



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The News & Observer

Family, faith fuel Hurricanes defenseman Jaccob Slavin's journey to 2026 Olympics

By: Anna Laible

Jaccob Slavin of the Carolina Hurricanes is introduced prior to the game against the New Jersey Devils at Lenovo Center on Oct. 9, 2025 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Slavin is playing for the U.S. in the 2026 Winter Olympics.

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Milan, Italy

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Jaccob Slavin has been an NHL All-Star. He's a two-time winner of the Lady Byng Trophy — given every season to the NHL player voted to have the best combination of sportsmanship, gentlemanly conduct and ability.

This year, Slavin is adding Team USA Olympian to his resume. He's preparing to suit up in the red, white, and blue on Thursday when the United States takes on Latvia in the Group C prelims.

The Carolina Hurricanes will be well-represented on the ice in Milan — five players will suit up to represent their home nations. Sebastian Aho (Finland), Nikolaj Ehlers and Frederik Andersen (Denmark), and late addition Seth Jarvis (Canada) join Slavin as Hurricanes Olympians.

Making it to Milan has been a long journey for Slavin.

He grew up in Colorado as one of five siblings and was selected in the fourth round (No. 120) of the 2012 NHL Draft by the Hurricanes. But before starting his time as a pro, he played two years for Colorado College. He's the ninth former Colorado College Tiger to compete in the Olympics. He debuted for the Hurricanes on Nov. 18, 2015, finishing his rookie season with 20 points (two goals, 18 assists) in 63 games.

Outside of playing, Slavin is a husband, father to two, and strong Christian. He's very outspoken on social media about his faith and how it has impacted how he has raised his family.

"Our faith is the most important thing to us in our life," Slavin said. "It's just the lens I see everything through. So whether that's playing the game of hockey or being a husband or father, it's all for the glory of God."

Jack Hughes of the New Jersey Devils avoids a check from Jaccob Slavin of the Carolina Hurricanes during the first period of the game at Lenovo Center on October 09, 2025 in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Jack Hughes of the New Jersey Devils avoids a check from Jaccob Slavin of the Carolina Hurricanes during the first period of the game at Lenovo Center on October 09, 2025 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Jared C. Tilton Getty Images

Slavin hasn't played as much this season, due to injuries. However, his ice time has steadily increased, and he seems ready for Milan. He remains the Hurricanes' franchise record holder among defensemen in points, assists and shorthanded points (18).

In the 2024-25 season, he made the United States roster for the 4 Nations Face-Off. While nothing is quite like the Olympic Games, that experience prepared him for what international competition looks like.

"I go back to last year with the Four Nations and just how awesome the hockey was playing against Canada, Sweden, and Finland," Slavin said. "Those games were just intense. It was unbelievable hockey."

Now a childhood dream of Slavin's is becoming a reality. He'll have his parents and wife supporting him in Milan, as he aims to help Team USA capture a gold medal. It won't be an easy feat for the Americans, as they have managed to win gold only twice (1960 and 1980), with Canada dominating with nine golds.

"I think for the most part it was just excitement," he said after learning he had made the Olympic roster. "Maybe a little bit of nerves for my wife having to fly overseas for the first time. My parents were there [when I found out], and it was something that they were excited for because obviously they've been there for my whole journey. They were probably more excited for me than I was for myself."

The Hurricanes athletes will be competitors rather than teammates for the Olympics and some will face off against one another when Denmark takes on Team USA on Saturday. Before they arrived in Italy, Slavin talked about how all of the Hurricane Olympians would share logistics info with one another.

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But Slavin isn't focused on playing against friendly faces. He's just keeping his focus simple.

"I think when it comes to playing against each other, once the puck drops, it's just going to be a hockey game.

If he does get some downtime, he's hoping to see figure skating with his daughter and go to Lake Como. But his big goal remains the same.

"We're there to win Gold."



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Anna Laible is a student with UNC Media Hub, a program with the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media, reporting from the Winter Olympics in Milan, Italy.

With Seth Jarvis' late addition to Team Canada, Hurricanes have five Olympians

By: Chip Alexander

Raleigh

Seth Jarvis is going to the Olympics after all.

The call from Team Canada came late for Jarvis, but the Carolina Hurricanes forward learned Thursday he is going to Milan, Italy, for the Winter Games, replacing the injured Brayden Point of the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Jarvis' late addition has turned the Canes' Olympic foursome into a fivesome. Defenseman Jaccob Slavin will compete for Team USA, center Sebastian Aho for Finland and forward Nikolaj Ehlers and goalie Frederik Andersen for Denmark.

"I'm happy for him," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Thursday after a 2-0 win over the New York Rangers. "It's the toughest team to make in the world, that and the U.S. team. I'm happy he's getting that opportunity."

Jarvis said the last few hours leading up to the game were a "whirlwind" of activity. Phone calls. Questions to be answered. Flights to make.

And a vacation to cancel. Jarvis said he initially had plans to go to Cabo during the Olympic break, but must quickly change gears for his first trip to Italy.

"I love warm weather, but this is a pretty good reason not to go," he joked. "It's incredible."

Aho after kind of gold

It has been 10 years since Aho won a gold medal for Finland, creating a nation-wide frenzy.

That was in the 2016 World Junior Championship, when Aho was 18 years old. Aho and his teammates were treated and feted like young rock stars after winning in Helsinki, beating Russia in the gold-medal game as Aho had a goal and assist.

And if Finland was to win an Olympic gold medal?

"I think people would go nuts," Aho said.

"Obviously, we were kids (in 2016) and it was a home tournament in Helsinki. So everything lined up perfectly, and it was unbelievable, one of my favorite hockey memories in my whole life.

"I'm just so excited to go out and compete in the Olympics and try to win gold. But just to put that jersey on ... it's unreal to even think about."

Jarvis feels the same way. And Slavin. And Ehlers and Andersen.

The NHL did not have its players in the Olympics in 2022 or 2018. Slavin, Aho and Jarvis participated in last year's 4 Nations Face-Off in Montreal and Boston, Team Canada winning that international event.

Jarvis was on that team, coming back to Raleigh with a gold, while Team USA and Slavin had to settle for silver medals.

Jarvis was hopeful of being selected to Team Canada for the Olympics but was bypassed during the roster selection — a downer for the Winnipeg native. He was placed on Canada's reserve list but as late as Tuesday said he had heard nothing from Team Canada officials.

It can be 'weird' playing against teammates

"The hockey in the 4 Nations was unbelievable," Slavin said this week. "International play is super fun and competitive and all that.

"But this is the Olympics. I think it should be that much better. It will be a little different with international rules rather than NHL rules out there and obviously no fighting. But the intensity will still be up and it will be such a blast."

In the 4 Nations event, with Team USA facing Finland, Slavin once stood up Aho at the blue line with a solid hit. Aho took a double-take at Slavin. Then they played on.

"That's always weird," Slavin said of facing teammates. "Last year was kind of the first taste of it and it's always weird.

"But I think we all agree once the puck drops you're playing the game of hockey and it doesn't matter who's on the other side. You're going to do what you've got to do to win the game, so you play hard and you play within your game."

Ehlers and Andersen are longtime friends, one of the factors in Ehlers signing as a free agent with the Hurricanes after last season, after 10 years with the Winnipeg Jets.

"Denmark is a small, proud country and it seems like everybody knows each other somehow from growing up, or playing against each other on teams growing up or with each other on national teams through the years," Andersen said.

Denmark is a long shot to medal in Milan. But it did beat Canada in the quarterfinals of the 2025 World Championship, hosted by Sweden and Denmark, and the Canadian team included Sidney Crosby and Nathan MacKinnon. Ehlers was a member of the Danish team, which finished fourth as Team USA took the gold.

"A lot of great players went before us to get us to where it is right now," Andersen said. "We've come a long way over the last three decades of being in the 'C' group and then the 'B' group and now hosted two World Championships and been in the 'A' group for almost 25 years."

Brind'Amour, who has his team in first place in the Metro Division at the Olympic break, is hopeful that his guys return healthy and with memories to last a lifetime. He was on Team Canada in the 1998 Winter Games in Nagano, Japan, the first year active NHL players were permitted to compete in the Olympics.

"For me, it was being around other athletes," he said. "I roomed with Wayne Gretzky. That would never have happened, but now I know Wayne Gretzky, you know, and I'm able to have a relationship there.



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"The whole experience is that these guys are going to remember."

Canada did not medal in 1998 as the Czech Republic (now Czechia) took the gold behind the sizzling play of goalie Domink Hasek, a future Hall of Famer.

Watching in Denmark was an 8-year-old hockey fan who said the '98 Games and Hasek in net provided his first Olympic memories.

"It was special seeing one of the greats of all time," Andersen said.

The Hurricanes (36-15-6-) are scheduled to resume practice Feb. 17 and have their first game back Feb. 26 against Tampa Bay at the Lenovo Center. Then it's a race to the finish line of the regular season.

"We've pushed pretty hard and they need this little break," Brind'Amour said Thursday. "Hopefully it will give us a little juice for that last push."



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The Athletic

NHL weekend rankings: A blockbuster trade, a midseason rankings reset and more

By: Sean McIndoe

Let's get you caught up on all the NHL action you missed over the weekend.

There wasn't any. Cool, good column. See you next time.

OK, we won't wrap it up quite that quickly. But with most teams getting only a couple of games in since this time last week, don't expect any major changes in the rankings.

Instead, let's use this week as a bit of a reset and regroup before the rankings take a few weeks off. For example, now would be a good time to look at which teams have been on which lists so far this year.

Bonus five: Observations about the rankings so far

5. The top five has been relatively consistent: Only ten teams have appeared in the top five this year. That includes two teams that have been featured all 18 weeks: the Carolina Hurricanes, who've held every spot from two to five at least once, and the Colorado Avalanche, who have been ranked first for 14 weeks and counting. The Dallas Stars, Vegas Golden Knights, Tampa Bay Lightning and Minnesota Wild have spent the last two months jockeying for the other positions. At the other end, the Edmonton Oilers were in the top five in our debut list, but not since.

4. There's been more churn in the bottom five: We've had 15 different teams show up there, which is already a record. No teams have been on the list every week. The Calgary Flames have the longest streak, with 16 straight appearances.

3. Some of those picks don't hold up well: It happens every year, but with 25 teams showing up on either list, some of those picks are going to look bad in hindsight. That's especially true when you look back at the early weeks, where we can find some picks that I'll go ahead say don't age especially well. The Florida Panthers in the top five early? Defensible. The Winnipeg Jets? Maybe a bit less so. The New Jersey Devils? Oof. And on the bottom side, teams like the Boston Bruins, Seattle Kraken and Pittsburgh Penguins have defied expectations, but the big miss is the Buffalo Sabres, who were in the bottom five through mid-December. I'm certainly not alone there, since I'm not sure anyone saw their transformation coming. But a whiff is a whiff.

2. About those missing teams: We're down to eight teams who haven't shown up on either list. That includes two Atlantic teams, the Detroit Red Wings and Montreal Canadiens, who've at least had cases to make pretty much all year long. The Utah Mammoth have been surging lately, although I'm not sure how I could find room for a fourth Central team. On the other end, the Ottawa Senators and Columbus Blue Jackets

both got close bottom-five considerations before getting back on track. The Washington Capitals and Los Angeles Kings have both been right in the mushy middle pretty much all year long. And the Toronto Maple Leafs have been closer to the bottom than the top, but aren't going to get close enough.

(For what it's worth, the Senators, Kings and Mammoth also made it all the way through last year without being on either list, and the Leafs haven't been on one since the 2022-23 season. I'm assuming that's the only record-setting drought they're in the middle of.)

1. The worst pick of all: You math nerds will have noticed that those 10 teams from the top five plus our 15 from the bottom five teams plus the eight that didn't make either list adds up to 33, and there are only 32 teams. That means that for the first time in a few years, we've had the dreaded double team scenario, where one team makes both the top and bottom five in the same season. That shouldn't happen, except that you have to keep something in mind: I'm not smart.

This year's team is the Jets, who've gone from Presidents' Trophy winner to in the running for dead last. That's pretty much unprecedented, so I'm not alone in being mystified by this team. But then again, you readers did try to warn me.

On to this week's rankings...

Road to the Cup

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

We'll have all your Olympic hockey coverage right here, including our staff's bold predictions.

5. Minnesota Wild (34-14-10, +26 true goals differential*) – Leave it Laz to come up with an angle that feels brand new. In this case: Bill Guerin's Olympic picks, maybe not completely awful?

4. Dallas Stars (34-14-9, +32) – We're still waiting on the prognosis for Tyler Seguin, who had surgery on his ACL last month. Remember, the Stars can use his almost \$10 million in cap space if and only if he goes on the season-ending LTIR. That would mean he couldn't return at any point in the playoffs, so they'll want to be sure before they play that card.

3. Carolina Hurricanes (36-15-6, +33) – Worth noting: Not only are the Hurricanes one of the only contenders to have all their own first-round picks for the next few years, they also have an extra first from the Stars from the Mikko Rantanen trade. That one's not until 2028, so it's not a prime asset for this year's deadline. But it might make the Hurricanes feel better about moving other picks, which in turn could make them even more aggressive than usual about pursuing big names.



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2. Tampa Bay Lightning (37-14-4, +57) – Somewhat quietly, the Lightning have caught up to the Avalanche for the best won-loss record in the league, with both teams sitting at 37-18. Given how unbeatable the Avs looked in the first half, that's pretty remarkable. And it's got me questioning whether the Lightning should get the top spot. After all, they've got the easier path to the final, so if they're even close to Colorado in terms of being the best team, their Cup odds should be better. That's what both the projections and the other rankings have said for the last few weeks.

We try to err on the side of caution in these parts, and for now that's what I'm doing. But once the break ends, be ready for a new number one.

1. Colorado Avalanche (37-9-9, +78) – For now though, make it 14 straight weeks on top for Colorado.

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

Not ranked: Edmonton Oilers – I'm still not quite sure what to do with this team.

As we mentioned up above, they've appeared in the top five just once this year, in the first week. That's easy enough to defend, since they were back-to-back Western Conference champs. Then they had the same slow start they seem to have most years, one that's always eventually followed by a lengthy hot streak that makes all the early-season anguish seem silly.

It's fair to say that the Oilers have been better since hitting December as a .500 team. But it's also fair to say the big hot streak hasn't happened. It looked like it might be starting at the end of January, when the Oilers ran off a three-game win streak that was somehow their first of the year. But they followed that with three straight losses, all in regulation, including to the Leafs and Flames.

That sent them into the break cold, trailing the Knights by four points for top spot in the Pacific. (Vegas also has a game in hand.) Even worse, by points percentage they're also trailing Seattle and Anaheim. With the Kings landing Artemi Panarin, they should be back in play for a playoff spot. And there isn't likely to be enough spots in the Pacific for all of those teams. Somebody's going to miss out.

Could it actually be the Oilers?

No, it couldn't be. I still feel pretty safe saying that. And assuming Edmonton does make it, their path out of the division wouldn't be that foreboding. Put it this way: Only one team in the Pacific heads into the break with more wins than losses. That would be Anaheim, whose 30 wins lead the division. That's impressive for a rebuilding team, but is anyone picking the Ducks over the Oilers in a playoff series? Or the Kraken, or Kings? You'd take Edmonton in any of those matchups, and probably wouldn't have to think too hard about it.

So in theory, the path is clear and not all that difficult. First, make the playoffs. Second, win an opening-round matchup that should be a warmup. Third, beat the Golden Knights, a tough opponent that hasn't looked right all year long. If all of that happens, the Oilers are back in the final four and we all act like we saw it coming all along.

If all of that doesn't happen, then things might get interesting for a team that's as all-in as you can be on winning a Stanley

Cup, and winning it soon. Leon Draisaitl sure doesn't sound happy, and he's not the only one questioning the goaltending. The Tristan Jarry trade hasn't worked, at least not yet, but you wonder if Stan Bowman even has a Plan B. They need more depth, especially up front, and are one of the teams under pressure to make a big add or two before the deadline. But they don't have their own first-round pick, so some creativity might be needed.

I still think the most likely scenario is that Bowman adds around the edges, the team makes the playoffs fairly easily, and ends up giving Vegas all they can handle in a second-round showdown. But maybe that's just force of habit. It's 58 games into the season, and this version of the Oilers hasn't looked like a Cup contender with any kind of consistency. We can't just hand wave away the worst-case scenarios, because for now at least, everything is in play.

The bottom five

The five teams headed towards dead last and the best lottery odds for the top pick in this year's draft and a shot at Gavin McKenna or Ivar Stenberg.

It was a weird and potentially costly week for Gavin McKenna. Other Sean has been all over the case, and has the latest here.

5. Chicago Blackhawks (22-26-9, -29) – A key detail here flagged by Scott: the Hawks can indeed win the lottery and move up to the top pick this year. There are rules about a team winning too often, and the Hawks have picked in the top three for three straight years. But only the Connor Bedard pick involved moving up in the order, so it's the only one that counts as far as the limit. That means they can move up this year if Gary Bettman rigs it again the lottery breaks their way.

4. Calgary Flames (23-27-6, -27) – One of the best parts about being a bad team is watching your opponents have an existential crisis when they lose to you.

