



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 21, 2025



Preview: November 21 at Winnipeg

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Canes' four-game road trip takes them north of the border
WINNIPEG, Man. - For the first time since signing with the Carolina Hurricanes this summer, Nikolaj Ehlers returns to Winnipeg to face the Jets on Friday.

When: Friday, Nov. 21

Puck Drop: 8:00 p.m. ET

Watch: FanDuel Sports Network South, FanDuel Sports Network App | [Learn More](#)

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes App

Canes Record: 13-5-2 (28 Points, 1st - Metropolitan Division)

Canes Last Game: 4-3 SO Loss to the Minnesota Wild on Wednesday, Nov. 19

Jets Record: 12-7-0 (24 Points, T-3rd - Central Division)

Jets Last Game: 5-2 Win over the Columbus Blue Jackets on Tuesday, Nov. 18

Last Time Out...

Although the Canes outshot the Wild 45-19 and out-attempted them 95-33, Minnesota earned the victory in a shootout on Wednesday.

Jackson Blake had maybe the best game of his young NHL career, scoring two of the team's three goals, including the game-tying tally with just 1:06 remaining.

Carolina went 0-for-3 in the skills competition, meaning Frederik Andersen suffered the loss in net, moving to 5-4-2.

Fly Returns To Where It Began...

A first-round pick by the Jets in 2014, Nikolaj Ehlers was a member of the organization until the conclusion of the 2024-25 season. Playing there for 10 years and 674 games, he ranks in the top 10 in the franchise's record books in almost every offensive statistic.

The 29-year-old signed a six-year contract with an AAV of \$8.5M on July 3 and has been one of the hottest producers for his new team as of late. Recording at least one point in 12 of the team's last 15 games, he paces the team with 13 points since Oct. 20.

In Net...

Over the last week, the Canes have narrowed down their three-goalie utilization to a rotation of just Frederik Andersen and Pyotr Kochetkov. Brandon Bussi remains on the roster and working with the team, but has not been tapped for game action since Nov. 9 in Toronto.

Andersen started on Wednesday night in Minnesota, signaling that tonight will likely either be Kochetkov or Bussi.

Kochetkov is 4-0 this season with a 1.70 goals against average and a .926 save percentage. He nearly recorded his second shutout of the season on Monday, before the Bruins spoiled the perfect outing with just 10 seconds to go in regulation.

Bussi is 4-1 through his first five NHL appearances. He allowed four goals to the Maple Leafs in his latest outing, but maintains a goals against average of 2.60.

On The Other Side...

Winners of three of their last four, the Jets have received a stellar start to their season from center Mark Scheifele. Entering Friday's play tied for fifth among all NHL skaters with 27 points, teammate Kyle Connor (24 points) sits not far behind.

But perhaps the most important player for Winnipeg this season has been defenseman Josh Morrissey. Logging 24:22 per night, his 21 points only trail Cale Makar (25) for the most by a blueliner in the NHL.

In net, Connor Hellebuyck continues to be the workhorse, playing 14 of the team's 19 games. Although an 8-6 record may not pop off the stats sheet, his .913 save percentage is sixth among netminders who have made a minimum of 10 appearances this season.

Injury Updates...

Forward Jesperi Kotkaniemi left the game on Nov. 14 with a lower-body concern. Rod Brind'Amour said on Nov. 15 that the injury is not considered long-term.

Defenseman Charles Alexis Legault suffered a cut to his hand via a skate blade on Nov. 9 and underwent surgery to repair lacerated tendons on Nov. 10. He is expected to miss three to four months.

Defenseman Jalen Chatfield entered concussion protocol on Nov. 6 and was placed on injured reserve on Nov. 8. He returned to practice with the team on Nov. 18 and is expected to play "at some point" during the team's current road trip.



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Defenseman Jaccob Slavin (lower-body injury) will be "out for a while," as of Oct. 14. He was placed on IR on Oct. 21 and, as of Oct. 27, was "still a ways away" from returning.

What Are We Wearing?

The Canes will wear their WHITE uniforms for tonight's contest. To view the team's full 2025-26 uniform schedule, [click here](#).

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes are scheduled to practice on Saturday in Buffalo. They'll return to game action against the Sabres on Sunday afternoon.

Next Game: Sunday, Nov. 23 at Buffalo | 1:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO, NHLN

Next Home Game: Wednesday, Nov. 26 vs. NY Rangers | 7:00 p.m. ET | Tickets | Parking

Prospect Report: Cerrato's Still Hot, Unger Sorum's Stepping Forward

By: Walt Ruff

Taking a look at the Canes' up-and-coming talent and their 2025-26 campaigns so far...

RALEIGH, N.C. - All levels of play are officially over one month into their hockey season. Some Carolina Hurricanes prospects have turned their hot starts into steady seasons, while some have picked up the pace since our last update.

Here are some things you should know about the future of the organization:

2025 second-round selection Charlie Cerrato continues to be one of the best producers at the NCAA level this season. With 20 points in 14 games, he currently sits third out of all skaters, even with Penn State facing the top two teams in the country the past two weekends. Next month, Cerrato will play with the United States Collegiate Selects at the 2025 Spengler Cup in Switzerland.

2024 fifth-round pick Justin Poirier is still thriving in his first season at school, currently just one of six players with double-digit goals in all of NCAA play. Pacing the Univ. of Maine in scoring, his 15 points are also tied for the most by any freshman in the country.

And lastly, on a team loaded with 12 NHL-drafted prospects, junior Jayden Perron is heating up at the Univ. of Michigan. Racking up 12 points in his last nine games, the 2023 third-round choice is continuing to round out his game after spending his first two years at the Univ. of North Dakota.

"He's a very talented winger, similar to Jackson Blake," Hurricanes Special Advisor to the General Manager Justin Williams reviewed of Perron. "When he has the puck, he's one of the most dynamic people on the ice."

At the pro level in North America, 20-year-old Felix Unger Sorum is showing huge strides in his second season with Chicago (AHL). Producing at least one point in 12 of the Wolves' 14 games this season, his five goals and 13 total points both pace the group.

The slew of injuries on the Canes' blue line has meant call-ups for Domenick Fensore, Charles Alexis Legault, and Joel Nystrom, all of whom started the season in Rosemont. The trickle-down effect has meant more playing time with the Wolves for 2021 sixth-round draft pick Bryce Montgomery, who has already played a career-high 11 games at the AHL level. Standing at 6-foot-5, 230 lbs., he's put his frame to use already this season, picking up three fighting majors.

Between the pipes, there's no shortage of depth for the organization. With Frederik Andersen, Brandon Bussi, and Pyotr Kochetkov all healthy and with the big club, Amir Miftakhov and Cayden Primeau are a solid one-two punch for the Wolves. Ruslan Khazheyev and Nikita Quapp are now with Greensboro (ECHL), allowing everyone to get game action.

"I think what we're seeing is the natural progression with Felix," Hurricanes Associate General Manager/Chicago Wolves General Manager Darren Yorke said of Unger Sorum. "If you look at how he performed at the World Junior Championship last season, you saw a player who was consistently able to use his body to defend a check, and then his elite hockey sense took over to quickly cycle through progressions. Throughout the season this year at the AHL level, he is demonstrating the ability to complete those same types of plays consistently."

Overseas, 6-foot-4, 205 lbs. Timur Kol has been dominant at the top junior hockey level (MHL) in Russia. With 15 points in his first 16 games, the 19-year-old sits just one back of the league's lead in points by a defenseman.

In net, 2025 top draft pick Semyon Frolov started the season 4-1 in net before going down with an injury. 2023 seventh-round pick Egor Velmakin has posted a .926 save percentage in eight games played with Dynamo St. Petersburg in the second-highest pro league in Russia.

For more information on the team's prospects, stay tuned to [@CanesProspects](#) on X.



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NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, each team's quarter-season MVP - ESPN

By: ESPN staff

With another week of the 2025-26 NHL season in the books, ESPN's panel of voters continues to believe the Colorado Avalanche are the top team in the league.

Beyond No. 1, there were some major swings this week, including the first top-10 appearance by the Chicago Blackhawks in quite some time, as Connor Bedard & Co. continue to be in the mix for a playoff spot with a quarter of the season complete.

Speaking of the quarter-season mark, as part of this week's rankings we've identified the most valuable player for each team through 25% of the season.

How we rank: A panel of ESPN hockey commentators, analysts, reporters and editors sends in a 1-32 poll based on the games through Wednesday.

Note: Previous ranking for each team refers to the previous edition, published Nov. 14. Points percentages are through Thursday's games.

1. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 82.5%

Quarter-season MVP: Nathan MacKinnon. With all due respect to the monster season thus far from Cale Makar, we have to give the nod to MacKinnon, who is leading the league in both points (36) and goals (16).

Next seven days: @ NSH (Nov. 22), @ CHI (Nov. 23), vs. SJ (Nov. 26)

2. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 70%

Quarter-season MVP: Seth Jarvis. Who else but the Hurricanes' rising superstar, who continues to play in all situations and hover around a point-per-game pace while doing so.

Next seven days: @ WPG (Nov. 21), @ BUF (Nov. 23), vs. NYR (Nov. 26)

3. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 64.3%

Quarter-season MVP: Leo Carlsson. The Ducks' selection of Carlsson at No. 2 overall in the 2023 draft over Adam Fantilli

was puzzling to some observers. It is puzzling no more, as the 20-year-old Swede is at the front of the proverbial Flying V for a Ducks team that is in the mix atop the Pacific Division.

Next seven days: vs. VGK (Nov. 22), vs. VAN (Nov. 26)

4. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 69%

Quarter-season MVP: Mikko Rantanen. The Stars didn't need to see how well Rantanen would perform on their roster before inking him to a long-term deal; that contract was signed the same day he was acquired from the Hurricanes. So far, so good.

Next seven days: @ CGY (Nov. 22), @ EDM (Nov. 25), @ SEA (Nov. 26)

play

0:43

Mikko Rantanen scores 300th career goal for Stars

Mikko Rantanen lights the lamp to score his 300th career goal for Stars.

5. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 67.5%

Quarter-season MVP: Jesper Bratt. Unfortunately, Bratt and the other Devils have experience playing without Jack Hughes in the lineup. They'll get more of it for the next several weeks following No. 86's "freak injury" at a steakhouse in Chicago last week.

Next seven days: @ PHI (Nov. 22), vs. DET (Nov. 24), vs. STL (Nov. 26)

6. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 63.2%

Quarter-season MVP: Mark Scheifele. The Jets' top-line center has never hit the 50-goal or 100-point plateau in his NHL career, coming closest with 42 goals in 2022-23 and 87 points in 2024-25. He's currently on pace for 50 tallies and 109 points.

Next seven days: vs. CAR (Nov. 21), vs. MIN (Nov. 23), @ WSH (Nov. 26)



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7. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 10

Points percentage: 65%

Quarter-season MVP: Jack Eichel. Though he's fallen off of his perch atop the goals and points races, Eichel led the Knights with 24 points through 19 games, making a strong push for his first Hart Trophy nod.

Next seven days: @ ANA (Nov. 22), @ UTA (Nov. 24), vs. OTT (Nov. 26)

8. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 63.2%

Quarter-season MVP: Sidney Crosby. Prior to the season, the trade rumors ran wild with potential new destinations for No. 87. Instead, he's led a resurgent Penguins team to a spot near the top of the Metro Division, including six power-play goals for the NHL's top man-advantage attack.

Next seven days: vs. MIN (Nov. 21), vs. SEA (Nov. 22), vs. BUF (Nov. 26)

9. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 14

Points percentage: 60%

Quarter-season MVP: Connor Bedard. The Blackhawks might have something in this kid, after all. With 29 points through 19 games in his third NHL season, Bedard is on pace for 118 -- and Chicago is right in the mix for a playoff spot after a quarter of the season.

Next seven days: @ BUF (Nov. 21), vs. COL (Nov. 23), vs. MIN (Nov. 26)

play

1:18

Connor Bedard nets hat trick for Blackhawks

Connor Bedard scores three goals for Chicago on Tuesday night against Calgary.

10. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 59.5%

Quarter-season MVP: Dylan Larkin. Larkin put the hockey world on notice with his performance during the 4 Nations Face-Off last season, and has carried at least some of that momentum forward into this NHL season, scoring with 24 points (12 goals and 12 assists) through his first 20 games.

Next seven days: vs. CBJ (Nov. 22), @ NJ (Nov. 24), vs. NSH (Nov. 26)

11. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 59.5%

Quarter-season MVP: Adrian Kempe. With a new contract extension now in hand, Kempe has been able to completely

put the business aspect out of mind and focus on his on-ice performance. With 19 points, he's the Kings' leading scorer through 20 games.

Next seven days: vs. BOS (Nov. 21), vs. OTT (Nov. 24)

12. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 61.9%

Quarter-season MVP: Matthew Schaefer. Honorable mention here to Bo Horvat and his team-leading 13 goals and 24 points, but the nod goes to the 2025 No. 1 pick, who leads the Isles in ice time per game (22:29), was recently added to Canada's 90-man list of Olympic candidates, and may be responsible for a sudden positive surge in vibes on the Island.

Next seven days: vs. STL (Nov. 22), vs. SEA (Nov. 23), vs. BOS (Nov. 26)

13. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 60%

Quarter-season MVP: Jake Guentzel. Like the team in general, Guentzel didn't get off to the best start this season. But, he's picked it up in November (with seven goals and three assists through the month's first eight games), as the Lightning look to climb back up the Atlantic Division standings.

Next seven days: @ WSH (Nov. 22), vs. PHI (Nov. 24), vs. CGY (Nov. 26)

play

1:02

Jake Guentzel completes Lightning late show with OT winner

Jake Guentzel lights the lamp to win it for the Lightning in overtime.

14. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 54.6%

Quarter-season MVP: David Pastrnak. For the Bruins to make noise this season, a lot was going to have to go right. One of those factors was Pastrnak scoring like the top-tier player he is. So far, so good, as Pasta scored 27 points through his first 22 games, with the Bruins near the top of the division.

Next seven days: @ LA (Nov. 21), @ SJ (Nov. 23), @ NYI (Nov. 26)

15. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 57.5%

Quarter-season MVP: Jakub Dobes. Although he has cooled off a bit after winning all six of his starts in October, the Czech 24-year-old appears to be the Habs' better option in net this season, as he stakes his own claim in the Calder Trophy race.



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Next seven days: vs. TOR (Nov. 22), @ UTA (Nov. 26)

16. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 62.5%

Quarter-season MVP: Jaden Schwartz. The Kraken have been one of the season's pleasant surprises, remaining in the mix for a playoff spot through the first quarter. It's been a full-team effort -- only six players have double-digit points after 19 games, and no one is in double digits in the goals column -- so we'll give the nod to the venerable, 33-year-old who shared the team scoring lead through 19 games and led the team with a +8 rating.

Next seven days: @ PIT (Nov. 22), @ NYI (Nov. 23), vs. DAL (Nov. 26)

17. Utah Mammoth

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 54.8%

Quarter-season MVP: Nick Schmaltz. In the club's first official season as the Mammoth, Schmaltz has led the team in scoring (22 points) and is tied for game-winning goals (two, with Clayton Keller) through the first 20 games.

Next seven days: vs. NYR (Nov. 22), vs. VGK (Nov. 24), vs. MTL (Nov. 26)

play

1:03

Schmaltz nets second career hat trick in Mammoth's win

Nick Schmaltz scores a trio of goals to lead Utah to a 6-3 win over San Jose.

18. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 60%

Quarter-season MVP: Tim Stutzle. The Sens had captain Brady Tkachuk for three games before the forward's upper-body injury sidelined him. Stutzle answered the call to fill the scoring gap, with a point-per-game pace through 19 games and double-digit goals.

Next seven days: @ SJ (Nov. 22), @ LA (Nov. 24), @ VGK (Nov. 26)

19. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 57.1%

Quarter-season MVP: Jesper Wallstedt. Sure, Kirill Kaprizov has been incredible, but that was expected. Let's give some credit to rookie netminder Wallstedt, who has gone 5-0-2 in seven starts, with a 2.10 goals-against average (second in the league) and .926 save percentage (first).

Next seven days: @ PIT (Nov. 21), @ WPG (Nov. 23), @ CHI (Nov. 26)

20. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 57.1%

Quarter-season MVP: Logan Thompson. Thompson was the last line of defense for a team that nearly won the Presidents' Trophy in 2024-25. He isn't winning as often this season, but his other numbers are even better: a league-leading 1.85 goals-against average, and .920 save percentage (third).

Next seven days: vs. TB (Nov. 22), vs. CBJ (Nov. 24), vs. WPG (Nov. 26)

21. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 57.5%

Quarter-season MVP: Brad Marchand. The Panthers headed into this season defending two straight Stanley Cup championships, but without captain Aleksander Barkov (out until April) and Matthew Tkachuk (December). The team's big trade deadline addition from last season (and playoff star) has stepped up, scoring a team-leading 23 points through 18 games; that puts him on pace for 99 points, one shy of a career high set back in 2018-19.

Next seven days: vs. EDM (Nov. 22), @ NSH (Nov. 24), vs. PHI (Nov. 26)

22. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 60.5%

Quarter-season MVP: Trevor Zegras. Who knew that a change of scenery was all it took to get Zegras' career back on an upward trajectory? The No. 9 pick of the 2019 draft had hit a wall in Anaheim, but is soaring in Philly.

Next seven days: vs. NJ (Nov. 22), TB (Nov. 24), @ FLA (Nov. 26)

play

0:18

Trevor Zegras goes five-hole for Flyers' shootout winner

Trevor Zegras goes between the legs to score the lone goal in the shootout for the Flyers vs. the Blues.

23. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 57.1%

Quarter-season MVP: Jet Greaves. Are we witnessing a changing of the guard in Columbus' crease in real time? Greaves finished the 2024-25 season strong, and has been the goalie of choice for Columbus thus far this season, with 12 starts to Elvis Merzlikins' eight (and better stats as well).

Next seven days: @ DET (Nov. 22), @ WSH (Nov. 24), vs. TOR (Nov. 26)

24. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 50%



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Quarter-season MVP: Igor Shesterkin/Jonathan Quick. The Rangers are still trying to figure out the right formula on offense, but the goal-suppression effort has been superb. Shesterkin is putting forth another superb effort, with a 7-7-2 record, 2.43 goals-against average and .911 save percentage; Quick has him beat in both of the ratios -- 1.42 and .951 (!) -- though he's fallen victim to the same lack of goal support, with a 3-2-0 mark. Things would be much worse for the Blueshirts without them.

Next seven days: @ UTA (Nov. 22), vs. STL (Nov. 24), @ CAR (Nov. 26)

25. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 50%

Quarter-season MVP: Connor McDavid. Ho hum, another season of elite scoring from the game's greatest talent. Through 22 games, McDavid's 32 points are six clear of second-best on the team (Leon Draisaitl's 26), as the Oil look to climb out of another early-season hole in the standings.

Next seven days: @ FLA (Nov. 22), vs. DAL (Nov. 25)

26. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 54.8%

Quarter-season MVP: Macklin Celebrini. Celebrini went first overall in the 2024 draft -- so we knew he'd be good. Did anyone expect him to be on pace to break the Sharks' all-time scoring record in his second pro season?

Next seven days: vs. OTT (Nov. 22), vs. BOS (Nov. 23), @ COL (Nov. 26)

play

0:32

Macklin Celebrini's hat trick wins it for Sharks in OT

Macklin Celebrini scores on the power play for San Jose Sharks

27. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 50%

Quarter-season MVP: William Nylander. It hasn't been the greatest season in the storied history of the Maple Leafs -- what with injuries to key skaters like Auston Matthews and Chris Tanev, and the appearance of four goaltenders on the seasonal stat sheet due to injuries in the crease. But Nylander has been Mr. Reliable, with an impressive 27 points through 17 games, including some eye-popping highlights.

Next seven days: @ MTL (Nov. 22), @ CBJ (Nov. 26)

28. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 45.5%

Quarter-season MVP: Quinn Hughes. Rare is the team led in scoring by a defenseman, but such has been the case for the Canucks this season, with their captain leading the way en route to (likely) another Norris Trophy finalist spot.

Next seven days: vs. CGY (Nov. 23), @ ANA (Nov. 26)

29. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 45%

Quarter-season MVP: Tage Thompson. Some day, the Sabres will return to the playoffs, providing a payoff to one of the most passionate fan bases in the sport. For now, Thompson keeps scoring goals (10 of them so far), and might earn a spot to represent Team USA at the Milan Cortina Olympics.

Next seven days: vs. CHI (Nov. 21), vs. CAR (Nov. 23), @ PIT (Nov. 26)

30. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 42.9%

Quarter-season MVP: Robert Thomas. Not a lot has gone right for the Blues this season after they snuck into the playoffs last season (and nearly knocked off the Jets). So, we'll give the nod to Thomas, the only player on the roster who's played in more than one game and has a positive plus/minus rating (along with his 13 points through 16 games).

Next seven days: @ NYI (Nov. 22), @ NYR (Nov. 24), @ NJ (Nov. 26)

31. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 40%

Quarter-season MVP: Filip Forsberg. At this point, GM Barry Trotz needs to figure out who is going to be a part of the next competitive version of the Predators and who is not. We think that Forsberg -- who's been around the past few versions -- will still be there when Nashville makes the playoffs again.

Next seven days: vs. COL (Nov. 22), vs. FLA (Nov. 24), @ DET (Nov. 26)

32. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 34.1%

Quarter-season MVP: Nazem Kadri. It's been a rough season for the Flames, and this roster could look quite a bit different by season's end (with trade rumors already circling Kadri, Rasmus Andersson, Blake Coleman and others). So, as the leading scorer, the veteran center earns the quarter-season MVP honors here.

Next seven days: vs. DAL (Nov. 22), VAN (Nov. 23), @ TB (Nov. 26)



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Canes fail to tame Wild in 4-3 overtime loss

By: Liela Hafshejani

Carolina Hurricanes forward Nikolaj Ehlers chases the puck during the game against the Minnesota Wild at the Lenovo Center on Thursday, Nov. 6, 2025. Ehlers scored one goal during the game. Carolina beat Minnesota 4-3.

Carolina Hurricanes forward Nikolaj Ehlers chases the puck during the game against the Minnesota Wild at the Lenovo Center on Thursday, Nov. 6, 2025. Ehlers scored one goal during the game. Carolina beat Minnesota 4-3.

In a late-night matchup at the Grand Casino Arena, the Carolina Hurricanes fell 4-3 to the Minnesota Wild in their second match of a four-game road trip.

The Wild (10-7-4) came into the game having won four of their last five games, including two shutouts at home, while the Canes (13-5-2) have staggered since a four-game win streak of their own, going 2-2 in their last four matches.

For the third time in their last four games, the Canes found themselves playing extra hockey in overtime. The difference? Both goalies held strong, forcing a shootout. The netminders continued their dominance, but Carolina's Frederik Andersen let a backhand shot from Matt Boldy sneak by, dooming the Canes to yet another loss.

The shootout loss doesn't reflect the effort that Carolina put in to even get to that point, again climbing out the depths of a 2-0 deficit, much like their match against the Edmonton Oilers last weekend.

Just two minutes into the game, Minnesota defenseman Brock Faber put his team on the board with help from right wingers Mats Zuccarello and Danila Yurov. Shot down the middle into the back of the net, the goal came from a break down the ice after the Canes overcommitted on the attack.

Gaining a confidence boost after an early goal, Minnesota defenseman Zeev Buium got aggressive and was sent to the penalty box for tripping Carolina center Logan Stankoven.

Even with the man advantage, the Canes further buried themselves after allowing a shorthanded goal by Boldy, who intercepted a pass from center Sebastian Aho and gave himself a 1-on-1 opportunity with Andersen.

With mere seconds left in the first period, Zuccarello's slashing of right wing Jackson Blake gave Carolina their second power play of the night. Moments later, the horn rang, marking the end of the first period, but also giving the Canes time in the locker room to plan for the man advantage.

The second period picked up with the remaining time left in the power play, but the NHL's worst power play converters — scoring on just 12.5 percent of their opportunities — couldn't capitalize.

After the expiration of the power play, Blake put the Canes on the board at last. Assisted by Stankoven and defenseman Sean Walker in the 24th minute, the trio got the puck into the back of the net through the jumble of green huddled around goaltender Jesper Wallstedt.

Minnesota made a habit of scoring early as Zuccarello flew down the ice after gaining possession of the puck thanks to left wing Kirill Kaprizov and Yurov, tucking the puck into the left side of the net only 15 seconds into the third period.

Carolina's staple players — Aho, winger Andrei Svechnikov and center Seth Jarvis — skated circles around the Wild to bring them to a one-score game with 13 minutes remaining in the third period. Aho shot the puck from the right side of the net through three green jerseys to get past Wallstedt.

It looked like the game was all but won for the Wild until Blake tipped in the puck with just over a minute remaining. A gathering of white and green around the net made visibility a struggle for the officials when Carolina started celebrating a goal when the puck was out on open ice, and raised voices of disagreement and protest arose from the Wild. After review, it was confirmed that the puck had crossed the line, marking the final goal of regulation.

Though the final score was close, the staggering difference in play was obvious. Without factoring the shootout, the Wild scored three goals on only 18 shots. Carolina matched the goals, but via a significantly larger 45 shots.

Carolina will look to rebound, taking on the Winnipeg Jets at the Canada Life Centre on Friday. Puck drop is set for 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

LINKS

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/preview-november-21-at-winnipeg>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/prospect-report-cerrato-s-still-hot-unger-sorum-s-stepping-forward>

https://www.espn.com/nhl/story/_/id/47037318/nhl-power-rankings-2025-26-best-teams-standings-best-stats-projections-pace-mvp

<https://technicianonline.com/152138/sports/canes-fail-to-tame-wild-in-4-3-overtime-loss/>



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SportScan

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

1369010 Websites

The Athletic / KHL players bitten by attack dog during ceremonial puck drop

By Alex Valdes

Nov. 20, 2025

If using a K-9 unit to do a ceremonial puck drop sounds like a dicey idea, well, you'd be proven right. Because in one KHL game Thursday night, it was.

An attack dog from the local Minsk police force got a little too snappy with players from CSKA Moscow and Dinamo Minsk, biting two of them, though not causing serious harm.

As seen in a video posted on X, a handler brought the dog to the spot of the ceremonial puck drop in between CSKA Moscow's Pavel Karnaukhov and Dinamo Minsk's Andrei Stas. The dog chomped at Karnaukhov's left lower abdomen before being pulled away. A few moments later, Stas gave the puck to the handler, who put it into the dog's mouth. The dog then released the puck onto the ice for the ceremonial puck drop.

With the dog's tail wagging the entire time, who knows? Maybe the police pooch was just trying to have some fun on the ice.

Just another night in the KHL, which has had its share of odd moments over the years, like a player getting trapped in the plexiglass, a player's cellphone falling onto the ice during a game, and a referee getting banned for life for allowing a goal that actually wasn't a goal

The Athletic LOADED: 11.21.2025

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ESPN / Grading preseason bold predictions for all 32 NHL teams - ESPN

Greg Wyshynski

Nov 20, 2025

Before the 2025-26 NHL season -- on Sept. 24, to be exact -- we made bold predictions for all 32 teams. With a quarter of that season now in the books, it's time to check the validity of those claims.

At least one of them was already proved true. At least one of them was very, very wrong.

Here's a progress report on our bold predictions. We'll rate each prediction on a 1-10 scale, with "1" indicating that the prediction absolutely will not come true and "10" indicating that I absolutely nailed it. Enjoy!

Atlantic Division

Boston Bruins

Bruins will trade Pavel Zacha

Considering the Bruins' massive trade-off last season, seeing Zacha shipped out during their "retool" made sense. He's a center who plays in all facets of the game and really found his offensive stride since arriving in Boston. He's signed through next season at a very affordable \$4.75 million annually against the salary cap.

But his availability is based on a few factors. Like whether Boston sees Zacha as part of their long-term solutions. Like if Boston is contending for a playoff spot or not. Like if someone in this center-starved league calls up GM Don Sweeney and makes him an offer he can't refuse.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

Buffalo Sabres

Rasmus Dahlin is a Norris Trophy finalist

Dahlin is skating with a lot on his mind. He revealed before the season that his fiancée, Carolina Matovac, received a heart transplant this summer following a health scare while on vacation. Earlier this month, he returned to Sweden to care for her, missing three games. The support he received from the hockey community was inspiring and a reminder of how far we've come in consideration of a player's life outside the NHL.

In the 17 games Dahlin has played, he has 14 points with 13 of them assists. That places him in the top 10 among defensemen in scoring. That he plays for a Sabres team once again struggling to contend shouldn't impact his Norris candidacy, as he finished sixth for the award last season. If there's an analytic argument for his defense to go along with strong offensive numbers, he's got a shot at being one of three finalists.

The real concern with this bold prediction is that for the foreseeable future, there might be only one Norris Trophy finalist spot open to someone who isn't Cale Makar or Quinn Hughes.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 5

Detroit Red Wings

Steve Yzerman fails upward

Naturally I predicted that the Red Wings' general manager would abdicate the throne in the season where Detroit raced to first place in the Atlantic. I still don't have too much faith in the "Yzerplan" -- rough starts for top prospect Marco Kasper and goaltending solution John Gibson haven't helped -- but Stevie Y likely won't be going anywhere if the Red Wings improve on their .524 points percentage from last season.

Of course, that's going to depend on whether Detroit avoids its traditional second-half tailspin. Over the past two seasons, the Red Wings are 16-23-4 after March 1. If they fall short of the playoffs and are worse than last season's record ... well, he's been the GM since 2019. How many more chances does the franchise legend get?



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Bold prediction confidence rating: 4

Florida Panthers

Sergei Bobrovsky gets a "Marchand" deal

Regular-season Bob is the guy who is 9-5-0 through 14 games with a .883 save percentage and a 2.80 goals-against average. He does what he needs to in order to collect points to make the postseason. Which is where he becomes Playoff Bob, the guy who has led the Panthers to three straight Stanley Cup finals and two straight championships. The guy with the .914 save percentage and a 2.20 GAA in 23 games last postseason.

The Panthers just re-signed a guy named Sam Bennett who is productive in the regular season and a monster in the playoffs. I imagine they'll do the same with Bobrovsky. The Panthers also just re-signed a 37-year-old to a six-year contract that pays him \$5.25 million against the cap annually. I imagine they'll do the same with Bobrovsky. Like Brad Marchand, he doesn't want to leave, either.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 8

Montreal Canadiens

Kaiden Guhle earns leaguewide appreciation

Well, it turns out Kaiden Guhle played five games before having surgery for a partially torn abductor muscle and will miss at least two months of the season.

Now, that does leave enough time in the season for him to make an impact and earn the notice he deserves. Or, failing that, the Canadiens miss him desperately while he's on the mend and he's appreciated for his absence.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 6

Ottawa Senators

Dylan Cozens sets new career highs

The targets for this bold prediction: 31 goals and 68 points, set when Cozens was a 21-year-old center with the Sabres in 2022-23.

