



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

The News & Observer

Hurricanes head to holidays on sour note. Inside another third-period collapse

By: Chip Alexander

It won't be a restful Christmas for the Carolina Hurricanes.

Not after another collapse. Not after losing a third straight game where they could not hold a lead and, try as they might, again could not find a way to beat the Florida Panthers.

The Canes, playing at home, determined to gain some payback for a very painful road loss to the Panthers on Friday, took a 2-0 lead into the third period at Lenovo Center.

And gave up five goals. And lost, 5-2.

For Canes fans, in a festive mood a few days before Christmas, it was a painful turnabout.

In the game at Florida, the Panthers trailed 3-0 in the third but scored three times in the final 10 minutes of regulation — twice after pulling goalie Sergei Bobrovsky for an extra skater. The Panthers then won in a shootout as the Canes limped out of town, having lost both forward Seth Jarvis and defenseman Jaccob Slavin to injuries in a physical game.

For the first two periods Tuesday, the Canes were at their best. Eric Robinson scored in the first period and then Andrei Svechnikov in the second after jumping out of the penalty box to beat Bobrovsky on a breakaway.

"We had a great first and second, and then we didn't do anything very well in the third," Canes captain Jordan Staal said. "We're up two goals, and we're looking for the third, fourth, fifth, sixth. Against a team like that you've got to be content with moving the puck forward, getting in their end and just grinding them down and make them go the whole ice before getting a shot on net.

"I have to do a better job as leader, obviously. I guess it's three in a row of that crap. We've got to do a better job playing with the lead and playing with some confidence in the third and burying teams. We just sat back and turned pucks over and it looked the way it did, again."

After losing at Florida, the Canes again took a 3-0 lead the next night against Tampa Bay in the first period. But the Lightning quickly tied it up and went on to a 6-4 win that Staal termed a "meltdown."

There was another coming Tuesday in the third period. Here's how it unfolded:

The Panthers' first goal came when Niko Mikkola's shot glanced off a Canes skate after goalie Frederik Andersen, making his first start since Dec. 4, had made a terrific save.

Luke Kunin then scored after Canes forward Jackson Blake could not get the puck out of the zone at the blue line, Florida's Aaron Ekblad grabbing it and getting off a long shot. Andersen again made the initial stop but an unchecked Kunin skated in to score off the rebound for a 2-2 tie.

Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen looks at the puck in the net following a goal by Sam Bennett of the Florida Panthers during the third period at Lenovo Center on Dec. 23, 2025 in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen looks at the puck in the net following a goal by Sam Bennett of the Florida Panthers during the third period at Lenovo Center on Dec. 23, 2025 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Jared C. Tilton Getty Images

The Panthers' go-ahead goal came after Eetu Luostarinen forced Blake into a turnover along the boards. Luostarinen crossed the ice to get the puck and get off a shot that was blocked, but Sam Reinhart set up Anton's Lundell score seven minutes into the period.

The Canes appeared shell-shocked after that. So solid in their D zone the first two periods, making smart plays, there were a string of miscues and missed assignments.

"We stopped making the plays we were making, skating, everything kind of slowed down for us," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

The Panthers' fourth goal came off a fortunate bounce after A.J. Greer's pass down the boards somehow caromed back toward the net where Sam Bennett grabbed the puck, turned and beat Andersen.

When Florida's Seth Jones later scored on a power play, the lead was 5-2 and many fans began hitting the exits.

The injuries to Slavin and Jarvis in the Friday game both seemed preventable — Slavin took a hit from behind from Greer, and Jarvis was tripped by Evan Rodrigues while driving the net and crashed hard into the post. Both now are listed "week-to-week." and the Panthers took the ice to thunderous boos Tuesday.

The Canes also played Tuesday without injured forward Jordan Martinook and forward William Carrier, who was sick and unable to go.

"It's tough," Brind'Amour said. "We were playing really well considering what we've been going through, and they get one and I don't know what the mindset is but we try to do things differently than we were doing and it clearly didn't work."

The Canes (22-11-3) next play Saturday, hosting the Detroit Red Wings in a game matching the two Eastern Conference leaders, both with 47 points. Staal first said he was glad to have a three-day break to rest up and re-set, then changed his mind with the three-game skid too fresh in his mind.

"I don't want to sit on that to be honest," he said.

"It's hard, but we've got to have some confidence in our group. I mean, our team is good."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

The Athletic

NHL trade targets: Which player should each team pursue after the holiday freeze?

By: Scott Powers, James Mirtle, Aaron Portzline, Max Bultman, Arpon Basu, Michael Russo, Jonas Siegel, Jeremy Rutherford, Allan Mitchell, Kevin Kurz, Josh Yohe, Murat Ates, Shayna Goldman, Fluto Shinzawa, Eric Stephens, Matthew Fairburn, Mark Lazerus, Jesse Granger, Harman Dayal, Sean Gentile, Peter Baugh, Joe Rexrode, Thomas Drance, Julian McKenzie, Cory Lavalette, Vincent Z. Mercogliano

Following the blockbuster Quinn Hughes trade, two players on Chris Johnston's trade board, Phillip Danault and Mason Marchment, were traded on Friday, moments before the league's holiday roster freeze went into effect.

Now, with the holiday freeze over in just a few hours (12:01 a.m. local time Sunday) and the trade deadline just over two months away, it's a good time to start thinking about which players make sense for different teams.

Who should each club target from the list of possible candidates?

The Athletic asked its NHL staff to pick one target from the trade board for each team.

Here's what they said.

Anaheim Ducks

No one

Ducks general manager Pat Verbeek has history with both Steven Stamkos and Ondrej Palat from his days in the Tampa Bay Lightning front office, and while another winger with proven playoff production would give their lineup added heft, I think the smarter play right now would be to bet on the continued progression from within. If they were one step closer to serious Stanley Cup contention, then I think it would be worth it. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

Matias Maccelli

The left-shot winger would give the Bruins some offensive help in their top nine. He is also 25 years old, which fits the Bruins' cycle in terms of building for the future while going for a playoff spot. — Fluto Shinzawa

Yegor Chinakhov feels like a realistic trade target for the Sabres. Justin Berl / Getty Images

Buffalo Sabres

Yegor Chinakhov

The Sabres are a wild card on the trade market with new general manager Jarmo Kekäläinen. Veterans such as Blake Coleman, Boone Jenner and Bryan Rust would be worthwhile targets. But Chinakhov feels more realistic, considering Kekäläinen drafted him and the cost to acquire him would be lower. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

No one

The Flames have a handful of players on CJ's trade board that should make them a seller come trade deadline day in March. And with no enticing star target between the ages of 18 and 23 that they'd feel would help their rebuild/retool on the board, the Flames shouldn't be looking to buy. — Julian McKenzie

Carolina Hurricanes

No one

The Hurricanes look set on defense, and the forward options — particularly the centers that could be of the most use to Carolina — are all flawed. Whether it's the age, amount of term and contract remaining or the ability to keep up with the Hurricanes' pace, the top center options, including Nazem Kadri and Ryan O'Reilly, have noticeable blemishes. Carolina won't be quiet — it has the cap space and desire to get better — but I don't think the fit resides in this list. — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

No one

The Blackhawks weren't likely to be buyers at the trade deadline before their series of injuries, and they're definitely not going to be after all those. With Connor Bedard and Frank Nazar out, the Blackhawks' season is spiraling downward and they're likely back into the draft lottery discussion. Between a number of expiring contracts and a continued effort to build from within, the Blackhawks won't be acquiring anyone of note this season. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

Ryan O'Reilly

What a full-circle moment this would be. Not only would it bring O'Reilly back to the place his career began, but he would also solidify the Avalanche down the middle of the ice, perhaps better than any other available player. Jack Drury and Ross Colton have been solid bottom-six centers, but O'Reilly would give Jared Bednar another option to create matchup problems for the opposition in the playoffs and



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

make the best team in the league even scarier. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

No one

A week ago, Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell sent a second-round pick and a fourth-round pick to the Seattle Kraken for Mason Marchment, hoping to jolt his underperforming club. But he's got to be careful about committing too many resources to this current Blue Jackets club. The Eastern Conference has been a traffic jam, but it's starting to loosen and the Blue Jackets are the team falling behind. If there's a prospect that excites him — Brennan Othmann, Brad Lambert or perhaps Lukas Reichel — and the price is low, why not? But unless the Blue Jackets turn it around, and quickly, this season may be a lost cause. — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

Rasmus Andersson

The Stars' greatest need is on the right side of the blue line, where the drop-off after Miro Heiskanen is precipitous. Jim Nill is never shy about making big additions, so he'll go right to the top and take a look at Andersson, No. 1 on CJ's big board. There'll surely be competition for Andersson, so the offensive-minded Dougie Hamilton or defensive-minded Connor Murphy could be solid fallback options. — Mark Lazerus

Justin Faulk would be a useful addition to the Red Wings' blue line. Bruce Bennett / Getty Images

Detroit Red Wings

Justin Faulk

The Red Wings' biggest need is to deepen their blue line, where their third pair has been a liability. Justin Faulk is playing 23 minutes a night in St. Louis, and you wonder if the veteran could improve his territorial numbers in easier deployment. He's still productive, has an extra year on his contract (so he's not just a rental) and could provide more support for Albert Johansson. Plus, he would be a playoff-ready second-pair option, so Detroit can shelter Axel Sandin-Pellikka a bit if the Red Wings make the postseason. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

Alex Tuch

Tuch is a big power winger with speed who can thrive with elite skill. The Oilers could use him on the top line with Connor McDavid and Zach Hyman, allowing Ryan Nugent-Hopkins to center the third line. Tuch's size is ideal for the rigors of playoff hockey and Edmonton doesn't have that kind of presence on the roster currently. A perfect plug-and-play for the Oilers. — Allan Mitchell

Florida Panthers

Alex Tuch

Big, fast, physical and loves the hard areas of the ice: sounds like a Florida Panther. His reasonable cap hit would fit nicely into the Aleksander Barkov LTIR space and he can help improve a power play that's been struggling at times.

