CAROLINA HURRICANES
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The News&Observer

Why the Hurricanes are close to eliminating the Capitals from the NHL playoffs

By: Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen (31) deflects a shot by Washington Capitals right wing Brand Duhaime (22) in the second period during Game 4 of their series on Monday, May 12, 2025 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen (31) deflects a shot by Washington Capitals right wing Brand Duhaime (22) in the second period during Game 4 of their series on Monday, May 12, 2025 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

Raleigh

Every NHL coach in the Stanley Cup playoffs, from Rod Brind'Amour to Paul Maurice, has the same check list/wish list:

▪ Stay healthy.

▪ Win special teams.

▪ Win five-on-five play.

▪ Get contributions from everyone.

▪ Timely goaltender saves.

So far for the Carolina Hurricanes, the boxes have been pretty much checked. That's why they'll go into Game 5 against the Washington Capitals on Thursday with a 3-1 lead in the second-round series and the chance to close it out and move into the Eastern Conference final.

The Hurricanes have been without major injuries. Goalie Frederik Andersen did miss a game after his collision in net with forward Timo Meier of the New Jersey Devils, and forward Mark Jankowski has been out a few games with an undisclosed injury that Brind'Amour has indicated is not serious. That's it.

The Canes' penalty killing has been spot on – 25 of 27 kills. The power play has produced nine goals. All five of the Canes' goals in a 5-2 win Monday in Game 4 came at even strength.

The Canes, rolling four lines in waves, have gotten eight goals in nine playoff games from Andrei Svechnikov but also big goals from Eric Robinson and Jack Roslovic. Defenseman Sean Walker scored another big one Monday for a 4-2 lead in the third period after the Caps had made a push. Defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere had the game's first goal, always important.

"We need everyone," defenseman Dmitry Orlov said Monday after the game. "Sometimes, it's different guys who make a nice play, but we need everyone."

May 10, 2025; Raleigh, North Carolina, USA; Carolina Hurricanes goaltender Frederik Andersen (31) looks on during the warmups before the game against the Washington Capitals in game three of the second round of the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center. Mandatory Credit: James Guillory-Imagn Images

May 10, 2025; Raleigh, North Carolina, USA; Carolina Hurricanes goaltender Frederik Andersen (31) looks on during the warmups before the game against the Washington Capitals in game three of the second round of the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center. Mandatory Credit: James Guillory-Imagn Images James Guillory James Guillory-Imagn Images

But it has been Andersen, the guy they call "Fredzilla," who has been the difference in the playoffs and against the Caps. In his eight playoff games, the big Dane has a 6-1 record with a 1.41 goals-against average.

His .935 save percentage is the best of any goalie with more than one playoff game, and he has a .933 save percentage against high-danger shots.

"I think it's apparent the confidence he's giving us," Walker said Monday. "We can play a lot more aggressive. Mistakes are going to happen but he's been bailing us out tons.

"We don't want to rely on him as much as we have (with) some of the Grade A (scoring chances) we're giving up. But he's playing really well and giving us a chance every game."

Each game, Andersen has turned back the Caps' early thrusts, whether it be denying Tom Wilson on a first-shift breakaway or Taylor Raddysh at point-blank range in the slot or whatever threat he has faced in patrolling the crease.

Andersen, who always portrays a calm, almost stoic demeanor, has not faced a ton of rubber in the series but has kept the Canes from having to play from behind early in games.

"He has done a nice job of always seemingly staying ready," Brind'Amour said Tuesday. "You have to be a pro about it and for me that's what he has done real well for us, being steady."

The Caps had 21 shots in Game 4 at the Lenovo Center. They scored on two of their six shots in the third period – the second a 5-on-3 goal by Alexander Ovechkin, who finally found a way to get the puck past Andersen.

At times, inactivity in net can be discomforting for a goaltender. They like to talk about "feeling the puck" and settling in and maintaining focus, and not being caught napping when there's little action in the zone and then a sudden breakaway or odd-man rush.

"You just try to be ready for that next save," Andersen said. "I guess you can say that every time, and it's a cliche, but just try to be in the moment, make the save. You don't get to

choose when you get a shot-against as a goalie. You just have to be ready for it."

Andersen, who now has played in 80 playoff games, never appears flustered. He remains composed, his face a blank, even when he does allow a goal.

Canes backup goalie Pyotr Kochetkov is more the combative type who will show his emotions at times. Andersen does not.

Carolina Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen (31) talks with defenseman Bret Burns (8) during practice on Friday, May 2, 2025 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen (31) talks with defenseman Bret Burns (8) during practice on Friday, May 2, 2025 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

"Our goalies are polar opposites in that regard," Brind'Amour said. "You've got to be who you are, you've got to know who you are. (Anderson) is real comfortable in that and that's what makes him successful."

Andersen, 35, is one of the Canes players along with a Brent Burns or a Taylor Hall who have put in a lot of good years in the league without winning a Cup. They're willing to do what's needed to get through playoffs that "drag on" for two months, as Brind'Amour put it, to get to where they want to go.

"That's what all hockey players know," Brind'Amour said, "that it is worth it."

Profile Image of Chip Alexander

In more than 40 years at The N&O, Chip Alexander has covered the N.C. State, UNC, Duke and East Carolina beats, and now is in his 15th season on the Carolina Hurricanes beat. Alexander, who has won numerous writing awards at the state and national level, covered the Hurricanes' move to North Carolina in 1997 and was a part of The N&O's coverage of the Canes' 2006 Stanley Cup run.

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The Athletic

Ranking the 16 possible Stanley Cup Final matchups, based purely on narratives

By: Sean McIndoe

Once the first round of playoffs was over, we could say goodbye to eight teams. And more importantly for our purposes today, we could also say goodbye to 48 potential Stanley Cup Final matchups.

Sorry, anyone hoping for Blues vs. Canadiens in a rematch of the 1969 final, or Kings vs. Senators in a re-litigation of the Dion Phaneuf trade. Losing half of our playoff teams means we lose three-quarters of our possible final combinations — thanks, math — bringing us down to a manageable 16. Gosh, that almost feels like the right number for a ranking.

To be clear, we're going to be going from the worst possible matchup to the best, based purely on narratives and vibes. After all, why was Stars/Avalanche the best and most memorable series of the first round? Because the two teams were super-talented and played close games at a high level? Fool! It was because of Mikko Rantanen and the power of the revenge game.

That's one area we'll look at in this list, although there are other areas to explore. We'll also toss you a few YouTube clips, just to keep that attention span humming. We'll start at 16 and work our way down to the best possible matchup. Here we go …

16. Panthers vs. Jets

Or, as the narrative will call it: The one that makes American fans think NFL preseason started early.

Regular season: They played a rare interconference home-and-home in November, with each team getting a regulation win on home ice.

Revenge potential: It's pretty much Nate Schmidt, although Dominic Toninato did play a season in Florida years ago, and we all definitely know who that is.

Random guy who played for both teams: Joey Crabb had a cool name.

Old clips to get you fired up: Fun fact, Mark Scheifele has fought Matthew Tkachuk and Aaron Ekblad, making the Panthers the only team he's dropped the gloves against twice.

Hey, that's a pretty good matchup for the 16 spot, which just tells us that pretty much all of these will have strong potential. Onward …

15. Oilers vs. Capitals

Or, as the narrative will call it: Connor McDavid vs. Alex Ovechkin in a battle of legendary top picks who represent different eras.

Regular season: The Caps won both, including a 7-3 blowout on home ice in which they lit up Calvin Pickard.

Revenge potential: Basically none, with apologies to Connor Brown.

Random guy who played for both teams: Remember that year Esa Tikkanen just randomly showed up in Washington for a few months and almost helped the Capitals win the Stanley Cup?

Old clip to get you fired up: Is this the best backcheck of Ovechkin's career? It might be. Is it the only backcheck of Ovechkin's career? Look, don't be a hater.

14. Panthers vs. Stars

Or, as the narrative will call it: The Finland rematch, aka the Sauna Series.

Regular season: They played those two Global Series games in Tampere at the start of November, with the Panthers winning both.

Revenge potential: Nothing great, although Stars players Evgenii Dadonov, Alexander Petrovic and Mason Marchment all played for the Panthers at one point.

Random guy who played for both teams: There are at least four Hall of Famers on the list: Jaromir Jagr, Eddie Belfour, Joe Nieuwendyk and Dino Ciccarelli if we count the North Stars. But of course, the correct answer here is "Tim Thomas in that one weird year where he didn't even bother to get new pads."

Old clip to get you not remotely fired up: Can I interest you in the two coaches having coffee with each other? No? Well, the NHL apparently thought it would be riveting, so that's what you get. It's more fun if you pretend that "your mom used to make cinnamon buns" is an insult.

No? Not exciting enough? OK, how about this bonus clip of Jamie Benn getting clotheslined by a linesman?

13. Stars vs. Maple Leafs

Or, as the narrative will call it: The team that got Mikko Rantanen vs. the team that tried to trade Mitch Marner for him.

(Unless Nick Robertson can make it back into a top-nine role, at which point this becomes a brother vs. brother battle and might move up a few spots.)

Regular season: They split the series, with each team winning in the other's rink.

Revenge potential: No superstars, but it has a quantity-over-quality thing going, as the Stars have Cody Ceci, Mason Marchment, Colin Blackwell and Ilya Lyubushkin while the Leafs have Chris Tanev and Max Domi. And don't forget to act surprised when Jani Hakanpää makes his dramatic comeback late in the series on two robo-skeleton knees.

Random guy who played for both teams: I will eventually forgive Benoit Hogue for having zero points in a seven-game series loss to the Blackhawks in 1995, but today is not that day.

Old clip to get you fired up: Wendel Clark scores a goal in his return to the Leafs lineup, aka the happiest I have ever been.

(Fun fact: I just watched the clip linked above about a dozen times and was smiling ear-to-ear and then realized that, as of very recently, that moment is closer in time to the Leafs' last Stanley Cup win than it is to the present day, at which point I closed my laptop and just stared at the wall for three hours.)

12. Maple Leafs vs. Golden Knights

Or, as the narrative will call it: An Original Six team trying to win its first Cup in 58 years against an expansion team trying to win its second in 24 months.

Regular season: They split two games, with each team picking up a regulation win on home ice.

Revenge potential: Max Pacioretty would be the story here. He was an early building block for the Golden Knights, coming over in the Nick Suzuki trade in 2019. But he was dealt to Carolina the year before they won the Cup, and seemed just about done before finding new life as one of several Maple Leaf OGWAC stories.

He'd be about it, unless Ryan Reaves, Ilya Samsonov or Ben Hutton worked their way into the series.

Random guy who played for both teams: He's hardly random, but in this house, we never pass up the chance to show some respect to Phil Kessel.

Old clip to get you fired up: Here's Marc-Andre Fleury robbing Jake Gardiner in 2019, sealing a sixth straight Leafs loss that cost Mike Babcock his job.

11. Stars vs. Capitals

Or, as the narrative will call it: The battle of the NFC East? I mean, it's not like New York or Philadelphia will be making a final anytime soon.

Regular season: Each team won its home game.

Revenge potential: Somehow none at all, with zero crossover between the two rosters that I can find. Seriously, I think Caps assistant coach Kirk Muller playing his last few years in Dallas is the best we can do.

Random guy who played for both teams: Where are you at on the whole Sergei Gonchar Hall of Fame debate? I'm not completely sold.

Old clip to get you fired up: Here's a sneaky dirty play from Jamie Benn on John Carlson from a few years ago that almost leads to a rare captain vs. captain fight.

10. Hurricanes vs. Jets

Or, as the narrative will call it: The return of the Southleast Division.

(For you kids out there, the NHL used to have a Southeast Division that never had more than one good team at a time. Yes, the Jets were in it for a few years. No, the NHL apparently doesn't own a map. The point is we all called it the Southleast, loved it very much and mourn it to this day.)

Regular season: They split, with each team winning in regulation at home.

Revenge potential: Not great, but you have Jack Roslovic on Carolina and Haydn Fleury on Winnipeg.

Random guy who played for both teams: Lee Stempniak played for the Jets and the Hurricanes, and also every other NHL team.

Old clip to get you fired up: Jets captain (and former Hurricane) Andrew Ladd scores the OT winner in this 2012 Southleast classic.

9. Hurricanes vs. Golden Knights

Or, as the narrative will call it: The two fun-loving teams from nontraditional markets; aka the matchup that will make your one crusty Canadian uncle who still misses Don Cherry way madder than it probably should.

Regular season: The Hurricanes swept the two-game series in regulation.

Revenge potential: Is it weird that I completely forgot that Noah Hanifin played three years for the Hurricanes at the start of his career? Either way, that six-year gap in between probably means this would be William Carrier.

Random guy who played for both teams: Which of Valentin Zykov's seven career goals was your favorite? He scored all of them for these two teams, and also, that may be a summer column for me.

Old clip to get you fired up: Wait, have these two teams ever produced a memorable moment together? I was close to having to resort to footage of the Pacioretty trade breaking. Instead, let's settle for Andrei Svechnikov and Sebastian Aho combining for an overtime goal.

8. Capitals vs. Jets

Or, as the narrative will call it: The two best teams in the league, based on the regular-season standings, meet in the Final and prove all their doubters wrong.

Regular season: The Jets won both games in overtime. (For what it's worth, if the Caps had won both in regulation, they'd have passed Winnipeg for the Presidents' Trophy.)

Revenge potential: There's only one option, but it's a good one. Pierre-Luc Dubois wanted out of Winnipeg, eventually landed in Washington and would now get to try to cost one of

his former homes the Stanley Cup that's eluded them for almost 50 years.

Random guy who played for both teams: I can't articulate why this is, but I feel like Matt Hendricks is the most "played for Washington and Winnipeg" guy theoretically possible.

Old clip to get you fired up: This is a great OT goal from Tim Stapleton back in the day, but the real highlight is Dustin Byfuglien getting his face mushed into the glass by his teammates about 15 seconds in and just immediately being done with it.

7. Oilers vs. Hurricanes

Or, as the narrative will call it: A rematch of the 2006 final, only this time the Hurricanes can't cheat by running the Oilers' star goaltender, seeing as they don't have one.

Regular season: They split, with the Hurricanes winning in Edmonton in overtime but then losing in regulation at home.

Revenge potential: Pretty decent, featuring Carolina's Taylor Hall and Edmonton's Jeff Skinner, a pair of wingers navigating the back half of their careers while trying to find playoff success that's eluded them. Honestly, watching Hall skate the Cup around the rink in Edmonton might finish off a few Oilers fans for good.

Random guy who played for both teams: I have zero recollection of Geoff "Father of Jake" Sanderson ever playing for the Oilers, but Hockey Reference would not lie to me.

Old clip to get you fired up: I already made Oilers fans sad by referencing the tragedy of 2006, so let's at least pull one of their highlights from that series, as Chris Pronger scores the only penalty shot goal in final history. (The goalies stopped each of the other 12.)

6. Golden Knights vs. Capitals

Or, as the narrative will call it: The rematch of the 2018 final.

Regular season: The Caps won both matchups in regulation, although the season series was over by mid-November.

Revenge potential: Huge, all thanks to Logan Thompson. After four years in Vegas, Thompson was traded during last summer's draft while he was signing autographs as the Golden Knights' fan ambassador. Now he'd be back, and seeking revenge with the Stanley Cup on the line. Or maybe he'd just be happy to see his old friends, and everyone would try their best and have fun. But let's go with the vengeance angle.

Random guy who played for both teams: Somewhere in Seattle, Chandler Stephenson would watch this series as a single tear rolled down his cheek before landing in a giant pile of money.

Old clip to get you fired up: This was the last known moment that it was safe to touch the water in a Las Vegas fountain.

5. Oilers vs. Maple Leafs

Or, as the narrative will call it: The all-Canadian final in which nobody in the country knows who to cheer for.

Seriously, the Oilers had a potential dynasty handed to them by the draft lottery, even though they already had one in the 1980s, so you can't root for them. But also it's the Leafs, so … yeah.

Or we could just say it's McDavid vs. Matthews. Sure, let's go with that.

Regular season: The Leafs took a pair of 4-3 wins, one in OT on Mitch Marner's 200th career goal.

Revenge potential: Zach Hyman is the big one, although that might play as less of a revenge story and more of a "You sure none of you guys want to take a little less so we can re-sign the future 50-goal scorer?" narrative in Toronto. Also, John Klingberg, why not?

Random guy who played for both teams: There are a ton, but I will never pass up an opportunity to remind everyone that Vincent Damphousse ruled.

Old clip to get you fired up: How good does a Connor McDavid goal have to be for it to be the first autofill on his YouTube search results? This good:

4. Maple Leafs vs. Jets

Or, as the narrative will call it: The all-Canadian final in which everybody in the country knows who to cheer for.

Let's be honest, Jets fans will cheer for the Jets and Leafs fans will cheer for the Leafs, but everyone else in the country who can bear to watch will line up for the Winnipeg bandwagon. And rightly so.

Regular season: Each team won on the other's home ice.

Revenge potential: None. The only player on either roster who's played for the other team is Luke Schenn, and I'm not sure he's really going to seek revenge against a team he's already been on twice.

Random guy who played for both teams: I'm invoking my longstanding "the Jets are the Jets" rule to remember how great Eddie Olczyk was in the 1980s and early 1990s. And also to remind everyone about that trade story.

Old clip to get you fired up: No. 1 and 2 picks Auston Matthews and Patrik Laine play dueling breakaways in overtime in their first meeting back in 2016.

Hey, cool, just a few weeks into his career and Matthews was already in playoff form.

(Editor's note: Delete this.)

No.

3. Panthers vs. Golden Knights

Or, as the narrative will call it: The two most recent champs face off in a rematch from 2023.

Regular season: They split it, with Florida winning in OT in October and Vegas getting a regulation win in January.

Revenge potential: Medium-low. Reilly Smith is back in Vegas, although he was there for the 2023 final, too. But with apologies to guys such as Tobias Björnfot, Robert Hägg and Grigori Denisenko, our only other option here is Tomáš Nosek.

Random guy who played for both teams: Remember when Brandon Pirri was going to be really good?

Old clip to get you fired up: The wild final moments of Game 4 from the 2023 final.

2. Oilers vs. Panthers

Or, as the narrative will call it: The rematch from the greatest collapse that never was.

Regular season: The Panthers collected a pair of one-goal regulation wins.

Revenge potential: Pretty minimal, unless Josh Brown or Jesse Puljujärvi can get into the series. But of course, the real revenge would be in the Oilers getting back for last year's heartbreak. And that would be more than enough to make this fantastic.

Random guy who played for both teams: I kind of miss Radek Dvořák.

Old clip to get you fired up: When should you watch this clip? RIGHT NOW!

1. Hurricanes vs. Stars

Or, as the narrative will call it: The Mikko Rantanen revenge series, part two.

Regular season: Carolina took both games in regulation.

Revenge potential: You saw the part about Rantanen, right? By the way, I mean part two in the "Terminator" sense, where the first one featured a ton of destruction but the second one somehow takes it up to an even higher level while flipping the script. Usually we talk about the player getting revenge against the team that moved him, but it also works the other way this time, especially after Rantanen basically shunned the Hurricanes in his stint there.

And of course, we'd also have Logan Stankoven on the other side. Seriously, this would be so good.

Random guy who played for both teams: Did you know Erik Cole had eight penalty shots in his career? That seems weirdly high, right?

Old clip to get you fired up: Here's Rantanen on deadline day, talking about how happy he is to sign an extension in Dallas.

Does that sound like a guy who hates the Carolina Hurricanes and wants them to be sad? Not really, no, but if we need to, we'll pretend.

(Photo of Dmitry Kulikov and Connor McDavid: Perry Nelson / Imagn Images)

Mikko Rantanen's 'smile is coming back': Family and friends on playoff dominance and new home with Stars

By: Peter Baugh

Inside their home in Nousiainen, Finland, Hannu and Hannamaija Rantanen keep a white trophy case dedicated to their children's athletic successes.

Their daughters, Laura and Noora, are both decorated floorball players, with Noora still an active player in Switzerland. The left side of the case is packed with the sisters' trophies, medals and plaques from their careers playing the sport, which is similar to floor hockey.

The right side is for their 28-year-old son, Mikko.

With framed photos sitting on top, it features game-used pucks and awards from his NHL career and his time with the Finnish national team, as well as memorabilia from the 2022 Stanley Cup, which Rantanen won with Colorado. There are at least 100 items in all, covering his journey from a youth player to the biggest stages of the NHL.

There's no space left. But with how Rantanen, now on the Dallas Stars, is playing, Hannu and Hannamaija might have to invest in another shelf.

A jam-packed display case doesn't have much room for new Mikko Rantanen memorabilia. (Peter Baugh / The Athletic 2022)

Not that the trophies are what's important to Rantanen's family and friends.

"The most important thing is that he's still the same kid that he was," said Sauli Mattila, a family friend in Finland. "He always has the Mikko smile on his face. … He's making big bucks now, and still nothing has changed."

Recently, Rantanen has had plenty of reasons to smile. His Stars are up 3-1 in their second-round series against the Winnipeg Jets, and he's been one of the most dominant players this postseason. After assisting on one of Mikael Granlund's goals in Game 4, he leads the league with 19 points this postseason.

In the first round, he became the talk of the sports world with four-point periods in back-to-back games. No player had ever done that, in the regular season or postseason. He had a third-period hat trick in Game 7 against the Colorado Avalanche, his former team, willing the Stars to victory after they went down 2-0 in the final period. At one point, he scored or assisted 13 consecutive Dallas goals, also a playoff record.

Despite his recent playoff flourish, this season has been far from easy for Rantanen. In fact, he's had one of the most unorthodox years ever for a superstar player.

Rantanen has been traded twice in 2024-25 — from Colorado to the Carolina Hurricanes, then from Carolina to Dallas — and wound up playing postseason games against the team with which he spent nearly a decade. His dad, Hannu, said he and Hannamaija "know that his mental resources have truly been tested" by the experience.

"We also know that he is very strong mentally," Hannu continued in an email translated from Finnish, "and we think he has shown that."

In January, the Avalanche — the only NHL team Rantanen had ever known — traded him to Carolina in a shocking blockbuster. Rantanen, a pending unrestricted free agent at the time, has said multiple times that he never wanted to leave Colorado. He thought extension negotiations were ongoing and felt the sides had made progress in talks. The deal caught him by surprise.

Rantanen had only two goals and six points in his 13 games with the Hurricanes, but his underlying numbers suggested he would have eventually bounced back in Carolina. The Hurricanes had 59.84 percent of the expected-goal share

with him on the ice at five-on-five and had more than 60 percent of the scoring-chance and shot-attempt shares, according to Natural Stat Trick.

The Hurricanes did not agree to an extension with Rantanen before acquiring him. After considering his options following the trade, he ultimately informed the Hurricanes front office he was not planning on signing an extension. Rather than keep him as a rental for the rest of the season and lose him in free agency, general manager Eric Tulsky decided to trade him again to a team he was willing to extend with: Dallas, one of the Avalanche's Central Division rivals and eventual first-round opponent.

The Stars parted with a hefty package to get him, sending Carolina two first-round picks, two third-round picks and promising young forward Logan Stankoven, who has had a strong playoffs so far with the Hurricanes.

For the Stars, who extended Rantanen on an 8-year, $96 million deal, it was a more-than-worthwhile price for a superstar under contract long-term, as his series-swinging tear against the Avalanche showed. In the aftermath, Sportsnet's Nick Kypreos said Rantanen wanted to go to Dallas to "jam it down Colorado's throat." The quote made the rounds on social media, but Rantanen dispelled it Tuesday.

"That wasn't ever my mindset, why I signed in Dallas," he said. "I was looking at my options, and Dallas was a good team. … I think just the fit, the core here, a lot of good young players, a good goalie. But (vengeance on Colorado) was never my idea. Nothing like that."

"When you think about his journey this year, he's been through a lot," Dallas coach Pete DeBoer added. "And there's been a lot written about him, there's been a lot said about him. There's been a lot of doubters out there, based on situations he's been in, and how it's looked at different points. I think there's a lot of motivation there."

He's certainly looked like it. He started slow against the Avalanche, with only one point in the first four games. But in his past seven games, he has nine goals and 18 points.

Rantanen's production will eventually regress to the mean, but Rantanen's mean in the playoffs was already high before his recent stretch. He has been at least a point-per-game player in seven of his eight postseasons. Among players who have logged at least 82 playoff games, he's sixth all-time with 1.30 points per game. The 12 players directly behind him on the list are either in the Hall of Fame (including Mark Messier, Peter Forsberg and Joe Sakic) or will be once their careers are done (Nikita Kucherov and Sidney Crosby).

Rantanen's scoring rate could fluctuate in the coming years, but he's clearly shown he's an elite producer at the most important times. This isn't a flash in the pan.

"Rule number one: You always keep the dawgs … #96," Rantanen's former Avalanche teammate Nazem Kadri posted on X after his three-point performance in Game 3 against the Jets.

