



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 31, 2026



## Hurricanes to play in Finland next season | The North State Journal

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH, N.C. — In 2010, the Hurricanes opened their season with a pair of wins. One went down as a home game and the other on the road, but neither was played in North America.

Carolina — featuring Finns Jussi Jokinen, Joni Pitkanen and Tuomo Ruutu — defeated the Wild twice in Helsinki's Hartwall Arena, and in the stands was a 12-year-old hoping to one day make a career out of hockey.

Sebastian Aho has certainly done that, and in November he will lead the Hurricanes in two regular season games at the same arena — now called Veikkaus Arena — in front of fans desperate to catch a glimpse of one of their national hockey heroes.

"I've been dreaming about it for 10 years," Aho told CarolinaHurricanes.com after the announcement. "When they announce the teams (for these games), you usually don't see Carolina there, and you're always like, 'Bummer.' But (this is) worth the wait."

The Hurricanes will face the Seattle Kraken in the two NHL Global Series games, on Nov. 12 and Nov. 14, a little more than a month into the 2026-27 season. The league also announced that the Senators and Blackhawks will play a pair of games in Dusseldorf, Germany, in December.

### Hurricanes introduce 3 minority owners

The value of the Hurricanes franchise has skyrocketed since Tom Dundon took over majority ownership of the team in 2018. More than eight years and soon-to-be eight consecutive trips to the postseason later, Carolina has gone from being worth more than \$400 million to now being valued at \$2.66 billion.

The team's value, fueled in part by its success on the ice, has certainly paid off for Dundon, who is now in line to purchase the NBA's Portland Trail Blazers for reportedly more than \$4 billion.

Not long after the Trail Blazers news, the Hurricanes announced that Dundon sold a 12.5% minority stake in the team to three investors, and they were introduced last Thursday: Brett Jefferson, Marc Grandisson and Bobby Farnham.

"I think Tom has thought about for a long time whether he wanted to bring in minority ownership or if there was a good time to do it," Hurricanes CEO Brian Fork said at the introductory press conference. "And I think he was always looking for the right people, and if he found the right group of

folks to come into the team, then that would be the right time ... and (he) just decided that the time was right."

Jefferson, founder of Hildene Capital Management, won a national lacrosse championship at Syracuse in 1988 and is also a minority owner of the Oshawa FireWolves of the National Lacrosse League, but he said hockey was his first love.

"I called Tom on my 60th birthday," Jefferson said, "and I said, 'I'd like to buy myself a birthday present. ... I'd like to buy part of your team.'"

Grandisson is a retired Canadian executive who said buying a stake in the Hurricanes is "a commitment that will last for my family for years and years."

"We love the team, we love the game, and that's really what it's all about," he said.

The most interesting addition is Farnham, who played collegiately at Brown and then piled up penalty minutes in nine professional seasons, including playing 67 NHL games with the Penguins, Devils and Canadiens.

"If there's a point that (I) can add incremental value on the hockey side, and I don't know what that looks like yet, I would love to do so," said Farnham.

### Byron's fandom goes back

Two-time Daytona 500 winner William Byron hasn't jumped on the Hurricanes' bandwagon.

"It was my dad and I coming to games when I was probably 6 years old," the 28-year-old Hendrick Motorsports driver said at last Thursday's game.

That included attending Game 1 of the Stanley Cup final in 2006.

"We sat up, like, the very top row," he said. "It was fun. That's my earliest memory, and we have a couple pictures from that time."

Byron has since gone from iRacing phenom to NASCAR star, totaling 16 Cup Series wins and a 2017 Xfinity Series championship. Last weekend's race in Darlington, South Carolina, afforded Byron the chance to fit in a Hurricanes game, and he's hoping to make more time, especially come the playoffs.

"We've been to probably a handful of playoff games," Byron said. "So I hope to come back here in April and May and get to a few more."



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## Preview: March 31 at Columbus

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Canes and Jackets battle for the first of two times in three days

COLUMBUS, Ohio - The Carolina Hurricanes and Columbus Blue Jackets go head-to-head twice this week, starting tonight at Nationwide Arena.

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When: Tuesday, March 31

Puck Drop: 7:30 p.m. ET

Watch: ESPN+/Hulu

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes App

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Canes Record: 46-21-6 (98 Points, 1st - Metropolitan Division)

Canes Last Game: 3-1 Loss to the Montreal Canadiens on Sunday, March 29

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Blue Jackets Record: 38-24-12 (88 Points, 4th - Metropolitan Division)

Blue Jackets Last Game: 4-3 Loss (SO) to the Boston Bruins on Sunday, March 29

Last Time Out...

Carolina put up 100 shot attempts and controlled the lion's share of possession on Sunday, but "couldn't cash in" and came out on the wrong side of a 3-1 score against Montreal.

Andrei Svechnikov scored the lone goal for the group, extending the power play's run to six straight games with a goal.

Frederik Andersen suffered the loss in net, allowing three goals on 18 shots.

Season Series vs. CBJ...

Dec. 9: As a part of the team's 20th Anniversary Championship Celebration, the Canes took a 4-1 win at Lenovo Center.

Mar. 17: The Canes "never got going" in a 5-1 loss in Columbus.

Power Play Precision...

Going back to their Mar. 18 win in Pittsburgh, the Canes' man advantage is 8-for-18, scoring at least once in their six games since.

Now 23.7% for the season, the units have broken into the league's top 10. An impressive about-face after they sat 30th on Dec. 2, many will point to Jordan Staal's inclusion as the turning point.

Nikolaj Ehlers and Andrei Svechnikov co-lead the way with nine power plays each this season.

In Net...

Should the Canes continue with their rotation in net, Brandon Bussi would be in line to get the nod tonight. A winner of his last two starts, the 27-year-old turned away 17 out of 19 shots on Saturday against New Jersey.

Conversely, should the Canes go back to Andersen, he's 6-3 since returning from the Winter Olympics.

On The Other Side...

One of the hottest teams in the league since the Winter Olympics, Columbus is hanging tough in a tight Eastern Conference playoff picture.

Picking up at least one point in 24 out of their last 29 games, the group has hit its first rough patch under Rick Bowness recently, dropping three in a row.

Dating back to the coaching change on Jan. 13, veteran Charlie Coyle has 30 points in 29 games. Gold medal-winning defenseman Zach Werenski is right there with him, producing the same total in three fewer contests.

Injury Updates...

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

What Are We Wearing?

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

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes will fly home immediately post-game. They are scheduled to practice on Wednesday before hosting these same Blue Jackets at Lenovo Center on Thursday.

Next Game: Thursday, April 2 vs. Columbus | 7:00 p.m. ET | [FDSNSO](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Parking](#)



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## NHL playoff watch: Hurricanes, Blue Jackets battle for seeding - ESPN

By: ESPN staff

As play begins on Tuesday, both the Carolina Hurricanes and Columbus Blue Jackets are in the 2026 Stanley Cup playoff field. Where the clubs wind up will be determined by the remaining handful of games.

That journey continues Tuesday as the two Metro rivals face off in Ohio (7:30 p.m. ET, ESPN+).

The Canes hold the Metro Division's first seed, and are a tiebreaker behind the Tampa Bay Lightning to be No. 1 overall in the East. If they maintain that spot, they'll be taking on one of the wild-card teams.

Speaking of the wild cards, Columbus possesses the second wild-card position. The Blue Jackets are four points behind the Boston Bruins for the first wild-card spot, one point behind the New York Islanders for third in the Metro and two points behind the Pittsburgh Penguins for second. They are being chased by the Ottawa Senators, Detroit Red Wings and Philadelphia Flyers, all of whom are two points back.

Stathletes currently projects the Hurricanes to edge out the Lightning for first in the conference (109.9 points to 109.7), and has the Blue Jackets (97.4 points) falling just short of both a Metro spot -- the Isles earn the No. 3 position with 97.7 --and the wild card, which goes to the Senators (98.0 points).

Given those margins, every possible point to be earned in the final stretch -- particularly against fellow Eastern teams -- is crucial.

Every team has 10 or fewer games remaining before the regular season concludes April 16, and we'll help you keep track of it all here on the NHL playoff watch every day. As we traverse the final stretch, we'll provide details on all the playoff races -- along with the teams jockeying for position in the 2026 NHL draft lottery.

Note: Playoff chances are via Stathletes.

Jump ahead:

Current playoff matchups

Today's schedule

Last night's scores

Expanded standings

Race for No. 1 pick

Current playoff matchups

Eastern Conference

A1 Tampa Bay Lightning vs. WC2 Columbus Blue Jackets

A2 Buffalo Sabres vs. A3 Montreal Canadiens

M1 Carolina Hurricanes vs. WC1 Boston Bruins

M2 Pittsburgh Penguins vs. M3 New York Islanders

Western Conference

C1 Colorado Avalanche vs. WC2 Nashville Predators

C2 Dallas Stars vs. C3 Minnesota Wild

P1 Anaheim Ducks vs. WC1 Utah Mammoth

P2 Edmonton Oilers vs. P3 Vegas Golden Knights

Today's games

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

Dallas Stars at Boston Bruins, 7 p.m.

New York Islanders at Buffalo Sabres, 7 p.m.

Montreal Canadiens at Tampa Bay Lightning, 7 p.m.

Ottawa Senators at Florida Panthers, 7 p.m.

New Jersey Devils at New York Rangers, 7 p.m.

Detroit Red Wings at Pittsburgh Penguins, 7 p.m.

Philadelphia Flyers at Washington Capitals, 7 p.m.

Carolina Hurricanes at Columbus Blue Jackets, 7:30 p.m.

Winnipeg Jets at Chicago Blackhawks, 8:30 p.m.

Seattle Kraken at Edmonton Oilers, 9:30 p.m.

Last night's scoreboard

Pittsburgh Penguins 8, New York Islanders 3

Colorado Avalanche 9, Calgary Flames 2

Vegas Golden Knights 4, Vancouver Canucks 2

Toronto Maple Leafs 5, Anaheim Ducks 4 (OT)

San Jose Sharks 5, St. Louis Blues 4

Expanded standings

Note: An "x" with a team's name means the club has clinched a playoff spot. An "e" means that the club has been mathematically eliminated. Teams clinch a playoff spot when their magic number reaches zero, and are mathematically eliminated when their tragic number reaches zero.

Atlantic Division

play

0:45

Maple Leafs top Ducks in final seconds of overtime



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The Maple Leafs earn a dramatic victory over the Ducks as they in closing seconds of overtime.

Metro Division

play

0:53

Anthony Mantha lights the lamp for Penguins

Anthony Mantha lights the lamp

Central Division

play

0:51

Nathan MacKinnon tallies goal for Colorado Avalanche on the power play

Nathan MacKinnon scores power-play goal vs. Flames

Pacific Division

play

0:51

Celebrini becomes 6th teenager in NHL history with 100-point season

Macklin Celebrini scores on the power play for the Sharks to reach 100 points on the season.

Race for the No. 1 pick

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

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

Toronto Maple Leafs fire general manager Brad Treliving

Kristen Shilton Mar 30, 2026, 09:06 PM ET

Close

Kristen Shilton is a national NHL reporter for ESPN.

The Toronto Maple Leafs fired general manager Brad Treliving, the team announced in a statement Monday night.

There was no indication as to who would replace him.

"Throughout the course of this season, there has been deep analysis into both the current state of the Maple Leafs organization and the direction needed to achieve the ultimate goal of delivering a Stanley Cup championship to the city," said Keith Pelley, president and CEO of Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment. "Brad Treliving is a man that we all have

deep respect and appreciation for, both as a hockey executive and as a person, but it was determined that the club must chart a new course under different leadership. The organization is grateful for all that Brad has contributed in his nearly three years with the Maple Leafs and we wish him and his family the very best."

Treliving came to Toronto in May 2023, replacing former GM Kyle Dubas, who was on an expiring contract that then-president of hockey operations Brendan Shanahan opted not to renew. Dubas is now GM of the Pittsburgh Penguins. Shanahan is no longer with the Leafs.

Toronto was a perennial playoff contender when Treliving took over. But the Leafs failed to find postseason success, recording consecutive first-round exits that ultimately led to Treliving firing coach Sheldon Keefe in April 2024 after Toronto's first-round playoff loss to Boston. Weeks later, Treliving hired Craig Berube as coach.

Initially, Toronto found success under Berube, advancing to the second round of the playoffs in 2025. But this season has been a disappointment -- the Leafs are on track to miss the postseason for the first time since 2016-17, and they sit near the bottom of the Eastern Conference with a 32-30-13 record after Monday night's 5-4 overtime win at the Anaheim Ducks. Toronto would have been eliminated from postseason contention with a loss to Anaheim.

"He cares about everyone in that locker room and everything he did to try to give us the best possible chance to compete, put us in the best position to have success," center John Tavares said of Treliving. "Brad brought us all in here, [had] tremendous belief in us and we just didn't deliver. It falls on us."

The Leafs found out not long before the start of Monday's game about the news that players called shocking.

"We haven't had much time to sit with it, so we're still processing it," said defenseman Morgan Rielly, the team's longest-tenured player. "How I feel is, in times like these, where changes are made, it's ultimately on the players. It's a business based on results."

In Treliving's short tenure with Toronto, his biggest misstep was not finding common ground to re-sign top forward Mitch Marner. He was the Leafs' leading scorer, totaling 221 goals and 741 points through 657 games with the team that drafted him No. 4 in 2015. Marner was a pending unrestricted free agent last season, and Treliving never managed to broker an agreement. Ultimately, Marner went to the Vegas Golden Knights in a sign-and-trade deal in July that removed one of the Leafs' best forwards from the lineup. Nicolas Roy -- the lone player acquired in the move -- was traded to the Colorado Avalanche in March.

"I think he's done a lot for this team," forward Matthew Knies said of Treliving. "I think he has helped. But yeah, I think that's just kind of the way the business goes right now, and when we're not performing, it starts from the top."



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## Canadiens' stars, goalie steal the show in Raleigh to beat Canes 3-1

By: Brennan Weiss

It's not shots, passing or possession that win a hockey game — it's goals.

