



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 15, 2026

The Athletic

How Brandon Bussi went from undrafted goalie to record-breaking 27-year-old phenom

By: Jesse Granger

In his first NHL action, Carolina Hurricanes goalie Brandon Bussi has put up an incredible 16-3-1 record over his first 20 starts. He became the fastest goalie in NHL history to 10 wins, doing it in only 11 games.

He's among the league leaders with a minuscule 2.31 goals-against average and has backstopped Carolina to the top of the Eastern Conference standings. If he carries this level of play into the spring and summer, he could be the long-missing piece to the Hurricanes' championship puzzle.

What makes the miraculous start to his NHL career even more improbable is that Bussi, 27, is too old to qualify as a rookie.

So, where did this undrafted puck stopper come from?

The Hurricanes claimed Bussi off waivers from the Florida Panthers on Oct. 5, just days before the regular season began. He had spent the first three seasons of his professional career in the minor leagues within the Boston Bruins organization. The journey of the late bloomer started much earlier, in his final season of junior hockey.

Bussi hadn't had a very impressive junior career before 2018, when he joined the Muskegon Lumberjacks. He was excellent that year, among the best goalies in the United States Hockey League, and caught the attention of the nearby university, Western Michigan. The Broncos offered him a scholarship and — much like his recent introduction to the NHL — Bussi was an instant hit.

"When we saw him in the net, we knew right away that he was going to be the guy," said Western Michigan goaltending coach J.J. Crew. "Every day in practice, his attention to detail with his technique, and how dialed in he was with his practice habits. He was just locked in on a different level."

Bussi is a big, rangy, athletic goalie with great feel for the game. He was the Broncos' starter from his first day on campus, and helped them to wins over three different ranked opponents in his first handful of starts.

"He's a sponge," Crew recalled of his days working with Bussi. "He's really easy to work with and a great kid. He's always continuing to learn any way he can. He's really open to new information. He's never been one to say, 'No, this is the way I've always done it.'"

Bussi credits his parents, Rob and Lisa, for his workmanlike mentality, attention to detail and maturity early in his career.

"Maturity can mean a lot of different things, but I think I have a unique perspective on the hockey world and life in a

sense," Bussi said. "I try to be able to brush things off and go with the flow, while also being critical when it's needed."

Crew felt Western Michigan had a team that could've contended for a title in Bussi's freshman season, but it was cut short due to COVID-19. When Bussi returned for his sophomore year, he was even better.

"In training camp that year, he just looked on a different level," Crew said. "As a coaching staff, we were talking about how we needed to be out recruiting another goalie for next year, because after this year he's going to sign (with a pro team)."

Bussi pulled his groin halfway into the opening game, costing him nearly his entire sophomore season. He came back as a junior and won the fourth-most games in the NCAA, and eventually signed with the Bruins in April 2022.

"It was just a question of whether he could get back to what we all knew he could be post-injury," Crew said, "and I think since he's been at the pro level, he has continued to earn his way and take steps, moving up the ranks."

During Bussi's three seasons in the Bruins organization, he was stuck behind several talented goalies. Linus Ullmark, Jeremy Swayman and Joonas Korpisalo at the NHL level offered little opportunity for promotion, so this summer, Bussi signed a one-year, two-way contract with the Florida Panthers. After training camp, the Panthers placed him on waivers with the hopes of sending him to the AHL, but Carolina surprisingly claimed him.

Hurricanes goalie Pyotr Kochetkov missed the start of the season with a lower-body injury that later required surgery and is expected to keep him out for the remainder of the year, opening the door for Bussi to see NHL action.

When Bussi made his NHL debut on Oct. 14, he posted a quote from Robert Frost on his Instagram account: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."

"I think adversity is a really good thing to have," Bussi said of his path to the NHL. "Every player, to get to the top level, has faced some adversity. Even the superstars, with injury or whatever. I think my adversity was maybe a little more unique early on, in terms of my junior hockey career. Things weren't going great for me. A lot of it was between the ears. It was my first time being away from home. Even though I was 18 and I felt like I was mature, there were areas that weren't quite ready."

When Bussi finally got his chance, he was ready.



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He won his debut in San Jose, then helped the Hurricanes top the Kings in overtime four nights later in Los Angeles. After a close loss to Dallas in his third start, Bussi strung together nine consecutive victories for the hottest start to a career in NHL history.

"It's exciting because it's what you work hard for your whole life, for this opportunity," he said. "But it has also been normal. This is what I've done for many years in my life. Yes, at the NHL level there's more media, more people watching the games on TV, more people in the crowd. You see Bussi jerseys in the crowd, so it's a little different, but I'm 27 now. I'm not an 18-year-old with the eyes wide open."

What have been the biggest keys to Bussi's instant success? The first thing that immediately stands out about his game is how aggressively he attacks the puck, especially when it's in tight. Bussi plays at the top of his crease and takes more aggressive angles than most goalies, often catching shooters off-guard.

"He just smothers guys and makes it look easy," Crew said. "He is so competitive on every shot."

In an era when goaltending has become increasingly formulaic, Bussi is no robot. He has an active stick and uses surprising save selections. Most noticeably, he doesn't sit back on his goal line and react to shots. He attacks shooting angles as aggressively as the situation will allow, such as on this sequence of saves against Philadelphia on Dec. 14.

Bussi has a big frame at 6-foot-4, 218 pounds, but has great feet. He uses them to maximize his size by controlling his gap to shooters. We often use the term "gap control" when discussing defensemen defending on the rush, but it's equally important for goalies in one-on-one situations. It's also one of the areas in which Bussi's aggression stands out most.

In a shootout or breakaway, most goalies adhere to the "Y" strategy. It starts with an aggressive challenge to gain depth outside of the crease. Then, usually once the puck carrier is roughly within a stick length of the goalie, he retreats. This forces the player to either shoot or choose a side to deke to. Once the shooter chooses a side, the goalie slides back on that angle, creating a Y shape.

That angle is typically close to a direct line back to the post, but this is where Bussi differs. He attacks on a much sharper angle, invading space the shooter is accustomed to having. Not only does it crowd the puck and cut down shooting angles, it often surprises the shooter.

The difference is subtle, but to shooters who have seen goalies react one way for most of their careers, it can be jarring.

"As a coach, I'd go out and try to score on him, and I couldn't even make a move because he was already on top of me," Crew explained. "It's crazy to think that as a goalie, the way he plays the position, he plays it from an attacking standpoint."

Here's an example of Bussi executing this concept on a shootout attempt by Washington's Dylan Strome on Dec. 11.

Crew's description of Bussi "smothering" shooters is perfect. This replay shows two key points that make it so effective. First, notice how Bussi keeps his glove out in front of him,

pointing down at the puck throughout the attempt. That crowds the puck and eliminates shooting angles.

Most importantly, watch how Bussi's left skate blade catches the ice as Strome dekes. At this point, most goalies allow their momentum to carry them back toward their net, but as soon as Bussi realizes the shot is coming, he digs his skate in and attacks the puck.

Here's another example, from Carolina's 6-3 win over Dallas on Jan. 6. Stars forward Wyatt Johnston made a sensational play to dance through the Hurricanes' defense, but ran out of room when Bussi cut off the angle and lunged at the puck rather than passively retreating and reacting to his dekes.

"I don't want (the shooter) to feel like he's entirely in control," Bussi explained. "My job is to do my best to take away the shot. If I take away the shot, it forces them to make a deke. At that point, if I'm close enough, I rely on my size and angles to fill the net."

The mindset doesn't just apply to one-on-one situations. Bussi uses smart reads to identify shooting threats early, and attacks those angles as well. Here's an exaggerated example of an incredible save on a one-timer by Alex Ovechkin.

That's obviously not the route most goalies would take on that play. Bussi ends up stuffing the shot basically directly off of Ovechkin's stick blade, well outside of the blue paint.

Like with anything in goaltending, every decision has some give and take, and the aggression can work against Bussi at times. Playing that far away from his goal line can lead to difficulties on second-chance opportunities in particular. Big-picture, though, it helps him make saves more than it hurts him. It also allows him to play freely and on instinct.

In this final example, Bussi's aggressive routes helped him make one of his best saves of the season on a grade-A chance by Stars forward Sam Steel on Jan. 6.

It's more subtle on this play, but the extra inches of depth Bussi buys himself are the difference between a goal and a save, especially on a point-blank redirect with no time to react to the flight of the puck.

By sliding out toward the shooter rather than back to his far post, Bussi does two things. First, he speeds up the process by eliminating the need to rotate his hips. Second, he gets his glove as close to the redirect as possible.

The result is a beautiful, smothering, glove save.

Bussi has enjoyed the ride over the last few months. He often says he feels like he's playing with house money, and credits his team for his record-breaking start. The Hurricanes' top-ranked defense is well deserving of the praise.

"It's obviously exciting," he said. "A lot of that stuff is definitely the team. It doesn't happen without really good efforts in front of me. They make my life easy."

That's nothing new for the Hurricanes, who have been one of the best shot-suppression teams in the NHL for the better part of a decade, but it has yet to result in a Stanley Cup championship. Carolina has made seven consecutive trips to the playoffs, and has used multiple goalies in each of those seven postseasons. It's not that the Hurricanes have been



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completely undone by their goaltending, but they also haven't gotten special performances in net. The kind that are often required to win it all.

Bussi has allowed two or fewer goals in 11 of his 20 starts, and has allowed more than three goals only twice.

May and June are a long way off, but perhaps Bussi can be that player. He leans on all of the work and preparation that have carried him to this point, and believes his lengthy path – going undrafted, spending years in the AHL, being claimed off waivers – was the correct one for him to end up in this position.

“Especially for goalies, there’s so much development that goes on,” he said. “It’s ironic, now that I’m 27, but the ultimate mindset is, you don’t want to be the best 18-year-old, you want to be the best 27-year-old. This is when you hit your prime, in a sense. I hope I have more than just now, obviously, but it’s such a long process to get where you want to be. In the end, it was a long process for me.

“We’re all striving for the dream of playing in the NHL, which is really what it is.”



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NHL Power Rankings: Once mighty Ducks floundering as they fall out of playoff picture

By: Austin Nivison

The Ducks tumbled from first in the Pacific to the wrong side of the playoff bubble

Back in November, I wrote about how the Anaheim Ducks were flying out of the gates on the strength of their talented young core, and they sat at No. 4 in these rankings. Well, that has aged rather poorly. Anaheim has since cratered, and the team now sits outside the postseason.

On Nov. 19, the Ducks were 13-6-1 and occupied first place in the Pacific Division. Thanks to an abhorrent 3-9-2 stretch over the last month, Anaheim is now outside the playoffs entirely, left to fight for a wild card spot with the rest of the Western Conference riff raff.

So, what went wrong? How did our beloved -- and once mighty -- Ducks fall so fast? For starters, the player driving that success has hit a wall. At one point this season, Leo Carlsson was atop the NHL scoring charts, alongside players like Nathan MacKinnon and Macklin Celebrini. Since Dec. 13, Carlsson has one goal and four assists in 13 games. That won't get it done.

On top of that, the team's defensive issues have finally come home to roost. The Ducks bleed expected goals against at the fifth-highest rate in the NHL. While the offense is able to make up for a lot of that, Anaheim's defense gives up too much for the team to hang around near the top of the standings.

The other major issue is that goaltender Lukas Dostal, who got off to a strong start like every other Duck, has been trending in the wrong direction. He's now allowed 6.57 goals above average, which is 76th in the league.

As the Ducks tumble, here are the updated NHL Power Rankings.

Expected goals and goals saved above average data via Natural Stat Trick.