At 6-foot-4, 215 pounds, Rantanen is a force on the ice and can skate well enough to keep up with the game's top players. Former Avalanche teammate Jonathan Drouin once referred to him as "built in a lab." Sakic, now Colorado's president of hockey operations, said early in the 2021-22 season that, "When he has the puck, you're not getting it from him." He likened him to Peter Forsberg in that regard.

"His combination of size, speed and skill — you can't have enough of that in the playoffs," said Jack Johnson, who was teammates with Rantanen on three playoff Avalanche teams, including the championship one in 2022. "Physicality is always ramped up. That's a big part of his game. He's a physical player. He might not necessarily be running guys through the boards, but you can't move him either."

Plus, Johnson added, Rantanen is a pure goal scorer who can come through in big moments. The Stars have seen that in his first postseason run with the team.

The Avalanche experienced it when he was with them, too. Rantanen scored a pair of playoff overtime winners in Colorado (2019 against Calgary and 2021 against Vegas) and had seven goals in a seven-game first-round loss to Seattle in 2023. His goal-scoring rate was lower than normal during the Avalanche's 2022 run, but he led the team's forwards with 25 points in 20 playoff games.

"If he's not feeling great or it's not his night or he's fighting it a little bit, he just finds a way to make a play a game or two to get on the scoresheet, and he's really consistent at it," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said during that season. "To produce even when you're not at your best, it's hard to do. It takes a special talent to do that."

Johnson first got to know Rantanen during Colorado's 2021 training camp. The Finnish winger's personality struck him immediately. He never seemed to have a bad day. In Johnson's eyes, that even-keeled demeanor helped the team navigate highs and lows during the playoffs.

That's why he wasn't surprised by what Rantanen did against the Avs in Game 7 this year.

"That's how good of a player he is," Johnson said. "It's just weird to see him do it in a different jersey."

Despite that, Johnson said he will "always be a Mikko fan." Bednar expressed a similar sentiment during the Dallas series.

"You're never going to hear me say a bad word about Mikko Rantanen," the coach said.

Nor will you hear one from Mattila, who became close with Hannu when their sons were teammates as children. Mattila has traveled multiple times to North America with the Rantanen family to watch Mikko, and he and Hannu wore burgundy and blue Avalanche-themed blazers to games. They also had Finland-themed jackets made for the 4 Nations Face-Off.

When Hannu first proposed a trip in 2018, Mattila remembers asking about the cost. Hannu told him to simply bring his passport and a toothbrush. Mikko took care of everything else, from tickets to flights to lodging.

"Sometimes it's hard to think: I've known him since he was a little kid, and now he's doing those things for me, and all the other people also," Mattila said. "But he doesn't make you feel (uncomfortable). … It just makes everything so easy, so everyone feels good about it."

Rantanen was on the Hurricanes when his family traveled to the 4 Nations Face-Off. Mattila didn't talk to him about the

Colorado trade or his looming decision with Carolina while on the trip, but he could sense he was going through a tough time. The situation was weighing on him.

Now that Rantanen is settled and thriving on the ice in Dallas, that has changed.

“We’re getting back to ‘same old Mikko’ in his face,” Mattila said. “The smile is coming back.”

— The Athletic’s Mark Lazarus contributed reporting from Dallas.

(Top photo: Michael Martin / NHLI via Getty Images)

Peter Baugh is a staff writer for The Athletic NHL based in New York. He has previously been published in the Columbia Missourian, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Kansas City Star, Politico and the Washington Post. A St. Louis native, Peter graduated from the University of Missouri and previously covered the Missouri Tigers and the Colorado Avalanche for The Athletic. Follow Peter on Twitter @Peter_Baugh

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025



Shane's take: Canes' depth shines in Game 4 win

By: Shane Willis, Carolina Hurricanes correspondent

The Hurricanes showcased their depth in a thrilling Game 4, with standout performances from Frederik Andersen, Taylor Hall and Sean Walker leading the charge.

Posted 5/13/2025, 3:18:03 PM Updated 5/13/2025, 6:24:28 PM

Shane Willis: 'There's no pressure on the Carolina Hurricanes (to win game 5)

Shane Willis, Carolina Hurricanes correspondent

Former Carolina Hurricanes player and current analyst Shane Willis offers his insight into the Canes' playoff run with a day-after recap of each game.

Shane's take

Watch More

The Hurricanes continue to make great efforts across the board, and their depth shined through in Game 4. Frederik Andersen slammed the door early in Game 4 to allow their offense to break through. Shayne 'Ghost' Gostisbehere, Sean Walker and Taylor Hall provided the depth scoring advantage to push this series to the brink.

Stars of the game

Taylor Hall – Hall has been a perfect fit for Brind'Amour since arriving. He makes so many plays in a game and has tremendous hockey IQ which led to his goal.

Sean Walker – Sean does the little things every night and tonight is rewarded with a goal. A BIG reason Tulsky went out and got this player was for this time of year!

Frederik Andersen – Freddie is playing his best hockey when it matters, period!

What the Canes need to do next

The start of Game 5 will be crucial. Taking the crowd out of the game and creating more frustration for the Caps will give the Canes the upper hand.

Coach Rod Brind'Amour will stress skating to the team, which will allow them to maintain two things:

First, being in good defensive position and being over the top of the Caps players taking away offensive chances.

Second, staying out of the penalty box! If you are skating and have a puck possession, you limit the chances of trips to the box.

>> Shane's take: An all-around effort earns Canes shutout in Game 3, series lead

>> Shane's take: Canes can't match Caps' desperation in Game 2

>> Shane's take: Canes stay true to themselves in overwhelming Caps in Game 1

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

Steady Freddie & Dangerous Depth Carry Canes In Game 4

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

"All over the board we had guys stepping up..."

© NHLI via Getty Images

By Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Hurricanes.com

May 13, 2025

RALEIGH, N.C. - With yet another win on home ice on Monday, the Carolina Hurricanes now hold a 3-1 series lead and are just one victory away from eliminating the Washington Capitals.

The prevailing theory ahead of the best-of-seven set was that it would be a long one, and if Washington wants its season to continue, it will be. But Carolina has earned its advantage, not necessarily through singular starring performances - Frederik Andersen notwithstanding, we'll get to him - but through production from everywhere in the lineup.

Some nights, it'll take a small handful of players dragging everyone into the fight. But to win the Stanley Cup, it'll take more than that.

It'll take nights like Monday, which saw 12 of the team's 18 skaters find the scoresheet, continuing to showcase the buy-in Rod Brind'Amour has received from his entire roster as they responded to each Washington surge.

“There’s no panic when things don’t go our way. Tonight, they’re closing the gap, we just keep playing," said the Canes' coach. "Our older guys have been through this, or even our not-so-old guys have been through it for a few years, so there’s a little bit of maturity there.”

1_250512_CARvsWSH_RD2_GM4_JL100269

© Josh Lavallee / Carolina Hurricanes

Gallery: Round 2, Game 4 vs. WSH

Freddie's On Fire...

It's become almost a broken record at this point, but the latest victory would not have been possible without some early, timely saves from Frederik Andersen.

Last night, he was tasked with five high-danger chances in the first period, again keeping Washington off the board before his team eventually swung momentum in their direction with the inaugural first-period goal of the series.

Although the Canes feel as if they're still asking too much of their backstop, at least to start games, the saves that they've been getting have brought a boost to the troops.

“It’s so apparent, the confidence he’s giving us. We can play a lot more aggressive [when he's playing like that]," Sean Walker identified post-game. "Mistakes are going to happen, but he’s been bailing us out tons. Just going out there every night, knowing that he’s back there, he’s playing unbelievable, really, it’s really a comforting feeling for us back there. We don’t want to rely on him as much as we have [and there are] some Grade-As that we’re giving up, but those are things we’re going to look at. But again, he’s playing really well and it’s giving us a great chance every night.”

Allowing his team to get the first goal of the night in the last two outings, perhaps equally as impressive, Andersen has remained locked in thereafter, even when the Canes have applied their patented pressure on Washington, forcing the man they call "Zilla" to go long stretches without seeing a shot.

"It's not easy to stay ready sometimes when there's maybe a big lull in the game, or you're not getting a ton of action. He's done a nice job of always seemingly staying ready," Rod Brind'Amour said on Tuesday. "You still have those high-quality chances, like early in the game last night, there were a couple there. To me, that's such a huge part of it, because now all of a sudden, you're able to settle us down and allow us to keep playing. You have to be a pro about it, and to me, that's what he's done really well for us, being steady."

Walker's Stock Continues To Rise...

While Walker was complimentary of Andersen last night, several others within the locker room praised Walker just as much.

"Coming out party" may not be the proper application for the first-year Hurricane's playoffs thus far, because if you ask Brind'Amour, he's been impressive all year, but following up a remarkable defensive performance in Game 3 with more

back end brilliance and a a multi-point effort in Game 4, there's no shortage of buzz surrounding Walker at the moment.

“He’s skating well. He’s got skill offensively and defensively. He plays hard. He’s the perfect fit for this organization and for us he’s played great all season," Dmitry Orlov shared.

Most of the season, Walker has been attached to the hip of Shayne Gostisbehere at five-on-five, but for a second consecutive game the right-handed shot spent some third-period time with Jaccob Slavin, a spot occupied by Brent Burns for most of the past two seasons. Brind'Amour was quick to say that the occurrence was because the team wanted Slavin out there more, but throughout the small sample size, Slavin and Walker look strong next to one another.

"Walks has just been solid. I think his game has gone up another level, so he’s earned that ice time and the trust from the group. Clearly, that goal tonight is an indicator of what he’s capable of. I know his numbers maybe weren’t great this year (statistically), but you watched him all year. He had a lot of good opportunities, and he’s capable of doing that," Brind'Amour said post-game.

It can take time to acclimate to new surroundings, but with his first career playoff points now under his belt, it's clear that Walker - and other fellow newcomers to this year's club - is finding his footing in Raleigh.

“It’s amazing...All over the board, we had guys stepping up," said Seth Jarvis, who also scored on Monday. "That’s why you bring those guys in, and to make the impact they had tonight was amazing.”

Nikishin Sighting...

Before last night's action got underway, fans were caught by surprise when defenseman Alexander Nikishin took to the ice for warmups. His first time on the ice with the team pregame it's another step closer to his eventual debut, and the latest advancement in his journey.

Brind'Amour was asked if the decision to have him on the ice was due to somebody being a game-time decision, and the head coach shot that down, instead insisting that it was just to keep the defenseman as close to the flow of playing as possible.

"We were just kind of giving him the routine," Brind'Amour said. "There's probably a good chance we'll have to use him at some point, but that was really the reasoning."

Also pressed if Nikishin is the next man up on the blue line, Brind'Amour wouldn't commit to that either, alluding to the fact that the team has other fresh bodies, such as Scott Morrow, Ty Smith, and Riley Stillman, ready to go, but he did say that it's possible.

"We've got a couple of options. We've had looks at other guys, so we know and there's a comfort in knowing what you're getting, versus not really sure," the head coach continued. "It would be a tough situation to plop a kid in there who hasn't played a game over here with these stakes. But I just think we're trying to give him every step of the way. Hopefully, we don't have to make those decisions, but if we do, we'll figure it out."

Speaking of the blue line, Brind'Amour said Jalen Chatfield, who got roughed up in Game 3 and "tweaked something" at the end of Game 4, is expected to be fine for Thursday's Game 5 in D.C.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

Capitals 'have to find a way to score' in Game 5, stay alive in Eastern 2nd Round

By: Dan Rosen

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Tom Wilson directly laid out what the Washington Capitals need to do to come back against the Carolina Hurricanes in the Eastern Conference Second Round.

"It's going to have to be all four lines one after another pushing, pushing, pushing," Wilson said after a 5-2 loss in Game 4 at Lenovo Center on Monday that put Washington behind 3-1 in the best-of-7 series. "And we're going to have to slowly try to push them out of this series."

The Capitals better start finishing their scoring chances the way they did during the regular season if they plan to push this series against the Hurricanes beyond Game 5 at Capital One Arena in Washington on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; MAX, truTV, TNT, SN, TVAS).

According to NHL EDGE Stats, the Capitals have not scored on a high-danger shot on goal in the series, going 0-for-24. The Hurricanes have goals on four of their 24 high-danger shots, including on two of five in Game 4 (one was Andrei Svechnikov's empty-net goal).

Carolina goalie Frederik Andersen leads the Stanley Cup Playoffs with a .933 save percentage on high-danger shots on goal, stopping 42 of 45.

"We just have to find a way to score a goal," Washington captain Alex Ovechkin said. "Obviously he's feeling it right now, but we have to find dirty goals, rebound, redirect. We're going to take a deep breath. The series is not over."

The Capitals were one of the better teams in the League during the regular season at producing on their high-danger shots on goal, scoring on 137 of 616, a shooting percentage of 22.2 percent that was fourth best in the League.

They were above the League average in high-danger shots on goal (593.9) and way above the League average in goals on high-danger shots (119.9).

It's been a much different story against the Hurricanes, and it's not all because of Andersen.

"I think he's still seeing a lot of pucks pretty easily and we're not making it hard on him," Capitals forward Connor McMichael said. "That said, he's playing lights-out right now and everything he sees he's going to save. We still have room to improve in that area and next game we'll have to get some more traffic on him."

Part of Washington's problem is it's simply not generating enough quality looks to turn the law of averages in its favor.

Carolina can live with allowing six high-danger shots on goal per game because it's controlling puck possession, forechecking aggressively to force turnovers, and putting pucks at the net from just about everywhere.

The Hurricanes have 126 shots on goal and 329 total shot attempts in the series.

The Capitals have 77 shots on goal and 187 shot attempts, of which 50 have been blocked, including 15 in each of the past two games, both losses.

The simple math says the more you shoot, the better chance you have to score.

"You know they're a big shot-volume team and they get their minutes in your [offensive] zone, so sometimes you have to be comfortable with getting a really big opportunity every couple of minutes or once or twice a period," Washington forward Pierre-Luc Dubois said before Game 4.

But when the Capitals do get the puck and potentially have a chance, there seems to be a bit of hesitation to shoot when clearly that could lead to a high-danger chance through a tip, deflection or rebound.

"I don't think that's an overriding theme, but I would agree at certain points we need to do a better job of shooting the pucks when we get into some spots for sure," Washington coach Spencer Carbery said. "I don't think it's a massive issue, but there have been times where I've thought through this series, 'Shoot the puck,' in my head, where maybe you have as well. There's that, and then you have to get your shot through too. We get a ton of shots blocked. Those are good situations. You've got to find a way to get the puck through."

The Capitals got enough through and connected on enough high-danger shots during the regular season to finish second in the League with an average of 3.49 goals per game.

They've scored six goals in four games against the Hurricanes, five with Andersen in net, none from the high-danger area.

Sure, they need to generate more from there, but to push Carolina beyond Game 5, it's either finish or be finished.

"Our guys will fight, just like they did [in Game 4]," Carbery said. "We're down 2-0, they reset, we fought right to the end. It doesn't work out, but I don't expect anything different. We've fought all year. I know our guys. I know the character of our group."

Blake contributing for Hurricanes in playoffs after following dad's footsteps to NHL

By: Dan Rosen

21-year-old forward has helped Carolina get to 1 win of Eastern Conference Final

© Getty Images

By Dan Rosen

@drosennhl NHL.com Senior Writer

May 13, 2025

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Jackson Blake is 21 years old, and already the Carolina Hurricanes rookie forward has some NHL bragging rights over his dad.

Jason Blake played 871 NHL regular-season games but never made it out of the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs in six trips. Jackson, in his first NHL postseason, is playing regularly against the Washington Capitals in the Eastern Conference Second Round.

Carolina leads the best-of-7 series 3-1 entering Game 5 at Capital One Arena in Washington on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; MAX, truTV, TNT, SN, TVAS).

"It's the thrill of a lifetime watching him," Jason Blake told NHL.com. "I'm just so proud of him. I've told him a couple times that I played in the playoffs six times and never got out of the first round, but how exciting is this?

"Nothing beats playoff hockey, but to watch your kid out there make plays, I don't know, you just get chills in the stands. I'm on the edge of my seat. There's things I watch and I'm like, 'Holy cow, I can't believe he just did that.'"

Jackson has peripherally been a part of the playoffs before.

He was 7 years old when Jason played for the Anaheim Ducks in the 2011 postseason. He was a toddler when Jason was with the New York Islanders in the 2004 and 2007 playoffs. He watched as a fan at home in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, and as a Hurricanes "Black Ace" last season.

All of it played a role in preparing Jackson for what to expect in the playoffs. It might be the biggest reason why he has looked comfortable in moments that could make a 5-foot-11, 178-pound rookie uncomfortable.

WSH@CAR, Gm3: Blake stuffs in loose puck on power play

Blake has five points (two goals, three assists) in nine games, including a power-play goal in a 4-0 win against the Capitals in Game 3. He has moved around from the top line to the fourth line in the second round and done so with ease, his game and his impact remaining the same. He is net front on the Hurricanes' power play, which is 9-for-30 (30.0 percent) in the playoffs. He's averaging 19:17 of ice time per game, up from 13:51 in the regular season, when he had 34 points (17 goals, 17 assists) in 80 games. He is third among Hurricanes forwards in ice time in the playoffs behind Sebastian Aho (21:06) and Seth Jarvis (20:37).

"I started on the fourth line for half of the year, and I think that was good for me, honestly, to get the pace," Blake said. "I think I'm an offensive guy, a skilled guy and I definitely want to play every minute, and I want to play against their best players, too, see what I can do against those guys.

"I played with 'Fishy' (Aho) and whoever in some games. I'd be on the fourth line but if we were down a goal, (Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour) would jump me up there if I was playing well. Then I think against Vegas about halfway through the year, game 50 or so, he put me with 'Fishy' and 'Svechy' (Andrei Svechnikov) and we had a pretty good game.

"After that, my confidence was just growing and growing, and I played with Fishy the rest of the season pretty much. I know I'm only 21 but I expect a lot of myself. I put a lot of pressure on myself to help the team and do what I can, and I've obviously come a long way since the first game to now."

Brind'Amour knew Blake's game well before the Hurricanes selected him in the fourth round (No. 109) of the 2021 NHL Draft. He and Blake's family have a mutual friend in Raleigh, Colin Muldoon, the director of player development for the Carolina Junior Hurricanes.

"He had been on him since he was in bantam, talking to us about this player, and he was even smaller back then," Brind'Amour said. "He watched him every step of the way and was always throwing reminders at us like, 'This kid is going to be a player.' He was right."

Blake has obvious skill, but it's his hockey sense that gives him an advantage.

"Hockey sense can be many things, but I always think it's you're ahead of the play," Brind'Amour said. "Where guys are, where they should be, both offensively and defensively, having that next play ready before you get it, knowing where it's going. He has that ability."

Jason said his son has always had that.

"When I retired, I spent so much time with him," Jason said. "His IQ, to me, it's off the charts. Someone might say differently. I don't know, he just sees it."

Said Svechnikov: "He feels the game. He always feels where the [defenseman] is behind him, in the corners. He is always actually beating them."

It shouldn't be surprising.

Blake spent part of his childhood in NHL locker rooms. He had a bond with Bobby Ryan when he played with Jason in Anaheim. He could talk to Teemu Selanne, Scott Niedermayer, Ryan Getzlaf, Corey Perry and Saku Koivu. He played knee hockey with their kids.

"I'll tell you this, I was like his sixth favorite player on the Ducks," Jason said. "He had his thing with Bobby Ryan. Bobby Ryan was so nice to him. All the guys were great to him."

To Jackson, that was all just normal.

"You don't realize it until you grow up that not every dad is playing in the NHL," he said. "I didn't realize that until I was like 10 or 11, maybe even 12. … I definitely don't take that for granted now. I grew up with it because I was always in the room with those guys. I learned a lot."

The learning continued in the playoffs last season, when Blake was with the Hurricanes as a Black Ace and working daily with head strength and conditioning coach Bill Burniston.

"I think it helped me a lot coming into training camp, getting to know the staff and kind of know the boys," he said.

Jackson made his NHL debut April 16, 2024, Carolina's final game of the regular season, but said it felt like a throwaway game because the Hurricanes didn't have anything to play for and it had been almost a month since he played his last game for the University of North Dakota.

But a preseason game against the Florida Panthers on Sept. 28 made Blake feel like he might be ready for the NHL this season. He scored a goal on four shots and played 17:23 over 23 shifts.

"That's when I knew I could play in the League," Blake said. "Preseason is not the same, obviously, but I kind of knew in preseason."

About a month later, when the Hurricanes were on a Western Canada road trip, Carolina general manager Eric Tulsky told Jason he should FaceTime his son to tell him that he could move out of the hotel he was staying in and get a place in Raleigh.

Jackson's younger brother, 12-year-old Brooks, videoed Jason doing the FaceTime call.

"I was obviously very emotional," Jason said. "It's the hardest thing to do to make the NHL. I mean, you're part of the one percent, basically, but the tougher thing is to stay in the NHL, and that's what I reiterate to him all the time."

The message has gotten through. Jackson is here to stay for now, for good.

"You watch playoffs growing up, you watch all the teams, towels waving around, but to play it kind of blows it all away, honestly," Blake said. "It's been everything I expected."

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

Which NHL teams have won the most Stanley Cup titles?

The Montreal Canadiens pose for a portrait after defeating the Los Angeles Kings in the 1993 Stanley Cup Final. Bruce Bennett Studios/Getty Images

ESPN

May 13, 2025, 11:14 PM ET

In June 2024, the Florida Panthers clinched their first Stanley Cup title, after defeating the Edmonton Oilers in a thrilling Game 7 finish.

The Montreal Canadiens have had the most Stanley Cup success, notching 23 titles throughout NHL history. Check out the other NHL teams with the most championships below.

Editor's Picks

Which NHL teams have never won a Stanley Cup?

10hESPN

NHL teams with the most wins in a single season

139dKeith Jenkins

Who has scored the most goals in NHL history?

26dKeith Jenkins

23: Montreal Canadiens (86 NHL playoff appearances)

13: Toronto Maple Leafs (74 NHL playoff appearances)

11: Detroit Red Wings (64 NHL playoff appearances)

6: Boston Bruins (77 NHL playoff appearances)

6: Chicago Blackhawks (63 NHL playoff appearances)

5: Edmonton Oilers (27 NHL playoff appearances)

5: Pittsburgh Penguins (37 NHL playoff appearances)

4: New York Islanders (29 NHL playoff appearances)

4: New York Rangers (63 NHL playoff appearances)

4: St. Louis Eagles (10 NHL playoff appearances)

3: Colorado Avalanche (30 NHL playoff appearances)

3: New Jersey Devils (25 NHL playoff appearances)

3: Tampa Bay Lightning (17 NHL playoff appearances)

Advertising

2: Los Angeles Kings (34 NHL playoff appearances)

2: Montreal Maroons (11 NHL playoff appearances)

2: Philadelphia Flyers (40 NHL playoff appearances)

1: Florida Panthers (10 NHL playoff appearances)

1: Anaheim Ducks (14 NHL playoff appearances)

1: Calgary Flames (31 NHL playoff appearances)

1: Carolina Hurricanes (20 NHL playoff appearances)

1: Dallas Stars (37 NHL playoff appearances)

1: St. Louis Blues (46 NHL playoff appearances)

1: Vegas Golden Knights (6 NHL playoff appearances)

1: Washington Capitals (34 NHL playoff appearances)

For more NHL updates, check out the ESPN hub page for breaking news, scores, standings, stats, and more.

2025 Stanley Cup playoffs: Second-round takeaways so far

Multiple Contributor

May 13, 2025, 09:30 AM ET

The second round of the 2025 Stanley Cup playoffs has passed the midway point, with all but one series through Game 4.

What have been the biggest lessons learned through the first part of the second round? Which teams and players have surprised (in either a good or bad way)? How will all of it matter when it comes to the rest of the postseason?

ESPN reporters Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton and Greg Wyshynski break it all down:

Could a recent playoff trend be a good omen for the Stars?

Of course, there's still quite a bit that can change in the Winnipeg Jets-Dallas Stars series. But let's just say that the Stars go on to win the series and advance to the Western Conference finals. It would be their third consecutive conference finals appearance, and their fourth visit since 2020. While they have yet to win the Stanley Cup during that window, does that level of consistency make them the preeminent team in the West?

Editor's Picks

'Understanding what it takes to win': How Jack Eichel became a complete, 200-foot player

2dRyan Clark

Top prospects for the 2025 NHL draft: Updated rankings after U18s, draft lottery

6dRachel Doerrie

Lessons of the Stanley Cup playoffs: Will the high scoring continue? Ewing Theory in Dallas, Winnipeg?

8dGreg Wyshynski

There's no shortage of challengers, with the Vegas Golden Knights winning the Cup in 2023, and the Edmonton Oilers coming within a game of doing so last season. If Dallas makes it to the next round, it will face one of those two.

