



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 12, 2026

The News & Observer

Jacob Slavin returns for Hurricanes, writes storybook ending in win over Kraken

By: Justin Pelletier

RALEIGH

Jacob Slavin is staunch in his faith, stout on the ice, and soft spoken about his talent, but there was no mistaking his body language when he finally got to share that he'd been given a green light to return to game action.

"Yeah, we're good to go, ready to be back out there," Slavin said with a smile Saturday morning.

And good to go, he was. Slavin didn't start, but was first over the boards. He didn't play long on his first shift — fewer than 30 seconds — but he was there.

And he made an impact.

With just over six minutes to play in regulation, Slavin pinched hard from the left point and drove the net. Jordan Staal fed the streaking defender and, with William Carrier running interference in front of goalie Joey Daccord — legally — Slavin slammed the puck toward the net, off Carrier and past the keeper, lifting the Hurricanes to a 3-2 win over the Seattle Kraken at Lenovo Center on Saturday.

You couldn't have scripted it any better. The assist was his first of the season, and is the 300th point of his NHL career.

Jordan Martinook also scored for the Hurricanes — a tying goal earlier in the third period— and Logan Stankoven started the Canes' scoring in the first.

Brandon Bussi stopped 10 shots in earning the victory.

Carolina Hurricanes fans react after a goal by Shayne Gostisbehere (4) in the first period against the Dallas Stars on Tuesday, January 6, 2026 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

After his initial short shift, Slavin played 10 more in the first period — most on the team. Normally among the team leaders in total ice time, Slavin eased his way back to action Saturday, skating 18:52 — fourth among the team's six defenders.

More importantly, though, after he misplayed Matty Beniers on the Kraken's first goal, Slavin was back to his normal, lockdown self, including eating minutes on the Canes' lone penalty kill.

Having Slavin back in the lineup was a sight for sore eyes, both for the team and its followers. Slavin was the first of the Canes' opening-night roster to miss significant time due to injury, and he was the last to return, having missed 39 games over two separate stints on the injured list, first with a lower-body concern and most recently an upper-body injury.

"It's been a tough year that way," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Saturday morning, before adding: "I don't

want to jinx it, but it's nice to finally get him back ... and then see how the team looks."

As it turned out, it looked pretty good.

Kids and the Hall

With a healthy lineup comes difficult roster decisions for the Canes, and as players have been in and out with various ailments — and as healthy scratches — Brind'Amour has had to try different combinations of skaters to see what might stick, like throwing cooked spaghetti at a wall to see if it's ready.

One combination that seems to have clicked of late is putting youngsters Jackson Blake and Stankoven with veteran Taylor Hall.

Carolina Hurricanes center Logan Stankoven (22) reacts after scoring on Dallas goalie Jake Oettinger (29) in the first period to take a 3-1 lead on Tuesday, January 6, 2026 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Blake and Stankoven are similar players — small in stature but swift, tough as nails and heady. A bigger but equally speedy Hall has meshed well alongside them.

In Thursday's win over Anaheim, each of the three players had a goal and an assist, and the line was a collective plus-9. In the previous game, a 6-3 Canes win over Dallas, Stankoven had a goal and the line was a plus-3, and in the game before that, a 3-1 victory over the Devils, the trio combined for two goals and an assist and was again a collective plus-3.

"(Hall) still has a lot of speed and he's certainly offensively gifted, he always has been," Brind'Amour said Saturday morning. "He thinks the game at a high level. And you stick him with (Blake and Stankoven), who have that same kind of quality but also have a kind of grind, hunt-the-puck mentality, and it's been good so far. Hopefully it keeps going."

Saturday night against Seattle, Stankoven continued his hot streak, netting his fourth goal in as many games to put the Canes on the board in the first period.

Steady as he goes

Jalen Chatfield is typically easy to spot at Lenovo Center. About two hours before each home game, the Canes defender walks out onto the clean, dry ice in front of the home bench with his stick and a puck — in sandals or sneakers — his hoodie pulled over his head, and stickhandles quickly for about five minutes.

Two hours later, his long, black hair flowing freely from under his helmet as he streaks up and down the ice, Chatfield forces you notice him with his speed, and the fact that he always seems to be around the puck when it matters.



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Where you don't normally see him — his name, anyway — is in the "goals" column of the scoresheet. Last season, Chatfield scored just seven times. This year? He's got one, and he scored it in Thursday's win over Anaheim.

But, Brind'Amour said, trying to measure Chatfield's contributions on a stat sheet is next to impossible.

"Take that away, that goal, and really he was all over it on the other side of things," Brind'Amour said Saturday. "You look at all the plays he was breaking up, killing plays in the neutral zone and just being aggressive that way, and helping us transition the pucks and play on offense. That's what he does, and he does it at a really high level."

Saturday, Chatfield ate a lot of minutes, blocked a few shots and was a plus-1.

In this screen grab from a video interview, Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Jaccob Slavin answers questions at his locker after morning skate at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C., on Saturday, Jan. 10, 2026. Slavin is making his return to the lineup after two separate, lengthy injury absences this season.

'Definitely an honor'

In addition to returning to the ice Saturday, Slavin also spoke Saturday for the first time in a public setting about his inclusion on Team USA for the 2026 Olympics.

After drawing immense praise for his play for the United States during the NHL's Four Nations Face-Off in 2025, Slavin was considered a lock for the Olympic roster before injuries struck. Still, despite playing just five games this NHL season, Slavin was among those announced to the team just after Christmas.

"It's going to be awesome," Slavin said Saturday. "It's definitely an honor to put on that jersey, any chance you get."

Slavin said Saturday he plans to bring his whole family to Italy, including his parents and siblings.

"It's something that's exciting, it's something my family is excited about, so it's going to be a super fun experience," Slavin said.



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The Athletic

NHL weekend rankings: The Senators and other tales of Eastern Conference misery

By: Sean McIndoe

Last week, I committed a grave violation of the Eastern sportswriter protocol by talking about the Pacific Division. Specifically, how comically bad it was.

Apparently, some Eastern Conference teams were jealous. And like a toddler who hasn't quite grasped the distinction between good attention and bad attention, they responded by making a nasty mess all over the floor. Is that chocolate? I really hope that's chocolate.

OK, fair's fair. Let's talk about a few of the utter disasters unfolding.

Bonus five: Eastern Conference misery

5. Florida Panthers – The good news is Matthew Tkachuk is almost back, and we all kind of agreed not to worry too much about their record until he returned. But that was when we assumed their record would still have them in a playoff spot. They've lost four of six, including a pair to the Montreal Canadiens and a rough one against the Toronto Maple Leafs, and they woke up this morning in seventh in the Atlantic. If it's not panic time yet, we're getting awfully close.

4. Columbus Blue Jackets – They won a game last night, their first in over a week. By Eastern Conference standards, that makes them "red-hot."

3. New York Rangers – It's over. That's Vincent's reaction to their recent spiral, and he's right. They've lost six of seven, and on Saturday they got absolutely lit up by a Boston Bruins team that isn't exactly a powerhouse. The question is how many of these veterans Chris Drury can actually move. Artemi Panarin could be a good starting point, but there shouldn't be any untouchables at MSG these days.

2. Ottawa Senators – They had a weird week. You may have heard about it. You know what, they probably need their own section down below, let's punt them down to the bottom five.

1. New Jersey Devils – Yikes. They've lost four straight, including a 9-0 embarrassment against the New York Islanders. The lost to the Winnipeg Jets last yesterday, and nobody loses to the Jets. Now they get to travel and then play in Minnesota tonight. Hey, does anyone cool play for Minnesota? Anyone they traded for recently, thanks to properly managing their cap space for just such an opportunity?

Speaking of trades, the latest news in New Jersey is some breaking drama with Dougie Hamilton, who was healthy-scratched over the weekend and now sounds like he wants out. He has a no-trade clause, and maybe more importantly, has two years left on a deal with a \$9 million cap hit, so this one may be tricky. But between this and the Luke Hughes

booing and a GM on the hot seat and an offense that's scored less than two goals in six of their last ten, and it all adds up to a season slipping away.

On to the rankings...

Road to the Cup

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

Sure, why not.

Speaking of the Wings, tonight is Sergei Fedorov's jersey retirement. If you're going to the game, be sure to avoid this article because it gives away the winning goal-scorer.

5. Carolina Hurricanes (28-14-3, +18 true goals differential*) – The Jesperi Kotkaniemi trade watch has apparently begun. It's not often you get a chance to add a forward with two goals and four years left on his contract, so here's hoping NHL GMs can form an orderly line and patiently wait their turn to make their offers.

4. Minnesota Wild (26-11-9, +21) – They get the Devils and Jets next, which should be easy wins, but then have to play the red-hot Sabres and Leafs. Imagine reading that sentence in November. This league makes no sense.

3. Dallas Stars (26-10-9, +28) – They snapped the losing streak with an impressive showing in Washington, then went out and lost to the San Jose Sharks. They still hold a slight edge on the Wild for home ice in that inevitable first-round matchup, but at some point you'd like to see them warm up again.

NHL Top NHL Stories

2. Tampa Bay Lightning (27-13-3, +39) – They've pretty clearly emerged as the class of the Atlantic. Sure, the Red Wings are technically ahead by one point, but that's thanks to three games in hand. Meanwhile, Tampa has nine straight wins and has scored four or more in every one of them (including putting up a converted touchdown in two of their last three). The Jon Cooper lifetime achievement award Jack Adams is finally going to happen, folks.

Also: Here's Pierre with Julien BriseBois.

1. Colorado Avalanche (33-4-7, +83) – They responded to their first regulation losing streak of the year by winning back-to-back games by a combined score of 12-2. Tonight, they get a fun one with the suddenly decent again Maple Leafs.

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



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Not ranked: New York Islanders – Over the course of a week and a bit, they beat the Leafs and the Wild, two of the league's better teams over the last month. They destroyed the Devils. And then, because this is the NHL, they also lost to the Predators. Whew, things almost made sense there for a second, glad we nipped that in the bud.

They've got five games left on a season-high seven-game road trip, with the Jets up next tomorrow night. They're comfortably in a playoff position, and are just four points back of the Hurricanes for top spot in the Metro. And Ilya Sorokin is starting to generate some awards buzz — not just for the Vezina, but maybe even as an MVP candidate.

But my main reason for mentioning the Islanders here was to flag a list that Mirtle put together in the most recent newsletter: Olympic representation per team. The Lightning have 10 players on Olympic rosters, which is the most in the league, one ahead of the Panthers. Three more teams are tied for third with eight players each, and one of them is a surprise; you'd expect the Avalanche and Wild, but maybe not the Devils.

And the Islanders? Despite being one of the league's better stories, they've got only one player headed to Milan. That would be Bo Horvat, who surprised a few of us by making Team Canada. That ties the Islanders with the Blackhawks for the league low. You could take that as a sign of disrespect, I suppose. Or you could think ahead to the post-break scramble, where the Islanders will be one of the best-rested teams in the playoff race. Come to think of it, maybe you'd rather do both.

Either way, let's enjoy Simon Holmström casually beating one of the best teams in the league.

The bottom five

The five teams headed toward dead last and the best lottery odds for the top pick in this year's draft.

This was weird.

If you're wondering, here's what was going on.

5. Winnipeg Jets (17-22-5, -8) – Two straight wins. As the kids like to say, we are so back. Chat. Sigma. Unc? I don't know what any of this means and I'm embarrassing myself.

4. Anaheim Ducks (21-21-3, -22) – It was fun while it lasted. But with nine straight losses and counting, the Ducks become our 14th team to make a bottom five appearance.

3. St. Louis Blues (17-21-8, -45) – Philip Broberg has a brand-new extension, which he celebrated by recording an assist against the Knights and then leaving after a questionable hit from Mark Stone. It's safe to say Brayden Schenn didn't like it.

