



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

## The Athletic

### Free agents for NHL teams 2025: Top college, CHL and European players

Corey Pronman

Today we look at this year's class of free agents coming out of the CHL, NCAA and major European leagues.

It's a weak free-agent crop. There is no Collin Graf in college who every NHL team will want to sign or a Maxim Tsyplakov overseas that I feel could step into an NHL lineup right away. This is also the first year doing this ranking since CHL players were permitted to play college hockey. For that reason, you will see very few CHL players listed as a lot of the bubble candidates are opting to go to school. Karsen Dorwart at Michigan State is the closest thing in this crop. I expect he will play NHL games this spring for whichever team signs him and will get a look at camp next fall.

While I spent many hours on this article, I do not cover the free-agent world as extensively as I do the NHL Draft or drafted NHL prospects. I therefore cannot claim to have a comprehensive scope of the free-agent world. There will be numerous players who sign that I don't have listed here, but excluding them isn't necessarily a commentary on the players; I may simply have never gotten around to watching them.

Have a chance to play in the NHL

#### 1. Karsen Dorwart, C, Michigan State (Big Ten)

Dorwart has been one of the better forwards in the Big Ten for the last two seasons. He will intrigue teams as a college free agent because aside from his offense he has good athletic traits. Dorwart is a strong skater with decent size who should be able to hold his own in one-on-one battles versus men. He's been a solid two-way forward at the college level, but I don't think he's a true standout at either end. He has the skill, but he's not dynamic and I wouldn't call his compete level super high either.

#### 2. Atro Leppänen, LHD, Sport (Liiga)

Leppanen is having a monster season in Liiga. The defenseman is over a point per game and could score 20 goals. He is 26 years old so there is reason to be skeptical about how much his offense is going to be real in North America, but his sharp development is interesting. He's a good skater with decent hockey sense and a big point shot. His defending and compete aren't massive selling points, though.

#### 3. Danil Aimurzin, C, Severstal (KHL)

Aimurzin has been a top scoring forward in the KHL this season, displaying significant progression in his 22-year-old season. He's not blazing fast, but Aimurzin is a good enough skater for the top levels. He has strong puck skills, offensive IQ and a great finishing touch. He's not overly physical and like a lot of shooters, he drifts to the outside a bit too much. His one-timer is legit, though, so I don't hate that part of his game because he does give a decent effort level. His average frame will be the bigger concern for NHL teams.

#### 4. Joshua Eernisse, RW, Michigan (Big Ten)

Eernisse's skill and scoring won't get you excited; he has one goal in 32 games this season. Teams are interested in him though because he is a big, fast and highly competitive winger. He is very physical, attacks the net and has the potential to be an effective penalty killer as a pro. If he has even a little puck game he could be successful versus men. I suspect he will go back to school for one more year though to try to develop some more offense.

#### 5. Jack Stockfish, C, College of the Holy Cross (AHA)

Stockfish has enough tools to make him interesting as a pro prospect. He's a big center who skates well for his size. He shows the ability to create in transition due to his speed and hands. Stockfish has been a decent two-way player in college even if he hasn't posted major scoring numbers. Trying to project his skill to higher levels is a bit more difficult due to the conference he plays in, but he has a puncher's chance.

#### 6. Simon Zajicek, G, Litvínov (Czechia)

Zajicek is having a huge season in the top Czech league as the clear best goaltender. He's small by NHL standards, but his quickness and smarts give him a legit chance to play games in the league. He has the side-to-side athleticism to make difficult saves, but what I like about Zajicek's game is he often doesn't need to do that. He squares up a lot of pucks and anticipates the play at a high level, playing bigger than his size with his angles and reads.

#### 7. Liam McLinskey, LW, College of the Holy Cross (AHA)

McLinskey was one of the top forwards in the country in 2024. He didn't quite back up the numbers this season but he's still a potential sign for an NHL team. He's a big winger



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

with good puck skills and creativity. McLinskey is also a solid perimeter shooter. His foot speed is a question, though, for the higher levels.

## 8. Gleb Veremyev, LW, Colorado College (NCHC)

Veremyev is a big, physical winger with intriguing athleticism for the pro level. He moves quite well for his size and can bully his way to the net to create offense. Aesthetically he looks like a prospect, but the puck play and sense in his game is a question. Veremyev hasn't scored much in college and it'll be a question for him as he advances levels.

## 9. Grigori Kuzmin, LW, SKA (KHL)

Kuzmin has played limited minutes on a top offense in SKA. The 21-year-old has shown good flashes, though, in the KHL and with the Russian national team. He's a very good skater with the skill and offensive IQ to create chances at higher levels. Kuzmin is a strong passer and shooter. The only downside in his game is his frame, as at 5-foot-10 it's questionable if he's dynamic enough to play in the NHL even if he does have talent.

Long shot to play in the NHL

## 10. Maxim Shabanov, RW, Traktor (KHL)

Shabanov has been one of the top scorers in the KHL this season as a 24-year-old. He's an excellent skater with the speed and edgework of an NHL player. He has good puck skills and offensive sense and makes a lot of plays at full speed. Shabanov is also a mid-range shooting threat who can score goals versus good goaltenders. The issue with him will come down to size. He's about 5-foot-8 and while talented, it's debatable whether it's the special variety of talent you need at his size to make it to the top league.

## 11. Riley Thompson, C, Ohio State (Big Ten)

Thompson took off this season at OSU following a transfer from Alaska-Anchorage. He's a big, heavy center with strong puck skills and good finishing ability. His skating stride is quite heavy and will be a significant issue against men. I see flashes of strong sense and playmaking, but if that aspect is more consistent I could buy him becoming a bottom-six NHL player.

## 12. John Prokop, LHD, Union (ECAC)

Prokop has been a top defenseman in the ECAC for the past two seasons. He's a very good athlete with the size/skating combo of an NHL defender. He's not a super instinctive puck-mover, but Prokop has skill and has shown quite a bit of offense at the college level. Defensively he's just OK and he's not super physical, but his mobility and length give him a real chance to be a useful two-way pro.

## 13. Trey Taylor, LHD, Clarkson (ECAC)

Another top defenseman in the ECAC over the past few years, Taylor is an awkward but powerful skater who will be able to close on pros and skate pucks up ice. He flashes impressive puck skills and offensive touch, but I don't see him as a true puck-mover in the NHL. He defends well due to his athleticism but I'd like to see him be a bit meaner. He may be a tweener for the top level, but the traits are good enough in combination to give him a real chance to play games.

## 14. Noah Beck, LHD, Arizona State University (NCHC)

Beck was a 2020 pick by St. Louis who didn't stand out during his time at Clarkson. As a fifth-year transfer at ASU, he's been a lot better. He's intriguing due to his size and the amount of offense he's shown this season while being a strong college defender. Beck's skating has been and remains a major red flag, though, and there are significant questions on how his game will translate to the pros.

## 15. Jack Williams, RW, Northeastern (Hockey East)

Williams was a top player in Hockey East this season. He's not that big, but he has the footspeed of an NHL forward which gives him some hope as a pro prospect. The offense in Williams' game has developed well since his junior days. He's not a high-end skill type, but he makes plays and can create chances with tempo. He also has a very good shot and can score from range.

## 16. Borya Valis, RW, Prince George (WHL)

Valis has had a big season in Prince George in his overage season. He has the typical points profile of a top overage player in the CHL, but what makes him interesting for the pro game is his athleticism. He has decent size and skates like a legit NHL player, which combined with the fact he has some skill could give him a chance to play games. I'm not completely sold on his hockey sense or compete level though for the higher levels.

## 17. Albin Boija, G, Maine (Hockey East)

Boija has been a top goalie in college hockey this season. He has the quickness, sense and technique for the higher levels, but his barely 6-foot-1 frame is why he went undrafted. He's a major long shot due to his size but the rest of his talent could earn him a contract.

## 18. Oskar Steen, RW, Färjestad (SHL)

Steen was a Bruins pick in 2016 and has 60 NHL games of experience. His first stint in North America didn't go well, and he was in tough at times to crack competitive Boston lineups. He's been a top player in the SHL since going back and could be set to give it a second go at the NHL. Steen is a hardworking winger who gets to the net to score. He has decent speed and skill, although for a smaller forward he isn't dynamic, which led to the AHL/NHL tweener status he found in his first go-around.

## Why each NHL team won't — but should — make a trade deadline blockbuster

Sean McIndoe

The trade deadline is just over a week away. Is your team going to make a blockbuster move?

No, because this is the NHL, where all the GMs are whiny babies and making trades is too hard. There will be trades

over the next few days, maybe even lots of them. But they'll be by-the-numbers stuff, a pick here for a rental there, not anything big and bold. Given the extremely middling talent expected to be available, that's all anyone can do. Your team will play it safe.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

But should they? That's a different question. And for just about every team in the league, we could at least make the case that they should be aiming much higher than they inevitably will.

So that's what we'll do today. Every team gets the cursory nod toward why they won't make a blockbuster, and then a longer section on why they should. Is that fair? No, because we're putting a thumb on the scale here because trades are fun and we want all of the (many) NHL GMs who read my column to get to work. Here we go ...

## Anaheim Ducks

Obviously not, because: They're a rebuilding team that doesn't have any big-name UFA rentals, apart from maybe Brian Dumoulin, who'd get them a middling pick.

BUT: It's time to shoot or get off the point with Trevor Zegras. This can has been kicked down the road for over a year now, and at some point, you have to concede that the ideal offer isn't going to land on your doorstep. Deal him now and move on. Or don't, and recommit to making him part of your long-term plan — while trading John Gibson instead and turning the full-time starter's job over to the deserving Lukáš Dostál.

## Boston Bruins

Obviously not, because: They're just about completely capped out, the prospect pipeline is dry and they're not even that good, so there's no point moving mountains to make a deal that will just get them into the wild-card, if that.

BUT: Your captain is 36 and a pending UFA, and it's been surprisingly quiet in terms of rumors of an extension. If this is it for Brad Marchand in Boston, then pick a lane: either make a big move to make sure he gets one last run, or bite the bullet and trade him to a playoff team for exactly the sort of windfall of future assets your system desperately needs. It sure seems like the Bruins have already decided which lane to take, so now comes the hard part. Marchand says he doesn't want to go, which is nice, but it's not (completely) up to him.

## Buffalo Sabres

Obviously not, because: Who even cares anymore, dude?

BUT: Elias Pettersson is there for the taking, maybe, and this is pretty much the only chance you're ever going to get to acquire a young star who's locked into a contract for seven more years. Honestly, this should have happened already. It's not working in Buffalo, it hasn't worked in over a decade and "patience" shouldn't be in anyone's vocabulary. Go get your star.

## Calgary Flames

Obviously not, because: They've already made a big-ish move and they're good enough to make the playoffs as is.

BUT: They're going to get their doors kicked in once they get there. And sure, there's some value in just getting to the dance, especially for younger players such as Dustin Wolf. But do you really want to burn through a season just to get swept by the Oilers and then hear about it from their fans for a decade? Either load up for a 2004-style miracle run or accept reality and move some of those big contracts you say you're keeping.

## Carolina Hurricanes

Obviously not, because: One step ahead of you, buddy.

BUT: Mikko Rantanen hasn't re-signed yet, and it doesn't sound like it's close. So that leaves you with two options: Either put him back on the market or decide to go all-in on winning it all with him in what might be your only opportunity. What you absolutely can't do is treat the deadline as business as usual. This is a big-time "shoot or get off the point" choice, maybe the biggest in franchise history, and there's no going halfway.

The Blackhawks don't have much to sell that would qualify as a blockbuster beyond maybe Seth Jones. (Luke Hales / Getty Images)

## Chicago Blackhawks

Obviously not, because: They're terrible, and terrible teams sell, except they don't have anything to sell that would qualify as a blockbuster beyond maybe Seth Jones, which feels unlikely. In other words: Make a few deals around the edges and then regroup in the summer.

BUT: First of all, let's not shut the door on some kind of Jones deal, if only because pre-emptively ruling out creative moves is the sort of thing bad NHL teams do all the time. Beyond that, the frustration in Chicago is palpable right now, and eventually Kyle Davidson is going to have to either add some legitimate right-now talent or watch his replacement do it for him. Yes, you can point to the offseason, but why not jump in now, especially with all the teams that thought they'd be contenders now looking to dump veterans?

## Colorado Avalanche

Obviously not, because: They already made the biggest trade of the year, have no obvious needs and could even get a massive addition in the form of Gabriel Landeskog.

BUT: Yeah, this is a tough one. But if Landeskog isn't coming back, which still seems to be the most likely scenario, then they do have about \$5 million in LTIR space to work with. Use it. We know this team can win it all, but the path out of the Central will be brutal. Get that big name before the Jets or Stars beat you to it. You've certainly got the ammo to do it.

## Columbus Blue Jackets

Obviously not, because: They've exceeded expectations all year long and could make the playoffs, but we all know they're not winning the Cup, so stay patient and enjoy the ride.

BUT: First of all, who says they're not winning the Cup? Oh right, all the same people who said they would never get near the playoffs. Interesting.

But sure, they wouldn't exactly be anyone's favorites. So what? This team has won one playoff round in franchise history, and this might be the most likable version of this team we've ever seen. There's already a ton of youth in the pipeline, so why not at least consider spending a bit of that future to reward a long-suffering fan base with a memorable playoff chase?

## Dallas Stars



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Obviously not, because: They're already good, they're capped out and their big addition will be when Tyler Seguin comes back.

BUT: And when is Seguin coming back? If the answer is "right around the start of the playoffs," then that means it's time to go big-game hunting. That probably means the blue line, although a top forward could help them outscore that problem. I'll just say it, Rantanen would look great in Dallas. (Hey, has he had a chance to spend any time with any Stars players lately?)

Detroit Red Wings

Obviously not, because: After years of spinning their wheels, the switch to Todd McLellan seems to have finally flipped the switch. Steve Yzerman has never been a big deadline guy, so he certainly shouldn't make any panic moves now that things are actually clicking.

BUT: You could play it safe, the way this franchise has done for the better part of a decade. But with a playoff spot in the East there for the taking, and no guarantee that the McLellan bounce will be a long-term effect, doesn't Yzerman owe it to his exceedingly patient fan base to finally take the next step?

Edmonton Oilers

Obviously not, because: They fell just short last year and already did their adding in the offseason. Now they're probably the Pacific favorites. Don't fix what isn't broken!

BUT: Except there is something broken. Namely, the goaltending, where Stuart Skinner just hasn't been good enough. There aren't many options for upgrading, but there are a few. Go get John Gibson and bring the Cup back to Canada.

Florida Panthers

Obviously not, because: They know they can win with the group they have now, and besides, they've never really been a big deadline player.

BUT: Not at the deadline, no, but this is a team that's been built on big, aggressive trades. The biggest, landing Matthew Tkachuk and Sam Reinhart, came in the offseason. But they also landed key pieces such as Sam Bennett in midseason deals, and sometimes that's the best time to strike. Flags fly forever. That's flags, plural.

Now would be a good time for the Kings to make a call on Brandt Clarke. (Luke Hales / Getty Images)

Los Angeles Kings

Obviously not, because: Their season has already been better than most expected, and they got their deadline reinforcements early when Drew Doughty came back.

BUT: Sure, stay the course. By the way, the course you're staying on is "losing in the first round every single year." Normally you might figure now would be a good time to make a call on Brandt Clarke and, if a move is the answer, do it now while he still has plenty of value. But if Rob Blake decides to play it safe and keep all his assets, I'm sure the next GM will appreciate it.

Minnesota Wild

Obviously not, because: This one obviously hinges on the Kirill Kaprizov injury situation, and Russo has it right: If they don't know for sure that they have his LTIR space to work with, they just can't do much.

BUT: If it turns out Kaprizov will miss the rest of the regular season, you have to spend that space, right? Especially if he could return in the playoffs. The Wild spent the first half earning their status as contenders; if the cap space is there, even under rotten circumstances, then you have to keep swinging.

Montreal Canadiens

Obviously not, because: Can I interest you in a Jake Evans blockbuster? That's about all we can reasonably expect.

BUT: Who said we were being reasonable? The Canadiens should be looking to spend future assets to land impact players with term, even if the AAV is a little high. If that sounds familiar, it's because they already did it last summer with Patrik Laine, and that's mostly worked out fine. Granted, the price wasn't prohibitive, and maybe that's not the case in March. But it's the sort of deal the Habs should be looking at repeating, especially after a season that's told them they're not necessarily as close as they'd hoped to be.

Nashville Predators

Obviously not, because: The season is toast. Play it out, then regroup in the offseason.

BUT: Why not regroup now? Or at least, get the process started. It's not like doing all the heavy lifting in the offseason worked out so great last summer, right? Granted, it's not like the Predators have a ton of players anyone would want, aside from the untouchables. So ... why not hear what's out there for some of those guys, if only to set the table for something smaller?

New Jersey Devils

Obviously not, because: They made their big move in the summer, landing Jacob Markstrom. Now it's about tweaking.

BUT: I think this Greg guy might be on to something here. At the very least, the Devils are the sort of team that's both good enough and young enough that they should be willing to move future pieces for help right now, especially if there's (reasonable) term involved. It's not like the Metro doesn't look very winnable right now.

New York Islanders

Obviously not, because: They're a borderline playoff team that isn't really a Cup contender, which means they'll tinker but mostly stay the course.

BUT: Would Lou Lamoriello kick off a rebuild? Probably not. Should he? Absolutely. Start with moving Brock Nelson, preferably to a team that wasn't scouting the 4 Nations. But don't feel like you have to stop there, because any offer to take a veteran salary should be seriously considered.

New York Rangers

Obviously not, because: They tried. Nothing's worked.

BUT: What a mess. Last year's Presidents' Trophy champs have already made two significant deals since the season started, and they still don't look like a playoff team. At some



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

point you stop throwing good money after bad and fold your hand.

But this is not that time. For Chris Drury, the only way out is through, and that means finding out if there's any sort of impact help available. Unlike other contenders — and yes, we're using that term extremely loosely — the Rangers should be happy to talk about sending out key pieces of the core in any deal because they don't seem to have any of that precious chemistry other teams are so protective of. If you can move an older piece, do it. Hell, even Adam Fox shouldn't be off the table. The point is we know how this ends if Drury plays it safe, and that ending won't be remotely acceptable.

## Ottawa Senators

Obviously not, because: They've got no cap room, no truly glaring needs and are on track to finally break their playoff drought. Add some cheap depth if you can, sure, but there's no need to aim bigger.

BUT: That "on track" is doing some work, given the Senators have spent the last month bouncing around 50 percent to 65 percent chances. Those are decent odds, but they're far from a sure thing. You want to risk the wrath of an exhausted fan base, and maybe your captain's patience, on decent? Fair enough, but hoo boy, you'd better be right.

## Philadelphia Flyers

Obviously not, because: They're a rebuilding team that's already made a major move, and now they should probably just tank the rest of the year.

BUT: That trade with the Flames cleared cap space, and the Flyers are now set up to be a big bidder on the top-line center they've long needed. That guy may not be out there at the deadline, but he could be. And if he is, first-time GM Danny Briere can't let some other team beat him to the punch after all but calling his shot.

## Pittsburgh Penguins

Obviously not, because: They're nowhere near good enough to buy, and nobody wants the overpaid veterans they'd be tempted to sell.

BUT: First of all, are we sure nobody would want Erik Karlsson at 50 percent retained, with just two years left and after a 4 Nations that saw him look revitalized? No chance at all? Fine, Sidney Crosby to the Avalanche it is then.

## San Jose Sharks

Obviously not, because: Who do they really have to trade?

BUT: That's a fair point. Tyler Toffoli signed for the long term, and while there are pieces here that some teams might want, none of those moves will be blockbusters. So let's just say this: The Sharks are absolutely stacked for the future, so if Mike Grier wanted to be a surprise player on any major names that shake free, he could be. We all love a mystery team when the rumor machine starts churning, and the Sharks are in a great spot to be that team if nothing much ever comes of it.

## Seattle Kraken

Obviously not, because: They're not making the playoffs or winning the lottery, so ride it out and regroup in the offseason.

BUT: The focus around Seattle seems to be on pending UFAs such as Yannick Gourde and Brandon Tanev, which is fine. You could argue that the question is a bigger one: Is this team even close to being on the right track to winning anything? If the answer is "no," which it might very well be, then adding a few more second-round picks isn't going to be enough. Anything truly seismic probably does have to wait for the offseason, but that starts with getting real with potential trade partners.

## St. Louis Blues

Obviously not, because: They're doing that weird "retool but don't rebuild" thing, which usually means making the predictable moves but nothing more.

BUT: And that's the right approach ... unless the hockey gods drop a gift in your lap. In this case, that gift would be Jordan Binnington playing his best period of the season with the entire world watching, pushing him to the forefront of any goaltending trade tiers. With at least a few contenders a goalie away from favorite status, now's the time to strike quickly and move Binnington while his value is the highest it will ever be again.

## Tampa Bay Lightning

Obviously not, because: They don't have much cap room or a first in this year's draft, and have had an up-and-down season as it is.

BUT: Nikita Kucherov, Andrei Vasilevskiy and Jake Guentzel are in their 30s, Brayden Point is getting close, and Victor Hedman is older than all of them. No team has been better at finding creative ways to add at the deadline than Julien BriseBois' Lightning, and this is no time to get conservative. Two Cups is nice, but three or more would be better, so squeeze this stone for every drop that it has then worry about the long-term repercussions down the line.

## Toronto Maple Leafs

Obviously not, because: The cap is tight and the roster is pretty much set, so they'll try to add some depth on the blue line and maybe down the middle but otherwise roll with what they've got.

BUT: How well has that plan worked out over the years? The difference is that this year, with new ownership on the way, it's almost certainly the last chance for upper management. If it goes bad and Brendan Shanahan is out, that means nobody is safe. In other words, if Brad Treiving wants to play it cautiously, that's fine. But he's going to be betting a lot of people's jobs on it, so he'd better be right.

## Utah Hockey Club

Obviously not, because: They're barely .500, so it wouldn't make sense to add anything beyond some cheap depth.

BUT: Hey, remember when this team was going to spend a ton of money to be the big offseason story, and that turned out to be Mikhail Sergachev and not a whole lot else? That may have been the right call, but now they find themselves with a semi-realistic path to the playoffs in year one while the Flames and Canucks flatline in front of them. You've got a



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

ton of cap room, extra picks from the Coyotes era and this one and only chance to make a first impression.

Vancouver Canucks

Obviously not, because: They already traded J.T. Miller, so what else do you want them to do, trade Elias Pettersson?

BUT: They should trade Elias Pettersson.

No, really, they should. Or at the very least, they should be having some extremely honest conversations about whether they want to be married to him and his \$93 million contract until 2032. I've been a fan of his for a while now, but this season worries me, and the 4 Nations was downright terrifying. It's possible he's just not the same guy he was once, and if that's true then the Canucks need to get out now, in what's likely to be their last chance. The offseason? That could be too late to have any kind of market. Dangle him now, let him be the deadline's biggest prize, hope some GM who thinks he's getting fired in April offers something decent, and then make a run for the getaway car and book it out of town.

Vegas Golden Knights

Obviously not, because: Maybe they could take a year off, just to see what happens.

BUT: Yeah, the Golden Knights may be the one team where we don't have to do any arm-twisting, because we know how they operate: painful goodbyes in the summer, then big swings during the season. And for the most part, it works. So no convincing here — just keep doing you, Vegas.

## NHL agent poll: Best and worst owners, Connor McDavid's contract, future GMs

James Mirtle, Michael Russo

Who are the best and toughest front offices to deal with in the NHL? Which owners are known for giving players what they need? What does the league need to do to improve?

Asking players these questions can yield some pretty good results, but there are limits to that approach. Players have relatively limited exposure to organizations outside their own. And some shy away from expressing controversial takes — even anonymously.

Want an unvarnished opinion on all things NHL? Talk to an agent. Agents often represent several players, whose employers span multiple teams and divisions. They spend their days talking to players, other agents and NHL general managers. And they're experts on the business side of hockey.

Over the past several months, The Athletic polled 19 agents, who combine to represent hundreds of NHL player contracts, on 10 key questions facing the league and its future. Agents were granted anonymity to encourage honest and candid answers.

1. What is the area the NHL can improve the most?

What's holding the NHL back? Mainly marketing, agents said.

The bulk of responses centered around the league's perceived failings when it comes to selling the game and its star players, bringing in new audiences and growing hockey-related revenue (HRR). To be fair, though, all agents were

Washington Capitals

Obviously not, because: They did their shopping in the offseason, and now they're already running away with the East. And before you say that means they have to go big at the deadline, remember that their only Stanley Cup came in a year where they basically sat out.

BUT: The Capitals are a very good team. They're also one that's had just about everything go right this year. Those seasons don't come along very often, which is why you do whatever it takes to take advantage when they do. Caps fans know better than anyone that regular-season records don't mean a thing in the playoffs. But the players have shown management that they've earned this swing at this thing, so let's get Ovi a second Cup to go with his goals record.

Winnipeg Jets

Obviously not, because: They may already be the league's best team.

BUT: That's why you go all in. Here's another: You have the best goalie in the world at the absolute top of his game, but he's about to turn 32 and there's no guarantee he can stay at this level forever. And one more: The future of the franchise might be at stake.

That's right, the whims of alphabetizing means we get to end on a team whose deadline decisions could be literally existential. If the Jets aren't in on any big name who shakes free, picks and prospects be damned, then I don't even know anymore.

polled before the recent 4 Nations Face-Off, which was a grand success for the NHL and the NHL Players' Association.

"The NHL has a compelling product, it's the most exciting live experience of any of the major pro sports," one agent said, echoing the majority of respondents. "Yet (the folks) running the league seemed content for decades to be focused more on fighting the players over using them to grow the game."

"This is where the NBA has probably done a better job than us and the NFL is hitting on all cylinders," another said. "Just using the crest and the trophy is not enough anymore."

One agent, however, noted a hurdle faced by the league in promoting player personalities: the players themselves.

"I would like to say 'selling their players better,' but the guys are so humble, it's hard to sell them," the agent said. "Other sports leagues do that better, but their personalities are bigger."

Meanwhile, more than one agent highlighted the NHL's problem in getting the games in front of viewers.

"We're missing the opportunity to expand the game to a more casual fan," one said. "We haven't quite unlocked what the key is to bringing the live experience to TV in a better way. If you watch old games from the '60s or '70s, they're kind of shot more or less the same way as now."

How the league sets up the schedule and its key events drew criticism as well. Here are some other areas in which agents feel the league could improve:



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

On the playoff format: "I wouldn't mind them going back (to) 1 seed vs. 8 seed instead of the divisional stuff. There's got to be incentives to having great regular seasons. Same matchups every year in the playoffs."

On expanding the playoff field: "The league continues to grow and it sounds like we're going to continue to grow beyond the 32, so I'm really surprised the owners haven't pushed this for their own selfish reasons. For certain markets, it would create hope right to the end."

On scheduling: "With the 4 Nations, Olympics, the World Cup — I think the PA, the league have failed the players, the fans, the owners instead of really understanding the wear and tear it has on the product."

On scheduling: "I'd like to see staggered start times, and I don't know how we go three or four nights with literally no games or one or two and then all of a sudden everybody plays."

On player safety: "My thing here lately is the inconsistencies with player safety. For some things that go unpunished and some things that do, I can never get a read on what they're doing or thinking. Some of these things that should be suspensions and certainly significant fines, they slip by. There's no punishment. And others that are borderline, there's heavy stuff. There needs to be a consistent standard."

On the de-centralization of the draft: "I hate (the change). It's a big thing for that city to have. I think the draft is an amazing thing."

The answers in this category offer more evidence of how far the NHL has come in the Sun Belt.

On-ice success is, of course, a big factor here, but so are other areas. Atmosphere, culture and leadership matter a lot, too.

"You have to look at Tampa with the way the owner's very good at being hands-off," one agent said. "(Owner Jeff Vinik) sat back, hired the best people and let them do their jobs."

"Tampa is awesome," echoed another. "Players want to be there. They're buying houses there and spending post-career there."

For similar reasons, the other Florida team ranks high on agents' lists.

"(The Panthers) are in sync and connected between ownership and management," an agent said. "They turned things around in short order with (GM) Billy Zito going in there. They're fair. They've developed in short order to become a destination. Those guys take less to go there because of the tax advantages down there."

In Vegas, one of the league's youngest franchises has quickly gained a reputation for winning — at all costs.

"They've been consistently competitive," an agent said. "They don't hesitate to do whatever it takes, although it may be cold-blooded at times to improve the franchise. But if you're rating them on their ability to execute on a game plan, I think from Day One they've been pretty impressive."

The Dallas Stars also received credit for on-ice success.

"From top to bottom, their scouting is outstanding, their development is outstanding. Obviously management," an agent said.

Added another: "They've just found so many players. And frankly they're really good people."

One somewhat surprising entry here might be the Jets. One agent praised the team for on-ice success in the face of attendance and business concerns.

"They are able to draft, develop very well," an agent said. "The West is a beast, but I'm impressed, for a smaller market, how they're able to operate."

The Maple Leafs, on the other hand, received credit on the business side in spite of on-ice struggles (at least in the playoffs).

"I think they've outdone the Rangers. They've outdone Boston. They've outdone Montreal," an agent said. "So I've got to give them their due as far as growing revenues in this business and running it like a corporate enterprise."

Several agents struggled to limit their answer to just one team, so 25 of the NHL's 32 teams received at least one vote.

In this category, words like "reasonable," "accessible" and "honest" carry a lot of weight.

That's the case when it comes to Tampa GM Julien Brisebois.

"Julien's pretty straightforward," one agent said. "Very accessible, easy to deal with. Player-friendly."

"They don't mess around," added another. "I like JB."

It's the case with the Wild and GM Bill Guerin, too.

"Bill Guerin's reasonable and easy to deal with and easy to have a conversation with," an agent said. "Very honest."

"Billy G's always fair," added another.

Minnesota and Guerin also received credit for staying competitive in the face of salary cap-related issues over the past several seasons.

"It's truly amazing how competitive they've been the last three years spending \$13-\$15 million less than anyone else. Imagine if they could have fielded full rosters."

People love Jim Nill in Dallas.

"Classiest, most honest guy in the league," said one agent.

Some agents noted a desire to deal with former player agents, such as Zito of the Panthers.

"I like dealing with Billy Zito. He's been on both sides of it," one said.

Canadiens GM Kent Hughes is another former agent. His partnership in Montreal with front-office veteran Jeff Gorton was a highlight for one agent.

"Kent Hughes is a very charming guy, and right into it. Jeff Gorton and him, I met with those guys, they were like two brothers fighting when I talked to them. They're funny. To actually rebuild is hard. They've done a nice job over there. They're on the right track."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Interestingly, the Ducks and Islanders — Nos. 1 and 2 in this poll's "most difficult to deal with" category, respectively — each drew a mention here.

"I know it's a crazy thing to say, but I have such trust in dealing with Lou," an agent said of Islanders GM Lou Lamoriello. "He's so honest. What he says is what he means, and vice versa."

Another agent felt similarly about the regime in Anaheim: "I like the old-school, straight-shooting guys."

As most agents quipped at first, "This would have been easy a year ago — Arizona. Poor Billy (Armstrong) had his hands tied, but the rest was unstable as hell. Not anymore in Utah."

Forced to choose a new answer, most agents picked Buffalo due to more than a decade of struggles.

The Sabres haven't made the playoffs since 2011. They haven't won a playoff series since 2007. They've been rebuilding for what seems like forever. And they're currently holding down last place in the Eastern Conference.

"Buffalo has just decades of mediocrity and is just a mess," one agent said.

Multiple agents brought up Anaheim: "The Ducks are not run well enough and are so difficult to deal with."

The Blackhawks garnered votes here for a perceived mismanagement of their rebuild so far — especially after adding Connor Bedard.

"When you got it all, you've got to run it like you do. I don't think they have a plan," one agent said. "It should be getting done right. For what they've been given, Chicago and Detroit are the biggest letdowns. They've been given the keys to the kingdom, but my gosh."

Two agents wondered about the Yzerplan in Detroit.

"They're really unstable," one said. "There's no plan, although they may say there's one."

One agent questioned the strategy in Nashville.

"They spent \$108 million on free agents this summer — older free agents, but yet they just have five first-round picks just sitting there and not developing. So what's the plan? What's the direction?"

One agent described the Ducks front office as something of a throwback.

"When I started, everybody was angry and telling you to go f-- yourself," one agent said. "So I kinda miss that. Anaheim, personality-wise, they're tough. (GM Pat Verbeek) is cranky and runs the show himself and (assistant GM Jeff Solomon) is a grinder. I like those two guys, but tough. I appreciate when they're a--holes."

"Verbeek is ridiculous. He draws lines in the sand and sticks by it irrationally," one said.