But what make the Stars' situation one worth contextualizing is how it compares to other teams' since the NHL moved to the Eastern/Western format in 1994. Beating the Jets and getting to a third straight conference finals would make the Stars just the fourth team under the current format to earn that distinction. The Detroit Red Wings did it first (from 1995 through 1998) and won two Stanley Cups. They did it again from 2007 through 2009, winning another title in 2008.

The most recent team was the Chicago Blackhawks, who did it from 2013 through 2015 and won two Cups. -- Clark

Toronto needs a new tactic

The Maple Leafs looked like fish out of water in Game 4 against the Florida Panthers, a brutal 2-0 shutout loss in which the reigning Stanley Cup champions were in top form. Florida smothered Toronto with sustained offensive zone pressure, leading the Leafs to take multiple penalties and generally kill any ounce of momentum they tried to generate.

If it weren't for a stellar (wasted) performance from goaltender Joseph Woll, the final score would have been a blowout, because Toronto had no answers for Florida's heat.

Sam Bennett nets goal to double Panthers' lead

Sam Bennett's goal gives the Panthers a 2-0 lead halfway throughout the third period.

Unlike earlier in the series, when the Leafs were capitalizing on rush chances and literally spinning Sergei Bobrovsky in circles, the Panthers battened down the hatches to keep Toronto on the outside while boxing out better in front of Bobrovsky. If they can maintain that, and the Leafs can't make adjustments, the Panthers are looking at a third straight Eastern Conference finals appearance

Should Toronto want to make one of its own, it's time to make some changes, and for its top skaters to step up. Mitch Marner doesn't have a shot on goal since he scored the winner in Game 2. Auston Matthews doesn't have a goal yet in the second round and hasn't registered one against Florida in nine career postseason tilts.

Toronto coach Craig Berube said after Sunday's loss that there are players the Leafs need more from -- no names required. It's clear. Both teams have owned home ice in the series so far. Toronto has that advantage still as this one becomes a best-of-three. The question is, what sort of counterpunch will the Leafs throw now that Florida's claws are out and sharpened? -- Shilton

Can Hellebuyck be trusted for the Olympics?

The first question Team USA's brain trust will need to answer before the 2026 Winter Olympic men's hockey tournament: Are the contests in Milan considered home games or road games? Because the answer could determine its starting goaltender.

At this point, Winnipeg Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck's struggles on the road in the Stanley Cup playoffs have reached the point of absurdity. He has won the Vezina Trophy twice in his career and will win it again this season. He's a finalist for the Hart (MVP). There isn't much debate, statistically or anecdotally, that he's the best goaltender in the world ... in the regular season.

In his past 20 playoff games, Hellebuyck is 7-13 with a .866 save percentage and a 3.90 goals-against average. The balance of those putrid numbers have come on the road, where Hellebuyck has lost eight of his past nine starts with an .835 SP and a 5.20 GAA.

After the first round of the playoffs against the St. Louis Blues, the bar for Hellebuyck was set at "can he get through a road game without being pulled?" The good news in Game 3 against Dallas is that he cleared that bar. The bad news is that he lost again and wasn't very good, letting in a fluttering Roope Hintz shot for Dallas' first goal, and then scoring what the NHL ruled was an own goal on Alex Petrovic's kicked puck in the third.

"He had to make some big stops. Him and [Dallas goalie Jake] Oettinger, they were going kind of toe to toe," Jets coach Scott Arniel said after the game. "But we're going to be judged -- not just Connor -- by what happens on the road. We've got to win."

Connor Hellebuyck has struggled on the road in playoffs throughout his otherwise impressive career. Associated Press

Oettinger, by contrast, is 12-11 with a .909 SP and a 2.63 GAA in his past 23 road playoff games. That's not great, but it certainly isn't getting pulled three times in the first round, either.

The U.S. has a deep goalie pool, but Oettinger is seemingly the next man up, having served as Hellebuyck's backup at the 4 Nations Face-Off in February. His play in this series and in other clutch moments -- like the Stars' Game 7 win against Colorado in Round 1 -- should spark a conversation about the American's Olympic starter, given Hellebuyck's struggles when the games matter most.

However, it should be noted that Hellebuyck was outstanding at 4 Nations, with a 1.59 GAA and .932 SA in three games. Which begs the question: Perhaps you can trust him more playing in back of an All-Star team rather than the Winnipeg Jets, no matter where the games are played? -- Wyshynski

The depth that has given the Oilers life could be the death of the Golden Knights

Seeing Adam Henrique score the first two goals in Game 4 before Evander Kane scored another did more than stake the Oilers to a 3-0 victory that now has them a win away from a second consecutive Western Conference finals appearance. It once again reinforced how the Oilers can rely on a level of depth that, by comparison, is lacking for the Golden Knights.

The statistic that has made that most clear is how the Oilers' generational duo of Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid have combined to score just three of their team's 15 goals. Draisaitl scored in Game 1, but the rest of those contributions, including the game winner, came from elsewhere in the lineup. Draisaitl did score the game winner in Game 2, but the previous four goals were scored by his teammates. In Game 3, Corey Perry scored the first two goals.

Now compare that to the Golden Knights. The trio of Ivan Barbashev, Tomas Hertl and Brett Howden combined to score 78 regular-season goals. They have been goalless through the first four games of their series against the Oilers. Vegas' six primary defensemen combined to score 35 regular-season goals, with 17 of them belonging to Noah Hanifin and Shea Theodore. The group has only one goal in the series.

It's a lack of scoring depth that has been further compounded by the fact that Jack Eichel, who led the Golden Knights with 94 points in the regular season, hasn't scored in the series. Meanwhile, leading goal scorer Pavel Dorofeyev, who missed the first two games with an injury, has also been blanked since his return. -- Clark

Own goals for everyone?

Fans love seeing goals scored as much as players enjoy scoring them -- except when it's on their own net. And we've seen some doozies in that latter category this round.

There was the own goal in Game 3 between Dallas and Winnipeg on Sunday, when Petrovic's go-ahead goal was found (after a lengthy official review) to have gone off Hellebuyck's stick into the net. The night before, it was Draisaitl's stick that put a puck past Stuart Skinner to give Vegas a buzzer-beating goal (with 0.4 seconds left on the clock) and its first win of the series.

Golden Knights stun Oilers with Reilly Smith's buzzer-beating goal

Reilly Smith scores a miraculous goal for the Golden Knights with 0.4 remaining to give them the win.

Morgan Rielly's stick guided a puck in past Woll in Game 3 of Toronto's series against Florida to cut into the Leafs' 2-1 advantage. Toronto eventually lost 5-4 in overtime.

It's not like there's a good moment to score on your own net, but could the timing on any of them have been worse? If you've ever wondered why "just put pucks on net" is a time-honored hockey cliché, here's your answer: Because anything can happen. -- Shilton

It's Mikko Rantanen's MVP to lose

Coaching in his 10th postseason, Dallas Stars coach Pete DeBoer has witnessed some startling individual playoff performances from his players. Like Ilya Kovalchuk's 19 points in 23 games for the Devils in 2012. Or Joe Pavelski's 14 goals in 24 games for the Sharks in 2016.

But nothing like the postseason that Rantanen is putting together for the Stars.

"It's the best performance I've gotten to witness, standing where I'm standing," DeBoer said after Dallas' Game 3 win.

"But for me, he's just getting started. He's just warming up here. I think he's on a mission."

Through 10 games, Rantanen leads the playoffs in goals (nine) and points (18). At one point, he had scored or assisted on 15 of 16 goals for the Stars, dating back to the first round. He's the first player in Stanley Cup playoffs history with five three-point games through a team's first 10 playoff games.

"Huge pickup at the deadline. He's been awesome for us," defenseman Alexander Petrovic said. "He's a great guy in the room. He's been on a tear."

Steve Levy to McAfee: We should be talking more about Mikko Rantanen, Stars

Steve Levy joins Pat McAfee and breaks down Mikko Rantanen's hot play in the postseason for the Stars.

He has done all of this after a turbulent season in which he was traded twice -- from Colorado to Carolina and then to Dallas -- before signing a blockbuster extension with the Stars. He has answered questions about his offensive prowess without having the benefit of Nathan MacKinnon on his team. He entered the playoffs as one of the NHL's best postseason scorers of the past several seasons. He has blown away those expectations and is the current leader for the Conn Smythe Trophy (postseason MVP).

Yet though all of this torrid scoring recently, the Jets blanked him in their Game 2 shutout in Winnipeg.

"The biggest thing is time and space," Arniel said. "I know that you hear that a lot in hockey, but at the end of the day, the more he holds onto it, the more he's comfortable, the harder it is to deny what he's trying to do next."

But The Moose was back on the loose in the Stars' Game 3 win, with a goal and two assists.

"I'm trying to stay in the moment. I'm happy to help the team and try to keep doing that as much as I can, both ends of the ice," Rantanen said.

It's certainly Mikko Rantanen's moment. -- Wyshynski

Ovechkin, Perry defying Father Time

Corey Perry will turn 40 on Friday, while Alex Ovechkin will hit that milestone in September. Perry and Ovechkin are part of a five-member group of players age 39 or older who have played more than one game this postseason. But to suggest Ovechkin and Perry are each having strong postseason campaigns for players their age only partially explains what they have done so far.

In fact, they're having two of the best postseason campaigns for two players in their age-39 season in NHL history.

Perry, a Stanley Cup winner who ranks 38th in career playoff goals, has scored five times this postseason. Ovechkin, a fellow Stanley Cup winner who is tied with Mario Lemieux for 12th in playoff goals, has four. They're both within striking distance of the most playoff goals in an age-39 season, per Quant Hockey. That mark is currently held by Jean Béliveau, with Le Gros Bill scoring six goals in 1971. -- Clark

But have the Hurricanes solved Ovi?

Some might accuse Ovechkin's game of being increasingly "one note." But when played right, it's a damn good note. And right now, the Washington Capitals are desperate for more of his contributions to their orchestra, at least at even strength.

Ovechkin's line has been stifled by Carolina's defense -- namely Jaccob Slavin and Brent Burns -- so far in the series, and they've had far fewer shot attempts and chances than the opposition at 5-on-5. Ovechkin and linemate Dylan Strome especially thrive on creating chances off zone entries, and the Hurricanes aren't giving them much in that respect.

Ovechkin continues to fight for open ice and does lead the Capitals in even-strength shots, but that hasn't materialized into anything on the scoresheet; Ovechkin's only goal of the series has been on the power play in Game 4.

Considering the Caps were just whacked 4-0 in Game 3 and 5-2 in Game 4, they are searching for consistent offensive contributions to carry them through. This is when Ovechkin has to start spinning his proverbial straw into gold again at full strength.

Washington got lucky in Game 2 after it was outshot 33-14 by the Hurricanes but still managed to come away with a 3-1 victory. If Carolina is finding its offensive groove now and beginning to solve Logan Thompson, then Washington must find ways to generate more offensive opportunities. That's easier said than done against the Hurricanes' smothering collective defensive game. -- Shilton

Carolina is no joke

If you've been following the second round, you've undoubtedly come across a joke or two (or 10) about the relative quality of the Carolina Hurricanes' series against the Washington Capitals compared to that of the other three playoff series. Perhaps you've made a few yourself.

Monday night's Game 4 was the outlier in what has otherwise been a grinding, tight-checking series in which four or fewer total goals were scored in each of the first three games, including a 4-0 shutout by goalie Frederik Andersen in Game 3.

The Hurricanes are the Hurricanes. Coach Rod Brind'Amour couldn't care less about the entertainment value of this series or any series. His team's mission is to vampirically suck the life out of opponents with a combination of puck possession, defensive zone coverage, reliable goaltending and elite penalty killing. Through four games, it has been mission accomplished.

Breaking News from Emily Kaplan

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Brind'Amour was asked about fans and media from other markets boiling down the Hurricanes' virtues to simply being a monotonous "shot volume" team.

"It's lazy. It's lazy. Because you're not really watching the game then. You're picking out part of it," he said. "But there's a method to all of it. It doesn't irk me."

When the Canes don't have the puck, they're preventing shots: Carolina is allowing an average of 24.6 shots per game this postseason, third best among active teams.

"There have been times through this series when I've thought in my head, 'shoot the puck.' But then we have to get that puck through," Washington coach Spencer Carbery said.

Again, this is what the Hurricanes do. This is what the Hurricanes have done. And this is what they'll continue to do in the Eastern Conference finals unless the Capitals have a rally in them. Which would be exciting. But the Hurricanes aren't about that excitement.

"You don't want to give them any life or give them any hope," Canes winger Seth Jarvis said of Thursday's Game 5 back in D.C. -- Wyshynski

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

Athlon Sports

Capitals' Tom Wilson, Dylan Strome Send Strong Message on Offense

By: Matt Levine

The Washington Capitals are now on the brink of elimination after dropping Game 4 of their second-round playoff series to the Carolina Hurricanes. Despite being the best team in the Eastern Conference this past season, the Capitals haven't been able to find any consistency on the offensive end of the ice.

Carolina's defense has made life very tough for the Capitals, and they have swarmed the puck when needed. But Washington has also missed some shots that they have normally hit, leading to the 3-1 series deficit.

One area that Washington has struggled heavily in is the power play. The Hurricanes have the best penalty kill, clocking in a 92.6 save percentage during the regular season, and it's made life tough on Washington.

Multiple members of the Capitals commented on the lack of offense in this series, as it has now become a source of frustration for this team.

"We don't score on the four-minute and they score at the end of it at the beginning of the second," Capitals forward Dylan Strome said. "That's a huge point of the game. We've got to figure out our power play."

Washington Capitals right wing Tom Wilson (43) and center Dylan Strome (17) talk before a face-off against the Pittsburgh Penguins during the third period at PPG Paints Arena. Pittsburgh won 4-3.

The Capitals were able to get the game within one score, but each time they did so, the Hurricanes responded. Carolina matched everything that Washington threw at them, leading to another victory.

"When we get within a goal we've got to find a way to keep the momentum on our side, and we just didn't do that tonight," Washington forward Tom Wilson said.

Game 5 will see the series head back home for the Capitals, giving them some grace. But if they can't fix the offense, Washington could be on the verge of letting a special season end quicker than expected.

Related: Oilers Reveal Big Injury Update on Calvin Pickard

Related: Maple Leafs' Craig Berube Raises Eyebrows With Mitch Marner Comments

NHL's Immediate Reaction to Alex Ovechkin's Historic Playoff Milestone

By: Antonio Losada

Game 4 in Raleigh brought more trouble for the Washington Capitals as they fell 5-2 to the Carolina Hurricanes and slipped into a 3-1 series hole.

Even with Washington on the brink of elimination after finishing the regular season with the most points among Eastern Conference teams, a moment from Alex Ovechkin earned attention from the NHL's official X account.

Midway through the night, the NHL reposted a Bleacher Report's B/R Open Ice graphic celebrating Ovechkin's 77th career playoff goal, which pushed him past Mario Lemieux for 12th place all-time in league history.

"THE GR8EST GOAL SCORER WITH ANOTHER MILESTONE 😱," B/R Open Ice wrote. "Ovi has passed Mario Lemieux for 12th all-time on the playoff goals list 🚨."

Ovechkin's goal came on a 5-on-3 power play with just over seven minutes left in regulation, with Dylan Strome recording his ninth assist of the playoffs on the play.

It was another trademarked shot by Ovechkin, finding the net from his office in the left circle, beating Canes goalie Frederik Andersen clean and cutting Carolina's lead to 3-2.

The goal marked a moment of hope for Washington, which had trailed all game long, but Carolina answered quickly, removing all chances of a comeback.

Sean Walker scored his first playoff goal with 3:15 remaining to reestablish a two-goal cushion before Andrei Svechnikov iced the game with an empty-netter for the final 5-2 outcome.

Washington Capitals left wing Alex Ovechkin (8) scores a goal against the Carolina Hurricanes at Lenovo Center.James Guillory-Imagn Images

Washington Capitals left wing Alex Ovechkin (8) scores a goal against the Carolina Hurricanes at Lenovo Center.James Guillory-Imagn Images

Capitals defenseman Jakob Chychrun scored earlier in the third period to cut Carolina's lead in half, making it 2-1, for the only other goal scored by Washington.

The Hurricanes lead the best-of-7 series 3-1 with Game 5 set for puck drop at 7 p.m. ET on Thursday at Capital One Arena in Washington.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

Capitals Make Alex Ovechkin Announcement During Game 4 Loss to Hurricanes

By: Emily Bicks

The Washington Capitals looked to even the series when they faced the Carolina Hurricanes in Game 4 of the Second Round of the NHL playoffs on May 12.

Following a rough 4-0 loss to Carolina at the Lenovo Center in Game 3 -- Washington's first playoff shutout since 2020 -- Capitals head coach Spencer Carbery remained positive about the team's outlook.

"I've always appreciated the fact that our guys are a confident group, and they feel like in any environment against any team on any given night, we absolutely can beat anyone in this league. And we've shown that all year long," Carbery told reporters.

However, Washington ultimately fell to the Canes 5-2 in Game 4.

Washington Capitals left wing Alex Ovechkin takes a shot against the Carolina Hurricanes.

Alex Ovechkin

James Guillory-Imagn Images

While there are very few good things to say about the Capitals performance on Monday night, Alex Ovechkin, who broke Wayne Gretzky's all-time goals record during the regular season, scored for the first time during this second-round series.

The team captain's third-period goal also broke a new NHL record. The Capitals announced, "Ovechkin scores his fifth goal of the playoffs to cut the deficit to 3-2. With the goal, Ovechkin passed Mario Lemieux (76) for the 12th-most playoff goals in NHL history.

"In addition, Ovechkin has passed Nicklas Lindstrom (30) and Joe Pavelski (30) for the fifth-most playoff power-play goals in NHL history."

While Ovechkin has reached hockey immortality, the 39-year-old would be the first person to say he cares more about team wins than personal records.

Unfortunately, the Hurricanes, a shot-volume heavy team, continue to keep Washington on defense and keeping Ovechkin from doing what he does best -- scoring goals.

Ovechkin and the Capitals now face a must-win Game 5 when the series returns to the Washington on Thursday, May 14.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

The Hockey Writers
Hockey News & Insight

2 Takeaways From Capitals' Game 4 Loss to the Hurricanes

By: Christopher Babos

The Washington Capitals are one loss from a postseason exit after a 5-2 defeat to the Carolina Hurricanes on Monday night. Game 4 followed a familiar pattern at the Lenovo Center. In Game 3, Carolina jumped out to a second-period lead and never looked back with the 4-0 shutout win. They also held a multi-goal advantage on Monday, but the Capitals pushed back in the third period before Sean Walker's late goal sealed Washington's loss.

After missing the final seven games of the Capitals' regular season, goaltender Logan Thompson has played admirably in eight postseason appearances, despite an early exit due to injury in Game 3 against the Montreal Canadiens in Round 1. Thompson battled through it and has remained a fixture in the crease for Washington since returning for Game 4. But he is missing a critical member of his shot-blocking unit, Martin Fehervary, whose absence might be too much to overcome during this postseason run.

Martin Fehervary's Absence Looms Large

Capitals defenseman Martin Fehervary was injured in the second-to-last game of the regular season in a 3-1 win against the New York Islanders. The 6-foot-2 blueliner twisted his right leg attempting to block a shot, resulting in a torn meniscus that required season-ending surgery. Before his injury, Fehervary had played all 81 games, with five goals and 25 points, averaging 19 minutes of ice time (TOI).

Martin Fehervary Washington Capitals

Martin Fehervary, Washington Capitals (Amy Irvin / The Hockey Writers)

"It's a massive loss for our team — really feel for him," head coach Spencer Carbary said on April 22. "My heart hurts for him because he's an unsung hero on our team. If you know the Washington Capitals, and if you're around our team, he's someone that goes unnoticed, that the rest of the hockey world probably doesn't pay much attention to, but he's a big part of the team."

Fehervary was one of Carbary's most-trusted options on the penalty kill, and the 25-year-old rewarded his coach's faith with 150 blocked shots in 2024-25. That mark was tied for the team lead, but Trevor Van Riemsdyk blocked a shot against the Pittsburgh Penguins in the season's final game to finish with 151 blocks.

Forward Ryan Leonard arrived from college hockey and jumped straight into the NHL lineup, but that was not an option on the Washington blue line. The next man up was 25-year-old Alexander Alexeyev. The Russian defenseman has not recorded a point in nine postseason games this season and has a minus-2 rating in 10:22 TOI. After recording a plus-1 in Game 2 and Game 3 against the Canadiens in Round 1, Alexeyev has watched his ice time fall dramatically from 14 minutes to 5:48 on Monday night against Carolina; he did not play a shift over the final 25 minutes of the contest.

While Alexeyev has collected 12 blocks during the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs, Capitals fans can only wonder how many blocks Fehervary would've collected if he were available.

Thompson Losing Goalie Duel Against Andersen

While the Hurricanes have outscored the Capitals 14-4 in Round 2, Thompson's postseason statistics still rank in the top half of the league. Among goalies who have started at least five postseason games, the 28-year-old ranks third with a 2.45 goals-against average (GAA) and second with a .918 save percentage (SV%).

The biggest problem is that the NHL's best in those categories is playing at the other end of the ice, Frederik Andersen. Like the New Jersey Devils in Round 1, the Capitals have struggled to score against the 35-year-old netminder, who sports an NHL-best 1.41 GAA and a .935 SV% through eight playoff games.

Related: 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs Round 2 Hub

After starting the series with 14 shots on goal against the Hurricanes in Game 1, the Capitals totaled the same number of shots (21) in each of their three losses to Carolina. With a goalie as red-hot as the 6-foot-4 netminder from Denmark, an average of 19 shots per game will probably not be enough to stave off elimination against Carolina in Game 5 on Thursday night.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

The Hockey News

The Capitals Know They Haven't Been Good Enough. What's The Solution With Their Backs Against The Wall?

By: Sammi Silber

The Capitals are ready to give everything they have with their season on the line entering Game 5. (James Guillory — Imagn Images).

The Capitals are ready to give everything they have with their season on the line entering Game 5. (James Guillory — Imagn Images).

The Washington Capitals aren't oblivious to what's going on. And now, with the season on the line, they're ready to do something about it.

Washington has been outplayed for the majority of the second round by the high-flying Carolina Hurricanes, a team that's set the standard with its heavy shot-volume mentality and lethal special teams. And now, they face a 3-1 series deficit, a feat they've only overcome twice in franchise history, the last time being 16 years ago.

"Obviously, our backs are against the wall," Tom Wilson said after Game 4. "Next game's the biggest game."

Though the Capitals knew it was going to be a challenge against Carolina, they certainly weren't expecting to be this outmatched and on the brink of elimination going into Game 5.

After all, Washington dominated the Eastern Conference in the regular season, finishing as one of the top teams in the league after a summer retool on the fly translated to almost immediate chemistry in the room. Even when they looked to be down and out, they never were, as no other team in the NHL came back more times to win than Washington.

However, the last month and a half has shown a trend in the wrong direction. That resilience and spark have faded, leaving behind remnants that come and go over the course of 60 minutes — and prove to be too little, too late.

The theme has lingered into the postseason, exacerbated by struggles for the team's top scorers, Frederik Andersen's strong play and, glaringly, the absence of Martin Fehervary on the blue line

"We're just not executing, making the play, whatever you want to call it," Carbery said. "And we're making some mistakes and they're capitalizing."

Now going into Game 5, the Capitals need a new game plan, and for them, it centers around a simple foundation: find a way.

"Obviously, we have to be better," Alex Ovechkin said.

Of course, the biggest priority will be capitalizing on opportunities and doing a better job of generating pressure and controlling play. Not only does the team need more from the top-6, but the secondary scorers have to step up, too.

Whether that means shaking up the forward lines again remains to be seen, but the current combinations just don't seem to be gelling.

Then, after generating that pressure, there's the matter of sustaining it.

"It's going to have to be all four lines, pushing, pushing, pushing, and we're going to have to slowly try and push them out of the series," Wilson said, adding, "Start with the first period and go from there."

Defensively, the Capitals will have to lock down better in front of Logan Thompson, who also needs to get back to the level that he was playing at earlier in the playoffs. That grit and battle from earlier in the season is still there for the taking; it's just about going out and grabbing it.

"It's not going to be easy, they're a hard-working team, but we're going to have some fight here," Wilson said.

And if they can do that, a furious rally and some life late in the series won't seem like an unrealistic possibility.

"We're going to go out there and do our best and leave it all out there and see what happens," Wilson added.

Game 5 is at Capital One Arena on Thursday.

"I really like our odds," Connor McMichael said simply.