2. Calgary Flames (19-22-4, -19) – They still can't score, but they didn't really need to to beat the Penguins and snap a four-game losing streak. Also, if the Leafs give up Easton Cowan in a trade for Rasmus Andersson, I will have a full-fledged temper tantrum. Conduct yourselves accordingly.

1. Vancouver Canucks (16-23-5, -40) – With six straight losses and Thatcher Demko hurt again, the tank is well and truly rolling. The question is whether you can trust them to pull it off.

Not ranked: Ottawa Senators – Well, that was certainly a week.

It wasn't the worst stretch in franchise history, or even the most ridiculous, because that bar has been set high. Higher than just about any team in history, actually. So no, we don't have to get silly when it comes to placing the last week in some sort of broader context. It wasn't the absolute worst. It wasn't the end of the world.

But man, it sure wasn't good.

Let's get you caught up. This time a week ago, the Senators were coming off wins over the Capitals and Jets, last year's two best regular-season teams. It was the latest up in a decidedly up-and-down season, one that's seen them hang around the playoff race without ever really taking control of a spot. That was hardly disastrous, but for a young team coming off a 97-point season and expecting to take the next step, it would be fair to at least call their first half a mild disappointment.

A big part of that first-half story had been the goaltending, or lack thereof. Linus Ullmark was struggling, which is bad news when a guy is in the first year of an extension with an \$8 million cap hit. Backup Leevi Merilainen had been even worse. Then Ullmark took a personal leave from the team at the end of December.

That leave was apparently enough for the online rumor mill to start churning, with speculation apparently reaching a point where GM Steve Staios felt the need to step in. You've seen the statement by now, and it's a doozy. You basically never see a formal statement like this from an NHL team under these circumstances, but the organization apparently felt that staying quiet wasn't an option. For what it's worth, the players seemed to appreciate it.

But while the statement is getting a lot of attention, the far bigger story in Ottawa is the team's diminishing playoff odds. They lost four straight this week, all in regulation, including an embarrassing blowout in Colorado the day the statement went out. That loss dropped the Sens to dead last in the Atlantic, and while they're still very much in the playoff race, they now feel like a long shot.

And while it's tempting to blame it all on fake locker room drama, the problems in Ottawa seem simpler: It's the goaltending. Julian nails it – the position has been an issue all season, and it should have been dealt with. The Senators signed James Reimer this week, a veteran who split last year between the Ducks and Sabres and hasn't played since. Maybe he can stop some of the bleeding. But unless he turns into this year's Hamburglar, the Senators are going to need Ullmark back and playing like an \$8 million goalie. If that doesn't happen, a playoff miss is looming.

Meanwhile, an exhausted fan base watches on. Staios had already raised a few eyebrows a week ago when he told reporters, "We'll contend when we're ready to contend," an odd turn of phrase from a team that was supposed to already be there. Now Senators fans aren't just watching their team fall out of the race — they're doing it while their team gets the sort of sideshow treatment that was supposed to be in the past. Oh, and in case you forgot, they don't even have their own first-round pick this year, having lost it as part of the whole Evgenii Dadonov fiasco a few years ago.



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That's all the bad news, and it's a decent list. The good news is that, through all of the recent mess, the Senators are still in the Eastern Conference, where nobody is ever out of the race. The schedule serves up the Canucks and Rangers this week, and trips to Columbus and Nashville the week after, so there are plenty of points on the table. The end of the month brings a nasty stretch of Carolina, Vegas and Colorado, but that's two weeks away. In the East, that's at least a couple of lifetimes.

For now, we can cut away the soap-opera noise and focus on the reality in Ottawa: A good young team that was supposed to take the next step forward and now could be falling back instead, in large part due to a crucial flaw that hasn't been addressed. That's bad enough, without any made-up sideshows to go along with it.



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Preview: January 12 at Detroit

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

DETROIT - The top team in the Metropolitan Division takes on the top team in the Atlantic Division on Monday, as the Carolina Hurricanes and Detroit Red Wings go head-to-head at Little Caesars Arena.

When: Monday, January 12

Puck Drop: 7:00 p.m. ET

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

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes App

Canes Record: 28-14-3 (59 Points, 1st - Metropolitan Division)

Canes Last Game: 3-2 Win over the Seattle Kraken on January 10

Red Wings Record: 27-15-4 (58 Points, 1st - Atlantic Division)

Red Wings Last Game: 4-0 Win over the Montreal Canadiens on January 10

Last Time Out...

The Canes "stuck with it" and scored twice in the final 9:23 to come from behind and beat the Kraken on Saturday, 3-2.

Logan Stankoven scored for a fourth consecutive game, Jordan Martinook earned the equalizer, and Jaccob Slavin, in his return to the lineup, set up Will Carrier for the late game-winner.

Brandon Bussi stopped 10 out of 12, improving to 16-2-1 in his first 19 NHL appearances.

Defense Wins Championships...

Carolina held Seattle to just 12 shots on Saturday, limiting them to just four shots in all three frames. 12 is tied for the fewest registered by any team in the NHL this season.

What makes that even more impressive is that the shutdown outing came just two days after they held the Anaheim Ducks to 13 shots over 60 minutes. The 25 shots

combined over a two-game span are the fewest in franchise history.

The New Jersey Devils are the only other team in the NHL over the past 20 years to allow 25 or fewer shots over the span of two games.

Rod Brind'Amour's group has now held opponents to 20 shots or fewer 12 times in 45 games this season. As they have over the last four seasons, the Canes allow the fewest shots on goal per game of all NHL teams, now giving up an average of just 24.3 per night.

In Net...

With two days since their last game, the Canes have the option to go with either Brandon Bussi or Frederik Andersen tonight. The team will need both over the next 48 hours, as whoever does not play tonight will likely play tomorrow in St. Louis.

Bussi picked up yet another win on Saturday, moving to 16-2-1. It was a light workload, though, facing just 12 shots, making it entirely possible that the team goes back to him for this contest.

Andersen got back in the win column on Thursday night against Anaheim, snapping a nine-game skid. He also had a light night, turning away just 11.

On The Other Side...

Back atop the Atlantic Division, the Wings have won three in a row and are 7-2-1 in their last 10 games.

Goaltender John Gibson was perfect on Saturday night against Montreal, saving all 27 shots faced for his third shutout of the season. 12-2 in his last 14 appearances, it's been a career resurgence of sorts for the 32-year-old, who has clearly taken the reins in net.

Up front, 23-year-old Lucas Raymond continues pacing the group with 48 points in 44 games.

Injury Updates...

Forward Noah Philp entered concussion protocol on Jan. 6. He has missed the team's last two games.

Goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov is set to undergo hip surgery and was declared "probably out for the year" by Rod Brind'Amour on Dec. 29.



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Defenseman Charles Alexis Legault suffered a cut to his hand via a skate blade on Nov. 9 and underwent surgery to repair lacerated tendons on Nov. 10. He is expected to miss three to four months.

What Are We Wearing?

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

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes will fly to St. Louis post-game, where they'll wrap up the back-to-back on Tuesday night.

Recap: Canes 'Stick With It' To Top Kraken

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

RALEIGH, N.C. - Highlighted by a late charge to erase a third-period deficit, the Carolina Hurricanes put together a balanced effort to knock off the Seattle Kraken 3-2 at Lenovo Center on Saturday.

Starting on the front foot, Carolina captured the game's first lead at 3:23 through Logan Stankoven's 10th of the season and fourth in the last four games. The Hurricanes' early dominance kept the Kraken without a shot for the first 13:38, but the second puck put on net by the visitors found twine, with a bit of individual brilliance from Matty Beniers leveling the score before intermission.

It took until 5:56 of the third period to see the red light come on again, as Berkly Catton gave Seattle its first lead of the night on its 10th shot of the game. But as the final frame rounded the halfway mark, the Hurricanes climbed back to equal terms, then took a lead they would not relinquish, with two tucks in a span of 3:13.

Jordan Staal was integral on both plays, first setting up Jordan Martinook in the crease for a slam dunk equalizer, then working a give-and-go with Jaccob Slavin to tee up the Olympian for a shot that deflected off William Carrier and in for the game-winner.

Brandon Bussi faced a lighter workload than usual, but his 10 saves on 12 shots fueled his 16th win in 19 starts.

SEA at CAR | Recap

Stats & Standouts

Forward Logan Stankoven scored for a career-best fourth straight game and extended his overall point streak to a career-best five games (4G, 2A).

Defenseman K'Andre Miller registered an assist to extend his point streak to a season-high-tying three games (2G, 3A). The blueliner has now tallied seven points in his last six games.

Forward Jordan Staal recorded a game-high two assists for his third multi-point game of the season. Both assists came in the final frame, marking the 39th multi-point period of his career and passing Sylvain Turgeon for the 11th-most in franchise history.

Defenseman Jaccob Slavin returned to action for the first time since Dec. 19 and recorded his 300th career point with an assist on the game-winning goal.

With Slavin's helper, every skater who has appeared in multiple games for the Hurricanes this season has posted at least one point.

The Hurricanes have now won four (or more) consecutive contests for the fourth time this season, matching Dallas for the most such streaks by an NHL club this season.

They Said It...

Jordan Staal on the victory...

"I thought it was a good game all around. We were pretty steady with our pressure. We had some good opportunities. Being down 2-1, I was happy to see the guys sticking with it. It might not always play out that way, but tonight was a great example of how we just have to stay with our game plan and believe in it..."

Jordan Martinook talking about the team "sticking with it," even when trailing in the third period...

"We pre-scouted them this morning, and the message was that the game was going to be just like it was. Everybody on our bench was just [saying], 'Stick with it, stick with it.' We were getting our chances. Their goalie played well, and it was just sticking with what makes us successful. Obviously, we did, and we came out on top."

Jordan Martinook discussing getting Jaccob Slavin back in the lineup...

"Slavo is kind of the general back there and has been forever. You don't know how many simple, good plays he makes when he's out there. You're like, 'Oh, if he was out there, that wouldn't be in our zone.' Some of the things he does are just pretty special..."

Jaccob Slavin, following his first game back, having a little fun at his own expense...

"It felt good. It felt good. Maybe a little rusty with some one-on-ones, those might need some work; I haven't had a lot of those lately. But no, it's good to be back out there."

Jordan Martinook discussing Logan Stankoven's four-game goal streak...

"We knew he was struggling with his confidence. It's nice to see him get his swagger back. He's shooting the puck like we all know he can, and that line's been phenomenal since they got put together."

Jordan Staal continuing on the team's four-game run...

"It's been a little up and down, obviously, as of late. Right now, it's a little more steady, and you can tell. The guys bought in a little better, and like I said, I'm happy about just kind of sticking to our game and being content to not give them chances. [We're] staying with grinding them down and checking for our chances."

What's Next After This Game?



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The Canes will stay off the ice on Sunday and fly to Detroit. They'll start a rare road back-to-back in the Motor City on Monday, first taking on the Red Wings before heading to St. Louis.

Next Game: Monday, January 12 @ Detroit | 7:00 p.m. ET
| FDSNSO

Next Home Game: Friday, January 16 vs. Florida | 7:00
p.m. ET | FDSNSO | Tickets | Parking



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Hurricanes rally in 3rd period, defeat Kraken for 4th straight win

By: Kurt Dusterberg

RALEIGH, N.C. -- William Carrier was credited with the tiebreaking goal in the third period, and the Carolina Hurricanes rallied to defeat the Seattle Kraken 3-2 at Lenovo Center on Saturday.

The game-winner deflected off of Carrier in the crease after Jaccob Slavin drove to the net on a give-and-go with Jordan Staal and chipped the puck on goal, making it 3-2 at 13:50. Slavin got his 300th NHL point on the goal in his return from missing 10 games with an upper-body injury.

