough call to make on Carlo, a 6-foot-5, 220-pound, right shot, penalty-killing defenceman.

Depending on where the Bruins are at the trade deadline, in the playoffs or chasing from distance, I don't think there's a real future for the team to hold on to Carlo. Of all the blue liners they have, he's the one vulnerable guy, with a \$4.1 million contract that runs another two seasons. Especially if a team like Edmonton can convince Boston or another team to retain some money.

As the Kraken have sunk to 11 points out of the playoffs, the lack of growth following their playoff appearance two years ago has the team thinking about restructuring the lineup and building out its base of prospects and draft picks. There are a few players who could be available here and Jamie Oleksiak is literally the biggest.

Teams are always looking for tough defencemen around this time of year and in Oleksiak you have a 6-foot-7, 252-pound blueliner who isn't even a rental -- he has another year left on his contract with a \$4.6 million AAV.

This player can be had and the Kraken would love to get a first-rounder back for him, but we're not sure if they can get it. He leads the Kraken in shot blocks and is a big part of their penalty kill.

A pending UFA, Brandon Tanev is a physical shot blocking forward and a key part of Seattle's penalty killing unit. His playoff style of game will be attractive to many teams and though the Kraken value him, the fact he's on an expiring contract makes him a likely trade rental candidate as the team tries to bring in some future assets.

With Nick Cousins' sandpaper element out of Ottawa's lineup for another month or two due to a knee injury, they're a team that could be looking at Tanev. The Senators sit fourth in the Atlantic Division right now, right on

the heels of the rival Toronto Maple Leafs and Tampa Bay Lightning, and have to start thinking about what they need to add to make themselves a tougher playoff out.

A sports hernia has Gourde on the shelf for five to seven weeks, which means he could still be injured when the March 7 trade deadline arrives. There was a long list of suitors for him, and still some interested teams, but this injury means the player now comes with much more risk.

What's enticing about Gourde, however, is that when healthy he's a great third line centre for a playoff team to have. He's won two Stanley Cups, can kill penalties and is a feisty type of player.

Making \$5.1 million for another two seasons past this one, Rasmus Ristolainen is a big, right shot, penalty killing defenceman who throws his weight around and having a bit of a bounce back season. And if that cap hit is a bit rich for you at first glance, a reminder that the quickly rising salary cap makes that rate less of a concern as Ristolainen gets into his 30s.

The Flyers were still in the playoff race when the last trade board went up, and if they managed to stay in the thick of it until March 7, Philadelphia may have changed course from being a seller. But, 3-6-1 in their past 10, the Flyers are tied with the Penguins, now eight points out of the playoffs, making any climb back up a difficult task.

Not much has changed on Laughton from the last update. His name has been out there for a year, but the Flyers aren't in a rush to move off him. Laughton is valued by coach John Tortorella, well-liked in the dressing room, and has one season left on his contract paying \$3 million against the cap.

The asking price is high for the player, with a first-round pick plus the starting point. Perhaps that's too rich for the market, but third-line centres with term are valuable commodities around the deadline.

A lot of teams like Ryan Donato, and why not? He's a sneaky good player who can come in and play anywhere in your lineup.

The 28-year-old is having a great year, already matching his career best in goals (16) and surpassing his career high in points (32). He also leads the entire Hawks team in even strength points.

However, he's a pending UFA and what he would offer a playoff club may give the Hawks a good return. And besides, the Blackhawks may be in a better position to give his minutes to a younger player next season.

The real prize for Philadelphia in their trade with Calgary last week were Jakob Pelletier and the two draft picks (a second and a seventh), but Andrei Kuzmenko is not the greatest fit for the team and it's not likely they have a whole lot of use for him.

That 39-goal season is a distant memory now and the fact is the Flyers are likely to quickly flip Kuzmenko ahead of the trade deadline.

An 8-2-0 run has the Islanders back in the thick of the playoff race, just four points out of the second wild card spot. With Columbus getting slammed with injuries and Boston just trying to hang on ahead of them, the Islanders may feel they're in a good position to stay in it to and through the trade deadline. Of course, the concern in New York right now is Matt Barzal's injury and what that does to their top-six.

Right now, the sense is that Brock Nelson is less likely to move than he was before since the Islanders have reestablished themselves as a competitor. But there is still lots of time between now and the March 7 trade deadline, so if the team slumps again, the chances he gets moved will go up again. If the Islanders do look to make a trade, Nelson is the player who would return the most value.

There is a lot of news around Matt Barzal having a very bad knee injury so, at some point, you have to think somebody's going to get the bad news across to Lou Lamoriello that this team is just not going to be a threat and needs to move some pieces out to prepare for the future.

Pageau, with one more season left at a \$5 million AAV, can come in and be a really good depth player for some team. He's physical, kills penalties



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and has won over 58 per cent of his face-offs this season. His 10 goals and 26 points in 50 games can't be overlooked either.

Still at the bottom of the league with the NHL's worst goal differential, the Sharks may have some exciting individual young players on the roster, but the rebuild is still in the early stages. That's the reality the team faces when it considers trading Mario Ferraro or not.

With the Sharks, Ferraro is top three in hits and blocked shots, gets plenty of penalty kill time and averages over 20 minutes of ice time a game. He's an important player to their back end who is still young enough at 26 to be part of the team when it eventually comes out of the rebuilding phase it's in. He also has one more season left on his contract with a \$3.25 million cap hit.

Will the Sharks look to move him now, before he's a rental candidate, and maximize their return? Teams will love what he has to offer and the contract value he brings. But the same reasons he'll be attractive to potential suitors are what will make San Jose think long and hard about moving him at all.

We said it from the first trade board in December: while the Blue Jackets say they'd like to re-sign Mathieu Olivier -- and that may yet happen -- until he's signed an extension he will remain on our trade board because of the value he'd bring to an acquiring team as a rental and how many suitors there will be for him.

Olivier has slowed in his goal production from earlier this season and hasn't scored any since Jan. 4, posting just two assists in that time. But if you're looking at this player it's not for his offence. Olivier is third in the NHL in hits and tied for fourth in blocked shots among all forwards across the league. The soon-to-be 28-year-old brings an in-your-face style that will translate well into the playoffs. That alone will create a market for his services.

Another big hitter and physical forward from Columbus, Sean Kuraly could be had. With an expiring contract at a \$2.5 million AAV and a 10-team no-trade list, he's five years older than Olivier and has more playoff experience.