Former Canadiens' Third-Overall Pick Kotkaniemi Still Struggling

By: Karine Hains

Oct 11, 2018; Montreal, Quebec, CAN; Montreal Canadiens center Jesperi Kotkaniemi (15) plays the puck against Los Angeles Kings during the second period at Bell Centre. Mandatory Credit: Jean-Yves Ahern-Imagn Images

Oct 11, 2018; Montreal, Quebec, CAN; Montreal Canadiens center Jesperi Kotkaniemi (15) plays the puck against Los Angeles Kings during the second period at Bell Centre. Mandatory Credit: Jean-Yves Ahern-Imagn Images

Marc Bergevin was criticized for many decisions during his tenure as the Montreal Canadiens' GM. Still, he made an excellent move by deciding not to match the Carolina Hurricanes' offer sheet to Jesperi Kotkaniemi.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

When The Canadiens Draft Twice (Or More) In The First Round…

Canadiens: The Grades Are In – Mike Matheson

Canadiens: The Grades Are In – Arber Xhekaj

Four seasons later, the Finnish center is still in Raleigh, but he's currently skating on the Hurricanes' fourth line. He was on the ice for much longer in the first round, against the New Jersey Devils, skating for over 18 minutes twice.

In the last three games of the Canes' second-round series with the Washington Capitals, he has spent less than 13 minutes on the ice. He has registered three assists in nine playoff games this postseason, one of which came on the man-advantage.

The Hurricanes poached Kotkaniemi from the Canadiens during the 2021 offseason, signing him to a $6.1 M offer sheet with a $20 signing bonus, a wink to the Canadiens' failed maneuver to sign Sebastian Aho.

Before that contract expired, Carolina signed him to an eight-year extension with a $4,820,000 cap hit, and the team and player implicitly admitted that the offer sheet was overinflated.

He's now in the third year of the eight-year pact, and he's not in Rod Brind'Amour's good books. Every year, he seems to be in trade rumours, but the length of his contract is somewhat prohibitive for a player who has never put up more than 43 points in a season. This season, in 78 games, he was limited to 33 points.

While not matching the offer sheet was the right call, drafting him in the first place was a mistake. The Canadiens were desperate for a quality center. They decided to draft for need rather than for best player available, picking Kotkaniemi ahead of Brady Tkachuk (who went fourth overall to the Ottawa Senators) and Quinn Hughes (who was picked seventh overall by the Vancouver Canucks).

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Report: Ex-Hurricanes Forward Finalist For Canucks Coach Gig

By: Michael DeRosa

Late last month, Rick Tocchet announced that he was moving on from the Vancouver Canucks. With this, the Canucks are now looking for a new head coach, and a former Carolina Hurricanes forward is reportedly one of the favorites for the job.

According to The Province's Patrick Johnson, former Hurricanes forward Manny Malhotra and current Canucks assistant coach Adam Foote are the frontrunners for Vancouver's head coaching gig. Johnson also added that Malhotra is the "slight favourite" in the race.

Hearing that Malhotra is getting serious consideration for the Canucks' head coaching job is understandable. The 44-year-old is currently the head coach of the Canucks' American Hockey League (AHL) affiliate, the Abbotsford Canucks and led them to a 44-24-2-2 record this season. Abbotsford is also set to play the Colorado Eagles in the Pacific Division Final.

If the Canucks end up going with Malhotra, it will be the Mississauga, Ontario native's first NHL head coaching job. However, he has experience as an assistant coach at the NHL level, as he previously held the role with the Canucks (2017-18 to 2019-20) and Toronto Maple Leafs (2020-21 to 2023-24).

Malhotra spent the 2013-14 season as a member of the Hurricanes, where he served as an alternate captain. In 69 games with the Metropolitan Division club, the 1998 seventh-overall pick posted seven goals, 13 points, 82 hits, and an even plus/minus rating. His time with the Canes ended when he signed a one-year deal with the Montreal Canadiens during the 2014 NHL off-season.

Hurricanes Benefiting From Taylor Hall Addition Big Time

By: Michael DeRosa)

The Carolina Hurricanes defeated the Washington Capitals by a 5-2 final score in Game 4. This victory was massive for the Hurricanes, as they now have a 3-1 series lead over the Capitals and only need one more win to advance to the Eastern Conference Final.

Hurricanes forward Taylor Hall was certainly a top star for the Metropolitan Division club in Game 4. The 2010 first-overall pick scored the Hurricanes' game-winning goal in the third period and later recorded the primary assist on Sean Walker's goal that gave Carolina a 4-2 lead. Thus, the veteran winger certainly stepped up in a big way for the Canes in this one.

With this latest impressive game, Hall is only continuing to prove to the Hurricanes that they made the right call acquiring him from the Chicago Blackhawks back in January. Playing for a legitimate contender has undoubtedly reenergized Hall, and he has become a very important part of the Hurricanes' forward group because of it.

It was no secret that the Hurricanes needed more secondary offensive production before they brought in Hall, and he is continuing to give them just that. He now has two goals and six points in nine post-season games for the Hurricanes this spring. This was after he posted nine goals and 18 points in 31 regular-season games with Carolina after being acquired.

Hall will now look to continue to stay clutch for the Hurricanes as the playoffs carry on. He has certainly been a nice addition for the Hurricanes, and it's precisely why they signed him to a three-year contract extension following the team's first-round series win against the New Jersey Devils.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

SB NATION CANES COUNTRY

Tick, Tick, Boom - Alexander Nikishin

By: Bob Wage

Carolina's top prospect, Alexander Nikishin, rushed as best he could to join the Hurricanes after his season was over with SKA of the KHL.

He even spent some time in Turkey waiting as they tried to expedite his Visa paperwork.

The team was hoping the star blueliner could make it stateside in time to play in a couple of regular season-ending games for them.

When that time came and passed, they hoped he might be able to play a bit for the Chicago Wolves during their postseason. When the Wolves were eliminated, that chance was also lost.

Since he arrived, he has been practicing with the team and getting acclimated with the help of his Russian teammates.

Much has been made about his inability to speak much English and effort has been made to alleviate this issue.

I took the following picture in the Carolina locker room after the game three, 4-0 win over the Capitals.

Nikishin seems to be communicating with Carolina owner, Tom Dundon. This was taken after Svechnikov left the duo for interviews.

Canes owner Tom Dundon speaks with Alexander Nikishin after game three of the series against Washington

Bob Wage, Canes Country

Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour had previously pretty much ruled out any possibility of Nikishin playing in these playoffs, but perhaps his stance has recently softened.

When he allowed the defenseman to dress and skate in warmups with the team prior to game four, it led to some questions.

Would he have played if a starting defenseman couldn't go in this game?

Could he be the "next man in" if there is an injury?

(continued - But we're trying to give him every step of the way. Hopefully we don't have to make those decisions, but if we do, we'll figure it out.")

This not exactly a ringing endorsement but saying "possibly" is better than a definitive "no".

In a perfect world, the defense as well as everyone else on the team stays healthy, but it is not unusual for injuries to happen in the postseason.

Of course, Brind'Amour will not do anything to upset the current team chemistry unless he absolutely has to, but it will be interesting to see what happens if it is necessary.

Opinions vary on what should happen if there are injuries.

Below is one of the many highlight reels available for the player.

Tick, tick, tick.... fans are counting the moments before they can see what this player can do for Carolina.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025



Hurricanes move within one game of clinching series with 5-2 win

By: Aidan Carlson, Contributor

Through the first four games of their series against the Washington Capitals, the Carolina Hurricanes haven't given up more than nine shots on goal in a single period. A deafening defensive effort led by goaltender Frederik Andersen has stifled the second-best scoring team in the regular season.

When the Canes did give up goals tonight, left wing Taylor Hall and defenseman Sean Walker both tallied a goal less than five minutes later to maintain a Carolina two-goal lead. Hall and Walker were the only two Canes players to record a multi-point night in Game 4.

"Those are huge plays, you need those plays," said head coach Rod Brind'Amour. "Finishing your chances at a crucial time in the game, that's the difference. Both those goals were huge."

Often, during the regular season, the Canes have gone down a goal early, putting themselves in a hole they have to dig out of for the remainder of the game. Over the past four games, the Canes haven't given up a single goal in the first period — largely due to the man in net.

"It's just so apparent the confidence that he is giving us," Walker said. "We can play a lot more aggressive. Mistakes are going to happen but he is bailing us out a ton. Just going out there every night, knowing that he's back there, he's playing unbelievable really."

Andersen's near-perfect play — especially in the opening 20 minutes — has allowed the Canes to settle in and has played a big part in each of the three wins this series. Andersen leads all goaltenders in the playoffs with a 0.935 save percentage and 1.41 goals-against average.

For the first time in the series, someone netted a goal in the first period and it came from defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere. Dancing along the blue line with the puck, Gostisbehere held onto the rubber for what felt like a lifetime before ripping a shot that beat Capitals goaltender Logan Thompson through traffic.

Following the opening goal, Carolina was down a man for most of the remainder of the period, having to kill six minutes of power play time. Like they have all postseason, the Canes' penalty killers stepped up to hold the 1-0 lead into the first intermission.

"You never want to do that, but when the time comes, everyone answered the bell really well. Your best penalty killer is always your goalie and [Andersen] played amazing again," center Seth Jarvis said.

The Hurricanes didn't take long to double that lead when Jarvis scored his third goal of the postseason 1:05 into the period. Jarvis followed up a shot from center Sebastian Aho that hit Thompson's glove, then the crossbar, before Jarvis knocked it over the goal line.

Jarvis' second-period goal ties his teammate, Aho, for most playoff points by a player age 23 or younger in franchise history. He trails only Anton Lundell of the Florida Panthers for most points in the postseason among members of the 2020 draft class.

The Capitals got a goal back 5:18 into the third when defenseman Matt Roy found his defensive partner Jakob Chychrun, alone at the back post. Three minutes later, Hall answered with a breakaway goal that restored the Canes' two-goal cushion.

"I just got my head up and tried to look where the goalie was," Hall said. "[The goalie] plays somewhat deep in his net, so shooting is a pretty good option. … I just picked my corner and was a good shot."

The Hurricanes went back to the penalty kill in the third when Hall tripped Capitals center Nic Dowd, and then defenseman Dmitry Orlov took another penalty while on the kill to make it 5-on-3 for an extended period of time.

From his office, left wing Alex Ovechkin beat Andersen with a one-timer that deflected in off Canes defenseman Jaccob Slavin, but the Canes luckily got back to even-strength with a one-goal lead.

"There was a lot going on," Orlov said "Almost shit myself there, you know? The boys, they didn't allow a second one. [Left wing Jordan Martinook] also had a chance on a 2-on-1 and I was hoping he would score that to make it easier on us. It was a bad play by me taking that penalty. Just need to be smarter and not lose concentration on certain plays."

With a little help from the boards, Walker and centers Jack Roslovic and Logan Stankoven charged up the ice for an odd-man rush that saw Walker earn his first career postseason goal.

Utilizing Roslovic charging toward the net front and taking a defender with him, Walker stopped up and ripped a shot past Thomson's glove.

Scored at the 16:45 mark, Walker's goal was effectively the dagger, but right wing Andrei Svechnikov made sure to twist the knife with an empty-net goal less than a minute later.

The Canes now have the Capitals on the brink of elimination, up 3-1 in the series, but know the hardest is yet to come.

“They’re desperate, everyone knows the situation,” Jarvis said. “We just got to match their desperation and up it and make sure we come ready to go because they’re going to give us their best.”

Game 5 in Washington is set for Thursday at 7 p.m.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

RMNB

Tom Wilson mocks the Carolina Hurricanes' storm surge which was both funny and ill-fated

Fifteen days ago, after reflecting on a viral crybaby taunt he made at the Montreal Canadiens, Tom Wilson told the press, "I should probably just shut up sometimes."

Thankfully, Wilson did not change, and he gave social media more fodder during Game 4 of the Washington Capitals' second-round series against the Carolina Hurricanes.

Wilson was back to his over-the-top, sarcastic self during the second period when he got in a scrum with veteran Hurricanes forward and "honest player," per TNT's telecast, Jordan Staal.

Wilson gave Staal a soft, nothingburger of a punch with his gloved hand. The 36-year-old Canes captain reacted by throwing his head back like a rock 'em, sock 'em robot meeting its fatal blow. While the scrum continued, Staal then threw a sucker punch at Wilson's head, which then sent the Capitals enforcer into Expressive Tom mode.

Skating back to the Capitals' bench, Wilson began chirping Staal and imitating how he threw his head back to try and draw a penalty.

Then, Wilson sarcastically did the Canes' storm surge celebration, where the players clap around the faceoff circle together to celebrate victories.

Here's another angle from Matt who was at the game. At the end, Wilson makes a lasso gesture for some reason.

What seemed funny at the time turned ill-fated later. The Capitals lost Game 4 by a score of 5-2, and the Hurricanes made sure to mock Wilson back.

"Bro knew the game was over so early he did the surge in the 2nd period," the Hurricanes tweeted on X.

Well played, Canes. Sigh.

Well played.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025



The Carolina Hurricanes are winning the mental game

By: Ryan Cannon

The Canes are exceeding expectations in the playoffs. Not just on the scoreboard, but mentally. As a longtime fan, I've often wished we'd show more grit after the whistle, with someone ready to stand up and drop the gloves when needed. It sometimes felt like other teams saw us as easily intimidated. That's exactly what the Capitals may have expected in this series, and exactly where they're being proven wrong.

The Caps are a physical, rowdy team. They'll try to beat you up if they can't beat you on the scoreboard. That works in the regular season. In this series, the Canes aren't biting. Carolina leads 3–1 heading back to D.C. for Game 5, and the Caps are losing at their own game. They came out swinging, literally, to try to shake us off our rhythm. The Canes have stuck to what they do best: play smart, outwork everyone, and keep their focus where it matters.

They aren't reinventing the wheel. They're just sticking to their plan and outhustling their opponent. When the Caps try to get under their skin, the Canes don't retaliate, as much as I'd love to see a punch thrown now and then. Instead, they reset, refocus, and go chase the next goal. That mental discipline is Washington's kryptonite.

Tom Wilson is only effective when you let him live rent-free in your head. The Canes are shutting him down by simply ignoring him. Even mocking the Storm Surge wasn't enough to shake them. This team isn't reactive. They're composed, confident, and laser-focused. That's a huge reason they're up in the series.

Had the Canes taken the bait and started playing emotional hockey, this series could look completely different. We'll never know for sure, but what we do know is this: the Capitals are visibly frustrated, and they can't seem to find their rhythm. Sure, everything could shift in Game 5, but Carolina is 8–0 all-time when holding a 3–1 series lead. That's a stat I'll take.

As much as we love seeing some post-whistle fireworks, sometimes the smartest move is to stay in your lane and play your game. The Canes are winning the mental battle, and it's paying off on the scoreboard. Every series is different but this time, the Canes just might be the Caps' kryptonite.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SportScan

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

1352406 Carolina Hurricanes

Why the Hurricanes aren't relaxing after taking 3-1 series lead over Capitals

Chip Alexander8-11 minutes 13/05/2025

The game was long over Monday but Jordan Staal still had work to do.

The Carolina Hurricanes captain was in an exercise area of the locker room at Lenovo Center, doing pushups, pushing himself. Up, down, up, down ...

Staal is 36 years old. He had just played a little more than 17 minutes, including nearly six minutes on the Canes' penalty kill, the kind of grueling job that can drain you quickly.

But there he was, working, sweating. The unstated message: The Hurricanes still have more to do to finish off the Washington Capitals in the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

The Canes now have a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven series after a 5-2 victory Monday in Game 4. Some would call that a cushy, comfortable margin. The Canes do not. They will go to Washington on Thursday with the intent of winning Game 5 at Capital One Arena to close it out, more than aware that the Caps have a tough, talented team and will fight back.

"It's never easy to close out a series," said Canes defenseman Dmitry Orlov, who played for the Caps before coming to Carolina. "It's going to be a lot of battles, a lot of scrums, They'll battle for their lives, for their season.

"We cannot come in and expect it to be easy. It's not going to be easy."

Added Canes forward Taylor Hall: "Obviously, we like where we're at. We have a couple of days here to regroup and it's about going into their building and playing the best we can."

The Caps have to believe they have seen the Canes' best, especially from Andersen in net. The Caps' goals Monday came when Jakob Chychrun pounced on a rebound with an open net and later when Alexander Ovechkin scored a 5-on-3 goal on the power play.

Andersen, who shut out the Caps 4-0 in Game 3, took care of the rest and made some testing saves to keep the Caps stifled.

Hall had given the Canes a 3-1 lead about three minutes after Chychrun's goal in the third period, getting open at the Washington blue line, skating in alone to beat goalie Logan Thompson to the blocker side.

But Hall then had the worst seat in the house — in the penalty box, after a tripping call. Orlov soon joined him as the Caps had a two-man advantage, and Ovechkin unloaded a shot from the left circle for his first goal of the series to make it a 3-2 game.

But the Canes had consistently outworked the Caps 4 on 5, killing off a double-minor high-sticking call late in the first period, drawing a standing ovation. After Ovechkin's goal, they killed off the Orlov penalty and then made it 4-2 when defenseman Sean Walker scored with 3:15 left in regulation – Walker's first goal of the playoffs.

"Walks has really been solid," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I think his game has gone up another level. That goal tonight was an indicator of what he's capable of."

Walker took a pass from Hall along the left boards near the Carolina blue line and carried the puck into the Washington zone. He cut back through the left circle, slowed up near the slot and beat Thompson.

“That’s something that’s really important, especially at this time of year,” Walker said. “You’ve got to answer when teams are making their push.

“Obviously you don’t want to give up those goals, especially in the third. But I think as a whole we kept our composure, didn’t panic, just stuck to our systems.”

That’s what experienced teams tend to do come playoff time when things get tight and playoff games are to won or lost.

“There’s no panic when things don’t go our way or whatever happened tonight (as) they closed the gap,” Brind’Amour said. “Our older guys have been through this and some of our not-so-old guys have been through this for a few years. So I think there’s a bit of maturity there.”

As one Triangle coach might say, it’s now on to Washington for the Hurricanes.

“We still have things we can get better at,” Hall said. “The series isn’t over until it’s over. An elimination game is always the hardest one to win and they’re probably going to play their best game in the series in Game 5, so we have to be ready.”

That’s why Staal was still working after a win, getting in his pushups. Up, down …

News Observer LOADED: 05.14.2025

1352407 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes rookie Jackson Blake oozes ‘hockey sense.’ What is that, exactly?

Robert Willett36-45 minutes 13/05/2025

Jackson Blake is small for an NHL player. His father, Jason, was even smaller for an NHL player and carved out a 12-year career as an undrafted free agent. It’s a difficult league for the undersized, where hulking bodies not only jostle for space but get a benefit of the doubt smaller players do not.

Officially 5-foot-11, 178 pounds in a league where the average player is 25 pounds heavier and 3-4 inches taller, Blake’s physical gifts lie elsewhere — in the hand-eye coordination and quick-twitch strength that allows him to maneuver through tight areas and make deft plays with his stick. Not surprisingly for someone with such exceptional fine motor skills, he’s also a scratch golfer. It’s what small players have to be able to do to thrive in a brutal, punishing league. It’s also not what comes up first when hockey people talk about Blake, as impressed as they may be with his talent.

What sets Blake apart is that rare combination of vision, anticipation and composure that gets mashed together under the broad and sometimes confusing term “hockey sense.” Scouts and executives love to talk about hockey sense. If nothing else, it’s a catch-all adjective to explain why you just took the general manager’s nephew in the fifth round of the draft in the absence of any other evidence. It’s expansive enough to mean whatever you want it to mean, and specific enough that every NHL player has his own definition in his head.

When it comes to Blake, that manifests in different ways. He wasn’t a big kid whose peers outgrew him as teens; he started out small and stayed that way. Because of that, he’s had to learn to dodge contact and find open space, not only to be able to make plays, but to avoid being clobbered. He grew up around the game, hanging around the locker rooms where his father played, mentored by NHL players, immersed in hockey from the time of his earliest memories. You can’t watch that much hockey and not absorb and internalize some of what you’re seeing.

But there are a lot of small players with hockey pedigrees who didn’t walk into the NHL straight out of college and end up playing alongside stars like Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov on the top line of one of the eight teams still playing in May. Blake scored 17 goals as a 21-year-old rookie for the Carolina Hurricanes this season and two more in the playoffs so far. That’s a lot for what might otherwise have been his junior year at North Dakota.

“He didn’t play a ton early, but that was by design,” Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour said. “Just kind of get him up to speed and feeling good. But whatever we threw at him, he just took it in and said, ‘OK, give me more.’ And we just kept throwing him more ice time and more responsibilities and he kept doing well with it.”

It’s something about the way Blake’s brain works that enables him to make plays others cannot, mesh with elite players and survive in a league where players almost a foot taller are trying to knock him through the end boards. It’s not just his superlative physical talent that allows him to overcome his size; it’s his superlative hockey sense. He wouldn’t succeed without both.

“I’ve always been the smallest guy,” Blake said. “Honestly, I think it’s kind of an advantage for me. You kind of grow up already being one of the smaller guys and playing against bigger kids. It helped me avoid hits. I learned that at an early age, so now I have that as a skill.”

Hockey sense means specifically different things to different people, but it generally means the same thing to everyone, and there’s one unquestioned certainty here: Whatever hockey sense is, Jackson Blake has it.

“He’s slithery, I think is a good word, in the corners,” Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said of his younger teammates. “He’s not the fastest player but he can turn on a dime and take three steps. It’s hard to read off of guys like that. He turns at the right time and finds a hole at the right moment.

“That’s smarts, just understanding how to create room for himself. He does that well on top of being very skilled and being able to make great passes and seeing open players. It kind of creates a deadly animal there.”

‘The puck seems to follow them’

The purest summation of hockey sense comes from the player who most personified it.

“I skate to where the puck is going to be,” Wayne Gretzky famously said, “not where it is.”

It's a good line, but every player is trying to do that. What distinguished Gretzky from every other player down the sliding scale of hockey sense was knowing better than anyone where it was going.

Anticipation is the core value of hockey sense, but it's only one aspect of something that encompasses far more than that. Ask 20 hockey people — players, coaches, executives, scouts, agents, broadcasters — and you'll get 20 definitions, but they all draw on a few key attributes that can be mixed into a million combinations, like oil paint on a palette: anticipation, composure, concentration, creativity, positioning, teamwork, vision.

Elite players, the best of the best, the 99th percentile, have elite hockey sense. It's one of the things that makes them elite. But among the other 730 or so NHL players, hockey sense exists on a wide spectrum, typically in equilibrium with size or scoring ability. If you're big or can fire a puck over a goalie's shoulder and under a crossbar, you might not need to see the ice all that well. If you're Blake — or new teammate Logan Stankoven, the league's shortest player at 5-8 — it has to be what sets you apart.

"You see a player that maybe isn't the fastest, isn't the strongest, isn't physically ahead of everyone else, but still seems to beat guys wide with their speed and find holes you might not see unless you're way up top," Staal said. "Really, the puck seems to follow them around. They just understand the game and they know where the puck is going before it gets there and they create something out of nothing at times and find open guys when you don't even quite see it."

In Blake's case, it pairs with his hands and his mentality — "Hypercompetitive," Brind'Amour said — to give him the edge he needs to play in the NHL.

"He feels the game the right way," Svechnikov said.

There's no question about that. The evidence is clear. But what does that actually mean?

Hockey sense and the draft

In the draft process, the Hurricanes are often willing to compromise in areas other teams treasure — size, skating ability — for players who exhibit high skill levels and show evidence of exceptional hockey sense. The theory is that so few draft picks actually make the NHL, especially outside the first round, that it's better to focus on players with a chance to become stars, however small that chance may be.

Evaluating hockey sense is a multifold process, which basically involves watching … everything. It defies simple definition, but like obscenity, you know it when you see it.

But what are you looking for?

"How much time do you have?" asked Darren Yorke, the Hurricanes' associate general manager who oversees amateur scouting.

"You're watching his play with the puck and the decisions he's making in terms of vision and playmaking and space-reading," Yorke continued. "If we're sticking to plays with the puck, is he able to make plays with less time and space? Is he able to create time and space? Navigating tight spaces, is he able to use his body to make plays? What if he can't make a play? What about versus a tight gap or loose gap? On the forecheck, can he read handedness and understand where the puck may go, where the defenseman is or where the defenseman's outs are? Defensively, is he able to read where the play is going in a variety of different chaos situations?"

That's a lot of anecdotal evidence, which raises the question whether a franchise as analytically focused as the Hurricanes, run by a chemistry Ph.D., considers it quantifiable?

"Of course it is," Hurricanes general manager Eric Tulsky said. "We basically use 'hockey sense' as a synonym for 'decision making.' You could quantify it by grading every decision as a positive or negative and reporting a percentage."

Even then, it's a difficult element to isolate in a game that moves as quickly as hockey. For Jack Han, a coaching consultant who worked in the Toronto Maple Leafs organization and publishes the indispensable Hockey Tactics e-book, it's almost better to look at surrogates for hockey sense rather than try to assess it in the abstract, because it isn't useful without at least some NHL-level skills.

