



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2026

The Athletic

'Disappointment' around Hurricanes' trade deadline shows their trust in Stankoven

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH, N.C. — After landing Jake Guentzel two years ago and going through the Mikko Rantanen saga last year, the Carolina Hurricanes had plenty of eyes on them before the trade deadline last Friday.

The result was, shall we say, anticlimactic.

Carolina did make one addition, trading for fighter Nic Deslauriers, but the brashness the Hurricanes' front office has shown in recent years didn't lead to the type of headline-making move seen in recent seasons.

And according to coach Rod Brind'Amour, the locker room wasn't thrilled about it.

"I know there's a lot of disappointment, I'm going to be honest," Brind'Amour said of the reaction of the players after Carolina brought in no major reinforcements. "The players were hoping to see us make a splash. It's tough."

Brind'Amour did, however, acknowledge that adding an impact player would have likely meant "disrupting" the current mix — and you can bet the deadline's big sellers were asking for Carolina's younger players in return.

That includes Logan Stankoven, and the fact the Hurricanes didn't include him in the type of move many wanted shows how the team views the 23-year-old's role in its success.

Stankoven's numbers don't jump off the page. He has 11 goals and 17 assists through 63 games, tying him for eighth among Carolina forwards with 28 points — hardly the production expected of a second-line center, the piece many fans and pundits thought the Hurricanes should add.

But GM Eric Tulsky, at his post-deadline press conference, was quick to defend his team's center depth.

"I think Logan's been great in that role," Tulsky said. "I know there's a lot of people out there who look at the point totals and fret about it. Truthfully, at five-on-five, he has produced at a high rate. We have three of the top 40 centers in the league in five-on-five production, and the fact that he's not on our first power-play unit (accumulating points) has nothing to do with how good he is as a center."

At five-on-five this season, Sebastian Aho, Stankoven and Jordan Staal have 33, 22 and 22 points, respectively, which ranks them tied for 14th and tied for 39th among players with at least 250 faceoffs. The player most identified as a target for Carolina at the deadline, Vincent Trocheck, has 21 five-on-five points this season.

There were reasons to consider Trocheck. He ranks in the top 15 in faceoff winning percentage at more than 57 percent. Stankoven — whose stated goal was finish about .500 at the dot — is at 44.3 percent. Trocheck's familiarity with the Hurricanes, having played two-plus seasons in Carolina, would have made the transition easy, and he would have boosted a penalty kill that is ranked 15th in the league — the worst since Brind'Amour took over as coach.

The asking price for Trocheck, however, was reportedly sky-high — with the Rangers looking to get at least one established player in return — and led to him not being moved before the deadline.

Even if the cost had gone down closer to 3 p.m., was Trocheck guaranteed to be an upgrade over Stankoven?

Stankoven's line, with Jackson Blake and Taylor Hall on his wings, has been Carolina's best line much of the season, Tulsky argued.

"I think people have forgotten how many nights in October and November that line was our best line," Tulsky said. "That line has created a lot of offense this year, and he's been part of that."

According to NaturalStatTrick, the trio has scored 22 goals while allowing 14 when playing together at five-on-five, and the line's Corsi For percentage (the number of shot attempts they take when on the ice vs. the number they allow) is above 60 percent.

Furthermore, Stankoven has been the driver of that. Both Hall and Blake are at more than 60 percent possession when playing with Stankoven, but each dips into the 50s without him.

Stankoven also proved he could step up in the playoffs. His five goals in 15 games last postseason included two game-winners, and he was particularly impactful at the start of the first two rounds.

In Game 1 of the opening round against the Devils, he helped set the tone for the series with a pair of goals.

On his first goal in the second period, he got the puck out of the defensive zone and then jumped into the play to score from the left circle in what became the game-winning goal. He added a second more than six minutes later on the power play, firing a shot from the other circle off the far-side post.

He was a difference-maker in the first game of the second round as well, scoring with just over 10 minutes left in regulation to force overtime in Washington. The 2-1 overtime



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win over the Capitals allowed the Hurricanes to quickly seize home ice en route to a five-game series win.

He also didn't back down against the rough-and-tumble Florida Panthers, getting a goal and an assist in a 6-2 Game 3 loss and scoring the game-winner in Game 4 by opening the scoring on a rush chance in the second period of a 3-0 win.

Stankoven did all that, however, on the wing, and his biggest shortcoming — pun incoming — is perception. Generously listed at 5-foot-8, Stankoven has been deemed too small by many to be a center in the NHL.

"He's not the tallest guy, and people worry about that, but he plays really hard," Tulskey said. "He's extremely competitive. He's the kind of person who drags teammates into the fight. Other people look at him and say, 'Well, if he can do that, then obviously I can. I'm twice his size.'"

Stankoven is anything but a shrinking violet. He memorably grappled with Washington's Tom Wilson — who is listed as eight inches taller and 60 pounds heavier than Stankoven — near the end of last regular season.

He took it a step further against the Capitals earlier this season, standing up for Blake in an after-the-whistle scrum and fighting Martin Fehervary — who doesn't have the pugilistic reputation of Wilson but still owned a six-inch, 50-pound advantage.

But fight cards, underlying numbers, regular-season stats and past postseasons won't matter come playoff time.

The Hurricanes showed their faith in Stankoven by not overpaying for his replacement at center at the deadline. It was probably the prudent move — but it will only be perceived as the right one if Carolina ends the season as the last team standing.



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Preview: March 10 vs. Pittsburgh

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Canes and Penguins meet for the first of three times in 13 days

RALEIGH, N.C. - Back home after a four-game road trip, the Carolina Hurricanes get set to dance with the Pittsburgh Penguins at Lenovo Center.

When: Tuesday, March 10

Puck Drop: 7:00 p.m. ET

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

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes App

Canes Record: 40-17-6 (86 Points, 1st - Metropolitan Division)

Canes Last Game: 5-4 Loss to the Calgary Flames on Saturday, Mar. 7

Penguins Record: 32-17-14 (78 Points, 2nd - Metropolitan Division)

Penguins Last Game: 5-4 Win (OT) over the Boston Bruins on Sunday, Mar. 8

Last Time Out...

In the words of Rod Brind'Amour, the Canes were "flat" in Calgary on Saturday, falling 5-4.

A second-period stumble was the key issue, allowing three consecutive goals and losing their early lead.

Brandon Bussi had his personal nine-game win streak snapped in the defeat, as the Canes ended their four-game western swing with two wins and two losses.

Season Series vs. PIT...

December 30: The Canes fell behind early and couldn't recover en route to a 5-1 defeat in Pittsburgh.

Walks This Way...

Defenseman Sean Walker scored for the second time in three contests on Saturday, moving his point streak to a career-best five games.

Now with six goals on the season, that also matches a career-high, which he originally set during the 2023-24 season with Philadelphia.

In The Green...

Carolina enters Tuesday's play with a league-leading 71 first-period goals.

A +20 in opening frames this season, the Canes are one of just three teams (also: Minnesota and Tampa Bay) to have a positive goal differential in all three regulation periods and overtime.

In Net...

Frederik Andersen was in the day before the starter's crease at Monday's practice in Raleigh, likely signaling that he'll get the start tonight.

Andersen picked up a win in his last start, backstopping Carolina past Edmonton on Friday. Trending in the right direction after a turbulent start to the season, the Canes have picked up at least one point in the standings in seven of the Dane's last eight starts.

Brandon Bussi, meanwhile, suffered just his fourth regulation loss on Saturday in Calgary, allowing five goals on 25 shots. It's been a historic start to the 27-year-old's first year in the league, but he has faced some adversity since the Olympic break. Allowing four to Tampa, four to Vancouver, and five to Calgary, Bussi will look to get back to the form that's made him one of the talks of the league in his next start.

On The Other Side...

The Penguins start a five-game road trip in Raleigh without Sidney Crosby (lower-body injury) and Evgeni Malkin (suspension), two key losses to a lineup pushing to stay in a playoff spot.

In their absence, Pittsburgh will lean on players like Anthony Mantha, whose 47 points this season rank second on the team and sit one shy of his single-season career best, as well as Tommy Novak, who has scored in back-to-back games, including the OT winner on Sunday.

Like Carolina, Pittsburgh also excels in the first period. Also holding a +20 goal differential in the opening 20 minutes of games, only the Colorado Avalanche (+22) is better than the two teams tonight.

Injury Updates...



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Defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere (lower-body injury) left during the team's Mar. 6 win in Edmonton and did not return. Rod Brind'Amour said on Mar. 7 that he "assumes it won't be too long" with him out of the lineup.

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

What Are We Wearing?

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

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes are scheduled to practice on Wednesday and will return to game action on Thursday against the Blues at Lenovo Center.

Next Game: Thursday, March 12 vs. St. Louis | 7:00 p.m. ET | [FDSNSO](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Parking](#)



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New CBA rules and NHL parity contributed to fewer big trades at the deadline - NBC Sports

By: Associated Press

There is an All-Star starting lineup that can be made from the NHL players who easily could have been traded at the deadline but were not.

In goal, Sergei Bobrovsky. On defense, Colton Parayko and Rasmus Ristolainen. At forward, Vincent Trocheck, Robert Thomas and Steven Stamkos.

A lot of trades, big and small, never materialized. A combination of factors from new CBA salary rules to no-trade clauses and league-wide parity conspired to make this to a quieter-than-usual deadline.

The 20 trades completed Friday were the fewest in five years, dating to the pandemic-shortened 2021 season.

New CBA changes the game

General managers were for the first time navigating an environment in which a third team cannot facilitate a trade by retaining salary, something that was eliminated in the new collective bargaining agreement. The so-called "double retention" solution that made so many past trades happen is now limited to 75 days apart, and fitting players in under the cap became more difficult.

"When you take that out, it's probably why you saw, I don't want to say as little trades, but not as many as the past," New Jersey GM Tom Fitzgerald said. "Teams would've made more moves, I think, if prices were split in half twice. I do think that had something to do with it. I think it was obvious by looking at the past and how many double retentions there were and have been versus this year."

Not that Florida was eager to trade Bobrovsky, who backstopped the Panthers to back-to-back Stanley Cup championships, but double retention would have allowed a team acquiring him to get him at a \$2.5 million cap hit, rather than \$5 million or his full \$10 million salary.

New York Islanders GM Mathieu Darche, who had plenty of space to get Brayden Schenn from St. Louis, pointed out that the Tampa Bay Lightning — where he worked before — "used that double retention quite a few times over the years." They won the Cup twice over that time.

The Lightning, Panthers and other recent champions also benefitted from no salary cap in the playoffs, which allowed them to keep players on long-term injured reserve through the regular season and dress them in the first round. That has also changed, because each team now has to make sure its 20-man roster for each game is cap compliant.

"With the new wrinkle of the playoff roster for calculations and things like that, you had to run the scenarios from a bunch of different viewpoints," Colorado GM Chris MacFarland said after he and the Avalanche made the biggest move of deadline day by reacquiring Nazem Kadri from Calgary. "We're on the phone with the different permutations and they got to be sharp in so many different ways, so there's definitely different lenses this year."

Players had the power to say no

At least a few deals were consummated but did not get to the finish line because the player involved had a no-trade or a no-movement clause and control over his destination.

Tyler Myers was rumored to be going to Detroit, but then Vancouver traded him to Dallas later in the week. Colton Parayko declined to waive his no-trade clause to go from St. Louis to Buffalo.

"I'm not talking about Parayko alone, players negotiate their trade rights based on their status on the team and in the league and some players have full no-trade clauses, some have partial no-trade clauses," Blues GM Doug Armstrong said. "To sign players, you have to provide those type of guarantees. And I respect when players, if they decide to invoke the right that they've earned, that's great and that means they want to be here."

A lot of teams are still in the race

At the time of the deadline, there were six teams within four points of a wild-card spot in either the Eastern or the Western Conference. Add that to the 16 teams in playoff position, and that leaves just 10 of 32 out of the mix.

"There's still so many more teams that are still in it or have a chance, so they're thinking, 'Well, even if I'm not sure I'm going to make it, I'm not going to sell the farm,'" Darche said. "There was probably less teams selling this year. It was probably more of a seller's market because of that. It's supply and demand, so I think that plays a factor, too."

With so much turnover of playoff teams from last season looking like they'll miss this year — and vice-versa — a lot of front offices can convince themselves the downfall is an aberration, chalked up to injuries and other issues.

"There are teams that are in playoff spots that probably they would admit that they didn't think they'd get there this quick," Fitzgerald said. "Then there are other teams that unfortunately aren't, like us, but still believe in this group and don't want to blow the whole thing up."



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Part of the parity is the record year-over-year rise the salary cap is seeing. Most teams have plenty of room to keep the players they want to keep.

"It's been really easy for teams to kind of go out there and resign their players, which doesn't put anybody at the end of

their contract and you saw that this year coming down the stretch," Utah GM Bill Armstrong said. "Everybody got re-signed, and there wasn't a lot of people and inventory into the market. It's kind of what we're going to see for the next few years."



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

How do several Hurricanes end up at a UNC Game?

By: Al Hood

Two weeks ago between the end of the Olympics and the return of the NHL, UNC tipped off against Louisville in a big ACC Matchup. The stands were stuffed with UNC fans, students, alumni, and dignitaries.

And right there a couple of rows behind the scorer's table, in clear camera view, sat several members of the Carolina Hurricanes.

It can be difficult to recognize the players without their jerseys on, but of course as the rest of the crowd was wearing either white or Carolina Blue it wasn't that difficult to spot Alexander Nikishin, Andrei Svechnikov, Nikolaj Ehlers, Jesperi Kotkaniemi, Mike Riley, and in the middle wearing team-provided gear was Logan Stankoven.

The Hurricanes have been in North Carolina since 1997 and in Raleigh since 1999, but between the fact that basketball plays their schedule at the same time as hockey, and nights off are extremely valuable to hockey players there really hasn't been an instance before where this group of players had been visible at a UNC Basketball game—or any game that wasn't NC State for that matter. This also happened a few days after Svechnikov and Nikishin went to see the home state Charlotte Hornets play.

As a UNC alumnus and Hurricanes fan I was curious about how this happened. After morning skate of the Detroit game, I was able to speak with Stankoven for a few minutes about the trip. I asked how it came about:

"Honestly...one of our team services..Mallory Wilmoth, she actually used to go to school there and work there as well. So she kind of has that connection to them. She had kind of mentioned, 'hey I can get you guys hooked up with tickets to go to their game.' And there were a bunch of us that were willing to go and just check it out."

It's funny that Stankoven would single out Wilmoth on this day because later on, after the win, Rod Brind'Amour would also single her out with one of the coveted post-victory t-shirts.

She's clearly someone who's made a connection in the locker room to the point she's picked up a nickname, and hearing that there was a team connection to UNC made me a little more curious about how this came about. So, I reached out to Madison White, the Manager of Communications, to ask if she could put me in touch with Mallory. Within a couple of days we were chatting.