Kuraly hasn't seen playoff action since his days with the Bruins, but he always showed up in the post-season across five years with Boston. A big body at 6-foot-2, he was a reason for the success the Bruins found and there will be teams looking to bring that into their fold.

Columbus has been one of the best stories in the league this season and if they stay in the playoff race they'll have to think hard about how to approach trades. But with Kirill Marchenko going out indefinitely with a broken jaw, if the team starts faltering from here, they'll certainly look to sell off pieces and Kuraly would likely be one.

Already just two points and two goals short of career highs in those categories, the 28-year-old centre may be pricing himself out of town as it doesn't look like Montreal will be able to keep him before he hits free agency this summer.

Evans will be in that same sort of Sean Kuraly zone -- a depth guy who can kill penalties and play with edge. Evans has won 52 per cent of his face-offs this season as well.

Teams will definitely come calling on this player.

Crouse isn't having his best offensive season, with eight goals and 12 points in 53 games, but he is a unique kind of player. There aren't many players like him who can skate on the penalty kill and power play, score 20-ish goals -- a mark he reached each of the past three seasons -- and are locked in at a reasonable number. Crouse is signed for another two seasons at \$4.3 million.

He's not Tom Wilson, but Crouse is an impactful physical player and is second on Utah with 111 hits. It would take a really good offer to get him, but teams are trying. He doesn't have any trade protections in his contract, so a team like the Winnipeg Jets would be wide open to get him.

Playoff teams are always looking for centres around the trade deadline and Alexander Kerfoot will get more attention than people give him credit

for, even in the midst of a 16-point season in 56 games. Given that, and the fact he's on an expiring contract (\$3.5 million AAV), he also wouldn't be all that expensive to acquire. Utah had been hoping to be in the playoff race and act as a buyer this trade deadline, but now six points out they may have to consider other options.

I believe Utah would be willing to part with Kerfoot if they can pick up a prospect or even a decent draft pick for him, giving them more ammunition to potentially acquire players in the summer. But Kerfoot is a good depth player and capable of killing penalties.

For teams that are perhaps looking to bring in a bigger centre than Kerfoot, 6-foot-5 Nick Bjugstad could be available from Utah. He's also having a down season in production, with five goals and 14 points in 45 games, but is much more physically engaging than Kerfoot and is one of Utah's leading hitters.

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Sportsnet.ca / Why separating Matthews and Marner may work better for Maple Leafs

Justin Bourne

Nikita Kucherov is an elite set-up man. He's one of five players in NHL history to amass 100 assists in a single season.

Connor McDavid is an elite set-up man. He's another of the five players in NHL history to amass 100 assists in a single season.

Leon Draisaitl is an elite set-up man. Over the past five years (including this one), he's third in the NHL in assists, behind only McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon, who is also (obviously) an elite set-up man.

Kucherov is an elite goal scorer. Pro-rated to 82 games, Kucherov has seven seasons where he's hit the 40-goal mark. He's top-10 in goals over the past three seasons.

McDavid is an elite goal scorer. Heck, he has a Rocket Richard Trophy for a 64-goal season, 'nuff said. Over the past five seasons, he's fourth in the NHL in goals.

Draisaitl is an elite goal scorer. He's tracking to win this year's Rocket Richard and has the second-most goals in the NHL over the past five seasons. Going back a full decade, Draisaitl has scored the third-most goals, which is a few places ahead of MacKinnon who, I should note, is also an elite goal scorer.

Mitch Marner is an elite set-up man. Over the past five seasons, he's fourth in assists, trailing only McDavid, Kucherov, and Draisaitl.

Auston Matthews is an elite goal scorer. Over the past five seasons he's led the league in goals by leaps and bounds -- more than a dozen ahead of second place Draisaitl and nearly three dozen ahead of David Pastrnak in third.

Here's the thing, though: Marner is not an elite goal scorer, and Matthews is not an elite set-up man.

Over the previous five seasons Marner is 44th in goals, while Matthews is 48th in assists. There are 32 teams in the league, which means they're not in the "elite" echelon for those categories. It's fair to say that no team game-planning for the Leafs says "Beware of Marner's shot," or "Be aware that Matthews can dish it too."

Every name listed before Matthews and Marner in this article here has either won the Stanley Cup, or played in Game 7 of last year's final. They are unpredictable offensive forces who will pass or shoot, which makes them hard to gameplan against.

The two Leafs we're discussing here are less so.





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Zoomed out, Matthews and Marner have been elite offensive forces in the league since their rookie seasons. Over that time, they're both in the top 10 in total points, with Matthews averaging 1.15 points per game, and Marner 1.13. But everybody — and I mean everybody — knows who's going to pass and who's going to shoot. They've had success together because they're both insanely good at the thing they do best. But it's becoming clearer to me that their unique tools should be used to help out other players. They do not need each other to be great.

What stands out to me most are the goals-to-assist rates.

When Matthews is with Marner, he scores at nearly a 2:1 ratio of goals to assists, which is insane. In an admittedly small but relevant sample, Matthews has had more assists than goals without Marner. His points-per-game go up as well, and Matthews still scores at a 53-goal pace.

Marner also gets more points without Matthews in this limited sample, and it seems like he takes on more scoring responsibility without him. With more total points, Marner goes from scoring at a 0.3:1 goals-to-assist rate, to a scoring pace that would net him a 50-goal-season, as unsustainable as that may be.

To be clear, I do not believe if you break them up that Marner would score 50 and Matthews would be the second coming of Adam Oates. But if it at least pushes them to a more well-rounded direction, perhaps we're on to something here.

Much like the Leafs' power play without Matthews, it was like the team was freed of the burden of "Mitch has to pass it, Auston has to shoot it" when one of them isn't there. They could take the best option that was available, which doesn't sound like a wild concept but is maybe one they've skirted in the past while they tried to force plays on their biggest stars.

To me, this one-dimensionality is all connected to their lack of post-season success. I was Sheldon Keefe's video guy in the AHL for two playoff runs, and over those years we played in five playoff series, winning three. My job was busiest then, as it involved immersing myself in the video of our opponent, looking for trends and finding what they liked to do best so we could figure out how to take those things away.

With the Leafs, you don't need to watch a second of video. Everybody in the building knows what Marner wants to do, and they know where Matthews is trying to go. As good as they are at those things, if you work hard at shutting them down, it's the equivalent of forcing a mediocre basketball player to go to their bad hand on a drive.

Kucherov has 167 points in 147 playoff games not because he's the fastest, or some big brute force. It's because he can "drive with both hands" equally and exceptionally well, and teams trip all over themselves trying to take everything away all at once.

