



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 10, 2026

## The Athletic

### NHL trade matchmaker: Predicting where top targets go by the deadline, part 4

By: Chris Johnston, James Mirtle

We're less than a month away from the NHL's March 6 trade deadline. That means teams have only a handful of games remaining before their front offices need to make big decisions.

With the NHL season on hold during the Milan Cortina Olympics, it's a perfect time to survey our latest Big Board and identify some intriguing fits.

Enjoy our latest version of trade-board matchmaker.

Robert Thomas

Team: St. Louis Blues

Position: Center

Shoots: Right

Age: 26

Contract term: 2031 UFA

Current cap hit: \$8,125,000

Trade Board ranking: No. 5

Johnston: Los Angeles Kings

Acquiring Artemi Panarin just before the roster freeze kicked in was a major splash dripping with "win now" ambitions, but it didn't address the organization's biggest need moving forward.

The Kings still have a chance to replace Anze Kopitar's minutes before he officially retires after the season.

Even if Thomas isn't quite at the Selke Trophy level the Kings have come to count on from Kopitar, he is a bona fide No. 1 center who is under contract into his early 30s. It's not too often a player fitting that profile is available on the NHL's trade market. This is a rare opportunity.

One of the best parts of the Panarin trade for the Kings is that they didn't have to surrender any premium assets to complete it. The Blues are going to need a haul to part with Thomas, but the Kings are in a position to make an aggressive bid with first-round picks in 2026 and 2027 still in the cupboard, plus other young players and prospects to deal.

Mirtle: Carolina Hurricanes

Something tells me that Hurricanes general manager Eric Tulsky is going to keep swinging on the biggest fish until one is reeled in for the long term.

The Hurricanes have missed on Artemi Panarin, Mitch Marner and (sort of) Mikko Rantanen and Jake Guentzel of late, but Thomas would be an even better fit as a center, given he'd

allow Logan Stankoven to shift to the wing and give Carolina two higher-end scoring lines.

Thomas has a full no-trade clause in his deal and five years remaining, so some of this would be contingent on where his head is at, but cap space and playing time won't be an issue in Raleigh. His exceptional vision and two-way ability would fit in well under coach Rod Brind'Amour.

Unlike most of the league's contenders, the Hurricanes have a first-round pick this year, too: the one they received from the Stars for Rantanen at last year's deadline. But it'll take a bigger haul than that to coax the Blues to give up one of their biggest stars.

Shane Wright

Team: Seattle Kraken

Position: Center

Shoots: Right

Age: 22

Contract term: 2027 RFA

Current cap hit: \$886,666

Trade Board ranking: No. 4

Johnston: Winnipeg Jets

The Jets need to search out opportunities amid a step-back season, and the possibility of bringing in Wright could put the organization on a stronger footing moving forward.

For starters, the perpetual cycle of needing to acquire a second-line center at the trade deadline every year would immediately be stopped.

That's a win in and of itself.

Of course, there's going to be risk attached to any trade for a 22-year-old selected near the top of his draft class who is still playing on an entry-level contract. The Kraken are going to need something enticing in return, like Cole Perfetti, who is two years older than Wright and still has room to grow.

But given how sideways things have gone in Winnipeg in recent months, it's a good time to take a swing. Fortune favors the bold.

Mirtle: New York Rangers

The Kraken are looking for a gamebreaker — and already took a big run at Artemi Panarin — so why not keep talking to Rangers GM Chris Drury and see if there's a fit for another high-end piece as they try to surprise in the wide-open Pacific?



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With the Rangers in retool/rebuild mode, they'll likely find the former No. 4 pick (2022) enticing, especially if the acquisition cost is a package involving an older player (Vincent Trocheck) or an underperformer (Alexis Lafrenière).

Wright just turned 22 and has the high IQ that could allow him to develop into more of an offensive threat over time, especially if given more opportunity than the 13 minutes and change he's had per night in Seattle this season. This could be a change of scenery deal on both sides, and sometimes those can pay off with surprising results.

Nazem Kadri

Team: Calgary Flames

Position: Center

Shoots: Left

Age: 35

Contract term: 2029 UFA

Current cap hit: \$7,000,000

Trade Board ranking: No. 9

Johnston: Montreal Canadiens

Even after acquiring Phillip Danault earlier in the season, the Canadiens could still use another center to strengthen their ability to go on a playoff run.

Kadri is a competitor who would immediately raise the ceiling in Montreal. While there's legitimate concern around how well his contract will age, with another three seasons remaining after this one, the fact he would be in favor of a move to the Habs, according to league sources, should bring a measure of comfort. Kadri has a 13-team no-trade list, and Montreal isn't on it.

Acquisition cost shouldn't be a significant barrier here, given the term left on Kadri's deal, while the potential upside is apparent for anyone who watched him elevate during multiple long playoff runs with the Colorado Avalanche.

There was a time when Montreal might have held out hope Sidney Crosby would become available on the trade market, but that ship has now sailed with the Pittsburgh Penguins in a playoff spot. Surveying the list of other veteran centers available, they might not get a shot to add anyone better than Kadri.

Mirtle: Minnesota Wild

Another team with an obvious gap down the middle that a savvy veteran could help to fill.

The Wild have been excellent since their huge swing on Quinn Hughes, but they know they need another pivot to get out of the Central given the Ays' and Stars' depth. Kadri has been there and won before, with Colorado in 2022, and would fit in well with any of Minnesota's big-shooting wingers. He plays on both sides of the puck and elevate in big moments.

Kadri is on the back nine in his career and has had a tough stretch of late in Calgary, but he's also likely to be somewhat cheap given his cap hit and the term left on his deal. And

Minnesota is well-positioned to absorb his salary, with a potential extension for Hughes still 18 months away.

Dougie Hamilton

Team: New Jersey Devils

Position: Defenseman

Shoots: Right

Age: 32

Contract term: 2028 UFA

Current cap hit: \$9,000,000

Trade Board ranking: No. 6

Johnston: Carolina Hurricanes

Hamilton enjoyed three productive seasons in Raleigh, N.C., before getting a free-agent offer he couldn't refuse from the Devils in 2022. However, the relationship ended on good terms, and there would be obvious comfort from both sides with a reunion.

Acquiring Hamilton as a mildly distressed asset also fits the profile of how the Hurricanes tend to do business.

The Devils may not have the same urgency to trade the veteran defenseman as they did earlier in the season because of an injury to Luke Hughes, but it's no secret that they're looking to get out from under the weight of Hamilton's contract amid a terribly disappointing season.

Hamilton has battled injuries the past couple of seasons, but there have been some recent signs of strong play. That's critical for a team with Stanley Cup ambitions. And while Carolina may not have a glaring hole in its lineup that needs patching, the Hurricanes are a team forever looking for upgrades that make sense wherever they can find them.

Mirtle: Toronto Maple Leafs

I was told by a league source that this was highly unlikely in mid-January, but call me stubborn: There's a good fit here, should the Devils decide to sell low on the big right-shot defenseman.

The retooling Leafs need to remake their defense to have more of a playmaking element, and with Chris Tanev (injuries) and Morgan Rielly (underperformance) both having cloudy futures in Toronto, there are going to be cap dollars and big minutes available.

The Leafs' first attempts at a deal here, per the source, were contingent on a lot of retention — understandably not ideal for New Jersey — but what if they opted to take on the bulk of the AAV? Toronto lacks many high-end picks or prospects, but if this becomes a cap dump, Hamilton brings an intriguing mix, including the ability to quarterback a top power play with star talent.

And cap room is no longer an issue in Toronto.

The Leafs are going to have to get a lot bolder and take some chances to right the ship next season; swinging hard on an oft-injured \$9 million reclamation project qualifies.



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## Preview: Canes At The Winter Olympics

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Things to watch as five Carolina players take the international stage in Italy

RALEIGH, N.C. - The Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 Men's Ice Hockey schedule begins on Wednesday, and the Carolina Hurricanes will be represented by five players, dressing for four different countries at the event.

Frederik Andersen and Nikolaj Ehlers will make Denmark proud, Sebastian Aho will be a part of Finland's group, Jaccob Slavin will sport the red, white, and blue of the United States, and Seth Jarvis will look to once again capture gold with Team Canada.

It's the first time NHL players have participated in the Olympic Winter Games since 2014, when Canada won in Sochi, Russia.

Two of just 11 players with any NHL experience on the Danish roster, Andersen and Ehlers are filled with joy at the opportunity after helping their country qualify for just the second time ever last summer.

Aho, named an alternate captain for Team Finland on Sunday, will try to help his national team achieve a greater result than its fourth-place finish at last year's 4 Nations Face-Off. Bringing a largely similar roster, the Finnish group will also feature former Hurricanes Erik Haula, Eetu Luostarinen, Mikko Rantanen, and Teuvo Teravainen.

As for Slavin, he'd be happy with a repeat of his personal performance during last year's 4 Nations tournament, which had him in the conversation for Most Valuable Player. Known for shutting down the opposition on a nightly basis, he'll now get the chance to show he can do so against the best in the world on any given night as the U.S. seeks to jump from silver in 2025 to gold in 2026.

Last, but certainly not least, Jarvis will compete for ice time on a stacked Canada roster. He appeared in three games for his country at last year's international event, including Canada's gold-medal-winning overtime victory against its southern rival.

### The Schedule...

Preliminary round games listed below involve at least one Canes representative, with their teams in bold. Games will be played at the Santagiulia Arena and the Rho Arena in Milan, Italy.

Wednesday, Feb. 11

Slovakia vs. Finland, 10:40 a.m. ET

Thursday, Feb. 12

Czechia vs. Canada, 10:40 a.m. ET

Latvia vs. USA, 3:10 p.m. ET

Germany vs. Denmark, 3:10 p.m. ET

Friday, Feb. 13

Finland vs. Sweden, 6:10 a.m. ET

Canada vs. Switzerland, 3:10 p.m. ET

Saturday, Feb. 14

Finland vs. Italy, 10:40 a.m. ET

USA vs. Denmark, 3:10 p.m. ET

Sunday, Feb. 15

Canada vs. France, 10:40 a.m. ET

Denmark vs. Latvia, 3:10 p.m. ET

USA vs. Germany, 3:10 p.m. ET

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To view the full schedule for the tournament, [click here](#).

### How To Watch...

In the U.S., all games can be streamed through Peacock (\$) and NBCOlympics.com (with TV provider sign-in).

Live and tape-delayed coverage of hockey will be shown on the following TV channels: NBC, CNBC, and USA Network. The full TV listings for hockey can be found on the NBCOlympics.com schedule page by clicking the toggle at the top to "TV Only."

To learn more about watching hockey during the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026, [click here](#).

### What To Watch For...

It hasn't been the season Frederik Andersen had hoped for so far, but he'll have the opportunity to enjoy a lifelong dream as he backstops Denmark over the next week or so. Expected to be counted in a big way for the group, the veteran is one of just seven players on the Danish roster currently playing on an NHL contract.

Of course, one of the others is Nikolaj Ehlers. Unquestionably the ace up front for the Danes, Ehlers had his most productive month yet for the Canes in January, totaling 15 points in 15 games. Highlighted by his first hat trick with the club in a 9-1



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roust of Florida on Jan. 16, the outing was one of three multi-point games for him during the calendar month, also providing three-point nights against Montreal on Jan. 1 and Dallas on Jan. 6.

As for Sebastian Aho, he paces Rod Brind'Amour's group with 57 points in 57 games. Like Ehlers, Aho had an exceptional January, turning in a new single-month career-best with 14 assists.

Jacob Slavin will likely play a prominent role in the USA blue line. Injuries have limited the 31-year-old to just 17 games this

season, but after returning in December, his workload has continued to trend upward, now averaging over 20 minutes per night again.

Seth Jarvis was a depth player for Jon Cooper's squad last year and will be ready to take on any role needed again this time around. After being left off the initial roster on Dec. 31, the 24-year-old was added as a replacement for the injured Brayden Point on Feb. 6.



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**SB NATION**  
**CANES COUNTRY**

## Your 2026 Olympics Men's Hockey guide

By: Al Hood

Just because we have a nearly three week break in NHL hockey doesn't mean you won't be able to see your Carolina Hurricanes play. The Olympics, after all, are the reason we have this break in the first place.

For the first time since the 2014 games in Sochi, Russia, the NHL is sending their players over to the Winter Olympics to compete in the men's hockey tournament. Unfortunately because Russia is being Russia, the IOC isn't allowing them to compete in this version of the games so players like Alex Ovechkin won't be there. Still, if you enjoyed the Four Nations last year, you're going to get that on steroids.

So here's your guide in both the micro and the macro. Keep this page handy for reference over the next couple of weeks, and thanks to the IIHF and NHL for the information.

### How the Olympic Tournament Works

There are twelve teams that will compete for a medal in this tournament, and are divided into three pools.

Pool A	Pool B	Pool C
Canada	Finland	USA
Switzerland	Sweden	Germany
Czechia	Slovakia	Latvia
France	Italy	Denmark

Each country will only play the teams in their pool in the preliminaries. So if you're hoping for a USA/Canada match this week you're out of luck.

There is overtime in Olympic hockey, unlike other international sports, and in group play the standings are determined using a 3/2/1/0 system. A regulation win gets you three points, a win in overtime or a shootout gets you two points, a loss in overtime or a shootout gets you one point, and a regulation loss doesn't earn you any points. Overtime in the preliminary rounds is the same as the NHL, but the shootout is best of five instead of best of three. One exciting part—after you've chosen your five and it's still a tie, you can reuse skaters over and over again until the tie is broken.

After the preliminaries, each group winner gets an automatic pass to the Quarterfinals, and then the team with the highest points after that fills out that fourth slot. The other eight teams are seeded based on points and other tiebreakers into a "Qualification Round." Those winners are bracketed with the teams with the bye, and we go from there. Thus, every country is guaranteed to play at least four matches—three Pool Play and at least one playoff.

Once you hit the quarters it's a regular tournament, with the losers of the semifinals facing off for the Bronze Medal and the winners going for the Gold.

Which Hurricanes are competing?

In case you need a reminder, here's who Carolina sent over to Italy to compete:

Jacob Slavin — United States

Sebastian Aho — Finland (Alternate Captain)

Seth Jarvis — Canada

Nikolaj Ehlers — Denmark

Frederik Andersen — Denmark

When are they playing?

The full schedule is outlined here, but if all you want to do is watch the Hurricanes play, this is when you should tune in:

Wednesday, February 11 10:40 AM — Slovakia vs. Finland (Peacock, USA network)

Thursday, February 12 10:40 AM — Czechia vs. Canada (Peacock, USA network)

Thursday, February 12 3:10 PM — Latvia vs. USA (Peacock, USA Network)

Thursday, February 12, 3:10 PM — Germany vs. Denmark (Peacock)

Friday, February 13 6:10 AM — Finland vs. Sweden (Peacock, USA Network)

Friday, February 13 3:10 PM — Canada vs. Switzerland (Peacock)

Saturday, February 14 10:40 AM — Finland vs. Italy (Peacock, USA Network)

Saturday, February 14 3:10 PM — USA vs. Denmark (Peacock, USA Network)

Sunday, February 15 10:40 AM — Canada vs. France (Peacock, USA Network)

Sunday, February 15 1:10 PM — Denmark vs. Latvia (Peacock, CNBC)

Sunday, February 15, 3:10 PM — USA vs. Germany (Peacock, USA Network).

From there, the "Qualification Playoff" occurs all on Tuesday, February 17th. If any of the four teams are in that round the time they play will be announced. Then the quarterfinals start



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on Wednesday, February 18th. The Semifinals will be on Friday, February 20th.

The Medals will be determined on Saturday, February 21st at 2:40 PM for the Bronze, and the Gold will be played at 8:10 AM Sunday, February 22nd on NBC. A lot of folks are expecting a USA/Canada Final, but the brackets will determine if that is possible.

There's your primer. Once things get going they get going at warp speed, and even if a country ends up eliminated from the tournament the earliest it would happen won't be until next Tuesday. We'll see how many Hurricanes we get to root for as the tournament progresses.



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## The Hockey News

### Aho Named To Finnish Leadership Team; Lines/Pairs From Olympic Practices

By: Ryan Henkel

Finnish leadership solidified with Aho, while Olympic practices reunite Hurricanes chemistry and reveal key defensive pairings for USA and Canada.

The men's ice hockey event at the 2026 Winter Olympics is just around the corner, with team practices getting started just the other day.

The round robin is set to kick off on Feb. 11 and so we're starting to get news from Milan and how all the teams are stacking up.

Here's the latest from Italy:

Aho On Finland's Leadership Team

After serving as one of the alternate captains for the 4 Nations Face-Off, Sebastian Aho will be reprising that role for Team Finland at the Olympics.

The 28 year old centerman has served as an alternate captain not only for the Carolina Hurricanes, but also multiple times for the Finns at a few different international tournaments from the 4 Nations Face-Off to the World Cup to World Juniors.

Finland will be captained by two-time Olympian Mikael Granlund, replacing the injured Aleksander Barkov, and Mikko Rantanen will serve as the other alternate.

C - Mikael Granlund

A - Sebastian Aho

A - Mikko Rantanen

[leijonat.fi/maajoukkueet/a...](https://leijonat.fi/maajoukkueet/a...)

#Leijonat #OlympicTeamFinland #PohjoisenTahdet

Aho/Teravainen Back Together?

At Finland's first team practice, Sebastian Aho was skating alongside former teammate Teuvo Teravainen once again.

The two were a dynamic duo for the Hurricanes throughout their eight years together and it's undeniable that they have some great chemistry.

