CAROLINA HURRICANES
NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 25, 2025

The News&Observer

Almost seven years after his last NHL game, Chuck Kaiton is getting back behind the mic

By: Chris Seward

Hurricanes radio broadcaster Chuck Kaiton was named North Carolina sportscaster of the year in voting by the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association.

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Without fanfare or celebration, Chuck Kaiton was back on the broadcast level of the Lenovo Center a few weeks ago, giving a quick tour to a friend who was hosting him in a luxury suite. He walked past the radio booth where he spent so much time, and the faded spot on the wall where his portrait used to hang.

It wasn't his first trip back to the arena since he and the Carolina Hurricanes parted ways after 39 years, back in the summer of 2018 — he reappeared in public, appropriately, at the team's Whalers Night in 2023, having started his NHL career in Hartford in 1979 — but that distinctive booming voice still has not been back behind a microphone since the final game of the 2018 season.

Until this week.

Kaiton is making a brief and belated return to broadcasting Thursday, filling in on the St. Louis Blues' radio broadcast at the Washington Capitals while their usual play-by-play man, Chris Kerber, is on bereavement leave.

Kerber called and asked the 73-year-old to come out of retirement for one night, and one night only. Kaiton, who still watches a ton of hockey on television, and hosts many of the visiting broadcasters when they're in town for games against the Hurricanes, says his pipes are already warmed up for it.

"There's nothing to it," said Kaiton, the Hockey Hall of Fame's 2004 Foster Hewitt Award winner and the 2014 North Carolina sportscaster of the year. "Come on! I've done it for almost 40 years. I don't think I'm going to forget how to do it. It's not going to be too hard. I've been watching all the games, with the luxury of the ESPN+ package."

Kaiton's departure, over a salary dispute with then-new Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, hit him hard, especially when the Hurricanes replaced his radio call with a simulcast of the television broadcast on what is now FanDuel Sports South. He kept his distance for a while, until former general manager Don Waddell convinced Kaiton and equipment manager Skip Cunningham, two Whalers legends no longer with the franchise after spending almost 80 years combined with it, to come back for that game in 2023.

That was the right and proper thing to do for everyone concerned, and it broke the ice a little bit. He's been back, more quietly, for a few games since. But Kaiton still misses the game, and the people, and even if he might have retired on his own terms by now, he still had the itch to get back behind a microphone when Kerber asked him to join analyst Cam Janssen in the booth at the Verizon Center.

"I really appreciated Chris reaching out and asking me to do it," Kaiton said. "It's very exciting to me. Let's face it — even though I'm in my 70s, I obviously wish I was still working. Some days I do, some days I don't, depending on the travel schedule, but I do miss the people. It's going to be an opportunity to see a lot of people I haven't seen in a long time who I really like."

The fact that it will be in a Southeast-slash-Metropolitan Division building where he probably called 100 games offers a little bit of a comfort level that might not be there otherwise.

"I watch a lot of games. I talk to a lot of my colleagues. The job hasn't changed," Kaiton said. "I did a lot of visualization, knowing that arena. It's a great place to do a game from. I know the engineer that works with me. He's going to be shocked to see me walk in. I told them not to tell him I was coming."

The Blues broadcast will be available on SiriusXM and streaming on the Blues' radio rightsholder, 101espn.com, but if you were hoping for a return of Kaiton's Korner, don't fire off any emails about the Blues or the game of hockey in general to Chuck and the letter K quite yet. The Blues have an hour-long pregame show as well as the usual intermission and postgame programming, but Kaiton won't have to host any of it.

"No intermissions! This is great!" Kaiton said. "I just do the game with Cam and that's it."

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The Athletic

Brock Faber, Jaccob Slavin give U.S. an Olympic shutdown pair after thriving at 4 Nations

By: Michael Russo

ST. PAUL, Minn. – In Raleigh, Canes fans and especially Rod Brind'Amour and his staff have long known just how good Jaccob Slavin is. In Minnesota, Wild fans and especially John Hynes and his staff have long known just how good Brock Faber is.

Now, after being on a national stage as big and bright as the 4 Nations Face-Off, the entire hockey world knows.

After all, this wasn't Brind'Amour or Hynes deploying these defensemen for mega minutes against Finland, Sweden and Canada's biggest stars. It was a bunch of different coaches, and although Hynes was on the United States staff, he wasn't the coach calling defense pairs throughout the tournament and he's not the one who decided in the middle of the first game to pair Slavin and Faber.

"This wasn't the Wild or Hurricanes staffs raving about these guys anymore or throwing them out there for 30 minutes a game," Team USA GM Bill Guerin, who has the same title with the Wild, told The Athletic. "Like, you should have heard how these guys were talked about in the coaches' room."

The cool part of the 4 Nations tournament from a U.S. standpoint is that it gave Guerin, head coach Mike Sullivan and the entire USA Hockey brass a look under the hood to see what works and what doesn't when choosing the roster for the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan.

One of the easiest decisions Sullivan will have heading into next year's tournament is which two players will make up the Americans' shutdown pair.

You can bet your last dollar it'll be Slavin-Faber, who weren't on the ice for a goal against in either game against Canada and certainly would have been on for Connor McDavid's last shift of overtime in the final had the Americans not iced the puck. Because of the icing, assistant coach David Quinn couldn't substitute Slavin and Faber for Adam Fox and Noah Hanifin.

Slavin and Faber did a tremendous job eliminating Canada's chances all night, including earlier in overtime when Faber twice used his trademark great gap and stick to knock pucks from McDavid upon entries. But on this one shift, without Slavin and Faber on the ice, McDavid buried the winner and delivered Canada the title.

Sullivan called Slavin "one of the best defending defensemen in the league, bar none," and labeled Faber – the youngest player on Team USA's roster at 22 – "an emerging star."

"The stage wasn't too big," Sullivan said of Faber.

Sometimes with defensive defensemen, to truly appreciate how good they are you have to watch them on an everyday basis. Hockey fans who paid attention to the tournament finally realized what all the hubbub has been about when it comes to Slavin and Faber.

"He plays every shift the same. Every game's the same," Brind'Amour said Monday regarding Slavin, 30, who is in his 10th year in the NHL after being drafted No. 120 overall in 2012. "He takes pride in his job. He knows he's a shutdown defending kind of player. We've seen it for I don't know how many years in the league, it's pretty much the same.

"It's just on that big stage, all of a sudden it gets a little more attention, but we've noticed that every game for the last how many years he's played."

Faber, a 2020 Los Angeles Kings second-round pick and last year's Calder Trophy runner-up, is a well-decorated international player, winning gold at the 2021 World Junior Championship and playing in the 2022 Olympics. But going up against the NHL's biggest superstars was one of the coolest experiences of his life and the defeat in the title game "makes you that much more motivated and excited to hopefully get them again a year from now (in Milan)."

He said being on a team with so many superstars "is something that I will definitely cherish forever."

Faber didn't look comfortable his first period-and-a-half of the tournament against Finland. He learned that he couldn't lose focus for a single second against these types of players. But two shifts after being paired with Slavin, Faber assisted on Wild teammate Matt Boldy's winning goal. The rest of his tournament was tremendous.

After getting the most ice time along with Slavin in the United States' round-robin win against Canada, Faber logged 28:50 in the championship – more than any other player on either team.

The faith the coaching staff showed Faber meant a lot. It helped that Quinn coached him at the 2022 Olympics, so he knew better than most how good Faber could be in such a high-stakes tournament.

"The more I play, the better I feel like I can get, versus playing a little less, like under 20," Faber said. "I feel like I find comfort in that. It allows me to for some reason just, I don't know, find and get to my game."

Faber would be all for being paired with Slavin again at the Olympics.

"I always loved his game and appreciate his game, but you find a whole lot more appreciation when he's on your team

and you get to see it," Faber said. "He's just always in the right spot. There's never any hiccups. It's just so impressive. It really is. Having a D partner like that, it's hard not to be confident when you know you've got Slavin in there to pick up the pieces, or (Connor) Hellebuyck to make a save."

Hynes, who coached the penalty kill during the 4 Nations, also grew a deep appreciation for Slavin.

"You see him, what, twice a year (with Carolina)?" Hynes said. "I didn't realize how good he was, how good of a skater he is, how big and strong he is, his stick, his reads defensively. He is a nightmare to play against."

Slavin, a two-time Lady Byng Trophy winner, also had an incredible appreciation for Faber, saying during the tournament, "He's just so smooth, defensively sound and he moves so well. He's an elite skater and very smart."

Just 36 hours after playing in the 4 Nations final, Faber logged more than 30 minutes in the Wild's come-from-behind overtime win at Detroit on Saturday afternoon.

"It was a quick turnaround, and it was almost harder mentally and emotionally to get there," Faber said. "Obviously, we want to push for a playoff spot, but to have a loss like that with a completely separate team, it's just a weird dynamic, a weird feeling. That was a huge win, and it was such a fun hockey game, too. Once I woke up in the morning, it was time to be on the Wild again."

Faber and Boldy were not at practice Monday before Tuesday night's rematch with the Red Wings. Hynes said he had to force Faber not to practice.

"Yeah, you hate taking days off, obviously," Faber said, before laughing, "And you know with (Mats Zuccarello), he'll let you hear it as a 22-year-old taking days off. No, I felt like I needed it, and I'm glad they kind of pushed me to go in that direction."

It's not just Faber who will benefit from the 4 Nations experience.

Boldy had a solid tournament and returned with greater confidence. Just look at his performance during Saturday's win at Detroit, where he scored a goal and assist, got to the dirty areas and stuck up for Faber when he was checked hard by Alex DeBrincat.

Hynes, who coached Boldy at last year's world championship where he led the tournament in scoring, said the metrics showed what type of impact Boldy had on the U.S.'s game during the 4 Nations.

"Heavy forecheck, heavy contact, north-south game, putting pucks in, there wasn't a lot of east-west play, net-front play, using his size, getting tipped goals, 40-second shifts," Hynes said. "So it's great that we (saw) that. If it veers off, we just bring it right back to when he played his best in a best-on-best tournament. But that's the style of game that Bolds needs to play to be such an impact player for our team.

"He's a very talented guy, so how does he continue to grow his game and grow his role to be a dominant NHL player? When he plays that style of game, that's when he's truly at his best, and we've seen that for long stretches, at least in my time last year and this year and two different international events."

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Thriving In Throwbacks: A Look At Whalers Night History

By: Peter Dewar

Canes seek to stretch unbeaten streak in heritage Hartford uniforms on Feb. 27

RALEIGH, N.C. - The next time the Carolina Hurricanes score a goal at Lenovo Center, you won't hear Petey Pablo blaring from the speakers.

Instead, you'll be treated to the iconic "Brass Bonanza," a staple of Hartford Whalers games and, more recently, Canes games - for one night per year.

Whalers Night, presented by Alpaca Peruvian Charcoal Chicken, returns for its sixth iteration this Thursday, Feb. 27, as the Hurricanes battle the Buffalo Sabres. But it's more than just a chance to dust off some classic uniforms and blanket the arena with retro vibes.

There are still two key points up for grabs, and as history shows, the Canes have a habit of rising to the occasion when wearing the whale, boasting an unbeaten 4-0-1 record on past Whalers Nights. Let's take a look...

Dec. 23, 2018 | CAR 5, BOS 3

The inaugural Whalers Night arrived with plenty of hype as the green and blue garb was revived in Raleigh for the first time since the team's relocation in 1997.

Taking the ice in green uniforms modeled after the Whalers' late '80s look, the Canes roared back from an early two-goal hole to take a 5-3 victory on the strength of four-point performances by both Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen - including a pair of shorthanded strikes between the two.

Justin Faulk scored the hosts' only other goal, while Petr Mrazek turned aside 27 of 30 shots in the win.

Jan. 11, 2020 | CAR 2, LAK 0

While the inaugural Whalers Night was about Aho, Teravainen and the rest of the offense delivering five goals against a tough Boston squad, the sophomore showing was a goaltending clinic from James Reimer as he shut out the Los Angeles Kings in a 2-0 win.

A Nino Niederreiter goal 4:52 into the contest put the home club ahead early, and a Teravainen empty-netter sealed two points in the third, but 41 saves from No. 47 were the story of the contest.

The win marked Reimer's third shutout in 10 games and was the second in a run of eight straight starts in which his team would pick up at least one point (6-0-2).

Jan. 29, 2022 | CAR 2, NJD 1

The Whalers' revival quieted during the pandemic-affected seasons (though it didn't fully disappear - more on that later), but made its triumphant return in the first full season back with fans in the building.

Like its predecessor, the 2021-22 Whalers Night was headlined by stellar goaltending - this time from Antti Raanta, who made 24 saves to hold off the Devils in a 2-1 win.

Andrei Svechnikov and Jordan Martinook struck just 6:20 apart to open up a 2-0 lead early in the contest, and although New Jersey halved the deficit soon after, Raanta and the defense went to work to help Carolina move to 3-0-0 in Whalers colors.

Mar. 26, 2023 | CAR 3, BOS 4 (SO)

Alas, all good things must come to an end, and in 2022-23, the Whalers Night winning streak became a Whalers Night point streak in a 4-3 shootout loss to the Bruins.

Trailing 3-1 through 40 minutes, Brady Skjei and Sebastian Aho each scored in the opening 3:44 of the third period to knot things up and ultimately earn a hard-fought point, but the comeback came up short in the skills competition.

Frederik Andersen, making his Whalers Night debut, stopped 35 of 38 shots in a busy outing for the Dane.

Feb. 10, 2024 | CAR 1, NJD 0 (OT)

With the winning streak in green snapped in 2022-23, Whalers Night returned with a refreshed look in 2023-24 - white sweaters reminiscent of the early '80s Whalers adorned with green and blue striping and numbers arrived, complete with the beloved Pucky logo on the shoulders.

The result? A return to winning ways as the theme of outstanding goaltending continued. Pyotr Kochetkov stole the show in this one, stopping all 34 Devils shots through 63:40 of game action.

The game's lone goal came off the stick of Sebastian Aho - his fourth goal and seventh point in five career Whalers Nights in Raleigh - as he batted home a rebound in OT to send the Caniacs home happy.

Other Whalers-Themed Games

While not officially deemed "Whalers Nights," the Canes have hit the ice in green and blue on a handful of other occasions as well.

After debuting the uniforms in Dec. 2018, the team rolled out the Whalers look in New England for a late-season clash at TD Garden in Boston. Sebastian Aho scored twice to help his team earn a point in a 4-3 OTL to the Bruins.

During the shortened 2020-21 campaign, Carolina rolled out a gray Whalers jersey as part of the NHL's Reverse Retro campaign, which was designed to give each team a unique throwback jersey for that season only.

The Canes wore those threads twice - topping Chicago 5-3 in February of 2021, then notching a point in a 5-4 SO loss to Detroit in April of that year.

Including their 4-0-1 mark on Whalers Nights in Raleigh, Carolina is 5-0-3 in green and blue gear since 2018. Aho leads the team in scoring in Whalers-clad contests with seven goals and three assists, finding twine in five of the eight total outings.

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NHL Bubble Watch: Projecting playoff hopes for all 32 teams - ESPN

By: Greg Wyshynski

After taking a pause for the 4 Nations Face-Off -- and continuing Canadian domination in best-on-best tournaments -- the NHL regular season is now rocketing toward the Stanley Cup playoffs.

The stakes are high. Time is short. Who's in and who's out?

The NHL Bubble Watch is our monthly check-in on the Stanley Cup playoff races using postseason probabilities and points projections from Stathletes for all 32 teams. We also reveal which teams shouldn't worry about any of this because they're lottery-bound already.

As a bonus this month, we're also including which player from the playoff contenders needs to step up the most in the stretch run.

But first, a look at the projected playoff bracket:

Projected playoff bracket

Note: Projected point totals via Stathletes.

Eastern Conference

M1 Washington Capitals (115.7) vs. WC2 Ottawa Senators (88.1)

M2 Carolina Hurricanes (104.1) vs. M3 New Jersey Devils (97.8)

A1 Toronto Maple Leafs (104.6) vs. WC1 Detroit Red Wings (90.7)

A2 Tampa Bay Lightning (101.2) vs. A3 Florida Panthers (100.8)

Western Conference

C1 Winnipeg Jets (113.2) vs. WC2 Calgary Flames (89.5)

C2 Dallas Stars (103.8) vs. C3 Colorado Avalanche (98.8)

P1 Vegas Golden Knights (107.6) vs. WC1 Minnesota Wild (98.1)

P2 Edmonton Oilers (105.5) vs. P3 Los Angeles Kings (97.9)

ATLANTIC DIVISION

The locks

Toronto Maple Leafs

Record: 35-20-2, 72 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

The Atlantic Division race has unexpectedly tightened over the past month, but the Leafs are still favored to finish in first place over the Florida Panthers -- a result that could give hockey fans both Battles of Florida and Ontario in the opening round. For all their offensive star power, the Leafs' success is owed greatly to Joseph Woll and Anthony Stolarz, who have helped Toronto to the fourth-best 5-on-5 save percentage in the NHL (.926 in 57 games).

Player who must step up: Morgan Rielly. The 30-year-old defenseman had 26 points in his first 57 games, well off his points pace of the previous three seasons. Rielly has struggled with adapting to new coach Craig Berube's system -- no Toronto player has been on the ice for more goals against this season than the Leafs' top defenseman.

Florida Panthers

Record: 34-21-3, 71 points

Playoff chances: 99.4%

The Panthers are going to experience life without star winger and spiritual leader Matthew Tkachuk for the foreseeable future because of the groin injury that kept him off the ice for Team USA in the 4 Nations Face-Off. They already had to manage without captain Aleksander Barkov for a slew of games this season.

But Florida is a resilient bunch, and one that remains firmly in a playoff position. In a fair and just world, Sam Reinhart would be getting MVP buzz for another outstanding season at both ends of the ice.

Players who must step up: Florida needs scoring from the back end. Aaron Ekblad (26 points) and Gustav Forsling (21 points) is the team's top defense pair and its top-scoring blueliners. The offseason losses of Brandon Montour and Oliver Ekman-Larsson were always going to have a deleterious effect on their defensive scoring. One assumes that if the D-men behind the top pairing can't generate more, GM Bill Zito will go shopping before the March 7 deadline for someone who can.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Record: 32-20-4, 68 points

Playoff chances: 99.5%

With 83 points in 53 games this season, it's fairly to safe to say that Nikita Kucherov can drive a line. Through 46 games together, the line of Jake Guentzel, Brayden Point and Kucherov is averaging 3.82 goals per 60 minutes. When Kucherov has played with Anthony Cirelli and Brandon

Hagel, that line has averaged 3.86 goals per 60 minutes. Nikita Kucherov: good at hockey.

Players who must step up: The bottom six. The Lightning's top two lines have accounted for 148 of the team's 200 goals this season. Tampa Bay's defense has accounted for 22 more. That means 30 goals have come from the Bolts' other forwards, and 10 of those were from Mitchell Chaffee alone. A lack of scoring depth at forward has been something Tampa has overcome in the regular season but has been exposed in the postseason over the past few seasons. Will that trend continue?

Work to do

Detroit Red Wings

Record: 29-22-6, 64 points

Playoff chances: 64.4%

Is the playoff drought finally over? The Red Wings last made the playoffs in 2016. Stathletes has them projected for around 90 points, which would earn them the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

GM Steve Yzerman bet big on his coaching change, and it has worked in the standings: Todd McLellan has a 16-5-2 record since taking over from Derek Lalonde, buoyed by a seven-game winning streak before the 4 Nations break.

The Red Wings aren't dominant by any stretch -- underwater in both goals for percentage and expected goals percentage under McLellan -- but they're finding ways to win.

Player who must step up: The answer would logically be Vladimir Tarasenko, but there's a better chance of him stepping out to another NHL team before the trade deadline than stepping up in Detroit.

So we'll go with Erik Gustafsson, whose assist against Anaheim on Sunday ended a 12-game point drought -- the second 10-plus game scoreless streak the defenseman's had this season, which is not what you want to see from a free agent ostensibly brought in for his offense.

Ottawa Senators

Record: 29-24-4, 62 points

Playoff chances: 42.5%

Stop us if you've heard this one before: The Senators have significant absences from their lineup. Centers Josh Norris and Shane Pinto sat out time because of upper-body injuries right before the 4 Nations break, and during a recent skid in the standings. Ottawa remains in good position in the wild-card race. Hopefully, Linus Ullmark gets his skates under him quickly now that he's back from injury.

Player who must step up: Drake Batherson. As the Senators deal with injuries, they could use more goal scoring from their 26-year-old winger. After he had a hat trick against Anaheim on Dec. 11, Batherson has scored only four goals since. He has 16 goals in 57 games after he had 28 last season.

Long shots at best

Boston Bruins

Record: 27-24-7, 61 points

Playoff chances: 10.4%

The shot got longer for the Bruins this week with the news that defenseman Hampus Lindholm is probably done for the season. Combine that with Charlie McAvoy's plight, which has no timeline for the defenseman's return after his hospitalization during 4 Nations, and the Boston blue line is in rough shape.

GM Don Sweeney said he's taking a "cautious" approach to the trade deadline -- i.e. probably not looking to add. It's unclear what that means for his own retooling. Is it possible Brad Marchand is no longer a Bruin after March 7?

Player who must step up: Jeremy Swayman. Every time the Bruins goalie looks as if he's going to turn the corner, he falls off the curb. He has given up at least three goals in 10 of his past 13 starts, in a season that has seen him play at a below-replacement level. Now he has to try to turn things around in back of a diminished defense corps. This is not the way one wants to begin an eight-year, $66 million contract extension.

Lottery-bound

Montreal Canadiens

Record: 26-26-5, 57 points

Playoff chances: 8.9%

The Habs had a 43.4% chance of making the playoffs in the last NHL Bubble Watch, which illustrates both how wild a ride the Eastern Conference postseason race has been and the fragility of Montreal's status as a contender.

The Canadiens have lost eight of their past 10 games. They're hanging tough with better teams, but the lottery beckons.

Buffalo Sabres

Record: 23-27-5, 51 points

Playoff chances: 0.8%

Feb. 22 marked the 14-year anniversary of owner Terry Pegula's introductory news conference in which he declared, "Starting today, the Buffalo Sabres' reason for existence will be to win a Stanley Cup."

They made the playoffs in 2011 and were eliminated in the first round. They haven't made the playoffs since, and that drought will extend to 14 seasons after this disappointing season.

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

The locks

Washington Capitals

Record: 38-11-8, 84 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Do the Capitals get enough respect as a Stanley Cup contender? They're near the top of the league in points percentage as well as both goals for and against per game. They're in the top 10 in power play and on the penalty kill.

They have eight players with 38 or more points, ranging from an all-time great chasing a legendary record (Alex Ovechkin)

to the comeback player of the year (Pierre-Luc Dubois) to a 24-year-old having a breakout season (Aliaksei Protas). They're for real.

Player who must step up: Andrew Mangiapane. The Capitals acquired him from the Flames to bolster their offense, which it turns out was bolstered enough. He has 11 goals and nine assists this season, with three points in his past 14 games. It's assumed top prospect Ryan Leonard will join the Capitals after his season with Boston College comes to an end. Will it be at the expense of Mangiapane's spot in the lineup?

Carolina Hurricanes

Record: 33-20-4, 70 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

The Hurricanes are doing what they do: leading the NHL in percentage of shot attempts, expected goals percentage and second in shot suppression at 5-on-5. Yet they've given up the 12th-most goals at 5-on-5 in the NHL this season, even if they've scored the eighth-most goals at 5-on-5.

Some of that can be chalked up to inconsistent goaltending, although perhaps the return of Frederik Andersen can stabilize that.

Player who must step up: Mikko Rantanen. There's a burgeoning cottage industry of insiders speculating that the Hurricanes could turn around and trade their blockbuster acquisition from earlier this season. Perhaps because they've realized they can't extend the pending unrestricted free agent. Perhaps because the fit turned out not to be right. He has three points in seven games with 22 shots on goal.

To say he needs time to adjust would be an understatement -- to a new home, a new team and in particular a new system. Assuming he remains a Hurricane, they need him to be a difference-maker now and especially in the postseason.

New Jersey Devils

Record: 32-21-6, 70 points

Playoff chances: 97.9%

The Devils were almost slotted down in the "work to do" category considering how underwhelming they've been for the past two months: 8-10-3 since Dec. 28.

But they've kept their collective heads above water despite injuries to captain Nico Hischier and star goalie Jacob Markstrom in that stretch. They're still searching for the kind of consistency they had when they won 10 of 13 games late in 2024 and have all the talent to do so.

Player who must step up: Simon Nemec. The No. 2 overall pick in 2022, Nemec was frustrated with being down in the AHL earlier this season, hinting that a trade request could happen is his situation didn't change. But Nemec hasn't played well enough to break into the Devils' top six, with one assist in 12 games.

His pairing with Luke Hughes was recently called out by coach Sheldon Keefe, but it was Nemec's ice time that was cut -- and then he was scratched in their win Sunday. He's still so young at 21, but is the clock ticking on his tenure with the team?

Work to do

New York Rangers

Record: 28-25-4, 60 points

Playoff chances: 32.9%

There are nights when you can squint hard enough and see the Rangers as a wild-card team this season.

But there are many more nights when the Rangers look like a team in serious need of a retool and an attitude infusion, and whose approach to the trade deadline should be to continue the export business that started with the trade of captain Jacob Trouba. Because even if they make the postseason, this incarnation of the team does not look like a Stanley Cup contender.

Player who must step up: Igor Shesterkin. The star goalie's overall numbers are above average: .903 save percentage and 5.4 goals saved above expected behind a Rangers team that doesn't impress at 5-on-5. But after agreeing to an eight-year, $92 million contract extension, Shesterkin has been wildly inconsistent. He has given up four or more goals in four of his past seven games.

New York Islanders

Record: 25-24-7, 57 points

Playoff chances: 24.0%

The Islanders won 11 out of 14 games after the calendar flipped, which in turned flipped their season from a meander toward the lottery to hope for a playoff berth. Their 24% chance of making the postseason isn't all that encouraging, but it might be enough for GM Lou Lamoriello to try to bolster this group rather than dismantle it -- although someone might bowl him over with an offer for Brock Nelson or Jean-Gabriel Pageau.

Players who must step up: The penalty kill. The good news for the Islanders is that they finally have some company for the NHL's worst penalty kill, as the Red Wings have dipped under 70% recently. Injuries have played a role here -- such as Adam Pelech being limited to 36 games -- but so has ineffective play from usually dependable PK players such as Scott Mayfield and Pageau.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Record: 27-22-8, 62 points

Playoff chances: 5.0%

The projections tell a different story than the standings. Stathletes has the Jackets with a 5% chance of making the playoffs, up from 1.7% in the last Bubble Watch. Money Puck has the Jackets at a 13.6% chance of making the playoffs, which is actually down from 16.2% last month. Stathletes projects Columbus to finish with 81.6 points, ahead of only the Penguins in the Metro Division and the Penguins and Sabres in the conference.

Some of this might be a symptom of having the top three spots in the Metro basically spoken for. But Columbus remains right at the wild-card bubble, fueled by a dominant season from defenseman Zach Werenski and the growth of players such as Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli.

The odds aren't in their favor, but the Jackets have overcome them -- and so much more -- to be in the position they're in this season.

Player who must step up: Boone Jenner. The Jackets captain sat out the first 56 games of the season after undergoing shoulder surgery in October. Pardon the pun, but what a boon for this lineup: Jenner, 31, has scored 22 goals or more in each of the past three seasons and brings some veteran savvy to the team's 5-on-5 play.

Columbus put him with Cole Sillinger and Johnson to start. He's an important player for their playoff push and one who's thrilled to be back for it.

Long shots at best

Philadelphia Flyers

Record: 25-26-7, 57 points

Playoff chances: 12.1%

The Flyers lost eight of nine games before the 4 Nations break to fall back from the wild-card bubble. Last month, they had over a 42% chance of making the playoffs.

Still, the Flyers have some glimmers of hope for another run at the playoffs, such as Matvei Michkov's chemistry with Sean Couturier. Their newly formed line with Owen Tippett has been dominant in the short term.

Player who must step up: Ivan Fedotov. Samuel Ersson can't do this alone, although he has started 10 of the past 13 games for the Flyers. Fedotov has been a major disappointment this season (4-8-3, .877 save percentage), including minus-7.3 goals saved above expected. He hasn't won in eight straight appearances, although good showings against the Leafs and Blue Jackets ended in overtime and a shootout, respectively.

They don't need Fedotov to steal 15 games before the playoffs. They just need the kind of competence that, on most nights, he's not giving them (.250 quality starts percentage).

Lottery-bound

Pittsburgh Penguins

Record: 23-27-9, 55 points

Playoff chances: 2.5%

The Stanley Cup playoffs are a better place with Sidney Crosby in them, but the math is no longer mathing for the Penguins. Stathletes gives them a less than 3% chance of making the postseason and projects just 80.8 points for Pittsburgh -- which would be its lowest point total in an 82-game season since Crosby was a rookie.

Money Puck is even more cynical, giving the Penguins an 0.8% chance of making the playoffs, ahead of only Nashville, Chicago and San Jose. Kyle Dubas, let the trade deadline discussions begin.

CENTRAL DIVISION

The locks

Winnipeg Jets

Record: 41-14-3, 85 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Connor Hellebuyck's MVP-level season in goal has fortified the Jets as the league's best defensive team this season. Their offense, fueled by a power play that has remained north of 30% all season, ranks in the top three thanks to Gabriel Vilardi, Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor amassing nearly 30 power-play goals combined on their own.

The Jets would be the first ones to tell you that none of this means anything if they're eliminated in five games in the first round for a third straight season. But that doesn't change how incredible their regular-season success has been.

Player who must step up: Josh Morrissey. Don't get it twisted: Morrissey has had a very strong season for the Jets, from orchestrating their power play to being their ice-time leader overall. But on a team with so many Jets flying higher than ever, Morrissey's even-strength output is just a tick below where it has been for the past two seasons.

Dallas Stars

Record: 37-18-2, 76 points

Playoff chances: 99.7%

It must be frustrating for the Stars to have this kind of regular season -- through 57 games, they had the third best points percentage in the NHL -- only to look up and see the Jets firmly planted on the ladder above them, never missing a rung.

Dallas is a top-five team both offensively and defensively this season, cruising along despite losing Tyler Seguin for the regular season because of hip surgery, having Mason Marchment limited to 39 games and now having top defenseman Miro Heiskanen month-to-month after knee surgery.

Player who must step up: Thomas Harley. The 23-year-old scrapped his vacation plans to join Team Canada in the 4 Nations Face-Off as an injury replacement, then was outstanding in the tournament. Though the Stars probably liked having their young defenseman in such a pressure-packed learning environment, they also might have been fine with him getting a rest.

Harley will be counted upon to power his own defensive duo now that his primary partner, Heiskanen, is on the shelf. With 30 points in 55 games, skating a career high 22:46 per game, he has shown himself more than capable.

Minnesota Wild

Record: 34-19-4, 72 points

Playoff chances: 95.8%

Winning six of their last eight games, the Wild continue to keep pace with the Stars in the Central Division.

They already managed life without MVP Kirill Kaprizov once this season, and it looks as if they'll have to do it again: The star forward returned for three games after sitting out a month but then left the lineup for surgery on a lower-body injury. GM Bill Guerin indicated that the absence will be longer than previously expected.

Player who must step up: Joel Eriksson Ek. It has been a rough ride for the Wild center this season. He was on injured

reserve until the end of 2024. He hasn't been himself offensively, as his per 60 minutes averages are way off his recent marks; or defensively, as the annual Selke Trophy contender has been a party to one of the league's worst penalty kills this season -- his 36.1% short-handed faceoff winning percentage hasn't helped.

Colorado Avalanche

Record: 33-24-2, 68 points

Playoff chances: 94.4%

In the aftermath of the Mikko Rantanen trade, the Avalanche went 5-5-0 but watched Martin Necas tally nine points in 10 games as his replacement from the Carolina Hurricanes.

Colorado is still searching for consistency -- it hasn't won more than two games in a row since the calendar flipped -- but the Avs will get healthier and be better.

Player who must step up: Mackenzie Blackwood. Acquired from the San Jose Sharks in mid-December, Blackwood fit in so seamlessly that the Avalanche awarded him with a contract extension after just a handful of games. He was one of the best goalies in the NHL after arriving in Colorado, going 12 straight games without giving up more than two goals against. But in the 11 games after that, he gave up three or more goals in seven of them.

Blackwood has continued to play well, with 12.5 goals saved above expected, but can he find that unbeatable form again?

Work to do

Utah Hockey Club

Record: 25-24-9, 59 points

Playoff chances: 22.5%

For all the losses the Utah Hockey Club has taken in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office this season -- Utah Yeti, we hardly knew ye -- they're finally picking up some wins on the ice.

Utah has won four of six games to creep back into the playoff race, including a huge win over the Canucks on Sunday in regulation.

They got key defensemen John Marino and Sean Durzi back from long-term injured reserve this week. Clayton Keller (63 points), Dylan Guenther (21 goals) and Logan Cooley (44 points in 51 games) continue to excel offensively. Karel Vejmelka (9.03 goals saved above expected) remains one of the season's best goaltending stories.

