



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 25, 2025



## Canes Begin Season-Long Home Stretch On Wednesday

By: Canes

Wednesday, Nov. 26 vs. NY Rangers

Start Time: 7 p.m. | Tickets | FanDuel Sports Network South + WRAL

The Canes and Rangers meet in an always-important divisional matchup. When the two teams squared off at Madison Square Garden earlier this month, Pyotr Kochetkov posted a 25-save shutout.

Friday, Nov. 28 vs. Winnipeg

Start Time: 5 p.m. | Tickets | FanDuel Sports Network South

A Black Friday matinee puts the Canes and Jets head-to-head for the second time in a week. A third-period power-play goal from Andrei Svechnikov decided last Friday's thriller in Winnipeg.

Sunday, Nov. 30 vs. Calgary

Start Time: 5 p.m. | Tickets | FanDuel Sports Network South

Close out the holiday weekend as the Flames pay their lone visit of the season to North Carolina. It is also First Responders Night, presented by Celito.

Thursday, Dec. 4 vs. Toronto

Start Time: 7 p.m. | Tickets | FanDuel Sports Network South

The Canes stay busy after a rare three-day gap between games. The Leafs did not have U.S. Olympic team star Auston Matthews in their lineup when the two teams met north of the border last month, but one of the game's biggest talents could be available by the time his team treks south.

Saturday, Dec. 6 vs. Nashville

Start Time: 7 p.m. | Tickets | FanDuel Sports Network South

A back-to-back weekend set starts by bringing former Canes Brady Skjei, Michael Bunting, and Eric Haula back to town.

Sunday, Dec. 7 vs. San Jose

Start Time: 5 p.m. | Tickets | FanDuel Sports Network South

The 20th Anniversary Championship Celebration presented by Pepsi officially begins! From a pre-game Red Carpet Event, to special guests sounding the siren and more, it's a night you don't want to miss.

Monday, Dec. 8 - Alumni Game

Start Time: 7 p.m. | Info & Tickets

Your favorite former Canes are back in action in the annual Hurricanes Alumni Game presented by Pepsi Zero Sugar. Headlined by several members of the 2006 team, the Canes Alumni will battle the NC State Icepack at Lenovo Center. Additional experiences, including guest coaches and a Chuck-a-Puck contest, will be sold to benefit the Carolina Hurricanes Foundation.

Tuesday, Dec. 9 vs. Columbus

Start Time: 7:30 p.m. | Tickets | ESPN+/Hulu

The Stanley Cup® is back in Raleigh as the 20th Anniversary Championship Celebration continues! Before Tuesday's game, all fans will have the opportunity to take a photo with hockey's holy grail.

In addition to the free general public line, fans can purchase a Trophy Photo Pass ticket package (includes game ticket) below that will allow them faster access in the photo lines. Season Ticket Members will also have their own access to take photos with the trophy on Tuesday.



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## Grades for all 32 NHL teams at the quarter mark of 2025-26 - ESPN

By: Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton

The 2025-26 NHL season has reached its quarter mark, with all 32 teams having played more than 20 games.

As usual, there are some positive surprises -- looking squarely at the Pittsburgh Penguins and Anaheim Ducks -- as well as the not-so-positive surprises, including the Toronto Maple Leafs, St. Louis Blues and Vancouver Canucks.

But, how does each team grade out on its report card for the first 25% of the season? Here's a rundown of what has gone right, what has gone wrong and a first-quarter letter grade for all 32 clubs.

Note: Teams are listed alphabetically by letter grade. Ryan S. Clark graded the Pacific and Central Division teams, and Kristen Shilton graded the Metropolitan and Atlantic Division teams. Stats are through the games of Nov. 23.

### A grades

#### Colorado Avalanche

Preseason over/under: 103.5

Current points pace: 137.9

What has gone right? They lead the NHL in goals per game while also giving up the fewest goals per game. They're generating the most scoring chances per 60 minutes, shots per 60 and scoring chances per 60 in 5-on-5 play. Their defensive structure has made them a top-10 team in terms of the fewest shots allowed per 60 and fewest high-danger chances per 60.

Nathan MacKinnon is in a position to win his second Hart Trophy. Cale Makar could win his third Norris Trophy -- and could challenge MacKinnon for the Hart. They now appear to have the supporting cast capable of providing consistent contributions.

The Avs might be the best team in the NHL. And at their current pace, they could threaten, if not surpass, the Bruins' record of 135 regular-season points set in the 2022-23 regular season.

What has gone wrong? Leading the NHL with 4.00 goals per game comes with the assumption that the Avs can score in any situation. But, the Avs are struggling when it comes to consistently scoring goals on the power play. Entering Monday, the Avs had a bottom-10 power-play unit that was converting on only 15.7% of its opportunities.

Grade: A+

#### Anaheim Ducks

Preseason over/under: 83.5

Current points pace: 108.1

What has gone right? They're fighting for the Pacific Division crown. They have the second-most prolific attack in terms of goals per game. They're continuing to see their young talent grow all while offseason addition Chris Kreider had 14 points in his first 15 games.

But what might be the strongest indication of just how well the Ducks are doing this season is Leo Carlsson's projected scoring pace. A Ducks player has finished with more than 100 points in a season only four times in franchise history. Carlsson is not only on pace to join a list with Paul Kariya and Teemu Selanne, but he's projected to finish with 108 points. That places Carlsson in a position to have what could be one of the best individual seasons in team history, and threaten Selanne's franchise record of 109 points.

What has gone wrong? An overreliance on Lukas Dostal in the defensive zone. Dostal has started 17 of the Ducks' first 22 games. It's a pace that has him projected to play 63 games -- which is the sort of workload reserved for top-tier goalies such as Connor Hellebuyck, Juuse Saros and Andrei Vasilevskiy.

But there's also the underlying numbers. The Ducks are in the top three in terms of most scoring chances allowed, shots against and high-danger scoring chances allowed per 60, per Natural Stat Trick. It's a contrast from Dostal posting a 5.42 goals saved above expected, which is sixth among goalies with more than 10 games.

Grade: A

#### Dallas Stars

Preseason over/under: 103.5

Current points pace: 111.8

What has gone right? Glen Gulutzan's second stint in charge of the Stars could be defined by perspective. There are some questions why the Stars are in the bottom 10 in scoring chances per 60, shots per 60 and high-danger scoring chances per 60. But there are also those who would argue that maybe it's just a sign of efficiency. The Stars have the NHL's No. 2 power-play unit, and are also 10th in goals per game.

It's a promising return on a season that began with questions about how they would fare under a new coach, while taking into account that they lost three forwards in Evgenii Dadonov, Mikael Granlund and Mason Marchment in the offseason.

What has gone wrong? There has been a bit of a disconnect with how the Stars perform in the defensive zone in 5-on-5 play compared to the penalty kill. They're among the top 10



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teams in fewest goals allowed per game, and high-danger scoring chances allowed per 60. They are also sitting around league average in allowing the fewest shots per 60. Yet their PK hasn't been up to par, with a success rate of 75.7%, which is in the bottom 10 in the NHL.

Grade: A

Detroit Red Wings

Preseason over/under: 84.5

Current points pace: 100.6

What has gone right? Detroit is having its best start in a decade, and it's not for one reason in particular. This is a group effort delivering on GM Steve Yzerman's vision for the Red Wings as a high-skilled, defensively responsible team. Head coach Todd McLellan is maximizing Detroit's potential in his first full season.

The defensive buy-in isn't only reflected in stats -- such as how the Red Wings average among the fewest shots against per game this season -- but in how skaters such as Dylan Larkin are thriving. The Red Wings' captain leads the team in goals and points and has provided invaluable leadership to the equally impressive rookie forwards Emmitt Finnie and Nate Danielson.

On the back end, rookie Axel Sandin-Pellikka has been an important presence, and provided Detroit with the depth it needed to be among the Atlantic's best.

What has gone wrong? The Red Wings have leaned on a strong power play this season; it's their even-strength scoring that can improve. It won't be sustainable for Detroit to rely on the extra man to see it through.

Although the Red Wings have shored up collectively on defense, they're still giving up over three goals against per game, which speaks in part to their goaltending. Cam Talbot has been better this season than last but John Gibson -- Yzerman's big offseason acquisition -- hasn't been any sort of savior. The Red Wings have to hope that tandem can be a difference-maker for them from here.

Grade: A

New York Islanders

Preseason over/under: 84.5

Current points pace: 99.8

What has gone right? Let's start with the obvious: Matthew Schaefer. The rookie defenseman arrived better than advertised after New York selected him No. 1 in the 2025 draft. Schaefer is electric at both ends of the ice, and takes on important minutes (over 22 per game) that shows how much confidence coach Patrick Roy already has in the Calder Trophy favorite.

And he's not the only exciting rookie that has Islanders fans buzzing. Maxim Shabanov delivered a breakout three-point performance to cap off a recent 6-1-0 trip, illustrating why New York coveted the former KHL player (and why he's likely to earn a promotion from the fourth line).

Beyond those two skaters, the Islanders are getting solid goaltending from Ilya Sorokin and David Rittich and, for a team that has consistently searched for more offense, New

York is top 10 in the NHL in goals, on the efforts of Bo Horvat (having his best start in years) and a healthy Mathew Barzal and Kyle Palmieri.

What has gone wrong? The Islanders aren't packing a potent power play (it's among the league's worst) and there's concern that their offense might be too top-heavy to keep pace with deeper clubs. New York also just lost one of its best defensemen -- Alexander Romanov -- for five to six months after shoulder surgery following a hit from Dallas' Mikko Rantanen.

Given how the Islanders have exceeded expectations so far, it's hard to nitpick what else hasn't worked for them in the grand scheme of the first quarter.

Grade: A

Pittsburgh Penguins

Preseason over/under: 77.5

Current points pace: 97.6

What has gone right? Pittsburgh is arguably one the season's most surprising contenders. Few would have picked the Penguins to be in the Eastern Conference playoff mix at the season's quarter mark.

This is a different Penguins' team under first-year head coach Dan Muse, who is pushing all the right buttons. Muse's system brings out the best in Pittsburgh's skaters by giving them freedom to operate, and that has paid off in the Penguins' growing confidence. Pittsburgh is giving up the second-fewest goals this season, ranks top 10 in offense and has the league's best power play. The Penguins' goaltending has benefited from the emergence of Arturs Silovs and an improved Tristan Jarry. Basically, it has been all systems go for Pittsburgh.

What has gone wrong? The Penguins have a problem closing out certain games -- namely, those stretching beyond regulation. Pittsburgh is 0-4 this season in overtime and the shootout, something Muse has sought to address with practice drills focused on the club's 3-on-3 work. The standings this season are closer than ever, and leaving points on the board that often is a small area Pittsburgh can clean up.

Rickard Rackell is out for two months because of a broken hand sustained in October, and that will continue to affect the Penguins' depth. Jarry going on injured reserve earlier this month was a blow too, and will test Pittsburgh's resilience.

Grade: A

Carolina Hurricanes

Preseason over/under: 105.5

Current points pace: 111.8

What has gone right? Carolina isn't the league's most exciting team, but it's one of its best for a reason. The Hurricanes thrive in head coach Rod Brind'Amour's structure that emphasizes smothering defensive play. Their offense has really excelled this season though, ranking second overall thanks to a potent Seth Jarvis -- who leads the team in goals -- a slippery Sebastian Aho -- pacing Carolina in points -- and the always-steady Jordan Staal.



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Goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov has been excellent in net amid starter Frederik Andersen's tough start. Overall, the Hurricanes are deep, detailed and disciplined. It's no wonder they have lost consecutive games only once this season.

What has gone wrong? The Hurricanes haven't thrived on special teams. Their power play is the worst in the league, and they're 21st on the penalty kill. It's a stark reality given how Carolina can dominate at even-strength (it ranks third in 5-on-5 goals) and might be a temporary glitch if Brind'Amour can figure out why the man advantage especially is such a momentum killer.

Carolina also has a goaltending conundrum with Andersen. The often-injured veteran has already dealt with a concussion this season and his numbers have been poor when he is available. Kochetkov can't be expected to carry the load entirely, so Carolina will need to either get Andersen on track or search for further goaltending options.

Grade: A-

New Jersey Devils

Preseason over/under: 99.5

Current points pace: 105.4

What has gone right? New Jersey's star-studded offense has been producing at a solid rate this season -- Jack Hughes had 20 points through 17 games, Jesper Bratt had 21 through 21 and Nico Hischier is still capable of being one of the league's premier two-way centers.

The Devils' goaltending is another strength because of veteran Jake Allen, who has been excellent handling an increased workload this season. Meanwhile, defenseman Simon Nemec has blossomed after taking a bit longer to hit his stride than some expected after he went No. 2 in the 2022 draft. He has taken on a heavy workload, and that has only amplified how good he can be in the Devils' own end as well as jumping into the rush.

What has gone wrong? The Devils just wanted to have a pleasant team dinner in Chicago -- and instead, the night ended with Hughes requiring surgery on his finger after a freak accident at the restaurant. Having Hughes healthy is (almost) all New Jersey needs to be a Stanley Cup contender, and now that he's out for multiple weeks (along with Cody Glass and Brett Pesce) the Devils will be dipping into their depth to cover.

Speaking of depth, it's a good thing Allen has been so hot to start the season because Jacob Markstrom has not. With Hughes out now, it's even more imperative that New Jersey finds ways to keep scoring and not expose Allen to an onslaught that wears him down.

Grade: A-

B grades

Boston Bruins

Preseason over/under: 80.5

Current points pace: 88.8

What has gone right? The Bruins were supposed to be Atlantic Division basement dwellers. But -- plot twist -- they've actually been one of its top contenders. Full credit to

first-year head coach Marco Sturm for implementing a defense-first structure that Boston has embraced enough to mitigate some of the sting from top center Elias Lindholm sitting out most of the season to date because of a lower-body injury.

Defenseman Nikita Zadorov has been particularly strong, bringing a bruising presence to the Bruins' blue line. Boston has also benefitted from Jeremy Swayman's return to form this season, and the team is top 10 on both the power play and penalty kill. The Bruins weren't expected to be a powerhouse up front, but David Pastrnak has been his usual dynamic self and Morgan Geekie is a budding offensive star.

What has gone wrong? Injuries are adding up. Defenseman Charlie McAvoy is out indefinitely after taking a puck to the face, and all of Casey Mittelstadt, Viktor Arvidsson and Jordan Harris also have been sidelined of late. The Bruins have overachieved out of the gate, but it doesn't feel sustainable if skaters such as Lindholm and McAvoy are sitting out extended time and the rest of the league gets healthy enough to catch up.

Even with Sturm's messaging and Swayman's solid play, the Bruins are still bottom 10 in goals against, and that's not an encouraging stat now that McAvoy won't be around to anchor the back end. The Bruins need consistency, and could struggle to find it.

Grade: B+

Chicago Blackhawks

Preseason over/under: 67.5

Current points pace: 89.5

What has gone right? Think about the issues the Blackhawks faced last season. Many of them have become the bedrock for a team that's in the running for the NHL's biggest surprise through the first quarter of the regular season.

The questions about Connor Bedard have been replaced with another set of questions: Will he make Canada's Olympic team while also possibly winning a scoring title? Bedard is on pace for 116 points and if that holds, it'll be the highest-scoring season of any Blackhawks player not named Denis Savard. Plus, any of the concerns about their veterans' struggles from last season have been erased by what they're doing this season.

Though Bedard is generating a lot of attention, the goaltending could signify just how much has changed with the Blackhawks from last season. They finished with a team save percentage of .894 in 2024-25 but have begun this season with a .911 mark through the first 22 games, tied for fourth in the NHL. Spencer Knight is presenting his case for why he could be under Olympic consideration for Team USA.

What has gone wrong? Finding cohesion within their defensive structure remains a bit of an issue. Make no mistake, the Blackhawks were expected to encounter some challenges on the defensive end due in part to being what Elite Prospects lists as the third-youngest team in the NHL this season. Their top-four defensemen, in terms of minutes played, are younger than 24, and two of them are rookies.

Having that much youth along with the Blackhawks' structure has played a role in why they are in the bottom four of scoring chances allowed per 60, high-danger scoring



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chances allowed per 60 and shots allowed per 60 in 5-on-5 play through their first 22 games.

