



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 5, 2026

The News & Observer

Inside US sled hockey player Kayden Beasley's journey from NC to the Paralympics

By: Jady Watson-Fisher

Six-and-a-half years have passed since Kayden Beasley, then a 13-year-old adolescent with visions of hockey pucks dancing in his head, first attended practice with the Hurricanes Sled Hockey team at Polar Ice Raleigh.

This weekend, those dreams have carried him all the way to Italy, where Beasley, now 19, will represent the United States in the 2026 Milano Cortina Paralympic Games.

Beasley, from Coats, North Carolina, is a congenital double amputee above the knee, meaning he was born without the bottom portion of his legs. Sled hockey — known on the international stage as para hockey or sledge hockey — is an adaptive version of the sport, allowing individuals with disabilities and medical conditions to participate in a group sport.

Beasley traveled to Italy last week to begin his Paralympic journey. He is the only Team USA member from North Carolina, and one of the youngest. Despite his age, Beasley already has international experience. He joined the national team in 2024, participating in the International Para Hockey Games in Czechia and helped the team win gold.

"His first international tournament, I think the second game, he was named player of the game," said Brian Jacoby, Hurricanes Sled Hockey co-founder and director. "He scores a ridiculous highlight reel goal against Team Italy."

It was exactly five years since he'd joined the local club.

Beasley, young in his athletic career, now has another chance to represent the U.S. on an international stage. He is one of 14 athletes selected for Team USA, which seeks to earn a fifth consecutive gold medal in the event and add another hockey medal to the women's and men's hockey golds in the Olympics.

"It's really cool," Beasley said during a press conference at Lenovo Center in February. "This is the first Paralympics I've been to, so I'm excited."

'He's a natural'

Jacoby remembered the first Saturday when Beasley showed up to the rink. Beasley had never played any adaptive sports, and had only ever played flag football and soccer with his church.

A physician's assistant recommended the Hurricanes Sled Hockey club to Beasley and his family during a medical appointment in 2019. It would be a way for him to remain active and participate in a team sport like other children his age.

After Jacoby helped fit him with a sled and equipment, Beasley took to the ice for the first time.

"It just happened," Jacoby said. "He's a natural, and he's never looked back. It's easy to say now we knew immediately [he would be successful], but there was a very strong suspicion early on."

Kayden Beasley fist-bumps Brian Jacoby after participating in a press conference at the Lenovo Center on Feb. 24, 2026. Beasley is a member of the U.S. National Sled Hockey Team who are competing in the 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Italy.

Kayden Beasley fist-bumps Brian Jacoby after participating in a press conference at the Lenovo Center on Feb. 24, 2026. Beasley is a member of the U.S. National Sled Hockey Team who are competing in the 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Italy. Ethan Hyman ehyman@newsobserver.com

Jacoby said it's "life changing" to see individuals like Beasley get on the ice for the first time and discover their capabilities.

Shortly after Beasley began playing with the club — backed by the Carolina Hurricanes of the NHL — Jacoby and the other coaches encouraged him to apply for a USA Hockey camp. He was one of the top 60 players selected to participate.

The young athlete impressed the organization and asked to attend future camps. It wasn't until he was on his second or third trip, with the backing of the Hurricanes Sled Hockey organization, that Beasley realized he could be successful in the sport.

"They were a big part in starting my journey," Beasley said of the club. "I'm very grateful to have them. They taught the beginning stages and just supported me throughout all of it."

'Part of the journey'

Beasley's full story began thousands of miles away from Raleigh — he was born in China in 2006 — and could easily have had a much different outcome.

In 1979, China introduced its one child policy in an attempt at curbing its booming population. The initiative, which immediately was subject to global criticism, restricted many families to one child.

The country established exceptions during its implementation, but it still had wide socioeconomic, cultural and demographic effects. Notably, the policy prompted an increase in orphanages after families were allowed to surrender their children to avoid penalties. The government, however, closed a loophole that allowed families to readopt their children. This led to the abandonment of infant girls — the culture valued sons over daughters — and children considered to have special needs.

The country repealed the policy in 2016, but Beasley, who was born 10 years prior, was abandoned by his biological family.



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His parents, Anthony and Amy Beasley, adopted him at age 3, returning to North Carolina on Christmas Day 2009. He grew up in Coats, roughly 30 miles from Raleigh, and considers the small Harnett County town home.

"I was adopted from China and moved to America," Beasley said. "I guess it's all I've ever known."

The Beasleys had also adopted Kayden's older brother, Caleb, from the same Chinese province three years prior. Caleb is 20 months older than Kayden, and the two play sled hockey together, the eldest Beasley son joining the team after seeing his younger brother's success and joy.

Beasley understands the importance of history, and always acknowledges where he came from, even ensuring that it's listed on his Team USA biography page. But it's what has come afterward that has made the greatest impact on where he is today.

Beasley's family is his greatest support and inspiration. His parents have driven him to practices and events, even when it's early in the morning, and traveled across the country to watch him compete. He's not wearing a Team USA jersey without his family's encouragement and sacrifices.

"[My adoption] is a part of the journey," Beasley said, "but not all of it."

Breaking down barriers

Hurricanes Sled Hockey was founded by Tyler Jacoby, son of Brian Jacoby and his wife, Kelly, in 2006. Tyler Jacoby was born with spina bifida, a condition that caused paralysis in his legs. He was inspired by the Carolina Hurricanes' 2006 Stanley Cup Championship, and he wanted to play the sport, too.

The Jacoby family thought it might be a fleeting desire, but Tyler Jacoby was on the ice less than a year later.

Tyler is believed to be the first sled hockey player from the Carolinas, and his passion for hockey served as the catalyst for the club's creation. It has steadily grown over the past 20 years, not only providing an outlet, but with the help of the Carolina Hurricanes Foundation, providing participants and their families with financial assistance. It serves children and adults, including active-duty and veteran military members, with disabilities or other health challenges.

"Our No. 1 purpose, why we exist, is to facilitate those kinds of things, to open doors for adaptive athletes," Brian Jacoby said. "That's why we're here. It was a very expensive thing, and his parents couldn't necessarily make that happen on their own, so the program steps in and fills the gap."

The Hurricanes — the NHL franchise and the club — are excited for Beasley's journey to the Paralympics, said Shane Willis, Hurricanes Director of Youth Hockey & Community Outreach. They're equally excited about the positive impact Beasley could have on other young athletes.

"We're excited to watch more kids walk into the rink on a Saturday and say, 'I want to try and play hockey,'" Willis said. "I think there's a number of parents and kids at home, they're looking for a sport. And I think a lot of times, when you look at hockey, people think, 'Well, it's dangerous.' We're here to tell you that it's not.

"We're going to take down every single barrier that's there for you and your family to get involved in what we feel is the greatest sport in the world."



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The Athletic

16 stats: This is shaping up to be the most unpredictable NHL season in recent memory

By: Dom Luszczyszyn

With 20 games left, the 2025-26 NHL season is shaping up to be one of the most chaotic and improbable seasons in the past decade.

Going into the season, the six least likely teams to make the playoffs according to oddsmakers were Anaheim (+250), Boston (+375), Seattle (+550), Pittsburgh (+600), San Jose (+1200) and Chicago (+1600). Four of those teams currently sit in a playoff spot and one, San Jose, is just outside the cutoff line. Just a little above those teams in the bottom 10 were the Islanders (+220) and Red Wings (+230), who also sit in a playoff spot.

That's potentially a 60 percent hit rate for the bottom 10, which is somehow higher than the hit rate for the 18 teams that started the year as playoff favorites: 50 percent. Toronto, Florida, New Jersey, Los Angeles, Washington, Winnipeg, Ottawa, St. Louis and the Rangers all started the season as probable playoff bets. They all look increasingly likely to miss instead.

We all know hockey is incredibly unpredictable, more so than any other sport, but this level of chaos is pretty unprecedented. It's extremely unusual for this many projected favorites to miss and this many expected bottom-feeders to make.

Over the past decade, the average playoff make percentage for favorites is 69 percent according to Sports Odds History, with the lowest being 59 percent in 2017-18. The average playoff make percentage for bottom-10 teams is 22 percent, with the highest being 50 percent in 2014-15. If everything holds, this year will be the most unusual year on record based on preseason playoff lines.

An interesting layer to that is how playoff prognostication has improved since 2017-18. Models and oddsmakers have only gotten better since that season, which is what makes this year's collective miss so fascinating. If one were to bet \$100 on every favorite to miss and every underdog to make, they wouldn't have had one winning season from 2018-19 to 2024-25, losing \$711 per year on average. This season, that naive system would've won \$2,400.

That's obviously not betting advice, especially considering this year is probably an outlier. It's simply a way to frame just how unusual this season has been from a prediction perspective. Oddsmakers have a financial incentive to set the right expectations and usually do so with ease. That they haven't this season is not necessarily a sign that they're "wrong," but it is yet another reminder about how wacky and random this sport can be. That's part of the charm and why they play the games — even in hockey's least chaotic seasons, there are always plenty of surprises along the way.

This year's chaos is one reason that the playoff race still feels so wide open. If you've noticed some of the "unlikely" playoff contenders still aren't playoff locks, it's precisely because of how unlikely it would've seemed at the start of the season. Every day, each team's priors are updated as they play well and bank points. But with hockey being so unpredictable, it's always a safer bet to keep every team's prior track record in mind and not put complete focus on this season alone.

That adds some caution as to whether or not they'll actually pull it off, but with 20 games left, it's becoming more and more probable that the surprise teams many expected to land in the bottom 10 will actually land in the playoffs instead.

It's going to be an exciting race to the finish in what has been the most unpredictable season in recent memory. Now we wait and see if this season's unlikely heroes can make it across the finish line.

16 stats

1. Always expect more from Boston

One of Boston's consistent calling cards is its ability to get the most out of its chance differential. This year, the Bruins are on track to have a goal differential that's 50 goals better than expected for the fifth time in the analytics era. It's something that has only happened 12 other times, with no team doing it more than twice. Perhaps just as shocking: The Bruins have had a negative goal differential above expected just as many times as they've been plus-50 (assuming they get there this year).

One of those seasons was last year, which is part of what made it difficult to expect the Bruins to play at this level this season. Considering their history, though, it's last year that was probably closer to outlier territory. Since 2007-08, Boston's goal differential is 450 goals above expected, 77 more than Washington in second and nearly 200 more than St. Louis in third.

2. Cautionary regression tales

As much as we should respect Boston's consistent ability to beat expected goals, the Bruins still find themselves within a heavy regression zone. Boston has a goals percentage nearly eight percentage points above expected, joining Seattle (8.6 percent), Colorado (8.3 percent) and the Islanders (5.1 percent) as the four teams above five percentage points.

While their ability to outscore more than expected may continue all year, that's still an important indicator going forward. Since 2007-08, there have been 42 teams whose goal percentage was five percentage points higher than



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expected. Of those 42, 37 saw a drop of 4.4 percentage points on average the following season.

Some teams do have an innate ability to finish or save better than expected, but there's usually a limit.

3. The worst teams below expected

The four worst teams in goal difference above expected in the analytics era should be of no surprise: Ottawa, Carolina, New Jersey and San Jose. All four are 250 goals below expected.

4. Carolina's record with Jaccob Slavin

The Hurricanes' loss on Monday to the Kraken was notable for one key reason: It was the team's first regulation loss with Jaccob Slavin in the lineup. The Hurricanes are 15-1-4 with Slavin playing this season and 23-15-2 without. The team's xG is slightly stronger, but it's their ability to actually outscore opponents (60 percent with Slavin compared to 52 percent without) with every defender properly slotted that really makes a difference.

As for Slavin himself, he's earning every bit of his defensive reputation this season. In 20 games, he has a plus-3.3 Defensive Rating, a plus-13.6 pace that would lead the league.

5. Anthony Mantha's breakthrough

With 21 goals and 45 points in 60 games, Anthony Mantha is on pace for 29 goals and 62 points, both of which would be career highs. The only time he's paced better than that was in 2019-20, seven seasons ago. Perhaps even more striking is that Mantha has played 60 games, not missing a single one. That's a big (and welcome) surprise for a player who came into the year missing at least 15 games in seven of 10 seasons.

Mantha finally figuring things out at age 31 and staying available for every game is a major reason the Penguins have surprised this season. He flaunted this potential back in Detroit; now he's finally realizing it.

6. Jim Hiller's long-overdue firing

The Kings finally did what fans have been clamoring for ever since a botched goalie challenge in the postseason last April tanked the team's playoff hopes: They fired Jim Hiller. Under Hiller, the Kings had an anemic offense, a middling ability to possess the puck and struggled to do anything except get to overtime, where they usually lost. The stagnation of Quinton Byfield and the puzzling usage of Brandt Clarke were also key points of issue. While management hasn't done the team many favors, the Kings should be a lot better than this: A team that's five points out of a playoff spot with a minus-24 goal differential.

While it's not too late for the Kings to claw back thanks to having the league's easiest schedule going forward, they haven't left themselves a whole lot of wiggle room waiting this long to do the obvious. The Kings still have a 47.5 percent shot of making the playoffs and are the eighth likeliest team in the West, but it's time to actually start stringing some wins together.

7. Edmonton's buy high, sell low

At the time of the deal, it was very strange how much the Oilers had to add to Stuart Skinner in order to acquire Stuart Skinner East, aka Tristan Jarry. While Jarry was playing better hockey at the time (0.54 GSx per game to Skinner's 0.16), both goalies had a strong tendency to run hot or cold and the Oilers seemed to time the deal at the worst possible time. Jarry was at the height of a hot streak, Skinner was in a lull.

There's still time for things to turn around, but so far the trade has gone roughly as expected. Skinner's play improved, while Jarry cooled off. Since the deal, Skinner has saved 0.21 goals above expected per game, while Jarry has allowed 0.46 per game. The difference ends up already being worth three standings points, enough to make Edmonton's playoff spot a little more precarious than it needs to be.

8. Can Connor Murphy improve Edmonton's defensive game

Lost in the goalie trade debacle was that part of Edmonton's real problem wasn't all goaltending to begin with. The defense in front of them hasn't been very helpful. Skinner's expected save percentage in Edmonton was .885, while Jarry's wasn't much better at .883. Both are among the lowest marks in the league.

That's an area where Connor Murphy may be able to help in terms of limiting chances to begin with. This season, he has a plus-2.9 Defensive Rating, which led Chicago's defenders. Since moving Brett Kulak, the Oilers currently only have one defenseman with a positive Defensive Rating this year, Ty Emberson. Murphy is an upgrade on both.

As good as Evan Bouchard and Mattias Ekholm still are, they've struggled a lot defensively this season. Getting a stopper was something the team badly needed.

9. Vancouver's wretched penalty kill

We all know the Canucks have one of the league's worst penalty kills, but they've taken things to brand new lows in the new year. Since Jan. 1, the Canucks have allowed 17.9 goals against per 60, four goals worse than the next-worst team. For the old school crowd, that means teams are converting on 42 percent of their power plays over Vancouver's last 21 games.

10. Filip Hronek surviving fine without Quinn Hughes

Before the Quinn Hughes trade, Filip Hronek had a 47 percent xG while scoring at a 42-point pace. After the Hughes trade, Hronek has a 47 percent xG while scoring at a 45-point pace. While it's certainly not ideal that Hronek is now the team's best defenseman, the idea that he was completely carried by Hughes doesn't really hold up with his numbers staying steady since Hughes' departure. And that's with Hronek taking on more of a matchup role now.

There are no silver linings during this horrible Canucks season, but Hronek continuing to play like a No. 2 guy, even without Hughes, is close.

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11. Matt Boldy's new level



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When Matt Boldy broke onto the scene as a rookie, he was immediately electric with 39 points in 47 games, a 68-point pace. But in the three years after that, his progress felt incremental. This year, he's finally hitting that next level, and he's been extra special of late.

Boldy sandwiched a strong Olympic showing with a couple of four-point games and is now on an 11-game point streak, where he's scored 22 points. Boldy is starting to look like a franchise winger — there aren't many better than him. This year, only Nikita Kucherov, Jason Robertson and teammate Kirill Kaprizov have a higher Net Rating than Boldy's plus-14.9.

12. Dallas's top-three defensemen are cooking

As badly as Dallas needs a top-four defenseman (and I'm skeptical that Tyler Myers is the answer to that problem), the team's big guns have been dominant of late, which mitigates the problem.

Miro Heiskanen may not be a Norris frontrunner, but he's once again in the conversation with his ability to produce, eat tough minutes, move the puck and defend; he's the whole package. Esa Lindell is having the best season of his career and his plus-10 Defensive Rating leads all players. And then there's Thomas Harley, who started slow but has started to come around of late. Over his last 12 games, he has 11 points, a 63 percent xG, and 67 percent of the goals, earning an average Game Score of 2.08. That's third best behind only Rasmus Dahlin and Heiskanen.

With Lindell being just as special, it's no wonder the Stars have been the top five-on-five team during that time frame, with 64 percent of the expected goals. That's 7.5 percentage points higher than second, a big reason they've been winning so many games. After starting the season with some question marks regarding their underlying numbers, the Stars are surging at the right time.

13. Pavel Buchnevich turning the corner

Too little, too late for the Blues this season, but it's been nice to see the Pavel Buchnevich of old come back over the last little bit. Buchnevich has six goals and 13 points in his past 10 games while being one of the team's top forwards at five-on-five.

14. Ottawa's playoff chances

The Senators are on the outside looking in and feel like the scariest of the threats to make a run. Over their past 10 games, they've taken their possession prowess to new heights with a 58 percent xG and they're starting to get the

goaltending to match that, which has led to the team scoring 61 percent of the goals. With a power play that's clicking and a penalty kill that's bleeding less, I like Ottawa's chances.

One important factor: A below-average remaining schedule where the average Net Rating of teams they'll face is minus-0.8. That compares favorably to Pittsburgh (plus-21.9), Boston (plus-11.9) and Detroit (plus-8.1). This race isn't over yet.

15. Goodnight, Florida

After losing five of six heading into the break and three of four immediately after, it's safe to say it's over for the Panthers. Their playoff chances on Jan. 25 were 70 percent before that skid; they now sit at eight percent.

During that stretch, the Panthers had 53 percent of the expected goals and 37 percent of the actual goals as their finishing and goaltending have abandoned them at the same time. On the latter front, Sergei Bobrovsky's minus-21 GSAX this season is better than only Jordan Binnington's this season. The Panthers needed him to hold the fort and instead, he's been the primary reason for the team's downfall.

16. The below-average Maple Leafs

It's obvious to anyone watching, but it's important to note that the last domino has fallen: Even Dom's Biased Model now views the Leafs as a below-average hockey team with a minus-six Net Rating. And that still doesn't feel low enough, as there's still some reverence reserved for the team's prior track record. How they're playing now falls well below that mark. It's the first time since Auston Matthews' rookie season that the Leafs have been rated this poorly — and for good reason. The once-dominant possession team is now a distant memory as the Leafs rank 26th in xG this season and 31st in shot attempts.

And no, Mitch Marner's departure is not the sole reason the Leafs have sunk so low. Marner's been worth 2.7 wins this season, which would not be enough to make up the nine-point gap between the Leafs and a playoff spot. It's a massive indictment on management that they've turned a perennial contender into a team that's not even a superstar away from making the postseason at all.

A lot of that is coaching, and some of that is injuries. But even with that in mind, what Brad Treliving has built is simply not good enough. That he's being lapped by a Pittsburgh retool built off the scrap heap by the guy he replaced is an extremely bad look.



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Recap: Ehlers' Hat Trick Helps Canes Escape Canucks

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

Carolina extends Metropolitan Division lead to nine points

VANCOUVER - Nikolaj Ehlers scored his second hat trick of the season to lead the Carolina Hurricanes to a 6-4 victory over the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday.

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After waiting nearly 60 minutes for a power play on Monday, an early man-advantage marker from Andrei Svechnikov gave the Canes the lead just 1:17 in. But what had been a dominant opening frame for Carolina took a sharp late turn, with two Vancouver goals in 44 seconds giving the hosts a surprising one-goal lead at the break.

Putting that hiccup behind them, the Hurricanes got right back to work in the second period. Goals from Sean Walker and Ehlers in the first 4:19 restored Carolina's one-goal lead, then a breakaway beauty from Sebastian Aho and Ehlers' second of the night arrived just 53 seconds apart to open up a 5-2 advantage.

