



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

The News & Observer

Sharks spoil first night of Hurricanes' 2006 Stanley Cup team celebration

By: Chip Alexander

Raleigh

Twenty years ago Sunday, the Carolina Hurricanes were on the longest road trip of the 2005-2006 season, on the West Coast, still coming together as a team.

After two games in Los Angeles, the trip ended against the San Jose Sharks, with a 4-3 loss. Rod Brind'Amour had the first goal for the Canes in that game, the captain scoring on a power play.

We all know how that season ended. Stories about it are being told and retold with Carolina's 2006 Stanley Cup champions back in Raleigh to be feted during a 20th anniversary Cup celebration.

There was a red-carpet reception Sunday for the '06 champs at the Lenovo Center, a few hours before the home game against the Sharks. They'll put on their skates Monday for a game against N.C. State's Ice Pack, then be recognized during the home game Tuesday against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Brind'Amour should again put on No. 17 and be on the ice Monday with several of the teammates he helped lead to the Cup. But he's also a busy man, coaching the Canes in games Saturday against Nashville and then again Sunday against San Jose.

This year's edition of the Sharks is not lacking energy, and they spoiled the first night of celebration, coming away with a 4-1 victory.

Jordan Staal, now the Canes' captain, was given a chance on the power play and scored in the first — his eighth goal of this season and his first power-play goal since October 2021. But that was one of the few things Brind'Amour liked about the game, as the Sharks led 3-1 after the second period against a Canes team playing its third game in four nights.

"We were mentally not prepared," Brind'Amour said. "It was an embarrassing effort, really, for two periods, and then it was, 'Oh, we better get playing,' and we did. Great third period as far as doing it right, but we were down two and they hunkered in. But we were not sharp.

"But no excuses. ... This is the National Hockey League and you have to be prepared every night, whether there's four games a week or not."

Sharks center Macklin Celebrini had a goal, his 15th, and two assists for San Jose (14-13-3), and goalie Alex Nedeljkovic, playing against his former team, had 28 saves and was named the game's first star.

The Canes (17-9-2) did have goalie Pyotr Kochetkov back in net for the first time since Nov. 17 after he was out eight games with a lower-body issue. Kochetkov allowed three goals on 21 shots.

Many of the stars from 2006 watched in a private box at Lenovo Center. While those players' faces are a bit more creased after 20 years, they remain so recognizable — Glen Wesley and Bret Hedican, Erik Cole and Chad LaRose, Cam Ward and Martin Gerber, Nic Wallin and Aaron Ward. And former coach Peter Laviolette, who was celebrating his 61st birthday Sunday.

A bearded Laviolette, wearing his Stanley Cup ring and with longtime former assistant Kevin McCarthy by his side, sounded the warning siren before Sunday's game.

Before the second period, it was LaRose's turn, earning another big cheer from Canes fans.

"It's pretty cool to see their camaraderie," Canes defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere said Sunday.

With the Canes now thoroughly entrenched in the community, and game sellouts so common at Lenovo Center, one must remember the team was just eight years removed from the franchise move from Hartford to Raleigh in 2005. The Canes had overachieved and reached the 2002 Stanley Cup, but two years without making playoffs and then the lockout season of 2004-2005 seemingly stalled the forward momentum being painstakingly being built by the franchise.

Then came 2006.

The community was all-in on the Hurricanes' march to the Cup; culminating with the seven-game Stanley Cup Final series against the Edmonton Oilers.

Mark the date: June 19, 2006. That's the night Brind'Amour was the first to raise the Cup after a gritty Game 7 victory. He did so gladly, hurriedly, as the arena rumbled.

"That team was a very good team, and you could see everybody getting behind that team," Brind'Amour said Sunday. "Then we had a lot of traction for a few years and then that kind of weaned. But the common thread was that when you win, you're going to have that support.

"We had it earlier (2002) and then that group brought it back to life. But the real takeaway was we can do this here. And now we have that belief and understand we can do that."

Carolina Hurricanes captain Rod Brind Amour, left, owner Peter Karmanos, center, Kevyn Adams and Glen Wesley watch as the Stanley Cup Banner is raised on Wednesday October 4, 2006 in the RBC Center.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

Carolina Hurricanes captain Rod Brind Amour, left, owner Peter Karmanos, center, Kevyn Adams and Glen Wesley watch as the Stanley Cup Banner is raised on Wednesday October 4, 2006 in the RBC Center. Chris Seward File photo

There's a banner in the arena rafters that's a consent reminder.

Some video tributes to the 2006 champions were shown during including one from Buffalo Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams, a member of the '06 winners.

Recently, Adams was in Raleigh with the Sabres and reminisced about that championship season.

"From the start we kind of had a special feeling in our room and let it build in the course of the year," Adams said.

Adams recalls Justin Williams scoring the empty net goal late in Game 7 against Edmonton to seal a 3-1 victory, clinch the Cup, and ignite a wild celebration.

"That was the first time that it was like 'We're going to do this' and that's something I'll never forget," Adams said, "And that's the great thing about hockey. The years go by, but the memories don't fade at all."

As the Hurricanes relive 2006, one player remains a refugee living in exile

By: Luke DeCock

When the members of the 2006 Carolina Hurricanes gather this weekend to celebrate the 20th anniversary of their championship, not every player on the Stanley Cup will be present. Some are otherwise preoccupied with work, like Kevyn Adams, general manager of the Buffalo Sabres, or with their own kids playing hockey. Josef Vasicek died 14 years ago. Some are just too far afield.

Then there's Anton Babchuk, who arrived in January of that season as a 21-year-old rookie, a big Ukrainian-born Russian defenseman with a big shot. In the group photos on the ice with the Stanley Cup, Babchuk looms in the back, in uniform, his arm around Mike Commodore with a wide grin on his face, very much part of the team.

While he didn't appear in a playoff game, he still played in 22 games down the stretch — the Hurricanes got special dispensation to add him and Andrew Hutchinson to the engraving — and went on to play another 141 games for the Hurricanes before returning to Russia's KHL to finish out his career.

As they assembled the group to return this weekend, the Hurricanes couldn't find Babchuk to invite him.

"That's the one nobody knew," a team official said.

Babchuk had seemingly dropped off the face of the earth.

And in a way, he had.

"After two months of living in the basement of our house under missile explosions, we decided to leave Ukraine," Babchuk wrote in an email to The News & Observer. "We have been living in Spain for the fourth year now."

Even professional athletes who made millions playing in North America are not immune to the whims of international politics and the ravages of war. Babchuk played for the

Russian national team as a teenager and in the KHL as a pro, but he was Kiev-born and raised, growing up alongside another future NHLer, Nikolai Zherdev.

A first-round draft pick of the Chicago Blackhawks in 2002, his hockey career took him around the world until he retired in 2015, moving back to Kiev with his wife and two sons. Russia was already waging a proxy war with Ukraine then, but far from the cosmopolitan capital.

"Everything was going very well, the children played football in the Dynamo Kiev team, my wife and I ran our own business and lived our happy life," Babchuk wrote.

Then the war came home with the Russian invasion in February 2022 and the constant bombing of cities like Kiev. Eventually, Babchuk and his family fled to Spain — first Valencia, and now Villareal. It's safe to say they are not only fortunate to make that escape but also making the best of a bad situation. Their eldest son Anton, 15, recently signed a pro soccer contract with La Liga club Villareal, the famous Yellow Submarine. Their younger son Platon, 12, is playing for another soccer club nearby.

But if that's a long way from Raleigh and this weekend's celebration of a long-ago championship, no less fondly remembered with the passing of time, it's an even longer way from Ukraine. Amid the good memories and better vibes of a time when the Hurricanes owned the hockey world, spare a thought for one player who won't be there because the rest of the world can be a cruel place.

"My wife Natalia and I try to help our children grow up to be happy and worthy people," Babchuk wrote. "That's how we live. We are very much looking forward to all this horror in Ukraine to end soon and we will be able to come to our beloved city Kiev."

Don't we all.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

The Athletic

Hurricanes' Bussi making the most of long-awaited chance: 'Things happen at random times'

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH, N.C. — On Feb. 12, 2023, there was a surprising person manning one of the Carolina Hurricanes' net.

Goalie coach Paul Schonfelder was filling in, wearing one of Pyotr Kochetkov's masks and Antti Raanta's backup set of gear. There was one problem: Schonfelder — who played primarily second-tier junior hockey in Ontario in the late 1990s and early 2000s, followed by a couple dozen professional games in the ACHL, UHL and CHL — is left-handed. Raanta is not.

Up the East Coast, another lefty was just coming off an AHL All-Star Game performance.

Brandon Bussi, less than a year after he was signed as an undrafted free agent by the Bruins, had been part of a who's who of goalie prospects from Laval, Quebec. First-round draft pick Jesper Wallstedt was named as an all-star from the Central Division, as were rising stars Lukas Dostal and Dustin Wolf from the Pacific. Joseph Woll, Joel Hofer and Nico Daws, NHL draft picks who have found their way to the NHL, were all there.

"The Bus," however, hit a roadblock. Boston had an embarrassment of riches in net with Linus Ullmark and Jeremy Swayman. Bussi was called up to the NHL eight times by the Bruins, including three times in April 2023. His stay was often for a day, though he did get eight days once and six another. What he didn't get was into a game.

"While I didn't play," Bussi said, "I was up a handful of times."

He signed with the Florida Panthers this past offseason, perhaps seeing a clearer path to the NHL with new Florida addition Daniil Tarasov not entrenched behind Sergei Bobrovsky.

Fate, however, had other plans. Bussi was placed on waivers for assignment to the AHL a day after the Hurricanes had made the same move with Cayden Primeau, intending to assign him to the Chicago Wolves. Concerned that Primeau would be lost to another team, Carolina's front office claimed Bussi, who coincidentally was headed to North Carolina anyway to join the Checkers, the Panthers' affiliate, in Charlotte.