Player who must step up: Durzi. The 26-year-old has been out since October after shoulder surgery, and will give Utah a major boost down the stretch with his return. Durzi can help solidify a second pairing behind Marino and Mikhail Sergachev on the top pair. Incredibly, Saturday was the first time all three of GM Bill Armstrong's big blue-line offseason additions were in the lineup together.

Durzi can also help on a power play that's sitting just outside the top 10. Utah is getting reinforcements at the right time.

St. Louis Blues

Record: 26-26-6, 58 points

Playoff chances: 13.4%

Money Puck has the Blues with an 11.1% chance of making the postseason, despite being within five points of sputtering Vancouver. That's probably not enough of a percentage chance to prevent GM Doug Armstrong from dealing away at the trade deadline, with players such as captain Brayden Schenn potentially on the block.

Could that also include the Blues trading goalie Jordan Binnington at the height of his hype after the 4 Nations Face-Off? Naturally, there has been some speculation to that end.

Player who must step up: Pavel Buchnevich. Let's pretend for a moment that a team that hasn't won three games in a row at any point this season suddenly mounts a serious challenge for the last wild-card spot. They could use a strong finish from Buchnevich. The 29-year-old, whose six-year contract kicks in next season, has been off his mark on offense all season. But he has heated up recently, with seven points in six games, playing on a line with Robert Thomas and Jake Neighbours.

Lottery-bound

Nashville Predators

Record: 20-29-7, 47 points

Playoff chances: 0.5%

For a while, the analytics indicated the Predators actually had a chance of making the Western Conference playoffs despite the smoldering mess of their season. Last Bubble Watch had Nashville with a 38% chance of making the cut, although Money Puck was the minority report on that claim, giving the Preds a 5.3% chance of making it.

Now, both sites are aligned: Nashville stinks, with both giving them a less than 1% chance of rallying for a playoff spot. Unless, by some miracle, there's a 16-0-2 run in this group as there was in last season's Preds.

Chicago Blackhawks

Record: 17-33-7, 41 points

Playoff chances: 0.0%

Chicago has been a special kind of bad in calendar 2025, winning only five times in 19 games. Seth Jones has politely asked the Blackhawks if he can get off this ride soon, which could make for an interesting trade deadline in Chicago.

After that, it's just daily tabulation of lottery odds until the balls enter the machine.

PACIFIC DIVISION

The locks

Vegas Golden Knights

Record: 34-18-6, 74 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Stathletes has the Knights projected for 107.6 points entering Monday night, slightly ahead of the Oilers' (105.5) points pace. (It's here that we'll request Kings fans look away from the horror that is another first-round meeting with Connor McDavid, which this projection portends.)

Vegas is a solid defensive team with a terrific power play, and Jack Eichel (69 points in 56 games) in pure MVP mode.

Player who must step up: William Karlsson. He has struggled this season through injuries and ineffectiveness. One of the last remaining original Knights, Karlsson has seven goals in 38 games after scoring 30 in 70 games last season. No one expected him to shoot 17% again, but he's better than this output.

Coach Bruce Cassidy said Karlsson is skating again, but there's not a definitive return date for him. The hope is that when he comes back, his offense will too.

Edmonton Oilers

Record: 34-19-4, 72 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

To put the contributions of Leon Draisaitl and McDavid into perspective: They have combined for 158 points together this season through the Oilers' 57th game. That's nearly what Edmonton's next five highest scorers have tallied combined.

Their 20 power-play goals are, in fact, more than the rest of the roster combined (16). The Connor and Leon Show -- or is it Leon and Connor Show? -- is the reason the Oilers are a lock to make the cut.

Player who must step up: Evan Bouchard. The easy answer here would be Stuart Skinner, who will need to solidify his hold on the Oilers' goaltending job and hope the team doesn't make a deadline move for a netminder.

But the more difficult conversation surrounds Bouchard, the team's most gifted offensive defenseman who has battled puck management issues this season on top of his defensive liabilities. He has 44 points in 57 games after tallying 82 points in 81 games in 2023-24.

Los Angeles Kings

Record: 31-17-7, 69 points

Playoff chances: 94.7%

The Kings jump from around a 72% chance to making the playoffs in the last Bubble Watch to 94.7% this month.

They don't score much (19th in goals per game) but remain a top-five defensive team, thanks in part to Darcy Kuemper's outstanding goaltending (9.1 goals saved above expected) in a bounce-back season that's every bit as unexpected as the one for the player the Capitals acquired for him (Pierre-Luc Dubois).

Player who must step up: Trevor Moore. The 29-year-old forward had a breakout season with 31 goals and 26 assists last season for the Kings, shooting 12.7%. He still hustles and has versatility at the forward spot, but his offense has completely fallen off this season with eight goals and 15 assists in 45 games -- do his two goals on Monday signal a turnaround?

Work to do

Calgary Flames

Record: 27-21-8, 62 points

Playoff chances: 41.5%

Stathletes projects the Flames will finish one point ahead of the Vancouver Canucks based on their trajectories entering Monday, and hence has given them a better chance at making the playoff cut. Money Puck disagrees, giving the Canucks a 51.5% chance of a postseason berth to Calgary's 29.7%.

Of note, rookie goalie Dustin Wolf continues to crush it, with a 20-11-3 record and a .913 save percentage.

Player who must step up: Joel Farabee. Now that the shock of his trade from the Flyers has subsided, the Flames forward needs to get back to the 20-goal pace that he showed he could hit in Philly. The 24-year-old has one goal in six games for Calgary.

Vancouver Canucks

Record: 26-20-11, 63 points

Playoff chances: 31.7%

Well, no one can accuse the Canucks of being dull.

The J.T. Miller trade sought to end the NHL's most notable feud between teammates, freeing Elias Pettersson to recapture his game ... which he hasn't. Starting goalie Thatcher Demko can't stay healthy, while his backup Kevin Lankinen was just handed a five-year contract extension. And don't even get us started on the "Quinn Hughes is coming" 4 Nations Face-Off hullabaloo. That all happened against the backdrop of a Canucks team that has done anything but cement the final wild-card spot in the West.

Player who must step up: Pettersson. Could it be anyone else? Miller was traded on Jan. 31. Pettersson has three assists and zero goals through eight games since, and that's not even mentioning his disappearing act at the 4 Nations tournament. Pettersson has get his game going if Vancouver is going to make the playoffs.

As coach Rick Tocchet said of Pettersson after the Canucks' loss to Utah over the weekend: "He's not moving his feet. I thought today, some shifts he was moving his feet and it looked like we had some glimpses. But 6-on-5 there at the end, it's the same thing, waiting. If he just takes three or four strides. ... I don't know if it's a mental block right now, all year, but he's got to move his feet."

Long shots at best

Anaheim Ducks

Record: 25-24-7, 57 points

Playoff chances: 2.4%

The Ducks' goaltending has been its greatest asset this season, sixth in the NHL with a .906 save percentage in all situations.

Their faint playoff hopes could be materially impacted if that tandem changes at the trade deadline: Will Monday's acquisition of Ville Husso from the Detroit Red Wings lead to a John Gibson trade? He has had a strong season and his $6.4 million AAV over the next two seasons of his contract are much more manageable under a rising cap.

Player who must step up: Leo Carlsson. With six points in five games, the big Ducks center is heating up. That's good news after a rather quiet January, which featured a stretch of

one goal in 12 games. Incidentally, the Ducks are 4-0 in games in which Carlson had multiple points.

Lottery-bound

Seattle Kraken

Record: 25-30-4, 54 points

Playoff chances: 0.3%

This is not the trajectory the Kraken want to be on, having seen their points percentage decline in consecutive seasons after their playoff breakthrough. Changes have to be on the way, starting at the upcoming trade deadline.

San Jose Sharks

Record: 15-37-7, 37 points

Playoff chances: 0.0%

The NHL's most "fun bad" team has a real gem in Macklin Celebrini, the league's top rookie in points per game with 0.89 through 45 games. Will that be enough to earn him the Calder Trophy?

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SPORTSNET

NHL Playoff Push: Trade deadline buyers, sellers and teams in between

By: Rory Boylen

The NHL returned from its 4 Nations Face-Off break over the weekend and very quickly the talk of the hockey world has shifted from a dreamy best-on-best event, to dreams of a busy upcoming trade deadline.

We're less than two weeks away from the March 7 trade deadline and there's still much to be decided. Sure, we know who some of the buyers will be. Toronto and Florida are in a battle to control the Atlantic, while Washington and New Jersey will look to improve their odds. You can never count Vegas out from doing something big, while Edmonton eyes a return to the Stanley Cup Final and Winnipeg looks to separate as the West's best team.

We know some of the sellers, too. Chicago has some players available, including a top-four defenceman who's asked out. St. Louis has become a surprising team to watch as a seller as well, while Buffalo — disappointingly at the bottom of the East — has tough decisions to make.

And then there are a bunch of teams in between it all, having to decide whether to buy, sell or do some combination of both.

This is the focus of today's playoff push, as we'll begin our look at the stretch run of the regular season.

BUYERS TO WATCH

Toronto Maple Leafs: It's no secret that the Maple Leafs will do something by the trade deadline, and that their primary need is another centre. Ideally, that's a 2C who could challenge John Tavares, though a more realistic target could be a 3C with some scoring punch to his game (like Brock Nelson).

But the Maple Leafs aren't swimming in accumulated cap space or LTIR room as some other teams are, and so there's an interesting case to be made that they should consider trading someone such as Max Domi to accommodate a more splashy move.

As pressure builds for this Core Four to finally find playoff success, the backdrop this year is that both Tavares and Mitch Marner have expiring contracts, which means the Leafs will have some very important players to discuss the futures for in the next couple weeks, and after the dust settles on March 7. The general feeling is they'll stick it out with both and neither has appeared on Nick Kypreos' trade board. Another bad playoff showing for the team, however, and who knows what direction management will take.

This trade deadline is as much about setting Toronto up for post-season success as it is ensuring there is an obvious case to make for pushing ahead with the same core past this season.

Washington Capitals: The best team in the East by 12 points — and one of just two NHL teams that had no representation at the 4 Nations Face-Off — Washington returned from the break by outscoring Pittsburgh and Edmonton 15-6 in two weekend wins.

This is a team as all-in as you could want to be, and with a couple of big injuries to players who won't be returning, the Capitals have $16.68 million in LTIR space, meaning they could do all sorts of things at the deadline.

They've already re-acquired Lars Eller this season and, perhaps, those are the kinds of depth moves Washington makes to bolster itself down the lineup and prepare for injuries. After all, so much changed with this team last summer and all of the off-season additions have clicked so well that there may not be a need to go overly big by March 7.

But if they want to, the Caps could make the league's best team even more dangerous.

Florida Panthers: We have to mention the defending champs in here because of how quickly their cap outlook could change. The Panthers were shaping up to have roughly $3.5 million in cap space at the deadline, but now comes news that Matthew Tkachuk's injury could be long term.

However, what's not clear yet is how long term that will be. Head coach Paul Maurice said Tkachuk will be "playing for us this year" but does that mean he'll return in the regular season or playoffs? If Tkachuk is put on LTIR and the team knows he'll miss the rest of the regular season, they'll have that much more cap space to do business with by March 7.

And we know how aggressive GM Bill Zito has been.

Meantime, Sam Bennett and Aaron Ekblad are still without contract extensions, on track to hit free agency in July.

SELLERS TO WATCH

Pittsburgh Penguins: While there were some missteps early in Kyle Dubas' tenure as Penguins GM (like signing Tristan Jarry, now in the minors), this is probably the toughest front office gig in the NHL because of the forced balancing act. Aching for a rebuild, the Penguins just can't step too far back as long as Sidney Crosby is around, and he's under contract with the team for another two years.

His presence also makes it harder (or impossible) to trade Rickard Rakell or Bryan Rust, productive linemates for No. 87.

So, while they should be sellers, the Penguins may not be able to do a lot of fun stuff for us to watch by the deadline. Still, after Erik Karlsson put together a strong tournament at the 4 Nations, perhaps interest could be renewed in some places if Pittsburgh was willing to use its last salary retention

slot to ease the burden of his $10-million cap hit through 2026-27. That would be a flashy move the Penguins could make. Though, we should note, it may be more attractive for some teams to pull off in the summer, after Karlsson gets a $5-million signing bonus on July 1.

Real Kyper's Trade Board

Real Kyper's Trade Board

Hockey Insider Nick Kypreos shares the latest intel on players who could be on the move ahead of the March 7 trade deadline.

Latest list

Buffalo Sabres: The Sabres went into the break winning four of their last five and then returned with a massive 8-2 win over the Rangers on home ice. Even so, a strong finish would once again likely be too little, too late for the last-place Sabres, who are still 11 points out of a playoff spot.

It's a time to tread carefully. The Sabres have many names in the rumour mill, including 24-year-old centre Dylan Cozens signed for the long-term, and 23-year-old defenceman Bowen Byram, who will be an RFA this summer. Defenceman Mattias Samuelsson (24) is signed at a great rate through 2030, just as the cap is set to spike.

It remains to be seen how hot GM Kevyn Adams' seat truly is as his fifth season on the job looks likely to finish with Buffalo's 14th consecutive playoff miss, but these are critical pieces of a young core the Sabres have to decide what to do with.

Is Buffalo's disappointing season because the core has failed, because the front office hasn't done well enough to surround them with productive veterans, or some combination? In time, all three of the players we mentioned could be on highly valued contracts when the salary cap spikes into the $100-million-plus. That's the best-case scenario.

The worst-case scenario would be for Buffalo to dial back on another rebuild and watch more ex-players go on to have success elsewhere, as we've seen with Sam Reinhart, Ryan O'Rielly, Brandon Montour and others. These big decisions could wait for the summer, or Buffalo could be a fascinating mover to watch at the deadline.

TEAMS IN BETWEEN

Carolina Hurricanes: The Hurricanes are an odd team this trade deadline. They aren't a seller in the traditional sense. Carolina has been a top 10 team in the league all season, sits second in the Metro, is battling for second in the conference and has advanced past the first round six years in a row. The Canes will look to add to this team and to take a run at getting over the hump — for all that playoff success, they haven't won a game in the third round since 2006.

And they have already made the biggest trade this season in acquiring Mikko Rantanen from Colorado. It cost them Martin Necas, Jack Drury and a second-round pick, but they also managed to pick up Taylor Hall for a little scoring depth. The fit so far hasn't been perfect, though — Rantanen has one goal and three points in seven games, while Hall has just one assist.

According to Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman, the Hurricanes have made a nine-digit contract offer to pending UFA Rantanen. That means the offer could be worth about a $12.5 million AAV at least, on a maximum-term contract.

With the trade deadline less than two weeks away, the Hurricanes are facing a dilemma. If Rantanen is undecided by March 7, will they look to flip him again? And what would that return look like? Necas is scoring at a nearly 90-point pace this season and has kept chugging in Colorado.

The "good" news is that since Chicago already retained half of Rantanen's AAV, Carolina could retain another half and knock his rate down to $2.31 million. That would make him attainable to any team and open up the market for the Hurricanes.

Of course, anyone acquiring Rantanen has eyes on winning and without the guarantee it could keep him, or much time to negotiate, Carolina's challenge would be finding a return that doesn't end up with the team taking a step back from where it was originally. Or, the Canes could decide to push on with Rantanen, even if he doesn't sign and they view him as a rental.

Carolina is a buyer, for sure, but this prickly situation ultimately has it as an interesting team between a rock and a hard place.

Boston Bruins: The Bruins returned from the 4 Nations break with bad news. Defenceman Hampus Lindholm is unlikely to return this season because of a knee injury, while fellow blueliner Charlie McAvoy (injured at 4 Nations) has no timeline to return after a shoulder injury that led to an infection.

Meantime, the Bruins lost in overtime to Anaheim at home in their first game back and sit one point out of a wild-card berth in the Eastern Conference and 13th in goal differential (minus-26).

The Bruins were floundering when they fired Jim Montgomery and made Joe Sacco the interim boss, but then the rumour mill cooled for a time when Boston responded with an 11-4-1 record after the coaching change into the holiday break. Since Christmas, however, the B's are 8-11-3 — tied for 27th in the NHL over two months.

"Historically, we've been pretty aggressive when our team's in a position. I think we'll take a much more cautious approach as we approach the deadline," Bruins GM Don Sweeney said Sunday. "May plant a seed for the draft and beyond."

Boston plays Toronto, the Islanders, Pittsburgh, Minnesota, Nashville and Carolina before the trade deadline, but is running out of time to put a hot streak together that makes it more of a buyer. In fact, it may be too late for that. If it's clear the Bruins will be a seller, the pertinent question is what becomes of Brad Marchand, the 36-year-old whose role diminished with Team Canada, and is a pending UFA. He's said only that his desire is to remain a Bruin for life, but there's still no contract extension in place.

"We've been in negotiations with Brad and communicating with him through the year," Sweeney said. "We'll have to have a conversation now that the 4 Nations is over, sit down with Brad and his representatives and have a clearer path in the next two weeks as to what his final outcome will be."

BUYERS TO WATCH

Winnipeg Jets: When you think of what's coming in the economic landscape in the league, it's fair to wonder if this is the year Winnipeg really should be aggressive in a big way and truly go all-in on a Stanley Cup run.

For the league's smallest market in its smallest arena, it's fair to wonder how much the Jets will be able to keep up with the highest-spending teams when the salary cap lands at around $113.5 million in three years.

For now, the Jets are the second-best team in the league and No. 1 in the Western Conference. They have two of the league's top 12 scorers, the runaway favourite for the Vezina Trophy, one of the top shutdown lines in the game with Adam Lowry back, and the league's best power play.

But they have needs. The Jets could stand to add another defenceman, or two, to help keep the quality looks at the net down a bit better. And they also have a need for another centre — whether Lowry is the second or third pivot, the Jets need someone else to play key minutes down the middle and have some offensive jam to their game.

And they have cap space to make a move. If the roster is left untouched until March 7, the Jets are tracking to have $12.4 million in deadline-day space, per PuckPedia, meaning they have flexibility to do lots of things. The incentive to make moves is already there, given their place in the standings, but knowing the economic realities of what's to come should drive the Jets even more to make a splash.

Dallas Stars: GM Jim Nill has already made a pretty solid move, bringing in Mikael Granlund from San Jose to add to a dangerously deep group of forwards.

But injuries have hit this team hard. Tyler Seguin is out for the rest of the regular season, at least, while Miro Heiskanen was injured just before the 4 Nations and is labelled as month-to-month with a knee injury. Two substantial losses.

At the moment, Dallas has $12.2 million in LTIR space, though it may yet have to be prepared for Heiskanen to return before the playoffs.

Either way, for as deep as Dallas' forwards are, we saw in last year's playoffs that its blue line depth was tested when Chris Tanev went down. The Stars would be wise to look at other blueliners to help their cause in 2025 and should have space to do something fairly substantial. On Monday's 32 Thoughts podcast, Elliotte Friedman floated the Stars as a potential destination for Erik Karlsson.

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

Hockey fans already know the name, but this is not the blog. From Sportsnet, 32 Thoughts: The Podcast with NHL Insider Elliotte Friedman and Kyle Bukauskas is a weekly deep dive into the biggest news and interviews from the hockey world.

Latest episode

SELLERS TO WATCH

St. Louis Blues: Five points out of a playoff spot, the Blues would miss for a third year in a row if they can't claw their way back. A return win, 3-1 over Colorado, was a good place to start.

Still, it was shocking to see several Blues names appear on Kypreos' latest trade board, including Jordan Kyrou, Pavel Buchnevich, Brayden Schenn and Justin Faulk. The Blues have been looking to trade a defenceman for some time, but four of them have no-trade clauses.

What's funny is that, after signing 23-year-olds Dylan Holloway and Philip Broberg to offer sheets last summer, GM Doug Armstrong has already been a buyer on this year's trade market when he acquired 33-year-old blueliner Cam Fowler, who has another year left on his contract.

But, after next season, Armstrong is preparing to step aside from the GM's chair and make way for Alexander Steen, currently working and learning under Armstrong. If this keeps tracking toward a tough uphill climb to the playoffs by March 7, Armstrong may pull the chute on parts of this core. If enough of them go, St. Louis could be something of a kingmaker.

"As we say every year, the players will tell us what we're going to do," Armstrong said Sunday. "Right now, we have a massive uphill battle. I think we really dropped the ball coming out of Christmas. (Coach Jim Montgomery) had done a nice job getting the guys in a good spot and then we didn't take advantage of a really positive schedule in January. Now, everyone has to live with the white noise around us until mid-March, but we've created that for ourselves."

Chicago Blackhawks: A seller through and through, the Blackhawks aren't going to be able to keep doing this forever and keep Connor Bedard happy. At some point, NHL players will need to be retained, or else a lot of pressure will be put on graduating prospects very quickly. Take one look at Buffalo to see the risk that entails.

At first glance, it didn't seem like the Hawks had a whole lot of super-intriguing players to move. Hall was sent to Carolina, but that was for a mid-round pick and he never settled into Chicago. Pending UFA Ryan Donato is having a terrific career season, but turns 29 in April and seems a good bet to get moved.

Those were thought to be the most notable names who could be had out of Chicago this season, until Seth Jones' name appeared on Kypreos' trade board in January. The defenceman has since confirmed that he's working with the Blackhawks to facilitate a trade to a contending team, even if it means Chicago has to use its final retention slot to absorb some of his $9.5-million cap hit.

Jones is 30 and signed through the 2029-30 season, so his timeline doesn't appear to line up with Chicago's. And while retaining some money for another five years is a big ask for the Blackhawks, it could also elevate Jones' trade value and make him able to pull back some good assets to Chicago. Jones isn't a No. 1 defenceman, but if he could be had for, say, $6 million to $7 million against the cap with the upper limit about to shoot up, he's suddenly a very intriguing second-pair defenceman.

TEAMS IN BETWEEN

Utah Hockey Club: Utah's 2-1 regulation win over Vancouver on Sunday was huge because it pulled it back to within four points of the Canucks for the second wild-card spot in the

West. The Hockey Club has work to do and has played more games than either Vancouver or Calgary in front of them, but with more home games upcoming to Chicago, Minnesota and New Jersey this week, a nice little run could leave the front office asking some big questions.

One thing seems clear: Utah will turn into a big-time buyer very soon. It has a deep-pocketed owner eager to put his hockey team on the map and almost too many future assets. It has made 42 picks in the past four drafts, has six picks in 2025 and then another 10 in 2026. With 90 reserve slots and 50 contracts ever allowed at one time, Utah may have to soon turn some of those assets into NHL players through trades.

But will that happen during this season? Utah has oodles of cap space, projected to be about $27 million on March 7, meaning it could do almost anything it wanted on deadline day. The question, though, is if it's really in position to buy now, or if it would be too far out of the playoffs and instead look to do big business in the summer. Meantime, it has some players (Alexander Kerfoot, Matias Maccelli, Nick Bjugstad) who could be traded by March 7.

As the defence has gotten healthy and the gap to a playoff spot closes, the front office might be thinking long and hard about pushing some chips in.

Vancouver Canucks: Already straddling the line of buyer and seller with their trading of J.T. Miller and acquisition of Marcus Pettersson, the Canucks are still facing questions about Elias Pettersson, whose no-movement clause will kick in this summer on his eight-year, $11.6-million AAV contract.

A weak showing at the 4 Nations did nothing to inspire confidence he'll finish this season stronger, and the fact he was a game-time decision before playing both Saturday and Sunday has folks in Vancouver wondering how impactful he'll be in a playoff push. It would seem a long shot that the Canucks would trade Pettersson now after already moving Miller, especially as long as they hold on to a playoff spot. But they failed to pick up a point in two weekend games, so their hold on that place is tenuous.

Meantime, pending UFA Brock Boeser seems all but assured of moving before the deadline, while Carson Soucy's name has also come up recently.

The Canucks aren't a seller in the sense they'll be looking to spiral into a rebuild — after all, they have to have eyes on re-signing Quinn Hughes when his deal expires in 2027. But it's wild how one of the best stories of last season, and a team that came within one win of eliminating the Edmonton Oilers in Round 2, has descended into such panic and mayhem.

CAROLINA HURRICANES
NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 25, 2025

yahoo!sports

NHL rumors: Hurricanes not shopping Mikko Rantanen despite trade buzz

By: Tristin McKinstry

The Carolina Hurricanes made a statement with their trade for Mikko Rantanen back in late January. The Hurricanes needed an elite goal scorer for the longest time before this move. Rantanen was a pending unrestricted free agent. However, having his goal-scoring ability in the lineup instantly made Carolina a Stanley Cup contender.

However, as the 2025 NHL Trade Deadline draws near, speculation has run rampant over the possibility of another trade. Reports have indicated the Hurricanes could flip their star forward ahead of the March 7th deadline. Especially if they decide to retain half of the $4.625 million cap hit they are on the hook for.

At this time, it remains entirely speculation. Neither the Hurricanes nor Rantanen have made an official statement regarding their future together. Still, The Athletic's Pierre LeBrun wrote about the situation on Monday. And he believes that any discussions taking place are not being started by Carolina.

“I do not believe the Hurricanes are actually calling around telling teams they might trade Rantanen. From my conversations around the league over the past few days, I think what’s happening is a few teams have had the courage to call Carolina and just ask ‘what if?' in case the Canes can’t extend him. But I’ve found zero evidence of Carolina actually initiating trade calls,” LeBrun wrote for The Athletic on Monday.

Where Hurricanes, Mikko Rantanen stand in contract talks

Carolina Hurricanes forward Mikko Rantanen (96) prepares for a face-off against the Toronto Maple Leafs in the second period at Scotiabank Arena.

Dan Hamilton-Imagn Images

Related Carolina Hurricanes NewsArticle continues below

Mikko Rantanen loved his time with the Colorado Avalanche. So much so, he was reportedly willing to take a massive discount to re-sign with the franchise. However, they decided to move on, putting him in a situation of negotiating with an unfamiliar team.

Rantanen was reportedly blindsided by the Avalanche trading him to Carolina. And he has taken some time to process everything between the trade and last week's 4 Nations tournament. Carolina understands the position their player is in, according to LeBrun.

“I also think the Canes understand that between a trade out of Colorado that blindsided him and barely getting a chance to acclimatize himself to his new surroundings in Carolina, in part because of the time away at 4 Nations, Rantanen needs time still to contemplate things. And that’s what is happening now. He’s thinking things over,” LeBrun wrote for The Athletic.

The Athletic's NHL insider also noted that Carolina had made a pitch to Rantanen over the 4 Nations break. The Hurricanes forward was skating for Team Finland during the tournament. But he met with Carolina's brass over Zoom for what was described as a “detailed” pitch.

Whether Rantanen re-signs in Carolina remains to be seen. However, as the NHL Trade Deadline nears, the speculation will grow louder. This will certainly be a situation fans want to monitor before March 7th rolls around.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 25, 2025

The Hockey News

Seth Jarvis To Be Featured On Season 2 Of Prime Video's 'Inside the NHL' Series

By: Ryan Henkel

Raleigh, North Carolina

Carolina Hurricanes forward Seth Jarvis has been selected to be featured in the second season of Faceoff: Inside the NHL.

The Prime Video series follows select NHL players and takes fans "behind the scenes of the National Hockey League, offering an unfiltered look at the players' lives, training regimens, and the high-stakes world of professional hockey."

Jarvis, 23, is a slam-dunk pick for the series as he's genuinely been one of the goofiest and just honestly funny players in the league.

The 2020 first-round pick is also a top player for Carolina, currently leading the team in goals with 22 in 50 games, so he can bring both entertainment and interesting insight to the series.

The six-episode series will premiere some time in 2025. The only other player other than Jarvis announced so far is Ottawa Senators captain Brady Tkachuk.

Here's part of the release from the NHL:

Jarvis took centre stage alongside his Canadian teammates at the 4 Nations Face-Off that saw Canada defeat USA 3-2 in dramatic fashion in a thrilling championship on Feb. 20. Jarvis, known for his goal scoring (he leads the Hurricanes with 22 goals this season) and energy around the locker room, is sure to bring excitement and insight to the series. He joins Ottawa Senators captain Brady Tkachuk (and a member of the U.S. team at 4 Nations Face-Off)who was previously announced as a featured player in the second season. Cameras will follow the duo and other players, to be announced at a later date, to give fans unprecedented access to their lives both on and off the ice.

FACEOFF: Inside the NHL takes viewers behind the scenes of the National Hockey League, offering an unfiltered look at the players' lives, training regimens, and the high-stakes world of professional hockey. The upcoming season will delve deeper into the personal and professional lives of NHL stars offering viewers a 360-degree view of their lives both on and off the ice. It will feature candid interviews with compelling players from across the NHL, their fiercest rivals, and those closest to them – including teammates, coaches, and family members. From the serene moments of introspection to the heart-pounding intensity of game time, FACEOFF: Inside the NHL showcases the extraordinary blend of skill, determination, and sacrifice required to excel in one of the world's most demanding sports."

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SportScan

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

1340967 Carolina Hurricanes

Would the Hurricanes trade Mikko Rantanen if they can't sign him by the trade deadline?

Pierre LeBrun

Before getting to the latest speculation surrounding Mikko Rantanen, I want to go back to something Carolina Hurricanes general manager Eric Tulsky said the day after the blockbuster acquisition for the star winger.

I asked Tulsky about the risk of trading for a pending unrestricted free agent without the certainty of being able to sign him, but also about Carolina, unlike a lot of teams, being unafraid of that massive salary cap gained and instead seeing it as an opportunity if the worst happens and the player walks July 1.

"That's absolutely true, for sure, we believe that if you have cap space you can always find ways to use it," Tulsky told me on Jan. 25. "So it's not the end of the world to leave yourself with room. But there's not many opportunities to add a player of Mikko's caliber. So we're not going to take that lightly. Of course we would like to extend him."

go-deeper

GO DEEPER

Eric Tulsky exclusive: Hurricanes GM on pulling off the Mikko Rantanen trade — 'You have to be willing to stretch'

That stuck with me. And it gave me the impression that the Hurricanes were comfortable trying to come out on top of a wide-open Eastern Conference this season by having a world-class rental player helping them do so.

Of course, they want to extend him and keep him long-term. That goes without saying. But if it's the worst-case scenario and they can't sign him by the March 7 trade deadline, why not still take your shot this season when there isn't a juggernaut, surefire contender in the East?

I thought that was the entire point of the Jan. 24 blockbuster trade with the Colorado Avalanche. And I loved the idea of going for it this year in the East then and still do. I saw potentially extending Rantanen as a pure bonus, but definitely not the point of doing that trade to begin with.

That's why I really don't get the speculation that's bubbled to the surface over the past week.

Would the Canes really trade him before the deadline if he's not extended by then?

I can't think of a trade on the table right now that would return a Martin Necas-esque value to Carolina. Other contenders who would want to deal for Rantanen are likely going to offer a futures package, perhaps involving a young player. But I don't see a Necas-type player on the table.

So why would a smart, forward-thinking front office like the Canes make a trade for a lower-value return than what they just paid for the player?

I don't get it.

Let's get to what I've heard as of Monday:

• I do not believe the Hurricanes are actually calling around telling teams they might trade Rantanen. From my conversations around the league over the past few days, I think what's happening is a few teams have had the courage to call Carolina and just ask "what if?" in case the Canes can't extend him. But I've found zero evidence of Carolina actually initiating trade calls.

• My understanding is that during the 4 Nations break, the Canes did, over a Zoom call, make a significant, detailed pitch to Rantanen and his camp, led by agent Andy Scott of Octagon. I don't believe it was the first pitch to them, but it sounds like it was certainly the most detailed.

• I also think the Canes understand that between a trade out of Colorado that blindsided him and barely getting a chance to acclimatize himself to his new surroundings in Carolina, in part because of the time away at 4 Nations, Rantanen needs time still to contemplate things. And that's what is happening now. He's thinking things over.

All things being equal, I believe Carolina's only focus right now is keeping Rantanen, whether that's as an extended player or, worst case, as a rental.

But the reason I'm not comfortable saying 100 percent that he won't be moved starts with Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon. Hey, it's his team. He's a mercurial owner. What happens if he gets so frustrated that Rantanen didn't sign the offer presented that he orders Tulsky to make the best possible trade?

Every GM has an owner. Every GM in the league answers to someone. Dundon just happens to be more involved on a day-to-day basis than most owners.

Again, I don't believe the Canes as of Monday were envisioning a world in which they would trade him if they can't extend him.

The other scenario not discussed here yet is: What happens if a team that Rantanen is more willing to sign an eight-year extension with enters the picture before the March 7 deadline? He can only sign a seven-year deal with other teams once he hits the July 1 market, but any team trading for him before the March 7 deadline can still give him the eight-year max. That would obviously enhance his trade value compared to being dealt as a rental, and in that case, I could certainly see Carolina recouping proper trade value.

The question I would have then is, if the reason Rantanen ends up not being comfortable extending yet is because he still hasn't had time to fully appreciate his new surroundings in Carolina, what would motivate him to forgo July 1 for Team X that he hasn't even played for?

I feel like if he decides he's not extending with Carolina, it's probably because he's headed to the July 1 market, period.