Once again, though, mistakes and momentum allowed Vancouver to make things interesting. Trimming the Canes' lead to one with goals on either side of the second intermission, the Canucks' late push led to an empty-net scenario in the waning minutes, when Ehlers completed his trifecta with a game-sealing goal.

Brandon Bussi picked up his 25th win of the season, and ninth in a row, with 18 saves on 22 shots in the Carolina cage.

Stats & Standouts

Forward Nikolaj Ehlers became the first Hurricane to notch multiple hat tricks this season. The Danish star has now scored five goals in his last four games and is up to 19 on the year, which ranks fourth on the team.

Ehlers is the first player in team history (since relocation) to post multiple hat tricks in his first season with the team.

Forward Sebastian Aho became the fourth Finnish player in NHL history to record eight 60-point seasons, Jari Kurri (13), Teemu Selanne (12) and Mikko Rantanen (8).

Forward Andrei Svechnikov posted two points to reach 417 in his career, surpassing Jeff O'Neill for the seventh-most in franchise history.

Forward Seth Jarvis logged two assists for his 11th multi-point game of the season, surpassing Shayne Gostisbehere for the third-most on the team.

Defenseman Sean Walker notched his third multi-point game of the campaign, tying his single-season career high.

Goaltender Brandon Bussi picked up his 25th career victory faster than any goaltender in NHL history, doing so in 29 games (prev. record: 32 games).

Bussi is the second goalie in league history with multiple winning streaks of nine or more games in his first season, joining Bill Durnan (MTL, 1943-44).

They Said It...

Rod Brind'Amour summarizing the contest...

"I thought we started out really well, then we kind of put ourselves in a hole a few times, and they were able to capitalize. Then we got ahead, and we thought we were just going to cruise through it. Then they made it interesting. We got two points out of it."

Rod Brind'Amour continuing on nearly letting this one slip away...

"It's one of those games where we were in control early and then let off the gas. Give them credit, they fought back... The game should've been over, and we took the foot off the gas. They made a couple of nice plays. We took penalties and [they had] a five-on-three. These are things that you certainly don't want to be doing if you want to win consistently. We got away with it tonight."

Nikolaj Ehlers on his night...

"I thought I played a terrible game tonight. It's one of those days where they just seem to go in, and I'm not complaining about that, but I've got to be way better."

Brandon Bussi following his 25th win...

"In this league, you just have to find ways to win games. I think I've got better, but it was good enough tonight. The team was really good in front of me, offensively. Putting up six is really nice, so we'll take the positives out of it."

What's Next?

The Canes are scheduled to practice in Edmonton on Thursday. They'll start a back-to-back set against Alberta teams versus the Oilers on Friday.

Next Game: Friday, March 6 at Edmonton | 9:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO

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



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Ehlers scores hat trick, Hurricanes hold off Canucks

By: Kevin Woodley

Carolina 11-1-2 in past 14 games; Hronek has 3 points for Vancouver

VANCOUVER – Nikolaj Ehlers scored a hat trick and the Carolina Hurricanes hung on to defeat the Vancouver Canucks 6-4 at Rogers Arena on Wednesday.

Sean Walker, Andrei Svechnikov and Sebastian Aho each had a goal and assist, Seth Jarvis had two assists and Brandon Bussi made 18 saves for the Hurricanes (39-16-6), who bounced back from their 12-game point streak ending in a 2-1 loss at the Seattle Kraken on Monday.

Carolina has won five of six and is 11-1-2 in its past 14, but Ehlers wasn't happy the Hurricanes almost blew a 5-2 lead before he completed his second hat trick this season with Carolina and seventh all time into an empty net with 14 seconds left for the 6-4 final.

"I don't think we love that game; gave up way too many big chances and made Bussi work for it tonight and just didn't play 100 percent our way and the way we need to play," Ehlers said. "I thought we came out really good, and then they kind of took over and after that, there was a lot of back and forth. So, we got some things we need to clean up."

Bussi improved to 25-3-1, tied for third in the NHL in wins in his first full season in the League despite playing 10 fewer games than anyone else in the top seven.

"I could have been a little better so that game didn't get to 5-4 and we're hanging on the last minute there but I loved our sacrifice, our ability to buy in, we created a lot of offense, and for the most part we prevented them from getting chances," Bussi said. "In this League, you just got to find ways to win games, so I think I got it better but it was good enough tonight."

Filip Hronek had a goal and two assists, Marco Rossi had a goal and an assist and Elias Pettersson had two assists for the Canucks (18-36-7), who were outshot 12-1 over the first nine minutes, have lost six in a row and have two wins in the past 23 games.

"The effort was there today, pretty happy about that," Hronek said. "But we have to be consistent with this and we have to have that effort for 60. Can't have it for 35 or whatever minutes."

Kevin Lankinen was pulled after four goals on 22 shots 11:53 into the second period. Nikita Tolopilo was beaten by the first shot he saw and made nine saves in relief.

"Maybe he could have had a couple of those but mainly just to change the energy," coach Adam Foote said. "It didn't work at first, did it? But the guys, what I liked was the fight they had throughout."

Svechnikov put Carolina ahead 1-0 on a power play 1:17 into the game, one-timing a short pass from Jarvis to the inside of the left face-off circle high over Lankinen's glove.

Rossi made it 1-1 on the power play at 16:31 when his cross-crease pass attempt from left of the net deflected off the stick of defenseman Jaccob Slavin and in between Bussi's pads.

"They came really hard," Rossi said of the start. "We just stick together and so I think we finished the first period pretty strong."

Hronek put the Canucks ahead 2-1 with a one-timer from inside the top of the right face-off circle after a pass from the net by Drew O'Connor that caught Bussi swinging his stick in anticipation of a wraparound and unable to get his blocker back into position.

Walker tied it 2-2 at 2:30 of the second period by skating onto a loose puck at the left dot after a rush chance was broken up and firing back the other way over Lankinen's glove.

Ehlers put Carolina ahead 3-2 at 4:19 off another rush chance, skating onto a pass from Jordan Staal and quickly firing far side over Lankinen's glove from the left dot.

Aho made it 4-2 on another rush at 11:53, knocking a Jarvis pass out of the air at the blue line to put himself in alone before lifting a backhand high over Lankinen's glove.

That ended Lankinen's night, but Ehlers scored on the first shot on Tolopilo less than a minute later, firing a slap shot off the rush from the left dot past the blocker to make it 5-2 at 12:51.

"I would think it's pretty tough coming in during the game when you've just been sitting and not thinking you're going to play, so every team thinks just shoot a lot," Ehlers said.

Brock Boeser converted a backdoor pass from Rossi on a 5-on-3 to make it 5-3 at 19:17. Vancouver finished 2-for-4 on the power play after going 0-for-13 over the previous eight games and 1-for-27 in the past 14 games. It's just the seventh time all season the Canucks have scored more than one power play goal in a game, and first time in 20 games back to Jan. 2.

"We were moving the puck pretty good today," Hronek said.



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Nils Hoglander scored his first goal in 22 games this season at 6:45 of the third period to make it 5-4, one-timing a cross-ice Pettersson pass past Bussi's blocker from the left hash mark.

"I just think the game should have been over and we just kind of took the foot off the gas," coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

Despite taking a penalty with 2:13 left, Vancouver had chances to tie it late, including a nice left shoulder save by Bussi on a high Pettersson shot from the slot, and Ehlers completed his hat trick into an empty net to secure the win.

"It's always special when you score three goals but at the same time, I'm not too happy about my performance," Ehlers said. "It's one of those where they just seem to go in and that's great, we won, but I got a bit better than that."

NOTES: The Hurricanes were 2-for-3 on the power play. ... Carolina center Jesperi Kotkaniemi was plus-1 in 10:27 of ice time in his first game back after being scratched the first three games after the Olympics. ... Canucks forward Evander Kane missed the game because of illness. ... Max Sasson was minus-1 in 11:46 of ice time in his place after being scratched for three straight.



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AP ASSOCIATED PRESS

Nikolaj Ehlers' hat trick leads Carolina Hurricanes past Vancouver Canucks 6-4 | AP News

By: AP

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Nikolaj Ehlers sealed his seventh career hat trick with an empty-net goal and the Carolina Hurricanes held off the Vancouver Canucks for a 6-4 victory on Wednesday night.

Sean Walker, Andrei Svechnikov and Sebastian Aho each added a goal and an assist for the Hurricanes. Seth Jarvis had two assists and Brandon Bussi stopped 18 shots.

Filip Hronek had a goal and two assists for the Canucks, who have lost seven straight and have just two wins in their last 23 games (2-17-4).

Vancouver traded defenseman Tyler Myers to Dallas earlier in the day for a 2027 second-round draft pick and a 2029 fourth-rounder.

Marco Rossi scored and had an assist and Brock Boeser and Nils Hoglander added goals for the Canucks. Kevin Lankinen allowed four goals on 22 shots before getting

pulled midway through the second period. He was replaced by Nikita Tolopilo, who made nine saves in relief.

The Canucks took a 2-1 lead on goals by Rossi and Hronek 44 seconds apart in the opening period.

Carolina took control with four consecutive goals in the second, with Walker, Ehlers, Aho and Ehlers again to make it 5-2.

Boeser scored with 43 seconds left in the second and Hoglander scored his first of the season to cut the Canucks' deficit to one at 5-4 6:45 into the third. But Ehlers sealed the win — and his hat trick — with 14 seconds left.

Vancouver played without forward Evander Kane, who general manager Patrik Allvin said was recovering from the flu.

Up next

Hurricanes: At the Edmonton Oilers on Friday.

Canucks: At the Chicago Blackhawks on Friday.



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NHL trade deadline rankings tiers: Which players could move? - ESPN

By: Greg Wyshynski

The NHL needs two things for an entertaining trade deadline: demanding contenders who have delusions of Stanley Cup grandeur, and enough teams willing to part with their current players to provide supply.

There are roughly eight teams that are probably out of the playoff hunt as the March 6 trade deadline approaches.

The New York Rangers already sent their letter to fans signaling a "retool" and traded Artemi Panarin to the Los Angeles Kings. Teams around the league are waiting to see how dramatically the Calgary Flames, St. Louis Blues and Vancouver Canucks compensate for disappointing seasons. All three clubs got into the trade game already the week of the deadline, with MacKenzie Weegar, Colton Parayko and Tyler Myers being dealt.

Meanwhile, a change in recent fortunes for some teams might change their thinking. Take the Columbus Blue Jackets, who have surged up the standings under new coach Rick Bowness. A month ago, players like Boone Jenner and Charlie Coyle would have been found in the trade tiers below. Now, it sounds like there's a better chance they could be extended than moved -- or at least kept around for a playoff push.

This list was compiled through conversations with league executives and other sources, as well as media reports. ESPN insiders, including Emily Kaplan, added their input as well. Salary figures are from PuckPedia.

With huge names such as Quinn Hughes and Panarin already off the board, let's start with some other shocking possibilities before diving into pending free agents, players with term left on their deals and some glue guys.

Jump ahead: Shockers

Elite pending free agents

Elite forwards with term

Elite D-men with term

25-and-under tier

Goalies | Glue guys

Shocking possibilities tier

Sergei Bobrovsky, G, Florida Panthers

Jordan Kyrou, RW, St. Louis Blues

Elias Pettersson, C, Vancouver Canucks

Morgan Rielly, D, Toronto Maple Leafs

Robert Thomas, C, St. Louis Blues

Alex Tuch, RW, Buffalo Sabres

The Panthers had an 18% chance of making the playoffs coming out of the break, according to our latest NHL Bubble Watch. Much of that depends on if and when star center Aleksander Barkov returns, and the two-time defending Stanley Cup champions can put together a run to make the postseason, where they'll remain inherently dangerous thanks to a deep roster and, of course, "Playoff Bob" Bobrovsky.

But what if, by the deadline, they decide the math isn't "mathing"? Is it possible Bobrovsky becomes someone else's playoff hero? ESPN's Kevin Weekes said it's a situation worth watching, particularly because Bobrovsky is a pending unrestricted free agent who has yet to receive a contract extension. He has two Vezina Trophies and two Stanley Cup wins to his credit. He makes \$10 million against the salary cap, but only \$6 million actual dollars this season, with trade protection. He's also 37 years old.

What do the Panthers want to do here? A short-term contract to backstop a veteran team that's back to full strength next season would seem like one avenue. But they do have 26-year-old Daniil Tarasov -- who, for what it's worth, has outplayed Bobrovsky this season. As Weekes said, this is something to watch.

It's hard to gauge how deep Blues GM Doug Armstrong is willing to cut into his roster during a disastrous season. Is Thomas' name in circulation only because other teams hope that the 26-year-old No. 1 center might become available? Or would the Blues offer up Thomas, provided he waives his trade protection, for the kind of package that could launch a retool? Thomas' contract has an \$8.125 million average annual value, but his annual salary declines or plateaus every season after this one.

Kyrou would only be shocking because the window seems closed on when the Blues could deal the 27-year-old winger. His no-trade clause started this season, and he remains in St. Louis despite some reports about his availability heading into last season's draft. Kyrou is signed at \$8.125 million annually through 2030-31.

It would be shocking if the Canucks finally did trade Pettersson considering his contract AAV (\$11.6 million through 2031-32) and protection (full no-move), as well as the fact that he may no longer be considered an offensive star in the NHL. Even after Vancouver removed the friction of the J.T. Miller situation, Pettersson still hasn't hit his marks: His past two seasons were his lowest in points per game for his career.

Rielly is one of several Maple Leafs with trade protection, in his case a full no-movement clause. He's signed through 2029-30 at a \$7.5 million AAV. He has 31 points in 54



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games, skating 21:34 of ice time per game. Could the Leafs decide to reshape their blue line by convincing the 13-year veteran it's time to move on, as another member of the "Core Four" leaves Toronto? As Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment president and CEO Keith Pelley told season-ticket holders on Wednesday in a letter: "We will do whatever is needed for this team to make the next step."

Then there's Tuch. The Sabres are in a playoff seed after 57 games. Tuch has 22 goals and 26 assists in 56 games, playing in every situation and is an absolute catalyst for the team. He's saying things like, "We're not just going to go for the playoffs, we're going to go for the Cup."

It's hard to imagine Buffalo trading that kind of player while seeking their first postseason berth since 2011, but Tuch and the Sabres have been talking contract for a long, long time with no long-term extension to show for it: first with former GM Kevyn Adams, now with Jarmo Kekalainen. Even without that extension, one assumes the Sabres would be comfortable keeping Tuch through the deadline with the playoffs in reach. But Kekalainen has always been a pragmatist.

Elite pending free agent tier

Jordan Eberle, RW, Seattle Kraken

Patrik Laine, LW, Montreal Canadiens

Evander Kane, LW, Vancouver Canucks

Nick Schmaltz, C, Utah Mammoth

Jaden Schwartz, F, Seattle Kraken

Kane is going to be traded, and the Canucks are going to gobble up a chunk of his \$5.125 million AAV to make it happen. He has a 16-team no-trade list, but the only requirement for Kane to agree to a move to his sixth NHL franchise is that it's a playoff team. The Dallas Stars have been a frequently mentioned fit, but don't discount a move back East for Kane, either.

The Kraken's playoff bubble is starting to burst, with a 41.2% chance of making the cut in the latest Bubble Watch, buoyed by Money Puck's outlier of a 68.4% probability. So what then happens to their unrestricted free agents, as GM Jason Botterill attempts to put his stamp on the team? Eberle (\$4.75 million AAV, no-trade clause) and Schwartz (\$5.5 million AAV, limited no-trade clause) seem primed for a move to a contender seeking scoring help on the wing. Eberle is the team captain and leading scorer through 54 games, with 20 goals and 38 points.

play

0:18

Jordan Eberle tallies goal vs. Devils

Jordan Eberle tallies goal vs. Devils

Schmaltz is a funny one. He has clearly endeared himself to Mammoth fans and has played a huge role in their push for a playoff seed with 53 points in 57 games, centering star Clayton Keller. But the 30-year-old is in line for a significant raise from his \$5.85 million AAV, and talks haven't exactly been sunshine and roses in the past. Dave Pagnotta of Daily Faceoff noted that last summer, Schmaltz and the Mammoth discussed possible trade destinations where he'd be willing

to sign an extension. Given Utah's playoff potential, it likely only makes sense to deal Schmaltz in a "hockey trade" for a significant roster upgrade.

What is Laine's value right now? He was limited to five games this season due to injury after a nice comeback season in 2024-25 with Montreal (20 goals in 52 games). The Canadiens would obviously have to pick up part of his \$8.7 million AAV to facilitate a trade. Laine is nearing a return from the IR. Is there someone who believes in a potential return to form enough to overlook his inability to remain in the lineup?

Elite forwards with term tier

Blake Coleman, C, Calgary Flames

Jake DeBrusk, LW, Vancouver Canucks

Conor Garland, RW, Vancouver Canucks

Nazem Kadri, C, Calgary Flames

Jonathan Marchessault, C, Nashville Predators

Ryan O'Reilly, C, Nashville Predators

Brayden Schenn, C, St. Louis Blues

Steven Stamkos, C, Nashville Predators

Ryan Strome, C, Anaheim Ducks

Owen Tippett, RW, Philadelphia Flyers

Vincent Trocheck, C, New York Rangers

You could build two pretty good center groups with the players available in the middle at this deadline -- in theory, at least.

Trocheck wasn't here in our last trade board because the Rangers were still feigning to be a contender at that point. Now that they're in the retool again, it's hard to imagine they won't move Trocheck for the benefit of both parties. He's as versatile a player as you'll find: someone who can average 0.76 points per game over the past two seasons, but also be a key defensive player, a role he served well in helping the United States win Olympic men's hockey gold.

Speaking of which: More than a few observers around the NHL believe Trocheck will end up with the Minnesota Wild, a team with a need in the middle and a general manager in Bill Guerin who built the aforementioned Team USA. Trocheck has a 12-team no-trade list.

The biggest name here is Stamkos, the 36-year-old star who started the season horrifically (one goal in 14 games) and then caught fire right as the Predators started moving up the standings. He had 16 points in 13 games leading up to the Olympic break and now has 28 goals on the season, proving his worth both to Nashville and the rest of the league. Complicating things is his contract: \$8 million annually through 2027-28. "I have a full-move clause, so I get to make a decision whenever it comes down to that. But I haven't had any conversations about that," he told The Athletic recently.

The Predators have two other big names in the middle. Marchessault has a full no-movement clause and makes \$5.5 million against the cap annually through 2028-29. He has 17 points in 38 games and has skated to a minus-18 in 38 games. His defensive game has deteriorated in Nashville,



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but the 2023 Conn Smythe winner can add some offensive pop to a contender.

O'Reilly, Nashville's other Conn Smythe winner, has a friendly cap hit (\$4.5 million AAV) on a contract with two years left on it. While the 2019 Cup winner doesn't have trade protection, GM Barry Trotz will work with O'Reilly on finding a preferred destination. O'Reilly has been awesome this season: 20 goals and 36 points in 57 games, winning 55.3% of his faceoffs, on par with his career mark. He's 35 years old but could be a "final puzzle piece" guy for the right contender.

Kadri is another "last piece" guy as a second-line two-way center with snarl, which is what he provided the Colorado Avalanche in winning the Stanley Cup in 2022. The 35-year-old makes \$7 million against the cap annually through 2028-29. He has a 13-team no-trade list but didn't exactly shoot down reports that he would be open to working with the Flames to facilitate a swap. Calgary loves what Kadri brings to the team, but the time might have come to maximize his return.

Complicating things: The Flames have only one slot to retain salary, after keeping a percentage in the Rasmus Andersson and Jacob Markstrom trades. If they use that for Kadri, they couldn't use it on Coleman. The 34-year-old forward has two years left at \$4.9 million annually, and a 10-team no-trade clause. He has 13 goals in 44 games and can help kill penalties, having won two Stanley Cups with the Lightning.

play

0:48

Nazem Kadri tallies goal vs. Maple Leafs

Nazem Kadri tallies goal vs. Maple Leafs

Schenn has a 15-team no-trade clause, making \$6.5 million against the cap annually through 2027-28. He has been in St. Louis for nine seasons and has 24 points in 57 games this season, skating to a ghastly minus-25. That said, the 34-year-old Stanley Cup winner is a coveted player around the league for his leadership, toughness and offensive upside. Assuming the Blues are in seller mode, he'll have plenty of attention and the Blues could get a hefty return for him.