"The guy that makes Anaheim tough is Jeff Solomon," another added. "He does all their contracts. Something as simple as doing entry-level deals ... there's always something they nickel you."

A so-called old-school mentality was a theme here. So, no surprise that the New York Islanders, with a front office led by the eldest statesman of NHL GMs, fall into the category.

"They're the biggest pain in the ass to deal with," one agent said. "A lot of old-school people, and (Lou Lamoriello) has no ability to let someone else have responsibility. It's all through him, and every conversation is draining."

"I respect the Islanders, but Lou definitely holds tight," an agent added. "When he locks in his heels, he locks in his heels."

Complaints about Carolina, which tied for second here, centered on owner Tom Dundon's management style.

"It's dysfunctional how the owner micromanages everything," an agent said.

But for the most part, answers in this category came down to how tough a front office was perceived to be in negotiations.

An agent on the Golden Knights: "(GM Kelly McCrimmon) is a tough customer."

And on the Predators: "Nashville is like pulling teeth dealing with them on contracts at all levels."

Tampa's Jeff Vinik has found a winning formula — on and off the ice.

"I think he's done a wonderful job," an agent said. "He walked in there and turned the franchise around. First-class all the way. I mean, just look at what the area around the rink used to be like compared to now. He's got to be one of the best owners in sports."

Another agent put it simply and enthusiastically: "My players say he's the best owner ever."

Added another, "That guy gets it. He got it from Day One. He's done all the right things and hired the right people and stayed out of it, but also done all the things that he needed to do for the market."

With all the answers here, high rankings go to owners who have deep pockets and are perceived as willing to spend.

That's the case in Toronto, one of few NHL teams with a corporate ownership structure rather than an individual owner. Agents appreciated MLSE's willingness to spend on more than player salaries.

"They have the money to basically do whatever they want," one noted. "They treat their players great."

"There's no cost spared with the Leafs," added another. "If you need an MRI, they'll get you 35 of them."

How about the new guy? Utah's Ryan Smith isn't new to sports ownership (he has owned a majority stake in the NBA's Utah Jazz since 2020) and he's already garnered at least one solid review in his debut NHL season.

"He's new, but a \$3 hot dog, \$3 water, \$3 pop? It feels like he's part of the people. He's the new wave."

Carolina Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon ran away with this category — something that could raise some eyebrows, given the relative success of his organization.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

What's clear from agents' comments is that this isn't really about any specific business decision or issues with spending (a more common sentiment the last time we did this exercise in 2022). It's more about Dundon's communication and leadership style, with several describing him as overly involved.

"I don't know how he has the time or the energy. He's the de facto GM," one agent said.

"A lot of people in our business hate it that Tom is so f---ing involved, and he is basically the manager and he has a lot of strong opinions, too, and he's not afraid to tell all of us privately those opinions."

"His GMs and assistant GMs ... have to ask him permission for anything," added another.

The idea that the owner's involvement is affecting the culture was raised several times.

"They've got some smart people there, but you just feel their culture by not even working there, just being around it. And it's not a great one."

One agent joked: "The worst part of Dundon lapping the competition here is he's probably proud of it."

Buffalo's Terry Pegula took the second spot in this category, but the comments were more focused on a perceived lack of involvement — and a lack of on-ice success.

"Buffalo has swung and missed a lot," one agent noted.

"He has not done anything," another said of Pegula. "He's in left field."

One agent said a lack of involvement was reason for the Ducks' Henry Samueli to earn votes, too. "Ownership that isn't involved when they should be frustrates me. Like, get involved."

"Whatever the f--- he wants."

That pretty much sums up the general feeling on this one.

When Connor McDavid's current deal expires after the 2025-26 season, the question isn't whether he'll become the highest-paid hockey player of all-time; it's how much he will make.

The current CBA limits a player to 20 percent of a team's salary cap. With the cap expected to jump above \$100 million for the first time as McDavid's deal expires, could he be the league's first \$20 million man?

"McDavid should make the max. It's imperative that he does," one agent said. "He's the best player in the league. With that carries the obligation to be paid the highest amount possible, end of story."

"He's worth every penny at 20 percent," another added.

"That guy better get 20 percent of the upper limit," said another. "He's by far the best player in the game and will be for awhile and should lead the charge. Our whole league works towards a ceiling, and he should be it."

Some noted the need to balance a desire to get paid and the desire to win.

"He's got to decide if he wants to win or not," one agent said. "He has every right to ask for 20 percent and then go backwards."

"I would suggest it's going to be whatever Connor McDavid decides is most appropriate," another agent said. "I'm sure a lot of people know this, but when he did his last contract, the night before he signed it, he called and took a couple million right off the top because he felt he was taking too much money and they needed more to be able to build the team."

Another agent noted that McDavid's contract will need to compare favorably to the eight-year, \$112 million extension signed by Oilers teammate Leon Draisaitl in September, which carries an AAV of \$14 million.

"I think Connor realizes Stanley Cups are the most important thing, but obviously Leon's contract's out there, so I would say a million dollars more than Leon."

Another agent agreed on that ballpark.

"I'd say 15 percent of the cap, because you need to leave 5 percent cushion for the team to have money to spend to win," the agent said. "I think that's fair. Because if the cap goes to \$115 million, that's \$15 or \$16 million."

7a. What is the biggest issue in the next CBA negotiations?

The current collective bargaining agreement expires after the 2025-26 season, and the NHLPA and NHL appear confident a deal will be reached amicably.

"I think we are in a good place in terms of our collective bargaining relationship, in terms of our overall relationship," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said ahead of the opening game of the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Indeed, many agents are hopeful the next round of negotiations will feature less animosity than we've seen in the past.

What are the big issues likely to arise?

"I hope none," said one agent. "I hope we've ironed them out. We've had enough battles in my life — over 30-plus years as an agent. We don't need a battle."

Still, this question yielded an array of concerns on agents' minds. Most of them center around money — and exactly how it is divided between owners and players. Several agents noted, for example, that players should get a piece of expansion fees.

"If it's going to be a real 50-50 partnership, it should be in respect to everything, and I'm not just talking expansion fees," one agent said. "I'm talking more along the lines of all the insurance and everything that all comes out of the player's share. Those expenses should be 50-50 as well."

Escrow came up with nearly half the agents.

"It's always escrow," an agent said. "Escrow will be fine as long as HRR keeps going upwards. It's just making sure HRR continues to grow so everyone can share and it doesn't rear its ugly head again."

But a falling Canadian dollar had some worried about the potential hit to HRR.

"The problem we're having with the Canadian dollar that's going to be a huge issue because HRR is driven by Toronto,



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Montreal, Vancouver — they contribute so much. I think we're going to be into another pickle a couple of years from now."

Others had thoughts on adjustments to the salary cap.

"(There should be a) luxury tax for teams that want to spend over the cap," one said.

Another added there should be focus on keeping the cap floor at a sufficiently high level: "I feel like as the cap goes up you're going to have more and more teams having self-imposed budgets, so that's a concern."

7b. What's an under-the-radar issue that should be addressed?

This was another question that drew a wide array of responses.

The idea that tax regimes in certain markets make teams more or less desirable to players was raised more than once. Is there a better way?

"The cap should be set off teams with no state tax," one agent said, echoing a few others. "Meaning Wild or Rangers or whoever could spend their percent difference to that of Vegas. Even (the) playing field."

Not everyone agreed, though.

"That's a thing I'm sick of hearing about," an agent countered. "Nobody was talking about this 15 years ago when the Panthers were terrible. It's complete bulls---. That's not why players go there. They go there to win."

Here were some other popular talking points:

On travel: "Cross-conference travel and rivalries. I think they should add an extra in-division game or two in their conference rather than, say, Tampa go to Vancouver. That travel is so taxing and they don't draw well."

On new CHL-college rules: "I think there will be a lot of discussion about the four-year college free agency thing. Teams hate that. Agents love it where the guys can basically walk after four years. I think there's going to have to be a lot of modification based on the CHL-NCAA changes just to try to get people on some sort of level playing ground."

On signing bonuses: "The signing bonuses haven't even kept up with the cost of living expenses. If you're a rookie in New York and told to get an apartment, you'd rather stay in the hotel for three more months. To me, Connor Bedard making a \$95,000 signing bonus is crazy. That's the same as a college free agent. I go to Hawks games and there's 16,000 Bedard jerseys. Maybe there should be an exception for first-round picks."

On player safety: "The player safety department needs to be overhauled."

On waivers: "That entry-level players have to wait so long before they're eligible to be put on waivers. I think a team should have two years to assess the talent of a player and develop them."

"Good players getting trapped in the minors for too long."

It's not entirely surprising that an overwhelming majority of agents are in favor of expansion.

After all, as one agent put it, "More jobs. Agents would always be for that."

"I want the NHL to go to 40 teams. Forty-five teams," another added. "The more the merrier. If we get to 50, I'd be thrilled."

Some did note, however, that the league should be careful not to dilute the talent pool.

"I don't think there's enough good players to expand," one said.

Most disagreed, arguing more opportunity will result in more stars.

As for where the NHL should go next?

"Going to strong TV markets is the low-hanging fruit and most important element, so Houston makes the most sense," one agent said.

"Add teams in the U.S. Avoid the Canadian dollar," another said. "Add Houston and Atlanta, and then realign. Why's Utah in the Central?"

Here's what agents had to say on the options:

On Phoenix: "Phoenix can work with the right owner and building. Utah, you see how much difference ownership makes right off the hop. It changed almost immediately."

On Houston: "Fourth-biggest market in the U.S., and it never gets mentioned. It's a no-brainer."

On Quebec City: "I have no idea why they're not in the league if Winnipeg is."

On Quebec City negatives: "I don't want another Canadian city; we need to generate revenue."

On Atlanta: "Bad ownership plagued them last time. Horrible ownership actually, so find the right group and location, it could work."

On Atlanta negatives: "F--- Atlanta. We've tried that a million times. There's no way."

On Atlanta negatives: "I'll believe this Atlanta stuff when we see it. We've been there twice. They seem to think it'll work a third time. We'll see."

On Kansas City: An agent pointed to the NFL's Chiefs as an example. "Maybe they can get that market."

On Toronto: "I think it's the most insane thing in the world that there's not two teams in Toronto. It's crazy."

Several agents described the current NHL schedule as a "grind." Adding more games is unpopular.

More teams having a shot at the postseason, though? There might be something there.

"I would probably be in favor of some play-in games," one agent said. "I think it's worked well in baseball and it's been good for TV and would be good overall for HRR."

Another added, "It's so hard to make the playoffs, so if we can take the teams that were like one regulation loss away from making it, I think that'd be fun."

Still, there were several who emphasized that the schedule is too long as it is.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

"There's too many games. If anything, I would reduce the number of games," one of eight agents who responded "no" said.

A main target for reducing the workload: the preseason exhibition schedule.

"The exhibition situation has been so poorly run," an agent said. "It's so imbalanced. There's really no rhyme or reason to it. Most teams, at most, really have one spot you can fight for in training camp if everybody's healthy."

One agent said the season needs to start and end earlier.

"Yes (to adding regular season games), but no more than two games and as long as the exhibition season gets cut down to balance it out. And the Stanley Cup needs to be awarded no later than the first week in June. Why not start the season Sept. 15?"

Seventeen GMs-in-waiting garnered votes as the one to watch — including two agents who selected themselves.

Penguins assistant GM Jason Spezza received the most mentions, though.

"From the very beginning, even when he was in his last year as a player, he had a thirst for knowing everything he could learn," one agent said. "He's very, very thorough in everything he does and is learning every part of the organization. Kyle (Dubas) gave him access to everything in

Toronto and now Pittsburgh. Jason approached it like he did everything else — just 100 percent."

Another member of Dubas's front office was praised by one agent: Vukie Mpofo, the Penguins' director of hockey operations and legal affairs.

"One of the sharpest, committed and genuinely good young people. He's a star," the agent said.

In the two-vote club, Leafs AGM Brandon Pridham and Panthers AGM Brett Peterson stood out.

"I think he does a lot of work and doesn't get a lot of credit," an agent said of Pridham. "He's quiet, but I think he's done yeoman's work there for a lot of years and doesn't necessarily get on people's radar."

Another said of Peterson: "Former agent. He's very smooth, very smart. He's in tight with USA Hockey, well schooled by Billy Zito. He's an impressive guy."

Speaking of former agents, Canucks AGM Émilie Castonguay — the first Canadian woman ever certified as an agent — received a vote.

"She's a strong presence. Smart and has the right edge," an agent said. "Not only does she have a strong legal education, she has navigated the game from all sides, player-agenting and managing. She's a skilled communicator and strategic thinker."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025



## Suzuki, Laine lead Canadiens to 4-0 win over Hurricanes

WRAL

MONTREAL — MONTREAL (AP) — Nick Suzuki and Patrik Laine each had a goal and two assists, and the Montreal Canadiens beat the Carolina Hurricanes 4-0 on Tuesday night.

Juraj Slafkovsky and Lane Hutson also scored for Montreal, and Sam Montembeault made 20 saves for his fourth shutout of the season and fifth of his career.

Frederik Andersen finished with 14 saves for the Hurricanes.

Slafkovsky opened the scoring at 8:05 of the first period after deflecting a shot from the point. Laine's deflection with 2:23 left in the opening period made it 2-0.

Montreal continued to set the tempo, forcing four consecutive Carolina penalties. Suzuki converted on the fourth when left alone in the slot, firing a wrist shot over Andersen's glove midway through the second.

Hutson made it 4-0 with another power-play goal midway through the third.

Hurricanes: Despite having four players on pace to score 60 points or more, Carolina's chance creation was tepid. They enjoyed long stretches of possession on a number of occasions, but could not find any space in the slot to trouble Montembeault.

Canadiens: Montreal has developed a habit of making it difficult when protecting a lead. This time, solid goaltending and an effective 2-for-5 power play removed any doubt.

The Hurricanes found themselves on the power play at the beginning of the third period while down 3-0 and could have started a comeback had they converted. Instead, they hit one post and registered one shot on net before Montreal made it 4-0 to ice the game.

It is the first time in more than a month, the Canadiens have won back-to-back games, dating back to consecutive wins on Jan. 19 and 21 over the New York Rangers and Tampa Bay Lightning.

Hurricanes host Buffalo on Thursday, and Canadiens host San Jose.

## WRAL to air two Hurricanes games in final stretch of season

WRAL

— WRAL-TV will air two Carolina Hurricanes games in the final stretch of the regular season.

The FanDuel Sports Network broadcasts will feature Canes games against the Boston Bruins (March 6) and Washington Capitals (April 2) at Lenovo Center. The games will be simulcast on WRAL at 7 p.m. as the team continues its playoff push.

The Capitals game figures to draw interest from around the sports world with Washington forward Alex Ovechkin closing in on Wayne Gretzky's record for career goals scored. The 39-year-old Ovechkin is 12 goals away from Gretzky's 894 total and could be near the milestone at that point.

The news comes after WRAL aired two games the week of Thanksgiving earlier this season.

"We are excited to once again partner with our friends at Capitol Broadcasting to expand access to our live broadcasts, after successfully doing so this past Thanksgiving," said Hurricanes president Doug Warf. "We appreciate FanDuel Sports Network for working with us to help simulcast these games over the air on WRAL to showcase our great team to more fans across the Carolinas."

The games will also air across a smattering of other markets throughout the Carolinas.

As of Tuesday, the Hurricanes are 33-20-4 with 70 points and second in the Metropolitan Division. The Capitals lead the Metropolitan Division with 84 points, a point behind the league-leading Winnipeg Jets.

The Canes have reached the NHL playoffs in six straight seasons.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025



## Recap: Canes Blanked By Habs As Road Woes Linger

Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

"We're starting off games down a couple and chasing is never a recipe for success..."

MONTREAL - Montreal goaltender Sam Montembeault stopped all 20 Carolina shots on Tuesday as the Canadiens dealt the Hurricanes a 4-0 shutout loss at Bell Centre.

[GAME SUMMARY](#) | [BOX SCORE](#) | [UPCOMING HOME GAMES](#)

For the second straight game, the Canes found themselves trailing by multiple goals following the first period of play after a pair of deflections helped the Habs get ahead.

Another Montreal goal arrived midway through the second stanza - this time on the power play - to lengthen the lead, despite the Canes limiting their foe to just two shots. Carolina generated ample opportunities on a pair of power-plays in the third, including hitting the post multiple times, but Montreal struck again on the man advantage to make it 4-0 at 10:22.

Frederik Andersen stopped 14 of 18 shots in his return to action after the break.

Stats & Standouts

Rod Brind'Amour and staff elected to go with 11 forwards and seven defensemen tonight, scratching Tyson Jost up front and having Riley Stillman skate as the extra on the blue line. Stillman played just 1:52, including zero shifts in the second and third periods.

Tonight was the fifth time this season that Carolina has been shut out. It is the second time in their last four road games, joining Feb. 4 in Winnipeg.

Discipline was a factor in the contest as the Canadiens capitalized on two of their five power plays. The Canes recorded 10+ penalty minutes for just the 14th time this season - only six teams in the NHL have done so fewer times in 2024-25.

Receiving no run support, Frederik Andersen is the first Canes goalie this season to suffer three consecutive defeats.

They Said It...

Rod Brind'Amour after the defeat...

"It's been a bit of the same story. It's not that we're giving up a ton, but when we do, we just seem to find a way [for it to go

in]. A couple of weird bounces there off the start and you're behind the eight ball. You've got to give them credit, they didn't give us much. They were doing a nice job of defending when they got the lead. Special teams have to be better. I did like the penalty kill tonight. They did a pretty good job. (Montreal's last goal) is a floater. That's kind of a tough break. The five-on-three did a hell of a job. I didn't like Suzuki's power-play goal, it wasn't a Grade-A opportunity. We've got to find a way to score goals."

Jordan Staal sharing similar thoughts...

"We're starting off games down a couple and chasing is never a recipe for success. I just don't think we're defending well enough. We're kind of hoping to out-score teams and hoping to out-chance teams, playing that 50/50 'we get more goals than them' kind of thing. We've always been a club that defends and defends well. We've slipped in that aspect of our game."

Rod Brind'Amour on the team's defending and what hasn't been going right for the team...

"(We gave up) under 20 shots again tonight. That's a pretty good defense. It was 11 until the last seven minutes of the game. To me, if you look at the identity of our team, it's definitely changed in the last couple of weeks. We've changed the way that we play a little bit and that's no knock on the guys that we brought in, they're great players, but we have to remember how we play the game. I think we've changed a little bit and it's clearly not working."

Jordan Staal when asked about the team's struggles away from Raleigh...

"We've got to find a way to be better on the road. It's really hard to put a finger on [what's not gone well on the road], obviously. It's really disappointing, there's nothing better than a greasy road win and we haven't done that much this year. I think it really comes down to defending. When teams are comfortable at home, they're feeling it. We've got to find ways to slow them down and keep the puck out of our net. That'll give us a better chance on the road to get some wins."

What's Next?

The Canes are scheduled to be off on Wednesday before returning to action on Thursday for Whalers Night at Lenovo Center.

Next Home Game: Thursday, Feb. 27 vs. Buffalo | 7:00 p.m. | Whalers Night | Tickets | Parking | Upcoming Theme Nights



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025



## Montembeault makes 20 saves, Canadiens shut out Hurricanes

Sean Farrell

Laine, Suzuki each gets goal, 2 assists for Montreal; Carolina has lost 5 of 6

Hurricanes at Canadiens | Recap

MONTREAL -- The Montreal Canadiens won consecutive games for the first time in a month with a 4-0 win against the Carolina Hurricanes at Bell Centre on Tuesday.

Sam Montembeault made 20 saves for his fourth shutout this season, and Patrik Laine and Nick Suzuki each had a goal and two assists for Montreal (27-26-5), which went 1-7-1 in its nine games prior to the 4 Nations Face-Off break.

"I think we're just playing more of a complete game," Montembeault said. "We played a really solid 60 minutes today. Sorry for the fans, maybe it wasn't the most exciting game of the year, but we played a really solid game and really simple game. That's a team that brings a lot of pressure and we did a really good job of getting the puck out of our zone."

The Canadiens, who defeated the Ottawa Senators 5-2 on Saturday, last won consecutive games from Jan. 19-21.

"I think we've played some pretty solid hockey," Laine said. "Obviously, in Ottawa it was a tighter game, but I think we played in a similar way both nights and obviously two wins right away it's huge for us from where we stand."

CAR@MTL: Sam Montembeault made 20 saves for his fourth shutout in a 4-0 victory

Frederik Andersen made 14 saves for Carolina (33-21-4), which lost 6-3 at the Toronto Maple Leafs on Saturday and is 1-5-0 in its past six games.

"It's been a bit of the same story," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It's not that we're giving up a ton but when we do it just seemed to kind of find a way, you know, a couple of weird bounces to start and then you're behind the eight ball. You've got to give them credit, they didn't give us much. They were doing a nice job of defending when they got the lead."

Juraj Slafkovsky put Montreal up 1-0 at 8:05 of the first period. He deflected Jayden Struble's wrist shot from the left point for his second goal in as many games.

Laine made it 2-0 at 17:37 when he tipped Alexandre Carrier's shot from the point.

CAR@MTL: Laine deflects the puck from down low past Andersen to put the Canadiens up 2-0 in the 1st

Suzuki pushed it to 3-0 with a power-play goal at 10:04 of the second period. He fired a wrist shot past Andersen's glove from above the right face-off dot after taking a cross-ice pass from Laine.

"I feel like whenever I've played them throughout my career, they've always had a healthy PK," Laine said. "We try to keep it simple. There were a couple of breakdowns they had and obviously we were able to capitalize, which was nice, which gives us confidence for our power play, and it'll be a major part for our success, you know, trying to get the PP going in these last 24 games."

Lane Hutson made it 4-0 with Montreal's second straight power-play goal at 10:22 of the third period, a wrist shot through traffic from the left point. The defenseman leads NHL rookies with 43 points (four goals, 39 assists).

"We're starting off games down a couple and chasing is never a recipe for success," Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal. "I just didn't think we were defending well enough. We're kind of hoping to outscore teams and hoping to out-chance teams and playing that 50/50, you know, if we get more goals than them kind of thing. We've always been built on a club that defends well, and I think we've slipped in that aspect of our game."

NOTES: Canadiens forward Josh Anderson left at 10:08 of the third after he slammed into the end boards, putting out his arms to brace himself after he was upended by Jalen Chatfield, who was penalized for holding. There was no update on Anderson after the game. ... Canadiens forward Cole Caufield had an assist on Suzuki's goal. It was his 200th point (108 goals, 92 assists) in his 263rd NHL game, making him the fastest Montreal player to reach that milestone in the past 30 years. ... Montembeault has the most shutouts by a Canadiens goalie since Carey Price had four shutouts in 2019-20. ... Suzuki reached 40 assists for the fourth straight season. Only Guy Lafleur (10 consecutive 40-assist seasons) and Saku Koivu and Bobby Smith (each with five straight 40-assist seasons) have had more for Montreal.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025



## Canadiens 4-0 Hurricanes (Feb 25, 2025) Game Recap - ESPN

ByAP

MONTREAL -- — Nick Suzuki and Patrik Laine each had a goal and two assists, and the Montreal Canadiens beat the Carolina Hurricanes 4-0 on Tuesday night.

Juraj Slafkovsky and Lane Hutson also scored for Montreal, and Sam Montembeault made 20 saves for his fourth shutout of the season and fifth of his career.

Frederik Andersen finished with 14 saves for the Hurricanes.

Slafkovsky opened the scoring at 8:05 of the first period after deflecting a shot from the point. Laine's deflection with 2:23 left in the opening period made it 2-0.

Montreal continued to set the tempo, forcing four consecutive Carolina penalties. Suzuki converted on the fourth when left alone in the slot, firing a wrist shot over Andersen's glove midway through the second.

Hutson made it 4-0 with another power-play goal midway through the third.

### Takeaways

Hurricanes: Despite having four players on pace to score 60 points or more, Carolina's chance creation was tepid. They enjoyed long stretches of possession on a number of occasions, but could not find any space in the slot to trouble Montembeault.

Canadiens: Montreal has developed a habit of making it difficult when protecting a lead. This time, solid goaltending and an effective 2-for-5 power play removed any doubt.

### Key moment

The Hurricanes found themselves on the power play at the beginning of the third period while down 3-0 and could have started a comeback had they converted. Instead, they hit one post and registered one shot on net before Montreal made it 4-0 to ice the game.

### Key stat

It is the first time in more than a month, the Canadiens have won back-to-back games, dating back to consecutive wins on Jan. 19 and 21 over the New York Rangers and Tampa Bay Lightning.

### Up next

Hurricanes host Buffalo on Thursday, and Canadiens host San Jose.

NHL contender kryptonite: Biggest flaws for nine top teams - ESPN

Rachel Doerrie

Rachel Doerrie is a professional data consultant specializing in data communication and modelling. She's worked in the NHL and consulted for professional teams across North American and Europe. She hosts the Staff & Graph Podcast and discusses sports from a data-driven perspective.

### Reactions

The NHL trade deadline is less than two weeks away on March 7, and there is plenty of adding to be done for the contenders. As is always the case, not every playoff team is a Stanley Cup "contender." We focus here on nine of the top teams based on the standings, with sustainable underlying numbers and key strengths heading into the playoffs.

A few principles that many GMs abide by when building a contender for the playoffs: you can never have enough defensemen, confidence in goaltending, and forwards with tough skill -- the kind of skill that allows players to be difference-makers when games get tighter. Management and coaches want players they can trust, and often those players are the physical, defensively responsible types. Shoring up those areas often becomes a more pressing priority than acquiring depth scoring, or a high-end player.

With those parameters in mind, here's a look at the current weaknesses of top five teams in the Western Conference and four from the Eastern Conference -- and what they might do ahead of the deadline to alleviate them.

### Carolina Hurricanes

Current record: 33-20-4, second in Metro

Last year's playoffs: Lost in second round

Carolina is certainly in a conundrum after pulling off one of the most high-profile trades in recent memory. Mikko Rantanen has not fit like a glove in Carolina. To be fair, he played a few games and went off to the 4 Nations Face-Off, so he hasn't had enough time to settle into his new surroundings. During that stretch, Carolina has played two home games, meaning Rantanen has spent five days at most in Carolina. That isn't enough time to decide whether he wants to sign an extension for \$100 million-plus.

Of course, the Hurricanes need to decide if they want to keep him. They have historically struggled to score at critical times in the playoffs, and Rantanen is a proven playoff



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

scorer. They need him for that exact reason. Should the Canes move Rantanen before the deadline, bringing in Brock Nelson (a pending unrestricted free agent), Brad Marchand (UFA) or Rickard Rakell -- who has three years remaining at \$5 million AAV -- might help bridge the gap.

### Colorado Avalanche

Current record: 33-24-2, fourth in Central

Last year's playoffs: Lost in second round

After acquiring Mackenzie Blackwood, trading Rantanen to Carolina and having Martin Necas fit perfectly alongside Nathan MacKinnon, the Avs are in good shape. The biggest area of need was addressed with the acquisition of Blackwood in goal, but Colorado has a few questions that need answers.

There is a Valeri Nichushkin-sized hole in its lineup as a player who was critical to their Stanley Cup victory and might be on the way back. Josh Manson is out of the lineup, leaving the Avs very thin below the top defense pairing. They could use an upgrade on their bottom pair, regardless of Manson's health.

The main hole in their roster for which there is no internal fix is second-line center. Casey Mittelstadt has not worked out, and the Avalanche need a lot more from their 2C if they are going to get out of gauntlet that is the Central Division. The Avs are getting consistently outmatched in that spot, and while Nichushkin's return will help, they need a significant upgrade at the center position. Adding the Schenn brothers address both the 2C (Brayden) and defensive depth (Luke) needs. Brock Nelson and Ryan O'Reilly (if he'd be willing to return to Colorado) would be excellent fits for what the Avalanche need on the second line.

### Dallas Stars

Current record: 37-18-2, second in Central

Last year's playoffs: Lost in conference finals

Miro Heiskanen's status for the rest of the regular season is the biggest piece of the puzzle. He is one of the best defensemen in the NHL, and when he and Thomas Harley are playing, Dallas might have two of the most underrated defensemen in the league.

The Stars need help on the right side of the D because Matt Dumba, Ilya Lyubushkin and Cody Ceci do not inspire confidence. The need for a 4/5 defenseman is obvious, and the Stars have money to make it happen. Given the significant need on the right side, Rasmus Ristolainen seems like a fair fit. The right-handed defenseman has performed admirably in Philadelphia, and brings a physical element. A top four with Heiskanen, Harley, Esa Lindell and Ristolainen would be formidable in the postseason.

There is the Seth Jones conversation as well. Jones, a Texas native, has indicated he'd like to be moved to a contender. Dallas is just that, and with its deep pool of prospects, could put together a good deal to get Chicago to retain money on Jones' contract. He plays the right side, kills penalties and can provide strong minutes when he isn't the top shutdown option. There is reason to believe Jones would welcome a move to Dallas, the question is whether Dallas has the appetite to pull it off.

### Edmonton Oilers

Current record: 34-19-4, second in Pacific

Last year's playoffs: Lost in Stanley Cup Final

The Oilers are in an interesting position because it's the last year of Leon Draisaitl's bargain contract, and only two playoff runs remain with Connor McDavid in his current deal. The Oilers are a roller coaster, with their top performances looking like future Cup winners and their bad performances looking like a 12th-place team.

Their "B" game needs to come a long way before April, and part of having a good B game is consistent goaltending. Can you get the saves when you don't have your A game? Right now, the answer is no. The Oilers also need some scoring depth because predictably, Zach Hyman and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins are not repeating their production from last season.

John Gibson is the most obvious name in the goaltending conversation, and it makes sense. When Stuart Skinner is on his game, he's a guy with whom you can win a Cup. When he's not, he's unplayable. Gibson is a better stopgap than Calvin Pickard, and he's used to being under siege on any given night in Anaheim. He has stolen wins for the Ducks and acquiring him might allow the Oilers to platoon their goaltenders in the playoffs. But Gibson's injury might complicate things.

Up front, if Carolina decides to move Rantanen and are willing to bring his cap number down even further via salary retention, the Oilers should explore it. Beyond that possibility, Ryan Donato and Brock Boeser make sense as pending UFAs, and Rickard Rakell presents a longer-term fit if they can make the money work.

### Florida Panthers

Current record: 34-21-3, second in Atlantic

Last year's playoffs: Won the Stanley Cup

Matthew Tkachuk is the biggest wild card, because there is no filling that kind of hole at the deadline. If the Panthers do have his cap hit to work with at the deadline (if he goes on LTIR), they might go after a big-name player. The Panthers need to strengthen their left side, regardless of Tkachuk's health, because it's thin after Carter Verhaeghe. Ryan Donato, Trent Frederic and Brandon Tanev all make sense for Florida, as does Scott Laughton, who can play a depth center role.

Florida also needs to add depth on its blue line, which drops off after the top three. A physical penalty killer to take the weight off the top pair would really strengthen Florida's defense. Luke Schenn, Rasmus Ristolainen, Connor Murphy and David Savard could be candidates for that role.

### Toronto Maple Leafs

Current record: 35-20-2, first in Atlantic

Last year's playoffs: Lost in first round

Yes, we're all aware the Leafs shouldn't necessarily be here until they prove their worth in the playoffs. But their standings position, underlying numbers, goaltending and play style have people believing this season could be different.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025**

The priority is no secret: They must add a third-line center. The Leafs have been rumored to be interested in reuniting Brayden and Luke Schenn -- Brayden for 3C and Luke for defensive depth. Scott Laughton and Nick Bjugstad are centers in whom the Leafs are known to have interest, especially given their physical play, two-way ability and general ornery presence. Yanni Gourde has been linked to the Leafs, but an injury has complicated the situation.

A few wingers of note for the Leafs: Brandon Tanev, Luke Kunin and Ryan Donato fill the role of bottom-six winger in the eyes of coach Craig Berube. Each of them has a few key traits: two-way player, physical, tough to play against and penalty killer. All of them are capable of chipping in offensively, which gives the Leafs an added dimension to the third line.

There is a strong belief that Toronto is very interested in uniting the Tanev brothers or the Schenn brothers. The top end of the Leafs' lineup is set in stone for this playoff run, so adding depth and value to the bottom end could be critical to their success.

**Vegas Golden Knights**

Current record: 34-18-6, first in Pacific

Last year's playoffs: Lost in first round

Vegas doesn't have a glaring need to fill externally. But the Knights have William Karlsson- and Shea Theodore-sized holes in their lineup. Both of those players, particularly Theodore, are vital to success for Vegas. Both are expected to play again this season, but Theodore might not be back until the playoffs. If the Golden Knights have assurances that he won't be healthy until the playoffs, they are expected to use the LTIR space to acquire some other players.

