



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

## The News & Observer

### Hurricanes forward's Olympic experience limited to watching on TV: 'It's tough'

By: Chip Alexander

Andrei Svechnikov of the Carolina Hurricanes will soon be taking a vacation in Mexico, sunning himself, off his feet for a few days.

Where he'd rather be is Milan, Italy, skating and competing in the 2026 Winter Olympics.

Had the International Olympic Committee not banned Russia from participating in the Olympics, Svechnikov likely would have been a forward chosen for his country's national team for the Games. Canes teammate Alexander Nikishin, who starred in Russia's KHL before coming to the Canes, also would have been considered.

But it's not to be.

Hurricanes defenseman Jacob Slavin will be playing for Team USA in Milan and center Sebastian Aho for Finland. Forward Nikolaj Ehlers and goalie Frederik Andersen are on Denmark's national team. Winger Seth Jarvis was not chosen for Team Canada, but was on the team's reserve list and hoping to be a late addition.

Svechnikov must watch.

"I've never had that experience before and that would be awesome for me, to play with the best Russian guys and spend time with them and get to know them better," Svechnikov said in an N&O interview. "With the Olympic Games ... as a kid you always dream about different things but the Olympics is one of the most important of them. I just feel like it's very important to be in the Olympics and it's tough not to.

"You would like to be going, but with all the situations ... it's tough not to be going. It sucks, for sure."

The "situations" Svechnikov mentioned center around the IOC's firm stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The IOC suspended the Russia Olympic Committee in October 2023, keeping Russian teams out of the Olympics but allowing some Russian athletes to compete under a neutral flag after being vetted.

Svechnikov, 25, would have been a perfect fit for a Russian team with his skill, strength and power. He also would have gone to Milan on a heater, off the most productive month of his NHL career.

Svechnikov set career highs for a calendar month in January with 10 goals and 19 points. He picked up his 19th and 20th goals of the season last Thursday in a 5-4 comeback win over Utah, and was a force on the ice.

"He's such a physical presence and can skate so well," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Obviously, he has that scoring

touch and passing ability, but he can touch all facets of the game when he's on. Maybe it's a hit, maybe a goal or a play, but he can have an impact on all areas of the game."

Svechnikov had an ACL injury in March 2023 that kept him out the rest of the season. But he said it wasn't a matter of again feeling like the pre-injury Svech, the one who won the fastest skater competition at the 2023 All-Star Weekend.

"I'm the same person, same player," he said. "I feel the same."

Svechnikov went without a point in the first eight games this season but more or less shrugged it off at the time, saying his goals and points would come and adding, "I know what kind of player I am and what I can do for this team."

Canes captain Jordan Staal knows. He appreciates what Svechnikov brings to the game and what he has seen of the power forward, who been playing on Sebastian Aho's line with Jarvis.

"He's got his strength and his speed back. I think he's also making better decisions with the puck as well and making it hard on teams to take it off of him," Staal said. "He's the player that we all know he can be and this year he's been solid throughout."

Russia hosted the 2014 Sochi Winter Games. Canada won the gold medal and Sweden the silver as Finland — with former Canes Jussi Jokinen and Tuomo Ruutu on the roster — came away with the bronze.

"I was 14 at the time and I watched pretty much every game," said Svechnikov, a native of Barnaul, Russia. "That was the biggest deal back home and probably still is. Everyone was excited and everyone was watching back home."

On the ice for Russia were forwards Alexander Ovechkin and Vladimir Tarasenko, Evgeny Malkin and Ilya Kovalchuk, and one of Svechnikov's favorites: Pavel Datsyuk.

"I was a big fan and with it being played back home, it feels so close to you," Svechnikov said.

Svechnikov later played for Russia's U-20 team in the 2018 IIHF World Junior Championship, losing to Team USA in the quarterfinals in Buffalo. That has been his only international competition for his home country, and he dreamed of bigger things.

Svechnikov said he may watch some of the Olympic hockey games, especially if his Canes teammates are competing — think Slavin battling Aho, as they did in the 4 Nations Face-Off last season..

"It's not tough to watch. It's fine to do that," Svechnikov said. "But it is tough not to be there."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026



## Preview: February 5 at NY Rangers

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Canes aim to move their season-best point streak to 10 games

NEW YORK - The Carolina Hurricanes play their final game before the Winter Olympic break on Thursday, taking on the New York Rangers.

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When: Thursday, February 5

Puck Drop: 7:00 p.m. ET

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

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes App

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Canes Record: 35-15-6 (76 Points, 1st - Metropolitan Division)

Canes Last Game: 4-3 Win over the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday, Feb. 3

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Rangers Record: 22-28-6 (50 Points, 8th - Metropolitan Division)

Rangers Last Game: 6-5 Loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday, Jan. 31

Last Time Out...

Another outstanding showing from Brandon Bussi helped the Canes earn a 4-3 win over Ottawa at home on Tuesday night.

Sebastian Aho scored for a third consecutive game, Seth Jarvis struck twice in just 2:02, and Jordan Staal put home the game-winner in the third.

The win moved Carolina to 7-0-2 in the last nine games.

Season Series vs. NYR...

Nov. 4: Pyotr Kochetkov stopped all 26 shots faced in his first game of the season, backstopping the Canes to a 3-0 victory at MSG.

Nov 26: Igor Shesterkin turned aside 36 of 38 shots faced, spoiling Thanksgiving Eve in Raleigh and guiding his team to a 4-2 win.

Dec. 29: Jackson Blake's first career overtime winner helped Carolina to a 3-2 win at Lenovo Center.

Captain Clutch...

Jordan Staal enters tonight's contest with four goals in his last six games, including a pair of late-game go-ahead goals that sealed two points for Carolina against Utah and, most recently, Ottawa.

Now with 14 tallies on the year — tied with Nikolaj Ehlers for fifth on the team and one more than his 2024-25 total in 22 fewer games — the 37-year-old is eyeing his second 20-goal season as a Hurricane, a feat he has not accomplished since 2015-16.

Eight of those 14 goals have given his team the lead in a game, a total second only to Seth Jarvis (11) among this year's crop of Canes.

In Net...

After a day off the ice on Wednesday, the Canes are expected to have both Frederik Andersen and Brandon Bussi available this evening.

Andersen was solid in his last outing with 38 saves against Washington — his second-highest single-game total of the season. Despite the OT loss, Saturday's result marked the fifth straight game that the Canes have picked up at least a point with Andersen between the pipes.

Should the Canes elect to go back to Bussi, just two days after his last appearance, he'll aim to pick up his seventh consecutive victory. The first-year netminder has been stellar all season, making NHL history in the process, winning 22 of his first 26 starts.

On The Other Side...

Idle for almost a week, this season has not been what the Blueshirts had hoped for. Winning just three of their 14 games in January, New York's 50 points on the year rank last in the Eastern Conference.

Former leading scorer Artemi Panarin was traded to the Los Angeles Kings on Wednesday, but the Rangers have already been operating without the star forward for four games. In that time, Mika Zibanejad has stepped up with points in all four contests, and paces the team (including Panarin) with 22 points in 14 games since the turn of the calendar.

Despite his team's struggles, Igor Shesterkin remains one of the NHL's top goaltenders. Ranking among the NHL's top 10 in both save percentage (.913) and GAA (2.45), Shesterkin has helped the Rangers pick up points in five of his last six starts (4-1-1).

Injury Updates...



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026**

Forward Eric Robinson suffered an upper-body injury on Jan. 19. Rod Brind'Amour told the media after practice on Jan. 21 that Robinson will be "out for an extended period," and further revealed on Jan. 23 that the forward will likely be out until the Olympic break.

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

What Are We Wearing?

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

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes begin their Winter Olympics break post-game. They'll return to practice on Tuesday, Feb. 17 and then game action on Thursday, Feb. 26, against Tampa Bay at Lenovo Center.

Next Game: Thursday, Feb. 26 vs. Tampa | 7:00 p.m. ET | [FDSNSO](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Parking](#)



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026



## How Artemi Panarin ended up with the Los Angeles Kings

By: Elliotte Friedman

Someday, someone's going to tell all about the final 48 hours of Artemi Panarin's Rangers tenure. Because it sounds bonkers.

As best as I can tell — and I freely admit I don't have the full picture — here is what happened:

Panarin wanted Florida and Tampa Bay involved. Those two teams would have been right at the top of his list, especially the Panthers.

I don't believe it ever got anywhere close with either. Despite my podcast diatribe explaining how the Panthers could do it, that didn't go far. It appears the Lightning considered it to some degree, but they aren't crazy about rentals and whatever they were willing to consider on an extension wasn't satisfactory.

So it was on to other options.

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

Latest episode

With 20/20 hindsight, we know California ranked next. Panarin liked the idea of reuniting with Joel Quenneville. But Anaheim wasn't willing to extend, at least not right now. That eliminated the Ducks. San Jose looked into it, but I'm still not sure how far that went.

Enter Los Angeles.

When it first got out that the Rangers weren't going to re-sign Panarin, there were rumours of the Kings trading for Evander Kane. They were treading water at that point, and openly wondered if giving up assets made any sense at all. Then, the Panarin possibility dropped on their laps, and they had to consider it.

They felt their greatest need was a centre. But when a talented offensive player indicates he'd like to come your way, you can't ignore it. I called the possibility of him going there "a fresh coat of paint," and honestly, they needed it.

Here's where it gets goofy. According to multiple sources, the Kings' Panarin pursuit almost fell apart over the last couple of

days. From the beginning, they were nervous about term on an extension for the 34-year-old winger. But the two sides were discussing something in the \$45 million range. (My guess is five years at a \$9 million AAV, but don't know that for sure.)

On Tuesday, that fell apart. Los Angeles wasn't willing to go there. Panarin's agent, Paul Theofanous (who could not be reached for comment) contacted several teams to juice the bidding. Only he knows what he really told people, but word spread like wildfire that he'd indicated Panarin was going to Carolina and someone else was willing to pay \$60 million (a four-year contract with a \$15 million AAV).

All of this was denied by anyone we asked (for good reason, as it turned out) but it certainly created a couple hours of craziness. Everyone heard the same rumours, and no one could figure out what was happening.

One major suspect for the big bidder: Seattle, who beat the Kings Wednesday night and are third in the Pacific. Several sources indicated the Kraken offered a four-year extension "with an AAV higher than Leon Draisaitl's." The Edmonton cornerstone is at \$14 million. That's ... just wow ... but I'm not surprised they'd do it. It's bold and it fits what they're looking to do.

"We had discussions with Paul Theofanous...just like numerous other teams," GM Jason Botterill said early Thursday morning. "We will continue to be aggressive at improving our team. But we won't comment on discussions with agents/players."

Carolina lurked. So did Washington, and, I suspect, Utah. But Panarin, as evidenced Wednesday when he told the Rangers he would only go to LA, wanted the Kings. So they re-engaged and got to the two-year, \$22-million zone they were comfortable with.

Panarin wanted LA so badly he may have left \$30 million behind.

It's a big win for Los Angeles, snaring a star after being rebuffed the past few years by Rasmus Andersson, Brad Marchand and Linus Ullmark.

We'll look at other tentacles of this trade later Thursday.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

## The Hockey News

### 3 Takeaways: Carolina Weathers Storm, Cash In On Chances Against Senators

By: Ryan Henkel

Carolina absorbed Ottawa's relentless pressure, then capitalized on key chances to extend their impressive point streak.

The Carolina Hurricanes pushed their point streak to nine games as they defeated the Ottawa Senators 4-3 Tuesday night at Lenovo Center.

Here are three takeaways from the win:

#### 1. Weathering The Storm

The best two teams in the NHL in terms of the percentage of their time spent in the offensive zone are the Carolina Hurricanes (45.2%) and Ottawa Senators (43.8%).

Last night though, Ottawa decidedly had the edge over Carolina.

The Senators were just able to attack in waves and seemed to constantly be applying pressure in the Hurricanes' end. Carolina meanwhile mostly generated off of the rush.

The craziest thing though is that the two teams generated virtually the same amount of chances through 60 minutes.

Ottawa had just a 56-50 edge in all-situation chances and a 49-47 edge in 5v5 chances.

However, as I said, the Senators dominated the zone time share and had the more dangerous chances overall because of that, with a 35-23 edge in scoring chances and a 17-11 edge in high-danger chances.

But perhaps the most impressive thing though was how the Hurricanes managed to mitigate Ottawa's offense in the third period.

Obviously the Senators tied the game on a power play goal, but the defensive effort at 5v5 was really strong.

Despite Ottawa being on the attack for nearly the entire period, the Senators had just five shots on goal and only nine total chances in the third period.

Carolina did an outstanding job of keeping Ottawa to the outside and not only prevent shots from getting through, but just preventing shots in the first place at all.

The team wasn't able to get going the other way much, but their ability to grind away shift after shift without giving up those open lanes and shooting chances was quite comendable.

#### 2. Cashing In On Opportunities

Even if they weren't the more dangerous team, Carolina certainly still had their looks and they made the most of them.

The Hurricanes scored twice off of faceoff wins — Sebastian Aho's lucky deflection came just six seconds following his faceoff win and Seth Jarvis' power play goal came just six seconds again after Jordan Staal cleanly won the draw.

The ability to run set plays cleanly is an often overlooked aspect of the game and when you can win draws, it goes a long way.

I mean, just look at Ottawa's first power play goal too. Aho loses the draw and the Senators get their look to score just six seconds later too.

Faceoffs can be so crucial in tight games such as this one.

The Canes' other two conversions came off of the rush.

Aho sent Jarvis off to the races for his second goal where he blew past Jake Sanderson and then Nikolaj Ehlers laced a perfect pass to Jordan Staal for a breakaway goal for the game-winner.

Not normally how things go for Carolina, but they'll certainly take it.

"It's not typically how a game goes for us," said Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour. "Gotta give Ottawa a lot of credit. They were on their game and it was kind of very similar to the one up there when we played them, to be honest. We were able to be opportunistic and cash in on a couple of really nice plays. Then we obviously had some big saves and that's another way to win as well."

#### 3. And Brandon Bussi, Yet Again

Jordan Staal said it best postgame...

"Not much more can be said about him. He's been unbelievable."

And I really don't know what more to say either because Bussi has been doing this game in and game out for Carolina all season long.

Against the Senators, he stopped 1.37 goals above expected with some truly outstanding saves.

I think about his save on Cousins in the first period from the slot to bail himself out after a turnover, his save on Stutzle coming down the wing, the save on Batherson that directly leads to Jarvis' second goal and then also his diving save at the very end of the game.

He's now 22-3-1 on the year and it's hard to imagine where the Hurricanes would be without him.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

## LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article314547261.html>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/preview-february-5-at-ny-rangers>

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/how-artemi-panarin-ended-up-with-the-los-angeles-kings/>

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/latest-news/3-takeaways-carolina-weather-storm-cash-in-on-chances-against-senators>

# SportScan

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

1378582 Carolina Hurricanes

From 'Boston' with love: How Raleigh girls hockey coach inspires next generation

Justin Pelletier 16-20 minutes 04/02/2026

Watching Jessica Hughes coach a girls' ice hockey team — no matter the level — you'd swear she's been working on the ice and behind benches for decades.

Hearing Hughes speak while explaining drills, or chatting with other coaches — no matter the venue — you'd swear she's a recent Boston-to-Raleigh transplant.

Neither is true, technically, and yet most who know Hughes know her only as "Coach Boston," or, simply, "Boston."

"I grew up to almost like Hannah Montana," Hughes said, "where you either know me as 'Jessica' or as 'Boston.' I'm like, I live a dual lifestyle. It's fantastic."

Hughes, 38, has been in the Raleigh area for almost 23 years. And while she's been involved in hockey for nearly all of those 38 years, she only started coaching in earnest about five years ago, after a personal loss nudged her into the embrace of her "hockey family."

And the "Boston" moniker? It doesn't take long while speaking with Hughes to figure that one out.

"(The accent) slips out occasionally, especially the maw comf-table I get with you," Hughes said, dropping the "r" in "more" and "comfortable" on cue.

What's abundantly clear through most of her interactions in and around a rink, though, is just how comfortable the Raleigh hockey community has become with her.

