



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 2, 2026

The News & Observer

Canadiens drub Hurricanes, Team Canada snubs Seth Jarvis to open 2026

By: Chip Alexander

For the Carolina Hurricanes, the new year began Thursday with forward Seth Jarvis back on the ice — and then a wild loss to the Montreal Canadiens.

Talk about taking the good with the bad.

Jarvis, sidelined since Dec. 19, was at the Canes' morning skate at Lenovo Center, wearing a yellow, no-contact jersey and anxious to get back in the lineup.

The Canes could have used him Thursday night against the quick, aggressive Canadiens, who wiped out a two-goal Carolina lead and skated off with a 7-5 victory.

Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho tied his career high with a five-point night (two goals, three assists), and Andrei Svechnikov and Nikolaj Ehlers each had a goal and two assists as the three were reunited on the top line. But a combination of poor puck management by Carolina and an opportunistic transition game by the Canadiens proved to be the difference.

"Obviously we're missing a lot of important pieces," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said after the game. "It's obvious we have deficiencies, and they're starting to show."

After falling behind 2-0, the Canes (24-13-3) regrouped to take a 4-2 lead in the second period, but the Habs (22-12-6) surged in front before the period ended, scoring their fourth and fifth goals 23 seconds apart late in the frame. The Canes made a push in the third, but Juraj Slafkovsky gave the Habs a 6-4 lead.

Goalie Brandon Bussi has been difference-maker for the Canes since they claimed him off waivers, and a big story in the league. But Bussi struggled Thursday, allowing six goals on 22 shots — the Habs' final score was an empty-netter.

"He had a tough night tonight, but he's been great all year," Brind'Amour said.

'I've got to live with that'

Jarvis, injured in the road game against the Florida Panthers, said being out the past few weeks has been "painful," both in not being able to play and in learning he had been left off Hockey Canada's Olympic team roster for the 2026 Winter Games, set next month in Italy.

Jarvis, 23, was a member of Canada's gold medal-winning team in the 4 Nations Face-Off international event last season. His numbers with the Canes this season until the injury seemed promising enough to be included on the Olympic roster: 19 goals and 29 points in 34 games, with two shorthanded goals and four game-winning goals, two in overtime.

Jarvis said Thursday that he was not sure the injury and missed time kept him off the Hockey Canada roster.

"I don't think so, though it definitely didn't help," he said. "But at the end of the day I had played enough games where I thought I gave a good sample size. I guess I didn't play good enough, and I've got to live with that."

"It sucks. It's a big blow. It's something I really worked for and wanted to achieve, but there's nothing you can do about it now. I gave myself a couple of days to take it in, feel emotions, and now it's just moving past it."

The Canes now are 2-4-0 in the six games he has been out as the injuries are taking a toll. Defenseman Jaccob Slavin has missed all but five games this season, defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere missed a third game with a lower-body issue and goalie Pyotr Kochetov has been lost for the season with a hip ailment that will require surgery.

Jarvis was hurt early in overtime against the Panthers. On the move and taking the puck to the net, he was tripped by Florida's Evan Rodrigues, fell and crashed into the near post, appearing to injure his ribs. No penalty was called on the play, and the Canes lost in a shootout.

Placed on NHL injured reserve Dec. 20, Jarvis' status has been listed as "week to week." The same for Slavin.

"To go out like that, and not know what your recovery time period is, is tough," Jarvis said. "I tried to take it day by day, but that's easier said than done when you see your friends all skating and I'm sitting on the bench watching practice."

"There's not much you can really do other than taking your time and trying not to stress it too much, which is tough. Now that I'm pretty much pain free day to day, I'm better."

Slavin, a standout in the 4 Nations event for the U.S. and arguably the best player in the competition, is expected to be on the Team USA Olympic roster — to be announced Friday — despite his nearly season-long absence because of lower-body issues.

Jarvis said he has been placed on a "standby" reserve list for Team Canada and could be added if there is an injury. That's not a great option for the Winnipeg native, but it is an option.

"They told me not to book any trips or anything," Jarvis said. "It's still a waiting game, but obviously I'm hoping nobody gets hurt. Obviously, if they call my name I'll be more than ready to come and contribute, but I'm not wishing ill will on anybody."

"If I do get picked, and it just so happens that I go, awesome. But I've already dealt with the emotions of it and moved past it."

Jarvis said the snub could be used as added motivation the rest of the season and Brind'Amour liked the sound of that, noting, "He's got to use it however he needs to use it."

For now, Jarvis wants to get back in the Canes lineup. Asked when he might take off the yellow jersey and replace it with a



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game jersey, Jarvis said the doctors and trainer Doug Bennett will make that call.

"I can take it off right now and probably fight 'Svechy,'" he joked, looking over at forward Andrei Svechnikov.



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Mistakes haunt Hurricanes in 7-5 loss to Canadiens | The North State Journal

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH — Self-inflicted wounds cost the Carolina Hurricanes on the first day of 2026 — so much so that even a five-point game by Sebastian Aho wasn't enough.

The top line of Aho, Andrei Svechnikov and Nikolaj Ehlers combined for 11 points, but countless turnovers and miscues allowed the visiting Canadiens to erase a two-goal lead and win 7-5 Thursday at Lenovo Center.

"It was just our lack of sticking with what we got to do," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said, "and we were just turning pucks over at an unbelievably high rate, all for no reason."

Things started to unravel for the Hurricanes in the second period when, after extending their lead to 4-2, three mistakes flipped the lead to Montreal.

At 5:01, Joel Nystrom and Mike Reilly misplayed a stretch pass, which allowed Sammy Blais to get in alone on Brandon Bussi (16 saves) and score his third of the year.

Montreal then scored twice in 23 seconds off Hurricanes' turnovers to take the lead.

Carolina defenseman K'Andre Miller's dump-in attempt instead hit Jordan Staal, leading to an odd-man rush that Cole Caufield finished at 16:23.

On the next shift, Ehlers passed the puck right to Josh Anderson in the slot, and the Habs winger snapped the puck past Bussi for his ninth goal and a 5-4 Montreal lead.

"It's one bad play, really, that Nicky made," Brind'Amour said. "Other than that, he was really good tonight. But that's the difference. You can't make those."

The night was full of "those."

The Hurricanes dug themselves a two-goal hole in the first period with a pair of mistakes.

After Hurricanes forward Jesperi Kotkaniemi turned the puck over at the Carolina blue line, Canadiens center Nick Suzuki wired a shot past Bussi at 3:10.

Oliver Kapanen made it 2-0 Montreal with his 12th of the season after fellow rookie Ivan Demidov dangled around Logan Stankoven and set him up for an easy back door bang-in 56 seconds later to double the visitors' lead.

After giving up a total of 15 goals in seven December starts, Bussi allowed six against the Canadiens.

"I don't know how many saves he made, but he didn't make too many," Brind'Amour said. "But he's been great all year, so we've got to help him out at that point and not give up those odd-man rushes and things that create those scoring opportunities."

The Hurricanes were quick to respond in the first period and regain the lead.

After Alexandre Texier was penalized for slashing Ehlers below the belt, Ehlers jumped on the ice with the top power play unit and snapped a shot past Jakub Dobes (20 saves) for his ninth goal to halve Montreal's lead at 10:47.

Ninety-two seconds later, Svechnikov set up Nystrom for a one-timer that Aho redirected in for his 15th goal of the year and a 2-2 tie.

Carolina then forced a turnover with its forecheck, and Svechnikov finished a scramble in front for his third point of the night and 11th goal at 14:51.

The Hurricanes extended the lead to two early in the second period.

Alexander Nikishin's one-timer on the power play 54 seconds into the period — his fifth goal of the season and first multipoint game of his career — extended the lead to 4-2. Carolina was 2 for 3 on the night on the power play, moving up 19% and 17th in the league after spending much of the season near the bottom of the NHL.

But Montreal rallied with four straight goals, and Aho's second of the night — with Bussi on the bench for an extra attacker — was followed by a long-range empty-netter by Montreal defenseman Lane Hutson to ice the game.

"I kind of mirror my own success with the team and how the team does, and it kind of just sucks to lose in this fashion, any game," Aho said. "But, yeah, just — I don't know what to say. ... If we want to go anywhere this year and make a deep run, we have to just somehow figure this out."

Notes: Aho became the first player to have five points in a regulation loss in franchise history and the first overall since Gabriel Landeskog on Dec. 16, 2017. ... Forward Seth Jarvis and defensemen Shayne Gostisbehere and Jacob Slavin did not play due to injuries. ... Kotkaniemi played his 500th NHL game. ... Miller played his 400th career NHL game. ... Mark Jankowski won 10 of 12 faceoffs.



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Recap: Canes Beaten In Back-And-Forth Battle

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

Puck management woes cost Carolina against Montreal

RALEIGH, N.C. - Despite a five-point night from Sebastian Aho, the Carolina Hurricanes couldn't overcome the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday, falling 7-5 at Lenovo Center.

The first five minutes of Thursday's tilt resembled Carolina's loss from two nights earlier, as a pair of Canadiens tallies separated by just 56 seconds lifted the visitors to a quick lead. Before the horn sounded for the end of the period, though, the Hurricanes had turned things around and taken the lead.

Nikolaj Ehlers kicked off the comeback with a toe-drag shot from the left circle at 10:47, capitalizing on a power play he drew in the neutral zone. Just 92 seconds later, Aho tied things up with a deflection of a Joel Nystrom one-timer. Aho then picked up his third point of the period with an assist on Andrei Svechnikov's go-ahead goal, as he pitchforked a shot past Jakub Dobes at 14:51.

Momentum continued in Carolina's favor on the other side of the intermission, as Alexander Nikishin doubled his team's lead with a power-play bomb from the blue line just 54 seconds into the middle frame. But as quickly as the pendulum swung the Canes' way in the first period, it did the opposite in the second. Sammy Blais stopped the bleeding and brought the Habs within a goal just past the five-minute mark, and two tucks in a span of 23 seconds late in the period gave Montreal a slim lead heading into the third.

Carolina's hope for a second comeback took a hit when Juraj Slafkovsky's seeing-eye shot made it a two-goal hole at 11:20, but Aho managed to claw a goal back late, allowing the Canes to pull their goaltender in hopes of tying things up once more. Unfortunately, that was as close as they'd come, as Lane Hutson's long-range empty-netter sealed the two points for Montreal.

Brandon Bussi suffered his first defeat at Lenovo Center, stopping 15 of 21 shots in the Carolina cage.

MTL at CAR | Recap

Forward Sebastian Aho recorded five points in a game for just the second time in his career, joining his performance in a 6-2 win over Minnesota on Dec. 7, 2019.

Aho's 11th career outing with at least four points gives him the third-most such showings in franchise history, trailing only Ron Francis (30) and Eric Staal (12).

Aho is the fourth player in franchise history to factor on all team goals in a single game (min. 5 goals), joining Eric Staal

(5 on April 8, 2010), Ray Whitney (5 on Feb. 8, 2007) and Nelson Emerson (5 on Jan. 25, 1997).

Forward Andrei Svechnikov registered his second three-point performance in the last four games. His 100th career multi-point game, Svechnikov is just the seventh player in franchise history to achieve the century mark in that category.

Forward Nikolaj Ehlers also logged three points, his second such outing in a Hurricanes sweater.

Sebastian Aho offering his thoughts on the loss...

"Sloppy. Not a great start... We have to take pride in helping the D out, helping the goalies out. Put the pucks deep, especially when we're up a goal or two. [We needed to] grind them out a little bit and wait for our opportunities, not trade one for one. We create enough offense, so we don't have to do that, right? We're deep enough to wait for the opportunities... Obviously, we haven't done that as of late. We've been letting in too many goals, and there's no one to blame but ourselves."

Jordan Staal discussing how the team needed to manage the puck better tonight...

"Puck management is exactly right. I think we were playing that 50/50 game of trying to outscore them and worrying about getting our own cookies. [We were] worrying about just trying to outscore the other team instead of taking pride in giving them nothing, defending."

Rod Brind'Amour on his team's self-imposed mistakes...

"This can't happen. It's just kind of self-explanatory... We were turning pucks over at just an unbelievably high rate, for no reason."

Jordan Staal discussing the recurring theme of turnovers...

"It's been enough games. We've talked about it enough. It's just a matter of going out and executing. I don't know how many more times Roddy can say it, [or] myself can scream it through the room. It's just a matter of going out, executing it, and taking pride in it. We've got to be better."

Postgame Quotes: Rod Brind'Amour

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes are scheduled to practice on Friday. They'll start another back-to-back set on Saturday, taking on the Avalanche at home before flying to New Jersey for a Sunday evening battle.

Next Home Game: Saturday, Jan. 3 vs. Colorado | Whalers Night | 7:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO | Tickets | Parking



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Team USA hockey team for 2026 Winter Olympics at a glance

By: NHL.com

Trocheck, Slavin, Keller part of group going to Milano Cortina in February NHL.com

The United States unveiled its roster for the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 on Wednesday.

It's the first time NHL players will participate in the Olympics since 2014.

This will be the first Olympics for every member of the U.S. team.

The United States hasn't won a gold medal in men's hockey since the 1980 "Miracle On Ice" in Lake Placid, New York.

Here is a look at the Team USA roster (listed alphabetically by position group):

FORWARDS

Matt Boldy, Minnesota Wild

The 24-year-old from Milford, Massachusetts will play for the U.S. for the seventh time dating to 2017, when he played in the World U-17 Hockey Challenge. Boldy had three points (one goal, two assists) in the 4 Nations Face-Off last season and won gold at the 2021 IIHF World Junior Championship. He played in the IIHF World Championship in 2022 and 2024.

Kyle Connor, Winnipeg Jets

Connor, 29, from Shelby Township, Michigan, will be wearing the red, white and blue for the fifth time in international competition. He played in the 4 Nations Face-Off last season, the first time he played for the United States since the 2016 World Championship. He also played in the Hlinka Gretzky Cup in 2013 and the IIHF U18 World Championship in 2014.

Jack Eichel, Vegas Golden Knights

The 29-year-old from North Chelmsford, Massachusetts has been a regular for USA Hockey, including competing in the World Juniors in 2014 and 2015, the World Championship in 2015, 2017 and 2019, and the 4 Nations Face-Off last season. He also won a gold medal with Team USA at the 2014 World U18 Championship. Eichel played for Team North America in the 2016 World Cup of Hockey.

Jake Guentzel, Tampa Bay Lightning

Guentzel, 31, who is from Omaha, Nebraska, will be making his second appearance for the United States in international competition after making his Team USA debut in the 4

Nations Face-Off last season. He tied for the team lead with three goals at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Jack Hughes, New Jersey Devils

The 24-year-old born in Orlando, Florida, will be representing the United States for the seventh time, including playing in the 2019 World Junior Championship, the 2019 World Championship and the 4 Nations Face-Off. He will be joined on the team by his brother Quinn, a defenseman for the Minnesota Wild.

Clayton Keller, Utah Mammoth

The 27-year-old from Chesterfield, Missouri has won gold at three different levels with USA Hockey; the 2015 U18s, 2017 World Juniors and the 2025 World Championship, where he was the U.S. captain and had 10 points in 10 games. Keller also played in the World Championship in 2017 and 2019.

Dylan Larkin, Detroit Red Wings

The 29-year-old from Waterford, Michigan has been a USA Hockey regular since 2013, when he made his debut in the red, white and blue at the World U-17 Hockey Challenge. He played in the World Juniors in 2015, the World Championship five times (2015-19), and the 4 Nations Face-Off. Larkin also played for Team North America at the World Cup of Hockey in 2016.

Auston Matthews, Toronto Maple Leafs

The 28-year-old who was born in San Ramon, California but grew up in Scottsdale, Arizona will be making his eighth appearance for the United States, including the World Juniors in 2015 and 2016, the World Championship in 2016 and the 4 Nations Face-Off, where he was Team USA's captain. Matthews played for Team North America in the 2016 World Cup.

J.T. Miller, New York Rangers

Miller, 32, who is from East Palestine, Ohio, won gold at the 2013 World Juniors and played for the U.S. in the 4 Nations Face-Off. He also played in the 2012 World Juniors. Miller was part of Team North America at the 2016 World Cup.

Brock Nelson, Colorado Avalanche

The 34-year-old who was born in Minneapolis and grew up in Warroad, Minnesota has played for Team USA seven times previously, including the World Championship five times (2014-17, 2024), and the 4 Nations Face-Off. Nelson's grandfather, Bill Christian, and his uncle, Roger Christian, won Olympic gold in men's hockey with Team USA in 1960.



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His uncle, Dave Christian, was part of the USA's "Miracle on Ice" team that won Olympic gold in 1980.

Tage Thompson, Buffalo Sabres

The 28-year-old born in Phoenix is a three-time gold medalist with Team USA, including the 2025 World Championship, where he had six goals in 10 games. Thompson also won gold at the 2015 U18 World Championship and the 2017 World Juniors, and he took home bronze in the World Championship in 2018 and 2021.

Brady Tkachuk, Ottawa Senators

The 26-year-old born in Scottsdale but raised in St. Louis is making his sixth appearance for USA Hockey, including the 2018 World Juniors, 2024 World Championship and the 4 Nations Face-Off. He is joined on the team by his older brother, Matthew, a forward for the Florida Panthers. His father, Keith, is a four-time U.S. Olympian.

Matthew Tkachuk, Florida Panthers

The 28-year-old older brother of Brady was born in Scottsdale and raised in St. Louis. He is making his fifth appearance with USA Hockey after competing in the 4 Nations Face-Off last season. He also played in three tournaments as a teenager; the 2014 World U17 Hockey Challenge, the 2015 U18 World Championship and the 2016 World Juniors.