The dominos that hadn't fallen for Bussi during his time in Boston started to topple in succession. Primeau was claimed by Toronto, and then Kochetkov was injured near the end of training camp.

Suddenly, Bussi was in the NHL, and Carolina's commitment to not overworking oft-injured 36-year-old Andersen meant

Bussi got the nod in San Jose in the third game of the season, for his first NHL start.

Bussi earned the win, stopping 16 of 17 against the Sharks, and hasn't stopped winning since. Bussi, who did not start Carolina's loss to San Jose on Sunday, has a 8-1 record with a 2.21 goals-against average and a .903 save percentage.

"Things happen at random times," said Bussi, who has looked just as worthy of being in the NHL as those big-name prospects he shared the ice with at the AHL All-Star Game in 2023. "You can't predict it. It just happens, especially for goalies. So I'm just fortunate that I've been able to help the team out."

Perhaps most impressive about Bussi has been the poise with which he's handled finally getting his opportunity.

"I think it helps anybody when you've been through it, and he's been through, especially a goalie, the ups and downs of that position, and in an organization where you're maybe the third guy," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said of Bussi. "And it's just knowing that you've got to be ready for whenever that start comes through and take advantage of it. And clearly, he's done that."

Bussi, 27, said being a bit older when he finally got his chance helped.

"I think not being young and new to this is beneficial in a way," he said. "But at the same time, you learn new things every day. ... What's the study? You hit your prime at 27 or whatever? I'm sure it's different for everyone, but you're constantly building and working hard, trying to achieve a goal. So it took me longer than some guys, than it does for some other people, but I feel good about the way I'm playing right now."

He should. According to NHL EDGE statistics, Bussi has the best high-danger save percentage (.886) of any goalie in the league, and his ability to make big saves at key moments is what has stood out the most to Brind'Amour.

"I think he's come up with the timely save," Brind'Amour said after Bussi's 16-save performance in Carolina's 1-0 overtime win on Nov. 30 against the Flames, the goalie's first career NHL shutout. "That's kind of, for me, how I sum it up because it's not like you've been leaving him out to dry and we're giving up 40 shots a night. It's not really that, but there's a breakaway here or there all of a sudden. Those are huge moments in tight games."

While many would probably be nervous about having their first career shutout hanging in the balance after neither team



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

scored in regulation, Bussi said “those are the games that are fun for goalies.”

“Maybe when he’s at home, maybe he’s like, ‘Holy crap,’” Hall said of Bussi’s poise. “The cream always rises to the top, right? And it doesn’t matter if you’re 22 or 26. Especially if you’re a goalie, there’s no direct path to being what you are. And when you’re big and you’re athletic, like he is in the net, just keep going. And like I said, I think he’s only going to get better and better.”

Bussi seems to be doing his best to soak in finally proving he’s worthy of being in the NHL while also knowing his ultimate goals are team-related and not personal.

“Anytime you hear your name being chanted by the crowd,” he said after the win over the Flames, “it’s really cool. ... Obviously I appreciate it, so I don’t want to understate that — it is cool. But the most important thing is kind of what we’re doing here and trying to keep it going.”

With eight wins in nine starts, the 6-foot-4 lefty who started playing goalie as a 7-year-old on Long Island is trying to do just that. And if he ever needs a day off, at least there’s left-handed equipment available to Schonfelder.

“Well, if he ever wants to hop back out,” Bussi said, “he’s got an extra set of my gloves.”

NHL weekend rankings: Naming and shaming the (many) fake .500 teams

By: Sean McIndoe

If you’re a sports fan, you know what “.500” means. In general, it means you’re average. Mediocre. Just OK. And specifically, it means you’ve won as many games as you’ve lost.

The exception: the NHL. Since 1999, the league has given out points for losing, which is dumb but we’ve been over that. In the NHL, we rank teams based on their points percentage, and because of those loser points, you can have a percentage north of .500 even if you’ve lost more than you’ve won.

Most years, it’s annoying. This year, with the loser point being well and truly out of control, it’s messing up the standings even more than usual. So this week, let’s take a look at five teams that are fake .500 — which is to say, they’re sitting at .500 or better even though they’ve lost more games than they’ve won. We’ll name and shame those teams here, and rank them from least to most fake.

Bonus five: The NHL’s fakest fake .500 teams

5. Columbus Blue Jackets – A classic example, as they’ve won 13 games and lost 16 but the league says they’re over .550.

4. Ottawa Senators/Toronto Maple Leafs – It feels like we’ve spent the last month talking about how the Leafs are a mess and the Senators are the only good Canadian team, so it’s mildly surprising to see them sporting identical records. Both teams are 13-11-4, which means both teams are comfortably over .500 and it’s fake.

3. Los Angeles Kings – They looked great against the Chicago Blackhawks on Saturday, but at 13-8-7 that still means they’re a .589 team that’s lost two more than they’ve won.

2. Chicago Blackhawks/San Jose Sharks (tie) – Seeing last year’s 31st and 32nd place teams sitting over .500 in December is impressive, as long as you don’t notice that San Jose has lost 16 of 30 and Chicago has lost 17 out of 29.

1. Seattle Kraken – They’re comfortably over .500 despite winning just 11 of 26 games, meaning only Nashville have fewer wins. More on them in a bit.

Honorable mentions: Yes, there are somehow too many fake .500 teams in this league to fit into a list even when you cheat and use ties. I didn’t include the New York Rangers or Utah Mammoth, since I figure their records come closest to feeling like an accurate representation of who they are. And I didn’t mention the Edmonton Oilers because they’re going to win 10 games in a row any second now and make all of this moot.

By the way, let’s slip in two more loser point-related notes here, both involving Boston. First, congratulations to the Bruins for being the last team standing without a loser point, an honor they earned when the Winnipeg Jets lost a shootout to the Montreal Canadiens last week. As we now know, they’ll be richly rewarded in some way during the 2026-27 season, because the hockey gods hate the loser point.

And in a related story that I didn’t catch until a reader flagged it for me: Because of their lack of loser points, the Bruins are now in a position where they could pull off one of the dumbest achievements that’s even possible in this dumb league. As of this morning, the Bruins were tied for second in the Eastern Conference in wins, while also being tied for first in regulation losses. Yes, there’s a realistic chance that at some point this year, the same team could be alone in first place in a conference in both the “W” and the “L” column.

That would be so stupid. I want it to happen so bad.

OK, on to this week’s rankings...

Road to the Cup

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

I don’t want to be the bearer of bad news, but the Oilers might be Oiling again.

That’s 15 goals in their last two games, with the Sabres up next.

5. Vegas Golden Knights (14-6-8, +6 true goals differential*) – They’re almost fake .500 themselves, thanks to all those loser points. But that might be enough in the Pacific.

4. Carolina Hurricanes (17-9-2, +12) – How worried should we be getting about Freddie Andersen? He’s given up three goals or more in each of his last seven starts, and hasn’t had



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

a game with a save percentage over .900 since Nov. 1. It's hardly contributed to a crisis in Carolina, since Brandon Bussi and Pyotr Kochetkov have both been good. But at 36 and playing on a one-year deal, you wonder if this could be the end of the Andersen era in Carolina.

3. Tampa Bay Lightning (16-10-2, +15) – An interesting note: Over the weekend, the Lightning briefly moved ahead of the Avalanche in terms of Cup odds from Dom's models. Presumably that's largely based on the lack of competition in the East, but it's still surprising given the Avs' dominance.

Meanwhile, they've lost three straight in regulation and visit the suddenly lukewarm Leafs tonight.

2. Dallas Stars (20-5-5, +27) – Ho hum, just seven wins in eight games, and points in all of their last ten. They're pushing Colorado in terms of total points, getting as close as one point back on Saturday, although the Avs still hold a game in hand.

1. Colorado Avalanche (21-2-6, +52) – Filthy.

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

Not ranked: Washington Capitals – I've been accused by Caps fans of napping on their team so far this season. I think they may have a case.

As recently as last week's newsletter, I basically wrote off the Metro as being a battle between the Hurricanes and Devils and a bunch of also-rans. The top-five rankings have reflected that, those two teams being the only ones in the division to get any love. Meanwhile, the team that finished first in the division last season was overcoming a slow start to end up in the same spot this year, and nobody seemed to be paying attention.

And ... yeah, guilty, I suppose. It wasn't unreasonable to think a team that was only barely fake .500 in mid-November wasn't a real contender. But you could make the case they've been the league's best team, non-Avalanche category, ever since then. They won nine of ten including six straight, a streak that finally ended on Friday in a shootout loss to the Ducks. They've been as high as second spot in goals differential, a position they share with the Stars after last night's shutout win over Columbus.

That's not to say that this stretch has been dominant. In fact, that nine-of-ten stretch came against a schedule that was basically a who's-who of struggling teams around the league, including the Kings (twice), Leafs, Jets and Oilers. Mix in a few blowouts against teams that they should beat, like San Jose and Columbus, and the wins pile up. But the only team they played over that stretch that really feels like a contender right now is Tampa, and that's the game they lost.

As always, you can only beat the teams you get to play, and taking care of business against struggling opponents is part of being a winning team. And the Caps do seem to have hit a tipping point last week, with the Other Rankings lads moving them all the way up to third on Friday — not just top spot for any Metro team, but ahead of everyone else in the entire conference.

I'm not there yet. Neither are the oddsmakers, who still have the Caps well behind the Hurricanes, Lightning and Panthers in their Stanley Cup futures listings (although some books

have moved them ahead of the Devils). That's probably just fine for Washington fans, who've been able to credibly bang the "nobody believes in us" drum for going on three seasons now.