That she has carved this niche with the Junior Canes girls program — as a coach, yes, and also as an organizational board member — is all the more significant. In a coaching world still statistically skewed toward men, Hughes' presence affords hockey players and parents the chance to see another woman helping to lead the way for the next generation.

"The girls need it," Hughes said. "They need representation. Even when the (Professional Women' Hockey League) came to Raleigh, it was so nice just to see women built for the game as a professional athlete. She was just like me, playing the top tier hockey and getting recognized for it. You don't even know how that makes me feel, you know? She doesn't care what I play, if I play D1 hockey, if I didn't, if I went to the Olympics or if I didn't. She's just like, 'Hey, you're a girl hockey player, and I don't see a lot of those.'"

Hughes first moved to the Triangle in 2003, when she and her mom relocated to Cary.

"Only child, single mom, she was just kind of burned out with the Northern lifestyle," Hughes said. "She had a lot of coworker friends that were moving to Cary. At the time, I was going to prep school in Connecticut, and I just asked her, I said, 'The only thing I want is, they have to have hockey. Like, that's all I want.'"

There wasn't much, Hughes conceded, but it was enough.

"CAHA (Carolina Amateur Hockey Association) at the time did have a select team that traveled to, like, the Connecticut Polar Bear Tournament, and that was made up of hodgepodge girls in the South," Hughes said. "But there wasn't much more than that for girls only."

"At the time Raleigh Storm had put together like a 16U girls team with Team CAHA," she continued. "And I actually skated, and I think my first weekend ever in North Carolina with the Trailblazers."

While still a student at Green Hope High School in Cary, Hughes joined a group of players playing under the N.C. State women's club team banner for coach Roger Kenney.

"That was how a lot of us our senior year in high school just were able to still play hockey once we did move down," she said.

After she graduated, Hughes stayed in Raleigh, playing on a mix of elite women's teams and traveling to play the sport she loved — a lot.

Joining the Junior Canes

The women's hockey community grew slowly in Raleigh, while the Junior Canes organization — and hockey leagues in general — blossomed as the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes planted deep roots in the Triangle.

By the late 2010s, though, participation in the girls' program began a sharp rise. Alyssa (Gagliardi) Sleasman led the Junior Canes' girls'



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

hockey efforts from 2019-2022, coming off an award-winning playing career in college and in the women's pro ranks.

Through the local women's hockey community, she knew Hughes, who had continued to play competitively with various local clubs and teams, including the Lady Hurricanes, a wildly successful Raleigh-based club that competes in USA Hockey's 21-plus Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 divisions, and the 30+ Tier 1 division.

After one particularly strong showing at a national tournament, Gagliardi had Hughes and some of her teammates speak to a room full of young girls in the Lil' Lady Canes program.

"We had Colleen Murphy, and Alyssa had known her from playing, and they were like, 'Hey, you know, you can come out to Canes' Girls and help out.' And now it's Lil' Lady Canes. And I was like, 'Oh, yeah, like, what else do I have going on? Yeah, OK, this will be fun.'

"And I think it was at PNC Arena (now Lenovo Center) at the time, and I was like, 'Oh, yeah, I'll skate on Canes' ice. Say less.'"

Junior Canes girls hockey players listen to instructions during a practice at Invisalign Arena in Morrisville, N.C. on Tuesday, Sept. 19, 2023.

Junior Canes girls hockey players listen to instructions during a practice at Invisalign Arena in Morrisville, N.C. on Tuesday, Sept. 19, 2023. Kaitlin McKeown kmckeown@newsobserver.com

### Building the brand

Hughes has worn various hats for the Lil' Lady Canes and now the Junior Canes over the past half-dozen years, but she made the biggest transition — from rink rat and assistant, to rink rat, assistant and full-on coach — in 2021, after her mom suddenly passed away.

"Only child, single parent, right?" Hughes said. "The game and the community became my local family. A co-instructor with the Lil' Lady Canes said they needed a coach for their women's team at NCSU that season.

"I think people assume I've been coaching 'forever,' when in reality it's only been a little over four years."

Those four years — since the COVID-19 pandemic — have seen the Junior Canes' overall numbers rebound, and the girls' program continues to show the same trajectory. According to Junior Canes girls program director Sarah (Antonelli) Swingle, there are about 170 girls in the Junior Canes' program alone for the 2025-26 season, and another 50 in the Lil' Lady Canes program.

Other area hockey programs like the Carolina Thunder in Hillsborough and the Raleigh Raptors have girls on various co-ed teams, the North Carolina Golden Bears have started to form girls-only teams — "they have about 40 players," Swingle noted — and the Polar House Hockey League has several teams with multiple girls on their rosters.

"It's been the best part of my life," Swingle said. "Picking up where Alyssa started, and seeing the continuous growth year after year. The growth and retention of the program is something I am very proud of."

That success in the Triangle and beyond has led program leaders like Swingle and Hughes into talks about forming a girls-only regional hockey league. Currently, girls travel teams are allowed to join the Carolinas Hockey League, but most teams they'll face are made up of all boys.

"The girls have outgrown co-ed leagues," Swingle said. "We all know what co-ed means — boys teams with one or two girls. Before our growth spurt, we were unable to have a full league for only girls teams. Now, there's a need.

"The growth is a testament to First Goal, Lil' Lady Canes, passionate and positive mentors like Coach Boston, (the Carolina Hurricanes') Shane

Willis for advocating for positions like mine, and the Carolina Hurricanes at large."

And it's that progress that keeps Hughes coming back for more.

"Knowing that when I came in 2003, there wasn't this, right? I was an anomaly," Hughes said. "Girls didn't play hockey. There was only a handful of us around the entire area, and now you can have a handful of you own your neighborhood."

According to Swingle, leaders like Hughes are a big reason for the sustained growth.

"Having someone as dynamic and respected as Coach Boston in our community helps attract others who want to be part of what we're building," Swingle said. "Dynamic leaders don't just fill a role, they widen the doorway for others to walk through it, and that's exactly what Coach Boston does for the other females here in Raleigh."

Justin Pelletier / News & Observer

### Hughes' 'why'

Hughes cruised around during Junior Canes Girls 10U Red practice at Wake Competition Center last week, making sure each of the team's players were on task, working on the drills she'd just diagrammed.

Watching as the group of 9- and 10-year-old skaters made progress toward their personal goals — each skater, of course, with a different path, a different plan — brought a smile to her face, especially when the new concept "clicked" for some of the players.

"It's got to start with love and the game," Hughes said. "You've got to want to show up to the rink, right? You got to want to do the drills, you've got to want to do the work, you've got to want to take the shots. Whether you take that to be a D1 athlete, that's on you, but show up and embrace it and know that it's a place where you can make a mistake, it's a place where you can fail, and just still build little tiny best friends and not just hockey players."

Hughes hasn't just stopped at growing the youth game. In addition to being the head coach of two teams, Hughes was elected last year to the Junior Canes Board of Directors. She also runs skills sessions for adult skaters, helps out with Hurricanes outreach programs like ball hockey, and volunteers with the Triangle Special Hockey Association, whose mission it is to "educate, motivate and encourage individuals with developmental and/or physical disabilities to participate in ice hockey in an adaptive environment."

"Boston" is truly one of a kind," Swingle said. "Boston was my first friend in Raleigh, and I think she is that person for many. She is one of the most experienced and influential coaches in Raleigh, male or female. She is motivated by impact, not compensation.

"Coach Boston is an authentic person, friend and coach, and rallies around those in our community, always," Swingle added. Everyone needs a Coach Boston in their corner."

And many do, judging by how many people want to bend Hughes' ear every time she's at a rink.

So, how often is she at a rink, really?

"I don't think it's as bad as somebody says," Hughes said, pausing to count. "Probably around 15 (hours)? With no kids in the program. Any situation where somebody says, 'I want to play the game,' and we can put a stick in their hand, I'm like, 'If I'm around, I'm good.'"

Anything, Hughes said, to give back to the game she believes has given her so much.

"I think I stumbled upon my passion accidentally," Hughes said. "I did not think I would be a hockey coach when I moved here — I didn't think I'd be a hockey coach 10 years ago — and I stumbled upon it. I like the



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

person I am when I'm in this environment, and it feeds me, right? And I just have fun with it. You just can't outperform someone that's doing it for fun."

Hughes paused. She sighed. She thought about all the hockey hats she's worn in recent years — and continues to wear; the hours she's spent on the ice. At 16, she'd arrived in Raleigh hoping there was any hockey at all. Now, she's on the front lines of the sport's continued growth among girls and women, helping the next generation find and fuel its passion.

"I'm exhausted," Hughes admitted after her reflection, her Boston accent finding its way to her lips again. "I'm exhausted, but in the best possible way, though. In the best possible way."

Profile Image of Justin Pelletier

Justin Pelletier

The News & Observer

Justin is a 25-year veteran sports journalist with stops in Lewiston, Maine (Sun Journal), and Boston (Boston Herald). A proud husband, and father of twin girls, Pelletier is a Boston University graduate and member of the esteemed Jack Falla sportswriting mafia. He has earned dozens of state and national sportswriting and editing awards covering preps, colleges and professional leagues.

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1378717 Websites

The Athletic / Top NHL Draft prospect Gavin McKenna charged with felony aggravated assault

By Sean Gentille

Feb. 4, 2026 Updated Feb. 5, 2026 1:23 am EST

Gavin McKenna, a Penn State hockey forward and one of the top prospects for the 2026 NHL Draft, is facing a felony assault charge for allegedly hitting a man in the face in an altercation that resulted in the man needing corrective surgery, police say.

McKenna, who turned 18 on Dec. 20, was charged with felony aggravated assault on Wednesday in State College, Pa., according to court documents and a statement from the State College Police Department. The native of Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada, is also facing a misdemeanor assault charge and summary charges of harassment and disorderly conduct for his role in the alleged incident that occurred Saturday.

In a written statement provided to The Athletic, John Hanna, Penn State athletics' associate director of strategic communications, said: "We are aware that charges have been filed; however, as this is an ongoing legal matter, we will not have any further comment."

The charges were first reported by Onward State, a Penn State student publication.

According to the statement and court documents, the incident took place Saturday in the 100 block of South Pugh Street, in State College, at approximately 8:45 p.m. ET. That was hours after the Nittany Lions played Michigan State in an outdoor home game in front of nearly 75,000 fans at Beaver Stadium.

McKenna allegedly struck a 21-year-old man in the face during the altercation, with the man suffering facial injuries that required corrective surgery, police say. McKenna was arraigned on the charges Wednesday

and released on \$20,000 unsecured bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Feb. 11.

The maximum penalty for first-degree felony aggravated assault in Pennsylvania is 20 years in prison and/or a \$25,000 fine.

McKenna is in his first season with the Nittany Lions after three seasons in the junior-level Western Hockey League, during which he emerged as a potential No. 1 NHL Draft pick — and as the first hockey player worthy of a six-figure NIL deal, a major factor in his stunning jump from Canadian juniors to the Big Ten. Once considered the top draft-eligible prospect, McKenna was ranked at No. 4 on The Athletic's most recent list of prospects, owing largely to an uneven first few months of NCAA hockey.

In 26 games this season, McKenna has 11 goals and 21 assists, which ties him for the team lead with 32 points. Penn State has eight regular-season games remaining on its schedule. The 2026 NHL Draft is scheduled for June 26 and 27 at KeyBank Center in Buffalo, N.Y.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.05.2026

1378718 Websites

The Athletic / NHL's trade freeze is in effect. What now? Rules for roster moves during 2026 Olympics

By Chris Johnston

Feb. 4, 2026 Updated 3:37 pm EST

An 18-day freeze on NHL trade activity for the Milan Cortina Olympics took effect Wednesday at 3 p.m. Eastern, but if anything, the general expectation around the league is that trade chatter is going to heat up during the break in the league's regular-season schedule.

There are no restrictions on trade conversations among executives while the Olympic flame is lit in Italy, and more than one-third of NHL general managers are scheduled to be in Milan for national team duties, which should provide plenty of opportunities for face-to-face conversations and meetings.

GMs staying back in North America for scouting trips or other business will be easily reached, too, and everyone should be in a position to have surveyed the market in a calculated fashion without the steady drumbeat of games being played each night.

A look back to last winter, when the league paused for the 4 Nations Face-Off, offers a pretty good indicator of what we should expect. There were six trades made in eight days coming out of 4 Nations, including the Florida Panthers acquiring Seth Jones from the Chicago Blackhawks in a deal that fortified them for another Stanley Cup run.

This season's Olympic trade freeze extends until 11:59 p.m. Eastern on Feb. 22.

Once it lifts, there will be a 12-day sprint toward the March 6 trade deadline — typically the busiest day each year for transactions on the NHL calendar.

Here's an explainer on what is and isn't permitted under league rules while the Milan Olympic tournament is being played.

Hot spots

At least two GMs who have already declared themselves deadline sellers will be on the ground in Milan: Doug Armstrong of the St. Louis Blues, who leads Team Canada's management group; and Chris Drury of the New York Rangers, an assistant GM with Team USA.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

They could be extra popular with their peers, as evidenced by the number of their players featured on our latest Big Board.

Most of the other GMs onsite for the Games are more likely to fall under the buyers category.

Julien BriseBois (Tampa Bay Lightning), Jim Nill (Dallas Stars), Don Sweeney (Boston Bruins) and Kyle Dubas (Pittsburgh Penguins) are each part of Team Canada's staff, while Bill Guerin (Minnesota Wild), Bill Zito (Panthers), Stan Bowman (Edmonton Oilers) and Tom Fitzgerald (New Jersey Devils) round out Team USA's executive.

Jarmo Kekäläinen of the Buffalo Sabres is part of Finland's management team.

Even though the Olympic tournament will play out quickly and carry high stakes for everyone involved, NHL business will remain front of mind. For execs, the heavy lifting is largely over once the national team rosters are selected.

### Contracts

Just because trade activity is frozen doesn't mean the NHL's Central Registry is going on an extended holiday. Players remain eligible to sign contract extensions during the Olympics.

In many ways, that goes part and parcel with the trade deadline.

The red-hot Columbus Blue Jackets, for example, intentionally put off getting down to business with a group of pending unrestricted free agents that includes captain Boone Jenner, Charlie Coyle and Mason Marchment ahead of the break.

Where those talks go could help set the course ahead of March 6.

There also hasn't been much action around Alex Tuch since Kekäläinen took over as Sabres GM in December. He's well-positioned to be a hot commodity on the open market come July 1, but it wouldn't be surprising to see Buffalo attempt to extend him before that happens.

In-season negotiations can be tricky to navigate on both sides of the table because of their potential to create distractions. However, the typical distractions will be removed over the next couple of weeks, which is why we should expect to see some new contracts get signed.

### Demotions to the AHL

Another trend to watch during the Olympic break is teams assigning young or waivers-exempt players to their AHL affiliates.

That league will continue operating with a typical schedule right through February. As a result, NHL teams will get the opportunity to find more minutes for some guys on the farm, or they'll simply take advantage of the chance to save daily cap accrual by shifting players off their roster during the break.

However, there are restrictions: Any player who dressed for at least 16 of his team's final 20 games before the Olympic break isn't eligible to be loaned out. The same goes for anyone who was on an NHL roster for 80 days this season as of Jan. 21.

Players in those categories will be granted time off.

Meanwhile, NHL waivers will continue as normal, with players eligible to be placed on the wire during the Olympic break. However, if someone is claimed after his team's final game before the freeze, that player won't be required to report to his new team until Feb. 17.

In other words, a player can't be summoned from vacation if he gets loaned out or claimed during the international window. He would have to be sent down before the break was formally underway to be required to report to the AHL team.

Back to work

The 600-plus NHL players who aren't participating in the Olympic tournament are required to punch the clock again starting Feb. 17.

Not unlike when teams return from the All-Star Weekend or a bye week in prior seasons, practices during the first day back can't be scheduled before 2 p.m. local time. That allows some extra time for those in transit from outside their own market.

If desired, NHL teams will have the runway necessary to hold as many as six or seven practices to get back up to speed before the sprint to the end of the regular season officially begins.

