



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 22, 2026

The News & Observer

How a playoff veteran is setting just the right tone for the Carolina Hurricanes

By: Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour talks about the crazy ending to the Hurricanes-Senators Game 2 of the NHL Playoff series. By Justin Pelletier

Raleigh

William Carrier of the Carolina Hurricanes (Shopping Cart IconShop Canes Fan Gear) has a Stanley Cup championship ring, and he knows what it took to get it.

Physicality, for one thing. In the playoffs, it's about hitting and being hit. It's about the wear and tear those hits can have as a series stretches on and the bruises mount.

Carrier won a Cup with the Vegas Golden Knights in 2023, beating the Florida Panthers (Shopping Cart IconShop Panthers Fan Gear) in the Stanley Cup Final. He's now doing all he can to help the Hurricanes get a ring.

The Canes took a 2-0 series lead over the Ottawa Senators on Monday with a 3-2 double-overtime win decided on Jordan Martinook's goal. In the myriad statistics from the four-hour game was one that stood out: 12 hits by Carrier.

Twelve hits? It was a franchise record for a Hurricanes playoff game and came in the winger's 15:37 of ice time.

Not that it should be that surprising. Carrier, 31, was signed to a six-year, \$12 million free-agent contract by Carolina in 2024 to add hard-earned experience and more thump and sandpaper play to the lineup.

Ottawa left wing Fabian Zetterlund (20) is stopped by Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Alexander Nikishin (21) and left wing William Carrier (28) in the first overtime period of Game 2, on Monday, April 20, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Ottawa left wing Fabian Zetterlund (20) is stopped by Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Alexander Nikishin (21) and left wing William Carrier (28) in the first overtime period of Game 2, on Monday, April 20, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

"Everyone knows his style of play, which is obviously effective this time of year, or any time of year," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "But I think it ramps up more this time of year. And what's more critical is he's been through this many times and he knows what it takes to get to the finish line."

And what does it take to get to that line and raise the Cup?

"It's a marathon, right?" Carrier said in an N&O interview. "It's a marathon but you have to do it shift to shift. That's the key. Any one shift can be the difference and you have to make sure every shift counts. And if you have a bad one, put it behind you, go back to work and win the next shift."

"A perfect game doesn't exist in the playoffs. It's all about mistakes, and the team that makes the less mistakes usually ends up winning. That's why every shift has to count."

"Any little detail, on any one play, can make the whole difference. It could be on the first play of the game, it could be the last play of the game. It could be a penalty, could be anything. You've just got to stay focused."

Part of the Canes' playoff focus has been on matching any degree of physicality the Senators want to present. In Game 1, Sens captain Brady Tkachuk challenged Canes captain Jordan Staal to drop the gloves after the opening faceoff. Staal did and Tkachuk may have second-guessed his decision as Staal got in the heaviest shots.

Ottawa left wing Brady Tkachuk (right) mixes it up with Carolina Hurricanes center Jordan Staal 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 (right) mixes it up with Carolina Hurricanes center Jordan Staal 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

Carrier was limited to about seven minutes of playing time and had three hits in a game that had Carolina credited with 57. But he was constantly on the move and checking with a purpose in Game 2, making a bigger impact. He made his 22 shifts count.

Midway through the second overtime, Carrier hammered defenseman Nikolas Matinpalo into the boards in the Sens zone as Matinpalo played the puck. Matinpalo was momentarily left on all fours on the ice, his helmet askew, after the collision with No. 28 in black.

It wasn't quite like the hit Carrier landed on forward Marc Gatcomb of the New York Islanders in the April 4 game at Lenovo Center. That one turned Gatcomb upside down and had him on his head for a split-second.

"He's been great for us," general manager Eric Tulsy said Tuesday. "The way we play, we spend a lot of time battling teams, winning puck battles along the wall. The D comes down and pinches and jams things up and you need someone who can come in and dislodge it."

"He can do that. He brings a lot pressure. He brings a lot of physicality. He makes us harder to play against and makes it a long night for the other team's defensemen. That's part of what we want to do and part of how we play."

Carrier isn't a big point producer, nor was he expected to be. He had seven goals and 11 assists in the regular season, averaging 10:45 in ice time per game. Playing on Mark Jankowski's line with Eric Robinson, the 6-2, 214-pound winger has given Brind'Amour and the Canes a dependable, hard-working fourth line.



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The best-of-seven Eastern Conference series now moves to Ottawa, where Games 3 and 4 will be played at Canadian Tire Centre, in the suburb of Kanata. Game 3 is Thursday, allowing both teams a little extra time to recover from Monday's marathon.

The Canes, making their eighth straight playoff appearance, have won the opening series in each of the past seven years. Asked if playoff experience can be the difference, Carrier quickly nodded.

"Oh, a lot," he said. "It's a whole different game and everyone knows it."



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The Athletic

NHL playoff breakouts: 6 players opening eyes with their postseason performance

By: Shayna Goldman

It took Porter Martone less than two weeks to generate buzz around the NHL — and just two postseason appearances to make history, as the first teenager to score back-to-back game-winners in his first two playoff games.

Martone jumped into NHL action when his season ended with Michigan State and made an immediate impact in Philadelphia with 10 primary points in nine games. He added a spark off the rush and moved the needle offensively with his slot-driving play to give this team a much-needed boost.

The Flyers ranked 25th in the league with 2.79 all-situations goals per 60 before Martone made his debut; since then, that has jumped to 10th, at a pace of 3.71 per 60.

It's not like the Flyers eased Martone in, either. He joined the team in the thick of a playoff race and was thrown into some tough matchups off the bat, like head-to-head minutes against Dylan Larkin and David Pastrnak. While small samples can skew outcomes, the Flyers did suppress scoring chances and goals against in his minutes down the stretch.

And that has quickly translated to a high-pressure playoff environment.

Breaking out in the regular season is one thing, but the Stanley Cup Playoffs are a different animal. What works in the regular season doesn't always break through in that environment, so when someone makes a statement there, it's all the more impactful.

It's where players can make a name for themselves, just like Wyatt Johnston did in Dallas in 2023. That's exactly what Martone and a few other rising talents are starting to do in the early goings of this postseason.

In Martone's first Stanley Cup playoff shift, he gained the offensive zone and set up a Christian Dvorak chance. Later, in the third, his screen helped Travis Sanheim get one past Stuart Skinner to pull ahead.

Then, with less than three minutes to go, he scored what became the game-winner. Martone picked up a loose puck in the neutral zone and skated it in. He was calm under pressure from Noel Acciari and spun away to create some space for himself.

That difference-making energy carried in Game 2, where he scored another game-winner to give the Flyers a 2-0 lead.

That scoring has obviously been incredibly clutch and has pushed Philadelphia to a 2-0 lead on the road. But his play without the puck has been key, too, especially in his matchup minutes against Sidney Crosby. The Flyers may not be generating a ton of quality offense in that time in those 10 head-to-head minutes, but they are limiting the Penguins to just 0.56 expected goals.

With that all-around play, Martone is quickly breaking out as a real top-six threat in Philadelphia. Here's who else is joining him around the league.

Juraj Slafkovský, Montreal Canadiens

Slafkovský has always been a gamer in big moments. It's what raised his draft profile in 2022 after thriving at the Olympics. It just took some time to develop at a consistent level in the NHL.

This season, Slafkovský really put the pieces together; he went from being a passenger alongside the Canadiens' best to becoming a real threat, who made more puck touches in all three zones, and found the balance between his dangerous passing and all-around offensive skill with his size and physical attributes. His play in Milan was a reminder of that next gear he can bring when the pressure rises, with another difference-making performance for Slovakia.

And now, the Canadiens are experiencing that when it matters most.

Montreal got a glimpse of that last spring, when Slafkovský put up two goals in five games against the Capitals and was a strong source of quality offense. It only took him one game versus the Lightning to surpass that on the scoresheet.

Slafkovský was the difference in Game 1 on Sunday, with a hat trick that powered the underdogs to an early series lead. First, with a one-timer from the right circle, set up by a cross-seam pass from Ivan Demidov on the advantage to tie the game 2-2:

Then, the go-ahead goal in the third period: another power play one-timer, this time from the center lane, set up by Cole Caufield. But Slafkovský wasn't done yet. On his 11th unblocked shot of the game, he completed the hat trick and clinched the Game 1 win with another power play goal, scored from the left circle.

Slafkovský led the game with those 11 unblocked shots, worth a game-high 1.00 expected goals for. Between his scoring and physicality, it was the kind of performance that highlighted just how much his game has evolved over the years.

While he wasn't as effective on Tuesday night in Game 2, Slafkovský has proven throughout the year that there is a lot of Big Game Play left in the tank — making him one of the breakout players to watch this spring.

Logan Stankoven, Carolina Hurricanes

Stankoven gained some playoff seasoning in Dallas and Carolina. And while he's had some moments, he had been more of a secondary contributor over the last couple of years — until this spring.



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Stankoven had an absolutely dominant Game 1 against Ottawa. At five-on-five, the team went up 19-5 in shot attempts, 2-0 in scoring, and earned a 93 percent xG rate in his minutes. Stankoven's seven shot attempts and overall efforts helped contribute to 2.17 of the Canes' 3.16 expected goals at five-on-five.

That was key for a team that surprisingly struggled to get pucks on net early; it was Stankoven's chances late in the first that gave the team a spark. And it was his goal that opened the scoring in the second.

After earning two primary points on the Canes' goals on Saturday, he saved a goal in Game 2 that almost slipped over the line (and likely would have changed the tone of the game early), and added another of his own.

While his Game 2 wasn't as strong — he had a couple of lapses and a dicey turnover along the way — his play still helped give Carolina an edge. And there are signs there is more to come, if his play down the stretch is any indication.

Stankoven, in so many ways, is an ideal fit for the Canes' system, with his forechecking ability and his ability to give this team more dimension with his play in transition. But scoring seven goals and 11 all-situations points in eight games down the stretch showed he has more of an offensive punch to offer. Through two playoff games, he is building off of that.

Matt Savoie, Edmonton Oilers

Not every breakout candidate has popped off on the scoresheet just yet. In the Oilers' opening game, Leon Draisaitl's line stole the show. But Savoie is a potential X-factor to keep an eye on moving forward.

The Oilers experimented with Savoie all over the top nine in the first half of the season, but he only mustered 18 points in his first 58 games. A move to Connor McDavid's wing after the Olympics helped unlock his offense.

Shocker, playing with the best player in the world, who went on a tear in the last two months of the season to solidify the Oilers' playoff standing, helped Savoie turn things around, right? The McDavid factor is massive here because his MVP-caliber play generally elevates everyone around him. But it does take a lot to actually keep up and complement him, and the rookie did that down the stretch.

McDavid's puck-moving play was on another level this season; his transition game and playmaking pushed Savoie to shoot the puck more and set him up for more scoring chances. His production, unsurprisingly, jumped. As a result, he scored 19 points in 24 games in all situations, and upped his five-on-five pace by plus-1.62 points per 60 from his first 58 games. But McDavid also scored more with Savoie; his highest pace came in those 337 shared minutes, with 3.03 points per 60. Post-Olympics, this duo outscored opponents 13-7 and earned a 53 percent xG rate.

So while the McDavid line wasn't as noticeable in Game 1 against the Ducks, he isn't someone opponents can contain for long, especially in the playoffs. As McDavid raises the bar, Savoie should keep growing on his wing. He could break out similarly to Vasily Podkolzin, who excelled on Draisaitl's line last postseason.

Jesper Wallstedt, Minnesota Wild

As much as teams rotate in the regular season, most playoff teams name one starter and stick with them, barring disaster or injury. Filip Gustavsson seemed like the likely choice for a few reasons: he started more games this year, actually got a few consecutive starts post-Olympics to gear up for a playoff workload, and has the experience.

Wallstedt had zero Stanley Cup playoff experience heading into Game 1. He didn't have any true 1A starting experience at the NHL level, either.

But he has the better track record this season and the right playing style for this opening matchup.

When accounting for the differences in minutes played, Wallstedt earned a GSAX of 0.40 per 60, compared to Gustavsson's 0.08. And he gave his team a chance to win with more quality starts down the stretch, while Gustavsson only mustered three in his last 10 starts.

In Game 1, Wallstedt proved his coaches right with 1.66 goals saved above expected against 35 unblocked shots. And while his Game 2 was slightly below average relative to his (tougher) workload, he still came up with some key saves to maintain the starter's role for Game 3 — like this third-period stop on Jason Robertson to keep it a one-goal game.

While Jakub Dobeš had the chance to prove that he is The Guy in Montreal before the playoffs started, this is Wallstedt's chance to prove that he has the chops to not only play a starting role but be the difference in net for Minnesota.

Zach Benson, Buffalo Sabres

Every team needs players who can help it reach the postseason. But teams also need guys who can grind it out in a playoff atmosphere. Players who can elevate their scoring, bring a clutch factor, and stir things up. And that's even more important for a team that relies heavily on a rush-based attack.

The Sabres thrive in transition, but need players who turn those entries into sustained offensive pressure: tenacious forecheckers who can retrieve pucks, pressure along the boards, and do the little things to support Buffalo's star talent.

It's something that Josh Doan and Zach Benson both excel at. Doan is a great puck retriever, which pairs so well with his high-end skill. Benson, on the other hand, brings a lot of two-way skill and pestiness to the lineup built for a playoff environment. Pair them up, and it makes for a second line that should be able to agitate opponents.

Benson has already mixed it up with the Bruins through two games, but there's still another level to unlock. His combination of skill and pesky play can be incredibly frustrating to go up against, and in a middle-six capacity (compared to a fourth-line role at times this season), he has a lot more opportunity to play into that. Channeling that against Boston, and potentially beyond, could make him the type of playoff player most teams want in their supporting cast.

Honorable mentions: Logan Cooley, Sam Malinski, Jakub Dobeš



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2026 NHL playoff pressure rankings: Which teams can't afford to lose?

By: Sean McIndoe

Edmonton Oilers forward Connor McDavid and Colorado Avalanche forward Nathan MacKinnon battle in a faceoff.

Nathan MacKinnon and the Avalanche, plus Connor McDavid and the Oilers, are facing pressure this postseason. Perry Nelson / Imagn Images

It's the Stanley Cup playoffs, and the pressure is intense. But pressure comes in different forms for different teams in different circumstances. Some teams have regular pressure, while others have capital-P Pressure. Some teams go all caps and break out the fancy fonts.

You get the picture. It's time for our annual playoff pressure rankings, where we count down from the teams that would prefer to win to those that have no other option.

16. Anaheim Ducks

The Ducks are a classic example of a low-pressure playoff team. Sure, it would be nice to win a round or two, and the ultimate goal is to win all four. But this is a young team that (almost) nobody thought would get anywhere near the postseason, and they almost finished first in the division.

