



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 25, 2026



Recap: Canes' Quick Start Not Enough In Montreal

By: Walt Ruff

Three-game win streak snapped at Bell Centre

MONTREAL - A pair of goals in the opening 7:09 couldn't get the Carolina Hurricanes to two points on Tuesday, eventually falling 5-2 to the Montreal Canadiens.

Bursting out of the gate once again, the Canes' power play, which struck three times en route to victory in Pittsburgh on Sunday, needed just 2:36 to keep their scoring streak going. An attempted pass from Nikolaj Ehlers to Seth Jarvis caught the stick of a Montreal defender and got past Canadiens goaltender Jakub Dobes to give the visitors an early lead.

Just a few shifts later, Jordan Staal doubled up the early advantage, and it was all Carolina through the first seven minutes and change.

But shortly thereafter, the tide of the contest completely flipped.

A redirection tally got the hosts on the board before the conclusion of the first period, and it was the start of what would be five unanswered goals for them. Building on their momentum in the second period, young stars Cole Caufield and Juraj Slafkovsky propelled their group into the lead, and in the third, an insurance marker from Ivan Demidov, coupled with a Jake Evans empty-netter, put a bow on the scoring.

Frederik Andersen's personal five-game win streak, as well as Carolina's bid for a perfect road trip, both came to an end in the defeat. At the other end of the ice, Dobes finished with 41 saves.

CAR at MTL | Recap

Stats & Standouts

Nikolaj Ehlers' early power-play goal marked the fourth consecutive game with at least one conversion for the man advantage.

Ehlers' 59th point of the season moves him to within five of his single-season career-high (64; 2016-17) with 11 regular-season games remaining.

Jordan Staal's first-period marker was his 196th goal with the Hurricanes, tying Geoff Sanderson for eighth place on the franchise's all-time list.

Staal's goal was also his 18th of the season. His last 20-goal campaign was the 2015-16 season.

Defenseman Charles Alexis Legault was recalled during the afternoon hours because Carolina had a few players "not feeling great." The "precautionary" recall wound up not being needed, though, and the 22-year-old was subsequently assigned back to Chicago (AHL) just before puck drop.

They Said It...

Rod Brind'Amour giving his assessment of the contest...

"We played really, actually a solid game. We had a few mess-ups where we're right beside a guy, and we're not getting the sticks, and they tip them in, or tap them in. That was really the game. They had one breakaway. We kind of lost the puck there. Other than that, we were pretty solid. We've got to get more out of those periods where we were on it. Coming out of [the first period] only up one [is not enough.] You've got to get a little separation there."

Jordan Staal giving his point of view...

"We had a tough second [period] there. They had their push, and we didn't defend well enough to keep it out of our net. They got three quick ones, two in that period, and playing behind in this league is tough. We had our chances to tie it up. There (were) lots of chances, but we have to find a way to keep the puck out of our net if we want to win games against a team like that."

Rod Brind'Amour continuing on the defensive mishaps...

"We had a couple in our d-zone where we just weren't tight. We've got to get a little more juice in there and not give them a little bit of space, and it ended up in our net. Tough game, because I thought we probably deserved a little better, but it's a good lesson. You can't take breathers."

Jordan Staal touching on Montreal's hunger and ability to cash in on mistakes...

"They're a puck pressure team. (If) you make a quick turnover, they're going to make you pay. They did that tonight. It wasn't a terrible game; we had lots of looks, lots of chances to win the game. We've just got to find ways to defend better and make sure we keep the puck out of our end and out of our net."



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Rod Brind'Amour talking about his message to the team, post-game...

"It's pretty clear. We know what we need to do to win; you can't let off the gas just for even a little bit. You can have nine shifts really good, but if that tenth one, you just decide, 'Ehh, I don't really need to do it.' That's the guy who taps it in on that one. It's those kinds of things. It's hard because, for the most part, we were really good tonight. Look at the score, and you're like, 'What just happened?' But, it wasn't that kind of game."

Rod Brind'Amour on turning the page and moving forward...

"If you want to look at the big picture, or the even bigger picture, we played really well for the most part. You've got to

learn from these little mess-ups that we have and hopefully not repeat them."

Jordan Staal summarizing the road trip as a whole...

"It was a good road trip. A tough road trip. [We played] some good teams. I thought we were in every game and playing hard. We'll continue to build on it."

What's Next?

The Canes will fly home immediately post-game. They are scheduled to practice on Wednesday, be off on Thursday, practice again on Friday, and then return to game action on Saturday against the Devils.

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



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Dobes makes 41 saves, Canadiens rally past Hurricanes

By: Sean Farrell

Caufield has goal, assist for Montreal; Carolina handed 1st loss in 4 game

MONTREAL -- Jakub Dobes made 41 saves, and the Montreal Canadiens rallied for a 5-2 win against the Carolina Hurricanes at Bell Centre on Tuesday.

Cole Caufield scored his 44th goal and assisted on Juraj Slafkovsky's go-ahead goal in the second period for Montreal (39-21-10), which has won three of four, including 7-3 against the New York Islanders on Saturday. Slafkovsky and Ivan Demidov each had a goal and an assist.

"Unreal," was how Caufield described Dobes' performance, with Carolina holding a 17-4 shot advantage in the third and 43-19 for the game. "He's been doing it all year. He competes, he battles, he just always gives us a chance and keeps us in games, obviously the breakaway save at the end there. It's cool to see the crowd get behind a guy like that."

CAR@MTL: Caufield ties it up in the 2nd period

Caufield, who is second in the NHL to Nathan MacKinnon (46) of the Colorado Avalanche in goals, has seven goals and 12 points during a six-game point streak. His linemates, meanwhile, are on seven-game point streaks. Slafkovsky has 10 points (five goals, five assists) during his streak, and Nick Suzuki, who assisted on Caufield's goal, has 12 points (three goals, nine assists).

The Canadiens are third in the Atlantic Division, five points behind the Tampa Bay Lightning for second place, and two points ahead of the Boston Bruins, who have played one more game.

"(Dobes) is really dialed right now," Slafkovsky said. "I really think he knows how important this stretch is and he wants to help the team. He wants to stop as many pucks as he can, and when you have someone like that it makes you more confident with the puck."

Nikolaj Ehlers and Jordan Staal scored and Frederik Andersen made 14 saves for Carolina (45-20-6), which blew an early 2-0 lead and had its three-game winning streak end.

Carolina is nine points ahead of the Columbus Blue Jackets for first in the Metropolitan Division and one point ahead of the Buffalo Sabres for first in the Eastern Conference.

"It's hard because for the most part we were really good tonight," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "When you

look at the score, you're like, 'What just happened?' But it wasn't that kind of game."

Caufield tied it 2-2 at 5:49 of the second period when he put away the rebound of Suzuki's shot.

"I like how we played," Caufield said. "We just didn't freak out after going down two."

Slafkovsky put the Canadiens up 3-2 at 9:19. Caufield appeared to have scored his second goal of the game, but his deflection of Noah Dobson's shot from the left point struck Slafkovsky on its way up and past Andersen's glove.

"I wasn't sure if it was the (defenseman's) stick, but (Caufield) had a nice celebration so I didn't want to ruin it," Slafkovsky said.

Demidov made it 4-2 at 13:53 of the third period, scoring the Canadiens' fourth straight goal on a breakaway.

CAR@MTL: Demidov extends Canadiens' lead in 3rd period

Jake Evans shot the puck into an empty net from the left face-off dot in the defensive zone with 1:00 remaining in the third for the 5-2 final.

"It's about what you give up, and I think we gave up maybe one too many in that second period," Staal said. "We kind of took the foot off the gas a bit and they made us pay. They had a couple of quick goals. They've got some talent, and when you're behind in this league, it's not easy."

"And we had some looks to definitely tie it up and played a solid game, but there's little things about finding ways to defend and making sure the puck's not in the back of our net."

Ehlers put Carolina ahead 1-0 at 2:36 of the first period with a power-play goal. His shot from the left boards deflected off Canadiens defenseman Mike Matheson's stick and slipped between Dobes and the post stick side.

Staal scored unassisted at 7:09 to make it 2-0. Jalen Chatfield's dump-in bounced off Matheson along the boards and was swiped by Montreal forward Oliver Kapanen's stick to Staal, who was alone in the slot and flipped a shot over Dobes' left shoulder as he backed into right edge of the face-off circle.

Kapanen cut it to 2-1 at 12:11 when he deflected Jayden Struble's shot from the point down and past Andersen.



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"We have to learn that we can't fall asleep at the start," Slafkovsky said. "Our execution has to be on the top level against a team like that. And then we have to make sure we get pucks deep and we play our best game. So then we make them defend and don't give them as much time, pretty much like they were doing to us."

NOTES: Staal's goal was his 196th for Carolina, tying Geoff Sanderson for eighth in Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers history. ... It was Demidov's 14th multipoint game, the fourth-most by a Canadiens player 20 years old or younger, one fewer than Guy Lafleur, Stephane Richer and Alex Galchenyuk, who each had 15 multipoint games before turning 21.



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AP ASSOCIATED PRESS

Caufield scores his 44th, Dobes makes 41 saves to lead Canadiens past Hurricanes

By: Associated Press

MONTREAL (AP) — Cole Caufield scored his 44th goal of the season and Jakub Dobes made 41 saves as the Montreal Canadiens held off the Carolina Hurricanes for a 5-2 win on Tuesday night.

Juraj Slafkovsky and Ivan Demidov had a goal and an assist each, and Oliver Kapanen also scored as Montreal erased a two-goal deficit for its second consecutive win.

Jake Evans buried an empty-net goal with 1 minute left in regulation and Caufield added an assist for a two-point night.

Nikolaj Ehlers and Jordan Staal scored for Eastern Conference-leading Carolina, which lost for the first time in four games.

Frederik Andersen stopped 14 shots.

The Canadiens sit third in the Atlantic Division with 88 points. The New York Islanders, who lost on Tuesday and are the top team outside the Eastern Conference playoff picture, trailed by three points.

Ehlers opened the scoring on the power play 2:36 into the first period when Montreal defenseman Mike Matheson deflected his pass intended for Seth Jarvis into the Canadiens' net. Staal doubled the lead at 7:09, beating Dobes glove side.

Kapanen tipped in Struble's point shot at 12:11 to give the Canadiens some life before Montreal struck twice in the second period.

Caufield trails Colorado Avalanche superstar Nathan MacKinnon by two goals for the league lead. No Canadian has led the NHL in goals since Guy Lafleur in 1977-78.

The Canadiens secured their 24th comeback win of the season, tying for the most in a single season in franchise history (1992-93, 1975-76).

Up next

Hurricanes: Host New Jersey on Saturday.

Canadiens: End a three-game homestand against Columbus on Thursday.



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SPORTSNET™

Canadiens' Dobes shines in win over Canes, must continue to fight for starter's role

By: Eric Engels

MONTREAL — With less than five minutes to play, with the Montreal Canadiens desperately clinging to a 4-2 lead Ivan Demidov secured moments earlier, Jakub Dobes stared down Logan Stankoven and robbed him of a breakaway goal.

The 24-year-old made six more saves before Jake Evans scored the insurance marker into an empty net, and one more for good measure on Eric Robinson to keep the Carolina Hurricanes to just two goals on 43 shots and cement himself in the chair he's been fighting for all season.

This was Dobes' 23rd win in 34 starts, and it affirmed his status as the Canadiens' starting goaltender — even if no one will anoint him just yet.

It's probably best no one does, for the man who's been labelled "competitive" above all other traits seems to be at his best when he's fighting for something.

"I think it's part of it," said Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis. "I feel that for Dobes, he's just been trying to get that chair, steal a chair, get that chair, and I think that's an every-day thing. Once you stop worrying about that, I think that's when somebody steals your chair."

Samuel Montembeault knows.

He fought his whole career just to have a chair, and the second he reclined in the one he earned, it was kicked out from under him.

We're talking about the goaltender who ranked fifth in the NHL in goals saved above expected last season, who came to the Canadiens as a third-string waiver claim and quickly went from proving he belonged in the league to proving he belonged in the No. 1 position over veteran Jake Allen.

Montembeault's rise hit its peak on the Canadiens' way to an unlikely playoff berth last season, which he played a huge role in earning by performing exceptionally well down the stretch. He started 20 of the final 22 games, posting the fourth-best save percentage in the league to win 13 of them while helping the Canadiens earn points in four others. And a torn groin in the middle of the first-round series with the Washington Capitals did anything but rip away the confidence the team had in him coming into this season.

It started poorly and got worse. And despite Dobes' best effort to push the off-balance Montembeault out of position, benefit of the doubt was rightfully extended to the veteran until it no longer could be.

It teetered when 21-year-old Jacob Fowler entered the mix for 10 games from Dec. 15-Jan. 11, and it broke awhile after Fowler returned to the American Hockey League.

In between, Dobes emerged with a crater on his shoulder — never mind a chip — and fought even harder for what he thought belonged to him.

And well, the results have been more than convincing, with the Ostrava, Czechia native going 7-2-1 prior to Fowler's return to Montreal, and 2-1-0 since. He's also posted a .907 save percentage over that period and looked better and better from game to game.

And yes, how Dobes has looked matters.

Take it from Cole Caufield, who scored his 44th goal of the season in Tuesday's win. He knows what players want to see from their goaltender.

"Confidence, and some swagger," Caufield said. "No matter if you get scored on or have a shutout, it's the same mentality. A win is a win, and you've just got to save more than the other guy. I think Dobes has that ... Just every night, he gives us a chance."

That wasn't the case a bit earlier this season, when Dobes looked anything but sure of himself and had to be bailed out by the Canadiens.

But on this night, Dobes allowed two goals he had no chance on and then made 33 straight saves with confidence oozing.

Several of them came while Carolina's goaltender was on the bench and an extra attacker was on the ice for the final 4:14, on shots that could've — and probably — should've beaten him.

"At the end of the day, your best player in those situations has got to be your goalie," said St. Louis, "and he was that tonight."

A career-high 41 saves made that an undeniable statement.

That's all we got from Dobes, for the Canadiens decided to not make the goaltender available to speak with reporters.

He's been as unpredictable in some of his media scrums as he has been in his crease at times this season, which has apparently caused some consternation in the organization.