So let's see where this goes. Perhaps Rantanen in the end decides to sign on the dotted line with Carolina. But if he doesn't, again to me what makes the most sense is still to make the most out of your high-end rental this spring. Go for it!

One final thing to keep in mind. We know the Canes and the Vancouver Canucks had trade discussions before Carolina pulled the trigger on the Avalanche blockbuster.

The only possible way dealing away Rantanen before the deadline would make any sense is if the Canes had a Plan B on tap. We know they have shown interest in Elias Pettersson, going back even to last season. Could that be a thing again? The Canucks center continues to struggle. His contract scares away most.

Something to file away.

In the end, if I'm Carolina, I'm keeping Rantanen past March 7 no matter what and hoping he helps get me out of the East.

If the Canes still can't sign him after the playoffs, there's always a scenario of a sign-and-trade before July 1. It's complicated and requires the player to see value in forgoing free agency, being so close to it. But it's an option.

For now, I don't get the idea of moving him at all. Renting Rantanen out makes the most sense.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.25.2025

1340962 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres look to keep rolling on offense as top players are piling up points

Mike Harrington 11 hrs ago

Team USA came up short in the 4 Nations championship, but our own gold medalists, Lance Lysowski and Mike Harrington, are here to discuss the runaway success of the new tournament. Rasmus Dahlin and many others had insisted that NHL players would take this moment seriously – and they did. Th…

In the six games since they returned from Western Canada, the Buffalo Sabres' offense has been rolling.

The Sabres are 5-1 in that stretch heading into Tuesday's game against Anaheim in KeyBank Center. They have 30 goals since Jan. 28, and their average of five per game is tied for the most in the NHL with Washington.

"A lot of it is confidence," said winger Tage Thompson, whose two goals pushed his season total to 28. "Goal scoring comes in waves, but I think we've been doing a better job getting to the net with simple pucks, not trying to look for too much.

"Sometimes, we pass up some shots to try to find that extra pass, extra play. Coming through the neutral zone, playing pucks behind them and getting offense off our forecheck backs off their 'D'. Then, later in the game, you get rush chances."

Each of the coaching points delivered by Lindy Ruff in the practices leading into the game were executed by Rasmus Dahlin from start to finish.

The Sabres are third in the NHL in 5-on-5 goals with 128, behind only Washington (139) and Columbus (132). And they're a solid plus-10 in goal differential at even strength, which should have them in the thick of the playoff hunt.

It doesn't, of course, because they've blown too many leads and struggled through segments of games in areas such as the power play, puck management, defensive coverage and goaltending.

"We've made some big strides," coach Lindy Ruff said. "We know why we're at where we're at, but you've got to keep improving. We've set a plan that we think we can push to get back in it. That plan includes good 5-on-5 play."

A win Tuesday would give the Sabres their first six-game winning streak at home since Nov. 3-27, 2018. Their top players are really producing.

Over the last six games, Rasmus Dahlin (three goals, nine assists) and Thompson (6-5) have double figures in points. Alex Tuch (3-5) and Jason Zucker (2-6) each have eight points, but there is some concern about their availability for Tuesday after both were hurt in the third period Saturday.

The Sabres have won five in a row at home for the first time since the 2019-20 season and are 8-2 downtown since Christmas. That includes 5-1 against Metropolitan foes and wins vs. Washington, Carolina, New Jersey and the defending Presidents' Trophy champion Rangers.

Zucker took a shot to the foot and hobbled off the ice, but did return. Tuch did not return after taking a hard hit into the boards on his back and shoulder. Neither practiced Monday, and Ruff said the morning skate Tuesday will tell the tale on their status.

Dahlin said after Saturday's game that he has been dealing with nagging injuries all year that have finally abated. Ruff agreed Monday that Dahlin is healthier now than he has been all season, and the uptick in play is a reflection of that.

"He's one of the best in the world, and I think the scary part is there's still more to this game that we haven't seen," Thompson said. "I think the confidence with the puck, just his ability to read plays and jump in, be that fourth guy up the ice makes our team so dangerous when we have our 'D' involved in the rush."

Dahlin's 12 points have him tied with four other players, including Washington's Alex Ovechkin, for second in the league since Jan. 28, behind Florida's Matthew Tkachuk and Tampa Bay's Brandon Hagel (13 apiece). Dahlin got another assist from Saturday's game added on Monday, which gave him a four-point night. He is leading NHL defensemen in points in this stretch.

"They've been incredible," center Dylan Cozens said of Dahlin and Thompson. "You really see that they're playing with confidence, trusting their abilities and making plays. That's what we want them to do. They're both superstars in this league, and a lot of fun to watch."

The hockey was magnificent and the word-of-mouth impact was instant. The numbers are eye-popping. There were 16.1 million viewers of Thursday's USA-Canada championship game in North America, just shy of the 16.3 million figure of Game 7 in last year's Stanley Cup final.

Thompson's first goal Saturday was particularly noteworthy, as he schooled top-pair defensemen Adam Fox and Ryan Lindgren in the right corner and curled out in front to tuck the puck under goalie Igor Shesterkin.

"It's a goal that you would show prospects, you would show anybody about coming off the wall and taking it to the net," Ruff said.

"Kind of a bobbling puck for Lindgren, and I got position on him," Thompson said. "Then Fox comes in, and I'm just trying to take it to the net and draw a penalty or jam it in. Fortunately, it went in."

Levi honored by AHL

Rochester goaltender Devon Levi was named AHL player of the week after posting back-to-back shutouts against Cleveland and Toronto, making 56 saves and going 5 for 5 in Sunday's 1-0 shootout win over Toronto.

Levi is 18-6-2 in 26 games for the Amerks this season and is tied for the league lead with five shutouts. He ranks third in goals-against average (2.17) and sixth in save percentage (.918). The Amerks (33-14-4) lead the AHL with 70 points, three ahead of Laval and Hershey.

NHL shelves Anaheim's Zegras

Anaheim will be without top line forward Trevor Zegras for the game in Buffalo as he received a three-game suspension for an unpenalized hit to the head on Detroit's Michael Rasmussen on Sunday. Zegras' hearing with the NHL's Department of Player Safety was held Monday.

Battling injuries and inconsistency, Zegras has just seven goals and nine assists this season. Taken at No. 9 overall in the 2019 draft, two picks after Buffalo chose Cozens, Zegras has a pair of 23-goal seasons for Anaheim.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Buffalo News LOADED: 02.25.2025

1340963 Buffalo Sabres

Red-hot Amerks goalie Devon Levi named AHL Player of the Week

Mike Harrington 13 hrs ago

Team USA came up short in the 4 Nations championship, but our own gold medalists, Lance Lysowski and Mike Harrington, are here to discuss the runaway success of the new tournament. Rasmus Dahlin and many others had insisted that NHL players would take this moment seriously – and they did. Th…

The Rochester Amerks have surged to the top of the AHL's overall standing and the red-hot play of a prime Sabres prospect was honored by the league on Monday.

Goaltender Devon Levi was named the league's player of the week after posting back-to-back shutouts against Cleveland and Toronto.

Levi stopped all 56 shots he faced in 125 minutes and was a perfect 5 for 5 in Sunday's shootout vs. Toronto as the Amerks earned a 1-0 victory in Blue Cross Arena thanks to a goal by Sabres first-round pick Konsta Helenius.

Levi was coming off back-to-back losses for the first time in his AHL career before making 26 saves in a 4-0 win at Cleveland. He stopped all 30 shots against him in regulation and OT against Toronto.

Each of the coaching points delivered by Lindy Ruff in the practices leading into the game were executed by Rasmus Dahlin from start to finish.

Levi, 23, is 18-6-2 in 26 games for the Amerks this season and is tied for the league lead with five shutouts. He ranks third in the AHL in goals-against average (2.17) and sixth in save percentage (.918).

Levi, who represented the Amerks at the 2025 AHL All-Star Classic earlier this month in Palm Springs, Calif., is 34-12-6, 2.29/.923 in his two seasons in Rochester.

Levi, however, has struggled in spot duty with the Sabres this season. In nine games, he has a 2-7 record with a 4.12 goals-against average and .872 save percentage. His most recent appearance was the 6-4 loss at Seattle on Jan. 18.

The Amerks (33-14-4) have 70 points, three ahead of Laval for the lead in the AHL's North Division and three ahead of the Rocket and the Hershey Bears for the lead in the overall standing. They lead the league in goals (178) and are seventh in goals against (136).

Rochester has won three straight and returns to action Wednesday night against Wilkes-Barre/Scranton in Blue Cross Arena.

Buffalo News LOADED: 02.25.2025

1341008 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens' Sam Montembeault says 4 Nations tourney was 'an amazing experience'

By Herb Zurkowsky

February 24, 2025 2:47 PM

Samuel Montembeault said he would do it again.

Although the Canadiens' first-string goaltender didn't play — nor did he dress — for any 4 Nations Face-Off games, Montembeault said he would gladly represent Canada again for the experience of practising with, and being around, some of the NHL's premier players.

Not only that, but Montembeault received a gold medal for his experience — Canada defeating the U.S. 3-2 in the championship game — and got to keep his mask and sweater, the latter signed by his teammates.

"It was such an amazing experience for me, even though I didn't play," Montembeault told The Gazette Monday morning, after the Canadiens practised at the CN Sports Complex in Brossard. "Just to be a part of that team and be around those guys. There was some great hockey to watch. Even if I was in the press box I was so happy watching that hockey live.

"Being able to practise with them instead of being on vacation ... have a chance to practise with (Connor) McDavid, (Nathan) MacKinnon and (Sidney) Crosby, all those guys. We were champions, too, so it's great memories for me."

Montembeault hadn't been playing particularly well before the break for the competition, with six losses in eight games dating back to Jan. 18. But he stopped 25 shots against Ottawa Saturday night in the Canadiens' 5-2 victory, and is expected to start again Tuesday, when Montreal entertains Carolina at the Bell Centre (7 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN Radio-690, 98.5FM).

The Canadiens have recalled forward Owen Beck from AHL Laval to replace Kirby Dach (lower-body injury) against the Hurricanes, who are coming off a 6-3 loss at Toronto Saturday night and practised Monday at the Bell Centre. Beck has played six games this season for Montreal, but has been held without a point. Beck has 13 goals and 32 points in 47 games for the Rocket.

Team Canada head coach Jon Cooper said he hoped to get each player into at least one game, but St. Louis's Jordan Binnington was the only netminder utilized. And although Binnington allowed some questionable goals along the way, he was superb in overtime against the Americans in the title match, proving Cooper prescient.

While Vegas's Adin Hill was the other goalie on the roster, and dressed as Binnington's backup for each game, Cooper eschewed selecting Montembeault in the opener, against Sweden, when he might have relied on the player's familiarity with the Bell Centre.

"I think maybe I didn't deserve to play because of the way I was playing before the break," Montembeault admitted. "I was a little inconsistent. I had some good games but some bad ones, too. Binnington's a guy who has more experience. I think (Cooper) wanted to go with one guy and stick with him. He played well and was absolutely amazing in the overtime."

Montembeault said he was impressed by the players' work ethic, especially MacKinnon and Crosby, the first on the ice in Brossard for an optional practice the day after Canada defeated Sweden in overtime. Due to a snowstorm that day, Montembeault said the trip to the South Shore from the team's downtown hotel took 40 minutes.

"I think that tournament was huge," Montembeault said. "Obviously it was the first (best-on-best) since 2016. You could tell before the start of that first game, everybody was so excited and couldn't wait for the game to start. The atmosphere was so nice. And that Saturday game (against the U.S.) was pretty crazy. I've never seen the Bell Centre like that; it was pretty sick. It was some great hockey to watch, really intense. And we got the win. That was the cherry on top."

Although Montembeault surrendered two first-period goals against Ottawa, he said he felt better as the game progressed, not allowing a score over the final 44 minutes. And Canadiens head coach Martin St. Louis liked what he saw from all his players as well.

"I like how we were committed to the stuff we talked about leading up to that game," he said. "You take a break. You reflect and you come up with a plan of attack for what's next. I felt we did that and were very direct in our actions on the ice. I thought Monty was solid and we didn't give them much. I like the commitment from the group."

Missing from Monday's practice were Josh Anderson and David Savard (therapy day), while Brendan Gallagher was excused for personal reasons.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Montreal Gazette LOADED: 02.25.2025

1341009 Montreal Canadiens

Todd: U.S-Canada rivalry is good, but difficult to contain when politics intrude

By Jack Todd Special to the Montreal Gazette

February 24, 2025 12:00 PM

My favourite rivalry moment occurred in the lead-up to the Nagano Winter Olympics in 1998.

We were in the Canadiens room at the Bell Centre after practice, with some players preparing to fly to Japan and others looking forward to the Olympic break.

Defenceman Peter Popovic (a Swede whose father was Serbian) was needling Finnish Olympic captain Saku Koivu when Koivu decided he'd heard enough. "What do you care?" Koivu said. "You're only half a Swede."

The 6-foot-6 Popovic looked down at the 5-foot-10 Koivu. "And you're only half a Finn," he said.

But Koivu got the last word. After Finland beat Sweden 2-1 in the quarterfinals in Nagano, I saw Koivu in the mixed zone. "Jack," he said, "say hello to Peter Popovic for me."

If only the banter in international rivalries could remain that friendly. Unfortunately, the constant barrage of threats and insults emanating from the Emperor of Mar-a-Lago have poisoned the waters between Canada and the U.S. to the point that Wayne Gretzky and P.K. Subban have been pilloried from coast to coast for their dubious loyalty to this country.

Rivalry is good but when political tensions are high, they're difficult to contain. Like it or not, Americans and Canadians have to coexist in the NHL just as Finns and Swedes, Czechs and Russians have done for decades.

That won't be a problem in Montreal with the current roster. With the 4 Nations Face-Off now the stuff of history, the league got back to business over the weekend with bushels of goals and a 5-2 thumping of the Ottawa Senators by the Canadiens, with young American stars Cole Caufield and Lane Hutson helping to lead the way.

Caufield and Hutson are two of most pleasant young athletes you will ever see. They're adored in Montreal and no one wants the booing of the anthem (which is definitely not aimed at them) to make the two youngsters uncomfortable.

That is not true of some of the more strident Americans from the 4 Nations tourney. Depending on your perspective, Ottawa captain Brady Tkachuk either turtled to avoid Arber Xhekaj Saturday night — or he took a sensible break to rest and heal. Either way, he can look forward to an unpleasant greeting from both the fans and the Sheriff when the Senators visit Montreal on March 18.

Leafs captain Auston Matthews played and scored a goal Saturday, two nights after he was caught about a five-yard penalty away when the wide-open Connor McDavid scored the winner for Team Canada in Boston. Together, Tkachuk and Matthews represent four of the seven captains on Canadian teams, along with the respected Adam Lowry in Winnipeg and Quinn Hughes in Vancouver.

That number is disproportionate but the league as a whole is increasingly American. According to figures from soundofhockey.com that tally with others, there are 358 Canadians in the NHL this season and 254 Americans. Canadians make up 41.1 per cent of rosters and Americans 29.1 per cent — but the number of Canadian goalies has fallen to only 28.7 per cent, a failure of development that Hockey Canada needs to address and soon.

Elite skaters are a different story, however. At present, there are no Americans among my top five skaters in the NHL, a list that has to include McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon, Leon Draisaitl, Nikita Kucherov and Cale Makar — three Canadians, a German and a Russian.

With a population approaching 350 million to Canada's 40 million, the long-term trend is unlikely to change, so barring some major political shift south of the border, every Canada-U.S. meeting in hockey will be fraught with tension.

The threats to crash our economy or make Canada the 51st state have left this country more united than it has been at any time since the 1972 Summit Series. Individual Canadians like Subban and Gretzky need to read the room and learn to recognize a hostile dictator when they see one.

Watch out for that speed bump: For much of this season, the Montreal Victoire have sailed along as though they were simply too good for the rest of the league.

Even in a newly formed league like the PWHL, that's rare. Montreal had a six-game winning streak going when the Minnesota Frost came to town Feb. 18 and handed the Victoire a 4-0 beatdown on home ice.

Saturday afternoon in Ottawa, it was 3-1 for the Charge and suddenly, it's a tight race. The Victoire now have 34 points to Toronto's 32, with the Sceptres coming to town Tuesday night. Montreal holds three games in hand, but the margin for error has dwindled to nothing.

Time for Marie-Philip Poulin to do her thing.

Heroes: The Philadelphia Eagles, Arber Xhekaj, Brendan Gallagher, Samuel Montembeault, Cole Caufield, Lane Hutson, Josh Anderson, Juraj Slafkovsky, Jordan Binnington, Sam Bennett, Nathan MacKinnon, Sidney Crosby, Mitch Marner, Cale Makar, Akim Aliu, Piper Gilles, Paul Poirier, &&&& last but not least, Canada's latest golden-goal hero — Connor McDavid.

Zeros: Wayne Gretzky, P.K. Subban, Bill Guerin, Mike Sullivan, Brady Tkachuk, Matthew Tkachuk, J.T. Miller, Jack Eichel, Auston Matthews, Don Cherry, Jim Ratcliffe, Bud Selig Jr., Claude Brochu, David Samson &&&& last but not least, Jeffrey Loria.

Now and forever.

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1341010 Montreal Canadiens

Stu's Slapshots: Canadiens' Lane Hutson has love affair with hockey

By Stu Cowan

Updated February 24, 2025 1:28 PM

Everyone in life should love something as much as Lane Hutson loves hockey.

While most of his Canadiens teammates headed for sunshine and beaches during the team's eight-day break for the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament, Hutson went to Boston so he could watch his two brothers, Quinn and Cole, play in the Beanpot tournament. The annual tournament features the four major college teams in the Greater Boston area: Boston University, Boston College, Harvard and Northeastern.

Hutson cheered on his brothers as Boston University — the school he attended for two years before turning pro — beat Boston College 4-1 in the final at TD Garden. Hutson also brought his equipment with him and was able to practise a couple of times with his brothers and the Boston University team.

Quinn, an undrafted 23-year-old forward in his third season at Boston University, has 18-19-37 totals in 28 games this season to lead the team in scoring. Cole, an 18-year-old freshman defenceman selected by the Washington Capitals in the second round (43rd overall) of last year's NHL Draft, ranks second in scoring for Boston University with 8-22-30 totals in 29 games and scored a goal in the Beanpot final.

Was Hutson not tempted to head to a beach somewhere to relax during the break after posting 3-38-41 totals in 56 games to lead all NHL rookies in scoring?

“No, not really,” the 21-year-old defenceman said. “Just wanted to see my brothers, watch some good hockey, just be around it. For a break, it’s tough to just kind of get away from the game. It’s more just mentally being able to watch and still be around it. I think that’s important for myself.”

Hutson was also able to hang out with his good friend and former Boston University teammate Macklin Celebrini, who was the first overall pick by the San Jose Sharks at last year’s NHL Draft. Celebrini ranks second in rookie scoring this season, one point behind Hutson, with 17-23-40 totals. Hutson and Celebrini read out the starting lineup for Boston University in the locker room before the Beanpot final.

“It was cool to see him at the game,” Hutson said. “He’s having a great year. We were talking about what we miss, what we don’t miss and all that stuff.”

What does Hutson miss about university hockey?

“Just the history of Boston University and all the guys that have been through there,” he said. “Really just taking advantage of all the practice days we had. It was really fun just learning and kind of gearing toward the one-game shots. It’s cool, but you also wish it was more (games). It’s just a different lifestyle having guys around a similar age and being around them. Definitely don’t miss the school (work) too much.”

Hutson felt like the break in the NHL schedule was too long.

“I think once you kind of shut off the motor it’s hard to get it going sometimes,” he said. “So you want to keep going and gear towards what we’re trying to do here. It was a good mental break, for sure.”

Bad scheduling

The Canadiens held the second edition of their Dream Big Casino Night on Thursday at the Cabaret du Casino de Montréal, in collaboration with Loto-Québec and Air Canada. Captain Nick Suzuki and his fiancée, Caitlin, were hosts for the event, which included the players and their partners, with proceeds helping support the Montreal Canadiens Children’s Foundation. Last year’s event raised $162,483.

The scheduling of the Casino Night meant the Canadiens players missed most of the Canada-USA final game in the Four Nations Face-Off tournament Thursday night, which Canada won 3-2 on an overtime goal by Connor McDavid.

“I saw all of the third (period) and OT,” Hutson said. “So I saw what I needed to.”

Hutson, who grew up in the Chicago suburb of North Barrington, Ill., said he didn’t make any friendly wagers on the game with his Canadian teammates.

Mike Matheson, who grew up in Pointe-Claire on Montreal’s West Island, didn’t make any wagers on the game with his American teammates. In fact, Matheson didn’t even see the end of the Canada-USA game.

“It ended pretty late,” Matheson said about the casino event after practice Friday morning at the Bell Centre. “I just caught the tail end of the third (period) and then I was pretty tired. I wanted to get to bed before today’s practice. I missed the overtime. It was already a little late and I knew I’d have to get up and get the kids to school.

“Priorities, right?” he added with a smile.

Matheson did head south during the break in the schedule with his wife and their two young children.

“It was great to be able to be with my kids for 24 hours a day and play and bring your mind elsewhere for a little while,” Matheson said.

The 30-year-old veteran wasn’t surprised Hutson went to Boston and brought his equipment with him during the break.

“When I was his age I was doing the same thing,” Matheson, who played three seasons at Boston College, said with a chuckle.

Trade winds blowing

The NHL’s March 7 trade deadline is coming up quickly and Matheson is a player other teams will certainly have interest in.

Matheson has 4-21-25 totals in 54 games to go along with a minus-9 rating. He also leads the Canadiens in ice time, averaging 24:38 per game. Hutson ranks second at 22:31.

Matheson has one more season left on his contract with a very reasonable salary-cap hit of US$4.857 million. Matheson said he hasn’t heard anything from Canadiens GM Kent Hughes about whether he could be traded.

“I think every year there’s always a possibility,” Matheson said. “Wayne Gretzky got traded, right? I think the more you worry about it, the more you concern yourself about it, the worse it could be. Having said that, I think it’s something that’s difficult to manage. It’s not the easiest thing. But I’ve always found, for myself, I just leave it where it is and whatever happens happens.”

Matheson has already been traded twice during his 10-year NHL career. On Sept. 24, 2020, he was dealt from the Florida Panthers to the Pittsburgh Penguins, who then traded him to the Canadiens on July 16, 2022. Hughes gave up Jeff Petry and Ryan Poehling to acquire Matheson from Pittsburgh, along with a fourth-round pick at the 2023 NHL Draft. The Canadiens used that pick (110th overall) to select Russian defenceman Bogdan Konyushkov.

A medal for Montembeault

The Canadiens’ Samuel Montembeault was the third goalie for Team Canada at the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament and never dressed for a game. But he still got a medal after Thursday’s win over Team USA.

“There’s so much you can gain from that experience, whether you’re on the bench and not playing a lot,” Canadiens head coach Martin St. Louis said. “You’re in the locker room, in the meetings, around that environment. You can learn so much. I’m sure Monty is going to get something out of that experience on top of just the medal. You can absorb so much by being around that environment with these players.”

Montembeault will start in goal for the Canadiens against the Senators on Saturday in Ottawa (7 p.m., SNE, City, TVA Sports).

St. Louis knows what it’s like to be part of Team Canada and be a spectator.

When Canada won the gold medal at the 2014 Sochi Olympics, St. Louis sat on the bench for the entire 1-0 semifinal win over the United States. He described himself as the “grocery stick” — sitting in the middle of the bench separating the forwards from the defenceman the way a grocery stick separates peoples’ items at the cash.

St. Louis noted he put “pom-poms” on his grocery stick to cheer on his teammates.

“It’s what are you learning when you’re sitting on the bench?” he said. “It’s a difficult time because we’re all proud. But you have to be capable to think about more than yourself. I was the grocery stick, but I encouraged the guys. When you’re the grocery stick, that’s what you do. You can’t be sitting with your big resumé and you’re pouting because you’re not playing.”

St. Louis was the grocery stick again for the first period of the gold-medal game in Sochi, before being used for the final two periods as Canada beat Sweden 3-0.

“They’re opportunities that don’t arrive often,” St. Louis said about playing for Team Canada. “It’s not easy to make those teams. And when you have an opportunity to put on that sweater and represent your country it’s something special. ... I’m happy I had a chance to live that.”

Suzuki gets a dog

Suzuki went home to visit his parents in London, Ont., for a brief visit during the break.

He also got a dog.

Suzuki is an ambassador for the Asista Foundation, which helps people cope with mental-health issues through trained service dogs.

Now, Suzuki and his fiancée have adopted a Golden Retriever named Ruby.

“It’s been in the works for a while now,” Suzuki said. “It was just a good time for me to be home and get her kind of on a good schedule for us and get her used to our life, so it’s been fun.”

Since 2011, the Asista Foundation has pursued a dual mission: rescuing dogs from shelters and transforming them into service dogs for individuals and organizations addressing mental-health needs such as PTSD, autism and anxiety. They create partnerships between dogs and their handlers.

“She’ll be our dog, but she’ll still be working,” Suzuki said. “My fiancée has been training and she’ll be Ruby’s handler. She has all the paperwork and stuff to be a handler for Ruby to be a working dog, so it’s pretty cool. She’ll be a service dog and help people out, so it will be fun.”

Suzuki didn’t have any pets while growing up because the family schedule was so busy with him and his brother both playing high-level hockey. His brother Ryan, who is two years younger, made his NHL debut this season with the Carolina Hurricanes.

Suzuki and his fiancée already had two cats, named Milo and Leo.

“Ruby and the cats have been good so far,” Suzuki said.

Suzuki added he has enjoyed spending time outside with Ruby.

“It’s a different relationship and it’s been fun to have her,” he said.

Heineman returns from injury

Emil Heineman practised with the Canadiens on Friday morning for the first time since suffering an upper-body injury when he was struck by a car as a pedestrian in Utah on Jan. 13. He will return to the lineup Saturday night against the Senators.

Heineman didn’t want to talk about how he was hit by a car when he met with the media Saturday morning in Ottawa.

“I will not comment on that today,” he said. “I’m just going to talk about the game tonight and hockey.

“For sure it was tough,” Heineman said about being out of the lineup for 14 games. “There isn’t anything I’d rather do than hop on the ice and play. We were in a good place and I felt good, too. So it was really big bummer for me. I was really excited to keep going. But, at the same time, I’m really excited to get back now, get that out of the way and just happy to be back.”

The Canadiens won their first two games after Heineman was injured, but went 5-8-1 overall without him in the lineup. Without Heineman as his regular linemate, Jake Evans’s offensive production dropped off with 1-3-4 totals in the last 14 games, along with a minus-5 rating.

“He’s great,” Evans said about Heineman. “I don’t think there’s an excuse when you lose a player. Every team goes through that. He has helped a lot of us out. He brings a lot of energy. I think when we have a guy like that out there it brings a lot of flow to the game and we can just roll our lines.

“He brings everything,” Evans added. “Energy, physicality, shooting. Just a smart player and easy to play with.”

There’s a very good chance now that Evans will get traded before the March 7 deadline since he and the team have been reported to be far apart in contract talks. Evans, who has 11-16-27 totals in 56 games, can become an unrestricted free agent on July 1.

“I don’t know if I’m looking that far ahead (to the trade deadline), honestly,” Evans said. “I’m looking just this next week and hopefully we can get something going as a team and for me just helping this team win.”

At practice Friday, St. Louis was able to reunite the four lines he rolled when the Canadiens were on a 9-2-1 run before Heineman was hurt. Suzuki was between Cole Caufield and Juraj Slafkovsky. Kirby Dach was between Alex Newhook and Patrik Laine. Christian Dvorak was between Josh Anderson and Brendan Gallagher. Evans was between Heineman and Joel Armia.

Slafkovsky admires Tkachuk

Slafkovsky told mon ami Anthony Martineau of TVA Sports this week: “You have to play like Brady Tkachuk if you want to have success in this league.”

The 6-foot-4, 225-pound Tkachuk has 21-23-24 totals in 56 games this season with the Senators to go along with 101 penalty minutes. Tkachuk and his brother Matthew, who play similar gritty styles, also played key roles with Team USA at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

I asked St. Louis on Friday what the 6-foot-3, 225-pound Slafkovsky can learn from Tkachuk’s game.

“I think his compete level and his heaviness,” St. Louis said. “Similar stature, right? I think for me when Slaf is at his best he brings pace and physicality and it’s hard to bring physicality without pace. You got to create some energy to bring some force. It’s just physics. To me, he’s on the right path and that’s something we talk to him about a lot, try to steer him in that direction. He’s still a young player, but I think that he’s got assets and if he plays inside those assets he becomes very, very, very important.”

Tkachuk leads the Senators with 188 hits this season, while Slafkovsky has 121.

I also asked St. Louis if the grit Tkachuk plays with is something that can be taught or if it’s something players are born with.

“Both,” St. Louis said. “But I feel like some players it’s more natural to have that grit. And I think the way the game is now if you don’t have a high compete level ... it’s not a perimeter game anymore. There’s so much back pressure, tracking, forecheck. It’s such a high-pace, very demanding physically, the game. It’s easier for some guys and some guys you have to steer and demand it more.”

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1341011 Montreal Canadiens

What I’m seeing, hearing about the Canadiens near NHL trade deadline

Arpon Basu9-12 minutes 24/02/2025

The Athletic has live coverage of the 2025 NHL trade deadline.

Before facing the Ottawa Senators on Saturday night, the Montreal Canadiens had a 1 percent chance of making the playoffs, according to Dom Luszczyszyn’s daily playoff projections.

The 5-2 win in Ottawa brought the Canadiens to within five points of a playoff spot with 25 games remaining, a seemingly realistic objective. But it also increased their playoff odds to 2 percent. Double what they were before, sure, but still just 2 percent.

Players and coaches will naturally look at the 50 standings points still available to the Canadiens as an opportunity. The model Luszczyszyn has built for his projections ingests a ton of data and spits out those numbers. It looks at things like the Canadiens’ minus-28 goal differential, their 196 goals allowed – 29th in the NHL – and their expected goal percentage at five-on-five of 47.23 – 27th in the NHL – and many, many more numbers and makes an objective assessment of the situation.

Players and coaches would not look at those numbers or those odds, but management’s job is to do exactly that.

The Canadiens are five points out of the playoffs with 11 days and five games left before the March 7 trade deadline. And they have a 2 percent chance of making the playoffs.

Consider the case of the Boston Bruins, a team with an equally bad goal differential. The Bruins are dealing with major injuries to their two best defencemen but have a 24 percent chance of making the playoffs, according to Luszczyszyn’s model. Bruins GM Don Sweeney addressed the media Sunday and, essentially, told his team’s fans that at the trade deadline, they will probably be looking to sell — possibly even franchise icon Brad Marchand, who remains unsigned less than three months shy of his 37th birthday.

If Sweeney is thinking that, is there a world where Canadiens GM Kent Hughes is not thinking the same?

An optimist could look at the Canadiens’ stretch from Nov. 11 to Jan. 21, when they went 20-10-2, fifth in the NHL over that span, and say it was a

sign the team is on the verge of great things. That is a big sample of playing .656 hockey. A realist might instead look at the Canadiens' 6-16-3 record in all their other games, or their two wins in 10 games since Jan. 21, when the team needed to elevate into a playoff race and instead wilted, as more indicative of where things are for this team.

All the data points that give the Canadiens a 2 percent chance at the playoffs matter, and they will surely be guiding the decisions the team has to make between now and March 7.

But for the Canadiens, deciding to sell is not a simple equation, at least not as simple as it's been the past three trade deadlines.

Trade value

The Canadiens have had valuable players to sell off under the Jeff Gorton and Hughes administration. Artturi Lehkonen, Tyler Toffoli, Ben Chiarot and Brett Kulak in 2022, Evgeni Dadonov in 2023, Sean Monahan and Jake Allen last season.

This season, it seems apparent at this point that Jake Evans will be moved. The Canadiens and Evans' camp are not close on a contract extension. But the return on Evans alone is not likely to be that great, especially considering the mountain of draft capital the Canadiens already have this season and next.

Joel Armia has expressed to the Canadiens a desire to stay in Montreal, but he would need to accept a rather sizable pay cut for that to happen. We spoke to Armia about this during the 4 Nations Face-Off, and he felt immediately uncomfortable with the conversation. All he would say is that he has communicated to the Canadiens he would like to stay. Otherwise, he is not thinking about it.

Evans on his own would bring a modest return. Armia on his own would bring a modest return. But the two of them together on the open trade market could bring back something significant. They are a top penalty-killing pair, they have played together at five-on-five for the better part of two seasons and would arrive on a new team looking for help on the PK and improved depth at forward as a plug-and-play solution to both problems.

This is an idea we floated before the 4 Nations break, and the Canadiens are exploring it on the trade market, a league source said. The goal for the Canadiens here is to add a third first-round pick in the upcoming draft, and that has already been set as the market rate for a package deal of two rentals. The Pittsburgh Penguins got that – plus a prospect and two undesirable contracts – from the Vancouver Canucks for Marcus Pettersson and Drew O'Connor, and the San Jose Sharks got that from the Dallas Stars for Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci.

