



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 28, 2026

## The Athletic

### Ranking the NHL's 10 biggest trade deadline buyers and sellers

By: James Mirtle

Red Light newsletter ✍️ | This is The Athletic's hockey newsletter. Sign up here to receive Red Light directly in your inbox.

Good morning, hockey folks. We're exactly a week out from the NHL trade deadline, and the scuttlebutt is coming fast and furious. Let's dive into some of the latest.

Illustration: Dan Goldfarb / The Athletic, with photos by Ezra Shaw, Ethan Miller and Melissa Tamez / Getty Images

For Sale

Top 10 sellers

Originally, I was going to rank all 32 teams by their willingness to buy and/or sell, but let's just say that ended up being too ambitious for this Red Lighter — in part because a few teams are in a weird in-between space, where they may not be big players either way at the March 6 deadline.

So, let's instead break down the 10 most likely buyers and sellers, with a deeper look at which players might be on the trade block over the next seven days. As always, make sure you're keeping an eye on the latest trade board for up-to-date info.

Here's our sellers list as it stands today, ranked by likelihood of being the biggest players on the market:

#### 1. St. Louis Blues

Pending unrestricted free agents: Oskar Sundqvist, Robby Fabbri

Others on trade board: Justin Faulk, Jordan Binnington, Brayden Schenn, Robert Thomas, Jordan Kyrou

Analysis: No team has as many high-impact players available. How dramatically GM Doug Armstrong unloads remains to be seen, but the Blues could bring the biggest fireworks if the deals line up for them. Here's what Jeremy Rutherford is hearing.

#### 2. Vancouver Canucks

Pending UFAs: Evander Kane, Teddy Blueger, David Kampf

Others on trade board: Elias Pettersson, Jake DeBrusk, Conor Garland

Analysis: It's full-on tank mode for the Canucks, who are paying for years and years of mismanagement and now have to sell off anything that isn't bolted down. It's going to be painful, sure, but at least there's finally a semblance of a plan and a youth movement on the way.

#### 3. Calgary Flames

Pending UFAs: Ryan Lomberg

Others on trade board: Blake Coleman, Nazem Kadri, Zach Whitecloud, Morgan Frost

Analysis: The Flames have some very interesting pieces with term that could fetch high prices, led by Kadri and Coleman, who have both played key roles on Cup winners in recent years.

#### 4. New York Rangers

Pending UFAs: Jonathan Quick

Others on trade board: Vincent Trocheck, Braden Schneider, Brennan Othmann

Analysis: The Rangers have already shipped out a ton over the past 12 months or so, but the sell-off is likely to continue with a haul for Trocheck — and maybe more, depending on how deep GM Chris Drury wants to cut.

#### 5. Nashville Predators

Pending UFAs: Michael Bunting, Erik Haula, Michael McCarron, Nick Blankenburg

Others on trade board: Ryan O'Reilly, Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault

Analysis: The Preds have made quite a run back to respectability of late, but their playoff chances are still sitting around just 24 percent, and they have some valuable vets to peddle. If ROR and Stamkos decide they want to go, Nashville could climb this ranking.

#### 6. Toronto Maple Leafs

Pending UFAs: Bobby McMann, Scott Laughton, Calle Järnkrok, Troy Stecher

Others on trade board: Simon Benoit

Analysis: Woof, have they been bad coming out of the Olympic break. The only question now is how aggressively GM Brad Treliving is willing to sell, as there's no point holding out hope they'll make a playoff push. (It's more like a lottery push at this point.)

#### 7. Chicago Blackhawks

Pending UFAs: Nick Foligno, Connor Murphy, Jason Dickinson, Ilya Mikheyev, Matt Grzelcyk

Others on trade board: none

Analysis: They're creeping into the lottery conversation again after a pile of losses over the last six weeks, and it's



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time to sell to keep stocking the cupboards for better days ahead.

## 8. San Jose Sharks

Pending UFAs: John Klingberg, Kiefer Sherwood, Alex Nedeljkovic, Mario Ferraro, Timothy Liljegren, Vincent Desharnais

Others on trade board: none

Analysis: The Sharks still have a legit chance at making the playoffs, but their contention window is a ways down the line, so moving off of some of their many UFA defensemen for futures makes a lot of sense. But they could keep some of their rentals if they'd like to give Celebrini and company a shot at a postseason push.

## 9. Winnipeg Jets

Pending UFAs: Gustav Nyquist, Luke Schenn, Logan Stanley

Others on trade board: none

Analysis: What a horrible, no good, very bad season in Winnipeg. It doesn't appear as though the Jets will move more than rentals, with an eye on a return to competitiveness next season, so there may not be anything too exciting here.

## 10. New Jersey Devils

Pending UFAs: Evgenii Dadonov

Others on trade board: Dougie Hamilton

Analysis: New Jersey's playoff chances are basically nil at this point, but don't expect a widespread sell-off. If the Devils find a taker for Hamilton, however, that could make them one of the more high-impact teams at this deadline. Otherwise, it could be quiet.

Nathan MacKinnon and the Avalanche. Jamie Schwabero / Getty Images

Goin' For It

Top 10 buyers

The list below reads a lot like a ranking of the top Cup contenders, with these 10 teams combining for an 86 percent chance to win it all this year.

## 1. Colorado Avalanche

Needs: This is a deep roster, but the Avs could still use help up front. They already bolstered the back end by adding Brett Kulak earlier this week, but another impact center and winger would go a long way to helping them escape their current malaise. And they have a ton of cap room.

## 2. Carolina Hurricanes

Needs: An elite center would sure fit nicely here. And you can't help but wonder if the 'Canes contemplate an upgrade

in goal, given Frederik Andersen's injury issues and Brandon Bussi's inexperience.

## 3. Dallas Stars

Needs: They have cap room if they spend some of Tyler Seguin's long-term injured reserve money and could use help both up front and in their top four on D.

## 4. Edmonton Oilers

Needs: Time to go play goalie roulette again, I guess? Tristan Jarry is down to an .864 save percentage, significantly worse than anything Stuart Skinner ever put up in Edmonton, so it's back to the drawing board.

## 5. Montreal Canadiens

Needs: If they can find a taker for Patrik Laine's contract, they'll have enough cap space to bring in an impact player up front. A center would be ideal, although rookie Oliver Kapanen has been growing into the role fairly nicely of late.

## 6. Minnesota Wild

Needs: Does Bill Guerin have another trick up his sleeve after landing the big fish in Quinn Hughes in December? The Wild ideally can land a center to help take on the Avs/Stars juggernauts in the Central, and they will dangle top goalie prospect Jesper Wallstedt to make that happen.

## 7. Detroit Red Wings

Needs: Help down the middle (second-line center) or a top-four defenseman would make the most sense for Detroit. Could Tyler Myers be a fit here?

## 8. Tampa Bay Lightning

Needs: They're a bit tight on cap space, so they'd have to get a little creative, but that hasn't stopped GM Julien BriseBois in the past. More forward depth is probably the only need, given how many defensemen they've had step up this year.

## 9. Vegas Golden Knights

Needs: Vegas GM Kelly McCrimmon is never shy about going after what he wants, and he has enough cap flexibility to be a player at this deadline. Do the Golden Knights feel good enough about their situation in goal, which has been in flux all year?

## 10. Utah Mammoth

Needs: Our insiders flagged Utah as a potential surprise player at the deadline, and the fact that the Mammoth are up to an 85 percent chance of making the playoffs in the West means they can get more aggressive. Could they possibly land one of the big names, given they're interested in adding either a forward or a D-man (or both)?



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## Preview: February 28 vs. Detroit

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Canes hunt fifth straight win as they close out February

RALEIGH, N.C. - The Carolina Hurricanes will try to extend their point streak to a dozen games on Saturday, when they go head-to-head with the Detroit Red Wings.

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When: Saturday, February 28

Puck Drop: 7:00 p.m. ET

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

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes App

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Canes Record: 37-15-6 (80 Points, 1st - Metropolitan Division)

Canes Last Game: 5-4 Win over the Tampa Bay Lightning on Thursday, Feb. 26

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Red Wings Record: 34-19-6 (74 Points, T-2nd - Atlantic Division)

Red Wings Last Game: 2-1 Win (OT) over the Ottawa Senators on Thursday, Feb. 26

Last Time Out...

The Canes battled through some adversity to take a 5-4 win from the Lightning on Thursday.

Four players had multi-point efforts - including Taylor Hall, Seth Jarvis, Logan Stankoven, and Andrei Svechnikov.

Brandon Bussi won his eighth start in a row, stopping 24.

Season Series vs. DET...

Dec 27: Andrei Svechnikov and Shayne Gostisbehere starred with three points apiece as the Carolina Hurricanes knocked off the Detroit Red Wings 5-2 at Lenovo Center.

Jan 12: A controversial finish at Little Caesars Arena ended with a 4-3 victory for the Red Wings.

Medals On Display...

As the Canes continue to welcome back their Olympians, fans have one last chance to see the gold, silver and bronze medals won by Jaccob Slavin, Seth Jarvis and Sebastian Aho at this year's Olympic Winter Games.

Their medals will be on display outside section 306 from the time doors open until the end of the first intermission.

In Net...

Both Brandon Bussi and Frederik Andersen are available options for tonight's contest.

Bussi, who was in the day-before starter's crease at Wednesday's practice, inked a three-year contract extension during the break. A winner of his last seven starts, he'll look to keep his momentum going following the shutout effort in New York in the Canes' most recent outing.

Andersen, meanwhile, has helped Carolina pick up a point in his last five starts (2-0-3). His last game in a Canes sweater was on Jan. 31, but he started three games for Denmark at the Olympics this month.

On The Other Side...

After a 1-3-1 skid into the Olympic break, Detroit returned to action with a 2-1 OT win in Ottawa, thanks in large part to gold medalist Dylan Larkin's two tallies.

Larkin, who has three goals in his last two games and five points in his last three, ranks third in team scoring with 53 points behind Lucas Raymond (62 pts) and Alex DeBrincat (57 pts). That trio has been crucial to Detroit's success, as no other Red Wing has posted more than 40 points on the year.

In net, John Gibson has emerged as a potential Vezina Trophy contender with 23 wins in 38 starts — one shy of Brandon Bussi. Reaching the 20-win plateau for the first time since 2019-20, Gibson backstopped a run of eight straight victories in January, but has gone 2-3-1 since then.

Injury Updates...

Goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov (hip surgery) was declared "probably out for the year" by Rod Brind'Amour on Dec. 29.

What Are We Wearing?

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

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes are scheduled to fly to Seattle on Sunday. They'll start a four-game road trip on Monday against the Kraken.

Next Game: Monday, March 2 at Seattle | 10:00 p.m. ET | [FDSNSO](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Parking](#)



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## North Carolina's Kayden Beasley To Play For Team USA at Paralympic Winter Games

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

19-year-old to compete on sled hockey team in Milan

RALEIGH, N.C. - Hurricanes Sled Hockey will be represented on the world stage next month when Kayden Beasley hits the ice for the 2026 Paralympic Winter Games.

Set to make his Paralympic debut, the young man from Coats, N.C. will try to help his sled team achieve the same result that both the U.S. men's and women's Olympic teams earned earlier this month - gold.

Named to the roster following a selection camp in New Jersey, Beasley has honed his skills over the years right here in the Raleigh area.

"They were a big part of the start to my journey. I'm very grateful to have them," the budding star said of Hurricanes Sled Hockey when he conducted a press availability at Lenovo Center this week. "They taught me the beginning stages and have supported me throughout all of it."

Making it look easy from the get-go, Beasley got started in the sport just six years ago and has already reached the pinnacle.

"Honestly, the first day he came on the ice, he got a sled, took off, and skated for about 30 minutes. I went over to his dad and was like 'Has he ever done this before?' He just seemed like a natural from the very first moment he was on the ice, and then just got better from there," Hurricanes Sled Hockey Coach Geoff Winn added.

Traveling far and wide over the past few years, Beasley's talent nabbed the attention of the U.S. program, leading him to receive invites for national team camps.

"Just getting to the development camps is a process of its own. Only 60 people in the entire country are invited to that

program, and then he was invited back each year before he was invited to join the development team. So it's not something [just] anyone gets a chance to do," Danny Morganelli, another Hurricanes Sled Hockey Coach, said. "It's very elite just getting to the camp."

Making his U.S. National Sled Hockey Team debut during the 2024-25 season and winning gold as a part of the 2025 World Para Ice Hockey Championship team, Beasley's stock continues to rise, along with his game.

Producing seven points (two goals and five assists) in five games, he finished the tournament second on the U.S. in scoring.

"I can always get better. You can't be satisfied with where you are now," Beasley said ahead of his biggest challenge yet. "(The sport has) definitely gotten more competitive over the years. It's still going to get more competitive, and hopefully we'll get more awareness about it."

