



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 15, 2025

The News & Observer

Jacob Slavin return. How the defenseman helped the Hurricanes top the Flyers

By: Chip Alexander

The long wait for Jacob Slavin has ended.

The Carolina Hurricanes star defenseman finally returned to the lineup Sunday in a 3-2 shootout victory over the Philadelphia Flyers at Lenovo Center that earned goalie Brandon Bussi his ninth straight win.

Slavin last played for the Canes on Oct. 11 — against the Flyers in Raleigh. He then missed the next 29 games with an injury the Hurricanes — and Slavin again Sunday — would only call a “lower body” issue.

A knee problem? Something more serious? No one would say, although Slavin in time did return and get in some practices with the team. Canes coach Rod Brind’Amour did say initially that the former NHL All-Star, believed to be a near lock for the U.S. Olympic team roster this year, did not undergo any preseason surgery or any other procedure.

But Brind’Amour had a somewhat surprising announcement Sunday about two hours ahead of game time: Slavin might be in the lineup as the Canes and Flyers finished up a rare home-and-home, back-to-back set.

For the second straight game, a shootout was needed to decide it. In the game Saturday in Philadelphia, the Canes’ Jackson Blake had the only shootout goal. It was Andrei Svechnikov who had the winner Sunday, beating goalie Dan Vladar with a sharp backhand.

In net for the Hurricanes, continuing his waivers-to-wonderment story was Bussi, who improved his record to 11-1-0. Bussi turned back shots by Christian Dvorak and Matvei Michkov, and Trevor Zegras hit the post with his attempt.

Add in the shootout win over Washington on Thursday, Bussi in net, and it was the first time in franchise history the team has recorded shootout victories in three consecutive games.

The Flyers’ two goals both came with an extra attacker, the first by Jamie Drysdale on a delayed penalty against Carolina, and then a Zegras goal after pulling Vladar in the final two minutes of regulation.

Forwards William Carrier and Taylor Hall scored for Carolina in the opening period for a 2-0 lead.

Slavin, who was paired with Alexander Nikishin on the third D pairing, played 14:31 in his return, about 10 fewer minutes in ice time than in many of his games.

“It’s hard playing that little,” he joked.

Slavin said he and the medical staff had Dec. 14 “circled” all along as the date for getting back in games. Come Sunday, he was ready, being activated off Injured Reserve.

In one sequence late in the opening period, Slavin first denied Zegras a shot, then used the back of his right leg to block a shot, a Slavin-being-Slav.in moment

“I was knocking off the rust for sure,” Slavin said. “But it was easy. Guys were helping out all over the ice. Coming back wasn’t too hard. I just have to make sure I’m in game shape.

“The guys did a great job while I was out. Obviously ‘Bus’ has been holding down the fort back there.”

Bussi did that Sunday, being named the game’s first star and having Canes fans again chant his name at game’s end. Among his 24 saves were several quick, athletic stops but also a few where the 6-4, 210-pound goaltender strongly stood his ground as the Flyers jammed around him.

“Once you feel the confidence in the goalie, the game comes easy, and I think that’s what we feel as a group,” Svechnikov said. “Obviously he’s playing unbelievable hockey here.”



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The Athletic

Hurricanes' Bussi emerges as an unlikely star — and how might a Hughes trade have looked?

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Carolina Hurricanes are atop the Eastern Conference after three shootout wins in four days, one over Washington and two over Philadelphia. That success wouldn't have been a surprise given the expectations to start the season, but the fact that Carolina has done it without Jacob Slavin and with a waiver-wire pickup leading the team in net makes the season's first 32 games impressive.

Perhaps the best news for the Hurricanes came on Sunday, when defenseman Jacob Slavin was activated from injured reserve and returned to the lineup.

It was a busy week for Carolina, and here's the latest.

Brandon Bussi has become the most unlikely of stars. The 27-year-old goalie, claimed off waivers by the Hurricanes from Florida as an insurance policy when Carolina tried to assign Cayden Primeau to the AHL to start the season, set an NHL record on Thursday by earning his 10th win in his 11th appearance. Bussi also saved 24 of 26 shots on Sunday in the shootout victory.

His unprecedented start has him in rare company.

According to Stathead, only 42 goalies in history have played in at least 11 NHL games after not making their debut until they were at least 27 years old.

Most fizzled out quickly, while a few — such as Aaron Dell and Carter Hutton — built respectable careers as NHL journeymen.

Nine of the 42 reached 100 wins in their career, but the careers of many of that list are not comparable to Bussi's path for a few reasons.

Wayne Stephenson didn't get his chance until 1972, when the NHL was rapidly expanding. He primarily played for the Canadian National Team before getting his shot. Richard Brodeur jumped to the NHL in 1979-80 after 165 wins with the WHA's Nordiques.

Europeans Niklas Backstrom, Roman Cechmanek, Cristobal Huet and Martin Gerber proved themselves overseas before getting a chance in the NHL.

Johan Hedberg — for my money, one of the most reliable No. 2 goalies of this century — reached the NHL seven seasons after being drafted, finishing with nearly 400 regular-season and playoff games with five NHL teams.

As Bussi's legend has grown, the name that's most come to my mind is Tim Thomas.

The two-time Vezina Trophy winner and recipient of the Conn Smythe Trophy (when the Bruins won their last Stanley

Cup championship in 2011) is the model for late-blooming goalies. Though drafted by the Nordiques in 1994, Thomas — with the exception of four games with Boston in 2002-03 — bounced between the minors and Sweden for nearly a decade before he got his chance, finishing his career with five seasons of 28 or more wins.

The better example might be Dwayne Roloson. Both he and Bussi went undrafted and had strong NCAA careers. Roloson spent two full seasons in the AHL before making his NHL debut at 27 years, 1 month and 1 day. Bussi played three AHL seasons and finally got his first game on Oct. 14 — at 27 years, 3 months and 19 days.

Roloson, however, had a losing record in each of his first five NHL campaigns before finishing his career at age 42 with more than 600 career games, 227 career wins and five 20-win seasons.

Let's be clear: That's a long way from a goalie who hasn't yet played a baker's dozen of games. But Bussi has made the best possible impressions on the NHL, Hurricanes fans and, most importantly, Carolina's front office.

While Bussi is not eligible to sign a contract extension until Jan. 1, there is optimism a new deal can be worked out between the team and its unexpected star goalie.

Two. That's how many of the Hurricanes' seventh-round picks since relocation have played more NHL games than rookie defenseman Joel Nystrom.

Frederik Andersen, with 531 games, has the most, though his circumstances are unique. While Andersen was selected by Carolina in 2010, he opted to reenter the draft and was picked by Anaheim in the third round in 2012. The other is Steven Lorentz, who was chosen 186th in 2015 in his second time through the draft. He has played 335 games — along with Kelly Cup, Calder Cup and Stanley Cup rings. (Eighth-round picks Jaroslav Svoboda and Niklas Nordgren played 134 and 58 NHL games, respectively, and 1997 ninth-round pick Kent McDonnell played 32.)

Nystrom, in his first full season in North America, impressed the Hurricanes' coaching staff enough during training camp that when defensemen started dropping at the start of the season, he earned a recall ahead of several more experienced options.

Nystrom got assigned to the AHL on Sunday, when Slavin was reactivated, and he had zero goals and five assists in 23 games with the Hurricanes — but he already has a new deal.

Carolina signed the 23-year-old Swede to a four-year extension on Friday that will pay him a total of \$4.9 million.



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The contract is reminiscent of the one given to goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov in November 2022. Kochetkov, fresh from Russia and the KHL, was pressed into action at the end of the 2021-22 season, winning all three of his late April starts and playing in four playoff games.

Kochetkov then went 2-0-2 in the middle of November 2022 before being rewarded with a four-year, \$8 million contract.

While there's an argument that both players could have bet on themselves to potentially get more money, there is a big carrot in both deals. Like Kochetkov, whose contract ends following the 2026-27 season, Nystrom will be an unrestricted free agent in the summer of 2030, after his second deal expires.

It's a low-risk bet for Carolina that also gives Nystrom a chance to cash in at the end of the contract. Furthermore, if Nystrom can't crack the Hurricanes' lineup during the deal, burying his \$1.225 million cap hit in the minors would have minimal cap implications.

Teams are allowed to stash \$375,000 more than the NHL minimum salary, which is \$775,000 this season and next. That's \$1.15 million — which means Carolina would only be on the hook for \$75,000 on its cap next season should Nystrom be in the AHL. With the salary cap rising, the minimum will as well, which should erase that risk in subsequent years.

That makes the only real risk the cash paid to Nystrom — with the potential of it being a considerable bargain should he become a regular.

It could also have implications for Jalen Chatfield, a fellow right-handed defenseman whose contract is up after the 2026-27 season, when he'll be 31.

Hurricanes make AHL coaching change

The Hurricanes made a coaching change with their AHL affiliate Friday, dismissing Cam Abbott as coach of the Chicago Wolves and naming assistant Spiros Anastas as interim coach.

The move came as a bit of a surprise seeing that the Wolves were 11-7-3 and in a playoff position, but Carolina has been considering the move for a while. While the on-ice results have been fine under Abbott — who led the team to the playoffs in his first season last year, a two-game exit in the first round courtesy of Rockford — clearly there were concerns about the direction of the team.

Before being hired for the Wolves job, Abbott had six years of experience in the Swedish Hockey League, leading Rogle BK to its first Champions League title in 2021-22. The Ontario native played collegiately at Cornell and had brief stints in low-level North American leagues before playing six seasons in Sweden and then transitioning to coaching.

The decision to relieve Abbott of his coaching duties wasn't made hastily — the Hurricanes tried to make the situation work over the past two seasons. But it became clear to the organization that a change was needed.

Anastas, who has coached internationally and in both the AHL and ECHL, is expected to serve as interim coach for the rest of the season. He won the Calder Cup as an assistant with Grand Rapids in 2013 and also twice served as a head coach in the ECHL.

Abbott — whose twin brother, Chris, is the Hurricanes' vice president of pro player personnel — will remain with the organization.

Friday's biggest news was the trade of Vancouver star defenseman Quinn Hughes to the Wild in a blockbuster swap. Minnesota gave up young center Marco Rossi, emerging defenseman Zeev Buium, first-round-pick winger Liam Ohgren and the Wild's 2026 first-round pick to get the eldest Hughes brother.

The Hurricanes sniff around anyone and everyone who might be available in the league, and you can bet they at least gauged what the price would be to acquire a superstar such as Hughes. So how would a package from Carolina have looked?

There's actually a pretty easy comparable trade.

Alexander Nikishin and Buium are similarly valued. Nikishin is farther along than Buium, but the Wild's 2024 No. 12 pick is four years younger and on his entry-level contract for another year. Both have all-star potential.

Rossi already has 40-point and 60-point seasons, and he is signed for two more seasons at \$5 million annually, after which he'll be an arbitration-eligible RFA. Logan Stankoven hasn't accomplished as much — he's trending toward a 40-point season this year — but is about a year and a half younger and locked in through 2034 with a contract that is \$6 million against the cap starting next season.

Ohgren, drafted at No. 19 in 2022, hasn't done much in 40-plus NHL games — he had zero points in 18 games with the Wild this season — but I wouldn't characterize him as a bust yet. Brady Nadeau, drafted at No. 30 in 2023, has been a better AHL player but hasn't yet translated that to the NHL. Nadeau is the better prospect, but you could also argue the overall value of the first two assets favors Minnesota, at least a little.

And then there's the first-round pick — Carolina could put up an equivalent draft choice to Minnesota's, especially since they have four first-rounders in the next three years.

The Hurricanes could have survived a deal such as that if it meant getting Hughes, but it would put them in a tough situation — one the Wild currently finds themselves in. By giving up a top-six center, Minnesota is paper-thin down the middle. Carolina could weather that better than the Wild, but losing Nikishin would hurt — that blow would be softened by the Hughes upgrade, obviously — and Nadeau still has sniper potential. It would also leave the team dangerously shallow down the middle.

The Hurricanes did a good job in last year's Mikko Rantanen deal of not ending up with a deficit of talent. I'm not sure the Wild did that — there are huge questions at center without Rossi and not enough cap space to fill the void with another trade.

Had Carolina made the equivalent deal that I mapped out, they'd have questions up front, too. The Hurricanes would have more cap space and remaining assets than the Wild to try to solve the 2C question, but it would be much less than what they have had they swung a Hughes trade.



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NORTH STATE JOURNAL

Hurricanes win third straight shootout in Slavin's return | The North State Journal

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH — The Hurricanes finally got Jaccob Slavin back on Sunday.

Oh, how things have changed in the 29 games he's missed — especially in goal.

Brandon Bussi improved to 11-1-0 by stopping all three shots in the shootout, and Andrei Svechnikov was the difference in Carolina getting the extra point against the Flyers for the second straight night in a 3-2 win at Lenovo Center.

Even coach Rod Brind'Amour seemed lost for words in describing the impact of Bussi, who made his first career start at age 27 after being claimed off waivers by the Hurricanes and has steered the team to the top of the Eastern Conference standings.

"I thought in the third period, especially, he made countless really timely saves," Brind'Amour said. "And obviously in the shootout — I dunno, that's pretty impressive."

Svechnikov, who lifted a backhand over Dan Vladar (30 saves) for the lone goal of the shootout, perhaps described Bussi's impact best.

"The No. 1 thing, once you feel confident in the goalie, the game comes easy," Svechnikov said. "And I feel like that's what we feel as a group. Obviously he's playing unbelievable hockey here, and he's just going to keep doing that."

The Flyers couldn't dent Bussi at 5-on-5 or on the power play, but a goal with just under 2 minutes left in regulation with Vladar on the bench for an extra attacker — Philadelphia scored both its goals at 6-on-5 — sent the game to overtime.

Carolina drew a penalty in OT, but the Hurricanes managed just one shot on goal and had to settle for going to a shootout for the third consecutive game.

Bussi didn't allow a goal by any of the three Philadelphia shooters, making a save on Christian Dvorak on the Flyers' second attempt by using every inch of his 6-foot-4 frame to extend his leg to the post.

Svechnikov, Carolina's second shooter, beat Vladar with a backhanded flip, extending his franchise record to 12 shootout goals in his career.

"I didn't score for probably the last 10 shootouts, so I had to score this one," he said. "I just went from the left side and

tried to make him make a move first, and thank God I scored that one."

The Flyers earned a point by tying the game in the third period for the second straight night.

After three goals were scored in the first period, no more pucks found the back of the net until the end of regulation.

With Vladar on the bench for an extra attacker, Travis Konecny found Trevor Zegras on the back door for the tying goal with 1:52 remaining.