Only question is, do they have the future assets to pull it off? — James Mirtle

Los Angeles Kings

Alex Tuch

Big and fast with skill, Tuch would be an immediate boost to the Kings' offense as a top-six right wing to go with leading scorer Adrian Kempe. The 29-year-old's \$4.75 million cap number is extremely appealing. But Tuch, a pending UFA, would be a tricky acquisition as he's reportedly seeking a contract more lucrative than the eight-year, \$85 million deal Kempe signed to stay in L.A. And the cost for him as a rental could be too prohibitive for the Kings, who don't have a ton of prized assets and are more than one piece away from legitimate Stanley Cup contention. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

Ryan O'Reilly

It sure feels like the Wild are a center from true contender status and O'Reilly could be the perfect fit. Perennially, the Wild are one of the NHL's worst faceoff teams, and they're tied for 28th this year. O'Reilly's tremendous in the circle. The Wild also rank 25th on the penalty kill, an area he can help. He can score and he's incredibly disciplined, so he'd fit in (the Wild have been short-handed second-fewest times in the NHL at 93). Plus, it'd be a reacquisition technically, since the Wild were the middleman when it came to salary retention when O'Reilly — the brother of former Iowa Wild captain Cal O'Reilly — was originally traded from St. Louis to Toronto in 2023. — Michael Russo

Montreal Canadiens

Blake Coleman

The Canadiens nabbed No. 9 on the list when they acquired center Phillip Danault from the Kings one hour before the holiday trade freeze, but they still have trade capital and Coleman plays a hard game, kills penalties, can pitch in on the power play and has Stanley Cup pedigree. But the real beauty is he has one year left on his contract after this one, same as Danault, Brendan Gallagher and Josh Anderson. By 2027-28, the Canadiens should be ready to truly hand the team over to their youngest players. Until then, players such as Coleman and Danault can help serve as a veteran bridge. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

No one

Several Predators appear on the list, as it should be. And Preds general manager Barry Trotz should be ready to move at least a couple of those players and bolster the future of the franchise. He must not be swayed by the team's recent resurgence, which has put the Preds in the range of a playoff spot and lifted them from the cellar. If he is swayed by that, mediocrity is officially the ceiling on his watch. And new minority owner Nick Saban can't like that! — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

Ryan O'Reilly

O'Reilly would have been a capable second-line center when Jack Hughes was out, and now he'd be able to slot in as a perfect third-line center. He can play a responsible two-way



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

game and has shown he contributes to winning. He might not be the Conn Smythe winner he was in 2019, but he's more than capable of helping the Devils. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Yegor Chinakhov

The Islanders may be exceeding expectations, but the big picture still has to stay in focus. This is a retool, so management should not be buying for a playoff run. But there may be up-and-coming players whose timelines align with the Islanders' plans. So someone such as Chinakhov should be on their radar — he would fit in with the team's rush-based style this season, and has the offensive ability to add another scoring punch to the middle six. — Shayna Goldman

New York Rangers

Yegor Chinakhov

There's an obvious connection to make with Bryan Rust, a favorite of Rangers coach Mike Sullivan from their time together in Pittsburgh, but a 33-year-old winger isn't ideal for a team that already relies too heavily on 32-and-up forwards. Tuch would be intriguing, as well, but the acquisition cost will be high and general manager Chris Drury has burned too many assets on rentals in recent years. New York should be targeting young players with scoring upside, speed and years left of team control. Chinakhov is a bit of a reclamation project, but at least he checks all of those boxes. — Vincent Z. Mercogliano

Rasmus Andersson's snarl and ruggedness would fit perfectly on a Senators team seeking to be tougher to play against. Jaylenn Nash / Getty Images

Ottawa Senators

Rasmus Andersson

If it were up to me, I'd call Craig Conroy and try to sell him on the idea of landing Andersson. An all-situations defenseman who seems healthier after some previous seasons battling injury. His snarl and ruggedness would fit perfectly on a Senators team seeking to be tougher to play against. The biggest hurdle is figuring out whether or not the Senators are on Andersson's no-trade list and if the Sens have the assets to make a move work. — Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

No one

The Flyers are seeking a depth center, but I'm not sure any of these guys on the list would or should be targets. O'Reilly or Brayden Schenn would give the Flyers a huge boost, but I doubt that they're going to be willing to part with the sort of future assets necessary to make that deal. Perhaps Alexander Wennberg is a player who could be traded out of San Jose, but I could also see the Sharks keeping him around if they remain in the playoff race. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

No one

"No one" isn't the most enticing answer, but I think it's prudent for the Penguins. I don't particularly think they're in a spot where adding anyone makes sense. They probably

aren't a playoff team, and if they do pull off a surprise and make it to the postseason, it will be because some of their talented young players in the system — such as Sergei Murashov and Tristan Broz — are recalled and make a real difference, as opposed to giving up an asset for short-term gratification. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

No one

An elite No. 1 defenseman such as Quinn Hughes would have been ideal for the Sharks, but many other teams could desire that. A blue-line upgrade or a true No. 2 center would be more pressing needs, but filling those would be more prudent if San Jose were a year or two further into a build where the full payoff could come in 2027 or 2028. You could look at a Brandon Carlo on defense, but there's no point in blocking Michael Misa with any one of Nazem Kadri, Ryan O'Reilly, Brayden Schenn or Boone Jenner right now. Those are endgame pieces. — Eric Stephens

Seattle Kraken

No one

The Kraken are fading quickly, and that's not a surprise to anybody who's watched them. While there's some intriguing talent in Seattle, this is a club utterly devoid of elite talent. They should be selling, tanking and crossing their fingers that they can get a top-three pick at the 2026 draft. A superstar winger is what the Kraken need, of the caliber that is only available at the top of the draft order. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

No one

CJ's trade board is full of Blues, so the options are limited. Of the 32 players, the Blues have Justin Faulk at No. 7, Jordan Binnington at No. 8 and Brayden Schenn at No. 13. After that, there are some good names on the list, but the Blues just aren't in a position where many of them make much sense. If anybody, they should make a deal for Blues killer Kiefer Sherwood (seven goals, five assists against St. Louis in 12 career games), or Nazem Kadri, so that Binnington can throw water bottles at him in the locker room. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

Rasmus Andersson

J.J. Moser has absolutely thrived in Victor Hedman's absence, and a shift back to his natural side, the left, may be a big reason for that. So maybe the Lightning should consider adding a right-handed defenseman to play with Hedman, so Moser and Darren Raddysh can stay together and cook on the third pair? Right-handed defensemen are not cheap on the trade market, so this is going to be tricky for a team without a ton of trade assets. But his reasonable cap hit and his overall step back this season could work in Tampa Bay's favor. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

No one

I'm going off board here to former Leaf Michael Bunting. Unlike some of the other names on CJ's board who would



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

absolutely help the Leafs, Bunting shouldn't cost much (for a team that doesn't have much to trade), and his contract expires after the season. The other thing: He has a past connection with Auston Matthews and could slip right back into top-line duties with the Leafs. He would also bring his hometown team some much-needed spunk and pushback. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Mammoth

No one

With Barrett Hayton struggling and Logan Cooley injured, the dream scenario would be Utah landing a top-six center. The problem is true second-line centers are scarcely available on the trade market and exorbitantly expensive to acquire. While Nazem Kadri, for example, would be a sweet short-term fit, his age (35) and the steep acquisition cost to lure him from Calgary don't align with the Mammoth's timeline, especially with how stacked the Central Division already is. — Harman Dayal

Vancouver Canucks

No one

The Canucks can't overreact to an uptick in form and results since executing the Quinn Hughes trade. This is a team that's years away from competing in any relevant fashion in the NHL and needs to fundamentally rebuild its forward group and reimagine its overall priorities and team-building approach. Vancouver, in other words, needs to sell. It needs to sell aggressively. And target draft picks and futures in return, not NHL players. If trading Hughes — and his reluctance to remain in Vancouver — isn't a wake-up call for this franchise, nothing ever will be. — Thomas Drance

Kiefer Sherwood would be an excellent addition to the Golden Knights. Andrew Mordzynski / Getty Images

Vegas Golden Knights

Kiefer Sherwood

I'm not expecting a blockbuster deal out of the Golden Knights this deadline, but Kiefer Sherwood would be an excellent addition. He does a lot of things Vegas desperately needs out of its wingers at the moment. He's big, strong, good on the forecheck and drives the front of the net. For all of the playmakers the Golden Knights have up front, they could use some brute force. Sherwood has all of that, plus the ability to score. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

Ryan O'Reilly

Any top-nine center would make sense for the Caps, especially with Pierre Luc-Dubois on the shelf for a couple more months, but O'Reilly seems like a particularly good fit. His offensive output (2.71 points per 60, 73-point pace) has rebounded after last season's dip, and his plus-3.0 Defensive Rating is second overall among centers. That kind of two-way substance would fit right in with Washington. — Sean Gentile

Winnipeg Jets

No one

Winnipeg is six points out of the playoffs, with six teams to pass. Which is possible with Connor Hellebuyck, but not worth betting on in the form of large trade assets. The Jets' first-round pick sits fourth overall. Their second-round pick would be in the top 40 if they hadn't traded it in a package for Luke Schenn. They need to be recouping assets, not moving them, and that means shopping pending UFAs Schenn, Gustav Nyquist, Tanner Pearson and Jonathan Toews to playoff-bound teams. Winnipeg bet and missed, and it will hurt less if the picks it recoups are gathered and moved later, for future Jets. — Murat Ates



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

NORTH STATE JOURNAL

Hurricanes collapse again, lose 5-2 to Panthers | The North State Journal

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH — The Hurricanes had a chance to shake off back-to-back losses in which they blew three-goal leads, entering the third period with a two-goal cushion on the visiting Panthers.

Instead, it was more of the same.

Florida scored five unanswered goals in the third period to turn a two-goal deficit into a 5-2 win Tuesday at Lenovo Center.

“There’s got to be more confidence in the third to bury teams and just play the way we do,” Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said after the loss.

The Hurricanes were in position to head into the brief Christmas break with a bit of redemption.

Florida had scored three goals in the final 10 minutes on Friday in Sunrise to erase a 3-0 lead before winning in the shootout. Seth Jarvis and Jaccob Slavin were both injured in the loss to the Panthers, further stinging the Hurricanes. The wound was ripped back open the following night when the Lightning rallied from three down to beat Carolina in Tampa.

Collapse was in the cards again Tuesday at home.

After Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen (17 saves) made a dazzling save to keep the Panthers off the board, Florida defenseman Niko Mikkola’s point shot on the same shift hit Carolina defenseman Alexander Nikishin’s skate and went in at 3:53 to halve the Hurricanes’ lead at 2-1.

From there, Carolina unraveled.

In just over a six-minute stretch, the Panthers scored four times to flip a two-goal deficit into a two-goal lead, and the fingerprints of the Hurricanes’ mistakes were all over the collapse.

Nikishin took himself out of position chasing a hit on one goal. Jackson Blake twice turned the puck over at the Carolina blue line, allowing Florida to stay in the zone and score. And the Hurricanes, who had limited the Panthers to eight shots in the first 40 minutes, were outshot 14-3 in the third as Florida scored five times to hand Carolina its third straight loss.

“There’s a lot of plays in hockey I wish I could go back and change, but I can’t do that,” Blake said after the game. “And, obviously, I take accountability for those mistakes. I mean, got to move on, right? It sucks that we lost. It sucks that we gave up that lead. ... It’s a terrible feeling for me right now, but like I said, I’ve got to move on.”

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour pointed to “young mistakes” for the team’s recent struggles, saying injuries have forced inexperienced players up the lineup and into situations they’re not yet prepared to handle.

“We made a few errors,” he said. “I think young, I call them young mistakes — guys that are out there playing a little above where they should be based on the situations. And (they) made some errors. And good teams make you pay. And that’s kind of what happened.”

Nikishin didn’t play the final 3:46 after going to the locker room and had ice on his right ankle following the game. Brind’Amour didn’t have an update on his status following the game.

The Hurricanes came out of the gate physical, finishing every check as if it was Game 1 of a playoff series. They also did something they hadn’t done in eight straight starts by Andersen — score first.

Defenseman Joel Nystrom, recalled from the AHL on Monday, made a stretch pass that Sebastian Aho corralled in stride. Aho then checked up and passed to a speeding Eric Robinson, who — with Nikolaj Ehlers crashing toward the far post — shot to the short side and beat Sergei Bobrovsky (17 saves) for his eighth goal of the season and a 1-0 Carolina lead at 4:11 of the first.

The Hurricanes started the second period with nearly a full two-minute penalty to kill off. Carolina held the Panthers without a shot on goal, and then Jordan Staal located Andrei Svechnikov coming out of the box for a breakthrough. The Hurricanes winger beat Bobrovsky five-hole at 1:58 of the middle frame to double the lead to 2-0.