3. St. Louis Blues (20-28-9, -54) – The Nick Bjugstad trade felt like a warmup. Jeremy looks at the bigger shoes still left to drop in St. Louis.

And speaking of trades...

2. New York Rangers (22-29-6, -31) – That was not much of a return on Artemi Panarin, was it?

On some level, that makes sense. Panarin has a no-move clause, and apparently was quite willing to use it as leverage to control his destination. If he ultimately decided that it was L.A. or nothing, well, what else could the Rangers really do?

The only real answer is: Wait, and play a little bit of chicken. That's why the rush to get this done before the Olympic roster freeze seems a bit odd. Maybe this plays out differently if Chris Drury says something along the lines of "Look, I know you want to go to Los Angeles, but their offer just isn't good enough. So you either need to give me another option, or hope they up their offer. Let's check back in two weeks and see if anyone has changed their mind."

Maybe somebody blinks and the Rangers get a better result. Or maybe it all falls apart, Drury ultimately can't even get the package he did get, and we all write eye-rolling pieces about a dumb GM obviously overplaying his hand.



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Vincent gets into all of this in much more detail in this piece, including whether Panarin would have refused to go anywhere at all.

Tell you what, let's put a pin in the Panarin talk for one minute...

1. Vancouver Canucks (18-33-6, -63) – They've quietly built a nice little cushion at the bottom of the standings. This isn't shaping up as one of those years with a McDavid-level or even Bedard-level prospect waiting with the first pick, but in a way that's even more incentive to tank for dead last, assuring no worse than a top-three pick in a year where that still might get you the best player.

Not ranked: Los Angeles Kings – OK, back to Panarin. We talked about the Rangers side. What about the Kings?

I'll be honest, they weren't high on my list of potential landing spots when we discussed it on the pod. Panarin felt like an ideal add for a contender, and the Kings had spent the season looking like ... maybe not that. Even with Panarin obviously preferring L.A. as his destination, and the trade price obviously

being more than fair, I wasn't convinced it made sense for the Kings to be giving up any significant future assets at all.

But all that leaves out an important factor: the extension Panarin would use all that leverage to extract from the Kings. And to some surprise, that contract ended up being extremely reasonable. The \$11 million cap hit is fine, but it's the term that really pops. Getting Panarin to sign for just two more years removes all sorts of risk from the Kings' side of the equation, and starts to make even the worst-case scenarios feel workable.

Ultimately, maybe this is less about Ken Holland following a plan and more about not being so beholden to one that you pass up on a gift that falls into your lap. Eric had a really good piece about the Kings' end of this deal, and what it could mean going forward.

Either way, the trade certainly signals a shift in the Pacific race. With the Oilers and Knights both looking at least a little bit vulnerable, and the Ducks, Kraken and Sharks the only other teams to worry about, the Kings look like a playoff team again. The flip side of that is that missing out now feels like a much bigger whiff than it would have. Let's see where it goes.

Seven NHL teams that need to make a move by the trade deadline

By: Harman Dayal

The NHL's Olympic freeze, which will prohibit teams from making trades until 11:59 p.m. Eastern on Feb. 22, has officially kicked in. Besides the Artemi Panarin trade, the league's pre-freeze trade activity was fairly tame.

That isn't entirely surprising, given the growing sentiment that teams wanted to wait until after the Olympics to complete business. After all, a buying team's trade needs could shift if one of its own players or outside trade targets is injured at the Olympics.

Once the freeze is lifted, we should see plenty of moves (even if they don't necessarily involve many big names) in the 12 days leading up to the March 6 deadline.

Which teams should we expect to make moves by the deadline? Here are the seven clubs — four of them buyers and three of them sellers — that are most likely to wheel and deal before the deadline. Others will make trades too, but these are the teams with the most urgent need to consider a move.

St. Louis Blues

The Blues (31st-place) are the only bottom-four team in the NHL standings that has yet to trade away a core player. Vancouver (Quinn Hughes), New York (Artemi Panarin), and Calgary (Rasmus Andersson) have already made a seismic selling move. We expect St. Louis to join that group before the deadline; five Blues players were on Chris Johnston's most recent trade board: Robert Thomas, Brayden Schenn, Justin Faulk, Jordan Kyrou and Jordan Binnington.

St. Louis is in a unique position because all five of those players are non-rentals with term beyond this season. I'm not privy to the exact trade conversations and league-wide market for those five players, but here's how I'd consider approaching their futures:

- Justin Faulk (15-team no-trade list): He'd be near the top of the list for who the Blues should be most motivated to trade because his value isn't going to be any higher than it is right now. He's having a nice bounce-back year that the Blues should capitalize on. There's a shortage of top-four defenseman on the market. He's signed through next season, so as a non-rental, he could be extra attractive to a team such as Detroit. Since his contract expires at the end of next season, the Blues should be willing to retain a small portion of his \$6.5 million AAV to further juice his trade value.

- Brayden Schenn (15-team no-trade list): Schenn turns 35 this summer and has two years left beyond this season at a \$6.5 million AAV. He's an excellent leader and means a lot to the organization as a captain, but his age and contract make him a depreciating asset (we're already seeing evidence of his on-ice decline this season), and I'd be motivated to shop him while he still presumably has value. It might not be a bad idea for the Blues to wait until the offseason to trade him because the free-agent center market is bleak (which means teams could be more desperate to trade for centers), and there's usually more demand for players on hefty contracts in the offseason when teams have more cap flexibility. Overall, though, this is a trade that the Blues should make at some point before next season begins.

- Robert Thomas (full no-trade clause): I would keep him unless a team massively overpays for him with a can't-refuse offer. First-line centers don't grow on trees, and at 26, Thomas is still young enough to be part of the Blues' long-term future.

- Jordan Binnington (14-team no-trade list): He's probably not worth much right now, considering his brutal season and sizeable \$6 million cap hit. I would hold onto him and hope he can rebuild his trade value, as Tristan Jarry did. Binnington's contract expires at the end of next season, so if he bounces back, he could become a significantly more valuable trade chip at next year's deadline as a rental, especially if the Blues retain salary on him.



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• Jordan Kyrrou (full no-trade clause): I'd be open to possibly trading him for the right deal, but the Blues shouldn't accept a low-ball offer for him based on his down season (13 goals in 47 games). He's on a big-ticket long-term contract and owns a full no-trade clause, so this type of move would be complicated to pull off midseason. I'd be comfortable keeping him next season and beyond if no offer impresses me.

It's unlikely we'll see the Blues pull off a massive fire sale ahead of the deadline, given the contracts and trade protections surrounding these players. However, they'll almost certainly make one or two notable selling moves before March 6.

Carolina Hurricanes

Four years in a row, the Hurricanes have been eliminated in the playoffs by either the Florida Panthers or the New York Rangers. With the Rangers hopeless and the Panthers sitting eight points back of a wild-card spot, those obstacles are likely out of the way this year. Couple that with Carolina standing out as the only true Cup contender in the Metro division — Washington and New Jersey have regressed significantly, and though the Penguins and Islanders are feel-good stories, they aren't threats to win a championship — and this year represents the Hurricanes' best chance of reaching the Stanley Cup Final with this core.

With this potentially easier playoff path in mind, Carolina should be highly motivated to buy ahead of the deadline. The Hurricanes have an endless pit of cap room, which isn't true for every contender and is especially valuable now that double-retention transactions are no longer permitted under the CBA rule changes. They have more trade chips to wield than most contenders, as they're armed with all of their future first-round picks and have an extra one in 2028 from Dallas.

Carolina's biggest need is to add a true second-line center behind Sebastian Aho. Logan Stankoven is an adequate middle-six center stopgap, but come playoff time, he would ideally shift back to the wing. In the past, the Hurricanes have gone after star wingers at the deadline (Mikko Rantanen, Jake Guentzel), but Nikolaj Ehlers' arrival from free agency has partially checked that box, not to mention that the club has an overall glut of wingers. A reunion with Vincent Trocheck could be an interesting idea, but it's a fool's game to guess who specifically Carolina will chase, because its front office often has smart outside-of-the-box ideas up its sleeve.

NHL Top NHL Stories

Dallas Stars

An arms race is brewing in the Central Division.

Minnesota is a Cup contender after acquiring Hughes and is likely not done shopping. The Avalanche, who are already the best team in the NHL, will surely be looking to add as well. The Stars can't afford to sit on their hands, as reaching a third consecutive Western Conference Final will likely require beating both teams in a playoff series.

Tyler Seguin's uncertain future adds another layer of mystery and urgency to Dallas' approach to the deadline. Seguin tore his ACL in December, and the club announced that his timeline will be evaluated after the Olympic break. If Seguin is ruled out for the playoffs, the Stars will be able to place his \$9.85 million cap hit on season-ending LTIR, which would open up a ton of cap flexibility ahead of the deadline. This feels

like the most likely scenario because the odds of a player recovering from ACL surgery to play in hyper-intense Stanley Cup playoff games in less than six months seem slim.

Dallas has a couple of weaknesses that it should address. Up front, the Stars would benefit from adding a middle-six forward — they lost a decent chunk of their forward depth in the summer as Mikael Granlund, Mason Marchment and Evgenii Dadonov all departed last summer. Seguin's injury has further exacerbated that gap, forcing the club to rely on less proven players such as Sam Steel, Mavrik Bourque and Justin Hryckowian in elevated roles, with mixed results this season.

On the back end, the Stars also need to add a top-four right-shot defender. This has become an annual trade deadline requirement, as the club traded for Chris Tanev in 2024 and for Cody Ceci last year. Finding an upgraded partner will be crucial to unlocking the best version of Thomas Harley. Harley, a top-20 defenseman in the NHL, is having a down year, earning only 44.9 percent of shot attempts and 47 percent of expected goals at five-on-five this season. He's been saddled with one of Nils Lundkvist or Ilya Lyubushkin for most of the season, which just isn't going to cut it come playoff time.

Dallas' asset pool is limited — GM Jim Nill is without his 2026 and 2028 first-round picks — so I'd expect the team to aim for a couple of savvy depth additions to solve these needs rather than an expensive home-run swing.

Toronto Maple Leafs

The Leafs are entering the Olympic break on a mini three-game winning streak, which has kept them alive on the fringes of the Eastern Conference playoff race, but that shouldn't change their posture ahead of the deadline. It's time to sell.

Toronto is still six points back of a playoff spot, but even if it did go on an unlikely charge back into a wild-card spot, this isn't a team that can realistically challenge for the Stanley Cup. The Leafs have regressed massively defensively; their back end is shaky without Chris Tanev, and their forward group isn't very imposing.

In 2016-17, the Blues traded Kevin Shattenkirk away for a first-round pick despite being in a playoff spot. A year later, they boldly traded Paul Stastny away for another first-round pick despite only being one point back of a playoff position. The reasoning was simple: Doug Armstrong knew his team wasn't a threat to go deep in the playoffs, even if it qualified, so he was willing to sell when many other teams in his position would have been satisfied with keeping the team together and squeaking into a playoff spot. Toronto would be wise to take the same approach.

The Leafs should be especially motivated to sell because they need to restock the cupboards after years of trading away picks and prospects. Bobby McMann, a pending UFA on pace for 28 goals, should have similar trade value to Kiefer Sherwood, who fetched the Canucks two second-round picks. Scott Laughton is also on an expiring contract and should have decent trade value.

On the blue line, Toronto should be listening to offers on Brandon Carlo and/or Oliver Ekman-Larsson. Carlo only has one year beyond this season, and while the Leafs won't be able to recoup all of what they surrendered for him, he should still be a valuable commodity. Ekman-Larsson, meanwhile,



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could present an interesting opportunity to sell high on a player who turns 35 this summer.

There are other players, such as Nicolas Roy, to consider, but the overall point is that the Leafs should be honest with themselves about how significant a step back they've taken and make an aggressive pivot ahead of the deadline.

Minnesota Wild

The Hughes trade immediately vaulted the Wild to Cup contender status. Since acquiring Vancouver's former captain in mid-December, Minnesota is 16-5-5, which is the best record in the Western Conference. The Wild were 24th in the league in goals scored per game before the Hughes trade; now they're the highest scoring team in the NHL since his arrival. Hughes, who is finally surrounded by elite talent, has racked up 34 points in 26 games, which would be a 107-point pace over 82 games.

All of this is exciting, but the Wild can't afford to be complacent. Their roster isn't perfect, and because they're in the vaunted Central Division, they're projected to face an elite Dallas Stars team in the first round of the playoffs. If they get past Dallas, the Colorado Avalanche will likely be waiting for them in Round 2. There's organizational pressure to finally get over the first-round playoff hump, as they haven't won a playoff series since 2015. The stakes are especially high because a long postseason run would boost their odds of being able to convince Hughes to re-sign when he's extension-eligible this summer.

It's no secret that Minnesota's biggest need is adding another top-six center to complement Joel Eriksson-Ek. Danila Yurov has had a solid rookie campaign, and Ryan Hartman can adequately fill in at center, but their one-two-three punch down the middle pales in comparison to Dallas (Wyatt Johnston, Roope Hintz, Matt Duchene) and Colorado (Nathan MacKinnon, Brock Nelson, Jack Drury).

The Wild spent a lot of assets in the Hughes trade, but they still have a fair bit of young trade chips, including their 2027 first-round pick, high-scoring NCAA center Charlie Stramel, and David Jiricek, among others. Because Filip Gustavsson is signed through 2031, there's even a possibility that Jesper Wallstedt could be available if a true No. 1 center (not for a Vincent Trocheck-level player) became available.

The debate now is whether it's worth taking another big, expensive swing at the deadline, or chasing a cheaper middle-six center stopgap for now and saving their best assets for the summer, when better players could become available. Regardless of what path they choose, though, the Wild will have to add up front ahead of the deadline, even if it ends up being a less splashy name.

Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton's roster has multiple flaws/question marks.

The team's defensive play has been shaky, and their blue line has some good pieces, but can be exposed at times because of Darnell Nurse's struggles. Their goaltending situation is still somewhat worrying, as Tristan Jarry has posted an .870 save percentage in 11 games as an Oiler. However, it's very unlikely they seek another goaltending move given what they just invested in the position. On the back end, they're stuck with Nurse and their other top-four defenders, Evan Bouchard,

Mattias Ekholm and Jake Walman, are quality players, so it's unlikely we'll see a major defense shake-up.

That leaves a top-nine forward as the most realistic need that the club can address ahead of the deadline.

During last year's Stanley Cup Final, the difference between Florida and Edmonton's forward depth was stark. The Panthers were so deep that they were rolling Brad Marchand and Anton Lundell on their third line; meanwhile, the Oilers were far too reliant on Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl. Florida had nine forwards who contributed at least four points in that Cup Final, while the Oilers only had four (McDavid, Draisaitl, Vasily Podkolzin and Corey Perry).

The Oilers can be flexible regarding the forward's position; if they land a center, it will give them the luxury of using Ryan Nugent-Hopkins as a full-time winger, and if they land a winger, they can deploy RNH as a full-time 3C.

Edmonton owns all of its future top picks, except this year's first-rounder, so the front office has trade chips to play with. The largest constraint will be cap space — the Oilers are pressed up against the ceiling, which means they'll need to shed a contract such as Andrew Mangiapane's to afford taking on a significant salary.

Calgary Flames

The Flames have moved several veterans as part of their teardown in recent years, including Noah Hanifin, Elias Lindholm, Jacob Markstrom, Tyler Toffoli, Chris Tanev, and, most recently, Rasmus Andersson. Calgary has accumulated excess draft picks and some intriguing young players, but there's still a lot of work to be done to execute a successful rebuild.

Nazem Kadri, in particular, stands out as a chip that the Flames should be trying to cash in on for several reasons. At 35, Kadri is too old to fit the timeline of a realistic Flames turnaround. The demand for top-six centers is high, and the supply is thin, which should drive prices up in Calgary's favor. The Flames shouldn't wait too long to pull the trigger on a Kadri trade because the older he gets, the greater the chance that his performance and trade value could decline. We're already seeing signs of that this year — Kadri is on pace for 15 goals and 57 points, which is a notable dip from the 35 goals and 67 points he racked up in 2024-25.

If the Flames move Kadri, you'd imagine they'll be looking for something similar to what they got for Lindholm or what Brock Nelson fetched for the Islanders last year. The Lindholm trade netted Calgary a first-round pick, a legit B-grade prospect in Hunter Brzustewicz, and a lesser prospect in Joni Jurmo. That first-rounder became Matvei Gridin, who's having a phenomenal season as a first-year pro. The 19-year-old winger has scored at nearly a point-per-game clip in the AHL and has six points in 13 NHL games, which is very impressive age-adjusted production.

Nelson went for even more than Lindholm: He returned the Isles a first-round pick, high-end prospect Calum Ritchie, and a conditional third-round pick.

Lindholm and Nelson were rentals, whereas Kadri has three years remaining on his contract after this season. I'm not sure the extra term significantly boosts Kadri's trade value, though, because he's signed through his age-38 season, which carries some risk. If anything, it'll be fascinating to see how amenable



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the Flames are to retaining a portion of Kadri's \$7 million AAV, which could affect how high the demand and price for his services are.

