



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 12, 2025

The News & Observer

Jordan Staal's power-play promotion is Rod Brind'Amour's subtle nod to 2006

By: Luke DeCock

Former Carolina Hurricanes players Rod Brind'Amour, Cam Ward and Eric Staal, three of the stars that led the team to become the 2006 Stanley Cup Champions, talked about how it felt on the 10th anniversary of the win. This season marks 20 years since the Canes won it all.

Amid all the good memories and positive vibes of seeing the 2006 champions back together again, it's hard to shake the sense that there's suddenly a big similarity between that team and this one.

No, not a rookie goalie coming out of nowhere to save the Carolina Hurricanes' bacon, as good as Brandon Bussi has been. Cam Ward, at least, was a first-round pick, even if his contributions came slightly earlier than expected.

And no, not a blue line that's been racked with so many injuries it seems like it's never the same six guys two games in a row. People forget that about the fall of 2005, how defensemen kept falling one right after another, so many that Oleg Tverdovsky — nominally the seventh and spare defenseman — ended up playing 72 games.

Perhaps there was something about the reunion that jogged some synapse deep in Rod Brind'Amour's brain, something long forgotten from that season surfaced by the familiar faces. Perhaps it was just desperation at having one of the NHL's worst power plays, even with Shayne Gostisbehere back and healthy again.

But here's the 2006 connection no one saw coming: When all else fails, send the thirtysomething captain out there with the man advantage to win a few faceoffs and maybe even get his butt in the way.

After scoring on the power play in each of the past two games, Jordan Staal has more power-play goals this season (2) than the previous four seasons combined (1), going into Thursday night's game at the Washington Capitals.

"There's some skill set he brings to that," Brind'Amour said. "It's pretty clear what he does. It's what power plays need. Every power play starts with a faceoff, every one I've been around. OK, he's our best one. And obviously you need traffic and he's our best one, he's our biggest dude."

Peter Laviolette did that with Brind'Amour, 35 in the fall of 2005, and he scored a career-high 19 power-play goals after scoring only one the previous season. He scored more that season as he had in his entire 4 1/2-season Hurricanes career to that point — and didn't stop in the playoffs, either.

And now Brind'Amour has tapped into Hurricanes history and done that with Staal, 37, now the owner of a two-game power-play goal streak after scoring his first in more than four years.

"It's a privilege, it's an honor, and I want to contribute throughout the lineup in all aspects," Staal said. "I was able to get out there and get one, which was nice. Power play's going to be huge for us going down the stretch."

In the four games Staal has seen significant power-play time — a total of 6 minutes, 9 seconds, after seeing a total of 64 seconds in the previous 22 games — he not only has two goals but the Hurricanes are converting at a 25 percent clip, up from a dismal 13.7 before that.

There's no excuse for a team with as much skill as the Hurricanes to be that profligate with their chances, but sometimes it takes a big body willing to take some abuse to let the fancier fellows do their thing. If nothing else, neither Sebastian Aho nor Logan Stankoven have been good enough in the faceoff circle; with Staal, you can at least count on that.

"We're just messing around a little bit," Brind'Amour said after Staal's first practice with the power-play units, but at a time when the Hurricanes were honoring their most cherished history, it was a subtle nod to the past that worked.



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The Athletic

The number of NHL injuries is on the rise. How are teams navigating them so far?

By: Shayna Goldman

There are too many ways to get injured in the NHL. It's the risk and reality of playing a high-speed contact sport, on an ice surface, with 90-plus mph pucks flying around, and sharp blades on everyone's boots. And this year, that all may be exacerbated by a condensed Olympic schedule.

Whatever the reason(s), injuries are on the rise around the NHL. The best teams have to find a way through it, with a "next man up" mentality to fill lineup gaps.

Just look at the Lightning, who have been dealing with major absences this season: Ryan McDonagh, Erik Cernak, Brayden Point and Andrei Vasilevskiy have all missed time. So did Victor Hedman — 12 games, to be exact, before returning last Saturday against the Islanders. That put players such as JJ Moser to the test, and he responded with a 58 percent xG rate and helped Tampa Bay outscore opponents 12-2 in tough five-on-five minutes. When Hedman exited Tuesday's game in Montreal early, Moser again stepped up.

The Lightning are far from the only team familiar with the injury bug this year, so let's take a look at how some teams are navigating key absences so far this season.

Matthew Tkachuk/Aleksander Barkov, Florida Panthers

It's impossible to have an injury conversation without the reigning champs. It's not the first time the Panthers have come into the year short-handed — in 2023-24, they had to start the season without two of their top-four defensemen when Aaron Ekblad and Brandon Montour were sidelined. But this year's hill has been a lot steeper with the team's two best forwards, Barkov and Tkachuk, absent.

That has thrust players such as Sam Reinhart, Sam Bennett and Anton Lundell into greater roles than they generally are tasked with. The problem is, when players such as Reinhart and Bennett slip on the scoresheet — which is entirely reasonable considering the situation — it's a lot more glaring when they are Florida's No. 1 and 2 forwards, instead of the 3, 4 or 5.

Carter Verhaeghe, Brad Marchand and Lundell, at least, have all picked up the offensive pace recently. That's even more promising with Tkachuk's return on the horizon; adding a star winger back to the top of the depth chart should have a trickle-down effect on the rest of the lineup.

But there is still going to be a Barkov-sized hole the rest of the year. Florida's team defense isn't as stout without a

player who puts up elite results against top competition, which is a pivotal part of it. So the Panthers have to find new ways to tighten up defensively, or get more goalie support, if they are going to claw their way back into playoff standing.

Jack Hughes/Brett Pesce, New Jersey Devils

The Devils were already strained when Jack Hughes was sidelined; two-way cracks had started to form a few weeks earlier when Brett Pesce went down with an injury.

At five-on-five, Pesce absorbed the toughest workload in terms of quality of competition to open the season. And while he wasn't flashy in that time, he was a stabilizing force on both ends of the ice with the Devils giving up 0.78 fewer expected goals per 60 relative to the rest of the team. But since he has been sidelined, a few things have happened: 1) Luke Hughes, his mainstay partner, hasn't been as strong on either end of the ice, 2) Simon Nemec has seen his minutes rise, and the process hasn't always matched what the scoresheet shows in that time and 3) the penalty kill has struggled more.

The Hughes injury then added another massive pressure point. Nico Hischier, at least, has stepped up as the de facto 1C on the scoresheet, despite some downward trends in his two-way game (that started before Hughes left the lineup). But a lack of depth below that top line has only been exposed over the last month of play. Dawson Mercer hasn't been as effective since shifting back to center, and the team has been outscored 9-6 without him or Hischier on the ice at five-on-five since Nov. 13. And that's contributed to the team going 5-8-0 in the 13 games without Hughes (0.385 point percentage), after a 12-4-1 start (0.735).

Anthony Stolarz was far from perfect in his 13 appearances before sustaining an upper-body injury. Kyle Ross / Imagn Images

Anthony Stolarz/Joseph Woll, Toronto Maple Leafs

At full strength, there are obvious roster holes in Toronto, which have suppressed the team's record so far this season. The stars haven't consistently shone bright enough. The secondary scoring, once again, lacks. And the defense has seriously slipped, especially with both Chris Tanev and Brandon Carlo injured.

And now, the team is without both of its NHL-level goalies.

Anthony Stolarz was far from perfect in his 13 appearances before sustaining an upper-body injury. But his workload was also more challenging, with the Leafs giving up more shots,



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chances and rushes to open the year, and that seemed to weigh on him in his last three appearances in particular.

Joseph Woll, at least, was ready for his season debut a couple of days later. He gave his team a chance to win with six quality starts in eight outings ... until he also got injured.

So now it's the Dennis Hildeby show in Toronto, and he has played a key part in the Leafs' recent turnaround. Hildeby has earned a quality start in all of his appearances so far and has saved a collective 12 goals above expected in 11 games. As much as the team is starting to trend up in front of the blue paint, goaltending has been the difference over the last month — especially in short-handed situations, with a combined 0.949 save percentage in 12 games since Stolarz went down.

Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets

Goaltending tends to be The Difference in Winnipeg. When Connor Hellebuyck is at his MVP-level, he can push this team far above expectations. And when he wilts in the playoffs, it crushes this group's chances of advancing.

Hellebuyck's efforts (and a high shooting percentage) helped mask some of the Jets' struggles in the first month of action, while the team was without defensive stalwarts Dylan Samberg and Adam Lowry. The team stayed above .500 with an 11-7-0 record in its first 18 games. But that has plummeted since Hellebuyck had arthroscopic knee surgery. Over the last 11 games, the team has a 0.318 points percentage (and 3-7-1 record), which ranks 31st in that stretch.

Changes in goaltending obviously are a driving force behind that. Eric Comrie's GSAX may be average through 10 games, but two stellar outings are doing a lot of the work there. Take out a combined seven goals saved above expected against the Sabres and Canadiens last week, and it exposes a GSAX of minus-6.76 in his eight other appearances.

Still, this doesn't fall solely on Comrie's shoulders. He doesn't have enough goal support, and the defense has been far from perfect even after Lowry and Samberg's returns. If anything, these last few weeks show where this team needs to improve to get back to contender status in front of their franchise goaltender.

Lukáš Dostál, Anaheim Ducks

The Ducks' abysmal defense has made goaltending all the more important in Anaheim over the years. While this team started to improve in early November, its xG has ticked right back up over the last stretch. Through 30 games, the Ducks have given up 3.17 goals per 60, which ranks 31st in the league, ahead of only the Canucks.

While Dostál can be his team's backbone, not everyone has the chops to play in that environment. What made this situation even trickier is that Petr Mrázek also went down with an injury a couple of games after Dostál, making Ville Husso The Guy over the last couple of weeks, when he really hasn't had to play a starting workload at the NHL level since early in the 2023-24 season.

At least, unlike seasons past, this team gives its netminders goal support with its high-octane offense. The Ducks have scored 3.39 goals per 60 since Dostál went down, which is a

key reason for their 5-3-0 record. But Husso deserves credit, too. His numbers are from perfect (0.893 save percentage, GSAX of 2.95), but he has still stepped over the last few weeks. Just take Tuesday night, when he helped steal two points against the Penguins with a dramatic overtime win.

Jacob Slavin, Carolina Hurricanes

There has been a lot of roster turnover on the Canes' back end in recent seasons, and the system gets a lot of credit for that plug-and-play mentality. But Jacob Slavin also deserves a lot of credit for his consistently elite defensive play, which has helped keep that blue line stable and clicking at a high rate.

So the fact that the Hurricanes sit second in the Metropolitan Division despite Slavin's absence in 27 or 29 games this season is truly impressive. But it's still clear that this team misses its most valuable player, especially over the last couple of weeks in short-handed situations.

The Hurricanes are known for having one of the league's strongest penalty kills — their strategy revolves around a stingy defense and an aggressive playing style. But over the last month, this team has allowed a higher rate of scoring chances against — 9.50 xG against per 60, to be exact. And that's proven costly on the scoresheet, with Carolina's goalies allowing 10.8 goals against per 60.

Slavin's impending return should help revitalize the Hurricanes' penalty kill and tighten up the team's even-strength defense that has been a little leaky over the last stretch.

Charlie McAvoy, Boston Bruins

The retooling Bruins weren't expected to be in the playoff picture this season. But the team's three cornerstones, David Pastrnak, Jeremy Swayman and Charlie McAvoy, have helped this group exceed expectations.

After missing five games, Pastrnak returned on Tuesday night, and it was the first time the team strung together back-to-back wins since McAvoy was sidelined. So his return should give this team a real boost on the back end.

Before his injury, McAvoy was playing matchup minutes on the top pair with Nikita Zadorov. In their 131 five-on-five minutes together, Boston earned a 55.6 percent xG rate and outscored opponents 5-2. Without McAvoy, Jonathan Aspirot and Andrew Peeke have been leaned on more.

While the Bruins have outscored opponents 8-3 with the Zadorov-Aspirot pairing on, the process isn't as smooth below the surface, with a 48 percent xG rate. Peeke in a larger role is even more concerning — his pair with Hampus Lindholm has been outscored 7-1, with a 43 percent xG rate, since McAvoy has been out.

Adam Fox, New York Rangers

Between his play on a crumbling Rangers team in 2024-25 and his showing at 4 Nations, the perception around Adam Fox's game shifted a lot over the last year. But his play so far this season only reinforces his value as one of the top defensemen in the league.

Fox's plus-9.9 Net Rating ranks third in the league among the position, behind only Cale Makar and Jakob Chychrun. His play in his own zone has been a key component of that;



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only Shea Theodore and Matt Roy rank higher in Defensive Rating. That all-around game excelled alongside Vladislav Gavrikov against top competition. Together, they earned a 59 percent xG rate and 16-11 scoring edge in 449 minutes.

Without Fox, Braden Schneider has been moved up to Gavrikov's right, and the results have been less than stellar — the team is just below break-even in expected goals, and has been outscored 6-3.

New York doesn't have a great way to replace Fox's special teams' impact, either. Without another high-end puck-mover or natural PP quarterback, the Rangers opted for a five-forward power play in Fox's absence — but that experiment may be coming to an end after an awful showing on Wednesday night.



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Hurricanes top Capitals 3-2 in SO in a matchup of the top teams in the Eastern Conference standings

By: Noah Trister, AP Sports Writer

WASHINGTON — WASHINGTON (AP) — Brandon Bussi stopped all three shots in a shootout to lift the Carolina Hurricanes to a 3-2 victory over the Washington Capitals on Thursday night in a matchup of the top two teams in the Eastern Conference standings.

The win pulled the Hurricanes even with Washington atop the conference and Metropolitan Division. Bussi ran his record to 10-1-0. The Carolina rookie stopped Anthony Beauvillier, Dylan Strome and Sonny Milano in the shootout. Strome also failed to convert a breakaway in overtime after two Carolina players collided.

Washington has lost all four of its shootouts this season.

Seth Jarvis had the lone goal in the shootout, but it was Logan Stankoven who gave him the opportunity by scoring the tying goal with 2:15 left in regulation. Nikolaj Ehlers scored for Carolina in the second.

