



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 23, 2026

The Athletic

NHL weekend rankings: The Pacific Division stinks, and other emerging storylines

By: Sean McIndoe

It was an unusually busy weekend in the NHL, with 20 games. That gives us plenty to dig into, including some storylines that are getting hard to ignore.

Bonus Five: Storylines that stood out from a busy weekend

5. The Pacific is a mess — You may have seen this stat floating around about all six Pacific teams in action on Saturday losing by multiple goals, which on the surface doesn't tell us a ton about the division, but certainly fits with the overall narrative. You almost definitely heard Connor McDavid's sound bite about the playoff race being a "pillow fight." You may even have noticed that the division's "best" team, Anaheim, has fewer points on the year than the Red Wings, who are in danger of missing the Eastern playoffs entirely.

Yeah, it's bad. And it's going to draw even more ire toward the NHL's playoff format and Gary Bettman's insistence that nothing should ever change.

And while the whole division is in tough shape, one team stands out ...

4. I'm no longer sure the Golden Knights are good — They might still be good enough, at least by Pacific standards. And they were good enough to beat the Stars last night. But with three straight losses before that, during which they've managed to score just one goal, the Knights have been spiraling. And this isn't a case of a dominant team taking its foot off the gas over the course of a long season. The Knights have now won 32 out of 71 games. That's fewer than teams such as the Devils, Panthers and Predators.

Vegas is still in the running for the Pacific title, thanks to 14 loser points and the fact that, again, the division stinks. But this no longer looks like a team that we should assume will be able to flip a switch in April. On too many nights, they've looked flat-out bad.

3. We may have been too quick to write off the Flyers — Everyone expected them to struggle this year, and while they were a nice early story, they'd slipped out of the race for good by midseason. Or so it seemed, because they're back in play. After sweeping their California trip, they've now won nine of 12 and moved within five points of a playoff spot. They're still long shots, but they're in the fight. And they play the Red Wings three more times before the end of the season.

2. The Islanders needed that win last night — It had been shaping up as a disastrous week. They'd blown at least a point in a buzzer-beater loss to the Senators, then collapsed and been overpowered in Montreal. A loss to the red-hot Blue Jackets would have felt disastrous. Instead, they got an

Ilya Sorokin shutout and a 1-0 win that may have saved the season. Remember this one when Sorokin shows up on Hart ballots.

1. The Predators might actually do this — Somebody has to grab that last Western playoff spot, and none of the Pacific teams seem to want it. That leaves Nashville, which won twice over the weekend to run its streak to four. Not bad for a team that was selling at the deadline. Outgoing GM Barry Trotz raised some eyebrows with that approach, which saw him move out depth pieces for picks without touching his veteran core. Now it seems like he may have played it exactly right.

On to this week's rankings ...

Road to the Cup

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

He did it. Alex Ovechkin has scored 1,000 goals in the NHL, counting playoffs and regular season. He hit the mark yesterday against the Avalanche on a play that looked just slightly familiar.

5. Tampa Bay Lightning (43-21-5, +57*) — The Nikita Kucherov MVP campaign seems to be picking up steam, and rightly so. He has 13 points in his last four games, which feels like video game numbers. He's now passed McDavid for the scoring lead, putting him on pace to win his fourth Art Ross (and third straight). Is it possible for a guy to have more scoring titles than Sidney Crosby, Nathan MacKinnon, Auston Matthews and Leon Draisaitl combined and still be underrated? Actually, yeah, it might be.

4. Buffalo Sabres (44-20-7, +40) — The votes are in, and Sabres fans have spoken. And the bandwagon is ... open for business, by a pretty overwhelming majority in the range of 80 percent. That's what I'd figured, because Sabres fans are cool. But if you were looking forward to this particular field trip, consider your permission form signed.

Also, this guy gets it.

3. Carolina Hurricanes (45-19-6, +42) — Two wins over the Penguins pretty much wrap up the Metro, and leave them just one win back of the Avalanche for the most in the league.

2. Dallas Stars (43-16-11, +49) — Well, we had a few days where it looked like they might catch the Avs. That was fun, right? Regardless, they still got an "X" on the standings page Sunday, which brings us to ...

1. Colorado Avalanche (46-13-10, +85) — A sure sign of spring: We had our first "X" on the standings page earlier, as



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the Avs officially clinched a playoff spot. Breathe easy, Colorado fans, I know you were all on the edge of your seats about making it.

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

Not ranked: Minnesota Wild — This is the first time in a while that the Wild aren't in our top five, a spot they've held down consistently since making their debut on December 15. Not coincidentally, that happened to be the first weekend rankings after the Quinn Hughes blockbuster, a trade that singlehandedly transformed the Wild from a solid sleeper to an elite contender.

Or did it? Four months later and with the season winding down, are the Wild starting to fade?

Their recent record says so. Since going into the Olympic break on a five-game heater, the Wild are a pedestrian 6-5-2. That record includes regulation losses to also-rans such as the Rangers, Blues, Leafs and Hawks, which is tricky — it could be the sign of a team in trouble, or merely one that's already looking past the dregs and ahead to the playoffs. But either way, the slump has been enough to end any faint hope of the Wild moving into the top spot in the Central. They're now locked into a brutal first-round matchup against the Stars, one they'll almost certainly start on the road. And if they do manage to beat one of those teams, they'll almost certainly have to do it all over again in Round 2 against Colorado.

So, can you be a Cup favorite when you're going to be an underdog in each of the first two rounds?

One side of the coin says no, obviously not. The other says you could be, but only if you're a truly great team that would emerge from those first two rounds as the clear favorite the rest of the way. Do the Wild fit into that category?

We've spent most of the year assuming they did, which is why they've been in almost every top five since the Hughes trade. But we're getting down to the wire here, and the standings are starting to lock into place. Even a month ago, the Wild's playoff path was a problem we could kick down the road. Not anymore.

They did beat the Stars on Saturday, although it took overtime. That was an impressive statement, and it gives them a little bit of momentum heading into tomorrow's matchup with the Lightning. But barring a Dallas collapse, the Wild are going to finish third in the Central, even if they also finish third overall. And given that, I'm just not sure I see a way to keep them in the top five.

I'm open to arguments, though. Wild fans, if you want to make the case that your team still deserves its spot, have at it in the comments. And if so, be sure to let me know if you think that spot should come at the expense of another Central team, or if we should have room for all three.

The bottom five

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

All the best to Ryan Reaves, who was hurt in a fight on Saturday and looks likely to miss time. If this is it for the 39-year-old, you can't say he didn't make the absolute most of

his skill set over a 16-year career. We won't see many more like him.

5. St. Louis Blues (28-30-11, -41) — Great piece here on Jake Neighbours.

4. Calgary Flames (29-34-7, -40) — We're at the point of a tank lottery-focused stretch run where schedule matters. On that note, it's worth mentioning that the Flames have just one of their last 12 games against a team that isn't either holding down a playoff spot or in a tight race for one. That lone game is next Saturday against the Canucks; other than that, it's all teams that, in theory, should have plenty to play for.

3. Chicago Blackhawks (26-31-13, -40) — Hawks fans, are we all concerned about Connor Bedard's production since he returned from injury? He's scoring at around a 70-point pace, which is good for a young player on a bad team. But it's well off the 116-point pace he was on before he got hurt, one that had him firmly in the Team Canada conversation alongside Macklin Celebrini. Since then, Celebrini has only burned brighter, while Bedard has come back to the pack a little. He's not a bust, but are we back to wondering if he's going to be a franchise difference-maker?

2. New York Rangers (28-33-9, -28) — Rangers fans will find some good stuff on Igor Shesterkin in this Granger piece about the league's most consistent goalies.

1. Vancouver Canucks (21-40-8, -81) — This goes well beyond the Canucks, but I was fascinated by Drance's take on how the rising cap could change the way we view long-term contracts. In short, if cap space is no longer scarce, does that mean teams should move away from the "max length, low cap hit" approach that's become the leaguewide standard, and start paying up for better term? And if so, which teams will be the first to figure that out?

Not ranked: Utah Mammoth — Here's what we know about the Mammoth after 71 games.

First, they're making the playoffs. Second, they're going to be a wild card. And third, they're going to cross over to the Pacific Division.

That last one was at least a little bit in play until last night's win over the Kings, but we can probably set it in stone now.

Otherwise, all of that feels like it's been locked in for a while now, to the extent that you wonder if it's had any impact on how the team has been playing. It's rare for a playoff-bound team to have next-to-nothing to play for down the stretch — not seeding, not home ice, not much of anything. Just stay healthy, clean up some details and finish strong enough to bring a little bit of momentum with you.

The question is whether there's going to be more to the story once the playoffs arrive. In theory, the Mammoth will be heading over to a very winnable side of the Western bracket, while avoiding the Central mess. They could play the Ducks in Round 1, a young team that's talented but could have a playoff learning curve. Utah would too — the Coyotes' last playoff appearance was in 2020 — but I'd be willing to bet that the expert picks on a Ducks/Mammoth series would be close, and maybe even lean to Utah.

(Note that while it's very possible that the Mammoth could enter the playoffs with the best record among "Pacific"



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teams, they wouldn't have home ice. They'd be the division's fourth seed no matter what.)

If they faced and beat the Ducks, then up next would be whichever team emerged from an Oilers/Knights matchup. That team would be favored, but also potentially beat up after a tough round. There's a path here for the Mammoth, one that would lead them to become the first team in the NHL's crossover format era to win a division they're not even in.

If that happened, we can all agree on two things: They absolutely have to hang a "Pacific Champions" banner, and nobody would be picking them to beat the Avs, Stars or Wild. But then again, we've all been wrong before.

Given the new-car smell still lingering over a Utah team, it's easy to start getting excited about where this could all lead. Then again, this is a team that was 8-2-0 after 10 games and

only 29-26-6 since. Their underlying numbers are good, but not so much so that they feel like a hidden contender, such as the Blue Jackets or Senators. Instead, it feels like the Mammoth are good but not great, at least not yet.

Is "good" good enough? In the Pacific, it might be, although the most likely scenario still feels like the Oilers and/or Knights finally finding a gear. The Mammoth might be the trendy long-shot pick of the postseason. They might also be a predictable early out.

Just as long as we all agree about the banner. Get to work on that now, Utah, just in case.

Finally, the hockey community suffered a terrible tragedy over the weekend. Let's all send our support and good thoughts to the family and friends of Jessi Pierce, and to the many people she touched through her love of the game.

NHL playoff tiers: Where each team sits and what's at stake down the stretch

By: The Athletic NHL Staff

The trade deadline is behind us and there are only 26 days until the end of the 2025-26 NHL regular season.

With each team having 15 or fewer games left, attention has shifted to the final leg of the season. Whether a team is vying for a division title, in a tight playoff chase or looking to finish the season with momentum, the stretch run has a lot to offer for all 32 clubs.

This week, The Athletic asked its NHL staff to put teams into five playoff tiers — "not happening," "long shot," "bubble team," "looks like a good bet" and "it's a lock" — and highlight what's at stake for each team down the stretch.

Not happening

Chicago Blackhawks

Draft-lottery position

The Blackhawks are in the mix with a handful of other teams near the bottom of the league standings. They could certainly use another dynamic forward to add to their roster pool. But whether they land somewhere closer to a top-three or top-five pick will depend on how they finish the season. They have played better since the Olympic break, so we'll see where their record falls. — Scott Powers

New York Rangers

Development and lottery odds

The Rangers' players have no interest in maximizing lottery odds. They've been playing well coming out of the Olympic break. Gabe Perreault thriving with bigger minutes is encouraging, and Alexis Lafrenière was just named the NHL's first star of the week. That is all going to be worth monitoring down the stretch. Some fans, of course, will still be on reverse standings watch. — Peter Baugh

New Jersey Devils

Management futures

The Devils have had a disappointing season after a red-hot start and are now all but eliminated. The club's management will have big-picture decisions to make about the organization's future. Will general manager Tom Fitzgerald be back next year? How about coach Sheldon Keefe? And will anything about the team's play down the stretch change anyone's fate? — Peter Baugh

Florida Panthers

Will they keep their first-round pick?