We'll see if the Canadiens can pry similar value out of their package deal.

And if the Canadiens were to wind up with three first-round picks in the upcoming draft, it would be fair to expect them to be very aggressive on the trade market using those picks to bring in a significant player.

Otherwise, it seems as though the market for David Savard and Christian Dvorak is rather soft, especially at their relatively high salary cap hit, and it doesn't sound as though the Canadiens are all that interested in using their final salary retention slot on either of them.

The Canadiens would probably be just fine with letting both Savard and Dvorak play out their contracts because that would solve another problem the Canadiens have to manage after the trade deadline.

The Laval roster factor

David Reinbacher just played his first two games of the season for the Laval Rocket, returning a bit earlier than the most optimistic timeline for his knee injury suffered in the preseason. The Rocket have 22 games left on their regular season schedule and sit second in the North Division standings.

Last season's Calder Cup champions in the AHL, the Hershey Bears, played 20 playoff games. The Coachella Valley Firebirds, who lost in the final to Hershey, played 18. If the Rocket were to reach the Calder Cup final, that would give Reinbacher more than 40 games played this season, which is more than he played for Kloten in Switzerland last season and right around the 46 he played in his draft year.

In other words, a long playoff run for Laval would make what seemed like a lost season for Reinbacher very meaningful.

Every trade the Canadiens make at the NHL level would have a residual effect on the Rocket, and that is something they'll keep in mind when evaluating whether the return is worth it on a trade. The Canadiens would rather avoid gutting the Rocket to fill out the lineup to play out the string in Montreal, especially when compared to adding another fourth- or fifth-round draft pick.

As an example, if Evans were to be traded, Owen Beck would likely be needed to finish the season in Montreal, which would naturally hurt Laval, especially with Brandon Gignac injured. Gignac was announced as being week-to-week with a lower body injury in early January, and it is still unclear as to when he might return. The Rocket are unlikely to miss the playoffs without Beck, but entering the playoffs on a string of losses would not be ideal circumstances to start a long playoff run, either.

Reinbacher is just one example of why the Canadiens want to do everything possible to help the Rocket go deep into the playoffs.

A change in focus

That said, there should be some desire from the Canadiens to see some of their most promising players in Laval get some time in Montreal. And not only that — some of the young players in Montreal should be placed in more prominent roles.

Martin St. Louis has often said the priority this season had gone away from pure player development to learning how to win. That was fine earlier in the season when there was a reasonable chance to play themselves into a playoff race.

But now, that's no longer realistic.

The most interesting part of the Canadiens' game in Ottawa on Saturday was not necessarily seeing Juraj Slafkovský go beast mode – though that was certainly important – but rather seeing defenceman Jayden Struble paired with Lane Hutson.

This has been a frustrating season for Struble, who was given a vote of confidence heading into the season when Jordan Harris and Johnathan Kovacevic were traded away in the offseason. Those moves were, in part, meant to provide more ice time for guys such as Struble, Reinbacher and Logan Mailloux. So, let's see more of Struble in roles like the one he had Saturday in Ottawa.

One reason to perhaps trade Savard would be to create even more lineup space from now until the end of the season, giving Reinbacher or Mailloux or both a chance to get a run in Montreal before heading back to Laval for the AHL playoffs.

If Evans or Armia or both are traded, maybe try Emil Heineman in an elevated role after resisting it all season. Give the second power play unit more time to see more of how Kirby Dach can run a power play. Try Alex Newhook at centre because he might very well be playing there once Dvorak is gone. Play around with line combinations and defence pairings. Try some things.

In other words, go back to a developmental mindset.

This season was always about gathering information for management. It was clear right from day one at the Canadiens' golf tournament.

There are 25 games left this season. It's time to get as much information as possible.

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1340987 Edmonton Oilers

6 troubling trends for Edmonton Oilers through 6 February games

Bruce McCurdy Published Feb 24, 2025

When the NHL stopped play to stage the 4 Nations Face-Off, it seemed that the 2-week break had come just in time for the Edmonton Oilers. The team had faced a brutal travel schedule while a bug ravaged the dressing room. By the time they dropped a 5-4 decision in regulation to Colorado

Avalanche on Feb 07, they seemed to be running on fumes. I was convinced at the time that had the break not intervened, a losing streak was inevitable.

Fast forward two weeks to the resumption of play, and that vision has in fact become a reality. Looking not the tiniest bit refreshed, the Oilers laid down a pair of stinkers this past weekend, getting thumped 6-3 in Philadelphia, then 7-3 in Washington. Just like that, they've lost 3 straight games in regulation for the first time since the opening week of the season.

In the process, the squad has allowed 5+ goals in back-to-back-to-back games. That hadn't happened in a season and a half; specifically, when they dropped consecutive games in 2023 Nov at Tampa Bay, Florida and Carolina by scores of 6-4, 5-3, and 6-3.

Guess which 3 teams the Oilers play next?

The Oilers wobble into the Sunshine State with their game in shambles, a malaise that extends from captain Connor McDavid through goaltenders Stu Skinner and Calvin Pickard and most of the roster in between.

Here are 6 alarming trends that have come to the forefront during their 6 February games.

6+ games without a regulation win

Let's start with short and simple. The Oilers are officially 2-4-0 in February, with both wins coming in overtime early in the month. Including the shootout loss the squad absorbed vs. Detroit in its final January game, 7 games have been played since they won outright. That was a 4-2 victory over Seattle way back on Jan 27.

6 games of penalty killing failure

The Oilers have played 6 games in February in which their penalty kill has been nothing short of atrocious. The club has been shorthanded just 13 times in those games, but has yielded no fewer than 8 goals for a clearance rate of just 38%, which is to say, putrid. Those 8 PPGA are 3 more than any other NHL team this month. 2 other clubs have clearance rates in the 55% range in February, while all the rest are 67% or better.

Worse, the team has proven utterly incapable of killing the first minor penalty of each game, a failure that has occurred 6 (SIX!!!) games in a row. This isn't just an "early in games" problem either; in those 6 games the Oilers first penalty came twice each in the first, second or third period. Whatever time in the game the striped arm finally went up, the Oilers weren't up to the task. Many of those PPGA proved costly.

Calculated a different way, the Oilers have allowed powerplay goals at a rate of over 25 per hour in February. Only Washington and Vegas are remotely close, with all other teams being at half or less. 21 teams are in single digits. [Source]

PK GA 60 Feb

Caveat

Worth noting that the other two clubs whose PK is on the rocks are both excellent, playoff-bound teams. Even good clubs have bad spells. Such is the nature of a small sample size which in the specific case of the Oilers is less than 20 minutes of hockey for the entire month. It's obviously a problem that needs fixing — no doubt fans of the Capitals and Golden Knights would say the same thing just now — but don't read too much into it.

Which sets the table for a larger issue…

6 games of poor defensive results

Edmonton's defensive play has greatly improved during Kris Knoblauch's time behind the bench, but during the recent slide that aspect has collapsed. Again, NHL stats for the month of February:

GA GP in Feb

As was the case with the prior chart, "#1" here really means "#32", or as some might call it, "DFL". 4½ goals against per game, worse than proven bottom feeders Chicago, San Jose and Nashville, worse than everybody. Only 10 other teams are within 1.00 GA/GP.

I've kept the column of PK "success" from the source because it helps to inform how far the Oilers have fallen from the norm in this category in particular. Still, that's just 8 of the 27 goals against, meaning more than 3 per game in non-PK situations.

6 games of iffy goaltending

While many fans and pundits point their fingers squarely at the goaltending as the root of all evil, this one sees a range of issues on the defensive side of the puck. Which does not exonerate the padded men, of course, who in concert with their team have both been struggling this last while. These February numbers extracted from their respective game logs:

Oilers Sv% in Feb

Which simply put is not good enough.

4 games of Connor McDavid in a funk

That McDavid hasn't been at the very top of his game this season is reflected by the fact he isn't at the very top of the scoring race. He missed time to injury in October and to suspension in January. But in February his game has fallen off a cliff. In particular, the last 4 (NHL) games:

McDavid Games 54-57

Offensive production is way off, but the ugliest results are found in the highlighted column at right, traditional plus/minus. McDavid has posted a ghastly dash-11 over that short span, which includes 3 consecutive games of -3. [Source]

To put that in perspective, McD had never previously logged 2 such games in succession before never mind 3. Indeed, he's had 6 entire seasons in which he didn't have 3 such games all year long!

McDavid has been a consistent outscorer throughout his career, landing in the +21 to +35 range in each of the last 4 seasons. A couple weeks ago he was tracking in a similar direction at +15. Now he's down at +4 and trending sharply in the wrong direction.

The stat does of course have its critics due to a couple of weird decisions made by its innovators, Allan Roth and Dick Irvin, back in the 1940s. Their idea to count who was on the ice for all even-strength goals, for and against, proved to be a template for modern on-ice stats like Corsi. But the decision to include shorthanded (but not powerplay) goals, as well as goals scored at either end when the goalie is pulled, resulted in plenty of noise in the data.

In McDavid's case, each of those -3 games was complicated by a GA scored in "other" situations: a shorty allowed to the Avalanche, empty netters to both the Flyers and Capitals. So let's use modern fancystats to weed those out and focus strictly on 5v5 play. This source offers the additional insight of goals scored at both ends of the sheet rather than simply a net figure. And the recent numbers remain shocking:

McDavid game log NST

Wowsa. The lousy shot shares are one thing, but what really jumps off the page is 4 straight games of identical goal shares, namely 0 for, 2 against. The game's top offensive star has played 66.5 minutes of hockey in its most fundamental manpower situation, and his team hasn't scored a single goal in that time while allowing 8. With McD on the bench over those same games, the Oilers hold a 9-5 advantage in 201 minutes of 5v5 play.

Explain that. I can't.

MASSIVE caveat

These are of course McDavid's last 4 NHL games. They sandwich 4 other games that he played on a different stage at mid-month. He was a feature player of the 4 Nations Face-Off, where he was routinely described (in multiple languages) as the best player in the sport. Then #97 went out and made his case, finding the scoresheet in each game and leading his club in scoring with 3-2-5. He capped it off by delivering the clutchiest of clutch goals, in overtime of the tournament final. He clearly put everything he had into the effort.

As an old fart who has rooted for Team Canada even longer (since 1964) than I have for the Oilers (since their inception in 1972), that's a trade-off I'm prepared to accept. A satisfying ending to a best-on-best international tournament will stick with me a lot longer than a bizarro slump in the dog days of a long NHL season.

Perhaps the Oilers would have been better served to give their main man the weekend off. No surprise of course that he insisted on playing, but who could have foreseen results like those?

2 games of weirdo shot splits

Which brings us to the pair of games since the restart in which the Oilers have looked flat-out awful, with results to match. A 6-3 loss at Philadelphia, a 7-3 defeat in Washington, Convincing results, and deserved ones.

What stood out about both was that the Oilers were badly outshot, 32-18 and 34-25.

The team that had led the league in shots per game (32.6) at the break mustered just 43 in total. But the really odd part of it was the distribution of those shots. Against the Flyers, Edmonton forwards mustered just 8 shots the entire game, while the defencemen had 10. Against the Caps, an ever more extreme split of 10 shots by forwards, 15 by defenders.

For the 2 games combined, Edmonton's forward corps mustered a paltry 18 shots in total, just 42% of the club's overall total. This from a forward corps that through 55 games averaged 22 shots per game and some 67% of the club's overall total.

What does it mean? By eye, the Oilers had difficulty penetrating the defensive set of either Eastern Conference opponent, and all too often settled for a shot from the point when they managed to get a shot at all. Far too much of both games was played without the puck, and much of that in their own end of the sheet or heading in that direction.

The flaws in Edmonton's game just now are real and they are spectacular. What seems lacking to these old eyes is the fundamental defensive structure, to earn possession of the puck and then advance it on the counterattack. To make a play when it is there, and when it isn't to put the puck in good places. Instead Oil fans have watched with increasing dismay a cavalcade of turnovers, weak backchecks, poor line changes, spotty zone coverage and so on.

For Coach Knobaluch and his charges, it's time to get back to the basics. And maybe to find Connor McDavid some new linemates.

Post script

…goes to Eric Friesen of the 99 Forever Podcast who reminds us all that the Edmonton Oilers are a good hockey team currently enduring a bad stretch. Even the best teams slump from time to time, and when they do it's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture.

This is the Oilers' first three-game losing skid since October 9-13. During the 51 games in between, they went 34-13-4, good for third place in the entire NHL. No one is happy right now, but the Oilers are still among the best teams in the league. Stay positive, Oil Country!

— Eric Friesen 🏒 (@EricJFriesen) February 23, 2025

Let's put it this way: I'd rather the Oilers had a run like this in February than in May or June. Present wobble notwithstanding, they remain a Stanley Cup contender.

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1340988 Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton Oilers will NOT trade for a goalie at deadline, says top NHL insider, plus Evander Kane turmoil

David Staples

This in from NHL insider Frank Seravalli, news of his interview with Edmonton Oilers GM Stan Bowman that the Oilers will NOT be acquiring a goalie at the NHL trade deadline, as well as the team having continued questions about when or if forward Evander Kane will be available to play.

On The Daily Faceoff podcast, Seravalli said there's not much the Oilers can do about their goalie situation and "they've got to figure out this situation with Evander Kane."

When he talked to Bowman last Friday, Seravalli said, "He said point blank, 'Don't need to add a goalie.' And beyond that, they're they're hoping they can get an answer on Evander Kane's health by March 1st to be able to make the correct decisions or appropriate decisions by next Friday (March 7 trade deadline)."

On Oilers Now with Bob Stauffer, Seravalli expanded on his comments on the goalie situation. "I think people are expecting that because the Oilers lost two games (over the weekend) that season-long questions about the foundation of the team will change based on the results of one weekend. And I just, I don't think that makes sense or is fair… I'm just going to say, 'Come on.' I'm looking big picture here, and that's, I think, what Dan Bowman's job is to always look big picture."

The biggest issue for the Oilers is their penchant to take their foot off the gas more than any personnel issue, Seravalli said.

Later he told Stauffer that the Oilers hope to have the Evander Kane availability issue answered by March 1.

"And that's going to tell the story of what they're able to accomplish because I think they're walking on pins and needles, or walking on eggshells, I should say, about how much they can possibly bite off given the LTIR situation. It's been a lengthy and long road of recovery with multiple different … surgeries for a Evander Kane. And I think people in the fan base have sort of provided the like, 'W ink wink, oh yeah, of course, there's a chance he could come back, wink wink. But really he's going on LTIR, isn't that right?' And I'm like, no, that's not the truth. The truth is the Oilers, they don't feel very comfortable about this situation one way or the other. And in the end, what it really might come down to is the Oilers don't have that LTIR money to spend and they could only really make one acquisition."

"Yup," said Stauffer.

"And it could come in to dollars in and dollars out, if that's the case. If they don't have Kane's money to spend, the only way they're really adding a $1 million-plus player is to be to move somebody off of this team. And that's not going to be an easy task either."

My take

1. Seravalli is one of the top two or three insiders in the NHL and this info comes from a named source, Bowman, so it's got the highest level of credibility. That said, as Seravalli himself said, if Bowman was looking to trade for a goalie, he might well not broadcast the news.

2. The Kane situation is indeed critical to the Oilers season and deadline plans. If Kane is not going to be ready to play until the end of the regular season, or at all this season, that frees up major cap space for the Oilers to bring in a player or two or three at the deadline. If he's back, the Oilers get Kane, who will be a major boost to the team if healthy. Edmonton lacks ferocity upfront and Kane provides that.

3. The March 1 deadline that Bowman mentioned hit me like a sledgehammer, in that on Feb. 28, the day before, Kane's No Movement Clause evaporates and Kane must provide the Oil with a list of 16 teams where he can be traded. Are the Oilers needing clarity by March 1 so they're better able to trade Kane? That would also free up cap space.

4. Would any teams be interested in Kane? Why not? He's exactly the kind of apex predator you need in the playoffs to deal with physical threats like Nikita Zadorov or Brady Tkachuk or Sam Bennett. If he's healthy, he'd be a useful addition to many teams. Of course, if healthy he'd also be useful to the Oilers. He was a menace against the Kings and Canucks in the playoffs last year before he got so hurt he could no longer play anywhere near his potential.

There's no dot to connect between Ville Husso trade to Anaheim and a potential John Gibson trade.

In AHL San Diego, Calle Clang is out month-to-month and Oscar Dansk is only other goalie with experience. They want San Diego to make playoffs.

Gibson expected back this week.

— Frank Seravalli (@frank_seravalli) February 25, 2025

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1340989 Edmonton Oilers

Matheson: The Edmonton Oilers have a goalie problem, or do they?

When the Oilers play well as a team, so do Skinner and Pickard. The goaltending is certainly enough. It got them within 60 minutes of the Stanley Cup a year ago

Jim Matheson Published Feb 24, 2025

It's low-hanging fruit to discuss goaltending, as we all know.

Every fan thinks their home side could be better in net unless they were gifted Grant Fuhr or Patrick Roy or Marty Brodeur—three guys voted in the top 100 players of all-time—or Connor Hellebuyck these days in Winnipeg. He's going to win his third Vezina trophy, current best in class, in the cage.

A loud segment of Edmonton Oilers fans are down on Stuart Skinner and his backup Calvin Pickard, with both guys with goal averages under .900 SV%. They gripe that there has to be another goalie on another team they should go out and get, rather than sticking with their current tag team—both of whom have played exactly 161 regular-season games.

Even if both guys have been hung out to dry at times, like this past weekend in Philly and Washington, even if Skinner, just turned 26, he still got the Oilers to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final last spring and clearly, you don't need a great goalie to win a Cup (.ie Chris Osgood, Adin Hill or Darcy Kuemper) if the team's playing well.

"Goaltending doesn't operate in a vacuum," said the highly-respected Kevin Woodley, the editor of InGoal magazine, the bible of netminding.

Right now, that Oilers wildcat fan trade scenario would probably be the red-hot Jordan Binnington, the Canadian 4Nations Face-off goalie who also won a Cup in St. Louis in 2019. A guy with average NHL regular-season stats but who seems to thrive when the heat gets turned up. He makes $6 million for two years after this Blues' season, which is more than double the AAV ($2.6 million) that Skinner makes.

Fuhr wants people to put the brakes on though. Back off on Skinner.

"I think Skinner will be just fine. There's still a lot of talent there with Stu. He's streaky…that's the best way to put it. When he's on, he's really good. But he's still evolving. It's still a learning process," said Fuhr, who won five Cups here with the Oilers and currently works on the broadcasts for Seattle's AHL farm team in Coachella Valley.

Fuhr definitely knows there's a target on every goalie's chest along with the logo and bad plays happen long before the puck gets to the goalies in a lot of cases.

"The Oilers when they're playing poorly…how should I put it? It's an interesting defence. It's very casual sometimes," he said.

"But when a team plays poorly, you would still like a goalie to steal you seven or eight times a year. Over 82 games, if you can get one of those every 10 to 15 games, where the goalie steals one for you, the team's doing well."

The Oilers are in win-now mode with Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, though, both here for at least 10 years with no Cup celebration, and the window, if not closing, certainly not all the way up

So, the heat's on the goalies.

"Keeps the panic happening early," laughed Fuhr.

"Stu's in the not-so-fun learning stages because of the win-now team mode. He's got about a two-year window where he has to be really good. Creates a bit of pressure, but that's the fun part.

"Stu's a big goalie who has some athleticism but sometimes doesn't use that, if that makes sense. His biggest bugaboo is east-west (going across the crease) with the Oilers giving up a lot of rush chances. That's learning to read the game so it makes yourself look quicker than you actually are," said Fuhr.

Are there better goaltending option for the Oilers?

There's a much better chance the Oilers would be looking in a trade for a 1 and 1a with Skinner—a younger goalie to push Skinner more than the great teammate and battler Pickard, 32, even with his fine 14-6 record, than a fantasy league deal for Binnington.

Say, Utah's UFA Karel Vejmelka, but it's all speculation.

Any trade for a goalie is GM Stan Bowman's call, of course. Trading for goalies at the deadline is spicy business with so little time to get to know the players in front of them over 20 games or less before playoffs.

"I did a piece for nhl.com where I talked to (MacKenzie) Blackwood and he said it was much easier on him getting traded (San Jose to Colorado) when he did than it would be in March with only 20 games left, and maybe the starter only plays 12 of those. I applaud the Avs for doing this early rather than later so it's given their goalies a chance to get comfortable," said Woodley.

In the real world, you would rather have Binnington at $6 million than, say, John Gibson at even more than that if Bowman was looking, but Woodley looks at the numbers between Skinner and Binnington and shrugs.

“At least statistically, not big picture, if you look at the (regular season) stats, you would be surprised how narrow those margins between Binner and Stu are in terms of how much of an upgrade would be (in net) for what would have to pay to get it,” said Woodley.

“In season, Stu has given up 10 low-danger goals, Binnington has given up seven. In high-danger chances to goals, Stu is league average, and Binnington is top 20. There’s not a huge difference. Yes, it’s hard to argue with what Binner’s done,” said Woodley.

“In the previous five years, he’s the only Canadian goalie in the top 10 in adjusted numbers. This is a down year for him but even in a down year, he has the ability to have big moments. And obviously, he’s a good puck-handler. That was a difference for them (Canada),” he said.

“The one thing I can’t answer (in terms of a perceived goalie upgrade), is would the guys in the room feel better?”

The Edmonton Oilers' goalie Stuart Skinner

Oilers “have some other demons”: Fuhr

In the most basic terms, Skinner’s .898 in 38 games and Pickard’s .896 rank in 22 games, isn’t good enough. Going deeper, Skinner’s “goals saved above expected” is -2.9 which is 38th rated amongst goalies with at least 20 games, according to MoneyPuck, and Pickard’s is 42nd at -6.5.

If you were to categorize things, the Oilers goaltending today is somewhere between the problem and the solution on the NHL’s oldest team with a heavy push to win a Cup. The defensive work in front of Skinner and Pickard has been somewhere between lax and lazy, in the first month of the season and in February. Skinner was torched for five goals on the first 15 shots in Philly Saturday and Pickard gave up six on 33 shots in Washington Sunday.

Again, they weren’t the reason the Oilers lost, at all. But lots of pucks were going in.

Woodley says there are very few “separators in the net”, acknowledging Hellebuyck is clearly the best at that physically and mentally with qualifiers.

“Logan Thompson may actually be having a better season than Hellebuyck (two losses in regulation in Washington) but is there anybody in the league that gives his guys more confidence to play the way the Jets play than Hellebuyck? There’s that swagger,” said Woodley.

Goalie seasons go up and down. Last season, Jeremy Swayman was outstanding in Boston (.916 save percentage, 2.53 average in 44 games). This season, on a much weaker Bruins club that’s scrambling just to make the playoffs, with his tag-team partner Linus Ullmark now in Ottawa, Swayman has been pedestrian at best (.898 save percentage, 2.98 average in 41 games).

Here’s what it looks like here. When the Oilers play well as a team, so do Skinner and Pickard. The goaltending is certainly enough. The goaltending got them within 60 minutes of the Cup a year ago. When the team is porous, with so many giveaways, the two goalies are unfortunately along for the ride on those nights. They haven’t maybe bailed them out enough, but that’s the story with most tenders.

Skinner’s goal average in seven games in October was 3.51 when the team was terrible. In four games this month it’s 4.23 when the team looks slow, too small, two ineffective offensively except for 29 and 97, and a giveaway machine.

When the Oilers play improved after the first month, Skinner’s goals-against average in November was 2.78, then 2.33 in December and 2.26 in January.

The Oilers have other issues apart from goaltending, like finding a top-six winger for Draisaitl, maybe a bigger, defensive top 4 D to play with Darnell Nurse, or a right-shot centre.

“They have some other demons,” said Fuhr.

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1340990 Edmonton Oilers

History says Edmonton Oilers will be fine, but this is getting scary

We’ve seen this movie before. A few times, actually. The Oilers are famous for these types of lapses and equally famous for recovering in spectacular fashion

Robert Tychkowski

Welcome to October.

We all remember it well.

The penalty killing was terrible, goaltending wasn’t making a positive difference, the team looked sloppy and detached and the Edmonton Oilers were getting smacked around — 0-3 with 15 goals against in their first three games.

And here we are again: Penalty killing is terrible, goaltending isn’t making a positive difference, the team looks sloppy and detached and the Oilers are being smacked around — 0-3 with 18 goals against in their last three games.

We’ve seen this movie before. A few times, actually. The Oilers are famous for these types of lapses and equally famous for recovering in spectacular fashion. A 16-game winning streak last year. A 22-6-2 recovery this year.

They know how to fix their problems and they know how to win.

We’ve seen enough to know that there is nothing to worry about, right?

Probably.

The difference this time is they’ve never been in a slump this late in a season. By this time last year, they had everything all figured out and were playing solid, winning hockey.

Slow out of the gate is one thing, looking this lost in late February is quite another. They’ve been a below .500 team for 12 games now (5-6-1) and seem to be going from bad to worse. They looked like the 2010 Oilers in handing Philadelphia about five easy goals in a 6-3 loss and they got run out of the rink in the 7-3 loss to Washington.

So, while you’d fully expect the Oilers to take care of this and put together a solid winning streak heading down the stretch, you can’t help but think, with all of the off-season changes, that this might be different.

“We’ll find it,” veteran winger Corey Perry said after the blowout loss in Washington. “We talked about it a little after the game and we’ll find it.

“We have guys in here who are world-class players and guys who can work. Everybody just has to pull their weight and do the things that they do well and not worry about anybody else’s job, just do their thing.”

The Oilers have pulled out of worse tailspins than this one, so it’s going to take a lot more than a three-game losing streak to scare them. They are still sitting two points out of first place in the division, after all, not gasping for air in 31st place like last November, or out of a playoff spot like they were this November.

And Kris Knoblauch believes that might be contributing to a slower recovery this time around.

“I think a lot of it is how well we handle adversity, it makes you a little more complacent,” said the second-year coach. “There’s not as much urgency to turn things around because there’s so much confidence about ‘It will be OK.’

“It’s kind of a fine line between being confident and a little complacent and overconfident. There is a lot of confidence on the team and right now we have to show a little urgency to turn the switch.”

Teams usually take the day off after back-to-back road games, but with a schedule that doesn’t get much easier from here — Tampa Bay, Florida and Carolina — the Oilers have to iron out the issues and find that switch.

“We have a lot of areas to improve,” said Knoblauch.

Perry, as Knoblauch pointed out, says the Oilers are not the least bit worried right now. The core of this team knows how to play and how to win and the collective has already proven it can string a lot of games together when it needs to.

“We started the season not great,” said Perry. “So we can look at that and look how we got out of it. All it was was hard work, putting your head down and doing the right things. You have to learn how to dig yourself out of a hole.”

The trade deadline is in five games and the post-season starts in two months, so this is when a team needs to be fine-tuning it’s game, not finding it.

“You don’t want to look too far ahead,” said Perry. “But if you get in the playoffs and lose a game you have to figure it out right away because you take too long and you’re gone, you’ll be sitting on your couch.

“All it is, and I keep coming back to the same thing, the same word, is your work ethic. That’s how you have to approach the game each and every night.”

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1340991 Edmonton Oilers

Eye test vs. analytics: What do you trust in Edmonton Oilers player debates?

Allan Mitchell

The Edmonton Oilers are a strong Stanley Cup contender (even with this weekend’s results) and are blessed with a knowledgeable and passionate fan base.

Back in the olden days, all discussion surrounding individual players involved boxcar statistics (games, goals, assists, points) and the eye test. If a player scored 30 goals in a season, it was still possible to express concern about things like physicality and consistency, but criticizing a 30-goal scorer is a difficult chore.

In the early 2000s, analytics began creeping into the game and offered us an opportunity to view the results from a different angle. That 30-goal scorer became more vulnerable to a critical eye, depending on how he scored those goals. If 20 came on the power play, and he was a five-on-five sinkhole (his line giving up more goals than scoring goals) room was available to question the overall contribution of said player.

Modern NHL players have to pass the eye test and a thorough math examination.

Oilers fans have two classic examples of eye test versus math on the roster currently.

Defenceman Evan Bouchard and goaltender Stuart Skinner are under close scrutiny from the fan base due to inconsistent performance.

Despite the mistakes, the math says both men are delivering within their own established levels of ability.

Who do you trust? Your own eyes or the math? Let’s see how much they differ.

The eye test

The video shows some alarming turnovers from Bouchard this season. He’s also less effective than he has been in the past in getting pucks through on the power play.

Let’s look at his five-on-five performance first, comparing his numbers to one year ago.

Stat 2023-24 2024-25

TOI-Game

17:59

18:44

Goals-60

0.33

0.51

Points-60

1.52

1.32

Shots-60

6.01

6.75

Sh. Pct

5.5

7.6

HD-60

0.45

0.69

GF-60

3.87

3.03

GA-60

2.39

2.17

Goal Pct

62

58

X-Goal Pct

62

59

All numbers five-on-five, via Natural Stat Trick

Bouchard's year-over-year performance at five-on-five is within the range of expectation. The goal share is close, with coach Kris Knoblauch's attention to goal suppression reflected in both offence and defence while Bouchard is on the ice. The biggest change is in ice time, as Bouchard is logging about one more minute per game. A nice spike in high-danger chances is also in evidence.

Based on math, and the knowledge Edmonton is trying to reduce goals-against at five-on-five, the Bouchard numbers this season suggest he's not a major drag on outscoring.

This season at five-on-five, Edmonton is 58 percent goal share with Bouchard on the ice, 49 percent when he's on the bench. One year ago, those numbers (62 percent with Bouchard, 51 percent without) were similar, but more productive. That tells us the goal suppression has improved, but at the cost of Edmonton's offence.

Has Bouchard kept pace with the rest of the team in five-on-five SA-60 year over year?

His 2.17 GA-60 this season is well clear of the Oilers when he's off the ice (2.46 GA-60). A year ago, the numbers were reversed. Bouchard's tandem was surrendering 2.39 GA-60 while the rest of the team was giving up 2.24 GA-60.

Bouchard has improved in GA-60 year over year.

On the power play, Bouchard's assist per 60 total is down slightly (5.12 from 5.79) and he has yet to score a goal with the man advantage. That leaves his points per 60 well off the pace compared to one year ago.

Eye test versus "saw him good" on Bouchard

The eye test says Bouchard is making poor passing decisions at five-on-five. The math says that is true. His giveaways per 60 have spiked from 2.76 to 4.46 year over year.

The power play is also a concern. Bouchard isn't getting shots through and when he does those shots are not dangerous.

Still, math recommends staying the course with Bouchard. In fact, math is implying his struggles might fetch the Oilers a more inviting contract this summer, but that's a distant bell.

Bouchard's five-on-five on-ice outscoring is a searing total. His contributions in this area make him one of the most important players on the team. The power play needs to improve, but five-on-five is the heart of the game and Bouchard is money even in a difficult season.

Skinner

The heat is on Skinner this season and fan discontent is at a fever pitch as the club enters the trade deadline window.

Math experts tell us that five-on-five save percentage is the best way to measure goaltenders. Here is Skinner year over year since 2022:

Year Games Save Pct NHL Avg

2022-23

50

0.926

0.914

2023-24

59

0.913

0.913

2024-25

48

0.907

0.912

All numbers five-on-five, via Natural Stat Trick

When Skinner arrived as an NHL regular, the Oilers badly needed an in-house solution. Jack Campbell was the big free-agent signing over the summer of 2022, but Campbell could never get untracked in Edmonton.

Enter Skinner, and his first-year performance was exceptional. He was well above average in 2022-23. Last season, he fell to average and this season Skinner has struggled overall and is well below average.

Important to note that Skinner's five-on-five save percentage since Nov. 23 (.917) is quality, meaning he has been below average for just 14 games at the beginning of this season.

This is an important decision for the organization, because Skinner's low cap hit ($2.6 million) allows the team to overspend in other areas.

If general manager Stan Bowman adds a veteran (like John Gibson of the Anaheim Ducks or Jordan Binnington of the St. Louis Blues) the organization is going to be forced to reset the cap dollars devoted to the goaltending position moving forward.

Eye test versus "saw him good" on Skinner

Spend an hour on social media and you can find Skinner's weaknesses. Many Oilers fans believe Skinner's performance this season is the single biggest factor in Edmonton's win-loss record (never mind that the Oilers are humming along at an impressive 34-19-4 pace).

The eye test frets about Skinner's lateral movement on shots that arrive after a cross-ice pass. It has replaced Mikko Koskinen's glove hand as the leading cause of heartache in Oilers nation.

That lateral movement is an issue for all goaltenders, which is the primary reason that NHL defencemen spend so much time attempting to intercept that pass.

Math looks at the table above, points out the early struggles by Skinner (and the Oilers) and concludes that staying the course is the correct progression.

Skinner's .917 save percentage at five-on-five ranks No. 11 among qualified goaltenders since Nov. 23.

The immediate future

Stan Bowman's opinion is the one that matters.

Math is telling him to keep his powder dry, to bet on his best young roster players (Bouchard and Skinner).

The eye test is less certain.