Unfortunately, their reward for a stunning season was to draw the two-time conference champs, so what are you going to do? Lose, probably, and that's OK, because just getting a chance to play winner-take-all hockey against Connor McDavid will pay off in a year or two when this team is ready to really contend.

If they lose early, it will be ... an unexpected chance for a young team to earn valuable experience for the real thing.

15. Boston Bruins

The Bruins weren't supposed to be in the running for much this year beyond a high draft pick, and I guess you could call that mission accomplished. But Marco Sturm and Don Sweeney somehow found a skip button for the rebuilding montage and got right back to the playoffs, stunning just about everyone. They rank a bit higher than the Ducks, because they're a bit older, the market's a bit more demanding, and they aren't facing a team with a ton of recent playoff success, to put it mildly. But it's the same basic scenario.

If they lose early, it will be ... the start of a fascinating discussion about where they go from here.

14. Utah Mammoth

The first playoff run in the market's NHL history is off to a so-so start against a tough opponent. You never get a second chance to make a first impression and all that, but the novelty of witnessing playoff hockey should outweigh the disappointment of an early exit for Utah fans ... for now. If the league's newest team exits early against its third-newest team, all they have to do is look at the team in the middle for a reminder of how future success isn't promised.

If they lose early, it will be ... a missed opportunity, albeit hardly a shocking one.

13. Philadelphia Flyers

Nobody had them as a playoff team. Certainly not at the start of the season, and not even in mid-March, when it seemed like they'd need a miracle to make a push. Yet here they are, not only earning the East's last spot but now threatening to roll over the Pittsburgh Penguins. It's a similar situation to the Ducks and Bruins, but two things put Philadelphia ahead: Their matchup looks far more winnable on paper, and it's against a hated rival.

If they lose early, it will be ... a tough-to-swallow collapse given how the first two games have gone, not to mention a missed opportunity to perhaps spell the end of Sidney Crosby's playoff career.

12. Montreal Canadiens

The Canadiens continue to be the model for a modern NHL rebuild, increasing their season point total by 15 for the second straight year. Cole Caufield scored 50 and almost won the Rocket Richard, while Nick Suzuki had 100 points in what will be a Selke-winning year. It wasn't enough to win a surprisingly good Atlantic, but that step almost feels inevitable at this point. Any questions about whether Montreal's core had a high enough ceiling to truly contend seem to have been firmly answered.

Will it sting if they lose to the Lightning? Sure. But we're not quite in must-win territory with this team yet. (But check back next year.)

If they lose early, it will be ... a screeching stop to a season that's been all sorts of fun.

11. Buffalo Sabres

The Sabres are already the league's best story, and even an early exit wouldn't undo that. But would it dampen it? Sure. And worse, it would feed into the whole "Buffalo can't have nice things" sports storyline that's been decades in the making. In other words, a loss to the Bruins wouldn't be a disaster, but it would be yet another kick in the gut to a fan base that's become sadly used to them.

If they lose early, it will be ... a disappointing end to a thrilling season. Still a net positive, sure, but one that will tarnish the story at least a bit.

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10. Los Angeles Kings

Nothing takes the pressure off quite like a classic "nobody believes in us" narrative, and in the case of the Kings' matchup with the Avalanche, it seems to be quite literally true. In theory, that means the Kings' hopes are already dead, and anything they can do against Colorado is a bonus. But then you remember that this team has lost in the first round each of the last four years, and hasn't won a round at



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all since 2014. Oh, and they traded futures for a 35-year-old winger before the deadline.

If they're not rebuilding and they're not contending, what are they? That's the question in Los Angeles, and it's only going to get louder unless they can shock us all with an upset. Or at least by putting up a bit of a fight.

If they lose early, it will be ... five years in a row of making the playoffs without scaring anyone at all, which may be worse than missing them altogether.

9. Ottawa Senators

The Sens deserve credit for even making the playoffs after nearly having their season torpedoed by historically bad goaltending, and they emerged as an inspiring story down the stretch. So far, they're giving the mighty Hurricanes all they can handle. But losses are still losses, and the magic number here is two: as in the 2-0 hole they're in heading into Game 3, and as in the back-to-back first-round exits they'll have posted if they can't turn this around. (And also for the number of overtime goals they gave up in Game 2, but we'll move on.)

For a team that's always had questions about how high their ceiling is, just sneaking into a wild-card spot won't be enough for much longer.

If they lose early, it will be ... easier to swallow than losing a series to the hated Leafs, while still raising questions about how to find a higher level.

Sidney Crosby stands next to goalie Arturs Silovs during warmups before a Penguins game.

Could this be Sidney Crosby's last shot to play in the postseason? Justin Berl / Getty Images

8. Pittsburgh Penguins

They weren't supposed to be here. They were supposed to be tanking, at least according to the consensus outside Pittsburgh heading into the season. But Dan Muse must have missed that memo, and Crosby apparently decided he wasn't missing the playoffs again. So here they are, with all sorts of "last dance" energy. Oh, and a very winnable matchup against a just-happy-to-be-here Flyers team ... we thought.

If they lose early, it will be ... the end of an era?

Watch

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How the Penguins became the NHL's best Cinderella story

Harman Dayal

7. Minnesota Wild

They didn't have a perfect season, but in terms of what you would have hoped for as a Wild fan back in October, they checked almost every box. And that's not counting the Quinn Hughes trade, which was the move that transformed them from good to great in a lot of eyes. An early exit after all of that, in the last year before Kirill Kaprizov's bargain deal nearly doubles, would be a major disappointment.

And yes, they're victims of the NHL's playoff format. But not to the extent it once seemed — they finished seventh overall, ending up closer in total points to the Flyers and Penguins than to the Stars, and don't even own the best record of teams that started the playoffs on the road. In other words, this isn't third overall, having to play the second overall like it once seemed. When you finish third in your own division, you're going to have a tough matchup in the first round. And if you lose that matchup, you weren't really a Cup contender.

If they lose early, it will be ... a tough sell to blame it on the playoff format.

6. Vegas Golden Knights

The Golden Knights followed a 110-point season by landing last year's biggest offseason prize, and went into the season looking like elite Cup contenders. Then they lost more games than they won for the first time in franchise history, costing their head coach his job in the process. A late surge let them win the Pacific pillow fight by default, and for a lot of teams, that might be enough. The Golden Knights are absolutely not one of those teams.

If they lose early, it will be ... a potential firing offense for everyone involved. As always.

5. Carolina Hurricanes

In a year where almost nothing went as expected in the East, the Hurricanes are the reason for that "almost" qualifier. They breezed to a 113-point season that was quietly the second-best in the league. (Yes, better than Dallas or any of the Atlantic teams.) But as impressive as all that was, none of it will matter much if they can't do some real damage in the playoffs.

In Carolina's case, that means a trip to the Cup final, if not a championship. That's a big ask of any team, but it's the reality for this one, as the Hurricanes start their playoff journey having won a round or two (but never more) in each of the last eight seasons. Most teams would love to have that kind of track record, but eventually it just translates to even more pressure.

If they lose early, it will be ... a step back for a team that's already developing a reputation for shrinking when the spotlight gets brightest.

4. Dallas Stars

Hey, remember when the Stars went all the way to the conference final last year for the third season in a row, then fired their coach because only winning two rounds just wasn't good enough anymore? I bet Glen Gulutzan does.

If they lose early, it will be ... validation for Pete DeBoer, another strike against the playoff format, and yet more evidence for those who believe this team, as good as they are, will never be able to outlast the big dogs.

3. Colorado Avalanche

They were the best team in the regular season by some margin. They've got an easy matchup in the opening round, followed by whoever manages to crawl away from the Stars/Wild slugfest, followed by the winner of the weakest division in hockey. And after this, there's only one year left before Cale Makar's new deal starts, which could shatter records and make their cap math very tricky.



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So ... If not now, when?

If they lose early, it will be ... further proof that the regular season barely matters anymore. Oh, and a crushing disappointment for a core that's talented enough to have multiple Cup titles by now.

2. Tampa Bay Lightning

After a slow start — remember when they were 1-4-2 and we all wondered if the window was finally closed? — the Lightning eventually found the gas pedal and roared up the standings. They couldn't quite seal the deal as far as top seed in the Atlantic, but that was OK because they still earned home ice against a team without anywhere near their playoff experience. The path is clear: Take a few rounds to teach the division's young punks some lessons about postseason pedigree, then on to face Carolina for a trip back to the final.

And sure, maybe it still works out that way. But the Habs don't seem like they want to be an easy out, and then you find yourself realizing that a first-round exit would be Tampa's fourth in a row. And then you start wondering if that window is shutting after all ...

If they lose early, it will be ... more than a little disconcerting to realize that the Rangers, Kraken and Canucks have all won a playoff round more recently than the Lightning have.

1. Edmonton Oilers

I know Oilers fans are sick of hearing it. And yes, some of the "McDavid surely has one foot out the door" stories are

just the product of jealous media and fan bases in other markets.

Some. But not all.

As much as Oilers fans can roll their eyes at the bad-faith McDavid narratives from around the league, that doesn't mean that this situation isn't both relatively unique and crucially important to the future of the franchise. This piece captured it accurately, and all the comment section meltdowns in the world won't change that.

Even if you ignore McDavid's short-term contract and convince yourself he won't ever want to leave, you're still left with a team built around two megastars who are exiting their primes. Draisaitl is already 30. McDavid will be next January. It's not now-or-never, or even all that close. But this team left the 2020 bubble looking as if they were staring down a decade of limitless possibilities. That decade is more than half over.

Mix in Kris Knoblauch, whose job might be on the line after McDavid's recent Jon Cooper comparison, and Stan Bowman's bungling of a Stuart Skinner trade, and the pressure goes up and down the entire organization.

The Oilers were the top team on this list in 2024, then dropped a few spots last year after their first trip to the final showed progress. But I'm not really sure there's even a case for anyone else being ahead of them this year.

If they lose early, it will be ... a disaster.



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Martinook's Moment, Canes' Resilience Spark Chaotic Game 2 Victory

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

"It's just staying with the grind and believing in what we're doing and trusting the process..."

RALEIGH, N.C. - On more than one occasion, both the Carolina Hurricanes and Ottawa Senators certainly thought Game 2 was wrapped up in their favor.

Between the Senators' shots that found iron and the Hurricanes' would-be winner that was cancelled out upon review, chance after chance at either end could have ended Monday's contest well before it began approaching Tuesday.

An emotional roller coaster until the finish line, it was Jordan Martinook's moment of redemption that ultimately sent the Lenovo Center faithful home happy at 11:41 p.m. ET — nearly four hours after the first puck drop — and brought his team halfway to advancing to Round 2 of the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Go inside the Canes' chaotic 3-2 double-overtime win over the Ottawa Senators in Game 2

Third Time's The Charm...

Expectedly, it was elation inside Lenovo Center when Mark Jankowski put home Seth Jarvis' rebound with 2:42 remaining in the first overtime. The bench emptied, joining the six skaters on the ice to celebrate for a moment of joy.

A release of tension after coming back from their squandered two-goal lead, the bliss was, unfortunately, short-lived. As is the case with any team conceding a goal in overtime, players and staff on the potential losing side immediately huddled around the monitors to look for any potential evidence indicating it was an illegal play.

In the Stanley Cup Playoffs, all goals scored beyond regulation are reviewed by the NHL's Situation Room in Toronto. 3:59 of real-time elapsed between Jankowski's putback and referee Furman South announcing that the playoff was offside, but to those with vested interest in the result, it felt like an eternity.

Amid the nearly four minutes, Martinook was alerted that if the goal wouldn't count, he would still be taking a penalty shot because he'd been hooked by Warren Foegele following the initial zone entry — the initial reasoning for the delayed penalty and Jankowski being on the ice in the first place.

While Martinook may not be an early choice in shootouts during the regular season (two attempts in 37 career

shootout games), a penalty shot in overtime was actually a position he'd been in before. Converting during the 2023 postseason in New Jersey, the veteran tried to channel the same execution as then, only to be on the wrong end of yet another one of Linus Ullmark's great saves from the night.

"I didn't feel very good about myself after that penalty shot, and that intermission felt very long," Martinook candidly admitted post-game.

But poetically enough, it wasn't the last opportunity the hockey gods would afford the Canes' alternate captain that night. Just over six minutes before a third overtime was necessary, a shuffle to the slot from Nikolaj Ehlers put the puck on Martinook's tape, and sent the Raleigh crowd into jubilation, this time ending their night for sure.

"I'd be lying if I said I picked my head up and looked and picked the corner. At that point, you're just trying to put as many pucks on (net) that you can," Martinook explained. "I felt like we kind of had them on the run a little bit. Fly made a great play to the middle, and I just ripped it. Luckily, it went in."

Been Here Before...

There's a certain element of perseverance required to go through the roller coaster of that game without caving in.

Much like when one team has had all the penalties called against them in a contest, the law of averages often indicates that the other side is bound to be dinged for one eventually.

They also say hockey is a game of bounces, and make no mistake, the Canes got theirs last night. The posts behind Frederik Andersen are owed a great deal of thanks.

Yet, when Jankowski's goal was disallowed, Martinook's penalty shot did not fall, and Ottawa continued surging forward, there was no wavering in belief. The group stuck with their game plan and were ultimately rewarded.

"It's not getting squirrely. It's just staying with the grind and believing in what we're doing and trusting the process," captain Jordan Staal reasoned. "Guys did that tonight, and it paid off. Sometimes it doesn't, but tonight it did."

Part of their ability to do so is rooted in lessons learned over their previous seven postseason runs. While not every player on the current roster has been here for all seven, Martinook is one of the four who have been, and seeing him earn his redemption and emerge as the hero meant a lot to his head coach.



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"We've been through a lot, obviously. This is just another thing to add," Rod Brind'Amour said, post-game. "We make it exciting, that's for sure. We've got a lot to look back on and say, 'Wow.' That was another one of those games. I'm just happy for Marty. He's been one of those guys [who has been here for a while]. It's nice to see him get that recognition for a game like that."

What's Next?

If "Carolina now heads on the road with a 2-0 series lead" feels familiar, it's not just you. Entering the 2026 postseason, the Canes were one of just four teams in NHL history to own a 2-0 lead in their first best-of-seven battle across five consecutive postseasons.

Now? They're the only team that's done it in six straight years, another example of the kind of consistency that's been unique to Carolina under Rod Brind'Amour.

The flipside, of course, is that two wins only get you part of the way to the next leg of the journey. It'll take two more for the Hurricanes to extend their streak of winning at least one playoff round to eight straight campaigns, and a stiff test awaits north of the border on Thursday.