Biggest Movers

Up: 8 Golden Knights

Down: 8 Senators

1

Avalanche Brock Nelson has been a terrific No. 2 center spot for the Avs. He's on pace for 40 goals, which would be a new career high at the age of 34. He also boasts a five-on-five expected goals share of 59.3%, which is better than Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar. -- 33-4-8

2

Lightning Tampa has now rattled off 11 straight wins, but Brayden Point may have suffered a significant injury on Tuesday night. The Bolts have already thrived in spite of the injury bug this season, but a lengthy stretch without Point would really test their mettle. -- 29-13-3

3

Red Wings One of the biggest reasons for this surge from the Red Wings has been the play of John Gibson. He got off to an abysmal start with his new team, but he's been a wall since the Christmas break. In his last seven appearances, Gibson has saved 8.87 goals above average. 3 28-16-4

4

Hurricanes The on-ice goal differential may not show it, but K'Andre Miller has been excellent for the Canes. His 57.6% expected goals share is exceptional, and with 21 points in 39 games, he may well set a new career high in that category. -- 28-15-4

5

Golden Knights There's a bender going on in Vegas. Mark Stone just scored goals in seven straight games. That streak came to an end on Sunday, and all he managed to do was register three assists against the Sharks. What a slacker. 8 22-11-12

6

Wild The young Matt Boldy has taken his scoring to another level. He's already up to 27 goals this season, which matches his total from 2024-25 and is just four away from his career high of 31. Boldy has seen a slight uptick in shots per game, but his finishing has been the difference with a 17.6% shooting percentage. 3 26-12-9

7

Canadiens Juraj Slafkovsky has been scorching lately. Since Dec. 20, he's fourth in the NHL with 18 points in just 13 games. Couple that with good five-on-five impacts, and the 21-year-old Slafkovsky seems to be climbing toward his potential in the NHL. 2 26-14-7

8

Sabres Who needs Owen Power to take the next step when you have Mattias Samuelsson? The rangy defenseman has already set career highs in goals (7), assists (15) and points (22). Meanwhile, his plus-12 goal differential at five-on-five leads the team. -- 25-16-4

9



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Stars Jake Oettinger hasn't been very sharp since the Christmas break. In his last five stars, Oettinger has allowed at least three goals four times, and his save percentage is .861 in that span. Oettinger should get back on track, but he's had a hand in the Stars' recent dip. 4 27-11-9

10

Islanders Mat Barzal is having a whale of a season, and that's a welcome sight on Long Island after injuries limited him to 30 games in 2024-25. He's up to 37 points, and the Islanders are hammering opponents when Barzal is on the ice. One of the NHL's more underrated stars, Barzal is buoying his team. 3 25-16-5

11

Oilers Since Zach Hyman rejoined the lineup on Nov. 15, he's given the Oilers a big lift with 16 goals and 11 assists in 28 games. Over that span, Edmonton has gone 15-9-4 while climbing toward first place in the Pacific Division. 1 23-16-8

12

Panthers With Aleksander Barkov out, Anton Lundell has struggled in a larger role. Due largely to increased ice time, Lundell is on pace for career highs in the traditional counting stats, but his five-on-five impacts leave a lot to be desired. Will Florida explore the trade market to find another center? 1 24-18-3

13

Bruins Marat Khusnutdinov scored four goals against the Rangers last week. Prior to this season, he'd never scored more than three in a single campaign. Now up to nine goals and 20 points, Khusnutdinov has given Boston some unexpected depth scoring, even if the underlying numbers aren't terribly flattering. 3 26-19-2

14

Flyers Matvei Michkov update: Zero goals and three assists in his last eight games. His ice-time is now down more than two minutes per game compared to last season. Michkov's sophomore slump has become a real concern for Philly. 2 22-15-8

15

Maple Leafs Joseph Woll didn't get his first start until Nov. 15 due to injury. Since then, he's recorded 11.2 goals saved above average (8th in the NHL) and a .883 high-danger save percentage. He's given the Leafs an edge in the crease as they make moves up the standings. 5 23-16-7

16

Penguins Erik Karlsson will miss multiple weeks with a hand injury, and that is awful news for the Pens. The veteran defenseman has been a net positive at five-on-five, and he leads the team with 29 assists. This will be a tough blow for Pittsburgh as it tries to claw back into a playoff spot. 3 21-14-10

17

Kraken After a few miserable seasons in Seattle, Philipp Grubauer is having a resurgence. His 10.1 goals saved above average are eighth in the NHL, and along with Joey Daccord, Grubauer has given the Kraken one of the best goalie tandems in the NHL. 6 21-15-9

18

Capitals The Capitals just need to make Logan Thompson a workhorse in goal. That may be easier said than done due to a compressed Olympic schedule, but Charlie Lindgren has been somewhat of a liability. He's allowed 3.62 goals above average and has a .796 high-danger save percentage behind a team that doesn't have a ton of firepower up front. 3 24-17-6

19

Sharks The next step in the Sharks' rebuild has to be acquiring an impact defenseman. They have Sam Dickinson in the prospect pipeline, but he's only 18 years old. San Jose is in dire need of blue liners who can drive play from the back end consistently. 1 23-19-3

20

Kings Over the last month, the Kings' goaltenders have combined for a .877 save percentage. Los Angeles simply cannot afford to have its goaltending falter for any kind of significant stretch because we know very well this team is unable to outscore its problems. 2 19-16-11

21

Devils The Devils may not have landed Quinn Hughes. They may be four points out of a playoff spot. But at least they went into Minnesota and won the Hughes Bowl in decisive fashion. It's the little things. -- 24-21-2

22

Senators What a week it's been in Canada's capital. The general manager calls out "trolls and sick people" for starting rumors about Linus Ullmark's absence. Meanwhile, the team has lost four straight games in regulation. 8 22-19-5

23

Mammoth Nate Schmidt has turned out to be a savvy addition. The veteran defenseman has a 59.2% expected goals share and a plus-17 goal differential at five-on-five. That's on top of 13 points, which doesn't sound like much but puts Schmidt on pace for his most since 2021-22. 3 23-20-4

24

Ducks Third-year phenom Leo Carlsson got off to a blistering start, but he's been ice cold as the Ducks have tumbled down the standings. Carlsson just snapped a 12-game goal drought on Saturday, and he has just one goal and four assists since Dec. 13. 7 22-21-3

25

Predators Prior to Tuesday night's win over the Oilers, the Predators surrendered the first goal in 10 straight games. They were 6-4-0 over that stretch. Nashville has lived dangerously in recent weeks, but it hasn't mattered.



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The Preds have to draw first blood more often. --
22-20-4

26

Blue Jackets The Blue Jackets have pulled the fire alarm by firing Dean Evason just halfway through his second season. I don't know what Columbus expected out of him, but we'll see whether Rick Bowness can get more out of this group. 2 20-19-7

27

Blackhawks Tyler Bertuzzi has been a real weapon for the Blackhawks on the power play this season. He's got nine goals on the man advantage already, and that's one shy of his career high with 39 games left on the schedule. 2 19-20-7

28

Flames Mackenzie Weegar's five-on-five results -- which include a minus-23 goal differential -- have been ugly. However, those results are largely driven by abysmal puck luck. His on-ice PDO is .930, which is almost inconceivable. 1 19-23-4

29

Jets Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi have combined for 46.3% of the Jets' goals. No other player is on pace for more than 14 tallies this season. Winnipeg has an extremely top-heavy offense. 3 18-22-5

30

Blues It sounds like the Blues are on the verge of hanging a "For Sale" sign out in front of the Enterprise Center. That's probably a wise move because the trade market is flooded with demand, but no teams have been willing to provide the supply. -- 18-21-8

31

Rangers Over the last month, the Rangers have exactly two regulation wins. This team, which is now below .500, is bad. There's just no other way to slice it. 7 20-22-6

32

Canucks Brock Boeser hasn't scored since Nov. 28, which amounts to a 21-game drought. He only has five assists over that span. Ouch. 1 16-25-5

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1375638 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes Need to Stop Looking for "Easy Wins" in Today's Parity-Driven NHL - The Hockey Writers Latest News, Analysis & More

Zach Martin

5-6 minutes 14/01/2026

There are no "easy games" in today's NHL. Back in the 1980s and up until the early 2000s, before the 2004-25 lockout, some games could declare a winner before puck drop. Since then, any team can win a game on any given night, and everyone is beatable. Sure, there are teams like this season's Colorado Avalanche, who are absolute wagons, but even they are beatable. It all comes down to preparation.

Against a struggling St. Louis Blues team on Tuesday, the Carolina Hurricanes were looking for that "easy win." They were shut out, 3-0.

Following their loss on Tuesday night, captain Jordan Staal stated, "I think we were just hoping for an easy one, really. It just seemed like we were kind of hoping for a 'We'll outscore them, we're going to get our few chances, we'll give them a couple, and we'll see what happens' kind of game. We weren't really ready to play that forechecking game or that stress game that we've been talking about. There wasn't a whole lot of spark from anyone throughout the lineup. It wasn't pretty."

For a team built on grinding their opponents down in all three zones, relying on skill and cheating on offense will not get them wins. This is the same team that said they had "no spark" following their 5-1 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Dec. 30, to close out 2025.

Since a three-game stretch of blowing leads in December, the Hurricanes are playing Jekyll and Hyde hockey – they rise up to a challenge one night and then show up the next with no life. In a very tight Eastern Conference race, there are no off nights, and there are no easy teams. But this has been an issue for weeks.

When asked about Staal's comments following their first shutout loss of the season, head coach Rod Brind'Amour said, "It was obvious, right



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from the start, we had no life. You could just see how we were turning pucks over. It's not how we play. They capitalized. They played a good team game. Structured, how they're supposed to. We were trying to do other things, and that never works."

Sebastian Aho Carolina Hurricanes Nick Bjugstad St. Louis Blues

St. Louis Blues center Nick Bjugstad faces off against Carolina Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho (Joe Puetz-Imagn)

The Hurricanes have been turning over pucks, suffering defensive breakdowns, and their transition game has been up-and-down, forcing their goalies to cover for their mistakes. In back-to-back games against the Detroit Red Wings on Monday and the Blues last night, the forwards and defensemen left Frederik Andersen and Brandon Bussi out to dry multiple times. Of the seven goals given up in the two games, only one might be blamed on the goalie, at most.

Brind'Amour said, "We were trying to do other things, and that never works."

Every team has stars on its roster. Every team can make their opponents pay when they try to cheat on preparation or positioning. Every team is also playing a heavier schedule with the Olympic break next month, and every team is dealing with injuries. It's about getting ready mentally for every game, and there are no nights off.

Brind'Amour noted, "This is part of being a pro. We've gone through this with other games too this year, where we've had these stretches of three (games) in four (days), and travel, and we have the same result. This is where you have to buckle down and not look the other way..."

There are no easy games, and every game matters.

This season, every team in the Eastern Conference is over .500 except for the New York Rangers (20-21-6). In the West, only five teams are under .500, including the Blues. The Hurricanes rank fifth in the NHL with 60 points in 47 games. They're one win from jumping into third over the Tampa Bay Lightning and the Minnesota Wild. The Blues are 29th with 44 points.

The Hurricanes must know they cannot underestimate any opponent in today's NHL, heading into a match with the mentality that 'we'll outscore them, we're going to get our few chances, we'll give them a couple, and we'll see what happens.' Not today. The Blues proved that.

If the Hurricanes want to make another deep playoff run and reach the Stanley Cup Final for the first time since 2006, they need to be ready for every game. When they play the right way, the Hurricanes' way, led by Brind'Amour, they can win the Stanley Cup. But they need to understand it will never come easy.

It's about preparing every night and showing up for 60 minutes each game. They need to stop cheating and looking for easy wins from teams below them in the standings. When they figure that out, they will be unstoppable.