"I try to be smart about it," Slavin said. "My job is to be a defenseman, but when the opportunity presents itself, I like to get up there. I just saw I'm the next open guy, and I figured I would keep going to the net, and Jordan gave it back to me. Obviously a big netfront presence by 'Cares' too."

Logan Stankoven and Jordan Martinook scored, and Staal had two assists for the Hurricanes (28-14-3), who have won four in a row. Brandon Bussi made 10 saves.

"We knew coming in how this game was going to go, just based on how they've been playing," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "You weren't going to get an odd-man rush because they were staying above it. We knew that was how we were going to have to score our goals."

Matty Beniers and Berkly Catton scored for the Kraken (20-15-8), whose 10-game point streak ended (8-0-2). Joey Daccord made 31 saves.

"It was a hard-fought game," Seattle coach Lane Lambert said. "They're very good at squelching opportunities. I thought when we did have some chances, we failed on them, whether it be [that we] got them blocked or missed the net. There were enough for us. We thought our goalie played well."

Stankoven gave the Hurricanes a 1-0 lead at 3:23 of the first period. K'Andre Miller intercepted a Vince Dunn clearing attempt inside the blue line and passed to Stankoven, who beat Daccord past the blocker from the left hash marks.

Stankoven has a goal in each of the past four games and 10 for the season. The forward had scored one goal in the previous 26 before the streak.

"We knew he was struggling with his confidence," Martinook said. "Just to see him get his swagger back, he's shooting the puck like we all know he can."

Beniers tied it 1-1 on a breakaway at 14:13. He stick-handled around Slavin in the neutral zone and scored through the five-hole.

Catton put the Kraken ahead 2-1 at 5:56 of the third period. Ryan Winterton intercepted a clearing attempt by Bussi and quickly passed to Catton, who scored on a snap shot from between the circles.

"I thought the guys were battling," Seattle forward Jaden Schwartz said. "It was right there, up one (goal) pretty late in the third. I thought we did a good job checking, staying within our system and trying to keep them to the outside as much as we can."

Carolina tied it 2-2 at 10:37. Staal passed from behind the net to Martinook alone in front, where he scored inside the right post.

"I don't see myself as a playmaker," Staal said. "I see myself as a strong defensive [player], try to chip in offensively when I can, whether it's dishing or shooting or going to the net hard and it going off my leg. I'm just trying to help win games. Tonight was a couple nice passes to help us win."

Staal has three assists in the past two games.

"He's a complete player. He's not flashy, but look at the results," Brind'Amour said. "He's always around it. He creates a lot. He makes people around him better. That's what all the elite players do."

NOTES: Beniers has five points (three goals, two assists) in a four-game point streak. ... Schwartz had one shot on goal and played 18:14 in his return after missing 19 games with a lower-body injury. ... Slavin has 55 goals and 245 assists in 751 NHL games. ... Miller has five points (two goals, three assists) in a three-game point streak.



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Jordan Staal's 2 assists lead Hurricanes to 3-2 win over Kraken

By: Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Jacob Slavin's first assist of the season on William Carrier's goal lifted the Carolina Hurricanes to a 3-2 win over the Seattle Kraken on Saturday night.

Jordan Martinook and Logan Stankoven also scored for the Hurricanes, who won their fourth straight game. Carrier deflected in a shot by Slavin with 6:10 left in the third period. Jordan Staal assisted on the final two goals.

Berkly Catton and Matty Beniers scored for the Kraken and Joey Daccord stopped 31 shots. Seattle lost in regulation for the first time in 11 games (8-1-2).

Slavin missed the previous 10 games with an upper-body injury he suffered in a 4-3 shootout loss at Florida on Dec. 19. He missed 29 games earlier in the season with a lower-body injury. It was only the sixth time Carolina had their top

defenseman in the lineup and they improved to 5-0-1 in those games. The assist was Slavin's 300th career point.

Brandon Bussi made 10 saves for his 16th win in 19 starts this season. The rookie goalie inadvertently helped Catton give Seattle a 2-1 lead at 5:56 in the third period. Ryan Winterton stole Bussi's failed clearing attempt and found Catton alone in the slot for the goal.

Bussi wasn't overly busy on the night since Seattle had a season-low 12 shots on goal and only eight through the first two periods.

Martinook tied the game at 10:37 in the third period on a feed from behind the net from Staal.

Stankoven gave the Hurricanes a 1-0 lead at 3:23 in the first period. He has scored a goal in four straight games.

Beniers tied it for Seattle at 14:13 in the first. He made a pretty move around Slavin at the blueline and then beat Bussi to his stick side.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Hockey News

Jacob Slavin Leads Hurricanes To Comeback Win In First Game Back From Injury

By: Ryan Henkel

For the first time since the start of the season, the Carolina Hurricanes had their full complement of skaters available for a game as the team welcomed back star defenseman Jacob Slavin for just his sixth game of the year.

As they took on the Seattle Kraken Saturday, you could tell just how much the Canes missed the veteran blueliner.

Well, other than when he got danced around by Matt Beniers...

"I felt good," Slavin said postgame. "Maybe a little rusty. Maybe the one-on-ones might need some work. Haven't had a lot of those lately."

But outside of the one gaffe, you could see Slavin getting better and better as the game went on, all culminating in a game-winner that only a high-end player like him is capable of pulling off.

Slavin, 31, has had a challenging year, dealing with injuries since even the offseason.

He missed the preseason while dealing with a lower-body injury, that was then reagravated just two games into the regular season.

The veteran blueline then missed the next 28 games before returning with a limited workload, to then suffer an upper-body injury after just three games following an uncalled board.

But he's back again and the cascading effect of his presence is going to be huge for Carolina as it already was against the Kraken.

Slavin played 19:35 in his first game back, racking up two hits, a game-winning primary assist and holding a 12-3 edge in scoring chances in his 5v5 minutes.

"He's such an exceptional player," said captain Jordan Staal. "He just moves the puck out of our end and into their end all game long. Obviously a little welcome back in the first period, but he came back, obviously not surprising, with a big goal to cap it off. Just such a great stick, great positioning, just so hard to play against. It was nice to have him back."

The Canes also wouldn't have been able to pull off the regulation win without Slavin as it all came to fruition thanks to his quick read and decisive action.

With a heads up play, Slavin activated from the neutral zone with a burst of speed and executed a give-and-go with Jordan Staal, crashing the net after the initial pass off, to put himself in a primary scoring position.

"I saw Jarv pull up, so I just tried to get up in the play," Slavin said. "He draws two guys to him, so it's easy for him to make that play and then I saw the next open guy and figured I'd

keep going to the net, why not, and Jordo gave it back to me. Obviously big net-front presence there by Carrier too."

He made no mistake and while William Carrier technically wound up with the goal, it was all Slavin.

After the game, Jordan Martinook referred to Jacob Slavin as "The General."

"Slavo is kind of the general back there and has been forever," Martinook said. "You don't know how many simple, good plays he makes when he's out there, but when he's not, you're like, 'Oh, if he was out here, that wouldn't be in our zone.' Just some of the things he does is pretty special."

So naturally, I was like, "What's a historical figure I can compare Slavin to in this instance?"

So after a bit of research, I give you Lieutenant General "Chesty" Puller, the most decorated marine in American history.

A decorated and accomplished American leader and one who preached discipline and accountability.

And the specific anecdote from Puller's service that I'd like to bring attention to is during WWII, he suffered "upper" and "lower" body injuries in the Battle of Koli Point, but after surgery and just 10-days of recovery, he returned to action to lead his "team" to success once again. So welcome back, General Jacob "Chesty" Slavin.

'It Was Just A Fun Game': Jacob Slavin, Jordan Staal, Jordan Martinook, Rod Brind'Amour On Comeback Win Over Seattle

By: Ryan Henkel

Slavin's return ignites offense. Staal's leadership shines. Martinook and Stankoven score as Hurricanes claw back for a thrilling win.

The Carolina Hurricanes pushed their win streak to four as they defeated the Seattle Kraken 3-2 Saturday night at Lenovo Center.

Jacob Slavin played a key part in the eventual game-winner in his first game back from injury and Jordan Martinook and Logan Stankoven each had goals in the win too.

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

Rod Brind'Amour



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On the leadership group stepping up and leading the way in the third period: They sure did. I agree with you. Those guys were all over it in the third and came up big.

On Jacob Slavin's return: Obviously he'd like to have the one back, but Beniers made a nice move on him and he probably wasn't expecting that. He's been out for half a year, so a little bit of rust probably there. But I think he got going as the game got going. Obviously pivotal in the game winner.

On Jordan Staal's playmaking ability: Sometimes when you do something so well, everyone just focuses on that and they don't look at the other stuff that you do. He's a complete player. He's not flashy, but look at the results. He's always around the scoresheet. Maybe not on it, but around it. Offensively, there's chances and he creates a lot. He makes the people around him better and that's what all the elite players do.

On the D staying active and staying above pucks: We knew coming in how this game was gonna go just based on how they've been playing. We knew it was going to be that way. You weren't gonna get an odd-man rush situation because they were staying above it and I'm not sure what they'd say about the game, but we gave them one because they were above it and we turned it over and they're probably thinking, 'There you go.' Even though we were playing pretty well, that was the way it was going to have to be. We knew that's how we were going to have to score goals and we were able to.

On Logan Stankoven's confidence starting to grow as he scores more: It's a good point. That is kind of what... You start seeing the net. When you're struggling, you see the goalie. It feels like you're never going to score again, then all of a sudden, when you get one or sometimes you get on a bit of a roll, you feel like every shot you take has a chance to go in. It's hard to explain how or why, people spend a lot of money trying to think they know the answers to that or how to get to that, but it's just how it is.

On picking up Brandon Bussi after his mistake led to a deficit: He's done it for us for the bulk of his starts. That's gonna happen and so your teammates have to pick you up and we did.

On the team's shot suppression: It's been pretty much all year. We've done a nice job for the most part. You would expect that when you throw Slavo back in the mix, but if you can keep that going, that mentality, then you're going to be alright.

Jacob Slavin

On capping off his return on a high-note: You could say that, especially after how that first period went when you give one up like that... but, no. Guys competed hard, so it's always nice to get a goal and help the team out.

On how he felt: I felt good. I felt good. Maybe a little rusty, maybe the one-on-ones might need some work, haven't had a lot of those lately, but no, no. It was good to be back out there.

On jumping into plays: I try to be smart about it. Obviously my job is to be a defenseman, but when the opportunity presents itself, I like to get up there. Don't try to force it too often. I definitely see it. There's probably some where I could probably be a little more aggressive on, but when it's there and it's open, take it.

On what he saw on the game-winning play: I saw Jarv pull up, so I just tried to get up in the play. He draws two guys to him, so it's easy for him to make that play and then I saw the next open guy and figured I'd keep going to the net, why not, and Jordo gave it back to me. Obviously big net-front presence there by Carrier too.

Jordan Staal

On the game: I thought it was a good game all around. We were pretty steady with our pressure and we had some good opportunities. When down 2-1, I was happy to see the guys sticking with it. It might not always play out that way, but tonight was a great example of how we have to just stick with our game plan and believe in it. Coming out with a big third was nice.

On the leadership group leading the way in the third period: It's been a little up and down obviously as of late. Right now, it's a little more steady and you can tell, I'm sure. Guys have bought in a little better and like I said, that's what I was happy about. Just sticking with our game and being content to not give them chances and sticking with grinding them down and checking for our chances.

On if he sees himself as a playmaker at all: I don't know. I've played a long time and if I don't know what I am... I don't see myself as a playmaker. I see myself as strong, defensive, try to chip in offensively when I can whether that's dishing or shooting or going to the net hard and it going off of my leg, I'm just trying to help win games. Tonight was a couple of nice passes to help us win and I'll take it.