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) | Time TBD | [How To Watch](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Parking](#)



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Senators must rely on 'mental fortitude' to climb back into East 1st Round

By: Stan Fischler

Capable of becoming unlikely underdog that can surprise like 1938 champion Black Hawks

Legendary hockey reporter Stan Fischler writes a weekly scrapbook for NHL.com. "The Hockey Maven" shares his humor and insight with readers each Wednesday. With the Stanley Cup Playoffs in full swing, this week focuses on the fascinating Eastern Conference First Round between the Carolina Hurricanes and Ottawa Senators.

Though the Carolina Hurricanes entered as a heavy favorite against the Ottawa Senators in the Eastern Conference First Round, history has shown that the most unlikely underdogs can surprise.

Though the "Caniacs," those rabid hockey fans in the Carolinas, are enjoying that sweet smell of success with the Hurricanes leading the best-of-7 series 2-0, the Senators could take back momentum in Game 3 at Canadian Tire Centre on Thursday (7:30 p.m. ET; CBC, TVAS, SN, TBS, FDSNSO, HBO MAX). They stood toe-to-toe with the Hurricanes through 33:53 of overtime in Game 2 before losing 3-2. With Ottawa goalie Linus Ullmark partially screened, Carolina left wing Jordan Martinook scored at 13:53 of the second overtime.

"(Heck) of a game," Senators forward Drake Batherson said. "Quite the turn of events there with the no goal and the penalty shot. I think both teams played great and it was a great game."

Senators at Hurricanes | Recap

Travis Green, the Senators imperturbable coach, entered the series seeing a silver lining behind the clouds. Ottawa went 16-5-4 after the break for the 2026 Winter Olympics to finish 44-27-11 and clinch the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the East.

"Mental fortitude has been huge for this group," Green told NHL.com before Game 1. "Based on the kind of season we've had, my job has been to keep them on the racetrack, keeping them at a high level."

Nobody had to tell Green why Carolina has been listed as a potential Cup favorite along with the Colorado Avalanche and Dallas Stars, among others.

"Of course the Canes are tough," he said. "To win this series we've got to play our aggressive 200-foot game, hunt and check, physical fast hockey and raise our game."

TNT analyst Eddie Olczyk predicted that the Hurricanes will reach the Stanley Cup Final. They had the best record in the East (53-22-7) and were second in the NHL with 113 points behind the Avalanche (121) thanks to a core of Sebastian Aho, Andrei Svechnikov, Seth Jarvis, K'Andre Miller, Nikolaj Ehlers and Jaccob Slavin, just to name a few.

"The time is now for Carolina," Olczyk said. "It's right there for them, there are no excuses. In Rod Brind'Amour, they have one of the best coaches. They've got checking lines, scorers, defensive defensemen."

Green and the Senators should be encouraged by a rare feat pulled off by the Chicago Black Hawks in the 1938 Stanley Cup Final, when an under-.500 team overcame defeated the favored Toronto Maple Leafs for a landmark upset.

"When the playoffs began in April 1938, the other clubs wondered why we were even there," Black Hawks executive Bill Tobin said. "Few teams in major league sport could have entered with fewer credentials."

For starters, they were the only one of the six qualifying teams to have less than a .500 record (14-25 with nine ties). Their first-round opponent were the Montreal Canadiens (18-17 with 13 ties) with two games of the best-of-3 series at the Montreal Forum.

No problem. Although the Canadiens won 6-4 in Game 1, the Black Hawks took the next two 4-0 and 3-2 in overtime. And if that wasn't amazing enough, they were being coached by a National League baseball umpire, Bill Stewart.

"And for the first time in history, Chicago's lineup was sprinkled with American-born players," wrote former NHL referee Paul Stewart -- Bill's grandson -- in his autobiography "Do You Wanna Go?"

Until that time it was rare to have a single United States-born skater on a roster.

Next up were the New York Americans after they eliminated the New York Rangers. The Amerks also had the advantage with two out of the three games at Madison Square Garden. Once again, Chicago dropped the opener but rallied to



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capture the next two and reach the Final against the Maple Leafs.

Once again, it appeared as if the Black Hawks were out of their league. The Maple Leafs (24-15 with nine ties) won the Canadian Division with 57 points. Chicago was third in the American Division, 20 points behind Toronto.

To everyone's astonishment, the Black Hawks won the best-of-5 series 3-1. When the ecstatic Chicago players sought out the Stanley Cup, they finally realized what an upset they had pulled off.

"NHL president Frank Calder had earlier caused the trophy to be shipped to Toronto," wrote Edward Burns in the Chicago Tribune, "reportedly on the assurance that a hockey

team which harbored eight American-born players, as did the Hawks, couldn't possibly win the Stanley Cup!"

With that in mind, Olczyk offered an asterisk regarding the unpredictable Senators.

"I won't be surprised if Ottawa wins because I've liked the Senators for a while, but for the Senators to beat (the Hurricanes) would be an upset, 100 percent."

After losing Game 2, Green said, "Playoffs are hard sometimes. When you lose, they sting sometimes."

Then a pause:

"This one is going to sting."

LINKS

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SportScan

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

1388352 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes' OT goal against Ottawa in Game 2 was redemption for Jordan Martinook

Chip Alexander 8-10 minutes 21/04/2026

Carolina Hurricanes took a 2-0 lead in the series after Martinook's second-OT goal.

Officials disallowed apparent winner, ruling Staal offside when crossing the blue line.

In the Stanley Cup playoffs, players are forever talking about being able to handle the highs and lows that inevitably come with the pressure-filled games.

With that in mind, think about Jordan Martinook of the Carolina Hurricanes.

With the Canes and Ottawa Senators locked up in Game 2 of their first-round playoff series Monday, Martinook had a chance to win it on a penalty shot late in a first overtime at Lenovo Center. Denied and

dejected after being stopped, the forward then gave the Canes a 3-2 win with a goal at 13:53 of the second OT.

Taking a pass in the slot from Nikolaj Ehlers, Martinook whipped a shot through traffic that Sens goalie Linus Ullmark, who had made some sensational stops in the game, could not see with Canes captain Jordan Staal setting a 6-foot-4 screen.

Just like that the Canes had a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven series, which now goes to Ottawa for the next two games.

Carolina Hurricane left wing Jordan Martinook (48) celebrates with Sean Walker (26), Taylor Hall and fellow teammates after scoring the game winning goal in the second overtime to secure a 3-2 victory over Ottawa in Game 2 on Monday, April 20, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricane left wing Jordan Martinook (48) celebrates with Sean Walker (26), Taylor Hall and fellow teammates after scoring the game winning goal in the second overtime to secure a 3-2 victory over Ottawa in Game 2 on Monday, April 20, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

"I didn't feel very good about myself after that penalty shot," Martinook said after the hard-fought game. "It was going to be a long night if that penalty shot came back to bite me."



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The penalty shot came after an odd sequence that had many shaking their heads. Martinook broke free up the middle of the Sens zone, took a pass up from Staal and was going in alone on Ullmark when he was hooked from behind by Sens forward Warren Foegele.

Ottawa Senators goalie Linus Ullmark (35) stops a scoring attempt by Carolina Hurricanes left wing Jordan Martinook (48) in the second period of Game 2 on Monday, April 20, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Ottawa Senators goalie Linus Ullmark (35) stops a scoring attempt by Carolina Hurricanes left wing Jordan Martinook (48) in the second period of Game 2 on Monday, April 20, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

Play continued on the delayed penalty and Canes center Mark Jankowski banged the rebound of a Seth Jarvis shot past Ullmark for an apparent winner. The arena rumbled, the Canes surrounded Jankowski to celebrate and fans quickly started heading off into the night.

But the play was challenged and then reviewed as both teams waited anxiously at their benches. The ruling: Staal did not have full possession of the puck as he crossed the blue line and was offside on the play — no goal.

Despite the offside call, under the rules the penalty against Foegele stood. Martinook was awarded the penalty shot with 3:11 left in the overtime.

Ullmark made the stop, play continued, and soon the game was in the second overtime. Martinook got a second chance and delivered the winner, setting off another, final celebration.

"Ever been on a teeter-totter before?" Martinook joked, breaking into a smile. "I was the big guy on the one end. Yeah, I felt pretty bad when I didn't score that one. Then obviously, when you score ...

"I don't know, hockey's crazy. Sports are crazy. To be able to score after that, I'll be able to tell my grandkids about that."

It was that kind of game, which stretched four hours. The Canes had a 2-0 lead in the second period, getting a power-play goal from Logan Stankoven in the first and then a score from Sebastian Aho in the second — Aho tapping in a Staal pass off the rush one second after the Canes had killed off a penalty.

Carolina Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho (20) scores on Ottawa Senators goalie Liinus Ullmark (35) to take a 2-0 lead in the second period of Game 2 on Monday, April 20, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho (20) scores on Ottawa Senators goalie Liinus Ullmark (35) to take a 2-0 lead in the second period of Game 2 on Monday, April 20, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

But the Senators, shut out 2-0 in the series opener Saturday, fought back for a 2-2 tie in the second as Drake Batherson and Dylan Cozens scored — Cozens on a soft goal that slipped through Hurricanes keeper Frederik Andersen's pads.

But Andersen, who faced 39 shots, made some scrambling stops and some high-quality stops, including one against Brady Tkachuk in the first OT and another against Michael Amadio in the second — the puck hitting the post after Andersen got a piece. And Ullmark, who anticipates well, used his glove to make some terrific saves among his 43 stops.

Carolina right wing Andrei Svechnikov (37) tries to score on Ottawa goalie Liinus Ullmark (35) in the first period of Game 2 on Monday, April 20, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina right wing Andrei Svechnikov (37) tries to score on Ottawa goalie Liinus Ullmark (35) in the first period of Game 2 on Monday, April 20, 2026 during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

Ullmark lunged to his left to stop a one-timer by Taylor Hall in the second that would have given the Canes a 3-0 lead. He then fought off a point-blank shot by Staal some 20 seconds before the end of regulation. In the second overtime, he twice denied good scoring chances by Hall.

"It was an emotional rollercoaster for everyone," Andersen said of the game. "Had the lead, give it up, had the win for a minute or two, lost it and had a new chance at it. And here we are."

For the Hurricanes, "here" is halfway to an opening-round series win.

"But they're not going to go easy," Andersen said of the Senators, the second wild-card team in the Eastern Conference.

The Senators played without defenseman Artem Zub, who was injured in Game 1. Defensemen Jake Sanderson and Thomas Chabot each played more than 40 minutes.

"It was a helluva effort," Sens coach Travis Green said. "Playoffs are hard, sometimes. Some of the games you lose, they sting. This one is going to sting, but we've got a couple of days to regroup and we get to go play in our building."

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Profile Image of Chip Alexander

The News & Observer

919-829-8945

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: 04.22.2026

1388353 Carolina Hurricanes

Martinook's OT winner ends Hurricanes' wild 3-2 win in Game 2

Cory Lavalette 7-8 minutes 21/04/2026

RALEIGH — Jordan Martinook is the emotional leader of the Carolina Hurricanes, and in Monday's Game 2 against the visiting Senators, he proved he can handle the highest of highs and lowest of lows.

Martinook's goal at 13:53 of the second overtime gave the Hurricanes a 3-2 win Monday and a 2-0 series lead.

"You couldn't have written it any better," Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said. "What a shot. The place was electric, so it was super fun. Definitely in the memory bank."

The path to Carolina's second win in the series was anything but linear.

After the NHL's Situation Room nullified Carolina center Mark Jankowski's winning goal in the first overtime on a delayed penalty,



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Martinook was awarded a penalty shot from the same infraction that presented a second chance to win the game.

He did — just 17 minutes later.

After Martinook was stopped by Linus Ullmark (43 saves) on the shootout attempt with 3:11 left in the first overtime, he and the Hurricanes regrouped.

With just over six minutes left in the second overtime, Martinook collected a loose puck at the left sideboards, passed to defenseman K'Andre Miller and circled to the slot. Miller handed off the puck to Nikolaj Ehlers, who passed to Martinook.

His shot whizzed past a screen by Staal and Ottawa defenseman Thomas Chabot and behind Ullmark at 13:53 of double overtime to give the Hurricanes a roller coaster 3-2 win and a 2-0 series lead.

"I didn't feel very good about myself after that penalty shot," Martinook said. "The intermission felt really long. That was cool though. I'm happy it worked out that way. It didn't matter who scored, but it was going to be a long night if that penalty shot came back to bite me."

Instead, Carolina delivered a blow to the Senators, who rallied from a 2-0 deficit to tie the game in the second period and were inches from winning the game in the second overtime when Frederik Andersen (37 saves) got just enough of a piece of Michael Amadio's 1-on-1 chance to deflect the puck off the post.

"Every moment matters, and any situation it's right then and there," Andersen said. "You just prepare like you would any other shot. And every time you make a save, you give the boys a new chance to score."

On Monday — nearly Tuesday as the game stretched to more than four hours — the chance ended up on Martinook's stick.

"I'd be lying if I said I picked my head up and looked and picked the corner," Martinook said. "At that point, you're just trying to put as many pucks on net as you can. I felt we kind of had them on the run a little bit, and (Ehlers) made a great play in the middle, and I just got it and ripped it. Luckily it went in."

The Hurricanes appeared to end the game with 3:11 left in overtime. After Staal set up Martinook for a chance, Ottawa's Warren Foegele was called for hooking. Carolina brought on Sebastian Aho as the sixth attacker on the delayed penalty sequence.

Staal then went off the ice for a line change, with Jankowski replacing him. Jankowski got the puck and passed to Seth Jarvis in the right circle. Jarvis' shot hit Ullmark's right pad and kicked directly to Jankowski, who banged it in the net.

But the zone entry with Staal and Martinook was reviewed, and the NHL Situation ruled Staal did not have possession of the puck upon entering the zone, nullifying the goal.

"I don't know that rule," Staal said. "I pick up the puck, I look up where (Martinook) is and apparently I lost control of it. And then I make a nice pass to (Martinook) for a breakthrough."

"I don't really get it. To call back an overtime goal for that is ..."

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour could be seen rallying his team on the bench before the officials announced that the goal had been overturned.

"I wasn't surprised, I can tell you that," Brind'Amour said with a grimace.

Martinook added, "Try having a penalty shot after all that. You exhale, think it's over, especially in overtime. It's hard."

After Ullmark's penalty shot save, both teams refocused, and redemption was on the menu for Martinook.

"Just happy for Marty," Brind'Amour said. "He's been one of those guys, and it's nice to see him get that recognition for a game like that."

The Hurricanes were in control at the midway point of regulation after building a 2-0 lead, but Ottawa pushed back to tie the game.