Bouchard has made dozens of baffling decisions with the puck this season, and the area where he is truly elite (power-play quarterback) has abandoned him at times.

Skinner has looked shaky more often this season and there's a growing sentiment among fans and observers that a goalie upgrade is required.

It's my opinion that the organization should ride the current situation through to the end of the season and playoffs. If it doesn't work, a summer reset may be in order.

That's a defensible position.

The trade deadline is the time of year when logic and reason take a holiday.

What does Bowman think? We wait.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.25.2025

1341064 Websites

The Athletic / Matthew Tkachuk recaps 4 Nations Face-Off with Jimmy Fallon: 'I truly believe in our team'

By Mark Lazerus

3m ago

Nobody's going to mistake Jimmy Fallon for Doc Emrick, but even the Tonight Show host sounded a little stunned when recalling an interview in which Matthew Tkachuk called the 4 Nations Face-Off final the biggest game he's ever played in.

"You won the Stanley Cup," Fallon told Tkachuk during Monday's show. "This was bigger?"

Tkachuk didn't take it back.

"It really was such a big tournament, such a huge stage, something that I'll never forget," the Florida Panthers and Team USA star said. "The thing that I'm most proud of with that team was how much pride we showed representing our country and being American and being so lucky to represent this great country."

Sidelined with an injury suffered at the 4 Nations tournament, Tkachuk took a trip to New York to be on Fallon's show while the Panthers flew to Nashville for a Tuesday night game. Tkachuk didn't have a noticeable limp and said he's "feeling better, just recovering right now."

Wearing an all-black suit with a black quarter-zip underneath, Tkachuk played it pretty straight, repeatedly mentioning how proud he was to finally get a chance to represent the United States on the international stage.

"It's been 10 years since the last international opportunity (and) this is my ninth year in the league, so I've gotten the short end of the stick on that," Tkachuk said (though his math was a little off, with the last best-on-best tournament coming at the 2016 World Cup). "Myself and all the guys that were in this were just so jacked up for it, and I think that's why you saw the fights at the beginning of the game against Canada. Guys wanted to get their anger out of the way."

Tkachuk noted that both he and his brother, Ottawa Senators star Brady Tkachuk, were involved in the instantly iconic three fights in nine seconds to open the round-robin game between the two rivals.

"Dad was proud, huh?" Fallon said.

"I think he was pretty proud," Tkachuk responded.

Fallon had a picture of Keith Tkachuk crying at the end of Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final last June. Tkachuk drew some "awwws" from the crowd when he said handing the Cup to Keith — who never won a championship in his 18-year career — during the on-ice celebration was "one of the most special moments of my life."

Brady was in that photo, too.

"My brother was crying there, too," Tkachuk said. "I haven't seen him cry since playing mini-sticks in the basement, throwing him through the walls."

Fallon mentioned three times over the course of the show that "over 16 million people" watched the final, a number that includes the Canadian audience. Fallon then brought up the Milano Cortina Olympics next February, and while Tkachuk was careful to point out how many countries have rosters loaded with stars, he obviously likes the Americans' chances.

"I truly believe in our team," he said. "We got so close with this tournament, looking at next year being a chance at redemption. I truly believe in our chances. Wearing the USA crest there's nothing like it — we have so much pride in it, and we'll be ready to go."

Fallon closed the four-minute segment by inviting Tkachuk back.

"Next time I see you," Fallon said, "there'll be gold around your neck."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.25.2025

1341065 Websites

The Athletic / NHL reduces Ryan Hartman's suspension to 8 games, hopes it's a 'wake-up call' for Wild forward

By Michael Russo and Joe Smith

7h ago

The NHL announced on Monday that commissioner Gary Bettman has reduced Minnesota Wild forward Ryan Hartman's suspension from 10 games to eight. The decision came 10 days after Hartman appealed the suspension.

Hartman will now be eligible to return March 4 when the Wild begin a two-game road trip in Seattle. His $487,804.90 in lost salary has also been reduced by $97,560.98.

The NHLPA had an opportunity to further appeal Hartman's case to an independent arbitrator on the player's behalf, but Hartman will accept the reduced suspension and not take the matter any further, according to a league source.

Hartman, 30, will serve the fifth game of his suspension Tuesday night when the Wild host the Detroit Red Wings.

Hartman and George Parros, the head of the NHL's Department of Player Safety, testified in front of Bettman during a three-hour hearing at a Montreal hotel on Feb. 14 that involved nearly 20 people, including NHLPA executive director Marty Walsh, Wild president of hockey operations and general manager Bill Guerin and Hartman's agent.

The decision to suspend Hartman came as a result of his match penalty for pushing Ottawa Senators forward Tim Stützle's face into the ice off a faceoff on Feb. 1. Stutzle sustained a laceration that took five stitches to close.

Hartman contended in his initial Zoom hearing with the NHL Department of Player Safety that he put his arm on Stützle's back to brace himself from a fall and that it was "accidental." The department disagreed and came down hard on Hartman, who received his fifth career suspension and fourth since April 2023.

The Department of Player Safety considered Hartman's track record when assigning the 10-game suspension. It also noted Hartman had been fined seven times, meaning he was assessed discipline roughly every 60 games in his career.

"It's important to note that this is not a hockey play," the NHL Department of Player Safety said in a video. "Hartman contends he's attempting to use his hands to regain his balance using Stützle for support and their fall to the ice is accidental. We disagree. … (Hartman) takes advantage of a vulnerable player in an unacceptable manner."

Bettman's ruling

In the appeal hearing, the NHLPA disagreed with the Department of Player Safety's conclusion that Hartman's act was intentional, saying it was "a mere accident with an unfortunate outcome." The union also noted that the 10-game suspension was the lengthiest suspension the league had ever imposed on a roughing penalty and was disproportionate to past roughing violations.

In his ruling, Bettman said he did not find Hartman's testimony credible that the incident was "accidental," adding that "there are thousands of faceoffs every NHL season and the fact that no prior incident has involved conduct of this nature confirms any conclusion that this was not simply an accident, but rather intentional conduct on the part of Mr. Hartman."

But in the end, Bettman determined that “an increase of seven (7) games from Mr. Hartman’s last suspension to this one” was “excessive” and “not proportional.”

Bettman added, “In light of Mr. Hartman’s prior suspension of three games, I believe that a suspension of eight (8) games should be sufficient to serve as an appropriate ‘wake-up call’ to Mr. Hartman, causing him to reevaluate his conduct on the ice and make positive changes to his game.”

What this means for Hartman

Other than his return date, it means that Hartman, who has been considered a repeat offender the last three suspensions, will likely have plenty of scrutiny from officials and the Department of Player Safety. “There’s no more wiggle room,” Guerin recently said.

It made sense for Hartman to try to appeal the 10-game suspension as the league went on a two-week break for the 4 Nations tournament. That gave Hartman a better chance to have the result of his appeal come before he served the entirety of the suspension. But these appeals are rarely successful, with a few notable examples. The Capitals’ Tom Wilson regained six games worth of salary when his 2018 suspension was reduced from 20 games to 14 on an appeal to an arbitrator jointly appointed by the league and union, even though he had already served 16.

Hartman has continued to skate and practice with the Wild since he got suspended, often spending extra time after those sessions with either strength and conditioning coach Matt Harder or skating coach Andy Ness. If anything else, Hartman should be in tremendous shape by the time his suspension is over. Coach John Hynes indicated there’s a plan for Hartman during his time away, which includes his conditioning and working on his game so that he’s ready to jump back in the lineup.

When it comes to getting into trouble, Hynes said it comes down to decision-making more than changing his game as a player, as he often plays on the edge. It’s part of what makes him successful.

“I think just understanding the moments you’re in,” Hynes said. “Understanding that, when you get into some situations where emotions get high. The game is emotional. It’s hard. It’s a difficult thing to be able to do, especially for a guy like him. He’s pretty competitive. And I think when you can get caught in sometimes, you’ve got to remain competitive and play on the edge and bring what you bring as a player. But sometimes you’ve got to take a deep breath too, try to do the right thing.”

Hartman is in the first year of a three-year, $12 million contract. He carries a $4 million cap hit and makes $5 million this season. It’s been another down season for Hartman, who has seven goals and 10 assists in 48 games, including a minus-8.

What the latest suspension means for Hartman’s future with the team remains to be seen. Hartman has a full no-move clause this season, and it changes to a modified no-trade clause the next two seasons (a 15-team no-trade list in 2025-26 and a 10-team no-trade list in 2026-27).

Hartman told The Athletic before the 4 Nations break that he would talk to the media soon after a ruling, so that could come after Tuesday’s morning skate.

What this means for Wild

The Wild, already up against the salary cap, will continue to have limited roster flexibility. Hartman must remain on the 23-man roster during his suspension, and it could eventually cost a teammate one of their jobs.

For example, when Jakub Lauko is ready to return from his lower-body injury — and Hynes indicated that could come Tuesday — Minnesota will likely make room by putting defenseman Travis Dermott on waivers or reassigning forwards Devin Shore or Liam Ohgren. Since Dermott wasn’t placed on waivers Tuesday, Shore or Ohgren could be reassigned once Lauko is activated off injured reserve.

The Wild will have to keep doing cap gymnastics if another short-term injury occurs. Minnesota claimed one of Hartman’s good friends, Vinnie Hinostroza, off waivers from the Nashville Predators before the 4 Nations break to help make up for his absence. Hinostroza has scored two goals in three games with the Wild.

“It affects the team. It affects him,” Guerin said. “This is a big hit for him financially. It’s the other player that gets hurt or possibly could have. Ryan is a good player. Not too many guys play his brand of hockey, but he’s got to do a better job of not crossing the line. He knows it.”

The Athletic LOADED: 02.25.2025

1341066 Websites

The Athletic / Projecting the 2030 Olympic men’s hockey rosters for Canada and the United States

By Max Bultman and Corey Pronman

Feb 24, 2025

It’s been an incredible time for international hockey, with the 4 Nations Face-Off surpassing even the loftiest expectations for what the first best-on-best tournament in nine years would bring. Canada’s overtime win over the United States in the championship game Thursday night was the exclamation point on a thrilling tournament — and a tremendous way to lead into the 2026 Olympics in Milan next year.

Odds are the rosters for that tournament will look very similar to the ones on display in Montreal and Boston. There will be some tinkering around the fringes, but with less than a year between the events, the cores will remain the same.

Looking ahead one more cycle, though, is a more revealing way to look at the future of both the U.S. and Canadian national teams and how the next wave of stars for both countries could fit in.

So, The Athletic’s Max Bultman and Corey Pronman took an early run at projecting the 2030 Olympic rosters for both North American powerhouses.

Because the current U.S. team is so young, there are a lot of familiar faces in this projection.

Jack Eichel, Auston Matthews, Dylan Larkin, Tage Thompson, Charlie McAvoy, Zach Werenski and Matthew Tkachuk will all be into their 30s by then, but not so old that we wouldn’t project them in the mix here. Their respective talent and track records give them a strong baseline.

So let’s focus on the new names. Logan Cooley has taken a step forward this season in Utah and should continue to rise steadily between now and 2030. By then, he’ll be 25 and should be a great fit between two very sound two-way wingers in Matt Boldy and Ryan Leonard.

Leonard takes some projecting, considering he’s not even in the NHL yet, but he’s a tough, two-way player who can score, kill penalties and play a hard-nosed game. Much of the same is true of Matthew Knies, who is already an important player in Toronto and should only get better in the next five years.

Matty Beniers, meanwhile, hasn’t quite gotten back to the offense he found in his Calder Trophy season in 2022-23, but is still trending to be an excellent defensive forward who slots into that bottom line perfectly. He should be a top penalty killer for this group and brings elements any coaching staff would love.

It’s fair to wonder if the fourth line could use a pure playmaker, as here it’s made up of a lot of north-south, 200-foot players. But the obvious candidates we left off (such as Clayton Keller, Jason Robertson, James Hagens and Will Smith) don’t have the same penalty-kill utility and aren’t as projectable to tough matchups.

We have Cole Caufield as the 13th forward, but it’s entirely possible he could work higher into this lineup. His chemistry with Hughes, dating back to their time at the USA Hockey National Team Development Program, is certainly appealing.

On defense, it’s a very similar makeup to the current group, losing only Jaccob Slavin, Noah Hanifin and Adam Fox. Hanifin and Fox are right on that same age-32/33 bubble as some of the top forwards, but the U.S.’s young defense pipeline is promising enough that we gave the nod to Jake Sanderson (who was the first call-up in this tournament), Luke Hughes and Zeev Buium — with Lane Hutson another potential option.

There are many capable options in goal, and including Connor Hellebuyck here is highly dependent on how he ages. He'll be 36 in early 2030. But Jake Oettinger would be a strong potential starter at age 31, and we'll take the bet on Spencer Knight — who has quietly performed well recently — re-emerging as a top goaltender as he enters his own prime.

Team Canada sees more turnover on its roster than Team USA likely will, with a lot of their important members on the 2025 4 Nations team aging out. Their blue line sees a massive revamp, and there is no returning goaltender.

The top-six forward group is a mixture of stars of today and tomorrow. Prime-aged superstars such as Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon remain important fixtures, but we expect the next generation of Canadian stars to be led by Macklin Celebrini, Connor Bedard and Adam Fantilli.

The third line featured some hard decisions. Dylan Guenther has been fantastic this season, but will he be the best choice in five years? Will Mitch Marner's play fall off? There are close calls and other reasonable candidates could have been picked. Some may argue for Gavin McKenna but this is a tough team to make. McKenna won't even be in the NHL for another 18 months, never mind being one of the top nine forwards in Canada in five years. We debated keeping Brandon Hagel in the mix and he could have subbed out one of the current fourth-liners.

This seems like a young blue line, but it won't be in 2030. We expect Owen Power, Thomas Harley and Noah Dobson will be established long-time major minutes defensemen by that point in their careers. Matthew Schaefer will be on the younger side, but we expect him to be a two-way star in the league by then as well.

The goaltending is a major question mark. Your guess is as good as ours. Canada lacks standout goalies in the NHL currently, and there isn't a no-doubt stud coming up the pipeline either. Some scouts are very high on Joshua Ravensbergen, but he's only 18 and goalies take a while typically to reach the highest echelon of their development.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.25.2025

1341067 Websites

The Athletic / Weekend NHL rankings: Closing the book on a memorable 4 Nations Face-Off

By Sean McIndoe

Feb 24, 2025

We're back, because the NHL regular season is back. Not very much of it, though, with only two days' worth of games to go on for this week's rankings. In other words, don't expect many big changes from a few weeks ago.

Don't expect a ton of deep dives on those games either, because I'll be honest, it was a little tough to get hyped for matchups like Ducks/Bruins and Sharks/Flames after eight days of high-stakes best-on-best. Just a slight downshift in intensity, you might say. So sure, we'll talk NHL where we need to. But we're also going to get in one last round of 4 Nations talk, starting right now.

Bonus five: Final thoughts on the 4 Nations Face-off

5. Jaccob Slavin — Has anyone ever gone from underrated to so underrated they're overrated to "wait, even though we're all saying he's underrated I think he might somehow still be underrated" in one week? I'm not completely sure, but I do know there was a certain point in this tournament when Slavin broke my brain. I might still be having nightmares years from now.

4. Elias Pettersson and Adam Fox — One of the sure things of any short tournament is that a few star players will string together bad games and everyone will freak out, including people who'd be smart enough never to overreact to a bad three-game stretch in the regular season. But when the spotlight is brighter and everything feels more important, suddenly a mild slump becomes much more. And it's almost always nonsense.

Almost. I'm a bit worried about these two guys.

Pettersson is the easy one. He's coming off a bizarre year-long stretch that saw him sign a monster extension, struggle through a brutal postseason, and then look miserable while all the J.T. Miller drama played out. With that scenario finally over, 4 Nations felt like an ideal chance for him to rediscover his game, and maybe even a little bit of joy in playing it. Instead, he was all but invisible. No points, no real chances and barely any ice time. With that NMC looming, I think it's officially time to be concerned here.

As for Fox, you certainly can't say he wasn't noticeable. But that's not always a good thing for a defenseman, and Fox had a tough tournament in which he looked outmatched for stretches. Fox is a Norris winner, but that was in 2021, and it's starting to feel like it's fair to ask whether he's already hit his peak before settling in as a very-good-but-maybe-not-quite-elite player. That question seems to be resonating in New York — check the comments on this piece. It's not like the Rangers can afford much more in the way of bad news this season, so here's hoping Fox's showing was a blip and not a vision of the future.

3. Brady Tkachuk — If I'm a Senators fan, I'm very happy about two things. First, that Tkachuk got to play in by far the biggest hockey games of his life, and looked every bit like the sort of difference-maker who can elevate his game in big moments. And second, that the Sens are on their way to a playoff appearance this year, because good luck selling Tkachuk on a state of perpetual rebuild after the week he just had. Fans in Ottawa know the "maybe Brady will want to go play with his brother down south" narratives are coming, and a playoff run would help shut that noise off before it gets a chance to really get going.

Not ranked: Brad Marchand — Good tournament, great soundbites, more international gold for the collection, but the entire country is now back to hating you. Enjoy riding out the season and missing the playoffs, you cheap-shotting bum. But uh, stay healthy for 2026, we'll need you buddy jerkface.

2. These guys who all get one sentence each — Zach Werenski is an absolute stud. Erik Karlsson is potentially tradeable again. Dylan Larkin and (especially) Lucas Raymond might be even better than we think. Basically every Ranger looked bad, which seems suboptimal. The Charlie McAvoy situation is a mess and you hope he's going to be OK, but you're telling me the dude was already hurt when he sent Connor McDavid into low-earth orbit? Brock Nelson is maybe not the big-game deadline target we thought he might be. Mikko Rantanen didn't scare anyone and I am trying not to worry. Jack Hughes was fine defensively but just barely outscored his brothers, who are both defensemen and also did not play. Drew Doughty, still a stud. Also that one player you like is really good so now you can't say I didn't mention him.

1. Jordan Binnington — I apologize. While I see no need to go digging for specific soundbites, it's possible I may have spent the days before Thursday's final publicly suggesting that Binnington wasn't as good as Connor Hellebuyck, just based on flimsy premises like his numbers, the eye test or the way he kept giving up easy goals every game. This was, of course, incorrect. Binnington was actually giving up those goals on purpose to lull the Americans into a false sense of security before morphing into late-90s Dominik Hasek as soon as overtime arrived.

Brilliant, and I should have seen it coming. If we ever meet, our new national hero gets to throw one water bottle at my head.

Road to the Cup

The five teams with the best chances of winning the Stanley Cup.

RIP to the legendary Mike Lange, one of the most memorable voices in hockey history. Rossi nails the tribute here.

5. Vegas Golden Knights (34-17-6, +33 true goals differential*) — We all realize they're going to LTIR Shea Theodore and then use the cap room to trade for Rantanen, right? Start processing that now, you don't want to take the full brunt of the rage all at once when it happens.

4. Edmonton Oilers (34-19-4, +24) — I think we can all agree there's a non-zero chance Leon Draisaitl spent the last two weeks sitting at home and stewing over all the world's other top players having fun without him, and will now go nuclear on the league for the rest of the season.

3. Dallas Stars (37-18-2, +45) — Did you enjoy the Thomas Harley coming out party last week? As a guy who maybe got just a little bit

ahead of myself when I had him as my long-shot Norris pick, I sure did. Also, based on last night, it's possible Jason Robertson is just a little bit cranky about being left off of Team USA.

2. Washington Capitals (38-11-8, +68) — Just a brutal tournament for all the Capitals stars, I didn't notice a single one of them the whole time. But I suppose it's possible that absolutely speed-bagging the Penguins and the Oilers in one weekend will be a small consolation.

1. Winnipeg Jets (40-14-3, +68) — It was a weird 4 Nations final to be a Jets fan. Hellebuyck didn't end up stealing gold, but looked fantastic even in defeat. Josh Morrissey got sick and couldn't play. And Kyle Connor was somehow a healthy scratch despite being the leading goal scorer for a team that would finish one goal short. None of that changes my view of the Jets as the team to beat right now.

(Also, Saturday night's shootout win over the Blues means we can now congratulate the Maple Leafs, annual winner of the "last team standing without a shootout" award. The trophy is in the mail.)

*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.

Not ranked: Team Canada — Sorry, let's watch the goal again real quick, just to refresh our memories.

If I were drawing up the defense, I probably wouldn't leave the best player in the world wide open there, but the Americans did just that and then watched him pass the puck to Connor McDavid. (That's right, Mitch Marner is good again. Try to keep up.)

We didn't learn a ton about this team over the tournament, beyond that Sam Bennett is better than you thought and Brandon Hagel has jokes. Instead, 4 Nations was about confirming what we already knew but may have had room to doubt: Sidney Crosby is the greatest best-on-best player of all time, Connor McDavid can indeed win the big one and Nathan MacKinnon is unstoppable when he wants to be, at least for the first 65 minutes of every game.

And sure, the goaltending is still a question mark. It all worked out in the end this time, but maybe you bring Logan Thompson next time, just in case.

This wasn't the 2014 team, rolling through a best-on-best with such ruthless efficiency that today's fans barely even remember that tournament. The gap between Canada and the U.S. has all but disappeared, another key thing we already suspected we knew. And of course, teams like Finland and Sweden and beyond will have a thing or two to say about any future coronations.

Enjoy the win for now, and then get ready to do it all over again in another year. As defending champs. Again.

The bottom five

The five teams headed toward dead last and the best lottery odds for a top pick that could be James Hagens, Matthew Schaefer or someone else.

The league announced that this year's draft will be held in Los Angeles on June 27 and 28. Remember, it's the debut of the decentralized format, where the top prospects will be in attendance but the teams themselves will not. The NHL is promising a "creative approach," and yes, that does fill me with a sense of dread, thanks for asking.

5. Pittsburgh Penguins (23-27-9, -40) — Yeah, I'm starting to think they may not make a big second-half run.

4. Buffalo Sabres (23-27-5, -9) — Siri, please find me a metaphor for the Sabres season that's a little too on-the-nose. Literally.

Yep, that works. Anyway, happy anniversary to those who celebrate.

3. Nashville Predators (20-29-7, -40) — After an ugly 4 Nations, you wonder what the next step will be with Juuse Saros. He's been the NHL's workhorse for years now, and it didn't seem to bother him. But with the season already lost, you wonder if it would make sense for the Predators to ease off down the stretch, if only to set him up for a rebound next year. Given his contract, they'll desperately need one. Getting badly outplayed by Nico Daws probably wasn't the start he was looking for.

2. Chicago Blackhawks (17-33-7, -48) — The big news is Seth Jones asking for a trade. It's worth noting that asking is not the same as demanding, and it's hard to envision a scenario where Jones and the five full years left of his $9.5 million cap hit are dealt during the season, but it's one more sign that patience is running out for the post-tank Hawks to find their way back to playing meaningful hockey.

Also, shout out to Frank Pellico.

1. San Jose Sharks (15-36-7, -65) — It's all about the deadline now, and Eric has your trade tiers. The Tyler Toffoli scenario is interesting, but Eric thinks it's unlikely.

Not ranked: Team USA — Let's check in on how the Americans are responding after very publicly calling their shot and then falling just short.

Team USA, stung by 4 Nations loss, draws inspiration from Olympics: 'That's the big one'

Ah. Yes, of course. I might have thought that the championship game against your longtime rival, held on your home ice, in front of one of the largest audiences to ever watch a hockey game in your country, that you vowed to win on behalf of your president, might be "the big one." But no, it was actually the next tournament that really mattered all along. Good to know.

And sure, the Americans are in great shape to win in Italy next year, and again at the 2028 World Cup. The roster they sent to the 4 Nations was young enough that there's no reason to expect a major overhaul. There will be changes, because there always are, and the talent pool is deep enough that there are very good players who didn't make this roster and will be looking to force their way in next time. The future is bright.

The frustration is that the future has been bright for decades now, and Team USA can't quite get it across the finish line. They came as close as you possibly can last week, ending up one goal away in a tournament where several of their best players weren't available by the end. Would a Quinn Hughes or a Matthew Tkachuk or a Charlie McAvoy have been the difference? Would all three? We'll never know for sure, but it's not exactly hard to imagine.

It's possible, although not guaranteed, that this roster will be healthier and deeper next year. It's also possible they'll get elite goaltending again, although with that position you're never sure. Who knows if they'll have to go through some version of a Russian team. And of course, a year is a long enough time frame for new stars to emerge and change the balance of power. But however it plays out, the Americans will head into next year as strong contenders at the very least, if not the outright favorites.

And they'll be motivated, because apparently the next one is the big one.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.25.2025

1341068 Websites

The Athletic / Steve Carell, Justin Bieber headline Los Angeles charity hockey game: 'These guys were ready'

By Eric Stephens

Feb 24, 2025

LOS ANGELES — Playing in a charity hockey game hosted by the L.A. Kings on Sunday, Justin Bieber took it upon himself to drop the gloves against a former NHL player.

"I can say I got beat up by Justin Bieber," said Jeremy Roenick, a recent inductee into the Hockey Hall of Fame. "That's a great day."

The "fight" they had saw Bieber, a noted hockey enthusiast and proud Toronto Maple Leafs fan, pull Roenick's jersey over the veteran's head in a tussle following a goal by Roenick. It was one of numerous lighthearted moments that came out of an event at Crypto.com Arena to raise money and support recovery efforts for the January wildfires that destroyed neighborhoods throughout suburban Los Angeles, including Pacific Palisades and Altadena.

Skate For LA Strong recognized the first responders who fought the destructive fires, with the Palisades and Eaton blazes claiming 29 lives and burning an estimated 16,200 structures. Those responders and their

families were the honored attendees for Sunday's charity games, with four teams comprised of celebrities, firefighters, NHL alumni and other personalities in competition.

It was a motley crew of individuals coming together. Former MLB catcher Joe Mauer, a Minnesota native and resident who gravitated to baseball and basketball instead, played on ponds but went away from organized hockey when the family saw how expensive it was for his older brother to play. "I never thought I had to leave Minnesota to play a hockey game," Mauer joked. "Here we are."

There was no viral moment like at the 2017 NHL All-Star Weekend in Los Angeles, when Bieber was driven into the glass by Chris Pronger, complete with a perfectly captured photo of Bieber being smushed by the legendary defenseman, proudly wearing a devilish smile. But on Sunday, Bieber did get a drop pass from Jeff Carter and attempted a toe-drag move, only to be denied by Billy Blase, a 37-year-old Santa Monica native who played in the U.S. National Team Development Program and for Yale.

Steve Carell, a goalie in college before he gained fame on "The Office," was playing defense — and not all that detailed — on this afternoon for Team Black. Actor Taylor Kitsch showed off his hockey skills from his days of Junior A play in the BCHL by scoring a neat goal for Team Blue. Danny DeVito was one of the guest coaches and cracked off one-liners.

"We're going full bore on these guys," DeVito spoke of his pregame message for Team Blue. "I want to see chiclets." And of an early shift change, the diminutive star of "Taxi," "Batman Returns" and "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia" quipped, "That line wants to lie down."

"Stay at home," Will Ferrell, noted Kings fan and season-ticket holder, barked out to his Team Black players during the game. "Stay at home. I don't know what that means. But stay at home."

Manon Rhéaume, twice a world champion goalie for Canada who once played in two exhibition games for the Tampa Bay Lightning, wanted no part of the net.

"Especially in a game like this," Rhéaume said, smiling. "Nobody can play defense."

Levity and fun were the order of the day.

"I know a lot of people that have lost their homes," said David Boreanaz, Philadelphia Flyers fan and star of "Bones" and "SEAL Team." "In speaking with them, it doesn't stop. The grief doesn't stop, and it stays with them. And this is an opportunity to shed some grief for them, give some healing for them."

Team Red, with actors Vince Vaughn and Cobie Smulders running the bench, was the last team standing as it won both of its games in shutout fashion. Vaughn threw credit Smulders' way in jest, saying the "How I Met Your Mother" star and member of the Marvel Universe was "doing the little things. Day in and day out. You see it on the ice." Smulders and her husband, actor Taran Killam, lost their home in the Palisades.

The competitive element that fueled the former NHL players in their careers quickly bubbled to the surface. Vaughn didn't have to channel Peter La Fleur, his "Dodgeball" character, to provide inspiration for a ragtag group.

"These guys were ready," Vaughn said. "I said, 'Just don't get content. There's one more to go.' And I didn't have to say anything. These guys were off the leash and ready. I felt bad for the other team at some point."

Roenick, with tongue in cheek, chimed in, "We were a well-oiled machine today. There's no question about it."

But there was a serious element that couldn't be ignored. The Kings were the first Los Angeles sports team to be directly impacted as their scheduled Jan. 8 home game against the Calgary Flames was postponed. The Los Angeles Rams had to relocate to State Farm Stadium in Phoenix — the home of the Arizona Cardinals — to play their first-round NFL playoff game. The NBA's Lakers and Clippers also had to move home contests.

The Kings helped lead the way in recovery efforts. Their practice facility in El Segundo became a donation center. Team president Luc Robitaille worked with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman on arranging the charity game. Teams throughout the league made donations through 50-50 ticket sales at their home games.

"I remember talking to Craig Conroy, who's the GM in Calgary," Robitaille said. "No one hesitated. We knew we had to cancel the game and move on. And then we saw how it just seemed to get bigger and bigger for the next few days.

"Those are things that happen and there's things that are much more important. Even though we love our game and it's our job and everything, it was way above anything that we've ever seen."

Jason Northgrave, a firefighter based out of El Segundo, was on the front lines of the Palisades blaze. Hockey is in Northgrave's blood. A native of London, Ont., who counts himself as a lifelong Toronto Maple Leafs fan, he cherished moments such as meeting Rob Blake, the Hall of Fame defenseman and current Kings general manager, or Dion Phaneuf skating with him and his son. He reveled in hearing the "game plan" from coaches Ferrell and Snoop Dogg.

"For me today, growing up a hockey fan and being here getting to play with some guys that I grew up watching, it's amazing," Northgrave said. "And having the celebrities here too to come out and show their love and support means a lot."

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1341069 Websites

The Athletic / Before the NHL, an all-Black hockey league helped to innovate the modern game

By Julian McKenzie

Feb 24, 2025

Jean-Marie Guerrier was surprised when he first learned about the Colored Hockey League of the Maritimes (CHLM), particularly as a volunteer for Black History Ottawa working to push more stories to educate the culture of Canadians of African descent. Guerrier is not alone in his discovery, as many are unaware of how prominent Black history has featured itself in a predominantly White sport.

But that could change.

This past week, the existence of the CHLM was celebrated through youth hockey clinics, a presentation and a panel on the league's history. The league was acknowledged during the Ottawa Senators' Black History Month celebration game Saturday. And on Monday, a game honoring the CHLM's anniversary will be played at the Canadian Tire Centre in Ottawa, featuring volunteer players representing the Halifax Eurekas and Dartmouth Jubilees, the two squads who played in the league's inaugural game in 1895.

Four Black Nova Scotia-based community leaders once enticed people to join their churches and grow their congregations in a unique way: a church hockey league that would see Black men attend service in the mornings and play the sport afterward. This year marks the 130th anniversary of the CHLM. Hundreds of Black players played for teams across Eastern Canada in provinces such as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island decades before the NHL began play in 1917.

"It helps to get over the perception people have sometimes: that hockey is not for Black people, or Black people don't play hockey or participate in hockey," said Guerrier, the vice president and treasurer of Black History Ottawa.

"With this commemorative game, we have players that are in their 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s who have been playing hockey for a long time, as well as youth who participate. The fact that a lot of people learn about this league, some for the first time, it really inspires them to keep going with their dreams — especially for the youth — of being a hockey player."

The CHLM's existence predates Hockey Hall of Famer Willie O'Ree, who broke the NHL's color barrier in January 1958, and even fellow Hockey Hall of Famer Herb Carnegie, long considered the best Black player who never made the NHL but played on the first all-Black line in professional hockey.

Long after the league's end in the 1930s, its story continues to hold interest. Its innovations and impact are seen in the pro ranks, all the way to the NHL.

The history of the league was documented by Canadian researchers George and Darril Fosty, in the book "Black Ice: The Lost History of the Colored Hockey League of the Maritimes 1895-1925," which was released in 2004. Eighteen years later, the documentary "Black Ice" was based on the book and featured LeBron James, his longtime business partner Maverick Carter and rapper Drake as executive producers. The documentary won a People's Choice Documentary Award at the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival.

In the book, Jubilees goalie Henry Franklyn is noted as the first goaltender to make saves while falling to his knees, a style that has morphed into the butterfly goaltending style that is commonplace today. Additionally, the slap shot, long attributed to Montreal Canadiens legend Bernie "Boom Boom" Geoffrion, was innovated by Eurekas star Eddie Martin in the late 1800s and used often in the early 1900s.

George Fosty believes Martin's accuracy and power in hockey stemmed from his skills in another sport. Martin spent the warmer months playing baseball, as did many of the league's participants, and similarly swung his hockey stick as he would a baseball bat.

"People made note of this in the newspapers," Fosty said. "There's at least two newspaper accounts of teams complaining about him and the accuracy of his shot. But it makes sense that Martin was a baseball player and he had taken his skill level to hockey and incorporated the style of swinging at the puck in the same way he would have swung at a baseball."

