



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

## The News & Observer

### Inside the mind of Hurricanes' Mark Jankowski, an OT hero who suddenly wasn't

By: Chip Alexander

For a few fleeting minutes, Mark Jankowski was a playoff hero.

Late in the first overtime of the Carolina Hurricanes (Shopping Cart IconShop Canes Fan Gear) playoff game Monday with the Ottawa Senators, Jankowski pounced on a juicy rebound of a Seth Jarvis shot and zipped the puck past goalie Linus Ullmark.

The goal horn sounded. The Lenovo Center erupted. Canes players swarmed around Jankowski, who had the biggest smile in Wake County.

But Jankowski was soon like everyone else in the arena, anxiously eyeing replays on the scoreboard. The goal was being challenged and being reviewed, and after several agonizing minutes, officials ruled Carolina captain Jordan Staal was offside at the start of what would be the scoring sequence on a delayed penalty against Ottawa.

It all ended well for the Hurricanes. Jordan Martinook, who drew a hooking call on the play, did not convert a penalty shot after the no-goal ruling, but did supply the winning goal in the second overtime for a 3-2 victory and 2-0 lead in the Stanley Cup playoff series.

"It was all pretty crazy," a smiling Jankowski said Wednesday after practice. "When I scored, it was a huge high right away. Super excited. Happy we had won the game. Celebrating with everyone.

"And then you see (Ottawa) still on the bench, and you try to figure out what's going on. We heard they were looking at offside, so I spent the next couple of minutes asking everyone I could see, 'What did you see, was it good, was he off?' I thought it was onside.

"When I saw it the first time, I thought it was. Then I saw it the next day, after I kind of calmed down, and he's still onside."

Jankowski had scored a playoff goal before — in 2024 with the Nashville Predators. But this was different. It would have been an overtime game-winner for the center, would have been a headliner in NHL Stanley Cup coverage.

After the game, Jankowski said he checked all the texts and messages on his phone.

"Almost everybody I knew had sent me the same text," he said. "It was like, 'Oh my God, let's go, yes!.' Then a few minutes later, it was 'Oh, no way, you got robbed!' I got both ends of the spectrum, and all from the same people.

"I'm just happy we won the game. It would have stung a lot more if we didn't end up on top, but we did. We didn't get down. We pushed through, and obviously it was huge to get that one to win it."

Jankowski's line, with wingers William Carrier and Eric Robinson, did its part. Brind'Amour continued to roll four lines throughout the game and Jankowski had nine total shifts in the two overtime periods — one more memorable than the others.

"In a long playoff run you're going to need your depth and that's a huge strength of our team," Jankowski said. "You get in those games like double overtime, or a long series, and you're going to need that. I think we can provide that, for sure."

The first-round series moves to Ottawa for the next two games. The Canes practiced Wednesday with a full complement of players, preparing for another physical, tight-checking game.

"They don't give you much," Jankowski said. "They play a good structured game. They play hard. We knew how hard a series it would be, and it has proven to be that, with low-scoring, tight games. We need to keep pushing forward and keep our foot on the gas."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

## The Athletic

### What's gone right and wrong for the Hurricanes entering Game 3 vs. Senators

By: Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Hurricanes did what they were supposed to do in the first two games of their first-round playoff series with Ottawa: win both at home.

Carolina, the Eastern Conference's top seed, smothered the Senators in Game 1, picking up a 2-0 win Saturday, and followed that with a 3-2 double-overtime win in Monday's Game 2.

Now the series shifts to Canada's capital for Thursday's Game 3, a matchup that feels like a must-win for the Senators and an opportunity for the Hurricanes to take a stranglehold on the series.

Carolina will want to build on some of the things they've done well in Games 1 and 2. There is also room for improvement in a few areas that, if corrected, could help push the Hurricanes to the second round. But if the issues linger, they may present an opportunity for the Senators to get back in the series.

"It's nice to be up two," Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said Monday. "But ... you've got to get to four. They're going to come back with a better effort in a tough building. So it'll be a brand new challenge next game."

What's gone right

Mr. Andersen

There was plenty of discourse about which goalie the Hurricanes should start to open the Stanley Cup playoffs, and there were also questions about whether Carolina would continue to rotate its goalies.

It's hard to argue with the path coach Rod Brind'Amour has taken.

Frederik Andersen, maligned much of the season as Brandon Bussi emerged as one of the NHL's feel-good stories of 2025-26, has matched Ottawa goalie Linus Ullmark save for save in a low-scoring series.

Andersen was in the red on goals saved above expected in a regular season that saw him lose more times than he won (16-14-5), but he's done a 180 so far this postseason. MoneyPuck.com has credited him with 4.2 goals saved above expected at five-on-five through two games, only bested by Ullmark's 4.6 among playoff goalies.

None was better than his stop in Game 1 that was initially ruled a goal but was proven a save upon review.

Carolina still has options, but for now, it's Andersen's net to lose.

"They're not going to go easy," Andersen said after Game 2. "So yeah, it's huge to keep home-ice advantage, and

obviously the focus shifts to 'go up there and try to take the next one.'"

Carolina Hurricanes center Logan Stankoven celebrates his goal against the Ottawa Senators in game two of the first round series in Raleigh, North Carolina

Hurricanes center Logan Stankoven has scored in each of the first two games of the series. James Guillory-Imagn Images

Too small for comfort

Much of the talk heading into the trade deadline was about Carolina's supposed need for an upgrade at center. Logan Stankoven has quieted those critics.

The diminutive forward blossomed down the stretch for the Hurricanes in his second full NHL season, entering the playoffs with seven goals and 11 points during an eight-game point streak.

That's carried over to the playoffs, where Stankoven has scored in each of the first two games against Ottawa and totaled three points.

"It's like he knew this was in him," Hurricanes GM Eric Tulsky said during a media availability Tuesday. "People worry a lot about his height. You know, in the end, it's about how hard you fight. And he wins as many puck battles as anyone.

"He's been great for us. He drags a lot of people into the fight and makes us harder to play against."

He's not doing it alone, as linemates Taylor Hall and Jackson Blake have turned an underlying numbers bonanza during the second half of the regular season into tangible playoff production.

Before the series, Senators beat writer Julian McKenzie described Ottawa shutdown center Shane Pinto as the team's X-factor. He's played almost exclusively against Stankoven's line, and the results have heavily favored Carolina.

It's about time for people to look past Stankoven's generously listed 5-foot-8 height and see him for what he is: a bulldog who terrorizes opposing teams with his relentlessness, willingness to get to dirty areas and finishing touch.