If that is the case, finding someone to slot in the top six on the wing would be a major boost. Brandon Saad and Mark Stone flank Brett Howden on one of the best third lines in the NHL. Karlsson will replace Raphael Lavoie on the second line, but an upgrade of Victor Olofsson for Jack Eichel's right side is something the Knights might consider.

Outside of that, depth defensemen to manage injuries throughout the stretch run and playoffs makes sense. Vegas has a Cup-contending lineup when its roster is healthy. They need to ensure the stop gaps aren't as big a drop-off if they're to get through the West.

**Washington Capitals**

Current record: 38-11-8, first in Metro

Last year's playoffs: Lost in first round

The Capitals have been the surprise of the season, and they should be engraving coach Spencer Carbery's name on the Jack Adams Award now, if they haven't already.

There is one glaring hole in the Capitals' lineup that needs to be addressed: third-line center. Washington loses matchups in that role, and having a player who is reliable in a shutdown role, can kill penalties and provide some offense would be a major addition. If Washington has the appetite for a longer-term solution, Dylan Cozens fits the timeline of its younger players, and the Caps have the prospects to acquire him in trade from Buffalo.

Washington is expected to add NCAA star Ryan Leonard to the lineup at the conclusion of his college season, but he's a winger who probably will slot in on the third line. Jake Evans and Nick Bjugstad are natural fits for the 3C role, and would bring a size and scoring flair to the third line while capably driving play.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

## SPORTSNET™

### Suzuki, Montembeault help Canadiens whip Hurricanes

Canadian Press

The Montreal Canadiens proved Tuesday night that good things eventually come to those who wait.

After enduring nine straight losses, and being outscored 33-9 in the process, the Canadiens finally solved the Carolina Hurricanes with a 4-0 win at Centre Bell.

The 'Canes held the joint-longest active winning streak against Montreal at nine games dating back to Feb. 29, 2020.

Even more impressive is that the fourth-most porous defence in the NHL put on a clinic Tuesday night in defending the zone, stamping out most chances before they could ever materialize.

"The way we handled their pressure was what I'm most proud of and we frustrated them," said Montreal's head coach Martin St. Louis. "When teams spend a lot of time in our zone, I feel like we don't give them all that much. We were really organized tonight and that's something we focus on a lot. We did a lot of very ordinary things over and over, they aren't the most fun, but they pay off."

Backstopped by a 20-save shutout from Samuel Montembeault, the entire Canadiens squad contributed to the stifling performance, blocking an additional 21 shots. The majority of the shots that did make it through were from tight angles or good lines of sight.

"I think we're just playing more of a complete game. Maybe it wasn't the most exciting game of the year, but we played really solid," said Montembeault, who is now tied for the second-most shutouts this season with four.

"When everybody's on board and plays the way we want to play, we can compete with any team. We were patient and we didn't try to force anything, we waited for them to get rid of the puck and we scored on our chances."

Defence aside, goals are needed to win, and the Canadiens provided the kind of opportunistic and efficient scoring that comes with winning hockey. Three of the goals came from a point shot with Patrik Laine and Juraj Slafkovsky's goals coming off deflections while Lane Hutson's goal managed to make its way through the front-of-net traffic.

### Breaking down Rantanen's slow offensive start with Hurricanes

Adam Vingan

Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman reported Saturday that the Hurricanes have made an offer to Rantanen that is "into the nine digits." Rantanen, according to Friedman, is still processing the sudden change and needs time before deciding. Carolina, however, does not have that luxury.

In addition to Hutson's goal, Nick Suzuki also scored on the power play. Finding the back of the net twice out of five attempts is even more significant when it comes against an elite penalty killing team like Carolina that has an 84.3 per cent efficiency.

"We tried to keep it simple, there were a couple breakdowns they had, and we were able to capitalize," said Laine. "Throughout my career, whenever I played (Carolina), they've been a very good penalty kill team."

Montreal forward Josh Anderson left the game halfway through the third period after being sent face-first into the boards and did not return. The team said post-game that he's still being evaluated.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Host the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday.

Canadiens: Host the San Jose Sharks on Thursday.

Winnipeg Jets

Current record: 41-14-3, first in Central

Last year's playoffs: Lost in first round

This might be the best Jets team since the return to Winnipeg. On the back of excellent seasons for Connor Hellebuyck, Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Josh Morrissey, the Jets are poised to go on a run.

That is, if Hellebuyck doesn't start seeing April ghosts as has happened in past playoffs. Then again, that's not an issue for which the Jets can prepare; he's their guy and deserves to be their guy for a long time.

Winnipeg does need a 4/5 defenseman, and if they could get Brock Nelson from the Islanders, he would be an upgrade over Vladislav Namestnikov for the playoff run.

The pairing of Dylan Samberg and Neal Pionk has worked for the Jets this season, but Pionk has struggled in the playoffs. Acquiring a physical presence -- who moves pucks well under pressure and can kill penalties -- would be a difference maker. Pionk and Dylan DeMelo have negative penalty kill value, which isn't good if you're a contender. Ristolainen and Ivan Provorov are capable second-pairing defensemen with positive penalty kill value that would bolster Winnipeg's chances.

Rantanen has been quiet offensively to start his Hurricanes career, with one goal and three points in seven games. The Hurricanes are 3-4-1 since trading for Rantanen, who missed one game because of a lower-body injury. (Meanwhile, Martin Necas, who went to Colorado in the trade, has nine points in 10 games as Nathan MacKinnon's new wingman.)

Although Rantanen's scoring pace is down considerably since coming to Carolina, he has been the Hurricanes' most



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

dangerous player. He leads the team in scoring chances (26), offensive-zone possession time (6:49), slot-pass completions (21) and one-timer attempts (10) over the past month.

“He has fit in very well to the way we play, creating some tremendous chances around the net for himself and his linemates,” Hurricanes general manager Eric Tulsky told The Athletic. “A couple of posts and some great saves have kept it from showing up on the scoresheet yet, but we can all see that the points will come.”

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour has tethered Rantanen to fellow Finn Sebastian Aho on the team’s top line. They have generated 62.9 per cent of the expected goals at even strength in almost 90 minutes of shared ice time. Scoring chances are 51-30 in favour of Carolina during those minutes (45-27 at five-on-five).

Despite that territorial advantage, the Hurricanes have been outscored 7-6 at even strength with Rantanen and Aho on the ice. Goals are 4-4 at five-on-five.

“We’ve definitely had some chances and looks,” Aho told reporters. “I don’t know if it’s puck luck or what. Sometimes, you try too hard because you want to succeed right away so bad, so maybe you’re not relaxed when you have a chance. But he’s an unbelievable hockey player. He’s fit right in.”

With all due respect to Aho, who is a high-end centre, he is not MacKinnon. Rantanen’s high-danger chances per game have dipped from 2.31 to 2.0 with the Hurricanes. Necas’ high-danger chances, on the other hand, have skyrocketed from 1.43 to 3.1 per game.

## NHL Rumour Roundup: Latest buzz around Capitals, Blues, Canadiens

Sportsnet Staff

The NHL is back in full swing following the 4 Nations Face-Off, and that means the rumour mill is heating up again, too.

With the March 7 trade deadline less than two weeks away, here’s a collection of news and notes from around the league making headlines right now.

What does Washington’s success mean for deadline approach?

The Washington Capitals have been flying all season, the group galvanized by Alex Ovechkin’s countdown to goal-scoring history and sitting comfortably atop not just the Metropolitan Division but the entire Eastern Conference.

Their healthy lead in the standings, combined with Ovechkin’s hunt for history — he’s now just 13 goals shy of passing Wayne Gretzky’s all-time goals record after a hat trick Sunday against Edmonton — is going to make Washington’s stretch run a really fun one to watch. But what does their contender status mean for the team’s trade deadline dealings?

In Monday’s edition of 32 Thoughts: The Podcast, Sportsnet’s Elliott Friedman cautioned against the club making many moves for fear of messing with chemistry, citing a 2010 run cut short due to too much deadline activity interrupting the roster’s flow.

Rantanen no longer having MacKinnon and Cale Makar as his running buddies was sure to have some impact on his performance. MacKinnon (2.31), Necas (2.28) and Makar (2.19) are the top three players in the league in on-ice expected goals for per game in all situations since Jan. 25. Rantanen is 60th at 1.44 on-ice expected goals for per game since making his Hurricanes debut on that date. (Following his final game with the Avalanche, Rantanen ranked fifth with 1.98 on-ice expected goals for per game.)

The Hurricanes have won a playoff series in each of the past six years, including the 2020 qualifying round during the pandemic post-season. But they have been unable to get past the conference final. (The Boston Bruins and Florida Panthers swept Carolina en route to the Stanley Cup Final in 2019 and 2023, respectively.)

Carolina’s inability to score consistently has been its downfall, which is why Tulsky brought in Rantanen — a two-time 100-point scorer who averages 1.25 points per game in the playoffs.

But will he be part of the team past March 7? The Hurricanes took a risk last season by trading for pending free agent Jake Guentzel, who ultimately signed with the Tampa Bay Lightning. (Carolina received a third-round draft pick from Tampa Bay for Guentzel the day before free agency started.)

It would be a tough look for Tulsky if he holds onto Rantanen past the deadline and fails to sign him to a new contract. Many contenders will be monitoring this situation closely over the next week and a half.

“A third-liner, Scott Laughton-type, I could see that,” said Friedman. “But I would be very, very careful about messing with what they have.”

Laughton has a year left on his deal with the Flyers, but his name has been around the deadline rumour mill plenty as a depth forward with an affordable cap hit (\$3 million through 2025-26). Another argument in favour of keeping the tinkering to a minimum is the Capitals’ approach in 2018, when they won it all after mostly standing pat at the deadline. The biggest deal they did that year was sending a third-round pick to Chicago for defenceman Michal Kempny, which worked out really well. Kempny slotted in seamlessly onto the blue line and helped the club hoist the Cup.

Another reason we could see a quiet deadline for the Capitals is the fact that their biggest boost is already in the system — forward Ryan Leonard, star of both the USNTDP and Boston College, will make the jump into the NHL once his NCAA career wraps this spring. His skillset and big-game experience at the world juniors has him projected as someone who can make an immediate impact upon signing with and making his debut in Washington.

Deadline chatter could get loud in St. Louis

While the rumour mill around the Capitals could be pretty quiet, St. Louis Blues general manager Doug Armstrong expects things to get pretty noisy thanks to all the uncertainty around the roster and whether this is a group Armstrong will build around, or if he’ll opt to sell.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

"As we say every year, the players will tell us what we're going to do," Armstrong told Blues reporter Andy Strickland during a pre-game sit-down on the team's broadcast on Sunday. "Right now, we have a massive uphill battle. I think we really dropped the ball coming out of Christmas. (Head 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."

More than one team is looking at reuniting the Schenns

Some of the noise in St. Louis is focused on the club's captain, Brayden Schenn — though, trade interest also includes his brother, Luke, in Nashville. As Friedman reported during his "Saturday Headlines" segment on Hockey Night in Canada, "teams have talked about uniting the Schenn brothers."

The key word here is "teams" — as in, more than one.

"I think a couple have discussed it," Friedman said during Monday's podcast, revisiting the subject.

It would take a lot of logistics to make not just one trade happen, but two. The brothers share an agent, which would streamline talks a little, but it would take some cap maneuvering on the part of the club acquiring them — Brayden still has three more seasons on his contract at \$6.5 million a year, while Luke has one more at \$2.75 million.

Both Schenns bring Stanley Cup-winning experience and veteran leadership, as well as more than a little sandpaper to their respective skillsets.

But ... are both Schenns actually available?

"Nashville's trying to get younger, faster. You could see them, if it creates some flexibility for them, you could see them saying, 'Yeah, we'll do that,'" said Friedman. "I think it's a harder one for St. Louis. He's their captain. It's not that it's impossible, but they've set a really high price on him."

"I don't know what the likelihood of this is — it might be impossible," added Friedman. "But I was told there were two teams, legitimately, at least, that have thought about it — or asked about it."

Canadiens considering a package deal?

The Montreal Canadiens are in position to sell at the deadline, but without a true top trade chip in play, it'll be hard to see them landing the kind of return that can help them as they continue their rebuild.

But as Arpon Basu of The Athletic reported on Monday, a package deal including forwards Jake Evans and Joel Armia "could bring back something significant." The Canadiens' goal, writes Basu, is "to add a third first-round pick in the upcoming draft." Basu points out that a first-rounder seems to be the going rate for a pair of forwards, as we've seen in recent deals between the Canucks and Penguins, and the Stars and Sharks. Armia and Evans would bring instant chemistry and penalty-kill know-how to a contender, making them an intriguing duo.

Hurricanes in holding pattern on Rantanen — and other teams could be, too

The blockbuster deal that saw the Colorado Avalanche trade pending UFA Mikko Rantanen to Carolina at the end of January caught Rantanen completely by surprise, and he hasn't had much time to soak up his new surroundings. Of the six games he played for the Hurricanes before breaking for the 4 Nations Face-Off, just two were home matchups, giving him little time and space to acclimate to life in Raleigh.

Although the team has made it clear it wants to keep him long-term, Rantanen has indicated he wants to take a little bit of time before deciding his future. That's understandable, but also makes things a bit complicated for the Hurricanes' deadline outlook. And other clubs are watching closely.

"I don't want to say Rantanen is holding up the trade deadline, because I don't believe that's true," said Friedman. "But I do think that there are teams that are looking at it and saying, 'Maybe we don't make our biggest move until we know for sure what his situation is.'"

Friedman believes the offer on the table is an eight-year contract worth somewhere between \$12.5 million and \$14 million per year. Recent rumours have suggested that if Rantanen knows he doesn't want to stay with the Hurricanes, the club could flip him before the deadline as a true rental. It could also keep him as its own true rental, going all-in for the Stanley Cup after several years of contending, or simply take the chance that Rantanen will feel comfortable signing after the deadline.

"I think this is now purely a matter of Rantanen to make his decision, one way or the other," said Friedman.

Jones' trade request not driven by team

News out of Chicago last week, thanks to Blackhawks reporter Ben Pope, saw Seth Jones declare his interest in being traded to a team that gives him an opportunity to win.

"He hasn't given a list of teams or anything like that, from what I understand," Friedman said on Monday's podcast. "I think he said he prefers a contender. And I think the Blackhawks have also indicated that if it doesn't work, I don't think they've got a problem with keeping him. This sounds like it's more Jones-driven than Blackhawks-driven."

Here's the thing about that: There are teams with cap space available to accommodate Jones' \$9.5-million cap hit — and the four remaining years of that deal. But those clubs aren't contenders.

One interesting case brought up by Friedman, based on standings and salary cap and not actual speculation around the rumour mill, is Jones' old club, the Columbus Blue Jackets. The team is playing meaningful hockey sitting just outside of the second wild-card spot. Jones spent six years there before being dealt to Chicago, and a return would see him fit in well both in the lineup and in the books.

"I would be curious, does he think that qualifies as a contender?" said Friedman.

All eyes on Tkachuk's injury status in Florida

One club that fits the bill in terms of a contender? The Florida Panthers. Friedman makes it clear in Monday's podcast that he isn't reporting any discussions between Jones' camp and the Panthers, but suggested the fit — in terms of Florida's need for a right-shot, puck-moving defender — is really intriguing. And he's right.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Here's where things get ... unclear: Cap-wise, there's a lot riding on the still-to-be-determined status of Matthew Tkachuk, who suffered an injury during the 4 Nations Face-Off that is believed to be long-term. During a Florida radio show Monday morning, head coach Paul Maurice said the team is still waiting for a definitive timeline but did say "he's playing for us this year."

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

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.

Whether that means a return just ahead of the finale of the regular season or a long-term IR stint and a return during the playoffs is still very much up in the air. But if Tkachuk is ruled out for the remainder of the regular season? Well, that makes things interesting, giving the Panthers room to play on the trade market and potentially be in play for Jones.

**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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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.

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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025**

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 26, 2025

# yahoo!sports

## Taming Their Bete Noire: 3 Takeaways From the Canadiens' Win Over the Hurricanes

Karine Hains

Nick Suzuki leads the celebration after scoring a power play marker - Photo credit: David Kirouac - Imagn Images

Nick Suzuki leads the celebration after scoring a power play marker - Photo credit: David Kirouac - Imagn Images

It had been a good long while since the Montreal Canadiens managed to have the better of the Carolina Hurricanes; it was probably when they made that overinflated offer to Jesperi Kotkaniemi but on the scoreboard, the Habs' last win against Tuesday night's visitors dated back to February 2020.

Logan Mailloux Is Getting Closer To The NHL

Canadiens: A Big Audition

Today In Canadiens History: A Little M Highlight

Speed Makes Quite A Difference

Although we didn't see much of Owen Beck thanks to the numerous penalties the Hurricanes took, when he was on the ice with his linemates, the second line looked much better than it usually does in transition.

Why? Because Beck has more speed than Dach, and on a line where there's already a slower skater in Patrik Laine, an infusion of speed made a big difference. The lack of speed was downright annoying when Dach, Laine, and Juraj Slafkovsky were on the same line, but even with Alex Newhook replacing the young Slovak, there's room for improvement.

At times, it looks like Newhook is too fast for his teammates. He pierces the defense and then finds himself alone in no man's land. On Tuesday night, we saw such an occurrence on the second wave of the power play, but not at even strength.

Old Habits Die Hard...

Before the game, captain Nick Suzuki had never scored a goal against the visitors, and in 12 games, he only had one point. That's not true anymore. On top of making a great play that led to the opening goal, on which he got an assist, the center scored a beautiful goal on the power play and added

an assist on Lane Hutson's goal, ending his struggles against Carolina.

Meanwhile, his partner in crime, Cole Caufield, got a secondary assist on his power-play goal, notching his 200th point in the NHL in the process. In 6 games against the Canes, he had never managed to notch a point, but he did it tonight for a significant milestone. He needed 263 games to do so, making him the quickest player to accomplish the feat in a Canadiens' uniform in the last 30 years.

As for Samuel Montembeault, after six consecutive losses at the hands of Rod Brind'Amour's men, he was finally able to win a game against them. That he did it with a shutout is just the icing on the cake.

Not Even A Factor Anymore

The Bell Centre crowd usually is unforgiving, to say the least. Once you cross Canadiens fans, you better be ready for a lifetime of booing. The most potent example is probably how Zdeno Chara was booed every time he touched the puck in Montreal after the Mac Pacioretty incident.

That's the kind of treatment Kotkaniemi received in Montreal since putting pen to paper on the above-mentioned offer sheet, but not anymore. The Finn has become such a nonfactor that Canadiens fans don't care they lost him anymore. There's no more hate. Instead, there's something much worse for a hockey player: indifference. Kotkaniemi has fallen into the "picks everyone would rather forget" category. This is fair enough, considering the Canes used seven defensemen in the game, leaving the pivot without an actual line or much ice time.

Ultimately, the Canadiens won the game 4-0, which will be great for the team's collective confidence, especially since Montreal had not beaten the Carolina outfit in regulation since 2018. The sole downside about the game for the Habs was the way Josh Anderson crashed into the boards at full speed. The dad-to-be has regularly replaced practices with therapy days, and this certainly won't help matters.

Full-marks for Laine last night, he managed to grab three points and was named the third star of the game. He appears much more confident than he was before the international break and that's a good sign going forward.

## Canadiens finally end 'curse of the 'Canes' with 4-0 victory

Elias Grigoriadis, The Canadian Press

MONTREAL - The Montreal Canadiens proved Tuesday night that good things eventually come to those who wait.

MONTREAL - The Montreal Canadiens proved Tuesday night that good things eventually come to those who wait.

After enduring nine straight losses, and being outscored 33-9 in the process, the Canadiens finally solved the Carolina Hurricanes with a 4-0 win at Centre Bell.

The 'Canes held the joint-longest active winning streak against Montreal at nine games dating back to Feb. 29, 2020.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Montreal Canadiens' Juraj Slafkovsky (20) reacts to a goal by teammate Lane Hutson (not shown) on Carolina Hurricanes goaltender Frederik Andersen (31) as Hurricanes' Jaccob Slavin (74) and Brent Burns (8) defend during third period NHL hockey action in Montreal, Tuesday, February 25, 2025. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Graham Hughes

Montreal Canadiens' Juraj Slafkovsky (20) reacts to a goal by teammate Lane Hutson (not shown) on Carolina Hurricanes goaltender Frederik Andersen (31) as Hurricanes' Jaccob Slavin (74) and Brent Burns (8) defend during third period NHL hockey action in Montreal, Tuesday, February 25, 2025. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Graham Hughes

Even more impressive is that the fourth-most porous defence in the NHL put on a clinic Tuesday night in defending the zone, stamping out most chances before they could ever materialize.

"The way we handled their pressure was what I'm most proud of and we frustrated them," said Montreal's head coach Martin St. Louis. "When teams spend a lot of time in our zone, I feel like we don't give them all that much. We were really organized tonight and that's something we focus on a lot. We did a lot of very ordinary things over and over, they aren't the most fun, but they pay off."

Backstopped by a 20-save shutout from Samuel Montembeault, the entire Canadiens squad contributed to the stifling performance, blocking an additional 21 shots. The majority of the shots that did make it through were from tight angles or good lines of sight.

"I think we're just playing more of a complete game. Maybe it wasn't the most exciting game of the year, but we played

## The Hockey News Big Show: Will The Hurricanes Avoid Another Guentzel Situation With Rantanen?

The Hockey News

All focus turns toward the NHL trade deadline, playoff push and more in The Hockey News Big Show.

Will The Hurricanes Avoid Another Guentzel Situation With Rantanen? by The Big Show

Here's what Katie Gaus, Ryan Kennedy and Michael Traikos discussed in this episode:

1:16: What did the Carolina Hurricanes learn from the Jake Guentzel situation last year that they're trying to handle better with Mikko Rantanen?

4:58: What teams could be interested in Rantanen if the Hurricanes trade him again?

7:45: Matthew Tkachuk's injury could be a bit longer term, which means the Florida Panthers could put him on LTIR. What are the pros and cons of the Panthers' options? Who could they acquire if there is LTIR room?

10:35: Matias Maccelli has been a healthy scratch for the Utah Hockey Club, raising speculation that he could be on the trade block. What teams could benefit from adding Maccelli?

12:54: Could it be time for the Boston Bruins to consider trading their captain, Brad Marchand?

really solid," said Montembeault, who is now tied for the second-most shutouts this season with four.

"When everybody's on board and plays the way we want to play, we can compete with any team. We were patient and we didn't try to force anything, we waited for them to get rid of the puck and we scored on our chances."

Defence aside, goals are needed to win, and the Canadiens provided the kind of opportunistic and efficient scoring that comes with winning hockey. Three of the goals came from a point shot with Patrik Laine and Juraj Slafkovsky's goals coming off deflections while Lane Hutson's goal managed to make its way through the front-of-net traffic.

In addition to Hutson's goal, Nick Suzuki also scored on the power play. Finding the back of the net twice out of five attempts is even more significant when it comes against an elite penalty killing team like Carolina that has an 84.3 per cent efficiency.

"We tried to keep it simple, there were a couple breakdowns they had, and we were able to capitalize," said Laine. "Throughout my career, whenever I played (Carolina), they've been a very good penalty kill team."

Montreal forward Josh Anderson left the game halfway through the third period after being sent face-first into the boards and did not return. The team said post-game that he's still being evaluated.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Host the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday.

Canadiens: Host the San Jose Sharks on Thursday.

17:41: TSN's Craig Button said Elias Pettersson is "holding the Canucks back." Do you agree? With his talent ceiling, is he worth taking a chance on despite his current struggles and contract?

21:41: Seth Jones has said he would like a chance to play for a contender. Do the Columbus Blue Jackets count as a contender?

23:21: Should Seth Jones no longer be the Chicago Blackhawks' alternate captain after expressing interest in playing elsewhere?

24:54: Are the Colorado Avalanche a legitimate Cup contender this year? Can the top line continue to carry the Avalanche?

30:09: Should the Ottawa Senators start to get concerned again about their playoff chances?

33:28: Did NHL commissioner Gary Bettman make the right call to reduce Minnesota Wild forward Ryan Hartman's suspension from 10 games to eight?

34:37: Trevor Zegras was suspended three games for his hit on Michael Rasmussen. Was that the right length?

35:45: Pick a favorite prospect featured in The Hockey News' newest Future Watch edition.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025**

37:22: Los Angeles is reportedly hosting the decentralized 2025 NHL draft. Where would you like to see the next one?

38:39: What's more surprising: Alex Ovechkin scoring his second hat trick of the season at 39 years old or Matthew Tkachuk being on The Tonight Show?



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025



**SB NATION**  
**CANES COUNTRY**

## Canadiens 4, Hurricanes 0

Bob Wage

The Carolina Hurricanes had another rough night on the road as they dropped a 4-0 decision to the Montreal Canadiens on Tuesday night.

The Canes fell behind 2-0 in the first period again, but this time could not get anything going in the offensive end to muster any type of comeback.

Carolina had just five shots on goal in the first period and six in the second. They had a total of 20 for the contest, but just 11 until the last seven minutes of the game.

The Habs had 18 shots on goal for the game.

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour was mixing up the lines at will, but could not seem to get much chemistry going.

After the game, the coach admitted that his team had lost its identity recently.

"To me, if you look at the identity of our team, it's definitely changed in the last couple of weeks. We've changed the way that we play a little bit and that's no knock on the guys that

we brought in, they're great players, but we have to remember how we play the game. I think we've changed a little bit and it's clearly not working."

It makes one wonder, how long will it take for the new players fit within the Brind'Amour system?

These performances will not quiet the endless rumors about Carolina considering flipping Mikko Rantanen.

Next up will be "Whaler's Night" at the Lenovo Center against the Sabres on Thursday night.

Game Summary -

<https://www.nhl.com/scores/htmlreports/20242025/GS020920.HTM>

Event Summary -

<https://www.nhl.com/scores/htmlreports/20242025/ES020920.HTM>

Team's Recap - <https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/recap-can-es-blanked-by-habs-as-road-woes-linger>



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025



## Canadiens and Montembeault Shut Out Hurricanes 4-0 - The Hockey Writers Montreal Canadiens Latest News, Analysis & More

Ryan Szporer

Despite the ramifications, the Montreal Canadiens' 4-0 win over the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday night at the Bell Centre had to feel good for the home side. It was their second in a row coming out of the 4 Nations Face-Off break. It was also goalie Sam Montembeault's first career win (and shutout) over the Hurricanes in now-seven career starts against them.

On top of that, captain Nick Suzuki scored his first-ever goal (and second point) in 13 career games against the Hurricanes as well. That put the Canadiens up 3-0 midway through the second period on the power play. On the play, Patrik Laine found an open Suzuki, who put it past Hurricanes goalie Frederik Anderson with a shot from the faceoff circle.

### Game Recap

Both Suzuki and Laine scored three points on the night. Suzuki also tallied a point on Juraj Slafkovsky's eventual game-winning goal eight minutes into the first, when the latter tipped home a shot from Jayden Struble. Laine meanwhile deflected in an Alexandre Carrier point shot that took another bounce off a stick in front for good measure to fool Andersen.

Nick Suzuki Montreal Canadiens

Montreal Canadiens forward Nick Suzuki – (Amy Irvin / The Hockey Writers)

With Laine's goal, the Canadiens went up 2-0 at 17:37 of the first. Laine and Suzuki also assisted on Lane Hutson's insurance marker, which closed the scoring at 10:22 of the third. Hutson's goal, which resulted from a seeing-eye point shot that eluded Andersen, came on the power play with Jalen Chatfield off for holding Josh Anderson, who had gone awkwardly into the boards on the play. Anderson subsequently left the game.

Anderson potentially adds to the Canadiens' injury woes, with both Kirby Dach and Kaiden Guhle out with lower-body injuries and Emil Heineman having just returned from off the shelf after having gotten hit by a car last month. The Canadiens had called up prospect Owen Beck from the American Hockey League in the days leading up to the game to compensate. Beck started the game on the second line between Alex Newhook and Laine, Dach's usual spot.

Related: Projected Lineups for the Hurricanes vs Canadiens – 2/25/25

Montembeault made 20 saves to earn the blank sheet for the Canadiens, his fourth shutout of the season. Andersen countered with 14 saves on 18 shots for the Hurricanes.

Despite the injury concerns, the now-27-26-5 Canadiens look to nonetheless keep their momentum going when they host the last-place San Jose Sharks on Thursday. The Hurricanes, who are now 33-21-4, next host the Buffalo Sabres, also on Thursday. Of note, the Sabres then play the Habs in a home-and-home series starting in Buffalo next Saturday and concluding next Monday, March 3 in Montreal.

### TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6128943/2025/02/25/nhl-free-agents-2025-ncaa-chl-europe/>  
<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6159271/2025/02/26/nhl-trade-deadline-team-blockbuster/>  
<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6153202/2025/02/26/nhl-agent-poll-anonymous/>  
<https://www.wralsportsfan.com/suzuki-laine-lead-canadiens-to-4-0-win-over-hurricanes/21880321/>  
<https://www.wralsportsfan.com/wral-to-air-two-hurricanes-games-in-final-stretch-of-season/21879496/>  
<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/recap-can-es-blanked-by-habs-as-road-woes-linger>  
<https://www.nhl.com/news/carolina-hurricanes-montreal-canadiens-game-recap-february-25>  
[https://www.espn.com/nhl/recap/\\_/gameId/401688519](https://www.espn.com/nhl/recap/_/gameId/401688519)  
[https://www.espn.com/nhl/insider/story/\\_/id/44013262/nhl-2024-25-stanley-cup-playoffs-contenders-trade-deadline-flaws](https://www.espn.com/nhl/insider/story/_/id/44013262/nhl-2024-25-stanley-cup-playoffs-contenders-trade-deadline-flaws)  
<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/suzuki-montembeault-help-canadiens-whip-hurricanes/>  
<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/breaking-down-rantanens-slow-offensive-start-with-hurricanes/>  
<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/nhl-rumour-roundup-latest-buzz-around-capitals-blues-canadiens/>  
<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/nhl-playoff-push-trade-deadline-buyers-sellers-and-teams-in-between/>  
<https://sports.yahoo.com/article/taming-bete-noire-3-takeaways-115257556.html>  
<https://sports.yahoo.com/m/569baab5-d532-3b84-823e-008ec1286534/canadiens-finally-end-course.html>  
<https://sports.yahoo.com/article/hockey-news-big-show-hurricanes-182308268.html>  
<https://www.canescountry.com/2025/2/26/24373206/canadiens-4-hurricanes-0>  
<https://thehockeywriters.com/nhl-recap-canadiens-win-hurricanes-02-25-2025/>



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

## SportScan

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

1341098 Carolina Hurricanes

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

Chris Seward

5-7 minutes 25/02/2025

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

Hurricanes radio broadcaster Chuck Kaiton was named North Carolina sportscaster of the year in voting by the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association. [cseward@newsobserver.com](mailto:cseward@newsobserver.com)

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 rights holder, 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."

News Observer LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341099 Carolina Hurricanes

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

Michael Russo

9-11 minutes 25/02/2025

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.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

"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 Boldy 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."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341100 Carolina Hurricanes

NHL trade board 7.0: The 4 Nations break is over, and things are about to get real

Chris Johnston

21-27 minutes 25/02/2025

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

Just days remain for any NHL team sitting on the fence to determine which direction it'll go before the March 7 trade deadline.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

There are currently 10 teams on the wrong side of the playoff cut-line that are within six points of the final wild-card spot in their respective conferences, which adds an air of uncertainty to a trade market that remained dormant throughout the break for the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Among that chase pack, who is prepared to buy, sell or stand pat?

As the clock ticks down toward clarity, here's our latest Big Board. Players are listed by how closely they demand watching, based on their potential impact and the current amount of buzz around them.

Note: Net Ratings and market values are via Dom Luszczyzyn's model and are projected for the full season based on statistics through Feb. 23. Goals saved above expected (GSAx) are via Evolving-Hockey, also through Feb. 23. Contract info is via PuckPedia.

Loading

Not only have the Islanders cooled off a bit, they also appear no closer to an extension with the pending UFA. And Nelson arguably has the highest trade value of any "rental" player who might be moved at this deadline. The 33-year-old all-situations forward is a big, sturdy man with a strong track record of scoring goals. He can be slotted as a second-line center or slide into a wing spot on the top line. Basically, he's exactly the kind of difference-maker that contending teams would be falling over themselves to get their hands on, which is why multiple contenders are monitoring this file closely.

Player type

Big veteran second-liner

Well on his way to topping 30 goals and 60 points this season, Rakell may be the most productive offensive player available ahead of this deadline. The right-shot winger is an above-average finisher who has a history of holding his own when playing alongside highly skilled linemates. With three years remaining on his contract after this one, the usual caveats apply: The Penguins do not have to move Rakell now, but they'd be willing to do it if the return helped them push along their organizational goal of getting younger. He's signed to an extremely reasonable contract in a rising cap environment.