Born as a congenital bilateral amputee with no legs and abandoned by his birth parents in China, Anthony and Amy Beasley adopted Kayden in 2009, when he was three. When the process was finalized, they brought him to their town of just over 2,000, roughly 30 miles south of Raleigh.

"We're excited for Kayden to go (to the Paralympics), but we're excited to watch more kids walk into the rink and say, 'I want to try and play hockey,'" Hurricanes Director of Youth Hockey & Community Outreach Shane Willis added. "We're using this platform now, and Kayden's success, and his continued success, to continue to open doors for every young player in our city."

Team USA's quest for a fifth-straight Paralympic gold medal begins against host Italy at 11:05 a.m. ET on March 7 at Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena.



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

## Game Preview: Hurricanes put 11-game point streak on the line against Red Wings

By: Kyle Morton

The Carolina Hurricanes face a second consecutive stiff test from an Atlantic Division foe on Saturday night, as the Detroit Red Wings make their way into the Lenovo Center for a 7:00 pm puck drop.

After defeating the Tampa Bay Lightning in thrilling fashion in their first game back from the Olympic break on Thursday, the Hurricanes get another possible playoff preview tonight.

After floundering for years under former Lightning general manager Steve Yzerman, the Yzerplan has finally started to pay dividends this season for Detroit, which brings a 34-19-6 record to Saturday's contest.

That's good enough to have the Red Wings sitting in third place in an extremely competitive Atlantic Division race. Detroit could very feasibly finish anywhere from second in the division to the second wild card spot.

The Wings are led in points by Lucas Raymond with 62. Raymond, who was a sparse bright spot for Team Sweden in Milan, has racked up 19 goals and 43 assists in 57 games.

Alex DeBrincat paces Detroit with 30 goals, while captain Dylan Larkin is right on his heels with 28.

On the back end, the Wings are led by German star Moritz Seider, who has taken a massive leap forward at both ends of the rink this season. His excellent defensive play and strong offensive production (39 points) have put him squarely in the race for the Norris Trophy.

Goalie John Gibson has gone 23-12-2 in the first season of his career outside of Anaheim.

For Carolina's part, this game presents an opportunity to run their point streak to 12 games. Thursday's win shortened the runway, but it didn't give the Canes any more cushion in the Metropolitan, as the Pittsburgh Penguins picked up a win as well.

The Pens have another prime opportunity for two points Saturday as they visit the flailing New York Rangers for a matinee at Madison Square Garden.

Carolina's Olympians shined in their first game back on Thursday, as Sebastian Aho, Seth Jarvis and Nikolaj Ehlers all found the back of the net against Tampa.

With Andrei Svechnikov's game at a high water mark, and the second line of Jackson Blake, Taylor Hall and Logan Stankoven looking sharp on Thursday, it feels like Rod Brind'Amour's forward group is finally rounding into peak form.

Brandon Bussi had the net on Thursday, so we could see Frederik Andersen between the pipes for the Canes tonight. It's more than understandable given the long layoff and the opponent, but Bussi did not have his best game in Carolina's win over the Bolts.

FanDuel Sports Network will have you covered for the game starting with the pre-game show at 6:30 leading up to puck drop at 7:00;



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## Canes return from Olympic break with 5-4 win over Tampa Bay

By: Liela Hafshejani

Right wing Jackson Blake (left) and defenseman Dimitri Orlov (middle) celebrate with center Sebastian Aho after a goal during the game against the Columbus Blue Jackets in the Lenovo Center on Thursday, Jan. 23, 2025. The Hurricanes scored five goals in the second period. Carolina defeated Columbus 7-4.

Right wing Jackson Blake (left) and defenseman Dimitri Orlov (middle) celebrate with center Sebastian Aho after a goal during the game against the Columbus Blue Jackets in the Lenovo Center on Thursday, Jan. 23, 2025. The Hurricanes scored five goals in the second period. Carolina defeated Columbus 7-4.

In their first game after the Olympic break, the Carolina Hurricanes welcomed back five players who were called to represent their country with an intense back-and-forth battle against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

In a tug-of-war 5-4 win, the Canes (37-15-6) bested the Tampa Bay Lightning (38-15-4) on home ice after falling to them earlier this season. They got revenge, and extended their point streak to 11 games.

Three Canes players returned from the Olympics with medals, as center Sebastian Aho won bronze for Finland, center Seth Jarvis won silver for Canada and defenseman Jaccob Slavin took home gold with Team USA.

Returning with high energy after representing Denmark, left wing Nikolaj Ehlers put the Canes on the board two minutes into the game. Assisted by defensemen K'Andre Miller and left wing Jordan Martinook, Ehlers breezed the puck past Tampa Bay's goaltender Jonas Johansson for the first goal of the night.

Following suit merely a minute later, center Logan Stankoven brought the score to 2-0, assisted by left wing Taylor Hall and defensemen Jalen Chatfield. Scoring the Canes third unanswered goal, Hall netted one to bring the score to 3-0 with help from Stankoven and right wing Jackson Blake.

"I was hungry to get back out there and contribute. It was nice to see the puck go in and have some success," Stankoven said, celebrating his 23rd birthday with a goal.

Hope for the Lightning was diminishing in a first period initially dominated by the Canes, but they got their spark back with four minutes left in the first frame.

Left wing Brandon Hagel put Tampa Bay on the board with assists from right wing Scott Sabourin and center Jake Guentzel, making the score 3-1. A minute later, Tampa Bay's right wing Nikita Kucherov scored, using a screen of Canes players in front of the goal to his advantage.

Heading into the second period up just one goal after quickly going up three in the first, tensions were high for the Canes. Solidifying the shift, center Dominic James tied the score for the Lightning off a pass from Guentzel.

But putting the Canes back in front, Jarvis responded six minutes later with a shot straight down in front of the Tampa Bay net after a pass from right wing Andrei Svechnikov, restoring the Canes' advantage.

"It was a little bit back-and-forth, not really the style that we're accustomed to playing," said left wing Taylor Hall. "At the end of the day, we get a win against a team that played last night. We'll take it."

The Lightning equalized again on a power play given for an Aho holding penalty. Aho put his team in a tie-game situation, but he also got them out of it by scoring on a power-play early in the third. Assisted by Jarvis and Svechnikov, his blue-line rocket took the lead for good.

"I think we did a nice job at the end of the game," said coach Rod Brind'Amour. "We make it interesting, that's for sure."

Carolina is set to host the Detroit Red Wings in Lenovo Center Saturday, Feb. 28. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m.



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## The Hockey News

### Hurricanes Return From Break With High-Scoring Win Over Lightning

By: Ryan Henkel

Hurricanes blast back into action with a thrilling 5-4 victory, showcasing offensive firepower and a clutch third-period defensive stand.

The Carolina Hurricanes got right back to business Thursday night, picking up a 5-4 win over the Eastern Conference leading Tampa Bay Lightning.

Carolina saw its offense kick it high gear right away and although the defense took a bit longer to show up, it came through with a good third period.

Here's four takeaways from Thursday's victory:

Carolina Hurricanes honor Olympians

#### 1. Expected Results After A Long Layoff

When you take three weeks off from competitive hockey, things aren't gonna look pretty when you return.

That was much the case last night as there were plenty of moments where guys looked like they were still getting their feet back under them.

Rust is always a factor of concern for any player that misses time, but when it's your whole team, the game isn't gonna be as crisp as one might expect.

Add in the fact that the Tampa Bay Lightning already had a game to get reacclimated too and you can see why this one looked much the way it did.

"Listen, everything that went on in that game was kind of what you knew was coming," said Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour.

"It was probably entertaining for the fans that were here and watching," said Taylor Hall. "A little bit back and forth. Not really the style we're constantly playing, but at the end of the day, we got a win against a team that, played last night, but probably knocked some rust off. For us, that's a long time to go without playing."

#### 2. Olympic Forwards Pick Up Right Where They Left Off

The Carolina Hurricanes honored their Olympians before the start of the game and that must have fired up their three Olympic forwards as each of them scored a go-ahead goal in the game.

Nikolaj Ehlers, who represented Denmark, got the game's first goal, rifling a shot past Jonas Johansson after receiving a great stretch pass by K'Andre Miller.

Seth Jarvis, who represented Canada, put the Hurricanes back up 4-3 after the team saw a three-goal lead dissolve, finding some soft space right in front of the Tampa net.

Then Sebastian Aho, who represented Finland, scored the eventual game-winner, sending a knuckler in past Johansson on the power play.

"Personally, I felt pretty gassed, to be quite honest," said Aho, who played in six Olympic games over the NHL break.

#### 3. Locking It Down In the Third Period

Thursday's game was as open as any you'll see through the first two periods and the score reflected that.

Eight goals on 45 shots isn't necessarily what you'd expect from the top two Eastern Conference teams, but with the talent on both sides and the lack of playing time under each's belt, it makes sense.

However, Carolina looked a lot more like themselves in the third period.

After a back-and-forth 40 minutes, Carolina held the Lightning to just two 5v5 shots on goal in the final frame.

Tampa still had zone time, but the Hurricanes were able to get in lanes, block shots and stymie the Lightning's elite offense enough to hold onto the win.

We'll see if they can carry over that type of game in Saturday's matchup.

"I thought the game got a little bit better there in the third," Brind'Amour said. "I liked our game. We didn't give up much and that was the key. We were giving up a few too many good looks, but I thought in the third, we settled down a little bit and got to our game a little better."

"Being able to reset between periods [was key]," said Logan Stankoven. "They're so good at being able to get the puck in the neutral zone and hit guys with speed and they're very dangerous off the rush. I thought that was just something we talked about between periods. That and limiting turnovers."

#### 4. Second Line Starting To Get Some Bounces

The Carolina Hurricanes' second line of Taylor Hall, Logan Stankoven and Jackson Blake has been one of the team's most consistently dangerous lines this season.

The trio has combined for the highest rate of scoring and high-danger chance generation on the team and also have the highest expected goals total.

However, they've been a bit unlucky this season in comparison to what they've generated.

Last night, we were able to see what the line is capable of, as they combined for two goals and a dominant showing.

"Lots of pretty goals," Brind'Amour said. "You don't always see that, but I think that line in general creates a lot for us and they're not always on the scoresheet, but they're always around it and they have the potential every shift to kind of make something happen. They were our best line."



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The Hurricanes are going to need them to continue be difference makers if they want to be successful in the postseason.

"Obviously there's games where we would have liked to have produced a bit more, but I think our team has that depth

where we have different lines that can step up and contribute at different times," Stankoven said. "Sometimes, you can't control where the puck goes, but if you can work as hard as you can and keep building on the little things, that's all you can ask of yourself."

## LINKS

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<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/north-carolina-s-kayden-beasley-to-play-for-team-usa-at-paralympic-winter-games>

<https://www.canescountry.com/carolina-hurricanes-game-day-previews/52964/game-preview-carolina-hurricanes-detroit-red-wings-february-28-nhl>

<https://technicianonline.com/156593/sports/canes-return-from-olympic-break-with-5-4-win-over-tampa-bay/>

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/game-day/hurricanes-return-from-break-with-high-scoring-win-over-lightning>

# SportScan

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

1380883 Websites

The Athletic / Watching Macklin Celebrini play for Canada at Olympics was 'a life memory' for father Rick

By Nick Friedell

Feb. 27, 2026

SAN FRANCISCO — Rick Celebrini spent the last two weeks on an Italian family vacation that he will remember for a lifetime, even if it didn't have the kind of ending he hoped.

Celebrini, the popular Golden State Warriors vice president of player health and performance, is the proud father of Macklin Celebrini, the 19-year-old hockey superstar who featured prominently for Canada's men's Olympic team. The elder Celebrini returned to Warriors practice Friday to share stories about his time in Milan.

"I don't know how you put it into words," Celebrini said. "It was an incredible experience being there as a family unit. I felt a little guilty playing hooky from my role here, but it was certainly something that is a life memory."

Celebrini, who started working for the Warriors in 2018, said he felt a variety of emotions during his time in Italy. He was happy to support his son, who returned to practice with the San Jose Sharks earlier this week,

and grateful to the Warriors for allowing him to step away from the day-to-day of his job to join the rest of his family.

"Beaming is one word," Celebrini said with a smile. "Stressful, nervous, anxious at times. An incredible roller coaster of emotions, as you can imagine."

Celebrini was referring to Canada's medal round, which included comebacks against the Czech Republic in the quarterfinals and Finland in the semifinals before its dramatic 2-1 defeat to Team USA in Sunday's gold medal game. After spending much of his life working for several professional sports organizations, Celebrini acknowledged that as painful as the result was for the Canadians, it may yield a larger impact for the game itself over time.