The conversation reveals how White has one of the more under appreciated jobs with Hurricanes and why the players are such fans of hers. Her job is Team Operations

Assistant, and on top of the other items she is basically the ticket master. If a player wants to go to a game—be it State, Duke, Carolina, Hornets—her job is to reach out to the various folks in charge and arrange to get them in the door. As fans you always wonder how random players will show up at other sporting events, and the answer is it's someone's job to make it happen.

That said, it seemed odd that a group of hockey players that are from Illinois, Canada, Finland, Denmark, and Russia would have a real desire to go to a college basketball game. Was this just something that popped up or part of Mallory's job to try and give the team something to do during a long off time before the season kicked back into gear?

The answer is a little bit of everything.

"So, [Vice President of Communications] Mike Sundheim..and [Head Athletic Trainer] Doug Bennett both mentioned that they were going to the game. They had gotten tickets...and they were taking Jordan Staal and my boss [Manager of Team Services] Mike Brown...and I was like 'this could be cool to see if any other guys want to go since Jordo's going...so I texted [UNC Director of Operations Eric] Hoots, and was just like 'Hey I think I'm going to see if we can get some guys together to come to this game. I know it's going to be a good one. I just wanted to see what the availability is.' Hoots goes 'say the word and we'll take care of you.' So I just went around the locker and just asked all the guys."

The reason that Wilmoth was able to easily text Hoots was her bond to the UNC basketball program. She grew up as a UNC fan herself, and her freshman year at Carolina was the 2016-17 National Championship year. She would get involved as a student manager, rising to be on the varsity for one season in 2019-20. Being a team manager at UNC, especially the work it takes to get onto the varsity program, creates a bond just as strong as amongst the players. It was the assistant coach at the time, Steve Robinson, who recommended her going to Florida State for graduate school to work in sports. Once done there, a friend sent her the opening with the Hurricanes. That bond with UNC helped her get her current spot,

"Mike...was the one who hired me and he actually knew Eric Hoots, which brings it back full circle to UNC. That was my reference. I was happy to be closer to home, and turn our guys into Tar Heels."

I also asked earlier if she was a fan of the team or if working with the Canes had turned her more into a fan. "I definitely feel confident in my hockey knowledge now compared to when I started. I definitely have great friends in the area who



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were huge Caniacs before, and when I got this job, they, of course, were delighted and picked my brain any chance they got...I didn't even know what a power play was, I didn't know what forecheck meant. There were just things that I had no idea because I was just so locked in on basketball for my whole life. It's amazing, now, I'm into hockey and I have it on all the time and I've got my parents, my sisters, all my family into it...It was just a really funny way to go from zero to 100."

Considering where the Hurricanes were as a team between the time she entered college in 2016 and when she returned to the area, it's understandable it wasn't on her radar. Now, though, they've become a team that can unite the area and the state.

At least until tip off.

LINKS

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7100429/2026/03/10/hurricanes-trade-deadline-stankoven/>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/preview-march-10-vs-pittsburgh>

<https://www.nbcsports.com/nhl/news/new-cba-rules-and-nhl-parity-contributed-to-fewer-big-trades-at-the-deadline>

<https://www.canescountry.com/canes-country-interviews/53065/how-do-several-hurricanes-end-up-at-a-unc-game>

SportScan

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

1382561 Websites

The Athletic / NHL prospect pool rankings 2026: Scott Wheeler evaluates all 32 farm systems

By Scott Wheeler

March 9, 2026 6:00 am EDT

Welcome to the 2026 edition of my ranking of the NHL's 32 prospect pools.

This 31-day project includes evaluations of roughly 500 prospects (each club's top 15 plus worthy honorable mentions). It will conclude with my annual top 100 drafted skaters and top 20 drafted goalie rankings. This page will update daily from March 9 to April 8 as we count down from prospect pool No. 32 to prospect pool No. 1.

Each ranking will include reports on every ranked prospect, projections, timelines and team-specific tiers, as well as video and insight from sources where relevant. The evaluations and rankings are the byproduct of countless viewings (both on tape and in person) spanning years.

I've placed emphasis on upside more than proximity to the NHL. A player with top-half-of-the-lineup potential may rank higher than a player with NHL experience who projects lower, even sometimes in cases where the former is less likely to reach his ceiling than the latter. Teams that have consistently prioritized upside instead of playing it safe tend to grade higher overall. I believe that over time, teams that draft and develop for ceiling instead of floor will distinguish themselves in a hard-cap league built on parity. The league's most precious resource is homegrown talent capable of making more than a marginal impact while cost-controlled, particularly when depth pieces are so readily available through trades and free agency. My rankings reflect that.

For more insight into my experience, my process, the things I look for and my potential biases and limitations, check out my guide to scouting.

Criteria

Skaters: To be considered a prospect, a skater must be under 23 and not fully established with his NHL club. The latter qualifier is arbitrary. There, I trust my judgment for whether a player should be considered fully graduated more than any predetermined games-played cutoff. Preference for inclusion as an NHL prospect is more likely to be given to teenagers than 21- or 22-year-olds.

Goalies: To be considered a prospect, a goalie must be under 25 and not fully established as an NHL goalie. This age criteria is more reflective of the typical goalie trajectory, allowing for the continued consideration of a small number of 23- and 24-year-old goalies.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.10.2026

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The Athletic / The NHL trade deadline may not have delivered, but it sets up a potentially explosive summer

By Pierre LeBrun

March 9, 2026 6:00 am EDT

The 2026 NHL trade deadline didn't produce the type of fireworks hockey fans wanted to see — and maybe even some NHL front offices.

It might, though, be a precursor to an offseason that delivers some rather explosive moves.

Let me clear, I'm not guaranteeing any of these. I'm simply raising the antennae on some of these situations and players to watch based on conversations with league sources.

Let's dive in.



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Simon Nemeč

The New Jersey Devils were absolutely listening on the 2022 No. 2 pick ahead of the trade deadline. But the bar for what it would take to move him was high: a young, impact top-six forward. It didn't materialize, but stay tuned for the offseason.

"We have seven NHL everyday players on our back end," Devils GM Tom Fitzgerald told local media after the deadline Friday. "Trying to shake one of those loose here in the offseason will be my goal, maybe to give us some help up front. Maybe a top-six winger or something."

Nemeč recently changed agents and needs a new contract after the season, coming out of his entry-level contract. And I think the Devils already know that the contract conversation will start, from the agent's perspective, with looking at the Luke Hughes contract: seven years at \$9 million per. So, yeah.

It would make more sense to move Dougie Hamilton this summer and keep the younger Nemeč. But moving Hamilton has proven difficult. He has two more years on his deal, also at a \$9 million average annual value, and his \$7.4 million signing bonus for next season is payable July 1, so most likely the earliest Hamilton would move is after that. But given the interest I know is out there for Nemeč, I think he could very well be the one who moves.

Roman Josi

There are a lot of ifs in this conversation, but a league source suggested keeping an eye on Josi this summer if the Nashville Predators, under new management, decide to deepen the rebuild and move on from the likes of Ryan O'Reilly, Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault.

I think if those three are dealt — or even two of them — Josi and his agent, Judd Moldaver, would probably want to have a conversation with the Predators about the organization's direction. He has two more years on his deal at a \$9.059 million AAV, with a full no-move through next season. Josi is as loyal as they come and has been a Predator for life, so the most likely scenario is that he stays put. Still, it was suggested to me to keep an eye on it.

As hard as it is to even think of Josi in another uniform, I actually think this has more of a chance of happening than one might imagine.

Vincent Trocheck

I think the New York Rangers made a mistake not taking their best offer for Trocheck before the deadline. I get it; they had a certain asking price, and it wasn't met. But Trocheck's value was probably the highest it's going to be, fresh off an Olympic gold-medal performance where he was a key member of a perfect penalty-killing unit for Team USA. His brand had been polished with perfect timing ahead of the trade deadline.

Trocheck turns 33 in July and won't be playing any meaningful hockey the rest of the season. I'm not exactly sure how the trade offers are going to improve between now and the offseason. He's got three more years on his deal at a \$5.625 million cap hit with a modified no-trade clause (10 teams). He didn't want to go west before the deadline. Let's see if Trocheck widens his scope this offseason on the trade market.

I think it's likely he moves, given the direction of the Rangers. I'm just not sure why it needed to wait until the offseason.

Erik Karlsson

The Swedish Olympian has one more year left on his eight-year contract, signed in San Jose back in June 2019. Man, time flies.

Anyway, this could finally be the offseason where Karlsson moves, especially after his \$6 million signing bonus is paid July 1. After that, all Karlsson has left on his contract is \$1.5 million in base pay for next season. His \$11.5 million AAV remains an issue as far as the cap hit, but

if the Pittsburgh Penguins were ready to retain half that cap hit, there should be genuine interest.

Karlsson turns 36 on May 31 and remains an effective player. He does also have a full no-move clause right to the end of his contract.

The Penguins are a surprising story this season, still sitting in a playoff spot, and they want to remain competitive next season. But the long-term view also matters, and if GM Kyle Dubas can recoup some assets for Karlsson this summer, I think he will.

Robert Thomas

Alex Steen officially takes over for Doug Armstrong as GM of the Blues on July 1. Whether Robert Thomas will still be a member of the St. Louis Blues by then remains to be seen.

Armed with a full no-trade clause, that will be up to the 26-year-old center. But given the depth of the trade conversations that occurred in the lead-up to the deadline, the expectation is that those conversations will pick up again in the offseason as the Blues try to retool their roster. Whether the very high asking price softens or not, we shall see.

Thomas has five more years on his contract at an \$8.125 million cap hit, which is very attractive to suitors because of where the salary cap and salaries for elite players continue to head. The Buffalo Sabres and Utah Mammoth may circle back, but the playoffs also have a way of bringing other teams into the fold. Do the Detroit Red Wings feel they need to take a run at Thomas depending on how the playoffs go? The Montreal Canadiens? Boston Bruins? Los Angeles Kings?

There are lots of possibilities there, and I think Thomas most likely gets moved this summer.

Brady Tkachuk

There has been speculation about Brady Tkachuk's future with the Ottawa Senators for the better part of two years now, and all of it has been unwarranted.

But that could change. I think the more realistic time frame is the summer of '27, when the Senators captain will be one year out from the expiry of his contract.

I would bet that Brady's brother, Matthew, is in his ear about coming to play with him in Florida. I still think the Senators as an organization feel they can convince Brady to stick around long-term, though, selling him with a vision of how they continue to improve their roster.

Regardless of how it all plays out, it would make zero sense to let Tkachuk walk out the door for no compensation on July 1, 2028. Tkachuk does have a full no-move clause, so he has a huge say in how things will eventually unfold.

So again, the summer of '27 seems like the most obvious window for all these things to play out, whether that's signing an extension with Ottawa or saying it's time to move on.

But I'm raising the possibility of this offseason, just in case. Tkachuk getting booed in Edmonton and Calgary last week, that's a real thing. Maybe the Canadian reaction to Team USA and the White House visit will die down over time, but let's not pretend it's not a thing when it comes to Tkachuk being the captain of the team in Canada's nation's capital.

Maybe a playoff run by the Senators is a cure-all. Maybe.

Auston Matthews

Matthews has two more years left on his deal after this one at a \$13.25 million cap hit and has the full no-move. So anything that may or may not happen runs through him and his agent, Moldaver.

Let me start by pointing out one very important thing: According to league sources, the subject of Matthews' future has not come up even once this



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season between Moldaver, general manager Brad Treliving and MLSE president and CEO Keith Pelley. Not once.

But given where the season is going, with the Leafs most likely to miss the playoffs, that conversation is certain to be had after the season.

Before that happens, it will be important to know who is running the team and what direction the Leafs are taking this offseason. If Treliving, who has one year left on his contract, remains at the helm and the Leafs indicate they want to re-tool on the fly and add some pieces around Matthews and William Nylander to make the team playoff competitive for next year, then I do think No. 34 will stick around.

Others will say the smartest thing the Leafs should do, from a hockey-only perspective, is go to Matthews and Nylander and gauge them about their interest in moving and tear the whole thing down to the studs. But my feeling is ownership doesn't want that. They want big names to keep selling those suites. They're not interested in a long rebuild.

Again, it's going to come down to how the Leafs' offseason plays out in May and June. Whether the Leafs are set up for a bounce-back season will greatly affect the thinking of Matthews and his agent. Either way, there's an expectation of some serious conversations involving Moldaver and management on No. 34 this offseason.

My personal feeling is it's 50-50 on Matthews moving or staying.

Connor McDavid

It is important as a matter of clarification to understand the context of No. 97 signing that team-friendly, two-year extension last fall. It did not necessarily mean he was signing it to be on the Edmonton Oilers through the 2027-28 season. My understanding is that the most likely scenario was that McDavid was giving the Oilers this season and next to try and win a championship and then it was decision time again in the summer of 2027 as to where everything stood.

The reason for that is that I don't think McDavid wants to just walk out the door in '28 as an unrestricted free agent and not have the Oilers get something in return.

The summer of 2027, if he decides it's time to leave, would be one year out from his contract expiry and allow the Oilers to gain something out of a trade, albeit a trade in which he controls his destination. Now, there's obviously a world in which he signs another extension and spends his entire career in Edmonton. Let's not discount that. But at a minimum, the feeling is he will give the Oilers one more season next year in this contention window.

Having said all that, let me just say this: If the Oilers flame out in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs this spring, I can't discount how No. 97 will feel about that, about the team's ability to win, and about his place in it.

The most likely scenario is waiting until the summer of '27 to revisit his future. But I can't dismiss what the disappointment of a first-round elimination might change.

So file that away.

And finally ...

The fact of the matter is, there are certainly more situations this offseason that will generate news. For starters, the 1-2-3 class of the 2023 NHL Draft all need new deals after coming out of entry-level: Connor Bedard, Leo Carlsson and Adam Fantilli. Young stars such as Cutter Gauthier and Trevor Zegras are among other restricted free agents who need new deals. So there will be lots of important contracts signed.

And, of course, there's 26-year-old scoring winger Jason Robertson of the Dallas Stars: the top-scoring pending RFA in the NHL. The Stars were careful not to add much money to the payroll past this season at the

trade deadline because they need the space to re-sign Robertson. It goes without saying that if they can't sign him, they would need to trade him.

Pavel Dorofeyev, 25, leading goal-scorer for the Golden Knights, is also an RFA July 1.

And let's say this: Given how meager the July 1 UFA class is looking, RFA offer sheets might be more likely this summer as a better option to improve a roster.

Then, in terms of offseason news, there are also the players who have one year left on their contracts, including Cale Makar, Quinn Hughes, Nikita Kucherov, Alex DeBrincat, Ryan O'Reilly, Drake Batherson and Bowen Byram.

Makar isn't going anywhere. The Colorado Avalanche will extend him, for sure. And Hughes has been such a great fit with the Minnesota Wild, I see him extending as well.

It's weird how under-the-radar Kucherov and his next contract has been. Maybe because we just all assume he's not going anywhere. I asked his agent, Dan Milstein, on Sunday about that next contract discussion coming with Tampa Bay Lightning GM Julien BriseBois.