For now, Caps fans will just have to settle for watching a fun season play out. They've got Logan Thompson making a run at the Vezina, Jakob Chychrun at least making Cale Makar sweat a bit for the Norris, and maybe even Spencer Carberry building a case to be the first back-to-back Jack Adams winner since the '80s. And of course, Tom Wilson's push for Team Canada will be front-page news up here for the next few weeks, which will just shine a bigger spotlight on what the Capitals are doing right now.

For now, they've got the Hurricanes up next in a Thursday night showdown on home ice that's an early contender for game of the week.

The bottom five

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

We had what I think is our first official vote of confidence for a beleaguered coach over the weekend, and it wasn't the one most of us would have expected.

Reached out to Ken Holland regarding today's speculation of a potential coaching change in L.A. and the Kings GM says "there's zero truth" to that.

— Pierre LeBrun (@PierreVLeBrun) December 5, 2025

Huh. I picked Jim Hiller to be my first coach fired before the season began, although it was supposed to have already happened by now. Instead, he had the Kings near the top of the division by mid-November. But since then they've lost six of nine, so keep an eye on the situation.

5. Buffalo Sabres (11-13-4, -14) – The good news: They were the only team in the league to get both Saturday and Sunday off, so the players are probably all caught up on their Christmas shopping. The bad news: In our second round of predictions, the Sabres were the only team in the East to not get a single vote as a playoff contender.

4. St. Louis Blues (11-12-7, -25) – This feels like the sort of list you don't want to be dead last on.

3. Vancouver Canucks (11-15-3, -21) – If you missed it last week, be sure to check Harman's look into what's surely the most pressing question in Vancouver right now: Can they tank, and if so what do they need to do? That's a question that will take on some extra urgency after reports that Quinn Hughes may well and truly be in play.

"It's not like me, Jim + Fitzy hopped on a call, I wasn't a part of that," said Quinn Hughes when I asked for his reaction to HNIC report about conversations about his future occurring between the #Canucks and Devils. "But obviously I'm aware that things like that could happen."

— Thomas Drance (@ThomasDrance) December 7, 2025

And yes, my reaction to that quote was the same as everyone else's: "Fitzy" is a terrifyingly familiar way to refer to another team's GM.

2. Calgary Flames (11-15-4, -16) – They won consecutive games in regulation for only the second time this season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

And more importantly, Dustin Wolf has looked like last year's version in those games. They get the Sabres tonight.

1. Nashville Predators (10-14-4, -27) – I'm telling you, Juuse Saros to the Oilers makes at least a little bit more sense than you might think it does.

Not ranked: Seattle Kraken – It kind of feels like the bubble has burst in Seattle after the Kraken spent most of the first two months looking like surprise playoff contenders. Despite few of us having them as a legitimate playoff contender coming into the season, they looked the part up until a few weeks ago.

(Fun fact: The Kraken were the last Western team to have a three-game losing streak this season. Yes, including the Avalanche.)

Now we get to the bad news, because it's been ugly lately. The Kraken have lost five straight, including the last four in regulation. That span includes two shutouts, plus a pair against the Oilers that saw Seattle outscored 13-4. Those games allowed Edmonton to push past them into a playoff spot, and they're even behind the Sharks today by points (but not percentage).

So it's over. Unless we're all wrong again.

That doesn't feel likely right now. The Kraken have been a team loaded with star power, and scoring is an issue. The penalty kill has been brutally bad. The five-on-five numbers are ugly. Philipp Grubauer remains a sub-.900 goalie for the fifth straight year, and Joey Daccord hasn't been good enough to make up for the other weaknesses on most nights. Jaden Schwartz, who'd been their leading scorer, is on IR.

If there's any optimism, our staff isn't finding it. Harman had them at a 2/10 to make the playoffs in his recent roundup of early surprises. And in our staff picks, they had more of us thinking they'd plummet all the way to dead last (one voter) than thought they'd make the postseason (zero).

All that said, we've been wrong on this team before. And there are certainly some winnable games on the schedule between now and the holidays, including the Sabres, Flames, Sharks and the struggling Kings twice. They've got the Wild tonight, and that team hasn't made much sense at all lately.

It's the Pacific, so anyone who pretends they know anything is lying. But if the Kraken are going to stay in this race, it's time for them to start surprising us again.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

NORTH STATE JOURNAL

Hurricanes flat in 4-1 loss to Sharks | The North State Journal

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH — The Hurricanes looked like a team playing for the third time in four nights. The Sharks' young legs took advantage.

San Jose scored twice in the second period to break a tie, and Alex Nedeljkovic made 28 saves to beat his old team in a 4-1 Sharks win Sunday at Lenovo Center.

"We were mentally just not prepared," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "They were hungry. It was an embarrassing effort, really, for two periods."

The Sharks took the lead at 7:54 of the second period when Carolina's fourth line and third defense pairing got hemmed in their own end. San Jose defenseman John Klingberg jumped into the slot and fired a shot past Pyotr Kochetkov (18 saves) to make it 2-1.

Then later in the period on the power play, Alex Wennberg scored off a rebound at 15:14 to double the Sharks' lead to 3-1. Through two periods, San Jose had eight high-danger chances to Carolina's one.

"The first two periods obviously weren't great," defenseman Sean Walker said. "I don't think we got to our game plan very well. Turning pucks over against a team like that that's hungry and has skill, they're going to make you pay. That's pretty much what it was."

Kochetkov's return to the crease — he was playing for the first time in nearly three weeks — got off to a sour start.

After Jordan Martinook failed to clear the puck out of the zone at the Carolina blue line, Sharks winger Will Smith got the puck to Macklin Celebrini. San Jose's sophomore phenom made a perfect pass to Collin Graf for a tap-in and a 1-0 lead 33 seconds into the game.

The Hurricanes evened the score with their third power play goal in two games. Defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere's point shot was redirected by Jordan Staal and past Nedeljkovic. It was Staal's first power play goal since Oct. 23, 2021.

"It was nice that we got a power play goal," Brind'Amour said, "but they also got one, so there was no advantage there for us tonight."

The loss was Kochetkov's first after four wins to start his season and Carolina's fourth defeat in its last seven.

"It's been kind of a little more 50/50 hockey and kind of just hoping for an easy game," Staal said. "Not really willing to grind it out and give them nothing and play our style. We have a good thing rolling for a bit, and then we don't. And then we do, and then we don't."

"It's starting to get a little frustrating. Tonight was a game that we should have been ready for. We should have been ready for a hard game, and we were not."

Notes: Gostisbehere's assist was his 18th of the season, pushing him past Sebastian Aho for the team lead. ... Staal has eight goals through 25 games after scoring 13 in 75 games last season. ... Celebrini finished with three points, his seventh three-point outing in 30 games this season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025



Recap: Canes 'Not Sharp' Against Sharks

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

"It was an embarrassing effort, really, for two periods..."

RALEIGH, N.C. - The Carolina Hurricanes struggled to gain traction on Sunday, ultimately taking a 4-1 loss to the San Jose Sharks as they capped off a weekend back-to-back at Lenovo Center.

A Sharks goal on the first shot of the game spelled trouble early, putting Carolina behind in the first minute for the second time in three contests. Unlike in that example, though, the Canes were able to get the next goal, with Jordan Staal tipping in a power-play goal to level the score before the break.

San Jose, which finished the night with a hefty 26 blocked shots, put on a stifling show in the second period, holding Carolina to just six shots on goal while scoring two of its own to open up a 3-1 advantage at the 40-minute mark.

With some new-look lines, the Hurricanes mounted a heavy third-period push and seemingly got to "their game" with 15 shots in the final 20 minutes, but it was not enough to climb back into the contest. An eventual Macklin Celebrini empty-netter completed a personal three-point night and sealed the two points for the Sharks.

In the Carolina cage, Pyotr Kochetkov returned from a lower-body injury to make his first start since Nov. 17. The 26-year-old posted 18 saves on 21 shots as he suffered his first defeat between the pipes this season.

Stats & Standouts

Forward Jordan Staal scored his first power-play goal since Oct. 23, 2021, simultaneously surpassing Rod Brind'Amour for the fifth-most points in franchise history (474).

Defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere recorded an assist for the third straight game, his fourth point streak of three or more games this season.

They Said It...

Rod Brind'Amour on the loss...

"We were not mentally prepared properly. They were hungry. It was an embarrassing effort, really, for two periods. And then it was, 'Oh yeah, we better get playing.' And we did. It was a great third period in terms of doing it right; it's just that you're down two, and they hunkered in. We got a few good opportunities, but we were not sharp."

Rod Brind'Amour continuing on the effort...

"This is the National Hockey League. You have to be prepared every night, whether there are four games a week or one of those stretches, but everybody's got to go through it. We were not sharp. And when the other team is sharp, you're going to get behind. Now you're chasing the game, and it's hard to come back."

Jordan Staal speaking along similar lines...

"I don't think we were very good, obviously. For the first two periods, they were the better team. They did what we do - be hard to play against, be above guys, and sticking to us. Obviously, we had a good third, but when they sit back, and you get a few chances, it looks good for the most part, but we got outworked for the first two periods, and it wasn't pretty."

Sean Walker on the team "not having their spark" twice in four days...

"When we get away from our game plan, it's a tough night of hockey. They stuck to their game plan. They got in on us and made us defend a lot. That definitely takes away your spark. (We have to) get back to our game plan, and most nights it works for us."

Postgame Quotes: Sean Walker

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes host their annual Alumni Game as a part of their 20th Anniversary Championship Celebration presented by Pepsi on Monday. The current team will be back in action on Tuesday against the Columbus Blue Jackets.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

Projected Lineup: December 7 vs. San Jose

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

RALEIGH, N.C. - The Carolina Hurricanes are expected to roll with the same 18 skaters that earned them a victory last night when they take on the San Jose Sharks this evening.

Led by three-point performances from Jackson Blake (2G, 1A) and Nikolaj Ehlers (1G, 2A), the only question mark is whether the Canes will turn to Frederik Andersen in net or if Pyotr Kochetkov is ready to return from injury.

