



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 20, 2026

## The News & Observer

### What Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said after Game 1 NHL playoff win over Sens

By: Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes center Logan Stankoven (22) celebrates with Alexander Nikishin (21) after scoring to take a 1-0 lead over the Ottawa Senators in the second period on Saturday, April 18, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Raleigh

Rod Brind'Amour's day-after analysis of the Carolina Hurricanes (Shopping Cart IconShop Canes Fan Gear)' performance in the opening game of the playoffs differed little from what the coach said just after it.

The Canes beat the Ottawa Senators, 2-0, Saturday in Game 1 of the first-round series at Lenovo Center as goalie Frederik Andersen had a 22-save shutout and the Logan Stankoven line provided the points — Stankoven and Taylor Hall each with a goal and assist, and winger Jackson Blake with a pair of assists.

Brind'Amour's thoughts on Sunday:

- Andersen was terrific but so was Sens goalie Linus Ullmark.
- The Canes failed to score on two 5-on-3 power plays but had their chances.
- A four-minute-plus shift by defenseman Jaccob Slavin at the end of the game was impressive.
- In what was a very physically taxing game, with 96 combined hits, the Canes came out of it fine, physically.
- The Canes' playoff experience showed in a tight game.

"It was a good game," Brind'Amour said Sunday. "It was the way we have to play and it was just good enough. That's

what we're dealing with here. We have a tremendous amount of respect for who we're playing against and how they play.

"We're doing everything we can to limit what we're giving up because we're not going to get a ton. I don't think there was a lot, either way. Most of the chances came off the power play. So, it's a tight one. ... You're fighting every shift to get that little edge."

The Canes were 0-for-5 on the power play and the Senators 0-for-4. Carolina had eight power-play shots — six with a two-man advantage. Ottawa had seven power-play shots.

"We had a couple of really good chances," Brind'Amour said of the power plays. "Both goalies played, I thought, really well. Most of our chances came on the 5-on-3. We had two or three really good looks ... and you'd like to score on those, obviously, because those don't come very often. But we got away with not scoring on 'em."

The Senators' last power play came with 2:35 left in regulation, and they pulled Ullmark out of net for a sixth attacker. The Canes hunkered down around Andersen as Slavin played all but nine seconds of the final 4:17 of regulation.

Ottawa used its timeout with 45 seconds left for a brief respite, but Slavin did not leave the ice until play was stopped with nine seconds showing.

"It's his time to shine, you know?" Brind'Amour said. "If he feels like he can stay out there, you're going to give him that benefit, without a doubt."

The Canes and Sens face off in Game 2 on Monday, with a 7:30 p.m. start at Lenovo Center. The best-of-seven series then moves to Ottawa for Games 3 and 4.

### Hurricanes take fight to Senators in physical Game 1 win to open NHL playoffs

By: Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes' Logan Stankoven talks about the Game 1 NHL Playoff fight between Jordan Staal and the Ottawa Senators' Brady Tkachuk By Justin Pelletier| News & Observer

The puck went down, the gloves came off and the Stanley Cup playoffs began with a bang Saturday.

It took only seconds for the Carolina Hurricanes (Shopping Cart IconShop Canes Fan Gear)' Jordan Staal and Brady Tkachuk of the Ottawa Senators to face off after the opening draw and start throwing punches. It was captain versus captain, and Staal got the better of it, getting off three right-hand strikes before the two players fell to the ice, Staal on top.

The Canes got the better of the Senators in Game 1 of the opening-round playoff series, too. With goaltender Frederik Andersen turning back every Ottawa shot and the Hurricanes tight checking and winning the physical battle — from the Staal fight and throughout the game — Carolina came away with a 2-0 victory at Lenovo Center.

"It was an intense game, obviously," Staal said.

To which Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour added: "There was not a lot of room and everybody fighting for everything."

Logan Stankoven and Taylor Hall each had a goal and assist for the Canes, but Andersen had the towel-waving crowd on its feet and chanting "Fred-die! Fred-die!" several times in the game. Those chants were never louder than in the closing



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minutes, with the Senators on the power play and pulling goalie Linus Ullmark for a sixth attacker.

The Senators got off three shots on goal and the Canes blocked another five Sens shots in the final 2 minutes, 35 seconds of the game — two of the blocks by Canes winger Seth Jarvis -- as Andersen finished off his sixth career playoff shutout.

The biggest of Andersen's 22 stops came at 3:54 of the third period, Carolina ahead 1-0 and the Senators on a power play. The goalie gloved a shot by Drake Batherson during a scramble in front of the net, but the initial ruling was a good goal as the Sens celebrated.

Carolina Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen (31) stops a scoring attempt by Ottawa right wing Drake Batherson (19) in the third period on Saturday, April 18, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen (31) stops a scoring attempt by Ottawa right wing Drake Batherson (19) in the third period on Saturday, April 18, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett [rwillett@newsobserver.com](mailto:rwillett@newsobserver.com)

Not for long.

With Canes fans howling after seeing replays on the board, the play was reviewed, and the goal disallowed as it was ruled the puck did not cross the goal line as Andersen snagged it.

"That's a game-changer," Brind'Amour said.

Andersen said he had a "pretty good idea" he had stopped the puck but also added, "You never know."

Many Canes fans were guessing which goalie Brind'Amour would start in Game 1 — Andersen or Brandon Bussi, who beat the Senators twice in his sensational first year in the NHL.

Brind'Amour gave Andersen the nod because of his 85 games of playoff experience, and Andersen responded by becoming the first goalie in franchise history to have a shutout in the team's postseason opener.

Ottawa left wing Brady Tkachuk and Carolina Hurricanes center Jordan Staal (11) tumble to the ice during a fight in the first period on Saturday, April 18, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Ottawa left wing Brady Tkachuk and Carolina Hurricanes center Jordan Staal (11) tumble to the ice during a fight in the first period on Saturday, April 18, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett [rwillett@newsobserver.com](mailto:rwillett@newsobserver.com)

Staal-Tkachuk fight opens the game

No one expected the game to begin with the two guys wearing a "C" to go at it. Staal said it was a first for him in the NHL — gloves off after the opening draw. But Tkachuk wanted to go, he said, and the two went at it.

"That's two big dudes," Hall said of the forwards, both 6-foot-4 and more than 220 pounds.

Or as Brind'Amour put it, "Two grown men going at it."

Stankoven said he sensed before the opening faceoff that something was afoot. He also liked what he saw after the puck went down.

"I thought it was great," Stankoven said. "It was a great way to get the crowd into it, and I thought 'Jordo' did a great job."

Carolina Hurricanes center Logan Stankoven (22) celebrates with Alexander Nikishin (21) after scoring to take a 1-0 lead over the Ottawa Senators in the second period on Saturday, April 18, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes center Logan Stankoven (22) celebrates with Alexander Nikishin (21) after scoring to take a 1-0 lead over the Ottawa Senators in the second period on Saturday, April 18, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett [rwillett@newsobserver.com](mailto:rwillett@newsobserver.com)

'Kids and the Hall' strike again — twice

After a scoreless first period not lacking hard-hitting action, Stankoven's line gave the Canes the lead early in the second period. After defenseman Alexander Nikishin made a nice play to keep the puck in the zone, Hall made a touch pass to Jackson Blake, who dropped off a pass to Stankoven in the slot for the shot.

Stankoven didn't get all of the puck, but got enough to beat Ullmark to the glove side for the 1-0 lead. The center, at 5-8 the shortest player on the ice, scored twice a year ago in the Canes' playoff opener against New Jersey, and appeared to have a second one Saturday in the third period.

Ullmark got a piece of a Nikishin shot, the puck falling near the post as Stankoven, Hall and Blake all converged, all whacking at it. Stankoven was initially credited with the goal, but it was later ruled the puck glanced off Hall's skate -- the assists to Stankoven and Blake, who had two.

"I didn't even know I had scored until I was named the third star of the game," Hall said, smiling.

Ottawa Senators goalie Liunus Ullmark (left) deflects a shot by Carolina Hurricanes right wing Jackson Blake in the third period on Saturday, April 18, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Ottawa Senators goalie Liunus Ullmark (left) deflects a shot by Carolina Hurricanes right wing Jackson Blake in the third period on Saturday, April 18, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett [rwillett@newsobserver.com](mailto:rwillett@newsobserver.com)

Finding the power

One shortcoming for the Canes was the inability to take advantage of their power plays against a team that struggled on the penalty kill in the regular season. Carolina twice had a 5-on-3 advantage, but the Senators battled to clear the puck and Ullmark did his job.

"Both goalies played great," Brind'Amour said. "Both rose to the occasion and kept their team in it."

The two teams were credited with 96 hits. The Canes had 57, getting a game-high eight from power forward Andrei



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Svechnikov, seven from Jordan Martinook and six from Stankoven.

"It's playoff hockey," Brind'Amour said. "It's the first round, and everybody has all the energy in the world."

The Canes and Senators will go at it in Game 2 on Monday before the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series shifts to Ottawa for two games. Ottawa defenseman Artem Zub left Saturday's game with an injury after a collision with Jarvis,

and Sens coach Travis Green did not have an update on Zub's status or availability.

"Carolina does a real good job of playing their game," Green said. "I don't think the series is ever going to look like there's a ton of space out there. It's going to look very similar every night. They're going to forecheck hard and we're going to forecheck hard. There's going to be a lot of hits."



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## The Athletic

### How the Canes stifled Ottawa's offense, and how the Sens can rebound in Game 2

By: Julian McKenzie

RALEIGH, N.C. — To get a sense of how little ground the Carolina Hurricanes and the Ottawa Senators gave each other in their first-ever Stanley Cup playoff encounter, chew on this: The first registered shot on goal Saturday afternoon came more than six minutes into the first period.

Yes, there were blocked and missed shot attempts before Ottawa forward Dylan Cozens finally put a puck on net. But it was very clear that each team was taking away the middle of the ice and limiting chances for the other. And if this regular season is any indication, the Hurricanes' 2-0 victory in Game 1 won't be a one-off.

"Not a lot of space for both teams, I think, all game," Senators defenseman Jake Sanderson said. "I think it's going to be like that all series. Tight checking, both of us pride our games on."

That defensive brand of hockey was projected to be the calling card for both teams entering the postseason, and neither side disappointed. However, the Senators' prowess wasn't the same quality as that of the Hurricanes, who outchanced and outhit Ottawa throughout.

As much as the Senators have drawn rave reviews for their commitment to playing defense under coach Travis Green, the Canes showed why they've been among the best teams in the league during coach Rod Brind'Amour's tenure.

"I think both teams have a lot to be proud of tonight with that effort," Hurricanes forward Taylor Hall said. "First game of playoffs is always fast and physical, and there's not a lot of time out there, and that was the case tonight."

Green said he hadn't seen the advanced numbers when he addressed the media in the bowels of the Lenovo Center, minutes after the loss. The eye test more than sufficed, as he also noted the lack of space given by either team.

"They probably deserve to win analytically, and they did," Green said.

The Senators hoped to take advantage of a game-opening scrap between captain Brady Tkachuk and Hurricanes counterpart Jordan Staal. The Senators "loved" the energy. But the Canes did, too. The physicality ramped up and so did the Canes' desperation. When the Senators had a first-period power play, the Canes were relentless defensively, even diving to make clearances. And with every defensive play and hit, the Canes flexed their home-ice advantage with a raucous, towel-waving crowd.

"They're just always on top of you," Tkachuk said. "They're always in the right spots. And you can see that they blocked

a lot of shots there, especially at the end. But all game, they're sacrificing their body so they don't give you much.

"They frustrate the whole league with the way they play."

According to Natural Stat Trick, Carolina overpowered Ottawa in shot attempt rate (71.05 percent versus Ottawa's 28.95 percent), scoring chances (14-7), and high-danger chances (6-4) at five-on-five in the opening 20 minutes.

And still, the Senators emerged from it tied 0-0.

"I thought we weathered the storm great in the first period," Sanderson said. "It's a really hard barn to play in, never mind playoffs."

When the dust settled, the teams had combined for 96 hits and 51 shots, with 27 of the latter coming in the third period. But goaltending, solid for both sides throughout the game, made the difference. The two shots that beat Ottawa's Linus Ullmark needed to be crafty. Canes forward Logan Stankoven redirected a puck past the netminder after the Canes' cycled around in the offensive zone. And their second one came after a goalmouth scramble, just after Ullmark made an initial save.

"I see the first (shot) and felt like I got such a good piece of it that it was going to end up in front of me," Ullmark said. "And when it didn't, all of a sudden you feel like people hit you from behind. You're thinking, 'Oh, it's, you know, it's there. So you're looking, unfortunately, the other way. And that's when they capitalized and got a greedy one.'"

Ullmark made 27 saves on 29 shots in the loss. He wasn't the biggest problem, but he remains an essential ingredient for the Senators to withstand the Hurricanes' pressure. He will need to be better than Frederik Andersen, who was perfect in the Canes' victory.

But the list of what needs to be done goes beyond Ottawa's goaltending. It starts with working hard down low to generate more high-danger chances. On Saturday, the Senators lost the battle 11-5 at five-on-five.

"I thought we had some good looks like that," Tkachuk said. "But the more you can do that, the better chance we have."

Continuing with the five-on-five theme, here's a startling statistic to swallow for the Senators' offense: Their checking line of Nick Cousins, Shane Pinto and Michael Amadio registered a 0 percent shot attempt rate and expected goals percentage, according to Natural Stat Trick and Money puck. Pinto, who ended the season with a faceoff rate above 50 percent in the regular season, only won two of his six draws against the Hurricanes. That will obviously need to change in a hurry for Game 2.