So as the Leafs head towards the playoffs, where their stars have typically struggled to score, does it not make sense to put Marner and Matthews in a position where they have to work on their "other hand" for a few months? If Matthews can become more of a distributor, will he not become a better scorer in playoffs? Would Marner's passing not be a bigger threat if opponents started to think he might legitimately call his own number the odd time?

The Leafs did start the 2024 playoffs with the two apart, but that series was a mess. Matthews was hurt, yet still managed to dominate a game the Leafs won when he wasn't on a line with Marner. William Nylander missed games, Bobby McMann missed the whole series, Joseph Woll pulled out before Game 7, and so I'm not sure taking too many lessons from that series is all that smart. But I do think they had it right going into the playoffs: starting with Matthews and Marner apart is probably the best way to maximize the roster.

Of course, what the Leafs do at the trade deadline will have a big impact on the "Who should play with whom" game, but while they work towards that, the team should see if this small sample grows in a similar fashion. Maybe it won't, and they conclude these two should stay taped together.

But maybe it would work.

In baseball, some good pitchers have good careers built on a straight heater, and others on junk. But the best can throw both, and keep the opposition guessing. McDavid, Kucherov, and the rest of the NHL's best players have a whole bag of tricks. The Leafs' biggest stars have been too one-dimensional, and that has led to one dimension of post-season outcomes.

Splitting them up could help unlock some of the other talent on Toronto's roster, broaden their own games, and help them score the goals that have dried up so consistently in playoffs past.

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1339293 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Avalanche's Kylington reflects on time with Flames, unexpected split

Eric Francis

CALGARY — Oliver Kylington was pretty convinced last summer that he would remain a Calgary Flame for the foreseeable future.

The organization that drafted and developed him had also stood by his side throughout a painful mental health battle they supported him through.

He felt the love, and was wanted back.

Yet, when free agency opened on July 1, the 27-year-old defenceman was unsigned and searching for a suitor.

It has proven to be a missed opportunity for both sides, as the biggest hole the Flames have in their lineup right now is a left-shot defender who can play alongside Mackenzie Weegar.

"I thought Calgary would happen," Kylington told Sportsnet Thursday, making his first comments on the split mere hours before returning to the Dome for the first time as an Av.

"That's why it's hard to talk about. There was a lot of stuff that happened behind the scenes, nothing to do with Calgary."

Kylington has long kept his personal affairs out of the public eye, and wasn't willing to delve any deeper on a subject that confounded many in and around the organization.

Both the Flames and Kylington seemed to indicate last spring that, given how respectful the two sides had been to one another through his year-and-a-half mental health break, a new contract would be easy to come up with.

A second-round draft pick of the Flames in 2015, who spent parts of five seasons in the minors before a breakthrough season in 2021-22 positioned him to be a second-pairing staple, he subsequently missed 18 months and wasn't as effective when he returned.

Flames fans can only wonder whether he could have returned to the form that saw him score nine goals, 31 points and finish plus-34.

In his stead, the Flames have used a revolving door of defenders in search of someone who can mesh with Weegar.

Ilya Solovyov was summoned from the AHL this week in hopes that he can make an impact as the club contemplates going the trade route.

While the Flames felt they offered Kylington fair value to return, he chose to test a market that fell through for him on several fronts.

A costly miscalculation by the soft-spoken Swede.

By the time he circled back to the Flames, they had moved on, inking Jake Bean early on July 1 to essentially replace him.





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"I'm not going to comment on everything, but there was a lot that happened at that time," said Kylington, who signed a one-year, \$1.05 million deal with Colorado more than a month later. (He'd made \$2.5 million each of the previous two years.)

"(Free agency) was a new place for me to be in also. It was a new world, and a lot of stuff happened, and now I'm here."

Kylington was brimming with excitement on Thursday, not just about his return to Calgary but also about being back in the lineup after a 10-week absence due to an upper-body injury.

A healthy scratch one game earlier, as he was so often early in the season, he managed to draw back in due to an injury to Josh Manson.

"A lot of emotions," said Kylington, who played 13 minutes and finished minus-1 in a 4-2 win.

"Everything has just been special this day. Just happy to be back in Calgary, in general.

"I kind of grew up here. A lot of friendships I still have, and a lot of familiar faces I still enjoy seeing.

"It brings back a lot of good memories."

Revealing to Sportsnet last season that his mental break stemmed from trauma and betrayal involving his family, he was humbled by how many offered support upon his return to Calgary last season.

"I'm grateful, especially through my stuff I went through with my family, and the support and understanding from the whole city," said Kylington.

"The human side of things. It's always been good people I've encountered in Calgary. People reaching out and being supportive."

"Yeah, it was crazy — from people who are not into hockey," said Kylington, who had a good visit with a few of his former Flames teammates Wednesday night.

"That wasn't something I was expecting. I was just trying to return to play hockey. I wasn't aware or prepared to be recognized in that scenario. It was very special to get that feedback and support from people in Calgary."

In and out of the lineup before his injury in late November, Kylington has had challenges in Denver, where he has only played eight games this season.

Yet, he's quick to point out he's been given plenty of assistance there too.

"Obviously, it was tough when I was injured, but feeling really good," said Kylington, who insists the change of scenery has come with plenty of benefits.

"It's been different. I've liked it, I've enjoyed it, but with injuries, I haven't had the start I was hoping for. I just want to finish it off good."

"For me, it's important I'm seeing something else, and learning and obviously trying to be better every day.

"I've enjoyed the new challenges."

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Sportsnet.ca / Senators slipping in playoff race with losses to key opponents

Alex Adams

Ottawa — Sometimes, the difference between making or missing the playoffs isn't just about how many wins but who those wins are against.

As the Senators have been vaulting themselves into a playoff spot, their few losses have a familiar theme. They've lost to teams they are battling against in the playoff race. This week, they had a chance to secure themselves as a top-three team in the Atlantic division. Instead, in a rare regular season back-to-back against Tampa Bay, they fell 4-3 and 5-1 and lost that spot to the Lightning. That dropped them into the first wild-card spot.

Since Jan. 7, the Senators are 10-5-2. Great, right? Well, kind of.

Of their five regulation losses, four were against the Boston Bruins, New York Rangers and Lightning (x2), who they were within four points of at the time. Do the math, and if the Senators had flipped those games or even got a point in them, they'd be in a more advantageous spot in the standings than sitting in the first wild-card spot.