Connor McMichael opened the scoring for Washington in the second, and Nic Dowd put the Capitals up 2-1 with 8:28 left in the third.

Bussi has now won eight straight. Only Cam Ward, with a nine-game run in 2009, has a longer streak in franchise history.

It was an eventful third period for Dowd, who dropped the gloves with Jordan Martinook two seconds into the final stanza and then broke a 1-all tie by redirecting Rasmus Sandin's sharp pass past Bussi.

But an attempted centering pass bounced to Stankoven in the left circle, and his shot evened the game back up.

The Hurricanes beat the Capitals in the second round of last season's playoffs. Washington entered the night with a one-point lead over Carolina atop the East.

The Capitals have scored first a league-high 23 times, going 16-4-3 in those games.

The Capitals announced earlier in the day that Ryan Leonard, who injured a shoulder last Friday at Anaheim, needs approximately three to four weeks to recover.

Hurricanes: At Philadelphia on Saturday night.

Capitals: At Winnipeg on Saturday night.



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Recap: Bussi Makes NHL History As Canes Edge Caps

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

Goaltender becomes league's first to record 10 wins in 11 career games

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Brandon Bussi made 23 saves in 65 minutes, then tacked on three more in the shootout, to backstop the Carolina Hurricanes to a 3-2 win over the Washington Capitals on Thursday.

[GAME SUMMARY](#) | [BOX SCORE](#) | [BUY TICKETS](#)

Playing on the road for the first time since Nov. 23, Carolina got the style of start it wanted with a heavy shot advantage, but couldn't find the game's first goal. That marker arrived off the stick of Connor McMichael five minutes into the second period, giving Washington a 1-0 lead against the run of play.

Despite that, Carolina's territorial dominance continued, and after finding iron on several golden opportunities, the visitors finally earned an equalizer as Nikolaj Ehlers slotted a rebound at 13:43.

It didn't take long to see some third-period fireworks, with Jordan Martinook and Nic Dowd dropping the gloves immediately after the frame's first faceoff. Dowd wasn't done there, grabbing the go-ahead goal with 8:28 remaining, but neither were the Hurricanes. As the clock ticked down to 2:15, Logan Stankoven followed up a rush chance and wired a loose puck under the crossbar from the left circle to knot things up once more.

Washington recorded the only three shots during overtime, but Bussi had the answers each time, and followed it up with a 3-for-3 showing in the shootout. Seth Jarvis potted the decisive, and only, goal during the breakaway battle.

Stats & Standouts

Goaltender Brandon Bussi became the fastest goaltender in NHL history to record 10 career wins (11 GP) and has now won eight straight starts, tying Frederik Andersen for the second-longest streak by a goaltender in franchise history. Thursday's victory was his first to come in a shootout.

Forward Logan Stankoven scored his first goal and recorded his first multi-point outing (1G, 1A) since Nov. 9, ending a 14-game scoring drought with a game-tying tally with just 2:15 remaining.

Forward Nikolaj Ehlers also posted two points (1G, 1A) and led all skaters with six shots on net.

With the win in Washington, the Hurricanes have tied the Capitals atop the Metropolitan Division with 40 points on the year, but have done so in one fewer game.

They Said It...

Rod Brind'Amour offering his thoughts on the game...

"It was kind of up-and-down. We played great for two periods. We should have had a few more [goals], we hit a few goalposts there and we were really on it. You knew they were going to have that push; that's why it would have been nice to have a couple more in there because then here they came, and we kind of were on our heels the whole [third] period. But give the guys a lot of credit, we found a way to tie it up. And then our goaltending tonight was great again, so that allowed us to pull it out."

Jordan Martinook expressing similar thoughts...

"I think if you look at those first two periods, we were pouring it on and we were getting a ton of chances. When you're tied, you're like, okay, well, you've obviously just got to try and stick with what was making us successful... They started kind of pushing back, and then they got the goal, so you're a little worried. But then I think it was almost like a little wake-up call in the third, and we stuck with it from there. That's a great win to get, knowing that if you kind of stick with your game, good things are gonna happen."

Brandon Bussi on what allowed the team to get the game to a shootout...

"I think we just stuck to what we do well. I think we deserved it tonight. It wasn't going our way early, and (the Caps) had a little bit of a pushback in the third; they got one, but we stayed with it. It feels good to get a late one and then find a way to squeeze out that extra point."

Brandon Bussi on becoming the fastest NHL goaltender to reach 10 career wins...

"It's awesome. Pretty crazy. I saw the nine [wins] out of 10 stuff, and I'm like 'ah, that's pretty cool.' But I didn't really know we were chasing anything today. It can't be done without the team, obviously. We're playing really good hockey, and I'm a small part of it, but it's pretty cool."

Logan Stankoven on Brandon Bussi...

"He's been unreal, stepping right in. Nothing seems to bother him. He's just always steady back there for us. Obviously,



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that's a big record tonight too. That's exciting. It's great to see him do well."

Rod Brind'Amour raving about his goaltender...

"I love making history in that form. When you get to know him, the story, and then he's just such a great kid. He's really earned every minute of his. Hopefully, obviously, we hope it continues. It's been a great ride here so far."

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes are scheduled to travel to Philadelphia tonight ahead of a home-and-home set against the Flyers this weekend.

Next Game: Saturday, Dec. 13 at Philadelphia | 7:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO

Next Home Game: Sunday, Dec. 14 vs. Philadelphia | 5:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO | Tickets | Parking



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Stankoven ties it late, Hurricanes edge Capitals in shootout

By: Harvey Valentine

Bussi wins 8th straight start for Carolina; Washington extends point streak to 9

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WASHINGTON -- Logan Stankoven scored the game-tying goal with 2:15 remaining in the third period, and the Carolina Hurricanes rallied for a 3-2 shootout win against the Washington Capitals at Capital One Arena on Thursday.

Nikolaj Ehlers' backdoor pass for Jackson Blake hit off the skate of John Carlson and deflected backward to the top of the left circle, where Stankoven roofed a shot glove side on Logan Thompson.

"I think [defenseman Jalen Chatfield] made a good pinch there and kind of turned the puck over, and then [I] just kind of hopped off the bench," said Stankoven, who had gone 14 games without a goal. "Then, [Ehlers] went to go shoot it and it deflected right to me and I just tried to roof it. Yeah, it was nice to see it go in."

Brandon Bussi made 23 saves, including 12 in the third period and three more in overtime, to earn his eighth straight win for the Hurricanes (19-9-2), who have won two in a row and five of their past seven games. Ehlers had a goal and an assist, and Seth Jarvis scored the only goal in the shootout.

"We're playing good hockey," Bussi said. "So, it's nice to be a small part of it, coming up when I need to, but ultimately we're playing really good hockey. It makes my life easy."

Connor McMichael had a goal and an assist for the Capitals (18-9-4), who extended their point streak to nine games (7-0-2). Thompson made 37 saves.

"We were right there grinding it out all game," Thompson said. "Just unfortunately couldn't get two points tonight, but we'll take the point and move on."

McMichael gave the Capitals a 1-0 lead at 5:00 of the second period. Rasmus Sandin sent a stretch pass up the right boards to Alex Ovechkin, but the puck deflected into the slot, where McMichael skated into it before sliding a backhand between Bussi's pads on a short breakaway.

"I've been trying to focus on my breakaways a little bit more," McMichael said. "I've had a few opportunities that didn't go in, so I've tried to bear down."

Ehlers tied it 1-1 at 13:43 when he got to a loose puck in front and beat Thompson with a snap shot from near the right post.

Nic Dowd put the Capitals back in front 2-1 at 11:32 of the third period, tapping in a diagonal backdoor pass from Sandin at the right post.

"We were kind of on our heels the whole [third] period," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "But give the guys a lot of credit, they found a way to tie it up, and then our goaltending was great tonight again. So, that allowed us to pull it out."

NOTES: Bussi (10-1-0) became the fastest goaltender in NHL history to record 10 career wins. ... Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal went 15-for-20 on face-offs. ... Washington is 0-4 in games decided by a shootout. ... Ovechkin had an assist to become the 11th player in NHL history to record 1,800 points in the regular season and Stanley Cup Playoffs combined. ... Capitals forward Aliaksei Protas had his six-game point streak end (four goals, two assists).



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

“Magic Bus” - Hurricanes 3, Capitals 2 - SO

By: Bob Wage

Brandon Bussi kept his winning streak alive and his magical season ongoing as he backstopped the Carolina Hurricanes to 3 -2 shootout win over the Washington Capitals on Thursday night at our Nation's Capital.

It was Bussi's eighth win in a row and his 10th win in his first 11 NHL games, which is an NHL record.

In his first ever NHL shootout appearance, he stopped all the Capitals' shooters. Overall, he made 23 saves on the 25 shots he faced.

Seth Jarvis scored the only goal in the skills competition to give his team the two points.

The Canes had to come from behind twice in this game as they fell behind 1-0 early in the second, then 2-1 in the third.

After the Canes had dominated most of the period, while hitting the post three times on various shots, Nikolaj Ehlers tied the game later in the second to make it 1-1. Logan Stankoven and Alexander Nikishin got the assists.

This might have been the best game Ehlers played as a Hurricane. He was all over the ice.

Jordan Martinook and Nic Dowd dropped the gloves right off the faceoff to start the third period although no damage was done, then Dowd would give the home team a 2-1 lead midway through the period.

With a bit over two minutes left in the game, Ehlers found Stankoven out front and the new second line center rifled in his shot to make the score, 2-2.

The score remained tied until overtime where the Canes looked out of synch as they managed zero shots on goal. Bussi stopped the three shots he faced in the extra period.

Next up came the shootout, which has not been a good thing for Carolina in the past.

But Bussi continued his strong play and all the Canes needed was a nifty move by Jarvis, who made a triple fake to guide the puck past Logan Thompson.

The Hurricanes outshot the Caps 39-25 and won 65% of the game's faceoffs.

The Canes will make a short trip to Philadelphia for the first game of a back-to-back on Saturday night with the Flyers.



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The Hockey News

Hurricanes Rookie Goaltender Brandon Bussi Chasing NHL History On Unfathomable Start

By: Ryan Henkel

From a waiver claim to a historic start, Brandon Bussi's rapid ascent with the Hurricanes is potentially rewriting the record books.

Who'd have thought that a contingency waiver claim could stake a claim as the potential number one netminder on a perennial contender, while making NHL history at the same time?

It sounds crazy, but that's exactly what Brandon Bussi is doing for the Carolina Hurricanes.

The 27-year-old netminder has seized the opportunity presented to him and he's seemingly cemented himself as the Canes' number one netminder.

To start his NHL career, Bussi has a 0.909 save percentage, one shutout and an 9-1-0 record, becoming just the fifth goaltenders in NHL history to record nine wins within their first 10 career starts (Igor Shesterkin, Frederik Andersen, Bob Froese, Frank Brimsek).

And he'll be getting the chance to do something only one other netminder in NHL history has done tonight as he is set for start number 11.

Bussi will be getting the chance to join Bob Froese as the only other goalie in NHL history to win 10 wins in his first 11 starts (Froese started his career 12-0-1) on Thursday night against the Washington Capitals, the second time he's started in consecutive games so far this season.

"I don't think we envisioned him going in an every-day rotation or a back-to-back, but he's earned that," said Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour Thursday morning.

You'd think that an NHL rookie would be a little caught up in the emotions of everything that's gone on along the way, but if you asked the 27-year-old netminder if this stretch or the moments within it have even felt surreal, you'd probably be fairly surprised by his blasé attitude.

"My job is to stop the puck as much as I can and I just take it day-by-day," Bussi said. "It feels good to get wins. Our team's been playing really well in most of these wins if not all of them, so it feels good. Gonna try and keep it going."

"He doesn't get shaken," said teammate Seth Jarvis. "I think obviously the position he was in coming in, a bad goal or something could have ruined his confidence, but I think he's incredibly confident in himself and knows that. And for us, knowing we have a guy back there that makes timely saves and will bail us out when need be is huge."

Hurricanes goalie Brandon Bussi debuts a custom mask, a vibrant tribute to autism awareness and personal family connection, featuring unique artistry.

thehockeynews.comHurricanes Goalie Brandon Bussi Unveils New MaskHurricanes goalie Brandon Bussi debuts a custom mask, a vibrant tribute to autism awareness and personal family connection, featuring unique artistry.

Bussi is writing quite the story in Carolina and it's only been getting better and better.

It's gone from a feel good story of a rookie doing well, to actually looking like a potentially game-changing acquisition for the Hurricanes.

"It doesn't matter if you're 22 or 26, especially when you're a goalie," said teammate Taylor Hall. "There's no direct path to being what you are and when you're big and athletic like he is in the net, you just need to keep going. I think he's only going to get better and better."

The 6-foot-4, New York native has positioned himself as the top netminder not only for the Hurricanes but currently in the league as well.

And it isn't like Bussi has been insulated by the Canes' play either. Sure, he's not facing 30 shots a night, but the saves that he's being asked to make are shorthanded breakaways, 2-on-1s, and overall just multiple high-danger chances game after game and he's been absolutely incredible.

"That's what goaltending's really about," Brind'Amour said. "If you can make the saves at crucial times, that's what I think goaltending is really about. You're supposed to make the ones you're supposed to make and make a couple that you're not supposed to make, but when you make them, I think, is real important too."

Bussi is currently leading the Canes in goals saved above expected (7.5) according to moneypuck.com and is actually leading the entire league in high-danger save percentage (0.888) according to NHL Edge.

"He's been great for us," Brind'Amour said. "He's come up with the timely saves and that's how I sum it up. Because it's not like we've been leaving him out to dry or giving up 40 shots a night. It's not that, but if there's a breakaway here or there all of a sudden, those are huge moments in tight games and every game, you could kind of say the same story. Timely saves that allow us to have a chance. That's what you ask of him."

While essentially an unknown to the league and the greater hockey world when he made his NHL debut, Bussi wasn't just a random claim by the Hurricanes.