Bothered by a lower-body concern for the first month of the season, Kochetkov went 4-0 in his first four starts when he finally made his debut. Unfortunately, before he could make it out of November, the same injury hampered the 26-year-old again and sidelined him for the past two-plus weeks.

Should it be Andersen, he'll have another opportunity to get his game on track after what's been a tough month for the veteran, going 0-4-2 in his last six appearances. Despite the struggles, he said on Thursday, "I've played better hockey, and I've had worse numbers," but also acknowledged that the recent stretch "doesn't look good." "We're not getting the wins with me in the net lately, but I still feel like I've got my game."

If it is Andersen's net, it'll be the 20th time in his long career facing the Sharks, boasting a career .927 save percentage against them.

Rod Brind'Amour will take questions from the media at 2:45 p.m., potentially confirming the decision in net then.

(2:45 P.M. UPDATE: Rod Brind'Amour told reporters pre-game that Pyotr Kochetkov will start today. Mike Reilly may also play on the blue line. No word on who comes out to make room.)

Tonight's Projected Lineup...

Forwards

Svechnikov - Aho - Jarvis

Ehlers - Stankoven - Blake

Martinook - Staal - Carrier

Hall - Kotkaniemi - Robinson

Defense

Miller - Walker

Gostisbehere - Chatfield

Nikishin - Nystrom

Starting Goaltender

Andersen/Kochetkov

Injuries

Pyotr Kochetkov (Lower-Body Injury | Day-To-Day)

Charles Alexis Legault (Hand Injury | Out 3-4 Months From Nov. 11)

Jacob Slavin (Lower-Body Injury | "Out For A While" as of Oct. 14)

Scratches

Mark Jankowski

Mike Reilly

PP1: Aho, Jarvis, Staal (Blake), and Svechnikov with Gostisbehere

PP2: Ehlers, Hall, and Stankoven with Nikishin and Walker



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025



Celebrini has 3 points, propels Sharks to win against Hurricanes

By: Kurt Dusterberg

Wennberg, Klingberg each gets goal, assist, Nedeljkovic makes 28 saves

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Sharks at Hurricanes | Recap

By Kurt Dusterberg

NHL.com Independent Correspondent

December 07, 2025

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Macklin Celebrini had a goal and two assists, and the San Jose Sharks defeated the Carolina Hurricanes 4-1 at Lenovo Center on Sunday.

John Klingberg and Alexander Wennberg each had a goal and an assist, and Alex Nedeljkovic made 28 saves for the Sharks (14-13-3), who had lost three of four (1-3-0).

"[Nedeljkovic] was locked in. You could see it from the start," San Jose coach Ryan Warsofsky said. "He made some huge saves. I liked his third period. He was outstanding tonight.

"We had moments where we saw growth playing with the lead. There's some improvement we need to continue to work on, but it was a step in the right direction."

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SJS@CAR: Celebrini adds to Sharks' lead with empty-net goal

Jordan Staal scored for the Hurricanes (17-9-2), who had won three of their past four. Pyotr Kochetkov, who missed the previous eight games with a lower-body injury, made 18 saves in his return.

"(We were) mentally not prepared properly, and [the Sharks] were hungry," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It was an embarrassing effort for two periods, really. Great third period, as far as doing it right. But we were not sharp."

Collin Graf gave San Jose a 1-0 lead 33 seconds into the first period. Celebrini wrapped a pass around Carolina defenseman Sean Walker at the top of the circles to Graf, who redirected the puck into an open net at the right post.

"It was a great start, just going to the net with my stick on the ice," Graf said. "I honestly didn't see it at first. I just thought I was going to the net, and it hit me right on the tape. From there you get confidence. If you score on the first shift, you feel good."

Staal's power-play goal tied it 1-1 at 13:18, a net-front tip of Shayne Gostisbehere's shot.

"We were kind of hoping for an easy game," Staal said. "Not really willing to grind it out and give them nothing and play our style. We have a good thing rolling for a bit, then we don't. Then we do, then we don't. It's starting to get a little frustrating."

Klingberg put the Sharks back ahead 2-1 at 7:54 of the second period. Celebrini circled the net and took a pass from Klingberg before setting up the defenseman for a snap shot from the right hash marks.

"I saw that 'Mac' was coming around the net and I didn't have a chance to shoot it right away," Klingberg said. "So, you want to give the best player the puck and then open up for a chance to get an even better scoring chance. When I got the puck, I saw that I had a lot of net to shoot on over [Kochetkov's] shoulder."

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SJS@CAR: Klingberg scores goal against Pyotr Kochetkov

Wennberg scored on the power play to extend it to 3-1 at 15:14. Kochetkov stopped William Eklund's one-timer from



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

the slot, but Wennberg finished on the rebound in the right circle.

Nedeljkovic was at his best in the third period, when he made 15 saves, including consecutive shots by Andrei Svechnikov and Seth Jarvis in close with Kochetkov pulled for the extra attacker in the final minutes.

"I just felt happy that I put us in a position to win honestly," Nedeljkovic said. "It's way more fun winning, whether you give up zero, one or five. "It was a two-goal game going into the third; they were very much in it. I thought we did a good job of just hunkering down, staying with it in our own end in the third and keeping it simple."

Celebrini scored an empty-net goal with 1:20 remaining in the third period for the 4-1 final.

NOTES: Celebrini, who has 106 points (40 goals, 66 assists) in 100 career games, recorded his 28th multipoint game, tying Steve Yzerman for the seventh most by a teenager at the time of their 100th NHL game, behind Wayne Gretzky (53), Ron Francis (41), Sidney Crosby (40), Dale Hawerchuk (40), Jimmy Carson (30) and Ted Kennedy (29). Celebrini recorded his seventh three-point game of the season, joining Yzerman in 1984-85 and Bryan Trottier in 1975-76 (both with seven) for the most three-point outings by a teenager through their 30th game of a campaign.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

AP ASSOCIATED PRESS



Macklin Celebrini has goal and 2 assists in the Sharks' 4-1 win over the Hurricanes | AP News

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Macklin Celebrini set up San Jose's first two goals to tie for the NHL assists lead and added an empty-netter, helping the Sharks beat Carolina 4-1 on Sunday night for their first road victory over the Hurricanes since 2018.

Celebrini tied Edmonton star Connor McDavid for the assists lead with 28, and moved a point ahead of McDavid for second in the scoring race with 43 — six behind Nathan MacKinnon of Colorado.

The Sharks had lost six in a row in Raleigh since a 3-1 victory Feb. 4, 2018 — when Celebrini was 11 years old.

Collin Graf, John Klingberg and Alexander Wennberg also scored, and Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 29 shots against his former team.

Jordan Staal scored for the Hurricanes, and Pyotr Kochetkov made 18 saves in his first loss in five starts this season. The Hurricanes dropped to 3-3-0 with a game left on their homestand.

Celebrini found Klingberg in the slot for a one-timer at 7:54 of second period to give the Sharks a 2-1 lead. Wennberg scored off a rebound on a 4:46 to go in the period.

Nedeljkovic was particularly sharp in the third period with 16 saves. Celebrini capped the scoring with the empty-netter with 1:20 left.

The Hurricanes kicked off a celebration of the 20th anniversary of their 2006 Stanley Cup champion team on Sunday. Most of the players, and former coach Peter Laviolette, were at the game and will be honored on the ice Tuesday night before a home game with Columbus.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Sharks 4, Hurricanes 1

By: Bob Wage

The Carolina Hurricanes came out flat again in this homestand and fell to the San Jose Sharks, 4-1 on Sunday night at the Lenovo Center.

The team is now 3-3 during this homestand with one more game on Tuesday night, that one against Columbus.

Head Coach Rod Brind'Amour called his team's performance and effort, "embarrassing".

The visitors got on the scoreboard quickly, just 33 seconds into the game as the Hurricanes seemed a step behind to start things off.

The home team did tie the game later in the first period when Jordan Staal tipped in a Shayne Gostisbehere shot on a powerplay opportunity.

But the Sharks scored twice in the second period to take a 3-1 lead and then ended the game with an empty net tally.

Pyotr Kochetkov, who returned from injury to play in this game, allowed three goals on 21 shots.

His season record dropped to 4-1-0 with a GAA of 1.96 and a SV% of .914.

19 year-old, Macklin Celebrini looked as good as advertised as he led his team with a goal and two assists.

During the broadcast, there were several interviews and much in depth discussion regarding the 2006 Stanley Cup win and they seemed to cover the game as an after thought at times. But it would seem that this would be a good game for that to happen.

The Canes had a tough time generating any type of consistent offensive pressure throughout and looked a bit tired. It was their third game in four nights.

They will take Monday off then have a morning skate for the game on Tuesday.

Hurricanes vs. Sharks: Preview, How to Watch, Game Thread

By: Al Hood

Yes, we just did this but it was so fun why not jump back in?

The Canes are right back in action this evening as they welcome the San Jose Sharks into Raleighwood for a game that will also serve as the beginning of sorts to the Canes' celebration of their Stanley Cup win 20 years ago. If Saturday Night was the precursor to the celebration, the next two days should be fun.

All eyes will be on the crease for the Canes to see who gets the start. It obviously won't be Brandon Bussi—but it's pretty clear now that he's going to be with the team for a while as he's won eight of nine appearances, becoming only the eighth goaltender to do so. How long this bus ride lasts, who knows? Looking back on some of his saves on Saturday it looks as if more than a few were of the "Nashville missed" than the "Bussi saved" variety, however, he also made saves when called on and that's something that Frederik Andersen hasn't been able to say for the majority of the season. Of the three goalies, Andersen has been the weakest so far. Will he get another chance today, or will Pyotr Kochetkov be healthy enough to get the start? As he was a full participant in practice on Friday it's clear he's close to returning.