PK back to old self

In the Brind'Amour coaching era, Carolina's penalty kill has regularly finished near the top of the NHL season after season.

Things were a bit different this year, with the Hurricanes finishing a respectable but low-for-them 11th in the league. The final numbers don't show, however, that Carolina spent



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

half the season without Jaccob Slavin, one of the NHL's best penalty killers.

Since Slavin returned in mid-January, the PK performed at a top-five level, and through two games of the series, it has been dominant. In 12 minutes of five-on-four shorthanded time, the Hurricanes have limited the Senators to five shots on goal and nine shot attempts.

Carolina's kill is 7-for-7 in the series, and given the suffocating nature of the play at five-on-five, being able to blank Ottawa when down a man has been a key reason the Hurricanes lead the series 2-0.

What's gone wrong

Slow on the draw

I highlighted before the series that Ottawa's prowess at the dot could prove to be a problem for the Hurricanes, and so far it has been just that.

The Senators have won 60.7 percent of the faceoffs through two games, and none of Carolina's centers are above 50 percent. Sebastian Aho has won just 29 percent of his draws, while Stankoven resides at 37 percent.

"It's not good enough," Staal said Wednesday. "Our group of centers have to be obviously better."

The Hurricanes knew there would be growing pains this season with Stankoven learning as he grows in his new role down the middle, but Aho's middle-of-the-road performance at the dot (50.5 percent) has been a surprising regression.

"That's an area we've got to get better," Brind'Amour said.

Brind'Amour also credited the Senators.

"They're good at it," he said. "You guys need to maybe look at more of what they're doing. They got righty-lefties on every draw. It's an advantage. Understand that — it's a big deal."

There is a silver lining: Carolina has buckled down in the circle on the penalty kill. Staal has won 7 of 11 on the penalty kill, and Aho got wins on both the draws he has taken.

Whither Jarvis

Carolina has a few key point-producing players, including Andrei Svechnikov and Shayne Gostisbehere, without a point in the first two games. Seth Jarvis has also been kept off the scoresheet so far against Ottawa, pushing his season-ending, three-game point drought to five.

Jarvis' value goes beyond just putting points on the board — see the penalty kill, and the fact that he and linemates Svechnikov and Aho have assisted in keeping Tim Stutzle from registering any points so far in the series. And he's still

doing the little things, such as his two big shot blocks at six-on-four when Ottawa was trying to break through at the end of Game 1.

All that stuff is great while playing a checking role for Canada at the Olympics — or for any team, honestly — but Jarvis needs to produce points if Carolina wants to make a long postseason run. While Svechnikov has shown flashes of dominance and Aho broke through with a Game 2 goal, Jarvis is credited with just one scoring chance at five-on-five so far in the series, according to NaturalStatTrick.com.

The Hurricanes will need Jarvis to be a star at some point to get Carolina where it wants to go. The sooner he can get there, the better.

"Our top guys have to be impactful in the game, which means they've got to probably be on the scoresheet," Brind'Amour said Wednesday. "But after two games, it's always about the next game. So whether they had lit it up — that's irrelevant. What are you doing next game?"

Offense from D

The Hurricanes got 197 points out of their defense this year, led by Gostisbehere's 13 goals and 50 points in 55 games. Through two games of the series against the Senators, the D has one point.

Much of what Carolina does is predicated on the play of its defensemen, specifically the way the team uses tight gaps in the neutral zone to break up zone entries before they even reach the red line.

That often leads to offense, but the only point for a Hurricanes defender so far this postseason came on K'Andre Miller's secondary assist on Jordan Martinook's overtime winner in Game 2.

It's not that the defense isn't playing a role. Rookie Alexander Nikishin factored in on both Game 1 goals — a blue line keep-in on Stankoven's series-opening goal and a left circle shot that handcuffed Ullmark, leading to Hall's goalmouth scrum score — but wasn't rewarded with a point on either.

Miller is the only Carolina defenseman with double-digit shot attempts at five-on-five in the series, and Gostisbehere surprisingly has just three.

To put that in perspective, Gostisbehere — when not knocked out of a game with injury — was held to a combined three or fewer five-on-five shot attempts in consecutive games just once this season. And that happened during a December back-to-back in Florida and Tampa Bay that probably represented the low point of the regular season for the Hurricanes.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026



## Preview: Round 1, Game 3 at Ottawa

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Series transitions to Canada's capital with the Canes up 2-0

OTTAWA - The Carolina Hurricanes look to put the Ottawa Senators on the brink of elimination on Thursday when the two teams meet for Game 3 of their first-round 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs series.

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When: Thursday, April 23

Puck Drop: 7:30 p.m. ET

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

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes App

Series: 2-0 CAR

The Series So Far...

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

Game 2: Jordan Martinook played hero, scoring in double overtime to take a 2-0 series lead.

Still Stanky...

Canes forward Logan Stankoven opened the scoring for a second consecutive game on Monday, giving his team the first lead of the night once again.

The second-year Hurricane has been red-hot over the last three weeks, recording nine goals in his last 10 games dating back to Mar. 31.

The Kamloops, B.C. native became the fifth player in team history (since relocation) to open a postseason with goals in the first two games. Only one player in franchise history has ever scored in three straight: Pat Verbeek (1991 w/ HFD).

In Net...

Tonight's starter has not yet been confirmed. Rod Brind'Amour previously noted that both Frederik Andersen and Brandon Bussi will likely play during Round 1, but did not indicate what a potential rotation could look like.

Andersen has gotten the nod in each of the first two contests, posting a shutout in Game 1 and turning aside 37 of 39 shots in Game 2. With two days of rest, it's feasible that the veteran gets the nod again in Game 3. He operated in his usual starter's crease at Wednesday's practice at Lenovo Center.

Bussi, meanwhile, wrapped up the regular season on a heater, following up his first set of consecutive losses (0-3-0) with a 6-0-1 run and allowing two or fewer goals in four of those wins. If and when he appears this postseason, it'll be his Stanley Cup Playoff debut.

Pyotr Kochetkov's surprising return to the active roster could add a new dimension to the Canes' crease as the playoffs roll on, but Brind'Amour indicated that, while he is healthy, the Russian backstop was not yet a viable starting option.

On The Other Side...

Goaltender Linus Ullmark turned in another incredible performance on Monday, including a few 10-bell saves to keep his team in the contest. Despite the losses, MoneyPuck.com, has him ranked as the best goalie in the Stanley Cup Playoffs so far.

