CAROLINA HURRICANES
NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 26, 2025

The Athletic

Ranking every NHL team's salary-cap situation, from best to worst

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The NHL offseason is here. Let's do some more math!

We've put together this list for the last several years around this time, as it's a good cheat sheet to look at how active teams are going to be able to be on July 1.

Our methodology is as follows:

Take a team's signed players, project what they'll need to pay the restricted free agents who will make the lineup, subtract those going on long-term injured reserve, and you have a solid estimate of what they can spend in unrestricted free agency to fill out their rosters.

This is not an exact science. Some teams may play hardball with their restricted free agents and give them all cheap one-year deals; other clubs may go long, long term, and that would cost more. We tried to be as reasonable as possible in coming up with projections, but we're talking about 120-plus contract forecasts, calculated in a compressed window. They're not all going to hit the mark.

But we're trying to come as close as possible, with invaluable assists from PuckPedia, Evolving-Hockey and The Athletic's staff of beat writers.

Remember that this isn't a ranking of how strong these teams are, or are set up to become. We're simply ranking how much cap space they likely will have to improve their rosters, beyond players who are already under team control.

By our accounting, nearly half of the teams have $15 million or more to spend after signing their RFAs, so this is likely going to be a wild offseason.

1. San Jose Sharks

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $58.4 million

RFAs estimate: $4.7 million

LTIR candidate: Logan Couture ($8 million)

Dead money deals: Martin Jones buyout ($1.66 million), Nikolai Knyzhov buyout ($466,000), Erik Karlsson retention ($1.5 million), Tomas Hertl retention ($1.387 million)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Jan Rutta, Alexandar Georgiev

Problem contracts: Marc-Eduoard Vlasic ($7 million), Barclay Goodrow ($3.64 million)

Projected cap space: $37.1 million

Analysis: When building their rosters, most teams strategize around how to stay under the cap ceiling. The Sharks, on the other hand, must create a plan to hit next season's $70.6 million cap floor. We estimate that San Jose will be approximately $12.2 million short, even accounting for its RFA extensions.

That gives San Jose's front office options — they can take on undesirable contracts for sweeteners (as they did with Jake Walman last summer) and/or they can attract free agents with contract offers in which they're willing to overpay on AAV, so long as they're shorter-term deals.

Upgrading the blue line must be the Sharks' top priority because they arguably don't have a single true top-four-caliber defenseman on the roster right now.

2. Columbus Blue Jackets

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $56.0 million

RFAs estimate: $5 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: Alex Wennberg buyout ($891,667), Adam Boqvist buyout ($533,333)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Dante Fabbro, Ivan Provorov, James van Riemsdyk, Jack Johnson, Sean Kuraly, Christian Fischer, Luke Kunin

Problem contracts: Damon Severson ($6.25 million), Elvis Merzlikins ($5.4 million)

Projected cap space: $35.4 million

Analysis: The Blue Jackets, thanks to their surprising performance in 2024-25, an abundance of cap space and a desire to spend it, are one of the most interesting teams of the offseason.

Columbus, according to The Athletic's Aaron Portzline, wants a top-six forward, a right-shot center and a right-shot (right-side) defenseman who can play in the top four. They're also interested in overhauling their goaltending. Other than that …

Some of that cap space could go to Dante Fabbro, who looked good on Zach Werenski's right side after Columbus plucked him off waivers. The same goes for Ivan Provorov. Both are in line for big paydays on the open market, though. What's clear is that, whether through free agency or the trade market, Don Waddell is big-game hunting. If Columbus is to build on last season, he'll have to land a target or two, and he has the necessary funds.

3. Carolina Hurricanes

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $67.9 million

RFAs estimate: $0

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: None

Notable unsigned UFAs: Brent Burns, Dmitry Orlov, Jack Roslovic, Tyson Jost

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: $27.6 million

Analysis: The core of one of the Eastern Conference's best teams is intact, but the Hurricanes still have some work to do. They'll have an open slot on their top pair once Brent Burns hits the market, and they continue their pursuit of a high-end winger capable of helping them clear some postseason hurdles.

The good news is that they have the money necessary to do both, thanks in part to Burns ($8 million AAV) and Dmitry Orlov ($7.75 million) coming off the books. Whether the Hurricanes replace them with in-house options or less expensive UFAs, there will be enough space available to make a splash.

The question is how they spend it. Is this Mitch Marner's landing spot? If not, Nikolaj Ehlers would make plenty of sense. Either way, Carolina has plenty of cap space and clear motivation to spend it.

4. Anaheim Ducks

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $76.2 million

RFAs estimate: $16.7 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deal: Cam Fowler retention ($2.5 million)

Notable unsigned UFA: Robby Fabbri

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: $19.3 million

Analysis: The Ducks have already been one of the most active teams this offseason, and yet the fireworks may only be beginning in SoCal. GM Pat Verbeek has made it clear that he expects the Ducks to make the playoffs next season, a lofty goal that would require serious roster upgrades.

Anaheim has a mountain of cap space and trade chips it can wield to make aggressive moves, even after you factor in Mason McTavish and Lukas Dostal's big RFA projections. And that isn't even factoring in the possibility of a John Gibson trade, which seems likely given how weak the goaltending market is.

Only two Ducks forwards, Troy Terry and McTavish, crossed the 50-point mark this past season, and none hit 25 goals, so you'd imagine that adding a top-flight scoring winger or two will be a priority.

5. Chicago Blackhawks

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $77.1 million

RFAs estimate: $4.1 million

LTIR candidate: Shea Weber ($7.87 million)

Dead money deals: TJ Brodie buyout ($3.23 million), Seth Jones retention ($2.5 million)

Notable unsigned UFAs: None

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: $18.4 million

Analysis: A few weeks ago, the Blackhawks were tracking as one of the low-key interesting teams of the offseason. They had money to spend, too many lineup holes to fill and a franchise player without much help.

Now, Scott Powers and Mark Lazerus are wondering if their big moves have already been made. Andre Burakovsky added talent to the mix and $5.5 million to the ledger. Ryan Donato, who popped last season as a goal scorer, isn't hitting the open market, either. They're good players, but not needle-movers. So much for all that Mitch Marner talk.

Still, without any major RFA concerns — Philipp Kurashev is a non-tender candidate — the Blackhawks have plenty of flexibility, should they wish to use it.

6. Detroit Red Wings

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $77.3 million

RFAs estimate: $4 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: Justin Abdelkader buyout ($1.06 million), Bonus overage ($871,150)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Patrick Kane, Jeff Petry, Alex Lyon

Problem contracts: Vladimir Tarasenko ($4.75 million), Justin Holl ($3.4 million)

Projected cap space: $18.2 million

Analysis: The Red Wings have close to a full roster signed, especially once their relatively inexpensive RFAs are accounted for. They can also create another $2.3 million or more in cap space if they decide to execute a buyout.

Bringing back Kane would eat into that room a little, but they have considerable space to be aggressive in free agency, which is a good thing given their needs. In an ideal world, they'd add a top-six forward and a top-four defenseman, but that may be challenging given the limited options out there.

This is a huge offseason for GM Steve Yzerman to fill some holes and finally get this group to the postseason for the first time in a decade.

7. Florida Panthers

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $77.4 million

RFAs estimate: $875,000

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: None

Notable unsigned UFAs: Sam Bennett, Aaron Ekblad, Brad Marchand, Nate Schmidt, Vitek Vanecek

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: $18.1 million

Analysis: The defending champs have some tough decisions to make, but the fact that they don't have any dead money or poor contracts certainly helps. In fact, they probably have the

cleanest cap sheet in the league, which is part of why they're the champs.

Bringing back Bennett would figure to cost at least $8 million, even on a hometown discount, which very likely doesn't leave enough cash for Ekblad, Marchand and a second goaltender. Regardless, the Panthers look set to again dress a top team next season, even if it means digging for a couple of bargain buys with the limited cap space they have left after signing some of their big-name UFAs.

Will the Penguins create more cap flexibility by trading Bryan Rust? (Bruce Bennett / Getty Images)

8. (tie) Pittsburgh Penguins

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $77.5 million

RFAs estimate: $6.5 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deal: Jack Johnson buyout ($916,667)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Matt Grzelcyk, Matt Nieto

Problem contracts: Erik Karlsson ($10 million cap hit), Kris Letang ($6.5 million), Ryan Graves ($4.5 million)

Projected cap space: $18 million

Analysis: For the first time in a long time, the cap's upper limit isn't a concern for the Penguins, who could create even more space ahead of July 1. Bryan Rust and Rickard Rakell, both productive wingers with relatively high price tags, are available for the right price, and not many other teams are so clearly in "sell mode."

That doesn't mean Pittsburgh isn't interested in adding salary; it's just more likely to come in the form of younger players, particularly via trade. They have two first-rounders, a second-rounder and three third-rounders in the 2026 draft alone.

Also, while defenseman Pierre-Olivier Joseph seems like a non-tender candidate, we included him in Pittsburgh's overall RFA bill.

8. (tie) Los Angeles Kings

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $77.5 million

RFAs estimate: $3.7 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: Mike Richards buyout ($600,000), Bonus carryover overage ($212,000)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Vladislav Gavrikov, Andrei Kuzmenko, Tanner Jeannot, David Rittich

Problem contract: Drew Doughty ($11 million)

Projected cap space: $18 million

Analysis: Among this year's playoff teams, L.A. has some of the most cap flexibility. Incoming GM Ken Holland has nearly $20 million to go big-game hunting with, and the Kings have already been linked as a top contender in the Mitch Marner sweepstakes. Adding a top-six game-breaking winger — even if it's not Marner — should be a priority for a team that had only two wingers hit the 50-point mark this season.

We'd imagine the Kings will also take a run at re-signing Vladislav Gavrikov, who was arguably the club's best defenseman this year. If they strike out on him, they'll presumably be in the market for a top-four replacement.

10. Toronto Maple Leafs

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $77.7 million

RFAs estimate: $9.1 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: Ryan Reaves buried ($200,000), Matt Benning buried ($100,000), Max Pacioretty bonus overage ($626,230)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Mitch Marner, John Tavares, Max Pacioretty, Steven Lorentz

Problem contracts: Morgan Rielly ($7.5 million), Max Domi ($3.75 million), David Kämpf ($2.4 million), Calle Järnkrok ($2.1 million)

Projected cap space: $17.8 million

Analysis: The Leafs have almost a full roster with their RFAs signed, but two huge holes up front with Marner and Tavares still up in the air.

Marner's departure is basically a foregone conclusion, leaving a top-line RW spot alongside Auston Matthews to spend on. If Tavares doesn't return, that would create a large void at center that they can't really fill in free agency.

Moving out some of their bad money and getting aggressive up front feels like the right play, with building better scoring depth a necessary priority since Marner's 102 points aren't going to be replaced by one player. But it may take some patience and ingenuity for the right pieces to fall into place, given how thin free agency is.

11. Montreal Canadiens

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $89.5 million

RFAs estimate: $2.69 million

LTIR candidate: Carey Price ($10.5 million)

Dead money deals: Bonus overage ($1.75 million)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Christian Dvorak, Joel Armia, David Savard

Problem contract: Patrik Laine ($8.7 million)

Projected cap space: $16.5 million

Analysis: If the Habs place Price on LTIR (or find a way to move the final year of his contract), they have oodles of cap room to get aggressive.

They don't have to — they essentially have a full roster under contract after getting RFAs signed and $6 million to invest in free agency without using LTIR — and there are downsides to using it, as evidenced by the bonus overage they're carrying from last season, given the success of young players such as Lane Hutson.

Regardless, Montreal has a smart front office and loads of financial flexibility, so don't be surprised if they pull off something unexpected. They need a center, but it's a market where those are extremely difficult to come by. And they

have enough young players coming that patience may end up being the best play. For now.

12. Boston Bruins

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $79.9 million

RFAs estimate: $8.3 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deal: Brandon Carlo retained salary ($615,000)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Henri Jokiharju, Parker Wotherspoon

Problem contracts: Casey Mittelstadt ($5.75 million), Joonas Korpisalo ($3 million)

Projected cap space: $15.6 million

Analysis: It'll be fascinating to see what the Bruins do after an uncharacteristically brutal, 28th-place 2024-25 season.

The big selloff of Brad Marchand, Brandon Carlo and Charlie Coyle created some holes, to be sure, but when fully healthy, this won't be a bottom-feeding team again. How do they deploy $16 million to fill out their forward group and back end? And will it make them competitive again, or merely get them into the mushy middle?

But with a bounce-back from Jeremy Swayman and a couple of smart additions, they could surprise.

13. Utah Mammoth

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $82.5 million

RFAs estimate: $2.75 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deal: Oliver-Ekman Larsson buyout ($650,000)

Notable unsigned UFA: Nick Bjugstad

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: $13 million

Analysis: Don't sleep on the Mammoth this offseason. (Wait, that sounds weird.)

Even after acquiring and signing JJ Peterka on Wednesday night, Utah still has plenty of cap space and a lot of up-and-coming talent to build around. Utah was on the verge of making the playoffs in Year 1 in SLC, and they have a great chance to take a big step forward with another year of development from their young players and a big investment of talent using their remaining cap room.

Everyone around the league has been saying GM Bill Armstrong will be aggressive. We doubt he's done, even after the big swing with Buffalo.

14. Nashville Predators

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $82.6 million

RFAs estimate: $3.8 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: Matt Duchene buyout ($5.56 million), Kyle Turris buyout ($2 million), Mattias Ekholm retention ($250,000)

Notable unsigned UFA: Jakub Vrana

Problem contracts: Steven Stamkos ($8 million), Brady Skjei ($7 million)

Projected cap space: $12.9 million

Analysis: The Predators have clear needs at basically every position after a brutal 2024-25 campaign. How aggressive they'll be in attempting to get back to the playoffs will be interesting given how much they committed to older players in last year's UFA class — and how that blew up in their face.

Their $13 million in cap space could go fairly far in terms of improving their offensive depth and adding another top-four defenseman, but they'll likely have to be creative as free agency (if you haven't heard) is a bit light on high-end talent.

But Nashville is always a place free agents want to go, which should help GM Barry Trotz if he opts to get aggressive again.

15. Calgary Flames

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $82.8 million

RFAs estimate: $12.5 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deal: Jacob Markstrom retention ($1.875 million)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Anthony Mantha, Dan Vladar, Joel Hanley

Problem contract: Jonathan Huberdeau ($10.5 million)

Projected cap space: $12.7 million

Analysis: Calgary was surprisingly competitive this season. It's probably too early in the club's retool timeline for them to make aggressive moves, unless it's for a player in his early to mid-20s who can grow with the core long-term, but GM Craig Conroy has the cap flexibility and assets (four first-round picks over the next two years) to take a big swing if he desires. The Flames might wind up with closer to $15 million in spending power once their RFAs are taken care of, especially since Evolving-Hockey's projection for Morgan Frost's next deal seemed too high.

That pool of cap room and trade ammo will only increase if the club trades Rasmus Andersson, who is entering the final year of his contract.

Re-signing Fabian Zetterlund gave the Senators some clarity. (Marc DesRosiers / Imagn Images)

16. Ottawa Senators

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $84.7 million

RFAs estimate: $0

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: Joonas Korpisalo retention ($1 million), Colin White buyout ($875,000)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Claude Giroux, Adam Gaudette, Travis Hamonic, Anton Forsberg, Nick Cousins

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: $10.8 million

Analysis: After signing RFA Fabian Zetterlund last week, Ottawa has some decent flexibility, but a good chunk of that nearly $11 million remaining is earmarked for the likely return of Claude Giroux.

The remainder of their cap space is probably best served filling out their forward depth and potentially bringing in a backup goaltender to replace Anton Forsberg.

The question facing GM Steve Staios is whether that level of sameness is good enough, given that the Senators are looking to take another step after making the playoffs this season. This roster is young enough that they can expect some growth from within and some better health from veterans such as Linus Ullmark, Brady Tkachuk and David Perron.

17. Winnipeg Jets

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $84.8 million

RFAs estimate: $13.75 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deal: Nate Schmidt buyout ($1.62 million)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Nikolaj Ehlers, Mason Appleton, Brandon Tanev

Problem contract: None

Projected cap space: $10.7 million

Analysis: After signing Jonathan Toews, the Jets still have plenty to spend — although it would be prudent to keep in mind the big bonuses ($2.7 million) he can hit simply by playing a lot of games next season and making the playoffs.

Winnipeg appears set on the back end, with eight NHL defenders under contract, but up front, there are some challenges with the pending departures of Nikolaj Ehlers and Mason Appleton, and the injury to captain Adam Lowry that will keep him out to start the season.

The Jets were one of the league's highest-scoring teams last season and won't want to jeopardize that, so finding a way to add another top-six piece with their cap space makes the most sense.

18. Seattle Kraken

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $85.4 million

RFAs estimate: $8.6 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: None

Notable unsigned UFA: Michael Eyssimont

Problem contracts: Chandler Stephenson ($6.25 million), Philipp Grubauer ($5.9 million)

Projected cap space: $10.1 million

Analysis: The Kraken are a dark-horse team to watch this summer. GM Jason Botterill told reporters at the end of the season that the Kraken are "going to be aggressive again in free agency," one year after they landed Brandon Montour and Chandler Stephenson.

Seattle owns extra first-round picks in 2026 and 2027 as a result of the Bjorkstrand trade, and extra second-round picks. President of hockey operations Ron Francis has said that Seattle will consider using some of that currency as trade capital.

The Kraken already added Mason Marchment to bolster their winger group, and with their slick maneuver to dump Andre Burakovsky's inefficient contract to Chicago, they still have the cap room to be in on any emerging opportunities. The biggest hurdle they could face is finding realistically available players who fit their need for elite, star talent.

19. Minnesota Wild

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $85.6 million

RFAs estimate: $5.9 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: Bonus overage carryover ($1.1 million), Zach Parise buyout ($833,000), Ryan Suter buyout ($833,000)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Gustav Nyquist, Justin Brazeau, Jon Merrill

Problem contract: Yakov Trenin ($3.5 million)

Projected cap space: $9.9 million

Analysis: Minnesota's offseason could go in very different directions depending on what the front office does with Marco Rossi. The Wild seem reluctant to commit a long-term, big-money contract to him. Minnesota will have closer to $15 million available to spend if it trades Rossi, plus whatever premium assets he would fetch in return.

Of course, trading Rossi would also create a hole at top-six center. Perhaps prized 21-year-old prospect Danila Yurov can fill that position immediately, but the club needs a short-term contingency plan in the very possible scenario that he needs more time before being ready for such a high-leverage role.

The brunt of the pain from the Zach Parise and Ryan Suter buyouts is mercifully over. GM Bill Guerin finally has the shackles off — let's see what he does now that he has some legitimate flexibility to work with.

20. Philadelphia Flyers

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $86.35 million

RFAs estimate: $6 million

LTIR candidate: Ryan Ellis ($6.25 million)

Dead money deals: Kevin Hayes retention ($3.57 million), Cam Atkinson buyout ($1.76 million), Scott Laughton retention ($1.5 million)

Notable unsigned UFAs: None

Problem contract: Sean Couturier ($7.75 million)

Projected cap space: $9.15 million

Analysis: GM Danny Briere has already put in some work this summer, hammering out deals with key RFAs in center Noah Cates and winger Tyson Foerster, and then acquiring Trevor Zegras in a low-risk, high-reward trade with Anaheim.

Briere's main bit of remaining business is figuring out how to proceed with Cam York. By the end of the season, he was the Flyers' best defenseman and he seems like a legit top-four piece. Things also got weird at the end under coach John Tortorella. Not coincidentally, Kevin Kurz reported on June 12 that long- and short-term deals are both in play for York. We have him signing a three-year bridge deal here worth $5 million annually.

We're also not putting Ellis in an LTIR slot, though he'd certainly be eligible, as his career is functionally over. The Flyers left him on standard IR last season, as they didn't need to use an LTIR exemption to exceed the cap, and they preferred to use Ellis' status as a way of accruing daily cap space.

21. St. Louis Blues

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $93.5 million

RFAs estimate: $3 million

LTIR candidate: Torey Krug ($6.5 million)

Dead money deals: None

Notable unsigned UFAs: Radek Faksa, Ryan Suter

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: $8.5 million

Analysis: The Blues are in a solid situation. Doug Armstrong said on June 23 that they planned to again place Krug on LTIR, which would leave them with enough space to add a middle-six center and match any (reasonable) offer sheet that might come for backup goalie Joel Hofer.

If they're going to level up in the Western Conference, handling both bits of business seems like it'll be crucial. Brayden Schenn, currently the 2C behind Robert Thomas, works best a bit farther down the lineup, and Hofer (.904 save percentage last season) gives them a solid option behind Jordan Binnington.

The longer-term issue for Armstrong (and incoming GM Alex Steen) is that Philip Broberg and Dylan Holloway — added last season via offer sheet to immense success — are soon to be eligible for new deals. Top-four defensemen and quality top-six forwards don't come cheap.

22. Buffalo Sabres

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $88 million

RFAs estimate: $13.5 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deal: Jeff Skinner buyout ($4.44 million)

Notable unsigned UFA: James Reimer

Problem contracts: Jordan Greenway ($4 million), Connor Clifton ($3.33 million), Mattias Samuelsson ($4.29 million), Sam Lafferty ($2 million)

Projected cap space: $7.5 million

Analysis: Even after dealing Peterka, Buffalo still doesn't have a ton of flexibility for a team that hasn't made the playoffs for 14 years and finished 26th last season.

The combination of a big RFA contract due to Bowen Byram and all of the contract misses they've piled up isn't a good one. The Sabres are going to need to continue to be active in the trade market in order to improve their roster this offseason.

But another swap that will give them more reinforcements is likely coming, with Byram at the top of the "likely to go" list.

23. Washington Capitals

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $88.125 million

RFAs estimate: $2 million

LTIR candidate: Sonny Milano ($1.9 million AAV)

Dead money deals: None

Notable unsigned UFAs: Andrew Mangiapane, Anthony Beauvillier, Lars Eller, Taylor Raddysh

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: $7.375 million

Analysis: The Capitals enter the offseason with relatively minimal needs and enough money available to address them. Their RFA class (Alexander Alexeyev and Hendrix Lapierre) doesn't pose any particular problem, either.

Washington's lineup isn't perfect. They could use another high-end piece and are certainly going to need a third-line center. The question is whether they will move Connor McMichael from his spot on Pierre-Luc Dubois' wing to fill it, look to the UFA market, or again start the season with Lapierre in that role. In any case, they have enough money to figure it out.

Milano, meanwhile, had a setback in his injury recovery in the spring and seems to be a candidate to hit LTIR should the Caps need that space, but there's too much uncertainty to assume that's the route they'll take.

24. Vancouver Canucks

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $88.5 million

RFAs estimate: None

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: Oliver Ekman-Larsson buyout ($4.76 million), Ilya Mikheyev retention ($712,000)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Brock Boeser, Pius Suter

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: $7 million

Analysis: Jim Rutherford and Patrik Allvin are expected to go all in this summer to improve their roster in an effort to maximize their chances of keeping superstar captain Quinn Hughes, who has two years left on his deal, in Vancouver for the long term.

The Canucks are searching for multiple top-six forwards to bolster an anemic offensive group that is staring at Boeser's likely departure in free agency. They're down to approximately $7 million to spend after acquiring Evander Kane.

Vancouver is chasing a bona fide second-line center to play behind Elias Pettersson, but the organization may pivot to adding another winger if that proves too difficult. Vancouver's front office will almost certainly shop the No.15 pick to accomplish that goal, though it may not be easy to land an ideal target because countless teams are searching for a top-six center, yet not many are realistically available on the market.

25. New Jersey Devils

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $89.6 million

RFAs estimate: $8.5 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: None

Notable unsigned UFAs: Jake Allen, Brian Dumoulin, Curtis Lazar, Daniel Sprong

Problem contracts: Ondrej Palat ($6.0 million), Kurtis MacDermid ($1.15 million)

Projected cap space: $6.9 million

Analysis: The Devils have most of their lineup in place, though there are a couple of Hughes-family-centric asterisks in play. The first revolves around Jack's health, given his season-ending shoulder injury.

The other: Luke, a huge part of their current and future defensive group, is a restricted free agent. Here, we're projecting that he signs long-term for an AAV of approximately $7.5 million, which could be on the conservative side.

Either way, the Devils don't have many open roster spots, and they won't have tons of wiggle room once their RFAs are signed. They need better bottom-six center options, though, and plan not to send a qualifying offer to Cody Glass.

Evan Bouchard factors heavily into the Oilers' cap situation. (Chris Arjoon / Icon Sportswire via Getty Images)

26. Edmonton Oilers

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $79.3 million

RFAs estimate: $10.6 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: Jack Campbell buyout ($2.3 million), Bonus carryover overage ($250,000)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Trent Frederic, Connor Brown, Corey Perry, John Klingberg, Jeff Skinner, Kasperi Kapanen

Problem contracts: Darnell Nurse ($9.25 million), Viktor Arvidsson ($4 million)

Projected cap space: $5.6 million

Analysis: Trading Evander Kane is only the start of Edmonton's effort to carve out sufficient cap space for upgrades this summer. The Oilers are projected to have only approximately $5.6 million in space after accounting for the massive contract extension that Evan Bouchard is expected to command. Viktor Arvidsson ($4 million) and Adam Henrique ($3 million) stand out as potential contracts to try offloading, though both of them have no-movement clauses.

If that extra space is created, the Oilers can consider re-signing some of their pending UFAs, such as Frederic, Perry and Brown, upgrading the goaltending and perhaps adding another top-six winger if there's leftover room.

27. Tampa Bay Lightning

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $91.7 million

RFAs estimate: $850,000

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deal: Conor Sheary buried ($850,000)

Notable unsigned UFA: Nick Perbix

Problem contract: Conor Sheary ($2 million)

Projected cap space: $3.8 million

Analysis: The Lightning could simply run things back again, since they have basically their entire team signed and are under the cap. But after a disappointing first-round exit, you wonder if there'll be changes as they attempt to catch up to their state rivals.

Any big move would require salary out, however. Tampa Bay does have some interesting young players coming, including potentially further progression from Conor Geekie, and can turn over some of their aging depth simply by letting UFAs such as Luke Glendening and Tyler Motte walk.

Beefing up their depth feels like the right play if they can find the right trade or bargain UFA signings.

28. New York Rangers

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $92.1 million

RFAs estimate: $10.5 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: None

Notable unsigned UFA: Calvin de Haan

Problem contract: Mika Zibanejad ($8.5 million AAV)

Projected cap space: $3.4 million

Analysis: It's fair to say that the Rangers' offseason hinges on the route they choose with K'Andre Miller. Here, we have him signing a four-year contract worth $6 million, which is in line with Evolving-Hockey's projections.

Of course, a trade that puts him elsewhere is clearly on the table. While Chris Drury's appetite to change the look of his team is understandable, Miller is still New York's best non-Adam Fox defenseman. If he's moved, he'll have to be replaced, and the Rangers will still have a messy blue line behind Fox and Replacement X, without all that much money to spend.

And we haven't even gotten around to mentioning the situation at center. Zibanejad, if he's not traded, seems likely to move to the wing full time, which would leave a major hole behind J.T. Miller and Vincent Trocheck.

29. Vegas Golden Knights

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $92.3 million

RFAs estimate: $4.4 million

LTIR candidate: Alex Pietrangelo ($8.8 million)

Dead money deals: None

Notable unsigned UFAs: Victor Olofsson, Brandon Saad

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: $3.2 million

Analysis: Vegas has one of the most fluid, fascinating cap situations in the league. Alex Pietrangelo's playing future for next season is reportedly uncertain because of ongoing injuries — if he lands on LTIR, it would suddenly give the organization $12 million to play with.

Even if Vegas approaches this offseason with the assumption that Pietrangelo will be on the roster rather than LTIR, management has ways to manufacture more wiggle room, if necessary. Players such as Nicolas Hague, Nicolas Roy, William Karlsson and Ivan Barbashev could be cap casualties if the front office wants to open up room for a run at Marner, for example. All of those players would be fairly easy to find suitors for, if they desire.