"I honestly have no idea," Milstein said. "We haven't spoken, and on this one, I'm keeping my lips sealed. Nothing will leak from my side, and I would expect the same from Tampa. In the end, it really comes down to three people, not four: Nikita, Julien and me.

"You'll just have to wait and see if and when something happens. Truthfully, I don't know how it will play out or, most importantly, when."

All to say, there will be no shortage of news this summer. The trade deadline may have disappointed. I doubt the offseason will.

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The Athletic / NHL weekend rankings: The Capitals, the Oilers and a deadline of swings and misses

By Sean McIndoe

March 9, 2026 Updated 10:41 am EDT

Well, that was a bit of a weird deadline. It wasn't a bad one, although I'm not sure it will rank all that highly among the best of the best. It had some decent names, and at least one surprise that we'll get to down below. It also had plenty of names that we were told to watch out for who didn't end up going anywhere.

If you missed it over the week, you can get caught up here: Trade grades for all the big deals, the classic winners and losers and grades for each team.

In theory, a deadline week's worth of player movement should cause some churn in the rankings. In reality, the deadline was a reasonably quiet one. How does that all play out? We'll find out in a bit, but first, let's lay the deadline to rest with a few final thoughts.

Bonus five: Final thoughts from a weird trade deadline

5. The timing was odd — By Tuesday, we were wondering where all the deals were. We were largely still wondering well into Friday afternoon, with only a handful of trades done. We did eventually get that final-hour surge we're used to by now, and I'm not sure we can really learn



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anything here other than that the Olympic freeze didn't seem to help and maybe hurt. But man, it was quiet, right up until it wasn't.

4. The dumbest story of the deadline — ... had to be GMs being surprised by the CBA, right? I mean, I knew about the changes to double-retention and playoff caps. I'm guessing you did, too. But the 32 GMs, whose whole job is to know this stuff? Apparently at least a few of them were caught off guard.

3. We miss hockey trades — Were there even any? We don't expect to see a ton at this time of year, but you'd think at least a few teams might find the rental market lacking and decide to try an old-fashioned player-for-player swap. I guess you could put the Bobby Brink/David Jircek deal into this category, but that's about it.

2. GMs are getting comfortable with trading for term — That was a big theme of this year's approach, with guys such as Nazem Kadri, MacKenzie Weegar and Brayden Schenn all moving with multiple years left on contracts that may not age well. We're not used to seeing that at deadline time, which is usually more about rentals. That never made a ton of sense — after all, term isn't necessarily a bad thing, and it was weird to see the same GMs who hand out max-length deals to their own guys like candy suddenly be worried about everyone else's. Maybe they're finally figuring it out.

1. As always, the teams that sit out may be the biggest stories — I'm especially thinking about the Hurricanes, who always go big-game hunting but couldn't find a worthy target. The Canadiens were apparently trying to do something big, but couldn't make it happen. The Devils were quiet, and now you wonder if Tom Fitzgerald even gets another chance in the summer. The Senators' approach made sense, but you wonder how it looks in hindsight if they miss the postseason by a point or two. And I'm still not sure I'm ready to live in a world in which the Vegas Golden Knights take it easy at deadline time.

On to this week's rankings.

Road to the Cup

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

Important post-deadline news: The Corey Perry trade means Artemi Panarin no longer has to pretend to be friends with a mascot.

5. Minnesota Wild (37-16-11, +30 true goals differential*) — Their deadline was fine, especially given the big-game hunting they'd already pulled off. But it's starting to look inevitable that they'll get the Dallas Stars in Round 1, and probably as a road team. That's rough, no matter how good your lineup looks.

4. Tampa Bay Lightning (39-19-4, +49) — I don't think we'll get any arguments about the game of the weekend. Or the week. Heck, maybe the season. Yesterday's Lightning/Sabres game absolutely ruled. It had a ton of offense, plenty of bad blood and one of the best atmospheres I can remember for a March game. The Sabres' playoff run is going to kick so much behind.

As for the Lightning, they've been cold coming out of the break, with just two wins in seven. Worse, both of those wins came against the Maple Leafs, meaning Tampa is 0-and-5 against teams whose players aren't blinking "I quit" in Morse code throughout every shift. All of which makes you wonder: Is it time to drop the Lightning off the list entirely, and swap in the Sabres? My answer: Maybe! It's absolutely on the table. I'd like one more week to mull it over, but I'm starting to think the Sabres may not give us much of a choice.

3. Carolina Hurricanes (40-17-6, +40) — Somewhat quietly, they became just the second team to get to the 40-win mark with Friday's victory in Edmonton.

2. Dallas Stars (39-14-10, +47) — The big news of the weekend is they lost a game. Kind of. Friday's loss to the Avalanche came in a shootout,

so it only sort of counts. Still, it was an opportunity to plant some doubt about who's really in charge in the Central, and that opportunity was missed.

1. Colorado Avalanche (43-10-9, +85) — I absolutely love the Kadri addition. It's a good move by both teams, a great move for the player himself and a fantastic one for all of us fans who missed the Kadri playoff experience.

Oh, right, they also beat the Wild and Stars on the same weekend, which was a nice flex even if both wins were shootouts. Those points probably put an end to any thought of the Central's top seed being back in play.

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

Not ranked: Edmonton Oilers — So that's that. In the end, Stan Bowman's trade deadline was a mixed bag, one that saw him pay seller's prices to bring in added depth. Connor Murphy, Jason Dickinson and Colton Dach should all help to varying degrees. The prices were high, but flags fly forever.

The question is whether we expect any flags in Edmonton after this season, given how things have gone so far. In a sense, Bowman was in a no-win situation — tight to the salary ceiling and without a ton of future capital to work with, with a team that had plenty of needs and a clock ticking loudly. Did he do enough? Too much? Somehow thread the needle and find the sweet spot?

The fun part is we don't have to answer now, because the Oilers have always been a Cup-or-bust team. That makes this easy. We just wait a few months, and then retcon Bowman's deadline however we need to.

For now, Allan gives him a B for his work, which sounds fair enough for the moves that were made. The big story may end up being the one that wasn't, as Bowman stood pat on his goaltending. I made the case against that approach last week and still stand by it. It was the team's biggest question mark heading into the season, and so far Bowman's lone move of turning Stuart Skinner into Tristan Jarry has made it worse. If the Oilers make an early playoff exit because Jarry (or whoever replaces him) gets lit up, the postmortems will write themselves. Of course, if Jarry flips the script and ends up being the answer, he and Bowman might both get statues in Edmonton someday.

That's the beauty of this kind of all-or-nothing decision. For now, while we wait for hindsight to give us 20/20 vision, the Oilers still need to lock that playoff spot down. That's no sure thing yet, although it's hard to imagine the sort of late collapse that would cause them to miss. This week will present a good test of where they stand among the Western heavyweights. They'll follow last night's win in Vegas with trips to Colorado tomorrow and Dallas on Thursday.

The bottom five

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

Come on, Bo Horvat, you know better than that. You can't just go around booping a guy's snoot and not expect the Department of Player Safety to let it slide.

5. New York Rangers (24-30-8, -32) — This piece nails it: Chris Drury is rolling the dice by holding Vincent Trocheck. He has term left, so in theory, there was no rush, and the team can revisit a move in the summer or beyond. It wasn't a take-whatever-you-can-get scenario for Drury. But it also feels like Trocheck's value will never be higher than it was coming off an impressive Olympic showing, making it tough to imagine his price going up. (For what it's worth, Trocheck sounds thrilled to stay.)

4. St. Louis Blues (25-29-9, 44) — We named them the deadline's most interesting team in last week's newsletter, and they lived up to it both in



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terms of the deals they made and the ones they didn't. Or both, in the case of Colton Parayko to Buffalo. No blockbusters for Robert Thomas, Jordan Kyrou or Jordan Binnington. But Doug Armstrong did well on Justin Faulk and got a nice haul for Brayden Schenn, thanks in part to the Islanders staying in the same hotel, giving Patrick Roy the chance to take him hostage talk him into it.

Also, Parayko's new nickname is The Elephant In The Room. We're working on an expedited session of Nickname Court to hammer that one through.

3. Calgary Flames (25-30-7, -33) — The teardown is the easy part. But it still has to be done right, and Craig Conroy has done some impressive work piling up draft capital.

2. Chicago Blackhawks (23-29-11, -34) — Essentially giving Nick Foligno to the Wild so he can chase a Cup with his brother was a nice move. But the bigger issue in Chicago is one Laz nails in a column: How much longer are the Hawks planning to be perennial sellers?

And of course: RIP Troy Murray.

1. Vancouver Canucks (19-36-8, -73) — I would have liked to have seen them move Elias Pettersson, although that was obviously always going to be a lot easier to do from a couch than in real life.

Not ranked: Washington Capitals — It's not often we get a genuine "I can't believe that guy got traded" moment at a deadline, but the John Carlson trade provided one.

From a distance, maybe it shouldn't have. After all, you have a veteran having a good season on a so-so team, and he's on an expiring contract. That's a classic rental scenario, the kind that often produces a move. Standard stuff, really.

Except in this case, the veteran was a franchise icon who'd spent his entire 17-season NHL career in Washington. And even in the middle of a disappointing season for this team, Carlson didn't seem to want to go and chase a Cup somewhere else. (He had no-trade protection, but it didn't include the Ducks.) This wasn't a feel-good story of a team doing right by a veteran leader, as the Hawks did for Nick Foligno. This was a front office making a hard decision, one it knows won't be popular with a big chunk of the fan base, but doing it anyway because they think it's the right move for the franchise going forward.

There's a certain admirable courage in that, and I've done the timid GM schtick for long enough that I'm not going to slam Chris Patrick here. But the trade is a fascinating one, not least because it seems to suggest that the Caps are throwing in the towel on a playoff race that the standings page says they're still very much in.

By the end of deadline day, the Capitals were four points back of the wild-card Bruins, who had two games in hand, and six back of the Islanders, with equal games played. That's tough, but not insurmountable, and our playoff projections had the Caps at 36 percent. It's rare, bordering on unheard of, for teams to sell in that situation. It probably shouldn't be, because history has seen plenty of teams pass up on opportunities in favor of selling false hope. Patrick didn't do that here, instead making a bold move for a solid return that could pay off in a big way down the road.

It's the short term that's the more interesting variable, at least for now. The Alex Ovechkin factor looms large here, with the captain calling it "probably the toughest day in my career." Hurt feelings come and go in this league, but that's a situation worth watching, if only to make sure it doesn't spiral into something ugly.

For now, the Capitals have a season to finish. They did get some minor additions in David Kämpf and Timothy Liljegren, so it's not like the white flag is waving quite yet. But Saturday's regulation loss to the Bruins was a massive missed opportunity, and may spell the end. And assuming they miss the playoffs, the offseason becomes another interesting inflection

point. They'll probably have the Ducks' first-round pick, which transfers automatically unless Anaheim implodes and misses the playoffs. Do they use it to build toward a post-Carlson (and post-Ovechkin) era? Or is it ammo for the sort of trade that would put them back in the Metro conversation next year?

Time will tell. But one thing we can say with some certainty now: Don't assume Patrick will take the easy way out. Apparently, the Capitals aren't scared of making hard decisions.

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The Athletic / Inside Nazem Kadri's return to the Avalanche and the trade that made it happen

The Avalanche crowd wasn't shy in letting Nazem Kadri know how happy Denver is to have him back. Isaiah J. Downing /

By Peter Baugh

March 9, 2026 Updated 11:59 am EDT

DENVER — The in-game entertainment staff at Ball Arena had an easy solution Sunday afternoon whenever they wanted to get fans excited. For the first time since Game 6 of the 2022 Stanley Cup Final, Nazem Kadri was wearing a Colorado Avalanche uniform. Any mention of his name over the public address system, any clip on the video board, and any action involving him on the ice was guaranteed to make the crowd explode.

"I love the noise," Kadri said in the aftermath of Colorado's 3-2 shootout win against the Minnesota Wild.

That's part of why the Avalanche re-acquired him Friday in a deadline deal with the Calgary Flames. When the moments are biggest, he's unafraid. Eager to make an impact.

That led to some of the biggest moments in Avalanche history, most notably his overtime winner in Game 4 of the 2022 Stanley Cup Final, which he played 18 days after breaking his thumb. Nearly four years later, with Kadri back in the fold, the Avalanche have reason to believe they can reach similar heights.

"I've been here a short while and I think we've got what it takes," the 35-year-old said.

Calgary signed Kadri after his career-best 2021-22 season, but the Flames did not make the playoffs during his three-and-a-half-year tenure with the club. Now he's joining an Avalanche team atop the league standings: a group with star power, depth and players who have experienced deep postseason runs.

Getting re-acclimated to Colorado didn't look like it would be an issue for Kadri on Sunday. Coach Jared Bednar played him more than 21 minutes in his return and immediately put him on the top power-play unit. He picked up an assist, and Colorado controlled 53.20 percent of the five-on-five expected goal share when he was on the ice, per Natural Stat Trick.

"Everyone who knows him knows he's kind of got that little bit of swagger," Cale Makar said. "With this group I think he's just going to take us to a completely different level."

That's what he did the first time Colorado acquired him, back in a 2019 trade with Toronto. He had 34 points in 33 playoff games with the Avalanche, though he also had to serve an eight-game suspension in the 2021 playoffs for a hit on the St. Louis Blues' Justin Faulk — the third



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postseason suspension of Kadri's career. He hasn't faced any supplemental discipline in the playoffs or regular season since.

Kadri played almost exclusively up the middle during his first stint with Colorado, but the Avalanche have a wealth of centers after trading for Brock Nelson at the 2025 trade deadline and Nic Roy this month. So Bednar, wanting Kadri to play with skilled players, slotted him in at wing. Kadri said it was his first time in years playing the position.

Kadri went through warmups on a line with Nelson and Ross Colton, but Bednar put him on the Nathan MacKinnon-led top line for the opening draw. That way the crowd could erupt when announcer Alan Roach read his name. The Denver fans responded as expected: Roach's booming voice was hardly audible over the cheers.

Bednar liked how Kadri looked with MacKinnon and Martin Nečas on the first shift, so he kept him on the top line the entire game. With the score tied 0-0 in the second period, Kadri burst into the offensive zone on the forecheck and picked off a Quinn Hughes pass. In one sweeping motion he directed the puck to the middle of the ice, where MacKinnon ripped it into the net.

Instead of celebrating, MacKinnon turned toward Kadri and pointed. He grinned as he skated Kadri's way, basking in an old connection rediscovered.

Two days before taking the ice in Denver, Kadri stood in the living room of his Calgary home, a golf putter in hand. He had been pacing all day, and now was practicing putts to calm his nerves. The 3 p.m. ET trade deadline had already passed, but deals were still trickling in.

Kadri's wife, Ashley, was milling around the living room, on the phone with Kadri's agent and refreshing X constantly. They had deadline coverage on their TV, waiting for any news to find out if Kadri was off to a contender or staying in Calgary.

