



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 17, 2025

## The News & Observer

### Hurricanes prospect has new high-profile teammate at Penn State, eyes pro ranks

By: Chip Alexander

Charlie Cerrato will have a new teammate at Penn State this year, and he could be the best hockey player in North America.

Gavin McKenna, the projected No. 1 pick in the 2026 NHL draft, recently announced he was committing to the Nittany Lions for next season. McKenna's uncanny ability and his hockey notoriety also have gotten the Canadian forward an NIL package worth \$700,000, according to various media reports.

That's the price of doing business in college sports these days, and Cerrato is just glad to have him. Drafted this year in the second round by the Carolina Hurricanes, Cerrato wants to follow up the school's first NCAA Frozen Four appearance with another.

"It was unbelievable, such a cool experience," Cerrato recently said of the Lions' NCAA run, which ended with a semifinal loss to Boston University in St. Louis.

Penn State forward Charlie Cerrato scores during game against Michigan at Pegula Ice Arena in University Park, PA, on Nov. 23, 2024. Photo by Kylie Barton (Penn State)

Penn State forward Charlie Cerrato scores during game against Michigan at Pegula Ice Arena in University Park, PA, on Nov. 23, 2024. Photo by Kylie Barton (Penn State) Courtesy Penn State athletics

"And going to the Frozen Four was an awesome learning experience. Obviously, it didn't end the way we wanted it to end, but we had a lot of young guys and we learned a lot from that. We're looking forward to going back and going in with a different mindset."

And a different, potentially loaded team.

In addition to McKenna, the Lions also will have defenseman Jackson Smith, a first-round choice by the Columbus Blue Jackets this year.

Cerrato was at home with family, antsy but hopeful, when his name was called by the Hurricanes, 49th overall. He quickly started packing for the Canes' prospect development camp, getting to Raleigh the day after the draft.

Pro sports pedigree

Cerrato, 20, was able to see how the Hurricanes do things, but already has had a pro sports indoctrination. He once roamed NFL locker rooms, observing players and coaches. His father, Vinny, was an executive with the San Francisco 49ers and Washington Commanders.

"He was a pro in a different sport, but I feel like all professional sports can piggy back off each other," Charlie Cerrato said. "The professionalism, the work ethic it takes to get you to the next level, is something he has given to me

since I was a young kid and started playing hockey. It's so great being from a family so involved with sports."

Penn State's Charlie Cerrato (15) during the game with Boston University. No. 12/5 Penn State dropped a 3-1 decision to No. 8/3 Boston University in the national semifinals on Thursday evening April 10, 2025 at the Enterprise Center in St. Louis. Photo by Mark Selders

Penn State's Charlie Cerrato (15) during the game with Boston University. No. 12/5 Penn State dropped a 3-1 decision to No. 8/3 Boston University in the national semifinals on Thursday evening April 10, 2025 at the Enterprise Center in St. Louis. Photo by Mark Selders Mark Selders Courtesy Penn State athletics

Vinny Cerrato played wide receiver at Iowa State and later was the recruiting coordinator for Lou Holtz at Notre Dame when the Irish won the 1988 national championship. Shifting to the pros, he was director of player personnel for both the 49ers (winning a Super Bowl) and Commanders, and also served as a college football analyst for ESPN before becoming a sports talk radio host.

Charlie Cerrato gave football a try, too — "I loved it," he said — and was a quarterback until he was 15.

"But from Day One, it was always hockey," he said. "I loved being at the rink, loved being in the gym. I loved football but those two-hour practices in 90-degree heat ..."

Speaking of being indoctrinated, Cerrato became a diehard Washington Capitals fan. His father apparently enjoys telling the story of Charlie being able to meet Alex Ovechkin one day in the Caps locker room — Charlie 4 years old at the time. It's a hazy memory to Charlie, but Ovechkin did become his favorite player and he said the Cerratos went to a "ton" of Caps games.

Fueling the fire

Growing up in Minnesota, Vinny Cerrato was a hockey player who found football to be his best sport. It was different for Charlie, who was a part of the USA Hockey National Team Development Program for two years and then spent a season with the Youngstown Phantoms in the USHL in 2023-24.

But was not drafted until this year.

"I went through some ups and downs, for sure, in junior hockey," Cerrato said. "But I feel like everything that happened to me was a blessing in disguise. I feel like everything happens for a reason and you come out better from it. I'm happy where I'm at."

But being passed over in the draft until he was 20 has further fueled the fire, he said.



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"Absolutely," he said. "Any time people doubt you, you can take it one of two ways. You can pout or you can use it as motivation. Just use it as a chip on your shoulder.

"When things go wrong, any time you pout and blame other people, it's just a waste of time. You're hurting yourself. Get back in the gym, get back on the ice, get back to work"

Off to college, and then ...?

Cerrato turned to college hockey and considered Michigan before choosing to go to Penn State. As a freshman, the guy called "Chucky" led all Big Ten rookies with 15 goals, 27 assists and 42 points in 38 games.

The Nittany Lions had their own ups and downs this past season but surged late to reach the Frozen Four. Cerrato had the primary assist on the overtime goal against Connecticut that got the Lions to St. Louis.

Cerrato had a quick response when asked about his strong points as a player – at least in his eyes – as well as his weaknesses.

"My competitiveness, my willingness to compete is something I've had my whole life," he said. "Whether playing

five or six minutes in junior or playing a lot in college, I feel my competitiveness will help me get to the next level.

"I think what I can work on are the small details. Especially being a center and making the jump to pro, you have to keep your stick on the ice, be on top of pucks and be in the right areas. Those small details make a huge difference, especially when you're in the Eastern Conference final and trying to make it to the Stanley Cup.

"That's what matters. That's what Rod wants.'

That being Rod Brind'Amour, the Canes coach, who is all about doing all the details the proper way. Cerrato, of course, would like to be playing for Brind'Amour soon.

Cerrato has good size at 6-foot-1 and 196 pounds. He has grit to his game. He's good on draws. He's responsible defensively.

"I have so much to get better on, and I'm young and can continue to do that," he said. "When my time is right, hopefully sooner rather than later, I'll make the jump. But I don't feel any sort of rush. I feel like I'm little more developed than most 17- and 18-year-olds being drafted.

"I feel like I'm in a great spot."

## Carolina Hurricanes' NHL schedule is out. Here's when the Canes play in 2025-26

By: Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes will celebrate the 20th anniversary of their 2006 Stanley Cup champions and seek to reach the playoffs for an eighth straight season in 2025-26.

The league released its full schedule Wednesday. The Hurricanes will open the season at home on Thursday, Oct. 9, against the New Jersey Devils at Lenovo Center in a matchup of Metropolitan Division teams.

It's the fifth straight season the Hurricanes have opened with a home game.

The Canes, as they did last season, will play six of the first eight games away from home to avoid conflicts with the N.C. State Fair. After a second home game against the Philadelphia Flyers, they will go West from Oct. 14-25 before returning to face the Vegas Golden Knights on Oct. 28.

The Canes will first face the Florida Panthers, now two-time defending Cup champions, on Dec. 19 on the road and then again Dec. 23 at Lenovo Center.

The NHL break for the 2026 Winter Olympics will be Feb. 6-Feb. 22, 2026.

The Canes will have a seven-game homestand from Nov. 26-Dec. 9, their longest stretch of home games since playing eight in a row in April 2021. They also will have a New Year's Day game at home against the Montreal Canadiens.

The Hurricanes will close the regular season with a four game road trip that concludes with a back-to-back set against the Flyers and New York Islanders on April 13-14. It

will be their 15th back-to-back of the season, matching last season's total.

The Canes reached the Stanley Cup playoffs for a seventh straight season in 2024-25, posting a 47-30-5 record and 99 points.

Carolina finished second in the Metro Division behind the Washington Capitals, who had 111 points. The Canes then topped the Caps in five games in the second round of the playoffs.

The Canes matched up against the Devils in the opening round, also winning in five games.

Last season, the Canes had a six-game road trip during the 2024 State Fair, their longest of the season, but won five of six. Carolina then closed the season with six of eight on the road.

The 2025-26 Carolina Hurricanes NHL schedule.

The 2025-26 Carolina Hurricanes NHL schedule. Contributed image Contributed image

How the NHL makes its schedule

Each Division Has Eight Teams

Games Within Division

5 teams x 2 home / 2 away (Subtotal 10 home / 10 away)

1 team x 2 home / 1 away (Subtotal 2 home / 1 away)

1 team x 1 home / 2 away (Subtotal 1 home / 2 away)



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Games Within Conference (Non-Division)

4 teams x 2 home / 1 away (Subtotal 8 home / 4 away)

4 teams x 1 home / 2 away (Subtotal 4 home / 8 away)

Non-Conference Games

16 teams x 1 home / 1 away (Subtotal 16 home / 16 away)

Grand Total – 82 Games

41 home / 41 away



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## The Athletic

### McTavish an offer-sheet candidate, Canes should let Ehlers cook: NHL offseason notebook

By: Shayna Goldman

The threat of an offer sheet didn't carry much weight in recent years, until last summer.

Aside from some sparks between the Canadiens and Hurricanes, first over Sebastian Aho (whose offer sheet was matched by Carolina) and then Jesperi Kotkaniemi (who left Montreal for Carolina), there hasn't been much traction on that front in the last 10 years.

And then the Blues disrupted the norm last summer, with not one but two offer sheets targeting the Oilers. Dylan Holloway and Philip Broberg emerged as key players in St. Louis and helped fuel their turnaround. Their success was a reminder of the power of an offer sheet. It's a mechanism that can give a team with draft capital and cap space a competitive advantage if general managers are willing to rattle their opponents.

Many wondered if the Blues would inspire a new trend and willingness to shake up the restricted free agent class.

Whether it was the threat of an offer sheet or general managers wanting a better salary cap picture ahead of free agency, teams got to work earlier on RFA extensions this summer. The Maple Leafs locked up Matthew Knies early. Edmonton extended Evan Bouchard, and the Rangers re-signed Will Cuylle. JJ Peterka, Noah Dobson and K'Andre Miller have all been traded and extended by their respective new teams.

And then more names, including Lukas Dostal, Bowen Byram and Gabriel Vilardi, came off the board when players (and teams) elected for arbitration.

Before general managers start daydreaming early about a stacked 2026 class of RFAs, there are still a few offer sheet-eligible players worth keeping an eye on this summer. That list starts with Mason McTavish.

Unlike Edmonton last summer, the Ducks have a ton of cap space at their disposal to easily match any offer thrown McTavish's way. So a mid-tier deal won't fly. An offer has to have some oomph behind it — at least to a tune of a \$7.02 million cap hit — to stump Anaheim.

Via PuckPedia

The Ducks don't need the draft pick compensation associated with the higher tiers. Their pipeline is stocked, and eventually Anaheim needs to turn those picks and young up-and-comers into actual NHLers to turn the corner. That's

why keeping McTavish makes the most sense, especially after moving on from Trevor Zegras.

But on the flip side, the Ducks may not want to make a commitment of that magnitude just yet. McTavish hasn't established himself as a true top-six center yet, and some of his comps, like Max Comtois, Max Domi and Casey Mittelstadt, add some question marks on just how much substance there is in his game. As much as the Ducks have short- and long-term financial flexibility, management still may not want to clog up the books too early with a hefty McTavish extension.

Anyone willing to roll the dice on McTavish has to see a little Dylan Strome in him — a late-bloomer who needs the right opportunity. For some eligible teams, such as the Canadiens, Bruins, Flames and Red Wings, it's worth throwing a dart this summer. At worst, it rattles Pat Verbeek in Anaheim, who easily matches an offer. At best, it lands a team a 22-year-old center who could thrive in a new environment.