Player type

Proven offensive contributor

A big name who comes with a big ticket, Jones is a player of intrigue because of a skill set that is in short supply around the league. The right-shot defenseman can shoulder big minutes in all situations and handle a shutdown role. He's so anxious for a move to a team closer to contention than the Blackhawks that he recently went public with his desire to be dealt. Moving his contract in-season won't be easy, but Chicago is believed to be open to retaining some of the remaining money to help facilitate a trade. Jones and the team are working together on trying to find him a new home.

Player type

Major-minutes defenseman

The retooling Flyers are short on rental players to take to market in the lead-up to the deadline, but they could be compelled to part with the big, physical defenseman who has some term remaining. Ristolainen plays a rugged style best suited for third-pairing duty, and he's taken meaningful steps forward over the past 18 months toward becoming a more reliable defender in his own zone. With a contract that stretches two seasons beyond this one, some salary retention might be needed to make a trade work.

Player type

Rugged veteran defenseman

A relentless high-motor player who is enjoying a career season in Chicago, Donato is attracting serious attention on the trade market. As a pending unrestricted free agent, he profiles as a rental who can add to a team's depth while playing basically anywhere in the lineup. Donato appears to have made some strides with his skating this season and has the hands to bury offensive chances when he gets them. He's one goal away from hitting 20 for the first time in his NHL career.

Player type

High-motor depth player

With the Sabres languishing at the bottom of the Eastern Conference standings and in need of some kind of shakeup, two-thirds of NHL teams have at least checked in on Cozens' availability. Even amid a down season, the 6-foot-3 center holds plenty of appeal. He's got great speed and skill for a player his size and already has a 30-goal NHL campaign under his belt at age 23. Here's the rub, though: It's going to take a meaningful offer to pry him out of Buffalo — something built around an established player, not just prospects — and so far that hasn't materialized.

Player type

Speedy young blue-chip asset

The Sabres certainly aren't shopping the 23-year-old defenseman, but he may be the piece they have to put in play in order to make a significant shakeup. Byram is an elite skater who can log big minutes and should still have his best and most productive seasons ahead. He's also due for a new contract after the season as a pending restricted free agent. The Sabres control his rights, but they're a team with a lot of money and years already tied up in their blue line, so decisions are looming.

Player type

Blue-chip prospect

With Laughton signed for one season beyond this one and producing at a 40-point pace, the Flyers are under no pressure to trade him. But if a contender is willing to part with a first-round pick, they'll probably be compelled to pull the trigger. Laughton would be a bottom-six upgrade for a lot of contending teams. He's a glue guy who kills penalties and plays with an edge to his game.

Player type

Veteran glue guy

A high-energy player who brings it on the forecheck and recklessly throws himself in front of pucks on the penalty kill, Tanev has a lot of the qualities contenders are looking for. Known for playing a grindy game that wears on opponents, he leads all Seattle forwards in short-handed ice time. He certainly doesn't back down when faced with a contested piece of ice. As a bonus, he also comes with 46 games of Stanley Cup playoff experience.

Player type

Grindy penalty-killing forward

Rantanen lands this high on the Big Board because 1) he's a massive name and 2) he's embroiled in an uncertain situation leading up to the deadline. The Hurricanes shocked the hockey world by acquiring him in late January and have since put their best foot forward to try to get him signed to an extension. So far, no dice. If Rantanen tells the Hurricanes he's going to hit the open market on July 1 rather than negotiating with them, do they still want to keep him around as a rental? Keep in mind that Carolina has the ability to get his cap hit under \$3 million if they flip him somewhere else with retention.

Market value

\$10.4 million

Player type

Superstar scorer

It has been an up-and-down campaign in St. Louis, with a coaching change and a few notable moves made already made with an eye toward shaking up the group. It also didn't go without notice recently when general manager Doug Armstrong spoke publicly about the possibility of making changes to his core. Enter Schenn, the Blues captain, who the team is believed to at least be gauging interest on. That doesn't guarantee a move, especially with Schenn in possession of a full no-trade clause, but it's enough to land him on the Big Board. The veteran center is having a good season and brings value at both ends of the ice, plus all kinds of playoff experience.

Player type

Two-way vet with Cup experience



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

The veteran right-shot winger remains a serious scoring threat into his 15th NHL season. He hit 30 goals in 2023-24 and is on pace to comfortably cruise past 20 this season. As a pending unrestricted free agent, Palmieri is an attractive rental option, especially with his willingness to battle his way to the hard areas of the ice. Not unlike the situation with teammate Brock Nelson, the only real question is if general manager Lou Lamoriello will willingly part with a valued member of his team while it's still hanging around the playoff race.

Player type

Veteran scorer

After acquiring Marcus Pettersson and signing him to a six-year extension, the Canucks have made the 6-foot-5 Soucy available on the trade market. Minutes are going to be tougher for him to come by now. Soucy is a prototypical shutdown defender who has performed well in the playoffs for the Canucks and during his previous stop in Seattle. As a bonus, the left shot is comfortable playing on either side of the ice. Soucy will have a lot of say in where he lands because of a no-trade clause that runs through the end of the season.

Player type

Shutdown defender

An effective skater for a man of his size, Armia is known for his defensive instincts and consistent 200-foot play. He's also a solid penalty killer who has chipped in with three short-handed goals for Montreal this season — third most among all NHL players through early February. A pending unrestricted free agent, he's available as a bottom-six rental.

Player type

Bottom-six defensive help

Evans is a high-end penalty killer in tandem with Joel Armia, who is also featured on the Big Board. In fact, it wouldn't be a surprise to see those players moved as a package deal by the Canadiens. Evans has gone cold offensively after a red-hot start but brings a fair amount of value as a right-shot center who is well above average on faceoffs. He isn't overly big, but he's a quick skater who is an affordable rental option playing on an expiring contract.

Player type

Quality fourth-line option

Mittelstadt's name started surfacing in trade discussions after the Avalanche dealt away Mikko Rantanen in a late-January blockbuster. Colorado is willing to get creative in an effort to upgrade its top-six forward group. Mittelstadt has good hands and is known as a puck distributor and playmaker rather than a goal scorer. While still young enough at age 26 to carry some upside, his play on the defensive side of the puck can leave something to be desired.

Player type

Playmaker with upside

Nyquist has found a nice home in Nashville and might prefer to stay, but it has been a rough ride for the Predators this season and he is the most marketable rental asset currently in their stable. One year removed from an unexpected 75-point season, Nyquist's production has dipped significantly. But the 35-year-old remains a strong skater and talented playmaker, and he could be had for a reasonable price.

Player type

Veteran playmaker

While Frederic has seen a decline after posting career bests with an 18-goal, 40-point campaign last season, he still brings intangibles teams appreciate. He's a big man who skates well and can effectively be deployed as a checker. With senior leadership in Boston acknowledging publicly that the organization is considering becoming a seller ahead of the deadline, Frederic is a hot commodity.

Player type

Checker who can score

A rough-and-tumble winger who boasts an impressive fight card, Olivier has caught the attention of at least a couple of teams currently eyeing

potential depth forward options. The 28-year-old pending unrestricted free agent has even managed to chip in more than his share of expected goals this season. But what makes him most attractive is his size, strength and willingness to embrace an energy role. Olivier is built for playoff hockey.

Player type

Rough-and-tumble energy winger

One of the largest men in the league at 6-foot-7 and nearly 260 pounds, Oleksiak represents the kind of depth contenders crave. While he's seen a small decline in his minutes this season in Seattle, he's shown he can handle second-pairing deployment at even strength while logging big minutes on the penalty kill. He can also line up on either side of the ice. The Kraken have a decision here since Oleksiak is signed through next season, but they may be able to maximize his value by trading him now.

Player type

Huge depth defenseman

Contract talks haven't produced any traction, which leaves the Canucks facing a decision while trying to hang tough in the playoff race: keep Boeser as an own rental or cash in on him as an asset? The sniper has experienced a decline following a 40-goal campaign — not only in production, but also in the number of shots and shot attempts he's generating. Still, he's got good puck skills and a strong history as a power-play contributor.

Marchand says he wants to spend his entire career in Boston, and the Bruins say they're trying to sign their captain to an extension. But ... talk is cheap. Marchand remains a pending UFA. Can a retooling franchise risk walking him to free agency? Fresh off helping Canada win the 4 Nations Face-Off, Marchand remains a high-end winger who can contribute offensively, kill penalties and, yes, get under an opponent's skin. His slow start following multiple offseason surgeries appears to be in the rear-view mirror.

Player type

Veteran leader, scorer and agitator

It's not clear how deep the Bruins are prepared to cut, but they could certainly attract a nice return of futures by moving Carlo now. He's still under contract for two more seasons, which could help an acquiring team justify paying a big price to get him. Carlo is a 6-foot-5, right-shot defenseman who is a trusted defender and penalty killer. He's got plenty of big-game experience, too.

Player type

Defensive defenseman

With Murphy having recently returned to Chicago's lineup after a recurring groin injury, teams will want some assurances about his medical file before proceeding with a trade. Still, a 6-foot-4 right-shot defenseman is a pretty appealing asset. Murphy has also posted strong defensive results under less-than-favorable conditions with a Blackhawks team on its way to yet another lottery pick.

Player type

Big defensive stalwart

Gourde isn't expected to return to the Kraken's lineup before the trade deadline after undergoing surgery to repair a sports hernia in January. However, he should be ready to play games again at some point in March. So while his health situation may slightly diminish his trade value, it hasn't completely submarined it. Gourde is a strong skater and two-way player who owns a couple of Stanley Cup rings from his time in Tampa — which means that he's exactly the kind of player a team gearing up for the playoffs will be looking at closely.

Player type

Feisty playoff performer

Reliable right-shot centers who can fill a depth role always have currency come deadline time. Bjugstad has shown that before — getting traded in 2022 from Arizona to Edmonton in a deal that brought back a third-round pick and defenseman Michael Kesselring — and he's trending toward being that kind of asset again for Utah HC. He's a reliable play-driver



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

who profiles as an ideal bottom-six utility man. Of course, Utah may elect to hang on to him depending on how the next few games go.

Player type

Bottom-six utility man

A huge winger at 6-foot-6 and 230-plus pounds, Greenway is on the radar for contenders seeking a bottom-six upgrade. As a pending unrestricted free agent, he can be acquired as a rental ahead of the deadline and the cost shouldn't be too prohibitive given his limited offensive output this season. Consistency is a bit of a question mark here.

Player type

Huge depth winger

The Blue Jackets will have a difficult decision on their hands if someone offers a first-round pick for Provorov. The team has overachieved this season, and the minute-munching defenseman has expressed a desire to sign an extension in Columbus, but the smarter move may be cashing in on his value as a trade asset now. We'll see. Although there have been some contract talks with the pending unrestricted free agent on an extension, a gap exists between how the two sides see things. Provorov is an all-situations defender who can play either side of the ice and tends to help his team keep the puck moving in the right direction.

Player type

All-situations defender

A minute-munching, shot-blocking defenseman who has drawn trade interest in the past, Ferraro is a valuable commodity. Signed through the end of next season at a \$3.25 million cap hit, the 26-year-old is a strong puck mover and penalty killer with a competitive streak to match.

Player type

Minute-munching shot-blocker

The 2019 Conn Smythe Trophy winner has two more seasons remaining on his contract and has already indicated a desire to stay in Nashville. However, it might not ultimately be his call. The organization wants to do right by O'Reilly, but general manager Barry Trotz will be forced to make a decision if he gets a strong trade offer amid a disappointing season for the team. O'Reilly is an excellent two-way center who can be counted on to chip in offensively and has the ability to be a true difference-maker for a contender. As an added bonus, he's a menace in the faceoff circle, too.

Player type

Top two-way center

A mountain of a man at 6-foot-6 and 232 pounds, McCarron may find himself in demand since he's playing on an affordable cap hit for one more season. He's a right shot who can kill penalties and win some draws. Even if he's limited offensively, there's value to be found in a fourth-liner who plays his style of game.

Player type

Mountainous depth forward

The writing has been on the wall since Montreal acquired Alexandre Carrier in December. At a minimum, it made the veteran defenseman on an expiring contract much more expendable. Savard should have suitors as a depth option and penalty killer, and it certainly doesn't hurt that he carries the experience of a Stanley Cup win with Tampa Bay in 2021 after being acquired midway through that season. He's also a right shot who routinely sacrifices his body to block shots, both of which are attributes good teams can always use more of.

Player type

Veteran defensive defenseman

A veteran left-shot defenseman with two Stanley Cup championships on his resume, Dumoulin profiles as a nice depth addition for a contender. Big and mobile, he can be trusted to move the puck effectively while handling a steady workload. He's not known for being overly physical, but he won't be pushed around. The 33-year-old is on an expiring contract and should be an easy piece for the Ducks to ship out before the deadline.

Player type

Depth defenseman with Cup rings

Lindgren is poised to potentially walk as a free agent on July 1 and also has had a hand in some of the Rangers' defensive struggles this season. That's not a great combination. A frequent partner of former Norris Trophy winner Adam Fox, Lindgren has still seen his team take on water during his five-on-five minutes. However, he's still considered a high-character player who doesn't shy away from physical play and is at an age where he likely hasn't yet hit his ceiling.

Player type

Struggling veteran

A Big Board mainstay, this may finally be the season Gibson finds his way back to a competitive team. He's lost the No. 1 job in Anaheim to Lukáš Dostál and is inching ever closer to the end of his contract with two years remaining on it after this one. That's been the biggest impediment to finding him a new home. While Gibson's numbers in recent seasons don't jump off the page in a positive way, they should be viewed with the understanding that he's played behind some horrific defensive teams. He's also had a major bounce-back performance so far this season. In a trade market with very few goaltending options available, Gibson has the highest ceiling.

Player type

Former ace in need of a fresh start

Injuries have kept Zegras from building any positive momentum the past two seasons. A fresh start could help that along. The Ducks are demanding more attention to detail from the offensive specialist, and getting it, but Zegras is still searching for a way to hang on to the parts of his game that once separated him. Remember that he already has two 60-point campaigns under his belt at age 23. The production has dried up, as has some of the player's enthusiasm.

Player type

Distressed asset

Another giant depth forward at 6-foot-5 and 220 pounds, Brazeau traveled the long road to the NHL and has earned a raise on his league-minimum \$775,000 contract. He's already hit the 10-goal mark for the first time in his career this season. Brazeau is a hard-working player who doesn't hesitate to finish his checks.

Player type

Late-blooming power forward

Robertson has bit his lip since a summer trade request went unfulfilled by the Leafs, but the situation could still come to a head before the deadline. He has at least helped his trade value with some more productive outings since a brief string of scratches in December. However, in the big picture, Robertson hasn't gained much traction under new head coach Craig Berube, and he may still get his desired fresh start once the Leafs begin looking at other acquisitions.

Player type

Diminutive winger who can score

A bottom-six forward option who plays hard at both ends of the ice, what you see is what you get from Kunin. He can chip in a bit offensively and has plenty of experience as a penalty killer. The right shot has made strides in the faceoff dot this season as well.

A pending unrestricted free agent in Pittsburgh who has contributed some offense this season, Beauvillier could be on the move yet again. He's bounced from Long Island to Vancouver to Chicago to Nashville to the Penguins in the past three seasons. Still, Beauvillier is a skilled winger with decent puck-handling skills. He's a pretty good skater, too.

A contract throw-in as part of the Flames-Flyers deal at the end of January, it would not be a surprise to see Kuzmenko flipped. The talented scorer has seen the goals disappear entirely this season and is on an expiring contract. But he remains a threat on the power play and could be due for a bounce-back.

For a few days at the 4 Nations Face-Off at least, Karlsson looked like he'd found the fountain of youth. He played extremely well for Team



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Sweden. Things have been much more up and down this season with the Penguins, and it's only natural to wonder if he might benefit from a more competitive environment. His contract remains the biggest barrier to a trade since it covers two more years at a \$10 million cap hit and the Penguins aren't believed to be warm to the idea of salary retention.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341092 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres' 'growth' was evident during come-from-behind win over Ducks: 5 takeaways

Lance Lysowski News Sports Reporter

Lindy Ruff was frustrated.

He watched from behind the bench in the second period Tuesday night as the Sabres missed the net and forced bad passes. During the intermission, he reminded them to stop trying to make a pretty play. To erase a two-goal deficit, they needed to get to the inside of the offensive zone and shoot, Ruff said.

It took only a few shifts into the third period for him to see that his advice was heeded. Tague Thompson went to the net and nearly scored when he redirected Alex Tuch's pass into Anaheim Ducks goalie Lukas Dostal.

Moments later, the Sabres' aggressive forecheck led to JJ Peterka spoiling Dostal's shutout with a one-timer from the right circle. They continued to apply pressure by making smart passes and outmuscling the Ducks in battles. Tuch banked the puck off Dostal's back for the tying goal, and Henri Jokiharju added the game-winner less than four minutes later as Buffalo held on for a 3-2 victory in KeyBank Center.

"I'd say three months ago it would have been a 5-1 loss, honestly," said Tuch, who scored his 20th goal of the season at 5:34 into the third period to tie it 2-2. "You just see the maturity, you see the change. You see no one was down. We were pushing each other. We were pressing each other. We were making sure each other were held accountable and making sure we were doing the right things the whole time. ... It was contagious. We had line after line after line going out there and playing the right way."

It was only the 15th time in franchise history that Buffalo won in regulation after trailing by two or more goals entering the third period. The Sabres (24-27-5) are still last in the Eastern Conference by two points, but they've won six of their last seven games. They won six in a row at home for the first time since November 2018.

This group of players responded poorly to adversity earlier this season. One goal against would turn into three or four. The same could have happened on Tuesday when Rasmus Dahlin's hooking penalty gave the Ducks a 5-on-3 power play, and Mason McTavish scored 3:05 into the first period to give Anaheim a 1-0 lead.

The Sabres had several opportunities to tie the score. Thompson had a breakaway. Dahlin and Jason Zucker hit the post during a power play. They couldn't breakthrough before Leo Carlsson scored another power-play goal 4:58 into the second period. Buffalo's players responded by making careless passes and failing to take advantage of their time in the offensive zone. They reverted to the bad habits that cost them in previous games.

"We mishandled the puck and made a lot of bad plays," said Ruff. "We got rewarded for taking the puck to the net."

The Sabres had an 18-6 edge in shots on goal in the third period and 35-18 overall. They had 83 shot attempts, 40 more than the Ducks, and nine high-danger scoring chances at 5 on 5 in the final 20 minutes, according to Natural Stat Trick. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen faced only one high-danger scoring chance at 5 on 5 the entire game, and the Sabres allowed only two perimeter shots while Dostal was pulled for an extra attacker.

Five of the next eight games are on the road, where the Sabres are 9-15-2 this season. Only two NHL teams scored more 5-on-5 goals than

Buffalo and it has an impressive plus-13 goal differential in those situations, but its power play went 0-for-3 against the Ducks and ranks 27th in the NHL. The penalty kill has also allowed four goals in the past three games.

Both special-teams units will need to be better if the Sabres are going to continue to win and finally climb the standings, but the composure they showed in the third period was the latest reminder of how much they've improved since the blown leads during their 13-game winless streak.

"Early in the year, we didn't handle that very well," said Ruff. "We probably ramp it up a little too soon and all of a sudden it's probably three or four for them, and we chased the game. ... I think it shows some of the growth of the club."

Here are other takeaways from the game:

### 1. Tying goal

Tuch has been one of the Sabres' most valuable players this season.

The 28-year-old winger has nine points in his last six games and 44 points in 56 games this season. His availability was a "game-time decision," according to Ruff, because of the undisclosed injury that forced Tuch to leave the game Saturday, but he seemed unfazed against the Ducks. Tuch had five shots on goal, 10 shot attempts and three blocked shots.

This was also another impressive performance by Thompson. He had a team-high seven shots on goal in 16:27 of ice time. The Sabres outshot the Ducks 5-1 in the third period when Thompson was with Tuch and Jordan Greenway.

### 2. Stepping up

Jokiharju's trade value may have increased significantly over the past two weeks with his performance for Finland at the 4 Nations Face-Off and his recent play with the Sabres.

The pending unrestricted free agent is in demand because he has a right-handed shot, and he's effective at breaking the puck out of his zone. He didn't look comfortable in Ruff's system until a few weeks before the break, but he's been solid in a third-pair role. Dostal had his post covered, but Jokiharju's short side shot went over the goalie's left shoulder.

"Obviously, he's been through a little bit this year with not being in the lineup every game, but he's a great player, he's got all the tools," said Cozens. "He's been playing with a lot of confidence since 4 Nations, and we're all happy for him."

### 3. Trending up

This was one of Cozens' best games of the season.

The 24-year-old center had three assists, a plus-3 rating, four shots on goal, nine shot attempts, seven hits and he won 50% of his faceoffs. The Sabres outshot the Ducks 15-3 and outscored them 3-0 at 5 on 5 when Cozens was on the ice, according to Natural Stat Trick. He has only 30 points through 56 games, but Ruff has been pleased with Cozens' progress for some time. The Sabres' coach reunited Cozens with Peterka and Jack Quinn at the start of the third period, and the trio immediately produced the first goal.

"We just know where we're going to be," said Cozens.

### 4. Flexing value

Peyton Krebs has become an important role player and agitator for the Sabres.

He filled in on the first line while Jiri Kulich was evaluated by the medical staff, and Krebs didn't back down when he was forced to fight Ryan Strome, who sought revenge for a knee-on-knee hit on Alex Killorn. Krebs raised his arms to encourage cheers from the crowd and his teammates.

Krebs kills penalties, wins faceoffs and his defensive metrics are among the best on the team even though he leads all Buffalo forwards in defensive-zone starts at 5 on 5, according to Natural Stat Trick.

### 5. Next



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

The Sabres return to the road to face the Carolina Hurricanes in Lenovo Center on Thursday at 7 p.m. Buffalo hasn't won in Carolina since March 22, 2016.

Buffalo News LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341093 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres wrap: Alex Tuch leads third-period rally as Buffalo roars back to win 3-2

Lance Lysowski News Sports Reporter

There were troubling signs from the Buffalo Sabres after Leo Carlsson scored in the second period to give the Anaheim Ducks a two-goal lead Tuesday night.

The Sabres were overpassing, and they weren't trying to screen Ducks goalie Lukas Dostal.

Anaheim Ducks vs Buffalo Sabres

Anaheim Ducks center Isac Lundestrom (21) races to catch up to Buffalo Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin (26) in the first period of their NHL game at KeyBank Center on Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2025.

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff changed his lines at the start of the third period, and the adjustment awakened his offense.

JJ Peterka, Alex Tuch and Henri Jokiharju scored in a span of less than eight minutes to roar back from a two-goal deficit, as the Sabres took the lead and held on for a 3-2 win in KeyBank Center.

The Sabres (24-27-5) have a six-game home win streak for the first time since November 2018, and they have won six of their last seven games overall. Dylan Cozens also had three assists for Buffalo, which entered Tuesday with a 3-18 record when trailing at the second intermission.

Tuch and Jason Zucker were in the lineup after coach Lindy Ruff labeled them as "game-time decisions." They were excellent during a strong first period for Buffalo, but Anaheim led 1-0 at the intermission because of Mason McTavish's power-play goal 3:05 into the game.

The two teams combined for 28 penalty minutes in the first period, with the Ducks receiving three power plays. They did not score on a 4 on 3 but took advantage of a 5 on 3 when McTavish used a one-timer to beat Sabres goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen. The Ducks were 7-1-1 in their previous nine games.

First period

- Jordan Greenway and Rasmus Dahlin were called for minor penalties in a span of 53 seconds, which gave the Ducks a 5-on-3 power play for 1:07.
- Anaheim snapped an 0-for-17 drought on the power play with McTavish's one-timer from below the right faceoff dot 3:05 into the first period. The Ducks entered the game with a negative-12 goal differential in first periods.
- Zucker nearly setup Tuch for a goal with a centering pass from behind the net, then Ryan McLeod had two shots on goal as the trio forced the Ducks to chase the puck.
- Dostal poked the puck off Tage Thompson's stick as the Sabres forward skated toward the Ducks' net on a breakaway. Thompson quickly gathered the puck and his shot created a rebound. Jiri Kulich was in position to snap it past Dostal, but the puck ricocheted and hit Kulich in the face. The 20-year-old center was forced to go to the dressing room for repairs.
- The Sabres had a 7-2 edge in shots on goal 12:42 into the first period when Ducks defenseman Pavel Mintyukov took an interference penalty. Zucker and Rasmus Dahlin hit the post during the Sabres' power play,

and Tuch's shot from the slot was stopped by Dostal before the penalty expired.

- Peyton Krebs' knee-on-knee hit earned the Sabres center a penalty, and he was swarmed by Ducks defenseman Jacob Trouba, who received a roughing penalty for retaliating. It turned into a 4-on-3 power play for Anaheim when Buffalo was called for too many men on the ice.

- The power play ended for Anaheim with a scrum around Buffalo's net. Mattias Samuelsson and Frank Vatrano were called for matching penalties, but Krebs was also forced to fight Ryan Strome. Krebs dodged a few punches, then delivered a few before the bout ended. Strome was given an additional roughing penalty for instigating, giving the Sabres a brief power play at the end of the first period.

- It was only the 14th time in 55 games that Buffalo trailed at the first intermission. Kulich wore a full face shield when he returned to the game late in the period. The Sabres missed the net 15 times, but outshot the Ducks, 10-5.

Second period

- Tuch's hooking penalty 3:13 into the second period gave the Ducks their fourth power play of the game.

- The Ducks took a 2-0 lead with Carlsson's one-timer from the right circle 4:58 into the second period. Luukkonen tracked the pass to Carlsson, but his legs weren't closed.

- Zucker couldn't corral the puck in the slot when McLeod led the rush, then Krebs tripped over the puck while trying to enter the offensive zone. Tage Thompson had a clear look at the Ducks' net, only to watch Dostal snare his shot with 7:11 remaining in the second period.

- Jack Quinn's shot from the left circle went off Dostal's glove, and Trouba batted the puck into the netting for a delay of game penalty with 6:16 left.

- The Sabres made too many mistakes on the power play, though. There were multiple turnovers and misfired passes with no traffic in front of Dostal.

- Ducks defenseman Brian Dumoulin suffered an injury while battling for the puck near the Sabres' bench with under two minutes to play in the second period.

- The Sabres had 50 shot attempts at the second intermission, but only 17 were on net and they trailed 2-0.

- Sabres coach Lindy Ruff changed his lines at the start of the third period. McLeod centered Kulich and Zucker; Thompson was between Tuch and Greenway; and Dylan Cozens centered Quinn and JJ Peterka.

- Tuch set up Thompson for a point-blank scoring chance, but Dostal made the save less than two minutes into the third period.

- The Sabres cut their deficit to 2-1 with Peterka scoring his 16th goal of the season only 1:56 into the third period. Owen Power retrieved the puck at the half wall and sent a backhand pass to Cozens, who set up Peterka with a pass to the right circle.

- The Sabres tied it 2-2 when Tuch carried the puck below the goal line and snapped it off Dostal's back for his 20th goal of the season.

- Jokiharju gave the Sabres a 3-2 lead with a high, short-side shot over Dostal's left shoulder 9:31 into the third period. Jokiharju has two goals in as many games and three this season. He had a plus-3 rating against the Ducks.

- Quinn missed the net from the slot before Cozens' tip went a few feet wide of Dostal.

- Luukkonen stopped shots from Vatrano and Radko Gudas while Dostal was pulled for an extra attacker. Tuch missed the empty net from nearly 200 feet and Greenway was unable to hold the puck below the goal line. The Ducks re-entered their offensive zone, but McLeod cleared the puck.

Dahlin almost hit the empty net again, and the Ducks missed a seam pass before Greenway closed out the win by clearing the puck.

Lineup

With Tuch and Zucker available to play, the Sabres used the same lineup as Saturday night:



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

JJ Peterka - Jiri Kulich - Tage Thompson

Jason Zucker - Ryan McLeod - Alex Tuch

Jordan Greenway - Dylan Cozens - Jack Quinn

Beck Malenstyn - Peyton Krebs - Zach Benson

Bowen Byram - Rasmus Dahlin

Mattias Samuelsson - Owen Power

Dennis Gilbert - Henri Jokiharju

Defensemen Connor Clifton and Jacob Bryson, and forward Sam Lafferty were the Sabres' healthy scratches for a second consecutive game. Ducks center Trevor Zegras was not available to play because he's serving a three-game suspension stemming from his high hit on Detroit Red Wings forward Michael Rasmussen.

Next

The Sabres return to the road to face the Carolina Hurricanes in Lenovo Center on Thursday at 7 p.m. The Montreal Canadiens will be in Buffalo to play the Sabres on Saturday 7 p.m.

Buffalo News LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341094 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres are 'getting better' at faceoffs, but they're still not winning often enough

Lance Lysowski

Tendencies of opposing centers are written on the whiteboard in the Buffalo Sabres' dressing room before each game.

Matt Ellis, the Sabres' assistant in charge of coaching faceoffs, also prepares video clips for each of his centers. The thorough scouting report can help Dylan Cozens, Peyton Krebs, Jiri Kulich, Ryan McLeod and Tage Thompson pinpoint weaknesses, but there's more to the skill than understanding your opponent.

"For me, it's all about timing," Krebs explained. "If my timing is off, I'm not good on faceoffs. (I win them more often than not) as long as I have my timing. That's why I do it so much after practice and before. It's staying in that rhythm and keeping your timing. If you do that, you may not win every draw, but that base will help you win more."

Improving the Sabres' faceoff-win percentage was one of Lindy Ruff's priorities when he returned as coach in April. Buffalo finished last in the NHL in each of the previous two seasons. Youth and inexperience were behind the struggles, as well as Thompson's switch from right wing to center. Even the best centers in the NHL – including Sidney Crosby – face a steep learning curve when they enter the league.

Not only do they need to gain strength, but they must learn which technique works best and how to avoid getting kicked out of the faceoff dot by an official. A few of the Sabres' centers have improved from last season, most notably Krebs and Cozens, but the team's 48.2 winning percentage on all faceoffs ranks 26th out of 32 teams. They had won at least 50% in only 24 of 55 games entering their matchup with the Anaheim Ducks on Tuesday at KeyBank Center.

The Sabres have 30 goals since Jan. 28, and their average of five per game is tied for the most in the NHL with Washington.

Reaching that benchmark doesn't guarantee victory, however, Ruff noted that it is no coincidence the Sabres are usually stuck in their defensive zone in games or periods when they're losing more often than not.

"It's something that we just continue to work hard on," Ruff said. "I think we've had some real good nights. Other nights, you've got to chase the puck around because you didn't win the faceoff. You notice that as part

of the game, especially, say you get a period where you're only 25% or 30%, you usually don't like that period because almost every draw you're chasing it around. ... Feel it's getting better."

Some centers have improved more than others. Cozens entered Tuesday at 50.5%, a 5% increase from last season, and Krebs is second on the team at 51.3%. McLeod, whom the Sabres acquired from the Edmonton Oilers in July, leads Buffalo with a mark of 52%.

The two centers on the top line aren't winning often enough, though. Thompson has won just 41.8% after registering 43.3 and 43.1 in each of the past two seasons, though bothersome injuries have been a factor. Kulich, who estimated that he won approximately 30% of his draws in Rochester last season, is at 45.9%. The 20-year-old forward has centered Thompson and JJ Peterka in recent weeks.

Experience is one path to improvement. Cozens, for example, learned some difficult lessons while facing top centers such as Crosby and Connor McDavid. And every center has to decide what works for them. A technique used by one player isn't going to work for another.

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.

Cozens has tried to swipe his opponent's stick away, but you're going to get kicked out of the faceoff dot if you mistime the maneuver. It is no secret in the NHL that veterans are given more leeway than younger players. Cozens has won 53.7% of faceoffs since he started the season at 40.8% through 13 games.

"I know a lot of guys like watching video, but I try to not watch too much video because I don't want to be overthinking on a faceoff," Cozens said. "My main thing is going in strong and trying to out-muscle the guy. ... I've tried to come under him with as much strength as I can and sweep it under his stick, but it's mostly just strength."

Krebs studied video in previous seasons, but faceoffs didn't become a major point of emphasis for him until the summer. He understood that he needed to be above 50% to earn more ice time and a bigger role with Ruff as coach. Winning faceoffs has helped Krebs become a regular penalty-killer, and he is second on the team in defensive-zone starts at 5 on 5, according to Natural Stat Trick. To prepare for the responsibility, Krebs focused on forearm strength and technique. He also spoke to current and retired NHL players about their approach to developing the skill.

The team's overall faceoff numbers are a reminder that more improvement is needed. The Sabres are 26th in the NHL on even-strength faceoffs (48.1), 27th on the power play (48.6), 12th on the penalty kill (48.4), 26th in the offensive zone (48) and 24th in the defensive zone (47.7). Losing a draw can be the difference between scoring an empty-net goal and blowing a lead in the final minute of regulation. Winning a draw can help Buffalo's power play set up quickly, or allow it to execute a set play at even strength.