The CHLM faced its share of racism throughout its heyday. White teams and leagues barred Black players from joining theirs. Additionally, Black teams could only play months after White teams and leagues had concluded their seasons, meaning CHLM games were often played in poor ice conditions.

Still, fans of many races attended league contests, and the games were covered by local media. The league was seen as faster and more physical compared to its counterparts.

The CHLM's best teams competed against each other annually for the Colored Hockey Championship, similarly to how White teams battled for the Stanley Cup, known then as the Dominion Hockey Challenge Cup. However, CHLM teams never crossed over and competed for the Cup.

"We don't quite understand why no team ever challenged for the Stanley Cup because there were at least two teams, maybe three, that would have been probably better candidates than some of these other teams that had gone out and sent out letters and requests," Fosty said. "I would think that the Halifax Eurekas, for example, and maybe even the West End Rangers out of Charlottetown would have been better teams than the Dawson Nuggets."

Despite the CHLM's growth, it ended in the 1930s with many of its original players retiring. Real-world factors such as the Great Depression and other economic constraints also played a role in the league coming to a close.

"This league survived racism. It survived the Halifax Explosion, survived World War I. It finally didn't survive the Great Depression," Fosty said. "That was the last straw that broke the camel's back."

The Fosty brothers came across the history of the league while writing another book, "Splendid is the Sun: The 5000-Year History of Hockey." It took them seven years to complete the book, which was released in October 2004. They met with local historians such as Bob Dawson, who helped promote their findings. Dawson is one-third of the first all-Black forward line in Canadian university hockey history as a member of the Saint Mary's University men's hockey team in February 1970.

Despite initial skepticism and criticism from journalists and hockey historians — Fosty says he and his brother were even called "frauds" — the CHLM has now received recognition and commemoration.

"I guess that is due to the work of George, Darril and myself to keep that story alive and to keep it out there, to the point where more and more people have come to accept that history and highlight it vis-à-vis articles, podcasts and so forth," Dawson said.

In 2020, Canada Post released a stamp in honor of the Colored Hockey Championship, featuring teams from the league. The stamp "recognizes the achievements and struggles of pioneering Black Canadian players who overcame adversity, broke down racial barriers and changed how ice hockey is played."

Last October, the Canadian government recognized the league as "an event of national historic significance" through Parks Canada's National Program of Historical Commemoration. Last Monday, a plaque celebrating the league was unveiled at the Black Culture Centre for Nova Scotia in Halifax. This came after Dawson filed a nomination to the Canadian government, seeking to bring more awareness to the "history and the importance" of the CHLM.

On Monday, Dawson hopes more people continue to discover how intertwined hockey is with Black Canadian culture.

"I strongly believe that it's more than just a game," Dawson said. "Blacks are part of that history, and Black hockey history is part of Canadian history."

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ESPN / NHL trade deadline 2025: Preview, picks in play for 32 teams – ESPN

Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton

29–36 minutes

Feb 24, 2025, 12:00 PM

The 2024-25 NHL trade season began early, as the Carolina Hurricanes landed Mikko Rantanen and the New York Rangers secured J.T. Miller. But many big names remain on the board, raising the usual questions as we look ahead to the March 7 deadline:

Who are the contenders that could make a big push? Which teams are caught between either going for a wild-card spot or moving on from players to collect draft capital? And how can the teams that are destined for the lottery use the deadline to gain more draft picks for their rebuilds?

Here's a comprehensive look at what the trade deadline could mean for every team, complete with the players and picks that are expected to be in play, as well as the salary cap restrictions. Plus, we identify the moves we think each team should make.

Stats are collected from sites such as Natural Stat Trick, Hockey Reference and Evolving Hockey. Cap space figures are per PuckPedia as of Feb. 23.

Note: Kristen Shilton provided the guide for the Atlantic and Metropolitan teams, while Ryan S. Clark handled the Central and Pacific clubs.

ATLANTIC DIVISION

Boston Bruins

Deadline status: Proceed with caution

Cap space: $5.72 million

Players, picks in play: Trent Frederic, Justin Brazeau, Morgan Geekie, Parker Wotherspoon

The Bruins are in a tough spot. Boston doesn't look like a contender this season but there's no desire to throw in the towel. So, does GM Don Sweeney go fishing for a low-risk rental or two to give Boston a potential boost? Or does he listen to offers for upcoming free agents such as Frederic and Brazeau and simply let the Bruins ride this season out (mostly) as is and see how the chips fall?

Boston's likely best bet is to stand pat and figure out the organization's optimal next direction in the offseason. The Bruins have been battered by injuries -- the hole left by Hampus Lindholm has been particularly tough -- but there's no reason to make any rash moves, either. Sweeney should

do his due diligence without the expectation of making the Bruins better or worse.

Buffalo Sabres

Deadline status: Motivated dealers

Cap space: $22.73 million

Players, picks in play: Bowen Byram, Dylan Cozens, Jordan Greenway, Jack Quinn, Jason Zucker

Buffalo has let another season slip away, and the best thing GM Kevyn Adams can do to salvage anything from this mess is to be an active trader at the deadline. The Sabres have players of interest to contending clubs -- like Zucker and Greenway -- and young players who haven't panned out for the organization -- hello, Cozens and Quinn! -- that will continue losing value if Adams doesn't act soon.

There's no use in pretending this Sabres' squad can just run it back next season and hope something magically changes. Adams standing pat at the deadline won't benefit Buffalo now or in the future. If the Sabres are serious about ever seeing the playoffs again, then the road there starts by making hard decisions right now.

Detroit Red Wings

Deadline status: Optimistic adders

Cap space: $7.84 million

Players, picks in play: Amadeus Lombardi, Alex Lyon, Carter Mazur, Jeff Petry, Vladimir Tarasenko

Detroit has pushed its way into the playoff picture this season, and GM Steve Yzerman would be well-served in helping the team stay there by making a few key additions at the deadline -- namely, another center and a defenseman.

Yzerman could target players on expiring contracts such as Jake Evans, or even guys with some remaining term like Ryan Strome or Connor Murphy. Regardless of which players Yzerman brings on board, his strategy should be to see the Red Wings get better by March 7 and take advantage of their impressive surge.

Detroit has waited a long time to be in this position again, and it would behoove Yzerman to give his players confidence in their ability to stay in the hunt through April.

Florida Panthers

Deadline status: Cautious adders

Cap space: $2.73 million

Players, picks in play: Spencer Knight, Tomas Nosek, Nate Schmidt

Florida doesn't have much to dangle out there at the deadline. It has no picks in the first three rounds of this upcoming draft, and it won't be looking to move players on the roster either given how well the season's gone. It's exactly for that reason Florida is unlikely to do much at all before March 7.

The Panthers don't have a weakness so obvious it must be addressed by GM Bill Zito. Perhaps an additional defenseman or a depth forward would give the reigning Stanley Cup champions some insurance on what they hope will be another long spring. If nothing materializes to Zito's satisfaction -- that works with his limited resources -- Florida will be no worse off. It's an enviable spot to be in.

Montreal Canadiens

Deadline status: Set the market

Cap space: $7.55 million

Players, picks in play: Joel Armia, Christian Dvorak, Jake Evans, David Savard

For a brief moment, Montreal looked like it was putting together a special run. But the Canadiens went into the 4 Nations break on a 1-7-1 skid, six points out of a wild-card spot and with little reason to believe GM Kent Hughes shouldn't be trading away whatever assets he can by the deadline.

Montreal has a slew of pending UFAs -- Armia, Evans, Dvorak, et al. -- who could be valuable additions in more competitive lineups, and the potential returns might set the Canadiens up well for future seasons.

Evans is likely to draw the most interest because of his age (28). Given the lack of a long-term deal coming together, Hughes should push hard to find a suitor for Evans now while he's garnering serious attention.

Ottawa Senators

Deadline status: Breakthrough adders

Cap space: $1.66 million

Players, picks in play: Michael Amadio, Anton Forsberg, David Perron

Ottawa is holding fast to a wild-card spot, and retaining it should put the Senators in the market to add at the deadline. Or at least that's their goal.

The reality? They don't have much to offer. Ottawa has a weak prospect pool, only one first-round pick in the next two drafts, its exciting young core is mostly locked in, and there's little cap space to work with on building around it.

GM Steve Staios will simply have to get creative. Ottawa needs a forward and defenseman, at minimum, to give itself a chance of staying on track in the wide-open Eastern Conference. Brandon Tanev and Ryan Donato both make sense in the Senators' scheme; Ivan Provorov could help boost the blue line. Staios could also prioritize veteran savvy, considering the lack of postseason experience in his current group. David Savard or Carson Soucy might be viable targets from that perspective.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Deadline status: Bold adders

Cap space: $3.97 million

Players, picks in play: 2026 first-round pick, Nick Perbix, Conor Sheary

The Lightning have been perennial deadline adders because they believe -- with good reason -- that they can make a Cup run any season. And GM Julien BriseBois should feel particularly emboldened considering his team's play has improved of late. What the Lightning needs most is forward help; particularly in the bottom six. The team is too top-heavy; the stars are performing to standard, but they're not getting a ton of consistent support elsewhere.

Alex Tuch's name keeps bubbling up around Tampa Bay because he'd be an ideal fit -- he has got the speed, skill and versatility (plus some edge) and a reasonable $4.75 million cap hit. Kyle Palmieri is another option BriseBois should pursue. The Lightning could pursue Jake Evans if they target a center.

Coach Jon Cooper gets the pieces to fit and creates chemistry even in the shortest spans (i.e. at the 4 Nations Face-Off). BriseBois can do the shopping; chef Cooper will make the most of Tampa Bay's ingredients.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Deadline status: Now or never

Cap space: $2.20 million

Players, picks in play: 2026 first-round pick, Easton Cowan, Fraser Minten, Nick Robertson

Toronto has to be done tinkering. It hasn't worked, not when the stakes are highest (i.e., in the playoffs), and the Leafs are running out of time to see their vaunted core carry them to the Cup. Toronto's main problem is it doesn't have much to offer outside of its top prospects such as Cowan and Minten. But if GM Brad Treliving wants to add a true difference-maker (and he should), those players represent the going rate.

The Leafs must acquire a reliable third-line center who won't get run over in the postseason. Ryan O'Reilly -- who was brought in as a deadline addition in 2023 -- or Brayden Schenn would qualify. And Jake Evans has been tied to the Leafs for a reason, too.

Toronto would benefit from adding another defenseman, but it would need to be a short-term veteran (like Carson Soucy) so Treliving can put the majority of his assets into adding the right forward.

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

Carolina Hurricanes

Deadline status: Waiting it out

Cap space: $499,000

Players, picks in play: 2025 first-round pick, 2026 first-round pick, Alexander Nikishin

Carolina got a jump on the league when it acquired Mikko Rantanen from Colorado in January. Rantanen hasn't found his stride with the Hurricanes -- with just one goal and two points in six games -- but these things can take time. Hence why Carolina brought in Rantanen well before March 7.

The Hurricanes also added Taylor Hall for some veteran forward help, and if Carolina were to do anything else before the deadline it should be in the same vein. GM Eric Tulsky should look to a skater like Jake Evans to ensure the Hurricanes are stout down the middle. Depending on the ask on another winger -- such as Mathieu Olivier or another low-risk player on an expiring contract -- it could give Carolina the boost it needs to maximize an already impressive collection of offensive talent.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Deadline status: Conservative adders

Cap space: $68.06 million

Players, picks in play: 2025 first-round pick, Mathieu Olivier, Ivan Provorov

Columbus was fortunate to have plucked Dante Fabbro off waivers from Nashville as a pre-deadline addition who has worked out nicely so far. But don't expect GM Don Waddell to stop there. The Blue Jackets have exceeded expectations -- even without Boone Jenner in the lineup most of the season and missed time for Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko -- and Waddell will make an effort to reward his group with some depth acquisitions to give it a shot to compete until the end.

Ryan Donato or Nick Robertson would be interesting options to fill bottom-six roles, and Scott Laughton would be a versatile player for Columbus to slot somewhere, too. The real question is whether Waddell has confidence that when Jenner and Monahan are both available, the pair can play up to their usual standard. If not, he'll want to take advantage of the trade market to keep Columbus from slipping out of the playoff bubble.

New Jersey Devils

Deadline status: Add, add, add

Cap space: $1.30 million

Players, picks in play: 2025 second-round pick, 2026 first-round pick, Anton Silayev

New Jersey is another squad that needs to build down the middle. Erik Haula has been a strong stopgap as the Devils' third-line center, but it wouldn't hurt to upgrade there. Trent Frederic would benefit from a change of scenery, and he could slide around the Devils' middle six depending on injuries or other trade acquisitions. And there's always the potential for a reunion in New Jersey with former Devil Kyle Palmieri.

The Devils have enough talent on defense to feel good about their blue-line status now and in the future. If GM Tom Fitzgerald really wants to push his chips in, then scoring depth and perhaps adding another goaltender -- given Jacob Markstrom's injury status -- should be the priority. And the sooner, the better, too -- New Jersey appears primed for a playoff run, and bringing in those new players to get acclimated will be huge for the Devils' chances.

New York Islanders

Deadline status: Rejuvenating adders

Cap space: $2.73 million

Players, picks in play: Brock Nelson, Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Kyle Palmieri

Given that the Islanders have a shot at the postseason, it's only right for GM Lou Lamoriello to tweak his roster enough that they stay in that mix. Nelson and Palmieri could both be traded to potentially return what the Islanders are lacking -- and that's a bona fide scoring threat.

Would the former Leafs GM consider a reunion with Toronto's Nick Robertson, who, given the right opportunity and appropriate ice time, might provide that extra punch up front? Nothing should be off the table when it comes to adding a young forward in that vein.

This team also has the worst power play in the league, so any skater the Islanders bring in should have some experience on special teams. Lamoriello should also capitalize on the interest in his veteran forwards even if it's just acquiring future assets -- New York went four consecutive seasons without a first-round draft pick. Time to start making up for that drought.

New York Rangers

Deadline status: Shopping cart is out

Cap space: $11.99 million

Players, picks in play: 2026 first-round pick, Will Borgen, Zac Jones, Ryan Lindgren, K'Andre Miller

The Rangers followed the Hurricanes' lead and got into their trade business early -- Jacob Trouba, Filip Chytil, Kaapo Kakko and Victor Mancini are out; J.T. Miller and Borgen are in. But the Rangers shouldn't stop there. Although this team spiraled early this season, it has rebounded to be in the playoff hunt again, and GM Chris Drury's addition of Miller showed his belief in New York staying within reach of a wild-card spot.

Miller and Lindgren haven't been consistent difference-makers on the blue line, and swapping them for new options will take pressure off Adam Fox to do it all on the Rangers' back end. Mario Ferraro might be of assistance there, or if Drury wanted to take on a pending RFA like Bowen Byram, it could be an audition for how the two sides might match up in a longer-term relationship.

But the Rangers' focus has to be on the here and now. Filling in the blanks with some second- and third-line scoring is going to provide insurance New York needs given the roller-coaster seasons that most of their forwards have endured. Drury can't be too conservative if New York is going to have a successful stretch drive.

Philadelphia Flyers

Deadline status: Selling sunset (on the season)

Cap space: $6.55 million

Players, picks in play: 2025 first-round pick, Scott Laughton, Rasmus Ristolainen

It's highly unlikely that the Flyers make the postseason. Therefore, GM Danny Briere should be accepting serious inquiries. Briere already flipped Morgan Frost and Joel Farabee to Calgary for Andrei Kuzmenko, a prospect and picks.

Whatever Briere targets in return for Philadelphia's other players must be with a similar eye on the next steps in the team's rebuild -- namely bolstering the organization's goalie depth and stocking the cupboards with some exciting prospects for future middle-six and blue-line roles. Sounds simple enough, right?

To be clear, it's not all doom and gloom for the Flyers. Matvei Michkov has provided a fine boost in his rookie campaign, and there are intriguing players in the franchise's pipeline. But the returns for Laughton and Ristolainen could help set up Philadelphia for even more success down the road given what genuine interest there is out there for their services. Briere should keep his phone close.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Deadline status: Soft dealers

Cap space: $8.47 million

Players, picks in play: 2025 first-round pick, Anthony Beauvillier, Matt Grzelcyk, Matt Nieto, Rickard Rakell

Pittsburgh is likely too far out of the playoff picture to merit GM Kyle Dubas bringing on depth skaters to help boost the Penguins' chances of making it. Yes, Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin & Co. would probably prefer that to throwing in the towel, but it's important to be realistic.

Pittsburgh's focus can begin turning toward the future, and that means putting Rakell out there for teams with current postseason aspirations and prospects they can send back to a Penguins group in need of fresh young faces. Dubas has prioritized prospects in the past who are closer to NHL-ready than not, and that strategy has come with mixed results. Looking at the quality of these skaters' long-term potential is critical.

Pittsburgh has avoided the "R" word for a while, but this offseason could tell a different tale. Dubas has some assets to toss out there now to expedite whatever process is going to turn Pittsburgh back into a perennial contender -- whether it's called a rebuild, a retool, a reload or something else.

Washington Capitals

Deadline status: Better be adding

Cap space: $3.65 million

Players, picks in play: Alexander Alexeyev, Hendrix Lapierre, Sonny Milano

The Capitals have been this season's surprising success story, and not just because Alex Ovechkin is closing in on Wayne Gretzky's goal-scoring record. It only makes sense for GM Chris Patrick to capitalize on that by adding some depth to the lineup.

They could use some help in their bottom six at center and on the wing. Veterans like Yanni Gourde, Scott Laughton and Brandon Tanev could all be intriguing short-term options to complement Washington's younger core, which has done well this season but still doesn't have the kind of experience those more seasoned skaters bring to the ice and the dressing room.

But it's crucial for the Capitals not to disrupt the chemistry they've worked hard to cultivate and that has continuously paid off for them. We're not talking drastic, swing-for-the-fences trades here. It's about Washington feeling confident that it has enough personnel to carry it through what could be a long spring.

CENTRAL DIVISION

Chicago Blackhawks

Deadline status: Continue adding to the farm system

Cap space: $18.21 million

Players, picks in play: F Ryan Donato, D Seth Jones, F Pat Maroon, D Alec Martinez, F Craig Smith

With Seth Jones telling the Chicago Sun-Times that he's talking to the club about a potential trade, it presents an opportunity for the Blackhawks to add more draft capital. The key word here being: potential.

Jones has three years remaining on his deal worth $9.5 million annually. Having such a sizable salary cap hit makes moving on from Jones a challenge.

How do the interested teams go about clearing the space to make a deal happen -- while also ensuring they present the sort of package that pleases the Blackhawks? As for the Blackhawks, a Jones trade would likely include salary retention, meaning they would have all three retention spots filled for this season (they'll get Jake McCabe and Mikko Rantanen off their books in the offseason).

Colorado Avalanche

Deadline status: Strengthen the second line

Cap space: $4.76 million

Players, picks in play: two 2025 second-round picks, 2026 first-round pick, 2027 first-round pick

Anything or nearly anyone could be in play with the Avalanche. Just ask Mikko Rantanen.

But more directly, adding more second-line help appears to be the area of greatest need. Since they won the Stanley Cup in 2022, they've struggled to create a consistent second line. It's possible they might have that once Valeri Nichushkin returns from injury and he's paired with Jonathan Drouin and Casey Mittelstadt, who has been inconsistent during his first full season in Denver.

Or they could seek to add reinforcements elsewhere, with the idea that it could be the difference between securing a Central Division spot or a wild-card entry.

Dallas Stars

Deadline status: Maybe add more? Maybe hold firm?

Cap space: $4.60 million

Players, picks in play: 2026 first-round pick, 2027 first-round pick

The Stars are in a championship window and have been for the past few years. But they are in one of the more nuanced situations ahead of the deadline.

They've built much of the current core through the draft, which is why they're hesitant to trade draft capital. But they already moved on from their 2025 first-round pick and a conditional 2025 third-round pick to get Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci.

That trade reinforces that they could be willing to part with draft capital for the right player or players. Is that something they could do when it comes to filling the void left by Miro Heiskanen's injury? He's expected to return by the playoffs, which presents one of two options: Do the Stars try to add more help? Or will prospect Lian Bichsel show the coaching staff and front office that he can be trusted with an extended run on the big club?

Minnesota Wild

Deadline status: Add scoring help around the edges

Cap space: $8.23 million

Players, picks in play: 2025 second-round pick, 2026 first-round pick, 2026 second-round pick

The challenge facing the Wild is finding legitimate scoring options on team-friendly terms. Their collective goal prevention is why they're challenging for a playoff spot. Their collective inability to consistently score goals, however, could be what gets them eliminated in the first round.

They're around league average in goals per game, but their plus-4 goal differential was the second lowest among the Western Conference teams in a playoff spot at the start of the 4 Nations.

What complicates everything is the combined $14.743 million cap hit from the Zach Parise and Ryan Suter buyouts. That drops to $1.6 million in the offseason. But until then, it leaves the Wild needing to get creative in order to get more scoring power in the lineup. Once Kirill Kaprizov comes off LTIR, his $9 million cap hit must be taken into account.

Nashville Predators

Deadline status: Figure out the strongest path for the future

Cap space: $23.56 million

Players, picks in play: F Gustav Nyquist

Are they in a rebuild, a retool or somewhere in the middle?

The Predators are in a bizarre position. Two years ago, the franchise moved on from key players like Matt Duchene and Ryan Johansen, only to emerge as a playoff team the following season. After adding major free agents in Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault and Brady Skjei this offseason, they now have eight players with deals that have more than three years left, with six of them earning more than $5 million annually.

It leaves Gus Nyquist as the only pending UFA who could be moved. The Predators have quite a bit to consider before and after the trade deadline.

St. Louis Blues

Deadline status: Strike if the right deal is there

Cap space: $4.69 million

Players, picks in play: F Radek Faksa

The Blues were eight points out of the final Western Conference wild-card spot heading into the 4 Nations break; can they get back in the mix?

They could move on from their first-round picks over the next three years should they want to use that draft capital to make a trade. But they lost a 2025 second-round pick along with a 2025 third-round pick due to the Philip Broberg and Dylan Holloway offer sheets. It's not that the Blues can't use draft picks to facilitate a deal. But it's tougher to justify for a team for which a playoff berth seems remote.

Utah Hockey Club

Deadline status: Use that cap space

Cap space: $21.06 million

Players, picks in play: 2026 second-round pick, 2026 third-round pick

They have a healthy amount of cap space and owners who have made it clear they're willing to spend. And while the team has a full war chest of draft picks, is it worth parting with first-rounders to make additions for a wild-card race, when picks later in the draft could suffice?

What could help GM Bill Armstrong answer those questions is if the UHC can cut its pre-4 Nations wild-card gap from six points to a margin that suggests a serious push for the playoffs is possible. If so, the Utah Hockey Club could make the inaugural campaign of hockey in Utah a memorable one.

Winnipeg Jets

Deadline status: Be aggressive but strategic

Cap space: $8.69 million

Players, picks in play: F Nikolaj Ehlers, 2025 first-round pick, 2026 first-round pick

Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff has made it clear at the past few trade deadlines that he's not afraid to make moves to bolster his team's chances. The expectation is he'll take the same approach this season, considering the Jets have emerged as the biggest (positive) surprise in the Western Conference.

What makes this particular deadline a critical one is that the Jets have five pending UFAs and four pending RFAs. It's a group that includes Ehlers, who presents the front office with a dilemma. Do the Jets use the deadline to move Ehlers and get a player with cost certainty? Or do they hold on to him for the playoffs, with the idea they could trade his rights for something before free agency if the sides can't reach a deal?

PACIFIC DIVISION

Anaheim Ducks

Deadline status: Keep ears open for advantageous deals

Cap space: $60.86 million

Players, picks in play: D Brian Dumoulin, F Robby Fabbri

Even though the Ducks are in a rebuild, this season was about making some form of progress. They've done that, considering they had 54 points through 54 games having not finished with more than 60 points in each of the past two seasons.

But they also entered the 4 Nations nine points out of the final wild-card spot. It's within the same margin as the Blues, Flames and Utah Hockey Club. And the Ducks have quite a bit of cap space should they want to utilize that advantage.

While it's clear the Ducks are making progress, is it the sort of progress that turns into a playoff appearance this season -- or do they keep building for future seasons?

Calgary Flames

Deadline status: Make the necessary moves to stay in playoff contention

Cap space: $63.67 million

Players, picks in play: 2025 first-round pick via FLA, 2025 first-round pick via NJD, 2025 second-round pick, 2026 first-round pick via VGK

It's clear the Flames need scoring help. In fact, they need quite a bit of it considering they entered the 4 Nations averaging 2.64 goals per game, which ranked 30th out of the NHL's 32 teams. They have four first-round draft picks between the 2025 and 2026 cycles, and the necessary cap space to facilitate a deal.

What's unclear, however, is if the Flames are the proverbial chicken or the egg. They returned from 4 Nations just three points out of the final wild-card spot, while on a three-game losing streak. The front office could decide that this simply might not be the year. Remember, this is a team that traded away Noah Hanifin, Jacob Markstrom, Elias Lindholm, Nikita Zadorov, Chris Tanev and Tyler Toffoli last season -- maybe the retool needs a little more time.

Edmonton Oilers

Deadline status: Find creative ways to strengthen their lineup

Cap space: $5.16 million

Players, picks in play: 2025 second-round pick, 2026 first-round pick, 2026 second-round pick

The Oilers are a top-four team in goals per game and a top-eight team in goal prevention; in other words, this is one of the NHL's more well-rounded teams.

But given their current cap restrictions, are the defending Western Conference champions in a position to bolster their roster to make another run? If they are able to add any help, they're going to have to find a way to maximize their current space. The Oilers could use their draft capital to swing a deal for help -- if they can get other teams to retain salary to make it work. Or they could be faced with having to move on from someone on their roster in order to create the flexibility needed.

Los Angeles Kings

Deadline status: Make the move that gets them beyond the first round

Cap space: $3.50 million

Players, picks in play: 2025 first-round pick, 2026 first-round pick, 2026 second-round pick

The Kings rank in the bottom third in goals per game, while being near league average in scoring chances and high-danger scoring chances. They also need to add scoring depth.

While the Kings have more than a dozen players who have scored more than 10 points, six skaters -- Adrian Kempe, Kevin Fiala, Alex Laferriere, Warren Foegele, Anze Kopitar and Quinton Byfield -- have accounted for 75% of their goals this season. Adding more depth would help a team that's trying to get out of the first round for the first time in more than a decade.

San Jose Sharks

Deadline status: Add for the future

Cap space: $25.54 million

Players, picks in play: D Jan Rutta, F Luke Kunin, F Nico Sturm

Make no mistake, the Sharks' focus is on building for the future. They've made a recent habit of having more than four pending UFAs on the roster in the event there's a chance to attain draft capital via trade.

That happened already this season when they traded Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci to the Stars, which saw them add a second first-round pick for this year's draft.

One note: The Sharks already have all three of their salary retention slots filled -- but all three of their remaining pending UFAs listed above carry manageable cap hits that are less than $3 million annually. Now it's just finding the right suitor for them.

Seattle Kraken

Deadline status: Start planning for next season

Cap space: $4.27 million

Players, picks in play: F Yanni Gourde, F Brandon Tanev

The Kraken are staring at missing the playoffs for a consecutive season and for the third time in their four-year history. What does the future look like, and what current players will be part of that future?

Gourde and Tanev are attractive to contending teams as two-way players who provide depth (and a Stanley Cup pedigree, in Gourde's case). The Kraken should do their best to get a return for them, with a chance to add more prospects or draft capital given all the questions they'll have to answer this coming offseason.

Vancouver Canucks

Deadline status: Add scoring for the playoff push

Cap space: $8.97 million

Players, picks in play: D Carson Soucy, 2025 first-round pick, 2025 second-round pick, 2026 first-round pick

The Canucks' primary mission before March 7 is to find another forward who can help fill the scoring void created by the J.T. Miller trade.

Moving on from Miller brought Filip Chytil to Vancouver. But is Chytil enough to make up for Miller's production, given he had three straight seasons of more than 80 points? Chytil had three points in his first four games, which was a promising start. But the deadline could still provide the Canucks with a window to add another impact forward in their attempt to return to the playoffs.

Vegas Golden Knights

Deadline status: Continue to add to a roster that's in a championship window

Cap space: $1.88 million

Players, picks in play: 2025 second-round pick, 2026 second-round pick, 2027 first-round pick

The Golden Knights have continually proved they are willing to tinker with the roster to keep the championship contention window open as wide as possible. Don't expect this trade season to be any different.

Keep in mind that they don't have their first-round pick for the next two seasons. That hypothetically leaves them trying to figure out how they can add while balancing draft capital and their cap situation. But do not expect them to go quietly into the night, particularly as they remain among the top teams in the West.

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1341071 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Four potential trade destinations for Canucks' Brock Boeser

Courtney Jacobsen

10–12 minutes

The Vancouver Canucks have signed three pending unrestricted free agents since the calendar flipped to February, but the biggest news is the high-profile player that was omitted from the recent bout of business.

With less than two weeks remaining until the March 7 trade deadline, longest-tenured Canuck Brock Boeser remains without a contract extension.

The soon-to-be-28-year-old is in the final year of a three-year, $19.95 million contract that he signed ahead of the 2022-23 season. His tenure with his draft team has been up and down and that is particularly true since he signed the bridge deal.

His 2022-23 season, much like the rest of the team, started bleakly and it culminated in the near healthy-scratch of the winger in December 2022. He remained in the lineup, but the fractured relationship between Boeser and the Canucks led to the beginning of trade speculation.

But the old adage is true — winning solves everything. Boeser and the Canucks enjoyed a resurgent season in 2023-24, one in which the winger scored 40 goals and the Canucks won the division for the first time since 2015.

Hitting career-highs in points and goals wasn't enough for Canucks management to commit to Boeser long-term in the off-season and the speculation has spilled into this year. An early-season concussion, for which he missed seven games, derailed his very achievable plans to match his production from last year, and he has yet to fully right the ship. Boeser has 18 goals and 35 points in 48 games — on pace for the third-highest goals total of his career — but he's certainly not scoring at the same clip and hasn't been the same game-breaker he's shown he's capable of being.

All of this has led the Canucks to an impasse of sorts. The team is sitting precariously in the second wild-card spot in the Western Conference, leaving them in the murky middle between buyer and seller.

Do they keep their own player as a rental and risk losing him in the open market? Do they trade him now and risk crashing out in the first round of the playoffs, or worse: Accept defeat and fail to meet the post-season entirely?

For his part, Boeser has been steadfast in his desire to remain with the Canucks, but is also accepting of the reality that an extension in Vancouver might not happen.

"I've said how much I love it here and I'm more than willing to come back," Boeser said to Postmedia's Patrick Johnston on Monday. "Obviously, I'd love to re-sign but if that's not the case, go to UFA and be just fine. That's made me less stressed and just focussing on helping the team win."

Whichever road the Canucks choose, Boeser is bound to attract suitors from across the league. Here are four teams that could benefit from having a player like him join its roster.

Starting with perhaps the most obvious destination, there are plenty of reasons why Boeser seems like a good fit for the Wild.

Aside from the fact it would be a homecoming for Boeser (we'll get to that shortly), he fills a hockey need for the Wild. Despite sitting third in the Central Division, four points ahead of the Colorado Avalanche with one game in hand, the Wild have just a plus-five goal-differential.

Since star winger Kirill Kaprizov was injured on Jan. 26, the Wild were shut out on back-to-back nights heading into the 4 Nations break and to make matters worse, general manager Bill Guerin said on Saturday that Kaprizov may be sidelined for longer than expected.

Without their perennial 40-goal man, the Wild's top-six doesn't generate nearly as much offence. As it stands, Boeser's point total would be fifth-highest on the Wild, a noticeable improvement on the right wing and could provide a boost to their struggling, Kaprizov-less power play that's sitting 24th in the league at 19.2 per cent.

Boeser would also provide a jolt in the post-season. It's been nearly a decade since the Wild won a playoff round and with 12 points in seven post-season games with the Canucks in 2024, Boeser could be the sparkplug needed to get Minnesota over the finish line.

It helps, too, that the Wild play spitting distance from Burnsville, Boeser's hometown. It certainly decreases the odds that his acquisition would be a pure rental, if the Wild can work out the number on a long-term extension.

The interest in Boeser has been there for the Wild for quite some time. Guerin hoped to make a trade work when the forward was placed on the block in 2022-23, per The Athletic's Michael Russo, but couldn't hack it within the Wild's cap situation. It would take significant number-crunching, and perhaps willingness on the part of the Canucks to retain some salary, but with the cap expected to rise significantly over the next three seasons, it's possible that Minnesota takes a run at the hometown talent.

The defending Stanley Cup champions are no strangers to taking big swings in pursuit of greatness and with their competitive window as wide as ever, there's no reason to believe that this year will be any different.