All signs that Dobes is still young, and green — just 54 games (regular season and post-season combined) into his NHL career.

The evidence is at least mounting, though, that he's maturing on the ice.

"I think he's progressed tremendously," said St. Louis, "and he's learning how to be a pro in this league, and how competitive it is, and he's doing well."

Well enough to be the starter for the Canadiens, even if it's best to keep him fighting for the job.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Canadiens 5, Hurricanes 2

By: Bob Wage

The Carolina Hurricanes jumped out to a 2-0 lead early in the game but they were unable to hold the lead or light the lamp again as the Montreal Canadiens defeated them, 5-2 on Tuesday night at the Bell Centre.

The Hurricanes played well enough, they outshot the home team 42-19, but they could not finish nor could they solve goalie Jakub Dobeš, who picked up the win.

Nikolaj Ehlers got the scoring started just two minutes and change into the game when he rocketed a shot on goal that deflected in off a Montreal player to make it 1-0. It was a powerplay goal, giving Carolina four powerplay goals in the last two games.

Jordan Staal found himself all alone in front of the opposing net and made no mistake to make the score 2-0 and the Canes were cooking. It was Staal's 18th of the season.

The Hurricanes did an outstanding job limiting Montreal's shots though the home team scored on a deflected goal as they were outshot, 16-4 in that opening period.

The Habs picked up their play in the second as they scored twice to make it 3-2 at the second intermission.

While the Canes had some chances, including a couple of breakaways, they could not score again.

Montreal put the game away later in the third when the puck got past K'Andre Miller and Ivan Demidov scored on his breakaway attempt to make it 4-2.

The Canadiens later scored an empty-netter to close out the scoring.

Alexander Nikishin played over 20 minutes in this affair for the first time in awhile, (20:49). He led the team with four blocked shots.

The game did not help Fred Andersen's save percentage as he allowed four goals on the 18 shots he faced.

It was reported that Charles Alexis Legault was recalled for the game in case a defenseman could not go. (Someone was not feeling well). He was returned to Chicago when he was not needed.

The Canes returned home and will take a day or two off as they prepare to face the New Jersey Devils on Saturday.



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Blue Jackets breeze by as Canes fall 5-1

By: Liela Hafshejani

Center Seth Jarvis battles an opponent during the game versus the Columbus Blue Jackets at the Lenovo Center on Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2025. Jarvis scored one goal for the Hurricanes. The Hurricanes beat the Blue Jackets 4-1.

Center Seth Jarvis battles an opponent during the game versus the Columbus Blue Jackets at the Lenovo Center on Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2025. Jarvis scored one goal for the Hurricanes. The Hurricanes beat the Blue Jackets 4-1.

Continuing a stretch of inconsistent play, Carolina was beaten at its own game in Columbus. Under head coach Rod Brind'Amour, the Canes aim to dominate possession and pressure the other team with a ruthless forecheck.

Against the surging Blue Jackets (35-21-11), Carolina (42-19-6) found itself on the other end of that gameplan. The Hurricanes struggled to get going offensively and fell in ugly fashion in a 5-1 rout.

It was clear from the start that Columbus had the upper hand. The Blue Jackets put up 11 shots on goal — compared to the six from Carolina — leading it to score two power play goals in the first period.

Left wing Mason Marchment used the man advantage to breeze the puck past the cluster of white surrounding the net and got the puck past goaltender Brandon Bussi. Centers Adam Fantilli and Charlie Coyle assisted in the game-opening goal five minutes into the game.

Coyle, with help from Fantilli and defensemen Zach Werenski, brought the score to 2-0. Scoring from the same

angle as the first goal, the Blue Jackets surrounded the remaining Canes players on the ice to one side of the net to quickly rearrange themselves behind them to snap the puck past Bussi, closing up the first period.

Right wing Andrei Svechnikov put Carolina on the board 14 minutes into the second period when left wing Nikolaj Ehlers and defensemen Alexander Nikishin rushed down the ice to Columbus' net in a flurry of white. Passing the puck, Svechnikov got close and personal with Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves, intimidating him and putting the puck past him, putting the Canes back in striking distance.

But much to the demise of Carolina, Columbus responded with two more goals to wrap up the second period. Scored in minute 17 by left wing Danton Heinen, he took advantage of a jumble of men around Bussi's net and got the loose puck to bring the score to 3-1.

A minute later, defenseman Denton Mateychuk scored off an assist from center Sean Monahan. He maneuvered the puck closer to center ice and rocketed it past the Carolina defenders. With a three-goal deficit after 40 minutes, hopes were all but gone for the Canes.

The cherry on top came from right wing Mathieu Olivier, scoring the fifth and final goal for the Blue Jackets seven minutes into the final period, drawing the Canes to one side of the ice before quickly flipping position and forcing the defense out of position.

The Canes will try to rebound on Wednesday, March 18 as it hosts the Pittsburgh Penguins. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m.



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The Hockey News

'We Didn't Defend Well Enough': Jordan Staal, Rod Brind'Amour On Blown Game In Montreal

By: Ryan Henkel

Staal and Brind'Amour dissect defensive lapses and missed opportunities after a tough Montreal Canadiens comeback.

The Carolina Hurricanes squandered a hot start and an early lead, seeing five straight goals go past them in a 5-2 loss Tuesday night to the Montreal Canadiens.

Even despite scoring two early ones, the Hurricanes couldn't find a way to score again even with 40+ shots on goal.

After the game, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour along with Jordan Staal spoke with the media in Montreal. Here's what they had to say:

Rod Brind'Amour

On the game: We played, really, an actually solid game, we just had a few mess ups where we're right beside a guy and not getting their sticks and they tap them in or tip them in. That was really the game. They had one breakaway where we kind of lost the puck there. Other than that, we were pretty solid. But we have to get more out of those periods where you're on it. Coming out of that first only up one, we probably have to get a little more separation there.

On taking breathers: We had a couple moments in the D-zone where we weren't tight. You have to have a little more juice in there and just not give them that little bit of space else it ends up in your net. Tough game because I thought we probably deserved a little better. It's a good lesson. You can't take breathers out there.

On the message to the group: It's pretty clear. We know what we need to do to win. You can't let off the gas for even a little bit. You have nine shifts that are really good and then that 10th one you decide, 'Oh, I don't need to do it,' and that's the guy that taps it in on that one. It's those kinds of things. It's hard. We were, for the most part, really good tonight. You look at the score and you're like, 'What just happened?' but it really wasn't that kind of game.

On the road trip as a whole: You always just kind of look at this game, but if you want to look at the big picture, we played really well for the most part. Again, have to learn from these little mess ups that we have and hopefully not repeat them.

Jordan Staal

On the game: We had a tough second there. They had their push and we didn't defend well enough to keep it out of our net. They really got three quick ones and playing behind in this league is tough. We had our chances to tie it up, lots of chances, but we have to find a way to keep the puck out of our net to win games against a team like that.

On taking breathers: They're a puck pressure team and if you make a quick turnover, they're going to make you pay and they did that tonight. It wasn't a terrible game, like I said, we had lots of looks, lots of chances to win the game, but just have to find ways to defend better and make sure we're keeping the puck out of our end and out of the net.

On the road trip as a whole: It was a good road trip, tough road trip. Some good teams and I thought we were in every game and playing hard. So we'll continue to build on that.

Hurricanes Recall Blueliner Before Showdown With Canadiens

By: Ryan Henkel

Defenseman Charles Alexis Legault returns to the Hurricanes roster.

The Carolina Hurricanes announced on Tuesday that they have recalled defenseman Charles Alexis Legault from the Chicago Wolves.

The 22-year-old blueliner recently returned from a pretty gruesome hand injury that had sidelined him for three months, and he has since been getting back up to speed in the AHL.

Carolina prepares to take on Montreal

It's an interesting timing for a recall as the Hurricanes are playing their final game of their road trip tonight in Montreal.

The team also already practiced earlier in the day with head coach Rod Brind'Amour stating that no lineup changes were expected.

Perhaps this is just a precautionary measure for perhaps another player (Mike Reilly has already been drawing in for the injured Shayne Gostisbehere) or maybe he could be in tonight.

Legault is originally from Quebec, so it could potentially be a chance to play near his hometown if he indeed draws in.

Either way, Legault brings a bit of size and defensively responsible depth to the lineup.

He appeared in eight games with the Canes already this season before getting injured.



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The Athletic / Radko Gudas expresses remorse for Auston Matthews' season-ending injury: 'I've got to learn'

By Eric Stephens

Anaheim Ducks captain Radko Gudas said he feels "terrible" for the injury that ended the season of Toronto Maple Leafs star Auston Matthews.

Gudas, who served a five-game suspension for a knee-to-knee hit on Matthews on March 12, is eligible to return to the Ducks for their game Tuesday night against the Vancouver Canucks. Gudas addressed the incident for the first time following Anaheim's morning skate Tuesday at Rogers Arena. Gudas said he contacted Matthews and let him know he never intended to hurt him on the play.

"I really hate the way it ended up, the point of contact," Gudas said. "I'm not a fan of that. I never want to injure anybody out there. It's a hard-fought game. It's just, yeah, I never want to go out there and hurt anybody. I feel terrible about the outcome. I just committed to the play, and unfortunately that was the point of contact."

Matthews underwent surgery Thursday to repair a Grade 3 medial collateral ligament tear with an expected recovery time of 12 weeks. The 28-year-old center finished his season with 27 goals and 26 assists in 60 games for the Leafs, who are 29-29-13 and will not make the playoffs.

Gudas' five-game suspension by the NHL's Department of Player Safety was met with widespread criticism for being too lenient. The 35-year-old defenseman was given a five-minute major and game misconduct for kneeling, but the additional ban, combined with Matthews' status as an NHL superstar, drew enough condemnation that Department of Player Safety head George Parros spoke publicly to defend the process used to arrive at the punishment.

"I've got to learn," Gudas said. "I've got to be better as a hockey player. I never want to go out there and hurt anybody. It's very unfortunate. I reached out to him, too. We spoke. I never want to see anybody get hurt, so I feel very terrible about that."

Gudas is in his third season with the Ducks and his second as their captain. The suspension was the fifth in his 14-year NHL career but his first since 2019, when he played for the Philadelphia Flyers and got two games for a high stick to Tampa Bay Lightning star Nikita Kucherov.

An unrestricted free agent this summer, Gudas said he has worked hard to play his physical game without crossing the line. He said he respected the NHL's decision.

"I've tried to stay on the good side," he said. "I stayed for a long time, over seven years since my last incident. I'm doing everything in my power to stay away, to stay on the right side, to play hard, but be on the good side of it."

"I think every player needs to develop as his career goes on, get better and improve in every aspect of his game to stay in the league and stay on the top of those levels. So yeah, definitely development. Learning. A lot of stuff goes into it."

Within the past two months, Gudas has come under other scrutiny. During the Olympics, when he played for the Czech Republic, he delivered a hit to Canada captain Sidney Crosby that left the Pittsburgh Penguins superstar with an MCL sprain and ended his tournament.

Canada went on to lose the gold medal game to the United States in overtime, but Crosby later said he had no issue with Gudas' hard check. In that same quarterfinal game, Gudas was heard using what is considered a homophobic slur after being given a roughing penalty in a battle with Canada's Brandon Hagel. He later apologized for the incident and said he understood why his language was considered offensive.

"In the heat of the moment, the emotions got the best of me and I'm sorry for the way it looks in all of hockey," he told The Athletic. "Nothing I can do about right now, but I feel sorry about that."

The Athletic LOADED: 03.25.2026

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The Athletic / The NHL's growing goaltending crisis: 'Everybody's making bad decisions'



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 25, 2026

By Harman Dayal	\$12.3M
	+12.6
Two years ago, the Vegas Golden Knights believed they had found their franchise goalie.	Florida
	\$11.1M
Adin Hill backstopped the team to a Stanley Cup in 2023 and followed it up with a strong 2023-24 season. Logan Thompson, once in the mix, was traded away that summer.	-17.2
	New York
Now Vegas probably wishes it could hit the undo button.	\$11M
	+37.4
Hill has been one of the worst goalies in the NHL (.869 save percentage), leaving Vegas searching for answers in net — just one year into his mega six-year contract. Meanwhile, Thompson has emerged as one of the league's best starters since joining the Washington Capitals.	Seattle
	\$10.9M
Stories like this are why some people believe that goaltending is becoming increasingly unpredictable. Every season, some highly paid starters like Hill, Sergei Bobrovsky or Linus Ullmark mysteriously struggle, while unknowns or journeymen like Alex Lyon, Brandon Bussi and Scott Wedgewood emerge to carry their teams. Only a few netminders, like Connor Hellebuyck, Andrei Vasilevskiy and Igor Shesterkin, are consistently elite.	+13.3
	Tampa Bay
NHL goaltending is quickly becoming one of the most volatile positions in all major sports. Here's some evidence to support that belief, along with possible explanations for why.	\$10.8M
	+12.9
If an NHL team spends \$6 million on a forward, you'd generally expect that player to be more productive and valuable than a forward making \$2 million. That isn't always the case, but on average, in an efficient market, more money should buy better outcomes.	Anaheim
	\$10.8M
However, in goaltending, that link between price and performance is broken.	-4.1
	Vancouver
Below is a table showing how many cap dollars each NHL team is spending on its goaltending tandem and the results they're posting. Traditionally, save percentage has been used to measure goalie performance. The problem with save percentage is it treats a long-distance point shot the same as a breakaway. It doesn't account for shot quality and defensive environment, which can heavily skew a goalie's save percentage for better or worse. To account for shot quality, we'll use a metric called goals saved above expected (GSAX).	\$9.5M
	-3.9
GSAX analyzes the quality of shots and scoring chances each team has surrendered. It then calculates how many goals a league-average netminder would have allowed based on that team's shots and chances allowed, and compares that to how many goals a team's goaltender has actually given up.	St. Louis
	\$9.4M
For example, Ilya Sorokin, the front-runner for the Vezina Trophy this year, has a plus-29.9 GSAX, meaning Sorokin has allowed roughly 30 goals fewer compared to a league-average goalie plugged into the same defensive environment. On the other hand, Jordan Binnington has a league-worst minus-25.4 GSAX, meaning he's cost his team about 25 goals compared to an NHL-average goalie.	-15.7
	Ottawa
Interestingly, there is zero statistical correlation between how much each team spends on its goaltending tandem this season and the club's overall goaltending results, whether you look at GSAX or even a simpler metric like save percentage.	\$9.3M
	-31.3
Goalie Tandem Investment & Performance	Dallas
	\$9.3M
New York	+14.4
	Winnipeg
\$13.1M	\$9.3M
+11.1	+2.4
	Washington
Boston	\$8.9M
	+28
	Detroit
	\$8.9M
	+13.4
	Nashville
	\$8.6M
	-2.7
	Vegas



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\$8.3M

-24.2

New Jersey

\$7.8M

-1.7

Los Angeles

\$7.5M

+4.4

Chicago

\$7.3M

+10.6

Colorado

\$6.8M

+21.7

Edmonton

\$6.5M

-16.7

Buffalo

\$6.3M

+19.2

Columbus

\$6.2M

+11.1

Toronto

\$6.2M

+2

Minnesota

\$6M

+18.5

Utah

\$5.3M

+9.2

Philadelphia

\$4.8M

-4.8

Carolina

\$4.8M

+3.4

San Jose

\$4.5M

-3.6

Montreal

\$4.1M

+1

Pittsburgh

\$3.5M

+6.3

Calgary

\$1.6M

+14.1

Data from March 16

We have cases where budget goalie teams like the Pittsburgh Penguins, Buffalo Sabres and Carolina Hurricanes are getting significantly better netminding results than big spenders like the St. Louis Blues, Ottawa Senators and Vancouver Canucks. In fact, the 10 highest-spending teams are getting a combined plus-15.1 GSAX from their netminders, whereas the bottom-10 spending teams are receiving a combined plus-57.2 GSAX.