Luke Hughes' next contract

Speaking of unsigned RFAs, there's Luke Hughes in New Jersey. Unlike McTavish, he isn't offer-sheet eligible, so there isn't that same pressure on the Devils to get a deal done sooner rather than later. But his extension could have a domino effect on the Devils' roster, depending on what he signs for.

Evolving-Hockey projects a six-year deal worth \$7.52 million a year. It's a contract that projects to age well, if he follows the path of comps Seth Jones and Noah Hanifin (and not Tyson Barrie or Dmitry Kulikov).

A contract of that value could lead to some subtractions to balance the books. The easy answer is flipping the last two years of Ondrej Palat's contract. But management could consider a bolder change on the blue line, too. If Seamus Casey or Simon Nemecek look ready for a full-time NHL role, their entry-level contracts would help offset Hughes' extension. But someone would have to step out of the starting six.

That's why Dougie Hamilton's name has surfaced this summer; as of July 1, he officially has a modified no-trade clause (instead of a full NMC), which could help facilitate a change. Hughes proved in Hamilton's absence that he could quarterback the top power-play unit and be a two-way difference in key minutes. It just depends on whether there is a market for the last three years of Hamilton's contract.

Bowen Byram extends in Buffalo



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A potential Hamilton trade is easier said than done because the defense market has been in a bit of a standstill, hinging on Bowen Byram.

The Sabres were prepared to match any offer sheets for Byram, but took away that option after filing for arbitration. Then on Monday night, Buffalo extended the RFA for two years, at \$6.25 million a year.

Evolving-Hockey projected a longer-term extension — an eight-year deal worth almost \$8 million a year on average. While a contract of that length could have opened the door to long-term savings, it was a risky play. As is, a \$6.25 million cap hit is pricey relative to two-year projections and his market value. Byram showed in Colorado that he can crush third-pair minutes. In Buffalo, he looks like somewhat of a passenger in a top-four capacity. While he isn't expected to be the driver of a pair with Rasmus Dahlin, his struggles away from the Sabres' number one sparked some concern. Maybe he just looked that exposed due to who he paired up with, otherwise. Until there is clarity on his true ability, the team can't afford to potentially overpay Byram, not with lefties Dahlin and Owen Power already locked up long-term.

A short-term contract lets Byram show exactly what he is capable of — and whether he can follow the path of comps like Brandon Montour, Ryan Pulock and Travis Sanheim, or if he is destined to be the next Jamie McBain or Zach Bogosian. But it's far from a perfect solution for either side because Byram's value could tank over the next two years. The Sabres could also lose him for nothing, since this contract walks him to unrestricted free agency.

So while this contract can quiet some trade buzz, it won't outright silence it. Because if the Sabres decide he isn't a long-term fit, management is officially on the clock to find a trade partner to ensure he doesn't leave for nothing. The team could take a more aggressive approach and use this contract as cost certainty for interested teams. A potential match, such as the Blues, who have an opening after waiving Nick Leddy, no longer have to worry about acquiring Byram and signing him for maximum value this summer.

Could the Sharks trade a defenseman?

After trading Cody Ceci last year at the deadline, trading Henry Thrun, and buying out Marc-Edouard Vlasic, the Sharks needed two things: bodies on the back end and more salary to reach the cap floor.

Two free-agent signings (Dmitry Orlov, John Klingberg) and a waiver claim (Leddy) brought in three NHL-caliber defensemen and \$12.5 million in cap space. With those additions and Shakir Mukhamadullin pushing for a mainstay role at the NHL level, the Sharks can consider a Mario Ferraro trade.

Ferraro has a year left on his contract and could also be packaged as a deadline rental in March. But teams would likely jump at the chance to add a 26-year-old with a \$3.25 million cap hit, especially after defensive prices spiked this summer. That cap hit comes in clutch for an acquiring team and San Jose; the Sharks should be able to save their last retention slot for the deadline to get maximum value on one of those newly-added veteran defensemen.

The Rangers could still use help on the left behind free-agent signee Vladislav Gavrikov. If Byram is off the trade block, the

Blues should be in the market for a lefty, too. The Jets may want a third-pair upgrade. The Red Wings' depth is far from perfect. The demand should be there, as long as teams are willing to gamble on a Ferraro glow-up outside of a challenging environment in San Jose, similar to Hampus Lindholm when he left Anaheim for Boston.

Rasmus Andersson's future

As much demand as there could be for a lefty like Ferraro, the right side is a coveted position. That could benefit the Devils if Hamilton officially goes on the trade block and the Penguins, who could flip the last two years of Erik Karlsson's contract. But Rasmus Andersson doesn't come with that same baggage, since he only takes up \$4.55 million on the cap for another year.

As the offseason market has evolved, the number of landing spots for Andersson has dwindled. But there are still teams seeking right-handed reinforcements. If the Stars or Lightning can clear space, Andersson could be a solid fit for either team. The Red Wings need a lot more help on the right than on the left. The Bruins' depth is still suspect. But the Golden Knights still look like the strongest fit, considering the Alex Pietrangolo situation and Andersson's chemistry with Noah Hanifin. Add in Andersson's willingness to extend there, which can help juice the Flames return, and it could all click — if Vegas can clear space for this year, and beyond.

After Andersson's current contract expires, he is in for a raise. Evolving-Hockey projects something in the \$8 million range. Even if the Golden Knights can get him to something more team-friendly, it will still take some maneuvering for Vegas, as it coincides with Jack Eichel and Pavel Dorofeyev also needing new deals.

The Penguins recently absorbed Matt Dumba's cap hit from Dallas and can afford to take on more. So can the Blackhawks, Flames, Blue Jackets and Kraken. The Ducks and Sharks outright need to add more salary. There should be a handful of buyers with space, because teams outside of the playoff picture were a bit less active in free agency this year. So the Golden Knights, and other contenders looking to shed contracts, should be able to move salary out if necessary.

The Penguins' three goalies

The goalie market seriously underwhelmed this summer, which added some intrigue to a potential trade candidate in Arturs Silovs. Between his waiver-exemption ending and the Canucks extending Thatcher Demko a year early, it seemed like his time in the organization was coming to an end. Over the last couple of seasons, he put in the work to raise his stock, between his experience at the NHL level and in the 2024 playoffs and his recent MVP honors after winning the Calder Cup with Abbotsford.

The Penguins, before acquiring Silovs on Sunday, didn't need a third goalie. Joel Blomqvist looks poised to play more, plus Tristan Jarry has another three years on his contract. With Silovs, Pittsburgh has a less-than-desirable three-goalie situation to navigate — unless another skate is about to drop.

Pittsburgh has all three salary retention slots open, so management can afford to commit one to Jarry for the next three years in the right trade. The problem is that he is



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incredibly streaky, so that multiyear commitment could still be dicey. Just take his swing from saving 12.4 goals above expected in 51 games in 2023-24, to last year's lows that saw him spending time in the AHL. And he doesn't have much pedigree, either. So while the Oilers seem like an obvious target considering their unstable crease, Jarry might only add to that volatility.

The Canes need to let Nikolaj Ehlers cook

The Hurricanes' system is both a blessing and a curse, in some ways. Few teams have managed to turn a playing style into an outright identity and maintain it despite roster turnover. But sometimes, that system can also bite the Canes when there isn't a willingness to depart from it.

As much as the Canes have a knack for maximizing players within their system, not everyone fits perfectly. Mikko

Rantanen didn't. Neither did Martin Necas. So when those situations arise, the question is whether the player should change their game to blend in more or if the coaches should let those players color outside the lines. The answer can be somewhere in the middle, as long as it doesn't suppress what someone like Nikolaj Ehlers can bring to the lineup.

Ehlers is a dynamic and creative forward who can electrify a team's offense. It's exactly what a team like the Hurricanes needs, around staples such as Sebastian Aho, Seth Jarvis and Logan Stankoven, who are perfect stylistic fits. But Ehlers' game does carry some risk, which could be why he was rarely deployed like a true top-line talent in Winnipeg. So will Rod Brind'Amour and the Canes' staff embrace all that Ehlers brings, and allow him to go against the grain from the standard that's been set? It could be the key to adding some dimension to Carolina's quintessential style.



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## Key dates for 2025-26 Carolina Hurricanes' schedule

By: Brian Murphy

The Carolina Hurricanes announced their schedule for the 2025-26 season. Carolina, which reached the Eastern Conference Final for the second time in three seasons, is seeking an eighth consecutive playoff appearance under coach Rod Brind'Amour.

Carolina made a big splash in the offseason, trading for defenseman K'Andre Miller from the New York Rangers and signing free-agent forward Nikolaj Ehlers, who played for Winnipeg since 2015.

### Opening night

Thursday, Oct. 9 vs. New Jersey Devils at Lenovo Center

### Saturday home games

The Hurricanes have 10 Saturday games at Lenovo Center, including Oct. 11 against Philadelphia.

### State fair trip

After the Oct. 11 game, the Hurricanes play six consecutive road games. Carolina returns to Lenovo Center on Oct. 28 against Vegas.

### Home cooking

The Hurricanes play seven consecutive home games from Nov. 26 (Rangers) through Dec. 9 (Columbus). Carolina has home games the night before and night after Thanksgiving.

### Ring in the new year

Carolina hosts Montreal on Jan. 1.

### Olympic break

NHL players are competing in the 2026 Winter Olympics from Feb. 6 through Feb. 22. The Hurricanes play Feb. 5 (vs. the New York Rangers in New York) and resume the season Feb. 26 vs. Tampa Bay in Raleigh.

### Regular-season finale

The Hurricanes close the season with four consecutive road games. The season-finale is April 14 at the New York Islanders.

### Preseason

Mon. Sept. 22 Tampa Bay 7 pm

Wed. Sept. 24 Florida 6 pm

Fri. Sept. 26 at Tampa Bay 7 pm

Sun. Sept. 28 Nashville 7 pm

Mon. Sept. 29 at Florida 6 pm

Sat. Oct. 4 at Nashville 4 pm

### Regular season

Thu. Oct. 9 New Jersey 7 pm

Sat. Oct. 11 Philadelphia 7 pm

Tue. Oct. 14 at San Jose 10 pm

Thu. Oct. 16 at Anaheim 10 pm

Sat. Oct. 18 at Los Angeles 9 pm

Mon. Oct. 20 at Vegas 10 pm

Thu. Oct. 23 at Colorado 9 pm

Sat. Oct. 25 at Dallas 8 pm

Tue. Oct. 28 Vegas 7:30 p.m.

Thu. Oct. 30 NY Islanders 7 pm

Sat. Nov. 1 at Boston 1 pm

Tue. Nov. 4 at NY Rangers 7 pm

Thu. Nov. 6 Minnesota 7 pm

Sat. Nov. 8 Buffalo 7 pm

Sun. Nov. 9 at Toronto 7 pm

Tue. Nov. 11 Washington 7 pm

Fri. Nov. 14 Vancouver 7 pm

Sat. Nov. 15 Edmonton 7 pm

Mon. Nov. 17 at Boston 7 pm

Wed. Nov. 19 at Minnesota 9:30 p.m.