Throw in an overtime loss to the now red-hot Detroit Red Wings, and the Senators are 2-4-1 against teams that were within four points of the Senators at the time of the matchup in the standings since Jan. 7. Trade the Sens' wins over teams like Washington and Minnesota for wins against teams they are actually competing against and the playoff picture would look entirely different.

It could be even worse if it weren't for their comeback of the season against Boston at home on Jan. 18, when they scored two goals in the last three minutes and then a shootout winner that saved them from another calamity.

Well, have they just gotten bad bounces? In those five losses, their opponents had more expected goals than them, according to MoneyPuck. The losses were deserved.

In both games with Tampa Bay, their stars excelled, with Nikita Kucherov, Victor Hedman and Andrei Vasilevskiy combining for six points, and yes, there was a Vasilevskiy assist. Meanwhile, Tim Stutzle and Brady Tkachuk combined for two points. Simply put, Tampa's stars rose to the challenge, but Ottawa's didn't.

One caveat: the Senators were without their injured second and third-line centres in Josh Norris and Shane Pinto for the majority of both games. The injury bug wasn't only eyeing Ottawa, though, as Tampa Bay missed second-line centre Anthony Cirelli, who made Team Canada for the Four Nations. Injuries shouldn't be an excuse.

"Try to win the next game, plain and simple," said head coach Travis Green after Thursday's loss. "Not worried about the lineup, who's not here. We're worried about who is here."

However, as far as we know, someone was absent from the ice not due to injury. Green decided to start backup Anton Forsberg over Linus Ullmark. It was a surprising decision. Until the end of the regular season, every game the Senators play against a team they are sparring against for a playoff berth is the "biggest game in eight years". Sad but true.

Regardless, Green explained his decision to play his backup in an enormous game as easing Ullmark back from injury. "I think that's a big part of it," he said, "We want to get him two of these games."

"Good chance he'll play the next one."

Why not play Ullmark against Tampa Bay, who you are competing against for an Atlantic Division spot?

For context, Forsberg had won his previous three games while posting a .923 save percentage. Nevertheless, Ullmark was good, stopping 34 of 37 against Tampa Bay in his return on Tuesday while saving 1.02 goals above expected. The Senators have committed to Ullmark with a four-year extension, paying over \$8.25 million a season. Play your best players.

Tampa Bay didn't give Vasilevskiy a break: he was outstanding on Thursday.

After Ottawa tied it 1-1 in the second on Thursday, Jake Sanderson rushed out of the penalty box onto a two-on-one, sliding the puck over to Matthew Highmore, who was robbed by Vasilevskiy. Seconds later, Brandon Hagel found himself alone on Forsberg and slid the puck five-



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hole. It was the same move that Filip Forsberg used on Anton Forsberg on Monday. In no way was Forsberg to blame for the loss on Thursday, but he wasn't as good as Vasilevski.

If Ullmark needs to be eased due to recovering from an injury, then why not rest him and keep up Leevi Merilainen, who has better numbers than Forsberg? Merilainen had an impressive .925 save percentage while he was up with the Senators and might be the first goaltender to be sent down to the AHL immediately after earning a shutout. Make it make sense. The Senators didn't need to rush Ullmark back if he wasn't 100 per cent healthy. It's hard to gauge whether it's Ullmark, the coach or management who is making these decisions or a combination of all three.

The Senators' communication about Ullmark's health has never been very clear this season. When he was injured, his status went from day to day to out for "a while". Now we are left wondering whether he is healthy or not and why he wasn't playing in the biggest game of the season. Clarity is needed. On the surface, it isn't computing.

By all accounts, Travis Hamonic is a well-liked teammate. Speak to Jake Sanderson, and he will rave about Hamonic. However, the decision by the past management regime and now this one to routinely play him over other players continues to draw questions. Due to injuries to Artem Zub and Nick Jensen, Hamonic has been a mainstay for the Senators' blueline this season. However, the two regular pairings he's had this season with Jake Sanderson and Tyler Kleven have been two of Ottawa's worst, analytically.

According to Natural Stat Trick at five-on-five

Without Hamonic, both Sanderson and Kleven elevated their play. Sanderson struggled earlier in the season while playing with Hamonic. When Zub came back, all of a sudden, Sanderson was thriving again. Sanderson won the third star of the week in the NHL last week while playing with Zub.

According to Natural Stat Trick at five-on-five

Against Tampa Bay on Tuesday, both Kleven and Hamonic lost battles behind the net, leading to Luke Glendening tying the game 1-1. Later, the duo miscommunicated, leading Brandon Hagel to walk in to rip a goal that gave Tampa a 3-2 lead that eventually was the difference in the game. Two crushing goals to allow.

On Thursday, Green reinserted Nikolas Matinpalo, who had been steady with Kleven as the seventh defenceman, going eleven forwards and seven defencemen likely due to salary cap constraints. Matinpalo is rugged, steady and calm on the puck. On Thursday, he was not very noticeable but in a good way. Meanwhile, to Hamonic's credit, he was fine, but the Senators outshot Tampa Bay with Matinpalo on the ice 10 to eight and were outshot 11 to 14 with Hamonic on the ice at five-on-five, according to Natural StatTrick.

There is obviously some nuance; Hamonic played more and drew harder matchups, which Green, his coach, has mentioned plenty of times. Yet, according to Evolving Hockey, Hamonic has the ninth-worst wins above replacement (WAR) of 797 players this season. Hamonic has been a great soldier for the Senators and deserves credit for his tutelage and leadership. But it's time to let others play.

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Sportsnet.ca / Friday Four: Can Auston Matthews still hit 50 goals this season?

Michael Amato

The Friday Four is a collection of thoughts and information on some intriguing player storylines from around the NHL. On deck this week:

There is perhaps no player more excited for the 4 Nations Face-Off than Auston Matthews.

It wasn't too long ago that there were serious questions about whether or not Matthews would even participate in the tournament. The Toronto Maple Leafs captain has been battling a mystery ailment all season, one that's forced him out of action multiple times in recent months and saw him fly to Germany for treatment. That made some ponder whether Matthews should sit out the 4 Nations to rest but lately, he's looked much more like himself on the ice. Then when he was named captain of the American team it was clear, he was playing.

Now that Matthews appears to have moved past the worst of his injury woes, what can we expect from arguably the best goal-scorer on the planet when he's closer to full strength? Matthews is currently sitting on 20 goals with 28 games left to play in the 2024-25 season. That means 60 goals is out of the question and 40 seems realistic, but what about 50?