"It's obviously something we've had to focus on and get better at over the years," Cozens said. "We've had young centers and it's tough coming in against veteran guys. ... I know I had a really tough stretch at the start of the year, but I think I've found what works for me and I've been on a good stretch here now."

Buffalo News LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341095 Buffalo Sabres

What should Sabres do with Zucker, Greenway, other pending UFAs before NHL trade deadline?

Matthew Fairburn

9-11 minutes 25/02/2025



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Buffalo Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams has less than two weeks to make a decision on Jason Zucker, Jordan Greenway and Henri Jokiharju, the team's three most prominent pending unrestricted free agents. The 4 Nations break is over, and the NHL trade deadline is right around the corner. Adams has expressed interest in re-signing Zucker and Greenway, two veteran forwards who have proven capable of playing reliable two-way hockey.

The Sabres also opened their post-break schedule with an 8-2 win over the Rangers and have been talking like a team that hasn't given up despite the slimmest of postseason chances. But Adams has to think practically about this roster, one that is still in last place in the Eastern Conference and 11 points out of the second wild-card spot with 27 games to play. Zucker, Greenway and Jokiharju all don't have contracts for next season. And as long as that remains the case, the urgency for Adams to act should intensify. Each situation is different, though, so let's look at the factors the Sabres need to consider with Zucker, Greenway, Jokiharju and the other pending UFAs on their roster.

Jason Zucker, winger

Zucker has been eligible to sign an extension since Jan. 1. He expressed interest in staying in Buffalo when I spoke to him shortly after that. Adams met with Zucker and his representatives on Buffalo's west-coast trip in late January. But Zucker, who recently turned 33, doesn't have a new contract yet. This is the most pressing situation Adams faces in the coming days.

If Adams isn't confident that Zucker will be willing to sign at a number that makes sense for the Sabres, he needs to move him to get an asset. This shouldn't be an overly complex contract negotiation. Given Zucker's age and his performance, a one- or two-year deal at a modest pay raise from his \$5 million salary would make sense for both sides. However, the NHL recently announced the projected salary cap increases for the next three seasons. With more cap space leaguewide than expected, Zucker may be enticed by the idea of hitting free agency coming off a career year. If the Sabres trade Zucker to a contender and he can have a strong playoff run, that would only further boost his value. For that reason, Zucker has the leverage to ask for more money from the Sabres. He could also push for a one-year deal and a higher salary to continue to bet on himself with the cap jumping even higher next offseason.

The fact it's gotten to this point without a contract means Adams will have to gauge Zucker's value on the trade market against his contract demands. The way Zucker has played, the Sabres should be able to get at least a second-round pick for him at the deadline. He had three more assists on Saturday and now has 44 points in 53 games. Maybe a team would be desperate enough to consider parting with a first-round pick, but that might be wishful thinking.

While a second-round pick may not seem like much for a team like the Sabres, it's another asset that the Sabres could use this summer when trying to reshape the roster. Maybe an extra second-round pick helps the Sabres move back into the first round at the draft. Maybe it can be used in a package to add a player to the NHL roster. It's a significant enough asset that Adams can't afford to let the deadline pass without either a new contract for Zucker or a trade. That's what happened with Linus Ullmark in 2021, and he walked away in free agency for nothing.

The case for keeping Zucker at the right price is straightforward. He's been consistently productive while playing a smart, two-way game. His veteran leadership has also been noticeable on the youngest team in the NHL. Moving on from Zucker would open up a need for another player like him. But that's all dependent on Zucker's desire to be here on a contract that makes sense for the Sabres. If that's not the case, Adams needs to be proactive about capitalizing on Zucker's value and getting the best asset he can. If Zucker has a few more strong games coming out of the break, that could be an opportunity to make a move. Because one injury could ruin his trade value, and the Sabres could see Zucker walk away in the offseason for nothing. They already had one injury scare with Zucker on Saturday when he blocked a shot and briefly left the game.

Jordan Greenway, winger

On Saturday, Greenway played his first game since Dec. 15 after having surgery for a mid-body injury. He was excellent, leading the Sabres with six hits and picking up an early assist in the win. But he's missed a lot of time, and that complicates his trade value. Before the injury, Greenway had started his contract season strong as one of Buffalo's most

consistent forwards at both ends of the ice. He's excellent on the penalty kill and is a reliable third-line winger. He picked up right where he left off in his first game back, but he has only six more games between now and the trade deadline to show the rest of the league how healthy he is. For that reason, the Sabres might not yet have an idea of his exact trade value. They up a second-round pick and a fourth-round pick for him two seasons ago, but he had term on his contract and was younger. As a rental coming off a significant injury, will the Sabres be able to get a second-round pick back? If he keeps playing like he did this weekend, that seems possible.

At full health, Greenway is the type of player who could help a playoff team. His steady defensive game and penalty killing would be sought after by contending teams. That's what makes the next six games important for him. His next contract also isn't straightforward given the time he's missed due to injuries. He's never produced more than 12 goals or 32 points in a season, but he brings more to the table than just scoring. AFP Analytics, a Rochester-based sport analytics consulting firm, projects Greenway to receive a four-year deal worth \$3.8 million per year. However, the same logic about the rising cap in the Zucker section could apply to Greenway. He's never been an unrestricted free agent, which is enticing enough on its own. Add in the extra cap space around the league and it would be reasonable for him to want to see what's out there.

It's also fair to wonder about the risk involved in signing a player like Greenway, who has dealt with plenty of injuries over the last few years. The version of Greenway the Sabres are seeing this season is one that is worth keeping around. There are more skilled forwards than Greenway on the roster, but he adds a different skill set to the lineup that is in short supply in Buffalo. The clock is ticking on getting a deal done, though.

Henri Jokiharju, defenseman

Of the three most notable unrestricted free agents, Jokiharju's situation seems simplest. He hasn't carved out a consistent role under Lindy Ruff because Buffalo's bench boss has wanted more physicality out of him. Jokiharju's role over the last two seasons has been frustrating for him. And while his \$3 million cap hit isn't the easiest to move, right-handed defensemen are always in demand around the league. Erik Johnson got traded for a fourth-round pick last season. I think the Sabres could get a similar return for Jokiharju, who is younger and a better puck mover.

Dennis Gilbert, defenseman

Dennis Gilbert got a lot of attention for fighting Mathieu Olivier when the Sabres played the Blue Jackets before the break. While that resonated with his teammates, Gilbert was already popular in the Sabres' locker room before that. He's the most physical defenseman on the team and worthy of another contract. He may only play a part-time role, but he plays it well. He's worth more to the Sabres than whatever trade return they would get.

James Reimer, goalie

Unless an unexpected great deal comes along, it doesn't make much sense to trade James Reimer. Devon Levi is having a great season in the AHL and should play out the season in Rochester while Reimer backs up Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen.

Jacob Bryson, defenseman

During his time with the Sabres, Jacob Bryson has occasionally been placed in a bigger role than he should be, but he's still been serviceable organizational depth. His price tag is much more reasonable this season, too. I don't know that there would be a big enough trade market for him to motivate the Sabres to make a trade.

Nicolas Aube-Kubel, winger

Nicolas Aube-Kubel is currently in Rochester after the Sabres waived him in January. That he passed through waivers unclaimed is a good indication that he wouldn't have much value on the trade market despite his physicality and playoff experience. That could change if the Sabres retained some salary.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341124 Edmonton Oilers



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Player grades: Slumping Edmonton Oilers fail to get job done at either end of the ice in Tampa

Bruce McCurdy

Oilers 1, Lightning 4

It was another bright start for the Edmonton Oilers on Tuesday, the Oilers opening up a first period lead for the third time in 3 games. But for the third time on this nightmarish Eastern road trip, the Oil failed to either build on their early lead or to protect it, then got blown out in a one-sided middle frame. Once again the entire third period was "garbage time" as the visitors struggled to reach the finish line of a multi-goal defeat. This one ended 4-1 for the Lightning. Bright as the start may have seemed, the end was dull as dishwater.

Make it 7 goals for, 17 against through the first 3 games of the trip with at least a 3-goal margin of defeat in each. Once again the Oilers were convincingly outshot, 37-24, making it 103-67 for the 3 games combined, an average of -12 per game. That is way out of character for a club that had the second best shot differential in the league at the resumption of play just 4 days ago.

Similarly, the team was on the short end of Grade A Shots by 17 to 11, and even more convincingly 11 to 3 in the more dangerous subset of 5-alarm shots, preliminary results from the Cult of Hockey's ongoing project to document the most important plays of each game. (Running count)

Player grades

Cult of Hockey player grades

#2 Evan Bouchard, 3. Didn't get the memo about improved puck management, committing a howler of a turnover not 20 seconds into the first period leading to Tampa's first 5-alarm shot. Skinner answered the bell(s) that time with a fine save. That was the first of a game-high 5 giveaways by the increasingly-erratic Bouchard on this night. Earned a secondary assist on Edmonton's lone goal. Set up by Savoie for a wide-open 2-on-1 but muffed the chance with a poorly executed pass to Podkolzin. Had one good thrust on net where his one-timer off a Draisaitl feed was thwarted by Andrei Vasilevskiy's blocker. But some soft defensive coverage at both goal posts was a major part of the breakdown on Brandon Hagel's game-winner early in the second. Credited with 5 hits, and went to bat for his goalie in one post-whistle scrum. Contributions to Grade A Shots (GAS): Even Strength +3/-2; Special Teams 0.

#13 Mattias Janmark, 4. Had a good early scoring chance but double-clutched, giving Vasilevskiy just enough time to recover and make the stop on Janmark's only shot of the game. Tabbed as Edmonton's lone forward on a second-period 3v5, his attempt to block Victor Hedman's point blast ended badly when the blast caromed off Janmark's shin pad, past a surprised Skinner and into Edmonton's net. So it's been going for the squad of late, especially on its star-crossed penalty kill unit. GAS: ES +1/-0; ST +0/-1.

#14 Mattias Ekholm, 4. Won a few battles, as evidenced by his 5 official takeaways, a very high number in this category. But lost a couple of wars on the 2-1 and 4-1 goals, when he numbered among the defensive culprits on both. Oilers were outshot 12-7 and outscored 2-0 during his ~20 even strength minutes. GAS: ES +0/-4; ST 0.

#18 Zach Hyman, 4. His standing screen of Vasilevskiy played a part in Edmonton's lone goal, scored on the PP. Mustered 3 shots at even strength, though nothing that was seriously dangerous. Was better than his boxcars (0-0-0, -2) but the Oilers need more from last year's 54-goal man, still stuck on 19 as 2024-25 approaches the 3/4 mark. GAS: ES +1/-1; ST +1/-0.

#19 Adam Henrique, 3. Oilers got mashed during his 12 minutes of even-strength play, getting outshot 9-3 and outscored 1-0. Slow recovery after Kapanen's key turnover and unable to impact the play. Didn't muster a shot attempt all night. GAS: ES 0/-0; ST +0/-1.

#22 Matt Savoie, 6. Had a few good moments, but learned an important lesson about how good are top goaltenders in this league. Thwarted by

Vasilevskiy on an early one-timer off a Draisaitl feed, and on a double chance off a favourable bounce on to his stick in the slot. Also made a great cross-ice feed to send Bouchard and Podkolzin away 2-on-1. GAS: ES +3/-1; ST 0.

#25 Darnell Nurse, 4. Took a nasty knock when Mitchell Chaffee ducked or fell underneath a Nurse hit that sent the big defender careening awkwardly into the boards. Looked to be injured but came back to start the next period. Played most of a decent game but was caught out on a bad pinch on the 4-1 goal that ended all suspense early in the third. GAS: ES +0/-3; ST 0.

#27 Brett Kulak, 4. Caught out far ahead of the play when Kapanen coughed it up at the red line, tried to get back but was unable to contain the man or the pass, his over-commitment on the play leaving himself in no position to check the eventual goal scorer. Led the Oilers in ice time with 23:18. GAS: ES +0/-3; ST 0.

#28 Connor Brown, 4. Played 14 minutes in this game but by eye and by stat had almost no impact on it. A complete clean sheet on the Event Summary with 0 shot attempts, hits, or anything else. GAS: ES +1/-0; ST 0.

#29 Leon Draisaitl, 7. Continues to be Edmonton's best player on a nightly basis, even as his team collapses around him. Drew the Oilers lone powerplay opportunity of the night when he got hooked down by Nikita Kucherov, then took advantage by scoring the one and only Oilers goal. The tally was his 43rd of the season, fully 10 more than any other NHLer at this point. His 5 shots on net were by far the team high, including all 3 of the Oilers' 5-alarm shots. Skated the puck hard through neutral ice and backed up the Bolts defenders more than once. Did take an unfortunate high-sticking penalty that inevitably led to a Tampa powerplay goal. Took another late in the third period when the stripes turned a blind eye to a couple of questionable Eric Cernak hits but were less forgiving when Leon took his pound of flesh in response. GAS: ES +4/-2; ST +1/-0.

#33 Viktor Arvidsson, 3. Got promoted to McDavid's line but did little with the opportunity, posting 0-0-0, -2 with 0 shots on net in 14½ minutes. GAS: ES +1/-1; ST 0.

#42 Kasper Kapanen, 3. Just 78 seconds after the Oilers took the lead, Kapanen's ghastly turnover in the neutral zone was the critical mistake that cost his team that lead. Got benched for the rest of the period but the damage was done. Came back to play a team-low 9:42 with little impact: 1 shot, 1 hit, 2 giveaways. GAS: ES +0/-2; ST 0.

#49 Ty Emberson, 5. About the best of an underwhelming crew of Edmonton blueliners. The only member of the sextet without a minus, also the only one with positive shots-on-goal shares. Did have his struggles at times behind his own blueline, but Skinner was his best friend on this night. 5 hits to co-lead the Oilers. GAS +0/-4; ST 0.

#51 Troy Stecher, 4. Played his first game since Feb 01 and largely held his own, though with no offence to speak of. Caught on an island as the lone man back on the 1-1 and took care of one danger man but was in no position to thwart the shooter in what from an Edmonton perspective was a broken play. 1 shot, 2 hits, 2 blocks in 16 minutes. GAS: ES +0/-2; ST 0.

#74 Stu Skinner, 5. Played a strong first period and made a few big stops to keep his team in the game. But that good work was undone when he was beaten badly by Brandon Hagel in the first half-minute of the second. He bit hard on Hagel's feint to the short side post and was unable to match his speed to the other post, where the slick forward tucked it home. A killer goal that would prove to be the game winner. Made a number of fine saves down the stretch to keep the score respectable. Stood tall against Tampa's first unit powerplay in the very late stages as they did their best to run up the score. 37 shots, 33 saves, .892 Save Percentage, -0.48 Goals Saved Above Expected.

#90 Corey Perry, 4. Quiet game in his old home arena (one of them). 1 mildly dangerous shot, no hits, and not much sign of the kind of greasy play which might spark his mates. GAS: ES +1/-2; ST 0.

#92 Vasily Podkolzin, 6. Decent game on the Draisaitl-Savoie line, his passes leading to 4 Grade A shots and his 4 hits creating a little bit of pushback if not actual chaos. But 0 shot attempts off his own stick, including a 2-on-1 chance where he couldn't handle Bouchard's pass in the slot. GAS: ES +4/-0; ST 0.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

#93 Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, 3. Made a critical mistake on the 3-1 when his high-sticking penalty while shorthanded put the Oilers 2-men down, the sort of thing the Bolts are unlikely to miss and didn't. Then he had a weak backcheck on Nick Paul who potted the 4-1 tally 7 minutes into the third. 1 shot. GAS: ES +3/-1; ST +0/-2.

#97 Connor McDavid, 5. A few positives, including a fine pass to Draisaitl for Edmonton's lone goal after just 16 seconds on the powerplay. 2 shots, 2 hits, and a team-best 9/16=56% on the dot. Showed a couple of flashes of his mad skills, notably an amazing pivot in the neutral zone to spring himself on a rush. But had trouble penetrating Tampa's layered defensive set to create any truly dangerous chances at 5v5. On the short end of shot shares and was 0-1 in goals. Over his last 6 (NHL) games at 5v5, Edmonton's captain has been on the ice for 0 goals for and 10 against, truly shocking results at both ends of the ice. GAS: ES +4/-2; ST +1/-0.

Recently at the Cult of Hockey

STAPLES: Oilers to sit out big name newcomers on wing, defence vs Tampa

McCURDY: 6 troubling trends for Oilers thru 6 February games

STAPLES: Oilers WON'T trade for a goalie at deadline, insider suggests

STAPLES: Jordan Binnington to the Oilers? Hmm

LEAVINS: 9 Things, Feb 23 edition

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341125 Edmonton Oilers

Still no sign of a pulse as Edmonton Oilers lose fourth in a row

Robert Tychkowski

It's not time to abandon ship yet, but with Edmonton Oilers taking on a disconcerting amount of water lately it might be a good idea to make a mental note of where the lifeboats are.

Just in case.

The losing streak is now four games in a row and the larger sample size is 2-5-1 after the Oilers were overwhelmed by another top-flight opponent — this time 4-1 by the Tampa Bay Lightning.

On the heels of a 6-3 loss in Philadelphia, a 7-3 loss in Washington and a 5-4 loss to Colorado before the Four Nations break, the Oilers didn't look any different in Tampa Bay.

A team that was supposed to have taken stock of itself and made a concerted effort to turn its game around after a pair of beatings to start the road trip didn't show any of the poise and fire they needed.

Too slow, too many turnovers, anemic offence, porous defence and not enough key saves. All of the same stuff that's been dragging the Oilers down for weeks dragged them down again on Tuesday.

In fact, it was a carbon copy of the last game. In Washington, Leon Draisaitl opened the scoring on the power play and the Capitals scored five-straight goals. This time, Draisaitl opened the scoring on the power play and the Lightning scored four-straight goals.

"We're a fragile group right now," said head coach Kris Knoblauch. "We're a little reluctant to play our game. Confidence is a little hard right now. We haven't gone through this tough a stretch in a while."

Tampa Bay was just faster, hungrier on pucks, better in puck battles, smarter with the puck management and better in net. Take away a couple of garbage-time goals in Washington and the Oilers haven't scored an even-strength goal in two games.

Everything is going wrong right now.

"We're not playing our best and we're playing some really good teams," said Knoblauch. "We can't not be at our best and expect to win these games."

Defensively, Edmonton started off on the wrong foot and stayed there most of the night. On the first shift of the game, Evan Bouchard got too casual and turned the puck over for a point-blank shot that would have made it 1-0 if not for Stuart Skinner.

On Tampa's first goal, Kasperii Kapanen turned the puck over at centre ice, setting up a four-on-two the other way.

Skinner was fantastic in the first period, stopping 13 shots to mask the mistakes, but they kept coming.

"We're giving up way too many chances, we're giving up way too much zone time," said defenceman Mattias Ekholm. "We're in that funk right now. It's going to take a gutsy effort that gets us out of it but right now we're not there."

On the first shift of the second period, Edmonton gave Tampa Bay a freebie to make it 2-1. On a simple one-on-one rush, Brandon Hagel skated up the wing, cruised behind Edmonton's net untouched and scored on a wraparound that caught Skinner napping and Bouchard mailing it in.

Bouchard watched the play develop from start to finish and never even took a stride in Hagel's direction, just coasted a safe distance away and then helped fish the puck out of the net.

That goal seemed to suck the life out of the fragile Oilers.

"Every one is a little discouraged," said Knoblauch. "They put a lot of pressure on themselves to win, they view themselves as one of the best in the league. We have to put the adversity moments behind us and be able to respond and push back."

Mix in another goal against on the penalty kill (nine of them in the last seven games) and it's 3-1 Tampa. In fairness, it was a two-man advantage for 1:12 with Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins in the box, but the Oilers have taken 16 penalties in the last seven games and killed just seven of them.

An odd-man rush in the third period made it 4-1. And the water keeps flooding in.

"We're in a bit of a hole right now as a team," said Ekholm. "It's about resiliency and sticking with it — we're going to have to dig one out here sooner or later."

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE: Draisaitl is basically Tiger Woods at the 2000 US Open or Usain Bolt winning the 100 metres in the Olympics. He is blowing away the field in this year's Rocket Richard goal scoring race, 10 goals up on second place William Nylander, after drawing a penalty and then scoring for the sixth game in a row to give Edmonton a brief lead.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341126 Edmonton Oilers

Speed is the key for an Edmonton Oilers squad slow to come off break

"But the importance is defensively, we're in the right positions but we're not closing quick enough and it's just allowing the other team to be given a little more time to make plays"

Gerry Moddejonge

You can't blame the Edmonton Oilers for looking ahead to the two-week break for the 4 Nations Face-Off earlier this month.

It's just too bad no one's told them the break's over.

They went into it having lost in a shootout to the Detroit Red Wings, and came out the other side with much more lopsided losses, 6-3 and 7-3 to Philadelphia Flyers and Washington Capitals teams that represent either end of the Eastern Conference standings.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

That set them up for Tuesday's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning, smack dab in the middle of a five-game road trip that isn't going to get any easier, as the Florida Panthers and Carolina Hurricanes — with all three opponents sitting top six in the East, alongside Washington — await them in a stretch of five games in eight days.

'Haven't been at our best'

"Our schedule isn't easy by any means. The last two games have been difficult for us, haven't been at our best. I think for us, we need to be playing a lot faster, moving our feet," Oilers head coach Kris Knoblauch said following Tuesday's morning skate at Amalie Arena.

"We've been standing still too much, I think the more we skate, the more we're going to create offensively.

"But the importance is defensively, we're in the right positions but we're not closing quick enough and it's just allowing the other team to be given a little more time to make plays."

In other words, their minds might be on the task at hand, but their feet are still kicked up on a beach they may or may not have visited during the break.

And with the NHL trade deadline coming up next week, there is no time like the present for the Oilers to find the same gear they rolled to a 22-6-2 record with from the end of November to the end of January, and hit the playoff stretch going full speed again.

With 'speed' being the key focus on the ice, providing benefits at both ends.

"We're one of the better defensive teams in the league at giving up chances, and a lot of that is a five-man unit closing space," said Knoblauch, acknowledging the Oilers have the oldest roster in the NHL.

"A lot of our guys with speed, not the quickest, but I think with making reads and just moving their feet, when we're doing that collectively, we are pretty good.

'Playing faster'

"And yes, offensively when we move the puck a little bit faster, that's going to increase our production. But I think the biggest thing about playing faster is helping us defensively."

Not giving up twice as many goals as they score is certainly a step in the right direction.

But it's not just the five up front doing the skating who need to rediscover their footing.

While he didn't give up any of those seven goals to Washington — including a hat-trick by Alex Ovechkin in his hunt for Wayne Gretzky's all-time goal-scoring record — he gave up five in Philadelphia one night earlier, before getting tapped to play against Tampa.

"It's tough for a goalie to find his game and play his best when we aren't defending well in front of him," Knoblauch said.

"You need your goalie to bail you out and make a save on a breakaway or two-on-one once in a while, but if you're giving up those regularly, you can only do it so many times.

"I think when we have a little more structure, our details to our defensive game are better, it makes it much more easier for him to play because the game is much more predictable for the goalie and they can really step up and play much better."

The key to playing fast, said forward Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, is not wasting any time getting off on the right foot.

"Just focus on the start, obviously try to play fast," he said. "Especially the last couple games haven't kind of been our M-O. We got away from it a little bit.

"I think something we've done well over the past couple years is not letting this kind of feeling linger on. But it's definitely got to start when the puck drops."

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341127 Edmonton Oilers

Tough love: Edmonton Oilers to sit out big name newcomers on wing and defence against Tampa

David Staples

Game Day 58: Oilers vs Lightning

This in from Tony Brar of the Oilers, news that the team will sit out veteran newcomers on the wing and defence, both John Klingberg and Jeff Skinner. In place will be Troy Stecher and Mattias Janmark. In net will be Stuart Skinner.

EDM projected lineup vs. TBL:

Arvidsson – McDavid – Hyman

Podkolzin – Draisaitl – Savoie

Janmark – RNH – Brown

Kapanen – Henrique – Perry

Ekholm – Bouchard

Nurse – Stecher

Kulak – Emberson

Skinner

GrA 57g

My take

1. Both benchings come as something of a surprise, give that Skinner scored a goal against Washington and was one of only three or four Oilers who played solid two-way hockey. As for Klingberg, he was one of many d-men who struggled in the game, but he was one of the few who played well against Philadelphia in the weekend's other appalling overall Oilers performance. That said Klingberg was part of an awful sequence on the fifth Caps goal, where he turned over the puck, got beat on the boards, then got passed around on the scoring play.

2. With Klingberg, the benching can be seen two ways. First, it could simply be tough love for his bad game against Washington. It could also be seen as giving Troy Stecher a chance to keep himself in the game. All told, it's not a solid signal for Klingberg, who has been a high event player since joining the Oilers with more bad, than good. This is expected given he was off for more than a year after serious injury and surgery. But if he's going to pick it up, it's got to happen fast. The trade deadline is approaching and the Oilers have to decide if they need another d-man or not.

3. On Oilers Now former Oilers coach and GM Craig MacTavish said he didn't think the Oilers could win with both Evan Bouchard and Klingberg in the line-up. That's certainly the case if both are struggling with their offensive and defensive reads, as they've been doing. At the same time, for the Oilers to win they need to move the puck fast and sure, something that both Bouchard and Klingberg can do well when they bring their "A" games. Overall, I've been impressed by Klingberg's quick reads and fine passing, but he's got to pick up his pace.

4. As for Skinner, this is the toughest love of all, given that he had a good game. But he's had an inconsistent season, so much so that rookie Matt Savoie is getting a shot on the second line. That can't be easy for Skinner to accept, but Savoie has skill, a good shot and has demonstrated some grit and success on the forecheck. If Savoie can get the job done on defence and win pucks in the corner, he's got a chance to stick.

5. Is it possible Skinner is moved at the deadline? Only if he moves his no trade clause. He's played well over the past month for the Oilers, but it's still not clear that the coaching staff trusts him enough to give him a regular spot and regular shift.

Jeff Skinner since Jan 01:

15 GP, 5-4-9, +5, 11:31 ATOI



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

5v5

5 goals, 2nd behind Draisaitl

3 primary assists, T-2 (Drai)

8 points, 3rd (Drai, Hyman)

1.95 G/60, 1st

3.11 P/60, 2nd (Drai)

On ice

3.5 GF/60, 2nd (Perry)

1.56 GA On/60, 3rd (Perry, Rico)

5 make it 6 healthy scratches

— Bruce McCurdy (@BruceMcCurdy) February 25, 2025

At the Cult of Hockey

McCURDY: Troubling Oilers trends

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341128 Edmonton Oilers

Game Day: Edmonton Oilers look to avoid season-high 4th straight loss

Another loss would make for a season-high fourth in a row for Edmonton, while the Tampa Bay Lightning are looking for their sixth-straight win

Gerry Moddejonge

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

Edmonton Oilers (34-19-4) at Tampa Bay Lightning (32-20-4)

TV: Sportsnet One. Radio: 880 CHED.

TIME: 5:30 p.m. Tuesday

Odds: Oilers -118, Lightning -102

### THE SETUP

Not since they started out 0-3 have the Edmonton Oilers been on this much of a slide. Coming out of a 14-day break for the 4 Nations Face-Off, they followed up a 6-3 loss to the lowly Philadelphia Flyers with a 7-3 shellacking at the hands of the first-place Washington Capitals.

And there are still three games to go in this five-game road trip through the Eastern Conference, with all the opposition sitting in the top three of their respective division.

Another loss would make for a season-high fourth in a row for Edmonton, while the Tampa Bay Lightning are looking for their sixth-straight win.

### LEON ALONE ON TOP

Leon Draisaitl carries an eight-game point streak (seven goals, five assists) into this one while sitting first overall with 42 goals in 57 games this season.

The Oilers' second-line centre also has 86 points on the season, just one point shy of Nathan MacKinnon in the overall points race. The Lightning, meanwhile, are led by Nikita Kucherov's 83 points (26 goals, 57 assists) in 53 games to sit third overall.

### THE QUOTE

"Sometimes, this happens after breaks. Some teams come out flying, some teams come out flat. We've obviously done the latter."

— Oilers captain Connor McDavid, following the two latest losses.

### THE LINEUPS

EDMONTON OILERS

Forwards

Podkolzin – McDavid – Kapanen

Perry – Draisaitl – Savoie

Arvidsson – Nugent-Hopkins – Hyman

Janmark – Henrique – Brown

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341096 Calgary Flames

Flames GM Craig Conroy not looking for rentals at the trade deadline

By Daniel Austin

Published Feb 25, 2025

The Calgary Flames aren't looking for rentals.

One point back of a playoff spot with a game in hand and 26 games left on the regular-season schedule.

That's where the Flames stood on Tuesday morning as they prepared for the Washington Capitals, their first matchup in a gruelling six-game road trip that will take them right up to the NHL's trade deadline.

So the question needs to be asked: Is there anything the Flames can do during this make-or-break stretch that would affect the way GM Craig Conroy does business at the deadline?

In short, probably not.

We'll let Conroy give the longer answer.

"If we won the next (six) games, maybe we'd be out there for a rental. But the mindset has always been we'd do something if it helps in the long-term, not just the short-term," Conroy said in an interview with Postmedia this past weekend. "Where we're at right now, it just doesn't make sense to give up draft picks for a guy who might be a rental. Rentals aren't what we're really looking for right now."

Conroy won't mortgage the Flames' future just because his team has outperformed the hockey world's expectations and has earned itself a solid shot at an invite to the post-season dance.

It's genuinely impressive that this year's team has managed to stay in the playoff fight by committing to a high-intensity, relentless forecheck and tight defensive structure.

But the organization is also well-positioned to stock up in the NHL Draft over the next two years and build the foundation of a squad that they hope will be competing near the top of the Western Conference in a few years' time.

Sacrificing that future for a rental player before the March 7 trade deadline just wouldn't make any sense — not if the player the Flames acquire wasn't going to be around when highly regarded prospects like Zayne Parekh and Matvei Gridin start being difference-makers in the NHL.

That doesn't mean Conroy isn't open to moves, though.

He already showed that willingness to make trades when he dealt Jakob Pelletier and Andrei Kuzmenko to the Philadelphia Flyers a couple of weeks ago and got Morgan Frost and Joel Farabee in return.

Farabee and Frost weren't rentals, though. They are players in their mid-20s who will be around for a few years, at least.

"We kind of made a hockey trade to bring in Farabee and Frost and if there's a hockey trade out there, for sure, you're always looking for that," Conroy said. "At this time of year, some teams are gearing up. We're



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

open to everything, I just don't see us going into the rental market this year."

Conversely, Conroy doesn't have any plans of a firesale where he's trading away veterans for picks. Reports indicate that the Flames have told other teams that the likes of Rasmus Andersson and Nazem Kadri won't be moved this year.

They won't sell guys just for the sake of selling and Conroy made clear that he's a big believer in the benefits of the Flames' young players competing in high-intensity, meaningful games coming down the stretch.

"They put themselves in the position where we brought in some guys, made some moves and you'd love to see what they could do as a team these last 27 games," Conroy said. "For the growth of our young guys and our veterans and for the whole organization, to make the playoffs would be an amazing accomplishment and then, once you get in you never know, but we know how hard it's going to be. These games ramp up, it gets more intense, it's going to get tighter. We've got to find ways to score goals, that's one thing we haven't done a lot of. We can play in tight games, but you still need to score goals.

"All these games, when you're in the hunt to make the playoffs after what's usually the all-star game, all these games are so important. For us, they are playoff games — I know they're not, but to us they really are because we can't afford to stumble coming out of this break."

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341097 Calgary Flames

GAMEDAY: Flames kick off tough trip against Washington Capitals

By Daniel Austin

Published Feb 25, 2025

Calgary Flames (27-21-8) at Washington Capitals (38-11-8)

When: Tuesday, 5 p.m., Capital One Arena

TV: Sportsnet West. Radio: Sportsnet 960 The Fan

Odds: Capitals -207, Flames +170

The buzz

Since training camp, this is exactly what the Calgary Flames were asking for.

They wanted to be in the mix for the stretch run, playing meaningful games against tough opponents with big stakes on the line.

And here they are.

Tuesday's game against the NHL's best team, the Washington Capitals, kicks off a six game trip that will see them play four of the Eastern Conference's playoff teams before a pit-stop in Philadelphia for a matchup with the Flyers and then one more against the Dallas Stars, who are one of the league's hottest teams.

So yeah, not easy.

But the fact that it feels so significant means the Flames have accomplished what they set out to do and stayed in the playoff mix through the first two-thirds of a season.

"I don't want to say make-or-break, but these are important games," Flames defenceman MacKenzie Weegar said. "We're going on a tough road trip against some pretty elite teams.