Technically, there remains a very slim chance the Panthers make the postseason. And they've won a pile of games recently to leave the basement. But with a large gap between them and Columbus/Ottawa/Detroit, it feels far-fetched. What remains at stake is whether or not Florida keeps its pick, as its first-rounder from the Seth Jones trade is top-10 protected. They sit eighth last in the league, right near the line. Adding a good young prospect/asset would be a silver lining from a tough season. — James Mirtle

Vancouver Canucks

Absolutely nothing

The Canucks have probably sewn up a 32nd-place finish and the best odds of winning the No. 1 pick at the draft lottery. There is nothing performance-wise that any veterans or prospects can accomplish that will dramatically change their value or impact their trajectory. Nothing will change the evaluation of Canucks management, or Adam Foote's suitability to get a second year as Vancouver's head coach. The Canucks have pride to play for, and that's about it. — Thomas Drance

In a season full of disappointments, a strong finish for Easton Cowan would be nice for the Maple Leafs. Chris Tanouye / Getty Images

Toronto Maple Leafs

Almost nothing

For better or worse, it feels like the die is already cast for just about everyone with the Leafs. There's no redeeming going



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on, given what a disastrous season this has been in Toronto. What would be nice for the Leafs is a strong finish for Easton Cowan. He's been playing bigger minutes of late after falling out of Craig Berube's lineup entirely for a spell. This is still an important development time for the 20-year-old. — Jonas Siegel

Calgary Flames

Draft position

The Flames aren't making the playoffs. They've sold at the deadline and are firmly committed to rebuilding. The biggest question is where they'll slot at season's end ahead of the draft lottery. If they can secure a top-three pick, something they've never had in their franchise's history, that brings them so much closer to a game-changing player they've craved for so long. — Julian McKenzie

Long shot

Philadelphia Flyers

Good feelings

The third year of the new leadership regime is about to conclude, likely without a playoff berth. There's a chance that the Flyers' six-year drought will be the longest in the league when the season ends. Patience could start to wear thin with the fan base. But if the Flyers finish strong and some of their young players have an impact, that would help the organization going into next season. Perhaps top prospect Porter Martone even arrives for a few games after his college season is over. — Kevin Kurz

St. Louis Blues

Nothing

I chose "long shot" because, as we saw with a franchise-record 12-game winning streak that squeezed the Blues into the playoffs last season, you can never count them out. Either way, they're a team in transition, and no one is getting fired because Alexander Steen will take over for GM Doug Armstrong, and coach Jim Montgomery will stay put. They've committed to a youth movement, so core players could be traded this summer. It's doubtful anything down the stretch will change the plan. — Jeremy Rutherford

Winnipeg Jets

The best shot at elite talent since 2016

Winnipeg is not a top unrestricted free agent destination. It is frequently cited on no-trade clauses. The Jets must therefore acquire as much top-end talent as possible through the draft. I don't see a path to the playoffs — and, even if they pull off a miracle stretch run, I don't see a path through Colorado in Round 1 — so the biggest concern is whether or not the Jets' first-round pick gives them their next star player. — Murat Ates

The NHL's all-time leading goal scorer, Alex Ovechkin, hasn't said whether this season is his last. Greg Fiume / Getty Images

Washington Capitals

Alex Ovechkin's possible exit

Washington's final games are, at minimum, about getting a glimpse of the post-Ovechkin era (hello, Cole Hutson). When

that era begins, though, remains unclear. The NHL's all-time leading goal scorer hasn't said whether this season is his last, and the Capitals' playoff odds are pretty grim. They close the regular season on the road against Columbus, and their final home game is against Pittsburgh. Worth noting. — Sean Gentile

Bubble team

Boston Bruins

Nothing

Whatever happens, this season is a win for the Bruins considering how poorly things went in 2024-25. Marco Sturm has been very good as a first-year coach. Don Sweeney made sound pickups in free agency. Jeremy Swayman came back to life. The Bruins are trending up. — Fluto Shinzawa

Columbus Blue Jackets

Keeping the band together

Since Rick Bowness was hired on Jan. 12, the Blue Jackets are 17-2-4, working their way into the playoff chase. But Bowness hasn't committed to next season yet, making him arguably their most important pending free agent. The others are prominent names, too: forwards Charlie Coyle, Boone Jenner and Mason Marchment, and defenseman Erik Gudbranson. A playoff berth would set Columbus afire, ending a five-season drought. If those UFAs believe they can win here, resigning them will be that much easier. — Aaron Portzline

Detroit Red Wings

Public confidence in their direction

This has always been a playoffs-or-bust kind of season in Detroit, and while some recent key injuries have upped the degree of difficulty, they don't change the stakes. If the Red Wings miss the playoffs for a 10th straight season, it will be hard for fans to remain confident in their direction. Detroit is on a ticking clock to win while it still has Dylan Larkin in his prime, and getting back to the postseason this year feels like an important first step to doing so. — Max Bultman

Nashville Predators

The last chance to dance for a while

There's no certainty on where things go from here for the Preds, not with Barry Trotz's replacement at general manager yet to be hired, but it's easy to envision a rebuilding period of some length just ahead. After Trotz half-measured the trade deadline by dealing some key contributors but holding back on deals that could have brought back huge returns, the Preds are fighting to sneak into the playoffs. It could be their last for a while. — Joe Rexrode

Seattle Kraken

A Stanley Cup playoff berth

The Kraken have punched above their weight in Lane Lambert's first season, buoyed by stellar team defense and unsustainably good goaltending. They're a hard-working team, and despite a limited ceiling and a lack of true superstar contributors, that gives the Kraken a real opportunity to outlast the Kings, Sharks and Predators to



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earn the second playoff berth in franchise history. — Thomas Drance

Ottawa Senators

Their reputation as a team that's progressing

The Senators need to make the playoffs to continue their upward trajectory as a team. It's much easier to entice players, whether internally or externally through free agency and trade, to commit long-term to Ottawa if the team is performing well. And if they're not, it invites more questions (not necessarily from Ottawa) about whether or not current players want to stay. Making the playoffs removes much of that doubt. — Julian McKenzie

Will Anže Kopitar get one last chance to add to his playoff legacy?Elsa / Getty Images

Los Angeles Kings

Getting Anže Kopitar to his final postseason

If the Kings sneak into the playoffs, it would bring a small measure of salvage for an underwhelming season. They're still alive thanks to the Pacific Division being full of flawed teams, and that means their venerable captain and future Hall of Fame center can be sent into retirement by adding to his legacy. A run at a third Stanley Cup is the longest of shots, but the Kings legend deserves it. — Eric Stephens

San Jose Sharks

Boosting Macklin Celebrini's Hart Trophy argument

The Sharks weren't supposed to be in a playoff race and they somehow continue to hang around. Celebrini has carried them while also starring in his first Olympics, so having him in the playoff spotlight as a 19-year-old would cap a monstrous second season. He has more than twice as many points as the next closest San Jose teammate and should have his first 100-point season. San Jose finished last in 2024-25. That's a pretty good Hart argument. — Eric Stephens

Looks like a good bet

New York Islanders

Playoff standing

The Islanders have held firm in the Metro standings for some time, but the Blue Jackets' run has challenged that, with Columbus now ahead of the Islanders, knocking them out of the picture. The odds are in New York's favor down the stretch, especially with a rookie sensation and one of the best goalies in the world. But the race is tight in the East, so the standings are fluid; the Isles could finish second or third in the division, slip to the wild card or fall out altogether. — Shayna Goldman

Vegas Golden Knights

A fifth Pacific Division title in nine years

If the Golden Knights finish atop the Pacific Division once again, they will have more regular-season division titles than any team in the NHL since they entered the league in 2017-18. Vegas hasn't played up to its usual standard this season, but with the division having a down year, the Golden Knights are in a position to continue their reign of dominance over the Pacific, which would set up for a much easier path to the

Western Conference final, which they've reached four times. — Jesse Granger

Pittsburgh Penguins

Finishing a dream playoff push

The Penguins entered the season among the favorites to land Gavin McKenna. Instead, they are on pace to finish with more than 100 points. A playoff appearance would give Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Kris Letang another chance to shine in the postseason spotlight. This marks the 20th straight season they've played together for the Penguins, something no trio in the history of North American professional sports has achieved. To reach the playoffs together again would be quite a story. — Josh Yohe

Anaheim Ducks

Solving what's wrong with Mason McTavish

The Ducks have a shot at winning the Pacific Division, but no playoff spot is locked up, and they can't afford to nosedive at the end. They've played well in 2026 and added a top-pairing level defenseman in John Carlson. If the Ducks hope to win a playoff series, they must get McTavish going. He's had a down year and a difficult go of late while being moved off center and was healthy scratched this week. — Eric Stephens

Utah Mammoth

André Tourigny's job security

Utah has a nice cushion built for the first wild-card spot in the West. Making the postseason would be an important milestone for head coach Tourigny to prove that he's still the right voice for this promising young core. Anything short of a playoff appearance would be wildly disappointing for the franchise, considering how much talent they have and how middling the competition for a wild-card spot is. — Harman Dayal

Montreal Canadiens

The next step in the rebuild

The Canadiens were ahead of schedule when they made the playoffs last season and remain ahead of schedule now, sitting in a playoff spot a month out from the postseason. A late-season nosedive would not be a disaster, but it would be a missed opportunity to fast-track the development of their young core. With a realistic chance for home ice in the first round, it's an opportunity they need to grasp. — Arpon Basu

It's a lock

Buffalo Sabres

Ending a record drought

The Sabres look like a lock to make the playoffs. But with a league-record 14-year playoff drought, you can bet nobody in that building is going to feel like the job is done until the Sabres have officially clinched. Beyond that, though, the Sabres are battling for seeding down the stretch. They've looked like a serious contender the last few months, so home-ice advantage could be critical in the playoffs. — Matthew Fairburn

Carolina Hurricanes



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Preparing for the playoffs

The Hurricanes have little to play for in the season's final month. They have the biggest cushion of any division leader and currently sit atop the Eastern Conference. Carolina has two objectives heading into the playoffs: secure the best seed it can to maximize home-ice advantage and be healthy come the postseason. Beyond that, expect the team to give some of its young players a look with the big club while resting some veterans. — Cory Lavalette

Edmonton Oilers

Missing the playoffs is not an option

Despite the loss of Leon Draisaitl for the rest of the regular season, the Oilers still have to make the postseason. The organization has traded all the major draft picks and mortgaged the future. Partly due to deadline additions, the team is playing a more complete, 200-foot game since the deadline, and Connor McDavid remains the best player in hockey. The key question for fans surrounds Draisaitl's availability come playoff time. — Allan Mitchell

Tampa Bay Lightning

First in the Atlantic

There may only be four points separating the Lightning from first place and the second wild-card seed, but this team is still very much in contention for the No. 1 seed (even with some recent struggles). Tampa Bay has an elite core to lean on, even though Buffalo took over after a banger matchup in early March. It may come down to their next meeting in early April. — Shayna Goldman

Dallas Stars

A path to a championship

It looked like Colorado was going to run away with the top seed in the Western Conference, but Dallas' recent 14-0-1 run has the Stars nipping at the Avalanche's heels. In a must-win-it-all season, the difference between facing the Minnesota Wild — arguably the third-best team in the league — in the first round and whatever deeply mediocre team finishes in the second wild-card spot is massive. Home-ice advantage for the next round against what would be Colorado or Minnesota matters, too. — Mark Lazerus

Colorado Avalanche

Avoiding the toughest first-round matchup in the NHL

Regardless of seeding, the team that emerges from the Central Division will have gone through a gauntlet to do so. Having said that, Colorado desperately needs to maintain its ever-shrinking lead over Dallas at the top in order to avoid a Cup Final-caliber matchup with Minnesota in the opening round of the playoffs. Hosting the second wild-card team in the West while Dallas and Minnesota duke it out sounds like a much better recipe for a long playoff run. — Jesse Granger

Minnesota Wild

Priming to be a serious contender

The reward for the Wild's terrific season in the great wisdom of this playoff format will be the Stars or the Avalanche. The Wild, who will likely start on the road, hope to get past the first round for the first time in 11 years. But the Wild have a tendency to enter the playoffs with a string of losses and/or serious health issues. As Bill Guerin said after three recent home losses, he doesn't want the Wild to limp into the playoffs and he wants more urgency. But health is paramount. — Michael Russo

Hurricanes' Nikolaj Ehlers isn't filling a top-line role, but the team is better for it

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH, N.C. — When Nikolaj Ehlers signed with the Carolina Hurricanes last offseason after a decade in Winnipeg, there was a collective sigh of relief among his supporters. Finally, the speedy winger would get the chance to play the top-line role that had eluded him during his time with the Jets.

"I've never said I wanted to play on the first line," Ehlers said of the sentiment that he wanted to leave Winnipeg for a higher-profile role. "I've never said I wanted to play a certain amount of minutes and stuff like that.

"But you pay me to be an important, key guy on the team, and I want to be out there for the key situations."

Ehlers is certainly playing an important role on the Hurricanes right now — just not one many thought he would play.

For much of the season's first three months, the 30-year-old Dane spent time flanking Sebastian Aho on the top line or teamed up with second-year forwards Logan Stankoven and Jackson Blake. But starting Jan. 16, Ehlers has slotted in a different role — opposite Jordan Martinook on a line centered by Jordan Staal.

"I think it was just a matter of the schedule that we were going into," Ehlers said of coach Rod Brind'Amour putting arguably his most dynamic player with the team's two defensive stalwarts. "Stanky, Blaker and I had a pretty good record together. We created a ton of chances and didn't give up a bunch either, and we just played some really good hockey.

"But the schedule that we were running into, you had three smaller guys on the same line, and he kind of wanted to change it up a little bit."

The Hurricanes had blown a pair of multi-goal leads to the gritty Florida Panthers in December, and clearly Brind'Amour thought his team needed a new look against the two-time defending champions — a foe that emphatically denied Carolina trips to the Stanley Cup Final in 2023 and last season — in their final meeting of the regular season in mid-January.

The result was a 9-1 thumping by the Hurricanes that started the Panthers' 6-11-0 spiral that dropped them from playoff contention and also triggered Carolina's 12-game point streak that vaulted the team to the top of the Eastern Conference standings.



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Ehlers has stuck with the two Jordans since, bringing offense to a line with the primary objective of shutting down the opposition's top players each night.

"Being out there and playing against the other team's best is a lot of fun," Ehlers said. "So you want to try to give them as little as possible and try to score goals. And I think we've been able to do that."