The progress so far: Cozens has seven goals and seven assists in 19 games. That puts him right around 30 goals but well short of his career point total. Praying for a hot streak at some point this season.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 3

Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning will win the Atlantic Division

The Lightning face-planted out of the gate with a 1-4-2 record and then suffered a slew of injuries to players like Victor Hedman, Ryan McDonagh and Anthony Cirelli. They've now won nine of 12 games and some of the aspects of their team that were struggling -- like their power play -- might be rounding into form. At some point it would be nice if Brayden Point looked like Brayden Point again, but he's got time.

Stathletes projects the Lightning to have an 81.5% chance of finishing first in the Atlantic Division. We'll take it.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 8

Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs will retain Nick Robertson

Given everything that swirled around the Maple Leafs in the first month of the season, this prediction reads like an act of cowardice. Where was "they fire Craig Berube before Christmas?" Or "the Leafs miss the playoffs outright?"

Instead, I predicted that Nick Robertson, a player perpetually in trade rumors, would remain with the team rather than being shipped out. He's still there, playing in 19 of their 20 games and has 11 points. But who knows where the wacky season in Toronto takes him.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

Metropolitan Division

Carolina Hurricanes

Canes will win the Eastern Conference

The Hurricanes' regular-season success has become so expected under coach Rod Brind'Amour that their 13-5-1 start is just background noise in the Eastern Conference right now -- despite not having star defenseman Jacob Slavin for all but two games of it. They've made the conference finals in three of the seven years that Rod the Bod has coached them, including two of the past three seasons in which they were eliminated by the Florida Panthers. No shame in that. Ask Edmonton.

Their issue in the playoffs remains their goal scoring. They averaged 3.12 goals per game during that three-year span in the postseason, down from 3.27 over 246 regular-season games 2022-25.

Absent a star scorer like Jake Guentzel or Mikko Rantanen, perhaps that defect prevents them from playing for the Stanley Cup again. Or perhaps the early returns on the Carolina offense this season (3.63 goals per game over 19 games) underscore how deep their goal generation goes on this edition of the Canes, indicating they have enough of it to finally break through the Eastern Conference ceiling.

All of that ignores the elephant in the room, which is that no one in the Eastern Conference seems all that formidable at the moment in comparison to the Hurricanes. Unless of course the Panthers get Aleksander Barkov back for the playoffs ...

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

Columbus Blue Jackets

Jet Greaves takes over the crease

There have been few stats more jarring than the Blue Jackets being among the leaders in team save percentage during the first 20 games of the season, given the recent effectiveness between the pipes. The goalie rotation of Jet Greaves and Elvis Merzljkins was working well, but it was becoming increasingly obvious that Greaves was outplaying his tandem partner. He had a .904 save percentage in 12 games and higher goals saved above expected.

If the crease isn't Greaves' now, it will be eventually. The Jackets have waited for someone to play well enough to relegate Merzljkins to a backup role, and Jet might have the fuel to do it.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

New Jersey Devils

Jack Hughes plays 82 games

Mea culpa: I was unaware that the Devils were going to have a team dinner at a Chicago steakhouse wherein Jack Hughes would have what's been called a "freak accident" that involved getting his finger sliced by glass. Jack had surgery and will be out a minimum of six weeks, all but assuring that New Jersey will continue to be a franchise without a 50-goal scorer or 100-point player and that his bold prediction can already be deposited in the trash.

On the plus side, Hughes was correct when he sassed reporters before the season about his offseason conditioning and perpetual injuries. There's no accounting for freak accidents on the ice or around the glass.

Bold prediction confidence rating: ZERO



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New York Islanders

Patrick Roy coaches his last season on Long Island

I'm going to blame Matthew Schaefer for mucking up what should have been a fairly easy call here.

Roy reportedly doesn't have a contract beyond this season. He has a new general manager in Mathieu Darche who had no hand in hiring him, and as a new general manager, he would probably like to get his own guy in there at some point. The Islanders were projected to finish with around 84 points and had a 1-in-4 chance of making the playoffs.

Then the 18-year-old first overall pick in the NHL draft shows up, plays like Cale Makar, and infuses the entire organization with a youthful enthusiasm and optimism. Suddenly the Islanders are in a playoff spot and ascendant in the East.

I'm not selling on this prediction yet for the factors listed above and because it's so early. But I am shaking a fist in the direction of Matthew Schaefer while muttering something about "these kids today."

Bold prediction confidence rating: 5

New York Rangers

Rangers return to the playoffs

There have been stretches in the first 21 games of the season in which this prediction looked quite good, and there have been stretches in which the Rangers making the playoffs seems implausible.

Stathletes says there's an 84.2% chance the Blueshirts make the Stanley Cup playoffs, which gives me hope. So do the seasons that goalie Igor Shesterkin and defenseman Adam Fox are having, and the seasons that players such as forwards Will Cuyille and Vincent Trocheck will have when they get through the team's early-season offensive doldrums.

And yet I worry about their depth, which was a concern before the season and is a deeper one having gotten eyes on them. I worry about captain J.T. Miller, whose offensive numbers have fallen off a cliff while fan-cams are catching him acting listless defensively. I worry that the chemistry is off and the competition is too good. But I keep the faith that Mike Sullivan and the Rangers will figure this thing out. And if they don't, GM Chris Drury will no doubt be aggressive in trying to ensure they do.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers win the Gavin McKenna draft lottery

The impetus for this prediction was basically a goof on Penguins fans who thought their team would continue its downward trajectory only to end up with the first overall phenom in next year's draft who also happens to play at Penn State. Wouldn't it be funny if he went to the other team in the state? Ha, ha. Everyone laughs.

Well, it turns out the Penguins aren't currently playing like a lottery team and the Flyers are stubbornly hanging tough in the Metro Division under head coach Rick Tocchet thanks to exceptional goaltending from offseason pickup Dan Vladar.

I'm heartened that the analytics community still sees the Flyers as an eventual cellar dweller. Stathletes projects them as a lottery team (89.2 points). Dom Luszczyszyn of The Athletic has them much lower at 81.6 points, ahead of only four other teams.

I remember sharing this prediction with someone in Philadelphia recently who said it would be ironic if the Flyers won the lottery the year in which a winger (McKenna) was top pick, given their needs at center. It's like 10,000 spoons when all you need is a knife.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

Pittsburgh Penguins

Sidney Crosby plays somewhere in the playoffs this season

The true genius of this prediction was in its vagueness. Like many others, I heard the speculation that Crosby might end up leaving the Penguins if this was another lost season. That he was tired of missing out on the most important time of the NHL calendar and wasn't going to be mired in a rebuild.

I asked Sid about that theory at the NHL player media tour in September. He told me it wasn't anything on his mind because he was optimistic that the Penguins, picked by many to finish last in the division, could return to the playoffs for the first time since 2022. Which, admittedly, seemed delusional. But it was enough for me to hedge my bold prediction, declaring that he would play in the playoffs "somewhere," including on the off chance that would be in Pittsburgh.

What I didn't count on was Crosby willing the Penguins into the playoffs himself. Through 19 games, the Penguins have a .632 points percentage and Crosby is leading them with 23 points. His buddy Evgeni Malkin, also the subject of trade speculation, leads the team with 12 goals.

They were never going to leave Pittsburgh if the team was relevant. Through their own efforts, some Jack Adams-level coaching by Dan Muse and the second-best goaltending in the league so far, the Penguins not only are relevant but are a team that could make the playoffs. Which would be fine by me, because Pittsburgh is -- at last check -- "somewhere."

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

Washington Capitals

Ovechkin breaks another Gretzky record

After shattering the most famous Wayne Gretzky goal-scoring record last season, Ovechkin has a chance to shatter another one this season. Gretzky scored 1,016 goals combined between the regular season and the Stanley Cup playoffs. Ovechkin needed 43 goals between the regular season and postseason to beat that mark.

Through 19 games, Ovechkin has six goals. That pace would put him under 30 goals for the season. Even with a prolonged playoff run by the Capitals, it would be hard to see him break that mark without a bigger goal cushion in the regular season. The good news is that when Ovechkin gets hot, his goal-scoring pace can get scorching.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 6

Central Division

Chicago Blackhawks

Frank Nazar doubles his points total

With Connor Bedard having a star-making season (13 goals in 19 games) that might earn him a trip to the Olympics, whatever Frank Nazar does for the Blackhawks might be a little overlooked. He's been great, with 13 points in 17 games and playing in all phases of the game. He briefly missed some time after taking a cross-check from Joel Farabee earlier this month, but Nazar is back and picking up points again.

He tallied 26 points in 53 games last season. At his current scoring rate, and assuming he stays in the lineup, Nazar could top 60 points. He isn't on Bedard's line, but he gets to hang with him on the power play. That's good enough for me.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 8

Colorado Avalanche

Avs win the Western Conference



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It's always a nice feeling when you hitch your wagon to a bulldozer. The Avalanche started the season going 13-1-5 in their first 19 games. They led the NHL in offense and defense and had its leading scorer in points and goals (Nathan MacKinnon), its top scorer among defensemen (Cale Makar) and the fourth best team save percentage (.909) thanks to a 33-year-old journeyman having potentially the best season of his pro career (Scott Wedgewood).

What's scary about the Avs is that there's still so much room for improvement in players such as Brock Nelson, Gabe Landeskog and Valeri Nichushkin.

The caveat here is that the Avalanche haven't made it past the second round since winning the Stanley Cup in 2022. But so far, MacKinnon & Co. seem absolutely determined to drink of the chalice again next June.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 8

Dallas Stars

Matt Duchene regresses

It does feel a bit awkward to grade this one out with Duchene on long-term injured reserve at the moment with an undisclosed ailment. He hasn't played since Oct. 18. Duchene had a goal and an assist in four games.

My point still stands that the departure of Mikael Granlund and Mason Marchment combined with a downgrade from his 19.7% shooting percentage means Duchene won't hit that point-per-game pace from last season when he returns to the ice.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 8

Minnesota Wild

Zeev Buium outscores Brock Faber

Through 20 games, Zeev Buium had 10 points to Brock Faber's nine points, so let's stop the count and call this one a win!

OK, to dig into this a little further, my prediction here was predicated heavily on Buium getting top unit power-play time, assuming that he wouldn't produce all that much at 5-on-5 as a rookie. True to form, seven of his 10 points have come on the man advantage. He's averaging more ice time per game (3:22) than Faber (1:04) on the power play so far this season, but his role as the quarterback for Kirill Kaprizov's unit isn't cemented.

He hasn't produced much of anything in his last 10 games heading into Wednesday night, and his overall ice time has been fluctuating. I'm concerned but confident.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 6

Nashville Predators

Andrew Brunette keeps his job

GM Barry Trotz recently said that the Predators are in a "transitional phase" as an organization but wouldn't go as far to call it a "rebuild." Either way, it's clear things aren't working under Brunette for a second straight season, which could necessitate his firing ...

... only what would that accomplish? Brunette signed a four-year deal in 2024. Unless Trotz wants to add "coach" to his job title for no significant bump in pay, wouldn't it make sense for the organization to let Brunette coach through a lost season instead of paying him not to work?

The only scenarios I see in which Brunette doesn't finish the season are if Trotz felt compelled to save the season himself or if he felt that AHL Milwaukee Admirals coach Karl Taylor was the next guy behind the bench and wanted to give him a few months of experience this season. Because even if things get bad for Nashville, that's ultimately good in a "transitional phase," no?

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

St. Louis Blues

Jimmy Snuggerud, Calder Trophy finalist

Snuggerud has been unremarkable during the first 20 games of the season after making a huge impression with four points in seven playoff games last season. He has five goals and six assists, skating to a minus-2. He has played up with Pavel Buchnevich and Robert Thomas and has gotten some power-play time.

Snuggerud faces two significant problems right now as a Calder candidate. The first is that the Blues stink, and therefore his accomplishments aren't going to get the same attention as those of rookies on contending teams. The second is that defenseman Matthew Schaefer of the Islanders and forward Ivan Demidov of the Canadiens have absolutely owned the rookie spotlight through the first quarter of the season.

Throw in a quartet of interesting rookies in goal -- Yaroslav Askarov (SJS), Jakub Dobes (MTL), Jesper Wallstedt (MIN) and Arturs Silovs (PIT) -- and it's already a crowded field. But Snuggerud still has a lane to the Calder if he can pick up the scoring pace. And by that we mean lead all rookie forwards in points.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 6

Utah Mammoth

The Mammoth make the playoff cut

When the Mammoth lost their third straight overtime game this week, head coach André Tourigny joked, "We're undefeated in regulation in the last four [games]. Let's put it that way."

To that end, the Mammoth are picking up points again after losing five of six games in regulation. That followed seven straight wins. This is what young, super-talented teams do, and Utah isn't immune to it.

The Mammoth have shown me enough to be confident that the sum total of this season will be a playoff appearance. Their core players are great, and their young stars like Logan Cooley are constantly improving. If I have a concern, it's in goal, where Karel Vejmelka and Vitek Vanecek are both playing below replacement levels. But I'm not giving up on them Yeti, er, yet.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

Winnipeg Jets

Kyle Connor stays, makes Marner money

After my predictions story ran Sept. 24, Connor signed an eight-year contract extension Oct. 8 worth \$96 million, which gives him a \$12 million average annual value through 2033-34.

Mitch Marner had signed an eight-year contract extension on June 30 worth \$96 million, which gives him a \$12 million average annual value through 2032-33.

Just a tomahawk dunk from the foul line of a prediction. I'd give this an 11 if I could.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 10

Pacific Division

Anaheim Ducks

Ducks are a final week elimination

The Ducks have been an early-season revelation as new head coach Joel Quenneville unlocked their offense to the tune of 3.63 goals per game, third in the league. Young stars like Leo Carlsson and Cutter Gauthier were among the NHL's top scorers. Chris Kreider and Jacob



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Trouba were playing like they wanted to make the Rangers regret forcing them out of MSG. Anaheim sat atop the Pacific Division, looking like they've turned the corner.

Stathletes gives Anaheim a 67% chance of making the playoffs, which tells you that this early-season sprint by the Ducks isn't an aberration. But contending for and making the playoffs are two different things. One assumes the Oilers will do what they usually do: start slow and then catch fire to finish in the top three in the division. The Kings are solid. The Golden Knights haven't truly hit their stride. The wild card could be crowded with teams like the Mammoth, Wild and Kraken.

But the reason I'm sticking with a near-miss by these Ducks: They don't defend at a playoff level yet. Which is fine, because a lot of them are still ducklings. Lukas Dostal is good enough to carry them to the bubble, but it'll eventually pop days before the postseason.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

Calgary Flames

Nazem Kadri will be traded

The Flames had the worst record in the NHL through 21 games, with just a .310 points percentage. They might be the only team in the league for whom you could say the season was already lost, sitting 10 points out of the final wild-card spot and 11 points out of third place in the Pacific on Nov. 19.

As one would expect, the trade rumor industrial complex is feasting on Flames content. Pending UFA defenseman Rasmus Andersson has been the subject of speculation for most of the year. Versatile forward Blake Coleman, signed through 2026-27, could be a coveted addition. But it's Kadri that continues to enchant fans whose teams need a No. 2 center, with his unique mix of skill and snarl. He has limited trade protection.