Depending on how deep the trading goes in Vancouver, Garland and DeBrusk could be part of it. Garland hasn't even started the six-year, \$36 million deal he signed in July. He has 25 points in 46 games for Vancouver. DeBrusk, 29, has a full no-move clause and five more years on his contract at \$5.5 million AAV. He's not having the offensive season he had in 2024-25 (28 goals), but he's a solid winger that can slide into a team's middle six.

Is Tippett's name being out there just noise or something more palpable? His trade protection kicks in during the 2026-27 season. He makes \$6.2 million against the cap annually through 2031-32. He has had three straight 20-plus-goal seasons and has 19 goals in 56 games this season. Everything we've heard is that the Flyers might move him in the right "hockey trade" to help the club.

Whenever a veteran's ice time dramatically falls, one assumes a trade can't be too far off. Strome, the 32-year-old who has another year left at \$5 million AAV, averaged 16:41

last season and is down to 12:05 this season, with eight points in 32 games.

Elite defensemen with term tier

Justin Faulk, D, St. Louis Blues

Dougie Hamilton, D, New Jersey Devils

Rasmus Ristolainen, D, Philadelphia Flyers

The Devils were poised to trade Hamilton before Luke Hughes went down with an injury in late January -- please recall Hamilton being scratched in favor of defenseman Johnathan Kovacevic earlier in the month. With their season all but over and Hughes nearly back, one assumes Hamilton Watch begins again.

He has a 10-team trade list and a \$9 million cap hit that the Devils probably have to keep a portion of to facilitate a deal. (Although he's only owed \$13.65 million in real dollars over the last two years of his contract.) Hamilton isn't the offensive player that he once was, but he could easily fill someone's need for a veteran puck-moving defenseman on their second pairing. One intriguing possibility: a reunion with the Carolina Hurricanes, whom Hamilton left as a free agent in 2021.

Ristolainen might be an alternative to Weegar. The 31-year-old right defenseman has no trade protection and two years left on his deal at \$5.1 million AAV. Anthony Di Marco of Daily Faceoff reports an uptick in interest for the Flyers defenseman during the Olympic break, as he was doing his thing for Team Finland.

Faulk has been in St. Louis for seven seasons. He has two years left at \$6.5 million AAV (with some trade protection), but his front-loaded contract means he's making \$4.5 million in actual dollars this season and next. He has 30 points in 57 games, skating 22:29 per game on average. Three teams to wonder about there: Boston, Detroit and Dallas.

The 25-and-under tier

Brad Lambert, C, Winnipeg Jets

Alexis Lafreniere, LW, New York Rangers

Mason Lohrei, D, Boston Bruins

Pavel Mintyukov, D, Anaheim Ducks

Brennan Othmann, LW, New York Rangers

Nick Robertson, F, Toronto Maple Leafs

Braden Schneider, D, New York Rangers

Jesper Wallstedt, G, Minnesota Wild

Shane Wright, C, Seattle Kraken

Some of these players aren't likely to move unless it's to bring something significant back to their teams. Players such as Lohrei, Wallstedt and Wright -- whose availability has been trumpeted by Nick Kypreos of Sportsnet -- fit that description.

It gets a little more complicated for Lafreniere and Schneider, who could end up being part of the solution for whatever the Rangers' retool produces. Schneider is a restricted free agent this summer -- please recall the team traded defenseman K'Andre Miller last summer before having to do



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the RFA dance with him. Lafreniere, the first overall pick in 2020 who has yet to find another level in his NHL career, is in the first year of a seven-year extension that carries a friendly cap hit (\$7.45 million AAV) and an eight-team no-trade list. Othmann is also in this boat.

Lambert and Mintyukov have both expressed a desire for a change of scenery. Robertson's tenure has always been tenuous.

The goalie tier

Jordan Binnington, St. Louis Blues

Michael DiPietro, Boston Bruins

Elvis Merzlikins, Columbus Blue Jackets

Sam Montembeault, Montreal Canadiens

Alex Nedeljkovic, San Jose Sharks

Stuart Skinner, Pittsburgh Penguins

Think about this: Canada lost in the gold medal game to the United States -- and no one was saying it was Jordan Binnington's fault? Not many would have predicted that, given all the hand-wringing over the Canadian goaltending depth and Binnington's putrid season in the NHL, where Money Puck had him at minus-24.9 goals saved above expected in 32 games.

He's a big-game goalie. The Blues won't be playing any of those this season. But teams like the Hurricanes, Oilers, Golden Knights, Canadiens and Ducks all might. Binnington has a 14-team no-trade list and a \$6 million AAV. He has one more year on his deal after this one, with his salary dropping to just \$4.5 million.

Montembeault could move in a trade and has one more year on his contract. Nedeljkovic is a pending UFA for the Sharks and makes \$2.5 million.

One of the most interesting names here: Skinner, whom the Penguins acquired from the Oilers in the Tristan Jarry swap. Does Pittsburgh keep him around for their playoff push or do they trade the pending UFA, hoping that his extensive playoff experience outweighs other concerns for acquiring teams?

Help up front tier

Michael Bunting, F, Nashville Predators

Paul Cotter, F, New Jersey Devils

Warren Foegele, F, Los Angeles Kings

Ryan Hartman, C, Minnesota Wild

Erik Haula, C, Nashville Predators

Calle Jarnkrok, F, Toronto Maple Leafs

Jesper Kotkaniemi, C, Carolina Hurricanes

Matias Maccelli, F, Toronto Maple Leafs

Ilya Mikheyev, LW, Chicago Blackhawks

Gustav Nyquist, F, Winnipeg Jets

Evan Rodrigues, C, Florida Panthers

Yegor Sharangovich, F, Calgary Flames

Eeli Tolvanen, F, Seattle Kraken

Three players in particular getting buzz lately:

Haula had an outstanding Olympic tournament for Finland, with three goals and three assists in six games, including a big one against Canada in the semifinal. The 34-year-old has a six-team no-trade list and can be a boon to someone's bottom-six forward group.

Kings GM Ken Holland basically said that he would "work the phones" for Foegele, a nine-year veteran whose been scratched this season a bunch. He had back-to-back 20-goal seasons prior to this one. He has a 10-team no-trade list and a \$3.5 million AAV through next season.

Rodrigues was a solid player on the Panthers' back-to-back Stanley Cup winning teams. He has no-trade protection and a \$3 million AAV through next season. Sportsnet speculated that the veteran forward could be moved so Florida can create cap space, should the Panthers believe they still have a shot at the playoffs this season.

Help on the blue line tier

Brandon Carlo, Toronto Maple Leafs

Ian Cole, Utah Mammoth

Mario Ferraro, San Jose Sharks

John Klingberg, San Jose Sharkss

Timothy Liljegren, San Jose Sharks

Jamie Oleksiak, Seattle Kraken

Luke Schenn, Winnipeg Jets

Brady Skjei, Nashville Predators

Zach Whitecloud, Calgary Flames

It wouldn't be a proper trade deadline if Schenn's name wasn't floated. The 18-year NHL veteran has played for nine teams in his career, including five since 2021, because he's a quintessential defensive defenseman with two Stanley Cup rings from the Lightning.

Another strong defensive defenseman is Carlo, whom the Maple Leafs acquired last trade deadline when ... well, when Toronto was in a different mode of contention. Carlo has an eight-team no-trade list with a \$3.485 million AAV through next season. They've checked the market on him.

Ferraro used to be in our elite tier until enough people told us that was a misclassification. He's likely to remain in San Jose, but he's a pending free agent with a \$3.25 million cap hit.

One more defenseman to watch: Whitecloud, whom Calgary acquired from Vegas in the Rasmus Andersson deal. There's probably a market for a 29-year-old right-shot defenseman with a Stanley Cup ring and a \$2.75 million AAV through 2027-28 if the Flames want to explore it.

Bargain-beauty contracts tier

Simon Benoit, D, Toronto Maple Leafs

Teddy Blueger, C, Vancouver Canucks

Erik Gustafsson, D, Detroit Red Wings



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David Kampf, C, Vancouver Canucks

Scott Laughton, C, Toronto Maple Leafs

Ryan Lomberg, LW, Calgary Flames

Bobby McMann, F, Toronto Maple Leafs

Lukas Reichel, LW, Vancouver Canucks

Logan Stanley, D, Winnipeg Jets

Kevin Stenlund, C, Utah Mammoth

Oskar Sundqvist, C, St. Louis Blues

All the players in this tier make \$2 million against the cap or less. Their king, Kiefer Sherwood, was traded earlier this season by the Canucks. But Vancouver has three more low-AAV forwards to offer up at the deadline: Blueger (\$1.8

million), Kampf (\$1.1 million) and Reichel (\$1.2 million), who is buried in the AHL but played well for Germany in the Olympics.

The Leafs have three interesting options, too. Laughton was sought after last trade deadline for having a low cap hit (\$1.5 million) with term; now, he's got a low cap hit with an expiring contract. Benoit is a big, physical defenseman who is signed through next season at a \$1.35 AAV. But it's McMann who has gotten the most attention. The late bloomer (age 29) is on the verge of a second straight 20-goal season. The versatile forward makes just \$1.35 million on an expiring contract. That could help a contender.

And there are so many contenders right now. But as the tiers above indicate, there is plenty of supply to meet their demand.



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Ehlers scores hat trick, Hurricanes hand Canucks seventh straight loss

By: Canadian Press

Nikolaj Ehlers sealed his hat trick with an empty-net strike and the Carolina Hurricanes held off the Vancouver Canucks for a 6-4 victory on Wednesday.

Sean Walker, Andrei Svechnikov and Sebastian Aho each added a goal and an assist for the Canes (39-16-6), while Seth Jarvis contributed a pair of helpers and Brandon Bussi stopped 18 of the 22 shots he faced.

The Canucks (18-36-7) showed signs of life in the first period, taking a 2-1 lead with goals 44 seconds apart, then made it close with a late goal in the second and another midway through the third before Ehlers sealed the win with 14 seconds left on the clock.

Filip Hronek registered a goal and two assists for Vancouver, while Marco Rossi notched one of each. Brock Boeser and Nils Hoglander also scored, and Elias Pettersson had two helpers.

Kevin Lankinen allowed four goals on 22 shots before getting the hook midway through the second. He was replaced by Nikita Tolopilo, who made nine saves in relief.

The result stretched Vancouver's losing skid to seven games (0-5-2). The team has two wins in its last 23 outings (2-17-4).

Takeaways

Canucks: Took advantage of an extended stretch of 5-on-3 play late in the second period to cut the deficit to 5-3. ... Played without bruising winger Evander Kane, who general manager Patrik Allvin said was recovering from the flu. ... Dealt veteran defenceman Tyler Myers to the Dallas Stars for a pair of future draft picks earlier in the day.

Hurricanes: Dominated from the outset, drawing a penalty in the opening minute and scoring a power-play goal 1:17 into the game. ... Outshot Vancouver 12-1 over the opening nine minutes.

Key moment

The Hurricanes retook the lead at the 4:19 mark of the second when Ehlers collected a stretch pass from Jordan Staal, faked a shot from the top of the circle, then skated in and fired the puck in past Tolopilo to make it 3-2.

Key stat

The Canucks went 2-for-4 with the man advantage on Wednesday after going eight games without a power-play goal.

Up next

Canucks: Visit the Blackhawks in Chicago on Friday.

Hurricanes: Face the Oilers in Edmonton on Friday.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Ehlers Nets a Hattie - Hurricanes 6, Canucks 4

By: Bob Wage

The Carolina Hurricanes got a hat trick from Nikolaj Ehlers and defeated the Vancouver Canucks, 6-4 on Wednesday night at Rogers Arena.

It was a tight game at the end as Ehlers netted his last goal into an empty net with just 14 seconds left. It was his second hat trick of the season and the seventh of his career.

At times it seemed like the Hurricanes might run away with things as they outshot the home team, 33-22, but Vancouver made it interesting.

After taking the lead early on a powerplay goal by Andrei Svechnikov, the Canucks scored twice before the end of the first period to carry a 2-1 lead into the first intermission.

The Canes would come roaring back in the second period and scored four straight goals to pull ahead.

Sean Walker, Ehlers, Sebastian Aho, then Ehlers again provided the offensive push.

Aho's goal gave him 60 points making him just one of four other Finnish players to score 60 points or more in eight straight seasons. He joins Kurri, Selanne, and Rantanen.

The Canucks scored late in the second and early in the third to make it a one goal game but it stayed that way until near the end.

Brandon Bussi picked up another win giving him a 25-3-1 record. Bussi didn't look sharp at times but made the saves he needed to when it counted, which he has done often this season. That makes nine wins in a row for the netminder.

The Canes were outhit again, 30-13 with Svechnikov leading the way with four. They won the faceoff battle, 53% to 47%.

This was the last game before the trade deadline. Will Tulskey make a deal? We will have an open thread Friday morning to discuss the deadline.



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Sports Illustrated

NHL Trade Deadline: Ranking the 10 Top Players That Could Be on the Move

By: Karl Rasmussen

The NHL trade deadline is on Friday. This will be the last opportunity for contending teams to fortify their rosters as they make a push for the Stanley Cup Playoffs. On the other hand, the deadline serves as a final chance for teams outside of the playoff hunt to expedite their rebuilds by trading players on expiring contracts and stockpiling draft picks or young talent.

There are several teams expected to be big buyers at the deadline, and early reports indicate that it will be a buyers market, with plenty of talent anticipated to be available in negotiations.

Surprising teams such as the Rangers and reigning champion Panthers could be sellers after struggling throughout the year, while teams like the Sabres will be looking to add talent as they continue to enjoy an unexpectedly strong season.

We've already seen a few trades go down this week, such as the Predators sending Michael McCarron to Minnesota for a future second-round pick, Tyler Myers joining the Stars in a deal with the Canucks, and the Oilers addressing their defensive needs by landing Connor Murphy from the Blackhawks.

So, what other players could be on the move come Friday's deadline? Let's take a look at 10 of the most intriguing trade candidates.

10. Ryan O'Reilly, Predators

Ryan O'Reilly is in his third season with the Predators

O'Reilly has bounced back after a lackluster season in 2024-25, and he could be a valuable addition for a team looking for an experienced center. The 35-year-old has 59 points in 61 games, and is in the midst of his third consecutive season with more than 20 goals. He has one more year left on his contract at a rate of \$4.5 million per season.

9. Dougie Hamilton, Devils

Dougie Hamilton could be a trade target on Friday.

Hamilton's seen a steep decline in his scoring output this season, and New Jersey's offense as a whole has struggled. The veteran defenseman has 25 points in 56 games, and with the Devils unable to get things going, a trade feels more likely than ever. Hamilton is under contract through 2028 and makes \$9 million annually, so New Jersey may need to retain some of his salary to get a deal done.

8. Blake Coleman, Flames

Blake Coleman is a top trade candidate at the NHL trade deadline.

Coleman will be an attractive option at the deadline with Calgary unsurprisingly out of the playoff race. With one more year left on his contract at a rate of \$4.9 million, Coleman's experience and abilities as a two-way forward and penalty killer will be highly sought after.

7. Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Maple Leafs

Oliver Ekman-Larsson has two more years remaining on his contract.

Ekman-Larsson has had an excellent season for the Maple Leafs, but as the team continues to struggle, he may wind up with a new team at the deadline. He's under contract for two more seasons, but if he can sustain this level of play, his \$3.5 million cap hit shouldn't be a hindrance for teams.

6. Steven Stamkos, Predators

Steven Stamkos has 30 goals this season.

Stamkos has been one of the league's top goalscorers this season, but with a no-movement clause, he'd need to approve any trade at the deadline. Stamkos has 47 points, including 30 goals, in 61 games, but his \$8 million salary (through 2028) might not be too easy to offload for the Predators.

5. Nazem Kadri, Flames

Nazem Kadri has three more years left on his contract.

Will there be a buyer for Kadri and the three additional years remaining on his contract? The veteran center would be a long-term addition at a rate of \$7 million per season, but he has Stanley Cup championship experience and is a constant competitor. He has 41 points this season but could elevate his play if he's surrounded by more talent than he has been in Calgary.

4. Justin Faulk, Blues

Justin Faulk is in his 15th NHL season

Faulk has only one year left on his contract beyond this season, but he's one of the league's most experienced two-way defensemen. He has 32 points this season, including 11 goals, and has the durability to eat up ice time and skate long shifts, averaging over 22 minutes per game.

3. Robert Thomas, Blues

Robert Thomas could be one of the biggest names traded this season.



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The Sabres are one of the teams reportedly interested in Thomas, and have been in discussion with St. Louis as they aim to add the standout playmaker to their ranks. Thomas is young, still just 26, and is coming off two seasons with over 80 points. He's under contract through 2031, but if the Blues are selling at the deadline, they could get a big haul for him.

2. Sergei Bobrovsky, Panthers

Sergei Bobrovsky is in the final year of his contract with the Florida Panthers.

There won't be a three-peat this year, as the Panthers' playoff chances have all but evaporated. With goaltender being a position of need for many teams, it's possible Florida looks to cash in on Bobrovsky at the trade deadline. The 37-

year-old is in the final year of his contract and has a \$10 million cap hit, but he could be a game-changing addition for contending teams.

1. Vincent Trocheck, Rangers

Vincent Trocheck may be nearing the end of his time with the Rangers.

After moving Artemi Panarin to the Kings, Trocheck may be the next Rangers veteran offloaded this season. Fresh off of winning gold at the Milan Cortina Olympics, where his dominance in the faceoff circle and on the penalty kill was critical for Team USA, Trocheck is one of the crown jewels of the trade market. He has 39 points in 46 games this year and comes with multiple years left on his contract.



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The Hockey News

'We Got Away With It Tonight': Rod Brind'Amour, Nikolaj Ehlers, Brandon Bussi On Win Over Vancouver

By: Ryan Henkel

Ehlers' hat trick and Bussi's record-setting win highlight a chaotic 6-4 victory, with the team acknowledging they "got away with it tonight."

The Carolina Hurricanes got back in the win column Wednesday night with a 6-4 win over the Vancouver Canucks.

Nikolaj Ehlers netted his second hat trick of the season and Brandon Bussi set yet another NHL record, becoming the fastest goaltender to 25 career wins.

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

Dominant stretches, bizarre bounces, and goaltending woes tested Carolina in a nail-biting 6-4 victory over Vancouver.

Rod Brind'Amour

On the game: We started out really well and then we kind of put ourselves in holes a few times and they were able to capitalize. Then we got ahead and just thought we were gonna cruise through at the end and so it made it interesting, but we got two points out of it.

On Nikolaj Ehlers: A couple of his goals were great individual efforts. Same on Fishy's goal. Good play by the D to transition up and then obviously ha da good finish there. But I don't know. It's one of those games where I thought we were in control early and then we just let off the gas. Give them credit, they fought back.

On if that's just human nature when facing the 32nd place team: I don't know. I just think the game should have been over and we just kind of took the foot off the gas and they made a couple of nice plays. You take penalties, give a 5-on-3, these are things you certainly don't want to be doing if you want to win consistently. We got away with it tonight.

On moving forward: Again, we know what game we have to play and it's just being consistent with it and not taking those breathers. We had a retaliation that cost us a penalty which led to the 5-on-3 and then we had a 2-on-1 on that rush. Like, it's just little things that we have to make sure doesn't keep happening.

Nikolaj Ehlers

On the game: I don't think we loved that game tonight. Gave up way too many big chances and made Bussi work for it tonight. Just didn't play 100% our way and the way we need to play. I thought we came out really good and then they kind of took over and after that, there was a lot of back and forth. So we have some things to clean up.

On generating off of the rush: Yeah, when we play the right way and get pucks deep, we're going to get the looks. We just didn't do that enough today. I think there was a lot of bringing the pucks back and turnovers and that created chances for them and not for us.

On if he was just trying to put the puck on net on his second goal since it was a new netminder in goal: Yeah, I mean obviously I don't know, but I would think it's pretty tough coming in during a game when you've just been sitting and not thinking that you're gonna play. I think every team thinks that you just shoot a lot and try to make him scramble a little bit.