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The Athletic / After Mike Tomlin's exit, these are the longest-tenured coaches in North American pro sports

By Devon Henderson

Jan. 14, 2026

An earlier version of this article misstated the three longest-serving MLB managers. It should be No. 1 Kevin Cash, No. 2 Dave Roberts and No. 3 Torey Lovullo and not No. 1 Dave Roberts, No. 2 Brian Snitker and No. 3 Oliver Marmol.

With Mike Tomlin stepping down from coaching the Pittsburgh Steelers after 19 seasons, it leaves Miami Heat head coach Erik Spoelstra, in his 18th season, as the longest-tenured coach in major North American sports.

However, it's not a sentiment Spoelstra is particularly proud of.

"Some people could look at that as a badge of honor," Spoelstra told reporters Tuesday. "I look at that as really a disappointment to this profession, that there's not more coaches that are given an opportunity to work through things."

He's not wrong. Of 167 total professional major North American sport franchises (NBA, NFL, MLB, NHL, MLS, WNBA), only 13 coaches have maintained their jobs since before 2019.

With the Baltimore Ravens recently firing longtime coach John Harbaugh after 18 seasons, it leaves Spoelstra and Minnesota Lynx coach Cheryl Reeve as the only ones who have held their jobs since 2010.

Both Tomlin and Harbaugh won Super Bowls for their franchises, but neither has had a championship appearance in the last decade.

In a world of instant gratification, a lack of immediate results has bred rapid change. Here's an updated list of the survivors — the top three longest-tenured coaches in each league across professional North American sports.

Reid was hired after a 2-14 Kansas City season in 2012 under Romeo Crennel and immediately elevated the franchise to an 11-5 record in 2013 and a playoff berth. His Chiefs have posted 12 consecutive winning seasons in his tenure, including nine straight AFC West division titles, seven straight AFC championship appearances, five Super Bowl berths and three titles.

Meanwhile, McVay inherited a 4-12 Rams team as the youngest-ever (30 years old) head coach hired. He ushered in a new star-studded era in Los Angeles, as his team was in the Super Bowl just two years after he was hired and then won it in 2020.

Unlike Reid and McVay, Shanahan hasn't lifted a Super Bowl trophy for his franchise, but he has remained at the San Francisco helm since 2017 because of the team's consistency in the playoffs. After two losing seasons in his first two years, Shanahan's 49ers started a trend in 2019 of either making it to at least the conference championship (four total and three consecutive between 2021-23) or not making the playoffs at all (2020 & 2024).

McDermott is the only one of the top four tenured coaches to have never led his team to a Super Bowl appearance. He remains because in the same nine seasons as McVay and Shanahan, he's produced the most total regular season wins and has the fewest amount of seasons (one) missing the playoffs.

The problem is he's consistently run into Andy Reid and the Chiefs (four times, losing all four), and he's yet to exorcise those demons.

When Spoelstra took over in 2008, he was lucky enough to inherit Miami's greatest ever player in the prime of his career — Dwyane Wade. Then LeBron James and Chris Bosh joined the project, and Spoelstra guided "The Big Three" to four consecutive finals appearances, winning two.

While Spoelstra inherited Wade and the rest of the superteam soon followed, Kerr inherited a burgeoning Golden State dynasty already built, but gave them the freedom to unleash an imperious reign over the NBA. Fresh off a conference semifinals loss in 2014, Kerr arrived in 2014-15 and gave Stephen Curry, Klay Thompson, Draymond Green and the rest



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of the Warriors the green light to run the free-flowing, shoot-from-anywhere offense that would reshape the way basketball is played.

The Warriors made five consecutive Finals, winning three, taking a hiatus, then coming back and winning another in 2022. Kerr was the man at the helm of the NBA's last great dynasty, as not a single team has repeated Finals appearances since Golden State, much less won consecutive crowns.

Donovan was once revered as a perennial winner as a college coach, winning two consecutive NCAA championships, leading the Florida Gators in 2006 and 2007. In Chicago, he's managed only one playoff appearance in six seasons, and just a single season above .500.

In 2012-13, Cooper took over a Lightning franchise that had one playoff appearance in six years. He's missed the playoffs only once in the 12 seasons since, making four Stanley Cup finals and winning two.

Meanwhile, the winningest coach in Avalanche history took over in 2016 for a franchise with just two playoff appearances in the previous nine years. The Avalanche struggled in Bednar's first year, but they made the playoffs in his second in 2017-18. They have yet to miss the playoffs since and won the Stanley Cup in 2022.

In 2014, Avalanche center Nathan MacKinnon won the Calder Trophy for rookie of the year before Bednar got to the Rockies. Since then, he's been Bednar's crown jewel, winning multiple accolades, including both the Hart Memorial and Ted Lindsay MVP awards.

Brind'Amour took over a perennial bottom-dweller in Carolina that had missed nine consecutive postseasons, and unlike Bednar and Cooper, who both took a year to start their playoff streaks, his impact was immediate. Since taking over in 2018, the Hurricanes have played a part in every postseason. Although they have yet to win a Stanley Cup, Brind'Amour's team has made the conference finals three times.

Rod Brind'Amour says you'd be surprised how similar coaching kids is to coaching NHL players: "Hockey is hockey."

Cash is the longest tenured manager and has been a frequent visitor to the playoffs, taking the Rays to the post season from 2019 through 2023 and winning the American League pennant in 2020, but losing to the Dodgers in the World Series.

Roberts has been a winner. Whether as a key base stealer in the 2004 World Series for the winning Boston Red Sox, breaking the Curse of the Bambino, or as the head of the modern dynasty that is the Los Angeles Dodgers. In nine seasons at the helm in the City of Angels, he's led the Dodgers to five World Series, winning three, including the last two.

Lovullo managed the Diamondbacks to the National League Division Series in his first season as manager in 2017 and led Arizona on an unexpected run as a wild card team winning the National League pennant before falling in the World Series to the Texas Rangers in 2023.

Schmetzer is built from the Reid, Roberts and Kerr cloth in inheriting struggling teams and coaching them to dynastic levels. He was hired as an interim halfway through the 2016 season, and by that season's end, Seattle was the MLS Cup champion. By the end of 2020, the Sounders had made it to four championship matches in five years, winning two.

Vanney has captured one MLS Cup in Los Angeles while leading the Galaxy, but neither he nor Pareja has seen as much consistent championship-winning success as Schmetzer in the Pacific Northwest. However, both Pareja and Vanney have won Coach of the Year accolades in 2016 and 2017, respectively.

Reeve is the torchbearer for the WNBA, its most successful coach and a dominant force. No other coach has been with one team since before 2020, and Reeve has been winning championships since early in her tenure, which began in the 2010 season. The Lynx were a WNBA doormat, but the arrival of Maya Moore from UConn changed everything.

Between 2011 and 2017, the Lynx played in the WNBA Finals in six of those seven seasons, winning four titles.

When Moore stepped away in 2019, she was replaced by another UConn stalwart in Napheesa Collier. Since then, the winning has only continued, with the Lynx making the WNBA Finals in 2024.

However, Reeve hasn't won a Finals since 2017, and one of the figures who has stood in her way has been Becky Hammon and the Las Vegas Aces. The former WNBA player and first-ever full-time women's assistant NBA coach with the San Antonio Spurs hit the ground running in Sin City. Like Reeve with Moore, Hammon took the reins of a team with superstar A'ja Wilson, and the Aces laid waste to the league in the first half of this decade, winning three championships in four years.

In 2023, Tibbetts was hired in Phoenix and quickly led the Mercury to success as the franchise transitioned away from longtime stalwarts Brittney Griner and Diana Taurasi and into a new era. In 2025, Tibbetts got the Mercury to the WNBA Finals, where they lost to Las Vegas.

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The Athletic / Five U23 NHL players or prospects whose stock rose in 2025-26 season's first half

By Corey Pronman

Jan. 14, 2026

We're just past the halfway mark of the 2025-26 season, and with the midseason release of this year's U23 list, I wanted to highlight five of the fastest-rising young players in the first half of the season.

At the midpoint of the 2025-26 season, Corey Pronman updates his list of the top U23 NHL players and prospects.

Igor Chernyshov, LW, San Jose Sharks

Ranking: No. 19 (No. 71 in September)

Chernyshov was a second-round pick in 2024 while playing in Russia. Since coming over to North America after the draft, he has looked like a potential impact scorer. He lit up the AHL as a 19-year-old to begin this season, earned a call-up to San Jose and hasn't looked out of place.

His rise is due to how translateable his game has proven to be. He attacks the net and creates offense in a direct manner. He checks almost every box between his speed, skill, sense and compete to go with his big frame.

Roman Kantserov, LW, Chicago Blackhawks

Ranking: No. 23 (No. 162 in September)

Kantserov has been one of the best players in the KHL this season. He has elevated his stock from a good prospect to a player on the fast track to playing for Chicago and possibly in a meaningful role.

Kantserov isn't the biggest player, but he can elevate against men despite his frame due to his high-end combination of skill, speed and motor. He creates in the hard areas, wins battles he shouldn't and is a responsible two-way player. He reminds me a lot of fellow Chicago forward Frank Nazar in that regard; he has the skill, but has the top-end compete you need to succeed and drive play at even strength at his size. After being a second-round pick, he's tracking to be a top-six winger who coaches will trust.

Yegor Surin, C, Nashville Predators



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Ranking: No. 34 (No. 112 in September)

Surin was a first-round pick by Nashville, so he's a bit different from the rest of this group, but the level at which he's playing for a top team, Lokomotiv Yaroslavl, has been quite unusual for a teenager. He's an easy player to fall in love with because he combines legitimate skill with a distinct, nasty edge. He brings it every single shift, playing a physical brand of hockey while still playing with pace, creating a lot of offense and finishing plays. Whether he settles as a second-line center or a high-end second-line winger, he has proven this year that he's the type of player coaches will covet in the playoffs.

Alexander Zharovsky, LW, Montreal Canadiens

Ranking: No. 39 (unranked in September)

Zharovsky, a high second-round pick by Montreal in 2025, is in the midst of a monster 18-year-old season in the KHL as a top player for Ufa. He even got an invite to Russia's senior team in December.

He's a super slick winger with legit offensive upside for the NHL. His hands and creativity are high-end, allowing him to consistently make difficult plays through traffic. While he has played some center, his style projects perfectly as a scoring winger in the NHL who can run a power play from the half-wall. He's trending toward being a top-six forward who scores a lot of points.

Perhaps the biggest surprise on this list, the undrafted Bowman has forced his way into the Golden Knights' lineup. Since his recall, he has provided secondary scoring for Vegas. While his skating has always been the main knock against him and at times he's struggled with the NHL pace, his rise is a testament to his great hockey sense and compete level. He looks like a player who can slide up and down the lineup and contribute on a second power-play unit, proving to be a valuable find for a Vegas team that's thin on prospects.

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Sportsnet.ca / Real Kypre's Trade Board 2.0: Rebuilding the Vancouver Canucks

Nick Kypreos

Wow, that escalated quickly.

The Vancouver Canucks started the year hopeful for a playoff run, then struggles on the ice led to them trading away superstar Quinn Hughes. Even after the Hughes trade, the front office talked about turning things around within a couple of seasons. Now, on the heels of an eight-game losing streak, the dynamic has changed again. Frame it however you want, the Canucks are in the midst of a rebuild.

If you're not in your very early-20s, you're going to have to put up with a lot of trade talk and rumours.

Pending free agents such as Kiefer Sherwood, Evander Kane and Teddy Blueger are all highly likely to be on new teams by the March 6 trade deadline.

But this change in direction also puts Elias Pettersson very much in the trade wheelhouse and he's featured on my latest trade board.