"We're going to have our full squad going into this road-trip. We need it, but I believe in this team."

The Flames are coming off a 3-2 win over the San Jose Sharks in their first game back from the 4 Nations Face-Off break on Sunday night, but the Capitals present a very different challenge.

The Sharks happen to be the league's worst team, with 38 points. Nobody has more points than the Capitals, who have 84.

Calgary Flames defenceman Joel Hanley celebrates his game-winning goal against the San Jose Sharks in the third period at the Scotiabank Saddledome on Sunday, February 23, 2025.

The quote

"It's sky-high, for sure. This is what you play for. We played all year to put ourselves in a position where we're pushing for a spot, and now we're here, 27 games out."

The news

Dan Vladar will get the start in net for the Flames against the Capitals. Head coach Ryan Huska told reporters the team was going to "need both goaltenders" on this road-trip.

Connor Zary and Kevin Bahl were both activated from the IR after missing significant stretches on Sunday, but only Zary played against the Sharks. Bahl was only out because of an illness, though, and was at morning skate on Tuesday so it's expected that he'll play.

The Capitals are on a 16-game home point streak, going 11-0-5 in that stretch. The most recent time they lost in regulation at home was Nov. 23 against the New Jersey Devils.

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341216 Websites

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."

Jaccob Slavin is an ELITE defenseman 🤩👏  
[pic.twitter.com/y3JX1hSZfo](https://pic.twitter.com/y3JX1hSZfo)

— B/R Open Ice (@BR\_OpenIce) February 21, 2025

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.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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.

@BJaffe: "What would the 15-year-old version of yourself tell you that at 22 years old you'd be playing for Team USA in this game?"

Brock Faber: "He'd tell me he hates Canada." 🤔 #4Nations | @mnwild  
pic.twitter.com/i6hYxGdmyW

— NHL Network (@NHLNetwork) February 21, 2025

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."

Jacob Slavin... American defensive hero 🇺🇸  
pic.twitter.com/bD9OkNkyd1

— B/R Open Ice (@BR\_OpenIce) February 21, 2025

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."

"Best stick in the league, Slave!"

Team USA bench was LOVING Jaccob Slavin's #4Nations performance  
🔥 pic.twitter.com/Yyy83e1ies

— B/R Open Ice (@BR\_OpenIce) February 22, 2025

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 Bold's 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."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341217 Websites

The Athletic / 2026 men's Olympic hockey: Projecting the goalies for all 12 countries

By Jesse Granger

The 4 Nations Face-Off tournament put a spotlight on national goaltending in a way we haven't seen in quite some time.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Hockey Canada was heavily criticized leading into the tournament. Perhaps Jordan Binnington's overtime heroics in the championship game will quell some of that. Perhaps not. The tournament also highlighted the strides the United States has made in goal, and allowed a new wave of Swedish and Finish netminders to make their mark.

The best part: It was only the appetizer for next year's Olympics in Italy.

Next February, 12 countries will assemble the best players their nations have to offer, battling for a gold medal in the first best-on-best Olympic competition in 12 years. There's still a lot of hockey to be played between now and then, but here's how each country projects to look in the crease.

### Canada

Picks: Logan Thompson, Mackenzie Blackwood, Jordan Binnington

In consideration: Adin Hill, Stuart Skinner, Sam Montembeault

Canada may be far removed from its days of choosing between Patrick Roy and Martin Brodeur in net, but it still has plenty of talent. There were arguments that several Canadian goalies should've been rostered over the three chosen in the 4 Nations Face-Off, and there will be plenty of debate leading into the Olympics.

Binnington ended up playing every game for Canada. He was the only goalie in the tournament to play four games, posting a .907 save percentage and 2.37 goals against average. More importantly, he showed well in the final and made several game-saving stops in overtime. One would think that is enough to at least earn him a spot on the Olympic roster.

Hill and Montembeault never touched the ice at the 4 Nations, and will need to perform well over the remainder of the NHL season if they're going to keep their spots over two surging Canadians: Thompson and Blackwood.

Thompson has been sensational in his first season in Washington. He's third in the NHL in save percentage (.920) and second in goals saved above expected (26.86). If he maintains anything close to those numbers, it'll be impossible to leave him off the Olympic roster.

The same goes for Blackwood, who was putting up relatively impressive numbers behind a struggling Sharks team for two years and has dominated since being traded to Colorado. He's big, athletic and is improving his play-reading ability as he gains NHL experience. A deep playoff run with the Avalanche could make him the favorite to start for Canada in Italy.

Hill and Montembeault are obviously still in the conversation, as is Edmonton's Skinner. Hill and Skinner specifically will need to impress in the playoffs this spring to give themselves a shot.

### United States

Picks: Connor Hellebuyck, Jake Oettinger, Dustin Wolf

In consideration: Jeremy Swayman, Thatcher Demko, Joey Daccord, Joseph Woll, Anthony Stolarz

Both of the American goalies who played at 4 Nations – Hellebuyck and Oettinger – should be locks for the Olympics. Hellebuyck is quickly establishing himself as the top goalie of this generation, and could be on his way to a third Vezina Trophy. Oettinger is only 26 and is already one of the most reliable workhorses in the NHL. His 117 playoff and regular-season wins over the last three seasons lead the league.

One of the more competitive battles will be for the third spot on Team USA. Swayman was the pick for 4 Nations, but after a down season to this point, he has several talented American goalies nipping at his heels.

Wolf is having one of the better rookie seasons in some time for Calgary and is only getting better. Demko is elite when healthy, but that hasn't happened often enough. Daccord has put together back-to-back impressive seasons in Seattle, and Woll and Stolarz have developed into quite the American tandem in Toronto.

The decision could come down to which goalie is hot when the rosters are decided. The one thing that's certain is there will be no lack of goaltending talent for the United States to choose from. When the NHL's save percentage leader (Stolarz) is arguably their eighth option, you're in good shape.

### Russia

Picks: Andrei Vasilevskiy, Igor Shesterkin, Ilya Sorokin

In consideration: Sergei Bobrovsky, Pyotr Kochetkov, Yaroslav Askarov, Ilya Samsonov

Only one country can rival the goaltending talent of the U.S. at the moment. If Russia is allowed to compete in the Olympics, it will have to make the preposterous decision to leave either Bobrovsky or Sorokin off the roster. Either goalie would be the No. 1 option for several countries, but one won't even make Russia's top three.

Vasilevskiy is still the king of the Russian crease. He had a down 2023-24 season but has bounced back strong this year in Tampa Bay. He still has the pedigree of two Stanley Cup championships and a Conn Smythe Trophy, and speaking with goalies around the league, he's still considered the top dog.

Shesterkin is a pretty solid backup. He's arguably the most talented goalie on the planet at the moment, and his 104.54 goals saved above expected over the last four years are second only to Hellebuyck.

The third spot will come down to Sorokin or Bobrovsky, who will be 37 by that time. There are plenty of other talented Russians, including Carolina's Kochetkov, Vegas' Samsonov and San Jose rookie Askarov, who is ultra-talented but has a lot to prove in such a small timeframe. None of them are expected to challenge for one of the three spots, though.

Andrei Vasilevskiy is the front-runner for the crease if Russia is allowed to compete. (Nathan Ray Seebeck / Imagn Images)

### Sweden

Picks: Jacob Markström, Linus Ullmark, Filip Gustavsson

In consideration: Samuel Ersson, Arvid Söderblom, Jesper Wallstedt

Markström was Sweden's top option heading into the 4 Nations tournament, but was forced out due to injury. Assuming he continues the level of play he's shown in New Jersey upon returning, he should once again be the No. 1. He'll be turning 36 next January, but he's the exact type of goalie needed for this tournament.

Markström's combination of size and willingness to break structure to make desperation saves makes him one of the best at stopping high-danger chances, which is exactly what Sweden will need to upset the powerhouse Canadian, American and Russian squads.

Behind him, perhaps Philadelphia's Ersson can challenge Ullmark and Gustavsson for the final two spots. He outperformed them in his lone start at 4 Nations and is only 25 years old.

Sweden has two other exceptionally talented younger goalies in Söderblom and Wallstedt, but it seems unlikely they'll have the opportunities to prove themselves enough to leapfrog the other options between now and the Olympics.

### Finland

Picks: Juuse Saros, Kevin Lankinen, Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen

In consideration: Joel Blomqvist, Leevi Merilainen, Justus Annunen

Goaltending has long been a strength for the Finns, but that wasn't the case at the 4 Nations. Saros and Lankinen combined for the worst save percentage of any country in the tournament, albeit playing behind an overmatched team.

Saros has had two down years in a row following a brilliant 2022-23 season. He's still a great goalie, and has perhaps the best skating ability of the bunch, but if the results don't improve soon, he could lose his spot as the top Finnish netminder. Not only has Lankinen played well in Vancouver — where he'll be staying for the next five years after last week's extension — Buffalo's Luukkonen continues to improve as well.

### Czechia

Picks: Lukáš Dostál, Karel Vejmelka, Jakub Dobeš

In consideration: Petr Mrázek, Dan Vladar, David Rittich, Vitek Vaněček

Don't sleep on the Czechs. They're quickly building quite the depth in net, with Dostál, Anaheim's breakout star, leading the way. In his first



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

opportunity as a starter, the 24-year-old has been incredible for the Ducks, trailing only Hellebuyck and Thompson with 25.83 goals saved above expected. He has represented Czechia at nearly every level growing up, and was one of the biggest reasons they won gold at last year's IIHF World Championships, in which he put up a .939 save percentage and 1.58 GAA. He's a lock to be the starter in Italy.

Behind that, Vejmelka is having another impressive season in Utah. His career arc is interesting, as he has alternated between good and poor seasons statistically. He's also set to hit free agency this summer, so his stock could potentially rise with a big contract in an attractive landing spot.

There are several other solid Czech goalies at the NHL level, including Chicago's Mrázek, Calgary's Vlachar, Los Angeles' Rittich and Montreal rookie Dobeš.

Lukáš Dostál is having a breakout season with the Ducks. (Brian Bradshaw Sevald / Imagn Images)

Denmark

Picks: Frederik Andersen, Mads Søgaard, Frederik Dichow

In consideration: Mathias Seldrup, William Rørth

If Carolina's Andersen is healthy, he's the easy choice to start for Denmark. That's far from a guarantee for a goalie who has played only 59 games over the last three NHL seasons combined. Durability is really the only problem for Andersen. When he's on the ice, he has produced elite numbers, including his games for Denmark. He had a .938 save percentage in the three Olympic qualifier games last fall.

The only other Danish goalie to ever play in the NHL is Søgaard, an Ottawa Senators prospect. The 6-foot-7 Dane has spent the majority of this season with the AHL's Belleville Senators. He hasn't performed particularly well as of late, but as a second-round pick, he's one of Denmark's top options.

There's also the 23-year-old Dichow, who plays in the Swedish Hockey League. Dichow was Denmark's primary goalie at each of the last two IIHF World Championships, and started a game in the 2022 Olympics.

Latvia

Picks: Elvis Merzjkins, Artūrs Šilovs, Kristers Gudļevskis

In consideration: Eriks Vitols, Ivars Punnenovs

Merzjkins has played for Latvia since his U17 days and should be the clear starter in the Olympics. He's been the country's top goalie basically every year since he was 16. The 30-year-old hasn't been nearly consistent enough for the Blue Jackets since they signed him to a five-year, \$27 million contract in 2021, but he's a rhythm-based goalie who can be great for stretches.

His backup should be the Canucks' Šilovs, who made a name for himself during last year's playoff run. He's spent most of this season with the Abbotsford Canucks in the AHL and played well for Latvia in the 2022 IIHF World Championship.

Gudļevskis is another option for Latvia. He posted a .914 save percentage and won all three Olympic qualifying games, and is having a strong season for the Fischtown Pinguins in Germany's DEL.

Germany

Picks: Philipp Grubauer, Mathias Niederberger, Arno Tiefensee

In consideration: Thomas Greiss, Nikita Quapp

Grubauer is the only German goalie to play in the NHL over the last two seasons, and while his career has taken a swift downturn in Seattle, he's still the clear top option for his country.

Grubauer did win four of his six starts for Germany in last year's World Championships despite posting a .895 save percentage. He has played well with the AHL's Coachella Valley Firebirds since Seattle waived him in January.

Niederberger is another option. He's one of the top goaltenders in Germany's DEL, playing for EHC München, and has appeared in 16 games for the German national team over the last two seasons. There's

also 22-year-old Tiefensee, who is having an excellent season in the DEL and was drafted by the Dallas Stars in the fifth round in 2023.

Switzerland

Picks: Akira Schmid, Leonardo Genoni, Stéphane Charlin

In consideration: Sandro Aeschlimann, Connor Hughes, Gilles Senn

Schmid is the only Swiss netminder to play in the NHL over the last five seasons. The 24-year-old is playing with the AHL's Henderson Silver Knights this season after a trade that sent him from New Jersey to Vegas in the offseason. His numbers haven't been great playing behind one of the worst teams in the league.

He isn't the guaranteed starter for the Olympics, though. It was Leonardo Genoni who started for the Swiss in the gold medal game of last year's World Championships. He'll be 38 in August, but he has been Switzerland's primary starter for years, including in the 2022 Olympics.

Charlin could also be an option. He hasn't played particularly well internationally this season, but he's the top goalie in the Swiss league with a .946 save percentage for the SCL Tigers.

Italy

Picks: Damian Clara, Andreas Bernard, Jacob Smith

In consideration: Marco De Filippo, Gianluca Vallini

One of the better stories from 2023's NHL Draft was Clara, who became the first Italian-born player to be drafted into the NHL. It's no surprise Clara has represented his country at nearly every age group. He even played on the U20 team as a 16-year-old in 2021. He's a massive goalie at 6-foot-6, and should be the clear starter for the host country.

His backup is likely to be the 34-year-old Bernard, who has played for the Italian national team extensively, including the qualifiers for the 2022 Olympics. Bernard is having a rough year — both internationally and for his team in the Austrian league — so there's a chance Smith claims the No. 2 spot. Smith has put up excellent numbers in limited starts for the Italian national team.

Slovakia

Picks: Samuel Hlavaj, Adam Gajan, Matej Tomek

In consideration: Eugen Rabcan, Stanislav Škorvánek, Rastislav Eliáš

No Slovakian goaltender has played in the NHL since Jaroslav Halak retired in 2023. There should be an interesting debate between the country's most relied-upon goalie in international play, Hlavaj, and the rising star, Gajan.

Hlavaj is the favorite to start in the Olympics. The 23-year-old played in all three Olympic qualifying games, winning all three while allowing only five total goals. He is having a down season for the AHL's Iowa Wild, and even spent some time down in the ECHL, perhaps opening the door a bit for Gajan.

Gajan is a 20-year-old goalie currently playing college hockey for Minnesota Duluth. He was a second-round pick by the Chicago Blackhawks in 2023, and was excellent for Slovakia in last year's World Junior Championship.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341218 Websites

The Athletic / The NHL's most improved players of 2024-25, from Dylan Holloway to Logan Cooley

By Harman Dayal

One of the best parts of every NHL season is tracking which players take off. It doesn't matter how many skaters are labeled as can't-miss breakout picks in September, there are always surprise performances



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

that nobody saw coming — whether it's a young piece blossoming into a franchise star, a spare part forcing his way into the team's core or anything in between.

There were a few important caveats in making this "most improved" list. For starters, we won't be including rookies. Simon Edvinsson, who's having a huge year in Detroit, is not Calder Trophy-eligible, but we're considering him a rookie for this article because he only played 16 NHL games last season. Same with Shane Wright.

Second, because there are so many breakout campaigns to choose from, we filtered out already-established star players who have leveled up, such as Zach Werenski, Brandon Hagel, Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele, Lucas Raymond and Cole Caufield, among others. Yes, they all took a significant step, but everyone already knew them as marquee players and producers.

Third, we're excluding big-name/established players in the middle of bounce-back years such as Jakob Chychrun, Pierre-Luc Dubois, Filip Gustavsson, Tom Wilson, Rickard Rakell, Anders Lee, Jake Walman, Jason Zucker, Darcy Kuemper and Nick Jensen, among others.

There are so many deserving candidates and whittling this list down was very hard; it definitely isn't perfect. But here's my best attempt at capturing the league's most improved players in 2024-25, presented in no particular order.

Dylan Holloway, LW, St. Louis Blues

This breakout isn't entirely surprising.

Holloway only produced modest offensive numbers last year — 16 points in 63 games between the regular season and playoffs — but he showed tantalizing flashes of dynamic speed and skill in a limited role with the Edmonton Oilers, averaging 11:22 per game.

With a larger opportunity in St. Louis, natural age-related growth and Holloway's explosive athletic tools, there were several reasons to be bullish about the left winger taking a step forward this season. The 23-year-old has exceeded even the most optimistic targets, though, as he's on pace for 58 points. He's found an even higher level since the Blues' coaching change, scoring 33 points in 36 games under Jim Montgomery.

One critical difference compared to last season is that he seems less rushed and more poised making plays with the puck. He's always had the jaw-dropping foot speed to thrive in an NHL environment, but sometimes when he had the puck his reads and decision-making were frenetic and didn't keep up. Now, it's as if the game has slowed down for him — he gets his head up and scans the ice for passing options more efficiently, which has unlocked better playmaking.

For example, watch how patient Holloway is with the puck in the clip below. He doesn't have much time and space in the neutral zone, but instead of forcing an entry or dumping the puck in, he recognizes that Brayden Schenn is flying up the wing. Holloway calmly holds onto the puck and springs Schenn for a Grade-A chance, on which he hits the post.

Earlier in the same game, Holloway showed good vision and did a clever job of masking his intentions — his head and body were turned to the net as if he was going to take a sharp-angle shot until the last second — to set Zack Bolduc up in the slot for a goal.

Here's a play where Holloway uses his speed down low to hold onto the puck. As he circles the net, he slides a pass across to the back door for a brilliant chance.

The three clips I've shown aren't sexy, highlight-reel plays. If I wanted to pick flashier plays, there are countless examples of Holloway torching defenders with his wheels. But I specifically chose the examples above because they showcase his increased confidence, ambition and poise with the puck, which has made him a terror because he's stacked that on top of the game-breaking speed, ferocious energy and heavy frame he's always had.

Logan Thompson, G, Washington Capitals

Thompson was a solid goaltender on a dirt-cheap \$766,667 cap hit in Vegas, but between injuries, inconsistent play and an untested playoff track record, he'd never established himself as a true No.1 goaltender. He and Adin Hill were both scheduled to be free agents at the end of 2024-25. Thompson wanted a bigger opportunity and Hill, who led Vegas

to a Cup win, was already their guy, so the Golden Knights flipped Thompson to the Capitals for two third-round picks.

The 27-year-old goaltender has been lights-out in D.C. Thompson has a .920 save percentage, ranks second-best among all goaltenders with 26.9 goals saved above expected and owns a ridiculous 25-2-5 record. If the season ended today, he'd probably be a Vezina Trophy finalist behind Connor Hellebuyck.

NHL goals saved above expected leaders

- 1  
Connor Hellebuyck  
35.9
  - 2  
Logan Thompson  
26.9
  - 3  
Lukas Dostal  
25.8
  - 4  
Joey Daccord  
24.8
  - 5  
Mackenzie Blackwood  
21.3
  - 6  
Igor Shesterkin  
20.4
  - 7  
Dustin Wolf  
19.8
  - 8  
Andrei Vasilevskiy  
18.6
  - 9  
Karel Vejmelka  
18.5
  - 10  
Jake Allen  
16.7
- Data via Evolving-Hockey
- Washington rewarded Thompson with a six-year, \$5.85 million AAV extension last month. Goaltenders can be notoriously volatile year over year, but given how precipitously the salary-cap ceiling is expected to climb over the next three seasons as well as the rapidly inflating goalie market, it's a deal that could yield considerable surplus value.
- Thompson will be the 14th highest-paid goaltender in the NHL next season, and he's only going to fall further down that list in the coming years as new goalie deals get signed. In other words, even if Thompson regresses a bit next season and is closer to a league-average starter, he'll still be worth his contract. And if he maintains this year's monster breakout, it'll be one of the best deals in the league.
- Kirill Marchenko, RW, Columbus Blue Jackets



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

The well-deserved hype around Werenski's otherworldly performance this season has caused Marchenko's exceptional breakout campaign to fly under the radar outside of Columbus. The 24-year-old Russian winger has exploded for 56 points in 54 games, 15 points ahead of the team's next-highest-scoring forward.

Marchenko's lethal, heavy shot is a standout attribute. His release is lightning-quick and he generates a ton of power, which makes it difficult for goaltenders to get set even when he's firing from medium to long distances.

Marchenko is a high-volume shot creator — he leads Blue Jackets forwards in shots per 60 at five-on-five — but what makes him special is that he has dangerous tools besides just his shot. He's a big-bodied winger at 6-foot-3 but is also a surprisingly fast and shifty skater, ranking in the 93rd percentile of NHL forwards for speed bursts above 20 miles per hour according to NHL Edge.

Marchenko's speed, silky-smooth puckhandling and size make him a dazzling puck carrier. Here's an example of his elite skill off the rush:

He and Sean Monahan have spent over 400 five-on-five minutes together on the top line, in which the Blue Jackets have controlled a whopping 60 percent of expected goals and outscored opponents 34-11.

Columbus looks unstoppable offensively when Zach Werenski's pair is deployed with the Marchenko/Monahan duo. They're fast and lethal on the counterattack but also have the size and puck control to create chances off the cycle.

In the clip below, for example, watch how strong Marchenko is on his feet. He wards off the pressure of two defenders and cuts into the middle to make a play to continue his line's offensive pressure. Moments later, he ends up with a Grade-A scoring chance.

Dylan Samberg, LHD, Winnipeg Jets

Samberg is arguably the most underrated piece of the dominant Jets.

Winnipeg's top-four blue line was a bit of a question mark heading into this season. The Jets' blue line always felt like it was missing another high-end top-four driver, and that's before second-pair stalwart Brenden Dillon left for New Jersey in free agency. Samberg's emergence as an elite shutdown defenseman has been a godsend for the Jets.

The 26-year-old left-shot defender's role has skyrocketed compared to the third-pair minutes he played last season. Samberg is averaging 21:20 per game and has been trusted by the coaching staff to eat the toughest matchup assignments against top forwards of all Winnipeg blueliners. The Jets have controlled 56.3 percent of expected goals during his five-on-five shifts, which is the best mark among the team's defensemen by a country mile.

Chart via Evolving-Hockey's RAPM model

Samberg has averaged the most PK minutes per game on the team and is driving stellar short-handed results in that heavy usage. He checks many boxes for a modern-day elite shutdown player: He's 6-foot-4 which gives him a massive reach/wingspan, he skates well which enables him to quickly gap up to eliminate time and space, his anticipation is impeccable and his defensive stick is constantly clogging lanes and breaking plays up.

He's got underrated offensive skill for a defensive defenseman too, as he's chipped in with 13 points in 36 games despite missing some time with an injury, which is about a 30-point pace over 82 games. Here's an example of that:

A little drop pass from Dylan Samberg to set up Gabriel Vilardi! pic.twitter.com/i7pnieu4vG

— NHL (@NHL) January 27, 2025

Aliaksei Protas, RW, Washington Capitals

Protas had just three goals and 18 points in 42 games last January when the Capitals inked him to a bold five-year, \$16.87 million (\$3.375 million AAV) extension. That contract already looks like a steal as the 24-year-old Belarusian winger has scored 23 goals and 50 points in 57 games this season.

Those offensive numbers are especially shocking because he's played less than 10 minutes on the power play all season. Protas' 22 even-

strength goals are tied with David Pastrnak, Nikita Kucherov and Alex Ovechkin for sixth-best in the NHL.

Most even-strength goals 2024-25

1

Leon Draisaitl

30

2

William Nylander

25

3

Brandon Hagel

24

4

Tage Thompson

24

5

Mark Scheifele

23

6

Aliaksei Protas

22

7

David Pastrnak

22

8

Nikita Kucherov

22

9

Alex Ovechkin

22

10

Artturi Lehkonen

21

Protas is a power forward boasting a freakish physical profile. He stands at a hulking 6-foot-6 but also skates like the wind, ranking in the 90th percentile of NHL forwards for speed bursts above 20 miles per hour. Watch how quickly he flies down the ice to turn a loose puck into a breakaway goal; it's rare for such a big man to move that well.

Protas' shot appears to have more oomph behind it this year. Here's an example of him ripping a snipe past Alex Nedeljkovic during the Caps' first game back from the 4 Nations break.

He can also make an offensive impact by parking himself in front of the net, sees the ice well as a passer and has decent puck skills for such a huge player.

Martin Necas, RW, Colorado Avalanche

Necas has always had game-breaking speed and skill, but it's taken until this season for him to break out as a star player. The 26-year-old winger is on pace to crack 90 points, and the pop in his production can be explained by a few factors.

Firstly, Necas had an excellent showing for Czechia at the IIHF World Championships last summer. He excelled offensively at that tournament, but most crucially, the coaching staff had full faith and trust in him, which



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

he hadn't experienced in Carolina and which built his confidence high heading into training camp.

Necas' high-octane puck-rushing style has never been an ideal fit with Rod Brind'Amour's system and in previous seasons, the leash was short if he turned pucks over or made defensive mistakes. But this year, the Canes, who lost a lot of talent in the summer, gave him much more free rein to play his natural style.

The fit for Necas in Colorado since the Mikko Rantanen blockbuster has been perfect. The Avs love attacking off the rush, which is Necas' bread and butter. Necas is one of the fastest players in the NHL — he's behind only Nathan MacKinnon and Connor McDavid for speed bursts above 20 miles per hour — and is a one-man zone entry machine.

The Avs have put Necas on the top line with MacKinnon and their dominance genuinely looks like something out of a video game. It's magical. Imagine how terrifying it is to defend MacKinnon's elite speed and skill; now imagine having to stop two forwards with the same skill set who play together like they have 10 years of chemistry. Enjoy a few of these outrageous plays:

Martin Nečas cz včera nakonec se 3 body. 8 bodů v 7 zápasech. A když jsem včera viděl od Nečase toto vyvezení puku z obranného pásma do útočného, věděl jsem, že to musím druhý den pro vás stříhnout. Jinak tohle není nějaká výjimka. Nečas patří k elitě v tomto směru.  
@DenikSport pic.twitter.com/TP7WBGy9XF

— Adam Papoušek (@AdamPapousek) February 7, 2025

The Avs have controlled a whopping 67 percent of scoring chances during Necas' five-on-five shifts.

Marco Rossi, C, Minnesota Wild

With the pressure to prove his value mounting, Rossi finally began putting it together last season, scoring 40 points as a rookie for the Wild.

Rossi's taken another leap in 2024-25, on pace to crack 70 points. You'd expect most undersized, high-point-producing centers to have explosive, game-breaking skill, but Rossi is a different archetype stylistically.

The 23-year-old is a sneaky net-front savant because of his timing, IQ and underrated physical strength. He barely racks up shots (he ranks 13th among Wild forwards in shots per 60 at five-on-five), but he's efficient at generating the highest quality looks from the interior — he ranks in the 91st percentile of forwards for shots on goal from high-danger locations, which is where 14 of his 20 goals have come from according to NHL Edge.

Rossi's off-puck play to get open in these premium scoring areas is a huge asset. He can outbatter bigger defenders to win inside position for tips and rebounds despite his height disadvantage. He can also intelligently slink into dangerous scoring locations and get open without being detected by the opposition.

In the clip below, watch how Rossi gets open at the back door for a goal because of his timing and off-puck movement — he starts high in the attacking zone, sinks deep into the corner to get lost from Anaheim's penalty killers and then re-emerges at the back post at the perfect time to feast.

It's easier for Rossi to get lost in coverage because of how much attention Kirill Kaprizov demands from the opposition, but he isn't just riding Kaprizov's coattails. Kaprizov has missed 19 games since the Christmas break due to an injury and Rossi has scored 17 points, nearly a full point-per-game, in those contests.

Kent Johnson, RW, Columbus Blue Jackets

Johnson has every ingredient you look for in a playmaking machine: He's got mesmerizingly quick hands, is an ambitious, creative puck carrier and boasts exceptional IQ/vision.

The knock on the No. 5 pick from 2021 was whether his wiry frame and lack of explosive straight-line speed would hold him back from top-six NHL success. Specifically, you wondered if he'd be limited to the perimeter and not have enough meaningful puck touches in threatening areas to let his elite offensive tools shine. He was also derailed by a major shoulder injury last season.

Well, Johnson came into camp this year thicker and faster and the rest is history. The dynamic 22-year-old winger has scored 19 goals and 38

points in 43 games. He drives offensive zone entries with possession at the highest rate of Columbus' forwards, according to Corey Sznajder's manually tracked data. He's often responsible for the top power-play unit's zone entries, too.

The clip below shows an example — you'll notice Johnson is a dynamic puck carrier more so because of his incredible stickhandling, his deception (he'll use his head movement to fake different passes) and how he slaloms in and out of space at intelligent angles, rather than relying on being blindingly fast in a straight line.

Johnson's also developed into a high-end finisher who can cleanly beat goalies from midrange distances. The key isn't just his shot, but how he uses his slick puckhandling to manufacture clear shooting lanes. He showed that in both of his goals against Chicago, which included this gorgeous finish on the power play.

The Blue Jackets' crop of exciting young forwards has arrived, which has propelled the team to top-10 status in goals scored per game.

Philip Broberg, LHD, St. Louis Blues

Broberg couldn't crack the Oilers lineup consistently in 2023-24, suiting up for 12 games in the regular season and 10 in the playoffs. In one year, he's gone from predominantly being an AHL player to thriving in a top-four role for the Blues.

Broberg has always had an exciting combination of size (6-foot-4) and smooth skating ability. The question was whether he could develop the IQ and puck skills to complement those physical tools, which he has.

The 23-year-old is averaging 20:07 per game, has chipped in with 17 points in 45 games and is driving solid two-way results. Broberg is becoming a confident puck carrier, which allows him to escape forechecking pressure on the breakout consistently. He's making subtle, poised passes to drive zone exits, too. Here's an example where he finds a loose puck in the defensive zone slot, stays composed even with an Islanders forward quickly closing on him and makes a nifty backhand saucer pass to spark a controlled breakout.

Broberg is excelling defensively because of his range and long, disruptive stick. He's been on the ice for just 1.45 goals against per 60 at five-on-five. He's going to be a valuable top-four building block in St. Louis for a long time.

Logan Cooley, C, Utah Hockey Club

Cooley endured some growing pains during the first half of his rookie campaign last season, scoring one goal at five-on-five in his first 41 games while also getting crushed from a two-way perspective. By the end of the year, however, he looked like one of the most promising young players in the NHL. Cooley piled up 11 goals and 16 points in his last 22 games, but more important than the numbers, he looked infinitely more comfortable and dangerous.

Cooley has built on last year's strong finish, scoring 44 points in 51 games this season. He and Dylan Guenther have been a deadly duo on Utah's second line, although Cooley's been bumped up to center the top line lately.

The 20-year-old sophomore is already nearly unguardable off the rush with his game-breaking speed and puckhandling.

LOGAN COOLEY 🤖

The former third overall pick now has 42 points in 46 games!  
pic.twitter.com/g84ixP7wI8

— NHL (@NHL) January 21, 2025

Cooley's continuing to improve as a two-way player, which has included increased penalty-killing responsibilities this season. He's also grown physically bigger: He was listed at 5-foot-10, 174 pounds by most draft guides in 2022 but is now officially listed at 6 feet, 191 pounds. That size difference makes a considerable difference as a center.

With his speed, hands, offensive instincts and developing two-way chops, Cooley has all the makings of a future superstar.

Honorable mentions: Anthony Cirelli, Sean Monahan, Simon Holmstrom, Matt Coronato, Ryan Donato, Dmitri Voronkov, Johnathan Kovacevic, William Eklund, Jackson LaCombe, Matthew Knies, Kevin Lankinen, Lukas Dostal, Jake Evans, Michael Kesselring, Mackenzie Blackwood,



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Connor McMichael, Will Cuyll, Anton Lundell, Ryan McLeod, Stefan Noesen, Adam Gaudette, Pavel Dorofeyev, Alex Laferriere, Spencer Knight

The Athletic LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341219 Websites

The Athletic / 'Innovate or die': How NHL teams prepare top prospects with the latest technology

By Jeremy Rutherford and Max Bultman

Before Bill Armstrong became Utah Hockey Club's general manager, he was a St. Louis Blues scout for nearly 20 years.

Armstrong can still recall when RinkNet — a database of player stats and rankings — was introduced to the NHL in the late 1990s. For some veteran scouts who weren't as ready for the laptop era of hockey, it was not a welcome change.

"They had a rebellion," Armstrong, 58, says now, laughing, "because they couldn't type."