After his three-assist effort in Carolina's 6-5 overtime win over the Penguins on Wednesday, Ehlers has six goals and 17 points in 19 games since his new assignment. Ten of those points have come at five-on-five, a total only topped by the 11 Taylor Hall has posted since taking Ehlers' place alongside Blake and Stankoven.

"Every night they're either scoring or doing their thing, and it certainly sets us up for being a more deep team when you can spread it around like that," Brind'Amour said of moving Ehlers — nicknamed "Fly" because of his speed — to Staal's wing. "So it's been a good fit."

It's also been an adjustment. While the Hurricanes have adapted from being a dump-and-chase team to becoming one of the league's more dangerous on the rush, Staal and Martinook still predominantly relied on using their forechecking to force turnovers and create chances.

"We're more of a 'chip it in, go get it' type line," Martinook said. "And I feel like with Fly, he carries it in a lot, and it just changes your reads a little bit when you enter the zone. And obviously there's an adjustment period with that."

Martinook said the best thing he can do is get out of Ehlers' way and "let him do his thing."

"He can make some incredible plays," Martinook said. "So it's trying to read off him, but then you want to try and get away from him a little bit too and give him (space)."

In the final three minutes of regulation Wednesday against Pittsburgh, Ehlers flashed that ability, dangling his way through the Penguins to enter the offensive zone and pick up an assist on K'Andre Miller's tying goal.

Playing with Staal and Martinook, however, also means taking on tough assignments. Ehlers has had 32 defensive-zone starts at five-on-five in the last 19 games, according to

NaturalStatTrick. In the first 50 games of the season, he had 47.

"I think that's an element that he's had to add to his game to really focus on it, right?" Brind'Amour said. "I don't know that was what he was prioritizing beforehand. But I know that it's a tougher match every night than maybe he's had in the past, and I think he's done a good job with it."

The move has allowed Brind'Amour to load up his top line with Andrei Svechnikov and Seth Jarvis on Aho's wing, while Hall has brought size and veteran guile to the second line with Stankoven and Blake.

Ehlers may still be adapting to the responsibilities associated with playing on a line with Staal and Martinook, but his explosiveness has given the line an offensive punch that it has rarely had.

"He can do what he does on any line, really," Staal said. "His solo abilities are quite impressive. Obviously, he can carry the mail and creates space for himself and others once he starts dragging guys to him. So he's a fun player to play with."

And Martinook thinks there's another level for the trio to reach once they get more comfortable playing with each other.

"It takes time to jell exactly how you want to jell," he said. "But obviously it's all of us kind of learning off each other. But whenever he can have the puck on his stick, it's something that we want."

Even if it's not the role everyone envisioned when he inked a six-year, \$51 million contract to come to Raleigh, Ehlers has added needed offense regardless of where he's been slotted.

"I think I'm comfortable in that position," Ehlers said of his current spot in the lineup. "This year has gotten better and better over time, but there's still a lot of things that I need to improve on as well."

For now, his current linemates are happy to be unexpected beneficiaries.

"I'll take it," Martinook said with a smile.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 23, 2026



Recap: Power-Play Prowess Propels Canes Past Pens

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

"You always want to start out the right way, and I think we really did that today..."

PITTSBURGH - Spearheaded by three power-play goals, the Carolina Hurricanes defeated the Pittsburgh Penguins for the third time in two weeks with a 5-1 victory at PPG Paints Arena on Sunday.

Scoring in the game's first minute for the sixth time this season, Carolina got an early boost from Sebastian Aho, whose seeing-eye shot on the man advantage provided a lead the Canes carried through the first intermission.

Going right back to 5-on-4 work in the middle frame, Nikolaj Ehlers wired a one-timer past Stuart Skinner to double the lead at 6:24. Jalen Chatfield then found twine with a shot through traffic just under three minutes later, potting the team's lone even-strength goal of the affair. Wrapping up a prolific second period, Seth Jarvis joined the fun with another man-advantage marker at 17:20, finishing a perfect feed from Ehlers.

Pittsburgh's Egor Chinakov eventually broke Frederik Andersen's shutout bid with a late goal, but Mark Jankowski ensured there would be no miracle with an empty-net tally in the final minutes. Andersen, meanwhile, finished with 18 sterling saves for his fifth consecutive victory between the pipes.

CAR at PIT | Recap

Stats & Standouts

Forward Sebastian Aho scored to become the first player in franchise history with eight career 25-goal seasons. He bested the previous mark set by Ron Francis (7).

Forward Seth Jarvis tallied his fourth three-point game of the season and pushed his point streak to three games (1G, 5A).

Forward Nikolaj Ehlers notched a goal and an assist for his second multi-point performance in his last two games against the Penguins.

Goaltender Frederik Andersen posted his fifth straight victory, marking his longest run of consecutive wins since a seven-game stretch in March/April of last season.

Carolina's power play scored three or more power-play goals for the second time this season, joining the 9-1 win over Florida on Jan. 16 (4 PPGs).

They Said It...

Frederik Andersen following the victory...

"I think our overall game, I liked a little bit better than the last few. We've been playing well against them, and it's a good team. Divisional games are always important, and you always want to try to do your best against teams you see a lot. We've seen them a lot lately, and it was a good effort today."

Nikolaj Ehlers on his team scoring in the opening minute for the sixth time this season...

"You always want to start out the right way, and I think we really did that today. I think if you can keep that going into the start of the second and the start of the third, you set yourself up for a good game, and I think we played great today."

Rod Brind'Amour talking about the power play's three-goal day...

"It's nothing that we hadn't been doing; we just got some shots that found their way to the back of the net. That happens. I think we've been due for that. As a power-play group, we've been getting one per night here or there, but you're going to have those (big) nights. We hadn't had one really all year, so it's nice to see."

Nikolaj Ehlers on a massive afternoon for the power play...

"Even the one we didn't score on there at the end, we had a ton of chances. Going in with that attacking mindset and getting pucks to the net, that will create some chaos and get them running around a little bit. That's where you sometimes score the goals. I think we've done a good job of just keeping the attack mindset."

Rod Brind'Amour discussing the importance of holding a high-powered team like Pittsburgh to just 19 shots...

"That's the key. Basically, until the end, they had 12 [shots]. In the last little bit, they pulled the goalie and all that, but I just thought, in general, that's a good number because you're not going to score three, four, or five a night, you've got to try and limit the other team. I thought we did a pretty good job."

Nikolaj Ehlers discussing what the team can take from today as they close out the trip in Montreal on Tuesday...

"The way that we kept playing the same way for all 60 minutes. We played fast, we got the pucks deep, we got shots to the net, kept them from bigger chances, and were just able to shut them down. And Freddie was great in net. We've got a lot that we can build on here."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 23, 2026

Need lunch plans for tomorrow? 😞

Celebrate today's #Canes road win with Alpaca Chicken! Redeem your Buy One, Get One FREE entrée in the Alpaca app tomorrow only. pic.twitter.com/OnyXM4UI8I

— Carolina Hurricanes (@Canes) March 22, 2026

What's Next?

The Canes will fly to Montreal post-game and are scheduled to practice on Monday. They'll get back in game action on Tuesday against the Canadiens.

Next Game: Tuesday, March 24 at Montreal | 7:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO

Next Home Game: Saturday, March 28 vs. New Jersey | 5:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO | Tickets | Parking

Recap: Trio Of Firsts Lifts Canes Past Leafs

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

"We had a nice couple of individual efforts that won us the game..."

TORONTO - Alexander Nikishin's first NHL overtime goal capped off a night of maiden markers for the Carolina Hurricanes, who defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-3 at Scotiabank Arena on Friday.

Finding themselves down by one at the first intermission after Toronto took the lead midway through the opening frame, the Canes responded with three goals in the second stanza.

First came Jordan Staal, whose power-play deflection leveled the score at 5:57. Six minutes later, it was Eric Robinson converting his first career penalty shot attempt that provided the Canes' first lead of the night. And when Toronto's John Tavares erased that advantage shortly afterward, K'Andre Miller responded with his first career shorthanded strike, burying a breakthrough to make it 3-2.

Carolina looked to lock things down in the third, but the Leafs' William Nylander had other plans and forced overtime with a goal at 13:50. Just 41 seconds into the extra frame, though, Nikishin's well-placed wrist shot found the back of the net and sealed two points for the Hurricanes, their second post-regulation win in as many contests.

In net for Carolina, Brandon Bussi returned to the win column for the first time in four starts with 23 saves on 26 shots.

CAR at TOR | Recap

Stats & Standouts

Defenseman Alexander Nikishin became the fourth rookie defenseman in franchise history to score in overtime, and the first to tally 10 goals in a season.

Defenseman K'Andre Miller scored his first career shorthanded goal and joined Mike Reilly (Oct. 30) as the second Hurricanes defenseman to tally one this season. Carolina is the only team in 2025-26 to have multiple blueliners with a shorthanded goal.

Forward Eric Robinson became the fourth Hurricanes player in the past 10 seasons to score a penalty-shot goal. The others: Stefan Noesen (Dec. 15, 2022), Jeff Skinner (March 13, 2017) and Elias Lindholm (Jan. 24, 2016).

Forward Sebastian Aho posted two points to become the franchise's third player to record five 70-point seasons, joining Ron Francis (11) and Eric Staal (7).

Forward Seth Jarvis also tallied two assists, his third multi-point effort in the last nine outings.

Friday marked the first time in franchise history that the Hurricanes/Whalers have scored a power-play, shorthanded and penalty-shot goal in the same period, and the third time they have done so in the same game (also: March 9, 2009 and Jan. 13, 2006).

They Said It...

Rod Brind'Amour looking back on the win...

"I thought we were okay tonight. Look at the bulk of the game, we had quite a bit of opportunities and just didn't cash in. I thought they got a couple that you'd like to have back. I like the fact that we just kept going, even though there were some of those ones where you say, 'Jeez, that shouldn't happen.' All in all, it's two points. [We] move on."

K'Andre Miller on the overtime hero, Alexander Nikishin...

"He can shoot the puck. I would not want to be a goalie trying to stop one of his shots. He can rip the puck. He's getting better each game, which is fun to watch. Obviously, he has a ton of skill. We believe in him to keep growing and keep doing his thing. A lot of good things from him."

Rod Brind'Amour on Alexander Nikishin's night...

"He had a couple of good looks early in the game. On the power play, he had a couple of bombs. [The overtime winner] was not even really a bomb; he just made a nice little play and got a screened shot through. Good for him and good for us."

K'Andre Miller walking through his goal...

"The defenseman just kind of fumbled it on the blue line. I thought I could use my speed to jump him and make him pressured a little bit. Thankfully, he coughed the puck up. I just tried to make a move on the goalie, and luckily it worked."

Rod Brind'Amour discussing K'Andre Miller's great outing...

"I like that you brought that up because we had a nice couple of individual efforts that won us the game, in essence. We got a penalty shot goal out of Robby, then K'Andre, I thought he was just phenomenal tonight. He was all over it. He's been a huge addition... We added him this summer, and that's been a big plus for us."

What's Next?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 23, 2026

The Canes will fly to Pittsburgh post-game and are scheduled to practice on Saturday. They'll get back in game action on Sunday afternoon against the Penguins.

Next Game: Sunday, March 22 at Pittsburgh | 3:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO

Next Home Game: Saturday, March 28 vs. New Jersey | 5:00 p.m. ET | FDSNSO | Tickets | Parking



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 23, 2026



Jarvis has 3 points, Hurricanes ease past Penguins for 3rd straight win

By: Wes Crosby

Ehlers gets goal, assist for Carolina; Pittsburgh point streaks ends at 4

PITTSBURGH -- Seth Jarvis had a goal and two assists, and the Carolina Hurricanes scored three power-play goals in a 5-1 win against the Pittsburgh Penguins at PPG Paints Arena on Sunday.

Nikolaj Ehlers had a goal and an assist for the Hurricanes (45-19-6), who have won three straight and five of seven, including three wins against the Penguins since March 10. Frederik Andersen made 18 saves.

CAR@PIT: Jarvis elevates Ehlers' pass into the twine for PPG

Carolina leads Pittsburgh by 10 points for first in the Metropolitan Division.

"I think divisional games are always important," Andersen said. "You have to be your best against teams you see a lot and, obviously, we've seen them a lot lately. It was good, a good effort today."

Egor Chinakhov scored the lone goal for the Penguins (35-19-16), who were 3-0-1 in their previous four games, including a 5-4 shootout win against the Winnipeg Jets on Saturday. Stuart Skinner made 21 saves.

Pittsburgh is one point ahead of the Columbus Blue Jackets for second in the Metropolitan.

"We weren't good today," Penguins coach Dan Muse said. "So, I don't want to paint a picture that I'm coming in here and placing blame on anyone other than us, including myself."

Sebastian Aho gave the Hurricanes a 1-0 lead with an early power-play goal just 47 seconds into the first period. His wrist shot from the point deflected off the stick of Pittsburgh forward Connor Dewar and bounced off the ice through the legs of Jordan Staal past Skinner's blocker for his 25th goal this season.

"Obviously, it helps when you start on time," Aho said. "We were able to score that one and then kind of took over the game from there."

CAR@PIT: Aho sends PPG into the twine early in the 1st

The Penguins didn't have a shot on goal until a wrist shot from Sidney Crosby at 11:55.

"For whatever reason, I don't think we had the best legs today," Pittsburgh forward Bryan Rust said. "And I think, as a result, we were playing the game a bit slowish, caused us to

turn the puck over a lot. Anytime you do that, especially against a team like that, it's going to be a recipe for an unhappy night."