The Western Michigan University product went undrafted out of college, but a strong three seasons with the Providence Bruins put him on the Hurricanes' radar.



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His name kept coming up in organizational meetings during the summer and he was a player that the team knew they'd want to keep an eye on.

"He was somebody I identified in the summertime," said Hurricanes goaltending coach Paul Schonfelder. "He obviously ended up signing in Florida, but he was somebody who was on my list of people to go after. I had him down as somebody who, he obviously played down in the American league for three years, but was ready to make that jump to the NHL."

And as fate would have it, a chance came on the waiver wire and the rest is history.

"The hockey world can be crazy at times," Bussi recalls.

From one of the hundreds of players hoping and praying for the chance to prove their mettle, to standing on the verge of making NHL history in just a few months.

"I think they know who he is now," Jarvis said. "He's been electric. He's the best guy. No one I'm happier for."

LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/spt-columns-blogs/luke-decock/article313578064.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6879422/2025/12/11/nhl-injuries-teams-adam-fox-jack-hughes/>

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SportScan

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

1371250 Carolina Hurricanes

Jordan Staal's power-play promotion is Rod Brind'Amour's subtle nod to 2006

Luke DeCock 5-6 minutes 11/12/2025

Amid all the good memories and positive vibes of seeing the 2006 champions back together again, it's hard to shake the sense that there's suddenly a big similarity between that team and this one.

No, not a rookie goalie coming out of nowhere to save the Carolina Hurricanes' bacon, as good as Brandon Bussi has been. Cam Ward, at least, was a first-round pick, even if his contributions came slightly earlier than expected.

And no, not a blue line that's been racked with so many injuries it seems like it's never the same six guys two games in a row. People forget that about the fall of 2005, how defensemen kept falling one right after another, so many that Oleg Tverdovsky — nominally the seventh and spare defenseman — ended up playing 72 games.

Perhaps there was something about the reunion that jogged some synapse deep in Rod Brind'Amour's brain, something long forgotten from that season surfaced by the familiar faces. Perhaps it was just desperation at having one of the NHL's worst power plays, even with Shayne Gostisbehere back and healthy again.

But here's the 2006 connection no one saw coming: When all else fails, send the thirtysomething captain out there with the man advantage to win a few faceoffs and maybe even get his butt in the way.

After scoring on the power play in each of the past two games, Jordan Staal has more power-play goals this season (2) than the previous four seasons combined (1), going into Thursday night's game at the Washington Capitals.

"There's some skill set he brings to that," Brind'Amour said. "It's pretty clear what he does. It's what power plays need. Every power play starts with a faceoff, every one I've been around. OK, he's our best one. And obviously you need traffic and he's our best one, he's our biggest dude."

Peter Laviolette did that with Brind'Amour, 35 in the fall of 2005, and he scored a career-high 19 power-play goals after scoring only one the previous season. He scored more that season as he had in his entire 4 1/2-season Hurricanes career to that point — and didn't stop in the playoffs, either.

And now Brind'Amour has tapped into Hurricanes history and done that with Staal, 37, now the owner of a two-game power-play goal streak after scoring his first in more than four years.

"It's a privilege, it's an honor, and I want to contribute throughout the lineup in all aspects," Staal said. "I was able to get out there and get one, which was nice. Power play's going to be huge for us going down the stretch."



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In the four games Staal has seen significant power-play time — a total of 6 minutes, 9 seconds, after seeing a total of 64 seconds in the previous 22 games — he not only has two goals but the Hurricanes are converting at a 25 percent clip, up from a dismal 13.7 before that.

There's no excuse for a team with as much skill as the Hurricanes to be that profligate with their chances, but sometimes it takes a big body willing to take some abuse to let the fancier fellows do their thing. If nothing else, neither Sebastian Aho nor Logan Stankoven have been good enough in the faceoff circle; with Staal, you can at least count on that.

"We're just messing around a little bit," Brind'Amour said after Staal's first practice with the power-play units, but at a time when the Hurricanes were honoring their most cherished history, it was a subtle nod to the past that worked.

News Observer LOADED: 12.12.2025

1371393 Websites

The Athletic / Who was the worst NHL general manager to keep his job for 5 years or more?

By Sean McIndoe

I'm a big fan of sports questions that seem simple but are actually more complicated than they appear, which is how I've managed to waste huge chunks of my life on questions about jersey numbers or building rosters of terrible contracts that are still somehow cap compliant. Today, we're going to try another one.

Which GM had the worst long stint with a team, meaning five years or longer?

You can already see the problem. There are lots of GMs in NHL history who've held the role for a particular team for a long time. And there are lots of GMs who didn't do an especially great job. But those two groups aren't supposed to overlap. This is supposed to be one of the most important jobs in a relentlessly results-oriented league — if you're not having success, shouldn't your team replace you with somebody else who might?

You'd think so. And sure enough, most of the GMs who are remembered poorly fall short of our five-year cutoff, often by a lot. Even guys that stuck around longer than fans might have wanted, such as John Ferguson Jr. in Toronto, Ron Hextall in Pittsburgh, Ned Harkness in Detroit or Peter Chiarelli in Edmonton, didn't get to the five-year mark. Five years is a lot.

But now and then, for a variety of reasons, a team sticks with a guy well past the point that results would dictate. Those are the guys we're interested in today, as we count down the 10 worst GMs to get at least five years with the same team.

10. Mike O'Connell, Bruins

Hired: November 2000, taking on the unenviable role of replacing a living legend in Harry Sinden, who'd held the job since 1972.

Fired: March 2006

In between: O'Connell's Bruins had decent regular-season success, including finishing first in the division twice. But they never won a round, and it's fair to say it did not end well.

Signature move: Trading Joe Thornton to the Sharks for Wayne Primeau, Brad Stuart and Marco Sturm. It was a confusing deal at the time, amid reports that the Bruins hadn't even shopped the former No. 1 pick before

taking the Sharks' offer. It got worse when Thornton won the MVP that year. Two decades later, it's considered one of the worst trades of all time.

Bottom line: You can't look past the Thornton trade. But O'Connell did set some of the stage for the good years to come, especially by drafting Patrice Bergeron in 2003.

9. Glenn Sather, Rangers

Hired: June 2000

Fired: July 2015

In between: Clocking in at just over 15 years, this is the longest stint we'll find on our list. And Sather certainly earned some runway, having built a Hall of Fame resume at his previous stop with the Oilers. That's where he's alleged to have uttered the fateful quote about how if he had the Rangers' payroll, "I'd never lose a game."

He did end up in New York, and he did lose games. Quite a few, actually. The Rangers failed to make the playoffs in any of Sather's pre-lockout seasons, which ironically were the ones where he could outspend everyone. They improved over the years to come, especially over Sather's last two seasons, in which they won a Presidents' Trophy and went to the final. But it's those early years that many fans remember.

Signature move: Signing every bad UFA contract you can remember from that era.

Bottom line: Sather is the classic case of a GM who seemed to get the blame when things were bad, and not much of the credit when they were good. I wonder if we'd remember his time in New York the same way if it weren't for that infamous quote.

8. Max McNab, Capitals

Hired: December 1975

Fired: November 1981

In between: A whole lot of losing. Which was to be expected, given that McNab took over an expansion team that had one full season under its belt, that being arguably the worst any team has ever had. Still, in five seasons at the helm, McNab's Caps never finished with more than 70 points.

Signature move: He had some solid draft success, as you might expect given all the Capitals' high picks. His best was picking future 700-goal man Mike Gartner fourth overall in 1979.

Bottom line: McNab's miserable record means he really has to be on this list, but he had absolutely nothing to work with. Of note, he's one of the few guys on this list who got another crack at a GM job, running the Devils for the four years before Lou Lamoriello arrived.

7.5. Ron Francis, Kraken

Hired: The Kraken named Francis the first GM in franchise history in July 2019.

Fired Promoted: He was moved up to president this past April.

Wait, time out: Should Francis count? I'm not sure that he should. In a technical sense, he was the Kraken's GM for almost six years. But he couldn't do much for the first two years, so it feels like we should really start the clock at the expansion draft. That was in 2021, meaning Francis was only a GM of a team with actual players for a little less than four years.

In between: That expansion draft was widely panned, not just because of who the Kraken took but because they failed to make any significant moves around the draft or their cap space. The Golden Knights had built a Cup contender by doing that in 2018, although it's fair to say other GMs weren't going to fall for the same trick again. But still ... nothing?



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Combined with doing very little in terms of big moves in his subsequent years, it's not an impressive track record for such a crucial role in a new market.

Signature move: Was there one? I guess you could say getting two firsts from Tampa for Yanni Gourde.

Bottom line: In the end, I don't think he counts. But he deserves a mention.

7. Michael Barnett, Coyotes

Hired: August 2001, when he followed longtime client Wayne Gretzky to Arizona as a rookie GM

Fired: April 2007

In between: The Coyotes made the playoffs in Barnett's first year, winning one game before being knocked aside by the Sharks. That was it for the postseason, as the team dropped to just 67 points by Barnett's last year. That said, it would be fair to mention that anyone running the Coyotes during this time period had the deck stacked against them.

Signature move: Sending a young Danny Briere to the Sabres at the 2003 deadline.

Bottom line: Let's face it, Barnett was in Arizona because of Gretzky, and Gretzky was there to sell tickets, and none of it really worked.

6. Doug MacLean, Blue Jackets and Scott Howson, Blue Jackets (tie)

Wait, two guys? Yeah, I didn't feel like picking on one team with multiple entries. Say what you will about the Blue Jackets, but they love their long-serving GMs. Not counting interim guys, they've only had four in franchise history, and that includes Don Waddell.

Anyway, MacLean was the Blue Jackets' first GM, lasting from February 1998 to April 2007. Howson was next up, from June 2007 to February 2013.

In between: Between them, MacLean and Howson produced one playoff appearance and zero playoff wins. Hey, if it ain't broke ...

In fairness, remember that back then, expansion teams were given virtually nothing to work with. But MacLean didn't build much, and Howson's attempts to shove the franchise into relevancy did not work.

Signature move: For MacLean, drafting Rick Nash. For Howson, trading away Rick Nash.

Bottom line: MacLean's record was worse, although in theory, he had less to work with. Howson did what he could under the circumstances, but may best be remembered for getting a third-place vote as GM of the Year despite being fired a few weeks into the season.

5. Gerry McNamara, Maple Leafs

Hired: October 1981

Fired: February 1988

In between: "GM the GM" built the 1980s Maple Leafs, a team noted for all the success they had. But of course, McNamara was working for Harold Ballard, quite possibly the worst owner in all of pro sports, so he had no chance. Ballard was the one forcing some of McNamara's most unpopular moves, like trading Darryl Sittler to the Flyers.

Signature move: Managing the team into the league basement in time to draft Wendel Clark No. 1 in 1985.

Bottom line: McNamara didn't make as many moves as you'd think, basically letting the Leafs drift into a ditch over nearly a decade while his owner counted money and kicked puppies. That said ... the Ed Olczyk trade was an underrated banger.

4. Rejean Houle, Canadiens

Hired: October 1995, despite having no front office experience, after Canadiens president Ronald Corey had decided to clean house just a few days into the season.

Fired: November 2000

In between: Yes, Houle just gets in under the wire, clocking in at five years and a month. He had more on-ice success than most of the names on this list, making the playoffs in each of his first three years and even winning a round in 1998. Of course, he also took over a team that was just two years removed from a Cup, so maybe expectations should have been high.

But none of that really matters, because Houle will always be remembered as the GM who traded away arguably the greatest goalie of all time for a handful of magic beans just a few weeks into the job. There was more to that story than just a GM making a bad move — a lot more — but it seemed bad at the time and isn't looking any better three decades later.

Signature move: The Patrick Roy trade. But Houle pulled off another poorly received blockbuster a year later, sending captain Pierre Turgeon to St. Louis for Shayne Corson.

Bottom line: I'll be honest, I remember Houle as the guy from the Roy trade, and was surprised to find out that he stuck around this long.

3. Kevyn Adams, Sabres

Hired: June 2020

Fired: Apparently never.

In between: No playoff appearances, little in the way of hope, lots of fan unrest, and the occasional article like this one.

Signature move: Definitely the Jack Eichel trade, and everything that led up to it.

Bottom line: It's always dangerous to put somebody on a list like this when they're still building out their body of work. Maybe this looks bad in a year or two. Let's just say that right now, I'm not getting that vibe.

2. Jim Benning, Canucks

Hired: May 2014

Fired: December 2021

In between: The Canucks made the playoffs in Benning's first year, with a roster still mostly built by former GM Mike Gillis. They made it again in the 24-team bubble year. In the other five years, they finished under .500.

Signature move: His best and arguably biggest move was trading for J.T. Miller. But in general, the Benning era was known for disappointing drafts and the constant promise that the team didn't need to rebuild because they were almost there. They were not.

Bottom line: Every Canucks fan right now is going "Wait, Benning wasn't first?" But then they remembered the one name we haven't mentioned yet ...

1. Mike Milbury, Islanders

Hired: December 1995

Fired: June 2006

In between: Hoo boy.

Look, the one thing you can say about Mike Milbury as a GM: He was not afraid to take a big swing. I do a lot of complaining about timid GMs who are scared of sticking their necks out, so I guess I have to give credit where it's due — Milbury was not that guy. He made plenty of big moves.



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The problem is that those moves rarely worked. And some of them were downright awful. So were his teams, which missed the playoffs in seven of his 10 seasons and never won a round.

Signature move: Do you go with trading a young Roberto Luongo? Drafting Rick DiPietro No. 1? Trading Jason Spezza and Zdeno Chara for Alexei Yashin? The Yashin contract? Trevor Linden? Bryan Berard? Ziggy Palffy? The list goes on. And on. And on ...

Bottom line: For Islanders fans, the Milbury era might be the ultimate example of that curse about living in interesting times.

Honorable mentions

Kevin Lowe in Edmonton. Phil Esposito in Tampa Bay. Pierre Dorion in Ottawa. Chuck Fletcher in Minnesota. Don Waddell in Atlanta. And maybe Garth Snow in New York, although he turned out to be pretty good for a backup goalie.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.12.2025

1371394 Websites

The Athletic / The number of NHL injuries is on the rise. How are teams navigating them so far?