"You need to pair it with something else at this level, or multiple other attributes," Han said. "One thing teams very much care about are loose-puck recoveries. Something like loose-puck recoveries, at the NHL level or scouting for junior players, I find it to be very telling because it's a composite attribute or analytic.

"Skating ability, hockey sense, the ability to be strong physically, to anticipate what's happening next — so much goes into that one sort of ability. The players who have it tend to translate their games really well to the next level. They're able to draw from several different areas to create competitive advantage."

In Blake's case, it was harder to discern in his draft year. He split time between Minnesota high school hockey, where he dominated lesser competition and won a state title, and junior hockey, where he wasn't used as often in high-leverage situations among older players. His size is one big reason Blake didn't go until the fourth round, with the 109th pick, but the Hurricanes thought they saw a player who saw the game equally well at each level. If his hockey sense continued to translate at North Dakota, it might into the NHL, as well.

It continued to translate. His freshman year in Grand Forks, he scored 16 goals in 39 games. His sophomore year, he was fourth in the country in scoring and a finalist for the Hobey Baker Award, the hockey Heisman. ("And we thought he should have won," Yorke said.) His junior year, he was gone, a professional, criss-crossing the continent with the Hurricanes and making $925,000 to do it.

"Every summer you see kids come in as freshmen who are highly skilled and you're like, 'Wow, these guys are really good,'" said Charlotte Checkers forward Riese Gaber, North Dakota's senior captain during Blake's sophomore year. "A lot of the time, that's just summer skate stuff. You never know what a player is going to be like in games, once he gets some real action. Blaker did everything he did in the summer. He wasn't afraid. He didn't shy away from it in games."

A father's lessons

Blake grew up around the game, especially when his father Jason was finishing up his career with the Anaheim Ducks. Ducks forward Bobby Ryan, then 23, particularly bonded with 8-year-old Jackson, not unlike young Seth Jarvis playing with Brent Burns' kids at the defenseman's house. His father was undrafted out of North Dakota and made the most of every chance, a five-time 20-goal scorer who

was always one of the smallest players on the ice, but found a way to play in the NHL until he was 38.

“When I played, I was a little rat. I can admit that now,” Jason Blake said. “But I was so competitive and I think that wore off on him, because I demanded so much from him. I knew that he had hands. I knew that he could skate. I just wanted to sharpen everything else up and make it perfect.”

Father and son would spend hours on the Sport Court in the backyard working on hockey skills. And every conversation, after every hockey game, started the same way: How do you think you played? But they also watched a lot of hockey together. A lot of hockey.

“He’s gifted, but we watched a lot of videos,” Jason Blake said. “We watched a lot of hockey every night, and any play that happened, we’d talk: ‘See what they’re thinking? You always have to be two steps ahead of somebody else.’ That’s impossible in this league, because you’re playing the best of the best. But this is at like 12, 13. So we’d go on the Sport Court and try to emulate someone else. He worked hard.”

Jackson Blake’s size was the subtext to all of that. He wasn’t the kind of player who started out the same size as his peers and watched other players shoot past him; he started small and stayed small. But like his father, he found ways to thrive regardless.

Always the smallest guy

Blake watched bigger players score more, catching the eye of scouts and college recruiters. Even as a pre-teen, he knew he’d have to find a different route to college, let alone the NHL. There was nothing he could do about the attention the bigger kids got. It was frustrating, but it was a reality he could not escape. Not then. Not in the draft. Even now.

“Growing up, being the smallest guy, there were kids in Peewees (age 11-12) scoring 100 goals, man-childs, and everyone’s like ‘These guys are so good!’” Blake said. “When you grow up, people start to catch up with their weight and their height. I was always a smaller guy. But now, there are some huge guys, like (6-5 Nikita) Zadorov on the (Boston) Bruins. That’s definitely an advantage, being that tall, but I don’t look at it as a negative thing. I think it’s good that smaller guys have to prove themselves.

“I wouldn’t want it any other way, honestly. Same thing with my dad. He wasn’t drafted at 5-8, 5-9, whatever. It might say 5-10 but he’s not actually. He was the definition of just grinding to get to the league. I wouldn’t say I had it as hard as him, but I had to prove myself. Everyone does. But especially for me.”

The Hurricanes had been aware of Blake for years, through an unexpected local connection. Colin Muldoon, a longtime Triangle hockey coach, roomed with Jason Blake at North Dakota and, later, coached Brind’Amour’s son Skyler here. Muldoon was always a believer in Jackson Blake, even as a 10-year-old.

“He was even smaller back then,” Brind’Amour said, but the coach still had an idea of what to expect when the Hurricanes signed him and brought him in last April.

Blake made his NHL debut in the 82nd and final game of last season, then hung around the team throughout the playoffs along with another prospect, 2023 first-round pick Bradly Nadeau. No one expected Blake to make the team this fall. More likely he’d spend the season in the AHL like Nadeau, who made the all-rookie team there.

As Brind’Amour introduced Blake to the team’s defensive system in training camp, one he had never played before, Blake grasped the concepts intuitively. He got his first opportunity on a defense-first checking line and thrived. Whatever the Hurricanes threw at him, he mastered. By the end of the season, he had played himself onto the top line with Aho and either Jarvis or Svechnikov.

“You may have watched him at North Dakota and questioned his defensive play, but it was so easy and intuitive to put him in an NHL system he’s never played before,” Yorke said. “It’s like ‘Good Will Hunting,’ when Matt Damon is talking about solving math problems and talks about the great composers sitting at a piano. They don’t see notes. They just get it.

“Jackson is like that when it comes to hockey. He just gets it. He was asked to play a role at the very beginning of the year that he’d never done before. He didn’t just do it. He excelled at it.”

Thinking the game

Hockey, like any sport, will make any number of apologies for the truly talented and the exceptional physical specimens. (In the NFL, former New York Giants general manager George Young had his “Planet Theory:” There are only a certain number of people on the planet big enough and quick enough to play on the line of scrimmage, so you better draft them when you have the chance.) A player who’s 6-5 and 250 pounds and hits like a dump truck going down hill with the hockey sense of a fire hydrant will find a place in the NHL.

“It’s not just size,” said Jim Rutherford, the former Hurricanes general manager and current Vancouver Canucks president. “Energy players — those guys that give it the extra, the hard-working guys, that also get away without it but contribute to winning teams. It may be a guy that’s just a pure goal-scorer. He’s just got to get himself in a position and somebody gets him the puck. There’s lots of guys that play with average or below-average hockey sense and are good contributors to the game. But the guys with real good hockey sense find the game a little easier to play.”

Most sports have a version of this kind of specific nous, but none is as essential to performance as it is in hockey. Basketball scouts love to talk about “basketball IQ,” but it tends to apply more to certain positions than others. The same is true in football, where the closest comparison may be evaluating quarterbacks’ processing ability, since it’s almost impossible to discern whether their decision-making will translate from the slower tempo of college football to the NFL. Soccer also asks players to assume multiple roles, but only hockey does at full speed, in tight quarters, at risk of dismemberment, at all times.

“Hockey is such a composite,” Han said. “You’re doing a bunch of different things and using several skill sets at the same time: Skating plus agility plus toughness, shooting on the backhand or shooting on a screen. Nothing is being done in isolation. And then there’s how fast the game is and how fast the pressure comes.

“If you have amazing hockey sense but zero ability to create separation with skating, or your passing is not accurate, or can’t shoot the puck, or you’re afraid to get hit and get hurt, it’s not going to show. Maybe you’re not dumb, you’re scared. Maybe you’re not dumb, you’re gassed.’

In a 30-year career as an NHL executive, Rutherford said one player stands out above all the others when it comes to hockey sense: Ron Francis. The former Hurricanes general manager was the linchpin of the team’s early days in North Carolina, the free-agent signing who gave the franchise a sheen of legitimacy when it needed it most.

‘Ronnie Franchise’

Francis was a tremendously skilled playmaker, with hands that could make the puck dance. The Hurricanes used to host a fiercely competitive media ball hockey game before training camp, and one day during his tenure as GM, Francis stepped onto the floor in dress slacks and loafers and, without moving his feet, whizzed passes onto the sticks of players — who, in most cases, weren’t expecting them — for tap-in goals.

That’s how Francis played. In 2001, when Jeff O’Neill scored a career-high 41 goals, Francis had the primary assist on 13 of them. His passing ability prolonged his career into his 40s despite the fact Francis was never the best skater on any team he was on. He played on skate blades that had almost no edge to them; he needed to be able to glide more than he needed to stop and start, in part because he had the innate ability to know where he needed to go before anyone else saw that he needed to go there.

As elite as Francis’ hands were, his hockey sense went even a level beyond.

“It’s that anticipating what’s going on in the game, reading the plays,” Rutherford said. “He was a step ahead of other players in thinking the game. And then of course, whatever’s going on in the game, being able to make a quick correction in how the game is played.”

Francis became a first-ballot Hall of Famer because hockey sense is not merely what keeps smaller or slower players in the game. It’s what turns good players into great ones, and great ones into legends. If you can put Blake’s hockey sense in a bigger, stronger or even more skilled player, you end up with a Gretzky or Bobby Orr or Sidney Crosby.

“Those are those elite guys,” Staal said.

Over the years, especially in amateur scouting, hockey sense has become a more important element of evaluation. The Hurricanes aren’t the only team focusing on it, even if they may prioritize it. Columbus Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell, the Hurricanes’ general manager from 2018-24, said his sense of hockey sense has evolved over the years, and so has the emphasis placed upon it.

“On our scouting reports, it’s the No. 1 thing,” Waddell said. “It used to be skating was No. 1, then stickhandling, handling the puck. Now hockey sense is the first thing, the first box that you check off. It’s something we always talked about but probably didn’t emphasize enough, but the game’s changed. It used to be size — how big is this guy? Now size has been proven by lots of players that it’s just a number. It’s how they use that size.”

November 11, 2023. Duluth, Minn. North Dakota leads Minnesota-Duluth, 1-0, early in the second period. Gaber chips the puck ahead to Blake in front of the benches, and Blake carries the puck across the blue line into the offensive zone on the right side. Three defenders surround him, one directly in front of him, two just behind on either side. Gaber is coming down the right wing behind him, skating to catch up.

As he reaches the right faceoff circle, Blake, a right shot, cuts inside on his forehand. The defender can’t pivot quickly enough to cut off his route, but stays close enough to deny him any room. The move allows the two trailing defenders to close the gap, and as Blake pushes off his right skate to move to the center of the ice, between the circles, the three Duluth players all move toward him.

Just as the space is collapsing, Blake makes a blind backward pass behind him and to his right, on his backhand, between two of the closing defenders to Gaber, who is cruising past the right faceoff dot with speed. The pass is right on Gaber’s tape. All he has to do is shoot. Unobstructed, Gaber rips a forehand shot past the goalie, who’s desperately lunging across the crease.

“I was just kind of following the play, hoping for some loose change, seeing what Blaker does with it,” Gaber said, describing a play he can recreate from memory 18 months later. “It honestly surprised me. I almost wasn’t ready for it. Luckily I was.”

It’s easier to make plays like that in college hockey than in the NHL, where defenders have longer wingspans, nimbler feet and aren’t often caught watching the puck like that, but the pass itself is equally stunning in both its execution — a perfectly placed, no-look pass in traffic — and its audacity, to a teammate Blake had no earthly way of knowing was there.

Could he pick up Gaber on the edge of his peripheral vision? Was that a slight turn of head to scan, almost imperceptible on the YouTube highlight? Was it just knowing where Gaber would be if he went where he was supposed to be?

Or was it all of that, because that’s just how his brain is wired?

“He sees everything,” Yorke said.

Nature vs. nurture

One of the all-time great experiments in hockey sense played out on a sod farm in northern Ontario. If it’s hard to define hockey sense, it’s equally hard to figure out where it actually comes from. Nature and nurture, to be sure, but a little of both — and sometimes neither.

Staal is a two-time finalist for the Selke Trophy, which goes to the NHL’s best defensive forward. In his case, size helps. He’s a hulking 6-4 and a stoutly muscled 220-plus pounds, at age 36. Even as his quickness wanes, his wingspan covers an extraordinary amount of ice, and he long ago learned how to use his strength to lean on the opposition’s best players, a duty he draws almost without exception. Just as Brind’Amour was one of the great defensive forwards of his generation in his playing career, Staal is his ultimate safety net as a coach, a player he can put out in any situation, to win any faceoff, secure he’ll do the right thing.

What makes Staal a great defensive player is not just his physical gifts; it’s a sense of defensive expectation that enables him to sense where an opposing player is going even when that player is a swifter skater than Staal, and most are these days. That’s hockey sense, in a sense, and Staal can pinpoint where it comes from.

The early days of the four Staal brothers are hockey legend at this point, battles fought day after day, night after night, on the outdoor rink their father built out of plywood and chicken wire on the family’s Thunder Bay sod farm. Jordan was the third in a span of four years and the physically strongest, if perhaps not quite as offensively gifted as Eric, the oldest, who the Hurricanes took with the third pick of the 2003 draft and ended up leading the NHL playoffs in scoring as they won the Stanley Cup three years later.

Jordan Staal spent his entire childhood trying to get the puck from Eric, chasing him around the rink along with second brother Marc, a future first-round draft pick and NHL defenseman. None of them needed any time in the minor leagues; they were all NHL-ready at 18 or 19. Eric was, at his best, an offensive dynamo, fast and nimble for

his size with a knack for clutch goals, while both Jordan and Marc built their careers on their defensive prowess.

“He was four years older than I was, and I didn’t have the puck,” Jordan Staal said. “I was constantly reading him, trying to get it off of him. I would 100 percent attribute a lot of how I can angle and read and understand how to get the puck back to that.”

The three oldest brothers all had long NHL careers, playing into their late 30s, a total of 3,829 NHL regular-season and 288 playoff games (and counting, in Jordan’s case), winning three Stanley Cups. But Jared, the youngest, was just as big and had all the same experiences his entire life and played all of two NHL games after being picked in the second round.

They all drew from the same gene pool and had similar experiences growing up, and it was enough for three of the four siblings to make hundreds of millions of dollars playing hockey in the NHL, but not the fourth, and the three who did make it each carved out completely different roles for themselves: the offensive superstar, the two-way workhorse, the defensive stopper.

“They all played the game different, but I think it’s fair to say in that group, hockey sense helped their careers a lot,” said Rutherford, who drafted Eric Staal as Hurricanes GM in 2003 and traded for Jordan in 2012. “They just played different roles.”

The little-brother scenario is not an uncommon one. When the Hurricanes drafted Aho in 2015, he slipped to the second round because of concerns about his size, but the Hurricanes always liked his skill and hockey sense. He also grew up around the game — his father is now the general manager of Finnish club Karpat Oulu — but he didn’t just play hockey. In every sport, he was always looking up at his brother.

“I was always the smaller guy,” Aho said. “I kind of had to find different ways to beat him. It wasn’t size or strength. I got my ass kicked all the time.”

Aho paused, then tapped his head.

“I had to do it up here.”

‘He just gets it’

But it’s facile to assume that older siblings or NHL-playing parents bequeath hockey sense as a rule. There are plenty of examples of players who emerge from such environments unable to see the game at that level, and just as many others who appear to be gifted with hockey sense as if touched by the finger of a god for no apparent reason.

“I think you can make a lot of mistakes if you do it that way,” Yorke said. “That’s a bias. Just because the brother played in the NHL or the father did, that’s an inherent bias that can get you in trouble and lead to mistakes. Obviously Jackson has a dad who was a hell of a hockey player and he grew up around hockey, but that’s not necessarily the reason he’s so smart. Give him some credit for everything he’s accomplished on his own.”

Which raises the inevitable next question: Genes and siblings aside, can hockey sense be taught? Some of it is unquestionably innate, but some skills coaches who believe there are techniques a player can work on to improve his or her hockey sense throughout a career. Often, after a player makes a play no one saw coming, a review of the video will reveal a slight turn of the head a moment or two earlier.

This is “scanning,” the ability to look away from the play for a split-second to survey the entirety of the ice, and it’s a skill that can be taught and practiced like any other. “Shoulder-checking” is what fighter pilots call “checking 6,” a glance over the shoulder at what’s happening behind you. Gaber talks about “pre-puck awareness” as well, consciously envisioning where players will be on the ice, so you know what you’re going to do before you even have the puck on your stick.

Just because Gretzky was born with a perfect grasp of it doesn’t mean the rest of humanity can’t try to get better.

“In the summer, there are lots of different things you can do,” Gaber said. “Shoulder-checking. Pre-puck awareness. Scanning the ice constantly. Scanning is something Blaker does really well. He knows where guys are and extends plays. It’s something that makes his hockey sense what it is.”

But there are diminishing returns, and a pro-caliber player may be able to improve his hockey sense, but it’s also not something that can be conjured from nothing.

“We can teach a lot of things in our sport,” Waddell said. “We can make a player a better skater. We can work on his shot. You can’t teach hockey sense. Either you have it or not. Everybody that plays the game has some hockey sense. But some players have more than others.”

In Blake’s case, there were so many factors that combined to make him the player he is. His size. His father. His mother, a star athlete in her own right. Growing up around the NHL. Even hockey video games — “You can be creative on that, and learn new stuff,” Blake said. But there’s also just the mere coincidence of human life, that some people have a genius within them that others do not, even if it’s a matter of degrees.

NHL players are the best on earth at what they do, at this particular combination of physical and mental skills, athleticism and intelligence. Even by that standard, Blake stands out.

“It just makes sense,” Yorke said. “He just plays. He just gets it.”

In the end, no one knows why Blake’s hockey sense is exceptional, why he developed an ability to think and see the game that allows him to play a brute-force game without brute force. Only that he wouldn’t be here, now, without it.

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1352408 Carolina Hurricanes

Taylor Hall is a natural Hurricane, and 4 seconds in Game 4 proved it

Sean Gentille7-8 minutes 13/05/2025

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

RALEIGH, N.C. — Four seconds isn't much time.

On Monday night, that's how long it took for the puck to hit Taylor Hall's stick, for Hall's skates to carry him from the blue line to the high slot, and for his shot to buzz past Washington Capitals goaltender Logan Thompson.

That's also how long it took to land on one particularly timely conclusion: That goal — that sequence, in that moment, at this juncture of the Stanley Cup playoffs — is why Taylor Hall is a Carolina Hurricane.

Hall, a 33-year-old former MVP who'd spent 1 1/2 seasons of his dwindling prime killing time on an NHL bottom-feeder, did in May exactly what Carolina acquired him to do back in January. As an opponent made its push, with the Hurricanes' control of the series in the balance, Hall held the dagger — and he buried it.

If it plays out any differently — if Hall slips offside, or if his shot goes wide, or if Thompson guesses correctly — who knows where things go for Carolina?

That could read as hyperbole, and that's not the intent; we've just seen this movie a couple of times before, at least as it relates to the Hurricanes. They were in the second round of the playoffs, outplaying their opponent dramatically, period-over-period and game-over-game, and still one bounce away from heading into Game 5 tied 2-2, moving back into a neighborhood they'd taken great pains to leave behind.

And now, with a large assist from Hall, they're one win away from closing out the Capitals in a series that on merit deserves to be 3-1. For three minutes and six seconds after a goal by Jacob Chychrun cut Carolina's lead to 2-1, it felt like they weren't going to get there.

Washington was buzzing, and the puck was in Carolina's end. On the retrieval, defenseman Sean Walker rimmed it to center Jack Roslovic, who'd clocked Hall waiting on the far blue line. Both knew exactly what they were doing.

"Everyone's asking me if I was cheating," Hall said. He wasn't. Carolina head coach Rod Brind'Amour backed him up.

"If I didn't get a breakaway there, we were going to exit with possession," Hall said. "So I thought it was something to try. And (Roslovic) and I made eye contact, and he made a great pass."

All that — the hockey sense, the creativity, the connection with Roslovic — only got Hall halfway home. He still needed the one-on-one strategy and finishing talent it'd take to beat a high-end goalie who'd already caused Carolina plenty of problems in the first 11 periods.

"I got my head up and tried to look where (Thompson) was. He plays somewhat deep in his net. So shooting is a pretty good option," he said. "If you deke, he's going to have a better chance at it. So, I just picked my corner, and it was a good shot."

Good shot. Big shot.

"It kind of gave us a breath," defenseman Dmitry Orlov said.

For Carolina, it was a shot that took root, at the latest, back in January. In Raleigh, they were in the middle of what's become a typical season: cruising for a playoff berth and doing it in statistically dominant fashion, controlling possession and scoring chance share at a metronomically elite level. That's been the story, more or less, for seven years.

In that span, though, Carolina hasn't made the Stanley Cup Final. It's the sort of stacked-up instances of almost-but-not-quite that dials up the pressure — and Carolina GM Eric Tulsky acted accordingly, trading for Mikko Rantanen and Hall in one swoop on Jan. 24. If you thought the Hurricanes were averse to all-in moves … actually, if you thought that, you missed the Jake Guentzel trade. If you wanted more proof, for whatever reason, the Rantanen and Hall deals provided that in full. More importantly, they added professional goal-scorers.

You know what happened to the first guy. He doesn't work here anymore. Hall remains, and all signs point to him sticking around a while longer; he signed a three-year extension after the Hurricanes' first-round win over New Jersey. As of Monday night, they've already recouped a chunk of it.

There are reasons to think that willl continue, too. Even if Hall's not scoring huge breakaway goals at the most crucial of moments, he is a stylistic and systematic fit. He spent 31 regular-season games showing it, and now nine in the playoffs. All the elements of a Brind'Amour player — the speed and tenacity necessary to pressure puck carriers, the skill necessary to consistently create chances when the puck changes hands — are present.

Look at Carolina's fourth goal, which (again) restored a two-goal cushion. Watch Hall pressure Capitals defenseman Rasmus Sandin along the boards, dislodge the puck and shuffle it ahead to Walker. That's a lab-quality Hurricanes scoring sequence.

Hall knew the fit made sense well before Tuesday night; he'd played Carolina plenty of times with the Devils and in a playoff series with the Boston Bruins.

"As soon as I got here and they kind of gave the systems rundown and showed some video," he said, "I was even more happy. (The) style of play is aggressive. It's in your face. Once you get the hang of it, there's not a lot of thinking. And that bodes well for my game."

Brind'Amour needed a bit of a refresher. "I obviously know the player, but I didn't know where his game was at," he said. "I hadn't really watched him the last little while."

Getting marooned with the Chicago Blackhawks, as Hall did, will have that effect on a person. The excitement and relief he felt after Tulsky threw him a life preserver were clear, and Brind'Amour made sure the vibes continued to improve.

"It was good to just give him a clean slate. I just kind of said, 'Look, you show us what you have,' and that's kind of what he's done," Brind'Amour said. "I think he's come in here and just wanted to be part of it. Not anything more than that. And he's clearly been a good addition for us."

A good addition at the right time.

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The Athletic / Defense attorney questions E.M. about calling players men during Hockey Canada trial

By Dan Robson, Kamila Hinkson, Katie Strang

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The fifth and final defense attorney in the Hockey Canada sexual assault trial accused the complainant of having “an agenda” for using the term “men” to refer to the five hockey players accused of sexual assault and other members of the 2018 Canadian World Junior team.

Throughout the trial, all five defense attorneys have referred to the accused, who were all at least 18 at the time of the alleged incident, as “boys.” Julianna Greenspan, lawyer for Cal Foote, suggested Tuesday that E.M. referring to the players as “men” was intentional.

“I’ve been calling them men because that’s what they were,” E.M. said.

Foote, Michael McLeod, Alex Formenton, Dillon Dubé and Carter Hart are all facing sexual assault charges stemming from an alleged incident in which E.M. said she was sexually assaulted over the span of several hours in a London, Ont., hotel room while players were in town for a Hockey Canada event celebrating their 2018 World Juniors championship. All five players have pleaded not guilty.

E.M. has appeared in the witness box by CCTV since May 2. Tuesday was her final day of cross-examination; she will be back Wednesday for re-examination, when the Crown can ask her to clarify things brought up during the cross-examination.

She has testified that after a night of drinking and dancing at Jack’s bar, she returned to the hotel with McLeod and engaged in consensual sex. Afterward, she said, men showed up in the hotel room without her consent and she was scared. E.M. said that she was asked to lay down on a bedsheet on the floor, and did so because she felt she had no choice. Over the next couple of hours, she said she was coaxed into performing oral sex and vaginal sex, and was slapped and spit on while players yelled out directions and encouraged each other. She said the experience left her feeling degraded and humiliated.

On Tuesday, Greenspan brought up the first statement E.M. made to police in June 2018, in which she uses the word “boy” to describe her interactions with the men she met at the bar that night. Greenspan emphasized that E.M. did not use the term “man” in her statement in June 2018.

“Not one single time did you use the reference ‘man’ or ‘men’ in June 2018 to refer to these individuals, right?” Greenspan said.

“That’s right. That’s not how I spoke back then,” E.M. replied. “That was seven years ago.”

Greenspan again suggested that E.M. used the term boys in 2018 because it described “who they were” and “what they were.”