"We gave that late one up, a pulled goalie situation," Brind'Amour said. "Really, that's the two goals we gave up tonight. So gotta do better job there, for sure."

The Hurricanes did break a streak of allowing the first goal in four consecutive games by taking the lead at 5:44 of the first.

After a Sean Walker pass to William Carrier in the high slot was deflected, Carrier located it and shot through a screen by Jordan Martinook and past Vladar to make it 1-0. The goal was Carrier's third of the season.

Carolina doubled its lead on the power play when the team's second unit converted. Jackson Blake set up Alexander Nikishin for a one-timer that Taylor Hall redirected in front at 15:53 for his seventh goal of the season to bump the lead to 2-0.

"I know it's sometimes hard to find him the ice time because we've got a lot of good wingers here to fit in, but he's dynamic, right?" Brind'Amour said of Hall. "And he knows and all the situations. So he's definitely a threat when he's on the ice."

The Flyers got one back with 53 seconds remaining in the period when, on a delayed penalty, Philadelphia defenseman Jamie Drysdale's shot hit Carrier's stick and got past Bussi (24 saves) to cut the lead to 2-1.

But the Hurricanes otherwise limited the Flyers, including going 4 for 4 on the penalty kill. Slavin, who played nearly three minutes of his monitored 14:31 on the PK, played a role in that.

"You could see just that calmness he brings," Bussi said of his first game playing with Carolina's top defenseman. "He's a reliable stick and we've missed him, and it's great to have him back."

Slavin, meanwhile, appreciated that the team managed to stay atop the conference while he recovered..



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"The guys did a great job while I was out, and, obviously, The Bus has been holding down the fort big time back there," Slavin said. "And everyone else has just been working. All the young guys that came up and played, the team's just done a great job."

Notes: Joel Nystrom was reassigned to AHL Chicago after Slavin was activated off IR. ... Slavin played with Alexander Nikishin, who moved to the right side and played 20:01. Nikishin, who assisted on Hall's goal, has points in consecutive games. ... Slavin had a team-high three blocks. Zegras had two points.



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Slavin returns from IR as Hurricanes beat Flyers again in a shootout 3-2

By: Pat Welter

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Andrei Svechnikov scored in the shootout and the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Philadelphia Flyers 3-2 on Sunday.

William Carrier and Taylor Hall scored in regulation for the Hurricanes, who have won four straight — three in a shootout. Brandon Bussi made 24 saves — all in regulation — for his ninth straight win, matching a franchise record.

Trevor Zegras and Jamie Drysdale scored in regulation for Philadelphia and Dan Vladar stopped 31 shots.

Svechnikov was the only skater to score in the shootout, with Bussi stopping all three attempts by the Flyers.

Carolina outshot Philadelphia 3-0 in the overtime period.

Zegras scored with 1:52 left in regulation to tie the score 2-2. Travis Konecny found Zegras alone at the far post after Bussi couldn't control a rebound with Philadelphia pressing with an extra skater.

The Flyers have had hard luck against Carolina this season, losing all three matchups in shootouts, including a 4-3 defeat in Philadelphia on Saturday.

Carrier gave Carolina a 1-0 lead at 5:44 in the first period when he beat Vladar to the glove side, thanks to a perfectly-timed screen from Jordan Martinook.

Getting the first goal has been a good sign for the Hurricanes this season. They improved to 14-2-0 when scoring first.

The Hurricanes made it 2-0 on Hall's power-play goal with 4:07 left in the first. Hall has three points in the past four games. Defenseman Alexander Nikishin picked up an assist on Hall's goal and leads all rookies in plus/minus this season at plus-11.

Bussi improved to 11-1 in his rookie season, becoming the first goaltender in NHL history to win 11 of his first 12 starts. The Hurricanes claimed the 27-year-old rookie on waivers on Oct. 5 and he made his first NHL start in a 5-1 win over San Jose on Oct. 14.

Drysdale scored with 52.4 seconds left in the first with assists from Zegras and Matvei Michkov.

The Hurricanes' defense was bolstered by the return of Jaccob Slavin, who had missed the previous 29 games with a lower-body injury.

Up next

Flyers: At Montreal on Tuesday night.

Hurricanes: At Nashville on Wednesday night.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Recap: Canes Foil Flyers For Fourth Straight Win

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

Bussi ties franchise mark with ninth consecutive victory in net

RALEIGH, N.C. - For the second time in 24 hours, the Carolina Hurricanes topped the Philadelphia Flyers in a shootout, taking a 3-2 victory at Lenovo Center to extend their winning streak to four games.

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

Sparked by a dominant start in front of their home crowd, the Hurricanes raced out to a 2-0 lead in the early going. William Carrier started the party with a spinaround shot from the high slot at 5:44, while Taylor Hall followed 10 minutes later with a deflection of an Alexander Nikishin bomb on the power play.

Shortly after Hall's tip-in, though, a bad-luck bounce off Carrier's stick brought the Flyers within a goal and provided some momentum before the break. A tighter tussle ensued in the second period as Philadelphia found its footing, before then applying more pressure in the third. Doubling Carolina's shot total in the final frame, the Flyers found a tying tally off the stick of Trevor Zegras with the extra attacker on and just 1:52 remaining to force overtime.

Buoyed by a power play, the Hurricanes fired the only two recorded shots on goal during overtime, but couldn't put one past Dan Vladar. Facing its third consecutive shootout, and second in as many nights against Philadelphia, Carolina turned to Brandon Bussi, who stopped all three Flyers shooters, and Andrei Svechnikov, who scored the shootout's only goal, to secure its fourth consecutive victory.

Bussi finished with 24 saves on 26 shots, moving to 11-1-0 as he continues to author a stellar start to his NHL career.

Stats & Standouts

Goaltender Brandon Bussi won his ninth straight outing, matching Cam Ward for the franchise's longest such streak by a netminder.

Forward William Carrier scored his third goal of the season in his 26th outing, climbing to within one of the four he recorded during 43 games last season.

Defenseman Alexander Nikishin picked up an assist to extend his point streak to three games (1G, 2A). He's the seventh rookie this season with multiple point streaks of three games or longer.

Forward Andrei Svechnikov scored his 12th career shootout goal, which is the most in franchise history. His

38.7% conversion rate also ranks fifth among all-time Hurricanes with at least 10 shootout attempts.

Defenseman Jaccob Slavin returned from a 29-game absence (lower-body), skating 14:31 and leading the team with three blocked shots.

The Hurricanes moved to 14-2-0 (.875) when scoring first this season, surpassing the New York Rangers (13-2-0, .867) for the best win percentage in that scenario.

Following last night's victory in Philadelphia, Carolina has now defeated the same opponent on consecutive days for the first time since posting back-to-back wins over Chicago on May 3-4, 2021.

They Said It...

Rod Brind'Amour assessing the game as a whole...

"I loved the first two periods. We gave that late one up in a pulled goalie situation, and then we gave up (the one with the extra attacker on). So, we've got to do a better job there, for sure, but I liked the way we played those two periods."

Andrei Svechnikov on his shootout winner...

"I didn't score for probably the last 10 shootouts, so I had to score this one. I just went in from the left side and tried to make a move first. Thank God I scored that one."

Brandon Bussi following yet another victory...

"I just try and bring my best every game, you know? I feel good right now. I feel confident. I feel like if I see the puck, I have a good chance to stop it. Our team has made some great plays in front, specifically, I remember at the end of the first period, after they scored... That's the sacrifice we need to win games."

Jaccob Slavin after his first game in over two months...

"That was fun. It's good to be back out there, good to be back playing. Sometimes being injured is almost harder than the grind of the season. But I'm just thankful. All in God's time. I was stressing that the whole time in the recovery process... The guys did a great job while I was out. Obviously, the Bus has been holding down the fort big time back there. Everyone else has been working hard, all the young guys that came up and played, I mean, the team has just done a great job."

What's Next After This Game?



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The Canes are scheduled to be off on Monday before practicing and traveling on Tuesday ahead of Wednesday's clash in Nashville.

Next Game: Wednesday, Dec. 17 at Nashville | 8:00 p.m.
ET | FDSNSO

Next Home Game: Tuesday, Dec. 23 vs. Florida | 7:00
p.m. ET | FDSNSO | Tickets | Parking



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Hurricanes edge Flyers, sweep home-and-home in shootout

By: Kurt Dusterberg

Bussi makes 24 saves for Carolina, which has won 4 straight; Philadelphia loses 3rd in row for 1st time this season

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Brandon Bussi made 24 saves for the Carolina Hurricanes, who swept a home-and-home series against the Philadelphia Flyers with a 3-2 shootout win at Lenovo Center on Sunday.

Bussi has won nine straight starts and is 11-1-0 with a 2.05 goals-against average and .911 save percentage this season.

"I just try to bring my best every game," Bussi said. "I feel good right now, I feel confident. I feel like if I see the puck I have a good chance to stop it, but our team made some great plays in front."

Andrei Svechnikov roofed a backhand in the second round of the shootout, and William Carrier and Taylor Hall scored in regulation for the Hurricanes (21-9-2), who have won four in a row, including 4-3 in shootout at Philadelphia on Saturday.

"I just went from the left side and tried to make (goalie Dan Vladar) move first," Svechnikov said. "Sometimes it could slide down (the stick), so it's 50-50 sometimes. But I wouldn't say it's super hard."

Jamie Drysdale scored, and Trevor Zegras had a goal and an assist for the Flyers (16-9-6), who have lost three in a row for the first time this season (0-0-3). Vladar made 30 saves.

"We hung in," Philadelphia coach Rick Tocchet said. "We had a bunch of kills. I think we had six penalties. That's tough. Once we started getting our legs, then we got some opportunities."

Carrier gave the Hurricanes a 1-0 lead at 5:44 of the first period, gathering a loose puck in the slot and scoring on a wrist shot through traffic.

Hall made it 2-0 at 15:53, redirecting Alexander Nikishin's one-timer between his legs for a power-play goal.

"I thought we had a really good two periods, we just didn't get enough lead," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I thought in the third period especially, [Bussi] made countless timely saves, and obviously in the shootout. That's pretty impressive."

Drysdale cut it to 2-1 at 19:07 of the first when his shot from the left point deflected in off the shaft of Carrier's stick.

"This team never gives up," Drysdale said. "Down one or two, we know we always have a fighting chance. We come in the room, we chat, we talk through it. We know we can be better."

Philadelphia tied it 2-2 at 18:08 of the third period. Travis Konecny drew Bussi out to the left post before passing across the slot to Zegras, who one-timed a shot into the open net from the right circle.

"It's a tough back-to-back, having a 5 p.m. game," Zegras said. "I think (the key) was just finding the groove."

Hurricanes defenseman Jaccob Slavin returned to the lineup after missing 29 games with a lower-body injury. He had three blocked shots in 14:31 of ice time.

"It's good to be back out there playing," Slavin said. "My style is not very flashy, so it's pretty easy. But (I had) a couple missed clears on the PK there, so I'm knocking off some rust for sure. Our system makes it really easy. Guys are helping out all over the ice."

NOTES: Philadelphia defenseman Cam York had four blocked shots in 24:39 of ice time in his return after missing four games with an upper-body injury. ... The Flyers were 0-for-4 on the power play and are 0-for-10 in their past five games.



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AP ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hurricanes defenseman Jaccob Slavin returns to lineup after missing 29 games | AP News

By: Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The Carolina Hurricanes have been able to reach first place in the Metropolitan Division without star defenseman Jaccob Slavin for most of the season.

The Hurricanes got Slavin back in the lineup for Sunday's 3-2 shootout win over the Philadelphia Flyers after a 29-game absence with what the team called a "lower-body injury."

He started the game and played 14:31 and blocked three shots. The 11th-year defenseman played in the first two games of the season but hadn't played since Oct. 11.

"It's good to be back out there playing," Slavin said. "Sometimes being injured is almost harder than the grind of the season."

Slavin said he and the team's medical staff had Sunday's date circled as a potential return.

"It's a long season, so we just wanted to make sure I was good to go and I wasn't going to have any flareups," Slavin said while declining to add any details about the injury. "We had a good plan in place."

Slavin has been a cornerstone of the Hurricanes' defense during the current streak of seven straight playoff appearances under coach Rod Brind'Amour.

He was a standout performer for Team USA in the 4 Nations Face-Off last year and is expected to have a key role for the Americans in the Winter Olympics in February. The team hasn't shared much publicly about Slavin's injury but there was an expectation that Slavin would try to return and be ready for the Olympics.

"In my mind, if my first game back wasn't going to be before the Olympics, I wouldn't have gone," Slavin said. "My priority is this team and the group that we have here. We have a special group this year. The Olympics would be awesome, if it happens, but we will have to see."

To make room on the NHL roster, the Hurricanes sent Joel Nystrom down to their AHL affiliate in Chicago. Nystrom had five assists in 24 games with the Hurricanes as one of the replacements for Slavin. On Friday, the Hurricanes signed Nystrom to a four-year contract extension.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

“The Bus” Keeps Rolling - Hurricanes 3, Flyers 2 - SO

By: Bob Wage

The Carolina Hurricanes won their third straight shootout game as they outlasted the Philadelphia Flyers, 3-2 on Sunday night at the Lenovo Center.

The win allowed Carolina to sweep the back-to-back and home-and-home series.

The Canes now have a 21-9-2 record as they sit three points ahead of the second place New York Islanders in the Metropolitan Division as well as the Eastern Conference.

They have won four games in a row and seven of their last 10.

Goaltender Brandon Bussi won his ninth straight game and improved his overall record to 11-1-0 which now makes him the first goalie in NHL history to win 11 games out of his first 12 career starts.

The former waiver wire pickup made 24 saves on 26 shots and made another three saves he faced in the shootout.

Overall, his stat sheet is now, 11-1-0, GAA 2.05 and SV% .911.

Will Carrier opened the scoring for the home team just five minutes and change into the game.

Later in the period, Taylor Hall tipped in an Alexander Nikishin shot during a powerplay to make it 2-0.

The Canes dominated that period as they outshot the Flyers, 14-4.

With less than a minute in the opening stanza, Carrier tipped the puck past his own goaltender and the score was 2-1.

After a scoreless second period, the Flyers were able to tie the score with 1:52 remaining in the game on an open Trevor Zegras shot.

The overtime period was scoreless although the Canes had a full two minutes of 4 on 3 time to work with, but they were unable to generate anything with the advantage.

Once again, Brandon Bussi came up huge in the shootout and was able to stop all three shooters he faced.

The Hurricanes got the win off a pretty backhander by Andrei Svechnikov, who was the only goal-scorer in the skills competition.