By Shayna Goldman

There are too many ways to get injured in the NHL. It's the risk and reality of playing a high-speed contact sport, on an ice surface, with 90-plus mph pucks flying around, and sharp blades on everyone's boots. And this year, that all may be exacerbated by a condensed Olympic schedule.

Whatever the reason(s), injuries are on the rise around the NHL. The best teams have to find a way through it, with a "next man up" mentality to fill lineup gaps.

Just look at the Lightning, who have been dealing with major absences this season: Ryan McDonagh, Erik Cernak, Brayden Point and Andrei Vasilevskiy have all missed time. So did Victor Hedman — 12 games, to be exact, before returning last Saturday against the Islanders. That put players such as JJ Moser to the test, and he responded with a 58 percent xG rate and helped Tampa Bay outscore opponents 12-2 in tough five-on-five minutes. When Hedman exited Tuesday's game in Montreal early, Moser again stepped up.

The Lightning are far from the only team familiar with the injury bug this year, so let's take a look at how some teams are navigating key absences so far this season.

Matthew Tkachuk/Aleksander Barkov, Florida Panthers

It's impossible to have an injury conversation without the reigning champs. It's not the first time the Panthers have come into the year short-handed — in 2023-24, they had to start the season without two of their top-four defensemen when Aaron Ekblad and Brandon Montour were sidelined. But this year's hill has been a lot steeper with the team's two best forwards, Barkov and Tkachuk, absent.

That has thrust players such as Sam Reinhart, Sam Bennett and Anton Lundell into greater roles than they generally are tasked with. The problem is, when players such as Reinhart and Bennett slip on the scoresheet — which is entirely reasonable considering the situation — it's a lot more glaring when they are Florida's No. 1 and 2 forwards, instead of the 3, 4 or 5.

Carter Verhaeghe, Brad Marchand and Lundell, at least, have all picked up the offensive pace recently. That's even more promising with Tkachuk's return on the horizon; adding a star winger back to the top of the depth chart should have a trickle-down effect on the rest of the lineup.

But there is still going to be a Barkov-sized hole the rest of the year. Florida's team defense isn't as stout without a player who puts up elite results against top competition, which is a pivotal part of it. So the Panthers have to find new ways to tighten up defensively, or get more goalie support, if they are going to claw their way back into playoff standing.

Jack Hughes/Brett Pesce, New Jersey Devils

The Devils were already strained when Jack Hughes was sidelined; two-way cracks had started to form a few weeks earlier when Brett Pesce went down with an injury.

At five-on-five, Pesce absorbed the toughest workload in terms of quality of competition to open the season. And while he wasn't flashy in that time, he was a stabilizing force on both ends of the ice with the Devils giving up 0.78 fewer expected goals per 60 relative to the rest of the team. But since he has been sidelined, a few things have happened: 1) Luke Hughes, his mainstay partner, hasn't been as strong on either end of the ice, 2) Simon Nemeč has seen his minutes rise, and the process hasn't always matched what the scoresheet shows in that time and 3) the penalty kill has struggled more.

The Hughes injury then added another massive pressure point. Nico Hischier, at least, has stepped up as the de facto 1C on the scoresheet, despite some downward trends in his two-way game (that started before Hughes left the lineup). But a lack of depth below that top line has only been exposed over the last month of play. Dawson Mercer hasn't been as effective since shifting back to center, and the team has been outscored 9-6 without him or Hischier on the ice at five-on-five since Nov. 13. And that's contributed to the team going 5-8-0 in the 13 games without Hughes (0.385 point percentage), after a 12-4-1 start (0.735).

Anthony Stolarz/Joseph Woll, Toronto Maple Leafs

At full strength, there are obvious roster holes in Toronto, which have suppressed the team's record so far this season. The stars haven't consistently shone bright enough. The secondary scoring, once again, lacks. And the defense has seriously slipped, especially with both Chris Tanev and Brandon Carlo injured.

And now, the team is without both of its NHL-level goalies.

Anthony Stolarz was far from perfect in his 13 appearances before sustaining an upper-body injury. But his workload was also more challenging, with the Leafs giving up more shots, chances and rushes to open the year, and that seemed to weigh on him in his last three appearances in particular.

Joseph Woll, at least, was ready for his season debut a couple of days later. He gave his team a chance to win with six quality starts in eight outings ... until he also got injured.

So now it's the Dennis Hildeby show in Toronto, and he has played a key part in the Leafs' recent turnaround. Hildeby has earned a quality start in all of his appearances so far and has saved a collective 12 goals above expected in 11 games. As much as the team is starting to trend up in front of the blue paint, goaltending has been the difference over the last month — especially in short-handed situations, with a combined 0.949 save percentage in 12 games since Stolarz went down.

Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets

Goaltending tends to be The Difference in Winnipeg. When Connor Hellebuyck is at his MVP-level, he can push this team far above



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expectations. And when he wilts in the playoffs, it crushes this group's chances of advancing.

Hellebuyck's efforts (and a high shooting percentage) helped mask some of the Jets' struggles in the first month of action, while the team was without defensive stalwarts Dylan Samberg and Adam Lowry. The team stayed above .500 with an 11-7-0 record in its first 18 games. But that has plummeted since Hellebuyck had arthroscopic knee surgery. Over the last 11 games, the team has a 0.318 points percentage (and 3-7-1 record), which ranks 31st in that stretch.

Changes in goaltending obviously are a driving force behind that. Eric Comrie's GSAX may be average through 10 games, but two stellar outings are doing a lot of the work there. Take out a combined seven goals saved above expected against the Sabres and Canadiens last week, and it exposes a GSAX of minus-6.76 in his eight other appearances.

Still, this doesn't fall solely on Comrie's shoulders. He doesn't have enough goal support, and the defense has been far from perfect even after Lowry and Samberg's returns. If anything, these last few weeks show where this team needs to improve to get back to contender status in front of their franchise goaltender.

Lukáš Dostál, Anaheim Ducks

The Ducks' abysmal defense has made goaltending all the more important in Anaheim over the years. While this team started to improve in early November, its xG has ticked right back up over the last stretch. Through 30 games, the Ducks have given up 3.17 goals per 60, which ranks 31st in the league, ahead of only the Canucks.

While Dostál can be his team's backbone, not everyone has the chops to play in that environment. What made this situation even trickier is that Petr Mrázek also went down with an injury a couple of games after Dostál, making Ville Husso The Guy over the last couple of weeks, when he really hasn't had to play a starting workload at the NHL level since early in the 2023-24 season.

At least, unlike seasons past, this team gives its netminders goal support with its high-octane offense. The Ducks have scored 3.39 goals per 60 since Dostál went down, which is a key reason for their 5-3-0 record. But Husso deserves credit, too. His numbers are from perfect (0.893 save percentage, GSAX of 2.95), but he has still stepped over the last few weeks. Just take Tuesday night, when he helped steal two points against the Penguins with a dramatic overtime win.

Jacob Slavin, Carolina Hurricanes

There has been a lot of roster turnover on the Canes' back end in recent seasons, and the system gets a lot of credit for that plug-and-play mentality. But Jacob Slavin also deserves a lot of credit for his consistently elite defensive play, which has helped keep that blue line stable and clicking at a high rate.

So the fact that the Hurricanes sit second in the Metropolitan Division despite Slavin's absence in 27 or 29 games this season is truly impressive. But it's still clear that this team misses its most valuable player, especially over the last couple of weeks in short-handed situations.

The Hurricanes are known for having one of the league's strongest penalty kills — their strategy revolves around a stingy defense and an aggressive playing style. But over the last month, this team has allowed a higher rate of scoring chances against — 9.50 xG against per 60, to be exact. And that's proven costly on the scoresheet, with Carolina's goalies allowing 10.8 goals against per 60.

Slavin's impending return should help revitalize the Hurricanes' penalty kill and tighten up the team's even-strength defense that has been a little leaky over the last stretch.

Charlie McAvoy, Boston Bruins

The retooling Bruins weren't expected to be in the playoff picture this season. But the team's three cornerstones, David Pastrnak, Jeremy Swayman and Charlie McAvoy, have helped this group exceed expectations.

After missing five games, Pastrnak returned on Tuesday night, and it was the first time the team strung together back-to-back wins since McAvoy was sidelined. So his return should give this team a real boost on the back end.

Before his injury, McAvoy was playing matchup minutes on the top pair with Nikita Zadorov. In their 131 five-on-five minutes together, Boston earned a 55.6 percent xG rate and outscored opponents 5-2. Without McAvoy, Jonathan Aspirot and Andrew Peeke have been leaned on more.

While the Bruins have outscored opponents 8-3 with the Zadorov-Aspirot pairing on, the process isn't as smooth below the surface, with a 48 percent xG rate. Peeke in a larger role is even more concerning — his pair with Hampus Lindholm has been outscored 7-1, with a 43 percent xG rate, since McAvoy has been out.

Adam Fox, New York Rangers

Between his play on a crumbling Rangers team in 2024-25 and his showing at 4 Nations, the perception around Adam Fox's game shifted a lot over the last year. But his play so far this season only reinforces his value as one of the top defensemen in the league.

Fox's plus-9.9 Net Rating ranks third in the league among the position, behind only Cale Makar and Jakob Chychrun. His play in his own zone has been a key component of that; only Shea Theodore and Matt Roy rank higher in Defensive Rating. That all-around game excelled alongside Vladislav Gavrikov against top competition. Together, they earned a 59 percent xG rate and 16-11 scoring edge in 449 minutes.

Without Fox, Braden Schneider has been moved up to Gavrikov's right, and the results have been less than stellar — the team is just below break-even in expected goals, and has been outscored 6-3.

New York doesn't have a great way to replace Fox's special teams' impact, either. Without another high-end puck-mover or natural PP quarterback, the Rangers opted for a five-forward power play in Fox's absence — but that experiment may be coming to an end after an awful showing on Wednesday night.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.12.2025

1371395 Websites

The Athletic / There have been 4 NHL hand-pass goal reviews in 7 days. What's going on?

By The Athletic NHL Staff

So far in the 2025-26 NHL season, there have been five goals reviewed for a potential hand pass. Four have come in the past week.

Coaches haven't minced words on the bench or after the game, both about the calls themselves and a perceived lack of consistency from game to game. "I don't think anybody in the league knows, anymore, where it comes from," Buffalo Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said after a hand-pass call waved off a goal against the Edmonton Oilers.

The NHL's position is that the rash of calls is an odd trend but not yet something in need of immediate attention. On Tuesday, at the conclusion



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of the Board of Governors meeting in Colorado Springs, league commissioner Gary Bettman was asked whether these plays needed to be looked at or addressed.

"No," he said. "1,312 games (per season), how many thousands of calls and non-calls? Two situations, as you called them, does not a situation make. We'll look at it long-term and, if necessary, we'll review it with the general managers in March."

Two more hand-pass reviews have occurred since that statement.

Here's a rundown of the four incidents and what coaches had to say.

Dec. 4: Tampa Bay Lightning vs. Pittsburgh Penguins

With Tampa Bay's net empty, the Penguins' Erik Karlsson rimmed the puck from his defensive zone. The pass hit Lightning forward Brandon Hagel's hand as he stood along the boards, and the Lightning retained possession. Twelve seconds later, Nikita Kucherov ripped what would've been the game-tying goal into the Penguins net.

The Lightning tied the game LATE in the 3rd period but the goal was OVERTURNED after a league-initiated review for a hand-pass from Brandon Hagel 🤔👀 pic.twitter.com/WQLZN6WtE7

— Gino Hard (@GinoHard_) December 5, 2025

Lightning coach Jon Cooper called the decision to overturn the call "laughable."

"You could really debate whether an advantage was gained. Did Brandon Hagel direct that puck knowing exactly where it was going? No. Would you sit here today and say Brandon Hagel was maybe protecting his face from a puck hitting it, or protecting some part of his body? If I threw this microphone at you right now, would you put your hand up to stop it? Hell yeah, you would," he said. "And he didn't direct any pucks. That was a bang-bang play. There were tons of guys around. It turned out we got it first. A lot of play, a lot of the game developed after that, and the puck went in the net."

Dec. 6: Florida Panthers vs. Columbus Blue Jackets

Midway through the second period, Panthers forward Brad Marchand appeared to try to catch a puck behind the Blue Jackets net. Instead, the puck hit his glove and went back onto the ice. Seth Jones scored from the point shortly after.

This was deemed not a hand pass on the Panthers second goal. Lightning fans would've liked these refs a couple nights ago. pic.twitter.com/CQM6bTsgap

— Spittin' Chiclets (@spittinchiclets) December 6, 2025

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason challenged but lost, much to his chagrin — both on the bench and in his postgame press conference.

"It's a joke," he said. "An absolute joke."

Dec. 9: Edmonton Oilers vs. Buffalo Sabres

Midway through the second period, Rasmus Dahlin put a puck on net. The rebound went off Stuart Skinner and hit Alex Tuch's glove as he stood in front of the net. Tage Thompson then grabbed the loose puck and scored.

Tage Thompson goal wiped out for a missed stoppage in play. They didn't say what though #LetsGoBuffalo #LetsGoOilers pic.twitter.com/7v1TvQPW6a

— Buffalo Hockey Moments (@SabresPlays) December 10, 2025

"I thought the glove pass, I don't know where that came from either," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said after the game. "I don't think anybody in the league knows, anymore, where it comes from."

"There's no explanation," Ruff said after the game. "I mean, I've watched every hand pass, from the Marchand one to the ones that are called hand passes. There are two hands on his stick. I don't even think he sees the puck. There's no hand off the stick. I don't know how they come up with hand pass. It boggles me. Somebody had to explain it to me. How that one is, and the one in Florida I watched isn't — no explanation."

Dec. 10: Chicago Blackhawks vs. New York Rangers

Midway through the second period, Blackhawks forward Colton Dach, having just fallen to the ice behind the net, stopped a loose puck with his hand while sitting on the ice. He moved his stick to try to play it, but teammate Ilya Mikheyev grabbed possession first. He fed it to Ryan Donato in the slot, and the forward beat Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin with a shot.