If you look at the NHL's nine worst goalies in terms of GSAX, seven of them have a cap hit of at least \$4.5 million. This includes some established names and Stanley Cup winners, including Ullmark, Bobrovsky, Binnington, Jacob Markstrom, Hill, Tristan Jarry and Kevin Lankinen.

NHL's Worst Goalies of 2025-26 by GSAX

Jordan Binnington

\$6M

-25.4

Leevi Merilainen

\$1.05M

-20.7

Sergei Bobrovsky

\$10M

-14.1

Samuel Ersson

\$1.45M

-12.9

Kevin Lankinen

\$4.5M

-12.8

Jacob Markstrom

\$6M

-12.3

Tristan Jarry

\$5.375M

-11.7

Adin Hill

\$6.25M

-11



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Linus Ullmark

\$8.25M

-8.9

If you zoom out and look at the big picture, there are a staggering number of bad or risky goalie contracts teams have signed over the past few seasons.

Recent Contracts Aging Poorly/Very Risky

Jack Campbell

\$5M x 5

2022-2027 (bought out)

Edmonton Oilers

Adin Hill

\$6.25M x 6

2025-2031

Vegas Golden Knights

Elvis Merzlikins

\$5.4M x 5

2022-2027

Columbus Blue Jackets

Tristan Jarry

\$5.375M x 5

2023-2028

Pittsburgh Penguins

Thatcher Demko

\$8.5M x 3

2026-2029

Vancouver Canucks

Cal Petersen

\$5M x 3

2022-2025

L.A. Kings

Jacob Markstrom

\$6M x 2

2026-2028

New Jersey Devils

Linus Ullmark

\$8.25M x 4

2025-2029

Ottawa Senators

Jordan Binnington

\$6M x 6

2021-2027

St. Louis Blues

Kevin Lankinen

\$4.5M x 5

2025-2030

Vancouver Canucks

Alexandar Georgiev

\$3.4M x 3

2022-2025

Colorado Avalanche

Joonas Korpisalo

\$4M x 5

2023-2028

Ottawa Senators

Philipp Grubauer

\$5.9M x 6

2021-2027

Seattle Kraken

Petr Mrazek

\$4.25M x 2

2024-2026

Chicago Blackhawks

Ville Husso

\$4.75M x 3

2022-2025

Detroit Red Wings

Anthony Stolarz

\$3.75M x 4

2026-2030

Toronto Maple Leafs

Ivan Fedotov

\$3.25M x 2

2024-2026

Philadelphia Flyers

Top goalies aren't stealing playoff series as often as they used to

Some top goalies are also struggling to live up to expectations in the playoffs more often than they used to. Last year, for example, the three Vezina Trophy finalists — Hellebuyck (.866 save percentage), Vasilevskiy (.872), and Darcy Kuemper (.889) all posted very disappointing postseason numbers.

To see if this was part of a bigger trend, I looked at every playoff series since 2020. I identified which team had the superior goaltender on paper before the series started (based on their regular-season GSAX rating) and then tracked whether that team won the series.

For example, when the Florida Panthers beat the Edmonton Oilers in the Stanley Cup Final, I tracked that as a series where the team with the superior goaltender on paper won because Bobrovsky entered the series with better regular-season numbers than Stuart Skinner. Conversely,



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when the Dallas Stars lost to the Oilers in the Western Conference, I counted it as a series where the team with the better goaltender on paper (Jake Oettinger) lost to a weaker one (Skinner).

From 2020 to 2022, the team with the superior goaltender on paper won 33 of 45 playoff series, which is a 73 percent win rate. Having the more established netminder made a team more likely to win the series during those years.

That has flipped lately, though.

From 2023 to 2025, the team with the more established goaltender won only 17 of 45 playoff series, a 38 percent win rate. For every situation where a star goalie like Bobrovsky is winning over a weaker one in Skinner, there are actually more instances recently where the Hellebuyck types underperform and lose, or where a Skinner gets hot for a series and outplays an Oettinger.

Maybe this is just a blip on the radar that will normalize in future years. But it's also possible we're entering a new golden age of offense and scoring, where the quality of a team's skaters and their two-way play, both defensively and offensively, is a more significant driver of wins and losses than the quality of a team's goaltender. This isn't to say "goaltending doesn't matter" because that would be an extremely foolish take, but it is fair to wonder if the position has less of an influence on winning compared to 10-15 years ago because of how advanced offenses are becoming.

NHL offenses have found a new level, and goalies haven't caught up yet

In 2015-16, the average save percentage for a goaltender was .915. Fast-forward a decade later, and the average save percentage has collapsed down to .896, which is the lowest mark since 1993-94, when the butterfly goaltending style was still in its infancy stage. The NHL has recently changed how it tracks shots on goal — goalies no longer get credited with a save for stopping borderline shots if the puck's trajectory was estimated to miss the net — but that's only part of the drop in save percentage.

There are two possible explanations for this dramatic decline: Offenses have evolved to become significantly more dangerous, and/or goalies have become worse. The first part of that equation is quite obvious to the eye. Players are faster, more skilled and better at shooting than ever before. There's also been a massive tactical shift — with analytics growing in popularity, teams have a far better understanding of what types of scoring chances goalies struggle with, and have optimized their offensive strategy accordingly.

"It's as challenging as it's ever been in my career," said Canucks goaltender Kevin Lankinen. "I've only been in the league for six years, but I see the (offensive) development and where it's going... The game has changed where there's not many teams who just send (low-danger shots) toward the net. Teams are doing more with the advanced stats and (targeting) what are the high-quality scoring chances. There's a lot more east-west (movement) than ever before."

The stats back this up. According to former NHL goalie Steve Valiquette, who founded Clear Sight Analytics, the number of unscreened shots from long range — which are very easy shots for goalies to save — declined nearly 28 percent between 2018 and 2024. Meanwhile, the number of shots right after plays or passes that crossed the middle of the ice — which is the challenging "east-west" movement Lankinen was referring to — jumped by 41 percent between 2018 and 2023.

"One of the reasons that I've always said that if I was a general manager I would try my best to avoid term when it came to goaltending is because we've literally seen guys sign contracts and the strength of their game when they signed a big deal no longer works, because the NHL attack has changed so much by the time the contract expires," said Kevin Woodley, a goaltending expert for InGoal Magazine, which has relationships with goalies and teams all around the league.

The rapid growth in offensive chances originating from east-west passes across the slot is a meaningful development because it's arguably the most dangerous type of scoring chance in hockey, with shooting percentage on those plays estimated at a sky-high 30 percent. These east-west plays are so difficult to stop because goalies have to move from side to side and often don't have a chance to get set and squared before the shot is taken.

The publicly available GSAX models, which are designed to account for the defensive environment in front of each goalie, lack the data needed to measure east-west passes. In other words, even the goalie statistics we referenced earlier in the story aren't perfect measures for netminder performance.

Overall, NHL goalie performance is becoming increasingly tied to how effectively the team in front can limit deadly scoring chances that netminders struggle with.

"I had a goalie coach tell me early this year that the position and performance have never been more closely tied to that (defensive) environment," said Woodley. "I'm not saying goaltending doesn't matter, but the amount of goalies that can consistently outplay bad environments (is low) ... because when guys create the types of scoring chances they're creating more regularly now, a lot of them are no-chancers."

Connor Hellebuyck's results this year exemplify that. Statistically, Hellebuyck, the NHL's reigning MVP, is having a middling season relative to his elite standards. His .897 save percentage is a sharp drop-off compared to last year's .925, and his public GSAX is only slightly above average.

In reality, though, this "volatility" in Hellebuyck's numbers this year has far more to do with the Jets' sinking defense than with his individual performance.

"Do you know that before he went for knee surgery (in late November), he was actually playing better by Clear Sight's numbers than he was last year when he won the Vezina and Hart?" said Woodley. "But nobody could see it because the defensive environment had totally cratered."

A generational loss of workhorse starting goalies

While some of the NHL's goaltending instability can be attributed to evolving offensive play, the pool of elite starting goaltenders also isn't as deep as it once was. Woodley pointed out that the league "lost an entire generation of workhorse No. 1s in a pretty short window" and that the next wave hasn't been strong enough.

Top Goalies Recently Retiring

Roberto Luongo

2019

Cam Ward

2019

Corey Crawford

2020

Jimmy Howard

2020

Henrik Lundqvist

2021

Ryan Miller

2021

Pekka Rinne

2021



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Carey Price

2022

Tuukka Rask

2022

Cory Schneider

2022

Braden Holtby

2022

Craig Anderson

2023

Marc-Andre Fleury

2025

"I definitely think it's (a lack of) talent," agreed one NHL executive. "You can even just isolate Canada as the whole cause of the problem. Look at this list of goalies you named: (Marc-André) Fleury, (Roberto) Luongo, (Carey) Price, (Martin) Brodeur, all Canadians. Imagine if you added four new, elite Canadian goalies to the NHL right now. You'd be talking about how amazing the league's goaltending is."

Why fear of the unknown causes teams to sign bad contracts

Earlier in this piece, we showed several teams have recently signed regrettable contracts. Part of that relates to the factors we've already discussed: offenses have evolved to a new level, a team's defensive volatility can dramatically affect a goalie's performance, and after most of the top goalies of the 2010s retired in a short time frame, the next wave of starters hasn't been strong enough.

However, there's also a huge psychological component. Because goaltending can be such an unstable position, once teams find a goalie who is performing well and appears to fit their system and coach, they want to keep what's already working, because the alternative is often having to bet on an unproven goalie from the minors or a second-tier goalie from the increasingly weaker free-agent market. The latter feels like a really risky, unknown decision, even though it's sometimes the correct one.

"If you look at how goalies are signed, how contracts happen, almost every team is like, 'I don't want to sign my goalie to this contract but he put up a great year, here are the comps,'" explained the NHL executive. "My options are either this guy or to not have a (reliable) goalie. I'm not surprised that everybody's making bad decisions."

Vancouver's decision to extend Lankinen last year is a prime example.

The Canucks originally signed Lankinen to a cheap, one-year deal during 2024 training camp because of Thatcher Demko's extended injury absence. Lankinen was lights-out as the club's starter, and arguably their second most important player behind Quinn Hughes in the first half of the 2024-25 season. He was on an expiring contract, and the Canucks had to decide whether to sign him to a lucrative extension or let him go.

The Canucks knew they needed a goalie capable of handling a significant workload, and perhaps even a No. 1 role again given the uncertainty around Demko's health. They also knew the 2025-26 season was one of the most important in franchise history because they needed to have a strong year to keep their chances of re-signing Hughes alive. Vancouver's alternatives to re-signing Lankinen were massive question marks: Arturs Silovs' NHL performance that year was so brutal (.861 save percentage in 10 games) that it seemed reckless to believe he was ready for NHL starting goalie duties — especially since this was before Silovs went on his stellar AHL playoff run — and the upcoming free-agent goalie market didn't look great either. With all that in mind, the Canucks signed

Lankinen to a splashy but seemingly justifiable five-year extension at a \$4.5 million cap hit.

This year, Lankinen's numbers have collapsed amid a significantly worse defensive environment, and the contract is aging poorly.

It's easy for outsiders who don't have skin in the game to say that teams should be bolder, more unconventional and more willing to take risks in goaltending decisions. In reality, it's far harder to follow through on that as a GM when you know that a gamble gone wrong in net could jeopardize your team's season and even your job.

This is why, as much as the league has evolved in its understanding of goaltending technique, workload, biomechanics and development, we're likely to see teams continue to make mistakes when they're forced to bet on this increasingly unpredictable position.

"That's the biggest problem with goalies: What are you supposed to do?" said the NHL executive. "Everybody is a critic of goaltending, but very seldom are people (like) 'Here's what you should have done right.'"

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The Athletic / If the NHL playoffs started today: Projecting all 8 matchups and

By Julian McKenzie

The NHL playoffs begin on April 18, and a handful of teams continue to jostle for playoff spots in each conference, including teams on the outside looking in that are surging. The Ottawa Senators, with a victory over Detroit on Tuesday, jumped into the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

Here's how the playoff bracket would look as of Wednesday morning, followed by analysis of each potential series.