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The spotlight will also shine on the Senators' defense on Monday night in Raleigh. Not just for the unit's efforts, but for who might have to potentially step up if Artem Zub can't play after a throttling hit on Hurricanes forward Seth Jarvis that backfired and knocked Zub out for the rest of the game. The Senators are already waiting on Tyler Kleven's return and using Dennis Gilbert, often used as an extra, as a third-pairing defender alongside Nikolas Matinpalo. It might mean using another depth option for Game 2, like Lassi Thomson, if they can't get their regular top-pairing rearguard back.

"It's tough," Sanderson said after the game. "He plays big minutes. Obviously, (he's) my partner, I rely on him a lot, so haven't seen him yet, but I hope it's OK."

All of these factors could result in Ottawa needing to double down on its defensive structure, stick work and aggressive nature in their own zone. If Zub can't go, the defense could be subjected to more changes, or the Sens might have to limit exposing their third pair. Gilbert, who played on that third pair, was on the ice for just 8:26 in the loss.

At least playing defensively isn't foreign to these Senators. Maybe to previous iterations, but not the 2025-26 version that ended the season tied for second league-wide for fewest shots against. And they know what they're up against when they meet Carolina again soon.

"It's just going to be like this all series," Tkachuk said. "It's going to be a long series and a good battle."

## Hurricanes vs. Senators, Game 1: Takeaways from Carolina's series-opening shutout win

By: Julian McKenzie

RALEIGH, N.C. — No one should've been too surprised to see the Carolina Hurricanes and Ottawa Senators, two of the NHL's toughest defenses, opening their playoff series trying not to give each other an inch. But it was the Eastern Conference-leading Canes who capitalized on their chances and imposed themselves en route to a 2-0 victory at home for a 1-0 series lead.

"Everybody out there was giving it all they had, and that was what you saw," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

On paper, the similarities between both teams' penchant for defending had forecast a tight-checking, structured and physical series. It delivered in Game 1. Carolina and Ottawa combined for only 51 shots on goal, with shot suppression, defensive stickwork, physicality and netminding winning the day.

"That's how they play. They're a quick team. They're good in this building," Senators coach Travis Green said. "I didn't mind our game. We didn't find a way to generate enough, but their team also does that to you as well."

The Hurricanes, who went 16-2-1 at home after Jan. 3 to close out the regular season, and the Senators had never met in the Stanley Cup playoffs before. It took them all of three seconds to build up disdain, thanks to an opening faceoff fight between team captains Brady Tkachuk and Jordan Staal.

After the teams settled into a fast, furious and physical pace of play, Logan Stankoven led the way with the game-clinching goal and an assist on linemate Taylor Hall's third-period insurance strike, and goalie Frederik Andersen posted his sixth career postseason shutout.

"We have a lot of depth," Stankoven said. "I think as the season went on, and I think since the (Olympic) break, our line's been clicking pretty good, and we've been able to just find each other. I think we're all hungry to track pucks, and we're not afraid to go to the net, and we can use our speed to our advantage. So I think that's something we just try and bring every night."

Here are some takeaways from Saturday afternoon at Lenovo Center.

Andersen stars in net

Brind'Amour took some by surprise when he chose Andersen and his playoff experience instead of Brandon Bussi, who went 31-6-2 with a 2.47 goals-against average and had an .895 save percentage in his first NHL season.

"We have good options," Brind'Amour said. "And those guys play well. And we have confidence in both guys. But clearly, experience, I think, won out, and it looked like he knew what he was doing."

"Freddie's got a track record, and we obviously know what he's capable of."

Andersen was up to the task, making 22 saves, including two huge stops in the third period. First, he robbed Drake Batherson on back-to-back shots at the doorstep, the latter of which was initially ruled a goal before a review reversed it, determining the puck had rattled around Andersen's glove but not crossed the goal line.

"I had a pretty good idea," Andersen said. "You never know. I think when they slow it down, obviously, from those angles, I had a good feeling that my glove wasn't really across the goal line."

Seconds later, Andersen made another huge save while falling backward. The Canes' video screen then flashed a message: "Also Not a Goal."

And now the Canes can take comfort in having two capable goaltenders they can trot out if necessary against the Senators.

Speaking of the Senators, goalie Linus Ullmark made some key saves to keep the game close and finished with 27 saves on 29 shots. But they needed him to be perfect to hold the fort. Ullmark was tricked on the first goal, and he couldn't track the puck on the second after saving the initial shot, with the Canes first to the scramble in the crease.

Goaltending was always going to be a storyline in this series. And it didn't take long for that to be established.

Stankoven surges

Stankoven missed practice earlier this week because of a virus, according to Carolina, and was a welcome sight at its



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practice Friday morning. The next day, Stankoven came up huge with a goal and an assist against the Senators. Stankoven one-timed a shot past Ullmark in the second period, and he got an assist on Hall's third-period marker at the goal mouth.

Last season, Stankoven opened the playoffs with a pair of goals for the Hurricanes against the New Jersey Devils.

The fact that Stankoven's goal stood as the lone tally for most of this game was an indicator of this matchup's closeness. Neither team was going to let the other swarm it with shots, particularly not off clean breaks. Stankoven's goal came after some offensive-zone motion and a deflection off Shane Pinto's stick resulted in a tricky low-roller sneaking by Ullmark.

The Senators had nine shots through two periods of play, but their offense played with more ferocity in the third — only for Hall's second goal to put the Canes further ahead.

Another Ottawa D-man goes down

At 16:33 of the second period, the Senators lost top-pairing defenseman Artem Zub to a collision with Hurricanes forward Seth Jarvis. In his absence, Ottawa joined Jordan Spence with Zub's former partner, Jake Sanderson.

Zub enjoyed a standout regular season, recording a career-best 30 points. As the left-shot Sanderson's literal right-hand man, he is predictable in his placements, can contribute offensively in a secondary role and plays physical hockey without backing down. Earlier this year, Tampa Bay Lightning head coach Jon Cooper referred to the pairing of Sanderson and Zub as "elite."

Zub's physical play, however, seemed to be his undoing, retreating to the visiting dressing room after the Jarvis hit and not returning to the game. Green had no postgame update on Zub's condition.

"It's tough," Sanderson said. "He plays big minutes. Obviously, (he's) my partner, I rely on him a lot, so haven't seen him yet, but I hope it's OK."

The good news is that Spence and Sanderson are pretty familiar with each other. And according to MoneyPuck.com, Spence and Sanderson ended the regular season in the top 10 for expected goals percentage among blueliners who played together for a minimum of 50 minutes.

The Senators' defensive corps was slowly getting back to health, entering this series with Sanderson and Thomas Chabot having rejoined the team in recent days. Depending on how long Zub is sidelined, though, the Senators might have to tap into their defensive depth again: They used 13 defensemen this season.

A tone-setting scrap

Tkachuk and Staal didn't give viewers any time to catch their breath to start the game. It wasn't the longest scrap, but the Canes' home crowd loved it. And it set the tone for a desperate, tight-checking, physical opening period.

"I just wanted to show it's going to be a long series, and (Staal) wanted to do the same thing," Tkachuk said. "The building loved it. Got the energy going. Got the playoffs started for the whole league."

The teams combined for 96 hits. Tkachuk and Dylan Cozens led the Senators with five hits. Carolina's Andrei Svechnikov had eight, and Jordan Martinook added seven.

Hurricanes defenseman K'Andre Miller also lined up Senators winger Fabian Zetterlund for a crushing check in the neutral zone that reflected the early intensity. The pace only slightly slowed in the second period, through which Carolina and Ottawa totaled 65 hits (40-25 Carolina).

But it all stemmed from the Tkachuk-Staal bout that broke out three seconds after the opening faceoff. And if you're Sportsnet or ESPN, broadcasting the game across North America, you've got to love that as a potential tone-setter for the playoffs. This is the entertainment business, after all.



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## NORTH STATE JOURNAL

### Andersen blanks Senators, Stankoven leads way in Hurricanes' Game 1 win | The North State Journal

By: Cory Lavalette

Hurricanes goaltender Frederik Andersen snares the puck short of the goal line near Senators forwards Brady Tkachuk (7) and Drake Batherson (19) during Carolina's 2-0 Game 1 win Saturday in Raleigh. (Karl DeBlaker / AP Photo)

RALEIGH — The Hurricanes are part of Justin Williams' legacy as Mr. Game 7. Logan Stankoven might be Mr. Game 1.

Stankoven, who opened last postseason with two goals in the opener against the Devils, scored the first goal of the 2026 Stanley Cup playoffs and assisted on the second, and Frederik Andersen made 22 saves for his first shutout of the season as Carolina beat the Senators 2-0 Saturday to take a 1-0 series lead over the Senators at Lenovo Center.

"Everybody out there was giving it all they had," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said, "and that was what you saw."

After a physical opening 20 minutes — including a fight between captains Jordan Staal and Brady Tkachuk off the opening faceoff — that favored Carolina, the Hurricanes got the first goal early in the second period.

Carolina rookie defenseman Alexander Nikishin kept a puck in at the Ottawa blue line that Taylor Hall retrieved. Hall whacked the puck to Jackson Blake, who one-touched it to Stankoven for a shot that trickled under Linus Ullmark (27 saves) for a 1-0 Hurricanes lead at 2:11 of the middle frame.

"I think it's just right place, right time," Stankoven said of his brief but prolific history in Game 1s.

It was the only goal Carolina would need thanks to Andersen.

Brind'Amour didn't reveal that Andersen would start in net over Brandon Bussi until just before 1 p.m. on Saturday. It proved to be the right decision.

Andersen was solid if unspectacular in the first two periods, calmly steering away the nine shots Carolina allowed to reach him in the first 40 minutes. In the third period, however, he proved spectacular.

The Senators were held without a shot on goal in each of their first two power plays. But with Carolina defenseman Jalen Chatfield in the box for interference early in the third

period, Ottawa forward Drake Batherson appeared to tie the game on a second-chance effort in front.

Dylan Cozens fed a pass across the crease that Batherson redirected on Andersen. The veteran goalie got his left pad on the shot, but Batherson shoveled the rebound back toward the net. Andersen lunged with his glove and swatted the puck out and covered it for a whistle.

But referee Brandon Blandina emphatically pointed toward the net signaling a goal.

An automatic review proved otherwise, as Andersen had kept the puck from crossing the goal line to preserve Carolina's 1-0 lead.

"I had a pretty good idea," Andersen said when asked if he thought he had saved the shot. "You never know. I think when they slow it down from those angles, I had a good feeling that my glove wasn't really going to cross the goal line. But I felt like I got a good piece of it. And obviously, the cameras agreed, so I'm happy."

Twenty-five seconds later, Andersen did it again, stopping Tkachuk off a Batherson feed from the seat of his pants to again deny the Senators.

"You're looking for goalies to make saves at the right time, and that's the right time, you know?" Brind'Amour said of the first of the two key stops. "And that's what he did tonight. How do you explain that? That's exactly the game right there. And he was up for the challenge tonight."

A few minutes later, Stankoven got his second point of the night when his chance in front of the net hit Taylor Hall's skate and went in to double the Hurricanes' lead to 2-0 at 7:15 of the third.

The Hurricanes killed off a late penalty to help Andersen secure his first shutout since his 3-0 shutout win over Florida in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference final on May 26, 2025.

"I think he's a guy that, at least I saw last year, when the lights are brightest, he's going to be there standing tall," Hall said of Andersen.

The tone for the game was set by the two players who loom largest for their respective teams.



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As the teams prepared for the opening draw, Tkachuk leaned in and asked Staal to fight. The Carolina captain accepted, and when the puck dropped, the gloves came off.

"A physical guy, plays hard, and he wanted to go," Staal said. "So it's part of the gig. ... It was an interesting start, for sure."

Staal, who hadn't fought since the 2016-17 season until he scrapped following a questionable hit by Minnesota's Tyler Pitlick earlier this season, got the better of the frequently fighting Ottawa captain.

"I had no idea that was going to happen," Brind'Amour said. "Two grown men going at it."

Hall credited Staal with leading the way — both in the fight and the rest of the Game 1 win.

"He's the best," Hall said. "Not just the fight. ... I thought he was a beast all night protecting pucks, doing what he does. He's such a good player."

Notes: Ottawa defenseman Artem Zub left the game after a first period hit on Seth Jarvis. ... The Hurricanes out-hit the Senators 57-39, led by eight from Andrei Svechnikov and seven from Jordan Martinook. ... Ottawa won 31 of 55 faceoffs (56.4%). ... Stankoven and Svechnikov led all players with six shots on goal. ... Blake had two assists. ... The Stankoven line held 5-on-5 advantages in Corsi (17-3), shots (10-1), scoring chances (11-2) and high-danger scoring chances (9-0). Forwards Nicolas Deslauriers and Jesperi Kotkaniemi, defenseman Mike Reilly and goalie Pyotr Kochetkov were healthy scratches for Carolina.



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## Preview: Round 1, Game 2 vs. Ottawa

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Canes look to take care of business at Lenovo Center before the series shifts north of the border

RALEIGH, N.C. - The Carolina Hurricanes will look to stay solid on home ice as they host the Ottawa Senators in Game 2 of their first-round Stanley Cup Playoffs series.

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When: Monday, April 20

Puck Drop: 7:30 p.m. ET

Watch: ESPN2, FanDuel Sports Network South, FanDuel Sports Network App | [\\*\\*Learn More\\*\\*](#)

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes App

Series: 1-0 CAR

The Series So Far...