TSN's Darren Dreger said the Flames aren't shopping Kadri, who is signed through 2028-29 at a solid cap hit (\$7 million annually), specifically noting that "Flames ownership" wants to keep him around. So that's discouraging, but not nearly as discouraging as the results the Flames aren't getting on the ice. Moving him might just eventually make more sense than keeping him around if some contender sees him as the final piece of a championship puzzle.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 6

Edmonton Oilers

Connor McDavid signs a team-friendly, three-year extension

Connor McDavid ended his contract drama by signing an extension on Oct. 6. Was it team-friendly, as predicted? Yes, as McDavid signed for much less than market value, insofar as such a thing could exist for the best hockey player on the planet. The Oilers inked him to a deal that carries an average annual value of \$12.5 million, which is \$1.5 million less annually than teammate Leon Draisaitl.

Was it three years? No, it was not. McDavid surprised many by taking an even shorter short-term deal with Edmonton, giving them a three-year window -- this season, plus two more -- in which to finally win a Stanley Cup with McDavid.

So, in the end, partial credit.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 8

Los Angeles Kings

Eliminate the Oilers in the first round

Stop us if you've heard this one before: The Kings are an excellent defense team (sixth in the NHL) that doesn't generate enough goal scoring (26th). They have a .600 points percentage so far in Anze Kopitar's farewell tour and are looking like a playoff team again.

Again, the law of averages would indicate that the Kings won't lose to the Oilers in a fifth straight opening-round series. This might be the best year to catch Edmonton, with a roster that might not match the depth of the ones that rolled to the Stanley Cup Final in consecutive seasons.

In hindsight, I goofed up this prediction with specificity. I should have said "the Kings advance further in the playoffs than the Oilers" on the off chance Edmonton doesn't qualify. Which, given the current state of things ...

Bold prediction confidence rating: 7

San Jose Sharks

Macklin Celebrini hits 90 points

What a season so far for Celebrini. At one point he led the NHL in points as he powered the Sharks to respectability for the first time in years. No one on the team is more deserving of the giant teal shark jaws necklace that Ryan Reaves is forcing players of the game to wear while topless during postgame interviews.

Celebrini had 30 points in his first 20 games. Based on his current scoring pace, Celebrini would end up in the neighborhood of 123 points in his second NHL season. That's not exactly going to tamp down the Sidney Crosby comparisons.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 9

Seattle Kraken

Kraken are the trade deadline's top seller

The Kraken have been better than expected at the start of the season, amassing a .605 points percentage in 19 games and sitting in a playoff spot as play began on Thursday. New coach Lane Lambert has them playing a confident and effective defensive game.

But Seattle doesn't exactly generate all that much offense (28th in the NHL). Does that mean they eventually slip down the standings in a competitive division and conference, or do they remain close enough in the playoff hunt that they aren't looking to move any of their half-dozen pending free agents like Jaden Schwartz, Jordan Eberle, Mason Marchment or Jamie Oleksiak?

Bold prediction confidence rating: 5

Vancouver Canucks

Elias Pettersson cracks 30 goals again

Free of J.T. Miller's dressing room tormenting, many expected this to be a bounce-back campaign for Pettersson on the Canucks. His offensive numbers are up year-over-year, with 19 points in 21 games.

Unfortunately, his goal-scoring rates are more aligned with last season (0.8 goals per 60 minutes) than when he was good for 30 goals in a season. Pettersson had six goals in those 21 games, which projects to around 24 for the season.

I never thought I'd say this, but I'd much rather Elias Pettersson have Kiefer Sherwood's goal total right now.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 4

Vegas Golden Knights

Knights make the conference finals

It's hard to get a handle on how good the Golden Knights can be given their lineup absences, which have included Mark Stone, Adin Hill, Noah Hanifin and William Karlsson.

We know how incredible Jack Eichel has been (24 points in 19 games) and that Mitch Marner is still doing his 200-foot player thing (21 points, plus-10). We also know that Shea Theodore has stepped up big time in



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the absence of Alex Pietrangelo and that Ivan Barbashev and Pavel Dorofeyev have absurd shooting percentages. We know they are adept at picking up points in the regular season, placing second in the Pacific through 19 games.

If they're at full capacity in the postseason, I think the Golden Knights can emerge from the Pacific this season, especially if Mark Stone can go. They're fundamentally sound and physical as they come. But yeah, I'm a little worried we'll never see them at full capacity.

Bold prediction confidence rating: 8

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1369012 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Easton Cowan's value to Maple Leafs growing fast

Luke Fox

TORONTO — The Toronto Maple Leafs lost another hockey game, and the youngest among them carried the burden of a squandered point as he walked out of the rink.

"I take responsibility. I got to bury one," Easton Cowan lamented, following a hard-fought 3-2 overtime defeat to the Columbus Blue Jackets.

"If I bury one of them, we could've won the game. So, that's the unfortunate part. But just gotta stay positive."

Sure, Cowan has been a tad unlucky through his first 13 NHL games, converting on just one of his first 24 shots.

But he's also 20 years old and, partly in response to Toronto's injury rash, got asked to skate more than 20 minutes Thursday.

When it comes to the words Cowan and burying this season, his first as a professional, many figured we'd be talking about stuffing unproven talent in the minors.

Not critical scoring chances in what suddenly feel like urgent mid-November games against mediocre opponents.

Sure, in a perfect world, 'Cowboy' would be afforded time to learn the ropes in the AHL.

But the climate in Leafland these days is far from perfect — six regulars sat out for this one — and that horse has long left the barn.

As a prized product of Leafs coach Craig Berube's good friend, Dale Hunter, in nearby London, Cowan had a leg up in training camp.

And despite a few rough outings, and one two-game stint on the farm (the GM's call, not the coach's), the energetic winger is swiftly establishing himself as one of Berube's more trusted skaters.

So impactful was Cowan Thursday that he rightfully earned a mid-game promotion to the top line alongside William Nylander and John Tavares. He was thrown over the boards in the final minute of a tied contest and again in 3-on-3 with valuable points on the line.

It speaks to the kid's confidence and internal standard that ripping four shots, setting up Tavares's go-ahead goal, throwing a pair of hits, blocking a couple shots, and finishing a team-best plus-2 isn't enough.

They lost, and Cowan didn't find the back of Jet Greaves' net.

"Yeah, it's good I'm getting out there, but I got to capitalize," Cowan said. "I'm getting chances. I just got to bury. I got to bury one of them, since I'm out there a lot."

We'll entertain the argument that it sure would be swell if Cowan could play all situations for the Marlies and enter the show with more experience battling grown-ups under his belt.

But Berube needs W's now, and it's becoming increasingly clear that Cowan gives him a better chance of securing them.

"He's come a long way," said Tavares, thinking back to Cowan's fourth-line shifts in pre-season. "You can see his ability to read the game and make little plays, just like he did on my goal. Like, he just lays it in there, not too quick, just in the right spot with the right pace on it, and just an easy play for me to put in.

"And he seems to be stronger on the puck, absorbing contact, things like that. And you saw it throughout the game. I thought it was evident in overtime as well. So, yeah, he's playing really well. And credit to him. He's not tried to do too much, focus too much on things offensively, just be consistent with this game in all areas."

No Leaf tilted the ice as aggressively as Cowan did Thursday; Toronto outshot Columbus 14-4 and out-attempted the Jackets 32-14 when the freshman hit the sheet.

"Watching him even over the last couple games, I've seen him grow a lot and getting more confidence out there," Joseph Woll said. "He's gonna be a special player, I think, for a while."

If the Maple Leafs have played too much vanilla hockey through their first six weeks, Cowan injects a swirl of flavour.

He's young and speedy, confident and easygoing. As quick to snatch a veteran's ice time as he is to claim ownership of a narrow loss.

"He's taken some good steps from Day 1," Berube said. "He's like a dog on a bone out there, for me. Like, he just works and skates and sees the ice extremely well. He's being a lot heavier on pucks and making good decisions with the puck. I thought he played a really good game tonight."

His best yet.

And there will be more to come.

Fox's Fast Five

- With the Blue Jackets flying from Winnipeg to Toronto Tuesday night, Adam Fantilli was gifted an entire Wednesday at home.

"I got to go from the airport straight home, which never happens," said the native of Nobleton, Ont. "Got to wake up in my childhood bed. My mom made breakfast. It was kind of cool. It was a good time."

The Fantillis had about 30 friends and family over for a big dinner, but it's not as if the 21-year-old's parents are banking on him moving back into his teenage bedroom anytime soon.

"No, they actually just finished a renovation like four months ago," Fantilli said. "All my stuff's gone.

"It's in a box in the basement."

Same.

Belly full of home cookin', Fantilli was the most dangerous man on the ice: two goals, including the game-winner, a primary assist, plus a couple of emphatic celebrations.

- Depth D-man Dakota Mermis scored his first goal as a Maple Leaf — and first in the NHL in 635 days.

Benches love themselves an unlikely scorer.



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"They're excited," Berube said. "He's very well-liked on our team. Solid guy. You know, he's come in and done a good job here for us with the injuries. He's played pretty well."

At even-strength, shot attempts were 14-6 in favour of Toronto when the third pair of Mermis and Troy Stecher were on the ice.

- The Leafs are stuck in another 0-for-10 power-play drought. Their season is only 21 games old, and they already have three separate four-game stretches without a power-play goal.

At least they're looking more dangerous at 5-on-4.

"Our power-play has been building, too," Tavares said. "We gotta find a way on the right side of the special-teams battle here to help us out."

- Props to Scott Laughton for gleaning the silver lining in getting sidelined by a suspected concussion, just four periods after he returned from a damaged foot that had already kept him out a month: "It gave my other injury a little bit more time to heal."

Laughton was a beast all night: four shots, 72 per cent in the dot, two hits, the biggest block of the game, and Toronto's hardest-working penalty killer.

- Frequent scratch Yegor Chinakov wants a trade out of Columbus, but he's not doing himself any favours.

The 24-year-old right wing is minus-4 without a point in his past nine games. Returning to the Jackets' lineup in Toronto, he was but a blip: zero shots while skating a team-low 8:49.

Stagnant situation here.

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1369013 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' goaltending an undeniable problem further exposed in blowout loss

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — Samuel Montembeault slid right by his post and watched as the shot flew past him and into the far side of his wide-open net.

It didn't come from Alex Ovechkin, the greatest goal scorer in history, who had already beaten him with the first shot of the night for the 905th tally of his career.

No, no, the shot came from fourth-line winger Ethen Frank, who came into Thursday's game with all of four NHL goals to his name.

Frank then suddenly had six after beating Montembeault clean just 1:38 after shooting the puck right through him to give the Washington Capitals a 3-1 lead.

The No. 1 goaltender of the Montreal Canadiens then surrendered his net after literally surrendering his net.

Montembeault had stopped just seven of 10 shots — some of them seemingly by pure fluke — before being replaced by Jakub Dobes, who also found himself sliding out of his crease on the second goal to get by him over the next 10 shots Washington registered in the game.

Not a good image.

Neither is .750 in big, block letters — a combined save percentage that not even the high-flying 1976-77 Canadiens would've been able to overcome in this game.

There are problems, and then there are problems, and this one is a severe problem: The only thing more damaging to a hockey team than having a goaltender who can't stop the puck is having two goaltenders who can't stop the puck.

But that's what the Canadiens have right now — at a time when they need the complete opposite, while they're immersed in the longest slump of their season, which extended to five games with Thursday's 8-4 loss to the Capitals.

Of course, the scoreline, which inflated thanks to two more goals Ovechkin scored for a hat trick that pushed him into 10th place on the all-time NHL points list, was indicative of more than just goaltending malaise.

At least that's what Mike Matheson, Brendan Gallagher and Nick Suzuki acknowledged before coach Martin St. Louis talked about how disappointed he was to see the Canadiens resemble the team that lost 6-3 to the Capitals a little less than 13 months ago.

On that night (Halloween of 2024), the Canadiens were a horror show, leaving St. Louis so disgusted that he kept repeating they had puked all over themselves.

On this one, the coach spit out a list of things he'd have liked to have seen his team do better to help its goaltenders out.

"Put the puck deep, have less turnovers, defend better, get the puck out when you're near the blue line, take less penalties, block shots, tie up sticks in front of the net," he said, and though we believed him to be completely earnest and genuine, it's not like he was about put his hand on the gear shifter of the tractor that ran over Montembeault and Dobes and flip it straight into reverse.

"Can our goaltenders play better? Yes," St. Louis said. "They're the first who will tell you that. You want me to say I want more saves? We all want more saves. For sure the goaltenders can play better, but I'm not going to blame everything on the goaltenders."

It wouldn't help.

Neither would a post-game sword swallowing competition for Montembeault and Dobes, hence the Canadiens' public relations team wisely sparing them from meeting the media.

Montembeault hasn't found solid ground since the season started, and he's owned it. Dobes has lost his balance from the high peak he stood on after winning his first six games, and he has been accountable. Both goaltenders appear to be in free fall, and talking about it publicly wasn't going to help them reach the latches to their parachutes.

Their teammates know how badly they want to stand tall and make the difference, and they sympathize.

"There's only certain positions in sports that are kind of, individually, you can put a lot of blame on yourself," said Gallagher, who scored his first goal of the season Thursday.

"It's a really tough position," Gallagher added. "I can't even relate to it. We have help, (the goaltender) is kind of the last line (of defence)."

His job is considerably more challenging when the details in front of the net fall off as much as they did against the Capitals.

They were sharp for the Canadiens in a 4-3 shootout loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets on Monday, to the point that St. Louis said he felt his team was ready to "flip it and get going" against Washington.

But the Canadiens failed to do that at the start of Thursday's game, and Montembeault left them chasing it after getting chased in the fourth minute of the second period.

Most of the "immature play" that followed was a direct result of that, with some of it undoubtedly exacerbated by the loss of Montreal's most



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defensively sound forward, veteran Jake Evans, who took a charge and shoulder to the chin from Tom Wilson in the second period and didn't return for the third.

There's nothing to do about that now, but St. Louis said the Canadiens will have to face the truth about how they played and hopefully grow from it.

The other truth that can't be ignored is that hockey is a game of mistakes, and you need your goaltender(s) to erase them from time to time.

With neither Montembeault nor Dobes doing that right now, the Canadiens must consider an alternative.

Perhaps there's one outside the organization.

Within it, Kaapo Kahkonen is 4-2-0 with a .919 save percentage for the Laval Rocket this season, and he has 140 games of NHL experience.

The 29-year-old Finn is probably a better option than 20-year-old Jacob Fowler at this juncture, even if Fowler is 6-4-0, with a .921 save percentage in Laval.

The risk of potentially denting Fowler's confidence at this critical point of his development probably outweighs the upside of him temporarily playing well.

But the Canadiens need someone to play well at the position right now.

Had either Montembeault or Dobes not played terribly Thursday, we wouldn't have been hearing about immature plays and setbacks to October of 2024.

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1369014 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Skidding Oilers' offence goes quiet, wasting Pickard's strong outing

Ryan Dixon

On a night the Edmonton Oilers got all the saves they could ask for, the team still couldn't come up with a win.

The Oilers were 2:32 away from blanking the Tampa Bay Lightning 1-0 at Benchmark International Arena, but Nick Paul — playing his first game of the year — became the first Bolt to beat Calvin Pickard in the game to square the affair.

In overtime, Jack Roslovic — who had two OT winners already in his short Oilers tenure — had a golden opportunity to end it. With Tampa goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy already splayed out in his crease to deny an in-close attempt from Zach Hyman, the puck came to Roslovic in the blue paint. The winger immediately tried to flip the puck over Vasilevskiy, but the big Russian kicked up his left pad just enough to make a spectacular save and keep the three-on-three action going.

No sooner had Vasilevskiy denied Roslovic than Tampa broke back the other way, eventually sending Jake Guentzel in alone on Pickard. The Bolts sniper scored his fifth goal in his past three outings to earn his squad a 2-1 win and snuff out any chance Edmonton had of ending the evening on a high.