Per Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman, the Panthers are in need of a right-shot defenceman and Seth Jones fits the bill, but how does a Matthew Tkachuk injury factor into their deadline plans? Injured at the 4 Nations Face-Off, there's concern that Tkachuk's ailment could be long-term, though coach Paul Maurice said on Monday that he expects the left-winger to play for the team again this year — whether that's in the regular season or playoffs is still to be determined.

In the meantime, is it possible that this club also pursues a top-six winger like Boeser, who could reasonably supplement some of the offence in Tkachuk's absence?

Boeser wouldn't outright replace Tkachuk, who has twice eclipsed 100 points and is a point-per-game in four consecutive seasons, but he's on pace for 27 goals and can provide some goal-scoring ability to complement the Panthers' big guns.

Last season's 57-goal man Sam Reinhart has the first-line right-wing spot cemented, but Boeser could be an upgrade on Evan Rodrigues, who has performed well for the Panthers as a secondary scorer but has never eclipsed 43 points in a season — something Boeser has done seven times and is on pace to do again this year.

This deal could be lucrative for the Canucks going the other way. Florida currently still holds its first-round pick for 2026, a draft class largely believed to be deeper than 2025. If the Canucks can fetch a first-rounder for Boeser — and the Mikael Granlund trade package suggests that is very doable — then having an additional 2026 first-round pick can be an incredible asset, especially if the Canucks decide to make additional moves at the deadline.

The Canucks aren't a team who fear intra-divisional trades. See last season's Elias Lindholm-Andrei Kuzmenko trade with the Calgary Flames or the shipping of Vasily Podkolzin to the Edmonton Oilers earlier this season. For that reason, it's not crazy talk to consider a trade between the Canucks and their divisional rival the Kings.

So how would Boeser fit? For starters, he could assist in sparking their dismal power play, which sits at 15.2 per cent and is good for second-worst in the Western Conference, behind only bottom-feeding Anaheim. Boeser has 14 power-play points so far this season, hit a career-high of 25 last season and has never dipped below 14 in a full year. He's also got 40 power-play goals since the 2021-22 season, despite missing some games in nearly every year in that time.

Much like the Wild, the Kings are also in search of a difference-maker come the post-season. They haven't won a playoff round since winning the Stanley Cup in 2014 and the Oilers have bounced them from the playoffs three years running. If they do face a familiar foe this spring — entirely possible given the makeup of the Pacific Division — Boeser has some experience scoring against the Oilers, with 10 goals and six assists against Edmonton since the start of the 2023-24 season.

For the Canucks, the Kings have some draft capital, but more intriguingly they have some solid, if not underused, young players that might be of interest to Vancouver. Might they try to nab 23-year-old Alex Laferriere, which would free up a spot for Boeser on the Kings' second line? Or perhaps Brandt Clarke, the defenceman selected eighth overall in 2021 but has not been given runway with the Kings and has spent the majority of the season playing fourth-line forward or sitting in the press box?

The Kings are also strapped for cap space so would likely have to send a player out to make the deal work. Either way, this could be an interesting dark-horse candidate to land Boeser.

This one could also be a bit far-fetched, especially considering they're actively competing with the Canucks for the second wild-card spot in the West, but this is a team that could benefit from a player with Boeser's acumen and at this stage of his career.

While in Arizona, it felt like this team was in rebuild purgatory, drafting promising young players with talent but no results to show for it. In Salt Lake City, now with an owner willing to invest in the team, Utah has taken a step forward this season and is closer to the playoffs than it has been since the 2020 bubble.

Utah is in the stage of a rebuild where it requires experienced, skilled players rather than draft picks — of which it has much to spare — and Boeser could supplement the leadership group both in experience and talent.

Boeser has also played with top-line winger Nick Schmaltz, developing chemistry on the 'CBS' line at the University of North Dakota alongside Drake Caggiula, and led the Fighting Hawks to an NCAA championship in 2016.

With just under $6 million of projected cap space ahead of the deadline, Utah could reasonably make the numbers work on a Boeser trade. Of course, since the team isn't in a playoff position, it makes little sense to acquire Boeser as a rental, so general manager Bill Armstrong will likely only make this trade if he believes his team can sign Boeser to a long-term extension. With some contracts coming off the books for Utah at the end of this season, it's possible it has the cash to do that.

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL Playoff Push: Trade deadline buyers, sellers and teams in between

Rory Boylen

18–23 minutes

The NHL returned from its 4 Nations Face-Off break over the weekend and very quickly the talk of the hockey world has shifted from a dreamy best-on-best event, to dreams of a busy upcoming trade deadline.

We're less than two weeks away from the March 7 trade deadline and there's still much to be decided. Sure, we know who some of the buyers will be. Toronto and Florida are in a battle to control the Atlantic, while Washington and New Jersey will look to improve their odds. You can never count Vegas out from doing something big, while Edmonton eyes a return to the Stanley Cup Final and Winnipeg looks to separate as the West's best team.

We know some of the sellers, too. Chicago has some players available, including a top-four defenceman who's asked out. St. Louis has become a surprising team to watch as a seller as well, while Buffalo — disappointingly at the bottom of the East — has tough decisions to make.

And then there are a bunch of teams in between it all, having to decide whether to buy, sell or do some combination of both.

This is the focus of today's playoff push, as we'll begin our look at the stretch run of the regular season.

BUYERS TO WATCH

Toronto Maple Leafs: It's no secret that the Maple Leafs will do something by the trade deadline, and that their primary need is another centre. Ideally, that's a 2C who could challenge John Tavares, though a more realistic target could be a 3C with some scoring punch to his game (like Brock Nelson).

But the Maple Leafs aren't swimming in accumulated cap space or LTIR room as some other teams are, and so there's an interesting case to be made that they should consider trading someone such as Max Domi to accommodate a more splashy move.

As pressure builds for this Core Four to finally find playoff success, the backdrop this year is that both Tavares and Mitch Marner have expiring contracts, which means the Leafs will have some very important players to discuss the futures for in the next couple weeks, and after the dust settles on March 7. The general feeling is they'll stick it out with both and neither has appeared on Nick Kypreos' trade board. Another bad playoff showing for the team, however, and who knows what direction management will take.

This trade deadline is as much about setting Toronto up for post-season success as it is ensuring there is an obvious case to make for pushing ahead with the same core past this season.

Washington Capitals: The best team in the East by 12 points — and one of just two NHL teams that had no representation at the 4 Nations Face-Off — Washington returned from the break by outscoring Pittsburgh and Edmonton 15-6 in two weekend wins.

This is a team as all-in as you could want to be, and with a couple of big injuries to players who won't be returning, the Capitals have $16.68 million in LTIR space, meaning they could do all sorts of things at the deadline.

They've already re-acquired Lars Eller this season and, perhaps, those are the kinds of depth moves Washington makes to bolster itself down the lineup and prepare for injuries. After all, so much changed with this

team last summer and all of the off-season additions have clicked so well that there may not be a need to go overly big by March 7.

But if they want to, the Caps could make the league's best team even more dangerous.

Florida Panthers: We have to mention the defending champs in here because of how quickly their cap outlook could change. The Panthers were shaping up to have roughly $3.5 million in cap space at the deadline, but now comes news that Matthew Tkachuk's injury could be long term.

However, what's not clear yet is how long term that will be. Head coach Paul Maurice said Tkachuk will be "playing for us this year" but does that mean he'll return in the regular season or playoffs? If Tkachuk is put on LTIR and the team knows he'll miss the rest of the regular season, they'll have that much more cap space to do business with by March 7.

And we know how aggressive GM Bill Zito has been.

Meantime, Sam Bennett and Aaron Ekblad are still without contract extensions, on track to hit free agency in July.

SELLERS TO WATCH

Pittsburgh Penguins: While there were some missteps early in Kyle Dubas' tenure as Penguins GM (like signing Tristan Jarry, now in the minors), this is probably the toughest front office gig in the NHL because of the forced balancing act. Aching for a rebuild, the Penguins just can't step too far back as long as Sidney Crosby is around, and he's under contract with the team for another two years.

His presence also makes it harder (or impossible) to trade Rickard Rakell or Bryan Rust, productive linemates for No. 87.

So, while they should be sellers, the Penguins may not be able to do a lot of fun stuff for us to watch by the deadline. Still, after Erik Karlsson put together a strong tournament at the 4 Nations, perhaps interest could be renewed in some places if Pittsburgh was willing to use its last salary retention slot to ease the burden of his $10-million cap hit through 2026-27. That would be a flashy move the Penguins could make. Though, we should note, it may be more attractive for some teams to pull off in the summer, after Karlsson gets a $5-million signing bonus on July 1.

Buffalo Sabres: The Sabres went into the break winning four of their last five and then returned with a massive 8-2 win over the Rangers on home ice. Even so, a strong finish would once again likely be too little, too late for the last-place Sabres, who are still 11 points out of a playoff spot.

It's a time to tread carefully. The Sabres have many names in the rumour mill, including 24-year-old centre Dylan Cozens signed for the long-term, and 23-year-old defenceman Bowen Byram, who will be an RFA this summer. Defenceman Mattias Samuelsson (24) is signed at a great rate through 2030, just as the cap is set to spike.

It remains to be seen how hot GM Kevyn Adams' seat truly is as his fifth season on the job looks likely to finish with Buffalo's 14th consecutive playoff miss, but these are critical pieces of a young core the Sabres have to decide what to do with.

Is Buffalo's disappointing season because the core has failed, because the front office hasn't done well enough to surround them with productive veterans, or some combination? In time, all three of the players we mentioned could be on highly valued contracts when the salary cap spikes into the $100-million-plus. That's the best-case scenario.

The worst-case scenario would be for Buffalo to dial back on another rebuild and watch more ex-players go on to have success elsewhere, as we've seen with Sam Reinhart, Ryan O'Rielly, Brandon Montour and others. These big decisions could wait for the summer, or Buffalo could be a fascinating mover to watch at the deadline.

TEAMS IN BETWEEN

Carolina Hurricanes: The Hurricanes are an odd team this trade deadline. They aren't a seller in the traditional sense. Carolina has been a top 10 team in the league all season, sits second in the Metro, is battling for second in the conference and has advanced past the first round six years in a row. The Canes will look to add to this team and to take a run at getting over the hump — for all that playoff success, they haven't won a game in the third round since 2006.

And they have already made the biggest trade this season in acquiring Mikko Rantanen from Colorado. It cost them Martin Necas, Jack Drury and a second-round pick, but they also managed to pick up Taylor Hall for a little scoring depth. The fit so far hasn't been perfect, though — Rantanen has one goal and three points in seven games, while Hall has just one assist.

According to Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman, the Hurricanes have made a nine-digit contract offer to pending UFA Rantanen. That means the offer could be worth about a $12.5 million AAV at least, on a maximum-term contract.

With the trade deadline less than two weeks away, the Hurricanes are facing a dilemma. If Rantanen is undecided by March 7, will they look to flip him again? And what would that return look like? Necas is scoring at a nearly 90-point pace this season and has kept chugging in Colorado.

The "good" news is that since Chicago already retained half of Rantanen's AAV, Carolina could retain another half and knock his rate down to $2.31 million. That would make him attainable to any team and open up the market for the Hurricanes.

Of course, anyone acquiring Rantanen has eyes on winning and without the guarantee it could keep him, or much time to negotiate, Carolina's challenge would be finding a return that doesn't end up with the team taking a step back from where it was originally. Or, the Canes could decide to push on with Rantanen, even if he doesn't sign and they view him as a rental.

Carolina is a buyer, for sure, but this prickly situation ultimately has it as an interesting team between a rock and a hard place.

Boston Bruins: The Bruins returned from the 4 Nations break with bad news. Defenceman Hampus Lindholm is unlikely to return this season because of a knee injury, while fellow blueliner Charlie McAvoy (injured at 4 Nations) has no timeline to return after a shoulder injury that led to an infection.

Meantime, the Bruins lost in overtime to Anaheim at home in their first game back and sit one point out of a wild-card berth in the Eastern Conference and 13th in goal differential (minus-26).

The Bruins were floundering when they fired Jim Montgomery and made Joe Sacco the interim boss, but then the rumour mill cooled for a time when Boston responded with an 11-4-1 record after the coaching change into the holiday break. Since Christmas, however, the B's are 8-11-3 — tied for 27th in the NHL over two months.

"Historically, we've been pretty aggressive when our team's in a position. I think we'll take a much more cautious approach as we approach the deadline," Bruins GM Don Sweeney said Sunday. "May plant a seed for the draft and beyond."

Boston plays Toronto, the Islanders, Pittsburgh, Minnesota, Nashville and Carolina before the trade deadline, but is running out of time to put a hot streak together that makes it more of a buyer. In fact, it may be too late for that. If it's clear the Bruins will be a seller, the pertinent question is what becomes of Brad Marchand, the 36-year-old whose role diminished with Team Canada, and is a pending UFA. He's said only that his desire is to remain a Bruin for life, but there's still no contract extension in place.

"We've been in negotiations with Brad and communicating with him through the year," Sweeney said. "We'll have to have a conversation now that the 4 Nations is over, sit down with Brad and his representatives and have a clearer path in the next two weeks as to what his final outcome will be."

BUYERS TO WATCH

Winnipeg Jets: When you think of what's coming in the economic landscape in the league, it's fair to wonder if this is the year Winnipeg really should be aggressive in a big way and truly go all-in on a Stanley Cup run.

For the league's smallest market in its smallest arena, it's fair to wonder how much the Jets will be able to keep up with the highest-spending teams when the salary cap lands at around $113.5 million in three years.

For now, the Jets are the second-best team in the league and No. 1 in the Western Conference. They have two of the league's top 12 scorers, the runaway favourite for the Vezina Trophy, one of the top shutdown

lines in the game with Adam Lowry back, and the league's best power play.

But they have needs. The Jets could stand to add another defenceman, or two, to help keep the quality looks at the net down a bit better. And they also have a need for another centre — whether Lowry is the second or third pivot, the Jets need someone else to play key minutes down the middle and have some offensive jam to their game.

And they have cap space to make a move. If the roster is left untouched until March 7, the Jets are tracking to have $12.4 million in deadline-day space, per PuckPedia, meaning they have flexibility to do lots of things. The incentive to make moves is already there, given their place in the standings, but knowing the economic realities of what's to come should drive the Jets even more to make a splash.

Dallas Stars: GM Jim Nill has already made a pretty solid move, bringing in Mikael Granlund from San Jose to add to a dangerously deep group of forwards.

But injuries have hit this team hard. Tyler Seguin is out for the rest of the regular season, at least, while Miro Heiskanen was injured just before the 4 Nations and is labelled as month-to-month with a knee injury. Two substantial losses.

At the moment, Dallas has $12.2 million in LTIR space, though it may yet have to be prepared for Heiskanen to return before the playoffs.

Either way, for as deep as Dallas' forwards are, we saw in last year's playoffs that its blue line depth was tested when Chris Tanev went down. The Stars would be wise to look at other blueliners to help their cause in 2025 and should have space to do something fairly substantial. On Monday's 32 Thoughts podcast, Elliotte Friedman floated the Stars as a potential destination for Erik Karlsson.

SELLERS TO WATCH

St. Louis Blues: Five points out of a playoff spot, the Blues would miss for a third year in a row if they can't claw their way back. A return win, 3-1 over Colorado, was a good place to start.

Still, it was shocking to see several Blues names appear on Kypreos' latest trade board, including Jordan Kyrou, Pavel Buchnevich, Brayden Schenn and Justin Faulk. The Blues have been looking to trade a defenceman for some time, but four of them have no-trade clauses.

What's funny is that, after signing 23-year-olds Dylan Holloway and Philip Broberg to offer sheets last summer, GM Doug Armstrong has already been a buyer on this year's trade market when he acquired 33-year-old blueliner Cam Fowler, who has another year left on his contract.

But, after next season, Armstrong is preparing to step aside from the GM's chair and make way for Alexander Steen, currently working and learning under Armstrong. If this keeps tracking toward a tough uphill climb to the playoffs by March 7, Armstrong may pull the chute on parts of this core. If enough of them go, St. Louis could be something of a kingmaker.

"As we say every year, the players will tell us what we're going to do," Armstrong said Sunday. "Right now, we have a massive uphill battle. I think we really dropped the ball coming out of Christmas. (Coach Jim Montgomery) had done a nice job getting the guys in a good spot and then we didn't take advantage of a really positive schedule in January. Now, everyone has to live with the white noise around us until mid-March, but we've created that for ourselves."

Chicago Blackhawks: A seller through and through, the Blackhawks aren't going to be able to keep doing this forever and keep Connor Bedard happy. At some point, NHL players will need to be retained, or else a lot of pressure will be put on graduating prospects very quickly. Take one look at Buffalo to see the risk that entails.

At first glance, it didn't seem like the Hawks had a whole lot of super-intriguing players to move. Hall was sent to Carolina, but that was for a mid-round pick and he never settled into Chicago. Pending UFA Ryan Donato is having a terrific career season, but turns 29 in April and seems a good bet to get moved.

Those were thought to be the most notable names who could be had out of Chicago this season, until Seth Jones' name appeared on Kypreos' trade board in January. The defenceman has since confirmed that he's working with the Blackhawks to facilitate a trade to a contending team, even if it means Chicago has to use its final retention slot to absorb some of his $9.5-million cap hit.

Jones is 30 and signed through the 2029-30 season, so his timeline doesn't appear to line up with Chicago's. And while retaining some money for another five years is a big ask for the Blackhawks, it could also elevate Jones' trade value and make him able to pull back some good assets to Chicago. Jones isn't a No. 1 defenceman, but if he could be had for, say, $6 million to $7 million against the cap with the upper limit about to shoot up, he's suddenly a very intriguing second-pair defenceman.

TEAMS IN BETWEEN

Utah Hockey Club: Utah's 2-1 regulation win over Vancouver on Sunday was huge because it pulled it back to within four points of the Canucks for the second wild-card spot in the West. The Hockey Club has work to do and has played more games than either Vancouver or Calgary in front of them, but with more home games upcoming to Chicago, Minnesota and New Jersey this week, a nice little run could leave the front office asking some big questions.

One thing seems clear: Utah will turn into a big-time buyer very soon. It has a deep-pocketed owner eager to put his hockey team on the map and almost too many future assets. It has made 42 picks in the past four drafts, has six picks in 2025 and then another 10 in 2026. With 90 reserve slots and 50 contracts ever allowed at one time, Utah may have to soon turn some of those assets into NHL players through trades.

But will that happen during this season? Utah has oodles of cap space, projected to be about $27 million on March 7, meaning it could do almost anything it wanted on deadline day. The question, though, is if it's really in position to buy now, or if it would be too far out of the playoffs and instead look to do big business in the summer. Meantime, it has some players (Alexander Kerfoot, Matias Maccelli, Nick Bjugstad) who could be traded by March 7.

As the defence has gotten healthy and the gap to a playoff spot closes, the front office might be thinking long and hard about pushing some chips in.

Vancouver Canucks: Already straddling the line of buyer and seller with their trading of J.T. Miller and acquisition of Marcus Pettersson, the Canucks are still facing questions about Elias Pettersson, whose no-movement clause will kick in this summer on his eight-year, $11.6-million AAV contract.

A weak showing at the 4 Nations did nothing to inspire confidence he'll finish this season stronger, and the fact he was a game-time decision before playing both Saturday and Sunday has folks in Vancouver wondering how impactful he'll be in a playoff push. It would seem a long shot that the Canucks would trade Pettersson now after already moving Miller, especially as long as they hold on to a playoff spot. But they failed to pick up a point in two weekend games, so their hold on that place is tenuous.

Meantime, pending UFA Brock Boeser seems all but assured of moving before the deadline, while Carson Soucy's name has also come up recently.

The Canucks aren't a seller in the sense they'll be looking to spiral into a rebuild — after all, they have to have eyes on re-signing Quinn Hughes when his deal expires in 2027. But it's wild how one of the best stories of last season, and a team that came within one win of eliminating the Edmonton Oilers in Round 2, has descended into such panic and mayhem.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers GM Stan Bowman focusing on 'full picture' ahead of trade deadline

Mark Spector

6–7 minutes

TAMPA BAY — Are the Edmonton Oilers a worse team today than they were 12 months ago?

Can a team that needs one more win come June look itself in the mirror today and say, “We’re good enough to make it through four rounds again this spring, the way we are currently constructed?”

Well, let’s dig in on that a bit, shall we?

Edmonton’s record is almost identical through 57 games this year (34-19-4) compared to last year (35-20-2), and the Oilers are two points out of the Pacific lead this year compared to 11 points back a year ago. There is still a trade deadline to come, and the possibility of Evander Kane re-joining the team at some point.

That’s the good news.

The bad news is, it appears that CEO Jeff Jackson shot blanks on July 1 when he spent $7 million on ageing wingers Jeff Skinner and Viktor Arvidsson, only to watch the St. Louis Blues offer sheet Dylan Holloway and Philip Broberg in response.

That “trade” is looking worse and worse, as neither Skinner (11-10-21) nor Arvidsson (7-12-19) are outperforming soon-to-be 40-year-old Corey Perry (12-8-20), who has more goals than both while playing almost exclusively on the fourth line this season.

They dearly miss the speed of Holloway and Ryan McLeod, while it appears that the best years are behind Arvidsson and Skinner. Neither have shown to be top-six forwards on a contending team, and both seed fears that they will be even less impactful as the rigours of playoff hockey expose their shared lack of size and ability to compete for pucks — and in Skinner’s case, a genuine lack of foot speed.

Then there are Stuart Skinner and Evan Bouchard — two lynchpins to any Oilers' success — who have both slightly regressed. Neither’s numbers from this year equal last season’s.

The Bouchard-Skinner question is a legitimate query and one that general manager Stan Bowman likely wishes he did not have to field, his team on a three-game losing skid and playing quite likely its worst hockey of the 2024-25 season.

But he spoke with Sportsnet on a rainy Monday in Tampa, a GM whose team lost 6-3 and 7-3 over the weekend who is trying to keep his focus big-picture.

“They are important players for sure. But so are Connor and Leon, and Nurse and Ekholm. There are a lot of important players,” said Bowman Monday in Tampa.

“Yeah, I'm worried about everything,” he admitted. “I mean, part of the job is to be concerned about having not only the right group of players, but also having them perform to their fullest. To be on top of their game. Most of our guys have had good seasons, but not everybody. So there is room for improvement.”

On defence, Darnell Nurse is having a better season than a year ago, while Ty Emberson has been fine as a third-pairing guy. We will hold our opinion on whether or not John Klingberg can hack it as a top-four defenceman at this level. He has only played seven games, with a two-week break between Games 5 and 6.

But Bouchard is not the player he was last season, for whatever reason.

The prodigal righty has the ability to raise the tide all by himself. That’s how good he can be.

So when Bouchard under-performs there is a deficit between where a team’s defensive game is and where it could be. And in Bouchard’s case, his mistakes can really sting because he has games where has to create two goals all by himself to even out the two he was responsible for in his own end.

Meanwhile, in goal, Skinner’s regular season numbers have gone from a save percentage of .905 and goals against average of 2.62 last season, to .898 and 2.81 this year.

We can have the conversation about defensive structure in front of him, but the numbers are the numbers and Skinner has to own them. They, too, are a net negative from a season ago.

Bowman would not rule out exploring the goaltending market prior to the March 7 trade deadline, but when asked about his level of concern he sounded very much like a guy who collected Stanley Cup rings with Chicago teams playing in front of guys named Antti Niemi and Corey Crawford.

Good goalies, but not great ones.

“There tends to be a lot of noise around the goaltending position, league-wide,” Bowman said. “Because when the puck goes in, it's like, either that was a good goal or a bad goal.

“I just think there's a lot of attention given to that. I'm not sure it's the most productive conversation all the time.”

Bowman’s bottom six can look old, slow and small at times — Connor Brown didn’t take the leap they’d hoped he would — another area of concern for a team with Cup aspirations.

And Bowman will only be able to scratch so many itches at the trade deadline. Some of what he has is simply going to have to step up its game.

“Nobody played well enough last weekend. They’ve all got to play better,” he said. “But for a large sample size this season we’ve been a pretty good team — and not because of one or two players.”

He would not tip his hand on deadline targets. This far ahead of the March 7 deadline, it’s still unknown exactly who might be available.

“We’re just putting our heads down, readying ourselves for a lot of different scenarios. Whether it's adding a forward, adding a center or winger with some size, speed with grit. A left defenceman, a righty defenceman…,” Bowman said.

“I tend to try to take the full picture into play and not be too focused on the noise of the last couple games.”

That is probably wise.

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1341074 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / What Maple Leafs' priorities should be heading toward the trade deadline

Justin Bourne

7–9 minutes

TORONTO — It’s the final of the men’s 100m dash at the Olympics, and will you look at that, there’s a surprise entry. It’s me, Justin Bourne, about to race Noah Lyles and Andre de Grasse and, sure, Usain Bolt in his prime is there too. They’re going to give the winner a million bucks.

We all take our positions before the gun to start the race, and …

I gotta tell ya: You’re not going to be getting my max effort in this scenario. There’s no way I’m trying to run the 100m as fast as I can because I am going to get absolutely obliterated, regardless, so what’s the point pulling all the strings in my hams?

But if it’s a race against a bunch of random dudes my age, and the stakes are the same, I’m training for that race. I’m stretching, I’m hiring a coach, I’m preparing myself as best I possibly can, because I might be able to win that one.

I use this obscure hypothetical to make an obvious point: Who you’re up against matters, a lot. Among my least favourite hockey playoff axioms is, “It doesn’t matter who we play, you’ve gotta … ” Maybe that finishes with “beat the best to be the best” or “win four rounds anyway” or whatever else, but the point remains equally devoid of logic, as who you play matters a ton (and some of that is within your control).

The 2019 Boston Bruins went to the Cup Final after playing the seventh-seeded Toronto Maple Leafs, then the fourth-seeded Blue Jackets, then the sevent-seeded Carolina Hurricanes before losing to the St. Louis Blues in the final. The 2006 Hurricanes won a Cup facing teams ranked

seventh, third, fourth and eighth. The 1999 Dallas Stars played teams ranked seventh, sixth, fourth and seventh.

It happens going the hard route too (I see you, Los Angeles Kings), but there's a reason they're call "upsets." Those underdog wins are rare.

If you're the Toronto Maple Leafs starting at the trade deadline, holy smokes, is this a winnable race. And nothing should provide them more incentive to stock up, to go in, and to prepare than a simple look around.

Pre-pandemic, the Tampa Bay Lightning had a season with 128 points. Three years ago, the Florida Panthers had 122 points. Two years ago, the Boston Bruins had 135 points. Last year, Florida won the division with 110 points and, suddenly, this year, they're on pace for an even 100, with Tampa on pace for 99. The Bruins might not make the playoffs.

As of this writing, if you win the Atlantic, you'd draw the Detroit Red Wings. Finish second, and you draw either Tampa Bay or Florida.

The Leafs, on pace for 103 points, have no excuse to tread lightly and cross their fingers heading into playoffs, as those Florida teams are certainly going to spend to get better in the coming weeks. Everyone is going to improve 5 per cent, so they need to go to 10.

So, let's take a look at what their priorities may be, and where I can see it all going:

There's been so much fuss about the Leafs at the deadline and getting a top-end centre, and that would of course be a massive help. But I can't say that watching Canada at the 4 Nations Face-Off (and the American team, for that matter) didn't make remind me of the value of a "Thank god that guy is on the ice" D-man. The Leafs have Chris Tanev, but he's not quite what I'm talking about.

Yes, Parayko is 31 and has five years left on his deal after this one. But for this year, and at least for the next couple, he's a tremendous defender who can also skate and shoot the puck. He's six-foot-six and 230 pounds, he's got 12 goals on the season after 10 last year, and he makes just $6.5 million.

He'd cost a lot to get, but he would 100 per cent change what the Leafs are in an instant. Here's a Cup contending D-corps:

Rielly-Parayko

McCabe-Tanev

Benoit-OEL

The Blues appear to be selling, and Parayko's age might not line up with their next contention window.

Now, I recognize how easy it is to sit here and write out a wishlist, while reality gets in the way of attaining many of the players a team may want, from salary-cap issues, to a lack of assets or, more likely, to teams simply valuing their own guys a ton. This one may be fantasy, but if you don't set lofty goals, you've got no chance to hit the highest highs.

Domi can dish, he can skate with good players, and he can go up and down the lineup. But Toronto looks to have about $1.3 million in deadline cap space and they want to add, and so someone's money likely has to go out the door. Domi doesn't defend or play physical enough to be impactful in the bottom six in playoffs, and the Leafs have six better offensive forwards with plans to add more. He makes $3.75 million per year for this year and the next three, and he's moving deeper into his 30s. He can be dealt, as he has a modified no-trade clause. His name will come up as an option to be moved.

Top team to pilfer: Unfortunately, it's the Boston Bruins

I say "unfortunately" because is Boston really going to trade good players to the Leafs? Seems unlikely if it has other options. But some of the rumoured-to-be-available names from the Bruins (if they lose enough to be sellers) are exactly what the Leafs could use. Trent Frederic plays hard and can shoot it in the net, Charlie Coyle plays centre and can chip in both ways, and Brandon Carlo is a big lanky D who can defend.

Top concern: Fans being sold "internal fixes" to roster holes

GM Brad Treliving isn't overly well-known for large in-season deals (I believe acquiring Tyler Toffoli is his biggest), though his reputation has him "in on everything." The Leafs have a few guys who haven't been healthy enough to contribute this season, and you can already hear the March 8 press conference about how Calle Jarnkrok is a deadline add, and so is Jani Hakanpaa, and maybe Connor Dewar is too. The Leafs don't need fringe help, which everyone is going to get. They need another needle mover.

What I expect will happen:

One medium-to-big name comes in, like Brock Nelson, or Yanni Gourde, or Scott Laughton, while they bring in a depth D-man to shore up the back-end.

In this scenario (player-dependent), the team would be better, probably the same amount better as the teams around them. That leaves them with a fighting chance, rather than an advantage. And with that, I suppose they could then start talking about how Calle Jarnkrok is an upgrade, etc.

As much as I'd love for them to land Parayko, or Dylan Cozens, or do to something insane like find a way to get Mikko Rantanen with crazy retention, it's hard to see it happening. The salary cap is going up, but things are still tight, and their asset list is pretty short. (I can't shake the "But, boy, Vegas always seems to find a way" voice in the back of my head.)

The mandate for the front office is clear, thanks to the soft division I mentioned off the top. They're not surrounded by Olympic-level sprinters for once, so get the best player or two they can — because they have a legitimate chance to outrun this somewhat-flawed group around them.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Slafkovsky intent on taking big step St. Louis is guiding him towards

Eric Engels

8–10 minutes

BROSSARD, Que. — It starts with the player.

That's what Martin St. Louis always says, and it's true.

But the coach of the Montreal Canadiens knows it ends with the player, too.

It's why St. Louis, who played 1,241 games (regular-season and post-season combined) over his Hall-of-Fame career, also always talks about "steering or guiding a player in a certain direction," rather than demanding they take a certain one.

He's coaching one of the youngest teams in the NHL, and he knows the growth of its youngest players depends more on their self-realization — and actualization — than anything else. It's why he focuses on guiding them through that process rather than just giving them the answers, and it's what makes him the right coach for this team.

St. Louis's nurturing approach has been at the heart of positive development we've seen from all the young players over the last few years in Montreal, and it's paying off with his youngest player right now.

Would the coach have liked for it to have paid off sooner with Juraj Slafkovsky? Absolutely.

But as St. Louis rightly pointed out after the Canadiens practised on Monday, experience is a better teacher than he'll ever be.

"There's a timeline, there's a chain of events that's gotta happen," St. Louis said. "And when the players take responsibility and have their own moments of reflection, that's more powerful than me (saying) 'Do this, do that.'"

St. Louis is one of many people in the Canadiens' organization who spent a fair portion of this season steering and guiding Slafkovsky towards realizing he needs to start with perpetually moving his six-foot-three, 225-pound body to his advantage on the forecheck so he can

unlock the other skills that made him such a productive player over the last half of last season.

But the coach knows better than anyone the reason the 20-year-old finally did that more in a 5-2 win over the Ottawa Senators Saturday than he has in any other game this season is because the player finally convinced himself it was what he had to do.

How did Slafkovsky do that before scoring a goal, registering five shots on net and a career-high eight hits in the win over the Senators? Trial and error, and then some much-needed time away from the rink to properly process those attempts and mistakes and draw some meaningful conclusions.

No matter what anyone said to him, Slafkovsky couldn't seem to figure it out for himself through the first 53 games of this season.

The first-overall pick in 2022 struggled in posting just eight goals and 30 points through the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025. It was a big step back from scoring 13 goals and 30 points over his last 33 games last season, and his emotional response to it ultimately clouded his ability to quickly adjust.

"The failure — if you see it as failure — becomes an emotional weight," said St. Louis. "If you see it as a learning process, now you look for the answers. That's what you learn (is that) the answers are everywhere. But if you're so wrapped up with the emotions of failing, you're wasting time."

Before Slafkovsky got so wrapped up in the emotions of his failings, Arber Xhekaj did.

The defenceman started training camp talking about taking the next step and bearing the responsibility he felt in his third season to become a role model for younger players emerging.

But when the season started, Xhekaj's next step was backward.