The two were joined by Colorado Avalanche Artturi Lehkonen on the second line for Suomi.

Rantanen-Hintz-Granlund

Lehkonen-Aho-Teräväinen

Luostarinen-Lundell-Kakko

Tolvanen-Haula-Armia

Kapanen-Kiviranta

Heiskanen-Lindell

Mikkola-Ristolainen

Määttä-Jokiharju

Lehtonen-Matinpalo

Saros

Lankinen

Korpisalo

Same Role, Partner For Slavin

For Team USA, Jaccob Slavin looks like he'll be reprising his role on the team's shutdown pair alongside Minnesota Wild blueliner Brock Faber.

There were some that were wondering if Faber would be joining new Wild partner Quinn Hughes, but it looks like he'll be paired up with Charlie McAvoy on the top pairing for the Americans.

Slavin/Faber was a very strong pairing for Team USA at the 4 Nations Face-Off last year, as they allowed just two goals against for the whole tournament while they were on the ice.

USA top 2 lines and D pairs

Guentzel-Matthews-Boldy

Brady Tkachuk-Eichel-Matthew Tkachuk

Rest of forwards were kinda scrambled with each rush

Hughes-McAvoy

Slavin-Faber

Werenski-Hanifin

Sanderson-Lacombe

Jarvis Looks To Be An Extra

While Seth Jarvis made Team Canada, that doesn't necessarily mean he'll be playing in games and that seems to be the most likely outcome based on the team's first practice.

Jarvis was skating as an extra alongside Sam Bennett, both of them also being late additions to the team.

There's no doubt that Jarvis can play and be a productive piece for Canada, but he might have to wait for someone else to have a reason to come out to get that opportunity.

First line rushes.

Celebrini McDavid Wilson

Suzuki MacKinnon Marchand

Stone Crosby Marner

Hagel Horvat Reinhart



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Bennett Jarvis

The Danes Arrive

There isn't really much media attention being given to Team Denmark and I guess that makes sense being that they only have a handful of NHL players and they're considered to not really be a competitive medal candidate.

But regardless, I'm sure Frederik Andersen and Nikolaj Ehlers are going to relish in the opportunity.

There's no confirmations on lines and all that, but I can almost guarantee that Ehlers will be a top-line option and Andersen will start in net come Game 1 against the Germans.

## LINKS

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7029884/2026/02/10/nhl-trade-board-matchmaker-thomas-kadri-hamilton/>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/preview-can-es-at-the-winter-olympics>

<https://www.canescountry.com/general/52879/your-2026-olympics-mens-hockey-guide>

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/latest-news/aho-named-to-finnish-leadership-team-hurricanes-lines-pairs-from-olympic-practices>

# SportScan

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

1379027 Carolina Hurricanes

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

Anna Laible

6-8 minutes 09/02/2026

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."

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



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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.

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."

News Observer LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379071 Websites

The Athletic / 2026 Winter Olympics men's hockey forecast

By Ryan Best and Dom Luszczyzyn

Men's Olympic hockey starts Wednesday, with 12 nations competing in this year's tournament. The NHL is allowing its players to participate for the first time since 2014, making this one of the most anticipated events of the Games.

Current standings	GROUP RANK	GAMES PLAYED	GOAL DIFF.	POINTS
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1				
United States				
C1	0	0	0	
2				
Switzerland				
A1	0	0	0	
3				
Sweden				
B1	0	0	0	
4				
Canada				
A2	0	0	0	

▲Automatic berth into quarterfinals

5				
Finland				

B2	0	0	0
6			
Germany			
C2	0	0	0
7			
Czech Republic			
A3	0	0	0
8			
Denmark			
C3	0	0	0
9			
Slovakia			
B3	0	0	0
10			
Latvia			
C4	0	0	0
11			
France			
A4	0	0	0
12			
Italy			
B4	0	0	0

▲Play-in game to quarterfinals

Updated Feb. 9, 2026 at 8:02 p.m. E.T.

Canada and the United States are strong gold medal favorites, but a host of European contenders also have a real chance at gold or silver. (Russia, a perennial medal contender, was banned from this year's tournament.)

You'll find current standings and detailed projections for each team throughout this page, updated during the tournament as games conclude. The gold medal game is Feb. 22.

Team-by-team forecast

	MAKE QUARTER FINALS	MAKE SEMI FINALS WIN	BRONZE WIN	SILVER WIN	GOLD
Canada	>99%	87%	17%	23%	42%
United States	>99%	86%	18%	26%	37%
Sweden	98%	68%	22%	20%	11%
Finland	96%	59%	18%	15%	7%



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Czech Republic	86%	34%	10%	7%	2%
Switzerland	80%	26%	7%	5%	1%
Germany	74%	19%	5%	3%	<1%
Denmark	54%	8%	2%	<1%	<1%
Slovakia	53%	8%	1%	<1%	<1%
Latvia	33%	3%	<1%	<1%	<1%
France	15%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Italy	10%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

Updated Feb. 9, 2026 at 8:02 p.m. E.T.

Just like in the women's tournament, either Canada or the U.S. is expected to win gold. But the men's tournament isn't nearly as top-heavy as the women's. Sweden, Finland, the Czech Republic, Switzerland and Germany are all medal contenders, too.

The projections here come from a statistical model that uses player ratings to estimate relative team strength, calculates each team's odds of winning every game and simulates the full tournament 30,000 times. You can find more details about our full forecast methodology at the bottom of this page.

### Tournament rules and format

The 12 teams are divided into three groups, with each team playing every team in their group once. Group winners advance directly to the quarterfinals, along with the best second-place finisher. The remaining eight teams compete in a play-in round, with the four winners of those games advancing to the quarterfinals.

There are no ties in Olympic hockey. Non-medal games proceed to a shootout if no team scores during one period of 3-on-3 sudden-death overtime. Wins in regulation are worth three points; wins in overtime are worth two points and losses in overtime are worth one point.

Within their respective groups, teams are ranked by total points. Teams across all groups are then ranked by (in order): group rank, total points, goal difference (goals scored minus goals allowed) and goals scored in group play. Last, if necessary, are International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) rankings. Read more about the full tournament structure and tiebreaker rules here.

Below you'll find detailed standings for each group.

### Group A

REG. WINS	O.T. WINS	T. LOSSES	REG. LOSSES
GOALS FOR	GOALS AGAINST	GOAL DIFF.	
POINTS			

1

Switzerland

0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
0

2

Canada

0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
0

3

Czech Republic

0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
0

4

France

0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
0

Switzerland

Switzerland is a rising star in international hockey, with a strong collection of NHL talent. The Swiss have a real chance at upsetting the Czech Republic in group play on Feb. 15 and could be a hard team to beat in the knockout rounds.

### Schedule and game forecasts

All dates and times local

OPPONENT	DATE	EXP. SCORE	WIN PROB.
France	Feb. 12, 6:10 a.m.	3.9-1.4	88% to win
Canada	Feb. 13, 3:10 p.m.	1.9-4.4	14% to win
Czech Republic	Feb. 15, 6:10 a.m.	2.7-3.0	44% to win

### Chances of getting each tournament seed

No. 7 seed: 21%

No. 1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

### Quarterfinals

18%

### Play-in to quarterfinals

82%

### Best guess for next tournament opponent

Latvia (play-in) 15%



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Italy (play-in) 15%

France (play-in) 13%

Denmark (play-in) 13%

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Canada

The Canadians won the last two gold medals in Games played with NHL players, but come into the tournament as co-favorites rather than the clear-cut team to beat. The Canadians should be able to win their group relatively easily. Should Canada and the U.S. secure the top two seeds, they'd be on opposite sides of the bracket and wouldn't meet until a potential gold medal showdown.

These Olympics will only be the second time NHL superstars Sidney Crosby, Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon share the ice together. The first time, they led Canada past the U.S. in an overtime thriller to win the 4 Nations Face-Off last February.

Schedule and game forecasts

All dates and times local

OPPONENT	DATE	EXP. SCORE	WIN PROB.
Czech Republic	Feb. 12, 10:40 a.m.	4.4-2.6	76% to win
Switzerland	Feb. 13, 3:10 p.m.	4.4-1.9	86% to win
France	Feb. 15, 10:40 a.m.	6.2-0.9	99% to win

Chances of getting each tournament seed

No. 1 seed: 29%

No. 1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

Quarterfinals

87%

Play-in to quarterfinals

13%

Best guess for next tournament opponent

Switzerland (quarterfinals) 14%

Germany (quarterfinals) 13%

Czech Republic (quarterfinals) 12%

Slovakia (quarterfinals) 11%

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Czech Republic

The 1998 gold-medal winner has seen its strength as a hockey power diminish over the last two decades, but the Czech Republic looks poised to reassert themselves in this year's tournament. Getting past Canada in the groups will be a tall order for the Czechs. But a second-place finish should still give them a good chance of securing an automatic quarterfinal berth. Their matchup against Switzerland on Feb. 15 may determine that outcome.

Schedule and game forecasts

All dates and times local

OPPONENT	DATE	EXP. SCORE	WIN PROB.
Canada	Feb. 12, 10:40 a.m.	2.6-4.4	24% to win
France	Feb. 13, 10:40 a.m.	4.4-1.4	91% to win
Switzerland	Feb. 15, 6:10 a.m.	3.0-2.7	56% to win

Chances of getting each tournament seed

No. 5 seed: 18%

No. 1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

Quarterfinals

25%

Play-in to quarterfinals

75%

Best guess for next tournament opponent

Italy (play-in) 16%

France (play-in) 14%

Latvia (play-in) 14%

Denmark (play-in) 11%

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France

France was the last team to qualify for the Olympics. Anything better than a last place finish would be unexpected. The French roster includes just one player from the NHL — Montreal Canadiens forward Alexandre Texier.

Schedule and game forecasts

All dates and times local



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OPPONENT	DATE	EXP. SCORE	WIN PROB.
Switzerland	Feb. 12, 6:10 a.m.	1.4–3.9	12% to win
Czech Republic	Feb. 13, 10:40 a.m.	1.4–4.4	9% to win
Canada	Feb. 15, 10:40 a.m.	0.9–6.2	1% to win

Chances of getting each tournament seed

No. 12 seed: 39%

No. 1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

Quarterfinals

<1%

Play-in to quarterfinals

>99%

Best guess for next tournament opponent

Germany (play-in) 17%

Czech Republic (play-in) 14%

Switzerland (play-in) 13%

Denmark (play-in) 12%

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Group B

REG. WINS	O.T. WINS	O.T. LOSSES	REG. LOSSES
GOALS FOR	GOALS AGAINST	GOAL DIFF.	
POINTS			

1

Sweden

0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0					

2

Finland

0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0					

3

Slovakia

0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0					

4

Italy

0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0					

Sweden

Sweden comes into the tournament as favorites to win Group B and take home the bronze medal. While the Swedes are probably the biggest threat to both Canada and the U.S. in the knockout rounds, some key injuries and a lack of true superstar talent at forward prevent them from being considered a real challenge to either as gold medal favorites.

Schedule and game forecasts

All dates and times local

OPPONENT	DATE	EXP. SCORE	WIN PROB.
Italy	Feb. 11, 3:10 p.m.	5.6–1.0	98% to win
Finland	Feb. 13, 6:10 a.m.	3.5–3.1	56% to win
Slovakia	Feb. 14, 6:10 a.m.	4.9–2.2	86% to win

Chances of getting each tournament seed

No. 4 seed: 23%

No. 1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

Quarterfinals

78%

Play-in to quarterfinals

22%

Best guess for next tournament opponent

Czech Republic (quarterfinals) 14%

Switzerland (quarterfinals) 14%

Germany (quarterfinals) 12%

Denmark (quarterfinals) 10%

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Finland

Finland is bringing arguably its strongest-ever roster to these Olympics, and looks poised to make a real medal push. All eyes will be on their matchup with Sweden on Feb. 13 — the winner will likely have a good shot at winning the group and earning a bye to the quarterfinals.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Schedule and game forecasts

All dates and times local

OPPONENT	DATE	EXP. SCORE	WIN PROB.
Slovakia	Feb. 11, 10:40 a.m.	4.5–2.1	83% to win
Sweden	Feb. 13, 6:10 a.m.	3.1–3.5	44% to win
Italy	Feb. 14, 10:40 a.m.	5.0–1.0	97% to win

Chances of getting each tournament seed

No. 4 seed: 25%

No. 1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

Quarterfinals

67%

Play-in to quarterfinals

33%

Best guess for next tournament opponent

Czech Republic (quarterfinals) 13%

Switzerland (quarterfinals) 12%

Germany (quarterfinals) 11%

France (play-in) 10%

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Slovakia

A clear favorite to beat Italy but an underdog against Finland and Sweden, Slovakia is very likely looking at a third-place finish in Group B. This would land them the No. 7, 8 or 9 seed and, if they make it past a single-elimination play-in, a quarterfinals matchup with either the No. 1 or No. 2 overall seed in the tournament. Slovakia would need quite a bit of luck to have any real shot at a medal.

Schedule and game forecasts

All dates and times local

OPPONENT	DATE	EXP. SCORE	WIN PROB.
Finland	Feb. 11, 10:40 a.m.	2.1–4.5	17% to win
Italy	Feb. 13, 6:10 a.m.	3.8–1.6	85% to win
Sweden	Feb. 14, 6:10 a.m.	2.2–4.9	14% to win

Chances of getting each tournament seed

No. 9 seed: 25%

No. 1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

Quarterfinals

8%

Play-in to quarterfinals

92%

Best guess for next tournament opponent

Denmark (play-in) 19%

Latvia (play-in) 18%

Germany (play-in) 13%

Switzerland (play-in) 12%

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Italy

This will likely be a very difficult tournament for the Italians. They do not have any NHL players on their roster and are expected to be outscored by three goals or more in each of their three group games.

Schedule and game forecasts

All dates and times local

OPPONENT	DATE	EXP. SCORE	WIN PROB.
Sweden	Feb. 11, 3:10 p.m.	1.0–5.6	2% to win
Slovakia	Feb. 13, 6:10 a.m.	1.6–3.8	15% to win
Finland	Feb. 14, 10:40 a.m.	1.0–5.0	3% to win

Chances of getting each tournament seed

No. 12 seed: 41%

No. 1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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9

10

11

12

Quarterfinals

<1%

Play-in to quarterfinals

>99%

Best guess for next tournament opponent

Germany (play-in) 18%

Czech Republic (play-in) 16%

Switzerland (play-in) 15%

Denmark (play-in) 13%

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Group C

REG. WINS	O.T. WINS	O.T. LOSSES	REG. LOSSES	GOALS FOR	GOALS AGAINST	GOAL DIFF.	POINTS
-----------	-----------	-------------	-------------	-----------	---------------	------------	--------

1

United States

0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0						

2

Germany

0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0						

3

Denmark

0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0						

4

Latvia

0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0						

United States

The United States has closed the gap with Canada since the last Olympics. They are projected to win every group stage game by multiple goals and have the highest odds of any team to grab the No. 1 overall seed. No American men's hockey team has been better positioned to win Olympic gold.

With its best-ever roster loaded with elite NHL talent and depth at every position, there is intense pressure on this American team to win it all — especially considering the U.S. hasn't won a best-on-best men's tournament since the 1996 World Cup of Hockey.

Schedule and game forecasts

All dates and times local

OPPONENT	DATE	EXP. SCORE	WIN PROB.
----------	------	------------	-----------

Latvia Feb. 12, 3:10 p.m. 5.5–1.2 97% to win

Denmark Feb. 14, 3:10 p.m. 5.2–1.8 92% to win

Germany Feb. 15, 3:10 p.m. 4.7–1.8 89% to win

Chances of getting each tournament seed

No. 1 seed: 40%

No. 1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

Quarterfinals

92%

Play-in to quarterfinals

8%

Best guess for next tournament opponent

Switzerland (quarterfinals) 15%

Slovakia (quarterfinals) 14%

Czech Republic (quarterfinals) 13%

Germany (quarterfinals) 12%

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Germany

No team offers more intrigue in this year's tournament than Germany. With high-end NHL talent and a strong defensive unit, this German team has real upside. Their opening game against Denmark will be crucial — the winner will be well-positioned to finish second in Group C and will keep their hopes of a bye to the quarterfinals alive.