Vincent Trocheck, New York Rangers

The 32-year-old from Pittsburgh is playing in his fourth tournament with USA Hockey after competing in the 4 Nations Face-Off. He also played in the 2014 World Championship, and the 2013 World Juniors. Trocheck won gold at the World Juniors. He played for Team North America at the 2016 World Cup.

DEFENSEMEN

Brock Faber, Minnesota Wild

The 23-year-old born in Maple Grove, Minnesota will represent the United States for the fifth time. He played in the 2021 and 2022 World Junior Championships, the 2022 Beijing Olympics and the 4 Nations Face-Off last season.

Charlie McAvoy, Boston Bruins

Born in Long Beach, New York, the 28-year-old will represent the United States for the sixth time. He played in the 2016 and 2017 World Junior Championships, the 2017 and 2018 World Championships, and the 4 Nations Face-Off last season.

Noah Hanifin, Vegas Golden Knights

Hanifin was born in Boston and will turn 29 on Jan. 25. This will be the sixth time he has represented the U.S. after the 2015 World Junior Championship; the 2016, 2017 and 2019 World Championships; and the 4 Nations Face-Off last season.

Quinn Hughes, Minnesota Wild

The 26-year-old born in Orlando, Florida, won the Norris Trophy as the NHL's best defenseman in 2024. He has

represented the U.S. four times -- at the World Junior Championships and the World Championships, each in 2018 and 2019 -- but could not play in the 4 Nations Face-Off last season due to injury. He will join his brother Jack, a center for the New Jersey Devils.

Seth Jones, Florida Panthers

The 31-year-old born in Arlington, Texas played for Team North America in the World Cup of Hockey 2016 in Toronto. This will be his sixth time representing the United States after the 2013 World Junior Championship and the World Championships in 2014, 2015, 2022 and 2024.

Jake Sanderson, Ottawa Senators

Born in Whitefish, Montana, the 23-year-old will represent the United States for the fifth time. He played in the 2021 World Junior Championship, the 2022 Beijing Olympics, the 2024 World Championship and the 4 Nations Face-Off last season.

Jacob Slavin, Carolina Hurricanes

The 31-year-old born in Erie, Colorado represented the United States at the 2014 World Junior Championship and the 4 Nations Face-Off last season. He is known as a defensive specialist.

Zach Werenski, Columbus Blue Jackets

The 28-year-old from Grosse Pointe, Michigan was runner-up for the Norris Trophy last season. He represented the United States at the 2015 and 2016 World Junior Championships and the 4 Nations Face-Off last season. In 2025, when the U.S. won the World Championship for the first time since 1933, he had six points (one goal, five assists) in seven games and was named the tournament's best defenseman.

GOALIES

Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets

The 32-year-old from Commerce, Michigan is one of the most decorated U.S. goalies of his era, winning the Vezina Trophy as the best goalie in the NHL three times (2020, 2024, 25) and the Hart Trophy as the most valuable player in the NHL last season. He's played in two World Championships for the U.S. (2015, 2017) and was the No. 1 goalie for the U.S. at the 4 Nations Face-Off last season.

Jake Oettinger, Dallas Stars

The 27-year-old born in Lakeville, Minnesota played for the United States at the 2018 World Junior Championship and the 4 Nations Face-Off last season.

Jeremy Swayman, Boston Bruins

The 27-year-old from Anchorage, Alaska made 25 saves to shut out Switzerland in the gold medal game of the 2025 World Championship, leading the U.S. to its first world title since 1933. He went 7-0 with a 1.69 goals-against average and .921 save percentage in the tournament. He also represented the U.S. at the 2018 World Junior Championship and the 2022 World Championship.



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AP ASSOCIATED PRESS

Quick strikes from Caufield and Anderson help Canadiens rally for 7-5 win over Hurricanes | AP News

By: Bob Sutton

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Cole Caufield and Josh Anderson scored 23 seconds apart in the second period, and the Montreal Canadiens erased a two-goal deficit in beating the Carolina Hurricanes 7-5 on Thursday night.

Sammy Blais had a goal and an assist for the Canadiens, who have a five-game point streak after winning for the third time in four games. Nick Suzuki, Oliver Kapanen, Juraj Slafkovsky and Lane Hutson also scored.

Alexander Texier added two assists and Jakub Dobes made 20 saves for Montreal.

Sebastian Aho had two goals and three assists to become the first Carolina player with more than three points in a game this season. Andrei Svechnikov and Nikolaj Ehlers each added a goal and two assists. Alexander Nikishin had one goal and one assist, but the Hurricanes lost for the second time in their last six home games.

Hurricanes goalie Brandon Bussi stopped 16 shots but took his second regulation loss in 16 games. He was trying to

match the franchise record of 13 consecutive games with at least one team point.

Suzuki, who scored the last two Montreal goals Tuesday at Florida, scored 3:12 into the game and the Canadiens went up 2-0 just 56 seconds later on Kapanen's goal.

The Hurricanes had rapid-fire offense with goals from Ehlers, Aho and Svechnikov in a span of about four minutes. Carolina's second power-play goal came from Nikishin only 54 seconds into the second period for a 4-2 lead.

When Blais scored at 5:01 of the second, the Canadiens had three goals on eight shots. Caufield and Anderson scored at 16:23 and 16:46, respectively, to regain the lead.

Slafkovsky gave Montreal a 6-4 cushion at 11:20 of the third. Aho's second goal came with 3:02 remaining after Bussi was pulled for an extra skater. Hutson's empty-netter came with two minutes left.

Up next

Canadiens: Saturday at St. Louis.

Hurricanes: Saturday at home against Colorado.



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NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, each team's game of the month - ESPN

By: ESPN staff

Amid the excitement of roster announcements for the 2026 Winter Games at Milan-Cortina, there are still many NHL hockey games to be played this month.

As part of this week's Power Rankings -- led again by, you guessed it, the juggernaut Colorado Avalanche -- we've identified a key game during the month of January for each team, whether it's a rivalry matchup, a clash with another contender in the other conference or a meeting of a certain player with former teammates.

How we rank: A panel of ESPN hockey commentators, analysts, reporters and editors sends in a 1-32 poll based on the games through Wednesday.

Note: Previous ranking for each team refers to the previous edition, published Dec. 19. Points percentages are through Thursday's games.

1. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 85.9%

Jan. 3 at the Hurricanes: Avs fans won't have to wait long to see their team test its mettle against three of the East's best teams. First up in that group is the Hurricanes, who have just missed the Stanley Cup Final in recent seasons, but seem as strong as ever in 2025-26.

Next seven days: @ CAR (Jan. 3), @ FLA (Jan. 4), @ TB (Jan. 6), vs. OTT (Jan. 8)

2. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 69.5%

Jan. 29 at the Golden Knights: The Stars get a break in January from the Avalanche and Wild. But they do play against (most of) the top contenders in the Pacific, including this showdown in Vegas at the tail end of the month.

Next seven days: vs. MTL (Jan. 4), @ CAR (Jan. 6), @ WSH (Jan. 7)

3. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 67.1%

Jan. 31 at the Oilers: Now that the Wild have entered into the inner circle of Western Conference powers, they must continue to prove themselves against the established teams. They beat the Oilers 5-2 on Dec. 20 at home; how will this game pan out in Alberta?

Next seven days: @ ANA (Jan. 2), @ LA (Jan. 3), @ LA (Jan. 5), @ SEA (Jan. 8)

4. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 63.8%

Jan. 16 vs. the Panthers: Both the Canes and Panthers have proved to be a tough out in the postseason recently -- literally no one could beat the Panthers the past two playoffs -- and this showdown could well be an Eastern Conference finals preview.

Next seven days: vs. COL (Jan. 3), @ NJ (Jan. 4), vs. DAL (Jan. 6), vs. ANA (Jan. 8)

5. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 63.8%

Jan. 18 at the Stars: Obviously, the Lightning will have something to say about the aforementioned Panthers-Hurricanes conference finals, but Jon Cooper's team always has its sights set on the big prize. Could this tilt be a Cup Final preview?

Next seven days: @ SJ (Jan. 3), vs. COL (Jan. 6)

play

0:18

Darren Raddysh scores OT winner for the Lightning

Darren Raddysh seals it for Tampa Bay with his second career overtime winner vs. the Ducks.

6. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 10

Points percentage: 61.9%

Jan. 10 at the Canadiens: Two Original Six franchises. Two iconic uniforms. Two teams in a playoff position in January. It's a good test for the Red Wings to maintain their hold in the Atlantic Division.

Next seven days: vs. PIT (Jan. 3), @ OTT (Jan. 5), vs. VAN (Jan. 8)

7. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 60.3%

Jan. 15 at the Penguins: We'll always have time for a Keystone State battle, and now that both the Flyers and



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Penguins are both challenging for a postseason spot, these games mean even more.

Next seven days: @ EDM (Jan. 3), vs. ANA (Jan. 6), vs. TOR (Jan. 8)

8. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 57.3%

Jan. 31 vs. the Hurricanes: If the Capitals are going to win the Metro Division title again, they'll need the Hurricanes to start losing more often -- they've got a chance to directly impact that trend in this matchup.

Next seven days: vs. CHI (Jan. 3), vs. ANA (Jan. 5), vs. DAL (Jan. 7)

9. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 58.5%

Jan. 28, 29 vs. and at the Rangers: There's bad blood (to some degree) between the Isles and all the other teams in the Metro Division, but there's nothing like games against their most vitriolic rivals from Manhattan. And these games are on back-to-back nights.

Next seven days: vs. TOR (Jan. 3), vs. NJ (Jan. 6), @ NSH (Jan. 8)

10. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 59.2%

Jan. 14 at the Kings: The Oilers' recent heater put them on top of the Pacific Division, but that doesn't diminish this key showdown between two teams looking up at them in the standings.

Next seven days: @ STL (Jan. 2), @ CHI (Jan. 4), @ WPG (Jan. 6), vs. CBJ (Jan. 8)

play

0:40

Mark Stone tallies goal for Vegas Golden Knights on the power play

Mark Stone tallies goal for Vegas Golden Knights on the power play

11. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 62.5%

Jan. 13 at the Capitals: Although making the playoffs was a nice surprise for Canadiens fans last season, the Capitals made quick work of the Habs in the first round. Revenge was not Montreal's in the first matchup this season either, as it was on the wrong end of an 8-4 result. Can the Canadiens ante up any better in this one?

Next seven days: @ STL (Jan. 3), @ DAL (Jan. 4), vs. CGY (Jan. 7), vs. FLA (Jan. 8)

12. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 14

Points percentage: 57.7%

Jan. 2 vs. the Rangers: No sense overthinking this one. It's the Winter Classic, a showcase of the two-time defending champions skating in an outdoor game in South Florida!

Next seven days: vs. NYR (Jan. 2), vs. COL (Jan. 4), @ TOR (Jan. 6) @ MTL (Jan. 8)

13. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 59%

Jan. 15 vs. the Canadiens: The Sabres' recent 10-game winning streak set a franchise record. To end their franchise's long playoff drought, they'll need to win games against teams ahead of them in the standings, such as this one.

Next seven days: @ CBJ (Jan. 3), vs. VAN (Jan. 6), @ NYR (Jan. 8)

14. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 56.1%

Jan. 22 vs. the Penguins: It's Round 2 of the Tristan Jarry-Stuart Skinner Bowl, after the Penguins and Oilers traded those goalies for each other earlier this season. Edmonton took Round 1, 6-4, on Dec. 16.

Next seven days: vs. PHI (Jan. 3), vs. NSH (Jan. 6), @ WPG (Jan. 8)

15. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 56.3%

Jan. 26 at the Oilers: The Ducks seem to have arrived as playoff contenders earlier than some projected. This matchup against the two-time defending Western Conference champs will be a litmus test as to how ready they are for a real run.

Next seven days: vs. MIN (Jan. 2), @ WSH (Jan. 5), @ PHI (Jan. 6), @ CAR (Jan. 8)

play

0:21

Mason McTavish scores power-play goal vs. Lightning

Mason McTavish scores power-play goal vs. Lightning

16. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 57.7%

Jan. 3 at the Red Wings: After a better-than-expected start, the Penguins have fallen off the pace a bit of late. A showdown in a nationally televised game against the Atlantic Division leaders could serve as a jumping-off point for another hot streak.



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Next seven days: @ DET (Jan. 3), @ CBJ (Jan. 4), vs. NJ (Jan. 8)

17. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 52.6%

Jan. 16, 17 vs. and at the Ducks: The Kings have had the upper hand in the Battle of Southern California in recent seasons, but the Ducks are a much more adept flock in 2025-26. These two games could have a major impact on where the two clubs finish in the Pacific Division pecking order.

Next seven days: vs. MIN (Jan. 3), vs. MIN (Jan. 5), vs. SJ (Jan. 7)

18. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 55%

Jan. 6 at the Islanders: Have the Isles stolen the Devils' spot in the Metro Division playoff race? The Devils need to get points in every divisional matchup, but particularly against their NYC-area neighbors.

Next seven days: vs. UTA (Jan. 3), vs. CAR (Jan. 4), @ NYI (Jan. 6), @ PIT (Jan. 8)

19. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 55%

Jan. 23 vs. the Golden Knights: This is a game the Maple Leafs have had circled on the schedule since it was released, as former Leaf Mitch Marner returns to Scotiabank Arena (current get-in price: \$210).

Next seven days: @ NYI (Jan. 3), vs. FLA (Jan. 6), @ PHI (Jan. 8)

20. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 55.1%

Jan. 10 vs. the Panthers: Although Matthew Tkachuk isn't going to play in the Winter Classic on Friday, he has begun practicing again and could be back in the lineup for this matchup against brother Brady Tkachuk and the Sens.

Next seven days: vs. WPG (Jan. 3), vs. DET (Jan. 5), @ UTA (Jan. 7), @ COL (Jan. 8)

play

1:19

Senators erase 2-0 deficit, beat Capitals 4-3

Senators erase 2-0 deficit, beat Capitals 4-3

21. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 53.8%

Jan. 11 vs. the Golden Knights: There was a time when this was one of the NHL's fiercest rivalries. Then the Sharks fell off the map a bit, before coming back into the playoff mix this season. A win here would solidify that claim -- at least from a psychological angle.

Next seven days: vs. TB (Jan. 3), vs. CBJ (Jan. 6), @ LA (Jan. 7)

22. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 53.7%

Jan. 10 vs. the Rangers: The B's-Rangers rivalry isn't as heated as, say, Red Sox-Yankees. But as both teams remain on the periphery of the Eastern Conference wild-card race, these points are crucial for both.

Next seven days: @ VAN (Jan. 3), @ SEA (Jan. 6), vs. CGY (Jan. 8)

23. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 51.2%

Jan. 2 vs. the Panthers: Although the Winter Classic is more of a showcase for the Panthers -- and the NHL's ice-making wizards -- this is the first game for the Blueshirts in calendar 2026, and a chance to perhaps turn over a new leaf as they try to get back in a playoff spot.

Next seven days: vs. FLA (Jan. 2), vs. UTA (Jan. 5), vs. BUF (Jan. 8)

24. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 50%

Jan. 24 vs. the Mammoth: After a brutal start to the season, the Predators have steadied the ship -- including going 7-3-0 in their past 10 games to pull to within a point of a wild-card spot. To stay in the mix, they'll need to fend off other challengers, such as the Mammoth, whose seasonal trend has been in the other direction.

Next seven days: @ CGY (Jan. 3), @ EDM (Jan. 6), vs. NYI (Jan. 8)

play

0:41

Steven Stamkos scores power-play goal vs. Mammoth

Steven Stamkos scores power-play goal vs. Mammoth

25. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 51.3%

Jan. 4, 17 vs. and at the Penguins: One of the NHL's best under-the-radar rivalries, as the Ohio-Pennsylvania neighbors have had some epic clashes in the past. Both teams are out of the playoffs at the moment, and could be fighting tooth and nail for every win.



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Next seven days: vs. BUF (Jan. 3), vs. PIT (Jan. 4), @ SJ (Jan. 6), @ VGK (Jan. 8)

26. Utah Mammoth

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 50%

Jan. 24, 26, 27, 29 at the Predators, Lightning, Panthers and Hurricanes: Although the Mammoth are improved from last season, they remain outside a playoff spot following a rough November and December. This Southern fried trip at the end of January will truly be a make-or-break stretch -- provided Utah can string some wins together beforehand.

Next seven days: @ NJ (Jan. 3), @ NYR (Jan. 5), vs. OTT (Jan. 7)

27. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 50%

Jan. 31 vs. the Sharks: The Flames' early-season struggles led many to predict the front office would start trading veteran players well ahead of the trade deadline. But along the way, the wins started piling up, and Calgary is on the fringes of the wild-card race. One of the teams they're chasing? The Sharks, who head to the Scotiabank Saddledome to close out the month.

Next seven days: vs. NSH (Jan. 3), vs. SEA (Jan. 5), @ MTL (Jan. 7), @ BOS (Jan. 8)

28. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 53.9%

Jan. 6 vs. the Bruins: Although it now has been a couple of years, dynamic Bruins winger Morgan Geekie was once a Kraken, and he'll bring his goal-scoring prowess back to the Emerald City for this one.

Next seven days: @ VAN (Jan. 2), @ CGY (Jan. 5), vs. BOS (Jan. 6), vs. MIN (Jan. 8)

29. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 46.3%

Jan. 20 at the Jets: The Blues gave the Jets just about all they could handle in the 2025 Stanley Cup playoffs. Neither team is too close to the postseason right now, but maybe this game could spur them to that end by April.