**\*\*Game 1\*\***: Frederik Andersen turned in a 22-save shutout, backstopping the Canes to a 2-0 victory.

The Kids Are Alright...

The two youngest Hurricanes took the reins offensively in Game 1, as Logan Stankoven (1G, 1A) and Jackson Blake (2A) became the sixth 23-and-under duo in team history (since relocation) to record two or more points in the same playoff game.

Stankoven's tally stood as his third career playoff game-winning goal, helping him become the first player in franchise history to reach that number before turning 24 years old.

In Net...

Rod Brind'Amour, as expected, did not confirm his starter during Sunday's media availability. The Canes' bench boss previously noted that both Frederik Andersen and Brandon Bussi will likely play during Round 1, but did not indicate what a potential rotation could look like.

After blanking the Sens in Game 1, it would hardly be a surprise to see Andersen get the chance to replicate his performance in Game 2. The veteran's sixth career shutout tied him for the sixth-most such showings in NHL history by a goaltender born outside North America.

Bussi, meanwhile, wrapped up the regular season on a heater, following up his first set of consecutive losses (0-3-0)

with a 6-0-1 run and allowing two or fewer goals in four of those wins. If and when he appears this postseason, it'll be his Stanley Cup Playoff debut.

Pyotr Kochetkov's surprising return could add a new dimension to the Canes' crease as the playoffs roll on, but Brind'Amour indicated that, while he is healthy, the Russian backstop was not yet a viable starting option as he works his way back from lower-body surgery.

On The Other Side...

Ottawa failed to find the back of the net in Game 1 but stood toe-to-toe with the top seed in the Eastern Conference — literally and figuratively.

German star Tim Stutzle was a frequent threat, leading his team in shots (4) and pacing both teams' forwards in ice time (23:05).

Netminder Linus Ullmark put together a solid showing with 27 saves on 29 shots, including a handful of highlight-reel efforts, but was outdueled at the other end by Andersen.

One question mark is the status of defenseman Artem Zub, who left Game 1 with an injury. Head Coach Travis Green did not have an update on Sunday, and a team that used 13 different blueliners during the regular season may have to rely on its depth once more.

Injury Updates...

The Canes currently do not have any injuries to report.

What Are We Wearing?

The Canes will wear their BLACK uniforms for the contest. They will wear black for every home game in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

What's Next After This Game?

The Canes are scheduled to practice on Tuesday. They're scheduled to practice again on Wednesday before flying to Ottawa for Thursday's Game 3.

Next Game: Thursday, April 23 | Round 1, Game 3 at Ottawa | 7:30 p.m. | [How To Watch](#)

Next Home Game\*: Monday, April 27 | Round 1, Game 5 vs. Ottawa (if necessary) | TBD | [How To Watch](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Parking](#)



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## Canes Played 'The Way We Have To Play' In Game 1 Shutout

By: Walt Ruff

"We're not backing down from anyone. We're ready to roll."

RALEIGH, N.C. - Taking care of business to open the Stanley Cup Playoffs on Saturday afternoon, the Carolina Hurricanes were rewarded with a day off from the ice on Sunday.

After meeting as a unit and reflecting on their Game 1 performance, Head Coach Rod Brind'Amour sounded pleased with the inaugural contest of the 2026 postseason run.

"It was a good game. It was the way we have to play, and it was just good enough," Brind'Amour said as he met with reporters at Lenovo Center. "We have a tremendous amount of respect for what we're playing against and how they play. We're doing everything we can to limit what we're giving up."

Limiting chances is the bread and butter of Hurricanes' hockey, which led them to 53 regular-season wins and the top seed in the Eastern Conference. Holding the Ottawa Senators to single-digit shots in both of the first two periods, the third period was then a shining example of what Frederik Andersen is capable of.

Posting his 47th career playoff win, the 36-year-old guided his group through some tense moments on the penalty kill, with some help from a few of his teammates putting their bodies in the line of fire.

"The blocked shots are huge this time of year. There's breakdowns," Andersen said understandingly following yesterday's final horn. "There's never a perfect game, but we know when to sell out and help each other out. I think that's huge."

Just one of many ways a body gets bumps and bruises this time of year, the Canes also rose to the occasion in the department of physicality, laying 57 hits — an increase of more than 20 from their regular-season single-game high (35; 12/23 vs. FLA).

"It's playoff hockey," Brind'Amour seemed to appreciate. "The first round, everybody's got all the energy in the world. That's kind of what you expect."

As impressive as some of the hits were in the contest, the physical tone was set right at the opening puck drop.

Leading By Example...

Jordan Staal is listed at 6-foot-4, 220 lbs. He has been for many years. Maybe that's true, maybe it's one of those things that isn't updated for one reason or another.

Regardless of his actual measurements, it's a large stature. Stand next to him, and he's probably even bigger than you'd expect. But that doesn't mean he's a bully of the game, and he doesn't roam around dropping the gloves often.

In fact, before yesterday, he'd done so just once in the last nine years. That was in November, after Tyler Pitlick of the Minnesota Wild laid a suspect hit on Jalen Chatfield that knocked the defenseman out of the lineup for a while.

Before that scrap? You'd have to turn the page back to 2017 for Staal's last fighting major, and that time, it was to stand up for Sebastian Aho, who was on the wrong end of a questionable cross-check in Dallas.

So when the captain voluntarily lost the opening faceoff yesterday and pushed forward as his gloves hit the ice, the whole bench, and seemingly the 18,000+ in attendance, were up on their feet in shock.

"I kind of saw a few of the guys chatting right off the draw. I can't remember who was on the far side, but they weren't really lined up for the puck drop, so I thought something was happening," Logan Stankoven explained from his perspective. "Sure enough. It was a great way to get the crowd into it, and I thought Jordo did a great job."

From the Tkachuk side of things, it wasn't surprising. Anyone who watched the Four Nations Face-Off last February knows of the Senators' captain's willingness to dance.

But for Staal to accept the request and hold his own felt like a message that went a long way.

"When he asks you to, you kind of expect it," Staal said with some level of excitement as he spoke to the ESPN broadcast during the first intermission. [Tkachuk's] a physical player who is ready to roll, and so am I. And so is this group. It's part of the gig, and we're not backing down from anyone. We're ready to roll."

"We're not backing down from anyone," coupled with Stankoven's comment that the team "learned a few lessons from last year," were clear statements from the locker room.

With Nic Deslauriers eagerly licking his chops in the press box, the Canes' captain set the precedent that he and his team won't be pushed around, even if "D-Lo" isn't in the lineup.

FredEx Delivers...

If Staal had the must-see moment of Game 1, Frederik Andersen was the story of the game as a whole.

Calm, cool, and collected throughout, the veteran backstop silenced any doubters about being the team's starter to begin their postseason.

Understandably, the team could have gone either way between him and Brandon Bussi, who had a superb first regular season in the league. But Brind'Amour and staff went with the guy who had been here before, and it paid off.

"A little experience never hurts," the head coach told reporters when reasoning his decision, pre-game. "We have confidence in both guys."

Yesterday was certainly a confidence boost, highlighted by the 6-foot-4, 229-pound Dane converting a would-have-been Ottawa goal and potential turning point in the contest into a save that will be remembered for the duration of the series.

"I had a pretty good idea [I had it in my glove]," Andersen answered when asked if he knew he'd kept it out. "I had a good feeling that my glove wasn't really across the goal line."



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[I] felt like I got a good piece of it and obviously the cameras agreed."

In the room, Taylor Hall had a glowing review of Andersen's play after taking the series' first lead.

"It gives us energy. It gives us a win, really," the experienced winger answered. "We don't want to have him tested as much as he was. Their power play started to figure us out by the end of the game, but he was there. If you look at his games at the end of the regular season, he was really trending in the right direction. He's a guy that, at least I saw last year, when the lights are brightest, he's going to stand tall."

Mr. Game 1...

Déjà vu?

Almost one year ago to the day, Logan Stankoven stamped his first playoff game as a Hurricane with two goals in a 5-1 romp past the New Jersey Devils. This time around, he just about replicated it, striking for the game-opener, and then having a second shot hit Taylor Hall's skate on the way in.

One of Carolina's seven 20-goal scorers during the regular season, the blossoming center humbly said it was "right place, right time," but also understands his need to contribute this time of year.

"I think [we] just provide some secondary scoring for our team," Stankoven said. "I think we have a lot of depth. I think as the season's went on, since the [Winter Olympics] break, our line's been clicking pretty good. We're all hungry to track pucks, we're not afraid to go to the net, and we can use speed to our advantage. I think that's something we try and bring every night."

With both Hall and Stankoven out-chancing their opposition 19-5 at five-on-five (per NaturalStatTrick), it was exactly what the doctor ordered from the duo and Jackson Blake, as

Sebastian Aho and Jordan Staal did their best to keep Ottawa's top dogs at bay.

"Stank's been great. He's been growing an amazing game this season. He's been getting hot lately, which is always great timing," Staal complimented. "That line, in general, has been unreal. We're going to need scoring from everyone if we want to keep pushing down the playoffs."

For those with concerns about the line having the necessary size? Look at where yesterday's second goal was scored and try to convince someone that they don't go to the net.

"I wouldn't doubt them, ever," Staal continued. "They've been so good, so tenacious, and so good with the puck, or getting pucks back. All of those things. They've been really good."

What's Next?

The Canes return to action for Game 2 of the series on Monday. They'll hold a morning skate at 10:30 a.m. to start the day.

Rod Brind'Amour confirmed his team made it out of the first bout with a clean bill of health, so any lineup changes, as far as the skaters go, would be nothing short of shocking. In net, there's always a possibility to keep the rotation going, but with Andersen's exceptional Game 1 performance, nobody would argue if he gets the nod again.

However, even if the decision is to run it back in both areas, the head coach agreed that there are things the team can execute better in the next go-around.

"There's a lot we're going to need to improve on," the head coach said. "You're always getting better, whether you win a game or lose a game. You constantly have to find that next little edge."

Next Game: Monday, April 20 | Round 1, Game 2 vs. Ottawa | 7:30 p.m. | FDSN, ESPN2 | Tickets | Parking



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## Andersen stops 22, Hurricanes blank Senators in Game 1 of Eastern 1st Round

By: Kurt Dusterberg

Stankoven, Hall each has goal, assist for Carolina

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Frederik Andersen made 22 saves, and the Carolina Hurricanes defeated the Ottawa Senators 2-0 in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference First Round at Lenovo Center on Saturday.

It was Andersen's sixth career shutout in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Logan Stankoven and Taylor Hall each had a goal and an assist, and Jackson Blake had two assists for the Hurricanes, the top seed in the East.

"We were on our game, but they were too," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I think most of the opportunities were on the power plays. That's where the goalies really had to shine."

Linus Ullmark made 27 saves for the Senators, the second wild card from the East.

"Tight-checking game. Not a lot of space for either team," Ottawa coach Travis Green said. "(Carolina) probably deserved to win, analytically, and they did."

Game 2 is at Lenovo Center on Monday (7:30 p.m. ET; FDSNSO, ESPN2, SNP, SNO, SNE, TVAS, CBC).

"I thought we played a really solid game," Senators captain Brady Tkachuk said. "There weren't many chances on both sides of the puck there. Two good bounces for them end up in the back of the net."

"They're always on top of you. They're always in the right spots and you can see that they blocked a lot of shots, especially at the end, but all game they're sacrificing their bodies."

Stankoven gave Carolina a 1-0 lead at 2:11 of the second period. Blake took a backhand feed from Hall and made a touch pass to Stankoven, who scored on a snap shot that slipped under Ullmark's left pad. The play started when Alexander Nikishin held in a clearing attempt on his backhand.

"I think (we) just provide some secondary scoring for our team," Stankoven said. "Since the (Winter Olympics), our line has been clicking pretty good. We've been able to find each other. We're all hungry to track pucks. We're not afraid to go to the net."

Stankoven closed the regular season with 11 points (seven goals, four assists) in an eight-game point streak.

"I think he's played great all year," Brind'Amour said. "If you watch every game, he looks like one of the better players every night. He just didn't cash in for a stretch. It's just kind of the law of averages."

The Senators appeared to tie the game at 3:54 of the third period when Drake Batherson tried to jam the puck past Andersen, but the goal was overturned. The play was initially ruled a goal on the ice, but video review determined the puck did not cross the goal line after Andersen stopped it with his glove.

"I wasn't sure. It happened so quick," Batherson said. "The ref called it a goal, but I feel like you never know nowadays. I probably should have just put it in. It shouldn't have got to that point."

Andersen made another key save on the power play 25 seconds later, squeezing his pads on a Tkachuk redirect at the top of the crease.

Hall then extended it to 2-0 at 7:15 of the third period. Ullmark stopped Nikishin's shot from the left circle, but the puck went over the goaltender's right shoulder and settled behind him, and Hall poked the puck into the net during a scramble.

"I saw the (Nikishin shot) and I felt like I got such a good piece of it that it was going to end up in front of me," Ullmark said. "All of a sudden, you feel people hit you from behind, you're thinking, oh, it's there. So you're looking, unfortunately, the other way. That's when they capitalized and got a gritty one."

Carolina was under constant pressure in the final minutes, down two skaters after a delay of game penalty and Ottawa skating with the extra attacker after pulling Ullmark. The Hurricanes blocked four shots while Ottawa pressed for a goal with a 6-on-4 advantage.

"The blocked shots are huge this time of year," Andersen said. "There's breakdowns, it's never a perfect game. But we kind of know when to sell out and help each other out. That's going to be important coming next game and down the line every night."