Eastern Conference

Carolina Hurricanes (Metro 1) vs. Ottawa Senators (Wild-card 2)

The Hurricanes have been in the Eastern Conference final in two of the last three seasons. And with the Florida Panthers all but officially out of the playoff picture, this might be the Canes' best chance of making the Stanley Cup Final for the first time since 2006. Rod Brind'Amour was captaining, not coaching, the Hurricanes to the Stanley Cup 20 years ago. The Canes remain analytical darlings based off Corsi. But because of the surging Buffalo Sabres, who we'll get to in a minute, there's no guarantee Carolina will end the season as the East's top seed.

The final wild-card spot remains a revolving door. The Senators had a shaky first half of their season. Their goaltending was historically poor. Their penalty kill was also in the league's basement. However, the bones of the Senators' defensive structure at five-on-five were there, and they were getting offense from Tim Stützle, Dylan Cozens, Drake Batherson, Jake Sanderson and Brady Tkachuk when healthy. But they've weathered that storm and moved back into a playoff spot, playing at a torrid pace since mid-January. Ottawa has since emerged as the league's best at suppressing opposing chances, while playing with a vastly improved penalty kill, solid goaltending and timely scoring. But they'll need better health going forward with Sanderson still working his way back while Thomas Chabot and Nick Jensen remain unavailable due to injury.

Remaining schedules:



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Hurricanes (11 games): vs. New Jersey (Saturday), vs. Montreal (March 29), at Columbus (March 31), vs. Columbus (April 2), vs. New York Islanders (April 4), at Ottawa (April 5), vs. Boston (April 7), at Chicago (April 9), at Utah (April 11), at Philadelphia (April 13), at New York Islanders (April 14).

Senators (11 games): vs. Pittsburgh (Thursday), at Tampa Bay (Saturday), at Florida (March 31), vs. Buffalo (April 2), vs. Minnesota (April 4), vs. Carolina (April 5), vs. Tampa Bay (April 7), vs. Florida (April 9), at Islanders (April 11), at New Jersey (April 12), vs. Toronto (April 15).

Columbus Blue Jackets (Metro 2) vs. Pittsburgh Penguins (Metro 3)

These teams traded spots on Tuesday, when Columbus beat Philadelphia and Pittsburgh lost to Colorado.

The Penguins began this season as the likely landing spot for Gavin McKenna in the draft. Barring a season-ending catastrophe, Sidney Crosby and the Pens will return to the postseason for the first time in four years. It's an admirable turnaround for the Pens, who went from crumbling empire to playoff dark horse under first-year head coach Dan Muse. And thanks to their draft-pick stockpile — 15 picks in the first three rounds over the next three years — they could be building a promising future.

If the playoffs started today, how would Pittsburgh fare against Columbus, another dark horse-in waiting? Rick Bowness has rejuvenated a Blue Jackets squad that looked destined for another lost season. Since Bowness took over on Jan. 12, the Jackets are 19-3-4. One big plus for the Blue Jackets: Jet Greaves looks like a starting goalie. He's 10-1-2 in his last 13 appearances.

Remaining schedules:

Penguins (11 games): at Ottawa (Thursday), vs. Dallas (Saturday), at New York Islanders (March 30), vs. Detroit (March 31), at Tampa Bay (April 2), vs. Florida (April 4), vs. Florida (April 5), at New Jersey (April 9), vs. Washington (April 11), at Washington (April 12), at St. Louis (April 14).

Blue Jackets (11 games): at Montreal (Thursday), vs. San Jose (Saturday), vs. Boston (March 29), vs. Carolina (March 31), at Carolina (April 2), vs. Winnipeg (April 4), at Detroit (April 7), at Buffalo (April 9), at Montreal (April 11), vs. Boston (April 12), vs. Washington (April 14).

Buffalo Sabres (Atlantic 1) vs. Boston Bruins (Wild-card 1)

Sabres fans, hopefully you don't mind your bandwagon filling up. Everyone is just happy you've become a virtual lock for the playoffs. We haven't seen you in the playoffs since 2011.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

The Buffalo Sabres might be the greatest bandwagon team ever. Do their fans want this?

This year's Sabres aren't just the season's best bandwagon team; they might be the single greatest bandwagon team of all time.

The Sabres' playoff chances were once as low as 10.2 percent in December. Since Dec. 9, the Sabres are 33-6-3. Now they're making a getaway with the Atlantic Division lead, having won 12 of their last 13 games, and their best players are leading the way — as many thought they would, with all the potential they'd accumulated over the years. Even journeyman goalie Alex Lyon has been a revelation, posting some of the best numbers of his career. The Tampa Bay Lightning are trailing them by two points, but there's a very real chance the Sabres will begin the postseason with home-ice advantage.

And then you have the Bruins, who are in a wild-card spot while having a strong home record (26-10-1). A big reason why is the play of Jeremy Swayman, who has the second-best goals-saved above expected rate behind Washington's Logan Thompson. Boston will need all the home

fortune they can muster, since they have only four home games remaining among their final 11 games.

Remaining schedules:

Sabres (11 games): vs. Boston (Wednesday), vs. Detroit (Friday), vs. Seattle (Saturday), vs. New York Islanders (March 31), at Ottawa (April 2), at Washington (April 4), vs. Tampa Bay (April 6), at New York Rangers (April 8), vs. Columbus (April 9), at Chicago (April 13), vs. Dallas (April 15).

Bruins (11 games): at Buffalo (Wednesday), vs. Minnesota (Saturday), at Columbus (March 29), vs. Dallas (March 31), at Florida (April 2), at Tampa Bay (April 4), at Philadelphia (April 5), at Carolina (April 7), vs. Tampa Bay (April 11), at Columbus (April 12), vs. New Jersey (April 14).

Tampa Bay Lightning (Atlantic 2) vs. Montreal Canadiens (Atlantic 3)

Tampa Bay might not win its division, thanks to Buffalo. But when the playoffs begin, don't be surprised if the Lightning are still considered the favorites. The Lightning have the highest odds to make the Final and win this year, according to The Athletic's model. Of course, they're led by Hart Trophy candidate Nikita Kucherov and Vezina Trophy candidate Andrei Vasilevskiy, and have arguably the best coach in the league in Jon Cooper plus a veteran-heavy supporting cast. But remember, the Lightning haven't gotten out of the first round since 2021-2022, when they advanced to the Final. They had Corey Perry on that team. No wonder they brought him back.

The Canadiens could return to the playoffs under coach Martin St. Louis, who might relish the opportunity to coach against the team he won a Stanley Cup with two decades ago. What's also funny — or infuriating, depending on which team you support — is that the Canadiens were locked in a rebuild the last time the Lightning were in the Final four years ago. Now the Canadiens are ascending with Cole Caufield scoring on Hockey Night in Canada and Nick Suzuki creeping toward the 100-point plateau. But questions about their goaltending, their center depth and team health will surround them once they enter the postseason.

Remaining schedules:

Lightning (12 games): vs. Seattle (Thursday), vs. Ottawa (Saturday), vs. Nashville (March 29), vs. Montreal (March 31), vs. Pittsburgh (April 2), vs. Boston (April 4), at Buffalo (April 6), at Ottawa (April 7), at Montreal (April 9), at Boston (April 11), vs. Detroit (April 13), vs. New York Rangers (April 15).

Canadiens (12 games): vs. Columbus (Thursday), at Nashville (Saturday), at Carolina (March 29), at Tampa Bay (March 31), at New York Rangers (April 2), at New Jersey (April 4), vs. New Jersey (April 5), vs. Florida (April 7), vs. Tampa Bay (April 9), vs. Columbus (April 11), at New York Islanders (April 12), at Philadelphia (April 14).

Other playoff candidates

New York Islanders (85 points, tied with Ottawa but one more game played) Detroit Red Wings (84 points), Philadelphia Flyers (80 points), Washington Capitals (79 points)

Western Conference

Colorado Avalanche (Central 1) vs. Nashville Predators (Wild-card 2)

The Avalanche were the first team to reach 100 points this season, and it's a squad that's been dominant since the beginning of the season. You're more than familiar with marquee names Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar. But the Avs also have the league's best goaltender in goals-against average and save percentage in Scott Wedgewood. Colorado has the best offense (3.71 goals per game) and defense (2.44 goals allowed per game), and the second-ranked penalty kill (83.2 percent). Why didn't we mention the power play? We'd rather not. (It's the sixth-worst in the league at 16.7 percent.)



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Nashville's surge is more recent. A five-game win streak has them in a playoff spot. These are the same Predators who sold pieces at the deadline while keeping veterans Ryan O'Reilly, Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault. If you're wondering about their chances of staying afloat in the playoff chase, they're still an arm's length from the Winnipeg Jets and also must fend off underachieving Pacific Division teams.

Remaining schedules:

Avalanche (12 games): at Winnipeg (Thursday), vs. Winnipeg (Saturday), vs. Calgary (March 30), vs. Vancouver (April 1), at Dallas (April 4), vs. St. Louis (April 5), at St. Louis (April 7), vs. Calgary (April 9), vs. Vegas (April 11), at Edmonton (April 13), at Calgary (April 14), vs. Seattle (April 16).

Predators (11 games): vs. New Jersey (Thursday), vs. Montreal (Saturday), at Tampa Bay (March 29), at Los Angeles (April 2), at San Jose (April 4), at Los Angeles (April 6), at Anaheim (April 7), at Utah (April 9), vs. Minnesota (April 11), vs. San Jose (April 13), vs. Anaheim (April 16).

Dallas Stars (Central 2) vs. Minnesota Wild (Central 3)

Thanks to the current playoff format, two of the NHL's top five teams are on a collision course to face each other in the opening round. As entertaining a series as Dallas-Minnesota would be, wouldn't it be more fun to see them play each other in the second or third round? Commissioner Gary Bettman doesn't think so!

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

NHL GM meetings: Gary Bettman defiant about playoff format, goalie interference debate gets testy

This week's three-day NHL general manager meetings wrapped up on Wednesday in South Florida.

The Stars hope to return to the Western Conference final for the fourth consecutive year. With a new coach behind the bench in Glen Gulutzan, they pose a significant threat with Mikko Rantanen, Wyatt Johnston, Jason Robertson, Miro Heiskanen and Jake Oettinger. Dallas has a top-10 offense and allows the second-fewest goals in the league. They haven't lost their luster as Cup contenders, but a big decision awaits them this offseason with Robertson headed toward restricted free agency and captain Jamie Benn's contract expiring this summer. The time to strike is now.

That motto has also rung true in Minnesota. Last September, the Wild signed Kirill Kaprizov to a lengthy extension. Months later, they swung for the fences and acquired superstar defenseman Quinn Hughes from Vancouver. They made ancillary tweaks at the deadline, landing pieces such as Nick Foligno, Michael McCarron, Bobby Brink and Jeff Petry. Should they have landed a center such as Vincent Trocheck? Maybe. But this is a strong Wild team armed with a strong goaltending tandem of Filip Gustavsson and Jesper Wallstedt. This would be the strongest matchup of the opening round if the postseason began today.

Remaining schedules:

Stars (11 games): at New York Islanders (Thursday), at Pittsburgh (Saturday), at Philadelphia (March 29), at Boston (March 31), vs. Winnipeg (April 2), vs. Colorado (April 4), vs. Calgary (April 7), vs. Minnesota (April 9), vs. New York Rangers (April 11), at Toronto (April 13), at Buffalo (April 15).

Wild (10 games): at Florida (Thursday), at Boston (Saturday), vs. Vancouver (April 2), at Ottawa (April 4), at Detroit (April 5), vs. Seattle (April 7), at Dallas (April 9), at Nashville (April 11), at St. Louis (April 13), vs. Anaheim (April 14).

Anaheim Ducks (Pacific 1) vs. Utah Mammoth (Wild-card 1)

Thanks to uninspiring play from Vegas and Edmonton, which is clearly missing Leon Draisaitl, the upstart Ducks are in the driver's seat for the Pacific Division title. If the NHL used the 1-16 playoff format, the Ducks would be the conference's only Pacific Division representative. But what's great for the Ducks is that their youth — especially Cutter Gauthier, Leo Carlsson and Beckett Sennecke — is leading the way while being insulated by veterans. They even added John Carlson from the Capitals for a well-deserved playoff push.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Can the Ducks win the Pacific Division? Here's how their surprise season is happening

Here are five major reasons why the Ducks have exceeded expectations this season.

The Mammoth have been building toward playoff contention for some time, even when they were still the Arizona Coyotes, thanks to the youth they assembled. At the trade deadline, the front office rewarded their efforts by adding MacKenzie Weegar. Thanks to their underlying metrics — their expected goals and Corsi have them rubbing shoulders with Cup-contending teams — it's worth wondering if the Mammoth might do more than just hang around in the first round of the playoffs. And that's regardless of who they face.

Remaining schedules:

Ducks (11 games): at Calgary (Thursday), at Edmonton (Saturday), vs. Toronto (March 30), at San Jose (April 1), vs. St. Louis (April 3), vs. Calgary (April 4), vs. Nashville (April 7), vs. San Jose (April 9), vs. Vancouver (April 12), at Minnesota (April 14), at Nashville (April 16).

Mammoth (10 games): vs. Washington (Thursday), at Los Angeles (Saturday), at Seattle (April 2), at Vancouver (April 4), vs. Edmonton (April 7), vs. Nashville (April 9), vs. Carolina (April 11), at Calgary (April 12), vs. Winnipeg (April 14), vs. St. Louis (April 16).

Edmonton Oilers (Pacific 2) vs. Vegas Golden Knights (Pacific 3)

In previous years, we'd salivate at a Vegas-Edmonton matchup, with two of the league's best teams trading paint. Intrigue remains, but it's focused a bit more on why things haven't gone exactly as planned in a weak Pacific Division. Connor McDavid recently likened the division to a "pillow fight."

Edmonton, which jumped over Vegas on Tuesday night, is just trying to hold the fort until Draisaitl comes back for the playoffs. McDavid can only do so much. Connor Ingram will likely get the lion's share of starts in goal because Tristan Jarry just hasn't worked out as a sufficient replacement for Stuart Skinner. That said, the Oilers should have enough horsepower to hold off Los Angeles, Seattle and San Jose below them.

The Golden Knights made the big splash for Mitch Marner last offseason. He's a point-per-game player, but that's still a drop from his career-best 102-point season last year with the Maple Leafs. And the spotlight will remain on him to deliver in the playoffs. Vegas made another splash for Rasmus Andersson this season, and he's fallen short of expectations since joining Vegas. And for some reason, Vegas hasn't been able to consistently knock off playoff teams in the regular season.