On having Jacob Slavin back: It's a good feeling. You guys could see. He's such an exceptional player. He just moves the puck out of our end and into their end all game long. Obviously a little welcome back in the first period, but he came back, obviously not surprising, with a big goal to cap it off. Just such a great stick, great positioning, just so hard to play against. It was nice to have him back.

Jordan Martinook

On the keys to victory as of late: Just getting healthy. Two huge pieces of our team. Obviously Slavo is kind of the general back there and has been forever. You don't know how many simple, good plays he makes when he's out there, but when he's not, you're like, 'Oh, if he was out here, that wouldn't be in our zone.' Just some of the things he does is pretty special. Then obviously Jarv is kind of the gasoline that makes our car go... Look at me, what else do I got here? He's the straw that stirs our drink. I'll stop. But no, just having those two guys back is massive. It was just a fun game. They played well, they check hard. It was just one of those games where everybody was into it. It was a lot of fun.

On the team's constant belief: We prescouted them this morning and the message was that it was going to be just like it was. I think everybody on the bench was just saying, 'Stick with it, stick with it.' We were getting our chances, their goalie played well and it was just about sticking with what makes us successful. Obviously we did and came out on top.

On Jordan Staal setting up a goal for him for a change: He always says I'm the one hanging out behind the net and he wants to be there sometimes and so I've gotta let him go. Let him spread his wings... There we go! Mic drop. Oh, man... I'll take those.



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On rallying for Brandon Bussi following his turnover which put them in a deficit: Yeah... I'm thinking now... Yeah, no. We know what he's meant to our team this year. He's been spectacular. Nobody thought anything of it. We just kept playing and hoped it worked out and it did work out. That's good... the driver of our bus, he... sorry, I've gotta stop.

On Logan Stankoven's goal-scoring stretch: Yeah... I don't want to quote that song that they've been playing, but his legs have been going. He's been doing the Stanky Legg... that one was tough, sorry. No, it's nice to see him, obviously

we knew he was kind of struggling with confidence and he's a player who... [Andrei Svechnikov: Superstar!]... hey, I'm in the middle of my interview, could you stop. Yeah, just to see him get his swagger back and shooting the puck like we all know he can. That line's been phenomenal since they got put together.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Hurricanes storm back, defeat Kraken 3-2

By: Al Hood

William Carrier had the game winning goal, Jaccob Slavin had an assist in his first game back since a new injury in Florida, Jordan Staal had two assists, and the Carolina Hurricanes came back to defeat the Seattle Kraken 3-2, handing Seattle their first game without a point since December 18th.

The win was Carolina's fourth straight since a three game losing streak, all in regulation, and leads to a big game Monday as the top two teams in the east—Detroit and the Canes—will face off.

The Hurricanes got the jump on the Kraken thanks to a laser by a red hot Logan Stankoven. The Hurricanes dominated play early and had the Kraken doing what they could to get the puck of the zone. K'Andre Miller would take one of those clearing attempts and keep it into the zone, skate to the next to draw the recovering defense, and passed it to Stankoven who slapped it past Joey Daccord for the 1-0 lead.

However after that the Kraken steadied their game and while the Canes would dominate the period in shots, the Kraken would make them lower danger and wait for their chance. It came late in the first as Matty Beniers skated in open ice and put on a great deke past Slavin—notable just because it just doesn't happen that often—and go in all alone to put it past Brandon Bussi and knot the score. The Kraken would get a late Power Play chance that went empty, and while the Canes led 10-4 in shots they would be tied after one.

The second period saw plenty of action in terms of the Canes once again leading in shots 11-4, and the Canes having a Power Play. However the extra man effort went empty, and after two the score was still tied 1-1.

The third period is when things picked up. Before the first stoppage, Seattle had started to put some pressure on, and it forced Bussi to try to clear the puck himself. While Bussi has been great at many things, one of them hasn't been his puck handling. Sure enough, his attempt went right into the stick of Ryan Winteron, who passed it back to a wide open Berkly Catton. Catton got it past the recovering Bussi and the Kraken took 2-1 lead.

Seattle would clamp down and for a short period of time it seemed like the game would be played at their style. But

after a few minutes the Canes started to dictate play and the Kraken played a little too passive. Unlike earlier in the game when it felt the Canes' shots weren't particularly high danger, the pressure put on by Carolina was intense. Sure enough, the My Two Dads line rewarded the hard work by getting a gritty goal to tie the game. It started with a good pass near the net by Seth Jarvis over to Jordan Staal. While Staal worked the puck, Jordan Martinook parked near the net. Staal saw him for a pass and Martinook potted it to make it 2-2.

The Canes continued to play hard, not content with going to overtime, while it seemed like Seattle was hoping to just continue their point streak. Soon enough, the Staal line was again on the ice, and Jarvis again initiated the play by intercepting the puck on a Kraken clear attempt. He led the charge and passed it off to Staal, and he and Slavin would pass it back to each other before Slavin pushed it towards the net in a goal that was initially ruled his, but later changed to Carrier as the replays showed the shot bounced off his foot.

Seattle would take their time out as they took a long time to decide if Will Carrier interfered with Daccord, but the replays showed Ryan Lindgren shoving Carrier in the paint, colliding with Daccord. Had the officials called interference on the ice it's possible it wouldn't have been overturned. Instead it was a good goal, and the Kraken decided they didn't want to risk being down a man for two minutes, especially missing their timeout. The goal stood, and then the Canes really didn't give Seattle any other good looks for the rest of the period.

For only the fourth time this season the Canes put out everyone on the ice they thought they would at the start of the season, and the time on ice reflected that as five of the six defensemen charted over 18 minutes in TOI, led by the K'Andre Miller and Sean Walker pairing with 22 and 21 minutes, respectively.

The Canes now head back out on the road for a tough back-to-back with Detroit and St. Louis before facing off against the Florida Panthers for the final time in the regular season at home. Those games start a seven game in thirteen day stretch with four of them on the road. In short, it's the right time for the team to be at full health for one of the first times this season.



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LINKS

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

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The Athletic / Mite hockey brawl at AHL game facing multiple investigations

By Rob Rossi

Jan. 11, 2026

There are multiple investigations into a brawl between young hockey players during intermission of an AHL game on Saturday.

The incident occurred during the Hershey Bears' Mites On Ice intermission segment. Players from the Central Penn Panthers Youth Ice Hockey Club began fighting as Bears and Cleveland Monsters personnel were in the dressing rooms at Giant Center in Hershey, Pa.

Team White's tiny but heavily padded goalie didn't tend the goal and instead began cleaning house in a huge brawl.

The mite players, including goalies, rushed toward one another and traded punches. One player appeared to hit his teammate. No officials attempted to break up the brawl, and the crowd cheered on the youth players.

Mite hockey players are aged 8 and under.

Video taken by fans from inside the arena began to spread on social media Saturday night. The fight was even mentioned on "Hockey Night in Canada."

In a statement on Sunday, the Atlantic Amateur Hockey Association (AAHA) referred to the incident as a "staged fight."

The AAHA said Sunday in its statement that "appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against those players and team officials involved with the staged fight" after an investigation. The AAHA statement noted that neither it nor USA Hockey sanctioned the Bears' Mites On Ice Game on Saturday.

In addition to the AAHA's investigation, the Central Penn youth club pledged an "internal review to fully understand the circumstances surrounding the incident" in a statement posted to its Facebook page. That statement said, "The safety, well-being, and positive experience of all participants — especially our young players — are of the utmost importance."

The Central Penn Panthers are based in Lancaster, Pa., and were founded in the early 1990s, according to the club's website. Teams feature players ages 4 to 18 from levels AA, A, and B.

On Sunday, the AHL's Bears referred to the statement released by the Central Penn youth club at the end of their own statement.

"What occurred during last night's youth scrimmage involving one team (split into two sides) held during an intermission of a Hershey Bears game did not reflect the values of the sport or the standards we expect when young athletes are on the ice," the Bears' statement said. "Hockey must always be played within the rules, with safety as the top priority.

"The Hershey Bears are proud to provide opportunities for young players to experience the game in a professional environment. At the same time, we cannot support or allow conduct that puts participants at risk.

"We are reviewing this matter and will work closely with participating teams and partners to ensure clear safeguards, supervision, and expectations are in place for any future youth activities held during our games. Our focus remains on protecting young players and upholding the integrity of the sport."

The Bears are an AHL affiliate of the NHL's Washington Capitals, who also feature games between mite-aged players during games. One on Thursday night featured Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin's son.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.12.2026

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Athletic / Olympic hockey arena's test event leaves IIHF president 'little bit more confident'

By Chris Johnston

Jan. 11, 2026

MILAN — The president of the International Ice Hockey Federation says he's feeling more confident about the status of the upcoming Milan Cortina Olympic tournament after seeing a test event played at Santagiulia Arena over the weekend.

Luc Tardif was particularly pleased with how the ice surface held up under the duress of a three-game day, which will be a common occurrence with 32 men's and women's games scheduled here from Feb. 5 to 22.

"I'm going back happy," Tardif told The Athletic on Sunday.

"There is no reason that the NHL will not come," he added later.

While there is still a considerable amount of construction to be done on the second level of the main hockey venue and behind the scenes at an adjacent practice rink, Tardif indicated that they can make due with shortfalls in some areas, if necessary.

But getting the ice right was essential to ensuring the first Olympic tournament in 12 years to feature NHL players went ahead as planned.

"For me, the setup for the sport itself ... I'm not worried," Tardif said. "The hospitality suite, the area for the journalists (is not finished), but my job is ice hockey."

"Outside, I'm not quite sure if it will be ready because some of it is a mess." But the shorter dimensions didn't bother players Friday.

The NHL and NHL Players' Association both had staff on site to observe how things ran throughout the test event, but neither group has offered formal comment yet. However, the overwhelming feeling on the ground is that the Games will go ahead as planned.

Still, organizers left virtually no room for error. The NHL would have preferred to see a test event staged at this venue a year ago — just as it was at the main rink in Sochi, Russia, ahead of the 2014 Games — but the building wasn't ready until this week. Organizers only started the ice installation process on Dec. 20, which delayed a previously scheduled test event by one month.

Tardif acknowledged feeling some pangs of concern as construction delays mounted. He visited this site in December while attending a test event held at the secondary Rho Arena and said he received daily progress updates over the past two months. Three critical days of construction were put on hold at Santagiulia in order to stage seven games featuring Italian men's teams over the weekend, but it was a necessary step for the organization that oversees the Olympic tournament.

"For us, that was important, this test event," Tardif said. "We were supposed to have it in December, and after a while, they said, 'Yes, but with the delay that's not going to be possible.' No, no, no. We have to do it. The most important thing is the field of play.

"So that was complicated for them. They had to stop their work, and they are in a hurry."

Organizers have entrusted Canadian Dan Moffatt with getting the ice right in both Olympic venues. He works for the Colorado Avalanche and was brought in as the "ice master" to lead the crew at his fifth Olympics. He could be seen closely inspecting trouble areas at one end of the sheet during every break in play over the weekend.

That was the same end where a hole appeared in front of the net during the first period of Friday's opening game. In a statement attributed to Moffatt that the local organizing committee distributed Saturday night, that hole was described as a normal occurrence for ice being skated on for the first time.

Only three of 14 locker rooms that will soon host Olympic hockey teams are complete with less than four weeks to go before the Games.

Tardif was encouraged by what he saw over the course of Saturday's three games. He felt the surface held up well under a level of use you'd typically only find at a World Hockey Championship.

"Yesterday, the third game, at the end, the puck was still sliding, so that's a good test," Tardif said.