In other words, no, the Golden Knights don't have much cap flexibility on paper to take home-run swings right now, but they have various ways of changing that in a hurry.

30. Dallas Stars

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $93.5 million

RFAs estimate: None

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: Ryan Suter buyout ($1.43 million), Bonus carryover overage ($368,000)

Notable unsigned UFAs: Mikael Granlund, Jamie Benn, Cody Ceci, Evgenii Dadonov, Colin Blackwell

Problem contracts: Tyler Seguin ($9.85 million), Matt Dumba ($3.75 million)

Projected cap space: $2 million

Analysis: The Stars are stuck in a cap bind, even after offloading Mason Marchment's contract to Seattle. They only have approximately $2 million available, with only nine forwards under contract for next season. Jamie Benn could help the team by taking a massive discount, especially on a performance bonus-laden contract now that he's hit the age of 35, but there's still more that needs to be done.

Seguin isn't a realistic candidate to be traded because of his full no-movement clause, but Matt Dumba and Ilya Lyubushkin could be cap casualties on defense. Dallas also has to keep an eye on next summer, when Thomas Harley and Jason Robertson will require significant raises. Barring a shocking Robertson trade, it's very likely that the Stars will have to let some of their pending UFAs walk, such as Mikael Granlund.

31. Colorado Avalanche

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $97.2 million

RFAs estimate: $2.9 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: None

Notable unsigned UFAs: Jonathan Drouin, Ryan Lindgren, Joel Kiviranta, Erik Johnson

Problem contracts: None

Projected cap space: -$1.7 million

Analysis: Brock Nelson's three-year, $7.5 million AAV extension ate up the overwhelming majority of Colorado's cap space. The Avs currently have $1.2 million in cap space, and could end up over that amount in salary commitments if they sign RFA Sam Malinski to anything longer than a one-year deal.

Colorado only has 11 NHL forwards and five defensemen under contract right now, so it's clear that GM Chris MacFarland will need to ship out a sizable deal or two to relieve the cap pressure. Ross Colton, Miles Wood and Charlie Coyle have been floated out as potential cap dumps management could explore.

32. New York Islanders

Current projected 2025-26 salaries: $97.9 million

RFAs estimate: $24.2 million

LTIR candidates: None

Dead money deals: None

Notable unsigned UFAs: Tony DeAngelo, Hudson Fasching, Mike Reilly

Problem contract: Pierre Engvall ($3 million AAV)

Projected cap space: minus-2.4 million

Analysis: Mathieu Darche's first summer at the helm of the Islanders won't be a particularly fun one. He has plenty of RFAs to worry about that, in all likelihood, will eat up the bulk of his salary-cap space.

Not all RFAs are signed, and not all of them are particularly crucial. Figuring out a deal with Noah Dobson, though, is vitally important to the organization, and it won't come cheap. Evolving-Hockey projects a long-term deal with him to cost more than $10 million per season, and that doesn't seem far off. Alexander Romanov is another pending RFA defenseman who won't come particularly cheap.

If Darche figures out a workable solution with those two (and Romanov might be a trade candidate), everything else gets easier. A Jean-Gabriel Pageau trade remains a possibility, too.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Erik Karlsson trade destinations: 8 teams that could make sense for the Penguins defenseman

By: Shayna Goldman

At his career's peak, Erik Karlsson wasn't just one of the best offensive defensemen in the league. He was legitimately one of the best play-drivers in the modern era. And that made up for the flaws in his game in his own zone.

That version of Karlsson won the Norris Trophy with the San Jose Sharks in 2023 — his third Norris — despite having little support around him. He also seemed like a strong fit with the Pittsburgh Penguins the ensuing offseason. But the reality has been a lot more bleak.

Karlsson is still a threat from the back end at 35, with a projected offensive rating of plus-10.2. That's one of the best marks in the NHL for defenders. But he isn't a fit with the rebuilding Penguins anymore, and he isn't worth his $11.5 million salary or $10 million cap hit (the Sharks retained $1.5 million per year when they traded him).

That could lead to an offseason trade. Chris Johnston has him 14th on The Athletic's trade board. Pierre LeBrun broke down the situation in his latest rumblings column on Wednesday.

There are a couple of hurdles to clear. The first is Karlsson's no-movement clause, which gives him control over where (and if) he goes. LeBrun wrote that Karlsson would be willing to waive that to go to a contender. But that contender has to be able to absorb his cap hit. Pittsburgh has three retention spots open to bring down his cap hit a bit more, but the Penguins can't bring in another team to also retain space. A player's contract can only be retained by two teams.

Another hurdle is Karlsson's $5 million signing bonus, due on July 1.

LeBrun reported that Pittsburgh will want a sweetener if it pays that signing bonus and another to retain salary.

If a team is going to take this leap — either at a $10 million cap hit and paying the $5 million bonus, or paying the asset cost to get the cap hit down and save the cash — it also has to be prepared to deal with all the risk and reward that Karlsson's game has to offer. He has to be utilized in a very specific way to get the best out of him, and not every team has the ability to put him in the optimum position.

Karlsson can still retrieve pucks and break play out of the defensive zone with control. He can get pucks to forwards and support plays. And he can outright take control and quarterback the action in the offensive zone. The Penguins were a better team in terms of expected and actual goal creation with him deployed five-on-five minutes, even if there wasn't as much separation between him and his teammates as usual.

But according to AllThreeZones' tracking, there were more errors in Karlsson's usually elite breakout ability. There were more failed retrievals and exits, which were glaring in front of the Penguins' shaky goaltending. That, paired with his usual defensive lapses in his own zone, made for a disappointing couple of years.

Still, there's a reason teams bet on aging stars. They've seen the peak. And if Karlsson's play at the 4 Nations Face-Off was an indication, with more support, he may still have a lot left in the tank. So, which teams could, or should, be kicking the tires on the defender this summer?

Here are eight that could make sense:

Carolina Hurricanes

The Hurricanes may be the best potential fit for Karlsson if this is the end of the Brent Burns era, which would open a slot on the right side of the top pair.

The Canes have a knack for maximizing defensemen within their system and hiding their defensive shortcomings. That was true with Dougie Hamilton and Tony DeAngelo, who both played stretches on Jaccob Slavin's right. If they can do the same with Karlsson, they'll be adding a premier puck-mover and true quarterback for the top power play.

On paper, the Hurricanes may be the best stylistic fit for Karlsson. Carolina could use the dynamic skill Karlsson can still offer, and it's in a unique position with a lot of cap space for a contender. The Canes likely wouldn't need as much retention on Karlsson's contract and might be willing to pay an asset cost to avoid the $5 million signing bonus.

Florida Panthers

If any team is known for bold swings to contend for the Cup, it's the Panthers.

Florida's cap space depends on how many pending unrestricted free agents extend this summer. If Aaron Ekblad walks, Florida could replace him with Karlsson for the next two years. The two are very different stylistically, but they wouldn't have to be deployed the same way. Seth Jones could absorb Ekblad's minutes alongside Gus Forsling on the top pair, with Karlsson shifting to Niko Mikkola's right. Or Karlsson could join Forsling to make a balanced pairing. And Karlsson would be a natural fit on the top power play.

Unlike the Canes, it would probably make sense for the Panthers to pay the signing bonus themselves but add a sweetener for cap retention. If Florida could get the cap hit somewhere in the $6 million range, or at least below Ekblad's $7.5 million from last season, it would help balance the books.

Ottawa Senators

Taking a step back from the contender's circle, here's another playoff team to consider.

Karlsson may not want to go to a team that isn't seen as a Cup contender, but his connection with Ottawa is obvious. He played his first nine seasons and won his first two Norrises with the Senators.

The Sens could be in the market for help on the right and an offensive boost. Karlsson would provide both. The question is whether he would take over PP1 from Jake Sanderson. At the very least, he could help address Ottawa's biggest weakness: five-on-five scoring. The Senators finished 28th in the NHL with 2.13 goals per 60 minutes last season and

dead last in the playoffs (1.45 per 60). Karlsson could help if his play-driving can rebound. Ottawa's newly instilled defensive structure could help balance out his weaknesses in his own zone, too.

Could Erik Karlsson return to the Senators? (Jana Chytilova / Getty Images)

Vancouver Canucks

The Canucks could be a wild card in the Karlsson race, considering how hard to predict (and reason) some of their moves have been recently. If management is really concerned about Quinn Hughes leaving as a free agent next summer, it may want another offensive defender at the ready. Even with Hughes in the fold, it wouldn't necessarily hurt to add another puck-mover in the bottom four. This team desperately needs help on the right side behind Filip Hronek, and Karlsson could still be that.

Vancouver has a lot of work to do this offseason, and not a ton of cap space — especially after adding Evander Kane's $5.13 million cap hit Wednesday. But maybe the Canucks could solve that by moving out weak links on defense or figuring out its goaltending.

Detroit Red Wings

Speaking of teams with weaknesses on the right, there's the Red Wings. Behind Moritz Seider, their current depth includes Justin Holl and Jeff Petry. Like Ottawa and even Vancouver, Detroit's not a true contender yet. But with an aggressive offseason, there's a path back to the postseason. One of the keys is bolstering the offense.

As red hot as the power play was last season, it didn't make up for what lacked at five-on-five. Detroit's expected goal generation ranked 25th in the league, and its scoring sunk to 30th. Adding a puck-mover of Karlsson's caliber could help the Red Wings regain control and push back up ice, where their forwards can get to work.

Tampa Bay Lightning

The Lightning are a long shot, but they're included on this list for two reasons: 1) They're known to make bold plays to contend, and 2) They were in the Karlsson race when San Jose traded him.

Also, the idea of Karlsson and Victor Hedman cooking on the blue line for one last go at the Stanley Cup is enticing.

The key is finding a way to clear out cap space, which won't be easy considering how much help this roster needs around its core. If management decides to move on from Erik Cernak, perhaps in exchange for a top-nine forward, maybe there's a path to making enough room to absorb half of Karlsson's cap hit. He could play a more sheltered role on the third pair, or if JJ Moser shifts back to his natural side, he could play with Hedman when the team needs more scoring.

The Lightning don't have the most assets to work with, but if management decides to move out picks further down the line, they should be pretty valuable to the Penguins with a long-term trajectory in mind.

Vegas Golden Knights

Vegas has done so much work to its blue line over the past few years that it could be out of the Karlsson race this time around. The cap hit isn't a fit at this point, but the Golden Knights always seem to find a way. If Alex Pietrangelo's $8.8 million salary ends up on long-term injured reserve, they will likely take an aggressive approach to fill the void.

That money is more likely to be used to address winger depth, which has been crushed over the years to build up Vegas' center and defensive depth. Any cap relief could be used in a lucrative offer to Mitch Marner in free agency, for example. But if that doesn't work out and there aren't other high-end options attainable up front, they could instead look to boost their offense from the back end.

You can never count them out when a big-name player hits the market.

Boston Bruins

Whether the Bruins belong here depends on management's true plans. If they see the 2025 deadline's sell-off as the start of a longer-term rebuild, Karlsson doesn't make sense. If it was a reset to facilitate a quick retool, Boston could be looking to have an aggressive summer, similar to the Washington Capitals' approach last summer.

And if it's the latter, Karlsson's name could be on the radar. In Charlie McAvoy, Boston has a No. 1 defenseman. But he isn't the perfect power play quarterback, and there aren't a ton of other options to choose from. Karlsson could take that role and a slot on the second pair with Hampus Lindholm or Nikita Zadorov. The latter may be a super risky pair defensively but also could thread the needle enough offensively to make it all click.

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Possible Trade Targets for Carolina

By: Bob Wage

The Carolina Hurricanes are one of several teams looking to improve their roster this offseason.

While former free agents, Matt Duchene and Brock Nelson are off the board, Mitch Marner, John Tavares and a few others are still available.

If the Canes cannot improve via free agency, then they will need to find a hockey trade to make it happen.

Recently, Frank Seravalli posted a few names that he feels could be on the market.

https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/news/nhl-trade-targets-board-top-35-frank-seravalli-dobson-pageau-kane-rust#disqus_thread

Many of these players would not help Carolina, but perhaps a few would.

JJ Peterka - He is young and he can score but is he a better option than Jackson Blake? Otherwise getting him seems redundant.

Marco Rossi - Smallish center who had 60 points last season.

Bowen Byrum - There is some talent here, but not a huge upgrade.

K'Andre Miller - Interesting possibility here as the Canes could use his size on the backend.

Jonathan Marchessault - He scored 40 plus goals for Vegas a year ago but disappointed in Nashville last season. At this point in his career, probably better to move on.

Evander Kane - In my opinion, a possible locker room issue and not worth the risk.

Rasmus Andersson - There is a lot of talk about this guy out there and he has talent. But his (-38) last season is worth looking into.

JG Pageau - Does not seem like an upgrade.

John Gibson - Who knows? He did post a .912 save percentage last year.

Charlie Coyle - I always liked this player but again I don't see him as an upgrade.

Rights to Isaac Howard - Don't see it.

Vladimir Tarasenko - Not at this stage of his career.

Erik Karlsson - Depends on a lot of factors, (partial salary holdback) but crazier things have happened.

Brian Rust - The guy can light the lamp and he could be a help.

Mattias Samuelsson - A stay at home defenseman who is not living up to his salary in Buffalo, but he is big and strong and would help out the blueline.

Connor Murphy - Another big, stay at home defenseman.

Samuel Girard - Not sure this would be an upgrade.

Matias Maccelli - Interesting project but he doesn't move the needle for Carolina.

Viktor Arvidsson - Again, not an upgrade.

Morgan Rielly - Don't see the fit here.

Carson Soucy - Again, not a fit.

Jamie Oleksiak - He has some size, who knows?

Ilya Lyubushkin - Two wrongs don't make a right.

Elvis Merzlikins - Had a down year last year but is capable of turning it around.

Noah Dobson - Here is a blueliner everyone is talking about, but is he worth $11 million AAV?

Morgan Geekie - A lot of fans were sorry to see him go and he has blossomed into a good player.

30. Thatcher Demko - Another goalie where a change of scenery would help.

32. Martin Necas - Now that there would be funny....

33. Rights to Mitch Marner - I think this would be a wasted draft pick. This kid wants to play the market.

34. Jason Robertson - A point a game player would help any team, including the Hurricanes.

35. Elias Pettersson - He would be a gamble.

A couple of names not on Seravalli's list I would like to see?

Dylan Larkin - He would solve the second line center issues for any team.

Alex Tuch - A big power forward who can score. Love it.

What are your thoughts?

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Carolina Hurricanes Draft Preview

By: Bob Wage

The 2025 NHL Entry Draft will be this weekend, with the first round on Friday night at 7 P.M. Eastern and the remaining rounds on Saturday afternoon, 12 P.M. Eastern.

The Carolina Hurricanes roll into the coming draft with a total of six picks including a late first rounder, number 29 overall. Will they end up that way? Odds say probably not.

This team is known for trading down to get additional picks. It would not shock anyone if they traded that first round pick for two later picks, but maybe they have someone in mind they want at that position in the draft.

Of course it is impossible to know what the teams in front of Carolina will do and who they will pick. All we can do is look at various mock drafts and scouting reports and guess what might happen.

If Carolina holds onto that 29th overall pick, let's see who they might be interested in and see what some mock drafts say.

The first one up is McQueen's Hockey.

https://www.mckeenshockey.com/nhl-blog/mckeens-hockey-2025-nhl-draft-guide-two-round-mock-draft/

29. Cullen Potter

According to Elite Prospects, he is rated as high as #5 and as low as #50. (This is common, you will see these players ranked all over the spectrum.) He is noted as an excellent skater.

Next up we will look at the NHL .com rankings.

https://www.nhl.com/draft/prospects

29. William Moore

Moore is ranked anywhere from 25 to 92.

One interesting thing I noticed from this report, a player named Ivan Ryabkin was ranked at number 3 earlier in the season and dropped to number 35 at the end. He is described as a "violent" player with high end skills. He scored a point a game in the USHL and also had 70 penalty minutes in the regular season and another 30 in the playoffs. Perhaps he has anger issues?

My NHL Draft is cool because if you click on the player's name, it will show several scouting blurbs for that player. http://www.mynhldraft.com/NHL-Mock-Draft/

29. Shane Vansaghi

He is a good player but notably has slow foot speed. He does not seem like a good fit.

Next is the Elite Prospects final ranking. https://www.eliteprospects.com/draft-center/eliteprospects.com

29. Jack Murtagh

Known as an explosive skater who plows through people. What's there not to like? He is ranked as high as 26 and as low as 70.

The NHL combines two mock drafts into one posting here. https://www.nhl.com/news/mock-2025-nhl-draft-opinions-vary-after-1st-4-picks

29. Bill Zonnon

I really like what I see in this kid. He's been described as the "best forechecker in the draft." He seems like a fit, but will he be around at 29? He's been ranked at 13 and 14, and as low as 33.

Don't hold it against him that he plays in the "Q".

29. William Horcroff

He is 6'4 and is ranked as high as 27 by Bob Mckenzie, but mostly ranked lower.

Speaking of Bob McKenzie, he has the Canes picking Zonnon at 29.

https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/air-of-unpredictability-after-schaefer-and-misa-in-bob-mckenzie-s-draft-ranking-1.2325555

29. Bill Zonnon

ProHockeyRumors has Cameron Reid falling to Carolina. https://www.prohockeyrumors.com/2025/06/phrs-2025-nhl-mock-draft.html

29. Cameron Reid

Stranger things have happened but it would be a stretch to have this defenseman fall this low. He is ranked higher on almost every service I have seen, from 13 to 33.

Tankathon puts out a mock draft which is interesting. They have us selecting a big strong center. https://www.tankathon.com/nhl/mock_draft

29. Jack Nesbitt

At 6'4 he uses his body to get where he wants to go. He has good numbers for Windsor and is ranked anywhere from 17 to 52.

Sports Illustrated is another source having Carolina selecting Zonnon.

https://www.si.com/onsi/breakaway/news-feed-page/nhl-mock-draft-2025-philadelphia-flyers-stockpile-continues

29. Bill Zonnon

The Athletic has a few mock drafts. https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6406848/2025/06/11/nhl-mock-draft-2025-staff/

29. Cullen Potter

At 5'10 he is called the best skater in the draft.

https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6436425/2025/06/20/2025-nhl-mock-draft-the-athletic-hockey-show/

29. Henry Brzustewicz

This defenseman is ranked lower by many services.

Scott Wheeler has us taking Potter.

https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6393677/2025/06/09/2025-nhl-mock-draft-round-1-wheeler/

29. Cullen Potter

What do you all think? Does anyone have a dark horse favorite?

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The Hockey News

Should The Carolina Hurricanes Re-Sign Brent Burns?

By: Ryan Henkel

It's not normal to actually sit and ponder the merit of re-signing a 40-year-old defenseman, but Brent Burns is a special case.

The veteran defenseman continues to be one of the game's all-time greats and he's honestly a modern marvel given the way he's been able to upkeep himself and his body.

While he's not the same player he was even three years ago, Burns has still managed to adapt his game and remain capable of playing at a high-level and that was especially apparent in these playoffs.

Carolina Hurricanes 2025 UFAs

While there were dips here and there in Burns' regular season performance, he really showed his mettle in the postseason.

In 263:25 of 5v5 ice time, Burns was on the ice for just six goals against, an average of just 1.37 goals against per 60 minutes.

In fact, four of those goals against came in the team's first-round series against the New Jersey Devils.

Burns did not allow a single goal 5v5 while he was on the ice in the entire series against the Washington Capitals and was only on the ice for two goals against in the Florida Panthers series that saw substantial blowouts.

He and partner Jaccob Slavin had the third most minutes together out of any other pair this past postseason, and even while facing the toughest competition night in and night out, they still managed to control a 53.78 CF% and outscore opponents 8-6.

Burns has come a long way in adapting his game to a more defensively-minded one and that's been especially apparent on the penalty kill.

The veteran blueliner had the 11th best GA/60 (4.9) amongst all defensemen in the league this past season to play at least 100 minutes on the PK (Burns played 195:54).

He also had the 8th best high danger chances against per 60 (18.07) and the 6th best high danger goals against per 60 (1.53) too.

Burns was also on the ice for five of Carolina's 10 total shorthanded goals.

"We had the best penalty kill in the National Hockey League and [Burns] is a big part of that," said coach Rod Brind'Amour in his end of season interview. "I don't think that was something that you would have said 10 years ago was up his alley, you know? So he's figuring that out."

Burns had potentially the hardest deployment in the league this year, with PuckIQ calculating that he spent about 42.3% of his minutes against 'elite' competition this season, more than every other defenseman other than Slavin (42.7%).

There's no denying the fact that that is an extremely difficult circumstance to adapt to.

"It was definitely a different challenge," Burns said in his end of season interview. "In the past, offensively, I was counted on a lot more. And you're playing against top guys those nights too, but I think when you're playing against those guys every night, if you make one mistake, it's a grade-A and it's a solid chance that they're scoring. So, the mindset definitely shifts to obviously trying not to give up anything, because if you do, it's gonna be scary. So, yeah, that affects the offense a lot. It was a great challenge. I loved it. It was fun. A little different, but it was a great challenge."

As can be expected from a challenge like that though, the on-ice results weren't as strong for Burns as in previous years, as he allowed 2.78 goals against per 60 at 5v5, well near the bottom of the league for defensemen who played at least 500 even-strength minutes this season.

The veteran was also the middle of the road for high-danger chances against per 60 (10.86) and again near the bottom for high-danger goals against per 60 (1.44).

However, perhaps part of that can also be attributed to the Hurricanes' surprisingly weak regular season goaltending as the netminders had just a 0.893 even-strength save percentage while Burns was on the ice.

Brent Burns' 2024-25 Player CardBrent Burns' 2024-25 Player Card

Burns' ability to contribute offensively was always one of his best traits, with the blueliner having had 13 seasons with double-digit goals (three over 20 goals) and 30+ points (six with over 60 points).

This past season however was the first time since the COVID-shortened year that Burns did not break either of those thresholds and before that, the last time was when he played less than half of a season due to injury in 2012-13.

The veteran's offense has drastically fallen off and another big indicator for that is his struggles with getting pucks to the net.

Burns' shot has always been heralded for being quick and powerful, able to find its way through traffic with ease, but in each of the last two seasons, Burns has failed to break the 200 SOG mark, a threshold he had frequently surpassed.

This was also Burns' worst season on the power play, with just three total points in nearly 139 minutes of PP time.

In fact, Burns' 1.39 goals per 60 was the worst mark out of any power play quarterback with at least 50 minutes of PP time this season.

He was also on the ice for four shorthanded goals against, meaning that he was even in terms of goals scored in his power play time this year.

While his offensive production has certainly taken a hit, the fact of the matter is that he's still an effective offensive generator.

The veteran had the 8th best Corsi For Percentage amongst all league defensemen (57.84%) -- though to be fair, every other Canes defensemen had a better percentage than him and only Mattias Ekholm and Evan Bouchard had a better rate outside of his own teammates.

Burns also had the highest rate per 60 for chances (73.76) and the fourth highest rate for expected goals (3.15), high-danger chances (13.68) and high-danger goals (1.81).

"Yeah, the older you get, sure you're going to slow down a little bit, but, I mean, I think he did a great job this year, and I think he's kind of learning too how to change his game a little," Brind'Amour said.

Brent Burns' 2024-25 MicrostatsBrent Burns' 2024-25 Microstats

It's also no secret that both sides would love to figure something out.

For one, Brind'Amour is unapologetically a huge fan of the defenseman.

"I love the guy for a lot of reasons, not just the hockey side of things and what you see, but just the way he handles himself on and off the ice," Brind'Amour said. "I can't say enough good things about him. ... He's been everything we could have asked for and I think it was one of the better acquisitions we've made in recent memory, that's for sure."

Burns too is a fan of the organization, the city and everything else that Carolina has to offer.

"This is a really special place," Burns said. "I've said it before and I think I've said it every year, because it's true. I was really blessed to play in three great places, but Raleigh is really special. ... We love it here and would love for it to work out."

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Brent Burns has been the focus of a good amount of ire as of late.

thehockeynews.comHas Brent Burns Actually Been a Burden For The Carolina Hurricanes? Well, No.Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Brent Burns has been the focus of a good amount of ire as of late.

The biggest question really, for me, is if signing him would block the way for acquiring a true top-pair defenseman.

Currently, the Canes have five defensemen under contract who look poised for significant roles.

The four returnees from last year's group + Alexander Nikishin.

I'm not 100% sold on Scott Morrow being ready to be an NHL regular, but I feel confident that Nikishin will be.

So that leaves just one spot on the blueline and there's a definite need for a top-pairing, right-handed defender.

While you could argue that a depth role for Burns could see him come in and out of the lineup when needed, but I don't see that working out mostly due to his ironman streak.

The veteran blueliner currently holds the 4th longest consecutive games played streak in NHL history (925) and he's only 39 games back of 3rd, 74 games back of 2nd and 139 games back of 1st.

If he's signing somewhere, it's so he can play and he's fully capable of playing.

But I just don't know if the space is necessarily there for the Canes to bring him back unless another defenseman is shipped out in a trade.

Regardless of that though, it's clear to me that Burns is still a very capable player who can be a contributor on most any team, even Carolina.

"Obviously, the business and all that comes into play, but I'd love to have him back," Brind'Amour said.

Rod Brind'Amour Once Again Snubbed By Hockey Hall of Fame Selection Committee

By: Ryan Henkel

The Hockey Hall of Fame announced its Class of 2025 on Tuesday which included eight selections: two builders (Jackie Parker and Daniele Sauvageau) and six players (Duncan Keith, Zdeno Chara, Joe Thornton, Alexander Mogilny, Jennifer Botterill and Brianna Decker).

While all were deserving of the nod, there was, yet again, one notable exclusion: Rod Brind'Amour.

The 2006 Stanley Cup Champion and Carolina Hurricanes legend has been eligible for selection into the Hockey Hall of Fame for 12 years now, but it seems like he continues to be overlooked.

Rod Brind'Amour Once Again Snubbed By Hockey Hall of Fame Selection Committee

The process works as follows: Each member of the committee is permitted to select only one player for nomination.

Once nominated, a player must then receive at least 75% of the vote from the 18-person committee, with each member permitted to vote for up to four male players each.

Players are supposed to be adjudicated on "playing ability, sense of fair play, character and contributions to his or her team or teams and to the game of hockey in general."

So it's clear that Brind'Amour meets and exceeds all of those criteria, but yet he continues to be disregarded.

The centerman is one of the best examples of longevity in the game, having played 1,484 games, the 28th most in league history (he was in the top-20 when he retired).

It wasn't like he was dragging out his career toward the end either, as he was playing over 18 minutes a night every year until his 20th season and he averaged over 21 minutes a game for his career.

Brind'Amour was also one of the early pioneers of the fitness movement in the NHL, earning the moniker "Rod the Bod."

He was also a highly successful two-way player. While known for his defensive ability, he still collected 452 goals and 1,184 points

In addition, the centerman was also one of the game's best ever faceoff men.

While the NHL didn't start tracking faceoff wins until 2005, Brind'Amour is credited with a 59.32% win rate in the dots for his age 35-39 seasons, well past his prime.

Brind'Amour broke into the league as a teenager with the St. Louis Blues in 1989, after a standout freshman season with Michigan State that saw him capture CCHA Rookie of the Year honors.

Immediately, he was impact player, with 26 goals and 61 points in that first season.

He made the NHL's All-Rookie Team that year and played one more season with the Blues before he was traded to the Philadelphia Flyers.

Brind'Amour was again a dominant force on the ice throughout his time in Philly, with multiple 70+ point seasons and Selke votes (he was inducted into the Flyers' Hall of Honor in 2015), but it wasn't until his eventual trade to the Hurricanes where he really cemented his legacy.

The veteran center went on to become team captain and led the franchise to its one and only Stanley Cup in 2006 (he also should have won the Conn Smythe that year, but Cam Ward, an Edmonton-born netminder, ended up with that honor instead). He also won back-to-back Selke trophies.