Fri. Nov. 21 at Winnipeg 8 pm

Sun. Nov. 23 at Buffalo 1 pm

Wed. Nov. 26 NY Rangers 7 pm

Fri. Nov. 28 Winnipeg 5 pm

Sun. Nov. 30 Calgary 5 pm

Thu. Dec. 4 Toronto 7 pm

Sat. Dec. 6 Nashville 7 pm

Sun. Dec. 7 San Jose 5 pm

Tue. Dec. 9 Columbus 7 pm

Thu. Dec. 11 at Washington 7 pm

Sat. Dec. 13 at Philadelphia 7 pm

Sun. Dec. 14 Philadelphia 5 pm

Wed. Dec. 17 at Nashville 8 pm

Fri. Dec. 19 at Florida 7 pm



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Sat. Dec. 20 at Tampa Bay 7 pm  
Tue. Dec. 23 Florida 7 pm  
Sat. Dec. 27 Detroit 7 pm  
Mon. Dec. 29 NY Rangers 7 pm  
Tue. Dec. 30 at Pittsburgh 7 pm  
Thu. Jan. 1 Montreal 7 pm  
Sat. Jan. 3 Colorado 7 pm  
Sun. Jan. 4 at New Jersey 7 pm  
Tue. Jan. 6 Dallas 7 pm  
Thu. Jan. 8 Anaheim 7 pm  
Sat. Jan. 10 Seattle 7 pm  
Mon. Jan. 12 at Detroit 7 pm  
Tue. Jan. 13 at St. Louis 8 pm  
Fri. Jan. 16 Florida 7 pm  
Sat. Jan. 17 at New Jersey 7 pm  
Mon. Jan. 19 Buffalo 1:30 p.m.  
Thu. Jan. 22 Chicago 7 pm  
Sat. Jan. 24 at Ottawa 7 pm  
Thu. Jan. 29 Utah 7 pm  
Sat. Jan. 31 at Washington 5 pm  
Sun. Feb. 1 Los Angeles 3 pm  
Tue. Feb. 3 Ottawa 7 pm  
Thu. Feb. 5 at NY Rangers 7 pm  
2026 WINTER OLYMPICS  
Feb. 11-22 • Milan & Cortina

Thu. Feb. 26 Tampa Bay 7 pm  
Sat. Feb. 28 Detroit 7 pm  
Mon. Mar. 2 at Seattle 10 pm  
Wed. Mar. 4 at Vancouver 10 pm  
Fri. Mar. 6 at Edmonton 9 pm  
Sat. Mar. 7 at Calgary 10 pm  
Tue. Mar. 10 Pittsburgh 7 pm  
Thu. Mar. 12 St. Louis 7 pm  
Sat. Mar. 14 at Tampa Bay 7 pm  
Tue. Mar. 17 at Columbus 7 pm  
Wed. Mar. 18 Pittsburgh 7 pm  
Fri. Mar. 20 at Toronto 7 pm  
Sun. Mar. 22 at Pittsburgh 3 pm  
Tue. Mar. 24 at Montreal 7 pm  
Sat. Mar. 28 New Jersey 5 pm  
Sun. Mar. 29 Montreal 5 pm  
Tue. Mar. 31 at Columbus 7 pm  
Thu. Apr. 2 Columbus 7 pm  
Sat. Apr. 4 NY Islanders 7 pm  
Sun. Apr. 5 at Ottawa 5 pm  
Tue. Apr. 7 Boston 7 pm  
Thu. Apr. 9 at Chicago 8:30 p.m.  
Sat. Apr. 11 at Utah 5 pm  
Mon. Apr. 13 at Philadelphia 7 pm  
Tue. Apr. 14 at NY Islanders 7 pm



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## Need To Know: The Canes' 2025-26 Regular Season Schedule

By: Walt Ruff

RALEIGH, N.C. - Open your calendar, connect with your friends and family, and get set to make some plans.

The Carolina Hurricanes' 2025-26 regular season schedule is here.

To view the team's six-game exhibition schedule, which was announced last month, click here.

Opening Night...

The Canes will open their 28th season in North Carolina on Thursday, October 9, against the New Jersey Devils.

It is the first of two home games for the team, before they go on their annual two-week trek west, while the NC State Fair takes place.

Start Times...

All Monday-Saturday home games are scheduled to start at 7 p.m., except the following:

Tuesday, October 28 vs. Vegas - 7:30 p.m. (NHL's Frozen Frenzy: All 32 Teams In Action)

Friday, November 29 vs. Winnipeg - 5 p.m. (Black Friday)

Monday, January 19 vs. Buffalo - 1:30 p.m. (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)

Saturday, March 28 vs. New Jersey - 5 p.m.

All Sunday home games will begin at 5 p.m., except the following games:

Sunday, February 1 vs. Los Angeles - 3 p.m.

It is worth keeping in mind that some start time changes may transpire following the announcement of NC State's basketball schedule, and the NHL's national television schedule.

The Foes...

The Canes will play all Metropolitan Division teams four times, twice at home and twice on the road, with the exception of the New York Islanders and Washington Capitals. Carolina will only face those two teams, and all eight Atlantic Division teams, three times in order to keep the schedule at 82 games.

The Canes will play all Western Conference opponents twice, once at home and once on the road.

Home Ice Advantage...

Carolina finished an Eastern Conference-best 31-9-1 at Lenovo Center during the 2024-25 regular season campaign.

The team's longest home stretch of the upcoming schedule will be seven games, taking place from November 26 - December 9, starting Thanksgiving Eve against the New York Rangers.

Conversely, the club will have just one six-game road trip. The team goes away for its annual road trip during the NC State Fair from October 14-25, including stops in San Jose, Anaheim, Los Angeles, Vegas, Colorado, and Dallas. Their second visit to the Western Conference comes in early March.

Active Around The Holidays...

Whether you're looking for something to do with the family or an excuse to get away from them, the Canes schedule can assist with both this season.

For a second consecutive year, the team will take on the New York Rangers the night before American Thanksgiving (Wednesday, November 26) and then be right back in action for a Black Friday battle against the Winnipeg Jets (3 p.m.). They'll then also play on Sunday of that weekend, hosting the Calgary Flames for the third game in their seven-game home stand.

Around the holiday break, the Canes will play in Raleigh on December 23, 27, and 29. The trio of games will kick off against the back-to-back Stanley Cup Champion Florida Panthers. Then, following the league-mandated off days of December 24-26, the team will get immediately back to work against the Detroit Red Wings. Their final home game of 2025 will come against the New York Rangers on December 29.

Carolina will then put a bow on the holiday run with their second New Year's Day home game in franchise history. Winners of their last four January 1 games (home or road), they'll host Calder Trophy Winner Lane Hutson and the Montreal Canadiens this year.

Olympic Break...

With the long-awaited return of NHL players participating in the Olympics this year, the league's schedule will pause for over two weeks in February.

The Canes will have a break in their game action from February 6-25.

By The Month...



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The busiest months of the team's season will be November, January, and March, when they'll play 15 games.

January holds the most home games in a single month, with nine contests at Lenovo Center.

Setting Up Shop On Sundays...

18 of Carolina's 41 home games will take place on either a Friday, Saturday, or Sunday.

In total, the breakdown by day of the week is as follows:

Monday: Two (2) Games

Tuesday: Eight (8) Games

Wednesday: Two (2) Games

Thursday: Eleven (11) Games

Friday: Three (3) Games

Saturday: Ten (10) Games

Sunday: Five (5) Games

Dates You Should Know...

Thursday, October 30: The New York Islanders, potentially including the first overall selection in the 2025 NHL Draft, Matthew Schaefer, pay an early-season visit.

Tuesday, November 11: Entering the final year of his contract, Alex Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals come to Raleigh for the only time this campaign.

Saturday, November 15: Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, and the back-to-back Western Conference Champion Edmonton Oilers make their lone appearance in North Carolina as the Canes wrap up a back-to-back against teams from western Canada.

Sunday, December 7: The San Jose Sharks and Dmitry Orlov come to Lenovo Center amid their eastern swing.

Tuesday, December 23: The two-time defending Stanley Cup Champion Florida Panthers make their first of two visits this season.

Saturday, January 3: Brent Burns and Martin Necas return to Raleigh for the first time since joining the Colorado Avalanche.

Tuesday, January 6: Mikko Rantanen returns to Raleigh for the first time with the Dallas Stars.

Thursday, January 22: Conor Bedard, Teuvo Teravainen, and the Chicago Blackhawks make their annual trip to the Old North State.

Thursday, January 29: The Utah Mammoth arrive in Raleigh for the first time since revealing their new identity.

Tuesday, April 7: Before closing out the regular season with four straight on the road, the Boston Bruins are set to serve as the Canes' final home opponent during the 82-game slate.

Season Ticket Memberships On Sale Now...

The best way to never miss a second of the Canes' 2025-26 season is to lock into a full Season Ticket Membership.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 17, 2025



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

## NHL Releases 2025-26 Schedule-a few highlights for the Carolina Hurricanes

By: albhoo

The last real “tentpole” event for the NHL before we dive deep into the summer abyss is the release of next year’s regular season schedule. In previous seasons the league had decided to release the new schedule closer to the start of Free Agency, but this year the decision was apparently made to wait and let most of the major headlines of Free Agency shake out before they released everything.

As they tend to do, leaks started happening complete with ESPN announcing when their opening night would be—complete with such contending teams as Chicago and Pittsburgh. Now the rest of the league joins in on the fun.

At first it looked like the Canes were going to just drop the calendars and let that be that.

It appeared to mirror previous seasons where the Hurricanes decided to opt out of the fun of a funny video to go with the schedule drop. League-wide they typically don’t have the same shot as ones from the NFL because you aren’t going to try to cram all 82—about to be 84—games in a short video. Still, they are ways to make some noise and sure enough, it was a bit of a fake out as a few minutes later the Canes dropped this:

No, your device isn’t messed up. For some reason Twitter deleted the video so the Canes had a redo.

So the Canes decided to use Jarvy’s pals one more time while the iron was hot. There’s very little doubt that they’ll make another appearance when the Amazon Prime NHL series debuts later this summer featuring Jarvis, but it’s great to see them one more time.

As far as the actual schedule goes, there are parts that are expected—there’s a long road trip at the start of the season while the State Fair occupies the area next door to the Lenovo Center, that trip is to the west coast, and it’s made up with some longer home stands later in the season. There’s also a two week Olympic Break as those that are participating head to Italy to represent their country for the first time in over a decade.

The unexpected is how the season ends. Of their final 23 games, 15 of them are on the road. Unlike last year, their trips out west aren’t wrapped up early, instead they go out to Utah on April 11th, and their last home game is actually on April 7th against Boston.

As far as the rotation of the season goes, Carolina gets to host Florida twice this time around, and the NHL seemingly wanted to build tension for another meeting down the road in the playoffs by knocking out all three within a month—December 19th, December 22nd, and January 16th. There is good news for Canes fans though—they not only are home both sides of the major holidays—Thanksgiving and Christmas—they even play at home on January 1st at 7 PM against Montreal. With the Winter Classic happening on January 2nd instead of the 1st, the NHL is letting more teams have a game on day where a lot of fans can attend.

There’s another interesting date in January—January 6th. That is when the Dallas Stars come into town and a certain player will make his return to Raleigh. The start time right now is 7 PM, but don’t be surprised if that one is picked up nationally.

Other interesting (new) returns: The Avalanche come back with Martin Necas and Jack Drury on Saturday January 3rd, and Dmitri Orlov will return to Raleigh on December 7th.