Vancouver's first objective is to get their players going again, and while that starts with Pettersson, they have waited too long for him to show another side or another gear in his game. While the Maple Leafs are getting a turnaround from Auston Matthews, who is helping correct

Toronto's course, the same is not happening for Pettersson and the Canucks. The challenge for Vancouver, however, will be finding a trade partner willing to take on all, or most of, his cap hit and be willing to swap a centre in return.

At the end of the day, this is a full rebuild. Unless someone says they're building around Pettersson, or Pettersson says he wants to be here for the turnaround, he will be on my list.

As far as Canucks players with term left on their contract, the possibilities for trade go deeper than just Pettersson.

Jake DeBrusk was made a healthy scratch on Dec. 29 and word is that did not sit well with his camp and it made rival teams aware that there might be some issues here. When DeBrusk signed as a free agent with Vancouver in 2024 he had as many as 14 teams after him with four-to-six year contract offers and teams are making calls on him now. There's blood in the water and sharks are circling this team.

Both Pettersson and DeBrusk would have to waive their no-movement clauses to make any deal happen, which would indicate that what's going on in Vancouver is not what they feel they signed up for.

When the NHL takes a break for the Olympics on Feb. 5, a trade freeze will commence. By the time the freeze lifts and teams return, we'll be less than two weeks out from the trade deadline, so there is some belief we could have action before the Olympics. That could include the Canucks, who may trade several players. They aren't the only ones, though, as there are many other teams looking to make waves.

That brings me to the latest trade board, and what I'm hearing around the league...

Elias Pettersson, C, Vancouver Canucks: 13 G | 15 A | 28 PTS | 38 GP

Vancouver's best interest is to prop up Pettersson a bit more, but the player also needs to play better for the Canucks to maximize their return in a possible trade. Despite his struggles, the 27-year-old centre is still an attractive asset to some teams out there and we'd put Carolina at the top of the list. Teams that have stockpiled assets for the past few years and are looking for a centre in his prime age range are the most likely partners in a Pettersson trade. Detroit would be another one, and Los Angeles needs to replace Anze Kopitar, who is on his way to retirement.

The issue for Vancouver is that they also need a centre back in return. Besides top prospects and first-round picks, they need something to hold the front line. When it comes to Carolina, for example, could Jesperi Kotkaniemi be a seat-holder until Vancouver is able to draft and develop another centre?

Jake DeBrusk, LW, Vancouver Canucks: 12 G | 10 A | 22 PTS | 45 GP

DeBrusk is just in the second season of a seven-year contract, but represents another one of the tenured players on this team the front office could move. DeBrusk scored 28 goals just a season ago, he has 86 career playoff games under his belt and he's proven he can play on a deep team anywhere from the first line to the third. A \$5.5 million cap hit isn't much for a team looking for some secondary scoring punch and the cap will continue to rise over the remaining years of his contract so there aren't many teams scared of adding him.

Kiefer Sherwood, RW, Vancouver Canucks: 17 G | 6 A | 23 PTS | 44 GP

When the Canucks acknowledged they were taking calls on veteran players in the final year of their contracts, Sherwood immediately came to mind. Vancouver's goal scoring leader with 17 in 44 games, Sherwood also plays a physical style of game, which combines for an intriguing set of skills that are even more valued come playoff time. Potentially complicating things now is that Sherwood is injured and Canucks coach Adam Foote estimated it could be "a week to three weeks" adding that "it doesn't look promising." That at least puts into question if Sherwood might get traded before the Olympic roster freeze, but as long as he



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returns before March 6, Sherwood is still more likely than not to be on the move.

Dougie Hamilton, D, New Jersey Devils: 5 G | 7 A | 12 PTS | 41 GP

A celebrated, top-of-class free agent signing in July of 2021, the sense is Hamilton's time in New Jersey is running out after he was made a healthy scratch on Sunday (he returned to the lineup Monday). Hamilton, now 32, has some trade protection, but it's believed he is willing to waive to go to some teams that were on his no-trade list.

I'm not sure Hamilton has the same cache as Seth Jones did last season and it will be very tricky to move him with two more years of a \$9 million cap hit coming with him. Would the Devils retain any money? If not, there is another interesting possibility. Hamilton is due a \$7.4 million signing bonus on July 1, so what if he went to a team with the understanding that the bonus would be honoured and then the rest of the contract gets terminated (if another trade partner is not found in the summer)? This would open up the market a bit more for Hamilton. After the signing bonus is paid, Hamilton would be owed \$6.25 million in actual dollars over the last two years on his deal, and it's possible he could recoup all that and perhaps even make more if he rejoined the free agent market. This possibility was recently explored on PuckPedia.

Artemi Panarin, LW, New York Rangers: 16 G | 34 A | 50 PTS | 46 GP

As the Rangers sag in the standings, the front office will have to consider every option and Saturday's 10-2 loss to Boston won't slow down any speculation. Although 33-year-old Panarin leads the team with 50 points in 46 games, his minus-13 is the worst plus/minus of any scorer within the NHL's top 25. It's believed the Rangers are not willing to meet Panarin's price on an extension, so since his contract expires this summer the Russian may be one of the most sought-after rentals. And while Panarin is in full control of his destination with a no-movement clause, he would be wise to consider waiving it to join a contender, be put in a position to succeed in the playoffs, and rebuild his stock ahead of free agency to maximize earnings on his next deal.

Jason Robertson, LW, Dallas Stars: 27 G | 28 A | 55 PTS | 47 GP

If Robertson holds strong on his asking price and wants more on a new contract with Dallas than Mikko Rantanen's \$12 million, then the Stars may eventually explore trading their top goal scorer, but they'd need a big scoring replacement. Already missing Tyler Seguin, a Robertson trade would require a significant player in return. He's not going to go for picks and prospects.

There is time for this to play out. Robertson will be an RFA this summer, but unless he signs a multi-year deal he would be on track for unrestricted free agency in 2027. Because of this setup, and since Dallas is chasing a Stanley Cup, a Robertson deal may get pushed into the summer. But if there is a trade out there that Dallas thinks will improve the roster right now, an in-season move can't be ruled out.

Anthony Stolarz, G, Toronto Maple Leafs: 6-5-1 | 3.51 GAA | .884 SV%

While he hasn't played since Nov. 11, there is growing belief that Stolarz could return to the Leafs' lineup before the Olympic break next month. How impactful can he be then? Stolarz played 34 games for Toronto last season, posted a 2.14 goals-against average and .926 save percentage to form one of the top tandems with Joseph Woll. In 2025-26, however, Stolarz came out with a 3.51 GAA and .884 save percentage. Stolarz, 31, makes \$2.5 million against the salary cap this season and has already signed a four-year extension with a \$3.75 million AAV that doesn't kick in until 2026-27. If he can return before the March 6 trade deadline and put together a few strong performances, the Leafs may explore trading him to a goalie-needy team.

Stolarz does have 16-team no-trade list, so Toronto's options could be somewhat limited. In a perfect world, they'd like to keep the depth they have in net, but they're not in position to do that and "win now" so hard

decisions have to be made. The Leafs need to find another defenceman, or a quality scorer up front, and since they're thin on picks and prospects the front office might have to get creative. Beggars can't be choosers. Stolarz is an asset, but he has to show he can return to form and stay healthy.

Alex Tuch, RW, Buffalo Sabres: 15 G | 22 A | 37 PTS | 43 GP

We'll keep Tuch on the trade board for now because a one- or two-week slide could change Buffalo's outlook again, but for now a recent run of success has the Sabres back in a playoff spot and more in a position to buy than sell. At the same time, there is renewed belief that GM Jarmo Kekalainen could be willing to meet Tuch's contract demands of around \$10 million.

Evgeni Malkin, C, Pittsburgh Penguins: 10 G | 22 A | 32 PTS | 30 GP

His return to the lineup last week came with a goal for himself and a win for the team, though the three losses that followed (two in regulation) has Pittsburgh on the outside looking in again. It's a tight race in the Eastern Conference, and the closer the Penguins are to the wild card (or a top-three spot in the Metro), the harder it will be to move on from Malkin and thus give up on one more post-season run with him and Sidney Crosby. If there is an opportunity to move Malkin, however, Pittsburgh's front office would take it as the 39-year-old is in the final year of his contract and this organization knows it needs to pivot to younger players. However the team performs, Malkin will have final say on how this situation plays out since he has a no-movement clause.

Brayden Schenn, C, St. Louis Blues: 9 G | 10 A | 19 PTS | 47 GP

Five points out of the playoffs, it's going to get harder for the Blues to pull themselves back in this time and, though we've heard these rumblings before, 2026 might go down as the year Doug Armstrong finally did make big moves involving his core. This will be Armstrong's final deadline as GM before handing off the reins to Alexander Steen, and while Armstrong won't want to leave this team in a worse spot for his successor, he may strive to leave behind a different team than a core that has won a single playoff series in five years. Schenn was a hot trade topic at last year's deadline and will be so again this year. He has two years left paying \$6.5 million against the cap and has a 15-team no-trade list. It's believed Brayden and brother Luke Schenn are communicating that they'd like to play together, so it's possible there's an organized effort to get them both at the same time. Luke is in the final year of a deal paying \$2.75 million against the cap as a member of the Winnipeg Jets.

Jordan Kyrou, RW, St. Louis Blues: 8 G | 11 A | 19 PTS | 37 GP

It has been a tough season for Kyrou, who has just 19 points in 37 games and missed time in December with an injury. He has another five years left on a contract paying \$8.125 million against the cap and a no-trade clause. However, as I wrote just last week, there's a growing sense that Kyrou may be amenable to waiving his NTC this season to get a new start if it's with a contending playoff team.

Jordan Binnington, G, St. Louis Blues: 8-12-6 | 3.53 GAA | .871 SV%

This is a name I've heard and written about in trade talk going back to last season and we can't ignore these rumblings again in 2026, especially as Joel Hofer posts better numbers and is tracking towards a career high in regular-season appearances. Binnington has been struggling all season and there has been little sign of improvement, but he is a Stanley Cup winner and proven big-game performer. There are goalie-needy teams out there that may be interested in taking a shot on Binnington, whose contract comes with a \$6 million AAV, but only has one more season left on it. There's not much of a market for Binnington right now, but he stays on the list as Armstrong sorts out how this will look.

Steven Stamkos, RW, Nashville Predators: 20 G | 11 A | 31 PTS | 46 GP



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A 12-goal run in December seemed to be turning the season around for Stamkos, and teams will be watching how he follows up such a strong month. Goals in back-to-back games now are fuelling hope. Stamkos has a no-movement clause, but the sense is he'd be open to waiving that for another look at the playoffs. The bigger issue in trading Stamkos is the \$8 million cap hit he comes with, which many teams will balk at and few would have room to fit in during the season. The Predators have already used two of their three salary retention slots and doing so for Stamkos would keep a portion of his cap on the books for another two seasons, which is not Nashville's first choice.

Jonathan Marchessault, RW, Nashville Predators: 7 G | 3 A | 10 PTS | 28 GP

He hasn't played since Dec. 17 and there's no signal yet that he's returning soon, but Marchessault will remain on this list until the trade deadline or until he's ruled out for well past March 6. Marchessault is similar to Stamkos in that they're both 35-year-old scoring forwards who have struggled to find any momentum since signing UFA deals to join Nashville and there are teams willing to bet that a more competitive roster will bring out more production. If healthy, however, Marchessault might be the easier of the two to trade since his cap hit is just \$5.5 million and more teams could absorb that without retention. Marchessault also has a no-movement clause to navigate and he has three more years left on his contract.

Ryan O'Reilly, C, Nashville Predators: 13 G | 26 A | 39 PTS | 46 GP

A valued centre — and a defensively responsible one at that — there are several playoff-bound teams that would love to add O'Reilly for two playoff runs. On paper he's the easiest to trade given his \$4.5 million AAV and lack of any trade protection. However, GM Barry Trotz has indicated that he will handle O'Reilly's case as if he did have trade protection and would seek to work with the 34-year-old on any potential move.