Remaining schedules:

Oilers (10 games): at Vegas (Thursday), vs. Anaheim (Saturday), vs. Seattle (March 31), vs. Chicago (April 2), vs. Vegas (April 4), at Utah (April 7), at San Jose (April 8), at Los Angeles (April 11), vs. Colorado (April 13), vs. Vancouver (April 16).

Golden Knights (10 games): vs. Edmonton (Thursday), vs. Washington (Saturday), vs. Vancouver (March 30), vs. Calgary (April 2), at Edmonton (April 4), at Vancouver (April 7), at Seattle (April 9), at Colorado (April 11), vs. Winnipeg (April 13), vs. Seattle (April 15).



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Other playoff candidates

Los Angeles Kings (74 points, three points out), Seattle Kraken (72 points), Winnipeg Jets (72 points), San Jose Sharks (70 points)

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Sportsnet.ca / 'You just black out': Cowan's courage exactly what Maple Leafs need

Luke Fox

BOSTON — Nearly everyone gave Easton Cowan a free pass for not attacking Radko Gudas when the Anaheim Ducks captain ended Auston Matthews' season with a greasy knee.

Hey, he's just a baby-faced rookie. The youngest Toronto Maple Leaf is just 20 years old and only learning the ropes. Three bigger veterans were on the same sheet. That's not his job.

Nearly everyone. But not Cowan himself.

"I wish I did something," the winger said, regretfully and quietly, a few days after the flashpoint incident. "And that's on me. I got to step in there, stick up for my teammates. So, I'll learn from that."

This Cowan kid, he's a quick study.

Not only was Cowan the first Leaf to drop the gloves following the infamous Non-Response Game, picking a fight with Anaheim's stud defenceman, Jackson LaCombe. But on Tuesday, in his first tour through the haunted TD Garden, the Cowboy rode wild.

The monstrous Nikita Zadorov — deliverer of injurious hits to both Matthews and Scott Laughton already this season — crushed John Tavares into the end-boards illegally, and Cowan bolted from across the zone, flippers off, attacking a fellow and fierce London Knights alum who has seven inches, 65 pounds and 737 games on him.

"I think you just kind of black out. And, you know, go for it," Cowan said, following an impassioned 4-2 comeback victory over the Boston Bruins. "He actually lived in my billet house in London. So, hopefully my billet parents aren't too mad."

"I was on the ice," Matthew Knies said. "I look up, and he's the first one in there. I saw his gloves flying. And that gets our whole team pumped. You know, watching a guy like that step up and try to fight a guy who's played a long time in this league and deserves a lot of respect. So, I give a lot to Easton for doing that. That's pretty cool."

With Zadorov stuffed in the box for a five-minute boarding major, Max Domi scored a go-ahead power-play goal, and the slumping Maple Leafs busted out with by far their best performance in at least two months.

A night that did nothing for lottery odds accomplished plenty for the morale.

Dakota Joshua challenged Zadorov to a proper square-up fight in the aggressor's first shift coming out of the box, and Toronto handled business on the shot clock (35-20), on special teams, and inside the intangibles.

An appreciative Tavares shared some words with Cowan as soon as he served his roughing penalty. The rookie was bombarded with knuckles and back-pats from teammates, then awarded the Leafs' player-of-the-

game belt on a night he had zero points, zero shots, and one heckuva character moment.

"I bet he's feeling pretty tall right now," Tavares smiled. "He plays with a lot of emotion. You can feel his excitement on a daily basis, just getting up and getting to play and compete. And I remember being in those shoes. So, it's invigorating and it's exciting. You know, I think the world of him.

"Speaks volumes to his passion for the group."

Toronto's passion, so lacking in the team's final game last season, has been pushed under the microscope in this troubled one.

Concerns that young Cowan could slip into the malaise, however, should be allayed. As another ex-Knight, Nazem Kadri, might say: You don't get rid of the dawgs.

"Playing in London and being around the Hunter brothers and learning about how to do things right is a big part of it," Berube said. "He's just got a lot of character.

"That's instilled in him. He has that. So, it's great to see."

Cowan has ridden quite the roller coaster through these first 58 games as a pro.

He's been demoted and scratched. He's seen top-line and PP1 shifts. And, just Saturday, he had his postgame comments of feeling "deflated" early in a loss to Ottawa ripped by Berube as "a copout" response.

Through all the turmoil and losing, Cowan has injected the veteran Leafs with a much-needed dose of youthful energy.

"His mindset has been fantastic. You know, I've checked in with him at times, just to ask him how he's doing, and he has such a great head upon his shoulders," Brandon Carlo says. "It's not easy to do, especially younger in a big market, but I have a lot of respect for the way that he's carried himself."

Carlo, 29, thinks back to his own freshman foray and how, if he made a mistake, he would stew on it.

Cowan, Carlo notes, is built a little different. He doesn't dwell on what he should've done last shift; he moves his feet and focuses on what he can do to help in his current shift.

No, Cowan didn't jump Gudas.

And no, he didn't hesitate to charge after Zadorov.

"I can appreciate just the mindset of letting it go and moving on to the next step," Carlo considers. "That's something you have to learn throughout your career, for sure. But if you can get a better grasp on it sooner rather than later, it's a big thing."

The Maple Leafs have a good one in Cowan.

For culture's sake, they better grasp on.

Fox's Fast Five

- Morgan Rielly invited ex-Leaf Jake Gardiner back to TD Garden for the club's annual mentors' trip.

Gardiner was all smiles, wearing a No. 44 road sweater with his own nameplate.

"Had a good chat with Jake this morning, which was nice," Berube said. "He told me that Tyler Bozak says hi. Bosie and I go back in St Louis days. So, it was a good talk."

- James Hagens, the seventh-overall pick in 2025, participated in his first pro practice with AHL Providence on Tuesday.

"He's gonna love it," Boston coach Marco Sturm says. "Gonna be great for him to be a pro and have that experience. And then, who knows?"



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The 19-year-old prospect wrapped a productive sophomore season with Boston College (47 points in 34 games) and elected to sign an amateur tryout with Providence.

"I like that part about him," Sturm says. "He just wants to play hockey. And that, for me, shows that it's going to be a bright future for us long term. That's just the first little step."

Is the next step joining the big Bruins in the post-season?

- With a two-goal showing, Knies hit the 20-goal mark for a second straight season and set a new career high in points (59).

His shorthanded solo rush, in which he bullied Mason Lohrei off a puck and undressed Jeremy Swayman, was a thing of beauty. Punctuated with an emphatic celebration at the glass.

"Huge goal," Berube praised. "He was really good all night, though, for us."

- Gudas, now a free man, finally spoke on the Matthews hit. The Ducks captain said he regrets the point of contact and that he reached out to Matthews via text. Matthews responded two days later.

"I've got to learn. I've got to be better as a hockey player. I never want to go out there and hurt anybody. It's very unfortunate," Gudas told reporters in Vancouver. "We spoke. I never want to see anybody get hurt, so I feel terrible about that."

- Fraser Minten and Carlo will be forever linked in Atlantic Division lore, and they are both spoken of in highest regard by the dressing rooms they were traded out of.

Carlo and Minten have never met.

Minten, who sits beside Alex Steeves in the Bruins' room, is striving for his first NHL playoff action.

"It's nice to be in really meaningful games every night right now and on a super-fun team. Been a really fun year, so hopefully we can keep it going into the post-season," the Vancouver native says.

Coach Sturm sees a bright future for his current top-line centre.

"Look at him. He looks like a 15-year-old," Sturm grins. "That means, for me, there's a lot to fill even in his body and everything. I've been working with young kids in the past, and I just love being part of this."

How much room does Minten have to grow?

"Probably not too much vertically. Maybe a little more horizontally," replies Minten, speaking for sportswriters everywhere.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Dobes shines in win over Canes, must continue to fight for starter's role

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — With less than five minutes to play, with the Montreal Canadiens desperately clinging to a 4-2 lead Ivan Demidov secured moments earlier, Jakub Dobes stared down Logan Stankoven and robbed him of a breakaway goal.

The 24-year-old made six more saves before Jake Evans scored the insurance marker into an empty net, and one more for good measure on

Eric Robinson to keep the Carolina Hurricanes to just two goals on 43 shots and cement himself in the chair he's been fighting for all season.

This was Dobes' 23rd win in 34 starts, and it affirmed his status as the Canadiens' starting goaltender — even if no one will anoint him just yet.

It's probably best no one does, for the man who's been labelled "competitive" above all other traits seems to be at his best when he's fighting for something.

"I think it's part of it," said Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis. "I feel that for Dobes, he's just been trying to get that chair, steal a chair, get that chair, and I think that's an every-day thing. Once you stop worrying about that, I think that's when somebody steals your chair."

Samuel Montembeault knows.

He fought his whole career just to have a chair, and the second he reclined in the one he earned, it was kicked out from under him.

We're talking about the goaltender who ranked fifth in the NHL in goals saved above expected last season, who came to the Canadiens as a third-string waiver claim and quickly went from proving he belonged in the league to proving he belonged in the No. 1 position over veteran Jake Allen.

Montembeault's rise hit its peak on the Canadiens' way to an unlikely playoff berth last season, which he played a huge role in earning by performing exceptionally well down the stretch. He started 20 of the final 22 games, posting the fourth-best save percentage in the league to win 13 of them while helping the Canadiens earn points in four others. And a torn groin in the middle of the first-round series with the Washington Capitals did anything but rip away the confidence the team had in him coming into this season.

It started poorly and got worse. And despite Dobes' best effort to push the off-balance Montembeault out of position, benefit of the doubt was rightfully extended to the veteran until it no longer could be.

It teetered when 21-year-old Jacob Fowler entered the mix for 10 games from Dec. 15-Jan. 11, and it broke awhile after Fowler returned to the American Hockey League.

In between, Dobes emerged with a crater on his shoulder — never mind a chip — and fought even harder for what he thought belonged to him.

And well, the results have been more than convincing, with the Ostrava, Czechia native going 7-2-1 prior to Fowler's return to Montreal, and 2-1-0 since. He's also posted a .907 save percentage over that period and looked better and better from game to game.

And yes, how Dobes has looked matters.

Take it from Cole Caufield, who scored his 44th goal of the season in Tuesday's win. He knows what players want to see from their goaltender.

Latest episode

"Confidence, and some swagger," Caufield said. "No matter if you get scored on or have a shutout, it's the same mentality. A win is a win, and you've just got to save more than the other guy. I think Dobes has that ... Just every night, he gives us a chance."

That wasn't the case a bit earlier this season, when Dobes looked anything but sure of himself and had to be bailed out by the Canadiens.

But on this night, Dobes allowed two goals he had no chance on and then made 33 straight saves with confidence oozing.

Several of them came while Carolina's goaltender was on the bench and an extra attacker was on the ice for the final 4:14, on shots that could've — and probably — should've beaten him.

"At the end of the day, your best player in those situations has got to be your goalie," said St. Louis, "and he was that tonight."



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A career-high 41 saves made that an undeniable statement.

That's all we got from Dobes, for the Canadiens decided to not make the goaltender available to speak with reporters.

He's been as unpredictable in some of his media scrums as he has been in his crease at times this season, which has apparently caused some consternation in the organization.

All signs that Dobes is still young, and green — just 54 games (regular season and post-season combined) into his NHL career.

The evidence is at least mounting, though, that he's maturing on the ice.

"I think he's progressed tremendously," said St. Louis, "and he's learning how to be a pro in this league, and how competitive it is, and he's doing well."

Well enough to be the starter for the Canadiens, even if it's best to keep him fighting for the job.

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Sportsnet.ca / Jarry, Oilers step up for each other to deliver quality win

Mark Spector

SALT LAKE CITY — Try being Tristan Jarry these past few months, a struggling goalie in a high-profile Canadian market.

Your name is on every tongue across the hockey world, and not in a positive way.

You're part of the worst trade made in the National Hockey League this season, they say. And not the good part, but instead just another failed attempt at finding a guy who can backstop a Stanley Cup win for Edmonton.

You've been in town for five minutes, and suddenly they're hanging the "Connor McDavid era" around your neck, like you've been part of this thing forever.

And on top of all of that, your game has been, well, kind of a mess.

And so it was that, on a night where the Edmonton Oilers rolled out a style of hockey that wins playoff games, Jarry found enough of his own game to make it all stand up in an impressive 5-2 win at Utah.

"The guys, they were doing everything in their power to help me, whether it's practice or games. They support me," said Jarry, who surrendered seven in Dallas on the last road trip and hadn't played in the five games since. "They were there with me, and they pushed me. And I think that's all you could ask for from them.

"They played great in front of me tonight. They were blocking shots. They were getting pucks out, clearing rebounds, and it made it really easy for me tonight."

It's been a trek here in Edmonton for Jarry, who arrived as a saviour then couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the kind of team defence his new team played. After a 7-3 loss to Minnesota — a game in which he let in a few questionable ones — he snapped.

"The chances we are giving up, some of the shots, they're tough," he said that night in January. "It's a lot of Grade A's, a lot of breakdowns. So I think it's tough (for him) to really think about your game at this point. It's a whole team game."

That's the last time Jarry has sounded even remotely selfish. There was a meeting, some conversations, whatever.

From the next day on, he's taken responsibility for his game publicly, even though there was a large dose of truth to his review of the Minny game.

Jarry hasn't been good enough in Edmonton. Full stop.

But the team hasn't given him a night like they gave him Tuesday in Salt Lake City either, where they limited the Mammoth to 18 shots on goal and six high danger chances.

"It goes both ways. I could have played better for them," said Jarry, who had started just two of 12 Oilers games coming into Utah. "This last couple weeks has allowed me to work on my game, practice well, and just kind of come in with a clear mind today. And they played a great game today in front of me. They did everything."

It was a night for round numbers at the Delta Center, a basketball arena that looks a little more like a hockey rink every time we visit.

Connor McDavid (two goals) scored career goal No. 400, while Ryan Nugent-Hopkins collected his 800th career point with an assist on a nice line rush goal by Jack Roslovic (two goals). Behind the Utah bench, Andre Tourigny coached his 400th career NHL game, but the most impressive player to post a round number was Evan Bouchard — whose first of three assists gave him 80 points on the season.