Honestly, there is also no singular player more impactful and more meaningful to the Carolina franchise and fanbase than Rod Brind'Amour.

Governor Roy Cooper presented Brind'Amour with membership following his team's 4-1 win over Columbus on Sunday.

thehockeynews.comRod Brind'Amour Awarded North Carolina's Highest Civilian HonorGovernor Roy Cooper presented Brind'Amour with membership following his team's 4-1 win over Columbus on Sunday.

So in terms of impact to the game and his teams, Brind'Amour is right there at the top. He's also a class act, great person and represents the game so well.

Furthermore, there are plenty of players already in with either similar or worse resumes than Brind'Amour.

So why isn't he in the Hall of Fame yet? Your guess is as good as mine.

But it is notable that the entire selection process is shrouded in secrecy. None of the selection committee's votes are ever made public and no one except for the 18-person committee is privy to those conversations.

Perhaps a little transparency could go a long way.

The Carolina Hurricanes Should Not Make Their First-Round Selection

By: Ryan Henkel

The 2025 NHL Draft is fast approaching and the Carolina Hurricanes currently hold six picks, including their own first-round pick (29th overall).

However, the Canes should absolutely not be making a selection this Friday and not just because they traded down to get an additional pick.

No, they need to be packaging that pick as part of deal for an impact player to improve the roster today.

The Carolina Hurricanes Should Not Make Their First-Round Selection

Carolina is in a high-compete window right now, with heaps of young talent like Sebastian Aho, Seth Jarvis, Andrei Svechnikov, and more, but that clock is ticking.

The Hurricanes need to be using that pick to improve their team for the present and not be too concerned with looking ahead into the future.

The team has made seven straight postseason appearances, winning at least a round each year, and they've also been to the Eastern Conference Final three times in that span.

They're right there, but they just can't get over the hump.

They need more talent.

There are a couple of notable holes in the team's lineup — namely a 2C and a top-pairing right-handed defenseman — and those are positions you aren't going to be able to get the best options from in free agency or out of a late first-round teenager.

The Hurricanes are loaded with assets, whether that be the picks they currently have over the next three/four years or the loads of prospects currently in the system.

Not everyone is going to be able to make the NHL roster, so they really need to start utilizing those.

If Carolina general manager Eric Tulsky is serious about maximizing this team's current ability to win, then he needs to find a way to make a splash this summer and the team's first-round pick should 100% be a part of that.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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

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The Athletic / NHL trade grades: Canucks make desperate bet on Evander Kane as Oilers get out of a jam

By Shayna Goldman and Sean Gentille

June 25, 2025Updated 1:32 pm EDT

The trade

Vancouver Canucks get: F Evander Kane

Edmonton Oilers get: 2025 fourth-round pick (No. 117)

(The Oilers retained none of Kane's salary.)

Shayna Goldman: If the Oilers are going to get better, management has to make subtractions. Leon Draisaitl's extension kicks in on July 1 and comes with a $5.5 million cap hit bump. There is the Evan Bouchard contract situation to navigate, and Connor McDavid is set to be up for a new deal in the 2025-26 season. If those aren't enough rising costs, Edmonton still has to find a way to improve around those three core players. The Oilers need more scoring wingers and help in goal.

In theory, Kane could have been one of those scoring wingers for 2025-26, after he missed the entire 2024-25 regular season with injuries. He scored six goals and 12 points in 21 playoff games. Perhaps the most impressive aspect is that 11 of the 12 points were scored at five-on-five, which ranked 12th in the league. The problem is that the offense can't be counted on consistently enough, his defense is shaky and there are disciplinary issues.

In the Stanley Cup Final alone, Kane took seven minor penalties — five in the first period, five in the offensive zone. While that didn't necessarily cost the Oilers the series, it certainly contributed to their downfall. At the end of the day, that offense generally doesn't outweigh all of the downsides that he brings to the table, and it's not worth that much precious cap space, either. The 33-year-old takes up $5.1 million on the books, when his market value is closer to $3.7 million. Every cent matters in Edmonton right now. While this now gives management the task of replacing his production in a growing cap world, there's more flexibility to do it.

The fact that the Oilers managed to clear that space entirely without having to pay another team is remarkable. Edmonton should have had to attach a pick as a sweetener, instead of gaining a fourth-rounder in return.

Trading a fourth-round pick for scoring depth isn't some back-breaking cost for the Canucks, in a vacuum. However, making this bet is a choice. Yes, the Canucks need more scoring depth in the top nine, and Kane could be extra motivated in a contract year, especially if he has a healthy offseason to train. But at what cost? The team should have kept that $5.1 million in cap space open in free agency, and then, if they struck out, considered Kane as a fallback option. The locker room fit is the most curious part of it. Last year's drama derailed the Canucks' season, and put an abrupt stop to all the progress made in 2023-24. So why would management welcome any potential distraction that could negatively impact the chemistry this group is trying to rebuild?

Canucks grade: D

Oilers grade: A-

Sean Gentille: One of the bigger story lines of the offseason — not the biggest, but somewhere toward the top of the list — was the question of who'd bail out the Oilers.

Front offices, the vast majority of the time, can find a partner willing to help them out of a jam or three. The identity of the guardian angel, though, was TBD.

Now, six days before free agency begins, we have our answer. Jim Rutherford and Patrik Allvin's fruit basket from Stan Bowman, we can only assume, is headed out with Wednesday's mail.

Bowman, trying to balance the challenge of hammering out an eight-figure extension with his No. 1 defenseman (Bouchard) and finding a way to improve a roster that's run into the same roadblock in consecutive seasons, just cleared out $5.13 million in the easiest imaginable fashion. No fuss, no muss.

To some extent, Bowman will have to replace some goals. Kane, for the last chunk of his career, could be counted upon to score at a pace of 25 per season or thereabouts. He's nearly 34 now, though, coming off a regular season spent (for one reason or another) recovering from a series of nasty-sounding abdominal injuries.

All that, combined with a 21-game postseason top-lined by 44 minutes spent in the penalty box, made his cap hit untenable for a team in any cap crunch. Aging, expensive third-liners whose value, even at their peaks, came almost solely from goal-scoring and are not the most economical players to carry. Bowman did well here. Now, he figures to have $5 million or so — could be more, could be less — to play with once

Bouchard's deal is done. And hey, maybe someone takes Viktor Arvidsson off his hands, too.

On to the next one.

Meanwhile, the Canucks seemed to start the summer in desperation mode, and trading for Kane certainly fits the bill. If he's at his best, he'll help — and every bit of that counts for a team sweatily trying to convince Quinn Hughes that they're worth another long-term deal — but he's almost certainly not going to help enough. This is a team that on Tuesday needed a top-six center and a top-line winger. They still do, and now, they have less cap space to help them in their quest.

Oilers: A

Canucks: D

The Athletic LOADED: 06.26.2025

1356473 Websites

The Athletic / Mitch Marner UFA power rankings: Who needs him, what's funniest and where does he land?

By Sean McIndoe

June 25, 2025 7:00 am EDT

We're less than a week away from free agency, and the big name is Mitch Marner. You may have heard about it. It's been kind of a thing.

And as you'd expect, several teams have emerged as potential destinations, while others are likely happy to lurk in the background. As of today, there's no clear favorite. That feels like a good reason to break out the trusty Power Rankings gimmick and see what kind of different lenses we can look at the situation through.

And yes, we'll end with a prediction. You should probably ignore that part, because I'm bad at this. But first, let's start with the obvious category …

The "which team needs him most?" ranking

There isn't a team in the league that wouldn't benefit from adding a 100-point forward. But some teams would seem to need to hit this home run, while others could afford to foul it off and work deeper into the offseason count. I lost that metaphor somewhere along the way, but you get the idea.

Not ranked: Florida Panthers — I'm hearing they might already be good. Working to confirm.

5. Seattle Kraken — They're admittedly a long shot. But with no legitimate superstars and few options for finding one, the Kraken are dangerously close to becoming permanent fixtures in the NHL's mushy middle. Landing Marner could put them back on the map, and they've got the cap space and no-tax advantage to be among his best financial options, if that's his priority. At the very least, you'd like to see them in the mix.

4. Utah Mammoth — Last year was about getting established and riding the novelty wave toward establishing a fan base. But with plenty of cap space, now would seem like the time to go out and reel in the sort of big fish who could be the face of the organization going forward — and help them take the next step toward making the playoffs.

3. Los Angeles Kings — After four straight first-round exits, it's fair to say that they're not getting past the Oilers without some major changes. Marner is the rare player who could move the needle on this one-sided rivalry. You don't hire a big-game-hunting GM like Ken Holland when you're looking for slow-and-steady steps forward.

2. Detroit Red Wings — The Wings desperately need to add the sort of talent that could raise their ceiling. But maybe even more importantly, seeing Steve Yzerman go into a competitive UFA market and sell the biggest star on his vision for the future in Detroit would be absolutely huge for Wings fans who are starting to have their doubts about where this plan is going.

1. Carolina Hurricanes — There are teams that need an offensive star like Marner and teams that are already Cup contenders. And then there's the Hurricanes, who represent the overlap in that Venn diagram. We know they're good. We also know that they don't have quite enough firepower up front to get over the postseason hump. We also know they have cap space. And we also know that they like Marner, having been interested in dealing for him at the deadline. Add it all up, and it's probably a little simple to have Carolina at the top of this list. Luckily, simple is what I do best, so here we are.

The "what's worst for the Maple Leafs?" ranking (i.e., the "what's funniest for everyone else?" ranking)

We kind of already did this one a few weeks ago, so we'll mix it up a bit and stay generic instead of focusing on specific teams.

Not ranked: He signs for $14 million in Utah — It's a cap number the Leafs couldn't match, in a low-pressure environment they could never offer him, and their odds of ever crossing paths with him in a meaningful game would be minimal.

5. Any other Canadian team — In that post from earlier in the month, we specified that we'd only focus on teams with a realistic shot at signing Marner. But a lot of you skipped that part and were mad that I didn't list Montreal or Ottawa or some other Canadian rival. Fine, here you go.

4. Any Atlantic rival — The Florida teams are getting some attention, but don't sleep on Boston or Detroit trying to jump-start a rebuild, or even the Sabres. Seeing their star sign within the division wouldn't just be potentially tough on the Leafs' playoff hopes; it would send a fun message to Toronto fans that Marner isn't remotely worried about how they'll respond to all of this.

3. Carolina Hurricanes — He didn't want to play for them at the deadline, but four months later, he changed his mind. This will somehow be Brad Treliving's fault.

2. Toronto Maple Leafs (on a record-setting contract) — Don't act like you couldn't see it happening. At the last minute, Marner goes back to the Toronto front office and says he'll stay for eight years and $128 million with total no-move protection until the end of time. The Leafs cave because that's all they know how to do. Matthew Knies immediately gets offer-sheeted. Marner finishes the season with career-low offensive totals, and somehow puts up -3 points in the playoffs. Leafs fans tell themselves that the deal will look better once Connor McDavid resets the market, except he ends up signing in Buffalo for less, saying that his priority all along was to play close to home.

1. Anywhere that sees Marner take a discount because he "just wants to win" — Easily the funniest possible option. Just imagine Marner sitting in front of a microphone after signing for some below-market number and shrugging that he's always been all about winning, and understands the importance of leaving some cap space aside for the rest of the roster. I can't decide if it would be funnier if he meant it sincerely or was openly trolling, but Leafs fans might never recover.

The "what's bad news for the rest of the league?" ranking

This is the result that would make everyone else go "uh-oh."

Not ranked: Columbus Blue Jackets — We would all be pretty much fine with this.

5. Carolina Hurricanes — The team we all keep picking to win the East might finally live up to that potential.

4. Tampa Bay Lightning — A loaded team that's already seen as quite possibly the most attractive destination in the entire league flexes its free market muscles yet again. The only good news here is that the Lightning haven't won much in the last few years, unlike certain other teams that oh no he wouldn't …

3. Florida Panthers — Somewhere there's a world where Marner not only signs in Florida, but takes a steep discount to do it. Let's hope that world isn't this one, because it's basically game over for Canadian teams if this becomes the new trend for star players.

2. Vegas Golden Knights — They cover a lot of the same bases as the Florida teams, minus any of the dues those fan bases had to pay before finally seeing success. Worse, the Knights finding enough cap room to land him would mean they're fully back to their completely ruthless ways.

1. Anywhere on a two-year deal — Uh oh, NHL players might be finally figuring out that they don't have to constantly cost themselves leverage, control and tens of millions by defaulting to whatever max-length deals their teams wave in front of them. Better hope your team already has all their key guys locked up.

The "what's best for Marner?" ranking

Just as a fun thought experiment, let's pretend that a star player is actually a person and not just an asset to be moved around for our amusement. While we don't know what Marner's specific priorities might be, we can probably make some reasonable assumptions based on what's been said and/or leaked over the last year.

Not ranked: Any recent Cup winner — Especially the Panthers, although Tampa and Vegas apply too. Yes, they're great teams. But if they won without you and they don't instantly win with you, guess who's getting the blame?

5. Carolina Hurricanes — Does Marner seem like he'd be a Rod Brind'Amour guy? I feel like he would be.

4. Toronto Maple Leafs — No, it's not happening. But if Marner shocked us all by going full Jordan Belfort with an "I'm not leaving" speech on June 30, it would instantly make him a hero again in Toronto. At least for a few weeks.

3. Chicago Blackhawks — One of the best cities in North America, with a ton of cap room and (we think) a franchise center already in place. And they'd be so happy to just make the playoffs that Marner wouldn't be under a microscope if he helped get them there. Scott and Mark think they might be done, but you'd assume that if Marner had an interest, that would change quickly.

2. Los Angeles Kings — The rare team that could offer a big, fancy market for him and his family without the nonstop attention that usually comes with.

1. Utah Mammoth — He'd get to be the unquestioned face of the franchise, but without all the pressure that usually entails. In a market that's still getting up to speed and hasn't been worn down by hockey-fan cynicism yet, his every move would be appreciated for at least a few years. And they have a ton of cap space.

The "juicy narrative" ranking

Forget about what's best for the teams, or the fans, or even Marner himself. Let's stay focused on the true main characters of this and every other sports story: the noble media, who'll need to turn Marner's decision into a dramatic yet easily digestible storyline.

Not ranked: Toronto Maple Leafs — Boring.

5. Nashville Predators — Dude, I have something fascinating to tell you about state tax rates.

4. Chicago Blackhawks/San Jose Sharks — The guy who loves racking up regular season numbers but disappears in the playoffs chooses a team that may be years away from a postseason return, conclusively proving that he was never about winning in the first place.

3. Any team that gives him the highest AAV in the league — He was in it for the money all along! Unlike everyone else who negotiates a new contract for their job!

2. Vegas Golden Knights — After years of proving that he couldn't carry his team on his back in the playoffs, Marner goes the A-Rod route by choosing an already-assembled contender where he can be a passenger instead of a driver. This one would be catnip for the sort of people who love to drone on about kids these days and their participation trophies.

1. Florida Panthers/Tampa Bay Lightning — Cut and paste the Vegas option, then add a fun kicker: While everyone assumed that Marner would slink out of Toronto and want to avoid running into his former team in the playoffs, it turns out he actually wants to be the one to look them in the eye and twist the knife into their back.

The "what will actually happen?" ranking

We'll end on the part where I make a prediction.

5. Pittsburgh Penguins — Find someone who loves you the way Kyle Dubas loves giving Mitch Marner a blank check.

4. Los Angeles Kings — Warm weather, fun city, minimal attention and at least semi-reasonable expectations for immediate success. The Kings check a lot of boxes.

3. Carolina Hurricanes — They make a ton of sense, although you wonder if watching the Mikko Rantanen situation play out from afar gives Marner any hesitation.

2. A mystery team — Remember, nobody thought Johnny Gaudreau would go to the Blue Jackets until he shocked us all by signing there. In a league where everyone has cap space, I might be willing to give you the four or five favorites and take the field.

1. Vegas Golden Knights — It sure seems to be trending this way, right? And it's a great fit for both sides … for now. My only concern is that if Marner thinks the Leafs organization didn't treat him with enough respect, wait until he finds out what the Knights do with guys who don't play up to their contracts …

Not ranked: The team he actually signs with — Sorry. I tried to tell you that I'm bad at this.

The Athletic LOADED: 06.26.2025

1356474 Websites

The Athletic / NHL rumblings: What it'd take to move Karlsson, plus latest on Tavares, Marchand, Ekblad, Bouchard

By Pierre LeBrun

June 25, 2025 7:00 am EDT

Could Erik Karlsson be on the move again?

Depends. On a lot of things.

It depends, first of all, on the teams seeking a top-four blue line upgrade via free agency next week and whether they strike out and need to look at trade options instead.

It depends on whether Karlsson is still a $10 million cap hit over the final two years of his deal.

It depends on whether Karlsson would waive his full no-move clause.

And it depends on the timing of trade offers for Karlsson, who has a $5 million signing bonus payable next Tuesday, July 1.

Let's dive into the last part first.

It goes without saying that there are teams that would rather entertain trading for Karlsson after the Penguins make that $5 million payment. But on the flip side, the Penguins will be less inclined to trade him after making that payment unless teams pay an extra asset to acknowledge it.

So the timing of the bonus payment is a factor.

Next, the salary retention. The Sharks already retain just over 13 percent of Karlsson's cap hit, which is why it's at $10 million and not $11.5 million. I think the sweet spot for making Karlsson as attractive as possible would be to turn him into a $7.5 million player. That would set up a pretty aggressive market for him. But similarly, I sense that the Penguins won't retain unless paid full value (asset-wise) for doing so. So there's another asset if you're trading for him post-bonus.

The rumor mill is churning at a high rate of speed in the runup to free agency, where there aren't enough solutions to satisfy every team.

Third, my understanding is that Karlsson, 35, would be open to waiving to join a contender. That might sound obvious given where the Penguins are — starting down a long rebuild — but he has the hammer via his full no-move, so it's no small consideration.

And finally, it all depends on how teams view Karlsson, who played very well for Sweden at the 4 Nations in best-on-best. He's got his deficiencies, to be sure, but he's also a very good forecheck-breaker along with his natural offensive skill.

“For me, Erik was a top-three D for the whole (4 Nations) tournament,’’ Sweden national team head coach Sam Hallam told me Tuesday. “Not just the playmaking, but his defensive reads and movement held a very high level. There’s a lot of quality and compete level left in that tank.”

This will take a smart front office to be creative and aggressive and see the value in Karlsson with two years left on a contract that isn’t quite the anchor it used to be.

Getting the No. 12 pick gives the Penguins power. They need stars and standing pat in this top-heavy draft won't do the trick.

What else is happening two days ahead of the draft? Rumblings from sources around the league:

Tavares, Leafs need to bridge the gap

Dialogue continues between the Toronto Maple Leafs and John Tavares’ camp, led by agent Pat Brisson. It’s been a grind. But what’s important to note is they’re keeping at it. The dialogue is almost daily. The sides are motivated to find a way to get it done, although the closer next Tuesday gets, the more real the idea of Tavares, 34, dipping his toes becomes. I think it gets done before that happens, but I’m not as confident as I was a week ago.

Two recent contract extensions have impacted the negotiations: Matt Duchene, 34, at four years with a $4.5 million average annual value, and Brock Nelson, 33, at three years and a $7.5 million AAV. You can see how Leafs general manager Brad Treliving would be pointing to Duchene’s AAV — and how Brisson would say, well, Tavares outscored Nelson this past year. So … where’s the sweet spot?

Tavares is willing to take less than market value to stay in Toronto. So he’s not trying to come close to Nelson’s new deal, as far as I can tell. On the open market on a two-year deal, I believe Tavares could fetch $7.5 million if not $8 million. Again, on a two-year deal.

If the Leafs put four years and a $5 million AAV on the table, Tavares would probably take it. I don’t think he would do $5 million for three years, though. So that’s similar to Duchene’s deal (which was negotiated by CAA as well) — just a tad more to reflect the different tax realities of the markets.

But both sides need to move toward each other over the coming days. And I think they will. I just can’t see the Leafs being OK losing both Tavares and Mitch Marner at the same time — that’s 176 points from this past season out the door — and I think it’s real just how badly Tavares wants to stay home.

Knowing what not to do can be instructive when facing an offseason of delicate maneuvers. Here's some advice for Brad Treliving.

Sweet spot on Bouchard

Talks are underway on the Evan Bouchard front, and my sense is there’s a genuine mutual desire to get something done and avoid any drama.

For my money, it’s one of the most interesting offseason negotiations in the league. The Edmonton Oilers are tight against the cap but hope to sign Bouchard before next week, when other teams can reach out to the restricted free agent. I think all options are on the table as far as different types of contracts, but I believe what may end up making the most sense is something around the four-year range. Think Auston Matthews in Toronto — same agency firm at play here (Wasserman Hockey).

A four-year deal would give Bouchard, 25, a healthy raise and allow him to have his next negotiation at 29, when he’s still at the peak of his career and the salary cap will have skyrocketed. A four-year deal also would not cripple Edmonton on the cap compared to what the AAV would look on an eight-year deal.

If the Oilers want to keep the best player in hockey, they need to prove he can win in Edmonton long-term. Here's how that could happen.

How the Panthers can make it work with Marchand

If I were to rank the probability of all three major pending unrestricted free agents on the Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers sticking around, it would be: 1) Sam Bennett, 2) Brad Marchand, and 3) Aaron Ekblad.

What’s surprising here, to some degree, is Marchand. I believe even a few weeks ago, he thought he was going to market, partly because he was the new guy and Florida had so many players to re-sign. But his outstanding Cup Final and perfect fit on the Panthers have made him someone Florida will try its best to keep.

The way around the cap constraints on Marchand would be to go long with him despite his age (37) to bring down the AAV. We’ll see whether Florida goes that route. I would put Marchand at 50-50 staying, where a few weeks ago I had that lower.

I think Ekblad is most likely to go to market. My understanding is that there haven’t been substantial negotiations since last summer, although I do expect Florida to make an offer before next Tuesday’s market opens. But the issue last summer, as I understand it, was mostly about term, and I don’t see why that issue would have gone away. What you love about Ekblad — his courageous style and the hard minutes — also has to worry the Panthers as far as committing too much term for a 29-year-old.

Winning another Cup has a way to bring people together, so perhaps Ekblad and the Panthers find a way, but I think it’s more likely he goes to market as of now.

The Athletic LOADED: 06.26.2025

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The Athletic / Where will all the goalies go? Breaking down the NHL’s upcoming moves in net

Where will all the goalies go? Breaking down the NHL’s upcoming moves in net

By James Mirtle

June 25, 2025 7:00 am EDT

With all of the hockey world’s attention on Mitch Marner, teams needing centers and defensemen, and the Florida Panthers getting obliterated at the Elbo Room, one thing we haven’t had time to talk about all that much is what’s happening in goal around the league.

Though there might not be as big of names available in net in free agency this year, there is still likely going to be a lot of movement. By my count, two teams potentially need a new starter and at least another six need to sign a backup.

At least eight established goalies, meanwhile, are either on the trade block or buyout/demotion candidates. And there are 10 experienced netminders who are UFAs and another nine who are set to become RFAs on July 1.

Add it up, and there could be quite the game of musical chairs happening in NHL creases over the next few weeks.

To make sense of it all, here’s my goalie big board for 2025. Slots marked in blue are pending RFAs. Those in red are trade, buyout or demotion candidates. And orange indicates a clear-cut opening at the position.

The big goalie breakdown

Anaheim

Dostal

Gibson

Boston

Swayman

Korpisalo

Buffalo

Luukkonen

Levi

Calgary

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Minnesota
Gustavsson
Wallstedt
Montreal
Montembeault
Dobes
Primeau
Nashville
Saros
Annunen
New Jersey
Markstrom
Daws
NY Islanders
Sorokin
Varlamov
NY Rangers
Shesterkin

Quick
Ottawa
Ullmark
Merilainen
Philadelphia
Ersson
Fedotov
Pittsburgh
Nedeljkovic
Jarry
Blomqvist
San Jose
Askarov
Romanov
Seattle
Daccord
Grubauer
St. Louis
Binnington
Hofer
Tampa Bay
Vasilevskiy
Johansson
Toronto
Stolarz
Woll
Utah
Vejmelka
Ingram

Vancouver
Lankinen
Demko
Silovs
Vegas
Hill
Schmid
Washington
Thompson
Lindgren
Winnipeg
Hellebuyck
Comrie

This isn't an exact science, as some of those I've listed as No. 3s could end up with the backup role, and some of those as No. 2s could end up getting supplanted by a free-agent signing or trade acquisition. But after talking to some people around the league, I think this represents a decent portrait of where things stand.

Let's further break these teams down into separate groups, with a bit more information on the most interesting clubs at the bottom.

The status quo

Teams with established No. 1s, backups or tandems:

Boston Bruins, Carolina Hurricanes, Chicago Blackhawks, Colorado Avalanche, Dallas Stars, Detroit Red Wings, Minnesota Wild, Nashville Predators, New York Islanders, New York Rangers, St. Louis Blues, Tampa Bay Lightning, Toronto Maple Leafs, Utah Mammoth, Washington Capitals, Winnipeg Jets

That's 16 teams, or half the league, where there's probably not a lot to see. In some cases, such as Detroit, they could make a move, but with other needs more pressing, I wouldn't bet on it.

There are some unknowns here, such as Connor Ingram's health status with Utah, and how some young goalies such as Jesper Wallstedt will fare, but for the most part, these feel like teams unlikely to make a major change.

The might-make-a-moves

Teams that could pull the trigger on a big goalie trade or sign a UFA backup:

Anaheim Ducks, Buffalo Sabres, Calgary Flames, Florida Panthers, Los Angeles Kings, Montreal Canadiens, New Jersey Devils, Ottawa Senators, Pittsburgh Penguins, Seattle Kraken, Vancouver Canucks, Vegas Golden Knights

Some of these teams have big names on trade boards right now, but they don't have to make a move. John Gibson in Anaheim, for example, is down to two years left on his deal, has been supplanted as the No. 1 and has been in trade talks for years. Could it finally happen, as general manager Pat Verbeek gets aggressive? Yes. But it doesn't have to.

Similarly, the Penguins, Kraken and Canucks all have veterans with big contracts who have struggled and could get moved or bought out in Tristan Jarry, Philipp Grubauer and Thatcher Demko, but there is no significant pressure on those GMs to do so.

Buffalo, Montreal, New Jersey, Ottawa and Vegas, meanwhile, need to decide whether they feel like their younger backups are enough or whether they need to dip into the free-agent market for more help.

Both the Panthers and Kings need a UFA backup to spell their aging No. 1. And Calgary needs a veteran to relieve rising star Dustin Wolf from time to time.

The NHL's four most intriguing goalie situations

1. Edmonton Oilers

Two consecutive runs to the Stanley Cup Final. Two losses to a Panthers team that has a likely Hall of Famer in net.

It feels time for a rethink for the Oilers in goal, but what do you do? Stuart Skinner and Calvin Pickard are signed cheaply, and Edmonton isn't flush with cap space given the need to sign Evan Bouchard. It is going to attempt to ship out some underperformers, including likely one of the netminders, but getting the new addition right is pivotal.

Signing Jake Allen feels like one possibility, but he turns 35 in August and likely commands a three-year deal at more than $10 million total. None of the other UFA goalies would seem to be No. 1 material for a Cup contender, so the trade route could be another avenue to pursue.

2. Philadelphia Flyers

The Flyers are in the unique situation of having three goalies signed … and not wanting to rely on any of them after a really tough season in goal. Samuel Ersson was their top option with an .883 save percentage, but Russians Ivan Fedotov and Aleksei Kolosov feel destined for the AHL (or KHL) this season.

Philadelphia has the cap room to make something happen here. Perhaps it's the right fit for Allen? Or maybe it goes big on a trade for someone like Gibson, Demko or one of the Edmonton goalies?

Definitely a team to watch as they continue to be heavily in the trade and free-agent mix after acquiring Trevor Zegras earlier this week.