Kadri's the main chip that should go, but Blake Coleman (signed through 2026-27 at a \$4.9 million cap hit) and Zach

Whitecloud (signed through 2027-28 at a \$2.75 million cap hit) could be possible assets as well.

Honorable mentions: Detroit Red Wings, Colorado Avalanche, Vancouver Canucks, Tampa Bay Lightning, Buffalo Sabres



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Bussi makes 16 saves and Svechnikov scores early goal to lift Hurricanes over Rangers 2-0

By: Pat Welter

NEW YORK (AP) — Rookie Brandon Bussi made 16 saves for his second shutout, Andrei Svechnikov gave Carolina an early lead in the first period and the Hurricanes topped the New York Rangers 2-0 on Thursday night to extend their points streak to 10 games.

Jordan Staal scored into an empty net with 54 seconds left to seal it for the Hurricanes in the final game for both teams before the Olympic break.

The Eastern Conference-leading Hurricanes are 8-0-2 since Jan. 16 and 12-1-3 since Jan. 4.

Jonathan Quick made a season-high 41 saves for the Rangers, who were shut out for the ninth time this season and the seventh at home. New York has lost four in a row.

Svechnikov made it 1-0 game 6:26 into the first period on a wrist shot off an assist from Mark Jankowski. And Bussi, who has won his last seven starts, made that goal hold up.

Bussi's first career shutout came on Nov. 30, 2025, when he stopped 15 shots against Calgary.

Up next

Hurricanes: Host Tampa Bay on Feb. 26.

Rangers: Host Philadelphia on Feb. 26.



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Jarvis Joyous To Join Team Canada

By: Walt Ruff

"To be able to play at the highest level, on a stage like this, is everyone's dream..."

RALEIGH, N.C. - As he sat at his locker inside the team's dressing room on Tuesday, fielding questions from reporters after a two-goal performance that helped his Carolina Hurricanes to another win, Seth Jarvis was asked if the impending Winter Olympics still weighed on his mind.

In typical fashion for himself, he playfully laughed, smiled, and started his response with, "I think I blew that opportunity already. I think that part's done."

Little did he know.

Fewer than 48 hours later, as he settled in for his pre-game nap in New York City before taking on the Rangers at Madison Square Garden in the team's final bout before the three-week gap in the schedule, Team Canada General Manager Doug Armstrong dialed up Jarvis.

Also, in typical fashion, the 24-year-old didn't pick up the phone.

"I didn't answer the first (call) because I was like, 'Who is calling me right now?' [I] picked up the second one, thankfully, and, yeah, they broke the news to me," he said. "I can't even explain it. It was incredible. [I'm] super honored."

With Tampa Bay Lightning center Brayden Point officially unavailable due to injury, the roster had a need, perhaps specifically for a quick, right-handed shot who can kill penalties.

After being left off the team's initially announced roster on Dec. 31, the winger who helped Team Canada to a gold medal at last year's 4 Nations Faceoff was officially locked in to run it back, this time on an even bigger stage.

"I'm just happy for him. It's the toughest team to make in the world - (Team Canada) and the U.S. team," Rod Brind'Amour said post-game on Thursday. "You could pick a lot of good players that get left off. It was no snub that he didn't make it initially; there's just so many good players. I hate that other guys are going to miss for him to get in there, but I'm happy that he's getting that opportunity."

When he was given the tough news in December, he'd been told not to book a vacation for the break just yet. But as the break got closer and closer, Jarvis wanted to ensure he could at least enjoy his rare 10-day sabbatical from the sport.

The ticket to Cabo San Lucas was booked, but now, that's a ticket that's going to go unused.

"Obviously, I love warm weather, but this is an absolutely great reason not to go," he gleefully said.

Instead of flip flops and sunshine, he'll look to continue the momentum built after eclipsing the 25-goal mark earlier this week.

"They told me to stay ready. You never want to see someone go down, especially Pointer, someone I model a lot of my game after and have a ton of respect for. He's someone who, at 4 Nations, I grew pretty close to and really enjoyed being around. It sucks that this is kind of the way it had to go, but now my job is to focus on helping the team any way I can, whether that's playing games, being a great teammate off the ice, or doing anything I can to contribute."

While it was always in Jarvis' plans to make his way to RDU on Friday, now, he'll be flying right back to New York, where a chartered plane will depart for Italy on Saturday.

"It's been a whirlwind. A lot of phone calls, a lot of questions," he continued. "I've reached out to a couple of guys asking what to pack, because I have no idea, figuring out flights and everything. I'll go home, throw some stuff in a suitcase, and head back here as soon as possible."

With warmer clothes in his bag and readiness to represent his country with pride, Winnipeg's very own won't just assuredly be making Canadians proud over the next few weeks, he'll be making Caniacs proud too.

"I knew I was in the running to be one of the guys up, and you never know what direction they're going to go. Obviously, I'm super happy it went my direction," he closed with. "I just can't wait to get over there and help contribute in any way that I can."

Recap: Canes Blank Blueshirts, Hit Break On A High

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

Carolina moves to 8-0-2 in its last 10 games



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NEW YORK - Backstopped by a 16-save Brandon Bussi shutout and spearheaded by goals from Andrei Svechnikov and Jordan Staal, the Carolina Hurricanes pushed their point streak to 10 games with a 2-0 win over the New York Rangers on Thursday.

The game's first goal proved to be the only one needed to win, as Svechnikov bagged the eventual dagger just 6:26 into the contest with a laser from the high slot. The first period was perhaps the most trying for the Canes, who navigated back-to-back penalties with the help of Bussi between the pipes.

The action from there was mostly one-sided as Carolina unloaded a barrage on Jonathan Quick, firing 33 of their 43 shots in the final two periods. The New York netminder withstood the storm, giving his team a chance to tie things up. But after Quick left the ice for an extra attacker, Nikolaj Ehlers found Staal alone in front of the net to seal Carolina's second shutout of the Rangers this season.

Bussi's shutout is the second of his career and marked his 23rd win of the season.

Stats & Standouts

Forward Andrei Svechnikov tallied his 21st goal of the season, reaching his highest goal total since 2022-23 (23) and surpassing Sebastian Aho (20) for the second-most behind Seth Jarvis (25) among Hurricanes skaters this season.

Forward Jordan Staal registered his first five-game point streak since the 2022-23 campaign, and has now scored in three straight games for the second time this season.

Goaltender Brandon Bussi has now won seven or more consecutive starts for the second time this season, joining his nine-game run to start the campaign. He's just the second goaltender in franchise history with multiple winning streaks of that length in a campaign, alongside Frederik Andersen in 2021-22 (8 GP & 7 GP).

The Hurricanes have now shut out the Rangers multiple times in a season for the first time in franchise history, following Pyotr Kochetkov's 25-save donut on Nov. 4.

Carolina's 44 shots are its third-most recorded in a game this season, trailing Nov. 9 @ TOR (47) and Nov. 19 @ MIN (45).

They Said It...

Rod Brind'Amour after yet another victory...

"I liked all of it. I liked it start to finish. I just thought we were pretty focused, especially with all of the distractions and this

big break. Everybody's excited for it. I thought we stuck with the game plan and didn't get flustered. I thought, for the most part, we were pretty in control of the game."

Brandon Bussi giving praise to the unit of skaters in front of him...

"That was about as good a 60 minutes as you could play. Just our willingness to put it on them, create O-zone time, win 50/50 battles, [that] made my job easy tonight."

Brandon Bussi on playing at Madison Square Garden for the first time as an NHLer, in front of over 40 friends and family...

"Very special. The sacrifice from the team tonight, I really appreciated it. It's special, for sure."

Rod Brind'Amour discussing a meaningful night for Brandon Bussi...

"That's the most important position. I'm happy for him, just in general. That was a special start to get, we knew that. We also knew he grew up idolizing the Rangers and Henrik, so that's pretty cool to do that here with his family and all that. It's a good story."

Seth Jarvis elaborating on what's been a special day for him...

"It's been a whirlwind. A lot of phone calls, a lot of questions. I've reached out to a couple of guys asking what to pack, because I have no idea, figuring out flights and everything. I'll go home, throw some stuff in a suitcase, and head back here as soon as possible."

Brandon Bussi putting a bow on the first "half" of the season and the team going into the break...

"It's been really good, but we can't get complacent, right? I think there are a lot of positives to bring going into the break. It's time to enjoy it a little bit, get some rest, but come back ready."

Rod Brind'Amour Postgame Quotes

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 Lenox Center.

Next Game: Thursday, Feb. 26 vs. Tampa | 7:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO | Tickets | Parking



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Team USA heads to Olympics with 'pretty incredible' group of defensemen

By: Bill Price

MILAN -- The confidence at the U.S. Olympic Orientation Camp in August was palpable, with players openly talking about how they expect to bring home a gold medal from the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026.

"I don't think we're dancing around it, either," Boston Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy said at the camp. "I think we're pretty comfortable talking about how it's our time.

"We have an expectation amongst our group here. All [the] guys that are here, everybody understands the message, which is we're going to win gold."

Part of that belief was born one year ago from the 4 Nations Face-Off, where the U.S. came within one goal of winning the best-on-best tournament. It was strengthened by a gold-medal performance at the IIHF World Championship last spring.

It also comes from amount of talent on the Team USA roster, especially the group of eight defensemen that some feel could be the best to ever play for the red, white and blue.

Just look at their resumes.

There's Quinn Hughes of the Minnesota Wild, who won the Norris Trophy as the best defenseman in the NHL for the 2023-24 season. His likely partner will be a rising star in Brock Faber, his teammate with the Wild.

Zach Werenski of the Columbus Blue Jackets is second among all NHL defensemen this season with 62 points (20 goals, 42 assists), trailing only Evan Bouchard of the Edmonton Oilers (63 points; 15 goals, 48 assists). He could be paired with McAvoy, the Bruins' top defenseman.

Jacob Slavin of the Carolina Hurricanes is considered by many as the best defensive defenseman in the NHL, and Noah Hanifin (Vegas Golden Knights) has had at least 35 points in a season four times.

Jake Sanderson (Ottawa Senators) and Jackson LaCombe (Anaheim Ducks) are up-and-coming stars in the League. Sanderson is 23 years old; LaCombe is 25.

Cale Makar, who will play for Team Canada, won the Norris Trophy with the Colorado Avalanche last season, but four of the eight U.S. defensemen on the Olympic roster finished in the top 10 in voting, with Werenski second, Hughes third,

Slavin eighth and Sanderson 10th. When Hughes won in 2023-24, McAvoy was 13th and Slavin 14th.

"It really is amazing," McAvoy said. "It just seems as though, through youth or college, American defensemen are churning out at a higher rate of players that are elite.

"You look up and down the majority of the teams in the NHL, and their [top] defensemen are U.S. defensemen."

The only differences from the seven defensemen who played for the U.S. at 4 Nations are Hughes, who was injured last season, and LaCombe, who is an injury replacement for Seth Jones of the Florida Panthers. Adam Fox of the New York Rangers played in the tournament but did not make the Olympic team. Fox won the Norris for the 2020-21 season.

"The depth that the U.S. has right now -- and we're confident group back there -- I feel like the whole team's a confident group," Werenski said this week. "And, yeah, I mean, it's hard to go back to some of the older teams and say this is the best group ever, but I do think it's probably the deepest pool to pick from that the U.S. has probably ever have or ever had."

Though Werenski wouldn't go as far to say this is the deepest group of all-time, considering past U.S. teams featured players like Hall of Famers Chris Chelios and Brian Leetch, he did say even being in the conversation says a lot.

"I definitely think it's a testament to how far USA hockey's come that people feel that way," Werenski said. "And I think if you do look at the defensemen that have made it, and the [defensemen] that probably just missed out, it's pretty incredible."

What makes this group so special is the versatility each player brings. Though Hughes and Werenski produce gaudy offensive numbers as defensemen, they are also elite in their own end.

And then there is Slavin, who can shut down the best of the best, freeing up his defense partner to go on the attack.

"When you look at our group, we're all long, rangy guys that skate really well," Sanderson said. "Obviously there's a lot of offense, but every single guy uses their feet and has great sticks to defend as well."

It's that variety that makes the U.S. group so dangerous.

"You just can't have six hammers in a toolbox," Slavin said Thursday. "You have to be able to have different tools. All of



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the defensemen there are great players all around, but some excel really well at certain things, so you need them to excel in those areas in a short tournament like this.”

Faber agreed.

“Yeah, 1 through 8, any guy can play any position at any time,” Faber said. “Whatever the pairs are, whoever is in the lineup, it’s a really deep, really skilled, really good skating [defense] corps, and that helps.”

“In tournaments like this, best-on-best, you need guys that can defend, make plays and skate with the best of them. I think we have that, and it’s exciting.”

Winnipeg Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck saw firsthand at 4 Nations just how strong this group is, backstopping the United States to the championship game against Canada. He is likely to be the No. 1 goalie for Team USA at the Olympics as well.

“It’s full reign of it off,” Hellebuyck said. “You’ve got your defensive defensemen, offensive defensemen, you’ve got puck-movers, you’ve got skaters and you’ve got guys that are doing it all.”

“So, it’s fun to be behind them, and honestly it makes my job a lot easier to play behind this player pool.”

What also helps the U.S. group is familiarity. U.S. general manager Bill Guerin, who also runs the Minnesota Wild, may have pulled off the trade of the season on Dec. 13 when he acquired Hughes from the Vancouver Canucks. Not only did it give the Wild a boost in the hunt for their first Stanley Cup championship, it also put Hughes and Faber on the ice together two months ahead of the Olympics.

“For sure, familiarity is important in an event like this,” Faber told NHL.com’s Mike Zeisberger last month. “I mean, when you’re playing with elite defensemen like the ones on (Team USA), it’s a pretty seamless transition no matter who you play with. But obviously, for me with Quinn, it’s pretty extra seamless.”

“We see a lot of minutes. We see a lot of time together, and it’s been great.”

LaCombe is in just his third full NHL season, but he’s had experience with some of his fellow defensemen, playing with Werenski at the World Championship last season.

“I think it’s huge,” LaCombe said. “We got an international taste there and we had a great group there and did a good job. It just gives us more experience and it’s going to help the three of us that were there.”

And then there’s 4 Nations, where all but Hughes and LaCombe competed. With just four days between arriving for the Olympics here on Sunday and playing their first game on Feb. 12 against Latvia (3 p.m. ET; Peacock, USA, CBC Gem, SN, CBC), any prior experience is key.

“You had a couple [different] guys, but I think just guys understanding the roles, how we have to play, kind of

understanding what guys are like away from the rink, in the room, a lot of that goes into it,” Werenski said. “When we got to the 4 Nations, there’s kind of a feeling-out process the first few days of understanding -- if it’s the power play, where guys like the puck, if it’s in the room -- different things guys do. It’s just a lot of different personalities that you haven’t been around before. And I feel like we got really close as that tournament went along.

“And I feel like it’s going to be the same way in a few days here, once we get to Milan and get back on the ice, get in the room, get in the village. I mean, we’re an extremely close group, and I feel like that’s an advantage.”

Though Hughes was injured and couldn’t play at 4 Nations, he knows many of his Olympic teammates through the U.S. National Team Development Program. Of the eight defensemen, all but LaCombe and Slavin are alums of the NTDP, the chief development program for 17- and 18-year-old U.S.-born players. Even though they all didn’t play on the same team, each went through the program at one point or another, which is another bond they share.

“I know Zach really well, I know Brock well,” Hughes said. “I know Sanderson decently well; I’ve trained with him in Michigan the last couple of summers. I know Charlie really well as well. I think it’s cool because we all went through the program together and you got to know these guys playing at World Juniors or that, or whatever it is. So, I know a lot of these guys pretty well.”

Werenski said the bonds originally formed through the program are important, but the time spent together at 4 Nations was tantamount. Like the Olympics, the players only had a few days to play together before the games began. They even traveled together from Montreal to Boston during the tournament.

“I mean, a lot of guys go back a long time with the Development Program, the World Juniors, previous World Championships,” Werenski said. “But in saying that, the 4 Nations was the first time we’re all on a team together, and it’s still figuring out the dynamic. And I feel like we kind of figured that out. I’m sure there’ll be stuff along the way here at the way here at the Olympics that you have to figure out, but I definitely feel like we have a leg up.”

Slavin said that feeling of togetherness and camaraderie plays a key role on the ice and in the dressing room too.

“Any time you build relationships off the ice, you care about guys more on the ice,” Slavin said, “and that’s what makes good teams is you have those relationships and you have the care for each other.”

“When you care for guys off the ice, you’ll care more about them on the ice.”

It could be a formula that proves to be gold

Denmark roster for 2026 Winter Olympics includes Eller, Ehlers

By: NHL.com

Denmark unveiled its roster for the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 on Jan. 7, headlined by Ottawa Senators



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forward Lars Eller and Carolina Hurricanes forward Nikolaj Ehlers.

This is just Denmark's second time participating in the Olympics in men's hockey. It finished seventh at the 2022 Beijing Olympics.

"It's cool to see who made it," Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen said. "I see a lot of guys in Denmark who have been part of the national team for a few years, so it's exciting to see who gets to go and who gets the experience with us. We're not a lot of us over here (in the NHL), so it's cool to be able to share that experience.

"Obviously, it's been a longer road for Denmark to be part of it. We cherish the opportunity to be a part of it."