Three minutes after Staal set up Aho for the goal that extended the lead to 2-0, Drake Batherson attempted a centering pass that Carolina defenseman Jaccob Slavin blocked. But the puck went right back to Batherson, who roofed a shot past Andersen at 10:47 of the second period. It was the first goal allowed by Andersen in more than 90 minutes to start the series.

Ottawa needed fewer than six minutes to get its second and tie the game.

After a neutral zone turnover by Hurricanes center Logan Stankoven, the Senators counterattacked, and Dylan Cozens' bad-angle shot from the bottom of the right circle hit Andersen's pads and trickled in at 16:40 to even the score at 2-2.

"You're going to make mistakes. Everyone does," Andersen said. "It's about what's next. And obviously we had to play a lot going forward. Just refocus and get ready for the next one."

Carolina took an early lead thanks to its power play.

On its only chance of the game in the first period, the Hurricanes sent out their second unit to start the man advantage. Taylor Hall set up behind the Ottawa net and waited for a lane to open. His pass to Stankoven in the low slot found its mark, and Stankoven scored his second goal of the series for a 1-0 Hurricanes lead at 6:31 of the first period.

"A really good pass," Stankoven said. "I was just sitting in the middle, and he made a nice play to find me."

The Hurricanes extended their lead in the second period just after killing off a penalty.

Staal and Aho came in on a 2-on-1 rush just after Sean Walker exited the box, and Staal's pass was finished by Aho to double the lead at 7:50 of the second period.

It was just the second time this season the tandem connected on a goal, and it was Staal's first time assisting on an Aho goal since Nov. 30, 2023.

What happened in the final 17 minutes of the game has probably never happened before.

"Hockey's crazy. Sports are crazy," Martinook said. "Being able to score after that, I'll tell my grandkids about that one, that's for sure."

Notes: Ottawa defensemen Jake Sanderson and Chabot each eclipsed 40 minutes. ... William Carrier had 12 hits. ... Ottawa won 51 of 80 faceoffs. ... Forwards Nicolas Deslauriers and Jesperi Kotkaniemi, defenseman Mike Reilly and goalie Pyotr Kochetkov were healthy scratches for Carolina.

North State Journal LOADED: 04.22.2026

1388354 Carolina Hurricanes

Senators head home down but not out facing 2-0 series deficit vs. Hurricanes

Julian McKenzie6-7 minutes 21/04/2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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RALEIGH, N.C. — There was no hiding the frustration and disappointment among the Ottawa Senators moments after a heartbreaking overtime loss in a building they had come so close to silencing on multiple occasions.

Veteran forward Claude Giroux scowled as he walked past the media horde waiting to enter the visiting dressing room, heading to an exercise area to cool down. When the Senators' best players took questions, disappointment and fatigue dripped from their voices. As Drake Batherson answered questions, a loud "f—!" rang out from a nearby room. Even Senators GM Steve Staios was in no mood, walking down the Lenovo Center hallway toward the exits so he could board a team bus to the airport.

"Obviously, it sucks," Senators captain Brady Tkachuk said postgame after his team lost 3-2 in a four-hour, double-overtime game against the Carolina Hurricanes. "But we've got a really important game in front of our fans that are going to be fired up and give us a lot of momentum.

"Of course, (we're) going to be pretty unhappy about it. But we're going to move on eventually and get ready for Game 3."

For the second straight year, the Senators are facing a 2-0 deficit in an opening-round playoff series. Last year, the Tkachuk-led core was mostly new to the playoffs and still appeared confident they could turn things around against the Toronto Maple Leafs. This year, the belief is there, somewhere. But the Sens sound more somber this time around, dwelling on a lost opportunity to split the series.

The game was an emotional battle in which the Senators had their chances and nearly lost in the first overtime on an overturned goal-turned-penalty shot. The Senators ultimately couldn't get the better of Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen, who made 37 saves but also had his posts and crossbars to thank.

"I think we had a lot of good looks," Senators forward Dylan Cozens said. "A lot of chances to put that one away. It hurts right now. But we've just got to move on and get ready for the next one."

The Senators really could've used that victory, for obvious reasons. But let's not forget that their defense is still hurting.

Tyler Kleven is working back to the lineup after taking a puck to the face earlier this month. But the Senators are now also without Artem Zub, who collided with Hurricanes forward Seth Jarvis in Game 1 and hasn't returned since. And Nick Jensen won't be back in the lineup any time soon.

Depth options like Nikolas Matinpalo, Dennis Gilbert and Lassi Thomson have seen more ice time as a result. But the Senators will still lean on their tried-and-true defenders, which explains why Jake Sanderson led all skaters in ice time at 43:06. Thomas Chabot followed that total by playing 40:50.

Most frustrating of all is that Linus Ullmark is playing at his absolute best for the Senators. His postseason numbers haven't always been great, and some early-season performances didn't always instill confidence. But he's looked like the Senators' best player through two games.

On Monday, Ullmark made 43 saves — his most ever in a playoff game — in a losing effort. That includes the penalty shot he saved to keep the Senators alive moments after seemingly losing on a Mark Jankowski game-winner in overtime before it was erased from the history books.

Ullmark's best save was with his glove on a one-time shot from Canes forward Taylor Hall. After initially snagging it, the puck nearly crawled behind Ullmark, but he quickly retrieved it from the goal line. Ullmark made the save when his team was down 2-0 in the second. It spurred his teammates on.

"He was great," Batherson said. "It could've been easily 3 or 4-0. He keeps us in it, and we were able to tie it up. He's been playing awesome.

(He) keeps us in it with the penalty shot. I've got nothing but good things to say."

"We can do a better job for him back there," Cozens said. "And helping limit some of those looks (on him)."

Both the Sens and Hurricanes might have enjoyed more stickhandling room in a phone booth than they did against each other during Game 1. This game was visibly more free-flowing and open, and the Senators worked to match the Hurricanes' intensity. As a result, they had a handful of quality chances that could've — even should've — bested Andersen.

"I think they simplified their game a bit," Canes hero Jordan Martinook, who scored the eventual double-overtime winner, said after the game. "They were just putting pucks in (the zone) and forechecking, and we knew that that's the type of team they are. You know what each team's bringing, and I think they got to what they do a little better tonight."

Even with injuries on the back end, the Senators had enough going to win, which would've galvanized the group ahead of Game 3 on Thursday night. But instead, the Senators have to overcome a two-game deficit. The Sens are home for the next two games, knowing they want no part of another 3-0 series deficit like they faced last year. But that's after they lick their wounds from losing a chance steal momentum against the East's best seed in the Hurricanes, who also happen to be 10-2 all-time in series where they leads 2-0.

"The confidence and the belief is still the highest you could possibly get," Tkachuk said. "We've shown we can hang in there. Of course, (we) don't like both the results, but I mean the confidence and the belief that I have in my teammates and we have each other as high as it's ever been."

The Senators have two more days to foster that belief and take a game in this series, working their way back from behind.

Apr 22, 2026

The Athletic LOADED: 04.22.2026

1388468 Websites

The Athletic / Playoff thrillers in both NHL and NBA, plus the most interesting man in sports

By Chris Branch

April 21, 2026 Updated April 22, 2026 12:53 am EDT

Good morning! Find your niche today. Coming up:

🔪 2OT thriller

🔴 Knicks choke away Game 2

👁️ Sports' most interesting man?

Gold Stars: More of these games, please

We had another bevy of great playoff games last night. Space is tight, though, so we're picking one game from both the NHL and NBA to earn a gold star. Let's start on the ice:

Carolina took a 2-0 series lead over Ottawa in what was nearly a historic NHL moment. The game itself was thrilling — a 3-2 double-overtime thriller, ended on Jordan Martinook's wrist — but the context was even better.



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It nearly ended when Martinook was awarded a penalty shot in the first overtime after an offside call. No Stanley Cup playoff game has ended on a penalty shot. Senators goalie Linus Ullmark kept the fun fact intact, but couldn't stop Martinook's shot minutes later.

In other games:

The Flyers cruised to a 2-0 lead against the Penguins with a 3-0 win. That series might be over.

The Stars evened up their series with a bruising 4-2 win over the Wild. This version of Dallas is a contender.

In the nightcap, Oilers outlasted the Ducks, 4-3, in what would've been the gold-star game if not for our double-OT winner above. Edmonton is up 1-0.

Let's move to the hardwood:

Brad Penner /

Atlanta shocked New York in Madison Square Garden with a late comeback, tying their series 1-1 with a 107-106 win. CJ McCollum scored 32 points, and this was one of those games that felt like both a Hawks triumph and a Knicks collapse.

New York led this game by as many as 14 points in the second half. Woof.

Our other results:

The Timberwolves pulled off their own road stunner in a 119-114 win over the Nuggets to even the series. This might be, as Zach Harper predicted for us before the playoffs started, the best first-round series. Great game.

The Cavaliers are up 2-0 after a convincing 115-105 win over the Raptors. Evan Mobley was awesome, as was James Harden. Might be time to file this one in the "Over" section, too.

More games tonight, of course. Onward:

Hi (Again), My Name Is: The baseball guy is back

Paul DePodesta is, bar none, one of the most interesting people in the history of modern pro sports, if only for his arc. Baseball to football and now back to baseball again to help run the Rockies, which is interesting enough. But as Brittany Ghirola wrote today, the details are actually more compelling than that.

What moved me:

DePodesta, despite his stellar resume, has always been somewhat of an outcast at every stop. As he rose to fame in the "Moneyball" era — Jonah Hill's character in the movie is based on him — he was decried as the analytics nerd by baseball traditionalists. When he made the leap to the NFL, he was lampooned as ... the baseball guy. And now he's back in the sport after a lifetime away.

DePodesta, 53, spent nearly 10 years as the Browns' chief strategy officer, and preferred to stay behind the scenes despite his hire being high-profile. Brittany talked to multiple Cleveland employees from that period, and they indicated that had team leadership followed DePodesta's system better, the Browns might be in a better spot today. Huh.

The story is well worth your time today, and I also found insights into the Rockies' current situation enlightening, too.

Let's keep going:

OBJ back? Brown to NE?

Odell Beckham Jr. had a workout and a physical with the Giants yesterday, sources told The Athletic, and a reunion in New York would be an incredible story. The Giants selected Beckham in the first round of the 2014 NFL Draft, and Beckham made three Pro Bowls in his first three

seasons in New York. Beckham, 33, also played for new Giants coach John Harbaugh in 2023 with the Ravens.

Meanwhile, NFL executives still expect A.J. Brown to be a Patriot come June. Read that full update [here](#).

Elsewhere on the NFL transaction wire: Dallas agreed to a four-year, \$28 million deal with Brandon Aubrey, sources told The Athletic, making him the highest-paid kicker in NFL history. Not bad for a guy who didn't play college football. Also, Trent Williams is back in San Francisco on a two-year deal.

Crooks picks OSU

Audi Crooks will transfer to Oklahoma State, she announced yesterday, after three stellar years at Iowa State. It's a mild surprise, as the Cowgirls don't have the national profile most assumed the portal's top player would seek. Read more on her fit [here](#).

More news:

Victor Wembanyama was a unanimous pick for NBA Defensive Player of the Year. That's a first in league history.

Carlos Alcaraz said he won't rush back from injury just to play in the French Open. Read his full comments.

The NFL restricted access to contact info for draft prospects after last year's prank call to Browns QB Shedeur Sanders. Probably smart.

The Bucks appear to have a lead candidate to replace Doc Rivers: Taylor Jenkins.


The non-lottery order of June's NBA Draft has been finalized after sorting through six tiebreakers. See it [here](#).

Dodgers closer Edwin Díaz will undergo a procedure to remove "loose bodies" in his elbow and is expected to return in the second half of the season. Brutal.

PGA Tour CEO Brian Rolapp said he is considering creating new ways to welcome former LIV golfers back to the tour. Also, the tour won't go back to Hawaii next year.

Elite PR move: Philadelphia is making public transit free when leaving World Cup games.

Yesterday's Boston Marathon saw back-to-back winners in the men's and women's races: John Korir, in a course record, and Sharon Lokedi. It was a party, as Steve Buckley writes.

 Find more news [here 24/7](#).

Watch Guide

 MLB: Yankees at Red Sox

6:45 p.m. ET on TBS

It's always hard to resist the classic matchup. And while he won't pitch until Thursday, I loved this story on how Boston-area product and Yankees phenom — what a title, right? — Cam Schlitler is handling the hometown hate.

 NHL: First round

7 p.m. ET on ESPN and ESPN2

Four hockey games tonight, one-upping their basketball brethren: Canadiens-Lightning (7 p.m.), Bruins-Sabres (7:30 p.m.), Mammoth-Golden Knights (9:30 p.m.) and Kings-Avalanche (10 p.m.). If I was picking a shift, I'd choose the early ones, especially since both Game 1s were scintillating.

 NBA: First round



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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7 p.m. ET on NBC and Peacock

Three more games this evening, also all Game 2s: Celtics-76ers (7 p.m.), Trail Blazers-Spurs (8 p.m.) and Rockets-Lakers (10:30 p.m.). The most important player across these three games is Kevin Durant, who will be a game-time decision for Houston.

I almost feel bad for the Blazers, too, as their playoff appearance has been overshadowed by the saga of their new owner's cheapness.

Get tickets to games like these here.

Pulse Picks

Things were dark for Mikaela Shiffrin after her first race of the 2026 Olympics. Here's the inside story of how she broke through four years of bad vibes for "golden redemption."

There has been plenty of, let's say, discussion about the personal relationship between consecutive Wings No. 1 draft choices Paige Bueckers and Azzi Fudd. But how will they coexist on the court together?

The Mets, Phillies and Astros have problems bigger than their managers, but as Ken Rosenthal reports, that doesn't mean their managers are safe, either. Hot seat in May? Yikes.

The Athletic's college baseball Top 25 returns this week. UCLA is a juggernaut.

How's your fantasy baseball team doing? Andy Behrens has an early mailbag of takeaways, including a good note for Robby Snelling owners.

Most-clicked in the newsletter yesterday: Our story on the husband-and-wife Vermont basketball coaching combo. We also received two helpful emails with a slight addendum: Alabama State's Lewis Jackson and Freda Freeman-Jackson were also married and coaching the men's and women's basketball teams from 2005-2020.

The Athletic LOADED: 04.22.2026

1388469 Websites

The Athletic / He was traded twice and has played with 9 potential Hall of Famers — all this season

By Peter Baugh

April 21, 2026 6:00 am EDT

DENVER — For some players, playing alongside even one Hall of Famer is an experience they can carry with them forever. They can get an up-close look at excellence, watching the skills that create legacies and feeling the gravitas of an all-time great in the dressing room.