If you need the whole schedule in one fell swoop, here’s is one version -

[https://media.d3.nhle.com/image/private/t\\_document/prd/qnc5zrqlku4liohjafft.pdf](https://media.d3.nhle.com/image/private/t_document/prd/qnc5zrqlku4liohjafft.pdf)

With the full schedule out, the national TV partners will dissect it and determine which games will appear on ESPN/ESPN app (remember their whole app process is going to be redone starting in September so there may not be ESPN + so much as just “available on the app/Hulu only”) and which games will appear on TNT. As a Cup contending team they won’t be shut out, it’ll just be interesting to see which games get picked up.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## The Hockey News

### Carolina Hurricanes To Open Season At Home Against New Jersey Devils

By: Ryan Henkel

The full 2025-26 NHL schedule comes out today at 1 p.m. EST, but it seems like teams are being allowed to release their home openers a bit earlier.

The Carolina Hurricanes announced that they will open their season on Oct. 9 against the New Jersey Devils at Lenovo Center.

The Canes faced off against New Jersey in the first round of the playoffs last season, with Carolina advancing in five games.

The two Metropolitan Division rivals will once again be jockeying for positioning next season and could very well be two of the top teams in the Eastern Conference when all is said and done.

The full schedule is slated to release in just a few hours.

#### Recent Stories

- 'I'm Very Excited About The Team In Carolina': Nikolaj Ehlers On Signing In Carolina
- Hurricanes Target Positional Depth In Opening Days of Free Agency
- Where Have Last Year's Carolina Hurricanes Ended Up?
- Carolina Takes Big Swing On Talented New York Blueliner
- 'Our Goal Is To Keep Getting Better And Raising The Bar': Eric Tulsky On Opening Day Of Free Agency
- 'The Last Two Years, It Wasn't Easy For Me Mentally': Dmitry Orlov Voices Potential Displeasures With Carolina After Signing In San Jose
- Hurricanes Sign Another RFA, Only 3 Remain Unsigned

### Hurricanes Sign Another RFA, Only 3 Remain Unsigned

By: Ryan Henkel

The Carolina Hurricanes are very close to finalizing all of their remaining RFA contract negotiations for this offseason.

With the signing of Skyler Brind'Amour last night to a one-year, two-way extension, the team has now made qualifying offers to four of their seven RFAs.

The Canes entered the offseason with eight RFAs, made qualifying offers to five of them and then added two more through trades.

The Hurricanes traded for both K'Andre Miller and Cayden Primeau while they were still unsigned RFAs, but agreed to terms on an eight year, \$7.5 million AAV deal in a sign-and-

trade for Miller and signed Primeau to a one-year, two-way \$775,000 deal.

And a couple of days ago, they extended Noel Gunler on a one-year, two-way deal as well.

That leaves the only outstanding RFAs needing new contracts as Ryan Suzuki, Domenick Fensore and Ronan Seeley.

The Hurricanes have taken care of a lot of business this offseason with those trades and key free agent signings, and if they can take care of these last outstanding contracts, the front office may finally be able to get a little bit of down time after a very busy year.

#### LINKS

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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# SportScan

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

1223124 Websites

The Athletic / NHL schedule release: Analyzing the biggest games and dates of the 2025-26 season

By Sean Gentile

July 16, 2025 3:14 pm EDT

If nothing else, give the NHL some credit for the timing of its full schedule release. By July 16, unless you care deeply about the future of Jack Roslovic, most of the major offseason questions have been answered.

Today, we're all free to sift through the finer points of the league's calendar for the 2025-26 season. The following year, when the 84-game schedule goes into effect, things will look a bit different. This time, the schedule is headlined by an Olympic break in February and a schedule that lasts from Oct. 7 to April 16.

Mixed in are some other dates that should hold extra interest, whether for one fan base or 32. Here's a look at the big ones.

Oct. 7: Opening night

The first night of the schedule features three total games — a triple-header. Things get started with Blackhawks-Panthers in Sunrise, Fla., at 5 p.m. ET. Connor Bedard versus the champs? It could be worse. That's followed by Penguins-Rangers at 8 p.m. ET, which we'll call the Mike Sullivan Bowl. The night finishes with the Avalanche-Kings. Both of those teams are good, which will be a nice change of pace.

Oct. 11 and Oct 28: Stacked slates

Having all 32 teams play on the same day is always a nice little gimmick, and the NHL is pulling it off on a Saturday and Tuesday in October. If you're a college football fan, too, prepare to put in a serious shift on the couch or at the bar.

Oct. 21: The rat's return

When the Panthers visited the Bruins in Boston on March 11, Marchand wasn't in the lineup for either team; Florida had acquired him at the deadline, but he was sidelined with an upper-body injury. That pushed his return to TD Garden to the fall and, in the process, completely changed the dynamic at hand for the Panthers-Bruins matchup. Now, rather than a freshly traded franchise icon, he's a two-time Stanley Cup champion and is helping another franchise chase dynasty status.

Nov. 8: Schaefer meets MSG

"How excited are you to play your first game at Madison Square Garden?" It's a bit of a cliché question, but that's because the answer is often worth hearing. The vibes at MSG are that unique. And it's even more true for defenseman Matthew Schaefer; he wasn't just the No. 1 pick in the 2025 draft — he was selected by the Islanders. The New York-New York rivalry will always bring plenty of juice, especially with what Schaefer recently told an NHL.com podcast about facing the Rangers: "I hate losing, so I'm looking forward to going and just beating them every time we play them." Here he will find out what Islanders-Rangers is truly like for the first time.

Nov. 14 and Nov. 16: A Swede escape

The league is again sending teams overseas for regular-season games. This time, it's the Predators and Penguins playing two games in Sweden. It'll be interesting to see whether Pittsburgh defenseman Erik Karlsson, one of the best Swedish players of his generation and a potential offseason trade candidate, is part of the action.

Nov. 22: A rematch of a rematch

At this point, it's strange to see the Panthers and Oilers play each other before June. Stanley Cup rematches, though, are always big nights on the calendar and given the recent history, that principle applies even more here. The big question, still, will be who's in net for the Oilers when they host the Panthers here.

Nov. 28: Holiday hockey

We're getting another Thanksgiving Day game in the United States. This time, it's the Rangers playing the Bruins in Boston.

Jan. 2 and Feb. 1: Sunshine spectacles

Both of this season's outdoor games are being staged in Florida. The first is the Winter Classic, between the Rangers and Panthers at LoanDepot Park in Miami, home of the Marlins. The second is a Stadium Series game between the Bruins and Lightning at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Fla, home of the Buccaneers.

Jan. 17: O Canada

This season's installment of Hockey Day in Canada — when all seven Canadian teams play throughout the afternoon and evening — features Montreal at Ottawa; Toronto at Winnipeg; the Islanders at Calgary; and Edmonton at Vancouver.

Jan. 19: Captain Serious comes back

The fact that Jonathan Toews is playing games at all is worth noting; he signed a one-year contract with Winnipeg after sitting out the last two seasons due to a variety of health issues. But his return to Chicago — where he captained three Stanley Cup teams and established his reputation as one of the best centers of his generation — is the big one. On nights like that, even beloved superstars can get a mixed reaction. In Toews' case, though, don't expect anything other than all-out adulation.

Jan. 23: Marnier mania

If you hoped that the Marnier saga, at least as it relates to the Maple Leafs, would end in July, we've got some disappointing news. Whatever comes next for him in Las Vegas will always be viewed, in one way or another, through the prism of his time in Toronto — what happened, what didn't happen and the way it all ended. Our first huge reminder of that will be his first game as a visitor in Scotiabank Arena, for Golden Knights-Maple Leafs. Bet on plenty of boos, even from the platinum seats.

Feb. 6-24: Take a break

The NHL's schedule will be fully cleared for this stretch. Hockey, of course, will still be played at the 2026 Winter Olympic Games in Milan and Cortina, Italy.

March 6: Deadline disruption?

We're getting seven games on NHL trade deadline day, which ... seems like a lot. Prepare for a lot of awkward morning skates and partially empty rosters.

April 12: Malkin's farewell — and more?



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This is likely to be Evgeni Malkin's final game against his biggest rivals, and that alone represents the end of an era: Penguins-Capitals, with Malkin as one of the primary participants, was one of the league's premier matchups for nearly two decades. Time, age and the Penguins' decline have taken off some of the shine over the last few years, but if this is the last Pittsburgh-Washington game for Malkin — and also maybe Alex Ovechkin, or Kris Letang, or (gulp) Sidney Crosby — it's worth circling on the calendar.

April 15: The race to the bottom

Down the stretch, we'll be monitoring the bottom of the standings to see who finishes in pole position for the Gavin McKenna Derby. Sharks-Blackhawks here, on the second-to-last day of the regular season, is certainly one to watch. The Penguins, meanwhile, finish up their schedule the night before against the Blues.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.17.2025

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The Athletic / Which NHL teams improved the most this offseason? Ranking all 32

By Dom Luszczyzyn

July 16, 2025 Updated 1:29 pm EDT

The summer calm has arrived, the time of the offseason where player movement slows to a crawl and most teams look set for next season — for better or worse. Some things can still change, but now feels like a good time to look at which teams improved (or declined) most this summer.

As usual, this article is about external changes only: who's in and who's out. There are a lot of internal reasons as to why a team gets better or worse from year to year, but that's not the focus here. It's all about whether a team looks stronger on paper now compared to where they were at the start of the offseason. That's based on the change in their Net Rating from their current roster to the one they ended the 2024-25 season with (including players acquired at the deadline).

This is not an exact science, nor is it a list of how good each team is expected to be next season — just how much they've changed. A great team with a poor offseason can still be a great team next season. Same with a bad team after an excellent offseason.

From most value added to least, here's how each team has changed this summer.

### 1. San Jose Sharks

Net Rating added: +26

In: Jeff Skinner, Adam Gaudette, Philipp Kurashev, Dmitry Orlov, John Klingberg, Nick Leddy, Alex Nedeljkovic

Out: Nikolai Kovalenko, Marc-Edouard Vlasic, Henry Thrun, Alexandar Georgiev

Addition by subtraction is often the most powerful tool when it comes to meaningful offseason change, especially for the league's worst teams. The Sharks added three new forwards, three new defensemen and one new goalie and even though all but one are below average, they're all upgrades over what's being replaced.

Jeff Skinner is one of the bigger names and he's usually at his best on bad teams. He has the offensive ability to play in the top six, but doesn't have the defensive chops to make it work in the bottom six on a good team. Here, he's home and should fit the Mikael Granlund void fine.

The bigger story here is on the back end. Dmitry Orlov gives the Sharks a legitimate top-four defenseman, while John Klingberg has the potential to be that if he can keep up his playoff turnaround. At the very least, one of the two will give the Sharks a real power-play QB, something they were missing after moving Jake Walman. Nick Leddy isn't more than a third-pair defenseman, but even that is an improvement over someone such as Marc-Edouard Vlasic or Henry Thrun.

San Jose will still likely be one of the league's worst teams next year, but they've given themselves a chance to be more competitive.

### 2. Montreal Canadiens

Net Rating added: +23

In: Zack Bolduc, Noah Dobson

Out: Emil Heineman, Logan Mailloux, David Savard, Christian Dvorak, Joel Armia

If you're a Canadiens fan, it's time to get excited. Only one team has improved more over the last summer externally and it's likely that few teams will improve more internally, given the collective age of Montreal's roster.

That doesn't necessarily mean the Canadiens will improve over last year's finish, but it does mean they are far less likely to regress with significantly more substance behind their results.

The big get is Noah Dobson, who has the potential to be Lane Hutson's Devon Toews. Dobson is a true top-pair defenseman, someone who adds tremendous upside to Montreal's back end with his puck-moving ability. He's a substantial get on his own, but the fact that it also means no more David Savard almost doubles the joy. Between the two, it's a 16-goal swing.