Ehlers said he's excited to share the experience with Andersen.

"I've never had a Danish teammate over here, so that's been really nice and really fun, especially coming to a new place for me. We've tried to get to the Olympics for 10 years now, him and I, and now it finally works, so that's going to be pretty special."

"It's a proud moment. It's going to be a lot of fun."

The tournament will feature all 12 teams playing three preliminary games in their respective groups.

"It's going to be a new experience," Eller said. "I've played a lot of NHL over the years and played a handful or so of world championships, but I've never really played on a national team, best on best, so it's going to be cool to check that off, cross that off the list as things you've been a part of and hopefully we can be competitive and make some waves.

"For me, I haven't always had the chance to go to world championships, so the ones, the chances you do have, they're special and I think all of them I've been a part of, they're very memorable, every single one. You remember each tournament, the camaraderie, some of the downs, but certainly a lot of the mostly ups and good experience winning together and the joy, a lot of those, at least a handful of guys, are guys I grew up playing with on junior national teams and had played world championships with, so there's a lot of past experiences that makes it special going with a national team group with a lot of familiar faces."

The three group winners and the best second-place team will get a bye into the quarterfinals; the other eight teams will play single-elimination games to determine the other four quarterfinalists. The gold medal game will be held on Feb. 22.

Team Denmark, which is in Group C, will open against Team Germany on Feb. 12, then play Team USA on Feb. 14 and Team Latvia on Feb. 15.

"It's such a close group," Senators goalie Mads Sogaard said. "I mean, we're definitely one of the smaller countries and underdogs, so I think over the last couple of years, the national

team from Denmark has just kind of taken on that ... underdog role and just kind of just trust the process, do everything we can and battle as hard as we can, and I think if we do that, then good things will happen. ... very, very excited and thankful and proud to get that call to represent my home country."

Here is the Team Denmark roster for the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 (in alphabetical order):

FORWARDS (14)

Mikkal Aagaard, Skelleftea

Mathias Bau, Herning

Oliver Bjorkstrand, Tampa Bay Lightning

Joachim Blichfeld, Tappara

Nikolaj Ehlers, Carolina Hurricanes

Lars Eller, Ottawa Senators

Nicklas Jensen, Rapperswil-Jona

Oscar Fisker Molgaard, Coachella Valley

Nick Olesen, Motor Ceske

Morten Poulsen, Herning

Patrick Russell, Kolner Haie

Frederik Storm, Kolner Haie

Alexander True, JYP Jyvaskyla

Christian Wejse, Bremerhaven

DEFENSEMEN (8)

Jesper Jensen Aabo, Klagenfurt

Phillip Bruggisser, Bremerhaven

Nicholas B Jensen, Bremerhaven

Anders Koch, Graz 99

Matias Lassen, Iserlohn

Markus Lauridsen, Pustertal

Oliver Lauridsen, TPS Turku

Malte Setkov, Rodovre*

*Named as replacement for injured forward Jonas Røndbjerg on Feb. 8

GOALIES (3)

Frederik Andersen, Carolina Hurricanes

Frederik Dichow, HV71

Mads Sogaard, Ottawa Senators

Slavin embraces unsung defensive role for Team USA at Olympics

By: Bill Price

Hurricanes veteran 'an all-world player' to peers entering tournament



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 9, 2026

NEW YORK -- The Team USA roster for the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 will be loaded with superstars, players who put up huge numbers on the ice and are well-known off it.

From elite goal-scorers like Auston Matthews, to emotional leaders like Matthew Tkachuk and Brady Tkachuk, to dynamic players like Jack Hughes and Quinn Hughes, and a stellar goalie like Connor Hellebuyck, the U.S. is chock full of A-list players.

But perhaps one of the most important players on the team is defenseman Jaccob Slavin, who, despite his superb defensive play, has somewhat slipped under the radar and is a household name in his home market only.

This is what the Carolina Hurricanes defenseman said at the U.S. Olympic Men's Hockey Orientation Camp in August:

"My game is not flashy, right?" Slavin said. "So going under the radar is something that doesn't bother me at all, and I'm not looking for the recognition. It is what it is, but I just think it comes with my style of play. But it doesn't bother me. It's not what I find my confidence in, or my identity, and it's OK."

This is what he said Thursday at Madison Square Garden before the Hurricanes' final game before the Olympic break, a 2-0 win at the New York Rangers:

"That hasn't changed. Still just going in with [the] mindset of ... whatever you have to do, whatever role you have to play, even if it's not the role you played on your NHL team, you're going to go and you're going to do it with a with a lot of joy and a smile on your face, because you know you're playing for your country, and it's just a special tournament."

And that mindset is just fine with the United States.

Though the defenseman corps has players who put up big offensive numbers, like Quinn Hughes of the Minnesota Wild and Zach Werenski of the Columbus Blue Jackets, Slavin is the prototypical defensive defenseman, letting others get the glory and points while he shuts down opponents.

"People talk about certain MVP players for what they do for their teams. That's what he does for our team," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "That's the kind of impact he has for our group, and that's what Team USA is getting. One of the better defensive-minded [players], but really a defender. I don't like to call him defensive-minded because he can do everything in the game, so good on them."

K'Andre Miller, who played against Slavin the previous five seasons with the Rangers before being traded to the Hurricanes this past offseason, said he has a whole new appreciation for his fellow defenseman.

"You hear about how good he is defensively, but I really didn't get to appreciate it from an opponent's standpoint," Miller said. "Being on the same side now, getting to see the work he puts in daily and just the type of player he is, it's not surprising how good he is."

"He holds the team accountable and pushes us in the right direction."

It's not been an easy season for Slavin. The 31-year-old sustained a lower-body injury in the second game of the season on Oct. 11 and was out until Dec. 14. He played three games before sustaining another lower-body injury on Dec.

19. Slavin returned to the lineup on Jan. 10 and played the final 12 games before the break.

On Thursday, he said he's "feeling good, feeling fresh," heading to the Olympics, and that's a huge boost for the U.S. because of what he can do and what he can stop the other team from doing.

"He brings a calm confidence," said Wild defenseman Brock Faber, who will also play for the U.S. "When he's out on the ice, it just feels like everything is going to be OK. In my opinion, he's the best defensive defenseman in the League and I think he should get a lot more recognition for what he brings to the table night in and night out."

Since being selected by the Hurricanes in the fourth round (No. 120) of the 2012 Draft, Slavin has 302 points (55 goals, 247 assists) in 762 games. The points don't tell the story. For his career, which began in the 2015-16 season, he is plus-176, which is eighth in the NHL and second among U.S.-born players in that time frame, behind Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Ryan McDonagh (plus-204). Since the start of the 2019-20 season, he's plus-151, which is fifth best in the NHL and first among U.S.-born players.

Over Slavin's 11 seasons, the Hurricanes have allowed an average of 2.70 goals per game, which is second best behind the Boston Bruins (2.65).

"Defensively, he's an all-world player," said Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy, another U.S. teammate. "He's extremely elite defensively."

"We play the game in a time where points are king, offensive (hockey) is king. No one shows up to watch a 1-0 game, but that might be the game Jaccob Slavin helps his team get a shutout."

How much is Slavin respected among his fellow U.S. defensemen? Jake Sanderson of the Ottawa Senators, who is on the Olympic team and played with Slavin at the 4 Nations Face-Off, said at the orientation camp that though the Norris Trophy usually goes to the best offensive defenseman in the NHL, there should be an award for the best defensive defenseman and it should be named after Slavin.

"Guys around the League know he's probably the best defensive D-man in the League," Sanderson said. "He skates so well, he's so strong, his details. I think firsthand at 4 Nations, I saw how good his stick is. Not just with poke checks, but knocking down pucks, which is a huge skill to have, too. It was pretty cool to see him play."

Slavin said his game wasn't always this way. With Chicago of the United States Hockey League, he had back-to-back seasons with at least 30 points (2011-12 and 2012-13). For Colorado College in 2013-14, he had 25 points (five goals, 20 assists) in 32 games.

"In college, I was running our first power play and everything, even my first couple of years in the NHL I was running the power play," Slavin said. "But I take a lot of pride in the defensive game and honestly, I don't like to get scored on."

"And just understanding what my role is on the team in Carolina, and especially in a tournament like the 4 Nations Face-Off, what my role is and what I'm expected to do."



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It was at the 4 Nations Face-Off last February when Slavin started to get some attention on the national and international level.

Playing on a pair with McAvoy and at times with Faber, and going against the likes of Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon and Sidney Crosby of Canada, William Nylander and Filip Forsberg of Sweden, and Sebastian Aho and Mikko Rantanen of Finland, Slavin helped lead a defense that allowed just seven goals in four games.

"Everyone within the game knows how good he is and how hard he is to play against," Faber said. "I guess the average fan that watches the game maybe wouldn't notice him or see him on the score sheet. That's maybe why he's a little

underrated. But within each team, each organization, we know how important he is."

Just ask Aho, who is his teammate with Carolina but could be going up against him if Team Finland and Team USA face off in Milan.

"He's just so solid, so defensively strong," Aho said. "You know, strong stick, good skater, plays the game the right way for us and I'm sure he'll be good for Team USA.

"You kind of saw it in the 4 Nations, his game, what it's about and obviously a great player."

NHL.com staff writer Derek Van Diest and deputy managing editor Adam Kimelman contributed to this report



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Canes extend point streak in 2-0 win over Rangers

By: Liela Hafshejani

Goalie Brandon Bussi keeps an eye on the puck before blocking an attempted goal during the game versus the Ottawa Senators at the Lenovo Center on Tuesday, Feb. 3rd, 2026. Bussi had twenty-two saves. The Canes beat the Senators 4-3.

Goalie Brandon Bussi keeps an eye on the puck before blocking an attempted goal during the game versus the Ottawa Senators at the Lenovo Center on Tuesday, Feb. 3rd, 2026. Bussi had twenty-two saves. The Canes beat the Senators 4-3.

Extending their point streak to 10 games, the Carolina Hurricanes breezed by the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Thursday night, ending on a high note before the Olympic break.

Playing away from home, the Canes (36-15-6) skated away with a 2-0 win against the Rangers (22-29-6), with the same faces we've seen all season making the difference. Right wing Andrei Svechnikov put the Canes up early in the first, and breakout goaltender Brandon Bussi maintained the Canes' lead, before an empty netter from center Jordan Staal iced the game.

Starting off quick, Svechnikov acquired a loose puck at mid-ice and skated towards the opposing side, firing a snap shot to the back of the Rangers' net.

Bouncing back from a mediocre start to the season, Svechnikov has now scored the second-most goals for

Carolina, trailing four behind center Seth Jarvis, and one in front of center Sebastian Aho.

Mimicking the latter half of the first period, the second period remained goalless. Though the Rangers put up four shots against Bussi, Carolina's efforts towards the net dwarfed the Rangers with their 19 shots on goal. By the end of the game, Carolina would have 43 shots, compared to just 16 for New York.

With an empty net in the final period and in desperation mode, the Rangers made one last push. But Staal — with assists from right wing Jackson Blake and left wing Nikolaj Ehlers — scored for Carolina to put the game away with less than a minute to go.

From free agent to NHL record breaker, Bussi has made a name for himself in his first season with the Canes. Since the season's start, Bussi first broke the record for the fastest to 10 wins, doing so in just 11 games. Later, he broke the record for the fastest to win 20 games, securing the win in 20 of his first 24 starts.

Having played the most games of all the goaltenders on Carolina's roster with 27, his statistics continue to impress, winning 23 and slowly inching towards his next record. He ended the night by keeping all 16 shots out of the net.

The Hurricanes will take a three-week break as many NHL players are representing their country in Milan, Italy for the 2026 Winter Olympics. Carolina will return to action on Feb. 26 to face the Tampa Bay Lightning at home. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m.



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The Hockey News

Brandon Bussi Earns Shutout In Front Of Friends, Family And Childhood Idol

By: Ryan Henkel

Carolina's record-breaking goalie faced his childhood team, got to meet his childhood idol and delivered a shutout for a packed house of loved ones.

The 2025-26 season has been the year of Brandon Bussi.

The first year NHLer has broken records and set milestones at a breakneck pace as he's helped keep Carolina amongst the top of the league.

Last Thursday, Bussi added to his accolades as he picked up his second career shutout in a 2-0 win over the New York Rangers.

It was Bussi's second career game against his childhood team, but the first at MSG and the Sound Beach native had quite the contingency in town to see him play.

"Started with 40, might have made its way up to 50 or 60, I don't know," Bussi said on the amount of people he had at the game.

It was the first time Bussi has been able to play near home since coming to Carolina and he got to relish in the opportunity to reconnect with his friends and family in New York.

But not only that, the 27 year old netminder also got the chance to connect with a very special person as well.

Growing up in New York, Bussi was a fan of the New York Rangers, but specifically, his favorite player was Henrik Lundqvist, one of the league's all-time greatest netminders.

"Henrik Lundqvist was my guy," Bussi said. "I was a Rangers fan growing up and so my prime years of growing up, he was the king of New York."

And as fate would have it, the Rangers were hosting a celebration specifically for their netminders as part of their centennial year celebrations and in attendance was Lundqvist.

So after the game, the two got the chance to connect once again.

This is not the first time the two have gotten the chance to chat, as Lundqvist did interview Bussi following a game in January as part of the TNT panel.

"I don't think this is a fluke," Lundqvist had said of Bussi at the time.

But this was the first time they really got the chance to connect in person.

What a moment and what a season for Bussi.

"That was a special start to get and we knew that," said Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour. "Also knew that he grew up idolizing that Rangers and Henrik [Lundqvist] so that's pretty cool to do that here with his family and all that. It's a good story."

From Naptime To Prime Time: How One Phone Call Changed Everything For Newly Olympic Bound Seth Jarvis

By: Ryan Henkel

A crucial phone call interrupted his nap, transforming Seth Jarvis's plans and transforming him into an Olympian.

Seth Jarvis in an Olympian

Anyone who knows Seth Jarvis knows just how important naps are to him.

The Carolina Hurricanes' 24-year-old star has long harped on the value of his midday recovery ritual and with Thursday being a game day — Carolina was set to take on the New York Rangers for their final game before the Olympic break — he was well into the middle of one.

But something lulled him from his deep slumber that afternoon.

His phone came alive, vibrating methodically, and his screen illuminated his Manhattan hotel room. A call was coming through.

However, Jarvis ignored it. Who'd be trying to reach him right now anyway, he thought.

After a bit, it stopped.

Then it rang again.

That's when Jarvis found out it wasn't just some spam caller. It was Team Canada general manager Doug Armstrong calling to let him know that he was officially an Olympian.

"I picked up the second one, thankfully," Jarvis said. "I can't even explain it. It was incredible. Super honored."

Jarvis, who was left off of the initial roster despite winning gold with Team Canada at the 4 Nations Face-Off a year earlier, became the second injury replacement for the Canadians,



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replacing Tampa Bay Lightning forward Brayden Point, who suffered a knee injury on Jan. 12.

"Obviously you never want to see somebody go down, especially Pointer, someone I model a lot of my game after, someone I have a ton of respect for and someone at 4 Nations I grew pretty close to and really enjoyed being around," Jarvis said. "It sucks that this is kind of the way it had to go, but now my job is to focus on helping the team in any way I can, whether that's playing games, just being a great teammate off the ice or just doing whatever I can to contribute."

The opportunity certainly adds to the sheer scope of the emotional range Jarvis has gone through throughout the whole process.

When he was initially snubbed, Jarvis took the news hard. He was one of just three skaters from the previous 4 Nations team to not receive an Olympic invitation.

But he took the high road and moved on from the disappointment.

"Sometimes you gotta eat a shit sandwich," Jarvis said back on Jan. 1. "You chew on it for a little bit and it doesn't taste too good, but you move on. This sucks and it's definitely a big blow and something I obviously really worked for and really wanted to achieve, but there's nothing you can do about it now. I gave myself a couple of days to take it in, feel emotions and now it's just moving past and getting ready for the rest of the season."

He was asked again about the Olympics actually earlier this week too. If his recent strong play could be a late showcase for the Team Canada brass, to which he responded, "I think I blew that opportunity already. I think that part's done."

Funny how life works out sometimes.

The Hurricanes star forward brings a lot to the table for the Canadians.

Jarvis is one of the best two-way wingers in hockey, who combines a relentless motor, with a high hockey IQ, speed and skill.

His 25 goals lead Carolina in scoring and with 43 points in 48 games as well, he can do almost anything on the offensive side of the puck.

But, as previously stated, he's tremendous defensively too, able to play a bottom-six grinding role, kill penalties and capitalize on opponents' mistakes.

Jarvis is a versatile player, who can fill in on any spot Canada may need him to play, and when you add in an already existing

familiarity with the team and the systems from having played at 4 Nations, you can see why he was selected.

"It is nice to know the guys and have a familiarity with the systems and stuff like that," Jarvis said. "Having a little bit of an idea of what's going on. It definitely makes it a little bit easier, having a relationship with a lot of those guys already, so it's not quite as intimidating as it was at 4 Nations, but just excited to get around all the guys and head over there."

But getting over there will be bit of a battle of its own.