NOTES: Ottawa defenseman Artem Zub left the game after one shift in the second period and did not return. Green did not have an update. ... Andersen recorded his sixth career



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playoff shutout, moving into a tie for sixth most in NHL history by a goaltender born outside North America, behind Dominik Hasek (14), Henrik Lundqvist (10), Evgeni Nabokov (seven), Tuukka Rask (seven) and Andrei Vasilevskiy (seven). ... The Hurricanes improved to 7-0 in their past seven postseason-opening contests dating to Game 1 of the

2020 Stanley Cup Qualifiers. Carolina became the fifth team in NHL history with a run of that length, following the Montreal Canadiens (12-0 from 1951-1962), New York Islanders (10-0 from 1975-1984), San Jose Sharks (8-0 from 2011-2019) and St. Louis Blues (7-0 from 1995-2001).



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## Stanley Cup playoffs daily: Previews, stats, schedule, bracket - ESPN

By: ESPN staff

Sabres complete epic comeback to win first playoff game in 15 years (2:03)

The Sabres seal their first playoff win since 2011 with a four-goal third period against the Bruins. (2:03)

Seven of eight first-round series in the 2026 Stanley Cup playoffs have gotten underway during the first two days of action, with some significant surprises.

Monday brings a chance for retribution for the Pittsburgh Penguins, Ottawa Senators and Dallas Stars, while the Philadelphia Flyers, Carolina Hurricanes and Minnesota Wild look to take commanding 2-0 leads.

Plus, the Anaheim Ducks and Edmonton Oilers finally join the postseason party!

Read on for previews of each of Monday's games, scores and highlights from Sunday's games, and updated playoff stat leaders.

Monday's games

Philadelphia Flyers at Pittsburgh Penguins

Game 2 | 7 p.m. ET (ESPN)

The animosity was on full display between the participants in the Battle of Pennsylvania in Game 1, and we'd expect a similar display in Game 2. There were 81 combined hits in Game 1, well over both teams' regular-season averages (23.0 for Philly and 17.6 for Pittsburgh).

The early trend is not a good one for Pittsburgh, as teams that win Game 1 of a seven-game series have gone on to win 68% of the time. One trend we don't expect to continue much longer: Sidney Crosby being kept off the scoresheet. Crosby has the most goals (60), assists (79) and points (139) of any player against the Flyers, including 36 points in 24 career playoff games.

The Flyers are led by a group of young players, including Porter Martone, who was credited with the game-winning goal in Game 1. At 19 years, 174 days old, he became the youngest Flyer to score a goal in his playoff debut, previously held by Simon Gagne (20 years, 44 days) set in 2000.

Pittsburgh now must dig out of a hole, and it doesn't have a superb track record for doing so. The Pens are 15-17 in seven-game series when losing Game 1, and that includes three straight series losses in that scenario.

Ottawa Senators at Carolina Hurricanes

Game 2 | 7:30 p.m. ET (ESPN2)

One of the major question marks heading into the postseason for Carolina was the goaltending.

Frederik Andersen answered the bell in Game 1, with a 22-save shutout. That was his sixth career postseason shutout and third with the Canes, breaking a tie with Kevin Weeks and Petr Mrazek for the second most in Whalers/Hurricanes franchise history. (Cam Ward is first, with four.)

The Hurricanes are no strangers to winning Game 1 at home in a playoff series, and it's a good omen: They are 10-2 in seven-game series when winning the first contest on home ice. This was the first time the Senators had been shut out in a playoff game since May 21, 2017, in the Eastern Conference finals against the Penguins.

Carolina's line of Taylor Hall-Jackson Blake-Logan Stankoven scored both of its goals and was on the ice for 19 shot attempts at 5-on-5 vs. just two shot attempts against.

One way for the Senators to get back in the swing of things: reigniting their power play. Ottawa finished the regular season on a streak of six games with at least one power-play goal but went 0-4 in Game 1.

Minnesota Wild at Dallas Stars

Game 2 | 9:30 p.m. ET (ESPN)

The Wild's 6-1 win in Game 1 was just the third time in the past 20 years that a road team won Game 1 of a playoff series by five or more goals (joining the Rangers in the 2014 Eastern Conference finals and the Canadiens in the 2006 conference quarterfinals).

However, the Wild have just a 2-2 record in seven-game series when winning Game 1 -- and one of those losses came to the Stars in 2023.

The superstars showed up for Minny in Game 1: Kirill Kaprizov scored his 16th career playoff goal, tying Zach Parise for the most in franchise history, and Quinn Hughes now has 25 career playoff assists in 31 playoff games, tying Brian Leetch for the third-fewest games to reach that benchmark in playoff history, behind Adam Fox and AI MacInnis (both 29 GP).

The Stars have an 11-22 series record in seven-game series when losing Game 1 at home. However, one of those 11 wins was against the Avalanche in the first round last season.

Dallas will need the power play to keep clicking. Jason Robertson scored with the man advantage in Game 1, and the Stars are now 5-for-13 (38.5%) against the Wild on the PP this season.

Anaheim Ducks at Edmonton Oilers

Game 1 | 10 p.m. ET (ESPN2)

These two Pacific Division foes were some of the last to clinch their postseason tickets -- and it wasn't until the



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season's final evening that they locked in their first-round matchup with one another.

The two teams' most recent playoff matchup came in 2017, a seven-game series win for the Ducks ahead of Anaheim's loss to the Nashville Predators in the Western Conference finals. The Oilers are no strangers to the conference finals in recent years, having won the past two of them before falling in the Cup Final in 2024 and 2025.

The Oilers won the season series between the clubs, 2-1, with 28 total goals scored between the teams in the three games. Connor McDavid paced the Oilers in scoring this season with 134 points, while Cutter Gauthier was atop the Ducks' leaderboard with 69.

Sunday's scoreboard

Colorado Avalanche 2, Los Angeles Kings 1

Avalanche lead series 1-0

The ESPN hockey family did not have much faith in the Kings in this series; every person who made predictions chose the Avs in this series, with a handful thinking it would be a sweep. So Game 1 was a bit closer than many expected, and the Kings had some scoring chances throughout in addition to Artemi Panarin's power-play goal late in the third. But despite seeing all of its big guns kept off the scoresheet, Colorado earned its first W of the postseason. Game 2 is back in Denver on Tuesday. Full recap.

Avalanche take down the Kings in Game 1

Avalanche survive Game 1 and win it 2-1 for a series lead.

Montreal Canadiens 4, Tampa Bay Lightning 3 (OT)

Canadiens lead series 1-0

Given how close these two teams finished in the standings, there was not a lot of love for the Canadiens in the hockey punditry. The Habs not only hung with the Lightning in Game 1, they looked like the better team at many points, and rode a power-play hat trick by Juraj Slafkovsky to victory in Game 1. The Lightning had two power-play goals of their own (from Darren Raddysh and Brandon Hagel). Game 2 is Tuesday night. Full recap.

Buffalo Sabres 4, Boston Bruins 3

Sabres lead series 1-0

The first playoff game in Buffalo in 15 years was an event, and the KeyBank Center crowd was extra loud for this one. Boston's Morgan Geekie quieted the crowd somewhat with a first-period goal, and tensions rose when Elias Lindholm put the B's up 2-0 early in the third. But in a span of 4:34, the Sabres scored three goals (two from Tage Thompson, and the go-ahead goal by Mattias Samuelsson). Alex Tuch added an insurance tally into an empty net -- which was needed, as David Pastrnak netted a power-play goal with eight seconds left. Game 2 for these two teams is Tuesday. Full recap.

Vegas Golden Knights 4, Utah Mammoth 2

Golden Knights lead series 1-0

The Mammoth, like many other underdogs, did not receive a lot of backing from our analysts predicting this series. But they showed considerable fight in Game 1, taking leads of 1-0 (via Logan Cooley) and 2-1 (via Kevin Stenlund). Eventually, the Knights overpowered the visitors, with third-period goals from Mark Stone, Nic Dowd and Ivan Barbashev to seal the deal. The two teams square off again on Tuesday night. Full recap.



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**SB NATION**  
**CANES COUNTRY**

## Round 1, Game 1 Player of the Game: Frederik Andersen

By: Evan Davis

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour said before and after yesterday's game that the team and coaching staff are confident in both goalies, and either could have started. Brind'Amour cited playoff experience as the factor in his decision, and that was the right call.

The Lenovo Center was buzzing, and the captain-on-captain fight off the opening puck drop took the energy to another level.

The Carolina Hurricanes needed a steady presence in net, and that is exactly what the team got in Frederik Andersen. And then some.

Ottawa had just 22 shots, well below their regular season average of 29. Andersen stopped high-quality scoring chances and delivered in the clutch when the game was on the line.

There is no easy shutout in the NHL, and this was no cakewalk for Andersen. Data from Natural Stat Trick paint a picture of elite goaltending under pressure:

xGoals Against: 1.508

Goals Saved Above Expected (GSAX): +1.517

Andersen saved 1.52 goals more than an average goaltender would have allowed based on shot quality and location. That is an outstanding single-game mark.

Below is the danger-zone breakdown via MoneyPuck:

Low-Danger Shot Attempts: 30 (0.739 xG)

Medium-Danger Shot Attempts: 5 (0.564 xG)

High-Danger Shot Attempts: 1 (0.205 xG)

Rebound xGoals Against: 0.385

Ottawa had some high-quality shots despite the low volume, and Andersen was perfect in every category.

Apr 18, 2026; Raleigh, North Carolina, USA; Carolina Hurricanes center Seth Jarvis (24) with goaltender Frederik Andersen (31) go to block the shot by Ottawa Senators left wing Brady Tkachuk (7) during the third period in game one of the first round of the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center. Mandatory Credit: James Guillory-Imagn Images

Other keys to victory yesterday were Carolina's edges in possession and shot quality.

The Canes had far more chances, a significant edge in total scoring chances, and expected goals. With shots and shot attempts packed in Ottawa's high-danger zone, it showed Carolina's overall territorial dominance.

This was certainly a major factor in the game's outcome, but the Senators were able to create some high-quality chances despite the Hurricanes' strong overall performance. Four power play opportunities for Ottawa were important sequences for both teams.

RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA - APRIL 18: Dylan Cozens #24 of the Ottawa Senators attempts a shot against Frederik Andersen #31 of the Carolina Hurricanes during the first period of the game at Lenovo Center on April 18, 2026 in Raleigh, North Carolina. (Photo by Jared C. Tilton/Getty Images)

The third period is when Andersen earned Player of the Game honors. While protecting a one-goal lead, Andersen made highlight-reel stops as Ottawa was controlling the game.

A spectacular glove save on Drake Batherson's rebound attempt at the top of the crease was when the game could have taken a different direction based on the Senators' surge during those minutes preceding that play. The referee had a quick whistle and initially called it a goal to tie the game. Replay confirmed the puck never fully crossed the line, and Carolina retained their one-goal lead.

RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA - APRIL 18: Frederik Andersen #31 of the Carolina Hurricanes makes a save against Drake Batherson #19 of the Ottawa Senators during the third period of the game at Lenovo Center on April 18, 2026 in Raleigh, North Carolina. (Photo by Jared C. Tilton/Getty Images)

Moments later, Andersen made a desperation falling-back leg save on Brady Tkachuk from in the crease. Again, a goal there and the game could have turned out much differently.

RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA - APRIL 18: Frederik Andersen #31 of the Carolina Hurricanes makes a save against Brady Tkachuk #7 of the Ottawa Senators during the third period of the game at Lenovo Center on April 18, 2026 in Raleigh, North Carolina. (Photo by Jared C. Tilton/Getty Images)

Facing a two-goal deficit, Ottawa pulled the goalie with nearly three and a half minutes left in the game. A delay of game penalty gave the Senators a power play, further ramping up the pressure on the Canes to close out the



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game. In the waning minutes during a six-on-four, Ottawa was in full attack mode. Once again, Andersen stood tall. He stopped three shots on net while his teammates blocked five attempts.

RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA - APRIL 18: Frederik Andersen #31 of the Carolina Hurricanes makes a save during the third period in Game One of the First Round of the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs against the Ottawa Senators at Lenovo Center on April 18, 2026 in Raleigh, North Carolina. (Photo by Josh Lavallee/NHLI via Getty Images)

## Hurricanes take Game One Fight against Senators 2-0

By: Al Hood

Jordan Staal got the crowd going with a fight, Frederik Andersen was outstanding, and the Carolina Hurricanes took down the Ottawa Senators in a dominant 2-0 performance that saw the team take a 1-0 series lead in the Eastern Conference Quarterfinals.

Any hopes of a sleepy start by either team, but especially the Canes who have basically been allowed to coast for the last couple of weeks were dashed from the start when Brady Tkachuk and Jordan Staal dropped the gloves for a fight that didn't last long. It seemed as if Tkachuk was trying to tell everyone he was fine after a scary incident earlier in week on Long Island when he stumbled off the ice, so that was accomplished. That said, Tkachuk easily lost as he took several punches from the Canes Captain before ripping him down onto the ice.

The rest of the period was as expected—a contest between two teams playing the same style. It took the Hurricanes several minutes to register a shot on goal, yet they basically dominated play to the first TV timeout. Both teams were in passing lines, diving to the ice, and clogging things up trying to prevent a score. Linus Ullmark and Frederik Andersen both faced a few tough chances, and both made easy stops. The Senators did get one Power Play in the period, but they spent more of it in the Hurricanes end than their own. The one best chance they had was intercepted by Sebastian Aho and led to a scoring chance for Carolina.