And what a high it would have been for this team — playing for the second time in 24 hours and for the sixth straight time on the road — to grind out a victory in a place they've now lost 12 of their past 13 trips to.

It was clear from the way Edmonton came flying out of the gate that it desperately wanted to end a two-game losing skid and earn a couple of points, preferably with its first regulation-time victory of November. Leon Draisaitl got the Oilers moving in the right direction when he picked off a brutal clearing attempt by Tampa defenceman Emil Lilleberg and immediately sent a pass to the slot for Trent Frederic to pound home just 92 seconds into the game.

At that point, it seemed Tampa Bay was ripe for the taking. The Lightning were playing without three of their top defencemen — Victor Hedman, Erik Cernak and Ryan McDonagh — and the Oilers certainly created ample opportunities to increase their lead in the first half of the opening frame.

However, after they failed to get another puck past Vasilevskiy, the ice — somewhat predictably — started tilting back towards the Oilers' end.

If Tampa took control in the middle frame, it was coming at Edmonton in waves by the third. To their credit, though, the Oilers — often maligned for playing shoddy defence much of the year — hung tough and got the kind of goaltending from Pickard that neither he nor starter Stuart Skinner has consistently delivered this year.

In the second frame, Pickard squared up to stop a clean one-timer from Brayden Point in the bumper. In the third, Pickard made a save no less jaw-dropping than the one Vasilevskiy made in OT on Roslovic when he Supermanned across his crease to get a scrap of blocker on a Brandon Hagel attempt from the side of the net.

It was all trending toward the kind of gutsy win that can feel like the start of something for a team. Instead, it was another gut-punch for a .500 club that must reconcile with the fact it has fewer 60-minute victories (four) than its cellar-dwelling Alberta rivals in Calgary (five).

"There's a lot of things to be happy about," Oilers coach Kris Knoblauch said after the game. "We've been talking about how to play better defensively and better awareness, and just digging in in those areas, and just a lot of good defensive plays tonight. And obviously (Pickard) had a heck of a game, especially in the third period. But you can see (evidence of a) fragile group in the third period. We're just a shell of ourselves, not wanting to make a mistake and holding on and when you hold on, you just have to defend over and over again. Unfortunately, they score that tying goal and it was too bad because it was a good effort for a lot of guys."

Certainly, Pickard tops the list of Oilers who showed up to play. Goaltending is a constant subplot with this team and Pickard entered this game with a gruesome .830 save percentage. To say he gave his club a shot to win against Tampa would be an understatement, and he, in turn, felt good about what he saw in front of him.

"I really liked how we played," Pickard said. "Obviously in the third, they kind of took it to us. They're a great team as well. They had some good looks. Very unfortunate result."

"We were staying tight, good in the middle, the penalty-kill was good, good sticks, let me see the puck and we kept the goals against down."

The Oilers, who've now played a league-high 10 extra-time affairs, will close out their long trip by visiting the Florida Panthers team that's got the better of them in the past two Stanley Cup Finals on Saturday night. They won't land in Sunrise on the high of a win, but there's certainly something to build on from their near victory in Tampa.

"Just playing with that intensity and that attention to detail, because any team that wins consistently has to be a good defensive team," Knoblauch said when asked what the team can carry forward. "Yes, you've got to be able to score goals, but the most important thing is just keeping the puck out of your net. I feel that if we can play good, solid defensive hockey, that we'll get our opportunities and we'll score enough goals that we should win most nights."



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The fact they didn't on this one, though, makes it all the more critical to finish the job next time out.

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1369015 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' superior effort vs. Stars comes up empty: 'We played the right way'

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER – The Vancouver Canucks' game got a lot better Thursday, but their record got a little worse.

With their season already precarious and the need for points increasingly desperate, no one was taking victory laps because the Canucks played one of their best games this National Hockey League season, outplaying the powerful Dallas Stars through two periods but still losing 4-2 after a pair of late goals from the visitors.

With their speed, forecheck, defensive zone and connectedness profoundly better than in Vancouver's just-completed three-game Eastern trip against Stanley Cup contenders, when the Canucks were outshot 109-50, the team deserved better against the Stars.

But the Canucks probably deserved worse than the three out of six points they harvested against Carolina, Tampa and Florida. So that's hockey.

Goalie Kevin Lankinen stole them a couple of points on the road, and on Thursday at home, he was outplayed by Dallas's Jake Oettinger. And that, too, is hockey.

Overall, there was little "wrong" with how the Canucks played, although they'll regret for a while their failure to capitalize on an 80-second five-on-three power play in the middle period when Vancouver was pressing to break a 2-2 tie.

But if the Canucks had managed a few more of these games, despite their rampant injuries, in the season's opening-quarter, getting nothing out of Thursday's superior effort wouldn't have hurt so much.

As it stands, the Canucks are 9-11-2, two games under .500 for the first time this season, and have just one win from their last six home games (1-4-1) and three wins in 10 games at Rogers Arena this season.

"I thought we deserved a better fate tonight," defenceman Tyler Myers said after one of his best games in a while. "Guys were pushing hard. I thought we generated (chances). I thought we were playing fast and our gaps were better because of that. So we just have to stick to it, come out next game with the same mindset and keep pushing forward. A lot of good to take away from it, and that's what we have to focus on. It just never feels good to lose."

Especially for the handful of forwards — Brock Boeser, Conor Garland, Elias Pettersson, Jake DeBrusk — who had outstanding opportunities to push the Canucks ahead after the teams came out of the first period tied 2-2.

"It's a game that we could have won," DeBrusk said. "We put ourselves in a good spot. We played the right way. But for me, personally, I probably won't be thinking about that. I'll be thinking more about the result because it's getting desperate."

The Canucks played one of their best periods at home this season in the middle frame, but couldn't manufacture a go-ahead goal, even during the two-player advantage that began at 4:50.

DeBrusk couldn't get enough lumber to propel Boeser's goalmouth pass under Oettinger, and on another sequence, Boeser zipped a wild pass across the slot when it looked like Pettersson's diagonal feed had left him with a semi-open net.

After the power play, Boeser was robbed by Oettinger on a crease-side pass from Garland, who also nicked the goalie with a shot that dinged the bar on an open look from left wing.

"Puck was on my stick; I've got to be better there," DeBrusk lamented of his power-play miss. "We're striving to finish these games now, but we had a five-on-three... we've got to have a killer instinct. And I was a huge reason. I had three back-door (chances) I could have had. Give the other goalie credit, obviously, but I've got to bury those and it's a different game."

"Obviously, a lot of positives. But that's what happens when you keep a good team lingering around. They'll make you pay."

Canuck captain Quinn Hughes' tough pass and defenceman Tom Willander's poor read opened enough ice for Stars' checker Colin Blackwell to zoom in on Lankinen on a breakaway and rocket a shot into the top corner for the lead at 10:47 of the third period.

"I haven't really watched it back," Willander, who has rarely put himself in bad spots as a rookie, said when asked about the breakaway. "I saw our forward getting a zone entry, so I was just trying to follow up the play, but then I got stuck on that side."

Stars superstar Mikko Rantanen, who wielded his stick for more violent purposes a couple of times earlier in the game, brilliantly spun away from Boeser on a one-on-one and buried a backhand under the bar to make it 4-2 and clinch the points with 1:31 remaining.

The Canucks countered first-period goals by Mavrik Bourque and Jason Robertson with goals by Linus Karlsson and Elias Pettersson.

"I didn't have an issue with our third period today," Canucks coach Adam Foote said. "We had a mistake. A pass got away from one of our D-man (Willander) and we have to get it deep there. And then we all went on a pinch, and then we didn't play a two-on-one. I mean, it happens. You give a breakaway to a guy from just a mistake, that doesn't mean we had a bad third period. I liked our game entirely. I didn't like that play, but it happened."

"It's about consistency. We bring that game more times than not, we're going to have good results."

Two games under .500 and four points out of a playoff spot, the Canucks play the Calgary Flames on Sunday before embarking on another difficult four-game trip.

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1369016 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Despite loss, Maple Leafs steadied by return of Laughton's quiet leadership

Sonny Sachdeva

TORONTO — It's been six months since Scott Laughton has had the chance to do what he did Thursday night. Six months since the 31-year-old has been granted an opportunity to lace up his skates, hop over the boards into the glow of the Scotiabank Arena lights, and play meaningful minutes for his Toronto Maple Leafs.



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The road back to the blue-and-white's lineup has been tumultuous. After a rollercoaster late-season spell with the club following his arrival at the 2025 trade deadline, the thinking was Laughton could head into the new season more settled, more a part of this group. A pre-season injury upended those plans, sidelining the Oakville, Ont., product for the first 13 games of the year.

He returned in early November, against Utah, easing himself back into the mix in his season debut. One game later, it all came crashing down again, Laughton knocked out of a tilt with the Boston Bruins with yet another injury.

Five more games on the shelf came and went. But Thursday night, No. 24 finally got his moment, drawing back into the lineup as a steadying presence for the Maple Leafs' injury-ravaged forward corps, helping them earn a much-needed point in the process.

"He was fantastic," John Tavares said of his fellow centreman after the dust settled on a 3-2 overtime loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets. "You know, I feel for him — I thought he came into the year looking great. Great camp, the way he prepared. It's been a tough go. But he's just put his head down. He's a tremendous guy in the locker room, and a hell of a player."

The former Philadelphia Flyer's blue-collar approach was noticeable on a night that saw Toronto pull out one of their better efforts in what's been an overall disappointing campaign. Logging 17 minutes of ice, Laughton showed the type of veteran poise Toronto was hoping to see when he joined the club late last season. He spurred his line on throughout the tilt, hemming Columbus in their own zone more than a few times. He led the club through a pivotal penalty kill late in the game with the score still even, a point still on the table. And he finished the evening with four shots on the Jackets' cage, third-most of anyone in a Leafs sweater.

"I thought he was really good tonight," head coach Craig Berube said of his veteran. "A lot of energy, skated well, killed penalties, created some offence. He just brings that tenacity every shift — with work."

It's a crucial development for these Leafs. Results aside, it's the way Toronto has played through the first quarter of the campaign that's had the Maple Leafs faithful pulling their hair out — the club has looked disconnected and disorganized, often getting outworked by the opposition.

On this night, they looked steady, if still thin in the depth department with Auston Matthews, Matthew Knies, Nicolas Roy, Chris Tanev and Brandon Carlo all still out of the lineup. Laughton's return was no small part of the better showing.

"I thought we had good energy," he said from the Maple Leafs locker room late Thursday. "They're a really good rush team, especially their top six. They make it hard on you. ... I thought we did a pretty good job, Woller made some big saves at key times. We take it to OT and they get the extra.

"You've got to keep building on it. You can't get negative or down in this situation — you continue to roll, you continue to go, and keep playing together. Good things are going to happen if we continue to manage the puck, and make it hard on teams to come out of the zone."

While the night will finish as a return to the loss column, the details say this was a sign of progress from these Maple Leafs. And it was a late sequence from Laughton that allowed Toronto to leave this one with at least one point to build off.

The moment came late in the third. The score was knotted up at 2-2, Toronto having clawed back from a two-goal deficit over the previous period-and-a-half. With nine minutes left in the tilt, the club's old ghosts came back to haunt them — a too-many-men penalty sent Columbus to the power play with a chance to put the game away in regulation.

But the Maple Leafs dug in and held their ground. Joseph Woll came up with some crucial saves to keep the Jackets' man-advantage off the board. In the final seconds of the kill, the puck came to Ivan Provorov at the point, with acres of space around him. The Russian rearguard loaded up and let loose, only to see his old Flyers teammate Laughton drop to a knee and sacrifice his body for a painful block.

Power-play chance nullified. Score preserved.

Asked post-game if he second-guessed blocking that one given his recent injury issues, Laughton smiled.

"No. That's part of the job. That's what I'm paid to do," he said. "We have a lot of guys who would do the same thing. You get your body in front of it and help Woller the best you can."

"He does so many things in little areas," Tavares said of the veteran pivot. "Great on the PK, great in the faceoff circle, really heady, really smart, understands the game. A huge block late in the game there as well, sacrificing himself. He's a big part of our team, and we're happy to have him back."

Laughton's return had an added impact on Tavares's own night, too, Berube pointing out that the bolstered centre depth meant the team didn't have to lean on Tavares for 23 minutes a night again, like they did last time out, or send No. 91 into the toughest defensive matchups.

But beyond the blocks or the o-zone shifts or the affected matchups, it's Laughton's quiet leadership that seemed to have the biggest impact on this group. His unwavering approach, shift to shift — honed by weeks watching from the press box as his club's campaign slowly went off the rails.

"You want to be out there," he said of the difficult injury spell. "You want to be battling with the guys. You feel helpless. I'll tell you, I was pretty excited this morning to get back at it. It's been a long time coming. Yeah, it sucks we lost, but we keep rolling. I've been in this situation many times back in Philly. You string together a couple and you get some momentum and you continue to go. The parity in the league, it's so tight. So you can't wear on yourselves. You keep a positive mindset. We're all in this together. We've got a veteran group here. So, I think this is good for us.

"Sometimes it feels like the world's falling on you, and things aren't always going to go your way. But the adversity, it's going to make you better down the stretch. Sixty or so games left — there's a lot of runway. You get that urgency in your game, you start playing the right way, good things are going to happen with the talent on this team. ... The sun comes up tomorrow and we'll get after it, and go to Montreal for a big game."

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1369017 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / NHL Power Rankings: Which coaches are on the hot seat?

Ryan Dixon

One year and one day ago, the axe fell.

The first coach fired last year was Jim Montgomery of the Boston Bruins on Nov. 19, 2024.

Five days later, Montgomery signed a five-year deal to coach the St. Louis Blues, who cleared space behind the bench by sacking Drew Bannister.



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Montgomery had a .715 points percentage in 184 games with Boston when the B's let him go, while Bannister had been on the job less than 365 days in St. Louis when the Blues gave him the boot.

Suffice it to say, the NHL can be a ruthless place both on and off the ice.

When the puck dropped on this season just over a month ago, nine teams — nearly a third of the league — had a new top suit calling the shots. And just to reinforce the notion that change happens fast in coaching circles, consider the fact Martin St. Louis — who was hired less than four years ago with basically no coaching experience at any level to shepherd the Montreal Canadiens through a rebuild — is currently the fourth-longest tenured bench boss in the NHL.

Of course, with a quarter of the season already in the books, some fanbases are already getting antsy about bad results. And, as the adage goes, it's always easier to fire one coach than 20 players.

With that in mind, we're using this week's power rankings as a hot-seat check of sorts, as we take a quick peek at the coaching situation for all 32 clubs.