The Senators will hope a shift to Canadian Tire Centre will help spark a comeback in the series. Ottawa was among the league's best teams on home ice during the latter half of the season, co-leading the Eastern Conference in wins (9) and points (20) since clubs returned from the Olympic break in February.

Two days without games were certainly welcomed by both clubs following Monday's marathon, but particularly by Ottawa blueliners Thomas Chabot and Jake Sanderson, who each logged over 40 minutes TOI in Game 2.

Part of the reason Chabot and Sanderson shouldered such a heavy load was the absence of top-four defenseman Artem Zub, who sustained an injury in Game 1. Zub did not participate in Ottawa's optional practice on Wednesday, with Head Coach Travis Green mentioning that the Russian may return at some point in this series.

Elsewhere along the Ottawa blue line, Tyler Kleven may be nearing a return to action after being sidelined since April 2. Kleven skated with the group on Wednesday and would be a boost to his club after averaging a career-high 17:21 TOI per game during the regular season.

Injury Updates...

The Canes currently do not have any injuries to report.

What Are We Wearing?

The Canes will wear their WHITE uniforms for the contest. They will wear white for every road game in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

What's Next After This Game?



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026**

The Canes are scheduled to practice on Friday. They'll return to action on Saturday for Game 4.

Next Game: Sunday, April 25 | Round 1, Game 4 at Ottawa | 3:00 p.m. ET | How To Watch

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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

## The Hockey News

### Carolina Hurricanes @ Ottawa Senators Game 3: Lineups, Game Preview and How to Watch

By: Ryan Henkel

Canes aim for a commanding 3-0 lead in Ottawa. Will the Senators shake up lines to find life, or will Carolina steal a road win?

What - Game 3 (2-0)

When - 7:30 p.m., Thursday, April 23

Where - Canadian Tire Centre; Ottawa, ON

How to Watch - FanDuel Sports Network South, TBS, HBO MAX, Sportsnet, CBC, TVAS

The Carolina Hurricanes capped off a thrilling 2OT victory on Monday to take a 2-0 series lead on the road to Ottawa.

The Canes will now look to steal a road game as they aim for a commanding 3-0 lead in the first-round series.

Frederik Andersen is expected to once again man the Hurricanes net and no lineup changes are anticipated.

For Ottawa though, coach Travis Green said that anything could be on the table for the team as they look to get some life.

The team has been missing Artem Zub and Tyler Kleven this series and both remain potential game-time decisions.

It should be another tight match in Game 3.

#### Streaks

Logan Stankoven (9g, 5a) has points in 10 straight games (regular season and playoffs) and has scored in back-to-back games.

Jackson Blake (3a) and Taylor Hall (1g, 2a) have points in back-to-back games.

#### Milestone Watch

N/A

#### Game Notes

This is the first time the Canes and Senators have faced off in the playoffs.

This year, Carolina went 2-1-0 against Ottawa in the regular season, outscoring them 11-10.

For their careers, Sebastian Aho (9g, 26pts in 26gp) and Nikolaj Ehlers (12g, 30pts in 27gp) are point-per-game players against the Senators.

Ottawa holds a few connections to the Hurricanes franchise as Ridly Greig's father, Mark, played for the Hartford Whalers from 1990-94; Jake Sanderson's father, Geoff, played for the Whalers and Hurricanes from 1991-97; Warren Foegele played for Carolina from 2017-21; James

Reimer played for Carolina from 2019-21; and goaltending coach Justin Peters played for Carolina from 2010-14.

Hurricanes assistant coach Tim Gleason was drafted by the Senators in the first round of the 2001 draft.

#### Key Matchups

#### Projected Starting Goalies

Frederik Andersen: 2-0; 0.967 Sv%; 0.78 GAA

Linus Ullmark: 0-2; 0.936 Sv%; 1.99 GAA

#### Leading Scorers

Goals - Logan Stankoven (2) / Drake Batherson & Dylan Cozens (1)

Points - Logan Stankoven, Taylor Hall & Jackson Blake (3) / Jake Sanderson (2)

#### Power Play

Carolina - 16.7% (1/6)

Ottawa - 0% (0/7)

#### Penalty Kill

Carolina - 100% (7/7)

Ottawa - 83.3% (5/6)

#### Hurricanes Projected Lineup

Andrei Svechnikov - Sebastian Aho - Seth Jarvis

Taylor Hall - Logan Stankoven - Jackson Blake

Nikolaj Ehlers - Jordan Staal - Jordan Martinook

William Carrier - Mark Jankowski - Eric Robinson

Jacob Slavin - Jalen Chatfield

K'Andre Miller - Sean Walker

Alexander Nikishin - Shayne Gostisbehere

Frederik Andersen

Brandon Bussi

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

#### Senators Projected Lineup

Brady Tkachuk - Tim Stutzle - Drake Batherson

Ridly Greig - Dylan Cozens - Claude Giroux

Warren Foegele - Shane Pinto - Michael Amadio

Nick Cousins - Lars Eller - Fabian Zetterlund

Jake Sanderson - Nikolas Matinpalo



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

Thomas Chabot - Jordan Spence

Dennis Gilbert - Lassi Thomson

Linus Ullmark

James Reimer

Injuries and Scratches: Xavier Bourgault, Graeme Clarke, Cameron Crotty, Stephen Halliday, Arthur Kaliyev, Kurtis MacDermid, Leevi Merilainen, Oskar Pettersson, Carter Yakemchuk, Nick Jensen (LBI), Tyler Kleven (UBI), Artem Zub (undisclosed)

## LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article315496661.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7220892/2026/04/23/hurricanes-senators-nhl-playoffs-right-wrong/>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/preview-round-1-game-3-at-ottawa>

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/game-day/carolina-hurricanes-ottawa-senators-game-3-lineups-game-preview-and-how-to-watch>

# SportScan

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

1388497 Carolina Hurricanes

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

Chip Alexander6-8 minutes 22/04/2026

William Carrier of the Carolina Hurricanes 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 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](mailto: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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

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](mailto: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 Gattcomb of the New York Islanders in the April 4 game at Lenovo Center. That one turned Gattcomb upside down and had him on his head for a split-second.

"He's been great for us," general manager Eric Tulsky 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.

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."

Of note: Anastas named Wolves coach

The Hurricanes announced Tuesday that Spiros Anastas had been named head coach of the AHL Chicago Wolves. Anastas was promoted to interim head coach on Dec. 12, 2025. He led the Wolves to a 25-14-5-6 record in the final 50 games of the regular season and a second-place finish in the AHL's Central Division

This story was originally

Published April 22, 2026 at 6:00 AM.