“Pretty obvious,” Greenspan said.

“Just because I used ‘boys,’ because that was the only way I could really articulate this and get this out to the officer, doesn’t change the fact that their age made them men,” E.M. replied.

Greenspan continued to press the point.

“The reason you have so carefully changed your language is that you have come into this trial with a clear agenda,” Greenspan said. “Isn’t that right?”

“No, absolutely not. I’m older. I understand more,” E.M. said. “They were men.”

Greenspan suggested that E.M. was likely aware of who the World Junior players were because she had family members who played and coached hockey at various levels. Greenspan also noted that the London Knights are a popular OHL team. The Knights play at Canada Life Place next door to the London Courthouse, and just a few blocks away from Jack’s bar and the Delta hotel.

“I knew of the London Knights team … I couldn’t tell you a single player on the team,” E.M. said, adding that she had never been to a Knights game at that point.

Greenspan said that in December 2018, the Canadian World Junior team played an exhibition game at the Knights arena, then known as Budweiser Gardens. E.M. said she was not aware that the team played there. She has previously testified that she did not share her family’s interest in hockey.

Greenspan spent part of the morning and afternoon showing videos from the night of the alleged incident to the court; however, the livestream was shut down due to technical difficulties.

According a CBC report from inside the courtroom, Greenspan returned to a specific claim E.M. made about what happened in the hotel room — that Foote did the splits over her as she was lying down, and put his penis on her face.

Greenspan said her client was wearing shorts at the time, which E.M. disagreed with.

“I think I can clearly remember having a penis in my face,” E.M. said. “It would not have been as shocking in my mind if he had shorts or pants on.”

During her cross-examination, Greenspan also questioned E.M. on when she realized the people she was with at the bar were on the national team, whether she told the truth about how drunk she was the night of the alleged incident and whether she was seeking attention from the men in the hotel room, among other topics, according to the CBC report.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

The Athletic / NHL Mock Draft 2025: Frondell to Chicago, Martone to Utah? Pronman projects Round 1

Corey Pronman

May 13, 2025 7:00 am EDT

With the draft lottery done, we have a template of the selection order ready for the 2025 NHL Draft. Unless Radim Mrtka breaks things up in the top 5-7, we expect a run on forwards early in the draft, especially with so many good centers available. The order in which these forwards go is the most interesting thing about this draft and will be debated by teams and fans in the coming weeks. This mock is my best attempt to project how I think the first round of the 2025 NHL Draft will transpire on June 27.

1. New York Islanders: Matthew Schaefer, LHD, Erie (OHL)

Schaefer gives the Islanders a true No. 1 defenseman prospect to build around. His high-end mobility, intelligence and competitiveness project him as a cornerstone on the blue line for years to come and he is highly likely to be the pick despite the limited number of games he played this season.

The New York Islanders will have to weigh Schaefer's limited body of work this season carefully.

2. San Jose Sharks: Michael Misa, C, Saginaw (OHL)

Misa's elite speed and creativity give San Jose a franchise-caliber center. The addition of Misa gives the Sharks flexibility to move either him or Will Smith to the wing long term. He can break games open with his skill and vision and will be a foundational offensive piece for a rebuilding Sharks squad.

3. Chicago Blackhawks: Anton Frondell, C, Djurgården (Allsvenskan)

Frondell brings high-end skill and a complete 200-foot game and fills Chicago's need for a strong two-way pivot to pair with Connor Bedard, who may end up as a long-term winger in the NHL.

4. Utah Mammoth: Porter Martone, RW, Brampton (OHL)

Utah prioritizes being hard to play against, and Martone will provide a lot of size and a high compete level while also being very skilled for a big man. It's easy to envision him next to Logan Cooley on a top line for the next 10 years.

5. Nashville Predators: James Hagens, C, Boston College (Hockey East)

Nashville adds high-end skill and speed down the middle with Hagens, even if his game needs more inside presence. He brings the potential to be a major point producer and address a critical need for the Predators at center, even if not every NHL scout is convinced he's an NHL center.

6. Philadelphia Flyers: Caleb Desnoyers, C, Moncton (QMJHL)

Desnoyers' stock continues to rise with his great playoff run for Moncton. He's a complete center with the size, skating, skill and off-puck play to be a big-minute NHL center, which is something Philly truly craves.

7. Boston Bruins: Jake O'Brien, C, Brantford (OHL)

O'Brien is a cerebral, playmaking center with top-line upside. His skill and vision are clear NHL traits and address Boston's massive need for a center who can drive play and create offense.

8. Seattle Kraken: Brady Martin, C, Sault Ste. Marie (OHL)

Martin brings an intense, physical two-way game that complements all the skill Seattle has drafted in recent years while also bringing plenty of puck play himself and the ability to be a top-six forward, be it at center or wing.

9. Buffalo Sabres: Radim Mrtka, RHD, Seattle (WHL)

Mrtka is a 6-foot-5 defenseman who skates well and has offensive flashes, giving Buffalo a rare right-shot blueliner with top-four upside. He compares to a Sabres pick from a long time ago in Tyler Myers.

10. Anaheim Ducks: Roger McQueen, C, Brandon (WHL)

A 6-foot-5 center with speed, hands and bite, McQueen gives Anaheim a potential massive talent down the middle. He would have gone top five if it weren't for a concerning back injury. With superb young talent in the organization, Anaheim can afford the gamble on McQueen.

11. Pittsburgh Penguins: Kashawn Aitcheson, LHD, Barrie (OHL)

Aitcheson adds significant physicality to Pittsburgh's system while also having the size, mobility and skill of a top-four NHL defenseman.

12. New York Rangers: Braeden Cootes, C, Seattle (WHL)

Cootes brings speed, compete and two-way versatility to the Rangers' forward group, giving them a hardworking center with offensive potential and addressing an important need at center.

13. Detroit Red Wings: Victor Eklund, RW, Djurgården (Allsvenskan)

Eklund's speed, high motor and ability to create offense gives Detroit an important addition of offensive talent to its system while continuing with a trend of prioritizing compete in its picks.

14. Columbus Blue Jackets: Cameron Reid, LHD, Kitchener (OHL)

Reid is a dynamic skater who closes well defensively and can generate clean exits and secondary offense. I could see him or Jackson Smith as the Jackets' pick here as they try to add young depth to their blue line.

15. Vancouver Canucks: Cole Reschny, C, Victoria (WHL)

Reschny is a very skilled and intelligent player who plays hard and was as good as any junior player in the second half of the CHL season. He theoretically gives Vancouver a much-needed young

center of the future, although not everyone in the league is convinced he's a pro center.

16. Montreal Canadiens: Carter Bear, LW, Everett (WHL)

A competitive and highly skilled winger who plays a physical game, Bear could provide a lot of elements to Montreal's top six.

17. Montreal Canadiens: Jackson Smith, LHD, Tri-City (WHL)

Smith brings size, skating and offensive tools to the Canadiens blue-line pipeline as they continue to build a very strong group of young defensemen.

18. Calgary Flames: Justin Carbonneau, RW, Blainville-Boisbriand (QMJHL)

A fast, strong winger with a dangerous shot, Carbonneau adds a scoring element and high-energy game to Calgary's top six, even if he's slightly redundant with someone like Matt Coronato.

19. St. Louis Blues: Lynden Lakovic, LW, Moose Jaw (WHL)

Lakovic is a big man with legit speed, skill and goal-scoring ability. He would be a highly talented forward addition to the Blues' system, even if his compete level still draws some debate.

20. Columbus Blue Jackets: Joshua Ravensbergen, G, Prince George (WHL)

Ravensbergen is a big, athletic goaltender with starter upside — the type of swing Columbus can afford to take on a second first-rounder.

21. Ottawa Senators: Blake Fiddler, RHD, Edmonton (WHL)

Fiddler's size, defensive ability, skating and hardness make him exactly the type of defenseman Ottawa has coveted. Ideally, the Senators would add some skill to their forward group, but a run on forwards before their pick left them without any of the top-tier forward prospects.

22. Calgary Flames: Milton Gastrin, C, MoDo (Sweden Jr.)

A responsible, hard-nosed, two-way center, Gastrin adds leadership traits and versatility to the forward group.

23. Carolina Hurricanes: Logan Hensler, RHD, Wisconsin (Big Ten)

Hensler fits the type of defenseman Carolina has liked to target: He's mobile, has skill and can make a reliable pass.

24. Philadelphia Flyers: Daniil Prokhorov, LW, Dynamo St. Petersburg (MHL)

Prokhorov's size and physicality fit the typical Flyers draft pick, and he has enough touch and speed to complement their skilled forwards.

25. Philadelphia Flyers: Sascha Boumedienne, LHD, Boston University (Hockey East)

One of the better-skating defensemen in the class, Boumedienne provides transition ability with the potential for some offense at the NHL level as well.

26. Nashville Predators: Jack Nesbitt, C, Windsor (OHL)

Nesbitt is a heavy center with strong puck skills and playmaking vision. Despite questions about his skating, his offense and physicality make him a legit first-round pick as Nashville builds out its center depth in this draft.

27. Los Angeles Kings: Jakob Ihs-Wozniak, LW, Luleå (Sweden Jr.)

The Kings take a swing on a tall winger with NHL-caliber feet, hands and scoring ability, hoping he becomes a future middle-six scorer.

28. San Jose Sharks: Henry Brzustewicz, RHD, London (OHL)

Brzustewicz is a smart, mobile right-shot who adds a steady two-way game to a Sharks system that needs quality blueliners.

29. Chicago Blackhawks: Malcolm Spence, LW, Erie (OHL)

Spence brings high effort, responsible two-way play and a solid track record for Canada. He's not the flashiest forward but he has legit enough talent to play in a middle six.

30. Nashville Predators: William Horcoff, C, Michigan (Big Ten)

A big, skilled forward with great hands, Horcoff needs to work on his skating but has the potential to be a legit scorer as a pro and looked quite good at the college level as a 17-year-old.

31. Washington Capitals: Cullen Potter, C, Arizona State (NCHC)

Potter's great skating and puck skill give Washington a dynamic, high-upside forward, but his size and perimeter play does worry teams too.

32. Winnipeg Jets: Bill Zonnon, LW, Rouyn-Noranda (QMJHL)

Zonnon is a big winger who skates and shoots well enough to be a middle-six contributor in Winnipeg's forward pipeline.

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ESPN / 2025 Stanley Cup playoffs: Second-round takeaways so far – ESPN

Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton, Greg Wyshynski

14–18 minutes

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 14, 2025

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The second round of the 2025 Stanley Cup playoffs has passed the midway point, with all but one series through Game 4.

What have been the biggest lessons learned through the first part of the second round? Which teams and players have surprised (in either a good or bad way)? How will all of it matter when it comes to the rest of the postseason?

ESPN reporters Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton and Greg Wyshynski break it all down:

Could a recent playoff trend be a good omen for the Stars?

Of course, there's still quite a bit that can change in the Winnipeg Jets-Dallas Stars series. But let's just say that the Stars go on to win the series and advance to the Western Conference finals. It would be their third consecutive conference finals appearance, and their fourth visit since 2020. While they have yet to win the Stanley Cup during that window, does that level of consistency make them the preeminent team in the West?

There's no shortage of challengers, with the Vegas Golden Knights winning the Cup in 2023, and the Edmonton Oilers coming within a game of doing so last season. If Dallas makes it to the next round, it will face one of those two.

But what makes the Stars' situation one worth contextualizing is how it compares to other teams' since the NHL moved to the Eastern/Western format in 1994. Beating the Jets and getting to a third straight conference finals would make the Stars just the fourth team under the current format to earn that distinction. The Detroit Red Wings did it first (from 1995 through 1998) and won two Stanley Cups. They did it again from 2007 through 2009, winning another title in 2008.

The most recent team was the Chicago Blackhawks, who did it from 2013 through 2015 and won two Cups. -- Clark

Toronto needs a new tactic

The Maple Leafs looked like fish out of water in Game 4 against the Florida Panthers, a brutal 2-0 shutout loss in which the reigning Stanley Cup champions were in top form. Florida smothered Toronto with sustained offensive zone pressure, leading the Leafs to take multiple penalties and generally kill any ounce of momentum they tried to generate.

If it weren't for a stellar (wasted) performance from goaltender Joseph Woll, the final score would have been a blowout, because Toronto had no answers for Florida's heat.

Unlike earlier in the series, when the Leafs were capitalizing on rush chances and literally spinning Sergei Bobrovsky in circles, the Panthers battened down the hatches to keep Toronto on the outside while boxing out better in front of Bobrovsky. If they can maintain that, and the Leafs can't make adjustments, the Panthers are looking at a third straight Eastern Conference finals appearance.

Should Toronto want to make one of its own, it's time to make some changes, and for its top skaters to step up. Mitch Marner doesn't have a shot on goal since he scored the winner in Game 2. Auston Matthews doesn't have a goal yet in the second round and hasn't registered one against Florida in nine career postseason tilts.

Toronto coach Craig Berube said after Sunday's loss that there are players the Leafs need more from -- no names required. It's clear. Both teams have owned home ice in the series so far. Toronto has that advantage still as this one becomes a best-of-three. The question is, what sort of counterpunch will the Leafs throw now that Florida's claws are out and sharpened? -- Shilton

Can Hellebuyck be trusted for the Olympics?

The first question Team USA's brain trust will need to answer before the 2026 Winter Olympic men's hockey tournament: Are the contests in Milan considered home games or road games? Because the answer could determine its starting goaltender.

At this point, Winnipeg Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck's struggles on the road in the Stanley Cup playoffs have reached the point of absurdity. He has won the Vezina Trophy twice in his career and will win it again this season. He's a finalist for the Hart (MVP). There isn't much debate, statistically or anecdotally, that he's the best goaltender in the world ... in the regular season.

In his past 20 playoff games, Hellebuyck is 7-13 with a .866 save percentage and a 3.90 goals-against average. The balance of those putrid numbers have come on the road, where Hellebuyck has lost eight of his past nine starts with an .835 SP and a 5.20 GAA.

After the first round of the playoffs against the St. Louis Blues, the bar for Hellebuyck was set at "can he get through a road game without being pulled?" The good news in Game 3 against Dallas is that he cleared that bar. The bad news is that he lost again and wasn't very good, letting in a fluttering Roope Hintz shot for Dallas' first goal, and then scoring what the NHL ruled was an own goal on Alex Petrovic's kicked puck in the third.

"He had to make some big stops. Him and [Dallas goalie Jake] Oettinger, they were going kind of toe to toe," Jets coach Scott Arniel said after the game. "But we're going to be judged -- not just Connor -- by what happens on the road. We've got to win."

Oettinger, by contrast, is 12-11 with a .909 SP and a 2.63 GAA in his past 23 road playoff games. That's not great, but it certainly isn't getting pulled three times in the first round, either.

The U.S. has a deep goalie pool, but Oettinger is seemingly the next man up, having served as Hellebuyck's backup at the 4 Nations Face-Off in February. His play in this series and in other clutch moments -- like the Stars' Game 7 win against Colorado in Round 1 -- should spark a conversation about the American's Olympic starter, given Hellebuyck's struggles when the games matter most.

However, it should be noted that Hellebuyck was outstanding at 4 Nations, with a 1.59 GAA and .932 SA in three games. Which begs the question: Perhaps you can trust him more playing in back of an All-Star team rather than the Winnipeg Jets, no matter where the games are played? -- Wyshynski

The depth that has given the Oilers life could be the death of the Golden Knights

Seeing Adam Henrique score the first two goals in Game 4 before Evander Kane scored another did more than stake the Oilers to a 3-0 victory that now has them a win away from a second consecutive Western Conference finals appearance. It once again reinforced how

the Oilers can rely on a level of depth that, by comparison, is lacking for the Golden Knights.

The statistic that has made that most clear is how the Oilers' generational duo of Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid have combined to score just three of their team's 15 goals. Draisaitl scored in Game 1, but the rest of those contributions, including the game winner, came from elsewhere in the lineup. Draisaitl did score the game winner in Game 2, but the previous four goals were scored by his teammates. In Game 3, Corey Perry scored the first two goals.

Now compare that to the Golden Knights. The trio of Ivan Barbashev, Tomas Hertl and Brett Howden combined to score 78 regular-season goals. They have been goalless through the first four games of their series against the Oilers. Vegas' six primary defensemen combined to score 35 regular-season goals, with 17 of them belonging to Noah Hanifin and Shea Theodore. The group has only one goal in the series.

It's a lack of scoring depth that has been further compounded by the fact that Jack Eichel, who led the Golden Knights with 94 points in the regular season, hasn't scored in the series. Meanwhile, leading goal scorer Pavel Dorofeyev, who missed the first two games with an injury, has also been blanked since his return. -- Clark

Own goals for everyone?

Fans love seeing goals scored as much as players enjoy scoring them -- except when it's on their own net. And we've seen some doozies in that latter category this round.

There was the own goal in Game 3 between Dallas and Winnipeg on Sunday, when Petrovic's go-ahead goal was found (after a lengthy official review) to have gone off Hellebuyck's stick into the net. The night before, it was Draisaitl's stick that put a puck past Stuart Skinner to give Vegas a buzzer-beating goal (with 0.4 seconds left on the clock) and its first win of the series.

Morgan Rielly's stick guided a puck in past Woll in Game 3 of Toronto's series against Florida to cut into the Leafs' 2-1 advantage. Toronto eventually lost 5-4 in overtime.

It's not like there's a good moment to score on your own net, but could the timing on any of them have been worse? If you've ever wondered why "just put pucks on net" is a time-honored hockey cliché, here's your answer: Because anything can happen. -- Shilton

It's Mikko Rantanen's MVP to lose

Coaching in his 10th postseason, Dallas Stars coach Pete DeBoer has witnessed some startling individual playoff performances from his players. Like Ilya Kovalchuk's 19 points in 23 games for the Devils in 2012. Or Joe Pavelski's 14 goals in 24 games for the Sharks in 2016.

But nothing like the postseason that Rantanen is putting together for the Stars.

"It's the best performance I've gotten to witness, standing where I'm standing," DeBoer said after Dallas' Game 3 win. "But for me, he's just getting started. He's just warming up here. I think he's on a mission."

Through 10 games, Rantanen leads the playoffs in goals (nine) and points (18). At one point, he had scored or assisted on 15 of 16 goals for the Stars, dating back to the first round. He's the first player in Stanley Cup playoffs history with five three-point games through a team's first 10 playoff games.

"Huge pickup at the deadline. He's been awesome for us," defenseman Alexander Petrovic said. "He's a great guy in the room. He's been on a tear."

Steve Levy joins Pat McAfee and breaks down Mikko Rantanen's hot play in the postseason for the Stars.

He has done all of this after a turbulent season in which he was traded twice -- from Colorado to Carolina and then to Dallas -- before signing a blockbuster extension with the Stars. He has answered questions about his offensive prowess without having the benefit of Nathan MacKinnon on his team. He entered the playoffs as one of the NHL's best postseason scorers of the past several seasons. He has blown away those expectations and is the current leader for the Conn Smythe Trophy (postseason MVP).

Yet though all of this torrid scoring recently, the Jets blanked him in their Game 2 shutout in Winnipeg.

"The biggest thing is time and space," Arniel said. "I know that you hear that a lot in hockey, but at the end of the day, the more he holds onto it, the more he's comfortable, the harder it is to deny what he's trying to do next."

But The Moose was back on the loose in the Stars' Game 3 win, with a goal and two assists.

"I'm trying to stay in the moment. I'm happy to help the team and try to keep doing that as much as I can, both ends of the ice," Rantanen said.

It's certainly Mikko Rantanen's moment. -- Wyshynski

Ovechkin, Perry defying Father Time

Corey Perry will turn 40 on Friday, while Alex Ovechkin will hit that milestone in September. Perry and Ovechkin are part of a five-member group of players age 39 or older who have played more than one game this postseason. But to suggest Ovechkin and Perry are each having strong postseason campaigns for players their age only partially explains what they have done so far.

In fact, they're having two of the best postseason campaigns for two players in their age-39 season in NHL history.

Perry, a Stanley Cup winner who ranks 38th in career playoff goals, has scored five times this postseason. Ovechkin, a fellow Stanley Cup winner who is tied with Mario Lemieux for 12th in playoff goals, has four. They're both within striking distance of the most playoff goals in an age-39 season, per Quant Hockey. That mark is currently held by Jean Béliveau, with Le Gros Bill scoring six goals in 1971. -- Clark

But have the Hurricanes solved Ovi?

Some might accuse Ovechkin's game of being increasingly "one note." But when played right, it's a damn good note. And right now, the Washington Capitals are desperate for more of his contributions to their orchestra, at least at even strength.

Ovechkin's line has been stifled by Carolina's defense -- namely Jaccob Slavin and Brent Burns -- so far in the series, and they've had far fewer shot attempts and chances than the opposition at 5-on-5. Ovechkin and linemate Dylan Strome especially thrive on creating chances off zone entries, and the Hurricanes aren't giving them much in that respect.

Ovechkin continues to fight for open ice and does lead the Capitals in even-strength shots, but that hasn't materialized into anything on the scoresheet; Ovechkin's only goal of the series has been on the power play in Game 4.

Considering the Caps were just whacked 4-0 in Game 3 and 5-2 in Game 4, they are searching for consistent offensive contributions to carry them through. This is when Ovechkin has to start spinning his proverbial straw into gold again at full strength.

Washington got lucky in Game 2 after it was outshot 33-14 by the Hurricanes but still managed to come away with a 3-1 victory. If Carolina is finding its offensive groove now and beginning to solve Logan Thompson, then Washington must find ways to generate more offensive opportunities. That's easier said than done against the Hurricanes' smothering collective defensive game. -- Shilton

Carolina is no joke

If you've been following the second round, you've undoubtedly come across a joke or two (or 10) about the relative quality of the Carolina Hurricanes' series against the Washington Capitals compared to that of the other three playoff series. Perhaps you've made a few yourself.

Monday night's Game 4 was the outlier in what has otherwise been a grinding, tight-checking series in which four or fewer total goals were scored in each of the first three games, including a 4-0 shutout by goalie Frederik Andersen in Game 3.

The Hurricanes are the Hurricanes. Coach Rod Brind'Amour couldn't care less about the entertainment value of this series or any series. His team's mission is to vampirically suck the life out of opponents with a combination of puck possession, defensive zone coverage, reliable goaltending and elite penalty killing. Through four games, it has been mission accomplished.

Brind'Amour was asked about fans and media from other markets boiling down the Hurricanes' virtues to simply being a monotonous "shot volume" team.

"It's lazy. It's lazy. Because you're not really watching the game then. You're picking out part of it," he said. "But there's a method to all of it. It doesn't irk me."

When the Canes don't have the puck, they're preventing shots: Carolina is allowing an average of 24.6 shots per game this postseason, third best among active teams.

"There have been times through this series when I've thought in my head, 'shoot the puck.' But then we have to get that puck through," Washington coach Spencer Carbery said.

Again, this is what the Hurricanes do. This is what the Hurricanes have done. And this is what they'll continue to do in the Eastern Conference finals unless the Capitals have a rally in them. Which would be exciting. But the Hurricanes aren't about that excitement.

"You don't want to give them any life or give them any hope," Canes winger Seth Jarvis said of Thursday's Game 5 back in D.C. -- Wyshynski

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Sportsnet.ca / More road woes push Jets to brink of elimination

Iain MacIntyre

6–7 minutes

DALLAS — The Winnipeg Jets must be good to be able to lose all these playoff games.

Over this season and the last two, no National Hockey League team has won more regular-season games than Winnipeg's 154. And, yet, no team has lost more consecutive road playoff games than the Jets, who on Tuesday had their best road performance of the current Stanley Cup tournament but still lost 3-1 to the Dallas Stars, imperilling their season.

It was the first time in Winnipeg's unfathomable nine-game road losing streak that the team allowed fewer than four goals. And the ninth time they have scored two or less.

"We had 70 shot attempts and scored one goal," Jets head coach Scott Arniel, who inherited the road kill from previous coach Rick Bowness, lamented after the Stars boosted their second-round series lead to 3-1. "If we can't find more than one goal, we're not going to win hockey games, especially against this hockey team.

"I liked a lot of what we did five-on-five. I liked a lot of the opportunities that we created. I loved our first period. We got off to a great start, had them hemmed in, had some great looks. (Jake) Oettinger made some big stops. But like I said, we had 70 shot attempts. We've got to get ... more than one goal off of those. Maybe that's driving harder (to the net), finding those rebounds, screening, whatever it is. We've done it in the past and we've got to find a way to do it the next game."

Dallas goalie Oettinger stopped 31 of 32 shots on net and was the second-best player Tuesday, behind only hat-trick hero Mikael Granlund, who single-handedly tripled the output of the entire Jets roster.

Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck was better than he has been, but still allowed a softie to open the scoring and was probably not among the top 20 players on Tuesday.