Ehlers made it 2-0 at 6:24 of the second period while on the power play, burying a one-timer from the point over Skinner's left pad off a pass from Jarvis.

Jalen Chatfield scored his second of the season at 9:15 to push it to 3-0 when his wrist shot from the right point was tipped by Chinakhov in the slot, and the puck went in off the left post.

CAR@PIT: Chatfield finds the twine from the point

Jarvis increased the lead to 4-0 with a power-play goal at 17:20. Ehlers sent a pass from near the left post through the legs of Pittsburgh defenseman Parker Wotherspoon to Jarvis in the slot, where he lifted a quick snap shot to the glove side.

"It's nothing that we hadn't been doing," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We just got some shots that found their way to the back of the net. That happens. I think we've been due for that."

Chinakhov cut the deficit to 4-1 at 14:56 of the third period, taking a pass from Rust in stride into the offensive zone and snapping a shot past Andersen's glove from in tight.

Mark Jankowski secured the 5-1 final with an empty-net goal at 18:56.

"Obviously, our PK wasn't at its best," Skinner said. "They got a couple lucky bounces as well. But I think, overall, no excuses, obviously, in this League, but it was a tough game for us. These guys are going on a back-to-back against the best team in our division. That's hard."

"Carolina was rested. They had a game in between. So, a tough situation, but that's no excuse. We definitely have to be better than that."

NOTES: Aho became the first player in Hurricanes/Whalers history with eight 25-goal seasons, passing Ron Francis (seven). ... Carolina, which was 3-for-5 on the power play, scored at least three power-play goals for the second time this season. It converted four of five chances in a 9-1 win against the Florida Panthers on Jan. 16. ... Pittsburgh lost in regulation to a division opponent for the first time since a 6-1 defeat to the New York Rangers on Oct. 11. It is 11-2-9 against the Metropolitan this season. ... Penguins defenseman Ryan Shea didn't play and is day to day with an upper-body injury sustained in a 5-4 shootout win against the Winnipeg Jets on Saturday. ... Rust extended his point streak to seven games (five goals, six assists).



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 23, 2026

Hurricanes recover to get past Maple Leafs in OT

By: Dave McCarthy

Nikishin wins it at 41 seconds; Nylander ties game for Toronto in 3rd

TORONTO -- Alexander Nikishin scored 41 seconds into overtime, giving the Carolina Hurricanes a 4-3 win against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Scotiabank Arena on Friday.

Nikishin skated into the right face-off circle and scored with a snap shot, using Maple Leafs defenseman Jake McCabe as a screen for his 10th goal of the season.

"'Nikky' has been great," Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said. "As a rookie defenseman, it's not easy. Especially a rookie defenseman, a Russian who doesn't speak very good English, he's stepped in and played really well for us. He's learned a lot and learned quickly and obviously as you can tell, he's got a cannon of a shot and it can go in at any moment, and he's chipped in a lot of different ways this year. He's only going to get better."

CAR@TOR: Nikishin rings overtime winner in off the post

William Nylander had tied it 3-3 for the Maple Leafs at 13:50 of the third period. He carried the puck out of the corner, cut to the net and banked a shot off the back of Brandon Bussi's stick, causing the puck to trickle between the goalie's pads.

Eric Robinson scored on a penalty shot, and Staal and K'Andre Miller also scored for the Hurricanes (44-19-6), who have won three of their past four games. Sebastian Aho and Seth Jarvis each had two assists, and Bussi made 23 saves.

"I thought we were OK tonight," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "If you look at the bulk of the game, we had quite a few opportunities and just didn't cash in. I thought they got a couple ones you'd like to have back obviously, but I liked the fact we just kept going even though there were some of those ones where you say, 'Jeez maybe that shouldn't have happened.' But all in all, it's two points and you move on."

The Hurricanes lead the Pittsburgh Penguins by 10 points for first place in the Metropolitan Division.

Dakota Joshua and John Tavares scored, and Joseph Woll made 32 saves for the Maple Leafs (29-28-13), who are 2-7-4 in their past 13. Matias Maccelli had two assists.

"They're a quick team and they play hard I thought throughout the whole game," Woll said. "We were right there again. I thought it was awesome by us to come back and push it to overtime. Pretty solid game I thought."

Joshua put Toronto up 1-0 at 11:48 of the first period, scoring after Bussi kicked out a rebound from Bo Groulx's shot into the slot.

The Hurricanes tied it 1-1 on the power play at 5:57 of the second period, just as a double-minor penalty to Brandon Carlo for high-sticking was expiring. Jarvis one-timed a pass from Aho at the top of the right circle, and the shot was deflected by Staal at the top of the crease.

CAR@TOR: Staal deflects PPG into the back of the net

Robinson put Carolina up 2-1 at 12:35 on a penalty shot, shooting under Woll's glove from the left hash marks. Robinson was awarded the shot after Troy Stecher hooked him on a breakaway.

"He's played well but tonight in the end, I don't think, I know, we need a save," Berube said of Woll, who has started five of the past six games. "Whether it's in the OT or one of the breakaways, we need a big save there."

Tavares then tied it 2-2 at 13:47. He outmuscled Jacob Slavin behind the net and swung a wrap-around shot between Bussi's pads. It was his first even-strength goal in 19 games since Jan. 23.

"Just felt like I had a little bit of space," Tavares said. "I didn't try to separate a whole lot, just tried to stay into his body. You know how good his feet and stick is, so just tried to jam him a little bit if that makes any sense, and take the ice I had there towards the net and give it a chance."

Miller scored for the second straight game to put Carolina up 3-2 at 17:40. After poking the puck away from Morgan Rielly in the defensive zone, he skated the length of the ice and tucked a backhand deke past Woll on a short-handed breakaway.

"That was a pretty special goal," Staal said. "Going to start calling him Mr. Lanky -- he's got a long stick and he made a great poke check on that obviously. He can fly, too. He's been exceptional for us all year long, very steady and he's starting to put the puck in the net lately, too."

Brind'Amour said the plays by Robinson and Miller plays were the difference in the game.

"We had some individual efforts that won us the game in essence," Brind'Amour said. "Penalty-shot goal from Robinson, and K'Andre I thought was phenomenal tonight. All over it. He's been a huge addition."

NOTES: Nikishin and New York Islanders defenseman Matthew Schaefer (21 goals) are the first two rookie defensemen to reach double digits in goals in a season since 2014-15 (John Klingberg and Aaron Ekblad). ... The Hurricanes scored a power-play, short-handed and penalty-shot goal in the same game for the third time in franchise history, following March 9, 2009 and Jan. 13, 2006, but Friday was the first time they have done so in the same period.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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AP ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hurricanes score 3 times on the power play in a 5-1 win over the Penguins

By: Dan Scifo

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Seth Jarvis scored on a power play and assisted on two other man-advantage goals as the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 5-1 on Sunday.

Sebastian Aho and Nikolaj Ehlers also scored on power plays for the Hurricanes, who beat the league's best penalty kill team for three goals.

Aho, who scored his 25th goal of the season, became the first player in Hurricanes or Hartford Whalers history with eight 25-goal seasons.

Jalen Chatfield and Mark Jankowski also scored for the Hurricanes, who have won seven of their last 10 games. Carolina has points in 24 of its last 29 games. Frederik Andersen made 18 saves for his fifth straight win. He's 6-1 in his last seven starts.

Jarvis has a goal and six points in his last three games. Ehlers has six goals and 14 points in his last 11 games.

Egor Chinakhov scored his 16th goal for the Penguins, tying a career high. Bryan Rust assisted on the goal and has for a career-high seven-game point streak. Stuart Skinner stopped 21 shots for the Penguins, who have two regulation losses in

their last nine games. Pittsburgh has points in 21 of its last 26 games overall.

Pittsburgh and Carolina played for the third time in 13 days. Carolina won the other two games, a 5-4 shootout and 6-5 overtime victory.

The Hurricanes have power-play goals in their last three games. It's the second time Carolina scored at least three power-play goals in a game after going 4 for 5 in a home game against Florida on Jan. 16.

Aho scored on a power play 47 seconds into the game. His point shot hit Connor Dewar's stick, went between Jordan Staal's legs and past Skinner. Ehlers scored Carolina's second power-play goal at 6:24 of the second. Chatfield gave Carolina a 3-0 lead at 9:15 of the second when his point shot deflected off Chinakhov's stick and past Skinner.

Jarvis one-timed a pass from Ehlers at the top of the crease for his power-play goal at 17:20 of the second.

Up next

Hurricanes: At Montreal on Tuesday.

Penguins: Host Colorado on Tuesday.

Nikishin scores in OT to lift the East-leading Hurricanes past the Maple Leafs, 4-3

By: Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Alexander Nikishin scored 41 seconds into overtime to give the Eastern Conference-leading Carolina Hurricanes a 4-3 victory over the Toronto Maple Leafs on Friday night.

Nikishin fired a shot beyond goalie Joseph Woll's blocker.

Eric Robinson scored on a penalty shot for Carolina, K'Andre Miller and Jordan Staal also had goals, and Brandon Bussi made 23 saves. Seth Jarvis and Sebastian Aho each had two assists.

John Tavares, William Nylander and Dakota Joshua scored for Toronto. Woll stopped 32 shots, and Matias Maccelli had two assists.

Robinson scored on the penalty shot in the second period after being hooked on a breakaway by defenseman Troy Stecher. The Carolina winger beat Woll to the glove side.

Aho became the third player to hit at least 70 points in five seasons with the Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers franchise. Ron Francis (11) and Eric Staal (seven) top the list.

Toronto captain Auston Matthews had surgery on his left MCL in New York on Thursday. He was injured last week on a knee-on-knee hit from Anaheim defenseman Radko Gudas.

Up next

Hurricanes: At Pittsburgh on Sunday.

Maple Leafs: At Ottawa on Saturday night.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 23, 2026



NHL playoff watch: Projecting the Senators' wild-card chances

By: ESPN staff

After nine games on the schedule Sunday, and before the 15 on Tuesday, the NHL calendar is a little slim Monday.

The Ottawa Senators head to Manhattan to take on the New York Rangers (7:30 p.m. ET, NHL Network). Though mathematically still a possibility, the Rangers' legitimate chances at a playoff spot left town weeks ago. Can the Senators still earn a ticket to the postseason?

Ahead of Monday's faceoff, the Sens are four points back of the New York Islanders for the second Eastern Conference wild-card spot, five back of the Boston Bruins for the first wild card, and also five back of the Montreal Canadiens for the No. 3 seed in the Atlantic.

Beyond their game against the Rangers, the Sens have 12 games left, including seven against current playoff teams; their only matchup against the Isles, Bruins or Canadiens is April 11 on Long Island. How does that schedule compare to the teams they are chasing?

Montreal has 13 games left, including eight vs. current playoff teams.

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Boston has 12 games left, with eight against clubs in a current playoff position.

New York has 11 games left, and six are against teams in playoff position.

Out of these four teams, Stathead projects the Canadiens to finish with the most points (101.0), earning the No. 3 spot in the Atlantic, with the Bruins (98.4) and Senators (98.0) earning the wild cards over the Islanders (96.0).

If Ottawa does make it as a wild card, should the teams battling for the Eastern division leads be concerned? Here's how the Sens have done against them this season:

The Sens have lost both games to the Buffalo Sabres this season, with one game remaining (April 2).

Ottawa won its only game against the Tampa Bay Lightning (on Oct. 9), but the clubs meet twice down the stretch.

Similar to the Buffalo situation, the Carolina Hurricanes have won both games against Ottawa so far, with one game remaining (April 5).

Every team has 15 or fewer games left before the regular season concludes April 16, and we'll help you keep track of it all here every day on the NHL playoff watch. As we traverse the final stretch, we'll provide details on all the playoff races - along with the teams jockeying for position in the 2026 NHL draft lottery.

Note: Playoff chances are via Stathead.

Jump ahead:

Current playoff matchups

Today's schedule

Last night's scores

Expanded standings

Race for No. 1 pick

Current playoff matchups

Eastern Conference

A1 Buffalo Sabres vs. WC1 Boston Bruins

A2 Tampa Bay Lightning vs. A3 Montreal Canadiens

M1 Carolina Hurricanes vs. WC2 New York Islanders

M2 Pittsburgh Penguins vs. M3 Columbus Blue Jackets

Western Conference

C1 Colorado Avalanche vs. WC2 Nashville Predators

C2 Dallas Stars vs. C3 Minnesota Wild

P1 Anaheim Ducks vs. WC1 Utah Mammoth

P2 Vegas Golden Knights vs. P3 Edmonton Oilers

Today's game

Note: All times ET. All games not on TNT or NHL Network are available to stream on ESPN+ (local blackout restrictions apply).