Profile Image of Chip Alexander

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

News Observer LOADED: 04.23.2026

1388605 Websites

The Athletic / Should NHL players have to fight after delivering a clean hit?

By Mark Lazerus

DALLAS — Connor Murphy's stick was wedged in Joel Eriksson Ek's armpit as they battled for a puck in the corner during a game at Chicago's United Center in November, and a couple of good yanks didn't do anything to dislodge it. So Murphy gave the Minnesota Wild center a shove to free himself.

Eriksson Ek fell awkwardly into the boards, his face meeting the wall. The shove itself was pretty innocuous, but the result — and the sheer sound of the collision — made it seem worse. Almost immediately, Minnesota's Yakov Trenin was in the then-Chicago Blackhawks defenseman's face and dropping his gloves. The two each landed a few haymakers in a spirited bout. As Murphy skated off to the penalty box, he looked furious.

Not with his performance in the fight. But at the mere fact that he had to fight.

"It's been like this for a while now, and I don't really understand why it's gotten so far that way," said Murphy, who now patrols the blue line for the Edmonton Oilers. "It's like any sort of hit that looks like a guy got hit hard in any way, guys feel like (there) needs to be a fight from that — or it needs to be answered. Because if there's hitting in the game, there's going to be some (hits) that look bigger than others. If it's clean, body to body, it just feels like (there) doesn't need to be (a fight)."

Five months later, Trenin was on the receiving end of a hit that looked and sounded more malicious than it was. In Game 2 of the first-round series between the Wild and the Dallas Stars on Monday night, Trenin took an ill-advised pass from Zach Bogosian — a "hospital pass," in hockey parlance, because of how it puts a teammate at great risk of an open-ice hit — and got absolutely rocked by Dallas' Colin Blackwell, a scrappy but undersized fourth-liner.

Ouf, quelle passe dangereuse de Zach Bogosian pour Yakov Trenin! [pic.twitter.com/AXhnJgVQzf](https://pic.twitter.com/AXhnJgVQzf)

— TVA Sports (@TVASports) April 21, 2026

It was a clean hit, Blackwell ramming his right shoulder directly into Trenin's left shoulder, but it left Trenin face down on the ice for several seconds. He eventually got up and left the game and didn't return. Marcus Foligno, one of Minnesota's veteran enforcers, skated over to Blackwell and got in his face after the hit. But Foligno didn't drop his gloves. It was a 1-1 game in the Stanley Cup playoffs, and the Wild are trying to get out of the first round for the first time in more than a decade. It simply wasn't the time to risk an instigator penalty.

Especially for a clean hit.

"They want it," Foligno said after the game. "They're looking to play five-on-four. That's their game. They can't hang with us five-on-five. ... I'm trying to be smarter out there. And if I go after Blackwell, it's putting their team on the power play. You can argue with the hit. It's clean. I mean, I think it is. And it's unfortunate (Trenin) gets caught there in a vulnerable position. But there are a lot of emotions in this game. I thought we did a really good job controlling it."

So who was right? Trenin for going after Murphy? Or Foligno for not going after Blackwell?



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

It's a debate that's been percolating in the league for years now. Back when fighting was more prevalent, it never seemed odd for a donnybrook to break out. Just look at a guy the wrong way and the gloves were flying off. But now that fighting has become less common, there's more scrutiny on the fights that do happen.

Ask just about anyone in the hockey world, from front offices to locker rooms to the arena stands, and they'll tell you they love the physicality of the NHL and want more good, clean hits in the game. So why are players so often punished — forced into a bare-knuckle brawl and an inevitable five-minute penalty — for doing just that?

Perhaps big hits are so rare now that they all seem dirty on first glance.

"There used to be more hits back in the day, and it was more normal," Montreal Canadiens center Phillip Danault said. "Now there's a big hit, and it's like, 'Oh, f—. We've gotta fight him.' You had more hits then, and more dirty hits, and the refs thought it was all OK. Now when you see a big hit like that, you're almost surprised. So you just react."

Trenin, who had 13 hits in Game 1, had the second-highest single-season regular-season hit total since the NHL began tracking the stat.

It can also be exceedingly difficult for a player to discern whether a hit was actually clean. It's hard enough for the referees, who have their heads up and are constantly scanning the ice looking for just such a play. Players are focused on their own game, their own positioning, the opposing player they're responsible for checking. So if you see a guy go down out of the corner of your eye or hear a monster collision behind you or spot a teammate laid out on the ice, the first response is to find the guy who did it and, at the very least, get in his face.

In the same Nov. 26 Blackhawks-Wild game in which Murphy fought Trenin, physical fourth-liner Colton Dach laid a hit on Jared Spurgeon, Minnesota's 5-foot-9 captain. It was a pretty mild hit, happening in the same corner in which Murphy caught Eriksson Ek, but not nearly as violent. Minnesota's Jake Middleton didn't see the hit — he was skating away, several feet up the ice. But he heard it, peeked over his right shoulder and saw Spurgeon on the ice. Middleton all but chased Dach to the blue line on the far side of the ice before Dach finally obliged him with a fight.

"Middleton thought I took a harder hit at Spurgeon than I really did," Dach said. "He turned around and asked me if I was going to fight. That's the first one where I hit someone and someone's asked me to fight after a clean hit."

A player's instinct is always to defend a teammate. It's part of the brotherhood of being part of a team, and it certainly wins brownie points with teammates and coaches and many fans. Whether a hit was clean is almost immaterial.

Especially if the hit comes at the expense of a skill player.

"If you're going to lay out somebody's star player, you're going to have to answer," said San Jose Sharks forward Ryan Reaves, one of the league's most prolific fighters. "That's just the sport, right? You protect your own. Whether the guy's willing to answer or not, that's to be determined. But that's the way the sport's evolved. You protect your guys, especially your star players, and then you can move on."

Foligno's decision not to go after Blackwell stemmed from the NHL's instigator rule, which was added to the rule book in 1992. Most routine fights end in a wash, both teams losing a player for five minutes, with play continuing at five-on-five. But the risk of an extra minor penalty for instigating is a deterrent — especially when the games really matter.

"Anytime you blow a guy up, there's always somebody looking to have his teammate's back," New York Islanders veteran Casey Cizikas said. "I don't think that has ever changed. But it's different now with the rules that they've placed, where if a guy lays a big hit and it's clean and he's forced

to fight right away, it's a penalty for the other team. It can be tough to make a snap decision."

Of course, the instigator isn't called nearly as often as it should be by the letter of the law. Can it be truly effective in eliminating these unnecessary and unwarranted fights if officials are reluctant to hand it out?