Schedule and game forecasts

All dates and times local

OPPONENT	DATE	EXP. SCORE	WIN PROB.
----------	------	------------	-----------

Denmark Feb. 12, 3:10 p.m. 3.2–2.5 61% to win

Latvia Feb. 14, 6:10 a.m. 3.3–1.9 73% to win

United States Feb. 15, 3:10 p.m. 1.8–4.7 11% to win

Chances of getting each tournament seed

No. 6 seed: 26%

No. 1

2

3



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
Quarterfinals  
16%  
Play-in to quarterfinals  
84%  
Best guess for next tournament opponent  
Italy (play-in) 18%  
France (play-in) 17%  
Slovakia (play-in) 13%  
Latvia (play-in) 10%  
Back to top  
Denmark  
Competing for a medal is a long shot for a Danish team that enters the tournament likely to finish third in their group. They probably need to win their first game against Germany on Feb. 12 if they want to claw their way into the top half of Group C.  
Schedule and game forecasts  
All dates and times local  
OPPONENT DATE EXP. SCORE WIN PROB.  
Germany Feb. 12, 3:10 p.m. 2.5–3.2 39% to win  
United States Feb. 14, 3:10 p.m. 1.8–5.2 8% to win  
Latvia Feb. 15, 1:10 p.m. 3.0–2.2 63% to win  
Chances of getting each tournament seed  
No. 10 seed: 18%  
No. 1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11

12  
Quarterfinals  
6%  
Play-in to quarterfinals  
94%  
Best guess for next tournament opponent  
Slovakia (play-in) 19%  
Italy (play-in) 13%  
Switzerland (play-in) 13%  
France (play-in) 12%  
Back to top  
Latvia  
Latvia are the odds-on favorite to finish last in Group C. They'll have their hands full with a powerhouse United States team and are underdogs against Germany and Denmark, too. Still, they have a good shot at avoiding the last overall seed, as their group is probably the softest of the three.  
Schedule and game forecasts  
All dates and times local  
OPPONENT DATE EXP. SCORE WIN PROB.  
United States Feb. 12, 3:10 p.m. 1.2–5.5 3% to win  
Germany Feb. 14, 6:10 a.m. 1.9–3.3 27% to win  
Denmark Feb. 15, 1:10 p.m. 2.2–3.0 37% to win  
Chances of getting each tournament seed  
No. 10 seed: 27%  
No. 1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
Quarterfinals  
2%  
Play-in to quarterfinals  
98%  
Best guess for next tournament opponent  
Slovakia (play-in) 18%  
Switzerland (play-in) 15%



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Czech Republic (play-in) 14%

Denmark (play-in) 11%

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**Methodology:** Our Olympic hockey projections work similarly to our NHL projections. They start at the player level using each player's projected Offensive Rating and Defensive Rating — a linear weight model that combines each player's production and play-driving ability using various box score and on-ice metrics using data from Evolving Hockey. That projection is based on the player's performance in each metric over the last three seasons (five for goalies), weighted for recency where more recent seasons carry more significance and regressed to the mean. That rating is then adjusted for the contextual usage of who they play with and against on average.

Those ratings are then applied to a projected ice-time based on a player's expected role for his Olympic team. For example, an NHL player playing for a weaker country may be used more than he normally would, while one playing for a medal favorite will likely be played less.

For players outside of the NHL, win-share equivalencies based on work by Cedric Ramqaj and Thibaud Chatel from NL Ice Data are used on weighted averages of each player's last three seasons outside the NHL (with non-NHL data provided by NL Ice Data).

From there, an Offensive and Defensive Rating is created for each team based on the combined ratings from the players on their roster. Those ratings create an estimate of how many goals each team is expected to score and allow in a game against an average Olympic opponent at a neutral site. We then assign a probability of how likely a team is to win a given game by factoring for their opponent's expected offensive and defensive ability.

Taking into account each team's standing and remaining schedule, we use these game-by-game projections to simulate the rest of the tournament 30,000 times using the Monte Carlo method. Within each simulation, each team's expected strength is dynamically variable based on the simulated margin of victory relative to expectations (ie. a 6-0 win given an expected score of 4-2 would rate the winning team higher in future games).

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379072 Websites

The Athletic / Red Wings, Tigers partnering with MLB for post-FanDuel TV, streaming broadcasts

By Max Bultman

The Detroit Red Wings and Detroit Tigers will enter into a broadcast partnership with Major League Baseball, the teams announced Monday, amid uncertainty over the future of Main Street Sports Group, which operates as FanDuel Sports Network in the United States.

Red Wings games are expected to remain on FanDuel Sports Network through the end of the 2025-26 season, with changes beginning in the 2026-27 hockey season, while the Tigers' partnership will begin for the 2026 MLB season.

"In the event that changes," the Red Wings' news release said, "updated tune-in details will be communicated to fans."

Game broadcasts will remain available to fans both on cable and via a to-be-announced direct-to-consumer streaming option.

Red Wings play-by-play voice Ken Daniels and color analyst Mickey Redmond, Tigers play-by-play announcers Jason Benetti and Dan Dickerson, as well as analysts Andy Dirks and Dan Petry, are all expected to continue in their current capacity, as are broadcast reporters Daniella Bruce and Logan Reever for both teams.

The news comes after six MLB teams that previously partnered with Main Street — the Cincinnati Reds, Kansas City Royals, Miami Marlins, Milwaukee Brewers, St. Louis Cardinals and Tampa Bay Rays — announced last week they would let MLB oversee production and distribution of their telecasts.

While the partnership means MLB will provide broadcast support for both the Tigers and Red Wings, the Red Wings are likely to handle most production of their games in-house. The move keeps together the broadcast futures of both teams, which are owned by Ilitch Sports and Entertainment.

"Given recent uncertainty throughout the sports broadcasting industry, we recognize the importance of providing fans with a consistent, year-round outlet to watch Tigers baseball and Red Wings hockey," Ryan Gustafson, President and CEO of Ilitch Sports and Entertainment, said in a statement. "We have two of the top-rated broadcasts in our respective sports and remain focused on listening to fans about what matters most to them. What we've heard includes making sure our games are available throughout the market, providing a reliable streaming product, and producing a broadcast that's informative and entertaining in all the right ways. This is a great path forward in those areas, allowing us to provide a great experience for fans throughout our local market."

FanDuel Sports Network has carried Red Wings and Tigers games since October 2024, when the regional sports network was rebranded from Bally Sports, its name beginning in 2021. Before that, games aired on Fox Sports Detroit starting in 1997-98, after having previously been on the PASS network since the mid-1980s.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379073 Websites

The Athletic / Why Canada and Sweden closed practices, and U.S. flip-flopped: Latest on Olympic men's hockey

By Arpon Basu and Michael Russo

MILAN — The head coaches for the Canadian and Swedish men's hockey teams broke new Olympic ground Monday when they closed their practices to the media, hiding their systems work and line combinations from prying eyes ready to send that information back home to nations full of fans obsessing over every last detail they can get on their teams.

They were also hiding those details from their Olympic rivals.

When Team Canada coach Jon Cooper was asked why he closed practice, though — something no men's Olympic hockey team has done since NHL players started participating in the Games in 1998 — he suggested that "closed" was the wrong term.

Canada was skating on the practice rink adjacent to Santagiulia Arena, a temporary facility with flimsy walls and little room aside from the ice surface itself.

"Practice wasn't closed," Cooper said. "It was only done because the rink's too small. It's just distractions and people — there's just issues to have so many people here. If you're asking me, did any lines change? Did anything happen? No, it did not. Nothing changed."

Everyone, however, will have to take his word for it.



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Cooper's and Sweden coach Sam Hallam's decisions to get alone time with their players at least temporarily inspired Team USA coach Mike Sullivan to do the same, announcing that U.S. practice would be off limits while the media was waiting to speak to Canada's players and coaches.

Even NHL officials in Milan were blindsided by the U.S.'s 11th-hour decision. Ultimately, though, the Americans changed course and allowed reporters into practice.

"We talked about it with our practice today," Sullivan said. "I think any time as a coaching staff — when you have an opportunity to spend alone time with your team, we would all prefer that. But we also understand that this is, to a certain extent, a business, and access to the group is an important element of it.

"But as a coaching staff, we love having alone time with our team and being able to work on things without having to read about it in a tweet 30 seconds later or whatever it may be. But we understand that's the world we live in."

Speaking of which, the United States' forward lines and defense pairs further became clearer Monday.

"Not that anything is etched in stone, because I just think that's the human element of sports," Sullivan said. "We'll see how it goes. But there were certain things that we liked (from the 4 Nations). For example, we liked the Tkachuk brothers when we put them together. They're heart-and-soul guys in a lot of ways. They personify what it means to be an American, with their fierce competitive spirit. And so, I thought they were the catalyst for our team becoming a team in that sense of the word."

The U.S. also may have provided an inside peek at its power-play units. Quinn Hughes quarterbacked the first unit with Auston Matthews, Kyle Connor, Matthew Tkachuk and Tage Thompson on Monday, and the second unit consisted of Jake Guentzel, Jack Hughes, Brady Tkachuk, Clayton Keller and Jackson Lacombe.

Because Monday's practice mostly entailed penalty-kill work, though, with Matt Boldy and Zach Werenski practicing with that unit, Keller and Lacombe may have been placeholders for them on the second unit.

Special teams decisions were at least partially why Hallam decided to close his practice, saying he just wanted one day where the Swedes could work on special teams without reporters sending out intel to their opponents. Sweden plans to open its practices in the coming days, Hallam said.

### Canada's Olympic Village stance

Team USA made it clear from Day 1 that it intends to stay in the Olympic Village, with Brady Tkachuk saying the Americans wanted to experience everything the Olympics have to offer.

"Part of the experience is to immerse yourself in the whole Olympic experience, and the village is part of that," Sullivan said.

Team Canada, however, has largely been evasive on the subject.

Defenseman Drew Doughty was asked after practice on Sunday if Canada would be staying in the village as opposed to using a hotel the NHLPA booked for players.

"Uhhhh, yeah," he said. "Tonight we are."

Canada forward Nathan MacKinnon was asked the same question after practice on Monday.

"I don't know. I think we have both options," he said. "It's not up to me."

### WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Canada's Nathan MacKinnon is not at the Olympics to enjoy himself

MacKinnon is not in Milan to soak up the Olympic experience. He is focused on one thing: leading Canada to men's ice hockey gold.

Forward Sam Bennett and goaltender Logan Thompson, on the other hand, said their understanding is that Canada will leave the village at some point.

"That's the plan," Bennett said.

It's just not clear if that will be a permanent exit.

One thing MacKinnon did confirm was that the men's team planned to gather to watch Canada's women's team take on Team USA on Tuesday evening, but not in the arena. They will do so on television.

Canada does not play its first game until Thursday, against the Czech Republic. Canada may stay in the village until Wednesday and move to the hotel — where it will have access to meeting rooms and video that are not available in the village — the night before its first game.

However, it's hard to say for sure. Much like their closed practice Monday, Canada is playing it close to the vest.

Canada, U.S. had homework ahead of the Olympics

When Canada named its Olympic roster on Dec. 31, the players who made the team were given access to an online portal where they could Watch videos and get up to speed on systems.

Canada forward Mitch Marner said Sunday that most of the systems remain unchanged from what Cooper ran at the 4 Nations Face-Off, but there are six players on Team Canada who were not at that tournament: goaltenders Thompson and Darcy Kuemper, and forwards Macklin Celebrini, Bo Horvat, Nick Suzuki and Tom Wilson.

For them, that video platform was essential prep work for this tournament. And they knew Cooper was taking attendance.

"For me, as a coach, you want to put your players in the best position to have success," Cooper said. "So all the information we can give them, the better. You can't come to this tournament and run through everything in one shot. It was a ton of preparation that went in for players — we would narrate videos and whatnot — and when the team was picked, they had access to watch all this.

"So a little bit of teacher to pupil, and then we had the ability to see who watched it and who didn't."

Attendance, according to Cooper, was very high.

Sullivan did much the same thing with Team USA, which welcomed three players who weren't on the 4 Nations roster: Keller, Lacombe and forward Tage Thompson. (Quinn Hughes also didn't play at 4 Nations due to injury, though he was on the original roster.)

"Our coaching staff put together some video meetings that we sent to the players where they had an opportunity to watch them on the plane ride over, and then we reviewed it when we got here," Sullivan said. "But we did the same thing with the 4 Nations experience. Also, we sent them a number of video meetings in advance, where they had an opportunity to look at it more than once. And we just felt like it gave us an opportunity to get ahead of it. It also cut down on some of the information overload that is always one of the concerns when you get in these types of experiences."

As opposed to taking attendance on the back end of an online platform, Sullivan took the scholastic analogy a step further.

"So far," Sullivan said, "based on the quizzes we've given them, they've all passed with flying colors."

Sweden's goaltending up in the air

Just like the United States and Canada, Hallam is keeping his starting goaltender quiet — as of now, even to his own goaltenders.

Filip Gustavsson said Monday he doesn't know yet whether he, Minnesota Wild sidekick Jesper Wallstedt or the New Jersey Devils'



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Jacob Markstrom will get the nod in Sweden's opener Wednesday against Italy.

"We've just been rolling all three goalies in practice, and we have two more days, so we'll see," said Gustavsson.

Gustavsson is 13-1-3 in his past 17 starts for Minnesota, so he enters the Olympics confident and seemingly playing better than Wallstedt and Markstrom.

"I feel confident, and we've been doing well in Minnesota, so I feel like my game is in a good spot," he said. "Hopefully, (Sweden's coaches) can see that, too."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379074 Websites

The Athletic / Which NHL teams are losing their 2026 first-round draft picks? Checking in on trade conditions

By Chris Johnston

Nearly one-third of the first-round picks in the 2026 NHL draft have already conditionally changed hands as part of completed trades.

That means most contenders don't have one to put in play before the March 6 trade deadline.

What those transactions also highlight is that there's a risk in not putting the proper guardrails on a traded first-rounder in a league where the margins between success and failure seem slimmer than ever before.

With the NHL season on pause for the Milan Cortina Olympics, it's a good time to check in on where things stand with the conditions on the 2026 first-round picks that no longer belong to their original owners.

Each of these conditions has been confirmed by league sources.

Florida Panthers

Top-10 protected, traded to the Chicago Blackhawks in the Seth Jones deal on March 1, 2025

When the Panthers made this trade, most people weren't too concerned about conditions on the pick since they were in the midst of a third straight run to the Stanley Cup Final.

In other words, it seemed moot.

However, hockey insider Frank Seravalli caused a small stir last week when he reported the pick was top-10 protected. That's an important caveat missed in the original discussion around the deal because Florida has been besieged by injuries this season and sat 23rd overall entering the Olympic break.

The Panthers were wise to protect themselves against the risk of a lost year. In the event that their 2026 pick lands in the top 10, Chicago will automatically receive their unprotected 2027 first-rounder instead.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Top-five protected, traded to the Boston Bruins in the Brandon Carlo deal on March 7, 2025

A rare trade between Atlantic Division rivals could wind up haunting the Maple Leafs for years to come.

Toronto is in grave danger of missing the playoffs — holding 21 percent odds of qualifying, according to The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn — and could end up in no-man's land barring a significant change in fortune

down the stretch. With the Leafs unlikely to bottom out and land a top-five pick, they're in a position where if they miss the playoffs, Boston would get a pick that falls somewhere between Nos. 6 and 16 — in addition to having received an exciting young player in Fraser Minten in the trade.

Of particular note here is how unique the scenario would be if the Leafs managed to keep their 2026 first-rounder courtesy of it becoming a top-five pick: That would mean their 2027 and 2028 firsts belong to Boston and Philadelphia — acquired by the Flyers in the Scott Laughton trade — with the Leafs in position to decide which team gets which pick in the event the 2027 pick falls in the top 10.

League sources believe the Leafs could leverage that situation to extract further assets out of either the Bruins or Flyers in a subsequent trade ahead of the 2027 draft. However, it's not the most likely outcome here. Right now, the odds suggest Boston will get the Leafs' 2026 first-rounder.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

'A steal for us': Fraser Minten promoted by Bruins, hinting at big things to come

Coach Marco Sturm on Minten: "He just has that quality, I would say, to be up and down the lineup right away at his early age."

Edmonton Oilers

Top-12 protected, traded to the San Jose Sharks in the Jake Walman deal on March 7, 2025

The Oilers maintained flexibility to make a further move at this trade deadline courtesy of the conditions they placed on the 2026 first-rounder traded to San Jose last season.

Edmonton hit the Olympic break sitting in a Pacific Division playoff spot, albeit not with as big of a cushion as it would prefer. No matter. The Oilers aren't particularly exposed here since they hold the option to convert the 2026 first to 2027 in the event it falls inside the top 12.

However, if they elect to trade their 2027 first-round pick in a subsequent deal ahead of this deadline, the Sharks will automatically get their 2026 first with no strings attached.

Vegas Golden Knights

Traded to the Calgary Flames in the Noah Hanifin deal on March 6, 2024

There were a couple of conditions involved in this trade when it was completed, but they have since been resolved.

The end result? Calgary now owns the 2026 first-round pick, free of any strings.

Dallas Stars

Top-10 protected, traded to the Carolina Hurricanes in the Mikko Rantanen deal on March 7, 2025

The Stars own the league's fourth-highest points percentage, which virtually guarantees their 2026 pick will be transferred after the season. It is top-10 protected, though, in the highly unlikely event that the bottom falls out in Dallas.

In that case, the Hurricanes would be transferred the rights to the 2027 first-rounder instead.

Carolina Hurricanes

Top-10 protected, traded to the New York Rangers in the K'Andre Miller deal on July 1, 2025

The Rangers are in line to receive Carolina's 2026 first-round pick or the one they acquired from Dallas for Rantanen as part of this transaction.



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The conditions call for New York to receive the “better” of those first-rounders in the event both are outside the top 10, which is by far the most likely outcome based on the current standings.

If one of those picks falls inside the top 10 and the other does not, the Rangers would receive the lower pick.

In the event both picks wound up inside the top 10, which is incredibly unlikely, the Rangers would receive the “better” of Carolina’s 2027 first or Dallas’ 2027 first.

Minnesota Wild

Traded to the Vancouver Canucks in the Quinn Hughes deal on Dec. 12, 2025

This one is straightforward and simple: The Canucks own this pick with no strings attached. There’s virtually no chance it becomes a lottery selection, though, with the Wild owning greater than 99 percent odds of qualifying for the playoffs, according to Luszczyszyn.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

She raised 3 NHL stars. Now Ellen Hughes hopes to help the U.S. women’s hockey team win gold

Hughes, mother to Quinn, Jack and Luke, is a player development consultant working with the U.S. women’s team vying for gold in Milan.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Top-10 protected, traded to the Seattle Kraken in the Oliver Bjorkstrand deal on March 5, 2025

While there are numerous conditions involved with this trade, the only one still relevant to the 2026 first-round pick is that Tampa has top-10 protection on it. If it were to end up that high, the Lightning would transfer a 2028 first and 2028 third to the Kraken instead. Otherwise, it goes to Seattle this year.