3. San Jose Sharks

The future in the Sharks crease is Yaroslav Askarov's. But is he ready to be their No. 1 of the present?

The 23-year-old No. 11 pick in 2020 performed ably in the AHL last season with the Barracuda and was fine in the 13 games he played in the NHL. But taking on a bigger load on a rebuilding club like San Jose could be a lot to ask, even with his considerable pedigree and upside.

Committing to Allen likely doesn't make sense at this point given his age and the need for term, so we suspect the Sharks will invest in a UFA veteran like Dan Vladar, Anton Forsberg or David Rittich who can tandem with Askarov and show him the ropes.

4. Columbus Blue Jackets

It appears time might be up for Elvis Merzlikins after his prolonged struggles (plus some drama) and the emergence of Jet Greaves. (There's more on that from our CBJ beat writer, Aaron Portzline, here.)

The Blue Jackets only missed the playoffs by 2 points last season and likely would have made it with better showings from Merzlikins (.892 save percentage) and Daniil Tarasov (.881). Greaves had an outstanding season last year in the AHL and in 11 games with Columbus and now will be waiver eligible, but how much can it rely on him next season? And what should it do with Merzlikins and Tarasov, assuming it can't find takers in a trade?

Other UFA goalies not yet mentioned who might be options:

Alexandar Georgiev, Alex Lyon, James Reimer, Ilya Samsonov, Vitek Vanecek

The Athletic LOADED: 06.26.2025

1356476 Websites

The Athletic / Which NHL teams need to upgrade on defense? Ranking all 32 by current quality

By Sean Gentille and Dom Luszczyszyn

June 25, 2025 7:00 am EDT

The offseason is here, and one of the most crucial things to know going into it is how each team stands on a position-by-position basis. Today, we look at each team's defensive depth with regard to what they already have and what they need this summer.

Using Net Rating as a starting point, we looked at how much value each team is currently carrying on the back end to figure out what holes it needs to address.

The stronger a team looks through the lineup, the better its baseline looks. We've also detailed our center depth rankings and winger depth rankings.

After adding a subjective touch, here's how each team's defensive depth ranks from best to worst before free agency begins.

1. Edmonton Oilers

Current quality: 99th percentile

Looking for: None

One of the reasons the Oilers were able to march back to the Stanley Cup Final was a defensive group so deep it was able to survive an injury to Mattias Ekholm, a top-pair star. That was made possible by the addition of Jake Walman, a lower-lineup luxury who gave the Oilers a heavy advantage in easier minutes.

Edmonton's group is a strong mix of offensive mobility and defensive suppression throughout, led by Evan Bouchard — a no-doubt franchise defenseman. This is a huge position of strength, one that could be parlayed into fixing an area of need elsewhere.

2. Colorado Avalanche

Current quality: 91st percentile

Looking for: Top-four defenseman

The Avs employ the best defenseman on the planet and another who'd be No. 1 for, give or take, half of the rest of the league. Cale Makar and Devon Toews, all by themselves, are enough to put their team near the top of any list like this one. They're that good.

What Colorado currently rolls behind their all-world pair, though, is a bit of a problem. Josh Manson is third-pair caliber these days, and Sam Girard would be best served with a higher-quality partner. Behind them, only Keaton Middleton is signed for 2025-26, and the Avs are close to the cap. If Makar and Toews are the best version of themselves, it's not a huge issue, but there's also not much of a safety net.

3. Winnipeg Jets

Current quality: 87th percentile

Looking for: Depth defenseman

Thanks to the emergence of Dylan Samberg and the resurgence of Neal Pionk, the Jets have a strong top four that has become their backbone. It strengthened the team's superpower in net, turning the Jets into one of the league's very best defensive teams.

It's not perfect though, not with a bottom pair that struggled often last season. While the Jets don't have a hole to fill on the third pair, they still could use an upgrade.

4. Dallas Stars

Current quality: 87th percentile

Looking for: Top-four defenseman

The Stars get nearly all their value from Miro Heiskanen and Thomas Harley, both of whom are projected to have top-10 seasons at the position. Esa Lindell is also a capable partner for Heiskanen on the top pair. That's an outstanding foundation.

Dallas, though, once again badly needs a legit No. 4 who plays on the right side — because Ilya Lyubushkin and Matt Dumba aren't going to cut it. Lian Bichsel works as a third-pair guy with upside, and Lybushkin would look better playing easier minutes beside him, but there's still a hole in the top four.

5. Vancouver Canucks

Current quality: 85th percentile

Looking for: Depth defenseman

At the great expense of the team's center depth, the Canucks have a top-five blue line. Was it worth losing Bo Horvat and J.T. Miller? Probably not! But for now, it's the team's biggest strength.

Quinn Hughes is a top-two defenseman in hockey, no argument there. The top four behind him is much more settled with his usual partner Filip Hronek and the addition of Marcus Pettersson. Both are decent 2/3 types. The addition of Pettersson allows Tyler Myers to slip into a more appropriate role as a No. 4 as well.

If there's a quibble here, it's with the third pair. Neither Derek Forbort nor Elias Pettersson (defenseman version) really move the needle and are below-average for their role. There's a chance Elias Pettersson can grow in his second season, but for now it's what's keeping the Canucks from a higher standing.

6. Washington Capitals

Current quality: 83rd percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman

The Capitals didn't clock in all that highly at center or on the wings. Defense, though, is another story; Washington has one of the deepest blue lines in the league. All six of their every-day D-men are returning for the 2025-26 season. That's great news for a team that finished last season atop the Eastern Conference. It's a talented, diverse group.

Just how good they are moving forward probably hinges on whether John Carlson, who had 51 points in 2024-25, keeps performing at a high level. When he truly starts to decline, Washington will need Jakob Chychrun, who crushed relatively sheltered minutes, to take over some of his responsibilities. The two played together in the postseason to mixed results.

7. Vegas Golden Knights

Current quality: 82nd percentile

Looking for: Depth defenseman

Vegas' placement on this list hinges on whether Alex Pietrangelo can play, but the Golden Knights already had a bit of a contingency plan in place when they acquired and signed Noah Hanifin. With him and Shea Theodore in tow, plus the defensive might of Brayden McNabb, Vegas should be just fine — even without Pietrangelo. The Golden Knights have a top-five defense with him, but even without, they're firmly in the top 10.

The strength of the team's top three means Vegas doesn't necessarily need a flashy top-four guy when an internal promotion can do. That could be Zach Whitecloud or Kaedan Korczak, who put up some sparkling results in sheltered minutes, enough for a model to be a fan despite his usage. In a bigger role, Korczak could be this year's Pavel Dorofeyev, who broke out on the wing for Vegas last season.

8. Tampa Bay Lightning

Current quality: 66th percentile

Looking for: Depth defenseman

From 1 through 5, Tampa is in great shape. Victor Hedman still projects as a high-end No. 1, even as he approaches his 35th birthday. Ryan McDonagh, at 36, is still eminently capable of handling tough minutes on his own pair. J.J. Moser and Erik Cernak, as their top-four running mates, get the job done. Darryn Radysh is a solid third-pair guy.

The issue for the Lightning, at least as it relates to this list, is that the model doesn't like Emil Lilleberg at all; his projection is near the absolute bottom of the league. The good news is that he's still just 24 and has only played one full NHL season, so there's room for growth, especially from such a brutal starting line.

9. Utah Mammoth

Current quality: 75th percentile

Looking for: Top-pair defenseman

The Mammoth acquired Mikhail Sergachev to emerge as a legit No. 1 defenseman, and everything on that front is trending in the right direction. They could use a better option playing to his right on the first pair, but plenty of other teams find themselves in a similar situation. John Marino and Sean Durzi are probably capable of getting the job done in that regard.

The rest of the group is deep enough to work, too. Utah is in good shape. It doesn't mean it shouldn't try to upgrade in some spots, but the Mammoth have done well.

10. New Jersey Devils

Current quality: 71st percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman

The Devils' group is basically set in terms of who's playing and where, and the end result is a group that lands just inside the top 10. What they need is one of their young defensemen to step up as Dougie Hamilton ages. While Hamilton still has offensive juice, he's no longer defensively stout enough to be franchise-level. The Devils badly need Luke Hughes or Simon Nemec to take over that mantle.

New Jersey needs a No. 1 defenseman and spent a lot of draft capital to make it happen. Is this the year that one of them makes due on that promise?

11. Minnesota Wild

Current quality: 64th percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman

The Wild are deep defensively, that's no secret. From top to bottom, Minnesota has high-quality players. It's their identity down to each player's defensive ability.

What they lack, though, is a No. 1. That was Jared Spurgeon, but age is starting to catch up with him. It was supposed to be Brock Faber, but his game fell off hard in the season's second half. It could be Zeev Buium, but he's only a rookie who looked very green in the playoffs.

The Wild sit on the cusp of the top 10 and don't need to make any additions to solidify the group. But they do need someone to step up and be franchise-caliber. Whether it's Spurgeon turning back the clock, Faber breaking through or Buium dominating from the jump, someone has to be The Guy.

12. Carolina Hurricanes

Current quality: 61st percentile

Looking for: Top-pair defenseman

Brent Burns' time on the first pair is almost certainly over. He turned 40 in March and is a pending UFA, and his performance noticeably dipped in 2024-25. That means it's time to find Jaccob Slavin, one of the very best defensive defensemen in the NHL, a new partner.

Carolina has in-house options, and nobody on its current group is a problem, which is part of the reason they find themselves on the edge of the top 10 even with a hole next to Slavin. That said, none of those options are ideal.

Jalen Chatfield has become a solid second-pair guy, and Slavin has a way of making his partners better, but that'd be a lot to ask. You could say something similar about Sean Walker. Scott Morrow remains a solid prospect, but he wasn't great in the postseason. Alexander Nikishin is green, too, and a left shot. The puzzle pieces are interesting, though, even if they don't fit perfectly at the moment.

13. St. Louis Blues

Current quality: 57th percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman

The Jim Montgomery Effect is clear on the Blues' defense. With him in place as head coach, Colton Parayko — at 31 and after a couple seasons' worth of declining play — looked like something close to a No. 1 guy. Cam Fowler, acquired from Anaheim around the time Montgomery took over, turned back the clock as well.

The end result is a solid, deep group that projects well for 2025-26, though it'd all look even better for St. Louis if it had a true high-end piece. Can Parayko keep marching back toward that designation? Does Phillip Broberg, already a huge success story with the Blues, have another offensive gear? Those two are their best in-house bets.

14. Florida Panthers

Current quality: 52nd percentile

Looking for: Top-pair defenseman

Never, ever doubt Florida's ability to find a defenseman. Gustav Forsling, Niko Mikkola, Dmitry Kulikov — all look much, much better with the Panthers. Seth Jones, too. Whoever they sign or acquire this offseason will probably work out well, because their acquisitions almost always do.

Still, it's hard not to be a little concerned about the sizable hole to their blue line potentially left by Aaron Ekblad and Nate Schmidt. The former has been a Panthers lifer, a No. 1 pick and a top-pair stalwart for a decade. The latter has been a monster on the third pair. They won't be easy to replace.

With both back, the Panthers would have a top-10 defense with no holes. Re-signing Ekblad alone brings them to the 78th percentile. With neither, the team's group only looks average.

15. New York Islanders

Current quality: 53rd percentile

Looking for: Top-pair defenseman

The Islanders have a pretty solid group with one real hole thanks to the degradation of Ryan Pulock's game: a first-pair defenseman. Noah Dobson is their top guy (if they keep him), but it would be ideal to have another to add to a strong top four that also includes Adam Pelech and Alexander Romanov.

Lucky for the Islanders, that hole looks likely to be filled at the draft with the No. 1 overall pick. While it's unlikely Matthew Schaefer, the likely choice, will be top-pair caliber as a rookie, it is very likely that he gets there one day.

16. Los Angeles Kings

Current quality: 52nd percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman

Last offseason, the Kings found themselves in a similar spot, largely due to the pending exit of No. 2 defenseman Matt Roy. Vladislav Gavrikov stepped up and now finds himself in position to cash in, big-time, on the UFA market. Once again, Los Angeles has a hole to fill on its top four — and Joel Edmundson is not nearly as good an in-house option as Gavrikov.

The bigger issue, though, is that Drew Doughty, who turns 36 in December, started to look his age after a franchise-caliber 2023-24 season. Los Angeles badly needs someone, ideally Brandt Clarke, to replace some of that production. Jordan Spence is also an interesting right-side option.

17. Buffalo Sabres

Current quality: 51st percentile

Looking for: Top-pair defenseman, top-four defenseman

The Sabres are here primarily because of Rasmus Dahlin. He's one of the best defensemen in the league, a no-doubt, high-end No. 1 who finished sixth in Norris voting last season and is a solid bet to do it again in 2025-26.

Behind him is some talent and plenty of uncertainty. Bowen Byram's results were good to Dahlin's right, but he's a left shot and a pending RFA who struggled with other partners. Mattias Samuelsson is a buyout candidate.

Worst of all, Owen Power's development seems to have stagnated. If he figures it out, Buffalo will be in good shape. That can't be taken as a given, though, and neither can anything about the Byram situation. The end result is, not surprisingly, a mess. But hey, Dahlin is really good!

18. Toronto Maple Leafs

Current quality: 49th percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman

Over the last decade, one of Toronto's biggest problems has been a lack of a true No. 1 defenseman. Morgan Rielly at his peak may have been offensively gifted enough, but he gave way too much back to really qualify.

To this day, it remains an issue for Toronto, leading to the team's top forwards playing one-dimensional hockey when it matters. When Nathan MacKinnon can play with Cale Makar and Connor McDavid can play with Evan Bouchard, they can offensively dominate while not giving much back. Auston Matthews playing with all-defense guys such as Jake McCabe and Chris Tanev does not offer the same luxury.

So while Toronto's blue line is mostly complete and is deep, it's lacking the high-end talent necessary to go all the way. The Leafs have three No. 2s and two solid guys in Oliver Ekman-Larsson and Brandon Carlo, but the lack of a clear-cut No. 1 is a huge problem.

19. Boston Bruins

Current quality: 48th percentile

Looking for: Top-four defenseman

The top of Boston's blue line is in fine shape. Charlie McAvoy projects as a true top-pair guy, and all signs point to him being fully healthy after a scary, unfair injury in the 4 Nations tournament. You could say something similar for Hampus Lindholm, a solid complement to McAvoy whose season ended after a February knee injury.

Boston badly needs a partner for Nikita Zadorov on the second pair, though — and not just as a complement, either. Zadorov is more of a No. 4, at this point in his career. Mason Lohrei has clear potential there but also needs to improve as a defender.

20. Montreal Canadiens

Current quality: 41st percentile

Looking for: Top-pair defenseman

The model, like nearly everyone else who watched him play, has made its decision on Lane Hutson. He's projected to be a top-10 defender in terms of value for the 2025-26 season. One of Montreal's priorities should be figuring out whether Kaiden Guhle is Hutson's long-term partner — and Guhle showed some signs — or if David Reinbacher is the better fit.

Reinbacher, the No. 5 pick in 2023, had a rough season but still profiles as a high-floor, low-ceiling option who would make sense next to Hutson. He's also a right shot, something Montreal lacked last season. If he pops, Montreal will be in fine shape.

Beyond that, Montreal has two capable veterans (Mike Matheson and Alex Carrier) and Arber Xhekaj, a player whose poor projection pushes the Canadiens down these rankings.

21. Nashville Predators

Current quality: 58th percentile

Looking for: Top-pair defenseman, top-four defenseman

Roman Josi's presence does a lot of the heavy lifting. It pays to have a franchise defenseman in the fold, and Nashville's place is colored a fair bit by his presence.

Nashville's big need is help for Josi, especially in the wake of his Postural Tachychardia Syndrome (POTS) diagnosis. Brady Skjei is probably an OK No. 4, even after a rough season, but there's a big gap between him and Josi in the top four. To their credit, a few of Nashville's depth guys — Nick Blankenberg and Adam Wilsby — earned competent results last season. They could work as internal options if that wasn't a fluke. Still, it would help to add an established player.

22. Ottawa Senators

Current quality: 38th percentile

Looking for: Top-four defenseman, depth defenseman

There's nothing inherently wrong with Ottawa's top four. Nick Jensen sliding down into a third-pair role would be ideal, but he's still a passable No. 4.

The biggest concern is with the team's third pair, which got crushed last season in heavily sheltered minutes. To their credit, they looked solid during the playoffs, but Ottawa is counting on some massive growth from Tyler Kleven and Nikolas Matinpalo that might be wishful thinking. Both look well below replacement level, which is the main reason the Senators fall below average here.

23. New York Rangers

Current quality: 36th percentile

Looking for: Top-pair defenseman, top-four defenseman

Adam Fox, unsurprisingly, is at the top of the list for the Rangers. He might not have acquitted himself all that well for Team USA at the 4 Nations, but he remains an extremely effective NHL player, and he's on the bubble of the top five for 2025-26 projections.

Behind him is K'Andre Miller, who remains a very real trade piece. On some level, that's understandable, because he's set to be an RFA and he seemed further than ever from true top-pair status after last season. For now, though, he's the only non-Fox Rangers defenseman who works on a top pair. Moving him would create another hole.

24. Columbus Blue Jackets

Current quality: 23rd percentile

Looking for: Top-pair defenseman, top-four defenseman

It helps to have Zach Werenski, one of the league's top defensemen, but losing Dante Fabbro and Ivan Provorov in one offseason would hurt. That'd be half the team's top four gone. Having Damon Severson as the team's second-best defenseman is a scary place to be.

Unless the Blue Jackets find a way to address the top four, it'll be very difficult to build on last season's success.

25. Seattle Kraken

Current quality: 25th percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman

Analyzing anything about the Kraken can feel like listening to a broken record. Sing it with us: Lack of top-end talent.

Vince Dunn, Brandon Montour and Adam Larsson are all solid NHL players, but they're all slotted one spot too high in the lineup. We said something similar about Seattle's forwards, too. The end result is a roster that'll need to catch a bunch of breaks if it's to end up as anything more than mediocre.

26. Philadelphia Flyers

Current quality: 45th percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman

The best way to describe Philadelphia's defense corps? Fine. It's fine. No serious weaknesses, decently deep, but also no legit stars. It's fine. Is "fine" enough? Probably not, which is why we bumped the Flyers down several pegs.

Like the team's issues up front, the main need here is star power. Travis Sanheim is a good defenseman, but it's hard to call him a great defenseman, one a franchise is built around. On a contender, he's an ideal No. 2, but as a No. 1, he's probably miscast.

Can Sanheim take an unexpected leap to that level? It's possible. Jamie Drysdale and Cam York have a small chance of getting there, too. But it's not probable for any of the three. For now, there's a serious lack of high-end talent on the Flyers' blue line, and it's a big reason they'll be unlikely to compete for a playoff spot anytime soon.

27. Detroit Red Wings

Current quality: 17th percentile

Looking for: Top-four defensemen, depth defensemen

For plenty of reasons, last season was a disappointment in Detroit. Moritz Seider and Simon Edvinsson, though, weren't part of it. Seider posted the best five-on-five numbers of his career against still-brutal competition, and Edvinsson showed that he works both as a partner for Seider and an anchor on a second pair. There, the Wings are set.

Beyond them, there's very little. Albert Johansson showed some promise, but Ben Chiarot's days on a top four should be over and Justin Holl is a buyout candidate. There are prospects in the pipeline, led by Axel Sandin-Pellikka, but the NHL group is extremely thin.

28. Calgary Flames

Current quality: 21st percentile

Looking for: Top-pair defenseman, top-four defenseman

MacKenzie Weegar is a No. 1 defenseman and the team's leader from the back end. But there's a pretty large gap between him and their next best defenseman, Rasmus Andersson, who looks closer to a No. 4. Andersson is solid offensively, but gives a lot back the other way. He's also reportedly a trade candidate.

Either way, the gap between Weegar and Andersson leaves a pretty large hole in Calgary's top four. The Flames are missing a No. 2 and No. 3. The rest of the group is pretty uninspiring, but fine for a third pair. When they play higher, there's an issue.

The X-factor here, even with Andersson's status, is rookie Zayne Parekh. Can he step in and immediately fill the top-four gap?

29. Pittsburgh Penguins

Current quality: 15th percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman, top-four defenseman

Erik Karlsson and Kris Letang used to be No. 1 studs, but those days are over. That leaves the Penguins wanting in the high-end talent department

on the back end. They're also lacking in top-four talent altogether, as it's just those two and then a bunch of third-pairing options.

Pittsburgh's goal is clearly to compete for Gavin McKenna, so all the power to them. The defense, as currently constructed, should help.

30. Anaheim Ducks

Current quality: 9th percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman, top-four defenseman

Anaheim has a pair of competent, overextended veterans in its top four, in Radko Gudas and Jacob Trouba. Jackson Lacombe also took a major step forward as a point-producer and offensive element, but he's unlikely to become a No. 1. In all, it could be worse.

The Ducks, though, saw stagnation from Olen Zellweger and regression from Pavel Mintyukov last season, and that's a major concern. If the rebuild is to actually work, they need both to be legitimate NHL defensemen and for one to be top-four worthy.

31. Chicago Blackhawks

Current quality: 2nd percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman, top-pair defenseman, top-four defenseman

With Seth Jones gone, Chicago's defense looks barren. The drop-off of Alex Vlasic last season didn't help, and he now grades out closer to a No. 4, possibly a result of being crushed in a difficult role on a bad team. If he can get back up to top-pair caliber, that would help.

The Blackhawks still need the rest of their top four adequately filled out, though, and that means that their two highly drafted defensemen need to step up. Neither Artyom Levshunov nor Kevin Korchinski have looked ready defensively, and that's a worrying sign.

The Blackhawks may need to add a veteran presence who can actually handle tough minutes so the kids aren't fed to the wolves too quickly.

32. San Jose Sharks

Current quality: 1st percentile

Looking for: High-end defenseman, top-pair defenseman, top-four defenseman

Big picture, the main concern for the Sharks should be whether Sam Dickinson can step into the lineup and immediately go from top prospect to legitimate NHL defenseman. The Athletic's Scott Wheeler is among those who love the long-term potential for the No. 11 pick in 2024.

As it stands, the defensive group is brutal. Timothy Liljegren is competent, and Mario Ferraro has been at points in his career. Even then, there's not much worth analyzing here.

The Athletic LOADED: 06.26.2025

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The Athletic / Has the 2015 NHL Draft class passed 2003 as this century's gold standard?

Has the 2015 NHL Draft class passed 2003 as this century's gold standard?

By Peter Baugh and Dom Luszczyszyn

June 25, 2025 7:00 am EDT

In Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final, Corey Perry flipped a no-look backhand pass to Connor McDavid, who made a perfect feed of his own, finding Leon Draisaitl for the overtime-winning goal. The pair of slick passes weren't just a highlight in the present. They also showcased members of two of the greatest draft classes ever, both of whom were still performing on hockey's biggest stage.

Ten years ago, the Oilers selected McDavid No. 1 at the 2015 NHL Draft. It's no surprise that the 2015 draft class still had players contributing in the Stanley Cup Final. The Panthers, who ended up winning the series, had Niko Mikkola and A.J. Greer in their lineup. Both were drafted in 2015, too. Most of the players in that class are 28, right in their primes.

Perry, though, is 40 and was drafted in 2003. That he's still playing reflects the staying power of what has long been considered the top draft class this century.

Future Hall of Famer Marc-André Fleury went No. 1 in 2003, and the first round included the likes of Eric Staal (No. 2), Ryan Getzlaf (19), Brent Burns (20) and Perry (28). Teams continued to find gems as the draft continued, from Patrice Bergeron and Shea Weber in the second round to Joe Pavelski in the seventh. Back then, the draft went nine rounds instead of seven, and even some players in the final two rounds were hits, including Dustin Byfuglien (245) and Jaroslav Halak (271).

And yet, if the 2015 draft class continues producing the way it has, it will likely supplant 2003 as the gold standard.

The individual excellence of McDavid buoys the class. None of the players picked in 2003 are top-10 players of all time, and McDavid seems bound for that territory. Still only 28, he already has three Hart Trophies (two more than the 2003 class combined), a Conn Smythe (the only one between the two classes) and has been on seven end-of-season All-Star teams. From the 2003 class, only Pavelski has a higher Game Score Value Added (55.3 compared to McDavid's 53.8), and he played nearly twice as many games.

But the 2015 class is more than just McDavid. The fact that it pairs an all-time great with incredible depth is what makes it truly special. Some — if not all — of Jack Eichel, Mitch Marner, Mikko Rantanen and Kirill Kaprizov will likely make the Hall of Fame, and the class features multiple more top-of-the-lineup skaters. In honor of the 10-year anniversary of the 2015 class, The Athletic re-drafted the first round, and there were still top-four defensemen (including Mikkola), middle-six forwards and starting goaltenders available after the 30 picks.

In total, the 2003 class has accrued 657 wins above replacement (GSVA). It likely won't accumulate too much more, though Perry, Burns and Ryan Suter could all remain in the league next season. The 2015 class is already at 450 with its top players still in their primes. Ten seasons after the 2003 draft, that class was at 387 wins, well behind where the 2015 class is now (with changes in scoring environment being taken into account by the model).

There is a caveat to that, though, that is responsible for a large chunk of 2015's lead. As analytics departments have grown league-wide, teams have become better at understanding and identifying player value. It's led to teams moving on much faster from sub-replacement level players in recent seasons. That wasn't always the case.

The 2003 class, for example, had multiple players with negative value stick around the league for more than 500 games, including Tanner Glass (-9.5 GSVA in 527 games) and Nate Thompson (-6.9 GSVA in 844 games). In all, the 2003 class had 11 players who finished their careers with a GSVA of minus-3 or worse, accounting for minus-56 wins in total. Eight of those players played 300 or more games. In contrast, the class of 2015 only has three such players: Christian Fischer, Jeremy Lauzon and Dan Vladar — without any current NHL players in striking distance.

When comparing the two classes, that's something worth remembering — some of the 2003 class's metrics suffer simply because of how general managers operated then compared to now. But even if every negative-value player is ignored, 2015 still comes out ahead after 10 seasons.

That result stems mostly from a higher quality of NHL player on average. Both 2003 and 2015 have put out a remarkable number of NHL players, generally defined as someone who has played at least 200 career games. The 2003 class had 64, and the 2015 class already has 65 with three other goalies who could potentially join. The two classes are comparable in that regard, even though 2003 had the advantage of two extra rounds. But in terms of quality, 2015 has the edge. Of those players, the 2015 class averaged 1.1 wins per 82 games compared to 0.8 for the first 10 seasons from the 2003 class.

Naturally, that's led by McDavid, who has averaged 6.2 wins per 82, but is also supplemented by Kaprizov (4.7), Marner (4.0), Rantanen (3.5), Sebastian Aho (3.5) and Eichel (3.1). In contrast, the 2003 class had four

stars with more than three wins per 82 (Zach Parise, Perry, Getzlaf, Pavelski), but none surpassing 3.3 in their first 10 seasons.

Several players from the 2003 class showed impressive longevity that might prove difficult to beat. Bergeron is a prime example of that, earning 23.7 wins through his first 10 seasons over 739 games (2.6 wins per 82), but jumped to 27.9 wins over his final 555 games (4.1 wins per 82).

Then there's the trophy case argument, where again, 2015's resume looks stronger through the same point in time.

So far, the 2003 class has accrued 28 Stanley Cups. The Kings and Blackhawks teams in the first half of the 2010s helped significantly with that. Brent Seabrook won three with Chicago (2010, 2013 and 2015), for example, and Jeff Carter, Dustin Brown and Mike Richards were on both of Los Angeles' championship teams (2012 and 2014). Through 10 seasons (skipping the 2004-05 lockout season) the 2003 class had 21 championships, a slight edge over where 2015 currently stands (18 Stanley Cups).