Ottawa Senators at New York Rangers, 7:30 p.m. (NHLN)

Last night's scoreboard

Winnipeg Jets 3, New York Rangers 2 (SO)

Colorado Avalanche 3, Washington Capitals 2 (SO)

Carolina Hurricanes 5, Pittsburgh Penguins 1

Nashville Predators 3, Chicago Blackhawks 2 (OT)

New York Islanders 1, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

Vegas Golden Knights 3, Dallas Stars 2

Calgary Flames 4, Tampa Bay Lightning 3 (OT)

Anaheim Ducks 6, Buffalo Sabres 5 (OT)

Utah Mammoth 4, Los Angeles Kings 3 (OT)

Expanded standings

Atlantic Division

Buffalo Sabres



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Points: 95

Regulation wins: 37

Playoff position: A1

Games left: 11

Points pace: 109.7

Next game: vs. BOS (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Tampa Bay Lightning

Points: 91

Regulation wins: 34

Playoff position: A2

Games left: 13

Points pace: 108.2

Next game: vs. MIN (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Montreal Canadiens

Points: 86

Regulation wins: 26

Playoff position: A3

Games left: 13

Points pace: 102.2

Next game: vs. CAR (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 87.5%

Tragic number: N/A

Boston Bruins

Points: 86

Regulation wins: 29

Playoff position: WC1

Games left: 12

Points pace: 100.7

Next game: vs. TOR (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 69.5%

Tragic number: N/A

Detroit Red Wings

Points: 84

Regulation wins: 27

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 12

Points pace: 98.4

Next game: vs. OTT (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 39%

Tragic number: 23

Ottawa Senators

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 30

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 13

Points pace: 96.3

Next game: @ NYR (Monday)

Playoff chances: 68%

Tragic number: 22

Florida Panthers

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 27

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 13

Points pace: 84.4

Next game: vs. SEA (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 12

Toronto Maple Leafs

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 21

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 11

Points pace: 82.0

Next game: @ BOS (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: ~0%

Tragic number: 8

Metro Division

Carolina Hurricanes

Points: 96

Regulation wins: 32

Playoff position: M1

Games left: 12

Points pace: 112.5

Next game: @ MTL (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Pittsburgh Penguins



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Points: 86
Regulation wins: 29
Playoff position: M2
Games left: 12
Points pace: 100.7
Next game: vs. COL (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 87.3%
Tragic number: N/A
Columbus Blue Jackets
Points: 85
Regulation wins: 26
Playoff position: M3
Games left: 12
Points pace: 99.6
Next game: @ PHI (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 92.7%
Tragic number: N/A
New York Islanders
Points: 85
Regulation wins: 26
Playoff position: WC2
Games left: 11
Points pace: 98.2
Next game: vs. CHI (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 37.8%
Tragic number: N/A
Philadelphia Flyers
Points: 80
Regulation wins: 21
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 13
Points pace: 95.1
Next game: vs. CBJ (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 10.3%
Tragic number: 21
Washington Capitals
Points: 79
Regulation wins: 30
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 11
Points pace: 91.2

Next game: @ STL (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 7.8%
Tragic number: 16
New Jersey Devils
Points: 72
Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 13
Points pace: 85.6
Next game: @ DAL (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 0.1%
Tragic number: 13
New York Rangers
Points: 65
Regulation wins: 19
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 12
Points pace: 76.1
Next game: vs. OTT (Monday)
Playoff chances: ~0%
Tragic number: 4
Central Division
x - Colorado Avalanche
Points: 102
Regulation wins: 40
Playoff position: C1
Games left: 13
Points pace: 121.2
Next game: @ PIT (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Dallas Stars
Points: 97
Regulation wins: 33
Playoff position: C2
Games left: 12
Points pace: 113.6
Next game: vs. NJ (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
Minnesota Wild



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Points: 92
Regulation wins: 25
Playoff position: C3
Games left: 11
Points pace: 106.3
Next game: @ TB (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Utah Mammoth
Points: 80
Regulation wins: 28
Playoff position: WC1
Games left: 11
Points pace: 92.4
Next game: vs. EDM (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 99.2%
Tragic number: N/A
Nashville Predators
Points: 75
Regulation wins: 24
Playoff position: WC2
Games left: 12
Points pace: 87.9
Next game: vs. SJ (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 28.2%
Tragic number: N/A
Winnipeg Jets
Points: 70
Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 12
Points pace: 82.0
Next game: vs. VGK (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 2.2%
Tragic number: 19
St. Louis Blues
Points: 67
Regulation wins: 25
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 13
Points pace: 79.6

Next game: vs. WSH (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 6.6%
Tragic number: 18
Chicago Blackhawks
Points: 65
Regulation wins: 19
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 12
Points pace: 76.1
Next game: @ NYI (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 0.4%
Tragic number: 14
Pacific Division
Anaheim Ducks
Points: 82
Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: P1
Games left: 12
Points pace: 96.1
Next game: @ VAN (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Vegas Golden Knights
Points: 78
Regulation wins: 24
Playoff position: P2
Games left: 11
Points pace: 90.1
Next game: @ WPG (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 98.1%
Tragic number: N/A
Edmonton Oilers
Points: 77
Regulation wins: 26
Playoff position: P3
Games left: 11
Points pace: 88.9
Next game: @ UTA (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 83.3%
Tragic number: N/A
Los Angeles Kings



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Points: 73
Regulation wins: 18
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 12
Points pace: 85.5
Next game: @ CGY (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 44.9%
Tragic number: 22
Seattle Kraken
Points: 71
Regulation wins: 25
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 13
Points pace: 84.4
Next game: @ FLA (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 4.9%
Tragic number: 22
San Jose Sharks
Points: 70
Regulation wins: 20
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 14
Points pace: 84.4
Next game: @ NSH (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 32.1%
Tragic number: 23
Calgary Flames
Points: 65
Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 12
Points pace: 76.1
Next game: vs. LA (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 0.1%
Tragic number: 14
Vancouver Canucks
Points: 50
Regulation wins: 14
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 13
Points pace: 59.4

Next game: vs. ANA (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: ~0%

Tragic number: 1

Note: An "x" with a team's name means the club has clinched a playoff spot.

Race for the No. 1 pick

The NHL uses a draft lottery to determine the order of the first round, so the team that finishes in last place is not guaranteed the No. 1 selection. As of 2021, a team can move up a maximum of 10 spots if it wins the lottery, so only 11 teams are eligible for the draw for the No. 1 pick. Full details on the process can be found here. Atop draft boards for this summer is Gavin McKenna, a forward for Penn State.

1. Vancouver Canucks

Points: 50

Regulation wins: 14

2. New York Rangers

Points: 65

Regulation wins: 19

3. Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 65

Regulation wins: 19

4. Calgary Flames

Points: 65

Regulation wins: 23

5. St. Louis Blues

Points: 67

Regulation wins: 25

6. Winnipeg Jets

Points: 70

Regulation wins: 23

7. San Jose Sharks

Points: 70

Regulation wins: 20

8. Toronto Maple Leafs*

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 21

9. Seattle Kraken

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 25

10. Florida Panthers

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 27

11. New Jersey Devils



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Points: 72

Regulation wins: 23

12. Los Angeles Kings

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 18

13. Washington Capitals

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 30

14. Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 80

Regulation wins: 21

15. Ottawa Senators

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 30

16. Detroit Red Wings

Points: 84

Regulation wins: 27

*Note: The Maple Leafs' pick belongs to the Bruins, unless it lands in the top five.



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SPORTSNET™

Taylor Hall explains why playing in Canadian market has different pressure to U.S.

By: Sportsnet Staff

Taylor Hall knows exactly what it means to live and play under the microscope of a Canadian hockey market.

The Carolina Hurricanes forward has not played for a Canadian team since 2016, but he knows that playing in an American market doesn't have the same spotlight.

"It's definitely easier in a place like Raleigh," Hall said when asked about the contrast between Canadian and American markets. "The NHL is unique in the fact that there's seven teams in Canada, and all seven of those cities love their hockey, and as they should."

The former first-overall pick of the Edmonton Oilers broke into the league with the weight of a hockey-mad country watching his every move. Now, after stops in multiple markets, including quieter U.S. cities, Hall has a clear perspective on the differences.

A major difference in Hall's experience is that the passion and intensity extend far beyond what happens on the ice.

"The fans are still the same during the game. There's sellouts, and they go crazy for the hockey," he said. "But I think away from the game, on social media, in the media, it's just a little bit different in Canada."

Hall compared the experience to one of the most recognizable small-market giants in pro sports.

"If you look at a team like the Green Bay Packers in the NFL, that's what it's like to play for a Canadian team," he said.

For Hall, that balance between pride and pressure has defined much of his career—from being the face of a rebuilding Oilers franchise, to a more low-key environment playing for teams like the Hurricanes and Arizona Coyotes.

Hall acknowledged that while the passion of playing in a Canadian market is special, it can sometimes cross into something more challenging.

"There's been some really good Canadian teams over the years," he said. "I do think there's times where it gets a little bit too much, and maybe becomes a bit of a distraction—but it's all because I'm Canadian, and we all have a lot of passion for hockey."

For the Canadian NHL teams, the country's Stanley Cup drought since 1993 has been a sore subject and carries extra weight.

Hall isn't ready to connect the pressure of playing for a Canadian market as the reason behind the Cup drought, though.

"I don't know. I mean, you're... I think you're looking for clickbait, but it's been a long time, and that's undeniable," Hall explained. "I don't think it's the reason. I think there's a lot of things that go into that; luck and randomness are definitely a part, but at this point it's starting to get a bit weird."



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Power Play Primed - Hurricanes 5, Penguins 1

By: Bob Wage

The Carolina Hurricanes scored three power play goals and dominated the Pittsburgh Penguins, 5-1 on Sunday afternoon in the Steel City.

The Canes controlled the puck most of the game and were holding the Pens to a paltry 12 shots on goal until the Pens finally found some offense with five minutes and change to go.

In all, the Hurricanes had 26 shots on goal to 19 for the home team.

The Canes opened the scoring on a power play goal by Sebastian Aho just 47 seconds into the game. While Carolina had other opportunities in the period, they did not score again until Nikolaj Ehlers scored another power play tally six minutes and change into the second.

Ehlers had another excellent game as he contributed in many ways throughout.

Three minutes later, Jalen Chatfield made the score 3-0 when his shot from the point found its way into the net.

Ehlers found Seth Jarvis in front of the net in close during another power play and the score was 4-0 Carolina before the end of the second.

The Pens finally solved Fred Andersen later in the third period but Mark Jankowski zipped in an empty-netter to close out the scoring.

Andersen has now won his last five starts and allowed just the one goal on 19 shots.

Aho's goal was his 25th, making eight seasons that he has scored 25 goals or more. That is a new franchise record.

The Canes travel to Montreal for their next match against the Habs on Tuesday night.

Nikishin Calls Game - Hurricanes 4, Maple Leafs 3 - OT

By: Bob Wage

For the second game in a row, a defenseman won the game for the Carolina Hurricanes in overtime, this time by rookie Alexander Nikishin, who notched his 10th goal of the season just 41 seconds into the extra period.

The Canes started off their road trip with a tight, 4-3 overtime win over the Toronto Maple Leafs on Friday night.

Brandon Bussi was the happiest to congratulate Nikishin as he got back into the win column, bringing his record to 26-6-1 for the season.

The Leafs jumped out to a 1-0 lead in the first period but Jordan Staal tipped in a shot to tie the score during a powerplay early in the second.

Later in the second period, Eric Robinson was awarded a rare penalty shot and the fourth liner made no mistake.

His score gave the Hurricanes a short-lived, 2-1 lead because just a minute later, John Tavares muscled past

Jacob Slavin to the front of the net and he was able to slip the puck under Bussi to tie the score.

A couple of minutes after this the Canes took the lead again, this time on K'Andre Miller's first career shorthanded goal.

Miller made a nice steal near center ice and took the puck in alone then lit the lamp on a slick move which faked out goalie, Joseph Woll.

The Canes held the lead until 13:50 into the third period when William Nylander skated through two Carolina players to beat Bussi and make it 3-3.

The game eventually went to overtime where the Canes got the game-winner.

The Canes outshot the Leafs, 36-26. The Leafs also blocked 21 shots.

Next up, they travel to Pittsburgh where they will battle the Penguins once again, this time on Sunday afternoon.



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The Hockey News

'Divisional Games Are Always Important': Rod Brind'Amour, Sebastian Aho, Nikolaj Ehlers, Frederik Andersen

By: Ryan Henkel

Brind'Amour praises Ehlers' sharpness, Aho details power play execution, and Andersen's puck-handling proved crucial in a dominant win.

The Carolina Hurricanes finished out their season series with the Pittsburgh Penguins with a dominant 5-1 victory Sunday evening at PPG Paints Arena.

The Canes scored three power play goals en route to the win and Frederik Andersen made 18 stops in the win.

After the game, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour along with Sebastian Aho, Andersen and Nikolaj Ehlers spoke with the media in Pittsburgh. Here's what they had to say:

Rod Brind'Amour

On the importance of the strong start: It allows you to not do anything different. When you get behind, the natural tendency sometimes is to try to do a little too much. So I think just getting ahead, and to keep adding, was huge.

On the power play: It went in the net. It's nothing that we haven't been doing, we just got some shots that found a way into the back of the net. That happens. I think we've been due for that. As a power play group, we've been getting kind of one a night here and there, but now, all of a sudden, you're gonna have those nights and we haven't really had them all year. It was nice to see.

On limiting Pittsburgh's chances: That's the key. Basically to the end, they only had 12 [shots on goal] and then in the last little bit, they pulled the goalie and all that. But I thought in general, that was a good number. Because you're not gonna score three, four, five a night. You have to try and limit the other team and I thought we did a pretty good job.

On Nikolaj Ehlers: He was sharp right from the get go. Had a lot of jump and you can see that when he has that little extra pep to his step, he's making plays. He was obviously impactful.