Jacob Slavin returned to action this game after a long absence. He led the team with three blocked shots, one of them from in close that probably saved a goal. They eased him back to action as he only had 14:31 of ice time.

Next up for Carolina will be a match against the Predators in Nashville on Wednesday night.



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Hurricanes cut two-goal deficit, win 4-3 against Flyers

By: Haley O'Neill

After a slow start, the Carolina Hurricanes shifted the tempo halfway through the second period, sparking a two-goal comeback and earning a shootout win to move into first place in the Eastern Conference.

The Canes (20-9-2), allowing the first half of the game to be dictated by the Philadelphia Flyers (16-9-5), flipped the script in the second period, proving their ability to adjust. With multiple game-tying goals, 65 minutes wasn't enough time to declare a winner. The Canes earned the shootout win, earning a 4-3 victory.

"I think the first period we didn't really play the way we're known for, and not the way we're capable of," said winger Jackson Blake. "I think we got to it later on in that second period and got two big goals there and kept it going in the third."

No stranger to shootouts, head coach Rod Brind'Amour sent centers Seth Jarvis and Sebastian Aho, and wingers Andrei Svechnikov and Blake to take the shots. For both sides, Blake was the only skater to get the puck past the goaltender, sealing the win for his team.

Starting strong, Philadelphia ended the first period with a two-goal lead. With goals from winger Bobby Brink and center Trevor Zegras, they went back to the locker room with

room to breathe. Halfway through the second, the Canes found their footing, and winger Nikolaj Ehlers and defenseman Alexander Nikishin each found the back of the net, putting their team back in the game.

"I thought [the first period] was fast," center Logan Stankoven said during the first intermission. "They're playing physical. I think we had to try and match that, and you just have to do a bit better job in our [defensive] zone and picking up guys. We can't just give them goals. They seem like they want it more right now, so we need to get back to our game quick here and turn things around."

Sitting at two goals a piece, Jarvis, with an assist from Svechnikov, capitalized on a breakaway opportunity. Using his signature fake, he slid the puck across the ice to the left of goaltender Samuel Errson, taking the lead late in the third.

The Canes failed to protect the lead for long as winger Carl Grundstrom found the back of the net just 23 seconds later. Off a 2-on-1 breakaway against defenseman Joel Nystrom, he decided to take it all the way himself and snapped a shot past goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov, scoring the goal that took them to overtime and earned his team a single point.

With less than 24 hours between games, the Hurricanes and Flyers both head back to the Lenovo Center for a rematch on Sunday, December 14, with a 5 p.m. puck drop.



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The Hockey News

'It's Good To Be Back': Jaccob Slavin Returns To Action After Two Month Hiatus

By: Ryan Henkel

Slavin returns, shaking off rust with key defensive plays. Limited minutes, but his impact is felt as the Hurricanes welcome back a vital defenseman.

The Carolina Hurricanes certainly got a boost to their lineup Sunday night as star defenseman Jaccob Slavin returned to action after 29 games on the shelf with a lower-body injury.

"It was fun," Slavin said on getting back into game action. "It's good to be back out there playing. Sometimes being injured is almost harder than the grind of the season, but just thankful. All in God's timing and I've trusted in that the whole time and through the recovery process."

The Hurricanes certainly took their time with Slavin, whose injury was essentially the same thing that had kept him out in the preseason per the blueliner, as it was important to the team that he was 100% healthy and ready to go for the rest of the season.

However, Slavin said that this was a date that he and the team had circled on the calendar.

"We kind of had this date circled for a while, just making sure because it's a long season," Slavin said. "So just wanted to make sure I was good to go and wasn't going to have any flareups. Just had a good plan in place."

According to Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour, the plan going into the game then was also for Slavin to play limited minutes, something that he described as "hard to do."

Over his career, Slavin has averaged north of 22 minutes a night, but Sunday night, he played fewer than 15.

"It's hard playing that little," Slavin said.

The 31-year-old star was paired alongside rookie blueliner Alexander Nikishin, perhaps a glimpse into a future many Hurricanes fans are hoping to see.

But Brind'Amour stated that the move was more so in line with the organization wanting Slavin to play limited minutes and so having him on that third pairing would help accomplish that goal.

In his limited minutes, Slavin still did his fair share of the heavy lifting he's used to with three blocked shots and multiple disrupted passes.

"My style's not very flashy, so it's pretty easy to get back to it," Slavin said. "A couple of missed clears on the PK there though, so I'm knocking off some rust, for sure, but our system makes it really easy. Guys are helping out all over the ice. Coming back wasn't too hard, just have to make sure you're in game shape. Our training staff did a great job keeping me in shape and getting me ready for today. It was a process, but coming back, for me, it was just about going out there, continuing to work hard and continuing to glorify God."

"It was great to have him back," said goaltender Brandon Bussi. "You could see just kind of that calmness that he brings. He's a reliable stick. We've missed him and it was great to have him back."

The Hurricanes have a three-game road trip coming up, so it will be interesting to see how the Canes' coaching staff continue to ramp up Slavin and when he'll actually be truly ready to go in full with no more training wheels attached.

As not only the team's number one defenseman, but also one of the league's best, they'll certainly need him.

"It's been a long time without him and so it's nice to get him back," Brind'Amour said. "Hopefully he'll get up to speed here in the near future."

'Once You Feel Confident In A Goalie, The Game Comes Easy': Jaccob Slavin, Brandon Bussi, Andrei Svechnikov, Rod Brind'Amour On Another Shootout Win

By: Ryan Henkel

Slavin returns, Bussi shines, and Svechnikov clinches another shootout victory as the Hurricanes continue their winning streak.

The Carolina Hurricanes picked up a third straight shootout win and the second in a row against the Philadelphia Flyers at that, as they won 3-2 Sunday night at Lenovo Center.

William Carrier and Taylor Hall scored in regulation, while Andrei Svechnikov scored the lone shootout goal. Brandon

Bussi stopped 24 shots in the win as well as all three shootout attempts he faced.

After the game, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour along with Bussi, Svechnikov and Jaccob Slavin, who returned to action after 29 games out, spoke with the media. Here's what they had to say:

Rod Brind'Amour

On getting Jaccob Slavin back into the lineup: We obviously have to ease him back and that's hard to do too. It's been a



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long time without him and so it's nice to get him back. Hopefully he'll get up to speed here in the near future.

On if the plan going in was to keep his minutes limited: That was kind of the direction we've been given, so that's what we're doing.

On Brandon Bussi being a difference maker: Not so much early. I thought we had a really good two periods. We just didn't get enough leeway. Enough lead in there and then obviously they got the late one, but I thought in the third period especially, he made countless really timely saves and obviously in the shootout. That's pretty impressive.

On his team's strong start: Loved the first two periods. Gave up that late one on a pulled goalie situation and then really that's the two goals we gave up tonight. Gotta do a better job there, for sure, but I liked the way we played those periods. Gave up that late one, but it is what it is.

On the overpassing from some of the top guys: There was a lot of that. I mean, we kind of fell into that trap because they blocked so many shots. They hunker in there. They don't give you the great look, but sometimes the okay look will create the good look and we didn't wanna... we were looking for the special one and it really didn't come.

On pairing Slavin with Alexander Nikishin: Slavo's first game back, so you don't really wanna be messing him up too by throwing him all these curveballs and we knew we were limiting his minutes, so that's kind of the pairing we felt we would start with.

On Taylor Hall: He's been a really solid player for us. I know it's sometimes hard to find him the ice time because we have a lot of good wingers here to fit in, but he's dynamic. And he knows all the situations. He's definitely a threat when he's on the ice.

On the impression Joel Nystrom made on him: Obviously a really good one because we gave him a four-year deal after 10, 15 games or whatever. It's a numbers game, but we'll see him again. That's for sure.

Brandon Bussi

On his game: I just try to bring my best every game. I'll take a look at the video with [goaltending coach Paul Schonfelder] and maybe we can try to rank it, but no, I feel good right now. Confident. I feel like if I see the puck, I have a good chance of stopping it. But our team made some great plays in front. Specifically I remember toward the end of the first half, they scored, I don't know who it was, but I think two D got sticks or skates on pucks with an open net, so that's obviously the sacrifices we need to win games.

On using his size: I'm thankful for my size. When you have it, you got to use it. I guess a difference between being overly aggressive or too conservative, so maybe trying to find that middle ground and using my length to my advantage.

On playing with Jaccob Slavin for the first time: It was great to have him back. Obviously the first time playing with him officially in a game, so you could see just kind of that calmness that he brings. He's a reliable stick. We've missed him and it was great to have him back.

Jaccob Slavin

On returning to action: It was fun. It's good to be back out there playing. Sometimes being injured is almost harder than the grind of the season, but just thankful. All in God's timing and I've trusted in that the whole time and through the recovery process. Had a lot of people reaching out, saying that they were praying for me, so just thankful for all of that. But that guys did a great job while I was out. Obviously Bus has been holding down the fort big time for us there and everyone else has just been working out. All the young guys that came up and played. The team's just done a great job.

On if the plan going in was for him to play limited minutes: Yeah, I think so. It's hard playing that little.

On if he felt his game came back naturally to him: My style's not very flashy, so it's pretty easy. A couple of missed clears on the PK there though, so I'm knocking off some rust for sure. But our system makes it really easy. Guys are helping out all over the ice. Coming back wasn't too hard, just have to make sure you're in game shape. Our training staff did a great job keeping me in shape and getting me ready for today. It was a process, but coming back, for me, it was just about going out there, continuing to work hard and continuing to glorify God.

On Brandon Bussi: Definitely watched him a lot from up top. The guy, he just makes saves. That's all you can ask for when you're back there is just a goalie that makes saves. He's been doing a great job of that. Just so calm and collected and it's great to have.

On if he remembers his first NHL opportunity: When I was 21? Yeah. An injury happened and I got the callup. Time flies. We're in Year 11 now and it's been a lot of fun stuff that has happened along the way. You cherish those moments. Nys came in and he played great, Dom... all those guys. They just come up and do their job and it's great to see and it speaks to just our organization and the management and the job they've done of building the team that we have.

On if he had a timetable for his return the whole time: Yeah, we kind of had this date circled for a while and just making sure because it's a long season. So just wanted to make sure I was good to go and wasn't going to have any flareups. Just had a good plan in place.

On if getting back now was important too for Olympic consideration: I think anyone would say yes, but in my mind, if my first game back was going to be before the Olympics, I wouldn't have gone. My priority is this team and the group that we have here. We have a special group this year, so Olympics would definitely be awesome if it happens, but we'll just have to see. That's all in God's plan.

On if he wants to reveal his injury diagnosis: No. We'll keep it there. Keep you guys guessing. Lower-body injury.

Andrei Svechnikov

On his shootout winner: I mean, I didn't score for probably my last 10 shootouts, so I had to score this one. Went from left side and tried to make him move first. Thank God I scored that one.

On his backhand: I mean, sometimes it could slide down, so it's kind of a 50/50. Sometimes it's going to go in and sometimes it's going to slide down, but I wouldn't say it's super hard. Just a backhand move.



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On deciding on his move: It was kind of from talking with [Pyotr Kochetkov] a lot actually. He kind of tried to explain how the goalie works and how to do the shootout. A little secret, but just been talking with him a lot about it.

On Brandon Bussi: Just feeling very confident in him. Just the number one thing, once you feel confident in a goalie, the

game comes easy and I feel like that's what we feel as a group. Obviously he's playing unbelievable hockey here and he's just going to keep giving us.

On having Jaccob Slavin back: The best D in the world.

7 Takeaways: Hurricanes Win Consecutive Shootouts On Short Road Trip

By: Ryan Henkel

Jarvis and Blake delivered clutch shootout goals. Goaltenders stifled opponents, as the Hurricanes battled back for two thrilling consecutive wins.

The Carolina Hurricanes picked up back-to-back shootout wins this week over Metropolitan opponents to move back into first place in the Eastern Conference.

The Canes came back to win each game, first picking up a 3-2 win in Washington and then a 4-3 victory in Philadelphia.

Here are seven takeaways from the wins:

1. You Only Need One

Both games came down to the wire for Carolina and things couldn't really be any tighter than they were, especially since one shot determined both outcomes.

Against Washington, it was Seth Jarvis in the one slot who scored the game's lone shootout tally and against Philadelphia, Jackson Blake sealed the victory in the four slot.

Both were fairly unlikely heroes as Jarvis entered Thursday's game 1-for-6 in his career and Blake entered Saturday's game 0-for-3.

But as two of Carolina's best offensive players, you need to just put them in a position to deliver.

"In these situations, you have to make moves," said Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour. "Goalies are too good. So you need guys that have that courage to be able to make moves."

2. But Seven Saves Combined

Goaltending was a big part of the conversation in these two wins, especially when it came down to the shootout and both Brandon Bussi and Pyotr Kochetkov went a perfect 7-for-7 combined on the shots they faced.

Kochetkov especially had a great showing as his unorthodox poke checks disrupted the Flyers skaters so much.

That was also both the first shootout loss for the Flyers this year in six tries and the first time Trevor Zegras had been stopped.

3. Comeback Canes

The Hurricanes had to overcome hurdles in both of the games, as they trailed at multiple points in each.

They gave up the first goal to Washington after a great start and then folded a bit in the third period to concede the lead again.

However, the team fought back with goals from both Ehlers and Stankoven to force the extra frames.

Against Philly, a bad start saw the Hurricanes go down 2-0, but a strong bounce back period saw the game tied again.

"We stuck with it and I think that's just a great win to get, knowing that if you stick with your game, good things are gonna happen," said Jordan Martinook.

4. But Probably Should Have Won Each In Regulation

It's a tale as old as time.

Carolina dominates a game, but find themselves tied or trailing regardless.

They dominated that game against the Capitals, but then got a bit on their heels in the third period and as such found themselves trailing.

Against the Flyers though, the Hurricanes had a bad first period.

At some point, the team needs to have a better 60-minute showing, but it's clear that this team is good enough to overcome poor starts or tough stretches.

5. Power Play Struggles

The Canes' power play is like a box of chocolates.

You never know what you're going to get.

After a really strong stretch and even back-to-back power play goals from Jordan Staal of all people, it went 0-for-4 on the road trip and honestly didn't look that impressive at all.

Every penalty kill is going to look and play differently, so varied results are going to happen, but it's kind of crazy to see how much variance there are for the Hurricanes on the man advantage.

6. Alexander Nikishin Benching

On Saturday, after the Hurricanes took the lead thanks to a Seth Jarvis breakaway, the team immediately gave it right back after the Flyers got loose on a 2-on-1.

The main culprit of that breakdown was rookie defenseman Alexander Nikishin.