Grade: B+

Montreal Canadiens

Preseason over/under: 90.5

Current points pace: 97.6

What has gone right? Montreal didn't think rookie goalie Jakub Dobes would be a backbone to their early-season success, but the rising star became exactly that by outperforming starter Sam Montembeault as one of the league's breakout netminders. Dobes has been aided by the Canadiens' more consistent defensive effort. Montreal didn't pay enough attention on that end of the ice last season, and it hurt them. Now, the Canadiens have been stronger through the neutral zone and played with tighter gaps to limit rush chances.

The Canadiens' top skaters have also delivered, with Cole Caufield already notching 13 goals and Nick Suzuki compiling 22 points in his first 20 games.

What has gone wrong? The Canadiens have regressed recently after their impressive start. Dobes and Montembeault have both been below average and Montreal's confidence appears shaken by lopsided losses (like a 7-0 defeat against Dallas) that call into question all the strides they appeared to have made across the board.

Injuries also continue to take their toll, with Kaiden Guhle, Kirby Dach, Patrik Laine and Alex Newhook all out for significant stretches. Montreal was a surprise playoff team last season but showed it was no fluke given how well they started this season. To stay in that conversation means Montreal has to rely on its depth and not lose sight of those difference-making defensive details.

Grade: B+

Philadelphia Flyers

Preseason over/under: 83.5

Current points pace: 102.5

What has gone right? Philadelphia is right in the Eastern Conference's mushy middle and that's not so bad if you're the Flyers. Rick Tocchet's group is finding ways to win hockey games with solid defensive play -- they've hovered near the top 10 in goals against per game. That has rubbed off on their penalty kill too, which is near the top of the league.

Goaltender Dan Vladar has been a surprisingly reliable starter, going from a tandem option with Samuel Ersson to a backbone of Philadelphia's whole operation.

Another pillar is defenseman Travis Sanheim, who has been in superb command of the Flyers' blue line. And up front, Trevor Zegras -- acquired in the offseason to bolster Philadelphia's center depth -- is averaging over a point per game to lead the Flyers' offense along with Travis Konecny.

What has gone wrong? The Flyers have a good pool of forwards, but they aren't producing at a high enough rate. Philadelphia is 26th in goals per game this season, and its power play is operating below 20%. Though Vladar and the

team's collective defensive approach has put the Flyers in a solid position for now, it won't last unless they can find more contributors on the score sheet.

Specifically, Matvei Michkov has taken a step back this season -- with only nine points in his first 19 games -- and Philadelphia is still searching for consistency throughout the lineup. There's also the issue of Ersson, and whether he can support Vladar as the season progresses. Some nights Ersson can pass the eye test, but if Vladar stumbles or gets hurt, they'll be counting on the backup to step up.

Grade: B+

San Jose Sharks

Preseason over/under: 70.5

Current points pace: 89.1

What has gone right? Any conversation around the Sharks at this moment is one that requires a level of nuance.

Their current projection has them on pace to finish with more than 80 points for the first time since the 2018-19 season, which was also their last playoff appearance. They've seen progress from their young core of Yaroslav Askarov, William Eklund and Will Smith while their veterans continue to help in ways that can and can't be measured.

Then there's an entirely different conversation that can be had about Macklin Celebrini. Yes, Celebrini has been so good that he is among the league leaders in points and could be playing his way on to Canada's Olympic team. Yet what might get lost in the discussion around Celebrini is the idea he could end up having the greatest individual season in Sharks history. He's currently on pace for 121 points, and if that holds, he'd surpass Joe Thornton for the most in a single season (114).

What has gone wrong? The six-game losing streak to start the season. They gave up more than three goals in each of those defeats, which only amplified what it meant to begin the season in a hole. It was a streak that also played a role in why the Sharks are in the bottom 10 in goals per game, goals allowed per game and have the 11th-worst penalty kill.

To put it another way: Since the losing streak ended on Oct. 23, the Sharks have the fourth-most points in the NHL

Grade: B+

Seattle Kraken

Preseason over/under: 78.5

Current points pace: 104.4

What has gone right? Only the Rangers have committed a higher percentage of their active salary cap space to their goalies than the Kraken. The early returns of that investment are one of the major reasons why the Kraken are actively fighting for a playoff spot at the moment.

Natural Stat Trick's metrics show that the Kraken were leading the NHL in team save percentage in 5-on-5 play as of Monday, and were tied for fourth in team save percentage in all situations. Joey Daccord, Philipp Grubauer and Matt Murray have provided a continuity in net that has complemented the Kraken's defensive structure.



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Lane Lambert's first season as coach has seen the Kraken reestablish their defensive identity as one of the stronger teams in the NHL at limiting high-danger scoring chances per 60, and scoring chances per 60 in 5-on-5 play.

What has gone wrong? Giving up 2.59 goals per game has made the Kraken one of the harder teams to score against this season. But scoring 2.55 goals per game will make it harder for the Kraken to stay in the hunt for a playoff spot. The margins have been so tight that they had identical numbers when it came to goals scored per game and goals allowed per game as recently as Friday. Having such little margin for error is part of a larger composite that illustrates how the Kraken have struggled to score goals and find ways to generate those opportunities for goals.

There are only three teams in the NHL that are averaging fewer goals per game than the Kraken. It's a process that has been made even more difficult by the fact that the Kraken are last in scoring chances per 60, shots per 60 and high-danger chances per 60. And yet, they entered Monday just a point behind the Ducks for first place in the Pacific Division -- having been in a wild-card spot just four days earlier. Because that's what the landscape has looked like in the Western Conference through the opening quarter.

Grade: B+

Vegas Golden Knights

Preseason over/under: 104.5

Current points pace: 105.4

What has gone right? They're finding defensive continuity without Alex Pietrangelo. Scoring goals is important, but there was a strong belief the Golden Knights were going to score many of them anyway -- and they have this season. Losing their No. 1 defenseman in Pietrangelo as he recovers from a bilateral femur reconstruction created questions about how they would fare without him.

They've used the first quarter to establish themselves as one of the more consistent defensive structures in the NHL. The Golden Knights have been a top-three team this season in terms of allowing the fewest high-danger scoring chances per 60 and shots per 60.

What has gone wrong? Here's where it gets bizarre. The Golden Knights are limiting high-danger chances and shots in ways that should benefit their goalies. And yet there's still something of a disconnect with how their goalies have performed this season.

The Golden Knights are around league average in team save percentage in 5-on-5 play but rank in the bottom third of the NHL when it comes to team save percentage in all situations, at .893. It's part of what played into the decision to sign Carter Hart, who is currently playing for their AHL affiliate as he'll be eligible for reinstatement on Dec. 1 as part of the Hockey Canada trial in which five players were acquitted for sexual assault.

Grade: B+

Columbus Blue Jackets

Preseason over/under: 84.5

Current points pace: 93.2

What has gone right? Columbus can always count on Zach Werenski to deliver, and the Blue Jackets' best player has been exactly that to start the season. Werenski is tied for the second-most points on the team -- having notched his 400th career point earlier this month -- and plays nearly 27 minutes per game.

Up front, it's Kirill Marchenko, Dmitri Voronkov and Adam Fantilli showcasing how promising Columbus' present and future are on offense, as those young skaters continue to grow and mature into their individual games. The Blue Jackets have had notable scoring success at 5-on-5 as well thanks to one of the league's best attacks on the rush.

The goaltending -- specifically from Jet Greaves -- has been better than expected to keep Columbus right in the Eastern Conference wild-card mix.

What has gone wrong? The Blue Jackets haven't had much luck on special teams, having a middling power play and one of the league's worst penalty kills. Though the man advantage has shown signs of life recently it has been a thorn in Columbus' side not being able to capitalize on more of those chances -- or keep their opponents' chances from ending up in the net.

The Blue Jackets have star performers, but there is a significant drop-off in contributors throughout the lineup. Losing captain Boone Jenner to injury hurts Columbus there, and the Blue Jackets might struggle in the wake of his absence trying to sort out their offensive attack.

Grade: B

Los Angeles Kings

Preseason over/under: 98.5

Current points pace: 96.9

What has gone right? It has been the defensive consistency for the Kings. Playoff teams are going to be judged on what allowed them to win and/or be eliminated. Giving up 20 goals over the final four games of their first-round series last season against the Oilers -- after having a 2-0 series lead -- created quite a few questions about the Kings. Among the items that came into question was their defensive structure.

They'll probably need to wait until the playoffs to definitively answer any of the questions raised after their four straight first-round exits. But the way they've started the season -- allowing the fifth-fewest goals per game -- has at least presented the notion that they're adept at playing close games, with goal prevention at the heart of that plan.

What has gone wrong? Scoring goals has been a problem for the Kings. They're in the bottom six in goals per game and on the power play.

But the detail that makes the Kings' struggles equally fascinating and perplexing would be how their underlying numbers skew. On one hand, they're ranked sixth in high-danger scoring chances per 60, and 12th in shots. But, they rank just below league average in scoring chances per 60. It's a formula that has further reinforced why their defensive consistency matters, as they're averaging 2.68 goals while giving up 2.68 goals entering Monday.

Grade: B



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## Minnesota Wild

Preseason over/under: 94.5

Current points pace: 99.8

What has gone right? Being able to consistently field the same roster. Injuries took the Wild from having one of the best starts of any team last season to one that had to fight just to grab a wild-card spot.

To be clear, this season has had its challenges. But it comes with the context that they've had eight players appear in every game, and 13 of their skaters have played in 20 or more of their first 23 games. The impact of that has been reflected in the Wild's defensive core: Three of the top four defensemen in terms of average ice time have played in every game, and Jonas Brodin has sat out only one.

What has gone wrong? They need to score more goals. Anyone who follows the Wild knows how this all works; they struggle to consistently score goals but can often rely on in some cases rely too much on their defensive structure and goaltending to win games.

This season has seen its share of disconnects with that approach. Minnesota's underlying numbers suggest it should be scoring more goals. The Wild are in the top half of the NHL in scoring chances per 60 and shots per 60. They are also 18th in high-danger chances, only to be in the bottom 10 of goals per game. To get in a more secure playoff position -- they've been jockeying between third place in the Central or a wild-card spot -- they'll need to ramp up the scoring.

Grade: B

## Ottawa Senators

Preseason over/under: 95.5

Current points pace: 101.5

What has gone right? Ottawa got off to a shaky start before recommitting to head coach Travis Green's defensive structure. That shift has been a game-changer, as the Senators staked their claim among the Atlantic's top three clubs. The Senators are giving up the third fewest shots against per game this season, and their goals against average has trended downward since adapting that new mindset in late October.

Ottawa hasn't had trouble scoring with Drake Batherson -- leading the Sens with 19 points in 17 games -- Tim Stutzle, and Shane Pinto all contributing regularly. Jake Sanderson continues to be a revelation at both ends for Ottawa, and that has been especially impactful with captain Brady Tkachuk still sidelined after an early-season injury.

What has gone wrong? The Senators have too often been fighting themselves because of subpar goaltending from Linus Ullmark. The Vezina Trophy winner hasn't been in top shape this season, giving up three or more goals in 10 of his first 16 starts, while forcing Ottawa to try to outscore every mistake. Backup Leevi Merilainen has done his best to step in when called upon, but Ullmark has to maintain control of the crease with more consistency from here for Ottawa to keep up in the crowded Atlantic race.

And to that end, recent injuries to top defenseman Thomas Chabot and forward Ridly Greig could certainly damage Ottawa's depth as they wait for Tkachuk to return.

Grade: B

## Tampa Bay Lightning

Preseason over/under: 101.5

Current points pace: 101.5

What has gone right? The Lightning are, well ... the Lightning. Regardless of what a season throws at them, this team adjusts to its circumstances and remains dangerous.

Jake Guentzel and Nikita Kucherov pack a one-two punch up front to lead the offense, and Guentzel's performance has been particularly strong this season while the Lightning's depth has been under the microscope. The Lightning also have Anthony Cirelli as an archetypal 200-foot center, and Victor Hedman can still go toe-to-toe to be among the league's best defenders. The Lightning are a solid defensive group overall and dominate on the penalty kill.

Jon Cooper makes the most of his lineup every night, and that's one of Tampa Bay's true superpowers.

What has gone wrong? The Lightning are going through it with injuries already -- and now Hedman is out for a couple of weeks. Only six skaters have appeared in all Tampa Bay's games this season, forcing the Lightning to rely on call-ups to fill in the gaps. It has worked well enough to keep the team in the playoff picture, but without the same swagger the Lightning are used to wielding.

Speaking of missing swagger, what happened to Brayden Point's? The usually dynamic top-line skater is a shadow of his previous seasons' performances, with only three goals and 11 points in his first 20 games. The Lightning are accustomed to getting quite a bit more out of him.

Grade: B

## Winnipeg Jets

Preseason over/under: 97.5

Current points pace: 93.7

What has gone right? The Jets can score goals, sometimes in bulk. They can get those goals from different line combinations and defense pairings in ways that many teams throughout the league can't replicate. The manner in which they've received offensive contributions from different players complements how Kyle Connor, Josh Morrissey and Mark Scheifele are each averaging more than a point per game.

It's part of the reason behind why they are in the top 12 of goals per game while also boasting a top 10 power play. Knowing they can generate goals at a high rate could prove useful upon the news that three-time Vezina recipient Connor Hellebuyck could sit out up to six weeks.

What has gone wrong? Missing Hellebuyck for an extended period could present challenges and potentially amplify what has been an area of concern for the Jets when it comes to their defensive structure. There are only three teams that have given up more scoring chances per 60. They've also given up the ninth-most high-danger chances per 60 in



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addition to being in the top 10 of allowing the most shots per 60.

It's what makes the work done by Eric Comrie and Hellebuyck even more vital through the first quarter. The Jets had a top-five team save percentage in all situations, and the eighth-best team save percentage in 5-on-5 play before Hellebuyck's injury. Now they'll need Comrie -- and World Junior Championships hero Thomas Milic -- to provide continuity in Hellebuyck's absence.

Grade: B

Florida Panthers

Preseason over/under: 106.5

Current points pace: 89.8

What has gone right? Florida has proved depth and resiliency can be a weapon. Or, at least a helpful tool. The Panthers are adaptive in the face of injury woes, and that next-man-up mentality could see them through as it has in the past.

Florida is getting some of Brad Marchand's best hockey in years as the team's goals and points leader, complementing strong starts from Sam Reinhart and Anton Lundell. The Panthers can seemingly weather a storm better than most thanks to, well, you know -- being back-to-back Stanley Cup champions and all, and the confidence that comes with it.

What has gone wrong? Florida has been cratered by injuries. Captain Aleksander Barkov tore his ACL and MCL during a preseason practice and is out for the season. Eetu Luostarinen was sidelined after sustaining burns in a barbecuing accident. Cole Schwindt needed surgery after breaking his arm colliding with Panthers' goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky. And all of those follow Matthew Tkachuk being out after offseason surgery.

Florida is truly putting "bend-don't-break" to the test, and it's hard to even assess what the Panthers can be given how long the injured list is -- and, more specifically, the caliber of players who are on it.

Grade: B-

Utah Mammoth

Preseason over/under: 92.5

Current points pace: 93.2

What has gone right? There has been enough of a sample size that proves the Mammoth could have something good with their current roster. A seven-game winning streak was part of a sequence that saw them open the regular season winning eight of their first 10 games.

One reason why they were in the top five in giving up the fewest goals per game in that span is because they were also a top-five team when it came to giving up the fewest shots per game. They were also in the top five of most shots per game, which translated into them being in the top five of goals scored per game.

What has gone wrong? There also has been enough of a sample size that proves the Mammoth still need more. Consider how they've performed since that seven-game winning streak ended Oct. 28. They've had a pair of three-

game losing streaks, with their second such streak reaching four. It's part of a larger sequence that has seen them lose nine of their 12 most recent games.

In that span, they're in the bottom four in terms of goals scored per game and are in the bottom 10 in terms of giving up the most goals per game.

Grade: B-

C grades

Washington Capitals

Preseason over/under: 96.5

Current points pace: 89.5

What has gone right? Washington has Alex Ovechkin still playing premier hockey into his 40s. That simply can't be taken for granted. The Capitals' captain tied for the team lead with 20 points in his first 20 games, and also added another hat trick earlier this month.