But Carolina, as they had in the previous two games, crumbled as soon as adversity struck.

“That’s the team to beat, right?” Blake said. “They’ve been in the Cup three years in a row. And we’ve just got to find a way to close out those games — and me personally, find a way to close out those games as well.”

Brind’Amour and his team will have three days to think about it — or, more efficiently, forget about the team’s most frustrating stretch in years.

“We’re not good enough to just not play that way, and I think that’s the message,” Brind’Amour said. “So hopefully we’ll get it across, right? We try to do it a little differently, that’s what ends up happening. That’s kind of what’s happened in these last couple games.”



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

Notes: Jarvis and Slavin did not play and are both week to week with injuries. Jordan Martinook and William Carrier also did not play for Carolina due to injuries. ... There were 67

hits, 35 by the Hurricanes. ... Staal won 16 of 21 faceoffs. ... Blake was minus 3 for the second straight game and third time in his career.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025



Kunin and Lundell score during Panthers' 5-goal 3rd period in 5-2 win over Hurricanes

By: Bob Sutton; AP

RALEIGH, N.C. — RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Luke Kunin and Anton Lundell scored 43 seconds apart during a five-goal third period for the Florida Panthers, who rallied past the Carolina Hurricanes 5-2 on Tuesday night.

Niko Mikkola began the Panthers' burst with his first goal of the season and Florida ended up with four goals in slightly more six minutes. Anton Lundell also scored, and Seth Jones capped the scoring on the power play. Sam Reinhart had three assists, and Eetu Luostarinen and Aaron Ekblad each provided two.

Sergei Bobrovsky made 17 saves for his sixth consecutive victory as the Panthers, who made their first visit to Raleigh since their series-ending Game 5 victory in the Eastern Conference finals last spring, won for the fifth time in six games.

Eric Robinson and Andrei Svechnikov scored for the Hurricanes, who've lost three straight games for the first time

this season. Frederik Andersen, playing for the first time after a nine-game layoff, made 17 saves but is winless in his last seven games (0-5-2).

It was Florida's second comeback against the Hurricanes in less than a week. The Panthers wiped out a three-goal hole in the third period Thursday on the way to a shootout victory at home.

Robinson scored 4:15 into the game. Svechnikov's goal came as he skated out of the penalty box and caught the Panthers off guard, scoring on a breakaway 1:58 into the second period. He slid the puck between Bobrovsky's pads.

The Panthers had seven shots on goal through the first two periods and then nearly as many goals in the third on 15 shots.

Panthers: Begin a five-game homestand Saturday vs. Tampa Bay

Hurricanes: Host Detroit on Saturday.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025



Preview: December 27 vs. Detroit

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Game to be simulcast on WRAL as a part of "Hockey For The Holidays"

By Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Hurricanes.com

December 27, 2025

RALEIGH, N.C. - The top team in the Atlantic Division meets the top team in the Metropolitan Division on Saturday, as the Detroit Red Wings come to Raleigh to take on the Carolina Hurricanes.

When: Saturday, Dec. 27

Puck Drop: 7:00 p.m. ET

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

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes App

Canes Record: 22-11-3 (47 Points, 1st - Metropolitan Division)

Canes Last Game: 5-2 Loss to the Florida Panthers on Dec. 23

Red Wings Record: 22-13-3 (47 Points, 1st - Atlantic Division)

Red Wings Last Game: 4-3 Win over the Dallas Stars on Dec. 23

Last Time Out...

The Canes blew a multi-goal lead for a third consecutive game on Tuesday, falling 5-2 to the Florida Panthers.

Up 2-0 after 40 minutes and controlling the game as a whole, the back-to-back Stanley Cup Champions rattled off a five-goal third to send Rod Brind'Amour's group into the holiday break on a sour note.

Eric Robinson and Andrei Svechnikov were the goal-scorers for Carolina, while Frederik Andersen allowed five goals on 22 shots, moving to 0-5-2 in his last seven appearances.

Regaining Confidence...

Following Tuesday's third straight collapse, Rod Brind'Amour admitted post-game that a lack of confidence has seeped into his group.

"You can see it now, it's crept in. We've never had that issue. You can see it. We've got some bad results here. You stop playing, just kind of sit back, stop making plays, stop skating, everything just kind of slowed down for us and that was not the way we needed to handle it," he said.

Describing it as a combination of the team's injuries and having to put young players in situations that are "maybe a little above their pay grade", the Canes will try to hit the reset button when they return to the ice and get back to their winning ways.

Despite their recent struggles, the Canes still went into the holiday break with the best win percentage in the Eastern Conference (.653).

In Net...

With three days since their last game, the Canes are expected to have their full complement of goaltenders available tonight.

Brandon Bussi suffered the first post-regulation loss of his NHL career last Friday in Florida, but has been mostly stellar to start his NHL career. 11-1-1 through his first 13 appearances, it's certainly possible that the Canes go back to him tonight.

Pyotr Kochetkov has been a respectable 6-2 in eight appearances this season, making his most recent appearance last Saturday in Tampa.

Veteran Frederik Andersen went 19 days between starts before falling to Florida on Tuesday. His last victory came on Nov. 6, winless in his last seven outings.

On The Other Side...

Winners of three in a row before the holiday break, Detroit comes to town 8-2-0 in their last 10 games.

Including two shutouts during that run, goaltender John Gibson has been simply remarkable since the calendar flipped to December. The longtime Anaheim Duck has won eight starts in a row and posted a .927 save percentage throughout.

In front of him, 23-year-old Lucas Raymond paces the group with 41 points in 36 games. A steady performer all season long, he had a three-assist game against Dallas just before the break.

Injury Updates...



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

Forward William Carrier did not play on Dec. 23 due to illness.

Defenseman Jacob Slavin suffered an upper-body injury on Dec. 19 in Florida. He was labeled as "week-to-week" and placed on injured reserve on Dec. 22.

Forward Seth Jarvis was also injured during overtime on Dec. 19, suffering an upper-body injury. He was placed on IR on Dec. 20 and labeled as "week-to-week" on Dec. 22.

Forward Jordan Martinook left the game on Dec. 17 with a lower-body injury and has not skated since then. He has missed three consecutive games.

Defenseman Charles Alexis Legault suffered a cut to his hand via a skate blade on Nov. 9 and underwent surgery to

repair lacerated tendons on Nov. 10. He is expected to miss three to four months.

What Are We Wearing?

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

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes will practice on Sunday as they ramp back up following three days off the ice. They'll then start a home-road back-to-back set on Monday, hosting the Rangers at Lenovo Center, ahead of a divisional matchup in Pittsburgh on Tuesday.

Next Game: Monday, Dec. 29 vs. NY Rangers | 7:00 p.m. ET | [FDSNSO](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Parking](#)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025



NHL Power Rankings: Sabres giving the gift of hope amidst seven-game winning streak

By: Austin Nivison

There's no shortage of belief in Buffalo this Christmas

For the last 14 years, Santa and his Christmas magic have bypassed the Buffalo Sabres. That may not be the case this year as the Sabres work their way onto the nice list with a seven-game winning streak.

Earlier this season, I buried the Sabres in these very power rankings, and I underestimated how long the Eastern Conference standings would be a compressed mess. The difference between last place and second place is a mere 10 points.

That has opened the door for any team lucky enough to get hot at the right time, and the Sabres have seized upon that opening with a nice run just in time for Christmas. Buffalo is now just three points out of a playoff spot with a game in hand, and it feels like belief is starting to build.

Over this stretch, Alex Lyon has stepped up as the No. 1 option in net with 3.94 goals saved above average, and Tage Thompson has tallied four goals and four assists. Rasmus Dahlin has also caught fire from the blue line with two goals and six assists while playing lights out defense.

In a wide open Eastern Conference, why can't the Sabres get hot and end their 14-season playoff drought? That's what fans are asking themselves as they get a little hope in their stockings this Christmas.

With that in mind, here are the updated NHL Power Rankings with one Christmas wish for each team.

All expected goals and goals saved above average data courtesy of Natural Stat Trick.

Biggest Movers

Up: 9 Sabres

Down: 7 Maple Leafs

1

Avalanche Power play prowess | The only thing this Avalanche team doesn't do well is score on the power play, which boggles the mind. Colorado has converted on 16.4% of its man advantages, which ranks 26th. This team might be undefeated if it had just an average power play. --

27-2-7

2

Stars Top-four defenseman | Defense was the biggest concern for the Stars entering the season, and that hasn't changed. In fact, those issues have only been compounded by the fact that Thomas Harley has regressed. GM Jim Nill needs to find a solution there. 1 25-7-6

3

Wild Different division | "Hey Santa, this Central Division is no joke. How about a spot in the Metro or Atlantic? We'd even settle for the Pacific." 1 22-10-6

4

Red Wings Better shooting luck | The Red Wings now lead the Atlantic Division, and that's in spite of an 8.15% shooting percentage at five-on-five. Detroit ranks 26th in that category, so the team should take off if more of those shots start to hit the twine. 3 22-13-3

5

Golden Knights Bonus points | Vegas has picked up at least one point in 26 of its 34 games, but getting the full two points has been an issue. The Golden Knights lead the NHL with 10 overtime losses. If a few of those had gone the other way, they'd be leading the division. -- 17-8-10

6



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

Panthers Matthew Tkachuk | This is one of the more realistic wishes on this list. Tkachuk may not make it down the chimney in time for Christmas, but there is speculation he will try to suit up for the NHL Winter Classic on Jan. 2.

6 20-14-2

7

Hurricanes Stankoven surge | Logan Stankoven was a big part of the return in the Mikko Rantanen trade last year, but he's struggled to find his footing with 16 points in 35 games. Stankoven should be a perfect fit for the Hurricanes' aggressive style, but it has yet to really click. 5 22-11-

3

8

Oilers Two more wins | Last season, the Oilers came up two wins short of the Stanley Cup (and that was further away than they were in 2024). You can bet Connor McDavid has every intention of willing his team to those elusive 15th and 16th playoff wins. 8 19-13-6

9

Ducks Defense | This young Ducks team has a real knack of scoring goals (t-3rd with 125). Unfortunately, they also have a knack for surrendering goals to their opponents (31st with 126). If Anaheim can tighten things up defensively, it'll be in business. 1 21-14-2

10

Lightning Vintage Point | It was already true that the Lightning needed Brayden Point at his best to win the Stanley Cup, but that's especially true with Brandon Hagel out of the lineup. At his best, Point is one of the best centers in the NHL, but he hasn't been anywhere near that level yet in 2025-26. -- 20-13-3

11

Islanders Olympic bid for Schaefer | The Olympic teams will soon be announced, and I'll pound the table for Schaefer. He may be 18 years old, but he's already shown the ability to thrive against the best players in the world. Do not deny him, Canada. 2 20-13-4

12

Capitals Centers | The Capitals are a good team, but they're severely lacking at the most important position on the ice.

Stack up their center depth with that of other Eastern Conference playoff hopefuls, and there's not much comparison, with all due respect to Dylan Strome. 6

19-13-5

13

Senators Goaltending | The Senators have become an elite defensive team, and they have a nice collection of young offensive talent. If the Sens could get a save or two, they would be in the driver's seat to win the Atlantic Division.