After a regroup by the Flyers in their defensive end, the Russian blueliner made a halfhearted effort to pinch along



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the board with no support back, giving up an easy odd-man rush.

It's one thing to make a wrong decision, but he also didn't give nearly enough effort on his attempt to hold the zone either.

If you're going to go, which is the wrong decision there in a game where you just took the lead, you have to commit and he sort of just found himself in no-man's land.

And thanks to that, he watched the rest of the game from the bench.

Those mistakes are the biggest things Nikishin still has to work on.

Knowing game situations, when and where to be aggressive, but also just effort overall.

The Hurricanes know how talented he is offensively, and his heads-up play in the second period gave the team a 2-2 tie. But as a defenseman, you have to be able to be trusted to protect a lead.

That's where Nikishin is still learning and developing and I see no problem with the decision to sit him there, especially being that the team was still in a tight contest.

7. Joel Nystrom Proving His Mettle

Fresh off becoming a million dollar man, the rookie blueliner is continuing to impress.

The Swede led all Hurricanes skaters in chance share over the past two games, with a 30-12 edge, and also had the highest expected goals percentage at 76.81%.

His on-ice results were also the best as he led all defensemen in goals for in his 5v5 ice time (3) and he conceded only three high-danger chances in over 25 minutes of 5v5 ice time.

There's no guarantee that he'll stick around with the Hurricanes when Jaccob Slavin returns from injury, but he's proved that he can be a successful NHLer.

LINKS

- <https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article313524501.html>
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SportScan

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

1371703 Carolina Hurricanes

Jacob Slavin return. How the defenseman helped the Hurricanes top the Flyers

Chip Alexander

6-7 minutes 15/12/2025

Raleigh

The long wait for Jaccob Slavin has ended.

The Carolina Hurricanes star defenseman finally returned to the lineup Sunday in a 3-2 shootout victory over the Philadelphia Flyers at Lenovo Center that earned goalie Brandon Bussi his ninth straight win.

Slavin last played for the Canes on Oct. 11 — against the Flyers in Raleigh. He then missed the next 29 games with an injury the Hurricanes — and Slavin again Sunday — would only call a “lower body” issue.

A knee problem? Something more serious? No one would say, although Slavin in time did return and get in some practices with the team. Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour did say initially that the former NHL All-Star, believed to be a near lock for the U.S. Olympic team roster this year, did not undergo any preseason surgery or any other procedure.



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But Brind'Amour had a somewhat surprising announcement Sunday about two hours ahead of game time: Slavin might be in the lineup as the Canes and Flyers finished up a rare home-and-home, back-to-back set.

For the second straight game, a shootout was needed to decide it. In the game Saturday in Philadelphia, the Canes' Jackson Blake had the only shootout goal. It was Andrei Svechnikov who had the winner Sunday, beating goalie Dan Vladar with a sharp backhander.

In net for the Hurricanes, continuing his waivers-to-wonderment story was Bussi, who improved his record to 11-1-0. Bussi turned back shots by Christian Dvorak and Matvei Michkov, and Trevor Zegras hit the post with his attempt.

Add in the shootout win over Washington on Thursday, and it was the first time in franchise history the team has recorded shootout victories in three consecutive games.

The Flyers' two goals both came with an extra attacker, the first by Zegras on a delayed penalty against Carolina, and then a Jamie Drysdale goal after pulling Vladar in the final two minutes of regulation.

Slavin, who was paired with Alexander Nikishin on the third D pairing, played 14:31 in his return, about 10 fewer minutes in ice time than in many of his games.

"It's hard playing that little," he joked.

Slavin said he and the medical staff had Dec. 14 "circled" all along as the date for getting back in games. Come Sunday, he was ready, being activated off Injured Reserve.

"I was knocking off the rust for sure," Slavin said. "But it was easy. Guys were helping out all over the ice. Coming back wasn't too hard. I just have to make sure I'm in game shape.

"He guys did a great job while I was out. Obviously 'Bus' has been holding down the fort back there."

Bussi did that Sunday, being named the game's first star and having Canes fans again chant his name at game's end. Among his 24 saves were several quick, athletic stops but also a few where the 6-4, 210-pound goaltender strongly stood his ground as the Flyers jammed around him.

"Once you feel the confidence in the goalie, the game comes easy, and I think that's what we feel as a group," Svechnikov said. "Obviously he's playing unbelievable hockey here."

News Observer LOADED: 12.15.2025

1371704 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes win third straight shootout in Slavin's return

Cory Lavalette

5-6 minutes 15/12/2025

RALEIGH — The Hurricanes finally got Jacob Slavin back on Sunday.

Oh, how things have changed in the 29 games he's missed — especially in goal.

Brandon Bussi improved to 11-1-0 by stopping all three shots in the shootout, and Andrei Svechnikov was the difference in Carolina getting the extra point against the Flyers for the second straight night in a 3-2 win at Lenovo Center.

Even coach Rod Brind'Amour seemed lost for words in describing the impact of Bussi, who made his first career start at age 27 after being claimed off waivers by the Hurricanes and has steered the team to the top of the Eastern Conference standings.

"I thought in the third period, especially, he made countless really timely saves," Brind'Amour said. "And obviously in the shootout — I dunno, that's pretty impressive."

Svechnikov, who lifted a backhand over Dan Vladar (30 saves) for the lone goal of the shootout, perhaps described Bussi's impact best.

"The No. 1 thing, once you feel confident in the goalie, the game comes easy," Svechnikov said. "And I feel like that's what we feel as a group. Obviously he's playing unbelievable hockey here, and he's just going to keep doing that."

The Flyers couldn't dent Bussi at 5-on-5 or on the power play, but a goal with just under 2 minutes left in regulation with Vladar on the bench for an extra attacker — Philadelphia scored both its goals at 6-on-5 — sent the game to overtime.

Carolina drew a penalty in OT, but the Hurricanes managed just one shot on goal and had to settle for going to a shootout for the third consecutive game.

Bussi didn't allow a goal by any of the three Philadelphia shooters, making a save on Christian Dvorak on the Flyers' second attempt by using every inch of his 6-foot-4 frame to extend his leg to the post.

Svechnikov, Carolina's second shooter, beat Vladar with a backhanded flip, extending his franchise record to 12 shootout goals in his career.

"I didn't score for probably the last 10 shootouts, so I had to score this one," he said. "I just went from the left side and tried to make him make a move first, and thank God I scored that one."

The Flyers earned a point by tying the game in the third period for the second straight night.

After three goals were scored in the first period, no more pucks found the back of the net until the end of regulation.

With Vladar on the bench for an extra attacker, Travis Konecny found Trevor Zegras on the back door for the tying goal with 1:52 remaining.

"We gave that late one up, a pulled goalie situation," Brind'Amour said. "Really, that's the two goals we gave up tonight. So gotta do better job there, for sure."

The Hurricanes did break a streak of allowing the first goal in four consecutive games by taking the lead at 5:44 of the first.

After a Sean Walker pass to William Carrier in the high slot was deflected, Carrier located it and shot through a screen by Jordan Martinook and past Vladar to make it 1-0. The goal was Carrier's third of the season.

Carolina doubled its lead on the power play when the team's second unit converted. Jackson Blake set up Alexander Nikishin for a one-timer that Taylor Hall redirected in front at 15:53 for his seventh goal of the season to bump the lead to 2-0.

"I know it's sometimes hard to find him the ice time because we've got a lot of good wingers here to fit in, but he's dynamic, right?" Brind'Amour said of Hall. "And he knows and all the situations. So he's definitely a threat when he's on the ice."

The Flyers got one back with 53 seconds remaining in the period when, on a delayed penalty, Philadelphia defenseman Jamie Drysdale's shot hit Carrier's stick and got past Bussi (24 saves) to cut the lead to 2-1.



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But the Hurricanes otherwise limited the Flyers, including going 4 for 4 on the penalty kill. Slavin, who played nearly three minutes of his monitored 14:31 on the PK, played a role in that.

"You could see just that calmness he brings," Bussi said of his first game playing with Carolina's top defenseman. "He's a reliable stick and we've missed him, and it's great to have him back."

Slavin, meanwhile, appreciated that the team managed to stay atop the conference while he recovered..

"The guys did a great job while I was out, and, obviously, The Bus has been holding down the fort big time back there," Slavin said. "And everyone else has just been working. All the young guys that came up and played, the team's just done a great job."

Notes: Joel Nystrom was reassigned to AHL Chicago after Slavin was activated off IR. ... Slavin played with Alexander Nikishin, who moved to the right side and played 20:01. Nikishin, who assisted on Hall's goal, has points in consecutive games. ... Slavin had a team-high three blocks. Zegras had two points.

The North State Journal LOADED: 12.15.2025

1371782 Websites

The Athletic / Jake Sanderson should play at the Olympics, but will he get Norris Trophy consideration?

By Julian McKenzie

As summer arrived, the last place Jake Sanderson wanted to be was at a hockey rink.

Sanderson's 2024-25 season with the Ottawa Senators was a breakout year following a slow start to the season. He was a late addition to the United States' roster at the 4 Nations Face-Off, scoring a goal in the championship game. Then, he helped the Senators make the playoffs for the first time in eight years before scoring an overtime game-winning goal in Game 4 against the Toronto Maple Leafs to keep his team alive.

The defenseman did not want a repeat of the previous summer, where he spent too much time in hockey rinks and not enough time resting. Yes, there would be time for skates at some point. But Sanderson needed time away. So, he spent most of his summer in his hometown of Whitefish, Mont., a resort town with a population of just over 9,000 according to the 2024 U.S. Census. Sanderson focused on his hobbies: fishing, hiking and mountain biking, before returning to Ottawa in early August.

That emphasis on rest and recovery, Sanderson believes, has been key to his early-season success.

"I feel, this year, much more energized coming into the rink," Sanderson told The Athletic last Saturday. "I just feel I have more energy this season."

That emphasis on rest has paid off for Sanderson, who appears to have an inside track at a spot on the United States' Olympic team when it travels to Milan in February. It would be the youngster's second time with the United States after playing in 2022, when NHL players weren't permitted to play at the Games.

"Ever since I went in college, when they didn't bring the NHL (players), and I realized how awesome it was," Sanderson said. "That hunger to go back is still there. So, hopefully, you never know what happens, but that's a long ways away right now."

Those chances have been bolstered by an improved start this year compared with last year, with 24 points in 31 games, including 13 points in his last 15 games this season. Sanderson's 24 points, before Saturday evening's NHL action, are tied for third-most among American defensemen this year with the Montreal Canadiens' Lane Hutson, trailing the Columbus Blue Jackets' Zach Werenski and the New York Rangers' Adam Fox.

For comparison's sake, Sanderson had 15 points in his first 28 games last year.

"I think (Sanderson's) just improving with age," Senators head coach Travis Green said. "He's relatively young still in the league. Years one to seven, you're just going to improve (by) getting stronger, your training, being in the league longer, understanding the game a little more, feeling more comfortable with what you can and can't do as you become a better player."

"That's something that he should be proud of, that he really wants to do well at both ends of the rink. He wants to be a really good offensive player, but he also doesn't want to do it at the risk of giving up goals that he shouldn't. And that, I think, speaks volumes of the maturity level that (Sanderson) has. He's a well-respected player at a young age, already in our locker room, and rightfully so."

The 23-year-old is fourth in points among defencemen who average 25 minutes per game, featuring a who's who of elite defenders such as Cale Makar, Miro Heiskanen, Quinn Hughes and Werenski. Sanderson is also fifth in points per game (0.77) in that cluster, and is also second in power-play points among said group. Sanderson is also fourth in net rating (a combination of offensive and defensive ratings according to Dom Luszczyszyn's metrics) in that group.

D-men w/ over 25 min. played per game

Player

AVG TOI

G

A

P

PPP

Net Rating

Cale Makar

25:21

10

27

37

10

14.2

Zach Werenski



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26:39

9

23

32

9

7.6

Miro Heiskanen

26:08

7

22

29

12

7.9

Jake Sanderson

25:13

6

18

24

11

7.7

Moritz Seider

25:09

4

18

22

10

10.0

Quinn Hughes

27:26

2

21

23

12

2.3

Travis Sanheim

25:15

2

11

13

2

3.1

Ivan Provorov

25:48

4

7

11

2

0.2

Unsurprisingly, Sanderson's team-leading defensive rating of 4.2 is tied with partner Artem Zub, a duo whom Tampa Bay Lightning coach Jon Cooper called "elite" earlier this season. Entering Ottawa's Thursday night game against Columbus, according to MoneyPuck, the duo registered the second-lowest expected goals against rate per 60 minutes at 1.86, trailing the pairing of K'Andre Miller and Sean Walker in Carolina.

There's been a lot more noise and praise surrounding Sanderson since his eye-opening 4 Nations performance in February. And he's keeping that attention at arm's distance.

"Personally, I don't, honestly, even hear much of it going on. Because I don't have Twitter or anything like that," Sanderson said. "But yeah, I think just getting more used to the league, getting older, getting more confident with my play. Our team right now is playing a certain style where we're playing hard, and it allows me to be more aggressive down the walls in the O-zone and keep more pucks alive."

It has been over a year since Sanderson sought out Jonathan Sigalet, a skills coach who's worked with defensemen such as Werenski and Vegas Golden Knights rearguard Noah Hanifin, as well as young forwards such as Anaheim's Cutter Gauthier and Chicago's Frank Nazar.

Throughout last season, Sanderson and Sigalet's relationship was remote, with the latter working with Sanderson through videos. This past summer, Sanderson spent time with Sigalet in Vancouver, where they skated a "handful" of times and worked on concepts that helped with his transition game and offensive zone play, among other skills. Even after a season where he showed significant improvement, Sanderson wanted to learn more.

"You'd never know anything different from talking to him," Sigalet said. "He's the same, humble, down-to-earth guy, no matter how much things start to go his way."

But it couldn't be all work and no play for Sanderson this summer. Sigalet remembers his brother, Stefan, hosting a get-together with Sanderson, his other clients and various family members. For a moment, Sigalet couldn't find Sanderson. Until he went into his brother's basement and found Sanderson, decked out in street hockey goaltending gear, "making kick saves" on breakaways against the Sigalet children.

"They don't even realize how cool it is. They've got this NHL All-Star," Sigalet said.

And as Sanderson continues his upward trajectory, it's only fair to wonder about his chances of winning the Norris Trophy, given to the league's best defenseman. Sanderson finished 10th in voting last year. He faces an uphill climb to be in contention this year, with Makar looking like a runaway favorite through the first quarter and a bit of the season.