Vincent Trocheck, C, New York Rangers: 11 G | 16 A | 27 PTS | 33 GP

A 32-year-old and an American Olympian, Trocheck still has a lot to give over the life of his contract, which runs for another three years beyond this one. A two-way centre and member of the leadership group, Trocheck had strong comments after New York's 10-2 loss to Boston, calling it "embarrassing" and saying the team needed a reset. That reset may come in the form of some trade considerations, which Trocheck himself may get caught up in. His trade value as a player may not rise much higher than it currently is, so the Rangers would be wise to work the phones on him now. Could a pre-Olympics trade be in the cards?

Blake Coleman, LW, Calgary Flames: 13 G | 8 A | 21 PTS | 44 GP

I wrote last week that Coleman was the Flames player drawing the most trade interest and that remains true. A two-time Stanley Cup winner, Coleman is versatile, a sneaky secondary goal scorer and he's making just under \$5 million. His contract runs through next season as well, so teams would get two playoff runs with the 34-year-old if they can get him at this year's deadline. The Flames have to be real with where they are at as a team, and that Coleman is not likely to still be around when their new arena opens anyway. Jumping the market on him now would maximize the return.

Rasmus Andersson, D, Calgary Flames: 10 G | 19 A | 29 PTS | 46 GP

The most obvious trade candidate in Calgary is Andersson, who we've been expecting to move all season. While he and the team have teased the possibility of an extension, the reality is the 29-year-old is months away from being able to test the UFA market and that is certainly an opportunity he would explore to join a contending team. The Flames will be moving this player before the March 6 trade deadline and, in fact, it's highly likely a deal will be found before Andersson leaves for the Olympics, where he will play for Team Sweden. The Flames cannot risk him being injured in that tournament and returning as a player they can no longer get assets back for.

Nazem Kadri, C, Calgary Flames: 8 G | 24 A | 32 PTS | 46 GP

The idea of trading for Kadri is a nice one. He's still a top-six centre at 35 years old, leads the Flames in scoring, and the last time he played in the post-season Kadri was a key member of Colorado's drive to a Stanley Cup win. However, the Flames aren't in as much of a rush to trade him as they are for Andersson or Coleman because Kadri still has another three years left on his contract. A decision can be kicked down the road. At the same time, there are some teams that are cautious to trade for a player at Kadri's age who also has so much term left on his deal and comes with a costly \$7 million cap hit. Those factors have dulled Kadri's market and the feelers the Flames have received on Kadri have been underwhelming so far.

Andrew Mangiapane, LW, Edmonton Oilers: 5 G | 6 A | 11 PTS | 42 GP

It's just not worked for Mangiapane in Edmonton and as the Oilers look to improve their roster ahead of the trade deadline, they'd happily move off his \$3.6 million cap hit and a contract that runs one more season. That may be easier said than done, especially given Mangiapane has a no-trade clause this season, but he may be open to waiving that for a better playing situation. Mangiapane has been a regular healthy scratch lately and played his first game in January on Monday night.

Jesper Kotkaniemi, C, Carolina Hurricanes: 2 G | 4 A | 6 PTS | 27 GP

Last week Elliotte Friedman wrote that the Hurricanes were listening to trade offers on centre Jesperi Kotkaniemi, the one-time offer sheet signee who these days has become a healthy scratch in Carolina's lineup. Kotkaniemi has one point in his past 15 games and just six points in 27 games on the season. However, there is still some potential here. Kotkaniemi is only 25 years old, so he's on the young side of his career, and he's signed for another four years at a \$4.82 million cap hit. That may be a lot for a struggling player, but a centre at his age might be an intriguing asset for a re-tooling team to take on. The Hurricanes are chasing a Stanley Cup, so this is not a situation where they will dump the player. They have to be getting someone, or something, back that will help them achieve their goals this season.

Boone Jenner, C, Columbus Blue Jackets: 8 G | 15 A | 23 PTS | 32 GP

Second-last in the Eastern Conference, six points out of a playoff spot, the Blue Jackets front office made its first big move to respond to the team's performance on Monday by firing head coach Dean Evason and replacing him with Rick Bowness. If a new coach bump and wins don't soon follow, player movement will be up next. Jenner, 32, is a beloved player in the organization, drafted and developed by the Blue Jackets and the current team captain. But he's also in the final year of his contract, and as a physical, middle-of-the-lineup centre, he's the type of player playoff teams would salivate over. It's a big decision for the Blue Jackets to make, but if they don't pull closer to the playoffs quickly, trading Jenner is a tough decision that'll have to be made.

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Sportsnet.ca / 10 questions answered about where Maple Leafs stand right now

Justin Bourne

The Toronto Maple Leafs have reached that familiar mid-season crossroads where clarity feels just close enough to touch, yet still frustratingly out of reach. A strong run has lifted them back into the playoff conversation and restored some belief, but the underlying questions haven't gone away.



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Are the Leafs finally finding their identity, or are they riding a stretch that won't hold up under tougher competition?

Injuries, lineup turnover, coaching changes and uneven play have made this one of the strangest Leafs seasons in recent memory.

With the trade deadline looming and the playoffs no longer a distant abstraction, this is the right moment to take stock. Here are 10 questions about the Leafs — and the best answers we have right now.

1. Is the Leafs' hot streak who they really are?

It's closer to who they are than what you saw at the start of the season, anyway. A lot was different to start the year with Marnier gone, wasn't it? The additions of Nicolas Roy, Dakota Joshua, Matias Maccelli, and Easton Cowan rearranged the parts of every line. Brandon Carlo was battling an injury, Matthews was still not quite himself, and Joseph Woll was absent, so it took some time to find themselves.

The team they are today, starting fresh out of the gate, they wouldn't be where they are today in the standings, of course. But a lot of teams can make that claim. To answer the question more directly: no, they're not a team that's going to win eight out of every 10 games. They've played some tomato cans, and they still need a lot to go right from here. But you can only beat who you play, and they did that for a good run there.

2. Do the underlying numbers like the Leafs?

No, absolutely not, mostly quite the opposite. But for the first time, you can dig up some positives. The Leafs have been quite bad by shot attempts and expected goals this season, and even over their hot streak, it wasn't great.

But part of that is that they were leading a lot of games over that time, which brings us to a real problem they've had once they get ahead: they stop playing, park the bus, and just try to defend. With that, shot attempts against shoot up, and so at the end of the game, they'll have won, but the numbers say they got caved in. The score created incentive structures that they didn't handle well.

But when the score has been tied or within one, they've been much better, and in some areas have carried the play. Things are trending much better all over, but they're in a tough stretch of games now.

3. Should they add at the deadline, or re-stock the cupboards?

It's tough to see a world where the Leafs have prime Auston Matthews and William Nylander, are in (or around) a playoff spot, and they sell off.

The other thing here is, it's the softest the East has looked in 10 years. If you improved by a couple of effective players and got hot goaltending, you'd be in a huge group of teams of whom you'd say, "you never know".

One option would be to flip their expiring assets — Bobby McMann, Scott Laughton, Matias Maccelli, those types — and use the assets that come back for players with more term or at least long-term upside.

In the end, I think they add. Which is a little scary, given how little they have to trade.

Assuming this came with serious retention, I'll say yes. The Leafs haven't had a defenceman who can really shoot the puck as a threat on the power play since maybe Jake Gardiner, and he wasn't anywhere near Hamilton's upside. When the six-foot-six defenceman is on, he's an effective puck mover from the backend, where their current blue line is woefully one-dimensional past Morgan Rielly and Oliver Ekman-Larsson.

It shouldn't cost much in the way of assets going the other way (they'd probably give him away for the cap space), and the Leafs just need to be way more talented than they currently are, particularly on defence.

5. Should they re-sign Bobby McMann?

The Leafs just can't keep letting assets walk out the door for nothing; it's been their biggest drain on talent over the past five years. The cap is going up, he's under 30, and he's not going to suddenly get way slower. If you can get a bit of a discount for offering some term, yes, I'd like to see him stay. He's a quality depth scorer whose physical game is only growing.

6. Should they re-sign Scott Laughton?

Also yes. I know you don't love the idea of giving McMann and Laughton like four million each, but this guy is a penalty kill dynamo, he can play up and down your lineup (if the coach would let him) and someone who has so much of what the Leafs often lack (passion, want, competitiveness).

If you look at their cap picture for next year, there's room for these guys. Yes, they'd need to make other moves to improve in other ways. But I just don't think they're better for letting these two go (barring some really clever maneuvering that I'm skeptical they're able to pull off).

7. Is Matthews back-back?

Confirmed. We had a chat about it on our show, where I was openly exasperated about ... where has it all been? How did it all suddenly come back?

After some time to think, I'll say: he was unequivocally hampered by injury last year. Like, badly. He did his best, which somehow inspired critique rather than praise because they weren't open about what was going on. A lot of stars just wouldn't have played at times when he dressed last year. So that's last year.

This year, it's tougher to say. Some other nagging injuries? That it suddenly got better post-Marc Savard's firing ... was it tied there somehow? Did he just need a run of games to get into the appropriate game shape? Finally getting comfortable with linemates? Or the most likely answer, some combination of all these things?

Whatever saw him go away, I can confirm that he is absolutely back-back. The tell-tale sign for me is the takeaways, as he's back to lifting sticks and yanking pucks back to stay on offence. He's threatening hard to the net with the puck, becoming a handful again, and obviously, ripping that trademark pull-and-snap release.

8. Should they trade one of their three goalies?

This is related to some of the above trade questions. If all three are healthy and looking good, you can send Dennis Hildeby back to the Toronto Marlies and just carry on. But he also looks like an NHL goalie now, and if Anthony Stolarz is back, he's a proven commodity, and teams out there need goaltending. Either could very well be a part of a package to bring someone back after the Olympic break.

Now, should they? I guess it depends on what you believe Hildeby is going to be. I'm not sold he's some great starter in wait, so the "should" depends entirely on what the offer is, but I'd certainly be listening.

9. Is the power play fixed?

It still looks only fine, and I'm not sold on any power play that asks Matias Maccelli to lug the puck up the ice and Morgan Rielly to be the quarterback is going to be an above-average unit. It's "fixed" in that it doesn't look like the league's worst anymore, but they're still not consistently threatening enough.

10. Do they have a chance in playoffs?

Their game against Colorado was their current ceiling, and if you can play to that four times in seven games, sure, they absolutely do. Part of that analysis is based on not being too afraid of any team in the East as a juggernaut, and hockey being weird. They've got the goaltending to surprise some teams, too.



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In a weird year, there's still a lot to be decided, which is a pleasant change from the years we know their seed and opponent by Christmas. Fun times ahead.

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Sportsnet.ca / New contract represents high upside for Alexandre Texier, Canadiens

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — If the upside wasn't obvious enough to Alexandre Texier, he wouldn't have signed the \$5-million contract he was offered by the Montreal Canadiens on Wednesday.

But Texier surely realized — whether it was while he was toiling in misery in St. Louis, or right after he put an end to that situation in November by ripping up the remainder of his \$2.1-million deal with the Blues to sign a prorated, \$1-million contract to play the rest of this season with the Canadiens — that it's best to capitalize on your success while you're enjoying it.

If Texier's previous experience hadn't made him leery of how fleeting success can be, his agent would've reminded him as soon as Montreal's offer to stay with them for two seasons beyond this one came across the table.

"We didn't see a reason to wait," Dan Milstein told Sportsnet shortly after announcing his client's new pact with the Canadiens on social media. "He loves playing in Montreal, and it hasn't even been 60 days since the whole contract termination, waivers situation in St. Louis, so there was no reason to wait."