"Once we get past the emotion of it, the fact that the Americans won is likely good for the game," Celebrini said. "I know that's been suggested before but it really does add to the rivalry (and) adds to the profile of the sport in this country. As Canadians, that's all we have. We have maple syrup and hockey."

Celebrini laughed as he made that last point, though it didn't stop him from receiving some good-natured ribbing from Warriors players.

"Rick is always joking around. (He's) the best at what he does, so we were missing him, and now he's back with us," Brazilian big man Gui Santos said. "I am not from USA, but I guess everybody that is from USA is probably talking something to him."

Celebrini said his son understandably took the defeat hard.



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"He was inconsolable after the game, he was upset," Celebrini said. "He was upset at himself. He was upset at the results. But I think that with a lot of athletes, it's fuel. I really do think it was a motivator for him."

The pride that shined through in Celebrini's words during his 10-minute news conference Friday was especially evident when he discussed how his son could grow from his experience playing with this particular Canadian national team.

"I don't know that he's realized yet, but without a doubt, (it helped) being around that environment, that group of athletes, with the experiences that they have," Celebrini said. "You got multiple Cup winners, Hall of Famers and legends of the game, guys that he looked up to. And the coaching staff as well."

"I think he picked up a lot from that experience. I think, over time, it will declare itself in terms of to what extent and what areas."

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1380884 Websites

The Athletic / U.S. hockey heroes Hilary Knight, Jack Hughes and Quinn Hughes to appear on 'Tonight Show'

By Michael Russo

Feb. 27, 2026

Team USA gold medal-winning brothers Quinn and Jack Hughes and gold medal-winning women's captain Hilary Knight will appear together on "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon" on Monday night, NBCUniversal announced Friday.

The Hughes brothers combined for 15 points in the Olympics, with Quinn scoring in overtime to beat Sweden in the quarterfinals and Jack, with missing teeth and a bloodied mouth after being high-sticked late in regulation, scoring in overtime to beat Canada in the gold medal game.

Knight, in her fifth and final Olympics, scored the tying goal late in regulation to force overtime in the United States' eventual overtime win over Canada in the gold medal game.

Quinn plays defense for the Minnesota Wild, and Jack plays forward for the New Jersey Devils. Knight, the longtime face of USA women's hockey, captains the PWHL Seattle Torrent.

"The Tonight Show" on Monday will also feature guests Nicole Kidman, Luke Thompson and a cooking demo by Chef Mario Carbone, the network announced. The show airs at 11:35 p.m. ET on NBC and streams Tuesday on Peacock.

The Athletic also reported Thursday night that Quinn Hughes is expected to appear on "Saturday Night Live" this weekend. There's a chance his brother, Jack, will also appear with him on "SNL," league sources told The Athletic. Jack's Devils play in St. Louis at 4 p.m. CT, and if they can make it back to the New York/New Jersey area on time, he plans to hustle over to the NBC Studios.

Heated Rivalry actor Connor Storrie is scheduled to host "SNL."

Quinn had a busy week.

After winning the gold medal on Sunday, he flew with his U.S. teammates Monday to Miami to celebrate the victory. Then it was off to Washington, D.C. on Tuesday for a trip to the White House to meet President Donald Trump. Wednesday, he flew from Washington to Minneapolis on Wild owner Craig Leipold's private jet where he caught up with his Wild teammates for their trip to Denver to face the Colorado Avalanche on

Thursday evening. Then it was off to Salt Lake City to face the Utah Mammoth on Friday. He will return to Minnesota on Saturday morning but his stay will be brief, as it will be off to New York for SNL. Quinn will wrap up the week on Sunday in Minnesota and play the St. Louis Blues. Monday it is back to New York to appear on Fallon before heading back to Minnesota to play the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday.

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The Athletic / Ranking the NHL's 10 biggest trade deadline buyers and sellers

By James Mirtle

Feb. 27, 2026

Good morning, hockey folks. We're exactly a week out from the NHL trade deadline, and the scuttlebutt is coming fast and furious. Let's dive into some of the latest.

For Sale

Top 10 sellers

Originally, I was going to rank all 32 teams by their willingness to buy and/or sell, but let's just say that ended up being too ambitious for this Red Lighter — in part because a few teams are in a weird in-between space, where they may not be big players either way at the March 6 deadline.

So, let's instead break down the 10 most likely buyers and sellers, with a deeper look at which players might be on the trade block over the next seven days. As always, make sure you're keeping an eye on the latest trade board for up-to-date info.

Here's our sellers list as it stands today, ranked by likelihood of being the biggest players on the market:

1. St. Louis Blues

Pending unrestricted free agents: Oskar Sundqvist, Robby Fabbri

Others on trade board: Justin Faulk, Jordan Binnington, Brayden Schenn, Robert Thomas, Jordan Kyrou

Analysis: No team has as many high-impact players available. How dramatically GM Doug Armstrong unloads remains to be seen, but the Blues could bring the biggest fireworks if the deals line up for them. Here's what Jeremy Rutherford is hearing.

2. Vancouver Canucks

Pending UFAs: Evander Kane, Teddy Blueger, David Kämpf

Others on trade board: Elias Pettersson, Jake DeBrusk, Conor Garland

Analysis: It's full-on tank mode for the Canucks, who are paying for years and years of mismanagement and now have to sell off anything that isn't bolted down. It's going to be painful, sure, but at least there's finally a semblance of a plan and a youth movement on the way.

3. Calgary Flames

Pending UFAs: Ryan Lomberg

Others on trade board: Blake Coleman, Nazem Kadri, Zach Whitecloud, Morgan Frost



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Analysis: The Flames have some very interesting pieces with term that could fetch high prices, led by Kadri and Coleman, who have both played key roles on Cup winners in recent years.

### 4. New York Rangers

Pending UFAs: Jonathan Quick

Others on trade board: Vincent Trocheck, Braden Schneider, Brennan Othmann

Analysis: The Rangers have already shipped out a ton over the past 12 months or so, but the sell-off is likely to continue with a haul for Trocheck — and maybe more, depending on how deep GM Chris Drury wants to cut.

### 5. Nashville Predators

Pending UFAs: Michael Bunting, Erik Haula, Michael McCarron, Nick Blankenburg

Others on trade board: Ryan O'Reilly, Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault

Analysis: The Preds have made quite a run back to respectability of late, but their playoff chances are still sitting around just 24 percent, and they have some valuable vets to peddle. If ROR and Stamkos decide they want to go, Nashville could climb this ranking.

### 6. Toronto Maple Leafs

Pending UFAs: Bobby McMann, Scott Laughton, Calle Järnkrok, Troy Stecher

Others on trade board: Simon Benoit

Analysis: Woof, have they been bad coming out of the Olympic break. The only question now is how aggressively GM Brad Treliving is willing to sell, as there's no point holding out hope they'll make a playoff push. (It's more like a lottery push at this point.)

### 7. Chicago Blackhawks

Pending UFAs: Nick Foligno, Connor Murphy, Jason Dickinson, Ilya Mikheyev, Matt Grzelcyk

Others on trade board: none

Analysis: They're creeping into the lottery conversation again after a pile of losses over the last six weeks, and it's time to sell to keep stocking the cupboards for better days ahead.

### 8. San Jose Sharks

Pending UFAs: John Klingberg, Kiefer Sherwood, Alex Nedeljkovic, Mario Ferraro, Timothy Liljegren, Vincent Desharnais

Others on trade board: none

Analysis: The Sharks still have a legit chance at making the playoffs, but their contention window is a ways down the line, so moving off of some of their many UFA defensemen for futures makes a lot of sense. But they could keep some of their rentals if they'd like to give Celebrini and company a shot at a postseason push.

### 9. Winnipeg Jets

Pending UFAs: Gustav Nyquist, Luke Schenn, Logan Stanley

Others on trade board: none

Analysis: What a horrible, no good, very bad season in Winnipeg. It doesn't appear as though the Jets will move more than rentals, with an eye on a return to competitiveness next season, so there may not be anything too exciting here.

### 10. New Jersey Devils

Pending UFAs: Evgenii Dadonov

Others on trade board: Dougie Hamilton

Analysis: New Jersey's playoff chances are basically nil at this point, but don't expect a widespread sell-off. If the Devils find a taker for Hamilton, however, that could make them one of the more high-impact teams at this deadline. Otherwise, it could be quiet.

Goin' For It

Top 10 buyers

The list below reads a lot like a ranking of the top Cup contenders, with these 10 teams combining for an 86 percent chance to win it all this year.

### 1. Colorado Avalanche

Needs: This is a deep roster, but the Avs could still use help up front. They already bolstered the back end by adding Brett Kulak earlier this week, but another impact center and winger would go a long way to helping them escape their current malaise. And they have a ton of cap room.

### 2. Carolina Hurricanes

Needs: An elite center would sure fit nicely here. And you can't help but wonder if the 'Canes contemplate an upgrade in goal, given Frederik Andersen's injury issues and Brandon Bussi's inexperience.

### 3. Dallas Stars

Needs: They have cap room if they spend some of Tyler Seguin's long-term injured reserve money and could use help both up front and in their top four on D.

### 4. Edmonton Oilers

Needs: Time to go play goalie roulette again, I guess? Tristan Jarry is down to an .864 save percentage, significantly worse than anything Stuart Skinner ever put up in Edmonton, so it's back to the drawing board.

### 5. Montreal Canadiens

Needs: If they can find a taker for Patrik Laine's contract, they'll have enough cap space to bring in an impact player up front. A center would be ideal, although rookie Oliver Kapanen has been growing into the role fairly nicely of late.

### 6. Minnesota Wild

Needs: Does Bill Guerin have another trick up his sleeve after landing the big fish in Quinn Hughes in December? The Wild ideally can land a center to help take on the Avs/Stars juggernauts in the Central, and they will dangle top goalie prospect Jesper Wallstedt to make that happen.

### 7. Detroit Red Wings

Needs: Help down the middle (second-line center) or a top-four defenseman would make the most sense for Detroit. Could Tyler Myers be a fit here?

### 8. Tampa Bay Lightning

Needs: They're a bit tight on cap space, so they'd have to get a little creative, but that hasn't stopped GM Julien BriseBois in the past. More forward depth is probably the only need, given how many defensemen they've had step up this year.

### 9. Vegas Golden Knights

Needs: Vegas GM Kelly McCrimmon is never shy about going after what he wants, and he has enough cap flexibility to be a player at this deadline. Do the Golden Knights feel good enough about their situation in goal, which has been in flux all year?



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10. Utah Mammoth

Needs: Our insiders flagged Utah as a potential surprise player at the deadline, and the fact that the Mammoth are up to an 85 percent chance of making the playoffs in the West means they can get more aggressive. Could they possibly land one of the big names, given they're interested in adding either a forward or a D-man (or both)?

MirTrivia Question

Let's see how well you know your trade deadline history.

Early in the salary-cap era, the Penguins were always aggressive at the deadline. At one point, their GM, Ray Shero, added three different veteran stars in 2008, 2009 and 2013, in three of the bigger deadline moves in that time period.

They traded away five young players (Colby Armstrong, Erik Christensen, Angelo Esposito, Kenny Agostino, Ben Hanowski), two first-round picks and a third-round pick to bring in two future Hall of Famers and one 400-goal man who is now the GM of a top club.

Who were those three additions? And which one won a Cup with the Penguins?

Answers at the bottom.

Coast to Coast

The U.S. women's players say they are eager to put the focus on their Olympic gold-medal win, not a "distasteful" joke from Donald Trump. And the men's team weighs in similarly here.

Here's what Blues writer Jeremy Rutherford is hearing about their deadline plans, including for Team Canada netminder Jordan Binnington.

Josh Yohe weighs in on Penguins GM Kyle Dubas' latest savvy trade and what it says about Pittsburgh's surprisingly successful retool.

A fire sale is coming in Vancouver, and Tyler Myers is likely the next to go. Here's why that's a good thing.

Should the NHL learn from the Olympics and switch to a 3-2-1 point system? It certainly has my vote.

"The Athletic Hockey Show" puts a bow on the Milan Cortina Games, discussing the controversy surrounding the men's team attending the State of the Union and Connor Hellebuyck receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The crew also looks ahead to the deadline.

MirTrivia Answer

Who did the Penguins acquire at the 2008, 2009 and 2013 deadlines?

Marián Hossa was the big addition in 2008, via the Atlanta Thrashers, and he helped Pittsburgh all the way to the Stanley Cup Final before the Penguins lost to the Detroit Red Wings, whom he then signed with the following season. And then lost in the final ... to the Penguins.

Bill Guerin, now the Wild GM, joined Pittsburgh a year later, in 2009, and won his second championship as a player.

And, in 2013, the Penguins went to the veteran well again, bringing aboard Jarome Iginla, whose brief tenure in Crosbyville ended when the Pens were swept by Boston in the Eastern Conference final.