In a playoff test, the Carolina Hurricanes (46-21-6) controlled possession, doubled up the Canadiens (42-21-10) shots and moved the puck around at will, but went home with a 3-1 loss. Montreal goalie Jakub Dobes backstopped his 25th win of the season, saving 34 of 35 shots and dropping the Canes to 0-3 against the Canadiens.

"We definitely created enough opportunities," said head coach Rod Brind'Amour. "We just didn't score. You tip your hat to the goalie, he played great."

The Hurricanes came to play in the first period. Their zone entry was clicking, they were outskating the Canadiens and they were getting shots on goal. A Kaiden Guhle hook gave the Canes a powerplay early, and Svechnikov capitalized. Receiving the puck in stride and all alone on the right faceoff circle, he beat Dobes to the near corner for the Canes' lone goal.

Meanwhile, Montreal had to fight for every inch of open space it got and didn't register a shot on goal until the 12th minute of the game.

"I thought we had a lot more of the play," Brind'Amour said. "I liked most of the game."

Soon after, Guhle drew a penalty on left wing Nikolaj Ehlers and cracks started to show. Guhle provoked the Canes forward with a shove that went unnoticed by the officials, and Ehlers' physical reply was deemed unnecessary. The Canes killed the powerplay, but it gave the Canadiens some repetitions controlling the puck in the offensive zone.

For the rest of the game, Montreal's star-studded top line was clinical. Right wing Cole Caufield broke away in transition and slid the puck to linemate Nick Suzuki in front of the net. Suzuki buried the shot for his team's first goal of the night.

"It's a tough game. Their top guys cashed in, you know," Brind'Amour said. "We definitely had enough looks, we just didn't cash in."

The Hurricanes kept the pressure on and played the possession game, pelting Dobes from the blue line and swarming any Montreal skater who neared the puck. But they just couldn't score. On top of Dobes' brick-wall performance, the Canadiens blocked 32 shots.

In a sustained Carolina possession, forward Jackson Blake sent a routine snapper at Dobes, who kept that shot and multiple putback attempts out of the net. After weathering the storm, Montreal found another offensive chance with its top line.

This time it was Suzuki who brought the puck up, weaving a pass through Carolina bodies and finding Caufield in front of the net. Caufield buried the shot for his 46th goal of the season. The Hurricanes had more than double the Canadiens' shots on goal, but no lead.

"They're a skilled group, they play fast like we do and they were just kinda making it count when they had a chance," said center Sebastian Aho. "We should have used our momentum a little better today, and not open up, and [instead] keep the pressure on."

Bad turned to worse as winger Eric Robinson was called for a tripping penalty with 15 seconds left in the second period. Suzuki won the faceoff and scored Montreal's third goal of the night right after.

"You don't want to take a couple of O-zone penalties. Those kill you," Brind'Amour said. "But they executed better than we did at the end of the day."

Facing a two-goal deficit and needing a score, Carolina didn't play as cleanly in the third period. It was beat to pucks, didn't connect on passes and never got close to figuring out Dobes.

The Hurricanes hit the ice again on Tuesday, March 31 at 7:30 p.m. against the Columbus Blue Jackets.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## The Hockey News

### Carolina Hurricanes @ Columbus Blue Jackets: Lineups, Game Preview and How to Watch

By: Ryan Henkel

Canes aim to rebound as desperate Blue Jackets fight for playoff life.

What - Game 74 (46-21-6)

When - 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 31

Where - Nationwide Arena; Columbus, OH

How to Watch - ESPN+, hulu

The Carolina Hurricanes will look to bounce back from their 3-1 loss at the hands of the Montreal Canadiens tonight in Columbus.

The Canes have been fairly hot and cold since the start of the month, with an 8-5-0 record overall.

They've had some really good outings, but also some poor ones and they'll really need their A-game against a desperate Columbus team.

The Blue Jackets have found themselves on a three-game skid after making it all the way up to the second spot in the Metro division.

They've blown leads in back-to-back games and if they want to remain in the playoff race in a very tight field, they need wins, so expect an intense game.

#### Streaks

Seth Jarvis (2g, 7a) has points in six straight games.

Sebastian Aho (2a) has points in back-to-back games.

#### Milestone Watch

Taylor Hall is one goal shy of 300 career goals.

Sean Walker is two assists away from 100 career assists.

Sebastian Aho is three assists away from 400 career assists.

#### Game Notes

Carolina is 1-1-0 against Columbus this season, having won 4-1 on Dec. 9 and lost 5-1 on Jan. 17.

The Hurricanes have earned a point in 12 of their last 14 games against the Blue Jackets (9-2-3).

Seth Jarvis (6g, 16pts in 14gp) is a point-per-game player for his career against Columbus.

#### Playwire House Ad

#### Key Matchups

#### Projected Starting Goalies

Brandon Bussi: 27-6-1; 0.896 Sv%; 2.45 GAA

Jet Greaves: 24-14-9; 0.910 Sv%; 2.56 GAA

#### Leading Scorers

Goals - Seth Jarvis (30) / Kirill Marchenko (25)

Points - Sebastian Aho (74) / Zach Werenski (77)

#### Power Play

Carolina - 23.7% (9th)

Columbus - 20.2% (17th)

#### Penalty Kill

Carolina - 80.2% (13th)

Columbus - 77.3% (24th)

#### Hurricanes Projected Lineup

Andrei Svechnikov - Sebastian Aho - Seth Jarvis

Taylor Hall - Logan Stankoven - Jackson Blake

Nikolaj Ehlers - Jordan Staal - Jordan Martinook

William Carrier - Mark Jankowski - Eric Robinson

Jacob Slavin - Jalen Chatfield

K'Andre Miller - Sean Walker

Shayne Gostisbehere - Alexander Nikishin

Brandon Bussi

Frederik Andersen

Injuries and Scratches: Mike Reilly, Jesperi Kotkaniemi, Nicolas Deslauriers, Pyotr Kochetkov (hip)

#### Blue Jackets Projected Lineup

Mason Marchment - Adam Fantilli - Kirill Marchenko

Boone Jenner - Sean Monahan - Conor Garland

Cole Sillinger - Charlie Coyle - Miles Wood

Danton Heinen - Isac Lundestrom - Kent Johnson

Zach Werenski - Dante Fabbro

Egor Zamula - Ivan Provorov

Denton Mateychuk - Erik Gudbranson

Jet Greaves

Elvis Merzlikins

Injuries and Scratches: Jake Christiansen, Luca Del Bel Belluz, Mathieu Olivier (UBI), Damon Severson (UBI), Brendan Smith (knee), Dmitri Voronkov (UBI)



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## LINKS

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<https://technicianonline.com/158423/sports/canadiens-stars-goalie-steal-the-show-in-raleigh-to-beat-can-es-3-1/>

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/game-day/carolina-hurricanes-columbus-blue-jackets-lineups-game-preview-and-how-to-watch-2>

# SportScan

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

1384884 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes to play in Finland next season

Cory Lavalette

5-6 minutes 30/03/2026

RALEIGH, N.C. — In 2010, the Hurricanes opened their season with a pair of wins. One went down as a home game and the other on the road, but neither was played in North America.

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1385003 Websites

The Athletic / Macklin Celebrini becomes sixth teenager to score 100 points in NHL season

By Eric Stephens

San Jose Sharks forward Macklin Celebrini became the sixth teenager in NHL history to record 100 points in a single season when he put up three points against the St. Louis Blues on Monday.

With his assist and goal in the first period, Celebrini became the first teen to hit the century mark since Sidney Crosby with the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2006-07. Crosby, to whom Celebrini often is compared, is the only player to reach that level twice before he turned 20. Celebrini now has 38 goals and 63 assists in 72 games this season.

Celebrini, who turns 20 on June 13, joined a group that includes Crosby, Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, Dale Hawerchuk and Jimmy Carson. Gretzky also scored 104 points in 72 games with the Edmonton Oilers in the World Hockey Association during his age-18 season, before the Oilers merged into the NHL.

Other NHL teenagers to reach 100 points

Wayne Gretzky

Oilers

1979-80

51

86

137

Sidney Crosby

Penguins

2006-07

36

84

120

Jimmy Carson

Kings

1987-88

55

52

107

Dale Hawerchuk

Jets

1981-82

45

58

103

Sidney Crosby

Penguins

2005-06

39

63

102

Mario Lemieux

Penguins

1984-85

43

57

100

A third-place finisher for the Calder Trophy as a rookie last season, Celebrini has moved into league-wide stardom. Only two other Sharks — Joe Thornton in 2006-07 and Erik Karlsson in 2022-23 — have scored more than 100 points for the club in a single season.

Thornton had a combined total of 125 points with the Sharks and Boston Bruins in 2005-06 and was the only Hart Trophy winner to play for two different teams in a single year. Celebrini has emerged as a Hart candidate in a year when he has often carried San Jose — which finished last in the NHL in 2023-24 and 2024-25 — into surprising playoff contention for much of the season. Celebrini has scored twice as many points as the next highest Sharks player (Will Smith has 49).

Celebrini has one year remaining on his entry-level contract, but he will be eligible for an extension on July 1. The Sharks figure to be eager to negotiate with their star and get him signed for eight years before September, when the new collective bargaining agreement takes effect and limits re-signings to seven years.

When asked in March about Celebrini's looming second contract and its potential worth, Sharks general manager Mike Grier quipped, "I don't want to think about the number."

After a nine-game point streak to start March, Celebrini went into a rare dry spell, with just one assist over a five-game span. He snapped out of that Saturday in a 3-2 road win over the Columbus Blue Jackets, scoring his 36th goal and adding an assist for his 26th multi-point effort of the season.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.31.2026

1385004 Websites

The Athletic / NHL weekend rankings: A stunning coaching change in Vegas shakes up the Pacific

By Sean McIndoe



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 31, 2026

Well, we didn't see that one coming.

Maybe we should have, given that the Vegas Golden Knights don't exactly have a reputation as a patient franchise. They've spent every year of their existence as aspiring Stanley Cup contenders, and they've made it clear that failure isn't an option. Given how much failing they've been doing this year, maybe we should have expected yesterday's bombshell, with John Tortorella replacing Bruce Cassidy as head coach with just eight games left to play.

What does it all mean? Let's dig into it...

Bonus five: Reactions to a coaching shocker

5. The Golden Knights are bad: This isn't news, but the change really brings it into focus. They're going to lose more games than they'll win for the first time in franchise history, and only loser points and a weak Pacific have disguised just how bad they've been. Nobody can score, they can't get a save, Jack Eichel somehow has zero power-play goals, Rasmus Andersson looks like a bust, and offseason prize Mitch Marner is playing out of position on the way to his worst offensive output since he was 20 years old. Other than that, going great.

4. John Tortorella is a fascinating choice: Maybe not a bad one, although we'll have to see how it all plays out. He's a known commodity, and you wonder how his schtick will play in Vegas. His reputation as a guy that players hate playing for is overwrought, but it's fair to ask whether a roster of superstars who chose this destination will be on board for the Torts Experience. Pete DeBoer? Total bum.

3. Tortorella should probably rent: If he fails, he'll get fired. If he succeeds, he'll still get fired, but maybe a year or two later. Tortorella becomes the fourth coach in the Knights' nine-season history. Gerard Gallant won a conference title and the Jack Adams with an expansion team and lasted two more years; Cassidy won a Cup and got two more and change.

2. You didn't expect this: Yes, you. Or at least you in the general sense of my readers, because Cassidy was the ninth-safest coach in this year's prediction contest. Then again, the coach right above him is Craig Berube, and the two right below him are Sheldon Keefe and Dean Evason, so maybe we should have figured it out.

1. This could work: As everyone almost instantly pointed out, this kind of move is close to unprecedented, but it has worked before — namely when the Devils went from Robbie Ftorek to Larry Robinson with days left in the season and then won the Cup. The Knights still have to get past the whole being bad thing, but if Tortorella can juice them up to "marginally better than mediocre," that might be enough in the Pacific, at least.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Cassidy-for-Tortorella coaching swap is consistent with Golden Knights' relentless culture

Vegas has long showed it will do anything to win, but can quick-fixer John Tortorella win with this roster?

On to this week's rankings...

Road to the Cup

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

Heartbreaking: The worst person you know just scored a great goal.

5. Buffalo Sabres (45-21-8, +36 true goals differential\*) – I did not jinx the Sabres. Don't put in the newspaper that I jinxed the Sabres. They only lost three in a row since we declared them playoff locks, and they snapped that streak on Saturday. It's fine. We're fine.

4. Tampa Bay Lightning (46-21-6, +62) – All the best to Victor Hedman.

3. Dallas Stars (44-18-12, +48) – I don't care how many times you see it, it's scary every time.

2. Carolina Hurricanes (46-21-6, +40) – With the division wrapped, there isn't much to play for down the stretch beyond home ice in the conference final. For what it's worth, this is their first time being this high in the rankings since November.

1. Colorado Avalanche (48-14-10, +88) – It really feels like the Hart Trophy might be slipping away from Nathan MacKinnon, as fans and media voters lock in on Nikita Kucherov's recent heroics and Connor McDavid dragging the Leon Draisaitl-less Oilers to a playoff spot. There's still a very strong case for MacKinnon, but at this point you wonder if being the front-runner all season isn't hurting his chances with voters who are looking for some late-season novelty.

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

Not ranked: Anaheim Ducks – So this might really be happening.

The Anaheim Ducks look like they're going to win the Pacific Division, at least as far as the regular-season standings go. The Oilers beat them on Saturday, which keeps the race open, but Edmonton seems likely to run out of time. The Ducks control their own destiny and are still the favorites to take the top seed.

And no, that's not going to get them into the top five, because the Pacific is still the Pacific and it's bad. My guess is you won't see many experts picking the Ducks to emerge from the first two rounds, with the Oilers and Knights still getting the benefit of the doubt as legitimate contenders. The majority probably won't even pick Anaheim in round one, because the novelty of the crossover Mammoth will be too hard to resist.