Werenski, a finalist for last year's award, is in the hunt, too. Not only are Sanderson and Werenski good friends, but the latter was also in Vancouver working alongside Sanderson and Sigalet. Sanderson said last season he wanted to skate like Werenski, who finished second in Norris voting last season, and defend like fellow American Jaccob Slavin.

"As cool as that is, I feel like it reciprocates back to him," Werenski said. "I look up to him in a lot of ways, too. And the way he works, and the way he plays the game. I feel like our group in the summer, me, him, Quinn,



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Luke (Hughes), we're all learning from each other and taking things from each other.

"I'm just really happy for him with how he's played these last couple of years, really getting to show what he could do at the 4 Nations, (and) the year he's having this year."

But what's important for Sanderson is that he is progressing, with his play featuring him among the league's very best at his position.

"He's just starting to scratch the surface of what he can become," Sigalet said.

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The Athletic / Three days with the Saginaw Spirit, where being different is the name of the game

Scott Wheeler

SAGINAW, Mich. — As Saginaw Spirit general manager Dave Drinkill pulls out of the alleyway behind the Dow Event Centre, he passes a mural on the arena's parking garage celebrating his team's 2024 Memorial Cup victory.

He's sitting in the driver's seat of his Chevrolet Silverado on a recent Friday game day, and he's defending the way he and his head coach, Chris Lazary, build and run their team.

Over three games in three days earlier this season, The Athletic went behind the scenes with the Spirit to get an inside look at what that looks like, from video sessions to pregame speeches, intermission chats and postgame celebrations.

Drinkill and Lazary are the second-longest tenured GM-coach tandem in the OHL. Drinkill is in his 20th year in the league and 11th as Saginaw's GM. He's a "handshake farm boy" from rural Elmvalle, Ontario, who started out throwing T-shirts at Sudbury Wolves games before rising through the ranks with the Barrie Colts to assistant GM and eventually landing the Saginaw job. Lazary is in his ninth year as one of his coaches and seventh as the head coach.

Together, they've developed top NHL draft picks such as Michael Misa, Cole Perfetti, Pavel Mintyukov and Zayne Parekh, won every on- and off-ice award there is to win, and put together winning teams. They've missed the playoffs just once — the pandemic season, when Perfetti unexpectedly played in the AHL under its one-off 19-year-old exemption, and when Drinkill would have to yell "the faxes are coming in!" before every road trip to Canada as one-by-one his players' COVID test results would spit out, telling them just how short-benched they'd be.

He thinks they could've won the OHL championship in 2020, when COVID hit, and they had a 41-16-5 record with the first age group he and Lazary built around together. The second team they built together was the only one to take games off the London Knights in the 2024 OHL playoffs, beating them twice in the Western Conference final and a third time when it mattered most in the Memorial Cup final.

And what they've accomplished in Saginaw, they've done in their own way.

Dave Drinkill lifts the Memorial Cup in 2024. (Courtesy of the Saginaw Spirit)

It all starts with a focus on puck possession. Drinkill gravitates away from north-south players who "just shoot pucks from anywhere." Those

players, he acknowledges, become high picks. "We're just not built that way," he said. He likes size, but only if it can play and believes bigger players take longer to develop, preferring to trade for them once he knows which ones panned out.

He scouts for game-breakers who are comfortable with the puck on their stick and could lead his team in scoring.

"We don't go by the consensus of 'This guy played for the Marlies, and he's a 6-3 winger who put up 40 goals.' Well, how did he put up the goals? Did he generate them by himself?" he said.

He uses the Montreal Canadiens as a team that, like the Spirit, has embraced manipulation as a big part of its game.

This summer, he recruited 5-foot-11, 2027 NHL Draft-eligible defenseman Levi Harper. Where some teams want just one Harper for their power-play role, he and Lazary wish they could have one on every pair and want offense from all six of their D.

The year they drafted Parekh, OHL scouts were scared by him. The Spirit loved him.

"They said, 'Oh, but he can't do that at the next level?' and I said, 'Why not?' And NHL teams said the same thing: 'He can't do what he's doing.' And it's like 'Why can't he?'" Drinkill said.

He believes players are over-scouted in minor and junior hockey, and doesn't fuss over a bad game or groupthink around a player's perceived flaws.

They like late birthdays because they get to work with them for three years pre-draft instead of two, and they look for the same traits in the 15th round as the first. This year, they drafted late-birthday forward Ryan Hanrahan, one of the only 15-year-olds to start the season in the OHL, with the 13th pick after he had just 10 points in 23 AAA games, betting on the development runway of a player who'd gone from a 5-foot-4 skill player to 6-foot-1 in a blink.

"Some GMs are scared away from trying things," he said. "I'm not a safe GM. I'm never like 'Oh, this guy's going to play.' They should all f—ing play. They're high picks in the OHL. I've had NHL scouts tell me about a second-round pick 'Oh, but he's a safe player, he projects as a third-liner.' You're looking for a third-liner in the second round?"

"Laz and I, we build differently," Drinkill said. "We just do."

Chris Lazary prepares "Spiritcakes" for his players ahead of a morning video session. (Scott Wheeler / The Athletic)

Drinkill calls Lazary "elite at presenting." That's when he's in his element.

Kyle Makaric, the team's newest assistant coach, got the job after tracking down Lazary at a coach's conference in Ann Arbor, Mich. He'd seen him present there two years ago and told himself if he saw him again, he'd go talk to him. Before Saginaw, he was an assistant in Tier 2 with the Ottawa Jr. Senators, and his owner had told him if he ever wanted to check out some OHL games, he'd get him tickets. The only time he took him up on it was when the Spirit visited because he felt they played a modern, progressive style.

Lazary treats the Spirit's theater like he's a teacher at the front of a classroom, constantly shooting questions to his players.

When he asks them, "Who are we bumping here?" or "If F1 comes down ice here, what are we doing?" or "Who's calling that?" or "What are the wingers doing here?" or "Who's responsibility is that?" they have the answers.

"The winger."

"Speed."

"The two drop guys."



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"Owning the slot."

"Low guy."

When he talks about the offensive zone, he talks a lot about swinging, slipping, rolling, movement, patterns and "getting to your landmarks."

When he talks about the defensive zone, he talks the players through their structure for two scenarios — low-puck and high-puck — and uses terms like "sting," "quick to four," "handoff," "reset" and "fold."

When his players drew up a new power play look called The Miro earlier this year, he told them he thought it was "f—ing sick" and encouraged them to try it again during a session.

"It's off-puck movement," he told them. "At the end of the day, they were a little confused, and we did a great job slipping in and getting that look."

Lazary likes to watch the team-made documentaries that the Carolina Hurricanes, Pittsburgh Penguins and others do so that he can cut and show his players when NHL coaches are talking about the same things he is.

Asked about the concepts of movement he teaches, he laughs about how even Perfetti, the smartest player he's ever coached, squinted through his early Spirit video sessions.

"We want guys to understand interchangeable parts and to get a player to develop his brain that way, sometimes there's mistakes. But when it takes hold, that's good development for them, whether they play that way in the NHL or not, because they understand the game more," he said. "I think we have a responsibility to develop players outside of winning, so to get them to have this visual, 360 degree of the ice, helps players when they leave here. We're big believers in not putting guys into 'Well, you're only going to do or be this.' You're just stunting growth. Our job is to try to get them to be more."

With enough repetition, and usually after slow starts for his teams, he says the players figure it out, and the chaos that some outsiders see is actually "just patterns."

"I think you can move a little more in the NHL and then you watch teams that do it a little and it works (he says Florida will slide guys through coverage, and that there's a method to Carolina's shoot-from-everywhere madness)," he said. "I say it all the time when guys ask about our offense: 'It's just basketball.' When one guy moves the ball, what happens? Another guy fills a space, and then all of a sudden someone on the interior has drawn someone from the three-point line, and there's an open shot. It's the same concept. When our guys come through coverage, it's hard to cover because the other guys are thinking, 'Do I go, or do I not go?' It's just a little bit of confusion — enough to find a play."

A lot of their offensive zone play is developed through three small area games they practice over and over, spray painting the ice to show the players the areas they always need filled and teaching them "it's all about reading off of the guy that you passed it to."

To illustrate it from his office, he takes a marker from his desk and maps out one of the drills.

"Guys are always like 'Yeah, but you give up chances back the other way.' And I'm like 'Yeah, well I watch teams that don't threaten that give up just as many chances the other way. Why not try to get a little more creative?'" he said. "As long as two of your guys are centered around the puck then what's the problem? If it's two D defending a rush, we're good defensively, but if it's a forward and a D, we're bad defensively? And now everybody forward angles when they skate, so we want our D to forward angle, and you think a forward can't forward angle?"

Chris Lazary addresses the Spirit before a recent game. (Scott Wheeler / The Athletic)

This season, after losing their top five scorers from a year ago (Misa and Parekh to the NHL, Igor Chernyshov to the AHL, Kristian Epperson to the NCAA and 21-year-old Calem Mangone), the Spirit are in a novel spot for Drinkill and Lazary.

Despite a record under .500, though, their conviction in what they're doing is unwavering.

That conviction isn't just in the way they play, either.

When prospects and their families visit Saginaw, Lazary will often take them to Heritage High School and Saginaw Valley State University. On those trips, he'll explain to them why, as some teams move to online schooling for their players so that they can be on the ice in the mornings, his must attend school from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., arguing it's better for them to be in a classroom, attending school events, and, yes, having girlfriends, than to always be at the rink. For the high school graduates, he'll tell them that they'll have to take at least one class at SVSU.

And their players are all-in with them.

At the end of a perfect 3-0-0 three-in-three, potential 2026 first-rounder and Saginaw newcomer Nikita Klepov said what his teammates — from Harper to top 2027 prospect Dima Zhilkin — had all weekend: How much he likes playing for Lazary and Drinkill. Lazary, he said, is the first coach he has ever had use some of the concepts he does. "Laz coaches a very unique style of game," he said. "It's very different with all of the motion, and I love playing in it."

But the passion players have for playing with Lazary and Drinkill hasn't been reciprocated by the NHL yet.

On the wall inside their player lounge are the names of Spirit NHL alumni. They'll bring a painter in the morning after a debut so that the players can see the names go up. Misa's is the latest. When The Athletic first arrived, Drinkill paused where Washington Capitals head coach Spencer Carbery's name is on it (Carbery was the Spirit's head coach for a year when Lazary was an assistant) and said, "Laz and I want to get our name up there someday."

After interviewing for a couple of AHL head coaching jobs, though, Lazary says he has been told, "unreal interview, but we're going to go a different direction."

Drinkill doesn't know why his head coach is still his head coach.

"I'm shocked that nobody has given him a long look here. He wins, guys love him, he's the hardest-working guy I've ever been around — like he's at the rink every day at 5:30. He's a good teacher," Drinkill said. "I think guys are scared because he's outside the norm a little bit. I worry that all of a sudden, 15 years from now, the NHL is going to be how Laz thinks, and I just hope it doesn't get to the point where now Laz is too old."

And Lazary doesn't know what else he can do.

"Team success has been great. Player development has been great. And the phone never rings. I'm at the point where I'm like 'Am I the next Brian Kilrea or Dale Hunter?'" Lazary said. "I look at our analytics, and they're like 'You don't defend,' and I'm like 'Last year we spent the least amount of time in our D-zone and gave up the second-least high-danger slot shots.' So we don't defend, but we have the best defensive numbers in the league, and our offensive numbers are always off the charts?"

At 42, Drinkill acknowledged he's not young anymore, either. He has had opportunities to scout in the big leagues, but to leave Saginaw, he said, he'd have to either get fired or not renewed, or get offered an assistant GM role.

"I can't just write reports, and if they draft my guys, they draft them, and if they don't, they don't," he said. "At least not right now in my life. And maybe it won't happen, but we have a good thing here, and I don't want to just leave for the sake of leaving. We believe in what we're doing. Guys are getting drafted high here and going on to pro careers."



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These days, Lazary's doing his best to take advice from longtime mentor Jeff Twohey and just "Do a great job where you're at."

Such is the life of a junior hockey coach, maybe especially one that's different.

"This is what I do," Lazary said. "I coach here. My family loves it here. I love working with Drinks. We've had some good success. My kids were born here. It's OK to be here."

The Athletic LOADED: 12.15.2025

1371784 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 'We're building something': Canucks embracing change in post-Hughes era

Iain MacIntyre

NEWARK, N.J. — A weekend that started with goodbye, ended with hello to a new era as the Vancouver Canucks beat the New Jersey Devils 2-1 Sunday in their first game since Friday's titanic trade of Quinn Hughes.

The prized piece among the four assets the Minnesota Wild surrendered for Hughes, Zeev Buium collected more points (two) in his first seven minutes as a Canuck than the former captain did in his final seven games with Vancouver. So, clearly, the Canucks won the biggest National Hockey League trade in years.

Actually, it may take another seven years to really determine that. But what was starkly evident in Sunday's matinee was the dramatic change of course the Canucks have embraced.

Buium, 20, who was still a teenager a week ago, ably quarterbacked the Canucks power play that scored two early goals and was the difference in the game.

Jake DeBrusk, who signed a seven-year contract 18 months ago to join Vancouver for the chance to win a Stanley Cup while playing with a star centre, scored for the last-place Canucks while skating with new centre Marco Rossi.

Buium scored the other goal by missing Brock Boeser with a pass through the slot and watching the puck bounce in off Devils defenceman Brenden Dillon.

Former Wild prospect Liam Ohgren was on the fourth line, Lukas Reichel was on waivers and Hughes, of course, was in Minnesota to make his Wild debut Sunday against the Boston Bruins after spending the first 6.5 years of his NHL career with the Canucks.

"You don't even know what these guys have yet because they're so young," Boeser, the longest-tenured Canuck, told Sportsnet after the game. "But today was a step in a new direction. And I'm looking forward to it."

Like all the other Canucks who signed long-term contracts to play on Quinn Hughes' team and have been asked about the trade, Boeser said his commitment to the franchise is not wavering with his friend's departure.

"I'm not the kind of guy who's like, 'We traded Huggy? OK, see you later,'" Boeser explained. "(The trade) happened a little faster than I thought it was going to happen. And it hit me hard. I had a lot of different feelings, emotions. But I do think we got some good players back, and we have a lot of good young players now.

"Obviously, it's going to be difficult, but you know, I have to be a good leader and a good veteran, and kind of help lead these guys. We want to

kind of change what's been going on in Vancouver, and I do think these young guys are capable of that. We have so much talent in that room. If we learn how to play the right way and mature the right way, and learn to play that hard hockey that it takes to make the playoffs, I think we can do it."

Before Hughes boarded Wild owner Craig Leipold's private jet on Saturday, he had a final dinner out on Friday night with a few of his closest teammates.