He finished the night with 82, tying a career-high with 10 games left in the season.

It was one of those nights where Bouchard laid down a game for the rest of the D corps to follow. Smart, subtle passes that led to zone exits. Perfect pucks that hit forwards' tape in stride. Eight shot attempts and a defensive game that reminded of playoff Bouchard — quiet, clean and deadly effective.

His game was the tip of the spear for an Edmonton team that's been trying to find, then replicate this level of game all season long.

"That's a pretty good example of it," head coach Kris Knoblauch admitted. "The past two games, five-on-five, we played the way we needed to: a lot more attention to the defensive details, a lot more grit, a lot more just simplicity.

"Going forward, especially without Leon (Draisaitl), we definitely need to be playing like that. And even when Leon comes back, we need to still play like that. That's a playoff-hockey type game that we just played."

"It was a good one," said McDavid. "One that we hope we can replicate on Thursday."

As he gets older, and the numbers get bigger and more historic, the 29-year-old McDavid is allowing himself to smell the roses a little bit more.

He has exactly 1,200 points — 401 goals, 799 assists — in 784 games. That makes McDavid the third fastest to 1,200 in NHL history, behind only Wayne Gretzky (504 games) and Mario Lemieux (593).

"When you're getting up to some of these bigger numbers, it's a reflection of time past," McDavid said. "It's my 11th year in this league, and you don't get those back.

"I'm very grateful to play in this league. I've played with some great players."

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Sportsnet.ca / Parekh goal, fluky finish show Flames' culture growing



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Eric Francis

CALGARY – There are those who don't find it remotely amusing the Flames are now on their longest winning streak of the season.

However, even those on Team Tank had to chuckle when Yegor Sharangovich lost the handle on his shootout attempt late Tuesday, only to see the game clincher slide under the pads of Kings goalie Darcy Kuemper.

"They're laughing and chirping in the back, 'Yegor Kucherov,'" Sharangovich grinned following a 3-2 shootout win over Los Angeles, punctuated by a fortuitously botched deke that had him covering his mouth while being mobbed by teammates.

"I went to go to the backhand and it just slipped under his pad. I'm just happy the puck went in."

On a night the undermanned Flames extended their winning streak to four games, the real story wasn't the bloopers-reel finish.

It was the man who set up the memorable shootout with a late, game-tying power play goal: Zayne Parekh.

Midway through the third, with the Flames down 2-1, and a 5-on-3 power play looking for a spark, the 19-year-old defenceman stepped into a shot at the point and hammered home his first goal of his season.

It came in his 26th game of a trying season.

"I was kind of accepting I wasn't going to score this year," Parekh admitted with a smile.

"So it was nice to find one. I like the way I'm playing. I like the way my game is trending, and I'm having fun. I mean, we're winning hockey games, so it's a lot of fun."

It was more than a goal. It was a marker of where this franchise is headed.

Parekh, Matvei Gridin, and Matt Coronato – three players expected to form the backbone of the next competitive Flames team – were all on the ice together in overtime.

It was merited, as they'd all combined for Parekh's snipe.

That's not an accident. It's symbolic of the shift in philosophy.

Flames coach Ryan Huska didn't hide how meaningful Parekh's breakthrough was, not just for the player, but for the process.

"I think he's frustrated, or he was, and we've had some conversations about that," Huska said, on a night the rookie had a career-high five shots on net.

"He just needs to remember that he's doing a lot of great things away from the puck. He's learning how to play the game at the NHL level, which is crazy. He's a smaller defenceman that's a skilled guy, and it's hard to break in as a 19-year-old."

Huska has been adamant: the points will come.

Tuesday was a start.

"The pressure gets put on him from outside sources at times," Huska added.

"What he is doing, though, is learning to be more of a complete player. And I think he's done an excellent job with that."

Gridin, who set up the goal, couldn't hide how much it meant to see his fellow rookie finally break through.

"It's good Zayne finally scored his first goal of the season – we were all waiting for that, and he was so happy," said the 20-year-old winger, who set up the overtime winner one game earlier against Tampa.

"Hopefully we'll play for, like, 15 more years together, and generate a lot."

If nothing else, they're generating plenty of confidence, which is what's needed for youngsters to grow.

"Sky high," smiled Gridin of his confidence, who was the first to say he was "really good" in the previous game's extra frame.

"I appreciate the coach's trust me in that situation."

Parekh echoed the sentiment.

"He trusts me in those situations, and it means a lot to me," said Parekh of Huska.

"Hopefully the three of us keep ending up on the sheet together."

Four straight wins in a season without playoffs doesn't help the club's draft status, but it sure helps a young team establish the standard necessary to compete nightly.

Helps morale too, as winning fosters a healthier environment for the youngsters to thrive in.

Right now it's about a coach who's not afraid to put teenagers on the ice in overtime.

It's about a room that can laugh at a fluky shootout winner while celebrating a rookie's first goal in a trying season.

It's about a culture forming around opportunity, growth and a bit of fun along the way.

Sharangovich's accidental Kucherov may have been the punchline of the night, but Parekh's goal was the headline.

And the kids? They're becoming the story.

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1224422 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / What can last-place Canucks learn from Ducks' rebuild?

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — Wistful excitement in imagining the Vancouver Canucks as the next Anaheim Ducks is tempered by the time — seven years — it has taken the Ducks to become what they are.

They are finally a playoff team again, but not yet one ready to actually win anything. They have tremendous speed and are a riot to watch because the Ducks attack exuberantly in waves, often at the expense of their own defensive well-being.

Tuesday against the Canucks, the Ducks surrendered a couple of leads before surviving a late surge by Vancouver and winning 5-3 on Troy Terry's empty-net clincher.

It was a far better game for the Canucks than what they offered their home crowd Saturday against the St. Louis Blues (3-1 loss) and last Thursday against the Tampa Bay Lightning (6-2 loss) but was still Vancouver's third straight defeat at Rogers Arena, and its fifth in seven games during a marathon homestand that ends Thursday against the Los Angeles Kings.



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But the Ducks were also a lot more fun for the Canucks to play than St. Louis or Tampa, which each limited Vancouver to just 10 shots through two periods. The Canucks' 30 shots on Tuesday — the Ducks had 34 — equalled their second-highest total in the last 18 games.

"I thought it was a better effort," Canuck winger Jake DeBrusk said after opening the scoring. "But I still thought we gave away way too many Grade-As (scoring chances). I think they had five breakaways, and a couple two-on-ones in there. So it wasn't necessarily our best game by any means, but I definitely liked our effort and the pushback.

"(The Ducks) have obviously gone through a lot of growing pains. Got a lot of younger guys, some older guys mixed in there. I like the way they play; I think they play hard. Obviously, they're known as a run-and-gun team because they can score goals, but I like the speed. I think that's the biggest part of their game. They probably want to clean up some things (defensively), but they're leading our division right now for a reason. And I think it's because they're starting to learn how to play a little tighter."

Asked Tuesday morning what lessons the Canucks could take for their rebuild from the Ducks, Vancouver coach Adam Foote hesitated long enough for the Buffalo Sabres and Detroit Red Wings to actually make the playoffs.

Foote could have said: "Miss the playoffs for seven straight seasons and be so bad during a four-year period that you draft three times in the top three."

Instead, after measuring his answer, Foote talked about surrounding good young players with some carefully chosen veterans who give the prospects space. But he also noted, as many do not, that the Ducks are still a work in progress and need to learn "not" to play run-and-gun each game.

He also could have said "be patient," although that is hardly news to anyone who has followed the painful, years-long rebuilds in places like Anaheim, Chicago and San Jose, as well as the excruciating, interminable ones in Buffalo and Detroit, where the roster construction has frequently looked like failure.

The Ducks, at least, have more or less shown progress in a rebuild whose foundation is drafted core players Leo Carlsson, Mason McTavish, Beckett Sennecke, Jackson LaCombe and Lukas Dostal, and acquired-in-trade sniper Cutter Gauthier.

Still, after nine straight losses, the Ducks were a not-so-mighty 21-21-3 on Jan. 10 when coach Joel Quenneville convinced them to start defending better.

They are 19-6-1 since and have allowed three or fewer goals in 18 of those games. A few times when they've been porous, the Ducks' speed and talent have allowed them to outscore their deficiencies. They've also been buoyed by an 8-0-1 record in overtime and shootouts the last two months. For what it's worth, Anaheim hasn't lost any of its eight shootouts this season.

Whether this makes them a playoff threat is doubtful, but right now they're definitely a playoff team. Not only are they winning the Pacific Division pillow fight, they've built a 10-point cushion in the wild-card race. So they'll be returning to the Stanley Cup tournament for the first time since 2018.

"I think the one thing we said was, 'Hey, listen, we've got to look at this differently,'" Quenneville said Tuesday of the Ducks' mid-winter turning point. "We've got to play games where we've got to be more stingy. It's not about making plays every single time we're out there, expecting a score. We've got to play games that are going to be tight the whole way and build off of checking." And, you know, different guys were stepping up, scoring some big goals and some timely goals, but it wasn't pretty. Basically doing everything we could to win that game and play the right way."

The Canucks will miss the playoffs for the second straight season — and the ninth time in 11 years. Will it be five more seasons before Vancouver sees a playoff game?

Well, if it is, few of the players and none of the staff who are with the Canucks now will be around to see it.

No wonder the players, especially veterans like DeBrusk who know what may lie ahead, are trying to stay focussed on the present — trying to be better next game than they were this game.

"I grew up in Edmonton," DeBrusk said. "Trust me, I know first-overall pick after first-overall pick doesn't mean success. It doesn't. You need a lot of things to go right in this league. You need a lot of good veterans and a lot of good luck. You need health. But, you're right, it's taken Anaheim a long time. I think if you look at a rebuild in general, you know, the position we're in, we're just looking for any improvements. Competing every night is pretty much our jobs as players. That's all we can control."

DeBrusk, Brock Boeser and Drew O'Connor scored for the Canucks. A pair of power-play assists by Elias Pettersson gave him 500 points in 533 games with Vancouver.

Mikael Granlund scored twice for the Ducks, while John Carlson and Leo Carlsson combined for five assists. Besides being the faster team, the Ducks are also, on average, 12 pounds heavier than the Canucks and outit them 21-13.

"I just liked the way we stuck with it and we pushed real hard," Foote said.

They will need to continue that for a while.

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Sportsnet.ca / Three long shots with best chance to become Hart Trophy finalists

Adam Vingan

This season's Hart Trophy race is shaping up to be a fascinating one.

The usual suspects are there. Nathan MacKinnon is the best player on the best team. Nikita Kucherov is on a scoring spree that puts him in rare company. And as long as Connor McDavid has air in his lungs, he will be in the mix for the NHL's MVP award.

But which outsiders could crash the party and become finalists? Here are three players who have strong cases:

Players whose teams miss the playoffs rarely end up as MVP finalists. Only three since the turn of the millennium — McDavid in 2018-19, Steven Stamkos in 2011-12 and Jarome Iginla in 2001-02 — have finished in the top three in voting despite sitting out the post-season.

That likely means Celebrini is out of the running unless the Sharks, who woke up Tuesday with a 25.8 per cent chance of qualifying for the playoffs, defy those odds. But if San Jose somehow finds a way into the playoffs for the first time since 2019, then Celebrini deserves consideration.

Celebrini's 96 points — 51 more than his next closest teammate (Will Smith) — speak for themselves. At his current pace of 1.41 points per game, the 19-year-old Celebrini will finish the season with 116, which would be the third most by a teenager in league history behind Wayne Gretzky (137 in 1979-80) and Sidney Crosby (120 in 2006-07).



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An argument can be made that Celebrini is the most well-rounded forward in the league. He ranks inside the top five at the position in defensive plays (league-leading 454), slot-driving plays (474) and scoring chances (250), as well as seventh in puck-battle wins (202). It would not be surprising if Celebrini winds up on a lot of Hart Trophy ballots even if the Sharks fail in their pursuit of a playoff spot.

"The way he drives our group into the fight, the way he drives and plays a 200-foot game is super impressive for a young player," Sharks coach Ryan Warsofsky told NHL.com. "The way he defends. He's arguably one of our most physical defensive players and can close and kill plays, and the way he can drive pucks in the offence. He's obviously had a really good year and has really put people on notice of who he is, that's for sure."

Most of the headlines out of Long Island this season have been about rookie defenceman Matthew Schaefer, and understandably so. But the Islanders would be nowhere near a playoff spot without their starting goaltender. Sorokin has kept the Islanders afloat almost single-handedly, saving an eye-popping 61.9 goals above expected in 45 games this season. (Connor Hellebuyck, who won the Hart Trophy last season, stopped 41.7 goals above expected in 63 games.)

Sorokin plays behind one of the league's worst defences; New York averages 3.43 expected goals against per 60 minutes when Sorokin is in net, which places him 71st out of 72 goaltenders who have appeared in at least 10 games this season.

And yet Sorokin leads all goaltenders in shutouts (seven), quality-start rate (82.2 per cent) and total steals (14). A steal occurs when a goaltender's GSAE is greater than the final score differential. (Sorokin recorded his latest steal Sunday when he saved 2.5 goals above expected in the Islanders' 1-0 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets.)

Remarkably, Sorokin has stolen nearly one-third of his starts (14-of-45). Put another way: Sorokin has directly contributed to 28 of the Islanders' 85 standings points.

"He has an impact every night he's in the net for us," Islanders forward Jean-Gabriel Pageau told reporters earlier this season. "He gives us a chance to win, or he wins the game himself sometimes. He's our best player most of the nights. I would for sure consider him in the Hart race."

Werenski was a dark-horse MVP candidate last season, finishing seventh in voting and even receiving one first-place nod. Columbus has surged into third place in the Metropolitan Division under new coach Rick Bowness, who has guided the team to an 18-3-4 record since Jan. 13. (The Blue Jackets' 8-0-4 run ended Sunday thanks to Sorokin and the Islanders.)