When the second period started Carolina was able to get the opening goal they were hoping for, and do it in a way that reignited fears fans would have had about Linus Ullmark. The play started with a great keep in by Alexander Nikishin, who fed it over to Taylor Hall, getting it over to Jackson Blake. Blake left the puck for Logan Stankoven to put it on net, and he found the five hole under Ullmark as it bounced off his skate and in. It was a tough goal for Ullmark to give up as he had a clear view of the puck.

The Canes though did waste a chance to put a hammer lock on the game as they would get their first Power Play on a too

With just five shots in the first period and four in the second, Andersen turned away 13 shots in the third period. That can be a tough position for a goaltender. Good defense and limited shots could build some rust, but Andersen stayed engaged. He proved that when it mattered most in the third.

In a series that promises to be tight and physical, Andersen's veteran poise, positioning, and big-save ability set the tone and helped Carolina earn a critical Game 1 victory.

many men, and that would turn into a 5-on-3 as a slash was called. Unfortunately the Canes came up empty, but the Penalty Kill for the Canes still came up big later to keep it at a 1-0 game heading into the third. Carolina outshot the Senators 8-4, but as expected the four for Ottawa were high quality chances that Andersen was able to save.

The third period was an intense show of playoff hockey, going back and forth and hinged on what ended up being an amazing save by Andersen. Ottawa was on the power play, and managed a Drake Batherson shot on Andersen. Andersen made the save but the puck rattled around in his glove a bit. The referee made a definitive motion that the puck crossed the line. To their credit, the officials immediately went to the video review where Toronto confirmed the puck did not fully cross the line. As explained on the ESPN broadcast, for it to be a goal—even if it's called one on the ice—on a review they have to see it completely cross the line. The Canes would use that as a rest, Andersen made another great save and a few minutes later the Hurricanes would crash the net on the other end. In the chaos the puck ended up in the net—the goal was credited to Taylor Hall—and Carolina had the important 2-0 lead.

Carolina had a chance to get it to 3-0 with yet another 5 on 3 advantage, but it again fell short—though it did at least look better. Ottawa would get another great chance with the Power Play near the end of the third as Jalen Chatfield would get called for Carolina's second Puck Over The Glass violation, but again the team stood strong and Andersen made a key save with about ten seconds left in the penalty to effectively shut the door on the game.

Carolina ended the game with the full compliment of players, while Ottawa—already missing two key players—played two periods without Artem Zub who left after putting a hit on Seth Jarvis. Travis Green didn't have any update after the game on his status, but a long term injury to a first pair defenseman could be a huge fork in the road moment for the Senators.

The two teams go back at it on Monday night at 7:30 in the Lenovo Center



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## The Hockey News

### 'I Feel Fresh': Jaccob Slavin's Early Absence May Be Blessing In Disguise For Hurricanes

By: Ryan Henkel

Will Slavin's extended absence prove beneficial? Now, fully healed, he feels "fresh" and ready to dominate the playoffs with the Hurricanes.

Carolina takes 1-0 series lead over Ottawa

Is missing your star defenseman for over half a season actually a good thing?

Stick with me here.

The Carolina Hurricanes were without defenseman Jaccob Slavin for over half the regular season, but still managed to lock up the second best record in the league.

It wasn't easy, but the Canes proved that their a deep team and were able to overcome the prolonged absence.

And now Slavin is fully back and, according to him, the freshest he's ever felt at this point of the year.

"I didn't play half the season, so the body feels good right now, legs feel good," Slavin said. "I feel fresh and like I only played half a season. Being injured is not easy, but you just don't have the wear and tear on your body like you do when you play 82 games in a year."

The NHL regular season is a seven-month long grind and those miles definitely rack up on the body.

But for Slavin, who only played in 39 games this year, those miles weren't really able to build up.

That's to the tune of around 800 less minutes played, 70 less shots blocked and 50 less hits taken.

Those are major physical tolls for a player to bear with and so for Slavin to go a whole year without that increased burden, perhaps those early injuries were truly was a blessing in disguise.

For one, that supposed "freshness advantage" was certainly on display Saturday.

In Game 1 against the Ottawa Senators, Slavin logged a team high 21:06, including a 4:08 long shift to close the game.

The veteran blueliner played a key role in shutting down the Senators' final push, facing both a 6v5 and 6v4 situation all the way to the end.

And it was his own choice to stay out there to preserve his team's win and Frederik Andersen's shutout too.

"There were some timeouts in there, but that's his time to shine," said Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour. "If he feels like he can stay out there, you're gonna give him the benefit of the doubt."

For Slavin, extra minutes aren't anything new, but if Carolina is able to give him even more this postseason, then that's going to go a long way for this team in their quest for the Cup.

"It was definitely a weird year, but it was one that you just take it as it comes," Slavin said. "But getting into playoffs is what it's all about. If you had told I'd have to go through all that to have the year that we did and then be fresh for the playoffs, might be a pretty easy, 'Yes.'"

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## SportScan

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

1388043 Carolina Hurricanes

What Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said after Game 1 NHL playoff win over Sens

Chip Alexander4-5 minutes 19/04/2026

Rod Brind'Amour's day-after analysis of the Carolina Hurricanes' performance in the opening game of the playoffs differed little from what the coach said just after it.

The Canes beat the Ottawa Senators, 2-0, Saturday in Game 1 of the first-round series at Lenovo Center as goalie Frederik Andersen had a 22-save shutout and the Logan Stankoven line provided the points — Stankoven and Taylor Hall each with a goal and assist, and winger Jackson Blake with a pair of assists.

Brind'Amour's thoughts on Sunday:

- Andersen was terrific but so was Sens goalie Linus Ullmark.
- The Canes failed to score on two 5-on-3 power plays but had their chances.
- A four-minute-plus shift by defenseman Jaccob Slavin at the end of the game was impressive.
- In what was a very physically taxing game, with 96 combined hits, the Canes came out of it fine, physically.
- The Canes' playoff experience showed in a tight game.

"It was a good game," Brind'Amour said Sunday. "It was the way we have to play and it was just good enough. That's what we're dealing with here. We have a tremendous amount of respect for who we're playing against and how they play.

"We're doing everything we can to limit what we're giving up because we're not going to get a ton. I don't think there was a lot, either way. Most of the chances came off the power play. So, it's a tight one. ... You're fighting every shift to get that little edge."

The Canes were 0-for-5 on the power play and the Senators 0-for-4. Carolina had eight power-play shots — six with a two-man advantage. Ottawa had seven power-play shots.

"We had a couple of really good chances," Brind'Amour said of the power plays. "Both goalies played, I thought, really well. Most of our chances came on the 5-on-3. We had two or three really good looks ... and you'd like to score on those, obviously, because those don't come very often. But we got away with not scoring on 'em."

The Senators' last power play came with 2:35 left in regulation, and they pulled Ullmark out of net for a sixth attacker. The Canes hunkered down

around Andersen as Slavin played all but nine seconds of the final 4:17 of regulation.

Ottawa used its timeout with 45 seconds left for a brief respite, but Slavin did not leave the ice until play was stopped with nine seconds showing.

"It's his time to shine, you know?" Brind'Amour said. "If he feels like he can stay out there, you're going to give him that benefit, without a doubt."

The Canes and Sens face off in Game 2 on Monday, with a 7:30 p.m. start at Lenovo Center. The best-of-seven series then moves to Ottawa for Games 3 and 4.

Profile Image of Chip Alexander

In more than 40 years at The N&O, Chip Alexander has covered the N.C. State, UNC, Duke and East Carolina beats, and now is in his 15th season on the Carolina Hurricanes beat. Alexander, who has won numerous writing awards at the state and national level, covered the Hurricanes' move to North Carolina in 1997 and was a part of The N&O's coverage of the Canes' 2006 Stanley Cup run.

News Observer LOADED: 04.20.2026

1388044 Carolina Hurricanes

How the Canes stifled Ottawa's offense, and how the Sens can rebound in Game 2

Julian McKenzie6-8 minutes 19/04/2026

RALEIGH, N.C. — To get a sense of how little ground the Carolina Hurricanes and the Ottawa Senators gave each other in their first-ever Stanley Cup playoff encounter, chew on this: The first registered shot on goal Saturday afternoon came more than six minutes into the first period.

Yes, there were blocked and missed shot attempts before Ottawa forward Dylan Cozens finally put a puck on net. But it was very clear that each team was taking away the middle of the ice and limiting chances for the other. And if this regular season is any indication, the Hurricanes' 2-0 victory in Game 1 won't be a one-off.

"Not a lot of space for both teams, I think, all game," Senators defenseman Jake Sanderson said. "I think it's going to be like that all series. Tight checking, both of us pride our games on."

That defensive brand of hockey was projected to be the calling card for both teams entering the postseason, and neither side disappointed. However, the Senators' prowess wasn't the same quality as that of the Hurricanes, who out-chanced and out-hit Ottawa throughout.

As much as the Senators have drawn rave reviews for their commitment to playing defense under coach Travis Green, the Canes showed why



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they've been among the best teams in the league during coach Rod Brind'Amour's tenure.

"I think both teams have a lot to be proud of tonight with that effort," Hurricanes forward Taylor Hall said. "First game of playoffs is always fast and physical, and there's not a lot of time out there, and that was the case tonight."

Green said he hadn't seen the advanced numbers when he addressed the media in the bowels of the Lenovo Center, minutes after the loss. The eye test more than sufficed, as he also noted the lack of space given by either team.

"They probably deserve to win analytically, and they did," Green said.

The Senators hoped to take advantage of a game-opening scrap between captain Brady Tkachuk and Hurricanes counterpart Jordan Staal. The Senators "loved" the energy. But the Canes did, too. The physicality ramped up and so did the Canes' desperation. When the Senators had a first-period power play, the Canes were relentless defensively, even diving to make clearances. And with every defensive play and hit, the Canes flexed their home-ice advantage with a raucous, towel-waving crowd.

"They're just always on top of you," Tkachuk said. "They're always in the right spots. And you can see that they blocked a lot of shots there, especially at the end. But all game, they're sacrificing their body so they don't give you much.

"They frustrate the whole league with the way they play."

According to Natural Stat Trick, Carolina overpowered Ottawa in shot attempt rate (71.05 percent versus Ottawa's 28.95 percent), scoring chances (14-7), and high-danger chances (6-4) at five-on-five in the opening 20 minutes.

And still, the Senators emerged from it tied 0-0.

"I thought we weathered the storm great in the first period," Sanderson said. "It's a really hard barn to play in, never mind playoffs."

When the dust settled, the teams had combined for 96 hits and 51 shots, with 27 of the latter coming in the third period. But goaltending, solid for both sides throughout the game, made the difference. The two shots that beat Ottawa's Linus Ullmark needed to be crafty. Canes forward Logan Stankoven redirected a puck past the netminder after the Canes' cycled around in the offensive zone. And their second one came after a goalmouth scramble, just after Ullmark made an initial save.

"I see the first (shot) and felt like I got such a good piece of it that it was going to end up in front of me," Ullmark said. "And when it didn't, all of a sudden you feel like people hit you from behind. You're thinking, 'Oh, it's, you know, it's there. 'So you're looking, unfortunately, the other way. And that's when they capitalized and got a greedy one."

Ullmark made 27 saves on 29 shots in the loss. He wasn't the biggest problem, but he remains an essential ingredient for the Senators to withstand the Hurricanes' pressure. He will need to be better than Frederik Andersen, who was perfect in the Canes' victory.

But the list of what needs to be done goes beyond Ottawa's goaltending. It starts with working hard down low to generate more high-danger chances. On Saturday, the Senators lost the battle 11-5 at five-on-five.

"I thought we had some good looks like that," Tkachuk said. "But the more you can do that, the better chance we have."

Continuing with the five-on-five theme, here's a startling statistic to swallow for the Senators' offense: Their checking line of Nick Cousins, Shane Pinto and Michael Amadio registered a 0 percent shot attempt rate and expected goals percentage, according to Natural Stat Trick and Money puck. Pinto, who ended the season with a faceoff rate above 50

percent in the regular season, only won two of his six draws against the Hurricanes. That will obviously need to change in a hurry for Game 2.

The spotlight will also shine on the Senators' defense on Monday night in Raleigh. Not just for the unit's efforts, but for who might have to potentially step up if Artem Zub can't play after a throttling hit on Hurricanes forward Seth Jarvis that backfired and knocked Zub out for the rest of the game. The Senators are already waiting on Tyler Kleven's return and using Dennis Gilbert, often used as an extra, as a third-pairing defender alongside Nikolas Matinpalo. It might mean using another depth option for Game 2, like Lassi Thomson, if they can't get their regular top-pairing rearguard back.

"It's tough," Sanderson said after the game. "He plays big minutes. Obviously, (he's) my partner, I rely on him a lot, so haven't seen him yet, but I hope it's OK."

All of these factors could result in Ottawa needing to double down on its defensive structure, stick work and aggressive nature in their own zone. If Zub can't go, the defense could be subjected to more changes, or the Sens might have to limit exposing their third pair. Gilbert, who played on that third pair, was on the ice for just 8:26 in the loss.

At least playing defensively isn't foreign to these Senators. Maybe to previous iterations, but not the 2025-26 version that ended the season tied for second league-wide for fewest shots against. And they know what they're up against when they meet Carolina again soon.

"It's just going to be like this all series," Tkachuk said. "It's going to be a long series and a good battle."

The Athletic LOADED: 04.20.2026

1388140 Websites

The Athletic / Overtime in the NHL Stanley Cup playoffs: How does it work?