On the other side of the ice is the Sharks. A team that many thought would be battling for yet another high draft pick has turned into a squad that is actually competing for the playoffs, if not a division title. The Canes opened the State Fair Road Trip with a 5-1 win over these Sharks back in October, but this team has fought hard since. They stand just two points out of a wild card spot, four points out of third in the Pacific, and six points away from the division leading...Anaheim Ducks.

They are doing this thanks to some exciting play by their youth, and former Hurricane Dmitri Orlov anchoring the defense. The Sharks have cooled off recently, though. They were blown out by Washington 7-1 at home, and then were kicked by Dallas 4-1 on Friday. They got the chance to watch the Canes in Raleigh last night, and no doubt they want to turn their fortunes around as they travel on to Philadelphia, Toronto, and Pittsburgh later this week.

Yes, the NHL schedulers had them go to Philly, Toronto, and Pittsburgh. Seriously does anyone check their work?

The player to watch for the Sharks, is of course 19 year-old phenom Macklin Celebrini. He hasn't scored a goal in six games, and was held without a point in the last two blowout losses. Still, he's leading the team in points and is a huge reason for optimism in the Bay Area. He's clearly showing



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

signs as being the star of the future, and it'll be interesting to see which line Rod Brind'Amour chooses to match up with the youngster. With 40 points, he's ahead of the next highest scorer Will Smith by 13, and he has 14 goals already—only Seth Jarvis has more for the Canes.

On the 20th Anniversary front, the Canes are rolling out the celebration. To prepare you for it, and if you haven't seen it, check out this video they posted on Twitter/X:

Also, as can be expected not every member of the Hurricanes on that team will be able to make it this week. Brind'Amour, of course is coaching and Kevyn Adams is busy trying to save his job in Buffalo. One interesting name that The News and Observer's Luke DeCock was able to catch up with: Anton Babchuck. His is a story that reminds us that as much as we want to use sports as an escape, the real world still intercedes. Check it out if you haven't.

If you aren't going to Lenovo today, here's how to catch the action:

Time: 5 PM

TV: FanDuel Sports Network. Mike Maniscalco will handle play-by-play alongside Tripp Tracy doing color. Hanna Yates and Shane Willis will provide off-ice reports as well as host pregame starting at 4:30 and postgame that will run for about 30 minutes after the conclusion.

Streaming: FanDuel Sports Network App for fans in the Carolinas. Outside of the area, the ESPN app has you covered, it typically has every out-of-market game except those that have been chosen to be on NHL Network.

Radio: The pregame on 99.9 The Fan starts at 4:30. At 5PM the Hurricanes Radio Network (consisting of 99.9, 730 The Game in Charlotte, ESPN New Bern 107.5/1490, and ESPN Greenville 107.5/1570) picks up the FDSN feed. You can also stream the call on the Hurricanes app.

Odds: Hurricanes -320 Moneyline, Puckline Hurricanes -1.5 at -132/Jets +255 Moneyline, Puckline +1.5 at +108, O/U 6.5 (+100 Over/-122 Under)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025



Eleven Hurricanes' players tally a point in 6-3 win over Nashville

By: Haley O'Neill

Showing a level of urgency that isn't always present, the Carolina Hurricanes controlled the pace, nearly doubling the shots on goal as their opponent, and capitalizing twice on the power play.

The Canes (17-8-2) came out of the gate firing shot after shot at goaltender Juuse Saros, earning a 6-3 win against the Nashville Predators (10-14-4). Wingers Jackson Blake and Nikolaj Ehlers had standout nights, securing three points apiece — Ehler's first three-point game with the Hurricanes — showcasing their chemistry as linemates.

"[Blake] especially had a real solid game tonight," said head coach Rod Brind'Amour. "You don't even have to know hockey to watch how he stands out almost every shift. It's nice to see him get rewarded. He's really put in a good, solid 25 games."

The first two goals were both on the power play and less than two minutes apart, marking the first game of the season that the Canes had a multi-power-play-goal night. Winger Taylor Hall took the credit for the first goal after a deflected puck bounced off his skate into the net. Ehlers, on the one-timer, fired the puck past Saros and gave the Canes some breathing room.

"It was just kind of a little muck fest going on there in front of the net," Blake said. "I thought it was a pretty good play by [Stankoven] to find a way to get it to the net, and that's what you have to do on the power play. Sometimes the simpler

the better, and that's what came there, and we got pretty fortunate with that one, so it was good."

The only goal of the second period, and fourth goal for the Canes was awarded to Blake, who received the pass from Ehlers. Blake skated the puck through the Predator's zone, around the defense and flicked it into the net past Saros, scoring the game-winner.

The final period saw a little less intensity and control of the pace from the Canes. The Predators found their spark and gained momentum and aggression. Former Hurricane, winger Michael Bunting, got the Predators on the board with a power play goal and ended goaltender Brandon Bussi's six-period shut out streak. Even though Bussi let in three goals, he ended with a .864 save percentage and increased his record to 8-1-0.

"Every game you're going to need that," Brind'Amour said. "It's very rare that you can go through a game and you don't need your goalie to make saves. It's a different game if it goes the other way...So the timely saves are crucial, and that's what he's been giving us."

On the other end of the ice, Saros wasn't having nearly as good a night. The sixth and final goal from the Canes got Saros booted out of the net and sent to the locker room. Goaltender Justus Annunen took his place less than halfway through the third, and stopped every puck sent his way.

The Hurricanes host the San Jose Sharks on Sunday, Dec. 7 at 5 p.m. at the Lenovo Center.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

The Hockey News

'It Was An Embarrassing Effort': Rod Brind'Amour, Jordan Staal, Sean Walker On Loss To Sharks

By: Ryan Henkel

Brind'Amour calls the effort "embarrassing," Staal admits they were outworked. Key players candidly dissect the Hurricanes' flat performance against the Sharks.

The Carolina Hurricanes were flat out embarrassed by the San Jose Sharks Sunday night as they fell 4-1 for their third loss in their last six games.

The Hurricanes didn't come ready to play and couldn't find any semblance of a game until the third period and by then, it was too late.

After the game, Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour along with captain Jordan Staal and defenseman Sean Walker spoke with the media. Here's what they had to say:

Rod Brind'Amour

On the game: We were mentally just not prepared. They were hungry. It was an embarrassing effort, really, for two periods. Then it was like, 'Oh, we better get playing,' and we did. A great third period as far as doing it right, it's just that we were down two and they hunkered in. Got a few good opportunities, but we were not sharp.

On the team not sticking with their game plan and style of play: We never got to it. In the third, it was like, 'Okay, we better get to it,' and it looked a little better, but we seem to keep having these lulls and I get it. There's a lot of games. I don't think this stretch of seven home games is ideal for that either. We just have gotten into a little bit of a rut here. But no excuses. They had a good game. Give them credit. They played really hard and they capitalized. We got behind the 8-ball there.

On Pyotr Kochetkov: He was fine. Played good. I don't blame him at all. He made some good saves. He didn't have a ton of work, but there were a couple, obviously, early that you can't give up.

On how to address the issues moving forward: It's not changes. This is the National Hockey League. You have to be prepared every night. Whether there's four games a week or whatever with what this stretch is. Everybody has to go through it. I just felt like we were not sharp. And when the other team is sharp, you're gonna get behind and now you're just chasing it and it's hard to come back.

On the power play: It was alright. The power play... we needed one in the third and had one good look, Svech missed the net. It was nice that we got a power play goal, but they also got one so there was no advantage there for us tonight.

On the decision to play Mike Reilly: I felt like Reils had been playing really well, no reason for him to be sitting out. Just back-to-back games, three in four. Trying to get some guys in there that are fresh and sometimes it's good for the young guys to just take a breather. [Nystrom] had been playing fine. Nothing against that. Just have extra bodies.

Jordan Staal

On the game: I don't think we were very good, obviously. I thought for the first two periods, they were the better team and they did kind of what we do. Be hard to play against, be above guys. They kind of stuck it to us and we obviously had a good third, but when they sit back, you kind of have a few more chances and it looks good, but for the most part, we got outworked in those first two periods. It wasn't pretty.

On if fatigue was a factor at all: You can make that excuse, but it's the NHL. We get paid to go and we weren't going. It wasn't good enough all throughout the lineup, to a man.

On his power play goal: Everyone here on the team wants to be on the power play. It's a privilege and an honor and I want to contribute throughout the lineup and all that stuff. I was able to get out there and get one, which was nice. Power play has to be huge for us going down the stretch if we want to make a push for the playoffs.

On having a couple of duds on the homestand: It has been frustrating. It's been kind of a little more 50/50 hockey and kind of just hoping for an easy game. Not really willing to grind it out and give them nothing and play our style. We have a good thing rolling for a bit, and then we don't. And then we do and then we don't. It's starting to get a little frustrating. Tonight was a game that we should have been ready for. We should have been ready for a hard game and we were not.

Sean Walker

On the game: The first two periods obviously weren't great. I don't think we got to our game plan very well. Turning pucks over against a team like that that's hungry and has skill, they're going to make you pay. That's pretty much what it was. The third was a little bit better, we got to what we do best. We have to make sure we're bringing that on Tuesday.

On if the condensed schedule is weighing on the team at all: You know what, everyone is doing it. So I don't think the schedule is really an excuse for the effort tonight. It's going to be like that the rest of the year, so you do what you can to get recovery and show up every night ready to work.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

On the team once again lacking a spark: When we get away from our game plan, it's a tough night of hockey. They stuck to their game plan, got it in on us and made us defend a lot.

That definitely takes away your spark. So we just need to get back to our game plan and most nights that works for us.

Pyotr Kochetkov To Start For Carolina; Had Missed Last 8 Games With Injury

Back from injury, Kochetkov returns to the crease. Can he recapture his early-season magic and steady the Hurricanes' net?

The Carolina Hurricanes will be getting goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov back in the lineup tonight as they take on the San Jose Sharks.