Avalanche defenseman Brett Kulak has been the beneficiary of that this season, and not just with one player. Traded from the Edmonton Oilers to the Pittsburgh Penguins in December, then from the Penguins to the Colorado Avalanche in February, he's played with at least nine potential Hall of Famers, including Connor McDavid, Sidney Crosby and now Nathan MacKinnon.

Friends and teammates have been eager to ask the 32-year-old about what each all-time great is like.

"It's been a main talking point for me," said Kulak, whose Avalanche led their first-round series 1-0 against the Los Angeles Kings. "I mean, it makes sense."

It makes sense because it's rare. It's not often that a player suits up for three different NHL teams in one season, and almost never does one go between teams with as much star power as the Oilers, Penguins and Avalanche each possess. According to NHL Stats, Alexei Gusarov — a 1996 Stanley Cup-winning defenseman with the Avalanche — and Harry York are the only two other players to play with a Hart Trophy winner on three different teams in a season. Gusarov played with the Avalanche (Joe Sakic), Rangers (Mark Messier) and Blues (Chris Pronger) in 2000-01, and York played with the Rangers (Wayne Gretzky), Penguins (Jaromír Jágr) and Canucks (Messier) in 1998-99.

Among Kulak's teammates this season, McDavid and Leon Draisaitl (Edmonton), Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Erik Karlsson (Pittsburgh) and MacKinnon and Cale Makar (Colorado) are almost certainly bound for the Hall of Fame. Pittsburgh defenseman Kris Letang and Colorado defenseman Brent Burns likely are, too. In total, Kulak's 2025-26 teammates have combined for eight Hart (MVP) trophies, six Norrises (top defenseman), five Conn Smythes (playoff MVP) and 11 Art Rosses (leading scorer). McDavid or MacKinnon could add another Hart this season; they're the presumed finalists, along with Nikita Kucherov.

Kulak sees two primary similarities between all of them: high-level preparation and competitiveness.

"I've been lucky enough to play with some superstars," said Avalanche goalie Scott Wedgewood, who added that he's asked Kulak about how his elite former teammates operate. "To do it all in one year is pretty sweet."

(Wedgewood himself is a rare player to appear for three teams in one season, going from the Devils to Coyotes to Stars in 2021-22. None of those teams featured the inner-circle Hall of Famers Kulak played with this year.)

All three of Kulak's 2025-26 teams are in the playoffs. He's only the 20th player to appear in games for three playoff-bound clubs in one year, according to NHL Stats. Mikko Rantanen did it most recently before him, playing for Dallas, Carolina and Colorado last season. Kulak hopes to become the first of those 20 players to have his name engraved on the Stanley Cup the season he played for three playoff teams. He's still seeking his first championship.

The Oilers acquired Kulak at the 2022 trade deadline from the Canadiens, with whom he appeared in the 2021 Stanley Cup Final. He proceeded to play 295 regular-season games with the Oilers, plus 75 more in the playoffs. He grew close to McDavid and Draisaitl off the ice and got to watch how they operated on it.

"They've kind of got the fire in their eyes, and when they're on the ice they want to make things happen," he said. "What the fans see on the ice pretty much speaks for itself."

The Oilers reached back-to-back Stanley Cup Finals with Kulak as a trusted defenseman in their lineup, but they moved on from him in December. Wanting to upgrade his goaltending, Oilers general manager Stan Bowman targeted Pittsburgh's Tristan Jarry. He had to send Kulak and his \$2.75 million cap hit back to the Penguins to fit his new goalie's contract under the salary cap.

Kulak didn't like the way he played to start the season in Edmonton. His ice time was down from the year before, and he had only two assists in 31 games. The team had a slow start in general; Kulak said he didn't know if anyone was happy with their individual performance.

Pittsburgh gave him a fresh slate.

"I started to really enjoy the game and (have) fun stepping on the ice and competing again, and I thought my game started getting back to where I like it to be," he said. "I'm skating, I'm assertive, breaking pucks out, joining the rush, defending hard. ... I thought that was huge to get me back to where my game needed to be."



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Kulak had a 44.67 percent expected goal rate with the Oilers this season, per Natural Stat Trick. That jumped to 50.17 percent while in Pittsburgh, where he played primarily on a pair with Letang. He also enjoyed watching how Crosby, Malkin and Letang — who have won three Stanley Cups together — led the dressing room.

"Everyone follows suit," he said. "They drive the bus for that team every single day, which is pretty cool when they're 20 years in. They're not letting their foot off the gas or anything."

Kulak, a pending unrestricted free agent, enjoyed Pittsburgh, but he wasn't there long. In February, two months after the trade with the Oilers, the Penguins sent Kulak to Colorado for a 2028 second-round pick and defenseman Samuel Girard, who is more than four years younger than Kulak and has another year of term.

President of hockey operations Kyle Dubas called Kulak in for a meeting at the Penguins' practice facility to tell him the news. He was sending the defenseman to a Stanley Cup favorite bound for the Presidents' Trophy.

"It was a lot of excitement," said Kulak, whose wife and two kids have moved with him between cities. "We loved it in Pitt — we were settled in — but I think Colorado was probably the best-case scenario for me to go to."

The high-quality players in Denver were a primary reason why. He'd watched Makar closely in recent seasons, and MacKinnon could go down as the greatest player in franchise history.

"After spending some time, quite a bit with Connor, and seeing Sid, I was excited to come and see what Nate was like, too," Kulak said. "A lot of similarities amongst the three of the guys, and there's a reason they're as good as they are. They manage to just do it year after year, which is I think the most impressive part."

Thanks to the pair of trades, Kulak played 83 games this season. He finished with only one goal and 12 points. Most of his value comes on the defensive end of the ice; Hockey Stat Cards rates him in the 82nd percentile of Defensive Rating.

"(He has a) great stick and closes plays out quickly and rarely gets beat one-on-one," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. "(The) ability to defend top players and give us flexibility is why we got him."

There's a reason he's played with so many great players this season: Teams see value in him. He isn't going to be a Hall of Famer himself, but he can fill a role that helps Hall of Famers succeed.

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1388470 Websites

The Athletic / NHL 2025-26 awards predictions for Hart, Norris, Jack Adams and more

By Sean Gentile, Shayna Goldman, James Mirtle and Mark Lazerus

April 21, 2026 5:45 am EDT

When The Athletic asked its NHL staff to make award predictions in the 2025-26 preseason, Connor McDavid was the clear favorite for the Hart Trophy. Now the MVP race seems to have a few legitimate candidates. Cale Makar was the clear No. 1 for the Norris Trophy. Now the honor for best defenseman has a new front-runner. Who will win?

We asked our staff for their end-of-season predictions for the Hart, Norris, Vezina, Selke, Calder and Jack Adams. To analyze and critique

the picks, we've brought in senior writers Sean Gentile, James Mirtle and Mark Lazerus and analytics know-it-all Shayna Goldman.

Lazerus: It would have been interesting to see these results if the Sharks had made the playoffs.

Goldman: Macklin Celebrini should still get top-three votes, regardless. McDavid's last couple of months sealed his No. 1 placement for me, though.

Mirtle: Yeah, I went with McDavid, too. He's won the Hart three times so far; here's hoping it's not voter fatigue that holds him back from piling up at least three or four more.

Gentile: Is Kevyn Adams eligible here?

Lazerus: The Norris ballot was brutally difficult this year. But it feels like it's Zach Werenski's "turn." Also, he's great.

Goldman: This vote does not reflect at all what a close race it is this year. Between Werenski, Makar, Rasmus Dahlin and Moritz Seider, there is no wrong answer.

Mirtle: Another vote for Werenski, who was right there last year and is such a force for that team.

Gentile: Werenski laid the groundwork for this last season. He's great. No complaints.

Lazerus: Remember, the GMs vote on this, not the writers. Andrei Vasilevskiy has the most wins, so he'll get the Vezina.

Goldman: That's the thing — I think it should probably be Jeremy Swayman (Ilya Sorokin's play over the last month probably knocks him out of the top slot) here. But what I think doesn't matter, because this one gets picked incorrectly pretty often.

Mirtle: I picked Swayman and it looks like he only received one vote. I agree it's unlikely he wins, so I probably didn't answer this properly, but he was such a huge part of the Bruins' rebound.

Gentile: This was Sorokin's to lose, and then he lost it.

Lazerus: Nick Suzuki is great. He's also 11th among Canadiens (seventh among forwards) in short-handed ice time. Can you really be the league's best defensive forward if you don't kill penalties? Mitch Marner's the guy here.

Goldman: How about some Yanni Gourde appreciation? Or Jack Eichel. All should be getting some love as well.

Mirtle: But also, can you be the league's best defensive forward if you don't get the toughest matchups? Eichel handled a lot more of those than Marner this year in Vegas. (I picked Suzuki, then Eichel.)

Gentile: Mirtle is right.

Lazerus: Sorry, everybody else. You should have picked a different year to be born.

Goldman: He set the bar astronomically high this year. You could really flip a coin between Matthew Schaefer and Sorokin as the Isles' MVPs this year.

Mirtle: We should have voted on who gets second for this one. Dobes?

Gentile: Someone from Philly is putting Porter Martone on their ballot, right? Kurz, I know you're reading this.

Lazerus: Remember, the broadcasters pick this one. And the broadcasters love Rick Tocchet.

Goldman: For the vibes, Lindy Ruff is a fun pick. But Dan Muse should get more appreciation here. He should, but he won't.

Mirtle: This is a rough one to pick, but I muse that Cooper is long overdue for this.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Gentile: Remember Rick Bowness?

The Athletic LOADED: 04.22.2026

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Sportsnet.ca / Young Canadiens served lesson by savvy Lightning in series-tying loss

Eric Engels

5–7 minutes

TAMPA, Fla. — This was a night that made you remember that one of these teams is the youngest participating in these Stanley Cup Playoffs, and the other is the Tampa Bay Lightning.

In the end, experience was the difference, with the Lightning erasing a one-goal deficit 12:33 into the third period before taking over and coming through in overtime.

They beat the Canadiens 3-2 to take this series back to Montreal tied 1-1.

"It would've been nice to get two (wins)," said coach Martin St. Louis.

His Canadiens were in premium position to deliver after winning the first game 4-3 in overtime and seizing control of Game 2 through the first 40 minutes.

And then the wheels fell off.

"We were just lacking poise," said St. Louis.

It goes hand in hand with lacking a bit of experience.

How else do you explain 22-year-old Juraj Slafkovsky, who was the hat-trick hero of Game 1, coughing up the puck at his own blue line before Nikita Kucherov finished a play to score his first playoff goal since April 18, 2023?

That came 17 games ago; four series ago; back when he was still in his 20s; back when he was just a year removed from participating in a third straight Stanley Cup Final.

Brandon Hagel, who came to the Lightning that year and then stayed alongside Kucherov for three straight first-round exits from the post-season, said after a game in which he scored the opening goal, fought Slafkovsky, and assisted on Kucherov's goal for the Gordie Howe hat trick, "It was a clinic in OT."

The 27-year-old was among the veteran Lightning players to make it so.

They were so composed. Much more so than they had been earlier in the game, when they were seemingly chasing last year's Florida Panthers instead of playing this year's Montreal Canadiens.

The Lightning teams that won back-to-back Cups at the start of this decade played fast, hard, skilled hockey before the back-to-back-winning Panthers of the last two years bullied them and left them with an inferiority complex.

"We got s---kicked," said Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy before this series with Montreal started, and he was referring to last year's beatdown at the hands of the Panthers, which was strikingly similar to the one given to them in 2024.

They added some sandpaper and tried to rub every team with it on their way back to the playoffs this year. And after losing Game 1 to the

Canadiens, they tried — and failed — to intimidate them through the first 40 minutes of Game 2.

Live and learn.

The Lightning saw their young opponents clamp up with the third-period lead and started playing hockey again.

Kucherov's goal brought a wave of momentum, which the Lightning carried into overtime, where they outshot the Canadiens 8-0 before one of Montreal's most inexperienced players needlessly iced the puck and then overplayed J.J. Moser on the ensuing faceoff.

It was a brutal sequence for Kirby Dach, who was playing in just his second playoff game since appearing in nine with the Chicago Blackhawks in the 2020 bubble playoffs, and it gave Moser the goal that saved the Lightning from 72 hours of trepidation about their place in this series.

The terrible feeling Dach had at the end of Tuesday's game will likely linger until Friday's Game 3 gets underway.

"It's things like that that you learn from," said Canadiens captain Nick Suzuki. "Next time he's in that situation, he's going to remember that play and he's not going to do that."

It could be a while before Dach's in that situation again. Especially with Montreal's most experienced playoff player, Brendan Gallagher, itching to make his series debut.

If it's Joe Veleno (zero games of playoff experience) who takes Dach's place — or someone else's — you hope he learns from watching the Canadiens fumble away a great opportunity to reunite with their fans up 2-0 against this savvy opponent.

If you're a Canadiens fan, you have to hope his teammates, who locked down leads with precision and confidence down the stretch of the season, figure out how to do it in the playoffs.

"You have to want the puck, and you have to play with the puck," said Canadiens veteran Jake Evans. "I thought we actually tried to do that, we just mis-executed and just made bad reads again. If you make bad reads and it's a harder play, the odds of them getting that puck back and just possessing it and putting more pressure on you, it's tough. I think that's what was happening tonight."

Not so much for him, Phillip Danault and Josh Anderson, who combined on Montreal's second goal.

But those guys have been around a long time and played a lot of big games in this league.

A lot of their younger teammates still have mileage to gain.

Even 26-year-old Suzuki and 25-year-old Cole Caufield, who led the Canadiens' offence all season, are among them. They struggled for a second straight game in a hard matchup with Hagel and Cup champions Anthony Cirelli and Jake Guentzel.

It didn't get any easier when Kucherov took Guentzel's place four minutes into the third period, leaving Suzuki, Caufield and Slafkovsky at zero five-on-five goals in the series.

"In order for us to win this series," said Suzuki, "our line's gotta find a way to produce five-on-five."

But hey, this series is tied, nonetheless, thanks in large part to the production Suzuki and his linemates have had on the power play.

A lot of experience has been gained by the Canadiens so far in this series, and they'll have to hope it serves them well moving forward.

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Sportsnet.ca / Things we learned: Mammoth make history with win over Golden Knights

Emily Sadler

7–8 minutes

The Utah Mammoth's second season has been filled with important firsts, and on Tuesday night in Vegas, they earned the best one yet: Their first-ever victory in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

The 3-2 triumph was a win befitting the Mammoth name — not just for its historic significance but for the first-round fate of the NHL's newest team, which could've headed home down 2-0 but instead brings a 1-1 series to Salt Lake City.

After pledging more net drives and offensive-zone persistence following Sunday's loss to Vegas, Utah put together a blueprint and stuck to it — perhaps no one more so than Dylan Guenther.