But that doesn't mean it's not one of the season's best stories. The Ducks came into the season as the classic rebuild trying to make the transition into ... well, something. This is supposed to be the hardest part of a true rebuild scenario; anyone can strip a team down to the studs and collect picks, but we've seen plenty try to flip the switch and start winning again only to find they can't make the transition. This was the Ducks' year to at least get back into the mix. That felt like the best-case scenario.

Instead, they've skipped the entire mushy middle and gone straight to the top of the division. You could have got 35-to-1 odds on that at the start of the season, and you'd have felt like a fool for taking them, because it would have been a sucker's bet. Even with Joel Quenneville and a young core aging into its prime, it was too big a leap. Back in my season preview, I left the Ducks to the very end and then made my dramatic prediction: "I kind of sort of think they're making the playoffs this season." And even that felt like a bold stand at the time. Today? It barely even counts as a good call.

The bigger question is what comes next. Are this year's Ducks going to follow in the path of, say, last year's Canadiens — the good young team that makes a surprise playoff appearance, loses quickly, but learns from the experience and comes back ready to take another step? Or will they be more like the Devils, a flawed team having a strong year that immediately regresses?

We'll find out. For now, Ducks fans are under no obligation to even pretend to care, because they're just enjoying the ride. And if six weeks from now, they're watching their team prep for the Western Conference final, they can save this column and toss it on the pile of predictions that completely whiffed on this year's team. It will have plenty of company.

They're hosting Toronto tonight, which was going to be the big Radko Gudas payback game until his injury put that in doubt. For now, it should be an easy two points as they make up their game in hand over Edmonton.

The bottom five



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The five teams headed towards dead last and a shot at Gavin McKenna or Ivar Stenberg.

Wait, writers on this site are allowed to get predictions right?

5. St. Louis Blues (31-30-11, -33) – This California road trip will make or break their chances at a miracle playoff run. I'm still betting on "break," but their recent wins have certainly put the bottom of the lottery into flux.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Could the St. Louis Blues still make the playoffs? Breaking down their remaining schedule

The Blues are 10-2-2 since the Olympic break but are still a long-shot to make the playoffs. Can they pull it off?

4. Calgary Flames (31-34-8, -37) – They've got points in six straight, including five wins. But before you worry too much about their lottery odds, check out the brutal schedule on this upcoming road trip. If they start winning those games, we can get concerned.

3. New York Rangers (30-35-9, -23) – The whole "the J.T. Miller trade may have been one of the worst in NHL history for both teams" thing is gaining steam and I'm kind of here for it.

2. Chicago Blackhawks (27-34-13, -50) – Friday's blowout loss to the Rangers did two things: put the Hawks solidly in contention for the second-best lottery odds, and produced one hell of a photo.

1. Vancouver Canucks (21-43-8, -91) – They've lost five in a row and given up 25 goals along the way, while also becoming the first team mathematically eliminated from the postseason. Honestly, for an active tank, that's a pretty good week.

Not ranked: Winnipeg Jets – The big question heading into the second half for the Jets was whether they could make a push back into the playoff picture, or would instead plummet all the way down to the bottom of the standings.

The season isn't over, but it's close enough that now we know the answer: No. As in, neither.

There was a time when it looked like that playoff push could happen, peaking with three straight wins in early March that at least made you wonder. That on its own felt like a surprise, given how far off the pace they'd fallen after a disastrous midseason losing streak that hit 11 games. It didn't last long, but was just enough to move the Jets into the dreaded mushy middle where fans aren't even sure what they should want.

What we do know: The Jets will become just the fifth team to ever follow a Presidents' Trophy win with a playoff miss. We looked at a few of those teams last season, when the Rangers were dropping out of the race. For good, as it turns out; they became the fourth team on the list, and it's fair to say the season they're having right now won't give Jets fans much optimism.

So now what? Murat's been doing some good work with that question, wondering what next year's lineup might look like and just how close the Jets really are to contending. The short answer to that second question is "closer than you might think, but not as close as you'd want to be." The Connor Hellebuyck factor looms large here, and his presence probably makes a bottom-out rebuild impossible. That might be a good thing — there's a reasonable question of whether the Winnipeg market could handle a multi-year absence from contending. And if you had to start with only one piece in place, a consistently elite goalie is probably the hardest to find in today's league.

Could the Jets be a playoff team next year? Absolutely, and that's true even if Hellebuyck doesn't singlehandedly carry them there. Could they be Cup contenders? That's a much tougher call, especially after how we watched the top of the Central separate this year. Add it all up, and the

Jets seem like they could be headed for the dreaded mushy middle, the wasteland of bubble playoff teams that pick in the mid-teens every year.

Jets fans, what do you want to see this summer? Is it time to take a step or two back, if only to build some momentum for the future? Do you double down on what was, let's remember, a 116-point team just a year ago? Do you trust Kevin Cheveldayoff to thread the needle between those two options, and come out on the other side with something that isn't just spinning its wheels? Or are you already getting that sinking feeling that the mushy middle scenario might be unavoidable? Let me know in the comments.

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The Athletic / Ivan Demidov, born to skate: How a family's devotion built a rising NHL star

By Arpon Basu

The Montreal Canadiens were trailing the Ottawa Senators by a goal at the Bell Centre on Nov. 1 when a rookie winger took over.

As the seconds and minutes ticked down in the third period, Ivan Demidov received the puck coming up the right wall in the offensive zone.

Senators defenceman Nick Jensen appeared ready to contain him. Or at least try.

But Demidov made a quick turn down the boards before, in an instant, leaning hard into his edges once more toward the blue line, leaving Jensen moving in the wrong direction. Suddenly, Demidov was alone in the high slot.

Senators centre Dylan Cozens was the closest defender to Demidov, who knew Cozens would be moving aggressively to block a shot. Demidov used that knowledge to his advantage, deceptively selling a shot before passing to Lane Hutson, then stepping around a diving Cozens and accepting a return pass from Hutson in the heart of the slot, where his one-timer tied the game.

It was Demidov's third goal of the season, one that demonstrated his incredible hockey sense. He has scored 13 more since.

"I think this is one of my favourite goals," Demidov said during a long conversation last week, his first one-on-one interview since arriving in North America nearly a year ago.

After hugging Hutson and celebrating with his teammates, Demidov pointed into the crowd — acknowledging two of the 20,962 in attendance, the two people most responsible for where he found himself in that moment: his parents Aleksei and Olga, experiencing their first NHL game.

In fact, it was the first time Aleksei had ever been to North America and the first time the pair had seen their son realizing a dream that's not only his, but the family's, as well.

The goal and the celebration were even more significant than they appeared. The edge work, the deception, the hockey IQ, the compete, the work ethic: Everything that makes Demidov a special hockey player comes as a result of a life-changing decision Aleksei and Olga made 13 years earlier.

"I owe them everything," Demidov said.

Demidov was born in Sergiyev Posad, Russia, in 2005, which is easily verifiable on any hockey website.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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But that is not his hometown.

He grew up in Dmitrov, about 50 kilometres to the west of Sergiyev Posad and roughly 90 minutes north of Moscow. When he was due to be born, there was a viral outbreak in Dmitrov and all the hospitals were closed, forcing his parents to make the trip to Sergiyev Posad.

If you want an idea of how Demidov is wired, just ask him to describe his hometown.

"It is a pretty small city, maybe 70,000 people," he began. "I lived close to the outdoor rink, maybe 50 metres. And also, it's not that good of a hockey team, but all the stuff there is pretty good, the facilities. We have four ice rinks there.

"When I was growing up, there was a lot of tournaments, 4 Nations, 5 Nations, under-18, so I used to see Jack Eichel when I think he was 17 years old. I didn't even know who was this guy, but it was pretty special to me that other countries played there. Maybe someone from our team even played there, I don't know."

His only description of Dmitrov that doesn't pertain to hockey is the population — and that tells you just about everything you need to know about Demidov.

His entire life, and that of his older brother, Semyon, has had hockey as the centrepiece.

Demidov was in skates at age two, and though his father Aleksei never played at a high level, he quickly recognized the talent in his two sons.

Aleksei drove a truck for a living, while Olga worked in retail sales. But when Demidov was about six years old and Semyon was nine, the family made an important decision to go all-in on hockey.

Aleksei stopped working and devoted his full attention to his sons and their hockey development, leaving Olga to support the family.

"It was not an easy decision, but we believed it was the right one," Olga Demidova said, through Demidov's agent Dan Milstein. "We owned two small apartments at the time, and we chose to sell one so that Aleksei could focus entirely on the boys' hockey careers. Everything was done with a clear purpose and long-term belief in their path."

This close contact with his father, and a near-constant focus on hockey, formed the Demidov we see today.

"My father is the type of guy where if you start doing something, he's not going to let you rest until the job is finished," Demidov said. "My mom also, she also was obsessed with me and my brother playing hockey. It was going well, so she tried to help us for all the stuff around hockey."

The timing of Aleksei's decision to devote himself to his sons' hockey careers might not actually be all that surprising.

Demidov's first hockey memory came a year earlier, and is telling.

Remember, he was born Dec. 10, 2005.

"I don't know why, but I remember one practice. It was a practice with '02s," Demidov said, referring to the players' birth year. "My brother is '02, but he wasn't there because he was practicing with the 2000s, and I was practicing with the '02. This group, we did some drills, but I didn't even know those guys were much older than me.

"Once my age group started (hockey), the '05 group, and my dad was like, 'All right, we're going skating with your age.' I'm like, 'What do you mean my age? I'm not going to go with them, they're too young for me.' And I was the youngest guy in my age group! But I'm like, 'I'm not going to go there.' Because I didn't even know that I was the same age as those guys. I was skating with the '04, the '03 and the '02, and I was thinking they were all my age. Maybe the '02s, I knew they were older, but the '04 and '03, I thought they were my age."

This was 2010. He was five years old. The kids he was skating with in the '02 group were eight. That is a massive developmental difference. But he didn't see much of a gap at all.

"It was normal if we talk about skills," Demidov said. "Obviously, they were more physically (developed). But for the skills it was, I think, the same."

The coach of the '05 group was a friend of his father's, so Demidov eventually agreed to skate in his own age group. Again, he was five.

"The first skate, everyone is skating without sticks. They can't skate," Demidov said, still busting out laughing at the memory. "And I'm just going with my dad in some corner doing figure eights with pucks already."

Ivan Demidov, right, with father Aleksei and older brother Semyon in Dmitrov, Russia. (Courtesy of the Demidov family)

The following year, Aleksei quit his job and became a full-time hockey dad.

As Demidov got older, his days became increasingly geared toward hockey. His typical school day saw him going on the ice at least three times, whether it was at that outdoor rink 50 metres from the house or one of the four indoor rinks in Dmitrov.

"My day was like, Tuesday and Thursday we had two practices at the outdoor rink," Demidov explained. "But on the other days I would skate in the morning with my team, and then school, five classes, then going back (home), eat, going for the second practice with the team, going back after practice, eat at home, do some homework for school, and then go back with my dad to this rink."

So, how long would he go to the outdoor rink with his dad after that long day?

"I mean, we would go at around 7 p.m., and the lights are off around 10. So ..."

The implication was clear. They stayed until they turned the lights off.

Rinse, repeat. Day after day.

"Usually if there was not a lot of people, we just worked on skills," Demidov said. "But if there was a lot of people, we would just play hockey, build confidence. It was pretty good, I feel."

This is where the edge work comes from. This is where the compete comes from. This is where the work ethic comes from.

Early in Demidov's life, it was Aleksei who pushed him to work. But at a young age, right around the time Semyon left to play in the national U16 hockey league, Demidov became self-motivated.

"The funny thing is for kids, when it's a lot, they can say, 'No, I don't want to do it,'" he said. "But I was another type of kid. ... It happened obviously sometimes, but maybe at age 13, I was like no, I can't. I didn't want to lie to myself because I didn't do it.

"I realized at 12 or 13 to just be honest with you and yourself."

Demidov is still a rink junkie. He is on the ice all the time. At 20, he remains honest to him and himself.

Milstein, Demidov's agent, has two other clients with a similarly special understanding of the game. They are legends, and he doesn't hesitate to put Demidov in the same group.

"If I put my clients Pavel Datsyuk, Nikita Kucherov and Demidov in the same room, I'm not sure who would have a higher hockey IQ," Milstein said. "They're very similar in the way they think, the way they view opponents. They are the most intellectual players I've come across."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Eight years ago, when Milstein's scouts in Russia informed him there was a player he needed to see, he boarded a plane to see Demidov in person.

"When I met with the kid for the first time, I thought it was a very mature, 27-year-old hockey player who was very aware, watching a lot of video," Milstein said. "He was very smart."

Demidov was 12.

When Demidov was told last week of what his agent said about his hockey IQ, he immediately began laughing and shaking his head.

"No. I'll tell Dan, but at this point maybe it's too early, because clearly Datsyuk and Kuch, they're on another level," Demidov said. "I couldn't say right now we have the same type of IQ because even this experience that they have, they have more of those situations than me and they will figure out (problems) much faster, much easier because of those situations."

Demidov is living those situations right now, and his teammates and coach are already impressed with how he's been able to process the speed and the skill of the NHL game at such a young age.

That goal against the Senators with his parents in the building was an example, but Demidov has demonstrated it consistently since.

"His edges and compete really help him out in those situations," Canadiens captain Nick Suzuki said after a win against the Carolina Hurricanes last Tuesday in which Demidov scored the insurance goal on a breakaway in the third period. "He's probably been doing that his whole life."

Suzuki, of course, had little idea how true that is. Demidov's whole life has been spent preparing for what he is now experiencing, and he will go through the situations that will allow him to compare his hockey IQ to his heroes Datsyuk and Kucherov as time goes on.

But for now, Demidov's first full season in the NHL has been a challenge. Even if he has spent his entire life playing hockey, the rhythm and pace of this NHL season haven't been easy.

"It's pretty hard, because you're 19 years old and it's your first year playing that type of games in a row," Demidov said. "For example, last year I played around 78 games. But (at) that time when I played (in Russia), we start earlier (in the year), you have so many days off between games. ... So you have a lot of days where you can go to sauna to rest and your body is feeling good. But here, it's like, you don't have those days. You're just playing, playing, playing, playing, and also your mind, you have to rest."