Brandon Bussi

On the game: I think there was a lot of really, really good and there was some breakdowns. I think I could have been a little better tonight so that game didn't get to 5-4 and we're hanging on in the last minute there, but I think I loved our sacrifice, our ability to buy in. I think we created a lot of offense and for the most part, we prevented them from getting chances. So just a few little things.

On his game: In this league, you just have to find ways to win games. I think I got better, but it was good enough tonight. The team was really good in front of me offensively. Putting up six is really nice and we'll take the positives out of it.

On not seeing many shots for the first 10 minutes: I just have to stay with the mindset of being ready for the next shot. That's not really a reason for that first period, the way it happened. I felt good the whole way, some bounces went off our guys, it's whatever, and some I think I could have. Things could have went a little differently, but I'll look at the video and move on to the next one, so not too worried. Proud of the guys for the effort and it was a good win.



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SportScan

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

1381512 Carolina Hurricanes

NHL rumblings: Panthers ready to sell, potential Bobrovsky suitors, latest on Thomas, Parayko, more

Pierre LeBrun

9-12 minutes 04/03/2026

If you were to tell me that in 15 months that the Florida Panthers will be Stanley Cup champions again, I would believe you.

Right now, though, they look like a tired, beat-up team that's played too much hockey over the past four years and finally needs a long summer to catch its breath.

Which is absolutely OK after going to three straight Stanley Cup Finals and winning the last two.

The Panthers came out of the Olympic break hoping to go on a run. They had five games in seven days heading into Friday's trade deadline. They've gone 1-3-0 so far.

I would never totally count them out — there's a heart of a champion in there still — but the Panthers woke up Thursday morning 10 points out of a playoff spot with 21 games to play. The math doesn't work.

And so, not surprisingly, league sources say the Panthers are in sell mode, listening on their pending unrestricted free agents, which include A.J. Greer, Tomas Nosek, Jeff Petry, Daniil Tarasov and the big guy, Sergei Bobrovsky.

Greer, with a cheap \$850,000 cap hit, will most likely move. His brand of physicality is a desired ingredient come playoff time.

The real question is what happens with Bobrovsky, 37, the two-time Cup champion and two-time, Vezina-winning netminder who has a 16-team no-trade list.

This is just me, but I don't think the Panthers move Bobrovsky just to move him. He's not getting dealt for a fourth-round pick, for example. It

would have to be a real offer, I think, because of the respect that organization has for him.

Still, league sources confirm that teams are already calling on him, and the Panthers are listening.

And of note, the Panthers announced Wednesday that they've signed goalie Louis Domingue to a two-way contract as depth for the rest of the season.

It's also worth pointing out that one can't discount a last-minute extension coming together. Those types of things happen.

But if not, the Panthers will keep taking calls on him.

Which teams could be interested?

- The Vegas Golden Knights could make sense. All of their goalies are outside the top 30 in the league in save percentage and goals saved above expected.
- The Carolina Hurricanes need to at least pick up the phone and inquire. Brandon Bussi has been an awesome story, but shouldn't the Canes do all they can to make sure of their goaltending if this is finally their year? According to league sources, the Canes checked in regarding the St. Louis Blues' Jordan Binnington earlier this week, though it doesn't seem to have gone anywhere.
- I know everyone will scream "the Edmonton Oilers," and I mean, that's a team that still needs more saves. Big time. But can the Oilers really swap No. 1 goalies twice in one season? I would imagine Edmonton is on Bobrovsky's no-no list anyway. It is amazing to think of Bobrovsky helping the team he beat in consecutive Cup Finals, though.
- What about the Montreal Canadiens? Jakub Dobes gave up six goals to the San Jose Sharks on Tuesday night (the Habs' defensive coverage was porous, too). I don't need to tell you how Samuel Montembeault has been this season. It's a move the Habs have resisted all year. They really, really haven't wanted to look at the goalie trade market, but I wonder if Tuesday night was a tipping point. What I would say is that if — and I still think it's a long shot — the Canadiens decided to trade for a goalie before Friday's deadline, it likely wouldn't be for a rental. In that scenario, Binnington (signed through next season) would actually make more sense.



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• Here's one from left field: the Buffalo Sabres? There's zero reason to worry about goaltending with the Sabres this season. Alex Lyon's .915 save percentage is top five in the NHL, and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen's .908 is top 20. But I will just point out the long history Sabres general manager Jarmo Kekäläinen has with Bobrovsky from their Columbus days.

All things being equal, Vegas and Carolina make the most sense if Bobrovsky moves.

And finally, one has to point out that, yes, the Cup champions look tired, but Bobrovsky is part of that. His .873 save percentage is the worst of his NHL career. It's the first time he's dipped under .900 since his second year in the NHL, with the Flyers in 2011-12. But given what we all witnessed from Bob the past three years in the playoffs, it's hard not to be enticed if you're a playoff-bound team needing help in goal. Could he bottle up that magic for two months?

Myers' patience pays off

Outstanding work by Dallas Stars GM Jim Nill in the Tyler Myers trade. Getting him at a 50 percent discount, his salary going from \$3 million to \$1.5 million through the rest of his contract next season, was the key to that deal finally going down.

The Stars at first were reticent to trade for Myers because every cent matters after this season, in terms of re-signing Jason Robertson and Thomas Harley's new extension kicking in (going from \$4 million per year to \$10.587 million). With Myers going from a \$3 million player to a \$1.5 million player, that's a different ball game.

Veteran agent J.P. Barry deserves props, too. He showed patience after the Canucks came to him and Myers with the original trade offer from the Detroit Red Wings last week, wanting to see if the market would produce more teams. That patience paid off.

Myers had to waive his no-movement clause for the deal.

Latest on Sabres-Blues

Some fascinating Wednesday morning news from TSN colleague Darren Dreger, who updated the Robert Thomas situation to say the Sabres had pushed all they could but weren't comfortable meeting the package price point the Blues needed.

Per Dreger, the Sabres and Blues are now focused more on a deal involving a defenseman, whether that's Colton Parayko (full no-trade clause) or Justin Faulk (15-team no-trade list). Either would address Buffalo's real need. So stay tuned on that one. Parayko would be a real beauty of an add for Buffalo.

Teams in on Thomas

Where does it leave the Thomas situation? Does St. Louis finally lower its ask, which has been very high? (As I've said before, I don't blame them for that. He's a 26-year-old No. 1 center.)

The Utah Mammoth could circle back, and I think they will.

The Canadiens have been unwilling to part with a top prospect like Michael Hage as part of a multi-asset return. But I would suspect they would also want to stay in that dialogue, at least just to see if the asking price changes.

I think teams like the Seattle Kraken, the Boston Bruins and the Red Wings all very much love Thomas, but not at the original asking price.

And keep in mind one final thing on the Thomas front: Even if/when the Blues find a suitable trade, because of the full no-trade clause, they would have to go to Thomas and his camp, led by agent Craig Oster, and present it to them. At which point, I would surmise that Thomas would need some time to mull it over and decide what he wants to do (see: Tyler Myers). So there's that to factor in all of this as well.

And again, there's no guarantee Thomas moves at all. The Blues can choose to revisit this in the offseason.

Habs after Kadri?

My sense is the Habs will continue to keep tabs on the Nazem Kadri situation, and it wouldn't surprise me if Montreal has at least checked in on the Vincent Trocheck situation as well. Again, I don't think the Habs will force anything before the deadline — they are trying to be very patient — but if trading for a top-six forward makes sense at a price point they're comfortable with, they will look at it.

I still think the Colorado Avalanche make the most sense for Kadri, but I think the Avs would need Calgary to retain on Kadri's remaining contract (three more years after this season at a \$7 million average annual value). In fact, I would imagine any team thinking of trading for Kadri would want that from the Flames, and I'm not sure where Calgary would land on being willing to do that.

Devils listening on Nemeč

The New Jersey Devils, per league sources, are listening on 22-year-old defenseman Simon Nemeč, the No. 2 pick from the 2022 NHL draft. That doesn't mean they're intent on moving him. But my understanding is that they've taken quite a few calls on him, as one would expect when a young, right-shot defenseman like that is on the market.

My sense is the Devils would only seriously consider moving him if it's a trade that upgrades their forward group in a real way. But to say the least, that's a very intriguing name to monitor.

Canucks-Garland

The phone lines suddenly burned up Tuesday for the Vancouver Canucks on Connor Garland, with a half-dozen teams showing interest, but as of Wednesday at 11:30 a.m. ET, my understanding is that the Canucks still hadn't gotten a firm trade offer.

That may be coming, given the interest in Garland, whose six-year, \$36 million contract extension doesn't kick in until next season and whose no-move clause kicks in July 1 (no-move for three years).

It makes sense for the rebuilding Canucks to move him before Friday's deadline if the offers are legit. But I think it's more likely they move him in June.

Teams to watch on Garland: the Washington Capitals, the Bruins, the New York Islanders and the Devils, among others.

Sherwood extension likely

All signs point to Kiefer Sherwood signing an extension in the next day or two rather than getting dealt by the Sharks ahead of the deadline.

There has been serious progress in negotiations on a multi-year deal between Sherwood and the team, per league sources. That was always the best outcome for everyone involved after the Sharks acquired the pending UFA on Jan. 19. He's a great fit in San Jose.

Update: After this story was published, Sherwood agreed to a five-year, \$5.75 million extension, per The Athletic's Chris Johnston.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.05.2026

1381654 Websites

The Athletic / NHL trade grades: Oilers make win-now bet on Jason Dickinson, Blackhawks get great return

By Mark Lazerus

March 4, 2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Jason Dickinson has been a very good defensive player on a very poor defensive team. He routinely drew the toughest matchups as the anchor of the Blackhawks' third line, but routinely had some of the best results on the team. Only 25 percent of Dickinson's shifts started in the offensive zone, the ninth-fewest among NHL forwards. Yet Dickinson had a 50.77 percent Corsi and a respectable 46.6 percent expected-goals share, well above his teammates' numbers despite their easier usage. The Blackhawks gave up the fewest scoring chances per hour and the second-fewest high-danger chances per hour with Dickinson on the ice.

With Edmonton, he'll slot in as the third-line center, giving the Oilers two solid bottom-six centers in Dickinson and Adam Henrique to complement Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl at the top of the lineup. But there are concerns with Dickinson, too. The biggest one is his penchant for getting hurt. Perhaps it's because of his shot-blocking, defensive style, but Dickinson missed 23 games last season and has missed 15 games this season with a variety of nagging injuries. Also, his offense has dried up almost completely. After spiking a career-high 22-goal season in 2023-24 — when he played in all 82 games — he's managed just 13 goals and 16 assists over the past two seasons combined. His defense is his bread and butter, but he's not the same two-way player who garnered some peripheral Selke Trophy attention just a couple years ago.

Colton Dach, meanwhile, is a physical young player who's been locked into a fourth-line role with the Blackhawks. The younger brother of Montreal's Kirby Dach, the native of the Edmonton suburbs was drafted by Stan Bowman in the second round of the 2021 draft. He has some skill to his game, but hasn't shown it often enough. He was about to get crowded out of the lineup by the bevy of young forwards on their way to Chicago, including Nick Lardis, No. 3 pick Anton Frondell and the KHL's leading scorer, Roman Kantserov. He's a little more than an AHL/NHL tweener, but a little less than an entrenched bottom-sixer.

The optics aren't great from the Edmonton side of things. Just a few years ago, the Vancouver Canucks gave Chicago a second-round pick just to take Dickinson off their hands. Now, the Oilers are giving the Blackhawks a first-round pick in 2027 (it's top-12 protected, which shouldn't be an issue) just to pry Dickinson out of their hands. So either Kyle Davidson is a genius, Stan Bowman is a poor negotiator, or the Canucks are lousy talent evaluators. The truth likely lies somewhere in between all that.

Of course, the trade didn't happen in a vacuum. Bowman had to get out from underneath the Mangiapane contract, which has been a disaster for Edmonton. Mangiapane, just four years removed from a 35-goal season in Calgary, has seven goals in 52 games this season, and was just put on waivers and sent to AHL Bakersfield. And he's signed through next season. So shedding that contract is no small thing for Edmonton. For Chicago, it's a non-issue; the Blackhawks are still two or three years away from having to worry about the salary cap instead of the salary floor. So Davidson can choose to buy out Mangiapane over the summer, bury him in Rockford, or simply hope he regains his scoring touch next season. No harm, no foul. The only real concern is that Davidson has now used all three of his retention slots (Seth Jones, Connor Murphy, Dickinson).

The fact is, Edmonton has to win. Now. The clock has been ticking on McDavid ever since he signed that two-year prove-something-to-me extension last fall. Murphy and Dickinson are both solid, reliable defensive players on a team that needs some reliability and defense. Their games should translate well to the physicality and tight-checking style of the Stanley Cup playoffs. But are they difference makers? Are they worth first- and second-rounders? Is that the best Edmonton, which now has no first-round picks this year or next, could do? We'll find out soon enough.

Oilers grade: B-

Blackhawks grade: A-

The Athletic LOADED: 03.05.2026

1381655 Websites

The Athletic / NHL trade grades: Mammoth make smart bet on MacKenzie Weegar, boosting their blue line

By Shayna Goldman and James Mirtle

March 4, 2026

Shayna Goldman: Weegar's play has taken a step back this year in Calgary. Age-related decline may be a factor, but his surroundings may be the issue above all else. In recent years, players like Hampus Lindholm and Seth Jones have shown just how much playing on a poor team can weigh a player down, and how much a move to a contender can revitalize their game. That potential is absolutely here.

At his core, Weegar can be an all-situations defenseman who impacts play on both ends of the ice. At his best, he can chip into scoring and help facilitate his teammates' offense while playing steady defense in his own zone. And he can suppress scoring chances, close passing lanes and win puck battles. Weegar is generally a workhorse when it comes to retrieving pucks and breaking them out, but he has made more mistakes and turned the puck over in the process over the last couple of seasons.

With more support in Utah, on a blue line that does a good job of breaking out the puck, according to AllThreeZones' tracking, he should limit some risk in his game. The Mammoth's speed and dynamic skill are completely different from the Flames', so Weegar's game should be more complementary here.

Right-handed defensemen don't come cheap, and with Weegar comes another five seasons at a \$6.25 million cap. It's a commitment, but it's an upgrade on Määttä, who has another two years on his deal. And Utah didn't have to give up a top prospect or a first-rounder to make this deal happen. This is really solid asset management for a team that could afford to part with three second-round picks, considering how deep its draft pick and prospect pool is.

It feels like a real "welcome to the playoff circle" moment for the Mammoth. Sure, this team still has to hold its playoff standing for another 21 games. But this franchise is finally swinging big and buying. And this is the kind of move that can really help solidify Utah's backend, and help this team hang on to that top wild-card seed (which would send them through the Pacific Division).

A first or stronger prospect would have moved the needle more for the rebuilding Flames. But three picks are nothing to shrug at either, especially with the Rangers' first (which will likely have to be equivalent to a late first) being included here. As coveted as right-handed defensemen are this time of year, a 32-year-old in the midst of a down year with another five years on his deal could be a tough sell. This was a contract that had to be moved to fully commit to this process, and waiting any longer could have hurt the Flames' leverage if his game slipped any further.

Mammoth grade: A-

Flames grade: B+

James Mirtle: When I was pulling together a top 10 buyers list last week, Chris Johnston stumped for the Mammoth to be on the list, explaining that they could make two high-impact additions — one up front and one on D. Weegar certainly qualifies for the latter, as the 32-year-old is one of the bigger minute-eaters in the league.



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If there's risk here, it's twofold. Weegar has had a tough season, with his impact in basically every situation falling off during what's been a miserable year all around in Calgary. Is that simply situational? Or could it be age-related decline?

The other thing worth pointing out is that his deal has five more years to go at a \$6.25 million cap hit, meaning he'll be paid top-four money into his age-37 season. That term definitely scared off some other teams.

That said, I still like this bet by Mammoth GM Bill Armstrong. If Weegar can regain his form from last season, he brings a sizable defensive upgrade that Utah needed to compete with the Central Division's Big Three in a playoff series. His presence will allow the Mammoth to ease off minutes from Nate Schmidt and John Marino and give Mikhail Sergachev more support. Weegar's cap hit is an easy fit, too, given Määttä was eating up \$3.5 million in space and barely playing.

For Calgary, the three second-round picks may not sound as sexy as getting a first-rounder, but one of the seconds is actually the Rangers' selection, which means it'll be right at the top of the second round, given how awful New York has been this year. Throw in Castagna, a 2023 third-rounder who leads Cornell in scoring as a 20-year-old, as well as the ability to rehabilitate Määttä (and potentially trade him down the line), and the Flames pulled decent value out of this with the five assets.

This deal is a great example of a trade made between two teams heading in opposite directions, but also one that should pay off on both sides — right away for Utah and down the line for Calgary.

Mammoth grade: B+

Flames grade: A-

The Athletic LOADED: 03.05.2026

1381656 Websites

The Athletic / NHL rumblings: Panthers ready to sell, potential Bobrovsky suitors, latest on Thomas, Parayko, more

By Pierre LeBrun

March 4, 2026

If you were to tell me that in 15 months that the Florida Panthers will be Stanley Cup champions again, I would believe you.

Right now, though, they look like a tired, beat-up team that's played too much hockey over the past four years and finally needs a long summer to catch its breath.

Which is absolutely OK after going to three straight Stanley Cup Finals and winning the last two.

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I would never totally count them out — there's a heart of a champion in there still — but the Panthers woke up Thursday morning 10 points out of a playoff spot with 21 games to play. The math doesn't work.

And so, not surprisingly, league sources say the Panthers are in sell mode, listening on their pending unrestricted free agents, which include A.J. Greer, Tomas Nosek, Jeff Petry, Daniil Tarasov and the big guy, Sergei Bobrovsky.

Greer, with a cheap \$850,000 cap hit, will most likely move. His brand of physicality is a desired ingredient come playoff time.

The real question is what happens with Bobrovsky, 37, the two-time Cup champion and two-time, Vezina-winning netminder who has a 16-team no-trade list.

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And of note, the Panthers announced Wednesday that they've signed goalie Louis Domingue to a two-way contract as depth for the rest of the season.

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And finally, one has to point out that, yes, the Cup champions look tired, but Bobrovsky is part of that. His .873 save percentage is the worst of his NHL career. It's the first time he's dipped under .900 since his second year in the NHL, with the Flyers in 2011-12. But given what we all witnessed from Bob the past three years in the playoffs, it's hard not to be enticed if you're a playoff-bound team needing help in goal. Could he bottle up that magic for two months?

Myers' patience pays off

Outstanding work by Dallas Stars GM Jim Nill in the Tyler Myers trade. Getting him at a 50 percent discount, his salary going from \$3 million to



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\$1.5 million through the rest of his contract next season, was the key to that deal finally going down.

The Stars at first were reticent to trade for Myers because every cent matters after this season, in terms of re-signing Jason Robertson and Thomas Harley's new extension kicking in (going from \$4 million per year to \$10.587 million). With Myers going from a \$3 million player to a \$1.5 million player, that's a different ball game.

Veteran agent J.P. Barry deserves props, too. He showed patience after the Canucks came to him and Myers with the original trade offer from the Detroit Red Wings last week, wanting to see if the market would produce more teams. That patience paid off.

Myers had to waive his no-movement clause for the deal.

Latest on Sabres-Blues

Some fascinating Wednesday morning news from TSN colleague Darren Dreger, who updated the Robert Thomas situation to say the Sabres had pushed all they could but weren't comfortable meeting the package price point the Blues needed.

Per Dreger, the Sabres and Blues are now focused more on a deal involving a defenseman, whether that's Colton Parayko (full no-trade clause) or Justin Faulk (15-team no-trade list). Either would address Buffalo's real need. So stay tuned on that one. Parayko would be a real beauty of an add for Buffalo.

Teams in on Thomas

Where does it leave the Thomas situation? Does St. Louis finally lower its ask, which has been very high? (As I've said before, I don't blame them for that. He's a 26-year-old No. 1 center.)

The Utah Mammoth could circle back, and I think they will.