It helped that it wasn't the first time he stepped backwards since joining the Canadiens in 2022.

When we spoke with Xhekaj on Monday, he said going to Laval for 17 games last season was "a mental hit" he didn't immediately recover from.

But once Xhekaj did, he found a fast route to fixing his problems.

"The more you fail, the more you learn," Xhekaj said. "Success breeds confidence, but anytime you fail it's not really a failure. It's just a learning step that there's something you've got to change or adjust to get around that hump in the road."

The 24-year-old made quick adjustments after a rocky October, and he's been steady and reliable ever since — a player who can be counted on for 17-18 minutes, like he was in Ottawa on Saturday.

What Xhekaj gained from that was much more than just confidence. He now has a foundation to return to when things slip, and he also now has the self-awareness to quickly identify what's slipping and correct it.

"That's when you become the teacher," he said. "It's when you can reflect on your own mistakes and you know before they (the coaches) do and they don't even have to tell you."

No one had to tell Xhekaj he ended up on the wrong side of a player during Saturday's game. He went to tell director of development Adam Nicholas about that play he'd like to have back and then suggested to us that's not something he'd have necessarily been able to do beforehand.

"Coming into this league, there's so many things you have to learn and figure out," Xhekaj said. "It's not just struggles; there's just some things you didn't even know."

Cole Caufield said the same thing when we spoke to him right after speaking with Xhekaj.

The sniper, who entered the NHL after breaking Auston Matthews's scoring record with the United States National Development Program Team, potted four goals and five points in his first 10 games before scoring four more and 12 more points in 20 playoff games to help the Canadiens to the 2021 Stanley Cup Final. Caufield then experienced a drought like none other he'd been through at any level of hockey, posting just three goals in 33 games.

Just like Slafkovsky (when Slafkovsky entered as a highly touted rookie), Caufield was struggling for the very first time in his hockey career and, just like Slafkovsky, he needed some guidance on how to deal with it.

St. Louis gave it to Caufield soon after being hired in February of 2022, and he's steered him towards becoming a much more complete player ever since.

But Caufield wouldn't have become one without realizing some things for himself and submitting to some big adjustments he had to make. He talked with us about having to get used to having the puck on his stick less often, about not being the main transporter of it like he was at the University of Wisconsin, and about the value of experience he gained along the way to make the necessary changes that would help him become the player who's now just two goals from establishing a new career high.

Caufield scored 28 in 82 games last season, but he's got 27 in 57 this season and can sense more are coming for him.

He can sense more are coming for Slafkovsky, too.

"As an individual, if you're doing the right things and you're being really good with what your strengths are, I think that goes a long way," Caufield said.

He added he was very encouraged to see Slafkovsky playing to his strengths in Saturday's game.

Slafkovsky beat himself up quite a bit for not being able to do that through the first few months of the season. He couldn't seem to shake his frustration, and no one would've blamed him for being confused about what he should be doing to produce better results.

You could see Slafkovsky using his great hands, vision and scoring touch to try to make the plays that brought him to the league and gave him success in it last season. You could see him resisting pocketing those skills to play a more grinding and exacting style.

But over the break for the 4 Nations Face-Off, watching Brady Tkachuk lead USA with that grinding style to access his great hands, vision and scoring touch made Slafkovsky say to himself that's how you must play to have success in this league.

That's what he told reporters in Montreal ahead of Tkachuk scoring again in the championship game versus Canada. And then he went out and emulated Tkachuk while Tkachuk watched Saturday's game from the sidelines.

"It's just funny how it comes when no one needs to tell me and I just focus on myself and do the things that I want to do," said Slafkovsky on Monday. "And it comes natural and looks good on the TV and feels good on the ice. Get more opportunities, more shots, more puck, more plays. … It's just one game, but it was good."

That one game was something to build on.

There are 25 to go for the Canadiens, and Slafkovsky might not play them all like he did on Saturday. But he now has a foundation to get back to if things begin to slip again.

St. Louis didn't build it for Slafkovsky, he just put the bricks in his hands. He will continue to give him the materials, but it'll continue to be up to the player to decide how to use them.

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Sportsnet.ca / Bruins facing tough reality ahead of trade deadline

Ryan Dixon

9–11 minutes

To be fair, the comedown from the 4 Nations Face-Off could probably be worse. While it's obviously an adjustment settling into "regular" hockey after seeing guys extract every ounce from their body on every shift

wearing their countries' colours, we still have heated playoff races, Alex Ovechkin's all-time goals chase and the excitement that precedes a looming trade deadline to keep us going.

That said, given the incredible stakes, drama and level of play, a letdown is inevitable.

That's especially true in Boston, a city where hockey fans now make a hard pivot from seeing — right in their own barn — their national team lose a heartbreaker to the country their club captain plays for, to rooting for a Bruins squad that is no small state of flux.

By the way, their favourite American son, Bruin Charlie McAvoy, was injured in the tournament and there's no clear timetable for his return.

On Sunday, Bruins general manager Don Sweeney also said Hampus Lindholm — his second-best defenceman, who hasn't played since mid-November — is unlikely to suit up again this season thanks to his serious knee injury.

In previous years, Lindholm was the kind of top-flight player Boston traded for at this time of year while gearing up for a playoff push. Heck, Sweeney even convinced guys like Lindholm — acquired in 2022 — and Charlie Coyle — a 2019 deadline pickup from the Wild — to stick around on long-term deals because, who wouldn't want to play for a strong team in a great city?

Suffice it to say, the Bruins — who dropped a 3-2 extra-time decision to the Anaheim Ducks on Saturday — won't be buyers this time out. Sure, they're only one point out of a wild card spot, but Boston's minus-26 goal-differential is worse than all but four teams in the Eastern Conference. Now they're down their best two defencemen for the foreseeable future in a year where goalie Jeremy Swayman, though better lately, has not played to the level expected after he inked a monster eight-year deal in September.

Boston is 24th in goals per game (2.74); 24th in goals against (3.17); 30th on the power play (14.8 per cent) and 24th on the penalty-kill (75.6 per cent).

What else would you like to know?

The only question is whether this is a soft or hard sell for Sweeney, with two pending-UFA players that teams will call about. One of those guys is the captain we referenced earlier, Brad Marchand. It's as simple as this when it comes to the 36-year-old, lifelong Bruin; if his contract demands are reasonable, he can and should finish his career where it began. There's no scenario where Boston is about to enter a full rebuild, triggering an everything-must-go posture. The B's just signed the likes of Elias Lindholm and Nikita Zadorov to long-term UFA pacts in the summer; none of McAvoy, Swayman or David Pastrnak have had their 29th birthday yet. This team may not be a true Cup contender next year, but there's no world where it will be taking a knee and, in fact, could be a serious UFA player with a rising cap, a good sales pitch and some intriguing names potentially hitting the market in the next couple of summers.

That said, the system needs help. Boston has missed the playoffs just twice in 17 seasons, whiffing in back-to-back years in 2015 and '16. The Bruins also haven't drafted in the top 15 picks since 2016, when they snagged McAvoy at No. 14. The organization can use an influx of young talent.

That need could be at least partially addressed by Boston trading its other pending UFA, Trent Frederic, a big-body centre who could certainly fetch an appealing asset from a playoff-bound club. And should the next few days reveal that Marchand's money ask isn't in line with what the team wants to give a guy on the wrong side of 35, deal him too. If the Avs can part with Mikko Rantanen, Boston can move on without Marchand.

It won't be easy, but that's the tough reality the Bruins find themselves in right now.

Weekend Takeaways

• You look at the result — three of four available points taken during two home games — and you think it was a pretty decent weekend for the Detroit Red Wings. Well, let's just say coach Todd McLellan will still have lots to work with at the next practice. On Saturday, Detroit had a 3-1 advantage on the Wild with under seven minutes to go in the third period and wound up losing to Minnesota in extra time. A day later, Detroit built a 3-0 advantage on the Ducks five minutes into the game and led 4-2 with under three minutes to play before allowing Anaheim two 6-on-5 goals to tie the game. Luckily for the Wings, Patrick Kane saved them from another OTL by scoring on a breakaway just moments after Jackson LaCombe had a glorious chance to win it for Anaheim. Not exactly how you draw it up.

• At the top of the Atlantic, it sure looks like it's going to be a three-team race for first place in the division after the Tampa Bay Lightning won their fifth straight contest over the Seattle Kraken on Sunday. Tampa is four points back of first-place Toronto with a game in hand and three points behind second-place Florida with two contests in hand. Tampa's plus-47 mark is better than every club in the NHL except for Washington (plus-65) and Winnipeg (plus-69). Andrei Vasilevskiy is 10-3-2 with a .931 save percentage since Jan. 7 and Brandon Hagel is 5-5-10 since the start of the winning streak, including an absolute beauty of a shorthanded marker to open the scoring against the Kraken.

The Week Ahead

• Blues forward Brayden Schenn is suddenly in the middle of trade rumours with less than two weeks to go before the March 7 deadline. The 2019 Cup champ scored in Sunday's 3-1 win over Colorado and is slated to play his 1,000th NHL game on Thursday in Washington.

• The Panthers host the Oilers on Thursday in a re-match of the 2024 Cup final. Head coach Paul Maurice said Monday that Matthew Tkachuk could be out for a while after injuring his groin during the 4 Nations Face-Off.

• The top two Calder Trophy candidates will battle Thursday night in Montreal when Macklin Celebrini's San Jose Sharks visit Lane Hutson and the Habs.

• An outdoor game is always a spectacle, but this Saturday will be extra special as the Blue Jackets host the Red Wings at Ohio Stadium. First off, this is the Jackets' first-ever outdoor game. Then there's the college football rivalry between Ohio State and Michigan fans can just port over to hockey. And, best of all, both teams really need the two points as they fight for a wild card spot in the Eastern Conference.

Red and White Power Rankings

1. Winnipeg Jets (40-14-3) A 15-day break did nothing to cool the Jets, who won their ninth straight game on Saturday thanks to a late goal from Gabe Vilardi that drew Winnipeg even with the Blues and allowed his team to snag a shootout win. Will Vilardi's name be one we hear about for the 2026 Olympics? He's up to 26 goals this year, more than all but four Canadians.

2. Toronto Maple Leafs (35-20-2) What a weekend for Toronto's support staff, as the Buds picked up back-to-back W's over Carolina and Chicago. Pontus Holmberg had three goals in two games; Nick Robertson bagged a pair versus the Hawks and the Leafs' defence corps — which ranks dead last in terms of goals scored this year — kicked in some offence when Jake McCabe and Chris Tanev both found the net in Chicago.

3. Edmonton Oilers (34-19-4) It was a rough re-entry from the 4 Nations break for the Oilers, who surrendered a total of 13 goals in road losses to Philadelphia and Washington. Things don't get any easier for Edmonton, which now goes to Tampa, Florida and Carolina.

4. Calgary Flames (27-21-8) It always feels good to score a game-winner in the third, especially if you're defenceman Joel Hanley and it's your first tally in 11 months. Hanley's late strike Sunday night gave the Flames a 3-2 victory over San Jose.

5. Vancouver Canucks (26-20-11) Two games back, two losses and a total of two goals scored for the Canucks, who are clinging to the final playoff spot in the West. Vancouver has scored three goals in a game just once in its past six outings.

6. Ottawa Senators (29-24-4) After falling 5-2 to the Habs on Saturday, Ottawa is now on its third four-game losing streak of the season.

7. Montreal Canadiens (26-26-5) Can Juraj Slafkovsky finish strong and establish himself as a valuable top-six guy? He was an assist shy of a Gordie Howe hat trick in Saturday's win over Ottawa.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 25, 2025

1341077 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How Maple Leafs' Mitch Marner can springboard off success with Canada

Luke Fox

7–8 minutes

BOSTON — To tell a story about Mitch Marner, let's first tell a story about Brad Marchand, his nemesis-turned-teammate.

Marchand was roughly Marner's age and looking for the most lucrative contract of his career when the 2016 World Cup of Hockey rolled around.

Not only was Marchand selected to wear the Maple Leaf and represent his country in his first professional best-on-best, but the undersized winger also had a heckuva tournament.

He killed penalties. He was elevated to Canada's top six. He produced alongside captain Sidney Crosby. And he orchestrated the trophy-clinching goal.

Those of us on the outside called it a coming-out party. Marchand, however, circles that event as his greatest moment of internal growth along his NHL journey.

"The biggest thing it did for me was, it changed my mindset," Marchand begins, embarking on a thoughtful reflection. "Your mind is such a powerful thing. It can propel you to achieve incredible things, and it can really hinder you and hold you back from accomplishing things."

At the time of his invite to the '16 World Cup, Marchand had already won a Stanley Cup. He'd scored 37 goals and 61 points once. But he had viewed the NHL talent-scape in tiers — and himself a notch below the elite.

"Look across the league. You got your McDavids and Crosbys and MacKinnons, all that. And then you got your mid-tier guys. I always viewed myself as looking at those guys as the best in the world — untouchables," Marchand continues. "And when I got to play as part of that team, I realized that one of the biggest things is that they know that. They believe that, every time they step on the ice, they're the best. They have that confidence.

"Once I realized I could play at that level, my mindset just changed. And I started believing. Every time I stepped on the ice — whether it was true or not — I would tell myself I was the best player. And I had that mindset. A little bit of an internal arrogance. But it just helped me, in games, get to another level.

"It helped me get to a different level that I never thought I would reach."

Ironically, the Boston Bruins star's confidence jolt took place in Toronto.

Equally ironic: Marner's "Iggy!" moment — setting up the world's best player for a gold-medal-winning overtime goal — unfolded in Boston.

Now, when the Toronto Maple Leafs fly to Beantown, when they walk past the Zamboni entrance, Marner can choose to associate this place not with three gutting Game 7 defeats but with his most splendid and clutch victory as a pro.

"Felt good. Can't lie," Marner said Thursday in the champagne-soaked visitors' room, a gleaming, golden 4 Nations Face-Off medal dangling from his neck.

"Confidence. Just belief, also, in a way. So, I'll try to take into it the rest of the season and then going forward."

In a short tournament, Marner stood tall.

His Crosby-assisted overtime goal in Game 1 looms even larger in retrospect. Because Sweden was the only country not to lose in regulation, Marner's clock-freezer at 6:06 in 3-on-3 stood as the difference between getting a rematch with Team USA or cheering on the Swedes.

Although Marner's play quieted during the fight-filled first battle against the Americans, and he was dropped off Connor McDavid's line to the bottom six, he dug in and rebounded when it mattered most.

Marner's slip pass to Sam Bennett — another fierce Atlantic Division foe — helped tie the championship game and convince his coach that he was worthy of an in-game promotion. Marner's difficult skate-to-stick-to-slot pass for Connor McDavid sealed the deal.

"Mitch had legs tonight — and that kid can make plays," Team Canada coach Jon Cooper said post-game. "He just needed one chance to make a play, and he did. It comes down to a gut feel and how the guys are going."

Hero McDavid was quick to credit the coach for his on-the-fly adjustment and Marner for his on-the-rim feed.

"Our line had a bit of a tough night. Just didn't work. Wasn't able to generate much. But throw Mitch up there, and we find a way to contribute at the end there. And that's all that matters," said McDavid, who wants fans to recognize the assist.

"I mean, it's so subtle. Your average hockey fan is not going to appreciate how impressive that is — to pick the puck up off the wall like that, so calmly, and make a great play. Have his head up, draw two guys to him, and dish in the middle. It's a great play. Fans might not appreciate how good that is."

Marner, 27, has been competing against McDavid "a lot in my lifetime," since they were wonderkids in the GTHL.

"Really never got to play with each other," Marner said. "And that's something we talked about coming into this tournament. Then, funny enough, first practice, we're on the same line together. We're talking how we want to play and stuff like that. And, yeah, it's nice to be on his side now, instead of against him for a lot of years. It's gonna be a really cool moment to look back on that and enjoy that with my family and with him."

When Marner's pass to McDavid proved to be the tourney's final one, when the twine behind Connor Hellebuyck bent and all the Canadians' gloves and sticks went airborne, Marner caught a glimpse of his mom, Bonnie, and dad, Paul, in the stands.

"They were just hopping around like three-year-olds," Marner said. "It's special. It means a lot.

"It's been a long time since we've been able to celebrate something hockey-wise, winning."

Marner is in his ninth NHL season. He has yet to savour more than five wins in a single post-season. He repped his country at one world juniors and finished sixth, one world championship and settled for silver.

"Unfortunately, times before when I've worn the Canadian jersey, we haven't had as great success as we did in this tournament. So, feels good," Marner said.

"It's cool to win something and hoist something."

Even cooler to do it in Boston — and to play an integral role in a high-stakes victory.

"This is a tough building. It's a tough building to win in regular season and playoffs," McDavid said. "He understands that. And it's great to see him not only win but be a massive part of it. He made two beautiful plays on two of the goals. Well-deserved for him."

The hope now, for long-suffering Maple Leafs fans, is that Marner can use his Team Canada experience, his time immersed in a room free of doubt and panic, in the same way that Marchand once did.

That his confidence can soar. That his first big-stage star turn is only the hint of more clutch to come, with Toronto's playoffs around the corner and the Olympics not so far beyond.

"It's nice," Marner said, "to be on the other side of things and win this one."

Now that Mitch Marner has broken through to the other side, how wonderful it would be if he believed he could stay there.

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TSN.CA / Mark Masters: Stolarz, Woll help Maple Leafs build momentum as stretch drive starts strong | TSN

Mark Masters

14–18 minutes

The Maple Leafs travelled to Boston on Monday. The team will skate at TD Garden on Tuesday morning.

Leafs goalie Joseph Woll grew up in the St. Louis area, so Sunday's first career start in nearby Chicago carried a little extra meaning.

"It was pretty awesome," the 26-year-old said. "My parents were here and some family so I imagine it was pretty cool for them as well. They were longtime Blues fans and stuff. It was an awesome experience and especially the anthem was pretty sweet."

It's tradition in Chicago for fans to cheer loudly throughout the Star Spangled Banner, which caught Woll off guard.

"I've never been to a game here," he told TSN. "Like, it's funny, when you back up you don't go on the bench so I'd never experienced the anthem. I didn't know they did that. I almost got chills. It's pretty cool."

Once the puck dropped, Woll looked sharp in his first game action in two weeks. He stopped 25 of 27 shots to earn his first ever win over the Blackhawks.

"Cool to beat them," he said. "Grew up cheering for the Blues a lot and against them so it was a pretty cool experience."

Woll's strong performance came one day after Anthony Stolarz made his own solid return from the 4 Nations Face-Off break by stopping 31 of 34 shots in a win over the Carolina Hurricanes.

"I felt good," said Stolarz. "My body feels good. I was seeing the puck well. Just try to build it going forward, build a little momentum."

Stolarz returned from a knee injury in the penultimate game before the break so now Toronto's top-notch tandem is in tact and rolling.

"Yeah, it's great," said Woll before cracking a smile. "I missed him on the bench, though. He couldn't sit on the bench. The bench was too small. I have yet to get him on the bench [for a game]. Vancouver was the same thing."

The visitors bench in Vancouver where Woll played in Toronto's final game before the break also didn't have enough space for the back-up goalie.

"I'm excited for when one day he's on the bench," a grinning Woll continued. "It's nice to have him there. He helps to keep the mood light. I appreciate having him around and he's great for the team as well."

"They have a great relationship," said winger Nick Robertson. "You know they are very supportive of each other whoever's in net."

Goaltending is a big reason why the Leafs moved back into first place in the Atlantic Division on Sunday. Stolarz, who was a backup with the Florida Panthers last season, has been a revelation with a .928 save percentage in 19 starts, which leads the league (minimum 15 games). Woll, who began last season as Toronto's backup, owns a .910 save percentage in 31 games. Neither goalie has lost more than two games in a row this season.

"They're outstanding," raved forward Max Domi. "Any given night you just trust them back there. It gives our team so much confidence. Yeah, they're both, game one and game two back front break, awesome."

The Leafs have a very busy schedule with plenty of travel coming up. Saturday was the start of a stretch of nine games in eight cities over 17 days.

"It's not easy to play a lot of games in this league as a goaltender especially," said defenceman Jake McCabe. "For them to be able to split the workload like they have been and stay as fresh as possible, it's been very important for us."

Woll's previous career high in terms of games played in the NHL was 25, which was set last season. Stolarz's previous career high in the NHL is 27 games, which he set last season.

The Leafs are planning to divide the starts relatively evenly down the stretch.

"It's a heavy schedule coming up," coach Craig Berube told TSN before Sunday's game. "We need both guys to play well and to play. They're both going to play. I said that right from the get go from the start of the year and we'll keep rolling it, and then we'll make decisions as it goes along."

Woll anticipates bench reunion with Stolarz as Leafs tandem builds momentum The Leafs won both games after the 4 Nations break with Anthony Stolarz and Joseph Woll each looking sharp. Woll, a St. Louis native, picked up a win in front of family in Chicago on Sunday, but lamented the fact there was no room on the bench for Stolarz, who always keeps the mood light.

Considering his St. Louis roots, Woll keeps a close eye on Blues goalie Jordan Binnington, who backstopped Canada to the title at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

"He's a special goalie," Woll said. "He's proved it at the highest level winning a Stanley Cup and again now."

Woll was surprised that so many people questioned whether Binnington should even be in Canada's crease in the best-on-best event.

"He deserves a lot of respect and maybe a bit more respect than he had going into that tournament," Woll said. "Every time I've played against him I'm in awe of how good of a goalie he is."

Berube was behind the Blues bench when Binnington helped St. Louis win the 2019 Stanley Cup.

"He is a clutch guy," Berube said. "It is the competitiveness and the effort he puts into it. Watching that [championship] game, he was highly competitive and there were a lot of effort saves. That is what he does. He finds a way. I thought he was outstanding playing the puck in that game. I have seen it before with him in the year he won and in the playoffs after that. Time and time again — again and again — he comes up big when you need him."

Is Binnington Canada's starter for 2026 Olympics?Bryan Hayes, Jeff O'Neill and Frank Corrado are joined by TSN Hockey analyst Mike Johnson to discuss Jordan Binnington's performance in the Championship game of the 4 Nations Face-Off and does he already have a spot on Canada's 2026 Olympic team.

Woll provided the saves and Toronto's third line of Domi between Robertson and Bobby McMann provided some offensive punch during Sunday's 5-2 win.

Robertson snapped a nine-game goal drought in a big way. The winger scored twice with Domi assisting on both strikes. It was Domi's first multi-point game since Dec. 20.

"They've had some good stretches earlier in the season too so it's nice to see them back together and playing well," said Woll. "It's a nice combination of players. Bobby is a good power forward, Robbie can rip the puck, and Domes always seems to find the open guy."

But it hasn't been a consistent grouping for the Leafs, who have been searching for third-line chemistry much of the year.

With Max Pacioretty tweaking something last week and missing the weekend games, Berube made the decision to move Pontus Holmberg into the top six and shift Domi back to the middle of the third unit. The coach liked the results on Sunday.

"Max was on pucks, making good plays with the puck," Berube said. "Robbie was driving the net and scored a nice goal. They got a power-play goal as well. Bobby was doing what he does. He skates, gets on top of people, and creates turnovers. That line was really good for us."

"Domes is a really good passer so you gotta be ready to shoot," Robertson said. "I think we complement our games well. We gotta play direct, fast, and be shooters. Domes has got a good shot. He's well-decorated as a passer but he has a good shot too."

Domi, who is mired in a 24-game goal drought, hit a post on Sunday and was credited with two shots on net. It was his first multi-shot game since Jan. 25.

"The strength of the three of us is moving our feet and using our speed and staying close," Domi said. "When we do that the three of us complement [each other] pretty well."

"All making really good small-area plays, connected and it's good stuff," McCabe said. "Depth scoring is really important for us down the stretch here. Everyone's gotta contribute."

Toronto's top six goal-scorers (William Nylander, John Tavares, Auston Matthews, McMann, Matthew Knies and Mitch Marner) have accounted for 72 per cent of the team's goals this season (130 of 180).

Robertson is seventh on the team with 10 goals. No one else has more than six.

Can Maple Leafs' depth players continue to produce offensively?The Leafs on TSN panel discuss the Maple Leafs' victory over the Blackhawks on Sunday, how their depth players continuing to score like they have in the past two games is important for their long-term success this season and if they can expect to continue getting offensive production from their defence.

While Robertson was scoring twice in the second period in Chicago, older brother Jason Robertson was producing a hat trick with the Stars during a second-period surge of his own against the New York Islanders.

"It's exciting for my parents," Nick said. "They got double TVs so they're jumping off the couch five times. It's good to see him do well and it's nice to have a good game too."

Dad Hugh and mom Mercedes have multiple television sets in a room at their home so they can track both their sons on nights when their games overlap.

"They got one on the left and one on the right side so they go back and forth a little bit," Nick said with a smile.

The Robertson brothers became the first pair of siblings to score multiple goals on the same day in the NHL since Pavel Bure and Valeri Bure on March 1, 2000.

Nick, who requested a trade in the summer, is still finding his way in the NHL. Sunday marked his 136th regular season game.

Jason is an established star, but also a motivated one at the moment. He was among the top snubs by USA Hockey for the 4 Nations Face-Off team.

"He wanted to be a part of it and I think it's his goal to look for next year," Nick said of the 2026 Olympics. "He's doing great right now and hopefully he keeps going."

Nick came close to matching Jason with three goals on Sunday, but Blackhawks defenceman T.J. Brodie knocked one of his shots off the goal line. Nick has never recorded a hat trick in the NHL.

Robertson sparks Leafs depth scoring, but can't quite match brother's hat trickLeafs winger Nick Robertson scored twice on Sunday while older brother Jason Robertson was producing a hat trick with the Stars. "It's exciting for my parents," said Nick, who came close to his first career hat trick. "They got double TVs so they're jumping off the couch five times."

McCabe and partner Chris Tanev get the toughest matchups for the Leafs every night. They are usually focused on preventing goals and not necessarily scoring them, but on Sunday night both McCabe and Tanev found the back of the net in Chicago.

"It's always nice to contribute offensively," said McCabe, who was traded by the Blackhawks to the Leafs on Feb. 27, 2023. "Obviously when we hop over the boards our main objective is to keep the puck out of our net but any time you can put one in theirs it's a good feeling especially against the old squad."

It was McCabe's second goal of the season. It was also Tanev's second tally this year. They both picked up the primary assist on the other's goal.

"They played unreal," Domi gushed. "You see the give and goes all over the ice and even the neutral-zone transition game, they drive the bus back there, so it's nice to see them get rewarded on the sheet. They do so many good things that no one ever talks about. Everyone seems to just think about goals and whatnot but they do stuff that's way more important than that. For them to get that, it's great to see."

"It makes me really happy for them," Woll said. "They're unbelievable every night in front of me, and when they get buzzing offensively it's pretty awesome too."

Tanev leads the team at plus-27 this season, which is eighth overall in the league. McCabe, who has missed nine games due to injury, is second on the Leafs at plus-20.

"They defend well," Berube said. "They block shots and make simple plays with the puck. They are in good positions to be on the offensive side of things and be plus players. It starts in our end with those guys, with how hard they are to play against. They have such good chemistry together and are so connected with each other, making little plays and moving the puck well."

Puck don't lie: Leafs' shutdown pair of Tanev, McCabe gets rewarded with goalsToronto's shutdown defence pair of Jake McCabe and Chris Tanev both scored their second goals of the season in Sunday's win. "They drive the bus back there so it's nice to see them get rewarded," said forward Max Domi. "They do so many good things that no one ever talks about."

Pontus Holmberg sealed the Leafs win on Sunday night with an empty-net goal, which the Blackhawks challenged. It looked like Nylander was still in the zone when Tavares carried the puck in.

The officials ruled that it wasn't offsides, because Tavares didn't touch the puck until Nylander tagged up. After the call, Nylander was spotted on the bench expressing surprise in the ruling, but Leafs video coordinator and statistical analyst Jordan Bean had already alerted Berube that the goal was likely to stand.

Puck don't lie: Leafs' shutdown pair of Tanev, McCabe gets rewarded with goalsToronto's shutdown defence pair of Jake McCabe and Chris Tanev both scored their second goals of the season in Sunday's win. "They drive the bus back there so it's nice to see them get rewarded," said forward Max Domi. "They do so many good things that no one ever talks about."

Leafs lines in Sunday's game in Chicago:

Knies - Matthews - Marner

Holmberg - Tavares - Nylander

McMann - Domi - Robertson

Lorentz - Kampf - Steeves

Rielly - Ekman-Larsson

McCabe - Tanev

Benoit - Timmins

Woll started

Stolarz

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TSN.CA / Oilers must grapple with goaltending question ahead of trade deadline

Travis Yost

6–7 minutes

Stuart Skinner is not making life easy on the Edmonton Oilers front office.

The Oilers, who enter every season in the Connor McDavid-Leon Draisaitl era with a Stanley Cup-or-bust approach, have some critical decisions to make as the NHL's March 7 trade deadline inches closer.

Chief among them: Can Skinner be trusted to carry this team in the postseason, especially considering his mediocre-at-best 2024-25 campaign?

Goaltender performance is highly volatile and there's no doubt the Oilers are dealing with some uncertainty right now.

In the past two years, Skinner looked the part of a quality regular-season goaltender, the player Edmonton dreamed they could develop him into after selecting him 78th overall back in 2017. And the beauty of having insurance policies named McDavid and Draisaitl is that it ensures the Oilers don't need elite goaltending to win a title.

But like any other team, the Oilers can't afford to have the goaltending department cost them games, and Skinner's downturn this season has undoubtedly forced some wandering eyes from GM Stan Bowman.

Unfortunately for Bowman, the goaltender trade market is a seller's dream, with only two credible puck stoppers (neither of whom is a surefire bet) believed to be available, and plenty of teams looking for help in net.

So, what should the Oilers do in net? Ultimately I think they have three options:

- Bet on Skinner to rebound, and look at possible skater upgrades at the trade deadline;

- Acquire John Gibson from the Anaheim Ducks in either a starter or platoon role;

- Acquire Karel Vejmelka from the Utah Hockey Club in either a starter or platoon role.

When I mentioned the goaltending trade market is a seller's dream, it isn't just about demand exceeding supply. It's also that Gibson and Vejmelka are tremendously outperforming against career averages this season. Both are inside of the top 15 in goals saved versus expected (via Evolving Hockey) this season; for Vejmelka, it's the definition of a career year.

The tricky question front offices wrestle with here is if the current season is an upside outlier, or more indicative of things to come. You only pay the price of the first at the trade deadline, and to that end, sending a collection of picks and prospects for a goalie who may provide no improvement over the long term is a great way to blow up your organization's future. It's why so many teams have opted for platoon approaches in net these days; it's not just the benefit of more rest and less financial commitment under a hard salary cap, it's also about the scarcity of elite, repeatable goaltending.

To that point: the more you're willing to look backwards, the more Skinner's resume strengthens in contrast to that of Vejmelka and Gibson. Over a four-year sample, there's a strong argument Skinner has been the best of the three.

The more you believe in Skinner's prior history, the more you might believe in him as the best option of the three. Put heavy weight on this season, and Skinner is third in a three-horse race. It's a tricky question to untangle, so let's consider some other factors.

In Gibson's case, the Oilers can see two things: tremendously flashy athletic play all over the video tape, and a career peak that was borderline elite. The problem is that career peak was at least five seasons ago. The Ducks have iced one of the worst lineups in hockey since that time, and there is no way the persistent breakdowns in coverage in front of Gibson have helped.

But we have seen great goaltenders flourish in difficult situations in the past. In this case, Gibson has been contributory to the Ducks' demise and now the injury bug has started to creep on the 31-year-old veteran.

I would be remiss to not acknowledge his contact situation here. Gibson's still signed on a $6.4 million AAV contract through the 2026-27 season. The Ducks have tremendous cap flexibility and could likely retain some salary in a trade with the cap-stressed Oilers, but this won't be the easiest of fits.

In Vejmelka's case, you're betting on a relatively less-known commodity. He's been one of the best goalies this season, but prior to that it was a smattering of games with a teetering Coyotes franchise playing in an NCAA arena. He is also the dream trade rental – an expiring contract carrying just a $2.7-million AAV charge through the end of this season.

Utah is wrestling with a long-term extension of Vejmelka right now. They have the same question to answer as the rest of the league, only they have to answer this first: Is Vejmelka worth a longer-term (and pricier) extension? The Oilers and any other trade deadline bidder could pursue Vejmelka as a pure rental, but considering what he's put on tape this year, there will be real interest in a longer-term deal.

You could go for hours here not just differentiating between these two goalies as external options, but whether or not they improve this Edmonton team right here, right now. These are thin margins to say the least, but the Skinner and Calvin Pickard tandem conceding 13 goals this past weekend did nothing to calm this conversation.

What would Travis Yost do? I'd go after Vejmelka and platoon him with Skinner the rest of the way, and I'd probably look at him as a rental to start.

Gibson is older with a bigger cap hit and more term risk. Vejmelka may or may not be an upgrade over Skinner, but at worst he's a cheap and high-quality insurance policy to platoon for this year's Cup run.

And, at best, maybe Edmonton finally finds goaltending salvation in Utah.

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