Colorado Avalanche

Top-10 protected, traded to the New York Islanders in the Brock Nelson deal on March 6, 2025

Some of the original conditions attached to this trade have been resolved, leaving just one remaining aspect still to be determined: Colorado’s 2026 first-rounder goes to the Islanders unless it falls inside the top-10. In that case, it would become a 2027 first instead.

Of course, with the league-leading Avalanche virtually guaranteed to make the playoffs this season, the 2026 pick is almost certainly going to Long Island.

Ottawa Senators

Pick forfeited

The NHL announced on Nov. 1, 2023, that the Senators would forfeit a first-round pick in either 2024, 2025 or 2026 as a penalty for their role in an invalidated trade involving former Ottawa player Evgenii Dadonov.

The Senators have since elected to keep their first-round picks in 2024 and 2025, thereby choosing to forfeit their 2026 first.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379075 Websites

The Athletic / Canada’s Nathan MacKinnon is not at the Olympics to enjoy himself

By Arpon Basu

MILAN — For any first-time Olympic athlete, there is a balance to strike between peak performance and appreciating the experience.

Most athletes work from early childhood for the opportunity to compete on a stage that only comes once every four years. When that moment finally arrives, soaking it all in and enjoying the reward for all that work would be a natural counterpart to the competitive portion of the Olympic experience.

It would only be human.

Nathan MacKinnon is not a typical human.

The Colorado Avalanche star centre and 4 Nations Face-Off MVP for Team Canada is attending his first Olympics. He has worked nearly his entire life for this, and he is finally here at age 30.

And his reaction to his first experience in an Olympic athletes’ village, a highlight for almost anyone because they get to meet other athletes from other sports, summarized MacKinnon’s skewed work-life balance perfectly.

“We’ve talked to some other athletes,” MacKinnon said after practice Monday. “But to be honest, I just want to win gold here. It’s fun to get to know people, but at the end of the day, we’re just trying to win.”

OK, so not a whole lot of mingling for MacKinnon, apparently. The Olympic experience to him, essentially, is all about the top step of the medal podium.

“I want to enjoy myself, but I’m not here to enjoy myself,” he said. “I’m going to do everything I can to play well, and hopefully it’s enough and hopefully I can contribute.”

Don’t you have to take this all in?

“No,” he responded.

Upcoming ice hockey events

All events have concluded. See full medal count.

See full schedule ›

It’s not that MacKinnon isn’t enjoying himself; it’s just that his version of fun is not the same as others. For him, an Olympic gold medal would be fun. Becoming a member of the triple gold club, reserved for players who have won the Stanley Cup, the World Championships and the Olympics, would be fun.

Going to watch speed skating would not.

“Like, I’m loving hanging out with the guys, I’m loving talking, I’m loving practising,” MacKinnon said. “But in terms of going to 10 events a day and going for dinner in Milan, I don’t think anyone’s going to do that. That’s what I mean in terms of enjoying myself. But I’m loving being with the guys. This is a dream for me. I’m sitting next to Sid in the dressing room. At 10 years old, how cool would that be?”

“Sid,” of course, is Team Canada captain Sidney Crosby, a fellow native of Cole Harbour, N.S., and MacKinnon’s mentor, summer training partner and close friend. Just after MacKinnon’s 10th birthday, Crosby began his rookie NHL season. And now, two decades later, they are sitting next to each other in Canada’s dressing room at the Olympics.

Crosby is very familiar with MacKinnon’s uniquely intense brand of competitiveness. He’s seen it first-hand for years in Atlantic Canada summer training sessions, running sprints on dunes or just competing on the ice far from crowds and cameras. They are very alike in that way, so when Crosby was asked about MacKinnon’s inability to dial it back just a tiny bit in order to soak in what he’s experiencing in Milan, he chuckled.



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"I've spent so much time with him, I think I'm used to that," Crosby said. "I think I know how much these events or these moments mean to him. I know how hard he works, and he's going to step up. Whatever guys need to do to get ready, and every guy's different. Yeah, he brings a lot of passion, a lot of emotion and intensity.

"But he wants it, and that's all you can ask for."

There is definitely a professional benefit to being as single-mindedly obsessed with winning as MacKinnon. It is a quality every coach would want out of a top player, something to be passed on to teammates. Still, Canada head coach Jon Cooper hopes MacKinnon at least allows himself the liberty to have some fun.

"Nate is a worker. I found that out when we were at 4 Nations and gave all the guys an off day, and he came to me and was like, 'Hey, do you care if I skate?' And he and Sid went down, and the two of them went on the ice together. And I thought, wow, these guys, they're really, really dedicated and committed players," Cooper said. "But, there is a time you have to have fun. We tell the guys: This is the Olympics. This is an experience we may never get to be a part of again, so enjoy yourself. Enjoy yourself in the village, introduce yourself to other athletes, become part of this.

"When it's rink time, it's our time, and then it's focus time. But I'm encouraging these guys to have fun."

MacKinnon fully intends to listen to his coach. He will have fun in Milan. His own fun.

"I have fun playing hockey," he said. "I go on vacations every summer."

Correction: An earlier version of this story misidentified MacKinnon's role with Team Canada. He is not an alternate captain.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

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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.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Men's Olympic hockey predictions: Gold medal winner? MVP? Biggest surprise?

For the first time in 12 years, NHL players are heading to the Olympics. Here are our picks for the men's hockey tournament in Milan.

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.



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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.

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 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.

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.



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

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379077 Websites

The Athletic / Canada can't risk starting Jordan Binnington over Logan Thompson at the Olympics

By Dom Luszczyszyn

Usually, Canada is the team to beat at the Olympics. Usually. This year, Canada enters the tournament as the co-favorite with the United States despite a markedly better forward group led by the two best players in hockey, and a comparable stable of defensemen. Team Canada also has one of the best goalies in the world as a potential starter in Logan Thompson.

The problem? There is a high likelihood that Canada makes the wrong choice in net by starting Jordan Binnington, one of the league's worst goalies this season.

It's that decision alone that has massive ramifications for Canada's quest for gold and puts the Canadians neck-and-neck with the Americans going into the tournament. What was once a somewhat marginal choice among arguably average options amid a nationwide goaltending crisis has now become a major storyline heading into the tournament.

Since the 4 Nations Face-Off, the chasm between Binnington and Thompson has grown to an extreme point, so much so that starting the former has turned into a genuinely risky decision. Going into the first game against Group A's top opponent, it's a risk Canada can't take.

The Thompson-Binnington divide

Goaltending is extremely difficult to predict; everyone in hockey knows that. When two goalies are close, the error is large enough that it truly can come down to a matter of preference. There isn't a wrong answer between Jake Oettinger and Jeremy Swayman, for example. When the gap is wider, though, the certainty grows. No one is picking Connor Ingram to start over Connor Hellebuyck.

That brings us to Thompson and Binnington and it's vital to view the difference between the two within a timeline of events.

When rosters were announced for 4 Nations, Thompson did not have much body of work as a starter, while Binnington was coming off one of his strongest seasons in 2023-24. Even with Binnington's slow start to the season, the difference in goals saved above expected was close enough at the time that opting for the veteran was completely defensible.

By the time the gold medal game was played, the gap between the two continued to grow. There wasn't anything to do about that with Thompson off the roster, but at the time, Binnington still looked like a decent starter. He wasn't trending in the right direction, but he was at least average over his prior 41 games and his resume made up for it. Even if Thompson was on the roster, the small sample of his elite play would've still put a Binnington start on the side of defensibility. I wouldn't have done it, but it would at least be understandable.

But a lot of hockey has been played since and the gap between the two continues to grow at a rate where it becomes harder and harder to understand how the decision could even be debatable. Thompson has maintained his level of elite play for over a year, while Binnington has continued to consistently trend in the wrong direction.

When the 4 Nations rosters were announced, Binnington had saved 0.25 goals above expected per game over his past 41 games compared to Thompson's 0.03. By the time the final was played, that flipped to 0.57 for Thompson and minus-0.06 for Binnington — a 0.63-goal gap. Today, Thompson has stayed steady at a high-end level (0.44). During that stretch, the difference between the two is now 1.01 goals. Over the past 41 games, the difference between Thompson and Binnington is equivalent to a team starting Binnington already being down 1-0 before the game even begins.

Obviously, Canada should not make decisions based solely on a goalie's most recent output and I genuinely don't think Binnington is this bad.

But even if all the numbers are regressed to reduce error — with Binnington's past and Thompson's small body of work prior to 2024-25 considered — it's hard not to look at the two goalies' peers and think this is anything but an obvious decision. At the very top of the goalie hierarchy, according to our projected output, is Ilya Sorokin (0.33 GSAs per game), Hellebuyck (0.33), Andrei Vasilevskiy (0.30) and then Thompson (0.3). To think that Canada has its own Hellebuyckian option and that it's still up for debate is difficult to comprehend. Binnington, on the other hand, is at minus-0.11. His peers: Alex Nedeljkovic (minus-0.12) and Charlie Lindgren (minus-0.10), Thompson's backup.

Between the two, it's a 0.41 gap in goals allowed per game. The average leaguewide difference between a team's starter and backup goaltender is 0.23 goals. The difference between Thompson and Binnington has simply become far too large to ignore.

The winning pedigree fallacy

There is one argument that the Binnington truthers love to use and it's that Binnington is a clutch winner. That was proven by his Stanley Cup win in 2019 and his clutch performance in last year's 4 Nations final. I'm not here to take either of those things away from him, but the overarching logic of the sentiment warrants scrutiny.

Let's suppose Binnington's winning pedigree is innate, as is his ability to rise to the occasion. That it's something he can summon whenever he wants and when it comes time to backstop Canada at the Olympics, he will lock in and play above the level he's played at for the last calendar year. It could happen!

If that were true, however, two instances from the last year immediately call that logic into question.

The first: Game 7 against the Jets in last year's playoffs. The Blues were up 3-1 with two minutes left in the third. They ended up losing 4-3 in



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overtime, which included a back-breaking game-tying goal in the dying seconds.

The second: A quarterfinal matchup for Canada against Denmark in the World Championships, where Canada had a 1-0 lead with two minutes left in the third and lost in regulation. Let me repeat this one. Binnington, in a Team Canada sweater behind one of the most stacked World Championship rosters that Canada has ever had, lost a game in regulation to Denmark in the final two minutes.

There is obviously plenty of blame to go around for both losses. But it seems like there's a lot of cognitive dissonance when it comes to talking about Binnington's 4 Nations final compared to his Game 7 loss and his loss to Denmark. On one side, Binnington gets a lion's share of credit for winning behind a loaded roster of superstars. On the other side, mostly crickets. With the Denmark loss in particular, it's hard not to blame both goals on Binnington, especially with the winner coming off incredibly poor rebound control.

If Binnington's ability to win is so innate that no statistical argument against his actual playing ability over the last year is apparently warranted, why is it that two devastating last-minute losses in big games where Binnington was the opposite of clutch are ignored? Why does one clutch game matter, but two choke games don't?

It's entirely within the realm of possibility that some goalies win more than others and that they are, in fact, clutch. Binnington may even be one of them and he rises to the occasion in Milan after taking a year off from competent goaltending.

But if we take that concept at face value, we still have one instance where that's actually true for Binnington over the last year and two glaring incidents where it's the exact opposite. Binnington folded at the worst possible time in high-leverage situations two times in games more recent than the 4 Nations final. If his "clutch" play in one is a point in his favor, his non-clutch play in Game 7 and against Denmark easily cancels it out.

Not only has Binnington struggled to make saves since the 4 Nations win, but he's struggled just as much at being clutch and it's difficult to take any argument about his "winning pedigree" seriously.

### The effect on Canada's chances

The question now is, how much does all of this actually matter? This is Canada we're talking about; they should win regardless, right?

Yes and no. Canada should still win because they have the best group of skaters, but the margin between Canada and the USA has shrunk considerably over the last decade. That was on full display at the 4 Nations in two tightly contested games, one that the USA won and the final that Canada won in overtime. The gap between the two countries is now so tight that who starts becomes a genuinely big deal. With Thompson, Canada is the favorite to win gold. With Binnington, that honor goes to the United States.

The effect size ends up being quite substantial, as you'd expect given the current difference between Thompson and Binnington is nearly twice as large as the usual difference between an NHL starter and backup.

From getting a bye to advancing through the knockout round and winning gold, here's how Canada's odds are affected.

A 15 percentage point loss in gold medal odds and a 12 percentage point loss in medal odds going from Thompson to Binnington is a massive deal. It's the type of win probability difference that should be an absolute no-brainer.

The reason the discrepancy is so wide is that every game in a short tournament carries a lot of leverage and has implications on seeding and path. Canada is still likely to win all three of its group games, but its

chances are slight enough to create more possibilities that it doesn't get a bye and ends up with an unfavorable path in the knockout round.

That's why Canada must make the right call between the pipes and that starts with the very first game, the highest leverage game for Canada in the group stage. Canada has a stronger team than the Czech Republic, but the Czechs are still its biggest threat to winning Group A. The Czech Republic also has the exact formula that can cause Canada headaches: a dynamic offense that doesn't need possession to do damage and game-stealing goaltending. It's not difficult to imagine a game where Canada loses 3-1 despite outshooting the Czech Republic 45-18 because of a masterclass from David Pastrnak and Lukas Dostal.

It's a game that Canada wins a majority of the time, but not all of the time. With Thompson, the Canadians are heavy favorites at 80.8 percent. With Binnington, those odds drop down to 72.8 percent — the kind of odds that hockey fans have seen many underdogs pull off in the NHL every year.

Those heightened odds of Canada losing, even if the team is still heavily favored, are worrisome. Some might say that it's no sweat, that Canada will figure it out and that it may even be a good thing if it shifts Thompson into the starter's role. But it's imperative that Canada gets the decision right before the game, not after.

The big issue is what a loss to the Czech Republic does to Canada's path. A regulation loss would mean a deep cut to Canada's bye chances and while they would have a high likelihood of winning that game, their post-group stage path would change drastically. At the moment, Canada likely plays Switzerland in the quarterfinal and Sweden in the semifinal. A loss to the Czech Republic would shift that to a date with Finland in the quarterfinal and the USA in the semifinal. Path odds are far from set in stone, but Canada's chances of facing Team USA before the gold medal game, jumping from 20 percent to 35 percent, would be far from ideal.

In the event that a loss to the Czech Republic happens, here's how Canada's tournament odds change (relative to starting the tournament with Thompson, assuming Canada likely turns to him after a Binnington Game 1 loss).

It may just be the first game and a little adversity never hurt, but a loss creates a huge ripple effect toward Canada's path. A collision-course with the USA in the semifinal rather than the final is not a risk worth taking — not with how close the two rosters are now.

Look, I know this has a decent chance of being a Chicken Little forecast. The sky is not falling if Canada goes with Binnington and/or loses Game 1. Canada still has a high chance of winning gold, no matter who's in net. And I do recognize that analytics aren't perfect, even less so for goalies. It's possible that Binnington, powered by the spite of many questioning his ability, indeed puts up the greatest goaltending performance of all time en route to gold. It's possible that with St. Louis' season in the tank, he's saving himself for this exact moment. As a Canadian, I could not be happier to be more wrong if that is the case.

But as a realist, it's impossible to ignore the mountain of evidence that puts a strong lean toward Thompson. The difference between the two has grown to a point that it's nowhere near close enough to come down to a matter of preference. The difference is large enough that running counter to the obvious logic of who the better goalie is would be a massive unforced error.

We're not talking about gut feel or intuition within a marginal difference in talent. We're talking about a difference so wide that it should be an incredibly easy choice. We're talking about the best statistical Canadian goalie since Carey Price vs. a goalie who lost his starting job to a different Canadian goalie who was nowhere close to making this team.

That it's even up for debate feels like an entire country being gaslit about the last year of hockey Binnington has played. That the debate is likely already closed in Binnington's favor is even harder to fathom.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 10, 2026

Binnington may have earned the benefit of the doubt during the 4 Nations final. But he's lost it repeatedly for a year, ever since, with his play trending downward and multiple moments where his play melted down at the worst possible time.

There should be no question who Canada's starter is at the Olympics. If Canada wants its best chance to win gold, Binnington can't be their Game 1 starter.

— Data via Evolving Hockey

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379078 Websites

The Athletic / New generation of NHL stars take Olympic ice for the first time: 'Like a kid living my dream'

By Pierre LeBrun

MILAN — The world's No. 1 hockey player led Team Canada out for practice Sunday night.

No one can blame Connor McDavid for being first in line out of the dressing room. No. 97 had waited 11 years into his spectacular NHL career to step onto an Olympic ice surface.

"Surreal, surreal," McDavid said afterwards. "It's been a long time. It's been a long time coming."

The NHL season is a grind, full of days that blend into each other, sometimes making players sound like robots. This was not one of those days.

For an entire generation of NHL stars, it was a moment that felt forever fleeting. The ultimate tease, like Charlie Brown and the football. NHLers were supposed to be in China four years ago, but COVID concerns cancelled those plans.

On this day, as the NHL chartered most of its Olympians to Milan and teams stepped into a rink draped in Olympic logos for practice, the dream became real.

Finally.