And the difficulty of his first full NHL schedule does not even take into account the culture shock Demidov and girlfriend, Ekaterina Yakovleva, are attempting to adjust to. The two live downtown with their dog, Céline, named after superstar singer Céline Dion, who announced the Demidov draft pick for the Canadiens in Las Vegas in 2024.

"Sometimes, yeah, you feel, I don't know, you miss your house, you miss your friends in Russia. I mean, miss everything in Russia," Demidov said. "But life is life. Just keep going and you have to, just don't lose your memories. I feel pretty good here, everyone lives hockey. Sometimes it's getting annoying, sometimes it's pretty funny."

Ivan Demidov and parents Olga and Aleksei in the Canadiens dressing room. (Courtesy of the Demidov family)

Asked last week to identify the moment this season that best demonstrated Demidov's hockey IQ, Hutson chose that goal against the Senators on Nov. 1, largely because Demidov had scored a very similar goal to tie the game late in the home opener against the Seattle Kraken a few weeks earlier.

Hutson is Demidov's roommate on the road. They have a similar single-minded obsession with hockey and have grown close over the last year. But when asked if he knew that was the first time Demidov's parents had ever seen him play live in the NHL, Hutson said he didn't.

When that game against the Senators ended, with the Canadiens winning on an Alex Newhook goal in overtime, Demidov made his way to the team's family lounge after addressing the media, showering and getting back into his suit — something he still wears to every game despite the NHL's loosened dress code.

In the lounge, his parents were waiting. He had just provided them with a memory they worked for years to produce.

That night, sitting in a full Bell Centre and watching their son electrify the crowd with an incredible goal, made it all worth it.

"(It) was a very special and emotional moment for us," Olga Demidova said. "After all the years of sacrifice and commitment, to see Ivan step on the NHL ice for the first time meant a great deal. We were extremely proud and deeply happy to share that moment together as a family."

It was wholly appropriate. Because Demidov's NHL success is his family's success.

And it is only getting started.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.31.2026

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ESPN / Ranking the top 2026 Stanley Cup playoff bandwagons - ESPN

Arda Ocal

Last week in this space, I ranked the most exciting matchups of teams that were still in the hunt -- and what could be plausible -- in the first round of the 2026 Stanley Cup playoffs.

This week, we're going to take a similar spin but home in on teams specifically.

Let's say you're an NHL fan and your team is out of the playoffs. You're looking for some rooting interest just to make it fun.

Even if it's for something like an "old guy without a Cup," various teams are going to be increasingly popular among the general hockey fan public in the coming weeks.

So, here are the top five potential playoff teams ranked by their "bandwagon jumpability" for 2026.

Note: Playoff chances are according to Stathead as of March 29.

5. New York Islanders

Playoff chances: 62.4%

They might have the most haters on this list, simply because of historical success and geographic proximity to teams such as the Rangers, Bruins, Flyers and Devils, but this has really felt like a franchise reset year for the Isles, and it starts with Matthew Schaefer.

I will forever contend that the biggest reason Schaefer didn't play in the Olympics was because of the number of NHL games he had in his career -- if he had even one more season under his belt, I believe he would have been selected. He has been dynamite in all categories for Long Island -- saying all the right things that make the fan base love him, and doing all the right things on the ice (including breaking copious amounts of rookie, teenager and franchise records).



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Can you imagine if Schaefer and the Isles make the Cup Final in his first season?

#### 4. Minnesota Wild

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Since their inception in 2000, the Wild have won only four playoff series. The Minnesota North Stars' Cup Final run in 1991 is a distant memory.

But we are now in the dawn of a golden era for the state of hockey in the NHL -- led by Quinn Hughes and Kirill Kaprizov. And of all the teams on this list, they might have the best shot on paper at winning the Cup ... that is, if they didn't have the absolute gauntlet of the Central Division to contend with in Rounds 1 and 2. I would be remiss if I didn't mention my friend and Wild reporter Jessi Pierce, who, along with her three kids, will be a sentimental rallying point for Wild hockey fans throughout the postseason.

#### 3. Columbus Blue Jackets

Playoff chances: 68.3%

The 2025 Stadium Series truly showed us that Columbus has hockey in its blood. Of all the teams on this list, the Blue Jackets have experienced the least amount of postseason success, with only one series win to its name (though it was a doozy).

The Jackets got close last season, they are in the thick of it this season, and it would be great to see Ohio's NHL team get some meaningful wins in May. Its front office is also full of wonderful people that represent the team and sport very well, among the best in the league.

The late Johnny Gaudreau had a presence in the Team USA dressing room during the past year-plus and still has a presence in that CBJ room as well. The team would love nothing more than to hand out the "donkey hat" after a key postseason series victory.

#### 2. San Jose Sharks

Playoff chances: 40.4%

Macklin Celebrini in the playoffs? Sign me up.

The sophomore star had a stellar Olympics and proved that he can shine on the brightest stage. His play just screams "I'm winning Cups in my future," even if you couldn't picture him actually screaming it.

This season, the Sharks have become many fans' "second-favorite team" in the NHL -- they are young, exciting, fun and have a bone fide superstar. They might very well miss the playoffs -- but there's an outside chance that they qualify and face the juggernaut Colorado Avalanche in the first round. Imagine they win that one?

#### 1. Buffalo Sabres

Playoff chances: 99.9%

This isn't even close. After a 14-year wait, the Sabres are finally bulldozing their way into the postseason, waving goodbye to the New York Jets to hold the dubious "longest playoff drought in professional sports" record by themselves.

Unless you hate Buffalo, there's no way you're upset at seeing this happen for a hockey-loving city that has been starving for success. In my opinion, there is no other city in North America that deserves major sporting success than the city of Buffalo, New York.

I mean, they are already changing road signs!

Sabres fans defacing street signs to make sure everyone knows the enormity of the moment >>> <https://t.co/CazJ7o3SBq>

— Conor Hurley (@CHur13) March 27, 2026

The content coming out of the city will be legendary. I hope Sabres fans pack the streets in the tens of thousands before Game 1. A "we made it back" parade! March all the way to the first home game at KeyBank Center to cheer on the team.

Jump ahead:

Games of the week

What I loved this weekend

Hart Trophy candidates

Social post of the week

Stick taps

Biggest games of the week

I'm locked in on the Detroit Red Wings and Ottawa Senators as they enter the week on the outside of the playoff picture.

Ottawa takes on the Florida Panthers on Tuesday, the Sabres on Thursday and the Wild on Saturday. The Red Wings face off with the Pittsburgh Penguins on Tuesday, Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday and New York Rangers on Saturday.

The East wild-card race still feels like it'll be a photo finish.

The Blue Jackets have a home and home with the Carolina Hurricanes, and those will not be easy points to pick up.

Meanwhile, the Boston Bruins have their Florida trip coming up, facing the Panthers and Tampa Bay Lightning after stepping on the ice against the Dallas Stars on Tuesday -- that's not an easy week either!

Hart Trophy contenders if the season ended today

Nikita Kucherov is making the ordering of this thing extremely tough. Connor McDavid was unseated for a minute in the points race, but he's back on top.

McDavid remains at No. 1 in my personal poll and also leads the scoring race with 124 points, including nine points in his past five games. Kucherov is trying to build a gap above Nathan MacKinnon and remains in hot pursuit of McDavid with 121 points, including 10 points in his last five.

MacKinnon is third in the points race, with 117, as he leads the team currently atop the entire NHL standings.

I believe it'll come down to these three as the MVP finalists this season, and it could come down to who wins the scoring title.

What I loved this weekend

I'm the unofficial "ESPN Star Wars sports reporter," so this one caught my eye. The Penguins' AHL affiliate, the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins, had their Star Wars night on Saturday, and once again knocked it out of the park with their jerseys. In previous seasons, they had chief creative officer of Lucasfilm Dave Filoni design the Star Wars night jerseys, so the bar was set pretty high!

This season was a riff of one of Filoni's previous designs, celebrating "The Mandalorian." The team added the Star Wars language "Aurebesh" surrounding the helmet. It says "Wilkes-Barre Scranton Penguins" on top and "This is the way" at the bottom. Incredible detail:

This is the way 🌟

Our threads for tomorrow night's Star Wars game have finally arrived, and you'll be able to bid on them on our DASH Auction site! [pic.twitter.com/DZc6LyNRYN](https://pic.twitter.com/DZc6LyNRYN)

— Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins (@WBS Penguins) March 27, 2026



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Social media post of the weekend

One of the highlights of my year is coming up this Sunday -- the "Inside Out Classic" -- which is Sunday at 7 p.m. ET. It's a special broadcast of the Washington Capitals-New York Rangers game (on Disney Plus, Disney Channel, Disney XD and the ESPN App), with real-time animation using NHL EDGE and Sony Hawk-Eye Innovations tracking data. We have plenty of goodies coming out this week in anticipation of the big game so be on the lookout for all of that.

But speaking of fun, my social post of the weekend falls in the "haven't seen it, should" category (shoutout "SportsCenter," IYKYK). Based on Connor McDavid's recent "pillow fight" comment regarding the Pacific Division, we staged a pillow fight on the set of our NHL broadcast. This included me tossing pillows at Steve Levy while he was trying to finish his read, and hitting T.J. Oshie before he picked up a pillow and flew at P.K. Subban from the top rope!

Stick taps

Stick taps this week go out to every NHL team that has commemorated Jessi Pierce, either by donating to the GoFundMe set up for her grieving husband and/or by leaving a seat empty in the press box with her name on it with flowers. The hockey community is the best.

Classy gestures by @TBLightning - leaving press box seat open for the late @jessi\_pierce, along with a bouquet. They also donated \$10k to family @gofundme + are holding a moment of remembrance pre-game pic.twitter.com/VzTBFMMFoY

— Joe Smith (@JoeSmithNHL) March 24, 2026

The Florida Panthers will honor Jessi Pierce at tonight's game against the Minnesota Wild - the team she covered. pic.twitter.com/5ys6lR6tam

— George Richards (@GeorgeRichards) March 26, 2026

Moment of silence during the #GoBolts pregame tonight in honor of first responders lost in the line of duty as well as Wild beat writer Jessi Pierce. pic.twitter.com/VlkoV4q8N0

— Benjamin Pierce (@BenjaminJReport) March 24, 2026

ESPN LOADED: 03.31.2026

1385007 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 'We just didn't deliver': Brad Treliving's firing shocks Maple Leafs

Luke Fox

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Ironic, isn't it?

The Toronto Maple Leafs waited until GM Brad Treliving got fired to summon one of their snottiest efforts in years.

Symbolism was in much greater supply than sympathy Monday night at Honda Center, where the vengeful, leader-less Leafs played the aggressor in a 93-penalty-minute affair and rallied late to edge the Anaheim Ducks 5-4 in overtime.

"Everybody wanted a piece, to be honest," Matthew Knies said. "We had a resiliency, and everyone was fighting, playing hard, physical. Yeah, I thought we were hard to play against today, and that's why we came out the win."

A flicker of the change Treliving was aiming for in Toronto's DNA, yet only when the season has been labelled DNR.

Max Domi — the Maple Leaf angriest over the club's lack of response to Radko Gudas's season-ending knee on Auston Matthews three weeks back — filled Gudas in off the opening draw, then later picked a scrap with defenceman Pavel Mintyukov.

Jake McCabe went after the Ducks captain, too, as did the overzealous, under-used Michael Pezzetta. Domi and Pezzetta got the boot, and the Leafs piled up 61 PIMs as they acquired one pound of flesh and two points Treliving could've used three months ago.

"I feel for Brad and his family. You never like to hear that or see that. And it was tough," said a sombre Craig Berube, who broke the news to his players in a meeting shortly before puck drop. "It's still difficult right now for me, but that's the business.

"We didn't live up to expectations this year, and that's what happens."

Thing is, the night Gudas went untouched, the night the Leafs have been so desperate to scrub since, represents rock bottom for the Era of Treliving.

Here was an executive dealt a tricky hand — too many no-move clauses already in place, too few draft picks and prospects coming — and passively let his chips dwindle away with the hope.

Perhaps because of the organization's blind faith that they had enough talent to survive, Treliving was allowed to oversee a second troublesome trade deadline but not the conclusion of this, the most disappointing campaign of the Maple Leafs' 109 years.

"Brad Treliving is a man that we all have deep respect and appreciation for, both as a hockey executive and as a person, but it was determined that the club must chart a new course under different leadership," MLSE president Keith Pelley stated, in a release that dropped less than two hours before the puck. (Pelley will hold a press conference Tuesday in Toronto at 2 p.m. ET.)

Treliving had stopped travelling with the team, and Pelley had begun conducting an internal review on his GM's operations. Treliving, who still has one more season on his contract, is believed to have felt uncomfortable twisting in the wind and pushed for a decision.

That decision came down via a curiously timed press release sent out 75 minutes before the most emotional game left on the team's calendar.

Knies, a nice value signing by Treliving, called the news "abrupt" and said he would always cherish their relationship.

William Nylander, to whom Treliving granted the richest contract in franchise history, chose "sad."

John Tavares, who took less than market value last summer because he believed in Treliving's vision, used the word shocking.

"It's a real tough one," Tavares said. "Brad brought us all in here, tremendous belief in us, and we just didn't deliver. And it falls on us, starting with myself, and just not playing consistent enough, and what we need to do to be a better hockey team."

The last time Treliving spoke to reporters in Toronto was minutes after his underwhelming returns for Bobby McMann and Scott Laughton. He looked like he'd just seen a ghost.

"I'll take responsibility for our season," Treliving said on March 6. "We got off to a poor start. (There are) some roster construction issues, lack of consistency, the ability to maintain any kind of level."

Injuries didn't help. But even healthy, the Maple Leafs lack puck-movers from the back end, playmakers in the top six, and that instinctual connectedness that binds true contenders between the front office and



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the bench, the bench and the skaters, and the amongst the players themselves.