Iginla, like Hossa, then joined the Bruins a year later — but failed to win a title.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.28.2026

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The Athletic / After Olympic gold, where does Connor Hellebuyck rank among history's best goalies?

By Sean McIndoe and Jesse Granger

Feb. 27, 2026

Connor Hellebuyck has had a good month. You might have heard about it.

The three-time Vezina winner and defending Hart Trophy winner as NHL MVP was the story of the story of Team USA's gold medal win over Canada on Sunday, making 41 saves in a 2-1 OT win. It was the sort of signature game that a goaltender's reputation is built on. After years of hearing about how he couldn't win the big one, Hellebuyck went out and almost single-handedly won one of the biggest ones that there's ever been. Then he became the first hockey player to earn the Presidential Medal of Freedom. And also, one of Frankie's dudes.

Not bad. So now what?

That's the question that comes up when a hockey history buff and a goaltending guru get together. So today, Sean McIndoe and Jesse Granger are teaming up to try to figure out where Hellebuyck stands in modern NHL history.

That's modern as in the post-1967 expansion era, meaning we won't be trying to compare Hellebuyck to names like Terry Sawchuk, Jacques Plante or Glenn Hall. But that still leaves a lot of great goaltenders to sort through. After the biggest win of his life, where does Hellebuyck fit in? Upper echelon? The truly elite? Mount Rushmore? Even higher?

We're not sure. So let's figure it out.

McIndoe: So before we start to dig into the other names, let's get into Hellebuyck's resume. He has three Vezinas, which ties him with Patrick Roy and Tony Esposito, trailing only Ken Dryden, Martin Brodeur and Dominik Hašek. He won the Hart Trophy last season, putting him in rare company among goalie with just Hašek's two, plus wins by Carey Price and, uh, Jose Theodore. Now he has Olympic gold.

That's pretty good! So let's start with what seems like an easy one: We both agree he's already a Hall of Famer, right?

Granger: In my eyes, Hellebuyck is already a Hall of Famer at this point without ever stepping on the ice again. At 32, he's beyond his physical prime, but we've seen plenty of all-time-greats add to their resume quite a bit beyond that point in their career. Both Brodeur and Hašek won half of their Vezina trophies after 32.

On top of his impressive trophy case, which is already HOF-worthy, Hellebuyck is already top-15 in NHL history in goals saved above expected (GSAA), and is on pace to fly past Jonathan Quick as the all-time leader for wins by an American goalie.

McIndoe: Fully agreed. So he's already Hall-worthy. But that's not our question for today. We're trying to figure out how high up the modern list he's climbed, and how far he could realistically go.

Let's establish a baseline. In my mind, there's a holy trinity of modern goaltenders: Hašek, Roy and Brodeur, in whatever order you want to put them. The next tier down would include older names like Dryden and Esposito, and then Grant Fuhr, Billy Smith and Eddie Belfour, plus some more recent ones like Price, Henrik Lundqvist, Marc-André Fleury and Roberto Luongo. Maybe you'd want to put a fellow active goalie like Sergei Bobrovsky on the list, or even Jonathan Quick, as well as guys who are closer to their prime like Andrei Vasilevskiy and Igor Shesterkin.

Am I missing anyone? I know asking you to pick your favorite goalies is like asking a parent to pick your favorite children, but have I left anyone that belongs in the "best of the era" conversation?



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Granger: I think you covered just about everyone. My only quibble is that I personally consider Dryden in the top tier with Hašek, Roy and Brodeur. Yes, he played behind stacked Montreal teams in an era with a shallower talent pool, but Dryden's dominance was on a level that has never been matched. If he hadn't retired at 31, I think he might've been in his own tier at the top.

I think Bernie Parent belongs somewhere on that list, although his career began just before the expansion era, which could explain that.

McIndoe: Yep, good call on Parent. All right, comparing stats across eras can be tricky, since scoring rates have changed so much over the years. You could have won a Vezina in the 1980s with numbers that would get you sent to the AHL today. But you had an interesting number that you flagged for Hellebuyck.

Granger: We've yet to perfect quantifying good goaltending, but the best statistic we currently have is goals saved above expected (GSAX). Unfortunately, we didn't begin tracking that until 2007-08, which limits its use in this discussion. I still think it's worth bringing up that Hellebuyck's career GSAX is in its own stratosphere in comparison to all other active goalies.

Hellebuyck's 195.09 GSAX isn't just the best among active netminders, it's 43.42 ahead of Ilya Sorokin in second place. Only Lundqvist's 277.94 GSAX tops Hellebuyck's number since the stat was tracked. Those two are the clear top two in this era, in my opinion, despite their lack of success in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

A better stat for historical comparison is goals saved above average (GSAA). I like it because it compares a goalie's save percentage to the league average that season, so it accounts for the differences in scoring across eras. It's still not perfect, but it's the best we have to compare goalies from the 1970s and 2020s (and everywhere in between).

Hellebuyck is already 15th on the all-time GSAA list, behind 13 Hall of Famers, John Vanbiesbrouck and Glenn Resch. I will reference this stat quite a bit as we compare Hellebuyck to the other greats.

McIndoe: OK, so let's plant our first real flag. Given what the numbers tell us, plus the three Vezinas, is Hellebuyck the best goaltender of the cap era?

Granger: Yes, Hellebuyck is the best of the cap era in my eyes. His main competition is Lundqvist, Luongo and Fleury, and Hellebuyck's individual accomplishments already outpace all three, and he still has plenty of time to add to them.

McIndoe: When we listed all of Hellebuyck's accomplishments up above, there was something missing, and it's one thing Hellebuyck has in common with other cap-era names like Price, Lundqvist and Luongo: He hasn't won a Cup. We should add a "yet" qualifier, since he's 32 and far from being done. But given some of the legends who led their teams to multiple championships, does that lack of a ring put a ceiling on how highly Hellebuyck could rank someday?

Granger: There's no question Hellebuyck needs a Cup to enter the conversation for the greatest goalie of all time. Even Hašek, who had won six Vezinas, two Harts and two Jennings trophies through the first 12 years of his career, didn't truly cement himself at the top until his Cup win with Detroit in 2002.

Hockey is a team sport. Wins and championships are team accomplishments. But in my opinion, nothing determines the outcomes more than the starting goalie. It's possible to be an all-time great without a Cup, but the higher you get on the list, the more championships become a factor.

McIndoe: Here comes another flag to plant, and it's a tough one. Is there a case to be made — not an ironclad one, but a reasonable one — that Hellebuyck belongs in the Roy/Brodeur/Hašek conversation?

I'll be honest, I find it tough. Hašek has double the Vezinas with six, double the Harts with two, a pair of Cup rings, and his own Olympic gold medal that he won almost single-handedly. Brodeur has 691 wins, well over 100 more than the next name on the list, to go with three Cups and four Vezinas. Roy is third all-time in wins and won four Cups, and he was the Conn Smythe winner for three of those, and may have been the single best big-game goalie to ever live.

Each of those guys achieved some of those honors in their mid-30s or beyond, and again, Hellebuyck isn't done yet. But right now, is there any case that he's knocking on the door of the big three?

Granger: I am in complete agreement with you. Hellebuyck still has time to climb into this tier, but as of now, he's not there.

McIndoe: Let's go rapid-fire for a few names. I'll give you a goalie, you tell me whether you have Hellebuyck above or below him on your list. Let's start with Belfour.

Granger: Belfour had a much quicker start to his career than Hellebuyck, but he burned bright and fast. Eddie the Eagle racked up two Vezinas and a Calder in his first three full seasons in the NHL, but added only two Jennings trophies over his final 13 seasons.

Belfour had an incredible shining moment, outdueling Hašek to finally win a Stanley Cup in 1999. He helped Dallas back to the Cup final the following year, and was absolutely sensational in both runs, which is arguably more impressive than Hellebuyck's Olympic run.

I think this one is razor tight at the moment. I'd give Hellebuyck the slight edge, and he obviously has time to widen the gap.

McIndoe: What about Fuhr?

Granger: Fuhr and Hellebuyck's careers are polar opposites. From a statistical perspective, Hellebuyck is far superior. His 170.7 GSAA is laughably ahead of Fuhr's 2.2. That's right, Fuhr saved 2.2 goals above average for his entire career. That number was somewhat depressed by three poor seasons at the end in St. Louis and Calgary, but Fuhr never put up individual numbers close to Hellebuyck's.

However, the biggest criticism of Hellebuyck's legacy is his lack of clutch playoff performances and Cups, and Fuhr is one of the best examples of both in NHL history. Fuhr was excellent in the postseason and won four Cups before turning 26.

This is a matter of preference. I personally think Fuhr is overrated (in relation to the all-time greats) due to the teams he played behind, so I side with Hellebuyck here. I'm sure this opinion won't be ridiculed at all.

McIndoe: How about Dryden, who you wrote an excellent tribute to when he passed away last year?

Granger: As I mentioned earlier, I think Dryden belongs in the conversation for the greatest goalie of all time. He ranks fourth all-time with 320.3 GSAA despite playing less than half of the games of the three ahead of him on the list.

Here's a fun stat: In Hellebuyck's masterpiece 2024-25 season that earned him the Hart and Vezina trophies, he saved a career-high 41.6 goals above average. Dryden played only seven full seasons in the NHL, and he topped Hellebuyck's GSAA number in five of them. Oh, and he won both the Vezina and Stanley Cup in four of those seasons.

Say what you want about the team in front of him, but Montreal couldn't get out of the first round of the playoffs the year Dryden took off (1973-74). Dryden is criminally underrated because of the brevity of his career.

McIndoe: Esposito?

Granger: Esposito is the perfect example of how the lack of a Stanley Cup championship can limit a goalie's ceiling in the all-time discussion. "Tony O" is the NHL's all-time leader in GSAA (453.6). His rookie season



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in 1969-70 is one of the greatest single seasons by any goalie, ever. He had a lengthy career that was tremendous, essentially from start to finish. And yet you never really hear his name in discussions for the greatest of all time, and the lack of a Cup certainly plays a factor in that.

At this point, Esposito ranks above Hellebuyck, but there's room for Hellebuyck to catch him with an impressive finish.

McIndoe: And how about four-time Cup winner Billy Smith?

Granger: It stirred the pot quite a bit when I ranked Smith over Fuhr as the best goalie to wear No. 31 this summer, so I'll continue stirring. Like Fuhr, Smith has a four-Cup lead over Hellebuyck. Unlike Fuhr, Smith's individual statistics stand up pretty well to Hellebuyck's.

Smith may not have a single season as impressive as Hellebuyck's 2024-25, but he lapped the field in save percentage for most of his career. This is the toughest call yet for me. I'll say Smith has the edge for now, but I think Hellebuyck will pass him when it's all said and done.

McIndoe: And you already gave Parent his flowers. I think, having gone through this exercise, here's where I'm at: I think it's still the Hašek/Roy/Brodeur trinity, in some order. (For what it's worth, that's my order right there, but it's close at all spots.) Dryden comes in next, and like you say, maybe he should make it a Big Four. And I really think there's a strong case that Hellebuyck has cracked the top five. I think I have him ahead of all the others, with the caveat that the next few years could still change things. But for now, he's passed most of the greats, but hasn't quite cracked the Mount Rushmore.

Granger: The last thing I'd like to mention is that aside from the numbers, most of these all-time greats had something else in common, which Hellebuyck also shares. They were all so great that they actually innovated the position in their own way, pushing boundaries and improving future generations of goalies as a result.

Esposito and Roy both made huge contributions to the development of the butterfly. Brodeur literally changed the lines with his puck handling and set a standard for mistake-free goaltending. Hašek played an unreplicable style, but showed the importance of play-reading and reactive goaltending.

I could go on and on, and I think Hellebuyck's mental approach to the game will go down in a similar vein when it's all said and done. He isn't nearly as athletic or flexible as most of today's goalies, but he processes what's happening in front of him at an almost superhuman rate. His thoughtful, efficient brand of goaltending will inspire future greats with similar physical limitations.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.28.2026

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ESPN / NHL Power Rankings: New 1-32 poll, over/under bet for each team – ESPN

Sean Allen, Victoria Matiash

Feb 27, 2026

The 2026 Olympic ice hockey tournament is complete, and all players have returned to their teams -- some to the ice, others to injured reserve (most notably Kevin Fiala, Sidney Crosby and Mikko Rantanen).

So as the next segment of the NHL season begins, it's time to take the temperature with another set of Power Rankings. In addition to a new 1-32 poll, this week ESPN analysts Sean Allen (Eastern Conference) and Victoria Matiash (Western Conference) are assessing the over/under

points total for each club and indicating whether an "over" or "under" bet makes the most sense at this point.

How we rank: A panel of ESPN hockey commentators, analysts, reporters and editors sends in a 1-32 poll based on the games through Wednesday.