The Canadiens could've taken their time before signing the 26-year-old, and it's arguable they should've.

Texier's sample with them is just 25 games, which is very short when compared to his 240-game sample with other teams. And that 240-game sample with the Columbus Blue Jackets and Blues, which was anything but as convincing as the one with the Canadiens, would've been enough to give the Canadiens pause on committing to him.

If it wasn't, not knowing for sure if the bulk of the seven goals and 16 points Texier has produced with the Canadiens were fueled not only by his opportunity to play the last 10 games with top-liners Nick Suzuki and Cole Caufield, but also by the need to prove himself would've been.

But Canadiens president of hockey operations Jeff Gorton and general manager Kent Hughes knew waiting to sign Texier would've likely proven costlier, and they'd clearly seen enough from him to move forward with what they deemed to be the lesser of two risks.

Gorton and Hughes have seen that Texier's skill and versatility have made him fit with the Canadiens from Game 1 through Game 25 in a way he never quite did with the Blue Jackets or Blues through the first 6.5 years of his career. They've seen that he's fit in as well in their bottom six as he has on their top line. They have to like that he's played effectively on the power play and even filled in admirably on the penalty kill, and they have to love that he wouldn't even need to register another point this season to justify the first contract they gave him.

The feeling that Texier wouldn't even need to produce at the same high clip as he has so far to justify the new contract would've only incentivized Gorton and Hughes to act now rather than wait for the player to produce plenty more en route to becoming an arbitration-eligible restricted free

agent who'd be one year away from unrestricted free agency this summer.

Because the Canadiens acted now, they'll pay close to bottom dollar for a player who can — and mostly likely will at different junctures — play well above their bottom line. With the salary cap spiking over each of the next two off-seasons, it's a bet they're poised to win after crushing the first one they made on Texier.

The player is understandably thrilled about it.

When Texier spoke with reporters in Washington shortly after the news broke on Wednesday, the native of Saint-Martin-d'Heres, France expressed his gratitude to the Canadiens for their faith in him, repeating several times that he knows there's a long road ahead and a lot of pushing for him to continue doing.

"I'm really happy about the next two years, and I'm just going to keep playing my game," said Texier.

"I think it's the guys in the room, the organization, the city, it's everything," Texier continued. "I'm just having a good time, so I didn't hesitate for one second when (the offer) came. I've been happy here since Day 1, so this is where I want to be."

St. Louis clearly wasn't that place.

If Texier was ever happy there (after being traded to the Blues from the Blue Jackets in June of 2024), it wasn't apparent. And he was obviously very unhappy there towards the end, as a frequent scratch through the first six weeks of the season, over which he produced just one assist and appeared in only eight games.

"I think what happened (in St. Louis) made me mentally stronger, and stronger as a hockey player," said Texier. "I've moved forward. I know it made me grow mentally, that's for sure, and I'm stronger now."

The Canadiens hoped Texier would be when they paid close to league minimum for him to achieve the bare minimum.

Texier's mandate was to outperform mostly American Hockey League competition in the bid to fill some of the void left by Canadiens players nursing long-term injuries, and he's delivered so much more to earn a commitment that'll, at the very least, keep him playing even once all the injured players return.

It's a commitment that'll likely keep Texier where he's happy for two more years beyond this one, and he was wise not to turn away from it.

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Sportsnet.ca / Time is right for Flames to trade Rasmus Andersson

Eric Francis

CALGARY — It certainly feels like the end of the Rasmus Andersson era in Calgary.

The end of one of the more successful draft and development stories in Flames history.

Just over a decade after drafting the chubby defenseman out of Malmö with a second-round pick acquired for Sven Baertschi, the Flames are clearly on the precipice of pulling the trigger on a trade to cash out on the 29-year-old defenceman.



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Like Joe Nieuwendyk's trade for Jarome Iginla, the Flames' hope is that even in trade Andersson continues to help the club he's dedicated his career to.

It's simply time, as the pending UFA doesn't fit into the Flames' rebuild timeline.

The timing is perfect, as a glut of teams are clamouring for a top right-shot defender, he's playing the best hockey of his career, and the Flames have done well to demonstrate they aren't playoff material.

Craig Conroy's patience – the GM's biggest asset – is poised to serve the club well once again.

Nothing will re-energize the hybrid (hybrid rebuild) as much as the return Andersson is sure to fetch, which is bound to include, at the very least, a first-round draft pick, and a first-round prospect who is already contributing at the pro level.

Quite predictably, the list of teams rumoured to be interested grows daily.

And if Tuesday's game in Columbus was his last as a Flame, what an exclamation mark it was on his 10 seasons with the club.

A fight that turned the game around, followed by a goal that tied the event, Andersson can look in the mirror and be proud that in this incredible bounce-back season he went down swinging.

Every possible suitor in the league saw it – his 10th goal, and the team's emotional response to his fifth NHL fight – a battle he initiated despite putting his Olympic participation and trade status in peril.

A minute-munching shutdown defender who is on the verge of shattering career highs for goals and points, there's nothing he won't do for his team.

He and the Flames have played this perfectly, all along.

Playing the final 12 games last season with a broken fibula said plenty about his character, giving his new employer one of the many intangibles they are looking for as they try to piece together a playoff winner.

As if his play hasn't done enough talking, the manner in which he's conducted himself throughout this season of potential tumult surely has, as the alternate captain is about so much more than what he brings on the ice.

His status as a pending trade piece since last summer has not been a distraction.

In fact, the man who finished minus-38 last season has been one of the team's best stories of the season, earning him a spot on the Swedish Olympic team while skyrocketing the respect of his teammates.

"I give him a lot of credit, as he's just all in," marvelled Blake Coleman, who is a trade-piece column for another day.

"Obviously, he's playing for a contract as well, but he hasn't been a distraction to our team. In fact, he's been a reason why we were actually climbing in the standings.

"I would say he's playing the best that I've seen him play as a Flame since I got here.

"I think we've had situations in the past where, you know, it did become loud and a distraction, and guys weren't fully in anymore, and it's hard to play that way when you don't have the guy next to you fully committed. So, I give him a ton of credit, and I hope that everything works out for him."

As Coleman's recent upper body injury, and a few blocked-shot scares for Andersson, have made clear, the hockey gods have certainly been warning the Flames of the dangers of keeping their biggest trade assets in the lineup for too long.

With every right hook Andersson threw at Boone Jenner on Tuesday came the possibility of a broken hand, or worse, which could've stymied the trade haul Conroy has been eyeing for months.

With a self-imposed Olympic trade freeze as the Flames' deadline to resolve Andersson's fate, it just seems natural for the deal to be consummated soon.

The living tributes started pouring in Wednesday morning on Sportsnet FAN 960, as hosts asked for fans' favourite memories of No. 4.

They spoke of his ill-fated fight with Darnell Nurse in rookie camp, his mockery exchange with Tom Wilson, his hatred for all things Edmonton, his long-distance playoff snipe on Mike Smith, his goal and Yuletide stares, and his relationship with Andrew Mangiapane and Johnny Gaudreau all came up.

The love-in continues, as do the trade talks.

Now is the time to rip off the band-aid.

The team is regressing on the ice and in the standings, their apparent Zayne Parekh is nearing a return, this club needs to start leaning into this lost season with a longer-term focus, and Andersson has earned a shot with a contender, not to mention a shiny new deal.

As much as it will hurt the current club and its morale, it's the perfect ending for everyone.

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Sportsnet.ca / Sportsnet's 2026 NHL Draft Rankings: January Edition

Sam Cosentino

For the second consecutive time, we have a new number one in our rankings.

In September we were looking at Gavin McKenna going wire-to-wire as the game's top-rated draft-eligible prospect. But Stenberg has put up historical numbers with Frolunda in the SHL. While McKenna has performed admirably in college hockey, there was a noticeable gap between Stenberg and McKenna at the WJC.

Before joining Sweden's junior national team, Stenberg put up an incredible 24 points in 25 games in the SHL, Sweden's top pro league. That set the tone for what we witnessed in Minnesota. Stenberg put up at least a point in six of the seven games he played and he saved his best for the most important games.

His goal and assist effort in the semis eliminated rival Finland and he added another goal and two helpers in the gold medal win over Czechia.

But it wasn't just his point production. Stenberg was on the ice in every important situation for Sweden in those last two games. His whole body of work this season, in league play and internationally, has led to him taking over the top spot.

While my history covering NHL Drafts goes back 15 or so years, I can't recall a world junior tournament that had so many exceptional draft eligible players. As much as half the players who will be called up in the first round of the NHL Draft in Buffalo will have played in this year's WJC.

Stenberg, Canada's Keaton Verhoeff and McKenna are expected to be the top three picks off the board in June. Others such as American Chase Reid, Latvian Alberts Smits, Canadian Carson Carels and Czechia's Adam Novotny will all garner top 10 consideration.



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In the meantime there is additional intrigue around another top talent, Tynan Lawrence, who moved from USHL Muskegon to NCAA Boston University midway through the season. On my list today Lawrence remains outside of consideration for the No. 1 overall pick, but scouts will now have an apples to apples comparison between him, McKenna and Verhoeff. Lawrence was held pointless in his first two collegiate games.

There are plenty of others to discuss, and for that, I present my January NHL Draft Rankings.

No. 1: Ivar Stenberg, LW, 5-foot-11, 183 pounds, Frolunda (SHL)

An absolutely brilliant performance at the world juniors has vaulted Stenberg to the top of this list. He competes like it's his last day. He carries the puck with swagger and has the confidence and poise to execute difficult plays. Stenberg also shoots the puck extremely well with plenty of pace. The numbers are important in this ranking, but his extensive 200-foot game and his high level compete are the things separating him from the crowd at the current time.

No. 2: Keaton Verhoeff, RD, 6-foot-4, 208 pounds, North Dakota (NCAA)

Was a healthy scratch for the first two games of the world juniors, but got in the lineup at the most important time for Canada and contributed an assist in the bronze medal game. Once he got settled into the lineup and adjusted to his limited role, he did show a lot of the things that have made him successful as a college freshman. He handles the puck well and is a threat offensively. Verhoeff is more successful as a defender when the game is more predictable, as it is in college. Footspeed isn't a major concern, but is something that will have to improve moving forward. He does have the agility to walk the blue line and make plays in small areas, which indicate the straight line speed will come with increased strength.

No. 3: Gavin McKenna, LW, 5-foot-11, 170 pounds, Penn State (NCAA)

Has lightning quick hands that operate well in tight spaces. His playmaking remains his strongest asset. McKenna knows what his next play is before he gets the puck. He finished second in world junior scoring with 14 points, which can't be overlooked. Admittedly, McKenna took his game to the NCAA to work on off-puck play and becoming a better defender. The end results of that move are still a work in progress. Clearly, McKenna is at his best when the puck is on his stick and when he's surrounded by like-minded offensive individuals. A dynamic offensive talent with work to do when he doesn't have the puck.

No. 4: Caleb Malhotra, C, 6-foot-1, 182 pounds, Brantford Bulldogs (OHL)

In terms of pure physical stature, Malhotra has the most room to gain of anyone inside the top 10. As such, he becomes more of a projection player. What scouts like right now is his attention to detail defensively and his overall awareness of what is required of him on any given night. From a numbers perspective, he is amongst the league leaders in power-play, penalty-kill and plus-minus categories. He also checks the box with six game winners, top three in the OHL. Either Malhotra or Tynan Lawrence (listed next) will be the first centre off the board.