It's a similar effect in giving up Emil Heineman for Dobson, and then trading for Zack Bolduc soon after. Heineman is a fine bottom-six player on the rise, but Bolduc showed he's already top-six caliber in his rookie season. What's exciting about Bolduc is his defensive game, a sorely missing element from Montreal's forward ranks beyond Nick Suzuki.

If Montreal stood pat this summer, there was a good chance the team would take a step back after taking several steps forward last season. With Dobson and Bolduc in the fold, Montreal looks poised to build on last year's surprise playoff berth and prove they belong for the long haul.

### 3. Anaheim Ducks

Net Rating added: +15

In: Chris Kreider, Mikael Granlund, Ryan Poehling, Petr Mrazek

Out: Trevor Zegras, Isaac Lundestrom, John Gibson

The biggest addition for the Ducks is not one that the model is going to capture. It's the new guy behind the bench: Joel Quenneville. That's likely to be a significant tactical upgrade for the franchise, one that brings about numerous internal improvements.

Beyond that, Anaheim has also fortified its forward group with two major additions and one intriguing trade. Chris Kreider and Mikael Granlund aren't young or without flaws, but they are both top-six caliber players who can bolster Anaheim's attack. Those additions give young centers Mason McTavish and Leo Carlsson some actual help to work with on the wing, enough for the Ducks to start digging out from the league's basement.

As for Ryan Poehling, he may not possess the offensive flash that Trevor Zegras has, but he does bring the defensive substance the Ducks desperately need. He provides a big boost to Anaheim's bottom six.

### 4. Carolina Hurricanes

Net Rating added: +9

In: Nikolaj Ehlers, K'Andre Miller

Out: Brent Burns, Dmitry Orlov

At long last, the Hurricanes got their guy. There's no doubt that Nikolaj Ehlers will be a game-changer for the Hurricanes, the exact kind of dynamic offensive talent Carolina has needed for a while. Carolina may still be a 2C short, but the team's winger room is stacked.

The back end is a bit trickier to evaluate, given K'Andre Miller's last season. Miller took a step back along with the rest of the Rangers and doesn't currently grade out as a huge needle-mover relative to what the Hurricanes lost. The fit, though, is hard to ignore and it wouldn't be a shock to see Miller elevate to his best self in Carolina's system.

With Alexander Nikishin ready to rock, Carolina's defense looks promising, even if on paper it arguably took a step back. It's up to the



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new guys to deliver, but regardless, the addition of Ehlers is huge. It's enough to make the Hurricanes one of the league's most improved teams this summer, which speaks volumes about a team that's coming off a trip to the conference finals.

### 5. Vegas Golden Knights

Net Rating added: +9

In: Mitch Marner, Colton Sissons, Jeremy Lauzon

Out: Nicolas Roy, Victor Olofsson, Alex Pietrangolo, Nicolas Hague, Ilya Samsonov

No team added a better player this summer than Vegas, snagging a franchise star in Mitch Marner at a fair price. Marner completely changes Vegas' forward dynamic, adding an elite point producer with serious defensive chops at the top of the lineup. Adding Marner to a team that already features Jack Eichel, Mark Stone and William Karlsson is a serious luxury to Vegas' two-way ability.

The Golden Knights are going to be a force next season thanks to one of the league's most stacked forward groups. Losing Nicolas Roy and Victor Olofsson isn't a big deal when the team has so much depth already and they're adding a top 15 forward to the mix on top of that.

Adding Marner wasn't the only news of the summer, though. Vegas' standing took a hit when it was revealed that Alex Pietrangolo's playing days were likely over. While Pietrangolo may not be the player he once was, likely due to injury, he was still a very capable top-four option that brought stability to the back end. It's a hole that will be difficult to fill and while Kaedan Korczak is an extremely interesting internal option, Vegas' defense corps is still obviously worse without Pietrangolo around. He's a big loss that dampens the effect of adding a superstar.

### 6. Seattle Kraken

Net Rating added: +9

In: Mason Marchment, Frederick Gaudreau, Ryan Lindgren

Out: Andre Burakovsky, Michael Eyssimont

Dumping Andre Burakovsky and adding Mason Marchment was tidy business for Seattle. Burakovsky had been floundering the last couple of years for the Kraken while Marchment looked like top-six caliber for the Stars — for \$1 million less, too. Couple that with the veteran presence of Ryan Lindgren pushing Josh Mahura out of the lineup, and the Kraken look a bit more competitive going into next season.

Whether that should've been the plan, given the current league landscape and the prize waiting for the league's worst team at the end of this season, is an argument for another article.

### 7. Buffalo Sabres

Net Rating added: +9

In: Josh Doan, Justin Danforth, Michael Kesselring, Conor Timmins, Alex Lyon

Out: JJ Peterka, Sam Lafferty, Connor Clifton, Jacob Bernard-Docker

There are a lot of folks who haven't been thrilled with Buffalo's offseason and that's understandable. For the third straight year, it feels like it's been time to push the chips in, spend some money and gun for a playoff spot. Instead, the Sabres made depth moves and shipped off a true top-six scorer without addressing the void afterward.

It feels like a wasted opportunity, which probably makes Buffalo's placement here seem out of touch with reality.

Maybe it is — betting on the Sabres has been a terrible idea for over a decade. But maybe this is the year Buffalo does turn the corner, thanks to internal jumps buoyed by cleaned-up depth.

Josh Doan is not as good as JJ Peterka. That's a downgrade without question. But his underrated defensive game compared to Peterka's issues without the puck does mean the gap might not be as large as their point totals suggest. Add more Justin Danforth and less Beck Malenstyn on the fourth line and it's possible the Sabres can cover up the loss in the aggregate. There is arguably enough young, developing forward depth to sustain a Peterka-sized loss.

The more important factor, though, is that the jump from Connor Clifton to Michael Kesselring is substantially larger than the drop from Peterka to Doan. Buffalo's defense corps was a major weakness last season, one that Kesselring's presence can help fix. He did well in a top-pair role when Utah ran into injuries last season, enough to believe he's a true top-four defenseman. Pair him with Owen Power and Buffalo's top four looks genuinely decent for the first time in a long time.

The addition of Conor Timmins should help with things as well. He showed some promise in an elevated role with Pittsburgh, enough to believe he can form an actually good third pair with the defensively stout Mattias Samuelsson. Timmins isn't much, but he's probably a better option than what Buffalo was toiling with last year in the same role.

Defensive depth is something this team has been missing for a while. If everything goes according to plan after this offseason, it'll finally be a source of strength for Buffalo. And that could be what changes everything for this team. The Sabres have gone from one good pair led by Rasmus Dahlin to potentially three.

### 8. Ottawa Senators

Net Rating added: +7

In: Lars Eller, Jordan Spence

Out: Adam Gaudette, Travis Hamonic, Anton Forsberg

One of Ottawa's biggest issues last season was a wretched third pair. No matter what combination of Tyler Kleven, Nikolas Matinpalo and Travis Hamonic was out there, things did not go well. The addition of Jordan Spence helps alleviate that. He's someone with a proven ability to crush sheltered minutes. Some may scoff at the idea of a third-pair powerhouse, but the Senators weren't getting anything close to what Spence can offer in the same role.

Spence, based on his numbers after accounting for usage, looks like a player who has the potential to make a top-four jump. That's the best-case scenario, which would push Nick Jensen to a more appropriate role. If the worst case is that Spence can't (likely due to his smaller stature), but keeps crushing soft minutes, that's still a big win that has moved the needle considerably for the Senators.

Ottawa may not have filled its biggest need (a top-line forward), but cleaning up the edges of the roster has put them on more stable playoff footing going into next season.

### 9. Detroit Red Wings

Net Rating added: +6

In: James van Riemsdyk, Mason Appleton, Jacob Bernard-Docker, John Gibson

Out: Vladimir Tarasenko, Tyler Motte, Jeff Petry, Alex Lyon, Petr Mrazek

The Red Wings may have mostly operated around the edges, but the team looks better because of it, even if none of the players the team brought in look like they bring a lot to the table. James van Riemsdyk and Mason Appleton aren't anything special, but it beats playing someone such as Tyler Motte. Jacob Bernard-Docker doesn't look like much either, but if the alternative is Jeff Petry or Justin Holl, that's a small win for the Red Wings, too.

The biggest change, though, is between the pipes. John Gibson's track record has been spotty of late, but he looked genuinely locked in last season and should provide a more stable presence over Alex Lyon.

It's a patchwork job and the team still needs work overall to make the postseason, but the Red Wings do look incrementally more competitive.

### 10. Tampa Bay Lightning

Net Rating added: +6

In: Pontus Holmberg, Jakob Pelletier

Out: Luke Glendening, Nick Perbix

Just how bad was Tampa Bay's depth last year? The simple addition of two slightly more competent bottom-six forwards, Pontus Holmberg and Jakob Pelletier, looks like a major contribution for a contending team. Holmberg, in particular, is a massive upgrade over Luke Glendening, whose Net Rating drifted below minus-10 last year, one of the worst



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marks in the league. With the Lightning's elite top six still in place, a couple of fixes at the bottom has them looking like one of the teams to beat this year.

### 11. Boston Bruins

Net Rating added: +4

In: Viktor Arvidsson, Tanner Jeannot, Sean Kuraly, Michael Eyssimont

Out: Cole Koepke, Parker Wotherspoon

The Bruins look better for just one reason and that's the addition of Viktor Arvidsson. His presence as a top-nine level player helps push one of Boston's lesser options out of the lineup. The rest? They mostly just replace other similarly poor players at a much higher cost. Between Tanner Jeannot and Sean Kuraly, the Bruins are spending \$5.25 million on two replacement-level players. If only there were a smarter way to spend \$5.25 million ...

### 12. New York Rangers

Net Rating added: +3

In: Taylor Raddysh, Vladislav Gavrikov, Scott Morrow

Out: K'Andre Miller, Chris Kreider

At the very least, Vladislav Gavrikov looks like he can be a significant upgrade over K'Andre Miller. Gavrikov was a true top-pair defenseman for the Kings last season and a defensive beast. He should look great on a pair with Adam Fox, or drive a matchup pair behind him — something Miller struggled to do last season.

Still, it would've been nice to add Gavrikov to a blue line that still had Miller rather than choose one over the other. The Rangers went from being short two top-four defensemen to being short two top-four defensemen. It's possible that Scott Morrow can step in and be that right away for them, but it doesn't feel like a likely bet in Year 1, considering how green he looked during the playoffs for Carolina.

As for the forwards, things still look really thin. Taylor Raddysh is probably a fourth liner and the Rangers already have enough of those.

### 13. Chicago Blackhawks

Net Rating added: +3

In: Andre Burakovsky, Sam Lafferty

Out: Philipp Kurashev, Patrick Maroon, Alec Martinez, TJ Brodie

It's probably not a good sign that one of the league's absolute worst teams only marginally improved compared to last season. Andre Burakovsky is not the top-six forward he once was and is probably only a minor upgrade over what was already here.

A lot is riding on internal improvement for Chicago this year. With no reinforcements coming in, it's up to the youngsters to step up. Good luck.

### 14. New Jersey Devils

Net Rating added: +2

In: Connor Brown, Evgenii Dadonov

Out: Erik Haula, Curtis Lazar, Brian Dumoulin

With Connor Brown and Evgenii Dadonov in the fold, New Jersey's bottom six is slightly better. Slightly. There's still a lot of work to do in order to make this team a contender, though. The Devils desperately need one more top-six forward to move up a tier.