Shesterkin immediately signaled to the referee that he thought there should have been a stoppage, and Rangers coach Mike Sullivan challenged. The referees didn't need long to review: They ruled the play should've been whistled dead. The Chicago crowd met their announcement with boos.

The Blackhawks have their 2nd goal overturned after a challenge for a hand pass on Colton Dach pic.twitter.com/Lwzitz3kim

— Gino Hard (@GinoHard_) December 11, 2025

"That one was probably pretty easy based on the way the rule is," Blackhawks coach Jeff Blashill said after the game. "As soon as I saw it, I was hoping as Dach was trying to touch it ... he touched it. But I knew that was going to be called back."

Sullivan agreed: "I thought that one was pretty clear-cut, but given the circumstances around the league there's a little ambiguity there."

The Athletic LOADED: 12.12.2025

1371396 Websites

ESPN / Pirates and sunshine: Inside the 2026 NHL Stadium Series jersey's inspiration –

Greg Wyshynski

For the Boston Bruins, it's sunshine and bear attacks. For the Tampa Bay Lightning, it's weather patterns and pirates.

On Feb. 1, 2026 at Raymond James Stadium -- home of the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers -- it's two more jerseys in the tradition of the NHL Stadium Series' bold design choices.

"They really capture what the Stadium Series is about: taking chances, leaning in, designing toward the future of the game and having fun doing it," said Dom Fillion, creative director for Fanatics.

The Bruins are playing in their sixth NHL outdoor game, while the Lightning are playing in their second. The Bolts' font and "stair step" design on the front reference their first outdoor game sweaters worn in Nashville in 2022.

Since the Stadium Series is being held at the home of the Buccaneers -- and during Tampa's Gasparilla festival -- there's pirate inspiration found throughout the Lightning jersey.

The jerseys feature a new patch logo for the Lightning on the shoulder. It's a crest with the team's name wrapped around a white skull with a lightning bolt on its head -- a little Ziggy Stardust, a little Jolly Roger -- and two pirate sabers crossed at the bottom. Fillion said the Lightning



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have done variations of skull logos before on fan jerseys, but this custom art logo is the first time they'll wear one on a game jersey.

Like Mardi Gras, the Gasparilla festival has become synonymous with the wearing (and throwing) of plastic beads. While Fanatics wouldn't explicitly cite Gasparilla as an inspiration, there are blue and white strands of "pirate beads" inside the collar of the Stadium Series jersey.

The "pirate beads" are also found on the embossing within the light blue stripes around the waist and the arms of the sweater. They connect the team's "Bolt for Life" logo with the lightning bolt skull found on the shoulder patch, which Fanatics said is meant to "recognize the team's season ticket base."

As they do on every specialty jersey, there's a small patch on the back of the sweater as an "Easter Egg" for fans. On these Lightning jerseys, it's a tattered Lightning logo flag that looks as if it could have been raised on a pirate ship.

These jerseys introduce a new shade of blue into the team's color palette, which honors their traditional team hues while acknowledging the outdoor game held in the Sunshine State.

It's within that new sky-blue tone that the jerseys have their other big innovation: an actual representation of lightning on a Lightning jersey.

This isn't the first time that has been attempted. Their alternate jerseys from the 1990s had cartoon lightning bolts down the sleeves, a look that was revived in their 2022 "Reverse Retro" jerseys. But this photo-realistic lightning in the letters and the numbers is a first for Tampa Bay, and a design element that was painstakingly tested.

Fillion said his team worked with digital artists and their factory to make sure they had the right materials and colors to execute the concept. Artists crafted each "vein" of lightning to make sure it was the right width, location and that there was the right amount of it on the jerseys. The sky-blue color and the coloring on the bolts themselves was tweaked to ensure they would pop, according to Fillion.

"It's all part of why people think we might be a little bit crazy within the design space, but being obsessed about the details ultimately makes a difference," he said.

— ESPN (@espn) December 12, 2025

Color choice was also the most important part of the Bruins' Stadium Series jersey, which introduces a much brighter and vibrant shade of gold for the team.

Like for the Lightning, Fanatics created a new logo for the Bruins on their shoulders: The letter "B" with five claw marks scratched around it. The claw mark motif is also found on Boston's pants and helmets.

The crest of the jersey features the "Bruins" bear shoulder patch that was introduced this season and the word "Boston" in the front -- a homage to their jerseys from the 1920s that incorporated both the city name and nickname for the team.

Another design element for this Bruins jersey is a nod to playing an outdoor game in Florida: an embossed sunburst pattern on the sleeves, which is also found on the "Easter Egg" tag on the back of the sweater.

Finally, the Bruins jersey also has a design element in the collar that might not make Hartford Whalers nostalgists happy. The acronyms of the six states that make up New England, including Connecticut.

ESPN LOADED: 12.12.2025

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Sportsnet.ca / 32 Thoughts: Everything we know about Quinn Hughes and the Canucks

Elliott Friedman

- Devils trying to get business done
- Why the cap isn't likely to rise more than projected
- Fate of the Olympics is with the players

Let's open with a few thoughts on Quinn Hughes. Everything I think I know and admissions on what I don't.

WE'RE HERE SOONER THAN EXPECTED

Back at the NHL/NHLPA media tour in Vegas, Hughes deflected questions about his future, stating his sole concern was getting off to a good start. Everyone — including both Hughes and the Canucks — thought we'd see how this season went, and go from there. Unfortunately, the Canucks aren't anywhere near where they hoped, and recently let teams know they were willing to discuss their veterans.

That wasn't supposed to be about Hughes, but, as Brian Burke said in 2005 after not realizing Joe Thornton's availability until too late: if you snooze, you lose. So they asked. Rutherford's reputation for moving early put other GMs on alert. Plus, you don't want to move your best assets elsewhere if Hughes is what you crave.

Before they were really prepared to, the Canucks had to consider an acquisition cost. And, Hughes had to wrap his head around the fact he might not finish the season in the Lower Mainland. There were rumours Hughes informed the Canucks last summer he wouldn't re-sign, but this has been ferociously denied by multiple sources. I don't think he was expecting this when the puck dropped in October.

WHEN WILL THIS HAPPEN?

This is what I'm least certain about. Vancouver has to get this right. I've heard the ask is very high, as it should be. One exec told me it is "outrageous." I replied, "Probably not outrageous enough." He laughed.

A young, impactful centre is very important to them. A deal is not impossible without one, but it will require something special to offset that desire. I got a few notes wondering if Detroit was "hiding" Marco Kasper Monday in Vancouver as a winger, but, as a lefty, he splits faceoffs with righty Nate Danielson, depending on where it is. That game, he took six and Danielson four.

Not impossible they wait until the draft, preferring no deal than a bad deal. But all of this noise exists for a reason. Talks are underway.

WHO'S IN THIS?

I always believe there are teams I don't see. This is Quinn Hughes, for God's sake. Who wouldn't want him?

New Jersey is obvious. I've been on Detroit for a while. Washington is around, but I don't think the Canucks can snare the Capitals' best young players. I know there've been suggestions about the Rangers, but I don't see the trade match. Philadelphia doesn't have the centre, so what else can the Flyers come up with? I mentioned Pittsburgh, but a few sources pooh-poohed this brainstorm.

Team I always assume tries: Carolina.

This, however, ignores the entire Western Conference. You know who has a lot of picks and prospects? Utah. Which brings us to...

HOW MUCH SAY DOES HUGHES HAVE?

This is a multi-layered question.



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Hughes does not have no-trade or no-move protection. Therefore, the Canucks can trade him anywhere they wish, and have indicated they are prepared to do just that. While it's believed Hughes prefers East long-term, the Canucks could send him West if one of those teams stepped up and took a chance.

Of course, there's no tampering in the NHL, but you can be certain any landing spot will want an idea if it appeals to the 2024 Norris Trophy winner. A few teams believe Washington, depending on the price, would consider a two-year stay, because there'd be something very special about another Stanley Cup run while Alexander Ovechkin remains a Capital.

WHAT ARE THE WILD CARDS?

Again, I always ask myself what I don't see.

There's one option we haven't considered: the Canucks can't extend Hughes until July 1, but nothing prevents them from talking to him. They could promise eight years at a monster number. It would require Hughes committing for a few more seasons, with the understanding that if he doesn't like what he sees at a certain point, he would be moved.

On Sept. 15, 2026, new CBA contract rules kick-in, with maximum term dropping to seven years and tighter limits on bonus payments. You'd think, if Hughes is traded, he'd get an extension before then, but it's not guaranteed. And, if Vancouver holds him into next year, he might not get one until the rules change.

My only question is if this would work. Hughes might not get what the Canucks are willing to do somewhere else, but he's still going to be handsomely paid. If he doesn't believe in what's around him, I don't see this working.

A lot of variables, no doubt. Which path is really the Canucks' choice.

32 THOUGHTS

1. Best quote from the Board of Governors: Was talking with an executive about how close the standings are. I said there used to be a joke about long-time NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle wanting pure parity, every team at 8-8. "We don't have parity," the governor said, deadpan. "We have Gar-ity," a nod to NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman. I'm still laughing.

2. On the Devils: they are legitimately trying to get business done, but to add, they have to subtract. If the team they are trading with isn't willing to take back salary, they must find other options — which they are trying to do. There are several no-trade or modified no-trade clauses, harder to thread the needle. That's why I believe things got out, they have hands in a few different places. (And all the best to Timo Meier, away for family reasons.)

3. In addition to Tristan Jarry, I believe the Oilers poked around Alex Lyon. Not as seriously as Jarry, but it was there. One thing I should have mentioned last Saturday about Jarry, in addition to Pittsburgh's unwillingness to eat salary, is that the Penguins' surprise addition to the Eastern Conference race gives them less motivation for an in-season sale. Not impossible, but not as high a priority.

4. Also with Pittsburgh: the Hoffman family's exclusive window to purchase the Penguins has expired. Doesn't mean the sale can't (or won't) happen — I've heard they are still pushing to close — but the process is once again open to other bids.

5. I had several sources indicate Los Angeles is not inclined to deal Phillip Danault without very good reason, because it is so hard to find centres. No matter his current struggles now, he's been very good for the Kings in the playoffs, despite their inability to climb the Edmonton mountain.

6. Those looking for a middleman are keeping a closer watch on Anaheim's Ryan Strome. Delayed start to the season, in-and-out of the

lineup. Ducks surging, is there a spot for him? If not, there will be interest.

7. Some other names to keep an eye on as they fight for lineup time: Maxim Tsyplov (Islanders) and Matias Maccelli (Toronto). I'm surprised at Tsyplov, I think there's a good player there. He had a strong NHL debut in 2024-25, but struggled to start this year and was squeezed out of the now-deeper Long Island lineup. Thankfully, Patrick Roy said Bo Horvat's injury isn't serious, so there may be a short window for Tsyplov to re-establish himself, but I heard other teams are poking around.

Maccelli, unfortunately, hasn't been a fit for the Maple Leafs. I don't believe they were the only team who looked at him in the summer, so some of those clubs may circle back.

8. It probably won't happen until Jaden Schwartz returns, but keep an eye on Seattle's Mason Marchment. He's another one who had several pursuers that could re-visit trading for him.

9. It's very clear now the fate of the highly-anticipated, long-awaited 2026 Olympic men's hockey tournament is with the players. As Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said Monday, "If players feel the ice is unsafe, then we're not going to play."

We know this: if the event was being played on a surface made of pancakes and syrup, the players would shrug and compete pedal to metal. The Olympics matter to them. They fought for it in this CBA, more of a priority to them than many financial issues. And, we all know what physical punishment they will ignore in games of high-consequence.

This whole situation reminds of the 2003 Montreal/Edmonton Heritage Classic at Commonwealth Stadium. It was so cold and the ice so brittle that the late Bob Goodenow told the players they had the option not to play. Led by captains Saku Koivu and Jason Smith, the two teams felt cancellation was not an option and agreed to make it a no-hitter. The show was so successful that outdoor games are a yearly event.

The most interesting voice will be NHLPA assistant Executive Director Ron Hainsey, who said last weekend that "the health and safety of our players while playing on any ice surface will not be compromised." During his 1,132 NHL games, Hainsey fought hard for player rights, so if he gets to Milan and thinks the ice is dangerous...we've got a serious problem. But, hearing Daly say what he did convinced me more than ever only an absolutely epic screwup of historic proportions will prevent this tournament from happening — because the players will make it work.

10. My attitude there will be: no matter what happens, I'm going to enjoy it. That said, you can feel the frustration, concern, and anger among the league/governors, who feel they were given more empty promises than a parent asking a teenager to clean their room. What's happened is "laughable, but not funny," one said. Even those who support NHL participation "because of the big picture" are shaking their heads.

Then-Ottawa GM John Muckler always felt Dominik Hasek's 2006 Turin injury cost the Senators the Stanley Cup. The Islanders were furious at John Tavares' 2014 broken leg. The construction delays increase their worries of a 2026 version ruining this season. Part of the deal the NHL made with the International Olympic Committee was that team owners received tickets and access to the games. Daly said Monday the league also learned that Hockey House — for hospitality — won't exist at all. It's a smaller thing, but part of the overall annoyance. Hopefully, on Feb. 22, when the gold medals are awarded, we are celebrating such a phenomenal tournament we will laugh at how concerned we were.

11. Teams certainly sound like they don't want the cap raised from the targeted \$104M in 2026-27. If revenues continue at the current pace (Bettman said between \$6.8-\$6.9B in US dollars), there would be room to rise. But, now it appears they would rather send a "top-up" payment to the players (to ensure the revenue split is 50/50) rather than raise the cap. That's new, but it shows how much they are wary of the rapidly-



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rising ceiling — even with new revenue-sharing rules to help the middle-class.

12. Okay, now we arrive at hand-pass craziness, which has only gotten worse this week. I'm very impressed the Situation Room remembered a 2024 Yegor Sharangovich score as precedent for why the puck hitting Brad Marchand's glove should not erase the goal that started Florida's 7-6 comeback against Columbus. But, it's not right the Blue Jackets were penalized.