6 18-13-5

14

Canadiens Forward reinforcements | I've noted it before in these power rankings, but Montreal is something of a one-trick pony up front. One line does most of the heavy lifting, so GM Kent Hughes needs to find Cole Caufield and Nick Suzuki a little support. 1 20-12-5

15

Flyers Maximized Michkov | Rick Tocchet has helped the Flyers hit another level, but the one player lagging behind might be the most important. Matvei Michkov is on pace for 21 goals and 25 assists, which would be a clear step back from his rookie season. Philly needs a little more out of Michkov to reach the playoffs. 2 19-10-7

16

Sabres Playoffs | Thanks to the heap of mediocrity that is the East, the Sabres are very much alive amidst their six-game winning streak. Buffalo has given its fan base the gift of hope this Christmas. 9 18-14-4

17

Bruins Peak McAvoy | For the most part, the Bruins have been able to walk a narrow path to success with David Pastrnak and Morgan Geekie carrying the offense and Jeremy Swayman playing well in goal. The final piece to that puzzle is getting elite defense from Charlie McAvoy. 6

20-17-1

18



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

Kings Offense (again) | The Kings have some extra offense on their wish list for the third (fourth?) year in a row. Santa has yet to deliver, so maybe Los Angeles is simply on the naughty list. Either that or the big man has trouble finding Crypto.com Arena. 4 15-12-9

19

Devils Top-six forward | Looking at this Devils roster, they just seem a bit incomplete at the top. Maybe Ryan O'Reilly will be waiting under the tree. What about Jonathan Marchessault? Could Nazem Kadri be on his way to Newark? New Jersey has some options. 1 20-16-1

20

Mammoth Second-half push | Despite miserable goaltending and a devastating injury to Logan Cooley, the Mammoth are still in the thick of the playoff race out West. All it will take is a second-half run to cement their status as a real playoff threat. 3 18-18-3

21

Rangers Home cookin' | The Rangers have gotten a little better at Madison Square Garden, but they're still 5-10-3 on home ice. That ranks 31st in the NHL, so a little home cookin' in the second half would go a long way toward putting New York in the playoffs. 1 19-16-4

22

Sharks Keaton Verhoeff | Macklin Celebrini and Will Smith are the future at forward. Yaroslav Askarov is the future in goal. If the Sharks can land another premium draft pick in 2026, Verhoeff could be their cornerstone on the blue line. 1 17-17-3

23

Predators Direction | Early in the season, the Predators couldn't buy a win and were on the fast track to a fire sale. Since Thanksgiving, Nashville has been one of the best teams in the league, so those plans are now on hold. Pick a lane, fellas. 3 16-16-4

24

Maple Leafs Change | Toronto has taken up residence in the East's basement, and the pressure is mounting.

Assistant coach Marc Savard was just fired, but is that really enough to spark this team? Whether it's a change at head coach or a big trade, there needs to be a major shake-up.

7 16-15-5

25

Penguins Clarity | Sidney Crosby's future continues to be a big story in Pittsburgh, and it may remain that way with a muddled playoff race in the East. The Penguins are at an organizational crossroads, and there is no clear answer about where Crosby will be in 2026. 7 15-12-9

26

Flames Draft capital | Between Nazem Kadri, Rasmus Andersson and Blake Coleman, the Flames have a few players who would be very valuable to playoff teams. They need to squeeze as much draft capital out of that trio as humanly possible. 1 15-18-4

27

Blue Jackets Winning streak | The Blue Jackets are near the bottom of the standings but just five points out of a playoff spot. They just acquired Mason Marchment from the Kraken. They haven't won more than two games in a row since October. If Columbus can get on a roll, it won't be hard to get back into the playoff picture. 2 15-15-6

28

Blues 2019 Binnington | If the Blues are going to get back into the fight, it will take a small miracle. Well, either that or Jordan Binnington returning to his 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs form. Heck, St. Louis might settle for his 4 Nations Face-Off form. 2 14-16-8

29

Canucks Gavin McKenna | Vancouver just traded away one franchise superstar in Quinn Hughes, and it needs another one to replace him. Landing Gavin McKenna at No. 1 overall would be a great way to ease the pain of losing Hughes. 2 15-18-3

30

Jets Refresh | This team has gotten stale. There's no two ways about it. Connor Hellebuyck has to carry Winnipeg



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

because there is a real lack of star power. It might be time for the Jets to explore a "retool" or "revamp" or whatever pablum GMs are putting out there nowadays. 6 15-17-3

31

Kraken Calder Trophy Beniers | It may be easy to forget that Matty Beniers posted 24 goals and 33 assists as a rookie in 2022-23. Unfortunately for him and the Kraken,

those remain career highs as his development has plateaued. 1 15-14-6

32

Blackhawks Time machine | Remember when Connor Bedard was fully healthy and the Blackhawks looked like a fun up-and-coming team? Me too. Chicago may want to rewind the season by about a month. 4 13-17-6



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Hurricanes blow another lead to Panthers, fall 5-2

By: Kyle Morton

Looking to go into the holiday break on a positive note after two gut-wrenching losses in Florida last weekend, the Carolina Hurricanes laid another egg in Raleigh on Tuesday, falling 5-2 to the Florida Panthers after one of the more dismal periods of hockey the team has played under Rod Brind'Amour.

Just as they did in Sunrise on Friday, the Hurricanes got the scoring started when Eric Robinson buried a shot past Sergei Bobrovsky off a patient feed from Sebastian Aho early in the first period.

Carolina got to its defensive game for the rest of the first period, ensuring that Frederik Andersen only faced three shots in his first 20 minutes of action since December 4.

Defense led to offense in the second period when right after a successful penalty kill, captain Jordan Staal fired off a perfect stretch pass to send Andrei Svechnikov in on a breakaway right out of the box. Svechnikov sold the high shot and slid the puck past Bobrovsky low to give Carolina a 2-0 lead that would stand up through 40.

It all unraveled from there, both for the team's defensive structure and for Andersen between the pipes, as the

Panthers put together the sort of run that used to win Roy Williams' UNC teams national championships.

Niko Mikkola got it started from distance to cut the deficit to 2-1. Less than three minutes later, Luke Kunin hammered home a feed from Noah Gregor to tie things up with his second tally of the season.

Just 53 seconds after that, Florida took its first lead of the game on a similar-looking play to the previous goal when Sam Reinhart found Anton Lundell in the slot. Lundell, admirably filling the Aleksander Barkov role in the latter's absence, sold Andersen on glove-high and then went stick-high after the Danish goalie bit hard.

Sam Bennett added an insurance goal to make it 4-2, though the Hurricanes had given up by that point. Seth Jones added another on a power play with just under five minutes remaining to make it 5-2.

Now with three straight losses after multi-goal leads to the Florida teams, the two teams in the East you really worry about in a playoff series, the holiday break has to become a time for introspection for Brind'Amour and the team.

The Canes will take the ice in Raleigh on December 27 against a surging Detroit Red Wings team that just earned a dramatic win on its home ice on Tuesday.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025



Hurricanes lose third-consecutive game after holding 2-0 lead

By: Haley O'Neill

The Carolina Hurricanes blew a multi-goal lead for the third-consecutive game, and after being up two, allowed their opponent to score five unanswered goals in the final period.

Having fallen short in the two previous games where they blew the lead, the Canes (22-11-3) hosted the Florida Panthers (20-14-2) just four days after playing them in Sunrise. In this rematch, the Hurricanes came out strong, but lost their momentum and confidence in the third period, allowing five goals.

Letting the Hurricanes dictate the first 40 minutes, the Panthers fought back and took the lead with 13 minutes left to play. The goal was snapped home by center Anton Lundell, who was positioned in front of the net, ready to receive a pass that came from center Sam Reinhart. It came just 43 seconds after the goal that tied the game.

With 16 minutes left in the third period, Panthers defenseman Niko Mikkola fired a shot from the top of the zone, receiving a lucky bounce off the inside of defenseman Alexander Nikishin's skate into the net. This goal was the start of a change of momentum that led to the Panthers taking the lead in just over three minutes.

"Obviously, [the Panthers] are a good team," said center Jordan Staal. "They're going to come in the third. They have talent. They're going to make you pay as soon as you make a mistake. The guys shelled up a bit the last few times, and

with the games before, it's hard. We have to have some confidence in our group."

Three other Florida skaters capitalized on mistakes and opportunities given to them by the Canes. Centers Luke Kunin and Sam Bennett, and defenseman Seth Jones each found the back of the net late in the third, not letting off steam for a second.

Aside from the final 20 minutes, the Canes held possession and chose the pace. Passing the puck over 120 feet from the Canes' zone, defenseman Joel Nystrom found center Sebastian Aho waiting in their offensive zone. Winger Eric Robinson, positioned in front of goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky, received the puck from Aho and fired it home.

"It was a good stretch pass by [Nystrom] there," Robinson said. "We're kind of rotating through some different lines here, so just ready for your name to be called. I got a chance to go with [Aho], and you know he is going to make a good pass when you're out there, so just be ready."

The second goal from the Canes that doubled its early lead came from winger Andrei Svechnikov, who was exiting the penalty box. Staal, swiftly and accurately, found Svechnikov skating alone into the Panthers' zone, and went 5-hole past Bobrovsky.

Next up, the Hurricanes will host the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday, Dec. 27, with a 7 p.m. puck drop.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

The Hockey News

'We've Never Had This Issue, Ever': Jordan Staal, Jackson Blake, Rod Brind'Amour On Yet Another Third-Period Collapse

By: Ryan Henkel

Hurricanes collapse again, blowing a lead. Staal, Blake, and Brind'Amour dissect the disheartening third-period implosion and a creeping confidence crisis.

The Carolina Hurricanes once again blew a multi-goal lead for the third straight game, this time losing 5-2 to the Florida Panthers Tuesday night in Raleigh after leading 2-0 after 40 minutes.

The Canes were in total control of the game, but one bad bounce and all of a sudden, they folded.

After the game, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour along with Jordan Staal and Jackson Blake spoke with the media. Here's what they had to say:

Rod Brind'Amour

On the game: It's tough. We were playing really well, considering what we've been going through, and then they get one and we just kind of, I don't know what the right mindset is, but we just tried to do things differently than we were doing them and it clearly doesn't work. We made a few errors. I call them young mistakes, guys that are out there probably playing above where they should be based on the situations and made some errors. Good teams make you pay and that's kind of what happened.

On the team lacking confidence: You can see it. It's crept it. We've never had that issue ever. Now, you can see it. We've gotten some bad results here and we just stopped playing. You sit back or you stop making the plays we were making, skating, everything just slowed down for us and that was not the way we needed to handle that.

On if he worries at all about Frederik Andersen's confidence given his situation: I worry about all the guys. I mean, like I said, we played a great two periods of hockey and then we didn't and it went the other way real quick. He was part of it. Not putting the blame on him. I really could go down the list. There was quite a few guys that just stopped playing the right way. Hopefully the lesson sinks in. We've been talking about it for a couple of games now. It's kind of crept in again and again. We've gotta stick with it and it's hard. We were playing extremely hard and we take a little breath and all of a sudden, that's what can happen. We're not good enough to just not play that way and I think that's the message that will hopefully get across. If we try to do it a little differently, that's what ends up happening. That's what's been happening in these last couple of games.

On if the fix is as simple as the team sticking with their style: You have to do what gets you success and not come off of it. That's part of it. Look, we're also dinged up. We're putting guys in situations and playing them in situations we shouldn't be, but we're forced to. You can see that they're hanging in

there, but they're kind of playing above their pay grade in essence right now. Putting them out there when maybe we wouldn't. That's not a good recipe either.

