



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 3, 2026

## The Athletic

### One bold 2026 NHL trade deadline prediction for every team

By: The Athletic NHL Staff

Will the St. Louis Blues' Robert Thomas be headed to the Colorado Avalanche or the Utah Mammoth? Will Vincent Trocheck join the Minnesota Wild?

This week, The Athletic asked its NHL staff for their bold predictions ahead of the March 6 trade deadline this Friday, and those were just a couple of the enticing (and sometimes contradictory) scenarios we heard about in response.

Here's one pick for each team.

Anaheim Ducks

They will trade for a right-shot defenseman

When at full strength, the Ducks are fairly deep up front and have enough offense to be a playoff team. But their defense can still play a stiffer brand of hockey within their own end in order to take the step toward becoming a contender. Mobile youngsters Jackson LaCombe, Olen Zellweger and Pavel Mintyukov hold down the left side, but what about another tough, proven righty to go with Jacob Trouba and Radko Gudas? Could Tyler Myers or Rasmus Ristolainen be an answer? — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

They will trade Matt Poitras

Poitras was once a rising star. He made the team unexpectedly as a 19-year-old. He broke camp with the varsity again in his second season. But as a third-year pro, the right-shot center was assigned to the AHL at the start of the season. He's made only three NHL appearances this year. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

They will trade their first-round pick

It's been a long time since the Sabres were in a position to trade their first-round pick at the deadline. But after more than a decade of drafting in or around the top 10, the Sabres are in a playoff position at the deadline. Jarmo Kekäläinen has a lot of assets to work with if he wants to make this team better, and I think the first-round pick could be in play for the right deal. This team could use another defenseman and another scoring threat up front. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

They will trade Nazem Kadri to Colorado

The Avalanche know all about Kadri, who won a Cup with the Avs before signing with the Flames as a free agent.

Reports surfaced this past weekend that members of the Avs' management staff were in Anaheim to watch the Flames-Ducks game. Would've been an ideal time to chat with GM Craig Conroy about whether or not they could strike a deal with the Flames to add a center ahead of their playoff push. — Julian McKenzie

Elias Pettersson is the subject of trade rumors in Vancouver. Matthew Stockman / Getty Images

Carolina Hurricanes

They will trade for Elias Pettersson

We know the Hurricanes have been interested in Pettersson in the past — Canucks GM Jim Rutherford used trade talks with the Hurricanes to leverage the Swedish center into signing his extension. Now, Pettersson is the subject of trade rumors with Vancouver residing near the bottom of the NHL standings. Carolina loves a distressed asset, though Pettersson's \$11.6 million annual price tag is steep even in today's exploding cap world. A fair price and some cap relief could make this deal a reality. — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

They will trade Ilya Mikheyev

The Blackhawks were hoping to re-sign Mikheyev, but after some discussions, that seems less likely now. If the Blackhawks aren't going to keep him beyond this season, they're open to trading him. There's expected to be some interest. The return probably won't be huge, maybe a third-rounder, but the Blackhawks need to create roster space for more incoming young players. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

They will trade for Robert Thomas

I've long speculated that Colorado should upgrade at center behind Nathan MacKinnon and Brock Nelson. I've suggested the Avalanche bring back Ryan O'Reilly, but this is supposed to be bold, not reasonable. Acquiring Thomas would send shockwaves across the NHL and give Colorado a massive matchup advantage up the middle. It would be tricky to pull off underneath the cap, but we've seen more complicated deals get done. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

They will trade to bring back Nick Foligno

Foligno was the Blue Jackets' captain during the greatest run of play in franchise history, including four straight playoff berths (2017-20). He has spoken openly about his love of



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Columbus and has built his retirement home there. The Blue Jackets don't have a lineup spot for Foligno, but there's always room for a leader like him in the room. The 38-year-old is a pending UFA and most expect this to be his final season. It would be a memorable swan song if Foligno gets a second tour in Columbus. — Aaron Portzline

## Dallas Stars

They will trade for Rasmus Ristolainen

Dallas has a spot for a top-six winger in light of Tyler Seguin's season-ending injury, but it's more realistic that Jim Nill addresses another need, for a right-shot defenseman. After missing out on Rasmus Andersson, Ristolainen would be a nice consolation prize, and he'd fit right in with Dallas' so-called Finnish Mafia. — Mark Lazerus

## Detroit Red Wings

They will add both a defenseman and a forward

Detroit's clearest need is on the blue line, and it would be a surprise if it didn't add a right-shot defenseman before Friday. That's a must for the Red Wings. But they could use a boost up front, too, and whether it's a second-line center or a gritty third-line scorer on the wing, I'll say Steve Yzerman moves for a real upgrade there as well. The Red Wings haven't been this aggressive at a deadline under Yzerman, but the conditions this year are right for that to change. — Max Bultman

## Edmonton Oilers

They will trade Matt Savoie

Oilers general manager Stan Bowman doesn't have a massive number of valuable trade pieces at this year's deadline. If the goal is a major addition to the roster, the ask will be painful. Bowman will attempt to make a deal with the 2027 first-round selection, but Savoie is the one young player with enough value to secure a top-flight acquisition at the deadline. The target could be a bigger winger, a right-handed defenseman or a No. 3 center. — Allan Mitchell

## Florida Panthers

They will trade Sergei Bobrovsky

It's not often you see the defending champs deal one of the top catalysts behind multiple recent titles, but that could happen this week for the Panthers. Their playoff chances are hovering around 30 percent with how competitive the Atlantic is, and without Aleksander Barkov, it may make sense to simply take a knee this season. If a team in need of a goalie (Edmonton?) steps up with a big offer, Bobrovsky just might be on the move. — James Mirtle

## Los Angeles Kings

They won't make any (more) notable trades

Ken Holland usually scratches that trade itch at this time of the year and it wouldn't be the least bit shocking if he does make a move. But he's already made one bold stroke in acquiring Artemi Panarin and by firing coach Jim Hiller on Sunday, he's hoping for a spark. Nothing has changed the fact that this is a decidedly average team at best and one not worth spending more assets on. But I'm not so sure he'll do any selling either. — Eric Stephens

Vincent Trocheck skates near the bench during a Rangers game.

Acquiring Vincent Trocheck would be a best-case scenario for the Wild. Wendell Cruz / Imagn Images

## Minnesota Wild

They will trade for Vincent Trocheck

Trading for Trocheck wouldn't necessarily be a surprise — he's been a target and fits the team's needs perfectly. But it's bold in the sense that the Rangers are asking for a sizable return for one of their top players, so this would mean that the Wild would have upped their offer — or waited out New York successfully. Getting Trocheck would be a best-case scenario for Minnesota, especially if it doesn't give up top assets such as Danila Yurov. — Joe Smith

## Montreal Canadiens

They will trade for a right-shot defenseman

It is bold because the right-shot defensemen seemingly available on the market are in high demand, and one just came off the board with Connor Murphy's move to Edmonton. When demand is higher than supply, prices generally inflate, and the Canadiens are unlikely to want to overpay. But it could happen because it represents a clear area the Canadiens can improve, balancing out their left-shot-heavy defense corps. If prices drop closer to Friday, perhaps this becomes less bold and more realistic. — Arpon Basu

## Nashville Predators

They will do nothing

Outgoing general manager Barry Trotz is going to get handsome offers for center Ryan O'Reilly. He might get calls on Steven Stamkos, too, though Stamkos recently told The Tennessean he will not waive his no-trade clause. Trotz could get assets back for Michael Bunting and Erik Haula. O'Reilly, in particular, is a move most in Trotz's position would make. But here's a guess: the coach in him lets it ride and sees if this team can make the postseason. — Joe Rexrode

## New Jersey Devils

They will trade Nick Bjugstad

The Devils acquired Bjugstad shortly before the Olympic break, but they have fallen even more in the standings since and are not going to make the playoffs. That means Bjugstad could be available again, as Chris Johnston reported on his trade board. Not many players get flipped after playing single-digit games for a club, but Bjugstad might find himself in that position. — Peter Baugh

## New York Islanders

They will trade for Jordan Kyrou

It's Mathieu Darche's first deadline as Islanders general manager, so there is some uncertainty. The challenge is balancing the retooling strategy the team started over the summer, and an impressive start that propelled the team into the playoff race. The Islanders shouldn't load up on rentals, but could still take a swing that would elevate this team now and in the future. A top priority should be a skilled top-six



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winger, and one name that makes a lot of sense stylistically is Kyrrou. — Shayna Goldman

## New York Rangers

They won't trade Braden Schneider — yet

This isn't a super bold prediction, but Schneider's name has been floated around, and he was on Chris Johnston's most recent trade board. The young defenseman is a pending restricted free agent, so the Rangers don't have to move him right now. New York will probably be trying to make plenty of trades as it embarks on its stated retool, but I'll say Schneider isn't one of them this deadline. In the summer, the Rangers will revisit those discussions. — Peter Baugh

## Ottawa Senators

They will trade for a right-shot defenseman

The Senators seem to like moving in silence. That's how they ended up being the boldest team to make a move at the deadline last year, landing Dylan Cozens when not many suspected the Sens to be in on the then-Sabres forward. This year, they have no first-rounder while not boasting the deepest prospect pool. Ottawa could play it safe this week or make another hockey trade to upgrade on defense ahead of their playoff push. — Julian McKenzie

## Philadelphia Flyers

They will trade Bobby Brink

At 24 years old and still on the upswing, Brink isn't the kind of player rebuilding teams tend to deal. But the Flyers are deep at wing, and have another, Porter Martone, on the way, perhaps as soon as the end of this season. Moving Brink, maybe for some help at center or in goal, would also allow Flyers coach Rick Tocchet the option of putting Matvei Michkov back on the right wing for the final six weeks. — Kevin Kurz

## Pittsburgh Penguins

They will make multiple moves

I don't know that Kyle Dubas will land a huge name, but I expect him to be active. He's already made 41 moves since taking over the Penguins; he has tons of movable assets and Sidney Crosby's injury might add some urgency. Look for Dubas to be busy on Friday or even before. — Josh Yohe

## San Jose Sharks

They won't trade Mario Ferraro

With the Sharks in a playoff push for the first time in several years, it will be hard to part with the 27-year-old Ferraro even if he's in the final year of his contract. He's a heart-and-soul type who went through their painful rebuild and remains a minutes-munching leader on defense. — Eric Stephens

## Seattle Kraken

They will acquire a player with a fairly significant cap hit

Seattle is in the Western Conference playoff mix, but not so convincingly that it can afford to part with premium assets. I doubt we'll see the Kraken deal a first-round pick or a Shane Wright-caliber piece. The Kraken are well-positioned to take on an inefficient contract that can help them now. They have cap space and a three-headed goalie rotation that allows

them to get creative with the playoff cap. Watch for the Kraken to add a high-salaried player for a discount before the deadline. — Thomas Drance

## St. Louis Blues

They will trade Robert Thomas for a nice return

I've been of the mindset that the Blues won't trade Thomas by the deadline and that his situation will be readdressed in the offseason. But there is a lot of chatter behind the scenes right now. My prediction is that Blues general manager Doug Armstrong will find a team that comes close to his asking price — not all the way, but close enough — and they'll get the deal done. — Jeremy Rutherford

Blake Coleman evades a Hurricanes player while stickhandling the puck.

Will the Lightning reunite with Blake Coleman? Jaylynn Nash / Getty Images

## Tampa Bay Lightning

They will trade to bring back Blake Coleman

As strong as Tampa Bay is, it could use some work around the fringes to really solidify its chances of going on a deep run. Up front, there are basically two ways to approach things: with a right-handed shot to elevate the power play or a utility forward to punch up the top nine. Coleman, five years after his back-to-back wins with the Lightning, still fits the latter mold perfectly. That could give Tampa's top nine more versatility, since he can be used in any capacity. — Shayna Goldman

## Toronto Maple Leafs

They won't get a first-round pick back for Bobby McMann or Scott Laughton

Fourth-line centers don't typically draw first-round picks, and that's what Laughton has been this season. Maybe his intangible qualities — his scrappiness and winning personality — up his value a smidge higher, but a first-rounder might be pushing it. McMann is having a career year, meanwhile, and playing a lot of top-line minutes for the Leafs. On a playoff team, he's likely a third-liner. Even a second-round pick is probably a win. — Jonas Siegel

## Utah Mammoth

They will swing big for Robert Thomas

The Mammoth need another top-six center long-term. On "Saturday Headlines" last weekend, Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman reported that the Mammoth are one of the teams in on Thomas, which makes sense: They're one of the only prospective buyers that have the currency (loaded prospect pipeline, excess draft picks, tons of cap space) to make a Thomas deal realistically happen. — Harman Dayal

## Vancouver Canucks

They will do disappointingly little

The Canucks aren't very good at managing the NHL trade deadline, historically speaking. It's a trend that predates current management, but also applies to them, especially after last season when they didn't monetize either Brock Boeser or Pius Suter before the deadline. I predict the club will fail to move at least one of their three pending UFA



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veterans (David Kämpf, Evander Kane and Teddy Blueger).  
— Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

They will sit out at the trade deadline

No team has been more active at the deadline than the Golden Knights since they entered the league, so this is pretty bold. While unlikely, Vegas has already traded its next two first-round picks to Calgary and views Rasmus Andersson as its big acquisition. On top of that, the team's biggest need may be in net, and they're not exactly in a position to add a goalie. Adin Hill's six-year extension runs through 2031 and the Golden Knights already signed Carter Hart to a two-year, \$4 million contract. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

They will make a big addition

The Caps have said they're looking to add a top-six winger. No surprise — and they're not alone. We're saying GM Chris Patrick gets something done, though. Hoping to make a big addition is one thing; landing the plane is something else. Jordan Kyrou would make a ton of sense. — Sean Gentile

Winnipeg Jets

They will spend big on a player in his mid-20s with term

The Jets are on track to miss the playoffs and aren't going to sell off their star players. Bold isn't particularly available to them right now, unless you consider moving 2016 first-round pick Logan Stanley in the midst of a career year to be a bold idea. The only way they achieve "bold" then would be in the form of a surprise: finding an under-discussed, underrated young player who can help them next season and beyond. Odds seem low. — Murat Ates



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## Daccord backstops Kraken to 2-1 win, ending 12-game point streak for Hurricanes

By: Andrew Destin — AP Sports Writer

Ben Meyers scored his career-high sixth goal and the Seattle Kraken ended Carolina's point streak at 12 games by beating the Hurricanes 2-1.

SEATTLE (AP) — Ben Meyers scored his career-high sixth goal and the Seattle Kraken ended Carolina's point streak at 12 games by beating the Hurricanes 2-1 on Monday night.

Kaapo Kakko also scored for the Kraken, and Joey Daccord was superb in net with 35 saves. Seattle defenseman Adam Larsson had two assists.

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Carolina had won five straight games and seven of eight. It was the first defeat for the Metropolitan Division leaders since a 4-3 overtime loss at Washington on Jan. 31, and their first in regulation since getting blanked 3-0 in St. Louis on Jan. 13.

Seattle avenged a 3-2 loss to Carolina in January and moved into third place in the Pacific Division, one game ahead of Edmonton with a game in hand on the Oilers.

Meyers, who signed a two-year contract extension with the Kraken last week, snuck a backhand shot around goalie Frederik Andersen to give Seattle a 2-0 lead midway through the second period.

Nikolaj Ehlers scored for Carolina to make it 2-1, ripping a wrist shot past Daccord with 1:30 remaining in the second.

That was all the offense the Hurricanes could muster, even with a furious push following a holding penalty against Seattle's Eeli Tolvanen with 1:29 left. Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour pulled goalie Frederik Andersen to set up a 6-on-4 advantage, but Daccord and the Kraken held firm.

Kakko scored early in the second when he put a wrist shot underneath Andersen's right shoulder.

Andersen finished with 13 saves.

Up next

Hurricanes: Visit the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday.

Kraken: Host the St. Louis Blues on Wednesday.



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## Recap: Canes Come Up Short In Seattle

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

Carolina suffers first regulation loss since Jan. 13

SEATTLE - The Carolina Hurricanes opened their four-game road swing with a narrow defeat in the Pacific Northwest, falling 2-1 to the Seattle Kraken on Monday.

[GAME SUMMARY](#) | [BOX SCORE](#) | [BUY TICKETS](#)

An early territorial edge signified a bright start for the Canes, but underlying mistakes proved costly in the second period, when an opportunistic Kraken club made the most of a pair of chances to take a 2-0 lead in a span of just 5:26.

Stemming the tide, Carolina continued to apply pressure and halved the deficit with 90 seconds left in the middle frame on a Nikolaj Ehlers laser from the slot.

Unfortunately, the Canes were unable to turn that momentum into an equalizer in the third period. Once again controlling play, their smattering of scoring chances found either a Seattle skater, for one of the team's 23 blocks on the night, or goaltender Joey Daccord, who finished with 35 saves in the Kraken cage.

At the other end, Frederik Andersen made 13 saves on 15 shots, but suffered his first regulation defeat in seven starts.

### Stats & Standouts

Forward Nikolaj Ehlers scored his second goal in three games and has found the scoresheet four times in his last five outings.

The loss ends Carolina's season-best point streak at 12 games (10-0-2).

They Said It...

Rod Brind'Amour on the contest...

"I thought we played well... You have to score more than one with the amount of zone time that we had. And with the opportunities that we had, you have to find a way to get more than one [goal]."

Jordan Staal offering his thoughts...

"We really just didn't capitalize on our chances. They're a team that, when they're up, they hunker down well, and they don't give you much. [They give you] a lot of shots from the outside, and I don't think we did a good enough job of getting in front of them. They box out well. We had a chance to tie it up. For the most part, it was a good game; it just didn't really click offensively."

Jordan Staal discussing puck management...

"There were some turnovers, for sure. That kind of cost us a couple of goals. There could have been a few decisions with the puck offensively that we could have done a better job [with]. Shooting when we need to or passing when we need to. The execution we needed wasn't there offensively, and we came up short."

Rod Brind'Amour on moving forward from here...

"If we can play like that, we're going to be fine. Tonight was just one of those nights. We didn't get a bounce all night. We've got to keep working for them, which I thought we did tonight."

Jordan Staal looking to Wednesday in Vancouver...

"It's about the next one. We'll learn from what we had going on tonight, take care of the bodies, and get ready for the next game. These road trips are tough. Everyone's got to go through them, and we've got to have a little better effort and get on a roll on this trip."

What's Next?

The Canes are scheduled to be off on Tuesday. They'll return to game action on Wednesday against the Canucks.

Next Game: Wednesday, March 4 at Vancouver | 10:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO

Next Home Game: Tuesday, March 10 vs. Pittsburgh | 7:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO | Tickets | Parking

## Alves Carrying Canes' Equipment Torch

By: Walt Ruff

"Jorge is the hardest working man in this organization, there's no question about it."

RALEIGH, N.C. - Equipment managers are the hardest-working men in hockey. It's a fact.



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No one works the hours they do. From meticulously preparing the locker room hours before players arrive for morning skate to unloading the gear at 3 a.m. in a third road city in four days, it's a role that requires sacrifice and selflessness, atop unparalleled attention to detail.

It's not glamorous, and their work isn't always noticed by the eye of the casual fan, but it is one of the most important jobs in an organization.

Fortunately, even prior to the franchise's first season in the NHL in Hartford, the position has been in good hands. Between Skip Cunningham, Wally Tatomir, and Bob Gorman, only three men had served in the role from 1972 to 2025, carrying the Whalers from their WHA days all the way to the present times.

And after leading the charge for the last five years and amassing 37 seasons in total, Gorman has started the transition to the next chapter of his life.

The departure left sizeable shoes to fill, but some that Jorge Alves is ready to embrace.

On a day-to-day basis, Alves has been an irreplaceable part of the team for many years.

The now 47-year-old is known around the hockey world for his seven-second appearance in goal for the Canes on New Year's Eve 2016, but behind the scenes, there's much more to know.

Growing up in Massachusetts, Alves, the son of Portuguese immigrants, was led to North Carolina when he was stationed at Camp Lejeune for four years while serving in the Marine Corps. Following those four years, he enrolled at North Carolina State University and got back into hockey, going on to be one of the best players in program history.

Playing with the Icepack from 2001-03, he was named ACCHL MVP, ACCHL Playoff MVP, ACCHL Goalie of the Year and NC State Team MVP in his final season. His #35 was retired by the club in 2023.

Spending the next few years suiting up for teams in the ECHL and Southern Professional Hockey League (SPHL), Alves joined the Hurricanes in 2005 as an Assistant Equipment Manager and has climbed the ladder over the last 20 years.

As reliable as they come, Alves has seemingly always been there when the organization is in need.

Skates to be sharpened? Jorge is on it.

Need an extra goalie at practice because someone needs a light day or the recall won't make it in time? Jorge can lace them up.

Want a helmet custom-designed for a gift or for a player just acquired by the organization? Jorge can do it.

"What he's meant to this organization, what he's done (is immeasurable). You know MacGyver? That's Jorge Alves," Rod Brind'Amour said. "Literally, anything you need done... (he can do it). 'Hey, something's not right with my car?' 'Okay, I got it.' Then he's got the equipment. Then you need a guy to go skate and be a goalie. He's maybe one of the most valuable guys around in this organization."

"Then, to boot, he's just an awesome guy," Brind'Amour continued. "I'm happy that he gets that bump. I've always thought of him as a head guy because he did so much for us. We lost Bobby (Gorman), and I hate to see that. We lost Skip (Cunningham) a couple of years ago. They're really special people. But when you have guys like Jorge replacing them, you don't miss a beat."

Alves' impact is not only noticed by the head coach, but also by the players whom he has taken great care of for many years.

"He's the epitome of what a Hurricane should be. He's hard-working, consistent, and cares. That's what you want in any person in this room, and he's a great example of that," Captain Jordan Staal preached. "He'll do anything for you with a smile on his face. He's always ready to work, always in a good mood, and just a good dude."

His role may just be one piece of the puzzle, but his can-do attitude is infectious.

"Jorge is the hardest working man in this organization, there's no question about it," Staal continued. "His character on a day-to-day basis is great, and he's always just good vibes."

But why?

Why did Alves work 20 years before getting an opportunity as the head equipment manager? Why does he continue to suit up in net when that falls very outside of the normal job description?

"It's a passion. It's funny to me when someone says 'Your job.' It's my life. I don't really look at it as a job," Alves started with a smile.

Good perspective.

"It's something I didn't really know about growing up or even in my younger adult years. I didn't know anything about an equipment manager or what they did. It wasn't until after I started skating with the guys and being around it that I learned that there's a guy who takes care of you, and you have the equipment you need. There's someone who makes sure you're protected and safe. That's interesting. That's something that I might be interested in doing. To me, that doesn't seem like work. That's just my life and what I do."

Admitting he was initially surprised when Gorman started his transition this summer, and he was subsequently offered the head role, the ensuing decision did not require much thought.

"(Becoming a head equipment manager) is something you shoot for. I don't know if it was a single goal of mine to become a head equipment manager, but when you start working in this business, it becomes the top role, and you always want to succeed and get to the top, right?"

While Gorman still remains around the team, just operating in a little bit of a lesser role, the leadership responsibility is on Alves, who is leaning on his past experiences as he claims the helm.

"There are different aspects of the job and the position that I'm not used to or hadn't done before, but at the same time, it's like being in the military and when you're leading other



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Marines. Now, in this role, I have other people to lead, and I have to look out for them," he said.

Always team first, whether that's the team on the ice or his team of equipment managers, which includes Nick Roy, Patrick Budds, C.J. Reif, and technically, Gorman, Alves doesn't take the responsibility of his position lightly. Ensuring that he and his group are capable of providing a service that allows the players to compete at the highest level is what it's all about.

"Those are the little things that, when we talk about self-gratification, are like, 'Okay, I got the skate change done in time, he's back out there and doing what he does best.' There are little hidden gems throughout the day," Alves said.

"Don't get me wrong, there's a lot of long days and a lot of hard work, and times where you're like, 'this is a tough one', but those little victories outweigh those tough days. Those are what you look forward to."

One task at a time, Alves plays his role.

"I'm not a player, and I'm not in the trenches with the guys during the game, but there is a layer of involvement. Someone comes off the ice, and they need their blade changed, or a repair on their equipment, we've got to be on it," he said with appreciation. "If someone needs a stick quickly, or their blades changed so they can be out there for their next shift, that's our job to do."



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## Daccord makes 35 saves, Kraken end Hurricanes' point streak at 12

By: Darren Brown

Kakko, Meyers score for Seattle; Carolina had won 5 straight, loses in regulation for 1st time since Jan. 16

SEATTLE -- Joey Daccord made 35 saves, and the Seattle Kraken ended the Carolina Hurricanes' 12-game point streak by holding on for a 2-1 win at Climate Pledge Arena on Monday.

"I thought our guys did a good job of trying to keep shots to the outside, force them to miss the net, and when they didn't, Joey made some big saves," Seattle coach Lane Lambert said.

Kaapo Kakko and Ben Meyers scored, and Adam Larsson had two assists for the Kraken (29-22-9), who have won two in a row after dropping their first two following the Olympic break. Daccord has won six of his past seven starts (6-1-0).