The Canadiens have been unwilling to part with a top prospect like Michael Hage as part of a multi-asset return. But I would suspect they would also want to stay in that dialogue, at least just to see if the asking price changes.

I think teams like the Seattle Kraken, the Boston Bruins and the Red Wings all very much love Thomas, but not at the original asking price.

And keep in mind one final thing on the Thomas front: Even if/when the Blues find a suitable trade, because of the full no-trade clause, they would have to go to Thomas and his camp, led by agent Craig Oster, and present it to them. At which point, I would surmise that Thomas would need some time to mull it over and decide what he wants to do (see: Tyler Myers). So there's that to factor in all of this as well.

And again, there's no guarantee Thomas moves at all. The Blues can choose to revisit this in the offseason.

Habs after Kadri?

My sense is the Habs will continue to keep tabs on the Nazem Kadri situation, and it wouldn't surprise me if Montreal has at least checked in on the Vincent Trocheck situation as well. Again, I don't think the Habs will force anything before the deadline — they are trying to be very patient — but if trading for a top-six forward makes sense at a price point they're comfortable with, they will look at it.

I still think the Colorado Avalanche make the most sense for Kadri, but I think the Avs would need Calgary to retain on Kadri's remaining contract (three more years after this season at a \$7 million average annual value). In fact, I would imagine any team thinking of trading for Kadri would want that from the Flames, and I'm not sure where Calgary would land on being willing to do that.

Devils listening on Nemeec

The New Jersey Devils, per league sources, are listening on 22-year-old defenseman Simon Nemeec, the No. 2 pick from the 2022 NHL draft. That doesn't mean they're intent on moving him. But my understanding is that they've taken quite a few calls on him, as one would expect when a young, right-shot defenseman like that is on the market.

My sense is the Devils would only seriously consider moving him if it's a trade that upgrades their forward group in a real way. But to say the least, that's a very intriguing name to monitor.

Canucks-Garland

The phone lines suddenly burned up Tuesday for the Vancouver Canucks on Connor Garland, with a half-dozen teams showing interest, but as of Wednesday at 11:30 a.m. ET, my understanding is that the Canucks still hadn't gotten a firm trade offer.

That may be coming, given the interest in Garland, whose six-year, \$36 million contract extension doesn't kick in until next season and whose no-move clause kicks in July 1 (no-move for three years).

It makes sense for the rebuilding Canucks to move him before Friday's deadline if the offers are legit. But I think it's more likely they move him in June.

Teams to watch on Garland: the Washington Capitals, the Bruins, the New York Islanders and the Devils, among others.

All signs point to Kiefer Sherwood signing an extension in the next day or two rather than getting dealt by the Sharks ahead of the deadline.

There has been serious progress in negotiations on a multi-year deal between Sherwood and the team, per league sources. That was always the best outcome for everyone involved after the Sharks acquired the pending UFA on Jan. 19. He's a great fit in San Jose.

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The Athletic / Why these 7 NHL teams won't — but should — make a trade deadline blockbuster

By Sean McIndoe

March 4, 2026

It's trade deadline week. Should your favorite team do something big? Yes. Will they? Probably not.

That's life in the NHL, a results-oriented league where the outcome is all that matters unless you're a GM, in which case you're allowed to mumble about your job being hard and everyone is supposed to feel sorry for you. These guys have only had four months to figure this stuff out since the season started, including two weeks off during the Olympics. Be reasonable.

Or don't. Today, we're going to give that option a try. We'll pick a team and lay out the honest and, yes, reasonable view for why they should play it safe and avoid any truly major moves. And then we'll try to make the case for why they should break the mold and actually take a big swing.

We tried this last year, with all 32 teams. This year, we're going to cut that list down. Some teams are obvious sellers who shouldn't need any convincing. Others will obviously buy. By my count, there are at least five scenarios that could see a team on the fence about a blockbuster.



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Will any of these teams take our advice? Based on how it's going so far, of course not. Do we even really believe most of this stuff? Not necessarily. But that's OK, the venting will make us feel better. Let's start off ...

Vancouver Canucks

Be reasonable: The Canucks are bad, and they know that, and they're selling. But like most bad teams, they don't have all that much to offer. And they've already made two big moves this season: one certified blockbuster (Quinn Hughes to the Minnesota Wild) and one more traditional rental (Kiefer Sherwood to the San Jose Sharks). They're going to move Tyler Myers and probably Evander Kane. They've been trying to move Conor Garland for a while and there just doesn't seem to be anyone interested in meeting their asking price.

Beyond that, there's not much left they can move. What do you want them to do, trade Elias Pettersson and his \$92.8 million contract?

BUT: Yes, they absolutely should be trying to move Pettersson and his contract. That should be their single highest priority. And they need to do it before any lingering window slams shut.

Look, Pettersson's 2022-23 season, which saw him score 102 points as a 24-year-old, made him seem like a blossoming star. But it turns out that was the high point; he has one other season where he's cracked 70 points. The Canucks paid him like a franchise player, and now he's shown he isn't that guy. Maybe a year ago, you could hand-wave those concerns away by blaming J.T. Miller, but he's long gone and Pettersson is still a mess.

And yet his name is still floating around on insider trade boards and rumor mills. Maybe that's wishful thinking. But maybe it's because there's still a team or two out there that would be willing to at least think about rolling the dice. And if there are, the Canucks should get them on the phone and refuse to hang up until a deal is done.

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

Yes, you'd be selling low. Yes, the return would feel meager compared to what it would have been a few years ago. Yes, you might even have to take back some junk contracts to make the math work. Do it anyway. This could be the very last opportunity to open an escape hatch on Pettersson's albatross of a contract. A rebuild is coming in Vancouver, maybe even one built around Gavin McKenna, and it's time to clear the slate.

If Pettersson goes somewhere else and actually does rediscover his game, even getting back to that 100-point level, so be it. Good for him. Seriously, you wish him all the best. But it's not going to happen in Vancouver, and at this point the only decision left to make is whether this team wants to be left holding the bag for the next six years. The answer should be obvious.

Buffalo Sabres

Be reasonable: They'll be buyers. But the team has been on fire since December, so you want to be careful about messing with the room too much. Besides, we'd all assumed they'd be trading Alex Tuch, so when they keep him, it will almost be like they're making a blockbuster trade with themselves. Beyond that, tinker here and there, but don't overplay the hand.

BUT: Fifteen years! That's how long Sabres fans have been waiting to get back to the playoffs. Now it's finally going to happen. If you'd told Buffalo fans last summer that the drought would end this year, they'd probably have been happy with that, especially given how stacked the Atlantic looked.

But that was then. Today, we know that the Atlantic isn't stacked at all, with the Toronto Maple Leafs circling the drain and the Florida Panthers

not much better. As far as the old guard, only the Tampa Bay Lightning are left, holding onto top spot as the younger teams chase them down.

The Sabres are the best of those teams, and they just smoked the Lightning in their own building. There's a path here. And while it's tempting to look at this year's Sabres as a team on the rise that will get plenty more kicks at the can, that's not always how this works. Once in a great while, a team has a year where everything breaks their way. Maybe this is the season that the hockey gods are finally paying the Sabres back for a decade-plus of misery. If so, take advantage.

That should mean exploring rentals. But it should also mean going hard after names such as Robert Thomas, who could be part of the program for years to come. Unlike just about all the other contenders, the Sabres are deep in cap space, picks and prospects.

And then there's the Jarmo Kekäläinen factor. He's certainly not afraid of making big trades, as his trophy case full of Sam Pollocks attests. Do you think he's maybe just a little bit sick of hearing about how Kevyn Adams built this team and deserves a big chunk (if not all) of the credit for its success?

Maybe not. But with rumors swirling about the Sabres being in on names such as Thomas, the time feels right for the Sabres to plant their flag and announce that they're back in the big leagues. Their fans have waited long enough.

The Central's big three

Be reasonable: The Colorado Avalanche, Dallas Stars and Minnesota Wild are arguably the league's three best teams. And because they're all in the same division, the path to the conference final is already brutal, which suggests that this isn't the year to go all in.

Besides, the teams have already made big moves — the Wild made the biggest trade in years by landing Quinn Hughes, the Stars went out and got Mikko Rantanen at last year's deadline, and the Avs are still reaping the rewards of remaking their goaltending and adding Brock Nelson. The moves have already been made, they worked, and the teams are legitimate contenders. They've even made smaller moves this week for guys such as Michael McCarron and Brett Kulak. The work here is done.

Besides, if one team takes a big swing, then the others might feel obligated to respond in kind, and we all just wind up back where we started. Do you really want to see the best division in hockey turn into even more of an arms race, with three teams throwing their remaining picks and prospects at anything that moves?

BUT: This is exactly what I want, thanks for asking.

But even beyond the entertainment value of watching these three teams one-up each other over the next few days, there are legitimate reasons for any or all of them to make big moves. Start with the one we've already mentioned: the path out of the division is brutal. Knowing that, a GM can shrug and say we'll just have to see how it plays out, or he can do anything he can to up his team's odds, even just a little bit.

Beyond that, all three teams have more cap room than you'd think — enough to chase most big names who might be available. And for all three, that might be a limited-time opportunity. The Stars have a Jason Robertson extension to figure out and Tyler Seguin presumably coming off LTIR next year, the Wild have the Kirill Kaprizov extension kicking in on July 1, and the Avalanche have the Cale Makar extension looming. The window is open, but might not be for long.

That probably rules all three teams out of any of the bigger names with term, although there's something to be said for the strategy of "Forget it, we'll figure it out later, flags fly forever." But let's say Colorado, sitting with the most flexibility right now, makes a big move. Are the Wild and Stars really going to just concede, agreeing to bash each other's heads in through round one just for the honor of losing to the waiting Avs? They



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could. But they shouldn't. All three teams got this good thanks to some aggressive, smart roster management. There's no backing down.

St. Louis Blues

Be reasonable: This one's tricky, because the Blues' top players have been all over the rumor mill. They certainly don't sound like a team that's going to be quiet, given how often we've been hearing about Robert Thomas, Jordan Kyrrou, Brayden Schenn and Jordan Binnington.

But there's a good chance it's all a bluff. A classic bait-and-switch. You leak the big names, wait for the phone to ring and then have the conversations. If somebody blows you away with an offer, you can think about it. But more likely, you hem and haw for a bit, and then turn the attention to lesser names. Thomas and Kyrrou are the bait, but they're not going anywhere.

BUT: The Blues are bad, and bad teams should sell. They usually can't, at least as much as they'd like, because bad teams don't have many players anyone else would want. But the Blues do. And they're in a unique situation, because we know this is Doug Armstrong's last deadline as GM before he hands the reins over to Alex Steen. That presents the opportunity to run a little bit of a good cop/bad cop routine, where Armstrong does the nasty business of stripping the roster down to the studs before Steen gets to come in and build it back up.

That's not to say that Steen wouldn't be in on any deals that happen this week; obviously he'd have to be. But perception matters, and having a Cup-winning GM clear the slate for the incoming rookie makes a lot of sense.

Beyond that, even if this all started off as the kind of bluff I outlined above, at some point you've subjected your players to so much smoke that you might as well light the fire. Thomas and Kyrrou are both young enough to be part of a turnaround in St. Louis, but clearly the organization is at least a little bit hesitant to commit. Well, shoot or get off the point. And the Blues have spent the last few weeks winding up. It's time to let it rip.

The Blues and Sabres might have the pieces to make a trade involving St. Louis' star center Robert Thomas. What would it take?

So trade Thomas. Or trade Kyrrou. Or trade both. Schenn too, if you can. We often talk about dominoes falling, and Thomas is the best asset on the market. But the Blues are positioned to have a few pieces in play once the first one tips over. The only thing missing, so far, is the boldness to actually make it happen. Enough talk. Now's the time. The rebuild ahead is a big one, but it could look an awful lot smaller in a few days.

Edmonton Oilers

Be reasonable: They've already made their big moves. Everyone wanted them to get a goalie, so they did. They've added Connor Murphy this week. They might make another move or two, but the hard work is already done. And in a weak Pacific, it's probably enough.

BUT: "Probably" shouldn't cut it in Edmonton, where a championship-caliber core has come agonizingly close over the years. They're right there. And Stan Bowman wasn't brought in to build this team, but to push it over the finish line. Well, get pushing.

And he should start in goal. Yes, they already tried that. It didn't work. Tristan Jarry isn't the answer, which is a possibility everyone saw at the time. One nice part about that move was that it came early enough in the season that there was time to pivot if it was clear Jarry wasn't the guy. Well, he's not. Pivot time is here.

Who should they go get? Great question. I offered a few suggestions back in December, right before they settled for Jarry. Many of those ideas weren't remotely realistic. But some might be. What about Binnington? He's been bad this year on a hopeless team, but looked good at the Olympics. Connor McDavid has won a big game or two with that guy.

Or what about Sergei Bobrovsky, the goalie who beat them twice in the final, who could be available as a rental?

The point is that Jarry was worth a try. He represented a lower-risk (and lower-cost) option than other names. If it had worked, great. It hasn't worked. You took one swing, and you fouled the pitch off into your own crotch. It happens. Get up, dust yourself off, and get back in the batter's box.

You have McDavid and Leon Draisaitl and a fan base that deserves to see them finally finish the story. Depth moves are nice, but you mustn't be afraid to dream a little bigger, darling. Find your target, and take the shot.

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The Athletic / Megan Keller on Olympic women's hockey gold, Trump's joke and her race to NYC for 'SNL'

By Hailey Salvian

March 4, 2026

In the days after she scored the golden goal for the U.S. women's hockey team at the Milan Olympics, Megan Keller knew the plan was for her to appear on "Saturday Night Live." But it hadn't really sunk in until she was on a call with the comedy icon who created the show in 1975.

"I think it hit me when Lorne Michaels wanted to hop on the phone with us," Keller said in an interview with The Athletic. "It's been a whirlwind, that's for sure."

Her opening monologue moment, which she shared with Team USA captain Hilary Knight and NHL stars Jack and Quinn Hughes, capped a near two-week run that saw Keller go from a crucial — though somewhat underrated — part of the U.S. women's national team to one of the faces of the sport in the United States.

Keller's goal in overtime against Team Canada secured the gold medal for Team USA in Milan — the Americans' first since 2018 — and punctuated a dominant run by the team. For Keller, the goal, a great one-on-one effort against Canadian defender Claire Thompson, is still a bit of a blur.

She remembers receiving the stretch pass from Taylor Heise, skating up ice, and seeing the puck bounce across the line behind Canadian goalie Ann-Renée Desbiens.

"I couldn't chuck my gloves off fast enough," she said. "Couldn't hug (Abbey Murphy) and (Tessa Janecke) fast enough. ... I'll never forget it."

The women's team stayed in Milan for the men's gold medal game — which also went to overtime against Canada — and the closing ceremony. When Keller returned to Boston, where she plays in the Professional Women's Hockey League, the spotlight on the sport had intensified. She went on "The Pat McAfee Show," among several media appearances, and played in front of a sold-out crowd in her first game back in the PWHL.

A cameo on "SNL," however, was next-level.

"SNL was the 'what is going on, what just happened,' moment for me," Keller said. "That is a show that you watch growing up and even now watching their skits, seeing them on social media, like ("SNL") was definitely on my dream list. So it was pretty cool to be able to experience that with Hilary."



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It started with a call last week from Michaels, who spoke to Knight and Keller about coming on the show and went over the “SNL” team’s vision for the monologue. Knight, who revealed on CBS that she played through a torn MCL during the Olympics, is out indefinitely for the Seattle Torrent. But Keller, the captain of the PWHL’s Boston Fleet, played in Ottawa on Saturday night just hours before “SNL” was set to air.

“Of course the game goes to overtime and a shootout,” said Keller, who played nearly 30 minutes in her team’s 2-1 victory.

After the game, there was a private plane waiting for Keller at the Ottawa airport that took her right to New York City, then a car to the NBC Studios at 30 Rockefeller Plaza, where “SNL” is filmed in Studio 8H. When she arrived, Keller met “Heated Rivalry” star Connor Storrie, that night’s host, and went right into a dress rehearsal in front of a live audience. Even during rehearsals, the cheers for Keller and Knight were so loud — and lengthy — that Keller didn’t know when she was supposed to say her lines.

“The applause,” she said, “was not stopping.”

When it came time for the real thing, Keller was so nervous she said she was “shaking in my boots.” A few minutes into his monologue, Storrie brought out Quinn and Jack Hughes to joke about “Heated Rivalry,” then made room for Keller and Knight, who walked onto the stage to an even bigger cheer.

“It was so loud,” Keller said. “That’s something that I’ll remember forever.”

When the applause finally died down, Keller delivered the first punchline, aimed at Storrie: “Don’t worry, we saw your show.”

When Storrie said it was “so cool” all four players were there, Knight dropped a punchline of her own: “It was gonna be just us, but we thought we’d invite the guys, too.”

“Yeah, we thought we’d give them a little moment to shine,” added Keller.

Michaels and the “SNL” writers were the masterminds behind all the jokes, but Keller said the team made sure the players were comfortable with them.

“They deserve all the credit and I thought they did such a nice job,” Keller said. “It was so fun to be a part of.”

The players’ main joke was in reference to U.S. President Donald Trump telling the men’s team after they won gold that he’d “probably be impeached” if he didn’t invite the women’s team to the White House and State of the Union as well. The phone call, which was posted to social media, and the men’s reaction to Trump’s comment — several players laughed — dominated online discourse for a week and was met with plenty of backlash.

The women’s team, meanwhile, decided not to attend the State of the Union, citing in a statement to The Athletic “the timing and previously scheduled academic and professional commitments.”

In a news conference upon returning from Milan, Knight called Trump’s remark “distasteful” and expressed disappointment that she had to “explain someone else’s behavior.”

When asked about Trump’s comments, Keller emphasized that her focus has been on celebrating what the women’s team accomplished in Milan.

“Everybody’s entitled to their own opinion and things kind of snowball and then get crazy,” she said. “(I’m) just focusing on how special of a team that we had and I think we did a great job of getting back to that and I think the world has too.”

“For us it’s the honor of a lifetime to put on the USA jersey and represent our country and all of our fans and our nation at the Olympics. We wanted to bring home gold and we got to do that and the men’s team did

as well,” she added. “We have a lot of respect for them and grew to become friends with them and cheered them on as they did us.”

The U.S. women had won gold before — in 1998 and 2018 — but never in such dominant fashion. In Milan, the Americans dismantled opponents 33-2 and handed their Canadian rivals their worst loss ever at the Olympics. Their 2-1 win in the gold medal game was Team USA’s eighth straight against Canada and second consecutive victory in a championship game, dating back to last year’s Women’s World Championship.

The roster was packed with skill and star power, and paced offensively by Keller and 23-year-old star defender Caroline Harvey, who won tournament MVP. Knight scored the game-tying goal on a torn MCL in her final Olympic appearance. Goalie Aerin Frankel became the first woman to post three shutouts in a single Olympic tournament.

“It was one of the best American teams that we’ve put on the ice in international play and at the Olympics,” said Keller. “That’s what should be celebrated.”

At last week’s State of the Union address, Trump said the U.S. women’s team “will soon be coming to the White House.” The specifics of that invitation are unclear, including to Keller.

“I know in years past, every Olympics, no matter who’s in office, Team USA is always invited to the White House,” Keller said.

There’s also the matter of the ongoing PWHL season, which will look to capitalize on the attention women’s hockey received at the Olympics.

The women’s Olympic finale drew an average of 5.3 million viewers in the U.S., with 7.7 million viewers tuned in for overtime; audiences peaked in Canada with over 4 million viewers before Keller scored the game-winning goal. On Friday, Knight’s Seattle Torrent set a new U.S. arena record for attendance at a women’s hockey game with 17,355 fans at Climate Pledge Arena.

According to the PWHL, on Feb. 24 and 25 — after the league’s return from the Olympic break — the league saw its biggest home venue ticket sales days of the season since opening weekend. By Friday, merchandise sales also increased 101 percent. For a league in its third year, it will only help that Knight and Keller wore their PWHL jerseys during the goodnights on “SNL” on Saturday; they also gifted Storrie and his “Heated Rivalry” costar Hudson Williams PWHL jerseys of their own.