No. 5: Tynan Lawrence, C, 6-foot-1, 185 pounds, Boston University (NCAA)

In a surprise move Lawrence changed course, leaving USHL Muskegon to join Boston University for the remainder of the season. Macklin Celebrini's success after a year at BU was enticing enough for Lawrence to turn his development over to Jay Pandolfo. After a great 16-year-old regular season, and electric playoffs leading to Muskegon's first ever Clark Cup, Lawrence felt like there was little left to prove in the USHL and that the NCAA would help hasten his development. This is a move that mirrors what Verhoeff and McKenna have done, giving scouts a direct comparison. Is Lawrence ready for the next challenge in his career? Only time will tell.

No. 6: Chase Reid, RD, 6-foot-2, 188 pounds, Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds (OHL)

He was most noticeable after Washington prospect Cole Hutson had to leave the lineup to injury during the world juniors. In just over a year's time Reid's game has transcended the NAHL, the OHL and now the world juniors. Reid is an elite skater and passer. He can quarterback a power play effectively and is always a threat on the rush. The adversity he has faced is not just a nice story, but a key factor in how he is viewed in the scouting community. Even bigger things are expected out of him in a second half where the Hounds are expected to contend for an OHL title.

No. 7: Viggo Bjorck, RW, 5-foot-9, 177 pounds, Djurgardens (SHL)

Because of his size, there will be a number of teams that shy away from Bjorck, and that may prove to be a mistake. Bjorck was the most pleasant surprise at the world juniors. He was leaned on in every situation and took every big draw for gold medal-winning Sweden. Yes, he missed four breakaways in the semifinal game, but he was relied on to play more than half the overtime period before the Swedes finally won in the shootout. Bjorck finished the event with nine points and won over 54 per cent of his faceoffs. Bjorck is constantly pursuing pucks with vigour, and he is a responsible player in all three zones. He competes hard and isn't deterred by his smaller stature -- in fact, he has a powerful lower half that surprises unsuspecting opponents in board battles.

No. 8: Carson Carels, LD, 6-foot-2, 202 pounds, Prince George Cougars (WHL)

Carels is like a security blanket: you feel safe and comfortable when he's out on the ice. He battled through the adversity of not playing in two of Canada's preliminary round games at the world juniors, to accepting a third/fourth pairing role when the games mattered most. That is not easy for someone who basically plays half the game with his club team in Prince George. Carels never deviated from his identity despite his limited role and that adaptability will carry him a long way in the scouting community.

No. 9: Ethan Belchetz, LW, 6-foot-5, 228 pounds, Windsor Spitfires (OHL)

Belchetz took a minor step back with his showing at the 2025 CHL/USA Prospects Challenge in Alberta. He wasn't as assertive as expected, nor did he display the type of skill we have come to know from his game in Windsor. He had a hard time producing points in the immediate eight-game segment after those showcases, but looks to be back on track now. Windsor will face serious competition in the OHL's Western Conference and Belchetz's play down the stretch will help shape his draft stock. He will always be an attractive specimen because of the size and skill combination, but he will have to answer the bell as games become harder into the playoffs.

No. 10: Alberts Smits, LD, 6-foot-3, 205 pounds, Jukurit (Liiga)

Played four minutes more per game at the world juniors than anyone else on the team, but never looked tired. Smits can come off looking lackadaisical in his play, but don't be fooled by the facade as he is highly competitive. He is the only first-year draft eligible player on an Olympic roster and it will be fascinating to see how he handles the stress of that responsibility if he gets regular minutes. Should he pass that test with flying colours, his spot on this list will rise next time around.

No. 11: Daxon Rudolph, RD, 6-foot-3, 206 pounds, Prince Albert Raiders (WHL)

Believed to be a prototypical two-way defenceman at the start of the year, Rudolph has since leaned more into the production side of things. He's been on a tear on the title-contending Prince Albert Raiders, having put forth 11 multi-point efforts in his past 14 games. It's not all about the points for Rudolph, though. He is more than a capable defender who



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consumes big minutes, something he should be able to do at the next level as well.

No. 12: Ryan Lin, RD, 5-foot-11, 177 pounds, Vancouver Giants (WHL)

When he gets healthy again, and that could be a while after getting injured on the weekend, Lin will have another great option in Mathis Preston to help bring more offence to the Giants. Appraised alone, Lin's skating defines his play. He has fancy edge-work, great straight-line speed and he can dance the blue line with ease. Lin also moves pucks efficiently and has the ability to run a first-unit power play. His size will limit his likability compared to those above him in this draft class.

No. 13: Adam Novotny, LW, 6-foot-1, 204 pounds, Peterborough Petes (OHL)

For most of the world juniors, Novotny looked a step off compared to how he had been playing in Peterborough. Although he rarely missed an opportunity to shoot the puck, Novotny didn't seem like himself until later in the tournament. He rebounded to leave a lasting impression despite Czechia falling to Sweden in the gold medal game. He played a robust 19:37 with three shots on goal, featuring prominently at the net front on the power play. He hounded pucks and used his frame to get leverage on opponents just as we see most nights in the OHL.

No. 14: Oscar Hemming, LW, 6-foot-4, 195 pounds, Boston College (NCAA)

The drama has subsided at least for now. Hemming, who was supposed to play for OHL Kitchener this season, didn't get a release from his Finnish club so now he's with BC. Just after his two-game debut at the end of December, one scout recently quipped to me, "have you planned to see Boston College yet?" After a five month layoff, Hemming didn't look out of place, and he can only get better. He's not overwhelmed by anything the NCAA game has thrown at him, albeit it's a short sample size of just the two games. He will be worth tracking to see if he can make a run for the top 10.

No. 15: Iliia Morozov, C, 6-foot-3, 200 pounds, Miami (NCAA)

As an August-born player, Morozov and Tynan Lawrence are the youngest players in college hockey. He's playing just under 20 minutes per game and has produced 14 points in Miami's 22 games. He exhibits a long and powerful stride that allows him to close quickly when hounding pucks, but also is used as an asset on the rush. He does a good job finding space and being available in the offensive zone. He will power his way to the net and has a good one-timer further out from it.

No. 16: Marcus Nordmark, RW, 6-foot-2, 187 pounds, Djurgardens (Sweden J20)

Nordmark is a mover and shaker who has worked his way up the ranks and got a recent four-game audition in the SHL, recording his first ever SHL point with an assist in a 4-3 loss in which he played just under 11 minutes. He does a good job not tipping off whether he's going to shoot or pass while in motion with the puck on his stick. Nordmark displays an all-around game, and is a dual threat offensively. There are times when it looks like he's not engaged, but that cerebral part of his game is more about efficiency than lack of effort.

No. 17: Elton Hermansson, RW, 6-foot-1, 181 pounds, MoDo (Allsvenskan)

He has adapted well since his promotion to the Allsvenskan in early December, making the most of his erratic usage. Hermansson has put up five of his 15 points in the last four games. Should this continue, he's liable to shoot up this list just as he has shot up NHL Central Scouting's list after being identified as Europe's fourth ranked skater.

No. 18: Xavier Villeneuve, LD, 5-foot-11, 162 pounds, Blainville-Boisbriand Armada (QMJHL)

Despite getting unseated as the top-scoring draft eligible defenceman, Villeneuve still gets high marks for his relentless compete. He wants the puck in big moments and can control the game with excellent skating and stick handling ability that makes him a threat on exits and entries. The question surrounding this player is: does his compete, risk and offensive upside outweigh his smaller size, and can it translate to the next level?

No. 19: Oliver Suvanto, C, 6-foot-3, 207 pounds, Tappara (Liiga)

At first glance Suvanto looks like a pro player. He's not elite in any area other than his shooting. He skates well, has a decent set of hands and can play in a variety of situations. He is strong on his skates and uses his thick frame to ward off anyone trying to defend him. He has net front presence and can work the corners as well. He pays attention to his defensive responsibilities and is happy to engage in any and all physical confrontations. Suvanto is at his best when he's checking hard and not giving up space, but also applying his skills to be a threat offensively. It's more about rounding out his game and polishing up his skills that are already in place. It is notable that he is one of the younger players available in this draft. The additional developmental runway is a plus.

No. 20: William Hakansson, LD, 6-foot-4, 207 pounds, Lulea (SHL)

He will show flashes of a player who is likely to produce secondary offence once he's settled into his NHL career. Hakansson can maintain good gap control with his smooth skating and agility. He is big already, but still looks like a player who can likely add weight and more strength to his frame. Right now he leans a little more as a complementary player as someone who should be able to eat major minutes because of his efficient stride. He is equally as good moving pucks quickly out of the zone as he is patiently transporting the puck to safe areas before moving it. He is thoughtful as to when and when not to join the rush.

No. 21: J.P. Hurlbert, LW, 5-foot-11, 176 pounds, Kamloops Blazers (WHL)

Hurlbert is a volume shooter and at time of writing, his 183 shots taken ranked third in all of the CHL. Having said that, he is amongst the top five in assists in the WHL. Hurlbert has since been passed in the WHL scoring race, but it will be a battle down the stretch with a number of players close to the league lead. He likely should've garnered more attention for a spot on the US world junior team, but leaving the USNTDP didn't help his cause.

No. 22: Juho Piipainen, RD, 6-foot-1, 201 pounds, Tappara (Liiga)

Because he's played so well in Liiga, there was an expectation of greatness at the world juniors. While he wasn't at his very best there, he still acquitted himself well in a third pairing role. At times the pace looked to be challenging for him as he was delayed in making some puck decisions that ultimately led to turnovers. Part of that can be attributed to the unpredictable nature of the junior game as opposed to the more structured environment he's accustomed to in Liiga play. Although he was scratched for a couple of the world junior games, he still managed 13:30 per game, with an assist and impressive plus-6 rating.

No. 23: Pierce Mbuyi, LW, 5-foot-11, 168 pounds, Owen Sound Attack (OHL)

After winning OHL Rookie of the Year, Mbuyi was highly thought of in the pre-season, making a number of first-round projection lists. However, a pedestrian Hlinka-Gretzky tournament and a slow first week of the OHL season saw him slip out of consideration. Being left off the CHL/USA Prospects roster was a setback that seemed to inspire him. First week not included, Mbuyi has had a dynamite season wearing an "A" and putting up better than point-per-game numbers. He's a worker who is a little light on size, but rarely on effort. He thinks the game well and has the required skill to play a middle six role at the next level.

No. 24: Brooks Rogowski, C, 6-foot-7, 232 pounds, Oshawa Generals (OHL)



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Length and range are all the rage in the NHL these days. Although he's not a perfect player for his size, there's a lot of value for someone you can see playing a number of roles and generally just being an obstacle opponents must try to avoid. Rogowski is of course, more than that. All of the skills required to play centre in the NHL are present, and as he continues to grow into his body, he'll keep improving. With no real deficiencies, and with plenty of room to refine his game, he will be highly regarded by almost every NHL team. You would like to see more production, but ultimately his NHL value won't be measured there.

No. 25: Wyatt Cullen, LW, 6-foot, 172 pounds, USNTDP (USHL)

It's been tough getting a gauge on Cullen because he's been in and out of the lineup with various injury issues. One thing is certain: when he's healthy, he's the most dynamic player on the U-18 team. He darts and dashes all over the ice and he can take advantage of even the smallest gap in coverage. He does need to stay healthy for a stretch and the Chipotle All-American Game will be an important kickstart in a run that will culminate at the World U18 Championship in April. Cullen is the son of former NHLer Matt, and that instantly adds intrigue to his potential.

No. 26: Nikita Shcherbakov, LD, 6-foot-5, 187 pounds, Ufa (Russia)

It's a movie we have seen before, where a highly thought of Russian prospect gets bounced between the MHL and VHL to protect him from NHL scout exposure. But with a number of teams having good contacts in Russia and with the availability of advanced video platforms, it's hard to keep a player hidden for too long. For a guy with Shcherbakov's hands, it's hard to believe he has one regular season goal in the last season and a half. Regardless, he will garner a lot of attention for his size, skating and skill combination. He looks like a long-term project so a path to North America will have to be clear and patience will be required by the team that drafts him.