Nylander: "Just shows that, like what we did this year wasn't good enough. And that sucks, because that comes on the players too. So, it's not just his fault."

Berube: "We wanted to build something here — and did last year. We were right there, but we didn't succeed. And this year we obviously dropped off."

Morgan Rielly: "How I feel is that it's on the players."

Rest assured, Treliving's dismissal is but the first shoe to drop here. And with a qualified coach like Bruce Cassidy joining the accomplished Peter DeBoer on the unemployment line this week, Berube is in jeopardy too.

"I don't think about it, guys. I mean, I really don't," Berube said. "You probably think I'm bulls----- you, but I'm not. I feel for Brad right now and his family. That's what I feel right now."

Treliving is a good man, a good hockey man. That's true.

Also true: Treliving was not good enough at this job to leave the Maple Leafs in a better spot than he inherited them.

And, at least publicly, he presented no plan to correct the mess. Internally and externally, faith in a Treliving-led turnaround dwindled.

Changes are afoot. This is only the beginning.

More good men are going to find themselves not working for the Maple Leafs soon.

Fox's Fast Five

- Skating at something less than 100 per cent, Gudas logged just 7:10, mostly as a flaming-orange target. But the captain's respect within the Honda Center's home dressing room elevated by his decision to stand in there and take his lumps.

Gudas didn't so much as attempt a meaningful punch when Domi jumped him, seemingly accepting his penance.

"I think more so for his conscience having to hold onto it for a whole other year, you know?" Brandon Carlo said at morning skate, when informed Gudas was going to dress.

"He definitely wants to be out there because I think he recognizes that he was the one who made the hit. So, I don't think he wants his teammates out there answering for it. He would rather be out there to deal with it himself. I think that's a good leadership move, for sure. But it is an interesting situation."

Rielly says there were conversations over the past couple days among the Leafs regarding who would get first crack at Gudas. Max Domi was the guy.

"He's a character human, and he's fearless, and it speaks to all that," Reilly said. "That's who he is."

- William Nylander's four-point night vaulted him ahead of father Michael (679 points) as the highest-scoring Nylander in NHL history (683).

Meanwhile, Tavares's two-goal effort gives him 28 on the year. He passes the injured Matthews for the team lead in goals.

- When Nylander interfered with Ducks goalie Ville Husso and a scrum ensued around the Anaheim crease, Anthony Stolarz wasted no time skating to centre ice. He later bumped his counterpart as they crossed paths during a stoppage.

Last week, Stolarz didn't shy away from the fact that he wants a goalie goal.

Now, we know he wants a goalie fight.

And Husso — three inches shorter and 43 pounds lighter — has zero interest in granting the big man's wish.

- Whoa, boy, can Cutter Gauthier rip a shot.

The sophomore's first-period snipe gives him 38 on the season. No one younger than the 22-year-old has that many tucks this season. Unfortunately for the Ducks, Gauthier left the game shortly after he scored with an upper-body injury and did not return.

Wonderful touch by game ops, who blast O.T. Genesis's "Cut It" to punctuate Gauthier's goals.

- For those wondering, Matthews is rehabbing from MCL surgery in Toronto.

"I just saw him before we left (Friday)," Berube said. "He seemed in pretty good spirits, talking to him. But it's tough when that happens."

"He'll be fine. He'll grind through it and do what he needs to do to get ready."

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Sportsnet.ca / 'Like a glove': Kadri sliding back in seamlessly with Avalanche after trade

Eric Francis

DENVER — Nazem Kadri made one thing abundantly clear in the days leading up to the trade deadline: He wasn't waiving anything just so the Flames could cash in.

It had to be the right fit, the right situation, the right room. And if you've followed his career at all, you knew exactly where that pointed.

Back to Colorado. Back to the place where he became a champion. Back to the place where, by all accounts, he slid back in like he'd never left.

And on Monday night, in his first game against the Calgary Flames since they granted him that wish, he delivered in classic Kadri fashion, with two goals.

Of course he did.

This is the guy who scored in his 1,000th game, his 900th game, his very first game as an Avalanche, and in overtime of the Stanley Cup Final.

Rising to the moment is practically his brand.

But before scoring twice in 66 seconds to help give the Avalanche a 5–0 first-period lead, Kadri wanted to talk about gratitude.

He wanted to talk about the Flames.

And he wanted to talk about how this trade wasn't something done to him, but something done with him.

"It was mutual," he said of the deadline deal that landed Calgary a first and second-round pick, and two players.

"A mutual respect, open conversation and transparency. And I think that's when the best deals get done, when everybody's on the same page. I wasn't just gonna be traded just to be traded, and go anywhere. (Colorado) was an opportunity, and I got to take it."

When the dream deal was done, he spoke with general manager Craig Conroy, president Don Maloney, and owner Murray Edwards.

"I just expressed my gratitude," said the 35-year-old.



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"It's a weird feeling, because you don't want to be traded. But in this specific scenario, which is very particular, it was kind of a happy ending to say the least. It's bittersweet for me. Never want to leave a team that you've grown so fond of, but obviously joining a team like this, you're excited."

He's been watching the Flames closely, well aware of their six-game point streak heading into Monday's drubbing.

"Not really surprised," he said of the recent surge he helped put an end to.

"It's nice to see them doing so well. I've been keeping a close eye on them. I'm happy some guys have gotten hot. It's exciting."

He said he loved his former teammates, enjoyed mentoring youngsters, and cherished his leadership role.

But Monday was about the present. And the present looks awfully familiar, as he paced the league's top team to a 9-2 win.

"I'm happy to be back," said Kadri to the roar of the Ball Arena crowd in his bench interview as the first star of the game.

Kadri was in the starting lineup, centring Calgary-born Logan O'Connor and Ross Colton on a third line that looked more like a second line on most teams.

In a first period that felt like a fathers vs. sons scrimmage, the Avalanche outshot Calgary 26-8, and chased Dustin Wolf with four goals on 16 shots, including two power-play strikes by Kadri.

He looked like a man who had been wearing burgundy all season.

"There's some chemistry there that we've kind of rekindled," he smiled.

"Our power play has certainly turned a corner and has looked a lot more dangerous."

Three of his four goals, and six of his nine points, with Colorado have come with the man advantage. And his teammates have noticed.

Cale Makar lit up when asked about Kadri's return.

"I love the guy," said Makar, who had three assists before leaving with an upper-body injury that will be evaluated Tuesday.

"He fits right back in, like a glove."

Gabriel Landeskog echoed it.

"He's a social chameleon," the captain said.

"He can fit in anywhere, in any situation. Same thing on the ice. You can play him up and down the lineup. It's just kind of right back to where it was a few years ago."

His first game back in Denver after the trade, the crowd welcomed him back with a standing ovation he'll never forget. Monday night's roar was similar.

"These fans have been so good to me and my family over the years," he said.

"I feel an obligation to go out there and give it everything I got."

His wife just arrived in town. His life is still a whirlwind. He joked he might need a second book to cover the last few weeks.

But he's home.

And while returning to Calgary will be "a little more difficult," Monday night was the perfect first step.

A reminder of why he chose Colorado.

A reminder of why Colorado chose him.

And a reminder that Nazem Kadri, when the lights go up, always seems to deliver.

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1385009 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks Takeaways: Edge, urgency not enough to stop Tortorella's Golden Knights

Iain MacIntyre

With one-time Vancouver coach John Tortorella standing behind the Knights' bench Monday for the first time since Vegas' surprise firing of 2023 Stanley Cup winner Bruce Cassidy, the Canucks played with more edge and urgency than they have in most games since the Olympic break.

They still lost their sixth straight, 4-2, but forced the Knights to rally from 1-0 and 2-1 deficits as the Canucks bounced back from a 7-3 loss Saturday to the Calgary Flames.

In his 1,000th National Hockey League game, Evander Kane opened scoring for Vancouver with a pretty finish from Jake DeBrusk on a two-on-one, and Brock Boeser's deft second-period deflection again put the visitors ahead.

But Shea Theodore and Reilly Smith scored goals for Vegas 1:17 apart late in the middle frame, and the Knights clinched just their second win in eight games on Cole Smith's empty-netter with 70 seconds remaining in the third. Coaching his sixth NHL team — and his third since Tortorella's one-and-done season with the Canucks in 2013-14 — the 67-year-old maintained the Knights' franchise streak of each coach winning his debut. (They've had four).

Especially after the opening period, the Knights elevated their abrasiveness and intensity for their new coach and outshot the Canucks 33-24. Shot attempts, however, were 67-33 and Vancouver goalie Kevin Lankinen had to be outstanding to keep his team within a goal until the 59th minute.

The second half of the Canuck road trip gets much harder, as Vancouver visits the Colorado Avalanche on Wednesday and Minnesota Wild on Thursday.

### QUOTEBOOK

Canucks coach Adam Foote to reporters in Las Vegas: "They were fighting. We knew they were going to come out hard and they were finishing their checks trying to play that hard game, and they did throughout the 60 minutes. And we matched it. We competed. We didn't back down, that's for sure."

### DEFENCE SCHOOL

The number of times this season that Foote has mentioned the inexperience of the team's young defencemen risks creating an impression that Zeev Buium, Tom Willander, Elias Pettersson (Junior) and, lately, Victor Mancini are the main reason the team is heading to its worst finish in franchise history.

Problems and deficiencies on the Canucks, of course, extend far beyond the academy on the blue line.

That said, all of the young defenceman might have been better suited to more (or some) development time in the American Hockey League, and their learning-as-they-go mistakes at the NHL level have indeed been a factor in team performance.



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Pettersson, for instance, knows he can't go all-in on a challenge and misplay a two-on-one like he did on Shea Theodore's tying goal. Buium knows he can't turn over the puck in his own slot, and Willander understands he has to box out in front of the net. These are smart kids.

Monday was just NHL Game Nos. 61 for Willander and 67 for Buium. In his second season, Pettersson is up to 90 games.

NHL growing pains are almost always a necessity for young defencemen, so at least the trio is that much closer to making it past adolescence as pros. And the Canucks, as everyone knows, are uniquely equipped to let them learn on the job.

### WHAT WE LIKE

Beyond their skillsets, what is encouraging about Buium, Willander and Pettersson is how willingly they compete and don't back away from the fight. Two games ago, Buium literally fought, against Brandt Clarke, when he thought a couple of Los Angeles Kings were going too far with their physicality at the end of a 4-0 game.

In Vegas, Pettersson had his gloves off and looked ready to stand up to tough Knights defenceman Jeremy Lauzon, who started a scrum by roughing up Canuck rookie Linus Karlsson in front of the Vancouver bench. Willander also jumped into the fray.

Pettersson co-led his team with three hits and in the third period took a run at Keegan Kolesar who, like Lauzon, had been trying to run Canucks all game.

Pettersson and Mancini got lit up as a defence pairing, getting outshot 6-0 and outscored 2-0 while generating expected-goals-for of zero per cent. But the appetite for battle of the young Canucks is impressive.

### KANE PAIN

The Canucks trade last spring for Kane was among several home-run swings that management whiffed on for this season in an effort to manufacture a bounce-back year good enough to entice Quinn Hughes to stay. They went to Plan B a while ago.

As for Kane, he didn't (or won't) score 25 goals for the Canucks, didn't make the team harder to play against, didn't help them get to the playoffs and didn't earn a contract extension with his hometown team. He didn't even get traded, as 31 other clubs passed on him at the deadline.

But the 34-year-old winger from East Vancouver did get his 1,000th game in a Canucks uniform, and marked the achievement by scoring against the Golden Knights. In a season of unhappiness for nearly everyone around the team, Kane's milestone is worth celebrating.

He is only the 26th British Columbian to log 1,000 NHL games, the 12th player from Metro Vancouver to do so. And he earned his millennium mark the hard way, playing for five teams and re-establishing his career after the San Jose Sharks terminated his contract in 2021.

With 13 goals and 31 points in 70 games this season, Kane will probably find a sixth NHL team in free agency this summer, albeit on a low-cost, show-me deal. But he will need a better season than this one. We can say that about a lot of Canucks.

### GOALIE CHOICES

Lankinen's improved play the last eight games, an .888 save percentage deflated by a six-goal outing two weeks ago when the Canucks were completely overmatched by the Tampa Bay Lightning, is one of the few bright spots of the team's latest losing spree.

With four more years under contract for Lankinen at \$4.5-million, and the ongoing uncertainty about Thatcher Demko's health, the Canucks and Foote have obviously made it a priority to try to get the goalie's game and confidence rebuilt a little before this season ends. That's why Lankinen is

playing and minor-league callup Nikita Tolopilo is not, although the goalies will split the back-to-back games later this week.

### AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'

The best thing about Tortorella's one season in charge of the Canucks was how well he behaved with the media.

Sure, a team that was still trying to keep itself warm on the dying embers of its Stanley Cup Final run in 2011 underperformed and missed the playoffs in 2013-14 for the first time in six seasons (remember the good old days in Vancouver?). And Tortorella memorably went cuckoo-for-cocoa-puffs and tried to storm the Calgary Flames' dressing room in order to punch Bob Hartley in the face, which he deserved.

At least, Tortorella's suspension gave Mike Sullivan a chance to run the Canucks' bench, and that cameo was followed by a job with the Pittsburgh Penguins and a couple of Stanley Cups.

Tortorella was simply the wrong coach at the wrong time for the Canucks.

But with reporters, he was generally accommodating and thoughtful and almost always quotable.

"I thought our best forward was David Booth," he said after a loss in Detroit. "Which is good for him (but) that's not good for our team."

Although he never fully articulated it, Tortorella, by then a Cup winner with Tampa Bay, was tired of being seen as a circus sideshow with the media instead of one of the best coaches of his generation.

But YouTube clips last forever, and a dozen years and three teams later, Tortorella is still dealing with the image he created during his infamous and entertaining televised dustups with the late New York Post reporter Larry Brooks and others.