"A big thing with playing a shot-volume team [like Carolina] is just controlling your rebounds," Daccord said. "Because they're going to try to just get pucks in that create chaos, so if I can suck up pucks, get a lot of whistles, put pucks in the corner, that helps our [defensemen] a lot in terms of just killing their motion in the offensive zone and resetting the play with a [defensive]-zone drop."

Nikolaj Ehlers scored for the Hurricanes (38-16-6), who were 10-0-2 during their point streak, which began on Jan. 16, and had won five in a row. Frederik Andersen made 13 saves.

"I thought we played well," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We gave up a few too many, just from [offensive] zone to be honest, just trying to force stuff, and then that transition game for them. ... We've got to score more than one with the amount of zone time that we had."

Kakko gave Seattle a 1-0 lead at 3:22 of the second period, looking off linemate Berkly Catton on a 2-on-1 rush and snapping a shot from the right circle that squeezed under Andersen's right arm.

"I was looking for [Catton]," Kakko said. "I actually wanted to pass that, but the [defenseman] kind of took it away. So, I just had a shot, and it went in. So, good for us."

Jaden Schwartz appeared to score a power-play goal at 7:57 of the second period, but the play was ruled offside and overturned following a coach's challenge by Carolina.

Meyers, however, extended it to 2-0 less than a minute later at 8:48. Off a rush, Frederick Gaudreau fed it from the corner to Meyers at the top of the crease. Andersen then stopped his redirection, but Meyers swatted the rebound off the post then off defenseman Alexander Nikishin and in.

"[Jacob Melanson] made a great play on the wall, got it to [Larsson] in the middle," Meyers said. "He just moved it quick to me, I got it to Freddy, and then just drove the net. I was able to put her home after a great pass from Freddy, too."

Ehlers cut it to 2-1 at 18:30. Jordan Martinook partially fanned on a pass from below the goal line, but it got past defenseman Vince Dunn to Ehlers in the right circle. He faked a slap shot, cut to the slot, and snapped it under Daccord's glove.

"For the most part, it was a good game, but it just didn't really click [enough] offensively," Carolina captain Jordan Staal said.

After Eeli Tolvanen was called for holding with 1:29 left in the third period, and with Andersen pulled for the extra skater, Carolina pushed but could not find the tying goal despite the 6-on-4 advantage.

"I think we just didn't capitalize on our chances, and they're a team that when they're up, they hunker down well and don't give you much," Staal said.

NOTES: The Kraken ended an opponent's point streak of 12 or more games for the second time in franchise history. The only other instance occurred on Jan. 12, 2023, when they ended the Bruins' 14-game point streak. ... Carolina's 12-game point streak was tied for the fourth-longest in Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers history.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## Deals we'd like to see before the 2026 NHL trade deadline - ESPN

By: Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton, Greg Wyshynski

The NHL trade deadline is at 3 p.m. ET on Friday.

Though several blockbusters have already happened -- including Quinn Hughes to the Minnesota Wild and Artemi Panarin to the Los Angeles Kings -- there are some big names still reportedly available to contenders.

So, who will get traded next?

ESPN reporters Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton and Greg Wyshynski devised logical trades that could happen before the deadline and benefit all teams involved, keeping salary cap implications in mind.

Let's start with a deal that would have seemed improbable in the preseason:

Edmonton Oilers get:

G Sergei Bobrovsky

Florida Panthers get:

G Connor Ingram, F Isaac Howard

Why it works: If you can't beat them, acquire them!

This transaction would require some serious soul-searching by Edmonton general manager Stan Bowman and Florida GM Bill Zito. For Bowman, it would mean acknowledging that his previous plan to fix the team's goaltending -- acquiring Tristan Jarry from the Penguins -- still puts the team's postseason fortunes at risk. For Zito, it would mean that this Aleksander Barkov-less season is a write-off, and that Bobrovsky, who turns 38 in September, accumulated too much wear and tear during the past three seasons to get a multiyear contract.

The Oilers know they have a three-year window before Connor McDavid becomes an unrestricted free agent. Chances must be taken. Bobrovsky has been pretty bad in the regular season, but that's not unusual for him. It's his evolution into Playoff Bob every April that makes him intriguing for Edmonton. The Oilers have witnessed it firsthand for two straight Stanley Cup Finals.

The money could work with full 50% retention by the Panthers and Ingram (with an expiring contract) being shipped out. The acquisition of Connor Murphy on Monday complicates things -- putting Mattias Janmark on long-term injured reserve was part of my Bobrovsky gambit, and they did so to make that trade with Chicago -- so some other parts would have to move. The Oilers don't want to give up Howard, but is there a player with the game and swagger who better fits the Panthers' aesthetic?

Yes, Edmonton needed another defenseman and could use a third-line center. None of that matters if the Oilers don't have someone who can stop the puck in the playoffs, and that's what Bobrovsky does. -- Wyshynski

Minnesota Wild get:

C Vincent Trocheck

New York Rangers get:

2027 first-round pick, 2028 second-round pick, D Carson Lambos and F Charlie Stramel

Why it works: Trading for one of the proven top-six centers at the deadline isn't a question of need but rather what it will take to complete the deal and if it makes sense for the acquiring franchise. Wild GM Bill Guerin and his front office are facing that decision ahead of the deadline.

Trocheck is practically the perfect deadline addition for the Wild. As a two-way center, he fits within their defensive structure, and he can do what's required in the offensive zone to score and set up others. He can be trusted to play in every situation, and on any special teams unit.

Above all, he gives the Wild someone who has experience playing against top-line centers -- a skill that could prove useful in the daunting Western Conference playoff bracket. Trocheck told reporters Monday that there are teams in the West that are on his no-trade list, and The Athletic reported that the Wild are not on that list.

In this trade, the Rangers get two prospects, Lambos and Stramel, and they could play as soon as this spring, or possibly at some point next season. The Rangers, who have two first-round picks this year, would have multiple firsts in 2027 if they completed this deal.

The Wild weathered the buyouts of Zach Parise and Ryan Suter, and that has allowed Guerin and his staff to explore more options -- but that comes with a few caveats. Are the Wild comfortable parting with two more prospects and a first-round pick when they've already moved on from Zeev Buium, Marat Khusnutdinov, Liam Ohgren and Marco Rossi within the past year? And though they have \$11.4 million in deadline cap space, per PuckPedia, are they also comfortable having what would be an eighth player with more than three years remaining on their current deal worth more than \$5 million annually?

If Guerin and his front office are comfortable saying yes to those questions, this deal makes a lot of sense. -- Clark

Colorado Avalanche get:

C Ryan O'Reilly, 2027 sixth-round pick



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Nashville Predators get:

2027 first-round pick, 2026 fourth-round pick (from Carolina) and F Nikita Prishchepov

Why it works: Colorado must strike now. The Avalanche have not advanced past the second round in a playoff series since winning the Stanley Cup in 2022. This is Colorado's best team in the past four years, and the Avalanche have an excellent chance of making another championship run. Colorado already has a one-two punch down the middle with Nathan MacKinnon and Brock Nelson. What the Avalanche need is someone like O'Reilly to round out their center depth with scoring touch, physicality and, of course, winning experience (O'Reilly was part of St. Louis' Cup victory in 2019).

O'Reilly is also having a terrific season. The 35-year-old leads the Predators with 21 goals and 57 points in 59 games while playing over 20 minutes per contest. If the Avalanche can draw that kind of production out of their third-line center, it will make their offensive attack enviably formidable.

But O'Reilly does not want to be traded. His family is happy in Nashville, and he'd like to stay put. But O'Reilly has no trade protection in his contract, which carries a \$4.5 million annual cap hit through next season, although there is a sense that Predators GM Barry Trotz would bring a trade proposal to O'Reilly before making anything official.

With that in mind, Colorado would have to give up quite a bit to land O'Reilly. The Avalanche don't have a first-round pick in 2026 -- that went to the New York Islanders in Colorado's acquisition of Nelson at last year's deadline. The Avalanche's win-now mentality makes giving up next year's top selection a calculated risk. It would be worth it, though, if O'Reilly puts them over the top.

The deal would also include Prishchepov, a 22-year-old center Colorado selected in the seventh round of the 2024 draft. He has played 10 NHL games, and his inclusion is a sweetener for Nashville, which is headed for a rebuilding phase. -- Shilton

Carolina Hurricanes get:

C Robert Thomas

St. Louis Blues get:

2026 first-round pick (from DAL), C Jesperi Kotkaniemi, D Alexander Nikishin, F Ryan Suzuki

Why it works: It's clear that St. Louis and Thomas could benefit from a clean break. Carolina would be an ideal trade partner.

The Hurricanes have had no problem making the postseason, but it's their lack of playoff scoring that has repeatedly derailed Carolina's recent opportunities to reach a Stanley Cup Final. The Hurricanes haven't hesitated to take a big swing before -- such as acquiring Jake Guentzel two seasons ago, landing Mikko Rantanen last season (before trading him again), and making a play for Mitch Marner last year, too.

Adding Thomas would give Carolina a 20-plus goal scorer to anchor one of its top two lines who can also be an asset on the power play. Thomas, 26, has five years remaining on his

deal with an \$8.125 million annual cap hit. The Hurricanes would be getting some of the best years of Thomas' career.

The return is significant, and it has to be. The Hurricanes would be trading the first-round pick they received when they dealt Rantanen to Dallas. Sending it off to bring in another potential superstar center seems right, somehow. Koktaniemi hasn't panned out into being the consistent scoring center Carolina hoped for, but he is still productive and could slide into the Blues' lineup while providing good depth in a second- or third-line role. Nikishin is a burly defender who can contribute offensively, with seven goals and 22 points in 58 games this season. Carolina wouldn't part with Nikishin easily, but he could swiftly elevate the Blues' defense corps.

Suzuki. Carolina's first-round draft choice in 2019, is a 24-year-old center who has played in only two NHL games, but has been excellent in the American Hockey League (he has 10 goals and 39 points in 47 games for the Chicago Wolves this season). St. Louis could give him an NHL spot soon. In Carolina, he hasn't broken through because of its depth up front.

Blues GM Doug Armstrong might not get a perfect trade return for Thomas. A deal with Carolina makes sense for his club in the short and long term. -- Shilton

Boston Bruins get:

C Robert Thomas, D Justin Faulk

St. Louis Blues get:

C Dean Letourneau, D Mason Lohrei, C Casey Mittelstadt, F Michael Eyssimont, 2027 first-round pick (unprotected)

Why it works: I've long felt that the Bruins were keeping their No. 1 center spot open in the hopes that either Connor McDavid or Leon Draisaitl could have filled it before both resigned with the Oilers. But top-line centers in their prime don't often become available, which is why it's noteworthy that the Blues are listening to trade offers for Thomas. The Bruins could pull off that kind of blockbuster because they have a deep well of assets. But why stop at Thomas?

The Bruins have been one of the teams mentioned to have interest in Faulk, who has 32 points in 60 games and is averaging 22:30 of ice time. Faulk, 33, has another year left on his contract at a \$6.5 million annual cap hit, and the Blues have the retention slots to keep 50% of his contract to make this trade happen. It'll cost the Bruins even more, but it could be worth it to slot Faulk behind Charlie McAvoy on the right-side defensive depth chart.

The Blues will, of course, not retain salary for Robert Thomas, who is signed through 2030-31 at an AAV of \$8.125 million. To make the money work, the Bruins likely have to send back Mittelstadt (\$5.75 million, signed through 2026-27) and Eyssimont (\$1.45 million, signed through 2026-27) to go along with Lohrei (\$3.2 million AAV, RFA after 2026-27), a player the Blues might want.

But if the Blues are going to move Thomas, they will move him for future assets. Boston won't move 2025 first-round pick James Hagens. Letourneau is a 20-year-old center for Boston College who is 6-foot-7 and has scored at more than a point-per-game pace this season.

Toss in an unprotected first, and that's a hefty price to pay. But it's a deal that helps Boston in the short term as a playoff



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team, and the long term with Thomas at the top of its center depth chart. -- Wyshynski

Anaheim Ducks get:

D Dougie Hamilton

New Jersey Devils get:

D Drew Helleeson, 2027 second-round pick (from ANA), 2027 second-round pick (from DET)

Why it works: This one would work for both teams now and in the future.

The Ducks don't need to make a trade, given what the group has accomplished this season. But getting Hamilton would fit their philosophy of adding veterans and blending them with a roster filled with young players to create a team that has a chance to be one of the NHL's next long-term factors.

Hamilton would bolster the right side of the Ducks' defense that already has Radko Gudas and Jacob Trouba. Hamilton's arrival would also help the Ducks pair their younger

defensemen, such as Jackson LaCombe, Pavel Mintyukov and Olen Zellweger, with a veteran.

Gudas and Trouba are both unrestricted free agents at the end of the season, while Hamilton still has two years left on his contract worth \$9 million annually. Hamilton would provide the Ducks cost certainty entering what will likely be an expensive offseason, with Leo Carlsson, Cutter Gauthier, Mintyukov and Zellweger set to be restricted free agents. LaCombe's contract extension begins in 2026-27, bumping his salary from \$925,000 to \$9 million annually.

The Devils moving off Hamilton's salary would be a bonus for a team that is facing cap challenges going into the deadline. But it's possible that the Ducks -- or any team that's interested in Hamilton -- could use that as a bargaining chip, provided they have the cap space. That's what makes assessing a potential return complicated.

It's possible that Helleeson, who will make \$1.1 million next season, along with the draft capital, could push this trade through. -- Clark



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

## Kraken 2, Hurricanes 1

By: Bob Wage

Streaks were made to be broken and a couple of them were broken late Monday night as the Carolina Hurricanes lost to the Seattle Kraken, 2-1.

The Canes had earned points in 12 straight games up to this night. The team was undefeated with Jaccob Slavin in the lineup up until this game. Both streaks are history now.

The Hurricanes outshot the home team by a 36-15 margin (shots on goal) but could only solve Kraken goalie, Joey Daccord once when Nikolaj Ehlers scored late in the second period.

Give Daccord credit, he looked very good and has now won seven of his last eight starts.

Head Coach, Rod Brind'Amour decided to break up the previously indicated goalie rotation with Brandon Bussi and started Frederik Andersen for the second game in a row.

Andersen allowed two goals on the 15 shots he faced.

The Kraken only had a total of 21 (5v5) shots attempted all game, the lowest amount the Hurricanes have allowed this season.

The Canes had a total of 71 attempted shots.

The Kraken outhit the Canes, 31-13 and had a couple of solid hits on Seth Jarvis and Eric Robinson which stunned each player.

Next up for Carolina will be a tilt against the reeling Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday night.



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## The Hockey News

### Could Hurricanes Red-Hot Second Line Impact Deadline Decisions?

By: Ryan Henkel

Surging second line dominates opponents and could force Hurricanes management to rethink deadline acquisition strategies. Their elite play sparks a crucial question for Carolina's championship hopes.

The Carolina Hurricanes are in a pretty good spot as the NHL trade deadline looms large just four days away.

The Hurricanes are the top team in the Eastern Conference and sit just five points behind the Colorado Avalanche for top spot in the league.

Logan Stankoven talks to the media after Carolina's 5-4 over Tampa Bay

There isn't necessarily any glaring weaknesses on the team, but there are certainly positions where the team could afford to upgrade.

One such position that has been talked about for years and years is second line center.

However, could the recent play of Logan Stankoven, Jackson Blake and Taylor Hall influence what the team decides to do at the deadline?

In the two games since returning to action, no line has been more productive for the Canes than their second line.

The trio have outchanced opponents 28-7, with a 12-4 edge in scoring chances and 7-1 edge in high-danger chances in that span, and in terms of where it actually matters, they're also up 4-0 in goals scored.

But really, that line has been strong for Carolina all season.

They've controlled a 56.63% of the scoring chances, 57.14% of the high-danger chances and have an expected goals for percentage of 54.95%.

And again, where it matters, they're up 20-12 in terms of actual goals.

And when you look at Stankoven in particular, even though his production is way down, he's still been one of the team's most consistent chance generators.

No line has generated more high-danger chances than the trio of Stankoven, Blake and Hall and Stankoven himself is second on the team in individual high-danger chances behind only linemate Jackson Blake.

He also leads all forwards in high-danger goals for in his minutes and his 61.06 Corsi For Percentage trails only Sebastian Aho.

So in terms of generating offense, he's been one of the best.

Logan Stankoven Isolated Impacts  
Logan Stankoven Isolated Impacts

He's also been one of the unluckier players on the team as Stankoven currently has scored -2.19 goals above expected at 5v5.

But if you compare him with other players on the team, he's sixth on the team in 5v5 points (21), which is only eight fewer than Sebastian Aho who paces the entire team.

So that's not really as big of a disparity as one might initially think and, really, it more so reflects a lack of power play production.

It's a small sample size of course, but what the second line has been doing over these past two games is exactly what the Hurricanes have been waiting on. They know that the line has been dangerous most nights, it just hasn't been able to break through.

Logan Stankoven RAPM Charts  
Logan Stankoven RAPM Charts

Regardless, upgrading at the center position could still be a big boost for the team.

The reality is that even though Stankoven has been playing pretty well at center, his faceoff struggles and potential physical limitations are real and could be something that tips the scales the other way in terms of going after another centerman.

Proven performers are never a bad thing to acquire and with the wealth of talented wingers that the Canes have, you could build fairly significant third line and even fourth line with that depth.

But if they don't make a move, I don't think it would necessarily be a failure by the front office.

This is a talented roster with still lots of room to grow and I think the players they have are capable of going all the way, they just need everyone pulling on the same rope and staying healthy.

If it's a big name and a proven player, then by all means the Hurricanes should do their best to acquire them. But if we're just talking about some of the other middling options out there, I'm not so sure that they'd necessarily be better than Stankoven is now.



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# SportScan

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

1381293 Websites

The Athletic / Hughes brothers join Hilary Knight on 'Tonight Show' to talk Olympics, stressful proposals

By Michael Russo

NEW YORK — Amidst a star-studded lineup that included Academy Award winner Nicole Kidman, "Bridgerton" actor Luke Thompson and celebrity chef Mario Carbone cooking meatballs and sending a studio audience of 227 people home with jars of tomato sauce, three gold medal-winning hockey players drew lots of laughs and many "awws" on another late-night appearance Monday.

Two nights after taking part in the monologue on "Saturday Night Live" at 30 Rock's famous Studio 8H, Jack and Quinn Hughes and Hilary Knight were two floors down in Studio 6B to appear on "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon." The three athletes, fresh off being part of U.S. teams winning men's and women's gold medals, dropped perfectly timed one-liners and touched the crowd with some personal anecdotes.

When Fallon asked Knight, a five-time Olympian who forced overtime with the tying goal late in regulation in the gold-medal game, what was more nerve-wracking between playing Olympic hockey or appearing on "SNL," Knight immediately responded, "Uh, SNL," drawing a huge laugh.

Jack Hughes, Hilary Knight and Quinn Hughes won gold with the U.S. men's and women's teams in Milan. (Photo courtesy of Todd Owyong / NBC)

Jack Hughes, a New Jersey Devils forward, had the audience howling when he described the dorm room setup at the Olympics, where he roomed with his older brother, Quinn, a Minnesota Wild defenseman.

"We walked in and the beds were like this far apart from each other," Jack said, holding his hands a couple feet apart. "And then the first thing we did, we were like, 'We've got to move these beds.' So we started shifting things around. I didn't want to roll over and be like this far from Quinn."

Quinn said, "There's a couple nights where I'm rolling around and he's like, 'Dude, you've got to stop rolling around.'"

But, he added, they loved it: "I felt like I was a freshman at Michigan again."

After the Hugheses talked about the "mayhem" of the room and how messy Quinn's side became by the end of the Olympics, Fallon turned his attention to Jack's missing front teeth. He lost them toward the end of regulation in the gold-medal game, then scored the gold medal-clinching goal in overtime.

Fallon, a hockey fan who attends many New York Rangers games and has had Henrik Lundqvist on his show three times since 2022, said, "That is the most hockey thing I could ever think of happening in the world."

Jack said Quinn came up to him during the final TV timeout and told him, "It's not that bad."

Fallon said he noticed that Jack hasn't gotten his teeth repaired yet and maybe he shouldn't: "I feel like this might be your thing."

"I can promise you this won't be my thing," Jack said.

In the audience was Knight's fiancée, Olympic speedskater Brittany Beau, to whom Knight proposed the morning before the gold-medal game. Fallon showed a picture of Knight proposing and pointed out how gutsy it was for her to pull out the ring over a storm grate.

"I like high-pressure situations, I guess," she said. "I didn't think about the grate before hovering over it."

Quinn talked about how cool it was for him and his brother to watch Knight and her teammates win gold, pointing out that their mother, Ellen, has worked with the team since 2023. When Fallon asked where he watched the game, Quinn said it was in a suite at the arena with his brother and fellow Michigan alum Tom Brady. It was the first time they had met him.

"I mean, it was crazy. I don't know how we got up there," Quinn said.

"He was the most pumped out of all of us," Jack said.

"It was a nail-biter, but I think they were the better team and I was happy for them, and no one was happier than Tom," Quinn said. "He was jumping up and down."

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

U.S. Olympic men's, women's hockey stars joke about 'Heated Rivalry,' Trump invite on 'SNL'



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Gold medalists Jack Hughes, Quinn Hughes, Hilary Knight and Megan Keller appeared on "Saturday Night Live" hosted by actor Connor Storrer.

Fallon pointed out that Knight told her mom at age 5 that she would be an Olympian, even though women's hockey wasn't an event at the time: "I'm just dialed in like that," she quipped.

And Fallon read a letter that Jack wrote to himself before he was drafted in 2019, which read in part, "Your brothers made you who you are on and off the ice. I hope that they'll be able to say you did the same for them, that they had great NHL careers too. Maybe you even suited up with them a couple of times. Maybe we all represented the United States in the Olympics. Maybe we won a gold medal or gold medals together. What an honor that would be."

Speaking of that, New Jersey Devils defenseman Luke Hughes — the youngest of the three NHL-playing brothers — was in the audience next to his mom and dad, Jim.

"He's 6-2, so he looks older," Quinn said.

When Fallon asked Luke if he plans to join Quinn and Jack on the 2030 U.S. Olympic team, he said, "Hope so."

Knight reiterated that this was indeed her final Olympics even though she joked that the French Alps in 2030 are appealing.

"This is definitely my last," she said. "I mean, storybook ending, amazing team to go out with, just an incredible win, double golds."

"You crushed it," Fallon said.

"Couldn't have written it better," Knight agreed.

After the segment ended, Fallon admired Knight's gold medal during the commercial break as some audience members yelled, "Go USA."

Jimmy Fallon holds Hilary Knight's gold medal on Monday. (Photo courtesy of Todd Owyong / NBC)

Knight and the Hughes brothers clearly had a blast throughout the process, including meeting Kidman before the show. She boasted during her interview that she got to hold the gold medal and was "so thrilled for them."

The original interview was 11 minutes long. It was trimmed for TV, but the extended version will go up online after the show airs.

"I know it's obviously a great show, and we're going to be ourselves on it and just have fun with it," Jack told The Athletic an hour before the taping. "It's a pretty cool experience. I know a lot of our family members watch that show, and we're happy to be a part of it."

The Athletic LOADED: 03.03.2026

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The Athletic / Why the NHL trade deadline carries extra intrigue this year

By Pierre LeBrun

Before we move on to what should be an intriguing week ahead of Friday's NHL trade deadline, a thought or two on what was a quiet weekend.

That, in itself, is a departure from what we've seen in past years. The weekend before the deadline has traditionally been active, even after the NHL moved the deadline to a Friday a few years ago.

Talking to team executives and agents over the past 24 hours, it's clear they believe CBA tweaks to create a new playoff salary cap — which closes the loophole on limitless payrolls via injured players returning for the playoffs — and to eliminate third-party broker teams in trades (double salary retentions) have hampered trades.

"Both have big impact, together with the uniqueness of the standings," one veteran agent said on Sunday.

"It obviously will hamper the trade action. Not sure how much," said one NHL team executive, who requested anonymity because teams are not supposed to comment on CBA matters. "I expect there will be some action between now and the deadline because there always is. My current take right now is that there isn't a lot of supply, and there is little demand for what is being made available."

More on that last point in a moment.

"I think it will pick up as prices are still a tad high," another agent said on Monday. "However, have detected restraint among GMs — being more realistic about their chances of getting in the playoffs and if they can win a round."

Let's be clear, we will get trades this week. The big three Cup contenders in the Central — the Colorado Avalanche, Dallas Stars and Minnesota Wild — are all active and plan to add. The Edmonton Oilers and Utah Mammoth are very active. Cup contenders in the East, the Tampa Bay Lightning and Carolina Hurricanes, are trying to add, as well.

We will get action.

But the mere fact that we had the kind of weekend we had is noteworthy.

The creation of a playoff salary cap and new restrictions on double salary retention in trades could lead to limited activity before Friday.

When new CBA details began to surface last June around the draft, I remember being surprised by the banning of double salary retention (third-party brokers). Technically, as the new rule reads, a second retention on the same contract can happen 75 regular-season days later. So it's not entirely banned, but the rule does nix double retentions in the moment at the trade deadline. Which was the point.

That tweak was absolutely something the league wanted in the new CBA.