Then, at 4 p.m. ET, 2 p.m. in Calgary — an hour after the deadline — Ashley gasped. A post from Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman had appeared on her phone.

"Oh my God!" she shouted, reading aloud. "Nazem Kadri back to the Colorado Avalanche!"

As if on cue, Kadri's phone rang with a call from Flames general manager Craig Conroy. He walked out of the room to answer, an excited bounce in his step.

"I think my head almost hit the ceiling," Kadri said. "I was so excited."

More than 1,600 miles away, in Kadri's hometown of London, Ont., his dad, Sam, was on the ice, playing in a men's league hockey game. He had brought his phone to the bench — something he never does in normal circumstances — and checked between each of his shifts. Moments after the trade broke, Nazem and Ashley called him on FaceTime and told him the news.

"At first I'm thinking maybe it's a joke," he said. "But I could see the tears of joy in (Ashley's) eyes and I knew it was for real."

Despite his excitement, Nazem Kadri called the trade bittersweet. With the Avalanche in a salary cap crunch following their Stanley Cup win, the Flames gave him a seven-year, \$49 million deal, the largest of his career. In the time since, he and his family grew to love the city.

They rave about the Flames organization, too. When they first arrived in Calgary, Ashley told owner N. Murray Edwards she was concerned the arena's family room was a bit beaten down. Edwards proceeded to renovate it, she said, with no questions asked. Sam mentioned how the Flames went "all out" to celebrate his son's 1,000th career game earlier this season. The team had Kadri's daughter, 6-year-old Naylah, announce the starting lineup in the Flames dressing room.

And, in the end, the Flames moved Kadri to his No. 1 trade option.

"For them to take care of a veteran player and put him where he wants to go and have that conversation and put in that work, I feel like that's a bit of a lost art in the executive positions these days," Kadri said. "I'm a fan of theirs for life."

Helped by a 35-goal season from Kadri, Calgary nearly made the playoffs in 2024-25. This season, though, has been a struggle. The Flames are in the bottom five of the league standings. Once it became clear they weren't making the postseason, Kadri's camp and the organization began discussing trade possibilities, according to a league source.

"Although the group was amazing, the management was amazing, the ownership unbelievable, the community was excellent, you still want to win," Sam Kadri said. "We knew that wasn't going to be the case. It started becoming more and more frustrating for Nazem."

Kadri has a 13-team no-trade list this season, which eliminated some interested teams. Colorado, of course, wanted to make a reunion happen, and Montreal — the team Kadri grew up cheering for — was in the mix until the afternoon on deadline day, the league source said. Ultimately, the Avalanche landed him for a 2028 first-round pick, a 2027 second-round pick, Victor Olofsson and prospect Max Curran. The Flames retained 20 percent of Kadri's salary.

The Avalanche and Flames reached the deal around an hour before the deadline, a league source said. But the league office has to process each pre-deadline move, so the flurry in the run-up to 3 p.m. ET can cause a logjam, leading to stressful moments like in Kadri's living room. Conroy called him immediately after the league approved the deal.

"Over the course of my professional career, I've only been traded twice, and it's been to the same team both times," Kadri said with a laugh. "They must really like me."

Ashley remembers her first time moving to Denver in 2019. She noticed that her husband didn't get recognized nearly as much as he did in Toronto, a hockey hotbed. His return to Colorado this weekend went much differently. The Kadri family landed at Denver International Airport late Saturday night, and Nazem tried "to stay incognito," he said.

It didn't work. Fans approached him. Ashley said some asked him to sign jerseys. A security guard recognized him and escorted the family to baggage claim, where people helped him with his luggage.

"This hockey community has grown so much over the last handful of years since I've even been here last," he said.

And, of course, he'd given it plenty of reason to remember his face.

After Kadri signed with Calgary, he and his family knew the Avalanche were good enough to contend for another Stanley Cup win. Every year, Ashley said, they would cheer for their friends in Denver once the Flames' season ended.

"But in the back of your mind you know that Naz (was) just going to be so crushed to know that he couldn't be there (if Colorado won again)," she said.

That concern is gone. If the Avalanche hoist the Cup in the near future, Kadri won't be missing out.

By the time warmups began Sunday, fans were packed four rows deep next to the Avalanche bench. Several held signs welcoming Kadri back. No. 91 jerseys dotted the crowd.

Kadri was one of the final Avalanche players to take the ice. He smiled as the crowd saluted him, then waved when the video board showed his face for the first time. He was anxious before the game, he said, desperate for the puck to drop.

"Once the game starts and it's a matter of winning and losing," he said, "that's when I'm in my comfort zone."



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During a stoppage in the first period, the team played a welcome back video, showing highlights from his first Avalanche tenure, including him lifting the Stanley Cup. Shortly after, Kadri nearly scored on a one-time look on the power play.

Minnesota seized a 2-1 lead in the third, but a goal from Roy — Colorado's other major deadline addition — sent the game to overtime, then ultimately a shootout. With a chance to win the game in the third round of the shootout, Bednar tapped Kadri's back and sent him onto the ice. Spectators around the arena rose to their feet and once again drowned out the announcer's voice.

It was the loudest the building got all game.

"It's almost like a pinch-me type moment," Kadri said, joking that he thought to himself, "Hey guys, can you settle down? I've got to try to focus here."

Wild goalie Jesper Wallstedt prevented the arena from experiencing an all-time crowd pop, with a save on Kadri's attempt. MacKinnon ensured it didn't haunt the Avalanche or put too much of a damper on Kadri's return. He won the game with a goal in the next round of the shootout.

Ashley, who watched from a suite, described the game as emotional. In its aftermath, Naylah darted through the hallway with a pair of white pom-poms. She was too young in 2022 to remember much about her father's championship run, though she tells her mom she remembers drinking Sprite out of the Stanley Cup. This time around, she'll be able to take in more of the experience.

Nearly 20 reporters crowded around Kadri's locker after the game. Though tired from a whirlwind few days, he smiled as he answered questions about his homecoming.

"I couldn't have asked for anything better," he said.

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ESPN / NHL Awards WATCH: Who's leading for Hart, Norris, Calder? – ESPN

Greg Wyshynski

The NHL trade deadline has passed, and the sprint to the 2026 Stanley Cup playoffs has arrived.

Where teams finish in the standings can impact how voters select their NHL Award winners. As we see in this month's NHL Awards Watch, that's especially true for a young superstar with the San Jose Sharks.

Welcome to the NHL Awards Watch for March. We've polled a wide selection of Professional Hockey Writers Association voters anonymously to get a sense of who has the edge among the current leaders. We've made sure it's a cross-section from the entire league, trying to gain as many perspectives as possible.

Keep in mind that the PHWA votes for the Hart, Norris, Calder, Selke and Lady Byng finalists, broadcasters vote for the Jack Adams and general managers vote for the Vezina.

All stats are from Hockey-Reference.com, Natural Stat Trick and Evolving Hockey.

Jump ahead:

Ross | Richard | Hart

Norris | Selke | Vezina

Calder | Byng | Adams

Art Ross Trophy (points leader)

[Click here for the updated point-scoring standings.](#)

Maurice 'Rocket' Richard Trophy

[Click here for the updated goal-scoring standings.](#)

Hart Trophy (MVP)

Leader: Nathan MacKinnon, Colorado Avalanche

Finalists: Macklin Celebrini, San Jose Sharks; Nikita Kucherov, Tampa Bay Lightning/Connor McDavid, Edmonton Oilers (tie)

MacKinnon has led the Hart Trophy race for four straight months, and rightfully so. The Avalanche have led the league in points since October, and MacKinnon has been the engine behind that success.

MacKinnon has 104 points in 61 games, including an NHL-best 43 goals. He leads Brock Nelson by 13 goals and tops teammate Martin Necas by 28 points. MacKinnon's career high in goals is 51, and the Avalanche record is Mikko Rantanen's 55 goals in 2022-23. If we include the Quebec Nordiques -- and we might as well because the Avs sometimes dress like them -- then MacKinnon is potentially within reach of Michel Goulet's 1982-83 record of 57 goals.

MacKinnon received the most first-place votes and 47% of the total first-place votes.

"Nathan MacKinnon remains the front-runner for me. Leads the league in even-strength points and has a plus-55 rating," one voter said.

"He's the clear MVP for me with 20 or so games remaining," another MacKinnon voter said. "I hope he doesn't get dinged for the fact that his organization outthinks and out-operates everybody else."

MacKinnon is seeking his second Hart after winning in 2023-24. Kucherov is also looking for his second MVP win, having last won in 2018-19.

Despite a recent push by the Buffalo Sabres, the Lightning have been leading the Atlantic Division for a good stretch of the season. Though some credit should go to goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy, the majority of it goes to Kucherov, who is having another dominant campaign.

Kucherov is third in the league points (103), second in assists (69) and first in points-per-game average (1.78). He was 36 points ahead of the Lightning's second-leading scorer, Jake Guentzel.

Kucherov was tied with McDavid for the third-most first-place votes.

Once again, McDavid has lifted the Oilers on his shoulders. Through 64 games, McDavid has an NHL-leading 108 points, including 35 goals, which was third behind MacKinnon and Cole Caufield. McDavid was second in the voting in January but has been outside the top 3 in consecutive months. But he's still collecting votes, while seeking his third Hart Trophy win, having last won regular-season MVP honors in 2022-23.

Connor McDavid skates around the back of the net before scoring a goal for the Oilers in the second period.

A solid case can be made for either of these veterans. And then there's the new superstar in town who finished with the second-most first-place votes behind MacKinnon.

Celebrini, who has played in 61 games, has 89 points, good for fifth in the NHL and well ahead of the Sharks' next-highest scorer: Celebrini led Will Smith by 45 points on San Jose. Celebrini's 32 goals were 13 more than Smith's as well -- although Smith has played just 48 games because of injury. Comparisons to Sidney Crosby will only intensify if Celebrini also wins league MVP in his second season, as Crosby did in 2006-07.



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Celebrini is easily the most fascinating MVP candidate this season. He's 19 years old and was one of the best players for Team Canada in the 2026 Olympics. While the Avalanche and Lightning are playoff mainstays, Celebrini is trying to drag the Sharks out of a rebuild and into their first postseason appearance since 2019.

"You could fit an eyelash between each of them in this race. Still giving the 'No. 1-A' nod to MacKinnon because he hasn't declined in any fashion," one voter said. "Celebrini and Kucherov have just been outstanding, too, and in terms of most valuable to their team ... it's tight."

"MacKinnon has been incredible, as usual. With Celebrini and Kucherov, my thought process is, 'How different would their team be if their top player were out?'" said one voter, who had these players in the top three of their ballots. "The Sharks wouldn't be sniffing the playoffs without Celebrini. Kucherov has over 30 more points than his closest teammate."

Entering Sunday, the Sharks had a 36.5% chance of making the cut in the Western Conference, per Money Puck. The playoff race is the key to Celebrini's candidacy. At least, that's the sense we get from our voters.

"It's Celebrini if the Sharks somehow rally," one Kucherov voter said.

"If the Sharks get in, I'd consider Celebrini," one MacKinnon voter said.

"If the Sharks squeak into the postseason -- a reasonable notion given the wan state of this season's Pacific Division -- it will be because of the sophomore who has more than twice as many points as anyone else on his squad," one of the Celebrini voters said.

At least one voter doesn't agree on the playoff criteria for the Hart.

"I don't buy the notion that you have to make the playoffs to win this award," the voter said. "If your team narrowly misses but would be a lottery team without you -- like San Jose -- you provide more value than a team who would still be good without a singular player."

Finally, earning his first MVP vote in this season's awards watch is New York Islanders rookie defenseman Matthew Schaefer, who is second in points (46) on his team.

"It's time for Matthew Schaefer to get Hart buzz. There's no player in the NHL more 'valuable' to his team," the Schaefer voter said.

Another player to receive support down the ballot was Zach Werenski of the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Norris Trophy (top defenseman)

Leader: Cale Makar, Colorado Avalanche/Zach Werenski, Columbus Blue Jackets (tie)

Finalists: Quinn Hughes, Minnesota Wild

The Norris race has been fun this season. Not because any of these finalists are unexpected -- they were the official finalists for the Norris last season, with Makar winning and Werenski placing second -- but in how Werenski has steadily chipped away at Makar's once-substantial vote lead to turn the Norris into a two-defensemen race with just over a month left in the season.

In fact, it's a dead heat: Makar and Werenski finished with 41% of the first-place votes, tied for the Norris lead.

Makar had 66 points in his first 61 games, skating to a plus-33 in 25:03 of average ice time. That 1.08 points-per-game average would be a badge of honor for 99% of the NHL's defensemen, but it's slightly down by Makar's standards. But he has excelled beyond his usual offensive dominance: The Avalanche have a 67% goals-for percentage when Makar is on the ice at five-on-five, averaging 3.77 goals and just 1.86 goals against per 60 minutes.

"My ballot is on its way to being a repeat of last year," one Makar voter said.

"It's Makar up top, no question. After that, I could argue for probably close to seven or eight guys," another Makar voter said.

Werenski, who has played in 55 games, has 65 points, which led all scorers on the Blue Jackets and was 11 points clear of second-leading scorer Kirill Marchenko entering Sunday's action. That includes 20 goals, which was second on the Jackets.

Werenski is second in the NHL in average ice time (26:27) and plays in all situations. His underlying numbers don't pop like those of Makar, but are outstanding relative to his teammates. Werenski earned some spotlight in Team USA's gold medal victory in the Olympics, and will continue to do the same in the NHL if the Blue Jackets keep up their playoff push.

"Makar's play has dropped of late. Werenski is going to find himself in the Hart conversation if Columbus makes the playoffs," one voter said. "He's been incredible, all year."

Makar received 55% of the vote last month, and his lead has declined for three straight Awards Watch installments. If his recent play has opened the door for Werenski a little, it's the Columbus defenseman who has knocked it down and made this a dead heat.

"He's doing more with less around him versus Makar," one Werenski voter said.

But Werenski still needs to make his case over the defenseman many consider a generational talent.

"Zach Werenski might've picked the wrong era to win one of these," one voter said.

Hughes was the clear third choice among our voters. He leads the NHL with 27:44 in average ice time per game, and has 63 points in 58 games this season with the Wild and the Vancouver Canucks. In 32 games with the Wild, Hughes has 36 assists and 40 points -- 17 of them on the power play.

"Cale Makar would still sit in the No. 1 spot for me, but it's a narrow gap between him, Quinn Hughes and Moritz Seider filling out my top three," one Makar voter said.

Seider was the only other defenseman to receive a first-place Norris vote, but was mentioned frequently down the ballot.

Even with the two clear favorites, there's still time for the Norris race to take a few more turns.

"It's close. Zach Werenski is right there behind him. And ... have we all been sleeping on Evan Bouchard?" one voter asked.

Edmonton Oilers fans would certainly say so. Through 63 games, Bouchard led all defensemen with 72 points, including 45 on even strength. He plays in all situations and has skated to a plus-13 this season.

"Evan Bouchard can also still get into the mix with 25% of the season remaining," one Makar voter said.