"Listen, I've made a lot of mistakes along the way," Tortorella told reporters in Las Vegas before his first game. "I answer questions; I'm going to answer them honestly. I'm not saying I'm the greatest guy in the world after games because you're in the fight with the players, and you guys need us out here, what, 10 minutes after the game, which is insane because we're still amped up.

"Sometimes emotion gets in the way. It's a good thing, it's a bad thing, right? We all make some mistakes doing it. I'm going to do the best I can for you guys, and I'll never lie to you."

I was wrong in thinking when Tortorella bombed in Vancouver that the end of his time as an NHL coach was near because the league evolves and eventually people fall behind. But Tortorella, with an Olympic gold medal freshly added to his sock drawer, has kept up and can still coach. That's why NHL teams keep hiring him.

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1385010 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Real Kyper's NHL Buzz: Potential front office changes to watch

Nick Kypreos

The day after the NFL regular season ends is known as 'Black Monday' for the mass firings of coaches and staff that occur after teams fall short of playoff expectations. Missing the NFL playoffs is high stakes and brutal, often surrounded by fan anger and media scrutiny.

It's not much different in the NHL.



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On Sunday, the Vegas Golden Knights didn't even wait for the regular season to end to fire Bruce Cassidy and bring in John Tortorella. Vegas very well could still be a playoff team, sitting third in the Pacific and four points inside the cut-off line, but that move happened because the Golden Knights have Stanley Cup goals and are falling well short of pre-season expectations, looking for a bump down the stretch and into the post-season.

The surprise with Vegas' change isn't so much that it happened, but that Vegas didn't replace Cassidy with a different kind of coach. Usually, when you make a change behind the bench, you go from bad cop to good cop, or good cop to bad cop, but in going from Cassidy to Tortorella, Vegas is going with two bad cops in a row. That tells you how upset the front office is with some of the players on their roster. The team has been inconsistent, and if Tortorella doesn't fix this in the short term, player personnel change could follow in the off-season.

A lot of people are already speculating about Mark Stone's health next season and whether he'll be able to play. It's not out of the realm to think Stone could be looking at a similar situation to Alex Pietrangolo, where the body finally breaks down and prolonged time off is necessary. Stone turns 34 in May and has just one season left on his contract with Vegas.

Beyond Vegas, it's not clear at this point how many other teams will be looking to change out their head coach and/or manager, but there are a few whose futures are uncertain.

Unlike Vegas still hoping for playoff success, Toronto, New Jersey and Vancouver are all playing out the string, already out of the playoff race, and needing to consider deep changes throughout their organizations. With less than three weeks left in the regular season, speculation is already surrounding these teams. Regardless of when the respective ownership groups of these teams decide the fate of their coaches, all three management groups are expecting a version of their own 'Black Monday' once 82 games pass.

Let's take a closer look at each...

- In Toronto, MLSE president/CEO Keith Pelley made the first move among these teams on Monday, firing general manager Brad Treliving.
- In New Jersey, Tom Fitzgerald holds the president of hockey operations and GM titles together, but some are wondering if the Devils' ownership will look to break up those two jobs. That was their intention when they first offered the president job to John Davidson when he left the Rangers in 2021, but Davidson felt at the time it was too close to his ties to New York and chose to return to Columbus instead.

It will be interesting to see if the Devils do look to hire someone solely for the president of hockey operations title this summer, and whether that would allow Fitzgerald to stick around for at least one more season as GM and assess him from there. The feeling in New Jersey is that Fitzgerald is preparing for the worst, knowing he's on the hot seat.

- In Vancouver, there are strong suggestions that change is coming, but to what extent remains unclear. Until there is a better understanding of Jim Rutherford's full commitment to a rebuild, things remain fluid. Either way, I hear GM Patrik Allvin doesn't expect to survive past this season.

Who is looking for a job and might be available?

When it comes to the names being discussed most, we have to mention Brendan Shanahan, Peter Chiarelli, Marc Bergevin, and Brian Lawton as four people with executive experience who might have their sights set on a president of hockey operations title.

We also want to keep an eye on Chris Pronger and Ryan Getzlaf, two others being discussed for front-office jobs, who don't have the same kind of executive experience. It doesn't appear Nashville is moving in that kind of direction, as they've made it known they want more NHL front office experience than what Getzlaf or Pronger can provide at this point.

We also need to talk about two others still under contract: St. Louis' Doug Armstrong and Seattle's Ron Francis.

Armstrong, currently St. Louis' president of hockey operations and GM, is under contract with the Blues through the 2028-29 season, but, effective July 1, he is set to relinquish his GM duties to Alex Steen and focus solely on the president role. However, I'm told he still immensely enjoys the day-to-day duties of a GM.

If Armstrong could get out of his contract with the Blues, it would only be for both a president of hockey operations and GM role elsewhere. However, for him to make such a significant personal change in his life at this point, he would want complete autonomy and to only answer to ownership in hockey decisions. There are conflicting reports out there if Armstrong actually has an out window this summer or not, but there is buzz that St. Louis ownership has tired of the Toronto rumours. We will have to keep a close eye on this situation in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, in Seattle, Jason Botterill has a long-term deal in the GM's chair, which has limited Francis' involvement in hockey decisions. So, like Armstrong, Francis may be in a position to seek out other longer-term opportunities should they arise.

And finally, we are keeping an eye on Steve Yzerman in Detroit. Ownership, led by Chris Ilitch, may be feeling more pressure than Yzerman himself to contemplate a change. Chris' parents, Mike and Marian, drafted Yzerman back in 1983 and have shared a family-bond loyalty ever since.

If the Wings miss out on the playoffs this season, it will be the seventh time they've fallen short under Yzerman, and fan-based pressure will hit a fever pitch. Just another situation to keep tabs on.

What is Alex Ovechkin's plan?

Washington has eight games left in its season, and it's all quiet around Alex Ovechkin, who is in the final season of his contract at 40 years old.

Ovechkin has kept his cards very close to the vest, and not many know his intentions right now. What I've heard is that he's never been interested in a farewell tour like Anze Kopitar has been having with Los Angeles this season. Ovechkin liked the way Wayne Gretzky did it at the end of his career, announcing two days before his last regular-season game that he was retiring at the end of the season. Ovechkin could follow a similar blueprint if he decides this is it.

What's Gary Bettman's future?

Managerial and coaching positions are not the only ones being wondered about at the end of the regular season.

Many at the recent GM meetings quietly speculated where Gary Bettman's future lies as commissioner of the NHL. It appears for at least the next two seasons, he isn't going anywhere.

Two main focal points for Bettman continue to be American broadcasting rights and the search for expansion into at least two more markets. It has been noted that additional commissioner responsibilities that were on Bettman's plate over the years have already been allocated to deputy commissioner Bill Daly.

Whenever Bettman does decide to retire, Daly is the odds-on favourite to be his successor.

One interesting scenario I heard about was the possible creation of a new job role, something like a chairman of the board type of position in the NHL. This would create the potential for Bettman to stay on with the league in a much leaner role after he decides to step down as commissioner.

Chairman roles can feel somewhat part-time, but they still carry critical responsibilities of governance and overall strategic health of the league.



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1385011 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers focused on playoff prep as Pacific chaos swirls around them

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — Up here in their little corner of a Pacific Division they've won for the past two seasons, the Edmonton Oilers are watching the mayhem around them, whistling quietly as their own season finally comes together.

A fired coach in Vegas. The daily recording of new lows in Vancouver. The plucky, rebuilding Flames, finally winning games at the worst possible time, and a San Jose team that looked so good only two weeks ago, suddenly tied for 28th and vying for another high pick.

Anaheim and Los Angeles are likely feeling the same way as Edmonton, three teams that like their circumstances — until they compare them to all those aforementioned teams. Then they like it even more.

"I love the direction that it's going right now," said Jack Roslovic, who became Edmonton's fifth 20-goal scorer when he slid one home Saturday against Anaheim in Edmonton's third straight win.

Roslovic played for John Tortorella in Columbus and isn't surprised to see him back behind an NHL bench.

"I think he just misses it," Roslovic said. "He lives on a lot of land. Maybe he gets lonely."

Nobody wants to have too loud an opinion on your chief rival's coaching change. Roslovic prefers a quiet role as part of the new blood in Edmonton, a group of first-year Oilers watching the environment change as the calendar turns from March to April.

The pending UFA Roslovic played 25 playoff games over the past two seasons — 16 with the Rangers, nine in Carolina — but in a nine-year NHL career he only has 45 post-season games.

Connor Murphy (nine) and Jason Dickinson (40) aren't far off that, two players who came to Edmonton at the trade deadline and are loving the process of being embroiled in a meaningful stretch run with the promise of playoff games in a Canadian market ahead.

"You want to play competitively, and at the highest stakes," said Murphy, a long-time Arizona Coyote and Chicago Blackhawks. "It's easy to get the most motivated you've ever been for these games, and you want that pressure to know that every little play you make has an impact on a meaningful game."

Dickinson has played in Chicago, Dallas, and Vancouver. He hasn't played a playoff game since 2020, and that was the antiseptic experience inside the Edmonton bubble during the pandemic.

It's a far cry from what he's experienced in a month spent as an Oiler in Edmonton, where hockey is king.

"The first thing I notice is getting recognized," Dickinson said. "Now, you go to the grocery store and people are just beaming with excitement. Not only to meet you just but also to say, 'Good luck. We're so excited.'"

"I'm Canadian and I get it. Hockey's a religion. It is everything to us in Canada, and Edmonton definitely rings true."

NHL on Sportsnet

NHL on Sportsnet

Livestream Hockey Night in Canada, Scotiabank Wednesday Night Hockey, the Oilers, Flames, Canucks, out-of-market matchups, the Stanley Cup Playoffs and the NHL Draft.

Broadcast schedule

Dickinson walked down the tunnel here at Rogers Place as a younger man back in 2020, playing for a Stars team that lost the Stanley Cup Final in six to Tampa. There were no fans, the building was freezing cold, and the fake, piped-in crowd noises were an abomination. A slap in the face to playoff hockey.

Three weeks from now he'll do all those things again, but for real.

"Definitely something to look forward to," he smiled. "I remember my first playoff game (for Dallas), it was against Nashville, in Nashville. I was blown away by what I saw.

"I didn't know Nashville could get like that. And I just imagine it being 10 times bigger here. So as excited and blown away as I was, then, I'm expecting much more this time, for sure."

It seems a stretch to conceive that this spring's Oilers could have similar success to the last two years, when you consider they've won exactly half of their games — 37 of 74 — in regulation this season.

That's basically a .500 team, with a few overtimes and loser points thrown in.

But on the flip side, would anyone have believed that Connor Ingram — denied a training camp invite by Utah and dealt away soon after — would emerge as the No. 1 in Edmonton?

"Would you have believed it if I told you?" Ingram asked.

Well....

"I don't think I ever doubted it," he said. "But, you know, there were days where it seemed like a distant future or a long ways away. It's hard in this business. You don't really know what's going to happen. I don't know what tomorrow holds for me, so it's been a big learning curve this year of just keeping your eyes open.

"Just being as ready as you can, whenever that opportunity."

That sums up his team perfectly, as a previously unforeseen path to playoff success may be unfolding in front of them.

It's quiet here now. The Oilers are winning of late.

They'd rather keep it that way, if you don't mind.

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1385012 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Will Golden Knights get Stanley Cup boost with John Tortorella?

Ryan Dixon

The Vegas Golden Knights are making a late-season move in the hope it can swing their fate the way the New Jersey Devils did at the start of this century.

Twenty-six years and about seven days ago, Jersey GM Lou Lamoriello axed Robbie Ftorek with eight games to go in the Devils season — the same number Vegas has left now — and replaced him with Larry Robinson. While the Devils — who were the top team in the East when Ftorek got canned, but had gone 5-9-3 over a 17-game stretch leading to



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the firing — finished just 4-4-0 under Robinson to close out the year, they caught fire in the playoffs and claimed the 2000 Stanley Cup.

As it happens, John Tortorella officially coached his first four NHL games at almost the exact same time the Devils installed Robinson, as the underperforming 1999-2000 New York Rangers club Tortorella was an assistant to axed head man John Muckler just before the season ended.

The next season, "Torts" was the top man in Tampa Bay and, a quarter century later, the 67-year-old is being tabbed by Vegas GM Kelly McCrimmon to grab the fast-dropping Golden Knights by the lapels and elevate them back up to the contender status they're supposed to hold.

It won't be easy.

Since Jan. 19, under deposed coach Bruce Cassidy, Vegas holds a .370 points percentage, a mark worse than everyone in the league save Toronto (.365) and Vancouver (.271). In that span, the Knights are averaging just 2.67 goals per game, which rank 25th in the NHL.

And, of course, there's the season-long issue of goaltending. Vegas sports an .874 team save percentage this year and if it drops even two points to .872 it'll be the worst number in the entire NHL, behind even the burn-it-to-the-ground Canucks.

Remember the "25 per cent rule," when Tortorella blasted former Bolts goalie John Grahame after one of every four Ottawa Senators shots beat him in the 2006 playoffs? Well, he might get some horrifying flashbacks in the desert if Adin Hill and Akira Schmid can't turn things around quickly.

If Vegas is hoping to alter its outlook with this move, there's a redemptive element for Tortorella here, too. He's a decorated coach, no doubt, with more wins (770) than every American bench boss except Peter Laviolette (846), a Cup ring from his time in Tampa and, most recently, an Olympic gold while serving as an assistant for Team USA.

But last year ended ugly for Tortorella, being dismissed in Philly with nine contests to go as the team slid into oblivion and he had a reported non-physical confrontation in the dressing room with defenceman Cam York.

Now, heading his sixth different NHL team, one of hockey's loudest personalities has a chance to pen another chapter.

Finding the success New Jersey did all those years ago might be a stretch, but who's more ready for a battle than Tortorella?

### Weekend Takeaways

• What a weekend for Pavel Zacha and the Boston Bruins. Zacha tied Boston's game in Columbus on Sunday with 11 seconds left in the third, netting the B's third goal of the frame after they'd fallen behind 3-0 in the opening 20. The Bruins went on to claim a critical 4-3 shootout win 24 hours after they'd doubled up the Minnesota Wild 6-3 in Boston. Zacha had a pair against the Wild and two more versus the Columbus Blue Jackets, driving his career-best goal total to 28 and putting him well in range of the first 30-goal season of his career.