"As you know, we are not in favor of salary-retention transactions generally," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said via email Monday. "We ultimately agreed to allow them (reluctantly) with tight rules and restrictions attached. We didn't feel the double retention transactions were consistent with spirit of the restrictions we had developed and enforced. So, we proposed the current modification in bargaining."

For those reading who were still pups when the salary cap was introduced in 2005, there was no salary retention in trades in the original system. GMs pushed for salary retention to facilitate trades in the coming years, and it was finally introduced in the 2013 CBA, with up to 50 percent salary retention allowed in one trade. But to Daly's point, that was done reluctantly by the league. The whole point of the original cap system introduced in 2005 was to tightly control spending. That's the spirit of the system.

Eventually, post-2013 teams also began exploring the double retention option, which meant 75 percent of a player's salary could be retained via a third-party broker.

And well, those days are over now.

As are the days of placing players on long-term injured reserve, spending over the cap in the amount of their cap hits during the regular season, then bringing those players back for the playoffs.

It's a double whammy.



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"I think those two changes took the oil out of the machine," one agent said Monday.

A few other team execs told The Athletic we may very well see a flurry on Thursday and Friday after bubble teams announce themselves out of playoff contention. The standings this year, for sure, have had an impact.

Teams such as the Columbus Blue Jackets and Nashville Predators have lots of sell if they become sellers. But staying in the race has delayed some names from being available.

Which brings me back to the point one team executive made at the beginning of the story: "There isn't a lot of supply, and there is little demand for what is being made available."

That certainly can and probably will change by Friday. But as of Monday morning, that's a reflection of certain desirable players still not being really available yet.

The other layer I wonder about before Friday's deadline is teams trying to move their offseason to-do lists ahead to this week. This could apply to teams above or below the playoff line. The reason I ask that question is when looking at the unrestricted free-agent class for July 1, and holding my nose while doing it, I wonder how many teams that have money to spend this summer, when the salary cap will jump up again, are wondering whether the trade route is more realistic for getting an upgrade than free agency.

Alex Tuch and Nick Schmaltz are currently the most attractive names on the pending UFA list. And, listen, they're very good players, but they're not Mitch Mamer.

And I mean, even Marner didn't actually end up in free agency last year. He picked Vegas and ended up there in a trade instead.

Which is to say, if either Tuch or Schmaltz re-signs with his respective team before July 1 or is involved in a sign-and-trade with a new team in June, then July 1 is at risk of becoming the worst July 1 class of free agency in ages.

All the more reason for teams that will have cap room this summer to wonder if they should try to act this week in the type of move they would attempt in June.

That's why I'm so curious to see what will happen with Robert Thomas. The St. Louis Blues are talking to teams about the 26-year-old top-six center. He has a full no-move clause and largely controls his fate. Utah is among the teams that have gone down that path with St. Louis on Thomas to a serious enough degree, per league sources, which makes total sense. The Mammoth are no lock to make the playoffs, but that's the kind of move that would augment their playoff chances — and, bigger picture, address what they felt was an offseason need anyway. I like that kind of thinking. We'll see if it happens or not.

The Toronto Maple Leafs obviously should be focused on being a seller, but they can also use this week to start thinking about and addressing their offseason. As long as Auston Matthews is on the team, they're not nuking that roster in a total rebuild. They're going to want to find a way to add this summer and bounce back to the playoffs next year. Is there a trade this week that gets things jump-started?

So, an intriguing week ahead. I can't wait to see the final tally on trades Friday afternoon after the deadline.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.03.2026

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The Athletic / Which NHL top lines have been the best and worst of the 2025-26 season?

By Harman Dayal

Nearly every powerhouse NHL team boasts star forwards at the top of its lineup. This has been true for recent Stanley Cup winners like the Florida Panthers, Vegas Golden Knights, Colorado Avalanche and Tampa Bay Lightning.

Of course, there's way more to team-building than having a few elite forwards. This isn't the NBA, where one or two superstars are enough to form a contender; you need formidable depth throughout your lineup.

A dominant top line is one heck of a start, though.

With that in mind, let's analyze which first lines around the NHL are producing and which are underperforming this season.

We'll begin by identifying each team's No. 1 center as a proxy for the first line, then examine the results when that player is on the ice. There will be exceptions for teams whose top center has moved up and down the lineup rather than staying fixed on the first line, or has missed significant time due to injury. In those cases, we chose a winger to represent his team's top-line minutes (eg: Clayton Keller, David Pastrnak, Nikita Kucherov, Travis Konecny, etc).

Here are the proxies we used.

NHL first-line proxies

Anaheim

Leo Carlsson

Boston

David Pastrnak

Buffalo

Tage Thompson

Carolina

Sebastian Aho

Columbus

Kirill Marchenko

Calgary

Nazem Kadri

Chicago

Connor Bedard

Colorado

Nathan MacKinnon

Dallas

Mikko Rantanen

Detroit

Dylan Larkin

Edmonton

Connor McDavid

Florida

Anton Lundell

Los Angeles

Adrian Kempe



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Minnesota  
 Kirill Kaprizov  
 Montreal  
 Nick Suzuki  
 New Jersey  
 Jesper Bratt  
 Nashville  
 Ryan O'Reilly  
 New York  
 Bo Horvat  
 New York  
 Mika Zibanejad  
 Ottawa  
 Tim Stütze  
 Philadelphia  
 Travis Konecny  
 Pittsburgh  
 Sidney Crosby  
 Seattle  
 Matty Beniers  
 San Jose  
 Macklin Celebrini  
 St. Louis  
 Robert Thomas  
 Tampa Bay  
 Nikita Kucherov  
 Toronto  
 Auston Matthews  
 Utah  
 Clayton Keller  
 Vancouver  
 Elias Pettersson  
 Vegas  
 Jack Eichel  
 Winnipeg  
 Mark Scheifele  
 Washington  
 Dylan Strome

Goal differential can be skewed positively or negatively based on shooting and goaltending luck. Sometimes, a team's first line controls play well and generates tons of chances, but is snakebitten finishing-wise and/or doesn't get saves from its goaltender. We'll be sure to point out where that seems to have made an impact.

Here are the numbers so far this season, sorted by the best goal differential rate.

NHL first lines' 5v5 goal differential

1  
 Colorado  
 4.82  
 1.61  
 3.21  
 2  
 Tampa Bay  
 4.54  
 2.61  
 1.93  
 3  
 Montreal  
 3.34  
 1.88  
 1.46  
 4  
 Utah  
 3.57  
 2.17  
 1.40  
 5  
 Vegas  
 3.88  
 2.77  
 1.11  
 6  
 San Jose  
 3.6  
 2.72  
 0.88  
 7  
 Washington  
 3.58  
 2.7  
 0.88  
 8

To measure performance, we'll look at the goals for and against differential when that first line is deployed at five-on-five. As an example, it means we're looking at how many goals Edmonton scores and how many it allows with Connor McDavid on the ice at even strength. We're using that as our measure instead of points because points can't account for defense.



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Dallas	2.34
3.07	0.48
2.24	17
0.83	Ottawa
9	3.51
Columbus	3.06
2.9	0.45
2.12	18
0.78	Los Angeles
10	2.4
Carolina	2.03
3.27	0.37
2.51	19
0.76	Seattle
11	2.35
Philadelphia	2
3.31	0.35
2.58	20
0.73	Toronto
12	3.04
Nashville	2.75
3.1	0.29
2.38	21
0.72	Pittsburgh
13	2.91
New York	2.63
2.96	0.28
2.27	22
0.69	Edmonton
14	3.39
Boston	3.16
3.26	0.23
2.68	23
0.58	Detroit
15	2.43
Winnipeg	2.35
3.81	0.08
3.24	24
0.57	Buffalo
16	3.05
Minnesota	3.05
2.82	0.00



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25

St. Louis

2.61

2.61

0.00

26

Chicago

3.19

3.35

-0.16

27

Anaheim

2.97

3.16

-0.19

28

Florida

2.49

2.74

-0.25

29

New York

2.12

2.55

-0.43

30

Calgary

2.17

2.87

-0.70

31

Vancouver

2.04

3.19

-1.15

32

New Jersey

1.88

3.19

-1.31

Colorado Avalanche

Colorado's top line is not only the best in the NHL this year, it's lapping the competition. Nathan MacKinnon's line has outscored opponents by a laughable 75-25 margin at five-on-five, making it on pace for an eye-popping plus-72 goal differential by the end of this season. The gap between the goal differential of the Avs' top line and the next-best first line is equivalent to the gap between second and 14th place.

It only took MacKinnon 55 games to score more five-on-five points than he did during all of last season. His 57 five-on-five points are eight more than the next-highest player in the league, Nikita Kucherov.

Martin Necas, who's on pace for a career-high 99 points, deserves a ton of credit for being a seamless fit on the top line. Necas is an elite puck transporter with game-breaking speed, and when you combine it with MacKinnon's exceptional skating, it makes this the fastest, most dynamic top line in the league. The only question is whether Necas can translate his elite production to the playoffs, where he has historically lagged (35 points in 66 career postseason games). Arturri Lehkonen's two-way intelligence, puck retrieval skills and off-puck work are a nice complement to them.

MacKinnon's line is benefiting from strong goaltending (.943 on-ice save percentage), which explains why they're surrendering a league-best 1.61 goals against per 60, despite their expected goals against rate appearing more middle-of-the-pack.

### Tampa Bay Lightning

I don't think anyone is surprised that a team with first-line options like Kucherov, Brayden Point, Jake Guentzel and Brandon Hagel is getting elite results at the top of its lineup. However, it's impressive and surprising that the Lightning have boasted the best top line in the Eastern Conference despite Point's underwhelming, injury-plagued campaign.

Point got off to an uncharacteristically slow start (three goals and eight assists in his first 21 games) and suffered an injury in late November. He returned in the second week of December and was finally scoring at his usual clip, but got hurt again right before the Olympic break. Overall, he's missed 18 games.

Kucherov and co. have found a way to keep rolling, though. Kucherov is the best east-west playmaker in the sport. Since Dec. 1, he leads the NHL in five-on-five points.

Interestingly, Kucherov's results haven't seen any drop-off away from Point: He's driven 61 percent of expected goals and has a plus-14 goal differential in 429 five-on-five minutes without his usual center. This does shine a light on how well Hagel, who barely played on the first line last year, performed when he had to elevate to the top line on Kucherov's opposite wing (he's back on the second line now).

### Montreal Canadiens

Nick Suzuki and Cole Caufield have been one of the most entertaining first-line duos in the NHL. They've been dynamic and threatening offensively, but their strong defensive results — a 1.88 goals against per 60 rate and a top-10 expected goals against rate — have taken them to the next level this season. Suzuki is having a Selke-caliber campaign, and Caufield, on pace for 46 goals, is one of the best snipers in the sport.

The other big story with the Canadiens' top line is that they've bumped Juraj Slafkovský down to drive the second line alongside Ivan Demidov and Oliver Kapanen. This has been a game-changer — Slafkovský looks like a completely different player now that he has more opportunities to carry the puck and make plays, rather than in his previous role with Suzuki and Caufield, where he had fewer puck touches and functioned more as a puck retriever.

This new-look second line has been dynamite, and was particularly important in picking up the slack in December when the Suzuki line momentarily cooled off.



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### Utah Mammoth

When the Mammoth are healthy, they have two relatively balanced top-six lines in a 1A/1B look — one led by Clayton Keller and Nick Schmaltz, and the other driven by Logan Cooley and Dylan Guenther. However, when Cooley hurt his leg in early December, it made Keller's unit the undisputed top line. There was extra pressure on them to deliver because the Mammoth were 10th in the West by points percentage at the time Cooley was injured, and they were struggling to get bottom-six offense.

Keller's line has answered the call. They outscored teams by a dominant 29-11 margin at five-on-five when Cooley was out, while also controlling an imposing 57 percent of scoring chances. That, coupled with Karel Vejmelka's heater in goal, helped Utah charge back into a playoff spot during Cooley's absence.

It will be really interesting to see what this success means for Nick Schmaltz's future with the club. Schmaltz, on pace for a career-high 76 points, has been immensely valuable to this line's gaudy results, but he's a pending unrestricted free agent and his price is surely going up by the day.

### Vegas Golden Knights

This is the third year in a row that Vegas' top line has ranked top-5 in the NHL. Jack Eichel has long been the engine for this line with his silky-smooth puck control, sublime passing and elite defensive game.

The only surprise is that Mitch Marner has mostly played on Vegas' second line when many expected he'd instead be a full-time lock next to Eichel, the way he used to be with Auston Matthews. Marner and Eichel were given an early look together, but while they performed decently, they didn't quite catch fire (perhaps because both of them are pass-first players). Instead, we've seen Mark Stone and even youngster Braeden Bowman, when Stone was injured, play on Eichel's right wing.

Ivan Barbashev is the unsung hero of this line as a staple on the left wing. Barbashev's heavy frame, ability to win puck battles and highly underrated playmaking down low make him the perfect complementary winger for Eichel. He's scored the fourth-most five-on-five points of any winger in the NHL, and is on pace for 57 points despite not receiving any first-unit power-play time.

### San Jose Sharks

What more can you even say about Macklin Celebrini?

The 19-year-old is a legitimate Hart Trophy contender, not just because he's on pace for 117 points but because of how little help he's had around him. Connor McDavid has Evan Bouchard and Leon Draisaitl (on the power play and at times at even strength), MacKinnon has Cale Makar and Necas, but Celebrini has to work around arguably the weakest blue line in the NHL, and while Will Smith is improving rapidly (41 points in 45 games), he isn't an elite running mate yet, as evidenced by the staggering 42-point gap between Celebrini and Smith, who's the second-highest-scoring Shark.

### Washington Capitals

Arguably no team's top line gets more favorable deployment than Washington's, as Dylan Strome and Alex Ovechkin lead all NHL players in offensive-zone starts. For this to work, the Caps lean on the Tom Wilson-led second line to absorb the toughest defensive matchups and also ask defensive specialist Nic Dowd to soak up tons of defensive-zone starts.

To their credit, Strome/Ovechkin's line is making the most of this catered opportunity, as they're one of only eight top lines scoring at least 3.5 goals per 60, and offensively their expected goal generation rate ranks sixth-best in the league.

There are defensive flaws with this line, as their 3.12 expected goals against per 60 rate ranks 31st in the NHL. But overall, they're creating more offensively than they're giving up, which makes it an acceptable trade-off. You might be surprised that Washington's first line ranks so high in goal differential when the team is outside a playoff spot. That's largely because both special teams units have sunk them — the Capitals' five-on-five goal share is third-best in the league, behind only Colorado and Tampa Bay.

### Dallas Stars

The Stars basically have two top lines: one predominantly driven by Mikko Rantanen and Wyatt Johnston, and the other led by Roope Hintz and Jason Robertson. The Hintz/Robertson combo has been electric (57.7 percent of expected goals and outscored opponents 30-14), but the Johnston/Rantanen pair is more commonly referred to as the team's "first line."

Rantanen and Johnston haven't carried territorial play as assertively, but it hasn't really cost them because of their elite finishing. Rantanen, in particular, has been ruthlessly efficient at converting chances into goals — he doesn't need many looks to break a game open.

### Columbus Blue Jackets

Last year, the Blue Jackets' top-line trio of Kirill Marchenko, Sean Monahan and Dmitri Voronkov was unstoppable. They not only controlled a dominant 71 percent share of goals during their shifts together, their underlying process was equally imposing as they drove nearly 62 percent of high-danger chances.

However, Monahan's slow start — he scored only six points in his first 13 games, despite being over a point per game last season — led to Adam Fantilli getting bumped up to center the first line with Marchenko.

The Blue Jackets' top line has driven above-average two-way numbers and is generating scoring chances at a prolific rate (eighth-best expected goals per 60). Tactically, I find it interesting that the first line has spent significantly less time self-matched with the Zach Werenski pair than last year — Marchenko is on pace to play roughly 100 fewer five-on-five minutes alongside Werenski than last year. It shows that Columbus is trying to spread Werenski's Norris-caliber effect throughout the lineup rather than solely maximizing his time with the top line.

### Carolina Hurricanes

Sebastian Aho's line is performing just as you'd expect. They have a decisive advantage over opponents in puck possession and offensive zone time, as evidenced by their sparkling analytics, and their bottom-line results in goal differential are strong but not quite elite.

The big story for Carolina's first line this year is Andrei Svechnikov's resurgence. Svechnikov, who failed to crack the 50-point mark last year, looks the healthiest he's been since his ACL surgery in 2023 and is on pace for a career-high 71 points. Meanwhile Seth Jarvis, who plays on the right wing, continues to thrive as a star two-way forward.

### Philadelphia Flyers

The Flyers are fortunate to rank this high — their expected goal differential ranks bottom-five among top lines in the NHL, which means they struggle to control play and will likely see their results regress down the stretch.

With that said, Philly's first line still deserves some credit for producing at a respectable rate, considering the team's glaring weakness at first-line center. Travis Konecny has bounced back after a slow start (only five goals and 17 points in his first 23 games) and is now on pace for a career high in five-on-five points.

Trevor Zegras mostly played on the second line to begin the year, but lately, he's played more frequently on Konecny's opposite wing. The top line's underlying numbers are significantly better with Zegras on it



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(Konecny's xG rate is 52.8 percent with Zegras, compared to 40.9 percent away from Zegras) even though the actual goal swing hasn't been as dramatic.

### Nashville Predators

Luke Evangelista's monster breakout has been a game-changer for the Predators' top line.

The results speak for themselves: When he and Ryan O'Reilly have played together, Nashville's top line is clicking at an elite level, both in terms of dominating possession and scoring chances, and also massively outscoring opponents. On the other hand, O'Reilly's results driving the top line without Evangelista fall off a cliff, with that version of the top line decisively losing its matchups.

### Evangelista's stellar impact on top line

#### O'Reilly with Evangelista

59.5%

62.1%

65.3%

#### O'Reilly without Evangelista

48.1%

44.7%

40.7%

### New York Islanders

The Islanders' first line may not boast a true superstar, but Bo Horvat's risen to the occasion as a capable 1C — he's on pace to hit a career high in five-on-five goals. Impressively, he's done this without having high-end linemates for most of the season. Early in Horvat's Islanders tenure, the club would shift Mathew Barzal to the wing in an attempt to load up the first line. But with Brock Nelson gone as the 2C, Barzal has mostly been asked to drive his own line this season (even though they've been reunited lately), and this balanced top-six approach has yielded strong results.

The top line's results do come with an asterisk, though — their goal differential is boosted by Ilya Sorokin's superb play, which has papered over some of the line's mediocre play-driving numbers. New York's top line is surrendering chances against at a very high rate (seventh-worst in the NHL), but its actual goals against rate ranks in the top 10.

### Boston Bruins

David Pastrnak's superstar impact has carried Boston's first line to the league's 14th-best goal differential despite the club's lack of a true top-flight center. It's been remarkable to watch Pastrnak, who initially made his name as an elite sniper, evolve his game into becoming the kind of game-breaking playmaker that can elevate his linemates and singlehandedly drive a line now that he has less help than the Perfection Line days when he was rolling with Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand.

Since the start of last season, Pastrnak has recorded the third-most five-on-five assists in the league, ahead of elite playmakers such as McDavid and Marnier. The way he can hold onto pucks, attract the opposition's attention and set others up is breathtaking. It's a huge reason why Morgan Geekie has become a top-flight scorer on this line.

Pavel Zacha was Pastrnak's most frequent center last season, but this year, we've seen much more of Elias Lindholm.

### Winnipeg Jets

Winnipeg's top forwards are still firing on all cylinders — it's unfortunately the club's nonexistent secondary scoring that's putting them at risk of missing the playoffs. Mark Scheifele has scored the third-most five-on-five points in the league. His line has produced 3.81 goals for per 60, which is the fourth-best rate among NHL first lines.

The top line's overall goal differential is weighed down a bit by some defensive struggles — they're bleeding chances and goals against at a very high rate — but you can't blame Scheifele and Kyle Connor for that because they're forced to take more risks than usual, knowing they're the only reliable source of offense on the team.

### Minnesota Wild

I was a bit surprised that Minnesota's top line has been average rather than truly high-end, but it makes sense when you dig deeper.

Kirill Kaprizov's running mate, Mats Zuccarello, missed 20 games because of injury. With Zuccarello out for a large chunk and Minnesota icing weak 1C options such as Ryan Hartman or promising rookie Danila Yurov — remember, Joel Eriksson Ek anchors the second line despite being the club's best center — it makes sense that the top line has been closer to the middle of the pack rather than the top tier.

Kaprizov has played well at even strength, but his power-play dominance (he's already scored 13 power-play goals compared to four during all of last year) is what's truly catapulted his overall point totals.

### Ottawa Senators

Tim Stützle's taken another mini-step offensively, as he's on pace for nearly 90 points. That's driven the Senators' top line to a 3.51 goals per 60 rate, which ranks seventh-best among all first lines. The top line's overall goal differential is being dragged down because they're surrendering goals against at the seventh-worst rate, but some of that is likely just a result of Ottawa's poor goaltending this season.

Line construction-wise, it's interesting to note that Stützle hasn't spent nearly as much time with Claude Giroux or Brady Tkachuk (Tkachuk also missed 20 games with injury) as he did last year, with Drake Batherson instead emerging as his most common winger in 2025-26.

### Los Angeles Kings

L.A.'s top line desperately needed Artemi Panarin's game-breaking skill. Yes, the goal differential for the Kings' first line looks fine on paper, but it's largely because they're surrendering goals against at the fourth-lowest rate of all top lines. And those defensive results have at least partially been inflated by strong goaltending, as they rank closer to the middle of the pack in expected goals against rate.

Offensively, L.A.'s first line has been one of the lowest-scoring in the league. Panarin should be a game-changer on this front, even though the early five-on-five returns haven't been anything to write home about.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Amid Kings' and Artemi Panarin's excitement, focus turns to perfecting the fit

The Kings needed a star who can put pucks in the net. Now they have one, but there may be a mutual adjustment period.

### Seattle Kraken

It's no secret the Kraken lack game-breaking, star forward talent, which limits the offensive ceiling for their first line. All things considered, though, Seattle's top line has held its own considering those offensive limitations. Matty Beniers' responsible two-way style fits the Kraken's overall identity as a plucky, low-event squad that makes it very difficult for opponents to manufacture offense. Beniers' line has surrendered just 2.00 goals per 60, helping drive a positive goal differential despite struggling to score.

### Toronto Maple Leafs



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In the last three years we've done this exercise, Toronto's top line was consistently elite, ranking 11th, 8th, and 1st. There's been a steep drop-off this season, though, which reflects a few factors.

The obvious change is Marnier's departure. With Marnier gone, Max Domi has spent a lot more time on Auston Matthews' wing. Going from Marnier to Domi is about as extreme a fall-off as you can expect defensively, so it's no surprise the top line's ability to control play and prevent chances against has fallen off a cliff.

Matthews hasn't looked like himself for most of the season as well. He's looked better since the holiday break (12 goals and 28 points in his last 23 games), but he's producing less than a point per game for the season as a whole, which hasn't happened since his rookie year.

On the left wing, Matthew Knies has played through injury and hasn't been as impactful as a play-driver, which has meant more time playing further down the lineup rather than being a full-time fixture on the Matthews line like last year.

### Pittsburgh Penguins

It's remarkable that Sidney Crosby is still producing at over a point per game at 38. When you look below the hood, though, you do notice Crosby's five-on-five play is closer to being great than as elite like we've come to expect. Crosby's line is scoring 2.91 goals per 60, which is respectable but a noticeable drop-off from the 3.44 goals per 60 it recorded in 2024-25 and the 3.71 goals per 60 in 2023-24.

It hasn't helped, of course, that Rickard Rakell missed a decent chunk of the year with an injury.

Make no mistake, Pittsburgh's aging stars are obviously the main drivers of the team's unexpectedly competitive season. It's just that they've been dominating more on the power play rather than even strength.

### Edmonton Oilers

Connor McDavid's line hasn't been throttling teams on the scoreboard as decisively as we'd expect — he's only earned 51.8 percent of goals, his lowest mark since the pandemic. There are a few factors to explain this, starting with some bad luck with finishing. Edmonton's top line is generating 3.75 expected goals per 60, which leads the NHL, but its actual scoring rate is much lower at 3.39 per 60. We should expect their finishing efficiency to improve.

Zach Hyman's injury also played a significant role. Together, McDavid and Hyman have a plus-12 goal differential and outrageously strong underlying numbers. However, McDavid has also played 451 minutes without Hyman, and in that sample he has a minus-four goal differential and a more pedestrian 52 percent expected goal share.

Lastly, there's plenty of room for this line to improve defensively, as they're allowing scoring chances and goals at high rates.

### Detroit Red Wings

Detroit's top line hasn't been as productive as you might think based on the team's surge up the standings. They've been excellent together on the team's ninth-ranked power-play, but at five-on-five, Dylan Larkin's line has been sluggish over the last three months.

Since Dec. 4, Larkin's line has a minus-8 goal differential and has driven only 44.3 percent of expected goals. He only has four five-on-five points in that 33-game stretch. Thankfully, the team's second line with Alex DeBrincat, Andrew Copp and Patrick Kane is crushing its competition, which, in conjunction with the club's stingy defensive results, has helped Detroit keep winning games.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

As Red Wings return for home stretch, what will decide their playoff fate?