Bouchard's problem is convincing voters that his frequently maligned defensive game has improved enough for Norris consideration.

"Evan Bouchard doesn't defend well enough to leapfrog either Cale Makar or Zach Werenski," one voter said.

Other defensemen mentioned down the ballot: Lane Hutson of the Montreal Canadiens and Matthew Schaefer of the New York Islanders.

Calder Trophy (top rookie)

No hipster picks. No contrarianism. Just the acceptance that Schaefer is the best rookie in the NHL this season, from his play on the ice to the vibe-shift he provided the Islanders.



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For the second straight month, Schaefer was the unanimous choice from our panel, earning every first-place vote. He had 46 points through 64 games, skating to a plus-12. No rookie has skated more on average (24:16) and no rookie had more power-play goals (seven) or points (15) than Schaefer. He's 23 points clear of the next-highest rookie scorer, Alexander Nikishin of the Carolina Hurricanes. As mentioned earlier, he's second on the Islanders in goal and points.

All of this at 18 years old, after playing 17 games for the OHL Erie Otters last season.

"Engrave the plaque. Write the release," one voter declared.

"He has 20 goals from the back and logs over 24 minutes a night, and has singlehandedly made the Islanders watchable," another quipped.

"Schaefer is past the Calder conversation and is now in the Norris conversation," another beamed.

"Remember how Matthew Schaefer wasn't guaranteed a roster spot with the Islanders ahead of this season? Feels like a remarkably silly notion now," another voter recalled.

This must be a bummer for Demidov and Sennecke, who are both having terrific rookie seasons but ultimately battling for the silver to Schaefer's gold. (Would it have been Canada's gold in Milan if Schaefer had been on the team? We'll never know...)

Sennecke led all rookies with 51 points and was tied with Schaefer with 20 goals entering Sunday's action. He has been a key factor in the Ducks' surge of the standings this season.

"Sennecke is going to finish with 25 goals and almost 40 assists in his first NHL season and it won't matter a lick in light of how Schaefer has dragged his club into legit playoff contention as an 18-year-old defender," one voter detailed.

Demidov was the odds-on favorite to win the Calder before the season. He hasn't disappointed with 13 goals and 35 points (48 points) in 62 games for the Canadiens, with 14 points on the power play. He just hasn't been Schaefer. Then again, no one has outside of Schaefer.

"Schaefer still has some company in Sennecke and Demidov," one voter claimed.

"Schaefer is going to win this and should win this, perhaps unanimously. I'd have Beckett Sennecke in the No. 2 followed by Ivan Demidov," another revealed.

Other rookies who received support down the ballot included Ben Kindel of the Pittsburgh Penguins; Ryan Leonard and Justin Sourdif of the Washington Capitals; Fraser Minten of the Boston Bruins; and Jesper Wallstedt of the Minnesota Wild.

Vezina Trophy (top goaltender)

Note: The NHL's general managers vote for this award.

While Kucherov is understandably getting the MVP love for the Lightning this season, none of their success would be possible without Vasilevskiy. He's 29-10-3 in 42 games and fifth in the NHL in goals saved above expected per Money Puck (17.8). He returned to form last season but finished second to Connor Hellebuyck in the Vezina voting.

"Tampa probably shouldn't be as good as they are," one voter proposed. "Vasilevskiy is like human duct tape. Somehow, he just gets the job done."

"Andrei Vasilevskiy has looked back to Vezina form all season. He also gets bonus points for the goalie fight that helped get his team going," another declared, referring to Vasilevskiy's scrap with Bruins goalie Jeremy Swayman during the Lightning's 6-5 Stadium Series victory on Feb. 1.

Bruins goalie Jeremy Swayman gets involved in a scrum in front of the net, which sends Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy to the other side of the ice to fight Swayman.

Vasilevskiy earned 53% of the first-place votes, and Sorokin was right behind him. The Islanders goalie leads the NHL in goals saved above expected per Money Puck (28.1). He's 23-14-2 with a .914 save percentage and a 2.50 goals-against average. He was second to Vasilevskiy among our panelists last month.

Thompson dropped out of the Vezina top three last month, but his success this season has been undeniable, with 21 wins, a .913 save percentage and a 2.41 GAA. He's second to Vasilevskiy in goals saved above expected (24.4). Thompson, who was on the Team Canada roster at the Winter Olympics, was fourth for the Vezina last season.

Thompson was the only other goalie to earn a first-place vote, but there was a ton of support down the ballot for several goalies.

One of them was the Bruins' Swayman, who is third in goals saved above expected (20.5). "Swayman is not getting nearly enough love or attention for the season he's having. He's a major reason they are in the playoff hunt," one Sorokin voter argued.

Carolina Hurricanes sensation Brandon Bussi, Igor Shesterkin of the New York Rangers and Karel Vejmelka of the Utah Mammoth also received some attention from the voters.

Selke Trophy (best defensive forward)

Sometimes it's just a player's "turn" to win an award. The buzz starts in the preseason, and if the player doesn't fumble the bag, he can remain the consensus choice.

Suzuki has done nothing to dissuade the voters who have backed him all season. This is the fourth straight month in which Suzuki has led the Selke race, this time with 59% of the first-place votes, up from 53% last month. Montreal averages 2.12 goals against per 60 minutes with him on the ice. Suzuki has never been a Selke finalist, and his previous highest finish was 13th for the award. That'll change this season.

"He keeps improving," one voter stated.

"Not a clear-cut front-runner for me with this award, but if I had to vote today, it would be for him," another suggested.

Staal is another player waiting for his turn. The 20-year veteran has been considered one of the best defensive forwards in the NHL for over a decade, but has been a Selke finalist only twice, the last time in 2023-24. He's a faceoff ace (55.3%) and the Hurricanes average 2.39 goals against per 60 minutes when he's on the ice.

Staal and MacKinnon tied with 12% of the Selke first-place votes. The Colorado star and MVP favorite has never been lauded for his defensive prowess -- his highest Selke finish was 22nd in the voting -- but he has an intriguing case this season if you believe the best defense is a good offense. The Avs get 57.6% of the shot attempts with him on the ice. They average 4.87 goals per 60 minutes and 1.56 goals against per 60 minutes when he's on the ice for an astonishing 75.7% goals-for percentage. They earn 60% of the scoring chances when he's on the ice.

"He has the second-lowest GA/60 of every forward in the NHL while averaging the fourth-most minutes. He also plays the seventh-most minutes against elite competition," one MacKinnon voter explained.

The knock on MacKinnon would be that he doesn't kill penalties as Staal does (2:12 of shorthanded ice time per game) or as Suzuki does (albeit at just 50 seconds per game).

This being the Selke Trophy voting, there's always a cast of thousands getting support from the voters. Other players receiving first-place votes were Vegas Golden Knights center Jack Eichel, Avalanche center Brock Nelson and Detroit Red Wings center Dylan Larkin.



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"I'm convinced that when you look at which of the NHL's most trusted defensive forwards have also been the highest-level top of the lineup players, it's Dylan Larkin and then it's everybody else," one voter opined. "I think he's the clear front-runner, but I doubt that's a commonly held opinion."

Other players receiving support down the ballot were Minnesota Wild center Joel Eriksson Ek, Dallas Stars winger Jason Robertson and Tampa Bay Lightning center Anthony Cirelli.

Dropping out as finalists and not receiving a first-place vote this month were Dallas Stars center Roope Hintz and Florida Panthers center Sam Reinhart.

Lady Byng Trophy (gentlemanly play)

This is the part where I mention that the Lady Byng Trophy for gentlemanly play should be voted on by the league's on-ice officials or by the NHL Players' Association instead of the PHWA. Traditionally, this award goes to a player with a top-20 point total and the lowest penalty minutes among those players.

Jack Eichel has 70 points in 55 games with just 10 penalty minutes, but a case could be made for Nick Suzuki, who has 74 points in 62 games and just 14 penalty minutes. If a defenseman strikes your fancy, how about Zach Werenski, who has 65 points in 55 games (averaging 26:27 in ice time) with only 12 penalty minutes?

Jack Adams Award (best coach)

Note: The NHL Broadcasters' Association votes on this award.

Leader: Jon Cooper, Tampa Bay Lightning

Finalists: Jared Bednar, Colorado Avalanche; Lindy Ruff, Buffalo Sabres

Is this the most fascinating race of the NHL Awards season?

The current finalists are all battling against their own flavors of history. Cooper, who led ballots with 53% of the first-place votes, has never won the Jack Adams despite two Stanley Cup wins and four conference titles. This season, he has guided the Lightning to near the top of the Atlantic Division despite a season filled with injuries to key players.

"It's his Martin Scorsese year," one voter quipped, in a nod to the director's inevitable 2006 win for "The Departed" after decades of snubs.

"Jon Cooper has continued to guide his team through nonstop injuries up and down the lineup. His ability to motivate different personalities is an art," another voter noted.

"It has to be Jon Cooper," another voter declared.

Unless it "has to be" Lindy Ruff, who earned 28% of the first-place votes as the coach who has the Sabres primed to break the NHL's longest playoff drought. The last time Buffalo made the postseason was 2011 under head coach ... Lindy Ruff? Well there's some delightful symmetry.

"Listen, Jon Cooper deserves this one, too. But for Ruff to have taken Buffalo from where they were to where they are is pretty special," one voter beamed. "Cooper has done tremendous work in Tampa, too, but Ruff's been through the wringer."

"Thrilled for Buffalo and the job that Ruff is doing. Everything is finally coming together and he deserves recognition," another voter argued.

"The mythical fresh GM bump is a pile of nonsense. The Sabres are a league-leading 28-5-2 since Dec. 9 in good part because of the guy calling the shots from behind the bench," another voter explained.

Ruff previously won the Jack Adams in 2005-06, the season when the Sabres lost in Game 7 of the conference finals to eventual Stanley Cup winner Carolina.

Bednar earned around 11% of the first-place votes and is pushing back against another kind of history. The Avalanche are expected to win the President's Trophy for having the league's best record. Only three coaches since 2005-06 have won the Jack Adams for having led a team to the President's Trophy.

"Jared Bednar is still a great candidate but seems to be coaching an all-star team while Cooper has dealt with a ton of injuries to key cogs," one voter opined.

Voters are more compelled by rags-to-riches than riches-to-more-riches stories -- another reason why Ruff's ascendance here can't be ignored.

"Lindy Ruff deserves to be in the conversation more! What's happening in Buffalo needs to be studied," one voter proposed.

Other coaches receiving first-place votes were Lane Lambert of the Seattle Kraken, who was a finalist in last month's Awards Watch; and Andre Tourigny of the Utah Mammoth.

Among the coaches mentioned down the ballot were Dan Muse of the Pittsburgh Penguins and Ryan Warsofsky of the San Jose Sharks.

ESPN LOADED: 03.10.2026

1382566 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why Maple Leafs' Matthew Knies went from untouchable to trade target

Luke Fox

MONTRÉAL — The very idea that Matthew Knies might be on the trade block broke the Internet.

OK, we're exaggerating a tad.

But a photo of No. 23 and a thoughts column titled "Could Leafs be persuaded to move Matthew Knies?" dished by insider Elliott Friedman and posted on Trade Deadline Eve did trigger a traffic surge that temporarily overwhelmed Sportsnet.ca.

Oh, no! Not our dear Kniesy!

Knies, of course, remains a Toronto Maple Leaf — and one of the few whose best seasons should still lie ahead — after the annual rumour maelstrom that is the NHL trade deadline.

But the notion of Treliving at least entertaining such a blockbuster, of welcoming roster-rocking ideas from trade partners, does hint at the level of dissatisfaction with his own flawed roster construction, for which the GM has already assumed blame.

"I didn't really look into it too much. I feel like, with this market, everyone's kind of almost a target," Knies told reporters in Toronto Monday. "It's a business. You earn the attention here. But I don't want to look into it too much, I guess."

Were Knies to dial up PuckPedia.com, he'd learn that he is the only member of the Maple Leafs core devoid of trade protection. He'd discover that the deal he signed as a restricted free agent — 2025's life-changing six-year, \$46.5-million pact for which Treliving was rightly praised — should age like Benjamin Button against an escalating salary cap. And he'd be reminded that, at 23, he is the second-youngest member (next to rookie Easton Cowan) of a roster that must get younger.

Crazy what a difference a year makes.



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At the 2025 trade deadline, you may recall, the Carolina Hurricanes reportedly asked Treliving for a (then unsigned) Knies when the Maple Leafs tried to pry away Mikko Rantanen as their Mitch Marner substitute.

The Canes took Logan Stankoven as a centrepiece of the Rantanen trade to Dallas. Treliving, at the time, viewed Knies as a near-untouchable.

"Matthew is just realizing how big and strong he is, and he's getting more comfortable," Treliving said last March, after spurning Knies's suitors.

"He's sort of grown right in front of our eyes. So, he's a big part of our team now (and will) continue to be moving forward. And he's a unique player. You know, that's a big, strong man."

The ground has shifted since. The Leafs aren't good or going for it. And Treliving's employment is much less secure.

Knies's NHL arrival aligned with the Leafs first-round breakthrough in 2023. He's only known winning.

Now he's just watched three friends shipped out of town amid a seven-game losing skid.

Forgive the young man if he's still wrapping his mind around this mess on the ice and the uncertainty off it.

"No one's happy about it. Everyone's frustrated. And we want to do better," Knies said. "We're not gonna hang our heads low and feel defeated.

"It's a crappy feeling that we put ourselves in the situation."

Are the Maple Leafs better without Knies on the books?

Gut reaction screams no.

But the status quo is untenable, trade nibbles in March can gain bite by June, and no one player should be off limits if a move can improve the roster big picture.

Whether it retools or rebuilds, Toronto will eventually need a couple of legitimate puck-moving defencemen and couple more centremen if it is serious about contending for a championship. (If, say, Treliving's talks with St. Louis about Robert Thomas involved Knies, would that be surprising?)

If 2025-26 is an anomaly and the Maple Leafs, as Jon Cooper predicts, successfully return to the dance in 2027, they'll need a bounce-back campaign from their best power forward.

Hampered for months with a knee injury that has him "not 100 per cent" and has taken a noticeable toll on his stride, Knies is now pushing for 20 goals, not 30.

And while his assist total has risen (from 29 to 35) and his positive attitude has maintained, there is no question that his production and defensive results, much like Auston Matthews's, have been hindered by the loss of Marner.

Knies was a plus-9 as a rookie and a plus-7 as a sophomore. This season, he's a dash-17.

On Tuesday in Montreal, the winger is expected to return to Matthews's top line after getting some more sheltered minutes.

"Still feel like I can contribute and help. I'm confident in my abilities that I'm still eligible to be a dominant player and help out," Knies said.

We agree, especially after a long off-season of recovery.

So do rival executives, though.

Which is why, for those talking trade with the asset-light Maple Leafs, you can't blame them for bringing up the big guy with the soft hands and the personality built to handle the spotlight.

Outside of Matthews and William Nylander — who both hold full no-move clauses — who would you ask for?