Next seven days: vs. VGK (Jan. 2), vs. MTL (Jan. 3), @ CHI (Jan. 7)

30. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 46.3%

Jan. 19 vs. the Jets: As much as anyone else, Jonathan Toews personifies the Blackhawks' dynasty days of the 2010s. This will be his first game back wearing a jersey other than Chicago's.

Next seven days: @ WSH (Jan. 3), Vs. VGK (Jan. 4), vs. STL (Jan. 7)

31. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 43.6%

Jan. 8 vs. the Oilers: Connor McDavid & Co. were not very gracious hosts when they laid a 6-2 beating on the Jets on Dec. 6. Can the Jets get some sort of revenge on this night?

Next seven days: @ OTT (Jan. 3), vs. VGK (Jan. 6), vs. EDM (Jan. 8)

32. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 44.9%

Jan. 3 vs. the Bruins: Hey, it's the 15-year anniversary of the 2011 Stanley Cup Final between the Canucks and Bruins. Neither team appears too likely to return to that stage here in 2026, but it's fun to reminisce.

Next seven days: vs. SEA (Jan. 2), vs. BOS (Jan. 3), @ BUF (Jan. 6), @ DET (Jan. 8)



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Hurricanes blow two goal lead, drop 7-5 result to Montreal

By: Al Hood

One thing that's been remarkable about this season for the Carolina Hurricanes is that despite the mountain of injuries they have faced, there have been few nights when it was truly apparent they were missing some really important players. Thursday night, though, hoping to put a horrible game in Pittsburgh behind them, it pretty clearly showed that they were missing Jaccob Slavin, Shayne Gostisbehere and Seth Jarvis. In a game that would be called a game of runs if it were basketball, the Montreal Canadiens had the last one to notch a 7-5 win over the Canes.

The first period seemed to be a continuation of the rough game in Pittsburgh. Just four minutes in the Canes were down 2-0 thanks to goals by Nick Suzuki and Oliver Kapanen. Suzuki's goal came when the Canes couldn't clear the zone and the Montreal Captain picked it off the blue line and sniped it past Brandon Bussi. The second was a complete breakdown as Sean Walker left Kapanen to follow the puck in front of the goal. Ivan Demidov was able to feed the pass straight to Kapanen who slammed it home.

The good news for the Canes though is that unlike Tuesday, the team was able to quickly respond. It began on a Power Play started by Nikolaj Ehlers taking a stick in a...sensitive area. He was able to get back on the ice during the man advantage, taking a feed from Alexander Nikishin to skate through the dot and score past Jakub Dobes.

The success on the Power Play seemed to wake the team up as they carried play for the rest of the first period. Less than two minutes later Sebastian Aho—who had the other assist on the first goal—was able to deflect a Joel Nystrom shot past the Montreal goalie to knot the score at two.

Less than three minutes after THAT the Canes continued their dominance of play and dog piled on Dobes. Andrei Svechnikov was able to stay patient for a rebound, and poked it past the Montreal goalie to give the Hurricanes a 3-2 lead going into the first intermission.

Aho was given another assist on the play, meaning that he ended the period notching a point on each goal, and Svechnikov's score was his second point as he was credited with the secondary assist on Aho's goal.

The good vibes continued at the start of the second period when the Canadiens were called for a hold, inducing another Power Play. This time fans got to see the booming shot of Alexander Nikishin, as he blasted a 90+ mph shot from the blue line past Dobes and was able to extend the lead for the Hurricanes 4-2.

Sebastian Aho was once again credited with an assist, giving him a point on all four goals on the night and Svechnikov notched his third point along with Nikishin. It seemed like the

Canes were rolling, but that ended up being the end of the good vibes for a while.

The turn started when Arber Xhekaj slashed Svechnikov on a breakaway, and then as that shot was missed Xhekaj shoved Svechnikov hard into the boards once he had come to a stop. The officials only called the slash, the Canadiens were able to keep the Canes off the scoreboard on the Power Play, and then Montreal got back to their game. It resulted in them scoring the next four goals on Bussi.

The first came about a minute after the end of the Power Play when Sammy Blais was able to get ahead of the Mike Reilly and Joel Nystrom pairing, splitting them and going in alone to get the shot past Bussi and bring the score to 4-3. Then in just a 23 second span, Cole Caufield notched his 20th and then Josh Anderson scored to give Montreal the lead back at 5-4. The air completely left Lenovo Center. The fifth goal came from perhaps the worst pass you could imagine by Ehlers to a wide open Anderson.

Things didn't get much better for the majority of the third. Carolina had several chances, but Montreal also had a few close. Then, Juraj Slafkovský just skated up the ice off a puck capture and flung the puck at the net while being shadowed by Nystrom. Bussi didn't close up the short post in time and the puck snuck in. Montreal had a 6-4 lead, and for the first time since the magic ride began, it was fair to wonder if the league had figured the waiver wire pickup out.

Things seemed without hope but then on an offensive zone draw Rod Brind'Amour pulled Bussi and Carolina took advantage almost immediately. The Canes put the top line on the ice that provided all the early magic and Ehlers pushed a shot toward the net that trickled in with Sebastian Aho up front. Aho tipped it in, and ended up having a hand in all five goals for the night.

The five point night though would go to waste as a faceoff on an icing saw Brind'Amour pull Bussi again. The Canes lost the faceoff, never really recovered and Lane Hutson flung the puck from the opposite goal line into the empty cage, providing the final score for the 7-5 result.

The Canes now are staring at a back-to-back this weekend with the best team in the league coming into their barn Saturday, just to turn around and play the New Jersey Devils in Newark on Sunday. Both Goalies have now given up five or more goals in their most recent starts, and with only Jarvis skating on Thursday in a yellow jersey, there's no sign that any of the other injuries are on deck to be healed any time soon.

A good result for the Canes was the Islanders losing earlier in the day, so they ended Saturday still with a three point lead on them and the Flyers in the Metro, and four on the



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Capitals. Montreal inched to within a point of the Red Wings atop the Atlantic who snatched a point in Pittsburgh earlier in the evening.

Next up for Carolina is Colorado on Saturday Night. It's a return of the Nordiques vs. Whalers, this time in front of the Raleigh crowd. It'll also be the return of Brent Burns, Martin Necas, and Jack Drury to Raleigh. Expect emotions to be high.



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The Hockey News

'We Have Deficiencies And They're Starting To Show': Jordan Staal, Sebastian Aho, Rod Brind'Amour On High-Scoring Loss To Canadiens

By: Ryan Henkel

Hurricanes stars admit glaring weaknesses are costing them wins. Turnovers and a lack of defensive pride are directly fueling their high-scoring losses.

The Carolina Hurricanes blew yet another multi-goal lead Thursday night as they fell to the Montreal Canadiens 7-5 in their first game of the new year.

The team squandered a five-point outing by Sebastian Aho as turnovers plagued the team all night.

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

Rod Brind'Amour

On the volume of turnovers the team had: That can't happen. It's kind of self explanatory.

On the message's not getting through: Yeah. It's pretty obvious when you watch. Obviously we're missing a lot of really important pieces, so when that happens, you have to double down on what we're doing and we're going the other way and trying to do too much. Like, 'Oh, he's out, so I'm going to do twice the amount of stuff,' and it doesn't work. That's what has plagued us here. It's pretty obvious when you watch it. We have deficiencies and they're starting to show. We've held on a for a long, long time. Just watch. It's obvious.

On Brandon Bussi: He had a tough night. You know. I don't know how many saves he made, but he didn't make too many. But he's been great all year, so we have to help him out at that point by not giving up those odd-man rushes and things that create those scoring opportunities.

On Sebastian Aho's five-point night: That line was great. Just one bad play that [Nikolaj Ehlers] made. Other than that, he was really good tonight. But that was the difference and you just can't make those.

On if the team struggled with Montreal's speed: No, it had nothing to do with that. It was just our lack of sticking with what we have to do. We were just turning pucks over at just an unbelievably high rate for just no reason. Yeah, they put a little bit of pressure, but a lot of it was we were trying to dangle through guys. That's just not how we do it.

On if the team needs to focus on their game if they want to beat Colorado: Nobody's beating them even when they're doing that, so yeah. We'll have no chance if we play like that. That's for sure not going to work. Listen, it is what it is. Guys aren't coming back, we're not going to get other players to help. We have to figure it out with this group. That's the reality.

Jordan Staal

On the game: We were playing that 50/50 game of trying to outscore them. Worried about getting our own cookies and worrying about just trying to outscore the other team. Not really taking pride in not giving them anything defensively and so it looked like that.

On if he feels like the message isn't getting through for certain guys: Yeah. Clearly, it's been enough games. We've talked about it enough. It's just a matter of going out and executing. I don't know how many more times Roddy can say it and myself can scream it through the room. It's just a matter of going out and executing it and everyone taking pride in it. We have to be better.

On preparing for their next game coming up against Colorado: If we play like that, we're going to lose 20-1. It's an exceptional team coming in, best in the league and they're going to make us look like an AHL team if we don't show up and play and defend and really just play our game. Big challenge.

Sebastian Aho

On the game: Sloppy. Obviously not a great start. But, we came back, got up a goal after the first. We were in good shape, went up two goals and then just sloppy. We obviously have to take pride in helping the D out, helping the goalies out, just putting pucks deep. Especially when you're up a goal or two. Just grind them out a little bit and wait for the opportunities. Not trading one for one. Obviously we created enough offense where we didn't need to do that. We're deep enough to wait for our opportunities and not give them much at all. Obviously we haven't done that as of late. We've been letting too many goals in. There's no one to blame but ourselves.

On why he thinks the team has gotten away from its usually defensively sound structure: I don't know if it's necessarily just the defensive structure. It's also turnovers in tough moments. It's the NHL. They're going to make you pay. That's a good team and we've been playing good teams as of late. You can't just give them opportunities. They're going to make us pay. If we want to go anywhere this year and make a deep run, we have to somehow figure this out because there's going to be good teams in the playoffs and they're going to make us pay. For sure. If we can learn from this and move on, then good for us. But obviously things have to change and change quickly.

On his offensive production starting to pick up: I mean, sure. Been able to score a little more as of late, but I kind of mirror my own success with the team and how the team does. It just sucks to lose in this fashion, any game



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

1373847 Carolina Hurricanes

Canadiens drub Hurricanes, Team Canada snubs Seth Jarvis to open 2026

Chip Alexander8-10 minutes 01/01/2026

For the Carolina Hurricanes, the new year began Thursday with forward Seth Jarvis back on the ice — and then a wild loss to the Montreal Canadiens.

Talk about taking the good with the bad.

Jarvis, sidelined since Dec. 19, was at the Canes' morning skate at Lenovo Center, wearing a yellow, no-contact jersey and anxious to get back in the lineup.

The Canes could have used him Thursday night against the quick, aggressive Canadiens, who wiped out a two-goal Carolina lead and skated off with a 7-5 victory.

Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho tied his career high with a five-point night (two goals, three assists), and Andrei Svechnikov and Nikolaj Ehlers each had a goal and two assists as the three were reunited on the top line. But a combination of poor puck management by Carolina and an opportunistic transition game by the Canadiens proved to be the difference.

"Obviously we're missing a lot of important pieces," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said after the game. "It's obvious we have deficiencies, and they're starting to show. "

After falling behind 2-0, the Canes (24-13-3) regrouped to take a 4-2 lead in the second period, but the Habs (22-12-6) surged in front before the period ended, scoring their fourth and fifth goals 23 seconds apart late in

the frame. The Canes made a push in the third, but Juraj Slafkovsky gave the Habs a 6-4 lead.

Goalie Brandon Bussi has been difference-maker for the Canes since they claimed him off waivers, and a big story in the league. But Bussi struggled Thursday, allowing six goals on 22 shots — the Habs' final score was an empty-netter.

"He had a tough night tonight, but he's been great all year," Brind'Amour said.

'I've got to live with that'

Jarvis, injured in the road game against the Florida Panthers, said being out the past few weeks has been "painful," both in not being able to play and in learning he had been left off Hockey Canada's Olympic team roster for the 2026 Winter Games, set next month in Italy.

Jarvis, 23, was a member of Canada's gold medal-winning team in the 4 Nations Face-Off international event last season. His numbers with the Canes this season until the injury seemed promising enough to be included on the Olympic roster: 19 goals and 29 points in 34 games, with two shorthanded goals and four game-winning goals, two in overtime.

Jarvis said Thursday that he was not sure the injury and missed time kept him off the Hockey Canada roster.

"I don't think so, though it definitely didn't help," he said. "But at the end of the day I had played enough games where I thought I gave a good sample size. I guess I didn't play good enough, and I've got to live with that.

"It sucks. It's a big blow. It's something I really worked for and wanted to achieve, but there's nothing you can do about it now. I gave myself a couple of days to take it in, feel emotions, and now it's just moving past it."

The Canes now are 2-4-0 in the six games he has been out as the injuries are taking a toll. Defenseman Jaccob Slavin has missed all but five games this season, defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere missed a



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third game with a lower-body issue and goalie Pyotr Kochetkov has been lost for the season with a hip ailment that will require surgery.

Jarvis was hurt early in overtime against the Panthers. On the move and taking the puck to the net, he was tripped by Florida's Evan Rodrigues, fell and crashed into the near post, appearing to injure his ribs. No penalty was called on the play, and the Canes lost in a shootout.

Placed on NHL injured reserve Dec. 20, Jarvis' status has been listed as "week to week." The same for Slavin.

"To go out like that, and not know what your recovery time period is, is tough," Jarvis said. "I tried to take it day by day, but that's easier said than done when you see your friends all skating and I'm sitting on the bench watching practice.

"There's not much you can really do other than taking your time and trying not to stress it too much, which is tough. Now that I'm pretty much pain free day to day, I'm better."

Slavin, a standout in the 4 Nations event for the U.S. and arguably the best player in the competition, is expected to be on the Team USA Olympic roster — to be announced Friday — despite his nearly season-long absence because of lower-body issues.

Jarvis said he has been placed on a "standby" reserve list for Team Canada and could be added if there is an injury. That's not a great option for the Winnipeg native, but it is an option.

"They told me not to book any trips or anything," Jarvis said. "It's still a waiting game, but obviously I'm hoping nobody gets hurt. Obviously, if they call my name I'll be more than ready to come and contribute, but I'm not wishing ill will on anybody.

"If I do get picked, and it just so happens that I go, awesome. But I've already dealt with the emotions of it and moved past it."

Jarvis said the snub could be used as added motivation the rest of the season and Brind'Amour liked the sound of that, noting, "He's got to use it however he needs to use it."

For now, Jarvis wants to get back in the Canes lineup. Asked when he might take off the yellow jersey and replace it with a game jersey, Jarvis said the doctors and trainer Doug Bennett will make that call.

"I can take it off right now and probably fight 'Svechy,'" he joked, looking over at forward Andrei Svechnikov.

News Observer LOADED: 01.02.2026

1373848 Carolina Hurricanes

Carolina Hurricanes' playoff potential rides on how they address goalie problem

Justin Pelletier 14-18 minutes 01/01/2026

If anyone was hopeful through the first half of the season that the Carolina Hurricanes were going to be able to play through whatever goaltending issues arose — and there were plenty of people who were — by throwing multiple goalies at the problem to see what might stick, it should now be abundantly clear that the team's path to a Stanley Cup championship is becoming riddled with 4-foot-by-6-foot holes.

In October, as the season began teeming with optimism, it was apparent the Hurricanes had made significant upgrades at all positions — except in goal.

At the time, it was fair to wonder whether the team's reliance on goalies with a particularly fragile history — physically — was wise, and whether the abundance of cap space, which has been made larger still this season by the team's unprecedented spate of injuries throughout the roster, could best be used on an upgrade between the pipes.

The answer to the latter, now, is unequivocally, "Yes."

At the time, we mused that the Hurricanes' goaltending numbers overall, their raw, statistics, had been fine enough, even in the playoffs. Mentally, we figured, they were fine. What was concerning was the extensive injury history for both Frederik Andersen and Pyotr Kochetkov. (At the time, Kochetkov was already on the IR to begin the season. We now know why.)

Andersen played in only 22 regular-season games last season. He played 16 in 2023-24; 34 in 2022-23; and 52 in 2021-22 (but none in the playoffs).

Kochetkov played 47 regular-season games last season. He played 42 in 2023-24; 24 in 2022-23; and three in 2021-22).

To begin this season, it was Andersen who appeared the epitome of health. Kochetkov's ailment, at the time, we thought to be minor.

And now?

Kochetkov is done for the season, choosing to address his nagging injury (sustained in the preseason) with surgery, ending his season before the halfway mark. And his numbers had been good, too — 6-2 with a 2.33 goals-against average.

Andersen is still healthy. That's about the extent of the positive news for the Great Dane, who is mired in one of the worst statistical stretches of his career. Andersen has plummeted to 51st overall in the NHL in GAA (3.38), and 59th (out of 60 qualified goalies) in save percentage (.865). For a team that doesn't allow a lot of shots like the Canes, save percentages will likely be lower in Carolina overall, but that might be stretching a bit too far.

Health no longer appears to be a concern for Andersen. But all of a sudden his mental state has to be. He's 5-9-2 in 16 starts this season. He hasn't won a game in nearly two months, and is 1-8-2 in his past 11 starts.

Thank goodness for Brandon Bussi.

Initially claimed as a stopgap and perhaps a solid option for Chicago of the American Hockey League after losing Cayden Primeau on waivers, all Bussi did was rip off 13 wins in 15 starts. Prior to the Canes' New Year's Day debacle against Montreal, Bussi led the NHL in GAA (2.08), was 13th in save percentage (.912), and had been the most dependable of all the Canes' keepers.

Bussi can't start every night, nor apparently, is he infallible, as everyone witnessed Thursday. Could he start more often than he has? Sure. But there's no telling how that will affect his play.