You see, Jarvis had already made plans to fly out to Cabo on Friday for a few weeks relaxing in the sun. Safe to say, that's not happening any more.

"Obviously love warm weather, but this is absolutely a great reason not to go," Jarvis said.

He'll hope to get some money back on a few refunds, but on top of that, he now has to fly back to Raleigh, pack for two weeks of hockey, then fly back to New York to catch Team Canada's charter flight to Italy on Saturday.

"It's been a whirlwind," Jarvis said. "There's been a lot of phone calls, a lot of questions I've had. I've reached out to a couple of guys, just basically on what to pack because I have no idea what's going on. Hopefully figuring out flights and everything, but yeah. I guess just go home, throw some stuff in a suitcase and head back here as soon as possible."

But he couldn't care less about that hassle.

To be an Olympian, to live out a life long dream of representing his country on the world's biggest stage, playing alongside legendary players who he grew up watching, idolizing, is all he could have ever asked for.

He was just eight years old when he saw Sidney Crosby, the player whose poster still adorns to door to his childhood bedroom in Winnipeg, score the Golden Goal.

Now he's teammates with him, aiming to win yet another gold medal for Canada.

To Jarvis, all of the struggles, the pain, the sacrifices. Everything he's been through over the years, it was all worth it for this opportunity.

"To be able to play at the highest level on a stage like this is everyone's dream," Jarvis said, his voice cracking as he fought through the emotions of the moment. "To be able to do it with my family too is going to be fun."

'There Was A Lot Of Distractions To Say The Least': Seth Jarvis, Brandon Bussi, Rod Brind'Amour On Milestone Moments, Win In New York

By: Ryan Henkel

Jarvis' Olympic nod, Bussi's shutout and homecoming, and Brind'Amour's insight after a crucial win over the Rangers.

The Carolina Hurricanes closed out their final game before the Olympic break with a 2-0 win over the New York Rangers.

Brandon Bussi made 16 saves for the shutout and Andrei Svechnikov and Jordan Staal (ENG) scored the lone goals.

After the game, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour along with Bussi and Seth Jarvis spoke with the media in New York. Here's what they had to say:

Rod Brind'Amour



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On the game: I liked all of it. I liked it from start to finish. I just thought we were pretty focused, especially with all the distractions with this big break that everybody is excited for. So I thought we stuck with the game plan and didn't get flustered. I thought we were, for the most part, in control of the game.

On Seth Jarvis' Olympic nod: I'm just happy for him. It's the toughest team to make in the world, that and the U.S. team. You could pick a lot of good players that get left off. It was no snub that he didn't initially, it's just that there's so many good players. Hate that other guys are going to miss for him to get in there, but I'm happy that he's getting that opportunity.

On Brandon Bussi getting the win in front of family and against his childhood team: That's the most important position and I'm happy for him just in general. That was a special start to get and we knew that. Also knew that he grew up idolizing that Rangers and Henrik [Lundqvist] so that's pretty cool to do that here with his family and all that. It's a good story.

On Brandon Bussi's importance: It's been huge for us, obviously. Really, it's just quality starts and that's the key. Just giving us a chance. We're playing well, we're not, he just every night gives us an opportunity to win and that's all you can ask.

On the long break coming right when the team is starting to roll: It's going to be interesting to see how we come out of it because it's hard to practice when you don't have half of your guys. So all of that is a little bit uncharted territory, but I think we've pushed pretty hard. We ask a lot. So they need this little break and hopefully it'll give us a little juice for the last push.

Brandon Bussi

On the game: Just a great 60 minutes by the guys in front of me. They made my job really easy.

On how he views his performance this season: Just giving my team a shot to win. We've been playing good hockey and if we continue that, I just have to make the saves when they matter.

On the team's performance: I thought we were creating a lot of zone time and a lot of chances. Credit to their goalie, he played great and kept it really close there. The Rangers had a little bit of a push in the third, but we did really well to handle it. It's a good win.

On how much he had to spend on tickets for tonight: A little bit. My family helped me out with a lot of it, but yeah, you know.

On the reception for him in the locker room: I think we're just fired up for everyone. We have a really good group in here and obviously a lot of excitement for me, for the guys going to the Olympics. It's a big accomplishment and I'm really pulling for all of them. Maybe Slavo a little more though.

On how many friends and family he had in the building: Started with 40, might have made its way up to 50 or 60, I don't know. We'll see when I get out there.

On if he starts to think about the shutout as the game goes on: I'm trying not to think about it at all. I'm not even looking at the clock. I want it to keep running as fast as it can. But, again, in late game scenarios, our team is really good at tightening up, making it hard for them to get in the zone and then getting some offensive zone ourselves. Great win for us.

Seth Jarvis

On the game: I think our defense played well, obviously Bus had a shutout and I think just being able to stay focused as a group knowing that there's still a job at hand and one game left and wanting to go out on a high note and I think that's what happened tonight.

On staying focused on the game even though he had found out he made Team Canada right before puck drop: There was a lot of distractions to say the least, but I mean, as soon as I stepped foot in here, everything goes away. This is kind of its own little world and that's what I love about hockey. As soon as you're in the rink, nothing else matters. At that point, coming to the rink, I was a little nervous on what was going to happen and how I was going to feel, but as soon as I stepped back in here, it was just kind of regular schedule and just getting ready for the games.

On what the few hours before puck drop were like: It's been a whirlwind. There's been a lot of phone calls, a lot of questions I've had. I've reached out to a couple of guys, just basically on what to pack because I have no idea what's going on. Hopefully figuring out flights and everything, but yeah. I guess just go home, throw some stuff in a suitcase and head back here as soon as possible.

On what his plans for the break had been: Going to Cabo. Obviously love warm weather, but this is absolutely a great reason not to go.

On if he's ever been to Italy: Nope. First time, so it'll be fun to go over there and especially in a situation like this. It's incredible.

On having familiarity with the group from 4 Nations: It is nice to know the guys and have a familiarity with maybe the systems and stuff like that. Having a little bit of an idea of what's going on. It definitely makes it a little bit easier, having a relationship with a lot of those guys already, so it's not quite as intimidating as it was at 4 Nations, but just excited to get around all the guys and head over there.

On the call: I was sleeping. I was in my pregame nap and Doug Armstrong called me. Great reason to interrupt my nap, I take those pretty seriously, but for that reason, more than happy to wake up. He just broke the news to me, I probably sounded a little groggy, wasn't quite sure what was going on yet, but as soon as I heard those words, just so much excitement.

On if he had held out hope at all: They had told me to stay ready. Obviously you never want to see somebody go down, especially Pointer, someone I model a lot of my game after, someone I have a ton of respect for and someone at 4 Nations I grew pretty close to and really enjoyed being around. It sucks that this is kind of the way it had to go, but now my job is to focus on helping the team in any way I can, whether that's playing games, just being a great teammate off the ice or doing whatever I can to contribute.

On if he felt that he had a good chance of being the next in-line replacement: Obviously I knew I was in the running to be one of the guys up and you never know what direction they're going to go. Obviously super happy that it went my direction and again, just can't wait to get over there and help contribute any way I can.

On where he was for the Sidney Crosby Golden Goal: I was at a friend's birthday party in Winnipeg. I vividly remember that



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and running around his basement as a like 12, no, 8 year old does.

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SportScan

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

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The Athletic / How Canada's Olympic men's hockey initial practice lines showcase planned identity

By Arpon Basu

MILAN — About an hour before the Canadian men's hockey team stepped on the ice for their first practice Sunday, the players entered the locker room and saw their line assignments for the first time.

Macklin Celebrini is 19, playing his second NHL season. Tom Wilson hoped all season to simply make Team Canada. Neither were on the team at the 4 Nations Face-Off a year ago.

When they looked at that board in the room, Celebrini and Wilson were wingers on Canada's top line, flanking Connor McDavid, the best player in the world.

In many ways, the composition of that line says a lot about how head coach Jon Cooper and his staff organized Canada's forwards for this first practice, which began roughly eight hours after they touched down in Italy on Sunday morning.

Though the Team Canada management group put a lot of stock in how players performed at the 4 Nations, it is telling that Cooper took two players who didn't play in that tournament and put them on his first line. He made a cold evaluation of his group and chose the two players he felt would complement McDavid the best.

McDavid plays with Zach Hyman on the Edmonton Oilers, a dogged forechecker who works the walls and the front of the net so McDavid can work his magic.

Enter Wilson.

"That's obviously, I think, the hope: someone that can go in and forecheck some pucks back and be good along the wall and get to the net and bang a few home," McDavid said. "That's what he does really well."

Cooper thinks Wilson does that more than "really well."

"Listen, everybody needs an F1," Cooper said, referring to the lead forechecking forward. "And that big boy there is one of the best I've seen, I'll be honest."

Wilson was put on this team, and on that line, to play a specific role. And he understands that perfectly well.

"Connor's one of those guys, you get him the puck, and he makes a lot of stuff happen," Wilson said. "It's obviously a quick sample size, but get the puck in their hands and good things will happen."



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As for Celebrini, the youngest player on the team, his skill and cerebral 200-foot game should, in theory, mesh well with McDavid. Because, as Cooper explained, he is objectively one of the best players in the world right now, even if he is 19.

Brayden Point likely would have been on this line playing the wing with McDavid, as he was in the 4 Nations championship game, had he not been forced to pull out of the Olympics with a knee injury. Point is a veteran of nearly 700 NHL games who was a complementary skill element on that line.

He is seemingly being replaced by a player who barely has to shave.

"Listen, he may be 19 years old, like his physical body is, but his acumen for the game is not," Cooper said. "He's wise beyond his years. And so I can't sit here and look at him as this kid. I've been with him. I was with him at (the World Championships) and followed his path closely. And speaking with the players, this kid is wise being beyond his years.

"Now, this is the first practice on the first day of the tournament, but if he's shown anything to all of us in his NHL year, he's a pretty special player. And I don't do any award voting and stuff like that, but there sure seems to be a lot of people on your side of the fence there saying this kid might be up for some big-time awards. So take his age out. He's a hell of a hockey player."

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Behind the viral Canada fleece from 'Heated Rivalry' — even Olympians want it

From members of Parliament to Olympians in Milan, a Canada fleece jacket has become the hottest clothing item among fans of the show.

Everyone on Team Canada is a hell of a hockey player, and Cooper will have several decisions to make as things evolve over the next two weeks. But what is clear from how Cooper started things off is that he is favoring balance up front, with McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon and Sidney Crosby centering the top three lines. Teams with a designated checking line will lose sleep deciding which line to deploy it against.

And the reason for that balance up front can be summarized with one word: pace. To maintain the pace necessary to win this tournament, minutes and energy will need to be meticulously managed.

"The pace and speed of the game at 4 Nations — I'm telling you, if a player plays 23 minutes in the NHL game, that's akin to playing 16 at 4 Nations," Cooper said. "The pace was so high. You need all four lines. This isn't one where, hey, listen, we're going to play our top two lines and roll with it. You can't do that here. If I think the pace is going to be anything like what it was at 4 Nations, and I'm pretty darn sure it's going to be that and then some, then you need everybody going. So for me, the balance, all these players are the best of the best. So to me, we've got four elite lines."

Facing Canada will be a grind, and that is another byproduct of the decision Cooper made to play Celebrini and Wilson with McDavid. That allows Mitch Marner and Mark Stone to play with Crosby and for Brad Marchand and Nick Suzuki to flank MacKinnon, and leaves Cooper with a fourth line of Brandon Hagel, Bo Horvat and Sam Reinhart, which is objectively elite.

But any combination of those 12 forwards — not to mention Sam Bennett and Seth Jarvis, who appeared to be extras at practice — would be elite.

Elite is the bar at this tournament. It is the coaching staff capable of taking all the elite talent on his roster and clearing that bar the highest that will get the edge. And the way to clear that bar is finding the right combinations, the best complementary skill sets, the best chemistry mix.

Canada's coaching staff has spent weeks coming up with these combinations. They were debated and they were stress-tested, and this is where they landed.

And the conclusion based on this first taste of what they came up with: Canada will come at you in waves. They will grind you down with pace and skill. Good luck keeping up with that.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.09.2026

1224081 Websites

The Athletic / What we saw as Team USA took the ice for first men's Olympic hockey practice

By Michael Russo

MILAN — After arriving on their Delta charter Sunday morning from JFK, the United States men's hockey team took the ice for practice for the first time Sunday night at Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena.

The arena looked great, although the ice remains a work in progress. Some players said it was "soft," and coach Mike Sullivan said it was pretty chewed up after the U.S. followed a day's worth of practices from other countries.

But the men's tournament doesn't start until Thursday, so the ice will have plenty of time to settle.

"Obviously, a lot of us just got off the plane this morning, so the main objective was just to try to move the blood out there, get them a sweat, get them some exercise, get their heart rates up a little bit," Sullivan said. "Hopefully they'll sleep better, they'll feel better and we try to get on the same time zone and circadian rhythm, start to normalize."

Sullivan said forward lines and defense pairs remain a work in progress, but it did look like the top two lines have started to take shape with Jack Eichel centering Brady and Matthew Tkachuk and captain Matthews centering Jake Guentzel and Matt Boldy, the young Minnesota Wild star who leads these American Olympians with 32 goals.

"There's a lot of scoring talent on that line, so it'd be pretty special if I play with them," Boldy said. "We'll see what happens. Like I've said, you can't really go wrong with who you play with here. Everyone's so good and talented, but if that's my spot, that's great. If not, you find chemistry with other guys and you try to be successful."

On the back end, Sullivan did initially reunite Jacob Slavin with his 4 Nations Face-Off defense partner, Brock Faber, despite the fact Faber and Quinn Hughes have been exceptional playing together since Hughes was traded to Minnesota. Hughes skated with Charlie McAvoy, while Zach Werenski was with Noah Hanifin and Jake Sanderson was with Jackson Lacombe.

"You know what, for me, it's such a deep defensive corps that I'm happy to play with anyone," Faber said. "They're all such good players. I'm definitely happy to play with whoever. (Slavin) saved my butt a few times (at 4 Nations). He's definitely a tremendous defensive partner."

Similarly, Hughes said he doesn't care whom he plays with.

As expected, Auston Matthews, seen here talking with coach Mike Sullivan, was named Team USA's captain on Sunday. (Gregory Shamus / Jpg

"Brock's an elite player, and if I play with him, great. If I play someone else, great, we have a bunch of elite guys."

As for the bottom two lines, Sullivan mixed and matched Tage Thompson, Vincent Trocheck, J.T. Miller, Brock Nelson, Clayton Keller, Kyle Connor, Jack Hughes and Dylan Larkin. Remember, too, unlike the



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NHL where teams can dress a maximum 18 skaters, in the Olympics, teams can dress 20.

"We have a little bit of time," Sullivan said. "We have an idea of what we want to start with, and that will start to unfold here over the next couple of days. Just like our defense group, one of the things we love about our roster is just the versatility. We have a lot of centermen that can play the wing. We can move guys around the lineup depending on how we think lines are performing or players are performing — things of that nature."

Sullivan did indicate the Tkachuks will be together.

"They were terrific at the 4 Nations event," Sullivan said. "In a lot of ways they were, I think, the catalyst for helping us become the team that we had sought to become in that tournament in such a short period of time."

McAvoy's jaw swollen, but not refractured

McAvoy, who broke his jaw earlier this season, wore a fish bowl during Sunday's practice to protect a jaw that has been swollen again, courtesy of a shot to the face from the Florida Panthers' Sandis Vilmanis last week.

Fortunately, McAvoy's jaw was not fractured again. But he is very sore.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Charlie McAvoy's Olympic diary: On the opening ceremony, his jaw and, yes, his tweet

From dealing with a swollen face to preparing for Thursday's game, McAvoy chronicles his time with Team USA for The Athletic.

"We're very relieved, and it was concerning to watch," said Sullivan, who happens to be McAvoy's father-in-law. "Charlie plays the game so hard. He's a fierce competitor, and he puts himself in harm's way all the time for the sake of his team. And I think that speaks volumes for how competitive he is and just the courage that he plays the game with. He's an elite defenseman, and he's willing to do whatever it takes to win and I think that's why he endures what he endures. He's a physical player himself, but he takes hits to make plays a lot and he does it undeterred. For me, if you want to define toughness, it's not just about what you dish out. It's your willingness to take hits to make plays also, and I think Charlie checks both of those boxes."

Jack Hughes practices

Jack Hughes, who missed the final three games with the New Jersey Devils before the break with a lower-body injury, was a full participant in Sunday's practice.

Sullivan said he won't be limited in practice this week.

"I feel good," Hughes said. "The body feels in a good spot."

Hughes has gotten criticism for missing time with the Devils but being available to play for the U.S. at the Olympics.

"Injuries are tough," his brother Quinn said. "And obviously the one with the hand (earlier this season) was a freak one and he just wanted to be healthy and wanted to be at his best. And he loves the game. No one hates missing games more than him."

Quinn Hughes is excited to be healthy after missing the 4 Nations last year.

"I would feel bad for anyone that missed the Olympics, just because, I mean, 4 Nations is one thing, but the Olympics is the Olympics," he said. "It was frustrating for me to miss it last year. And I think I would know what that felt like a little bit. But for me, I'm just thankful to be here this year and have more gratitude, if anything."