He would need 30 goals in the final 28 games to reach the milestone, which seems like a real challenge for most players. Matthews isn't most players, though. Just last year the 27-year-old showed what he's capable of when he's firing on all cylinders. Matthews scored 51 goals in his first 54 games, becoming the fastest player to hit 50 goals in a season since 1995-96. Breaking that down even further, Matthews notched 28 goals in the first 30 games of the year and then 27 more in another 30-game span in the second half of the campaign.

That's not quite 30 in 28 games, but it's close. What powered Matthews last year on the way to 69 goals were multiple games where he posted huge numbers. He had six hat-tricks in 2023-24, including three in an 11-game stretch. Numbers like that can really accelerate a goal pace and make something like 30 in 28 much more achievable.

This year, on the other hand, Matthews hasn't picked up a hat-trick yet and only has a pair of two-goal games. That will have to change down the stretch if he wants to get to 50. Part of that has simply been that he was playing through injury and wasn't 100 per cent. Matthews has looked better recently, though, enjoying a run in January where he had eight goals in eight games. Unfortunately, he's followed that up with no goals in his past five, although he's still generating plenty of shots and scoring chances. He'll need the dam to burst after the 4 Nations in order to give himself a chance for 50.

In order for Matthews to get there, he'll have to overcome a few obstacles. The main one is health, as there's no guarantee the injury he was dealing with won't creep back up and cost him a few games this season. Matthews said last month he this ailment could bother him throughout the remainder of the campaign. If he misses even another few games, 50 feels like an impossibility.

There's also the health of his linemates to consider. The Matthews, Matthew Knies and Mitch Marner line has been great, but Knies has missed his fair share of time this season as well. Marner also just missed a game with a minor injury. Matthews has proven to also be productive with Max Domi in the past, but Domi looks nothing like the player he was offensively last season. Should Knies or Marner miss any substantial time from here on out, it could also drastically reduce Matthews' chances to go on a scoring run.

With all that said, I don't think Matthews and Marner have to necessarily play together, but having them both healthy is key. Matthews can produce away from Marner, but if Marner is in the lineup it forces the opposition to split their defensive focus. Matthews will inevitably get some favourable matchups here and there.

The other thing to consider is how much Matthews is going to play down the stretch. The Leafs played Matthews right up until Game 82 last season during his pursuit of 70 goals. It's unlikely Toronto will employ the same strategy this year given his lingering injury and they'll be much more inclined to rest him when they can. Right now, the Leafs don't have a playoff spot locked up as tightly as they have in years past and they are



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still jockeying for position, but that could change heading into the final week or two of the season. Don't expect Matthews to play every single game leading up to the playoffs if the Leafs don't have anything substantial to play for.

Matthews is no doubt far more concerned about post-season success than individual milestones at this point in his career. He would probably like to get to 50 goals, but not at the expense of putting himself in the best possible position to succeed in the playoffs. Even if the stars were to align and Matthews got hot down the stretch, he'd have to score at a ridiculous pace to make it happen. However, crazier things have happened, especially for a two-time 60-goal scorer and someone who may have a chance to challenge the all-time goal record someday.

Doubt Matthews at your own peril.

With several high-profile players having already changed addresses this season, teams may have to get creative leading up to the trade deadline to fill needs.

Mikko Rantanen, J.T. Miller, Mikael Granlund, Joel Farabee and Morgan Frost have been dealt but there is some uncertainty around other impactful names potentially being available. Now that the New York Islanders are back in the race, is Brock Nelson still a trade candidate? Can someone pry Ryan O'Reilly out of Nashville? Are the Philadelphia Flyers asking too much for Scott Laughton? Does Yanni Gourde's injury take him off the market?

That could make Trevor Zegras an intriguing option to consider. The Anaheim Ducks forward has been the subject of trade rumours in the past, after injuries and inconsistencies have seen Zegras put together a couple of underwhelming seasons. The 23-year-old recorded more than 60 points in each of his first two full campaigns with the Ducks, only to score at around a 39-point pace in the past two injury-filled years.

A former top-10 pick, there's no denying Zegras has talent but he has yet to find consistency in his game at both ends of the ice. He's probably best suited on the wing, but Zegras does have the ability to play centre as well and there is no shortage of teams looking for help down the middle right now. Anaheim is probably going to ask for a decent amount in return if they decide to move him based on his potential and the fact that he isn't a rental. Zegras is under contract for one more after this at a reasonable \$5.7 million and then he'd still be an RFA in the summer of 2026.

The key will be putting Zegras in the right spot for him to both develop without too much pressure and help a team in the short term. That probably means more of an offensive role and one where the acquiring team isn't asking him to do too much heavy lifting in the defensive zone. Perhaps as a scoring winger in the middle six for a team that's looking to inject some more offence into its lineup heading into the playoffs. Goals are hard to come by in the spring and Zegras' creativity could be crucial in sparking an offence.

Where it becomes challenging is trusting Zegras enough to play him in important situations during the post-season. He's far from polished, so asking him to be on the ice late in a critical playoff game that's close could be risky.

With all that said, there are very few deadline acquisitions that come without risk. At least with Zegras, he would have the potential to help a team both now and in the future, if all goes to plan. All it takes is one team to decide that the possible reward is worth the return it would cost to acquire him.

His role has diminished but his accomplishments haven't.

Jonathan Quick picked up his 400th career victory on Sunday with a win over the Vegas Golden Knights. The New York Rangers goaltender also became the first American to reach the milestone and the 15th netminder overall to accomplish the feat.

Now 39 and closer to the end of his career than the beginning, it's worth pondering: Is Quick a Hall of Famer?

He has an impressive resume. Quick has three Stanley Cups to his credit, a Conn Smythe Trophy in 2012 and two William M. Jennings Trophies for allowing the fewest goals in a season. He also has a silver medal at the Olympics and is a three-time All-Star. Of all the goalies ahead of Quick in all-time wins, only Curtis Joseph, Chris Osgood, Marc-Andre Fleury and Sergei Bobrovsky are not in the Hall of Fame. Bobrovsky and Fleury aren't in because they're still active, but both figure to get in at some point when they retire.

Quick currently sits 23 wins behind Tony Esposito on the all-time list and if he finishes out this year and plays one more, he has a decent chance to pass Esposito, Glenn Hall, Grant Fuhr and Osgood to close in on the top-10. That's some impressive company.