Primeau is back in the system after a waiver-wire boomerang from Toronto, and his numbers in Chicago are adequate (3-3-5, 2.49, .914), but his career NHL numbers are nothing to write home about (15-25-7, 3.73, .882).

As previously mentioned, the Canes are awash in cap space. They already had about \$10 million to begin the season, and with so many games lost to injury throughout the roster this season, the team's number has actually grown a bit, and sits at about \$13 million.

While it can be debated on what else the team may or may not need to try and win a Stanley Cup this season — apart from a completely healthy roster — let's focus on what options the Hurricanes have to address what is now a glaring need between the pipes.



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Option A: Trade for an NHL-ready goalie

Primeau and Amir Miftakhov of the Chicago Wolves are playing well in the AHL. They sit 15th and 16th, respectively, in GAA and 10th and 11th in save percentage. The last thing Carolina needs is another AHL-ready goalie who may or may not do well in the NHL (though at this point, it's fair to ask whether they'd be better than Andersen has been the past two months).

But how about NHL goalie on teams that, at the halfway mark, are ready to accept that this season may be more "rebuild" than "reload"?

And for that, the Canes would have to look west. None of the teams in the Eastern Conference are more than five points out of a playoff position at the moment, and it's fair to say that none can realistically be ruled out of a run to the postseason. Yes, even the Sabres, with their recent run.

But in the West? The chasm between the haves and have nots is widening.

Jordan Binnington of St. Louis is a name that appears a lot as a possibly available trade target. The Blues are close to the cap, and Binnington is owed \$6 million this year and next. His salary off the books in St. Louis would give the Blues a bit of flexibility to retool, certainly, and his cost may not be as high as some others. But his numbers this season are less than impressive. In fact, his GAA is worse than Andersen's, and his save percentage is just a hair better. That's ... not an upgrade.

Here's an option not enough people are talking about, though: Vancouver's tandem of Thatcher Demko and Kevin Lankinen, most specifically Demko. There seems to be regular chatter about Canucks center Elias Pettersson and the Hurricanes (and for good reason, the Hurricanes need a center, too), but not to be overlooked amid Vancouver's tough season is the potential availability of its goalies.

Demko is having a good season behind a suspect defensive group, posting a 2.72 GAA and .907 save percentage despite an 8-8 record. He was a 35-game winner two seasons ago. In a Fantasy Sports world, you could see a Demko-Pettersson combo deal benefitting the Canes, of course, but that would get pricey, and Carolina would almost certainly have to give up a top-end roster player — think Andrei Svechnikov — to make it happen. General Manager Eric Tulsy has pushed a lot of right buttons in his brief time at the helm in Raleigh, but that would be a very large, red button to push.

The other possible bugaboo in that scenario is Demko's contract. His new deal kicks in next year and pays him \$8.5 million over three years, with a full no-trade clause. But since that doesn't kick in until next season, Vancouver could freely move him this season. Pettersson, for what it's worth, is due \$11.6 million for four more seasons after this year.

Devin Cooley would be another possibility out of Calgary, with Dustin Wolf's new long-term contract set to kick in next season making him the Flames' obvious No. 1. And until a recent indefinite leave of absence, even Linus Ullmark out of Ottawa may have been an option. But it's going to cost a lot in terms of player equity, especially since every team in the NHL knows the situation in which the Canes find themselves.

Option B: Stand pat

This option would draw the ire of an anxious fanbase, but it seems to be the direction in which the current administration is leaning. The thought is — and it's not entirely unfounded — that most goalies, playing in the Canes' system, will have a chance to win every night, if they go on a "run." This very franchise has seen it happen, in 2006 with Cam Ward.

Ward, in that season, was an even lesser-known entity than Bussi is this season, and his run through the playoffs that season was nothing short of amazing.

That was ... 20 years ago.

In the past 10 Stanley Cup Finals, six of the 10 winning goalies played more than 50 regular-season NHL games that year. Another played 42 in the COVID-shortened season.

Of the remaining three champions, two rode a single goalie through the playoffs after a regular-season split or late-season switch. Those two times in 10 tries are what the Hurricanes would be trying to replicate by standing pat: hoping the "best" option catches fire at the right time — or doesn't get hurt along the way.

The way this season has gone, assuming injury is a far safer bet than assuming health, which is cause for concern should the Canes choose Option B.

And after Thursday's meltdown against Montreal, standing pat with either Andersen or Bussi, behind what is now a suspect defensive group, seems more reckless than hopeful.

Thirteen million dollars affords a lot of wiggle room. No one — rocket scientist or otherwise — could have predicted the level of injury attrition to which the Hurricanes have been subjected this season. But there was plenty of foresight to have that wiggle room in place, in case something happened.

Well, something has happened. A lot of somethings.

The Carolina Hurricanes' administration owes its coaching staff, its players, and its fan base, particularly in this 20th anniversary season of a run to the Stanley Cup — during which they also made big, in-season moves — an all-in effort to win another one.

With the pieces the Canes already have in place, and the team's generous salary cap flexibility, Tulsy can afford to fix this goalie conundrum (and any others, while he's at it).

The Hurricanes' playoff potential depends on it.

News Observer LOADED: 01.02.2026

1373849 Carolina Hurricanes

Mistakes haunt Hurricanes in 7-5 loss to Canadiens

Cory Lavalette4-6 minutes 02/01/2026

RALEIGH — Self-inflicted wounds cost the Carolina Hurricanes on the first day of 2026 — so much so that even a five-point game by Sebastian Aho wasn't enough.

The top line of Aho, Andrei Svechnikov and Nikolaj Ehlers combined for 11 points, but countless turnovers and miscues allowed the visiting Canadiens to erase a two-goal lead and win 7-5 Thursday at Lenovo Center.

"It was just our lack of sticking with what we got to do," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said, "and we were just turning pucks over at an unbelievably high rate, all for no reason."

Things started to unravel for the Hurricanes in the second period when, after extending their lead to 4-2, three mistakes flipped the lead to Montreal.

At 5:01, Joel Nystrom and Mike Reilly misplayed a stretch pass, which allowed Sammy Blais to get in alone on Brandon Bussi (16 saves) and score his third of the year.

Montreal then scored twice in 23 seconds off Hurricanes' turnovers to take the lead.



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Carolina defenseman K'Andre Miller's dump-in attempt instead hit Jordan Staal, leading to an odd-man rush that Cole Caufield finished at 16:23.

On the next shift, Ehlers passed the puck right to Josh Anderson in the slot, and the Habs winger snapped the puck past Bussi for his ninth goal and a 5-4 Montreal lead.

"It's one bad play, really, that Nicky made," Brind'Amour said. "Other than that, he was really good tonight. But that's the difference. You can't make those."

The night was full of "those."

The Hurricanes dug themselves a two-goal hole in the first period with a pair of mistakes.

After Hurricanes forward Jesperi Kotkaniemi turned the puck over at the Carolina blue line, Canadiens center Nick Suzuki wired a shot past Bussi at 3:10.

Oliver Kapanen made it 2-0 Montreal with his 12th of the season after fellow rookie Ivan Demidov dangled around Logan Stankoven and set him up for an easy back door bang-in 56 seconds later to double the visitors' lead.

After giving up a total of 15 goals in seven December starts, Bussi allowed six against the Canadiens.

"I don't know how many saves he made, but he didn't make too many," Brind'Amour said. "But he's been great all year, so we've got to help him out at that point and not give up those odd-man rushes and things that create those scoring opportunities."

The Hurricanes were quick to respond in the first period and regain the lead.

After Alexandre Texier was penalized for slashing Ehlers below the belt, Ehlers jumped on the ice with the top power play unit and snapped a shot past Jakub Dobs (20 saves) for his ninth goal to halve Montreal's lead at 10:47.

Ninety-two seconds later, Svechnikov set up Nystrom for a one-timer that Aho redirected in for his 15th goal of the year and a 2-2 tie.

Carolina then forced a turnover with its forecheck, and Svechnikov finished a scramble in front for his third point of the night and 11th goal at 14:51.

The Hurricanes extended the lead to two early in the second period.

Alexander Nikishin's one-timer on the power play 54 seconds into the period — his fifth goal of the season and first multipoint game of his career — extended the lead to 4-2. Carolina was 2 for 3 on the night on the power play, moving up 19% and 17th in the league after spending much of the season near the bottom of the NHL.

But Montreal rallied with four straight goals, and Aho's second of the night — with Bussi on the bench for an extra attacker — was followed by a long-range empty-netter by Montreal defenseman Lane Hutson to ice the game.

"I kind of mirror my own success with the team and how the team does, and it kind of just sucks to lose in this fashion, any game," Aho said. "But, yeah, just — I don't know what to say. ... If we want to go anywhere this year and make a deep run, we have to just somehow figure this out."

Notes: Aho became the first player to have five points in a regulation loss in franchise history and the first overall since Gabriel Landeskog on Dec. 16, 2017. ... Forward Seth Jarvis and defensemen Shayne Gostisbehere and Jaccob Slavin did not play due to injuries. ... Kotkaniemi played his 500th NHL game. ... Miller played his 400th career NHL game. ... Mark Jankowski won 10 of 12 faceoffs.

The North State Journal LOADED: 01.02.2026

1373948 Websites

The Athletic / Will Ferrell, NHL referee? Actor dresses up in full gear at Kings game and makes calls in stands

By Eric Stephens

Jan. 1, 2026 10:28 pm EST

There were the usual two referees assigned to the Tampa Bay Lightning-Los Angeles Kings game on New Year's Day, but a "third" had the stripes on to make his own calls.

Will Ferrell brought in 2026 by wearing full referee attire — though with a borrowed black Kings helmet — and drew attention by following the action and mimicking actual penalty calls or making up his own from his usual seat Thursday at Crypto.com Arena.

The comedic actor is a longtime Kings fan and has, in the past, been in full face paint during playoff games or even worn his famous lime green "Elf" costume. But on this day, he was in support of Francis Charron and Brandon Schrader and was ready to help if they needed assistance.

"I've always been in support of the NHL referees," Ferrell said during a first intermission interview with reporter Carryn Bathe on the Kings' FanDuel telecast. "In fact, I trained two of the guys out here. They're two of my prize students, Brandon and Francis. They're calling a heck of a game. Heck of a game."

Will Ferrell is at the Kings game tonight in full referee gear making calls from behind the glass 🤖🤖 pic.twitter.com/jfw2hVky33

— Gino Hard (@GinoHard_) January 2, 2026

Like a coach in the stands with a pupil during a tennis tournament, Ferrell said he was making a connection with Charron during the opening period. "I'm telling him, like, 'Relax. It's OK. You're doing great. You're doing great,'" he said.

While he acknowledged that the last time he put skates on was 15 years ago, Ferrell had his uniform and was ready for duty. "I've got it all ready to go at a moment's notice," he said. "Because you never know if one of these guys go down, I may have to put on the skates and get out there.

"I'm very nimble. I'm still ready to go."

"You never know if one of these guys goes down, I may have to put on the skates and get out there."

Will Ferrell says he's ready to sub in as a referee at any moment tonight 🤖 pic.twitter.com/rbYf4vf9cw

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) January 2, 2026

The Kings did have a proviso for Ferrell. He couldn't blow his whistle while game action was underway, as "that could cause issues." But he did cut loose once the period was over.

It was obviously all in good fun, though Ferrell couldn't have enjoyed the Lightning's late three-goal burst in the final 3:19 of regulation for a come-from-behind 5-3 road victory. But the actor and wannabe official is clearly at home with his favorite club.

"I'm waiting to be at a game where Copper is going to play, where Pheonix is going to play because he always comes over and says, 'Hi,'" he said, referring to goalie Pheonix Copley, who has played between Los Angeles and the Kings' AHL club. "But (Darcy) Kuemper, he's game face. He doesn't really give me much. He looks right past me. It doesn't hurt my feelings. I get it."

The Athletic LOADED: 01.02.2026



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1373949 Websites

The Athletic / What I'm seeing from Winter Classic: Adam Fox on Olympic exclusion, Miami ice quality, more

By Peter Baugh

Jan. 1, 2026 Updated 8:12 pm EST

MIAMI — Minnesota Wild general manager Bill Guerin, who holds the same position for the U.S. men's Olympic team, called Adam Fox on Wednesday with a decision: The defenseman did not make the American Olympic roster, marking a precipitous fall from when he was one of the first six players named to the 2025 4 Nations Face-Off roster.

"I thought my play this year was worthy of it and my track record as well," Fox said Thursday after practice at LoanDepot Park, home of the Miami Marlins. "But it's out of my hands at a certain point."

Fox's resume includes the 2021 Norris Trophy, as well as three other top-five Norris finishes, and his play this season has indeed been excellent. The 27-year-old has four goals and 28 points in 28 games with sterling underlying numbers, all while taking on some of the team's hardest defensive matchups. He missed a month with a shoulder injury but returned to the lineup against the Washington Capitals on Wednesday — logging a goal and an assist — and is set to have his second game back Friday against the Florida Panthers in the Winter Classic.

The 4 Nations tournament wasn't Fox's best performance — he was on the ice and at least partially responsible for Connor McDavid's overtime goal in the gold medal game — and that likely played into Team USA's decision. Colleague Michael Russo wrote in his recent roster projection that "there's no doubt the brass was concerned about pace of play being an issue for Fox at the 4 Nations. ... (W)e just think that the lasting impression of that tournament and specifically McDavid's winning goal is embedded in the minds of the key decision-makers." The Vegas Golden Knights' Noah Hanafin and Florida's Seth Jones presumably edged Fox out for the final defensive spot. The full roster will be announced Friday morning.

New York Rangers coach Mike Sullivan will coach the American team, and assistant David Quinn is on his staff. Rangers president Chris Drury is one of Guerin's assistant general managers. A league source said they advocated for Fox to make the team. Guerin, though, had the ultimate decision.

Discussing conversations with Sullivan, Quinn or Drury about the Olympic decision, Fox said, "They let me know their thoughts. It's a conversation I'll keep between us." Asked directly whether his relationship with Sullivan and Drury is OK, Fox said, "Yeah. Like I said, my focus from the start of the year has been with the Rangers. ... We've got a lot of games until that (Olympic) break."

"Adam and I have had a number of conversations around this, and I will keep that conversation between Adam and (me)," Sullivan said. "What I will tell you is these teams that are being picked are the best of the best. And there's so many good players, and there are very, very difficult decisions that have to be made. It is a collaborative effort on everybody's part. And that's just the reality of these circumstances."

Ice shouldn't be an issue

Given that Florida is a warm-weather state, Sullivan found himself pleasantly surprised when he stepped onto the ice, which is thicker than the usual indoor surface.

"It was in pretty good condition given the circumstances," he said. "It's always a challenge in this type of an event, and I thought it was pretty good today."

The stadium's retractable dome was up throughout the day Thursday, but the NHL tested it Tuesday with no issues. It's set to be open for Friday's game.

"It's going to be awesome," Panthers coach Paul Maurice said. "The ice was fantastic. ... That's a big job. I don't know how they pull it off."

"It's pretty good," Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin said of the conditions. "But a little bit warmer than usual."

Mika Zibanejad said the ice was pretty good, especially because Florida practiced and had a family skate before the Rangers took the ice.

Matt Rempe reflects on past outdoor experience

Walking into LoanDepot Park, Matt Rempe found himself thinking back on a different outdoor venue. He remembered how nervous he felt entering MetLife Stadium in 2024 ahead of his NHL debut. He was 21 then, filled with nerves and excitement when he took the ice for both his first NHL practice and game.

Now he's 76 games into his career. The nerves aren't fully gone, but they've certainly diminished.

"Now it's much more relaxed, but it's still a big stage," he said. "Those are games I remember always being excited to watch as a kid. ... You're taking it in — there's 80,000 in the crowd, jets are flying overhead, and you're like 'what is going on right now?'"

Rempe will have a difficult time having as memorable an outdoor game as his first one. When he took the ice for his first shift, New York Islanders veteran Matt Martin congratulated him and asked whether he wanted to fight to add to the memory. The two dropped the gloves, and Rempe pumped the fans up as he skated to the penalty box. Last season, Martin's last in the NHL, Rempe thanked the Islanders forward in a late-season matchup.

"I've got a ton of respect for him," Rempe said.

Martin responded kindly, the Rangers forward remembers. He told Rempe he's doing the right things and encouraged him to keep it up. Now he's a lineup regular for the Rangers, though he has only one goal in 17 games this season and missed time with a broken thumb.

Rangers call on injury reinforcements

The Rangers suffered two injuries during the Washington game — Conor Sheary and Noah Laba — and neither will be back any time soon. Sheary went on long-term injured reserve Thursday and attended practice on crutches. Laba is out week to week, per the team. He was also at the practice, watching from the first-base dugout with injured winger Adam Edström.

"It's a tough loss," Sullivan said of Laba. "The one element that he brings to our group is a speed game and just a conscientious game on both sides of the puck. He's not going to be an easy guy to replace."

J.T. Miller, out with an upper-body injury, went through practice in a red noncontact jersey.

The Rangers made a flurry of roster moves to account for their injuries. Justin Dowling, Brett Berard and Anton Blidh all were recalled, and the Rangers sent Brennan Othmann to the AHL. The Othmann decision was at least partially cap related; because of his bonus structure, the Rangers would not have had space to keep him up and recall two other players. New York wanted the flexibility to have 13 forwards because an illness has been going through the team.

Dowling and Berard looked likely to slot in. Dowling centered Jonny Brodzinski and Taylor Raddysh on the third line Thursday. The 35-year-



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old journeyman played 52 NHL games with the New Jersey Devils last season, plus five more in the playoffs, and had 7 total points. He's set to make his Rangers debut on outdoor ice — the first to do so since Rempel at the 2024 Stadium Series.