There are eight games scheduled leaguewide on Wednesday, Feb. 25 — three days after the Olympic gold medals are handed out at Santagiulia Arena in Milan.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.05.2026

1378719 Websites

The Athletic / Remembering 10 NHL stars who lost their best Olympic opportunity in 2018 and 2022

By Sean McIndoe

Feb. 4, 2026 6:30 am EST

We're about to hit a whole bunch of important Olympic milestones. The NHL break starts tomorrow night. The first men's preliminary round games are next Wednesday. The medal round starts two weeks from tomorrow. Construction on the arena should be finished shortly after that.

The point is, this is happening. And that's big, because as every hockey fan knows, the NHL hasn't been to an Olympics since 2014.

That's 12 years ago, which is a long wait for fans. But it's also a big gap for the players — big enough that some legitimate stars have seen their peak come and go since the last time they had the opportunity to play on the world's biggest stage. We're talking about players who were almost certainly good enough to make an Olympic team, but just never got the chance.

Let's recognize a few of those guys today.

To set the ground rules, we are looking for players who never played in the Olympics. The list includes some active players who are unlikely to play in 2030 — meaning guys such as Jason Robertson, Cole Caufield or Seth Jarvis don't qualify quite yet. And while we'll never know who would or wouldn't have made the teams in 2018 or 2022, we'll make some educated guesses based on stats, awards and other international invites.

(Also, I'm not including any Russian players, since their continued exclusion from this year's tournament is a whole other issue that's beyond the reach of the NHL.)

I'll start us off with 10 names, and then hand it over to you in the comments to suggest others.

Team Canada: Claude Giroux

There was a brief time when Giroux was in the "best player in the world" discussion, and while that was largely driven by a collective case of Sidney Crosby fatigue, it still speaks to how good he was in his prime. That prime overlapped strongly with the 2014 Olympics, and it was widely considered a surprise that Giroux didn't make that team. (Here's The Hockey News in 2014 naming Giroux as the team's top snub, calling it "shocking.")



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

A strong second half to that 2013-14 season led to Giroux being a Hart finalist, and by 2016, he was in the running for another Team Canada, this time for the World Cup. He eventually did make that team, although he only dressed for one game. But by 2017, he seemed to have won over the Canadian brain trust, being named captain for that year's World Championship entry. And then in 2017-18, he had the single most productive season of his career, cracking the 100-point mark and leading the league in assists.

It feels reasonably safe to assume he would have had a spot on Team Canada if the NHL had sent players to the Olympics. Instead, that 2017 World Championship ended up being the last international experience of his career so far. At 38, there's a good chance it stays that way.

Team Finland: Patrik Laine

Laine's the youngest name on our list, meaning it's not impossible he could still make the Finnish roster in 2030. He'll be 31 by then, though, and given his injuries and declining production, it's looking more and more likely that we may never see him suit up for a best-on-best Olympics.

That would have felt hard to believe back in 2018, when Laine would have been a slam-dunk selection. After scoring 36 goals as a rookie, he was on his way to what would be a career-high 44. He would have been only 19 at the time, which is the age where hockey executives love to galaxy-brain their way into leaving talent at home in favor of veterans who won't make mistakes. But given how Finnish rosters tend to lack a ton of NHL-level depth up front, it feels reasonably safe to assume Laine's offensive ability would have at least earned him a role as a power-play specialist. Remember, he'd been on Finland's World Cup roster as an 18-year-old in 2016.

By 2022, Laine's injury woes had already started, and some of the bloom was already off the rose, even at just 23 years old. But again, it feels likely that he would have made the team that year, because we know he ended up getting an invite to the 4 Nations Face-Off.

That's two chances at the Olympics that the NHL's absence cost him. Mix in this year's injury and the downward trend in his output, and you have to wonder if he ever gets a chance now.

Team USA: Dustin Byfuglien

Byfuglien was a surprising omission from the 2014 Olympic team. You'd think David Poile and friends would have found room for one of the most imposing players of his generation, especially given that Byfuglien could also light the lamp. But presumably because of his reputation for occasional lapses in his own end, he didn't make the cut.

That changed by 2016, when Byfuglien was named to Team USA's roster for the World Cup, where he was expected to play a key role. With that best-on-best experience under his belt, and three straight top-12 finishes in Norris voting, he probably would have been penciled in for a spot on the 2018 Olympic team. It's not hard to imagine Byfuglien playing the role of the grizzled veteran at 32, while using his massive wingspan to negate the wider international ice.

He never got that chance, and by 2019 he had walked away from the sport entirely. We may never see another player like Big Buff in the NHL, let alone in international best-on-best competition.

Team Canada: Taylor Hall

Hall is headed toward one of the weirder careers in modern NHL history. Barring a late renaissance that feels exceedingly unlikely, he's going to end up having just one season in which he earned any MVP votes at all. Of course, that would be the year he edged out Nathan MacKinnon to win the award, making him one of the stranger one-hit wonder stories in the Hart's history.

But here's the thing: that MVP came in 2017-18, which would seem to suggest that Hall would have been a top candidate for that year's Team Canada. I'm not sure he would have been an absolute lock, since his last full season in 2016-17 had been a disappointing one. And even in his MVP year, his first-half numbers were good but not great; by the end of December, around the time the final rosters would have been announced, Hall was scoring at a point-per-game pace. For a relatively one-dimensional player, that might not have been enough.

Still, it's hard to imagine a guy who was on his way to an MVP season wouldn't have at least been seriously considered for a Team Canada spot. It certainly would have been his best shot at representing Canada at a best-on-best.

Team Sweden: William Karlsson

Karlsson hadn't even made his NHL debut when the 2014 Olympics were held, and he spent his first few seasons looking like a modestly skilled depth piece in Anaheim and Columbus. Then came a new opportunity with the expansion Golden Knights, and Karlsson went on to one of the greatest single-season transformations we've ever seen.

He finished that 2017-18 with 43 goals while leading the NHL in plus-minus and shooting percentage, finishing in the top 10 in both Hart and Selke voting. Would all of that have been enough to get him on Team Sweden midway through the year? You'd have to think so — he already had 20 goals by the new year, when rosters would have been finalized. And while he never came close to reproducing those career heights, he was still a solid middle-six guy with defensive chops by 2022, so a second appearance isn't hard to fathom.

Instead, he didn't get either opportunity. And while he probably had a solid chance at this year's roster, an injury ended those hopes, too. At 33, this was probably his last chance. And unlike most of the guys on this list, he also never played in a World Cup or the 4 Nations, meaning he's likely to finish his career without ever seeing best-on-best action.

Team USA: John Gibson

Goalies are tricky for this sort of exercise. I also considered North American names such as Corey Crawford, Devan Dubnyk, Craig Anderson, Ben Bishop and Braden Holtby. But Gibson seems like the easiest call of the bunch, because the timing lines up perfectly. (Or not so perfectly, from his perspective.)

In 2014, he hadn't seen NHL ice yet. But by 2018, he'd made his debut, won a Jennings, and was on the way to his third straight top-seven finish in Vezina voting. He was putting up great numbers in Anaheim and doing it as a workhorse. Not only would he have almost certainly made the 2018 team, but he might also have given a young Connor Hellebuyck and an aging Jonathan Quick a run for the starter's job.

Gibson's case in 2022 would have been weaker, with Hellebuyck established as a star and Thatcher Demko having a career year. Still, Gibson would have had a shot, even if it was just as the third string.

Instead, he'll end up having to settle for the 2016 World Cup, where he got into a couple of games for Team North America. He never got to represent Team USA in an international event after his NHL career began.

Team Czechia: Petr Mrázek

Mrázek was still a rookie with just a few NHL games under his belt in 2014, but he would spend the next few seasons playing well as the starter in Detroit. His best season came in 2015-16, when he won 27 games and posted an impressive .921 save percentage. That was enough to earn him a spot on the 2016 World Cup team, and almost certainly would have had him solidly in the running for the 2018 Olympics.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

His case in 2022 would have been weaker, since he was well into the journeyman portion of his career by then, although it's possible he could have been viewed as veteran insurance for younger goalies such as Vitek Vaněček and Dan Vladar.

All told, from the 2014-15 through 2022-23 seasons, Mrázek ranked second among Czech goalies with 147 wins, narrowly trailing Halak (who'd already played in the Olympics in both 2010 and 2014). But a rough year in Anaheim, both in terms of results and health, took him out of the running for this year's Team Czechia.

One more goalie, and it's a bit of a stunner ...

Team Finland: Pekka Rinne

Yep, I had to double-check a few times, but Rinne never went to the Olympics despite a career as a starter that stretches back to 2008.

In 2010, he was having a solid sophomore season, but was passed over for the veteran trio of Miikka Kiprusoff, Niklas Bäckström and Antero Niittymäki. At the time, it was viewed as a minor snub, but more as evidence of how deep Finland's options in goal were. If he was disappointed, he didn't show it, going on to finish as a Vezina finalist in both 2011 and 2012, establishing himself as one of the best goaltenders in the world.

Unfortunately, the only serious injury of Rinne's career showed up just in time to cost him a 2014 Olympic nod, as his bad hip caused him to miss most of the season. But he was back the following year, finishing as Vezina runner-up in 2015 before finally winning the award with a career year at the age of 35 in 2018.

If the NHL had gone to the Olympics that year, Rinne would have been one of the most obvious picks in the entire league. But they didn't, making it the second straight time that arguably the greatest goalie in Finland's history couldn't represent his country on the biggest stage.

Team Canada: Ryan O'Reilly

Not surprisingly, Canada gives us a ton of forwards to choose from. But I tried to think like a Team Canada GM, meaning I'm not just looking at offensive output. For example, if Mark Scheifele couldn't make the team with the year he's having right now, who's to say he would have made it as a 70-point player in 2022, or a 60-point player in 2018? Would Tyler Seguin have been a candidate for the same type of snub? If they didn't want Islanders rookie Matthew Schaefer this time, would they have taken Islanders rookie Mathew Barzal in 2018? You get the idea.

But when it comes to O'Reilly, I don't think we have to worry too much. He was only 22 when the 2014 team was named, and it wasn't a shock to see him left off that roster. But by 2018, he'd established his reputation as a strong two-way player in Buffalo. And by 2022, he'd won a Conn Smythe and a Selke to go with another year as a finalist. It's easy to imagine him being penciled in for the Anthony Cirelli/Sam Bennett role.

He did make the World Cup team in 2016, and has worn the maple leaf in six world championships (and one relatively forgettable NHL playoff run). Just never at the Olympics.

Team USA: Johnny Gaudreau

This one hurts, for obvious reasons. Gaudreau was drafted in 2011, but didn't make his NHL debut until after the 2014 Olympics. By 2018, he was an established NHL star on his way to his first point-per-game season, but might have been snubbed by the Team USA brain trust because of his size.

By 2022, there would have been no doubt, with Gaudreau in the midst of a monster season that saw him finish with 115 points while leading the league with a +64 rating and earning first-team All-Star honors.

He ended up representing America in four world championships and played in the 2016 World Cup as part of the Team North America squad. But tragically, we'll never get a chance to see him at the Olympics.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.05.2026

1378720 Websites

The Athletic / NHL player poll: Next expansion city? How big is too big? Fan Venmo requests? Worst chirps?

By The Athletic NHL Staff

Feb. 4, 2026 6:00 am EST

Nick Cousins is a perfectly capable third-line winger for the Ottawa Senators. He's a safe bet to score somewhere between six and 10 goals a year. He's been in the league for a dozen seasons, hasn't seen the AHL in a decade, has made more than \$11 million and has played for seven teams. He's a Stanley Cup champion. He's had a very respectable career in the NHL.

And it seems that everybody hates him.

In our last incarnation of The Athletic's anonymous player poll, Cousins was named the NHL's most punchable player for the second consecutive year. This time around, he's been dubbed the player with the worst chirps.

Of course, in the NHL, being obnoxious is part of a player's skill set, so maybe Cousins has the rest of the league right where he wants them.

For this edition of the poll, 118 players participated, though not every player responded to every question.

We asked players:

Who has the league's worst chirps?

What should be the next city to get a team?

For expansion, how big is too big?

Do you get Venmo requests from fans?

Other than players, what should teams spend more money on?

Where would Russia place in Olympic men's hockey? (coming Friday)

Who's your Olympic dark horse? (coming Friday)

Now let's get to the results!

An NHL rink is bluer than a late-night comedy club. Players curse at themselves and at the heavens when they miss a golden scoring chance. They curse at opponents incessantly. They curse at teammates, both encouragingly and disparagingly. Coaches curse at players and refs. And even the refs are cursing at both players and coaches.

But Mark Scheifele doesn't curse, gosh darnit. And it makes his chirps sound kind of pathetic, according to his peers.

"He doesn't use cuss words," said one player who voted for him.

"Because he doesn't swear," said another. "He's never chirped me, but I've seen videos of him, and I think it's hilarious."

"I've got to go with a buddy here," said another player. "Scheifele. He tries, but he can't swear. It never delivers very well."

Cousins, of course, ran away with this one, stealing Brad Marchand's title — and his nickname.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

"He's a rat," one player said of Cousins. "I played with him in Arizona, so I know him. He doesn't even know what he's saying. He just mumbles half the time."

Here are some other nominations:

On Trevor Zegras: "Just a couple of bad chirps, I've heard him say. I'm like, 'What are you talking about?'"

On Tim Stütze: "He just kinda skates around saying stupid s--- about people. It's not creative. Just stupid, useless stuff."

On Mason Marchment: "He just yaps. He doesn't chirp very good."

On Dmitri Voronkov, from a Blue Jackets teammate: "Nobody knows what he's saying out there. He doesn't know what he's saying."

On Nikita Kucherov: "He starts talking in Russian when he gets pissed off. I have no clue what he's saying."

On Jean-Gabriel Pageau: "He's a buddy of mine. He's French. He chirps everyone, but sometimes they don't always make sense."

On Marchand: "I find every chirp kind of funny. They're trying to give you their best, a little bit. Even if it's a bad one, it makes it almost funnier. Marchand is really funny. He goes overboard sometimes. It's kind of laughable, the stuff he says. One of those guys for sure."

Plenty of players downplayed the effectiveness — or even the existence — of old-school chirping.

"No one really chirps me anymore," one player said. "You call me old. I'm like, good one. It's a compliment. Now. I'm still f---ing playing."

"There's too many sharks in the water to be bad at it," said another player. "If you're not good, guys just keep their mouths shut."

"They don't talk to much to the goalies until it's playoff time," said a goalie.

"I find the NHL more respectful," one player said. "The AHL is the wild west. Everybody's giving me something on the way by."

"Nobody says anything to me," one player said wistfully. "I'm kinda taking it personally."

"I don't get a lot of chirping," said one congenial player. "I'm so nice. Everybody likes me."

"I don't speak English," said another.

As the league has changed over time and players think twice about what's said on the ice, chirping in the NHL is less "ruthless" than ever.

Houston is the fourth-largest city in the United States and the fifth-largest in North America. Oh, and you might not have ever heard about this one little aspect of Texas — there are no state income taxes.

Big shock that Houston ran away with this one. A second Texas team has seemed inevitable for years, anyway.

"Makes sense size-wise," one player said. "Atlanta's a big city, but they were already there."

"I heard it's unreal," one player said of Houston.

"Just because I played there (in the AHL), and I know the fan base there, and it's a great spot to live," another said.

"I think it'll be Atlanta, but I'd want Houston," said another. "I think Houston is a great market. Right in the middle, and there's a lot of corporate money there. It's a great city so I think that would be a top one."

"That's a huge freaking city," one said. "It would do well there."

A return to Quebec City has long been a fantasy scenario for Canadian hockey fans, but the Colorado Avalanche appropriating their classic uniforms is probably as close as they'll ever get.

"I'd love for it to be Quebec City, but that's probably not happening," one player said.

"I miss the Nordiques," another said.

"Everybody says Atlanta; I don't understand why," said another. "It's already been there twice. I think Quebec City could do it."

"That city deserves a team," said another. "I'd love to play a game there."

While fans might roll their eyes about a return to the desert, Arizona was, is and always will be popular with hockey players — so many of whom are golfers, too.

"It's a great spot — just Glendale had nothing," one player said. "Like, everything was in Scottsdale. If they could put something closer to downtown, I think it should go back there. I think everyone enjoyed going there."

"I'd like for them to go back to Arizona," one said. "I really loved playing there. If they can just figure out the rink and where they can be, it's a great place."