“We’ve never come back from the Olympics and and hopped right into a league — we (used to) come back and our fans don’t get to watch us play anymore, or they have to wait until the next worlds, the next Olympics,” Keller said. “To really galvanize all the support and the viewership that we gain from the Olympics and bring that back to the PWHL, us as players have definitely felt that.”

“It’s just a great time for women’s hockey and hockey in general to bring more fans into our sport and our league.”

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The Athletic / Meet the photographer behind the viral photo of Jack Hughes’ teeth at the Olympics

By Peter Baugh

March 4, 2026



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Hours before capturing one of the enduring Images of the 2026 Olympics — and perhaps sports this decade — Elsa Garrison scouted her surroundings at Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena, host of the men's gold medal hockey game in Milan. The Getty Images photographer made a mental note of where Team Canada families were sitting, then did the same for the Americans. She knew that after the game, the victorious players would likely skate toward their loved ones for a moment of celebration. Garrison wanted to be ready.

As she and American forward Jack Hughes both learned that evening, iconic shots happen when preparedness meets a crucial moment.

Garrison, who has been with Getty for nearly 30 years and goes by her first name only in the company's photo credits, shot the game from near center ice on the penalty-box side of the rink. When Hughes scored the game-winning goal in overtime, Garrison immediately took photos of elated American players pouring off the bench. She didn't linger near center ice, though. Less than a minute after the goal, she moved to the corner of the rink, right in front of the American families.

As Garrison predicted, that's exactly where the Team USA players skated before the medal ceremony. As the golden-goal scorer, Hughes was at the top of Garrison's mental list of players to shoot. She snapped a series of photos through the glass, including the now-viral image likely to be shown in sports photography classes. Hughes has the American flag draped around his shoulders and is gazing into the crowd, his right fist lifted. He's grinning, showing off his chipped front tooth and still-bloodied mouth from a high-sticking penalty drawn earlier in the game.

"It's all the elements you would look for from somebody who scored the game-winning goal," Garrison said.

"It's definitely a pretty legendary picture," said Hughes, who plays for the New Jersey Devils. "The photographer just captured the perfect moment of the teeth and the jersey and the flag draped over my shoulders and just the pure excitement."

If the gold medal game had been played at an NHL rink, where seats are directly against the boards, Garrison's picture would have been impossible. But at Santagiulia, there was a gap behind the glass to accommodate more photographers, so Garrison was able to rush through it quickly to get in position after the game. Her assignment for Getty was to monitor the perimeter while other photographers lined up to get on the ice for the medal ceremony. She was the only still photographer situated by the U.S. families, allowing her to capture an image different from anyone else: one that may endure for decades.

"We've gotten so used to Images having such a short shelf life," Garrison said. "To see this one have a little bit more staying power has been really cool."

"It just brings you back to the moment," Team USA coach Mike Sullivan said.

Garrison works out of Getty's New York office and lives in New Jersey, so she frequently shoots Devils games and knows plenty of the team staff. One of her first thoughts after snapping the photo was that the team would be happy with it; she had no sense in the moment how far the photo would reach.

In the time since, Garrison has gained more than 10,000 Instagram followers. She's been inundated with direct messages. She doesn't believe any other photo she's taken in her career has received this kind of attention. That's saying something, given her track record.

Garrison is no stranger to taking momentous sports photos. She shot Eagles running back Saquon Barkley's backwards hurdle over a defender in 2024, as well as Simone Biles and Jordan Chiles bowing to gold medalist Rebeca Andrade at the 2024 Paris Olympics. ESPN football reporter Adam Scheffter and SportsCenter posted a compilation of those two photos, as well as the Hughes image, with the caption:

"Three of the most iconic sports Images captured in the last few years have all been taken by the same photographer." The post has nearly 200,000 likes on Instagram.

Garrison is from Brainerd, Minnesota, a town about two hours north of Minneapolis best known as one of the settings in the movie " Fargo ." She first picked up a camera as a freshman in high school, then started working part-time as a photographer for the Brainerd Daily Dispatch as a sophomore. After graduating from the University of Missouri, she was hired by Allsport, a photo agency acquired by Getty in 1998.

Garrison was the first woman Staff Photographer at Getty. She believes the industry has changed and become more inclusive in the past 20 to 30 years. Last month, at the Olympic team figure skating event in Milan, she noticed that seven of the eight or nine photographers on the international press pool carpet were women.

"There is a lot left to do, but I feel like women are more encouraged and more welcomed to be sport photographers than certainly when I started," she said. "We're not as singled out or harassed or any of that sort of thing. We're allowed to do our jobs for the most part."

In the late 1990s, Sports Illustrated — then known for its excellent photography — used one of Garrison's University of Missouri football photos for a two-page display. She was thrilled to appear in the magazine, but when she opened it, she saw that the publication had incorrectly added extra vowels to her maiden name, Hasch, and had written her first name as Eli, not Elsa. Her excitement quickly faded into sadness.

"Maybe I should just go by Elsa so they can learn how to spell that first, and then I can add my last name later," she remembers joking.

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The Athletic / These 6 goalies could help a contending team at the NHL trade deadline

By Jesse Granger

March 4, 2026

The NHL trade deadline is on Friday and, as always, more teams are hunting for a goalie than there are netminders to be found.

That could be further magnified by the parity between teams this season. With so many still in the playoff chase, fewer are willing to sell a goalie. There aren't many obvious options on the trade market, but we'll make a case for six goalies who could help a contender to varying degrees.

They range from starters who could instantly elevate a contender to Stanley Cup favorite status to backups who could solidify a tandem entering a long, arduous postseason, and even a young potential franchise goalie.

Here's an argument for why each goalie could end up being one of the best acquisitions of the deadline.

Sergei Bobrovsky, Florida Panthers

There's no point in easing into this. Let's start the list off with a bang.

It's easy to make a case for how Bobrovsky can help a contender. He's playing in three straight Stanley Cup Final series. The 37-year-old is having a rough season playing behind the banged-up defending champions. His save percentage is below .900 for the first time since



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2011-12 (his second season in Philadelphia) and he has a negative goals saved above expected number (-15.5) for the first time in five years.

But we've seen this from Bobrovsky before. His aggressive, acrobatic style can lead to big numbers against him if he's not at his sharpest, especially if the team in front of him is leaky. That same style can also carry a team through the postseason when he is on his game, and that chance alone is a bet worth making.

If Bobrovsky looked like he was physically slowing down, there would be more reason for hesitation, but that's not the case. He's as physically fit as any goalie in the league and still looks it on the ice. There have been more bad nights than good this season, but his best is still elite, and there are plenty of recent examples of that.

Bobrovsky is on an expiring deal, set to hit free agency this summer, and hasn't made progress toward an extension in Florida, according to The Athletic's Chris Johnston. A trade still feels unlikely, but contenders without a stud in net should be calling. Acquiring Bobrovsky could be the move of the deadline.

Elvis Merzljikins, Columbus Blue Jackets

Merzljikins' name has made the rounds at this time of year for several seasons, and that was before he had been supplanted as the starter in Columbus. Even as the Blue Jackets fight for one of the final playoff spots in the East, Jet Greaves' emergence could open the door to them shopping Merzljikins.

He still has another year beyond this season on his current deal, with a cap hit of \$5.4 million. That is a bit high, but with the recent rise in the cap and goalie contracts that have followed, it suddenly looks a lot more reasonable (especially for only one more season).

Merzljikins still has issues with consistency, and that's unlikely to change. At 31, he is what he is at this point, but he's also the type of goalie who can get hot, stand on his head and steal a playoff series. His postseason experience is extremely limited, but in his only two opportunities in 2020, he stopped 70 of 74 shots (.946).

The ship has already sailed, but this is the type of gamble that would have made sense for the Oilers, rather than swapping Stuart Skinner for another similarly styled, high-floor goalie in Tristan Jarry. The contracts are comparable, and Merzljikins offers a higher ceiling.

He is a fiery, athletic goalie built to be the hero. Any team that trades for Merzljikins is rolling the dice, but it could pay off. Hang up the phone with the league office, cue up "Viva Las Vegas" by Elvis' namesake and hope Lady Luck keeps the dice hot.

Stuart Skinner, Pittsburgh Penguins

Speaking of Skinner, he could also be available at the deadline. The 27-year-old has been solid since joining the Penguins, going 8-4-2 with a .890 save percentage and 8.06 GSAX through Monday. Currently in a playoff position, Pittsburgh could prefer to hold onto Skinner to keep him in rotation with Artūrs Šilovs.

However, with Skinner set to become an unrestricted free agent this summer, and the Penguins' promising goalie prospect Sergei Murashov tearing up the AHL, there's a chance Pittsburgh doesn't see a future with Skinner and would prefer to get something for him.

He doesn't represent a drastic upgrade as a starter, but Skinner is a big, solid, positional goalie with a lot of playoff experience. Behind a structured defense, he could thrive.

Devin Cooley, Calgary Flames

Unbefitting of his name, Cooley has been on an absolute heater. The 28-year-old, who has played the majority of his career in the AHL, has been lights out backing up Dustin Wolf in Calgary.

Cooley's .923 save percentage is the highest in the NHL among goalies with at least 20 games played. He ranks fifth with 16.3 GSAX behind only Ilya Sorokin, Logan Thompson, Andrei Vasilevskiy and Jeremy Swayman.

Considering his body of work, it's unrealistic to expect Cooley to step in as a starter and reproduce these types of numbers for a contender, but any front office feeling uneasy with its backup situation could solidify its depth by acquiring Cooley for what shouldn't be a haul.

Calgary likes Cooley a lot, and already signed him to a two-year, \$2.7 million extension that hasn't even started yet. But the Flames are in a rebuild, already have their goalie of the future and need future assets, so they could at least consider moving him.

Jordan Binnington, St. Louis Blues

Binnington is the only goalie to make it onto every version of The Athletic's Trade Board this season, and after a solid showing at the Olympics in Italy, he's still a potential upgrade for teams deficient in the crease.

The season-long stats are ugly. Binnington ranks last out of 92 goalies with -23.8 GSAX, and his .867 save percentage is close to the bottom of the league.

Still, Binnington's reputation among general managers, coaches and his peers as a big-game performer is well established, and his play behind Team Canada in Italy only furthered it. Rebound control is still the biggest concern, which stems from how aggressively Binnington challenges on initial shots, but as we saw in the Olympics, that issue can be mitigated by strong defense.

It's the riskiest option on this list — largely because his reputation could inflate his price well beyond what his actual production justifies — but he has consistently elevated his game when pressure rises. If a contender were to plant their flag by trading for him and making him their starter for the playoffs, that would certainly ratchet up the pressure.

Most of the other goalies on this list are short-term fixes or rental additions, but if a team were to trade for Minnesota's promising rookie, it would have the potential to change the franchise's future outlook in net.

Just ask the San Jose Sharks or Chicago Blackhawks if they're happy with their trades for Yaroslav Askarov and Spencer Knight. Both have been stellar this season and project to anchor each team for the next decade-plus, and Wallstedt represents a similar potential.

The Swedish netminder has already shown exceptional patience and angles at the NHL level. He regularly wins one-on-one battles with shooters and is only scratching the surface of his game at 23 years old, with 30 starts under his belt.

As with Florida and Nashville when they traded away Askarov and Knight, respectively, the Wild already have a talented starter with Filip Gustavsson under contract through 2031. If Minnesota wants to add another skater in its push to win now, moving Wallstedt could be on the table.

It would require quite a package in return, but Wallstedt might be worth it.

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Sportsnet.ca / Scout's Analysis: How did Calgary do in the MacKenzie Weegar trade?



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Rory Boylen

Earlier on Wednesday, MacKenzie Weegar told Eric Francis that, if he were asked to waive his no-trade clause, he'd consider it. Weegar wasn't making a trade request; he was facing facts that the Flames are rebuilding, not close to the playoffs, and at 32 years old, he still has little playoff experience in his career so far.

So the table was set for a trade.

Hours later, one was finalized.

The Flames sent Weegar to Utah for defenceman Olli Maatta, collegiate forward Jonathan Castagna and three second-round picks, all in the 2026 draft. Those originally belonged to Ottawa, the Rangers and Utah.

Flames GM Craig Conroy explained that Maatta had Calgary on his 10-team no-trade list, but was convinced to come in. Weegar had a full no-trade clause and, after considering his options, decided Utah was the way to go.

"His thing was he wants to go to a team that has a chance to make the playoffs this year and going forward," Conroy told Pat Steinberg on Sportsnet 960 The FAN. "With him being 32, that was a big thing for him. I don't think it was an easy decision.

"He's a very competitive guy. He gives everything he has every night."

Maatta, a 31-year-old defender, has been around the block. Approaching 800 career NHL games, the Finnish Olympian won two Stanley Cups early in his career with Pittsburgh, and that experience is what's valuable to the Flames, who have a young team coming along that could use the leadership.

"I see (Maatta) as a solid, good puck mover, PK guy. I don't see him on the PP," Conroy continued. "But I do see him playing good minutes for us. He's going to be able to help these younger guys along."

Castagna is an interesting prospect, a 20-year-old in his third season with Cornell, where he leads the team in scoring and wears an 'A'. He could be added to the organization as soon as this spring.

But, perhaps, the best part of the trade for the rebuilding Flames was the three second-round picks. The Flames now have six picks in the first two rounds of this year's draft, and all of them would land inside the top 50 overall as of today. Whether they are all used to pick up new prospects in the pipeline or not, these are assets Conroy can take into the off-season and try to get creative with.

"You can use those picks to maybe move up in the draft. You can use those picks to make trades for players. It gives you a lot of opportunities," Conroy said.

So that's one big domino down for the Flames, and not the one we expected weeks ago. Without retaining any salary, Calgary still has one retention slot left and may have to keep it open for a Nazem Kadri trade. Meanwhile, Blake Coleman also hangs out there as a trade candidate. The rebuild continues, aiming to be more competitive in 2027 when their new arena opens.

For Utah, this trade signifies a break from how they've approached trade deadlines in the past, with a clear mission to get to the playoffs. Holding the West's first wild card spot with a healthy plus-24 goal differential, the Mammoth have begun spending their picks and prospects after hoarding futures for years.

For more on the trade between Calgary and Utah, we turn to our scout, Jason Bukala:

I have a bias whenever I'm tasked with writing or talking about MacKenzie Weegar, and the great career he has mined for himself over the years. When I was in Florida, we drafted Weegar with the sixth-last

pick of the draft in 2013 (206th overall). The fact that he has played 610 career NHL games so far speaks to his hard work and determination.

Utah GM Bill Armstrong and the coaching staff with the Mammoth will be blown away by the pro that Weegar is on and off the ice. The two-way defenceman's stats this season don't tell the entire story. People will be quick to judge his minus-35 rating as a massive concern, but the reality is the Flames have struggled to score goals, and Weegar has been tasked with facing top-line matchups every night.

I fully expect the Mammoth will value the fact that he is willing to play physical and block shots. Weegar has been credited with 130 hits and 143 shot blocks this season. He averages over 23 minutes per game of ice time, can be deployed in all situations, and provides secondary offence.

Utah has been building towards being a playoff team, and the addition of Weegar sends a clear message to the team and their fans that Armstrong believes the time is now to spend assets and become part of the discussion in the Stanley Cup tournament.

To Calgary: Olli Maatta, Jonathan Castagna, three second-round picks in 2026

Castagna is an NHL prospect. He's the leading scorer for the Cornell Big Red at the college level (14G-18A) and gets between 18-21 minutes per game of ice time while being deployed in all situations. Castagna is trustworthy in all three zones. When he isn't producing offence, he buckles down defensively and can be relied upon to match up against top lines and win key face-offs. He plays with pace and, in my opinion, projects as a bottom-six NHL forward who might earn some spot duty on a second power play unit.

Calgary has, no doubt, done its due diligence ahead of this transaction and feels well-positioned to sign Castagna to an entry-level contract at the conclusion of his season at Cornell.

Part of their process would have involved delving into the details of Castagna's game. To illustrate some of the trustworthy intricacies of his overall game, here are his shot metrics (left graphic) alongside his face-off success rate (right graphic).

As for the draft capital, I'm not the least surprised about what the Flames received in return from Utah in this transaction. Weegar is a pro. He tugs the rope in the right direction for his team, and he competes to the best of his ability every single night.

Weegar arrived in Calgary along with Jonathan Huberdeau, Cole Schwindt and a first-round pick in the 2022 trade for Matthew Tkachuk. Looking back on that and seeing what they now received in return for him alone at this deadline four years later speaks to how much Weegar is respected around the league. I suppose an argument can be made that Utah overpaid for his services, but the Mammoth have been stockpiling assets for several years waiting for the opportunity to make these kinds of transactions.

Conroy deserves a ton of credit here. He communicated with Weegar every step of the way, and they clearly have a mutual respect for each other. The end result is the following draft grid, as it stands today, for the Flames:

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Sportsnet.ca / Weegar trade marks organizational shift for Flames

Eric Francis



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CALGARY — Craig Conroy might not be ready to say it, but the move he made Wednesday afternoon represents a significant shift from the approach of years past.

It was the kind of organizational jolt Calgary Flames fans have been waiting on for years, but never truly believed would come.

MacKenzie Weegar, the 32-year-old pillar of the blue line, the heartbeat of the room, the future captain-in-waiting, is gone.

And with him goes any illusion that this team is still trying to straddle two timelines.

This was the day the Flames finally picked a lane.

The message is unmistakable. What seemed unthinkable mere weeks ago became reality when the Flames brokered a five-piece deal with Utah that required Weegar to waive his no-trade clause, opening the door for a massive return.

Days earlier, the lovable leader they all call "Weegs" was still considered a foundational veteran in a retool built around getting younger with the help of players like him.

But the Flames finally saw fit to author a shakeup, an accelerator, something to reinvigorate a program that has stalled.

Conroy knew it. The room knew it. And now the league knows it, too.

"Hard to say a shakeup," Conroy told Sportsnet.

"I guess it could be, but this is something we thought would make us better in the future."

Weegar didn't ask out. He didn't sour. He didn't quit on the city or the crest. He simply recognized the reality Conroy finally acted on: the Flames aren't close, and time isn't slowing down for anyone.

"We weren't really actively shopping Weegs," said Conroy over the phone after the deal was announced.

"But when calls were coming in, we were taking them and exploring them. This morning, it came together that this was a deal we had to bring to Weegs, or we'd be doing a disservice. Those are never easy conversations, but he understood."

Weegar never saw the trade coming, but revealed to Sportsnet earlier in the week that, given his age and the way things were going, he would consider it.

"He's 32 years old and he wants to be in the playoffs too," said Conroy, who praised his alternate captain for being the ultimate professional through an emotional day.

"I think both sides are really happy with the deal."

Utah paid a premium, sending 31-year-old defenceman Olli Maatta, three second-round picks in 2026 (its own, the Rangers', and Ottawa's), and Cornell centre Jonathan Castagna, a 20-year-old with 14 goals and 32 points in 29 NCAA games.

There was no salary retention on Weegar's remaining five years at \$6.25 million. That alone keeps the door open for further moves involving Nazem Kadri or Blake Coleman.

It's a masterful return for a club that now has two first-round picks, four second-rounders and a pair of thirds this year to use as they please.

Maatta had to waive his own no-trade protection to come to Calgary. He's a steady, left-shot defender who can play either side and helps stabilize a blue line that suddenly looks very different.

The acquisition of Zach Whitecloud for Rasmus Andersson earlier in the year helped make a Weegar trade possible, giving the Flames enough

veteran insulation to open the door for prospects like Zayne Parekh and Hunter Brzustewicz to push for more NHL minutes.

Castagna is a key piece for an organization short on centres.

"He plays hard, can score, is excellent in the faceoff circle, has good size, skates and finishes checks," said Conroy, who has had his eye on the six-foot-one, 183-pound Torontonian for a while.

"I just talked to him and everything was positive, so I don't see any problems signing him."

He'll sign, and will almost surely join the Flames later this season, when his third year at Cornell comes to a close.

"We've been rebuilding, or retooling, or whatever you want to call it, the last three years," said Conroy.

"But unfortunately, where we are this year, and where we need to get to, we had to continue going down that path."

Translation: the hybrid rebuild, if not dead, is on life support.

With Weegar gone and Andersson moved earlier, the leadership group the team has rallied around has been slashed. Kadri's desire for relocation likely increases, and Coleman remains the most likely to be moved by Friday.