Werenski's case for the Hart Trophy is fairly straightforward. He averages 26:23 of ice time per game, second only to Quinn Hughes (27:44) among all skaters, and his 75 points are second most on defence behind Evan Bouchard (79). Werenski is the only defenceman in the league who leads his team in points.

Columbus' attack runs through Werenski, whose 592 offence-generating plays in all situations lead all defencemen despite missing seven games. Those include passes and carries to the slot, as well as slot shots on net and other plays that often translate to goals. The Blue Jackets have outscored opponents 74-57 during Werenski's minutes at five-on-five.

"I'm at a point where I'm a veteran guy and I think it's important to lead by example," Werenski told reporters. "And doing that means doing what you're capable of, and, for me, I feel like that's driving the offence and bringing our team into that way."

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Sportsnet.ca / Why Norris Trophy race is as tight as it's ever been

Emily Sadler

When we last checked in on the Norris Trophy race, we had a clear leader in Colorado Avalanche defenceman Cale Makar. He set the pace, but since that point, some of his peers have caught up.

Of the NHL's major individual awards this year, the honour of being named the NHL's best defenceman might just hold the most intrigue based on not only how tight the race is this deep into the season, but just how strong a field it is. In an era of special blue-liners, this truly is a special season. It's hard to recall a year in which this many top defencemen have been this great, this consistent, this productive... all at the same time.

The fact the Calder Memorial Trophy was won by a defenceman last year in Lane Hutson — now a Norris contender — and is once again fixed on the blue line as defenceman Matthew Schaefer tightens his grip on the top rookie award shows us this chapter of game-changing defencemen is here to stay.

Checking in on the Norris race as we enter the final stretch of the season helps us appreciate the great performances we're seeing and put it all into perspective.

With that in mind, here's a look at the top names — and there are many — in the hunt for the Norris Trophy right now.

There might just be a new leading man in the Norris Trophy race. Zach Werenski finished as runner-up for the award last year behind Makar, and this season looks hell-bent on finally earning the honour for himself. The bigger story, and the bigger goal for Werenski and Columbus, is of course how the star rearguard is propelling the Blue Jackets from league basement to playoff position in the span of two months, but he's more than worthy of the hardware for his efforts. The hiring of Rick Bowness in mid-January has injected an energy and an identity into this lineup that goes beyond the new-coach-bump phenomenon.

One season after registering his first 80-point campaign (he had 82 points in 81 games last year), Werenski is five points shy of hitting the milestone again with career-highs across the board. He currently leads all defencemen in scoring pace (1.19 points per game) and sits second behind only Evan Bouchard in total points right now. He's also second in ice time per game, skating an average of 26:23 (only Quinn Hughes logs more). He is the biggest driver of the Blue Jackets' surging success, both offensively — he leads the team in assists (55) and points (75) by a mile — and defensively, too. All that adds to him not just being a deserving front-runner for the Norris but worthy of some Hart Trophy chatter, too.

Cale Makar, Colorado Avalanche

The defending Norris Trophy winner has won the award twice now (he also earned the honour in 2021-22) and for most of this season, he's been the clear front-runner for a third. But a (relative) slowdown in his production, combined with a serious surge by some of his peers, brings plenty of intrigue to this award race.

The first half of the campaign saw Makar lead all defencemen in assists (35 — tied with Lane Hutson), points (47), and plus-minus rating (plus-32) while producing offence at a rate of 1.15 points per game (second behind Werenski). In 28 games since that mid-season point, his production has fallen to a rate of 0.82 points per game, with eight goals and 15 points in 28 games in the second half of the season. A pair of four-game point streaks since the Olympic break have him getting back to his previous pace, and have added some excitement, too — because there's history on the line.



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With 498 career NHL points to his name, he's just two shy of hitting 500 and if he can hit the mark Tuesday night against Pittsburgh, he'll tie the great Denis Potvin as the third fastest defenceman in NHL history to get there. Potvin scored his 500th career point in career game No. 465, trailing only Bobby Orr (he needed just 396 games to get to 500 points) and Paul Coffey (422) for fewest games to reach the milestone.

Quinn Hughes, Minnesota Wild

The Wild knew exactly who they were getting when they sent a haul to Vancouver in exchange for Quinn Hughes, and the defender has more than lived up to the billing. The 2023-24 Norris Trophy winner (and 2024-25 finalist) has been Minnesota's best setup man since landing with the wild on Dec. 14 — his 42 assists in 39 games since then is tops on the team, and it's not particularly close. The only teammate with a better points-per-game average since that date is Kirill Kaprizov, with 1.24 compared to Hughes' 1.18.

Hughes has registered 12 multi-point games with the Wild — already tying a franchise record among defencemen — and has been held off the score sheet just 11 times in Minnesota.

His 63 assists in 65 games this season (including with the Canucks) has him fourth in the category league-wide regardless of position, while his marathon minutes (27:44 per game) this year has him logging nearly 90 seconds more than the next-busiest skater. Truly, a dominant defenceman worthy of adding another piece of hardware to his trophy cabinet.

Evan Bouchard, Edmonton Oilers

No defenceman has scored more goals or tallied more points since the calendar flipped to 2026 than Evan Bouchard. In fact, his stat line in that time — 42 points in 30 games, including 12 goals (three of which served as game-winners) — ranks him fifth in scoring across the NHL regardless of position since Jan. 1.

His offensive outburst has already seen him surpass his previous goal-scoring high, and he's just two points shy of posting his best-ever points total, too. On top of that, he's reined in his penchant for untimely turnovers, proving his status as a reliable top-pairing rearguard is about more than his offensive contributions. His nearly 25 minutes of ice time per game is good for 10th league-wide. The trust is there, and he's rewarding it.

Lane Hutson, Montreal Canadiens

Last year's Calder Trophy winner as the NHL's top rookie isn't the front-runner for the honour of being named this year's best defenceman, but it's certainly within reach. The veteran-like play of Montreal's blue liner has shone through from the start as he's proven himself to be a key pillar of the Canadiens' young core.

Hutson's average ice time doesn't jump off the page compared to his peers on this list, but his offensive contributions do. The 22-year-old's 58 assists on the season are third best among all defenders and his 69 points have him tied with Hughes for fourth-most at the position. His season stats show a huge jump over last year's excellent output — he's almost doubled his goals total, from six last year to 11 through 69 games this season, and has already bested last season's points total by three. His plus-26 rating shows the biggest jump (up from minus-two last year!) and while it's a long shot for him to land the Norris in just his second season, the fact he's in this conversation tells us a lot about what's yet to come for this budding star.

The Buffalo Sabres are the best story going in the NHL right now — between their playoff position atop the Atlantic and the Blue Jackets' third-place status in the Metropolitan, the underdog presence is powerful in the East, overall. It's no great surprise that Rasmus Dahlin has a lot to do with Buffalo's long-awaited breakout, and while he's not the top contender for the Norris Trophy, he's making an exceptional case to be among the finalists.

Dahlin's 15 goals and 50 assists have him sitting seventh in both categories among defencemen, while his 65 points have him sitting sixth. That 11 of those goals and 37 of those points have been registered since the new year reinforces his role as a key propeller in the Sabres' success. His plus-20 rating since the NHL's Olympic break shows yet another surge for both player and team.

Compared to his offensively elite peers, Moritz Seider's point production doesn't jump off the page — though, we know that's an incredibly high bar. That Seider's 48 points (two shy of his career-best, set as a rookie) in 70 games ranks on the low end compared to the others on this list speaks to just how talented this crop of d-men are.

It also speaks to how much we value offence in Norris conversations — offensive production tends to play an outsized role in our view of the top defenders. But Seider's dominance goes beyond his efforts on the scoresheet. His two-way play is almost unparalleled and his impact at both ends of the ice is hard to miss with his fourth-highest ice time league-wide, at 25:35 a game. It's rare to have a player with such an elite skillset also register as many blocked shots as Seider does (his 154 this season is fifth-highest; you've got to scroll a while to find another Norris contender among the league's best shot-blockers). The Norris is likely a long shot this season, but if we're talking about truly well-rounded defenders worthy of a little more shine, Seider is establishing himself as one of the best in the game today.

Miro Heiskanen is back, and he has been about as steady as they come this season. Unlike others on this list, Heiskanen hasn't had the drastic surge in production in the second half of his season. With 59 points in 68 games, he's been a consistent offensive presence from the Stars' blue line — great to see, after his season was cut short last year by a serious knee injury. While that likely puts his Norris candidacy at the lower end compared to his elite peers, he belongs in this conversation all the same. His marathon minutes (25:50 per game) rank third-highest league-wide while his playmaking (50 helpers) has been on full display. His obvious value as both a power-play quarterback for Dallas' second-ranked PP and excellent penalty-killer (he's the only Norris contender on this list sitting among the top defenders in PK minutes) have been on full display this season, too.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs notebook: Carlo blocking criticism of Minten trade

Luke Fox

BOSTON — There was a time, not so long ago, when springtime showdown between the Toronto Maple Leafs and Boston Bruins at TD Garden would mean something.

A Round 1 playoff preview perhaps. A measuring stick for two Eastern Conference titans. A civic referendum on hockey culture. Something grander than 60 minutes of entertainment as the frost evaporated off the Causeway's flying Bobby Orr statue.

A couple of storied and good teams puffing their chests to see who's better.

In 2024-25, you may recall, the Maple Leafs and Bruins were co-owners of the NHL's longest active post-season streak at eight years.

Well, Boston ceded that title Toronto last March, and now the floundering Maple Leafs have spiked their own impressive playoff run, selling at the



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trade deadline and hoping for a Bruins-like rebound to relevance in 2026-27.

To that end, a top-five draft pick in 2026 would bless Leafs Nation with much-needed hope.

A prospect drafted between No. 6 and No. 10 overall that funnels into Boston's system?

That's a major yikes. And it would only further reflect poorly on GM Brad Treliving's 2025 deadline deal for defenceman Brandon Carlo, which cost Toronto 21-year-old Fraser Minten and a 2026 first-round pick that is only protected through the top five.

Team Tank would prefer the Maple Leafs extend their losing skid Tuesday, when Treliving's most criticized move will be on full display.

Whip-smart Minten has bulked up. He is in the throes of a breakout campaign, his first full one in the show. His 70 games, 16 goals, and 31 points are all career highs.

Minten's plus-22 rating leads all Bruins forwards. And he's now centring playoff-bound Boston's top line. David Pastrnak is on the man's wing.

Boston coach Marco Sturm has likened Minten to another two-way pivot, L.A.'s Quinton Byfield, in the way the centre thinks the game.

"There are a lot of things you can't teach," Sturm told reporters of Minten's hockey IQ, which was also raved about in Toronto. "That's why he's ahead of some other guys. He already had it. Even the teaching part, he gets it right away. He just has it. He's lucky enough to be born with it."

The flip side of the Minten trade, Carlo, has heard the criticism and admitted to reporters in Toronto on Monday that the fan base's angst over move has been "a little bit" tough on him.

"If you're gonna be in the NHL environment, there's gonna be a lot of things you need to tune out throughout your career," Carlo said. "Just put it in the category with most of those things and continue forward."

Could the prospect-light Maple Leafs, who recently traded away depth centres Nicolas Roy and Scott Laughton, benefit from the service of the emerging Minten? No doubt.

To be fair, Carlo has battled a foot injury this season and has consistently professed his appreciation and desire to be a Leaf. He's also under contract for a team-friendly \$3.49-million cap hit next season, which makes him a valuable contributor if they get back in the mix and a valuable trade asset if they don't.

And then there's this nugget, which may surprise some: The Maple Leafs, at minus-29, have the worst goal differential in the Eastern Conference. Carlo (plus-9) is the only Leafs defenceman (minimum 12 games played) who has been on the ice for as many goals for as goals against (36-36), despite starting only 45 per cent of his shifts in the offensive zone.

Carlo hasn't hurt his new team.

The catch is that where the Maple Leafs find themselves now — in search of picks, young impact players and centre depth — Carlo's best game can't make up for all of that.

Carlo is the rare player who has seen both sides of the Toronto-Boston rivalry. He predicts a competitive affair Tuesday, standings be damned.

"You know it's going to be physical," Carlo said.

And, because of their link, you know both Carlo and Minten will be scrutinized in this one.

Stolarz rebounds from Nylander scare

Despite Saturday's unplanned visit to an Ottawa hospital and Monday's recall of third-stringer Dennis Hildeby on an emergency basis, Anthony Stolarz is expected to start one half of this week's back-to-back. (Coach Craig Berube hasn't declared whether that'll be in Boston, site of Stolarz's original neck injury this season, or Wednesday at home versus the New York Rangers.)

An errant William Nylander warm-up shot caught the goaltender in the throat, making it difficult for him to breathe or talk for 30 or 40 minutes.

Stolarz, who recovered from a nerve issue in his neck shortly before the Olympic break, went for imaging to make sure blood vessels weren't damaged. He was cleared by the buzzer and traveled home with the club.

"I'm fine," Stolarz told reporters in Toronto, after practising with some new neck protection. "It's an occupational hazard. You get pucks coming at you anywhere from 70 to 100 miles an hour, they're gonna catch you in a bad spot once in a while. Just kinda shock."

Nylander checked in on Stolarz immediately after his mistake and followed up with text messages before leaving Canadian Tire Centre on Saturday.

"I have certain spots where I shoot it, so they know where I'm shooting it all the time," says Nylander, who was aiming glove. "Except for maybe the last shot we do in the half-moon, maybe you try to score. But other than that, I'm always doing the same shot."

"I feel really bad for that."

Accidents happen. No real harm done.

"He's good. It's a one-off," Stolarz said, shaking off the incident with a smile.

During the broadcast, Sportsnet analyst Craig Simpson suggested the onus is on Nylander to control his aim. A couple goaltenders we spoke to, though, suggested that goalies must never let their neck be exposed during shooting drills.

Soccer players cover their most sensitive bits when building a wall to block free kicks.

Auston Matthews even gave Stolarz a bit of advice: "Next time, keep your chin tucked."

One-Timers: Morgan Rielly missed Saturday's game in Ottawa due to a lower-body injury but returned to practice Monday and was a full participant.... Oliver Ekman-Larsson left practice early because "something was bugging him," according to Berube. The coach assures the durable defenceman will be fine to play Tuesday.... Joseph Woll says he never took so many pucks in the head as he did Saturday in Ottawa: three. "My poor mask was taking a beating," he chuckled. "It broke. We fixed it. It broke again. Check my brain after that game. That's the most I've gotten hit in the head for sure.... The Maple Leafs mentors' trip is going down in Boston."