There are lessons to be taken from the test event. For example, the surface took on a gray hue that Tardif believes will be corrected before the Olympics get underway.

"There is a little bit too much snow, but that's the level of the temperature (in the building)," he said. "So, that's just an adjustment. The color of the ice (is off), but they will put the logo and another batch of white (paint).

"So, it's going to be ready."

Based on where things stand with less than four weeks left before the start of the Games, it will almost certainly not be perfect. They've abandoned completing the concession areas on the main concourse, opting instead to park food trucks outside of the main entrance. The hospitality suites were covered by black bags all weekend and guarded by security. And a tour conducted on Friday night for IIHF and federation personnel didn't include any stops on the second floor because the status of construction wouldn't allow it.

Tardif is disappointed that the arena capacity only got to 11,800 — although he mentioned that there were some recent conversations about it falling as low as 10,000 and was relieved that didn't happen. It's not entirely clear why capacity fell so far below the 14,000 organizers had been targeting — a number that was cited as recently as this week in an official document distributed to the press.

"I would have liked for the competition we're going to do to have more seats to sell and more fans, but it's like it is," Tardif said. "But it will be a nice setup for an atmosphere. The most important thing is the ice will be ready for this kind of competition."

That would seem to bode well for the return of NHL players to the Olympics. The intention is for this to be the start of a new era where the league sends its players to the 2030 French Alps Games and 2034 Utah Games, as well.

Tardif said the IIHF has relented on objections it had about participating in an NHL-led World Cup tournament in 2028, noting that it's "not exactly the win-win agreement we wanted," and hopes to return to the table immediately after the Milan Games are finished to hammer out the next Olympic agreement with the NHL and NHLPA.

"That's already started," Tardif said. "We said, 'Focus on (these) Olympics' because you don't know if it turns bad. You don't know what can happen. Now I'm a little bit more confident."

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The Athletic / Two leagues, five rings: How Mathieu and J.P. Darche forged their unusual NFL-NHL success



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 12, 2026

By Peter Baugh

Jan. 11, 2026

Not long after Islanders forward Kyle Palmieri crashed into the end boards in November, general manager Mathieu Darche received a text from his older brother, J.P., with a clip of the play.

"Let me guess," he wrote. "ACL?"

J.P. would know. A retired NFL long snapper, he's now a team physician for the Kansas City Chiefs. Unfortunately for the Islanders, his assessment was right. The team announced Palmieri had torn his ACL a day later.

The brief interaction encapsulated how Mathieu and J.P. operate. Separated in age by only 21 months, they kept frequent contact while navigating unconventional paths to their sports' highest levels as players. Nowadays, the two remain each other's trusted confidants in their successful second acts in the athletic world: no surprise to their mother, Lucie Darche.

"Right from the beginning, they were more friends than brothers," she says.

The 49-year-old Mathieu dressed for 250 games in the NHL, and now he's in his first year as a general manager. He has helped reenergize the Islanders' fan base by restocking the team's prospect pool, all while keeping a competitive roster on the ice. Halfway across the country, J.P., 50, practices medicine full-time for the University of Kansas Health System, which is the health care provider for the Chiefs. He has three Super Bowl rings thanks to his work with the team.

The brothers, who grew up in Montreal, have been taken with sports since they were kids. On winter days, they would carry their skates and sticks to an outdoor rink to play hockey with friends until dark. Summer was for street hockey. Sometimes, they'd line up and pretend to listen to the national anthem as if they were Montreal Canadiens players waiting for a game to begin.

Sports dominated conversation, too. Lucie, a school teacher, would urge her sons to read more. Her best strategy was buying them Sports Illustrated magazines.

"Do you want to know how many arguments we had at the supper table where all they would talk about was sports, sports and sports?" she says.

Because of everyone's busy schedules, car rides to and from practice were often the best time for one-on-one conversation. Lucie cherished those drives — except for the smell of musty gear.

The Darches' late father, Édouard, shared his kids' passion for sports, but he never forced them to play anything specific. His only rule was that they couldn't quit in-season. That meant Mathieu once had to suffer through a swimming season after quickly realizing he didn't like it.

"We did every sport," says Mathieu, who opted out of hockey one season so he could ski more at the family cottage. Along with hockey and football, the brothers tried everything from baseball to soccer to tennis to golf. Their older sister, Isabelle, took to swimming.

"Once we got older, in college and even after that, we weren't the guys who were just (burnt) out," J.P. says. "All that extra stuff that kids do nowadays, we didn't do it. We played sports just because we loved it."

It was never a chore. It still isn't.

J.P. was two years ahead of Mathieu in school, and every other year, they were in the same age group for hockey. Lucie might say her sons

are more friends than brothers, but J.P. certainly embraced a fraternal role on those teams.

"I took a lot of stupid penalties to stick up for him," J.P. says.

Unsurprisingly, given his future in the NHL, Mathieu had more skill than those around him. His older opponents often didn't take kindly to a smaller, younger player dominating, so they'd sometimes try to go after him on the ice. That's when J.P., a bruising defenseman, stepped in. Mathieu remembers J.P. getting kicked out of games for hits he laid on opponents — many of which were to make sure his brother felt safe on the ice.

"That's when I could do whatever I wanted," Mathieu says with a smile. "He was my bodyguard."

J.P. stopped playing hockey when he was around 17. He had a poster of Hall of Fame linebacker Lawrence Taylor on his wall, and football became his athletic focus when he enrolled at McGill University in Montreal. Mathieu followed him there two years later. He had only one college offer for hockey — UMass Lowell — but McGill's football coach had recruited him and told him he could also play hockey.

Mathieu took snaps at nickelback his first year with McGill and got significant playing time.

"I had a better football season than hockey season," he says. "I was never recruited for hockey (at McGill)."

J.P., a standout linebacker who set the school record in tackles, was managing a knee injury that year. The brace he wore made long snapping hard, so Mathieu handled those duties that season.

"He was just as good as I was," the older brother says.

Despite his strong season, Mathieu decided to play only hockey after his first year. It was better, he thought, to put everything into one sport rather than maybe being average at two. The results came quickly: He went from a one-goal, three-point season his first year to 28 goals and 45 points in 40 games in his second.

By the end of his McGill career, Mathieu was a force, catching the eye of NHL clubs. Lou Lamoriello — then with the New Jersey Devils and, eventually, Darche's predecessor as Islanders general manager — was one of the first people he remembers scouting him, which they have reminisced about since.

"It's funny how things come full circle," Mathieu says.

It turned out he wasn't the only Darche brother on the precipice of his sport's pinnacle.

After breaking his leg playing for the Toronto Argonauts in a Canadian Football League playoff game, J.P. assumed his athletic career was over. He had already completed two years of medical school while playing at McGill, and it looked like the time to return and finish his degree.

His agent had other ideas. He pitched J.P. to the Seahawks as a long snapper, and Seattle flew him in for a tryout. J.P. was excited but kept low expectations. CFL teammates told him to use the trip as a chance to steal some free gear, so he nervously stuffed his bag with Seahawks T-shirts: souvenirs from what was potentially a one-day NFL experience.

"I always thought I'd never come back," he says.

His agent called again by the time he got to the airport. The Seahawks wanted to sign him. In May 2000, he inked a deal. The same week, Mathieu signed with the Columbus Blue Jackets. Neither had gone to McGill with professional sports aspirations, but through a mix of strong performance and fortuitous circumstances, they'd made it.

"Now it gets real," J.P. remembers thinking.



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The older brother went on to play seven years with the Seahawks, then two more with the Chiefs. He reached the Super Bowl with Seattle in 2006. Mathieu, playing professionally in Germany at the time, flew in for the game. The long snapper he once played over in college was now vying for a championship. (Pittsburgh ultimately beat the Seahawks — the loss J.P. finds most painful from his career.)

Mathieu made his NHL debut with Columbus in February 2001, only a few months after J.P.'s first game with Seattle. Establishing himself as a full-time NHLer proved difficult. He played 552 career games in the AHL and never appeared in more than 14 games in an NHL season until 2007-08, when he was with Tampa Bay. At various points, his mom talked to him about retirement.

"I remember telling him, 'Mathieu, you have a degree (from McGill). I think it's enough,'" Lucie says. "And he kept telling me, 'Mommy, I'm going to make the NHL.'"

"I am where I am because I'm stubborn," Mathieu says. "I don't quit on something."

He leaned on J.P. throughout his playing days. They spoke almost every day. They could relate to each other, Mathieu says, because they were living through the same pressures. The two would dissect roster situations — J.P. says Mathieu always had a sense of where his teams were from a big-picture standpoint — and sometimes frustrations. Once, when Mathieu was finally getting consistent NHL time with the Lightning during the 2007-08 season, he found chemistry on a line with Jeff Halpern and Michel Ouellet. Coach John Tortorella switched him off that line, though, and he grumbled about it on a call with J.P.

"Who are you playing with?" he asked.

Future Hall of Famer Martin St. Louis and All-Star Vincent Lecavalier, Mathieu told him.

"Well shut the f— up!" J.P. told him. "Stop whining! You're playing with the two best players on the team!"

There's a long history of brothers playing in the NHL, but a pair of brothers playing in the NHL and NFL is rare. According to NHL Stats' research, Chargers tackle Joe Alt and former NHLer Mark Alt — who played 20 games with the Flyers, Avalanche and Kings spanning between 2015 and 2021 — are the only other two brothers to accomplish the feat.

Because of his NFL experience, J.P. doesn't often get starstruck. He's played in a Super Bowl and shared the field with Hall of Famers, after all.

That day was an exception.

"You remember being a little kid, bonding over the Canadiens," he says.

Now his brother was one of them.

Facing a life-altering choice, Mathieu turned to J.P. for advice.

After his playing career, the younger brother had used his business degree from McGill and settled into a job at Delmar International, a customs brokerage firm for which he was managing a staff of 40. The Lightning, though, wanted to hire him in a front-office role in 2019. Julien BriseBois, who had gotten to know Mathieu while working for the Canadiens, offered him a role as the director of hockey operations. Mathieu had to decide: Was leaving his home in Montreal and all the stability that came with his job worth pursuing a hockey management career?

"Do you love your job?" J.P. asked him.

"Yeah."

"How about going to Tampa, becoming a GM at some point, going that route?"

"Oh, that'd be my dream," Mathieu told him.

So, with encouragement from his older brother, that's what he chose to chase.

J.P. Darche poses with the Lombardi Trophy after the Kansas City Chiefs won the Super Bowl against the Eagles in 2023. (Courtesy of J.P. Darche)

J.P., meanwhile, had a promise after his NFL career ended in 2009. His mother couldn't believe he left medical school for sports, but he immediately told her he'd become a doctor someday. After the Chiefs released him, he made good on his word. He restarted medical school at the University of Kansas, completed four years of residency and earned his degree. He started as a team physician with the Chiefs in 2019, the same year Mathieu made the leap from the business world to the Lightning.

Thanks to Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs' recent run of success, J.P. has three Super Bowl rings, one more than Darche's two championships as part of the Lightning front office.

"I need to catch up," Mathieu says.

The brothers' father died in August 2024 after a battle with amyloidosis. Later in his life, he wasn't able to accompany Mathieu on the Lightning's dad's trip, which allowed players and staff to bring their fathers on the road. So the now-general manager has brought a different loved one — his older brother — for the past three years, including in December with the Islanders. On the recent trip, J.P. got to meet Patrick Roy, whom he watched win a pair of Stanley Cups with the Canadiens in the '80s and '90s. The brothers had a blast and heeded their mother's pre-trip warning to behave.

Mathieu and J.P. don't talk on the phone every day like they did when navigating their playing careers, but they still chat around once a week and are in frequent contact via text, including in a group chat that includes their kids. As big a Canadiens fan as J.P. once was, he's fully converted to the Islanders, just as he did with the Lightning before.