Back to college

Hughes will be rooming in the Olympic village with his older brother, Quinn, while Brady and Matthew Tkachuk will be roomies and are right across the hall from the Hugheses, who "are like family to us," Matthew Tkachuk said. "We've got a good little wing in our area. So it's pretty much hanging out with them 24/7."

"I think they probably push their beds together," Eichel cracked about the Tkachuk brothers.

Matthew Tkachuk has already named their room "Club Tkachuk."

Even though living in a hotel is an option for NHLers, Brady Tkachuk said the Americans have decided to stay in the athletes' village so they can get the full Olympic experience.

"I'm not going to say I hate the posh hotels; they're pretty nice, those ones that you go around North America and stay in," Eichel said. "But, listen, it's a really cool experience. It brings me back to what it's like in college. You got a roommate who's two feet away from you in the same room and you're in a small little dorm, but I think it just brings the guys together."

Odds and ends

As expected, Auston Matthews was named captain with Matthew Tkachuk and McAvoy wearing the "A's."

Sullivan predicts the Patriots will win the Super Bowl: "You can take the guy out of Boston, but you can't take the Boston out of the guy."

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1224082 Websites

The Athletic / Charlie McAvoy's Olympic diary: On the opening ceremony, his jaw and, yes, his tweet

By Michael Russo

Throughout the Winter Olympics, Boston Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy will give readers of The Athletic an inside look at Team USA.

At 28, McAvoy, a former Boston University standout and three-time gold medalist in international tournaments, is in his ninth full NHL season. On Sunday, he was named one of Auston Matthews' two alternate captains at the Olympics, with Matthew Tkachuk being the other.

Here's his first diary entry, edited for clarity and length, as told to senior writer Michael Russo.

MILAN – It's been a blast so far in Milan, and I'm so glad I came early.

Landed a few days ago and me and Zach Werenski, Jake Oettinger and Sway (Jeremy Swayman) got fitted with our Ralph Lauren outfits and then got to be part of the opening ceremony.

We went back and forth for a little. But once I saw that we were done on the 4th and the ceremonies were on the 6th, I knew there was a chance that maybe we'd be able to come over here. So everybody with USA Hockey, the USOPC, everybody, they went through and jumped through a lot of hurdles for us to be able to get over here and have the chance to walk through. And after getting that experience, it was absolutely incredible. For me, it felt like once in a lifetime, to be there and walk and see thousands of people cheering us on and be with the other athletes and everybody from Team USA. It truly was one of the most special things I've been a part of.



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And once you get to meet so many different athletes, you want to go to events and root them on. So we went last night to the figure skating, and it was incredible.

The village is really cool. It honestly feels like being back in college again, really, you know, it's dorm rooms, it's small, there's a dining hall, some rec spaces, athletes everywhere. So that's kind of like your students. And it's always busy. Everybody's just coming and going, everybody's on their own schedule. So, it just feels like I'm back at BU a little bit.

What's really sweet is I'm by myself. Don't know how that happened. Actually, like half the guys are alone, and then the other half have roommates. So I'm one of the single ones. I don't know how much time I'll spend in my room anyway. I think we're gonna be spending a lot of time together, this group.

pic.twitter.com/e4WUZ18YnE

— Charlie McAvoy (@CMcAvoy44) February 7, 2026

As you can tell, I'm not comfortable after being hit in the jaw (by Florida's Sandis Vilmanis) the other night. I'm in pain. I'm having trouble chewing. My face is swollen again. Back to square one, it feels like.

I got to a place where I felt really comfortable after breaking my jaw earlier this season. I kept the fishbowl on just as a precaution. And the idea was to try and take it off here. I could have taken it off before, but the idea was you'd really, really regret it if I took it off beforehand and something bad happened. So I kept it on. I had gotten used to it. Then I get hit in the fashion in which I got hit. And it sucks, because it's just really, it's really painful. Honestly, it feels like it did when I first broke it. I've had a lot of that pain come back. So it's just frustrating that this is kind of something I have to go through again, but I can play in the bubble, and I've done it for a while now, and it'll just be about managing the pain.

I know a lot of attention has been given to my tweet of the play. I didn't say anything (about him not getting suspended). I feel like a lot of people have a strong opinion on it that I share. So it is what it is. These things are not up to me, unfortunately. And we just have to have trust in the system.

It didn't occur to me until someone brought it up that we play Latvia in the first game, and I'll play him Thursday. It doesn't matter to me. I just want to beat Latvia. I don't know him. I'm not going to be looking for retribution. Like, whatever happened in the NHL can stay in the NHL, and we'll handle that whenever we get there. But this is about USA versus Latvia and us getting off to a really good start.

It's just an honor to be here. I mean, it's incredible. You get that taste in 4 Nations, you know, the speed, the skill, just how impressive the practices even are. Getting a chance to play with these guys the way everybody sees the game and thinks the game and performs, it's just unique, and it's really special to be a part of. Practice was great today. We've waited a long time to get to the Olympics, and now it feels like it has officially started.

I'm looking forward to just getting back to the village with these guys. It'll be the first night that we have together to spend some time and catching up with a lot of guys that I haven't seen in a while. This group will be spending a lot of time together. It's a special group, and we just hope we can make our country proud and come home with gold.

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The Athletic / Canada names Sidney Crosby captain of Olympic men's hockey team

By Chris Johnston

Sidney Crosby is reprising his role as Captain Canada after being selected to wear the "C" at the Milan Cortina Olympics.

It's the fourth straight best-on-best men's tournament at which Crosby has captained Team Canada, and they've won the previous three: the 2014 Sochi Olympics, 2016 World Cup of Hockey and 2025 4 Nations Face-Off.

Crosby also captained Canada to gold at the 2015 IIHF World Hockey Championship and was an alternate captain for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, where he scored the Golden Goal.

In Milan, Connor McDavid and Cale Makar will serve as alternate captains to round out the leadership group — just as they did during last February's 4 Nations tournament.

Even on a roster that features 13 players who wear letters with their NHL teams, there was no debate about who would get the "C." Canada made the announcement on Sunday morning.

"What Sid means to me, I think that's been well-documented," McDavid said during Canada's Olympic orientation camp. "For our generation, and for him to still be here and being the captain and still playing a massive role, it's special. It's special for all of us."

Not only is the Pittsburgh Penguins captain riding a record-setting run of 20 consecutive NHL seasons with at least a point per game, but Crosby also tied McDavid for Team Canada's scoring lead at the 4 Nations tournament with five points while also producing a team-best plus-3 rating.

He's the last player remaining from Canada's golden generation, which won the 2005 World Juniors in dominant fashion before running through a series of major tournaments with nary a loss.

With Crosby in uniform, Canada has a 54-8 record.

Scott Salmond, Hockey Canada's senior vice-president of high performance and hockey operations, said this summer that Crosby is the one remaining advantage the country still holds over a list of improving international competition.

"It can't be overstated, and I saw it again at the 4 Nations, (Crosby) has this incredible ability to bring people together," Salmond said. "I believe that there's this belief within the team and the players that they don't want to let him down. These players have the weight of the nation on their shoulders, but they look at Sidney Crosby and they want to carry on that legacy that he's created. You can never underestimate it."

"I think what he brings to Hockey Canada, the way he carries himself, the way he represents Canada, is incredible.

"And it's a huge advantage for us, no question."

Team Canada opens the Olympic tournament with a game against Czechia on Thursday.

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1224084 Websites

The Athletic / She quit hockey twice. Now, with no prior international experience, she's an Olympian



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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By Hailey Salvian

MILAN — Five years before becoming a Canadian Olympian, Kati Tabin was a hockey player crashing on a friend's couch.

She was playing for the Connecticut Whale of the now-defunct Premier Hockey Federation, but without a fully processed visa, Tabin couldn't collect a paycheck. After six games and nearly two months on the couch, Tabin's career seemingly came to an end in December 2021.

"I ended up just going home (to Winnipeg)," said Tabin in an interview with *The Athletic*. "I didn't really have that much money to live there for free."

Tabin's stop in Connecticut was just one of what's been a winding path to the 2026 Milan Olympics for the 28-year-old defender. When she hit the ice for the women's hockey tournament on Saturday, she became the oldest player since 2002 to debut for Team Canada at the Olympics — and one of very few Canadians to crack an Olympic roster with no prior international experience.

After the game, Tabin said she was feeling "a lot of emotions."

"Obviously, I was really, really excited and didn't know how it was going to feel out there," she said. "But it was nice to get game one under my belt and get a feel for it."

Tabin's inclusion on the Canadian roster is a strong indicator of two things: her own persistence and the opportunities created for players by the Professional Women's Hockey League. In the two years since the league launched in January 2024, Tabin has gone from the bubble to establishing herself as a steady, shutdown defender and the exact kind of player Team Canada might need to upset the No. 1-ranked Americans.

"Kati Tabin is a perfect example of an athlete that has taken the platform that was offered to her and shown that she's a great shutdown 'D' that is hard to play against," said Canada general manager Gina Kingsbury. "She is playing really great hockey and we think that's going to continue to (the Olympics). The elements that she brings, the style of play she brings in the PWHL, is exactly what we are looking for."

Tabin had decided she was done with hockey once before.

Over her four-year career at Quinnipiac University, Tabin played well enough to be named captain of the team and get an invite to a 47-player Canadian national women's team camp ahead of her final season. Her performance then, however, wasn't enough to make her any sort of mainstay on the national team.

After her senior season in 2020, the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tabin felt she hit a dead end. At the time, the PHF presented one of the few post-graduate opportunities, but in 2020-21, the league was attempting to play a "bubble" tournament in Lake Placid, N.Y., which failed due to rapid COVID-19 transmission.

"There weren't very many places to go play or practice," Tabin said. "So I just ultimately made the decision (that) it's just time I hang them up and get a real job."

Tabin took a position as a marketing director for a campground and marina in Wisconsin, but soon started to miss being on the ice. With the encouragement of her mom, Heather, Tabin left for Connecticut to try out for the Whale.

She hadn't played competitively in 18 months, so she went into her visit with low expectations: She'd visit friends and former Quinnipiac teammates, talk to coach Colton Orr, and potentially secure a roster spot for next season.

"I was obviously pretty rusty," Tabin said.

So she was surprised when the team came to her with a contract offer — but not for the next season. Tabin joined the Whale immediately, sleeping on her teammate Abbie Ives' couch while her work visa was processed. She played six games, without pay, for the love of the game.

But after several weeks, Tabin went home to Winnipeg, disillusioned with the idea of making hockey a full-time job. She got a new gig as a player development coach at the RINK Training Centre, a hockey facility just outside the city. The position kept Tabin on the ice, and one year later she felt ready to give hockey one more shot, this time with the PHF's Toronto franchise.

"Always in the back of my mind I wanted to get back in the door with Hockey Canada," Tabin said. "So I just said, why not? You really gotta put everything forward here if you wanna get there."

She spent the summer training and getting back into shape before the start of the 2022-23 season.

As a member of the Toronto Six, Tabin balanced a full-time job at Yamaha Motor Canada to help offset her modest salary and finished the year as the highest scoring defender en route to a league championship.

"I just put my head down, went to work and didn't care how much I was getting paid," Tabin said. "It was a lot, but I just loved the game and it was a really fun year."

Tabin signed a two-year extension with Toronto just weeks before she learned the league would cease operations in June 2023. A new league led by Mark Walter, the billionaire owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers, and tennis legend Billie Jean King would launch the following year, but it meant that Tabin's contract was nullified. Despite another abrupt change in her career, Tabin stuck with it and declared for the inaugural PWHL draft, where she was selected 30th overall by Montreal.

Since then, Tabin has built a reputation as one of the most consistent all-situations defenders in the league. Montreal general manager Danièle Sauvageau said Tabin "does everything right."

Tabin's skating ability allows her to keep up with the high-octane forwards in the PWHL, and her physicality makes Tabin among the most difficult to play against.

It's a skill set displayed on a major stage for the first time in Tabin's career

"The PHF allowed me to kind of get my feet wet, and then when I joined the PWHL, I was against USA's and Team Canada's top players every game and I think that just allowed me to reach another level, especially here in Montreal being able to train alongside (Marie-Philip Poulin, Laura Stacey, Ann-Renée Desbiens and Erin Ambrose)," Tabin said. "My physicality grew, my speed grew, my offense and defense both grew as a whole and I feel like I've just become much more consistent."

Team Canada decision-makers took note of that growth, too. Over the summer, Tabin was named to the 30-player roster that would try out for the Olympic team and made her Team Canada debut in November at the Rivalry Series. When it came time to name the 23-player roster for the 2026 Olympics, Tabin's name was on it.

Montreal coach Kori Cheverie, who also serves as an assistant coach for Team Canada, was the one to deliver the news on a call with the rest of the national team staff.

"Holy s—," Tabin said. "Those were my first words. And then honestly, I just blacked out."

Obviously, I believed in myself but just hearing those words was kind of a shock, like oh my god I really did this ... It's a true dream come true."

That Tabin cracked the Olympic team over players with more international experience and a 19-year-old phenom whose game has been likened to that of NHL star Quinn Hughes might have come as a



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surprise to some. But, to Team Canada staff, she brings something the team needs if it's going to have a chance at beating Team USA — the top-ranked team who outscored Canada 24-7 at Rivalry Series — in an expected gold medal rematch.

"A lot of players when they play against her in the PWHL, they recognize the physicality that she has, they recognize the compete, they recognize how difficult she is to play against," said Canada head coach Troy Ryan. "And I think it's important to have some players like that in your group."

In Milan, Tabin should give Canada another solid defender to play against top competition. If Canada needs someone to step in and play tough matchup minutes — either due to injury or poor performance — Tabin has proven herself capable of playing that role against top competition in the PWHL.

"I actually think a lot of players could learn a lot from Kati Tabin's journey," said Ryan. "She stuck with her game, didn't change who she was as a player or as a person, and finds herself in the Olympic Games at this point in her career."

"To me, that is what the Olympics are about."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.09.2026

1224085 Websites

The Athletic / You don't have to like Bill Guerin's gutsy Olympic roster decisions to respect his choices

By Mark Lazerus

MILAN — As preposterously good as Canada's forward group is, as unnerving as the Czechs' goaltending trio is, as dynamic as Sweden's blue line is, as pesky as Finland's bottomless store of two-way players always is, there's a very real chance the members of the United States men's hockey team leaves Milan in 16 days with gold medals slung around their necks, their names forever burned into our collective memory. It's a great team full of great players, most of whom have waited their whole lives to wear the red, white and blue jersey of Team USA on an Olympic stage.

It would be a crowning achievement for so many players who have wanted this for so long. Auston Matthews could cement his status as an American hockey hero. Connor Hellebuyck could prove himself worthy of the big moments. Quinn Hughes could write a signature moment as an all-time elite defenseman. Matt Boldy could launch himself into the realm of household names. We're talking legacy stuff, the kind of thing that gets etched into the first sentence of your Hall of Fame plaque. It's hard to overstate just how much is riding on these Olympics for those who compete in them.

But the man with perhaps the most at stake over these next couple of weeks won't even be wearing one of those jerseys. He'll be watching from above, sweating out every shift as if he were playing. Two weeks from now, he'll either be a genius or a fool, the man who built the perfect roster or the man who squandered the golden age of American hockey.

Whether it's in the form of a gold medal or an albatross, Bill Guerin will wear Team USA's result at the 2026 Olympics around his neck for the rest of his life.

Because the easiest thing for the American general manager to do would have been the obvious thing to do. To put the very best American players on the ice. To cast his lot with the most gifted players available to him. To pick chalk. Had Guerin simply done that, he still could have been hailed

as a hero and a genius in the event of an American victory, but could have largely avoided being blamed in the event of another American failure.

But that's not what Guerin did. He left off three of the top four American goal scorers in the NHL. No Jason Robertson, who has 32 goals in 57 games with the Dallas Stars. No Cole Caufield, who also has 32 goals in 57 games with the Montreal Canadiens, including a league-leading eight game-winners — a league-high four of them in three-on-three overtime, a discipline which very well might decide these Olympics. No Alex DeBrincat, who has 30 goals in 58 games with the Detroit Red Wings. No Lane Hutson, the second-leading point-getter among defenseman and as dynamic a talent as the Americans have. No Adam Fox, who was looking like his old Norris-winning self before an injury.

Jason Robertson's Olympic roster snub raised eyebrows. The Dallas Stars forward has 32 goals in 57 games. (Robert Edwards //)Jpg

All told, Guerin left off four of the top eight scorers among American defenseman (though Jackson LaCombe was added as an injury replacement for Seth Jones), and six of the top 14 scorers among American forwards. Of course, there are always going to be good players left off the roster with such a deep talent pool. But when Team Canada's Doug Armstrong decided against bringing Sam Bennett, Connor Bedard and Matthew Schaefer, it was for the likes of Nick Suzuki, Tom Wilson and Anthony Cirelli — elite players having elite seasons. Guerin chose J.T. Miller and Vincent Trocheck, both of whom are mired in a dreadful campaign with the New York Rangers, both of whom earned their spot not on their present but on their past.