The Russian netminder had missed the team's last eight games with a lower-body injury, a reaggravation of the ailment that kept him out of the start of the season.

However, he's been practicing with the team for over a week now and tonight he's indeed back in the crease.

Kochetkov, 26, has a 4-0-0 record this season with a 0.926 save percentage and 1.70 GAA.

He was nine seconds away from a second shutout in his last start in Boston, but has provided the Canes with steady performances in each game he's played this year.

The Russian goalie has played in 40+ games in each of the past two seasons, but injuries have started to add up for him rather frequently already in his short career.

The team will really need him to be available moving forward, especially with Frederik Andersen struggling, so tonight will be a good test for the young goalie.

Carolina Hurricanes vs. San Jose Sharks: Lineups, Game Preview and How to Watch

By: Ryan Henkel

Hurricanes aim to sweep Sharks. Check projected lineups, key matchups, and how to catch the action live from Raleigh.

What - Game 28 (17-8-2)

When - 5 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 7

Where - Lenovo Center; Raleigh, NC

How to Watch - FanDuel Sports Network South, NBCSCA

The Carolina Hurricanes are looking to sweep their season series against the San Jose Sharks as they host the Western Conference team tonight.

Carolina is coming off of a 6-3 beatdown of the Nashville Predators on Saturday, a game in which the power play struck twice and Jesperi Kotkaniemi got back into the lineup.

While Jacob Slavin remains out for at least another game, the question remains on whether or not Pyotr Kochetkov will be back in or not.

San Jose enters tonight's game having lost three of their last four outings, most recently falling 4-1 to the Dallas Stars on Friday.

While the team's young superstar, Macklin Celebrini, is as offensively talented as anybody in the league, the Sharks' depth leaves a lot to be desired and this is a game Carolina needs to be able to take advantage of.

Streaks

Seth Jarvis (1g, 1a), Sebastian Aho (1g, 1a) and Shayne Gostisbehere (2a) has points in back-to-back games.

Milestone Watch

Jesperi Kotkaniemi is one point shy of 200 career points.

Jacob Slavin is one point shy of 300 career points.

Jordan Martinook is two goals shy of 100 career goals.

Game Notes

Carolina is 1-0-0 against San Jose this season, having won 5-1 on Oct. 14 in California.

Key Matchups

Projected Starting Goalies

Frederik Andersen: 5-7-2; 0.875 Sv%; 3.15 GAA

Alex Nedeljkovic: 3-5-2; 0.894 Sv%; 3.19 GAA

Leading Scorers

Goals - Seth Jarvis (16) / Macklin Celebrini (14)

Points - Sebastian Aho (26) / Macklin Celebrini (40)

Power Play

Carolina - 14.6% (27th)

San Jose - 18.5% (18th)

Penalty Kill

Carolina - 79.7% (23rd)

San Jose - 80.4% (18th)

Hurricanes Projected Lineup

Andrei Svechnikov - Sebastian Aho - Seth Jarvis

Nikolaj Ehlers - Logan Stankoven - Jackson Blake

William Carrier - Jordan Staal - Jordan Martinook

Taylor Hall - Jesperi Kotkaniemi - Eric Robinson



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

K'Andre Miller - Sean Walker

Shayne Gostisbehere - Jalen Chatfield

Alexander Nikishin - Joel Nystrom

Frederik Andersen

Brandon Bussi

Injuries and Scratches: Mike Reilly, Mark Jankowski, Pyotr Kochetkov (LBI), Jaccob Slavin (LBI)

Sharks Projected Lineup

Tyler Toffoli - Macklin Celebrini - Will Smith

Philipp Kurashev - Alexander Wennberg - William Eklund

Jeff Skinner - Ty Dellandrea - Collin Graf

Barclay Goodrow - Zack Ostapchuk - Adam Gaudette

Dmitry Orlov - Timothy Liljegren

Mario Ferraro - John Klingberg

Sam Dickinson - Nick Leddy

Alex Nedeljkovic

Yaroslav Askarov

Injuries and Scratches: Vincent Iorio, Shakir Mukhamadullin, Ryan Reaves, Vincent Desharnais (UBI), Michael Misa (LBI)

LINKS

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SportScan

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

1223803 Carolina Hurricanes

As the Hurricanes relive 2006, one player remains a refugee living in exile

Luke DeCock5-7 minutes 07/12/2025

When the members of the 2006 Carolina Hurricanes gather this weekend to celebrate the 20th anniversary of their championship, not every player on the Stanley Cup will be present. Some are otherwise preoccupied with work, like Kevyn Adams, general manager of the Buffalo Sabres, or with their own kids playing hockey. Josef Vasicek died 14 years ago. Some are just too far afield.

Then there's Anton Babchuk, who arrived in January of that season as a 21-year-old rookie, a big Ukrainian-born Russian defenseman with a big shot. In the group photos on the ice with the Stanley Cup, Babchuk looms in the back, in uniform, his arm around Mike Commodore with a wide grin on his face, very much part of the team.

While he didn't appear in a playoff game, he still played in 22 games down the stretch — the Hurricanes got special dispensation to add him and Andrew Hutchinson to the engraving — and went on to play another 141 games for the Hurricanes before returning to Russia's KHL to finish out his career.

As they assembled the group to return this weekend, the Hurricanes couldn't find Babchuk to invite him.

"That's the one nobody knew," a team official said.

Babchuk had seemingly dropped off the face of the earth.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

And in a way, he had.

"After two months of living in the basement of our house under missile explosions, we decided to leave Ukraine," Babchuk wrote in an email to The News & Observer. "We have been living in Spain for the fourth year now."

Even professional athletes who made millions playing in North America are not immune to the whims of international politics and the ravages of war. Babchuk played for the Russian national team as a teenager and in the KHL as a pro, but he was Kiev-born and raised, growing up alongside another future NHLer, Nikolai Zherdev.

A first-round draft pick of the Chicago Blackhawks in 2002, his hockey career took him around the world until he retired in 2015, moving back to Kiev with his wife and two sons. Russia was already waging a proxy war with Ukraine then, but far from the cosmopolitan capital.

"Everything was going very well, the children played football in the Dynamo Kiev team, my wife and I ran our own business and lived our happy life," Babchuk wrote.

Then the war came home with the Russian invasion in February 2022 and the constant bombing of cities like Kiev. Eventually, Babchuk and his family fled to Spain — first Valencia, and now Villareal. It's safe to say they are not only fortunate to make that escape but also making the best of a bad situation. Their eldest son Anton, 15, recently signed a pro soccer contract with La Liga club Villareal, the famous Yellow Submarine. Their younger son Platon, 12, is playing for another soccer club nearby.

But if that's a long way from Raleigh and this weekend's celebration of a long-ago championship, no less fondly remembered with the passing of time, it's an even longer way from Ukraine. Amid the good memories and better vibes of a time when the Hurricanes owned the hockey world, spare a thought for one player who won't be there because the rest of the world can be a cruel place.

"My wife Natalia and I try to help our children grow up to be happy and worthy people," Babchuk wrote. "That's how we live. We are very much looking forward to all this horror in Ukraine to end soon and we will be able to come to our beloved city Kiev."

Don't we all.

News Observer LOADED: 12.08.2025

1223804 Carolina Hurricanes

Sharks spoil first night of Hurricanes' 2006 Stanley Cup team celebration

Chip Alexander8-10 minutes 08/12/2025

Twenty years ago Sunday, the Carolina Hurricanes were on the longest road trip of the 2005-2006 season, on the West Coast, still coming together as a team.

After two games in Los Angeles, the trip ended against the San Jose Sharks, with a 4-3 loss. Rod Brind'Amour had the first goal for the Canes in that game, the captain scoring on a power play.

We all know how that season ended. Stories about it are being told and retold with Carolina's 2006 Stanley Cup champions back in Raleigh to be feted during a 20th anniversary Cup celebration.

There was a red-carpet reception Sunday for the '06 champs at the Lenovo Center, a few hours before the home game against the Sharks.

They'll put on their skates Monday for a game against N.C. State's Ice Pack, then be recognized during the home game Tuesday against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Brind'Amour should again put on No. 17 and be on the ice Monday with several of the teammates he helped lead to the Cup. But he's also a busy man, coaching the Canes in games Saturday against Nashville and then again Sunday against San Jose.

This year's edition of the Sharks is not lacking energy, and they spoiled the first night of celebration, coming away with a 4-1 victory.

Jordan Staal, now the Canes' captain, was given a chance on the power play and scored in the first — his eighth goal of this season and his first power-play goal since October 2021. But that was one of the few things Brind'Amour liked about the game, as the Sharks led 3-1 after the second period against a Canes team playing its third game in four nights.

"We were mentally not prepared," Brind'Amour said. "It was an embarrassing effort, really, for two periods, and then it was, 'Oh, we better get playing,' and we did. Great third period as far as doing it right, but we were down two and they hunkered in. But we were not sharp.

"But no excuses. ... This is the National Hockey League and you have to be prepared every night, whether there's four games a week or not."

Sharks center Macklin Celebrini had a goal, his 15th, and two assists for San Jose (14-13-3), and goalie Alex Nedeljkovic, playing against his former team, had 28 saves and was named the game's first star.

The Canes (17-9-2) did have goalie Pyotr Kochetkov back in net for the first time since Nov. 17 after he was out eight games with a lower-body issue. Kochetkov allowed three goals on 21 shots.

Many of the stars from 2006 watched in a private box at Lenovo Center. While those players' faces are a bit more creased after 20 years, they remain so recognizable — Glen Wesley and Bret Hedican, Erik Cole and Chad LaRose, Cam Ward and Martin Gerber, Nic Wallin and Aaron Ward. And former coach Peter Laviolette, who was celebrating his 61st birthday Sunday.

A bearded Laviolette, wearing his Stanley Cup ring and with longtime former assistant Kevin McCarthy by his side, sounded the warning siren before Sunday's game.