He's not the only veteran contributing for Washington -- Tom Wilson, John Carlson and Jakob Chychrun have all been difference-makers in D.C.

Goaltender Logan Thompson also has been outstanding, ranking among the league's top starters in save percentage and goals-against average.

What has gone wrong? The Capitals aren't the same team that finished atop the Eastern Conference standings last season. Coach Spencer Carbery's aim to build Washington into a faster club that can keep pace with the league's speedier lineups isn't happening. There's a lack of consistency in the scoring attack, and that was made worse when Pierre-Luc Dubois hit injured reserve this month. And now Nic Dowd is also out.

It's not just at even strength where Washington hasn't produced -- the Capitals' power play is well below average, and their penalty kill is bottom five in the league. There's just something off about how the Capitals show up on a game-to-game basis. Though their top players appear mostly dialed in, the supporting cast isn't doing its part on a regular basis.

Grade: C+

Buffalo Sabres

Preseason over/under: 83.5

Current points pace: 82

What has gone right? Buffalo found a potential hidden gem in goaltender Colten Ellis. The Sabres claimed Ellis off waivers from St. Louis in October, and he has stepped in recently to help stabilize Buffalo in net. Ellis was 3-1-0 in his first four games, with a .914 save percentage, earning a longer look in the starter's role and providing a bright spot amid an otherwise difficult season.

Josh Doan is another new face that has fit in well, playing over 15 minutes per game and notching 12 points in his first 20 games.

The Sabres have shown they can score in bunches -- that 9-3 victory over Chicago this month was proof -- and they've produced the league's best penalty kill (89.8%). And,



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Buffalo's actually starting to heat up; after losing five straight, the Sabres have rebounded to win four of their past five.

What has gone wrong? The Sabres aren't yet close to snapping that historically long playoff drought. Buffalo sank to the bottom of the Atlantic Division early, and are only now making slow progress out of it. The Sabres are leaky defensively, their offense is top-heavy and inconsistent, plus their power play is sputtering too often.

Injuries have invariably played a role in Buffalo's struggles -- only a handful of skaters have appeared in every game this season -- and the Sabres simply haven't had the depth to make up for their frequently full infirmary. It's hard not to question if coach Lindy Ruff's messaging is already falling on deaf ears if Buffalo can't turn things around. And what happens then?

Grade: C

Edmonton Oilers

Preseason over/under: 103.5

Current points pace: 85.4

What has gone right? Being a point out of the final wild-card place at this point. Much of that has been due to Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid both averaging more than a point per game while others such as Evan Bouchard, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Jack Roslovic have also made offensive contributions for the Oilers.

The two-time defending Western Conference champions have done this before. They've had slow starts -- some even slower than what they've encountered this season -- and have still reached the Stanley Cup Final.

What has gone wrong? The thing about slow starts is that it leads to the same questions being asked every season.

That's what could make Nov. 19 a potentially crucial date for the Oilers after giving up seven goals in a loss to the Capitals. It was the 13th time in 22 games that the Oilers gave up more than four goals. Watching the Oilers be exposed led to Sportsnet's broadcast pointing out that they gave up the most goals in the NHL, the most goals in 5-on-5 play and had the lowest team save percentage.

Grade: C-

New York Rangers

Preseason over/under: 95.5

Current points pace: 78.4

What has gone right? New York is a superior defensive team under first-year coach Mike Sullivan, and that has kept them afloat. The Rangers are one of the NHL's stingiest teams -- averaging 2.65 goals-against per game -- and that's credit to many of New York's skaters playing some of the best defense of their careers.

And of course the offseason addition of Vladislav Gavrikov changed the narrative there too; the big-bodied defender has been a strong partner to Adam Fox anchoring the Rangers' blue line.

Igor Shesterkin and Jonathan Quick have been a terrific goaltending tandem for the Blueshirts as well, a good reflection of the Rangers' defensive commitment.

What has gone wrong? The Rangers can't score enough goals, which might be an understatement. New York scored one goal in its first four games, and still hasn't lit the league on fire. The Rangers' offense ranks 30th overall (2.48 goals per game) for good reason: their star scorers being anything but. J.T. Miller had 12 points in 22 games -- and is now out because of an upper-body injury. Mika Zibanejad managed only 15 points through 23 games. Not even Artemi Panarin is averaging a point-per-game pace.

It's a good thing New York has shut down opponents defensively because Sullivan has yet to find an answer for the sputtering offense. Fittingly, it's made New York a team without a clear identity.

Grade: C-

Toronto Maple Leafs

Preseason over/under: 99.5

Current points pace: 78.3

What has gone right? Toronto could not have anticipated John Tavares turning back the clock. That's the case though, and a good thing too because Tavares -- along with William Nylander -- has been powering the Leafs' success up front. Tavares' 12 goals in his first 21 games was top 10 in the NHL, and Nylander compiled 27 points in his first 19 games. Nick Robertson is also a surprise standout with a regular top-six role.

Toronto has managed to rank top five in goals scored and second in 5-on-5 goals. The Leafs recently welcomed Joseph Woll back from dealing with a personal issue to start the season, and the netminder has barely missed a beat stepping in as Toronto's reigning No. 1 goalie.

What has gone wrong? Mitch Marner is no longer on the roster, and unsurprisingly, they just don't look the same.

Granted, Toronto's difficulties stem from much more than just Marner's absence. Toronto thrived in coach Craig Berube's defense-first system last season, but are one of the league's worst teams against the rush and are top three in goals against per game this season. Toronto has no real identity; frankly, it has been difficult to establish one. The Leafs have been decimated by injuries everywhere, from goaltender Anthony Stolarz (who struggled in his early starts), to top forwards Auston Matthews and Matthew Knies, to depth centers Nicolas Roy and Scott Laughton and right through the blue line, with Chris Tanev and Brandon Carlo both sitting out time.

That has left Berube to try to patch together a lineup too often lacking chemistry -- or confidence. Tavares and Nylander have been instrumental in keeping the Leafs afloat, but Toronto's recent stretch going 1-5-2 has left them at a loss for answers, and at the bottom of the Eastern Conference standings.

Grade: C-

D grades

Calgary Flames

Preseason over/under: 83.5

Current points pace: 64.9



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What has gone right? Being in contention for the worst record in the NHL usually comes with the association of a porous defensive structure. Unless it's the Flames, apparently.

Their defensive structure would be the hallmark of a team that's trying to make a push for a playoff spot. They're in the top four in terms of allowing the fewest scoring chances per 60 and high-danger scoring chances per 60. The Flames are also 13th in shots allowed per 60.

What has gone wrong? Their struggles in the offensive zone have played a significant part in why the Flames have alternated between having either the worst record in the NHL or one of the worst marks in the league. They were averaging 2.10 goals per game throughout the early portion of November.

But their recent three-game winning streak has seen them average 4.66 goals in those victories, which has raised their average to 2.38 goals per game. Don't get too excited; that's now the second-lowest average goals per game in the NHL. It's a figure that also makes them one of the more offense-challenged teams in NHL history. The Flames' current goals per game average would be in the bottom 200 teams all time in terms of single-season goals per game.

Grade: D

Vancouver Canucks

Preseason over/under: 90.5

Current points pace: 71.3

What has gone right? Winning four of their first six games. That window provided a glimpse into how a healthy version of the Canucks could function. A fully healthy Thatcher Demko looked like the version of himself that was a Vezina Trophy finalist in 2023-24. Filip Chytil scored three goals during that stretch and was starting to answer questions about whether he could find consistency as a top-six center.

There was also the continued emergence of Kiefer Sherwood -- who went from having 19 goals in his first season with the Canucks to scoring four times in those six games as part of a month in which he finished with nine goals.

What has gone wrong? Nearly everything since Oct. 21. That's when the Canucks went on the first of what has been three, three-game losing streaks, along with a rash of injuries that has greatly altered their lineup.

They have needed 29 skaters and three goaltenders just to get through their first 23 games. They're a bottom-10 team in terms of shots per 60, scoring chances per 60 and high-danger chances per 60, and have faced even greater struggles defensively. The Canucks are either the worst or second-worst team in the NHL when it comes to allowing the most shots per 60, scoring chances per 60 and high-danger chances per 60.

Grade: D

St. Louis Blues

Preseason over/under: 92.5

Current points pace: 74.5

What has gone right? A positive that can quickly be turned into a negative appears to be the most succinct way to describe the Blues in 2025-26.

They're among the best teams in the NHL at limiting scoring chances. They are a top-10 team when it comes to giving up the fewest scoring chances and high-danger scoring chances per 60. OK, so how is having what appears to be a functional defensive structure a bad thing? It's because the Blues are giving up the third-most goals per game at 3.64 goals per game.

What has gone wrong? They've had one of the more disappointing starts in the NHL. They were a playoff team that used the offseason to add a 25-goal scorer in Pius Suter to a group that had seven returning players who reached double figures in goals.

But they've gone through the first quarter with the third-fewest points in the NHL. They're averaging the fifth-fewest goals per game, while residing in the bottom 10 of shots per game. Their goaltending has disrupted their defensive structure by having the fourth-lowest team save percentage in all situations, and the fifth worst in 5-on-5 play. The Blues came into Monday five points adrift of the final wild-card spot, with the idea that what happens in the near future could determine if they're a playoff team or one destined for the lottery.

Grade: D-

F grade

Nashville Predators

Preseason over/under: 86.5

Current points pace: 62.5

What has gone right? Well, they have an above league average penalty kill. So, there's that at least.

Filip Forsberg is continuing to build upon his legacy as the best forward in the franchise's history. He's projected to reach the 30-goal mark for the fourth time in the past five seasons, and for the fifth time in his career. Plus, Matthew Wood is presenting a strong case to make the All-Rookie Team and potentially be a Calder Trophy finalist. All of that, along with the fact that the Tennessee-Vanderbilt game Saturday could have College Football Playoff implications for both teams.

What has gone wrong? They were the last team to reach the 50-goal mark this season, and have the lowest goals-per-game average in the NHL at 2.29. This has a chance to be one of the more offense-challenged seasons in league history should it continue. They entered Monday in the bottom 125 in league history when it comes to the lowest single-season averages in goals per game.

Those frustrations have extended to other areas, with the Preds giving up the sixth-most goals per game. They have a bottom-seven power play. They've been without their best defenseman and arguably best player in Roman Josi for most of the season. And Steven Stamkos, who has scored more than 580 career goals, is on pace to finish with fewer than 20 for the first time in his career in a non-injury season.

Grade: F



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## LINKS

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/canes-began-season-long-home-stretch-on-wednesday>

[https://www.espn.com/nhl/story/\\_/id/47085484/nhl-2025-26-grades-quarter-season-all-32-teams-players-standings-playoffs](https://www.espn.com/nhl/story/_/id/47085484/nhl-2025-26-grades-quarter-season-all-32-teams-players-standings-playoffs)

# SportScan

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

1369494 Websites

The Athletic / NHL weekend rankings: The oncoming holiday tidings of Canadian panic

By Sean McIndoe

If you're American, this is Thanksgiving week. There's a good chance you're making plans to see friends and family. You might be traveling, in which case we wish you the best of luck with all that. By Thursday, if all goes well, you'll have a belly full of turkey and a full slate of NFL games to doze to.

If you're a Canadian, you're probably busy panicking about your NHL team.

For our purposes, that second group is more interesting than the first. So let's take a quick tour around the country and ask the question: Just how worried should you be right now?

Bonus five seven: Panic rankings for Canadian teams

7. Ottawa Senators: Probably the only team that doesn't really qualify for this exercise. They haven't been great, but they've been good enough to stay near the top of the Atlantic while captain Brady Tkachuk recovered from injury. He could be back this week, so between that and Linus Ullmark's performance trending up in recent games, the vibes are good in Ottawa.

6. Winnipeg Jets: Record-wise, they're doing fine, even as the Colorado Avalanche pull away in a tough Central. But the last week brought two concerning stories: A trade request from a player who was supposed to be part of the long-term plans, and an injury to their most important player. Both situations should be resolved long before the playoffs, but the road might be bumpy for a few weeks. Ah well, as long as none of their Central rivals are suddenly completely unbeatable.

5. Montreal Canadiens: So it turns out they're not going to run away with the Atlantic after all. Not with that goaltending. The question is whether the recent losing streak is this team regressing back to playoff also-ran, or merely a good young team getting some much-needed lessons in handling adversity. Saturday's win was a positive sign, but let's see them do it against a good team.

4. Calgary Flames: It feels weird to have the team that's spent a lot of time dead last in the league only midway down the list, but I think that speaks to the difference between panic and despair. Flames fans should be well onto the acceptance phase of things by now, so the panic here

might sound more like, "Wait, are they actually going to sell as hard as they need to, or will they talk themselves into some sort of half-hearted reload instead?"

3. Vancouver Canucks: They're just not very good. Worse, they're in danger of falling out of the playoff race completely. And if Vancouver fans think they're sick of the Quinn Hughes discourse now, wait until this team is ten points out at the holiday break and facing a second half of treading water at best.

2. Edmonton Oilers: Man, they needed that win on Saturday, even as it didn't really make you feel any better about their issues. We all know a goalie move has to come at some point, and the longer Stan Bowman waits the more the pressure mounts. A playoff miss still seems unlikely. But it's not impossible, and given how disastrous that would be for the franchise, the prospect is terrifying.

1.5 Quebec Nordiques: They don't exist. They haven't existed since 1995. It's becoming increasingly clear they will never exist again. Still, it could be worse, they could be the ...

1. Toronto Maple Leafs: They're under .500, have the worst road record in the league and it seems increasingly clear they're going to miss the playoffs for the first time in a decade. They just got embarrassed by their rivals on "Hockey Night in Canada." The Sabres have now passed them, leaving them in dead last in the East. Everyone's hurt, but they weren't any good when they were healthy. They don't own their own first-round picks for this year or next. The coach may be out of answers and the front office seems completely paralyzed. Other than that, going great.

Wow, that was fun. On to the power rankings, where it will not shock you to learn that it's an all-American top five this week...

Road to the Cup

The five teams with the best chances of winning the Stanley Cup.

The Flyers moved into a wild-card spot on Saturday. Are they for real? Eh, do you want to know the terrifying truth, or do you want to see them sock three dingers in 26 seconds?

Go back and watch the pass on that second goal. Filthy.

5. Vegas Golden Knights (10-4-7, +8 true goals differential\*) – They remain my Pacific pick, although the Ducks are warming up again. The two teams met on Saturday, and it was Mitch Marner's overtime playmaking that decided it.

4. Tampa Bay Lightning (12-7-2, +6) – I've seen enough – welcome back to the top five, Atlantic Division. It had been four weeks away, but the Lightning have done enough despite all their injuries to break the streak.



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3. Dallas Stars (13-5-4, +10) – So apparently Mikko Rantanen is dirty now.

"This one tonight, there's no excuse for it."

The panel share their thoughts on Mikko Rantanen's second game misconduct in three games. [pic.twitter.com/XXphkG90Hx](https://pic.twitter.com/XXphkG90Hx)

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) November 23, 2025

That put him into first place in the league in penalty minutes. Everyone else will get a chance to keep up, though, as Rantanen will sit one game automatically because he's had two game misconducts.

2. Carolina Hurricanes (14-6-2, +13) – The best news for the Hurricanes this week might be the Devils stumbling a bit without Jack Hughes, allowing Carolina to build just a bit of breathing room. Meanwhile, there was buzz during the week about Andrei Svechnikov either asking for a trade or at least indicating he'd be OK with one, but it doesn't sound like that will go anywhere.

1. Colorado Avalanche (16-1-5, +40) – The streak is over! No, not their winning streak, which reached nine with last night's 1-0 win over Chicago. But that close score did snap their streak of five straight wins by exactly three goals. Keep it up with this sort of progress, and somebody will be able to beat these guys by New Year's.

\*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.

Not ranked: Los Angeles Kings – Two things were true about the Kings heading into this season. The first: They'd been a good team for four years in a row, making the playoffs each season while averaging over 100 points. While they'd lost to the Oilers in the first round in each of those years, calling into question the height of their ceiling, they were clearly at least a playoff-caliber team, and were coming off a 2024-25 season that was the best of the bunch.