On Seth Jarvis: He's obviously one of our top guys and he plays a lot of roles for us. Scoring is part of that. We need him on the scoresheet. When he can be adding that element every night, that just helps our group because he does so much other stuff that maybe doesn't show up on the scoresheet. But when he's on it, we generally do all right.

On Frederik Andersen: Tonight, he just did a nice job handling the puck on the forechecks. He did a real good job there and that really helps out so much when you can relieve the stress. Then when he had to make a few saves, he did. That's what you ask of from your goalie.

Sebastian Aho

On the strong start: It obviously helps when you start on time. Good play by Jordo's line. Fly had a chance to score

himself, but got us on the power play and we were able to score on that one and then kind of took over the game from there.

On the power play: We were working, executing the passes, executing the shots. That pretty much summarizes a good power play.

On limiting Pittsburgh's chances: I thought we were breaking the puck out pretty well. They didn't have too many o-zone shifts in our end. Freddie was playing well too. He played the puck with the stick well and that helped the D there a little bit. I thought we were solid.

On if there's adjustments with facing the same team three times in one month: Obviously you want to adjust, but at the end of the day, you want to execute your own game plan. Obviously there's details on everything whether it's special teams or 5v5 that you can execute better and kind of watch the video and all that, but I think it all comes down to executing your own game plan and making hard plays. I thought it was a simple road game for us. We played simple hockey and that got us the results.

Frederik Andersen

On the game: I think our overall game I liked a little better than the last few. We've been playing well against them. It's a good team. Divisional games are always important. Try to do your best against the teams you see a lot and obviously we've seen them a lot lately. It was a good effort tonight.

On special teams: Those are big moments in the game and so it's important to take advantage of them. Either offensively obviously or not really giving them anything on the PK. That's obviously the goal. You can gain momentum from it and come out ahead.

On the defense in front of him: There were some great blocked shots, a few in the second that were big and even leading up to big plays in their end. Just that stuff is huge at this time of year and moving forward.

On playing with the lead: It's huge. You come ready to play and draw a penalty right away on the first shift, that's huge and you want to try and take advantage of it.

On his puck handling: They're trying to make adjustments obviously and you have to be able to see what they're doing. I think they were trying to take the walls away a little bit more and obviously gave me a little bit more time to make a play. Again, just trying to help the D out as much as possible and the best case is that they don't get hit and they can get out of the zone clean.

Nikolaj Ehlers

On the strong start: You always want to start out the right way and I think we really did that today. I think if you can keep that going into the start of the second and the start of



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the third, you set yourself up for a good game and I think we played great today.

On the power play: Even the one we didn't score on at the end, we had a ton of chances. So I think going in with that attacking mindset and getting pucks to the net, that will create some chaos and get them running around a little bit and that's where you sometimes score the goals. I think we've done a good job with just keeping the attack mindset.

'We Had Some Individual Efforts That Won Us The Game': Rod Brind'Amour, K'Andre Miller On OT Win In Toronto

By: Ryan Henkel

Rod Brind'Amour and K'Andre Miller break down a thrilling overtime victory, praising key players and the team's relentless fight.

The Carolina Hurricanes defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-3 in overtime Friday night at Scotiabank Arena.

Alexander Nikishin scored the overtime winner, with Jordan Staal, Eric Robinson and K'Andre Miller all notching goals as well.

After the game, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour spoke with the media in Toronto. Here's what he had to say:

Rod Brind'Amour

On the game: I thought we were okay tonight. If you look at the bulk of the game, we had the bulk of opportunities and just didn't cash in. Then I thought they got a couple that you'd like to have back obviously. But I liked the fact that we kept going even if there were some of those ones that shouldn't have happened. All in all, it's two points. We move on.

On Alexander Nikishin's OT winner: He had a couple of good looks earlier in the game. On the power play, he had a couple of bombs and obviously that one was not even really a bomb, but that's what happens. Made a nice little play and got a screened shot through. Good for him, good for us.

On headshots: It's always been part of the game. Guys are getting bigger and faster and stronger. It's probably a tough thing to really police and manage because... we could talk all

On what the team can take from this game moving forward: The way that we kept playing the same way for all 60 minutes. We played fast, we got pucks deep, we got shots to the net, kept them from bigger chances and we were just able to shut it down and Freddie was great in net. We got a lot that we can build on here.

day about it, but I think when there's intent, that's when you have to kind of crack down. But I think there's always going to be that because we're a physical sport.

On K'Andre Miller: We had some individual efforts that won us the game, in essence. Get a penalty shot goal out of Robbie and then K'Andre, I thought he was just phenomenal tonight. Just all over it. He's been a huge addition. We added him this summer and that's been a big plus for us.

On Eric Robinson: You can tell when he's out there. There's a speed element, got behind the D on that one and broke away to get the penalty shot. He's just a hard working guy. He's been a valuable, valuable asset that we added last year. He's always finding a way to contribute.

K'Andre Miller

On the team's resiliency: Just fighting until the last whistle and just doing our best to give ourselves a chance to win every night.

On his shorthanded goal: Honestly, the D-man just kind of fumbled it at the blueline and so I thought I could use my speed to kind of jump him and make him pressured a little bit. Thankfully he coughed the puck up and I just tried to make a move on the goalie and luckily it worked.

On Alexander Nikishin: Man, he can shoot the puck. I would not want to be a goalie trying to stop one of his shots. he can rip the puck and he's getting better each game, which is fun to watch. Obviously he has a ton of skill and we believe in him to keep growing and keep doing his thing. Lots of good things from him.

LINKS

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SportScan

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

1384242 Websites

The Athletic / Jessi Pierce will be remembered for the heart, humor and zest she had for the Wild — and life

By Michael Russo and Joe Smith

March 22, 2026

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Jessi Pierce probably had no idea the impact she had on the State of Hockey, because her love of this sport and her job was so absolutely genuine.

It was not for show.

This was who she was — someone with the biggest heart and such a zest for life.

If the Hendrickson Foundation called and asked her to play sled hockey or be an honorary coach, she was there. If the Minnesota Frost called and asked her to emcee an event, she was there. If DinoMights had a fundraiser, she was there. If she was assigned to shadow the Minnesota Wild's Marcus Foligno for an NHL.com story, she was there. If the Da Beauty League needed a feature done or Minnesota Hockey Journal needed a story written, she was there.

And always with the brightest smile on her face and a twinkle in her eyes.

"This is our 10th year, and she was there to support us and promote us since Day 1 at our Hockey Festival," said Danny Hendrickson, the executive director of the Hendrickson Foundation. "She was a hockey luminary. She touched so many people in hockey and had a way of making people feel better, whether it was me or the athletes. She made a difference in the hockey community. Every time I saw her, she was smiling, and in turn, she made us all smile."

If you were a viewer and listener of the Bardown Beauties podcast she hosted with good friend Kirsten Krull, or on SKOR North, you know how fun and eloquent Jessi was — and that she wasn't afraid to offer her opinions on the Wild, the NHL or just about any subject.

This resonated because she was often the voice of the fan. Her personality was infectious, her confidence inspiring. So even if you didn't know her, you felt like you did. Even if you weren't friends with her, you felt like you were.

That's why when the tragic news was confirmed Sunday that Jessi, 37, and her three children, Hudson, 8, Cayden, 6, and Avery, 4, died in a house fire while her husband, Mike Hinrichs, was out of town on a work trip in the early morning hours Saturday, so many people across not only Minnesota but also North America were devastated.

Yes, the circumstances surrounding their deaths are unspeakable. But the fact that Jessi made such an imprint on hockey is why there is such immense sorrow in our community.

That's why scores and scores of tributes poured in, not just from fellow media members who loved her, but also from players, coaches, GMs and the league itself.

Jessi wasn't just known and respected by Wild players.

There's not an NHL player from Minnesota who she hasn't interviewed with a smile on her face, whether it's during the season or the offseason. And as NHL.com's local correspondent, she often had visiting team responsibilities. With very few outlets traveling, she'd be the first (and maybe only) writer Nathan MacKinnon or Victor Hedman or Jake Oettinger or Sebastian Aho would see and talk to in the room after a morning skate or postgame.

That's why so many media relations people around the NHL reached out to mourning Wild reporters on Sunday. They all got to know her deeply. Jessi didn't just lean against a wall with her mouth shut. She made her presence known and was so darn nice and warm and inquisitive and good at what she did.

Her social media was a must follow, and not just for "line heathens." She would post pictures of her kids all the time.

When she gave birth to her first son, Hudson, she had to balance work with motherhood. She used to bring Hudson, the cutest baby ever, to practice often.

One player in particular gravitated toward him: Mikael Granlund.

Jessi Pierce's son Hudson and Mikael Granlund shared a special bond. (Courtesy of Katlyn Gambill)

Whether he was on a hot streak or a slump, the second Jessi carried Hudson into the room, Granlund's eyes lit up. He'd sprint to Jessi just to hold him as Hudson looked at the Finnish hockey star with wide eyes and a smile.

Nobody else had this effect on Hudson. Certainly not us reporters.

The last picture posted on Jessi's Instagram story on Friday was a peaceful picture of Hudson and Avery reading. She lived for her kids, and the pride she had in them could be felt on the other end of that camera.

We love that one of the last things she did on Friday was take her kids for ice cream, wearing her beloved Iowa State sweatshirt.

We also love that her last interviews on Friday were asking players about their win song — making them laugh, as she smiled widely.

She was a grinder at work. Between waking up early with her kids and taking them for field trips after school, Jessi was always present, rushing to practice, churning out quotes, writing umpteen stories and returning for games.

She was always present, always making our days brighter at every practice and every game.



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Sportswriters on beats can be territorial. Cranky. But she was a unifier. And always inclusive.

Jessi was very at ease with players, able to talk to Ryan Hartman about ice fishing to quizzing Mats Zuccarello on his passion for trivia. She was also unapologetically herself. She could talk about Joel Eriksson Ek's injury with green lipstick on St. Patrick's Day, take a dozen selfies before and after games.

She was confident, not cocky, completely comfortable in her own skin. She could laugh at herself, but most often she made us laugh.

She didn't need others to accept her style of doing things. She welcomed everyone.

That's why the PR staff, the elevator operators, the ushers, everyone left it on Saturday. It was surreal to work during a hockey game while all were so saddened and with an empty seat in her usual spot.

President of hockey operations and general manager Bill Guerin visited with every writer one-on-one during the intermissions to make sure we were OK and knew he and the franchise would be there to support us.

John Hynes had the cameras turned off after his postgame press conference and, through tears, told us how much he respected and would miss Jessi, especially their conversations about Mahtomedi — the alma mater she was so proud of — and their White Bear Lake community.

Hynes, always the coach, gave us a pep talk — one we desperately needed.

Still, the press box will never be the same again. It'll be quieter and a lot less fun, but we vow to continue to show up and tell the stories of the Minnesota Wild in a way that would make Jessi proud.

It won't be as good, though, and certainly not with the same energy, vigor and passion.

Because Jessi was one of a kind.

If Jessi only knew how many players — active and former — reached out to us Sunday. How many teams. How many fans. How there were thousands of brokenhearted offering tributes to her on X. How there were articles about her in People Magazine and the New York Post. How so many were ready to contribute to a GoFundMe to raise money in her name.

"I think she'd be speechless at how big a legacy she left behind," said Wild emergency goaltender Connor Beaupre, who sat next to Jessi at every home game. "She was always so grateful that she got to work the jobs she did, even the tiniest one-off stories that sometimes didn't pay anything, but she put everything she had into them.

"She made such an incredible impact on so many people, whether she worked with them forever or just interacted with them once on Twitter. We lost such a good one."

The Athletic LOADED: 03.23.2026

1384243 Websites

The Athletic / Alex Ovechkin joins Wayne Gretzky as only players with 1,000 career NHL goals

By Eric Stephens

March 22, 2026

Alex Ovechkin took down Wayne Gretzky's hallowed record as the greatest goal scorer in NHL history, a mark based on play in the regular season. Now he sits beside The Great One for another seemingly unapproachable goal milestone.

With his goal in the third period Sunday against the Colorado Avalanche, Ovechkin totaled 1,000 across NHL regular-season and postseason play to join Gretzky as the only players to achieve that feat.

The 40-year-old Washington Capitals superstar scored with 5:43 left in regulation on the power play in the office he has made famous, blasting a one-time shot past Avalanche goalie Mackenzie Blackwood from the left circle just above the faceoff dot. It was his 331st power-play goal, another NHL record he set long ago.

Ovechkin broke Gretzky's previous regular-season record of 894 goals on April 6, 2025, against the New York Islanders. The winger's 26th goal of this season on Sunday gives him 923 to go with the 77 he has scored in 161 playoff games. Gretzky has 1,016 NHL goals between the regular season and playoffs.

The Avalanche won 3-2 in overtime on Brock Nelson's goal 1:22 into the extra period. Washington sits five points out of the Eastern Conference wild-card race with 11 games to go. Colorado boosted its lead in the Central Division to five points over the Dallas Stars, which host the Vegas Golden Knights on Sunday night.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.23.2026

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames aiming to build winning culture with late-season heater

Eric Francis

The wrong results, at the wrong time, say many.

The fans want entertaining, pedal to the metal efforts, they want lots of offence, and they cherish close losses.

Ryan Strome has heard the narrative ever since he arrived at the trade deadline, but when asked after Sunday's win over Tampa why it is important in the room to win with regularity, he came up with an answer every bit as impactful as his overtime winner.