On Jackson Blake's turnovers: He's our playmaker. There's certain guys you have to give leeway to, but there also has to be an understanding of the time of the game and how the game is being played, your opponent and how that works. That's all a learning curve. Nikishin had the same thing. He was going good and then there were some young mistakes. You could go down the list to be honest with you. That's all part of the process here.

On if the youth of the team is playing into its struggles: That's part of it. Like I said, we're putting them in situations you wouldn't normally put them because we've got some guys out. So you wouldn't have to throw them in those situations as much as we are. That's just how it is. They're learning on the fly here.

On Alexander Nikishin's status, who left early in the third period: I don't know. I don't have an update there.

Jordan Staal

On the game: I'm assuming what you guys all saw. It was a great first and second and then we didn't do anything very well in the third. We're up two goals and we're looking for the third, fourth, fifth, sixth. Like, I mean, against a team like that, you have to be content with moving the puck forward, getting in their end and just grinding them down and make them go the whole ice before they get a shot on net. I have to do a better job as a leader obviously. It's three in a row of that crap. It's gotta start with me and the other leaders in this room, we have to be better as a group playing with the lead and playing with some confidence in the third of just burying teams. We just sat back and turned pucks over and it just got uglier and uglier. Obviously it looked the way it did again.

On if the team is mentally fragile right now: I would say that's a part of it. Obviously they're a good team and you know they're going to come in the third. They have talent and they're going to make you pay as soon as you make a mistake. I think the guys shelled up a bit the last few times. It's hard, but man, we have to have some confidence in our group. I mean, our team is good. There's gotta be more confidence in the third to bury teams and just play the way we do. I mean, it's pretty simple. If we play our game, our style and keep moving north and playing in their end, it's just that much harder to score goals for them. We didn't do that.

On if the break is coming at a good time: Yeah, sure. I don't know. I don't want to sit on that for three days, to be honest. But gonna have to. We're gonna have to learn from it. We're gonna have to be better.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

On moving forward as a group: It's 82 games. We're going to have to learn from this and honestly do what they did. That's the Stanley Cup Champion team and even they're missing guys, so there's no excuses. They consistently play their game. They looked shaky in the first, but they got to their game and they got going. They took over the game and put the puck in the net. We have to learn to just be consistent in what we do and be comfortable in that kind of game. It's just... man, I don't know.

Jackson Blake

On moving past his turnovers: Obviously there's a lot of plays in hockey that I wish I could go back and change, but you can't do that. I take accountability for those mistakes. I mean, gotta move on, right? It sucks that we lost and sucks that we gave up that lead. To give up five in the third is never what you want to do, especially against that team. I thought the first two periods were great too. Just little mistakes like that can cost you. It sucks and is a terrible feeling for me right now, but like I said, I have to move on. Can't let this one soak in and affect my confidence or anything like that because if I let that happen, then it's just going to keep happening. Just have to move on. This Christmas, I think that it's nice that it's right now. Kind of get away from it for a

couple of days and then right back at it. Have to be better in those areas for sure.

On once again losing to Florida: I mean, I feel like we've shown that we're right there. Up 3-0 last time and up 2-0 this time. I know speaking for myself as well, but we just have to find a way. We gotta find a way to close out that game and close out the one in Florida too. But like I said, I can't really say anything because it's the little mistakes like I made tonight that just totally cost us. Sucks, but I think it's good to see that at least we can... that's the team to beat, right? They've been to the Cup three years in a row. We just have to find a way to close out those games and me personally, close out those games as well.

On sitting on this game over the break: I don't know. I'm obviously going to think about it all night tonight and then a little bit tomorrow, but like I said, I have to move on. I have to have a quick mental reset a little bit and just spend some time with some family over the next couple of days and kind of clear my head a little bit. But like I said, it comes at a good time, but it kind of sucks that we can't just go play another one tomorrow. It sucks.

Carolina Heart and Soul Jordan Martinook Doesn't Have Timeline For Return Says Coach

By: Ryan Henkel

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour confirms Jordan Martinook's return remains uncertain amidst a wave of injuries. The team faces key absences.

Injuries have been a prevalent problem all across the NHL this season and the Carolina Hurricanes are no exception.

The team has only had seven skaters who've appeared in every game so far this season and were just hit with another round of injuries as it was announced on Monday that both leading scorer Seth Jarvis and top defenseman Jaccob Slavin were out week-to-week with upper-body injuries.

Hurricanes dealt bad hand with new slate of injuries

And to make matters worse, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour was asked about alternate captain Jordan

Martinook, who's missed the team's last two games with injury as well, and it was revealed that Martinook doesn't currently have a timeline for return.

"Another guy that we need in there, but I don't expect him to play," Brind'Amour said.

Martinook, 33, has four goals and 11 points this season, but his real impact comes from his defensive and forechecking game.

The veteran is one of the team's best at dragging his team into the fight too, so his absence is definitely one that is noticeable.

"It's a weird year we're dealing with, but you've gotta deal with it," Brind'Amour said. "Next guy up has to do his job."

LINKS

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

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

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The Athletic / World Juniors takeaways: Canada wins tense rematch with Czechia, Frondell stands out for Sweden

Scott Wheeler, Corey Pronman 5-7 minutes 27/12/2025

Welcome to The Athletic's daily notebook for the 2026 World Juniors. All tournament long, prospects writers Scott Wheeler and Corey Pronman will provide their standouts and takeaways from each day's slate of games in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

That kicked off on Boxing Day with a four-pack of games featuring the tournament's presumptive top five teams and a rematch of last year's Canada-Czechia quarterfinal.

Sweden defeated Slovakia 3-2, with a late goal from top draft eligible Ivar Stenberg elevating the Swedes.

Finland topped Denmark 6-2. Wild prospect and team captain Aron Kiviharju registered two assists and was named player of the game for the Finns. Projected first-rounder Oliver Suvanto also scored.

USA beat Germany 6-3. Bruins prospect Will Zellers, who was a late addition to the team, scored two goals and three points.

Canada and Czechia traded leads in the best game of the day, with Canada narrowly prevailing 7-5.

Blackhawks' Frondell leads Sweden to opening win

Anton Frondell, Chicago's pick at No. 3 in the 2025 NHL Draft, was instrumental in Sweden's Boxing Day victory. He blasted a one-timer for Sweden's opening goal and set up Victor Eklund (Islanders), both on the power play. He played hard and was constantly around the offensive attack. Eklund was also quite good, showing his trademark tenacity that has scouts thinking he can help an NHL team even with his smaller frame. — Corey Pronman

Finns will be by committee

Finland is the only team other than Canada that had a player withheld by their NHL team this year, and without would-be first-line center Konsta Helenius (Sabres), this group is lacking a star. On Friday, all four of their lines scored, and they got four points from the back end via Kiviharju and Lasse Boelius (Ducks). Their defensemen can all move the puck, and they're returning last year's goalie of the tournament, Petteri Rimpinen (Kings). They also have some really well-rounded 19-year-old forwards, and Suvanto continues to look like one of the better center prospects in the class. Everyone's going to beat Denmark this year, but it was a game that looked like a typical Finnish one at this thing to get things going. — Scott Wheeler

USA wins surprisingly close game over Germany

The U.S. got a group scoring effort today, with two goals from Zellers, and one apiece from Cole Eiserman (Islanders), Will Horcoff (Penguins),

Max Plante (Red Wings) and Chase Reid (2026). The forwards did their part, even if the U.S. will want a bit more at even strength from their star players.

The defense pair of Cole Hutson (Capitals) and Adam Kleber (Sabres) was excellent. Hutson showed his typical skill and playmaking, and Kleber was a legit stopper, breaking up a lot of plays. The defensive play outside of those two was lacking. The USA coaches will have a hard time getting reliable minutes from the bottom half of their defense group in the tough games if they play like this going forward. Logan Hensler (Senators), a returnee and first-round NHL draft pick, in particular, had notable struggles against an average German team. — Pronman

Canada wins an ugly one

On the back of two big plays from Canada's game-breaking defenseman — a player they missed on their blue line after Matthew Schaefer was injured in the Boxing Day opener last year — Zayne Parekh (Flames), Canada pulled out the back-and-forth win.

It wasn't pretty, though. Canada's bottom-six forward group struggled. Their offensive-zone play was too cute. Their defensive-zone coverage was sloppy, resulting in a ton of Grade A chances in the slot for the Czechs, often with backs turned and guys scrambling to find the puck. Until Tij Iginla (Mammoth) took a Michael Misa (Sharks) pass off an entry, I thought that line with Porter Martone (Flyers), which is supposed to be Canada's first, was largely quiet (even with the goal, I didn't like their game).

The one constant for Team Canada through pre-tournament and into Boxing Day has been the play of their second line with Gavin McKenna (2026), Michael Hage (Canadiens) and Brady Martin (Predators). Each had multi-point games in the opener, and I thought Hage was Canada's best forward. — Wheeler

Czechs look legit (again)

I thought Vojtech Cihar (Kings) was one of the best players on the ice. He was recently signed to his entry-level contract, is still 18 and eligible to play in next year's tournament, and looked like someone who has played pro hockey for the last two years. He was noticeable shift-to-shift at five-on-five, effective on the penalty kill, and had a hand in Czechia's second, third and fifth goals. Wild fans in attendance got a look at the creativity and vision of prospect Adam Benak, too — and so did three of his Brantford Bulldogs teammates from the other side of the ice. The mobility of this Czech blue line was noticeable throughout, too, led by the elite-skating undrafted Tomas Galvas (who I thought was outstanding). And that's without their highest-drafted player, Sabres No. 8 pick Radim Mrtka, who was sidelined with an injury he suffered in pre-tournament.

The Czechs have medaled in three straight tournaments and been to four straight medal games, and they look like they'll be in the mix for a fifth year in a row again. — Wheeler

Day 2 schedule

Here's your schedule for Dec. 27 (all times in local Central Time):



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

Slovakia vs. Germany in St. Paul at 1 p.m. Canada vs. Latvia in Minneapolis at 3:30 p.m. USA vs. Switzerland in St. Paul at 5 p.m. Czechia vs. Denmark in Minneapolis at 7:30 p.m.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.27.2025

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The Athletic / 2026 World Juniors predictions: Medalists, relegation and top draft-eligible player

Dec. 26, 2025 7:00 am EST

By Corey Pronman, Scott Wheeler, Max Bultman and The Athletic NHL Staff

With the festive season in full swing, one of hockey's ultimate holiday traditions is around the corner.

The 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship offers a glimpse into the future of hockey, featuring 10 teams and showcasing the world's top under-20 players. Whether you're a fan keeping a close eye on your NHL team's pipeline or a big national team supporter, there are plenty of interesting storylines to follow when the tournament opens on Dec. 26 in Minnesota.

Can the United States pull off a three-peat with a gold medal win? Can Team Canada bounce back after back-to-back quarterfinal exits? Which prospects will raise their stocks?

Ahead of this year's tournament, The Athletic polled 27 NHL staffers between Dec. 16 and 21 to get their predictions. All those polled answered each question in the team picks portion of the survey. An expert prospect panel of Corey Pronman, Scott Wheeler and Max Bultman was then brought in to pick apart the results, provide analysis and make individual player predictions, too.

Here are the results.

Note: Voting result percentages are rounded for visualizations.

Wheeler: Classic North American bias! I kid, I kid. I think this is a coin toss, but I leaned with the minority here and voted for Sweden. It is the deeper team and I think the stars are equal or close. The loss of Trevor Connelly due to injury does hurt USA from a skill level standpoint, too.