"It's difficult. I feel like I haven't been in a situation like this," Knies admitted.

"You look around this room and see the talent, the skill base we have here. I think we'll be back and stronger than ever."

Maple Leafs projected lineup Tuesday in Montreal:

Knies – Matthews – Domi

Maccelli – Tavares – Nylander

Cowan – Quillan – Robertson

Joshua – Lorentz – Järnkrok

Rielly – Carlo

McCabe – Ekman-Larsson

Benoit – Stecher

Woll

Stolarz

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1382567 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers need to find ways to lean on McDavid less

Mark Spector

DENVER — The addiction is real.

Dave Tippett and Todd McLellan both had it. Jay Woodcroft did his best to recover from it.

And now, Kris Knoblauch has perhaps graduated to a new stage of rehab, having played Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl together for just 22 seconds at five-on-five during Sunday's 4-2 win at Vegas. He's still afflicted, but trying to kick the habit one ... day ... at ... a ... time.

The drug? It has been dubbed "The Nuclear Option."

How do you know a coach is on it? Well, Jon Cooper succumbed to it in Milan — a propensity to over-use Connor McDavid, the best player on the planet.

And if even Cooper could not abstain, perhaps it's impossible.

"You media guys think you're so smart, with your 'Don't put them out together' bull----," a former Oilers coach said to me recently, only half-joking. "If you were behind the bench you'd be throwing those two out there before the 10-minute mark."

From what we've seen, and what players have told us on and off the record, I'm not so sure we would.

Here's how it works: The moment a game appears to be slipping away — the second a 2-1 game goes to 3-1 — the lines are ripped up so that McDavid and Draisaitl can slide down the pole, don their silk capes, and save the day like Batman and Robin when the Bat-Signal illuminates.

It's been an issue here for as long as the Oilers have contended, in equal parts helping them win and hindering their team-building. I found these quotes in a four year old column, penned after a well-rounded game that hinted at a total team effort back in February of 2022:



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"It's not like the NBA, where you can have two guys and you can win a championship," Evander Kane instructed. "You see how hard it is to win, and the teams that win don't always have the best players."

"I don't think in the game of hockey that you can win the Stanley Cup with two guys," fourth-line centre Derek Ryan added that night. "That is the beautiful thing about hockey. You can't just have the best player and win. You have to have the best team."

"Those guys are amazing and we can speak to that all day. But we need to support them," Ryan said. "We also needed the opportunity to do so."

Somehow today it's still a topic, as Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman said on the 32 Thoughts podcast this week.

Even general manager Stan Bowman appears to coaxing his coaching staff in that direction, with the acquisition of a quality third-line centre in Jason Dickinson and a rowdy fourth-liner in Colton Dach at the Trade Deadline.

Dickinson has "leader" written all over him, and is ready to take on the responsibility of dragging this Bottom 6 into the fight — if Knoblauch gives them the minutes to fight with.

"I like going out there and making everybody feel comfortable," Dickson told Sportsnet. "When I get out there it's a sense of security that, OK, I can count on him. 'If I pinch, he's got my back. If there's a bobbled puck, he's got my back.' To solidify a Bottom 6 is what I like to do."

On Sunday, the Oilers got a welcome fourth-line goal from Trent Frederic, who was rewarded with 10:59 of ice time — decent fourth line minutes. But his linemates, Dach (5:05) and Josh Samanski (7:39) were not so fortunate.

Dickinson played 15:33 (12:34 at even strength), as Knoblauch begins to trust — for one game at least — a more traditional four-line system.

The irony for Dickinson lies in the fact that, while most players come to Edmonton gushing over the opportunity to play with 97 and 29, if he plays his cards right he won't play with them at all.

"Exactly," he said. "My role is to make their jobs easier."

"Connor and Leon are special players, and me coming in is not going to change that," he explained. "So what I want to do is give them better matchups. Take a little bit off their plate."

"I know Connor was killing penalties every now and then. (Dickinson wants to) take that off his plate, so he's not wasting his energy out there on the kill. Better having him play five-on-five and on the power play with full energy, and (with Dickinson) being able to take some of the matchups off his plate."

Baby steps.

McDavid took a regular turn killing penalties in Vegas, playing 1:56 shorthanded, but regular PK centreman Adam Henrique was not in the lineup. Only Dickinson played more among forwards than McDavid on the PK.

We're not sure why McDavid is killing penalties, an art that should increasingly include shot blocking as the playoffs approach. Many coaches use their PK unit to find ice time for depth forwards — to include them in the process — rather than going back to their star player on yet another occasion.

Then there's the fact that this season, for some reason, McDavid and Draisaitl have not produced at five-on-five the way they have in past years.

"The (expected goals) stats are overwhelming. They're about 70%, which is an unbelievable number," Knoblauch said. "But they just haven't been able to put the puck in the net."

"It hasn't been the same this year."

We asked Draisaitl about it, and he was steadfast, despite the metrics:

"I'm pretty sure when you look at the chances created and the way the ice is tilted, it's probably still in our favor," he said. "I know how it feels when we're out there together, and that the ice is tilted most of the night. Sometimes that's just as important as actually scoring."

"Maybe the puck hasn't gone in as much as we'd like, but I wouldn't bet against us."

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1382568 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' intensity, competitiveness starting to move in right direction

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — The duration of the Vancouver Canucks' rebuild, the length of time it takes the organization to start winning again, will be determined partly by how quickly and solidly they establish new standards and a better culture than they've had for most of the last decade.

Sure, talent is paramount. The Canucks have to continue to accumulate talented prospects and develop them into National Hockey League players. But talent wasn't this team's biggest problem in recent years.

They need better culture and that, at least, can be worked on every day. You shouldn't need to wait years for that.

In this respect, the degree to which the league's worst team has dug in and battled in recent games is a small step in the right direction.

On Monday, they lost 2-0 to an aggressive, heavy Ottawa Senators team that scuffled through the first half of the season but is 9-1-2 since Jan. 25. Brady Tkachuk scored into an empty-net and the Senators' other goal, by Ridly Greig in the second period, probably shouldn't have counted if the referees had actually read the NHL's Rule 79 on hand passes.

The Canucks took three out of four points in back-to-back weekend road games against the Winnipeg Jets (3-2 overtime loss Saturday) and Chicago Blackhawks (6-3 win on trade-deadline Friday).

It's possible none of these opponents will actually make the playoffs, so it's not like the Canucks are squaring up against Stanley Cup heavyweights.

But they are squaring up and competing tenaciously, which is more than what transpired most of this winter when the Canucks, during a dismal stretch of two wins in 23 games, lost by three or more goals in regulation 13 times.

"I think the compete has been great," goalie Kevin Lankinen said after his second straight A-grade performance. "Other guys have been stepping up in bigger roles. I know it's not easy always to do that, but I'm really happy to see guys taking ownership, taking leadership within the room and on the ice as well, so it's fun to watch."

These three games have happened, of course, post-deadline — after the Canucks traded away veterans Tyler Myers, Conor Garland and David Kampf, whose exits were preceded by the trades of Quinn Hughes and Kiefer Sherwood.

It's a different team now, and it has a different vibe, too.



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"I think it's a great opportunity for us younger guys," 22-year-old rookie winger Liam Ohgren said. "They've showed that they believe in us, and they play us a lot, so it's great for every one of us. It's great for our future and all that stuff. And yeah, that brings a little confidence boost."

"It's getting much better," another recent acquisition, Marco Rossi, said of the compete level. "Especially the last few games, we've been playing a better game. There's a few areas where we have to improve, but I think overall we are playing a better game. We can focus on us."

The focus before the deadline, with half the roster spinning in the vortex of trade conjecture, was a little distracted. The timing of the Canucks' uptick in focus and intensity, and the elevation of their younger players, is not a mystery.

"That's usually what happens once the deadline passes," Lankinen said. "Obviously, we lost a lot of good guys. I hate to see that, guys that have been part of this thing for a long time, and a couple of guys that haven't been (here) so long. But all in all, just great human beings and obviously we are going to miss those guys. But that's how the business goes. We're going to turn the page and focus on what we have here, and I really do like the young talent that we have."

But this talent needs to develop. The competitiveness they're showing could provide them the foundation to get better.

Against the Senators, the Canucks managed only 16 shots, and none during four minutes of third-period power-play time when Vancouver attempted only four shots. Three missed the net and one was blocked.

The Canucks power play is just 5-for-48 (10.4 per cent) over the last two months. The only first-unit player gone since the season started is the best one, Hughes. Vancouver needs to do better at five-on-four. Especially as this ever-younger team is going to be challenged to generate even-strength scoring chances, the Canuck power play must find ways to make a difference when it can – like in Monday's game.

"We just didn't execute," Rossi said of the third-period failure. "It doesn't matter if it was in the (offensive) zone or in the breakout, we just had too many mistakes."

"Sometimes, you know, you just try too much. And I think that doesn't help your team. We just need to keep it simple, just put the puck to the net. Once we do that, then probably the PK will be more passive, and then other things are going to open up. But we try to do the (fancy) stuff first, and then at the end we try something else. But that just doesn't work."

Canuck penalty killing, however, was good. It blanked the Senators' eighth-ranked power play on four chances.

Critically, one of the kills came after Vancouver coach Adam Foote unsuccessfully challenged Greig's fortuitous goal for Ottawa at 10:11 of the middle period.

A fluttering point shot by Artem Zub was instinctively parried away by teammate Shane Pinto, who got his glove in front of the puck as it was about to hit his face, sending it bouncing at a right angle to Greig, unchecked and alone in the slot.

Foote challenged for a missed stoppage on a hand pass. The NHL rulebook is clear that intent is not required for a hand pass to be whistled and that play should be stopped if a puck deflected off a player's glove "has allowed his team to gain an advantage."

We're thinking that a go-ahead goal in a 0-0 game constituted an advantage for the Senators. But we also know there is no such thing as a "clear" rule in the NHL, and referees Kyle Rehman and Corey Syvret disagreed with Foote.

"Well, I was told by the referee (Rehman) that if a guy protects his face, it's a goal," Foote explained to reporters. "I told him it's not the rule book. In 79.1, it's clearly not stated that. You know, the Situation Room (in

Toronto) came out so quickly with a statement for me that... it is inconclusive. But clearly on the video, he was protecting his face. But the oddest thing is the same play happened in December in Tampa, and it was called no-goal by the same ref.

"For me, it bothered me because if they get that wrong and we get a penalty, they can make it 2-0. You can't get that wrong. I think there's been an argument on hockey shows about this rule, and it may be changed in the future. But the way it's stated (in the rulebook), it should have been overruled."

Yes, shocking, NHL. Shocking.

But so would a Vancouver victory have been without the Canucks managing to score a goal themselves.

Still, the harsh rule interpretation felt like piling on a Canuck team that, while fully accountable for their collapse to the bottom of the NHL, has also had almost everything go against them this season.

At least their intensity and competitiveness are starting to move in the right direction.

Their fifth shutout loss of the season — and fourth at Rogers Arena — opened an eight-game homestand. The Canucks' next game is Thursday against the Nashville Predators.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames' Joel Farabee makes emotional rise to team leader

Eric Francis

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The moment Ryan Huska pulled Joel Farabee aside Saturday morning will stick with the 26-year-old for a long time.

You could see it in the way he talked about it afterward, still a little wide-eyed, still a little emotional.

Huska told the Flames winger he'd be wearing a letter above his heart — an 'A' — for home games moving forward. And for a player who has spent the past two seasons reshaping his identity, his role, and his voice, it hit hard.

Farabee admitted he didn't want to "jinx it," so he didn't call anyone.

But he did what any guy in his shoes would do: he snapped a photo of the Blasty jersey hanging in his stall, the crisp white 'A' stitched above the Flaming Horsehead, and sent it to his closest buddies. He still keeps the picture on his phone.

"It was pretty cool," said Farabee of seeing his jersey with a letter on it for the first time in his pro career.

"It definitely means a lot."

It meant even more when he went out that night and played like a guy determined to prove Huska right.

Farabee didn't just wear the letter, he owned it. He took over the team goal-scoring lead with a late breakaway winner, added two assists, and walked away with the red jacket from Mikael Backlund as player of the game.

The groundwork for the moment was laid hours earlier, when Huska gathered five players — Farabee, Connor Zary, Kevin Bahl, Matt Coronato and Morgan Frost — and delivered a challenge. With Nazem



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Kadri and MacKenzie Weegar gone after the deadline, the leadership vacuum was real.

"The door is open," Huska told them. "We need more."

Farabee has been giving more for months. Huska singled him out because of his energy, his voice, and his willingness to put the team ahead of himself, whether that's grinding in the middle six, killing penalties, or filling whatever hole the lineup springs on a given night.

"I feel like I'm in that age group where I'm not quite a young guy anymore, but I'm not quite an old guy," he said.

"I feel like I have a good voice with talking to the young guys versus talking to the older guys."

When Farabee arrived in Calgary, he was still wrestling with what kind of NHLer he was supposed to be. He'd been a scorer in junior, a skill guy in college, and a tweener in Philadelphia. But in Calgary, he's found his niche.

"To play in the NHL for years and years, you have to realize who you are," he said.

"I kind of understand that I'm that middle six and help on the power play or help on the PK. I take a lot of pride in filling spots in whatever the situation would call for."

That's leadership. And it's why he's wearing a letter now.

On Monday, with Kevin Bahl wearing the A in the absence of injured Zach Whitecloud, Farabee was at it again.

You don't need a letter to lead.

Down 3-0 after a brutal first period, the Flames clawed back with a three-goal second, sparked by rookie Matvei Gridin's sharp-angle finish.

Then came the penalty kill that will be replayed in team meetings for years.

First, Blake Coleman scored shorthanded. Then Farabee intercepted a bump-back pass, raced deep into Washington's zone and fed Yegor Sharangovich for another shorty — two on the same kill, something Calgary hadn't done since 2018. Only one other NHL team has done it this year.

Even though Washington stormed back in the third to win 7-3, the message was clear: this team isn't folding. Not with Coleman. Not with Farabee. Not with the young core being pushed to lead.

"We lost some good friends and teammates, but the guys coming in have stuff to prove, and we have stuff to play for too - we want to prove to the coaches we belong here," said Farabee.

"That's gonna be the story of our team," added Coleman of the gutsy comeback they failed to build on in the third.

"There won't be any quit in this room. We're gonna have guys that fight every night, and the game's not over till it's over. I thought we had the momentum going into the third and just didn't quite take advantage of it."

That's the culture Farabee, Coleman and Backlund are helping build: "You can't win on skill alone," said Farabee.

Farabee is a bridge between eras, a player who has lived the grind, embraced the role, and earned the respect of both the veterans and the kids.

He's the right guy to wear the 'A', and you don't get the feeling he'll ever stop trying to prove it.

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Sportsnet.ca / Without Sanderson, Senators' playoff hopes face real test

Alex Adams

OTTAWA — The Ottawa Senators' playoff lives went from a hope and a prayer to a real possibility in a matter of weeks, but now the Senators and their fan base are desperately knocking on wood for a healthy Jake Sanderson.