The Red Wings will need to figure out their five-on-five offense, keep up their strong goaltending and have a few other things go right.

### Buffalo Sabres

I was surprised that Buffalo's first line didn't rank higher, considering Tage Thompson is tied for the most five-on-five goals this season. Unfortunately, they've given a decent chunk of that value back with their leaky defensive play — they've surrendered 3.05 goals against per 60, the eighth-worst mark among first lines.

It's extremely important to note, though, that Thompson's line has been red-hot since early December, which coincides with the Sabres' season turning around. Since Dec. 9, Thompson's line has earned nearly 56 percent of actual goals, including a significant reduction in how frequently they're surrendering goals against defensively.

### St. Louis Blues

It's been a difficult year for the Blues all around, and the top of their forward lineup is no different. St. Louis' first line has struggled to generate offense, as its expected and actual goals-for per 60 rate rank 25th and 24th, respectively, among the league's first lines.

Thomas scored 61 even-strength points last year, but in 2025-26, he's down to just 24 in 43 games. A big part of this line's mediocrity can be attributed to Pavel Buchnevich's decline. Buchnevich was a near-point-per-game winger with an elite two-way play-driving profile a few years ago, but he's a fraction of that player now.

### Chicago Blackhawks

Connor Bedard has taken a massive step; he's only two points back of matching last year's five-on-five point production in only 47 games. His line is scoring 3.19 goals per 60, which is a huge bump compared to 2.28 goals per 60 last season. And impressively, he's doing it with linemates that wouldn't be first-line wingers on most teams, as cap dump André Burakovsky and youngster Ryan Greene have most frequently ridden shotgun with him.

Chicago's top line is struggling defensively, ranking 32nd in both expected and actual goals-against rate. However, the defensive results for Bedard's line will surely improve in future years once he's surrounded by a capable blue line and upgraded linemates, not to mention his individual age-related growth.

### Anaheim Ducks

Leo Carlsson is in the middle of a monster offensive breakout, but his five-on-five results have been quite streaky and volatile. During the first seven weeks of the season, his line was on fire. They were driving nearly 55 percent of scoring chances, outscoring opponents 21-14, and individually he was racking up 2.52 points per 60. Carlsson was a game-breaker off the rush and excelled under Joel Quenneville's new run-and-gun playing style.

Opposing teams have adjusted, however. Since Dec. 1, Carlsson's line has scored only 10 goals while allowing 19; his expected goals-against rate is the worst among Ducks forwards, and his five-on-five point production rate has been cut in half, down to 1.23 points per 60.

This is obviously still a wildly encouraging year for Carlsson overall. We shouldn't be surprised that a 21-year-old playing as a No. 1 center has been a bit inconsistent and streaky. What version of Carlsson's line (which has often featured Chris Kreider this season) the Ducks get down the stretch could swing whether or not the team clinches a playoff spot.

### Florida Panthers

Florida's top line ranked fifth and first for goal differential when we did this exercise over the last two years. This year, they've suffered a catastrophic drop-off, which says all you need to know about how indispensable Aleksander Barkov is.



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Barkov's line over the last two years was by far the best in the league at denying goals against. Anton Lundell is a good player, but with him stepping into the 1C role after Barkov's injury, the top line's defensive performance has slipped significantly. Offensively, they've only mustered 2.49 goals per 60, which ranks 25th as well.

### New York Rangers

The Rangers haven't really had a consistent top line this season. J.T. Miller and Vincent Trocheck have had injury spells, and Artemi Panarin is now on the west coast. Mika Zibanejad and Panarin were probably the team's most consistent first-line duo this year, but in any case, there hasn't been a whole lot to write home about for New York's top forwards.

New York's top line has produced a measly 2.12 goals per 60, which is the third-worst mark among NHL first lines. This is a slow, aging top six that lacks dynamic, game-breaking talent.

### Calgary Flames

The Flames are a spirited, hard-working team, but their lack of star forwards has been evident all year. Calgary's first line is scoring goals at the fourth-lowest rate in the league.

Nazem Kadri is still a great player, but at 35 he simply can't be counted on to singlehandedly carry a first line. He's had a lackluster crop of wingers as well, with Joel Farabee, Yegor Sharangovich, Jonathan Huberdeau and Connor Zary all logging at least 150 five-on-five minutes on his line.

### Vancouver Canucks

Elias Pettersson's two-way play has been sturdier than his line's alarming goals-against rate (which is likely worsened by Vancouver's post-Quinn Hughes blue line and Adam Foote's system) suggests. Defensively, he's deserved better results.

Offensively, though, there's no denying he's no longer the game-breaker that once scored 102 points. Yes, Pettersson's been hindered by a disappointing group of wingers (Evander Kane, Jake DeBrusk, Brock Boeser) on his line, which has almost certainly deflated his point production. However, it's also clear his skating lacks the separation it used to have, and his individual shot rate remains a major red flag.

Overall, it isn't surprising the Canucks' first line is one of the worst in the NHL because it consists of mediocre middle-six wingers and a center that's still good, but a low-end 1C/elite 2C rather than a premium No. 1 center.

### New Jersey Devils

With the elite forward talent they boast, I don't think anybody would have guessed that the Devils' first line would be struggling this mightily.

Jack Hughes' injury had a devastating impact as he was out of commission for 21 games. Nico Hischier had to fill in as the 1C at times and has had a down year. He also hasn't been fully healthy — he played through an illness that caused him to lose 10 pounds — which is a contributing factor. Jesper Bratt, who was coming off an 88-point campaign, has had a disappointing year and hasn't been able to step up, either.

There's also an element of brutal finishing luck involved: New Jersey's top line has the third-best expected goal differential among all first lines, but they've scored on just 5.8 percent of their shots and have a PDO of just 93.5. So yes, the Devils' top players unquestionably need to play better (and hopefully stay healthier), but they're also the unluckiest top line in the league.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.03.2026

The Athletic / Inside a wild week for the U.S. men's hockey team: From gold to the White House to 'SNL'

By Mark Lazerus

As Megan Keller took a Taylor Heise stretch pass at the blue line in overtime of the women's gold medal game, much of the American men's hockey team crowded around a screen to watch. When Keller turned Canadian defender Claire Thompson inside out and slipped the puck between the pads of goaltender Ann-Renée Desbiens, the men erupted in celebration.

"We're all standing up, going nuts, clapping," Brady Tkachuk said.

With their own semifinal against Slovakia looming the next day, most of the men didn't attend the game, but they were there in spirit. The respect between the two teams had grown into a real bond over the course of the Olympics.

"They came to a lot of our games, and we went to a lot of theirs," forward Grace Zumwinkle said after the tournament. "And I think there was that mutual level of respect. And it was evident with Ellen Hughes also being on our staff as well, and her two sons (Quinn and Jack) being on the (men's) team. So, yes, we did feel the respect, and then just having been in the Village with them, as well, was a good experience."

Three days later, the American men made it double gold for USA Hockey, with Jack Hughes' golden goal giving the U.S. its first Olympic championship in men's hockey since the Miracle on Ice in 1980, 46 years earlier to the day. But instead of a prolonged celebration of two historic teams, the afterglow of the men's gold quickly devolved into a political firestorm, one that stretched from Milan to the U.S. Capitol to the "Saturday Night Live" and "Tonight Show" studios in New York. The discourse over a locker-room interloper, a "distasteful" joke and a once-perfunctory trip to the White House created headlines all over the world, forced players to answer uncomfortable questions about their politics, and dampened enthusiasm for what had been a watershed moment in American hockey history.

The unifying joy and celebration of the accomplishment lasted all of an hour or so. The scrutiny of what was done and said and laughed at in the locker room is still ongoing.

Here's how it all went down:

Sunday, Feb. 22

An instant after Zach Werenski and goaltender Connor Hellebuyck break up a Connor McDavid rush, Jack Hughes — who started the tournament as a fourth-liner and an afterthought in the midst of another injury-plagued season — wins a puck battle with McDavid behind the net. Hughes then wins another 50/50 puck with Cale Makar at the blue line, before sending the puck into the offensive zone, where Werenski outmuscles Nathan MacKinnon for the puck, then sends a cross-ice pass to Hughes, who buries a shot past Jordan Binnington at 4:52 p.m. Milan time for the golden goal.

The celebration is on. First along the boards between the penalty boxes, where the dogpile began. Then all over the ice. Brady Tkachuk embraces captain Auston Matthews, then Matthew Tkachuk wraps up his kid brother in a bear hug. Brady Tkachuk has an American flag draped around his shoulder as "U-S-A" chants fill Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena. Matthew Tkachuk holds a flag aloft and the Americans take turns skating it around the rink as if it were the Stanley Cup.

Eventually, Matthew Tkachuk and Werenski skate a Johnny Gaudreau jersey around, alongside a flag-draped Matthews. Two of Gaudreau's children sit in on the on-ice team photo, with Werenski holding 3-year-old Noa and Dylan Larkin holding 2-year-old Johnny Jr.



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After the medal ceremony, the national anthem and a jubilant walk through the mixed zone, Team USA enters its locker room to celebrate. American general manager Bill Guerin invites his friend, FBI director Kash Patel, into the locker room. Patel is a well-known hockey fan; he sat with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and hockey legend Wayne Gretzky as Alex Ovechkin tied Gretzky's all-time goal mark last spring in Washington. Patel is later criticized for using a government jet to fly to Milan for the Olympics, though a spokesman said he had "highly productive meetings in Italy focused on strengthening joint counterterrorism coordination, transnational crime enforcement, the extradition of high value targets and Olympic security planning with our closest allies."

Patel quickly finds himself at the center of the Americans' locker-room celebration, as seen in Dylan Larkin's live Instagram video. He hugs a beer and pumps his fists as the players cheer him on. Matthew Tkachuk, in what will become a signature move for him over the week, drapes his gold medal around Patel's neck. Patel and the players then begin singing Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)." The footage of the celebration appears to be coming from Tage Thompson's phone.

Through Patel, U.S. president Donald Trump calls into the celebration. Patel's phone simply reads "DT" on the screen as he puts the president on speaker.

Trump: "Your goalie played not bad."

Matthew Tkachuk: "Helly! Say hi to him!"

Hellebuyck: "How ya doin', Don?"

Trump tells the team that the State of the Union address will be on Tuesday night, in two days.

"I can send a military plane or something," Trump says. "If you would like to, it's the coolest night."

Matthew Tkachuk immediately says, "We're in!" which is met by universal agreement.

Matthew Tkachuk: "Can you pick us up in Miami on Tuesday morning?"

Trump: "We'll get Kash and we'll get the military to get you guys over here."

Matthew Tkachuk: "Thank you, Mr. President."

Trump: "And we'll do the White House the next day. We'll just have some fun. We have some medals for you guys. And I must tell you, we're gonna have to bring the women's team, you do know that."

At this point, Tkachuk says, "Absolutely," while another player yells, "Two for two! Two for two!"

Trump responds by saying, "I do believe I probably would be impeached, OK?" to which many of the players laugh.

Trump says he'd "be honored to have you," and Patel chimes in excitedly, "I got it, Boss. I got it. I'm on it. I'm f—ing on it!"

Trump congratulates the team again, saying he didn't know anybody who wasn't watching the game.

"And you're going to be proud of that game for 50 years as you grow older," he says. "It was amazing. We love you guys. And I hope to see you. Kash? Tuesday night. I'm gonna shake hands with everybody, but I gotta shake hands with that goalie."

Matthew Tkachuk: "We'll see you Tuesday night, Mr. President."

Trump: "We'll see you Tuesday night."

Patel: "I'm driving the bus, Boss. We're bringing them home."

Later that night, after packing up but before heading home, the U.S. men's and women's teams hang out and celebrate in the dining hall back at the athletes' village following the women's team's return from the closing ceremony, where Hilary Knight was the American flag-bearer.

"We were in the cafeteria at 3:30 in the morning with them," Jack Hughes said. "We go from there, pack our bags, and we're on the bus."

But while they're celebrating together, the tenor of the discussion outside that dining hall has taken a dramatic turn. For one, Patel's involvement in the middle of the celebration has injected politics into the celebration, and becomes the latest flashpoint in America's fractured political discourse. For another, Trump's joke about having to invite the women's team is seen by many as dismissive and demeaning, meant to diminish their historic accomplishment in comparison to that of the men.

In the aftermath, the men's players repeatedly point out how close they are to the women's team, and how much the two squads supported each other. But the way the men's team laughed at Trump's joke rankles fans across the country.

"We love the women's team," Matthews says a few days later. "We support them. I mean, the night we won the gold medal, we were hanging out in the dining hall until like three, four in the morning. ... We have nothing but love and respect for the women's team and what they were able to accomplish. And it's amazing that the men's and women's ice hockey teams are both bringing home gold medals for the United States of America. And I think that should be talked about more than (Trump's joke). But we're extremely proud of them and happy for them and we support them 100 percent."

Monday, Feb. 23

The team flies to Miami in the morning. It was originally supposed to be a flight through New York, but a blizzard forced a change of plans.

USA Hockey releases a statement that the women's team will not attend the State of the Union. "Due to the timing and previously scheduled academic and professional commitments following the Games, the athletes are unable to participate. They were honored to be included and are grateful for the acknowledgement."

About a dozen of the women's players are later spotted on a commercial Delta flight from Atlanta to Minneapolis.

During the day, the White House shares an AI-doctored video on TikTok that has Brady Tkachuk calling the Canadians "maple syrup-eating f—s." Tkachuk, of course, never said this.

"It's not my voice," he says three days later. "It's not what I was saying. I would never say that. That's not who I am. ... I don't like that video because that's just never come out of my mouth."

The men's team arrives at self-described "ultraclub" E11EVEN in Miami around 11 p.m. It's the same club that hosted the Florida Panthers after winning the Stanley Cup, the Indiana University football team after winning the national championship, and F1 champions Lando Norris and Max Verstappen.

According to the club, there are more than 2,000 people waiting in line, hoping to get in. The team blows through more than \$150,000 worth of champagne, pouring it into fans' mouths and spraying the crowd. Matthew Tkachuk leads the team and the club in singing "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue," "The Star-Spangled Banner," Queen's "We Are The Champions," Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the USA," and Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA." Tkachuk addresses the crowd and calls Hellebuyck "the savior and secretary of defense." Brady Tkachuk hoists Jack Hughes on his shoulders as Hughes waves an American flag. J.T. Miller crowd-surfs.

Before the party, Jack Hughes is asked about the growing controversy behind the Americans' partying with Patel and laughing at Trump's joke



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about having to invite the women's team. Hughes' mother, Ellen, works with the women's team.

"Yeah, we're excited," Hughes says. "Everything is so political. We're athletes. We're so proud to represent the U.S. When you get the chance to go to White House and meet the president, we're proud to be Americans, and that's so patriotic. No matter what your views are, we're super excited to go to the White House tomorrow and be a part of that."

Tuesday, Feb. 24

Jack and Quinn Hughes start the day with an interview on ABC's "Good Morning America." Jack's voice is largely shot. As he talks about celebrating with the women's team, his audio is dropped out so the hosts — Michael Strahan, Robin Roberts and George Stephanopoulos — can joke about them being hungover.

The team arrives at the White House in matching USA sweaters, white pants and, of course, gold medals. Five players — Kyle Connor, Jake Guentzel, Jackson LaCombe, Brock Nelson and Jake Oettinger — do not attend, citing commitment to their families and NHL teams. None mention any political reasons for their absence.

Guentzel tells reporters in Tampa it was about "timing," saying he was "definitely not denying the request" and noting that he visited Trump at the White House with the Tampa Bay Lightning in 2017. Nelson tells the Denver Post, "I would love to check out the White House," but cites his family's travel home and a looming schedule of five games in seven days with the Avalanche. LaCombe notes it was a "tight window" to be back in Anaheim for a Wednesday night home game and said it was "the only reason" he skipped the White House visit. Connor also cites a Wednesday night game to prepare for, and Oettinger points to both the Stars' busy schedule and the fact that he has a 3-month-old baby at home for his decision, calling the invite "a tremendous honor."

The rest of the team meets Trump in the Oval Office. Matthews, then Larkin, then Matthew Tkachuk are first to shake his hand at the Resolute Desk. Matthew Tkachuk says, "Good to see you again." Trump responds, "You've come a long way since I last saw you." Trump turns to the rest of the team. "I saw him when he was peanuts. Now he's a big star."

Matthew Tkachuk gives Trump his gold medal to wear. For lunch at the White House, it appears the team is eating McDonald's hamburgers.

Press secretary Karoline Leavitt later posts a photo on her Instagram story with the Hughes brothers (in "USA" hats), Tage Thompson (in Trump's signature red "Make America Great Again" hat), Hellebuyck and Jeremy Swayman. Later, a video shows Thompson still wearing the MAGA hat as the team tours the U.S. Capitol.

"I'm proud to be an American, and I have my own faith, my own beliefs, and everyone's entitled to their own opinions and beliefs as well," Thompson says the next night after his Buffalo Sabres beat Jack Hughes' New Jersey Devils. "I think we should be able to live in peace knowing that not everyone's going to agree with you."

At 6:10 p.m. ET, the Tkachuk brothers and Hellebuyck do a nine-minute in-studio interview with Fox News' Bret Baier.

"It's absolutely insane, but we deserve it," Matthew Tkachuk says of being feted by the president.

Baier reads a chunk of Pierre LeBrun's postgame column in *The Athletic* on the first American gold medal in 46 years. Neither Baier nor the players mention the women's team.

At the State of the Union, Trump spends roughly six minutes of his nearly two-hour, record-length address talking about the team.

"Our country is winning again," Trump says. "In fact, we're winning so much that we really don't know what to do about it. People are asking me — please, please, please Mr. President, we're winning too much. We can't take it anymore. We're not used to winning in our country. Until you

came along, we're just always losing, but now, we're winning too much. And I say, no no no. You're going to win again. You're going to win big. You're gonna win bigger than ever, and to prove that point — to prove that point — here with us tonight is a group of winners who just made the entire nation proud: the men's gold medal Olympic hockey team."

At this point, 17 of the men's players step out onto the balcony to cheers.

Trump says Hellebuyck will get the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and says the women's team "will soon be coming to the White House."

At 11:51 p.m., Matthew Tkachuk sits down with Sean Hannity during his post-SOTU coverage. He puts his gold medal around Hannity's neck for the interview. Hannity tells Tkachuk he's a Panthers season ticket holder. The interview runs about four and a half minutes.

Wednesday, Feb. 25

Knight, during an interview on ESPN's SportsCenter, says Trump made "a distasteful joke" during his locker-room call.

"And unfortunately, that is overshadowing a lot of the success, the success of just women at the Olympics, carrying for Team USA and having amazing gold-medal feats," she says.

Knight reinforces the level of support and respect the men's and women's teams have had for each other.

"I think that's being overshadowed by a quick lapse," she says. "I think the guys were in a tough spot, so I think it's a shame this storyline and narrative has kind of blown up and (is) overshadowing that connection and genuine interest in one another, and cheering each other on."

Later, at a Seattle Torrent news conference, Knight expands on her thoughts: "I just thought the joke was distasteful and unfortunate. I think the way women are represented, it's a great teaching point to really shine light on how women should be championed for their amazing feats. And now I have to sit in front of you and explain someone else's behavior. It's not my responsibility."

## WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

U.S. women's hockey players eager to put focus on Olympic win, not 'distasteful' Trump joke

"I can't wait 'til this blows over in a week and we can go back to each team being proud of what we accomplished," Taylor Heise said.

The first NHL game after the break is the Devils hosting the Sabres. Before the game, Jack Hughes addresses the crowd and brings out Thompson to celebrate one last time as teammates before going at it as opponents.

As the men's players return to their NHL teams throughout the day, they are asked about partying with Patel and Trump's joke about the women's team and why they laughed at it. A sampling of their responses:

Matthews: "I don't like to get political or get into that kind of stuff. Like I said, we're proud Americans and winning a gold medal, it's been 46 years since the men's ice hockey team has done that. So I mean the team that wins the Stanley Cup every year accepts the White House invitation to go. So I just think it is something that you do because we are proud Americans, whatever your political beliefs may be. Hopefully something like this will hopefully bring more unity to the country and stuff like that. But for us, we believe it's a great honor no matter who's in office."

Thompson: "I think in the moment, you're just in the locker room celebrating and you're just excited that there's people that are influential in this country that want to be a part of it, that are watching you play. You know, we're all athletes, we love the country. The fact that there are people that are high up in the country that make decisions that are watching the game and want to be a part of it and celebrate, because



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that's at the end of the day what it was, a celebration of the country. I think that's why we were so excited."

Swayman: "We should have reacted (to the joke) differently. We are so excited for the women's team. We have so much respect for the women's team. To share that gold medal for them is something we're forever grateful for."

Charlie McAvoy: "Certainly sorry for how we responded to it in that moment. Things just happened really quick there."

Werenski: "Incredible group of women. We got to know them extremely well in the village. No one was bigger supporters of them than us as a team. ... Obviously, it's not a great moment. It doesn't look great, so I understand that. But, you know, I think deep down, they know how we feel about them and how much support we have for them."

Saturday, Feb. 28

Connor Storrie, one of the stars of HBO's "Heated Rivalry," hosts "Saturday Night Live." During his monologue, he openly wonders if he really pulled off portraying a hockey player — which, of course, leads to Quinn and Jack Hughes joining him on stage, wearing their jerseys and gold medals. Jack Hughes had to hop a private jet from St. Louis after the Devils' game to get to New York in time.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

U.S. Olympic men's, women's hockey stars joke about 'Heated Rivalry,' Trump invite on 'SNL'

Gold medalists Jack Hughes, Quinn Hughes, Hilary Knight and Megan Keller appeared on "Saturday Night Live" hosted by actor Connor Storrie.

The brothers tell Storrie they heard he did great, but that they haven't seen the show yet.

Quinn Hughes: "It's about hockey, right?"

Storrie: "Kind of."

Jack Hughes: "I got my teeth knocked out in the finals. Does that happen in your show?"

Storrie: "Metaphorically."

Storrie then says, "I hope some hockey players watched it," to which Keller and Knight walk on stage in their jerseys and gold medals — to a significantly longer and louder ovation. Jack Hughes claps along.

Keller: "Don't worry, we saw your show."

Storrie: "Hilary, Megan, it's so cool that we're all here."

Knight: "It was gonna be just us, but we thought we'd invite the guys, too."

The crowd gets the joke and cheers.

Keller, nudging Quinn with an elbow, says: "Yeah, we thought we'd give them a little moment to shine."

After a bit more banter, they all put their arms around each other, smiling broadly.

The victory lap continues on Monday night, with Knight and the Hughes brothers scheduled to be on "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon." For Jack Hughes, the big hero who scored the biggest goal of his life, it will cap a whirlwind eight-day stretch that took him from Milan to Miami to Washington to Newark to St. Louis to 30 Rock, as well as to the center of America's fraught political discourse.

He still hasn't gotten his teeth fixed.

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1381297 Websites

The Athletic / How good is each NHL defenseman available on the 2026 trade board?

By Dom Luszczyszyn

The NHL trade deadline is a week away and we're diving deep into the numbers behind the names from Chris Johnston's trade board.

Which defensemen can actually move the needle? Which defensemen can capably fill depth roles? Which defensemen should teams probably avoid?

That's the name of the game here. Let's dive in.

Top-pair defensemen

John Carlson

It was a bit shocking to see John Carlson's name on the trade board given how long he's been a member of the Capitals. It's still hard to imagine they'll move him, but this is a business and if the Capitals are out of it, Carlson would instantly become one of the top prizes of the market. Even at 36, he's still that good.

Carlson is, without question, the best offensive defenseman on the market. He creates chances at an elite rate, according to tracking done by Corey Sznajder, and is a machine in the offensive zone which has led to him scoring 46 points in 55 games this season. That's not just because he gets power-play time either; Carlson's 1.73 points per 60 at five-on-five is close to a career high and actually ranks seventh this year among all defensemen. Carlson is still elite with the puck in-zone, which has him on pace for an Offensive Rating of plus-14. That'll move the needle.

There are some concerns defensively and in transition. Carlson allows a lot of controlled entries against and has the worst impact on expected goals against on the Capitals. Carlson does play the toughest minutes and may look better in a lesser role, but it's still probably unfair to expect him to be above-average in that realm. It also doesn't help that his ability to move the puck up ice, while still fine, isn't what it once was.

Even with that in mind, what Carlson brings to the table offensively is more than enough to make him the most valuable defenseman on the market ... if he gets traded, that is.

Dougie Hamilton

We've talked a lot about Dougie Hamilton over the past month after his name first surfaced in trade rumors. The key point: He still has game, and that's been proven even more since being healthy-scratched. Since sitting in the press box, Hamilton has a 52 percent expected goals rate at five-on-five and seems to be the only Devils defenseman who can outscore opponents with 64 percent of actual goals; everyone else is below 45 percent. He also has 11 points in 13 games as his production has predictably regressed to the mean.

Even when he wasn't scoring, though, Hamilton still had value as he was adding a lot for the Devils defensively. He was limiting chances at the highest rate and playing the team's toughest minutes. The big change in Hamilton's microstats profile to make that happen was fewer mistakes, both on retrievals and exits. A safer Hamilton turned into a better defensive Hamilton — though the lack of risk may be part of the lesser offense.