His rooting interests are with his brother.

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Sportsnet.ca / In throes of 'hybrid rebuild,' Canucks keeping all options on the table

Iain MacIntyre

TORONTO — How is everyone enjoying the Vancouver Canucks' organic tank?

The last-place team's 5-0 defeat Saturday to the Toronto Maple Leafs and six-game losing streak is the level of ineptitude that many fans and reporters have been calling for in Canucks Nation, although that does make some of that constituency's outrage over recent results somewhat perplexing.

With 38 games to go, the Canucks have plummeted safely into the Gavin McKenna draft-lottery sweepstakes, 11 points out of a playoff spot and at least five points adrift of 30 of the 31 teams above them in the standings.



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After being outscored 15-4 through the first half of their current six-game funeral procession — and still looking for their first lead of 2026 — the Canucks face difficult back-to-back games against the Montreal Canadiens and Ottawa Senators starting on Monday.

The Canucks' young players are making mistakes and some of their experienced ones haven't looked particularly engaged or, at least, sharp. No. 1 goalie Thatcher Demko is hurt again, and the only cavalry coming is winger Conor Garland, whose return from injury is imminent.

So, the odds don't favour things suddenly getting better for them — or worse, depending on your fan tribe.

But the "hybrid rebuild" may get more combusive.

Canucks president Jim Rutherford said Sunday that although plans for the hybrid haven't changed, as the organization tries to support and guide its developing prospects by retaining key veterans, everything is on the trade table for the NHL team.

After notifying other teams in November that Vancouver was taking offers on its free-agency-eligible players, Rutherford told Sportsnet that general manager Patrik Allvin has been getting calls of interest on Canucks other than just their impending UFAs.

"I would suggest that we listen to teams when they call — about anybody," Rutherford said. "But that would be the same whether we're winning or losing. When someone talks about a hybrid rebuild, it means the team is not shopping every player.

"But prior to this, we already made the decision that we were going to go with younger players. Over the past few years, our staff has done a good job and we have a number of good young players, whether they're in our lineup now or close to getting in our lineup. And those players are going to get a chance to play. Based on the circumstances with this team, this is the year to do it. The fact of the matter is we're in a rebuild."

Nine of 12 Canucks older than 25 and on multiple-year contracts have some form of trade protection. According to Rutherford, none has approached management to say they don't want to endure the pain of the organization's pivot towards youth, which became more sharply defined with last month's trade of captain and superstar Quinn Hughes to the Minnesota Wild.

"People will go through their times of struggling with what's going on, and times they won't," Rutherford said when asked about the uneven performance of Canuck veterans. "Nobody wants to be a part of losing, and certainly, losing streaks. But it's in everybody's best interest to play within the system, try to play the right way, and win some games. For anybody that totally drops off from that, it's only going to hurt the individual more so than it will hurt the team.

"We have a number of first-year players in our lineup, which is what we want. It's the direction we want to go. We have to realize we're in a process now, OK? We have to learn to play the game the right way and learn when and when not to try to do things. And we're seeing (those mistakes) very clearly this week that we can make better choices to prevent goals. And that's what we want to see from this group. We have to learn from our mistakes."

With the proceeds of the Hughes trade, Rutherford said at the time the Canucks could "turn things around within a couple of seasons." That belief was predicated on the idea that a full rebuild could be avoided by retaining some key veterans still young enough to be contributing once the new wave of prospects mature as NHL players.

Allvin later termed it a "hybrid rebuild."

"The process of a rebuild would take two or three times longer if you just go with young players," Rutherford said Sunday. "You have to have the right veteran players to mentor these up-and-coming players. If you do that, the (rebuilding) process doesn't have to be nearly as long. And we

happen to have some very good veteran players that can and, I believe, are willing to play in a situation like this and be good mentors."

Shortly after Rutherford's interview, the Canucks announced that one of their three 21-and-under defencemen, Elias Pettersson, was being sent to the American Hockey League for development, replaced on the NHL roster by 23-year-old call-up Victor Mancini.

Goalie Nikita Tolopilo was also promoted from the Abbotsford Canucks to fill in for Demko, who was placed on injured reserve after sustaining another setback while allowing three goals on six shots in the first period on Saturday.

The Canucks did not practise Sunday in Montreal.

"All options will be open as far as development," Rutherford said. "Our plan this year, before we added Zeev Bulum (from Minnesota), is that our young defencemen would go up and down to the minors and get different reps in the American Hockey League and be able to play not under the same pressure you get at the NHL level. Some of the mistakes I'm seeing are very correctible. But all of those options are open."

He said the same applies to the trade market.

"Whether you win 10 in a row or lose 10 in a row, those options should always be there," Rutherford said. "And even more so now with where this team is."

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Sportsnet.ca / 'Another level': Maple Leafs dominate Canucks in Nylander's return

Luke Fox

TORONTO — No matter who you're playing.

That was the key phrase Craig Berube used in his pregame pep talk with his Toronto Maple Leafs, whom the coach is pushing to bring intensity regardless of the opponent.

"Tonight's a good example," Berube said. "Initiate right away."

Another version of these Maple Leafs may have eased off the gas pedal when the slumping and last-place Vancouver Canucks stumbled into town.

Perhaps they would've been too pleased with their eight-game point streak to nudge it to nine.

Or maybe they would've started peering too far down the highway and saved something in the tank for the stiff three-games-in-four-nights road trip (Colorado, Utah, Vegas) that looms ahead.

But not these 2026 Leafs.

Not now, when they're dancing and fighting and scoring and winning and feeling themselves for the first prolonged stretch all season (7-0-2).

Nah, these Leafs took it to Canucks starter Thatcher Demko with three goals on their first six shots and breezed to a 5-0 dismissal of a Canadian foe whose next meaningful win might come in the draft lottery.

It's OK to feast on a cupcake occasionally.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"We've just took it to another level," William Nylander said, "Everybody's been more connected."

Jolted by the healthy return of two mainstays, Nylander and Jake McCabe, the Maple Leafs' searing-hot special teams set the tone in Period 1 and remained effective throughout.

They went a perfect 6-for-6 on the penalty kill and converted on two of four power-plays.

The Maple Leafs have killed 58 of 63 penalties in their past 27 games (92.1 per cent). And goaltender Joseph Woll, much like tandem mate Dennis Hildeby on Thursday, deserves credit on the kill. Woll stopped all 29 shots he faced for his second shutout of the season.

"It's huge," John Tavares said of Toronto's killer kill. "You can just see the confidence that they have, just how well connected they are, how well in sync, and how it's feeding our team, our energy. And obviously we're getting a lot of plenty of good looks the other way off it as well."

You wouldn't have known that Nylander (lower body) had not so much as practised with the team in two weeks, as the team's leading scorer hung three points on the Canucks.

"Good way to come back," Nylander said. "Just happy that the boys have been playing great while I've been gone, so it was easy to jump in."

And Max Domi came an assist short of a Gordie Howe hat trick after taking a snappy feed from ex-Canuck Troy Stecher and sniping short-side on Demko, then dropping the gloves with Marcus Pettersson.

"Awesome," Matias Maccelli enthused. "Threw a couple of rights and then switched to left. I didn't know he had that, but it was just unreal. He's the heavyweight now."

Pettersson fared about as well in that scrap as the Canucks are these days. Loser of six straight and eight of their past nine, Vancouver has sunk to a minus-37 goal differential. The group looks depleted, deflated, and disorganized.

Heck, one fan chucked Canucks replica sweater onto the ice in disgust. (Reminder: The game took place in Toronto.)

Meanwhile, the resurgent Maple Leafs head west after having won seven straight at home, outscoring the opposition 35-16 in the process.

"That's a pretty clean game by us defensively. Obviously great offensively. And then won the special teams battle," Woll said. "A clean game all the way through."

"Special teams are important, especially come playoff time. So, I think getting that dialed in is very important for us."

You can't spell resurgent without urgent.

And that's how the playoff-hunting Leafs have been attacking game nights lately.

No matter who they're playing.

Fox's Fast Five

- Playmaker Maccelli, who has supplanted 500-goal man John Tavares on assistant Steve Sullivan's now-healthy top power-play unit, opened the scoring on the man-advantage.

"They're tough decisions that we gotta make, but I spoke with J.T. about it," Berube explained. "He's a good team guy, and he's fine."

Tavares has not scored a power-play goal in 25 games.

"It's nice get touches, you know?" Maccelli said. "I don't know who doesn't want to play power play. So, it's always fun to get out there and try to score and help the team win."

- David Kämpf failed to make the Maple Leafs out of training camp and was honoured with a Jumbotron thank-you in his return to Toronto.

"I wouldn't say chip (on my shoulder), but of course I'm excited," the Canucks centre told reporters pre-game. "I have a lot of friends there on the other side."

Unable to establish himself as a Berube guy, Kämpf wanted a trade away from the Marlies. His return to NHL action helped him earn a coveted spot on Czechia's Olympic roster.

"I'm happy with my decision and what I did," Kämpf said. "I'm here and I'm moving forward."

- Toronto is falling head over heels for a Cowboy.

Rookie Easton Cowan's rush to scrub it up with Nils Högländer, who delivered a greasy cross-check to Simon Benoit, elicited a standing ovation. The kid gets it.

Brad Treliving ain't trading this guy.

- Nylander ran into Berube during morning skate, and the coach didn't budge an inch.

"I'm a little overweight, that's why," Berube chuckled. "He told me he let up on me."

- Injury roundup!

Chris Tanev is still figuring out whether he'll elect surgery to repair his damaged groin. That decision is expected soon.

And goaltender Anthony Stolarz, still skating on own, is progressing well and expected to join the Leafs on next week's four-game road trip.

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Sportsnet.ca / Sunday Overreactions: Arniel, Keefe both on hot seat

Michael Amato

One of the more remarkable things about this NHL season is that we've crossed the halfway point without a head coach being fired. That's unusual at the best of times, but in a turbulent campaign like this one, it's borderline stunning.

That doesn't mean there haven't been some close calls, though. It felt like John Hynes was on the ropes earlier in the year before the Minnesota Wild turned things around. Andrew Brunette seemed as good as gone back in November, but rose from the mat after a nine-count as the Nashville Predators have clawed their way back up the standings. Marc Savard was let go by the Toronto Maple Leafs just before the holidays, as Craig Berube clung to his job in somewhat of a Christmas miracle. Now the Leafs are back in the mix for a playoff spot again, and Berube is on solid ground for the time being.

However, all of those coaches had the benefit of time on their side to turn things around. It's now getting to a critical juncture in the season where missteps are running out if you plan on playing spring hockey.

The New Jersey Devils and Winnipeg Jets are clearly under the microscope now, with both falling well below expectations and needing something positive to happen immediately. Jets head coach Scott Arniel



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and Devils bench boss Sheldon Keefe are both feeling the pressure and need some miraculous bounce back to cool down their seats.

Scott Arniel and Sheldon Keefe are both coaching for their jobs

The Jets and Devils will meet Sunday afternoon with serious potential consequences for the loser. Winnipeg quieted the noise briefly on Friday, finally picking up a victory after losing 11 in a row. Meanwhile, New Jersey has lost seven of nine outings, including a 9-0 trouncing at the hands of the New York Islanders earlier this week. Losses like that get everyone's attention, and if Keefe's seat wasn't hot already, it is now.

Most coaches who get fired in the middle of the season are usually those whose teams are in unexpected spots in the standings, and both the Devils and Jets are nowhere near where they want to be. Winnipeg was the Presidents' Trophy winner a year ago and is now tied for last in the NHL, while the Devils were supposed to be an automatic playoff team after winning eight of their first nine games, but now find themselves close to the Eastern Conference basement with a minus-22 goal differential. It certainly does feel like both Arniel and Keefe need to put together a string of wins in the worst way to save their jobs.