"Yeah, for sure. I mean, being here, landing today and going through a little experience, getting checked into the village, definitely feels real now," said Team USA center Jack Eichel, who had been vocal for years about his desire to live out his Olympic dream. "We're here and obviously we fought hard for this. It means a lot to the players and I think we're all really excited to be here."

"It means a lot," added teammate Auston Matthews, Team USA's captain. "It's crazy to think about now we're here, and you get this opportunity, and it's just very special. ... I think it definitely hits you once you touch down and get to the Olympic village and get settled in, just how special and cool it is to be here representing your country and experiencing what the Olympics is all about."

The players made the Olympics a top item in collective bargaining with the owners. It was a must. They weren't going to back down on it. Some of those owners still aren't thrilled their players are here, but they weren't going to deny them any longer.

"It was a little dicey in '22 to even go, so I think that was for the best, obviously," said Team Canada superstar Nathan Mackinnon. "In '18, I can't remember why we didn't go, but we didn't. It was a long time coming. My rookie season (2013-14) we went, and obviously I wasn't

going to make the team. It was kind of a tease in '22 and a lot of us are in our primes right now, so it's a good time to go."

McDavid, Eichel, MacKinnon, Matthews — the cream of a generation that got robbed of Olympic opportunities.

Sunday was a day to turn the page.

"Eichs, Matthews, Matt Tkachuk and all those guys are 28, 29 now, so they (should be) starting their third Olympics by this point," said Team USA forward Jack Hughes. "So I'm sure super excited to be a part of this and finally be here."

The hard part, too, is that not everyone got to be here. Even though NHL players are back in the Olympics, some very good players didn't get the call. All of which isn't lost on all these first-time NHL Olympians now here in Milan.

"It's very true. And you never know what people think about you," said Team USA goalie Connor Hellebuyck. "So you never know when your opportunity or your window closes. I'm very grateful to be here today. I'm going to soak it in and enjoy every single moment and give it my best."

That's last year's Hart and Vezina Trophy winner, sounding like he wasn't sure this day would ever come.

Dylan Larkin took a moment to absorb it in practice.

"I was skating around and looked over at Zach Werenski and seeing the Olympic rings on our helmets, it's just incredible," said the Team USA forward. "It's pretty cool. You dream about it. I know a lot of players, the big dogs in the league, were vocal about coming here. And we're here. That speaks a lot to the players stepping forward and wanting to have a say in it."

Swiss center Nico Hischier's eyes lit up when asked to describe what it felt like to skate on the Olympic ice sheet Sunday.

"Special. I mean, for myself, it's my first Olympics," said Hischier. "You grow up watching these big events, Summer and Winter Olympics, it's only every four years. It's very cool to be experiencing this now. It took a little while, but the players are all very happy to be part of it."

Sweden's Mika Zibanejad hasn't had a lot to rejoice with his New York Rangers this year. Stepping into the ice here Sunday made all that go away.

"Great, honestly. I don't have anything negative to say. I've been just so stoked to be able to be part of Olympics," he said. "I think it's bigger than maybe some hockey people think, and you may not realize how big it is when you start thinking about the athletes around that are working 4-8 years to get here and to get the chance to even crack the qualification to Olympics."

"And for us to be able to be here, obviously a different situation for us now because it's been so long since the NHL players have been around, but amazing. I feel like a kid living my dream. It's going to be awesome."

I feel like a kid living my dream.

And it's not just the players. Jon Cooper's face spoke volumes Sunday.

"Humbling," said Team Canada's head coach, who is in his first Olympics. "You walk into that Olympic Village for the first time and you're surrounded by the world's greatest athletes and to see them in a meal room or in the lounge or whatever and you're like, oh my God, that's whoever. I don't know, like I said, it's humbling to be there. It's eye-opening. I've watched the Olympics my entire life. Now to actually be here and see it and see the passion ... I don't know, it's super cool."

And the thing is, it's not just surreal for the first-timers. Even two-time Olympic hockey champions get goosebumps. It's been 12 years for No. 87 between Olympics.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"I think there's some days that it feels like 12 years and other days where it feels like yesterday," Team Canada captain Sidney Crosby said after practice Sunday, smiling ear to ear. "It's so great, though. There's been a lot of anticipation ever since we found we were going back to the Olympics. And then the naming of the team, just a lot of anticipation. It's just great to be with the guys and get out there and get to work and see the speed and try to get better here and become a team."

His advice to to all the first-time Olympians on the team?

"I think you got to be open-minded and go with the flow," said the man who scored the Golden Goal in 2010. "There's always different things, whether it's your routine or different things that come up, you just have to embrace the whole experience. It's a special one. Not only representing hockey but the — just the entire Team Canada and celebrate sports. There's expectations and there's pressure that comes with it, but it's about our group trying to be the best team we can. It's on all of us to help each other and that's what we'll try to do."

It's really happening. What has the potential to be the greatest hockey tournament in the history of the game, based on the collection of talent assembled here in Milan, is finally here.

Let's take a moment to recognize how amazing that truly is.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379079 Websites

The Athletic / Could the Czech Republic's goaltending make it an Olympic men's hockey dark horse?

By Jesse Granger

Lukáš Dostál was a bit starstruck.

In the summer of 2024, the Anaheim Ducks goalie met legendary Czech netminder Dominik Hašek for the first time. The surprise meeting was on the stage of the Zlata Hokejka (Golden Stick) award show in the Czech Republic, where Hašek congratulated Dostál for being named one of the country's best hockey players.

Hašek is athletic royalty in the small, hockey-loving country in central Europe. The Czech Republic (also known as Czechia) has a storied history of goaltending, of which Hašek is the star. Not only is he arguably the best to ever play the position, he also delivered his country its first and only Olympic gold medal in 1998. Dostál joked afterward that he might skip a shower that night following a handshake with Hašek.

The moment between the two on stage was a symbolic passing of the torch. Now, Dostál leads a new generation of talented Czech goalies that may be its deepest yet. As Czechia begins play in the men's hockey tournament at the Olympics on Thursday against Canada, the latest wave of Czech goalies — led by Dostál — gives the nation hope that it can shock the world again, as it did with Hašek in the crease.

Dostál, Karel Vejmelka of the Utah Mammoth and Dan Vladař of the Philadelphia Flyers are Czechia's three goalies. It's still unknown how Czechia, with three games in four days in the preliminary round, might split its goaltending duties, but Dostál is considered the best option.

Dostál was born in Brno, Czechia in 2000, roughly two years after the greatest moment in the country's hockey history. Hašek led the Czechs on a stunning run to a gold medal at the 1998 Olympics in Nagano, Japan. That year, Hašek allowed only six total goals in six games. With his flashy, acrobatic style, he shut down the powerhouse Canadian team in a semifinal shootout thriller, then shut out the Russians in the gold-medal game.

"Obviously I've seen a lot of 1998 in Nagano," Dostál said. "That was running on the TV all of the time (while I was growing up), so I saw plenty of that."

Now, 28 years after Hašek backstopped a squad of underdogs to Olympic gold, Dostál hopes to do the same.

"Especially in these tournaments, the goalie can steal a game," said Vegas Golden Knights forward Tomáš Hertl, who is one of Czechia's top forwards. "That's a great starting piece for us, because we might not have that many NHL players. In these tournaments, when you see upsets, it starts with the goalie."

Only 26 Czechs have played in the NHL this season, and eight of them are goalies. While the country only makes up 2.6 percent of the league's forwards and 1.1 percent of its defensemen, Czechia accounts for nearly 10 percent of the league's goalies.

Dostál's emergence as one of the most talented goalies in the Western Conference has helped Anaheim turn the corner on its rebuild and enter playoff contention. Vejmelka has become a true workhorse starter for the Mammoth, and is currently tied with Andrei Vasilevskiy for the most wins in the NHL. Vladař is having a career year and has arguably been the Flyers' best player.

Czechia had plenty of other Olympic options this year. Jakub Dobeš has had strong stretches for the Montreal Canadiens and David Rittich has played lights-out behind Ilya Sorokin on Long Island. Petr Ruzek, Vítek Vanecek and Jiri Patera have also earned starts elsewhere.

It's an impressive list from a nation with a population a fraction of the size of the United States or Canada.

Top 5 NHL goalie-producing countries

Canada

22

United States

21

Sweden

10

Czechia

8

Finland

7

"It's huge for our country," Vejmelka said. "We are a small country, but we have so many great goalies, and they play huge roles on their teams, which is great."

There aren't enough Czech NHL defensemen to even fill out a blue line, but more than half of the Czech goalies in the NHL didn't receive an invite to Milan. Producing top goalies is nothing new for the country. Hašek and Tomáš Vokoun are the clear top two all-time, but Petr Mrázek, Ondřej Pavelec, Roman Turek, Michal Neuvirth and Roman Cechmánek all carved out impressive NHL careers.

"When I was a kid, I watched almost every tournament for the Czech hockey team," Vejmelka said. "So whoever was in the net, I was excited to watch him. It maybe built me, a bit, as a goalie too."

Dostál can remember looking up to the goalies on his hometown professional team, HC Kometa Brno. Jiri Trvaj and Finnish-born Sasu Hovi were Brno's top netminders at the time, both of whom Dostál idolized as a child.



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"It's actually funny, I have a picture of me and Hovi when I was like 10 years old," Dostál said. "We were doing some kind of advertisement for the current generation, and the generation coming up. Then, eight or nine years after that, we took a similar picture on the ice, after I was drafted (by Anaheim). So that was pretty cool. It's funny how small the world is."

Once a child in the stands cheering on his countrymen in Brno, Dostál is now one of his nation's top goalies, and leads a resurgence of Czech netminders across the NHL.

"There had been a little break, and now we have a lot of Czech goalies in the NHL, in very good positions, so obviously that makes me happy," Dostál said. "I love to see that."

As recently as the 2019-20 season, only three Czech goalies appeared in NHL games. What led to the recent influx? Dostál credits a goalie coach by the name of Radek Toth, who led an effort to unify the development philosophy for youth goalies in Czechia. Back in 2014, the Czech Ice Hockey Association appointed Toth to a newly created position as the head of goaltending with hopes of standardizing goalie coaching across the country.

"We were essentially starting from scratch," Toth explained. "The first task was to assemble a coaching team and think together about the best development path for our goalies, and where our system needed to improve. What proved most effective was the collaboration between young coaches – hungry for new information and education – and coaches who had rich playing careers behind them."

The group drew inspiration from Sweden and Finland, both of which have a long history of producing technically sound goaltenders, and combined it with their own philosophies.

"For example, Finnish goalies were excellent skaters and used very active hands," Toth explained. "Swedish goalies were strong in their positioning when defending plays from behind the net."

Within two years, Toth and his team had built development programs across almost all age groups, running nationwide in Czechia.

"These programs helped us promote a unified methodology throughout the entire hockey community," Toth said. "We involved club goalie coaches in every project, and for the youngest age groups, we even invited the parents. In my opinion, the Regional Association Coaches Project was absolutely crucial."

Most of today's Czech goalies grew up and developed in that environment. And while Dostál, Vejmelka and Vladař all play different styles, there are plenty of commonalities. They play a patient game, holding their edges as long as possible and waiting out shooters. They're quiet and efficient in the crease, with little wasted movement.

It's very different from Hašek's wild acrobatics from the '90s, but the trait all of Czechia's best goalies share with the Hall of Famer is how they read and anticipate plays.

"I would call it active goaltending," Toth explained. "It's built on several key elements: excellent skating, staying on your feet as long as possible, using active hands, and tying it all together with elite game-reading. In other words, the Lukáš Dostál style."

This is the first time in 12 years that the NHL's best will face off internationally. After watching the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament last February, Dostál expects it to be hockey at its highest level.

"It was beautiful to watch that hockey," Dostál said. "I couldn't be more excited to do my best and to be a part of the team."

Czechia can't match the sheer depth of the United States and Canada, but it has plenty of high-end talent. Up front they'll be led by Hertl, David Pastrnak, Martin Necas and Pavel Zacha. The blue line will feature Filip Hronek and Radko Gudas.

And as Hašek proved in 1998, if the goaltending is strong enough, it can be the ultimate trump card. Dostál, Vejmelka and Vladař obviously aren't quite at that level yet. Hašek had already won the Vezina Trophy three times at that point in his career, and was on his way to a Hart Trophy he won later that season, but the Olympic stage can produce instant legends. A hot goalie can convince a team it's capable of the impossible.

The talented Czech goalies are practically salivating at the opportunity.

"At the international level, playing in the Olympics is the best thing you can achieve," Dostál said. "To win a medal would be even greater. It's going to be exciting times."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379080 Websites

The Athletic / Sidney Crosby on 2026 Olympics and the weight of Team Canada gold medal aspirations

By Josh Yohe

Sidney Crosby has been under pressure his whole life. When you grant your first interview at age 7, become arguably the most hyped player in your sport's history, and then live up to all of that hype, pressure is a given.

A different type of pressure awaits Crosby in Milan.

The captain of Team Canada is familiar with the Olympics and with the rigors of best-on-best international play. This time, his third Games after winning gold in Vancouver in 2010 and Sochi in 2014, may feel different for Crosby, though, because the pressure isn't solely rooted in winning another gold medal. This time carries the added weight that these could be his final Olympics.

In addition to the Olympics, Crosby has played in two more best-on-best tournaments: last year's 4 Nations Face-Off and the 2016 World Cup of Hockey. Canada has won all four tournaments. Crosby was the captain in the three most recent events and won MVP at the World Cup of Hockey. In 2010, the only time Crosby wasn't captain of Team Canada, he scored the golden goal on Canadian soil at 22.

The 38-year-old Pittsburgh Penguins captain has always handled pressure with a seemingly innate knowing and calm.

How?

"At this point in my career, I've learned to draw on my own experiences," Crosby recently told The Athletic. "That's the way I look at it. It's a trust thing. Do you trust your game? Do you trust all the work you've put in? I trust my game, and what I need to do, and what I believe in. So, when you can say that, I think it helps you deal with all the pressure."

Crosby is widely considered to be among the greatest captains in hockey history. As a youth player, he was never captain of his teams because he typically played with older groups due to his advanced talent. The captaincy in Pittsburgh, though, quickly became a perfect fit. So, too, did the captaincy of his homeland.

His philosophy on his leadership and the Olympic success that has accompanied it is classic Crosby.

"For me, the biggest thing is always to remember that it's a team sport," he explained. "Hockey isn't supposed to be about just one person or anything like that. It's a team sport. You're supposed to help each other. That's what I've always believed, and I think that's what works best. It's a lot easier to play the game the way you want to play it, and to have



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success as a team, and to win together, if everyone is on the same page and working together as a team. That's the way I've always looked at it, and that's what's always worked best for us in the past."

Crosby's Penguins and Canadian teammates alike have long appreciated his approach.

"Sid just wants to win," said Colorado Avalanche star Nathan MacKinnon, Crosby's close friend and Team Canada teammate. "He always leads the way, and he leads the way the right way. You just follow him."

Even those who have been Crosby's teammates for a matter of days are impressed by the team-first philosophy that, by all accounts, is completely authentic and sincere. Brett Kulak, Connor McDavid's Edmonton Oilers teammate before a December trade sent him to Pittsburgh, is already in awe of Crosby as a captain.

"You have to appreciate him and all that he does," Kulak said. "We all deal with pressure and stress that revolves around the game and wanting to win. But I can't even imagine how much he has on his plate, that he's able to process mentally. That's one of the things that separates him. Another thing that separates him is his ability to be successful under pressure and in stressful situations."

Crosby also has a rare ability to relate with everyone in a locker room and to make the pressure seem a little less daunting.

Kulak said Crosby is unlike anyone he's ever been around.

"That's the thing," Kulak said. "You know who he is, but he just always puts everyone in the locker room before himself. That's the thing about him that you notice right away. He always puts everyone else first."

Crosby, in his 21st NHL season, is having a typically outstanding campaign. His 59 points in 56 games put him ahead of a point-per-game pace, which he's accomplished in every other season of his career en route to breaking a Wayne Gretzky league record. His Penguins are making an unexpected romp toward the Stanley Cup playoffs in a season they were expected to finish near the bottom of the NHL standings.

Still, the expectations in Canada over the next two-plus weeks are sky-high — but it's nothing he hasn't experienced before.

"More than anything, I'm just trying to find balance with my game and with how I handle my time and everything else," Crosby said. "I'm excited. But I also want my game to be in a good place going into the Olympics. You want to be playing well."

Upcoming ice hockey events

All events have concluded. See full medal count.

See full schedule >

Crosby has only two points in his past six games, an oddly quiet stretch that he's highly aware of. He doesn't seem terribly concerned, though, and believes the production will come.

"I've been preparing for it," he said. "It's going to be a busy few days, even before our first game in the Olympics (on Thursday). A very busy few days. So I have to keep balancing that stuff. The physical work, that preparation, it's already done. At this point, it's getting everything else ready on the mental side of things, planning your schedule."

Even though Crosby's most recent Olympics came a dozen years ago because of the COVID-19 pandemic and governing body disputes, he believes he can rely on his previous experiences.

"I had a great time in Vancouver and Sochi, just incredible memories and accomplishments for us as a team," he said. "And from what I've heard from people who are already over there (in Milan), it's beautiful and things are going really great. So, to get to go one more time? I just look at it as a great opportunity more than anything. You never know when you're going to get to go again."

At Crosby's age, he realizes this could be his last Olympics, though he's never said it. He would be 42 at the next Winter Olympics, 2030 in the French Alps. If this is his final time on the biggest international stage, he'd like it to be memorable — and he'd like to keep that record unblemished.

Pressure?

"You can look at it that way," Crosby said.