Finding the right balance is key, and that also means finding the right fit and role. A second-pair role with a defensive partner is the most suitable place for Hamilton, who still has a lot to offer as a No. 2 defenseman. With a projected Net Rating of plus-7.0, Hamilton may not be worthy of his \$9 million paycheck, but he's shown lately that he's not far off. For a



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team in need of offense from the blue line with tough-minutes experience, he's worth the risk.

### Top-four defensemen

#### Justin Faulk

The St. Louis Blues have struggled mightily this season, but Justin Faulk has been one of the team's few bright spots. That's thanks to a plus-3.5 Defensive Rating, one of the highest marks on the team. As he's grown, Faulk's value has stayed consistently in the No. 3 range, but the skew between offense and defense has shifted as he's become a more responsible player.

This season, the Blues allow 0.15 fewer expected goals against per 60 with Faulk on the ice, the best mark of his career. That's especially impressive given how much time he's spent with Cam Fowler, who's had a rough season. Faulk has the highest projected Defensive Rating of any defenseman available.

While Faulk is unlikely to deliver high-end value, he may be the only defenseman on the market who's a plus at both ends of the ice. Carlson and Hamilton are better, but neither would be mistaken for a defensive stalwart. None of the defensemen below offer much of anything offensively. Faulk fits a unique second-pair niche on the market and has the tough-minutes experience to move up the lineup.

Faulk's ability to move the puck has waned over the years, but as long as he's playing with someone who can, he can be an intriguing addition to a contender.

#### Rasmus Ristolainen

The key to Rasmus Ristolainen's perceived glow-up was putting him in the right role. Away from tough minutes, he's been able to thrive defensively with four solid years of suppressing chances with the Flyers.

As he's aged, though, it's become unfair to expect much offensively. He's on pace for a minus-9.7 Offensive Rating this season as the Flyers have been unable to generate many chances or goals with Ristolainen on the ice.

Ristolainen is still valued like a defensive No. 4, but that offensive decline is concerning for how much longer he can play up to a top-four level. It's possible some of that has to do with the team environment, but I'd be a little wary of paying a presumably high price tag for a player that could be offensively stifling.

#### Mario Ferraro

It is really difficult to judge a defenseman getting big minutes in a difficult environment. Are their numbers poor because of the team around them, or is the team poor because they rely so heavily on a weak player? That's been the Mario Ferraro conundrum for the last few years.

This year, at least, he's showing what he can do with more support around him, even as his responsibilities increase. In a tough-minutes role, Ferraro is holding his own and playing at a No. 4 level, which bodes well for playing in the top four of a more capable team.

I still have some concerns with Ferraro given how weak his microstats profile looks, where he struggles in all three zones. But that might have more to do with his role, considering it looked much better last season when Ferraro was getting secondary matchups.

#### Connor Murphy

While he may not deliver much offensively, Connor Murphy has long been a steady defensive presence. There hasn't been a single season in Murphy's career where his team has given up more chances with him on the ice. This year's relative impact on expected goals against of minus-0.49 per 60 is a career-best mark. Murphy's projected plus-1.3 Defensive Rating is among the highest available.

The question with Murphy is whether he can still deliver that in a top-four role at 32. While he's projected to be a fringe No. 4, that's not how he's been used on a bad Chicago Blackhawks team. That leaves some doubt about whether his ability can still scale up the lineup, but given his track record of doing so, Murphy feels like a worthy gamble for teams in need of a stopper.

### Depth

#### Zach Whitecloud

Projected Net Rating: minus-3.6

Once an analytics darling, Whitecloud struggled immensely in Vegas this season. But he's starting to pick things up in Calgary, where he's played extremely well on a shutdown pair with Kevin Bahl. Whitecloud had a 46 percent xG with Vegas in a sheltered role, but is at 52 percent in a tougher role on a worse team. Go figure.

It's only been eight games, but it's enough to believe Whitecloud still has it. His zone exit numbers this year are solid and he could provide a real boost to a team's third pair.

#### Jamie Oleksiak

Projected Net Rating: minus-5.2

At his best, Oleksiak was able to handle tough minutes and was a genuine defensive asset thanks to his size. Those days look behind him as he's fallen down the Seattle Kraken depth chart and is now playing sheltered minutes. Oleksiak is still great at defending entries and has used that skill to suppress chances well in a third-pair role. Just don't expect anything more — especially with the puck.

#### Mason Lohrei

Projected Net Rating: minus-4.6

Lohrei profiles as a risky empty-calorie scorer. He can move the puck and make plays, but he also makes a ton of mistakes that often lead to a lot of chances the other way. This year they aren't going in as much as they should, leading to a goal rate (56 percent) that far exceeds Lohrei's expected goals rate (44 percent). From Boston's perspective, he's a savvy sell-high candidate.

#### Braden Schneider

Projected Net Rating: minus-6.3

I don't see a lot of the allure here aside from size and handedness. Schneider has been thrust into a top-four role this season and struggled immensely under the weight. The Rangers give up a lot with him on the ice as he's had a difficult time moving the puck in his own zone. Schneider is young enough that he may still figure it out, but his numbers have never really leapt off the page — even when he was playing easier minutes.

#### Andrew Peeke

Projected Net Rating: minus-5.7

Peeke briefly found his footing last year with the Bruins, but has reverted back to his usual self this season where he's struggling at both ends of the ice. He's an extremely poor puck-mover who doesn't defend as well as his reputation suggests. The right fit on the third pair may suit him, but he's probably best suited as a depth option.

#### Logan Stanley

Projected Net Rating: minus-6.9

Being extremely tall and scoring lots of goals may net the Jets a premier asset for Stanley, whose defensive play is still as bleak as ever. Despite earning sheltered minutes for most of his career, the Jets have allowed more chances against with Stanley on the ice in each of the last five



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seasons. Stanley is projected to have the worst Defensive Rating of all the players available.

This year, Stanley has been especially porous, a result of being one of the league's weakest defensemen on puck retrievals and zone exits. Stanley is too mistake-prone to be treated as an everyday option in a team's top six. Buyer beware — he won't shoot 14 percent (!) forever.

Luke Schenn

Projected Net Rating: minus-7.6

Father Time has really caught up with Schenn, this season with Winnipeg's xG difference per 60 dropping 0.59 with Schenn on the ice — with an even larger drop in actual goals. Schenn can still retrieve pucks and deny entries, but gets burned for chances often and is a complete non-factor with the puck. A potentially strong room presence as a No. 7.

Simon Benoit

Projected Net Rating: minus-8.0

Statistically one of the league's weakest defensemen in three of the last four seasons. This year, he's not getting bailed out by percentages which has helped show his true value. At his best, Benoit can defend well and elevate his game when it matters, but is best suited as a one-dimensional depth piece.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.03.2026

1381298 Websites

The Athletic / NHL trade board 8.0: Big names abound, but will the deadline end up being a dud?

By Chris Johnston

Mere days away from the NHL's trade deadline, the market is starting to feel like an unstoppable force versus an immovable object.

There will be trades, of course, before the bell sounds at 3 p.m. ET on Friday, but multiple league sources indicated over the weekend that the level of chatter was unusually low for this pocket of the calendar.

It's not for a lack of star power or players who can fill premium positions. Plenty who fall into those categories are available right now. But with recent changes to the collective bargaining agreement, including the creation of a playoff salary cap and new restrictions on double salary retention in trades, there seems to be an expectation that trade activity won't match what we've seen in years gone by.

Of course, that could still change once the dominoes start to fall this week. The centers represent a potential tipping point with three notable ones atop our latest Big Board.

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

Note: Net Ratings and market values are via Dom Luszczyszyn's model and are projected for the full season based on statistics through Feb. 28. Goals saved above expected (GSAX) are via Evolving-Hockey, also through Feb. 28. Contract info is via PuckPedia.

1

Vincent Trocheck

NEW YORK RANGERS

FORWARD

CENTER

2

Nazem Kadri

CALGARY FLAMES

FORWARD

CENTER

3

Robert Thomas

ST. LOUIS BLUES

FORWARD

CENTER

4

Justin Faulk

ST. LOUIS BLUES

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

5

Tyler Myers

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

6

Blake Coleman

CALGARY FLAMES

FORWARD

WINGER

7

Andrew Mangiapane

EDMONTON OILERS

FORWARD

WINGER

8

Evander Kane

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

FORWARD

WINGER

9

Steven Stamkos

NASHVILLE PREDATORS

FORWARD

WINGER



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CENTER

10

Oliver Ekman-Larsson

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

DEFENSEMAN

LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

11

Connor Murphy

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

12

Ryan O'Reilly

NASHVILLE PREDATORS

FORWARD

CENTER

13

Elias Pettersson

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

FORWARD

CENTER

14

Dougie Hamilton

NEW JERSEY DEVILS

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

15

Rasmus Ristolainen

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

16

Bobby McMann

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

FORWARD

WINGER

17

Scott Laughton

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

FORWARD

CENTER

WINGER

18

Jason Dickinson

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

FORWARD

CENTER

19

Michael Bunting

NASHVILLE PREDATORS

FORWARD

WINGER

20

Conor Garland

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

FORWARD

WINGER

21

Patrik Laine

MONTREAL CANADIENS

FORWARD

WINGER

22

Gustav Nyquist

WINNIPEG JETS

FORWARD

WINGER

23

Mario Ferraro

SAN JOSE SHARKS

DEFENSEMAN

LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

24

Andrew Peeke

BOSTON BRUINS

DEFENSEMAN

RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN

25

Erik Haula

NASHVILLE PREDATORS

FORWARD

CENTER

WINGER

26



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Teddy Blueger  
VANCOUVER CANUCKS  
FORWARD  
CENTER  
27  
Warren Foegele  
LOS ANGELES KINGS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
28  
Jesper Kotkaniemi  
CAROLINA HURRICANES  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
CENTER  
29  
Brayden Schenn  
ST. LOUIS BLUES  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
CENTER  
30  
Luke Schenn  
WINNIPEG JETS  
DEFENSEMAN  
RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
31  
Ilya Mikheyev  
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
32  
Evan Rodrigues  
FLORIDA PANTHERS  
FORWARD  
CENTER  
WINGER  
33  
Jaden Schwartz  
SEATTLE KRAKEN  
FORWARD  
WINGER

34  
Jamie Oleksiak  
SEATTLE KRAKEN  
DEFENSEMAN  
LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
35  
Logan Stanley  
WINNIPEG JETS  
DEFENSEMAN  
LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
36  
Zach Whitecloud  
CALGARY FLAMES  
DEFENSEMAN  
RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
37  
Alex Tuch  
BUFFALO SABRES  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
38  
Jonathan Marchessault  
NASHVILLE PREDATORS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
39  
Mason Lohrei  
BOSTON BRUINS  
DEFENSEMAN  
LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
40  
Simon Benoit  
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS  
DEFENSEMAN  
LEFT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
41  
Shane Wright  
SEATTLE KRAKEN  
FORWARD  
CENTER  
WINGER  
42



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Stuart Skinner  
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS  
GOALIE  
43  
Jordan Binnington  
ST. LOUIS BLUES  
GOALIE  
44  
Ryan Strome  
ANAHEIM DUCKS  
FORWARD  
CENTER  
45  
Jordan Kyrou  
ST. LOUIS BLUES  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
46  
Jake DeBrusk  
VANCOUVER CANUCKS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
47  
Trevor van Riemsdyk  
WASHINGTON CAPITALS  
DEFENSEMAN  
RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
48  
Nick Jensen  
OTTAWA SENATORS  
DEFENSEMAN  
RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
49  
David Kämpf  
VANCOUVER CANUCKS  
FORWARD  
CENTER  
50  
Nick Bjugstad  
NEW JERSEY DEVILS  
FORWARD  
CENTER

51  
Kiefer Sherwood  
SAN JOSE SHARKS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
52  
Calle Järnkrok  
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
53  
A.J. Greer  
FLORIDA PANTHERS  
FORWARD  
WINGER  
54  
Braden Schneider  
NEW YORK RANGERS  
DEFENSEMAN  
RIGHT-SHOT DEFENSEMAN  
55  
Jesper Wallstedt  
MINNESOTA WILD  
GOALIE  
56  
Sergei Bobrovsky  
FLORIDA PANTHERS  
GOALIE  
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The Athletic / NHL weekend rankings: 5 post-Olympic break overreactions (unless they're not)

By Sean McIndoe

Welcome back to the NHL weekend rankings, returning after a three-week Olympic break. Aw, I missed you too.

Of course, those three weeks only contained a handful of NHL games for each team, so in theory our outlook on the league shouldn't have changed too much. In theory, sure. But this is the real world, where half our job as fans is to overreact to anything and everything.

So today, before we get to the top five and bottom five, let's first take a moment to pick a few teams and go way overboard based on their first few games back from the Olympic break.



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Bonus five: Overreactions to the NHL's first week back (or are they?)

5. The Toronto Maple Leafs are cooked – No argument here, right? They went into the break on a three-game win streak that offered just a smidge of hope that they could get back in the race, but three regulation losses have put an end to that. Now they're sellers, and they should be selling big. How big? Mirtle weighs in here, and Jonas is already justifiably wondering if they'll screw it up.

4. The Columbus Blue Jackets were fun while they lasted – No team had worse timing around the Olympic break than the Jackets, who were the hottest team in hockey when the league shut down. Coming out of the break, they've lost their first two, including a crucial one against the wild-card Boston Bruins and another in overtime to the New York Islanders. It's not over by any stretch, but any hopes they could continue to ride their momentum have been quashed.

3. The Buffalo Sabres haven't missed a beat – At the other end of the momentum spectrum are the Sabres, who were hot going into the break and somehow came out of it looking even better. They've started with three straight wins, all on the road and all in regulation, including Saturday's stomping of the Tampa Bay Lightning. At this point, the playoffs are getting close to a lock and first place in the Atlantic isn't completely out of the question. This is happening, folks.

2. Wait, isn't the deadline in a few days? – It's been a week since the Olympic trade freeze ended, and so far we've had exactly one trade of any consequence with the real-thing deadline coming on Friday. If that feels weird, it's because it is weird. The week before the deadline is usually a lot busier than this.

This time last year, we'd already had the Seth Jones trade. The year before, Chris Tanev had already been moved. The year before that, Timo Meier, Dmitry Orlov, Jake McCabe and Tanner Jeannot had all been dealt with four days to go.

Most of the bigger moves tend to happen in the two or three days before the deadline, which is to say right about now. So there's still time. But with the Olympics potentially throwing a wrench into the normal workflow, you have to wonder when GMs are going to get cooking. They're already behind schedule.

1. The Los Angeles Kings are broken – I had them on the list even before yesterday's news, but Ken Holland's decision to make a coaching change only reinforces it. Jim Hiller was a popular "first coach fired" pick heading into the season, and while he stuck around long enough for Dean Evason to steal that honor, this change felt inevitable. Having D.J. Smith around as an assistant with recent head coaching experience should make for a smooth transition.

But a transition to what? The Kings looked absolutely awful in their first two games back, giving up 14 goals in a pair of losses that dropped them down to tenth in the West. Ironically, they followed that up with a tidy 2-0 win over the Flames on Saturday, but by that point Holland had reportedly already made his decision.

And it's hard to argue, given how tenuous the path to a playoff spot looks right now. Remember, Holland already went out and got Artemi Panarin, arguably the biggest name available at this year's deadline. An extension meant that move wasn't a one-off rental, but you typically don't go out and add 34-year-olds unless you're in win-now mode. And the Kings weren't winning anywhere near often enough.

We saw the Blue Jackets get a nice new coach bounce this year, and the Sabres somehow managed to get one from a GM change. If the Kings can follow suit, they might be OK as far as the wild-card chase. Do they have a best-case scenario beyond that? Based on the last week, that would be a no. Kings fans are hoping we're overreacting. I'm not sure we are.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Jim Hiller firing too little, too late for Kings team with delusions of contending

While a new voice can help the Kings move on from last season's playoff disaster against the Oilers, it's shocking it took this long.

On to this week's rankings...

Road to the Cup

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

If you missed it, the Oilers put Andrew Mangiapane on waivers yesterday; we'll find out if was claimed today. Either way, the move may spell the end of one of the offseason's weirdest signings, one that seemed destined to work but very much has not. And maybe more importantly, the move will free up some extra flexibility for the Oilers to make a much-needed move.

5. Minnesota Wild (35-16-10, +24 true goals differential\*) – Joe Smith got some interesting comments from Bill Guerin in the aftermath of Team USA's gold medal win, including some of the post-game controversy.

4. Carolina Hurricanes (38-15-6, +37) – Here's my question: Are they a lock for top seed in the Metro? They came out of the weekend seven points up on the second-place Pittsburgh Penguins, which feels insurmountable with Sidney Crosby missing multiple weeks. The New York Islanders are hanging tough, but would need to continue their recent surge for at least another week or two. It feels like the Hurricanes are home and cooled, which could have some interesting implications for how they play things down the stretch.

3. Dallas Stars (36-14-9, +36) – Eight straight wins, which could become ten with the Vancouver Canucks and Calgary Flames up next. And then comes the big showdown on deadline night: their first game against the Colorado Avalanche since the season's opening week.

2. Tampa Bay Lightning (38-16-4, +54) – Two things can both be true: We all know they're not actually going to reacquire Steven Stamkos, and also it would be super cool if they did.

1. Colorado Avalanche (39-10-9, +79) – So at what point, if any, do we start to worry here? On Jan. 3, this team won their tenth straight to move their record to a ridiculous 31-2-7. But since then they're a very pedestrian 8-8-2. You'd expect them to cool off at some point, if only out of boredom. But we're coming up on two months of this being a fake .500 team. We have to start taking that seriously soon, right?

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

Not ranked: Vegas Golden Knights – We have to figure this Pacific Division thing out.

That day is apparently not today, because we've once again got a top five with three Central teams and nobody from the Pacific. If we're picking the best five teams at any given time, there's no reason they'd have to be spread out nicely across divisions. But if we're trying to pick a Cup winner, there's an argument that what we have now can't work. Only one of those three Central powerhouses is going to make the conference final. And barring some crossover wild-card weirdness, there's going to be a Pacific team waiting there for them.

Right now, that team sure seems like it should be the Knights. They've spent the entire season doing just about everything other than pull away in a division they should win, but they still hold a comfortable lead. The Ducks, Kings and Kraken all have plenty of flaws, and the Oilers just refuse to look like a true contender. That leaves the Knights, even if it's by default. Doesn't it?

The projections page sure thinks so — they have Vegas with the fourth-best Cup odds, ahead of teams like the Stars and Wild. That makes sense when you factor playoff path into the equation, and maybe we



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should be doing it too. By the end of the season, we probably will be. For now, it would be nice to see a bit more about how the Central shakes out.

The bigger point is that it's not especially difficult to imagine the Knights being the one that finally finds its top gear down the stretch, and next thing you know we're two rounds into the playoffs and everyone is saying of course Vegas looks great, we should have all seen this coming. But this is also a team with fewer wins than the Ducks and Mammoth (and tied with the Kraken), and just one more regulation win than the Predators, Flames and Jets. Finally fix the standings so that teams can't just play for free points in overtime and this season looks different.

In other words, they should be good, but so far, they're not. Or at least they're not good often enough, including yesterday's 5-0 loss to the Penguins. And we're at the point where the beat writer's "they're obviously not going to fire the coach" shirt is raising questions already answered by his shirt.

Then again, the Knights are just exploiting a system that's there for everyone. They tend to do that when it comes to the player market too, which makes this an interesting week. Do we get another big move from the Knights, or have they already crossed off everything on their shopping list? We'll find out over the next few days. But it may take a few more weeks to trust them enough to get them back into the top five. Even if that's where they probably belong.

The bottom five

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

I'm just going to go ahead and say it, some of you readers are out of your minds if you don't think Connor Hellebuyck is easily a top-10 goalie of the modern era, and a lot closer to top-five than he is to not being on the list at all. With three Vezinas, a Hart and now a gold medal, he's not quite knocking on the door of the Hasek/Roy/Brodeur trinity, but he's within arm's reach. The playoff resume is an issue, sure, but if you don't think a three-time Vezina winner is in the elite tier then I'm not sure what to tell you.

5. Chicago Blackhawks (23-28-9, -29) – Yesterday's impressive shutout win over Utah ended a post-break losing streak, which is either good news or not depending on where you're at on the importance of another high pick. On that note, with Winnipeg tomorrow and the Canucks on Thursday, this is shaping up as a big week for lottery odds.

4. Calgary Flames (24-28-7, -26) – I've got to be honest, I kind of like the idea of Nazem Kadri going to the Sabres. Let's make that happen.

3. St. Louis Blues (21-29-9, -50) – No, see, hockey gods, when I said I wanted the team Doug Armstrong built to beat the team Bill Guerin built in a tight Sunday battle, what I meant was...

Anyway, this is the week the Blues either trade Robert Thomas and/or Jordan Kyrou, or at least have to stop pretending for a few weeks. Exciting times. Here's Shayna on what potential suitors should know.

2. New York Rangers (23-29-7, -32) – Do you think it was awkward for Vincent Trochek and J.T. Miller and Mike Sullivan to have to stop their gold medal talk whenever Adam Fox entered the room? I bet it was super awkward.

1. Vancouver Canucks (18-34-7, -68) – The latest from Drance not only captures the critical week ahead of the organization, it also makes use of the phrase "vortex of ineptitude" to do it.

Not ranked: New Jersey Devils – It's been a weird stretch of NHL schedule for Devils fans. Heading into the break, they lost three straight in regulation to essentially end any lingering playoff hopes. Coming out of it, they went right back to losing, a streak they snapped against the Blues on Saturday. They're done. Despite coming into the season with Cup

hopes, they're going to miss the playoffs by a mile, while probably also almost certainly losing out on a top-five pick. What a disaster.

Oh, and in between, the franchise player became a national hero.

We'll stick to what Jack Hughes did on the ice, as opposed to the mess he and his teammates made off of it. But scoring the biggest goal of his career, and the biggest in American hockey since 1980, is the kind of thing that can redirect a player's career. Mario Lemieux used his 1987 Canada Cup winner to signal that he was well and truly ready to take the torch from Wayne Gretzky. Hughes may not be in the "best player in the world" discussion, but will we look back at the 2026 Olympics as a turning point in his career trajectory?

And maybe more importantly, if you're a Devils fan, does that potentially save an otherwise miserable season? Ever since being taken first in 2019, Hughes has essentially done two things at the NHL level: flash the kind of elite-level talent few players have, and then fail to do it for long enough to truly be considered for the league's top tier.

Thanks to inconsistency and (mostly) injury, he's only had one full season of top production, and that came back in 2022-23. Seven seasons into his career, he's been a worthy No. 1 pick, but not the kind that transforms a franchise.

Right now, the Devils could use some transforming. Barring a miracle down the stretch, this year's miss will be their second in three years, wrapped around last year's brief appearance that saw them go out in five. Winning one playoff game in three years doesn't sound like contender status, and the 2022-23 team that had 112 points and at least won a round feels like a lifetime ago.

That's led to speculation of some big moves to come, including a busy rumor mill for Dougie Hamilton. Is that enough? Probably not, but after missing out on the Quinn Hughes deal we all figured would be a sure thing, there aren't any easy answers here. There's also the question of whether Tom Fitzgerald will even get the chance to turn this around, or whether a new GM is incoming. If so, what does that mean for Sheldon Keefe? Can you really start over when you've built the roster around two top picks in their prime?

Like we said, no easy answers. Except for one: Hughes using his big moment as a launching pad to finally looking like that consistent Hart-level franchise player would go a long way toward moving the needle in the right direction. It might even change how the 2025-26 season is remembered in New Jersey, from yet another disappointment to the start of a new era. Let's see how it plays out.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.03.2026

1381300 Websites

ESPN / These NHL teams need a blockbuster before the trade deadline - ESPN

Arda Ocal

The NHL trade deadline is Friday, and while we might be slightly concerned about the volume of activity on deadline day itself -- with players such as Artemi Panarin already having found new homes -- let's be optimistic about it: Fortune favors the bold, and there are definitely teams that are one or two players away from becoming true Stanley Cup contenders.

There are also a handful of front offices that might look at their current position in the standings, and decide it's time rebuild -- or at least "retool."



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Here are some teams I'd love to see take big swings by Friday at 3 p.m. ET:

### Edmonton Oilers

The clock is ticking. Connor McDavid gave the franchise two more seasons past this one to figure it out by signing one of the most team-friendly deals in recent professional sports history.

Goaltender Tristan Jarry was swapped in earlier this season for Stuart Skinner. Since his arrival, he has posted an .860 save percentage and has given up four-plus goals in each of his past five starts (including the first game back from the Olympic break). Do the Oilers look to add another goaltender, or ride it out with Jarry (and waiver claim Connor Ingram)?

The Oilers are bottom 11 in the league in shots faced per game, but have given up the most high danger-goals (55), despite giving up middle of the road high-danger chances. A shutdown defender could help further prevent those chances coming through, which would certainly help.