Before the second period, it was LaRose's turn, earning another big cheer from Canes fans.

"It's pretty cool to see their camaraderie," Canes defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere said Sunday.

With the Canes now thoroughly entrenched in the community, and game sellouts so common at Lenovo Center, one must remember the team was just eight years removed from the franchise move from Hartford to Raleigh in 2005. The Canes had overachieved and reached the 2002 Stanley Cup, but two years without making playoffs and then the lockout season of 2004-2005 seemingly stalled the forward momentum being painstakingly being built by the franchise.

Then came 2006.

The community was all-in on the Hurricanes' march to the Cup; culminating with the seven-game Stanley Cup Final series against the Edmonton Oilers.

Mark the date: June 19, 2006. That's the night Brind'Amour was the first to raise the Cup after a gritty Game 7 victory. He did so gladly, hurriedly, as the arena rumbled.

"That team was a very good team, and you could see everybody getting behind that team," Brind'Amour said Sunday. "Then we had a lot of traction for a few years and then that kind of weaned. But the common thread was that when you win, you're going to have that support.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

"We had it earlier (2002) and then that group brought it back to life. But the real takeaway was we can do this here. And now we have that belief and understand we can do that."

There's a banner in the arena rafters that's a consent reminder.

Some video tributes to the 2006 champions were shown during including one from Buffalo Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams, a member of the '06 winners.

Recently, Adams was in Raleigh with the Sabres and reminisced about that championship season.

"From the start we kind of had a special feeling in our room and let it build in the course of the year," Adams said.

Adams recalls Justin Williams scoring the empty net goal late in Game 7 against Edmonton to seal a 3-1 victory, clinch the Cup, and ignite a wild celebration.

"That was the first time that it was like 'We're going to do this' and that's something I'll never forget," Adams said, "And that's the great thing about hockey. The years go by, but the memories don't fade at all."

News Observer LOADED: 12.08.2025

1223805 Carolina Hurricanes

Blake scores twice, Bussi wins again as Hurricanes top Predators

December 6, 2025 Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH — The Bus keeps rolling for the Hurricanes, and Jackson Blake hopped aboard Saturday night.

Goalie Brandon Bussi made 19 saves — including several key ones early — to win his sixth straight start, and Blake was one deflection off Taylor Hall's skate from a hat trick in Carolina's 6-3 win over the visiting Predators at Lenovo Center.

Blake created the game's first goal by pouncing on a loose puck and shooting it in off Hall, scored with a dynamic individual effort in the second and banged in a rebound in the third period to chase Nashville goalie Juuse Saros and register his first three-point game of the season. Linemate Nikolaj Ehlers also had three points for the first time since joining the Hurricanes.

"When you're not providing offense for the team, it's kind of a mental struggle a little bit because every night you want to provide for the team and help the team win in that way," said Blake, who ended a six-game point drought. "We've had some really good games and didn't get rewarded. So tonight was good for us all to get rewarded."

Ehlers' 5-on-3 goal in the first period gave Carolina its first game this season with two power play goals, and he added primary assists on Blake's two goals.

"We're three guys that want to contribute with everything, of course," Ehlers said. "I think we've still, at times, created a lot of chances, they just haven't gone in. We knew it was going to come at some point — I literally said that to (Logan Stankoven) after the last game. So it was nice to score some goals again."

The Hurricanes jumped out to a two-goal lead by scoring twice on the power play in the first period.

With Nashville's Filip Forsberg in the box for an offensive zone penalty, Blake got to a rebound and threw the puck at the net. The shot bounced off Hall's leg and in for Hall's sixth goal of the year and a 1-0 lead at 8:01.

Then Ehlers blasted a one-timer past Juuse Saros (32 saves) on the two-man advantage to make it 2-0 just before the midway point of the opening period.

"We had had a clear plan today, and we were able to execute in the beginning," Ehlers said.

Bussi blanked Nashville for two-plus periods to help Carolina build a four-goal lead before his shutout streak of 135:45 was broken.

"I think my job is to stop the puck as much as I can," Bussi said. "So I made enough early to kind of get us some momentum and put the puck in the net. Third period, probably need to clean it up a little bit. But we built a big enough lead that it didn't matter."

Coach Rod Brind'Amour added, "Timely saves are crucial, and that's what he's been giving us."

William Carrier scored his second of the year with 16 seconds left in the first period to push the lead to 3-0, and after Blake scored his first of the night in the second period, Sebastian Aho scored on a breakaway at 4:45 of the third to make it 5-0 before Michael Bunting ended the shutout bid at 8:12.

Despite giving up three goals in the third period, Bussi was again serenaded by the crowd with chants of "Bussi! Bussi" after he improved to 8-1-0 to start his NHL career.

"Whenever you're home, having an excited, loud crowd, it fuels anyone," Bussi said. "So we're very lucky."

Notes: Jesperi Kotkaniemi returned to the lineup after missing nine games. ... Carolina improved to 10-3-2 against the Western Conference, including eight straight with at least a point. ... K'Andre Miller and Sean Walker were both plus 3, while Roman Josi and Nicolas Hague were both minus 3.

The North State Journal LOADED: 12.08.2025

1223906 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Sunday Overreactions: How Panthers are in real danger of missing playoffs

Michael Amato

It was pure elation for the Florida Panthers this past summer. Not only did they win their second of back-to-back Stanley Cups after their third straight appearance in the Final, but they also retained Sam Bennett, Brad Marchand and Aaron Ekblad on lengthy contract extensions. Things can change fast in the NHL, though.

A December win over the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday felt way too important than it should be for this team. The desperate Panthers squad erased a three-goal deficit and then another two-goal deficit to pull one out right at the buzzer in overtime for a much-needed victory. Another loss could have been disastrous.

Even with that win the Panthers still find themselves in second last in the East, thanks to some key injuries and inconsistent play. Thursday's loss to Nashville was a crushing blow, as most teams have been picking up



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

two points against the Predators this season. I don't think anyone wouldn't believe in the Panthers if they qualify for the playoffs, no matter what seed they are, but they are starting to dig themselves a big hole they may not be able to get out of.

Florida will not make the post-season

As it stands today, the Panthers are five points out of third in the Atlantic and five points out of a wild card spot. They remain in the mix thanks to a very mediocre Atlantic division and a conference where no one is running away with things. Still, even if those odds don't look insurmountable, it's not always about how many points back you are as opposed to how many teams you have to pass.

With the loser point leading to a number of three-point games, you have to go on a really great run to make up ground. That's especially true in Florida's case, with six teams between them and the playoff cutoff line. The Panthers would have to play at a .616 points percentage the rest of the way to reach 95 points, which should give them a chance at a wild card spot. That's easier said than done, though, as Florida played at a less than .600 clip when they finished third in the Atlantic a year ago, with a much healthier team. It's going to be a real uphill climb for the Panthers to defend their title.

Overreaction? – No

What's really working against the Panthers here is injuries. Perhaps Aleksander Barkov will be available for the post-season, but that won't matter if Florida doesn't get there first. Matthew Tkachuk has also missed substantial time and should be back sooner than later, though it remains to be seen how much of a boost that will give the lineup. Those are the two biggest names the Panthers have been missing but other more under the radar losses like Eetu Luostarinen and Dmitry Kulikov have also taken a toll. Kulikov has played only one-and-a-half games this season, leading to a ripple effect of Seth Jones, Gustav Forsling and Aaron Ekblad having to absorb more ice time. Any hope of Florida managing some of its veteran's minutes has gone out the door with all the injuries.

Brad Marchand is having a great year, but other key Panthers aren't delivering what we're accustomed to. Carter Verhaeghe is trending towards just 20 or so goals again after averaging 38 from 2022-2024, Sam Reinhart is scoring less than a point-per-game for only the second time in five seasons and Forsling, who was a combined plus-89 over the past two seasons, is only sitting at plus-three right now.

Not to mention Sergei Bobrovsky, whose numbers are starting to slip. At 37 years old and after three very deep playoff runs, the Panthers netminder isn't having a banner season, sporting an .881 save percentage and ranking only 50th in goals saved above expected. Bobrovsky's save percentage would rank as the worst of his career and the only other time he had a mark below .900 was back in 2011-12. It would be foolish to write off Bobrovsky yet, but it's hard to see him getting better as the season drags on considering how much extra hockey he's played over the past three springs.

Every team has been trying to figure out a way to beat the Panthers in the post-season and the best answer might be to simply try to keep them out of the playoffs altogether.

Jason Robertson deserves a spot on Team USA

Robertson certainly picked a good time to go on an incredible heater. The Dallas Stars forward can't be stopped over the past month, tallying 26 points in November and Robertson now has 15 goals in his past 13 games. That has vaulted him up the ranks when it comes to the conversation for the American Olympic team after Robertson wasn't included on the Four Nations squad. Robertson is also due for a contract extension that's going to include a substantial raise, as he's now on pace for 105 points. That's a total many felt Robertson couldn't get back to after he cleared the century mark back in the 2022-23 season. Even with

all the talent USA has, it's hard to imagine Robertson not being included in the Olympic squad given how well he's playing.

Overreaction? – No

The Americans are loaded at forward, but you'd have to think there's room for a player that's producing at an elite level on one of the league's best teams. You can bring an extra forward to the Olympics for a total of 14 and let's assume Chris Kreider, Brock Nelson and Vincent Trocheck don't make the cut this time around, which would leave:

That's not even including Alex Tuch, who some may have on their final rosters, but I can't see Tuch, Trocheck, Nelson or Kreider overtaking Robertson for a roster spot. He's just been too good.