Overreaction? – No

There are some troubling signs for each coach. When it comes to the Devils, the fact that the return of Jack Hughes from injury hasn't done anything to boost the team whatsoever is concerning. New Jersey feels like a group that was expecting to land Quinn Hughes via trade and hasn't recovered from the deal falling apart. Plus, the fact that \$9M defenceman Dougie Hamilton is going to be a healthy scratch likely won't help team camaraderie. It's Keefe's job to hold everything together, and general manager Tom Fitzgerald has been quiet lately, not giving his coach a vote of confidence.

As for the Jets, their biggest issue has been a lack of secondary scoring after losing Nik Ehlers last summer. Arniel finally moved Gabriel Vilardi away from Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele, who have both been excellent, but it may be too little too late. The fact that Arniel's been so hesitant to split up Scheifele and Connor to try and spark other Jets forwards could be viewed as complacency.

Ultimately, someone is going to lose another game on Sunday and only hear the chatter get louder. At some point, something has to give.

Senators have mismanaged their goaltending situation

Has there been a more disappointing team than the Ottawa Senators this season? If there is, it's a short list.

After an impressive push in the second half of last year and a strong showing against the Toronto Maple Leafs in the postseason, many felt the Sens were a team on the rise, looking to take another step in 2025-26. Instead, the Sens have dropped seven of their past nine games and sit second last in the Eastern Conference. A huge part of that is goaltending, or lack thereof. Ottawa is sporting an .872 team save percentage at the moment, good enough for last in the league. To make matters more challenging, Linus Ullmark has been absent from the team and it's unclear when he'll return. Goaltending should be a real strength for this team but some questionable transactions have put them in a bind.

Overreaction? – No

It wasn't that long ago when the Senators had both Joey Daccord and Filip Gustavsson, now two quality starters for the Seattle Kraken and Minnesota Wild respectively, on their roster at the same time. Ottawa left Daccord unprotected in the expansion draft in 2021 where the Kraken scooped him up and they dealt Gustavsson to the Wild in the summer of 2022 for Cam Talbot. When the Sens traded for Talbot, he was 35 and played all of 36 games for the team. Both Gustavsson and Daccord are now in their primes and have been very consistent over the past few seasons.

These missteps led Ottawa to hand out big money deals to Joonas Korpisalo, who was a disaster and traded after one season, and Ullmark, who has been very underwhelming thus far. Hindsight is 20/20 and goalies are hard to forecast, but it does feel that the Sens would've been wise to give at least one of Daccord or Gustavsson some more runway to prove what they could do.

Leafs won't be able to overcome loss of Chris Tanev

Almost every team has dealt with some type of significant injuries this season and the Toronto Maple Leafs have felt them specifically on the back end. Jake McCabe just sat out a few games, Brandon Carlo missed a huge chunk of the year and Chris Tanev is now sidelined for his third stretch of the season, something he may or may not be able to return from in 2025-26. I don't think anyone would argue that Tanev is Toronto's most important defenceman and they are 6-3-2 with him this year and 12-12-5 without him. Considering how little room for error the Leafs have in their playoff chase, it's going to be almost impossible to crack the postseason without him.

Overreaction? – Yes

While it's still going to be a major uphill battle to get in, the Leafs have been playing much better lately and are actually 5-0-1 since Tanev's latest injury. The return of Carlo has been a breath of fresh air for the blue line, as the veteran looks like a completely different player than he was earlier in the season when he was playing through an injury. McCabe is arguably playing the best hockey of his career, and Troy Stecher has been a massive addition off the waiver wire.

Staying healthy will obviously be the key here, but if Auston Matthews continues to play the way he has over the past few weeks and Toronto keeps getting excellent goaltending, it does at least seem plausible they could sneak in minus Tanev. Competing for a Stanley Cup would be an entirely different story, though this version of the Leafs should be able to hang with any of those bubble teams trying to grab a spot.

The Eastern Conference is superior to the West

I think the belief of many fans this season has been the East has been very mid. It makes sense, considering no one is really out of it and no one is running away with anything. Plus, you could argue the three best teams in the NHL are in the West and for that matter, in the Central. There's no denying the Colorado Avalanche are head and shoulders above everyone and then the Dallas Stars and Minnesota Wild have put together strong campaigns as well. But just because the East doesn't have as many elite teams as the West, it doesn't mean it isn't as strong. The East standings are as tight as it gets and the conference as a whole has a great case that it's better than the West.

Overreaction? – No

First off, at one point a few days ago, the only West teams that would've been in a playoff spot if they were in the East were Colorado, Dallas and Minnesota. Every other West team would've been below the cutoff line. Vegas, with a couple of recent victories, would now be tied for a wild card spot if they were in the East, but no one else would be higher than 10th. Only five Western Conference teams have a positive goal differential, and only Vegas has one from the Pacific.

The head-to-head records support the East's case as well. It's been very one-sided, with the East dominating the West in 2025-26 with a mark of 168-107-28. Just in the last week for example, the East is 21-11-2.

Finally, the Avalanche have been playing at a historic pace this season and could go down as one of the best teams of all time, but all four of their regulation losses have come against Eastern Conference teams. No one would argue that the elite teams reside in the West, but they also have more teams on the lower end. The East has more good teams overall.

Dostal is starting to regress for the Ducks



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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There was a point earlier this season where the Anaheim Ducks were leading the Pacific Division and appeared to be a lock to return to the playoffs, but things have taken a drastic turn. The Ducks have lost nine in a row and have fallen out of the playoff picture, as Anaheim is suddenly having trouble keeping the puck out of its net. They've allowed an average of five goals per game over this stretch, and Lukas Dostal's numbers are plummeting. He has an .887 save percentage, and after finishing in the top 20 in the league in goals saved above expected a year ago, Dostal has dropped all the way down to 75th with a mark of -5.4. Perhaps we anointed Dostal as one of the league's best young goalies too soon.

Overreaction? – Yes

Dostal's struggles have more to do with the Ducks' lack of defensive prowess than a drop-off in play. Anaheim is a bottom-10 team when it comes to shots allowed, and they rank third-worst when it comes to high-danger chances against. Dostal is used to being under siege like this, as the Ducks were 32nd in both categories last year, but it's starting to catch up to him. You can't expect Dostal to keep standing on his head year after year when he's constantly being put in a difficult position to succeed. At some point, the Ducks are going to have to start helping him more, and it's Joel Quenneville's responsibility to get them playing better defensive hockey. Dostal is one of the most talented young goalies in the game and could be a franchise netminder for the Ducks, but Anaheim has to start making it a little easier on him night in and night out.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers happy to celebrate Draisaitl's milestone despite shootout loss

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — If it's true that even a journey of 10,000 miles starts with but a single step, Leon Draisaitl walked out of old Rexall Place a few nights wondering if he was on the wrong path altogether.

"There were a lot of nights where I didn't know if I could play in this league," Draisaitl said Saturday, a few hours before receiving a silver stick in commemoration of his 1,000th NHL point, notched last month on an assist in Pittsburgh. "This league is really hard when you're 18. It's really, really hard. The game is different than juniors, and you're not really ready. You're not as strong as you need to be, and you're not as fast as you need to be.

"There were a lot of nights where I came home and I was like, 'I don't know if I can play in this league,'" he repeated. "I needed to become a better player in every facet — a better athlete. I put in the work and it helped me immensely."

Ya think?

Today, in a National Hockey League that has seen exactly 10 50-goal, 100-point seasons posted in the last decade, Draisaitl has authored four of those. (Auston Matthews has two, four players have one each.) After a recent slump he's a bit behind a 50-goal pace this season, but well on his way to his seventh 100-point campaign in 11 NHL seasons.

And on the night he was feted for his 1,000-point milestone, Draisaitl delivered two goals — No. 22 and 23 on the season. However, his team lost 4-3 in a shootout to the Los Angeles Kings, Edmonton's eighth

attempt at winning three games in a row, and the eighth time this season they've fallen short.

The St. Louis Blues are the only other team in the NHL not have to have strung three wins together this season.

Connor McDavid scored to extend his points streak to 18 games, the longest such streak in his distinguished career. He has 19 goals and 41 points during his skein, and his goal Saturday was his 30th of the season.

But this night was about the other head in the two-headed monster that is the Oilers, as McDavid tried in vain to set his close friend up for the hat trick, with his entire family in the seats at Rogers Place.

"It's a fun night for him, an exciting night, celebrating his 1,000 points and having his family in town," a subdued McDavid said after the loss, in which both he and Draisaitl failed to score in the shootout.

Kasperii Kapanen set Draisaitl up for the game's first goal, a nifty feed for Kapanen's fourth point in three games since returning from injury.

"I think we all knew (Draisaitl) was going to score tonight, right?" Kapanen said. "He's had such an amazing career thus far, and he's going to keep on scoring. Whenever you can get the puck to him that close to the net, it usually has a good chance of going in."

With the Oilers Dads' trip lifting off on Sunday — a two-game excursion through Chicago and Nashville — Draisaitl's father Peter was in town, accompanied by Leon's Mom, grandmother and sister. A long-time German national teamer, Leon grew up in the many dressing rooms that his father Peter inhabited during an 18-season stint in Deutschland's top league.

"Very grateful for the insight that I've gotten from my Dad, the hockey knowledge that he has instilled into me. He's a huge reason that I am where I am today," said Draisaitl, 30, who was asked if his Dad influenced him in other ways. "He used the exact same blade, in fact. He was a very similar player too."

The pre-game video montage belied a group of players who were baby-faced when scoring those first few goals, but look today like the veterans they are, all approaching 1,000 games in the NHL with the scars of two Stanley Cup runs in the past two seasons.

"We all grew up together in this room, the core (players)," Draisaitl said. "We all started when we were young kids, 18, and you don't know how your career is going to go at that point. To be able to witness Connor getting 1,000 (points). Nursey doing his thing. Nuge getting to 1,000 games (next week).

"It makes a little bit more special, just because you've seen every stage of their career. You've been there for all of them."

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Sportsnet.ca / Despite loss, Canadiens gain better blue-line balance in Guhle's return

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — On Saturday, the Montreal Canadiens lost a few too many battles on their way to losing a game to the Detroit Red Wings. As



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a result, they also lost pole position—and a bit of the lead they had built up over their many pursuers—in the Atlantic Division.

But the Canadiens gained something on this night that they've been searching for since the start of the season, and its value should enable them to win even more than they already have. With Kaiden Guhle back, and with Arber Xhekaj playing at the height of his abilities, they finally had the right mix on their blue line.

A bad bounce off the boards near the Zamboni entrance, which gifted Lucas Raymond the game's first goal in the 25th minute of play, didn't dull that reality. Neither did Dylan Larkin's power-play goal roughly seven minutes later.

Alex DeBrincat got a freebie because Canadiens forward Juraj Slafkovsky lost him in transition one minute into the third, and Andrew Copp got one with just over a minute to play with the Canadiens' net empty.

Copp's goal capped a 4-0 win the Red Wings deserved.

But the Canadiens still showed—as Guhle got back up to speed, as Xhekaj launched a game-high eight hits, as Alex Carrier killed plays while Noah Dobson, Lane Hutson and Mike Matheson created them—they'll have a defence corps to reckon with moving forward, and that was a critical development.

It's been pretty good so far, hence a 25-13-6 record for the Canadiens coming into Saturday's action.

But the balance restored by Guhle's return makes it considerably better.

"I think we have the tools that we need to win back there," said Guhle, who played 18:54 in his sixth game of the season and his first since Oct. 16.

"I think we've got offence, we've got guys that can defend," Guhle continued. "Everyone can defend, we've got pretty elite offensive guys, I think everyone plays hard, blocks shots. I think we have the recipe. It's hard to do. It's hard to get to glory. But I think we have the guys that can do it."