### Seattle Kraken

The Kraken recently had a nice win streak full of playoff-style games ... gritty, gutsy, 3-2, 2-1 type of wins. They currently sit in a wild-card spot with no player above 40 points and only one (Jordan Eberle) at the 20-goal mark. This team could certainly use a superstar. Someone like Panarin (if he were still available).

Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman has reported that Seattle did aggressively pursue Panarin, and would have inked him to a three-year, \$14.25 million extension.

There might not be too many players of Panarin's level left available via trade, but Seattle would really benefit from a true star. Easier said than done, of course.

There are still some good scorers who might be available in the next few days that could be a good option, and Calgary Flames center Nazem Kadri comes to mind. Kadri also brings a "ring to the room," having won the Stanley Cup with the Avalanche in 2022.

### Toronto Maple Leafs

It doesn't seem to be working this season for Toronto. For several seasons, the narrative was that this team was elite in the regular season, then disappeared when the postseason arrived. That narrative has fallen apart this season, as the team sits well outside the playoff mix as deadline week begins.

Captain Auston Matthews is now a champion, captaining Team USA to gold at the Olympics. He's nearing his usual points-per-game pace, but as far as the team around him, there are several questions.

Should they trade players at the deadline, perhaps borrowing that term "retool" from the Rangers? Calle Jarnkrok, Scott Laughton, Bobby McMann and Troy Stecher are all UFAs at the end of the season, and Nicholas Robertson and Matias Maccelli are pending restricted free agents. After making significant additions in recent deadlines, the flow should be reversed this season.

### Pittsburgh Penguins

The Pens are in the playoff hunt, to the surprise of many. They have cap space to make some additions -- to the tune of \$10.54 million, per PuckPedia.

### Why not take a big swing?

Sidney Crosby might be even more motivated after he was unable to play in the gold medal game in Milan and his teammates fell short. Pittsburgh is currently second in the Metro, and firmly in the playoff chase. GM Kyle Dubas has taken a high-risk, high-reward stance in the past, so why not here again?

Adding a shutdown defenseman and another scorer or two could suit the Pens well now and beyond.

### Jump ahead:

Games of the week

What I loved this weekend

Hart Trophy candidates

Social post of the week

Stick taps

Biggest games of the week

The three teams that I'm the most curious about this week are the ones that are right on the wild-card playoff bubble.

Los Angeles Kings

The Kings are three points out, acquired Panarin just before the Olympics. They have a tough schedule this week, facing the Avalanche on Monday, the New York Islanders on Thursday and the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday.

San Jose Sharks

Can the Sharks gain ground? Macklin Celebrini & Co. are five points out. On their dance card this week are the Canadiens on Tuesday, St. Louis Blues on Friday and the Islanders on Saturday.

Columbus Blue Jackets

In the East, the Blue Jackets are 7-2-1 in their last 10 games, and are five points back of the second wild-card team. They have a four-game slate this week, with the New York Rangers on Monday, Nashville Predators on Tuesday, Florida Panthers on Thursday and Utah Mammoth on Saturday.

What I loved this weekend

The U.S. gold medal Olympic teams continued their whirlwind media tours after defining a generation of hockey, winning both men's and women's gold at the Olympics for the first time.

Jack Hughes and Megan Keller both appeared on "The Pat McAfee Show":

Then, Hughes and Keller were joined by Quinn Hughes and Hilary Knight on stage during "Heated Rivalry" star Connor Storrie's monologue on the latest episode of "Saturday Night Live":

Hart Trophy candidates if the season ended today

Jack Hughes, Quinn Hughes and Connor Hellebuyck. That's the list.

In all seriousness, we're only a handful of days back from the Olympic break, so my candidates remain the same from before I took an Olympic break from the column (but didn't take an Olympic break from The Drop):

McDavid continues to lead the league in scoring, and very well could for the remainder of the season. He's at 103 points through 61 games, which is a pace for 138.

Nathan MacKinnon is hot on his trail, with 97 points through 57 games -- on pace for 137, as the Avalanche remain atop the league standings.

The Tampa Bay Lightning are rolling atop the East, and Nikita Kucherov (with 95 points through 54 games) has unseated Celebrini for the third spot on my list. The gap between the top three and the rest of the field continues to widen.

Social media post of the weekend



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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If you're a New Jersey Devils fan, you're well aware of Hobby's Deli, which is about half a mile from Prudential Center.

It's fully decked out in Devils' memorabilia, and the menu features chirps at Rangers fans including "King Henrik Soup," which is served in a bowl only ... "no cups." It has a price of "\$19.94" and is "now served with a teaspoon so you don't CHOKE on the soup."

The deli also has sandwiches named after players, including "Nico No. 1," the sandwich created by and named after team captain Nico Hischier, and his No. 1 selection in the 2017 draft.

Now, Hobby's has added another player-specific sandwich to the menu: "Jack's Golden Goal." It's prime rare roast beef, American cheese (of course), with golden sauteed onions on a roll. A sandwich fitting for Jack Hughes and his golden goal at the 2026 Games.

### INTRODUCING:

#### JACK'S GOLDEN GOAL SANDWICH!

Our Prime bloody-rare Roast Beef (so tender, you don't need teeth), American Cheese and Golden Sautéed Onions on a Roll.

### OVERTIME SPECIAL:

Fried Olympic Onion Rings [pic.twitter.com/cbWuYm61SE](https://pic.twitter.com/cbWuYm61SE)

— Hobby's Deli (@Hobbysdeli) February 24, 2026

### Stick taps

Many hockey players grow up dreaming of winning the Stanley Cup. One youth hockey team just got to raise a smaller version of it after a big championship victory.

The Ajax Pickering Raiders U9 select team went 3-0-1 in round-robin play, including a 6-2 win over rival Dorchester, then sealed the deal with a dramatic overtime win against the Brantford 99s -- including a short-handed winning overtime goal by Logan Stevenson.

Here's James Shortt showing off the trophy:

Congrats to the entire team on an epic victory, and creating the kind of core memory that inspires them to keep chasing their hockey dreams.

The team is:

First row: Mikhail Kassam, Ryan Arbic

Second row: Austin Harrington, James Shortt, Louis Dasilva, Jack Sleath, Klay Hunt, Arley Thacker, Nick Vrantisis

Third row: Jack Aitken, Nolan Daley, Dane Cotter, Ezra Fernandez, Cole Coady, Logan Stevenson, Carter Flude, Paul Den Decker

Fourth row: Dylan Harrington, Rafiq Kassam, John Flude, Darryl Stevenson, Kyric Aitken, Chris Cotter, Pieter Den Decker

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Sportsnet.ca / Resignation replacing frustration as Maple Leafs drop fourth straight

Luke Fox

TORONTO — If a good team loses to a bad team, the players drill down on their mistakes or rip their own effort. They blame puck luck or credit a locked-in goaltender at the other end.

They find the result either unacceptable or an anomaly.

When a bad team drops a hard-fought battle to another bad team, the tone is much different. They focus on the positives; they highlight improvements and talk about building blocks.

This — after nine straight post-season berths and 61 games in a campaign that will not see an 83rd — is now where we find the Toronto Maple Leafs.

And it's a frightening place to live, the standards for urgency and excellence having dipped so low.

A bad hockey team finding the bright spots on a night where it could've defeated another bad hockey team, but instead lost 3-2 in a shootout to the Philadelphia Flyers, who also plan to shed veteran talent by Friday's trade deadline.

"Our game was good all around," head coach Craig Berube said. "That's kinda like our blueprint. That's the way we need to play."

This assessment came after the defending Atlantic Division regular-season champs' fourth consecutive loss and seventh consecutive loss at Scotiabank Arena, a building now packing all the atmosphere of a dentist's waiting room.

To be fair, Berube isn't wrong.

After having their heart publicly questioned after Saturday's listless effort against rival Ottawa, the Leafs did submit their most consistent effort since the Olympic break.

They scored first and dominated the second period and outshot their visitors 31-25. They didn't roll over down 2-1 late, and they salvaged a standings point thanks to William Nylander's power-play blast with just 2:30 on the clock.

"I thought it was a better effort," Nylander said. "Today was a step in the right direction."

But we're accustomed to discussing playoff positioning and the ideal depth defenceman to add at this time of year in Toronto. Not clinging to moral victories.

Alas, this is the new reality in Leafland.

So, good on the skaters for doing a better job limiting odd-man rushes and easy looks around Anthony Stolarz's net. The Flyers managed just three high-danger chances five-on-five. (The Leafs had two, per [NaturalStatTrick.com](https://NaturalStatTrick.com).)

And good on Dakota Joshua for sniping one past Dan Vladar off a nice backhand feed from Matias Maccelli. That goal marked the power forward's first since missing nearly two months of action as he recovered from a lacerated kidney.

"That was nice. It's been a while," Joshua said. "But it makes the hard days of recovery and coming back worth it when you can get one."

"I feel like I'm getting better every game."

The 2025-26 Maple Leafs as a whole, unfortunately, have run out of time to get better and have it matter. The league is passing them by, and they know it.

Which explains why resignation has replaced frustration.

"It's hard right now, but everyone's in it together," said Scott Laughton, at risk of being dealt at consecutive deadlines.

"Just trying to stay positive," Joshua echoed. "Obviously, it's a tough time for the group. And, you know, trying to keep our heads up and keep it moving, and just find a way to start grinding out some wins here."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 3, 2026

The Maple Leafs fly to the Big Apple Tuesday for a back-to-back against a pair of two more Eastern Conference clubs who weren't where they planned to be, the Devils (Wednesday) and Rangers (Thursday).

Who knows what Toronto's roster will look like next time they take to the ice at home?

"Everyone's staying positive," Stolarz said. "At the end of the day, this is our jobs. And everyone knows that we have to go out there and we have to play hard, regardless of the situation."

Fox's Fast Five

- Did Bobby McMann just play his final home game as a Maple Leaf?

"It's hard to put into words," the winger told reporters at morning skate, trying not to get swallowed by the trade noise during his 200th career game. "It's been fun my whole career."

- Scott Laughton, pending UFA: "I'm a Leaf, and that's where I want to be. And we'll see where it goes."

- Nick Robertson has just one goal in his past 11 games, and his average ice time in February (11:51) was his lowest of any month this season.

Berube scratched him Monday for a reset.

"I felt Nicky's game has dropped off, even before the break, a little bit," Berube said.

- Four members of the Sabres brass were in attendance for this one. Whispers that they are considering bringing back edgy, rangy Rasmus Ristolainen.

Philly's right-shot defenceman is signed through 2026-27 at a \$5.1-million cap hit, but his actual salary for next season is only \$4 million. Hard to find guys who skate 20-plus minutes a night for that rate.

Stan Bowman's acquisition of Connor Murphy out of Chicago (for a second-round pick) Monday suggests one potential buyer is off the board.

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Sportsnet.ca / Real Kyper's Trade Board 5.0: Setting up deadline week

Nick Kypreos

The first few games back from the Olympics have given teams a better idea of how they need to approach this week, with the trade deadline coming up Friday at 3 p.m. ET / noon PT.

The heat is on some teams to add significant players to their roster. That includes those we deem Stanley Cup contenders, but there are a few others farther down the standings who are feeling that pressure to buy.

There's no better example of this than the Utah Mammoth.

A huge 5-2 win over division-rival Minnesota last Friday fuelled Utah's drive to use a number of assets to try to drive the team forward. A 4-0 loss on Sunday to Chicago ended a 1-2-0 home stint before they head on the road for five games. By the time the Mammoth return to Utah next week, they could have a big name added to the roster.

Word is that there is tremendous pressure on Utah GM Bill Armstrong to help the team make the playoffs this season. With 66 points, the Mammoth hold the first wild-card spot in the West, four points clear of

San Jose, Nashville and Los Angeles, who sit just outside the playoff outline.

According to some sources, one of Utah's targets is St. Louis centre Robert Thomas.

Utah has the assets that would appeal to the Blues and possibly be able to pull off this blockbuster trade.

St. Louis would like to bring back more than just an abundance of draft capital, so one could see how a deal would need to be built around one of the Mammoth's top three prospects: Tij Iginla, Cole Beaudoin or Caleb Desnoyers.

We should also keep an eye on Nick Schmaltz, who is second on Utah in goals and points, but a pending UFA this July. He and Logan Cooley are Utah's 1-2 punch down the middle, but if a deal for Thomas is made, will that change Utah's minds on re-signing Schmaltz to a new contract? For now I hear his ongoing contact negotiations are trending positively, but if Utah obtains another centre, will it change that?

For now, I'm keeping Schmaltz off my trade board, but will see how things play out this week.

Seattle, holding on to the West's second wild card with 65 points, would love to increase its chances of making the post-season. The Kraken would love to add an impact scorer like Jake DeBrusk from Vancouver to cover pending UFAs Jaden Schwartz and Jordan Eberle, who are both in their mid-30s.

San Jose had two huge wins over Edmonton and Winnipeg over the weekend, and is three points out of a wild-card spot. GM Mike Grier would love to give Macklin Celebrini, Will Smith and Yaroslav Askarov some playoff experience this early in their development, but he won't alter his longer-term objective. Because of that, the Sharks will still be taking calls on pending UFA defenceman Mario Ferraro. We should also keep an eye on Kiefer Sherwood, who the Sharks traded for earlier this season. Sherwood's ask on a contract extension remains high — in the ballpark of \$5 million — so San Jose has a decision to make on him. There are rumblings he's on the verge of being thrown back into the market.

We've gotten some clarity on Steven Stamkos, who wants to be part of Nashville's playoff push. The Predators have earned three of a possible four points since the Olympic break ended and are also three points out of the playoffs. Stamkos is coming off my trade board, as are Jonathan Marchessault and Ryan O'Reilly because, at the moment, the feeling is that they're not going anywhere. However, we'll continue to monitor how Nashville does this week and will adjust accordingly.

In the East, Montreal is similar to Utah with how many young assets and draft picks it has available to trade. Sitting third in the Atlantic, the Canadiens feel some motivation to make a splash and really push their competitive window forward. Montreal could compete with Utah in a possible Thomas trade, and the Blues would be targeting Michael Hage as a starting point.

And we can't rule out Detroit on Thomas either. The Red Wings are in the mix with Montreal and Utah as a team that is flush with assets and maybe being ready to push some of those chips in to try to break their nine-season playoff drought.

Real Kyper and Bourne

Real Kyper and Bourne

Nick Kypreos and Justin Bourne talk all things hockey with some of the biggest names in the game. Watch live every weekday on Sportsnet and Sportsnet+ — or listen live on Sportsnet 590 The FAN — from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. ET.

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 3, 2026

What about the Florida Panthers? Regulation losses to Buffalo and the Islanders hurt their outlook, and they start the week eight points out of a playoff spot. Sergei Bobrovsky's agent and the team are talking this week about his next contract and what might happen from here.

The amount of playoff hockey he's played over the past three seasons is the equivalent to a full extra season. He has the option to take care of some of the wear and tear and come back next season stronger. Whether that's with Florida or somewhere else remains to be seen. Bobrovsky, who's on an expiring contract, has a 16-team no-trade list and, while he's not on my trade board today, he's another player I'm watching this week to determine if he belongs on here.

This latest trade board will be updated all week as the market continues to develop. Many things are bound to change over the next few days, and you can find all the latest here on my trade board.

For now, on to the current list ...

There is momentum growing toward a trade here and Blues GM Doug Armstrong is trying to hit a home run with Thomas. On Sunday, Thomas played his first game in nearly two months, scoring an empty-net goal and adding an assist in a 3-1 win over Minnesota. With a no-trade clause, Thomas is in total control here. If Utah or Montreal does make St. Louis the best offer, does Thomas think about joining either of those teams? Thomas still could shut this down and revisit his options in the summer.

In some ways, Thomas is like Elias Pettersson in that they're both in the early parts of long-term contracts, but know they're not long for the teams they're on. They could put this talk to bed for 20 more games and work with the team in the off-season.

St. Louis is also not being forced into a move here, so if Armstrong can't find the big return he's looking for, he'll wait for the summer.

This may yet turn into a summer decision, but the connection with the Red Wings isn't going away. With Vancouver in full sell mode, getting a centre in his prime years with a 102-point season in his past might be an opportunity to pounce on, though the risk is obvious now. A minus-2 outing with just 14:20 of ice time in Saturday's loss was a tough look for Pettersson and may give any of the teams kicking tires a moment of pause.

There is a bit of a game of chicken going on here. There are teams asking about Kadri, including Colorado, where he won a Stanley Cup in 2022. But will the Flames be forced to retain some of his \$7 million AAV if they want to let him go? That's being explored, but it's not something Calgary wants to do.

However, the price on Kadri will be dependent on Calgary's ability to retain. Colorado could make it work at full value, but would prefer the flexibility of a lowered-cap hit. The Flames have to consider how much better the return would be by retaining money.

There are a few good centres out there and the clock is ticking on Calgary's decision with Kadri. Will salary retention be the difference in him staying or going?

A lot of teams would like to take a run at Tippett, and he's far from untouchable as the Flyers are looking for change. Tippett's contract is friendly enough (\$6.2 million for another six seasons) and he has top-six pedigree. He also doesn't have any trade protection this season, but a partial no-trade is introduced to his contract in 2026-27. What's interesting about Tippett is that he doesn't necessarily have to go to a contending team. This is a player anyone can use to help build out a top six over the next five years, so any team could be in on him. This is the ultimate "hockey-trade" candidate.

Fifth on the Rangers in scoring, and in Year 1 of a long-term, \$7.45 million contract, there might not be any takers for Lafreniere. However, like Pettersson, whose value is also low with a high cap hit, Lafreniere is

still young enough (24) that some teams like to think they could steal him from the Rangers. He's a talented player and a new start may help.

There is still an outside chance Montreal takes a run at getting Binnington, but it's highly unlikely Edmonton is going to look at him, given they're in dire need of a top-four defenceman. Binnington has that big-game potential and could help a team get over the hump. I mentioned last week that Carolina might think about Binnington as well, even though they've re-signed Brandon Bussi. They have to have Tampa Bay, and Andrei Vasilevskiy, in mind.

The conditions for a Wallstedt trade are clear and the return has to be just right for it to happen this week. Minnesota had a big 5-2 win over Colorado after returning, but a 5-2 loss to Utah and a 3-1 loss to St. Louis serve as a reminder why it still would like to add another scorer. With Filip Gustavsson signed to a long-term contract that kicks in next season, Wallstedt is an intriguing trade asset to try to pick up that top-six forward with. Contending for the Calder Trophy, Wallstedt's GAA is 4.20 and his save percentage .877 since the start of 2026.

The Leafs aren't getting rid of everybody, but have a number of players who could be had. Max Domi, Mattias Maccelli and Calle Jarnkrok could all be moved if there are takers. But Ekman-Larsson is one of the three available Leafs (along with Scott Laughton and Bobby McMann) who could bring real value back to the team. He has another two years left on his contract and can play either side of the ice.

The Leafs are asking for a lot in an Ekman-Larsson deal. It will be tricky because of his age, and chances are if you're a contending team, you're not necessarily looking for a top-four defenceman, so what is the market for OEL? The Oilers do need a top-four addition, which is why they have been connected to Ekman-Larsson. If Toronto moves a notable defenceman, it'll be him. There is no market for Morgan Rielly, and the Leafs have Jake McCabe on an affordable long-term deal.

A highly anticipated Trocheck trade should get done this week, though he has some say in the matter. Armed with a 12-team no-trade list, Trocheck does not want to go to the West, where some teams have shown interest. The Minnesota Wild remain a team to watch here, and may have a chance since they aren't all the way out west, and because GM Bill Guerin had him on the American Olympic team.

All eyes are still on Weegar, who was an addition to my trade board last week after hearing rumblings about teams coming after this right-shot defenceman. As with Kadri, the Flames could push this decision back, but Weegar is a 32-year-old who may not fit into Calgary's long-term winning window. The Senators are still a team to watch here.

Detroit is still interested in bringing Myers aboard, but he's got a no-movement clause and is considering what's in front of him. He didn't turn down Detroit this far along to say he'd never go there. Rather, he's looking over options before revisiting the Red Wings. However, by making Detroit wait, the Red Wings could change direction and pursue Rasmus Ristolainen or another defenceman instead. We'll see how this develops. Myers might yet be a Red Wing by week's end.

Two more post-Olympics losses leaves no doubt that the Canucks are considering all trades, big and small, and they could be one of the most active teams this week. DeBrusk comes with the risk of acquiring him in the middle of a down season, but just one year removed from scoring 28 goals, the upside of getting him as an effective complementary scorer has teams thinking a lot about this player.

Another Blue struggling to score this season, Kyrour turns 28 in May and has three 70-point seasons on his resume. On a long-term contract, he's another player teams might think they can try to steal, though it's hard to see Armstrong giving in to an offer that's less than a big return to set up incoming GM Alex Steen. If that's not out there this week, and if Kyrour isn't persuaded to waive his no-trade clause, he will be revisited in the summer.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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An all-situations, right-handed defenceman who can run a power play, Faulk's value is steady this season as St. Louis' highest-scoring blue-liner. He'll turn 34 later this month and has only partial trade protection, but the sense is growing that he is generating a market among a few Cup contenders, including Edmonton, and is likely to move by Friday.

With Luke Hughes back in the lineup, a trade focus returns to Hamilton, who scored the game-winning goal in New Jersey's 3-1 win over St. Louis on Saturday. The big challenge will continue to be his \$9 million AAV, and a contract that still has another two years left on it. That cap hit may complicate someone's playoff-cap projection and is a big number to commit to for another couple of seasons.

Even though the Flyers have won two of three games since the Olympic break, they are still six points out and looking to shake something up. Even though he's not a rental until next season, Ristolainen is the type of player who is highly attractive to Cup contenders — big, right-shot, physical, top-four blue-liner who can play heavy minutes.

He is not looking to move on from St. Louis, but Schenn's 15-team no-trade list does give the Blues options on how to proceed and, if it came to it, the centre might be willing to consider waiving his clause if it means joining a contender. Schenn wins face-offs and plays a physical brand of hockey. A saturated market of centres will make for an interesting situation with the 34-year-old.

Coleman returned to the lineup for all three of Calgary's post-Olympics games, showing prospective buyers that he's healthy and ready for the stretch drive. A depth/complementary winger who plays physical, has won two Stanley Cups and is still on pace for 18 goals after missing a month of games, the Flames have been fielding calls on Coleman for some time and it's not believed his 10-team no-trade list will hurt the chances of a deal getting done.

One of the players Toronto could move for a notable return, Laughton is a valued depth centre who can play a tough, gritty game and wins over 56 per cent of his face-offs. He's said he'd like to remain in Toronto, but the Leafs have to be real with their situation. Laughton is a rental player making just \$1.5 million with the Leafs after the Flyers retained salary in the trade that brought him to Toronto. They have to take advantage of that value and move him now.

Another Maple Leaf who would be pursued as a rental, there is still a chance Toronto keeps and re-signs McMann, if his extension would come in somewhere closer to \$4 million than \$5 million. A poor 0-3 return to NHL action has put Toronto in an even deeper hole and makes them much more likely to sell off multiple players now than they wanted to a week ago. The ideal return for McMann is a first-round pick, though it's hard to say if there's a team out there willing to pay it, seeing McMann as something more than a reliable third-liner.

Seattle had no trouble putting up five goals against Vancouver on Saturday, but managed just one goal in each game against Dallas and St. Louis earlier in the week, both losses. The Kraken are 24th in goals per game, last among any team in a playoff spot today. Though this is a top-10 team in GAA, they have a minus-6 goal differential and badly want to find a scoring driver. They made a big run at Artemi Panarin and couldn't get it done, but they're motivated to acquire that sort of player somewhere else this week. Wright, a 22-year-old centre, is an enticing young player Seattle would make available for a big move like that.

After a couple of big weekend wins, the Sharks are in the thick of a playoff race, but have only one more game (vs. Montreal) to assess their situation before the trade deadline. There is still a long-term plan here, and so with only one blue-liner signed for next season, a player such as Ferraro will be explored as a rental candidate. A left-shooting defenceman who logs a lot of PK minutes for San Jose, don't be surprised if the Sharks are a soft seller for the right return. There is a demand for defencemen and San Jose is still not sure exactly what it is this season: playoff team or not?

Montreal would be open to retaining money on Laine's expiring deal and the cost of acquisition won't be too high for him because he hasn't played since October. Laine looks to be a low-risk pickup with decent scoring upside if healthy. Remember, he scored 20 goals in 52 games for Montreal last season.

The Rangers want to turn over some of what they have here, and while most of that attention will be on a few veterans, 24-year-old Schneider is still a potential trade candidate. Another right-shot and physical blue-liner, Schneider is early enough in his career that he's only an RFA this summer and so will be more than a rental. If a team is comfortable projecting what his extension looks like, Schneider will be an appealing target.

The Jets have picked up four of a possible six points since the Olympic break, but still sit nine points out of the playoffs. Jonathan Toews has said he doesn't want to go, and the sense is there are no blockbuster moves coming out of Winnipeg. But, pending UFA Stanley is another big, physical defenceman, the kind that tends to generate a bit of a market during trade deadline week.

While the Carolina connection with Pettersson in Vancouver won't go away, neither will Kotkaniemi's association with the rumour. A bit of a project at 25 years old, but in his eighth NHL season, Kotkaniemi hasn't gotten into Carolina's lineup since the Olympic break. The fact he plays centre and is still so young makes him a moveable asset because teams are always looking to add down the middle.