Bultman: I voted for Sweden here, and while I'm not sure this result should necessarily be flipped, it should at least be closer than it is. The Americans have some strong star power, but Sweden's depth is legit, and Ivar Stenberg has a chance to be one of the offensive stars of the tournament.

Wheeler: This probably doesn't give enough love to the Czech blue line, or the Finnish team that beat Canada decisively at the World Junior Summer Showcase. The pick is Canada, but the odds won't say 92.6 percent (or shouldn't).

Bultman: I love the boldness from a couple of voters to deviate from the heavy tournament favorite Canada, and the acknowledgment of Finland consistently punching above its weight at international events. But I think in pool play, at least, Canada should overwhelm its opponents. Even if it does stumble into one upset loss, I don't think there's another team I'd feel can win all of its group games.

Wheeler: This checks out, though I'd still give the Swedes better odds (despite their track record).

Bultman: It's boring, but it's the consensus for a reason. Canada has stars. It has depth. It could very well have the best goaltender in the tournament. That adds up to being a major favorite, as reflected here.

Bultman: I took Sweden, but would expect it to come down to the Swedes and the Americans for this one, either way.

Wheeler: I didn't vote for Czechia (who I have slated to finish fourth), but I strongly considered it.

Bultman: I'm figuring this comes down to whoever loses a USA-Sweden semifinal (or which of the two gets stuck playing Canada in the semifinal), but I think the voters have the right dark horses here, too, in Finland and Czechia.

Pronman: I would throw Latvia into this mix. It pushed Czechia into overtime in the pre-tournament and gave Slovakia a hard time too, returning a bunch of players from last year's team that had a lot of success. It has a group of hard-working, physical players with speed who will frustrate opponents even if they're not overly skilled.

Bultman: I get that the Finns aren't quite in the same tier as Canada, USA and Sweden on paper, but they feel closer to a favorite than an underdog. So, if they're in this mix, I'm taking them.

Pronman: As I stated above, I would bet on Latvia beating a favorite over being relegated. Its team is more impressive on paper than Denmark and Germany.

Wheeler: The Danes don't stand a chance, I'm afraid. They're the weakest team in the tournament and I don't think it's close. I wouldn't have the Latvians in this conversation either (frankly, I'd have the Swiss and Germans below them).

Bultman: I voted for Denmark here, and am surprised at how many votes Latvia got. Have we already forgotten them winning two games — including one over Canada — and pushing Sweden to the brink in the knockout round last year?

Pronman: I'm not the biggest fan of Cole Eiserman's game in terms of NHL translatability, but he can wire a puck and is lethal on the man advantage. He will be a constant threat to score for Team USA.

Wheeler: I'll take Gavin McKenna for points but Eiserman for goals.

Bultman: I interpreted this as points, but either way, Porter Martone should be all over the score sheet for Canada, playing top-six minutes and bringing the size to produce around the net, too.

Bultman: It's the boring answer, but McKenna should be in a prime position on the tournament's best team. He'll have challengers, but it's hard to pick against him.

Bultman: What's interesting here to me is that I'm not completely sure Carter George will be Canada's No. 1 through the whole tournament, with Jack Ivankovic a threat to steal some starts as well. I think whoever of the two earns the lion's share of action is the front-runner here, though, and for now that looks like George.

Bultman: Cole Hutson led the tournament in scoring last year, making him a strong favorite going in this year — especially if the Americans can put together a strong finish as a team.

Wheeler: Latvian defender Alberts Šmits is a dark horse for this as well, but you'll rarely see a quarterfinalist win it. Those two extra games in the semifinal and medal games matter.

Pronman: Michael Misa's combination of high-end speed and skill differentiates him from the rest of the player pool. He should be the main driver of the tournament favorites.

Bultman: In addition to what should be prime opportunities in Canada's top six, McKenna will also be in the spotlight, making sure his contributions are noticed.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

Pronman: I could have gone either way between McKenna and Stenberg. I'm a big fan of Chase Reid and Šmits, but I don't think Reid will have the opportunity to fully shine in this tournament while sharing a blue line with Hutson. Canada's power play should bulldoze opponents and McKenna will be flanking it.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

The top 25 NHL prospects playing at the 2026 IIHF World Junior Championships

Based on their NHL projections, these players are the top prospects at the 2026 World Juniors in Minnesota.

Bultman: Stenberg should be in a prominent role for the tournament's top teams, too, but McKenna has the advantage of being a returning player to the event and should hit the ground running.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.27.2025

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The Athletic / NHL trade matchmaker: Predicting where top targets go by the deadline, part 2

By Pierre LeBrun and Chris Johnston

Dec. 26, 2025 6:00 am EST

The NHL's March 6 trade deadline is just 10 weeks away.

That leaves enough runway for the needs of buyers and sellers to shift before the biggest decisions are made — or for buyers and sellers to switch places. Still, it's never too early to start identifying potential fits between teams and players available on our latest NHL trade big board.

With that in mind, enjoy part two of trade-board matchmaker.

Updates on Jonathan Marchessault, Connor Murphy, Yegor Chinakhov and other trade candidates

Jonathan Marchessault

Team: Nashville Predators

Position: Winger

Shoots: Right

Age: 34

Contract term: 2029 UFA

Current cap hit: \$5,500,000

Trade Board ranking: No. 23

LeBrun: Toronto Maple Leafs

One can argue the last thing the struggling Leafs need is another aging player. But hear me out. The Leafs don't have many assets to trade. For the Predators, this would be more about moving the remainder of the contract — three more seasons after this one at a \$5.5 million cap hit. The Leafs would still have to trade assets, but it wouldn't be as costly as other trade targets they've looked at.

Marchessault, 34, would have to consent via his full no-movement clause, but I wouldn't be surprised if he would consider the Leafs, where he would get a top-six role skating alongside either Auston Matthews or John Tavares.

Again, I can see how some Leafs fans just want the whole thing rebuilt now and no more trades for veterans. But with the team not having its first-round picks in 2026 or 2027, and the standings still very tight, general manager Brad Treliving isn't ready to wave the white flag just yet.

Johnston: Montreal Canadiens

This is a move that would certainly sit well with Marchessault, which is important given the fact he's got that NMC in his contract. The former Conn Smythe Trophy winner would bring some experience to the NHL's youngest roster and should be able to add offensive pop to the Habs' top-six forward group.

Facilitating a trade for Marchessault would necessitate some money going out the door, with Patrik Laine's \$8.7 million cap hit the most obvious candidate to go.

The Quebec native would be a popular addition for the fanbase.

Marchessault was named the NHL's postseason MVP, becoming the first truly "undrafted" player to ever win the award.

Connor Murphy

Team: Chicago Blackhawks

Position: Defenseman

Shoots: Right

Age: 32

Contract term: 2026 UFA

Current cap hit: \$4,400,000

Trade Board ranking: No. 18

LeBrun: Florida Panthers

The Jeff Petry flyer for \$775,000 hasn't turned out as good as hoped in South Florida, and my sense is the two-time Stanley Cup champs will try to upgrade on the right side of their third pairing. Murphy, 32, is a pending unrestricted free agent and fits the bill.

The hurdle for Florida would be finding the cap space. Murphy's \$4.4 million cap hit is rich, but obviously it would require Chicago retaining some, plus the Panthers have \$3.8 million in long-term-injured-reserve money at their disposal with captain Aleksander Barkov out. The Panthers and Blackhawks made a trade a year ago involving Seth Jones. Obviously, this wouldn't be at the same level, but it could be beneficial.

I also think the Blackhawks will want to do right by Murphy, who has long been respected in that room. He's only played nine career playoff games and they were in the Edmonton pandemic bubble in 2020, so he hasn't experienced a traditional playoff run with fans. Joining the Cup champs would be perfect.

Johnston: Vegas Golden Knights

The Blackhawks could certainly do right by Murphy by sending him to an organization that's always aggressively chasing the Stanley Cup. The Golden Knights still haven't replaced the hole left on the right side of their blue line left by Alex Pietrangolo's injury and would be looking at a more reasonable acquisition cost by chasing Murphy rather than Calgary's Rasmus Andersson.

They're a little thin on trade capital after years of going all-in.

Where could Rasmus Andersson, Steven Stamkos, Ryan O'Reilly and Kiefer Sherwood end up by the deadline? Our insiders make their picks.

Yegor Chinakhov

Team: Columbus Blue Jackets

Position: Winger



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

Shoots: Left

Age: 24

Contract term: 2026 RFA

Current cap hit: \$2,100,000

Trade Board ranking: No. 15

LeBrun: San Jose Sharks

Chinakhov asked for a trade before the season and that request hasn't gone anywhere. Now, with the Mason Marchment acquisition, Chinakhov's role in the Jackets' lineup is shaky again.

When teams called earlier this year, I don't think Columbus wanted just a draft pick for Chinakhov. They wanted a player. But now that they've spent a second-round pick and a fourth-round pick on Marchment, they might be OK recouping a second-round pick for the 2020 No. 21 pick. It just so happens the Sharks have two second-round picks this year, their own and the Colorado Avalanche's.

And given Chinakhov's age, he fits San Jose's young group. And he's the kind of reclamation project that could turn into a player.

Why not if you're the Sharks?

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Blue Jackets hope Mason Marchment gives lineup a boost, dressing room a jolt

GM Don Waddell has wanted Marchment for a while, but he also wanted to change the dynamic with the Blue Jackets.

Johnston: Buffalo Sabres

You won't find anyone in the NHL more familiar with Chinakhov than Jarmo Kekäläinen, the man who drafted him in Columbus. With Kekäläinen now in charge of the Sabres front office, it's not unreasonable to expect him to lean on some known quantities as he starts to put his own stamp on the Buffalo roster.

The Sabres have the draft capital needed to make a future-focused trade, but they also have young roster players who could be moved in a more traditional hockey deal.

Chinakhov is still viewed by some around the league as a strong candidate to break out if given a fresh start. His strength and speed are certainly attractive attributes. They're the qualities that attracted him to Kekäläinen in the first place.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

In replacing Kevyn Adams as Sabres GM, Jarmo Kekäläinen has a heavy lift ahead

Kekäläinen's to-do list will be lengthy as he takes over for Adams as Buffalo's general manager.

Our final player doesn't appear on the trade board and is not a "trade" candidate at all, unless it's in the sense of trading in back nines for back-to-backs. But 'tis the season for having some fun, and there are very few players more fun than this one.

Marc-Andre Fleury

Position: Goalie

Age: 41

LeBrun: Tampa Bay Lightning

Several teams have reached out of late to see if Fleury would be inclined to come out of retirement. I'm not sure how likely it is to happen, but the fact that teams have reached out is interesting in itself.

Jonas Johansson hasn't been bad. His .897 save percentage and 4.1 saves above expected (per MoneyPuck) are solid for a No. 2 goalie.

But my theory here is that if something should happen injury-wise to Andrei Vasilevskiy in the playoffs — and he's been dinged up more than a few times over the past few seasons, including this one — imagine having the insurance of a future Hockey Hall of Fame goalie in Fleury?

Johnston: Edmonton Oilers

That same insurance could be mighty enticing in Edmonton, where the crease has been a constant source of fascination and frustration. The pitch to Fleury would be pretty straightforward: Come join a team with Stanley Cup ambitions and rejoin forces with No. 1 man Tristan Jarry, a fellow former Pittsburgh Penguin.

Jarry's recent lower-body injury is a clear and present reminder of the need for depth as the Oilers gear up for another long playoff run.