Dowling was on the Dallas Stars when they played an outdoor game at the Cotton Bowl, but he was a scratch that game.

"Just being a part of the whole experience was awesome," he said. "Now being able to actually play and skate in one, it'll be a little different. I'm excited."

The Athletic LOADED: 01.02.2026

1373950 Websites

The Athletic / What would Canada's Olympic B-Team look like, and could it win a medal?

By Arpon Basu

Jan. 1, 2026 6:30 am EST

The process of selecting an Olympic hockey team for Canada is always based on filling roles more so than taking the 25 most talented players.

That is what makes the process so difficult. Extremely talented players are left off because the prime roles are filled by more talented or experienced players. Whether a player kills penalties, can play on either side on defense or can play at center or wing up front, which way they shoot, all of it matters in building a team. And Canada has the deepest pool of talented and experienced players to choose from in the world.

Whenever a Team Canada is announced, it is almost always said that they could put together a B-team that would compete for a medal.

It is said because it is true.

And even in the process of selecting a B-team, some very deserving and talented players are left off because of the sheer number of varied options available.

So here, then, is our version of Canada's B-team, with a breakdown and thought process for each position group.

Forwards

Canada's B-team is lucky to be able to anchor its offense around Connor Bedard, one of the most electrifying players in the world, and someone who frankly belongs on the real Team Canada. A similar argument could be made for Seth Jarvis, Sam Bennett and Mark Scheifele, but Canada B will gladly take them as well.

In selecting our forwards, however, some deserving names were left off, perhaps most notably John Tavares and Nazem Kadri. We decided instead to lean in hard on youthful talent, which might be a mistake in the long run, but the way the NHL is trending, this seems like a smart risk. Our oldest forward is 34-year-old Nashville Predators center Ryan O'Reilly, who we've projected as a 13th forward who can still get minutes as a left-side faceoff specialist, designated penalty-killer and a late-game lead protector.

Otherwise, Zach Hyman (33), Scheifele (32), Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (32) and Carter Verhaeghe (30) are our only other forwards on the wrong side of 30.

We also wanted to ensure a good balance of left and right shots, which hurt the candidacies of players such as Steven Stamkos, Drake Batherson and Mathew Barzal, all of whom shoot from the right side.

Ultimately, the 14th forward spot went to Dylan Guenther, also a right shot, over those three players. Even with that as a priority, we still wound up with only six left shots out of the 14 forwards and each of our top three lines only has one left shooter: Bedard, Nugent-Hopkins and Verhaeghe.

The ability to pair Nugent-Hopkins with Hyman — linemates with the Edmonton Oilers — on a second line seemed like a natural fit. And though someone such as Bennett could easily play further up the lineup — an argument could be made that he could center the top line if Bedard were moved to the wing — a fourth line combination of Bennett, Quinton Byfield and Travis Konecny appears to be an excellent checking line.

As far as special teams are concerned, filling out two power play units will not be an issue, but Jarvis, O'Reilly, Nugent-Hopkins, Konecny and Robert Thomas are all able to kill penalties.

Defense

This is where Canada-B differs from the real Team Canada the most. Because Doug Armstrong decided to bring back the entire blue line from the 4 Nations Face-Off — and there is honestly no reason not to — Canada-B winds up with an offensively-oriented back end that is high on scoring, perhaps a bit less so on defending.

Considering the tight-checking style of the games at the 4 Nations, this might come back to bite us. But again, our overall team-building strategy here is to lean in on youthful talent, and so we have the youngest player in the NHL on our top defense pair.

Matthew Schaefer came close to cracking the real Team Canada, and we will be leaning on him heavily. The heir apparent to Cale Makar on Canada's blue line, Schaefer's been playing big minutes for Patrick Roy with the New York Islanders and has shown no signs of slowing down. This would be another big jump for him, but based on how he's not only adapted to the NHL, but is dominating as a rookie, we have few concerns. Pairing him with a responsible, physical and veteran right-shot defenseman such as MacKenzie Weegar helps mitigate some of Schaefer's youth and free-wheeling style of play.

The second pairing of Jakob Chychrun and Evan Bouchard have 22 goals and 67 points between them this season. They will get heavy offensive zone starts and will play mainly behind the top-six up front; Bouchard's chemistry with Nugent-Hopkins and Hyman on the second line will be particularly useful.

The third pairing of Mike Matheson and Noah Dobson already plays together with the Montreal Canadiens, getting very difficult minutes and still driving play in the right direction despite heavy defensive zone deployment. In a short tournament like this, their ready-made chemistry is extremely valuable. Both kill penalties for the Canadiens, which is the real weakness of this top six. Weegar can kill penalties as well, but otherwise Canada-B will need to shoehorn one of Chychrun or Schaefer into a penalty-killing role.

It's not ideal, but we can live with it. And frankly, we're not putting it past Schaefer to excel in that role if he were the one to get shoehorned.

The extra defensemen we went with could also help on the penalty kill. Over the last month, as the Buffalo Sabres have piled up wins, Owen Power's improved play has been one of the reasons why. The 2021 No. 1 pick has had a slow start to his career, but appears to be coming into his own, just in time to make this B team. The final spot on the blue line came down to two veteran right-shot defensemen in Aaron Ekblad and Brandon Montour. We ultimately opted for Ekblad because he brings a physicality this blue line group decidedly lacks and he is a regular on the Florida Panthers top penalty killing unit with Gustav Forsling. If the coaching staff decides the blue line needs more jam, they will have Ekblad to insert if needed.

Goalies



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Honestly, Canada-B does not have a whole lot to envy the real Team Canada here, which is more an indictment of the country's goaltending pool than anything else. Mackenzie Blackwood would be the starter on this team, but there will be legitimate competition between him and Scott Wedgewood, just as there is on the Colorado Avalanche.

There were several options for the third goalie, including youngsters Jet Greaves and Joel Hofer, but we went with a good veteran who is known as an excellent teammate, Jake Allen of the New Jersey Devils, who has a .910 save percentage and nine goals saved above expected in 20 games played this season.

Medal hopes

As good as this team looks on paper, we would have a tough time seeing this team finishing higher than fourth if the Olympics were a 40-game tournament. Over the long haul, this team would surely lose out to Canada, the United States and Sweden at the very least, and probably Finland too.

But in a single-elimination tournament? We'll roll the dice with our youth and talent on Canada-B. This team would not necessarily be favored to medal at the Olympics, but there is more than enough talent here to grab a surprise spot on the podium.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.02.2026

1373951 Websites

The Athletic / NHL buyer's remorse team: 20 players front offices may be having second thoughts about

By Sean McIndoe

The holidays are done, and right now there's a good chance that you're looking around your home and thinking: Man, I paid way too much for stuff I didn't really need.

If so, welcome to life as an NHL general manager.

In most of the front offices around the league, there's probably been a similar feeling, one that's been growing as the season went on. It's the classic buyer's remorse, where a move that seemed to make sense in the summer now feels like a mistake.

Today, we're going to build out our all-buyer's remorse team, based on players who were acquired over the offseason via trade and free agency and aren't working out for their new teams. We'll do 12 forwards, six defensemen and two goalies, with a limit of three players per team so that it's not all your favorite team fair.

(As a side note, tradition tells us that most of the players I choose for this piece will immediately heat up and play like MVP candidates for the rest of the year. If this happens, you are not allowed to send me "this aged poorly" jabs. Instead, you have to thank me for personally motivating the player to turn things around. These are the rules and you've legally agreed to them by reading this article.)

Great teams are built from the net out. But so are regrettable ones, so we'll start there.

Goalies

I'll be honest, it's weirdly difficult to find goaltending candidates for this year's team. We didn't see a ton of goalies moving over the summer, and a few of the ones who did — such as Dan Vladar, Alex Lyon and Dave Rittich — have been success stories. By process of elimination, we're almost forced to choose two guys who were traded for each other.

John Gibson, Red Wings

He's been fine. Not good enough to vindicate all the "get him away from the Ducks defense" voices, but also not bad enough to call the trade a mistake. His save percentage is nearly 20 points lower than it was in last year's mini-comeback season, so it's fair to say that Steve Yzerman was hoping for more. Still, things are clicking in Detroit, so I'm guessing its fans aren't asking for a do-over quite yet.

Petr Mrazek, Ducks

He's been hurt and not very effective when he has played. We've seen him twice in December, and one of those was in mop-up duty in a game the Ducks lost 8-3. Still, he was more of a veteran cap balancer in the Gibson trade than anything else, and as the third option in Anaheim, he's unlikely to make or break their season either way.

Honorable mention: Alexandar Georgiev didn't even make it into an NHL game for the Sabres before heading to the KHL. Waiver pickup Cayden Primeau got shelled in Toronto before heading back to Carolina. And while Alex Nedeljkovic's goaltending numbers have been decent in San Jose, his goal-scoring rate has dropped by an unacceptable 100 percent.

Defense

We're always told that great defensemen are never available. That's obviously nonsense, as certain recent events would remind us. But they're probably harder to find on the open market than any other position, which in theory leads to more regret.

Cody Ceci, Kings

Brian Dumoulin, Kings

The Kings' two big offseason additions to the blue line were widely panned over the summer, and while neither has been an outright bust, they also haven't done much to prove the critics wrong. They're playing third-pair minutes and are struggling to break even in those matchups. It's hard to call that a win, especially with the departed Vladislav Gavrikov playing well for the Rangers. In fairness, though, Ceci and Dumoulin have at least combined for (checks notes) one goal.

Nicolas Hague, Predators

Another one from the offseason "I told you so" pile, the Predators took Hague off the Knights' hands and gave him a \$22 million extension in a deal that raised eyebrows. In exchange, they got a preseason injury that delayed his debut, followed by about what you'd expect: Just under 20 minutes a night of slightly below-water results

Logan Mailloux, Blues

The trade that sent Mailloux to the Blues for Zack Bolduc featured two players who were young enough that you knew you couldn't declare winners and losers after just a couple of months. But it's been three months now, so: The Blues lost. Bolduc has been solid in Montreal, while Mailloux has struggled to show he's ready for full-time NHL duty in St. Louis. He's been better since his November "reset" in the AHL, but ideally, you don't want to be sporting the league's worst plus/minus rating based on 13 minutes a night.

Matt Dumba, Penguins

Dumba has become a quintessential journeyman in recent years, with the Penguins representing his fifth team since 2023. The Penguins got a second-round pick to take the last year of his contract off the Stars' hands, so maybe you don't worry too much about the lack of production. You'd like to think you still had an NHLer, though, and Dumba was waived down to the minors a few weeks ago.

Travis Hamonic, Red Wings

I'll admit that I'd completely forgotten about this signing, which was cheap and meant for depth and not really a problem. Still, Hamonic has an



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expected goals south of 40 percent and an actual goals south of 25 percent, so you have to admire his commitment to the bit.

Honorable mention: I'm still not sure I'm completely on board with Carolina going so hard after K'Andre Miller, but he's been a solid addition so far. The Sharks added a bunch of veterans such as John Klingberg, Dmitry Orlov and even Nick Leddy, but they've all been mostly fine.

Forwards

It's not often we get to start this section with a slam dunk Hall of Famer.

Jonathan Toews, Jets

OK, remorse feels like the wrong word here. We're all glad to see Toews back in action after two full seasons out of the league. And to have the comeback happen for his hometown team, even better. But the reality is that Toews hasn't been good in Winnipeg. That doesn't mean it can't be a feel-good story, but it's probably fair to say that the Jets needed more than three goals here, especially once those games-played bonuses start kicking in.

JJ Peterka, Mammoth

He's on pace for a run at his first 30-goal season, so the Mammoth are probably still OK with taking this swing. But his points-per-game total has dropped from last year's peak in Buffalo, and he's only barely ahead of Josh Doan, one of the youngsters he was traded for, in points. This might still end up being remembered as a win-win trade, but Sabres fans might be thanking Kevyn Adams for pulling it off.

Nikolaj Ehlers, Hurricanes

So far, the Hurricanes aren't exactly reaping the rewards of his \$51 million deal. Ehlers has just eight goals on the year, and is on pace to barely clear 50 points. That's well off his pace from last year, despite an uptick in ice time. This is a weird one because one look at the Jets this year tells you how much they miss Ehlers, which makes him look like an underrated difference-maker. His numbers so far in Carolina, not as much.

Evander Kane, Canucks

On some level, bringing in a hometown veteran in the twilight of his career makes a certain amount of sense, even if the \$5.1 million cap hit was always going to represent a gamble. Unfortunately, Kane hasn't been worth the price, with just six goals on the season. But the bigger problem is that the plan has clearly changed in Vancouver, where the focus has shifted to the future. Kane is a pending UFA, so if they can flip him for decent assets between now and March, maybe it's all washes out in the end. That might be easier said than done, though.

Jonathan Drouin, Islanders

There haven't been too many disappointments for Patrick Roy's surprise playoff contender, but Drouin's three goals have to qualify. He's gone from shooting 19.6 percent last year to just 6.3 percent this season, so short-term variance is obviously a big factor. But you generally don't want your total goals and total suspensions to be this close halfway through a season.

Nicolas Roy, Maple Leafs

Matias Maccelli, Maple Leafs

Dakota Joshua, Maple Leafs

We'll group these three, because fairly or unfairly, they can be viewed as the Leafs' attempt to spread Mitch Marner's cap hit into a deeper roster while recreating at least part of the departed star in the aggregate. The three forwards account for a total cap hit of almost \$9.7 million while accumulating a total of 37 points. Roy and the now-injured Joshua at least bring some defensive upside, but it's fair to say that Brad Treliving's offseason spending hasn't exactly yielded any home run swings.

(In case you're wondering, Marner hasn't exactly been lights out in Vegas, with his production down across the board. But he's been good enough that he wasn't a contender for this list.)

Andrew Mangiapane, Oilers

There's something weird about how the Oilers keep signing talented offensive players to cheap deals that seem like can't-miss wins, only to see them fail to really click with any of the existing offensive firepower. Last year, it was Jeff Skinner and Viktor Arvidsson. This year's it's Mangiapane, following an iffy year in Washington with an even less productive one in Edmonton — he has just five goals and 11 points through the first half.

Evgenii Dadonov, Devils

Yeah, apparently he's on the Devils now. You could be forgiven for missing that, as he's only been healthy enough to play five games, with one injury costing him six weeks early and a more recent one landing him back on the IR. Those five games, and the zero points he's scored in them, aren't the ones the Devils had in mind when they signed him. But the contract is cheap and contains performance bonuses, so they can afford a little bit more patience.

Gustav Nyquist, Jets

The idea here was that he'd at least replace a chunk of Ehlers' production. Goals aren't the only way to evaluate a forward, which is good news for Nyquist, because right now he's tied with you. He's only signed for this year, so while the cap hit is a little hefty given his numbers, they may be able to flip him at the deadline if they end up selling ... which is a path we didn't think they'd have to contemplate, but here we are.

Lars Eller, Senators

This is another one you probably forgot about if you haven't been paying close attention to the Senators. Ottawa fans were hoping to land a top-six difference-maker, but had to settle for Eller on a cheaper deal. So far, he's chipped in just two goals and six points.

Honorable mention: Nobody seemed to like the Tanner Jeannot signing in Boston when it happened, but he's been fine. Mason Marchment wasn't great in Seattle, but they already found a new home for him. Jeff Skinner has five goals in San Jose, and it's probably time to close the book on him being a top-six scoring threat.

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The Athletic / So much sports: Why 2026 will be a sports year unlike any other

By Stephen J. Nesbitt

Jan. 1, 2026 Updated 12:11 pm EST

It's the second weekend of June in 2026, and the eyes of the sports universe are trained on the FIFA World Cup fixtures kicking off across North America. And the NBA Finals. And the Stanley Cup Final. And ...

That same weekend, there's a Formula 1 Grand Prix in Spain, the 24 Hours of Le Mans in France, the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup in England, a PGA Tour event in Canada, two ATP Tour tournaments in Europe, the College World Series in Nebraska, a NASCAR race in the Poconos and a UFC fight night on the White House lawn.



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Topping it off? An American royal wedding, with a sports connection: artist Taylor Swift and athlete Travis Kelce marrying in Rhode Island as a World Cup game goes on 70 miles away in Massachusetts.

It'll be one of the busiest sports weekends ever. Yet, this year, it may feel like just another weekend. The 2026 global sports calendar is overflowing, as the Winter Olympics, World Cup and World Baseball Classic align for the first time in two decades and other quadrennials return to regular intervals after pandemic-related postponements. This confluence caused scheduling headaches for event organizers and TV execs.

For viewers, it's a windfall.

The Olympics overlap the Super Bowl and rugby's Six Nations Championship. The World Baseball Classic ends the first night of March Madness. The World Cup is king of a jam-packed summer slate.

It's so much sports.

As the New Year's Eve confetti is swept away and games resume with the College Football Playoff quarterfinals, we've put together a primer on why 2026 is such a seismic year in sports. We'll cover the big, non-annual events ahead on the calendar and explain which leagues are undergoing major structural changes this year that could shake up the sport.

Here, in roughly chronological order, are some of the recurring even-year events stuffed into the 2026 sporting schedule alongside the annual staples.

Winter Olympics: Feb. 6-22, Italy

Milano Cortina 2026 marks the first Winter Olympics since 2018 with regular crowd capacities, the first since 2014 with active NHL players participating, and the first since 2002 with a new discipline (ski mountaineering). The Olympics are followed by the Winter Paralympics (March 6-15) and later the Summer Youth Olympics (Oct. 31-Nov. 13).