"That's a tough one," Cizikas said. "Depending on who the (instigator) is, they might look at it and think he knows his role, he knows what he's doing. That's a gray area. The refs know everybody, and they know exactly what type of player each guy is. But at the same time, if somebody wants to stick up for his teammate, I say go for it. That's what I love about hockey, that part of it, where you have your teammate's back. Hits are going to happen, but you have to understand that someone's probably going to come up to you and give you a tap and let you know, 'Hey, that's our star guy and we're going to have his back.' That's the way the sport is, and that's why people love it."

For some players, any excuse to keep fighting in the game is a worthy one. In previous eras, there might have been several staged fights in a game, with players planning them at center ice during warmups or before faceoffs. Something to fire up the boys, wake up a sleepy crowd. That hardly happens anymore, making bouts like the one between Ottawa Senators captain Brady Tkachuk and Carolina Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal at the opening faceoff of their first-round series so surprising and rousing.

The two dropped the gloves only three seconds into Game 1 of their first-round playoff series.

A player probably shouldn't have to be goaded into a fight for playing clean, hard hockey, but at least the spur-of-the-moment fights feel a little more real, a little more honest.

"There's way less fights now," longtime Los Angeles Kings defenseman Drew Doughty said. "I miss watching them. I don't miss being in them, but I do miss watching them. So maybe it's a way to keep fighting in the game."

Even Murphy, in the same conversation in which he lamented having to fight after a clean hit, conceded the fact.

"I'm not going to say it needs to change," he said. "It's just the way it is. I guess it brings out some more fighting, which fans want to see. If anything, anytime something can continue to keep fighting in the game, I think it's a bonus for the people watching."

In the modern-day NHL, where players are bigger, stronger and faster than ever and big hits aren't nearly as common as they used to be, every open-ice hit can feel seismic. And in the heat of the moment, they all look dirty. They all sound dirty. And when it's your teammate lying face down on the ice, they certainly feel dirty. So players, roiling with adrenaline and full of piss, vinegar and vitriol, respond in the only way they know how, the way hockey players always have. They fight. Or threaten to, at least.

No, Blackwell did nothing wrong on Monday night. But it was a big, loud hit that injured a Wild player. Foligno was probably wise not to call out Blackwell. But had he done so, very few people in the NHL would have blamed him. That's just hockey.

"You're allowed to hit, for sure," Reaves said. "But you're also allowed to fight."

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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

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.

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



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

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.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Which NHL playoff teams might have an edge because of goalie play?

Goaltending is likely to play a disproportionate role in the fates of the 16 teams in this tournament.

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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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers still waiting for McDavid to put stamp on series with Ducks

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — There is a weird fascination in watching Connor McDavid struggle like this.

Like spotting a lynx in the wild, or watching your golf partner bag a hole-in-one, there are some things you only see once in a lifetime. This level of struggle from that level of player — in the playoffs, no less — is as unique as it gets.

Not enjoyable, nor do we expect it to last. But man, for two games of these playoffs, McDavid's game has abandoned him in shocking fashion.

"I think he's putting a lot of pressure on himself," assessed head coach Kris Knoblauch, after a 6-4 loss to the Anaheim Ducks in which McDavid was an abysmal minus-two. "He wants the team to do well. He's a leader and usually when we have success, he's a big part of that.

"There've been stretches during the season that he hasn't been the best player, nights where he hasn't been outstanding. That doesn't happen very often and I'm certain that he's going to find his game."

A 1-1 series heading down to Anaheim for Game 3? We've seen a ton of that in Edmonton over the years.

But a series shifting before McDavid notched his first point of the playoffs? That's like getting a Spanish doubloon mixed in with your change at the car wash.

Is it his game that gets the blame? Or should the Ducks get the credit?

"A little bit of both," McDavid said. "They're obviously checking hard and they've got good sticks and good players. And we haven't been as crisp as we'd like, obviously."

McDavid went pointless in Game 1, and the hockey world agreed that Anaheim had blown a huge opportunity when they lost 4-3. There's no way Connor McDavid would go pointless in Game 2, right?

Well, hold my beer.

Plays dying on his stick. Passes that seldom found their target. Turnover, after turnover, after turnover...

McDavid is the undisputed "Best Player in the World." Nobody is saying he isn't.

But struggling through 24 minutes of ice time in Game 2 — including a short trip to the dressing room after getting tangled up with Mattias



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

Ekholm — McDavid went pointless in back-to-back playoff games for just the fifth time in his career.

"Obviously, we'd like a better outcome tonight and a better product tonight, but we're comfortable going on the road," said McDavid.

The product through two games is more concerning than the results, to be honest.

"Obviously," McDavid agreed. "It's the playoffs and we've got to start going."

When this series opened the Oilers spoke about playing low-event hockey against a young, skilled Ducks team that likes to open games up and play 5-4 hockey. Edmonton has not come close to succeeding at that, but the lack of a playoff-worthy defensive game isn't even their biggest concern right now.

Special teams is where the real trouble is, with Anaheim crushing that matchup with three power-play goals and a shorthanded marker in this series, compared to a big goose egg from the NHL's top power play this season.

The Ducks' power play went two-for-three in Game 2, and an Oilers power play that couldn't get out of its own way also coughed up a shorty.

"As good as you are five-on-five, it's pretty tough to overcome three goals there. I believe that was the story of the game tonight," said Knoblauch.

"Five-on-five, we had four goals tonight. You score four even-strength goals, that should be enough to win a hockey game.

"We scored quite a few the other night to win. So five-on-five I think we're generating enough."

"Where there are shifts that aren't going our way, we have to be better at managing that and making it a B shift and not have it turn into a C or D level shift and giving up chances," said Edmonton defenceman Connor Murphy. "They play free when the scoring is high, and when they get behind. We have to bear down and know that if we make it low scoring our offence will take over from our defensive play."

Zach Hyman scored a goal, the only marker Edmonton's top line has produced in this series. That unit saw Matt Savoie get changed out for Ryan Nugent-Hopkins — it's been a disappointment thus far.

Leon Draisaitl's line has been by far Edmonton's best. The fact that a one-line team without a power play is getting out of town tied at a game apiece is likely good luck for Edmonton.

They haven't kicked into playoff gear yet.

"I think we're capable of making plays," Hyman said, when asked about the struggles in execution.

And the power play?

"I think we're obviously a little bit rusty," he said. "It's the first time we've been back, all five of us, in a little bit. Sometimes you just need the first one to drop. We've had looks, we've had chances, but we can be sharper and much cleaner."