No. 27: Egor Shilov, C, 6-foot, 177 pounds, Victoriaville Tigres (QMJHL)

A fascinating prospect because of how he can dominate the small-area game. Rather than use physicality as a means to win board battles, he utilizes his smarts and a lightning quick stick to emerge victorious. Those same skills also make him a threat off the rush and in the one-on-one game. Shilov has been up over 55 per cent in the face-off circle all season. He's not for everyone as his effort can be inconsistent, but his skill is very enticing.

No. 28: Maddox Dagenais, C, 6-foot-4, 196 pounds, Quebec Remparts (QMJHL)

At his best, he's the kind of player who opponents know is on the ice. You can't miss him size-wise, but if you do, he will let you know he's there by finishing his checks. He doesn't just hit the body, he works through the body and that trait can intimidate. As the first overall pick in the Q, there was an expectation to produce big numbers. His production has been better than average and he does lean more goal-scorer than playmaker. He can really shoot the puck, but his value lies in his power-forward game.

No. 29: Mathis Preston, RW, 5-foot-11, 177 pounds, Vancouver Giants (WHL)

With his talent, there is no question he should be well up over a point per game. He has everything required to be a top end point producer at the junior level, with great skating ability, magic hands, and a shot that is hard to pick up. He electrified the crowd for his new team with an overtime highlight-reel goal in his first appearance with the Giants after the trade from Spokane. He's now injured and it looks to be for an extended time. He will be highly viewed upon his return, whether with the Giants or perhaps for Canada at the world U18s in April.

No. 30: Tommy Bleyl, RD, 5-foot-11, 165 pounds, Moncton Wildcats (QMJHL)

If you like Villeneuve (No. 18), you can't help but look at Bleyl and be impressed. Their games are very similar in that they both get up and down the ice with blazing speed and have a desire to make a difference every shift. Bleyl has come out of nowhere to become the Q's top scoring defenceman. He gets off the mark quickly and uses a number of deceptive tactics to make plays and avoid hard contact. His game does have some risk to it, but the good often outweighs the bad. He's not as hard as Villeneuve, but he does compete. Like Villeneuve, he will also have to fight the size issue.

No. 31: Charlie Morrison, RD, 6-foot-3, 198 pounds, Quebec Remparts (QMJHL)

It's refreshing when a player recognizes what he is at a young age. I believe Morrison fits into that category as a complementary defenceman who brings a low risk approach to the game. He is a defence-first type player who moves well for his size. He has enough deception in his game to avoid the first wave of the forecheck, but he also makes good decisions on zone exits be it with a swift first pass, or taking the safer way out when no other options present themselves. He won't blow people up, but there is a physical element to his game.

No. 32: Tomas Galvas, LD, 5-foot-10, 168 pounds, Liberec (Extraliga)

My recency bias has taken hold here after watching Galvas own the world juniors. Because he is 19 and under six feet, it is highly unlikely that he will be taken in the first round. Having said that, taking a here-and-now approach, Galvas has earned at least the nod of being in this spot. He competes up and down the ice. He's fearless in transporting the puck and knows when he can hang around low in the offensive zone as an additional threat. He skates well and has the agility and stick skills to deceive opponents on the blue line. He's a leader on the ice.

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TSN.CA / 'This is a flush game'; Leafs reset and rest up with Marner reunion on deck

Mark Masters

The Maple Leafs lost 6-1 to the Utah Mammoth on Tuesday night at the Delta Center in Salt Lake City. Wednesday is a day off for the team in Las Vegas.

Toronto's 10-game point streak (8-0-2) came to a crashing halt on Tuesday night as the Utah Mammoth handed the Leafs their most lopsided loss of the season.

"I didn't really like our game from the start," said defenceman Oliver Ekman-Larsson following the 6-1 setback. "They came out and had the puck a little bit more, and it was hard to defend them. We got to be better."

"We were just not playing to our level," said winger Matias Maccelli. "We got to be better and everyone knows that."

But the Leafs are not planning to dwell on their first regulation loss since Dec. 21 in Dallas.

"This is a flush game," said coach Craig Berube. "I talked to the guys. We need to rest up. We are going to have a tough game in Vegas, who are good at home. That is a good team. We need to rest up here and get our legs under us for the next game."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Leafs will continue their four-game trip on Thursday in Las Vegas where they will face Mitch Marner for the first time since the summer sign-and-trade.

"Anytime I've switched teams and you play buddies, it's always a little bit different the first night," said defenceman Jake McCabe. "Yeah, looking forward to it."

"It's going to be fun to play against him," said Ekman-Larsson. "It's going to be fun to see him."

The schedule makers did the Leafs no favours to start this road trip.

After playing at home on Saturday, Toronto flew to Denver on Sunday before beating the league-leading Avalanche in a high-altitude, high-emotion overtime game on Monday night. Then it was off to Salt Lake City to face a Mammoth team that had Monday night off.

"Everyone's got games like these in the schedule," said McCabe. "You know, it's not easy for anyone. So, you're not going to hear me making excuses about the schedule."

All teams deal with back-to-back situations, but this one stood out because both games started at 8 pm local time.

"It's just a little weird," Maccelli acknowledged. "It's late in Toronto, but still that's another excuse. We gotta be better."

It's commendable that the Leafs did not want to make excuses, but they sure looked like a tired group on Tuesday night.

"We just didn't execute well enough," Berube said. "It was kind of like we were 'almost' [there]. We almost got a goal, we almost got the play off, but we just didn't execute well enough. I'll give them credit. They had a great game plan. They were on us. We didn't have much room out there. We really had to work for any opportunity we got. They were tight defensively, and they were quick offensively. They made us chase it around."

"We attacked every shift with a lot of speed through the neutral zone and a lot of pace, a lot of pressure on their D," Mammoth coach Andre Tourigny told reporters. "We knew they were on the back-to-back and played a big game [Monday]."

The Mammoth firmly grabbed hold of the game in the second period. After John Tavares was denied by Karel Vejmelka on a breakaway, Dylan Guenther scored twice in quick succession.

"Tavares didn't put it in," Berube said. "We had some opportunities early on [in the second]. We got our legs under us. The second goal went in, and the third one really dug us into a hole."

"I kind of made the situation worse a little bit during the second period, which I'm not too happy about," Leafs goalie Dennis Hildeby said.

Guenther's first goal was a high, short-side snipe off the rush that beat the 6-foot-7 Swede.

"It's a good shot," Hildeby said. "Like from that angle, I don't think it matters who it is, I mean, it should be a save. I just mistimed it a little bit and I wasn't in my position. But, yeah, credit him, obviously a good shot, but I've got to save that."

Hildeby allowed six goals on 41 shots.

"I guess you'd want the second one back, but I don't put anything on him," Berube said. "This is a team loss. We're all accountable for it. We have to be better. We weren't good enough."

Did the travel and late start impact Hildeby?

"Not enough for it to be an excuse," the 24-year-old said. "First period felt alright."

It's easier to shrug off the start time after a win.

"10 p.m. start time, it's always fun," Joseph Woll said with a laugh after stopping 31 of 34 shots to beat the Avalanche on Monday. "Actually, I felt great. So, yeah, I think we're all pros, so we know how to take care of our bodies and hopefully set us up for success. We've been hammering the beets and the iron and stuff. I do everything I can. So, yeah, my body felt good and great to get the win."

Woll is winning a lot lately. He's 6-0-1 since Dec. 23. And when Woll picks up the 'W' teammates are blasting 'Wonderwall' by Oasis in the dressing room following the usual post-win song of 'Come On Eileen' by Dexys Midnight Runners.

"That's pretty cool," Woll said with a smile. "Yeah, I like our post-win songs right now."

Woll is expected to get the start on Thursday in Vegas where he's never won. He lost his only previous game in Nevada last season and it wasn't pretty. Woll was actually pulled after allowing three goals on seven shots at T-Mobile Arena last March.

Maccelli was playing his first game back in Utah since being traded by the Mammoth in the summer.

"It's always fun to play against guys you know, but obviously we didn't get the result," he said. "So it wasn't as much fun because they were buzzing."

But Maccelli did log over 15 minutes once again while playing on a line with Tavares and William Nylander. He is averaging 15:29 of ice time per game since re-entering the Leafs lineup on Dec. 20 following a nine-game stretch as a healthy scratch.

"Everyone wants to play," the 25-year-old Finn said. "I was out for a few games, you know, just trying to reset and work hard in practice and then once I got back in just gave it my everything."

"Talking to him, he wasn't making excuses," Berube said. "He knew he had to be better and he was waiting for an opportunity to be better."

Maccelli has produced three goals and five assists in the 13 games since getting back in. He's also earned a look on the top power-play unit.

"He's playing with a lot more confidence, hanging onto pucks and making better plays with the puck and defensively he's been solid," said Berube before Tuesday's tilt. "He's working above things. He's getting above. He's being strong on the puck when he has to be in battles, but it's confidence that I see in him now that I didn't see early on."

Maccelli produced nine points in his first 22 games this season while averaging 13:12 of ice time per game.

"Obviously getting more ice time helps," Maccelli said. "My strength is with the puck and trying to make plays, so it helps when you play more and get more touches. And you get to play with JT and Willy, it makes my life a little easier too."

Auston Matthews did not score on Tuesday, but Toronto's captain continues to look dangerous.

"He's been cooking," Nylander said following Monday's game. "It's nice to be out there with him. You know [if] you give it to him, it gets in the net."

The manner in which Matthews scored on Monday in Colorado stood out to teammates. It looked a lot like the signature style he displayed en route to winning the Rocket Richard Trophy three times.

"That way he can weight shift and pull that puck in ... it was a beautiful goal," said winger Bobby McMann. "And really timely. The boys were fired up for that one."

Matthews used Avalanche defenceman Josh Manson as a screen while snapping a puck past Trent Miner. The goal gave the Leafs a 3-2 third-period lead.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"There's a lot of that [old] Auston Matthews, like, with the speed coming down, pulling it in and ripping it," said Berube. "He's getting his looks every game now."

McMann scored a beautiful goal of his own on Monday night.

The Avalanche won a faceoff in the Leafs zone with Victor Olofsson tapping the puck back towards the point. The pass ended up going between defencemen Ilya Solovoyov and Samuel Girard.

"Sometimes when a puck pops out like that, neither D is really sure who should get it," McMann said. "So sometimes I just got to poke it ahead and try and get the wheels going and see if I can out skate'em there."

McMann did just that and beat Miner on a breakaway to tie the game up at 2-2.

"He's so explosive," said Matthews. "You can just see how on his goal, I mean, once he gets a step, he's hard to pick up. He's been playing great lately."

"He's been playing like a beast," said Nylander. "Using his speed."

What is working well for McMann?

"I was just skating," the 29-year-old said after Monday's game. "I think that's the biggest strength of my game. Just skating onto pucks, trying to force turnovers, generate pucks back to our guys. I was doing things like that and trying to stay consistent with that and continue to be physical."

"He's got such great speed and he uses it extremely well," said Berube. "He can play anywhere and does the job. I thought defensively he was outstanding with his stick and his speed. It broke some plays up."

Among all NHL forwards, only Edmonton's Connor McDavid (39.61 km/h) and Utah's Logan Cooley (39.23) have hit a higher max speed than McMann (39.03) so far this season, per NHL Edge stats.

"It's a little unfair, honestly, how fast he is," said Leafs winger Matthew Knies. "It's crazy."

After blocking a shot off his left leg on Monday, winger Nick Robertson missed Tuesday's game with a lower-body injury. He is listed as day-to-day, per Berube.

Robertson sat out two games earlier this season as a healthy scratch, but Tuesday's game marked his first injury-related absence of the year.

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