The second true thing was that it hadn't been good enough to keep Rob Blake employed, and new GM Ken Holland had been pretty unanimously panned for his offseason work. Dom had them dead last on his summer improvement rankings and there wasn't exactly a ton of pushback. And when you combined those offseason reviews with a general sense of fatigue with a team that had delivered the same result four years running, there were more than a few of us who dropped the Kings off our playoff list for this year, making room for one of the younger and/or more interesting teams.

Then the season started, and we all waited to find out what the Kings would be. Good? Bad? Somewhere in the middle?

And now we know the answer: Yes.

They were bad for the first few weeks, winning just one of their first six games. And all the haters were proven right.

Except then they worked their way back up past fake .500, before winning five of six to move into first place in the Pacific. And their loyal fans were vindicated.

Only now they've lost three straight, allowing the Ducks and Knights and even the Kraken to push past them. With the Oilers still lurking and the Sharks surging, the Kings once again look like they might not even be a playoff team. But also, it's three games, and all three were one-goal losses, and they still managed two OTL points, so what are we even doing here?

The answer, unsatisfying as it is, seems to be something like this: The Kings aren't great, but they're not as bad as a lot of us thought, and in a Pacific Division that refuses to follow expectations, that's probably enough to keep them hanging around the race all year long.

(There was some post-goal controversy on that one; the details are here.)

All three California teams are confusing, a problem that Eric tried to help me with in last week's newsletter. (Are you subscribed? You should subscribe.) He had the Kings pegged as a scrappy possession team that was getting good goaltending from Darcy Kuemper, and was banking points by getting to overtime as often as possible. That last part is important, because they're now up to 10 overtime appearances, going 4-6 in the extra frame. It's true the hockey gods hate the loser point, but it's also true that coaches love them, and it's how you can win 10 of 22 games and still be close to .600 in today's NHL.

Great. So are they good or bad or stuck in the middle? It's been all three, at least so far. But if I had to pick an option to ride with, it would be the last one. They're fine, with gusts up to very good. And in this year's Pacific, that's probably enough. Get them into the playoffs, with solid goaltending and a classic last-dance storyline from Anze Kopitar, and who knows what could happen. Especially if you can somehow avoid the Oilers for a change. They'd have a shot. I think. Maybe.

Kings fans, help me out here. Where are we at with this year's edition? Should us sleepy east-coasters be paying more attention, or is the simple "They're OK" answer the right one?

The bottom five

The five teams headed towards dead last and the best lottery odds for Gavin McKenna (we think).

Since this is the section for feeling bad, make sure you don't miss this collection of every team's regrettable trades.

5. Buffalo Sabres (9-9-4, -5) – I can't say I was super close to putting the Leafs or Rangers here. Long-term view, all that stuff. I did think about the Canucks. For now, we'll stick with the Sabres, who looked good yesterday and are making a strong case to escape this section.

4. San Jose Sharks (11-9-3, -4) – I'm not really sure how I feel about this: Tarps off, Shark tooth necklace on.

A new tradition has begun. [pic.twitter.com/Wml6WPPm4W](https://pic.twitter.com/Wml6WPPm4W)

— San Jose Sharks (@SanJoseSharks) November 19, 2025

3. St. Louis Blues (7-9-6, -21) – Some good stuff from Jeremy this week, with a look at the Blues' new top line and how Jim Montgomery is approaching a losing season.

2. Calgary Flames (8-13-3, -14) – Got to be honest: While the Rantanen hit was ugly, if I'm a Flames fan I sure don't mind seeing Jonathan Huberdeau get in there and drop the gloves. His contract means he'll probably always be open to criticism, but he hasn't checked out.

1. Nashville Predators (6-11-4, -25) – They had almost a week off after being shut out by the Penguins to end their mini-series in Sweden. The result: Another shutout, this time against the Avalanche. When they face the Panthers tonight, it will have been ten days since their last goal.

Not ranked: Columbus Blue Jackets – They were a great story last year, riding the emotion of the Johnny Gaudreau tragedy and a Norris-worthy breakout from Zach Werenski almost all the way to a playoff spot. That "almost" was the painful twist, with the Blue Jackets eventually ending up two points shy after a late-season losing streak dug a hole that even six straight wins to end the season weren't enough to climb out of.

The question coming into this year was whether there was a path to improvement. I wasn't convinced there was, and 70 percent of our staff agreed, but I was hoping I'd be wrong. So far this year, the Blue Jackets are playing to a 93-point pace, which would have been enough last year but may not be this time. But they've got points in seven of their last eight, including a tough Saturday loss to the Red Wings that saw



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Columbus blow a two-goal lead they held midway through the third. They were technically holding down a playoff spot when that game ended (by points but not by percentage), but have since been bumped back out.

All that said, there's plenty of room for optimism in Columbus. Start with Jet Greaves, the rookie goalie who's looked the part of an NHL starter. Werenski has shown last year wasn't a fluke and Kirill Marchenko is on pace for a career year at 25.

And then there's the guy I mostly wanted to talk about: Adam Fantilli. The No. 3 pick from the 2023 draft hasn't been getting the kind of attention names like Connor Bedard, Macklin Celebrini and Leo Carlsson have had this year. And that's fair, because those guys are out-producing him on teams that are bigger surprises. But you might think that a guy who just turned 21 and already has a 31-goal season under his belt would get a little bit more credit. Maybe his highlight-reel OT winner in Toronto will help in that regard. Maybe it shouldn't have to.

Aaron Portzline had his quarter-season grades, and they were mostly solid. There have been some rough starts for veterans like Sean Monahan and Boone Jenner, and Kent Johnson and Cole Sillinger are reminding us that even highly drafted prospects can have their ups and downs. But with lots of runway left on the season, some room for improvement is hardly the worst thing in the world.

We may get a good sense of where this team is headed over the next few weeks, as the Blue Jackets play their next nine against Eastern teams, most of whom are right in the middle of the playoff mix. You can't clinch anything in November, but it's a chance to make a few statements.

We'll see where it goes, but don't sleep on this team. They didn't get the storybook finish they probably deserved last year, but maybe that was just setting the stage for something bigger.

The Athletic LOADED: 11.25.2025

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The Athletic / Meet 2027 NHL Draft prospect Dima Zhilkin, who found his game and a home in Saginaw

By Scott Wheeler

SAGINAW, Mich. — When Saginaw Spirit general manager Dave Drinkill talks about Dima Zhilkin, this is where he starts: "He's a competitive little prick."

Chris Lazary, the Spirit's head coach, calls Zhilkin a rat.

There are other things they'll say about him.

"He has always been a pro. He can kill penalties, he can play on the power play, he fights, he's got jam to him, he's a leader," Drinkill says.

The Spirit selected Zhilkin with the 19th pick in the 2024 OHL draft. He was eighth on his Toronto Jr. Canadiens U16 AAA team in scoring that year with just 22 points in 34 games as a 5-foot-6 winger.

But he played with drive, and he was a late-birthday who was also one of the youngest players on that AAA team. The Spirit felt that he was going to make the most of the runway that he had.

Two seasons later, Zhilkin is still a full year out from his NHL Draft year in 2027, and he's already, in Drinkill's eyes, the Spirit's best player. Next year, he expects he'll be their captain, too.

And he's found a home away from the rink in Saginaw.

Kevin Smiley can still remember the first day he opened his doors to a billet.

It was the day of the national championship in college football, Jan. 7, 2013. John Llewelyn, a former billet of the Spirit who worked at the hospital with his wife, Kristen (an interventional radiologist), had brought defenseman Jesse Graham by because he needed a place to stay.

At the time, the Smileys had young kids, and so Kevin had told him, "Well, bring Jesse over and we'll meet him and see if he wants to be in our house and if it's a good fit."

When he showed up, Kevin was plowing snow in their driveway. When Graham hopped out of Llewelyn's car with a duffel bag, he remembers thinking, "Well, it's going to be awkward if we say no."

After tucking his kids to bed at halftime, suddenly he was sitting next to a stranger on his couch.

When Smiley tells that story today, he smiles ear to ear when he says that "by the next day, Jesse was a part of our family."

Until that moment, the Smileys were always a soccer family. Though they have a pond in their backyard in Saginaw's Chestnut Grove neighborhood, they rarely skated on it.

These days, though, they're a hockey family. Zhilkin is their newest billet son, Smiley is retired, and they don't miss a game.

They'll often even go to road games in Flint, Sault Ste. Marie and Windsor (where Zhilkin's parents, Anna and Boris, now live), too. They took two breaks from billeting when their two boys were in their senior years of high school but once they left home, Spirit assistant general manager Brian Prout, who oversees their billet program, asked them if they'd take Zhilkin in during their 2024 Memorial Cup run for a few weeks after the league permitted Zhilkin to be around the team immediately after they drafted him.

Those few weeks have turned into two seasons (it'll be three when Zhilkin returns for his draft year next year instead of going the college route). When the Spirit asked the Smileys if he could come back for his rookie season a year ago, Kristen told them, "You gave us a puppy for a few weeks and then said, 'Now he's gone.' Absolutely."

Sitting in his living room with their golden doodle Zoey in his lap ahead of a three-in-three weekend slate of games, Smiley, who used to substitute teach and always cherished when kids would scream to their friends "We've got Mr. Smiley today!" when he'd show up, says billeting Zhilkin has given him that feeling back.

More than a decade after having Graham stay with them, they attended his wedding and gifted him his jersey from the outdoor game he played in with Saginaw. On Mother's Day, Graham's text to Kristen often beats her own kids'. In their basement, they've got framed photos and memorabilia from all of their former players — from Graham to NHL Draft picks like Nick Moutrey, Jake Paterson and Markus Niemelainen. It was a hard Christmas the year that Moutrey and Paterson were traded days apart. Before Paterson left, he insisted on dropping by both of the kids' schools to give them hugs goodbye.

They're not looking forward to that eventual goodbye with Zhilkin and say they've developed a particularly special relationship with him.

Last season, before Zhilkin had even played his first game with the Spirit, the Smileys helped the then-15-year-old through his first injury after he took a knee to his quad in an exhibition game, and it turned into a hematoma.

The morning after it happened, Zhilkin called Drinkill to ask if he could skip a team event because his leg was bothering him. Drinkill, who was on the way to St. Lucia for his honeymoon, told him, "Well, you kind of have to do a team event." When he landed, Zhilkin was in the hospital.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Left: Zhilkin and the Smileys on billet night. Right: Zhilkin's hematoma. (Scott Wheeler / The Athletic)

He didn't play until November of that year and had to miss playing for Canada at U17 worlds, where he would have been on Drinkill's team.

"We missed him a ton. It's probably why we lost in the gold medal game," Drinkill says from the Smiley living room. "He proved it at Hlinka this year (where he scored three goals in five games). He ended up being one of their go-to guys by the end of it."

More time spent away during the injury helped bring him even closer to the Smileys. Zhilkin talks about their place as his second home now, and talks fondly of getting them out onto the pond last winter.

"You don't know what you're expecting with a billet, especially coming into your first year as a 15- and 16-year-old. It's tough moving away from family. But they've welcomed me so easily, and everything just clicked. I'm super happy to be here," Zhilkin said.

They'll have movie nights, ping pong matches and play pool in the basement. The night before The Athletic's visit, they were playing cards together. A few nights before that, when Zhilkin turned 17, his mom, dad and sister came over, and Smiley asked him what he liked to have for dessert on his birthday. He told him pancho, a Russian cake that he gets from a bakery whenever he's home. (Zhilkin moved to Canada from Russia when he was 8, two and a half years after his mom, sister and older brother, Danny, a prospect of the Winnipeg Jets, did, while he and his dad awaited their visas.)

So Smiley made him pancho, and the family ate it all.

When they were done, Anna told her son's billet dad, "This is exactly what it tastes like."

"Well, you made my heart feel good," Smiley answered.

He has also taught himself how to make borscht, a Russian stew, and pelmeni, a kind of dumpling.

Zhilkin and his birthday pancho. (Kevin Smiley)

Smiley talks about Boris, who still speaks very little English and communicates primarily using his phone as his translator, as "just so thankful."

"Oh, Kevin, you my friend," Boris will say to Smiley whenever he sees him.

Smiley laughs about a game during Zhilkin's rookie season when Boris looked back down at a stream of one of Danny's games on his phone while Zhilkin was in the middle of a fight, numb to that competitiveness that everyone else now sees. Though Boris and Anna didn't attend the game against Erie, instead making the trip to see Danny play in Grand Rapids with the Manitoba Moose, they were in Windsor for the tail end of their three-in-three and having them a couple of hours away has been big for Zhilkin.

"He showed me his phone after the Memorial Cup, and it said 'You're the first person I've ever entrusted my son to,'" Smiley said.

Smiley, who noted that he doesn't like winter and would eventually like to travel in his retirement, said he would have only made the three-year commitment they made for Zhilkin.

"We absolutely love having him," Smiley said. "We get to provide a safe space to be away, and we were so happy to really get back into billeting with Dima."

Zhilkin insists his second family has helped him perform on the ice, too.

He describes himself as a poised playmaker who can create under pressure and past defenders, but also likes to play in the dirty areas and defend.

His linemate, top 2026 prospect Nikita Klepov, describes him as "a hard-skill guy." Lazary calls him a future first-round pick who's still growing. He's now 5-foot-10 and change, and if he gets another inch or two (Danny is 6-foot-1), they think his first-round projection could become a top-of-the-draft one next year.

When the puck dropped on the three-in-three at the end of October, he already had 11 points in just six games to start the year.

By the end of the weekend, he'd made it 16 points in nine games, capped off by a hat trick against the 11-2-1 first-place Windsor Spitfires and the dagger in the shootout.

The "competitive prick" came out late in the third period when he took a slashing penalty in the offensive zone with the Spirit trailing 4-3 and on the power play.

He made up for it when he came out of the box and immediately scored to tie the game.

"He's got everything," Drinkill said when it was over.

The Athletic LOADED: 11.25.2025

1369496 Websites

ESPN / NHL's best this week: The case for a new 'playoff cutoff' date - ESPN

Arda Ocal

I'm sick of the "American Thanksgiving playoff position" conversation that happens every single year in the hockey world. I say this with complete respect to longtime NHL executive Ken Holland, who is credited with introducing the idea.

You know exactly what I'm talking about: If an NHL team is in a playoff position by American Thanksgiving (the fourth Thursday in November, this year on the 27th), they will probably make the playoffs. From 2005-06 through last season, 77.1% of NHL teams in a playoff spot on American Thanksgiving made the postseason. That ratio was as spot-on as mathematically possible last season, with six of eight teams in each conference that were in playoff position on Nov. 28 remaining there at season's end.

Here's why this season could be different: in the past 10 seasons (taking out the season that COVID-19 affected the Thanksgiving mark), the average gap between top and bottom of the East was 20.4 points. In the West, 20.5; that makes the NHL average a 20.45-point gap.

If the current eight-point gap in the East as of Monday holds through the next few days, it will be the smallest gap in either conference at American Thanksgiving in the past decade. Before this season, the smallest in the past decade was 14 points, which was last season in the East. Even with that smaller gap, six of eight teams in playoff position on Turkey Day made it in the spring; the New York Rangers and Boston Bruins were replaced by the Ottawa Senators and Montreal Canadiens, the latter of whom were in last place in the conference on Thanksgiving.

So yes, history will tell us that the 77.1% success number will roughly hold. But given the tight standings in the East, we could be in store for a healthy amount of absolute pandemonium and more juggling around than at a circus -- and let's be real, that would be a lot more entertaining to hockey fans!

But I have another new idea; what if we hold off on the playoff talk until a slightly later date? We don't need to crowd Thanksgiving. Let it have its day. Let's not be like stores that sell Christmas decorations on Sept. 15.



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Thanksgiving roughly lands around the Game Nos. 18-22 mark for teams. Why don't we make the cutoff date the first Monday of December instead? That would be one to three more games per team.

So let's have the "Stanley Cup playoff Mendoza line" discussion be its own day on the first Monday in December. From the content angle, Thanksgiving already gives us enough themes to work with: What are we thankful for in hockey, which NHL players would you invite to Thanksgiving dinner, etc. We don't need to stuff in the playoff talk.