"It was really important because it was obviously a big shock," Boeser said. "Just to kind of grasp the whole thing ... you want to get to say goodbye, and so it meant a lot that we got to have a dinner with him and kind of say our goodbyes. We all tried to have (upbeat) attitudes, but obviously some of us were sad."

"Losing your captain, I mean, it's always different," DeBrusk said after the Canucks' second win in eight games. "Having new guys ... they're excited, all the younger guys. And they all have different energy that they bring, so that's the positive side of it. But yeah, it's definitely an adjustment. But we got enough to win tonight.

"I think it's kind of hard to judge off one game, but I liked what I saw in my centre (Rossi). I thought that he was fast, quick. He was on pucks. He was looking for me. I felt like I wasn't ready for some pucks that came, so I told him just to be patient with me. Wasn't necessarily my best, either. I thought Ohgren played well, was really hard on pucks. He seems like a strong kid. I thought that he was really heavy on the forecheck, and he's got good speed as well. And then obviously, Zeev, lots of skill there. Really fluid skater. I thought he was comfortable out there. Seems like he's pretty confident in himself."

Buium, who logged eight minutes in the first period and finished with 19:50 of ice time on a pairing with Tyler Myers, said playing the game was the easiest part of the last 48 hours.

"I think that's definitely the easiest part, being on the ice," the dynamic defenceman said. "There's obviously a lot of noise and, you know, things that you could probably overwhelm yourself with. But the second you step on the ice, it's just hockey.

"I think it all clicked pretty easily. Mysie was unbelievable to me. Throughout the whole game, I think there's moments where you see a little bit of a new guy on a new team. But I think it came pretty easy and, like I said, it was nice to get the win."

"It's different," coach Adam Foote said of the tone around his team. "You can tell it's different. It's just a really different feeling that ... the noise, what you said, is gone. It was hard on Huggy. It was hard on the players when that's out in the public. We'll miss Huggy, you know.

"But as far as going forward with your team, it was a distraction, and you could feel it. I'm sure there was a couple of guys today that lost a lot of energy because they lost their buddy, right? It just happened so quickly that they might not have their legs, but it was important to get that win. The players really fought hard for it, and it's good to see that happen right out of the gates."

Thatcher Demko was excellent in net for Vancouver, making 25 saves, a couple of the best ones during a five-on-three New Jersey power play late in the first period. Hughes' little brother, Luke, was the only Devil to get a puck past the Canuck.

Until Myers' interference penalty at 13:03 of the opening period, the Canucks outshot the Devils 7-1. In the final 47 minutes, shots were 25-8 for New Jersey.

Still, the Canucks did not yield many high-quality chances.

"I mean, obviously, it's not what we wanted as a team," DeBrusk said of the new Canucks world without Hughes. "No one wanted this; I can tell you that for free. But sometimes sports are weird, and you learn a lot



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about yourself when the times are tough. Obviously, like I said, we've got a lot of younger guys. But I don't have any regrets ... and I'm still happy to be here. We're building something here."

- Foote scratched forwards Aatu Raty and Arshdeep Bains to make room in the lineup for Rossi and Ohgren. To bring Rossi off injured reserve — he was hurt in Minnesota on Nov. 11 — top centre Elias Pettersson was placed on IR retroactively to Dec. 5. Pettersson has missed four games but is close to returning ... The Canucks visit the New York Rangers on Tuesday.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 12.15.2025

1371785 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers' Pickard 'dealing with it' after Skinner trade, loss to Canadiens

Mark Spector

MONTREAL — For the past couple of weeks, Calvin Pickard and Stuart Skinner had noticeably lingered over their post-game embraces.

It was some new, weird level of the post-game goalie love. Part, "Good game, buddy," and part, "It's been nice knowing you."

It was as if they knew that their tandem would soon be ripped apart by trade. Like they were sending out some kind of sign, some portent of a crease-changing deal to come.

And when Skinner got dealt away on Friday, you could almost hear the Oilers fan base: "We KNEW it!"

Well, as it turns out, they didn't know jack. Because the goalies didn't know jack.

"No," admitted Pickard after a 4-1 loss in Montreal on Sunday. "We were just screwing around with everybody."

Seriously?!

"Ya," he confessed. "Because after the first (hug) that happened — it was a long one, because I was so mad at letting that goal in with four seconds left, and we won 9-4 — and then you guys read into it too much. Then we were screwing around there after the next two wins.

"It doesn't look like we were screwing around, obviously, with (a trade) happening. But that was the truth."

So perhaps, we'll submit, the night Pickard had in Montreal Sunday was karma, faced with four separate breakaways and the Sisyphian task of holding his team in against the Canadiens as long as humanly possible.

It's a lonely life being a career backup, always getting the second game of back-to-backs, backstopping the tired team that lapses after winning the night before. The backup can't leave practice early, and even when he doesn't play in a couple of weeks, he's expected to arrive sharp and ready, because nobody wants to hear a list of excuses from the No. 2 'tendy.

"It happens, yeah," Pickard admitted. "I haven't played in 10 days, so it has its own challenges, for sure. But I've done it for years now. It can get frustrating, but it's the hand I'm dealt. I just gotta go out and deal with it."

And, in the end, Pickard did lose his partner Skinner. He'll see him again in Pittsburgh, where the Oilers and Penguins meet Tuesday in what should be a Tristan Jarry versus Skinner showdown.

"Obviously, I've been through this. I've been in pro hockey for a long time," Pickard said of the trade. "It's definitely felt weird. You know, Skins

and Cooley (Brett Kulak) just leave in the blink of an eye. Two big parts of our team since I've been here. Two good friends."

On a night when all the top Oilers delivered C-minus performances, there was Pickard, "dealing with it." Standing on his head in a losing cause.

"We were forcing it," said head coach Kris Knoblauch, whose team had taken nine of its last 10 possible points heading into Montreal. "The (four) breakaways we gave up were just puck management, just trying things in the offensive zone where we should have just put pucks in a safe spot. Picks (Pickard) bailed us out and gave us an opportunity to stay in the game, but it was just too much."

In a town that blames every loss on the goaltending, surely nobody was crooning that tired old song after this loss.

Pickard stopped Josh Anderson on a breakaway. Then Nick Suzuki had a pair of breakaways and came up empty. For good measure, Alexandre Texier was given the opportunity to bear down on Pickard from the centre line and came away with nothing.

Pickard has likely played in shootouts and seen fewer breakaways than the Oilers skaters coughed up Sunday, on a night where they had jump, but their execution was tragic.

It started with a full, two-minute five-on-three power play just 6:04 into the game, when two Canadiens went to the box at the same time.

With Leon Draisaitl in search of point No. 1,000, that power play could have been the springboard to a fun night at the Bell Centre for the Oilers. Score one or two early, and this one might have been a whole lot different.

"There were a lot of things on that power play," Knoblauch said. "I thought we had some good chances, their goalie made some unbelievable saves. They made some nice defensive plays, and we even had an empty net that one of our players blocked.

"But, yeah, that definitely would have made a difference."

Montreal's power play scored twice — the difference in the game — and from there, "We got behind in the second (period), and then there was too much run-and-gun for me," Mattias Ekholm said. "Without Picks tonight, it could have been a lot worse."

File this one under "You can't win 'em all."

Far more importantly, will be how the Oilers bounce back after their first regulation loss in six games.

"Credit to Montreal, they played well," Knoblauch said. "But we are feeling confident. We've scored a lot of goals (lately), we're starting to win, and now some bad habits are creeping into our game — when things are going well.

"We gave up four breakaways, two-on-ones... It's just not sustainable."

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens answer embarrassing loss with 'best game of the season'

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — The sequence continued with Joe Veleno sucking Mattias Ekholm into a trap to start a cycle and ended with him burying his second goal of the season and Montreal's second goal of what turned out to be a 4-1 win over the Edmonton Oilers.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Everything that happened in the lead-up to it was the stuff this game was made of for the Canadiens.

When Veleno intercepted a forced pass from Connor McDavid and ripped a shot past Calvin Pickard, it capped a 57-second shift that spanned all 200 feet of the ice. He, Jake Evans and Josh Anderson lost a faceoff after icing the puck, and after defending like the game was on the line, they pushed the play up the ice and forced the world's best player and his linemates to defend until they broke.

The whole sequence required attention to detail, intensity, and the type of persistence the Canadiens just haven't had often enough for the better part of six weeks.

They had it on this shift, though, after re-establishing it at the start of Sunday's game, and they maintained it until the final whistle blew.

"It was our best game of the season," said Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis.

It wasn't a coincidence the Canadiens conjured it up directly after playing arguably their sloppiest game of the season—a 5-4 loss to the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden 24 hours prior, over which they surrendered 3-0 and 4-2 leads.

"Marty was obviously really pissed," Veleno said.

We wondered if he and the rest of the players were, too, and felt they needed a long, hard look in the mirror if they weren't. Because Saturday's game wasn't a throwaway; it was a game that provided a critical lesson to a young, stubborn team searching for—and failing to find—consistency.

"It's about, as a team, playing more desperate, playing like it's the playoffs right now," said Jake Evans, and he was right.

But it wouldn't have made a difference if he were the only one to realize it.

Because he wasn't, we got something vastly different Sunday from what we've watched over an up-and-mostly-down, topsy-but-mostly-turvy run of play that put the Canadiens' character, system and coach on trial in the court of public opinion and undid a lot of the good that felt solidified through a 9-3-0 start.

Hey, this was never going to be a straightaway for the youngest team in the league. And more bumps and bends in the road are surely coming.

But the Canadiens all steadying the bus together Sunday gave them a roadmap to navigating those bumps and bends better when they come.

"I don't think anything is linear in life," said St. Louis. "If it teaches us anything, this non-linear thing, I think it's when you have 20 guys that take care of the team, I think the dips are (shallower) and you rise faster."

It's a commitment that must be made over and over again, and it's anything but easy to do this far from the finish line. As St. Louis always says, deadlines spur urgency, and the deadline is still 50 games away.

But Games 31 and 32 set off alarm bells right when the Canadiens needed to wake up. The embarrassment of Saturday's game, and the threat of embarrassment on Sunday rang loud and clear to all.

"I think sometimes it takes playing against the best players to understand you need to play that way, because then you play more with the awareness that they can do something very bad to you," said Veleno.

Playing "that way" meant playing simple and smart, playing direct and connected, playing intensely and relentlessly, and managing each situation the way it needed to be managed.

The Canadiens did that at the start.

Then they took two penalties on the same sequence and fought like hell to kill a five-on-three they'd have not survived if not for the five saves Jakub Dobes made.

The Canadiens fed off the momentum Dobes gave them until Ivan Demidov broke the ice on their power play 2:28 into the second period. And then they broke the Oilers down methodically and systematically to create three breakaway chances and much more momentum for Veleno to capitalize on.

"We frustrated them just by being good defensively, being on the right side of the puck, winning battles and forcing them to give up pucks," he said. "Teams get annoyed when you take away their time and space, and we annoyed them."

It was Evans, Anderson, Matheson and Carrier who annoyed McDavid all night, limiting him to a measly secondary assist on the power play in the 13th minute of the third period, long after Nick Suzuki made it 3-0 Canadiens.

The playoff intensity Evans demanded was there from start to finish.

"I definitely saw it tonight," he said. "I thought that was one of our most complete games. Just simple plays. You're up a couple of goals against a really skilled team that'll make you pay quickly, and everyone chipped in. Literally. Everyone was literally chipping pucks in."

It is the template a team must employ to win consistently in this league, with the schedule unrelenting and the standings airtight.

Relying on skill—even if you have enough of it—rarely works, and games like the ones against New York and Edmonton should reinforce that lesson to the Canadiens.

"Tonight was very encouraging, and I feel like if we do that, you're helping yourself to be consistent," said St. Louis. "And when you have consistency, you're going to get home runs, you're going to keep climbing in the standings. If you lack consistency, you're just rolling the dice."

That reality appeared to finally be acknowledged by the Canadiens on Sunday, and that enabled them to grow a little bit.

We'll find out exactly how much by Tuesday, when they face the Philadelphia Flyers.

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Sportsnet.ca / 'It felt like it was time': Quinn Hughes talks leaving Canucks, settling with Wild

Michael Vavaroutsos

It has been a long time coming in the Quinn Hughes trade saga, but on Friday, the long-awaited move finally became a reality.

Hughes made his Minnesota Wild debut Sunday, just two days after being acquired from Vancouver.

After recording his first goal in the team's 6-2 win over the Boston Bruins, Hughes spoke to reporters for the first time since being traded and reflected on his time with the Canucks, while also talking about the excitement in starting the next chapter in his hockey career.

"This team is impressive," Hughes said following the game. "As I get going here and feel more comfortable, it's gonna be exciting."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Despite it being only his first game on his new team, Hughes says that he already felt the love coming from all of the fans in attendance for his Wild debut.

"It was pretty special," he said. "I wasn't expecting that. I know (Minnesota) is a hockey market, but that was exciting."

Hughes spoke highly of his new teammates, including Kirill Kaprizov, and said he's excited to continue building chemistry with blue-line partner Brock Faber.

However, it wasn't the players who first caught his eye — it was general manager Bill Guerin.

"I really appreciate him trading the assets that he did to get me. Some teams are in until they hear what they have to trade to get me, but Billy was all-in.

"Obviously, I wanna do what I can here and do him right."

Hughes mentioned that his time with the Wild general manager during the 4 Nations Face-Off in February really impacted his decision to come to Minnesota.

Hughes is set to become an unrestricted free agent in 2027. He is eligible to sign an extension on July 1, and is "extremely open-minded" on staying with the Wild long term.

"They've got an amazing core. Obviously I've only been here for four hours, but I'm getting to know some of the guys, and how energetic and positive some of them are. And then Minnesota, being so close to Michigan, and just the State of Hockey and the passion here.

"... That means a lot to me."

The 26-year-old spent the first seven years of his NHL career with the Canucks after being drafted seventh overall by the team out of the University of Michigan. During that time, he made the playoffs just twice, including once under Jim Rutherford, the current president of hockey operations for Vancouver.

Still, Hughes stressed that the process was handled the right way.

"I have the ultimate respect for Jim Rutherford, and (team owner) Francesco Aquilini and the Aquilini family," he said when asked about his involvement in the trade. "They were first-class with everything that was going on, and obviously it was a tough situation, but it felt like it was time, and I think Jim did too.

"... (Jim) wanted me to go where he thought I'd be happy."

The return for Vancouver in the blockbuster trade included forwards Marco Rossi and Liam Ohgren, defenceman Zeev Buium and the Wild's first-round pick in 2026. All three players made their Canucks debuts Sunday against New Jersey, with Buium shining by recording a goal and an assist in Vancouver's 2-1 win.