"I'm biased; I loved playing in Arizona," said an ex-Coyote. "I'd love them to get back there."

"It sucks that they don't have a team," said a likely cold player. "It's a sick place to visit."

"Do it the right way: Put the arena in the right part of (Phoenix), and I think you'd have an NHL hotspot," said another.

There were plenty of other suggestions.

On Atlanta: "I could see Atlanta because they've already had a team there. I know obviously it wasn't successful at that time, but I think if you put a better product on the ice and just where the NHL's at now, I think it could be successful."

On Austin: "The American League team in Austin does really well, and it's a bigger city than people realize."

On Milwaukee (from a Blackhawks player): "It'd be close for us to go and play them. It's a pretty cool city."

On Kansas City: "I always thought Kansas City, but I think it's a tapped market because everybody is probably a Blues fan."

On Miami: "It's got to be somewhere warm."

On Lake Tahoe: "Key West would be fun, too."

Owners like expansion because it lines their pockets with sweet, sweet expansion fees. Players like expansion because it boosts the salary cap and creates more NHL jobs. There will be more NHL teams in the not-too-distant future. But how many is too many?

The prevailing opinion was that 32 is just about right, but 34 would be doable.

"I think it's fine right now, to be honest," one player said. "It'll create jobs for more players, staff, coaches, so that's nice. But how does it affect the quality of the product?"

"We're pretty close to too big in my opinion, but I don't run the league," said another. "Thirty-two teams is quite a lot of teams. At one point, you can't have 36 or 35. ... Maybe one more. Maybe. But don't push 34, 35."

"If there are two more, you'd probably keep guys around for a little bit longer," one said. "There would be a lot more older guys, which I think would be good. ... Probably two more teams and then it would start thinning out."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

"I think you've got to start moving teams before you keep expanding," said one voter, who thought 34 should be the cap.

"I'm on the players' side — the more the merrier," said one player. "At the end of the day, it'd get pretty watered down, too. There's probably not 40 more good players in the American League right now. So I'm picking one or two max."

"One of the arguments is the league gets watered down, but I think the skill level of players coming up is so great that I don't think it's as big of an issue," said one voter who pegged 34 as the right number. "When I first came in, a lot of the kids weren't doing what they're doing now. The more the better."

"Thirty-six would be money," one said.

"If you get too big, you're going to get into 100-game seasons if you play every team, right?" said one voter who thought 36 was right.

Of course, AHL/NHL tweeners want as many teams as possible.

"I think they should make about 50 teams so I can get in here full time," one said.

"The NHL can never be big enough."

Typically, when a player grabs his phone after a game, he's scrolling through texts from friends and family about a sick goal he scored or a fight he had. But with the proliferation of gambling in sports, a new alert is becoming more and more common: Venmo requests from fans who lost money on the game.

How often does it happen?

"Ten times a year," one player said.

"Quite a bit," said another. "Not like a crazy amount, not every game, but ... not just once."

"Every time we lose," a goalie said. "It's pretty often. It's crazy. ... Sometimes it's when we win. I didn't let in enough goals to hit the over. They'll actually put that in the memo."

"It's funny because you can't hide," another player said. "It's just an innocent thing that you don't know is public, and it's pretty insane that something like that, your name can be found. I've heard guys go both ways. I've been requested something that was almost a joke. I've heard guys say they've been offered money because they won them a bet."

One player said he got a Venmo request from a fan who wanted to buy tickets, and another from a fan who wanted their money back after a loss.

"All the time, after games," one player said. "I tried to go private, but I don't know how that works. Sometimes it's like, 'Hey, I want to go on a boys trip. Can you send me like a couple grand?' And sometimes they're like, 'You owe me.' Yeah, I definitely get it. I think I sent someone a couple bucks to have a good time."

"I used to get more of them," one player said. "I tried to make my name harder to find. I got one here asking me to chip in on their Bud Light fund. It was like a \$5 request."

"I get a lot of lost bets," said another. "That type of thing. It's mostly just that. 'You guys lost so pay for my ticket.' 'You lost my parlay,' or something, 'so give me \$5.' Those come through sometimes. I have a very generic Venmo name, which is a problem. I can sell it a little more cryptic. Got to disguise it a little bit."

Players with Canadian phone numbers can't use Venmo, so any requests for them come from social media. Plenty of others stay off most apps entirely, and might be better served with a flip phone. Ignorance is bliss.

"What's Venmo?" asked one player.

Reporting for this story by Arpon Basu, Peter Baugh, Max Bultman, Thomas Drance, Matthew Fairburn, Jesse Granger, Joshua Kloke, Kevin Kurz, Mark Lazerus, Julian McKenzie, Vincent Z. Mercogliano, Aaron Portzline, Scott Powers, Michael Russo, Jeremy Rutherford, Fluto Shinzawa, Joe Smith, Eric Stephens and Josh Yohe.

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1378721 Websites

The Athletic / What should NHL teams spend more money on, other than salaries? Here's what players say

By The Athletic NHL Staff

Feb. 4, 2026 6:00 am EST

NHL players aren't wanting for much. There's a massive food spread everywhere they go. They fly on private jets with all first-class seating. They regularly stay in five-star hotels like the Ritz-Carlton or the Four Seasons. And the minimum salary is nearly a million dollars.

They're doing fine.

Twenty years ago, there was still a big gap between the haves and have-nots of the league. Some organizations were known among players as "first class," and others made you stuff your equipment in a black trash bag at the end of the season rather than give you a team-branded hockey bag. Now, every team spends beaucoup bucks on pampering players and ensuring they're at their best physically and mentally when they play, even if some spend more than others.

But just because things are great doesn't mean they can't be better.

So what do players want owners to spend more on? As part of our player poll this year, The Athletic asked 118 NHLers that question and left it open-ended. The majority of the answers fell under the umbrella of health, recovery and training.

Here's a sampling of the answers we received, split into general categories.

Player health and training

We'll split the comments on player health and training into four categories: food, training, recovery and staff, though many of the players polled mentioned different combinations of those or even all four.

Food

There's only so much grilled chicken with brown rice and sweet potatoes an athlete can eat. So a little variety couldn't hurt.

"It's a long season, and I think, just speaking for guys in here, it's tough (to eat) the same thing over and over again," one player said. "So I think if you could spend a little bit more, not on quantity, but maybe different quality. There's so (many) different kinds of foods out there. It gets repetitive eating steak, chicken and salmon for eight months of the year."

"People say, chicken — where is the chicken coming from?" one player said. "The beef, is it grain-fed or grass-fed? You can upgrade a lot of food areas."

"It would be great if there was food everywhere," said another. "Food waiting for us as soon as we got into the hotel, so I don't have to think about where to order from or where to go."

"We're pretty good here, but there's some places around the league that aren't."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

### Training

Another area in which players are looking for an upgrade is in training — techniques, equipment, anything it takes to be a little bit better than the other guy.

"Anything high-performance, anywhere you can find an edge," one player said.

"We spend close to half our day at the rink," another said. "Some rinks are nicer than others. All those amenities, from treatment rooms to cold tubs to hot tubs, those should be very elite. You look at soccer teams — obviously they make more money and more revenue — but some of these stadiums and practice facilities are off the charts. ... Those little things matter, especially (to) free agents nowadays."

"You spend all your time at the training center or at your game rink, so it's a massive thing to have them at the highest level," added another.

### Recovery

Recovery means different things to different players. But it's been at the forefront of just about every player's mind this season, as the Olympic break has necessitated a compressed schedule that is wearing players down. Moving to an 84-game season next year only underscores the need.

"Especially with how fast the game is and even more games," one player said.

"If you're (winning) one or two (more) games over the course of the season (because of it), that's maybe a few percentage points that you get, and you invest in that, you make the playoffs and you make it all back anyway," another said.

"I think that's an area guys are really conscious of — making sure you have the elite taking care of guys to get them back on the ice," said another. "Everyone is so health-conscious now, understands their body so much better. It's not just put a piece of ice on them and away they go. Not to say there's anything wrong now, but I think it's an area every team can get better in."

"Anything for our bodies to keep us healthy," one player said. "They pay a lot of money in salaries. Keep us on the ice, right?"

Among the requests were hydrotherapy rooms, more cold tubs and hot tubs, hotel spa access on the road, red-light beds, saunas — even a hyperbaric chamber.

"I know that's pretty ballin', but it works," said the player who wanted the hyperbaric chamber. "We're taught as athletes you want to take care of your body the best you can, and in that regard, that could be something."

### Staff

Athletic trainers, strength coaches and massage therapists are the unsung heroes of locker rooms. And players want more body experts to help them along.

"There's really good athletic trainers and all that," one player said. "Then there's some individuals who are on top of (things) treatment-wise and all that. Obviously, they cost more. I think the game is going to go that way. Every team is going to have more (about) treatment, how to have your body ready and all that stuff. ... When I think about how much money teams spent for the players, how much they pay us, (I think) it's kind of understanding how to get the best out of them. Trying to get the absolute best in their field to the teams, I think that would be really beneficial for a lot of organizations. And it's already going in that direction."

"Like chiropractors and hands-on secondary athletic training," said another.

"Hands-on treatment, chiropractor ... that gets guys on the ice," said another.

"You've got a \$95 million payroll; they should bring the best treatment guys in," one player said. "(Nathan) MacKinnon has got his own guy. (Jack) Eichel has got his own guy. Maybe a half million bucks, and what is that going to save you in man games lost?"

### Visiting locker rooms

Some of the worst visiting locker rooms in the league are now defunct — Nassau Coliseum, Joe Louis Arena, Rexall Place — and some have been moderately renovated, such as Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C., and Capital One Arena in Washington. But plenty of road rinks have a long way to go to meet the standards of a multi-billion-dollar league.

"Just to make it more consistent, I think we can invest in the amenities for away teams," one player said. "Some places are a little tighter than others. When you get a nice away locker room, I feel like that shows that they put a lot of (thought) into it. It makes you imagine what they put for their own players."

"Some places are really nice and some are just OK," another said. "So maybe if everybody had to up their standards for the away room, and cold tubs and gyms, too. Some of the gyms are pretty small."

"Yeah, some of the visiting locker rooms are pretty average," said another. "Some of those, going in there in the morning and it's freezing cold, it sucks."

"Carolina has improved," one veteran said. "Boston has improved. Washington has improved. Columbus has improved. I think the locker rooms have been better on the road than when I first got in the league. They did some renovations that definitely helped."

### Travel

Any frequent flyer knows first class is nice, but international first class is a whole different experience. And considering how often players are flying deep into the wee hours of the morning after a night game, an upgrade would be welcome.

"That'd be sick if we had Polaris-like pod seating on the plane," one player said.

"I wish we had a sick airplane where it's just sleeper beds," another said. "You know when you go on a Delta One flight and they have those little beds in there. We fly so many five-hour trips. I think that'd be sick."

"Like an Emirates plane or something," said another.

### Other suggestions

Because this query was open-ended, some players got creative or had pet causes.

Increasing staff pay got five votes: "They work their asses off. Some teams have more staff than others. Seeing how much they work, that's the first thing."

Marketing also got five: "Just trying to grow (the game) as much as we can. Fill the ad space on the NHL app or whatever. You're watching a game, and it just shuts down for commercial breaks. Throw in more ad space, like they do in some other sports like football and basketball. Commercials, whatever — just getting guys out there."

Equipment staff got four: "There's a lot of things organizations think matter that don't matter. But making life as easy on everybody as possible should be the main objective for every organization. That's what great organizations do. They make your life incredibly easy and so all you have to do is worry about playing."

On team apartments instead of extended-stay hotels for young players (two votes): "Like a dorm, it would be sick."

On tickets for players (one): "We don't get any tickets on the road, and even at home, we get two."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

On a staff member to handle family issues (one): "I've been in a few different organizations, and some have a designated person to do a bunch of different family stuff. That's a really cool idea. It's nice to have a direct contact for everything."

On community projects (one): "I think our team does a good job of spending money on getting the fans involved and doing charity stuff. Kind of growing the game that way. I think that's probably the biggest key. Growing the game more and helping people in need. Like a foundation and community stuff."

And the topic du jour in the hockey world with Olympic hockey opening Thursday, improving ice conditions: "I honestly think buildings should have a code that they have to abide by. Across the league. Some teams don't have dehumidifiers. Some teams have dehumidifiers. (Some say) it costs too much money to put one in. Ice conditions, it's been a big topic of discussion ever since I came in the league, and it's only getting worse. Florida had the best ice. Why? They got one."

Or maybe it's nothing at all

All the wishes aside, players are well aware of just how good they have it.

"We're treated very well," one player said. "We fly pretty much everywhere. We don't have it too tough."

"I'm too spoiled already from what I'm used to in Sweden," said another.

"You look around with the money that's coming in and stuff, a lot of teams are — not catching up, but their standards are rising," one said. "Talking to the guys on other teams, too, including guys that have been here, I think we're getting treated well."

Reporting for this story by Arpon Basu, Peter Baugh, Max Bultman, Thomas Drance, Matthew Fairburn, Jesse Granger, Joshua Kloke, Kevin Kurz, Mark Lazerus, Julian McKenzie, Vincent Z. Mercogliano, Aaron Portzline, Scott Powers, Michael Russo, Jeremy Rutherford, Fluto Shinzawa, Joe Smith, Eric Stephens and Josh Yohe.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.05.2026

1378722 Websites

The Athletic / NHL trade board 6.0: Could we get a blockbuster before the Olympic freeze?

By Chris Johnston

Feb. 4, 2026 6:00 am EST

Will Artemi Panarin find a new home before the Olympic break?

That was certainly the New York Rangers' intention when they started holding him out of their lineup for "roster management purposes" last week.

However, this isn't a straightforward transaction. The superstar forward holds all of the cards with a no-movement clause and a desire to sign a lucrative contract extension as part of any trade. That all needs to fall into place before the Rangers figure out what kind of return they'll get back in the deal itself.

The clock is now ticking loudly on those talks — and any others happening around the NHL — with an Olympic trade freeze set to take effect at 3 p.m. ET on Wednesday.

It runs through 11:59 p.m. on Feb. 22.

There's expected to be an avalanche of transactions on the other side of the Milan Cortina Games, with the trade deadline looming on March 6, but it remains to be seen how much business will get done in the final hours before the freeze.

Here's our latest Big Board, featuring 11 new targets to bring us to a total of 50.

As always, players are listed by how closely they demand watching, based on their potential impact and the current amount of buzz around them.

Note: Net Ratings and market values are via Dom Luszczyzyn's model and are projected for the full season based on statistics through Feb. 2. Goals saved above expected (GSAX) are via Evolving-Hockey, also through Feb. 2. Contract info is via PuckPedia.