1. Colorado Avalanche (13-1-5) Jared Bednar is the second-longest tenured coach in the NHL, having been tabbed to guide the Avs — his first head coaching gig in the NHL — in the summer of 2016. Bednar, of course, is the first coach to win an ECHL, AHL and NHL championship. He's a huge character in the current iteration of the Avs. That said, Colorado has hit that point where another early playoff exit could put anything on the table.
2. Carolina Hurricanes (13-5-2) Just like in our power rankings, Rod Brind'Amour is right behind Bednar as the third-longest tenured bench boss in the league. As much as any coach in the NHL, Brind'Amour is the face of his team.
3. Dallas Stars (12-5-3) Glen Gulutzan is getting his third crack (and second with the Stars) behind an NHL bench. His previous two stops as head coach ended after two seasons, so he's obviously hoping for more in Big D this time around as the Stars try to get over the championship hump.
4. New Jersey Devils (13-5-1) Sheldon Keefe got the Devils back in the playoffs during his first year behind the bench in Jersey last season and the expectation is for a deep playoff run soon.
5. Anaheim Ducks (13-6-1) Joel Quenneville returned to the NHL in the summer after nearly four years away from the league. The hiatus, of course, stemmed from his inaction when Kyle Beach — a member of the Chicago Blackhawks team Quenneville coached — came forward with sexual assault allegations against Blackhawks video coach Brad Aldrich in 2010. Quenneville is second all-time in NHL wins (982) behind Scotty Bowman (1,244) and has the Ducks off to a great start this season.
6. Winnipeg Jets (12-7-0) Scott Arniel has a .693 points percentage in a season-and-a-quarter as Jets coach. A few factors play into that number, but Arniel surely deserves his share of the credit.
7. Los Angeles Kings (10-6-4) Jim Hiller took over the Kings in-season in February 2024 and while L.A. remains a strong club, Hiller is 0-2 versus the Edmonton Oilers in the first round of the playoffs, just like his predecessor Todd McLellan was.
8. Detroit Red Wings (12-7-1) McLellan was out of work less than a year after being axed in L.A. He's been a staple behind Western Conference benches this century, guiding the Kings, Sharks and Oilers. He's still in search of a ring and hoping to guide the Wings to their first playoff appearance since 2016.
9. Vegas Golden Knights (9-4-6) Bruce Cassidy has 119 Stanley Cup Playoff games on his resume, fifth-most among active coaches. He's already in his fourth season behind the bench in Vegas. While Cassidy

won the Cup during his first year in the desert, another deep run is required soon to satisfy management's high expectations.

10. Chicago Blackhawks (10-5-4) Jeff Blashill missed the playoffs in six of the seven years he coached the Red Wings. Wouldn't it be something if he made them during his first year in Chicago?
11. Pittsburgh Penguins (10-5-4) When Dan Muse was tabbed to coach the Pens last spring, it marked as big a surprise hiring as we've seen in a minute. Even more surprising is how well Muse has Pittsburgh — pegged for the bottom of the standings in most circles — playing through a quarter of the season.
12. Seattle Kraken (9-5-5) Lane Lambert is getting his second crack as an NHL head coach after spending two years guiding the Islanders. Lambert was a big branch on the Barry Trotz coaching tree and that means his teams always aim to play with pristine structure.
13. New York Islanders (11-7-2) The league is more fun when Patrick Roy is in it, full stop. Let's see if he and the Isles can keep the good results coming all year in his second full season at the helm on Long Island.
14. Tampa Bay Lightning (10-7-2) Can Canadian Jon Cooper add an Olympic gold medal to his incredible resume in February? That's about the only thing the NHL's longest-tenured coach has yet to accomplish behind a bench.
15. Montreal Canadiens (10-6-3) Only one NHL coach was a Hart Trophy winner in his playing days and it's Martin St. Louis of the Canadiens. (Of course, Habs fans would also be happy to point out Isles coach Patrick Roy was a three-time Conn Smythe Trophy winner as playoff MVP). An out-of-the-box hiring early in the rebuild, St. Louis has shown he's the man for the job in Montreal.
16. Minnesota Wild (10-7-4) John Hynes has coached three teams in the past 10 years and when he's been out of work, it hasn't been for long. Still, a Hynes-coached team has never finished as high as third in its division.
17. Florida Panthers (10-8-1) Jon Cooper is the longest-tenured NHL coach, but Paul Maurice had already coached 15 seasons in the league when Cooper made his debut with the Lightning in 2013. A handful of coaches are in their 60s and Maurice, at 58, still isn't one of them. Barring unforeseen events — and, hey, this is coaching we're talking about — Maurice will pass Scotty Bowman for the most contests coached in the NHL about halfway through 2027-28 and he'll still basically have his entire 60s ahead of him to keep piling up games.
18. Philadelphia Flyers (9-6-3) Something about Rick Tocchet coaching his old team in Philly just feels right.
19. Ottawa Senators (9-6-4) Travis Green got Ottawa back in the post-season during his first season with the club last year. Making the playoffs again will have a lot to do with the Sens' goaltending — currently posting the 25th-ranked 5-on-5 save percentage in the NHL — improving.
20. Washington Capitals (10-8-2) Spencer Carbery won the Jack Adams Trophy during his second year with Washington last season. If the Caps want to defend their Metropolitan Division crown, Carbery and Co. will have to get the club's 30th-ranked power play clicking.
21. New York Rangers (10-9-2) Mike Sullivan is one of the defining coaches of this century, having guided the Pittsburgh Penguins to a pair of championships. Year 1 in New York, though, has been defined by an inexplicable 1-7-1 record at Madison Square Garden.
22. Boston Bruins (12-10-0) Marco Sturm became a Bruin 20 years ago in November 2005, when he was part of the return from San Jose in the trade that shipped Joe Thornton west. He returns to the organization as a freshman NHL coach trying to navigate the club through a retool on the fly.



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23. Edmonton Oilers (9-9-4) It's cold comfort because Edmonton has not been able to get over the hump, but Kris Knoblauch's .617 playoff winning percentage is the highest of any coach in the NHL.

24. Utah Mammoth (10-7-3) Andre Tourigny is now in his fifth season guiding the Coyotes/Club/Mammoth. He's never had a better squad than the one he's got right now, but with increased spending from ownership comes higher expectations and pressure to perform.

25. Columbus Blue Jackets (10-8-2) Dean Evason had a .639 points percentage in five seasons with the Wild and nearly got the Jackets into a playoff spot last year when nobody expected too much from the club. Year 2 in Ohio comes with the notion that Evason and the Jackets can snag a post-season spot.

26. Toronto Maple Leafs (9-9-2) Even the biggest pessimist likely never thought GM Brad Treliving would be fielding questions about coach Craig Berube's job security earlier this week at the former's quarter-season press conference. Treliving backed Berube, but obviously things need to improve fast in Toronto.

27. San Jose Sharks (9-8-3) 38-year-old Ryan Warofsky was hired to oversee a long-term project in San Jose and the fact he's got the rebuilding Sharks over .500 this far into his second season behind the bench speaks well of his work.

28. Vancouver Canucks (9-10-2) Adam Foote is one of three rookie head coaches in the league, along with Dan Muse and Marco Sturm. Right now, his team has the worst expected goals percentage (42.76 per cent) of any club in the NHL.

29. Buffalo Sabres (7-9-4) Lindy Ruff will always be a legend in Buffalo, but having swords criss-cross his heart hasn't allowed Ruff to stop the bleeding during his second tour as the team's coach.

30. St. Louis Blues (6-9-5) Jim Montgomery is regarded as one of the finest coaches around, which makes the Blues' miserable start that much more perplexing.

31. Nashville Predators (6-10-4) You don't want to see anybody lose their job, but if you were to put a nickel down on the first coach who might fall this year, Nashville's Andrew Brunette would be squarely in the mix.

32. Calgary Flames (6-13-3) Ryan Huska just got a contract extension before the season. Whatever is next in Calgary, he figures to be a part of it.

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Sportsnet.ca / Biggest questions each Canadian team needs to address

Adam Vingan

As the NHL reaches the quarter mark of the season, the league's seven Canadian clubs all face major questions. Here are the ones each team hopes to answer in the immediate future:

Andersson, a pending unrestricted free agent, is one of two defencemen (Anaheim's Jackson LaCombe is the other) who averages at least 18 minutes at even strength, three minutes on the penalty kill and two minutes on the power play, per game. He is not afraid to let it rip (and stare down fans), ranking tied for third on defence in one-timer attempts and 14th in overall shot attempts.

And then there is forward Blake Coleman, a two-time Stanley Cup winner who can contribute in multiple ways. More than half of Coleman's goals

(48 of 86) over his five seasons in Calgary have come from the inner slot, so he is willing to take punishment to provide offence. He also is an ace penalty killer, ranking third among forwards this season in shorthanded defensive plays. (His nine shorthanded goals since joining the Flames are tied for eighth in the league.)

Edmonton's 7-4 loss to the Washington Capitals on Wednesday was emblematic of its season. The Oilers have allowed at least four goals 11 times — tied with the Buffalo Sabres for the most in the league.

The defensive corps, thought to be a strength of the team, has severely underperformed. Mattias Ekholm and Evan Bouchard, who helped the Oilers generate 60.7 per cent of the expected goals at five-on-five last season, are down to 52.8 per cent in that department. Coach Kris Knoblauch split them up against the Capitals. Darnell Nurse, meanwhile, has committed a league-worst seven turnovers that have resulted in goals against within 10 seconds.

It requires a team effort to fix one of the league's worst defences, but it falls largely on the defensive corps' shoulders to help right the ship.

Injuries have decimated the Canadiens, who have come back to earth (1-3-3 since Nov. 4) after a hot start. Forwards Alex Newhook (broken ankle) and Kirby Dach (fractured foot), as well as defenceman Kaiden Guhle (torn adductor muscle), are all out for considerable amounts of time. (Guhle has been out since mid-October but recently underwent surgery.)

On Monday, against the Columbus Blue Jackets, forward Zack Bolduc was promoted to Montreal's top line alongside Cole Caufield and Nick Suzuki. The Canadiens generated 41.6 per cent of the expected goals at even strength in nearly 13 minutes of ice time. (Bolduc has one goal in his past 16 games after opening the season by scoring in each of his first three games.)

Rookie centre Oliver Kapanen also received a season-high 17:30 of ice time Monday — nearly five more minutes than his season average entering the game (12:38 per game). He scored his seventh goal, tying New York Islanders defenceman Matthew Schaefer for the rookie lead.

The Senators have earned points in 12 of 16 games (8-4-4) without injured captain Brady Tkachuk, who could return to the lineup during the team's upcoming seven-game road trip.

Linus Ullmark has started 12 of those games, and his traditional numbers are unspectacular (2.84 goals-against average, .882 save percentage) behind one of the league's best defences as measured by shot quality against. (Ottawa ranks ninth in expected goals against per game overall and sixth across the past 16 games.)

After finishing 10th last season with 17.9 goals saved above expected (0.44 per 60 minutes), Ullmark has been decidedly average (0.05 GSAE per 60). Although Ullmark has recorded a quality start in nine of his 15 appearances (60 per cent), the Senators need more from him to keep pace in a tough Atlantic Division.

"(I'm) the first one to say that I'm not happy with a lot of the results," Ullmark told The Athletic earlier this month. "And why should I? If I was happy about that, about the things that I've accomplished so far in this season, I don't think I would be sitting here today."

Specifically, Toronto has struggled to defend the rush, surrendering the second-most rush scoring chances in the league.

The league began tracking penalty-kill percentage in 1977-78; Vancouver's 67.1 per cent rate would be the worst in history.

It is a substantial drop from the 82.6 per cent success rate that the Canucks had last season. The Canucks have plummeted from fifth to 30th in shorthanded expected goals against per two minutes. Opponents have completed 61.7 per cent of their slot passes against the Canucks' penalty kill, compared to a league-low 53.7 per cent last season.



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Vancouver's goaltenders can hardly be blamed, despite giving up more than four combined goals above expected while shorthanded.

The Canucks are without many of their top penalty killers from last season, such as centres Pius Suter (now in St. Louis) and Teddy Blueger, who has played in just two games this season because of injury. Regardless, the team's defensive structure is in tatters.

Winnipeg Jets: Will another forward line emerge as a scoring threat?

Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor are off to outstanding starts, combining for 22 goals and 51 points through 19 games. Along with Gabe Vilardi (14 points), the Jets' top forward line has outscored opponents 16-11 at five-on-five. That is second to only Colorado's top line of Artturi Lehkonen, Nathan MacKinnon and Martin Necas (21 on-ice goals for at five-on-five).

The problem, however, is that the Jets have only one other forward (Nino Niederreiter) with double-digit points. No other line combination has been on the ice for more than three Jets goals at five-on-five all season. Since captain Adam Lowry returned to the lineup earlier this month, his line with Niederreiter and Alex Lafallo has done well, outscoring opponents 3-0 and generating 58.3 per cent of the expected goals.

Winnipeg had 11 forwards record at least 10 points during its Presidents' Trophy-winning season, including nine who had at least 30 points (tied for second most in the league). Secondary scoring is critical to any team's success.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs Notebook: Stolarz injury 'worse' than anticipated

Luke Fox

TORONTO — When the Toronto Maple Leafs lost a game, their No. 1 centre, and their No. 1 goaltender during a bad night Boston, the sense was that Auston Matthews' lower-body injury was more worrisome than Anthony Stolarz's upper-body one.

Speaking post-game, coach Craig Berube was even hopeful that Stolarz might be available to him the very next game.

That was nine days ago.

Matthews was a full participant in Thursday's morning skate — good news — but will miss a fourth straight game as the Leafs host the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Stolarz, however, has yet to strap on the pads since leaving that Nov. 11 game early.

"Worse than we thought," coach Craig Berube said. "He's not ready to get on the ice yet and do the things he has needed to do. Hopefully it's soon. I really don't have a timetable for him. Maybe tomorrow he'll be on the ice. I'm not sure."

The timing of partner Joseph Woll's delayed start to the season couldn't be better.

Woll will start a third consecutive match Tuesday and has stabilized the crease with his 1.96 goal-against average and .934 save percentage.

Prior to Woll's return, the club had given up four-plus goals in four straight losses.

The organization believes burnout got to Stolarz, a tandem goalie who carried a starter's burden through October and early November.

"Anthony had a real strong start," general manager Brad Treliving said. "I think the workload caught up to him. I think that he'd be the first to tell you, his game dropped a little bit. I think it's tied a little bit into the number of starts he had, right?"

"Our hope is that we get Anthony healthy. Got all the faith in the world in Anthony. Glad to see Joe back there. They're a big part of our team, the tandem together and how they play off each other."

Järnkrok receives big promotion

Veteran Calle Järnkrok, who has bounced all around and right out of the lineup this season, will get a top-line look Thursday alongside John Tavares and William Nylander.

The strategy?

"Work as hard as I can and get the puck back to those two," said the winger, who is still looking for his first assist.

Berube leaned on Järnkrok for a season-high 19:18 in Tuesday's skid-stopping 3-2 overtime win over St. Louis. The coach likes the veteran's matchup defence and familiarity with Nylander. (Look for Järnkrok's cameo in Nylander's latest YouTube episode.) The coach also wants the Swede's right-handed shot on the top power-play unit.

"He's a valuable guy. He does a lot of things night in, night out that go unnoticed. That we notice but maybe you guys don't, or the fans," Berube explained.

"He's a penalty killer. He's a hard worker. He does a lot of little things right all over the ice. And he can complement any line."

Järnkrok scored goals in his first three games of the season, then was surprised to get scratched. Since returning to regular(ish) action, he has just one goal and is minus-8 in 11 outings.

But Nylander's magic can be contagious.

"He's one of the best players in the world. Usually, when you give him the puck, something good's happening," Järnkrok said.

"He had probably the nicest goal of season — and the biggest blooper, too. So, it was fun to see."

Laughton is back, again — hopefully for good

An injurious shot block in a meaningless pre-season game. A long rehab and too many days stuck in the gym when he couldn't jam his damaged foot into a skate boot. Then a return trip to IR after just four periods of hockey.

"The last five or so years, I haven't dealt with this. So, it's something new to me and something that I've had to deal with, but try and stay grounded," said Laughton, who makes his second comeback to the lineup Tuesday.

Laughton got rocked down the wall on Nov. 8 by a hard Nikita Zadorov check and missed a dozen days with a suspected concussion.