By Eric Stephens

The Stanley Cup playoffs and overtime go together like all great pairs: peanut butter and jelly, macaroni and cheese, Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl. An already dramatic hockey game gets a breath-holding period of next-goal-wins play.

In the playoffs, there is no three-on-three gimmickry, no shootouts, no time limit. If a game is tied after regulation, it's five-on-five hockey — barring penalties — for as long as it takes, with 20-minute periods.

Most overtime games won't require a second period, though four of them did in the 2025 playoffs. The most dramatic was in Game 7 of the first-round series between Winnipeg and St. Louis, when the Jets scored in double overtime after tying the game with two goals late in the third period.

In last year's playoffs, 20 of the 86 total games went beyond regulation. Twelve occurred in the first round and five in the second round. And even though it felt like the Florida Panthers handled the Edmonton Oilers with ease in the Stanley Cup Final, three of the six games went to overtime.

How many overtime games will be played over the next two months? And who will provide the heroics? It remains to be seen, but here's a refresher on how things work after regulation:

- After the third period, the game will pause for 15 minutes — an "intermission" during which teams return to their dressing rooms and the ice is resurfaced.



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- Upon returning, the teams will resume play at five-on-five for 20-minute periods, each followed by another 15-minute intermission if necessary, until a goal is scored. Once that happens, it's "sudden death" to the losing team.

- Remaining time from a penalty assessed near or at the end of regulation — or from the previous overtime period — carries over.

- The home team shoots at the same end of the ice it had during the second period. If the game goes beyond one overtime period, the teams will alternate shooting ends.

- As in regulation, after a stoppage in play, the home team is granted "last change" of on-ice players before the next faceoff. The visiting coach is required to deploy his skaters first.

- There are no TV timeouts.

In NHL history, 15 games have gone into a fourth overtime period. Some seemed as though they might never end. Here are the five longest games in history, all of which went into a fifth or sixth overtime period:

1. March 24, 1936: Detroit Red Wings 1, Montreal Maroons 0 (sixth OT; 116 minutes, 30 seconds)
2. April 4, 1933: Toronto Maple Leafs 1, Boston Bruins 0 (sixth OT; 104:46)
3. May 4, 2000: Philadelphia Flyers 2, Pittsburgh Penguins 1 (fifth OT; 92:01)
4. Aug. 11, 2020: Tampa Bay Lightning 3, Columbus Blue Jackets 2 (fifth OT; 90:27)
5. April 24, 2003: Anaheim Ducks 4, Dallas Stars 3 (fifth OT; 80:48)

And if you wonder (or forgot) how many times the Stanley Cup winner has been determined by an overtime goal, the answer is 17. The most recent was in 2014, when Alec Martinez scored in double overtime for the Los Angeles Kings in Game 5. The first example was Bill Cook of the New York Rangers in the first overtime period of Game 4 of the 1933 Cup Final.

The Athletic LOADED: 04.20.2026

1388141 Websites

The Athletic / One of Edmonton's greats is tired of the city being an NHL punchline

By Chris Johnston

The headline alone guaranteed a click from Kevin Lowe — "Chris Pronger's great mistake: Negotiating under the influence, signing long-term in Edmonton" — but it was one specific phrase in the story that didn't sit right with the former Oilers general manager.

It was the part where Pronger wrote "Edmonton? Nobody mentioned f—ing Edmonton" while recounting the night in August 2005 when Lowe, then the Oilers' general manager, acquired the Hall of Fame defenseman for what would become a one-and-done season in the city.

"It's been home for almost 50 years," Lowe told The Athletic this week. "When I saw that, I felt that someone needed to say something."

And so he crafted a public retort to the story Pronger shared about the alcohol-influenced beginning of his Oilers tenure in his new book,

"Earned: The True Cost of Greatness From One of Hockey's Fiercest Competitors," an excerpt of which was

Published by The Athletic on April 13.

After reading it, Lowe wrote on LinkedIn that he was disappointed by how casually Pronger folded the city into his anecdote about agreeing to a five-year contract with Edmonton at the end of a night of drinking while his wife, Lauren, was sleeping. Pronger framed that breach of marital trust as the reason why he asked for a trade the following summer, following a loss in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final against the Carolina Hurricanes. He didn't include any apparent remorse about how his actions impacted the fans, organization or city.

Reading Pronger's account nearly 20 years later, Lowe said it made him wish he had never honored the player's request to be traded by sending him to the Anaheim Ducks in July 2006.

"I just thought it was someone again using Edmonton as fodder just because it's for clicks," Lowe said. "I don't think Prongers disliked it here, but I thought just how Edmonton was represented in that one line about 'it was f—ing Edmonton.' It was like 'Really?' It's a beautiful city. I came here close to 50 years ago. It was just over 400,000 people then; now it's 1.2 million.

"I say to people it has a small-town feel, but it has everything that a big city has. And, yeah, it's a little cold in winter, but we don't have hurricanes, and we don't have earthquakes and things like that.

"It's a pretty safe place and a great place to raise a family."

As Lowe can attest, it's also been an amazing place to raise a banner. He was an important part of the teams that won the Stanley Cup in 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988 and 1990. He was GM during the Oilers' unexpected run to the 2006 Final that fell one game short. And he had a front-row seat as an organizational ambassador for near-misses the last two springs, when Edmonton was beaten by the Florida Panthers in consecutive finals.

Add it all together, and the Oilers have arguably been the most accomplished organization of the NHL's post-Original Six era. No other team born after the league's 1967 expansion has been to more finals than the nine Edmonton has appeared in, and only the Pittsburgh Penguins can match its five championships from that group.

And yet the Oilers always seem to be fighting against some sort of negative undercurrent. You could sense it in the way Pronger shared his reaction to being told he was being traded to Edmonton after thinking he was instead going to Los Angeles, Florida or Boston. The Oilers were the punchline to that anecdote.

Connor McDavid referenced the team's ever-present battle against public perception in a piece for The Players' Tribune in February, writing: "I think there's this narrative that we're this unlucky, troubled team. The end result hasn't been there, but it's not easy getting to two straight Cup Finals."

They've been a smashing success by any measure, including at the gate, where the Oilers are a top-10 NHL revenue generator despite being the league's northern-most market and one of its smallest when measured by population.

Lowe was raised outside of Quebec City in the small town of Lachute, Que., and had never been to Edmonton before becoming the Oilers' first-ever draft pick in 1979. He immediately took to the city, living with Mark Messier in those early years while choosing to stay year-round, and never really left, save for a four-year run with the New York Rangers that included his sixth Stanley Cup win in 1994.

He came to appreciate the fact that Edmonton boasts the largest urban park system in North America, with over 160 kilometers of maintained trails, and sits in close proximity to the mountains. The long summer days were another highlight.



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"What really stood out for me is the amount of daylight you have in the summertime, like, it's crazy," he said. "I mean, you can play a round of golf after dinner."

Plus, it's a hockey town.

An Oilers town.

Lowe returned to Edmonton to finish his playing career before eventually becoming an assistant coach, head coach, GM, president and chairman of the organization. He's had a long time to think about the misconceptions that exist about the city.

"I think it's as simple as people that often speak poorly of it have never been here — never lived here — to experience it," Lowe said. "Once a statement's made, they get a life of their own, you know?"

Lowe thinks back fondly to a dinner he was part of in 2023, before Doug Weight was inducted into the Oilers Hall of Fame. It included Weight and Bill Guerin, two Americans who had successful runs with the team and spoke in glowing terms about their experiences in the Alberta capital that night.

"The wine was flowing," Lowe said. "They got up and they had all of their families there, and Billy talked about how he and his wife were young and it was good to get out of New Jersey and get on their own. This is where they grew up and owed so much to the city. Dougy Weight said the same thing. I mean, you don't ever hear of any guys not liking to play here."

With the Stanley Cup Playoffs upon us and the Oilers gearing up to face the Anaheim Ducks, it's the best time of year to be in Edmonton. The bars, restaurants and patios will be overflowing with excitement, and a building that can credibly lay claim to being the loudest in the NHL is ready to come alive again.

Even though it's been an uneven regular season, there's legitimate hope that McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Evan Bouchard can drag the city through another two-month thrill ride. There's belief they can finish the job this time.

"They're knowledgeable fans," Lowe said. "They know it's not a slam dunk. I was talking to (Wayne Gretzky) yesterday, and a couple things resonated from that conversation. You don't get to two Finals (and stop) unless a team ages out, but you know the will and the desire is deep, right? And they showed signs this year of playing well enough to be able to contend."

Asked what he expects to see in the city Monday, when the Oilers and Ducks play Game 1 at Rogers Place, Lowe paused for a moment.

"Let me look for what the weather is," he said. "Oh yeah! Eighteen degrees (64 Fahrenheit) and sunny. It's playoff weather, man. Playoff weather."

"When playoffs came around (in his playing days), it always seemed like we were out of winter and the sun was shining, the outdoor patios were open, guys like Mess and I were like, 'Holy geez, we're missing all of the action there.' But it was fun to drive to the rink and see people out enjoying the sunshine and stuff."

"It'll be all of that."

The Athletic LOADED: 04.20.2026

1388142 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Slafkovsky lives up to reputation as 'big-game player' in Game 1 win

Eric Engels

TAMPA, Fla. — Nick Suzuki suggested his six-foot-three, 225-pound linemate would play like a giant as soon as the puck dropped in this Stanley Cup Playoff series between his Montreal Canadiens and the Tampa Bay Lightning, and he was right.

"His attributes fit perfectly for this type of hockey," Suzuki said of Juraj Slafkovsky Sunday morning.

By the end of Sunday night, Slafkovsky had become the first Canadiens player in history to notch three power-play goals in a playoff game.

His last one came 1:22 into overtime, giving the Canadiens a 4-3 win in a seesaw Game 1 at Benchmark International Arena.

It was the 22-year-old's seventh shot on net, his 10th attempt of the night, and it rubber-stamped a performance he's been building towards ever since he first donned a Canadiens uniform just months after being taken first overall in the 2022 Draft.

As Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis said after the game, Slafkovsky's path to this point "wasn't linear."

"You understand that," St. Louis continued. "I think when you're dealing with young players, talented players like that, I think as a coach you have to have some patience, empathy, whatever it is. But the goal is to always advance, him growing but understanding that it's not going to be linear. There was ups and dips, but I feel like as he's evolved the last year, there's not a lot of dips."

Over Slafkovsky's first year, there seemed to be nothing but dips.

He practically spent more time swimming on the ice than skating on it, often knocked sprawling by hits he'd had no previous experience taking—including some major ones to his confidence, as he went on to collect only four goals and 10 points through 39 games before injury ended his season prematurely.

Over the next season, Slafkovsky was able to take steps forward without taking as many backward.

Then his evolution into the power forward he was meant to be came steadily from the halfway point of last season through the entirety of this one.

"It's been unbelievable," said Josh Anderson, who scored Montreal's first goal and set the physical tone for a Canadiens side that had 42 hits in this game.

The 31-year-old, who's also six-foot-three and 225 pounds, had also set the tone for Slafkovsky ever since they became teammates.

"Ever since I got here, I sit next to him in the locker room," said Slafkovsky. "He's a great guy to take from, and he's helped me (by) always being positive and telling me when not to make plays and go hit some people. We can see he does it a lot, so I'm just trying to do it whenever I can."

It's given Slafkovsky a better understanding of how to access the type of skill that Anderson never quite possessed.

That skill enabled the kid to push three pucks past Andrei Vasilevskiy in the most important game of the season to date. But Slafkovsky got to it on this night—and over a season that saw him score 30 goals and 73 points to set career highs in both categories—by using his speed and tenacity the way Anderson always does.

"He's a power forward. Big guy that's hard to stop," said Anderson. "And you'd think that Nick and Cole (Caufield) make him better, but he makes them better too. Obviously, he's a huge-time player for us. He's got a lot of confidence, a lot of swagger, and I just love his game."



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It hit another level at the Milan Olympics in February, where Slafkovsky scored four goals and four assists in six games, willing Slovakia to the semifinals.

"I was definitely impressed, but I wasn't surprised," Canadiens teammate Lane Hutson told Sportsnet last week. "I was impressed because it's such a high level. No disrespect to Slovakia, but they don't have a ton of star power, so to do it with not much, it was really impressive.

"But I think when those stakes get higher and the game's on the line, he wants to make an impact anyway he can, whether it's throwing a hit, getting in hard on the forecheck, making a big play, or extending possession. He can do it all, and he knows it, and it's a luxury to have him on our team."

On this night, against a Tampa team that clawed back 1-0 and 3-2 leads, it was essential.

Brandon Hagel, Anthony Cirelli and Jake Guentzel threw a blanket over Suzuki and Caufield, holding the 101-point man and his 51-goal accomplice to one shot attempt at five-on-five between them.

But they couldn't stop Slafkovsky on the power play. Especially with the game on the line.

"I got some open space there and decided to shoot it," he said, "and it went in."

Slafkovsky had the composure to make that big play in overtime — and several others in the game.

"We know what he's capable of bringing, and he brought it tonight," said St. Louis. "Not just his goals; he was physical, he won his battles, he was annoying. It was a big game for him."

It was a huge one for the Canadiens, who also kept their composure despite a wild momentum swing in the second period.

Anderson had a goal wiped off the board after it was ruled he made contact with the puck above the crossbar.

Twelve seconds later, he was given a questionable charging penalty for a hit that knocked Charle-Edouard D'Astous out of the game, and while he was serving it, the Lightning scored the first of two goals in 29 seconds to take a 2-1 lead.