1

Artemi Panarin

NEW YORK RANGERS

FORWARD

WINGER

2

Vincent Trocheck

NEW YORK RANGERS

FORWARD

CENTER

3

Blake Coleman

CALGARY FLAMES

FORWARD

WINGER

4

Shane Wright

SEATTLE KRAKEN

FORWARD

CENTER

WINGER

5

Robert Thomas

ST. LOUIS BLUES

FORWARD

CENTER

6

Dougie Hamilton

NEW JERSEY DEVILS

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

7



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

Luke Schenn  
WINNIPEG JETS  
DEFENSEMAN  
RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
8  
Evander Kane  
VANCOUVER CANUCKS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
9  
Nazem Kadri  
CALGARY FLAMES  
FORWARD  
CENTER  
10  
Jesper Wallstedt  
MINNESOTA WILD  
GOALIE  
11  
Brayden Schenn  
ST. LOUIS BLUES  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
CENTER  
12  
Justin Faulk  
ST. LOUIS BLUES  
DEFENSEMAN  
RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
13  
Connor Murphy  
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS  
DEFENSEMAN  
RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
14  
Logan Stanley  
WINNIPEG JETS  
DEFENSEMAN  
LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
15  
Charlie Coyle  
COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS

FORWARD  
CENTER  
WINGER  
16  
Jesper Kotkaniemi  
CAROLINA HURRICANES  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
CENTER  
17  
Bobby McMann  
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
18  
Andrew Mangiapane  
EDMONTON OILERS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
19  
Michael Bunting  
NASHVILLE PREDATORS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
20  
Alex Tuch  
BUFFALO SABRES  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
21  
Boone Jenner  
COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
CENTER  
22  
Ilya Mikheyev  
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
23  
Warren Foegele



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

LOS ANGELES KINGS

FORWARD

WINGER

24

Andrew Peeke

BOSTON BRUINS

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

25

Mason Lohrei

BOSTON BRUINS

DEFENSEMAN

LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

26

Jonathan Marchessault

NASHVILLE PREDATORS

FORWARD

WINGER

27

Jordan Kyrou

ST. LOUIS BLUES

FORWARD

WINGER

28

Patrik Laine

MONTREAL CANADIENS

FORWARD

WINGER

29

Gustav Nyquist

WINNIPEG JETS

FORWARD

WINGER

30

Braden Schneider

NEW YORK RANGERS

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

31

Simon Benoit

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

DEFENSEMAN

LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

32

Jason Dickinson

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

FORWARD

CENTER

33

Mario Ferraro

SAN JOSE SHARKS

DEFENSEMAN

LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

34

Zach Whitecloud

CALGARY FLAMES

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

35

Brett Kulak

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS

DEFENSEMAN

LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

36

Scott Laughton

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

FORWARD

CENTER

WINGER

37

Elias Pettersson

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

FORWARD

CENTER

38

Steven Stamkos

NASHVILLE PREDATORS

FORWARD

WINGER

CENTER

39

Brennan Othmann

NEW YORK RANGERS

FORWARD



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

WINGER

40

Jordan Binnington

ST. LOUIS BLUES

GOALIE

41

Ryan O'Reilly

NASHVILLE PREDATORS

FORWARD

CENTER

42

Ryan Strome

ANAHEIM DUCKS

FORWARD

CENTER

43

Morgan Frost

CALGARY FLAMES

FORWARD

CENTER

44

Teddy Blueger

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

FORWARD

CENTER

45

Jaden Schwartz

SEATTLE KRACKEN

FORWARD

WINGER

46

Calle Järnkrok

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

FORWARD

WINGER

47

Jeff Skinner

SAN JOSE SHARKS

FORWARD

WINGER

48

David Kämpf

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

FORWARD

CENTER

49

Conor Garland

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

FORWARD

WINGER

50

John Carlson

WASHINGTON CAPITALS

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

The Athletic LOADED: 02.05.2026

1378723 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' chase to Olympic break proves readiness for playoff push

Eric Engels

WINNIPEG —This game turned on a play Juraj Slafkovsky started and Oliver Kapanen finished.

The Montreal Canadiens never looked back after that goal came in the 17th minute of Wednesday's game against the Winnipeg Jets. It proved to be the first of five unanswered they scored in their 5-1 win at Canada Life Centre.

If not for Samuel Montembeault stopping 12 of the first 13 shots he faced — standing on his head for most of them — all we'd be doing is reflecting on one of the worst periods the Canadiens had played all season.

They were disorganized and disconnected, leaving Montembeault to return the favour they've done him in most the games in which he's appeared out of sorts.

"I think it was my best game," the 29-year-old said after not allowing more than one goal for only the second time in 23 appearances. "I felt great physically before it started."

Montembeault was on Cloud 9 afterwards, with 36 saves banked and confidence restored, and that was a nice story on its own, even if it isn't the focal one heading into the Olympic break.

Big picture: This was Montreal's fifth win in their last eight games, with the other four coming against the elite of the elite (Minnesota, Vegas, Colorado and Buffalo). It's quite a departure from what they did last year at this time.

Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis wanted them to chase to the break for the 4 Nations Face-Off, but they sputtered and choked, losing seven of their last eight games and digging themselves a hole almost too deep to climb out of.

"We're not the same team," said St. Louis after the win over the Jets. "We might have a lot of the same players, but we have more experience. I think that playoff round (against the Washington Capitals) helped us



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

mature. I think we carried that into the season and we were able to mature and able to navigate the lows we had this year just because of what we went through last year, and we understood what happened last year before the break and we did not want to repeat that. So, I felt we had the right intentions to give ourselves the best chance to not repeat that. And it's not one guy, it's not two guys. You need everyone, and I felt we had that."

Despite pockets of play that weren't great but never quite as bad as what we saw in Wednesday's first period, the Canadiens found exactly that over this sequence of games.

A lot of it was driven by guys going to the Olympics.

On this night it started with Slafkovsky, who notched his 45th point of the season by peeling the puck off the boards, shuffling his feet to create space for himself near the point and leaning on his poise to get the play over to Noah Dobson.

It was more of the stuff the 21-year-old has delivered all season, which should make him that much more dangerous than he was as MVP of the last Olympics for bronze-medalist Slovakia.

"I think he's made another big jump this year," said St. Louis prior to Wednesday's game. "You can see this year his confidence level, his touches, have improved tremendously... He's played some really good hockey for us."

So has Kapanen, who once again put himself in the right place at the right time to score that crucial first goal.

It was his 18th of the season, tying him with Beckett Sennecke for the most among NHL rookies.

"He's smart, he's in the good spots, he can read off playing with me and (Ivan Demidov)," said Slafkovsky Wednesday morning. "He's in the good spots most of the time during the games."

That's where Finland will need Kapanen to be at the Winter Olympics in Milan.

"I'm just excited to get over there, get going with the guys in a few days and get going on the dream come true," the London, Ont., native said after getting his second-lightest assignment all season.

Call playing only 16:56 against the Jets a gift from St. Louis, who knows how much energy Suzuki's expended to push the Canadiens to the sixth-best record in the NHL through 57 games and how much energy he'll need to help Canada in their bid for gold.

Suzuki may have been held off the scoresheet in the game against the Jets, but the Canadiens went 5-1-2 over their last eight with him posting 11 points and a plus-7 rating to bring him to 65 points and plus-25 on the season.

"He has the ability to elevate his game when we need it most, and he's taken over games for sure," said Brendan Gallagher Wednesday morning. "He's in a good spot heading to the Olympics."

As for Gallagher, Phillip Danault and Josh Anderson — the veteran triumvirate of the Canadiens — they all scored against the Jets to extend an excellent run of play that's made them an unbreakable line moving forward.

The rest will likely benefit them most among all the other Canadiens not going to the Olympics, with all three of them being in their 30's on a team full of 20-somethings.

The 31-year-old Mike Matheson, who played 24:50 against the Jets — which is his team-leading average time-on-ice this season — will reap the rewards, too.

St. Louis wants him, and everyone else to do that before practice resumes Feb. 17.

"Take a break, disconnect a little bit from the grind, be safe, have fun, but be hungry for what's next," was the message the coach imparted on his players.

Most of them will heed that advice and head to their tropical destination of choice.

But Lane Hutson, who scored as nice of a goal as you'll see a defenceman score to get to 10 goals and 58 points on his season, isn't like most of them.

He's going to Boston to take in the rest of the Beanpot, and then he's shuffling home to Chicago, where he will undoubtedly be on the ice more often than just about any other player in the league not attending the Olympics.

Don't worry, that's Hutson just doing what he wants to do most.

If we're to take anything from the way he and the Canadiens played in the lead-up to this juncture of their season, it's that they'll be ready for the real fun when hockey resumes.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.05.2026

1378724 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Real Kyper's Trade Board 3.0: How deep will Toronto's changes go?

Nick Kypreos

TORONTO — The trade board took a dramatic turn last week when the Toronto Maple Leafs' 18-wheeler really started skidding. It's not yet going "right off a cliff," as former GM Brian Burke once described the team back in 2012, but it's certainly closer to disaster than anyone expected.

If we look at the standings going into this week, the Leafs are on the outside looking in, no different than Florida or Ottawa, two teams that aren't throwing in the towel yet. If Florida and Ottawa think they're still in it, Toronto will too.

Now, if the Leafs finish with a couple more losses this week, there will be some tough conversations to have through the Olympic break. But when they come back, Toronto will have more big games against Florida and Ottawa as well. If they lose all, or most, of those points, that's when we'll start seeing some bigger names on my trade board.

With that in mind, I'm adding Bobby McMann to this trade board, as he becomes the first significant Leafs skater we hear is already out there as GM Brad Treliving gauges the market before the trade freeze begins Wednesday at 3 p.m. ET / noon PT. Barring an immediate hot streak out of the Olympics, we'll surely hear more names after the Olympic trade freeze is lifted on Feb. 23.

One of those players might end up being Oliver Ekman-Larsson, who will represent Sweden at the Olympics. Toronto is not in position to trade him yet because he's been its best defenceman, but that calculation might change before the March 6 trade deadline.

Beyond the Leafs, Robert Thomas is the newest big name I'm adding to my trade board. I'm not sure how realistic it is that he'll be wearing a new jersey by March 6 because the asking price is very high — higher than what Mikko Rantanen fetched in a trade last year. However, GM Doug Armstrong is serious about exploring all avenues for the Blues.

I'm not putting any Philadelphia Flyers on the board quite yet, but I'm hearing they are willing to swing big, if not now, then certainly this



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

summer. When that comes to pass, the biggest pieces they could move out in a blockbuster are Owen Tippett and Travis Konecny.

As far as the Nashville Predators go, the Barry Trotz news puts the organization in a greater state of flux but, for now, all the usual suspects remain on my list.

This week's trade board also includes additions Patrik Laine in Montreal, Jesper Wallstedt in Minnesota, and a couple of Seattle Kraken in Shane Wright and Matty Beniers.

For our last check-in on trade potential before the Olympics, here is my latest list.

Dougie Hamilton, D, New Jersey Devils: 7 G | 14 A | 21 PTS | 50 GP

The Devils are second-last in the East, but just seven points out of third in the Metropolitan Division, and there is pressure on GM Tom Fitzgerald to try to hang in there. I think they're a lot like the Maple Leafs in that they're not yet ready to wave the white flag.

Luke Hughes has been out since Jan. 19 and since the team is still trying to stay in the race, I'm not sure how eager Fitzgerald is to move Hamilton without Hughes there. The latter is out through the Olympic break, after which we'll have more information that might influence what the Devils decide to do.

Artemi Panarin, LW, New York Rangers: 19 G | 38 A | 57 PTS | 52 GP

If Panarin is traded — and with a no-move clause, he's in complete control — he'd prefer to have an extension with the new team. There has been a link to Los Angeles here, among others, but the issue is that he wants an extension to be worth something in the vicinity of \$50 million, depending on the term. The asking price to get him from New York is steep and the signing price is steep, but Panarin can still bring it and can help take a team to the next level. He's being scratched from New York's starting lineup until a move is made or the deadline passes.

Washington is all over him. There's a sense he could be a good replacement for Alexander Ovechkin if Ovechkin does in fact decide to shut down his brilliant career after this season. Washington seems to be one of the few teams willing to spend the \$40 million to \$50 million he's looking for, but will Panarin want to go there?

Where he might want to go is Florida, though it's hard to imagine how the Panthers would make that work. But, since he has a no-movement clause, he could manipulate the situation much like Brad Marchand did last year from Boston. Don't put anything past Panthers GM Bill Zito.

Jesper Wallstedt, G, Minnesota Wild: 14-5-4 | 2.62 GAA | .914 SV%

Making a case for himself to be included in the Calder Trophy conversation, Wallstedt is having such a good season as Minnesota's No. 2 goalie and is still considered a top prospect at 23 years old, now with NHL experience. But with Filip Gustavsson also performing well as the team's No. 1 goalie, trading Wallstedt might be GM Bill Guerin's best way to find top-six scoring without significantly hurting his roster.

Having to play through such a tough division in the playoffs, the Wild have to maximize every position, and with Gustavsson under contract through 2031, Wallstedt has become a luxury.

Anthony Stolarz, G, Toronto Maple Leafs: 6-7-1 | 3.67 GAA | .876 SV%

The Leafs feel they have a luxury in net like Minnesota does and could get an asset for Stolarz, but he hasn't played well enough for that yet. A strong showing before the trade deadline might push his value up enough and the Leafs will search the market. Toronto is trying to manage its goaltending assets, and having Joseph Woll and Dennis Hildeby playing so well in the NHL (and Artur Akhymov in the minors), you have to think they'd feel most comfortable moving Stolarz right now. But the return will still have to be worth it and the team has to feel it's getting an upgrade to the roster.

Bobby McMann, LW, Toronto Maple Leafs: 17 G | 13 A | 30 PTS | 54 GP

On pace for a career-best season, McMann is garnering the most interest among Maple Leafs players. If the Leafs are going to attempt a retool on the fly so they can try to make the playoffs again next year, they may not be comfortable keeping McMann, who could be looking for about \$5 million AAV. In the meantime, they could maybe get a couple pieces for him, a second-round pick plus.

In many ways, he could be one of the most sought-after wingers at the deadline because he's the easiest to fit in with a \$1.35-million cap hit, something every contender could manage, from Colorado to Florida, Anaheim, Ottawa ... you name it.

Brayden Schenn, C, St. Louis Blues: 12 G | 12 A | 24 PTS | 55 GP

Armstrong is taking calls on for the valued centre for the second deadline season in a row. Schenn still has a couple more seasons left on his deal and has some say in where he goes (15-team no-trade list), and the rumours continue that he and brother Luke are hoping to come together in a new destination. For teams looking at a centre, Schenn is a slightly cheaper option than Nazem Kadri and has one less season left on his contract.

Robert Thomas, C, St. Louis Blues: 11 G | 22 A | 33 PTS | 42 GP

There is no question that the Blues' leading scorer is being shopped, but this could also be about Armstrong sending a message that any player could be available from this roster. The price is astronomical, in the vicinity of something equivalent to three top-15 first-round picks. He's looking for cache in prospects and picks. I don't know what team would do that, given he's not exactly a 100-point player (Thomas has 33 points in 42 games this season). In my opinion, he's more in the mould of a second-line centre on a Stanley Cup-contending team. Currently sidelined due to a "minor leg procedure" and out until after the Olympics, I appreciate the noise that is around Thomas.

Jordan Kyrou, RW, St. Louis Blues: 12 G | 15 A | 27 PTS | 45 GP

If the Blues do make a big change up front, Kyrou is more likely to get dealt than Thomas. Last week, Armstrong told KSDK News that the Blues are "embarrassed" to be where they are near the bottom of the standings and that "it's been a really poor year." He's sent these kinds of messages to his team before and often it has led to a turnaround, including last year, when the Blues wound up in the playoffs. But this year they're in a big hole (11 points out) and it's Armstrong's last deadline in the GM chair.

Jordan Binnington, G, St. Louis Blues: 8-16-6 | 3.60 GAA | .866 SV%

Binnington remains on the list because if the right deal comes along, St. Louis will consider almost anything. However, Binnington has not come through with a stretch of strong play at any point this season, so he's no longer seen as an obvious upgrade around the league. A strong showing in the Olympics might revive a market for him and remind teams that Binnington does step up in big moments. However, as far as NHL performance and the goalie market goes, Binnington is now taking a back seat to Wallstedt.

Steven Stamkos, RW, Nashville Predators: 25 G | 14 A | 39 PTS | 54 GP

It's believed there have not been any discussions about a possible move between Stamkos' camp and the Predators. If Stamkos would consider waiving his no-move clause for anything, at this point it would only be to a contending team that's also a good place for his family. It's highly unlikely that plays out between now and March 6, given both he and the team are playing well again and in playoff contention. It's more likely a new head of hockey operations will have to make this decision, whenever that person arrives. For now, though, I'm keeping him on the list because this team is in flux. This may end up getting revisited in the summer.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

Jonathan Marchessault, RW, Nashville Predators: 9 G | 5 A | 14 PTS | 35 GP

Despite a much better run of play recently and crawling back to within four points of a playoff spot, the Predators will look over their options. Marchessault falls into a similar camp as Stamkos in that he also has a no-movement clause, though he isn't playing as well. Will the Predators find the right package and will Marchessault agree to a move? Or will this situation wait for Trotz's replacement to come in and make a call? It's hard to say, but the Predators do want to get younger.

Ryan O'Reilly, C, Nashville Predators: 18 G | 33 A | 51 PTS | 54 GP

O'Reilly is definitely garnering the most attention of anyone in Nashville because centres are at such a premium and he's having a strong year, leading the Predators in scoring. It's hard to imagine O'Reilly's value will ever be higher than it is now, and he doesn't have any trade protection. Trotz has to ask if now is the time to maximize a premium asset.