Plus, Fleury's easygoing personality would be additive to the dressing room and should remove any potential concerns about how things might go if the organization carries three goaltenders with Calvin Pickard still in the mix, too. Edmonton is currently leaning on Connor Ingram as its No. 3, but the jury remains out on whether he'll be able to fully rebuild his game in time to be considered a viable option should the Oilers run into health or performance issues come the playoffs.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.27.2025

1373142 Websites

The Athletic / World Juniors 2026 viewing guide: Team previews, predictions, schedule and more

By Scott Wheeler

Dec. 26, 2025 6:00 am EST

The 2026 World Juniors start on Boxing Day in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minn.

Here's your quick introduction to the tournament, including rundowns of all 10 teams, predictions, draft-eligibles to watch, frequently asked questions and more.

Team-by-team need to know

Group A

United States: USA Hockey is hosting the tournament for the first time since 2018, and looking to three-peat for the first time ever. This Team USA is notably weaker than the last two that won gold, especially in net and down the middle, but they're still a contender. Center James Hagens (Bruins) and defenseman Cole Hutson (Capitals) were two of the top players in last year's event and are both back, and they're surrounded by an impressive group of talented wingers.

Sweden: The Swedes have famously won gold at the World Juniors just twice, but they always enter the tournament among the favorites, and that's no different this year. Top 2026 prospect Ivar Stenberg, Blackhawks first-rounder Anton Frondell and Islanders first-rounder Victor Eklund should be top players at this event, and the Tre Kronor have double-digit forwards who could play on any team. Watch out for Ducks second-rounder Lucas Pettersson, too. They don't have a star defenseman, but they've got a good seven there as well.

Slovakia: The Slovaks are usually carried by a couple of drafted stars, but after staples Dalibor Dvorsky and Maxim Strbak aged out, this year's team is a younger and less talented one. Draft-eligibles Tomas Chrenko,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

Adam Nemeč, Tobias Tomik and Adam Goljer will make them a pitstop for scouts, though.

Switzerland: The Swiss should be reasonably competitive on the back end and in net this year. They're bringing two drafted goalies and three drafted defenseman, and their undrafted 19-year-old D (Daniil Ustinkov, Gian Meier) are solid players at this level as well. Up front, the undrafted Jamiro Reber is a good player at this level, but Lars Steiner (2026) and Jonah Neuenschwander (2027) are the names to know. Steiner is a potential top-50 pick this year.

Germany: The Germans are headlined by three forwards: Oilers prospect David Lewandowski, Capitals prospect Maxim Schafer and 16-year-old forward Max Penkin, a 2027 draft-eligible who has scored two professional goals in Germany's top-flight DEL this season. The diminutive and speedy Dustin Willhoft is fun to watch at the junior level, too, even if he's not an NHL prospect. The Germans could be at risk of finishing at the bottom of Group A.

Group B

Canada: After back-to-back quarterfinal disappointments, Canada again enters this year's tournament as the gold-medal favorite. They've got a roster full of first-rounders, the best goalie tandem (the Kings' Carter George and Predators' Jack Ivankovic) in the event for a change, multiple players on loan from the NHL, and a handful of the most potent forwards in the event (led by 2026 star Gavin McKenna and top 2025 picks Michael Misa and Porter Martone). There should be no excuses for this year's group.

Czechia: The Czechs have played in a medal game at four straight tournaments, and have medaled in the last three (two bronze, one silver), and while they don't have the game-breaking forward (such as Jiri Kulich or Eduard Sale) or star goalie (like Michael Hrabal) they've had at those events this year, they're bringing arguably one of the best blues lines to the tournament (led by first-rounders Radim Mrtko and Adam Jiricek, and age group standouts Tomas Galvas and Jakub Fibigr, as well as a supporting cast that includes 18-year-old Mammoth prospect Max Psenicka and 2026 draft-eligible Vladimir Dravecky. Diminutive Wild forward prospect Adam Benak has been a top performer internationally as well, and their group up front also includes Blackhawks first-rounder and UMass standout Vaclav Nestrail, as well as top 2026 prospect Adam Novotny and a good veteran group of 19-year-old returnees. Don't be surprised if they're back playing in a medal game.

Finland: The Finns are missing some star power, but 19-year-olds Aron Kiviharju (Wild), Emil Hemming (Stars), Aatos Koivu (Canadiens), Heikki Ruohonen (Flyers), Daniel Nieminen (Predators) and Julius Miettinen (Kraken) are very good players at this level, they're returning Kings goalie prospect Petteri Rimpinen (who was the goalie of the tournament last year), and they've got draft intrigue with projected 2026 first-rounders Oliver Suvanto (a big, strong center) and Juho Piiparinen (a well-rounded right-shot D). The Finns have a way of exceeding expectations, so don't count them out.

Latvia: Last year's Cinderella story after an upset over the Canadians and a near one over the Swedes in the quarters, the Latvians will be looking to make more history again this year in their pursuit of three straight quarterfinal appearances for the first time ever at the event. They should get there, too. They were the youngest team in last year's tournament and are returning standouts Oliver Murnieks (2026) and Bruno Osmanis, as well as a still-young group that will attract scouts: Alberts Smits (a potential top-10 pick in 2026), Rudolfs Berzkalns (2026) and towering 2027 prospect Roberts Naudins. They're always a fun, plucky watch.

Denmark: After earning promotion from Division 1A, the Danes will be up against it to stay in the top flight. Panthers fourth-rounder Mads Kongsbak Klyvø is their only drafted prospect, and they don't have any high-end draft-eligibles.

2026 NHL Draft prospects to watch

The old saying goes that this is a 19-year-old's tournament. And it's true. The odd super high-end draft-eligible will make Team Canada or Team USA, and there are usually a few draft eligibles on most of the European teams, but the bulk of the top 10 in any given draft class is typically at home during the World Juniors. This year, that's not the case.

If Canada and Sweden play (as they did twice in pre-tournament), there's a chance the top three picks in the draft are all in that game, and certainly three of the top five. Gavin McKenna's place at No. 1 will either continue to slip out of his grasp or be tightened again. And challengers Keaton Verhoeff and Ivar Stenberg have a chance to continue to test that.

This is one of the best tournaments in years for amateur scouts, frankly — the best since Russia's exclusion, for me. Canada, which also named potential top 5-6 pick Carson Carels to the roster, is bringing three draft eligibles, which is actually a bit of history. With the big three, Carels, Smits for Latvia, Novotny for Czechia, Suvanto for Finland and Chase Reid for the USA, the bulk of the top of the draft will be on display at this year's tournament. Swedes Viggo Bjorck and William Hakansson, plus Finn Piiparinen, are three more first-rounders, too. Plus more second-round types such as Steiner, Chrenko and Dravecky. No shortage if you're a draft junkie!

Frequently asked questions

Which top prospects and NHL players are missing?

Canada is always without an NHL player or two, and this year that number has ballooned to a handful: Macklin Celebrini (Sharks), Matthew Schaefer (Islanders), Beckett Sennecke (Ducks), Ben Kindel (Penguins), Berkly Catton (Kraken) and Sam Dickinson (Sharks).

The Finns are the only other team in the tournament missing an age-eligible player after Sabres first-rounder Konsta Helenius wasn't loaned for what would have been his third World Juniors. Helenius is a near point-per-game player with Rochester in the AHL at the moment.

What would Team Russia have looked like?

The Russians would have been a formidable opponent in this year's event. Goalies Mikhail Yegorov (Devils), Pyotr Andreyanov (Blue Jackets) and Semyon Frolov (Hurricanes) could have given them the best trio in the event, and they would have been supported by a team led by Flames prospect Matvei Gridin (who has already scored in the NHL), Devils top-10 pick Anton Silayev, KHL standouts Yegor Surin (Predators) and Alexander Zharovsky (Canadiens) and second-rounders Daniil Prokhorov (Islanders) and Ivan Ryabkin (Hurricanes).

Where is next year's tournament?

The hosts for the next three World Juniors have already been announced. They are:

2027: Edmonton and Red Deer (Canada)

2028: Tampere and Turku (Finland)

2029: Quebec City and Trois-Rivières (Canada)

Tournament schedule

Dec. 26

Sweden vs. Slovakia, Grand Casino Arena, 1 p.m. ET

Denmark vs. Finland, 3M Arena, 3:30 p.m. ET

Germany vs. United States, Grand Casino Arena, 6 p.m. ET

Canada vs. Czechia, 3M Arena, 8:30 p.m. ET

Dec. 27



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

Slovakia vs. Germany, Grand Casino Arena, 2 p.m. ET

Latvia vs. Canada, 3M Arena, 4:30 p.m. ET

USA vs. Switzerland, Grand Casino Arena, 6 p.m. ET

Denmark vs. Czechia, 3M Arena, 8:30 p.m. ET

Dec. 28

Sweden vs. Switzerland, Grand Casino Arena, 2 p.m. ET

Finland vs. Latvia, 3M Arena, 4:30 p.m. ET

Dec. 29

Germany vs. Sweden, Grand Casino Arena, 1 p.m. ET

Finland vs. Czechia, 3M Arena, 3:30 p.m. ET

Slovakia vs. USA, Grand Casino Arena, 6 p.m. ET

Canada vs. Denmark, 3M Arena, 8:30 p.m. ET

Dec. 30

Switzerland vs. Germany, Grand Casino Arena, 2 p.m. ET

Latvia vs. Denmark, 3M Arena, 4:30 p.m. ET

Dec. 31

Switzerland vs. Slovakia, Grand Casino Arena, 1 p.m. ET

Czechia vs. Latvia, 3M Arena, 3:30 p.m. ET

USA vs. Sweden, Grand Casino Arena, 6 p.m. ET

Canada vs. Finland, 3M Arena, 8:30 p.m. ET

Jan. 2

Relegation game, 3M Arena, 12:30 p.m. ET

Quarterfinal 1, Grand Casino Arena, 2 p.m. ET

Quarterfinal 2, 3M Arena, 4:30 p.m. ET

Quarterfinal 3, Grand Casino Arena, 6 p.m. ET

Quarterfinal 4, 3M Arena, 8:30 p.m. ET

Jan. 4

Semifinal 1, Grand Casino Arena, 4:30 p.m. ET

Semifinal 2, Grand Casino Arena, 8:30 p.m. ET

Jan. 5

Bronze medal game, Grand Casino Arena, 4:30 p.m. ET

Gold medal game, Grand Casino Arena, 8:30 p.m. ET

Predictions

For fun, here's how I see things playing out. I think the Sweden-USA New Year's Eve game is the biggest of the tournament, because it likely decides the top seed in Group A, and I think it's about a coin toss. I leaned Sweden, because I think they have fewer holes, though on top-end talent, USA might have the slight edge.

Group A

1. Sweden

2. USA

3. Slovakia

4. Switzerland

5. Germany

Group B

1. Canada

2. Czechia

3. Finland

4. Latvia

5. Denmark

Quarterfinals

1A Sweden def. 4A. Latvia

2A USA def. 3B Finland

1B Canada def. 4A Switzerland

2B Czechia def. 3A Slovakia

Semifinals

Canada (1) def. Czechia (4)

Sweden (2) def. USA (3)

Bronze medal game

USA def. Czechia

Gold medal game

Canada def. Sweden

Tournament MVP: Gavin McKenna (Canada)

Top F: Gavin McKenna (Canada)

Top D: Cole Hutson (USA)

Top G: Carter George (Canada)

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Sportsnet.ca / Ten draft-eligible prospects competing at 2026 world juniors

Jason Bukala

7–8 minutes

The World Junior Hockey Championship is generally regarded as a tournament that showcases some of the most elite 19-year-olds from around the world. What makes this year's event even more exciting is the fact that many of the top 2026 draft-eligible prospects are on several rosters.