### 15. Philadelphia Flyers

Net Rating added: +1

In: Trevor Zegras, Christian Dvorak, Dan Vladar

Out: Ryan Poehling

Sorry, but it was really funny to see the Flyers address their biggest problem, goaltending, with one of the worst options around. Hopefully, Dan Vladar can do well here, but his track record is rough.

Trevor Zegras and Christian Dvorak are a lot more interesting. Zegras offers a potential offensive spark that's seriously missing among the team's forward group, while Dvorak should help replace some of the depth defense that was lost when the team dealt Ryan Poehling for Zegras.

The Flyers probably won't be much better than last year, but the addition of Zegras is at least intriguing. The upside there is obvious — he just needs to make due on his promise.

### 16. Minnesota Wild

Net Rating added: 0

In: Vladimir Tarasenko, Nico Sturm

Out: Gustav Nyquist, Frederick Gaudreau, Declan Chisholm

The Wild spent the summer rearranging deck chairs. Vladimir Tarasenko and Nico Sturm are pretty close in impact to Gustav Nyquist and Frederick Gaudreau. The real wild card here will be how much value Zeev Buium can bring in from the jump. The Wild moved Declan Chisholm to make room for the rookie defender — will it pay off?

### 17. Calgary Flames

Net Rating added: 0

In: Ivan Prosvetov

Out: Dan Vladar

Does losing Anthony Mantha count? Probably not. In that case, we get one replacement-level goalie replacing another. Boring!

### 18. Columbus Blue Jackets

Net Rating added: 0

In: Charlie Coyle, Miles Wood, Isac Lundestrom

Out: James van Riemsdyk, Sean Kuraly, Justin Danforth, Jordan Harris, Daniil Tarasov

The Blue Jackets shuffled a few things around, mostly to end up in the same place. Miles Wood and Isac Lundestrom dragging things down is the primary culprit for that, though Wood adds some jam that could be helpful for a young team.

At the very least, Charlie Coyle is a stabilizing piece down the middle for the team's top nine. He offers some positional flexibility as a utility player and was a decent get — even if the cost to acquire him felt high.

### 19. Washington Capitals

Net Rating added: 0

In: Justin Sourdif

Out: Andrew Mangiapane, Lars Eller

After having one of the strongest offseasons last year, the Capitals mostly moved around the edges this summer. The hope is that internal improvements from key young players will be able to replace what the team lost in Andrew Mangiapane and Lars Eller. Ryan Leonard and Hendrix Lapierre look like they can adequately fill those shoes.

Newcomer Justin Sourdif is the wild card here, considering his lack of NHL experience (four games) and Washington's high acquisition cost. I don't currently have a projection for him, but it doesn't feel likely he will move the needle a considerable degree here.

### 20. St. Louis Blues

Net Rating added: -1

In: Pius Suter, Nick Bjugstad, Logan Mailloux

Out: Zack Bolduc, Radek Faksa, Nick Leddy, Ryan Suter

St. Louis' placement here is not a product of what seems like a decent summer, but rather the lack of a projection for Logan Mailloux. The young defender played just seven chaotic games for Montreal last year and it wouldn't be fair to judge what he can do based on that data. In theory, he's the exact kind of defender the Blues need: one who can bring a lot of offense from the blue line.



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In practice, though, Mailloux is a giant question mark. Zack Bolduc isn't — he looks like a potentially strong top-six player with defensive upside. The difference there is what colors the Blues' placement here. If Mailloux can be as impactful as Bolduc already is, the Blues would shoot up considerably. That's still a big if at this juncture, but at the very least, it was probably a worthy bet considering St. Louis' surplus of winger talent. The presence of Jimmy Snuggerud for a full season should help offset the loss of Bolduc internally.

Aside from that, it's easy to like what the Blues did nabbing Pius Suter and Nick Bjugstad. Those two considerably bolster the team's center depth, with the latter being a notable upgrade over Radek Faksa.

### 21. Pittsburgh Penguins

Net Rating added: -1

In: Anthony Mantha, Justin Brazeau, Matt Dumba, Parker Wotherspoon, Connor Clifton, Arturs Silovs

Out: Matt Grzelcyk, Conor Timmins, Vladislav Kolyachonok, Alex Nedeljkovic

The problem with Pittsburgh's summer is that the Penguins have not become bad enough yet. If they want to be serious about Gavin McKenna, there's still a lot of work to get to Chicago and San Jose territory.

The additions that Pittsburgh did make do look like decent lottery tickets, though. Anthony Mantha, if healthy, looks like a great bounce-back candidate while Justin Brazeau showed some nice promise two seasons ago. On defense, Parker Wotherspoon's underlying numbers suggest he has some upside while Matt Dumba has the name recognition to potentially get flipped for value at the deadline. The Penguins gave themselves a lot of future mid-round pick ammo here.

Until Bryan Rust, Rickard Rakell or Erik Karlsson get moved, though, this has been a very mid summer. There's a lot of room to get worse.

### 22. Colorado Avalanche

Net Rating added: -2

In: Brent Burns

Out: Jonathan Drouin, Charlie Coyle, Miles Wood, Ryan Lindgren

It feels like many are underrating the Colorado Avalanche, at least if Gabriel Landeskog looks as good as he did during the playoffs. He could be the biggest difference between last year's team and this year's, helping to replace some of the void left by Mikko Rantanen. Retaining Brock Nelson is also underappreciated.

In terms of who's in and who's out from this summer, though, the Avalanche did take a small step back. Jonathan Drouin and Charlie Coyle are notable losses from the top nine that will be felt; there's no denying that. But it does help that the Avalanche let Ryan Lindgren walk and signed Brent Burns instead. Even at his advanced age, Burns still has some game left and brings borderline top-four value to the Avalanche as a puck-mover. With the team's second pair being one of the biggest problems last year, Burns is a savvy addition that keeps Colorado in the contender's circle.

### 23. Florida Panthers

Net Rating added: -2

In: Jeff Petry, Daniil Tarasov

Out: Nate Schmidt, Vitek Vanecek

The defending back-to-back champs are basically running it back. Be very afraid that the Panthers only lost two goals of value and were able to keep all three of their key free agents: Sam Bennett, Brad Marchand and Aaron Ekblad. Florida looked likely to be at the bottom of this list after the parade ended and management's ability to minimize the damage has been commendable.

The only notable difference here is Jeff Petry in to take Nate Schmidt's role. It's a downgrade given what Schmidt was able to do for the Panthers last season, but a small one. Petry wasn't great in Detroit's top four, but should be adequate in a sheltered role.

### 24. New York Islanders

Net Rating added: -2

In: Jonathan Drouin, Maxim Shabanov, Emil Heineman, David Rittich

Out: Noah Dobson

Noah Dobson — even if he's not exactly beloved by those on Long Island — is a big loss. While he's probably not as good as his 2023-24 breakout, he's probably also not as bad as he looked in 2024-25 (though the numbers don't exactly agree with that sentiment either). He's a top-pair defenseman and any team losing that is going to take a big hit. Until Matthew Schaefer arrives, the Islanders' defense corps is going to be a lot worse.

What's going a bit unnoticed is that the team's forward group looks a lot better. Beyond a healthy Mathew Barzal, the addition of Jonathan Drouin looks like a nice bet given what he's shown in Colorado the last two seasons. It's possible he's completely a product of Nathan MacKinnon, but the reward is worth that risk if he's truly found his game as a top-six forward. Emil Heineman, while not a needle-mover, is a decent bottom-six improvement over a big drag like Kyle MacLean.

The wild card is Maxim Shabanov, who signed with the Islanders after scoring 67 points in 65 games in the KHL. It's hard to know what Shabanov can do in the NHL given his size, but it's worth noting that Maxim Tsyplov, whose KHL numbers were worse, ended up being a decent third liner. If Shabanov can mirror that, the Islanders' forward group looks a lot deeper than given credit for, even if it lacks high-end upside.

### 25. Vancouver Canucks

Net Rating added: -2

In: Evander Kane

Out: Pius Suter

The trade is one-for-one and it's not a win for Vancouver. Evander Kane looks like a downgrade.

Kane is probably better than his underlying numbers give him credit for and he was a noticeable force during the playoffs ... aside from his penalty box parade, of course. He brings a different element to Vancouver's top six and should add some offensive pop. But it would've been nice to see the Canucks retain Pius Suter on top of that. If it was either or, Vancouver made a questionable choice — especially when factoring for position.

Without Suter, the Canucks remain thin up front and especially down the middle. His defensive presence will be seriously missed. Depending on Filip Chytil to stay available for an entire season is a huge gamble and the Canucks will be in trouble the minute he's out.

It's not a disastrous offseason, but these being the only moves so far doesn't inspire much confidence.

### 26. Dallas Stars

Net Rating added: -4

In: Radek Faksa, Vladislav Kolyachonok

Out: Mikael Granlund, Evgenii Dadonov, Mason Marchment, Cody Ceci, Matt Dumba

The Stars had one mission this offseason: fit under the cap. Dumping Mason Marchment and Matt Dumba fit the bill and what remains should still be a good team. There are internal solutions to both that minimize their losses, especially Dumba, whose game is closer to addition by subtraction territory. Vladislav Kolyachonok looks like a boilerplate third-pair guy, but even that feels like an upgrade on Dumba.

For many, the big loss on paper is probably Mikael Granlund. The Stars are more than deep enough to survive his absence. His empty-calorie points probably won't be missed much — especially if someone such as Mavrik Bourque takes a big step.

### 27. Nashville Predators

Net Rating added: -4

In: Erik Haula, Nicolas Hague, Nick Perbix

Out: Colton Sissons, Jeremy Lauzon



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After "winning" the offseason last year, the Predators decided to go in a different direction this summer. Erik Haula isn't much of an upgrade over Colton Sissons, and while Nicolas Hague holds some promise, he doesn't have the top-four experience that Jeremy Lauzon has. Nick Perbix also feels a little redundant to some of the lesser-known options the team already has, too. The end result is more of the same, but probably a little worse.

### 28. Utah Mammoth

Net Rating added: -8

In: JJ Peterka, Brandon Tanev, Nate Schmidt

Out: Matias Maccelli, Josh Doan, Nick Bjugstad, Michael Kesselring

Of all the team placements on this list, Utah's might be the most perplexing. JJ Peterka was one of the biggest additions of the summer, but he's far from a perfect player and it did come at a depth cost.

Peterka has a bit of defensive baggage that limits his overall value. The upside is there for him to be a star and make the trade a big win, but cleaning things up without the puck is a priority. Stylistically, he's a strong fit for a rush-oriented team, but Utah's depth has taken a hit in the process. Josh Doan looks like a capable top-nine player, while Michael Kesselring has proven he has top-four upside.

In the grand scheme of things, it's always better to get the best player in the deal. But in this case, the Mammoth's depth options aren't strong enough to make up the difference. The loss of Matias Maccelli exacerbates that up front, while the addition of Nate Schmidt doesn't do enough to cover Kesselring's departure. Adding to that is a seemingly small swap with notable ramifications. Going from Nick Bjugstad to Brandon Tanev is a three-goal drop itself, considering Tanev's recent decline over the last two years.

Utah's top six is stronger now and some internal growth should still put the Mammoth in the thick of the playoff race. But this team isn't as deep as it was at the start of the summer.

### 29. Edmonton Oilers

Net Rating added: -8

In: Andrew Mangiapane, Ike Howard, Curtis Lazar

Out: Evander Kane, Viktor Arvidsson, Connor Brown, Corey Perry, John Klingberg

For the Oilers, everything hinges on their two rookies. They need one or both of Ike Howard and Matthew Savoie to be good from the jump.