Since the calendar flipped to 2026, the Bruins have the second-best points percentage (.727) in the entire league, behind only the Buffalo Sabres (.743) squad they could see in the first round.

• While we're at it, the three best points-percentage teams of 2026 are Buffalo, Boston and Tampa (.721), all members of the Atlantic Division. Throw in Montreal (.676) and Ottawa (.643), and five of the best eight marks in the back half of the season belong to Atlantic teams.

By the way, you have to drop down to Dallas at No. 9 (.632) to find the top points percentage by a Western Conference club since Jan. 1.

• Given everything we just mentioned about the Atlantic, what is that group going to look like next year when the Florida Panthers come back rested, healthy and ready to reclaim their championship turf?

The Cats lost 5-2 to the Isles on Friday and 3-1 to the Rangers 24 hours later at Madison Square Garden. They'll be officially eliminated from the playoffs as soon as Tuesday, but — even with some uncertainty in the crease, where 37-year-old Sergei Bobrovsky is a pending-UFA — it's hard to imagine they won't bounce back in a big way next fall.

### Red and White Power Rankings

1. Montreal Canadiens (42-21-10) The Canadiens gathered two huge weekend wins with back-to-back W's in Nashville on Saturday and Carolina 24 hours later. With five straight victories, Montreal is on pace for 105 points, a number the club has reached just once (110 in 2014-15) since the 1988-89 Habs posted 115 on their way to losing in the Cup final.

2. Edmonton Oilers (37-28-9) The Oilers host two non-playoff teams this week — Seattle and Chicago — before Vegas visits Edmonton on Saturday. If the Oilers — winners of three straight after downing Pacific-leading Anaheim on Saturday — are going to make a play for the division title, this is the week.

3. Ottawa Senators (38-25-10) With injuries on the back end, Jordan Spence — a healthy scratch at times early in the season — is averaging over 26 minutes per game in his past four outings and found the net during Saturday's deflating 4-2 setback in Tampa.

4. Winnipeg Jets (31-30-12) Jonathan Toews will play as a visitor in Chicago for the second time in his career on Tuesday. It goes without saying the Jets absolutely must leave the Windy City with two points to remain relevant in the Western Conference wild-card chase.

5. Toronto Maple Leafs (31-30-13) If Radko Gudas — who sat out Saturday's game with an injury — plays on Monday night, somebody on the Leafs is going to seek retribution for the knee he hit Auston Matthews with in mid-March that ended the latter's season. Maybe Michael Pezzetta will get in the second fight of his brief Leafs tenure after dropping the gloves one second into his Blue and White debut a couple weeks back in the very game that Gudas took out Matthews.

6. Calgary Flames (31-34-8) After scoring in Saturday's 7-3 win over Vancouver, Morgan Frost is two goals away from his first 20-goal campaign. Frost posted a career-best 19 three seasons ago in Philly.

7. Vancouver Canucks (21-43-8) John Tortorella's debut as Golden Knights bench boss comes on Monday against the Canucks club he coached for one season in 2013-14. You have to think Vegas, under the circumstances, will come out flying on home ice and a loss would represent the Canucks' third six-game losing streak of the year. Evander Kane will be suiting up for his 1,000th NHL contest against the Knights.

### The Week Ahead

• The Isles and Penguins clash in a huge Metro matchup on Monday night in New York and Matthew Schaefer, with his 23rd goal, can tie Brian Leetch for the most ever by a rookie D-man. Later that night, Nazem Kadri will see his old pals on the Flames when Calgary visits Denver. Avc centre Nathan MacKinnon is two goals shy of becoming the first player to hit the 50-goal mark this year. With three goals, MacKinnon will equal his career-best showing of 51 in 2023-34.

• Cole Caufield is also in range of 50 goals after netting his 46th in Sunday's victory over Carolina. The Habs are in Tampa for a possible playoff preview on Tuesday and Caufield will get three more chances this week to reach the magical half-century mark.

• Quinn Hughes will face the Vancouver Canucks for the first time in his career when his former squad visits Minnesota on Thursday, while the Flames will see an old friend for the second time in a matter of days



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when they drop into the Vegas desert to face Rasmus Andersson and the Golden Knights. That same night, Ottawa begins a vital five-game homestand by hosting Buffalo. Meanwhile, Porter Martone — the sixth-overall pick in the 2025 NHL Draft — inked his entry-level deal with the Flyers on the weekend and could make his debut in the Flyers' next home game, versus Detroit, on Thursday.

• A 15-game slate on Saturday features Colorado and Dallas meeting at 3 p.m. ET for the final time this regular season in Texas, as Avs defenceman Brent Burns can become just the second NHLer after Phil Kessel to skate in 1,000 consecutive games. Burns, who turned 41 earlier this month, hasn't missed a contest since November of 2013 and could pass Kessel for the all-time mark (1,064) if he plays next season. Saturday also features Rick Bowness facing the team he "retired" with when the Jets visit Columbus and the Tortorella-led Golden Knights battling the Oilers for the first time with their new coach when Vegas travels to Northern Alberta.

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1385013 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Scout's Analysis: Can Porter Martone help Philadelphia's playoff push?

Rory Boylen

The last time the Philadelphia Flyers had a highly anticipated scoring winger coming out of the NCAA, it didn't go so well.

Cutter Gauthier, the fifth-overall pick in 2022, refused to sign with Philadelphia, leading to a trade with the Ducks. Gauthier scored 20 goals for Anaheim last season and is approaching 40 this season.

So, when Porter Martone's season with Michigan State ended over the weekend, you could forgive Flyers fans who were hoping for a quick signing to bring him up into the pros and ensure he's part of the organization from here. The sixth-overall pick in last June's draft, Martone was among the top scorers in the NCAA after making the move over from the OHL's Brampton Steelheads.

Unlike James Hagens, who signed an amateur tryout contract with the Providence Bruins to get his pro career started, Martone signed his entry-level contract on Sunday with an NHL team and he could get into some big-time games down the stretch as Philadelphia challenges for a playoff spot. The Flyers have won three in a row and eight of their past 10, now just two points out of the wild card.

But how, exactly, can a 19-year-old help?

Philadelphia GM Daniel Briere believes Martone is ready for the jump and, interestingly, talked about how the transition from the OHL to the NCAA helped prepare the winger for top-level hockey after he spent the season playing against older players and preparing his body for the big leagues.

"The way he's developed physically," Briere said, when asked how Martone has improved this season. "And that was the biggest reason for encouraging the move to the NCAA this season: To have a stepping stone from the OHL to the NHL, developing his body, getting stronger. I think the amount of time he spent in the gym, you can see in his body how it's changed. It's almost going from a teenager to a man and his play on the ice spoke for itself.

"Playing against men in the NCAA, there's a lot of strong players that are much older than the 16- or 17-year-olds in the CHL, so it was a good stepping stone for him."

The Flyers are on a roll and have nine games remaining, so how long will they wait to put a teenager into this streaking lineup? This week, Philadelphia travels to Washington for a game on Tuesday, before returning home to face Detroit on Thursday, and going into New York to play against the Islanders on Friday.

Briere suggested the Flyers are ready to use him immediately and won't necessarily let the playoff race play out much longer. The GM was open to the possibility of Martone debuting against Washington.

"We're not closing down the window for Tuesday, assuming everything goes according to plan. There's paperwork to be done, there's doctors' visits to be done as well. We're hopeful that Tuesday could be (the) game, but we'll see. I don't want to get too far ahead of myself."

### SCOUT'S ANALYSIS

For a closer look at Martone, we posed a few questions to our scout Jason Bukala.

After being picked sixth overall last June, how did Martone's game develop at Michigan State this season? Would you rank him ahead of any of last year's top five today?

Martone played to his offensive identity. His power-forward approach to the game resulted in Martone tying for sixth overall in the college hockey scoring race with 25 goals and 25 assists. Out of the top 50 scorers, Martone had the second-most penalty minutes (78), which speaks to his willingness to engage in hard areas and push back physically.

He's added more strength to his frame, resulting in even more leverage along the boards and out front of the opponent's net than he had before the Flyers selected him sixth overall. He's trending toward being a top-six forward and goal scorer for the Flyers.

As far as comparing Martone to the players selected ahead of him, it's too early to judge. Everyone on the list provides something unique to the teams that drafted them. That said, I do believe that, in time, Martone will eventually provide the Flyers with an extra layer of offence. He will develop into another checking distraction for opponents, which should open up more space for his linemates and other shooters on the Flyers' roster, like Owen Tippett.

If you had to compare Martone's game to a current or former NHLer, who would it be and why?

The player I compare Martone to is Anaheim Ducks rookie Beckett Sennecke. They are very similar in stature, difficult to check and impact the game offensively. I would also point out that both players are a work in progress defensively, and it will take time to button down that side of their game at the NHL level.

What kind of opportunity do you think Martone should be given the rest of this NHL season, and can he help Philadelphia's playoff push?

Philadelphia is on the cusp of earning a playoff spot. The Flyers are 8-1-1 in their last 10 games. It's going to be interesting to see how head coach Rick Tocchet deploys Martone. His group has been battling for one another, so it's hard to imagine Tocchet wanting to upset what has been working well.

That said, I could see Martone earning an opportunity similar to Ryan Leonard's last spring, when he left Boston College to sign with the Washington Capitals. Leonard averaged 14 minutes of ice time with the Caps. The biggest difference might come with the man advantage; Philadelphia has the worst power play in the NHL (15.6 per cent). Martone gives the Flyers an option on the flank, bumper, or net-front with the man advantage.

What do you project Martone to bring over a full NHL season in 2026-27?

I project Martone as a prospect who should challenge for a top-six role with the Flyers next fall, but it won't be handed to him. Martone is a



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winger and the Flyers have more of a strength there than they do at centre.

Martone has the potential to stand out offensively, but his defensive game remains a work in progress, and Tocchet demands attention to detail in all three zones. Martone will have to adjust to the speed and size of the NHL game, but he certainly proved he's up to the challenge this season at Michigan State. The bulk of Martone's ice time will come at even strength and on the power play.

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Sportsnet.ca / Nine things to watch for in the Senators' final nine games of the season

Alex Adams

OTTAWA — It'll be a nervy final nine games for the Ottawa Senators before the regular season concludes. Their playoff fate will be on the line.

Here's nine storylines to watch out for in the final nine games of the Senators' season.

Ullmark's durability

Every game now is the Senators' biggest game of the season, and in the new era of tandem goaltenders, you don't expect even the best of starters to play the final nine games of a heated playoff race.

Nevertheless, when Linus Ullmark missed a pivotal game against Tampa Bay because of fatigue, it brought up more questions.

"I want to play Linus every night. He needed a rest, and he wasn't available to start tonight," said Senators head coach Travis Green.

It's been a trying season for Ullmark, who struggled with anxiety episodes and mental health challenges mid-season that he courageously acknowledged. Ullmark missed a month for a personal leave of absence to tend to it. Since his return, he's been closer to his Vezina-calibre self, with two of his best performances of the season last week against Detroit and Pittsburgh. Mental health is no joke, and nobody should take shots at Ullmark for his absence.

Ullmark has played only 42 times this season and his teammates are grinding through aches and pain mixed with a ton of exhaustion to get back into the playoff race. The game against Tampa Bay wasn't on the second night of a back-to-back and the Senators had two days off before their next game. The Senators needed him, and he wasn't available due to weariness. If Connor Hellebuyck or Igor Shesterkin or Andrei Vasilevskiy missed a key regular-season in a playoff race due to rest, it would be a story. It is in Ottawa too, and rightfully so.

In the past, Ullmark has mentioned how much he wanted the opportunity to be a bona fide starter. He's paid a lot of money to play three games in six nights, à la the Tampa Bay game on Saturday.

If Ullmark had played and to his recent form, there is a decent chance the Senators could have snuck out at least a point against Tampa Bay.

Regardless, if Ullmark can't play the vast majority of the remaining games of the season due to fatigue, then the Senators are in trouble. And the questions about whether the Senators can rely on the Swede will grow louder.

Sanderson's health

Jake Sanderson reportedly separated his shoulder on March 7, when he was playing the best hockey of his career, with 48 points in 62 games and creeping into the Norris Trophy conversation. You don't need to be an expert to know his presence was sorely missed by the Senators.

However, Sanderson has been skating and joined his team on its current Florida road swing, which likely means a return in the near term. Because the Senators backline is so depleted, especially with Thomas Chabot's recent forearm surgery, and the Senators are two points out of a playoff spot, Sanderson's return could determine the team's fate.

Without Chabot or Sanderson in the last three games, the Senators have been outshot 100-78. In their previous 70 games with either Chabot or Sanderson in the lineup, the Senators outshot opponents 2,030-1,670 for a plus-360 shot differential — third in the league. The wear and tear is showing for the Senators, so if the guy who wears all the biggest matchups for the Senators returns, they could start to thrive, not just try to survive.

Cozens' struggles

It was good to see Dylan Cozens score against Tampa Bay because the "Workhorse from Whitehorse" had been cold as a winter day in Yukon lately. Cozens has three points in his last 11 games, coinciding with Sanderson's injury.

You have to wonder if Sanderson's absence has made it harder for Cozens to maintain himself in the offensive end and produce on the power play, where he's been so effective. Before the injury to Ottawa's No. 1 D-man, Cozens had 18 points in 17 games. When Cozens is producing, the Senators' offensive complexion becomes lethal.

Spence's trajectory

The dynamic, diminutive defenceman has been rolling in an augmented role since the Senators' two best defencemen went down with injuries. Jordan Spence has six points in his last six games and, in an elevated role due to the injuries, has been Ottawa's best defenceman.

In a matter of weeks, Spence went from sheltered third-pairing minutes to trying to play the most of any Senator routinely and effectively. We've never seen Spence get a long period of trust in a top-four role; now, without Chabot, he will for an extended period of time. If it continues, he could be in for a big payday as a restricted free agent this summer, and the Senators could have another gem on the blueline.