McDavid (2017, 2021, 2023) and Perry (2011) are the only Hart winners in the two classes, though Kaprizov could have had a case this past season had he not gotten hurt. The 2015 class has the edge in Calder (Mathew Barzal and Kaprizov) and Conn Smythe (McDavid) wins, but the 2003 class currently has the only Norris (Burns), Vezina (Fleury) and Selke (Bergeron and Ryan Kesler) winners. But it's worth noting six of the nine individual trophy wins from the 2003 class came after the first 10 seasons post-draft.

(Note: We defined Stanley Cup winners as people with their names on the trophy.)

There's still plenty of time for the non-McDavid members of the 2015 class to add more trophies. Zach Werenski nearly did this season, finishing second in Norris voting, and Eichel and Adin Hill both had a case for the 2023 Conn Smythe. The 2015 class won't be able to come close to 2003 in Selke wins, though. Bergeron had six.

The 2003 class has one undisputed edge over 2015: goaltending, as evidenced by the six Jennings Trophy wins. Hill is the most accomplished goaltender in the 2015 class. He leads in save percentage (.909) and was excellent when Vegas won the Stanley Cup in 2023. Meanwhile, the 2003 class had Fleury, who won a Vezina and three Stanley Cups, as well as two-time Cup champion Corey Crawford and longtime starters Halak, Brian Elliott and Jimmy Howard. All five of those goalies had a save percentage equal to or better than Hill's .909.

Perhaps the 2015 class can bridge the gap a bit. Goalies often develop later than skaters, and Mackenzie Blackwood, Sam Montembeault and Ilya Samsonov have all started playoff games. But there's no Fleury-level goalie in that class, and the odds of the goalie class getting too close to 2003's feels minuscule.

Still, the 2015 draft class is on pace to emerge as an even better collection of talent, and it's not just because of McDavid's brilliance. When all is said and done, it will have featured more than two full rounds of NHL players, several of whom are bound for the Hall of Fame. If 2003 currently has the torch for classes this century, 2015 looks poised to snatch it.

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The Athletic / NHL Draft 2025: Pronman and Wheeler answer the biggest questions facing teams

NHL Draft 2025: Pronman and Wheeler answer the biggest questions facing teams

By Corey Pronman and Scott Wheeler

June 25, 2025 7:00 am EDT

Each year, in advance of the NHL Draft, The Athletic's prospects writers Corey Pronman and Scott Wheeler solicit team-specific questions from our pool of beat writers. Consider it our experts' pre-draft news conference.

This year, questions from a dozen different teams were submitted. Here are their answers.

Anaheim Ducks

With some pressure being applied by the general manager (and maybe ownership on the GM), should the Ducks put the No. 10 pick in play for more immediate help as they enter a win-now phase following a lengthy rebuild? And if they do keep the pick, should they go with a forward or continue stocking their defense pipeline? — Eric Stephens

Wheeler: I think the answer to this question is dependent on the market and what's available for the No. 10 pick. I think if you're the Ducks, you have to consider trying to add directly to the NHL roster. They have several core young forwards and half a dozen legitimate young D (give or take) to work with and build around. But there's also always risk in trying to accelerate too early, and I'd always lean patience over forcing a knee-jerk, let's-get-going move into existence. If they do pick at No. 10, I'd lean forward for their pool. One of the top forwards may still be there, and if that's the case, I'd go that direction over Radim Mrtka, Kashawn Aitcheson or Jackson Smith for them. They've got D who look like the last two (though Mrtka would be unique in their system).

Buffalo Sabres

The Sabres could be a candidate to trade this pick, but it seems like the market might be oversaturated with teams willing to trade a first-round pick. Assuming they hang onto the No. 9 pick, is there a surprise player who could fall to nine? For a prospect pool that needs more top-of-the-lineup talent, who has the most upside in that range? — Matt Fairburn

Wheeler: The length and talent of Brandon center Roger McQueen and the length and skating of Seattle defensemen Radim Mrtka give those two the most intriguing profile in that range. I'd expect one, and possibly both, to be available there. And if they aren't, it probably means that Jake O'Brien, whose skill-skating-IQ combination gives him that top-of-the-lineup upside you're talking about, is.

Pronman: The dream scenario for them is probably a run on all the centers in front of them and/or Radim Mrtka getting into the top eight. That could result in one of the premier centers getting to 9, or someone like Porter Martone.

Calgary Flames

The Flames have two first-round picks this year, which could serve them in their retool/rebuild. Are they better off keeping them and picking talent? How likely is it that the Flames move up in the draft through those picks? — Julian McKenzie

Wheeler: Because the Blackhawks, Predators, Flyers, Canadiens, Blue Jackets and Sharks also all have multiple first-round picks, I actually think the sheer concentration of picks among those seven teams may work against them in the market for moving up because they could all be thinking the same thing and there are fewer teams with solo picks to dance with. Because the perception of this draft is that it's a weak class, I always wonder about groupthink turning the value of the picks this year into less than their real worth, too. If either of those hypotheses is correct, if I'm the Flames, I'd stand pat and make the pick, likely with an eye to adding more skill up front after dedicating a lot of recent draft resources to similar-typed defensemen.

I also wonder if it's more likely we see teams without a first-rounder look to move back into it, and that becomes the more likely trade consideration for teams with multiple first-rounders than trading up.

Chicago Blackhawks

The Blackhawks have drafted an abundance of centers — most notably Connor Bedard, Frank Nazar, Oliver Moore, Sacha Boisvert, Ryan Greene — over the last three years. As of now, the Blackhawks are set on Bedard and Nazar centering their top two lines. Based on that, which of the draft prospects make more or less sense for the Blackhawks to take at No. 3? — Scott Powers

Wheeler: Despite this being a center-heavy draft at the top, there are some who believe each of Michael Misa, Anton Frondell, Brady Martin and even James Hagens may end up on the wing. Caleb Desnoyers is really the only consensus "that's a center" profile in that top group. I'd

argue that Misa and Hagens are better-suited for the middle and believe both will be centers, but I can see it going either way for Martin and Frondell. I don't think you make your decision at No. 3 based on locking in two 5-10 centers as your 1-2 Cs of the future, though. I think you want your best players at the middle of the ice, and that Bedard will get his faceoffs and defensive play to where he needs to get it to in order to be successful at 1C. But I'd argue that all of the potential candidates at No. 3 in this class are likely better fits as the 2C than Nazar, freeing Nazar to play the wing with this year's pick or Bedard. I'd consider Porter Martone, the one true winger, there, but as we've written, he's not their type. Of the three they're believed to be considering, I'd order them Misa-Desnoyers-Frondell.

Pronman: Frondell and Misa have experience playing the wing, as Frondell was a winger most of the season versus men. Obviously, Martone is the top winger in this year's class. I would probably not be so rigid in this thinking, though. It's a lot easier to move a guy to the wing than vice versa, and you can never have too many natural centers if you think they are the best player.

Columbus Blue Jackets

With the No. 14 and 20 picks in this draft, it looks as if the Blue Jackets may just miss drafting one of the top D prospects in this draft. But you tell me … how big is the cluster of D-men who should be considered at No. 14? (Yes, we know Matthew Schaefer and Mrtka will be gone.) — Aaron Portzline

Wheeler: The consensus that has emerged among scouts is that there are two groupings after Schaefer. The first includes Mrtka, Aitcheson, Smith and Cameron Reid, with the former three names all having their camps as the best prospect of that group and the latter as the consensus fourth but having joined them. The second includes Logan Hensler, Blake Fiddler and Sascha Boumedienne, more or less in that order. You can consider the four in that first group at No. 14 (though two or three of them will be gone) and the three in that second group at No. 20.

Pronman: I would say the second group is some order of Aitcheson, Mrtka and Smith, and I do expect there's a strong chance they go bang, bang, bang right in front of Columbus' pick. Some people in the league view Hensler or Reid in that group, although it's a minority opinion, and I expect them to be available at 14.

Detroit Red Wings

The Red Wings are a bit small in their top six, with Lucas Raymond and Alex DeBrincat. How much should they weigh that at pick 13 if they're debating some smaller forwards (such as Victor Eklund and Cole Reschny) against players with a bit more size such as Carter Bear and Justin Carbonneau? — Max Bultman

Wheeler: I think it matters more how those players play than whether or not they're quote-unquote small. Sam Bennett, Evan Rodrigues and Brad Marchand were a big part of the Stanley Cup champion's top nine in these playoffs. They'd be about the same size as Raymond, Eklund/Reschny and DeBrincat. And Eklund and Reschny are two of the more competitive, committed forwards in this class. Bear is also going to play at Bennett's size (6-foot/6-foot-1 and 190ish pounds). Now, Justin Carbonneau is my second-ranked forward from that group of four names, so I'd absolutely consider him, and his added size/strength is a definite plus if you're the Red Wings, but it wouldn't be the thing that pulls me decisively in that direction necessarily. All four of those players would be great picks, and I think you consider the player, the profile, the skill set, the development they have in front of them, handedness, etc., as much or more than the size factor because of Raymond and DeBrincat. I don't consider Eklund or Reschny to have the attributes that can work against smaller players, either.

Pronman: I wouldn't be too worried. They've done a good job of acquiring bigger, hard-to-play-against forwards in recent years. It's quite possible DeBrincat is no longer with the team by the time Eklund or Reschny are ready to play prominent NHL roles as well, and frankly, I would bet he isn't.

Montreal Canadiens

With the 16th and 17th picks in the first round, the Canadiens find themselves with a bit of a unique opportunity where they could allow themselves to take on some risk with one pick, knowing they can go a bit safer with the next one (the Blue Jackets have a somewhat similar opportunity here). Which players likely to be available in the middle of the first round do you think warrant taking a big swing, knowing a strikeout is possible, but whose upside would be a total home run if he hits (keeping in mind the Canadiens are unlikely to take a risk on a smaller player)? And conversely, which players in that same range do you consider to be good, high-floor players to mitigate that risk? — Arpon Basu

Wheeler: Among the players that are going to be available in their range, I don't know that there are very many high-risk, high-reward types this year. I think Lynden Lakovic and Carbonneau each have areas of their games that have come under criticism, but I don't think either has big strikeout potential. Bear's Achilles injury is a rare one for a prospect and comes with some unpredictability, but he'd otherwise fit into the high-floor category more than the high-risk one. If it's believed that smaller players come with more inherent risk or are unlikely to be targets for the Habs' brass, then I suppose Reid or Reschny could be viewed that way, but I view both as legit talents and have compared them to Denton Mateychuk and Seth Jarvis, respectively, who were both really good picks in front of that range.

I would say that Braeden Cootes and Malcolm Spence fit the high-floor designation, but I'd take all of the above players in front of them and would be reluctant to treat the back-to-back picks differently just because they're back-to-back.

Pronman:

Riskier guys (i.e., ones who have glaring flaws)

Cole Reschny (size, skating)

Jack Nesbitt (skating)

Lynden Lakovic (compete/consistency)

Sascha Boumedienne (hockey sense)

Safer guys (i.e., fewer flaws, more well-rounded)

Braeden Cootes

Carter Bear

Cameron Reid

Justin Carbonneau

Malcolm Spence

Logan Hensler

Ottawa Senators

The Senators are keeping this year's first-round pick, meaning they'll have to give up next year's first-round pick as punishment for the Evgenii Dadonov trade mishap with Vegas. Ottawa hopes next year's first will be late enough that it won't miss it too much. But is the 2026 draft class that deep where the Sens may still come to regret not having a pick? — Julian McKenzie

Wheeler: I've done a fair amount of prep on 2026 already, and I still think it's too early to tell. Gavin McKenna is Gavin McKenna. Ivar Stenberg and Keaton Verhoeff look like star prospects. Czech forward Adam Novotny and Canadian forward Tynan Lawrence look legit as well. There's a really strong contingent of WHL D. But it also looks like another weaker class for USA Hockey and Finland, and that in and of itself will mean that we're not talking about a can't-miss class.

Pronman: Nobody really knows beyond the top couple of names at this point. It's impossible to have any real confidence on the depth of a class more than 12 months out.

Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers AGM Brent Flahr told me earlier this month that he believes "the second round actually has some depth to it." The Flyers have three picks in the top half of the second round. What kind of talent could they potentially land with those picks? — Kevin Kurz

Wheeler: Though I think I'm lower on this class than Pronman, one of the things that it does have is variety. That's something that I've talked with multiple scouts about this season — that this draft has players in all shapes and sizes. The three little forwards (Cameron Schmidt, Adam Benak and L.J. Mooney) have obviously been a talking point, but a couple of scouts also commented to me at the combine about how big

this year's group was. And there's a chance none of the three little guys go in the second round, but a lot of the really big guys are projected in that range, and for a Flyers team and pool that skews below average in size, I think that's a potentially interesting ripple. There are giant D such as Simon Wang, Peyton Kettles, Jacob Rombach and Carter Amico who could be in that mix. There are big forwards such as Shane Vansaghi, William Horcoff and Mason West who could be targets in the second or with their latest first. There's a shooter such as Jack Murtagh, or skill wingers such as Ryker Lee, Jakob Ihs-Wozniak and Alexander Zharovsky, or well-rounded centers such as Cole McKinney and Eric Nilson, or smaller speedsters such as Ben Kevan and Luca Romano. There are multiple legitimate goalies to consider in the second round. It's a diverse group.

Pronman: I tend to think, for the most part, drafts after the first 5-10 picks tend to look mostly the same with some minor deviations. This year is no different. I would prefer to have a top-five pick in 2023 than in 2025, and I would prefer a 6-10 pick in 2024 than in 2025, but after that, they look quite similar. Especially in the second round, 33 this year looks like 33 every year as far as I'm concerned.

Pittsburgh Penguins

If Porter Martone slides out of the top five, is it worth it for the Penguins to move up from 11 to get him? And what would it take to move up? — Josh Yohe

Wheeler: I'm not convinced he's going to slide out of the top five, but if he were to, I absolutely think the Penguins should do everything they can to be aggressive in adding a premium prospect, and Martone specifically makes a lot of sense for them as a target. The Penguins brass have done a good job adding quantity to their long-depleted pool with Harrison Brunicke, Tanner Howe, Ville Koivunen, Vasili Ponomaryov, etc., but they're still missing that true star prospect. If you're just going by a pick value chart, the combined value of their first two selections in the draft (No. 11 and now No. 12 from the Rangers) is 61.97, almost identical value to pick No. 3 (62.07) and is technically a higher value than pick No. 4 (55.24). Value in a pick value chart and in reality are two different things, but I know the Penguins have looked into moving up and that the Blackhawks, who have No. 3, and the Mammoth, who have No. 4, have been listening. I don't think the Blackhawks are interested in more quantity, though. In fact, I think they're interested in the opposite. As always, the most likely outcome is they stand pat, but Kyle Dubas has never been shy to move up/down.

Pronman: I think so, I just don't know what assets Pittsburgh would have to make it work. You can't really part with future first-round picks given the trajectory of this franchise. You would probably need to put Brunicke or Rutger McGroarty into a deal or one of their few legit roster players.

St. Louis Blues

The Blues drafted defensemen with their first three picks in last year's draft, and as Corey wrote recently, the No. 1 need in the pipeline is probably center. When their first pick this year comes around at No. 19, is it more likely the best available player will be a center or a defenseman, and if so, who? — Jeremy Rutherford

Wheeler: I think it's more likely that the best-available player is a defenseman or a winger than a center, but it's not a sure thing that the two Cs who I'd strongly consider there are gone. I think there's a chance one of Cootes or Reschny is still available, but those are the only two centers I'd view in the best player available conversation at No. 19 (I'm not there on Nesbitt, for example), and I think it's probably 60/40 that they're both gone, so I'll lean toward it being one of the other positions atop my list when it's their turn.

Pronman: I think they are probably hoping one of Cootes, Reschny or Nesbitt is still on the board.

Winnipeg Jets

What do the Jets need most, and how do they get it with their limited draft capital? They have just five picks at the 2025 draft, starting off at No. 28 in the first round, and have competing needs: Their prospect pool was middling, based on your rankings, even prior to Chaz Lucius' retirement, while the NHL squad is looking for help at center. — Murat Ates

Wheeler: I always look at the pool's needs more than the NHL team's needs, especially when the team has few picks and those picks skew later. The needs of this Jets squad will not be the same needs of the Jets squad that exists when the No. 28 pick (and beyond) is ready to be a factor. I think that's especially true when your team is a veteran one like Winnipeg's, and you can expect the current core to age out. There are some centers who could conceivably be available there (I think Nesbitt and Milton Gastrin are both likely gone but it wouldn't shock me if one is there, the smart but undersized Benjamin Kindel could be there, the rangy and smart William Moore should be, etc.) but I actually think the area of need for the Jets' pool is on defense and in net more than up front. Brayden Yager, Colby Barlow, Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov and Kieron Walton represent a strong starting point up front than Elias Salomonsson represents virtually by himself on the back end, or a pair of — with all due respect — middling goalie prospects represent in net. As a result, if you're focusing on need (and I'm not saying they should necessarily do that), I think you're looking at some of the D (some of the giants I highlighted above plus guys such as Henry Brzustewicz) and strongly considering top goalie Joshua Ravensbergen if he's there at No. 28, and certainly the two Russian goalies and CHLers such as Jack Ivankovic and Lucas Beckman a little later.

The Athletic LOADED: 06.26.2025

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The Athletic / NHL free-agent big board 3.0: Expanding to the top 80 targets ahead of Draft Day

Chris Johnston

June 25, 2025Updated 10:26 pm EDT

With the party finally starting to subside in South Florida, it's time to get down to business.

The Florida Panthers would love to keep all three of their high-end unrestricted free agents, but that's going to be a tall task with the contracts Sam Bennett, Brad Marchand and Aaron Ekblad will all be able to command following a Stanley Cup victory.

Stay tuned.

They've each got a whack of teams hoping to be able to take a run at them when the market opens on July 1.

Any rivals trying to mimic Florida's recent run of success would also be wise to look for some hidden gems a little deeper down the board, too. The Panthers have been masters at finding useful contributors on bargain basement deals while winning consecutive championships.

With less than a week to go until free agency, the market is starting to take shape.

Here's the latest edition of the Big Board.

(Note: Net ratings are for 2024-25 via The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn, stats are via Hockey-Reference and GSAx via Evolving-Hockey. Contract projections are via CapWages and AFP Analytics, updated through the end of the regular season.)

Sort by position

Search

1

Mitch Marner

Winger

Forward

2

Sam Bennett

Center

Forward

3

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Brad Marchand
Winger
Forward
4
Aaron Ekblad
Defenseman
Right-shot defenseman
5
John Tavares
Center
Forward
6
Nikolaj Ehlers
Winger
Forward
7
Brock Boeser
Winger
Forward
8
Vladislav Gavrikov
Defenseman
Left-shot defenseman
9
Ivan Provorov
Defenseman
Left-shot defenseman
10
Jake Allen
Goaltender
11
Mikael Granlund
Center
Winger
Forward
12
Patrick Kane
Winger
Forward
13
Pius Suter
Center
Winger
Forward
14
Dmitry Orlov
Defenseman
Left-shot defenseman
15
Dante Fabbro
Defenseman
Right-shot defenseman
16
Ryan Lindgren
Defenseman
Left-shot defenseman
17
Nate Schmidt
Defenseman
Left-shot defenseman
18
Claude Giroux
Center
Winger
Forward
19
Jonathan Drouin
Winger
Forward
20
Jack Roslovic
Center
Winger
Forward
21
Jamie Benn
Center
Winger
Forward
22
Corey Perry
Winger
Forward
23
Dan Vladar
Goaltender
24
Connor Brown
Winger
Forward
25
John Klingberg

Defenseman
Right-shot defenseman
26
Henri Jokiharju
Defenseman
Right-shot defenseman
27
Cody Ceci
Defenseman
Right-shot defenseman
28
Trent Frederic
Center
Winger
Forward
29
Victor Olofsson
Winger
Forward
30
Andrei Kuzmenko
Winger
Forward
31
Nick Perbix
Defenseman
Right-shot defenseman
32
Brent Burns
Defenseman
Right-shot defenseman
33
Brian Dumoulin
Defenseman
Left-shot defenseman
34
Andrew Mangiapane
Winger
Forward
35
Alex Lyon
Goaltender
36
Mason Appleton
Winger
Forward
37
Adam Gaudette
Center
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Jeff Skinner
Winger
Forward
39
Anthony Beauvillier
Winger
Forward
40
James van Riemsdyk
Winger
Forward
41
Evgenii Dadonov
Winger
Forward
42
Gustav Nyquist
Winger
Forward
43
Max Pacioretty
Winger
Forward
44
Alexandar Georgiev
Goaltender
45
Anton Forsberg
Goaltender
46
Brandon Tanev
Winger
Forward
47
Matt Grzelcyk
Defenseman
Left-shot defenseman
48
Joel Armia
Winger
Forward

CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Taylor Raddysh
Winger
Forward

50
Nick Bjugstad
Center
Forward
Winger

51
Tony DeAngelo
Defenseman
Right-shot defenseman

52
Ilya Samsonov
Goaltender

53
Lars Eller
Center
Forward

54
Luke Kunin
Center
Forward
Winger

55
Christian Dvorak
Center
Forward

56
Jan Rutta
Defenseman
Right-shot defenseman

57
Tomas Nosek
Center
Forward

58
Michael Carcone
Winger
Forward

59
Steven Lorentz
Center
Winger
Forward

60
Sean Kuraly
Center
Forward

61
Justin Brazeau
Winger
Forward

62
James Reimer
Goaltender

63
Justin Danforth
Center
Winger
Forward

64
Nico Sturm
Center
Forward

65
Tanner Jeannot
Winger
Forward

66
Cole Koepke
Winger
Forward

67
Michael Eyssimont
Winger
Forward

68
Radek Faksa
Center
Forward

69
Parker Wotherspoon
Defenseman
Left-shot defenseman

70
Nathan Bastian
Winger
Forward

71
Jon Merrill

Defenseman

Left-shot defenseman

72

Joel Hanley

Defenseman

Left-shot defenseman

73

Kasperi Kapanen

Winger

Forward

74

TJ Brodie

Defenseman

Left-shot defenseman

75

Ethan Bear

Defenseman

Right-shot defenseman

76

Nick Cousins

Winger

Forward

77

Sammy Blais

Winger

Forward

78

Vitek Vanecek

Goaltender

79

David Rittich

Goaltender

80

Joel Kiviranta

Winger

Forward

(Note: Big Board was updated on June 25 at 10:25 p.m. Eastern to remove Brandon Saad, who re-signed with the Golden Knights. Reilly Smith, who also re-signed with the Golden Knights, was previously removed.)

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The Athletic / 2025 NHL Draft consensus big board: Schaefer, top centers headline class

Max Bultman

June 25, 2025 6:00 am EDT

No matter how much we analyze, report and project, the NHL Draft always finds ways to surprise us.

Take last year, for example. When The Athletic compiled its annual consensus big board, Zeev Buium checked in at No. 4 — the second-highest-ranked blueliner in a defense-heavy class. But when draft day came along, Buium hung around longer than expected, lasting until the Minnesota Wild finally traded up for him at No. 12.

So, throw all the rankings out the window, right? Not so fast. While the overall consensus board did have Buium much higher than he went, the makeup of those rankings also told a story that could have much more closely predicted the outcome on draft day.

While Buium did rank fourth overall and second among the group of six D atop the class — and no lower than seventh overall on any individual list we surveyed — you could also look a little closer and see that four defensemen (Artyom Levshunov, Sam Dickinson, Anton Silayev and Carter Yakemchuk) were ranked ahead of Buium by at least one of the five rankings we compiled to create the consensus list. A fifth defender (Zayne Parekh) was back-to-back with Buium on one of the lists.

So while it was still stunning to see Buium as the sixth defenseman off the board that night at Sphere, it also wasn't totally unheard-of; it only takes one team to love a player, and it's more than possible to be ranked high by virtually everyone (including teams) but end up on the wrong side of a few close calls.

That's where the beauty lies in the draft, and it's also why, each year, The Athletic seeks to make a consensus big board like this one, which surveys five lists in search of both agreements and outliers.

The original five lists forming this consensus belong to Corey Pronman and Scott Wheeler, The Athletic's prospect experts; Flo Hockey's Chris Peters, who co-hosts The Athletic Hockey Show Prospect Series podcast; former NHL general manager Craig Button, now TSN's director of scouting; and the great Bob McKenzie, also of TSN, whose list is itself a consensus ranking of 10 NHL scouts — and thus a great barometer for the league's opinion on players. We highly encourage you to read all of their individual lists as well.

But in analyzing them all together, the hope is to find those little extra details that can play such a big role in shaping how things play out on draft day.

Year of the center

2

Michael Misa

C

2

2

2

2

2

4

Anton Frondell

C

6

6

4

3

4

T-5

Caleb Desnoyers

C

4
5
5
7
5
T-5
James Hagens
C
5
3
3
8
7
7
Jake O'Brien
C
7
9
7
11
6
8
Brady Martin
C
10
10
9
6
8
T-9
Roger McQueen
C
9
11
10
5
9
14
Cole Reschny
C
13
15
15
14
19
17

Braden Cootes
C
14
23
14
22
18
22
Milton Gastrin
C
25
26
22
21
26
24
Jack Nesbitt
C
15
32
25
38
17
25
Benjamin Kindel
C/W
33
21
27
27
22

While this class has taken some barbs at various points in the cycle, there's no doubting that it's rich at one of the most coveted positions on the ice: center.

The draft's headliner and projected first pick, Matthew Schaefer, is a defenseman, but after that, it's the centers who are expected to dominate the top 10. That starts with Michael Misa at No. 2 on all five lists, and even though winger Porter Martone checks in at third on the overall list, it's entirely possible that there could be an early run on centers right after Schaefer.

There are all different styles of center making up that group, too. Coming in at No. 4 is Anton Frondell, a strong two-way center out of Sweden whose Allsvenskan production outpaced William Nylander's and David Pastrnak's at the same age. He also plays a responsible game that is easy to project to the NHL. Tied at fifth are Caleb Desnoyers and James Hagens, who was at one time the favorite to go first in the class. His freshman season in college hockey wasn't as loud as recent top picks Macklin Celebrini and Adam Fantilli, but he was still a point-per-game player and brings dynamic skating and skill.

At No. 7 is Jake O'Brien, whose playmaking ability is among the best in the class, and at No. 8 is the late-rising Brady Martin, who was a major standout at the U18 World Championships and plays with the kind of physicality and hard skill that tends to shine in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

And that's before getting to perhaps the most interesting prospect in the whole class. Roger McQueen is a highly skilled pivot who stands 6-foot-5 and skates well, normally the kind of profile that gets you picked closer to the top five. But McQueen missed much of the season with a back injury, and as a result there's some hesitation, particularly after Cayden Lindstrom (the No. 4 pick last season) missed nearly his entire season in 2024-25. Still, McQueen ranked as high as fifth (Button) among the five lists we tracked, though the other four had him more in the nine-to-11 range.

Even outside the top 10, there are more names to monitor, again in all kinds of varieties. Cole Reschny (No. 14 on the aggregate list) is a small, skilled and smart pivot, while Jack Nesbitt (24th) is 6-foot-4 and a big-time competitor with sneaky hands. Teams can pick their flavor.

In all, 12 of the consensus top 25 are potential centers — and while not all of them will stick down the middle in the NHL, it's still notable (and quite appealing) to have that much down-the-middle talent high in a draft.

Top defensemen

1

Matthew Schaefer

LHD

1

1

1

1

1

11

Radim Mrtka

RHD

16

7

12

9

11

12

Kashawn Aitcheson

LHD

11

13

11

15

13

13

Jackson Smith

LHD

12

17

16

13

12

T-18

Cameron Reid

LHD

20

19

19

20

24

20

Logan Hensler

RHD

26

20

20

26

15

23

Sascha Boumedienne

LHD

21

33

21

28

23

27

Blake Fiddler

RHD

22

29

24

40

28

37

Henry Brzustewicz

RHD

27

51

33

47

32

46

Simon Wang

LHD

44

44

38

77

42

50

Kurban Limatov

LHD

47

45

48

NR

55

A year ago, in last year's defense-heavy class, 10 blueliners were picked in the first round. This year, our consensus board has only 11 in the top 50.