Note: Previous ranking for each team refers to the previous edition,

Published Feb. 6. Points percentages are through Thursday's games. All odds are by DraftKings Sportsbook, subject to change.

### 1. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 74.6%

O/U 119.5 (over -115; under -115). Post-Olympic fatigue doesn't appear to be much of an issue, as Brock Nelson, Martin Necas, Gabriel Landeskog and Cale Makar all hit the scoresheet in their first game back -- a victory over Utah in which they could afford to rest Nathan MacKinnon. Already the cream of the NHL crop, and with new defender Brett Kulak aboard, the Avs could be even stronger via trade by next week. Pick: Over (-115)

Next seven days: vs. CHI (Feb. 28), @ LA (March 2), @ ANA (March 3)

### 2. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 70.2%

O/U 113.5 (over -110; under -120). The Bolts remain the class of the East, on pace to claim the division with some breathing room at the end. But 113.5 is still a bold line. Especially if they manage to get there before the final week of the season and rest some key players in the final games. Pick: Under (-120)

Next seven days: vs. BUF (Feb. 28), @ MIN (March 3), @ WPG (March 5)

### 3. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 69%

O/U 110.5 (over -115; under -115). Going over 110 points is a tall order for the Canes, even with Brandon Bussi's breakout season. A savvy trade could tip the scales toward the over, but the margin is thin. Pick: Under (-115)

Next seven days: vs. DET (Feb. 28), @ SEA (March 2), @ VAN (March 4)

### 4. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 67.8%

O/U 106.5 (over -115; under -115). Since trading for Quinn Hughes, Minnesota is 15-5-5 and GM Bill Guerin might not be done yet fiddling with his playoff-bound squad. While the well-balanced Wild won't likely catch the Avalanche, don't be surprised if they narrow the gap. Pick: Over (-115)

Next seven days: @ UTA (Feb. 27), vs. STL (March 1), vs. TB (March 3)

### 5. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 68.1%



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O/U 107.5 (over -120; under -110). The way they're competing right now, the Stars should have little issue winning 14 of their last 24. And that's even without Rantanen, who hopefully suits back up before the end of the season. You can bet GM Jim Nill is also endeavoring to improve his already strong club further before next Friday. Pick: Over (-120)

Next seven days: vs. NSH (Feb. 28), @ VAN (March 2), @ CGY (March 3)

6. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 62.9%

O/U 100.5 (over -110; under -120). With the knowledge that they can pull Jacob Fowler into the mix if the goaltending slumps again, the Habs have all the pieces to drive this to the finish line. Juraj Slafkovsky just played his best hockey of the season in Italy, and there is some flexibility for the Habs to carefully improve at the deadline, too. Pick: Over (-110)

Next seven days: vs. WSH (Feb. 28), @ SJ (March 3)

7. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 63.2%

O/U 95.5 (over -120; under -110). The Penguins were on pace for second in the Metropolitan, but a tough remaining schedule -- including crossover games against Vegas, Colorado, and Dallas, plus three against Carolina -- could limit them. Still, they have enough cushion to make the playoffs and top the 95.5 number. Pick: Over (-120)

Next seven days: @ NYR (Feb. 28), vs. VGK (March 1), @ BOS (March 3), vs. BUF (March 5)

8. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 62.7%

O/U 97.5 (over -115; under -115). After a slow start, the Red Wings are still on track for an Atlantic playoff spot. The key will be how they handle the Panthers and Lightning, with three and two matchups remaining, respectively. Pick: Over (-115)

Next seven days: @ CAR (Feb. 28), @ NSH (March 2), vs. VGK (March 4)

9. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 62.1%

O/U 97.5 (over -130; under +100). One small stumble could derail the Sabres' long-awaited playoff push, though there's no pressing concern if the new regime hangs on to Alex Tuch (and possibly gets a contract extension done too). This 97.5 line is fair, as the Sabres can reach 98. Pick: Over (-130)

Next seven days: @ FLA (Feb. 27), @ TB (Feb. 28), vs. VGK (March 3), @ PIT (March 5)

10. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 10

Points percentage: 60.3%

O/U 99.5 (over -105; under -125). Which form of Adin Hill do we see in the final weeks? If it's the one that surrendered a single goal on 33 shots to the Kings ahead of the Olympic break, Vegas should have no issue hitting 100 points. But the version that has floated a .854 save

percentage and 3.61 goals-against average since returning on Jan. 15 casts greater doubt. Still, the Knights are probably stacked enough otherwise to eke it out. Pick: Over (-105)

Next seven days: @ WSH (Feb. 27), @ PIT (March 1), @ BUF (March 3), @ DET (March 4)

11. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 61.2%

O/U 93.5 (over -120/ under -110). The Bruins probably won't boost the roster at the trade deadline, but they still have enough of a tail wind to extend the season into the playoffs with a wild-card spot. This 93.5 line feels bearish -- no pun intended -- given the games remaining and pace they've been on this season. Pick: Over (-120)

Next seven days: @ PHI (Feb. 28), vs. PIT (March 3), @ NSH (March 5)

12. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 14

Points percentage: 60.2%

O/U 94.5 (over -125; under -105). With Ilya Sorokin and Matthew Schaefer playing the way they are (as the favorites for the Vezina and Calder Trophies), the Isles can beat anyone. Working in their favor is that going over this line would probably mean bypassing the wild-card spots into the third Metropolitan berth. Pick: Over (-125)

Next seven days: @ CBJ (Feb. 28), vs. FLA (March 1), @ ANA (March 4), @ LA (March 5)

13. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 57%

O/U 93.5 (over -120; under -110). Columbus faces a tough finish, including three games against Carolina. The line feels fair, but the Jackets aren't likely to buy at the deadline and missing the playoffs wouldn't be a shock -- or a major setback long term. Pick: Under (-110)

Next seven days: vs. NYI (Feb. 28), @ NYR (March 2), vs. NSH (March 3), vs. FLA (March 5)

14. Utah Mammoth

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 55.2%

O/U 93.5 (over -110; under -120). Sitting in the top wild-card spot, the Mammoth would have to earn another 30 points in 24 games to satisfy this line. Here's why they do it: With a healthy Logan Cooley back in the fold, the squad is finally back on the ice, back to front. Plus they're facing the fifth-easiest schedule to wrap, including 13 games at home. Pick: Over (-110)

Next seven days: vs. MIN (Feb. 27), vs. CHI (March 1), @ WSH (March 3), @ PHI (March 5)

15. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 57%

O/U 91.5 (over -120; under -110). With top forward Leo Carlsson back, this is the healthiest the Ducks have been in some time. Tearing into the break with a 10-2-0 record, one of the hottest teams in the league faces the third-easiest schedule (by record) going forward. Twenty-seven points in 25 games should be no great ask. Pick: Over (-120)



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Next seven days: vs. WPG (Feb. 27), vs. CGY (March 1), vs. COL (March 3), vs. NYI (March 4)

play

0:53

Cutter Gauthier scores late winner for the Ducks

Cutter Gauthier gives the Ducks their first lead of the game with a late tally against the Oilers.

16. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 55.8%

O/U 91.5 (over -125; under -105). With among the fewest remaining games in the NHL and a softer schedule, the Capitals should come close to the 91.5 line. Whether they can push past it -- or mount a playoff run in the East -- might hinge on how effectively Pierre-Luc Dubois extends the offense now that he's back from injury. Pick: Under (-105)

Next seven days: vs. VGK (Feb. 27), @ MTL (Feb. 28), vs. UTA (March 3)

17. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 55%

O/U 92.5 (over -130; under +100). As Leon Draisaitl suggests, everyone needs to be better through the season's final stretch. While the Oilers have only 23 games left to stave off potential charges from divisional rivals such as the Kings and Sharks, a .417% pace -- floated through their past dozen -- isn't going to cut it. If the goaltending doesn't improve quickly, not even Connor McDavid will be able to drag this squad into the postseason. Pick: Under (+100)

Next seven days: @ SJ (Feb. 28), vs. OTT (March 3)

18. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 55.2%

O/U 91.5 (over -115; under -115). The Senators have their work cut out for them. This line feels overly optimistic about the rest of the season, asking for the team to suddenly shift their point accrual into the next gear. That only happens if Linus Ullmark finds his former Vezina-winning form and quickly. Pick: Under (-115)

Next seven days: @ TOR (Feb. 28), @ EDM (March 3), @ CGY (March 5)

19. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 54.3%

O/U 87.5 (over -125; under -105). Currently occupying a playoff spot, the Kraken probably deserve a little more respect. Not to suggest they'll be in the postseason mix by the season's conclusion, only that 25 points in 25 games seems doable for a team batting .553. Pick: Over (-125)

Next seven days: vs. VAN (Feb. 28), vs. CAR (March 2), vs. STL (March 4)

20. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 53.4%

O/U 89.5 (over -125; under -105). The Maple Leafs face a tall order down the stretch. Missing the playoffs in the first season post-Mitch Marner would sting, and this 89.5 line undersells the urgency of their push. They'll likely surpass 90 points, though it might not be enough to keep playing into May. Pick: Over (-125)

Next seven days: vs. OTT (Feb. 28), vs. PHI (March 2), @ NJ (March 4), @ NYR (March 5)

21. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 51.7%

O/U 91.5 (over -110; under -120). The loss of Kevin Fiala hurts. However, the addition of Artemi Panarin provides some much-needed scoring pop, and GM Ken Holland likely isn't done yet. Plus, the Kings face the easiest schedule to conclude the season, against teams with a combined points percentage of only .524%. Pick: Over (-110)

Next seven days: vs. CGY (Feb. 28), vs. COL (March 2), vs. NYI (March 5)

22. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 54.3%

O/U 91.5 (over -110; under -120). They don't project for the playoffs and will need more than 91.5 points to get there, but don't count out the Panthers, especially now that they have a swagger-laden Matthew Tkachuk back in the lineup. Pick: Over (-110)

Next seven days: vs. BUF (Feb. 27), @ NYI (March 1), @ NJ (March 3), @ CBJ (March 5)

23. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 54.3%

O/U 88.5 (over +100; under -130). It's not going to punch them into the postseason, but getting past 88 points is still on the table for the surprising Flyers. But even being in the mix will be looked back on as a successful campaign. With no pressure and untapped upside still on the roster, a respectable finish should be expected. Pick: Over (+100)

Next seven days: vs. BOS (Feb. 28), @ TOR (March 2), vs. UTA (March 5)

24. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 51.8%

O/U 85.5 (over -115; under -115). Emerging from the break, the Sharks play their first six at home where they've enjoyed significantly more success than on the road. Four projected wins through that half-dozen -- including tilts with the Flames and Blues -- would place a hungry Macklin Celebrini & Co. on a clearer path to reaching 86 points. By the numbers, only the Kings face an easier concluding schedule. Pick: Over (-115)

Next seven days: vs. EDM (Feb. 28), vs. WPG (March 1), vs. MTL (March 3)

25. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 52.6%

O/U 85.5 (over -110; under -120). Is Ryan O'Reilly still a member of the Predators after next Friday? What about Jonathan Marchessault, Steven



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Stamkos and others? The next few days will help determine which direction GM Barry Trotz takes before March 6. Another concern is the Preds face more away games than home games, where they haven't been as competitive. Pick: Under (-120)

Next seven days: @ DAL (Feb. 28), vs. DET (March 2), @ CBJ (March 3), vs. BOS (March 5)

26. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 49.2%

O/U 86.5 (over -115; under -115). The Devils are at a major crossroads as the trade deadline approaches. On paper, they should be adding to fuel a deeper playoff run. But they probably aren't making the postseason without even more standout Jack Hughes performances than we saw at the Olympics. Pick: Under (-115)

Next seven days: @ STL (Feb. 28), vs. FLA (March 3), vs. TOR (March 4)

Jack Hughes receives a tribute in return to the Devils, with U.S. teammate Tage Thompson joining in, and praises the U.S. men's and women's hockey teams.

27. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 47.4%

O/U 80.5 (over -120; under -110). Despite being nine points short of the final wild-card spot in the West, the Jets don't fancy themselves out of it yet. Riding high from his gold-medal-clinching performance in Italy, goaltender Connor Hellebuyck appears in peak form. Pick: Over (-120)

Next seven days: @ ANA (Feb. 27), @ SJ (March 1), vs. CHI (March 3), vs. TB (March 5)

28. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 47.4%

O/U 76.5 (over -110; under -120). If top producer Nazem Kadri and others such as Blake Coleman are moved ahead of the trade deadline as anticipated, it will be even more difficult for the Flames to carve out the necessary number of wins to finish above the aforementioned mark. Headed into Thursday's game in San Jose, this team had just eight road victories. Pick: Under (-120)

Next seven days: @ LA (Feb. 28), @ ANA (March 1), vs. DAL (March 3), vs. OTT (March 5)

29. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 45.7%

O/U 74.5 (over -125; under -105). After a promising start, the Blackhawks are now in tumble mode. Already looking to next season, GM Kyle Davidson is likely to deal a lineup regular (or more) before the March 6 trade deadline. Wins could be scarce for Connor Bedard and friends down the stretch. Pick: Under (-105)

Next seven days: @ COL (Feb. 28), @ UTA (March 1), @ WPG (March 3)

30. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 44%

O/U 74.5 (over +100; under -130). Despite trading Artemi Panarin and heading to the bottom of the Eastern Conference, the Rangers should clear this low bar. Even if Vincent Trocheck is also traded, they still have game-changers on the blue line and in goal, and their remaining schedule is much softer than what got them here. Pick: Over (+100)

Next seven days: vs. PIT (Feb. 28), vs. CBJ (March 2), vs. TOR (March 5)

31. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 44%

O/U 74.5 (over -120; under -110). Why would we expect a club that has averaged 0.86 points per outing thus far -- one with a minus-56 goal differential -- to all of a sudden bang out 26 in their last 25 games? Especially when one or more prominent performers are likely to be traded elsewhere? Pick: Under (-110)

Next seven days: vs. NJ (Feb. 28), @ MIN (March 1), @ SEA (March 4)

32. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 37.1%

O/U 64.5 (over -115; under -115) With several prominent players likely out the door by the time the deadline hits, Vancouver will struggle to collect more victories. After the Canucks won just two of their past 20, asking them to emerge triumphant in nine of their last 24, plus earn a few overtime loss points, is a lot. Pick: Under (-115)

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Sportsnet.ca / 'He's a leader': Canucks backing Hronek's impact through rebuild

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER – As the Vancouver Canucks search the market for Plan B in the trade of Tyler Myers, it would be heartening for many of his experienced teammates to know management has a list of untouchables.

Unfortunately, the only veteran we know for sure is on it is defenceman Filip Hronek.

In his Thursday appearance on the 100% Hockey podcast with hosts John Shannon and Daren Millard, Canucks president Jim Rutherford made it clear that Hronek, the 28-year-old who became the team's No. 1 defenceman with December's trade of Quinn Hughes, won't be going anywhere ahead of the National Hockey League trade deadline next Friday.

No other veteran Canuck was given the same endorsement.

Rutherford went even further, confirming that Hronek is one of the front-runners to succeed Hughes as the team's captain.

"We haven't got to that point yet; that will be a discussion in the summer," Rutherford said. "But in my opinion, he would be on that very short list (of candidates) for sure. He has all the qualities to be a very good captain. What you see on the ice is what you see off the ice. He's a leader."

Fiercely competitive, Hronek is one of those players who leads by example in both practices and games. Earlier this week, he cuffed and



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admonished Nils Hoglander after being angered by his teammate during a practice battle drill.

Hronek's word count during that skirmish probably exceeded his output with reporters all season, which could complicate his captaincy if the Canucks actually want the face of their franchise to, you know, speak.

This is the player, after all, who proudly went 1,000 days in Detroit without an interview earlier in his career.

In his interview with Sportsnet on Friday, Hronek said he was unaware of Rutherford's remarks ("I'm not following media"), hadn't been worried about getting traded ("no, not really") and hadn't considered being captain ("I haven't thought about it").

Those answers, by the way, have not been edited for brevity. He responded to three questions with 12 words, which surely puts him at the top (or bottom) in some analytics category per-60.

And how would he like having to speak to reporters every day as captain?

"Yeah, that would be cool," he deadpanned.

Whether the decorative letter on his jersey front changes from an "A" to a "C" is actually irrelevant to the Czech's status on the Canucks as a powerful leader.

Before Hronek went to play in this month's Winter Olympics, rookie teammate Zeev Buium offered a fascinating observation: "You know you can't get through a day not being at your best because you're going to hear about it from Fil. I think that's a good thing. I think the best teams usually have guys like that, where you can't get around them. You've got to go through them, and you've got to live up to their standard. He's trying to push everyone to be their best."

And coach Adam Foote loves that.

"I mean, Zeev's a young guy; welcome to the world of work," Foote told reporters before the Canucks flew to Seattle for Saturday's game against the Kraken. "We all have people holding us all accountable, right? That's the way it works. But I get his point where, yeah, that's what you want. Accountability, that's all you've got."

"It's so huge, and Fil's one of those guys that recognizes that. And I'm glad Zeev said it, because it's not going to stop. For example, Zeev didn't have to have good gap-ups (against opposing forwards) where he came from because of his mind, his ability, his talent. And what I love is ... maybe 10 per cent, 15 per cent of that, is still in his game, so he's come a long way just from the accountability of, you know, our coaching staff and his leaders — a guy like Fil saying, 'gap up, gap up, gap up, move your feet.' And, you know, that's what we need. You need a core group to lead and continue to help our youth to speed up their growth. So it's a nice relationship that has to continue for us building for the future. And I'm just so glad that he recognized that and, you know, both guys are doing their part."

For his part, Foote also hadn't heard what his hockey-operations boss said about Hronek.

Veteran teammate Jake DeBrusk, whose name pops up daily in trade conjecture about the Canucks, said he has seen a growth in Hronek's leadership since J.T. Miller was traded to the New York Rangers 13 months ago.

"Obviously, him and J.T. were pretty tight, and I think once that (trade) happened, he kind of took it upon himself," DeBrusk said. "You've got to do (leadership) by committee. I think it's hard to try to just mold yourself into being a captain or trying to get into captain material. You can't do it. I've been with enough pretty good captains in my day where they all say the same things: you need more, everyone around you, or else it doesn't really get through."

On this point, Hronek offered an oration.

"You always need more guys than one or two," he said of leadership. "Just need a group. I mean, like, everyone has to hold each other accountable. I don't think it's just older guys to younger guys. They have to get in that, too, that we have to hold everyone accountable."

Nobody can say which Canucks over the age of 25 will be around next season to help Hronek with leadership. Rutherford assures us there will be experienced leaders during the rebuild in Vancouver to help mentor and guide the team's growing number of young players, but not necessarily the guys who are already here.

The names of nearly all senior Canucks seem to be fodder for trade discussions.

"That shocked me when I was getting texts about it yesterday," long-serving winger Brock Boeser said. "But it's not a trade deadline if my name's not in there."

As for Myers, who was held out of Wednesday's 3-2 overtime loss to the Winnipeg Jets due to a trade offer for the defenceman — widely reported to be from the Detroit Red Wings — the 36-year-old did not practise with teammates on Friday but was scheduled to accompany the Canucks to Seattle in case he is needed. With only six other defencemen on the roster, Myers will play if someone gets sick or injured.

According to sources, the Canucks are not exactly being flooded with offers for their players, although this situation is not unique in the NHL, with seven more sleeps until the trade deadline.

Vancouver general manager Patrik Allvin is trying to either improve the return on the initial offer for Myers or, more likely, see which other teams may be interested now that the senior Canuck has agreed to consider waiving his no-movement clause for the right destination.

Foote doesn't know how long he must plan the lineup without Myers.

"I can't even answer that as far as the coaching part," he said. "Mysie and I had another good chat last night, so we're good. We talked about this, it's part of the game and, you know, it's unfortunate. But for us being ready as coaches, you know, every day is different, and you just keep going, keep putting it together and keep going out there."

The only change Saturday to the Canucks' lineup could be in goal, where Kevin Lankinen may replace Nikita Tolopilo as the starter after returning from the Olympics on Tuesday. The extra skaters are expected to be Myers and forwards Max Sasson and Aatu Raty.

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Sportsnet.ca / As path to Oilers' No. 1 job opens up, Ingram stays grounded

Mark Spector

SAN JOSE — One would think, the way this season has unfolded for Connor Ingram, that 2025-26 would simply be an endless procession of awesome day after awesome day for a kid from Imperial, Sask.

But somehow it just doesn't work that way for Ingram.

Probably never will.

"For guys like me who don't feel good some days, I mean, it's hard to keep it between the lines," said Ingram, 28, who kindly took time after Thursday's 8-1 win at L.A. to sit down for a chat with Sportsnet.ca. "Part



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of it is being a pro too, being the same person every day. That's hard for people like me."

"It's something I'm pretty proud of, the growth I've had."

Ingram, whose struggles with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) have been widely chronicled, may have left "The Program" last summer, before the Utah Mammoth refused him a training camp invite but then retained enough money to facilitate a trade to Edmonton. But the NHL/NHLPA Player Assistance Program will never fully leave Ingram.

Even as the road to becoming Edmonton's No. 1 opens up — as that first playoff start approaches and stalemated Tristan Jarry searches for a semblance of his game — Ingram stays in the here and now.

He'll tell you: He has to keep things small. You'll never catch him talking about a game in April, no matter how well he's playing in February.

"Luckily for me, I've built a network of people that I can rely on," he said. "I mean, there are guys in this room that I know, if I'm having a bad day, I can go talk to.

"Two or three days ago, I found a guy in here," he said, glancing around the Oilers dressing room. "I said, 'Man, I'm struggling right now.' And, he knows what it's like. He took care of me, and I'll always appreciate that. There's guys around here that know what you're going through. You don't have to do it alone."

Ingram opened up voluntarily when we sat down. The plan was to talk about his game and his shot at stepping into the No. 1 role.

But he likes to talk about the struggle. It's cathartic, perhaps, for him to share what he goes through on a daily basis.

It makes you wonder if choosing "NHL goaltender" as a profession was the best idea for a guy who battles mental health the way Ingram does.

He laughs.

"I have three older brothers. They just strapped 'em on me and said, 'Get in there!'" Ingram said. "I'm a big advisor of not being a goalie. Yeah, I'm not good for the brand."

Only a Warren Foegele deflection stood between him and a shutout Thursday in Los Angeles, and after Jarry stumbled the previous night in Anaheim, we're guessing the crease will be Ingram's Saturday against the San Jose Sharks.

But the fact is, Ingram really doesn't love talking about the things he does well — like playing goal in the National Hockey League. It seems he prefers to dig in on, to share, areas where he's not some kind of "monument."

"People forget: we're humans. Especially in Canada," he said. "You play hockey, you're almost a monument.

"But at the end of the day, I go home to my wife and my family, just like everybody else. My job's just on TV. That's the only difference between you and me."

Ironically, we look at Ingram as a blocker of pucks. A guy whose job is simple: get between the flying vulcanized rubber and the white twine.

But when he talks about "blocking out" certain thoughts or impulses, hockey is the furthest thing from his mind.

"No, never things like that," he said. "Some days you deal with depression, anxiety. Some days you feel like garbage. That's half the battle: just putting a face on and being the same person every day. It's hard to do. But as I've started to feel better and gotten older, I think it's gotten easier.

"People around you expect the same thing every day, and if you can't give that to them, it makes it harder."

As the glare of Jarry-Stuart Skinner trade — perhaps the worst trade in the NHL this season — lights up general manager Stan Bowman's world, lying in the shadows is the Ingram-for-futures trade that Bowman pulled off on Oct. 1.

It was a savvy play for a guy who was excellent in Arizona behind a young, loose group of Coyotes.

Slowly this season, his game has crystallized. Whether or not it's found a place that satisfies him.

"I'm happy with it, if that's what you're asking me," he said. "But it's never as good as you think it is, and it's never as bad as you think it is, too. Part of being a pro is coming in every day and just trying to get a little bit better at something.

"I don't think you're going to see huge bounds and strides at this point in my career, but there's always something to work on."

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Sportsnet.ca / Why Maple Leafs shouldn't be afraid to sell big before the trade deadline

Justin Bourne

TORONTO — Brian Burke has long been an advocate for the philosophy that based on current incentive structures, NHL teams should either be trying to get good or bad fast. Pick a direction.

Working with him here at Sportsnet, I came to agree with his theory that there's nothing worse than the muddy middle, where the team has no actual shot to win the Cup, it needs some bounces to make the playoffs, it finishes middle, drafts middle, and gets some player who's going to be a decent middle-six forward in, oh, maybe four years.

Middling in, middling out, you stay in the middle. It's not fun for the fans, it doesn't sell tickets, and it's a treadmill that's tough to get off. The Minnesota Wild — the poster team for decades of mediocrity — got so sick of it that they paid Kirill Kaprizov a zillion dollars per year to help shove them off said treadmill, then sent a haul to the Vancouver Canucks for 1.5 years of Quinn Hughes.

And good on 'em.

I bring this up regarding the Toronto Maple Leafs, who are, for the first time in a decade, on the verge of getting on that treadmill. They're 14th in the East in a season in which, if you squint, you can convince yourself they're probably better than that, but not by much. They're extremely "mid," and some might call that generous.