Hurricanes need to add a goalie

The Carolina Hurricanes have big expectations once again this season and are determined to get over the hump and into the Stanley Cup Final, but bad goaltending could potentially derail those plans. I'm not sure the Canes planned on Brandon Bussi even being on the roster this year, let alone being their most important netminder. Bussi has been excellent since Carolina plucked him off waivers from Florida back in October, going 8-1-0 with 5.4 goals saved above expected. But therein lies the problem, Bussi shouldn't be that important to the Canes. Pyotr Kochetkov has missed all but five games with injuries and Frederik Andersen has struggled mightily in 2025-26. It would be foolish for Carolina to bank on the inexperienced Bussi playing this way for the remainder of the season, so they may have to look into adding someone for insurance if Kochetkov and Andersen can't solidify the crease.

Overreaction? – Yes

There are a handful of teams that are likely in the market for a goalie right now, including Montreal and Edmonton, but there isn't an obvious upgrade out there for Carolina. Even though Andersen's numbers have been dreadful this season, with only three quality starts on the year and the fact that he hasn't posted a save percentage better than .850 in five straight outings, sometimes the devil you know is better than the one you don't in net.

Adding a goalie is easier said than done and the handful of options available at the moment all have flaws. Jordan Binnington and Tristan Jarry could be in play, as well as Laurent Brossoit, who is on a conditioning stint in the AHL. It's not like those three don't come with potential concerns of their own. Elvis Merzlikins and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen may also be available, but the acquisition cost would be high. Perhaps there's another outside the box option we're not seeing that the Canes can look into as well, but goalies are never a sure thing. If I was Carolina, I'd rather bank on Andersen's game improving and Kochetkov getting healthy to help support Bussi.

Caps will finish first in the East again

The Washington Capitals shocked much of the hockey world last season by claiming the most points in the Eastern Conference and it certainly doesn't look like a fluke. After overcoming a four-game losing streak in late October, the Caps have righted the ship and have now won nine of their past 11 games. They've also outscored their opponents 31-12 in their last seven and now have the best goal differential in the East at plus-26, second only to Colorado and Dallas in the entire NHL. There was some concern that Washington would regress this season based on a number of players having career years in 2024-25 with inflated shooting percentages, but right now they look like a wagon again. The Capitals are leading the East and may have a chance to run away with it given the way they've been playing lately.

Overreaction? – No

In a very mediocre Eastern Conference, the Caps may have the best shot of starting to create some distance between them and the rest of the pack. They are mostly healthy, minus Ryan Leonard going down Friday



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

night, where other contenders for the conference crown like Tampa Bay and New Jersey are dealing with key injuries. Meanwhile, Carolina got off to a great start but they have slowed down a fair bit. Washington is starting to click on all cylinders and they don't have any glaring weaknesses.

Logan Thompson leads the league in goals saved above expected. John Carlson is having a renaissance season and Jakob Chychrun is on pace to shatter last year's 20-goal total. Alex Ovechkin is also starting to come around and is now on pace for a 40-goal season at age 40. Not to mention Leonard is starting to show flashes of what could make him a premier power forward sooner rather than later. The Caps are a deep team and you have to really squint to find any flaws right now.

The Sabres will regret trading for Josh Norris

If you were judging today, you'd have no choice but to admit the Ottawa Senators won the Dylan Cozens and Josh Norris swap. Cozens has been a very effective player for the Sens since arriving in Ottawa, while Norris has been limited to just seven games across parts of two seasons for the Sabres. Those seven games have been excellent, though, as Norris has totaled seven points in those outings, with five of them coming in only four contests this season. Norris' talent has never been in question, it's always been his health. Injuries have plagued Norris relentlessly throughout his career and finally led the Sens to moving him, despite his upside and talent. We simply haven't seen Norris in the lineup enough to trust he can be an impact player.

Overreaction? – Yes

I can't believe Norris's luck is this bad. The injuries don't seem to be related and it's hard to imagine him missing huge chunks of time for the remainder of his stay in Buffalo. Norris is making less than \$8M per year for the next four seasons beyond this one, which isn't an exorbitant amount if Norris ends up being a top line player for the Sabres. It also could be huge for Tage Thompson if the two can develop chemistry together. There has to be at least mild concern that Thompson could want out if Buffalo continues to struggle. Hopefully playing with a centre like Norris and connecting with him for a bunch of points will make Thompson want to stay.

The Sabres do have a lot of talent up front and if Norris can stay healthy there's no reason to believe he can't be a 70-point player for them on a good value contract.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 12.08.2025

1223907 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Unexpected cast leads gritty Canucks performance in skid-snapping win

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — After the smouldering but inextinguishable brush fire that is the Quinn Hughes situation was fanned again Saturday on Hockey Night in Canada, illuminating the uncertainty of his future with the Vancouver Canucks, two other defencemen showed why the team sees them as essential to whatever comes next.

Friends and countrymen Tom Willander and Elias Pettersson (Junior), who are breaking into the National Hockey League together after first playing as defence partners for Sweden's national junior team two years

ago, scored goals a little more than two minutes apart as the Canucks stunned the Minnesota Wild 4-2 at Rogers Arena.

It wasn't just that the last-place Canucks ended a four-game losing streak against one of the NHL's hottest teams and its untouchable goalie that was so surprising, but that Vancouver won after top centre Elias Pettersson (the original EP) was an unexpected last-minute scratch due to an upper-body injury.

When Pettersson joined experienced Canucks centres Filip Chytil and Teddy Blueger on the injured list, Vancouver's first-line pivot became Toronto Maple Leafs castoff David Kampf, who is pointless in nine games for the team and is known primarily for his penalty-killing and faceoff work as a fourth-line checker. The other Canucks centres on Saturday were recent minor-league graduates Aatu Raty and Max Sasson, and NHL winger Drew O'Connor.

And still, Vancouver won with one of its grittier performances this season.

Did we tell you that the Canucks goalie who outplayed the Wild's Jesper Wallstedt was emergency minor-league callup Nikita Tolopilo?

As for the Hughes drama, Elliotte Friedman's television report that the Canucks and New Jersey Devils had a phone call about the superstar defenceman is just another page in the subplot that will be part of the Canucks' story until the team captain signs a contract extension next summer or asks out of Vancouver.

"If there was a call, it wasn't like me, Jim and Fitzy hopped on the call," Hughes told reporters post-game, referring to Canucks president Jim Rutherford and Devils general manager Tom Fitzgerald. "You know, I wasn't a part of that. But obviously I'm aware of that and how things like that could happen, for sure."

The result on the ice was far more of a plot twist than the latest report involving Hughes.

Over the course of four shots spanning less than six minutes in the second period, three Canucks prospects who had combined for one goal this season (Willander, young Pettersson and Raty) pumped three pucks past Wallstedt, who had allowed as many as three goals only once while winning his last seven starts.

The "Wall of St. Paul" looked more like a speed bump.

Willander scored his first NHL goal to tie it 1-1 at 9:29, taking Linus Karlsson's patient pass and picking the top corner on Wallstedt with a wrist shot from above the circles.

Just over two minutes later, at 11:46, Pettersson (Junior), a frequent blue-line partner for Willander, scored his first of the season with a seeing-eye shot from the point that tumbled in after Raty won an offensive-zone faceoff.

And then Raty, the second-year centre with one goal in 25 games, rifled home an unscreened wrist shot on a two-on-one sprung by Evander Kane as the Canucks shockingly went ahead 3-1 at 15:12.

These goals against the NHL's hottest netminder came on Vancouver's sixth, eighth and ninth shots of the game. They also came after the NHL Situation Room took away what looked like a perfectly good goal from Raty for a "distinct kicking motion." For a Canucks team that has watched opponents score more goals with their feet this season than Lionel Messi, it looked like an extremely harsh decision after Kiefer Sherwood's centring pass hit Raty's skate.

But given what the Canucks have been going through, the video-review decision felt, well, typical. The three Vancouver goals that soon followed certainly were not.

It's not like the Wild were overrunning the Canucks with 16 shots through two periods, but the visitors could have led by more than just 1-0 — and



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2025

would have were it not for Tolopilo, who started ahead of Kevin Lankinen on the second night of back-to-back games.

High-danger scoring chances were 6-1 for Minnesota through two periods.

"Obviously, our best player on any given night," veteran defenceman Marcus Pettersson (no relation) said of missing the older Elias. "I think we came together as a group. We knew it was going to be a battle. Guys stepped up and made some great plays, but the battle — the compete level — is what's sticking out for me tonight.

"I think for a while now, we played some pretty good hockey but didn't get the results. So we kind of talked about what that missing piece is to get the results. And that was a little bit more attitude, more compete, and I think we showed that tonight."

By the end, Raty had tripled his season's goal total by making it 4-1 at 5:09 of the third period on a gift from Wallstedt, who hesitated and then mishandled the puck behind his net, losing it to the Canuck.

"I think Woody yelled to the goalie, 'Leave it!'", Raty said of Sherwood. "I'm pretty sure, so I think he messed their breakout there a little bit. And then obviously, just a bad bounce ... just so unlucky on their goalie. (But) I think we were due."

With 74 games of NHL experience, Raty, 23, was the Canucks' second-line centre. He went 14-2 on faceoffs and finished with three points.

"Yeah, I don't know why they're not asking me about going, like 22-3, on my last 25 draws," Raty said of the post-game media attention. "Those are the things I worry about. But it's always good to get goals.

"We had a really good meeting this morning, and went over some things, mindset-wise, about what we want to be and what we were going to do today. And I think that showed out there today. I think everyone was pretty fired up to play."

Young defencemen Willander, 20, and Pettersson, 21, started playing together at training camp in September and have been pushing each other at the NHL level.

"I think we just, we want each other's best all the time," Pettersson explained. "Almost every practice, we're doing something together. After the practice, we're working on our game. So, yeah, it was fun to see those (shots) go in today."

The Canucks play the Detroit Red Wings on Monday before closing their four-game homestand Thursday against the Buffalo Sabres, when there is a chance injured Vancouver starter Thatcher Demko could play for the first time since Nov. 11.