Schaefer, a unanimous pick at No. 1 among these five lists, is the headliner, but there's a real difference in who should go next among the D. Wheeler, Button and McKenzie's lists all have rangy 6-6 defender Radim Mrtka as the next man up at the position, but Pronman and Peters both have the hard-hitting Kashawn Aitcheson. Penn State commit Jackson Smith, though, is right in that mix with them, bringing strong two-way potential, with his skating a real asset to transition play.

There's a slight gap after that group before the next cluster on this list, which begins at No. 18 with Kitchener's Cam Reid, who's on the smaller side but plays a very smart and competitive game, which could make him a nice bet in the late teens or early 20s in spite of his stature.

It's worth noting that McKenzie's list, however, has Wisconsin righty Logan Hensler (No. 20) at 15 after his poll, closer to the first group of defenders than to this later cluster, which also includes Swedish lefty Sascha Boumedienne, who won top defense honors at the U18 World Championship, and WHL righty Blake Fiddler, who plays in the shutdown mold.

While only Reid finished top 20 on this consensus ranking, it wouldn't be a shock to see any of the four, or multiple, go in the top 20 on draft day. In fact, when you consider the scarcity of defense in this class, perhaps that should be the expectation.

Notable variances

39

Cameron Schmidt

RW

39

34

36

58

19

47

35

Jack Ivankovic

G

35

36

42

47

12

45

28

Cullen Potter

C

34

31

16

31

50

21

30

Ryker Lee

RW

31

55

24

34

30

31

38

Ivan Ryabkin

C

28

48

27

52

24

41

24

Jack Nesbitt

C

23

15

32

25

38

17

27

Blake Fiddler

RHD

18

22

29

24

40

28

29

Bill Zonnon

RW

16

41

31

28

25

29

26

Joshua Ravensbergen

G

15

19

28

26

29

34

20

Logan Hensler

RHD

11

26

20

20

26

15

11

Radim Mrtka

RHD

9

16

7

12

9

11

17

Braeden Cootes

C

9

14

23

14

22

18

T-9

Roger McQueen

C

6

9

11

10

5

9

T-5

James Hagens

C

5

5

3

3

8

7

7

Jake O'Brien

C

5

7

9

7

11

6

This is always one of the most interesting parts of this exercise, but this year, it was notable how much agreement there was between most of the lists.

Many of these gaps, then, aren't all that massive. And to be clear, these aren't necessarily the biggest gaps on the top-50 list — the deeper you get in the rankings, the more variance there is, so we tried to look for one of two things: any differences high in the draft (where any distinctions are more notable) or a strong outlier high ranking, as in the cases of smaller forwards Cullen Potter and Cameron Schmidt, or goalies Jack Ivankovic and Joshua Ravensbergen.

Ravensbergen, out of WHL Prince George, finished as the top goalie on the consensus list, but notably only had one vote inside the top 25: Pronman, who ranked him 19th. Meanwhile, Ivankovic was outside the top 35 on every list, except for Button's, where he ranked 12.

Drafting top goalie prospects in the first round has yielded mixed results in recent years, and for that reason, it would be understandable if teams are hesitant to do so this year. But again, it only takes one team to really believe in a goalie to swoop them up and surprise the field.

Potter is among the most dynamic skaters in the draft, and has some offensive flair as well — the question is, as a 5-foot-10 forward, will he create enough in the interior parts of the ice to really translate as a top-six player in the NHL? His 22 points in 35 games as a freshman for Arizona State were good, though they don't provide an emphatic answer to that question. And accordingly, Potter is outside the top 30 on three of the five lists. But Wheeler has him all the way up at No. 16, and he slots in at No. 21 for McKenzie.

Another interesting split is Nesbitt, who at 6-foot-4 brings toughness, good hockey sense and impressive hands, but is also a heavy-looking skater. Pronman and McKenzie's lists both have him in the top 17; the other three have him 25th or later, with Button having Nesbitt all the way down at No. 38. The bet is he will be a comfortable first-rounder on Friday night, but that range of opinions is what can make the draft so interesting.

More toward the top of the first round, where the differences are smaller, but under more of a microscope, it's notable to see a nine-spot gap between Wheeler (No. 7) and Pronman (No. 16) on Mrtka, and to see

Hagens and O'Brien all the way down at No. 8 and No. 11, respectively, for Button.

Hagens in particular feels like one of the top stories in this draft. It's possible that his early-season front-runner status has put too much of a microscope on him, allowing his flaws to be nitpicked in a way more late-surging prospects were not. A point-per-game season in the NCAA is still outstanding production, and Hagens has a long track record of success.

Again, there seems to be less disagreement on these lists this year than in the past. Could that mean we're headed for more of a "chalk" draft? Perhaps. But as last year showed, even something that feels like consensus can be shaken up by just a couple of key decisions going a different direction.

Here is the complete consensus list for 2025:

Consensus top 50

1

Matthew Schaefer

LHD

1

1

1

1

1

2

Michael Misa

C

2

2

2

2

2

3

Porter Martone

RW

3

4

6

4

3

4

Anton Frondell

C

6

6

4

3

4

T-5

Caleb Desnoyers

C

4

5

5

7

5

T-5

James Hagens

C

5

3

3

8

7

7

Jake O'Brien

C

7

9

7

11

6

8

Brady Martin

C

10

10

9

6

8

T-9

Victor Eklund

RW

8

8

8

10

10

T-9

Roger McQueen

C

9

11

10

5

9

11

Radim Mrtka

RHD
16
7
12
9
11
12
Kashawn Aitcheson
LHD
11
13
11
15
13
13
Jackson Smith
LHD
12
17
16
13
12
14
Cole Reschny
C
13
15
15
14
19
15
Justin Carbonneau
RW
18
12
13
18
16
16
Carter Bear
LW
17
14
17
17
14
17
Braeden Cootes
C
14
23
14
22
18
T-18
Cameron Reid
LHD
20
19
19
20
24
T-18
Lynden Lakovic
LW
23
18
18
23
20
20
Logan Hensler
RHD
26
20
20
26
15
21
Malcolm Spence
LW
24
22
23
16
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22
Milton Gastrin
C
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23
Sascha Boumedienne
LHD
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33
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Jack Nesbitt
C
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Benjamin Kindel
C/W
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Joshua Ravensbergen
G
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Blake Fiddler
RHD
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28
Cullen Potter
C
31
16
31
50
21
29
Bill Zonnon
RW
41
31
28
25
29
30
Ryker Lee
RW
55
24
34
30
31
31
William Horcoff
C
28
50
30
43
27
32
Eric Nilson
C
40
35
37
37
30
T-33
Jakob Ihs-Wozniak
C
29
25
29
59
38
T-33
Jack Murtagh

LW
45
34
35
33
33
35
Jack Ivankovic
G
36
42
47
12
45
36
William Moore
C
42
30
39
32
40
37
Henry Brzustewicz
RHD
27
51
33
47
32
38
Ivan Ryabkin
C
48
27
52
24
41
39
Cameron Schmidt
RW
34
36
58
19
47
40
Eddie Genborg
RW
38
47
42
34
43
41
Cole McKinney
C
39
40
32
57
37
42
Alexander Zharovsky
RW
49
41
46
36
35
43
Daniil Prokhorov
RW
30
56
40
48
36
44
Mason West
C
32
46
41
56
46
45
Shane Vansaghi
RW
35
43
36

NR

48

46

Simon Wang

LHD

44

44

38

77

42

47

Vaclav Nestrasil

RW

46

53

44

65

39

48

Ethan Czata

C

37

64

53

42

53

49

Theo Stockselius

C

51

63

45

31

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Kurban Limatov

LHD

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NR

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ESPN / 'Everything's on the table' for Connor McDavid's NHL future – ESPN

Greg Wyshynski

Edmonton Oilers star Connor McDavid sat in a news conference days after losing in the Stanley Cup Final to the Florida Panthers for the second straight season. He was peppered with questions about his future, with unrestricted free agency looming in summer 2026 if he doesn't sign an extension with the Oilers.

The Edmonton media was fishing for any sign that McDavid was committed to the organization and the city, but he wasn't biting. Someone asked if he had a sense of unfinished business with his teammates after coming so close to raising the Cup, losing in seven games to Florida last season and in six games this month.

"This core has been together for a long time and we've been building to this moment all along. The work that's gone on behind the scenes, the conversations, the endless disappointments and some good times along the way, obviously. We're all in this together, trying to get it over that finish line," McDavid said.

Then came the four words that shook a city to its soul.

"With that being said," McDavid continued, "ultimately, I still need to do what's best for me and my family. That's who you have to take care of first."

It was the first time McDavid even hinted at hesitation about his future in Edmonton. He's entering the final season of an eight-year, $100 million deal signed in July 2017. Many assumed the ink would be drying on an extension with the Oilers -- in what is expected to be the richest contract in NHL history -- when he's eligible to sign on July 1. But McDavid is unlikely to sign that extension unless he is comfortable with the progress Edmonton's made in improving its roster for next season and beyond.

"I'm not in a rush to make any decision, so I don't think that there needs to be any timeline," McDavid said. "I know people are going to look at July 1 and will be looking to see if there's anything done. But for me, no, I'm just not in a rush in that way."

An NHL source said that McDavid isn't committed, at this point, to staying with the Oilers beyond next season. But he's also not committed to moving on from the organization that drafted him first overall in 2015.

"He's trying to find reasons to stay, not to leave," the source said. "But everything's on the table for Connor right now."

IF MCDAVID DOESN'T RE-SIGN with the Oilers, it would be an unprecedented moment in the history of NHL free agency. Never before has a generational talent -- with multiple MVP awards and scoring titles to his credit -- reached unrestricted free agency in his prime.

There might not be a comparative moment in North American professional sports since LeBron James and "The Decision" in 2010 -- although given what fans and players have been chanting about McDavid after the Panthers' second Stanley Cup win over Edmonton, one assumes McDavid won't be taking his talents to South Beach.

With Stanley Cup contention as his goal, the pool of teams with whom McDavid would consider signing is limited. There's been speculation about the Ontario native having a homecoming with the Toronto Maple Leafs, still seeking their first Stanley Cup since 1967; that he could join former Oilers GM Ken Holland with the Los Angeles Kings; that the New York Rangers could make him the king of Broadway while easing his goaltending headaches with Igor Shesterkin; or that well-maintained franchises like the Boston Bruins, Colorado Avalanche, Vegas Golden Knights, Dallas Stars and Tampa Bay Lightning could make their pitches.

McDavid is committed to Edmonton for the 2025-26 season. That list of potential suitors could change in that span, depending on their own fortunes.

After Leon Draisaitl inked an eight-year, $112 million deal last summer -- a contract that will keep him in Edmonton until 2033 -- many assumed McDavid's extension would be a mere formality. After all, why would Draisaitl sign without some indication that his close friend and frequent linemate McDavid would do the same?

But sources told ESPN in January that one signing was not a harbinger of the other, and that McDavid would make his own decision independent of Draisaitl's.

But make no mistake: Draisaitl is a factor in McDavid's decision. As are defenseman Evan Bouchard, forward Zach Hyman, forward Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and every other core player who theoretically will be in Edmonton for the next several seasons. As McDavid said, the core has been through playoff battles together, and there's a sense of unfinished business for him in Edmonton.

"We were two games away from winning. Last year, we were two shots away from winning, so the belief is incredibly high in that room," he said. "We talked about that all throughout the playoffs, and we do believe that this group can win and will win."

But for all that belief, McDavid wants to understand the plan for how the team can win in the short term and the long term. It's an essential part of his decision-making process to remain in Edmonton.

He wants to know how a team with just over $10 million in cap space, without much draft capital and the 30th-ranked prospect pool, can make the necessary moves to get over the championship hump and remain competitive. Last summer, that pool of young players got thinner when forward Dylan Holloway and defenseman Phillip Broberg were poached by the St. Louis Blues via offer sheets.

McDavid nodded at that thin prospect pool during his press conference. "It's not like we have a ton of cap room and we've got a long list of highly touted prospects knocking on the door," he said.

McDavid reiterated: "If I feel that there's a good window to win here over and over again, then signing is no problem."

GM Stan Bowman didn't necessarily agree that pitching McDavid on the Oilers' window to win was any more vital than meeting his asking price during negotiations.

"I don't know if you have to sell one thing any more than another," he said.

But Bowman knows that convincing McDavid of Edmonton's continuing commitment to win is paramount. When he was hired to replace Holland last summer, Bowman visited with McDavid, who told him that he wanted to win the Stanley Cup.

"That was it. We didn't talk about anything else. This is his singular focus," Bowman said.

"I guess it's my job to connect with Connor and demonstrate that's what we're all trying to do. We all have the same objective. I know how passionate he is about winning. It's what I love about him," he said. "He's not just a fantastic hockey player, but he's a great person, a great leader, and he's incredibly motivated to do whatever it takes."

IF MCDAVID ULTIMATELY RE-SIGNS with the Oilers, what he hears from Bowman could determine the length of that contract. There's a growing belief that McDavid may not sign an eight-year extension like Draisaitl, but could explore something in the three- to five-year range. That would allow him to attempt to finish the "unfinished business" with the core in Edmonton, while reaching UFA status in his early 30s with the NHL salary cap projected to continue its record-setting ascent.

Another reason to believe this could happen is Judd Moldaver, executive vice president at Wasserman and McDavid's agent. He was the first NHL agent in the salary cap era to seek contracts for superstar clients with significantly less than maximum term. He's gone shorter than eight years on blockbuster extensions for Maple Leafs star Auston Matthews, with a five-year deal in 2019 and a four-year deal signed in 2023, as well as Columbus Blue Jackets star Zach Werenski (six years, signed in 2021). He could seek to do the same for McDavid.

Matthews had the league's highest cap hit ($13.25 million average annual value) before Draisaitl's contract ($14 million AAV) kicks in next season.

McDavid is all but certain to eclipse that. His next contract -- at whatever length it ends up being -- will range between $15.5 million and $19 million per year on a max deal, multiple sources indicated to ESPN. Anything above Draisaitl's cap hit would set a new NHL record for highest average annual value in the cap era.

The money will take care of itself. It's Connor McDavid, the guy with three Hart trophies as NHL MVP, a Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP and five scoring titles. In theory, the contract negotiation with McDavid is essentially a general manager asking how much he needs, and then writing the check.

But McDavid has said that the chance to lift the Stanley Cup is more important than his bank account.

"Winning would be at the top of the list," he said. "It's the most important thing."

The Oilers are confident that, after two trips to the Stanley Cup Final, they offer the best shot at winning for McDavid. But they also offer the comfort of being the only NHL home he's known.

McDavid and his wife, Lauren Kyle McDavid, have a house in the Parkview area of Edmonton that was featured by Architectural Digest. Kyle McDavid also recently helped open the stylish Bar Trove in Edmonton that features Trove Living, a retail home furnishing store on the floor above it. Her company, Kyle & Co. Design, is located on the third floor of the building.

Given his history with the team and his roots in the city, the Oilers are optimistic but patient with McDavid.

"He's earned the right for us to be respectful of his timing. Certainly we're eager to meet with him whenever he wants, but we also understand that he just went through a very tough ending to the season," Bowman said.

Last year, Leon Draisaitl didn't sign his extension until Sept. 3.

"Timing-wise, Connor's going to drive that process, but there's no question he's a pivotal player on our team for not just what he does on the ice, but his leadership," Bowman said. "I've had a chance to work with him now and I've been just so impressed with things you guys probably don't see. He's incredibly important to our group and whenever he's ready, we're going to dive into that."

Near the end of his news conference, McDavid was asked by a local reporter for a message to the fans. The ones that have been on this journey with the Oilers during his time with the team. The ones "wanting to see what exactly happens with your future here" in Edmonton, as the questioner put it.

"My message to the fans would be to keep being patient and keep believing. They've been through a lot, just like our team has. The emotional highs, the lows. I look at what these playoff runs do to my family. It's hard on them. It's hard on the fans. It's hard on everybody. But ultimately when that day comes, it'll all be worth it," he said. "These moments are tough now. But when that moment comes, it'll be worth the wait for sure."

The message wasn't a passionate commitment to stay in Edmonton nor was it a declaration that his bags are packed for free agency. The message was that a championship will make all the postseason heartache worth the pain. As the NHL offseason begins, where McDavid might eventually win that championship is, at this moment, uncertain.

ESPN LOADED: 06.26.2025

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ESPN / Predicting the Hockey Hall of Fame Class of 2026 – ESPN

Greg Wyshynski

The Hockey Hall of Fame will welcome an impressive class of players in 2025: Zdeno Chara, Joe Thornton and Duncan Keith, all first-ballot choices; Alexander Mogilny, ending a prolonged wait; and women's hockey stars in Jennifer Botterill of Canada and Brianna Decker of the United States.

Who will join them in the Class of 2026?

Here's a look at the most likely men's and women's players to next get the call for the Hall, ranked in order of their likelihood for enshrinement.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 26, 2025

We'll begin with the former NHL players eligible for the first time next season:

MEN'S CANDIDATES

1. Patrice Bergeron, center (first year)

An extremely easy call for the selection committee. Bergeron won the Selke Trophy as best defensive forward six times, an NHL record. The center was a finalist for the award in 12 consecutive seasons, the longest streak for any player being nominated for an NHL award in league history.

He was a dominant defensive force whether measured by traditional stats or analytics during his 19-year career with the Boston Bruins but was anything but a one-dimensional star. Bergeron had 1,040 points in 1,294 games, including 427 goals. That's the third-most points for any Bruins player.

From a team perspective, he won a Stanley Cup with the Bruins in 2011 and was a primary reason they made to back to the Final in 2013 -- a series against Chicago in which Bergeron played through a punctured lung, separated shoulder, a broken rib and a broken nose -- and in 2019. He's a member of the Triple Gold Club: winning Olympic gold in 2010 and 2014 and world championship gold in 2004. He also won world junior gold in 2005 and the World Cup of Hockey in 2016, all with Canada.

2. Carey Price, goalie (second year)

Price follows in the legacy of great Montreal Canadiens goaltenders such as Hall of Famers Jacques Plante, Ken Dryden and Patrick Roy.

He played all 15 seasons with the Habs from 2007 to 2022 and is the franchise's all-time leader in wins (361) in 712 games. He helped Montreal to the 2021 Stanley Cup Final during the NHL's COVID-impacted season. Price had one masterpiece season in 2014-15, becoming only the seventh player in NHL history to win the Vezina Trophy as top goaltender and the Hart Trophy as MVP in the same season.

Price won Olympic gold in 2014, backstopping Canada in Sochi. He also won gold at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey and the 2007 world junior championships.

His candidacy is intriguing, because it signifies the collision between two competing Hockey Hall of Fame forces: the Hall's traditional hesitancy to induct goaltenders and its over-indexing on Team Canada heroes. Although we should note they've put six goalies in the Hall since 2018, so maybe that first trend is changing.

3. Patrick Marleau, center (third year)

Come on, admit it: You thought there was a chance that Marleau could join Thornton in the same class when Jumbo's name was announced. The Hall of Fame is cheeky like that.

But unlike his longtime teammate, Marleau's induction is anything but guaranteed. It comes back to a central question: Does breaking the NHL record for career games played make him a hockey legend or just an accomplished compiler of stats?

Marleau finished his career with 1,779 career games played, breaking Gordie Howe's record of 1,767. He's 25th in NHL history with 566 goals and 53rd in career points with 1,197. He cracked 30 goals seven times and had a career peak of 44 goals in 2009-10. He won Olympic gold in Vancouver and Sochi, IIHF World Championship gold in 2003 and the World Cup in 2004, all with Canada. But Marleau was a finalist for only one NHL award: the Lady Byng, for gentlemanly play, once. And he never won a Stanley Cup.

If he is a "compiler," he'll be far from the first one inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. His stats are strong and his longevity is probably too impressive to keep him out -- keep in mind there are plenty of ex-players on that committee.

Elias on 23-year career: 'Time flies'

Patrik Elias reflects on his career with the New Jersey Devils and looks ahead to his retirement ceremony.

4. Keith Tkachuk, center (14th year)

Now that Mogilny is in, the next great offensive player that fans and media rally around might be Tkachuk.

He amassed 538 goals and 1,065 points in 1,201 games over his 18-season career whose prime was spent in the dead puck era. He led the league in goals only once (1996-97) but was otherwise a model of consistency. He's 35th all time in goals. Every player ahead of him who is Hall of Fame-eligible is enshrined.

He won World Cup gold in 1996 and Olympic silver in 2002 but never the Stanley Cup. He never got a sniff of an NHL award, although 89 playoff games in an 18-year career spent in Winnipeg, Phoenix, St. Louis and Atlanta isn't exactly the stuff of postseason hardware.

It's a solid but unspectacular career, but those numbers are hard to ignore. Ask around, and you can sense there's momentum building for him. It probably doesn't hurt that he has found new life as the father of Matthew and Brady Tkachuk, which has afforded him camera time during playoff games, ice time during Stanley Cup celebrations and airtime on reality television series.

5. Ryan Getzlaf, center (second year)

The big center spent 17 years with the Anaheim Ducks, leading them to a Stanley Cup in 2007. He's their all-time leader in regular-season games played (1,157), assists (737) and points (1,019), and holds the same marks in the playoffs for Anaheim.

During the span of his career, he was fifth among centers in points. Three of guys he's ranked behind -- Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, and Anze Kopitar -- are all likely to be Hall of Famers. The fourth, Thornton, was just announced as one. Overall, he had the seventh-most points of any player in that span.

Getzlaf won Olympic gold in 2010 and 2014, World Cup of Hockey gold in 2016 and gold at world juniors in 2005. He finished second for the Hart to Crosby in 2013, but that was the extent of the awards love. But given how he dominated his era, Getzlaf should be in line for a higher accolade.

6. Henrik Zetterberg, center (fifth year)

When Pavel Datsyuk made the Hall in 2024, attention turned to his Detroit Red Wings teammate Zetterberg. But Datsyuk is one of the reasons Zetterberg might not make the Hall, as he vacuumed up Selke trophies that might have otherwise gone to his teammate during Zetterberg's prime.

Zetterberg finished his career with 960 points in 1,082 games, including 337 goals. His greatest individual accomplishment was winning the Conn Smythe in the Red Wings' 2008 Stanley Cup win. That ring earned him Triple Gold Club status, going with championships in the 2006 Olympics and the 2006 IIHF World Championship with Sweden. He had 120 points in 137 playoff games, including 27 in 22 games when he won the Conn Smythe.

He's one of the most respected players of the past 20 years and a legend in both Detroit and Sweden. It's not a clear-cut case, but he does have a case.

7. Patrik Elias, center/left wing (seventh year)

Elias has been the hipster pick for the Hall of Fame ever since previous hipster pick Sergei Zubov made the Hall in 2019.

His numbers are stellar, holding the New Jersey Devils records goals (408), assists (617) and points (1,025) in both the regular season (1,240 games) and the playoffs (162 games). He won the Cup twice with the Devils in 2000 and 2003, and was in the Stanley Cup Final two other seasons. He was a rookie of the year finalist in 1998. Internationally, he helped the Czechs to Olympic bronze in 2006 and bronze twice at IIHF worlds.

The argument from Elias backers is that this exceptionally skilled player put up impressive offensive stats in a defensive era for a defensive team. Paul Pidutti of Adjusted Hockey, which Pidutti founded to analyze NHL players' Hall of Fame potential, computes that Elias would have 119 more points if he played in a "neutral era." Elias has some vocal supporters. Will the Hall listen?

8. Sergei Gonchar, defenseman (eighth year)

Gonchar is 19th in career points among defensemen, with 811 in 1,301 NHL games. Everyone who is Hall of Fame-eligible ahead of him -- save for Gary Suter -- is in the Hall. That includes Nicklas Lidstrom, with whom Gonchar has the misfortune of sharing an era.

The Detroit Red Wings Hall of Famer -- considered one of the best defensemen in hockey history -- is the only blueliner who amassed more goals (236) and points (985) than Gonchar (220 goals, 811 points) from 1994-95 to 2014-15, which was the span of the Russian defenseman's career. He did some real offensive damage during the dead puck era.

Lidstrom won the Norris Trophy seven times. Gonchar finished in the top five for the award four times, which is more than Hall of Famer Zubov, for comparison's sake. Gonchar won the Stanley Cup with Pittsburgh in 2009. He won Olympic silver in Nagano, bronze in Salt Lake City and world championship silver in 2010.

9. Rod Brind'Amour, center (13th year)

The Carolina Hurricanes coach's candidacy has been fascinating to watch over the years. Brind'Amour had 1,184 points in 1,484 games, including 452 goals. But his Hall of Fame case is built on his reputation as a defensive center. It's a role in which he excelled with the Hurricanes during their run to the Stanley Cup in 2006, which is also the first year of his back-to-back Selke Trophy wins.

But Pidutti, for one, has believed his reputation was overstated.

"I think Brind'Amour has been a bit retroactively lionized because he's the coolest guy in the room and an awesome coach," Pidutti told ESPN in 2023. "He was never really a top Selke candidate. And then he's pushing 40 and he was just this incredibly interesting, intense warrior. He wins those two Selkes. ... I don't want to say out of the blue, but if you look at the voting history, they kind of were. I think everyone remembers him being the best defensive forward in the league, and really wasn't the case during his entire career."

Still, there's a lot of support for "Rod The Bod" to make the Hall.

T-10. Tim Thomas (ninth year) and Ryan Miller (third year)

There's a "peak years" argument that could be made for two goalies of the same era.

From 2008-09 to 2011-12, Miller was third in wins (182) and fourth in save percentage (.919) while playing for a Sabres team that was 21st in points percentage (.520). The apex of his career was 2009-10, when he won the Vezina Trophy, finished fourth for the Hart Trophy and became a superstar while backstopping Team USA to Olympic silver in Vancouver, losing gold in overtime to Sidney Crosby and the Canadians.

But if we're talking all-time heat checks, that Thomas from 2007 to 2012 for the Boston Bruins: 151-78-31 in 270 games with a .926 save percentage, 2.28 goals-against average and 27 shutouts. He won the Vezina Trophy twice and the Conn Smythe in 2011, leading the Bruins to the Stanley Cup with a .940 save percentage, a 1.98 goals-against average and four shutouts. He played only nine NHL seasons, debuting at 28 years old. His journeyman status before NHL stardom is part of his legend, but he probably doesn't have the longevity for the Hall.

There are other goalies such as Curtis Joseph, Chris Osgood, Tuukka Rask and Pekka Rinne that offer interesting cases. But these two are the most fascinating ones.

The field

Among the other players waiting for their Hall of Fame moment are first-year eligible Eric Staal and Phil Kessel, to prolific scorers with Stanley Cup wins; Jason Spezza, in his second year of eligibility; older offensive stars Peter Bondra, Vincent Damphousse, Theo Fleury, Steve Larmer, John LeClair, Rick Nash, Bernie Nicholls and Pat Verbeek; and defensemen Gary Suter and P.K. Subban.

WOMEN'S CANDIDATES

1. Meghan Duggan, forward (seventh year)

Duggan won seven IIHF World Championship gold medals and captained the U.S. women's Olympic hockey team to gold in the 2018 Pyeongchang Games. She won the 2011 Patty Kazmaier Award as the top women's player in the NCAA while playing for Wisconsin. Duggan was the first American men's or women's player to win seven consecutive world championship gold medals. Off the ice, she played in integral role in the national team's fight with USA Hockey over inequitable support and conditions in comparison to the men's team. She's currently director of player development for the New Jersey Devils.

The Class of 2025's Brianna Decker was a worthy Hall of Famer, but it was a little surprising she was in before Duggan.

2. Shannon Szabados, goalie (seventh year)

Former Team Canada goalie Kim St-Pierre was the first women's goaltender inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2022. Szabados has the case to be the next.

She won Olympic gold twice, pitching a shutout in 2010 and winning in overtime in 2014 for Canada against the United States. When Canada won silver in 2018, she was selected the tournament's top goaltender.