Maple Leafs' projected lineup Tuesday in Boston:

Forwards

Cowan – Tavares – Nylander

Knies – Domi – Robertson

Maccelli – Groulx – Joshua

Lorentz – Quillan – Pezzetta

Defence

Rielly – Carlo

McCabe – Ekman-Larsson



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Benoit – Stecher

Goalies

Stolarz starts

Woll

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TSN.CA / Disastrous deadline deal looms over Leafs as they limp into Boston

Mark Masters

Last year's disastrous deadline deal is looming over the Leafs as they limp back into Boston for the final time during this nightmare season.

It was last March that Toronto acquired defenceman Brandon Carlo (under contract through 2026-27 with 15 per cent of his cap hit retained) from the Bruins in exchange for their 2026 first-round pick (top-five protected) and prized prospect Fraser Minten.

The Leafs enter Tuesday's game in Boston with the sixth worst points percentage in the league. So, Toronto may be about to hand over a top-10 pick to their Atlantic Division rivals.

Meanwhile, Minten is lining up as Boston's top-line centre.

"It's fun," the 21-year-old said. "It's nice to be in really meaningful games every night right now and on a super fun team. Been a really fun year, so hopefully we can keep it going into the post-season."

The Bruins occupy the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference, but have just a two-point cushion over the ninth-place Detroit Red Wings.

Minten has produced 16 goals and 15 assists and leads all Bruins forwards at plus-22. He's currently slotting in beside David Pastrnak and Marat Khushnutdinov.

How much room does Minten, who played a career-high 21 minutes and nine seconds in Saturday's win in Detroit, have to grow?

"Probably not too much vertically," the 6-foot-2, 204-pound pivot said with a grin. "But maybe a little more horizontally. We'll see."

"Look at him, he looks like a 15-year-old," coach Marco Sturm said with a grin. "So that means, for me, there's a lot to fill even in his body and everything. I've been working with young kids in the past and I just love being part of this."

Minten is only getting better, which means the trade is only getting more painful for the Leafs.

"Mints is a great kid," said Leafs forward Max Domi. "Works hard. He's having a great year just like their whole team is, but happy for him. He was a good teammate, great hockey player, and obviously we all knew he was going to have a great future."

"Really reliable player and his offensive instincts are very good," said Leafs rookie Easton Cowan. "I feel like he doesn't get credited for them enough. He's good in the D-zone, but as soon as he gets to that O-zone too, he's a very good player."

Cowan missed the first two games against Boston this season because he was in the American Hockey League, which means Tuesday will be his first game against Minten.

"It will be cool," Cowan said. "Very cool. Obviously a good player and one of my closest friends. I'm excited to get out there. We're good friends, but on the ice we're competitors and we're excited to go to battle tonight."

Cowan, 20, scored a goal and added an assist on Saturday in Ottawa, which was the first two-point game in his career.

"It's hard to come in as a young guy in this league," Minten said. "I know he's had his ups and downs, but that's normal and he's stuck with it and nice to see him get rewarded with a good game the other night. Happy to see he's having success."

In the last eight seasons (since 2018-19), only one other Leafs player had a multi-point game at age 20 or younger (Rasmus Sandin).

After the game in Ottawa, Cowan said he felt the Leafs got "deflated" after the Senators scored first. Craig Berube made it clear he felt that type of talk was "a cop out."

"I think Easton's handling everything fine," Berube stressed on Tuesday. "He makes mistakes and he understands them and wants to correct them, but that's not going to make him play a different game. He's the type of kid that's going to keep going out and doing what he does best. There's going to be mistakes and we all know that, but he's going to keep doing it because he knows he's good at it. He's just maturing. I thought he played a real good game in Ottawa."

Berube elevated Cowan to the top line with John Tavares and William Nylander on Saturday.

"I thought he was really going that game and he did a good job for us," the coach noted.

How can the Leafs avoid any deflating moments moving forward?

"We're just going to stick together as a group," Cowan said. "Whether we get the first one or not, just stay positive and keep going at it."

Gritty winger Michael Pezzetta will draw into the lineup on Tuesday and play his third game with the Leafs.

"Boston and what they bring here in this Boston, we're going to need some physicality," Berube explained. "That's why he's in."

Pezetta already has one fight under his belt with the Leafs. He dropped the gloves off the opening faceoff in his first game with his hometown team on March 12.

"It's going to be a hard game," Berube predicted. "We all know that. It always is and especially in Boston, it's never easy."

The Leafs are out of the playoff race, but Sturm believes his players will get a jolt from the Original Six rivalry.

"We love these kind of games," said Sturm, "especially at home with the crowd behind us, that alone should be motivating for us. I shouldn't even come in and talk to them before the game because they should be ready to go."

The last time the Leafs visited Boston on Nov. 11 it was a feisty affair. Bruins defenceman Nikita Zadorov knocked down Auston Matthews with a big hit in the second period. The Leafs captain then sustained an injury while delivering a retaliatory hit.

Domi (5-foot-10, 208 pounds) attempted to fight Zadorov (6-foot-7, 255 pounds) in the third period, but the burly blueliner did not feel comfortable



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fighting someone below his weight class. The pair are former teammates with the London Knights.

"Me and Z go way back," Domi said. "He's an unbelievable person, great teammate, and I love him to death. But playing against him at this level, you park that pretty quick. We've had our battles over the years. He's a big, physical guy and I'm so happy for him, the career he's had. He's a great person, great player. He's got a couple kids now. He's a dad, which is hilarious."

Domi and Zadorov helped the Knights win an Ontario Hockey League title in 2013.

"I love playing against him," Domi said. "I love playing against all my buddies from juniors. When you win you share a special connection for the rest of your career but you always have that much more urge to beat them. It's fun."

Zadorov also injured then-Leaf Scott Laughton with a big hit in the first meeting between the teams on Nov. 8.

On Monday the Leafs held only their second full practice since games resumed following the Olympic break. Domi stayed out well after the end of the main session to put in extra work with player development staffer Patrick O'Sullivan.

"He's probably the best development coach in the league as far as I'm concerned," Domi declared. "I learn so much from him and even an extra half an hour after practice, a few minutes before, it goes a long way. Practice time has been super limited, so just taking advantage of it."

What makes O'Sullivan, who retired as a player after the 2012-13, season, so good?

"His way of communicating is amazing," Domi said. "And he can back up the on-ice stuff with some video. Super fortunate to have a friendship with him and just be able to learn from him every single day."

This is the annual Mentors Trip for the Leafs with the players all allowed to invite a guest with them to Boston.

Domi brought his uncle.

"He's like a kid in the candy store," Domi said. "He's soaking it all in. It's good to see. He's really happy and I think everyone is. Everyone's got a lot of joy to be able to show how much that person or player means to them and it's great. That's what it's all about. That's what we play for so it's a fun trip."

Morgan Rielly invited former Leafs defenceman Jake Gardiner, who played for Toronto from 2011 to 2019. Rielly lived with Gardiner during his rookie season.

There was a group dinner Monday night and the mentors have been included in the team meetings.

"It's a lot of fun for everybody," said Berube. "The mentors are excited to be around and see everything and the players are excited."

Rielly will return to the Leafs lineup after missing Saturday's game with a lower-body injury.

Defenceman Oliver Ekman-Larsson will play after leaving Monday's practice early with an undisclosed issue.

Philippe Myers stayed out late at the skate and is projected to be a healthy scratch.

Anthony Stolarz is set to start for the Leafs on Tuesday.

Stolarz missed Saturday's scheduled start after taking a shot to the neck from William Nylander in warm-up.

Stolarz is returning to Boston for the first time since sustaining a nerve-related injury on Nov. 11, which kept him sidelined until Jan. 23.

Boston will start Jeremy Swayman instead of saving their No. 1 goalie for Wednesday's game in Buffalo against the surging Sabres.

"He's playing too well," Sturm explained. "It's a big game for us. Every game is big but today, facing a team out of the playoffs and they have nothing to lose, I think Sway gives us the best chance to win the hockey game. We have to go into games like that, it's just way too important."

Swayman has allowed just one even-strength goal over his past two games.

Projected Leafs lineup for Tuesday's game:

Cowan - Tavares - Nylander

Knies - Domi - Robertson

Maccelli - Groulx - Joshua

Lorentz - Quillan - Pezzetta

Rielly - Carlo

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TSN.CA / Federal report urges sweeping sports reforms, national sanctions registry

Rick Westhead

The most comprehensive review of Canada's sport system in a generation concluded with a stark assessment: the system is fragmented, under-regulated and, in the words of its authors, "broken."

The final 950-page report of the Future of Sport in Canada Commission, released Tuesday, laid out a detailed roadmap for change, anchored by nearly 100 recommendations and a series of calls to action that would fundamentally reshape how sport is governed, funded and policed in this country.

At the centre of those recommendations is a proposal that has been debated for years: a national, mandatory public registry of sanctioned individuals, designed to prevent those who have been banned for misconduct from quietly resurfacing elsewhere in the system.

The report built on the commission's preliminary findings from August 2025, when commissioner Lise Maisonneuve, the former chief justice of the Ontario Court of Justice, warned that Canada's sport system was in crisis and called for a new independent body to oversee it.



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Now, after hearing from more than 1,000 participants – including 175 survivors of abuse and maltreatment – and reviewing years of complaints, legal cases and policy failures, the commission urged governments to impose structural change to confront what it called a “culture of silence” within Canadian sport, in which victims and witnesses have been discouraged from speaking out.

“Sport should be a place of joy, growth, community, and belonging,” the report said. “But for far too many Canadians, especially young athletes, sport has been an environment marked by abuse and insecurity, where they have not been adequately protected and where no one has been held accountable. In recent years, the public has learned, as has the Commission, of a distressing number of abuse and maltreatment cases involving sport participants — particularly young athletes — across many sports and communities. The magnitude of abuse that has been brought to light — and tolerated — is unacceptable.”

The commission called the absence of a unified registry one of the system’s most persistent and dangerous gaps. Individuals sanctioned in one league, province or sport have, in some cases, been able to move undetected into another. That absence of a registry is a direct contributor to harm, the commission wrote.

The call for a national sanctions registry was recommended in 2024 by the federal Heritage Committee.

Across Canada, sport organizations rely on inconsistent screening practices and incomplete information, the report said. In some cases, it noted, individuals with lifetime coaching bans continued working in youth sport. In others, references withheld critical information about past misconduct.

The commission argued that a sanctions registry must not be voluntary. It recommended making participation in a registry mandatory and tying it directly to federal funding.

The report detailed how, for decades, Canadian sport has operated through a patchwork of national, provincial and local bodies, each with its own policies, codes of conduct and disciplinary processes. The commission described the system as a “fragmented framework” that has allowed gaps, inconsistencies and, at times, deliberate opacity.

To address this, the report called for the harmonization of safe sport standards across the country, including a strengthened and consistently applied Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport.

Perhaps the most consequential recommendation was the suggestion to create a centralized national sport entity similar to agencies in Australia and New Zealand, likely structured as a Crown corporation, that goes beyond the role currently played by Sport Canada and has the authority to oversee governance, funding, safe sport enforcement and data collection.

“We were repeatedly told that genuine change would not be possible if the new entity is established and led by the same familiar groups and people,” the commission wrote, adding that it had heard how “a small contingent of decision-makers and senior leadership within the Canadian sport system had gained massive influence over the direction of priorities and funds and directly or indirectly benefited from the status quo.”

Secretary of Sport Adam van Koeverden said in an interview with TSN that the commission has made it clear that system-wide action is needed and that efforts to make sports safer are already underway.

Last week, Sport Integrity Canada, which accepts and investigates complaints of misconduct and abuse in amateur sports, expanded a sanctions registry to include details of historical cases provided by some national sport organizations.

“This is a journey we are on,” van Koeverden said. “A good majority of the immediate recommendations [from the report] are underway or

already complete... We’ve announced additional funding for Sport Integrity Canada so that they can do their work. We’ve announced funding for athlete mental health services... and that expanded registry is good progress.”

Van Koeverden said he was confident at least some sport organizations have been taken over led by new leaders.

“What I’m heartened by is the number of athletes – prior to my generation, my generation, and since – who have stepped up to lead sport organizations, who are committed to turning the page and moving forward in a more athlete-centred, sports-centered, ethical manner,” he said. “I’m confident a new generation of sport leaders is emerging.”

Beyond a sanctions registry, the report placed significant emphasis on prevention.

It called for the establishment of a universal screening standard across all sport organizations, addressing what it described as inconsistent and, at times, ineffective background checks. Background screening policies should feature vulnerable sector and criminal record checks, screening disclosure forms, reference checks, interviews, and social media screening, the commission wrote.

The commission also highlighted the need for improved data collection, arguing that policy decisions have too often been made without reliable evidence. A coordinated, national approach to data would allow for better tracking of complaints, sanctions and outcomes, as well as a clearer understanding of the prevalence and nature of maltreatment, the commission wrote.

The commission recommended that every sports organization in Canada should appoint an independent individual to be a “safeguarding officer... ideally a licensed health professional who operates outside performance structures,” to observe training and competition environments directly to identify potential maltreatment without relying on athletes to report it themselves.

“Athletes described situations where their concerns raised about abusive coaching were dismissed, minimized, or suppressed by sport leaders who prioritized performance results and avoided negative publicity,” the report said. “Even when formal complaint processes existed, many athletes first disclosed concerns to team personnel who lacked the independence or qualifications to handle them. This resulted in mishandled complaints or further silencing.”

Education was another pillar of the proposed reforms.

The report recommended harmonizing safe sport training across the country, ensuring that coaches, administrators and athletes receive consistent instruction on preventing and responding to abuse.

The commission also called for mandatory governance standards across all sport organizations, including requirements related to board composition, decision-making processes and financial transparency.

In presenting its findings, the commission expressed cautious optimism that change is possible. There is, it says, a growing recognition of the need for reform and a willingness among many stakeholders to engage in the process.

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