Two days after the Lightning's tying goal against Pittsburgh was erased, how could Dean Evason not challenge? Is it reasonable for him to remember something from 13 months ago? Within 10 seconds of Florida's goal being ruled good, one GM texted, "Let's see you explain this one." In fairness, there are some who felt that if the puck deflects backwards, that's not a hand-pass. Anyways, I think replay rules should be amended, and a wrong challenge on your first attempt should not be penalty. There are too many inconsistencies, too many plays — especially goaltender interference — that look similar and are ruled differently. You get one freebie. Second miss (and on from there), bench minor.

Some coaches feel very strongly there should be no penalty ever, that it should simply be about getting it right, but, then replay gets used as a tactic, an extra timeout to slow opponent momentum. That's awful to watch, too. But too many people who watch too much hockey cannot differentiate between too similar plays. Maybe that's life in a judgement-call world, but I don't feel anymore it should be an automatic penalty on first offence.

13. As for hand-passes themselves, there has to be a better way to define them. Montreal's winning goal in Buffalo on Remembrance Day 2024 counted because the puck hit Mike Matheson's glove when he was reaching with his stick. He wasn't trying to use his hand, it just hit him there. Maybe it's that simple: if you try to play the puck, it's no goal no matter where it goes.

The great Lou Nanne suggested allowing players to use their hands everywhere, since it's already allowed in the defensive zone. I'm not as crazy about that idea. I'd actually prefer no hand passes anywhere, but was reminded the league would rather not have more whistles blowing play dead when defenders do this under pressure — because they will.

14. As promised, the NHL did warn teams about players not wearing helmets as mandated for pregame warmups. (Exemptions: players in the league before 2019-20 and rookie laps.) Clubs were notified of \$25,000 fines to either them or the head coach for a first offence, increasing "exponentially for each successive violation."

15. The NHL said it would announce 2028 World Cup venues sometime after the Olympics. Vegas was one of the bidders. It makes a lot of sense for what the league and NHLPA are going for. Biggest challenge: in the past, they have said they don't like a Western North American location when teams are coming from Europe for the final rounds. Really long travel. Extra few hours.

16. Idea that may make sense to only me: Canada names Adin Hill to its initial Olympic roster. Hill's earliest return date was Christmas, which is unlikely. So they name him, and replace him with someone else who steps up — or continues to play well — in January. Maybe Hill comes back and keeps the job himself. Of course, Canada could just name Jordan Binnington, Darcy Kuemper and Logan Thompson right away.

17. Went to Washington on Wednesday to do a piece on Tom Wilson's bid for a Team Canada berth. Boy, are his teammates and the Capitals organization lining up in support of him. Whenever we enter a post-Ovechkin world, very good chance Wilson is the Capitals' next captain. His brother Jamie is a huge Blue Jays fan. After they lost the World Series, Tom texted condolences. Jamie didn't respond for days. Many Canadians can identify with that.

18. John Carlson — without a second of pause — destroyed any rumours about retiring. "No chance."

19. Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis, asked if he'd called Jon Cooper on behalf of Nick Suzuki: "I pleaded my case in the summer."

20. Teammate Luke Gazdic did a segment on a recent Canadiens broadcast praising Cole Caufield because he doesn't stick-handle a ton. "Catch and release. Trusts the puck," Luke said. Asked about that last weekend, St. Louis said he thinks many young players "stickhandle too much." He prefers lacrosse-style, always in position to shoot. He also pointed to Nikita Kucherov, saying he's always got his stick in a place where it is dangerous.

21. Toronto promised to be very careful with Joseph Woll, and Dennis Hildeby's strong performance gave them room to breathe. He could play as soon as this weekend, and if not, early next week. But they won't push him too hard as he returns, again.

22. Have mentioned a few times now that the NHL wants to increase its footprint into Germany. Edmonton (Leon Draisaitl) vs. Ottawa (Tim Stutzle) makes too much sense not to happen. In his Board of Governors interview with Kyle Bukauskas, Senators owner Michael Andlauer sure made it sound like that's as inevitable as Thanos.

23. For record-keeping purposes, percentage of teams to make the playoffs who held a spot on American Thanksgiving, post-COVID; 75 per cent in 2021-22, 2023-24 and 2024-25; 81.3 per cent in 2022-23.

24. Another note about how close NHL games are: a couple of weeks ago, a friend did a calculation of what every team's record would look like if we still had ties. The NHL record is 24, set by the 1969-70 Flyers. He found 11 teams en route to break it, and 11 more "just off the pace."

25. Through Wednesday, Sidney Crosby is on-pace for 51 goals. Now 38, he has a chance to break Alexander Ovechkin's record as the NHL's oldest 50-goal scorer. The Great Eight was almost 37 when he did it in 2021-22.

26. As I write this Thursday night, Nathan MacKinnon is plus-38. Only one player since 1986-87 has reached the Top-50 for a single-season plus/minus in NHL history. That's Johnny Gaudreau, plus-64 in 2021-22, tied for 45th place. Brad Park (1971-72), Al Sims (1973-74), Mike Bossy (1978-79) and Brian Engblom (1980-81, better broadcaster than a defenceman) are in a four-way tie for 47th at plus-63. MacKinnon has a shot at that extremely rare air. Bobby Orr holds the record, a ridiculous plus-124 in 1970-71.

27. I've had a few debates about Mark Stone's Olympic candidacy, mainly because of the injuries. The smaller ice makes him more of a lock for me. Plus, he's got 24 points in 14 games. He leads the NHL in points-per-game at 1.71, slightly ahead of MacKinnon.

28. Some good podcast Thoughtline help this week. One listener asked if the Olympic break counted towards the 75 days necessary between trades, allowing a player's contract to be eligible for double-retention. We checked with the NHL, and were told the answer is yes. Anyone moved before the Dec. 20 Christmas freeze can have retention a second time. If that pause in the schedule did not count, no one traded now would qualify.

29. Detroit's 1-0 goal last Saturday in Seattle was Emmitt Finnie from Nate Danielson and Axel Sandin-Pellikka. Several Red Wings fans asked if that was the first time in NHL history three players from the same draft combined for a goal in their Rookie season. Great question. Shockingly, it was the 10th. (I would have guessed it happened, like, three times.) The last was Dec. 13, 2006 in a game Philadelphia lost 8-4 to Pittsburgh: Ryan Potulny from Stefan Ruzicka and Alexandre Picard.

30. The excellent Florida broadcaster, Steve Goldstein, has a son, Jake, who spent four years as a team manager for Western Michigan's hockey program. He then went to grad school at St. Thomas University in Miami,



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which decided to start a hockey program at the club level. They will play out of the Panthers' practice facility and Jake is running things. If you're interested in playing, email him at JGoldstein@stu.edu. I'm always happy to spread the hockey gospel and why not play where you can get a tan?

31. Shoutout to Eli Pulver from Vancouver, the backup to Daniel Hauser at NCAA Wisconsin. An old friend's son, Eli beat then-No. 1 Michigan State 5-4 and 2-1 on back-to-back nights in his first career starts at the end of November.

32. When I left the Fan in 1997, Eric Smith took over from me on the Raptors beat. He did a far superior job than me, for sure, and has now written a great book *We The Raptors* about 30 of the players he's covered throughout the team's 30-year history. He has a great story in there about Doug Christie's daughter wanting Michael Jordan's autograph after Toronto beat the Bulls, and he initially says no, because Pat Riley taught him that's not what you do. Of course, Christie relents, because it's his daughter. We're all suckers for our kids.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Fowler makes successful first impression in NHL debut

Eric Engels

PITTSBURGH — It was a night Jacob Fowler met his destiny, taking his first steps down the path paved by the great Montreal Canadiens goaltenders of the past.

The 21-year-old debuted with a win in Pittsburgh, just like Ken Dryden did in 1971, Patrick Roy did in 1985 and Carey Price did in 2007. Just like all of them, Fowler did it projecting the confidence of a goaltender who knew he belonged exactly where he was. Just like all of them, he arrived there sooner than anticipated. And just like all of them, he gave the Canadiens exactly what they needed when they needed it most.

"Fowler was so calm," said Juraj Slafkovsky, who set up two of Montreal's goals in the 4-2 win that saw his goaltender tested 38 times.

The Canadiens entered Thursday coming off a loss in which both of their other goaltenders were the opposite of calm.

Jakub Dobes allowed the first three goals before Samuel Montembeault replaced him to allow the next three in a 6-1 drubbing at the hands of the Tampa Bay Lightning, and the Canadiens were out of sorts in front of them.

In front of Fowler, they fed off his energy and denied the Penguins a shot until the end of the 10th minute of play.

How Fowler handled that, playing in his first-ever game, which was delayed 30 minutes due to an accident that prevented several Penguins players from reaching PPG Paints Arena on time, was a harbinger of things to come.

A back-door pass across the crease fed Anthony Mantha two scoring chances in that 10th minute, but Fowler smoothly stifled them with his left pad.

The kid ended the night with three straight saves on "Sid the Kid" Crosby, with stars in his eyes after receiving first-star honours. What made it so impressive was that Fowler quieted all the noise that came with being grouped with Canadiens royalty, and he silenced the buzz of being heir apparent to Montreal's four-by-six throne as he just focused on being the best version of himself.

"I think before, I always relied on certain moments in the past that kind of hold me grounded," Fowler said. "I've played on big stages before — the world juniors and the national championship — but I think I'm just living in the moment every day, right here, right now, not worrying about a shot that hasn't been taken yet. There's so many things that go around of who you play like or who you want to be like. I'd be lying if I didn't want to be like every great goalie who's ever played, but I understand that I've got to be myself, and that starts every day with doing the right things."

Those habits brought Fowler to stardom in the United States Hockey League, and then in the NCAA, in between at the world junior championship with Team USA, and finally with the Laval Rocket in the American Hockey League.

The vault towards becoming the first Florida-born goaltender to play in the NHL was inevitable, and he stuck the landing as expected.

"You're always hesitant to compare him to Price because it puts a lot of pressure on the kid," said Brendan Gallagher, who scored Montreal's second goal of the game in the same way he scored many goals in front of Price — with a one-timed shot to the roof.

"One thing I'll say is he seems to be very calm in the net and has limited movement, and that's something that Price did very well," Gallagher continued. "Price seemed to make hard saves look easy, and in the limited time I've seen Fowls, that's what I've seen. He's obviously a talented kid. He's done it every level he's played at."

Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis watched Fowler at the minor-league level, and at every other one after that, and he had an inkling of what he might look like in the NHL.

"I've known him from his youth hockey," he said earlier on Thursday. "From what I know, he's a gamer."

It's what permitted Fowler not to be intimidated by the last three shots from Crosby, not to mention the first four the Penguins' captain hit him with.

He wasn't rattled by the slot chances Bryan Rust had, nor the high-slot tips Erik Karlsson set.

And Fowler wasn't vexed, either, after Rust and Karlsson scored on him.

The six-foot-two, 213-pound goaltender just played the whole game even keel, square to shooters, gobbling up rebounds and, along the way, giving the Canadiens the confidence to play their game much more effectively than they did their last one.

They stopped more plays before they got to their zone, they managed the puck more efficiently, and they found a way to be more compact and connected defensively, even if they weren't perfect.

Putting the league's best power play to work six times wasn't part of Montreal's plan.

But it was under that pressure that Fowler stopped 15-of-16 shots, and several of those saves built his first NHL highlight pack.

Montreal's goaltending dominated the lowlights through the first 29 games. Some bright spots aside, Dobes and Montembeault combined for the lowest goals-saved above expected numbers in the league, making Montreal's 15-11-3 record coming into this one somewhat miraculous.

It's too soon to say Fowler's performance in one game will turn the tide and end the referendum on their defensive system, but it's not premature to suggest this win was likely the first of many he and the Canadiens will combine for over the coming years.

The Canadiens started this one with some swagger to earn the lead, and Fowler strutted his to help them maintain it.

"I think it keeps the confidence in the group, for sure," said St. Louis. "We all know we're chasing perfection, knowing that we'll never get there, so there's going to be moments when he's going to have to make saves."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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There's good players on the other side, their PP is No. 1 in the league, they pull their goalie with five minutes to go, there's no structure with that that's bulletproof; he's going to have to make some good saves, and I thought he did."

It's what was expected of Fowler, even if it was unfair to expect such things of a goaltender his age.

But he's not just any young goaltender, and neither were those greats that came before him.

"He's a guy that's been doing kind of this his whole life," said St. Louis. "He's won at every level, I think he's used to the big stage, and I feel his play reflected that a little bit."

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers' Hyman keeps Olympic dream alive with hat trick in win

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — The Olympic dream still flickers for Zach Hyman, who has five goals in his last six games alongside the unstoppable Connor McDavid.

Hey, a flicker is better than where we were a few weeks ago, with Hyman waiting for the doctors to let him back into the lineup after dislocating his wrist in last spring's playoffs.

"I don't even think about it anymore," he said of the Olympic dream, answering questions after his sixth hat trick as an Oiler in a 4-1 win over Detroit. "It would be a massive honour ... just to be in the conversation is an honour. To be at that (orientation) camp in the summer was an honour."

If the hands that scored 54 goals two seasons ago — and another 16 in the playoffs — haven't fully returned for Hyman, he can see them from here. On Thursday, in a solid team win over a game Red Wings squad, Hyman did what he's been paid to do ever since he came out West from Toronto:

He buried three passes from McDavid: a re-direct from the blue paint; a one-time snipe from the slot, and an empty netter to put Detroit out of its misery.

McDavid closed the night with four primary assists in the 4-1 win, and we know he'll be in Milan for the Games.

If Hyman catches fire and becomes the same triggerman for McDavid that he's been in past years, is it fantasy to say that the Team Canada brain trust would see value in bringing him to Italy, the way they brought Chris Kunitz to play alongside Penguins teammate Sidney Crosby back in 2014?

"Obviously I'm biased, but I think all of our Oiler guys should be in the conversation," McDavid said.