Utah's leading goal-scorer didn't look like himself in the series-opener, but he hit his stride in Game 2, and that confidence brought a spark to Utah's offence. With about five minutes left in the second frame of what was at that point a 1-1 game, Guenther unleashed a lethal one-timer from the point to give the Mammoth the lead. Even though Vegas quickly responded, Guenther's confidence stuck.

That was on full display as the game went on, as was his speed. He was the difference-maker on offence for Utah on the game-winning goal, blowing past Vegas' defenders while driving to the net and starting a play that Logan Cooley finished. Guenther has hit his stride, and is well-positioned to be a real force as this series shifts to Utah.

Kings and Avalanche are playing chess

Through two games of this first-round series, that might just be the best way to describe this matchup. Colorado and L.A. finished the regular season separated by a whopping 31 points in the standings, but you wouldn't know it by how things have played out thus far — two incredibly closely contested bouts with very little scoring. Tuesday's 2-1 overtime victory for the Avalanche followed Sunday's win by the same score in regulation.

Anyone who thought Game 1 was merely a feeling-out period for Colorado's red-hot offence before exploding in a flurry of goals was sorely mistaken. The only explosion in this game was the panel of glass behind the Kings' bench, which couldn't withstand the rowdy fans. They certainly weren't celebrating a goal — there were none to be found until the second half of the third period, when Artemi Panarin cashed in on the power play to finally break the stalemate. The Avalanche answered late to force overtime, where Nicolas Roy notched the game-winner.

The lack of goals wasn't for lack of trying. Goalies Scott Wedgewood (24 saves) and Anton Forsberg (34) were sensational, the latter once again stumping Colorado's biggest stars.

Despite what the series score says, the Kings are testing Colorado like few have managed this year, and it's making for a fascinating series.

Kucherov's game-tying goal snaps years-long skid

Lightning defenceman J.J. Moser was the overtime hero in Game 2, his first career playoff point ultimately serving as the difference between an 0-2 deficit and the clean slate of a best-of-five as the series shifts to Montreal.

But in many ways, you can point to Nikita Kucherov's third-period marker as the most important goal of this series so far for the Lightning. Because in addition to evening things up late to force OT, it saw the star forward break free from a years-long playoff goal drought.

Prior to Tuesday night's wrap-around marker, Kucherov had gone a whopping 16 post-season games without a goal. The dry spell dated back to 2023, when Kucherov potted one in the first period of Tampa Bay's first-round series against the Maple Leafs... and then didn't score again until Tuesday night. The lack of production has been among the handful of reasons for the Lightning's three straight first-round exits. (Andrei Vasilevskiy's struggles in net haven't helped, nor did the fact two of those exits were at the hands of the Cup-winning Florida Panthers.)

Kucherov certainly hasn't had any issues piling up goals in the regular season. Whether or not he can turn Tuesday's skid-busting goal into any kind of momentum now that he's no longer playing with a monkey on his back will be a storyline to follow as the series moves north.

Hagel's the heart and soul of this Tampa Bay team

Brandon Hagel is built for playoff hockey, and we're seeing that play out two games into Tampa Bay's first-round series against Montreal. He tallied two goals in Game 1 on Sunday, including the game-tying marker to push for overtime, and opened the scoring Tuesday night en route to registering a Gordie Howe Hat Trick in Tampa Bay's series-tying win.

Hagel was a driver not just on offence but in the rough stuff, too. And there was a lot of rough stuff Tuesday night, the Lightning clearly hell-bent on stirring the pot and causing chaos to rattle Montreal right from the get-go.

Was it the smartest strategy, considering how effective the Canadiens' power-play has been this series? Maybe not. But it was certainly entertaining, as was Hagel's brief bout of fisticuffs against Montreal's Game 1 hero, Juraj Slafkovsky, in the second.

If Tampa Bay is to topple Montreal, they'll need Hagel to continue to lead the way.

Buffalo's spark sputters out, and a goalie question emerges

The hockey gods were with Buffalo on Sunday as the club pulled off a remarkable comeback in their first trip to the playoffs since 2011. On Tuesday, though, the Sabres were on their own. Bad luck struck in the second period when Morgan Geekie sent a harmless-looking backhand into Buffalo's zone from beyond the blue line, the puck fooling Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen and trickling into the net to stun not just the netminder and his team, but the crowd of Sabres faithful hoping for another thriller and instead witnessing something closer to a nightmare.

Luukkonen's night ended early in the third period, after Viktor Arvidsson potted his second of the night, with Alex Lyon taking over in relief.

And yet, just when all the hope was sucked from the building, Bowen Byram's goal injected a little spark. Peyton Krebs added to it soon after with another goal to come within two.

Could they really do it again? You could almost see the tidal wave of dreadful *deja vu* crash over the Bruins' bench, but a well-timed timeout allowed the club to regain its composure and close out the win to even up the series.

It's worth wondering, as the series now moves to Boston, whether the Sabres give Lyon the start in Game 3. While Tuesday's loss should not be blamed on Luukkonen, this team clearly needs to try something new after back-to-back sluggish starts. Lyon, like Luukkonen, started 34 regular-season games for Buffalo this year. He's played post-season hero against Boston before, albeit in a limited capacity, back in 2023.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1388473 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 'That was Bruins hockey': Boston bounces back to tie series vs. Sabres

Ryan Dixon

6–7 minutes

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Boston Bruins got a victory and slayed some demons all at once. And while their series with the Buffalo Sabres is technically split 1-1, you can understand why the Bruins might be heading home feeling as though they've cracked some kind of code against their favoured opponents.

Forty-eight hours after watching a late-game lead evaporate versus the Sabres, Boston locked down a 4-2 victory Tuesday in Game 2 to draw even in their Atlantic Division battle. For the second straight outing, Buffalo's offence came alive only as time was ticking away. The Sabres halved a 4-0 Boston advantage with two goals 1:14 apart, the second coming with 4:42 still on the clock in a building suddenly full of belief.

But rather than buckle under the extended six-on-five Sabres pressure — to say nothing of the fresh scar tissue from letting Game 1 slip — the B's buckled down, backed by another strong performance by goalie Jeremy Swayman.

"They played to our identity," coach Marco Sturm said of his charges. "That was Bruins hockey, right from the start to the finish."

Sure, the conclusion was once again a little hairy. But after getting this one over the line, Boston is understandably pleased with its body of work in Buffalo.

"Two great games," said defenceman Nikita Zadorov. "I felt like we only played a bad five minutes last game. I thought we were controlling [that game] and today was great. We didn't give them anything, pretty much, five-on-five."

Yes, the only gifting that occurred on this night was when Sabres goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen misplayed a harmless flip-in by Morgan Geekie from centre ice with 3:31 to go in the second frame. It was a goal that triggered audible gasps and, unfortunately for Luukkonen, promises to stick to him for a long time.

Asked if he'd ever scored on a play like that before, Geekie offered a flat "no" before adding, "I don't think I ever will again."

A play that jarring can skew the perception of the game. The reality, though, is Boston had several quality chances on Luukkonen in the first frame that the Finnish stopper turned aside. Undeterred, the Bruins kept coming and really took over the contest in the middle frame, netting three goals while outshooting the home team 11-8.

"It's a little bit of a lucky goal, but I think we outplayed them today," said Boston centre Pavel Zacha.

Few Bruins were more motivated to do just that than Zacha and his linemates, who were publicly chided by their coach following a Game 1 showing where Zacha and wingers Viktor Arvidsson and Casey Mittelstadt all finished minus-3. The response in Game 2? Arvidsson keyed the offence with a pair of strikes, while Zacha contributed a vital power-play goal.

"I called those guys out for a reason," Sturm said. "They just needed a poke, that's all."

It was Arvidsson who got the party started, opening the scoring when he darted behind two Sabres and received a high, flip pass from blue-liner

Jonathan Aspirot. The Swede swept in on Luukkonen and snuck a backhand through the goalie's legs 4:54 into the second.

Then, with the Buffalo crowd still fighting off the nausea caused by Geekie's unthinkable goal just 1:41 earlier, Zacha worked his way into the slot and re-directed home a feed from David Pastrnak to make it 3-0 Boston late in the middle frame.

When Arvidsson came charging out of the gate and flung a far-side shot that chased Luukkonen just 16 seconds in the third, it felt like the final blow in a Boston win.

However, after a chippy third period that resulted in a steady stream of bodies to both boxes, Buffalo got some life from a Bowen Byram goal with just over six minutes left in the third, then really picked up steam when Peyton Krebs banged home a loose puck to put the Sabres one shot away from being one shot away.

At that point, Swayman signalled to the bench that perhaps a timeout was in order and the Bruins did indeed take a moment to gather themselves. When play resumed, the B's felt prepared for the onslaught.

"Obviously they have a bunch of skill up there, they're going to push at the end," Zadorov said of the Sabres. "There's no give-up in anybody's game in this league. It's playoff hockey.

"I feel like in those situations, you want to lean on your veteran players. Go out there, have a good shift, have a calm shift, get the puck out, protect the middle, nothing against. I feel like we made a couple mistakes in Game 1 when we left open players in the slot. That was [the] idea to not give it away today, we protected, we did a good job."

Few players were more up to the task than Arvidsson, who would have finished with a hatty had a centre-ice attempt on Buffalo's empty net been just a hair more on target.

"He was winning a lot of puck battles, he was fast, even the breakaway [to open the scoring], he beat his guy one-on-one," Zacha said of his linemate.

Of course, the most important Bruins player was the guy who stood between the pipes. On balance, Swayman wasn't quite as busy as he was in Game 1, but he stood tall when it mattered most and — after holding the high-powered Sabres off the scoresheet for over 52 minutes in Game 1 and nearly 54 in Game 2 — he's glimpsing the form everyone knew would be required if there's to be a Boston upset in the making.

"His calmness," Zadorov said when asked what stood out about Swayman through two outings. "It's super important to see from the goalie, his confidence is great. I don't want to give a lot of compliments to goalies — I don't want to jinx it — but he's been awesome."

Swayman and the Bruins have shown they can put the hex on Buffalo's vaunted attack for huge chunks at a time. If that continues when the series switches venues, Boston could soon be in the driver's seat.

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Sportsnet.ca / How Gillis, Sundin would change Maple Leafs' culture, decision-making

Luke Fox

6–8 minutes



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 22, 2026

TORONTO — Mike Gillis wasn't chasing goals, he was chasing culture when he made his aggressive pitch to free agent Mats Sundin.

The general manager of the Vancouver Canucks paid a hefty price to bring in a 37-year-old Sundin as a late-December gamble in the 2008-09 season.

That's both in terms of dollars per goal — one of the greatest Maple Leafs of all-time, Sundin plummeted from 32 goals in his final Toronto season to a mere nine in 41 games as a Canuck, while raking in \$5 million — and in terms of blowback from fans, media and fellow execs.

Gillis later explained that Sundin's leadership and citizenship were more attractive to him at that point than the former Leafs icon's on-ice production.

Vancouver had a young core of Scandinavian studs in need of a mentor. Sami Salo, Alex Edler and the Sedin twins all bubbled with admiration for Sundin. Seeing how a European Hall of Famer conducted himself at the rink and carried himself off it was invaluable, even if it was for just four months before Sundin hung up his skates.

"We got crushed for it, but he was instrumental in changing the fabric of that team," Gillis later explained at the 2019 TeamSnap Hockey Coaches Conference in Toronto, addressing one of his most controversial moves.

"He elevated our level of professionalism internally, even though there was a cost associated with it. We didn't realize people would be so critical of Mats. It took him a while to get going, but the level of criticism he got was just remarkable.

"We can't even calculate the benefit we got out of that guy."

Sundin, Gillis believes, improved the culture of a core that would enjoy the best years of Vancouver hockey and come one win shy of a Stanley Cup.

Now, funny enough, both men have been linked to a Maple Leafs front office in flux and in need of alignment and a culture boost. They share a mutual respect.

Sundin, whose No. 13 hangs from the Scotiabank Arena rafters, was in Toronto last week to discuss increased involvement with the franchise to which he devoted his best playing years. No doubt upping the profile of the classy 55-year-old Leafs legend in this city would be splendid PR.

Sundin would bring in the headlines and hook some drifting fans.

It is the 67-year-old Gillis, however, who would bring the hockey operations experience, having served as the architect of some elite Canucks teams and as a successful player agent before that.

Skepticism over Gillis running the show in Toronto stems from the fact that he hasn't worked for an NHL team since being fired from the Canucks in 2014, but he's an outside-the-box thinker who has always embraced sports science and analytics.

He has studied the U.S. military and teams in other sports to learn how to maximize human performance. Gillis credits his deep dive into sleep, recovery and nutritional science for improving the Canucks' road record. He built algorithms around fatigue analysis and brought in specialized coaches for both offensive and defensive skills.

Many of these performance-boosting methods are now commonplace across the league. They weren't when Gillis pushed the problem-solving in the early 2010s.

That Gillis already has a vision for how an NHL team's front office should be structured and backs his decisions with data would make him attractive to MLSE president Keith Pelley, with whom he has reportedly met multiple times during the Leafs' job search.

Gillis's leaked pitch deck to be president of the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2021 — a gig that ironically went to Sundin's final Leafs GM, Brian Burke — includes the following organization chart and stresses autonomy:

After studying best practices in other sports, Gillis believes hockey decisions must be made only after a thorough process that involves and empowers multiple stakeholders.

"I've thought long and hard about what an organizational chart should resemble for a National Hockey League team in today's day and age," Gillis told the On Air podcast in a fascinating 2021 interview. "Technology and analytics and human performance, that science is there, and it can be utilized in a really effective way, provided the organization wants to.

"General managers in Canada get way too much credit when things go really well, and they get way too much blame when things don't go well. And if you had a high-functioning organization, it would include a variety of different people that were filling in roles that were highly critical to the team's success, but were allowed to also participate in designing that team success and were part of the decision-making process.

"Where teams stumble is they don't have a decision-making process. They don't stick to it, no matter what the stress level is or what the circumstances are. You know, they're kind of flying by the seat of their pants and not having a real plan to move the organization forward."

Gillis believes players and surrounding staff must feel like they're part of something bigger, a vision they understand, are committed to, and feel integral to.

"If those features are in place, I think you're going to be successful. I know you are," Gillis said. "If any of those features aren't in place, your likelihood of success is remote."

Today's Maple Leafs do not have those features in place.

As Pelley phrased it upon firing Brad Treliving: "We didn't have the alignment, we didn't have the culture, we didn't have the structure that we needed."

Gillis has a specific idea of how a hockey team should operate and has claimed he can be "picky" about the next job he takes.

Just as the Maple Leafs are interviewing Gillis, he is interviewing them.