"I've been through this before, and it's really, really hard to snap your fingers and just become a winning hockey team," said the veteran of over 900 games.

"So I think if you throw these games away, you don't compete, you don't play hard, those habits leak into next year. Then all of a sudden you have a group that's like, 'okay, we've got to start winning,' and you don't have the characteristics. You don't have those qualities and the leadership and all those things that it takes."

He wasn't finished.

"Hypothetically it'd be great to have the first-overall pick, and you can guarantee this and that, but it's a team game, and there's a lot of guys in here playing for jobs and playing for their life, and that's important," he said.



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"The team is trying to build a culture and a confidence moving forward, and having been a part of this before, I know that it's a huge piece of it. So I think the traits that we're showing now are great things that will bleed into next season."

The goal, as he crystallized, is to keep the culture strong.

As undermanned as it is, this team will most certainly lose more games than it'll win down the stretch run of a season in which the Flames are destined to finish in the bottom five.

Although unable to bottom out enough to fall below the shipwreck long steered into the rocks by a dysfunctional room in Vancouver, they'll have anywhere between 8.5 per cent and 13.5 per cent chance to win the draft lottery (Vancouver gets a 25 per cent chance).

After catching both the Rangers and Blackhawks with Sunday's win to sit in a three-way tie for second last (in which the Flames hold the tiebreaker), they'd enter the May 5 lottery with a 9.5 per cent chance to land Gavin McKenna, or whoever is chosen No. 1.

And while many fans cringe with every victory, the leadership of Mikel Backlund, Blake Coleman, Zach Whitecloud, and now Strome, continues to do a good job preserving and growing a culture in which hard work is non-negotiable.

Just listen to the game's best coach for further proof the Flames are moving in a healthy direction.

"Listen, Ryan (Huska) does a heck of a job here," said Jon Cooper, whose Lightning had just been stunned 4-3 by the Flames.

"I like the way they play, their structure. There's guys who played on other teams who weren't fits, like Strome. He is a hell of a player. He was just on a hell of a team in Anaheim.

"The Flames lost some big pieces here, but you get the hunger of some of these young guys that come in and want to make impressions this year, but also next. They've got a whole boatload of 'em out there. Good on them, they're a tough team to play against, and I like what they're doing."

There's plenty for an undermanned mishmash of young and old to be proud of right now.

The backbone of the team's win Sunday was Devin Cooley, whose 32-save performance was the difference in a game the Flames led 3-1 midway through.

After being scored on early, the Flames' first goal came from trade deadline throw-in, Victor Olofsson, followed by a sublime finish from Morgan Frost who seems hell bent on proving over the last dozen games he's capable of being the team's first-line centre moving forward.

Backlund's slapper beat Jonas Johansson high, short-side, before a Darren Raddysh point blast beat Cooley to make things interesting.

The Flames appeared to go up 4-2 later in the period when a nifty backhand feed from Backlund to Coleman got the crowd on their feet, only to have the goal overturned via offside on a coach's challenge.

It marked the fourth time in their last three games they've been so victimized.

Yet, despite that, and a late tying goal by Pontus Holmberg, the Flames managed to win in overtime, thanks to a brilliant play and centring pass by 19-year-old Matvei Gridin to Strome, who buried it.

A perfect illustration of how young and old are collaborating already.

"For a young guy to have that poise, to hold on to it in overtime and make a nice little slip play is impressive," said Strome, 32.

"He's got a lot of great tools. And you know, a lot of these young guys, you give them a little more open ice in three-on-three, they can make

good plays. Backs won the (opening) face off, did his job (was replaced by Gridin), and Grids just put it on a platter for me.

"With these young guys, I think winning is important. To have some confidence and to keep pushing forward here to the end of the year."

The evening started with a focus on 23-year-old college signing Tyson Gross making his NHL debut in front of a Saddledome crowd he spent his youth sitting in.

It ended with a 19-year-old making the play of the night, capping a collaborative effort the whole team could feel good about.

Those in attendance got their money's worth, and the bold new direction the Flames have embarked on includes a healthy approach in which wins are coveted. They should be, as there won't be too many of them for the next little while.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.23.2026

1384245 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Sunday Overreactions: Are Blue Jackets legit Cup contenders?

Michael Amato

There are new coach bumps — and then there's what the Columbus Blue Jackets got when they hired Rick Bowness.

Bowness has transformed the perception of the entire Blue Jackets organization in a matter of months. Once viewed as plucky underdogs with a hard-working mentality, Columbus is now a team feared by others when it shows up on the schedule.

It appeared the Blue Jackets were destined for a sixth straight spring out of the playoffs before Bowness took over. Columbus was tied for dead last in the East on Jan. 12 with a minus-18 goal differential, good enough for second worst in the conference.

Now? The Blue Jackets have climbed all the way back into a playoff position at third in the Metro and their goal differential has skyrocketed to plus-14.

There's growing belief in Columbus and around the league that the Blue Jackets don't just have a chance to get back into the post-season, but that they could be championship contenders in a wide-open Eastern Conference as well.

It truly is astounding how different this team looks under Bowness. Since he took over, the Blue Jackets have only lost twice in regulation, going 18-2-4. Columbus also sits near the top of the league in a number of categories.

In 24 games with Bowness behind the bench, the Blue Jackets rank second in the NHL in points, first in points percentage, second in regulation wins, third in goals, third in goals-against and tied for first in shutouts.

Granted, it's a small sample size, but it's coming at the perfect time, and the Blue Jackets could ride this momentum right through the spring if they get into the post-season.

They have a balanced lineup and if they continue to get good goaltending, the sky's the limit for Columbus in the playoffs without the



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juggernaut Florida Panthers and with a not-so-daunting path through the Metro division.

Overreaction? No

A team going on this type of torrid run isn't unprecedented. It wasn't that long ago in 2019 when the St. Louis Blues sat last in the NHL as the calendar turned to January before going on an improbable Stanley cup run. Much like the Blue Jackets, the Blues also took advantage of a new coach bump when they hired Craig Berube in the middle of that season.

That St. Louis team was transformed by the emergence of Jordan Binnington, who was nearly unbeatable between the pipes down the stretch and in the playoffs.

Columbus has its own under-the-radar goaltender this season with Jet Greaves making a name for himself in his first full NHL campaign. The undrafted Greaves has won nine of his past 11 starts, owns a .909 save percentage and his 15.2 goals saved above expected is good enough for eighth best in the NHL.

There's still a long way to go but the Blue Jackets have a lot of the necessary ingredients to go on a long playoff run. Good goaltending and a team that's gelling at the right time has long made up a recipe for success in the post-season.

The Blue Jackets should be asking themselves, "Why not us?"

Oilers in danger of missing the playoffs without Leon Draisaitl

After making back-to-back Stanley Cup Finals very little has gone right for the Edmonton Oilers this season.

The Tristan Jarry trade has been borderline disastrous, Edmonton hasn't been able to firmly lock down a playoff spot and now Leon Draisaitl is likely out for the rest of the regular season with an injury.

Draisaitl is a hugely important player to the Oilers, as their top-heavy forward group relies on him and Connor McDavid to carry the load. With the Pacific Division being so tight and Edmonton struggling with consistency issues, are the Oilers now in danger of missing the playoffs?

Overreaction? Yes

Edmonton picked up a massive win over the San Jose Sharks this week, creating a seven-point margin between the two teams when it could've been down to three. The Oilers are also still up six points on the Seattle Kraken and five ahead of the Kings, so they do have some room for error.

Plus, the Oilers appear to finally be finding at least some stability between the pipes. After relegating Jarry to backup duties, Connor Ingram has won five of his eight appearances since his promotion. The 28-year-old doesn't have to be elite every night — he just can't sink the Oilers by giving up bad goals.

Edmonton also has a few very friendly games on the schedule the rest of the way like matchups with Chicago and Vancouver. As long as it can win those and play around .500 hockey in the other matchups, it should have enough cushion to get over the finish line.

The rumblings that the Toronto Maple Leafs were listening on Matthew Knies around the trade deadline sent shockwaves through the fanbase, and you can understand why.

Knies is a 23-year-old unicorn that has a unique blend of size, skill and physicality that's rare around the league. So, why would the Leafs want to trade him? Well, Toronto has several needs to fill and moving Knies could be a way to solve more than one of them if it can get a decent haul in return.

It will be a critical off-season for the Leafs if they're hoping to turn things around quickly in order to convince franchise star Auston Matthews to

sign a long-term extension in 2027. That could mean making a bold move like trading Knies.

Overreaction? No

Let's start by saying this: the Maple Leafs absolutely don't have to trade Knies.

He's a talented player that's still young enough to be an important piece of a rebuild if the Leafs eventually go that route. This isn't a Scott Laughton or Bobby McMann situation where Brad Treliving has to offload them and is searching for the best return minutes before the deadline. You'd be very happy to start the 2026-27 season with Knies, who is signed long-term at a team-friendly number.

With that said, Knies is one of the few players the Leafs could move that would bring back multiple pieces, and if Toronto wants to re-tool on the fly quickly, the only way to really do that is with a seismic trade.

They need a top-pairing defenceman, a second-line centre, more draft capital and prospects, among other things. There's really no path for the Leafs to get any of those pieces this summer if they just nibble around the edges.

Toronto could move one of its goalies, but the return there doesn't figure to be a needle mover.

It could set the price high for Knies with a return of a top-pair blue-liner and a young centre, and stick to it. If someone bites, great; if not, you can simply keep a player around you're very happy with and that should be part of the solution.

Bobby McMann has been the most impactful deadline acquisition

Bobby McMann's debut for the Seattle Kraken was delayed due to visa issues, but it was worth the wait.

In his first five games with the Kraken, McMann's tallied four goals and six points while playing significant minutes on Seattle's top line.

McMann had developed into a streaky scorer with the Toronto Maple Leafs, but he's injected new life into this Kraken team and appears to have instantly made them more dynamic. His speed brings a new element to Seattle, which is currently in a battle for the final playoff spot in the Western Conference.

If McMann can help them get there, the second- and fourth-round picks the Kraken gave up are going to look like nothing in return. There's an argument to be made that McMann is the most impactful deadline acquisition we've seen thus far.

Overreaction? No

There were definitely bigger names than McMann that moved around the deadline, but most went to teams already in a great position in the standings.

Players like Nazem Kadri, MacKenzie Weegar and Brayden Schenn figure to be key additions to their respective squads but they were supposed to be cherries on top of strong teams. McMann, on the other hand, could end up being the difference between making the playoffs or not for the Kraken if he continues to play this way.

Seattle doesn't have a singular elite talent and must score by committee, particularly because it doesn't even have a single 50-point player on its roster. McMann's 23 goals now leads the team, and on a squad starved for offence, he might be the talent that pushes it over the top and into its second-ever post-season berth.

The 2025-26 season hasn't been kind to Mason McTavish.

Things started off slow when McTavish didn't put pen to paper on a contract extension until late September, delaying his start to training camp and putting him a step behind to start the campaign.



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It really feels like McTavish has been trying to catch up ever since as he's only scored 13 times and is on pace for a career worst in points.

Things then hit rock bottom recently when Anaheim Ducks head coach Joel Quenneville made him a healthy scratch for two straight games.

There will no doubt be teams calling the Ducks this summer to see if the former third-overall pick is available.

Overreaction? Yes

You simply don't trade a 23-year-old centre with as much promise as McTavish unless you absolutely have to.

Unlike Toronto's situation, the Ducks are a team on the rise and shouldn't feel any pressure to shake up the roster with a major trade.

McTavish flashed last season with 22 goals and more than 50 points, so the talent is clearly there and he's still only scratching the surface of what he's capable of. Not to mention, he's signed at only \$7 million per season until 2031 in a rising cap world.

Even as a second-line centre that deal is going to look incredible given with how high the cap is going to jump. It would be unwise of the Ducks to make a hasty decision this summer and, instead, bring McTavish back with a full training camp to try and get him back on track.

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1384246 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' win over Islanders reinforces way to play in race to playoffs

Eric Engels

He charged into the offensive zone trailing linemates Ivan Demidov and Oliver Kapanen. He got checked in the slot right as a great pass from Kapanen was arriving. But he still wriggled loose to some dead space near the corner of the offensive zone to free himself up for the shot that found the back of the net and resolved a great deal of frustration for both him and his team.

How the Canadiens dealt with that frustration to beat the New York Islanders 7-3 on Saturday, to close out the week with a 2-1-0 record against teams doggedly pursuing them in the suffocating playoff race that's gripped the Eastern Conference, taught them a lot about who they are and how they need to play to win at this time of year.

It took a deep conversation after loose-playing losses to the San Jose Sharks and Anaheim Ducks last weekend.

"We knew we needed to change something," said Kaiden Guhle. "We were giving up too many goals. Sure, we were scoring, but in this league, it's tough to win games 5-4, 6-5, especially at this time of year. Had a discussion, the guys knew what we needed to do and how we needed to play, and everyone's stepping up and doing it. I love the way we're playing right now, going into the final stretch. It's fun."

It's the only way, and it's about time this young team embraced it.

They've diverged plenty throughout this season, and they've largely gotten away with it. Young, brash, and full of talent, they permitted themselves to play loose and free because they still managed to win when the games seemed less relevant. They could outscore their problems, so they delayed facing them.