Could Ryan Lomberg, Brayden Pachal or Joel Hanley be far behind?

This is what a full rebuild looks like.

Not half-measures. Not patchwork. Not waiting for a core that never quite was.

"I don't know if it's a shift, but it's something we thought would make us better in the future."

"It doesn't make us better now, but it does in the future."

Call it whatever you want. Flames fans know what they saw.

A pillar was moved.

A direction was chosen.

A message was sent.

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Sportsnet.ca / 'A crappy feeling': Maple Leafs feel trade pressure as Treliving scratches, scrambles

Luke Fox

NEWARK, N.J. — Brad Treliving, it's your move.

Pressure on the Toronto Maple Leafs general manager to make a deal — something he hasn't done since taking a flyer on Dakota Joshua on July 17 — escalated further Wednesday as he scrambled to healthy-scratch trade bait and watched potential partners give up their futures for other veterans.

The Edmonton Oilers, for example, had some level of interest in Toronto depth centre Nicolas Roy; Treliving is believed to want, at minimum, a first-round pick for the last year plus 20 games of Roy's services.

The Oilers instead spent a 2027 first-round pick as part of a package to acquire centre Jason Dickinson out of Chicago.



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Oliver Ekman-Larsson falls under a similar category as veteran defenceman MacKenzie Weegar, who was shipped from Calgary to Utah, yielding the Flames a tidy return that included three second-round picks.

Ekman-Larsson was the one trade-bait player with term whom Treliving sat out of Wednesday's 4-3 shootout loss to the New Jersey Devils, which extends Toronto's losing skid to five.

"There's not a lot to say. He knows what's going on," head coach Craig Berube said of his best defenceman. "More of a conversation that Brad would have with him about that."

The other late scratches were pending UFAs Scott Laughton and Bobby McMann, two useful and inexpensive assets seemingly destined to wrap their seasons on better teams.

"He's been nothing but good to me," Cowan said of mentor Laughton. "Honestly, I haven't known him long, but probably wouldn't be the person I am right now without him. Just a great teammate. Yeah, it's unfortunate, obviously. Sucks."

The circumstances of the three holdbacks indicated some disconnect between the front office's plans and those of the coaching staff.

Berube had announced after morning skate that no players would sit out the game for roster-management reasons, and projected scratches Nick Robertson, Calle Järnkrok, and Troy Stecher put in some extra work.

"Things change as the day goes along," Berube explained postgame. "It's tough. We want to win games. And when you come to the rink, and there's three important players that aren't in the lineup, it's going to impact the guys."

Starting goalie Anthony Stolarz — stellar in a 44-save effort until going 0-for-2 in the shootout — didn't learn of the new plan until he ran into Laughton in the hotel lobby before walking over to the rink.

Matthew Knies caught on when he saw three empty stalls in the Prudential Center visitors' room.

"It sucks. You know, those are great guys. And I played with Bobby for three years, and with O for two, and Laughty for one. You get to know those guys so well. So, it's a crappy feeling not being able to suit up next to them and play with them," Knies said.

"We're not gonna hang our heads low and feel defeated. I think we're still in it. Like, we still have a chance. So, keep believing in that. And, you know, hopefully it all works out. But it's a crappy feeling that we put ourselves in this situation. But, again, it's on the guys in this locker room to change course and get it back to where it was."

Ekman-Larsson, the only Leafs defenceman yet to miss a game this season, had fully expected to dress.

His wife, Maja, is expecting to give birth to their second child any day now. The family decided Oliver would travel to participate in the Olympics alone because of that.

"She's got a lot to think about at this time. You forget, at times, that you have other stuff going on in your life, too. We're just focusing on controlling what we can control and go from there," the 34-year-old father said. "It's obviously tough on everybody."

"We, as a family, we're super happy to be here, and we want to stay here."

They all do.

But as much as McMann and Laughton have each professed their appreciation for being Maple Leafs and belief that the roster can eventually get things on track, they have also put themselves in line for paydays that Treliving appears unwilling to match.

That San Jose signed Kiefer Sherwood — who has 18 goals to McMann's 19 this season — to a five-year contract worth \$28.75 million (\$5.75 AAV) on Wednesday should only improve McMann's bargaining power. Both are undrafted, late-blooming wingers who will be 30 when next season begins.

As the losses pile and the hours tick down, change is coming.

On this night, with Treliving's late scratches and Hockey Twitter ablaze with trade activity not yet involving the Maple Leafs, that change is at once feeling more imminent and more pressing.

Reality is seeping in here.

Denial is no longer an option.

"All three of them would be very tough to see them go," William Nylander said, quietly and without a shirt. "Something you don't really want to think about too much."

The same goes for missing the playoffs.

"It's weird to be in this position right now. Haven't really, I think, fully understand that's what might happen," Nylander said. "I mean, it's a tight spot to get in. I mean, if it doesn't happen, I mean, it's a tough position to be in."

Even tougher for Treliving, as the executive is feeling the squeeze.

- Waiver pickup Stecher's transition to Toronto was seamless. The hardworking righty shot into a top-four role and went plus-11 over his first 20 games as a Leaf.

Over the following 20, Stecher went dash-10. The pending UFA had come back down to earth.

So much so, Berube healthy scratched Stecher Monday versus Philadelphia and had planned to sit him again Wednesday — until Treliving pulled Ekman-Larsson from the lineup a few hours before puck drop.

"He owns it," Berube said. "He knows that his play dropped a bit, and he gave us a lot of good hockey, and he's been really good for us. But sometimes you got to take a break and get a different guy in there."

The prideful Stecher wants to keep his conversations with the coaching staff private.

"Obviously, I haven't played well enough, so not very happy with my game, and got to be better," the defenceman told us Wednesday morning, after putting in extra work at morning skate.

"It's on them to get me back in the lineup, and then it's on me to make sure I do the job, to prove that I deserve to stay in. So, just focus on trying to play as best I can."

The veteran Stecher carries a bargain \$787,500 cap hit and does have 29 games of playoff experience. He tells us he's unfazed by the uncertainty of the trade deadline.

"Just another day, honestly," Stecher said. "I got traded three years in a row. I'm pretty immune to having any feelings on deadline day. It's just another day. If you get traded, you get traded. If you don't, you don't."

"Ask anybody in here. We all love playing for each other, and we love being a Leaf. But none of us have any control over what happens."

- New Jersey is facing a decision on right-shot defenceman Simon Nemeč, who is in the final year of his entry-level deal and is worthy of a significant raise.

GM Tom Fitzgerald is entertaining trade offers on the 22-year-old, and the Devils already have six other legitimate NHL blueliners under contract for 2026-27, including Dougie Hamilton.



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Hard to see a world where all seven arrive at training camp.

- Cool moment as golden goal scorer Megan Keller dropped the puck in a ceremonial faceoff won by fellow golden goal scorer Jack Hughes, who has been jumping from Saturday Night Live to The Pat McAfee Show to The Tonight Show.

"Everybody from that team has had a whirlwind couple weeks, but him probably more than anybody," Team USA captain Matthews said. "I'm so happy for him. He's an incredible, incredible person, incredible player, and I think all the attention and stuff that he's getting couldn't have happened to a better person."

The Hughes brothers shared a memorable podium with Matthews in Milan on the eve of the Americans' victory and pumped the captain's tires:

"Both of them stepping up like that was obviously nice," Matthews said. "I think the world of those two as people."

- MLSE honcho Keith Pelley was offered a chance to discuss his plan for the underachieving Maple Leafs on Wednesday during an appearance for his soccer club.

He declined to answer.

"We're here to talk about TFC and to welcome Josh Sargent to Toronto," Pelley said. "There will be a time that I will address the media on the Leafs, but today is not that day."

- Chris Tanev's undergoing core muscle surgery in New York on Wednesday certainly feels like the right move, but, curiously, the procedure took place more than two months after the defenceman's most recent game action.

"He wanted to try to come back and play this year," Berube said. "But it didn't work out, so he got the operation."

Here's hoping the 36-year-old is rehabbed and ready for training camp as expected. He and the Leafs are committed to each other for four more seasons beyond this one.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks show 'more fight' in close loss to Hurricanes

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER – The Vancouver Canucks were disappointed but not embarrassed.

Losing should never be acceptable. But if they can lose the way they did Wednesday, 6-4 against the elite Carolina Hurricanes, the Canucks will earn respect and patience from their fans during what is going to be a loyalty-testing rebuild. Which ones aren't?

Uncompetitive and unredeemable in their last two losses, and challenged Wednesday morning by general manager Patrik Allvin to show "more fight," the Canucks dug in and competed against the soaring Hurricanes, who needed an empty-net goal from Nikolaj Ehlers to complete a hat trick that secured his team's 15th win in 20 games.

Even after Carolina reeled off four straight goals in 10 minutes in the second period to pull away 5-2, the Canucks didn't disintegrate as they have in so many games since the New Year when they've surrendered goals in bunches.

Canuck Brock Boeser scored during a five-on-three power play late in the second period, and Nils Hoglander blistered a one-timer from Elias Pettersson's nice pass to make it 5-4 at 6:45 of the third.

And even shorthanded, but skating five-against-five with their goalie pulled, the Canucks made it uncomfortable for the Hurricanes in the final minute before Ehlers scored with 14 seconds to go.

Disappointed, but not embarrassed.

"I mean, it's tough when you're in a spiral like this," centre Teddy Blueger said. "We go down like we did last game against Dallas (6-1 loss on Monday) and you can just feel the energy kind of drain out. It's tough to pick yourself back up; that's maybe a bit of human nature. But we've got to fight that. I think the least we can do is compete and fight in every game, no matter the score.

"Obviously, we'd probably like to have a couple of those goals back (in the second period) with the breakdowns and stuff. But I think in terms of competing and fighting back and not getting deflated like we have been, I thought that was pretty good tonight."

Defenceman Filip Hronek said: "The effort was there today. I'm pretty happy about that. But we have to be consistent with that, and we have to have that effort for 60 (minutes) and not 35 or whatever minutes."

As a group, the Canucks top players were far more noticeable than they've been in most games since the team collapsed into 2026 on a freefall that is now 2-17-4 since Dec. 29.

Certainly not known for his physicality, Boeser recorded a career-high seven hits as Vancouver out-hit Carolina 30-13. Specifically challenged by Allvin during the GM's morning press conference after the Tyler Myers trade, Pettersson played with a little more spark and had his second two-point game since Nov. 17. And Hronek, the last defenceman standing from the Canucks' National Hockey League playoff run less than two years ago, may have been the best player on either team, finishing with a goal and two assists and a plus-two rating in the loss.

The last-overall Canucks just need a lot more of this, no matter what else happens before Friday's trade deadline.

"It feels a whole lot better when the guys are trying like that," rookie defenceman Tom Willander said. "You know, some of these teams are very good and they're tough, and you're not going to win all of them. But you always have to compete. I don't feel like it's just about playing well; I feel like if you compete, you're just going to get a lot better. Even practices are better."

The Canucks weren't winning even before they started trading important players like Quinn Hughes, Kiefer Sherwood and Myers (which is why they traded them to start this rebuild). So nobody expects this hollowed-out team to be winning now, especially with star goalie Thatcher Demko out for the season after hip surgery.

But what the Canucks had lost along with 21 of 23 games before Wednesday was baseline competitiveness — the basic, professional combination of preparedness and execution that every team requires to be respectable.

Thirteen of the previous 18 regulation losses were by three or more goals, and in its last two losses, Saturday in Seattle and Monday at home against Dallas, Vancouver was outscored 11-2.

Despite what some unfamiliar with the last century may think, these aren't the darkest days in franchise history. The Canucks were in peril of being sold and moved a couple of times, and when Brian Burke was hired as GM in 1998, ownership charged him with saving the franchise in a city where Rogers Arena was half-empty many nights.

But this rebuild will turn black if the Canucks not only lose but surrender. Nobody wants to watch that.



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So Allvin challenged his players to dig in and compete.

"I want to see more fight in the group," he told reporters. "It's their job, the players' job and our job, to prepare every night for the fans and playing for the crest. You can lose games, but you've got to play the right way and you've got to compete. And that's what I want to see from my group here moving forward. I want to see us getting better. Losing games is not great for anyone, and we owe it to the fans here that have been great in Vancouver, and our players should play hard every night."

"One-hundred-percent agree," Willander said. "I think that's something (fight) you need more of. You know, you can't always be at your best, but you can always work hard. I feel like you need to compete and show up even on the days you're not, you know, not everything is clicking. And I feel like that's going to be so important later on when you want to win those big games."

From now until the end of the season, all of the Canucks' games are big for respect – their own and from the people they need to support the rebuild by buying tickets to watch them play.

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Sportsnet.ca / Tyler Myers reflects on trade from Canucks: 'It was emotional'

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — Tyler Myers knew he was extending the Vancouver Canucks' trade mission when he walked into the dressing room earlier this week and teammates started chirping him.

"The guys were, like: 'You still here?'" Myers said Wednesday, chuckling over the phone in a call with Sportsnet. "It wasn't hard to do, but it was a little weird. It's a situation you don't see too often around the league, but I enjoyed my time with the guys. I was lucky enough to be around everyone today when the trade happened, so I got a chance to say goodbye. A lot of players don't get that opportunity. Yeah, it was emotional."

After nearly seven tumultuous National Hockey League seasons in Vancouver, where a couple of impressive playoff highs by the Canucks were followed by precipitous drops, Myers walked out of the dressing room for the last time after the Dallas Stars acquired the 36-year-old defenceman for second- and fourth-round draft picks.

Although he grew up in Calgary, Myers was born in Texas, where his mom still lives and there is support for his family.

He met his wife, Michela, while playing junior hockey in Kelowna, and the couple have made their home there since Myers won the Calder Trophy with the Buffalo Sabres in 2010. Their children, Tristan, Skylar and Tatum, have been raised almost entirely in British Columbia. There is established medical support here for Tristan, whose special needs Tyler has spoken about publicly.

So waiving his no-movement clause to leave the Canucks with a year remaining on his contract was not easy.

"For sure it was a factor; we discussed that quite a bit," Myers said of family implications. "But we'll figure it out, and Tristan actually adapts to change very well. He's excited about getting a new jersey."

"When all of this started a couple of weeks ago, I really didn't know what to think about anything. We just wanted to take some time and let everything play out and then go over our options. When we found out

that Dallas was a possibility and started to think about that, I just realized it checked a lot of boxes for us. I still have family down there and an opportunity to join a team that has a chance to compete for the Stanley Cup.

"It was special not only for me but for my family to play in Vancouver, and we're just incredibly grateful and fortunate to say that we had that chance. We call B.C. our home and it was incredible for the family — and I'm thinking about my kids, too — to have the run that we had. Vancouver will always hold a special place in our hearts."

The Canucks took Myers out of the lineup one week ago, a day after the Detroit Red Wings made a trade offer that Vancouver general manager Patrik Allvin presented to the player.

Despite ongoing interest from Dallas, Wednesday's trade came together only when Stars GM Jim Nill called Allvin as the Canuck boss was driving across the Burrard Bridge on his morning commute to the arena.

Despite the uncertainty and mental stress of the last week, Myers continued to report to the rink each morning for practices and workouts and team meetings. He wanted to play games, too, but the Canucks kept him out of the lineup to protect their asset.

"I do want to set the record straight on one thing — that I wouldn't waive (my NMC) to go to Detroit," Myers said. "That just wasn't true. When this thing started, we just wanted to assess every possible option and, in the end, we just landed on Dallas. I have a lot of respect for Detroit and Steve Yzerman."

Everyone in hockey has respect for Myers, a 17-year veteran who has played 1,123 NHL games.

Derided by some in the market when former Canucks GM Jim Benning signed him as a free agent in 2019, Myers managed to transform "Chaos Giraffe" from an insult into a term of endearment.

It turned out the chaos was rarely his fault, and the six-foot-eight blue-liner earned respect from reporters and admiration from teammates for how well he handled the many plot twists — one of the biggest being the organization's dramatic pivot to a rebuild this winter, less than two years removed from a 109-point season that ended one win short of the Stanley Cup semi-finals.

"I think kind of how he handled everything in the last week just proved to me everything that I was thinking," winger Brock Boeser, Myers' longest-tenured teammate, told reporters Wednesday morning. "Like, he handled it so good. He showed up to the rink every day — everyone knowing he's probably getting traded — still working on his game, still in the gym, still communicating with guys, still acting like he's here."

But now he is not.

The trade looks like a win-win for everyone involved.

Myers gets to try to win a Cup in Dallas, the Canucks receive second- and fourth-round draft picks (in 2027 and 2029) and the Stars, with salary retention cutting the veteran's \$3-million cap hit in half, get an experienced, capable defenceman who adds character, leadership and depth to a formidable team that breezed to a 6-1 win in Vancouver on Monday.

But even as the Canucks prepared themselves for their senior skatesman's exit, there was a sobering finality to the door closing behind him when Myers left Rogers Arena before Wednesday's game against the Carolina Hurricanes.

"A great leader, a good human, going to miss being around a guy like that," coach Adam Foote said. "A true professional every day."

Foote added: "I think he'll leave his mark on this dressing room for a long time."



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"I mean, he's just such a kind, caring dude," Boeser said. "He came to the rink every single day, good days or bad days, (and) always had a smile on his face. Always in the gym, always working hard, always working on his game, shooting pucks on the ice. That's something that will stick with me. He was just one of those veteran guys that was just so good to everyone. We're going to miss him, but he deserves a chance to win a Cup.

"Yeah, it's tough, but I think we all knew and saw that this was coming, so at least we had some time to prepare and got to spend some time with him before he left."

With his NMC and roots in B.C., Myers was not expected to be the first Canuck traded on NHL deadline week.

The team has been dangling free-agent-eligible forwards Evander Kane and Teddy Blueger since November.

Both could still be moved before Friday's deadline. But the Canucks have other players available, too.

A combination of factors — the NHL's new playoff salary-cap, contract lengths and trade restrictions, and the spectacular under-performance of several Canuck players — has made it a challenging market for Allvin.

"Yeah, the market is interesting," he said. "I don't even know if it is a market or not. This year, when you have a salary cap for the first time in the playoffs, it changed. It's hard to get a feel for it. There is some ongoing discussions, and we'll see here over the next 48 hours if something materializes or not.

"I would imagine there's going to be around the league more trades, but how many, I don't know. As you guys pointed out, the protection and terms (involving Canuck players) are probably things that teams are looking into as well."

The Hurricanes are the Canucks' final opponents before Friday's deadline. Vancouver has a road game that night against the Chicago Blackhawks, so the Canucks will have to make sure they have enough players for their lineup if there are a couple of buzzer-beating trades.

The last-overall team is a grotesque 2-15-4 in 2026 and haven't won a road game.

"I want to see more fight in the group," Allvin said. "It's their job, the players' job and our job, to prepare every night for the fans and playing for the crest. You can lose games, but you've got to play the right way and you've got to compete. And that's what I want to see from my group here moving forward. I want to see us getting better. Losing games is not great for anyone, and we owe it to the fans here that have been great in Vancouver, and our players should play hard every night."

Asked about struggling centre Elias Pettersson, who has no shots on net in three games since the Olympics, no goals in 14 games and was benched by Foote in Saturday's 5-1 loss in Seattle, Allvin said: "I believe he was pretty honest in saying that his game isn't where he wants it to be. That being said, it's easy to say that you've got to be better, but what are you actually going to do to be better? And I think that the action is something we want to see."

With Myers traded and Pierre-Olivier Joseph going on injured reserve after being hurt on Monday, the Canucks have recalled minor-league prospect Victor Mancini to fill out the defence. Wednesday's trade means Filip Hronek is the only defenceman left from the group that made it to Game 7 of the playoffs' second round just 22 months ago.

"It is sad," Hronek said. "But at the same time, something new and exciting is coming."

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Sportsnet.ca / Can the Maple Leafs make the playoffs in 2026-27?

Justin Bourne

TORONTO — There are a couple things keeping the Toronto Maple Leafs from tearing it all down. And by "things," I mean of course, people. Those people are Auston Matthews and William Nylander, and, if you squint, Matthew Knies.

It's hard to get stars, and none of these guys have yet turned 30, and so with the good regular-season goaltending we know they're able to get from Anthony Stolarz and Joseph Woll, they've at least got a few important pillars of successful teams in place.