The Canadiens weathered that storm before Slafkovsky scored his first goal of the night in the final minute of the period.

Slafkovsky's second came 5:56 into the third, and it felt like destiny he'd get that third after Guentzel's penalty with 20 seconds remaining in the frame put the Lightning's comeback bid in jeopardy.

"He showed that he can be a dominant player," Suzuki said before the game. "I think being around him the last week, he's excited for that."

Slafkovsky showed it immediately.

"He's been so good for us," said Jakub Dobes, who stopped 20 shots and also played a huge role in the Canadiens' win. "Hopefully he'll do the same thing on Tuesday (in Game 2)."

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Sportsnet.ca / Buffalo roars as Sabres complete epic comeback vs. Bruins in playoff return

Ryan Dixon

BUFFALO — They went 14 years without playoff hockey. Then, when it returned, somehow the wait for a single goal likely felt just as long. But when the dam broke and keyed a thunderous Buffalo stampede, it was all worth it for hockey's longest-suffering fans.

As expected, the city of Buffalo was on tilt as the Sabres hosted the Boston Bruins on Sunday night for a match that marked the first NHL post-season hockey in Western New York since 2011. Before the game, KeyBank Center was surrounded by Sabres supporters fueled by — among other things — the exhilarating knowledge that their team was about to emerge from what seemed like a never-ending winter and finally play hockey in the season it matters most.

Then came a game that felt like air slowly leaking from a tire.

Already put to the test beyond any reasonable expectation, Sabres supporters had to do 52:02 more of hard time before they had something specific to centre all that pent-up emotion on. With his team down 2-0 to a crafty Bruins team backed by Jeremy Swayman's strong goaltending, Tage Thompson — after two Boston defenders pinned his teammate, Peyton Krebs, against the boards — took a puck that squirted loose behind the net and stuffed it past Swayman before the goalie could get a toe to the post.

Belief blossomed and permeated the building, starting with the 20 guys wearing blue and yellow.

"The energy on the bench, the energy in the building after we got the first one, I just felt, we're going to get one; we're going to have a good look to get the next one," said Sabres coach Lindy Ruff. "Because we were garnering a lot of the offensive-zone play; it was just whether we could break them down and get that good chance."

When the next opportunity came, it was Thompson finding the net again, sniping his second tally in a span of 3:42. Fifty-two seconds later, defenceman Mattias Samuelsson buried from the slot, then did a celebratory slam into the glass with the same force he used to smack Bruins forwards all night.

"Tommer got us going there and the place just erupted," Samuelsson said. "You could feel the energy building. As a group we felt, once we cracked them, we could roll from there."

By the time native son Alex Tuch was heading toward an empty net with no Bruin in between, the pre-game hysteria had not only returned, but elevated to a whole other level, the wildest of emotions validated by a rollicking victory that landed on a 4-3 count after Boston's David Pastrnak scored with just eight ticks remaining in the third.

What better way to end a drought than with a flood?

"Tonight's game was full of emotion for everyone, so I'm just happy we could come out on the right side," Thompson said.

While the comeback required everyone pulling on the rope — not to mention some key saves by Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, including thwarting Pastrnak on a pair of second-period breakaways — there's no denying Thompson's skill and determination keyed the comeback. After catching Swayman a touch off guard on his first strike, the six-foot-six Thompson was a tenacious demon on his second, forechecking below the goal line and ultimately beating Boston centre Elias Lindholm to a loose puck at the side of the net, before wiring it past Swayman on the glove side.

It was the kind of play that showed the ferocity Thompson and Sabres captain Rasmus Dahlin are in constant conversation about.

"We always talk about, dogs have to be dogs said and today he showed up and led the team," Dahlin said. "That was special."

That was the way it looked from all the way down in the Sabres crease, too.



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"I feel like Tage has grown as a leader so much this year and he's been a really, really big part of our success on the ice, off the ice," said Luukkonen. "He takes care of everybody. Those big moments, he's shown it in many levels that he's built for that. He showed his best tonight."

Suffice to say, there's been more than enough anger and disappointment to go around in Buffalo, both inside and outside the dressing room. Thompson, though, has been there as long as anyone, having landed still shy of his 21st birthday in a 2018 trade with the St. Louis Blues. Like 10 other teammates Sunday, Thompson was making his post-season debut and was determined to meet the moment.

"I think eight years of adversity is enough experience to get you ready for something like this," he said. "Any time you go eight years of not making the playoffs and then it's finally here, the last thing you want is regret. There's just a heightened feeling of hunger; you just don't want to let this opportunity slip. I thought tonight was really important to make a statement and set our standard. We still have another level to get to and we're going to keep trying every game to find another level."

Certainly, despite the win, there's room for improvement. Ruff acknowledged there was some jittery puck play in the early going. And, perhaps more concerning, a power play that entered the game on an 0-for-22 skid went 0-for-4 and seemed to be less threatening with each successive opportunity.

Even if Buffalo had lost this game, though, it would have been hard to get too bogged down in the negative given the circumstances. But to win it the way the club did, with the same never-say-die attitude it showed all year while storming back to NHL relevance, it only stokes fires of belief and makes it easy to put the focus where it should be on a night like this.

"It was definitely cooler than I expected," Dahlin said of the atmosphere. "I couldn't hear anything except the crowd."

Ruff, the rare person on the Sabres with all kinds of post-season chapters in his book, was just as rosy as the newbies.

"You could feel the building shaking," the 66-year-old veteran bench boss said with a glow. "The atmosphere was unbelievable. It was great to give our fans [that] third period."

Thompson said the anticipation for what the Sabres would be skating into was on his mind for several days leading up to Game 1. The people in the stands came though, just like he did on the sheet.

"These are the kind of games you live for," Thompson said.

And, after that one, Buffalo could not be more alive.

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Sportsnet.ca / Things we learned: No love lost between Mammoth, Golden Knights

Emily Sadler

For a franchise experiencing playoff hockey for the first time ever, the Utah Mammoth certainly understood the assignment. The team flew out of the gates in Game 1 against the Vegas Golden Knights, setting the tone early with their fleet-footed game... and plenty of extra-curriculars.

The Golden Knights brought the glitz. Utah brought the grit. And 60 minutes of chippy, chirpy hockey later, it looks like we've got a new rivalry on our hands. This one brought plenty of heat, and lots of hate.

There was no love lost between the Pacific-topping Golden Knights and the league's newest franchise, which earned a post-season berth in just their second season in Salt Lake City but couldn't kick things off with a win on Sunday. Vegas's 4-2 series-opening victory gives them the upper hand for now.

But the rough stuff was the biggest story of this one. Net-front scuffles broke out early and often. Face-washes were plentiful, as were fighting words. There was even a head-butt — Utah's Sean Durzi got away unpenalized after (lightly) head-butting an irate Rasmus Andersson, but would be wise not to use his noggin in battle again. He got a lucky break here.

The camera caught a bloody-faced Nic Dowd, scorer of the game-winning goal, shouting not-so-niceties across the ice after the final buzzer. Perhaps a promise for Game 2. After all the fracas, it's worth wondering if officials will be quicker to call penalties in Game 2 before things get out of hand.

Considering how this one played out, Utah won't be going anywhere without a fight.

Cooley writes his name into Utah's history books

Logan Cooley is known for his killer shot and his penchant for scoring against Vegas — he had four in a single game (including two empty-netters) against the Golden Knights back in November.

Late in the first period of Game 1 in Vegas, Cooley scored the biggest of them all when he potted the first playoff goal in Utah Mammoth history. That puck's a keeper.

The goal opened the scoring for the series, and the timing of it could've been a real momentum-shifter. But Vegas' experience ultimately shone through, the home team staying patient and keeping pace through the second period before a three-goal third to claim the 4-2 victory.

Kings contain Avalanche's stars, but Colorado's depth shines through

There are no moral victories in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, but it's hard not to look at the way the Los Angeles Kings approached Game 1 against the Colorado Avalanche and not see a few small victories within the 2-1 loss.

L.A. held Nathan MacKinnon to just a single assist, goal-less on three shots. Cale Makar and Martin Necas were kept off the scoresheet. Top-line winger (and noted playoff performer) Artturi Lehkonen opened the scoring for Colorado, and it was an unlikely hero who registered the game-winner: Logan O'Connor, who only made his season debut on Mar. 24 after missing most of the campaign with an injury. Sunday's goal was the first of his season.

Artemi Panarin's power-play goal with less than three minutes remaining in regulation was too little, too late for the Kings, but it might prove to be the shot in the arm the team needs to generate a bit more offence heading into Game 2.

Colorado's power play could be a sleeping giant

It certainly should be... but will it ever wake up? There were signs of life on Saturday as the Avalanche put on a passing clinic with the man advantage, but not in any way that mattered on the scoreboard.

In four power-play opportunities against the Los Angeles Kings' 30th-ranked penalty kill in Game 1 of their first-round series, Colorado couldn't capitalize. Cue the snooze button.

While the club's power-play issues didn't stop the home team from registering a 2-1 series-opening win, it's certainly a head-scratcher for a squad that boasts such dominant offensive numbers.



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The team that led the league in goals per game (3.63) and goal differential (plus-99) while posting a Presidents' Trophy-winning 121 points and boasting two 100-plus point-getters, finished the regular season with the 27th-ranked power play. That just doesn't compute.

Equally head-scratching is L.A.'s penalty kill rate in the regular season. The team's reputation for shut-down defensive play hasn't typically translated on special teams, but it was certainly on full display Sunday.

Meanwhile, it was the Kings' power play that got on the score sheet in this one, with Panarin breaking Scott Wedgewood's shutout bid with less than two minutes to go in regulation against Colorado's top-ranked PK unit.

Perhaps Colorado could take a few notes from the Canadiens...

Slafkovsky makes Tampa Bay pay for undisciplined penalties

No team took more penalties in the 2025-26 regular season than Tampa Bay, and it wasn't particularly close — the Lightning's 425 trips to the penalty box were 53 more than the next most-penalized team.

They didn't exactly change their ways in Sunday's series-opener against the Montreal Canadiens, and they paid a hefty price for it. Montreal went 3-for-5 with the man advantage for a 60 per cent success rate.

It should be noted, of course, that Montreal didn't go unscathed, either. They gave up a pair of power-play goals on five opportunities, the first of which brought the Lightning's offence to life — just 29 seconds after Darren Raddysh got Tampa Bay on the board midway through the second period with the man advantage, Brandon Hagel gave the Lightning a 2-1 lead.

But undisciplined play by Tampa Bay — a high-sticking minor for Conor Geekie late in the second, an interference call against Anthony Cirelli early in the third, and Jake Guentzel's high-sticking penalty that saw Tampa open overtime short-handed — got the best of the home team, and ultimately cost them a shot at opening Round 1 with a win.

It was Slafkovsky who came to collect, scoring all three power-play goals in Montreal's 4-3 overtime win. His hat trick was truly a heroic performance — and a historic one, too:

The Slovakian goal-scorer came up clutch, but in a game of details, head coach Martin St. Louis' decision to call a timeout just one minute into overtime might just be the most clutch move of all. It was easy to question the timing of it at first, with the OT period having just gotten underway. But it gave his top PP unit an opportunity to catch its breath and stay out — and we all saw how it paid off.

Buffalo wins series-opener in most Buffalo way possible

The stage was set for a celebration 15 years in the making as the Sabres hosted the Bruins for Game 1 of their first-round series. Fans showed up in droves, the festivities starting long before puck drop... and after all that, the Sabres were late to their own party.

Turns out, the Sabres were planning a surprise party — one in which they lulled home fans back into the familiar darkness of disappointment, only to set off fireworks 12 minutes into the third frame of a 3-0 game with four unanswered goals to claim the 4-3 win.

It was, for much of the matchup, a deeply flawed performance by Buffalo. But the win was so perfectly fitting for these Sabres. After the long wait, what's a few more periods, anyway?

It was historic: The three-goal, third-period surge was the first such comeback since Brad May led the Sabres to victory in April 1993. That win, too, was against the Bruins. What unfolded Sunday in Buffalo wasn't a series-clincher like the one that took place more than 30 years ago, but it was a "May Day!" moment for a new generation.

That Tage Thompson got the party started with Buffalo's first two goals to tie things up was fitting, too. He's been the team's offensive leader all

season and was a main driver of their first-place finish atop the Atlantic Division. The Sabres finished the season with the second-most goals by defencemen, and Mattias Samuelsson's go-ahead marker to take the lead was a perfect example of how Buffalo's blue liners have contributed all year. That hometown kid Alex Tuch's empty-net goal wound up serving as the game-winner was the perfect ending to what was a perfectly Sabres win.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers Notebook: Leon Draisaitl appears ready for Game 1 return

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — It's playoff time, so the Edmonton Oilers aren't telling us whether Leon Draisaitl — or Jason Dickinson — will play in Game 1 Monday evening against the Anaheim Ducks.

So if we can't have a doctor's clearance, a hockey writer's eye will have to do.

After consecutive practices centring Vasily Podkolzin and Kasperii Kapanen, Sportsnet.ca is declaring Draisaitl as highly likely to play in Game 1 against Anaheim. He looks ready, and has been skating hard since last Tuesday.

A week of pushing himself, and then being able to replicate or increase that workload the next day consistently, tells us his knee is ready for the rigours of playoff hockey.

"I feel good," a coy Draisaitl said after Sunday's practice. "We'll see how it feels tomorrow, and then we'll make a call from there.