"It was clean. I honestly thought he was backing up. When I took a peek, he stepped up. I lost the puck a little bit. He's (six-foot-seven). I'm six-foot. So, there's going to be some contact there. Got the best of me," Laughton said.

"I had more of an issue with a couple of his other hits in Boston. But, yeah, I thought it was a clean hit. You got to keep your head up and keep going."

Did Zadorov reach out to check in with Laughton?

"No. I wouldn't really want him to, either."

Laughton will centre Steven Lorentz and rookie Easton Cowan — a trio that impressed with its energy and aggressive forecheck at camp.



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"It sucks because he was playing so well in pre-season, and we had that chemistry going that carried over from last year," said an empathetic Lorentz. "Sucks when you work out all summer and you get hurt in camp, and then you miss a little while. You're excited to get back, and you played one whole game, and then it was the first period of that Boston game that he was out again for another couple of weeks. So, definitely frustrating.

"A guy like that, he just wants to be around the guys. Such a good locker-room guy and great teammate."

One-timers: Still no timeline for Matthews' return to game action. "He's feeling a lot better, and he's shooting the puck pretty well. So, that's a good sign," Berube said.... Jet Greaves (.904) will tend goal for the Blue Jackets.... Philippe Myers and Sammy Blais will be scratched for Toronto.... The oft-scratched Yegor Chinakhov draws into Columbus's lineup because coach Dean Evason likes how he matches against Toronto.

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Sportsnet.ca / 32 Thoughts: Bedard, Celebrini making strong cases for Team Canada

Elliotte Friedman

Last week, at the NHL GM meetings in Toronto, commissioner Gary Bettman jumped on the Generation Z bandwagon.

There was a video highlighting the fact Zoomers led 18 teams in goals, with 10 per cent of all goals scored coming from players aged 21 or younger — the highest since 2018-19. There were slides showing a 20-year age range among the top 10 scorers, with both teenagers and 35-plus geriatrics represented.

Seven days after that presentation, Connor Bedard and Macklin Celebrini put on another show. Energized by an "A" stitched onto his jersey (smooth move, Blackhawks), Bedard sealed a 5-2 win over Calgary with his second hat trick of the season. Ninety minutes later, Celebrini matched with his third of the night an overtime winner to beat Utah.

It was the second night in NHL history with hat tricks by players 20 or younger. Almost 82 years ago, on Feb. 19, 1944, Jack Hamilton and Bud Poile combined for seven Toronto goals in a 10-4 victory over Boston.

Bedard and Celebrini deserve a ton of credit. Bedard's been very private about last summer's training — the one detail that's understood is better co-ordination of his workouts to truly impact on-ice performance — but the impact is obvious. In all of 2024-25, he had 70 speed bursts of at least 32 km/h. That was in the 55th percentile of the NHL. By last weekend, he was already at 60, now in the 97th percentile. He's Barry Allen, after the lightning bolt struck his forensic lab.

More importantly, the back-to-back No. 1 picks are elevating their organizations. Entering Wednesday's games, Chicago is a wild-card team and San Jose is two points out of the playoffs. No one saw this coming. (Apropos of nothing, if this continues, Spencer Knight is going to build himself a heck of a Vezina case.)

Now, there is an even bigger conversation.

Twenty years ago, Team Canada left 18-year-old Sidney Crosby off the Olympic team. Did it prevent them from winning gold? That's a stretch. But, with 20/20 hindsight, would a different decision be made?

Both Bedard and Celebrini attended the August Olympic orientation camp in Calgary. You can definitely see Canada thinking, "We hope one of them forces us to think hard." Two? Nope. No way, not happening, not even a conversation over GM Doug Armstrong's favourite Scotch.

Yet here we are in the year 2025 AD. Team Canada is careful about discussing these decisions, knowing the nuclear nature of discourse.

The case for Bedard/Celebrini is obvious: use your eyes. And: not taking them is anti-fun.

But there are enough clues to understand where resistance might come. In putting together the 4 Nations champion, Canada emphasized winning pedigree at the senior level. That mattered. It was a short, stressful event with a nail-biting championship that had an entire country sweating buckets on their couches. The calmness of those who'd played in multiple main events won the day.

Bedard and Celebrini don't have that experience, due to their age and that when you get taken first overall, you don't get an elevator straight to the top. Bedard won back-to-back World Junior golds, featuring highlight-reel material and 31 points in 14 games. He had eight points in 10 games at the 2024 World Championship, where Canada finished fourth. Celebrini had eight points in five games at the 2024 World Juniors, and six points in eight games at the 2025 World Championship. Canada was eliminated in the quarterfinals at both. (Obviously, that's not solely on him.)

I think you can, however, shape this into an argument for them. Mitch Marner celebrated junior success — a Memorial Cup — and won silver at the 2017 World Championship, but had not been past the second round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. He talked at length about Sidney Crosby's poise, how the bench never lost positivity, then set up the tying and winning goals in the 4 Nations gold-medal game.

If that attitude elevated Marner, there's no reason it can't do the same for Bedard and Celebrini.

The more I think about it, though, the more I wonder if the real debate is defensive play. If the 4 Nations taught us anything, it's that if you weren't committed to being a two-way demon, you weren't going to be trusted. Look at all of the players on the Canadian and U.S. rosters who were more dogged defensively than with their regular teams. Look how hard it was for even Connor McDavid, the most dynamic player in the sport, to do what he needed to do. Every inch of the ice was a fight.

Neither Bedard nor Celebrini have seen this before, but, again, it's a factor of being drafted to bad teams. I think it's safe to say they'd do whatever they could to show they'd adopt the same attitude. The underlying numbers indicate Chicago and San Jose give up more goals (and shots) when they are on the ice as opposed to when they aren't — although it should be pointed out they do play against the best players.

The debate is not Bedard vs. Celebrini. It's about both. There's no way Team Canada thought this would happen. The brain trust is remembering 4 Nations overtime: can they play 200 feet in that?

32 THOUGHTS

1. All of that discourse and didn't even mention Matthew Schaefer. As impressive as Bedard and Celebrini are, Schaefer's ascension to this discussion is mind-blowing. He was added to the Olympic drug-testing protocol, making him eligible to be selected by Team Canada. Total credit to him. He's been above 25 minutes six times in 20 games, and his arrival breathed new life into Long Island. You can't tell me his positive aura isn't an important factor in their rise to a .600 points percentage.

Canada was very happy with its 4 Nations defence, so it would be a surprise if anyone was deleted. (Drew Doughty's injury timeline is not a factor.) There's an extra spot in Milan that Schaefer's in the fight for. The Islanders do an excellent job deploying the defender, shielding him a bit



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against the toughest competition so he can freely wreak havoc. His ice-times (at home) vs. key opponents:

Macklin Celebrini: Schaefer 2:52 (Pelech 14:03)

Connor McDavid: Schaefer 2:06 (Pelech 8:43)

The numbers were closer against Dylan Larkin, Alexander Ovechkin and Mark Scheifele. Would Canada be comfortable with his lack of experience against the best? His attitude would be welcome anywhere, though.

2. Patrick Roy's eruption at Alexander Romanov's injury is about one thing: standing up for his team, making sure the players know he has their backs. That resonates.

Florida and Tampa Bay were warned last weekend before their first meeting since the exhibition brouhaha, and Roy will be too before the Dallas/Islanders rematch in March. Don't let things go too far. (Didn't stop the Panthers and Lightning from playing their typical, nasty affair.) One thing the officials were told to do that didn't happen during the pre-season meeting? Throw players out of the game, right away. Don't be afraid of that.

3. One more Olympic note: At the 1956 Summer Olympics, the equestrian events were held in Sweden, away from the rest of the Games, in Australia. That country's laws required all foreign horses to be quarantined for six months, an impossible ask. So, while there's precedent to host one event separately from the rest, the NHL and NHLPA made it very clear they are not interested in anything remotely similar this February. Both sent emissaries to the Milan rink this week. Reaction: There's still a lot of work to do, although the hosts are saying the right things. One source who saw photos last week called the facility "Stonehenge." I said no way it's that bad. He laughed. Clearly, Bettman is agitated that this is even a discussion. The last thing he wants is injury because of a rushed rink.

4. It is impossible not to look at what is happening in Anaheim, Chicago and San Jose without wondering about attitudes to rebuilds. The arguments against them are simple: there are no guarantees, the lottery is a fickle mistress (ask Detroit) and, perhaps the one that scares owners the most — you get financially pummelled while going through them. Organizations will tell you fans may support rebuilds, but not the way it most matters in a gate-driven league. There was a lot of pain for the Ducks, Blackhawks and Sharks. That said, every team reaches a point where you must consider it. You can't help but look at those rises and think: wouldn't it be easier to sell that now?

5. Those three teams are must-watch, with a new, particularly promising trend arriving in Anaheim. At the GM meetings, another slide was about power play/penalty kill differential. A couple of people noticed the Ducks weren't in their customary position, last. Heading into Wednesday, they were even: 67 power plays, 67 penalty-kills, and were around plus-7 until last week.

Over the past 20 years, the Ducks were the worst team in the NHL in this differential — a gap the size of the Pacific Ocean, minus-722. Second-worst was Boston, minus-327. It's kind of hilarious that the difference between 31st and 32nd was more than the Bruins' entire total. When the Ducks won the Stanley Cup in 2007 and were at their peak, it was a tactic. They bullied you and dared you to do something about it. But they made a conscious point of trying to change that this year, and so far, it's working. A few coaches on other teams have said that several members of the staff received short-term contracts (I think two years), so they're happy for their peers to make an instant impact.

6. Best teams? Carolina (plus-518) and San Jose (Plus-411).

7. There was never a question Adam Lowry wanted to stay, the latest Jet in a close-knit group to make a Manitoba commitment. Lowry showed why he's the captain, not complaining that he wasn't the first priority,

knowing Kyle Connor's puzzle piece needed to be inserted first. He's a unique case at his age (33 when the deal kicks in) and has intangible value to the organization. I have zero doubt the Jets wanted to make a splash at their Wednesday-night gala, and bent a bit to get it done in time. His teammates will be thrilled to see him taken care of.

8. After back-to-back healthy scratches, word filtered that Ducks defenceman Pavel Mintyukov would like to be moved if he's not going to play. He has fallen behind Jackson LaCombe and Olen Zellweger on the left side of Anaheim's defence. Ian Moore, who had a strong camp, was elevated in Mintyukov's place. This is the 10th overall pick in the 2022 draft, so Ducks GM Pat Verbeek will not be rushed into anything. Something to keep an eye on.

9. There was no mention of Marner during Toronto GM Brad Treliving's media meeting on Tuesday. I'm not interested in re-litigating the past, but it's impossible to look at their current struggles without recognizing the connection to his departure. Marner was everywhere: gobbling up points, getting it to Auston Matthews, entering zones, power play, penalty-kill, defending leads and a huge part of the off-ice social construct. They are still adjusting, and if the first six weeks taught us anything, it's that this may take much longer than everyone hoped.

Toronto's been looking for a top-six forward since the summer, but if that was an easy solve, it would be done already. Before our Nov. 8 broadcast, head coach Craig Berube shared some thoughtful observations regarding the fact he'd used 20 forward lines by that date, tied with Edmonton for most in the NHL. Injuries, which everyone is dealing with, are obvious. He wasn't sure Matthews and William Nylander would work because the latter likes to hold the puck and the former prefers give-and-go, but they've showed real promise. He likes Steven Lorentz with Scott Laughton. He wanted Matias Maccelli with Dakota Joshua and Nicolas Roy, because Maccelli's greatest success in Arizona came with bigger players: Nick Bjugstad and Lawson Crouse.

Now, Matthews is out, maybe (?) back Saturday. Laughton is out. Roy is out. Add Matthew Knies — who didn't play Tuesday — although they don't seem worried it's long-term. There is not a definitive timeline for Chris Tanev. Tough to build chemistry.

10. The second part of this problem is that, barring the injection of another elite offensive talent, Toronto may have no choice but to change its identity and mentality. Last year, Anthony Stolarz and Joseph Woll were human swiffers, cleaning up all messes. In 2024-25, the Maple Leafs were fourth in save percentage. Now they are 23rd. (Woll just returned with two strong starts, but Stolarz is injured.) Adding deeper Sportlogiq numbers, they were second in even-strength save percentage and eighth in inner-slot save percentage. Now they are 29th in both.

It's not simply: goalies, make more saves. They have to defend better, particularly against the rush. That was the focus of a harsh meeting last Monday, about the way they have to play as they adapt to their new reality. Last Thursday, they played one of their best defensive periods of the season, structured and disciplined, leading Los Angeles 2-0. But it's not what they are used to, and they couldn't hang on. Tuesday brought a massive win against St. Louis. It's going to be a grind until they figure it out.

11. I do not believe Berube is in trouble. Treliving, as is his way, has looked around. He would like to do roster-for-roster deals, if he can. They do not want to trade futures (include Easton Cowan in that). They will listen to anyone not named Matthews, Nylander, Knies or John Tavares.

12. The Bruins outbid Toronto by \$500,000 for Nikita Zadorov in the summer of 2024. Now that the Maple Leafs have a WWE partnership, maybe they dress Roman Reigns against him on Jan. 4.

13. Treliving called his team "vanilla." I see the same with Edmonton. I believe the Oilers' desire is to let their players figure it out. I admit, though, I'm surprised at how long this malaise continues. There are a lot of reasons not to panic. They're too good, too experienced, they always



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start slow, they've played a lot of hockey, there's always one weirdly awful stretch every season and the compressed travel is harder on teams in more... remote outposts. But they are sleepwalking, and it continued Wednesday in Washington.

The most insane stat I've seen so far this season was unearthed by Jonathan Willis in his The Corsi Knight blog. Per Natural Stat Trick, the Oilers had nine five-on-five rush attempts in their first 21 games. That shouldn't be possible. There were rumours last week that Edmonton was considering bringing back Paul Coffey, but that was denied to me. It's easy to throw everything on Stuart Skinner or Calvin Pickard, and you always hope a goalie bails you out, but it's not like Edmonton is playing like the 1977 Canadiens in front of them.

I'm waiting for Kris Knoblauch to pull some shock benching to wake up everyone. There was a hilarious post-game interview last weekend with AHL Bakersfield's Connor Clattenburg, a first-year pro out of OHL Flint. I don't know that he's ready for NHL action, but I thought his energy is what they need.

14. I am a big Brett Kulak guy. Big. Every year, people are like, "Oh, he'll drop down to a third-paring guy." When the games get bigger, he gets better, the Oilers lean on him more and more. Never fails. Happened before he got to Northern Alberta, too. Someone sent me a stat that Edmonton's been outscored 15-0 this month at five-on-five with him on the ice. That's insane. Just as crazy as the lack of rush chances.

15. Less than one week after David Kampf terminated his contract to stay in the NHL at a lower salary, there are rumours that Alexandre Texier is considering the same. He has played only one game for St. Louis since Oct. 28 and is making \$2.1 million.

16. Would Texier make any sense for Montreal? The Canadiens are looking to plug injury holes. The standings are tight, so few white flags are waving.

Here's what's out there.

Calgary gets a lot of calls, but few they'd consider serious (reminder: all it takes is one legitimate conversation to change everything). They can be patient, they have players people want. Nashville is starting to get calls and will have decisions to make. (More on them shortly.) We mentioned the Maple Leafs. Minnesota's been pretty consistent, looking for forwards and edge on defence. Vancouver and centres is the romance waiting to be consummated. Washington, looking for speed. The Hurricanes, as always, and the Senators are lurking, looking to hit a home run.