That's because a lot of their forward depth has been turned over this summer. Gone are Evander Kane, Viktor Arvidsson, Connor Brown and Corey Perry — all of whom looked like serviceable middle-six talents. In their place is only Andrew Mangiapane, who could have some upside in a bigger role, but is coming off a down year with the Capitals.

The Oilers have lost a lot on paper. They're still an elite team, but how Edmonton responds internally — with the rookies as focal points — will dictate how far the Oilers can go next season.

### 30. Winnipeg Jets

Net Rating added: -13

In: Gustav Nyquist, Jonathan Toews, Tanner Pearson

Out: Nikolaj Ehlers, Mason Appleton, Brandon Tanev

If it makes Jets fans feel any better, this is roughly where the Jets ended up on last year's list — mostly as a result of being unable to retain several key deadline additions. This time around, it's harder to see a silver lining, not after losing one of their most important forwards in Nikolaj Ehlers. He's a true top-six scorer, one whose absence will be felt heavily in the team's top six. Gustav Nyquist is far from an ideal stop-gap.

On top of that, the Jets are betting heavily on hometown hero Jonathan Toews. It's a wonderful story for Manitobans, but it's fair to be skeptical about how much on-ice value Toews can actually provide, given his age, a significant absence from hockey and what he already was when he left. The best guess based on his previous trajectory is that Toews can be an OK 4C for the Jets this season. Winnipeg seems to be penciling him in

as the team's 2C, an incredibly ambitious goal that Toews will likely have a hard time reaching.

### 31. Toronto Maple Leafs

Net Rating added: -13

In: Matias Maccelli, Nicolas Roy

Out: Mitch Marner

There is a gigantic Mitch Marner-sized hole in the Leafs' forward group that remains unfilled. The Leafs badly needed a true top-six forward to fill that void, but didn't have a lot of options to do so. What they did to get Matias Maccelli and Nicolas Roy was savvy and has bolstered the team's forward depth, but it obviously doesn't come anywhere close to equaling the value Marner brings.

Without Marner and without an adequate top-six forward replacement, the Leafs enter the 2025-26 season a lot worse on paper. They're still a quality playoff team, but they've fallen outside the contending tier. Toronto is now arguably closer to the Ottawa and Montreal tier of the Atlantic than it is to the Florida and Tampa Bay tier.

### 32. Los Angeles Kings

Net Rating added: -18

In: Corey Perry, Joel Armia, Cody Ceci, Brian Dumoulin, Anton Forsberg

Out: Tanner Jeannot, Vladislav Gavrikov, Jordan Spence, David Rittich

You've heard of addition by subtraction? Well, the Kings pulled off the rare feat of subtraction by addition. On defense, the team turned Vladislav Gavrikov, an actual top-pair defenseman, into Cody Ceci and Brian Dumoulin, two low-end third-pair defensemen — at best. They also parted ways with Jordan Spence, an undersized defender who looked promising in a sheltered role last year.

The series of decisions is among the strangest in recent memory, where the team ended up paying the exact same amount of money (\$8.5 million total) to downgrade their blue line by 18 goals.

It is possible that The System is all that matters in Los Angeles, that both Ceci and Dumoulin will be better than they look because of it and vice versa for the departed. Given the age and track record of the two new guys coming in, consider me highly skeptical of the bet the Kings made here — one where they saved zero dollars and got a lot worse in the process.

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The Athletic / What the NHL gets wrong in sticking with a decentralized draft format

By Scott Wheeler

July 16, 2025 Updated 8:05 am EDT

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it," might be the only cliché that we apparently don't subscribe to in hockey.

For a long time, the NHL ran a centralized draft that worked. Then they tried a decentralized one, and it didn't. Naturally, they're going to try to fix the broken one.

Aside from the pandemic-affected 2020 and 2021 drafts, this was the first year the league went to a decentralized model.

I know why they want to. I was stuck in that Nashville airport in 2023 when the storm clouds rolled in, and the delays and cancellations piled up, and the gathering executives, scouts, agents, players, team personnel and media, desperate to get home for July 1, had to do their business from the gates, some sitting on the ground and others calling it quits and finding available hotel rooms. I understand why they hate the logistics of it. I understand the size limitations of those draft floor tables and the growing number of people who are involved but left out of the big



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day (though for many of those who were included at those tables, that big day was also a special one they may now never get to have again). I understand why they prefer the privacy of a conference room to openly discuss their next pick or make their next move over the earshot close quarters of the floor. I know it's cheaper for owners and the league to do it this way, and that there was some sticker shock at the cost of the draft at Sphere in Vegas last year (though the decision to decentralize had already been made before that).

There was some good in what took place in Los Angeles at the Peacock Theater last month. I thought the lighting and staging were striking and popped. I thought the commissioner asking all of the players in attendance to stand and soak it in was a nice way of giving them their moment, and it was followed by an early emotional high with Matthew Schaefer and some really nice touches — the breast cancer ribbon on the Islanders jersey, the way they let him catch his breath. There's nothing fans hate more than the wants and complaints of the media, but in the interest of highlighting the positives, the media setup in the mezzanine level was the best it's been at any draft I've covered from a logistics standpoint and the wifi, which famously never works at these things, was borderline fast (!) — in large part because there were so few media in attendance, I'm sure.

For a moment, I thought to myself, "This is actually going well."

But then it didn't, and it didn't for hours longer than it should have, so that the missteps festered and it grew harder and harder to watch.

The Draft House was a predictable debacle, slowing down the production by requiring almost every player on Day 1 to step into its box of choppy connections, delayed feedback, mic echoes, awkward silence and even cuts. Some of the managers could be seen chuckling or frustrated during the issues. In a particularly uncomfortable moment, James Hagens, the American star of the night, was asked to wave at a broken screen. Patching into 32 different rooms, with 32 different lines of communication and camera equipment, was always going to produce the problems that it did, too, and the league should have known that.

After giving the players their moment off the top of the show and lining them all up at the seats nearest the exit of their rows, they all felt they had to go down the line and shake hands with each other after Schaefer did — and who could blame him, a teenager in the haze and adrenaline of it all. On the stage, their moment felt hollow. Several of the top prospects stayed home once they knew their moment wasn't going to be the traditional one, arm-in-arm with their new team on the stage for that draft day photo. Some agents even advised their players to, predicting they'd enjoy it more.

The buzz outside in the square at L.A. Live, a place invented to manufacture it for these types of things, felt nothing like it usually does in the host city at the draft. It was so good, so successful, in Vancouver, Montreal and Nashville so recently, too — those cities coming alive with hockey people, their bars and restaurants slammed with them, fans wandering through their local spots and stumbling upon their childhood heroes, everyone at ease and willing to share a beer, a conversation or a photo. Even in Vegas, where it's hard for anything to break through in the circus and was always going to be impossible for the NHL to take over the host city like it usually does, the big night at Sphere — an incredible, if expensive, success that the NHL did first — was the talk of the town for a moment.

Whenever the NHL has tried to copy and paste the events of the other major leagues, it has often felt Mickey Mouse. Our sport's All-Star weekend and awards show have never captured the imagination of fans like the home run derby or the dunk contest. A to-a-fault commitment to including a player from every team in the festivities has taken the prestige and honor out of being selected, too. In the NBA, it's at the top of a player's Hall of Fame credentials, and the picks are hotly debated on network TV for weeks. In the NHL, it has turned into a footnote. For a time, Zdeno Chara and Shea Weber gave the hardest shot competition some juice, but then it got squeezed out.

But the NHL Draft was always different. It was uniquely hockey's, the one place where fans got to see a notoriously private group of executives (Lou Lamoriello and Steve Yzerman come to mind) do their business with no curtain — and see how the sausage is made. Outdoor games were novel for a time, too. Cool, even. A definite success, where credit is due. But the novelty has worn off there over time as well.

The novelty of the NHL's centralized draft hadn't, though, except maybe for a couple of dozen executives and their penny-pinching owners (owners who we don't hear have plans to decentralize their annual Board of Governors meetings in sunny Boca Raton, Fla., or Pebble Beach, Calif.).

For everything the league gains by saving a few bucks and giving its general managers a little more comfort to do their business, it loses in the intangible — everything that's gained by getting its league together once a year, from relationships built, business partners engaged with, media from all 32 markets instead of a select few and the interest that they drive and stories that they tell, one of its markets energized (and financially stimulated), the list goes on.

There are believers, like my colleague Thomas Drance at The Athletic, who think the decentralized draft can work with the right tweaks. I think it's closer to make-believe to count on the NHL to hit all of the right notes. In the real world, I'd bet the league proves Drancer wrong.

Presumably, the Draft House is done and dusted. Get the players up there for a photo with Gary Bettman, get them off for a quick interview with a knowledgeable broadcaster, and move it along at a clip that doesn't result in even die-hard fans falling asleep late at night on their couch. That should be the obvious starting point for next year. Some have suggested announcing picks from landmarks — the Rangers from the Empire State Building, the Ducks from Disney (Roger McQueen's helicopter ride into Disneyland this year was well-executed), the Maple Leafs from the CN Tower, etc. That could work. It's definitely preferable to bringing out C-list celebrities to give fans 10 "I forgot about him/her" thoughts for every "That's very cool" Celine Dion or Adam Sandler cameo (those were good!).

To just assume that it can work, or at least that it will ever not feel like it's beneath the tall shadows of its NFL and NBA equivalents, puts a lot of trust in a league that I don't think has earned it with these things. They could have done all those things people want to see them do next year in the first go-around. It should have run under three hours. Duh. They didn't execute that. It should have run faster than it did in the unbearably long COVID-years drafts, too. They didn't execute that, either.

It will get incrementally better, I'm sure. It will never be as good.

And the one way we know that did work, that was good, they've gone away from.

The new CBA could have been an opportunity to rejig the calendar and give a little more cushion for teams and agents between the draft and free agency, too. The league doesn't even need to crack it open and remake it all to give them that cushion, either. One or two more days of breathing room could have made all the difference. If the league had decided to move back to the centralized draft format, some teams were prepared to stick around in the draft city and run their free agency out of there as well.

There was talk among teams and within the league about returning to a centralized draft and doing it in major airport hubs to alleviate some of the potential for travel headaches during crunch time. A rotation with cities like Dallas, Montreal and Vegas — cities that have direct flights from almost anywhere — was discussed. Some smaller markets would have lost out in that scenario, too, but it could have been a compromise.

Certainly, so long as this is the format they're committed to, we'll never get a moment anything like the gasps and then roar that we got at the Bell Centre when Juraj Slafkovský's name was announced as the No. 1 pick.

The question should be as simple as "What's best for the product and the fans?"

The league, I'm sure, would argue that nothing's that simple and talk about all of the factors I've highlighted above, plus some others, as things they have to consider. But it's always easier to find ways to complicate a decision than it is to be laser-focused on the simplest truths.

As with digital board ads, or the divisional playoff format, I'm sure the league will tell its fans that, actually, you like the new, better-for-them-financially, less grand, watered-down version of what everyone else does way. But actually, the fans won't.

And then year after year, the powers that be in the NHL will continue to wonder why their sport is small fry.



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Sportsnet.ca / Marner's debut, Toews' return: Can't-miss games on 2025-26 NHL schedule

Sonny Sachdeva

Just three months separate this quiet stretch of the NHL off-season from the start of the 2025-26 campaign. And the early wave of summer business has set us up for some intriguing storylines come October.

Mitch Marner's time with the club he idolized as a boy has come to an end. Jonathan Toews will make his return to NHL ice with his own hometown team. And a number of other big-league stars are set to debut in new sweaters, eventually navigating tense reunions with their former clubs.