Szabados was also a trailblazer: In 2014, she signed to a professional contract with the Columbus Cottonmouths of the Southern Professional Hockey League (SPHL) to finish out the 2013-14 season, becoming the first woman to compete in the regular season in that minor league. She ended up playing four seasons in the SPHL.

3. Julie Chu, forward (seventh year)

One of the pioneers in American women's hockey, Chu won silver three times and bronze once in the Olympics, and captured gold five times in the IIHF world championships. She was the top NCAA scorer of all time during her time at Harvard, and won the Patty Kazmaier Award in 2007.

Chu also played professionally in the CWHL, winning playoff MVP while helping Minnesota to the Clarkson Cup in 2010. She's an iconic American player who captured 23 medals during her storied international career.

4. Meghan Agosta, forward (fifth year)

Overshadowed by other Team Canada legends such as Hayley Wickenheiser and Marie Philip-Poulin, Agosta was a crucial part of the national team that won Olympic gold in 2006, 2010 and 2014, and then silver in 2018.

At the time of her official retirement in 2024, Agosta ranked sixth all time in goals (85) and points (176) and seventh in assists (91) in 178 career games while playing for Team Canada.

5. Florence Schelling, goalie (fifth year)

The selection committee has heavily skewed toward Canadians and Americans among women's players. If they wanted some international flavor, look no further than Schelling, a goaltending star for Switzerland.

She had stellar international numbers, backstopping the Swiss to bronze in Sochi, earning MVP honors for the tournament. She was also dominant during four seasons at Northeastern.

Final prediction for the Class of 2026

For the men, it's Bergeron, Price and Getzlaf, the second time in three seasons they only take three inductees; for the women, we'll say Duggan and Szabados to make it three straight seasons of multiple women's players getting into the Hall.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' trade for Evander Kane a huge risk-reward move

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER – To get to the ice in the National Hockey League, you have to go through the dressing room.

For the miniscule price of a fourth-round draft pick, the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday acquired the 33-year-old Kane, an East Vancouver kid, to bring his combination of skill and snarl to a team that needs both.

Resurrecting his mercurial career with the Edmonton Oilers, Kane scored 24 goals two years ago before missing all of this past regular season due to major surgery in September on a variety of abdominal injuries. He also had knee surgery in January.

Kane returned this spring for the Stanley Cup Playoffs and scored four times in the Oilers' first nine games before appearing to wear down after going 10 months without playing.

With his heft and disposition, his willingness to engage physically, the left winger makes a miserable opponent. Evander Kane is exactly the "player" the Canucks need.

But as a teammate, a piece of the dressing-room puzzle that strained former Vancouver coach Rick Tocchet, Kane has accumulated in his 16-year career more than a few red flags.

This is the Canucks team that was sabotaged this season — as publicly confirmed by hockey-operations president Jim Rutherford — by dressing-room dysfunction triggered by tension between J.T. Miller and Elias Pettersson, who were the team's core centres until Miller was traded to New York Rangers on Jan. 31.

Rutherford admitted the dressing-room culture, the leadership, was not as strong as management had thought. Rebuilding the chemistry of the Canucks is key to rebounding on the ice next season, which is seen internally (and everywhere else) as paramount to have any hope of retaining captain and superstar defenceman Quinn Hughes.

In a league of conformists, Kane has always stood out for individualism, which certainly worked against him at times in earlier career stops in Winnipeg, Buffalo and San Jose. The Sharks terminated his $49-million contract in 2022 not long after Kane's 21-game NHL suspension for fabricating COVID vaccination documents. The two sides later reached an agreement to settle his contract grievance.

There is nothing wrong with personality; the NHL doesn't have enough of it. And you have to admire someone with the conviction in himself to rent luxury vehicles on Edmonton road trips so Kane could be filmed arriving at the rink in a Lamborghini while Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl schlepped off the Oilers' team bus.

Even on Wednesday, Kane couldn't restrain himself and announced his own trade on social media before the Canucks had the chance to do it.

So, is this the right person for the Vancouver dressing room, where leadership is being recalibrated and the culture isn't established and policed by McDavid and Draisaitl?

Vancouver general manager Patrik Allvin called it a "fair question."

"I think the past is the past with Evander," Allvin told reporters at Rogers Arena. "The last couple of years in Edmonton, I think he contributed a lot to the off-ice stuff and helping out... there. Having three kids here now, I think he has matured. I do believe that this gives us a chance and him a chance to see if this is a fit moving on here, and I'm sure hoping so after this year."

Kane is in the final season of a four-year contract worth $5.125 million annually. His trade was a salary dump by the Oilers, who facilitated the former Vancouver Giant's wish to play in his hometown.

"It definitely means something for us here to have a player that is on a one-year deal get a chance to come home after two back-to-back years in the Stanley Cup Finals, with experience playing with Draisaitl and McDavid and a good team in Edmonton," Allvin said. "It means a lot to have an excited player coming here to Vancouver and provide the spark and juice we need here."

Later, Allvin said: "We all know that there has been some stuff in the past. But again, I have no problem with personalities. As long as they perform on the ice and fit in with the team rules off the ice, I've no issues or concerns with players or what they're wearing and how they're driving to the games."

Allvin said the Canucks did their "due diligence" on Kane, speaking to former teammates and staff. The GM is also confident that the team, under head coach Adam Foote and his new coaching staff, plus Canuck development coaches Henrik and Daniel Sedin, can build and manage the leadership group.

Despite significant, immediate backlash to the trade among fans, Rutherford, Allvin and Foote know what they're getting into. They can Google Kane's name just like everyone else.

Wednesday's trade is obviously a risk they are willing to take.

But it is a huge risk-reward move.

So was promoting the coaching-inexperienced Foote to replace Tocchet. So is bringing back Pettersson on his $92.8-million contract after a disastrous 45-point season that followed the centre's no-show in the 2024 playoffs. So will be trading Friday's first-round draft pick, with other assets, for another top-six forward, which the Canucks are trying to do.

As the Canucks go all-in on next season, the team certainly will be getting a highly-motivated Kane.

Finally healthy after missing half of Edmonton's games over the last three years, Kane is playing for another contract, likely his final one in the NHL. He is four years removed from filing for bankruptcy in California, registering debts of $26.8 million.

"I think every team is looking to be harder to play against," Allvin explained. "And for us, with the group we have here, when a player like this comes available... we felt we have a chance to upgrade our top nine, mid-six, and become a harder team to play against.

"Evander is one of those guys that you hate to play against, and you love to have him on your own team."

We'll see.

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL and NHLPA getting close on CBA talks

Elliotte Friedman

Nothing earth-shattering from Wednesday's NHL Board of Governors meeting in Los Angeles, although Commissioner Gary Bettman mentioned the collective bargaining update was "quite extensive both in terms of the process and the substance."

The NHL and NHLPA are not believed to be far apart on CBA talks.

"It's conceivable that there would be an announcement when we reach an understanding, but that understanding is again subject to ratification," Bettman added. "We're not (there) at the moment."

Earlier this season, the league and the union agreed to a three-year salary-cap projection that will take the ceiling higher than it's ever been. That was the heaviest lifting, and both sides have worked hard to keep other details private. Among the notable items believed to be under consideration:

• Dropping maximum-length contracts from eight years (your own player) and seven (another team's free agent), to seven and six, respectively.

• Draft rights until age 22

• The ability for some first-round picks from the CHL to have AHL eligibility earlier than currently allowed. (Some believe it should be one per NHL club as opposed to first-rounders because not every team has a pick in that round, but no idea if that has any traction.)

• No more deferred-salary contracts

• Creation of a "permanent" EBUG to practise and travel with their NHL team

• A revenue-sharing tweak to help some of the more middle-class teams

Whatever the case, it shouldn't be too long until we find out for sure.

Other stuff:

Bettman said Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly gave an expansion update "in terms of the expressions of interest, but there's nothing new. We have no pending applications and we're not seeking to initiate a formal process at this point."

During the previous processes with Vegas and Seattle, Bettman revealed an expansion fee. Is there a set price this time?

"To the extent that there have been expressions of interest, we talk generally about it," he answered. "But nothing we need to get into."

Daly also clarified the league's review of Evander Kane's LTIR status. At issue is a knee surgery he had in January that halted rehab from a previous procedure to his hip. The NHL's position is it had the right to ask for additional information, but wouldn't do so until the Oilers finished playing.

"That's what I've held as pending. And again, I haven't made any decisions yet with respect to how long I'm going to hold it pending."

The league also approved Bill Haslam's additional 18 per cent purchase of Nashville, giving him almost two-thirds ownership of the Predators.

I'd say the only negative is the lack of "draft buzz" around the event. There's something missing with this decentralized event; it's not the same without everyone here. Bettman reiterated that he will poll teams sometime this summer about reversing course — which can't happen fast enough.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers free up valuable cap space with Kane trade during crucial off-season

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — As the Evander Kane era sidles into its Lamborghini and zooms west towards Vancouver, he leaves behind the gift of cap space — $5.125 million of AAV with no money retained. Every penny destined for the pockets of Leon Draisaitl, Evan Bouchard, Trent Frederic and a goalie to named later.

The first domino of the Edmonton Oilers off-load off-season fell on Wednesday, as general manager Stan Bowman went back to the well that delivered Vasily Podkolzin for a fourth-rounder a year ago, sending Kane to the Vancouver Canucks for a fourth-round pick in the 2025 draft.

It is the first step in a series of moves Bowman has telegraphed this summer, the next being a deal that moves Viktor Arvidsson's $4 million out, followed by the signing of Trent Frederic in the range of $3.75 million, to Evan Bouchard's next contract — and eventually to The Big One:

But before we take you down the path Bowman hopes to walk this summer — one that includes a goalie who can lend a genuine belief that the position has been upgraded — let us review the tenure of a player who was acquired amidst controversy, but mostly turned the narrative around over three-and-half seasons in Edmonton.

Kane finished with 62-49-111 in 161 games as an Oiler — fifth in points among forwards despite only playing in 56 per cent of regular-season games, mostly due to a pair of serious injuries.

Kane led all Oilers forwards in penalty minutes during his time in Edmonton, but that didn't always live up to his "unicorn" status as that tough power forward who has become a rarity in our game. Kane had just four major penalties as an Oiler while leading all forwards with 73 minors, culminating in a handful of costly minor penalties in the Stanley Cup Final that marks his final act as an Oiler.

Kane was an above-average finisher in Edmonton, but not great defensively or at the finer points of the game. His board work, working a cycle, or making the dull, effective play that winning teams have to make was never Kane's thing, a legit top-six left winger who somehow never found chemistry next to either of the top-six centremen in this town.

That is probably the final nail in Kane's time here — that he never forged a lasting on-ice bond with ether Connor McDavid or Draisaitl. We all know, if they'd have preferred Kane stay, someone else would have been a Canuck today.

Kane — who turns 34 in August — arrived like a cyclone, with 22 goals in his first 43 regular-season games and a 13-goal post-season in 2022. But he never quite recaptured that level of production, even as he embedded himself in the community here, growing a family and getting involved in Edmonton.

So Kane exits as he arrived, from an Oilers team making transactions aimed at making up that final, most difficult part of the journey.

Not only must Bowman sign his pillars, he has to acquire the requisite support players to bring home two more wins than the Oilers won last season — all while changing out a goodly portion of the team.

Between a salary cap that is going up roughly $7 million, Kane's $5.1 million, Arvidsson's $4 million, Jeff Skinner's $3 million and John Klingberg's $1.75 million will free up nearly $21 million for Bowman — assuming he can move Arvidsson with no retention.

Draisaitl's AAV goes up $5.5 million to $14 million, as his new eight-year deal kicks in in 2025-26. Bouchard's AAV could go up as much as $6.5 million in a new deal — from $3.9-$10.4 million, while signing Trent Frederic will add another $1.5 million to last season's cap.

That's $13.5 million for those three players — with the spectre of McDavid's raise on the horizon, something Bowman can do the math on next summer.

So there is $7 million, give or take, to beef up the bottom six and add that goalie.

Matt Savoie will slide in at just $886,000 next season and given a chance to earn a spot. David Tomasek — the 29-year-old Czech who led the Swedish league in scoring last season — is a longshot to hold a spot as a right-shot centre, but worth the shot. Noah Philp is likely ready to be a 4C, again, at low cost.

It's doable, but the level of success will hinge on one or two veteran NHL players taking less than their market value with the promise of winning a Stanley Cup as an Oiler.

And if the lineup that opens the season for Edmonton inevitably has a hole or two in it, well, that's where the trade deadline comes in.

It's a matrix, building a Stanley Cup winner. One that the Oilers have been oh so close to solving.

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Sportsnet.ca / Four steps to how the Maple Leafs should approach the off-season

Justin Bourne

When it was time to sign UFAs in 2024, much like the running of the bulls in Pamplona, a few people were likely to get gored. The rewards are not often great (congrats on not crippling yourself), while the risk of damage is very real.

In the case of the NHL, it's the GMs who have to get out in front of the danger and take those chances, and free agency is just about the only time of year when we see them break their typically stoic postures and get active.

And boy, was 2024 a blood bath. We don't need to rehash it all, but Nashville got carved up, handing out big deals to Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault, and Brady Skjei, none of whom lived up to their new big contracts en route to a tough team finish. Elias Lindholm struggled in Boston after landing his big deal, too. There were a few names for whom it went maybe about as expected – Jake DeBrusk and Chandler Stephenson come to mind – but by and large the only "This

seems like a big deal" signing that ended up correctly being a big deal was Jake Guentzel, who scored 41 times for Tampa Bay.

Teams cling to the hope of those successes, but there are numerous horns out there, which is why it's often better to just jump the guardrails and sit on the sidelines.

With all that in mind, this is an article about what the Toronto Maple Leafs should do on July 1, when free agents are available to be signed to new contracts.

Step 1: Start where you can find value

Every year, the bulk of "successful UFA signings" are guys who sign for somewhere between league minimum and $1.5 million, and end up being real contributors.

Last year, the Boston Bruins signed Cole Koepke for league minimum, and he ended up dressing in 73 games, scoring 10 times, finishing second among team forwards in hits, and ending the season with a plus-1 rating on a team that had a minus-50 goal differential. You'd take that on your fourth line, no?

Well, Koepke is available and shouldn't cost too much more than last year, but you're also searching for next season's breakout players who just need a shot. For years the Leafs have had a fourth line without a clear identity, and while it was much better this past season, the focus of their fourth line was exclusively on defence while lacking any kind of bite (let alone offence) as a group.

So, what would you like that fourth line to be? Mikey Eyssimont is an interesting name, as he isn't afraid to drop the gloves (he's at least willing), and I think he has a little more offensive upside than he's shown in the league to date. He can really skate.

There's value to be found in this price range.

Step 2: Don't overpay those guys

There are always good bottom six players available in UFA. I like Brandon Tanev as much as the next guy, but you can't let yourself become convinced he's going to give you a ton more than someone like the aforementioned Koepke. Tanev had the same 10 goals last year, had slightly less ice time, and was minus-12. I legitimately like the player and would love his hustle and heart in the Leafs' bottom six. I love that he stirs it up. But you just can't give Tanev multiple millions and years because he's a name brand. He's not worth twice as much (or more) than some of the other players in this pool.

Step 3: If you're going to pay, find out who fits your exact puzzle, and is worth the bidding war

It's not free to get a quality player, which is why UFAs cost a bit more. The "asset" it costs you is just additional cap space, but that is slightly less precious as we move forward. So, is there anyone who might cost a bit more than you'd like, but scratches your precise itch?

I love Nikolaj Ehlers, but I don't think he quite does it. Yes, the Leafs need to add talent after the departure of Mitch Marner, but they're going to have to do it via trade. Ehlers would be keeping the team stylistically the same, just downgraded from Marner.

Yes, Brad Marchand scratches that exact itch, which is why the rumours about him making a bit more than you'd expect make sense. But the rumour about him making $9 million per season – for four years! – feels like it pushes this logic to its most absurd boundaries.

When shopping for anything I very much believe in paying more money for something you actually want and need than buying something cheaper that doesn't quite work. But boy, it would be a tough start for Marchand's time in Toronto if he shows up as all the previous core players did, first focusing on maximizing personal gain while hamstringing the team's financial flexibility. That lesson has been taught often here, and the fans don't love watching it.

Still, Marchand's fit is perfect. So, we'll see how bad the Leafs want to make that happen.

Now, the other name that makes me sound like I'm contradicting myself is Tanner Jeannot, partially because I just said you can't overpay bottom-six guys. But I like a lot about the fit. A lot, a lot. He just turned 28 and checks in at 6-foot-2, 220 pounds. He's got a 40-goal WHL season and a 24-goal NHL season, to go with being someone not just willing to fight, but who seems like he wants to fight. Yes, there may be some injury concern, but this guy is a legit intimidator. They got rid of Mason Marchment because they didn't think he could stay healthy, that's one heck of a guess on which to pass on a good player.

I have a ton of respect for the way Steven Lorentz and David Kampf and Calle Jarnkrok play. But it would nice to have maybe one guy on the roster who was capable of getting mad.

Step 4: Work the phones

I've said this over and again: the Leafs can't get from where they are to Stanley Cup contender via free agency alone. While everyone is making moves and clearing cap space, we've seen a handful of deals already. Chris Kreider, Marchment, Evander Kane, and Trevor Zegras have all been moved, and not for massive returns.

The Leafs have to be all over that market, as someone like Tomas Hertl makes perfect sense if you can get him out of Vegas. William Karlsson would be a compromise, but at least one with a more palatable contract. Whatever the case may be, it's tough to know who's available, but this is the store in which the Leafs need to be shopping. And if that involves trading current roster players like Morgan Rielly or Brandon Carlo or Max Domi or Jarnkrok, or even if it involves more picks, it just has to happen.

For the Leafs, losing Marner should be viewed as the impetus for an overhaul, not just to try and replace what's left and to get back to where they were before. They can't replace him in free agency, but there are different paths to building a winning team than the one the Leafs have previously taken.

We know Brad Treliving has good relationships with just about every GM in the league. It's time to for him to show the value of those connections by getting some meaningful deals across the line.

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Sportsnet.ca / Real Kyper's Off-Season Trade Board 2.0: Who could go this summer?

Nick Kypreos

As we inch closer to July 1, all indications are pointing to a Mitch Marner sweepstakes.

It's important to know that many teams are figuring out how much space they have (or don't have) to try and sign the cream of this year's UFA crop, a 100-point player and terrific defensive forward.

Could the Vegas Golden Knights or Dallas Stars get involved?

With the bar set so high in Vegas, I don't expect George McPhee and Kelly McCrimmon to sit idle for long. There is plenty of speculation that they are getting ready to take a big run at Marner. This is where we'll keep an eye on how expendable William Karlsson is to the Golden Knights. Jack Eichel is firmly in place down the middle for Vegas and commands big dollars already – plus he needs an extension before next summer – so teams see an opportunity to try and get Karlsson and are calling about the player. While Karlsson has been an integral player for Vegas since their expansion season, the lack of centre depth on the free agent market means he could bring back key assets to the Golden Knights while freeing up some much-needed cap space to do other business. If not Karlsson, some attention should be paid to Tomas Hertl, another centre who Vegas could move in the right deal.

Perhaps trading Karlsson and placing Alex Pietrangelo's $8.8 million AAV on LTIR will be enough to land Marner in a projected $13-14 million range. There is real concern Pietrangelo's injury is threatening enough to not only jeopardize his Olympic spot, but perhaps his entire season.

As far as Dallas is concerned, outside of a potential one-year deal for Jamie Benn, all eyes will now be focused on how they will get some fresh new talent to help support Mikko Rantanen. Could they take a serious run at Marner?

That may depend on the decision ownership and GM Jim Nill face on whether to re-sign Jason Robertson or cut him loose now with a trade. Robertson has one year remaining on his four-year $31 million deal signed in 2022.

The early word is the two-time 40-goal scorer may command as much as $12 million in AAV on a long-term deal, which may be too high for Dallas' liking.

Trading Robertson could lead Dallas right into the mix for Marner.

I'm hearing as much as half the league will try and take a run at Marner in free agency, but the serious bidders will be established well before July 1. However, while the focus around Marner has to do with his free agent status, we can't rule out the potential for a sign and trade here. For example, going back to Vegas and Karlsson, obtaining a No. 2 centre is as high a priority for Toronto as a top winger replacement for Marner this summer.

So, Marner ends up on my trade list and is perhaps the most interesting case to watch this week leading into the draft on Friday and Saturday, before free agency opens next Tuesday.

Beyond Marner, the team that is getting the most calls in the league are the Buffalo Sabres. Many teams anticipate that the Sabres are itching to get something going, with key names such as Bowen Byram and JJ Peterka potentially available.

But this is just scratching the surface about what's being discussed around the league.

It's a big week for everyone and we could see many teams cleaning up their salary cap picture through trades prior to July 1. Draft weekend is an important event, even though it's decentralized this year, and we have an eye on plenty of trade action happening in the lead up.

With that in mind, here are some names we're hearing about on the trade market with the Stanley Cup awarded and the off-season in full swing…

If Mitch Marner makes it to free agency, there is a chance he'd sign somewhere for less than the maximum seven years he'd be able to get on the open market. But what if he could end up in a market he liked and on a Stanley Cup contender?

It's not out of the question that Marner could still seek maximum term and this is where a sign and trade could get interesting for everyone involved. For Toronto, allowing a sign and trade might be the best resolution of all. Dealing Marner would ensure they get something back for losing him, and doing so with a contract in place would bring a return that's far more enticing and impactful than simply trading his negotiating rights. They might be able to bring in a roster player to replace him with.

For an acquiring team, this could also make the most sense. For one, they'd be getting him before the market opens, thus avoiding any bidding war and the uncertainty that brings. For another, a sign and trade would be the only way a new team could get Marner for eight years since Toronto would "sign" him to the contract before July 1 and then trade him. That's key because a lot of these Cup contenders would be bumping up to the cap after signing Marner, and an eighth season would be one way for them to bring down the AAV. Every little bit counts.

Once seen as nearly untouchable, there is now a question about how much the Stars will be willing to pay Jason Robertson on an extension, and if the better move is to trade him this off-season to maximize a return. Robertson scored 35 goals and 80 points this past season, but scored just four times in 11 playoff games, and has fallen from his career-highs of 46 goals and 109 points from two years ago.

Robertson makes $7.75 million against the cap for one more season, after which he'll be an RFA, so he can extend this summer. But since Robertson will be eligible to test unrestricted free agency in 2027, an extension will have to consider the expensive UFA years being bought up.

The feeling is the ask could be as high as $12 million on an extension, which leaves Dallas facing a big question: are they paying a player who can help them get into the playoffs, or someone who will help them win in the playoffs? The Stars are already paying $12 million to Mikko Rantanen.

Dallas has just $2.76 million in cap space this summer and may decide to move Robertson's money to re-invest in other ways after three consecutive eliminations in the Western Conference Final has the front office thinking creatively about how they get another step better.

It's a big week for the Canucks, who have six days to consider moving Pettersson without any limitations before a full no-movement clause kicks in on July 1. He managed just 15 goals and 45 points in the first year of an eight-year contract that pays him $11.6 million against the salary cap.

Vancouver must be careful with how it proceeds, however. Every move the team makes in the next two years must be done with Quinn Hughes in mind, seeking ways to be more competitive so the 25-year-old superstar defenceman re-ups before his contract expires in 2027. After already trading out J.T. Miller during the season, the Canucks have a need to add centremen already, so the timing of a Pettersson deal may not be quite right. However, despite his down year offensively, he still has the potential to climb back towards being a 100-point player, so his value hasn't taken as big a hit as many assume.

If the Maple Leafs lose Marner to unrestricted free agency as expected, they'd quickly need another winger for the top six. While the team could explore other players in free agency to fill that hole, the trade market is another option for the Leafs.

We know GM Brad Treliving wants to change the core of this team, but what does that look like past Marner's departure? Trading Morgan Rielly is an option that could present itself and, if the right return comes across his desk, Treliving would consider taking it.

But the thing is, that decision isn't entirely going to be Treliving's to make. Rielly has five years remaining on a contract with a $7.5 million cap hit and a full no-movement clause, so there would need to be a mutual understanding between all sides that a change of scenery is in everyone's best interests.

Anticipation is growing that a Rasmus Andersson trade will happen at some point this off-season, though this week's NHL Draft is a key event that could bring about such a move. Andersson is entering his last season under contract with Calgary and will have a chance to test unrestricted free agency in his prime at age 29 next summer.

The rebuilding Flames have to weigh the chance they have of extending him with what they could get via trade to help them in the future. His end of season press conference felt like something of a farewell and countless teams will be interested in his services, even for just the one season. The Toronto Maple Leafs were interested in acquiring him last trade deadline and could jump back in now.

With just two years remaining on his contract and the Pittsburgh Penguins one of the few selling/rebuilding teams in the league, it's becoming more likely that Erik Karlsson will be traded by the day. When originally signed, his AAV was $11.5 million, but after the San Jose Sharks retained money when they traded him to Pittsburgh in 2023, Karlsson counts for just $10 million on the Penguins' books. That rate would surely be cut further as Pittsburgh would accept retention to maximize their return on the player today.

One thing to keep in mind is that Karlsson will be paid a $5 million signing bonus on July 1, meaning this is a move that is more likely to happen in the summer than during the busy period of the draft and opening of free agency. After that bonus is paid, Karlsson will be owed just $11.5 million total in the final two years of his contract, making the financial burden far more palatable to the buying team.

The fact Seth Jones -- whose perceived value had taken a hit in Chicago – fit in so well and contributed so much in a better system with the Florida Panthers will lead some to pause on Karlsson. Could the 35-year-old have the same type of resurgence in a better circumstance?

With Mathieu Darche in place as the new GM and the No. 1 overall pick in hand, it's setting up to be an interesting off-season for the Islanders where a few things could be in play.

One of the big situations to watch is with Noah Dobson, who is an RFA this summer and just one year away from being UFA eligible. Two years ago Dobson had an explosive breakout season with 70 points, but fell back to just 39 points in 2024-25 with an average ice time per game that also dipped by over a minute.

The 12th overall pick from 2018 has huge potential, but the Islanders are left having to make a big decision on an expensive contract. What is he

worth? There are some who believe his ask is north of $10 million per season.

At the same time, the Islanders are days away from likely selecting Matthew Schaefer first overall, another exciting offensive defenceman. While it would be great to have both to move forward with, the Islanders should also be able to get a nice return for Dobson if they move him. But the risk is that he returns to his 2023-24 form elsewhere and leaves the Islanders in regret.

It's not often you see a player like this show up in an off-season trade list. Rossi is a 23-year-old centre, coming off a career season in which he scored 24 goals and 60 points, playing for a team that had for years been searching for a top-six pivot. But by the time the Wild got to the playoffs in 2025, Rossi had been demoted to the fourth line and had one of the lowest average even strength ice times per game on the team.

Rossi is a restricted free agent this summer, making this situation even more urgent for the Wild to resolve. If unsigned by July 1, Rossi could become an interesting offer sheet target and a high enough AAV could make Minnesota uncomfortable as they also need to figure out what Kirill Kaprizov will get on a monster extension, which he will be eligible to sign this summer as well.

What does Martin Necas want? We could find out before too long. The last time his contract came up, Necas was a member of the Carolina Hurricanes with a 71-point season in his past, but also coming off a down year (slipping to 53 points). He signed a short-term, two-year deal with the team and then was traded to Colorado six months later in the first Rantanen blockbuster.

Now, Necas is a year away from becoming a UFA and this time coming off another career season in which he scored 27 goals and 83 points between the Canes and Avs. In Colorado, Necas largely delivered on his promise, scoring at just under a point per game pace and fitting in well on the Avalanche's top line. This will give him a lot of negotiating power and, as the salary cap rises, his number on an extension will, too.

After Colorado traded Rantanen, a homegrown superstar talent, over how much money he was seeking on an extension, it will be interesting to see how they perceive Necas who produces less and was brought in from the outside.