"I just can't wait to get there, to be a part of it, to be surrounded by other Olympians."

A third gold medal?

"It would mean everything," he said.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379081 Websites

The Athletic / Men's Olympic hockey predictions: Gold medal winner? MVP? Biggest surprise?

By Sean Gentille, Shayna Goldman, Mark Lazerus, Jesse Granger and James Mirtle

At some point over the last month, the NHL season started to feel more like a preamble to the 2026 Winter Games than anything else.

Are we complaining about that? Nope! Twelve years between best-on-best at the Olympics is a long time, and what's about to happen in Milan should be treated like a big deal — because it is.

The Athletic's NHL staff, accordingly, has had plenty of time to think about how it'll all go down. Here are our picks and predictions for the men's hockey tournament, with expert analysis and critique from senior writers Sean Gentille, Mark Lazerus and James Mirtle, analytics know-it-all Shayna Goldman and goaltending expert Jesse Granger.

Figures are rounded.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Olympic women's hockey predictions: Gold medal winner? MVP? Canada vs. USA?

The women's tournament brings high stakes, incredible talent and one of the best rivalries in sports to Milan. Who will come out on top?

Lazerus: This is both obvious and a bit misleading. Both the Czech Republic (also known as Czechia) and Switzerland are legitimate threats to spring an upset or two in this tournament, and I'm sure everyone on staff knows this, even if only one of us had the guts to pick it (wasn't me, alas). As a supporter of Team Chaos, I hope Lukáš Dostál prints this out and sticks it in his locker stall.

Gentille: I desperately tried to get myself to a place where I could pick Czechia, but this is still a roster with two NHL defensemen.

Granger: I genuinely think Czechia could be the third-best team in this tournament. Unfortunately for them, Canada might be the best.

Goldman: The problem is, the winner of this group comes down to a matchup between these two teams; maybe Czechia can shake things up later on, but it feels like it's Canada's prelim game to lose.

Mirtle: If you're on Team Chaos, you're rooting for Canada to somehow lose its first game and have to scramble the rest of the way. Feels unlikely, although there is the Jordan Binnington factor.



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Gentile: Sweden is banged up enough to make this interesting — I'm legitimately disappointed that we're not going to see Leo Carlsson — but I can't pick against an Aleksander Barkov-less Finnish team.

Goldman: Finland still has star power without Barkov, but Sweden's team just feels deeper.

Granger: I was one of the few who took Finland to win this group. I just love how well-rounded that roster is at every level. It has firepower up front led by Mikko Rantanen, Sebastian Aho and Roope Hintz. The blue line is strong from top to bottom, and while Juuse Saros hasn't had stellar stats behind Nashville lately, he's the type of athletic goalie who can steal a game.

Mirtle: Closer to a coin flip than this, in my opinion. Never sleep on the Finns. But this could be the biggest matchup in the prelims, if a quarterfinal bye is at stake.

Lazerus: At least Latvia has the coolest uniforms.

Gentile: If the second-best team in the group were Czechia or Finland, rather than Germany ...

Granger: The United States certainly got a favorable group to ease into this tournament. I wonder if it hurts them in the first knockout games, where they'll face a more battle-tested team.

Goldman: Boring! But no other choice.

Mirtle: This group shows how much the tournament misses Russia, talent-wise. Just not a deep field overall.

Lazerus: Perhaps if Bill Guerin hadn't left three of the top four American goal scorers at home, this would have been a closer vote.

Gentile: He did what now?

### WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

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

In two weeks, the American GM will either be the man who built the perfect roster or the one who squandered the golden age of U.S. hockey.

Goldman: Better to be brash than bring multiple 40-plus goal scorers — that's how you win games!

Granger: It didn't work out for me at 4 Nations, but I'm still picking the U.S. based on the advantage in net. If you guaranteed me Canada will play Logan Thompson in net, I'd be much more comfortable picking it to win, but I'm not sure it will.

Mirtle: The goaltending decision looms large for sure. Dom has Canada's odds as dramatically different depending on who it starts. The Connor Hellebuyck factor will be interesting, too. Does he finally break out in a big way?

Granger: The Finns might put this poll up on the wall in their dressing room.

Goldman: The fact that the USA isn't even a lock for silver tells you what you need to know about its roster construction.

Mirtle: Someone has been watching the Swiss at worlds of late.

Lazerus: Wow. And here I thought I was being bold picking the Czechs to win bronze. The Swedish disrespect is real.

Gentile: Makes sense — when this poll was taken, Sweden's injury situation seemed pretty dire. At the moment, though, I feel better about William Nylander, Victor Hedman and Gabriel Landeskog being ready to make an impact.

Granger: I also thought I was going out on a limb to pick Czechia here. Seeing everyone had the same thought process reminds me of when I

picked Tampa Bay to win the Cup last year. Hopefully, this goes better for the Czechs than it did for the Lightning.

Goldman: Czechia going from potential disruptor to actual competitor makes this tournament even more fun. But the fact that Sweden is actually healthier than expected definitely makes this a closer race.

Lazerus: They're definitely the seventh-best team in these Olympics, but make no mistake, Leon Draisaitl, Moritz Seider and Philipp Grubauer absolutely can ruin someone's tournament on any given night.

Goldman: Yep, we're all too on the same page with Czechia to feel like a surprise, so Germany feels like the next best pick here. While it isn't deep enough to medal yet, it could steal a big win just to shake things up.

Gentile: Switzerland's got some high-end pieces, too. If Akira Schmid randomly pops off, things could get interesting.

Granger: I watch him nearly every day here in Las Vegas, and Schmid is playing the best hockey of his life entering these games. It's perfect timing, and it would be really cool if he and the Swiss can pull off an upset or two.

Lazerus: The Olympics can burnish reputations of longstanding greats, but they can also mint new stars. This feels like the moment Matt Boldy becomes a true household name.

Gentile: I picked the U.S. to win gold against my better judgment, then I dipped into some game theory here; Hellebuyck snapping into 2024 mode seems like the easiest route.

Granger: It's looking like Hellebuyck won't get the opportunity to exorcise his Stanley Cup playoff demons this season in Winnipeg, but leading the U.S. to a gold medal would go a long way toward rewriting the narrative. I say he does it.

Goldman: I simply have a hard time betting against Sidney Crosby in what is very likely his last Olympics.

Mirtle: No Auston Matthews shows how tough a go it has been for him of late. But kudos to the Mitch Marner vote; that would certainly be something.

Lazerus: Sometimes, the obvious answer is the right one.

Gentile: I don't mind the Nylander logic, since he seems like a good bet to play as many games as Connor McDavid, but yeah, what Laz said.

Goldman: McDavid for leading scorer, Crosby for MVP. It just feels right.

Granger: Considering there are four legitimate Canadian options on this list, and Jack Eichel is the lone American, perhaps the Canadians will spread the wealth and Eichel will be the answer. Having said that, I'm not betting against McDavid.

Lazerus: Leonardo Genoni had to be Granger.

Gentile: Dostál put up a .930 save percentage in his last nine pre-Milan games. I didn't pick him, but I kind of wish I had.

Granger: The Dostál bandwagon I've been driving for two years is really starting to pick up steam. He's really, really good. Playing behind Anaheim, he's used to facing a barrage of high-danger shots, so he's well-prepped to face the All-Star Canadian and/or American squads. Then there's the history of a certain Czech goalie willing his country to a gold medal in 1998. It would be something if it repeated itself.

Goldman: I feel like this one belongs to a player on a smaller, less NHL-supported team. If Germany upsets at some point, we're going to be looking at someone such as Seider as the reason why for his shutdown play. He obviously has broken out at the NHL level already, but this could be his moment on the big stage.

Mirtle: I picked Genoni. Laz owes me a beer if I'm right. (We all forget about this if I'm wrong.)



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Lazerus: I will not stand for this Genoni erasure.

Gentile: And to think, I just bought his jersey.

Mirtle: Look, he's going to break out, but best goalie is a reach.

Goldman: Czechia probably has to go through Canada to go deep in this tournament, which means it's Dostál against some of the top offensive forces in the world.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379082 Websites

The Athletic / You may not know these 3 Olympic men's hockey players, but soon you just might

By Mark Lazerus

MILAN — You might know the name Kristers Gudļevskis, but you might not remember why. Maybe you're a Tampa Bay Lightning fan, and the two NHL starts he made — one in 2014, one in 2015 — are still rattling around in the back of your mind somewhere. Maybe his five seasons in the American Hockey League left an impression. Maybe you're a fan of European hockey, and he briefly came across your radar in the KHL, or the German league, or the Austrian, Slovak or Swedish leagues.

There are countless Kristers Gudļevskis in the hockey world, who come and go without a second thought.

Ah, but had one of his Latvian teammates buried a two-on-one midway through the third period instead of hitting the post, had Shea Weber's slap shot on a late power play not found a hole, had this 21-year-old nobody from a hockey-afterthought nation made one more stop, every hockey fan would know the name Kristers Gudļevskis. Hell, they probably should, anyway.

Twelve years ago in Sochi, Russia, Gudļevskis had one of the greatest performances in Olympic hockey history against mighty Canada. He almost singlehandedly beat what many consider to be the best hockey team ever assembled. His 55-save effort in the quarterfinals of the 2014 Olympics defied description. The young goalie was exhausted, bent over at the waist, sucking wind at every stoppage, every clearance. Gudļevskis kept defying and denying the Canadians anyway.

It went from a curiosity to an absurdity as the game wore on, his performance from admirable to indomitable to almost comical. Eventually, Weber broke through and Canada escaped with a 2-1 victory, going on to win the gold medal.

It's one of the great what-ifs in modern hockey history. We were denied an upset that would have topped even the Miracle on Ice, even Belarus over Sweden in 2006. And all these years later, Gudļevskis still feels the sting of being a footnote instead of the whole darn book.

"I always look at it with a little regret, because I thought we had a good chance to get one lucky bounce and find a way to win," he said after Latvia's practice in Milan on Sunday morning. "It's extremely hard to compete with or beat them, and we were pretty close. So I feel like it was a missed opportunity."

Gudļevskis still remembers the feeling — and the sound — of the postgame locker room at Bolshoy Ice Dome that night. There was no cursing. There were no overturned tables. There was simply nothing left to give, and more importantly, nothing left to lament.

"It was one of those moments where everyone was just sitting in their own seat and trying to get their breath back and their energy back," he

said. "That's the best part of the game, when you've really given your everything. You don't have any guilt about the game."

Gudļevskis said Latvians are naturally "conservative and a bit more shy," so people weren't exactly stopping him in the street or anything upon his return home. But there was a palpable pride in how Latvia had given Canada its best shot, Rocky going the distance against Apollo Creed. Gudļevskis called that game "a moment everyone remembers."

Everyone in Latvia, that is. A different result would have been a different story.

Now the question becomes: Can they do it again? Latvia opens its tournament against the United States in the round robin on Thursday. With just five active NHL skaters and a couple of former NHLers, Latvia's roster pales in comparison to the Americans' star-spangled lineup. But Latvia has two NHL goalies: Columbus' Elvis Merzlikins and Pittsburgh's Arturs Silovs. They also have Gudļevskis, now a cagey veteran of both sides of the Atlantic. Whether he plays or not, he's a reminder of just what might be possible.

Because Latvia remembers. And so does Gudļevskis.

"The more time goes, the more I just appreciate the opportunity I had just to play against (Canada)," he said. "That was a hell of a team in all positions, and it was an extremely good challenge. It always gave me confidence. If I ever don't feel confident about myself, I can always remember that game. Because after that, I know there is something in me that can help me win against anybody."

He's won seven league championships and a league MVP. He's been to five All-Star games. He's been to 11 World Championships, taking silver three times, including each of the last two years. He's a really, really good goaltender.

So how has Leonardo Genoni, Swiss icon, never even sniffed the NHL?

"Maybe you should ask them," he said with a wry smile. "I'm not sure. I never had the possibility. But I don't think about this. I had a couple of great years in Switzerland, and I still have a couple of great years ahead of me."

Yeah, a couple. At 38 years old, Genoni has accomplished more in Switzerland than most players can dream of. And he only seems to be getting better with age. In the gold medal match of the World Championships last May, Genoni stopped the first 39 shots he faced before Tage Thompson finally beat him in overtime, giving the United States a 1-0 victory. Genoni lost the game, but won the tournament MVP. He had three straight shutouts in the tournament, breaking Pekka Rinne's record by going 243 consecutive minutes without yielding a goal.

So while it's true that Switzerland — which is becoming more and more of an international hockey power every year — has an NHL goaltender on its roster in Vegas' Akira Schmid, there's no question who the No. 1 goalie is. It's Genoni. It's always Genoni.

"We've had this discussion three or four years ago, who's going to be the next one," Swiss coach Patrick Fischer said. "Akira Schmid has had an outstanding season in Vegas. He's played almost 30 games now with the Golden Knights and he was the best goalie on that team. That's really, really great for us, and it's good for the future. We've got other young goalies, too. But Leo — he's here. And when he's here, normally he performs well."

Genoni has proven at worlds that he can hang against NHL players. But these Olympics give him a chance to go up against the very best of the best, a bucket-list item for an aging European goalie. After opening against France, he'll get a crack at Canada on Friday. And he can't wait. Switzerland has been knocking on the door of the Big Four — Canada, the U.S., Sweden and Finland — for years now. An upset would knock that door down.



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"It's another chance," Genoni said. "Another chance to play the best. We were close the last couple of years in the World Championships, and we have to change one game or one goal to make the next step."

In polling 118 NHL players, the Czech Republic was the top pick, with support also for Switzerland, Germany and Latvia.

Genoni leads from the back, his athleticism matched by his work ethic and level head.

"Leo — I've never seen a guy that can be so focused," Fischer said. "On everything. There is no detail he's not thinking about. He's a perfectionist. And he's unbelievably prepared for everything — for every practice, for every drill. He studies the game and that's why he has success. He's not the biggest goalie, he's not the (size of a) guy who's normally in the net. But his hockey IQ is extremely good, he reads the play, and in the Swiss league, he's got the most titles. He's been a huge, huge factor."

At Genoni's age, the NHL is a long-forgotten dream. But he's relishing the chance to show North America what it's been missing, that it's long past time to take him — and more importantly, his nation — seriously.

"We have a great team and a team that wants to play for Switzerland, that takes every possibility to go and play with this national team," Genoni said. "I think that's one of the reasons why we are getting closer to the big teams. Of course, it's special to play against those teams. But it's special also to play with our guys."

Slovakia's Samuel Takáč isn't a national institution the way Genoni is in Switzerland. He hasn't had a signature moment the way Gudjevskis did for Latvia. And he'll never have the name recognition of the dozens of NHL players who have descended upon Milan.

But Takáč — a 34-year-old, workmanlike, good-but-not-great 15-year veteran in the Slovak Extraliga, a player who's never scored more than 18 goals in a season at that level— is emblematic of so many in this Olympic tournament beyond the Big Four. Canada's Connor McDavid, the United States' Matthew Tkachuk, Sweden's Gustav Forsling and Finland's Anton Lundell all desperately want to represent their countries well and have long dreamed of being Olympians. But they've also played for the Stanley Cup, still hockey's biggest prize. They've been on the big stage; they've lived in the limelight.

For Takáč, and so many others on the supposedly second-tier teams, this isn't just the biggest tournament he'll ever play in. It's everything. Representing Slovakia is the only thing that truly matters. It's literally the only reason he's still playing.

About seven years ago, after a few uninspiring years playing in France, Takáč was strongly considering calling it quits. He was hurtling toward 30 years old, he didn't see much of a future as a mid-level player in a mid-tier league, and he thought maybe it was time to grow up and get a real job. But then Craig Ramsay took over as coach of the national team, hell-bent on jump-starting a flagging program. Ramsay started plucking players from the Extraliga and giving them a chance on the national team, and Takáč, who had always dreamed of playing in a World Championship, decided to take one last crack at it.

He didn't make it 2018. He didn't make it in 2019. He didn't make it in 2021. He was always on the short list, but never on the roster.

But he kept trying. And in 2022, Takáč finally made it. His first tournament was the Deutschland Cup, a relatively minor four-team affair. His second tournament was the Olympic Freaking Games. Takáč could barely process the magnitude of it.

"I never even thought about the Olympics," Takáč said. "I kept playing because I had the passion, some fuel inside me, to play for the national team. And then when I started playing for the national team, the passion just kept going up. And now it's at the highest."

With NHL players staying home, Slovakia won a surprising bronze medal in Beijing. Takáč and his teammates came home as conquering heroes, feted in the streets with a parade.

"It was huge," he said. "Historic medal for hockey, for Slovakia. We're a hockey country, so it was amazing."

Four years later, Takáč is back in the red, white and blue of his native country. Another medal seems like a pipe dream, given Slovakia only has seven NHLers, none of them goaltenders. Slovakia is on an upswing after a deep dip post-Sochi, but it has nowhere near the firepower of a Canada, of a Sweden, of even a Czechia or a Switzerland.

However, they do have Samuel Takáč and plenty of guys just like him. Guys who have waited their whole lives for this moment, who might never know another moment like it, and who are determined not to let it go without a fight.

"It's just 12 teams, and everybody can beat anybody," he said. "Everything is possible. And we want it as much as anybody else."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379083 Websites

ESPN / Can the U.S. beat Canada for a men's hockey gold medal? - ESPN

Arda Ocal

Team USA defeats Team Canada in the gold medal game in overtime. If I was a script writer, that's how the men's Olympic hockey tournament would end.