If they blew it up — meaning traded Matthews and Nylander — the Leafs would spend years bottoming out and drafting high in hopes of even getting one of those quality players back any time soon. It could be a years-long journey, and so before you do that, you should at least see if you can't build around the guys you currently have and see if you can't get everything to line up just so. Before you go full rebuild, you have to exhaust all other options.

So, it's a retool then, is it?

Let's talk about how realistic it is for the Leafs to get themselves back in the playoff picture next season, and how that should affect what they do at the deadline.

The salary cap this season is set at \$95.5 million, and as of today, the Leafs sit almost exactly \$10 million below that cap. Next season, only one player is set to get a raise, that being Stolarz, who goes from \$2.5 million to \$3.75 million. Chris Tanev comes off IR, but not all of his cap hit is on LTIR, so it adds only \$3.8 million to their cap hit.

That leaves them well below the cap limit, and that salary cap? It's shooting up to something around \$104 million. If the Leafs move on from Morgan Rielly, which seems quite possible, there's another \$7.5 million they'll have to play with.

Which is to say, the idea of trading Oliver Ekman-Larsson may not make the most sense. I've advocated for the Leafs to be "over-sellous" very recently, and I did so because I'm at least a little skeptical this "retool" is going to be able to work. As I explained in that piece, you're probably better off just getting a pile of assets and hoping for a few things to break your way: that you can sign some decent UFAs at the cost of no assets (you can overpay Darren Raddysh, for example), or that some great players want a change of scenery (Adam Fox?), and you've now got the assets to acquire those guys.

But that's just the way I've been thinking about it big picture, and that way doesn't exactly honour the idea of the quick fix they apparently want. If the Leafs are serious about contending next season, it's hard to imagine they can find a better fit of a D-man than OEL (and his two additional years of term makes him flippable next year anyway). It's tough to imagine doing better than Scott Laughton or Bobby McMann in the UFA market, and since you're not trying to get worse, I can see a world where management sees fit to extend one or both.

For whatever many think is the long-term forecast of this team, a retool involves needing good players and supplementing around them, not stripping them from the roster.

What a serious attempt to win next year means for the deadline is that you probably part ways with Calle Jarnkrok for a song, and see Matias Maccelli as a borderline giveaway, and you see if you can't grab a couple other picks for fringe pieces that you see as outright replaceable (maybe that's Simon Benoit, for example).



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From there, what you're selling is that everything that could go wrong did, and that next year will be different.

You're hoping that your weird start with goaltending this season doesn't happen again. You're hoping that Nylander stays healthy for 82 games like he usually does, and that a long summer brings back 50-goal threat Auston Matthews. You're hoping a first dose of skepticism about Knies motivates him this summer, and that Brandon Carlo's ankle is better and he has a bounce-back season.

You're hoping the return of Tanev changes the look of your D-corps entirely.

The other question is what a different coach might do for the group. I think it's fair to say they haven't maximized their roster this season, and if you're hoping for a big turnaround with little change, it's certainly one of the buttons they have at their disposal to push.

A lot of this I do believe can happen and can help, but the problem is how fine the margin of error is — and you know there's always unforeseen error. I can't see Tanev playing 82, or even 72 games next season, can you? With his history, at his age?

You can pick through basically all the notes above and express similar dollops of skepticism.

The next part is just looking at the division around the Leafs, and assessing the state of those teams:

Ottawa: Elite underlying numbers undone by goaltending, likely gonna be better next year with even average goaltending.

Montreal: Running with a red-hot shooting percentage this year, but so talented they should be a home-ice playoff team the next few years at least.

Boston: Maybe the only team in a similar spot as the Leafs, except they have five first-round picks the next three years to play with.

If the Leafs have everything go right next season, they're still going to need help. So while I've advocated for selling — because I'm looking big picture — you can see how they'd talk themselves into the opposite.

As they move toward this deadline, I see a team with a management group banking on a whole bunch of bounce-backs with little change. There are days ahead for me to be proven wrong in that guess, but with a fanbase hungry for action, for a clear direction, for a pulse, it seems to be shaping up for a mighty dull Leafs-based trade season.

The team wants to go back at it next year, and with the pillars they have, you can see why. I may be skeptical, you may be skeptical, hell, they may be skeptical, but the Leafs feel like they at least have to try. And with that in mind, trying may look like not doing a whole heck of a lot.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers' Connor Murphy ready to contribute toward 'meaningful' games

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — There was once an old defenceman named Rob Scuderi, whose nickname was actually a bit of a joke.

Scuderi — a low-scoring, defensive-minded defenceman on that 2009 Pittsburgh Penguins team that delivered Sidney Crosby's first Stanley Cup — made a huge shot-block one night during a playoff game in

Carolina. True to character, in the post-game interview, he simply told a reporter that he was "just a piece of the puzzle" on a Penguins team that would sweep the Hurricanes in that Eastern Conference Final.

But the headline atop the picture in the next day's paper said different.

"The Piece," it announced in big block letters. And forevermore, that would be Scuderi's nickname.

"The Piece."

Here in Edmonton, big Connor Murphy arrives in not a vastly different role than the one Scuderi took on in Pittsburgh.

Murphy is a defence-first guy who has spent 805 NHL games honing his craft. Now, he's finally found a team that can use the player he has become, down the stretch and into the playoffs.

Murphy is a piece who has finally found a puzzle.

But can he be "The Piece" for Edmonton in games that actually matter?

Well, it's high time we all found out.

"At this point in my career, winning is the top priority," said Murphy, who has toiled through rebuilds in Arizona and Chicago over 13 NHL seasons. "I feel comfortable in my role now, and really just want to play meaningful games and winning hockey. With that comes pressure, which is a privilege to have on your shoulders.

"To come together with a group, feel the emotions, the highs and lows, is what it's all about. That's why Edmonton has always been a top priority (and a place) I was hoping to come to."

It's a long career when you walk into the NHL as a 20-year-old, and at age 32, you've only played nine playoff games. Those were in the bubble, against Edmonton, of course.

He was needed for leadership and setting the right example as the longest-serving Chicago Blackhawk. In Edmonton, however, they only require his on-ice game: a steady role behind his own blue line and a key piece of the penalty kill.

"That's kind of all I've done. My career has been a lot of penalty killing and defensive zone time," said Murphy, who is six-foot-four and 212 pounds. "Where I'm comfortable, honestly, is more with my defending, using my instincts that way. I've settled into that role for a few years now and been really comfortable doing it.

"Definitely something I take pride in."

So, what is Murphy as an NHL defenceman? We asked around.

He's a polished pro. Committed, prepared and an excellent teammate loved by all. He is not as skilled as he is smart, not as blessed with puck-handling skills as he is with compete and will.

He'll really help Edmonton's penalty kill, and a guy who will eat up the final shifts of a period a game, provided you're ahead and not in need of a late goal. He doesn't move as well as he once did, but is a smart, positional player who blocks shots better and more often than anyone the Oilers currently have.

In short, he is well known as "a pro's pro," a descriptor used by more than one source we spoke to.

In a Wednesday practice that was skipped by top pairing D-men Even Bouchard and Mattias Ekholm — maintenance days, media was told — Murphy worked with Jake Walman while Darnell Nurse was paired with righty Ty Emberson.

Walman's game could surely use a steadying force like the right-shot Murphy. Walman revealed on Wednesday that he was benched through the entire third period of Tuesday's 5-4 win over Ottawa, despite head



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coach Kris Knoblauch raising the possibility in his post-game interview that Walman's absence had been due to an injury.

"I think it was more about other options," admitted Walman. "I had a small tweak, but I could play. I need to play better. I have more to bring, and I'm confident I can."

OIL SPILLS

Andrew Mangiapane is back in Edmonton, but with no games between now and Friday's trade deadline, it's a good bet he's played his last game as an Oiler ... Curtis Lazar was seen with his arm in a sling after the Senators game. He's expected to miss a month, leaving Edmonton without a right shot centreman in their fold. That will make the pursuit of a centre like Toronto's Nicolas Roy even more acute. "I saw the rumour like everybody else," Roy told Sportsnet's Luke Fox at the Leafs morning skate in New Jersey on Wednesday. "But I'm playing for the Leafs now, and I want to be here."

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1381668 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why Senators need to add top-four defenceman at trade deadline

Alex Adams

OTTAWA — All season, Ottawa Senators fans have been discussing it: what's more important, a top-six forward or a top-four defenceman?

The answer is clear: a top-four defenceman.

The Senators' future on the right side of defence is muddled today and into the future, while much of Ottawa's young forward group is signed into the next decade, with the notable exceptions of captain Brady Tkachuk and Drake Batherson.

Sure, the puck could find the back of the net more often, but the Senators as a collective have the 10th-best shooting percentage in the league. An issue has been that their defence is incomplete.

In an ideal world, the Senators need to upgrade in both areas, but this season has been anything but ideal for Sens Nation.

Ottawa's top four defence corps is settled, outside of pending unrestricted free agent Nick Jensen, who has played better of late but overall has struggled. It's evident that Jensen is not the solution. He has been on the ice for 53 goals against at five-on-five: that's the 13th-most of any player to play over 800 minutes this season, and third-most goals per 60 at 3.54 in the league. An addition to the right side of the top four could conceivably mean the Senators have one of the best defences in the league, led by Jake Sanderson, Thomas Chabot, Artem Zub and (insert trade-deadline acquisition).

Also, the narrative that Ottawa struggles to score is deceptive. The Senators are 11th in goals and have the eighth-best power play, while sitting 23rd in goals allowed per game.

Plus, what may have been Ottawa's biggest question mark offensively, Dylan Cozens, has found his game.

It's naïve to think that Ottawa's forward group is of championship calibre. But a top-six elite forward won't fix finding a partner for Chabot. Most of the time in the NHL, you defend your way out of problems, not outscore them. General manager Steve Staios will eventually need to find a scoring winger, but presumably not before Friday's trade deadline.

Ottawa's centres Cozens, Tim Stutzle and Shane Pinto are all signed until 2030, while only Sanderson is signed to Ottawa's blueline past 2028. The defence needs reinforcements.

We all know the reason the Senators' season has been underwhelming. Every Senator goaltender this season has faltered, most notably Linus Ullmark with his .884 save percentage. Yet, on Tuesday in Edmonton, the Senators' defence let Ullmark down.

We understand the Senators are six points out of a playoff spot, but MoneyPuck.com gives them 39 per cent odds of making the playoffs. They've got points in eight of their last nine, and in games Ullmark has started and finished, he is 7-0-3 in his last 10 (he was pulled against Toronto on Dec. 27). They are clawing close enough to a playoff spot.

If Ullmark's run of play continues, that gives more reason to believe in the roster, if you're Senators management.

The Senators should go all in, a bold deadline to bolster this season but, importantly, into the next few.

You have to capitalize on your window with Tkachuk signed, and with Sanderson and Stutzle on bargain contracts, making barely over \$8 million a season. In theory, the next few seasons should be when the Senators become a contender.

Meanwhile, Staios clearly recognizes the need for a right-shot defenceman because his first two first-round selections as GM were grabbing just that in Carter Yakemchuk and Logan Hensler.

The underrated plot point is that Zub is an unrestricted free agent in 2027, when he will be 31. Zub has created one of the best defensive partnerships in Senators' history with Sanderson — in the same stratosphere as Erik Karlsson-Marc Methot or Zdeno Chara-Chris Phillips. It puts the Senators' hierarchy in a precarious position, as youngsters Yakemchuk and Hensler aren't likely to be impact contributors in the near term. Ottawa's lack of draft capital, prospects and impending free agency to Zub means they have to plan to fill the right side of the defence for 2027-28.

All of these point to Ottawa needing a right-shot defenceman for the Sanderson-Stutzle-Tkachuk era of Senators hockey.

The Sens could trade one but not both of their prospects for the ready-to-win-now version of what you'd hope Yakemchuk and Hensler would someday become.

Elite right-shot defencemen are hard to acquire but not impossible. On Nick Kypreos' Trade Board, there are plenty of right-shot defencemen with term.

There's MacKenzie Weegar, who is paid until he's 38 but is an Ottawa native and a really good NHL defenceman. Imagine a top four of Sanderson-Zub and Chabot-Weegar? Pretty good now and into next season.

Also on Kypreos' board are the likes of Tyler Myers, Justin Faulk, Dougie Hamilton, Rasmus Ristolainen and Braeden Schneider — all with team control until at the very least the end of next season.

None are perfect solutions, but some would be clear upgrades for this Senators franchise.

Beggars can be buyers.

Priority No. 1 for Staios at the deadline must be to propel Ottawa into a playoff spot, in tandem with elevating the Senators' lineup for 2026-27 and beyond.

It would also insulate Yakemchuk's future next season, meaning he wouldn't be thrust too soon into a top-four role.

We acknowledge the Senators need to be prudent in not trading picks away needlessly for short-term gain, as former GM Pierre Dorion did,



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trading a first-rounder each for Alex DeBrincat and Jakob Chychrun, who combined for two-and-a-half seasons in Canada's capital.

At the same time, the Senators aren't as far away as they were then. They are ready to win now, not trying to expedite a rebuild with short-sighted, short-term swings at the wrong time, as Staios' predecessor did.

Let's be clear, any move must have term. Ottawa isn't a free-agent destination, and without a first-round pick this season and just two elite prospects at their disposal. Staios has one shot at this.

Something in the way of a smart, calculated gamble is in order.

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TSN.CA / Roy the latest Leaf to surge up Trade Bait board

Mark Masters

Nicolas Roy surged up to No. 12 on TSN's trade bait list on Wednesday.

"You never know what's going to happen," the Leafs right-shot centre said. "But try not to think about it too much."

It's hard to avoid all the trade talk right now with Roy acknowledging he's well aware of the report on TSN's Insider Trading segment that the Edmonton Oilers may be interested in acquiring him.

"Well, obviously I saw the rumour like everybody else," Roy said. "But, I mean, rumours, until they come true, nothing really happened. I mean, I wasn't expecting to be traded last summer and never heard any rumours and then it happened, and sometimes you hear rumors and it doesn't happen. So, yeah, I heard it like everybody else, but I'm playing for the Leafs now and I want to be here."

The Leafs acquired Roy in a sign-and-trade deal that sent Mitch Marner to the Vegas Golden Knights.

"Growing up, I was a Leafs fan so, for sure, it's really fun to be playing for this team," said Roy, who idolized former Leafs captain Mats Sundin as a kid. "Obviously, playing in Canada, big market, everybody's really involved and obviously really good group of people so really enjoying my time."

Roy helped the Knights win a Stanley Cup in 2023 and centres are always a hot commodity this time of year. The 29-year-old Quebec native agreed with the idea that it can be a compliment to be on a trade list.

"Obviously I have a lot of playoff experience playing in Vegas for a while," he noted. "So, yeah, for sure a little bit."

Roy has produced five goals and 15 assists in 58 games with the Leafs. He's won 52.4 per cent of his faceoffs.

Craig Berube appreciates Roy's consistent effort.

"I know what I'm getting every night," the Leafs coach said. "I know that his production is not where he wants it to be and we would like it a little higher too ... He's had some real good opportunities to score more and it hasn't gone in but, overall, we're pretty happy with his game. He's done a good job killing penalties and just being used in different situations for us throughout the year."

There are six Leafs on TSN's trade bait list with winger Bobby McMann (No. 9), centre Scott Laughton (No. 23), defenceman Oliver Ekman-Larsson (No. 26), defenceman Simon Benoit (No. 42) and defenceman Brandon Carlo (No. 45) joining Roy.

"I don't go sit around and talk to every guy about what they're thinking, but they're obviously thinking about it," said Berube. "That's natural ... The deadline is around the corner here and there's a lot of talk and noise, but you got to block it out and play."

The NHL trade deadline is set for 3 p.m. ET on Friday. Will the Leafs scratch any players for roster management reasons?

"Not tonight, but it could happen, obviously," Berube said following the morning skate. "But it's not gonna happen tonight."

Things change quickly at this time of year and it turns out there will be roster management taking place on Wednesday.

TSN Hockey Insider Chris Johnston reports McMann and Laughton will not play in Wednesday's game against the New Jersey Devils. TSN Hockey Insider Darren Dreger reports Ekman-Larsson will also not play.

Toronto Marlies centre Jacob Quillan is in New Jersey and on standby in case the Leafs make trades and need more than the extra two forwards on the roster.

Toronto will also play on Thursday in New York against the Rangers.

Ekman-Larsson's wife is due to give birth soon.

"I kind of want to leave that personal stuff out of it just for my wife's sake," the 34-year-old Swede said. "She's got a lot to think about at this time ... We are focusing on controlling what we can control and go from there."

Ekman-Larsson is in the second year of a four-year deal with the Leafs.

"We love it here," he said. "We, as a family, we're super happy to be here and we want to stay here."

Ekman-Larsson leads all Leafs defencemen with 35 points.

Despite losing Marner, the Leafs entered the season with the expectation of making the playoffs for a 10th straight season. So, what went wrong?

"I don't know," said centre Auston Matthews. "I mean, I think you can look at a lot of different factors. I'm not going to sit here and speculate on what went wrong, I mean, we've got a game tonight and that's kind of where my focus is at. Obviously, you never want to be in this situation. For us, you know, it's tough. It's obviously frustrating but we got a game tonight. We've got to get ready and focus for that."

Matthews is in his second season as captain. How is the Arizona native planning to lead during this trying time?

"Just staying positive," he said. "And continue to do the right things on the ice and leading by example. I mean, you can only control what you can control, so for me it's the work ethic, it's the compete level that I play with."

Matthews has yet to score in four games since the Olympic break with the Leafs dropping all four games (0-3-1). He does have three assists during the skid.

"Grind through it," Berube advised. "He's got to go out and lead by example on the ice and with work ethic. Obviously, we're counting on him to score goals amongst other things. That's what leaders do. And just keep everybody in check in the room and make sure we're going out and competing every shift and playing for the team. That's the biggest thing that, as a captain, he needs to handle."

Matthews also went goalless in his last three games at the Olympics.

Injuries have played a role in Toronto's slide to last place in the Atlantic Division. Chris Tanev has only played 11 games this season.

"He wanted to try to come back and play this year, but it didn't work out so he got the operation," Berube said.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Tanev is expected to fully participate in training camp in September. The 36-year-old defenceman, who has been sidelined since December, underwent successful core muscle surgery on Wednesday in New York and will miss the rest of the season.

Matthews will be playing Jack Hughes for the first time since the Devils centre scored the golden goal in Milan.

"Everybody from that team's had a whirlwind couple weeks, but him probably more than anybody," Matthews said. "I'm so happy for him. He's an incredible, incredible person, incredible player and I think all the attention and stuff that he's getting couldn't have happened to a better person."

Matthews has already faced some of his USA teammates in the NHL since the Olympics, including Tampa Bay's Jake Guentzel, Florida's Matthew Tkachuk and Ottawa's Brady Tkachuk.

"It's a little interesting after going from that and then coming back and playing against each other and competing," Matthews acknowledged. "But, no, it's cool. And, like I said, I'm extremely happy for him, couldn't have happened to a better guy."

Matthews and the Hughes brothers shared the podium during a post-win news conference in Milan when the Leafs captain was asked if the gold medal could help him get over the hump in the NHL.

"Doesn't matter what anyone says now," Jack interjected with a smile. "Auston Matthews is a winner."

"That's what the media in Toronto should be talking about," Quinn Hughes added. "Auston Matthews led us to a championship"

What did Matthews think of the brothers leaping to his defence?

"It was nice," he said. "Both of them stepping up like that was obviously nice. I think the world of those two as people."

Easton Cowan logged a career-low eight minutes and 23 seconds on Monday night.

"He didn't get a lot of minutes last game, but I will get his minutes up," Berube promised.

The coach said that Cowan's offensive-zone tripping penalty did not factor into his decreased ice time. The 20-year-old rookie, of course, needs to be more disciplined, but Berube stresses the focus is more on improving his wall play.

"He's getting better," Berube said. "Like, he's a good learner and he wants to learn and he's got a great attitude. I think Easton has grown a lot this year as a player and he's only gonna continue to grow."

After being scratched in five straight games, including the final three before the Olympic break, Cowan has dressed in the last two games.

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