Consider this my official petition to start the movement: I will see you all on Monday, Dec. 1 for our playoff team predictions and laments! For those who are back to work after a four-day Thanksgiving weekend, we'll hit you with all of those sweet playoff positioning prognostications. Boom! (And again, sorry, Mr. Holland.)

Jump ahead:

Games of the week

What I loved this weekend

Hart Trophy candidates

Social post of the week

Stick taps

Biggest games of the week

But speaking of American Thanksgiving, it is a unique week on the NHL calendar. There are 15 games on Wednesday and another 15 on Friday - and none on Thursday, because we will all be too busy eating turkey and not talking about playoff teams, right?

So, as a slight swerve from the usual department, here's a ranking of all 15 games on Friday's all-day slate, which starts at noon ET and runs through a pair of games with an 8 p.m. ET puck drop. Enjoy the hockey holiday!

1. New York

Rangers at

Boston

Bruins

1 p.m. ET | TNT

The Bruins have eventual 50-goal scorer (according to teammate David Pastrnak) Morgan Geekie, who is one goal behind Nathan MacKinnon in the Rocket Richard race. Meanwhile, the Rangers continue their reverse home-road split; world beaters away from MSG, quite fallible on home ice. And coincidentally, the teams' No. 1 netminders, Igor Shesterkin and Jeremy Swayman, have virtually identical .909 and .907 save percentages as the week begins.

Give me an Original Six matchup between two teams who definitely need the points. But there's always something a little extra when it's Boston vs. New York in any sport, no matter the standings.

Here's the rest of my rankings for Friday's schedule:

2. Colorado

Avalanche at

Minnesota

Wild

3:30 p.m. ET | ESPN+

3. Montreal

Canadiens at

Vegas

Golden Knights

4 p.m. ET | ESPN+

4. Los Angeles

Kings at

Anaheim

Ducks

4 p.m. ET | ESPN+

5. Pittsburgh

Penguins at

Columbus

Blue Jackets

7 p.m. ET | NHL Network

6. Utah

Mammoth at

Dallas

Stars

8 p.m. ET | ESPN+

7. Tampa Bay

Lightning at

Detroit

Red Wings

12 p.m. ET | ESPN+

8. Philadelphia

Flyers at

New York

Islanders

4 p.m. ET | ESPN+

9. Vancouver

Canucks at

San Jose

Sharks

4 p.m. ET | ESPN+

10. Toronto

Maple Leafs at

Washington

Capitals

5 p.m. ET | ESPN+

11. Winnipeg

Jets at

Carolina

Hurricanes



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5 p.m. ET | ESPN+

12. New Jersey

Devils at

Buffalo

Sabres

4 p.m. ET | ESPN+

13. Nashville

Predators at

Chicago

Blackhawks

8 p.m. ET | ESPN+

14. Ottawa

Senators at

St. Louis

Blues

4 p.m. ET | ESPN+

15. Calgary

Flames at

Florida

Panthers

4 p.m. ET | ESPN+

What I loved this weekend

New York Islanders defenseman Matthew Schaefer is a joy to watch so young in his career. He's already calling out spots like a veteran on the ice, skating really well with great positioning, battling for pucks and making smart passes. Seeing him play in person for the first time on Saturday was an absolute treat. He's appointment viewing for me already.

I'm not ready to make big comparisons yet to what he'll be when he hits his peak, but I will say that the way Schaefer strips players of the puck on the defensive end and makes it look so effortless reminds me of how Cale Makar is able to do that seemingly with ease, often against superstars such as Connor McDavid.

Hart Trophy candidates if the season ended today

Nathan MacKinnon might be on this list for the rest of the season the way he's going. After 22 games, he has 37 points and 17 goals, leading the league in points and tied for the league lead in goals.

Speaking of the Art Ross race (for the NHL's leading point scorer), Nos. 2, 3 and 4 are currently McDavid, Macklin Celebrini and Connor Bedard. Sign me up for the "kids" fighting the established superstars for the point-scoring lead all season.

In fact, since both Celebrini and Bedard have more goals than McDavid, I'm making them both Hart Trophy finalists for the week. I hope this changes again, because the constant shifting in the race has become a storyline I absolutely love this season.

Social media post of the week

Speaking of Matthew Schaefer, he showed incredible poise and strength for the kids he interacted with during Hockey Fights Cancer Day at UBS Arena. Schaefer's mother Jennifer died from cancer, and the game was played on her birthday.

— NHL (@NHL) November 22, 2025

A very touching post came from Sydney Esiason Martin, with whom Schafer is living this season. Responding to a photo of Schaefer hugging her kids, Martin replied "My girls are lucky to have him in their lives":

My girls are lucky to have him in their lives ❤️ <https://t.co/JKvN9jZf2s>

— Sydney Esiason Martin (@sydneyemartin) November 23, 2025

On a lighter note, a shoutout to Grant Joseph and his daughter Skyla, whom I met at UBS Arena. Their videos, where daughter Skyla chirps dad Grant for being a Maple Leafs fan, crack me up. Grant bravely wore a Leafs John Tavares jersey to the game.

We filmed a collab -- it didn't go well for me:

Stick taps

As noted in the sections above, I was on site for the Islanders' Hockey Fights Cancer game to see how the organization did such a terrific job showing the kids that were present an incredible time. It started right off the hop at the ceremonial puck drop; shoutout to Blues captain Brayden Schenn, who positioned the kids so that the pictures would look great, one they will no doubt cherish.

Three of the young warriors got to ring the bell for beating cancer, which drew an incredible, emotional reaction from the crowd.

Isles GM Mathieu Darche held a special news conference for the kids. In speaking with them, you could tell it became a core memory.

We see many examples of acts of kindness on social media during Hockey Fights Cancer month, but it's a different perspective to see it in person as opposed to in videos on social media.

The Islanders, like many other teams, have incredible charitable initiatives year round. I was told that money raised from auctions regularly allows winners to sit in the owners box, often meeting with Isles co-owner Jon Ledecky, or sitting against the glass, interacting with players (and usually Sparky the Dragon), along with other unique experiences.

ESPN LOADED: 11.25.2025

1369497 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks listening to trade offers on 'veteran players'

Elliott Friedman

According to several sources, the Vancouver Canucks have let it be known that — in an effort to get younger — they are willing to listen to offers on "veteran players."

The obvious question is: Does this mean Quinn Hughes? I'm told the answer is no, at this time.

"They've made it clear (trading him) is not their priority right now," one executive said. (Filip Hronek is another player teams feel is unlikely to go anywhere.)

What it does appear to mean is potential UFAs and potentially a player or two with term, but the Canucks have also indicated they do not desire to tear it right down to the studs.

This action is noteworthy because of Jim Rutherford's track record. Historically, once he decides to act, he does not wait. His resume is full of moves consummated well before the trade deadline.



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Now, he and GM Patrik Allvin want to know what could be available to them.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 11.25.2025

1369498 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Last-place Maple Leafs favour rest ahead of 'critical' road trip

Luke Fox

TORONTO — That season Craig Berube guided his hockey team to a Stanley Cup, it too was a mess at this time of year.

So much so, those 2018-19 St. Louis Blues fired bench boss Mike Yeo in the back half of November after stumbling to a 7-9-3 start and falling to last place in their division. They promoted assistant Berube to the head gig on an interim basis.

The group didn't immediately rally; those eventual champions were tied for dead last in the league on New Year's Day.

In order to write a wonderful comeback story, you need something to come back from.

Flash forward seven Novembers, and Berube is back in familiar territory. He can only look up to see anyone else in the conference standings.

"Same approach almost, right now," the Toronto Maple Leafs coach said Monday. "Same approach."

Judging by points (.21), points percentage (.477) and goals against per game (3.37), Berube's bunch wakes up three days before U.S. Thanksgiving as the worst team in the NHL's Eastern Conference.

Recent endorsement from the boss be damned, Berube said he wears the weight of earning just one win over the past eight tries the same way a player would.

"I mean, we all feel it and want to be better and want to do better. But at the same time, my job is to help these guys, to teach them, to work with them. And everybody's got to grind right now. It's a grind. You got to grind.

"Do I sleep any differently? No. I wake up and look forward to coming to the rink and trying to get better, like everybody else."

It says something, though, about the physical fragility of these Leafs that — in wake of a lacklustre performance Saturday in Montreal and a day off Sunday — that Monday's developmental workout was light on grind.

A healthy and busy leadership core — Morgan Rielly, William Nylander, John Tavares, Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Joseph Woll — eschewed the skates Monday in favour of "mental and physical rest," per Berube, who also stayed off the ice. The injured and role players scattered on separate pads to sharpen individual skills.

A full practice is scheduled for Tuesday before the Leafs embark on their longest road trip to date: Columbus, Washington, Pittsburgh, Florida and Carolina.

Banged up mentally and physically, the Leafs will board a charter to take on a handful of hungry conference rivals in what Berube positioned as a "critical" road trip.

Toronto is a league-worst 1-6 away from home, and it is banking on the return of healthy skaters to prevent that record from worsening.

First, the good news: Jake McCabe, who left Saturday's loss with a puck to the face, is good to play Wednesday in Columbus, the coach assures. (McCabe did not skate Monday.)

Captain Auston Matthews (lower body), top-line left wing Matthews Knies (lower body) and centre Nicolas Roy (upper body) are all "close" and have not been ruled out for Wednesday.

Now, the concerning news: neither Brandon Carlo nor Anthony Stolarz (both upper body) have skated since their respective injuries. Stolarz hasn't been seen by reporters in days now. Berube said Thursday that he was hopeful Stolarz has not suffered a setback and would likely resume skating Friday.

Didn't happen.

On Monday, Berube said his goalie is "a ways away."

Curious.

If Berube has any hope of resummoning the magic of 2019, health is imperative.

So is team defence, which has shot to the top of the coach's list.

Berube has no interest in overhauling his system, but he said he's seen improvement from a couple mid-season adjustments he's made to the game plan.

Execution without the puck remains an issue, be it limiting counterattacks, making quick exits, or tightening around the crease.

"It's something we've been banging away at for a bit here, and we got to keep banging away at it. We prided ourselves on defence last year. Checking. And we got to get back to that," Berube said.

Simon Benoit, of all Maple Leafs, offered the most impassioned and accountable words on the first day back to work since getting passed by the hapless Buffalo Sabres in the standings on Sunday.

"Just not good enough. That's it. There's no explanation. Just not good enough," Benoit said of the 5-2 egg Toronto laid in Montreal.

"We have to be more hungry — myself. Just start. We have to be more hungry. We need to show that we want to win out there."

Benoit was asked to assess the mood of the group. He didn't quite know. They hadn't been together. He'd been working on his own game, which he says has been too passive.

"The guys are trying, but it just takes more. It's a hard league to win," Benoit said. "Everybody has to show up every night, and all together. It's a team sport. Just not one guy can make it. It has to be everybody."

The hallmarks of that squad from seven Novembers ago that Berube helped elevate from the basement — impenetrable defence, all hands on deck, elite goaltending, dogged forecheck, relentless work ethic, sum greater than the individual parts?

Those traits have yet to materialize here in Toronto.

There is still time for them to develop, an optimist would counter.

"We know we can be much, much, much better," Benoit said. "And he's pushing us to achieve that goal.

"And we all like the guy, respect him a lot. He wants us to succeed."

Maybe rest is a weapon.

Maybe Berube's history of 2019 can repeat itself.

Maybe sports are crazy and the miracle we can't see coming lies just around the corner.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 11.25.2025



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1369499 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Time is now for Flames to extend GM Craig Conroy

Eric Francis

TAMPA – Never mind salvaging the season, the Calgary Flames need to safeguard their future.

And that starts with signing Craig Conroy to a contract extension.

Immediately.

It should have happened months ago, as it's beyond insulting for him to have been operating this season as a rare, lame-duck GM whose contract runs out next summer.

That is, of course, unless an extension has already been quietly agreed to.

That's certainly a possibility, as ownership is well aware of how well the popular spokesman for the club has navigated through choppy waters over the last two-plus years.

The club may simply be waiting to find the right time to make it public, which has been tricky due to the optics of announcing that the man in charge of the league's 31st-ranked squad is being extended.

And so we wait, with everyone outside the organization pondering whether the team is somewhat directionless without him getting the nod to plot a clear path through the new series of tests that await.

Despite the team's current standing, there is certainly no shame in what Conroy has done to date.

Given how well he re-shaped the team through two years of tumult, he's proven he has the patience and smarts to continue putting pieces in place as part of a rebuild/retool/hybrid (hybrid rebuild) he kickstarted to help stabilize a team in significant flux.

The players trust him, they like him, and they respect him, as he was once one of them.

Equally as important is the fact he's beloved in the community.

Now, perhaps more than ever, he's needed to not only pave the way forward, but also be the one to shape the messaging hockey president Don Maloney struggled with last week.

As one of the most popular players ever to wear the Flaming C, he's built up plenty of emotional equity with a fan base he's asking to be patient.

It's time to give Conroy another three-year mandate to continue trying to accumulate and develop a young core capable of taking over from the veteran leadership group when the time is right.

Long-term vision is what's needed most.

As players are dealt, acquired, drafted and developed moving forward, there needs to be one stabilizing voice mapping the way, setting the tone and staving off criticism from a growing number of impatient fans.

He's done it before, as evidenced by the mess he tackled admirably his first year when he had to trade away key veterans Tyler Toffoli, Nikita Zadorov, Elias Lindholm, Chris Tanev and Noah Hanifin.

By season's end, he managed to stabilize the team, putting a cherry on it in the summer by trading Markstrom and Andrew Mangiapane in separate deals.

The second-rounder for Mangiapane turned into highly-touted Theo Stockselius.

The Markstrom swap with New Jersey will pay off for years to come, landing the Flames Kevin Bahl, first-rounder Cole Reschny and opening the door for franchise backbone Dustin Wolf to become a Calder finalist.

Despite being criticized by knee-jerk fans at the time, it proved to be his finest hour.

The Lindholm trade was equally as shrewd, landing the Flames Andrei Kuzmenko, Joni Jurmo, Hunter Brzustewicz, a conditional fourth-round pick and a 2024 first-rounder that turned into one of the organization's most exciting prospects, Matvei Gridin.

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

Hockey fans already know the name, but this is not the blog. From Sportsnet, 32 Thoughts: The Podcast with NHL Insider Elliott Friedman and Kyle Bukauskas is a weekly deep dive into the biggest news and interviews from the hockey world.

Latest episode

Kuzmenko was later packaged up to help the Flames land top-six forwards Morgan Frost and Joel Farabee.

Both trades are well-orchestrated gifts that keep on giving.

Although perceived as a deal in which Conroy was backed into a corner, the Hanifin swap gave the Flames a third-rounder last year (Kirill Zarubin) and a first-rounder from Vegas in this year's deep draft.

His moves haven't all been home runs (see Yegor Sharangovich's extension), but his track record is full of patient, well-thought-out transactions that demonstrate he is capable of boldly moving the organization forward.

Debate all you want which veterans should be shipped out, which youngsters should be brought in, and how the team should react to a playoff-ending start that has the fan base in a tizzy.

But the reality is there is only one obvious first step that needs to be taken: ink the architect, giving him a runway on which to build something the city can be proud and excited about a year, two or three after the new arena opens.

Ownership was proven right when it took a chance on Conroy to be the club's rookie GM.

The group put even more faith in Conroy when they approved his recommendation to promote Ryan Huska from assistant to head coach.

Conroy's intuition was right on Huska, as evidenced by the two-year extension he just inked to continue managing the bench.

Now it's Conroy's turn.

If it hasn't already been signed, you can bet it will be.

Given the noise, frustration, uncertainty and importance of charting the right course, there's no better man for the job.

And there's no better time than now to make it public.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 11.25.2025

1369500 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / David Kampf embracing larger role amid Canucks' centre crisis



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 25, 2025

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER – It is far from ideal that David Kampf is suddenly the Vancouver Canucks' second-line centre, but his deployment illustrates the crisis that the reeling National Hockey League team has down the middle.

The Toronto Maple Leafs' castoff is better than the alternatives.

For Kampf, a 30-year-old Czech who built a solid reputation as a checking centre in the NHL, anything is better than where he was a month ago – riding buses in the American Hockey League for the first time in seven years after falling out of favour with Maple Leafs coach Craig Berube.