Yakemchuk's defensive work

Carter Yakemchuk rocketed onto the scene in his NHL debut with a howitzer wrist shot to help earn the Senators a win. However, he's come back to earth like the space shuttle in his subsequent two games. Tampa Bay's third and fourth goals, which sealed the Sens' loss, exposed Yakemchuk's inexperience with two defensive mishaps. The 20-year-old's offence is real, but the defensive warts are also self-evident. If the Senators get healthy, the decision will be whether to play Yakemchuk with the high-upside in big games or play it safe with a more experienced defenceman.

Can the PK stay effective?

Since Mike Yeo took charge of the penalty kill on Jan. 24, the Senators have the fourth-best penalty kill, humming at 83 per cent. The Senators have killed 24 of the last 27 power plays against. If you consistently win the special-teams battle, it translates onto the win column.

Which Tkachuk will they get?

The Senators captain is producing offence at the second-highest rate of his career. Nevertheless, Brady Tkachuk and his coach have admitted his game hasn't always been where they'd like it to be this season. Tkachuk was hurt and limited by a wrist injury earlier this season.



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"I didn't like my game last night," he said last week, about his game in Washington. "So, yeah, I try not to let things sit and fester, I needed a bounce-back."

Tkachuk was an animal the following night, beating the New York Islanders with a goal just 11 seconds left before the final buzzer.

Those types of performances where Tkachuk's presence is felt have been too few and far between. The Senators need the best version of Tkachuk in the final nine games.

Can they stay healthy?

Every game the Senators are playing has a "must-win" importance to it. That takes a lot out of you, especially when your backend is decimated. With so little margin of error, and the Senators two points out of a playoff spot, they can ill afford any major injuries. The inner monologue of Senators fans until the end of the regular season: "Please, no injuries, my lord."

Can they score enough?

Before Sanderson's injury, the Senators were ranked eighth in goals per game. Since then, with a period that also includes Chabot's absence, the Senators are 18th in goals per game. Cozens has slowed down, and despite some great offence from the depth players — notably newcomer Warren Foegele, who has five goals in 12 games — the Senators are missing that finishing touch.

As good as they've been defensively this season, they'll need to find more offence to get themselves into the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Suzuki continues to prove he's among world's most complete players

Eric Engels

Nick Suzuki closed the gap on Sebastian Aho, dropped to one knee and put the finishing touches on one of his most desperate performances of the season with his strongest defensive play of the night.

Suzuki's only block of Sunday's game came with his Montreal Canadiens barely clinging to a 3-1 lead, with just under three minutes to play against a Carolina Hurricanes team that had put them in a spin cycle all night.

It came with the Hurricanes' net empty, in a five-on-six situation, with the Canadiens burning every ounce of gas remaining in their reserve tank, and it was no coincidence it came from him. Because no Canadian has come up with bigger plays at either end of the ice this season than their captain, who's in the process of simultaneously becoming the team's first Selke Trophy winner since Guy Carbonneau won his third in 1992 and its first 100-point player since Mats Naslund in 1986.

Naslund, who had 110 points for the Canadiens the year they won their second-to-last Stanley Cup, wasn't exactly a defensive maven nor shot-blocker. He didn't have to be, though, because Carbonneau left a lot of goals and points on the table on his way to being first crowned the best defensive forward in the NHL three years later.

In the decades that have passed since, no player for the Canadiens has blended Naslund and Carbonneau's skills as well as Suzuki, who registered points 89, 90 and 91 on Sunday before making his 58th block of the season to keep himself at plus-2 on the night and plus-32 through 73 games.

"Those are the little plays you need to win," assistant captain Mike Matheson told reporters at PNC Arena after the Canadiens closed out their fifth consecutive regulation win. "At this time of the season, going into the playoffs, that's what you have to do."

You must make small plays and big plays all the same, and Suzuki does that every single game.

He sets the standard, and the Canadiens follow, even if on this night they blocked 31 shots before Suzuki got his leg on Aho's last attempt.

When they needed a rescue breath earlier, down 1-0, Suzuki provided it by skating the length of the ice to score his 25th goal of the season.

Lane Hutson stretched a three-zone pass up to Cole Caufield, and Caufield drew coverage in to lay the puck up for Suzuki to dunk it right as he arrived in front of Frederik Andersen.

Suzuki returned the favour when he set up Caufield's 46th goal of the season a little over 11 minutes later.

And then, in the dying seconds of that middle frame, Suzuki drew a faceoff back to the point, drove to the net, took a shot, and then buried his own rebound to put the game out of reach.

They were two of a team-leading five shots on net the 26-year-old registered over his 20:17 spread over 22 shifts of this second game in 22 hours, which was played in a different time zone than the one the Canadiens were in the night prior.

Suzuki was desperate, and so were the tired Canadiens. Especially as the Hurricanes pressed and pulverized them early.

"Not an easy team to play against here on a back-to-back," said Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis. "We had a tough time getting going, and not because we weren't engaged. We just had trouble executing after their forecheck. We weren't able to get forechecking ourselves. When you don't have the puck, it's hard to gain momentum..."

"When you play Carolina, you expect a team that'll surely have more shots than you, and you're going to have to for sure weather a storm, and then you have to capitalize on chances when they're over-aggressive."

That's what the Canadiens did.

When they bent, Jakub Dobes kept them from breaking.

The goaltender, who made a career-high 41 saves in a win over the Hurricanes at the Bell Centre to start the week, made another 34 against them Sunday. He stopped 33 consecutive shots after allowing the game's first two goals Tuesday, and he stopped 26 straight after Andrei Svechnikov ripped one past him on the power play to start the scoring in the final game of the week.

In between, Dobes saved 25 shots in a 2-1 win over the red-hot Columbus Blue Jackets.

"He's really finding himself as a goalie in this league," said Suzuki, "and he's been there for us every single time he's been in the net."

In front of Dobes, no player has been more consistent at both ends than Suzuki.

Playing every shift against either the best defensive players in the league or the most offensively potent ones, he's dominated his matchups, never going more than two consecutive games without a point and rarely allowing anyone to get the over on him.

As a result, Suzuki is already two points up on the 89 he posted in 82 games last season. He ranks seventh in league scoring and is on pace to score 11 more points over the final nine games. And we know that Aho shot won't be the last one he blocks this season.

It was Suzuki's final play in a game that highlighted how he's become one of the most complete players in the world.



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TSN.CA / Gudas ready and willing to 'stand behind my own mistakes' in Leafs rematch

Mark Masters

The Maple Leafs and Anaheim Ducks skated at the Honda Center on Monday.

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Radko Gudas left last Thursday's game in Calgary in a walking boot after sustaining a lower-body injury against the Flames. The 35-year-old defenceman then missed Saturday's crucial showdown in Edmonton. But Gudas will be in the lineup on Monday night against the Maple Leafs.

It is the first meeting between the teams since Gudas ended the season of Leafs captain Auston Matthews with a knee-on-knee hit.

"Stand behind my own mistakes," Gudas explained when asked about his desire to play despite not being in top physical condition. "I want to address it myself, so that's one of the reasons, 100 per cent. That's one of those games where I have to play."

The Ducks captain is expecting fireworks early on.

"When it's addressed early in the game everybody can, I don't want to say relax a little bit, but everybody knows that the thing is going to [be] addressed," Gudas said. "I would assume something like that's going to happen again."

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Gudas reached out to Matthews and expressed regret for what happened. Toronto's top-line centre sustained a Grade 3 MCL tear, which required surgery.

Gudas was assessed a five-game suspension, which the Leafs made clear they felt was too lenient.

Are the Leafs still angry?

"We lost our best player so (pause) that's my response," defenceman Simon Benoit said.

"It's going to be a game that means a lot for our side so, yeah, we'll be fired up," winger William Nylander told reporters after Saturday's loss in St. Louis.

The other Leafs skaters on the ice when Matthews got hurt (Nylander, Easton Cowan, Morgan Rielly and Brandon Carlo) did not confront Gudas, which led to a rebuke from coach Craig Berube and criticism across the hockey world.

"We all kind of saw the media after that game, so we know that it's going to be an emotional game out there," said Ducks rookie Beckett Sennecke. "We're a strong, hard team to play against so we're excited for the challenge."

Benoit said the initial non-response to Gudas was "a wake-up call." Toronto is the most penalized team in the league since that game against the Ducks on March 12.

On Monday night, they get another chance to confront Gudas.

"Just play him hard like anyone else," said winger Dakota Joshua, who leads the Leafs in hits. "If there's a chance to hit him, I'm sure we'll make sure we're physical."

"Just be hard on him," Benoit echoed. "But it doesn't mean I'm going to take my stick and rip his head off. It's just being hard on him. Those two points are important for them as well so being hard on them, being physical, and grabbing those two points from them will hurt too."

The Ducks are just three points up on the Oilers in the race for top spot in the Pacific Division.

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George Parros, who is the head of the NHL's department of player safety, will be in attendance on Monday night.

"They don't want the game to get out of hand," Leafs coach Craig Berube said. "I don't blame them. I don't think it's good for anybody. You don't want anything stupid happening, suspensions, things like that, that doesn't solve anything. Just go out and play the game with a lot of emotion, energy, be physical and be hard on their skill players."

Still, these are the type of games where things can go off the rails quickly.

"It's hard to predict but you anticipate a physical game," Ducks coach Joel Quenneville said. "Both teams are probably going to come out playing hard. That's what I expect, and let's be smart about it."

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Gudas describes his health as "good to play" but didn't look comfortable at times during the morning skate.

Ducks teammates appreciate his desire to fight his own battle.

"It's huge," said winger Cutter Gauthier. "When you're the leader of a team and you're willing to do whatever it takes to be in front of the guys and support the guys and step up for your actions it's obviously great. So, super happy he's able to get healthy enough to play tonight and we'll be behind his back and help him through it all."

Quenneville checked in with Gudas at the end of the skate just to make sure he was good to go.

"He's been around so he knows how games like this can be played out and the experience can help him," the coach said. "He wants to play and he's going to play."

Gudas is beloved in the Ducks dressing room.

"He's got the 'C' for a reason," Gauthier noted. "All the things he does on and off the ice to help this group and bond this group, I've never seen anything like it."

"He's the best. He's the voice that keeps us all together," said Sennecke. "He looks out for all of us and we look out for him too."

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During the game between the teams earlier this month, Max Domi received a misconduct for going after Sennecke in the third period.

"Honestly, I don't really know what happened," the 20-year-old Ducks rookie recalled with a smile. "He got a little aggressive there in that scrum. It's an emotional game and he's an emotional player."

Domi appeared to have Sennecke in his sights for much of the night.

"It was interesting," said Sennecke. "I don't really know why, but he's a competitive guy and I'm excited to get out there against him today."

Domi was not available to the media after Monday's skate.

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Lines at Leafs skate on Monday:



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 31, 2026

Cowan - Tavares - Nylander

Knies - Groulx - Maccelli

Joshua - Domi - Robertson

Pezzetta - Quillan - Lorentz

Jarnkrok

Rielly - Carlo

McCabe - Stecher

Benoit - Ekman-Larsson

Myers

Stolarz

Woll

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TSN.CA / Goaltending woes put Sens under immense playoff pressure

Travis Yost

No team is under more pressure over the next two weeks than the Ottawa Senators.

A team this talented should not be kept out of the playoffs. And yet, with nine games to go in the regular season, Ottawa's playoff outlook sits where it has just about all season – 50 per cent, dancing on the razor's edge.

It shouldn't be this close; certainly not for a team ranked 11th in goal differential (+18) on the season, and certainly not for a team with a top-10 scoring offence. But the goaltending woes that have ailed this franchise for large stretches of the past two decades have roared back at the worst possible time, and the poor reliability at the position has prevented Ottawa from pushing their way up the standings.

It starts with the big bet on Linus Ullmark a season ago; the Senators committed \$33 million to the Swedish netminder in October of 2024. Fast forward one year, and Ullmark's game has seemingly disintegrated. His underperformance may have a lot to do with his intra-season leave of absence – Ullmark courageously came out and acknowledged he'd been dealing with mental health issues in December, and to the team's credit, they have supported him along the way.

But challenged play and intermittent availability, including a curious absence in a crucial game against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Saturday for rest (Ottawa went on to lose in regulation), has put the Senators goaltending depth chart in a bind.

Backup Leevi Merilainen was so poor in 20 games he was sent down to AHL Belleville, placing the keys of the No. 2 role in the hands of well-travelled 38-year-old James Reimer.

The trio's play has been, in one word, dreadful. If we look at every goalie's performance this year relative to the shot profile they have faced (goals saved versus expected), the Ottawa goalies come in dead last – even behind the Vegas Golden Knights, whose goaltending has been so bad it culminated in a firing of the team's head coach this weekend:

Yost1 Yost

It's true that Merilainen sank much of Ottawa's overall numbers, but backups and developing prospects at this position are expectedly volatile – these bets fail to pan out all the time.

The problem is more so with Ullmark. If you are paying a goaltender north of \$8 million (committing about nine per cent of the total salary cap in the process), you need reliability and availability at the position.

Reliability hasn't been there. Ullmark has been indiscernible from a replacement-level goalie this year (+0.8 goals saved vs expected; 88.8 per cent stop rate), comparable to that of journeymen like Edmonton's Connor Ingram, Columbus' Elvis Merzlikins, and Detroit's Cam Talbot.

Year over year, it's a meaningful step backwards:

Yost2 Yost

Ullmark's availability has also been challenged several times this season now, and it seems likely he'll finish the season with fewer than 50 games played. It goes without saying this was not what the Senators front office had in mind a year ago.

But redemption is always around the corner, and this besieged goaltending group has a chance to erase a disaster of a season with just two weeks of quality play. Ottawa's finish to the season includes a five-game homestand, with four of their remaining nine games coming against lottery-bound teams (Florida twice; New Jersey; Toronto).

That presents the Senators goalies with a golden chance to rewrite this team's story and push into the postseason.

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