Here's a look at 10 of the top prospects who will be competing at the WJC in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, over the holidays:

Team Canada

Gavin McKenna, 6-0, 170 pounds, left-shot winger

McKenna was the consensus pre-season top prospect for the 2026 NHL Draft. He's still hanging around the top ranking, but his first semester playing NCAA hockey at Penn State has challenged him to make some adjustments to his game. He's averaged over 20 minutes per game while producing four goals and 14 assists in his first 16 college games.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

McKenna remains one of the most dynamic offensive forwards in the draft class, but his three-zone detail on and off the puck is a work in progress. The WJC will provide him an opportunity to shine on the world stage and re-establish his top draft ranking. McKenna will be slotted into one of the top-two forward lines for Team Canada and roll over the boards as part of the top power-play unit.

Keaton Verhoeff, 6-4, 212 pounds, right-shot defenceman

Verhoeff is having a productive freshman season at the NCAA level playing for North Dakota. He averages over 19 minutes of ice time and has been deployed in a variety of roles. Verhoeff has proven he can beat goaltenders from long range with a heavy, accurate shot, while still thoughtfully making plays, distributing the puck. He's produced four goals and seven assists in 16 games at North Dakota.

Verhoeff appears to be the extra defenceman for Team Canada. The group includes other right-shot defenders Zayne Parekh (Calgary Flames), Harrison Brunicke (Pittsburgh Penguins) and Ben Danford (Brantford Bulldogs). Verhoeff can easily slot in to take the place of one of these players if they falter. If his number is called by Canada's head coach Dale Hunter, expect Verhoeff to be deployed primarily at even strength.

Carson Carels, 6-2, 194 pounds, left-shot defenceman

Carels is a prospect on the rise, an outstanding skater with exceptional hockey sense. He can be trusted in all situations. Carels closes on opponents physically, moves pucks responsibly and can create offence. He's a complete player who has produced eight goals and 21 assists in 28 games for the Prince George Cougars in the WHL.

Ethan MacKenzie, 6-0, 174 pounds, left-shot defenceman

MacKenzie is a relentless competitor who can also be used in a variety of roles. A strong skater, MacKenzie closes on opponents quickly and has the legs to escape pressure and defensive-zone exits. He's produced 10 goals and 21 assists for the Edmonton Oil Kings (WHL) while being deployed in all situations. MacKenzie isn't the biggest defender, but he's more than willing to engage physically.

It's safe to say MacKenzie is a bit of a late bloomer compared to the other draft-eligible prospects in the tournament, but he's earned his roster spot, and a productive tournament will go a long way toward him being selected by an NHL club in June.

Team Sweden

Ivar Stenberg, 5-11, 183 pounds, left-shot forward

Stenberg is challenging for the top draft slot and producing at a historic rate, playing for Frolunda in Sweden's top pro league, the SHL. He's produced six goals and 18 assists in 25 games.

Stenberg plays like an NHL-ready pro. He's above the play when his group doesn't have the puck and battles hard in traffic to extend plays. Stenberg has been part of the leadership group in his age group every step of his journey with the Swedish national team. He leads by example and has the skill to be a difference-maker offensively.

Viggo Bjorck, 5-10, 177 pounds, right-shot forward

Bjorck is a prospect I'm eager to view in high-leverage games at the WJC. He stands out as a forward who seems to be in continuous motion, with quick-strike offensive ability in small areas and an extra gear in transition off the rush. Bjorck is likely to land a role on one of Sweden's power-play units. He's a bit undersized compared to others in his peer group, but his speed and skill are undeniable. Bjorck could end up being a top-10 draft pick in June.

Team Finland

Juho Piiparinen, 6-3, 203 pounds, right-shot defenceman

Piiparinen is a coveted right-shot defenceman who plays a steady two-way game. He's skating in Finland's top pro league, Liiga, playing for Tappara.

I don't expect Piiparinen to move the needle offensively, but he's an outstanding skater who kills plays with his length and gets in shooting lanes to block shots. Players like Piiparinen are very trustworthy and can be deployed in key match-up/shutdown scenarios.

Team USA

Chase Reid, 6-2, 188 pounds, right-shot defenceman

Reid is a player to watch closely at the WJC. Like Canada's Carels, Reid is a prospect on the rise. He's deployed in all situations at the OHL level playing for the Soo Greyhounds, contributing 14 goals and 21 assists in 31 games.

Reid isn't shy about joining the rush as an extra player off the puck. He makes plays in the offensive zone and has excellent vision. He reads how plays are developing and has the hockey sense to exploit open space and create offence. Reid accomplishes what he does offensively without sacrificing detail defensively. Right-shot defenders with this pedigree are highly valuable prospects.

Team Latvia

Alberts Smits, 6-3, 205 pounds, left-shot defenceman

Latvia comes into the tournament as an underdog that will be fighting to stave off relegation. Its entire roster will have to perform to the best of its ability every shift just to give the team a chance to stay in games.

Smits is a player I'm tracking very closely. He's a two-way defenceman with better than secondary scoring upside. Smits is an elite skater. He's quick to take away time and space defensively, and presents an extra gear with the puck on his stick in transition. Smits has produced six goals and six assists in 28 pro games for Jukurit in Liiga.

Team Czechia

Adam Novotny, 6-1, 205 pounds, left-shot forward

Team Czechia is always competitive at the WJC, and this year's roster is loaded with big, strong, character players.

It took some time for Novotny to find his stride in North America, but he's settled in nicely and produced 19 goals and 16 assists in 29 games for the Peterborough Petes (OHL). Novotny provides a combination of power and skill. He has a lethal release when the puck ends up on his stick in high-danger areas. A productive WJC will increase his stock as he continues to trend upward as a top prospect for the 2026 NHL Draft.

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TSN.CA / Hunter allowed players to vote on Canada's World Junior captains

Mark Masters

6-8 minutes

Team Canada held a skate at Ridder Arena in Minneapolis on Friday. Team Czechia skated at 3M Arena at Mariucci.

Head coach Dale Hunter revealed that Team Canada's captains for the World Juniors were determined by a player vote.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

"It's your peers," Hunter explained. "The most important thing is your peers [because] you're leading them. So, the peers pick their leaders and it's a real compliment."

The vote happened two days ago with Michigan State winger Porter Martone coming in first. The Philadelphia Flyers prospect will serve as Canada's captain as he did at the 2024 under-18 World Championship.

"He's mature and he understands the game," said Hunter. "He's a real captain that way where he's helping out the younger guys on the team."

Martone is one of six returning players on Team Canada.

Barrie Colts centre Cole Beaudoin, another returnee, will serve as an alternate captain as will Pittsburgh Penguins defenceman Harrison Brunicke, who is one of three NHL players on the roster.

Hunter uses the same player-vote approach with his Ontario Hockey League team in London.

Canada finished fifth last year in Ottawa, which means they are the third seed in their group this year behind Finland and Czechia. And that means Canada had third choice of dressing rooms available.

Team Finland, the silver medalists last year, are set up in the Golden Gophers room while Czechia has the next biggest room. Rather than take a really small room inside 3M Arena, Canada opted for a space in Ridder Arena, which houses the Golden Gophers women's team and is connected to 3M Arena.

But it's a bit of a trek to get to the rink.

"I'm getting my steps in," Hunter quipped.

Canada will have a little less time together during intermissions than their opponents.

"It is what it is," Hunter downplayed.

"We got to face adversity, and none of us are dwelling on it or anything," said Beaudoin. "We're excited to just play and if it has to lead to a little bit of a walk then that's fine."

Beaudoin and Brunicke said they've never been a part of a set up like this before.

"It's a little bit of a walk, but I guess that's kind of what happens when you finish fifth," Brunicke said with a shrug.

After Thursday's practice, Martone and Penn State freshman Gavin McKenna did not hesitate to bring up their desire to exact some revenge against the Czechs, who eliminated Canada in the last two World Juniors.

It was a bit of a different vibe after Canada's morning skate.

"We're not focused on the past now," said Brunicke. "We don't focus on who the opponent is. We have a game plan. We're ready to stick to that no matter who it is."

Beaudoin said facing Czechia "obviously" brings some extra emotion, but quickly pivoted.

"We're just worrying about our game plan and what we do best," he said. "I don't think we're worried about the team. We're just worrying about what we can do. Obviously, they're a good team over there, but we're just worrying about ourselves and what we can control."

Canada opted to only make their alternate captains available to the media on Friday morning. Martone spoke to the media after Thursday's practice.

Czechia made all their players, minus goalies, available to the media by request on Friday morning.

"I think they have a lot of anger," said UMass-Amherst winger Vaclav Nestrasil. "Obviously we got to prove ourselves once again as we did the last two years. I think that's our mindset going into the game."

What sort of opponent are the Czechs expecting?

"The best possible, probably," Nestrasil said. "I mean, there's a bunch of first rounders. They're going to be hard."

There are 18 first-round picks on Team Canada's roster with three more players projected to go in the first round in 2026.

On paper, Canada is the clear favourite on Boxing Day, but the Czechs are drawing inspiration from what happened the last two times the countries faced off at the World Juniors.

"It's a huge motivation for us," said Edmonton Oil Kings centre Max Curran. "If they could do it, why not us? We're going to stay humble, stay prepared and see what's going to happen."

Czechia's challenge will be greater, though, because Seattle Thunderbirds defenceman Radim Mrtka is sidelined due to injury.

"A guy like that, you just need to have him in this team," said Nestrasil. "I'm kind of sad that he doesn't play this game, but hopefully he gets healthy and he plays the rest."

Mrtka participated in Czechia's morning skate.

"He's close to getting to a game," said assistant coach Robert Reichel. "We'll see how everything goes and hopefully we are ready for tomorrow or after tomorrow's game."

Hunter pulled Beaudoin and Knights forward Sam O'Reilly aside for a chat at the end of Canada's skate.

"We're just talking about PK," Hunter said. "Yeah, they're the first guys over the boards, so just talking about it."

The key theme?

"Just be loud, talk, follow the game plan," Beaudoin said. "Talk to each other. I think that's the most important thing with this kind of tournament. You have to get to know who you're killing with and bond so that when it comes time to kill a penalty off, we know where each other are and know what we can do."

Beaudoin and O'Reilly continued to chat after Hunter departed.

Canada allowed a power-play goal in two of three pre-tournament games although one came during a 5-on-3.

Canada finished sixth in penalty kill percentage at last year's World Juniors.

Team Canada will be using the Toronto Blue Jays home run horn as their goal horn at the World Juniors.

Hunter declined to name his starting goalie, but Carter George of the Owen Sound Attack, who was the Boxing Day starter last year, was the first goalie off the ice at the morning skate.

Hunter confirmed that Everett Silvertips winger Carter Bear and University of North Dakota defenceman Keaton Verhoeff will be healthy scratches.

Projected Team Canada lineup for Friday's game:

Iginla - Misa - Martone

McKenna - Hage - Martin

Reschny - Beaudoin - Luchanko

Greentree - Cootes - O'Reilly

Desnoyers



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 27, 2025

Reid - Parekh

Carels - Brunicke

Aitcheson - Danford

MacKenzie

George

Ivankovic

Scratches: Bear, Verhoeff, Ravensbergen

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