There will be no problem having Vancouver retain up to half of Kane's \$5.125 million cap hit as they will look to maximize whatever return they can get for the 34-year-old who has 10 goals this season. When engaged, Kane can play physical and has complementary scoring upside. He scored 25 points in 53 playoff games with Edmonton the past three seasons.

I've taken the biggest names from the Predators off my trade board for now, but this is a team that still does want to pick up younger players or draft capital, and so McCarron is someone they'll consider moving as a rental. The 30-year-old plays a heavy-hitting game and I believe there are 10-12 teams after him. That kind of attention will make it hard for Nashville to say no. Other, more expensive pending UFAs such as Michael Bunting or Erik Haula could also still be pulled out of Nashville.

Deslauriers had a big fight with Tanner Jeannot over the weekend. He has played in only 22 games this season and won't pull a big return, but the fact is that some teams will spend this week looking to add toughness, and that's where Deslauriers might come in.

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Sportsnet.ca / Five bargain-bin NHL trade candidates

Adam Vingan

Many big-name players could be dealt before Friday's NHL trade deadline, but there are also players available who could improve contending teams at a fraction of the cost.

Here are five players — all of whom come with cap hits of \$3 million or less — who fit the bill:

Scott Laughton, Toronto Maple Leafs

Age: 31

Position: Centre



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Statistics: 8 goals, 12 points in 42 games

Contract terms: \$1.5 million cap hit through 2026

The Maple Leafs paid a steep price for Laughton at last year's trade deadline, giving up their first-round pick in 2027 as part of the deal with the Philadelphia Flyers. Laughton's offensive impact (16 points in 62 games since the trade) has been negligible, but Toronto does not count on him for that.

Laughton is a defensive specialist who wins 56.4 per cent of his faceoffs and blocks 4.23 passes per 20 minutes — the latter of which ranks eighth out of 352 forwards who have played at least 500 minutes this season. He averages 2:15 of ice time per game on the penalty kill, where he places 15th in puck-battle wins per two minutes among 156 qualified forwards (minimum 50 minutes of short-handed ice time).

Toronto, which is eight points out of a playoff spot, has drained its draft-pick resources in its pursuit of the Stanley Cup. The team has one pick — a third-rounder — within the first four rounds this year. A Laughton trade could help restock the coffers.

Bobby McMann, Maple Leafs

Age: 29

Position: Winger

Statistics: 19 goals, 32 points in 59 games

Contract terms: \$1.35 million cap hit through 2026

McMann, who is on pace for a career-high 26 goals and 44 points, meets the very definition of "bang for your buck." The winger offers a tantalizing combination of size (six-foot-two, 217 pounds) and speed. His maximum skating speed of 24.25 m.p.h. is the fourth fastest recorded by the league this season, and his 194 bursts over 20 m.p.h. rank in the 98th percentile.

Besides his speed, McMann makes an impact by being a nuisance in the offensive zone. He is 55th out of 352 forwards (minimum 500 minutes played) in offensive-zone defensive plays and 60th in offensive-zone puck-battle wins per 20 minutes.

Evan Rodrigues, Florida Panthers

Age: 32

Position: Centre/winger

Statistics: 11 goals, 27 points in 59 games

Contract terms: \$3 million cap hit through 2027

Sportsnet's Nick Kypreos reported last week that "if the Panthers have designs on taking a run for the playoffs, and knowing (injured captain) Aleksander Barkov may still return in the regular season, the team could still run into cap troubles."

That could force Panthers general manager Bill Zito to trade Rodrigues, who had 30 points in 45 playoff games during Florida's back-to-back championship runs.

In Barkov's absence, Rodrigues' ice time per game (17:15) has climbed by two minutes from last season (15:13) as he has shifted from the wing to centre. He recovers loose pucks at one of the highest rates in the league, averaging 18.1 per 20 minutes (ninth out of 352 qualified forwards).

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The well-traveled veteran can fit in on both scoring and checking lines. This season, Rodrigues has centred Carter Verhaeghe and Sam Reinhart (193:53 as a line at even strength), as well as A.J. Greer and Mackie Samoskevich (138:22). His positional versatility and winning pedigree would make him highly appealing to other teams if the Panthers put him on the market.

"When we win games here this year, he's been a really major factor," Panthers coach Paul Maurice told reporters in January. "He's been very strong for us, and his all-around game from the day he got here to now is completely different."

Braden Schneider, New York Rangers

Age: 24

Position: Right/left defence

Statistics: 2 goals, 11 points in 59 games

Contract terms: \$2.2 million cap hit through 2026

It has been a rough season for the Rangers, and Schneider's play has suffered along with many of his teammates. New York has generated 44.9 per cent of the expected goals at five-on-five during Schneider's minutes, which have increased to 20:21 per game in all situations this season.

The six-foot-three Schneider, however, is still a physical presence in the defensive zone, ranking 42nd in defensive-zone puck-battle wins per 20 minutes among 542 qualified blue-liners (minimum 500 minutes played).

At 24, Schneider has a lot of room to grow. Injuries to defenceman Adam Fox forced the Rangers to give Schneider a top-pairing role before he was ready, but he can help a contender with a deeper blue line.

"You want to be on the team that's adding and you're keeping your group intact," Schneider told The Athletic. "We all care for each other like family in this room, and when it comes to that, it sucks. But at the end of the day, we're struggling, and it seems like you've got to be ready for change."

Zach Whitecloud, Calgary Flames

Age: 29

Position: Right defence

Statistics: 2 goals, 11 points in 58 games

Contract terms: \$2.75 million cap hit through 2028

Whitecloud just arrived in Calgary as part of the return for defenceman Rasmus Andersson, so the Flames may not want to flip him so quickly. But right-handed defencemen are a precious commodity, especially those who have won the Stanley Cup.

In 11 games with the Flames, Whitecloud has averaged 23:20 of ice time per game — up from the 18:46 he averaged for the Vegas Golden Knights. Whitecloud's first passes are often on target; his 9.81 outlet-pass completions per 20 minutes are fourth most out of 542 qualified defencemen.

The Flames have been winning Whitecloud's minutes at five-on-five; Calgary has outscored opponents 4-3 and generated 57.1 per cent of the expected goals when he has been on the ice.

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 3, 2026

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' uncompetitive deadline week continues with lopsided loss

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER – No wonder this is not an easy sell for the Vancouver Canucks.

With Friday's National Hockey League trading deadline creeping closer like a dare, Vancouver general manager Patrik Allvin isn't getting much help these days from his players as he tries to sell off a couple of pieces to help the team's rebuild.

In three games since the Olympic break, the Canucks are 0-2-1 and in the last two have been outscored 11-2.

In the team's first game back last Wednesday, scouts or management staff from 15 other NHL teams were crowding reporters in the Rogers Arena press box. When the Canucks were humiliated 6-1 Monday by the Dallas Stars, a Stanley Cup contender that dominated the home team despite missing Mikko Rantanen and Roope Hintz, only five other NHL organizations were represented. Four, not including the Stars.

Let's be real: anyone interested in rental trades for free-agent-eligible Canucks Evander Kane and Teddy Blueger probably aren't changing their minds based on Vancouver's most recent duds because these players have been watched for years, and it's their body of work teams would be purchasing.

But it sure would help the sales team if the Canucks didn't look so overmatched and uncompetitive during deadline week, especially since it's obvious none of the available UFAs is anybody's Plan-A. It's possible Allvin may have to wait until the final hours before the deadline to see which teams circle back on his players.

The veteran Canucks with more trade appeal are those the team would rather not discount, like Connor Garland and Drew O'Connor.

Whatever happens, only one pre-deadline game remains for the Canucks to showcase themselves – and it's Wednesday against a Carolina Hurricanes team that is every bit as good as the Stars.

"We just have to be better in a lot of different areas," O'Connor said. "We gave them a ton of Grade-As. Tolo (Canucks goalie Nikita Tolopilo) had some good saves but, I mean, you give them that many Grade-As, they're going to score. We struggled all night, I thought."

The Canucks are in last place in the NHL for many reasons, but one of the biggest, injuries, should no longer be a factor.

The team emerged from the Olympic break as healthy as it has been this season. Not including injured starting goalie Thatcher Demko, the only missing skaters are luckless middle-six centre Filip Chytil and depth defenceman Derek Forbort.

Finally playing with the luxury of four actual NHL centres, Vancouver should not look this bad, even with three first- or second-year prospects on defence.

But the Canucks simply aren't doing enough offensively to offset what has been a continuation of the defensive mistakes that have crushed them this season. And culpability for those goes far beyond three inexperienced kids on the blue line.

It was veteran winger Jake DeBrusk who let Stars defenceman Lian Bichsel skate away from him to score Dallas' go-ahead goal at 8:31 of the second period. Experienced defenceman Marcus Pettersson turned the puck over in his zone on the fourth Dallas goal, and O'Connor bobbled the puck away in his slot on the fifth one.

Kane, at least, scored Vancouver's goal in the first period, albeit with his skate on the rebound from DeBrusk's shot. Despite being outchanced

and slightly outplayed in the opening 20 minutes, the Canucks competed and hung in against the Stanley Cup contenders.

But the Stars outshot them 16-3 in the second period and 32-7 over the final 43 minutes. Needing a surge to start the third period, when a Vancouver goal would have cut Dallas' lead to 3-2, the mistakes by Pettersson and O'Connor allowed Stars Matt Duchene and Colin Blackwell to score in the first six minutes.

"Usually, you don't see those guys do those things," coach Adam Foote said. "But after that... we've all been there before as players (when) you don't feel anything's going your way. That's where you just kind of dig deep and stick together and, you know, put out the fires together."

"You learn from it, right? You're going to have to, that one, learn the hard way. You're playing against a really good, savvy hockey team on their A-game. Even with a couple of guys out, they won nine in a row coming in and, you know, those types of plays, they're going to bury you on it."

The Stars had won eight straight before Monday, so their heater is now nine games.

The Canucks, meanwhile, have won twice in 21 games in the year 2026.

After scoring twice in seven consecutive games, their struggling offence has fallen by half in consecutive losses to Dallas and Seattle, where the Canucks were thumped 5-1 on Saturday.

Vancouver's 14 shots against the Stars were a season low.

Garland hasn't scored in 22 games, and Elias Pettersson is goalless in 14. Benched in Seattle, Pettersson returned to the first line on Monday but still doesn't have a shot on net since the Olympic break.

DeBrusk has one goal in 17 games, Marco Rossi one in 11 since his trade to the Canucks.

Without Vezina Trophy goaltending, the Canucks have no chance to win like this.

"We've got to find a way," Marcus Pettersson said of the adversity. "Like, we can't just fall down and die; we've got to get back on the horse. And like I said, it's up to us, to us veterans in here, to kind of get the team back on track. And I think we can do a better job of that."

"Everyone wants to be better," O'Connor said. "I mean, I was pretty bad tonight; I gave up that fifth goal. I turn the puck over, and they score. There's a lot of plays I could have been better on tonight and, you know, we probably all need to look ourselves in the mirror a little bit."

Sixth defenceman Pierre-Olivier Joseph left the game with an injury one shift into the third period. The Canucks only extra defenceman has been Tyler Myers, who has sat out the last three games while Allvin tries to trade him. Foote was unsure post-game what the Canucks will do with their lineup on Wednesday if Joseph is unavailable to face the Hurricanes.

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1381305 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 'Haven't lived up to expectations': Canucks' Pettersson reflects on extension

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — Exactly two years after Elias Pettersson signed his \$92.8-million contract extension that carried the fifth-highest salary-cap



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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hit in the National Hockey League, the struggling Vancouver Canucks' centre is again clouded by trade rumours.

The Canucks strong-armed Pettersson into re-signing on March 2, 2024 by working on a potential trade – reportedly with the Carolina Hurricanes – ahead of the NHL deadline that season.

With this year's trade deadline on Friday, PostMedia reported on the weekend that the Detroit Red Wings are pursuing Pettersson, the 27-year-old centre who has 35 points in 51 games, and Saturday in Seattle was benched by Canucks coach Adam Foote for the final 10 minutes in a 5-1 loss to the Kraken – Vancouver's 19th defeat in 21 games.

Pettersson's current status, and the Canucks' low negotiating leverage, would have been unfathomable two years ago.

On the day he signed his eight-year deal, the Swede was tied for 10th in NHL scoring with 29 goals and 75 points in 62 games. He was coming off a 102-point season. In 135 games since then, not including Pettersson's dismal playoff run in 2024, he has 33 goals and 94 points, which is tied for 135th in the NHL over the last 24 months.

Although Pettersson appeared to be rebounding somewhat this season before getting injured in December, he'll never escape the weighty implications of that \$92.8-million contract.

"Yeah, I mean, who wouldn't (mention it)?" Pettersson told reporters after the morning skate ahead of Monday night's home game against the Dallas Stars. "I mean, I haven't lived up to expectations of the contract, and I'll be the first one to say it. Obviously, I wish I would be different (and had) played better, a lot more points. But it is what it is. I'm trying to play a good game tonight and see what happens."

Asked if he's surprised, two years later, to be the subject of trade rumours, he said: "I mean, it's you guys who make the trade rumours, so ask yourself."

With no goals in 13 games for Pettersson and no shots in two contests since returning from the Olympics, it's not surprising that Foote finally reached the point on Saturday where he pulled one of the last coaching levers available to him and benched his alternate captain.

"I mean, Petey's a top-line centre," Foote explained Monday. "In my opinion, the last game, he didn't have the zip, didn't have the energy and I wanted to make an adjustment. He and I will talk today before the game. He's good. I think you'll see him react the way we want him to react, respond the way we want him to respond, and I don't expect anything less."

On Saturday, Foote told reporters in Seattle: "He's got to be better, and he knows that, he's aware of that. We need more from him and he's got to find it. He knows he's got to be better for us and we'll see that next game. (He has) got to play with more zip, like, more pace to his game, more engaged. Good things will happen when he gets his motor going."

All of this was entirely fair and, really, not especially harsh.

But the coach's critique stood out because Foote, despite the tire-fire of the Canucks season and organization's dramatic pivot towards a rebuild, has rarely gone public with any unhappiness over individual players.

"(There's) no sense of me giving the media something that they don't need to have," Foote said. "I've always believed in fixing our stuff in house, and we'll continue to be that way."

"You know what? When we're a team that's ready to win three playoff series and we're ready to win a Stanley Cup, and we're playing on all cylinders like Dallas is, and we have laid three eggs in a row, you'll see me publicly go off. We're in a completely different situation here this year."

"There's guys that are working. It's a fine line every day coming to work when you have veterans and youth and them working together to stay on

the boat and play the right way. And they've done a good job doing it. We want better results, but it's part of the process."

Foote praised Pettersson for his attitude. The player has acknowledged his shortcomings with coaches and been open to their ideas and instruction.

"He's had a great attitude with it," Foote said. "Sometimes all you (can) take away is some ice at this level. When I played, if someone took my little ice (away). . . the next game, I was coming out with vengeance. And I know Petey will respond the right way tonight."

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

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On getting benched, Pettersson said: "He saw what's best for the team to try to win the game and I respect his decision. And I need to be better."

"I mean, it sucks losing. We're last in the league; it's a terrible feeling. But I'm just trying to play a good game tonight and take it from there."

The Canucks' final game before Friday's deadline is Wednesday against the Carolina Hurricanes.

Dropped to the fourth line in Seattle before watching the final 9:47, Pettersson skated Monday morning back on the first line between wingers Evander Kane and Jake DeBrusk.

Defenceman Tyler Myers, who came out of the lineup to consider a trade proposal presented to him by management nearly a week ago, will miss a third straight game tonight.

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1381306 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers trade deadline preview: Cup contenders must address defensive woes

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — The Edmonton Oilers have been the National Hockey League's second-best team for two years running. They've played the second-most playoff games in the last five seasons.

In the middle of their Stanley Cup window, there can be no question as to where general manager Stan Bowman stands heading into Friday's trade deadline.

"We want to win. That hasn't changed," Bowman said Monday, not surprisingly.

But, he warned, bringing in a couple of new players won't solve what really troubles this team right now: "We haven't played well defensively as a team ... goaltending, defence and forwards."

Bowman added right-shot defenceman Connor Murphy to his team in a trade with Chicago on Monday for a 2028 second-round pick. Murphy, a big defensive D-man, was the first guy over the boards on the league's best penalty-killing unit in Chicago this season. The Blackhawks retained half of his \$4.4 million cap hit.



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Murphy will slot in next to Darnell Nurse on the second pairing in Edmonton, a duo of six-foot-four, 212ish-pound defencemen with more than 775 games of NHL experience.

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That alone will not assuage the Oilers' defensive shortcomings, however.

"There has to be a better, bigger commitment from our players — all of our players — to play smarter hockey and not trying to make plays every shift," Bowman said. "Maybe it's having more respect for the game, the simplicity of the game. We want to put on a show ... but there are two sides to it. We haven't managed that very well.

"The way to fix that, it's not going to be magical new players," Bowman warned. "It's going to be the approach that we take as a team. Understanding that going through a whole period without getting a lot of scoring chances is OK, if you don't give up a lot."

Projected deadline cap space: \$200,000

Contracts: 47/50

Retention slots open: 3/3

Draft picks (via PuckPedia):

Needs

The disaster of a trade that was Stuart Skinner for Tristan Jarry also cost the Oilers trusty defenceman Brett Kulak, who was smartly snapped up by Western Conference foe Colorado last week.

Adding Murphy drops Jake Walman back to his natural left side on the third pairing, and upgrades a D corps that should be much more than it has shown this season, if history tells us anything. This team has 20 games to find its defensive posture, and Murphy will be part of that for sure.

Up front, Edmonton's greatest need is that prototypical third-line centre: a guy who can win faceoffs, kill a penalty and provide a modicum of offence at five-on-five while matching up against the opponent's top players once in a while. That would push 36-year-old Adam Henrique down to 4C, which suits his game more favourably after having logged 1,000 games in the NHL.

The Oilers could always use an upgrade in goal — this is Edmonton, after all — but we'd be mighty surprised if a team with this little capital could scratch that itch as well at the deadline.

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Assets to trade

Like any Cup contender, Edmonton's cupboards grow increasingly bare each year. But give Bowman some credit here: he's managed to add younger players like Vasily Podkolzin, Matt Savoie, Josh Samanski, Ty Emberson and Ike Howard along the way, keeping his average age at 28.5 years, right in the middle of the NHL pack.

They'd move six-foot-four right-shot defenceman Alec Regula — who cleared waivers Monday — in the right deal, and likely Howard as well.

Andrew Mangiapane simply must move in any further deal to open up the cap space required to bring a new player in. It will cost Bowman an extra draft pick or a better prospect, the price for a misguided July 1 from which the Oilers GM must rescue himself and his team.

Howard is likely their most appealing prospect who is playing pro right now, a winger who can score. He's 21 and has 14 goals and 32 points in 30 games at AHL Bakersfield, better than decent for a first-year pro.

Bowman envisions Howard as a top-six winger who could finish for Leon Draisaitl or Connor McDavid one day soon. But the Oilers are firmly in win-now territory and will move off of Howard if required.

Potential targets

Boone Jenner: This would be the Cadillac of moves for Edmonton, a character centre with good size and decent hands. If Jenner is your third-line centre, you're doing OK.

Scott Laughton: He's a pending UFA who makes just \$1.5 million. If the Leafs retained half, that deal could work.

Bobby McMann: Another pending UFA from Toronto, he's an affordable winger who could add some size and speed.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.03.2026

1381307 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames trade deadline preview: Just how much selling will be done?

Eric Francis

Have been for months.

So when Craig Conroy and his team arrived in Anaheim for Sunday's game to find Colorado GM Chris McFarland and his two right-hand men in attendance, the news resurrected age-old rumours suggesting Nazem Kadri might be on his way back to Denver.

Although the Avalanche missed Kadri for several years, the reality is that Kadri is no longer a fit with his old club. Brock Nelson has stepped seamlessly into the middle of the second line Kadri anchored when Colorado won the Cup. Nelson has 30 goals this season and is signed for two more years at \$7.5 million, ending the Kadri connection.

Besides, the Avs' brass were just in town a day ahead of back-to-back California games.

However, that's not to suggest Blake Coleman wouldn't be a brilliant fit on McFarland's third line.

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Indeed, you can expect plenty more swap suggestions involving those two veterans to make the rounds over the next four days, as the Flames look to continue trying to find established youngsters.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Given how hard they are to identify and acquire, the Flames can continue to be patient at this deadline. In fact, if it is indeed a buyers' market, Conroy could potentially remain relatively quiet, as only one of his trade chips — Ryan Lomberg — is on an expiring contract.

The rest have term, meaning that if Conroy continues to be unsatisfied with the returns being offered, he could continue shopping at the draft, through the summer and into next season.

Although that wouldn't sit well with a fan base looking to shake things up, the ever-patient Conroy may have no choice.

Projected deadline-day cap space: \$44.2 million

Contracts: 45/50

Retention slots open: 1/3

Draft picks (via PuckPedia):

Needs

With a solid goalie tandem in place, and a capable blue line with young and old, the search is for scorers — difference-makers who can help the league's lowest-scoring team.

No, those players aren't generally traded by contenders at the deadline. But young prospects and draft picks are.

With the new arena opening in the fall of 2027, Conroy would prefer to acquire young players who are already in the league, on the cusp of blossoming with the team.

Whatever age they are, they need a nose for the net.

Assets to trade

Blake Coleman: Coleman continues to be the most sought-after Flame, as he's a two-time Cup champion who is one of the league's best shutdown wingers and penalty killers. His cap hit is just \$4.9 million and whoever acquires him gets the leader for two playoff runs.

Nazem Kadri: The Flames' best player is the type of add every contender would love to add up the middle, but the hurdle is the three years left on the 35-year-old's contract.

Brayden Pachal: A hard-hitting, right-shot defender who earned a Stanley Cup ring with Vegas, Pachal has the moxie to be an insurance policy for a team stocking up for a long run.

Joel Hanley: The 34-year-old defenceman has been a steadying presence, filling in wherever he's needed, making him a potential depth add for a contender.

Ryan Lomberg: Despite making an impassioned plea to remain with the club Lomberg hopes to re-sign with, the 31-year-old is a natural to be on this list because he's the only pending UFA on the roster.

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More information

Potential targets

Connor Geekie: Tampa's Geekie is a perfect example of the type of player the Flames would love to add. The six-foot-four, 212-pound first-rounder is a 21-year-old sniper who has been shining in the AHL as he awaits his chance to break through on a deep Lightning roster.

Plenty like to link Coleman with a return to Tampa, making Morgan Geekie's younger brother an obvious target if the two sides were to work out a deal.

Other considerations

The Flames have one salary retention spot left, which could be key to trading either of their two biggest names, especially Kadri, whose AAV is \$7 million. Two more retention spots open up this summer when Rasmus Andersson and Jacob Markstrom come off the books.

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1381308 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens trade deadline preview: Why Blues' Thomas might be worth high price

Eric Engels

SAN JOSE, Calif. — The Montreal Canadiens are rolling into the NHL's trade deadline in a luxury ride, with the windows down and sunroof open to all possibilities that might happen to fall out of the sky.

And if none do, they'll cruise, because they don't have to do anything between now and March 6.

We're talking about a team that's been in a top-10 position for most of the season to date, a team that's challenging for first place in the Atlantic Division, a team that's scored more goals than all but three others in the league. A deep team currently at full health, and most importantly, a team that's well ahead of schedule on its journey to becoming a perennial Stanley Cup contender.

It was just four years ago that the Canadiens embarked on a rebuild. No one — not even president of hockey operations Jeff Gorton nor general manager Kent Hughes — would've imagined their transition out of it would be so smooth and expedient.

But now, with both the present and future appearing so bright, both men will tread carefully to ensure the next step the Canadiens take is forward.

"Kent and I spend a lot of time analyzing that next thing, and we're in a phase where whatever we do next is really important to get right," said Gorton when we interviewed him ahead of the Olympic break. "When you ask how we balance our long-term vision with not wasting the opportunity in front of us, it's hard to answer if this is the time or when the time will be (to strike) because you really don't know until something is presented to you. Kent's really good at being really on top of what is out there, talking to managers a lot. He's pretty thorough. I think our job is to be ready for whatever it is and when those decisions come, whether they come today or tomorrow or months down the road."

Makes sense.

Then again, that came after Gorton said he and Hughes would "like to be aggressive," and guaranteed they would if need be.

Having space — and the ability to create more of it — as well as tons of draft capital and one of the deepest and most talented prospect pools in all of hockey has put them in the plush seats of that luxury ride.

If the right piece(s) become available, you have to think Gorton and Hughes will pounce.

Projected deadline day cap space: \$1.49M

Contracts: 45/50

Retention slots open: 3/3



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 3, 2026

Draft picks (via PuckPedia):

Needs

None.

Desires? Yes, the Canadiens have some.

Start with a second-line centre who's more established than rookie Oliver Kapanen.

If the Canadiens can't find one, an edgy top-six winger with winning experience wouldn't be turned away from.