The plan, in many ways, sounds like, "Maybe the same guys will play better next year?"

Which should be scary for Leafs fans.

The idea of extending pieces of this team — Bobby McMann and Scott Laughton — who are past their physical primes and are moving farther away from them, is hardly a plan at all. This is neither helping them get good or bad fast, it's a path to getting back to the same place.

The Leafs need a sober look at where they stand. They've been one of the top dogs in the Atlantic for so long that as they've finally been passed, and the teams doing the passing aren't exactly slowing down any time soon. Their years of draft picks are becoming realized, useful players.



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The Montreal Canadiens are going to be a force for years to come with their young talent, the Detroit Red Wings are way better and buying, the Buffalo Sabres have taken that long-awaited step. The Leafs are chasing the Ottawa Senators in every conceivable statistical category that isn't goaltending, and we haven't mentioned the Florida teams yet, both of whom seem to have brighter immediate futures than Toronto. What Boston is, that I don't exactly know, but overall, that's not an encouraging divisional picture, is it?

My point here is, if the Leafs head into this trade deadline, flip McMann for a pick and say, "We'll be better next year," they're selling a fantasy.

Here's the challenge, though: I think it's legitimately hard to get the few great players they do have in Matthews, William Nylander and Knies, and I'll even lump Cowan in there, who I think has a bright future in the league. Given their ages, and how hard it is to turn around a rebuild, I don't actually think a full rebuild is in order here, at least not while they still have Matthews.

But in a lot of ways, this team does in fact need a full-on defibrillator, and so they have to figure out how to plug that in. On the JD Bunkis show on Thursday, I said I'd look at most of the lineup like a bad batch of letters in Scrabble, where you willingly skip a turn to dump the letters into the bag and pick all new ones. The Leafs have to err on the side of overselling — being over-sellous, if you will — because it's a lot more likely this is a bigger turnaround than they're admitting to themselves, and this might be the quiet first step they have to take to something greater.

I know that's a huge ask for the general manager, but you can either take on the hard thing, or step quietly onto the zombie franchise treadmill.

If the Leafs are indeed able to turn it around next year, it's going to take something so much more than "same guys play better." It's going to be because the haul of picks they bring back helped them land a great player or two in trades at the draft, and maybe they make a great UFA signing or two after moving on from a guy like Rielly.

Anyone whose name is even close to have been mentioned in the past few weeks should be available, even the guys they really like as players. I like Oliver Ekman-Larsson a lot, but he's got meaningful value around the league on a great deal. Laughton is a great pro and player (even if they have never, for a day, given him a chance to prove that up the lineup), and a team would love to get their hands on him. Carlo, yep, McMann, sure, Simon Benoit, yes, and then you have to see which contracts you can move on from, whether it's Max Domi's, or Matias Maccelli's, or yes, Rielly's.

You're not going to be able to do everything, but you better start trying today, because you don't have enough phones or hours on deadline day alone to make this greater fix happen. Throwing hands up and going, "Well, it was hard," isn't going to cut it.

The Leafs are in a super-weird spot, and I think that includes GM Brad Treliving, who's on the hot seat. He has to defend his role to his bosses regarding how they got here, while telling them he should be the one in charge of the steps I've mentioned. But I think it's his best case at showing he's out for the good of the franchise, not just hanging on for as many wins as possible to stay employed.

The Leafs can't choose to win the draft lottery as the Islanders did last summer, but the Isles did more than that last season. They made a big trade, moving off Noah Dobson for the 16th and 17th picks in the draft, as well as Emil Heinemen. They've now got two kids on the way they're really excited about, and it doesn't even seem like they're all that serious about trying to win the Cup this year. Playoffs are gravy. But they injected hope for the future when they traded for picks, and the fans — who had been watching an old and slow team for years — were excited to lean in to said hope. Yes, the Matthew Schaefer stuff took it to the next level, but there are still lessons for the Leafs in there.

Fans are not too impatient to see the team aim for the future. They're smart. They would be reinvigorated by a restocking of the cupboard that allowed them to at least be in on bidding wars when good players become available. And, ironically, as they aim to be good enough to keep Auston Matthews happy past this contract, your best bet is being able to show him that you have some future mapped out beyond "Hope everyone plays better next year."

I don't know how big you'd wanna go in a real sell-off, but there are degrees of grandeur at their disposal. Some management types I've talked to have said they'd include Nylander in their considerations. But to me, I'll say what I've said before there: you want to be the team looking at other teams' great players and saying, "How do I get that guy" (as Vegas does so well), and not the team looking at your own great players and saying, "Let's get rid of this guy."

So, at least look around. Is there a 1D out there who you'd covet enough to consider moving Nylander? You can't say you've tried to solve the problems without considering everything.

The Leafs have almost no draft capital. They're rolling out four of the same wingers in Domi, Robertson, Maccelli and Cowan, when they actually dress the latter at all. The D-corps badly needs some players who can make plays.

They're too far from good to claim they're "playing better" from being better. They need to sell, yes, but they need to get over-sellous, or they risk mounting that treadmill of mediocrity, setting the run speed at "average," and jogging off into an uninteresting oblivion.

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Sportsnet.ca / Why Lomberg's appeal to stay with Flames will likely fall on deaf ears

Eric Francis

LOS ANGELES – Ryan Lomberg didn't mince his words.

"This," said the Calgary Flames' most popular player, "is where I want to be."

"I've been pretty vocal on how much I love the city, and the people, and the organization.

"I want to win here. My family and I love it here, and we're extremely proud to be part of the organization and a big part of the community.

"I signed here with the intention of helping this team win, and being part of the solution. So that's definitely how I would like it to stay. But obviously some things are out of my control, and I can't control those things. So, I just kind of take it day by day."

One week away from the trade deadline, his words sounded as much of a plea as a statement.

It's not the usual deadline-week lip service players offer when they sense their time might be up.

His is from the heart – unmistakably genuine – which is precisely why it hits differently.

Lomberg doesn't want to be traded.

"They're well aware how much I love it," said the effervescent winger who rivals Enmax in energy production.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"I'm tremendously proud to wear this sweater and be a part of this organization, and hopefully it stays that way."

Unfortunately, it's not that simple.

And Lomberg knows it.

Lomberg is the only unrestricted free agent on the roster. He's 31. He's a fourth-liner averaging nine minutes a night, with four goals and eight points in 50 games. He's the type of player contenders call about in the final hours before the deadline – cheap, experienced, fearless and beloved in any room he walks into. A Stanley Cup winner.

He's also exactly the type of player a rebuilding team usually moves on from.

On Thursday he was a healthy scratch in San Jose, making way for younger players the team is trying to evaluate and develop.

Craig Conroy has already shown he's willing to make tough calls on players he likes. He's traded heart-and-soul guys before and he's made tough moves because the mandate is clear: get younger, create opportunity, build for the next core.

Keeping Lomberg blocks a prospect, trading him opens a door.

Keeping Lomberg speaks to the importance the organization puts on building around character and leadership, trading him adds to the coffers.

And yet, it doesn't feel good.

Not when the guy is this invested. Not when he's this proud to wear the sweater.

Calgary fans have seen enough players come and go to know when someone is feeding them a line, telling reporters he loves it here, then bolting for greener pastures.

Lomberg isn't built that way. He's a five-foot-nine firecracker who has made a career out of punching above his weight, literally and figuratively.

He's the guy who will fight someone six inches taller, then spend the next day reading to kids at a school visit. He's the guy who signs a two-year deal after winning a Cup because he wants to "be part of the solution" and help a retooling team.

For Lomberg, this isn't just a stop along the way. This is where he wants to spend the rest of his career, and the rest of his life.

"I would love to, yeah," said Lomberg, regularly spotted at rinks around town. "We've already talked about it. The first day we moved here, my wife was like, 'Oh, I can see us living here after we're done.'"

"Hopefully we don't have to go somewhere else, then come back."

He also added: "It is what it is. So we're gonna enjoy our time here as much as we can."

Lomberg knew how special the city was, as he'd spent the early part of his pro career as part of its minor-league system before getting his big break in Florida.

He's a Cup champion on a team with very few, he's a tone-setter on a roster that sometimes needs one, he's a community guy in a city that values that more than most. And he's doing it all for \$2 million, which is practically a bargain for the energy he injects nightly.

Nothing gets Flames fans on their feet faster than when Lomberg drops the mitts.

However, the club isn't in the business of sentiment right now.

Unless something changes – and Lomberg says there have been no extension talks – he may very well be on his way out. A late-round pick from a contender, a handshake, a 'thank-you,' a promise that the door is open in July.

And maybe it is. Maybe he does come back as a free agent. Maybe he even retires here like he hopes.

Or maybe it remains status quo, as a buyer's market isn't demanding a player of his ilk.

But for now, the likelihood is the Flames are thinking long-term, even if it means parting with a guy who wants nothing more than to stay.

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Sportsnet.ca / Friday Four: How Olympic injuries could impact playoff races

Michael Amato

We finally saw the return of best-on-best hockey at the Olympics for the first time in 12 years and it didn't disappoint. It was an incredible gold-medal game between Canada and the U.S. that added another chapter to their storied rivalry, one that now seems set to only grow over the next decade.

As good a showcase as it was for the sport, not everyone escaped unscathed. There were a handful of injuries to significant players that will now have a ripple effect throughout the rest of the NHL season. Some key players are set to miss substantial time, which is going to have a major impact on playoff races and could even alter the plans of a few teams leading up to the trade deadline.

Let's look at four injuries that could shape how the standings play out the rest of the way.

If the Penguins plan to complete an improbable run to the post-season, they're going to have to do most of the work without their captain.

The news that Sidney Crosby is expected to miss the next month after suffering an injury at the Olympics is a devastating blow to their hopes. Crosby was on pace for 86 points before going down and is still the Penguins' most important player by a mile. Evgeni Malkin continues to play at a high level, but is he still capable of putting this team on his back for a critical month with a congested schedule at age 39?

Pittsburgh is holding down second place in the Metro, just one point up on the New York Islanders, five up on the Washington Capitals and seven ahead of the Columbus Blue Jackets. There is some cushion for the Pens there, but those leads could erode quickly without Crosby. If Pittsburgh slips in the division, it could still grab a wild-card spot, though that's easier said than done. The Buffalo Sabres are tied with the Penguins and the Boston Bruins are one point behind, so earning a top-three divisional spot might actually be easier for Pittsburgh than going the wild card route.

If you're a Penguins fan looking at the glass half full, general manager Kyle Dubas has made some savvy acquisitions and has stockpiled a ton of draft picks. So Pittsburgh is in a good position moving forward. They have 16 combined picks over the second and third rounds of the next four drafts, meaning they could theoretically spare one or two and add leading up to the deadline without doing much damage to their rebuild.

If all goes well, Crosby could potentially return for Pittsburgh's final nine or 10 games of the season. Can the Pens survive in the race until that reinforcement arrives? You know Crosby is hungry for at least one more playoff run in Pittsburgh, and it's going to take a serious effort over the next month to keep his chances alive.



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Mikko Rantanen doesn't project to miss as much time as Crosby, but he is expected to be sidelined for at least two weeks with an injury he suffered while playing for Finland in Milan. The good news for the Dallas Stars is that they aren't in as precarious a position as the Penguins when it comes to the playoffs. They have a spot all but secured and are just jockeying for positioning in the Central.

Dallas is likely going to have to go through Colorado and Minnesota — arguably the two best teams in the NHL — in the first two rounds if it hopes to make a deep run. The Stars need to put themselves in the best position possible if they hope to get through that gauntlet. Currently, they sit third in the Central, one point behind the Wild and six behind the Avalanche. Any hope of catching Colorado could be fading now that Rantanen is set to miss a bunch of games, but finishing ahead of Minnesota could be key.

If the Stars play the Wild in the opening round, it's likely going to be an incredibly tight series where something like home-ice advantage could end up being the difference. There's also the possibility Minnesota could end up catching Colorado and jumping them for the division title, which would mean an even tougher matchup for the Stars if they meet the Avalanche in Round 1.

Both the Wild and Avalanche seemed poised to try and make a major addition prior to the deadline, with a centre upgrade as their rumoured target. That could also give them an edge down the stretch with Rantanen out and may force the Stars to follow suit. Unfortunately, Dallas doesn't have its 2026 first-round pick or much cap space to absorb a talented player, so swinging a deal will be complicated. The Stars ultimately may not be able to make a huge splash and instead might have to cross their fingers that Rantanen returns sooner rather than later.

If there was one sour note from the Olympic tournament, it was that Kevin Fiala was lost for the season after a brutal injury while playing for Switzerland. Now the Los Angeles Kings have a hole in their top six after bolstering it before the break with the acquisition of Artemi Panarin.