Kampf was so desperate for another NHL opportunity that he agreed to terminate his contract with the Leafs, forfeiting about \$3.7 million in guaranteed salary this season and next, before signing 10 days ago a pro-rated \$1.1-million, one-year deal with the Canucks. Who were also desperate.

"I thought the opportunity here is the biggest one," Kampf said after the 30th-place Canucks practised Monday at Rogers Arena. "I played a few years already in the NHL, so I just decided to get one more chance. I wanted to get one more chance and see if I'm still able to play in the NHL. That was my thinking. It's not about proving (something) to people. It's proving more to myself. It's about myself, not about what people think of me."

The Canucks' urgent need at centre was the biggest draw for Kampf, but the eight-year veteran also cited the appeal of Vancouver, a couple of Czech teammates named Filip, Hronek and Chytil, and a platform to audition for his country's Olympic team in February.

Kampf, however, has skated straight into an inferno, a 9-12-2 Canucks team that has lost to injury or free agency all but one of its centres from last season, as well as its stout, defensive structure.

As it travels Tuesday for a difficult four-game road trip that begins with the reborn Anaheim Ducks and ends against the NHL-leading Colorado Avalanche, the Canucks have one win in seven games and are playing themselves out of the playoff race and into the Gavin McKenna draft sweepstakes.

"To be honest, I wasn't thinking about it like that, like if this team's doing good or not," Kampf said of his decision. "I just felt that's the best decision for me, for the opportunity. Yeah, it's a little bit harder (for the team) right now, but I think we have to just keep working hard."

"I can not say what's the problem (because) we're still trying to figure it out. But I would say our defensive zone, we can be so much better there. We can improve there. So, yeah, we need to focus on the D-zone (and) be a little bit harder to play against, closing quick and trying to win the battles. It's about the battles. If you're winning the battles, you have the puck and you can go (and attack)."

The Canucks have lost all three games with Kampf, including Sunday's disheartening 5-2 loss to the Calgary Flames. But in the last two games, the newest Canuck has been centring scoring (but not currently) wingers Brock Boeser and Conor Garland.

The odd-fitting trio – two offensive right wingers and a checking centre – is actually generating scoring chances.

Garland and Boeser have combined for 13 shots in all situations, but Boeser remains pointless in three games and Garland has just one point in six.

With 50 points apiece, Garland and Boeser were the leading scorers among Vancouver forwards last season.

"I feel bad for him because he could easily have three or four assists if, you know, if me and Brock were converting," Garland said of Kampf. "But we're not right now. It's only been two games, but it felt like we were pretty good (as a line) in both games. Had a lot of looks, just not much going in right now. Just one of those times of the year."

Asked about Kampf's low offensive ceiling – the centre's career-high for points is 27 – Garland said: "To get to the NHL, everybody was an offensive player somewhere. It's just about keeping your confidence and knowing you can make plays when you have the chance. I mean, even three years ago, I was on the fourth line here. No power play, no PK, 10 or 11 minutes a night. So you've just got to stick with it. You've got to get better, though. Put your time in after practice, before practice. Sit in (special teams) meetings. Don't rim it out every time (at practice); maybe try to make a play. Have no fear because in games, we need guys to make plays."

"Whether it's on the forecheck or whatever, I think he's a smart hockey player," Boeser said. "I think he's just trying to get an understanding of kind of how me and Gars operate and where to be, and kind of our system. It's still early, but I definitely see glimpses of that (offensive) game. I like the way our line's been playing, but we've just got to put the puck in the net."

Hronek played with Kampf at a couple of world championships, including the 2022 tournament in Finland, when Czechia beat the United States 8-4 in the bronze-medal game.

"I know he's a really smart player, and obviously everyone (around the NHL) knows him because he's been a good defensive player," Hronek said. "But I know he has an offensive upside in him as well. I don't know if he's ever had a chance to play with, like, good players like he's playing with right now. He can produce more for sure."

Kampf is getting an opportunity to play in the top half of coach Adam Foote's lineup because Chytil and Teddy Blueger, two of only three experienced NHL centres the Canucks opened the season with (Elias Pettersson is the other), were injured on Oct. 19 and haven't played since.

Lukas Reichel, an earlier low-risk pickup from the Chicago Blackhawks, looked completely unsuitable as a top-six centre and eventually played himself out of the lineup after one assist in 13 games and zero shots on goal in nine of them.

And the Canucks' AHL centre graduates, Max Sasson and Aatu Raty, are just starting to learn the NHL game and have struggled at times in the defensive zone.

"When you lose that many guys up the middle at once," Foote lamented on Saturday, "it's just logic that... (defensive) numbers are going to go down. I mean, I don't know how they can't. Right, that's logic to everybody? It's logic to me."

So until someone gets healthy or until general manager Patrik Allvin manages to acquire a top-six centre, a trade mission that began when last season ended, this is Kampf's big chance.

"For sure, everyone wants to score goals and have points," Kampf said of rising beyond a checking role. "But like I said, everyone has their own role on the team. You can not have, like, 20 guys who score 50 goals. I found this role, so I'm trying to do my best."

"Yeah, of course, it's huge when you're playing with those guys (Boeser and Garland). They're great players, lots of skills. But I wouldn't say I'm thinking about it too much, like if it's second line or third line or fourth line. I think I still get the same minutes like I always had, so it's not about what line it is. Like I said, those two guys are great, so I'm enjoying it right now and trying to do my best to help them."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 25, 2025

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

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Latest episode

Kampf is probably one of the few veteran Canucks genuinely excited to be with the team right now.

"For sure, like, it wasn't a great start of the season for me," he said. "But right now, I'm trying to be positive, you know? Like, I'm back in the NHL, and it's still early (in the season). I'm here 10 days probably. So I'm trying to enjoy every day and get better. Like I said, I didn't have a good start of the season, didn't play too many games. . . so I'm still trying to get back to my level."

And beyond.

ICE CHIPS – Blueger (lower-body injury) practised with the team for a third day in a non-contact jersey, although he appeared to fully participate in a contact drill near the end of Monday's practice. . . The Canucks swapped emergency-callup backups, bringing Nikita Tolopilo up from the minors to back up Kevin Lankinen while sending Jiri Patera back to the AHL. . . Winger MacKenzie MacEachern was also returned to the Abbotsford Canucks.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 11.25.2025

1369501 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Upgrades far from guaranteed in goalie trade market

Ryan Dixon

We're approaching the one-year anniversary of a couple swaps Edmonton Oilers fans might consider a missed opportunity.

Unfortunately for the Oilers, those moves also represent a bit of an anomaly when it comes impactful in-season goalie trades.

It was Nov. 30, 2024, when the Colorado Avalanche moved goalie Justus Annunen to the Nashville Predators for Scott Wedgewood. Nine days later, the Avalanche were in the middle of another goalie move, sending — among other parts — masked man Alexandar Georgiev to San Jose for puckstopper Mackenzie Blackwood.

Colorado's team save percentage on the day it dealt for Wedgewood was .856, dead last in the NHL through over a quarter of the 2024-25 season. Since Dec. 3, 2024, — the day Wedgewood played his first game for the Avs — the club has a .909 team save percentage, a number that represents the third-best figure in the NHL over a stretch of 79 games for the club.

The Oilers, for what it's worth, are tied for 22nd at .889.

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Goaltending, of course, has been a major subplot in Edmonton for some time now. The team's inability to get over the Florida Panther-shaped hump — Saturday night's win notwithstanding — often leads to a conversation about whether Stuart Skinner and Calvin Pickard, bless their hearts, can get this team where it wants to go.

As it happens, the Oilers aren't the only Canadian NHL team to experience some goaltending woes of late.

The Montreal Canadiens — who surely felt pretty good about their tandem of Samuel Montembeault and Jakob Dobes coming into the season — have seen both guys hit the skids in November. Since this month began, the Canadiens have a league-worst .846 save percentage. Edmonton sits 29th at .861.

Crease concerns have been top-of-mind longer in Northern Alberta than Quebec and any Edmonton supporter who's had Part 1 of the goalie conversation — "I don't think our guys are good enough" — knows full well that Part 2 — "So, uh, who can we get?" — isn't going to make you feel much better.

Even in the off-season, when teams make most of their moves, the goalie market is grim. And once the puck drops on a new season, those options don't really improve.

That's what makes Colorado's moves at this time last year so impressive — and anomalous.

While some in-season goalie trades since the start of 2021-22 improved a squad's situation, the wins tend to be modest. Let's look at a few trades in that timeframe by teams in a somewhat similar situation to Edmonton and Montreal (clubs that are playoff bound — or hope to be — that are trying to improve their crease).

Goalie

Acquired by

Date

Games played with new club

Save percentage

Scott Wedgewood

Dallas

March 20, 2022

8

.913

Marc-Andre Fleury

Minnesota

March 21, 2022



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 11               | Colorado  |
| .910             | Nov. 30, 2024   |
| Joonas Korpisalo | 19  |
| Los Angeles      | .917  |
| March 1, 2023    | Mackenzie Blackwood   |
| 11               | Colorado  |
| .921             | Dec. 9, 2024  |
| Jonathan Quick   | 37  |
| Vegas            | .913  |
| March 2, 2023    | As the table above shows, some of the moves made for goalies did pay off — at least in the regular season.  |
| 10               | Wedgewood did not start a playoff game for either Dallas in 2022 or Colorado in 2025 and Quick didn't play a minute for Vegas during its 2023 run to the Cup. As for Allen and Kahkonen, their arrival in Jersey wasn't even enough to get the Devils into the post-season at all.  |
| .901             | The Wild lost in the 2022 first round and Fleury posted a .906 save percentage in five games, while Korpisalo had an .892 save percentage during a six-game, first-round loss to Edmonton in '23.   |
| Kaapo Kahkonen   | That leaves Blackwood, who also had an .892 save percentage last spring — in what marked his first-ever NHL post-season action — as Colorado lost to Dallas.  |
| New Jersey       | Obviously Colorado is over the moon with how its goalie trades from a year ago worked out, but completely remaking your crease on the fly and finding a new, solid tandem is, to put it lightly, the exception to the rule.   |
| March 8, 2024    | Still, Edmonton could not be in more of a win-now mode and must exhaust every avenue to help the squad. As for the Habs, they're watching a good start slip away thanks to shoddy netminding. If Dobes — who was solid on Saturday in a win over the Toronto Maple Leafs — and Montembeault show any more signs of slipping, outside help may be required.  |
| 6                | What's even be possible for Edmonton, Montreal or any other club looking to level up in goal?   |
| .923             | Let's examine a few options.  |
| Jake Allen       | St. Louis's tough start to the season has Jordan Binnington's name in the rumour mill again, just as it was last winter when the Blues were struggling. Binnington came up huge for Canada in the 4 Nations Face-Off final and has the 2019 Cup on his resume, but he's got some blood on his pads when it comes to the Blues' bad record this season.  |
| New Jersey       | Among goalies with at least seven games played this season, Binnington ranks 49th of 51 goalies in terms of Money puck's goals save above expected (minus-6) and his .880 save percentage is upsetting. While this season has been particularly bad, it's not as though he's been a Vezina challenger in the past couple years. Since the start of the 2022-23 campaign, Binnington's save percentage clocks in at .901. That's not |
| March 8, 2024    |   |
| 13               |   |
| .900             |   |
| Scott Wedgewood  |   |



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 25, 2025

terrible, but 34 goalies who've played at least 75 games in that stretch have a better mark.

If you're shopping for a goalie in the Central Division, the dream scenario might be scraping Juuse Saros out of Nashville. But while the lowly Preds are sure to sell some pieces, Saros seems unlikely to move. If he ever does, the 30-year-old Finn will be calling his own shot thanks to a no-move clause.

The big Finn has trade protection that kicks in on July 1. The Sabres — like 15 other teams in the Eastern Conference — remain the playoff hunt and helped their cause with a couple big home wins on the weekend, both started by UPL.

Still, if the Sabres don't have a realistic shot at the post-season come late January, they could see what Luukkonen might fetch. Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman — during the height of the Habs' goalie drama last week — even drew a line between Luukkonen and Montreal.

Is it possible the Rangers — should they fall out of playoff contention — would part with pending-UFA Jonathan Quick? The two-time Cup champion with Los Angeles is having a strong final chapter as Igor Shesterkin's backup and you could hope to catch lightning in a bottle for two months with a guy who turns 40 in January. One thing is for sure: no moment would be too big for the 2012 Conn Smythe Trophy winner.

The reality is the Leafs woke up Monday morning sitting dead last in the Eastern Conference. There's been plenty of speculation about the kind of trade Toronto can make to shake things up, but what about a move that could help replenish some futures?

Woll has obviously had trouble staying healthy, but he sports a .910 save percentage in exactly 82 career games. You could see a team bringing him in to be part of a tandem somewhere else and hoping his highs are loftier than their current guy's. Woll is in Year 1 of a three-year contract that does not offer trade protection right now. With Anthony Stolarz inked for four years after this one and the Buds clearly in some kind of transitional position, maybe Toronto would move Woll for the right return.

Given how limited in-season goalie options tend to be for buyers, the right return just might be out there for the few sellers.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 11.25.2025

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens quarter-mark report: Solid start fueled by offence

Eric Engels

BROSSARD, Que.— If you'd have told the Montreal Canadiens in September that they'd go 11-7-3 and post the 10th-best points percentage (.595) in the NHL through the first 21 games of this season, they'd have taken it.

It's a marked improvement over what the Canadiens did through their first 21 games last season, even if where they find themselves on Nov. 24 in the same place they were towards the end of last November—outside of a playoff spot.

Still, back then, the Canadiens were 7-11-3, six points out of an Eastern Conference wild card position and 11 points back of the Atlantic Division-leading Toronto Maple Leafs, and right now, despite a recent skid that saw them lose seven of eight games and five in a row, they're just two points out of second in the conference and first in their division.

There's been a lot of good, with most of it propelling the Canadiens to a 9-3-0 start.

But some bad mixed in leading to a 2-4-3 record to close the quarter served up an important lesson, coach Martin St. Louis hopes his group will absorb quickly—ahead of the schedule condensing considerably between now and the end of the first half.

"We've just got to earn it every day," said St. Louis after Monday's practice, before departing for Utah to play the Mammoth for what will kickstart a stretch of 16 games in 28 days that features five sets of back-to-backs in the lead up to the brief Christmas Holiday break.

"It's a hard league," St. Louis continued. "Don't take anything for granted. We know what works. I would say don't take anything for granted, just get after it."

Most encouraging development: The offence

The Canadiens have waited many years to have as many weapons dispersed throughout their lineup as they currently do, and it's no coincidence they've produced as much as they have.

They rank fourth in goals per game (3.43), seventh in five-on-five goals per game (2.83), and 14th on the power play (21 per cent) despite a recent 0-for-17 run.

Up front, Nick Suzuki's on pace to at least the career high he set last season of 89 points, while Cole Caufield is poised to shatter his previous highs in goals (37) and points (70).

The Wisconsinite has 13 goals and is on pace for 50, and his 22 points put him on pace for 86 over 82 games.

Caufield and Suzuki didn't carry the offence alone through the first quarter.

Alex Newhook had six goals and 12 points through 17 games before getting hurt, counting as one of a few forwards who have spread out Montreal's scoring.

Juraj Slafkovsky is another, with six goals and 10 points, while Josh Anderson and Kirby Dach each found the net five times.

Then you have Ivan Demidov and Oliver Kapanen. The former leads all rookies with 17 points, and the latter is tied for first in goals (7).

From the backend, sophomore Lane Hutson has scored 18 of the 61 points Canadiens defencemen have collected thus far. Only the blueliners of the first-place Colorado Avalanche have combined for more (64).

Most concerning development: The goaltending

Samuel Montembeault ranks 73rd out of 75 goaltenders to have played in at least one game this season in goals saved above expected.

That's a belly flop off the high-diving board into the abyss for a goaltender who ranked fifth in the category among 103 goaltenders to appear in a game last season.

It has temporarily cost Montembeault more than pain. It's cost him his net.

For how long, no one knows, because Jakub Dobes, who started off the season with six consecutive wins, hasn't been able to inspire much more confidence of late.

The 24-year-old has gone 1-2-2, allowing 18 of the last 115 shots he's faced to beat him.