Mix in a right-handed, top-four defenceman that slots next to either Mike Matheson or Lane Hutson and pushes Kaiden Guhle back to his natural side on the left and you're cooking with gas.

As for a goaltender, Gorton pooh-poohed that possibility before the break, and we don't think the three games the Canadiens have played since (wins over Winnipeg and Washington, with an overtime loss to the New York Islanders in between) have changed his and Hughes' stance.

We're also not convinced that anything that happens in the Canadiens' final game before the deadline — against the Sharks on Tuesday — will alter that.

"We're probably more comfortable than everyone suggests we are right now with our two goalies," Gorton said of Jakub Dobes and Samuel Montembeault. "I think that we're all encouraged with how they've both been playing lately. We're encouraged with what we've seen from Sam since he came back (from his December conditioning stint in Laval) and Dobes has been better."

No arguments here, with Montembeault ranking 13th in the league in goals saved above expected over his last 10 appearances and Dobes not suffering a regulation loss in any of his last 11 games, with his last one coming Dec. 9.

Assets to trade

Provided the first-round picks are lottery-protected, they and all the other picks would be in play for the right player(s).

Rentals probably don't qualify, as Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman reported on a recent Saturday Headlines segment on Hockey Night in Canada.

Jayden Struble: Not that he's being shopped, but his most regular place with the Canadiens this season has been on the margin of an overcrowded blue line. There's no doubt he's good enough to be a regular, though he has a better chance of being one with a team that's not as deep. If the Canadiens need to create a bit of space, clearing Struble's \$1.41 million cap hit through 2027 might be one way of doing it, and so he's being listed as a tradeable asset — with the caveat that the Canadiens will more likely hang onto Struble if no other defenceman is coming in from another team.

Patrik Laine: He is being shopped, with the carrot of retaining half of his expiring \$8.7-million cap hit dangling as enticement because little else about the player appears to be attracting suitors at the moment. Laine's played just five games this season, and though he produced 20 goals last year — including 15 on the power play— there are few (if any) teams in playoff or title contention clamouring for his services. And the Canadiens are only likely to move him to a non-contender to clear space if they need it. Otherwise, he'll finish the season in Montreal.

Oliver Kapanen: OK, don't freak out, Canadiens fans. By no means are we suggesting the brass is pushing a 22-year-old centre with 18 goals and a very promising future out the door. But when we get to the next section, at least one of the players listed as a potential target carries a very high acquisition cost.

We're not going as far as to list top prospects David Reinbacher, Adam Engstrom, Michael Hage and Alexander Zharovsky as "assets to trade,"

either. But if we could call them all untouchable, they wouldn't even be mentioned.

Zachary Bolduc / Alex Texier: Again, neither is being shopped, but neither is completely off the table. Especially if the Canadiens need to make space for an incoming roster player.

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

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Potential targets

In the go-big-or-go-home category is Robert Thomas, because the Canadiens can't afford to just completely disregard a top centre who fits perfectly in the age range and salary structure of their team — especially one with the potential to immediately vault them into their contention window — just because they love their prospects so much.

We think the world of Kapanen, Hage, Zharovsky, Engstrom and Reinbacher, too.

But Thomas is a serial winner — he has two OHL Championships, one Memorial Cup, one world junior championship and one Stanley Cup to his name — who produced 65 points as a low over his last four seasons. In each of the two campaigns that preceded this one, he generated 60 assists, with 86 points recorded over 82 games in 2023-24 and 81 points notched in 2024-25. And the dip of 35 points in 43 games this season can be at least partially attributed to some injury issues and the St. Louis Blues being largely disconnected and dysfunctional.

Make no mistake, if Nick Suzuki is the Canadiens' Patrice Bergeron — and the latter seems to think the former fits the bill — then Thomas could be their David Krejci.

It's only more enticing that he's six-foot, 207 pounds, 26 years old, and counting for just \$8.125 million on the cap through 2031.

The Canadiens don't have to go get Thomas, though. They can — and might even prefer to — wait and hope for Kapanen, Hage or Zharovsky to become as effective. They can also hold Engstrom and Reinbacher, even if it's unlikely there'll be long-term space for both of them with Lane Hutson signed for eight more years, Noah Dobson signed for seven more, Matheson and Guhle both inked for five more years beyond this one, and an ace like Bryce Pickford rising up beneath them.

Or Gorton and Hughes can think about creating a package no one else can beat for Thomas, who's a sure thing.

Maybe it's something like Kapanen, Engstrom/Reinbacher, another prospect like Owen Beck and a second-round pick. Maybe it's either Hage or Zharovsky and one of the blueliners or a first.

Whatever it is, the price will be very high, and the Canadiens should seriously consider paying it.

Because players like Thomas rarely become available in their prime and none of those incredible prospects of theirs is guaranteed to hit the way he already has.

If they deem the cost to acquire Thomas too high, then looking at either Ryan O'Reilly or Nazem Kadri to bridge the gap to Kapanen, Hage and Zharovsky's ascension makes sense. Particularly in that order, with 35-year-old O'Reilly signed for just \$4.5 million through 2027.

The six-foot-one, 207-pounder fits perfectly with the Canadiens — as a player who plays bigger than his size, as a lefty who wins over 55 per



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cent of his faceoffs, as a Stanley Cup winner, and as someone who's produced 21 goals and 57 points in 59 games after putting up 21 and 55 in 79 last season.

The problem is that even if O'Reilly doesn't have trade protection, he's reportedly being treated as though he does. And every source we've touched base with about him since Friedman mentioned him as a potential target for the Canadiens has suggested he'd prefer to remain in Nashville or move to a quieter market than Montreal, if he must move.

Sources have suggested to us that Kadri, however, wouldn't be opposed to coming to the Canadiens.

The hitch: even if the 35-year-old Cup winner is still quite productive — he has 12 goals and 41 points for a Calgary Flames team that can't score — and even if he also plays bigger than six-foot, 185, he counts for \$7 million on the cap for each of the next three seasons beyond this one.

We don't know if the Canadiens would meet Flames GM Craig Conroy's high asking price to take all that on, but we do know they can't without clearing significant space.

As far as an edgy winger is concerned, Calgary's Blake Coleman, who makes \$4.9 million per through 2027, is compelling. But some sources have indicated Montreal is among the 10 teams he's listed on his modified no-trade clause, and two others have suggested his destination of preference is Dallas.

When we sat with Gorton, he didn't feel "an imminent need" for a defenceman who could be counted on more than Struble or Arber Xhekaj currently are.

And while we didn't talk with Gorton about getting a big crease-clearing, board-eating righty to play above them, it stands to reason he and Hughes would be in the market for such a player. We were banging the drum earlier this season for Vancouver's Tyler Myers, but that was before sources informed us his family situation had him unlikely to waive his no-movement clause for any team in the Eastern Conference.

Maybe that changes now that Myers has been told the Canucks want him to consider offers already on the table to move him.

If it doesn't, Philadelphia's Rasmus Ristolainen fits, even if he's never played an NHL playoff game. Like Myers, he's only under contract for one more season, and the price to pay will likely only be picks.

My friend Tony Marinaro, of the Sick Podcast, has speculated about Chicago's Connor Murphy, who's six-foot-four, 212 pounds, right-handed, and on an expiring \$4.4-million cap hit.

But we don't know if Montreal sees him as a fit, and it's unclear what the front office would be willing to pay for a rental.

What we know for sure is they won't make trades just to make them. If the Canadiens stand pat, after having already added Bolduc, Dobson, Texier and Danault since the off-season, it's because the right thing(s) didn't fall through their sunroof.

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1381309 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why every contender in the East should be buying before the trade deadline

Ryan Dixon

There's a decent chance a six-year, sun-soaked Eastern Conference trend continues for the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs. Still, if you're looking

in the direction of daily sunrise, it's easier than ever to contemplate new possibilities and the very real opening that exists for several success-starved Eastern squads.

The Tampa Bay Lightning may well be the class of the East and, if they do win three rounds and final themselves in the Stanley Cup Final, it will mark seven straight years either Tampa or the Florida Panthers represented the conference.

But the Buffalo Sabres — who've won three straight road games coming out of the Olympic break to further legitimize their fantastic results heading into the hiatus — pumped the Bolts 6-2 in Tampa on Saturday night. That same evening, the Montreal Canadiens topped a Washington Capitals club that eliminated them from the playoffs last spring and the New York Islanders won their fourth consecutive contest by beating the Blue Jackets in Columbus by a 4-3 count in overtime.

A day later, the Isles ran the streak to five games — thanks to super rookie Matthew Schaefer's second two-goal showing in his past three contests — by downing the two-time defending Cup-champion Florida Panthers 5-4 and the Penguins — with Sidney Crosby relegated to spectator status — beat the wheels off the Vegas Golden Knights in Steeltown to the tune of 5-0.

With the trade deadline set to hit on Friday, the 'Why not us?' chatter should be spreading throughout the upper halves of the Atlantic and Metropolitan divisions.

Five teams that did not make the playoffs last season — Buffalo, the Isles, Pittsburgh, Detroit and Boston — are currently in decent-to-strong places in terms of qualifying for the 2026 post-season. Boston is back just one year after a hard reset, but the Islanders haven't won a round since 2021, Pittsburgh hasn't won one since 2018, while the Wings and Sabres — as you've no doubt heard — have not participated in the second season since 2016 and 2011, respectively.

Now toss in the Habs, who emerged from a total rebuild ahead of schedule last season to make the playoffs and have a real shot at home-ice advantage in Round 1 this spring.

Seriously, why wouldn't all these teams be sniffing around a buyer's market for help, considering there's a great chance you'd be facing a fellow up-and-coming team come April?

A big, steady third-pair guy for Buffalo and Montreal? Another guy who could put the puck in the net on Long Island? How about a monster swing for Robert Thomas by the Wings?

It all makes sense when you consider none of these teams must end the state of Florida's Cup final streak for this spring to be judged a success. They may never say so publicly, but simply winning a playoff round — or, my goodness, a couple rounds — would represent a massive win in these markets, especially the ones in Michigan and Western New York with big-time hockey fans starved for nourishment.

And although Tampa and Carolina don't need any kind of nudge to get in go-for-it mode, the quiet part those division-leading teams aren't going to say out loud is, any year the path to the final doesn't go through the Florida Panthers — losers of two more games on the weekend — is a year you should think about adding that extra piece or two to exploit the opening.

Even if their ultimate goals differ, every team in an Eastern Conference playoff slot should be looking to add.

Weekend takeaways

- Does everything we just said about the Eastern Conference also apply to the Pacific Division? Here are the top six Pacific teams by points percentage in 2026 after the division-leading Vegas Golden Knights were waxed by Pittsburgh on Sunday: Anaheim (.632); Seattle (.591); Vegas (.568); San Jose (.528); Los Angeles (.500); Edmonton (.500). With



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respect to an Oilers team that has gone to two straight Cup finals, who exactly is the big, bad boy in that group this year? The Ducks, Kraken and Sharks may be inexperienced, but they've got to feel like winning a round is absolutely in play if they can stay away from the Central Division side of the draw in the West.

- The Kings, of course, axed coach Jim Hiller on Sunday and, after having previously dealt for Artemi Panarin, there's a feeling of "in for a penny, in for a pound" around this club. Stay tuned; more moves that would directly alter the on-ice product in L.A. could be coming this week.

- A final Pacific note: Michael Misa, the second-overall selection in 2025, scored the overtime winner in San Jose's 2-1 victory over Winnipeg on Sunday. That came one day after a 1-1-2 showing for the rookie in a 5-4 win over Edmonton. In all, Misa has two goals and four points in his past three outings as he appears to be hitting his NHL stride.

### Red and White Power Rankings

1. Montreal Canadiens (33-17-9) With two goals in Saturday's 5-2 victory over Washington, Cole Caufield has 35 on the year and at least a crack at becoming the Canadiens' first 50-goal scorer since Stephane Richer in 1989-90.

2. Ottawa Senators (29-22-8) After downing their provincial rivals 5-2 in Toronto on Saturday, the Sens head west with an outside shot of being buyers on Friday. Ottawa begins a jaunt through Western Canada and Seattle on Tuesday in Edmonton.

3. Edmonton Oilers (29-24-8) After losing 5-4 in San Jose on Saturday, the Oilers have surrendered five or more goals in six of their past 10 outings. Their goals-against average in that run is 4.60 and the only time they allowed fewer than three in that stretch is when they held a Kings squad that just fired its coach to one goal.

4. Toronto Maple Leafs (27-24-9) Exactly how different this team looks by Saturday is unknown, but there's no doubt change is coming now after what captain Auston Matthews called out an "embarrassing" loss on Saturday.

5. Winnipeg Jets (23-26-10) The Jets begin an eight-game homestand on Tuesday versus Chicago. Winnipeg will play the four worst teams in the league by points percentage (Chicago, St. Louis, the Rangers and Vancouver), while also facing two of the best three in Colorado and Tampa. It seems like a pipedream, but any chance 14 of a possible 16 points gets them back in the Western Conference wild-card hunt?

6. Calgary Flames (24-28-7) If Nazem Kadri is dealt this week, there's a decent chance the Flames will finish the season without a 50-point guy. Kadri is on pace for 57 and the next-closest Flame to him is captain Mikael Backlund, who's tracking a 48-point season. Twenty-six teams already have a 50-point player on their roster.

7. Vancouver Canucks (18-34-7) No matter what happens this week, the Canucks made the biggest deal they could make this season when they dealt Quinn Hughes to Minnesota. On the rare happy note, one of the players Vancouver got in that deal — winger Liam Ohgren — scored in Saturday's 5-1 loss to Seattle and now has two goals and four points in his past five outings.

### The week ahead

- New Kings (interim) coach D.J. Moore will jump right into the fire when his club hosts the top-of-the-table Colorado Avalanche on Monday night in L.A. That game will be Anze Kopitar's 1,499th in the NHL and the future Hall of Famer — in his final season — will play career game No. 1,500 on Thursday, when the Kings host the Islanders.

- Tuesday brings a heavyweight tilt in Minnesota when the Tampa Bay Lightning travel north to battle the Wild. Both teams will be looking to distance themselves from poor showings on the weekend, as Tampa was

thumped by the Sabres and the Wild lost at home to lowly St. Louis on Sunday.

- It's an all-disappointment matchup on Wednesday in Jersey when the Leafs visit the Devils. New Jersey coach Sheldon Keefe — who knows a thing or two about both clubs — is poised to miss the playoffs for the first time in his seventh season as an NHL bench boss.

- Speaking of the deadline, it will land at 3 p.m. ET / noon PT on Friday. Last year featured a crazy day that saw Mikko Rantanen dealt for the second time in six weeks and Brad Marchand heading to Florida in a buzzer-beater of a deal. What will this Friday bring?

- The two best teenagers in the league will battle Saturday night in San Jose when Matthew Schaefer and the Islanders visit Macklin Celebrini's Sharks. Meanwhile, Sunday brings big Western Conference duels with the Wild in Colorado and Edmonton visiting Vegas.

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TSN.CA / Berube calls for players to dig in as trade rumours swirl

Mark Masters

The Toronto Maple Leafs and Philadelphia Flyers skated at Scotiabank Arena on Monday.

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Craig Berube is urging his players to tune out the noise in Toronto as trade speculation swirls around the struggling team ahead of Friday's trade deadline.

"They're Leafs today," the coach said. "They're professionals, and they've got to deal with that. Nobody can deal with it for them. They've just got to deal with it, and they've got to go play. They've got to do the job."

Toronto has lost all three games since the Olympic break while getting outscored 14-5. The Leafs have fallen to last place in the Atlantic Division and sit eight points out of a playoff spot.

John Tavares acknowledged it's normal for players to be thinking about the uncertainty right now, but the 35-year-old centre also stressed there's "a responsibility" for guys to perform at a high level.

"There's a job to do and there's a great opportunity to not only play in the National Hockey League, but play here in Toronto and put the Maple Leaf on your chest," Tavares said.

"The bonds that you build and the type of team you want to be, there's an accountability there and a trust you want to build and you want to rely on. So, as much as the noise can be going on, all those things, you do the best you can to focus on what you can control."

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The Leafs have five players on TSN's latest trade bait list including Scott Laughton, who is No. 21.

"It's hard sometimes," the veteran centre, who is in the final year of his contract, admitted. "But, at the end of the day, you're in the NHL and [part of] one of the best franchises. It's a very humbling opportunity and it's a special place."

Monday's game against the Flyers will be Toronto's final home date before the deadline, which means it may be the final time Laughton wears the colours of his hometown team inside Scotiabank Arena.



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"Obviously, I've loved it here," the Oakville, Ont. native said. "I loved my time and that's all I really can control. I don't get into the conversations too much. So, I'm a Leaf and that's where I want to be and we'll see where it goes."

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Auston Matthews described Toronto's performance on Saturday in a loss to the Ottawa Senators as "embarrassing."

Asked about getting the team to play with more pride, Berube said on Saturday that he couldn't give his players heart.

"I expected more coming out of the break from our group," Berube said on Monday. "We've got to fight and claw our way out of the situation we're in."

What sort of response is Berube expecting against the Flyers?

"It's going to be a better response for sure," Berube promised. "I expect a lot better tonight from our team."

Rick Tocchet, who is close friends with Berube, was asked what it takes for a coach to get out of a situation like this.

"You got to rely on your staff and as an organization, but you're looking for a chunk of players to really lead the charge for you when things don't go your way," the Flyers bench boss said. "I'm sure he said it, we all say it, 'Block out the noise,' but also you rely on guys to steady the waters."

Tocchet believes Berube's calm nature is an asset at moments like this.

"he may not look calm sometimes, but behind the scenes he is," Tocchet said. "Sometimes the waves are only six feet and everybody acts like they're 20. Sometimes, as a coach, you gotta be careful that you don't act like that too. Even myself, you know, sometimes it's not 20-foot waves, it's only six so sometimes you gotta be a little calmer and things like that. I'm just talking about myself. I'm not talking about Craig."

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Berube is loading up his top line for Monday's game with Matthews and William Nylander playing together.

"Well, they're arguably our two best players, right," Berube said. "Go out and control the game and do what you guys do best."

The Leafs have only scored one 5-on-5 goal since returning from the Olympic break and it came right as a power play expired early in Saturday's game.

"So, we need some offence for sure from those guys, but they have to be responsible defensively too," Berube said.

Bobby McMann will slot in on the left side of Matthews and Nylander.

"Two exceptional players," McMann said. "Move the puck well. See the ice well. Just get them the puck any time I can. They can make special plays when they have it. Try and open up space with my speed, and hopefully they can do their magic."

Matthews was not available to the media on Monday morning.

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McMann is No. 7 on TSN's trade board, which makes him the top Leafs player on the list.

"I'm here right now," the pending unrestricted free agent said. "I know there's been a lot of talk. I'm trying not to pay attention to it as much as I can."

McMann is an undrafted college free agent, who worked his way up the ranks from the ECHL. What has it mean to play for the Leafs?

"That's hard to put into words," the 29-year-old from Wainwright, Alta. said. "I'm not really necessarily trying to speculate on officially leaving either, like, I want to just battle here. It's been fun my whole career working my way into the NHL here and getting the opportunity. I want to make the most of it and continue to put my best effort forward no matter the situation."

Monday marks McMann's 200th game in the NHL.

"Pretty sweet," he said of the milestone. "Not something that many guys get to do. It's something I'll definitely look back on in the future ... It's pretty cool and something I can definitely appreciate."

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Winger Nick Robertson will be a healthy scratch for the first time since Dec. 8.

"I felt Nicky's game dropped off even before the break a little bit and through the break here, so he's going to get a reset today," Berube explained.

Robertson has gone five straight games without a point.

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The Leafs traded winger Nikita Grebenkin to the Flyers as part of the deal that brought Laughton to Toronto last March. Grebenkin only played in seven games with the Leafs, but said Monday's first game back in Toronto will be a little extra emotional.

"I want to win today," the 22-year-old Russian said with a smile. "I think I go [on] ice, speak a couple guys, Max Domi, what's up buddy? But game started, it's war. It's business."

Grebenkin became a fan favourite in Toronto thanks to his gritty style and quotable interviews. He said he received hundreds of messages from Leafs fans on social media.

"My Instagram broke and I don't use now," he said with a smile. "Too many guys. Guys, what's up? Hello Toronto! But I won't see them today."

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Newmarket, Ont. native Denver Barkey will play his first NHL game in Toronto on Monday. He expects between 50 and 100 supporters in the crowd.

"It will be a surreal, full-circle moment," the 20-year-old said.

Barkey grew up a big Leafs fan and has fond memories of attending games with his dad. Among his favourite players to watch were Darcy Tucker and fellow London Knights alumnus Mitch Marner.

Barkey is looking forward to facing off with his former Knights teammate Easton Cowan, who scored the overtime winner during their first NHL game against each other in January. Did Cowan let Barkey hear it after that big goal?

"No, he's pretty good with that stuff," Barkey said with a smile. "Nothing too crazy. But, yeah, just a competitive guy. Looking forward to going to war with him tonight."

It was in the victorious dressing room after that game that Leafs teammates had Cowan replicate a TikTok dance to the song "Hide Away" by Daya that he did with Barkey and Oliver Bonk during his Knights days.

"I haven't seen a video of it yet," Barkey said with a smile. "But his one in person wasn't great. Not the best moves."

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Leafs lines at Monday's skate:

McMann - Matthews - Nylander



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Knies - Tavares - Domi

Maccelli - Roy - Joshua

Lorentz - Laughton - Cowan

Robertson, Jarnkrok

Rielly - Carlo

Benoit - McCabe

Ekman-Larsson - Myers

Stecher

Stolarz

Woll

Leafs power-play units at Monday's skate:

QB: Rielly

Flanks: Matthews, Nylander

Middle: Tavares

Down low: Knies

QB: Ekman-Larsson

Flanks: Maccelli, Domi

Middle: Cowan

Net front: McMann

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TSN.CA / Oilers' issues run deeper than goaltending woes

Travis Yost

The Edmonton Oilers have reached the Stanley Cup Final in consecutive seasons and, organizationally, there is still belief this team as structured can win it all. The math, however, is starting to get complicated.

It goes without saying any team with a two-headed monster of Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl is alive until they are officially dead. And in fairness to both the Oilers superstars and the organization broadly, Edmonton has shown itself to be a very resilient team.

The offensive firepower has been there, but the regular-season dominance hasn't always been guaranteed. In fact, since the 2020-21 pandemic-shortened year, the Oilers are just 10th in goal differential (+69) – a strong number, but perhaps less than you'd expect for a team that's routinely been pushing deep into the playoffs.

There have been several reasons for Edmonton's intra-season roller coasters over the years.

Early in the McDavid era there was a stunning lack of depth at the forward position, and more recently the team has been fighting woeful goaltending. But none of these issues have slowed them down for an extended period. In fact, one of the defining points of the McDavid era has been this team's ability to rally, especially late in the season.

But that's hardly been the case this season. This is a team that's been fighting to stay alive in the playoff race rather than pushing for a divisional win. The sharp rallies of years past simply haven't appeared,

and that's why, with six weeks left in the season, Edmonton is just 67 per cent likely to qualify:

Yost1

From a talent perspective, this Oilers team is still loaded. But when you start comparing them to the Central Division goliaths or Vegas (i.e., Western Conference contenders), they don't look as fierce.

What's complicating matters is Edmonton doesn't have much salary flexibility to modify their lineup heading into the trade deadline after adding goaltender Tristan Jarry from Pittsburgh. As it stands today the Oilers have effectively zero cap space, which means any sort of addition is going to require meaningful salary retention or a cap-neutral trade, which can be hard to find.

What complicates matters further is that isn't solely a goaltending story. While they have been outsized contributors to the goals against problem, it should be noted expected goal rates against (blind to goaltending performance) are up considerably, and the penalty kill has slid to 27th in the NHL:

Yost2

Beneath the surface, the offensive juggernaut we have grown to love still exists, but the margins have disappeared. And why those margins have dissipated is straightforward. The goaltending remains a nightmare – Jarry is about three goals worse than a replacement-level goaltender since being shipped to Edmonton on an 86.2 per cent stop rate.

Relative to league averages, Edmonton goaltenders are all too forgiving (via HockeyViz):

Yost3

If nothing else, it will be fascinating to see what the Oilers' approach will be heading into such a crucial trade deadline.

The non-existent cap space really limits their ability to upgrade, and the question of where to upgrade still feels meaningful.

A second goaltending move feels unlikely; the team must instead hope Jarry can find his game. There's been speculation about adding a defenceman to pair with the struggling Darnell Nurse – perhaps Calgary's Zach Whitecloud or Ottawa's Artem Zub, if the Senators could be incentivized to move on from the reliable veteran? As far as forward depth is concerned, Nashville winger Erik Haula's defensive touch would fit in nicely with this team.

Improving this team, given the constraints, is going to be difficult. But it's clear the front office is preparing as we head towards Friday's deadline. It started with waiving Andrew Mangiapane and his \$3.6 million cap hit over the weekend, and there's already speculation as to whether Edmonton can get Adam Henrique to waive his no-trade clause in the event of a future deal.

General manager Stan Bowman has less than five days to figure all of this out and reposition his team back into Stanley Cup contention. Fail to do so, and there will be an awful lot of questions about the quality and viability of this roster.

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