Hellebuyck was beaten three times on 24 shots, but couldn't be faulted on the lasers Granlund perfectly fired into small windows for his final two goals. The killer was a one-timer into the roof of the net at 7:23 of the third period at the end of what had been an exemplary

Winnipeg penalty kill of three seconds less than the four-minute, double-minor Jets defenceman Haydn Fleury took for high-sticking Roope Hintz at 3:26.

But Granlund's first goal, an unscreened 32-footer at 8:36 of the first period, was another groaner like the several from distance Hellebuyck has surrendered in these playoffs.

Asked if he was aware from the Stars' pre-scout that Hellebuyck has been vulnerable from distance, Granlund said: "Honestly, no clue. I was just shooting it somewhere and it went in. Obviously, we go through a little pre-scout but, you know, you just try to find a hole. And I was lucky it went in."

"I need to review it," Hellebuyck told reporters. "His stick snapped into our guy's shin pad, but I had a clean enough look. It was just a damn perfect shot, just above my pad and below my glove. I don't know, I need to review it."

Arniel didn't need to see it again.

"Obviously, probably wants the one back, the first one, the wrister coming in," the coach said of his goalie. "Man, the one, three seconds left on that four (minute penalty), it was an unbelievable kill by us. That's a seeing-eye shot, that's a heckuva shot. I mean, right under the bar from the short side. But at the end of the day, we've got to get (Hellebuyck) some run support.

"He'll do his job. We've got to get him some run support. We've got to get him the lead, we've got to get out in front. Make this team chase us, instead of us chasing them like we have in the last couple of games."

The Jets will be chasing from now on.

They need to sweep the series' final three games to advance to their first Western Conference Final since 2018, and the good news is only one of those would be away from home.

Game 5 is Thursday in Winnipeg, where the Jets are 5-1 in the post-season.

"Just win one game," Hellebuyck said. "Leave it all out there. I leave it all out there every night. I'm doing my best. Sometimes it's a heartbreak, but all it takes is one little change, one little bounce and things can start going our way."

Oettinger wasn't quite perfect.

He was fooled by Nikolaj Ehlers' sharp-angle shot that made it 1-1 at 1:02 of the second period. But nearly all of the toughest saves were made by Oettinger — none bigger than his stop on Jets sniper Kyle Connor on a shorthanded breakaway about two minutes before Granlund's clinching goal.

"He was probably our best player tonight," Dallas coach Pete DeBoer said of his goalie. "He was so solid. You know, he made a lot of really tough saves look easy. And the breakaway save was ... the turning point of the night. They score there, the momentum flips and who knows what happens down the stretch. So he was fantastic."

In his first game back from knee surgery three-and-a-half months ago, Dallas defenceman Miro Heiskanen teed up Granlund's third goal and logged 14:52 of ice time as DeBoer used seven blue-liners.

DeBoer said he could tell Heiskanen is still working to find his game because he couldn't catch Connor on the key breakaway. But Heiskanen will probably be better in his second game than he was in his first. Outplayed for stretches of Tuesday's game, in which shot-attempts finished 72-45 for Winnipeg, the Stars team might be better, too.

At least it's a home game for the Jets.

"If I had the answer to why," Ehlers said of the nine-game road losing streak, "we would have gotten one at some point.

"The message is pretty clear to everyone: We need to go home and win and we know that. Obviously, going to Dallas and losing two is not what we were looking for. We had some good moments, but at the end of the day, we lost. So we've got to go home, recharge, get ready for the next one."

And hope there's another one after that.

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Sportsnet.ca / What's behind Auston Matthews' goal-scoring woes?

Adam Vingan

5–6 minutes

In assessing Auston Matthews' playoff performance, two things can be true:

1. The Toronto Maple Leafs captain impacts games beyond scoring goals, winning key faceoffs and taking on tough defensive assignments.

2. He needs to score more goals.

Matthews has yet to put the puck in the net against the Florida Panthers, who have knotted the second-round series after falling behind 2-0. The NHL's most prolific scorer of the past nine years has three goals in his past 20 playoff games dating to the start of the Maple Leafs-Panthers series in 2023.

"I get it, but he does a lot of other things in the game that really dictate things and does a great job with a lot of other areas of the game," Maple Leafs coach Craig Berube told reporters Monday when asked about Matthews' scoring drought. "He's just got to keep focusing on that. He's going to get his looks, and (he) just (needs to) stick with what he's doing and (not) get too frustrated with anything, because it's not just about scoring goals."

Despite the results, Matthews has been active on the offensive end against the Panthers, ranking first on the Maple Leafs in slot shots

on net (10) and second in scoring chances (16) behind John Tavares (18) in all situations. Matthews' average of four scoring chances per game against Florida is in line with the 4.04 he averaged during the regular season, which led the league.

Accuracy is not a glaring issue, either. Matthews has hit the net on 16 of his 26 shot attempts (61.5 per cent) and 10 of his 16 scoring chances (62.5 per cent) in the second round. That is an improvement from his performance against the Ottawa Senators; Matthews connected on 53.7 per cent of his shot attempts (22 of 41) and 45.5 per cent of his scoring chances (10 of 22) in six first-round games, respectively. The percentage of Matthews' shot attempts that are one-timers is up as well, jumping from 12.2 per cent against the Senators to 19.2 per cent against the Panthers.

Matthews is also getting himself open in dangerous scoring areas. His 14 slot-pass receptions are tied for fourth most in the league since the second round began.

Overall, Matthews has scored 2.4 fewer goals than expected in the playoffs, ahead of only Dallas Stars captain Jamie Benn (3.8 goals scored below expected).

"The chances have been there," Matthews told reporters following Toronto's 2-0 loss in Game 4. "I think I've just got to do a better job of bearing down on some of them. I think for the most part throughout the four games, we've been winning shifts, generating chances against tough matchups. But obviously you want to score. I want to score."

Those statements are mostly true. Matthews' line with Mitch Marner and Matthew Knies has won the battle against Selke Trophy finalists Aleksander Barkov and Sam Reinhart on the scoreboard, outscoring them 4-1 at 5-on-5. Toronto is up 5-2 against Florida in goals at 5-on-5 when Matthews has been on the ice, and scoring chances are 21-20 in the Maple Leafs' favour.

When the series shifted to South Florida, Panthers coach Paul Maurice pivoted to Anton Lundell's line with Eetu Luostarinen and Brad Marchand as the primary cover for Matthews' line. Although the Maple Leafs had a significant territorial advantage when Matthews' and Lundell's lines went head-to-head, they came up with just one goal at 5-on-5 — Morgan Rielly's game-tying goal in the third period of Game 3.

Two years ago, Matthews failed to score in the Maple Leafs' second-round loss to the Panthers, meaning he has zero goals in nine career playoff games against Florida. He has deserved better; Matthews' shot quality against the Panthers is identical to his average in the other 17 playoff games he has played over the past three years. The Panthers have not done anything special to contain him.

Outside of scoring, Matthews is producing impressive numbers. His 70 defensive plays are second most among all forwards this post-season. That includes 33 blocked passes and 21 stick checks, the latter of which leads all forwards. In the faceoff circle, his 57.4 win percentage is fifth best out of 47 qualified skaters who have taken at least 15 per cent of their team's total draws.

Much of the data supports the notion that Matthews is mired in bad luck. The Maple Leafs, however, need him to turn expected goals into actual ones to get past the Panthers.

"Big goal's coming. That's the way you've got to think about it," Berube told reporters. "He's doing a good job. He's doing a lot of good things for us. I get it. The puck's not going in the net for him, but it's not all about scoring.

"He's out there killing penalties. He's going against top lines. He's checking. He's working. He's competing. A lot of good stuff. Yeah, we'd like him to score, and so would he. It's not easy to score in the playoffs. I'm not overly worried about it."

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers' Kane leading charge as playoff difference-maker

Mark Spector

5–6 minutes

EDMONTON — National Hockey League players have never had the flair of their football or basketball brethren. Maybe it's all us Canadians, but hockey culture has always encouraged the boring.

Fitting in is in. Standing out is out.

But inside this "we" sport, Evander Kane has always eschewed the team bus. Instead, "he" arrives at arenas in Ferraris and Rolls Royces, the camera crew on alert to record and post his entrance — a type of entrance Edmonton Oilers star Connor McDavid would never make.

But that's what makes Kane who he is. And perhaps, allows him to accomplish what he's accomplished this spring. Writing a comeback story through the first 10 games of the playoffs that has been written once by Nikita Kucherov of the Tampa Bay Lightning, and perhaps by no one else in recent memory.

"It's hard to sit out a whole year and then come right into the playoffs," said Oilers head coach Kris Knoblauch of the forward's return. "The L.A. Kings are a good team, and (for Kane) to come and contribute right away …"

In a game where getting up to speed in May when you've missed an entire season is nearly impossible, Kane has not only hopped onto the moving train, but he was driving the train in Game 4 versus the Vegas Golden Knights.

Ten months and two surgeries removed from his last NHL game, Kane has played nine of Edmonton's 10 playoff games. He has twice as many playoff goals (four) as either Toronto Maple Leafs' Auston Matthews or Mitch Marner (two each), and his seven points would place him third on the entire Golden Knights playoff roster.

This isn't Mark Stone or Patrick Kane missing the back half of the year and re-joining their team for the playoffs. Kane's last game was in the 2024 Stanley Cup Final, nearly a full year ago.

And if you think he's surprised at what's going on, well, then you don't know Evander Kane very well.

"Am I surprised? No," he said. "But I didn't necessarily have any expectations.

"I had confidence. I didn't really have any set expectations."

This is the Evander Kane that makes it all worthwhile.

Hit by hit, goal by goal, every ounce of outside-the-box that Kane brings to a team is paid back at this time of year — in spades. He's different all season long, then he's different in the playoffs too — and the Oilers have grown fine with that.

"Evander is a gamer. He loves the big pressure games when there's a lot on the line," said Knoblauch. "The physical play, scoring a big goal for us, crashing the net, winning puck battles. He's contributing a lot for our team."

As a team, the Oilers finished dead last in the NHL in hits this season — a season missed entirely by Kane — averaging just 15 hits per 60.

With Kane in the lineup, his style of play has caught on as the Oilers are third among playoff teams, averaging 35 hits per 60.

"With the physicality, we've got a lot of it through the lineup," Knoblauch said. "(Zach) Hyman … (Adam) Henrique, (Vasily) Podkolzin, (Kasperi) Kapanen. It's nice having that element, but the guy who leads the charge is Kane."

How does a player get up to seed as fast as Kane has?

"A couple of reasons," began Knoblauch. "One, he's an extremely gifted athlete. He's strong, fast, powerful.

"The other one is, he likes the intensity. The game means more at this time of year. He rises to the occasion, where you'll other guys wilt. He likes the competitiveness," Knoblauch said. "The (playoff) game changes to fit his style. More physicality, harder to get to the net. There are more battles, more hits."

He was a force in Game 4 against Vegas, with a goal, an assist, four shots on goal, six hits and a plus-3 rating in a 3-0 win.

He affected the game, "from every standpoint," said Henrique. "We talked about playing with energy right off the bat, and Kaner gets in there, mixes things up, and other guys are following suit, just shift after shift.

"You want to play on that line. And you know, we ended up with a few more penalties in the first in them, but … we continued to push that line and play with that energy from start to finish."

A year ago, Kane skated more gingerly through the payoffs, destined for major abdominal surgery and a knee procedure as well.

This spring?

"He's moving, skating, his agility, everything is much better," Knoblauch said. "The skill, being able to make plays on the wall, plays under pressure. Last year he didn't practise very much and your mobility is laboured. It's difficult to play.

"This year he's much more healthy, he's making plays, he's getting up and down the ice better. He's putting more oomph into the hits. Looks like a different player."

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Sportsnet.ca / 'Chris Tanev for playoff MVP': The most-hit Maple Leaf just won't back down

Luke Fox

8–10 minutes

TORONTO — "Chris Tanev for playoff MVP!"

Respected Toronto Maple Leafs alum Curtis Joseph is wrapping up a discussion on his former club's heavyweight second-round tilt versus the Florida Panthers on the Spittin' Chiclets podcast when he, unprompted, feels compelled to get in his early Conn Smythe vote.

No matter how deep Tanev and his hometown team go this spring, the 35-year-old will be, at best, a longshot to win the trophy.

Stay-at-home, puck-gobbling, forecheck-abused, smart-first-pass defencemen hardly fit the profile of prestigious individual award winners.

But he might win the thing if MVP ballots were handed out to goalies, past and present.

Heck, 25 per cent of the playoff starters still standing — Toronto's Joseph Woll and Dallas's Jake Oettinger — went out for dinner this season and ended up gushing about how great it is to protect a net that Tanev is already protecting.

Curtis Joseph views Tanev as the cornerstone of the smartest and stingiest, roughest and toughest Maple Leafs blue line of the Core Four era; the tone-setter of a playoff team that has blocked more shots (215) than any other team in the Sweet 16; and a "no-brainer" to be on Team Canada's Olympic roster in 2026. (Tanev was under serious consideration for the 4 Nations squad but just missed out.)

"He's a stud defenceman to me. He plays hard," Joseph says. "This is a coming-out for his career, playing for the Leafs, getting all eyes on him.

“All those guys are playing great, but Tanev has been the big difference-maker back there.”

That Tanev led the Leafs in plus/minus in the regular season (+31) and again in the post-season (+5) despite getting a steady diet of the opposition’s most dangerous forwards is a fine place to start.

Where does Tanev rank among all the defencemen teammate Simon Benoit has played with?

“He’s up there,” replies Benoit, compiling a quick mental power ranking. “Probably top one.”

Tanev is the clear No. 1 among all playoff skaters in hits taken (81), with 35 more than the next most-slammed player, teammate Morgan Rielly (46).

“Taking hits, blocking shots,” William Nylander says, with admiration. “Just laying his body on the line for the boys every night.”

In fact, half of the league’s top 10 most hit players are Leafs defencemen (Tanev, Rielly, Jake McCabe, Benoit, Brandon Carlo), which speaks to the visceral game plan imposed by Paul Maurice’s Stanley Cup champions — and should be of some concern in Leafland as this hate-fuelled quarterfinal swells into a war of attrition.

“We play a certain style that’s hard to play and hard to play against. It’s no secret, we try to put everything in and try to be physical. And not just on (Tanev), but it's on their whole team,” explains Florida’s Matthew Tkachuk.

“Over a course of a series, if you continue to do that shift after shift, it’s human nature —you’re going to wear down.”

And yet? The undrafted Tanev remains undeterred, unfathomably unfearful.

The veteran right shot is the hockey equivalent of an inflatable punching bag, the human embodiment of Chumbawamba’s greatest (only?) hit. He gets knocked down, but he gets up again.

“Tough as they come,” says shutdown partner McCabe. “He’s so steady. He’s willing to do whatever it takes to win. We’re lucky to have him.”

“He’s an old-school type of guy,” says Berube, an old-school guy himself. Game recognize game. “He's a warrior. He’s a competitive person. Like, he’s right up there with all the ones that have been around, laying his body on the line every night, whether it’s a block, taking a hit to make a play. I mean, you name it. He’s going to lay it on the line.”

In Game 4, Tanev misplaced a puck between his skates in the slot, and Brad Marchand trucked him over from behind. He popped right up like Whack-a-Mole.

In Game 3, Tanev was on the business end of a flurry of slams into the glass by attacking forwards and needed to go to the dressing room. The whole barn assumed he needed bodily repairs.

So, when Berube dismissed the D-man’s mid-game break as an “equipment issue,” eyes rolled. What? Was his equipment irritating his torn muscles and separated shoulders and bruised shins?

“My skate broke,” Tanev later explained. “Obviously sucks. But the guys did a great job of fixing it and getting me back out there as quick as they could.”

The man isn’t prone to untruths and once bounced back from blocking a slapshot with his face, so we’ll take him at his word.

“He’s really good at absorbing the check and making those plays,” said defenceman Simon Benoit. “He's been doing it for such a long time, and he's just impressive how he does it. He blocks shots. He puts his body on the line.”

Despite all those hits to make a pass and bolts to block a shot (28 blocks, second-most in these playoffs), Tanev hasn’t missed so much as a morning skate.

If Leafs games were major motion pictures, Tanev would be Bruce Willis in Unbreakable.

He absorbed a nasty crash into the end-boards on his bad shoulder in Game 3. Doubled over in pain, he glided to the bench, where he was wincing in pain and talking to trainer Paul Ayotte on the bench. Tanev then hopped the boards next shift.

“I feel great. Every day is a great day,” Tanev smiles, revealing his few remaining teeth. “So, you wake up and you’re happy and come to the rink.”

Remember the classic Looney Tunes? Chris Tanev is Ralph Wolf clocking in every day, knowing he’s going to get clobbered by Sam Sheepdog. Then showing up again next morning on time.

“I’ve always said how great of a player he’s been for years, but to see him at this stage, and continue to do it year after year, it’s incredible,” gushes Tkachuk, once teammates with Tanev in Calgary.

“He’s kind of like the head of the snake back there on their back end. He’s their leader. You can tell. And we’re not inside the walls of their room, but you can tell just by the way he conducts himself and talks to the team and blocks shots and then leads by example. I've seen it, so it's no surprise to see what he's doing now.”

The youngest Leaf, Matthew Knies, has elevated his own physicality this season. One must imagine the Tanev effect is contagious. The good brand of peer pressure.

“He's a stud back there,” Knies says. “He’s always watching. He’s thinking ahead, making the play and getting the puck out of his own zone, and blocking shots. That’s what it takes to win.”

For a man whose game is as blue-collar as it gets, Tanev is thinking ahead more than you might guess.

During the Leafs’ weekend in Fort Lauderdale, Mitch Marner tipped us off that Tanev has been spending his downtime between games studying finance.

That knowledge came in handy when deciding to sign with Toronto as a free agent, as the Canadian was wary of being subjected to a departure tax if he moved to the U.S. (Dallas was keen to keep Tanev as more than a rental.)

Tanev explains that his “10-year break” from school ended when the NHL shut down for the pandemic.

“My wife was like, ‘Why don’t you start taking classes? We’re just sitting at home,’ ” Tanev says.

Through the Players’ Association, Tanev has been picking away at his Southern New Hampshire finance degree one course at a time.

“Almost done,” he says. “I’ve always been good at it, so it’s come easy to me.”

Easy. Like withstanding pain. Or earning his peers’ respect. Or standing tall and absorbing another round of bodychecks from those pesky Panthers.

“Probably sometimes I could move it a little quicker,” Tanev says. “But it’s just playoff hockey, and that’s what happens.”

Berube chuckles when asked if he’s thought of telling Tanev to avoid so much contact.

Hey, if he ain’t broke, why fix him?

“There are probably defencemen in the league that you might be able to change the way they play with a heavy enough forecheck,” Maurice says. “But I don’t think they got anybody on their back end that’s changing the way they play because of it.”

That’s because the rest of the snake has no choice but to follow the head.

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1352501 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Should Maple Leafs change up power-play personnel for Game 5?

Sonny Sachdeva

10–13 minutes

TORONTO — Rewind a few weeks, and the Toronto Maple Leafs’ greatest conundrum seemed their greatest strength.

A round ago, when the blue-and-white were flying high through the early going against the wild-card Ottawa Senators, no aspect of Toronto’s game seemed to be soaring higher than the club’s lethal power play. The five-forward unit of Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, William Nylander, John Tavares and Matthew Knies had not only hung three goals on the Sens in Game 1, it took them a total of 20 seconds to amass the sum.

By the end of the six-game series, the unit had potted six goals on 17 opportunities, finishing Round 1 as the third-most prolific man-advantage squad — and obliterating the paltry 1-for-21 performance the Leafs had put up in their previous post-season go-round.

Now, the Sens have been swapped for the defending champion Florida Panthers, Ottawa’s tentative penalty kill has been replaced by the Cats’ unrelenting aggression, and the Maple Leafs’ power-play dominance has all but disappeared.

The issue was no more pressing than in Sunday’s Game 4. Trailing 1-0 on the road — hunting a win that would’ve pushed the Cats to the brink of elimination — the Maple Leafs were granted three second-period chances to send their all-forward unit over the boards to tie things up.

May 15, 2025

Panthers

VS

Maple Leafs

Moneyline

FLA

-135

TOR

+115

Spread

-1.5

+180

+1.5

-220

Over/Under

O 6

+100

U 6

-120

May 15, 2025

Panthers

VS

Maple Leafs

Not only did the man-advantage end up bringing the Leafs little in terms of quality chances, it wound up doing the opposite, swinging momentum Florida's way courtesy of a slew of short-handed chances that required Joseph Woll's best.

Before the clubs headed back out for the third period, veteran winger Blake Wheeler — who amassed 255 points on the man-advantage during his 16-year big-league career — shared his thoughts on the Maple Leafs' approach during an appearance on Sportsnet's intermission panel.

"I think I'm ready to see that Toronto power play get mixed up a little bit," Wheeler said. "The five forwards have obviously had some impact here in the playoffs, but they're giving up too much against this [Florida] penalty kill. You're starting to see that they're taking away from some of the really good things that Mitch Marner does when he's on the point. You're really not seeing Auston Matthews get his shot like we're used to seeing as well.

"I'd really like to see Morgan Rielly back up top. Let's get Auston Matthews some of these one-timers we're used to seeing. Mitch Marner's job is really to set the table on the power play, not to be back-checking against these Florida forwards all night."

There's no question the unit has struggled against the Panthers, who nullify power plays by swarming the opposition, attacking the puck-carrier and forcing costly errors.

"You know, they are very good at countering and making you pay for your mistakes," Marner said Tuesday from the locker room at the Maple Leafs' practice facility. "We've just got to stick with our game plan, stick with our patience. We've had our looks — we had our looks last game as well, it just didn't fall for us. But we're doing the right things. You've got to keep working, and you've got to find yourself in good areas."

The top-unit quarterback shed light on the approach the group's tried to take through the first four games of this series, to limited success:

"Try to work the puck around as much as we can, try to get them tired," Marner explained. "And then from that point on, just try to exploit areas that we can. You know, we've done a good job throughout the series of doing that. Last game, it just wasn't there."

Toronto has struck twice on the man-advantage against Florida, tallying once in Game 2 and once in Game 3. Both goals came in a similar fashion — finding a moment of space at the top of the zone, throwing the puck on net, and getting a quality deflection. In Game 2, it was a puck fired by Rielly that found its way past Sergei Bobrovsky courtesy of an elite Max Pacioretty redirect. In Game 3, it was Tavares deflecting a puck sent on net by Marner, which then careened off penalty-killer Gustav Forsling and into the cage.

Go back through the eight power-play goals scored by Toronto to this point, and you'll see a similar trend. Three of the eight have bounced off defenders like that Forsling play, the result of simply throwing a puck into traffic and hoping for chaos — as was the case on Tavares' power-play tally in Game 2 against Ottawa, and Knies' goal a game later. But more importantly, Toronto's man-advantage success has largely come from getting the puck on net quickly, rather than moving it around the offensive zone seeking out the perfect sequence.

In Game 1 against the Senators, when the Maple Leafs struck three times on the man-advantage, all three tallies came off shots fired at the net moments after an offensive-zone draw, two of them the result of rebounds tucked home after that initial attempt. The latter three power-play goals in Round 1 came off those fortunate blue-liner bounces, and from Matthews' Game 6 tally, which saw him find the twine after simply sliding in a curling shot towards the net-front crowd, only to see it drift all the way in.

Against Florida, two quick shots into traffic netted the two successful attempts. But Toronto's three power-play chances on Sunday saw the Maple Leafs get away from that quick-trigger approach.

The first attempt, five minutes into the middle frame, saw the Leafs struggle to gain the zone, or set up once they were there, Florida continually swarming them along the boards, winning those battles, and getting the puck out. The top unit — which stayed out for the entire two-minute stretch — did try to direct a few pucks to the net-front when they were able to hold onto it in the offensive zone, but couldn't filter their shots past the penalty killers in front of them. The group looked more hesitant and indecisive as it navigated the pressure.

The second attempt, midway through the second period, was even less promising, the Panthers winning the puck off the first draw in their end and pushing up ice, where Sam Reinhart blew by Matthews, backed up Marner, and got a quality short-handed look on Woll. A few more attempts to gain the Cats' zone were stymied before the puck was sent all the way back into Toronto's end again, the Panthers penalty-killers beating Marner to the puck deep in the Maple Leafs' zone, and the home side earning another dangerous short-handed chance — and a tripping penalty from No. 16 that cut the power play short.

The final attempt, late in the second period, went south early too, a Marner one-timer from the point blocked by Reinhart, turning into a footrace between the two going the other way — Reinhart earned one more short-handed chance, and Marner was forced to wheel around the net to block a follow-up attempt on the rebound.

Simply failing to break through, or falling short in terms of generating quality looks is one thing, but as Wheeler suggested, it's another to be fighting to keep the puck from going the other way, to be finishing a two-minute power-play spell with the opposition having earned the better of the scoring opportunities.

Throwing Rielly back into the mix seems a risky call, though.