There is some value in the chemistry McDavid and Hyman have forged over the years.

For every Gretzky there's a Kurri, for every Trottier a Bossy.

Somehow, the inside game Hyman plays meshes perfectly with McDavid's many strengths. McDavid tends to draw defenders away from the net front and out of position, while Hyman has mastered the art of finding the soft spots that are left unattended.

He's the net front bag man for the game's best attacking forward. It's a match made in heaven.

"It's just a mentality," Hyman said. "For me, I'm around the net, so you're at the net to score. You're at the net to try and get open — not just getting tied up. There's so many little things that go into getting open and trying to score than just the puck hitting your stick and it going in. You really have to work when you don't have the puck."

Suddenly, Edmonton has found stability in its lineup, starting with a Top 6 that has remained the same through a 3-1-1 homestand that has produced a far more recognizable team than we'd seen even two weeks ago.

McDavid has been furnished with his familiar wingers: Hyman on the right side and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins on the left. Leon Draisaitl gets Vasily Podkolzin and — with Jack Roslovic injured — the feisty Matt Savoie on his right side.

That allows the Bottom 6 to stabilize as well, and lo and behold, you end up with a team that has the ability to repeat its performances night after night, a prerequisite of consistent play.

"It's so important," began McDavid. "We've been flip-flopping (line combinations) like crazy all year long, and just to get some stability throughout the lineup... It's not easy to build chemistry. It's not something that happens overnight.

"To have a little bit of continuity, lines that can start to meet, and talk, and figure out where each other are going to be. I think you're starting to see that."

Evan Bouchard gave his team 24:34 of solid defensive play Thursday. The penalty kill was perfect in two chances. Stuart Skinner was outstanding in goal.

When all the parts begin to do what they're supposed to, you get a team that can find some mojo, grabbing seven of the last eight points available on this homestand.

"It's an insanely competitive league," said Skinner, his save percentage climbing back up to .891 on the season (.913 since Nov. 22). "Every team is finding ways to win and climbing up the ladder in the standings. For us to get a few wins here was really important. Especially on a homestand, you want to bank as many as you can."

OIL SPILLS — With two assists Draisaitl edged closer to 1,000 career points. He has 996 ... Mattias Ekholm scored a goal to stretch his points streak to four games (1-4-5) ... Andrew Mangiapane was dropped to the fourth line Thursday, swapping spots with Trent Frederic, who moved up to Line 3 ... After calling up Max Jones Thursday, head coach Kris Knoblauch said they'll have a defenceman from Bakersfield meet the team in Toronto.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks sink deeper with loss to Sabres

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — When play-by-play announcer John Shorthouse wondered Thursday for his Sportsnet audience if he had just felt an earthquake inside Rogers Arena, it seemed plausible that the Earth might simply crack open beneath the Vancouver Canucks and swallow them.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Already last in the National Hockey League, it would be the only way the Canucks could fall any lower. But then they lost 3-2 to the Buffalo Sabres, who are the worst team in the Eastern Conference and looked it on Thursday.

The Canucks are now lower than Death Valley, with one win in eight games and two in 12 and suddenly trailing the other 31 teams by daylight — three points adrift of the Calgary Flames and Nashville Predators.

It was the Sabres' first road win in regulation time since last April.

This is the new low point for the Canucks. But check back soon because they open a five-game road trip Sunday against the New Jersey Devils.

On Thursday, the Canucks finally scored a couple of goals and broke a six-game power-play drought. And it didn't matter. They got star goaltender Thatcher Demko back from a month-long injury, and that didn't change the outcome of the game. They still lost.

The Canucks outshot the Sabres 32-15, including 12-2 in the third period when high-danger scoring chances were 7-1, but couldn't get a third puck past goalie Alex Lyon.

"Right now, or any day, it's the NHL," Canucks goal-scorer Max Sasson said when asked about the Basement Bowl. "But obviously, we know that they're at the bottom of the standings, and we're at home in front of our fans. We've got to find a way to win.

"It's extremely hard. I thought the last three losses, I mean, I know it's getting old saying it, but we (frickin') dominate them. Especially tonight, it felt like we're in their zone all game, and have Grade-A after Grade-A (scoring chance) and nothing's going in. So it's frustrating. You've just got to think that if we keep playing like this, the tide's going to turn and we'll string together some wins."

The Canucks haven't strung together two wins since Oct. 19. They'll soon be at the two-month anniversary of their last winning streak.

But Sasson is correct: the Canucks have been frickin' outplaying teams recently while still frickin' losing.

They had one win in their four-game homestand and in the other losses they outshot the Detroit Red Wings 39-21 and the Utah Mammoth 33-18.

So, including the Buffalo game, the shots were 104-54 for the Canucks. And the score was 11-3 for their opponents. And the points in the standings for Vancouver were zero.

"Kind of weird, just because I feel like we're playing... playing pretty good and creating lots of looks, but it just hasn't gone for us," Canucks captain Quinn Hughes said. "You've got to stay positive knowing that we're playing pretty good hockey. I think we're actually in every game, for the most part, and getting quality looks. Just got to be positive about where our game is trending, but obviously you want a better result."

The Canucks augering their way to the bottom of the NHL, 2-8-1 since last "peaking" at .500, roughly coincides with the groin injury Demko suffered on Nov. 11. Amid a sea of Canucks injuries, it's his absence that sank the team.

But any notions that the 2024 Vezina Trophy runner-up might suddenly produce his superpowers and instantly turn around the Canucks' season were shattered when Rasmus Dahlin's heavy, unscreened one-timer went through Demko to make it 1-0 for the Sabres 7:36 into the game.

"Yeah, obviously, I'm not super happy with that," Demko told reporters afterwards. "I felt a little late on it, maybe a little slow. Maybe just trying to acclimate back to game speed. I mean, yeah, that's one that I think that I can save.

"I'm not going to make any excuses about anything. I felt ready to play (but) definitely didn't feel perfect tonight. Definitely need to be better."

With his first point in nine games, Kiefer Sherwood scuffed a loose puck through Lyon to tie it on a Vancouver power play with 14 seconds remaining in the opening period.

And when Sasson used a speed burst to skate onto Jake DeBrusk's pass and past Buffalo defenceman Bowen Byram, his shot between Lyon's pads put the Canucks ahead at 6:15 of the middle period.

The lead lasted less than three minutes.

At 9:12, Buffalo's giant sniper, Tage Thompson, had space in the high slot to drag the puck and change his shooting angle before whipping a wrist shot cleanly past Demko's blocker to make it 2-2.

And at 14:46 — after Filip Hronek's penalty for pulling off Jack Quinn's helmet in front of the Canuck net — Sabre Zach Benson scored his first goal of the season when he was given too much room in the slot by Brock Boeser and one-timed a low-to-high pass from Josh Doan past Demko's catching glove.

Buffalo had three goals in 13 shots in the first two periods, the same high yield that Canucks goalie Kevin Lankinen allowed in Monday's 4-0 loss against the Wings.

The third period included point-blank chances for Boeser and Drew O'Connor, a high-speed redirect by DeBrusk and a couple of six-on-five one-timers by Sherwood that were blocked.

"Yeah, it's frustrating," Sherwood said. "It's kind of how things are going right now, but... we continue to fight till the end. Eventually, things are going to start to go our way if we keep playing the right way and keep out-working and dominating these teams for long spurts.

"I know it's tough right now... but you can't get dissuaded by the results, right? Like, those things sometimes are out of our control. We just try to focus on the process, and eventually things will go in. Obviously, we deserve (the win) tonight, but continue to fight for each other and build towards our identity."

"I mean, there's no sugar coating it," Demko said. "It's no fun when you're not winning games. Unfortunately, it's part of the job sometimes. You've got to show up and you've got to stay working hard, and you have to do your best to do your job. That's the reality we're in right now. You know, the ship's not going to turn itself around."

• Asked post-game about coach Adam Foote's comments this week that "noise" regarding Hughes' future can be heard in the dressing room, the Canucks captain said: "I think guys are focused about themselves, too, and trying to get their own games going and trying to be productive and bring their best. I think at the end of the day, when guys are lacing up the skates, they're not necessarily thinking about me. They're probably thinking about other things."

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Sportsnet.ca / Despite loss, Maple Leafs see signs of life from struggling power play

Sonny Sachdeva

TORONTO — Amid a campaign that's been all tumult, all peaks and valleys, it was a familiar sight for the fans packing the Scotiabank Arena stands. A night that saw their Toronto Maple Leafs seemingly find progress — only to see injuries, past ghosts and ill-timed moments of wobbly focus undo them in the end.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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A lacklustre third period sunk the blue-and-white Thursday, allowing the San Jose Sharks to claw their way back, level the game at 2-2 in the final minutes and ultimately take the extra point courtesy of Alexander Wennberg's overtime winner.

"It could've gone either way, honestly. I thought we played a pretty solid game," captain Auston Matthews assessed from the Maple Leafs' locker room after the dust settled on the 3-2 Sharks win. "They tie the game late — it's always a battle there those last couple minutes, especially 6-on-5 and they were able to find a way through to tie it. It could've gone either way.

"It's tough being on the wrong side of it, but I thought there were a lot of good things that we did today."

Tops among those bright spots, no doubt, was the resuscitation of the Maple Leafs' long-lifeless power play, which looked fluid, dangerous and promising for perhaps the first time this season.

Heading into the night, the club's man-advantage had looked anything but. Humming along at a paltry 13.7 per cent leading up to Thursday's affair, Toronto's power play ranked dead last in the league — well below plenty of clubs who don't send more than \$40 million worth of salary over the boards on PP1.

But more than the lack of results, it was the lack of any signs those results might be coming. The group looked stagnant, without direction, often stymied as they tried to calculate their next move, let alone when they tried to actually put it into motion.

A day before they hit the ice against the Sharks, head coach Craig Berube put his squad through a lengthy practice session focused on reviving the power play. The veteran bench boss's message to the group was clear.

"We've got to have a more simple approach to it all," Berube said after Wednesday's practice. "The puck needs to move quicker. Reset, and look to get it to the net. That's really, right now, where it's at. Other good things will happen after you start getting some momentum from that — good touch, good touch, shot; good touch, good touch, shot.

"You know, we're trying to look for the perfect play too much, and it's not there. So we've got to work our way through that. It's just execution. It's making the play that's available — make it, and make it quickly. And if we can get pucks to the net, then get them to the net."

Thursday night, his squad got the message.

Granted their first chance to prove themselves early in the second period, the familiar top-unit group — Matthews, William Nylander, John Tavares, Matthew Knies and Morgan Rielly — were sent over the boards. They took their positions, Tavares won the draw and they set up in the Sharks' zone.

For a moment, the old habits seemed to creep back in, as Matthews collected the puck on the right side and tried to filter a saucer pass to Tavares — surrounded by three Sharks and turning away from No. 34 — on the off-chance the veteran might be able to corral it and create something.

The next time the puck came to the captain, he took the more straightforward approach, loading up and wiring a one-timer towards the net. Off the next faceoff, the puck made its way to Nylander — he did the same, whipping it on net, causing some chaos in the slot, spurring a rebound Matthews was nearly able to pounce on. It came back to Nylander on the left side — he held the puck for a moment, the Sharks backed off, and No. 88 wired a pass through traffic to a waiting Matthews, who threw it on net again.

The chances kept coming, the Maple Leafs continued to filter pucks towards the cage and the second unit kept up the pressure. San Jose's Alex Nedeljkovic held them at bay, but for the first time in what's seemed

like eons, Toronto had managed to drum up some momentum from their man-advantage, had managed to tilt the ice ever so slightly in their direction.

A few minutes later, they got another opportunity, a Macklin Celebrini hook on Troy Stecher sending Toronto back to the power play.

The face-off was won — Tavares blasted it on net from the high slot. The puck came to Matthews behind the net — he tried to jam it past Nedeljkovic's pad. And 30 seconds into the opportunity, the group finally broke through, Nylander trying another cross-ice pass through traffic, Matthews trying another one-timer, and the pair connecting to flutter the twine.

It was the first power-play marker tallied by the Maple Leafs since their win over Pittsburgh five games ago, snapping a 16-game power-play goalless drought for Matthews.

"The whole power play tonight in general was good," Berube said post-game. "They moved it, shot it; moved it, shot it. And things opened up. A seam finally opened up, and they took advantage of it."

The group got one more opportunity in the third, and once again managed to build some momentum, get some chances, tilt the ice.

It was far from a flawless showing — for all the puck movement and quality looks, the Maple Leafs finished with one goal on three opportunities, and lost a narrow game that could've used a couple insurance markers. Still, given how it's looked of late, the signs of life for the top unit were crucial.

"It's good. I thought we had some good looks tonight," Matthews said. "I thought we were moving it quicker, shooting pucks and those pucks were getting through and creating good chances. It's always nice to see one go in — it gives the power play a bit of a boost.

"We just want to continue to stay diligent, and continue to move forward with positive momentum on the power play."

"We were due for one," Nylander added. "I feel like we haven't scored one in a long time. We should be able to score way more on the power play. You know, that was a confidence builder, and I thought we moved the puck pretty well today, could've had a few. So, that's good."

The mercurial winger was under the spotlight himself heading into the tilt — riding a cold streak, called out by his coach yet again and moved to a new line to try to spark the return of his offensive dynamism.

No. 88 answered, playing a part in both Maple Leafs goals on the night, and showing some fight in his own end, too.

"It was the best game I've seen him play in a while. He was engaged," Berube said of his star winger. "When I see him skating and handling the puck, keeping the puck, and doing things he did tonight with the puck, I know he's ready to go."

Still, for all the progress found — by Nylander, by his power-play mates — a late collapse and a dropped point shows their are holes still in need of filling.

"Third period, to me, we didn't come out and dictate how to play the game," Berube said late Thursday, diagnosing the dip in form that ultimately sunk them against the Sharks. "Turned pucks over. Passive. We didn't finish them off."

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL Power Rankings: Handing out a gift to all 32 teams



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 12, 2025

Ryan Dixon

The nature of lists this time of year depends greatly on the age of the person scratching them out.