This is why the Oilers are a team that does not live and die on trying to win a division or secure home ice advantage. They never win the first two at home, and traditionally, Edmonton has been a better road team in the playoffs.

"We've been in this situation a lot, 1-1 going on the road," McDavid said. "We're comfortable on the road, we like playing on the road. Obviously, we'd like a better outcome tonight and a better product tonight.

"But we're comfortable going on the road."

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Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Stars capitalize on momentum swings to top Wild in Game 3

Kristina Rutherford

At the 92:10 mark of a game that began on a Wednesday and wrapped up in the wee hours of a Thursday, Wyatt Johnston tipped the puck past Wild goalie Jesper Wallstedt and silenced the crowd in the State of Hockey as the Dallas Stars beat Minnesota 4-3 in double overtime.

Matt Duchene had three points, including the goal that forced extra time, as the Stars took a 2-1 series lead in this Western Conference first-round series. If Game 3 was any indication, this one could well go the best-of-seven distance.

Dallas, owners of the NHL's second-best power play during the regular season, struck three times with the man advantage, including Johnston's winner.

The Wild had two power plays in overtime, but failed to convert on both in front of fans who were on their feet at Grand Casino Arena in Saint Paul for all of overtime.

The game was back and forth and back and forth again, and it saw the Stars get out to an early 2-0 lead, and Wild star forward Matt Boldy leave the ice after a hit to the head before returning to help flip the script on the game, though only temporarily.

Wild goalie Jesper Wallstedt, the 23-year-old rookie who managed to look calm and collected all game long, made 32 saves in his first home start of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, and the winner was a tight deflection he didn't have a chance to stop.

Here are our takeaways from Game 3, which saw Wild defender Quinn Hughes log a game-high 43:47 minutes of ice time.

Boldy down but definitely not out

In the first period, Stars captain Jamie Benn skated through the slot and clipped Boldy as he skated by, making contact with Boldy's head. Boldy immediately went down on the ice and didn't return for the rest of the period.

You could hear the collective sigh of relief in Minnesota when the star winger came back in the second — and did Boldy ever come back. Early in the second frame, the 25-year-old winger led a rush into the offensive zone, wheeling through three Stars players and corraling a bouncing puck before he found a wide-open Joel Eriksson Ek in the slot, who then found a wide-open net to tie the game. Eriksson Ek pointed at his winger afterwards — it was a heck of a pass.

Boldy, who recorded a career-high 42 goals this season, now has four points this series. He nearly added to that tally: Boldy wired one off the post on a power play, and in the third he narrowly missed cashing in on a rebound after a short-handed two-on-one with Eriksson Ek.

For a team that has been without veteran playmaker Mats Zuccarello for the last two games due to injury, losing Boldy would've been worse than a sucker punch.

The Stars forward figured in big on both his team's goals in the first frame, the first coming on the power play. Just 1:15 into the game, Robertson threaded a laser-beam pass through traffic to find Mikko Rantanen for an easy deflection to give the Stars the early lead.

Then, with about six minutes to go in the first, Robertson made it 2-0 Dallas after a turnover that led to a two-on-one. Robertson looked off his winger and then snapped it into the back of the net from his off-wing.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

Robertson now has goals in all three games this series.

### Momentum swings

There were so many in this game, and one of the biggest came late in the second period after Dallas squandered a massive opportunity.

Minnesota was already short-handed when Boldy fired the puck over the glass, incurring a delay of game penalty and gifting Dallas a five-on-three for 41 seconds. But the Wild survived it all, and stymied the Stars' usually lethal power play.

Not only that, but just seven seconds after Boldy got out of the penalty box, Nick Foligno found Michael McCarron streaking down the ice, and McCarron wired one over Jake Oettinger's blocker to give the Wild a 3-2 lead.

It was McCarron's first-ever playoff goal, and talk about a boost from a monster penalty kill.

The shot seemingly caught Oettinger by surprise, and otherwise the Stars netminder was solid in Game 3, with 28 saves to record the win. The first goal came on the Wild power play after Marcus Johansson fired a shot from the slot that deflected off at least two bodies and pin-balled its way into the net. Oettinger also didn't have a chance on the second goal thanks to Boldy's shiftiness, and that sweet dish.

It was late in the third when Oettinger made a pair of big saves on a two-on-one while Dallas was on the power play. Duchene tied things up seconds later thanks to some incredible patience from Rantanen, who waited and timed a pass that Duchene one-timed into the back of the net from a bad angle.

The momentum had swung yet again in Game 3, and for the last time.

Game 5 is on Saturday at 7 p.m. CT in Saint Paul.

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Sportsnet.ca / Series-tilting brawl sparks Flyers to Game 3 win, pushes Penguins to the brink

Sonny Sachdeva

PHILADELPHIA — The building shook, as if trying to contain a great storm.

It was a den of chaos. A pack, 19,000-strong, clad in bright orange, screaming at the top of their lungs, unleashing all they'd kept pent up in the half-decade since playoff hockey last came to this Philadelphia Flyers barn.

Before their squad took the ice Wednesday, Flyers fans lined the glass, pressed their faces and hands up against it. A customary 'Crosby sucks!' was belted out by a fan who sounded no older than 12, loud enough for it to filter up to the press box. The crude chant would soon be taken up by the rest of the crowd, bellowed in unison and rained down on the ice as the visitors made themselves known. As hostile an environment as could be found for a Pittsburgh Penguins squad whose backs were already against the ropes.

Still, for 20 minutes, it seemed like Sidney Crosby's club might be able to navigate this maelstrom, might make it out of here with their post-season hopes intact. For 20 minutes, they were the Penguins of old, or of this past regular season, at least. Evgeni Malkin was tucking home a power-play goal from one knee. His club was volleying pucks at Dan Vladar with abandon, from all angles, making the Flyers netminder work, making the

team in front of him defend their house. The Penguins were composed, dangerous. They looked like they were wresting this one back from the brink.

Then the chaos came for them, enveloped them. One messy, sprawling, series-tilting brawl, and it all collapsed.

It started with a Travis Konecny shot four-and-a-half minutes into the second period. The Flyers veteran got tangled up with Bryan Rust to the right of the Penguins' cage. Konecny threw an elbow, Rust wrestled him to the ground. For a moment, the Flyers winger's helmet was launched into the air, and seemed to hang there, spinning. By the time it landed back on the ice, it was pandemonium.

Rust lunged again at Konecny, shoving his head into the back of the net. Sam Girard and Cam York tangled behind them. Travis Sanheim went after Erik Karlsson. Ryan Shea and Christian Dvorak tumbled to the ground. Matvei Michkov and Connor Dewar thrashed around, too.