I'm tapping into my pro wrestling fandom to "book" the Olympics for maximum benefit for the interest of the game in North America. I have thought about this at length, and this is the best possible outcome. Yes, I'm saying this as a Canadian. This is almost as devious as Tate McRae endorsing Team USA.

Here is my reasoning. Fans are still talking about the Miracle on Ice from the 1980 Games -- there's even a new documentary about it. It was a massive moment in American sports hockey, one of the biggest. That will never change. But we are long overdue for another signature moment of USA hockey success.

Even the captain of that 1980 team, Mike Eruzione, told us on "The Drop" that he's sick of talking about it and wants to see another generation get that same glory:

If Team USA were to win gold in Milan, a similar explosion of interest in hockey would follow. We're already seeing an increase this season, with viewership up and the show "Heated Rivalry" bringing new fans into the mix. Team USA earning gold would be in the vicinity of a "1980" moment -- a rallying, unifying moment where the country celebrates the U.S. being tops in the world.

Looking at the team, this isn't a big stretch either: It's a stacked roster, with incredible goaltending depth. The team also has heart and soul (look no further than the Tkachuk brothers). The U.S. has also achieved success at different levels recently -- including wins at the 2024 and 2025 IIHF world junior championships and the 2025 world championships.

Now for the Canadian side. Interest in hockey isn't going anywhere in Canada. Canada is the top dog in hockey and has been for a very long time. If The Great White North were to lose, it would be devastating for team and country. To see the U.S., a team that Canada has toppled on multiple occasions on the international stage, parade around as



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champions would be worse for fans than Connor McDavid winning the Conn Smythe in a Stanley Cup Final loss.

But it does set up a captivating redemption arc for the country. Starting with the World Cup of Hockey in 2028 and then the Olympics in 2030, Canada will do something it hasn't experienced in best-on-best competition on a long time -- hit the comeback trail. Canadians will rally behind their players and yearn for glory once again.

Now, I can be talked out of the gold medal game overtime scenario; that was mainly a callback to last year's 4 Nations Face-Off final. Another intriguing scenario -- if we're thinking of the narrative arc -- would be that U.S. wins gold without ever facing Canada in the knockout round. This would give the Canadians the right to claim that yes, the Americans won, but they never faced Canada in order to do it. Which would spark a healthy debate until the two countries met again.

Imagine what a Canada vs. USA final would look like under these circumstances at the 2028 World Cup of Hockey, and the 2030 Olympics. Magical!

Jump ahead:

Games of the week

What I loved this weekend

Hart Trophy candidates

Social post of the week

Stick taps

Biggest games of the week

We are officially in "Olympic szn" -- so it's all Olympics, all the time. Here's a master schedule for men's and women's hockey.

If you're looking for another athlete with a hockey connection to cheer for, two-time X Games gold medalist skier Mac Forehand will be representing the USA in Milan Cortina, looking for his first Olympic medal. He is the cousin of Philadelphia Flyers forward Trevor Zegras.

What I loved this weekend

The Battle of Florida is as thrilling as any NHL rivalry, past or present. Technically this was from Thursday, but nothing will top this for me: Another all-out brawl between the Florida Panthers and Tampa Lightning resulted in 147 penalty minutes.

Amazingly, that was only the fourth most in a Panthers-Lightning game all time, and the second most in a regular-season NHL game in 2025-26; not surprisingly, the Calgary Flames and Edmonton Oilers top the list with 154 on Dec. 23.

The Battle of Florida also produced 136 penalty minutes on Dec. 27. In a preseason game in October, the teams combined for a whopping 322 penalty minutes and 16 ejections.

Based on recent Stanley Cup success and the fiery nature of this feud, Florida is definitely the State of Hockey in 2026.

Hart Trophy candidates if the season ended today

Connor McDavid has a three-point lead atop the scoring leaderboard with 96 points. He had six points in his final five games before the Olympics. Nathan MacKinnon has 93 points, with five points in his last five contests.

I've had Macklin Celebrini in the third spot for much of the season, but Nikita Kucherov has established a 10-point gap between him and Mack to take over third place.

It's time to place Kuch as a finalist on this list. With 13 points in his last five games, he now has 91 total on the season.

He has simply been obliterating the competition lately and could easily pass both McDavid and MacKinnon once the NHL season restarts on Feb. 25.

Social media post of the weekend

The Artemi Panarin trade news broke courtesy of ESPN's Emily Kaplan ... and Adam Scheffer. An unlikely dynamic duo that joined forces like Shaq and Kobe to deliver one of the biggest pieces of trade news that we will get this season!

Hopefully not lost in all of this, including @AdamScheffer breaking NHL news: what a move by Los Angeles to go all-in, especially for Anze Kopitar's final season.

Panarin's camp kept this close to the vest but few people around the league guessed the Kings as front runners. <https://t.co/R3rft9wuVI>

— Emily Kaplan (@emilymkaplan) February 4, 2026

Stick taps

"Star Wars" has a brand-new hockey reference.

Before we get to that, first let me shout out to Rancho Obi-Wan, the largest collection of Star Wars memorabilia in the entire world -- Guinness World Record-certified and everything!

There is a sports section among the 100,000 items, and one of the things displayed is a Colorado Avalanche Star Wars Night hockey puck. What's noteworthy about this puck is that it's from a game from the 2014-2015 season, which is one of the very first to have been put on in the NHL.

Now about that hockey reference in the "Star Wars" universe. Mike Chen, who covered hockey a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away -- i.e. Fox Sports, Versus and SB Nation -- has released his latest Star Wars novel "Star Wars Outlaws: Low Red Moon," a story featuring characters from the popular "Star Wars Outlaws" video game, released on Feb. 3.

"I had actually started a few years prior contributing to a Sharks site called The Feeder (which is still up as LetsGoSharks.com) and freelancing for some of the earliest online sports outlets," Chen told ESPN. "Everyone in that space just kind of got to know each other and eventually bigger outlets would pick us up. So I wound up doing regular coverage for Fox Sports and Versus/Comcast while managing SB Nation's NHL site and writing for SB Nation Sharks sites Fear The Fin and Battle of California."

Now to the reference. There's technically two. One is a planet that is referenced in the book named Arda. Was it explicitly named because of me? Who's to say? Was there already a planet named Arda from years ago? Unclear. Nobody should investigate. Am I going to take credit for the naming of this planet and claim it as my own? You bet I am.

The second is a character named Zeev Oversam, who is an executive corporate liaison to the Empire.

Let's unpack the name. Zeev definitely looks like a nod to Zeev Buium, current Vancouver Canucks defenseman. But at the 2024 NHL draft, the NCAA national champion with the Denver Pioneers was drafted 12th overall by the Minnesota Wild.

The Sharks had the pick directly before this and selected fellow defenseman Sam Dickinson from the OHL's London Knights at 11th overall.

Remember: Chen is a Sharks fan.

Zeev Oversam.

Zeev Over Sam.

Could this be one Sharks fan's opinion of general manager Mike Grier's draft decisions? A clever way to sneak in hockey names into The Galaxy Far, Far Away? Or both?



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I didn't ask Mike if this was indeed the case. For now, I'm rolling with it as 1000% Star Wars (and hockey) canon.

ESPN LOADED: 02.10.2026

1379084 Websites

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

Thompson

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



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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: 02.10.2026

1379085 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canada, USA taking different approaches to Olympic village

Luke Fox

MILAN, Italy — Team USA is jumping all-in on the Olympic village experience.

Team Canada is dabbling, and ... well ... uh, dorm life is cute and all. But the comforts of a five-star hotel and a good night's sleep might be too attractive to pass up.

"I don't think we're doing it as an insult or anything like that," Canadian goaltender Logan Thompson said Monday morning. "We want to win gold, and we want to give ourselves the best opportunity to do so."

Here's the deal.

The vast majority of athletes, including most men's and women's hockey teams, from all the skating events taking place in Milan are bunking together in residence-style housing at athletes' village.

Dining hall, card games, common areas, roommates, the whole nine.

Given the hotel option, the American men's squad, loaded with multimillionaires, has decided to embrace the bare-bones college lifestyle for the full two weeks.

The Canadian men spent the first couple nights in the village but will also be testing out hotel life. Canada's leadership group is making the call.

"Whatever we do, we'll do as a team," goalie Darcy Kuemper says.

"We're gonna make the decision that we feel is giving us the best chance to win."

Thompson joked that he has no trouble flying under the radar at Camp Milano, but Connor McDavid and Sidney Crosby have become instant attractions among the speed and figure skaters.

Follow the medal race at Milano Cortina 2026

Follow the medal race at Milano Cortina 2026

See how all the countries are doing in the overall standings at the Winter Olympics.

Medal table

"You see everyone just staring at them, because they're the superstars. So, it's cool to see how other countries really notice them, and how they all just want to come over and say hi to Crosby and McDavid and those guys," Thompson said.

"I'm still gonna be going to the village as well, going back and forth. You definitely want to get that experience. And it's cool to meet other athletes, and I want to be able to do that as well as see other Olympic events."

The six-foot-four, 207-pound goaltender admits his bed is a little smaller than the one he's used to.

"But it's got everything we need," said Sweden's Lucas Raymond of his assigned room. "It's got a bed, a bathroom.

"That's part of the experience, being in the Olympic village. And just talking with guys who've been here before just how much fun that is."

Raymond is bunking with Atlantic Division rival Rasmus Dahlin.

"I don't know if he's a snorer," Raymond said, "but we'll find out."

Matthew Tkachuk confirms that brother-slash-roommate Brady was sawing logs Sunday night.

"Yeah, he was," Matthews said. "A couple times I'm off to the bathroom, give him a little kidney shot on the way, telling him to shut up."

The Tkachuks won't zip it when it comes to gushing about their Winter Games setup.

"I've had some great times hanging out with the rest of the athletes, playing cards, watching the other Olympians," said Matthew, whose room is near the Hughes' boys. "It's been just an unbelievable experience."

The Tkachuks have already dubbed their room "Club Tkachuk," and they've jokingly been referred to as RAs of the Team USA's residence.

"I think they probably push their beds together," snapped Jack Eichel.

"If we hear someone go through a wall in the middle of the night, probably know where it came from."

And if an American hockey player is getting asked for a selfie by an amateur athlete, it's probably Auston Matthews. Matthew Tkachuk said the captain is the biggest celeb in subsidized housing.

"I don't know about that," Matthews said, laughing. "It's been cool. You see athletes from all different sports, all different countries, different journeys. It's a pretty intimate setting. You get to see what they get to go through on a daily basis compared to what you're used to in your own respective sport.

"I've never seen or been in anything like this. It's what, kind of, the Olympics is all about — all the best athletes from all around the world and their respective sports. It's just very neat, very cool to be a part of."

Counterpoint! Some Michelin-level room service and a quiet, solo sleep inside, say, The Ritz is also very cool.

"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 admitted.

"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."

"Just the camaraderie is really, really high for being one day. It's actually pretty incredible. I've loved every second of it," added Matthew Tkachuk, before walking out of the rink.

"I'm excited to get out of here, back to the village and hang out with them more."

Ice will suffice

A puck that shouldn't bobble does off Mark Stone's stick.

Jake Oettinger's cross-crease cuts resound with a strangely loud echo. Sounds vaguely like an orca's moan.

Assistant coach Rick Tocchet, wearing a toque indoors, fetches a shovel to do a little dry scraping mid-practice.

Eichel catches a bit of a rut but plows through.



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No, the rushed-but-ready surface of the work-in-progress Milano Santagiulia is far from pristine.

But the conditions are good enough. Heck, downright fantastic given the time frame to prepare it. And you won't catch a single NHLer arguing otherwise.

"I can't imagine having to put together something like this with a limited amount of time. I thought they did a pretty good job to get it up. The setup's good, the rink looks good, the ice is solid — it's never going to be perfect — but it's cool," said U.S. captain Matthews. "Looks pretty good."

Yes, the neutral zone is roughly three feet shorter than a standard NHL rink. And the corners round tighter, which helps explain why the Canadians and Americans both ran through some down-low battle drills off hard rims.

But like playing a windy golf course, hey, everyone's dealing with the same conditions.

American Dylan Larkin described the ice as having an "outdoor-game feel." Eichel said he could tell "the ice is kinda new." Drew Doughty says it got "crappy" toward the end of Canada's hourlong skate Sunday, but, hey, that happens everywhere when you run drills for 60 minutes.

"It's great," McDavid said, allowing no space for excuses. "It's an even playing field for everybody. Same ice that everyone's gonna skate on. It's great."

USA coach Mike Sullivan is reading from the same playbook: "Both teams got to play on the same surface, so we're thrilled to be here and we love every minute of it."

And if there's such a thing as an ice-rink sommelier, poor Brady Tkachuk ain't it.

"I honestly can't even tell if the ice is bad or not," he said, shrugging. "It's just either I'm fast or I'm slow that night. No, it was fine. And I'm excited to see how it holds up throughout this whole tournament."

Team USA avoids injury scares

Charlie McAvoy, who was injured midway through 4 Nations, is sporting a full shield here after getting chicken-winged by Sandis Vilmanis in his final club game for the Bruins.

It was a frightening and greasy play that, at least for a moment, put the U.S. alternate captain's Olympic dream in doubt.

"We're very relieved, and it was concerning to watch," said Sullivan, who doubles as 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 defenceman, 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."

Fun fact: The Americans open their tournament against Vilmanis and Latvia Wednesday. McAvoy said retribution will not be top of mind.

In other near-miss news, Jack Hughes has been a full participant in practices and assures he is good to play.

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

The Devils star missed New Jersey's final three games before the break due to a lower-body injury.

Being ready for the national squad but not his struggling club team has raised some eyebrows.

"Injuries are tough," brother-slash-roommate 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, of course, missed out on the 4 Nations, leaving a hint of what if? in his absence.

"I would feel bad for anyone that missed the Olympics," Quinn said. "Four Nations is one thing, but the Olympics is the Olympics."

"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."

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Sportsnet.ca / Bad-Timing Team: Top Canadians to miss out on past Olympics

Ryan Dixon

Not having best-on-best competition at the Olympics for two cycles was a blow to all hockey fans. But for a specific crew of Canadian hockey players, it was a real gut punch.

It's very easy to glean, based on how they react upon being named to a national team, that representing their country is hugely meaningful for players. The unfortunate counter to that is losing your best chance to do so just because your career peak coincided with the 2018 and/or 2022 Olympic Winter Games, when NHLers didn't participate.

As excitement builds toward the start of the men's tournament in Italy, there is surely a group of Canadian NHLers who will be tuned in from warm locales thinking, "I should have had my turn to do this."

The goal here is to identify a bunch of guys who have the biggest claim to that sentiment. Being part of any Canadian Olympic team in the past — even as an extra forward or third goalie — makes you ineligible for this list.

To be clear, we're not talking about snubs for the 2026 squad. As disappointing as it is for Connor Bedard not to get his chance this time out, he'll surely be there in the future.

This is about recognizing Canadian players who, had there been Olympics with NHLers in 2018 or '22, would have stood a great chance to make one or both of those squads. At this point, though, they're either retired or at a juncture in their career where — especially if you're trying to crack Team Canada — the Olympic dream has passed them by.

To be honest, Stamkos' situation doesn't truly capture the spirit of what we're after here, but it's worth addressing and clarifying that out of the chute. Stamkos would have been a go-to player on the 2014 team for the Sochi Games had he not broken his leg in November of the 2013-14 season. Career timing didn't deny him an Olympic shot; an ill-timed injury did.

Injuries, of course, remained a storyline during Stamkos' career and — in 2017-18, when the Olympics were held in South Korea without NHLers — he netted a modest 27 goals on the heels of being limited to just 17 games the season prior. That said, when the Olympic Winter Games were held in China in 2022 without NHLers, Stamkos had a career-high 106-point season in Tampa and surely would have carved out a spot on that roster at age 31.



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Ryan O'Reilly, centre

O'Reilly was turning 27 just as the 2018 Winter Olympics were firing up. He'd already built a sparkling reputation for himself as a two-way centre, and you know how much the people who pick national teams love responsible players who can play a defensive role on a roster packed with superstars. Sixteen months after the PyeongChang Games, O'Reilly won a Conn Smythe Trophy with the St. Louis Blues that took his reputation as a do-it-all centre to an entirely different level. In 2022, he was still in his prime and would have brought all kinds of big-game experience to China. Heck, in a pinch, couldn't you see O'Reilly still doing the job on the '26 team at 35 years old?

Braden Holtby, goalie

We'll start with Holtby, but use this as a catch-all space to talk about a couple of other puckstoppers.

Holtby established himself as one of the best goalies in the league in the season after the '14 Games and won the 2016 Vezina. Though he took a bit of a step back during the 2017-18 campaign and actually lost his starter's job in Washington, he wound up leading the Caps to the Cup that spring. His body of work would have made him a very likely candidate for a spot on the 2018 squad.

Another goalie who was riding high in that moment was Matt Murray. Coming off two straight Cups with the Penguins in 2016 and '17, Murray's big-game credentials were indisputable.

It's worth mentioning, too, that Corey Crawford — a two-time Cup winner with Chicago — was one of the best goalies in the league in 2017-18, but that's the winter he began to struggle with vertigo. If not for that condition, he too would have garnered serious consideration to fill out the net behind the guy who won gold in 2014, Carey Price.

As for 2022, when Price was ostensibly done thanks to a knee injury, the goalies in the mix — Marc-Andre Fleury, Mike Smith, Darcy Kuemper, Jordan Binnington — don't qualify for our list here because they all got an Olympic nod in either 2010 (Fleury), 2014 (Smith) or this time out for Italy (Binnington, Kuemper).