Today, teams trying to find the next wave of talent need scouts to do a lot more than tap on their keyboard. They've got to tap into a new world of technology that features full-length games at their fingertips and advanced analytics that they're delivering to prospects younger than ever before.

Sportlogiq, like RinkNet before it, revolutionized the industry when it started in 2015. The company lists 31 NHL teams as clients and provides clubs with "a computer vision and machine learning technology that tracks what the human eye cannot" by using raw data and tools powered by artificial intelligence. Of those 31 teams, 27 subscribe to the junior package that covers video for their prospects outside the NHL.

"We're trying to know the player better than he's ever been known before," says Armstrong, whose organization uses Sportlogiq. "It's just an importance the whole NHL has on their prospect pool of making it. Draft picks are at a premium and getting them to work out is not an option, so you've got to invest a lot of time and money into them."

"Our whole motto is 'Innovate or die.'"

Those innovations are already happening — all over the league and sport. They have been for years. The challenge teams face now is taking the opportunities that new technology offers and making the most of them.

When Armstrong was scouting for the Blues, they would draft a player and the local scout would watch him play and write up a postgame report. The scout might've dropped off a hat from the NHL club, too.

"But as far as giving you some advice about how you're playing," Armstrong recalls, "the scout might say, 'Hey, maybe if you did this a little bit better ...'"

"Didn't have that type of access or someone to watch your games, talk to you after, go over video, go on the ice and work with you," added Dan Cleary, the Detroit Red Wings' assistant director of player development and the 13th pick in the 1997 NHL Draft. "Just didn't have that extension, if that makes sense."

If an NHL team had a development coach, they'd likely go see the prospect once or twice a year. If there was a summer development camp, that would be another opportunity. Or if the player participated in the World Junior Championship.

On average, Armstrong says, there were three or four "touches," or viewings, in a year.

"There was one development guy that traveled around the world," he said, "and the world is too big."

Thanks to modern tools and technology, the NHL's development landscape has been completely transformed from those days. In addition

to having full-time staffers to work with players, new services such as Sportlogiq and InStat allow teams to keep fully abreast of all the happenings with their prospects around the globe.

Cleary used the example of having a prospect in Sweden playing on a Sunday.

"If I wasn't there, I'm able to watch his game in pretty good depth — like shift to shift, zone to zone, you can filter a lot of different things — by Monday," Cleary said.

In 2024-25, all 32 teams in the league have a player development coach and many have added more staff. Scouts are seeing players as many as eight to 10 times per season, and the evaluations are a lot more sophisticated with extensive analytics and video.

And it's not just goals and assists being tracked now — it's entries, exits, puck battles and recoveries. Now, there's a number attached to all the little things you might have once had to eyeball.

The collection of that data could be a story in itself — computers analyzing a game, supplemented by "manual quality assurance" to validate data points. If the computer struggles to identify something — such as who really "won" a faceoff that pinballs off skates or a board battle on a difficult angle for the camera — then it can flag the event and the person assigned to the game can identify the answer.

The smoothness of that process is, naturally, somewhat dependent on the quality of video, which can vary by arena and league. But once they have the footage, Sportlogiq's computers can identify which players are on the ice, then track their movements, passes and shots, as well as subtler elements, such as who wins a given puck battle.

In total, Sportlogiq collects approximately 4,000 data points per game, according to Derek Arnold, the company's director of business development for hockey. That data can give teams a decent picture of what happened and, crucially, allows teams to watch the corresponding video that comes with it. All the data is linked back to video.

"If you're a scout and you wanted to watch this defenseman's controlled exits, you would have the ability to click on basically a number from that game — the number of controlled exits he had — (and) it takes you right to the video," Arnold says.

When teams can take large swaths of that information over multiple years, it becomes even more valuable for identifying trends and patterns.

"When a team looks at the data point for that young prospect in their draft-eligible year, they can go back and say, 'OK, we can project this to be — when he's 24 and he's in the NHL, we can project him to be here,'" Arnold says.

Utah GM Bill Armstrong, right, acknowledges every team has all of the latest tools. It's about who can use them best.

For a GM, that big-picture look can paint a picture of how a player is progressing and help them plan. And for a development coach, the sortable data and video can create coaching points for them to apply with their prospects throughout the season.

Just having the data and video is no longer revolutionary, though. As Armstrong readily notes, "Everybody has that information, so I just think it's a tighter race now."

The key, then, is simply: Who can use it best?

And that question can be borderline existential for teams that play in unsexy markets or lack the financial muscle to lure top talent in free agency.

Drafting and developing works in the NHL — but only if the development comes to fruition.

Baseball remains the gold standard for advanced stats in sports, and the same is true in player development, where teams have proven to be able to add velocity to pitchers' fastballs and alter pitches and swings to mold young players the entire way up to the big leagues.

There is even a pitching machine, called "Trajekt," that allows hitters to practice against a given pitcher's exact pitch specifications in preparation for facing him.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

But baseball has arguably the perfect conditions for that level of data and technological integration: a game that features a hitter against a pitcher in fixed circumstances that can be more easily isolated.

Hockey, meanwhile, is a flow sport. A goalie doesn't know exactly where a shooter will shoot from, or how many other players might be standing in between himself and the puck. He doesn't know if there will be a pass option he has to account for as he sets up. And a shooter, likewise, has no idea when or where a scoring chance will arise, or how much time he can count on having to make the most of it.

Still, teams work on the underlying abilities that help their players make the most of those situations: their skating and stickhandling, their ability to read a situation and make the best possible choice, and how to maximize their shot.

"You're never going to take a bad player and make him good, so the scouts have to see some goodness in them, and then pass them along to the development guys," Armstrong said. "But now we're doing that a little bit with the eyes and the numbers."

Hockey will likely never be on baseball's level, and teams will never be able to truly perfect the art of developing a player.

But they have every reason to try.

Once every two weeks, Armstrong meets with Utah's scouting and development staff on a Zoom call to discuss the organization's prospects. They pore over the numbers, and the GM asks about each player: Is he making progress? Is he going sideways? Backward?

To prepare for those reports, Armstrong relies on people such as Lee Stempniak, a 14-year veteran player hired as a data analyst and later promoted to director of player development.

Stempniak said he relies on Sportlogiq "a ton." In fact, he was searching the site when The Athletic reached out recently.

"The way it's able to break the video down, in certain situations, it's incredibly useful," Stempniak said. "You can see trends in what they're doing."

"How quickly are they getting back to the puck? Are they pressured? How many times does he dump it out? Or maybe he's doing a good job and his partner is throwing pucks back to him and he's under siege."

The challenge when analyzing the information and then presenting it, Stempniak says, is deciding which numbers are useful and which are just interesting. Which ones help a player play better and a team win more games?

"You're prioritizing what things are really valuable versus what things are just noise," Stempniak said. "It's definitely thorough, but to me, it's not the be-all, end-all. I'd be lying to you if I said that (the analytics) had all the answers."

"I think that's where there's a little bit of an art to it — taking the numbers, using the eye test and blending the two together to see, 'Hey, this makes sense and this doesn't make sense.' It's part of the process for us."

When teams have a firm feel for what they want from a player, they can deliver that information to their prospects, whether they're in European pro leagues, junior hockey or NCAA, and let them start working on it.

"I've always found that sometimes the player gets to the NHL and then you're trying to change him," Armstrong said. "I think the biggest thing before they get to the NHL — give them an understanding of the corrections they need to make, so when they get here they're not like, 'Oh my God, it's so much coming at me.'"

"That way, when they get here and the coach looks them in the eye and says, 'You've got to do this,' they go, 'Yep, I'm working on it and I've got a good understanding of it.'"

University of Minnesota hockey coach Bob Motzko has been behind a college bench for 20 seasons, including the last seven with the Golden Gophers.

Minnesota has an open-door policy for NHL development coaches to visit players, and there's been a lot of interaction. The Gophers have had six first-round draft picks in Motzko's tenure, which has given him an up-close look at the transformation in NHL player development.

"We watch some NHL teams, and they're unbelievable how they communicate, and then there are some that can be a little overbearing," Motzko says, sitting in his office at 3M Arena. "These are still young kids, and it's still new, so I think everybody's learning."

"There's value in it, but you have to be cautious. How many voices can you have? You've got parents, you've got agents, you've got coaches, and now you've got development coaches. For some of these guys, it's a little overwhelming."

Ultimately, it's a relationship that's built on trust between the NHL club, the college team and the players themselves.

"That's one of the first things we clarify — they play for that coach," Stempniak says. "If you're doing everything we want you to do, but you're not pleasing your coach, he's not going to play you, and that's not good for anyone."

"So the coach dictates that, and for us, it's filling in the gaps and giving the player pointers that can be applied to any system. The biggest thing is the player knowing you have their best interest at heart and your goals are aligned."

There's also the question of how much information those prospects can retain at once. And like anything, each player has their own needs and wants that teams have to be conscious of.

"Some guys really love video, some guys like the more — they need to see it and feel it on the ice," Cleary said. "And other guys (are) not as needy for a 'touch.'"

Blues prospect Jimmy Snuggerud on the data and feedback he receives from St. Louis: "You have to get used to it. ... It's all used to make yourself a better player."

Gophers winger Jimmy Snuggerud, whom the Blues selected No. 23 in the 2022 NHL Draft, works directly with Blues development coach Chris Thorburn, who sends him video of his shifts each week with notes on each. Snuggerud could tell Thorburn he doesn't want that information but says he enjoys it.

"I like how I get to learn weekly, not just our team film, but film from him, too," Snuggerud says. "I just think you have to get used to it because it's an up-and-coming thing, and it's all used to make yourself a better player."

Some little detail in there could be the difference between making it or not. Entire careers could have changed if these resources existed in the past — even for someone like Armstrong, a Flyers third-round pick in 1990 who never reached the NHL.

"It happened to me as a player when I got to the minor leagues — you get slapped in the face pretty hard," said Armstrong, who spent nine seasons in the minors before retiring. "You're going to camp and you're reading your name in 'The Hockey News' about how good you are, and all of a sudden you get about 20 seconds into the NHL camp and you're like, 'I'm not even close.' It's a rude awakening. ... You have to remember these prospects have been courted all the way through, and nobody's ever said, 'Hey, you're not that good at this.'"

"So instead of saying 'You're wonderful — BOOM! — you can't play,' we have our development people working with them and saying, 'You're getting away with this at that level, but you won't get away with it at the next level and here's why.' But it's not only the voice. It's the analytics and the video, and it's important for us to push the limits of technology."

"The game is changing, it's always going to change, and you have to use the information to be better."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341220 Websites

The Athletic / Free agents for NHL teams 2025: Top college, CHL and European players

By Corey Pronman



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Today we look at this year's class of free agents coming out of the CHL, NCAA and major European leagues.

It's a weak free-agent crop. There is no Collin Graf in college who every NHL team will want to sign or a Maxim Tsyplov overseas that I feel could step into an NHL lineup right away. This is also the first year doing this ranking since CHL players were permitted to play college hockey. For that reason, you will see very few CHL players listed as a lot of the bubble candidates are opting to go to school. Karsen Dorwart at Michigan State is the closest thing in this crop. I expect he will play NHL games this spring for whichever team signs him and will get a look at camp next fall.

While I spent many hours on this article, I do not cover the free-agent world as extensively as I do the NHL Draft or drafted NHL prospects. I therefore cannot claim to have a comprehensive scope of the free-agent world. There will be numerous players who sign that I don't have listed here, but excluding them isn't necessarily a commentary on the players; I may simply have never gotten around to watching them.

Have a chance to play in the NHL

### 1. Karsen Dorwart, C, Michigan State (Big Ten)

Dorwart has been one of the better forwards in the Big Ten for the last two seasons. He will intrigue teams as a college free agent because aside from his offense he has good athletic traits. Dorwart is a strong skater with decent size who should be able to hold his own in one-on-one battles versus men. He's been a solid two-way forward at the college level, but I don't think he's a true standout at either end. He has the skill, but he's not dynamic and I wouldn't call his compete level super high either.

### 2. Atro Leppänen, LHD, Sport (Liiga)

Leppanen is having a monster season in Liiga. The defenseman is over a point per game and could score 20 goals. He is 26 years old so there is reason to be skeptical about how much his offense is going to be real in North America, but his sharp development is interesting. He's a good skater with decent hockey sense and a big point shot. His defending and compete aren't massive selling points, though.

### 3. Danil Aimurzin, C, Severstal (KHL)

Aimurzin has been a top scoring forward in the KHL this season, displaying significant progression in his 22-year-old season. He's not blazing fast, but Aimurzin is a good enough skater for the top levels. He has strong puck skills, offensive IQ and a great finishing touch. He's not overly physical and like a lot of shooters, he drifts to the outside a bit too much. His one-timer is legit, though, so I don't hate that part of his game because he does give a decent effort level. His average frame will be the bigger concern for NHL teams.

### 4. Joshua Eernisse, RW, Michigan (Big Ten)

Eernisse's skill and scoring won't get you excited; he has one goal in 32 games this season. Teams are interested in him though because he is a big, fast and highly competitive winger. He is very physical, attacks the net and has the potential to be an effective penalty killer as a pro. If he has even a little puck game he could be successful versus men. I suspect he will go back to school for one more year though to try to develop some more offense.

### 5. Jack Stockfish, C, College of the Holy Cross (AHA)

Stockfish has enough tools to make him interesting as a pro prospect. He's a big center who skates well for his size. He shows the ability to create in transition due to his speed and hands. Stockfish has been a decent two-way player in college even if he hasn't posted major scoring numbers. Trying to project his skill to higher levels is a bit more difficult due to the conference he plays in, but he has a puncher's chance.

### 6. Simon Zajicek, G, Litvinov (Czechia)

Zajicek is having a huge season in the top Czech league as the clear best goaltender. He's small by NHL standards, but his quickness and smarts give him a legit chance to play games in the league. He has the side-to-side athleticism to make difficult saves, but what I like about Zajicek's game is he often doesn't need to do that. He squares up a lot of

pucks and anticipates the play at a high level, playing bigger than his size with his angles and reads.

### 7. Liam McLinskey, LW, College of the Holy Cross (AHA)

McLinskey was one of the top forwards in the country in 2024. He didn't quite back up the numbers this season but he's still a potential sign for an NHL team. He's a big winger with good puck skills and creativity. McLinskey is also a solid perimeter shooter. His foot speed is a question, though, for the higher levels.

### 8. Gleb Veremyev, LW, Colorado College (NCHC)

Veremyev is a big, physical winger with intriguing athleticism for the pro level. He moves quite well for his size and can bully his way to the net to create offense. Aesthetically he looks like a prospect, but the puck play and sense in his game is a question. Veremyev hasn't scored much in college and it'll be a question for him as he advances levels.

### 9. Grigori Kuzmin, LW, SKA (KHL)

Kuzmin has played limited minutes on a top offense in SKA. The 21-year-old has shown good flashes, though, in the KHL and with the Russian national team. He's a very good skater with the skill and offensive IQ to create chances at higher levels. Kuzmin is a strong passer and shooter. The only downside in his game is his frame, as at 5-foot-10 it's questionable if he's dynamic enough to play in the NHL even if he does have talent.

Long shot to play in the NHL

### 10. Maxim Shabanov, RW, Traktor (KHL)

Shabanov has been one of the top scorers in the KHL this season as a 24-year-old. He's an excellent skater with the speed and edgework of an NHL player. He has good puck skills and offensive sense and makes a lot of plays at full speed. Shabanov is also a mid-range shooting threat who can score goals versus good goaltenders. The issue with him will come down to size. He's about 5-foot-8 and while talented, it's debatable whether it's the special variety of talent you need at his size to make it to the top league.

### 11. Riley Thompson, C, Ohio State (Big Ten)

Thompson took off this season at OSU following a transfer from Alaska-Anchorage. He's a big, heavy center with strong puck skills and good finishing ability. His skating stride is quite heavy and will be a significant issue against men. I see flashes of strong sense and playmaking, but if that aspect is more consistent I could buy him becoming a bottom-six NHL player.

### 12. John Prokop, LHD, Union (ECAC)

Prokop has been a top defenseman in the ECAC for the past two seasons. He's a very good athlete with the size/skating combo of an NHL defender. He's not a super instinctive puck-mover, but Prokop has skill and has shown quite a bit of offense at the college level. Defensively he's just OK and he's not super physical, but his mobility and length give him a real chance to be a useful two-way pro.

### 13. Trey Taylor, LHD, Clarkson (ECAC)

Another top defenseman in the ECAC over the past few years, Taylor is an awkward but powerful skater who will be able to close on pros and skate pucks up ice. He flashes impressive puck skills and offensive touch, but I don't see him as a true puck-mover in the NHL. He defends well due to his athleticism but I'd like to see him be a bit meaner. He may be a tweener for the top level, but the traits are good enough in combination to give him a real chance to play games.

### 14. Noah Beck, LHD, Arizona State University (NCHC)

Beck was a 2020 pick by St. Louis who didn't stand out during his time at Clarkson. As a fifth-year transfer at ASU, he's been a lot better. He's intriguing due to his size and the amount of offense he's shown this season while being a strong college defender. Beck's skating has been and remains a major red flag, though, and there are significant questions on how his game will translate to the pros.

### 15. Jack Williams, RW, Northeastern (Hockey East)

Williams was a top player in Hockey East this season. He's not that big, but he has the footspeed of an NHL forward which gives him some hope



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

as a pro prospect. The offense in Williams' game has developed well since his junior days. He's not a high-end skill type, but he makes plays and can create chances with tempo. He also has a very good shot and can score from range.

16. Borya Valis, RW, Prince George (WHL)

Valis has had a big season in Prince George in his overage season. He has the typical points profile of a top overage player in the CHL, but what makes him interesting for the pro game is his athleticism. He has decent size and skates like a legit NHL player, which combined with the fact he has some skill could give him a chance to play games. I'm not completely sold on his hockey sense or compete level though for the higher levels.

17. Albin Bojja, G, Maine (Hockey East)

Bojja has been a top goalie in college hockey this season. He has the quickness, sense and technique for the higher levels, but his barely 6-foot-1 frame is why he went undrafted. He's a major long shot due to his size but the rest of his talent could earn him a contract.

18. Oskar Steen, RW, Färjestad (SHL)

Steen was a Bruins pick in 2016 and has 60 NHL games of experience. His first stint in North America didn't go well, and he was in tough at times to crack competitive Boston lineups. He's been a top player in the SHL since going back and could be set to give it a second go at the NHL. Steen is a hardworking winger who gets to the net to score. He has decent speed and skill, although for a smaller forward he isn't dynamic, which led to the AHL/NHL tweener status he found in his first go-around.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341221 Websites

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

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.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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 Nemeč. The No. 2 overall pick in 2022, Nemeč was frustrated with being down in the AHL earlier this season, hinting that a trade request could happen in his situation didn't change. But Nemeč 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 Nemeč'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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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.

Michael Russo of The Athletic reported Tuesday that Eriksson Ek was injured in practice on Monday and will be placed on IR. Russo expects Eriksson Ek will be out beyond the next four games, which would be the minimum time he'd need to spend on IR.

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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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 got 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?

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

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.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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 Yann 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.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

### 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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

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.

ESPN LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341222 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' Mitch Marner conjures Boston magic: 'Breathing through my eyelids'

Luke Fox

BOSTON — Mitch Marner was so gassed when the Toronto Maple Leafs forced overtime, he couldn't see who scored the tying goal with 46 seconds left in regulation.

And yet, the best-on-best champion summoned enough from his depleted tank to undress Team America—slash—Boston Bruins goaltender Jeremy Swayman in overtime and produce his second clock-freezing victory at TD Garden in six nights.

"Big goal at 6-on-5 there by ... I think it was (Pontus) Holmberg," said Marner, half undressed and half out of breath following a raucous 5-4 comeback win Tuesday. "Couldn't even see. I was breathing through my eyelids, kind of. But we didn't quit, and that's something you like to see out of our team."

OK, so let's get this straight.

Boston — site of three heartbreaking Game 7 losses for these Maple Leafs — is now governed by Mayor Marner?

"I don't know about that. I mean, I've had a couple tough, really gut-wrenching things in this building, as well as some great memories," Marner said. "I'm just trying to go out there and do my thing."

Marner was held pointless in Toronto's back-to-back weekend wins over Carolina and Chicago, and was in danger of extending his point drought to a season-long three games before his third-period power-play snipe helped dig a slow-to-rev Leafs group out of 3-0 hole to the white-flag-waving Bruins.

The star winger admits that playing against the toughest competition of his life with Team Canada at the 4 Nations Face-Off, while most of the league caught its wind, "was taxing, for sure." He wasn't satisfied with his own effort over the weekend, as coach Craig Berube mindfully kept Marner's and Auston Matthews' minutes under 20.

"Starting to get my energy back, slowly," Marner said.

Well, he needed it.

Marner logged an exhausting 25:41 in the win — more than any Bruin and any Leafs forward.

In addition to getting tossed over the boards on both special teams, Marner logged a wild 97-second shift with goalie Anthony Stolarz pulled late, then followed that up with a 78-second haul in 3-on-3 to prevent a Bruins dagger before catching a breath and hopping back on to end the thing himself.

"Just the resilience. He's someone who is a catalyst of our team," Stolarz raved. "You look at him: He was out there for like a minute and a half, and instead of changing, he stays on in the D-zone there at the end. He's not trying to cheat the game, and he knows that it's his responsibility to stay there and play a defensive game. It's late, and he ends up getting the change and making a good play. Gets off and gets back out there and scores the goal for us."

"Definitely something that was deserved by him for his two-way play tonight."

Morgan Rielly, Marner's longest-serving teammate, helped set up the winner on a three-point night in which the defenceman reached 500 for his career.

Rielly says Marner hasn't changed much since returning to the Leafs with a gold medal.

"That just speaks to the character," Rielly said. "It would be easy for him to sort of change or get caught up in hanging out with all the big dogs. But he just comes back, and he's right back to his old self. We love him."

"For sure," Berube said when asked if fatigue plagued Marner and Matthews in their immediate return from high-stakes, higher-emotions hockey.

"But they're grinding through it. We're trying to help them as much as we can for rest purposes. We're going to have to do that going forward here, too, for a little bit."

Matthews, the reigning Rocket Trophy champ, hasn't scored on a goaltender in 10 games now (including the three he played with Team



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

USA at 4 Nations), but he assisted on Marner's winner and generated several dangerous looks.

The Leafs are striving to fend off Florida and Tampa for first place in the Atlantic Division while being thrust into a hectic schedule on the heels of 4 Nations: nine games in eight cities over 17 days.

"The break is a lot for the mental (aspect), just stepping away a little bit, and a lot of guys have been able to do that," teammate Steven Lorentz said. "But these guys have just been go, go, go."

Matthews skated 22:41 in Tuesday's win, as the coach blew past his self-imposed time limit for the superstars.

"(Mitch) and Auston have been a little bit tired for me, but I thought they showed a lot of grit tonight, a lot of determination," Berube said. "But Mitch had a heck of a game.

"They're a little wiped out, so I mindfully tried to keep their minutes under 20, which I think I've done a good job (at). But tonight, I didn't. It worked out."

For Marner, in this barn, everything is starting to.

Fox's Fast Five

- Might be something, might be nothing:

William Nylander was out pressing for a 77-second shift at the end of the third period but curiously never touched the ice in 3-on-3 overtime — where he's particularly dangerous.

"Something was bothering him," Berube said, "so he didn't go in the overtime."

Nylander was seen holding his wrist or hand on the television broadcast.

- Massachusetts native Jim Gaudreau, the proud uncle of Johnny and Matthew, grew close with Leafs GM Brad Treliving.

Leafs management — which is travelling in full — invited Jim to take in the team's morning skate with them from the TD Garden stands. A touching gesture.

The Gaudreau brothers' tragic passing has hit this town hard, as evidenced by Boston's spontaneous and voluminous "Johnny Hockey!" chants during the USA-Canada 4 Nations championship game.

- Calle Järnkrok (sports hernia) is traveling with the Leafs for the first time all season and sure looks like a man who could make his season debut any day now.

"He's close. He's very close. There's some things that have to be done with ... you know, stuff," said a comically vague Berube.

Järnkrok's \$2.1-million salary has been tucked away on LTIR, and the cap-tight Leafs have maximized their active roster slots, so management will need to do some stickhandling before giving Järnkrok — who has a doctor's appointment coming up shortly — the green light.

When the two-way winger does return, we expect a look in the top six.

"Very intelligent player," Berube said. "Checks a lot of boxes: penalty killing and end-of-game [shifts], faceoffs. Like, he can play any position. He's a real complementary player with good players, which is nice to have."

- Boston's Mason Lohrei will be leaned upon more heavily with the long-term injuries to fellow defencemen Charlie McAvoy and Hampus Lindholm.

After getting a promotion to PP1 and helping set up the game's first two goals, the 24-year-old is already up to 24 assists in his first full NHL season — despite clocking under 19 minutes a night.

Nice platform campaign for an impending RFA with arbitration rights.

- Chris Tanev suffered an upper-body injury from a first-period check into the end-boards by forechecker Johnny Beacher, ending his night.

The Leafs defenceman left the rink with his right arm in a sling and will be evaluated further on Wednesday.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341223 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers' Stuart Skinner second-best goalie on ice yet again as slump continues

Mark Spector

TAMPA — You can argue that the Edmonton Oilers don't need to acquire a goaltender — and we have made that assertion more than most this season.

Or you may be in the burgeoning group that believes Stuart Skinner needs some help in the Oiler nets if they are to go anywhere come playoff time. That he is simply an average goaltender this season, and average won't cut it come May and June.

But what you can't dispute is the look in head coach Kris Knoblauch's eyes as he described a crippling 2-1 Lightning goal on the opening shift of the second period by Brandon Hagel.

The wrap-around gave Tampa the only lead it would need in a 4-1 win, an entire game turning around what everyone who watches the sport would judge to be a soft goal, with Skinner painfully slow to come across his crease.

"I'm not saying it's a terrible goal," began Knoblauch. "It's one you want him to make more times than not."

I've been doing this for 35 years: When a coach tells you he's "not saying it's a terrible goal," what he is actually saying is that it was a terrible goal.

It came on the first shift of the second period, after an evenly played first period that ended at 1-1. Just 29 seconds into Period 2, Tampa had all the momentum.

"It was a pretty even first period, and now you put a team on their heels," assessed Tampa (and Team Canada) head coach Jon Cooper. "A team that, I mean, it's a hell of a team, but they're struggling coming out of the break.

"Let's put them behind again and make them go back to chasing the game. That was a huge goal to get, 30 seconds in."

Back to Knoblauch:

"It was tough, especially the time the game. We come out against the team that's playing really well right now, in their building, it's 1-1. And then that happens the first shift.

"It's deflating."

That's is perhaps the best descriptor of Skinner's game that we can conjure up: Deflating.

His numbers this season — .898 saves percentage, a 2.84 goals against — are down from a season ago: .905 and 2.62.

He was a top six or seven goalie in the NHL from mid-November on last season, where today Skinner ranks somewhere in the mid-20's among starters, in a 32-team league.

It's not as much that his game has been mid, it's that Skinner at the top of his game can carry a team to the Stanley Cup last season. At just 70 or 80 per cent of that, how can it possibly take a team as far again this spring?

Skinner made numerous quality saves on Grade A Tampa chances Tuesday, in a game where the high-danger chances were 13-4 in Tampa's favour according to Natural Stat Trick. But none of those matter when the axis shifts on a soft, confidence-sapping goal, at a time when his team is "fragile" according to Knoblauch, and in need of a backbone in the crease.

"That second goal is a funky goal. I don't know how it got in," said defenceman Mattias Ekholm. "I think Stu may want that back."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

"The third goal, (Mattias) Janmark goes down, courageous, to block a heavy one-timer. And somehow it goes off of something, bounces off the ice, off (Skinner's) glove and in the net."

Goaltending, of course, is simply a microcosm of a game in which good play begets good breaks. And poor play comes hand in hand with bad bounces and unlucky deflections.

Right now Skinner, like his team, skates off as the second-best goalie on the ice every night. No matter that his team couldn't score a goal at five-on-five Tuesday, or that Evan Bouchard inexplicably failed to help his goalie on that Hagel wrap-around, despite being in perfect position to thwart Hagel's effort.

No matter how loose this Oilers team has played in a season-high four-game losing streak, it can't be everyone else's fault all the time.

Even good teams need their goalies to bail them out, to keep them in a tough game once in a while.

Skinner knows it and his teammates know it, though they'd never say so publicly. And general manager Stan Bowman has to see it, as he looks down from above at a team whose warts are being exposed on a road trip through some of the toughest buildings out East.

The Oilers had a meagre 36 shot attempts, to 67 by the Lightning. They've allowed 17 goals in three games on this trip, lit up three games in a row with their first trip back into Sunrise since Game 7 of the 2024 Stanley Cup Final on tap for Thursday.

"We will reign it in," promised Zach Hyman, whose game has disappeared alongside Ryan Nugent-Hopkins', Connor McDavid's and so many others. "This is a group that's been through a ton of adversity. This isn't our first rodeo with this. Nobody wants to go through it, but we know to claw our way back."

He disputed any assertion that this lineup may not be able to play with the big boys.

"Three weeks ago when we were the hottest team in the league, there have been no personnel changes (since then). So I don't there's anything to infer there. This is a group with all the pieces," Hyman said.

"We're a fragile group right now. Confidence is a little hard right now," admitted Knoblauch. "Everyone's discouraged. They put a lot of pressure on themselves to win; they view themselves as one of the best (teams) in the league."

"We've got to be able to respond and push back."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341224 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames set tone for daunting road trip with statement win over Capitals

Eric Francis

WASHINGTON – Ice bags strapped to his ankle and upper thigh, Rasmus Andersson stood in front of the media like he did in front of Alex Ovechkin's slappers all night.

With six of his eight blocked shots coming at the expense of the man chasing hockey history, Andersson's painful evening was symbolic of just how hard things are about to get for the Calgary Flames.

Kicking off a daunting six-game road trip in a rink the hosts hadn't lost in regulation in 16 outings, the Flames exhibited a grit that led to one of their most improbable and impressive wins of the season.

And they did it under the glare of a tight playoff race, not to mention Ovechkin's monumental pursuit.

"He's on a great chase and you've got to eat a few," shrugged the Flames defender following a 3-1 win that saw his club block 30 shots.

"It's just the way the game went. Now it feels good."

Had to feel incredible for a team presented with what Nazem Kadri called an "opportunity to go into some tough buildings, get some wins and maybe have some people look at you a little bit differently."

One game in, the lens through which people look at this club had to have changed somewhat.

That's how big this win was.

Perhaps the only thing more surprising than handing the Capitals their second regulation loss of 2025 was the starting goaltender largely responsible for limiting Ovechkin to just one goal: Dan Vladar.

Scarcely used over the last two months, Vladar was given the starting nod based on his history against the Caps, and the desire to keep Dustin Wolf as fresh as possible.

With just one win since mid-December under his belt, it was a risky move.

However, when the dust settled on an evening that saw ol' Ovie blast away with 19 shot attempts, it was Vladar beaming over a 26-save win.

"It's gonna be a story for my kids one day that a player like that scored on me, but obviously, at that moment, you don't appreciate it," said Vladar, beaten only by a power-play slapper from Ovechkin's office to move within 12 goals of surpassing Wayne Gretzky's coveted goal scoring record.

"I'm happy we just play twice against them."

Happy only begins to describe how proud Vladar and his teammates were after a statement win that catapulted them over Vancouver for the final wild-card spot in the West.

"We just beat the first-place team in the league, so we're going to be proud, but only until midnight tonight," said Vladar, well aware Andersson's shot-blocking will come at the expense of a steep dinner tab.

"We know it is a really tough trip for us."

Next up, Tampa, where there's a good chance Ryan Huska will once again open the game by rewarding his fourth line with a starting assignment.

Following a tremendous outing against San Jose two nights earlier, Martin Pospisil, Kevin Rooney and Ryan Lomberg were tapped to open the game against Ovechkin's line. Their opening shift set the tone for the team's best first period of the season, which saw them lead 2-0 on goals from Pospisil and Matt Coronato, while outshooting the hosts 14-5.

Rolling all four lines throughout the evening, the Flames kept steady pressure on the Caps with a defensive style the Flames will need to employ to preserve the one-point lead they now have on the Canucks.

Things could easily have changed early in the third when Ovechkin's 30th of the season brought the crowd at Capital One Arena back to life. It marked the 19th time in his career he's hit that mark.

Given the Caps had scored 15 goals over their previous two outings, tense moments ensued.

However, several timely saves by Vladar opened the door for Jonathan Huberdeau to bang in an insurance marker with five minutes left, eliciting a roar from the bench.

Wins don't come any bigger than these for a team trying to prove to itself, and others, that it belongs amongst the West's top eight.

And to do it as an opener against a murderer's row of Cup contenders on this road trip was, well, somewhat unexpected.