ICC T20 World Cup: men's Feb. 7-March 8, India and Sri Lanka; women's June 12-July 5, England and Wales

In the 10th edition of this biennial cricket tournament, India attempts to defend its title on home turf on the men's side, and New Zealand returns as the reigning champs in the women's field. The U.S. men are back after upsetting Pakistan and advancing to the Super 8 as first-time participants in 2024.

World Baseball Classic: March 5-17, Japan, Puerto Rico, United States

After the 2023 WBC ended with a superstar clash — Samurai Japan's Shohei Ohtani vs. U.S. captain Mike Trout — there's a surge of interest in international baseball. Japan seeks a fourth WBC title while the U.S. strengthened its roster with a wave of commitments from top American players.

The Finalissima: Argentina vs. Spain: March 27, Qatar

This intercontinental showdown, resurrected in 2022, pits the champions of Copa América against the Euro winners. Argentina has won two of the previous three Finalissima. This will be the first meeting between Argentinian legend Lionel Messi and 18-year-old Spanish star Lamine Yamal.

FIFA World Cup: June 11-July 19, United States, Canada, Mexico

Here, again, Argentina are defending champions. The men's World Cup is back on U.S. soil for the first time since 1994, and since then, the field has doubled in size — expanding from 24 to 32 teams in 1998, and to 48 in 2026 — so there will be games in 11 cities in the United States, three in Mexico and two in Canada. Team USA has a favorable draw in Group D.

Nations Championship: July 4-18, Nov. 4-29, TBD

This all-new biennial rugby tournament features southern hemisphere teams hosting games in July, and their northern hemisphere counterparts hosting in November before a finals weekend in London. The U.S. is in a lower-division World Rugby Nations Cup running concurrently to the Nations Championship.

Commonwealth Games: July 23-Aug. 2, Scotland

This is the centerpiece of a busy "Games" season that includes the Asian Games (Sept. 19-Oct. 4), Mediterranean Games (Aug. 21-Sept. 3), South American Games (Sept. 12-26), Central American and Caribbean Games (Oct. 30-Nov. 2), Maccabiah Games (June 29-Aug. 14) and Gay Games (June 27-July 4). Many events were either postponed or canceled in 2022.

FIBA Women's Basketball World Cup: Sept. 4-13, Germany

Five-peat? The United States has won four consecutive World Cups — and 11 of 19 in the event's history — but has to contend with the recurring challenge of the tournament being set in early September. That's right before the WNBA playoffs typically begin. Perhaps the playoffs will be pushed back. FIBA will move the World Cup to late November in 2030.

Presidents Cup: Sept. 22-27, United States

After failing to defend home turf against the Europeans in a rowdy 2025 Ryder Cup, the Americans hope for a better fate in this round of international play. They will be heavy favorites over the International Team in Medinah, Ill. The U.S. has lost only once in 15 Presidents Cups.

Rugby League World Cup: Oct. 15-Nov. 15: Australia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand

A postponement punted yet another quadrennial event to 2026. This World Cup includes men's, women's and wheelchair rugby league tournaments running concurrently. In 2021, Australia won the men's and women's World Cups, and England won the wheelchair team competition.

That incomplete list doesn't even cover international championships for handball, futsal, women's football, field hockey or cross country. It doesn't include the U-20 Women's World Cup, the Women's Africa Cup of Nations, Women's World Cup qualifying or the inaugural FIFA Women's Champions Cup in London, or the World Equestrian Games.

It leaves out one-off events like UFC in Washington D.C., and WWE in Saudi Arabia; college football games in Ireland, Brazil and England; NFL games in Australia, Brazil, Germany, England and Mexico; NBA games in England and Germany; NHL outdoor games in Florida; and MLB games in Mexico and in an Iowa cornfield.

There's a lot happening — and a lot changing.

This isn't only a busy time for sports. It's also an interesting sports year, with technology, media restructuring, and league expansion combining to bring broad-brush changes to some familiar institutions.

After consulting colleagues around The Athletic's newsroom, we've circled 2026 changes you should know. Not about specific players or teams. But about which sports leagues are undergoing major structural changes this year.

Formula 1: A regulation overhaul promises to transform the pecking order. It's rare Formula 1 changes both the car designs and the engines in the same year. Also, a new American broadcast partner (Apple TV), a new team (Cadillac) and a new circuit (Madrid's Madring circuit).

NASCAR: After growing backlash from fans and drivers, NASCAR will introduce a revamped playoff format in 2026, scrapping the elimination-style playoff and a one-race championship that has been in place since 2014.



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WNBA: The league enters a new era with an 11-year, \$2.2 billion media rights deal — \$200 million annually, compared to \$50 million under the previous deal — as collective bargaining agreement negotiations continue. Project B, a new league starting in November, provides players with an alternative winter destination — and is spending to sign big names early.

NWSL: While we're on the expansion topic, the National Women's Soccer League welcomes two new teams in 2026, with Boston Legacy FC and Denver Summit FC kicking off their first NWSL games in March.

MLB: While "robo-umps" debut via an automated ball/strike challenge system this season, a potential lockout looms. MLB's collective bargaining agreement expires Dec. 1. Four years ago, it took 99 days for MLB's owners and the players' union to reach an agreement. If owners push for a salary cap, a lockout could drag on far longer this time.

PWHL: The Professional Women's Hockey League plans to add two to four teams in 2026, and the current barnstorming tour should provide clues as to where new franchises will wind up. The last round of expansion, adding Seattle and Vancouver, came at significant cost to the league's six original franchises, which had their rosters plundered in the expansion draft.

Boxing: Dana White's Zuffa Boxing enters the fray, marking its arrival in the boxing world with a media rights deal with Paramount Skydance. The promotion company's first event with Paramount will reportedly be held Jan. 22 in Las Vegas. White and TKO Group, which owns UFC and WWE, are campaigning to overhaul the Muhammad Ali Act, a law enacted to combat boxer exploitation.

Elsewhere, leagues enter 2026 on the cusp of major change. Take the PGA Tour, for example. With the arrival of a new commissioner, former NFL exec Brian Rolapp, and an influx of private equity investment, the PGA Tour schedule could be on the precipice of dramatic upheaval. Maybe that means rewriting the calendar to start after the Super Bowl. Maybe fewer events and more exclusivity. Maybe the entire competitive model requires a rethink to maintain interest in a crowded sports landscape.

That's a slightly different category of change, but worth mentioning: decisions that will be made in 2026 but implemented later. This could be the last year of the 68-team NCAA Tournament and the 12-team College Football Playoff. The NBA will decide this year whether to add two teams. The ATP Tour and players are debating numerous rule and schedule changes. College football players have gone to court arguing for a free fifth year of eligibility. Then there's the 2026 decision that would generate the most headlines of all: another vote on a "tush push" ban.

Welcome to the year of sports. Catch your breath while you still can.

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Sportsnet.ca / 'He carried us': Auston Matthews' hat trick caps comeback thriller

Luke Fox

TORONTO — This is Auston Matthews' hockey team, for better or worse.

And the way Matthews stomped through his return from a one-game foot injury, things have never looked better this troubled season for the superstar or the logo he represents.

"He carried us to the win tonight," Bobby McMann said, as the Toronto Maple Leafs rang in the new year with a wildly entertaining 6-5 comeback barnburner over what's left of the Winnipeg Jets.

It was 4-1.

For the other guys.

Matthews had scored Toronto's only goal of the first 30 minutes, a net-driving tip off a Max Domi feed.

Leafs starter Joseph Woll had gotten the yank, in favour of relief specialist Dennis Hildeby, after surrendering four on 17 shots — a move coach Craig Berube would characterize as a ploy to shift momentum.

But these reinvigorated Maple Leafs, more trusting of their teamwork and special teams, didn't panic or sulk.

"Belief" is how scrappy defenceman Troy Stecher described the bench vibes down by a field goal at halftime. "It never felt like the game was out of reach. And that's not to discredit them. I think that's to credit us as a group. And understanding that you put your nose to the grindstone and you continue to work, and good things are going to happen."

Oliver Ekman-Larsson found twine. Then Matthews followed with his second of the night, on the red-hot power-play, a slick snipe with just two seconds remaining in Period 2.

"Kinda gives you life and momentum going into the third," Matthews said. "Never know what can happen."

A hair-on-fire third frame was capped by Matthews' unassisted game-winner in the 56th minute.

As Scotiabank Arena's cleanup crew collected the littered hats doffed in celebration of Matthews' first three-goal (and four-point) effort of his beleaguered campaign, game ops smartly blasted Notorious B.I.G.'s "Big Poppa." Nice. (Alternate suggestion: Jay-Z's "Hey Papi.")

On this night, Matthews (233) surpassed legend Darryl Sittler (231) for the most goals scored at home in franchise history.

As early as Saturday, Matthews (419) will match — or surpass — Mats Sundin (420) for most goals by a Maple Leaf.

"It's special just to be in the same sentence as him," the 28-year-old said. "Try not to think about it. It's hard when you guys bring it up every day, but I just try to take it day by day. And when that moment comes, it'll be really cool. But it's just very, very humbling."

That the Maple Leafs and their captain's greatest offensive explosions this season are happening simultaneously is no coincidence.

That Matthews threw down such a dominant performance after jamming a sore foot into his boot, when a "pretty worrisome" shot block had made it too swollen to play Tuesday, was impressive stuff.

Toronto is averaging five goals per game over its past five.

Matthews has ripped a team-high 19 shots and posted eight points over his past three.

"He's our captain for a reason. He's our leader," Stecher said. "A heckuva performance by him. It's kind of weird. You expect that every night, but it's hard to score three goals in a game, so the boys are pumped for Tone."

Stecher explains that Matthews' positioning in the D-zone and smart stickwork give Toronto's defencemen comfort, knowing that they can grab a tighter gap because Matthews will be in the right position.

"It's a trickle-down effect. His details are incredible," Stecher said. "Defensively, it helps him create offence, because he gets to strip pucks and then go on the rush."



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Be it defensive nuance, pep on the puck, or jump in the stride, this is easily the captain's best stretch of hockey in 2025-26.

Did a German doctor slide down Matthews' chimney on Christmas Eve?

"Taking pucks in the middle of the ice more and attacking, taking people one-on-one and winning all those battles," Berube noted. "Just his attack mentality around the net. Looks like he's ripping the puck a little bit quick. Just more oomph on the shot."

We're sure poor Eric Comrie — the poor Jets backup goalie who led his troubled and tired team into the second half of a back-to-back, both regulation losses — would concur.

Trust is growing within the Maple Leafs' room, and so is the point streak (now up to five games runnin').

But the Matthews-esque play of Auston Matthews might be the most encouraging sign as Toronto rings in 2026 on a winning note.

"That's a big one," Matthews smiled. "It's an exciting game."

Fox's Fast Five

- The Jets and Maple Leafs won their respective divisions in April. They entered January last in their respective divisions.

Here are their odds of making the playoffs this April, according to MoneyPuck.com.

Winnipeg: 20 per cent.

Toronto: 14.1 per cent.

- Jets coach Scott Arniel on his conversation with Mark Scheifele about missing out on Team Canada:

"It was a tough one. I thought he had a real good chance of being on the team. I know there's really tough decisions out there, a lot of great players. I just thought he was so close last year (to make 4 Nations), having a fantastic season, great start.

"I really felt he would be a big bonus for Canada."

With a pair of goals and a buttery cross-ice assist on Thursday's opening strike, Scheifele (48 points) ranks fourth among all Canadians in scoring. Only Nathan MacKinnon, Connor McDavid and Macklin Celebrini have more.

He's also a plus-7 player on a club with a minus-9 goal differential.

"I obviously wish I was picked," Scheifele said. "But God's got a plan, and I've just got to trust it."

- William Nylander (lower body) missed his third consecutive game and seventh overall this season.

This already marks the most games Nylander has missed in any season due to health concerns; he sat 28 games in 2018-19 due to a contract dispute.

Nylander took the ice for some tentative solo work Thursday morning but is "doubtful" to participate in the team's Friday practice, per Berube.

Don't bank on Nylander playing Saturday on Long Island.

- The Jets scratching fan favourite Luke Schenn in their lone trip to Toronto is a small shame. (We get it; they're on a back-to-back.)

The rugged right shot is in the final year of his contract and could well be headed to the trade block.

Who knows how many seasons Schenn, who turns 37 in November, has left?

- Team USA announces its Olympic roster Friday morning.

Will Matthew Knies join Matthews on a flight to Milan?

Among U.S.-born skaters, only Winnipeg's Kyle Connor (34) has put up more even-strength points than Knies (32) this season.

"Very anxious to see that (roster)," Matthews said. "He's played great this year, and he's a great young and up-and-coming player. There's going to be guys that get left off that made a good case to be on it.

"But selfishly, I'd love to see him be on the team."

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' depth the difference in wild win over Hurricanes

Eric Engels

RALEIGH, N.C. — Jakub Dobes was running out of air after pumping all his into Arber Xhekaj's tires.

The Montreal Canadiens goaltender referred to Xhekaj as "unbelievable." He facetiously said, "Without him, I would be screwed." And then he mockingly concluded, "He's my favourite guy," just because Xhekaj was chirping at him as he was conducting his post-game interview.

The thing is, without Xhekaj stepping up before the Canadiens got back to the visiting room at Lenovo Center, Dobes wouldn't have been yucking it up at all at the end of the game Thursday. The six-foot-four, 240-pound defenceman brought a hard game to one of the hardest forechecking teams in the league, notching a game high in hits and proving stalwart on a night that forced him to be exactly that for multiple reasons. Xhekaj certainly played a big role in Dobes becoming the first Canadiens goaltender to win in Carolina since April of 2016.

Mike Matheson's absence made it improbable.

"He plays 30 minutes a night," said Dobes, and though he was only slightly exaggerating this time, at least he was being serious.

Missing Matheson, who averages 25:06, required Lane Hutson, Noah Dobson and Alex Carrier to carry the Canadiens against the Hurricanes.

When none of them could, it forced Xhekaj, Adam Engstrom and Jayden Struble to elevate, and that's exactly what they did. They're three players who have been in a rotation with each other to fill out the bottom end of Montreal's defence, but on this night they proved to what extent depth can make the difference in the uber-jammed standings.

It's a 16-car pileup in the Eastern Conference; where a team like the Buffalo Sabres just went from draft lottery pole position to playoff spot with a 10-game winning streak; where last-place Columbus has a .513 points percentage; where momentum swings even more wildly from week-to-week than it did within this 7-5 game between the Canadiens and Hurricanes.

Rod Brind'Amour, who's been coaching the latter for seven years to follow a 21-year playing career, said earlier in the day he's never seen anything like it.

Neither have we in 18 years covering the league and 38 years watching it.

The talent spread is part of it, but it's been spread for awhile now.

The condensed schedule due to the upcoming three-week Olympic break feels like the ultimate equalizer, though. It has crushed every team,



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levelling them with fatigue and injuries and levelling results for the most part.

The Sabres' recent surge is the anomaly, while the top teams — like Montreal and Carolina — have ridden top-tier talent, but really relied on depth to achieve more consistent results.

"You're not going to go through this season with 23 guys," said Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis. "You're probably 30-deep, and that's for every team in the league ... It's the league ... And if you're 30-deep, it's good, because it could be way worse than that."

It is worse for some, no doubt.

Heck, it was way worse than that for a long time for St. Louis' Canadiens throughout this rebuild.

But not anymore.

Oh sure, Montreal's top guys are playing huge. Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield, Juraj Slafkovsky and Hutson all scored against the Hurricanes.

But 16th forward Samuel Blais had a goal and an assist. Alex Texier, who couldn't get into a game with the St. Louis Blues before having his contract ripped up and his NHL career put on life support, had two helpers from a top-line role he'd not be serving in if not for injuries on the Canadiens. And then there was what Xhekaj, Struble and Engstrom brought.

Matheson took the morning skate but ultimately wasn't able to play after still feeling the effects of the forearm shiver he took from Brad Marchand in Florida two nights prior, so Engstrom went from scratch to partnering with Dobson. He played 19 shifts, skated the puck out of harm's way consistently, made great breakout passes, brought some offensive pressure, and finished plus-2 without being on for any of the five goals the Hurricanes scored.

Struble was scratched in Florida and returned in Carolina to play one of his best games of the season, notching one assist and finishing plus-2 through 19:17.

And Xhekaj was plus-1, with six hits ... which was one more hit than Dobson had giveaways.

"I felt good," Xhekaj said. "When your best defender goes down, you have to step up. There's no excuses. You can't be sitting here after the game saying, 'Oh, Mike wasn't playing.' It's 'Mike's not playing and it's time to go, it's time to step up.' Your team needs you to step up and it doesn't matter how young you are, how many games you have."

That's what the league demands now.

The Hurricanes know.

They've put together the best record in the Metropolitan Division without No. 1 defenceman Jaccob Slavin for all but five games this season. Veteran Shayne Gostisbehere watched Thursday's contest alongside Slavin — missing a 12th game since the puck dropped in October — and star forward Seth Jarvis hasn't played since Dec. 19.

The Canadiens, meanwhile, have accumulated 50 points in 40 games — and most of them without key defenceman Kaiden Guhle.

Patrik Laine has been injured since Oct. 16, Kirby Dach and Alex Newhook have been out since mid-November, and Jake Evans has been missing since Dec. 20.

So, if you were wondering why a game at the halfway mark of the season looked more like pre-season shinny than playoff hockey, it probably has more to do with that and the relentless schedule and much less to do with the reason St. Louis provided afterwards.

"It was New Year's Eve last night," he said. "I'm going to blame it on that."

The coach was joking around, laughing heartily as he said it.

Dobes's delivery was far more deadpan when talking about Xhekaj, but he should be seriously thankful for what he got from the big guy — and the other two depth defencemen — in Thursday's game.