In a resounding 7-4 win in Seattle, Sanderson took a hit from Brandon Montour in the second period and left the game immediately while grabbing his shoulder.

Senators' fans' hearts sank when Sanderson went down as fast as the Toronto Maple Leafs have sunk to the bottom of the Atlantic.

It's been one of the best seasons any defenceman has played in a Senators uniform, rivalling Erik Karlsson in his time in Canada's capital.

Sanderson was on pace for career highs in every offensive category while on the trajectory to amass 60-plus points.

Sanderson's defining trait is his defensive prowess, with his unmatched skating ability, hockey IQ and size, which has led him to enter the discussion as the best defensive defenceman in the game.

"Everyone knows how important he is to us. So, we're praying for him, and hopefully everything's all good," Senators forward Shane Pinto said about Sanderson before the extent of the injury was known.

Sanderson has also entered the Norris Trophy discussion, and all that means his loss at this time, especially, could make or break the Senators' season.

With Sanderson now listed as week-to-week, the post-season mission — the Senators' playoff chances were listed at 51 per cent, according to MoneyPuck.com — just got infinitely more difficult.

The sting is even greater, given how well the Senators have been playing. They've earned points in 10 of their last 11 games, going 8-1-2 while outscoring opponents 45-25 since Jan. 25.

Meanwhile, Linus Ullmark hasn't lost in regulation in 2026; it's been 13 consecutive starts since his last regulation defeat, which was on Dec. 9.

With Sanderson out, the Senators' elite defensive structure will bend; it'll be up to Ullmark to ensure that it doesn't break.

Next man up — but who?

Thomas Chabot was the No. 1 defenceman for a long time. In theory, he can provide elite puck-moving, despite less defensive aptitude than Sanderson.

Meanwhile, Nick Jensen has seemingly turned a corner just in time.

It's likely that Tyler Kleven and Jordan Spence vault up from the third pair to the second, like they did earlier this season when Chabot was on the sidelines due to injury. Their analytics were excellent against better competition with the Kleven-Spence pair churning out a 58 per cent expected goals share at five-on-five with a plus-1 goal differential, from Nov. 13 to Dec 18, when Chabot missed 15 of the 16 games.

Don't sleep on newly minted Olympic bronze medallist Nikolas Matinpalo, who played all six of Ottawa's playoff games last season but has been a healthy scratch the majority of the season.

Regardless, the Senators find themselves facing another massive hurdle in a season defined by distractions and adversity.



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Ottawa has stayed afloat despite the chaos and lack of saves, but this one is different. This time it's Sanderson, arguably their best player this season. We will soon find out just how good this Senators team is without its star defenceman.

Adams' Apples

Warren Foegele needed no time to introduce himself to the Senators' faithful, scoring in his debut.

"It's been a wild 48 hours," said Foegele, after getting traded to Ottawa from L.A. on Thursday.

Foegele detailed how he had been plagued by injuries in training camp and throughout the season, for a player coming off back-to-back 20-plus goal seasons.

He looked the part of a skilled, fast, defensively attuned player on Ottawa's fourth line in Seattle.

One of his first acts as a member of the Senators was to text a wink emoji to Spence.

"I was really confused. I'd never gotten a text like that before," said Spence, jokingly.

The two former L.A. Kings bonded in California and became close friends.

It's not the only connection Foegele has to his new team. The newest Senator also trained over the summer in Muskoka with the currently red-hot Dylan Cozens and Sam Gagner, the Senators director of player development.

Interestingly, Foegele explained that his new Senators team reminded him of his Carolina team that made it into the playoffs in Game 81 in 2019 before making the Eastern Conference Finals. There is no doubt that if Senators get into the playoffs, they could do damage.

Explaining Dylan Cozens' heater

Cozens is playing the best hockey of his career. His goal in Seattle thrust him to goals in four straight for the first time in his career. Cozens has 18 points in his last 17 games with 31 points in his first 45 games.

So, what changed?

Seventeen games ago, he started playing with Brady Tkachuk.

When the Senators were mired in a dismal January stretch, coach Travis Green decided to split up Tkachuk and Tim Stutzle from the first line to help boost Cozens on the second, which had struggled at five-on-five. That's when his heater started, and when the line of Tkachuk, Cozens and Ridly Greig became a force.

Cozens had 12 five-on-five points in his first 45 games before playing with Tkachuk: since Tkachuk's insertion to his side, Cozens has 10 five-on-five points in 17 games. Juxtapose that with Tkachuk's 21 points in his last 17 games since joining Cozens' side. The other linemate on the dominant line, Greig, has been a defensive stabilizer who retrieves pucks, and is good on the forecheck. At the same time, Tkachuk has been doing the majority of the heavy lifting.

Tkachuk's ability to drive play, win battles, and be an effective playmaker has given Cozens the ability to be the goal scorer he was touted to consistently be when he scored 31 goals in 2022-23.

Cozens is on pace for 30 goals this season.

Tkachuk has taken a lot of criticism this season. The condemnations have to end. The captain is propelling his Senators and Cozens' stock upward.

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Sportsnet.ca / Sunday Overreactions: Maple Leafs staring down full-blown rebuild

Michael Amato

The trade deadline for the Toronto Maple Leafs was a microcosm for their season. Uninspired, indifferent and nowhere near good enough. There was no creativity, no weaponizing of cap space to add assets and no clear plan.

For the first time in nearly a decade, the Leafs are destined to miss the playoffs, forcing Brad Treliving to begrudgingly accept his fate as a seller on Friday. The Maple Leafs general manager finally came to grips with the fact that his team wasn't good enough to invest any more draft capital and assets into, as Toronto begins a journey in an uncertain direction.

Ideally, Treliving would like that path to be a quick retool. With Auston Matthews, William Nylander and Matthew Knies still in the fold, along with capable goaltending, there is a world where some savvy moves in the summer to bring in some new faces around that group could get things back on track. That's easier said than done, though.

Barring a miraculous set of circumstances where they plummet into the bottom five, Toronto doesn't own their first-round pick this year, and the Maple Leafs are not one or two players away from contending again. They need a number one defenceman, a top-six centre and a bunch of other skaters to rebuild their forward group and blue line. Sure, you might be able to solve some of that through free agency or maybe promote an AHLer or two, but the idea that this team can fix all its issues overnight is starting to feel like a pipe dream.

Leafs are much closer to a rebuild than retool

Toronto did bring back five draft picks by the time the deadline arrived. Nicolas Roy, Bobby McMann and Scott Laughton were offloaded for a first-round pick, a second rounder, a conditional third, as well as a fourth and fifth. That's not a bad restocking of the cupboards, but how many of those picks are going to make a difference in 2026-27? The first rounder isn't until 2027, and the highest pick they have this summer is the third they got back for Laughton, which becomes a second if the Los Angeles Kings make the playoffs.

The fact that they only got one first-round pick and one second out of this haul is also problematic for immediate help via the trade front. It's hard to imagine the Leafs being able to package any of these selections together to bring back a difference maker in a summertime swap.

A primary reason for the Leafs to try to turn things around so quickly is the future of Auston Matthews. The Leafs captain can sign an extension in the summer of 2027, and Toronto will want to know what Matthews is thinking sooner rather than later. If the Leafs again look like a team nowhere close to the playoffs, Matthews could decide he doesn't want to stay long-term. Toronto will want to make sure it gets a good return for its superstar if he decides he wants out in order to avoid another Mitch Marner situation.

If you want an illustration of how quickly things can change for a contending team, look no further than the Vancouver Canucks. We saw the Canucks go from one game away from the Western Conference Final to full-on rebuild in less than two years, and it's starting to feel like the Maple Leafs are heading down an eerily similar path. Much like Canucks, Toronto was one game away from the East final last year and will miss out on the post-season this spring.



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A half a season later, the Canucks were forced to trade Quinn Hughes roughly 18 months out from his free agency when it was clear his intentions weren't to stick around, and Matthews will be on the exact same timeline this December. Time is running out for Treliving to give these Leafs a second act.

Overreaction? – No

In order to execute a good re-tool on the fly, you can't just trade for a bunch of draft picks. You also need to add good young players to freshen up your roster. Take the Boston Bruins, who went the re-tool route at last year's trade deadline. Boston did stockpile a handful of quality picks, but they also brought in guys like Fraser Minten, Marat Khushnutdinov and Casey Mittelstadt. All three are playing in the Bruins middle six right now and scoring at roughly a 20-goal pace.

The Leafs didn't bring in a single player this past week who they could get a look at down the stretch and possibly utilize next season. Toronto needed to shed more bodies, and guys like Brandon Carlo and Oliver Ekman-Larsson with term likely would've returned a bigger package that could've included some young talent ready to play.

Now Treliving will have to look to free agency and deals around the draft to reshape the roster, where any returns figure to be less substantial. The Leafs would probably be fine moving on from players like Morgan Rielly, Max Domi and Simon Benoit, but the assets they recoup in those deals, if they can even pull them off, will likely be minimal. Maybe they can try and move one of the goalies to bring back a more impactful piece, but that is also challenging. Netminders don't often have a ton of value, and Joseph Woll and Anthony Stolarz both struggle to stay healthy. Dennis Hildeby played well in a small sample size this year, but how much responsibility is he really ready for if Stolarz or Woll gets moved?

Compounding matters is that the Atlantic division is suddenly loaded with talented teams. Buffalo, Montreal, Detroit and Ottawa, who were bad for a huge chunk of the Matthews era, all now appear to have surpassed the Leafs by leaps and bounds. Florida and Tampa aren't going anywhere, and the Bruins feel like at least a step or two ahead of Toronto in their retool.

There's a very real possibility things could go off the rails even further next season, and come the 2027 trade deadline, the Leafs could be looking at a complete teardown.

The Wild didn't do enough at the deadline to keep pace with the Avalanche

Minnesota made its biggest splash back in December by trading for Quinn Hughes, so they understandably didn't land a big name on Friday. Instead, the Wild opted for depth pieces like Bobby Brink, Jeff Petry, Nick Foligno and Michael McCarron. One could argue Bill Guerin has put together the most formidable Wild roster in years, and they are definitely Cup contenders, but their centre depth could certainly be questioned. With Colorado adding Nazem Kadri and Nicolas Roy, the Avalanche loaded up down the middle and solidified a potential weak spot. There's a good chance Minnesota will meet Colorado in one of the first two rounds, and strength at the centre position could be the deciding factor.

Overreaction? – No

The two teams are very evenly matched, with very little separating the rosters. Both teams have good goaltending and elite talent. Hughes and Cale Makar are the two best defencemen in the league, while Nathan MacKinnon and Kirill Kaprizov have the ability to take over a game for each side. Avs forwards Martin Necas and Brock Nelson are a good counter for Matt Boldy and Joel Eriksson Ek, but things start to sway in Colorado's favour after that. The Wild have a centre depth chart right now of Eriksson Ek, Ryan Hartman, Daniil Yurov and McCarron, compared to MacKinnon, Nelson, Kadri and Roy. Minnesota was in the market for players like Vincent Trocheck, but a deal never materialized. If the Wild

can't overcome the juggernaut Avs, their lack of centre depth will likely be the reason.

Oilers should've traded for another goalie

We're about to head into another postseason where the Edmonton Oilers have major question marks in goal. The Oilers revamped their crease this season by trading for Tristan Jarry and Connor Ingram, and things have gone anything but swimmingly for the new Edmonton tandem. Jarry (.862) and Ingram (.890) have really struggled to find their footing. The Oilers have now allowed at least four goals in nearly 50 per cent of their games this season. That's bad news for a team operating in win-now mode in hopes of keeping Connor McDavid around long-term. Even though they already spent some assets in a Jarry trade a few months ago, there's an argument to be made that the Oilers should have been desperate enough to trade for another netminder like Sergei Bobrovsky or Jordan Binnington.

Overreaction? – Yes

The Oilers have cycled through several goalies in McDavid's tenure, and it might be time to focus more on the defensive side of the puck. Edmonton ranks in the bottom half of the league in high-danger chances allowed and is one of the worst teams on the penalty kill. It would be foolish to spend more draft capital or young players to try and find an upgrade in goal again so quickly. Bringing in Connor Murphy and Jason Dickinson should help on both of those fronts, as well as aid in shutting down the opposition's best players. It was a good move to try and upgrade on Stuart Skinner and Calvin Pickard, given how the past couple of post-seasons have gone, but constantly shuffling in and out goalies is a risky proposition. The Oilers need to focus on protecting their netminders more and helping them keep the puck out of the net.

Blues were the big winners of the deadline

Most people were quick to crown the Colorado Avalanche as the big winners of the deadline, and why not? The Avs added Roy and then, at the buzzer, a reunion with Kadri. Their centre depth is unrivalled, even if it did cost them a couple of first-round picks and there might be some questions about how Kadri's contract will age. That's why there might be a case that the St. Louis Blues made out the best on Friday. The Blues accumulated a haul of future assets, which includes two first-round picks, two third-rounders and a couple of prospects. St. Louis clearly came into the deadline looking to move some older players while re-stocking the cupboards, and even with the Colton Parayko deal not materializing, they've now positioned themselves very well moving forward.

Overreaction? – No

What made Doug Armstrong's deadline so impressive is that he did it all without moving his high-end players. The Blues didn't end up dealing Robert Thomas, Jordan Kyrou, Parayko or even Jordan Binnington. That leaves St. Louis in a flexible position moving towards the summer, as they could move some of those aforementioned names around the draft to add pieces for a full-blown rebuild, or they could try to come back and compete with more draft capital at their disposal. Getting the haul the Blues got for Justin Faulk and Brayden Schenn, two players in their mid-thirties, was a huge win for Armstrong.

The new retention and LTIR rules put a damper on the deadline

It wasn't the most exciting of trade deadlines, was it? There were only a few trades for the first five or six hours of the day before a late flurry right around three o'clock. We also didn't see big names like Robert Thomas, Vincent Trocheck or Sergei Bobrovsky change teams. One reason for that could be the new rules in the CBA that took effect this year, which prohibit double retention in trades and require teams to declare a player out for the entire season to get full LTIR cap relief. There was concern these new rules would make the deadline quieter than usual, so could this be a trend going forward?



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Overreaction? – Yes

The retention and LTIR changes definitely played a role in a slower-than-normal deadline, but there were other factors at work. There was a lack of significant rentals in play this year, which may have made teams more cautious about taking on players with term. Almost 40 per cent of the league now also has some form of trade protection, complicating potential deals. Let's also not discount how high some of the prices were earlier in the week, which could've made some teams hesitant about getting into bidding wars over players. Depth centres like Roy and Dickinson returned first-round picks prior to Friday, which likely meant the prices for guys like Trocheck and Thomas weren't attainable for most teams. With the cap rising next year, it should give teams more flexibility, and hopefully that leads to more deals on deadline day.

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TSN.CA / 'We'll be back and stronger than ever': Leafs hoping 'down year' is just a one-off

Mark Masters

The Toronto Maple Leafs held a practice at Ford Performance Centre on Monday before flying to Montreal.