The Kings are three points out of a playoff spot and five points behind the Anaheim Ducks for third in the Pacific, so they're very much in the mix. Even with the addition of Panarin, Fiala is still a big loss for their lineup, as he scored 35 goals last year and was on pace for around 30 again this year. Replacing that scoring isn't going to be easy, but you can bet the Kings are going to try with this being Anze Kopitar's last season. They'll surely want to try and give him a final playoff run on the way out.

Los Angeles was probably hoping to bolster its centre depth after dealing Phillip Danault, though now it may be in the market for a winger as well without Fiala. The Kings might not be able to make a major move, but could they look at someone like Bobby McMann or Blake Coleman to help replace the loss of Fiala?

Both players can score and play with physicality, something that would help the Kings if they hope to finally get past the first round and the Edmonton Oilers. The Kings have the advantage of owning all their first-round picks, and it may end up costing them one if they truly want to upgrade their top six.

It doesn't appear that Josh Morrissey will be out that long after getting banged up at the Olympics, but every game is precious to the Winnipeg Jets at this point. The Jets are nine points out of a playoff spot with three teams to leapfrog, and last year's Presidents' Trophy winners are going to have to go on an incredible run if they hope to make up ground.

Making things even more challenging for the Jets is that Neal Pionk is now out week-to-week with an injury of his own, thinning out the blue line that much more. It's a possibility that Morrissey could return as soon as next week after the Jets return home from their three-game road trip, though at this point, Winnipeg can't afford to just survive without him in the lineup. They need to get on a winning streak immediately.

Morrissey is really the Jets' only true puck mover on their defence corps, and the team is very top-heavy up front, so his loss is massive from an offensive perspective. Six-foot-seven Logan Stanley will quarterback the power play in Morrissey's absence, and he had never recorded more than 14 points in a season coming into this year. To say the offence is likely to sputter without Morrissey is a major understatement.

Even if Morrissey misses more than a handful of games, I wouldn't expect the Jets to try and acquire a stopgap via trade. Winnipeg is too far back in the playoff chase to be spending assets for a short-term fix. Unless there's someone who is young and has some term, it seems unlikely the Jets would add to try and spark a miracle post-season push. The most likely path forward for the Jets is they now start selling some pending UFAs to recoup some assets and regroup for 2026-27.

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Sportsnet.ca / Tkachuk, Sanderson return to Ottawa with gold medals, controversy

Alex Adams

OTTAWA — For the first time in two decades, two Ottawa Senators are coming back to the nation's capital from an Olympics with a gold medal around their necks.

Last time it happened was 2006, when Daniel Alfredsson won gold for Sweden.

Not bad company for the Senators' American stars.

"I'm dreaming and somebody's got to wake me up," said Tkachuk Thursday about Team USA's victory in Italy.

Last year, these two each scored a goal in the 4 Nations Face-off final loss against Canada, but this time they were able to win the final game of an international tournament.

In Milan, Sanderson was stellar on the back end, playing with Zach Werenski and Jaccob Slavin for large swaths of the tournament, tallying two assists.

Meanwhile, the Senators captain was excellent, amassing five points in six games. Sure, he had a bit of a tough gold-medal game, but they don't ask how, they ask what medal you bring home.

By that measure, their performances were both golden.

It was especially cool for Tkachuk as he and his brother, Matthew, had dreamed of playing together and winning gold — something that eluded their father, Keith, at three Olympics.

Keith was the bridesmaid in 2002; his sons were the brides in 2026.

"To do it with Matthew and be with him for two-and-a-half weeks, non-stop together, and just how special that was, that's (something) we will forever remember," Tkachuk said.

But if the Tkachuks are lovable when they are on your side, they can seem like cartoon villains if they are the opposition.

"They're not the happiest with me right now," Tkachuk said of Senators fans, speaking to Fox News on Tuesday. "(I'll) go back and give them everything that I got.

"It's a funny feeling, you feel their support every day, (then) for two weeks you're public enemy No. 1. Going back with a smile on my face and get ready for a playoff push."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Unlike Alfredsson's gold medal, however, the aftermath of this victory came with a shade of controversy.

During a dressing room celebration of their Olympic gold medal, the team took a call from President Donald Trump, who invited them to the White House.

"I must tell you, we're going to have to bring the women's team, you do know that," Trump said, adding he'd "probably be impeached" if he didn't also invite the women's team. That statement was met with laughs by some of the U.S. men, who engaged in a celebratory back-and-forth with Trump.

Hilary Knight, captain of the US women's team, called the joke "distasteful and unfortunate" ahead of her return to PWHL play. "And, I think just the way women are represented, it's a great teaching point and really shines light on how women should be championed for their amazing feats," Knight said.

The two Senators were asked about that exchange with the president.

"Looking back at it now, I think it was a mistake," Sanderson said. "But I think things got blown out of proportion a little bit. You know, we have nothing but the utmost respect for the women.

"I think if we were to do it again, I think we wouldn't do that, and we made a mistake. But, again, I think it kind of got blown out of proportion a little bit. We love the women."

Said Tkachuk: "Honestly, it was just a whirlwind of a moment. Can't be in control (of) what somebody says. It just caught (us) off-guard a little bit, talking to the president."

As it happens, the Senators play their "Women in Sport" game on Thursday versus Detroit.

Also heard in the video of the call with the president was someone in the dressing room calling for the closing of the northern border.

"I've been seeing stuff that people think it's me, but if you watch the video, that's not my voice and something that I never say," Tkachuk said.

"I just think that's something that I never thought would happen in my head, and especially would never say it. I know it's crazy when things go on social media, how fast they go."

Tkachuk was asked if the political backdrop would affect his desire to stay in Ottawa. He's a free agent in 2028.

"That's not something that has crossed my mind," he said. "I love playing for this team. I love the guys in this room. I really believe in what we're all about."

In the meantime, along with gearing up for his NHL return, Tkachuk is still celebrating with his family, though his one-year-old son Ryder is too young to understand the significance of his dad's accomplishment.

"Yesterday, we were taking a picture (with the medal), and he thought (it) was ... a wheel of a car, so he started doing car motions," said Tkachuk.

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TSN.CA / Maple Leafs are sliding toward the trade deadline

Mark Masters

The Leafs have fallen eight points out of a playoff spot with one week left until the NHL trade deadline next Friday.

"It's not a fun time of year for anybody," defenceman Brandon Carlo said prior to Thursday's game. "There's situations when you know your team's going really well and you're looking to add and there's situations when it's not ... It's a hard reality to face. It adds a little bit of extra angst during this time."

The angst is only growing after the Leafs lost 5-1 on Thursday, dropping a second straight game coming out of the Olympic break.

The Leafs have done a lot of buying since Auston Matthews and William Nylander entered the league, but the feeling is much different heading into this year's deadline.

"There's always going to be a lot of noise," said Matthews. "For us, it's focusing on the guys in the room right now, focusing on what's in front of us, directly in front of us, which is the next game on Saturday."

Any concern that management is entering sell mode?

"I don't know what to say," Nylander responded. "That's their decision and whatever they do I'm still going to be trying my best every night."

There are five Leafs, who are in the top 50 on TSN's latest trade bait list, including winger Bobby McMann (No. 7), centre Scott Laughton (No. 21), defenceman Oliver Ekman-Larsson (No. 25), defenceman Simon Benoit (No. 39) and Carlo (No. 42).

"I don't think that's something worth focusing on for myself," said goalie Joseph Woll. "It's probably in the back of people's minds and whatnot, but for me I haven't really thought about it. I'm trying to focus on what's important now and take it a day at a time, and stay in the moment."

It's probably harder to maintain focus when you're a pending unrestricted free agent like Laughton, who is a local kid living out a childhood dream by playing for the Leafs.

"You try not to think about it, but it's your life at the end of the day," the veteran centre from Oakville, Ont. said prior to Thursday's game. "It's where you live. It's where you work. I love my time here. I love spending time with the guys here and being in the fight and I want to continue to be in it with these guys. But we have to start doing some things a little bit better and put some wins together."

The Leafs acquired Laughton from the Philadelphia Flyers and Carlo from the Boston Bruins at last year's deadline and now both could be on the move again.

"Leaning off of the experience from last year, I definitely would feel not as caught off guard I guess you could say," Carlo acknowledged. "I have a hope to be here, but with the situation anything can happen. It's scary. It's intimidating. It's anxious, anxiety ridden, but overall you just control what you can."

Players are not exactly making this a tough decision for management with their performances this week.

After losing 4-2 in Tampa on Wednesday, there was a lot of talk about coming out more desperate and hungry on Thursday. But it was actually the Panthers who came out hot and built a 3-0 lead while outshooting the Leafs 16-7 in the first period.

Where was the desperation?

"It's a good question," admitted centre John Tavares, who has scored in both games out of the break.

"I don't know," said Matthews. "We should have the energy and the desperation that we need to start the game, that we had in the second and third period. Yeah, I don't know."

Nylander offered a theory. Sort of.

"I mean, back-to-back [situation], haven't played one in a while maybe, I don't know," he said. "But it shouldn't be an excuse."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Panthers, who were playing for the first time since the Olympics, passed the Leafs in the standings with Thursday's win. The Leafs are now in the basement of the Atlantic Division.

During a power play in the first period, Nylander committed a neutral-zone turnover that gifted Evan Rodrigues a breakaway goal. Nylander's pass was blocked by the Panthers forward.

"He did a pretty good job stepping up on me," Nylander said. "I should've maybe held onto it, but he did a good play, made a good play."

Craig Berube did not like the way the Leafs started the rush with Matthews sending a backhand pass to Nylander.

"I just thought it was a tough play all around," the coach said. "We have to make a better read and maybe not make that play. The guy stood up on us. It is a tough play. It is a tough play for Willy with the puck there. He had no time, and he tried to make a play, but it got picked off, and they were gone. We have to execute better there."

In general, Nylander likes how his body has responded coming off the Olympics.

"I felt like my legs have felt pretty good," he said.

Nylander picked up two assists in Tampa but was held off the scoresheet in Sunrise, Fla.

Berube blamed a flat start to the second period for the loss in Tampa Bay. The coach admits seeing a similar lapse to start Thursday's game is troubling.

"You need it for 60 minutes, especially now," he stressed. "We can't take any shifts off. It is my job to make sure they have [urgency]."

Berube made a quick exit from the bench after the first period on Thursday. What was his message in the intermission?

"We have a lot of hockey left," he said. "I get it is not the start we wanted coming out of the break, but we have to understand that if you play [like we did in] the second and third for 60 minutes, you give yourself a better chance to win. That is it. I mean, we're capable of doing it. We have to do it for 60 minutes. We have no time to take shifts off and periods off. We are not in that mode."

The Leafs have 23 games left and just four more until the deadline. The odds of making the playoffs are long, but Berube is vowing to do his best to keep spirits up.

"It's always hard," he said. "It is my job to instill that confidence in our guys. For myself, I stay confident. I am confident. I know what these guys are capable of doing. I have to get it out of them."

How did Matthews, who finished minus-4 on Thursday, feel in his first games back after helping Team USA win gold in Milan?

"I felt fine," he said. "I felt better [Thursday] than I did [Wednesday] night. It's just tough. It's two tough games to produce offensively. We didn't do enough. We didn't execute enough and that's something we need to do more of. I mean, I don't think we scored a 5-on-5 goal in these two games so that's a big part of it."

Matthews produced two assists in the two games and landed four shots on net.

The Leafs appreciated that their captain jumped right back into action after a whirlwind few days after arriving back in North America.

"It's awesome," Carlo said before Thursday's game. "You get to see some of the USA gear rocking around, some hats floating around and things like that. We're so proud of him and what he accomplished and super happy to have him back in our lineup. He's our captain so he's a huge part of our team and we look forward to going out there and competing and trying to get ourselves back in the playoffs."

Easton Cowan sat out as a healthy scratch again on Thursday. The 20-year-old rookie was not eligible to be sent to American Hockey League during the Olympic break and has not played since Jan. 29.

"He understands and he wants to play," Berube said. "He's not happy about not playing and rightly so. He's got to stay patient and working like he is. I thought he had a great week of practice."

Cowan was benched for the final three games leading into the Olympic break with the Leafs winning all three, which is why Berube decided to stick with the status quo on Wednesday in Tampa.

"At the time I took him out of the lineup, I felt he hit a bit of a wall," Berube explained. "We won three in a row, so I kept the same lineup going into the game against Tampa."

With Dakota Joshua ready to return from a lacerated kidney on Thursday, Berube preferred getting the big winger's size into the lineup to face the physical Panthers.

So, Cowan continues to wait.

"I don't believe his development is being hurt," Berube stressed. "I believe he has improved this year as the year has gone along. He still has the swagger that is needed. He is a confident kid. In saying that, he has to get in there and play. That is our job: to get him in there at some point."

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