Buium's new teammate — and Hughes' former teammate — Conor Garland discussed the impressive debut for the newly acquired Buium.

"He was really good on the power play," Garland said. "His entries are up there with the best, so he's gonna be a really good addition going forward."

When Sportsnet's Dan Murphy asked Garland about what the loss of Hughes means to him, he kept it brief, saying, "he's one of the best guys out there, but as a group, we gotta move on."

After the game, Canucks coach Adam Foote also reflected on the loss of Hughes in the locker room, saying it has a completely different feel to it.

"It's just a really different feeling," he said. "All the noise is finally gone. It's hard on Huggy, it's hard on the players when that's out in the public, and it's hard to keep those things behind closed doors.

"We're gonna miss Huggy, but as far as it goes with your team, it was a distraction and you can feel it."

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1371788 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Sunday Overreactions: Wild are Cup contenders after Hughes trade

Michael Amato

Another Friday blockbuster.

The Jonathan Huberdeau-for-Matthew Tkachuk swap as well as the Mikko Rantanen and JT Miller trades have all jolted us from casual Friday night plans in recent years, so we probably should've seen the massive Quinn Hughes deal coming. But very few saw Minnesota in the Hughes sweepstakes or would've predicted the massive haul the Wild gave up to acquire the former Norris winner. Minnesota gets a premier puck mover on the back end and now have no glaring weaknesses as they ready themselves for what will be a gauntlet in the Central division.

The Wild will get their first look at Hughes' fit when he makes his debut on Sunday, when the team hosts the Boston Bruins (6 p.m. ET / 3 p.m. PT on Sportsnet, Sportsnet+).

The Wild are now legit championship contenders

Hughes may very well have been the missing piece for Minnesota, which hasn't made it past the first round in a decade. A first pair of Brock Faber and Hughes may be able to play half the game. Add in talent up front like Matt Boldy, Kirill Kaprizov and Joel Eriksson Ek, and you've suddenly got a very balanced team.

Marco Rossi goes the other way and is a tough loss for the Wild, but keep in mind, Minnesota only used him sparingly in the post-season last year anyway. Rossi barely played 11 minutes per game last spring, as the Wild perhaps didn't trust him to take on heavy minutes and assignments when the games mattered most. Zeev Buium should be a great player someday, but Hughes is a massive upgrade for the immediate future. The reality is the Wild pushed all their chips to the middle of the table and gave up what should be some great future talent for a chance to win it all in the next couple seasons.

They also will have cap space to add pieces next summer and are the only team that will be able to offer Hughes an eight-year deal before the CBA changes in September. Minnesota will have a year and a half to convince Hughes to stay long term and extend a championship window that now appears to be wide open.

Overreaction? No

Make no mistake about, the Wild are in a really tough division looking up at arguably the two best teams in the league in Colorado and Dallas. That said, Minnesota should feel pretty good about itself in a seven-game series against any of the league's elite teams. The Wild already have the 10th-best power play in the NHL without Hughes and adding him gives them a realistic chance to make that a top five unit. Minnesota can also trust Faber and Hughes to play in any situation and split them up if needed to give them more balance. That should put them in a good position when potentially matching up with other division rival duos on the back end like Cale Makar and Devon Toews as well as Miro Heiskanen and Thomas Harley.

Hughes is also joining one of the few teams with elite goaltending. The Wild are tied for second in the NHL in team save percentage and lead the league in shutouts, with two goalies playing at a very high level. Jesper



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Wallstedt and Filip Gustavsson have combined for nearly 17 goals saved above expected this season and Wallstedt specifically has been a revelation, leading the league with four shutouts.

It's never easy to win a championship, but the Wild can keep the puck out of their net and fill the scoresheet with regularity with the likes of Boldy, Kaprizov and now Hughes. They are better positioned perhaps than ever before in franchise history to take a run at the Cup.

Tristan Jarry could push the Oilers over the top in the post-season

They finally did it.

After years of mediocre goaltending and being linked in rumours to seemingly every netminder on the market, the Edmonton Oilers acquired Tristan Jarry on Friday. When he's at his best, Jarry is a clear upgrade over Stuart Skinner and Calvin Pickard, but the issue with the former Pittsburgh Penguin has always been consistency and staying healthy.

Jarry is coming off a dreadful 2024-25 season, one that included a demotion to the AHL and an .893 save percentage. It's been a different situation this year, though, as Jarry has bounced back to the tune of a .909 save percentage and 9.8 goals saved above expected. If the Oilers are getting this version of Jarry, it's reasonable to believe he can help them get over the hump in the post-season.

Last year's rough campaign was probably a little overblown for Jarry. He wasn't great, but half of his 36 appearances were actually quality starts where he had a save percentage above .900. Jarry also finished the season strong, posting nine quality starts in his final 14 outings. What really skewed Jarry's numbers was a small sample size of really bad games. The 30-year-old had 10 starts where he gave up four or more goals and was pulled early a handful of times. Pittsburgh also wasn't giving Jarry much help. The Pens ranked 25th in high-danger chances allowed in 2024-25, continually putting Jarry in less than ideal spots.

If we take a step back and look at Jarry's much larger career sample size, he's actually been a very solid goaltender. In more than 300 games, Jarry has a .909 save percentage and a goals-against average well under three. If he can provide the Oilers anything even in the ballpark of those numbers in the post-season, it's going to be a huge win for Edmonton.

Overreaction? No

Sure, people will point to the fact that Jarry has never won a playoff series, but how much of Edmonton's success in the post-season was because of Stuart Skinner as opposed to in spite of him? Four of the Oilers' 14 wins last spring came when the opposition scored four goals, as Connor McDavid and company had to outscore their deficiencies in net. Skinner and Calvin Pickard ended up combining for an .888 save percentage in the 2025 post-season, which would have been the worst mark by any Cup-winning team in the cap era. The lowest save percentage of any Cup-winning team in the past 30 years was .902, and the Oilers were miles away from that.

All this is to say Edmonton doesn't need prime Patrick Roy or Terry Sawchuk in goal. If Jarry can even give them league-average goaltending or slightly below, it would be a huge step up from what the Oilers have been getting in the post-season. Adding Jarry, who is signed for two seasons after this, is a reasonable gamble to make in order to try and maximize every season where Edmonton has McDavid under contract.

Leafs should trade a goalie to boost another area of their roster

It makes sense, right? Trade a player from a position where you have a surplus of talent to fill another area of need. With the emergence of Dennis Hildeby, the Toronto Maple Leafs suddenly have an embarrassment of riches in net. Anthony Stolarz had an incredible season last year, leading the league in save percentage and ranking fourth in goals saved above expected. Joseph Woll may have saved the

Leafs' season when he returned to the team earlier this year and was incredible for a few weeks. Now Hildeby has been a revelation with both Stolarz and Woll sidelined, sporting a .923 save percentage in 11 appearances.

With Chris Tanev's unpredictable return timeline and Brandon Carlo potentially being sidelined for a substantial amount of time, Toronto could move a netminder to add to the blue line or fill a hole in the top six.

Overreaction? Yes

On the surface this seems like a good idea, but the problem is can the Leafs really rely on any of the three goalies? Stolarz and Woll can't seem to stay healthy for any reasonable stretch and it feels like you can't lean on either of them for more than a handful of games in a row. Their strength is in a tandem by alternating games and keeping them fresh and healthy.

Hildeby could end up being durable, though we haven't seen enough of him yet to make that assumption. He's also on a very cheap \$841,000 contract for the next three seasons — if Hildeby can sustain even anything in the ballpark of what he's delivering now, he's going to provide the Leafs major value. Hildeby could be a big part of the Leafs' future.

The Maple Leafs currently have two goalies out of the lineup, which is why Hildeby got an opportunity in the first place, and if they moved someone, the Leafs could find themselves in a disastrous spot. So much of Toronto's success is based on high-level goaltending and when you have a pair of injury prone goalies, you really don't have the luxury of moving one. The Leafs must hope at least one guy is healthy at any given time and by removing one from the equation, they would be in a risky situation.

Was Lafreniere's 2023-24 season just a mirage?

The former first-overall pick had 28 goals and 57 points in a breakout campaign, following that up with an impressive post-season run of eight goals and 14 points in 16 playoff games. Lafreniere took a big step back last year though, dropping all the way down to 17 goals. Now, he's pacing for right around another 17-goal, 42-point campaign. Those aren't horrible numbers by any means, but nothing close to what you'd expect from a No. 1 pick. Perhaps it's time for the Rangers to explore the trade market and see if they can acquire a more proven piece for Lafreniere.

Overreaction? No

Lafreniere is still only 24, though the likelihood of him popping off for elite production after six seasons in the league are slim. He's spent the majority of his time this season and last with some combination of Artemi Panarin, Vincent Trocheck or Mika Zibanejad and his numbers have still been very average. That should cause the Rangers concern that Lafreniere doesn't have a very high ceiling.

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

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

Latest episode

New York also has a Panarin contract extension to worry about and moving on from Lafreniere for a cheaper option and perhaps some draft capital would free up precious cap space. It's not like Lafreniere has a massive average annual value with the cap going up, but paying someone nearly \$7.5 million per season who struggles to hit 50 points isn't ideal. The Rangers may find a team with more cap space that thinks it can unlock something in Lafreniere who's willing to take his contract. That would free up New York to re-sign Panarin or potentially re-shape the roster in other ways.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 15, 2025

Devils' playoff hopes in jeopardy without Jack Hughes

There is a pattern emerging for the New Jersey Devils without Jack Hughes and it isn't good. New Jersey really struggles without its best player in the lineup (shocking, I know), but the extent to which the Devils are sliding could be problematic for their playoff chances. After a great start that made them look like the class of the East, the Devils are now 6-9-0 since Hughes went down, including a five-game losing streak where New Jersey was outscored 20-7. This trend goes further back to last season, where Hughes suffered a season-ending injury in early March. New Jersey closed the campaign 9-11-1 and barely held onto a playoff spot. Could the same thing happen again?

Overreaction? Yes

The difference this time around is Hughes isn't lost for the season and should be back some time in the new year, giving the Devils more runway to get back on track. Plus, the East is really bunched up right now and no one is running away with it, so New Jersey should have time to make up ground if it does slide further without Hughes available. Plus, the Devils don't have an incredibly difficult December schedule. There are a few tough games in there but they also play Vancouver, Buffalo, Columbus and some others that should be beatable minus Hughes. If they can just stay in the mix until after the holidays, they should be OK.

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1371789 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Berube calls out Maple Leafs' 'leaders' after no-show versus Oilers

Luke Fox

TORONTO — They say your best players gotta be your best players.

But first, they need to show up.

On a night when the Edmonton Oilers' best players flooded the scoresheet, added to their highlight reels and stopped celebrating goals because the outcome was so out of reach, we're gonna have to check the walk-in footage to see if the Toronto Maple Leafs' stars even entered the building.

Captain Auston Matthews mustered two shots and won just 42.9 per cent of his faceoffs. He was requested but did not speak to reporters post-game.

John Tavares had a couple shots to go with his minus-3 rating and lost most of his draws, too.

Morgan Rielly got posterized by you-know-who and was also dash-3.

Same with William Nylander, who got benched towards the end of Saturday's 6-3 rout, coach Craig Berube said, because he "wasn't even close to 75 per cent," so why bother keep throwing him out there.

None of those Toronto stars had a point.

Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid put on a clinic, each running their own line, each piling three points on plus-3 efforts.

"I talked to the team after the game. Our leaders got to take control of it a lot more than they are right now," Berube said. "It's all mindset."

A week ago, the Maple Leafs appeared to have turned a corner.

Now, with consecutive blown-lead losses and roll-over third periods at home, they're acting like crawling out of the basement is good enough.

This meeting between two notoriously slow-starting perennial playoff teams began fun, fast and frantic. And with time dwindling in the second period, the score was 2-2.

Who wants it more?

Nick Robertson threw a blind pass that led to a deadly Oilers counterstrike, and McDavid orchestrated a tic-tac-toe goal for Darnell Nurse with 31 ticks before intermission.

"It's not smart hockey," Berube said.

The Maple Leafs came out for the third with all the intensity of a passport renewal office.

By the time a solid but "tired" Dennis Hildeby (Berube's word) got the mercy pull, he'd given up six goals on 32 shots and five unanswered.

Artur Akhymov, Toronto's fifth goaltender this season, made his NHL debut in mop-up duty as patrons filed out early. Some stuck around to boo or mock-chant "Let's! Go! Blue! Jays!"

Could you blame them?

They'd just watched the home team get outmanned and outworked at the net-fronts, weaved through like traffic cones by the speedier side, and give the puck away 24 times.

"Not taking care of the puck, turning the puck over, and obviously not playing hard enough in front of our net. That's what's happened the last two games," said Oliver Ekman-Larsson, another minus-3.

"We need to want to have the puck too and help each other out. So, I think that's something we gotta look at."

A couple Leafs mentioned poor execution, but effort looked nonexistent in what Rielly called an "unacceptable" final 20.

"Well, I think they go hand in hand, and I think it's across the board," Rielly said. "You go to the third, you just have to play better than that, if you're gonna win in this league."

Scott Laughton, whose fourth line was Toronto's best on this night, says these flat third periods are difficult to understand.

"We have to be better managing games in certain situations. You see those guys, you know how good they are in moments. And then it can turn on you that quick," Laughton said. "It's a 60-minute game for a reason. You gotta wear the team down and go the other way, play north, make them come 200 feet. I don't think we did enough of that."

The Oilers' best players were quick.

The Maple Leafs' were quick to disappear.

"We played into their speed, too. You can limit them a little bit. And obviously they got two of the best players in the world, right? But you can make it harder on them getting up and down the ice. But, yeah, we need to be better in every area of the game — and it's just not good enough," said Laughton, speaking like a leader.

"So, pick ourselves up and pick up some points here at home. We got to start pushing. Have some urgency and get going."

Fox's Fast Five

- Tough moment for Oiler-turned-Leaf Troy Stecher, who sniped an own goal off a McDavid centring pass in the second period.

"Tonight's probably my biggest test as an individual player, going up against 97," Stecher said pre-game. "Hopefully know some of his tendencies where I can have some success tonight, but I'm sure he's going to get his look. Just fortunate for the opportunity."

Outside of the costly gaffe, Stecher held his own on another busy night at the office (one assist, plus-1, 22:22).



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"A great teammate. That's the biggest thing," McDavid said. "An unbelievable teammate. Does whatever is asked of him. It's been great to see him come here and have such a big role. And he's playing great."

- Draisaitl put up three primary assists in a span of two minutes and 26 seconds.