Guerin liked what he saw from the Americans at the 4 Nations Face-Off last year and stuck to the same plan — even though it was a very short, made-up tournament featuring only four teams; even though the Americans, as they so often have for the last four decades, came up short. Was that team every bit as good as the Canadians who beat them in overtime? Or did it need one more game-breaker, one more goal scorer? Guerin's betting everything on the former.

Choosing truculence over talent in a tournament like the Olympics opens a GM up to all sorts of criticisms — from fans, from pundits, even from team social-media accounts.

And Guerin clearly knows it.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

What Russia's hockey team would look like and how its absence affects the Olympics

Russia would have been bronze medal favorites at the Olympics and the team most likely to upset Canada or the United States.

"Honest to God, I really don't care," Guerin told KFAN's Dan Barreiro on Monday. "I don't care what the media says, I don't care what a fan in a certain market (says after) their player was left off the team. I don't care. All I'm trying to do is put together the best team for the United States and go over and win. Maybe I'm right, maybe I'm wrong. But those are the decisions I've made."

Any wonder this guy loves truculence?

Team Canada has these dilemmas, too, of course. Seth Jarvis is replacing the injured Brayden Point at the last minute instead of the more dangerous and productive Bedard because of his ability to kill penalties and play in a bottom-six role. Bedard is a far more tantalizing choice because who wouldn't want to see him skating in Point's spot alongside Connor McDavid? But Armstrong and head coach Jon Cooper clearly have other plans and will elevate another roster player to Point's spot on the top line. Bedard doesn't make sense in a bottom-six role, so the scrappier, more versatile Jarvis gets the spot. It's all part of the team-building process.



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But the Americans have always taken this idea to extremes, long before Guerin had the top job. It's almost as if too many Americans have watched "Miracle" too many times, and have taken Herb Brooks' concept of building not the "best" team, but the "right" one too far. As a result, they historically overrate grit and underrate skill. You can't win a gold medal without scoring goals, and this very American idea of bringing brass knuckles to a swordfight has failed repeatedly. The Miracle on Ice was 46 long years ago, and the United States has won exactly one of these best-on-best tournaments since — the 1996 World Cup. That famously truculent squad further entrenched this scrappy American mindset. But that was 30 years ago. What have we seen since?

In Sochi in 2014, the Americans left home Dustin Byfuglien, the top-scoring American defenseman who was on his way to a 20-goal season; Bobby Ryan, a four-time 30-goal scorer; and Kyle Okposo, the second-leading American point-getter at the time rosters were announced. That team scored zero total goals in the semifinal against Canada and the bronze medal match against Finland. At the World Cup in Toronto in 2016, the Americans really committed to the bit, making John Tortorella the coach and picking Justin Abdelkader and Brandon Dubinsky instead of Phil Kessel, Tyler Johnson, Ryan (again) and Okposo (again). That team flamed out spectacularly, losing to Team Europe, Canada and Czechia, scoring five goals in three games.

Scoring goals matters, it turns out. And there very well might come a time over the next couple of weeks, when the United States is getting goalied by a supposedly lesser nation or when Finland is suffocating the Americans in a low-event affair or when the score is tied late against Canada or Sweden when Robertson's nose for the net or Caufield's knack for clutch goals or DeBrincat's sniping skills or Hutson's offensive-zone wizardry would be more useful than Trocheck's solid-but-unspectacular two-way efficiency or Miller's surly disposition. And when it happens, NBC's cameras will surely find Guerin.

It's also entirely possible that Trocheck creates a turnover and converts it at the other end to even up a huge game, or Miller pots a short-handed tally that gives the Americans a massive win. And when it happens, NBC's cameras will surely find Guerin.

You might not like Guerin's decisions. You might even strongly disagree with them. But you can't help but respect someone who so firmly believes in what he's doing that he's willing to so dramatically put his reputation on the line on the world's biggest stage. Playing it safe isn't always a bad thing, but it's never really been Guerin's style.

Whether he's right or wrong, clever or foolish, playing 3D chess or 2D checkers, this is Guerin's team. One he believes in, one he's standing by, one to which he's freely — and fully — attached his reputation.

"You want to bring heat on me, go ahead," he told KFAN. "The good outweighs the bad. Honestly, in this world, you can't keep anybody happy anyway. So I'm just going to make my decisions and move along, enjoy the people that I get to go through this process with. I'm representing the USA in the game I love at the Olympics. How could I be upset, or how could I be having a bad time? This is an incredible experience, an incredible honor."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.09.2026

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Sportsnet.ca / Team Canada's lines: Who's playing with Connor McDavid, and why

Luke Fox

MILAN, Italy — Jon Cooper flashes a grin as wide as a Zamboni entrance.

Team Canada doesn't open its Olympic tournament for three days, but the head coach knows his first crack at the forward lines will be juicy fodder for the hot stove.

The answer as to who gets to play with Connor McDavid on the favourites' top line, at least for the first practice: teenager Macklin Celebrini and steamroller Tom Wilson.

Two guys who weren't even selected to 2025's golden 4 Nations roster are riding shotgun alongside the world's most dynamic player.

"That was for you guys," Cooper smiled Sunday night, after wrapping an hour-long skate at Milano Santagiulia. "Just in case a fight breaks out, he's protected."

There is no fighting at the Winter Games, however. And although Coach Cooper has jokes, he's dead serious about giving Celebrini and Wilson a peek in the penthouse.

Hours of preparation were poured into determining which combinations of talents will click. Cooper asked his stars — and, in some cases, their NHL coaches — which linemates best complement their skill-set. Not specific names, but rather what type of player they need.

Zach Hyman's not here, but Wilson sure is.

"Everybody needs an F1 right? That big boy there is one of the best I've seen," Cooper explained.

"It's never like a situation where (the player is) pointing the fingers: 'Oh, I want to play with this guy.' Nobody does that. But what helps them? And so, some guys are forecheckers. Some guys aren't. Some guys are puck-possession guys. And when you find that right mix..."

That's the mission over these hasty, jetlagged practice days and the three games of round-robin action to follow.

Figure out what clicks. Because if you're still searching for chemistry when the knockout rounds hit, you'll be searching for an earlier flight home.

Revealed, Mitch Marner said, just an hour before Canada hit the ice, Cooper's lines are balanced. How could they not be, with Sidney Crosby at 3C?

Here's our first look:

Forwards

Celebrini – McDavid – Wilson

Marchand – MacKinnon – Suzuki

Stone – Crosby – Marner

Hagel – Horvat – Reinhart

Jarvis – Bennett

Defence

Toews – Makar

Morrissey – Parayko

Harley – Doughty

Theodore – Sanheim

Goaltenders

Binnington



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Kuemper

McDavid says his initial wingers inject a fine blend of skill, speed, and physicality. The trio has already piled a combined 226 points in the NHL this season.

"Very different players," McDavid said. "But great players in their own way."

Celebrini's way is mature beyond his birth certificate. Only 19, he's the youngest athlete participating in the men's bracket.

"Take his age out of it. He's a helluva hockey player," said Cooper, who worked with the Sharks phenom at the '25 world championships. "He may be 19 years old — like, his physical body is — but his acumen for the game is not. He's wise beyond his years."

Wilson, 31, is the oldest first-timer on Canada's squad. Not since the U17 worlds in 2011 has he repped the Maple Leaf at a best-on-best.

"I've played against Macklin and Connor a lot, and it's not fun. Playing with them is a lot more fun. They're so good with the puck. For me, it's about, go get it for them and get open, and they'll do the rest," Wilson said.

"It's not every day you play with a guy that just has the skating ability like Connor. Obviously, I'm a straight-line skater and a hard worker."

McDavid is already taking Wilson to school on where to go on certain routes and how to trust that his centreman will join the rush.

"He's like, 'Hey, I'm gonna catch up to you, you know. Like, maybe you don't need to go there. Maybe widen out there. I'll catch up with my skating,'" Wilson explained. "Creating space for him versus crowding his space or whatever."

"And if we stay together, we'll get better and better."

That's a major if.

As diligent as Cooper is when it comes to constructing his blueprint, he'll be searching for weaknesses, ways to tweak and adapt his lines as these two weeks roll on.

"If anybody watched 4 Nations, the lineup we started against Sweden was not the lineup that finished against the U.S. four games later," Cooper said. "Ultimately, you have to start somewhere. This is where we started tonight."

"But, I'll tell you, it sure is fun."

Team Canada's first-look power-play units:

PP1

Makar

McDavid – Reinhart – MacKinnon

Crosby

PP2

Theodore

Celebrini – Horvat – Marnier

Stone

Canada's first men's hockey game at Milano Cortina 2026 will take place Feb. 12 against Czechia at 10:40 a.m. ET on Sportsnet.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.09.2026

Sportsnet.ca / Brady Tkachuk aims to carry family torch to new heights at Olympics

Alex Adams

OTTAWA — It will be a passing of the torch when Brady Tkachuk walks onto the Olympic stage.

Not, of course, the literal Olympic torch from the Milano Cortina 2026 opening ceremony, but rather the metaphorical one from his father Keith Tkachuk, who won silver at Salt Lake City 2002.

And don't forget brother Matthew, who will join Brady on Team USA in Italy.

"Can't believe it's kind of knocking at the door here," Brady said before heading abroad. "Whenever you wear your country's jersey, your colours, your flag — you just feel this immense amount of pride."

The brothers are trying to accomplish something their father, who represented Team USA at three Olympics, never did: win gold.

"As a kid, you switch between scoring the game winner for the Stanley Cup and scoring the game winner for a gold medal," Brady said.

The Tkachuk brothers attended the 2006 Torino Olympics as spectators and family members.

"I remember my dad taking us through the Olympic Village. And I mean, now looking at it in my perspective, there's really no family or kids allowed. So, I don't know how he did that or got the permission to do that," Brady said.

"So that was really cool. And seeing Alex Ovechkin, Evgeni Malkin in the cafeteria and the Russia gear, that was really cool. And, yeah, just going to his games and watching him and having our face painted and stuff like that. So, it was a lot of fun."

Due to the time difference and travel hurdles, the third generation of Tkachuks, Brady's son Ryder, won't be in Milan. Maybe Brady can watch his son Ryder Tkachuk at the 2050 Olympics?

As for these Games, it's been a long road for the Senators' captain.

He first started envisioning going to the Olympics with his brother Matthew four years ago.

"I was on the outside looking in (for making Team USA in 2022), but, yeah, that was kind of the first time. Like, OK, this could actually happen," Brady said about playing with Matthew.

NHLers didn't go to the 2022 Olympics due to COVID. Since then, the younger-but-larger Tkachuk brother has taken his game to another level. He isn't just the sidekick anymore.

Brady has compiled 249 points in 272 games since the start of the 2022-23 season.

No slouch.

The Tkachuk brothers both elevated their profiles at last year's 4 Nations Face-Off — and that tournament can be a template for playing on an even bigger international stage.

Canada-U.S. has long replaced Canada-Russia as international hockey's greatest rivalry.

"It was almost the perfect storm. Where it was the real world and then also hockey," Tkachuk said on a CBC documentary.



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The Tkachuks are at the centre of the rivalry. Within three seconds of the first U.S.-Canada battle beginning in that tournament, two fights featuring two Tkachuks had already taken place.

The fight had been orchestrated by the bash brothers and J.T. Miller.

There was also an infamous group chat started by the Tkachuks before that game about fighting the Canadians, which led to Brady becoming one of the pre-eminent faces of USA hockey.

"We're out there playing for the flag, not the cameras," Canada's Brandon Hagel remarked in reaction.

The Tkachuks were inspired by their father, who fought in the 1996 World Cup of Hockey against Canada, where he did in fact bring home the gold medal.

"Can't believe all the things that my dad could do there, of course, to see the fights and he got kicked out, and all the battles," Brady said in the documentary.

"Just seeing the kind of hate that they had then, and how they wanted to be the best."

Fighting doesn't fall far from the genetic tree, apparently.

"Once we found out about the 4 Nations, (we thought) how sick would it be just to square up at centre ice versus Canada," Tkachuk said.

Expect Brady Tkachuk to take centre stage again in Italy if another Canada-U.S. matchup takes place.

Unfortunately for him, there is no fighting allowed in the Olympics.

"I'm not going to change a thing. I think I'm going to use the skill set and my attributes that got me there," he said.

Brady Tkachuk can be one of the best players on the ice in the biggest of games. But it won't just be imposing his physical will. One advantage Tkachuk will have in Milan is that the rink will be three feet shorter than the NHL standard. Be ready for loads of hits.

"I'm one of the few that's going to like the change, I guess. But yeah, obviously won't know until we get there and see if it really is a difference maker or not," he said.

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

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Latest episode

He scored in the 4 Nations final and was inches away from an OT winner.

"He was such a beast," said Team USA and Senators teammate Jake Sanderson about Tkachuk's performance. "I think he put his name on the map, but it was nothing out of the ordinary for me to see out of him."

Expect the same in Milano Cortina 2026.

"He's going to be a man possessed," said Shane Pinto. "When he's coming downhill, it's hard to stop, and you definitely don't want to get hit by him."

Tkachuk isn't worried about getting acclimated to the pace or to his teammates' elite level when the Olympic Rings surround him in Italy.

"It's the best players in the country. So, I think everybody's able to adapt pretty quickly," he said. "For the most part, everybody, I would say, thinks the same way, but smart enough to adapt to the players they play with."

What Tkachuk learned from the 4 Nations was acknowledging the magnitude of the moment.

"This is going to be make or break and play like it's (your) last game and Game 7."

Regardless, the younger Tkachuk brother could be on a collision course for hero status with Team USA hockey. And we presume many Senators fans will be as conflicted as ever if Canada plays Team USA.

Don't be surprised if the Tkachuks are each others' wingmen in Italy. At the 4 Nations, they shared a line with Jack Eichel in the gold-medal final, which produced Brady Tkachuk's goal.

It's likely the two partners in hockey warfare will feed off each other at times throughout the two-week sprint of a tournament.

However, both siblings left the 4 Nations with season-altering injuries, which forced Brady to miss most of the regular-season push for the Senators. Matthew missed the rest of the regular season, only to come back, win a Cup and then have off-season surgery on a torn adductor.

Senators fans will be knocking on maplewood and praying to the hockey gods in the nation's capital, remembering Dominik Hasek's season-ending injury suffered in the 2006 Winter Olympics.

What we know, thanks to the 4 Nations, is that Brady Tkachuk is ready for the moment.

His dad never won the last game of an NHL season or got golden hardware from an Olympic games. Matthew Tkachuk has done the first — winning two Stanley Cups in Florida.

Now, Brady and Matthew are trying to cement the Tkachuk name as forever golden.

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Sportsnet.ca / Nick Suzuki's Olympic dream formed watching idol Crosby score golden goal

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — Nick Suzuki doesn't remember this, but his father will never forget it.

"Nick would've been 11 or so when he had a coach that gave the boys on his team a homework assignment to compare themselves to whichever NHLer they felt they most resembled as players. Nick looked at me and said, 'I think I want to put Crosby,' but it was almost intimidating to him to compare himself to Crosby," said Rob Suzuki.

"I told him, 'Crosby's not an unreasonable comparison. You play a pretty good game along the boards, you don't do a lot of glamorous, fancy things, but you put up points — goals and assists — and are pretty responsible defensively.'

"I think Nick was a bit too embarrassed to write down Crosby in the end, though I really do think he modelled a lot of his game after Crosby's, and that's why he's become the type of player he is."

The type of player Nick Suzuki is has put him on the team that Crosby will be captaining at the upcoming Olympic Winter Games in Milan. He's one of the most complete players in the world — a leading Selke Trophy candidate who's also currently the 12th-most productive player in the NHL and fifth-most productive Canadian player — and that's just part of



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the reason he'll be breathing the same rarified air as Crosby over the next two weeks.

The type of person Nick Suzuki is, which is perfectly encapsulated in his father's anecdote, is the other part of it. He's as quiet, cool and humble Canadiana as it gets, the type to never beat his own chest nor compare himself to the greatest player in the world.

As Suzuki's mother, Amanda, put it: "He doesn't go out there and say, 'Hey, look at me, I'm a superstar, I'm smarter than everybody else,' and he's always been that way."

Underneath all that is a person who's always known how good he is and how good he could be.

That's why, instead of just fantasizing about one day playing for the national team, Suzuki was visualizing it — even back when he was watching the player he modelled his game after score the golden goal at the 2010 Vancouver Games.

"As a kid, you kind of think you can do anything, but you also have to be picturing yourself in those situations," Suzuki said in a recent interview with Sportsnet. "And now you have to believe that you can help the team and play with those legendary players who are going to be your teammates. I can definitely picture it, and I'm looking forward to living that."

When we caught up with Suzuki's parents via Zoom two weeks ago, they said they were elated to find out they'd be witnessing it after receiving a casual text from their son on the last morning of 2025 that read, "We're going to Milan."

"He would've called, but he wasn't looking for applause," said Rob. "He was just excited to share the experience with us."

It is the most meaningful step to date in an athletic ascent that started 22 years ago, back when Suzuki was wowing his friends and their parents on the soccer field.

"He was playing with kids two or three years older than him, and he was playing with them no problem," recalled Amanda.

"We brought cupcakes to a game, and someone's mom asked how old he was," added Rob. "We said, 'Four,' and then she goes, 'The rest of the kids are turning seven.'"