If you wanted to make an argument against Quick, he never won the Vezina Trophy as the league's best goalie and he played the entirety of his career when the shootout was implemented. That means his win totals are a tad inflated, like a few others on the all-time wins list, because there are no more ties. Someone like Terry Sawchuk, who is currently eighth on the all-time wins list, had 171 ties in his career. If all those games had to be decided by a shootout, you could probably say conservatively that 40 per cent of those games would have turned out to be wins.

With all that said, Quick's playoff performances with the Los Angeles Kings that ended up in Stanley Cup victories are hard to ignore. During his Conn Smythe run, Quick had a .928 save percentage guiding the Kings to a championship.

Ultimately, I think Quick should get in pretty easily, but it may take a couple of years after he's eligible before he gets the call.

Move over Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane is the new shootout king.

Kane scored his 53rd shootout goal Tuesday night to power the Detroit Red Wings past the Seattle Kraken and move him ahead of former teammate Jonathan Toews for most all-time.

As gorgeous as that move from Kane was, I'm not sure it even cracks the top five of his shootout goal resume. This is my personal favourite.

Kane has mastered the art of patience on his shootout attempts, slowing down about halfway through and trying to out-wait the goaltender.

A lot of hockey fans aren't fond of the shootout and consider it sort of gimmicky, but there's no denying how important those extra points can be in a playoff race. Now that overtime is three-on-three, more games get decided in overtime, though when it was four-on-four, some teams used to pick up 10 or more extra points in the standings from winning shootouts.

Players like Kane are invaluable in those situations. The Red Wings are actually 3-0 in shootouts this season and thanks to Kane's efforts against the Kraken this week, Detroit has now won seven straight games. That's suddenly vaulted the Wings from the Eastern Conference's basement to a wild card spot. Conversely, the Pittsburgh Penguins are 1-5 in shootouts this season and sit eight points back of the Red Wings. Their playoff chances would be a lot better if they had an extra three or four points from shootout victories.

There's likely going to be a team or two that falls just short of the playoffs in the Eastern Conference lamenting the fact that they didn't win a few more games that went beyond 60 minutes.

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TSN.CA / Despite lack of execution, Nylander and Marner stay together at Leafs practice



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Mark Masters

The Maple Leafs practised at Doug Mitchell Thunderbird Sports Centre in Vancouver on Friday.

Toronto's new look second line of John Tavares between William Nylander and Mitch Marner will get a second chance together when the Leafs take on the Vancouver Canucks on Saturday. The trio received mixed reviews for their performance in Toronto's 3-1 win on Thursday in Seattle.

"There were some times where they had good situations set up and didn't execute," observed head coach Craig Berube. "If they execute the line could be very dangerous for sure."

"We started off well and kind of slowed down as the game went on," Marner said. "We've just got to keep our foot on the gas."

Shot attempts favoured the Seattle Kraken 11-7 in the 10 minutes and 40 seconds the line spent together in 5-on-5 play, per NaturalStatTrick.com.

"We got a lot of speed in our line," Marner said. "We got to use it. A lot of skill as well, but we've just got to make a little better plays and a little clearer plays, and we need to communicate a little more to get the pucks where we want them to."

Prior to the game, Berube told TSN a concern he had with the line is that it would spend too much time on the outside.

"Playing with those two guys you know they're going to find open ice and have the puck on their stick," Tavares noted while highlighting his strength at winning battles along the walls and getting to the front of the net. "Important that we still have a presence through the middle of the ice."

Tavares describes Marner and Nylander as "very puck dominant" players, but the 34-year-old centre also stressed the need to keep it simple at times.

"As a group, we got off to a good start yesterday in the game, and then our game, you know, maybe wasn't as crisp or as dynamic as we could have been," Tavares said.

Marner leads the team in assists (55) and Nylander is leading in goals (33) so this should be a match made in hockey heaven. But both guys play right wing and so they haven't had many sustained stretches of time together on the same line at 5-on-5.

"Maybe they haven't had a lot of time together in the past, but you gotta think the chemistry's there," said centre Auston Matthews. "I mean, just with the amount of time on the power play and the amount of time that we've been around each other."

Leafs see potential in Marner, Nylander combination

Leafs see potential in Marner, Nylander combination After going with a line of Mitch Marner, William Nylander and John Tavares, the Maple Leafs practiced with the same combo Friday ahead of their game Saturday in Vancouver. The Leafs spoke about the potential Marner and Nylander can have together, even if they haven't had much of a chance to try it at even strength.

Marner missed Tuesday's game in Calgary after a "bizarre" bout of spasms. In his absence, Max Domi moved up to the top line beside Matthews and Matthew Knies. That trio remained together in Thursday's game and in Friday's practice.

Domi is mired in a 21-game goal drought, but sparks flew when he partnered up with Matthews down the stretch last season.

"He's an easy guy to play with," said Matthews. "A guy I'm familiar with, and just want to keep getting better."

Matthews has gone five straight games without a goal, making this his longest drought since October 2022. But he's also put up six assists during Toronto's current three-game winning streak.

"It's been fine," Matthews said when asked about his game of late. "I think you always want to play better. Obviously you want to score, but the

opportunities are there. Still producing as a line, power play's been good. We're winning games. It's been a good road trip so far."

Matthews has fired 22 shots on net in the last four games.

"I think he is playing pretty well," Berube said. "He had six shots last night, and three or four of them were very dangerous. They will go in. He just has to keep getting the looks. He is making plays, too. His game is good, and he is playing a well-rounded game at both ends of the ice and killing penalties. He just has to keep getting the opportunities."

Leafs Ice Chips: Productive trip for Matthews despite goal drought

Leafs Ice Chips: Productive trip for Matthews despite goal drought During their current road trip, Toronto captain Auston Matthews has yet to score in three games, but has picked up six assists. TSN's Mark Masters has more on what has been different in Matthews' game, and how he has been adjusting to his new-look line.

Matthews picked up a secondary assist on the Knies goal in the second period on Thursday. The sophomore winger deflected a Jake McCabe point shot past Joey Daccord. The Kraken goalie immediately signaled to the referee that Knies struck the puck when his stick was above the crossbar.

Knies himself didn't seem sure and actually told McCabe to lead the celebration at the bench in the hopes of making the officials think the initial shot went straight in.

"I was kind of trying to hide it a little bit because I know it was a questionable call," Knies told TSN during an intermission interview. "They called a good goal on the ice so luckily it stood."

Knies smiled broadly.

The move by his linemate made Matthews smile as well.

"Maybe he doesn't realize there's like a thousand cameras in the stands and in the stadium so that no matter what happens, I mean, they're going to be looking at it," Matthews said. "But I appreciate the effort on that, for sure."