But allowing 32 goals in the first nine games off the Olympic break provided a mirror they couldn't turn away from.

Corrections were made in a 3-2 win over the Boston Bruins earlier this week, and they led the Canadiens to an excellent performance in Detroit on Thursday against a Red Wings team that capitalized on a late bounce to beat them 3-1.

How did the Canadiens respond to that?

They put the pedal down in the first period of Saturday's game against New York, spending 9:37 in the offensive zone, notching 17 shots and nine high-danger attempts, holding the Islanders to just six shots and 1:39 of offensive possession time, and they found themselves trailing 2-1.

"The only thing I hated about the first period was the score," said Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis, who was just as happy about his team not allowing itself to be deflated by it.

Newhook, who failed to block a shot on the goal that allowed the Red Wings back into Thursday's game, lifted himself, his linemates and his team up at a time they needed it most.

And then Nick Suzuki and Juraj Slafkovsky connected with Cole Caufield to give him the first of three goals that got him to 43 on his season.

Before Caufield scored those other two, the Islanders tied the game 3-3 on Matthew Schaefer's power-play marker 45 seconds into the third period.

But the Canadiens refused to allow that to take them out of their game.

"I just felt a hungry group that wanted to get what they wanted," said St. Louis. "They went after it, and they got it."

They got it with good defence leading to a lot of offence, with what Newhook referred to as "a blueprint" the Canadiens must continue to adhere to through the final 13 games of their season.

Slafkovsky finished the night with two goals and two assists to get to 27 goals and 34 assists and bust him through the 60-point barrier for the first time in his career. Suzuki had four assists to get him to 61, which is two more than he's notched in any other season over his impressive career. And after becoming the first Canadiens player to get to 40 goals in a season since Vincent Damphousse did it in 1994, Caufield got himself to within seven goals of becoming the first Canadiens player to get at least 50 since Stephane Richer scored 51 in 1990.

None of them cheated the game to hit these milestones, leading the Canadiens through a performance that exemplified some newfound maturity exhibited throughout the week.

"This version of ourselves, we've seen it throughout the season," said St. Louis. "We lose it sometimes, like every team does, and you have to be able to repair and focus on the right things. I think that's the kind of version we need to go down the stretch. Obviously, again for us, the playoffs have started based on the standings and how everybody else is playing around us, too, and I feel that's the kind of hockey you need to play at this time of year and if you go into a playoff run. It's good to see."

"Our group is finding its best version. But you can't have a group finding its best version without the individuals finding their best version, and a lot of guys are starting to find their best version."

Guhle is one of them.

After long-term absences this season that prevented him from building up his game, he played to his identity in the win against the Bruins and played his best against the Islanders after another strong performance in Detroit.



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Guhle started this game with a huge hit on Anthony Duclair, and he finished it with assists on Newhook's goal and one of Caufield's goals to bookmark the game-winner he scored.

Jacob Fowler made only 19 saves behind him, but came up with his best ones shortly after the Canadiens went up 4-3 on Guhle's one-timer from the point with 16:43 to play.

Again, things were tight then.

They were tight at 2-1 when Newhook scored. They were tight again after the 18-year-old Schaefer scored his 22nd goal of the season.

But the Canadiens never loosened.

"We've tried to get away from that plan (this season), and it didn't work out for us," said Guhle. "We're starting to mature a little bit."

It's the path the Canadiens must stay on to make the playoffs, and they know it.

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1384247 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Senators flip script on Maple Leafs as rivalry power shift takes hold

Alex Adams

For nearly a decade, the Ottawa Senators were the Toronto Maple Leafs' whipping boys. No more.

It has flipped.

The gulf between the two franchises hasn't been this wide in Ottawa's favour in years. The Senators dominated Toronto on the ice, in the stands and even in the podcast world, earning a 5-2 win Saturday in Ottawa.

"It's always fun to beat those guys," said Senators defenceman Tyler Kleven. "We still have a bad taste in our mouth from the playoffs, and you know what they did to us there. So to push them down the standings ... it's a great feeling."

Toronto's past supremacy — and the shared goaltending woes between the teams — loomed in the background. On a night when an emergency backup goalie (EBUG) was required after Anthony Stolarz was injured by a puck to the neck in warmups and taken to the hospital, the unusual circumstances only added to the storyline.

The memory of David Ayres lingered in the air.

It's difficult to watch these teams play and not wonder if this is what next season could look like. Senators fans outnumbered Leafs supporters, filling the building with chants of "Leafs suck" and the pointed "you need Marnier."

One fan even wore a "LeafsSuck" No. 67 Senators jersey.

"Definitely way more Ottawa fans than Toronto fans," said Tim Stützle, referencing how Leafs fans have often taken over the arena in the past.

Schadenfreude reigned.

Even the Senators' social media account joined in, making a post-victory joke about Drake and his so-called curse.

Senators fans should savour this stretch of supremacy over their biggest rivals — it has been a long decade.

But the tension extended beyond the stands, driven in part by Ottawa captain Brady Tkachuk. On his Wingmen podcast, Tkachuk criticized Toronto for not defending captain Auston Matthews after Radko Gudas delivered an illegal knee.

The comments did not go unnoticed.

"No," said Morgan Rielly, when asked if it bothered him.

Why not?

"People are allowed to share their opinions."

Ridly Greig made his mark with a slick goal while Rielly was sidelined due to injury.

Toronto opted not to respond physically, and with enforcer Michael Pezzetta out of the lineup, there was no on-ice answer to Tkachuk's comments. It's a different era, where a player's podcast can help fuel a rivalry.

On the ice, the imbalance was stark. Ottawa outshot Toronto 43-14, turning the game into a lopsided affair.

Adding to Toronto's frustration, Ottawa recently regained a key draft pick, while the Leafs' situation remains uncertain.

Meanwhile, questions linger around both teams' captains.

How long until Toronto is a contender again?

Tkachuk doesn't need to ask.

The Senators sit on the edge of a playoff spot, just three points out with a game in hand. In contrast, the Leafs are slipping in the Eastern Conference standings.

An off-season full of bold moves could change Toronto's outlook. But for now, the balance of power in Ontario is clear.

Stützle continues to thrive against Toronto. He now has 26 career points against the Leafs — tied with the Montreal Canadiens for his most against any opponent.

"I think it's a big rivalry," he said.

At morning skate, Stützle worked on faceoffs with rookie Stephen Halliday.

"On the record, if Timmy goes over 50 per cent tonight, I'm taking credit for it," Halliday joked.

Stützle finished exactly at 50 per cent.

"If I had done my faceoffs exactly the way I practised, I think I would have been at 98 per cent," he said with a laugh.

The plan is for some of Halliday's Senators teammates to take him out for a nice meal in New York City this week. We are unsure if Halliday will owe interest or earn his line of credit when that happens.

Ottawa's recent success has been driven by depth forwards contributing at both ends of the ice. Michael Amadio exemplifies that.

He could have had a hat trick Saturday but settled for a single goal — and strong praise from Stützle.

"Nothing against management, but he was a pretty good player," Stützle said, referencing Amadio's earlier departure.

Ottawa signed Amadio to a three-year, \$7.8-million contract in the summer of 2024, a move that is paying dividends for general manager Steve Staios.



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Amadio reached the 30-point mark for the first time in his career and is one of 11 Senators with at least 10 goals this season.

Also, he's a defensive ace.

"He's really underrated in my opinion, one of the best sticks in the league," said Stutzle.

It had been since Feb. 2 that Claude Giroux last scored.

He ended that 13-game drought against Toronto.

"I haven't scored in a while, so maybe I was a little shocked," Giroux said with a smile.

Nicknamed "Mr. Desperate" by teammates, Giroux has embraced the label.

"The story is basically that every time Giroux checks, he is really desperate and moves his feet," Stutzle said. "So that's what Green was saying, and now we call him Mr. Desperate."

Kyle Bukauskas asked Stutzle what the fiery Giroux thinks of the nickname.

"Well, he's a Hall of Famer and he probably gets chirped the most out of the team, so. But he can take it, and he's not afraid to go back either," Stutzle said.

Giroux has always been known as a disher.

Injury updates

There was encouraging news on the injury front. Jake Sanderson could return within seven to 10 days and has resumed skating.

His return would be significant, especially after Dennis Gilbert left Saturday's game and is expected to miss some time, according to head coach Travis Green.

If Sanderson returns soon, the Senators could be positioned not just to make the playoffs, but to make noise once they get there.

Lassi Thomson is expected to fill in on the blue line, while Carter Yakemchuk remains an option from Belleville in the AHL.

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1384248 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 'Got to respond better': Maple Leafs hang Woll out to dry after Stolarz accident

Luke Fox

KANATA, ONT. — The most disappointing season in Toronto Maple Leafs memory won't stop supplying rubberneckers of this car wreck with another ugly scene to digest.

The series of unfortunate events just keeps getting renewed.

On Saturday, in a barn beside an Ottawa highway, the Maple Leafs didn't even make it to puck drop before things veered off the road.

William Nylander — aloof whipping boy and barrel-chested leading scorer bundled into one — accidentally zipped a puck off Anthony Stolarz's throat during warmups, sending the visitors' intended starting goaltender to a nearby hospital for imaging.

(Stolarz was released from hospital and did fly home with his teammates, but it's worth noting that he already dealt with a nerve injury in his neck this season that sidelined him for three months.)

"Really tough to see that happen. I mean, I always come in and shoot a puck in the glove, and this one just came off a little bit to the left. I hit him in the neck, so I was obviously worried for him. But I've been texting with him, so he seems to be OK," an apologetic Nylander explained, following a 5-2 thumping by the Ottawa Senators.

"I have certain spots where I shoot it, so they know where I'm shooting it all the time."

In came a scrambling Joseph Woll, who had lost an overtime game and been called out by his coach for coming up one save short less than 24 hours prior.

A surprised Woll, who hadn't played both halves of a back-to-back since March 2021 with the Marlies, swapped out his practice equipment for his game gear and "hit play" on starter mode.

"Just tried to, soon as I could, get to my routine and give our team the best chance I could," Woll said. "Just an accident. Stuff happens."

We won't blame Woll for missing a big save in this one, as the bad-luck, highly fragile Maple Leafs turned in another sloppy, slumpy performance, this time to a provincial rival they eliminated from the playoffs the last time these teams played a game of any consequence at Canadian Tire Centre.

But those Maple Leafs are not these Maple Leafs, who don't particularly need wins and are acting like it.

Outshot by a resounding 43-14 and out-chanced 44-18, the Maple Leafs inadvertently injured one goalie, then hung their next out to dry.

An ugly pattern that has permeated this stain of a season.

In total, Craig Berube's club has allowed 382 more pucks on net than it has taken. Only the rebuilding Blackhawks have a worse shot differential.

"It's tough on Joseph, for sure. Played last night. Now he's got to prepare and everything," Berube said. "He did a great job, but the team's got to respond better than that.

"We get ourselves back in the game again in the third, and we just don't have enough guys that go out and push."

Trouble is, mentally they're getting pushed over too easily.

When Tim Stutzle took advantage of a bad Matias Maccelli tripping penalty and sniped a power-play marker in an otherwise tightly contested first period, rookie Easton Cowan said the 1-0 score "deflated us."

The game wasn't 15 minutes old at that point.

"I don't really understand this deflated stuff, to be honest with you. I think it's a copout," Berube said.

"Second period, they took the game over. You know, they just wanted it more. Came out harder. We couldn't get the puck out of our zone."

Couldn't tie up sticks. Couldn't complete a smart first pass. Couldn't block enough shots.

Couldn't protect the net-front of a tired and overworked goalie thrust into emergency action.

"They just kept rolling over on us," Nylander said.

The night began with an unfortunate bout of friendly fire and concluded with gleeful Sens fans twisting the knife, rejoicing in "You need Mar-ner!" chants.

Only Team Tank could glean a silver lining from this one, as Toronto secured its 29th regulation loss.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Eleven more to go.

Mercy.

"I feel like some nights we have been giving up a lot of shots and not being able to generate that much offence, spending a lot of time in D-zone," Nylander said. "If we spend some more time in the O-zone, we can relieve some of that pressure on Joe tonight on the back-to-back.

"But, I mean, I think the battle, it's hard now."

Fox's Fast Five

- Morgan Rielly suffered a lower-body injury in Friday's overtime loss to the Hurricanes and did not play. He's listed as day-to-day.

- Why is Matthew Knies still participating in meaningless games with a bad knee?

"It's kind of an injury I don't think can get much worse, so I don't think there's any risk for me playing," Knies told reporters. "Everyone is playing through something."

Berube notes that Knies did get weeks of rest during the Olympics: "I haven't heard one thing, so he's healthy."

- The Maple Leafs recalled the scrappy Michael Pezzetta for this weekend's back-to-back but didn't dress him in either game.

Berube: "I thought about it a lot."

Would have liked to see diehard Leafs fan Pezzetta's energy in the Battle of Ontario over, say, impending UFA Calle Järnkrok, who is unlikely to be with the team next season.

- We sense a new Fan Day competition coming...

- Cowan, who set up John Tavares's goal and scored his ninth, has mentioned that he is trying to model his game after that of feisty winger Brandon Hagel.

Berube likes the aspiration.

"That's going to be a big part of Easton's game, just the skating and being a hounder and having the ability, which Hagel does, to score some goals and make some plays," Berube says. "I do see some similarities there. In time, he can get there if he keeps working on his game."

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