The Necas situation is no different than that of Robertson or Andersson: the team either has to dive into and embrace an expensive extension, or trade the player off the roster. Colorado cannot afford to do what the Leafs are with Marner (and possibly John Tavares) and watch a top producer walk out the door for nothing. The Avs have to be asking themselves if Necas is a player who can help them win.

In a growing salary cap environment, Necas could get $10 million-plus for sure.

Lukas Dostal's emergence in Anaheim and a very thin UFA goalie market are the driving factors behind Gibson being on this list. He's certainly no stranger to trade rumours, which have circulated throughout the Ducks' rebuild, but there's plenty of reason to think it could finally happen in 2025.

Gibson will turn 32 over the summer and now only has two years remaining on his contract, with a $6.2 million cap hit. He also had a pretty solid 2024-25 campaign, posting a .912 save percentage in 29 games, his best mark since 2018-19.

Injury concerns still loom over Gibson and any team exploring a trade here will be careful of that history. He may no longer be seen as a clear No. 1, but more as one half of a tandem. The goalie market – whether via free agency or trade – is not deep, so Gibson might be the best bet, especially if the Ducks will relent on previous asking prices, or even be open to some salary retention. Anaheim is looking to make big strides to get out of their rebuild this summer and could make a big splash in free agency, but also have over $36 million in cap space (after dealing Trevor Zegras Monday) and two retention slots available.

There is a link between Gibson and the Oilers, who are facing a lot of pressure to fix their goalie situation. With McDavid saying he is in no rush to sign an extension, Edmonton has to have a strong off-season that helps encourage him to stay and the goalie position is their biggest question mark.

Pressure is mounting on GM Kevyn Adams to get the Sabres on track after the likes of Ottawa and Montreal leaped over them and into the playoffs this past season. It'll be a delicate balance to not fall back in a rebuild, while also exploring trade options around a few very solid players.

One of those is Bowen Byram, an RFA this summer who is only two years away from being able to become a UFA. It's possible Byram becomes a target for an offer sheet, though he could also seek to slow walk himself to the open market as a 25-year-old.

Where does that leave Buffalo? They have already invested tons on the blue line, with Rasmus Dahlin making $11 million, Owen Power at $8.35 million and Mattias Samuelsson at $4.285 million, all on long term deals. If Byram's extension is around $7 million, will Buffalo be spending too much on its back end? The left shot defender is only 23 and coming off a career-best offensive season so if the Sabres do move him, they should be able to nab a nice return.

At first glance it doesn't seem to make a lot of sense why a player like JJ Peterka, who had a career-best season with 68 points and was Buffalo's second-highest scorer this past season, would be on this list. Just 23 years old, he would seem like a great player to move on into the future with, but this situation isn't so clean.

Peterka is in a strong position because there aren't a lot of players out there who scored as many points as him at such a young age, and he's an RFA. The Sabres should be happy to re-sign him, but the question is: does he want to stay? He's a young player who knows this team hasn't made the playoffs in 14 years and will want to know where are things going. Peterka wants to play in the playoffs and find success, so may not want to commit long-term yet. That leaves Buffalo in a hard position of figuring out how to replace his production if they do have to trade him.

Overall it is a seller's market this summer, especially so at centre. A number of teams are looking to fill or upgrade the position without an overflow of options via free agency. So, any team that has a centre they could trade can be patient, let the summer market play out a bit, and move when the offer is just right.

Indications are that Colorado isn't looking to move Charlie Coyle, but that teams are calling on the 33-year-old. Coyle was acquired by the Avalanche at this year's trade deadline for Casey Mittelstadt in an effort to upgrade their depth chart down the middle. The Avs also acquired Brock Nelson for the same reason and have since re-signed him to a three-year extension.

Coyle remains a nice third line player for the Avalanche, but will be entering the final season of his contract making $5.25 million against the salary cap in 2025-26. He has a partial no-trade clause that only protects him from being moved to three teams, so Colorado will have plenty of leeway if they do decide to move him.

After being eliminated in Rounds 1 and 2 the past two seasons, the always aggressive Golden Knights will be ambitious in going about their business this summer. William Karlsson is a likeable player who the team would prefer to keep, but if they're going to continue to act as aggressively as we think they will in chasing after someone such as Marner, they'll have to create some space and Karlsson's name is being bantered more than anyone else's.

Vegas enters the off-season with $9.62 million to work with, which is the seventh-least league-wide, and not enough to land the biggest fish (though Alex Pietrangelo's health situation could change that picture). As mentioned off the top, with Eichel already entrenched as the top line centre, 32-year-old Karlsson could be the trade candidate who it makes the most sense to move. There are a lot of teams seeking help down the middle and not a great depth at the position, so the Golden Knights are in a good position to land a meaningful return.

Karlsson makes $5.9 million against the cap for another two years and has a 10-team no-trade list. However, teams need options and Karlsson may not be the only centre Vegas is open to trading. The Carolina Hurricanes, for example, have called on both Karlsson and Hertl. While Karlsson may be the more likely of the two to move right now, keep an eye on Hertl as well because he's not an untouchable asset. Hertl makes $6.75 million against the cap through 2029-30 and has a modified no-trade clause.

The Chris Kreider trade has given the Rangers more breathing room under the cap, with $13.172 million in space available. Between K'Andre

Miller and Will Cuylle there are two important RFA deals to sign, though Miller could still end up on the trade block this summer.

Still just 25 years old, Miller is coming off a disappointing season individually, leaving the Rangers unsure whether a short- or long-term deal is best, or if trading him now will be the better way to position the team to return stronger in 2025-26. The range of possibilities for Miller this summer is wide – sign a contract that makes him a centrepiece of the core, or end up on another team entirely.

Miller still oozes potential, plays on the penalty kill, and averaged more even-strength ice time than any other Ranger this past season.

Pietrangelo's status could weigh heavily on what the Golden Knights decide to do with Nicolas Hague, a 26-year-old defenceman who is an RFA this summer but could set himself up to test the market as a UFA in 2026. But it may be in Vegas' best interest to trade him sooner rather than wait until July 1 because Hague is a real threat to receive an offer sheet Vegas would be uncomfortable to match. A two-year offer sheet at $4.6 million would walk him to UFA and return only a second-round pick in compensation. A longer term offer sheet could return a first- and third-rounder as compensation, but bring an AAV that makes it harder for Vegas to do any other big business they hope to accomplish this summer.

In Vegas, Hague's offensive output has been limited, with a career high of just 17 points. He posted five goals and 12 points this past season. But, this was a player who scored 35 goals in his draft-plus-one season in major junior. There are some teams out there who believe Hague has sneaky offensive upside despite not showing it in the NHL yet, because he's been playing behind too many people on a strong Vegas blue line. Hague was sixth among all Golden Knights defencemen in average ice time per game this past season (17:00) and did not contribute to the power play.

GM Tom Fitzgerald vowed to find more offence this summer and that he wouldn't return with the same group of players in 2025-26. Erik Haula has already been moved out, traded to the Predators last week, but we should expect more from the Devils.

Dawson Mercer appeared on my last trade list and remains there in our second look to the off-season. This is a player who will turn just 24 early next NHL season and is still full of potential, so there will be a market for him. But he's now two years removed from a 27-goal, 56-point breakout season and, after failing to hit the 20-goal plateau in 2024-25, he might be a player the Devils try and use to find a better roster fit.

After re-signing centre Brock Nelson, the Avalanche have only $1.2 million in cap space to work with. And while they made a lot of changes to the roster during this past season and, on paper, don't have to change too much, it's still believed they could surprise and strike at the bigger names available this summer.

To do that, salary cap space needs to open up and Ross Colton could help the team achieve that. Making $4 million for another two seasons, Colton scored 16 goals and 29 points in 2024-25 and ranked 10th among all Avs forwards in average ice time per game. Between Coyle's $5.25 million appearing higher on our list, and Colton at $4 million, we shouldn't be surprised if the Avalanche move one of those players, but it's also possible both will be in play if it puts Colorado in position to take a run at Marner.

The Seattle Kraken are expected to be among the busiest teams this summer as they seek a way to return to the playoffs after missing for the past two years in a row. They've already added Mason Marchment and Joe Veleno, while moving out Andre Burakovsky after three disappointing years. That is just going to be the start.

Jamie Oleksiak could be a helpful piece for the Kraken to move into the next season with, but it will also be his last under contract so all options will be looked at. Oleksiak would be an attractive trade candidate for several teams, especially in reaction to the Florida Panthers winning another Stanley Cup with a large back end. Oleksiak fits that bill, a 6-foot-7, 252-pound blue liner who led the team in blocked shots and played often on the penalty kill. His $4.6 million cap hit is great value, which should help the Kraken maximize a return if they do in fact end up moving him.

The Philadelphia Flyers are a team to watch this summer as they make efforts to move the competitiveness of the roster to the next level. They have $15.1 million in cap space after acquiring Trevor Zegras, so aren't starved to dump salary, but will be open to moving parts of the roster if it means upgrading the team overall.

Rasmus Ristolainen was on my trade list all season long, but the Flyers don't have to rush to move him since he has another two years left on his contract still, at a $5.1 million AAV. He'll turn 31 in October and his a large, physical, right shot defender coming off a bounce back season, so the market could be blossoming for a player of this type. The Flyers can remain patient on the player, but Ristolainen will remain on my trade list through the summer.

As we've mentioned at times throughout this piece, the centre market is full of buyers so it's a perfect time to a seller to explore the market. Andrew Copp signed a five-year contract with a $5.625 million cap hit to join Detroit in 2022 when he was coming off a career-best season, but he has not built on that and, in fact, has had declining offensive totals in each of the past three years.

That's not the best sell job on this player, which is why GM Steve Yzerman could be open to retaining a hefty amount of Copp's cap hit for the next two years. Ideally the Wings would do that if it meant getting a return similar to what Philadelphia got for Scott Laughton (a first-round pick). Copp has a 10-team no-trade list in his contract.

The Panthers are trying to figure out if they have enough room to keep pending UFAs Sam Bennett and Aaron Ekblad, with $19 million in cap space currently. But there's some feeling they could perhaps also squeeze in Brad Marchand with some extra savings. This is why Evan Rodrigues is being contemplated as a trade candidate. The 31-year-old was a productive member on back-to-back Stanley Cup winners (15 points in both playoff runs) and makes $3 million against the cap for another two seasons.

It may not be so easy as trading him and being guaranteed to keep all three, however. Marchand's persona is growing daily and where his contract value ends up outside of Florida may shock some people. But he loves Florida and the Panthers would love to keep him. If Marchand wants to stay, how much less is he willing to take? The Panthers are in tough to keep all three and have to move out as much money as possible to make an offer that Marchand can seriously consider, which is why Rodrigues is one to watch as a potential cap casualty.

TRADED OFF REAL KYPER'S LIST THIS SEASON: Seth Jones, Ryan Lindgren, Alexandre Carrier, Cam Fowler, Taylor Hall, Martin Necas, J.T. Miller, Marcus Pettersson, Drew O'Connor, Trent Frederic, Yanni Gourde, Reilly Smith, Carson Soucy, Brock Nelson, Dylan Cozens, Mikko Rantanen, Scott Laughton, Brandon Tanev, Charlie Coyle, Casey Mittelstadt, Brad Marchand, Brandon Carlo, Chris Kreider, Trevor Zegras, Evander Kane

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Sportsnet.ca / Why Flames should consider trading Rasmus Andersson ahead of draft

Eric Francis

CALGARY – Craig Conroy has a bit of a streak going that he'd be wise to continue.

In each of his first two seasons as the Calgary Flames' GM, he's made draft-week trades, cashing in on veterans who were one year away from unrestricted free agency.

Two years ago it was Tyler Toffoli.

Last year it was Andrew Mangiapane.

And with the draft just a few sleeps away, the move should be made in time to acquire a draft pick or two to be used as early as Friday night or Saturday.

Andersson's fate as a Flame was sealed last week when, after the two sides exchanged thoughts on what a possible contract extension would look like, it became crystal clear the gap is insurmountable.

Understandably, and predictably, so.

As the Flames' top minute-muncher and chief shot blocker, Andersson has every reason to be demanding the sort of top dollar deal several teams will be clamouring to pay next summer when the cap goes up again and his considerable talents are offered up to all 32 teams.

He's willing to gamble on himself, demonstrating the former 50-point man is a much better player than his 31 points and minus-38 last season might otherwise suggest.

His is a price (and maximum term) the Flames aren't willing to come even close to, given Andersson will be 29 next summer, and the retooling Flames are still at least a few seasons away from building what anyone might consider to be a contender.

They've also got a pair of hotshot right-handed defencemen in Zayne Parekh and Hunter Brzustewicz who are tabbed as the future of the team's right side, alongside MacKenzie Weegar.

And so, as seemed inevitable when Andersson made what felt a lot like a farewell media availability two months ago, the two sides will move on.

It's in everybody's best interest to make it happen before a very-centre-heavy draft starts Friday, improving the team's chances of adding another middle-man they can start developing.

None of this is to suggest a knee-jerk reaction to last week's contract talks is the play, as getting the most for a proven, inexpensive, heavy shooting, right-shot defender is paramount.

Given what Andersson brings as part of his six-foot-one, 202-pound package, there are no shortage of teams interested in the services of a top-pairing defenceman entering his prime, and being paid just $4.55 million next season to do it.

After all, we're talking about Sweden's captain at the recent world championships.

Andersson is armed with a six-team no trade list, which undoubtedly includes division rivals Edmonton and Vancouver of whom he joked, "I hate the Oilers, I hate the Canucks and that's just the way I am."

It's that sort of snarl that adds to his appeal as a leader in demand.

As a pure one-year rental he's an attractive commodity, but for those interested in locking him up long term with a sign-and-trade deal, the pot could get sweetened.

That's what could take some time.

But with teams around the league already two months into their off-season planning, surely those interested have long been prepared to delve more into what possibilities there might be in terms of adding one of the more passionate players in the loop.

Teams around the league in search of shoring up their right side have long been aware Andersson would likely be in play this summer.

It's important to note that the current situation is not acrimonious, nor is Conroy under the gun to make a move of any sort until next season's trade deadline at the very latest.

If the right deal can't be found this week, or even this summer, Andersson is a pro who would continue to be one of the team's emotional leaders to open next season, providing mentorship for Parekh.

But his presence would be the type of distraction Conroy has striven to avoid ever since the constant trade chatter surrounding other pending UFAs dominated the storyline two seasons back with Elias Lindholm, Noah Hanifin, Chris Tanev and Nikita Zadorov.

There's also the risk of injury to a lad whose 196 blocked shots last year were more than all but three players in the league. Remember, it was Andersson who played the final 12 games with a broken fibula suffered while absorbing a blast.

As a great example of how much more fruitful it is to cut bait on lads with one foot out the door, consider the trade last June that sent Jacob Markstrom to the Devils.

Not only did it land Conroy's crew a cornerstone defender in Kevin Bahl and the first round pick they'll use 18th overall Friday night, but it opened the door for Dustin Wolf to finally get a chance to prove conclusively he's the organization's goalie of the future.

Three birds killed by sending one frustrated stone east.

It also ended needless drama in the room and in the press.

An Andersson swap would add more depth to the Flames prospect ranks and give even more ice time and opportunity to Parekh, who is a shoe-in to start the season in the bigs due to his ineligibility to play in the AHL.

Andersson wears a letter on his jersey and has been one of the organization's most impactful second-round development stories in decades, but by essentially being forced to cash in on him is a golden opportunity for a team looking to retool by getting younger.

Now is the time teams have the cap space and maneuverability to effect the sort of significant change that comes with acquiring a proven, heart and soul defender to your top four.

Half the teams in the league could use an upgrade on the right side like Andersson, including the ever-open-for-business Dallas Stars, Nashville Predators and the Buffalo Sabres, whose GM has been frank about his openness to trading the ninth overall pick. Given the fact six or seven impact centres are projected to go in this year's top 10, surely Conroy has made an inquiry with Kevyn Adams, unless the Sabres are on Andersson's no-go list.

Toronto could also be a landing spot, as Leafs GM Brad Treliving drafted Andersson and re-signed him to the team-friendly deal he would probably love employing the Swede at for at least one more year as part of his desire to change his team's DNA.

Given the importance of maximizing this trade chip, you can understand if the patience that has been Conroy's hallmark is exhibited once again while shopping Andersson.

But whether he makes this trade this week or later this summer, Conroy has to get it done before the fall when teams are out of cap space and flexibility.

It's too important to wait any longer than that.

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Sportsnet.ca / Senators Notebook: How aggressive will Staios be during draft, free agency?

Alex Adams

OTTAWA — It's the time of the year when every hockey fan is refreshing X to see what their team's general manager is cooking up. In Ottawa, where "Steady" Steve Staios holds the reins for a Senators' organization that seems poised to blossom if the team is managed well this summer, the question is how aggressive will he be?

With the draft on Friday and free agency less than a week away, Staios and head scout Don Boyd spoke to the media on Wednesday morning.

Here is a summary of the storylines, updates and information from Ottawa as the Senators prepare to tackle the challenges of a busy summer in the NHL.

Giroux's uncertain future

The hottest topic in Sens-land revolves around the future of aging hometown star, forward Claude Giroux.

"We continue to talk. That's really all I have, nothing to report on," said Staios.

"We want Claude back."

Is no update an update?

The gap between the sides has been over the bonus structures of a contract, according to our Elliotte Friedman. If Giroux returns, there won't be a top-six role for him unless he grabs it.

"I'll give you Travis (Green's) line: (He)'ll dictate where he plays," said Staios on where Giroux will fit in the Sens lineup if he re-signs.

You wonder, if Giroux doesn't return, how they can replace his leadership and 50-point output from last season. Well, Staios currently has over $10 million in cap space to play with if Giroux does end up elsewhere.

Free agency and draft approach

Many fans want the Senators to be aggressive, whether that be at the draft or via free agency. That might not be Staios' plan: He hinted at a quieter summer in Ottawa.

"I don't feel like we need to force anything at this point in time. I like our group. But we're working hard to see where we can upgrade," he said.

"If I get aggressive to try and add, where do I add? And who is it? This is the question, and if I can, and it makes sense, I would. Everybody gets eager at this time of the year to make a big splash or get a big player in. But my approach has always been that it has to be the right fit at the right time."

"Was it more pressing last year (to add)? Was there a more clear direction? Probably", Staios added.

Don't forget it was supposed to be quiet at this year's trade deadline until Ottawa pulled off the Dylan Cozens and Fabian Zetterlund moves. Staios has the ultimate poker face. The Senators are rumoured to be trying to acquire high-impact players, so we should take Staios' words with a grain of smelling salts.

As for the 21st pick in the draft, Staios says he's open to moving down but not trading up because of the Senators' lack of draft capital. His head scout, Boyd, has gone over different tiers of the 2025 class, so if Staios does move down, he'd understand what type of player they'd be getting lower in the draft.

The fascinating storyline is that the Senators decided to hold onto their pick, meaning they won't have their first-round pick in 2026 as it stands because of the botched Evgenii Dadonov trade in 2021.

The 2025 class is generally not thought to be as strong as the 2026 class.

"There's places in the draft that might be a little softer than it has been in the past," said Boyd about the current crop

Staios explained his rationale for keeping Ottawa's 2025 first-round pick.

"We know where the ruling lies right now," he said.

"Speaking (with owner) Michael Andlauer about it, (we're) hoping for some leniency at some point in time, but we're comfortable that if we do have to give up the pick, that's where we're at."

In last year's draft, all of Ottawa's picks were six-foot-two or above. The Senators love size but say it's not the only redeemable quality they look for.

"I think size is a factor, as we see in our league. But there's certainly some players that aren't all that big that are hugely effective as well," said Staios.

"If it's a tie between a smaller or bigger player and a lot of the other qualities check off, (we) probably look at the bigger player."

Meanwhile, Boyd said the team just happened to draft taller players last year.

Interestingly, this year, Boyd said he asked 79 prospects in the interview process to make a joke. Only three could. Hockey needs more personality.

The goal for Boyd was to get players to loosen up.

Two Russian prospects told the same joke.

"The joke was, I won't play in the NHL. We said, well, that's not a joke. And they said, 'Yes, it is a joke. The joke is we won't play in the NHL,'" said Boyd.

"If they didn't tell a joke, they all failed the combine," Boyd said with a wry laugh.

More seriously, Boyd said, "I think there's four, five, or six guys in our area that'll be still available (at 21)."

"Everybody's going to get a player (they love). Everybody's winning a Stanley Cup on that (draft) day," said Boyd.

Hopefully for the Senators, in the 2025 draft, they select the next cornerstone of the franchise that will help propel them to that Stanley Cup.

One player from last year's draft they hope helps them to the promised land is Carter Yakemchuk, whom Boyd was quick to defend after a less-than-stellar season for the Calgary Hitmen (WHL).

"(Carter) did some things that we asked him to do," said Boyd. "I know that his numbers weren't as good last year, but he paid a lot more attention to detail in this game. Contrary to some people's beliefs, he played a better defensive game."

"He's got so many avenues and so many ways that he can play. He's big, he can handle the puck, he's got deception, he can shoot the puck (and) thinks the game offensively."

How close is Yakemchuk to playing in the NHL?

"Well, I don't know," said Boyd. "You saw him in exhibition games last year. (He was) pretty good."

"His job is to make (the Senators) make the decision, force their hands."

Jensen update

Nick Jensen battled a hip injury all season, which forced him to undergo surgery earlier this month.

"I wouldn't be surprised if he's ready sooner (than expected). But as far as a specific date, I'd be cautious on doing that right now," said Staios about Jensen's status.

You have to wonder if a healthier-than-expected Jensen changes the Senators' calculus in acquiring another defenceman, whether in free agency or via trade.

Zetterlund extension

The Senators signed Fabian Zetterlund to a three-year, $4.275 million (AAV) contract last week. Despite scoring only two goals in 20 games with Ottawa and being held pointless in the playoffs, Staios believes in Zetterlund.

"We feel like Zetterlund can grow into that type of player that creates five-on-five," said Staios. "He's a good shooter, something that I thought we lacked a little bit up front. He gets to those tough areas of the rink."

Backup goaltender resolution?

It doesn't seem like Anton Forsberg is returning to Ottawa as he hits free agency in a very weak goaltender class.

"I enjoy Anton, I think he's a great pro and a real good person," said Staios when asked about bringing back Forsberg.

Not exactly a vote of confidence, though Staios did say he was continuing dialogue with Forsberg's camp.

That leaves Leevi Merilainen — who needs a contract but is a restricted free agent this summer — as the likely backup goaltender next season.

"We're comfortable with Leevi," said Staios, while also expressing confidence in the team's current third goaltender, Mads Sogaard.

It was a small sample size, but Merilainen had a .925 save percentage in 12 games last season with three shutouts, which was better than Linus Ullmark's numbers with the Senators, while also playing stellar last season when in the minors in Belleville.

One could argue he was Ottawa's best goaltender last season. If he maintains that level, we could have a goalie controversy in Ottawa by the end of next year. Nevertheless, the Senators would be prudent to sign another goaltender as insurance for the unproven 22-year-old.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 06.26.2025

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TSN.CA / Marner next team betting odds: Golden Knights the favourites as rumors swirl

Luke Bellus

After spending nine years with the Toronto Maple Leafs, it appears Mitch Marner is set to test the free agent waters on July 1.

The 28-year-old winger enters the summer fresh off of a career-best 102 points in the regular season, bringing his career total to 741 points in 657 regular-season games, and projects to be one of the highest-paid players in the league on the open market.

With Marner just days away from becoming a free agent, FanDuel has priced a market on his next team, with two coming in shorter than 5-1. Let's dive into those odds.

Vegas Golden Knights +650 -> +230 -> -135

Is Marner heading to Vegas?Bryan Hayes, Jeff O'Neill and Jamie McLennan discuss the reports linking Mitch Marner to the Vegas Golden Knights and the different options the Toronto Maple Leafs have with the cap space leftover from Marner.

We have a new favourite.

After opening with the fourth-longest odds at +650, the Vegas Golden Knights now sit as the clear favourite at -135.

With reports that Vegas could move Thomas Hertl to open up cap space, the conversation around Marner to Vegas seems to be heating up.

Anaheim Ducks +850 -> +650 -> +500

Here come the Ducks.

After opening with odds of +850 to land Marner, Anaheim's odds to ink the winger to a deal have been getting shorter with each update.

After trading forward Trevor Zegras on Monday, the Ducks have the third-most projected cap space entering free agency and have already been busy this spring.

The team hired Joel Quenneville as their new head coach to start the off-season and acquired veteran winger Chris Kreider from the New York Rangers earlier this month.

After Monday's trade, the Ducks have just over $36 million in space this summer with restricted free agents Mason McTavish and Lukas Dostal in need of new deals and a total of 17 players currently under contract, per Puckpedia.

Team owner Henry Samueli set the tone last month that he was willing to spend to end his team's seven-year postseason drought.

"We're not going to write stupid cheques," Samueli said, per The Athletic. "But I told [GM Pat Verbeek], you do what it takes to make this a really steady perennial playoff contender and Stanley Cup contender down the road. And if it means signing big-name free agents, go for it. We told him, going forward, you will not be constrained by the budget."

Carolina Hurricanes +340 -> +470 -> +750

If leaving Toronto but staying in the Eastern Conference is the path for Marner, then perhaps no team makes more sense than the Carolina Hurricanes.

Carolina was back in the Eastern Conference final this season, falling 4-1 to the Florida Panthers and moving to 1-12 in their past 13 Conference Finals games under head coach Rod Brind'Amour.

With Sebastian Aho, Andrei Svechnikov and Seth Jarvis all under contract through 2029, and the team holding over $28 million of cap space, the Hurricanes seem to have enough ammo in the money department to back up the Brinks truck for a 100-point guy like Marner.

Toronto Maple Leafs +430 -> +1900 -> +2600

So, you're saying there's a chance?

A return to Toronto can't fully be ruled out until the ink has been put to paper on a new deal for Marner, but the odds are now stacked against the Leafs.

Two weeks ago, TSN Hockey Insider Chris Johnston spoke about why he believes Marner will test free agency and is "very, very likely" to leave the Maple Leafs.

After opening at +430, the Leafs have fallen to +2600 with the ninth-longest price in the market.

Here is a look at where every other team in the league is priced in his market.

Team Name	Betting Odds on May. 30	Odds on June. 16	Odds on June. 25
Chicago Blackhawks	+250	+750	+1800
Carolina Hurricanes	+340	+470	+750
Toronto Maple Leafs	+430	+1900	+2600
Vegas Golden Knights		+650	+230	-135
Anaheim Ducks	+850	+650	+500
Los Angeles Kings	+1100	+1000	+850
Florida Panthers	+1500	+2900	+3500
Utah Mammoth	+1500	+1500	+2000
Pittsburgh Penguins	+2200	+650	+1800
New York Islanders	+2900	+4000	+6000
San Jose Sharks	+2900	+2900	+2200
Philadelphia Flyers	+2900	+4000	+6000
Detroit Red Wings	+5000	+4000	+5000
Montreal Canadiens	+5000	+6000	+6000
Nashville Predators	+6000	+6000	+6000
Edmonton Oilers	+6000	+6000	+6000
Columbus Blue Jackets		+6000	+2900	+3500
Washington Capitals	+6000	+6000	+6000
Tampa Bay Lightning		+6000	+6000	+6000
Seattle Kraken	+6000	+6000	+6000
St. Louis Blues	+6000	+6000	+6000
New Jersey Devils	+6000	+6000	+6000
Dallas Stars	+6000	+6000	+6000
Minnesota Wild	+6000	+6000	+6000
Calgary Flames	+6000	+6000	+6000
Winnipeg Jets	+6000	+6000	+6000
Colorado Avalanche	+6000	+6000	+6000
Buffalo Sabres	+6000	+6000	+6000
Boston Bruins	+6000	+6000	+6000
Vancouver Canucks	+6000	+6000	+6000
New York Rangers	+6000	+4000	+5000
Ottawa Senators	+6000	+2900	+3500

Settled on the official announcement from the team which Mitch Marner signs his next contract with.

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