After Tampa Bay snapped a four-game losing streak in Toronto on Saturday night, Lightning coach Jon Cooper threw a life preserver to Leafs fans swimming in a sea of negativity.

"They have a fabulous core still," Cooper told reporters. "If they don't make it, this will probably be a one-off for them, because they got a good group."

That assessment from a two-time Stanley Cup champion resonated in the Leafs' dressing room.

"You look around this room and you see the talent, the skill base that we have here," said winger Matthew Knies. "I agree with what he says. I think we'll be back and stronger than ever."

"I remember the Lightning missed the playoffs one year and then the next year they're back at the top of the division, competing," centre Auston Matthews noted. "A team like Boston that had a down year and same thing, like, they're in the mix [this season]. You know, sometimes it happens."

With sniper Steven Stamkos limited to just 17 games due to injury, the Lightning missed the playoffs in the 2016-17 season. Cooper's crew rebounded to reach the Conference Final in the 2017-18 season before eventually claiming Stanley Cup titles in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

The Boston Bruins sold at the deadline last year and finished 28th overall. But Boston bounced back immediately and currently hold the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

"We've been fortunate to be in the playoffs for the last nine years," said Matthews, who has two years remaining on his contract beyond this season. "So, you kind of hope that it's, like what [Cooper's] saying, a one-off and we can continue to build and continue to be in contention. Obviously, the focus is on right now and trying to get our game back and then trying to get in the win column. But, you know, obviously, it's something you think about."

Toronto has qualified for the playoffs in every season since drafting Matthews first overall in 2016. That run appears destined to end this

spring. The Leafs are winless (0-5-2) since the Olympic break and have fallen 11 points out of a playoff spot with 18 games to go.

"We do have a good core," said coach Craig Berube. "I think we have a lot of good players here. I do believe in all of these guys. It has just been a down year. We have not done a good enough job to put ourselves in a better spot here moving forward. We will just keep fighting here for the rest of the season, see what happens, and make decisions at the end of the year."

Toronto's path back to contender status likely starts with Matthews returning to his top level.

"It took a little bit for me to get going," Matthews admitted when asked about his season. "And then I thought in December I kind of started to find my game."

Matthews scored 16 goals in 26 games from Dec. 4 to Jan. 27. Since then, though, he's gone cold.

Matthews failed to score in the four games before the Olympic break and has been held without a goal in all seven games since returning from his gold-medal run with Team USA in Milan.

"It's been tough stretch for everybody, myself personally, and us as a team," Matthews said. "We're having a tough time creating offence, finding the back of the net."

This is the second-longest drought in Matthews' NHL career and his longest dry spell since a 13-game run in his rookie season.

"Just trying to still play like a complete game," Matthews said of his mindset. "I mean, I know, especially at home, you're going to get a lot of tough matchups, you get a lot of D-zone starts, stuff like that. So just trying to stick with it and compete on both sides of the puck and go from there."

Matthews has landed 30 shots on net during the last seven games, which is third in the NHL since the Olympic break behind only Nathan MacKinnon and Timo Meier.

"He does get his looks," Berube noted. "He has hit some posts, and the goalies have made good saves. I talked to the whole team today about getting a little more greasy around the net, getting to the blue paint, and getting more pucks to that area. Tampa scored two goals by doing that; one goes off a guy, and it bounces off [Jake McCabe]. It is just putting pucks into those areas. I think we can all do a better job as a whole team of getting more pucks into the blue paint and getting some second and third looks around there. Sometimes, that is what you have to do to score some goals when it is tough."

Matthews is on pace for 34 goals this season, which would be the second-lowest total of his career.

"Some of it is just bounces, really," said Knies. "It's a lot of the other guys on our team too [that] are kind in the same boat. I feel like I could be doing a lot better offensively and contributing a lot more. It's everyone. Our power play hasn't been great all season too. I don't think it's necessarily all on him."

Matthews has just four power-play goals this season with the last one coming on Jan. 1. Toronto is clicking at 19.3 per cent on the man advantage this season, which is 20th overall.

Matthews scored a career-low 33 goals last season while dealing with a nagging back injury. While he has missed six games due to injury this season, the 28-year-old is happy with how he's holding up physically.

"You're always going to have bumps and bruises and that's just the nature of the season," he said. "For the most part, been healthy and it's a positive."



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Matthews scored 69 goals in the 2023-24 season and potted 60 en route to a Hart Trophy in the 2021-22 season. He's a three-time Rocket Richard Trophy winner.

"I'm confident that he'll get back to that form," said Knies. "It's just going to take a few bounces, and we'll have to have good special teams and guys around [him] are going to have to chip in a little bit too."

Morgan Rielly, who celebrated his 32nd birthday on Monday, is one of the players who can chip in more. The defenceman and power-play quarterback has registered just two goals and one assist in the last 14 games.

"We've all done some reflecting, and we all want to be better," Rielly said when asked about his performance this season. "I think that's what everyone's feeling, myself included."

Where can he be better?

"It's like the team game," he said. "It's not just one thing. You want to execute within structure, you want to play well with your [defence] partner, be more effective offensively and that's what we're all pushing for."

"It has been a tough season for the whole team, not just Morgan," said Berube. "He falls into that category, but it has been a tough season for everybody."

Rielly is on pace for 41 points, which would equal his total from last year. He's also been on the ice for more 5-on-5 goals than any other skater this season, per NaturalStatTrick.com.

"I think he has played pretty well recently, to be honest with you," Berube said. "I do. He and [Brandon] Carlo have been pretty steady for me. Offensively, I think he can provide more. There are times when he can probably jump into the play or just get more pucks to the net from the point, and obviously on the PP. But I think he and Carlo have played pretty well and have been pretty steady for us as of late."

The Leafs watched as centre Scott Laughton, centre Nicolas Roy, and winger Bobby McMann were traded at the deadline in exchange for draft picks.

"It's a crappy feeling," Knies said. "It sucks to see them go."

Knies, who is in the first season of a six-year contract, admitted to being "a little bit" surprised to hear his name pop up in some rumours.

"I didn't really look into it too much," the 23-year-old said. "I feel like in this market everyone is almost a target. Yeah, it is what it is. It's a business. I guess you earn the attention here. But I don't want to look into it too much."

The deadline seemed to weigh on the team. Defenceman Simon Benoit, who was on TSN's trade bait list, noted that this is the first time he faced such speculation.

"I love being here," he said. "They gave me a chance so obviously I want to play for this logo. I try my hardest out there. Obviously, it's not going the way I wish it would go."

The hope was the deadline passing would help the Leafs play with a little more freedom on Saturday, and Toronto did score first goal against Tampa Bay. But the Lightning responded immediately and piled up four unanswered goals in the first period.

Matthews invoked Murphy's Law when asked about his team's effort.

"I'm just going to continue to repeat myself here," Matthews said. "It's tough. Like, you're just in a stretch where everything that seems to possibly go wrong, just kind of goes wrong. I don't think we played terrible. I didn't think that we didn't compete. Just thought we had a couple of bad bounces and then a couple of bad breakdowns. And, you know, when we had those breakdowns, the puck just seems to be ending in the back of our net."

The Leafs were booed off the ice following their eighth straight home defeat. Toronto fans haven't celebrated a win at Scotiabank Arena since Jan. 10.

"You hate to hear the boos," said goalie Anthony Stolarz. "Obviously people are going to be frustrated. They're spending their hard-earned money to come watch us play. It's just more motivation for us."

Berube is hoping an historic rivalry can spark his beleaguered bunch. Toronto will play against the Montreal Canadiens at the Bell Centre on Tuesday night.

"We have a good chance tomorrow," he said. "Montreal is probably our biggest rival. If you can't get fired up for that game and come out with some attitude in that game ..."

The coach shifted gears mid-sentence.

"I think we have to get a little uncomfortable right now. We have to get our noses dirty. There is no better time to start than tomorrow."

The Canadiens occupy the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference standings.

"It's a great opportunity for our group tomorrow to play well in an important game and great building and great matchup," said Rielly. "There's no reason why our group shouldn't be ready to go tomorrow night."

The Leafs are looking for their first win since Feb. 3.

"We haven't had that winning feeling in a long time," Knies said. "Going into such a crazy environment, it's really easy to get up for."

Berube split up Matthews and William Nylander at Monday's practice. Max Domi moved back to the right side of the top line beside Knies and Matthews while Nylander shifted down to the second line with John Tavares and Matias Maccelli.

"We are not producing enough," Berube explained. "We are not getting enough goals. We are getting looks and some chances, but they are not going in. I sort of went back to the lines from before the break, when we were scoring a little more at that point."

The Leafs scored 11 goals during a three-game winning streak right before the Olympic break.

With Domi moving back to the wing, Jacob Quillan is taking over as the centre on the third line. The recent call-up skated between Nick Robertson and Easton Cowan at practice.

"Robertson and Cowan had some really good chemistry for a stretch with Nic Roy there," Berube said. "They were pretty good together. I thought they were good [in practice] today, too."

Cowan's development will be a key storyline down the stretch.

"I plan on using Cowboy as much as I can, if it is warranted and he is going," Berube said. "I'll move him around."

Cowan, who is the team's only rookie, has a goal and an assist in the last three games while logging more than 15 minutes of ice time in each outing.



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"I love his energy and ability to transport a puck up the ice," Berube said of the 20-year-old. "He makes some good plays."

Berube pointed out that Cowan set up Knies for a great chance in the slot on Saturday night.

"He has a lot of confidence and a lot of energy and that's a good spark in this locker room," Knies said. "We're a little bit of an older team so to have that energy is awesome. He's been super professional on and off the ice. He's handled it really maturely. It's good to see."

"We'll just keep working with him on managing his game," Berube said. "There are times when he could make better decisions with the puck and be a little harder on things at times. For me, he has played pretty well."

Lines at Monday's practice:

Knies - Matthews - Domi

Maccelli - Tavares - Nylander

Cowan - Quillan - Robertson

Joshua - Lorentz - Jarnkrok

Rielly - Carlo

McCabe - Ekman-Larsson

Benoit - Stecher

Myers

Stolarz

Woll

Power play units at Monday's practice:

QB: Rielly

Flanks: Matthews, Nylander

Middle: Tavares

Down low: Knies

QB: Ekman-Larsson

Flanks: Domi, Maccelli

Middle: Robertson

Net front: Cowan

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TSN.CA / Pacific Division race has slowed to a crawl

Travis Yost

The National Hockey League loves to market the post-trade deadline action as a sprint to the postseason.

Watch a game between the Buffalo Sabres and Tampa Bay Lightning on Sunday night and you'll see exactly what the league is hoping for – spirited, up-tempo, passionate hockey between two teams jockeying for position in an uber-competitive division.

The only problem? Results across the league may vary. And in the Pacific Division, the sprint to the playoffs feels more like a crawl to the playoffs, where one contender after the other lines up to disappoint.

Because of the NHL's forced divisional playoff format, each division produces no less than three playoff teams per season, and that number can rise to as many as five – depending on how the two wild-card berths shake out. The top three teams in the Pacific Division for most of the year have been the Anaheim Ducks, Vegas Golden Knights, and Edmonton Oilers, with teams like the Seattle Kraken and San Jose Sharks trying to stay in the race for an outside shot at a wild-card spot.

Anaheim is a bit of an upstart team, whereas Vegas and Edmonton came into this season with bona fide Stanley Cup aspirations. But the reality is those two teams have been shockingly mediocre across the board. And beyond them, Seattle and San Jose offer even less.

One of the first things I like to look at when determining a team's potential viability as a contender is how they are performing against other playoff-calibre teams. And what stands out to me is how poor these teams have looked against the rest of the likely playoff field.

Every single one of the remaining Pacific Division contenders has a steep negative goal differential, a stark contrast to what you see in the Central:

Yost1 Yost

Those are ugly numbers, and they don't improve by much when looking at the full season results.

Only Vegas (+4) and Edmonton (+9) have favourable goal differentials in the Pacific on the year, a rather stunning collapse in performance for these organizations compared to where they were just two seasons ago. And yet, the remaining field is having just as hard of a time trying to dethrone them.

However, no fewer than three teams will qualify. How would you gauge the field? In these situations I like to explore the relative core strengths of each team as I stack them against one another. Let's go through all five hopefuls:

Anaheim Ducks (73 Points): Stars of the shootout!

Every point in the standings matters right now and Anaheim has forced their way to the top of the division because they have stolen many points through the shootout.

Their 8-0 record in the extra session (compared to, say, the 1-6 Golden Knights) has buoyed them in the standings, and while these results can be volatile, personnel matters here – goaltender Lukas Dostal has been outstanding all season, and their skilled forward group has little difficulty confusing opposing goalies.

The shootout may go away in the playoffs, but in the regular season it can be a meaningful differentiator, and it has been so far for the Ducks.

Vegas Golden Knights (72 Points): Special-teams monsters

For as tough of a watch as this team has been at 5-on-5, the Golden Knights have stayed afloat through special teams dominance, and it's on both sides of the ice.

Their power play is third in the league (10.5 goals per 60 minutes), thanks in large part to 29 goals combined on the man advantage from Pavel Dorofeyev and Tomas Hertl.

But this is also a team with the 10th-ranked penalty kill (6.7 goals against per 60 minutes) – a surprising achievement considering how much goaltenders Adin Hill and Carter Hart have struggled, and how much the team has had to rely on journeyman Akira Schmid as a result.

Edmonton Oilers (70 Points): The two-headed monster



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I know this Oilers roster has come under immense criticism. I understand the goaltending quagmire this organization continues to find itself in, replacing a struggling Stuart Skinner with another struggling goalie in Tristan Jarry.

But for as long as any team can ice the likes of Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, they are alive. Even in a relative down year, the duo has combined for 69 goals, trailing only the duo of Kirill Kaprizov and Matt Boldy in Minnesota (71).

Seattle Kraken (67 Points): The goaltender room

The Kraken have lived through some horrifying goaltending in years past; that hasn't been the case in 2025-26.

The combination of Philipp Grubauer (91.3 per cent stop rate; 22 goals saved above expected) and Joey Daccord (90.2 per cent stop rate; 17 goals saved above expected) have made the Kraken a relatively tough nut to crack on the defensive end of the ice. Across all situations, Seattle's conceding 2.8 goals per 60 minutes played, good for 10th in the league.

San Jose Sharks (66 Points): Macklin momentum?

Of the five teams, the Sharks have the hardest mountain to climb to reach the postseason, and this is still a relatively talent-thin team that's seeing itself through another year of their rebuild.

But you would be remiss to ignore the effect Macklin Celebrini is having on this organization, especially after his breakout during the 2026 Winter Olympics with Team Canada. He looks like the league's next big superstar, and he's playing like it too – his 10 goals since Jan. 1 mirror that of Vegas' Jack Eichel, while his 27 points match that of Islanders forward Mathew Barzal. His line continues to pose problems for the rest of the league.

Enjoy the stretch run. Or in the case of the Pacific Division, enjoy the rock fight!

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