His next point will be his 1,000th.

- McDavid does not seem too concerned about the unfinished Olympic rink in Milan.

"You'd like the ice quality to be good. The size of it doesn't matter," says the Canadian superstar.

"I'm excited. I think everybody is. Seems to be in the back of everyone's mind that is going or thinks they have a chance to go. You've seen guys get off to great starts, pushing for spots all across the league. It's been fun to watch."

Like fellow top-five scorers Macklin Celebrini and Connor Bedard.

"Great to see them take steps," McDavid said. "They've been really impressive."

- The way Ekman-Larsson left Thursday's game, unable to place weight on his left leg, we're floored he played Saturday. His injury looked serious.

"Crazy how much it can change in a day or day and a half," the defenceman said. "So, I'm lucky."

Ekman-Larsson's perfect attendance remains intact — and he scored.

- Safe to say, the third-round pick Toronto sent to Utah for Matias Maccelli won't be upgraded to a second-rounder.

That was the condition tagged on the trade if Maccelli scored at least 51 points.

The man can't even get in the lineup.

Maccelli took warmups but was scratched for a seventh straight game. He hasn't played since Nov. 28 and hasn't scored since Nov. 8. The Leafs have won only one of their past nine games when the shifty winger does dress.

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1371790 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Frost family shines from start to finish on big night for Flames

Eric Francis

LOS ANGELES — As the Toronto Maple Leafs' public address announcer for 17 years, Andy Frost introduced well over 700 starting lineups.

It would be hard to believe any of those could possibly have meant as much as the one he announced Saturday night at Crypto.com Arena.

This one included personally introducing his son, Morgan, and was punctuated by a dressing-room embrace that could have melted all the snow in Calgary.

After Andy used his iconic voice to kick off the dads' trip with the stirring intros, Morgan took it upon himself to bookend the family affair with the overtime winner over the Kings.

And his first thought in a jubilant Flames dressing room afterwards was his hero.

"Really exciting to have him here," said Morgan of his dad.

"Can't wait to give him a hug right now."

There were hugs all around following one of the Flames' most complete efforts of the season, as the fathers flooded the room to share their excitement following a 2-1 win the team fully deserved.

Outshooting the Kings 38-21 and dominating in every statistical category, the Flames upped their recent record to 8-3-1 as one of the hottest teams in the league.

The Flames' celebration was almost spoiled 33 seconds into the extra frame when an Adrian Kempe centring pass bounced in off the trailing foot of Anze Kopitar.

However, a video review negated the goal due to an obvious kicking motion that set the table for Frost's heroics.

The game winner one minute into OT started in the Flames' zone when Frost finished his check on Brandt Clarke and stole the puck to create a three-on-one.

Dishing the puck to Jonathan Huberdeau, he then drove to the net where he redirected a perfect Huberdeau return past Team Canada hopeful Darcy Kuemper to silence the crowd.

Well, most of the crowd, as the Flames' jersey-clad dads in a private box at the far end of the rink sprang to their feet in jubilation, exchanging high fives, earning stick salutes from all their sons as they left the ice.

"You don't see that play from me too often probably," smiled Frost of the rare physicality he exhibited.

"I just saw an opportunity and I felt like he was kind of stuck on the wall. Just kind of took off. I think the plan is always to get the puck to Huberdeau and get open. That's what I was thinking."

Despite trailing 1-0 after a first period in which Dustin Wolf made a huge glove save on Kevin Fiala, the Flames felt great about their game.

Six minutes into the second period, Blake Coleman went on the world's longest breakaway, which he finished off for his third short-handed goal of the season.

"Happy that one went in and it was a goal we needed," said Blake Coleman, who has scored three goals in front of the dads since his father, Rusty, dubbed him The Texas Tiger during player intros on the last trip with the fathers.

"I think (the nickname) is going to live on. I mean I have a tiger head at the Dome when I score, so I feel like it's pretty much part of my DNA now.

"To my knowledge, with the dads we're 4-0, so hopefully keep it running.

"For a road game, that was about as complete, and as well, as you could play. It was up and down the lineup, to a man everybody showed up tonight. I guess the dads brought the juice we needed."

They'll try to do it again Tuesday when the Flames conclude the two-game California trip in San Jose. But not before the fathers and sons take in a San Francisco 49ers game Sunday.

"I think Mr. Frost did an excellent job with our lineup read tonight and he set the tone for the way the game went," said coach Ryan Huska, who got 20 timely saves from Wolf.

"It's pretty cool.

"I thought we had a lot of energy tonight and played the game the right way.



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"The room had good energy. The boys always seem to play well when their dads are in town. When you get a collective group of them on the dads trip you kind of know how they're going to come out."

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TSN.CA / Draft-eligible defencemen Carels, Verhoeff closing in on spots with Team Canada

Mark Masters

Team Canada held a practice at the Gale Centre in Niagara Falls, Ont. on Sunday.

Draft-eligible defencemen Carson Carels and Keaton Verhoeff are closing in on spots on Canada's World Junior team.

"It was a little bit unexpected and wasn't really on my bucket list this year but, I mean, I think I've played my way to get here," said Carels, who logs big minutes for the Prince George Cougars in the Western Hockey League.

"I don't know if I expected it," said Verhoeff, who is a freshman at the University of North Dakota. "I think I was playing well. I thought I'd put my name in the hat, maybe."

There are nine defencemen at Canada's training camp with eight spots available. If Carels and Verhoeff make the cut, they will become the sixth- and seventh-youngest defencemen to play for Canada at the under-20 event. Both are still just 17-years-old with Carels being four days younger than Verhoeff.

"I'm young, but I don't think age really matters right now," said Carels.

"Coming from college, too, I'm a younger guy there as well," said Verhoeff. "You adapt to it and kind of find a way to fit in."

The only time that two 17-year-old defencemen have played for Canada at the same World Juniors was in 1987 when Chris Joseph and Luke Richardson both made it.

The San Jose Sharks may still loan Sam Dickinson to Hockey Canada, which would create more competition on the blue line but, for now, Carels and Verhoeff both appear to be in a good position.

Carels, a left shot, is skating on Canada's third pair beside Toronto Maple Leafs prospect Ben Danford.

"He's a couple of years younger and I can't believe it," Danford said. "He's a really good two-way guy."

Carels has produced eight goals and 29 points in 28 games this season. He registered six goals and 35 points in 60 games last season.

"My game has taken off a little bit on the offensive side," the native of Cypress River, Man. said. "I've gotten a little bit of a freedom to play a little offence and rack up some points, and get on that top power play unit. So, that's where I've expanded my game a little bit."

Carels is up to No. 6 on TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button's latest list of top 2026 NHL draft prospects.

Carels, who stands at 6-foot-2 and 194 pounds, is doing it all for the Cougars, who are second place in the Western Conference.

"He's up to 30, 32 minutes a night and for a 17-year-old that's a lot," said Team Canada assistant coach Brad Lauer, who is working with the defence. "He plays a game where he can calm things down and be patient with it. He plays an intelligent game."

"Smooth, smart game," Verhoeff observed. "He's a strong kid, super strong on his feet as well, and able to move pucks super well and control the game ... You can put him out in any situation and you're going to have a trustworthy, strong defenceman back there."

Carels says he models his style on Jake Sanderson and Miro Heiskanen, because of the way they mesh a two-way game with great puck-moving ability.

Carels has represented Canada three times in the past year, winning a silver medal at the World U17 Hockey Challenge, gold at the under-18 World Championship, and bronze at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup.

Verhoeff and Carels were also teammates at the under-18 World Championship and at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup.

Verhoeff, a right shot, is skating on the fourth pair at camp beside Penn State freshman Jackson Smith.

"I love his game," Carels said of Verhoeff. "He's a big guy and he can move pucks up the ice. He's got a lot of offensive upside. He can really rip that puck. And he's learning how to really play defence too. He's turning into a great complete player."

Verhoeff, who finished with 45 points in 63 games with the Victoria Royals in the WHL last season, has produced four goals and 11 points in 16 games so far this season in the NCAA where he is the second-youngest player.

"I have learned to adapt my game a bit, [adapt] to the pace of play and the style of our league," Verhoeff said. "It's a tough, physical league [so] kind of being able to move pucks better and join the rush after has been something huge."

Verhoeff and Smith are Canada's tallest defencemen at 6-foot-4. Verhoeff is Canada's heaviest blueliner at 212 pounds.

"He moves very well for a big guy," said Lauer. "Plays the game heavy. He's got a good stick and he's got great feet. He's not as polished yet, but there's a huge upside to his game ... What we've seen the first two days here has been a very mature game from him."

Verhoeff is the top defenceman on Button's latest list coming in at No. 3.

"I'm a competitive kid," the native of Fort Saskatchewan, Alta. said. "I enjoy kind of that competitive feeling and competing every day to help move up in that draft stock as well as just having a better team back in North Dakota. And hopefully will bring that compete and skill level here as well."

Verhoeff says he admired Victor Hedman while growing up and is now watching a lot of Thomas Harley.

"He's another big Canadian that can move pucks," Verhoeff noted. "He has some offensive upside, but also really takes care of his 'D' zone."

Carels and Verhoeff need to wear additional facial protection (cage or full visor) under IIHF rules, because they're under 18.

Gavin McKenna, who will turn 18 on Dec. 20, is wearing a regular visor at Canada's camp after playing in a full face shield at Penn State.

"It felt really good," Canada's top-line left winger said after his first practice at the camp.

What's the biggest change?



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"The breathing aspect," he explained. "With the bubble, you're all tight in there. You're free in the visor."

Ethan MacKenzie of the Edmonton Oil Kings skated as the ninth defenceman at the first two practices. But being an underdog is a familiar role for the 19-year-old from West Kelowna, B.C., who was passed over in the last two NHL drafts.

"He's just gotten better and better over his three or four years in the Western Hockey League," said Team Canada general manager Alan Millar. "He's gone from a guy in his draft year that was, you know, five-foot-six to being just under six-foot-one now and close to 190 pounds. He does things hard.

"I would say he's categorized as a complete defenceman. You can see his mobility, the way he skates, his edge work, and he does things hard. He snaps pucks and gets them to the net. He makes hard passes, tape to tape. He's just turned himself into a real good player and is well deserving of being here and competing for one of the eight spots."

MacKenzie, a lefty, has piled up 31 points in 30 games this season. Among Canada's defence, only Kashawn Aitcheson of the Barrie Colts (32 points in 27 games) has scored more this season.

"He's a kid that's maybe come out of nowhere," said Lauer, who also oversees the power play. "He's a guy that can skate. He's a guy that can defend and he's also a guy that can put numbers up ... He's kind of gone through the cracks, but he's caught some eyes through this season, which is a credit to him and it's a great that he's here."

MacKenzie got a look as the quarterback on the second power-play unit at Sunday's practice.

Danford is leaning on Leafs winger Easton Cowan, who played for Canada's head coach Dale Hunter in London during his junior career, for advice as he looks to lock down a spot on Canada's blueline.

"He said that [Hunter] likes guys that play hard, block shots, and that made me smile because, you know, that's what I like to do," Danford noted. "So, it's perfect."

After leading the London Knights to a Memorial Cup championship, Cowan is turning heads as a rookie with the Leafs this season.

"We talk on almost a daily basis," said Danford. "He was just texting me asking how the first couple of days have been ... He said, 'You'll do just fine,' and 'Just go make the team and win it all.'"

Danford's Oshawa Generals lost to the Knights in the last two Ontario Hockey League championship series. He was recently traded to the Brantford Bulldogs where he's eager to chase down an elusive trip to the Memorial Cup.

"We had a couple really deep runs and a couple tough pills to swallow there," the 19-year-old from Madoc, Ont. said. "It's almost like there's a fire built up in me to go all the way and win it this year. I want to win in all aspects of hockey. I want to win here. It sucks coming second place."

Former NHL centre Mike Eagles is serving as a faceoff consultant for Team Canada.

"It's a game within the game," said Eagles, who played for the Quebec Nordiques, Winnipeg Jets and Washington Capitals during a 16-year career. "It's your first opportunity for competition at the start of a shift and I love that part of the game."

Eagles, who played with Hunter during his time with the Capitals, believes faceoffs are even more important in today's game.

"The players are better," the 62-year-old said. "They skate better. They protect the puck better. The players are passing the puck better. There's better structured systems. There's more structure on 'O' zone face-offs and 'D' zone face-offs than there ever was and so getting that first possession is that much more important."

Eagles made a presentation to the players before the on-ice sessions began at the training camp and has been working with the centres at the end of practice.

"I'm not really that interested in talking about the things that I talk about with the players," Eagles said. "We want them to be good. We want them to get better, and as a team we want to be really good on faceoffs."

The players received the memo about being tightlipped on the faceoff strategies this year.

"I don't know if I want to give away any of his stuff," said Bulldogs centre Jett Luchanko with a small smile. "There's a lot to think about."

Barrie Colts centre Cole Beaudoin did reveal that he liked a new drill that Eagles introduced where the puck starts on the dot before two players go at it.

Eagles helped Canada win bronze at the 1983 World Juniors and brought his tracksuit from that tournament with him to Niagara Falls for this camp.

"I'm super proud to have worn that in 1983 and happy to be back again," he said while holding up the jacket. "It's just a thrill for me to be part of this program, and to have been asked to come in and try to help the guys to get better. I couldn't be happier."

Luchanko is one of six players back from last year's Team Canada that finished fifth in Ottawa.

"Not the result we wanted," he said. "We're going to take that fire into this year and hopefully get it done."

Luchanko has scored two goals in six games since being returned to the OHL by the Philadelphia Flyers.

"I've tried to develop my game as much as I can and especially my shot and offensive things like that," the 19-year-old from London, Ont. said.

How different is his shot this year?

"I've worked on it, so I'd like to hope it's better," he said. "I'm just going to continue to keep putting in the work on that and hopefully keep raising it to the next level."

It's not just about increasing the power and accuracy.

"I think the big thing is kind of getting into those [high-danger] areas and setting myself up in shooting situations," he said.

Lines at Sunday's practice:

McKenna - Beaudoin - Martone

Cootes - Iginla - Hage

Bear - Luchanko - Martin

Greentree - Desnoyers - O'Reilly

Vanacker - O'Brien - Reschny

Reid - Parekh

Aitcheson - Brunicke

Carels - Danford



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Smith - Verhoeff

MacKenzie

George

Ivankovic

Ravensbergen

Absent: Misa

Power play units at Sunday's practice:

QB: Parekh

Flanks: Iginla, McKenna

Bumper: Reschny

Net front: Martone

QB: MacKenzie

Flanks: Hage, Luchanko

Middle: O'Brien

Net front: Greentree

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