The Red Wings have some as well, which is why they're currently on top of the Canadiens and Tampa Bay Lightning in the Atlantic.

Moritz Seider played nearly half the game and was exceptional next to Simon Edvinsson for most of his minutes. Former Canadien Ben Chiarot finished plus-2 over 22:03 while Axel Sandin-Pellikka, Albert Johansson and Jacob Bernard-Docker tightened the screws on the Canadiens to offer them very little opportunity through the first half of the game.

Goaltender John Gibson stood tall as Montreal pressed through the second half.

If you were watching closely, it was a charge led by Dobson, Matheson, and even Xhekaj, who rarely gets a chance to see the ice when the Canadiens are chasing the game.

But the six-foot-three, 240-pounder wasn't just throwing his weight around in this one. He was covering ice at both ends, standing up at his own blue line, activating at the offensive one to generate chances, and he deserved to be out there late.

Xhekaj finished with two shots on net and seven attempts, but like the Canadiens, he finished with nothing to show for his efforts on this night.

Xhekaj's play has been consistent for the better part of two weeks of winning hockey for the Canadiens, and it has helped show his potential to complete this formidable group of six.

"I think he's just playing consistent," Dobson said. "I know from a forward's standpoint, it's never fun when he's out there. He's finishing his hits, he's having good gaps, he's making good plays. Obviously, he's got

confidence, too. He's making some plays in the o-zone and getting some good looks, so it's been great to see him playing as well as he is."

Dobson has been playing his part to near perfection over the last 10 games to help the Canadiens to a 6-2-2 record.

He came into Saturday's contest with three goals and nine points in his last nine games and made a ton of plays that could've flipped the outcome against the Red Wings.

Only Hutson (1:04) and Matheson (0:52) had more time than Dobson (0:51) with the puck on their stick in the offensive zone, and neither of them had as many as his four controlled zone entries.

Meanwhile, Guhle playing close to 19 minutes kept Hutson, Matheson and Dobson all under the 25-minute mark, with Xhekaj playing a bit more than he usually averages and Carrier playing a bit less.

There was a better equilibrium there—and not just in terms of ice-time. The more balanced minutes are what the Canadiens need with the schedule so frenetic between now and the February Olympic break, and the balancing of roles should keep each defenceman confident to help keep the Canadiens chasing the top of the ever-tightening race in the standings.

Even if Saturday's loss bumped the Canadiens from first in the Atlantic to third, with the Red Wings seizing first and the Lightning jumping a point ahead in second, even if the Buffalo Sabres pulled to within four points with two games in-hand and the Toronto Maple Leafs clawed to within five points with one game in-hand, and even if the Florida Panthers and Boston Bruins are now five and six points back, respectively, the strength of their blue line gives them reason to believe they can do it.

"We like what we have back there," said Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis. "It's a mix of players that we feel very comfortable with what we have, and bringing Guhles back in, we're going to figure out how to juggle that, find rhythm. Obviously, special teams breaks that sometimes, but we have great options."

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames Takeaways: Flu-ridden Cooley guts out skid-snapping win

Eric Francis

It was only after the Flames snapped a four-game losing skid the real entertainment began.

Cue the game's first star, Devin Cooley, whose 27 saves in a 2-1 win in Pittsburgh came despite battling a litany of illnesses he's struggled with for the better part of a week.

"Dude, brutal," said the Flames backup, with a voice barely recognizable.

"I had the flu, and I've had a fever the last five days. When the flu went away, it turned into bronchitis, so they started me on antibiotics and an inhaler because I can't breathe and I've got a really bad cough. So it's been five or six days with no sleep, a ton of meds, and just sweating constantly in my sleep, barely eating.



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"I've just been in this dream state, really out of it and loopy. It hasn't been fun. The travel doesn't really help. But there's no excuses in this league, so I'm really glad I was able to go out there and do it."

Cooley's last start was Dec. 20, giving Dustin Wolf eight straight starts, which included four straight losses through a hectic schedule heading into Saturday's afternoon affair.

Cooley was slated to start at least two recent games, but was unable to shake the long list of ailments he cited.

"You can't sit there and be like, 'I feel like I'm getting screwed, why haven't we called anyone up?'" he said.

"I'm like, 'No, look at it like a challenge. If I can have a good game when I feel like this, I can have a good game whenever.'

"I haven't been really practising either, so maybe I can tell the coaches I don't have to practise anymore."

Connor Zary opened the scoring early in the first with his second in as many games, converting a lengthy breakaway he earned by picking off a Penguins pass.

Midway through the second period, Cooley was beaten by Egor Chinakhov, who finished a nifty give-and-go with Evgeni Malkin.

Matt Coronato scored in the opening minute of the third, setting the stage for Cooley to shut the door and end Pittsburgh's six-game winning streak, despite the netminder being hit twice in the head by intruding Penguins.

Coleman on the shelf

Blake Coleman missed his first game of the year with an upper-body injury, likely suffered two nights earlier in Boston when he was wrestled down by towering defenceman Mason Lohrei.

He's considered day-to-day, which is a relief for Flames fans who cherish him as both the team's best forward this year and one of their biggest trade chips.

Yegor Sharangovich replaced Coleman on Mikael Backlund's line, which served to give the Belarusian a rare spark, as he upped his compete level considerably.

Joel Farabee replaced Coleman on the first penalty kill unit, and did well to ensure the Flames weren't scored on in any of Pittsburgh's three power plays. Farabee finished with 20:32 of ice time, as he continues to play well.

Given how important Coleman is as a player and asset, you can bet the Flames will continue to be cautious with how they proceed with the 34-year-old winger.

Pachal delivers

Brayden Pachal stepped into the lineup for Hunter Brzustewicz, and then stepped into Chinakhov with a blast that ranks as one of the hardest in the league this season.

The Penguins forward was rocked with his head down as he crossed into the Flames zone from the right side, allowing Pachal to lower his shoulder, tuck in his elbow and deliver a clean hit early in the second period that got the Flames bench all jazzed up.

"That was a big moment in the game for us," said Flames coach Ryan Huska of the hit.

"I felt that it brought a little energy to our team when we were sagging a little bit. That stuff matters. You don't often see a good, hard, clean in the open ice like that anymore."

Playing alongside Joel Hanley on the third pairing, Pachal finished the afternoon with a game-high four hits. His last appearance came Dec. 5 against Seattle, when he recorded nine wallops.

The Lines

Wranglers call-up William Stromgren drew into his second NHL game due to the Coleman injury, and offered up a taste of his skill with a toe-drag around Ryan Shea, which he then took to the net for a great scoring chance.

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Sportsnet.ca / 'It's unacceptable': Canucks' nosedive continues with drubbing by Maple Leafs

Iain MacIntyre

TORONTO – When you are falling as fast as the Vancouver Canucks, who are at terminal velocity with 38 National Hockey League games to go, it's hard to know precisely what the bottom will look like.

But it will probably be something like Saturday's demoralising 5-0 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs on Hockey Night in Canada.

It will look like Thatcher Demko allowing three goals on six shots and leaving the game after the first period with what coach Adam Foote said is yet another injury for the goalie. It will look like 0-for-6 on the power play, while the Leafs finish 2-for-4.

It will look like a 3-0 deficit after 20 minutes despite four Vancouver power plays and a 15-6 advantage in shots, and it will look like Marcus Pettersson getting beaten in a fight by Max Domi after answering the bell against the tough Maple Leaf because Pettersson, at least, was desperate to try to get the Canucks going.

In this game last year, when the Canucks shut out the Leafs 3-0 here on Jan. 11, teammates were shouting "Selke! Selke!" at Vancouver centre Elias Pettersson.

The call on Saturday could have been: "Where are you?"

Pettersson had one power-play shot on target and went 2-for-11 on faceoffs.

He was far from the only veteran Canuck missing.

"It's unacceptable," winger Kiefer Sherwood confirmed. "It's frustrating and, yeah, just unacceptable. We need to scrap and claw for every game right now, and we've got to take more pride in the little things: winning our battles, defending our net-front. The stuff in front (of our goalies) is unacceptable. They're the backbone of our team and we're just giving up way too many Grade-As (scoring chances). We've got to be desperate from the get-go. We can't just keep getting behind in these games and trying to come back."

Five games into 2026, the Canucks have yet to hold a lead in the New Year. They have lost six straight games, and eight of nine. Halfway through their longest road trip of the season, and now facing difficult back-to-back games in Montreal and Ottawa, starting Monday, Vancouver is 0-3 and been outscored 15-4.

"Yeah, it's really disappointing," winger Drew O'Connor said. "I mean, I think we just have to be better all-around. I don't think we were good enough in any area tonight. We give them three Grade-As that they score on in the first. There's nothing Demmer could have done. It's on us to be sharper."



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"I mean, we have to show up every night and play. There's no way around it. Doesn't really matter the circumstances. This is the NHL. Everyone has something to play for, and we just haven't been good enough. And you know, we can say we had chances and things like that ... but we have to put the puck in the net, we have to defend hard and we have to stop making the same mistakes."

On a night when the Canuck power play was mostly inert during 12 scoreless minutes, the Maple Leafs' power play needed just 36 seconds to make it 1-0 at 8:03 of the first period when Elias Pettersson was a step behind Matias Maccelli as the Maple Leaf tapped in William Nylander's cross-ice pass.

Liam Ohgren's failed reception on Filip Hronek's breakout pass, as Canuck defenceman Elias Pettersson (Junior) was looking for a line change, left Domi completely open down left wing before he fooled Demko with a short-side shot at 16:31.

Vancouver's power play was already 0-for-4 by the time Nylander got behind Marcus Pettersson and beat Demko on a patient deke at 19:40.

Demko finished the period with as many saves as goals against, and then was finished for the game.

"Thatcher went out with an injury," Foote told reporters. "So he's going to be re-evaluated. He'll be evaluated in the next couple days."

The goalie has already missed a month of this season with what was believed to be a groin strain, although there has also been speculation about his knee. Foote said the latest injury is "lower body."

Whatever it is, it will be the sixth injury in less than two years for the 2024 Vezina Trophy runner-up.

Demko's replacement, Kevin Lankinen, was easily the best Canuck in Toronto. He stopped 16 of 18 shots and made a handful of five-star saves. He was beaten only by John Tavares on a breakaway from Zeev Buium's turnover, and a last-minute power-play goal from the slot by Nick Robertson after another Canuck rookie, Tom Willander, fanned a clearance straight on to his stick.

The mistakes by Buium and Willander were a reminder how young the Canucks are, but that doesn't explain all the mistakes by veteran players.

Since the bottom of the standings were never far from the Canucks, the six straight losses have provided separation from 30 of the 31 teams ahead of them. Their season has become painfully bleak.

"It's the NHL; you've got to (bleeping) bring it every night," Sherwood said. "It doesn't matter who you are, where you're at (in the standings). If not, you're letting your teammates down. And it doesn't matter if we're young, it doesn't matter. We have to give ourselves a chance and dig in and – I say it all the time – put our work boots on and give ourselves a chance. The details and system stuff we can clean up. But to not be ready or to just get out-willed in certain areas, it's unacceptable."

"It's the best league in the world, and we all want to play in this league," Marcus Pettersson said. "So I don't think (motivation) should be an issue. And we ought to make sure it's not an issue. I think we deserve to give each other more than this."

ICE CHIPS – Injured forwards Conor Garland and Teddy Blueger joined the team for the morning skate in Toronto, giving the Canucks a trio of players in non-contact jerseys. Filip Chytil has been on the trip from the start. Garland, who banged his head on the ice on an unpenalized slew foot by Philadelphia Flyer Noah Cates on Dec. 30, is the closest to returning.