17. St. Louis? The thing about Armstrong is he's sent thunderbolts before, including an epic pre-Christmas 2018 memo laced with holiday shopping motifs. Six months later, they won the Stanley Cup. He's gone to that method a couple of times since, hoping it shocks everyone back to their senses. One of the Blues said this week that "everyone's been bad at the same time, which never happens." Another said they were trying to be more aggressive, particularly with a lead. When it comes to Brayden Schenn, teams that have talked to St. Louis the last two seasons say the price was very high.

18. I've talked quite a bit about Buffalo's goalie situation, because there are a lot of bodies. The thing I can see becoming an issue here is if Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen feels the cluttered crease costs him a shot at the Olympics. He's only played four games. He has to be better, too.

19. Not surprised Andrew Brunette survived Nashville's post-Sweden break. Mid-season changes usually come when a team shows zero pushback, and the Predators' late comeback in the first game was the exact opposite.

20. The toughest thing with trying to read Nashville's decision-making process is that we don't have a long runway with new owner Bill Haslam. What we do know is that he went with the team on their Canadian road trip early in the season, and joined them in Sweden. I've heard that, in his

wish to make informed decisions about the future, he is making sure he spends "up-close" time before committing to anything. So, what we're getting here is an education into his process. It's not as fast as fans might like, but it's the right move. He's also trying to keep a lid on things because the NHL can be leaky. (No way that's true.)

21. It seems like there are a billion injuries out there. I asked Steve Fellin, one of the brains behind Sportsnet Stats, who did some work with the people behind the invaluable nhlinjurybiz blog. (Thank you to both.) We are on-pace for 7,230 man games lost to injury in 2025-26. That's more than last season (6,723), but less than 2023-24 (7,375) and 2022-23 (9,152). Just seems like 15 guys are going down every night.

22. Anze Kopitar took about 20 sticks on the Kings' recent road trip. A few were, obviously, for game use. Others were given to opponents wanting a keepsake from his final season. Apparently, a referee received one. Let's see who gives the Kings a few extra power plays down the stretch. One teammate, asked if Kopitar has changed at all during his last season, laughed, "No, he's still a robot."

23. Flames president of hockey operations Don Maloney joined Brendan Parker during the first intermission of Calgary's Wednesday win in Buffalo. On the John Beecher waiver claim: "We need more speed in our lineup. It's clear from the first 20 games, we need to be quicker." Overall, Maloney called the season start "terribly disappointing," adding they weren't giving up.

"We're just determined not to throw young players in before they are ready," he said. "It doesn't work, it's not good for your culture. We go into the season, we want to win hockey games. We expect to be a playoff team. That's how we have to enter in our minds, every season... We want a team people will want to watch and be proud of... this identity we established (last year) as a hard out, a hard-working team, that's who we are. When (our young players) are ready, they are going to get a chance."

24. That quote will raise eyebrows locally, but it's part of another conversation in hockey development circles. The NHL and NHLPA agreed in the new CBA to allow one 19-year-old per organization to play in the AHL, beginning in 2026-27. However, that's more of a guideline than a negotiated rule and teams are pushing for more flexibility.

The Flames are used as an example, with another executive saying, "If Calgary wants to put Matvei Gridin and Zayne Parekh in the AHL, why shouldn't a team be able to do what's best for their development? These are million-dollar investments."

I don't speak to everyone, but have received a lot of sympathy for this position and I don't sense — yet — the NHL is against the idea. Some teams are protective of the CHL, recognizing it is an excellent development path and not wanting to hurt that, others don't care as much. But, one thing everyone seems to agree on is that there aren't 50 19-year-olds who would bolt. The AHL is a tough league and not everyone is ready for that. The NHLPA has a vote here, too. This is one to keep an eye on.

25. The NHL made it very clear it wants the USHL to be protected. One CHL executive agreed, saying, "It's not good to have every 16-year-old American playing in Canada." That's why you are hearing a lot of rumours about its future. At the GM meetings, there was also a stat tossed out saying this NCAA freshman class was more than 50 per cent Canadian. Crazy times.

26. There's a lot of Gavin McKenna slander out there. Sportsnet's Jason Bukala and Sam Cosentino — who are much more plugged in than I am — dropped him out of the No. 1 draft position. I'm not an expert, but I'll say this: All of this is the best thing that could happen to him. The road is never straight. When you're a big dog, everyone comes after you. Get used to it now, and, even more importantly, get used to handling it.



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27. The NHL's time of game (regulation only) is up one minute. From 2:32 to 2:33. You'd be surprised at how much they care about this, but they do.

28. Smiled when I saw Ben Hutton score his first of the season the other night. One of the NHL's nice people still carving out a role in Vegas. There's another great story unfolding, Braeden Bowman. Undrafted three times, captain of the 2023-24 OHL Guelph Storm. Attends Golden Knights prospect camp last year, ticketed for the ECHL. Does enough to get an AHL deal, where he finishes second in scoring. Now, an injury replacement, he's playing with Jack Eichel and Ivan Barbashev, earning first power play time. Love to see it.

29. Dallas players call rookie Justin Hryckowian "Ritz-Carlton" because it's easier to pronounce than his real name.

30. Attended the Dallas Stars Hall of Fame last weekend. I've said it 100 times, but every team should be doing this. It's such a fantastic event. Was great to see Joe Nieuwendyk recognized, because, as you can imagine, he needed time after being let go as GM. There are so many players who name him their favourite teammate, including Jamie Langenbrunner, who introduced him (and Mats Sundin). Nieuwendyk looked it up in preparation for the speech, but Lanny McDonald was 36 when the Flames won the 1989 Stanley Cup. Then he added, "Jamie Benn is 36." The message was not lost on the other players.

He also told a great story about Jere Lehtinen, who was there. Nieuwendyk said Ken Hitchcock kicked the great checker's line — with Brett Hull and Mike Modano — out of practice once to make a point. Hull and Modano rushed to the showers to make an earlier-than-expected tee time, while Lehtinen sat on the bench "apologizing like he was in a church confession."

The Builder inductee was Ralph Strangis, like so many play-by-play orators, the voice connecting the fans and the team. Introduced by Dan Stuchal, he was afire. He had a priest deliver grace, later saying, "You think you have a hard job? He's my priest, and I'm an atheist." He revealed that, when he got divorced, Tyler Seguin helped him create a Tinder profile. And he added advice we all need from time to time: "If you want to create things, don't listen to anyone."

31. The great Michael Russo added another Nieuwendyk story after listening to the podcast. Nieuwendyk signed with Florida in 2005, when he covered the Panthers. Russo was vacationing in Italy at the time, and his hotel room was robbed. He still needed to file a story, so he got a note to Nieuwendyk asking him to phone an internet cafe. "I'm sitting at one of the computers, and all of a sudden the guy working there asks, 'Is there a Mike Russo here?'" Nieuwendyk made the call. Russo sheepishly admitted he offered to reimburse the cost, but switched jobs and never got the opportunity. Nieuwendyk should collect, with interest.

32. Last week, Major League Baseball debuted a new off-season golf event, called the MLB Open, at Shadow Creek Golf Course in Vegas. It was a two-day tournament won by the duo of Twins third basemen Royce Lewis and recently retired Aaron Hicks. I would love to see something like this in the off-season for NHL players. The NHL has looked into it, but cost is an issue. Golf is notoriously expensive to produce. The league is brainstorming "a signature off-season event." This is something I'd love to see tried at least once. There are some great golfers, active and retired.

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TSN.CA / Laughton returns as Leafs look to build on slump-busting win

Mark Masters

The Maple Leafs and Columbus Blue Jackets skated at Scotiabank Arena on Thursday.

What has the start of this season been like for Scott Laughton?

"It's been great," the 31-year-old centre said with a deadpan delivery. "It's been awesome. No. I mean, it's obviously not ideal."

Laughton missed the start of the season with a lower-body injury after blocking a shot off his foot in a pre-season game on Oct. 2. In only his second game back from that injury on Nov. 8, Laughton absorbed a big hit from Nikita Zadorov and suffered an upper-body injury.

"It's hard sometimes, but you stay on top of things," the Oakville, Ont. native said. "It gives my other injury a little bit more time to heal ... I've never been in this situation before in my career. I've missed a couple games here and there, but the last five or so years, I haven't dealt with this. So, it's something new to me and something that I've had to deal with, but I try to stay grounded."

Bobby McMann dropped the gloves with Zadorov after the hit on Laughton and coach Craig Berube said it looked like a head shot.

"Thought it was clean," Laughton said. "I honestly thought he was backing up when I took a peek. He stepped up. I lost the puck a little bit, and he's 6'7, I'm 6-foot, so there's going to be some contact there. He got the best of me. I had more of an issue with a couple of his other hits in Boston [in the next game between the teams]. But, yeah, I thought it was a clean hit. You've got to keep your head up and keep going."

Did Zadorov reach out afterwards?

"No. I wouldn't really want him to either."

Laughton will draw back into the Leafs lineup on Thursday night when Toronto hosts the Columbus Blue Jackets. He will slot in as the third-line centre with Steven Lorentz and rookie Easton Cowan on his wings. That trio enjoyed a lot of success while playing together at training camp.

"We've talked about it a little bit this morning already," Laughton said. "Just got to kind of find that again and then continue to talk. I've been playing with Stevie here since I've kind of got here. Cowboy's playing with a lot of energy. We've got to continue that."

Laughton's return offers some rare positive injury-related news for the Leafs, who are missing several key contributors while attempting to get their season back on track. Toronto snapped a five-game skid with a 3-2 overtime win on Tuesday against the 30th-place St. Louis Blues.

"A big win last game," Laughton said. "We obviously have some key injuries. Those wins kind of bring you together throughout the season and can change the momentum. It was a big win for us. We've got to keep it rolling here. You've got to string some together."

"By no means does that mean we're out of the woods or everything is great," said defenceman Morgan Rielly. "We want to build off what we thought was a pretty good game, pretty good effort, and start playing some better hockey over a long period of time."

The Leafs held a lead in four of the five games during their winless streak. That inability to retain the lead was a theme that stuck out to Rielly.

"We were in games and we kind of lost control of them in a third period," Rielly noted. "I think that's the one thing that kind of stands out to me, and not because we were taking chances or being risky, I think it's the opposite."

On Tuesday, Toronto led St. Louis 2-1 in the second period before watching the Blues tie it and then control possession down the stretch.



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"Once you lose one, I mean, you do tighten up a little bit," Rielly said. "I think that's a natural thing. This time of year, it's important that you work through those things and you get more comfortable and you learn to trust the structure and trust each other, and that's what we're working towards."

Veteran winger Calle Jarnkrok is moving up to the top line with John Tavares and William Nylander for Thursday's game.

"Just a little bit for matchups and also just the familiarity that William and him have together," said Berube.

Nick Robertson, who is a more offensive-minded player, started Tuesday's game with Tavares and Nylander.

Nylander and Jarnkrok are countrymen and good friends off the ice.

"One of the best players in the world," Jarnkrok said. "Usually when you give him the puck something good's happening."

Do they ever talk in Swedish when they are linemates?

"Well, he's Canadian," Jarnkrok said to laughs.

Nylander was born in Calgary when his father, Michael Nylander, played for the Flames.

Nylander played the overtime hero on Tuesday after starting the night with an accidental own goal.

"He had probably the nicest goal this season and the biggest blooper of the year," Jarnkrok said with a grin.

You can understand why Berube is looking for a bit more defence on the top line on Thursday night. The Jackets hung six goals on the Leafs during a 6-3 win in the Ohio capital last month.

"We know what Columbus is all about, so we're going to have to be a tight checking group tonight," Berube said.

The Jackets have won five of seven games against the Leafs while scoring at least five goals in all of their wins.

Jarnkrok is also getting a look as the down-low man on the top power-play unit.

"Right-handed shot down there," said Berube. "That's one thing I think we kind of miss, obviously, and that was the reason we put him there."

With Mitch Marner departing in the summer, Toronto's top power-play unit has only featured one right-hand shot, Nylander, this season.

The Leafs are 0/7 on the power play in the last three games.

Matthew Knies, who will miss a second straight game with a lingering lower-body issue, usually plays in front of the net on the top unit.

Auston Matthews joined the Leafs skate on Thursday morning. It was his first team session since sustaining a lower-body injury on Nov. 11 in Boston.

"It's good to see him out there with us," said Berube. "Just talking to him, he's feeling a lot better. I thought he was shooting the puck pretty well, so that's a good sign."

There's still no timeline for the top-line centre's return. Matthews sustained the injury in the process of hitting Zadorov in a retaliatory move after the Bruins defenceman knocked him down from behind.

"He looked good out there today," said Laughton. "And we're going to need him for sure."

Anthony Stolarz also got hurt in that game in Boston on Nov. 11. Initially, Berube said the upper-body issue was minor and Stolarz was expected back soon.

"Obviously, worse than we thought," the coach acknowledged. "He's not ready to get on the ice yet and do the things that he's needed to do. So, hopefully it's soon. I mean, I really don't have a timetable for him. Like maybe tomorrow he'll be on the ice. I'm not sure."

Joseph Woll, who has played the last two games after returning from personal leave, will make a third straight start on Thursday night.

Woll was kept off the ice on Wednesday.

"He seems fine," said Berube. "That's a good rest day for him yesterday. He feels good and feels like he's got great energy out there."

Cambridge, Ont. native Jet Greaves gets the start for the Blue Jackets.

After playing in Winnipeg on Tuesday night, the Jackets got into Toronto very early on Wednesday morning.

"I got to go from the airport straight home, which never happens," said centre Adam Fantilli. "Got to wake up in my childhood bed. My mom made breakfast. It was kind of cool. It was a good time."

Is his room still looking the same?

"No, they actually just finished a renovation like four months ago," the 21-year-old from Nobleton, Ont. said. "All my stuff's gone ... It's in a box in the basement."

The Jackets enjoyed a full day off on Wednesday.

"I had like 30 people at my house for dinner," Fantilli said. "I got to see all the people that are really, really close to me and then have conversations and stuff, which is great. After the game, I don't get too much time to talk to them."

Last season, Fantilli thrilled friends and family by recording his first career hat trick at Scotiabank Arena on Jan. 22.

"It was an exciting day," he said. "It was really special for me and my family. It was a blast of the day. Hopefully we can get some of that magic going tonight too. That was pretty special."

What does he remember most about it?

"Just seeing my parents after," he said. "It was really exciting. Obviously, you dream of playing in this arena, and to have a night like that, it was really special."

Jacob Quillan earned a good review from Berube for his performance on Tuesday in what was his second career NHL game.

"From last year to this year, I saw a lot of growth in him," the coach said. "He is confident and comfortable in his play. His speed is dangerous. He got behind their D a couple of times. Overall, he was a pretty good player for us."

Quillan admitted feeling a bit overwhelmed when making his NHL debut last season. It was a much different sensation this time around.

"I felt good," the 23-year-old centre said. "I felt like I had good legs, good jump to my game. When I got the puck, I felt like I had a little more time and space than I initially thought, so that's good."

Quillan even generated a clean look at Jordan Binnington off the rush, but decided to try a backhand pass instead of going to the net.

"I was thinking pass," he said. "My instincts kind of took over. It didn't end up being the right look. Probably should have shot it. You live and you learn."

Quillan has 12 assists in 14 games with the Toronto Marlies in the American Hockey League this season.

"It was just my instinct," he said. "Sometimes my reads aren't 100 per cent. If I get a look like that next time, I'm probably shooting."



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Another adjustment Quillan is looking to make is on faceoffs. He lost all five draws he contested on Tuesday.

"It wasn't good enough," he said. "Just going to try to get better. I'll learn from the guys here, talk, watch a little more video on the other team and, you know, get better at it."

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