Elias Pettersson, C, Vancouver Canucks: 13 G | 21 A | 34 PTS | 47 GP

As I mentioned on my last trade board, the Canucks are rebuilding and everything is on the table. How deep those changes will go before March 6 remains to be seen, but all options will be considered. Including Pettersson, their leading scorer this season.

A Pettersson trade will be complex for a few reasons. One, is that he has a sky-high cap hit and still has six years remaining on his contract. Two, is that his production has not improved much this season and so it's not obvious if he'd be as significant an upgrade to another team. And, three, is that the asking price needs to be high enough to help push the Canucks forward and, likely, need to include a centre as Vancouver is thin at the position. A tough trade to make in-season, but Pettersson is very much out there and the interest from Carolina is not going away.

Jake DeBrusk, RW, Vancouver Canucks: 13 G | 15 A | 28 PTS | 54 GP

DeBrusk remains on my trade board as he struggles to produce in his second year with Vancouver. He's just one year removed from scoring 28 goals, and the \$5.5 million he makes against the cap isn't too much for a player who should provide complementary scoring and has 86 career games under his belt.

Vincent Trocheck, C, New York Rangers: 12 G | 24 A | 36 PTS | 42 GP

Like O'Reilly, Trocheck is at an age (32) where his trade value may never be higher. I think Minnesota GM Bill Guerin will be watching Trocheck closely over the Olympics with Team USA to see if he's a fit with the Wild. Trocheck is a real asset that the Rangers know they can't hold on to.

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

Out through the Olympics with an upper-body injury, Coleman still has plenty of potential suitors and is the player Calgary is getting called most about. He's a two-time Stanley Cup winner and is under contract for another season, so should return more to the Flames than a traditional rental package.

Nazem Kadri, C, Calgary Flames: 9 G | 26 A | 35 PTS | 54 GP

Since Kadri has so many seasons remaining on his contract, there hasn't been great urgency to move him yet and even some talk of keeping him. However, he has informed Calgary that he'd like to move, and the Flames know his wish is to try to win a Stanley Cup this year.

The market still has to be right for the Flames to trade him, and some teams are cautious about making this trade because of his age and the fact he still has another three years left on his contract.

Shane Wright, C, Seattle Kraken: 9 G | 11 A | 20 PTS | 54 GP

Picked fourth overall in 2022, Wright has been unable to build on and break out from a 44-point effort last season. He has nine goals and 20 points in 53 games, but he's still just 22 years old and has a solid

pedigree. There are teams seeking youth that will find him intriguing. Seattle is in a heated playoff push but need to add scoring, so we will see if they can use Wright to get that immediate roster upgrade.

Matty Beniers, C, Seattle Kraken: 14 G | 23 A | 37 PTS | 54 GP

The second-overall pick of the 2021 draft, Beniers has been a solid player for the Kraken — a first-line centre who's tied for the team scoring lead, at 37 points.

While trade conversations with the Kraken might start with Wright, they could turn to Beniers as well if Seattle can get its much-needed scoring upgrade that way. But a team would need to pay for his upside, which has not yet fully surfaced. It would be tough to move him and Beniers isn't the most likely player to be traded off this roster. He's on this list because if the return is a franchise-changing blockbuster for the Kraken, they'll consider it. I'm not sure if GM Jason Botterill is ready for that, but teams will try.

Patrik Laine, LW, Montreal Canadiens: 0 G | 1 A | 1 PTS | 5 GP

Laine hasn't played since October, when he was shut down to have surgery to repair a core muscle. That return timeline was initially three-to-four months and he passed the three-month mark last week. Laine has practised with the Canadiens, but a return to the lineup isn't imminent, though he's ready to play again.

Montreal is looking to move out his money and might be willing to spend an asset to do that. The Canadiens are prepared to retain a good chunk (even up to 50 per cent) of his deal, considering they haven't used any retention slots and because Laine's contract expires at the end of the season anyway. I wonder if this kind of move could help Montreal open space to do something bigger, and there is interest in Laine because he'll be coming on an expiring contract. He would be a freebie with upside, whether for a playoff team hoping to find a cheap-to-acquire scorer, or for a non-playoff team like Calgary to get a free look at him before considering him long-term.

Edmonton's Andrew Mangiapane is also on my list and it makes me wonder if a Montreal-Edmonton match might be found here.

Ryan Strome, C, Anaheim Ducks: 3 G | 5 A | 8 PTS | 32 GP

I think Anaheim is a team to keep an eye on just before the Olympics. Though they have plenty of cap space, the Ducks would love to shed some money and a Ryan Strome trade could accomplish that. As for the market of teams that need a centre, Strome represents the cheapest cost of acquisition compared to Schenn, Kadri or O'Reilly.

Braden Schneider, D, New York Rangers: 2 G | 9 A | 11 PTS | 56 GP

Just about any option is on the table in New York outside of Igor Shesterkin. Schneider, a 24-year-old pending RFA who's been getting top-pair minutes, is one player the Rangers are taking calls on. Schneider is young enough and under contract control long enough to appeal to a wide range of teams, plus he's a valued right shot.

Evander Kane, LW, Vancouver Canucks: 9 G | 16 A | 25 PTS | 54 GP

If the Canucks can trade Kane, they will, but it's been a slow market to develop. Kane's agent, Dan Milstein, has been given permission by the team to try to find a trade partner. No doubt, Vancouver would be willing to use one of its two remaining salary-retention slots on Kane to make him a more appealing asset. The Los Angeles Kings are one team with some level of interest.

Andrew Mangiapane, LW, Edmonton Oilers: 6 G | 6 A | 12 PTS | 47 GP

Though it just hasn't worked out in Edmonton and he's not the player he was with Calgary, the Oilers continue to work the market for Mangiapane and should be able to find a partner by March 6, though the return isn't likely to be anything major. The biggest hurdle might be Mangiapane's



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

no-trade clause, though it does seem like he'd be willing to waive it to try to find a better fit elsewhere.

Jesper Kotkaniemi, C, Carolina Hurricanes: 2 G | 7 A | 9 PTS | 34 GP

The Hurricanes are in on several players as they seek to upgrade the roster and finally get over the playoff hump with this group. Though Kotkaniemi has not delivered on the promise he had when he first arrived in Carolina via offer sheet, he's still just 25 years old and a centre, so there may be a team out there willing to take a chance that he'll rebound.

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Sportsnet.ca / 10 questions about NHL teams and players as we head to the Olympic break

Justin Bourne

TORONTO — The return of an Olympic break to the NHL schedule this season — the first in a dozen years — has inevitably led to a condensed schedule and some surprising results.

As we quickly approach that break this week, I figured I'd do one last notebook-style "questions" piece about where we're leaving things off, and what it means for the rest of the season when the NHL returns.

Let's get into those questions.

1. Are the teams that are sending the most players to the Olympics at a significant disadvantage?

The disparate nature of teams sending players to the Olympics should, in theory, have a good deal of effect on the rest of the season. Injuries have been a major theme of the year, so getting healthy (by not playing hockey) is a massive advantage.

By my math teams are sending on average just under 4.6 players per team to the Winter Games, which means if you're sending fewer than that, your team should be getting more bodies rested for the home stretch compared to the rest of the league. And if you're sending more, you might be falling behind.

According to NHL.com, the Eastern Conference-leading Tampa Bay Lightning are sending nine players, as are their local rival Florida Panthers. You would expect the good teams to be sending more guys, but there are, of course, exceptions.

Buffalo and Detroit are within the top three of the Atlantic Division just behind Tampa and are sending just two and three guys respectively, which seems advantageous. The Edmonton Oilers are just sending three while their rival Vegas is sending seven. All three teams at the top of the Central are way above average (sending between seven and nine players each), while a chasing team like Utah is sending just four.

One thing to WATCH: of the teams that lead divisions, the Carolina Hurricanes are sending the fewest guys (four), and they're also rumoured to be big game hunting at the trade deadline. East favourites?

We'll have to track if there's any connection between those teams and success/failure down the stretch.

2. Who most benefits from the break?

Old dudes and the infirm. I spend a lot of time covering the Maple Leafs, so I've seen how effective John Tavares is early in the year, and how effective he was coming out of last year's 4 Nations break.

These days, though, he's dragging. Matthew Knies has nagging injuries, same with Brandon Carlo, and there's just a litany of guys who are barely getting through each night.

This goes for most teams in the NHL, and it's hurting pace of play of late. I imagine that after a break, which coincides with pre-trade deadline hockey, you're going to see a significant uptick in pace, even with some of the stars not getting much rest at all.

3. What is the Olympic trade freeze, and how does that shape the run up to the trade deadline?

Players wanted a real break, and they'll get one. Nobody can be traded from Feb. 4 at 3 p.m. ET to Feb. 22 at 11:59 p.m. ET (let's call it Feb. 23, shall we?). That's a clean two weeks, save for a few guys who are waiver exempt and can be sent to the AHL provided they meet certain criteria (outlined here by PuckPedia).

Coming out of the break you'll see 12 days from Monday, Feb. 23 to Friday, March 6, where guys can be traded. Teams are not allowed to practice between and including Feb. 6 and Feb. 16, meaning they'll be back for almost a week of practice before game action resumes, and GMs will be back at work too. What I'm getting at is I think many conversations will be had that week, and several deals will be put in the drawer to finalize in the ensuing build up to the deadline.

4. Will any of the risers in the Atlantic drop and open the door for the chasers?

The Red Wings and Sabres are currently slated to meet in the "Holy Crap We're Back In The Playoffs" Bowl, while Montreal and Boston currently sit as wild card holders. The gap between these teams and anyone else is significant, but the problem is there's some motivated teams chasing as we head into the season's final 25 games or so.

My two cents: everyone not named Boston is pretty safe. But the Bruins are in the final spot, and they neither create nor limit expected goals at a league average level. There's potential for one spot to open up here, and no shortage of suitors for it.

5. Where is the push coming from in the East?

Some of the teams on the outside looking in:

The Leafs, who have already declared themselves as sellers, would not-so-secretly like to get red hot and play their way back into this thing. Even if they prune a little talent at the deadline, the idea of getting suddenly-good-again goaltending, a healthy William Nylander, Matthew Knies, Brandon Carlo, and a rested Tavares, could help them win some games down the stretch and be annoying.

The Ottawa Senators, who by the underlying numbers are right there with the league's five best teams, just haven't gotten saves. But they're getting saves lately, Linus Ullmark is back, and they're hopeful.

The two-time defending Cup champion Florida Panthers also lurk back there, and watching them get super hot isn't impossible either.

If we're talking just about the final wild card spot, the Columbus Blue Jackets are the closest to it and have won nine of their past 10 games. Meantime, the Capitals still have a heap of talent and a very good goalie.

Somebody in the basement is going to get hot, no doubt.

6. How aggressive will Edmonton be at the deadline?

The Oilers are slowly finding their way to some depth scoring, something that's plagued them over their years on a quest for the Cup. But they still need to shore up their defending, and given their prime stars and the experience they've got, you have to believe they're going to take another big swing at the deadline. Frankly, it would be crazy not to, as the rest of the Pacific is a bit of a dog's breakfast right now.

7. Is Vegas going to get it sorted out?



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

The Golden Knights have 25 total wins and have been mangled by a bizarre inability to close out the zillion overtime games they've been in (they've won seven of 21). It's really something to see a team that talented play 55 games and win just 18 of them in regulation, one fewer than St. Louis and Nashville.

I'll give Vegas some credit though: like Ottawa, they've really just got to get some saves. They're getting the fourth-worst team save percentage this season despite having some of the league's best defensive metrics. Get saves, and they'll win. But that goes for a lot of teams.

8. What's the NHL schedule look like coming out of the Olympic break?

Busy! There's no fewer than four games a night, every night, until the trade deadline, and most teams play at least five times. The Leafs happen to play a series of back-to-backs (Tampa Bay-Florida, then New Jersey-NY Rangers), and they're not unique. It's going to be a sprint to the finish.

From the March 6 deadline onwards, the final playoff races will heat up and teams will have less than six weeks to get things sorted out before the season ends April 16.

9. Can anyone hang with the best of the Central?

Colorado, Minnesota, and Dallas are all loaded up, and all currently top-five in the NHL by points percentage. Unfortunately for them, with this NHL playoff format, they have to play their way out of the division first, which means one fun thing for fans: a trade deadline arms race.

Colorado is the clear front-runner, but with a big move or two either of the green teams would take over the mantle as Cup favourites.

And finally,

10. Is an Olympic break in the NHL schedule worth the hassle?

Everyone's welcome to their own opinion on this, but here's what I've got:

Players who are going to the Olympics will love it. They wanted this, dreamt about it.

Players who are not going will also love it. Yes, the condensed schedule is hard, but a February break is rare and welcome.

As a hockey fan, I love it. I like that there are more games more often during the season (I don't have to play in them), and I'm thrilled to watched the Olympics.

Let the games begin.

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Sportsnet.ca / How Maple Leafs should approach the 2026 NHL trade deadline

Jason Bukala

Despite winning their last three games before the Olympic break, Toronto is five points back of a wild card spot and have played more games than any of the teams ahead of them. Like most teams around the NHL, the Leafs have suffered their share of injuries to key players, but also, far too many players on the roster have taken significant steps backwards in their consistency and impact. They have been chasing a sustainable identity and results all season but, to date, reflect a team that requires something more than just an oil change.

Toronto's management has to be realistic. The truth is that it's time to make some extremely difficult and perhaps uncomfortable hockey decisions.

Part of the process that goes on behind closed doors at this time of year includes being honest about whether or not they believe the group, when healthy, is as competitive as the organization thought they would be. A management team has to shelve any bias, forecast where their group is heading with an open mind, and then discuss any change in direction with the owner (or a board).

Everything has an expiry date in sports, and Toronto is having to wonder if their time has come.

When we come out of the Olympic break, it will be about a week and a half until the NHL trade deadline, so time is running thin to make moves. With that in mind, here is my organization breakdown of the Maple Leafs, and some strategies they should implement for the good of the group moving forward.

Draft Capital

Toronto's situation in terms of prospect depth and future draft capital is bordering on dire. They have sacrificed so many high-end draft picks in their chase for playoff success over the year and it's now catching up to them in a predictable way.

Over the next 10 rounds of the draft spanning 2026 and 2027, Toronto only owns four picks, just one of which comes in the first two rounds. I may not be a mathematician, but even I recognize the odds are stacked against them being able to build some depth through the draft with so few opportunities to pick a player.

Current Roster: Forwards

There's no doubt the Leafs will be taking calls on pending UFAs Scott Laughton, Bobby McMann, and Calle Jarnkrok. Each one of these players have varying degrees of value and Toronto requires more draft capital.

Teams will have the most interest in McMann. He's affordable and on pace for over 20 goals, which would be a career-high. He plays with good pace, which is an attractive element for teams that like to track up and down the ice with speed, such as Edmonton or Colorado, for example.

Unless McMann signs an extension with his new team, if I were the Leafs I'd entertain re-signing him in the summer at the right price. But at this stage it's more important for me to acquire some draft capital and he might land the team a first-round pick. I'll address free agency later this year when it rolls around, but I'm not letting it influence how I handle a McMann trade at the deadline.

It's also worth noting all the forwards who have no-trade clauses:

- Auston Matthews has a no-movement until his contract expires in 2028.
- William Nylander has a no-movement until his contract expires in 2032.
- John Tavares has a no-movement until 2027, then a five-team trade list in 2028 and 2029.
- Max Domi has a 13-team no-trade clause until his contract expires in 2028
- Dakota Joshua has a 12-team no-trade clause until his deal expires in 2028.
- Calle Jarnkrok has a 10-team no-trade list until his deal expires this summer.

Current Roster: Defence

Troy Stecher is the only pending UFA defenceman for the Leafs and he's played some of the best hockey of his career since arriving in Toronto. I'm positive teams have taken notice of the fact he's averaging over 20



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

minutes per game of ice time, including over two minutes on the penalty-kill. He has market value the Leafs should explore but, like McMann, I would entertain bringing Stecher back in the off-season if he's interested, depending on the cost and the term of a new deal.

The elephant in the room is that it has come time to address the Morgan Rielly situation. However, I don't envision a trade happening by the March 6 deadline.