"I don't need to work in hockey in a way where I just have a job in hockey. If there isn't an opportunity to contribute and make changes and put things in place that you believe in over quite an extensive period of time of thinking and looking at them, then it's not going to make sense to me," Gillis said.

"If you have everybody contributing at an optimal level, you're going to have success. And I have some firm beliefs in how to set that up, and there hasn't been a place yet that was willing to view it that way.

"I think it'll come, because other teams and other organizations and businesses are successful using organizational science to design the most optimal working environment. And if I can't do that, then I'll do other stuff."

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Sportsnet.ca / Experienced depth players loom large in Oilers' push for Cup

Mark Spector

5-6 minutes



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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EDMONTON — Somehow, the Anaheim Ducks managed to cut off the head of the snake in their playoff debut at Edmonton, yet still, the rest of the Oilers strangled them in a 4-3 win.

For the first time all season, the Oilers won a game in which Connor McDavid didn't have a point. Talk about a double-edged sword for the Ducks.

"If you're able to shut down some of those top, high-end guys, you typically have a good result," mused Anaheim's Alex Killorn. "I'll give credit to their secondary scoring."

Alas, death by Jason Dickinson and Kasperii Kapanen was not on Anaheim's Bingo card as these playoffs opened Monday. But up north, the entire theme in Oil Country has revolved around getting to games like this one.

In Edmonton, the local hockey team has played eight playoff rounds in two years with nothing but a pair of Western Conference banners to show for it. There have been no banner-raising ceremonies, or hour-long variety shows preceding the following seasons' home opener.

Just half of a Canadian province, trying to conjure up a solution on how to find one or two more wins in a season of 105 games? How to fine tune one of the NHL's better teams into the league best team, to build a better base underneath and around the premium one-two punch of superstars in the league today?

And Edmonton does look a little bit different these days.

As these playoffs begin, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins — a first-line fixture for years in Edmonton — plays on the third line with Dickinson and Jack Roslovic. Leon Draisaitl's wingers are not Top 6 staples, but instead a pair of utilitarian forwards in Vasily Podkolzin and Kapanen, whose games are being raised by their proximity to the NHL's most consistent 50-goall, 100 point player.

And at last, the Oilers have a fourth line with an identity, with certified bangers Colton Dach and Trent Frederic flanking one of Josh Samanski or Curtis Lazar, with the injured Adam Henrique out for Game 2.

Their best defenceman in Game 1 was Jake Walman, who comes at you off the third pair.

It's a supporting cast that played well down the stretch without the injured Draisaitl, and for one game at least, succeeded in the playoffs on a night when McDavid and the power play were silent.

"We have so much experience within our depth," Nugent-Hopkins said on the off day, "(and) guys understand that sometimes it's their turn to show up and find ways to score big goals. We saw last night with Kappy and Dick — two apiece got us the win. Because the depth that we have, and the experience within that depth that we have, guys are ready to step up in any moment."

Across the way, Ducks head coach Joel Quenneville walks the line between wanting to win a series, and making sure that every important piece of his promising young roster gains as much experience as possible from this first playoff series in the past eight seasons for Anaheim.

As much as they want to win, it's more about tomorrow than today in Anaheim, home of the best looking rebuild in the Western Conference.

"We wanted to find out about our guys in the playoffs, and we showed that we're competitive (in Game 1)," Quenneville said. "There are some things we can learn from, and we've got to get better as we go along in the series anyways."

"The effort was there, the pace was fine. We expect to get better in order to win and be successful. And that's our challenge."

Somehow, the Ducks walked into Edmonton and shut down the best player in the world, his entire first line, and the NHL's top power play — all in one fell swoop. It's crazy to think they accomplished, what so many other teams have failed at without much post-season experience.

But, can they even dream of holding McDavid pointless for a second straight game?

"That's a full-time job description for everybody that's on the ice, every guy on our team," Quenneville said. "We expect him to get his moments ... he's going to get his turn, his chances and opportunities. But whether it's the guys who scored last night or one forward, we don't just have to stop one guy. We've got a whole group (to stop)."

A quote like that must be music to Kris Knoblauch's ears.

A playoff opponent, worried about all the players not wearing Nos. 97, 29, and 2. Dare to dream.

"There's always going to be times where somebody else is the hero," the Oilers coach began. "Draisaitl, McDavid, they're going to be our heroes many times — but they can't be the heroes every single time. There's nights where it just doesn't happen (for the stars) and you need other guys stepping up."

"Last night ... we got the win because our other guys really stepped up big when we needed them."

If that continues, and the big boys heat up, the Oilers may just find that extra punch they've been looking for.

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Sportsnet.ca / Senators' Stutzle looks to turn frustration into breakthrough

Wayne Scanlan

6–8 minutes

Nobody wants to win more than Tim Stützle.

Nobody gets more frustrated when he doesn't produce enough to make that happen.

To say that Stützle had the game on his stick in the wildest overtime in Senators history, is to say that he had to get in line. Who didn't have a glorious chance at some point during the epic, nearly 94-minute double OT loss to the Carolina Hurricanes Monday night?

Ottawa's third-longest playoff game was so crazy that the Hurricanes scored the winner off a slot shot in the second overtime after missing on a penalty shot in the first overtime, which ended a unique sequence in which Carolina had the potential winning goal called back on an offside call.

All the while, Stützle was pushing, pressing, missing, cursing.

In the early moments of the game, it was Stützle who faced a yawning net, the puck in on his feet a bit, causing him to fan on his shot, the puck harmlessly slapping the side of the net.

Late in a power play, a Stützle turnover in the offensive zone sent the Canes off on a rush that ended in Sebastian Aho's goal for a 2-0 lead just as the man advantage ended.

Stützle. Toujours Stützle.



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The 24-year-old could have hung his head after missing a breakaway chance on Frederik Andersen, looking for a five-hole opening when the payoff might have been to hold the puck a half-second longer and tuck it inside the post.

It was Stützle who had a glorious chance from the low slot late in the third period, his shot missing wide on the stick side.

And yet again, Stützle was in alone in overtime, his shift to the left a winning one, but his deke tuck hitting the post and bounding back out of harm's way.

On the Sportsnet broadcast, Stützle's F-bombs resonated on the arena microphones, competing with the play-by-play call of John Bartlett.

For a while, it seemed as though the younger Stützle might surface, the one who would throw a tantrum and sulk as the young Senators of D.J. Smith struggled to mature into a playoff team.

And yet after a difficult first half of the game, Stützle pushed play and was a key reason that the Senators more than held their own in the third period, outshooting Carolina 8-5 with both teams in search of the go-ahead goal. The shots were 28-16 for the Canes after two periods, and it was due to goaltender Linus Ullmark in his finest hours as a Senator that the Sens were still in the hunt after 40, 60 and even the 80-minute mark. The shots ended 46-39, advantage Carolina.

The Senators hit a post or crossbar five times, including a crossbar shot off the stick of Michael Amadio in the second overtime.

When would this end?

How would it end?

With Ullmark lunging and battling to keep puck after puck from getting past him – the upward body thrusts to get a shoulder on a shot was a lasting image from this wild night – it was going to take a clean shot to beat him. And Jordan Martinook's shot at 13:53 of the second OT just inside the post on Ullmark's trapper side, was perfect. If also lucky.

"I'd be lying if I said I picked my head up and looked to pick the corner," said Martinook, whose penalty shot effort in the first overtime was swatted away by Ullmark's glove.

"At that point (of double OT) you're trying to put as many pucks on the net as you can and I felt like we kind of had them on the run a bit. I got it and just ripped it."

It was Drake Batherson, Ottawa's first goal scorer of the game and series, and Stützle who were victimized on the winning passing play.

Dylan Cozens had tied the game on a sharp-angle shot in the second period.

Stützle finished with just two shots on goal, which looks like a typo on the scoring sheet considering the number of looks he had. He had five missed shots.

During the overtime intermissions, the Hockey Night panel had his back.

"If anyone deserves to score in overtime, it's Tim Stützle," said Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman.

It wasn't to be for Ottawa or their flashy centre as they dropped their second consecutive game in Raleigh. Growing pains for a young-ish Senators core that has known just eight career playoff encounters.

Stützle had five points in his inaugural playoff experience last spring, a six-game loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Experience matters in the playoffs, in particular against a ready club like Carolina.

In Game 1, it felt as though the Canes brought a coarse level of sandpaper to the proceedings compared to Ottawa's medium grade. By

Game 2, particularly in the second half, the Senators matched blow for blow and chance for chance. They won puck battles and produced chances. A game there for the taking.

This was a surprisingly free-wheeling event compared to the opener, with its expected defensive approach from both teams. That's the rub – with room to operate and wheel this could have been, should have been, Stützle's night to celebrate rather than curse like a German sailor.

There have been moments in this series when Stützle has resembled his younger self, trying too hard and wanting to succeed too badly.

Hockey is a funny game. All macho talk and physical play, but certain critical moments require poise and patience that might be better equated to a game of chess than a brawler's contest.

That's when finishers finish.

So now what, as the Senators and their fans anticipate Game 3 at the Canadian Tire Centre Thursday night?

In their history, the Senators have never erased a 2-0 series deficit, and they've been in the situation 10 previous times.

If any group is equipped and familiar with being in a hole, it has to be this 2025-26 edition of the Senators, who fought long odds just to have the privilege of being in this post-season.

They need to win four of their next five games, the kind of streak they managed in the long road to get here. The task grows in stature considering the opposition is a playoff-hardened group like the Hurricanes.

It starts with one game, one win.

To see Stützle end his frustration and the Senators' power play do some damage would be a welcome sign as the series shifts to Ottawa.

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Sportsnet.ca / Scout's Analysis: Prospects to watch at U18 hockey championship

Jason Bukala

6–7 minutes

The 2026 scouting calendar is nearing its conclusion. The CHL is already deep into their playoffs, the college hockey season has concluded, and the junior circuit in Europe has recently come to an end as well.

For the next 10 days I'm based out of Bratislava, Slovakia, one of the host cities for the Men's U18 World Championship alongside Trencin.

With the NHL Draft on the horizon, this event provides teams one final opportunity to view prospects in high leverage games representing their countries.

Here are some players to watch at the tournament:

CANADA

Keaton Verhoeff, 6-foot-3, 212 pounds, right shot defenceman, North Dakota (NCAA)

Verhoeff has been in the conversation at the top of the draft class all season long. He had a solid year playing for North Dakota at the NCAA level. The two-way defenceman has the skill set to quarterback a power



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play and beat goalies from long distance with a hard and accurate shot. Verhoeff produced 6G-14A in 36 regular season games for the Fighting Hawks. The previous year he contributed 21G-24A in the WHL playing for Victoria.

It will be interesting to see how Verhoeff is deployed for Team Canada. Playing amongst his peer group provides Verhoeff an opportunity to plant more seeds of confidence for one of the teams drafting in the top five in June.

Tynan Lawrence, 6-foot, 185 pounds, left shot centre, Boston University

This tournament provides players an opportunity to reset their trajectory in comparison to their draft eligible peers. I'm curious to see the impact Lawrence has offensively at the tournament after an up-and-down season playing first in the USHL with Muskegon and then the NCAA with Boston University.

After producing 10G-7A in 13 games with Muskegon, Lawrence made the move to the NCAA mid-season and it took him some time to adjust to the level. He totalled 2G-5A in 18 games with BU.

Lawrence is one of the top centres available in the draft. His all-around game took a big step forward towards the end of the year, so a big tournament offensively will go a long way towards elevating his draft stock.

Adam Valentini, 5-foot-9, 190 pounds, left shot forward, Michigan

Valentini can play both centre and wing, but at Michigan he primarily played on the wing. He's sturdy and strong and doesn't shy away from contact or battling for pucks in the hard areas of the ice. His off-puck attention to detail improved on a weekly basis this season at Michigan, to the point I believe Team Canada can have the confidence to deploy Valentini in a variety of roles at the tournament.

FINLAND

Oliver Suvanto, 6-foot-2, 207 pounds, left shot forward, Tappara (U20)

Suvanto is the kind of player NHL teams value when games get physical. His offensive numbers don't jump off the page, but Suvanto's a big, strong, engaged power forward who extends plays along the boards and gives opponents all they can handle out front of the net. There are times when it takes two opponents to move him off the play, which opens up more space for his teammates to create and score.

Juho Piiparinen, 6-foot-1, 201 pounds, right shot defenceman, Tappara (Liiga/U20)

Piiparinen is an intriguing prospect. The right-shot defenceman displays excellent skating ability and battles to win pucks physically in the defensive zone. He has the puck skill to quarterback a power play, but his real value appears when he's matched up against the opposition's top forward groups.

I'm expecting Piiparinen to be deployed in all situations for Finland and be on the ice for well over 20 minutes per game. He didn't score a goal at the pro level, but he did contribute 1G-12A at the U20 level competing against his peer group.

SWEDEN

Elton Hermansson, 6-foot-1, 176 pounds, right shot winger, MoDo (Allsvenskan)

Hermansson produced his share of offence playing pro in Sweden's second division this season. He's trustworthy, plays with solid pace and pays attention to detail on and off the puck. He's the kind of prospect who can be deployed in a variety of roles in addition to creating offence.

Alexander Command, 6-foot-1, 183 pounds, left shot centre, Orebro (Sweden J20)

Command is one of my favourite draft targets in the back half of the first-round. He plays a tight, detailed game on and off the puck and has the skill and speed to attack off the rush and drive to the net. Command contributed 17G-27A at the J20 level in Sweden this year while being whistled for 61 penalty minutes.

Markus Nordmark, 6-foot-1, 180 pounds, left shot forward, Djurgardens (Sweden J20)

Nordmark has a chance to be selected in the top 10 at the draft in June. He has decent size and deceptive speed. Nordmark is the kind of player who controls the pace of the game with the puck on his stick. He changes gears, pulls up to make plays, and is generally difficult to check. He produced 14G-24A at the J20 level this season. Goalies can't sleep on his shot from distance. He's proven he can shoot the puck in motion from the outside and beat netminders in the process.

USA

Wyatt Cullen, 6-foot-1, 176 pounds, left shot winger, USNTDP

Cullen has battled through some injuries at times this year but, when healthy and at his best, he's a play-driving forward who's very difficult to check. He makes plays from the perimeter and escapes pressure in small areas. I appreciate his competitive approach and feel he has another level of offence to provide in the future.

Casey Mutryn, 6-foot-3, 200 pounds, right shot winger, USNTDP

Mutryn is another power forward competing at this tournament who's hard to play against and consistently involved battling to create turnovers or extend puck possession along the boards. He won't wow anyone with elite skill, so he might fly under the radar of a naked eye, but he plays a valuable role that led to 14G-23A in 55 games this year. He was also whistled for 87 penalty minutes.