All eyes in the building were stuck on the two original combatants, Rust and Konecny still trading shots around the body of a referee trying unsuccessfully to calm them. They finally got back up. Konecny wheeled around the Penguins winger and dropped his gloves. Rust was already being escorted to the box, deflated. The jumbotron cut to Konecny screaming at him for not engaging while he was vertical. The fans were furious, and thrilled, and on their feet.

It took a full 10 minutes for the officials to sort out the mess. By the time play restarted, each penalty box was fully stocked — five Flyers on one side, five Penguins on the other.

"It kind of turned into a bit of a circus there," Crosby said after a Game 3 that ended up getting away from him. "I'm not sure why they decided to put five guys in the box on each side. I felt like that changed all the momentum."

"They just decided to take everybody who was on the ice, which I've never seen in my 17 years here," said Karlsson, one of the five locked up after the melee. "It's unfortunate. It benefitted them more than it benefitted us."

When the smoke cleared, the Flyers emerged with a power play, Rust given an extra two minutes while all the other offenders had their infractions cancel out. Forty seconds into that man-advantage, Jamie Drysdale floated a pass from the point to a waiting Trevor Zegras, posted up on the half-wall. He loaded up, time standing still as the puck drifted into his wheelhouse, and then the former Anaheim Duck uncorked an exclamation-point one-timer past Stuart Skinner and into the back of the cage.

The building exploded. Zegras beelined to the penalty box, banging on the glass as the five Flyers inside jumped in an absurd joyful huddle. It was clear something had shifted, something had turned. And the Flyers kept coming.

Four minutes later, Noah Juulsen corralled the puck near the left circle and wired a cross-ice pass to a wide-open Rasmus Ristolainen. He took a step, waited, and whipped the puck through Skinner's five-hole.

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Two minutes after that, Juulsen was at it again, collecting the puck at the point, faking a shot, and finding Nick Seeler — the veteran threw one in from distance, and saw it sail past Skinner, too.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

Three goals in six minutes, and it was over. Pittsburgh managed to get one back in the third, but Philadelphia answered, and added an empty-netter for good measure, winning 5-2 when all was said and done. With it, the underdog Flyers have managed to take a 3-0 chokehold on this first-round series.

"We believe in our group," captain Sean Couturier said from the bowels of Xfinity Mobile Arena after the final buzzer had sounded. "We've believed in our group all year long. You know, a lot of people counted us out all year, and we stuck to the way we want to play. It's just the belief in that room. We play for one another."

His head coach couldn't help but marvel at the bond this group has formed over the course of the campaign, at the way it came to the fore on this particular night.

"I've been in the game 40 years. I'm not just saying it — this is one of the tightest groups [he's seen], even as a coach, as a player," Rick Tocchet said. The Flyers bench boss, who played for the organization for 11 years back in the day as well, heaped praise on the Philly faithful after a raucous night in the building, too.

"For me, I've lived it. I've seen it," Tocchet said. "It's seeing the young guys, and [Couturier], [Konecny], see that crowd. It's been a while. So I'm really happy for those guys."

Down the hallway, a stunned silence hung in the visitors' locker room after Game 3 had wound to a close. But unlike the first two tilts in this series, there was no confusion this time about when and why the game had slipped away from them.

"When they put all the players in the box," head coach Dan Muse said simply, when asked where it all went sideways for his team. "There's a scrum there, we get the extra penalty — where? That changed everything. And it took a long time to get it all sorted out. Listen, I'm not going to be here making excuses — there's plenty that we can do better. But that definitely factored into the feel of that period, and the game."

The club was also irked by an early call that saw Garnet Hathaway's stick connect with Crosby's face as the teams waited to take a draw — the officials sent Hathaway to the box for high-sticking, and sent Crosby to the box for embellishment too, after the captain dropped to the ice.

"We don't have a single embellishment all year," Muse said of the decision. "Sidney Crosby doesn't have an embellishment in 21 seasons. Stick's in his face. They take both of them. I disagree on that, strongly. Not one — not one for our team. All season. So, we didn't come into this series to start now. Our guys have done a good job with that. And Sid doesn't embellish."

"I don't know how Rusty ends up with the extra (penalty) out of all that, I don't know how I end up with embellishment," Crosby said from his stall in the visitors' room, shaking his head. "It's hard to understand. But you've got to play through that."

Through three games in this series, the Penguins have struggled to play through the Flyers' physicality. All three games have seen the Broad Street squad pull their state rivals into the muck, drag them into the mud, and wrestle out a win from there. It hasn't happened by accident.

"Listen, we talked about it," Tocchet said of his club's physicality in this series. "We talked about playing through people, boxing out, things like that, that are kind of our staples."

"It's just part of it. It's a battle out there," added Konecny. "You're fighting for ice, you're trying to own the blue paint. Things are just going to happen."

To this point, it's been a battle dominated by one club. Though the Penguins have shown glimpses of their game, put together sequences here and there of the offensive dominance they showcased during the regular season, by and large their offence has run dry. No more so than

on the power play — the Pens have earned a league-leading 12 man-advantage opportunities through three games, giving them plenty of chances to punish the Flyers' agitating approach. Pittsburgh's managed just two goals in that span, both scored Wednesday.

Now, they await an all-or-nothing Game 4 on Saturday. Win and stay in, or lose and it's over.

"I mean, there's not much room for error when you're in this position, that's the reality," Crosby said of his club's situation. "The fact is, we've got to win a game. That's going to be our focus. We can't grab three on Saturday. We've got to win one."

"It hurts," said Karlsson. "We've dug ourselves a hole that for some can seem impossible, but at the end of the day, it's a great opportunity. And we have to find a way to move forward. By now, we should know what to expect. We've done things for three games in a row that haven't benefitted us."

"Now, it's do or die. Now, we're going to see what we're made of."

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Sportsnet.ca / What you should know about Toronto Maple Leafs' GM finalists

Luke Fox

TORONTO — MLSE president Keith Pelley seems to have a type he is targeting for the coveted title of Toronto Maple Leafs general manager.

Three of the four candidates reported by Sportsnet's Elliott Friedmann on Wednesday fit the profile of experienced front-office star on the rise, executives that have learned the business with well-run franchises as assistant GMs but would be first-time GMs at the National Hockey League level.

These hopefuls may not splash headlines the way, perhaps, a savvy veteran like Doug Armstrong would.

But this hiring strategy has proved successful elsewhere.