If you've only recently learned to spell or are at a point where your parents just allowed you your first phone to tap notes on, your list is almost certainly a collection of wants.

If you're a bleary-eyed adult trying to make the magic happen for the family, chances are you're focused on a bunch of to-do bullet points that HAVE to get done in the next two weeks.

There's a bit of a want vs. need dynamic to it all.

With Christmas around the corner, it's worth remembering that NHL teams all have a collection of wants and needs, too. Some desires are rooted in necessity, while others could be considered more of a nice-to-have.

Either way, it's officially gifting season and we're here to hand something out to all 32 clubs, whether they desperately require it or not.

1. Colorado Avalanche (21-2-7): With all that firepower, somehow the Avs have the 24th-ranked power play in the NHL. Colorado could use a few more PPGs.
2. Dallas Stars (21-5-5): It's a big ask, but could this team land a right-shot defenceman for the top 4? Two seasons ago, they got one in Chris Tanev from the Calgary Flames. Could the clubs hook up again in a deal for righty (and pending-UFA) Rasmus Andersson?
3. Washington Capitals (18-9-3): How about a starting gig for Canada at the Olympics that Logan Thompson uses to prove he can be a big-game goalie.
4. Vegas Golden Knights (14-6-9): Hey Santa, can we keep Mark Stone healthy for a long stretch? He's only played 13 games this season, but among guys who've competed in that many contests, Stone's 1.69 points-per-game is second only to Nathan MacKinnon (1.70).
5. Carolina Hurricanes (18-9-2): Playoff scoring and reliable goaltending, just like last year! And the year before...and the year before...
6. Anaheim Ducks (19-10-1): The Ducks need some help on the PK, where the team is better than only five other NHL clubs.
7. Minnesota Wild (16-9-5): How about a big, splashy addition to help with the offence. Minny's 2.73 goals-per-game ranks 26th in the league.
8. Philadelphia Flyers (16-9-3): The Flyers don't have to ask for anything new; it would be enough to just keep the players they have and make it into the playoffs for the first time in an 82-game schedule since 2018.
9. Pittsburgh Penguins (14-7-7): One more season for 39-year-old Evgeni Malkin.
10. Los Angeles Kings (14-8-8): How about a three-way deal that lands Ryan O'Reilly in L.A., Phillip Danault back in Montreal and a Kings first-rounder with a Montreal prospect in Nashville?
11. Tampa Bay Lightning (17-11-2): An Atlantic Division title that does not come with the headache and trauma of playing the Panthers as a wild-card team in Rd. 1.
12. New York Islanders (17-11-3): Don't get greedy, guys; moving up the lottery 10 spots to draft Matthew Schaefer only to find out he's Rod Langway crossed with Bobby Orr is enough for one year.
13. Detroit Red Wings (17-11-3): Any all-world defencemen from Michigan at the centre of trade speculation the Wings could pursue?

14. Toronto Maple Leafs (14-11-4): A fourth good goalie in case Dennis Hildeby gets hurt.

15. Boston Bruins (18-13-0): Please, please let this be the real Morgan Geekie.

16. Florida Panthers (15-12-2): Did you know Santa's official residence is located in Finland? Surely he's got a soft spot for the Finns, so maybe he can deliver a healthy Aleksander Barkov for Game 1 of the playoffs.

17. New Jersey Devils (17-12-1): Forget Quinn Hughes; how about, when Jack Hughes returns to the lineup from his latest injury, we make it the start of, like, three years where the guy doesn't miss a game.

18. Edmonton Oilers (13-11-6): "Dear Santa, nearly 20 years ago we traded for this goalie at the deadline named Dwayne Roloson who took us to the Cup final; any chance you could re-create history for us?"

19. Montreal Canadiens (15-11-3): This time of year, a red light is associated with Rudolph's glowing nose. In Montreal, though, it means more awful goaltending from Sam Montembeault and Jakub Dobes. Canadiens fans will be begging St. Nick — and any other magic man they can think of — to have things change with touted prospect Jacob Fowler now on the scene.

20. Chicago Blackhawks (13-11-6): How about some underlying numbers that match the positivity of being in a playoff chase? Right now, the Hawks have the worst five-on-five expected goals percentage in the NHL, according to Money puck.

21. New York Rangers (15-13-4): It might be the Rangers who give us all something if they don't re-sign Artemi Panarin and he becomes one of the few very intriguing UFA options on the open market.

22. Winnipeg Jets (14-14-1): Christmas could come a bit early in Manitoba as Connor Hellebuyck is back practising with the team. Really, it can't come early enough.

23. Columbus Blue Jackets (13-11-6): Adam Fantilli has been good, but fans in Ohio would love to unwrap a reality where he makes the kind of Year 3 leap the two guys drafted ahead of him in 2023 — Connor Bedard and Leo Carlsson — have made.

24. Ottawa Senators (13-12-4): How about a bunch of Norris Trophy votes for Jake Sanderson?

25. Utah Mammoth (14-15-3): Utah is likely asking for it to be October again. After starting the year 8-2-0, the Mammoth are 6-13-3 in their past 22 outings.

26. San Jose Sharks (14-14-3): The World Junior Championship is a holiday tradition and the Sharks surely want Michael Misa — the second-overall selection last June — to go there, dominate and use that as a springboard to a positive second half to his rookie pro season.

27. Seattle Kraken (12-10-6): The first three things on Seattle's list should be talent, talent and talent. The Kraken have scored 2.62 goals per game this year, fewer than everybody except the Calgary Flames.

28. St. Louis Blues (11-13-7): Are we at the point where Blues fans are just asking for good returns for signature franchise players like Brayden Schenn and Jordan Binnington?

29. Nashville Predators (11-14-4): If there's one thing Nashville had for 20 years, it was a clear identity. Now it feels like time to ask for a new one.

30. Calgary Flames (12-16-4): "Dear Santa, we have never selected in the top 3 picks of the draft since moving to Calgary; can we just get one lottery win to stop all this arguing about whether to tank or not?"

31. Buffalo Sabres (12-14-4): Buffalo needs road wins in a bad way. The Sabres' .286 points percentage as the visitor is the worst mark in the NHL.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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32. Vancouver Canucks (11-16-3): A huge, huge Quinn Hughes haul, whenever it happens.

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1371403 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Ryan Reaves' frustration with Maple Leafs stems from trade deadline

Luke Fox

"They basically said that I couldn't play in this league anymore," Reaves told reporters inside Scotiabank Arena's visitors' room Thursday morning. "And I'm back."

Reaves, 38, returns to Toronto as a fixture of the San Jose Sharks' fourth line and protector to his latest club's emerging stars.

In two complicated, inconsistent campaigns with the Maple Leafs — who sought him out for his ability to bring toughness and togetherness — Reaves created a few memorable moments and made good friends, such as Auston Matthews and Max Domi, whom he dined with Wednesday night.

But things ended abruptly and poorly, and both management and the player thought it best to part ways in the off-season. GM Brad Treliving dealt Reaves to San Jose for young defenceman Henry Thrun, who fittingly makes his Leafs debut against Reaves's Sharks Thursday.

"It's another game. I played on seven teams. Almost every barn is like that," Reaves said Wednesday, in off-camera conversation. He flashed a smile. "I mean, it's always fun playing against your buddies, and you never want to lose against them, so they're always a little more special for you. But I've done it many times.

"I enjoyed my time here. It was a great experience. The guys I met on this team will hopefully be friends forever, and I've met some really good people on this team and in the city."

There's a but coming ...

"It's a business, and sometimes business doesn't go the way you want it to. I think things could've been handled a little differently with me, just a little more upfront honesty," Reaves continued.

The 937-game veteran specifically took issue with how Treliving handled him at the 2025 trade deadline.

Facing cap and roster constraints, Treliving waived Reaves in advance of the March deadline, clearing the decks for acquisitions Scott Laughton and Brandon Carlo.

Though recalled to serve as a black ace in the post-season, Reaves never played another game for the Maple Leafs after getting waived. For the first time in 12 years, he skated in the minors.

"Just some upfront honesty of what was going on with my situation and the trade deadline thing was a little frustrating for me," Reaves said.

"But, again, I don't hold any grudges. Business is business. And I've been on the good side of it. I've been on the bad side of it."

At the time he waived Reaves, Treliving described it as "a difficult conversation" and praised the winger's professionalism.

"This isn't goodbye, right? Ryan's still a big part of our locker room. He's part of the team. Those are hard conversations. Good, good man," Treliving said on March 7. "My hope is we can get him back here sooner rather than later. But, obviously, you got to work within the guidelines."

Reaves said he feels more comfortable, more like himself now that he's in San Jose.

He has scored twice through 25 games, something he didn't do once in his 35 with Toronto last season.

"It's hard to describe. I just feel a little bit more myself here. In Toronto, it's a little more corporate. You got people hovering over you all the time. You do an interview in Toronto, and they're running down saying, 'Hey, don't say this.' It's like, 'Well, then you do the interview.' Here, they don't come tell me what to do," Reaves previously told Spittin' Chiclets.

"I just feel like I'm a little freer to be myself here. Everything's a bit more comfortable. When you're comfortable, you play better. You have more fun. That's just how it is."

New teammate Tyler Toffoli raves about Reaves' energy injection.

"There's been some downs throughout the season, and he's done a great job of keeping things as positive as can be. And at the same time, holding this team accountable within that as well," Toffoli said.

"Yeah, he's been unbelievable addition for our group," Sharks coach Ryan Warsofsky added.

"He's almost an addition to the coaching staff and how we want to play, and what we talk about as a staff. And he relays that message to the group. So, he's been very vocal with our young guys, been very vocal for our team, brings energy to our room, been one of the better additions this summer."

Thing is, Reaves was supposed to be that source of spark and wisdom for the Leafs.

The player pushed for a three-year contract in Toronto with Treliving in the summer of 2023, in part because he's striving for a Silver Stick.

"I guess I look at it as I ended up in San Jose, where they let me play and let me help these young kids, and it's been a fun role for me. It's been fun helping these young guys, kind of being a leader for them," Reaves said Wednesday.

"Again, I've been on the ice for most of the games this year, so it's just been fun getting back and battling with the boys."

How confident is Reaves that he'll hang around long enough to see 1,000 games?

"Oh, man. I mean, I'd like to say I'm confident, but I guess that's up to the big man up top," said Reaves, who is set to play Game 938 Thursday.

"When I signed in Toronto, I could have hit 1,000 games in that contract. And then, obviously, last year didn't go the way I wanted it to.

"So, I want another year."

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TSN.CA / Leafs defence corps wearing thin after Ekman-Larsson injury

Mark Masters

The Toronto Maple Leafs have lost yet another defenceman due to injury.

San Jose Sharks forward Adam Gaudette lost his balance and fell onto the left foot of Oliver Ekman-Larsson while the pair circled the Leafs net together during a shift early in the third period of Thursday's game at Scotiabank Arena.



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Ekman-Larsson did not put any weight on his left leg as he left the ice and needed help getting to the dressing room.

Craig Berube described it as a "lower-body" injury.

"Gotta be re-evaluated tomorrow and we'll know exactly the length of it," the Leafs coach said.

Ekman-Larsson is off to a strong start this season with 20 points in 30 games. The 34-year-old lefty had been logging big minutes while playing the right side of a pairing with Morgan Rielly.

"He's been great," said Berube. "He'll be missed. Yeah, hopefully it's not too bad, but he's played great hockey for us."

"You hope for the best for him, and that it's not too serious, because he's been playing great for us," said captain Auston Matthews, who scored a power-play goal in the 3-2 overtime loss to San Jose. "He's a big part of our team, a big part of our back end, and a guy that brings a lot of experience to our group, so I definitely hope for the best."

Ekman-Larsson entered Thursday's showdown with the Sharks averaging 20 minutes and 57 seconds of ice time per game, which ranked fourth on the team.

The Leafs are already missing their two top right-shot defencemen in Chris Tanev and Brandon Carlo.

Carlo recently underwent surgery to deal with an injury that the team has called a "lower-body" issue. Berube thinks the injury occurred during the team's recent road trip, but could not remember exactly when. He is expected to miss "about a month" of time.

Carlo last played on Nov. 13. It's unclear how or when he sustained the injury.

Tanev has not played since being stretchered off the ice on Nov. 1 during a 5-2 win over the Philadelphia Flyers. The team has referred to his injury as an "upper-body" issue. Tanev returned to practice in a red, no-contact sweater on Wednesday.

Will Tanev be cleared for contact soon?

"That decision will be made in the next day or so," Berube said.

The Leafs are scheduled to hold an optional practice on Friday at 11:30 am. Toronto will host Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers on Saturday.

Defenceman Dakota Mermis, a lefty who had been playing the right side, sustained an injury courtesy a knee-on-knee hit from Tampa Bay Lightning forward Gage Goncalves on Monday and is expected to miss at least a month. The Leafs are calling his injury a "lower-body" issue.

Defenceman Marshall Rifai also participated in Wednesday's practice while wearing a red sweater. He has been out since suffering a wrist injury that required surgery in training camp. There's no timeline for his return.

Add it all up and the Leafs are currently missing five defencemen.

"It's tough for sure," said Berube. "Critical position. We all know that. Yeah, that's the way it is. Need another guy to step up."

Defenceman Henry Thrun made his Leafs debut on Thursday. The lefty logged 16 minutes and seven seconds against the Sharks and finished plus-one while playing on the right side.

"I thought he was good," Berube said. "You know, playing his off-side, too. First game, I thought he handled himself well."

"I don't think he looks out of place when he's out there," said Matthews. "He's got great poise with the puck. He can play either side. He's got good skill. Yeah, he didn't look out of place at all. I thought he made good plays, and definitely a guy that can move the puck back there."

Right-shot defenceman Philippe Myers was a healthy scratch on Thursday. He has mustered just one assist in 14 games this season while posting a minus-six rating.

Leafs defence at the start of Thursday's game:

Morgan Rielly - Oliver Ekman-Larsson

Jake McCabe - Troy Stecher

Simon Benoit - Henry Thrun

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