"He was trying to fool the ref there a little bit," winger Bobby McMann said. "Good play by him. I think it was nice that he swiped down on it because it was very close. I think because it was a goal on the ice, it ended up being a goal all the way through."

That's the message that Berube got from the team's video coaches, who are a perfect 5-0 on challenges this season.

"It's close," Berube said. "It's very close, but when they call it on the ice, it takes a lot to overturn it."

Indeed, upon review the play stood as called on the ice.

Smiling Knies admits to attempted cover-up after high-tip goal

Smiling Knies admits to attempted cover-up after high-tip goalMatthew Knies wasn't sure if his stick was below the crossbar when he deflected in Toronto's third goal on Thursday in Seattle. The Leafs winger told defenceman Jake McCabe to lead the bench celebration in an attempt to avoid a review.

Toronto's opening goal came from an unlikely source as Philippe Myers blasted a point shot that deflected in off of Kraken centre Matty Beniers. It was Myers' first NHL goal since Nov. 17, 2022.

"It felt really good to see that one go in," the 28-year-old defenceman said. "For me, I was just trying to get the puck on net and got a fortunate bounce there and I'll take it."

It was a fortunate bounce, but maybe Myers was due for one. The right-shot rearguard consistently puts pucks on net. He's landed 30 shots in 22 games this season or 1.4 per outing.

"He was aggressive and played a simple game like he normally does, and shot pucks," said Berube. "That's what he does. He got one off their guy but, you know, you never know when you shoot it."





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Myers leads the Leafs defence in shots per 60 minutes at 5.51, per NaturalStatTrick.com.

"Over the years I just found I have more success when I keep it simple and put pucks on net so that's my mentality this year," Myers told TSN during an intermission interview. "I'm going to keep going with that."

Myers snaps 812-day drought to help Marner reach milestone

Myers snaps 812-day drought to help Marner reach milestonePhilippe Myers scored his first NHL goal since Nov. 17, 2022 on Thursday. The Leafs defenceman fired a long-range shot that deflected in off Kraken centre Matty Beniers. The fortuitous bounce gave Mitch Marner his 500th assist and threw off the Kraken.

Marner picked up his 500th career assist on the goal by Myers.

"He does everything," Myers said. "Best player in the league. He's fun to watch every night."

"He's just a one-of-a-kind player," said goalie Anthony Stolarz.

High praise from teammates, but there's no doubt that Marner belongs among the elite guys in the game. Marner is the third-fastest player (629 games) in the last 20 years to reach 500 assists behind only Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby (554 games) and Edmonton's Connor McDavid (527 games), who are set to be his Canadian teammates at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

"It's pretty crazy," Marner said after the game. "It's pretty cool. I'll enjoy it for the night and then forget about it. Something cool to have. A lot of appreciation for the guys around me that put pucks in the net. I'm just trying to find them in the right areas, and they're the ones putting them in."

Teammates feel that Marner is too modest.

"He sees the ice better than anyone," raved McMann. "The way he plays the game, the way he thinks it, is different, and I'm not surprised that he has 500. It's an incredible milestone, and congrats to him, but just how he plays the game, there's many more to come."

"It's really cool," Marner said. "I don't really want solo achievements in this league, or enjoy them as much as maybe people should. A lot of credit to the guys around me that have been here with me since day one, and some guys that have moved on."

'Best player in the league': Marner earns 500th assist, high praise

'Best player in the league': Marner earns 500th assist, high praiseMitch Marner is the third fastest active player to reach 500 assists behind only Connor McDavid and Sidney Crosby. Leafs teammates heaped praise on the star winger in Seattle on Thursday with defenceman Philippe Myers declaring Marner is "the best player in the league."

Stolarz stopped 26 of 27 shots to pick up the win in his first game since sustaining a knee injury on Dec. 12.

"I felt really good in there," the 31-year-old told TSN. "It was nice to get a couple shots early, a couple long ones, and the guys did a great job of helping me ease back into it ... Coming back you just want to have fun, start getting back into it a little bit, so that was my mindset going into [the game] and not worrying too much about the results. But it's always nice when you give up one and you get the two points."

And always nice when you can beat an old buddy. Stolarz robbed former Florida Panthers teammate Brandon Montour with a glove save on a Kraken power play in the second period.

"Just trying to have some fun with it," Stolarz said. "I played with Monty last year and kind of know his tendencies. And where the puck was and where the bodies were in front, the only spot he could shoot as a righty was glove so just stuck everything I could out there and just was lucky it got in the glove."

Stolarz shot a smile at Montour after the save.

The 6-foot-6 goalie made another key shorthanded stop in the third period when he denied Shane Wright from the slot while dropping his

stick. Stolarz credited mentor Sergei Bobrovsky for teaching him an important lesson last year.

"That's something I learned from Bobby last year," Stolarz said. "That stick kind of weighs you down and pulls you back a little bit so being able to drop that and get across is my main goal there."

At the time of the injury, Stolarz had played 17 games and led the NHL in save percentage at .927. He's still in top spot after bumping the number up to .929 on Thursday.

"He's a big part of his team," Berube said. "We know that. When he was out, we missed him. I thought he played a heck of a game."

"He was fantastic," said Tavares. "He's just a great competitor, just competes so hard, a very intense guy once he puts the pads on."

'We missed him': Stolarz doesn't miss a beat in Leafs return

'We missed him': Stolarz doesn't miss a beat in Leafs returnAnthony Stolarz stopped 26 of 27 shots to pick up the win in his first game since Dec. 12. "He's a big part of his team," said coach Craig Berube. "We know that. When he was out, we missed him. He played a heck of a game."

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Simon Benoit finished a marathon shift in the second period by dropping the gloves with Seattle's Oliver Bjorkstrand. Benoit tried to land a hit and Bjorkstrand responded with his own hit.

"We were both tired and we just went at it," Benoit said. "I had to get a whistle some way. I was on the ice for a long time there. It was an easy way to get a whistle. So, that's it."

"He had a long shift," Berube said. "He might have been more pissed off about that. It is tough when you drop your gloves on a long shift like that."

Benoit had been stuck on the ice for one minute and 48 seconds with most of that time spent in the defensive zone. What was Benoit thinking as he struggled to get off the ice with the long change in the middle stanza?

"That's the thing, you don't think that much," he said. "When you have no more blood in your brain it's just all foggy, right. You're just trying to get the puck out to get a change for everybody."