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Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing Canada's official roster for the Winter Olympics

Justin Bourne

What I missed was Sam Bennett being left off in favour of Bo Horvat.

But who didn't?

All eight D were the same, there was no massive surprise in goal (unless you consider the inclusion of the steady Darcy Kuemper as one) and, yeah, we got about what we thought we would get with this team.

Which is good! Great, even. Canada's men's Olympic hockey roster is loaded.

One question I'd ask Canadians to consider as we head into the tournament: Let's just say the brass here did a perfect job. And I mean flawless. This is a hypothetical, so let's say there's some world where you could run the simulation of the Olympics with a zillion different versions of the Canadian hockey roster, and this was the version that won the most gold medals. This is the best they could do, let's just say.

Now, how many times do you think that this roster — the hypothetical one — would win gold?

Is it 60 per cent of the time? Fifty per cent? Less?

It sure isn't 100 per cent, is it?

Hockey is a sport with massive amounts of randomness, and the tournament is single-elimination. My point here is that failure to win gold is not necessarily a failure of the process, and from where I sit, the process here was pretty good. They picked a talented team, a well-rounded group, and there aren't really any names that don't make sense.

But because second-guessing our national teams is darn near as popular as playing the games themselves, let's talk about who Team Canada brought, who was left off and what it all means.

No Sam Bennett

I'm just gonna say it directly: this is wild, this is shocking. From a purely logical, analytical standpoint, Bennett is no must-have lock. He doesn't put up huge points or dominate elite opponents night in, night out. He's often a minus player, as he is this season.

But he's also everything we've come to believe Canadian hockey is: a brute, a gamer, clutch. He cares, he competes, he's unafraid.

He elevated his game in a couple big spots at the 4 Nations (tying the gold medal game in the final 10 minutes to go along with his opening fight against the Americans), and followed that up by winning the Conn Smythe Trophy, awarded to the guy who's best over the two-month grind that is Stanley Cup Playoffs. He's won two straight Cups and been to three Cup Finals, to go with that 4 Nations gold.

In this humble writer's opinion, he should be there. And shocking though it is, I still think Bennett is wearing red and white in Milan. There are 14 forwards picked, and the NHL schedule in January is beyond rammed (with most teams playing 15-16 games in 31 days) because of the Olympic break. You can't tell me the team will be 100 per cent healthy. If



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there's so much as a single injury, it's hard to imagine they don't reach out to the Panthers forward.

Bo Horvat gets the nod

My thought on the Horvat selection is he provides a few things Team Canada management really likes. First and foremost, he's on pace for 46 goals, which has a lot of appeal. But more than that, he's incredibly versatile. He can play centre, he can play wing, he can play on the power play, and he can play PK. You don't know what you're going to need as the tournament progresses, and so if you're planning to fill roster holes as you go along, you like to have a guy who can take many different forms to plug a number of different holes. He's duct tape.

There's no doubt he's seen as the 14th guy right now, and so if he's getting in, that means they've got injuries or real failings somewhere, and Horvat can do it all. His speed and shot make him a threat from any role. I think this could've been Seth Jarvis spot were it not for the injury, but the reality is Jarvis is injured, and so Horvat reaps the rewards.

Safety on the back end over offensive skill

I was walking the dog last night thinking about Canada's decision to take Travis Sanheim and Colton Parayko, while leaving off Matthew Schaefer and Evan Bouchard — and if you want to expand this, taking Thomas Harley and leaving Jakob Chychrun — when I asked myself a few questions to try to make sense of the logic here. Because for a moment, I had the thought "I bet over a full season, you'd win more with those skilled names," and it led to these self-inquiries, which I now put to you:

Which team would do better over an 82-game regular season, one with Sanheim and Parayko, or one with Schaefer and Bouchard? Like if you were the GM going into an 82-game season starting today, who would you take?

And yes, I'd bet a lot of money the team with the two offensive dynamos wins more games, all other factors the same. Bouchard is an 80-point D-man, and Schaefer is going to be one, a potential Norris threat in just a couple years. Between the breakouts, the little touches that push the play the right way, they just help their teams have the puck. So, yeah, I'd take the skilled D here.

Which team does better in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, where you only play good teams with max effort and physicality, Sanheim/Parayko or Schaefer/Bouchard?

I know Bouchard has been playoff clutch, but it gets dicier in this scenario for me. Here's Team Canada GM Doug Armstrong describing the decision to take Parayko and Sanheim, who are both huge, long, lanky: "Parayko and Sanheim, we call it going through a carwash. They're all arms and legs. It's hard to get to the net."

I love that analogy. You saw that work out in the 4 Nations, where every zone entry against was met by a swarm of long Canadian reach. I guess the difference for me is the battle level and pressure on the D that comes in the playoffs, versus a Tuesday night in Nashville or whatever.

And, finally, you've got one game to win against the Americans, win and get gold, lose and you go to jail for life. Parayko/Sanheim, or Schaefer/Bouchard?

I'm sorry, I just cannot go to jail for life after I watch Bouchard make some egregious gaffe and head back to the bench without emoting. I just can't.

The point of that exercise for me is that it's real easy to say, "You should always err on the side of skill," but when push comes to shove — and there will be ample shoving — I like the big carwash of men clearing pucks and traffic from the front of the net, while putting the offence in the hands of Canada's insanely elite forwards.

To put a final point on it: As good as Logan Thompson has been for a while now, the Canadian weakness in this event appears to be goaltending. And if you believe that to be true, the last thing you want to

do is trade chances or give up surprise Grade-A chances in big moments. So, keeping it safer on D makes sense here.

Reputation, previous results save Binnington, Harley

I did that whole exercise above and barely mentioned Chychrun, who easily could've been selected as the next man up to play D on Canada's back-end, mostly because I wanted to focus on the greater idea of leaning toward skill over defending.

But Chychrun has been awesome, and without mincing words, Harley has been ... not. He's had a tough year, while Chychrun has a whopping 15 goals already (Harley has 14 ... points).

In terms of offence created this season, here are some of the Canadian defenders we've been discussing here, listed with their points:

2. Evan Bouchard, 37

3. Jakob Chychrun, 30

7. Matthew Schaefer, 25

17. Travis Sanheim, 17

28. Thomas Harley, 14

38. Colton Parayko, 11

(Drew Doughty and Devon Toews are closer to 30th as well.)

So, for Harley with 14 points a year removed from recording 50, how did he maintain his roster spot? And it's here where I agree with the idea that you can't just base these picks on a run of a few months. This is obviously an excellent player who's just been a bit below his standard this year, a guy who they've seen elevate in big moments. He was unfazed at the 4 Nations — arguably one of their best D, actually — he can skate, defend, move the puck ... like Horvat, they just like his versatility.

That's been the case for a lot of guys who were red-hot this year alone: They had to be so good, because they often had to overcome the great past of players who'd made the team before (Bennett notwithstanding, apparently).

So Jordan Binnington has looked every bit the .870 save percentage goalie his stats say he is, but the brass likes his attitude, which has led to great performances in big moments. Mackenzie Blackwood, Scott Wedgewood or any other goalie you could drag out of a Canadian forest, these guys just don't have the extended track records of Binnington, or Kuemper, for that matter. (I also think it hurts the Woods that they're in Colorado, unfair though that may be ... when the team is that good, it's tough to know how much credit to give the goalies.)

No Connor Bedard

In the end, I think the injury to Bedard afforded them the shield of not taking him without making any waves. I don't think they believe he's good enough without the puck, or has played in enough big games to warrant inclusion on this team just yet, as unbelievable as he is offensively. And they think he'll get there on those things, but he's just not there today. With the injury, they can point to that, while allowing him a couple years before he's a top-six guy for them at the next World Cup.

Now! Now, let's just say he comes back from injury and immediately starts filling the net again, and someone like Macklin Celebrini or Mitch Marner goes down, I could definitely see him getting the call. He'd be a winger in an event like this, so those are the guys he's watching for an opening. It isn't over yet for Bedard, but the injury definitely pushed his bid for a roster spot to the outside for now.

Cirelli gets a spot

I compared Anthony Cirelli to a winter jacket on our radio show on Wednesday. You don't want to bring it with you, ever. You'd rather just



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pack T-shirts. But if you go outside and the weather is bad, you're gonna thank god you brought it. There are just times you need it, you need a guy to kill the five-on-three, you need a guy who's on the right side of the puck when you're up two in the third and the Tkachuks are running around out there, you need a guy on the five-on-six to get you through to the final buzzer.

There's no doubt that with the score 2-2 in the second period, he's not going to be the guy getting the tap to go over the boards and push the team ahead. But there's gonna be weather over a two-week tournament, and you want to be prepared. Pack the damn bulky coat, and you'll be glad you've got it when the temperature drops and snow starts to fly.

Conclusion

Canada: Good.

Win or lose, I don't think you can look at the team they've selected and fail to see the thinking, or fault the process in any significant way, even if you disagree at the fringes.

As constructed, they're slight favourites in Milan, and now it's just a matter of getting through the gauntlet of January with as many bodies intact as possible.

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL Power Rankings: A reason for every team to have a happy new year

Ryan Dixon

For the next couple of days, the word "happy" will be ubiquitous as we all ring in the new year with well wishes for family, friends, the person dropping off takeout and the blessed baristas who make mornings possible with their work.

"Happy New Year!" is something we'll all hear and say around town, even if actual joy levels fluctuate.

When it comes to NHL teams, some must definitely work harder than others to find something cheerful to toast. For every Colorado Avalanche squad that could set a new points record, there's a Winnipeg Jets club left dazed from getting knocked off its Presidents' Trophy perch.

Still, hockey — like everything outside the rink — features highs and lows, and it's critical to lean into the good when you get a chance.

With that in mind, as we flip the calendar and ponder what's ahead in 2026, it seems prudent to highlight at least one reason to be happy for all 32 NHL teams.

1. Colorado Avalanche (30-2-7): In addition to all the wins their team is producing, Avs fans could be watching the first 70-goal season since Teemu Selanne and Alexander Mogilny both netted 73 in 1992-93. With 39 games in the books, Nathan MacKinnon is currently on pace for 71 goals.

2. Dallas Stars (25-8-7): Here's to the fourth-longest tenured captain in the NHL still going strong; 17-year vet Jamie Benn is scoring at a 27-goal pace this season after his 2025-26 debut was delayed by a punctured lung.

3. Minnesota Wild (24-10-7): However it all works out, Wild fans must be happy to have a GM in Bill Guerin who has the go-for-it gene. Is "Billie Guts" a great or gross nickname?

4. Tampa Bay Lightning (23-13-3): Cheers to the unexpected delight of seeing Darren Raddysch on pace for 72 points, a mere 35 more than his career high of 37.

5. Carolina Hurricanes (24-12-3): To all that cap space (nearly \$14 million, according to Puckpedia) and the possibility that something big could be done with it before the March 6 trade deadline.

6. Detroit Red Wings (24-14-3): Only five teams in the league have two guys with at least 20 goals and Detroit is one of them thanks to Alex DeBrincat (20) and Dylan Larkin (21).

7. Philadelphia Flyers (20-12-7): Where would the Flyers be without three newcomers in Trevor Zegras, Dan Vladar and Christian Dvorak? Cheers, boys.

8. Montreal Canadiens (21-12-6): Lane Hutson (62nd overall in 2022) is really turning into one of the biggest draft coups of the past 10 years. In terms of scoring by defencemen, his 78 points in 2025 are outstripped only by Cale Makar (91) and Zach Werenski (82).

9. Buffalo Sabres (21-14-4): A 10-game winning streak? Need we say more?! What a way to ring in 2026.

10. Florida Panthers (21-15-3): Remember when the Panthers acquired Brad Marchand at the deadline and we all thought it would be a fun little three-month fling? This guy is leading the team with 23 goals and feels like an essential member of the squad.

11. New York Islanders (22-14-4): Given how quick they were to stick up for him the other night, the Isles clearly understand how happy they should be to have Matthew Schaefer in 2026 and well, well beyond.

12. Edmonton Oilers (20-15-6): Knowing Connor McDavid will be on the Oilers at least into 2028 is enough for Oilers fans to raise a glass.

13. Washington Capitals (21-14-5): Here's to having Jakob Chychrun locked up long-term. The second-year Capital is leading all blueliners with 15 goals this season.

14. Vegas Golden Knights (17-10-11): The Knights wish they could toast to good health, but that's just not been the case with this veteran-packed lineup.

15. Pittsburgh Penguins (17-12-9): A 2026 that involves being in a playoff chase? Pens fans will clank a glass to that.

16. Toronto Maple Leafs (18-15-6): If the past few games are any indication, all is not lost in Toronto. And, given the way the club has looked at times earlier in the season, that's something for Leafs fans to wrap their arms around.

17. Ottawa Senators (18-15-5): Here's to Tim Stutzle and the 17 points he's put up in his past 10 games, a run that's put a second 90-point season in play for the Sens' most talented offensive stick.

18. San Jose Sharks (20-17-3): There's getting lucky with a first-overall pick, and then there's catching a comet like the Sharks did with Macklin Celebrini in 2024. Here's to a dream Shark Tank.

19. Anaheim Ducks (21-16-3): How can you not be happy to know Leo Carlsson is going to be at the top of your lineup for years and years to come?

20. Los Angeles Kings (16-13-9): Cheers to Anze Kopitar, the Slovenian trailblazer who has half a season to go in his spectacular NHL career.

21. New Jersey Devils (21-17-2): Another squad that can only wish to be toasting good health. Instead, the Devils are enduring another season with significant injuries to key players.

22. Columbus Blue Jackets (17-16-6): New toys are always something to get excited about, so cheers to Mason Marchment and the four goals he has in five outings with Columbus.



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23. Seattle Kraken (16-14-7): Here's to the hope that Jake O'Brien — the eighth-overall pick last June — can one day be the offensive dynamo Seattle so desperately needs.

24. Nashville Predators (18-17-4): Raise a glass to Steven Stamkos, who scored his 600th NHL goal Wednesday night in a win over Vegas. And while you're at it, keep your glass elevated and toast the idea Nashville could actually see a playoff game in 2026, which is not something we expected to say quite late in 2025.

25. Calgary Flames (18-18-4): Flames fans can be happy to have a goalie duo of Dustin Wolf and Devin Cooley that is one of 10 in the NHL to produce a team save percentage of .900 or above.

26. Boston Bruins (21-18-2): Cheers to the possibility of having a couple picks in the top half of the first round thanks to pocketing the Leafs' 2026 first-rounder at last year's deadline.

27. Utah Mammoth (18-19-3): It hasn't been all roses in Utah this year, but knowing the team is so supported by ownership and still has plenty of young talent developing in the NHL or arriving shortly should have Mammoth supporters stoked for 2026 and beyond.

28. New York Rangers (19-18-5): Cheers to Adam Fox's return to the lineup on Wednesday and the slim hope he can spark this sagging squad.

29. St. Louis Blues (15-18-8): Maybe it's time to toast some longtime Blues who could be moving on from St. Louis early in the new year, given where the team is at.

30. Vancouver Canucks (16-20-3): Hey, if you're going to trade a captain with major NHL hardware on his shelf, it's always nice to land a return package that offers hope for the future. At least 2026 — unlike '24 and '25 — won't be defined by endless speculation about serious stars moving on from the team.

31. Chicago Blackhawks (14-18-7): It would have been lovely to toast Connor Bedard making Team Canada, but 2030 is a lock. And at least — unlike the Connor in Edmonton — Bedard's early-career blossoming will dovetail with the return of regular best-on-best hockey events. His chances at glory are coming.

32. Winnipeg Jets (15-19-4) Here's to the last possible moment where there can be some flickering hope for this cratering Jets club; Winnipeg can try to save its season early in 2026 when it plays nine of 11 at home from Jan. 6 to Jan. 24. You don't often say this, but the team will need a Sabres-like run to get back in the fight.

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Sportsnet.ca / Boeser, Canucks putting tumultuous 2025 behind them

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — On the first morning of the new year, Brock Boeser went to work early.

It's like he couldn't wait to put 2025 behind him. Who could blame any of the Vancouver Canucks for feeling that way?

Last year started with the trade of J.T. Miller and ended with the trade of Quinn Hughes. It began with the Canucks believing they were Stanley Cup contenders, and ended with them positioned among the draft-lottery favourites.

A year ago, they could still see the summit of their 2024 playoff run and the best National Hockey League season in Vancouver in more than a decade. But Thursday, as Boeser skated out early with teammates Jake DeBrusk and Aatu Raty for some pre-practice skills work at Rogers Arena, the longest-serving Canuck was again in that dark valley of transition in which he has lived for so many of his nine seasons in Vancouver.

So, yes please, out with the old and in with the new — whatever that is.

"That's a pretty good recap," Boeser said of our summary of 2025. "I mean, there's just been so much. Yeah, it's crazy. You look back to two years ago, if you would have said this would happen and then this would happen, you would have never guessed that.

"It's definitely hard. But, you know, I still believe in our team and the guys we have here. I do believe if we can get all our centres healthy, we can string games together like we did on that road trip before the Christmas break. I still believe in our group."

But as Boeser told us this after breaking away from the media herd, Canucks coach Adam Foote had just informed reporters that newly-acquired centre Marco Rossi and play-driving winger Conor Garland would both be out "at least a week" after being injured in Tuesday's 6-3 loss at home against the Philadelphia Flyers.

Garland, whose three brief absences from the lineup earlier this season included at least one head injury, appeared to hit the ice with the back of his helmet when he was clotheslined away from the puck by forechecking flyer Noah Cates in the third period.

"He got slew foot," Foote said. "That kind of a play, I'm surprised all four guys (officials) missed it."