That's an .843 save percentage, which is far off the .922 Dobes posted through the first six games.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Montembeault is at .852 in 12 appearances. His four wins and a point in extra time are almost exclusively thanks to the Canadiens' offence.

They won't win at the same clip through the second quarter without at least one of their goaltenders stepping up.

Neither of them must be spectacular. They just have to be average.

If Montembeault and Dobes can't be at least that through the start of this second quarter, the chances either of them will be guarding Montreal's net by the end of it will diminish considerably.

Top-six forwards: B-minus

Suzuki and Caufield carry the grade, with Demidov and Kapanen supporting them.

Newhook remaining healthy would've eliminated the minus next to the B, and a little more production from Slafkovsky would've turned it into a plus.

Bottom-six forwards: D

The grade is as low as it is due to the dearth of production from this group.

We figured it might be lower with Christian Dvorak and Joel Armia becoming free agents and Emil Heineman getting traded, but it shouldn't have been as low as it was through the first quarter of the season.

Zachary Bolduc scored goals in each of his first three games as a Canadien but has just one since.

Perhaps that'll change now that he's three games into playing with Caufield and Suzuki.

Not that it'll help the bottom-six.

Brendan Gallagher and Joe Veleno scoring more than the two goals between them will, as will Anderson, adding to his total.

After scoring 13 last season, Jake Evans only has three so far, but at least he's done a remarkable job in the most defensive role of any forward on the team.

In general, the bottom-six—even with callups Jared Davidson, Joshua Roy, Owen Beck and Florian Xhekaj featured in it—has been decent defensively.

We'll see if they improve in that department while providing more scoring now that Alexandre Texier is in the mix.

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Defence: B-minus

They're producing a ton, but they have to give up much less.

Mike Matheson and Noah Dobson have been fantastic at both ends. Hutson has been great offensively and not bad defensively.

Reverse that quotient for Alex Carrier.

As for Jayden Struble, he's shown flashes of greatness and lapses in concentration—too often from shift-to-shift, never mind from game-to-game.

And yet Struble has still been more consistent than Arber Xhekaj, who has understandably struggled more than he's succeeded in a role that sees him used so sporadically within a game.

One of Struble or Xhekaj stepping up could help the grade.

Adam Engstrom is now with the team and threatening to unseat whichever one of them doesn't.

Perhaps the competition brings the best out of all three of Engstrom, Xhekaj and Struble.

They should be treating it as the fiercest one they've faced at this level while Kaiden Guhle heals up from surgery. Because when Guhle returns between the first and 14th of January, he'll be taking someone's spot.

Goaltending: D-minus

The only thing keeping it from being an F is Dobes' performance at the start.

Quarter Mark Awards

MVP: Suzuki

Most Improved Player: Kapanen

Best Defensive Player: Matheson

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Sportsnet.ca / Weekend takeaways: Gauthier, Robertson pushing their way into Olympics talk

Ryan Dixon

Is November providing a sneak peek into a possible American Olympic revolution?

Never mind the whole month, this past weekend alone offered further evidence that some extremely talented Yanks are pushing their way into the five-ringed conversation.

Nobody is hotter than Jason Robertson, who went 1-1-2 during the Dallas Stars' 3-2 shootout loss to Calgary on Saturday. The left winger has 19 points in 11 November games, more than any American NHLer. The only NHLers of any heritage who also have 19 points in the month are Canadians Nathan MacKinnon and Connor McDavid.

Another deadly American with 1-1-2 on Saturday was Cutter Gauthier, whose production came as part of a 4-3 overtime win for the Anaheim Ducks over the visiting Vegas Golden Knights. Gauthier has exploded for 13 goals and the same number of helpers for 26 points in 22 games as a league sophomore. That's more points than every American except Robertson (28) and Team USA lock Jack Eichel (29).

We had a stirring comeback on Saturday, when the Atlantic-leading Detroit Red Wings popped two goals in the second half of the third period to tie the Columbus Blue Jackets. In overtime, Alex DeBrincat skated the length of the ice and whipped a seeing-eye shot over Jet Greaves' left shoulder and under the bar for a 4-3 win.

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and Kyle Bukauskas is a weekly deep dive into the biggest news and interviews from the hockey world.

### Latest episode

DeBrincat's 39 goals last season were more than all but three Americans — more on that in a second — and he's been on fire lately for a surging Wings team with nine points in his past half-dozen outings.

The guy who led all Americans in goals last season was Tage Thompson, who netted 44. Thompson is up to 12 goals this year, including one on Friday night during a big 9-3 win over Chicago, and another into an empty net on Sunday afternoon to seal a 4-1 win over Carolina and make it a great 48 hours for the Sabres.

It's basically impossible to see how Thompson — who has nine points in his past six games — doesn't make Team USA this time out, especially after scoring the overtime marker that secured an American victory at the World Championship last May.

Like Thompson, Robertson, Gauthier and DeBrincat were all left off America's 4 Nations Face-Off roster last season. The same can be said for Cole Caufield, who has as many goals as any American this season at 13, and Will Smith, who is nearly a point-per-game sophomore in San Jose while listening to all the chatter about whether his Sharks teammate, Macklin Celebrini, will force his way onto Team Canada.

Will all those forwards whose calling card is offence make the squad? Certainly not. But it's sure easy to wonder who is going to make Team USA when both Tkachuk brothers, Auston Matthews and Jack Hughes are all hurt. And while all four of those players are cemented on the team if healthy, the "if healthy" part of that sentence carries more weight than you'd like when discussing each of those guys.

Now ask yourself if veterans Brock Nelson, Vincent Trochek and Chris Kreider — all guys who made the 4 Nations roster — are making the trip to Italy in February.

Understanding balance is required when making a roster meant to compete with the best national teams in the world, it's safe to assume some turnover up front for the Stars and Stripes.

And, right now, there's no shortage of super-skilled players showing why they deserve consideration for a spot.

### Weekend takeaways

- Make it five in a row, seven of eight and 9-1-1 in November for the scorching Minnesota Wild after they blanked the Jets in Winnipeg 3-0 on Sunday afternoon. That is how you turn things around from a 3-6-3 October. Jesper Wallstedt, a long-heralded goalie prospect, is making good on that promise. The whitewash in Winnipeg was his third shutout of the month and the Swede — everything leads back to Olympic talk this year, right? — has a stunning .970 save percentage in his past five outings. Mats Zuccarello made his season debut this month and quickly amassed eight points in eight games, while Marcus Johansson continues to produce at an unexpected clip. A goal on Friday in Pittsburgh and an apple against the Jets gives the veteran winger 15 points in his past 15 outings. Then there's rookie centre Danila Yurov, who scored against the Jets for his fourth point in his past three contests. With the Avs soaring, Dallas as strong as ever and Minnesota now raging, the Central Division is living up to its billing as the NHL's Group of Death.

- Speaking of the Central, with the Wild jumping the Jets for third place this weekend, the leaves a single Canadian team in possession of a playoff spot on Monday morning, and it's the Ottawa Senators.

- After a 1-4-2 start — to say nothing of having multiple very important defencemen injured — the Tampa Bay Lightning are rolling. The Bolts' 5-3 win in Washington on Saturday drove their record to 11-3-0 in their past 14 games. For all the talk of turnover in the Atlantic — with Ottawa,

Detroit and Montreal trying to rise up — it would surprise no one to see cagey ol' Tampa Bay back at the top of that group come April.

### Red and White Power Rankings

1. Winnipeg Jets (12-9-0) Two starts, two L's for Eric Comrie in the absence of Connor Hellebuyck, who's sidelined four to six weeks after knee surgery. That's obviously not great, but no goalie could have earned the W for Winnipeg on Sunday when the Jets failed to score on the visiting Wild.

2. Ottawa Senators (11-6-4) With another assist in Saturday's 3-2 overtime victory in San Jose, Drake Batherson is producing at a 91-point pace.

3. Edmonton Oilers (10-9-5) The Oilers closed a tough seven-game roadie with a big 4-3 win in Florida on Saturday. Now it's time to make some hay, with six of their next seven games at home.

4. Montreal Canadiens (11-7-3) The Habs' team toughness quotient went up a few levels with Florian Xhekaj getting in a tilt (and chipping in an assist) during his NHL debut in Saturday's 5-2 win over the Leafs. Florian, big brother Arber and the rest of the Habs now hit the road for a tough roadie through Utah, Vegas and Colorado.

5. Toronto Maple Leafs (9-10-3) Only four teams have a worse points percentage than Toronto. It just so happens two of them are Canadian ...

6. Calgary Flames (8-13-3) Make it three W's in a row for Calgary after a convincing 5-2 defeat of the Canucks in Vancouver Sunday night.

7. Vancouver Canucks (9-12-2) Nobody is giving up more goals per game than Vancouver this season, which has surrendered 3.74 per contest to opponents.

### The week ahead

- It's feast or famine in terms of NHL games this week, as the schedule is driven by the fact Americans will be feasting all day on Thanksgiving Thursday. Tuesday's lone game is a good one, as Dallas visits Edmonton in a rematch of the past two Western Conference finals, both won by the Oilers. Glen Gulutzan, who was an assistant coach with the Oilers from 2018 until he became the top man in Dallas last summer, makes his return to Northern Alberta.

- The second annual CHL/USA Top Prospects Challenge goes off this week, with the teams meeting Tuesday in Calgary, followed by another clash 24 hours later in Lethbridge. The CHL team is headlined by the likes of power forward Ethan Belchetz of the Windsor Spitfires and offence-minded blue-liner Xavier Villeneuve of the Blaineville-Boisbriand Armada. They'll be taking on the U.S. National Team Development Program U-18 squad, which features a potential first-rounder in big, right-shot defenceman Luke Schairer.

- Sandwiched around the Thanksgiving blackout of games on Thursday are two 15-contest slates on Wednesday and Friday. Celebrini leads the Sharks into Denver to face Nathan MacKinnon and the Avs on Wednesday night, while Black Friday has a bevy of afternoon action. The Bolts and Wings kick things off with a big Atlantic tilt in Detroit at noon ET, followed by an Original Six duel in Boston between the Bruins and Rangers at 1 p.m. ET and a good Central battle between the Avs and red-hot Wild in Minny at 3:30 p.m. ET.

- Clear a little space Sunday afternoon to watch some of the brightest young guns in the game, as Gauthier, Leo Carlsson and the rest of the Ducks visit Connor Bedard and the Blackhawks in Chicago.

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 25, 2025

Sportsnet.ca / Senators' third line throwing opposition for a loop with scoring prowess

Alex Adams

OTTAWA — What's the best third line in the NHL?

The trio didn't start the season together, but after an embarrassing effort by the Ottawa Senators against the New York Islanders on Oct. 18, head coach Travis Green composed an absolute monster of a line.

"That line is probably the only line that I haven't touched for a little while. You guys know me that when that happens, some good things are happening," said Green last week.

Green is famous for mixing and matching his line combinations; he's realized it's better to let his third line cook.

The third line is different from most third lines. They aren't fast or necessarily heavy, but they out-think opponents with an elite blend of offensive capability and defensive doggedness.

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Latest episode

Recently, against Boston, they were up against David Pastrnak's electric line. They thwarted a chance behind their net and then immediately, in transition, Giroux got the puck in the neutral zone, made a nifty quick pass to Pinto, leading him to a two-on-one, where he found Amadio with a beautiful backdoor feed to open the scoring. The play exemplified the line's ability to go from defence to offence in the blink of an eye.

The threesome has amassed 27 points in 15 games. Not only that, at 69 per cent, they have the best expected goals share of any forward line or defence duo in the entire NHL that has played 100 minutes together this season. Before the third line was united, in the first six games of the season, the Senators allowed the second-most goals per game, at 4.93 a game. Since the line was conceived on Oct. 21, the Senators have the third-fewest goals allowed per game, at 2.54.

It's not all on this line, but they have played a dramatic part in the defensive turnaround of the Senators.

Since the line was put together, the Senators have lost only two games in regulation while vaulting from two games below .500 to five games above, with a 9-2-4 record in that span.

The beauty of this third line is that they can shut you down and then score on you too. The line has outscored opponents 9-5 this season at five-on-five.

In the NHL, having superstars is essential, but depth puts you over the top — which is why Ottawa's success with its third line has led to wins.

"I think we're all kind of smart players and read off each other super well," said Pinto about his line.

"And just all three of us are kind of resorting to a simpler game and easy to predict, kind of what the other guy's doing. And, yeah, when we get in the O-zone, we try to kind of grind teams down."

It's a line made up of a budding elite player in Pinto, a mid-career journeyman in Amadio and an aging superstar in Giroux.

Let's start with the least flashy player on the line and the least fleet of foot: Amadio. He is a different version of Mark Stone: Amadio, 29, is unbelievable at protecting the puck and reading plays at a high level.

"He's a smart player when he's on his game," said Green. "I think some guys get by with their skill, their speed, their skating, and some guys have to think their way around the game, and that helps them a little later in their career.

"He's strong on the puck, and he's really good on the walls. When I say strong, he's been owning a lot of pucks."

When general manager Steve Staios took over the Senators, he wanted to acquire players with elite hockey IQ and great forechecking prowess. That is Michael Amadio. He has the best expected goals percentage on the team and is on pace for a career high in goals, assists and points. In his first summer in charge of the Senators, Staios signed Amadio to a three-year contract; Amadio has been worth every penny of the \$2.75 million per season.

Meanwhile, Pinto, 25, has grown into a force not only defensively but offensively — and has been rewarded with a nice little \$30 million in the bank and a well-deserved four-year extension.

Pinto is on pace for a career high in goals, assists and points. He's still tasked with the toughest defensive assignments, such as shutting down McDavid, Pastrnak, and Rantanen this season, and is producing at a 39-goal pace.

"He's gotten stronger, he's gotten better," said Green. "I think, mentally, he's grown as well and plays in that position where you're still trying to score, and he's a good offensive player, but understanding that he's playing against the best players, that takes some maturity in your game."

The skill has never been more on display from Pinto.

But like Amadio and Giroux, he presents himself with the same elite quality.

"His hockey IQ is really high," said Giroux. "And when you play with a guy like that, you know he's going to win his battle."

If your third-line centre can suppress the opponents' first line while scoring at a 39-goal pace, then he is your third-line centre in name only. Third-line centres don't typically score like that.

Meanwhile, Giroux is the elder statesman who still has plenty of skill, despite losing a step, and provides elite-level face-off ability. Late in the game against San Jose, he won multiple key draws to secure the win.

Giroux is a steely competitor, but he's his own harshest critic.

"They're both pretty consistent. Maybe I should be more consistent?" Giroux said about his linemates.

Nevertheless, he's adapted well to a new role on a checking line, unlike his previous seasons in Ottawa, when he played alongside Brady Tkachuk and Tim Stutzle.

Stutzle has taken notice.

"He's so good, so consistent," said Stutzle about Giroux.

"(He's) impressed me. Every year he comes back in better shape, and (this season) the best I've probably seen him since he's been in Ottawa. It's just so much fun to watch, and how you can get better at that age."

Last season, the Senators' third line had Amadio and Pinto with Ridly Greig. What Giroux has added is offensive power, with 1,130 career points. He had 50 points last season and is on pace for more this season. Greig is a really hard-nosed, workmanlike player, but his career high is 37 points. Last season, the third line struggled to score, with 45 goals between them. This season, it has accumulated 20 goals in 21 games.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 25, 2025

The most fascinating dynamic is how Green deploys the line. Firstly, they almost rarely start in the offensive zone: the trifecta of Senators starts in the O-zone just 23 per cent of the time. For comparison, the Stutzle, David Perron and Drake Batherson triad starts in the offensive zone 47 per cent of the time. Yet, the third line has produced offensively and been a nullifying force defensively, allowing only five five-on-five goals in 15 games against the best competition.

The success of Ottawa's third line demonstrates that in a league that is getting faster by the day, elite hockey IQ still is a crucial trait.

Third lines are constantly trying to shut down teams; in the Senators' case, opponents are trying to find ways to shut theirs down.

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Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Flames 'make some headway' with third consecutive win

Eric Francis

Doubled over with a pair of clenched fists in celebration, Connor Zary's scream echoed around the Rogers Arena he'd just silenced.

After banging in a crease-front rebound that marked just his second goal of the season, the Flames winger exhibited the sort of relief that comes from finding the net for the first time in 21 games.