"I think it matters," said Huska when asked about the significance of opening their trip with an emotional win like this.

"This is a tough place to play and finding a way to get two points out of here is a big thing."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.26.2025



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

1341225 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Suzuki's growth as captain helps Canadiens keep Hurricanes in spiral

Eric Engels

MONTREAL— It's eight minutes into a tight-checking game against a desperate Carolina Hurricanes team when Nick Suzuki puts together a defining sequence for the Montreal Canadiens.

He sees David Savard get control of the puck just outside Montreal's blue line. He flashes to centre ice to give Savard the best pass option. He gets the puck and reloads his team's attack.

Suzuki then identifies he's skating into a trap of four Hurricanes players with only two teammates standing somewhat stationary alongside him, so he flips the puck into space before speeding past everyone to retrieve it. Then he finishes the sequence by emerging from the left corner, firing a quick pass to Jayden Struble at the point and watching as Struble's shot gets tipped by Juraj Slafkovsky for a 1-0 lead.

It's really simple stuff from a player who has the ability to make it complicated. He's Montreal's best offensive gun, a deceptive skater and gifted stickhandler who can turn disadvantageous circumstances into advantageous ones with one unexpected turn or one dirty dangle.

But Suzuki's process to turn lemons into lemonade on this sequence involves none of that and ultimately set the tone for a 4-0 win against a great Carolina team that came into the night intent on reviving its greatness by snapping a skid that saw it lose four of its last five games.

"Everybody's actions were really in the direction of taking care of the team in terms of how much risk we're going to take," said Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis afterwards.

It started with his captain and filtered on down through the lineup, and the timing of it was noteworthy.

With 10 days to go to the NHL trade deadline, no player in Montreal wants to keep the band together more than Suzuki. He entered the season talking about how he was sick of seeing players sold off the roster come February and sick of playing out the string for the final months of three consecutive years away from the playoffs. He said he was desperate for all 82 games to be meaningful.

Suzuki used the 58th game of the season to help ensure they still might be.

Yes, the Canadiens entered the night five points out of the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference and closed it in the same position. But they earned their second win in as many tries post-4 Nations break by playing the way they need to play to remain in the race, and their captain was at the heart of it.

Suzuki had two assists in a 5-2 win over the Ottawa Senators last Saturday and he set up Montreal's first goal against Carolina before scoring one of his own and adding another assist to increase his totals to 16 goals and 57 points this season. He took what the game gave him and provided the rest of the Canadiens a template to follow.

Patrik Laine (who had a goal and two assists) followed. He arguably played more responsibly in this game than he had in 29 others with the Canadiens, and he ended the night talking about Suzuki's influence on him and his teammates.

"He always plays the right way and shows us how it's supposed to be done," the 26-year-old said. "I think it's important for this group with a lot of young guys to have that kind of example of how to play these kind of games. I think he's been great."

It's not the time for Suzuki to just be ordinary, and he knows it.

The Canadiens lost eight of nine games going to the break and undid all the momentum gained over a 19-9-2 run that catapulted them back into the playoffs, and Suzuki was far too ordinary over the last three games of that stretch. He faltered with zero points and a minus-3 rating because he forced too many plays and took too many risks.

But Suzuki went away determined to flip the script, and now he has.

It matters that he's delivering this way now—when the Canadiens need him to most.

"Coming off the break, I think he's in a good place," said St. Louis, "and he's leading with a lot of good actions on the ice right now."

It's what you need your captain and best player to do.

It might not give Suzuki what he wants between now and the trade deadline. He said earlier on Tuesday he feels the Canadiens have an opportunity to discourage management from trading away players. "We haven't gotten a message from (general manager) Kent (Hughes) that we're selling or anything, so we're pushing and trying to make it tough on him," he added, and being the driving force in a win that directly followed those comments won't guarantee the outcome he's looking for.

But whether Suzuki gets it or not, he's growing as a leader by delivering in these moments.

The hope is that growth will be defining for the Canadiens, and not just for this game but for the 24 that will follow to the end of the regular season—and beyond.

As this team becomes the team it wants to be in future years, it'll depend on Suzuki not only leading on the stat sheet but leading the Canadiens to play the right way.

That's what he did on Tuesday, and it's what he needs to consistently do moving forward.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341226 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / John Tavares would 'love' to sign new Maple Leafs contract before deadline

Luke Fox

BOSTON — The NHL trade deadline lies just 10 days away, impending free agents are getting crossed off the board, and the ambiguity around John Tavares's future with the Toronto Maple Leafs quietly drags on.

One thing is for certain, though: The stud centreman would prefer to put his signature on a contract extension in Toronto before the March 7 trade deadline and take care of business early.

"I certainly would love to get it done," Tavares said Tuesday inside Boston's TD Garden, prior to the Maple Leafs' faceoff against the Bruins. "I mean, obviously the club has a lot going on. It's not just about me."

"I know management will do what they have to do at that time of year and whatnot. So, if we have the opportunity to get it done, I'd love to do that. If not, when that time comes, we'll get there. So, just looking forward to continuing my journey here as a Leaf — and obviously want it to continue past this season."

Tavares — a family man with no interest in uprooting — believes he was well served by the extra days off for rest and dad time during the 4 Nations Face-Off break. At 34, he is enjoying a resurgent campaign and is on pace for 30 goals and 70 points despite missing seven games due to a leg injury and seeing more usage in the defensive zone.

And yet, the veteran finds himself in the unusual position of not being management's top priority with roughly four months before his deal expires.

Knowing Tavares's strong preference to stay put, and understanding the former captain holds a full no-move clause, general manager Brad Treliving's more pressing concerns are with making moves ahead of next Friday's trade deadline and figuring how to move ahead with or without star winger Mitch Marner.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

Tavares has been willing to negotiate in-season, via agent Pat Brisson, but his file has been nudged to the backburner and there is no sense that an announcement is imminent before more dominoes fall.

Is the uncertainty stressful on Tavares?

"Not really. I just try to go about my business, control what I can control, and do what I can to help this team," Tavares said. "I've had a great six-plus years here. Since Tree has come on board, and certainly with Chief [coach Craig Berube] this year, they've been great with me.

"Where our focus is, we're just trying to help the team and get as many wins as we can and earn a spot in the playoffs and obviously try to make a deep run. So, when the time comes [to negotiate], be ready for that. And I think I've been around long enough, just go out there about my business and try to impact the team as best I can."

Tavares has held up his end of the bargain. Age be damned, his performance is elevating alongside the salary cap.

Some athletes change or, worse, buckle under the weight of a contract year.

Not Tavares, his coach argues.

"Not a little bit," Berube said. "He's a pro. He just does his thing. It's every day. He just comes to work. He does his routine. He's got it down. And he's played extremely well for us. I don't think he thinks about it, to be honest with you. I haven't noticed any of that with him."

The Maple Leafs have never had a better shot at clinching first place in the Atlantic Division. They've never faced the possibility of losing two of their Core Four forwards — Marnier and Tavares — this late into one of their many contending campaigns.

Still, Tavares says the buildup to March 7 has the same energy as recent trade deadlines past in Leafland.

"Things all feel the same," Tavares said. "We've been a team that's been pushing and wanting to do something special, and we've had the makings of a team that's been aggressive in trying to add.

"Whether that's the case this year, obviously that's not up to me. But the feelings are always the same."

Just as Tavares's feelings about being a Maple Leaf haven't changed — even if management isn't rushing to lock up its second-line centre while it scours the market for another middle-six pivot.

"I mean, I love to play," Tavares said. He is seemingly unbothered as he hangs around to chat for more than 10 minutes after a brisk morning skate. "When the time comes, it'll get taken care of. So, until then, you just go out there and play and compete."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341227 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Chris Tanev injury highlights Maple Leafs' need for defensive depth

Luke Fox

BOSTON — If there was a scarier sight Tuesday night at TD Garden for Toronto Maple Leafs fans than seeing David Pastrnak on a clean breakaway, it was spotting Chris Tanev walking out of the rink with his right arm in a sling.

Tanev suffered an upper-body injury from a hard but clean first-period check into the end-boards by forechecker Johnny Beacher, which ended the defenceman's night prematurely and sent a jolt of worry through Leafs Nation.

"One of the best D-men in the league, in my opinion," said Morgan Rielly, following Toronto's 4-3 comeback win over the Boston Bruins. "Important to the penalty kill, plays big minutes. He plays hard minutes against other teams' best players.

"We hope he's not out too long."

The veteran Tanev has been as resilient as he has been excellent in his first season skating for his hometown Leafs. He ranks third overall in blocked shots (151), has been a boon to the PK, and has formed one of the NHL's elite shutdown duos with Jake McCabe.

"Starts in the D-zone a lot of times and doesn't care. Doesn't complain about it. Just does his job. And he's a guy that you love to have on your team and in the locker room," Mitch Marner said.

Tanev's injury will be further evaluated Wednesday, when the Maple Leafs will travel to New York for Friday's game against the Rangers.

Toronto had already been exploring trade options to bolster its defensive depth. Picturing important games without Tanev's services on the right side is downright dismal.

If names like Rasmus Ristolainen and Luke Schenn were already on the board, they'll be circled and underlined if Tanev's injury is long-term.

Few players on the Leafs' roster would be more missed.

"Just his grit and his toughness," goalie Anthony Stolarz said. "I mean, you look at the way that he blocks shots, the way he is fearless in front of the net.

"Hopefully he's not out too long."

Coach Craig Berube rhymes off all the same heart-and-soul attributes Tanev brings to the group, then adds one more.

"And leadership," the coach said.

"There's a lot of stuff you miss. He's a very important player for us."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341228 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / What recent trades of top-six centres tell us about the market

Emily Sadler

Looking for a top-six centre at the trade deadline? It'll cost you. The demand for NHL centres never really stops, and come springtime the price tends to go up. While many contenders target depth at this time of year, the idea that we could see some top-six centremen on the move before March 7 brings plenty of intrigue to a trade season that's already brought a few blockbusters.

The promise of salary-cap growth on the horizon has expanded the trade market, too, with rentals no longer the sole focus. Teams are looking to buy.

So, who might be available? And what can we learn from recent trades involving top-six centremen about the going rate?

The top takeaway from looking at some of the more recent trades is that creativity is key in determining how, exactly, the price is determined — and paid. We've seen a bit of everything, from salary retention and third-party helpers and packages of picks and prospects as deal-sweeteners, to the more stripped-down transactions as teams trade high and low for fresh starts benefitting both franchises.

Here's a collection of lessons learned from some of the more notable recent trades headlined by top-six centres and what they can tell us about the market, as well as a few names to watch in the days leading up to the deadline.

In February 2024, the Winnipeg Jets handed over their 2024 first-round pick and a conditional 2027 third-rounder to the Montreal Canadiens to land rental centre Sean Monahan, who'd revived his game. Interestingly, this was the second time Monahan had earned Montreal a first-round pick via trade — the Flames included a conditional 2025 first-rounder in



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

the August 2022 salary-shedding transaction that saw Monahan (and his \$6.375-million AAV at the time) land in Montreal.

As Monahan landed in Winnipeg, Calgary earned quite a haul from the Vancouver Canucks for Elias Lindholm, another true rental. The Flames got Vancouver's 2024 first-round pick and conditional 2024 fourth-rounder as well as winger Andrei Kuzmenko and two prospects.

Earlier this year, we saw Mikael Granlund — a player who's listed as both a centre and winger — dealt to Dallas. Granlund was one of two players sent from the San Jose Sharks to the Stars, alongside defenceman Cody Ceci. (Dallas also sent a third-rounder to San Jose in this deal; no salary was retained.) Granlund has been moved a lot the last few seasons, and although he hasn't always been the headliner, his presence in these deals makes for an interesting case study in market value for a middle-six centre capable of top-six time. Before landing in Dallas, he'd been part of the blockbuster that sent Erik Karlsson to Pittsburgh for a package of players and picks. Granlund had been a deadline acquisition by the Penguins before that, landing in Pittsburgh from Nashville in exchange for a second-round pick. This season's deal to Dallas represents his highest trade value in terms of draft capital.

Compare those returns to a centreman who's more suited to a third-line role, and you're looking at a return involving a second-round pick — for example, last March's deal that sent Alex Wennberg to the Rangers for a second- and fourth-round pick, with Seattle also retaining half his salary.

All five centres mentioned above were true rentals as pending UFAs, but this year has already shown us one big-name centreman being moved along with their big-money, big-term deals.

One day before Granlund and Ceci were traded to Dallas, the New York Rangers and Vancouver Canucks pulled off a five-player, six-piece trade that saw the clubs swap top-six centres J.T. Miller and Filip Chytil, with Vancouver also sending a pair of prospects to New York for a return that included a first-round pick (top-13 protected) in 2025. This was a sell-low deal for Vancouver, but still got it a pretty good haul considering Miller's dismal stats this season and the Canucks' need to shake things up and create cap space.

Sometimes the cost is to the buyer, securing salary-cap certainty at the right price; sometimes it's the seller who's footing the bill in a space-saving deal. And, sometimes, it's both. Last year's trade between the San Jose Sharks and Vegas Golden Knights is a great example of a trade involving term that benefited both sides.

Not all term is good term, but in the case of Tomas Hertl being acquired by Vegas last March in just his second season of an eight-year, \$65.1-million contract, it was a big plus for the club in the desert to land some salary-cap certainty down the middle. It was also pretty rare to see such a big-name player, with so many years still on his contract, move at the deadline — trading players so early in big-money deals doesn't happen often, and when it does, it's typically saved for summertime.

The Hertl-to-Vegas deal, while an exception to many rules, is also a strong example of what teams can expect to pay for top talent and cost certainty — Vegas sent its 2025 first-round pick to San Jose — the going rate for a top-six centre, it seems — as well as the top prospect in its system (Swedish centre David Edstrom, selected in the first round in 2023). A 17 per cent salary retention on Hertl's remaining seasons sweetened things for Vegas, while a pair of third-round picks accompanying Hertl to the Golden Knights evens things out. It was, by all accounts, a very fair trade that's a win for both sides, considering Vegas' win-now mentality and San Jose's need to get younger.

Considering the number of players with term at various levels of the rumour mill — Brayden Schenn, Dylan Cozens, even perhaps Elias Pettersson — it'll be interesting to see how that factors into the price on both sides, should deals get done.

One-for-one deals are rare, but they do happen

And two recent examples show how these deals can be equally beneficial for teams and players in need of fresh starts. Take last spring's transaction between Buffalo and Colorado, for example, which saw the Avalanche acquire centre Casey Mittelstadt in exchange for defenceman Bowen Byram. The deal was lauded by onlookers as a win-win that helped both sides fill a specific need while dealing from a position of strength.

For Colorado, it brought in an immediate, younger and more affordable replacement for Ryan Johansen after he was sent to Philadelphia in a cost-cutting move. For the Sabres, it gave the franchise a third cornerstone rearguard to build around alongside Rasmus Dahlin and Owen Powers.

For both players, it brought a fresh start, and strong chemistry in their new homes — though, with rumours that Mittelstadt could once again be on the trade block after a dip in production, it'll be interesting to see what he fetches if he's dealt again a year later.

"Fresh start" was also the key term in last June's deal that sent an out-of-sync Pierre-Luc Dubois cross-country to the Washington Capitals in exchange for goalie Darcy Kuemper. While not a deadline deal, it's still worth highlighting to show the creativity involved with measuring players' worth in accordance with teams' needs. The prevailing sentiment at the time was surprise that the Kings found a suitor for the disgruntled centreman without having to retain any of his \$8.5-million AAV that runs through 2031, and that they filled a key need in net in the process.

The three-player package L.A. sent to Winnipeg for Dubois in 2023 is more indicative of the typical going rate for a top-six centre, but Dubois' dwindling value required them to seek a different kind of return to wipe the slate clean. This is a deal that's worked out really well for both sides, considering both Kuemper and Dubois — who looks like a totally different, and totally motivated true 2C with the Capitals — have found a really strong fit.

COULD THESE TOP-SIX CENTREMEN BE ON THE MOVE?

Dylan Cozens, Buffalo Sabres

Cozens enjoyed an offensive breakout in 2022-23, when he registered 31 goals and 68 points in 81 games, but his stats since — 18 goals and 47 points last season, and just 11 goals and 27 points through 55 games this season — indicate a player who could really benefit from a fresh start and a chance to win if he's to live up to his 2C potential.

Though he's not your typical deadline target, considering he's far from a rental, Cozens checks just about every box when it comes to a desirable player to acquire. At 24, the 2019 seventh-overall pick hasn't yet hit his prime and should continue to pack on muscle to his six-foot-three frame. He's in only the second season of the seven-year, \$49.7-million contract he signed in February 2023, and boasts the kind of offensive upside that could very quickly make his \$7.1-million AAV look like a steal, if he can reach it. (And, if he can't, the rise in the salary cap makes his contract look reasonable, still.) Every single team should be calling Sabres GM Kevyn Adams — and they probably are.

Brayden Schenn, St. Louis Blues

With three more seasons remaining on his eight-year pact with the Blues (there's a trend of term here on this year's list of eligible centreman), Schenn is an interesting case. He has all the makings of being a final piece to a team's championship puzzle — the veteran leadership, the Stanley Cup-winning experience, consistent production, and a little grit — but the biggest question is whether the Blues are actually looking to move him.

The fact he's still under contract through 2028 at \$6.5-million per year is just one of many reasons GM Doug Armstrong would be wise to keep him. Then again, he could fetch a healthy return, should he decide to move on and get younger.

The Maple Leafs do have a history of acquiring other clubs' captains — or, at least, players who've previously worn the captain's C. Just saying.

He didn't get much ice time as a role player and fourth-liner with Team USA at the 4 Nations Face-Off, but Nelson is poised to get a lot more time in the spotlight before March 7. Nelson, 33 and suiting up as the second-line centre with the Islanders, is a true rental in the sense that he's on an expiring contract and can inject an instant dose of secondary scoring and production into a contender's lineup at a reasonable AAV of \$6 million.

Casey Mittelstadt, Colorado Avalanche

Mittelstadt thrived upon landing in Colorado last March, a fresh start proving key to his success slotting into as the Avalanche's second-line centre behind Nathan MacKinnon. But his numbers have taken a dip of late, and despite signing a three-year extension to stay in Denver last June, it's worth wondering if the team will try to move him one year later.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

It's hard to see it recouping the value it traded away for him, but considering the market for centremen is particularly strong this time of year and Mittelstadt comes with two years of term on a reasonable deal, he could be a candidate for team that believes it can jumpstart his scoring.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341229 Websites

TSN.CA / Leafs' Tanev suffers upper-body injury in OT win over Bruins

Mark Masters3-3 minutes 26/02/2025

The Toronto Maple Leafs beat the Boston Bruins 5-4 in overtime on Thursday night, but lost Chris Tanev to injury. The 35-year-old defenceman left the game after taking a hit from Bruins forward John Beecher on his second shift of the night.

"He'll get evaluated tomorrow," head coach Craig Berube said. "Yeah, upper body, I don't know, we'll see."

Tanev was spotted leaving TD Garden with his right arm in a sling.

In his first season with the Leafs, Tanev has quickly established himself as one of the team's most trusted and irreplaceable players.

"He plays against all the top lines, shutdown [role], you miss a lot of things," said Berube. "Penalty kill, you know, just all the hard working, gritty stuff he does on the back end, and leadership. There's a lot of stuff you miss. He's a very important player for us."

The Leafs have played without Tanev only once this season, losing 5-2 to the Winnipeg Jets on Dec. 23.

"Starts in the D-zone a lot of times and doesn't care," said winger Mitch Marner, who scored two goals, including the overtime winner on Thursday. "Doesn't complain about it and just does his job. He's a guy that you love to have on your team and in your locker room so hopefully [it's] not too bad and he's OK."

Tanev is averaging just over 20 minutes of ice time, including a team high two minutes and 39 seconds shorthanded. Toronto's penalty kill allowed two goals on Thursday after Tanev departed.

Tanev is second in the NHL in blocked shots.

"One of the best d-men in the league, in my opinion," said defenceman Morgan Rielly, who produced a goal and three assists on Thursday while logging a game high 27 minutes and 39 seconds. "He plays big minutes. He plays hard minutes against other teams best players ... We hope he's not out too long. Hopefully he's back soon."

Philippe Myers is the extra defenceman on the road with the Leafs. He has been a healthy scratch in all three games since the regular season resumed following the 4 Nations Face-Off. Like Tanev, Myers is a right shot.

There was another injury scare for the Leafs on Thursday night as winger William Nylander, the team's leading goal scorer, didn't take any shifts in the extra frame.

"Just came back [to the bench] and something was bothering him," Berube said. "So he didn't go in the overtime."

The Leafs will have two days off before continuing their road trip in New York against the Rangers on Friday night.

TSN.CA LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341230 Websites

TSN.CA / Improved chemistry helping Flames in surprise playoff chase

Salim Valji5-7 minutes 25/02/2025

Of all Calgary Flames goalie Dustin Wolf's accomplishments this season, including sitting near the top of the NHL leaderboard in several categories and making a run at the franchise record for wins by a rookie, there's one that evokes a different type of grin from the 23-year-old Californian.

In the fall, he earned a spot in the team's in-flight poker games.

"I was able to sneak in to the table just due to some injuries at the start of the year," he said last week.

The tables are overwhelmingly occupied by veterans. Rasmus Andersson, Nazem Kadri, Jonathan Huberdeau, MacKenzie Weegar, Yegor Sharangovich, Brayden Pachal, Kevin Bahl, and Wolf are split into two groups that sit beside each another to play on the plane.

"I thought at the start of the year when I got an opportunity, that I wanted to get into the group and feel a part of it right away," Wolf said. "It's a great time. Lots of banter. A lot of poker faces you're not too sure of. Ras, you're definitely not too sure if he's bluffing you or if he's telling you straight up what cards he has."

Wolf's success on the ice this season apparently hasn't translated to the poker table.

"He's just okay," Kadri said of his goalie. "He's got some good days and he's got some bad days. Mostly bad days, but I think he's hanging in there. It just speaks to his competitive nature. I think he just always wants to be the guy in the lead, but unfortunately at the poker table, that doesn't happen a whole lot."

Card games on the road are just one example of how the Flames' bond off the ice is propelling them during a playoff race few could have anticipated in training camp. Calgary sits one point out of the second wild-card spot entering play Tuesday night, with one game in hand on Vancouver.

Huberdeau called this the tightest team he's been a part of during his three seasons in southern Alberta, in part because there's not the noise of contract extensions and trade chatter that was present a year ago.

Even newcomers Joel Farabee and Morgan Frost, acquired in late January from Philadelphia in exchange for Andrei Kuzmenko, Jakob Pelletier, and draft picks, have gotten immersed quickly. Farabee took Bahl's place in the poker group during Bahl's recent injury absence.

"A lot of guys [from last season] obviously left, so I feel like it's more solid," Huberdeau said. "Everybody wants to be here. That's why maybe we've got a tighter group."

There are daily signs that this Calgary squad has chemistry beyond the rink.

Practices are generally louder, with fourth-line winger Ryan Lomberg often yelling words of encouragement that can be heard in all corners of the Saddledome. They also stand up for one another more on the ice. At different points this season, rookies Matthew Coronato and Adam Klapka have gone after opponents who targeted captain Mikael Backlund.

The head coach has noticed the tight-knit locker room.

"I always gauge the room in the morning," Ryan Huska said. "Are they talking when they come in? Usually, you get the best indicator of how a room is when you're going through some challenging times when the team's not winning."

"Our guys, in whatever situation we've been in this year, there's been good energy where they've enjoyed being around the rink...from speaking to some of the older players, they really do think this is one of the stronger teams they've played on in regards to the personalities and how everyone connects."

Bahl's introduction to the revamped Flames culture early on in his first training camp after he was acquired from New Jersey over the summer.

"The vets lay out what the culture is and what's expected of guys, and it makes it kind of easy to gel in if you just follow the script of what other guys do," he said. "That's a big thing. You're a young guy. You don't



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

really know how to take care of your body...just their presence and seeing how they take care of themselves."

Sometimes, those veterans haven't had to say anything. They simply lead with their actions.

"It doesn't have to be verbal, right?" Bahl said. "It's just the way the guys carry themselves. Showing up extra early, taking care of their bodies, that extra spin on the bike, extra lift. That's a big thing."

Veteran Blake Coleman, a two-time Stanley Cup champion with the Tampa Bay Lightning, said that strong off-ice bonds between teammates have a real impact during games.

"It's pretty obvious guys on this team care about each other," he said. "It carries over on the ice, whether it's sticking up for somebody, scrums, playing hard for someone...it makes it a lot more fun to come to the rink, you tend to have a lot more energy."

Wolf, who has played his way into the Calder Trophy discussion, said that the culture has made his transition to the NHL easier and played a big role in his early success. He's among league leaders in categories like five-on-five save percentage and goals saved above expected.

"The poker table's a great example of that," he said. "A bunch of older guys that are letting a young buck like me get in there. They probably look at me as bait to take some cash out of my wallet, but these are great leaders in our room. It's a big reason why we've had the success we've had this year, because everybody is included in everything."

TSN.CA LOADED: 02.26.2025

1341231 Websites

TSN.CA / Matthews and Marner 'grinding through' busy post-4 Nations schedule

Mark Masters9-12 minutes 25/02/2025

Leafs head coach Craig Berube is seeing signs of fatigue from centre Auston Matthews and winger Mitch Marner following an emotional experience at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

"For sure," Berube said. "But they're grinding through it. We're trying to help them as much as we can for rest purposes. We're going to have to do that going forward here, too, for a little bit."

Saturday was the start of a gruelling stretch for the Leafs, who will play nine games in eight different cities over 17 days.

Marner averaged 21 minutes and 33 seconds of ice time before his star turn with Team Canada at the 4 Nations Face-Off. He averaged 18 minutes and 40 seconds of ice time in the weekend wins over the Carolina Hurricanes and Chicago Blackhawks.

Matthews logged 20 minutes and 25 seconds per outing before captaining Team USA. He was down to 18 minutes and 22 seconds in the past two games.

Matthews and Marner were not made available to the media after Tuesday's morning skate as the team is trying to give them a break in that regard as well considering the countless interviews they did at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

"The break is a lot for the mental [side], just stepping away a little bit, and a lot of guys have been able to do that," said Leafs winger Steven Lorentz. "But these guys have just been go, go, go."

Marner played in all four games during Team Canada's championship run while Matthews got into three tilts with Team USA. And these were no ordinary games.

"There's tempers flaring," Lorentz said. "You obviously saw the first game [between Canada and the United States] with a couple fights, so it's very, very emotional hockey and then coming back here and, it's not that it's 'just' regular-season hockey, but it's just a different feel."

Matthews and Marner both produced two primary assists in Canada 3-2 win in the championship game at the 4 Nations Face-Off, but both were relatively quiet over the weekend.

Matthews scored an empty-net goal on Saturday and chipped in a secondary assist on Sunday courtesy a faceoff win. Marner was held off the scoresheet in both games over the weekend and didn't generate a shot on net on Sunday.

Did Marner have an extra bounce in his step as he returned to the scene of Thursday's big win?

"Yeah, maybe a little bit," said winger Bobby McMann with a grin. "Probably some good memories come back pretty quick, so I'm sure he's happy."

Marner made a great pass to set up Connor McDavid for the overtime winner inside a raucous TD Garden.

"We're expecting another emotional game tonight," Lorentz said. "Obviously Toronto-Boston, this is a big rivalry, so I know [Marner and Matthews] will be up for this one too."

It won't be the same, of course, but Tuesday's game should be intense as Boston currently sits outside a playoff spot.

"Any time we play Toronto, sometimes you can throw out a lot of the X's and O's," interim Bruins coach Joe Sacco told reporters on Monday. "It's more about the emotion of the game and the competitiveness and the sense of urgency."

Boston ended Toronto's season in a seven-game series last year.

"It's definitely a little bit more emotional with the recent history," said McMann, who missed the playoffs due to injury. "They are a good team and they play really hard, and they may even play a little harder against us. We gotta be ready for it. It's usually dictated in the first 10 minutes of the game, which way it might go, so we have to come out hard."

The Leafs have scored first in all three games against the Bruins this season.

After losing the first game of the season against Boston in overtime, the Leafs have won two consecutive games against the Bruins in regulation. Toronto's top line dominated the last game against Boston on Jan. 4, with Matthew Knies producing his first career hat trick. Knies and Marner finished the 6-4 win with five points each.

ContentID(1.2257607): 'More about the emotion of the game' as Leafs face desperate Bruins

---

After three playoff series against each other, Marner and Brad Marchand finally found themselves on the same side at the 4 Nations Face-Off. And Marner noticed that they have similar personalities.

"He's got a really good sense of humour," said centre John Tavares, who played with Marchand at the 2016 World Cup. "Obviously, I've talked a lot about Mitchy's energy and the juice that he brings to the locker room every single day and the type of vibe that he has about him that's infectious around our group. I would say it's different, unique in their own way, but the same type of type of idea in terms of always bringing a type of energy to the group that's very impactful."

Marchand has been happy to stir the pot against the Leafs over the years. Whether it's kissing and licking Leo Komarov, tweeting about Marner's contractual situation, or chirping the bench after a controversial play that injured Timothy Liljegren last year. That incident sparked a Leafs team meeting about the lack of a response.

"When you get together like they did for this tournament and you're playing for your country, all that goes out the window for the tournament," Berube said. "But it's back to normal now, you know. It went away for a bit and now it's back to normal."

The coach laughed.

"It's kind of weird how you have to go right back to hating each other a little bit again," Lorentz said, "but they obviously have that respect for each other."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 26, 2025

William Nylander is second in the NHL in goals this season with 33. There's a possibility that he could hit 50 for the first time and maybe even challenge Edmonton Oiler Leon Draisaitl for the Rocket Richard Trophy.

Nylander leads the Leafs with five 5-on-6 goals this season, but wasn't looking to pad that statistic over the weekend. In the last two games, Nylander found himself on the ice with the opposing net empty and Toronto up by two goals.

In both situations, Nylander passed to Pontus Holmberg, who scored.

"Willy just tries to make the right play – whether it's setting up a teammate or putting it in himself," said Tavares. "He's just trying to do what he can to help the team win."

"He makes in-game reads and he sees whatever's most fit," McMann said. "That's why he's had so much success is he just reads and reacts and takes whatever play's there and, at that time, it's a pass."

The two goals allowed Holmberg to raise his season total to five.

"It's always good to see guys throughout our lineup contribute and get on the board and feel good about themselves," Tavares added.

Nylander is up to three empty-net assists this season.

"He's done that a couple times this year," said Berube. "He's an unselfish guy that way."

Nylander hasn't scored since posting a hat trick in Calgary in the third last game before the break. He's now on pace for 47 goals and has fallen nine goals behind Draisaitl.

Lorentz picked up an assist in both games over the weekend. He could have had a goal if not for a bizarre play in Sunday's game.

Lorentz broke his stick early in a second-period shift and dropped the knob in the faceoff circle in the Blackhawks zone before retrieving a new twig at the bench. Moments later, he was breaking back up the ice on a 2-on-1 rush with David Kampf when the discarded stick got in the way of his scoring chance.

"I could hear the bench shouting, 'Shoot!'" Lorentz recalled. "I wanted Dave on the back side there, but we just wanted to get that chance and a shot on net and I had the whole left side. As soon as I released it, that's when I noticed it. When I fired the puck I was like, 'Just my luck! You've gotta be kidding me!' It's unfortunate, but we scored enough goals to win that game, so we're happy."

Lorentz has never seen something like that happen before.

"Just tough luck, I guess," he said with a shrug.

Perhaps he's due some good luck in Boston?

"That's it," he said. "Yep."

Calle Jankrok joined the Leafs for this road trip. The winger hasn't played since undergoing sports hernia surgery in October.

"He's close," said Berube. "He's very close. There's some things that have to be done with, you know, stuff."

That elicited laughs from the assembled reporters. The plainspoken Berube is not one to wade into medical matters.

"He's feeling excellent," Berube continued. "He has to see the doctor yet and he will do that shortly here, but he's feeling great on the ice. He's really ready to play."

Jankrok, who had the surgery in New York City where the Leafs are heading next, hasn't played since suiting up in a pre-season game on Oct. 3. The team expects that the 33-year-old Swede can make a significant impact down the stretch.

"Very intelligent player," Berube said. "Checks a lot of boxes: penalty killing and end-of-game [shifts], faceoffs, like, he can play any position. He's a real complementary player with good players, which is nice to have, too."

---

Projected Leafs lineup for Tuesday's game:

Knies - Matthews - Marnier

Holmberg - Tavares - Nylander

McMann - Domi - Robertson

Lorentz - Kampf - Steeves

Rielly - Ekman-Larsson

McCabe - Tanev

Benoit - Timmins

Stolarz starts

Woll

TSN.CA LOADED: 02.26.2025