"I know it's going to take me a couple games to really be myself, and that's okay," he added. "But it's just the best time of year. There's nothing like it: the atmosphere, the intensity of it, the meaning of it... The adrenaline takes a lot of pain away."

Dickinson skated with the team on Sunday for the first time since being hit with a shot in San Jose 12 days before. He took a regular turn at 3C Sunday between Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Jack Roslovic, and if he plays that means the Oilers would be 100 per cent healthy when the playoffs begin, missing only fourth-line winger Max Jones.

"Health throughout the playoffs is important, and the team that can stay the healthiest usually has a good chance," Connor McDavid said. "So you want to be healthy on Day 1, and we're getting closer and closer to that."

Draisaitl is such a big part of this team's DNA, and everyone knows it. He's the power play triggerman, jumps on to McDavid's wing when the situation calls for it, and come playoff time he produces right alongside No. 97, with 119 playoff points in the last five years to McDavid's 132.

He's a leader that players here have been following for some time now, especially come playoff time.

"He has an ability to raise his game to a whole other level," McDavid said. "We see that time and time again in the playoffs, a guy who battles through anything."

Game 1 Lines

Here's how the Oilers should set up in Game 1:



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Savoie-McDavid-Hyman

Podkolzin-Draisaitl-Kapanen

RNH-Dickinson-Roslovic

Dach-Henrique-Frederic

Ekholm-Bouchard

Nurse-Murphy

Walman-Emberson

Ingram

Quack in the foundation

If you could encapsulate the Oilers' advantage in experience over Anaheim in one paragraph, McDavid provided it when he was asked how much wiser he is today than on the eve of his first ever playoff run back in 2017:

"Just knowing what to expect. Knowing what it's going to feel like — the environment, the game, the pressures, the momentum swings," he said. "Playoffs is really a different game. It really is, and you have to understand all of that. This group has been through plenty of runs, played in plenty of big games and tomorrow's no different. It's a big game: Game 1 at home. A great opportunity to get off to a good start.

"But with that being said, we've got a big challenge in front of us: a really good, young, skilled, exciting, Ducks team that we've got to play hard. That we've got to be ready for, and we will be."

While Anaheim makes the playoffs for the first time in eight seasons, the Oilers have played 79 playoff games in the past five springs — with neither McDavid nor Draisaitl having missed any of them. That duo is one-two in playoff scoring over that span, but of course, there's one goal left to be accomplished: Winning a Stanley Cup.

Is there anything different about this team, as the journey begins, than any of the previous ones?

"One extra year of experience, that always helps," Draisaitl figured. "But at the end of the day, when the puck drops, both teams are going to go at it, both teams are going to try and establish their game. Every series, every game, every playoff run writes its own story and plays out differently."

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Earned the right to pillow fight

Yes, the Pacific was "a pillow fight," as McDavid dubbed it a little over a month ago. And, yes, the Oilers only had 93 points this season after four years of eclipsing the 100-point mark.

But as the playoffs open, all of that and about \$20 bucks will get you a beer at Rogers Place.

"We've earned the opportunity to be in this position. Pacific Division or not, we're here," McDavid declared on Sunday. "We're in the playoffs, and we have an opportunity to play a Game 1 (Monday), and I know this group is excited for it.

"The regular season has become a little bit monotonous for this group, and I think you see that through the day to day. But this is what we get excited for."

Head coach Kris Knoblauch has had to remain patient as his team stumbled and bumbled through most of the season. He gets it, but it will be nice now to have everyone's full focus and attention.

"It's a long season for any team in the NHL, but it's even longer when you've played as long as you have the last two years. To the end of June, and then a couple months (of rest), and you're back at it again," Knoblauch said. "I think everyone's excited, ready for this. It's been on their mind for a while.

"I think we've got another level."

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Sportsnet.ca / Sunday Overreactions: Jets need to overhaul top-heavy roster

Michael Amato

Among the teams that aren't participating in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Winnipeg Jets would have to be right near the top of the list for most disappointed.

The Jets captured the Presidents' Trophy a year ago and expectations were sky high heading into 2025-26. And why wouldn't they have been? Connor Hellebuyck was coming off a Hart Trophy win, and Winnipeg also boasted the likes of Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Josh Morrissey all playing at a very high level. Fans probably felt the Jets were much closer to the Cup than they were to missing the playoffs.

Individually, a lot went right for the Jets this year. Scheifele topped 100 points for the first time, Connor eclipsed 90 for the second straight season and Hellebuyck, despite a significant injury earlier in the campaign, ended up winning a gold medal with a signature performance at the Olympics. Even Gabriel Vilardi nearly hit the 70-point mark.

Collectively, though, the Jets couldn't get it together. Despite working their way back in the race down the stretch, they could never close the deal. Winnipeg lost its final four games of the season by a combined score of 24-7, punctuating a 34-point drop in the standings year over year.

Hellebuyck expressed his frustration at how this season unfolded for the Jets during locker cleanout on Friday and thinks changes are necessary.

"Complacency is not gonna get us moving forward," Hellebuyck said. "So, something's got to happen. To just put that same product on the ice. I just, I don't think it worked for a reason."

The Jets certainly have talent to build around, but in order to stay competitive in a tough Western Conference, Winnipeg needs a major shakeup throughout the rest of its roster.

Jets need significant roster change this off-season

One of the things that stands out from this Jets season is how their offence really dropped off outside the top line of Connor, Scheifele and Vilardi. After those three and Morrissey, their next highest scorer, Cole Perfetti, had just 32 points. Everyone else had less than 30. Last season, Perfetti was a 50-point scorer and the Jets had another five players who came in between 30-40 points. Not great, but a lot better than 2025-26.



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The offence also dried up on the power play this year, as Winnipeg finished with the league's 24th-best unit. Last year, it ranked first in the NHL in that department, clicking at nearly 29 per cent.

As talented as the top end of the Jets roster is, there's no way they can be a serious contender with this little secondary scoring. Brad Lambert showed some flashes down the stretch, but counting on the inexperienced 22-year-old for heavy offensive lifting in 2026-27 would be a big ask. They may have little choice but to explore some seismic moves this off-season to get back on track.

Overreaction? No

The Jets play in arguably the toughest division in the league, and you could make a case that Colorado, Dallas and Minnesota are three of the NHL's best teams. So you really need talent up and down your lineup to succeed in the Central. Nino Niederreiter and Alex Lafallo will continue to make a combined \$7.6 million next season and the duo is coming off a campaign where they produced a total of just 48 points together. Can they get off of either contract and look for an upgrade? Then there was the Gustav Nyquist experiment, which was a disaster. Nyquist tallied just one goal in 51 games and almost certainly won't be back. Jonathan Toews might, but he can't be counted on to be an offensive force at this point in his career.

That means the Jets will have to comb through a thin free-agent class or make trades to upgrade the roster. It's always challenging for Winnipeg to attract players, but it can promise those available on July 1st opportunities that not everyone can. The Jets could easily have three top-six forward spots open next season, and if they wanted to balance out the lines, they could potentially dangle the opportunity to play with Scheifele or Connor as an incentive to prospective free agents.

That's exactly what the Pittsburgh Penguins have done over the past year. The Pens signed Anthony Mantha and Parker Wotherspoon on cheap deals last summer and both have thrived in elevated roles. Then they traded for Yegor Chinakhov during the season, and he's taken off since arriving in Pittsburgh.

The Jets would be wise to follow a similar strategy to try and freshen up a lineup that's become stale. If they return with the status quo, it's going to be challenging for Winnipeg to avoid a similar fate to the one it endured in 2025-26.

Maple Leafs did enough to secure bottom-five pick

It was a disastrous season for the Toronto Maple Leafs, and there potentially wasn't even going to be a silver lining of a high draft pick at the end of it. The Leafs dealt their first-round pick to the Boston Bruins at last year's trade deadline with only top-five protection. Toronto didn't expect to be this bad this season, but here we are. The Maple Leafs managed to finish fifth from the bottom to at least give themselves a shot at keeping the pick through the lottery. They now have a 24.5 per cent chance at staying in the top five and an 8.5 per cent shot at picking first overall. Winning just five times in their final 25 games was enough to put themselves in a position to grab a franchise-altering player.

Overreaction? Yes

As well-positioned as the Leafs are, the chances of falling to sixth in the lottery are still 44 per cent, which would mean handing the pick over to the Bruins. Had it finished one spot lower, Toronto would've had a 60 per cent chance at keeping its pick and if it finished third worst, it would be guaranteed to keep it. Falling another two spots actually wouldn't have been that difficult, as both Calgary and the New York Rangers finished one point behind the Leafs, and Toronto would've ended up behind each of them due to having fewer regulation wins.

It could be an agonizing fate for Leafs fans if they lose the pick because the organization did absolutely nothing to assist in a drop down the standings. They continued to play top players heavy minutes, started Joseph Woll whenever they could and constantly pulled the goalie down

multiple goals with minutes left in games. In fact, in one particular 5-4 Leafs win against the Anaheim Ducks a couple of weeks ago, William Nylander played 23:35, posted four points and had eight shots. He sparked a third-period comeback to help pick up two points. Could five or six of those minutes have gone to a young player like Jacob Quillan instead?

The word tanking has a negative connotation, as some people might think teams are intentionally trying to lose. Instead, an organization like the Leafs should have been prioritizing player evaluation and development over picking up points in a lost season. You learn a lot about your young players and who could maybe have value next season, while also likely sacrificing a few points in the standings. A lack of direction could be really costly here to the Leafs, as it's not like if they drop one or two spots in the lottery, they'll still be getting an impact player. Toronto could either get a franchise cornerstone for the next decade in June or walk away empty-handed.

Panthers will be a Cup contender again next season

Not many people had the Florida Panthers missing the Stanley Cup Playoffs on their bingo card heading into the season. Things never got off on the right foot for the Panthers after captain Aleksander Barkov tore his ACL during training camp and everything snowballed from there. The injuries and three straight deep playoff runs took their toll, and it was evident the Panthers wouldn't be able to defend their title.

This very likely won't be the last we've heard of the Panthers, though. Florida still has a very formidable roster, and when healthy, it should again cruise to the post-season and challenge for another Stanley Cup. The rest of the Eastern Conference should be on notice and take advantage of this one-season reprieve where the Panthers are concerned.

Overreaction? No

Florida will be able to take advantage of a couple of benefits of missing the playoffs, which should allow it to come back stronger than ever. The first is the fact that it will get a long off-season to rest and recuperate for the first time in a few years. Playing into late June three years in a row can really wear a team down, especially for veteran players with the condensed schedule due to the 4-Nations Faceoff and Olympics over the past two seasons. That should allow the Panthers to hit the ground running at the start of next season with presumably no injuries to start 2026-27.

Additionally, because the Panthers are going to finish in the bottom 10 after the draft lottery, they should have a first-round pick to utilize. It was top-10 protected as part of the Seth Jones deal and the selection will give Florida a lot of flexibility heading into the off-season. They could choose to trade it for immediate help to their team or use it on a young talent to freshen up their roster.

If anyone thinks we've seen the last of the Panthers, they're likely headed for a rude awakening in 2026-27.

New York Rangers netminder Jonathan Quick put a bow on a storied career earlier this week, suiting up for his final game and sparking a couple of healthy debates online. Mostly surrounding whether he should be a Hall of Famer, which I firmly believe he should. He has a .910 career save percentage, more than 400 wins and helped the Los Angeles Kings to a pair of Stanley Cups. There was also a question of whether Quick is the best American goalie of all time. No other American goalie has as many wins as Quick, and only John Vanbiesbrouck has played more games. Plus, Quick has 20 more shutouts than the next closest U.S. netminder and also owns a Conn Smythe Trophy. So, it's a fair question to ask and Quick certainly does have a good case to be considered the best at his craft among his American peers.

Overreaction? Yes



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As good as Quick's career has been, I'd put him second on that list next to Hellebuyck. The Winnipeg Jets goalie boasts three Vezinas and a Hart Trophy, while also besting Quick's save percentage with a mark of .916. Not to mention that gold medal Hellebuyck led the U.S. to back in February with a performance for the ages. Hellebuyck is also only 65 wins back of Quick and still only 32, so he'll easily pass him barring something unforeseen happening. He also has a decent chance to catch Quick in shutouts as well by the time his career concludes. I'd say Quick is undoubtedly a Hall of Famer, but Hellebuyck is likely going to go down as the best American goaltender when all is said and done.

One of the more remarkable stories in the NHL this season was the Philadelphia Flyers storming back into the playoff race when it appeared they were surely going to miss out on the post-season once again. A major catalyst for their run has been Porter Martone, who joined the Flyers after finishing up his season at Michigan State. Martone has given Philly a huge boost with 10 points in nine games down the stretch, helping the Flyers finish third in the Metro and book a date with the rival Pittsburgh Penguins in the first round of the playoffs. The 19-year-old will still be eligible for the Calder next season and it might be fair to say he's the frontrunner as it stands now.

Overreaction? No

There's obviously a lot that's going to happen over the next year, but for now, how can you not have Martone right at the top of the list for next season's Calder? The point production stands out, but it's his confidence and aggressiveness with the puck that make him look savvy beyond his years. Martone fired five shots on goal in his first game and then followed that up with nine more in his second. He's averaged nearly four shots per game in his brief career and you can see the confidence building every night, something that should only grow with a bit of playoff experience this spring. He's off to a good start in that regard as well, notching the game-winning goal Saturday night against the Penguins.

Sure, maybe someone like Gavin McKenna, Ivar Stenberg or Chase Reid will burst on the scene next season to claim the award, but right now Martone has as good a chance as anyone to capture the Calder in 2027.

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