"He just always excelled at sports," Amanda said. "Whatever it was, he excelled at it."

For Suzuki, hockey became the be-all, end-all starting in sixth grade, when he transferred from the Waldorf School in London, Ont., to a private hockey academy nearby called Blyth — a school also attended by NHLers Travis Konecny, Lawson Crouse, Jared McCann and fellow Team Canada member Mitch Marner. His parents were able to afford the tuition hike to send him there because his brother Ryan decided he wanted to transfer from Waldorf to a public school so he could be in classes with kids from the neighbourhood.

"Nick ended up there through Grade 8 and was gaining a foundation for working out, strength, conditioning and skills," says Rob. "I wanted him to move on to other fun things after, but after his Grade 8 graduation, he said he wanted to continue through high school."

"There was only six kids in the class and they were all boys, and it was very pigeon-holed and too focused on one thing. I told him, 'Are you sure you want to do this? You're going to be missing out on a lot of different things.'"

"He said, 'I'm sure this is what I want to do,' and I was hoping he wouldn't look back on it wondering why he'd spend all this time chasing this hockey dream if it didn't end up materializing. But he said he wouldn't, and his commitment proved it."

Suzuki had good influences.

Rob and Amanda are salt-of-the-earth types. He's now in his 30th year as a practising dentist and she's in her 28th as a chartered professional accountant who's edging closer to retirement from a career as a senior manager in charge of collections for the ministry of finance in the Ontario public sector. They work hard and lead by example, as their parents did before them.

On Amanda's side, Maurice and Helen Bell immigrated to Canada from Scotland in 1964 because Maurice, a chemical engineer, was recruited by a Toronto-based company. Rob's parents, Art (a materials scheduler for 3M) and Marlene (a nurse), were second-generation Canadians, with their grandparents touching down from Japan and Germany decades prior.

Rob said Nick's quiet and confident-yet-proud nature was inherited from Amanda's side of the family, and Amanda said his humility and athletic genes came from Rob. It's safe to say the work ethic was passed down by everyone above.

Coupled with exceptional talent, it brought Suzuki success early in his hockey career, when he was in bantam with the triple-A London Junior Knights.

He scored 34 goals and 68 points in 31 games and was hoping to represent Team Ontario in the 2015 Canada Winter Games in between, but was surprisingly snubbed before another boy got injured and cleared the path for him.

What happened at the tournament could be foreshadowing for Milan, with Suzuki still unsure as to what his role may be with Team Canada.

"Nick was called two weeks before the games and told he was finally on the team, and then Drew Bannister had him on the fourth line," Amanda recalls. "He was the coach, and he was also the assistant coach for Owen Sound at the time. Anyway, Nick started on that fourth line, but he played so well he and his linemates got bumped up throughout the tournament. And then he scored what ended up being the winning goal in the gold-medal game."

That summer, Suzuki was taken 14th overall by Owen Sound in the OHL Draft, and so began his steady rise through Canadian junior hockey.

The ride to NHL stardom seemed just as smooth, and now he's an Olympian.

"This was his destiny," Amanda says, "and I think he knew it early on."

Suzuki worked tirelessly to materialize it.

After being drafted 13th overall by the Vegas Golden Knights and getting traded to the Montreal Canadiens, he went back to junior and dominated, putting up 42 points over his final 24 playoff games to lead the Guelph Storm to an OHL championship.

Then Suzuki posted 41 points in his first NHL season and followed it up with another 41 in the pandemic-abridged, 56-game 2020-21 season.

In both years, the Canadiens went further in the post-season than anyone expected them to, and Suzuki proved what kind of big-game player he was to help them do it. He put up four goals and seven points in his first 10 playoff games before posting seven goals and 16 points through the Canadiens' 22-game run that put them within three wins of capturing the Stanley Cup.

A year later, the Canadiens named Suzuki captain, and all he's done since is exhibit the qualities of a player who belongs on Team Canada.

Still, the call didn't come for him to represent the country at the 4 Nations Face-Off last February, and that left him both disappointed and motivated.



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Suzuki then compiled 29 goals and 81 points and rounded out his profile as one of the most complete players in the world in the 65 games played between the end of that tournament and the naming of the Canadian Olympic team.

He was relieved and honoured to get the call, citing the chance to chase gold alongside Crosby as a vision on the verge of being realized.

"It's going to be amazing experiencing that," he said. "Every guy on the team looked up to Sid, and for him to still be playing at the level he's at and being captain of Canada, it's an honour to be a teammate of his."

The thought of it is still surreal to his parents.

"I'd have never dreamt of that," says Amanda. "We're so proud of the fact that he made the team and is representing Canada. The thought of everybody across Canada watching my kid on the ice, along with Crosby, McDavid and MacKinnon and the greatest hockey players..."

"It means a lot," says Rob.

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Sportsnet.ca / 'He's got a lot of heart': Hronek emerging as leader for Canucks, Czechia

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — With a game face as intimidating as Darth Vader's, Filip Hronek is not the easiest Vancouver Canuck to get to know.

"He is definitely intimidating at first, for sure," rookie defenceman Zeev Buium, acquired from the Minnesota Wild in December, told Sportsnet. "When you try to start a little conversation, especially as a younger guy and a new guy, that can be intimidating. But he means so well. Like, he cares about everyone in here from the bottom of his heart. And he's a great guy."

Turns out, Hronek not only speaks, but he's a pretty good leader, too.

Despite proudly going 1,000 days in Detroit earlier in his career without doing a media interview, Hronek could be the next captain of the Canucks. That's the kind of leader the 28-year-old defenceman has become among teammates.

And that's the kind of leader he could be for Team Czechia, the 2024 world champions who open the Olympic tournament in Milan against Canada on Thursday.

"I would say right now he's our best defenceman," Canucks and Czechia teammate David Kampf said. "We don't have too many guys playing in the NHL right now for the defence. So, yeah, he's the biggest player for us."

Hronek has probably been the biggest player for the Canucks, too.

In an NHL season that has blown up like the Death Star in Vancouver, Hronek is unique among experienced Canucks in that he has been playing the best hockey of his career.

Drew O'Connor is having a good season, as was Kiefer Sherwood before he was traded last month to San Jose. Teddy Blueger has been terrific, but missed three months due to injury. Rookie wingers Linus Karlsson and Liam Ohgren have been impressive. But among veterans, no one is having a season like Hronek.

What makes it even more impressive is that if any Canuck was going to surrender a little when Hughes was traded, it might have been Hronek, who signed an eight-year extension with Vancouver in 2024 partly for the chance to continue partnering with the best defenceman in franchise history.

Instead, Hronek has elevated his game to another level.

"I think you're bang on," Canucks coach Adam Foote said. "You've seen him do more offensively, like hold the puck, carry the puck. It was almost like Fil (Hronek) would be drawn to get Huggy (Hughes) the puck, right? And it became so obvious that the other teams just cheated on Huggy. When Huggy left, I think Fil held on to more pucks, skated with more pucks, showed his skill set, his ability."

"He's grown a lot, and he'll continue to grow. I know he was good friends with J.T. Miller, and (that trade) hurt him, too. We all have buddies in the game. The longer you play, the more you realize guys come and go. That happens in hockey. I just think that Fil had to grow. I thought Fil could get to this point, but probably not this quick. I thought it would take longer. But his leadership, I think he's ready to take another step there."

One of the fascinating Canucks subplots in team dynamics has been the often bumpy integration of young defencemen Buium, 20, Tom Willander, who turns 21 on Monday, and Elias Pettersson, 22 on Feb. 16. The trio is being mentored (and usually paired with) veterans Hronek, Tyler Myers and Marcus Pettersson.

Hronek remembers when he was the 21-year-old rookie in Detroit, trying to crack a Red Wings blue line dominated back in 2018-19 by 30-something veterans Niklas Kronwall, Jonathan Eriksson, Mike Green and Trevor Daley.

"It was nice because I could always get tips from them," Hronek said. "They were such nice guys, like, always tried to help me."

"But it's different, coming from college and then you play right away (in the NHL). That one is tough. I played (professionally) back home, so it was different for me. At age 20, when you come in, everything is new, and you're learning. Every day, every game, you learn something new."

Ready or not, Buium and Willander are playing for the Canucks straight out of college. Young Pettersson split his rookie season last year between the NHL and the American Hockey League, but played professionally in Sweden before coming to North America.

"I think they have a little bit of everything," Hronek said. "You know, it's not easy when you're that young, and play against the best players (in the world). So they're learning. But they're listening. I think they're doing a really good job of, like, listening and adding to what they already know."

"He's very good at using his voice on the bench and on the sheet," Willander said of Hronek's counsel. "I think he's got a lot of heart, you know? You can tell, like, he plays his heart out every night. And I like his game, too. He plays a two-way game. I feel like many guys, when they start getting points, they kind of shy away a little bit from the defensive side. But he plays hard (everywhere)."

Despite what seems to outsiders to be a permanent scowl on Hronek, Buium said his teammate is especially accommodating to young Canucks.

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

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"I mean, we joke around," Buium said. "Sometimes at lunch or whatever, he'll come sit with us and, you know, just be chirping us for whatever. But it's friendly chirping. It's that good older guy-younger guy kind of thing, so we enjoy it. He's been awesome to be around. Obviously, on the ice, and with his work ethic, he's just dragging everyone into the fight every night."

What can Buium take from Hronek's game?

"Just how much he wants to win," he said. "I feel like I can relate to that (because) I've always felt that way, too. It doesn't matter if you've lost eight straight or if you've won eight straight; you want to win every game. And he comes with the same mentality every night. Like I said, he's dragging everyone into the fight."

"I think it's really good for all of us to see that even though we've been struggling, it doesn't mean that you have to change your attitude. He's been really good for our locker room. You know you can't get through a day not being at your best because you're going to hear about it from Fil. I think that's a good thing. I think the best teams usually have guys like that, where you can't get around them. You've got to go through them, and you've got to live up to their standard. He's trying to push everyone to be their best."

Myers, the senior Canuck at age 36, said: "Fil doesn't get enough credit for how good his hockey mind is. He's got incredible hockey sense, really understands the game. When you look around the league, he's one guy that I think doesn't get enough credit."

"Fil's a guy that you know can take on as much responsibility as he's given. He's quite amazing that way. He's going to give you the same effort, the same look, whether he plays 30 minutes or 20 minutes. So it's not too surprising he's doing what he's doing."

Since Hughes was traded, Hronek leads the Canucks with 16 points in 26 games while averaging 24:31 of ice time. And despite Vancouver's 7-16-3 record over that time — and Hronek frequently drawing the toughest matchups — the right-sided defenceman has a five-on-five shot-share of 50.8 per cent and expected-goals-for of 50.5 per cent.

"I'm just trying to play the same way," Hronek said. "And I was trying to play the same way when Quinn was here. I'm just trying to be the same always."

Does he feel like he has taken a step since Hughes left?

"I'm not looking at it this way," he said. "Like I said, I'm just trying to play the same way, like I have always been playing. So, yeah, I don't really have an answer for this."

With Czechia excluded from the 4 Nations Face-Off a year ago, Hronek said he is excited to play best-on-best hockey at the Olympics.

"It's big for every country," he said. "Not that different (than) in Canada; it's big for Czech people."

What does he like about Team Czechia?

"Everything," he said, game face on.

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TSN.CA / 'Best feeling in the world': Wilson's dreamlike Olympic start includes spot on McDavid's wing

Mark Masters

MILAN – Walking toward the ice for his first practice with Canada's Olympic team, Tom Wilson tried to take as many mental pictures as possible.

"There's just so many moments today that you'll try and remember, because it's a dream come true," the Washington Capitals winger said. "There's so much pride to pull this jersey on. It's the best feeling in the world."

Wilson did not play for Canada at the World Juniors. He never wore the Maple Leaf at the senior World Championship either. He hasn't played in an IIHF event since the under-17 Worlds in 2011. This opportunity has been a long time coming for Wilson.

The 31-year-old from Toronto planned to reflect on his journey before falling asleep on Sunday.

"Just think about what little Tom back in the day would've been dreaming of," Wilson said. "It's just so special."

Adding to the dreamlike feel on Sunday, Wilson skated alongside Edmonton Oilers centre Connor McDavid and San Jose Sharks sophomore sensation Macklin Celebrini during Sunday's first on-ice session in Milan.

"Two of the best players in the world," Wilson said. "A lot of skill. A lot of IQ. A lot of speed. Get them the puck and it will be in good hands, and then get to the net."

Of course, it's not that simple. McDavid is the fastest player on the planet and that can be an adjustment for new linemates. McDavid initiated a conversation with Wilson midway through practice.

"There's times where I don't need to be over where he is because he's going to catch up," Wilson noted. "You just talk it out. He's a very smart player."

"I've known him a while just growing up around Toronto," said McDavid. "He's worked hard to put himself in this position and make this team, and he should be very proud of himself."

Wilson is not shy about throwing around his 6-foot-4, 220-pound frame. He leads all Team Canada players with 78 penalty minutes this season.

"He has so much more to his game than just the physicality and toughness he brings," stressed Celebrini. "It's his skill and his finishing around the net that is really important."

Wilson has racked up 23 goals and 49 points in 50 games this season. He's on pace for a career-high 72 points. "For me, it doesn't matter where I am, I'm going to try and play my game," Wilson said of the line assignment. "I'm going to try and do my thing and do whatever it takes for this country."

Jon Cooper is quick to point out that line combinations are not set in stone.

"If you watch the 4 Nations, the way we started that tournament was not the way it finished," Canada's coach said. "Part of our job is to find chemistry and at some point you need to put lines together. A lot goes into communication with the players, their coaches, what helps them, what makes them tick, what they like. The one thing I love about this team is not only are we loaded with skill, but we got a bunch of guys out there [who are] gamers with toughness and size and having that mixture."

Wilson is one of six new players on the roster from the 4 Nations Face-Off, but already seems to be fitting in. He playfully tapped Brad Marchand on the helmet as he walked by the Florida Panthers winger in the media mixed zone on Sunday.

"Well, first of all, have you met him?" Cooper said when asked about Wilson's role. "He's full of life. He's unbelievable this guy. He just lights



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up the room when he comes in. He's extremely positive. He's really driven. I see why he's adored in Washington. What a teammate. So pretty fired up to have him. We all know what he can do on the ice, but he may even be better off the ice."

Team Canada's players will spend Sunday night in the Olympic Village where they can rub shoulders with other athletes. Wilson, who is rooming with goalie Darcy Kuemper, already congratulated some of the players on Canada's women's hockey team for their opening win on Saturday night.

"It's really fun," Wilson said. "We walked by one of the Canadian lounges and all the speed skaters were in there watching one of their buddies compete. You learn a lot about where everyone came from and who they're cheering on and what their sport entails. It's gotta be one of the best things about the Olympics is being not only a hockey team but a team as a country and pulling for every single person who walks into that Canadian dorm and village together it's fun."

What does Celebrini think about getting the chance to play on a line with McDavid?

"It's pretty cool," the 19-year-old said. "Playing with a guy like that. He's just, I mean, you can't really put into words the kind of player he is. It's going to be fun."

Celebrini is the youngest player at the Olympic tournament. He doesn't look like it on the ice.

"Young, but he's such a pro already it seems," said McDavid. "He plays a very pro game. Just impressed with how he handles everything."

In a surprise to no one, Team Canada announced Pittsburgh Penguins centre Sidney Crosby will once again serve as captain.

"It's a huge honour any time you get to wear this jersey regardless of whether you have a letter or not," the 38-year-old said. "It's a big responsibility, a big honour, but pretty fortunate to have some amazing leaders on this team and over the years. We're all going to help each other. There's so many guys who are going to lead and everyone has to if we want to have success, but it's definitely an honour."

McDavid and Colorado Avalanche defenceman Cale Makar will serve as alternate captains.

Crosby captained Canada to gold at the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, which was the last time NHL stars participated in the Winter Games. It's been a long wait to get back to this stage. So, what did Sunday feel like?

"It's great," Crosby said. "A lot of anticipation so nice to just to get out there and play and start to go over things. You can prepare on paper and all that stuff and do video, but just fun to get out there. It's a great group and we got to start becoming a team here."

Crosby is comfortable with the captaincy role, but neck guards are a different story. The IIHF mandates all players wear them and Crosby was among the many guys fidgeting with the piece of equipment during Sunday's practice.

"It's a little different," he said while looking down at the neck guard in his hands. "Going to try some different ones here the next few days and figure out what I'm comfortable with. The good thing is we have some practices so, yeah, I'll figure it out over the next few days."

Canada is scheduled to hold two more practices before opening the tournament against Czechia on Thursday.

Team Canada lines at Sunday's practice:

Celebrini - McDavid - Wilson

Marchand - MacKinnon - Suzuki

Stone - Crosby - Marnier

Hagel - Horvat - Reinhart

Jarvis, Bennett

Toews - Makar

Morrissey - Parayko

Theodore - Sanheim

Harley - Doughty

Binnington

Kuemper

Thompson

Team Canada power play units at Sunday's practice:

QB: Makar

Flanks: McDavid, MacKinnon

Bumper: Reinhart

Down low: Crosby

QB: Theodore

Flanks: Celebrini, Marnier

Bumper: Horvat

Net front: Stone

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