Benoit (6-foot-4, 211 pounds) had a significant size advantage on Bjorkstrand (6-foot, 175 pounds). Benoit also has more experience with 17 fights versus five for Bjorkstrand.

"After a long shift in our zone like that fighting is never easy," Benoit said. "I gave a couple punches and then I just had to wait it out a bit. Good for him. I'm on the bigger side and he didn't back down."

"Ah, just kind of try to hold on and see if I can throw a few," Bjorkstrand told reporters in the Kraken dressing room. "I'm obviously not an expert on that, but sometimes it just happens and you just try."

Benoit felt ready to roll again after spending five minutes in the box, but wasn't exactly well rested at Friday's practice. It's hard to get shuteye after fighting.

"You just can't sleep after," he said. "Usually the adrenaline is always higher so it's hard to get to sleep."

How much sleep did he get?

"Not a lot," he said with a laugh.

Benoit drops gloves to get whistle at end of marathon shiftAt the end of a 1:45 shift, Leafs defenceman Simon Benoit dropped the gloves with Seattle's Oliver Bjorkstrand to get whistle at end of marathon shift. Friday, Benoit joked about the fight, admitting he just wanted to get off the ice.

Friday's practice only lasted 15 minutes.

"We played yesterday and flew in, so we just wanted to get in a little movement before the game tomorrow," Berube explained. "It is a four





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o'clock game [so there's no morning skate]. We just wanted to get on the ice, touch the ice a little bit, move the puck, get the guys up and moving a little bit. That's it."

The Canucks had the day off after winning in overtime over San Jose on Thursday night.

American defenceman Quinn Hughes has missed Vancouver's games this week and his status for Saturday's showdown against Toronto and the upcoming 4 Nations Face-Off is now in doubt.

"I was really looking forward to the opportunity to play with him," said Matthews, who will serve as captain of Team USA. "I don't know what the situation is, you know, whether or not he'll be ready to play or not. But if he's not, it'd be an unfortunate loss for us."

Vancouver blanked the Leafs 3-0 in the first game between the teams this season back on Jan. 11 in Toronto. Hughes had a goal and an assist while finishing plus-three.

"He's got the puck on his stick the whole game it seems like, and he drives so much of their offence," Matthews said. "Coming out of their zone as well, I mean, he makes so many plays, and gets the puck in good spots for the forwards. And obviously on the power play, he's extremely deceptive and dynamic, and able to shoot the puck."

NHL: Maple Leafs 3, Kraken 1

NHL: Maple Leafs 3, Kraken 1 Philippe Myers opened the scoring with his first of the year, Bobby McMann and Matthew Knies also found the scoresheet and the Maple Leafs won their third straight game. Anthony Stolarz stopped 27 shots in his first game since December 10th.

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TSN.CA / Frost, Farabee getting comfortable as Flames

Salim Valji

Calgary Flames sophomore Matt Coronato is pulling double duty these days. Not only is the winger the club's third-leading scorer with 30 points in 49 games, he's also become a chauffeur for his newest teammates.

Morgan Frost and Joel Farabee, acquired last week in a deal with Philadelphia for Andrei Kuzmenko, Jakob Pelletier, and draft picks, both credited the 22-year-old for shuttling them around town early in their Flames' careers.

"He's been great, driving us around," Frost said after an off-ice workout on Friday morning at the Saddledome.

Frost was hesitant, however, to give Coronato a full five-star rating.

"He's been on time and he's been doing a good job, for sure," he said. "We appreciate it a lot...we'll go 4.8 [stars], just because we can't give him a five-star."

Frost said that he's been hanging out at the rink more than he normally would have, just to get to know his new teammates.

"I've been taking my time getting out of the rink when we're done, hanging out in the lounge and stuff like that," he said. "Just trying to talk to guys."

He's also getting used to an increase in attention.

"[I've] been doing a fair bit of media, which is a little different," Frost said. "You can see the passion from the fans and everyone around the rink."

Both say that they haven't had to change much of their approach on the ice.

John Tortorella's system with the Flyers is similar to Ryan Huska's in Calgary. The two clubs forecheck hard, play more north-south than east-west, and demand their forwards are committed at both ends of the rink.

"Both systems really, when we have the puck, it's get going north and try to get behind their D," Farabee said.

One of those subtle differences is the centre's role in the defensive zone. While Tortorella wanted more structure from his pivots, under Huska, that centre improvises more.

"I would say it's a little bit more freelance, kind of thing [in Calgary]," Frost said. "It's basically the same. There's a little bit of stuff where you've got to be in a slightly different spot, but it's fairly similar."

The two clubs also have different approaches in how they enter the offensive zone.

"In Philly, it's a little more dumping and chasing," Farabee said. "At the same time, we want to play behind their D here and try to turn over pucks as best we can."

Frost, in particular, gives the Flames a skill set they previously lacked. Calgary doesn't have many forwards who are comfortable bringing the puck into the offensive zone on their own. More often than not, they drop it to a winger or dump it in. Connor Zary and Nazem Kadri are the two who prefer controlled zone entries.

Frost brings that dimension to the group.

"We want him to do it," Huska said. "The challenge we've given him now is to do it with more pace. We want to see him play faster with the puck. I think if he's able to do that [and] continue to add to that part of his game, he's going to be even more dangerous and dynamic when he hits the offensive blueline."

Frost is more of a playmaker than shooter, but Huska feels that by playing faster, he can add another layer to his game.

"Speed is hard to defend," Huska. "You're a shot threat like we saw in Seattle [when Frost scored his first goal as a Flame]...he can also distribute. It's a more dangerous player when you're learning how to do it with more pace with the puck."

The franchise hopes Farabee and Frost will be key contributors in the present and future.

Farabee, 24, is signed through the 2027-28 campaign while Frost, 25, is a restricted free agent this summer. Neither had visited Calgary as tourists before the deal, but both are already making plans to come back for the summer.

"[Former Flyers teammate] Travis Konecny had been inviting me to come to the Stampede," Frost said. "I never ended up pulling the trigger...hopefully when the summer time comes around, I'll be back for that."

Frost and Farabee both spoke how hectic their lives have been in over the last eight days. They've changed teams, countries, residences, rinks, and are getting to know dozens of new colleagues.

They've already played four games in their new colours but it feels like much longer.

"It feels like it's been long," Frost said, with a laugh. "It feels like it's kind of been both. You saying that it's been a week, it also feels like it was three days ago...it feels like we've already been here for two-and-a-half weeks."

"There's a lot going on in our heads."

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