Burns basically played his entire 20s without getting any Norris Trophy consideration, partially because he sometimes lined up at forward during that stage of his career. Between 2014 and '18, though, Burns' game on the back end elevated, and people began to really appreciate what he brought. He was a Norris finalist in 2016 and won the trophy the following year. By 2018, you have to think the big, right-shot blue-liner — a member of Canada's 2016 World Cup squad — would have carved out a spot for himself on the Olympic team.

Mark Giordano, defence

Even more so than Burns, Giordano was a late bloomer who didn't have his best NHL years until his 30s. He was knocking on the door by 2014 and only got better after that. In 2019, one season after the Olympic Winter Games in South Korea, Giordano won the Norris Trophy at age 35. His all-world skating and ability to play in any situation may have made him a perfect third pair or seventh D-man for the 2018 Olympics.

Giroux was a point-per-game stud in his mid-20s in 2014, but that is sometimes still not enough to crack Team Canada. Four years later, though, Giroux was a legit MVP candidate — he finished fourth in Hart Trophy voting in 2017-18 — who posted a career-best 102-point season. It's hard to imagine that, at 30 years old, he wouldn't have found a spot on one of Canada's scoring lines in the winter of 2018.

Logan Couture, centre/wing

A responsible, two-way forward, Couture posted a career-best 34 goals at age 28 in 2017-18. Couture was a member of Canada's 2016 World Cup squad, and at the height of his powers, he could have been a top-

line winger on the Olympic club, the fourth-line centre or anything in between.

Hall had the best year of his career during the 2017-18 season, earning him a Hart Trophy win at the end of the campaign. On balance, the first-overall pick from 2010 hasn't produced the way we may have expected he would way back when, but his best showing in the NHL coincided with an Olympic year and Hall — especially with that high-draft pedigree — surely would have squeezed onto the 2018 Canadian team at age 26.

Couturier's offensive breakout season occurred during 2017-18, when he notched 31 goals and 76 points at age 25. He also finished second in Selke Trophy voting that year, a testament to his smothering abilities as a checker. Two years later, he won the award. It would be tough sledding competing with the likes of Patrice Bergeron, Ryan O'Reilly and Logan Couture for that do-it-all, responsible-guy role on the team, but one thing Couturier had over those other guys is his six-foot-four frame. He would have gotten a long, hard look in 2018.

Letang was a high-profile player in 2014, having won the 2009 Cup in Pittsburgh. At the time, though, people still worried about defensive warts in his game. By 2018, Letang had built a much stronger resume thanks to a fantastic post-season showing in 2016, when the Penguins won their second title of the Sid-Geno-Letang Era. Letang would have pressed hard for a spot in 2018, when he was 30 years old.

Seguin's offensive breakout came in the 2013-14 season, but at 22 years old, he still wasn't nudging onto the '14 team. By 2018, at 26, he was firmly established as a top-notch offensive player in the NHL. His ability to play centre and wing would have helped him, but it would still have been a battle to make that '18 roster.

Don't let recency bias wipe from your mind how productive Huberdeau was during his final year in Florida. The only Canadian player in 2021-22 who wound up with more points than Huberdeau's 115 was Connor McDavid at 123, and nobody from any country topped his 85 assists. Huberdeau — who was 28 when the 2022 Olympic Winter Games were held — was a big, playmaking winger who could have brought a serious offensive dimension to one of Canada's top two or three lines.

We'll close with Scheifele as a sort of bookend to Stamkos because, by letter of the law, Scheifele doesn't perfectly fit the definition of what we're after with this list. It's not that Scheifele's game peaked when NHLers stayed home — he's on pace for a career-best 99 points right now at age 32 — it's just that he hasn't been able to grab a roster spot on Canada either for the 4 Nations Face-Off or this time out for the Olympics.

Still, you have to think — with two more cracks at it in 2018 and '22 — Scheifele would have gained a spot.

Who knows? Maybe he'll still be going strong in 2032 at age 36 and finally get to live out the Olympic dream.

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Sportsnet.ca / How Drew Doughty grew from unsure Olympic rookie to Canadian cornerstone

Eric Francis

LOS ANGELES – Drew Doughty swears he didn't want the flag.

Of all the memories a two-time Olympic gold medalist could lead with - the Golden Goal, the pressure of overtime, the legends in the room - he goes straight to the moment his teammates forced him, a 20-year-old



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rookie, to skate a victory lap with a Canada flag so massive it could've doubled as a parachute.

"I sprinted to Sid and kinda blacked out," he said of the seconds after Sidney Crosby scored the most famous goal in Canadian Olympic hockey history.

"And then the guys made me skate around with this massive Canada flag, and I remember I didn't want to do it. But they're like, 'you're doing it, no option. You're a rookie.' I didn't want all the attention on me. I hate that."

That's the beauty of Doughty. Even in the middle of a moment that will be replayed in this country for generations, he was just a kid trying not to be noticed.

And yet, he was impossible to miss.

Doughty's Olympic story starts long before the Golden Goal, when he started the 2010 tourney as the seventh defenceman on a team so stacked it could've iced two medal contenders.

"I was just so nervous that I don't even remember what the (expletive) happened," laughed Doughty of his earliest Olympic memories.

"I was roommates with Chris Pronger, so I remember spending time with him, and he made me laugh a lot."

Imagine being 20, walking into a room with Pronger, Crosby, Niedermayer, Iginla, Nash, Toews, Bergeron: the hockey equivalent of sitting at the grown-ups' table for the first time.

"We all sat on our own on the bus, but once in a while one of the vets would just come and sit with me on the bus and talk to me," said Doughty, who was less than 200 days older than Macklin Celebrini will be when the 19-year-old plays in Milan this week.

"I remember one instance, Sid doing that, talking to me the entire time until we got to the practice arena. I just remember thinking, 'Damn, I'm lucky to be here.'"

Lucky, maybe. But he wasn't just there to soak it in.

He was there because Team Canada's executive director Steve Yzerman saw something in the second overall pick of the 2008 NHL Draft.

"I didn't really know if I felt like I belonged until I kind of went from the seventh defenceman to, like, the fourth D," said Doughty.

"And then Stevie Y came to me, and he could see in my game that I was just playing very simple. And he was like, 'Hey man, we chose you to play the way that you play. Go out there and be confident.' From that moment on I thought I stepped up my game and played much better."

He didn't want to let anyone down. He'd watched these guys as a kid. Now he was trying not to screw up in front of them.

Yet, there he was, on the ice in overtime of the gold medal game against the Americans, somehow comfortable in one of the most intense scenarios in hockey history.

"Back then nothing fazed me," said Doughty, now 36, and the only Canadian team member other than Crosby with Olympic experience.

"I didn't feel it in that moment. As I've gotten older, I think about things more, like maybe negative outcomes and things like that. But when I was young, man, it was 'play, have fun off the ice, and that was it.'"

He remembers the play in Vancouver like it was yesterday, or at least the part before the blackout.

"I just remember seeing Sid in the corner, thinking not much was gonna happen," he grinned, as he stood in shorts at the Kings' practice facility.

"I was going to kind of go back door, so if he shot or missed the net, I was gonna go get that puck. And then it went in."

And then the sprint. And then the flag. And then a lifetime of Canadians remembering exactly where they were while he was trying to hide behind a piece of fabric the size of a billboard.

Four years later, in Sochi, Doughty wasn't hiding from anything.

He was driving the bus.

Doughty led Canada in scoring with four goals, something even his Kings teammates didn't realize until recently.

"Someone spoke about that recently, I don't know who it was, and guys on my team were all shocked," said Doughty, well-aware his role now is as a defensive stalwart alongside Thomas Harley.

"I was like, 'Yeah, screw you.' Maybe I don't put up the points I used to, or have the offensive touch that I used to, but I was really good back then."

He wasn't just good. He was dominant.

"In Sochi, I was more of a guy that was counted on, and I just ran with it," he said.

"Even then, I remember I had so many good seasons with L.A., but I don't think until that 2014 Olympics, and that 2014 Stanley Cup, that people actually realized how good of a player I was. I remember, even guys on the team saying, like, 'Wow.'"

That's the thing about Doughty: he's always been elite, but he's never been shy about reminding you he knows it.

Doughty's Olympic arc is one of the great Canadian hockey stories - from the wide-eyed rookie who didn't know if he belonged, to the guy carrying the flag (literally), to the veteran who led the team in scoring four years later.

He didn't ask for the spotlight. He didn't want the flag.

But he earned both.

And he'll always be part of the moments this country will never forget.

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Sportsnet.ca / Sweden's Pettersson ready to embrace pressure, responsibility at Olympics

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — Elias Pettersson's strongest Olympic memory is also his first.

He was seven years old, at his grandfather's house in a tiny town near where Elias grew up in central Sweden, watching his hockey heroes play arch-rivals Team Finland in the 2006 final from Turin.

"I still remember watching it at my grandpa's house," Pettersson told Sportsnet before travelling last week to Italy for the Winter Olympics. "It was a village where probably 500 people lived, close to where I grew up in Ånge. I remember the double drop pass and the (Nicklas) Lidstrom slapshot to take the lead, and then all the chaos in the last minute."

Sweden won the gold-medal game 3-2, the winning goal conjured by arguably the three greatest players in Swedish hockey history — Peter Forsberg to Mats Sundin to Lidstrom — and the lead preserved by Henrik



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Lundqvist with a circus save against Olli Jokinen with about 25 seconds remaining.

Back then, it was Lundqvist, not Forsberg or Sundin, whom Pettersson wanted to be like.

"Yeah, I was screaming," he recalled. "At practice later that night, I was the goalie. I wanted to become a goalie."

Pettersson said his grandfather, Toivo, escaped to Sweden from Finland with his family during World War II when he was four years old.

"So, I'm one-quarter Finnish," he said.

Toivo died when Pettersson was a teenager, so the memory of that 2006 Olympic final has become even more precious with age.

"Time flies," he said. "I'm always going to remember the final in Turin in '06. That was 20 years ago, so it would be cool to repeat."

Pettersson eventually became a centre, not a goalie, and one of the highest-paid players in the National Hockey League.

The 27-year-old Vancouver Canuck will face pressure and scrutiny with Team Sweden, which will be without emerging star Leo Carlsson and could also be missing another key centre, Elias Lindholm, due to injury.

Sweden opens the Olympic tournament against the host Italians on Wednesday.

"I want to have the pressure and want to have that responsibility and play big minutes," Pettersson said. "But I've got to earn it, not take it for granted. Whatever they ask me, I'm going to do my best."

Through injuries and organizational upheaval, Pettersson has struggled to play his best for the Canucks over the last two years.

His 15-goal season last year, in which Pettersson's strained relationship with teammate J.T. Miller became a focal point for all that was wrong with the Canucks, was pretty much a disaster.

Healthier and stronger this season, Pettersson has been a little better but is still generating offence (13 goals and 34 points in 49 games) like a second-line NHL centre and certainly not the first-line superstar the Canucks want him to be.

"The Olympics, it's a great opportunity to play for your country," Canucks coach Adam Foote said before the team scattered last week. "I know he's played for his country before ... but when you're playing for an Olympic medal, it seems different than, say, a world championship. Like, it's just different. It's amazing.

"It'll be a good marker for Petey and good experience to get to play at that pace. I think there's another pace he can play at and, you know, he's aware of it. We've been having deep discussions with our coaches and him, and he's owned it. He's been way more open to discussion about it this year. I think he knows he's got something more to offer, I really do. And I think it's just, you know, it's just the work. Maybe playing at the pace of the Olympics will give him that jumpstart."

Pettersson's first best-on-best hockey came during the 4 Nations Face-Off a year ago, but he did not register a point in three games, and Sweden failed to advance to the final.

"Just the experience," Pettersson said of his main takeaway from that tournament. "I mean, you always play against good players in the NHL, but now all those good players were on one team. Just the level of hockey, level of detail, everything, races (for the puck), definitely the speed. Just everything."

"It's the Olympics, so I think he's going to be incredibly driven," long-serving Canucks teammate Tyler Myers said. "It's a chance to win a gold medal, not too far away from home, really. So I fully expect Petey is going to go over there and will be extremely motivated to do well. I'm

excited for all those guys to get over there and ... bring that experience back here to this room."

The Canucks' dressing room has not been a happy place this season.

Expecting to bounce back from last year's 90-point season, the 18-33-6 Canucks instead are last in the NHL and on pace to finish with 59 points, which would be the franchise's worst campaign this century. The trade of captain Quinn Hughes in December accelerated the organization's dramatic pivot towards a rebuild.

Interestingly, Pettersson isn't viewing the Olympics as an escape from all the troubles.

"It's easy to say that it's nice to go to the Olympics," he said. "Obviously, Olympics are a dream come true to play in. But these are my guys here (in Vancouver) that I play with and battle with. I don't want to get out of that. I'm not looking for any outs to get away from this. Like, we're going to try to turn this around, and I want to be part of that. I am very excited for Olympics, but it's not an out."

"He's a leader," Canucks teammate and friend Linus Karlsson said. "I mean, you can see how he blocks shots, how he works so hard at both ends. He's maybe not the most vocal guy, but he works hard for the team. He's going to be a big part of Team Sweden, and they're going to need him to play really good to have a chance to win. And I think he's going to do that. He wants everything for the team. That's just how it is."

Karlsson said there is a lot of "fight" inside Pettersson that people don't see.

"Some people show (emotion), and some people don't show it," teammate Nils Hoglander said, "but he cares a lot about the game. And especially now, you're fighting for your country. It's not that often you get to play at the Olympics, so he cares a lot, and I know he's super excited to go there."

Twenty years later, back in Northern Italy, Pettersson is empowered to make new memories.

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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



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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 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.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 10, 2026

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.

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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TSN.CA / Kyrrou a strong trade candidate for teams needing forward help

Travis Yost

With Artemi Panarin off the trade board as the newest member of the Los Angeles Kings, contenders around the league are reassessing their deadline plans. If you want a big upgrade at the forward position, where do you look?

For my money, the answer to that question starts with Jordan Kyrrou and the St. Louis Blues.

The rumour mill has been churning for several months now over St. Louis' intentions to sell at this year's trade deadline, and Kyrrou is just one of several names – you can add forwards Robert Thomas, Brayden Schenn, Mathieu Joseph and Oskar Sundqvist to that list – that is likely available from the Blues for the right price.

What makes Kyrrou such an alluring trade target for a contender is that this "down year" he's having, which included a healthy scratch back in November, looks much more reflective of the playing environment around Kyrrou than his individual calibre of play.

The speedy winger has averaged 34 goals per 82 games played over the past four seasons; that production alone justifies a contract that carries a cap hit just over \$8 million per year, especially for a 27-year-old forward in his playing prime. (Note: Kyrrou's contract does have a no-trade clause, so he can dictate potential landing spots if moved.)

His scoring pace has dropped this year (23 goals per 82 games), but that coincides with St. Louis' broader collapse in the Western Conference. What's intriguing to me about Kyrrou is he looks every bit the part of a dynamic top-six attacker – just one with miserable goaltending behind him.

Kyrrou has the fifth best on-ice goal differential for St. Louis this season, with the Blues outscored 31 to 29 (-2) with him deployed. That's nothing to write home about, but noteworthy when your goaltenders aren't even stopping 88 per cent of shots faced:

Yost1

Save percentages are a function of both goaltending and defensive play in front, which is why analyzing expected goal rates are important here. Poor defensive skaters can be responsible for high goals-against numbers; other times, it's shoddy goaltending that makes the defensive play look worse than it actually is. In the case of Kyrrou, I suspect the latter is what's happening.

Let's look at this same table but swap out real goals against for expected goals against, which measures the probability of each shot against finding the back of the net. If Kyrrou and every other Blues player had neutral goaltending play behind them, how would their on-ice numbers look?

In Kyrrou's case, incredible:

Yost2

If you need any more evidence that Blues goaltenders are hurting Kyrrou much more than his play is hurting them, consider the shot profiles faced at 5-on-5 with and without him deployed.

St. Louis looks fantastic defensively with Kyrrou on, with very few shots coming from those dangerous areas near the net mouth and between the circles. It makes it rather stunning Blues goalies are stopping under 88 per cent of shots faced in these scenarios, especially when they're playing much better in the non-Kyrrou minutes where more dangerous shots are likely (via HockeyViz):

Yost3

Considering the above (and the fact that goaltenders have reliably stopped 91 per cent of shots with Kyrrou on the ice over his career), it's reasonable to argue that defensively Kyrrou has been burned by some rather unfavourable puck luck.

If we take purported defensive concerns off the table and chalk them up to goaltending woes, the other question of concern inquiring teams may ask: Should we be concerned about his individual production this season?

My short answer again is no. While scoring is marginally down, expected goal rates and corresponding individual shot volumes are at or above his career baseline. When reliable goal scorers see a meaningful and sustained drop in production, it usually coincides with less shooting volume and/or shots from less dangerous areas of the ice. Kyrrou is getting to his spots the same way he has in years past, an encouraging sign that a rebound is ahead:

Yost4

The Blues organization knows how talented Kyrrou is – they drafted and developed the player, and I suspect their asking price at the trade deadline will be commensurate with his production in prior seasons. But the Blues as an organization know they are headed toward a rebuild of sorts, and a player like Kyrrou could generate a substantial return.

It's a price I'd be willing to pay if I'm a contender in need of a speed and scoring upgrade on the wings. Kyrrou looks primed for a rebound, and if you can get him for 90 cents on the dollar at the trade deadline, it's a price you pay every time.

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