With the NHL's 2025-26 schedule released Wednesday, here's a look at a few noteworthy games to circle on the calendar:

Mitch Marner returns to Toronto as a Vegas Golden Knight: Jan. 23

The Toronto Maple Leafs' Core Four era is over, and the Vegas Golden Knights' Marner era is just beginning. The longtime Leaf will make his debut with his new club on Oct. 8, at home against Los Angeles — an extra twist of the knife for the Kings, who hoped to start their season with Marner wearing their own colours.

The star winger is set to play his former Maple Leafs teammates for the first time on Jan. 15, in Vegas. Not long after, on Jan. 23, he'll make his way to Toronto for what's sure to be an emotional return to Scotiabank Arena.

Jonathan Toews debuts with his hometown Winnipeg Jets in NHL return: Oct. 9

It's been two years since Toews suited up for an NHL game. After a lengthy absence recovering from long COVID and chronic inflammatory response syndrome — during which it seemed the former Selke and Conn Smythe trophy winner's career might be through — Toews is set to return to the big leagues with his hometown Winnipeg Jets.

His first game in Jets colours is expected to come on Oct. 9, at home in front of the Winnipeg faithful, against the Dallas Stars. He'll play his first game against his former club on Oct. 30, in Winnipeg, before heading south for his first game back in Chicago, this time as a visitor, on Jan 19.

Nikolaj Ehlers returns to Winnipeg with the Carolina Hurricanes: Nov. 21

The addition of Captain Serious won't be the only notable personnel change for the Jets — they'll also be without Ehlers, who signed with the Carolina Hurricanes this summer after a decade in Winnipeg. After beginning the summer as the star of the league's free-agency window, all eyes will be on how Ehlers fits into the Canes' offence, and whether he can find a new level in a new environment.

We'll get our first look at that new union on Oct. 9, when the Canes opens their season at home against the New Jersey Devils. A month later, on Nov. 21, Ehlers returns to Winnipeg to suit up against his former club, in front of the fans who cheered him on for the past decade.

Canadiens newcomers Noah Dobson, Zack Bolduc debut in classic rivalry tilt: Oct. 8

The Montreal Canadiens made waves this summer by swinging a deal to bring in star defenceman Dobson, who begins a new eight-year deal in Habs colours after a sterling half-decade with the New York Islanders. Also joining the Habs this season is Trois-Rivières, Que., product Bolduc, fresh off a breakout season in St. Louis.

The pair's debut in Montreal colours will be a memorable one — a season-opening meeting with the rival Maple Leafs on the road in Toronto, with the Habs looking for redemption after dropping three of four meetings with the blue-and-white last season.

Philly's Trevor Zegras returns to Anaheim with something to prove: March 18

After an early-career rise to stardom followed by a tense couple years in Anaheim, Zegras saw his time with the Ducks come to an end in June, the club trading him to the Philadelphia Flyers in a move that would've seemed unthinkable just a few years ago. Now, he'll join former Ducks teammate Jamie Drysdale and former U.S. NTDP mate Cam York in Philly, as the Flyers kick off a new era under head coach Rick Tocchet.

Zegras will play his first game in a Flyers sweater on Oct. 9, meeting the defending champs on the road in Florida. He'll face his former club for the first time on Jan. 6, and take the ice back in Anaheim as a visitor on March 18, surely with something to prove to the team that traded him away.

J.T. Miller goes back to Vancouver for first time since trade to Rangers: Oct. 28

Speaking of returning with something to prove, veteran Miller has yet to play a game in Vancouver since the January trade that sent him back to the New York Rangers. The 32-year-old played one game against the Canucks last season post-trade — a 5-3 Rangers win at Madison Square Garden, in which he collected a goal and an assist.

On Oct. 28, he'll return to Rogers Arena for his first game back in front of the Canucks faithful. Former head coach Rick Tocchet will make his own return a couple months later, on Dec. 30.

Stanley Cup champion Brad Marchand goes back to Boston: Oct. 21

It may have gotten lost amid the fireworks of Marchand's run in Florida — which has so far brought a Cup-winning trek, some colourful social-media celebrations and a hefty contract extension — but the former Boston Bruins captain has yet to face off against his former club as a member of the Cats.

The thrill of his Cats tenure might feel a bit bittersweet that night, when Marchand returns for an emotional reunion with the Boston faithful on Oct. 21.

No. 1 pick Matthew Schaefer plays his first NHL game: Oct. 9

The New York Islanders ushered in a new era of their own last month when they added defenceman Schaefer with the first-overall pick of the 2025 NHL Draft. Fresh off a sterling season as an alternate captain for the OHL's Erie Otters, Schaefer will look to crack the big club in 2025-26.

Should he make the team out of camp, the teenager could play his first NHL game on Oct. 9, and it would be a memorable one — on the road in Pittsburgh, against Sidney Crosby's Penguins.

Oilers look for redemption in Cup Final rematch with Panthers: Nov. 22

The Edmonton Oilers will have a young rookie debut of their own to look forward to, the club having added Michigan State standout Isaac Howard earlier this month. The 21-year-old joins what is set to be a new-look Oilers offence, Edmonton's front office having shaken up its roster in the wake of a second-straight Stanley Cup Final heartbreaker.

Edmonton will get another crack at redemption against the Panthers a couple months into the campaign, meeting the Cats on the road on Nov. 22.

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL's top 10 UFAs still available: Latest buzz

Luke Fox

When the NHL's free agency opened on July 1, the league's general managers committed a whopping \$862 million to 190 players before the weekend hit.

The frenzy has long since fizzled, but a few useful everyday players and a smattering of depth options remain unclaimed.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 17, 2025

While the salary cap is on the rise, 29 teams are still under the 2025-26 ceiling in mid-July, so there is still budget to burn and flyers to take.

Here's the best of the 2025 UFA crop still hunting for jobs.

Age: 28

Position: Centre

2024-25 salary cap hit: \$2.8 million

The right shot enjoyed a productive regular season in Carolina, posting 22 goals and 39 points in 81 games, but he fell out of the lineup when it mattered and got scratched for some playoff games.

The speedy, versatile Roslovic (he plays wing too) battles inconsistency but can make an impact when on his game.

Not many forwards under age 30 on the market. The best backup option for teams who were interested in Pius Suter.

On the season's final 32 Thoughts podcast, Elliott Friedman reported that the Toronto Maple Leafs — who have sufficient cap space for the first time in a long time — are interested in signing Roslovic.

The insider also mentioned that the Capitals took a long look at signing Roslovic.

Age: 29

Position: Left wing

2024-25 salary cap hit: \$1.075 million

A smart value buy, Olofsson finds himself one of the odd men out in cap-crunched Vegas after scoring 15 goals and 29 points in 56 games.

Olofsson is a power-play weapon who can fire the puck (career shooting percentage: 13.5) and has three 20-goal campaigns on his resume.

Don't bet on him to play physical or rely on him for too many D-zone starts.

Age: 31

Position: Defence

2024-25 salary cap hit: \$2.75 million

Originally a Bruin, Grzelcyk played all 82 games for the Penguins this past season and told reporters that he was hoping to ink an extension in Pittsburgh.

The Penguins, however, signed defencemen Parker Wotherspoon and Caleb Jones to two-year deals on July 1 and are going in a different direction.

The left-shot, undersized Grzelcyk (five-foot-10, 180 pounds) notched a career-best 40 points in 2024-25 and boasts 527 games of experience, plus another 66 in the playoffs.

Age: 28

Position: Goaltender

2024-25 salary cap hit: \$1.8 million

No goaltender who turned UFA on July 1 had a better record in 2024-25 than the Russian's 16-9-4 mark in Vegas.

The Golden Knights feel set with No. 1 Adin Hill, 29, and Akira Schmid, 25, under contract at a combined \$7.125 million, and Samsonov wants a change of scenery.

Samsonov posted a 2.82 goals-against average and a .891 save percentage. He did not see action during the Knights' post-season.

With the goalie market particularly thin this summer, and John Gibson finally traded, Samsonov is the most intriguing option.

Landing spots are limited, though, and he may need to lower his asking price.

Age: 36

Position: Left wing

2024-25 salary cap hit: \$873,770

Author of the Maple Leafs' series-clinching goal over the Senators, the veteran winger elevated his performance at the most critical time (eight points in 11 playoff games) and turned his Toronto tryout into what may be a noble final act.

Pacioretty's arduous battles with injury are well-documented, and the father of five is still weighing all options — including retirement.

The former sniper has wisely adopted a more physical style.

If he wishes to keep playing, he can contribute on a one-year deal. Just don't bet on Pacioretty being available for all 82 games.

Leafs GM Brad Treliving says the door is still open in Toronto.

Age: 27

Position: Centre

2024-25 salary cap hit: \$2.75 million

Moved by San Jose to Columbus as a trade deadline rental, the right-shot depth centreman failed to gain any traction with his latest club (zero points, minus-4 in 12 appearances).

The veteran changed agents, to Craig Oster, and should have no problem bringing his hard-hitting 434 games of experience to a fifth team's lineup.

Kunin's offence peaked with Minnesota in 2019-20, when he scored 15 goals and 33 points in 63 games. He can still check.

Age: 29

Position: Left wing

2024-25 salary cap hit: \$775,000

The undrafted Kiviranta exceeded his sub-\$1-million salary in his second year for the Avalanche, posting career highs in games played (79), goals (16), assists (seven) and plus/minus (plus-15).

The "Finnish Gretzky" — as he was dubbed following his out-of-nowhere Game 7 hat trick for Dallas in 2020 — appears, like Jonathan Drouin, headed for a raise outside of Colorado.

And plenty of teams could do worse than trying Kiviranta out on their bottom six.

Age: 34

Position: Defence

2024-25 salary cap hit: \$2.75 million

While a lower-body injury hampered Rutta's season in San Jose, the six-foot-three blueliner still posted three goals, nine points and 81 blocks over 53 games.

Plenty of teams could do worse than adding this responsible, veteran right shot with championship pedigree to their dressing room.

A one-year contract sounds about right.

Age: 29

Position: Goaltender

2024-25 salary cap hit: \$3.4 million

An absolute stud in 2022-23 — when he racked up 40 wins and a .919 save percentage for the Colorado Avalanche — Georgiev's fall from awesome has been precipitous.

Carrying a starter's load, the NHL's first Bulgarian bungled his contract year, getting traded to the lowly Sharks mid-season and stumbling to a 15-26-4 record with a career-worst .875 save percentage.

The 2024 all-star was informed in April by San Jose GM Mike Grier that he would not be back, and buzz surrounding Georgiev's next landing spot has been minimal.

A pay cut is inevitable.



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Still, the man is a workhorse and could be a bounce-back candidate. He's better than he has shown recently.

Age: 29

Position: Right wing

2024-25 salary cap hit: \$775,000

Columbus Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell took a one-year flyer on Labanc, who will be hard-pressed to match his heights of 2018-19, when he piled up 56 regular-season points and was a key contributor to the last playoff run in San Jose.

Injuries and inconsistency have plagued the winger since.

Now, after failing to have an impact in Columbus — scoring two goals and 12 points in 34 appearances — Labanc will either need to earn his spot on an NHL roster or take his skills to the other side of the pond to continue his pro career.

More UFAs still on the market: Ryan Suter, Robby Fabbri, Jon Merrill, Oliver Kylington, James Reimer, Chris Dreidger, Brett Leason, Craig Smith, Luke Glendening, Klim Kostin, Jakub Vrana, Georgii Romanov

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