"It felt good — I think that's a lot of emotion," said Zary, who entered the game with a 3.8 per cent shooting percentage that said plenty about the frustration he's been carrying around since his opening night snipe.

"It's been a frustrating year so far for me, personally. I think, just mentally, trying to overcome things and be better for it. When you're going through something like that, I think it's just as special as any other goal you score, just to have that kind of weight just lifted even for a second."

While it was one thing to end his painful streak, it was another to contribute meaningfully to the Flames' third win in a row.

Less than 24 hours after a gritty shootout win at home over Dallas was followed by a late-night flight over the Rocky Mountains, Zary and the Flames started a daunting date with the Canucks by spotting the hosts a 1-0 lead one minute in.

However, goals by Morgan Frost and Zary 35 seconds apart turned the tide midway through a first period that the Flames built on one period later with goals from Kevin Bahl and another frustrated forward, Yegor Sharangovich.

By night's end, the offensively challenged Flames extended their oddest of streaks to 41 straight wins when scoring four or more, triumphing 5-2 on Sunday.

"Really proud of our group," said Blake Coleman, whose 300th career point was a short-handed redirect that capped the Flames' five unanswered goals.

"We could have had every excuse in the book tonight: couple tough back-to-backs, get in late, and a quick turnaround from 8 to 6 p.m., and we gave up an early goal. ... I could go down the line, but guys dug in. We took over the game and we're starting to find our rhythm."

"Guys are committed, we knew it would turn at some point. It took a little longer than we would have liked, but we're starting to make some headway."

More takeaways from the opening contest of a five-game roadie:

Andersson en fuego

Rasmus Andersson's ongoing surge in play saw the veteran blue-liner pick up three assists, racking up his ninth career three-point game.

For those keeping track at home, that's now two goals and eight assists in a five-game point streak, putting him in the mix for being one of the NHL's three stars of the week.

All told, he was plus-4 on the night, which is where he stands on the season — a far cry from the minus-38 his critics point to when they discuss the season he had last year.

"Much like Connor, he's being rewarded now," smiled coach Ryan Huska of his top minute-muncher.

"I think he's been consistent all year for us, and now I would say he's on a heater. The younger guys always talk about that.

"He's doing a lot of good things for us in a lot of different situations, whether it's penalty kill or the power play now, which is starting to generate for us, and five-on-five."

Bubble boy rolls on

Matt Coronato's four-game goal-scoring streak came to a halt, but he's now on a five-game point streak after helping set up the Flames' opening goal.

Despite wearing a fishbowl to protect the series of stitches needed to piece his nose back together following a vicious hit from behind by Mikko Rantanen, Coronato was in the thick of things all night.

Earlier in the day, the league announced Rantanen would miss one game by virtue of an obscure rule essentially saying he had a mandatory suspension due to getting hooped from two straight games within a 41-day window.

Perhaps Coronato is counting his blessings, as the hit Rantanen laid on Alexander Romanov earlier in the week has put the Islanders defender on the shelf for up to six months after having to undergo shoulder surgery.

The horrific hit on Coronato warranted more than just one game, but such is life in the NHL.

No goalie debate here

Lost in the Flames' offensive outburst was the fact that after allowing the first shot of the night to beat him clean a mere 65 seconds in, Dustin Wolf rebounded with a stellar outing that saw him finish with 28 saves.

"We're finding our groove," said Wolf, who watched his backup shine in the previous two wins.

"It's good to get the road trip off on the right foot.

"You can see in our game we're giving up less chances. When you score five, you're going to win a lot of games. We did our job on the back end and the forwards did theirs, and we came out with two points."

The Flames make the longest charter flight the NHL has to offer Monday for a Wednesday visit in Tampa.

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TSN.CA / 'No easy answer' as slumping Leafs rest up for 'critical' road trip



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 25, 2025

Mark Masters

After a day off on Sunday, the slumping Leafs did not hold a full team practice on Monday.

"Well, there's been a lot of guys playing a lot of minutes lately, injuries, all that," coach Craig Berube explained. "A little extra mental and physical rest for some guys, and other guys just more of a reset day."

Centre John Tavares, winger William Nylander, defencemen Morgan Rielly, defenceman Oliver Ekman-Larsson and goalie Joseph Woll all stayed off the ice as did the coaching staff.

The remaining players split into smaller groups to work on separate pads with members of the team's development staff.

It was the first chance for the Leafs to get back to work following a 5-2 loss in Montreal on Saturday, which Berube described as "inexcusable."

"Just not good enough," said defenceman Simon Benoit. "There's no explanation, just not good enough. Had a day to rest yesterday, think about our game individually, and development day today. We just got to be better. That's it. We have to be more hungry ... We need to show that we want to win out there."

The Leafs have dropped seven of eight games (1-5-2) to fall all the way to last-place in the Eastern Conference.

"There's no easy answer," said Rielly. "It just kind of feels like we're in it right now and we're trying to fight our way out."

Toronto will begin a five-game trip on Wednesday night against the Columbus Blue Jackets, who already beat them twice this season. There will also be stops in Washington, Pittsburgh, Sunrise, Fla. and Raleigh over the next 10 days.

"It's critical for sure," said Berube of the trip. "But, listen, I'm only focused on the game Wednesday. I'm not going to look beyond that. It's a big game ... But it is a big road trip for sure. It's good for our guys to get on the road here together. We got to rally around each other."

The Leafs have the worst road record in the NHL (1-6-0), but the team's longest road excursion has only been two games. The hope is an extended journey will help the team build chemistry.

"You try and keep it light," said centre Scott Laughton. "It's tough right now. It's tough sledding, but we're all in this together. You got to come out of it together, and that's what we're trying to do here. And we'll continue to work at it. This is a huge road trip for our team coming up. It's a big one. We've got to get going here."

It was hard to get a read on the mood of the team on Monday considering the spread-out nature of practice.

"I haven't really seen the guys," said Benoit. "I've been on the ice. Some guys do their own stuff. But I think everybody wants it. We're all trying. It's going to click at one point. I'm sure of it."

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The Leafs played on Saturday without six regulars in the lineup due to injury. It looks like help is on the way.

Centre Auston Matthews, winger Matthew Knies and centre Nicolas Roy all skated again on Monday.

"Matthews, Knies and Roy are close," said Berube. "I'll probably know tomorrow if they're available Wednesday."

The Leafs have a full practice scheduled for Tuesday.

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Jake McCabe is expected to play on Wednesday after leaving the game in Montreal early. The defenceman took a puck to the side of the face in the second period.

"He's fine," Berube said.

Defenceman Brandon Carlo, meanwhile, has not skated since sustaining a lower-body injury on Nov. 13.

Defenceman Chris Tanev skated before practice on Monday, but there is no timeline for his return from an upper-body injury suffered on Nov. 1.

Anthony Stolarz has not hit the ice since suffering an upper-body injury on Nov. 11 in Boston. Initially, it was considered a minor injury, but Berube now says the goalie is "a way away" from returning.

"There's no excuses," Tavares said of the injuries. "We believe we have a very deep team. Obviously, we're missing some really good, key players, but I think that's where you want to rely on your game and the identity that you build. We're still having that come together consistently."

William Nylander on the losses & injuries piling up:

"I think this builds, you know, character. So, obviously it's tough right now, but in the end I think it'll be good for our group"@TSN\_Sports

— Mark Masters (@markmasters) November 23, 2025

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Is Berube losing any sleep as the losses pile up?

"Do I sleep any differently? No," the coach said. "Like, I enjoy it. I wake up and look forward to coming to the rink and trying to get better like everybody else."

But, make no mistake, the grind is real right now.

"My job is to help these guys, to teach them, to work with them," the coach said. "Everybody's got to grind right now. It's a grind. You've got to grind."

Berube's tone "goes up and down" as he seeks to find the right words to snap the team out of this skid.

"Sometimes my tone is not fun, but that's part of it all," the 59-year-old said.

"Craig means business," said Benoit. "He wants us to succeed. He wants us to play at our level. We know we can be much, much, much better, and he's pushing us to achieve that goal. And all the guys respect him a lot."

Despite the underwhelming results, players aren't sensing a big change in the man behind the bench right now.

"He's great," said Rielly. "He comes in here the same every day. He's intense and he has high expectations for everyone in here as we all do for each other."

"He's the same," said Laughton, who also played for Berube in Philadelphia. "He's trying, for sure, and it's hard. We have to play better, just plain and simple. And we have to start dominating teams and making them play 200 feet, making it hard on them to come out of their zone. I don't think we're doing a good enough job of that. We obviously need to be a little bit more connected. But, yeah, I think he's been the same with us. He's trying to get his point across, which is how you should play, and we have to follow that."

Berube is no stranger to big in-season turnarounds. After the St. Louis Blues sagged to last place in the 2018-19 season, Berube replaced Mike Yeo as head coach and led the franchise to its first Stanley Cup.

"Same approach almost right now," Berube said. "Same approach."

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 25, 2025

Berube notes he's made a couple system tweaks to try and spark the Leafs, but isn't contemplating a more significant overhaul.

"I'm not really thinking about that at all," he stressed.

Defence remains Berube's top priority. The coach is keeping the faith that his team can rediscover the level of play that allowed them to finish eighth in goals against last season (2.79 per game). The Leafs sit 31st in goals against (3.73 per game) entering Monday's slate of games.

"We prided ourselves on defence last year, checking, and we got to get back to that," Berube said. "It's something we've been banging away at for a bit here, and we've got to keep banging away at it."

Berube points out that the Leafs have allowed too many odd-man rushes and are not defending the middle of the ice well enough.

"In the D zone, for the most part, it's not been terrible, but just not tight enough," Berube said. "I bring up the details of the sticks and things like that."

It would also take some pressure off the defence if the Leafs are able to generate more offensive-zone time themselves.

"I don't think our forechecks have been as good," Berube said. "I don't think we stall enough pucks in the offensive zone. We do create O-zone time, and it's been getting better, but I think those stalls are important to neutralize the breakouts [by] the other team in the transition game."

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With Carlo and Tanev out, the Leafs need more from their healthy blueliners, including Benoit.

"I have to be better," Benoit admitted. "I've been too passive. I don't have the knife in my teeth right now. I got to be better for the team. I got to show up. I got to be hard to play against. I got to be, sorry my language, but like a pain in the ass for the other team."

Benoit is minus-two on the season after being plus-12 last year. The gritty defenceman is also landing fewer hits. Benoit's hits per 60 minutes have dipped from 9.48 last season to 7.89 this year.

"I'm looking forward for the next game just to be a better player for the team," he said.

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Woll was pulled in the second period on Saturday night after allowing four goals on 25 shots.

"We were just giving freebies to them," Berube explained. "I had enough."

With Stolarz out, Berube was keen to protect Woll while also sending a wake-up call to the group of skaters.

The Canadiens outshot the Leafs 16-1 to open the second period.

"As a group that's the ultimate one on us when you leave your goalie out to dry," Tavares said. "He's giving you everything he's got, keeping you in the game, and we're just not executing well enough to turn the game around."

Woll is 1-2-1 with a .905 save percentage since returning from personal leave on Nov. 15.

Dennis Hildeby stopped all three shots he faced in relief. His save percentage is .906 in five games with the Leafs this season. Three of his appearances have come in relief.

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With Carlo and Tanev out, Dakota Mermis is doing his part to pick up the slack. The 31-year-old defenceman scored his first goal with the Leafs on Thursday.

Late in Saturday's game, Mermis dropped the gloves with Florian Xhekaj after the Canadiens rookie skated into Hildeby's crease at the end of a play.

"You want to have some pushback," said Mermis, who still had blood on his knuckles during his post-game media session. "You're down a D [McCabe] so that makes it hard maybe earlier in the game for something like that to happen. He's obviously in his first [NHL] game and we know those guys, those [Xhekaj] brothers, and what they want to do. He comes to the net and I'm trying to have some pushback and spark something late in the game. Obviously, we're able to get one [to pull within 4-2] and you see what happens from there. But just trying to hold your ground and you don't give an inch."

Teammates appreciated the effort.

"Showing some character there at the end," Nylander noted. "A lot of guys were battling and showing a lot of emotion, so that's great."

"It's good to see," agreed Ekman-Larsson. "We're sticking up for each other, and we need more of that."

Ekman-Larsson on slash to back of the leg by Carrier:

"It's part of it. I give & take a little bit. Yeah, it's part of it."

OEL had big ice pack taped to back of leg in post-game scrum  
@TSN\_Sports <https://t.co/WYHlrh5Z77>

— Mark Masters (@markmasters) November 23, 2025

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Attendance at Monday's skills practice:

### FORWARDS

Sammy Blais

Easton Cowan

Max Domi

Calle Jarnkrok

Dakota Joshua

Matthew Knies

Scott Laughton

Matias Maccelli

Auston Matthews

Bobby McMann

Nick Robertson

Nicolas Roy

Jacob Quillan

### DEFENCE

Simon Benoit

Dakota Mermis

Philippe Myers

Troy Stecher

### GOALIE

Dennis Hildeby

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 25, 2025

1369507 Websites

TSN.CA / Oilers need to find more offence at even strength

Travis Yost

To say the Edmonton Oilers needed that victory on Saturday night over the Florida Panthers would be an understatement.

Not only did it snap a nasty winless streak, but their six-goal outburst gave hope that a suspiciously quiet Edmonton offence is primed for a rebound.

It goes without saying that the Oilers can ill afford any sort of offensive regression if they want to return to the Stanley Cup Final for a third consecutive year. Right or wrong, the organization decided to punt on making a meaningful goaltending change this summer, hoping a tandem of Stuart Skinner and Calvin Pickard could be just good enough to survive the regular season.

The Oilers' goaltending duo has been far from impressive, perhaps not surprisingly – through 24 games, they are stopping just 86.5 per cent of shots in all situations, dead last in the NHL. That sort of stop rate puts immense pressure on the offence to outperform by significant margins to stay afloat in the Western Conference, but that's not something foreign to this Oilers organization in recent years.

So far, this regular season has been different – and not in a good way. The offence has struggled. Kris Knoblauch's team is fighting to stay out of the cellar in the Pacific Division, playing to an 85-point pace through a quarter of the season. And a regression in offensive production could not come at a worse time, considering the netminding.

What exactly has happened to the offence, though? The Oilers look like a shell of themselves on the attack. In fact, if you look at Edmonton's offensive production on a rolling basis, we are at multi-year lows in rate goal scoring and falling behind league averages:

Yost1

It's been a concerning slowdown and doubly so when you start parsing the all-situations data. Edmonton's power play has rebounded nicely after a cooler-than-usual 2024-25 season – they are averaging 11.0 goals per 60 minutes on the man advantage, which is still well inside of the top five across the NHL.

The degradation has entirely happened at even strength, where the Oilers have seen meaningful slippage in real goal-scoring rates and expected goal-scoring rates, both measures correlating sharply with a slowdown in shots (and corresponding scoring chances):

Yost2

Whenever you see a slowdown like this and there isn't an obvious explainer (i.e. injuries), it's important to investigate at the skater level. And unfortunately for the Oilers, the scoring challenges at even strength appear relatively widespread.

Every returning skater, with the exception of forward Vasily Podkolzin and defenceman Jake Walman, is realizing lower scoring rates, and for the new additions to the lineup, only Jack Roslovic has been able to beat the team averages:

Yost3

This sort of team-wide shift points to structural issues. If you don't want to take my word for it, consider the shot profiles year-over-year courtesy HockeyViz. Last season (and just about every season prior in the Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl era), Edmonton was able to push into the most dangerous areas of the offensive zone, generating heaps of shots

between the circles and in front of the net. Couple that with high-end shooters, and you'll print goals.

This season, it has been a lot more offence from the point, where scoring rates decline considerably:

Yost4

That's a scary chart and one that should be printed on the walls of Oilers offices until the offence finds its groove again. Betting on defensive prowess and goaltending outperformance for this team is not a viable path; getting the offence out of this slump and returning as the NHL's most prolific attack is much more likely considering the talent on the roster.

Edmonton has been able to dig themselves out of scoring slumps before, and betting against their two-headed monster has been a foolish proposition in years past. But if the Oilers are serious about another Stanley Cup run, they need to find their scoring rhythm at even strength, and fast.

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