The reason for Rossi's "lower-body injury" was unclear, although the second-line centre was crosschecked hard on the hip or lower back (again without penalty) by Jamie Drysdale, causing a turnover that led to Bobby Brink's two-on-one goal that made it 4-2 Philadelphia at 1:34 of the final period.

Based on Thursday's practice, second-year centre Max Sasson will again be elevated to a top-six role for Friday's home game against the Seattle Kraken. David Kampf and Raty will play behind him, while struggling Elias Pettersson centres the top line. Long-injured centre Filip Chytil practised in a non-contact jersey and is likely still at least two weeks from playing.

Boeser skated with Sasson and winger Evander Kane.

Whoever he plays with, Boeser knows he has to do better.

The 28-year-old is goalless in his last 14 games (with just one assist) and has scored once in the last 21 — one-quarter of an NHL regular season.

After grinding through an undisclosed injury during the Canucks' five-game, pre-Christmas road trip, Boeser said he is feeling better and skating better since the four-day holiday layoff. But he had zero shots on net against the Flyers. With a career shooting percentage of 14 per cent, Boeser has one goal in his last 41 shots (2.4 per cent).

"I've seen some of the analytics and, like, I've had the most chances (on the team) and I just can't score," he told Sportsnet. "When you go through something like that, yeah, it's hard to stay positive."

He said he has been putting more pressure on himself to provide offence since his friend Hughes, the Canucks' leading scorer last season by 26 points, was traded three weeks ago to the Minnesota Wild.

"I think that's maybe played a part in it, putting a lot of pressure on myself," Boeser explained. "I don't think that's helping. I've really been hard on myself, so I'm trying to just take a deep breath and, you know, go practise the little details. Tomorrow's game, I'm going to focus on the little details of the game, not worry about scoring. I feel like in the past few



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games, I was just worried about not scoring. Like, 'you're not scoring, it's just not coming.' I've been thinking too much."

Boeser was able to unclutter his mind a little during the break, which he spent here with family, including his mom, Laurie. He said they made it to Whistler for one night.

"So at least I got one day in the snow," the Minnesotan said.

One thing in which Boeser has clarity is his desire to stay with the Canucks and be part of whatever comes next for the transitioning team. Expecting the Canucks to rebound this season from last year's turmoil, the winger signed a seven-year, \$50-million contract extension after making a U-turn back to Vancouver an hour before free agency opened on July 1.

"Just continue to build something here," he said. "We have so many good young pieces, and I think that's the kind of my mindset right now — to try and help those guys.

"We have a ton of great young hockey players in this room. All of us (experienced) guys have to teach them the way. We have to be good leaders and teach them the right way to play. Like last game, when Philly started taking over, us older guys had to calm everyone down, like, 'We're fine, we're going to be OK.' I think we can do a better job of that as leaders.

"I'm not going to give up on this season. We have tremendous goaltending and a really good D-corps. We all believe if we can string four wins in a row together like we did (before Christmas), and get back to .500 and just keep chipping away, you never know."

Boeser said it's hard to predict what can happen. Just look at 2025.

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TSN.CA / 'I don't want to be a robot': Parekh's play and personality driving Canada at World Juniors

Mark Masters

Team Canada held an optional practice at Ridder Arena in Minneapolis on Thursday. Team Slovakia held a full practice at 3M Arena.

Before taking the ice for his first shift in the New Year's Eve game, Zayne Parekh told his longtime pal Michael Hage that he was going to get a goal.

"He scored 20 seconds later," Hage said with a big smile. "I was losing my mind."

"Me and Hager have been saying dumb stuff all tournament," Parekh said with a grin. "It finally worked."

Parekh also added two assists in Canada's 7-4 win over Finland, which clinched top spot in Group B. The Calgary Flames defenceman is tied for the scoring lead at the World Juniors with eight points.

After producing just one assist in 11 games during an injury-plagued start to the season with the Flames, Parekh hoped to regain his mojo in Minnesota. And that's exactly what's happening.

"It's been so much fun," the 19-year-old from Nobleton, Ont. said. "I wish I could stay here all year and hang out here as long as possible. I'm sad. I'm kind of counting the days down. It's coming to an end. It's been great for me. It's a refresher. I really needed this, and I'm loving every second."

Parekh's play and personality are big reasons why Team Canada went undefeated in the preliminary round.

"He's got so much confidence and swagger," said centre Cole Beaudoin, who also produced three points against Finland. "You see it in his game and even off the ice. I was not around when he called his shot, but I'm sure he did, because it's the type of player he is."

"He's just very loose," said Team Canada captain Porter Martone. "I think that's what makes him him. He's very calm."

"He's pretty laidback even in games," said Hage, who is a Montreal Canadiens prospect. "You'll miss chances and he'll come over and laugh at you, and it kind of lightens up the mood. He keeps everything pretty light. It helps you not get too down on yourself."

Parekh is appreciating the opportunity to be himself on and off the ice in Minnesota. Why is he so comfortable showing his personality with the media? Is it from watching a certain athlete?

"It's more [from] watching NHL guys be robots and not having any personality," Parekh said with a laugh. "I think you need some personality. It's kind of the best way to grow the game. I don't want to come in here and be a robot. When I'm in Calgary, I definitely have a lot of guys that are telling me to give really simple answers, but here I can kind of do what I want."

On the ice, Parekh is getting the green light to be himself as well.

"He has some freedoms," said Team Canada head coach Dale Hunter, who also runs the bench for the London Knights and watched Parekh eclipse the 30-goal mark in back-to-back seasons in the Ontario Hockey League. "We got some rules we put in and some structure, but other than that, he's got to see the opening when it's there, and when it's not there, don't do it. It's up to him."

That approach has allowed Parekh to bounce back quickly from any tough shifts.

"If I have a bad play or I make a mistake, the next shift I'm trying to make an impact again," Parekh said. "I feel like I've been flipping the page pretty easily and it's really helped me."

Parekh credits his long stick and distinctive skating style for turning his shot into a real weapon.

"It goes maybe to my bottom lip now," he said of his stick. "It used to be up to my nose. I cut it down a bit, but not much in the grand scheme of things ... I can leverage the puck so much and it kind of snaps off my stick. I skate pretty straight up, so I can kind of get some snap on it and it comes hot off the blade."

Parekh is tied for third in the tournament with four goals. No other defencemen has more than two.

Parekh's passing ability is also on display at the World Juniors.

"He's played in the NHL," noted Martone, who is a freshman at Michigan State. "He realizes you need to snap it around. He fires it so defencemen don't have a chance to intercept it."

"He's right on the tape," observed Hunter. "It's hard, so he catches guys off guard a lot."

Parekh reminds Hunter of Edmonton Oilers defenceman Evan Bouchard, who he coached in London.

"He sees those long stretch passes that a lot of guys don't see," Hunter added.

"He's got his head up," said Canadian forward Tij Iginla. "That's a huge thing for playmaking. It lets him see a pass, however far it is."



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One of Parekh's laser beam stretch passes led to an Iginla breakaway goal during a second-period power play against Finland.

"I saw Iggy and he was, like, making some silly faces at me and I hit him in stride and he did the rest," Parekh said.

Silly faces?

"Yeah, it looked like he angrily wanted the puck," Parekh explained. "I gave it to him and he delivered."

"I don't know if I would say I was making faces," Iginla responded. "He's got unbelievable vision and that was on display more times than just that one."

Parekh has four assists in four games.

Iginla's goal came 30 years to the day that his father, Jarome Iginla, recorded a hat trick for Canada at the World Juniors en route to a gold medal in Boston. What's it like to carry on the family tradition?

"It's special for sure," the 19-year-old said. "But will only really consider it 'carrying it on' if we win it."

Iginla's parents were in the crowd to witness his goal live on Wednesday.

"It was cool," the Kelowna Rockets sniper said. "Any time that I can play well with them watching, and in an atmosphere like this, and in a big game, it's special."

Is Iginla getting a lot of advice from his Hall-of-Fame father?

"Nothing too crazy," the Utah Mammoth prospect said. "If I'm in a little bit of a slump or something like that, he'll encourage me. It's more after games and looking at what I can work on and encouragement, and things like that. He usually lets me be a little bit more leading up to the game."

Parekh is quick to point out that he was not the only Canadian player to call his shot on Wednesday night.

"Hager, before the power play, told B-Marts that it's coming," Parekh revealed. "And it happened."

Hage, who operates on the flank of the top unit, fed Brady Martin at the net front for a power-play goal in the first period.

"Watching the pre-scout on them, I had an idea that I was just going to have to beat just one stick and he was going to be wide open," Hage said. "It was a good job by him burying it."

"We give them three or four options that could be available," said assistant coach Brad Lauer, who oversees the power play. "And they talk amongst each other."

Canada is seven for 13 on the power play and leads the tournament with a 54 per cent success rate. Seven different Canadian players have scored on the power play.

"We're very predictable right now with each other and when you're predictable and you understand each other, you can make plays with each other and we're starting to do that now," Lauer said.

Canada has scored a power-play goal in every game.

Martin does not have much experience playing in front of the net on the power play, but has made a seamless transition to the role.

"I love it," the Soo Greyhounds forward said. "I mean, I'll stand in front of the net, and I'm not scared of it. I'll just take the eyes away."

Early in training camp, Lauer spent extra time working with Martin on where to accept passes down low.

"It's not an easy position to play," Lauer said. "He's doing well at it. He understands when to get in the goalie's eyes. He understands when to be available down low. He understands when to pop up into the bumper spot. It shows his intelligence."

Martin's hockey IQ is not in question. His decision-making when it comes to his diet, however, is a hot topic around Team Canada.

Before the tournament, Martin revealed he usually eats two chocolate-glazed donuts from Tim Hortons before games. However, that routine has been scrapped in Minnesota, where the coffee chain does not have any locations.

"Haven't had any in a while," Martin said. "It's been tough to get them. We're not in Canada right now."

How's he filling the void?

"I usually get some Chick-fil-A," the Nashville Predators' fifth overall pick said.

Hage looks like a man on a mission at the World Juniors.

"I just think he wants to be the guy," said Parekh. "He loves the spotlight. He embraces it ... He's been our best player probably."

Hage assisted on both of Martin's goals against Finland.

"He always makes the right play," Martin said. "If you get open, he'll find you. Just his hands and his IQ take him a long way."

Hage is tied for the tournament scoring lead with eight points, including two goals. Is he extra motivated after being left off last year's World Junior team?

"It's more me wanting to win so bad," Hage said. "I think everyone just elevates the level they're playing at, and that's what I feel like I'm doing."

"It's in his nature to begin with," Hunter said. "Whenever he's playing, he's driven."

With 28 points in 20 games with the University of Michigan, Hage is among the top scorers in the NCAA during his sophomore season.

"Ever since my first year of juniors when I got hurt, I just wanted to prove a lot of people wrong and show that I could get better and better every single year," the 19-year-old from Mississauga, Ont. said. "So that's really it."

Hage missed most of the 2022-23 season after sustaining a torn labrum during his first USHL practice with the Chicago Steel.

Martone picked up one assist on Wednesday night and finished minus-two.

"We were alright," he said of his line, which includes Michael Misa and Iginla. "I think a big thing in this tournament is you need all four lines to be successful, and we contributed in our own way last night."

Martone made his presence felt with physical play and did his best to agitate the Finns. During one post-whistle scum, Martone grabbed the glove off the hand of Arttu Valila while falling to the ice. Martone skated away with the glove and dropped it in the bench.

"Just playing my game," he said with a smile. "As the games get tougher, I've got to play on that edge and not cross that line. That's who I am, and that's how I play."



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It's that type of play that has earned the Philadelphia Flyers sixth overall pick comparisons to some of the top shift disturbers in the NHL.

"I've been compared to Corey Perry and the Tkachuk brothers," Martone noted. "I like to play on that line and be a hard player to play against."

Canada's top line has been quiet for most of the World Juniors.

"A big thing we've talked about in meetings is that at the end of the tournament there's not going to be a photo of one person up on the wall," Martone said. "It's a team photo when you win a gold medal. At the end of the day, points don't matter with this group. We're a very unselfish group, and we're all fighting with each other to win a gold medal."

Still, it's hard not to feel the pressure to produce, especially for a guy like Misa, who has been playing in the NHL for the San Jose Sharks.

"Obviously, I'd like to help the team out a little bit more myself, but we're finding ways to win," the second overall pick in June's NHL draft said. "Different people are stepping up."

Misa produced a goal and two assists in a blowout win over Denmark, but mustered just one assist in the other three group-stage games. The 18-year-old centre did not hit the scoresheet against Finland.

As he looks to get in a groove offensively at the World Juniors, Misa is keeping words of wisdom from Sharks teammate Macklin Celebrini in mind.

"Just to be myself and not worry about anything else," Misa said of the advice. "He said, 'Just trust the process, and it'll all be good.'"

Misa reached out to Celebrini after the 19-year-old was named to Canada's Olympic team.

"I texted him yesterday and wished him congrats," Misa said. "He was asking me how the tournament is going and stuff."

Carter George allowed four goals on 18 shots on Wednesday night as his save percentage cratered to .844 in the tournament.

"For me, the only stat is wins," said the Owen Sound Attack goalie, who is 3-0-0.

George's save percentage is the lowest among goalies who have played at least 40 per cent of the minutes for their team in Minnesota.

Hunter was asked if he's still confident with George in the quarterfinals.

"Oh yeah," he said before quickly adding that he prefers not to confirm his goaltending plan until game day.

Backup goalie Jack Ivankovic, who is 16-4-0 with a .927 save percentage at Michigan this season, picked up a win against Latvia (.963 save percentage) in his only appearance so far in Minneapolis.

George's numbers are not great in the OHL this season as he has an .899 save percentage in 22 games. But the 19-year-old from Thunder Bay, Ont., previously led Canada to a gold medal at the under-18 World Championship and is considered a clutch performer by Hockey Canada's staff.

"Had a great third period," said assistant coach Gardiner MacDougall. "You want to play your [best] when the game is on the line, and he had to make big saves in the third for us."

"G-Mac always says the most important one is the next one," George noted. "I just lived by that."

George stopped all six shots he faced in the third period on Wednesday.

"It doesn't really matter if he's let in one, zero, three, he's pretty unflappable," said goalie coach Dan De Palma. "You know you can count on him to not to lose his way in the middle of a game. The third period last night is a good example. He shuts the door."

And George's numbers wouldn't look quite so bad if Finland's third goal by Lasse Boelius had been disallowed. Joona Saarelainen swatted George's glove with his stick as he tried to make the save.

The officials ruled that George's glove was outside the crease.

"They know the rule better than me," said De Palma. "For me, the spirit of goalie interference is: Did you interfere with the goalie and prevent him from making a save? I thought that happened."

Canada will be playing Slovakia in a do-or-die quarterfinal on Friday night. It's the first game between the countries at the World Juniors since a dramatic 4-3 overtime win by Canada in the quarterfinal of the 2023 World Juniors in Halifax.

"It was really sad," said forward Adam Nemeč, whose older brother captained Slovakia in Halifax. "Slovakia is a small country, and we know how big the win will be if they win. It gives us big inspiration that we can win against big countries like Canada."

Did Simon Nemeč, who plays for the New Jersey Devils, tell Adam anything about that game?

"Not really. It was too sad."

What was it like for the brothers growing up?

"He's older, so he put me in the net," Adam, 18, recalled. "I was the goaltender when I was young."

The younger Nemeč couldn't wait to escape the crease. Unlike his brother, Adam is a forward.

"I like to score goals," he explained.

The 2023 game between Canada and Slovakia ended when Connor Bedard deked around all three Slovaks on the ice, including Nemeč, and beat goalie Adam Gajan.

"It was probably one of the best games I've ever seen," said Slovak goalie Michal Pradel. "My friend Adam Gajan was playing. Just a crazy experience."

Pradel has leaned on Gajan, who just led the U.S. Collegiate Selects to the final of the Spengler Cup, for advice during the World Juniors.

"He was telling me, 'Just enjoy the game. Focus on the moment,'" the Detroit Red Wings prospect said.

Pradel, who plays for the Tri-City Storm in the UHL, planned to check in with Gajan again prior to the quarterfinals.

Pradel has an .894 save percentage in three games at the World Juniors.

"I like watching tall, big goalies like [Connor] Hellebuyck and [Jake] Oettinger," said Pradel, who stands 6-foot-5. "Those are my role models."

With five goals and three assists, Slovak forward Tomas Chrenko is tied with Hage, Parekh and Gavin McKenna for the tournament scoring lead.

"He's absolutely brilliant," said Nemeč, who also plays with Chrenko on Nitra MHC in the Slovak league. "I tell him to keep shooting. We have chemistry at the club and here too. It's good."

How does the draft-eligible Chrenko describe his style?



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"Smooth style," he said.

His favourite players are Nathan MacKinnon and William Nylander. Why?

"MacKinnon is unbelievable," Chrenko said. "And Nylander is smooth."

What will it take to beat Canada?

"It will take 100 per cent and more," said Slovak coach Peter Fruhauf.

"We have to go way out of the comfort zone."

Canada has 16 wins and one tie in 17 all-time meetings with Slovakia at the World Juniors.

"We're facing a great team with a huge talent," said Fruhauf. "It's going to be hard, but on the way here we became a family. Boys would die for each other and it's a huge thing. It's not ordinary. So, let's use this. I wish success to the boys. The goal of success is not the quarterfinal game. It's semifinal and maybe more."

Team Canada lines in Wednesday's game:

Iginla - Misa - Martone

McKenna - Hage - Martin

Desnoyers - Beaudoin - O'Reilly

Luchanko - Reschny - Cootes

Bear

Reid - Parekh

MacKenzie - Brunicke

Aitcheson - Danford

Verhoeff

George starts

Ivankovic

Scratches: Greentree, Carels, Ravensbergen

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