Rielly has been a fantastic pro in Toronto and a great teammate, but the reality is that his best years are behind him and he has far too much term left on his contract. That will be a situation to monitor in the off-season and watch play out heading to the June draft, or early in the summer.

Oliver Ekman-Larsson has value on the open market, but he's also on a very good contract for Toronto. They have to listen to offers on him, but depending on how deep they feel the cuts need to go on the left side of their defence corps, the Leafs must approach his situation with a degree of clarity. They don't want to find themselves having to overpay for a replacement who is a lesser play in free agency, but they also have to weigh the draft capital they might be able to acquire for him. Could OEL fetch a first-round pick at the deadline?

Here are the defencemen with no-trade clauses:

- Morgan Rielly has a no-movement clause until his deal expires in 2030, but a 10-team no-trade list for the final two years of the contract.
- Jake McCabe has a full no-trade clause through next season, then a 16-team no-trade list for the final three years of his contract.
- Chris Tanev has a no-movement clause until his contract expires in 2030.
- Brandon Carlo has an eight-team no-trade list this season, and a three-team no-trade list next season.

Current Roster: Goaltending

Woll and Stolarz were fantastic as a tandem last season, but both have missed time with injuries this season and have struggled for stretches when either of them have had the net.

With Dennis Hildeby starting to round into form as a potential full-time NHL netminder (2.90 GAA, .912 SV%) Toronto has some options as far as how it handles its future at the position.

However, since Woll and Stolarz haven't proven physically reliable enough to stay healthy for an entire season, those options are limited. Because of the health concerns, the Leafs require three NHL-quality goalies on the roster. Since Hildeby is only 24 years old and on a two-way contract for another season, Toronto has one more season of waiver flexibility before his one-way contract kicks in for the 2027-28 season.

As far as no-trade clauses go:

- Stolarz has a 16-team no-trade clause for this season and next, then a 10-team no-trade clause in 2027-28 and 2028-29, and a five-team no-trade clause in the final year of his new contract, which kicks in next season.
- Woll has no trade protection at all this season or next, but an eight-team no-trade list kicks in for the 2027-28 season.
- Hildeby doesn't have any trade protection.

Salary retention in trade

The Leafs have the flexibility to retain salary in a trade. They have three salary retention slots available to them.

Trade Bait

The inconsistency we've seen from this year's Maple Leafs has been a source of frustration. I've had days where I felt I would listen to offers for

any player on the roster, and others where I've felt less so. But I have to shelve my emotion for now and approach trade strategies with a more reasonable and realistic outlook.

Having said that, I can't shake the feeling the inmates are running the asylum here and a culture change is what's really required.

So who should they look to trade by March 6 and what might they get in return? Keep in mind that Toronto hasn't used any of its three salary retention slots, so they have that option available to them as well.

Bobby McMann

His affordable cap hit (\$1.35 million) and lack of trade protection make him an intriguing trade candidate. There is a chance he could return a first-round pick because several teams have a need for a player like McMann. The Oilers have been frequently mentioned as one, but the Los Angeles Kings also lack layers of scoring depth on their roster and have the draft capital and cap space to easily add a player like McMann.

McMann turns 30 this June, so will likely be looking for financial security and term with his next contract since it will likely be the last chance for him to really cash in on the open market.

Scott Laughton

The Leafs swung for the fences last spring and Laughton was one of the players acquired to hopefully assist with pushing them deeper into the playoffs. The Leafs gave up a top-10 protected first-round pick in 2027 which would become an unprotected 2028 first-rounder if they end up keeping the 2027 selection.

Laughton has struggled to gain any traction offensively since he arrived in Toronto and he's averaging less than 14 minutes per game of ice time this season. I've always appreciated the character Laughton provides, but his role has diminished to the point he's a bottom six, and perhaps fourth-line, centre on a good team at this stage of his career. His ability to win faceoffs and kill penalties might be what a team is looking for at the deadline, but don't expect anything more than a third-round pick in exchange for his services.

Laughton is a pending UFA rental, doesn't have any trade protection, and only counts for \$1.5 million against the salary cap. If Toronto agreed to retain 50 per cent of his contract from here, they might be able to get a late second-round pick in either this draft or a future one.

Nick Robertson

Robertson has arguably played some of his best hockey for the Leafs this season. He's on pace to score over 15 goals in a role that allows him less than 13 minutes per game in ice time. On some level it feels wrong to include him on this list considering he's only 24 years old, is affordable at \$1.825 million, and is still an RFA this summer. However, it's time for the Leafs to acquire some draft capital and take a chance at developing another prospect who will hopefully provide the same sort of impact Robertson does.

He could return an early third-round pick, or hopefully a late second-round selection in a trade.

Calle Jarnkrok

Jarnkrok has little to no trade value, but there might be a team willing to acquire him to add some depth to their playoff roster. His contract comes with a 10-team no trade clause, but I would be surprised if he didn't accept a move to a playoff contender if asked. The Leafs might have to eat 50 per cent of his expiring contract to maximize the return, but they would be selling an asset for pennies on the dollar with Jarnkrok. If they are offered a fifth-round pick for his services they should take it.

William Nylander



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

As the salary cap rises, Nylander's \$11.5 million AAV should age well. The way he approaches the game doesn't result in a ton of wear and tear on his body and I don't foresee the soon-to-be 30-year-old losing a step as he ages.

Nylander is one of the top talents in the NHL. He has the skill to take over a game offensively, but he can be supremely frustrating with his detail and independent approach to how he likes to play the game. There was a time when I felt he was simply immature, but I would accept him for what he was due to his enormous amount of talent. I don't feel the same way any longer. Given the current trajectory of this version of the Leafs it would be irresponsible to suggest the organization shouldn't listen to offers.

Would a team like the Chicago Blackhawks be willing to invest their two 2026 first-round picks (Chicago and Florida) and a prospect like Nick Lardis in a Nylander trade? The vision could be to have Nylander play with Connor Bedard for years to come.

This is an example of just one scenario I would consider. This may not be one that would come together by March 6, but it's time to acknowledge that Toronto should be exploring even this option.

### Max Domi

Domi is a serviceable forward who can slot into a variety of roles. He provides energy, but his defensive detail ranges and he doesn't define himself as elite in any one category. He's too expensive for what he provides (\$3.75 million AAV) which makes it very unlikely the Leafs will find a buyer for Domi unless they agree to absorb some of his contract. He also has a 13-team no trade clause.

### Who are the future core players for the Maple Leafs?

When an organization decides to retool (or rebuild) they identify core prospects who will become the foundation of the team and then attempt to surround that core with players who complement their skill set.

Herein lies the problem for the Leafs. The cupboards are mostly bare when it comes to roster-defining prospects. They have spent the majority of their draft capital chasing playoff success and it has come at a huge cost in homegrown talent.

Hindsight is 20/20, but the Kyle Dubas era of draft strategy has resulted in a black hole of results that have set the organization back. Over the course of three drafts (2019-2021) Toronto selected 21 prospects and only two of those became NHL players: Matthew Knies (215 games played) and Robertson (210).

Specifically, the 2020 draft class was an opportunity for the Leafs to insulate themselves with prospects for years to come. They selected 12 players that year, but not a single prospect developed into an NHL player. (We should note, however, that the tragic death of first-rounder Rodion Amirov has to be remembered here.)

So, today, Toronto's top prospect is already on its NHL roster in Easton Cowan.

### Conclusion

If the Leafs do the right thing and decide to reset the future trajectory of the organization, they could end up with a significant amount of valuable draft capital and future cap space.

I recognize how difficult it will be to make some of the decisions I have proposed, but it's time for Toronto to deal with reality.

This team as constructed can be competitive on any given night, but the reality is there are far too many cracks in the foundation and the organization is bare when it comes to prospect infrastructure. Toronto has chased playoff success for years, but the time has come to re

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Sportsnet.ca / What's next for Predators after Trotz steps down as GM?

Josh Beneteau

Barry Trotz's surprise announcement Monday that he will be retiring from his job as general manager of the Nashville Predators sent shockwaves across the NHL.

Trotz has been synonymous with the Predators for most of the franchise's existence, first as coach before stepping into the front office in 2023. And that strong bond remains intact, with Trotz continuing to be the lead decision maker for the team until his replacement is found.

That means Trotz will be making calls and moves ahead of the March 6 trade deadline as the Predators fight for positioning in the crowded Western Conference wild-card race. Principal owner Bill Haslam said Monday the goal is to have a new general manager in place by the draft in June.

So what does all this mean for the Predators? Let's answer that question from a few different angles.

How will they navigate the trade deadline?

The Predators disappointed last season, finishing 28 points out of a playoff spot, but have bounced back this year. Through Tuesday's games, the Predators are three points out of the second wild-card spot in the West. The Mammoth, Ducks, Kraken, Sharks and Kings are the other teams competing with the Predators for the two wild-card spots.

While the wins have been coming, the Predators are still a work in progress and sit 25th in the league with a negative-26 goal differential. If they do secure a playoff spot, they would be major underdogs against the West's best teams in the first round.

That puts Trotz in a difficult position heading into his final trade deadline as he tries to choose between being a buyer and a seller. When asked about his strategy Monday, Trotz credited his players for their play this year but added "We're not in the playoffs right now, so I've got to listen to everything."

"I owe that to... anybody who is a fan of the Predators, I have to look at everything," he said. "And I'm going to look at it from a now and I'm going to look at it from a futures. Everything is on the table."

Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman reported on Tuesday's episode of 32 Thoughts: The Podcast that the Predators "are not backing down" from listening to trades on some of their veteran players, even after Trotz's announcement.

"They've got the big names, (Ryan) O'Reilly and (Steven) Stamkos, people are making their pitches," Friedman said, later mentioning other players including Jonathan Marchessault, Erik Haula, Michael McCarron, Michael Bunting and Nick Perbix as possible trade candidates.

Haula, McCarron and Bunting are all pending unrestricted free agents, making them viable rentals for a contender looking for depth forwards. Friedman reported that the Predators came close to trading Bunting to the Islanders recently, but that the trade fell apart when the two teams couldn't agree on what year one of the draft picks should be for.

While it remains to be seen who could be moved before the deadline, what is clear is that ownership has Trotz's back as he navigates those decisions during the search for his successor.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

"I have zero doubts, and I want to emphasize that, that he won't always do the right thing for the Nashville Predators," Haslam said of Trotz on Monday. "He's a person that doesn't have the kind of ego that's going to affect doing things right."

Who could be the next GM?

The Predators are casting a wide net in their search for the next general manager, with a large search committee involved in the process.

The team has hired Creative Artists Agency to lead the search and formed a committee that includes Haslam, Trotz, CEO Sean Henry, President and COO Michelle Kennedy, and minority owners Nick Saban and Chris Cigarran.

"I think we have a good mix of people," Haslam said, adding that Trotz knows a majority of the people who would be candidates from his decades in the game. "The end result will tell us how well we did but I like the team we have together."

Haslam said that he is approaching the search with an open mind and that he doesn't have "a preordained candidate."

Friedman reported that "there is enormous interest in this job," citing the quality of life in Nashville and the fact that Tennessee is a no-tax state. "Players really want to play there," he added.

Friedman said there will be a wide-ranging list of candidates who might show interest in the job. Some of the possible names:

- Marc Bergevin (former general manager, Montreal Canadiens)
- Rob Blake (former general manager, Los Angeles Kings)
- Ryan Bowness (assistant general manager, New York Islanders)
- Evan Gold (assistant general manager, Boston Bruins)
- Ryan Johnson (assistant general manager, Vancouver Canucks)
- Jeff Kealty (assistant general manager, Nashville Predators)
- Jamie Langenbrunner (assistant general manager, Boston Bruins)
- Ryan Martin (associate general manager, New York Rangers)
- Sunny Mehta (assistant general manager, Florida Panthers)
- Scott Nichol (assistant general manager, Nashville Predators)
- Brad Pascall (assistant general manager, Calgary Flames)
- Brian Poile (assistant general manager, Nashville Predators)
- Brendan Shanahan (former president of hockey operations, Toronto Maple Leafs)
- Scott White (assistant general manager, Dallas Stars)

What's the long-term plan?

The Predators have been a model franchise for the last 20 years, making the playoffs in 15 of those seasons and reaching the Stanley Cup Final in 2017. However, the team has missed the playoffs in two of the last three seasons and, with nothing guaranteed this year, the Predators are in a period of transition.

The next general manager will inherit a team with more than \$6 million in cap space (before any trade-deadline deals), a full cupboard of draft picks and a prospect pool headlined by forward Brady Martin and defenceman Tanner Molendyk.

For that reason, Haslam said that while the new GM will have full autonomy over the direction of the team, he is optimistic about the direction they are already going in and is not looking for a full rebuild.

"I like this team, I like how they're playing. We have some great hockey players, I like how they're playing together. Our fans are enjoying it," the owner said. "So to say we're going to scrap all this and totally start over, I don't think is going to be the right approach."

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1378728 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why Maple Leafs' Bobby McMann is on Oilers' radar

Adam Vingan

Just when it appeared that reality had set in for the Toronto Maple Leafs, they strung together three wins in a row before the NHL's Olympic break to keep their faint playoff hopes alive. The Maple Leafs woke up Wednesday with a 6.1 per cent chance of making the playoffs.

Before the streak began, Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman reported over the weekend that the Maple Leafs had started gauging the value of their players on the trade market. The Maple Leafs player reportedly generating the most interest is 29-year-old forward Bobby McMann, whose \$1.35 million cap hit "could be one of the most sought-after wingers at the deadline," according to Sportsnet's Nick Kypreos.

"I like it here (with Toronto)," McMann told Sportsnet earlier this week. "I wouldn't necessarily want to go anywhere. I want to run with these guys. I want to make a push here. I can't really control what happens outside of that. I'll just have to deal with it then."

McMann, who has 19 goals and 32 points in 56 games this season, offers a tantalizing combination of size (6-foot-2, 217 pounds) and speed. His maximum skating speed of 24.25 MPH is the fourth fastest recorded by the NHL this season, and his 185 bursts over 20 MPH rank in the 98th percentile.

Besides his speed, McMann makes an impact by being a nuisance in the offensive zone. He is 47th out of 339 forwards (minimum 500 minutes played) in OZ puck-battle wins and 64th in OZ defensive plays per 20 minutes.

Early in the third period of the Maple Leafs' 5-2 win against the Edmonton Oilers on Tuesday, McMann blocked a pass off an offensive-zone faceoff that led to a scoring chance for linemate Max Domi.

"That's skating and trying to be physical and being disruptive and being hard to play against," McMann told The Athletic at the start of the season. "If I'm doing that and competing hard, I'm super happy with my game whether I score or not, because that's me doing my 100 percent effort."

Individually, McMann is not an offensive driver, but he has shown he can complement a team's top centre. McMann has flanked Auston Matthews at various points throughout the season, and Toronto has outscored opponents 22-20 at even strength when they have shared the ice. The Maple Leafs have generated 50.9 per cent of the expected goals at even strength during McMann and Matthews' shared minutes.

"He's so explosive," Matthews told reporters last month. "Once he gets a step, he's hard to pick up. ... He just continues to take steps in his game."

On Tuesday, McMann scored an empty-netter and led the Maple Leafs with five shots on net in their win against the Oilers. Fifteen of McMann's 19 goals have come in the slot, but he is not a high-volume shooter from that area of the ice. Only 46.5 per cent of his shot attempts this season have come from the slot.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

In terms of getting bang for your buck, McMann is one of the most productive forwards in the league at \$42,000 per point, according to PuckPedia. That places him behind only Minnesota's Marcus Johansson (\$22,000 per point) among the 128 forwards on standard contracts with at least 30 points this season.

For that reason, the cap-strapped Oilers have frequently been mentioned as a suitor for McMann. The Oilers need more secondary scoring up front, as well as size and speed on their third line. McMann would be the fifth-highest scoring forward on the Oilers behind Connor McDavid (95 points), Leon Draisaitl (78), Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (44) and Zach Hyman (36).

Kypreos reported that McMann "could be looking for about \$5 million AAV" on his next contract. There seems to be enough interest in McMann for the Maple Leafs to extract a lot of value from trading him, which presents an interesting dilemma for general manager Brad Treliving.