Since coach Craig Berube went to the five-forward unit midway through the regular season, its success has come primarily on the back of Marner's ability to move the puck decisively from the top of the point — or, as we've seen in these playoffs — to fire it into traffic and cause some chaos at the net-front. The Maple Leafs faithful need no reminding of the fact that it was often a different story with No. 44 quarterbacking the unit, the defender more prone to holding onto the puck and assessing his options than whipping it quickly to waiting sticks.

Against a Cats penalty kill that leaves the opposition little time to think, inserting Rielly back up top seems the opposite of what the Maple Leafs' man-advantage needs. An alternative, though, could be Oliver Ekman-Larsson, who's amassed nearly 200 career points on the power play himself, knows this Panthers PK group well, and more crucially, has shown an ability to wire pucks through traffic into the area Toronto needs to get to more.

A change doesn't seem to be coming just yet, though. The Maple Leafs rolled out the five-forward power-play group at Tuesday's practice, while Ekman-Larsson didn't skate due to illness.

For the time being, it's Marner's unit to run. And the central task at hand for No. 16 is figuring out how to get more pucks to the net next time out.

"Try to get yourself in better areas," Marner said Tuesday, of how to do that. "I try to get shots — last game they did a good job of blocking them. For myself there, you just try to work around it. You know, I'm trying to find sticks a lot of times, especially on power plays, to cause havoc down low. That's what my game is."

Speaking to the media on Monday in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., his head coach offered his own assessment.

"Sometimes your top guys, they're looking to get too good of a chance, instead of just putting the puck on net," Berube said. "And I think there's times where we could put more pucks on net — at bad angles, just firing it in there with people going to the net. You never know, it goes off somebody, rebounds, anything like that. I think Mitch could just be a little bit more direct in that area. He has the puck a lot. He's got to look to put more pucks to the net. I get what he's trying to do — he wants to upgrade his chance. He's a passer first, we know that, but we need him to shoot pucks too."

The body of work the Maple Leafs have come up with on the power play throughout these playoffs makes clear the benefit of taking the more straightforward approach, Toronto having tallied primarily off of rebounds, deflections, and fortuitous net-front bounces.

After Tuesday's skate wrapped, Berube expanded on the thought, laying out the path to putting that more direct, straightforward offensive approach into action, in the face of the Cats' relentless kill.

"It's about getting deliveries quicker," he said. "Because the pressure's coming, they're good at it. So, we could deliver quicker. I thought we missed the net a lot — I think we had 20 missed shots in that game. And I get it, it's tough sometimes, trying to get it around people. You know, they do a good job.

"We got to the puck on the forecheck, we had a lot of stalls in their zone — we've got to get the puck out of those swarms, which will generate more opportunities to get pucks to the net."

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1352502 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why Claude Giroux's free agency could chart course of Senators' off-season

Alex Adams

5–6 minutes

Three summers ago, Giroux was a free agent, as he will be again this summer. Back then, decided to take a chance on a young team in his hometown.

Both Giroux and the Senators eagerly wanted each other. Now, though, things are more complicated — a Senators-Giroux reunion is more conundrum than serendipitous embrace.

Both sides were mum when asked about their future with each other.

"It's still early. I haven't given it any thoughts," Giroux said. "I haven't really talked to (general manager) Steve (Staios) yet. I love the players, the fans, the city. This year is the most fun I've had in a few years."

"We love (Giroux). We want to have him back," said Staios, while also saying he wouldn't discuss whether the two were having substantial contract negotiations.

The 37-year-old Giroux clearly wants to keep playing hockey. Whether that's in Ottawa or elsewhere is the question.

"I feel like I have a lot left in the tank. I'm loving hockey right now," said Giroux. "I want to play. Feel like I can be an impact player."

But for the Senators, the determining factor in signing Giroux will be just how much is left in said tank.

Maybe the most interesting aspect of the potential contract negotiations will be determining a dollar value for Giroux.

With the salary cap rising, does Giroux believe he's worth $4-5 million? What's the term of that contract? And do the Senators believe that's a fair valuation for a player on the decline, edging towards the age of 40?

Where's the middle ground?

A one- or two-year contract between $3-4 million seems fair, but does Giroux want that? And would he try to find a better contract elsewhere, even if it means uprooting his family?

Family, money and business will all come into play in these negotiations.

Giroux has a solid Hall-of-Fame case with 1,116 career points, but he slipped to 50 points (still good!) this season, marking his lowest points-per-game clip since his 2009-10 sophomore season. Father time hits everyone including the ClaudeFather, as Senators fans sometimes affectionately call him. At one point this season, Giroux even played on the third line.

Meanwhile, it's hard to know how the not-so-fleet-of-foot Giroux will age. A comparable could be Joe Pavelski, who thrived as an elder statesman in Dallas but struggled as a 39-year-old in the playoffs last season, recording only four points in 19 games.

Paying an aging star would create plenty of quandaries.

The Senators have over $17 million in cap space, but still need to sign defenceman Tyler Kleven and forward Fabian Zetterlund as well as addressing their backup goaltender position while filling out depth. Giroux's future also impacts how long-term the Senators want to sign players. Typically, when signing young players like Kleven or Zetterlund to longer-term contracts, their AAV rises because you are buying off potential free-agent years when in theory they could be making more based on future performance.

Just imagine if Tim Stutzle took a bridge contract instead of signing long-term. That was a bet for Ottawa at $8.35 million over eight years, and it's paying off. But Ottawa might not be able to bet as big this off-season if it eats up cap space with Giroux.

Meanwhile, if the Senators want to add a substantial piece in free agency or via trade, signing Giroux could hamper their ability to improve — although it would also clarify the need to add another defenceman. If Giroux stays, the Senators' next move will likely be to acquire an impactful right-shot blue liner who could boost their defence corps from good to elite.

However, if the Senators lose Giroux, it would make their No. 1 off-season goal clear: acquire a top-six forward. It wouldn't be easy, and it might mean overpaying in free agency or a trade.

The Senators could try to pursue top forwards such as Nikolaj Ehlers, Brock Boeser, Brad Marchand and others in free agency. On paper, any would represent an improvement over Giroux next season and into the future.

Staios has shown that he isn't afraid to trade away a beloved teammate if he feels it's the right move — just look at Josh Norris. The right move, if possible, is to mirror Tampa Bay general manager Julian BriseBois, who let go of Steven Stamkos for the younger and better Jake Guentzel last off-season.

Don't forget Staios also swung for the fences with the Linus Ullmark move last year.

Sometimes picking your head over your heart works, and Staios should prioritize improving his team over anything else.

However it plays out, Giroux's destiny this summer will have an enormous ripple effect on the Senators' off-season.

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1352503 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Foote's lawyer focuses on choice of language at hockey sexual assault trial

Paul D. Grant

4–5 minutes

LONDON, Ont. — A lawyer for Cal Foote challenged the complainant in the trial of five former NHLers accused of sexual assault in June 2018 on Tuesday about her choice of language in her testimony.

The woman, known as "E.M." in court documents because of a publication ban on her name, answered from elsewhere in the courthouse via CCTV to questioning by lawyer Julianna Greenspan, who represents Foote. It was E.M.'s seventh day of cross-examination.

Greenspan questioned E.M. as to why she referred to the accused players as "boys" or "boy" in her statement to London police in June 2018 but has been referring to them as "men" or "man" in testimony.

"They were at least 18, 19; they were men," E.M. said.

"Not once, not one single time, did you use 'man' or 'men' in June 2018 to refer to these individuals?" Greenspan later said.

"That's right, it's not how I spoke back then," E.M. said. "That was seven years ago.

"Their ages make them men. Just because I called them boys doesn't change the fact that their age makes them men."

"The reason why you have so carefully changed your language is because you have come into this trial with a clear agenda," Greenspan said.

"Absolutely not," E.M. said. "I'm older now, I understand more, they were men."

Greenspan also challenged E.M. on whether she knew the men she met at Jack's bar in London were members of the Canadian world junior hockey team. Greenspan questioned E.M.'s stated lack of knowledge about hockey considering that, in June 2018, she worked at a sporting goods store, her brother and cousins had played hockey, and her father had volunteered in minor hockey.

Greenspan also suggested E.M. was told by a bouncer in Jack's on June 18, 2018, that players from Canada's world junior team were in the bar. E.M. responded, "I didn't know that's what they were."

In afternoon cross-examination, Greenspan challenged E.M.'s police statement about one of the players doing the splits over her while she was naked and lying on a bedsheet in a room in the Delta Armouries hotel on June 19, 2018.

"They were all laughing and thought it was hilarious. It wasn't funny to me," E.M. said in court.

Greenspan suggested she heard one of the men say, "Hey, Footer, do the splits" and that it was part of the "fun and games" of what was going on in the room at the time that E.M. was participating in.

"This was not something I asked for," E.M. said, adding she didn't hear a name. "I got no notice before that happened to me. … They were having a good time at my expense."

Greenspan suggested to E.M. that she liked the attention.

"This was attention I never asked for," E.M. said. "They were objectifying me. They were literally laughing at me. They didn't need to be in that room."

Greenspan said E.M. was having a "good time" and didn't like it when they started talking amongst themselves.

"Any one of those men could have stood up and said, 'This is not OK,'" E.M. said. "They didn't do that. They didn't want to think about the fact that I wasn't consenting."

Michael McLeod has been charged with two counts of sexual assault, including one relating to aiding in the offence. Dillon Dube, Foote, Alex Formenton and Carter Hart have each been charged with one count of sexual assault. All have pleaded not guilty to their charges.

The Ontario Superior Court of Justice trial is expected to continue Wednesday with redirect of E.M. by assistant Crown attorney Meaghan Cunningham.

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1352504 Websites

TSN.CA / Leafs sticking with Matthews and Marner together for Game 5

Mark Masters10-13 minutes 14/05/2025

The Maple Leafs practised at Ford Performance Centre on Tuesday.

Auston Matthews is goalless through four games of Toronto's second-round series against Florida. Mitch Marner did not register a shot in the last two games. But Leafs coach Craig Berube is sticking with them together on the top line for Game 5 against the Panthers.

"It's not all about scoring for me and for them," the coach explained. "I mean, it's about the game, playing 200 feet, doing all the little things that are needed to be done. Yeah, I've gone away from them for a bit and it's fine, but it's not exactly what I want to see. So I put them back together. They've been a great pair for a long time."

Berube briefly split up the longtime linemates for a couple shifts on Sunday in what ended up being a 2-0 loss to Florida, which evened up the second-round series at two games each.

"Just stick to what we're doing," Marner said. "Stay patient with it. Yeah, we knew it wasn't going to be an easy series. They're a very good defensive team. They make you work for everything, so just stick with what we're doing and trust our process."

The Leafs are outscoring the Panthers 5-2 in the series with the top line of Matthews, Marner and Matthew Knies on the ice in 5-on-5 play.

But Toronto's top line could only muster two shots when on the ice together in Game 4, per NaturalStatTrick.com, despite playing mostly against the Anton Lundell line. They only allowed one Panthers shot during their almost nine minutes of 5-on-5 play, but couldn't tilt the ice in Toronto's favour.

The Panthers outshot the Leafs 37-23 in the game.

"We didn't do a good enough job of helping our D in executing coming out of the zone, and they were able to kind of sustain an O-zone pressure throughout the game," Matthews said of the team's performance on Sunday. "I thought there was times where we were better, but I think just consistently over the 60 minutes they outworked us and outplayed us in that area."

ContentId(1.2305261): Which Maple Leaf is facing the most pressure?

Marner described his game as being "fine" right now. What about the lack of shots?

"Try to get yourself to better areas," he said. "I tried to get shots through last game. They did a good job blocking them. For myself, it's about just trying to work around it. I'm trying to find sticks a lot of times, especially on power plays, to cause havoc down low and that's what my game is."

The Panthers have been deploying the defence pair of Seth Jones (6-foot-4, 213 pounds) and Niko Mikkola (6-foot-6, 204 pounds) against Toronto's top line.

"Two big guys that have great length to their bodies with their stick, their positioning," Marner said. "They make it hard to make plays in front of them so we got to try to exploit behind them and work that kind of ice. And I thought we've done a good job of it. It's not going to be perfect every single time, you know that, so you keep working towards it."

There should be more ice available on the power play, but the Leafs failed to convert on three chances on Sunday to drop to 2/15 in the series. The Panthers aggressive penalty kill is proving difficult to break down.

"Try to work the puck around as much as we can," Marner said of the strategy. "Try to get them tired, and then from that point on just try to exploit areas that we can. We've done a good job throughout the series of doing that. The last game, it just wasn't there."

ContentId(1.2305220): Marner not worried about lack of shots; describes his game as 'fine'

Anthony Stolarz completed a 30-minute on-ice workout with goalie coach Curtis Sanford ahead of the main practice on Tuesday. Sanford checked in with Stolarz as the session progressed to make sure the 31-year-old was responding well.

"He's progressing," said Berube. "He was on the ice a little bit, so he's doing much better."

Tuesday was the first time that the media saw Stolarz on the ice since leaving Game 1 with an injury. He took a forearm to the head from Panthers centre Sam Bennett before vomiting at the bench and heading to the hospital for further evaluation. The team has not announced any specifics about the injury.

Does Berube have a best-case scenario for when Stolarz may be ready to return to game action.

"Not right now," the coach said. "I don't know."

But the mere presence of Stolarz on the ice generated some positive energy around the team. Joseph Woll called it a "good little morale boost."

Added Marner, "Seeing him in good spirits, it's always something you love to see as a teammate."

ContentId(1.2305224): 'Good little morale boost': Stolarz back on the ice, but no timeline for his return

Woll stopped 35 of 37 shots in Game 4 as his mom watched from the crowd. How does she handle the nerves?

"Probably a lot more nervous than me," Woll said. "Yeah, I can't imagine."

Woll's mom and two siblings travelled from the family home in St. Louis to south Florida to watch the 26-year-old make his seventh career playoff start.

"Just having the support of my family there means the world. I don't get to see them as much as I'd like to living away from home. It's pretty special that they were able to come."

After allowing five goals in an overtime loss in Game 3, Woll bounced back in a big way on Sunday.

This is the third straight year in which Woll has taken over the Leafs net midway through the playoffs.

"The experience the last couple of years has certainly helped build the confidence that I know I'm capable in those situations," he said. "And I think I was prepared. I was making sure I was doing things to keep myself in game shape, even though you're not playing the game."

Woll owns an impressive .915 save percentage in 11 playoff appearances.

Leafs Nation has rallied behind the thoughtful goalie with videos being posted on social media featuring fans singing the Oasis song 'Wonderwall' with Woll's name inserted into the lyrics.

"Kniesy was showing me that the other day," Woll said with a smile. "Yeah, it's nice. It's a nice little ring to it."

Is he an Oasis fan?

"I like Wonderwall, yeah."

ContentId(1.2305236): Woll on Leafs fans putting his name in 'Wonderwall' song: 'Nice little ring to it'

In the final seconds of Sunday's game, Leafs centre Max Domi hit Panthers captain Aleksander Barkov into the boards from behind. Domi was fined for boarding by the NHL Department of Player Safety on Monday.

He refused to address what happened on Tuesday.

"Just looking forward to the next game, bud," he said.

Does he expect any emotional carryover from that play in Game 5?

"Just looking forward to the next game," Domi reiterated.

Berube does not think the Panthers will be looking for retribution.

"What are they going to do?" the coach mused. "I mean, they can go after him, but Max has been around. Yeah, I get it, your emotions get high and things happen. That's part of the game and we all know that. He's going to be fine. Just go out and play his game and do his thing. You can't worry if there's going to be a reaction. You know, you just got to go and play. I don't think there will be a reaction, but I don't really have a whole lot to stay on it."

ContentId(1.2305223): Domi refuses to address hit on Barkov; Leafs don't expect any fallout

After Domi's hit on Barkov, Matthew Tkachuk got in the ear of William Nylander and suggested the Leafs winger would now be in the crosshairs of the Panthers on Wednesday night.

"He probably didn't even hear him," Berube said. "He doesn't hear me."

The coach has been stressing the need for composure since the playoffs began, but the Leafs lacked discipline in Game 4. Toronto took four straight penalties in the first period, which eventually led to Florida's game-winning goal. Power plays ended up favouring the Panthers 6-3.

"We talked about that today," Berube said. "We can't go to the box that many times, especially four in the first period, it takes your momentum away. It takes certain guys out of their rhythm on the bench and overusing other guys, so it's not a good recipe. We've got to be more disciplined. Like the stick ones aren't good. You've got to control your stick. We all know that. Those are the ones, in my opinion, that hurt you. I get there's physical penalties and hits and things like that, and you're going to go to the box at times, but that's playing the game hard."

Domi was whistled for high sticking on Sunday, which started Toronto's parade to the penalty box. Domi leads the Leafs with five minor penalties in the playoffs.

"You got to stay disciplined," said Domi, who led the Leafs in penalty minutes in the regular season (76 PIM in 74 games). "Obviously some penalties you're not going to be able to control. It's just how it goes, the game of hockey. But you got to be super, super careful and diligent with your stick. The high sticking, the tripping and all that stuff, it can be avoided. Sometimes it's just really bad luck, but for the most part, you have to be aware of where your stick goes. And that can eliminate a couple there. But other than that, just play hard between whistles."

Defenceman Oliver Ekman-Larsson missed Leafs practice due to an illness.

He's just a little sick," Berube said. "Nothing terrible, but I thought it was better that he stay off today and rest up."

Jani Hakanpaa filled in as a placeholder beside Simon Benoit on Toronto's third pair.

ContentId(1.2305253): Leafs Ice Chips: OEL misses practice (sick); Berube sticks with same lines

The Panthers held an optional skate in Fort Lauderdale before flying north. Evan Rodrigues, who left Game 4 after getting hit by Ekman-Larsson, took the ice.

“He is not ruled out, but not cleared to play," Panthers coach Paul Maurice told reporters.

Rodrigues, who has been skating on the top line beside Barkov and Sam Reinhart, is scheduled to skate again on Wednesday morning before a decision on his status for Game 5 is made.

Ekman-Larsson was assessed a two-minute minor for interference for the hit.

Lines in Tuesday's practice:

Knies - Matthews - Marner

Pacioretty - Tavares - Nylander

Lorentz - Laughton - Jarnkrok

McMann - Domi - Holmberg

Robertson - Kampf - Reaves

McCabe - Tanev

Rielly - Carlo

Benoit - Hakanpaa*

Mermis - Myers

Woll

Murray

Hildeby

Power play units at Tuesday's practice:

QB: Marner

Flanks: Matthews, Nylander

Middle: Tavares

Net front: Knies

QB: Rielly

Flanks: Domi, Robertson*

Middle: McMann

Net front: Pacioretty

*Ekman-Larsson absent

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TSN.CA / Cross-examination of E.M. comes to a close after seven days

Rick Westhead7-9 minutes 13/05/2025

Content advisory: This article includes graphic details of alleged sexual assault

A lawyer representing Callan Foote, one of the five former members of Canada’s 2018 world junior hockey team who are on trial after being charged with sexual assault, suggested Tuesday the complainant in the case has had “an agenda” by referring to the defendants throughout the trial as “men” rather than “boys.”

Michael McLeod, Alex Formenton, Carter Hart, Dillon Dube and Foote have been charged with sexually assaulting a woman referred to in court records as E.M. in McLeod’s hotel room following a Hockey Canada event in London, Ont. McLeod faces a second criminal charge of being a party to the offence. The players, who face up to 10 years in prison if they are convicted, have all pleaded not guilty.

Julianna Greenspan, Foote’s attorney, was the fifth and final defence lawyer to cross-examine E.M. She began her time on Tuesday morning by suggesting that E.M. has purposefully identified the players as “men” during her testimony.

“You have specifically refused to use the term ‘boy’ at this trial, isn’t that right?” Greenspan said. "You refer to these individuals as ‘man’ and ‘men’ over and over and do not once, not one single time, refer to them as ‘boy’ or ‘boys.’ Do you accept that?"

"Yes I accept that...Don't know if that's a conscious decision I've been making,” E.M. answered. “They were at least 18, 19. They were men...that's why I've been referring to them as that."

Greenspan read E.M. clips of the statement she made to London police on June 22, 2018, three days after the alleged sexual assault. In all of those clips, E.M. called the accused players “boys.”

“I’m going to put this suggestion to you…. The reason why you have so carefully changed your language is because you have come into this trial with a clear agenda,” Greenspan said.

“No, absolutely not. I am older, I understand more. They were men,” E.M. responded.

All five lawyers for the defendants have constantly referred to them as “boys” throughout the trial.

The court has heard evidence that E.M. met some members of Canada's 2018 world junior hockey team at Jack's, a bar in downtown London during the late evening of June 18, 2018. E.M. has previously testified that while she was drinking and dancing with the players, who were at Jack's following a Hockey Canada ring ceremony, she did not know that they were high-level national team players.

Greenspan suggested to E.M. that she did, in fact, know who the players were and that she must have heard that Canada won the 2018 world junior championship earlier that year.

"I just knew they were a group of hockey guys by the end of the night. I didn't know they were world junior players, and I wouldn't have cared, frankly," E.M. testified.

Greenspan showed E.M. a video of her at Jack's Bar in which she speaks with a bouncer standing near the back of the bar as the hockey players arrive at the front entrance. Greenspan suggested to E.M. that the bouncer told her about the players' arrival.

E.M. testified that never happened.

"As someone who's running security, I feel you don't really go around announcing that there's a group like that around to just anybody," E.M. testified.

During the afternoon session, Greenspan suggested to E.M. that she was not as drunk as she has testified she was on the evening of June 18, 2018. Greenspan said E.M. has had to maintain the "narrative" that she was drunk because of her family and her boyfriend.

"I'm going to suggest that it is because if you do not follow this mantra of being so drunk, you knew that your behaviour would not be accepted by others," Greenspan asked. "Do you accept that?"

"I think that my behaviour was that way because I was drunk and I think the behaviour of others, that should be questioned," E.M. responded.

Greenspan suggested that E.M.'s claim during the trial that she did not eat before going out to dance and drink the evening of the alleged incident was the first time in seven years that she has publicly shared that fact.

Greenspan also showed E.M. and the jury a pair of shoes that were the same make and model as the ones E.M. wore the evening of the alleged incident. While Greenspan called the shoes stilettos, E.M. said she would call them heels. The shoes could not be easily slipped on and off and had a zipper on the back.

Greenspan asked E.M. whether she put her shoes back on when she was trying to leave McLeod's hotel room. When E.M. said she did not recall if she had put on the shoes, Greenspan suggested that E.M. didn't actually want to leave.

"You were never planning on leaving, obviously without your shoes and you weren't really getting dressed to leave," Greenspan said.

"Why else would I be trying to get dressed and go to the door?" E.M. said.

"You were putting on, what I would suggest, an act to say: 'Okay, I'm leaving,' to put the focus back on you. Do you agree?" Greenspan asked.

"No, not at all," E.M. responded.

"I'm going to suggest that it worked... because what happened was the attention was put back on you and you resumed interacting with the boys in the room," Greenspan said.

"No, I don't agree with it. This was never attention that I was asking for. I was trying to leave. I tried multiple times to do so," E.M. answered.

Greenspan suggested some of the men who gathered in McLeod's hotel room were not paying attention to the then-20-year-old E.M., even though she was naked, because they were discussing other subjects and celebrating their world junior championship win together.

"Let's get right down to the chase," Greenspan said. "The guys who came into the room and were hanging out in the room were all there just for you?"

"They were objectifying me," E.M. testified. "They were literally in there laughing at me. They could have let me leave if they weren't in there for me, or they could have left. They didn't need to be in the room. Literally any one of those men could have stood up and said, 'This isn't right.' No one did...They thought I was fair game."

Greenspan also read E.M.'s initial statement to police on June 22, 2018, about one of the players doing the splits over top of her and putting his penis in her face while she was lying on the floor.

During the Crown's opening statement, Crown attorney Heather Donkers told the jury that Foote had done the splits overtop of E.M., grazing his genitals over her face.

Greenspan suggested on Tuesday that one of the players doing the splits was a "pretty cool thing" and described it as a "party trick." The lawyer said that as the players were all "goofing around" in McLeod's hotel room, one of the players said, "Hey Footer, do the splits."

E.M. then laid down on the floor and encouraged the act, Greenspan suggested.

"I don't know who in their right mind does that," E.M. said, shaking her head.

Greenspan then suggested that the player who did the splits was wearing shorts.

"I think I can clearly remember having a penis in my face when someone is doing the splits on me…," E.M. said. "I don't think this would have stood out as shocking to me in my mind if he did have pants or shorts on."

When the player was over top of her, E.M. pulled him closer, the lawyer said.

"When you touch, and he recoils from you, he gets up and walks away," Greenspan said.

"I don't remember it happening like that," E.M. testified.

Tuesday afternoon marked the end of the cross-examination after seven days. The Crown will have an opportunity to redirect on Wednesday.

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