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1388478 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Senators lose double-OT thriller, must find ways to capitalize on chances

Alex Adams

5-7 minutes

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Ottawa Senators and Carolina Hurricanes played an all-time classic game on Monday night, but the only reward the Senators got was the sharp pain of defeat.

The Hurricanes won the game 3-2 after two overtimes stuffed with playoff shenanigans and now lead the series 2-0 as it moves to Ottawa.

"This one's going to sting," Senators head coach Travis Green said afterward.

Jordan Martinook was the hero in the second OT period when he made good on a scoring chance after missing on a penalty shot in the first overtime.

That penalty shot came immediately after the Hurricanes thought they had scored the winner, only for the goal by Mark Jankowski to be taken off the board following an offside review.

Senators fans won't be happy with that type of poetic justice.



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There were so many twists and turns that Senators owner Michael Andlauer and general manager Steve Staios left after Jankowski scored. They initially thought the game was over, only to return for the second overtime.

Now, the Senators find themselves down 2-0 in the series after one of the most bittersweet defeats this franchise has ever had, and one of the best playoff games they've ever seen.

It had everything, from furious comebacks, unbelievable saves and multiple close calls that hit the post.

The Hurricanes even put a meditation video up on the jumbotron in the overtime intermission to relieve fans of their anxieties.

It was that type of game, with nails flying off fans' fingers.

"Felt like they controlled the first half of the game and felt like we controlled the last half," Green said. "Man, in overtime, I don't know. It felt like we had a lot of looks to score."

Green's message after Monday's morning skate was "bring it tonight," with some cursing for emphasis. His team did everything, but Frederik Andersen and his lucky goal posts (three hit in total) kept getting in the way.

It was the first double overtime for the Senators since Game 7 of the 2017 Eastern Conference Final, a loss that, in some ways, set the club on the rebuild path it spent most of the last decade on.

Amid the chaos, Linus Ullmark had the best game of his Senators career.

"It could have been easily 3-0, 4-0 there but he kept us in and we were able to tie it up," said Senators forward Drake Batherson.

Here's a montage of his saves:

Ullmark made 43 saves, with 1.8 goals saved above expected. Through two games of the post-season, he has the best expected goals saved above expected of any goaltender in the playoffs.

He's been the Senators' best player through two games, which is typically a recipe for success in the playoffs.

Although it wasn't the flashiest, Ullmark's biggest clutch save came on Martinook's penalty shot.

With under four minutes to play in the first overtime, Jordan Staal led the Hurricanes on a rush into the Senators' end. As the Hurricanes set up in the offensive zone, Martinook was hooked by Senators forward Warren Foegele, creating a delayed penalty. Jankowski then scored but the game was not over. A review for offside determined Staal had possession but not control when he crossed the blue line. Thanks to Rule 38.7, the penalty was allowed to stay and the officials surprised everyone in the building when they announced a penalty shot for Martinook.

It was Ullmark's finest hour.

Despite such a heart-wrenching defeat, if Ullmark continues to play at a Vezina-calibre level, the Senators are right in the fight in spite of the 2-0 deficit.

Another reason for a glimmer of hope is that Tyler Kleven skated with the team in the morning as a full participant and is likely to return for Game 3. Pair that (not literally) with Artem Zub, who was a game-time decision on Monday, and there is a world where the Senators' injury report reduces and the team's chance of winning increases.

If one or both defencemen return, the Senators could start imposing more of their will on the series.

Nevertheless, the blue line was valiant in Game 2, with Jake Sanderson, Thomas Chabot, Jordan Spence and Nikolas Matinpalo all playing well over 30 minutes.

Matinpalo was a revelation in 31 minutes, which was the most of his NHL career.

"This guy that wasn't in the lineup not too long ago, (now) playing in the top pair (well)," said Green of the 27-year-old Finn.

If and when Zub and Kleven return, the emergence of Matinpalo improves the overall level of the Senators' backend.

But with the Hurricanes healthy, the Senators defence showed its wear in overtime while Carolina continued to roll out three pairs consistently, which is something to watch moving forward in this series.

The Senators do have some experience from last spring to consider as they prepare to head home for Game 3. The Toronto Maple Leafs beat the Senators in overtime in Games 2 and 3 in last year's playoffs to go up 3-0 in the series, but the Senators then won twice to force a Game 6.

Ottawa has shown fight all year long, including on Monday, and that mindset should continue no matter how the rest of the series unfolds. At the same time, it just might be too much to overcome to get out of a 2-0 hole against the best team in the Eastern Conference this season.

There are no moral victories in the playoffs, but the Senators should still believe despite the heartache.

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Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Oettinger's resilience leads Stars over Wild in Game 2

Emily Sadler

6-7 minutes

That's more like it.

After stumbling out of the gates in Saturday night's series-opener, the Dallas Stars showed up Monday night and took back a little control with a 4-2 victory to even up the first-round series before it shifts to Minnesota.

Dallas learned the hard way in Game 1 that there's no slowing down the Wild. You can only hope to match their pace. And on Monday night, they won the race, all while matching the hockey world's expectations of what this series should be.

It helped that the Stars received a major boost in net with a bounce-back performance by goaltender Jake Oettinger.

Blame for Saturday's lop-sided loss wasn't squarely on Oettinger — that was a true team-effort — but much like the rest of the roster, the No. 1 netminder's play didn't bode well for the series ahead. Oettinger looked shaky at times, as though perhaps a few ghosts of series past had come back to haunt him. Or, more realistically, as though his season-low regular-season save percentage might get worse under the brighter lights of the playoffs.

But the Oettinger we saw in Monday night's victory looked like a man who'd put those struggles behind him. He was sharp right from the start, not only staving off an early Minnesota attack but shifting the momentum in the first period. Dallas's first goal of the night would never have happened without Oettinger's clutch save on a point-blank snipe from Danila Yurov. The stop led to a quick rush in the opposite direction for the Stars and a noticeable shift in momentum as Wyatt Johnston cashed in on a lucky bounce off the end board behind Wild goalie Jesper Wallstedt.



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That might have been Oettinger's best save of the night. Or perhaps that title goes to his glove save on a Matt Boldy backhand later in the frame — one of five saves against the winger on Monday — that would have seen the Wild take a 2-1 lead. Or maybe it was his save on Boldy's breakaway opportunity a few minutes later. Minnesota excels at finding cracks and breaking them wide open, but Oettinger's resilience was strong enough to keep the Wild from mustering up the kind of momentum that saw them cruise to victory on Saturday. It was on full display during the Wild's final push to tie things up, too, but even after allowing Minnesota to climb back to within one goal halfway through the third period, Oettinger stood tall.

At the other end of the ice, Wallstedt put up another strong performance — he stopped 28 of 31 shots. But this was Oettinger's night, and the series now shifts to a best-of-five because of it.

Puck luck sides with Stars

While it clearly took some extremely clutch performances, especially from the man in the blue paint, for Dallas to even up the series on Monday night, it also took a touch of luck. The hockey god sided with the home team in Dallas.

Take their game-opening goal, for example, which saw Johnston fire a puck just behind the net only to see it take a lucky bounce off the end board, then deflect off Wallstedt and in to give Dallas the game's early lead.

Look closely at the trajectory of Johnston's empty-netter insurance goal in the dying minutes of the game, and you could argue a lucky bounce may have been the difference there, too. It certainly fooled Quinn Hughes, who was in hot pursuit of the puck as it rolled down the ice towards Minnesota's wide-open cage, but slowed slightly in anticipation of it going just wide before it curled into the net.

The Hughes-Faber pairing is the best in hockey

We're watching a masterclass of blue-line chemistry every time Quinn Hughes and Brock Faber are on the ice — which, according to Monday's ice-time totals of 28:35 and 26:42, respectively, was pretty often.

Minnesota's top defence pairing has been elite ever since the two teamed up following Hughes' move from Vancouver, with Faber's offensive game blossoming. That was certainly the case Monday night in Dallas, with the duo combining on both of Minnesota's goals in the 4-2 loss. In addition to leading the team in shots (6), Faber registered both goals — the first and second playoff goals of his career. After being held without a point in his first two trips to the playoffs, Faber now has three in two games.

The defencemen had their fingerprints all over Saturday's series-opening victory, too, though not in as obvious a way. Their ability to drive play from the blue line, orchestrate entries with seeming ease, and keep Dallas' top stars (mostly) in check is unmatched. Two games in, it feels like the Wild will go as far as Hughes and Faber will take them. And we've only just seen the beginning.

Minnesota misses Zuccarello

Forward Mats Zuccarello was ruled out of Game 2 with an upper-body injury. The announcement came as a bit of a surprise, as Zuccarello participated in the Wild's morning skate Monday but was later listed as day-to-day, with Bobby Brink suiting up in his place.

Zuccarello's playmaking was missed on Monday, and never more than during Minnesota's power plays. The winger's pass-first game is a significant driver of the Wild's third-ranked PP. Two of his three helpers in Game 1 came with the man advantage. Without the veteran in the lineup, Minnesota did not convert on any of its four PP opportunities. His status for Game 3 will be closely watched, as will that of Yakov Trenin. Trenin was seriously shaken up after taking a blistering (but clean) open-ice hit from Stars forward Colin Blackwell late in the first period. He was slow to

get up, and went straight to the dressing room and did not return. Trenin led the league in hits this season and, despite Monday's early exit, leads the category in the post-season, too (tied with teammate Marcus Foligno's 16). His physical presence was missed following his departure.

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Sportsnet.ca / 'We got outplayed': Penguins shut out as Vladar, Flyers take 2-0 series lead

Sonny Sachdeva

6–8 minutes

They'd been pushed back, hemmed in, cornered. After walking all over the Pittsburgh Penguins in Game 1 of this series, the Flyers had taken the ice in the middle frame of Game 2 and seen Sidney Crosby's club slowly start to come to life, seen the league's third-best regular-season offence begin to find some juice.

"They were pressing us," head coach Rick Tocchet said late Monday night. "For about three or four minutes, [before] we got to the timeout. They were coming in waves at us."

Then netminder Dan Vladar strode over to Philly's bench, the picture of calm. He had a message.

"He said, 'We're okay,'" the coach remembered. "'Guys, don't worry about it. Relax.' He says that. He's the goalie — he's getting peppered. It means a lot. Now, guys are like, 'I've got to pick my game up. I've got to block a shot for this guy.'"

The TV timeout concluded, the Flyers went back over the boards, and the visitors tilted the ice back in their favour. A few minutes later, teenage phenom Porter Martone was shovelling a deflected puck into the back of the Penguins net to draw first blood. Then Garnet Hathaway was finishing off a savvy short-handed sequence from Owen Tippett to put the Broad Street squad up 2-0.

Momentum killed, pressure deflated.

And on the other end of the sheet, Vladar backed up his words of wisdom, and proved just how relaxed he was. The 28-year-old turned aside everything the Penguins threw at him, posting his first career post-season shutout and sending the Flyers back to Philadelphia with a 2-0 lead in this first-round series.

"He's been like that all year for us. Guys enjoy playing for him," Tocchet said of his netminder as the fans filtered out of PPG Paints Arena, fresh off his club's 3-0 win Monday night. "He comes by the bench, he's talking to the players, talking to the bench. A lot of guys aren't used to goalies talking that much, but that's the way Vladdy is — I love his personality."

It was another banner night for the Flyers. For the second straight game, the underdog squad that came into these playoffs rolling like a freight train ran right over the veteran Penguins. Though Pittsburgh managed a better offensive effort this time around, and looked steadier in the face of the Flyers' physicality, the home side still looked a ways off the fluid, free-flowing form they found for much of the regular season.

"I don't think that we've played, collectively, the game that we have throughout the year," veteran Erik Karlsson said from the Penguins locker room post-game. "It doesn't feel like we're as comfortable as we want to be, and it's frustrating. They're doing a good job. There's nothing else to it — they outplayed us. For six periods now.



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"It's unfortunate. It sucks right now. But at the end of the day, we can't do much about it. We got outplayed for two games at home. It hurts. But we've got no one else to blame but ourselves. All we can do is take care of that and move forward."

What's worrying for the Penguins faithful is that on the other side of the sheet, the Flyers — who head home to their own rink two wins away from ending this series — didn't much like their performance, either.

"I didn't think we had our game tonight. They were coming," said Tocchet. "But I liked our resolve. You know, we gave them some outside stuff, and when we didn't, Vladdy was there. We know we can't play like that again. ... Give them credit, they played well. It was a goofy game for us.

"Sometimes in playoffs you're going to have to win those ugly games. It was an ugly game, for us."

No doubt uglier for a Pittsburgh squad that now must win one of two in as hostile an environment as they could find if they hope to stay alive and keep this return to the post-season rolling.

"I mean, playoffs aren't easy. That's the way it is sometimes. It doesn't always go your way," said Crosby, who's been held pointless through two games. "Especially here at home, we would've liked to get at least one, obviously both, and it didn't happen. So, we've got to find a way to regroup and be better for Game 3, and get the next one."

The captain was asked if the Flyers are doing anything specific to make it difficult for he and his linemates to produce.

"No. It's playoff hockey," he said. "It's tight-checking. You've got to find a way to generate."

As this series shifts to Philadelphia, his club is running out of chances to do so. After finishing the regular season as one of the most prolific offensive outfits in the league, the Penguins' attack has sputtered through two games, stringing together only a handful of sequences that saw them truly look like the offensive juggernaut they'd been for much of this campaign.

But it won't get any easier come Wednesday, in Game 3.

"I don't think this is something that's common to just us, in this series. This is playoff hockey," said Penguins head coach Dan Muse post-game. "You look around the league — everything's hard. It's supposed to be hard. It's the NHL playoffs. Everybody's going to be in lanes. Everybody should be in lanes. You're going to have to do those little things that can give you an extra inch — finding the shot lane a little bit quicker, working to get to the netfront a little bit faster. All those things are in play.

"Not just for us — that's across the league. We have to get to that point. We haven't yet."

The Penguins' frustration came to a boiling point in the dying minutes of Monday's tilt, the game finishing an ugly scene after Luke Glendening potted a late empty-netter for Philadelphia. Helmets and gloves littered the ice, officials sprinted to separate combatants, the home side clearly perturbed at another night that had gone off the rails.

And rightfully so, said their coach.

"There should be frustration. We should be frustrated. We just lost two games at home," Muse said. "I think with frustration, though, comes 'How are we going to respond?' I would hope every single guy in that room, on our staff, nobody's happy right now. Nobody should be. Tomorrow we're going to have to make a decision in terms of, you know, are we going to stay with it? Stay with what we want to do, get to our game — which we haven't gotten to in two games — or are we going to let frustration continue to boil over into the next one?"

"That's going to be a choice we, together, all of us, including myself, are going to have to make here over the next 24 hours."