"I think there'd be a lot of interest in McMann," Friedman told The FAN Hockey Show on Tuesday. "If they decide to go this route instead of re-signing him, he's the most valuable trade chip they have."

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1378729 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Senators notebook: Playoff push facing major hurdles

Alex Adams

OTTAWA — Maybe it's just not meant to be for the Ottawa Senators.

Good teams find ways to win; other teams find ways to lose.

The Senators dominate teams game after game, yet find themselves seven points out of a playoff spot.

And, yes, their recent four-game winning streak was very impressive. They beat two of the best teams in the league in Colorado and Vegas, while swatting away Pittsburgh and New Jersey, allowing just six goals in four games.

Nevertheless, on Tuesday in Carolina, with the game on a knife's edge, a pitiful line change sunk them. It was a gutsy effort on the second night of a back-to-back, coming back from two goals down to tie it late in the third.

Effort shouldn't be questioned.

If they had won, they would have had a 50 per cent chance of making the playoffs. Instead, in defeat, they dropped to 36 per cent, according to MoneyPuck.

All the pieces are in place for this team to be a playoff team, but maybe an unquantifiable "it" factor is missing. Add in a combination of poor goaltending, penalty kill, lack of a top-four, right-shot defenceman and, if you can believe it, line changes.

It's not all doom and gloom, though.

So, let's analyze how the playoff push may be on, and the hurdles Ottawa faces, too.

Are line changes really a problem?

Yes, and they have been for a while. In two games against Carolina, Ottawa has allowed two goals from inexplicably awful line changes.

Jordan Staal widened Ottawa's chasm to make the playoffs and exposed its need to work on something as simple as line changes.

I wrote about this same issue multiple times last season.

It's hard to quantify, but you know it when you see it.

Saves: Good and ugly

It's been a wonderful return for Linus Ullmark from his bout with mental health struggles, stopping 40 of 43 shots. This season, the Senators have a .638 points percentage with Ullmark in the net. If the Senators continued at that pace, they'd finish the season with 94 points, which is likely on the cusp of a playoff spot. The bad news is that in Carolina on Tuesday, James Reimer was outduelled by Brandon Bussi. It wasn't all on Reimer, but a good performance would have earned Ottawa a point and maybe a win, which would have left behind a sweet sugar-cane taste when departing Carolina.

You're only as good as your goaltender.

Ottawa's season now rests on Ullmark.

It might be haunting to hear, but the Senators sit top-five in almost every underlying metric other than goaltending. If they miss the playoffs, the 2025-26 Ottawa Senators may be one of the best teams ever to miss the playoffs.

Stutzle has goals in four straight games, five of his last six. He's on pace for a career high of 40 goals. This season, he's been held pointless in only 33 per cent of his games. He's elevated of late, too. In his last 28 games, he's been held pointless in just five of them.

OK, you get it.

Excellence was defined thousands of years ago by Aristotle: it's a habit, not a single moment of brilliance.

"I think it's nothing new for us," Senators defenceman Jake Sanderson told Sportsnet.ca about Stutzle. "From the day I came here, I knew he was a stud. With his competitiveness, I think that's the No. 1 thing, why he's such a great player. He brings it every day, and he wants to win so bad. And I think that's great to have on our team. He's a great leader for us. He's going to put up 100 points here soon."

Stutzle is on pace for 87 points. But he has become one of the best 200-foot centres in the world, and he's only 24 years old. Who knows what heights he will hit in the back half of the 2020s?

Halliday has four goals in his last six games while averaging less than 10 minutes a night. He sits 20th in the NHL in points per 60 minutes at 3.37.

Ottawa has found itself an interesting and productive player with his six-foot-four frame matched with a good shot, quick hands and elite playmaking qualities.

Hockey isn't an academic exercise, but Cousins has a master's (practical degree) in the art of a hockey rat.

He's also one heck of an effective hockey player.

Since uniting on the third line with Shane Pinto and Michael Amadio, the trio has the 10th-best expected goals of any forward or defensive pairing in the league (minimum 70 minutes played).

Senators head coach Travis Green called him an extremely smart player, while affectionately referring to him as "annoying."

He was voted the most punchable face in the league in an Athletic poll of NHL players last season.

"I think, first and foremost, you have to believe in yourself, right? Or nobody else will," Cousins said with a wry smile. "That's probably one of my strengths, to be honest. It's just my hockey IQ and reading the game."

Cousins believes this season. He's played some of his most consistent hockey and sits third in the league with 1.95 expected goals against when he's on the ice. On Tuesday in Raleigh, Cousins hit the post and



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

twice got robbed by Bussi. Cousins is on pace for the most points in his last three seasons.

Getting away from the game with family as a father of two young kids is important for Cousins. So much so that his teammates doubt whether he even watches hockey away from the rink.

"I don't know if guys will believe me or not," Cousins said, joking. "I actually watch a lot of hockey, and I think you can pick up certain aspects of the game, just reading the game and what other guys do."

Like many of us watching hockey, we tend to love watching the players who remind us of ourselves.

"As much as I hate the guy, I like watching Brad Marchand a little bit," said Cousins of the league's future Hall of Fame pest. "I mean, we're obviously different players. He's a little bit faster, but just the way he uses his body to protect pucks, and he's not the biggest guy. But he's certainly brave and gets into the corner, and he wins every puck."

"It's a fun guy to watch, as much as I hate the guy. I'm sure he hates me, too."

So how does one become a rat?

"Honestly, it is something that I've always had, like even minor hockey, it was the same way," said Cousins.

"Junior was probably worse," Cousins said, laughing. "But it's also made me pretty effective."

"I'm just super competitive, and I hate losing. I also like to stick up for my teammates verbally. I honestly think it's just something that's in my DNA."

Cousins said he chirps opponents as much to get underneath their skin as to boost himself.

"Sometimes when you're going into like three games in five nights, and you're kind of a little sleepy sometimes right away. I just start chirping, but then, when the other team starts chirping me back, it fires me up," Cousins said.

"I told Giroux this, too. I'm like 'G, I hope someone chirps me.'"

Claude Giroux himself was notorious for chirping back in the day, as Cousins recalled when they played together in Philadelphia from 2014-17. That includes Giroux's infamous pigeon call.

"He doesn't say a whole lot now, but actually, when I was in Philly, he would do a lot of yapping, too."

"(Now) he's old and grumpy," Cousins said, joking.

Thankfully, for our entertainment, Cousins is passing down the art form to the next generation. He's taken Ridly Greig under his wing, a player who's somehow managed to annoy both Toronto and Montreal already in his young career with an empty-net slapshot and pre-season shenanigans.

"I tell him to be a little bit of a rat because it's contagious," said Cousins.

"Like, as much as people don't like it, I think it drags other people into the fight a little bit, like when he's doing what he's doing."

If the Senators want to get back into the playoff race, they'll need to win the physical and, maybe most importantly, the mental battle. It doesn't hurt when you have Cousins amping up the troops.

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1378730 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers don't look like contender after disappointing homestand

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — We're 57 games into the season, and the Edmonton Oilers have 64 points.

They are, to this point, an average team playing slightly above average on some nights, well below on others.

They resemble a Stanley Cup contender at this juncture of the season about as much as the Vanier Cup resembles the Super Bowl, or I resemble Brad Pitt.

"We can't be letting in five, six, seven, goals per game. It's just it's too much. It's just not the right way to win," Kasper Kapanen said after the Toronto Maple Leafs spanked Edmonton 5-2 on the Oilers' home ice. "I feel like we're just always trailing by two, three goals. And they've scored four or five."

"As a good team, we can't be doing that moving forward, and it's something that we've addressed," he said. "You know, it doesn't happen overnight. We're trying, guys. We're trying, and we want to be better defensively."

This is where the tracks always lead in Edmonton, home of those "High Flying Oilers."

This team is never dominant until it starts to defend. Killing penalties, blocking shots, playing a simple, effective game.

In short, Edmonton's advantage in scoring ability is most acute when the two teams are splitting up a minimum of scoring chances, not a maximum. When the high danger chances are coming by the boatload at either end of the ice, it in fact levels the playing field, history tells us.

"It's a little bit of everything," said head coach Kris Knoblauch, who seems increasingly perplexed as each week passes and his team still doesn't get it. "Five-on-five defending. Obviously the penalty kill (0-for-2 Tuesday) — we've talked about how many penalty kill goals we've given up. And some goaltending. It's a little bit of everything."

On this night, the Oilers climbed back from 1-0 and 2-1 deficits before Matt Savoie took an unfortunate interference penalty at 6:38 of Period 3. Six seconds into the penalty kill, Mattias Janmark was racing for a puck against Auston Matthews and high-sticked him in the face.

The Maple Leafs scored on the ensuing five-on-three, and again on the five-on-four.

Game, set and match.

"I felt like I was maybe held a little," explained Janmark. "I'm not going in there trying to high-stick a guy. But at the end of the day, they're on a two-minute five-on-three in a 2-2 game in the third."

"It cost us the game."

It was an original way to lose, something the Oilers have become rather inventive at. The familiar face, however, is their goals against, now at 3.28 and the seventh highest in the entire National Hockey League.

And the much-ballyhooed eight-game homestand on which Edmonton was going to vault into the Olympic break with a nice first-place cushion?

Yeah, they went 4-4, allowing 32 goals in the final seven games. If they hadn't rescued two games with the goalie pulled, it would have been a full-on disaster.

"We haven't been playing our best and obviously playing eight games in a row at home, you'd like to win more games," Kapanen said. "But that's how it is now, and you can't do anything about it."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026

They'd better figure out how to do something about it, because despite playing in an extremely forgiving division, loose, turnover-laden hockey with average goaltending simply does not take a team into May.

"We have to do our individual jobs better and not point any fingers," said Darnell Nurse, who was screened by an official and missed a pass that led directly to the 2-1 goal. "I've been out there (for goals against). I have to be better in that department, so I'm not going to deflect it anywhere else."

Toronto is 11-2-1 at Rogers Place in their last 14 visits, while Edmonton is now 0-9 this season when Connor McDavid doesn't get a point, and the Leafs kept him off the scoreboard Tuesday.

...

Winger Andrew Mangiapane drew into the lineup for the first time in four games and was Edmonton's best player in the opening period. Then he turned a puck over just inside the offensive blue line in the second period, causing the Oilers to have a bad change, and seconds later the game-opening goal was in Edmonton's net.

Knoblauch sat him out for the final 12 minutes of Period 2, but played him in the third.

"Obviously the turnover had an effect on his ice time," Knoblauch said after the game.

Mangiapane was very effective on the fourth line, for a team that has had zero production from its Bottom 6 of late. It will be interesting to see if he plays Wednesday in Calgary, with general manager Stan Bowman actively shopping him around the league.

Usually, when a player who is being traded plays well, he stays in the lineup.

But when the coach can't stand the player....?

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1378731 Websites

TSN.CA / 'Kids at Christmas': Poulin, Canada ready to 'start fresh' at Olympics

Mark Masters

Team Canada posed for their official Olympic picture before practice on Wednesday. After the main picture was snapped, everyone squeezed in tight for another one. Natalie Spooner then skated a few feet in front of the group and snapped a selfie with everyone behind her.

"Seemed like kids at Christmas," said Montréal Victoire centre Marie-Philip Poulin, who is getting set for her fifth Olympics. "Your first, your fifth, there's no better feeling. The emotion is still there. I jumped on that ice and looked a little bit around, taking it all in. We do it because we love it and it's a real privilege. Every time we wear the Maple Leaf, there's no better feeling."

After a pair of practices during a training camp in Switzerland, Wednesday was Team Canada's first workout at the Milano Rho Ice Hockey Arena where they will play their first three Olympic games.

After the centre-ice snapshots, the players and staff had 15 minutes to take any additional pictures they wanted around the rink.

"You dream of those moments," said top-line winger Laura Stacey, who also plays for the Victoire in the PWHL. "You dream of seeing the rings, skating around with the Canadian jersey on your chest with all your best

friends, so to get to spend 10, 15 minutes enjoying it with your teammates, what more could you ask for?"

Players posed in every spot where the Olympic rings were featured. Some players seemed to be trying out moves destined for TikTok or Instagram. Then everyone congregated for another group shot around a net.

"I feel like this is the only place in the world that the rink doesn't have all these advertisements," said Vancouver Goldeneyes forward Sarah Nurse, who broke the scoring record for a single Olympic tournament when she produced 18 points in Beijing four years ago. "It's just Milano-Cortina and the Olympic rings. It's been fun seeing all the new [players] here with kind of wide eyes. It feels like our first Olympics. It's crazy. The last one was so COVID-focused and my first one [in 2018] was my first one. So, I feel like I'm back at square one."

It feels like that sentiment is shared by all the players. Team Canada is eager to turn the page after being outscored 24-7 while losing all four games during the recent Rivalry Series against the United States.

"We're just excited to get back together," said Poulin, who is one goal away from matching Hayley Wickenheiser for the all-time Olympic record (18). "The Rivalry Series, people are going to talk about it and we're all aware of that, but I think just take it in and start fresh. It's a brand-new tournament. It starts tomorrow. Whatever happened before doesn't matter."

Captain clutch is sounding like captain calm as Canada prepares to open defence of its gold medal against Finland on Thursday night.

"She's the best leader in the world," said Nurse. "She's one of one. She's so unique, so special and to have her on our side, it's pretty awesome."

The Americans also beat Canada twice at the 2025 World Championship so they have a six-game streak going against their rivals. But Poulin, who carried the Canadian flag into the Opening Ceremony four years ago, is the ultimate X-factor at an event like this. She scored the game-winning goal at the 2010, 2014, and 2022 Olympics.

"Obviously there is pressure, but it's fun," said the 34-year-old from Beauveville, Que. "So, for all of us, enjoy that moment and go from there."

"To be honest, she's as perfect as it gets," said Team Canada head coach Troy Ryan. "For me to have someone like that, that's as consistent as she is and that shows up in big moments ... If she's just being herself, she can lead the way she wants to lead."

Poulin skated beside Stacey, her wife, and Julia Gosling at practice on Wednesday. Gosling is one of seven Olympic rookies on the Canadian roster. Ryan acknowledged it's a bit of "out-of-the-box thinking" to put Gosling on the top unit. So, why is the coach turning to the 24-year-old Seattle Torrent sniper in such a prominent role?

"She's someone who can finish like no one else," said Ryan. "If Poulin's able to get her some pucks, I think she can put them in the back of the net. And then [she's] a big body and if she needs to play net front, she's great at getting sticks on pucks. I think the big thing is just maybe not having Pou be the one that's grinding it out on that line. [We] can get Poulin a few more pucks offensively. Stacey will be the one that hounds pucks. If Poulin gets them, she's going to find people like no one else. And we think if it does go on Gosling's stick, she'll be able to finish."

Ryan quickly noted that he's ready to adapt as needed. Canada faces a stiff test right out of the gate against the Finns, who finished third at the last Olympics.

"It's a tough one for game one," Ryan said. "In my time here with the national program, Finland has been kind of a thorn in our side a number of times. So, it's a good test for us right off the bat. And I guess that's



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 5, 2026**

how you want it, right? You want to jump right into it and just get better every day.”

Finland also won bronze at the past two women’s world championships. But the Finns may not be at their best. They cancelled their practice on Wednesday after four players contracted a stomach illness.

“I just actually heard that from the Finnish media,” Ryan said. “We’ll probably have a little debrief here as a staff and connect with our medical group. It’s something we’re always going to be prepared for. Obviously, the Olympic committee will get involved as well. But, as far as right now, our group’s healthy.”

Four players on the Finnish Women’s hockey team have contracted an illness which caused their training session on Wednesday to be cancelled.

Canada’s first match is against Finland on Thursday. @CBCOlympics #MilanoCortina2026 #Olympics

— Claire Hanna (@clahanna) February 4, 2026

And this Canadian group is focused.

“I’m very confident,” said Stacey. “We all came in here with huge smiles on our faces. Obviously not the result we wanted in the Rivalry Series, but that’s not the goal. The goal is right here, right now, to win a gold and bring it home to Canada. What we started here the past few days, what we started four years ago, eight years ago, it’s all been coming down to this this very moment. Honestly, now it’s just a matter of executing and enjoying every single moment.”

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