The Stars' Jim Nill (Red Wings), Islanders' Mathieu Darche (Lightning) and Lightning's Julien BriseBois (Canadiens), to name a few, all cut their teeth with one strong organization before running the show with a competitor.

The New Jersey Devils are following this pattern with their new Starter-jacket-wearing hockey ops honcho Sunny Mehta (Panthers).

The Maple Leafs are conducting another round of in-person interviews this week in Toronto, as Friedman reported, and the following four executives have risen as serious contenders to succeed Brad Treliving.

ron Stars. In the summer of 2024, Brad Treliving snatched Mark Leach to direct the Leafs' amateur scouting department. So, with Nill himself resigning in Dallas, Pelley has taken an interest in Nill's right-hand man.

White is a hockey lifer who has held down nearly every rink job except for mascot.

The 58-year-old native of Ormstown, Que., bounced around pro hockey's minor leagues in the early 1990s as a defenceman for seven teams in the ECHL, IHL and AHL. Upon retiring as a player, he immediately began assistant coaching for his alma mater, Michigan Tech, and worked his way up to head coach of the ECHL's Columbia Inferno in the early 2000s.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

A member of the Stars organization since 2005, White has paid his dues, literally working his way up as an executive from the minors. He has been a fixture in Dallas's front office for 11 seasons, guided the 2014 Texas Stars to a Calder Cup, and was tapped by Hockey Canada to manage the country's Spengler Cup squad that same year.

White is a climber, and his next step would be NHL general manager.

Ryan Martin

Like White, New York Rangers associate general manager Martin serves as GM for his organization's AHL affiliate, the Hartford Wolf Pack, which has qualified for the playoffs twice since Martin took helm in 2021.

Martin is seen as next in line to Chris Drury, whose Rangers have preferred short-term retools over long-term rebuilds. That strategy would align with Pelley's suggestion that Toronto's "foundational pieces" are already in place.

Martin also reportedly interviewed for the Nashville Predators' GM vacancy and has Drury's blessing to seek a promotion elsewhere.

The Connecticut native brings 20-plus seasons of scouting and front office experience and has been involved in player personnel for USA Hockey's improving national junior program.

Martin got his NHL start working with the Grand Rapids Griffins as part of Ken Holland's group in Detroit and guided them to a Calder Cup in 2017. Prior to that job, he worked as both a lawyer and as a player agent with KO Sports.

Evan Gold

Are the Maple Leafs tired of the Boston Bruins taking from them? Do they want to swipe something back?

Gold, who earned both his law and MBA degrees at the University of Toronto, is a candidate to return to his hometown of Toronto after serving 11 seasons in the front office of the Maple Leafs' bitter rival.

Another AGM hungry for promotion, Gold also serves as the Bruins' director of legal affairs and, yep, runs their AHL farm team in Providence.

Gold, 46, serves as Boston GM Don Sweeney's advisor in day-to-day hockey operations and comes with experience in pro scouting, arbitration cases, roster planning, contract negotiations and cap compliance. Prior to joining the B's in 2015, Gold cut his teeth for eight-plus seasons with the Washington Capitals operations — a job he earned through an internship. His hockey journey began with "licking envelopes." Gold had an opportunity to work with the NBA's Washington Wizards instead but chose the Caps because of his hockey fandom.

John Chayka

Easily the most familiar name on Friedman's reported short list, Chayka is the only one here with GM experience at the NHL level.

The 36-year-old Ontario native became the youngest GM in league history when the Arizona Coyotes gave him the keys in 2016 as a 26-year-old, partly due to his analytics expertise. The Coyotes went 131-147-38 under the first-timer's guidance and clinched a playoff spot in the last of his four seasons at the helm.

Chayka abruptly resigned in July 2020, terminating his contract early. He got into hot water with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman for pursuing job opportunities with other teams without permission from Arizona and was running the club when it hosted a private scouting combine for draft prospects. As punishment, Bettman forced the Coyotes to forfeit their second-round pick in 2020 and their first-round pick in 2021.

The data-centric Chayka has kept a relatively low profile in hockey since, running a dozen Wendy's franchises alongside wife Kathryn, but appears intrigued by a return.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens notebook: Expect Suzuki line to respond, possible changes for Game 3

Eric Engels

TAMPA, Fla. — A dose of perspective, 48 hours after yet another game in which Montreal's best players were held to nil at five-on-five: the Bell Centre's opening up with the Canadiens tied 1-1 in their series with the Tampa Bay Lightning, and matchups shift in coach Martin St. Louis' favour.

He's confident that no matter how he handles them, Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield and Juraj Slafkovsky will unblock.

"It's a line that can dominate five-on-five," the Canadiens' coach said after Game 2 was lost 3-2 in overtime. "They just haven't yet."

"Yet" was the operative word.

There's plenty of reason to believe it's coming now.

Chief among them is that these players, who played over 500 minutes together this season, had the fifth-best expected goals share (54.2 per cent) and fifth-most goals (33) of any in the league to spend as much time together.

Two games hard-matched against three of the best two-way players in the world (Brandon Hagel, Anthony Cirelli and Jake Guentzel) won't define their playoffs, especially with home ice advantage in their corner. And Suzuki (three assists), Caufield (three assists) and Slafkovsky (three goals) will still have plenty of confidence from what they did on the power play in those two games.

The Canadiens should take plenty of it, too, considering what they were able to achieve without their top line carrying them at five-on-five. Through seven of eight periods so far, the numbers — expected goals, high-danger chances, slot-driving plays, scoring chances off the cycle, scoring chances off turnovers, controlled entries and exits, and puck battles won — have tilted heavily in their favour, according to Sportlogiq.

It's certainly lent credence to St. Louis' feeling that the Canadiens have performed as he'd hoped they would.

Even if Game 2 was decided by his team's worst period and Tampa's very best.

"We battled hard, we competed," said St. Louis. "Controlled a lot of the game yesterday, just lost it. But it's there. Very confident in how we want to play it and the thoughts behind our intention and the courage that we've shown."

He should be.

But not so confident that he should avoid making changes...

That is the name of the game in the playoffs, and St. Louis' counterpart, Jon Cooper, knows it.

His Lightning lost Game 1, so he swapped Connor Geekie for Scott Sabourin for Game 2.

It's a move that could've backfired — and it almost did, with Sabourin taking an inexcusable penalty on Josh Anderson when the game was tied 2-2 with 2:15 remaining in the third period.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

Cooper acknowledged that when he said, "For 58 minutes (Sabourin) kind of held it together."

But the coach was willing to risk it going wrong to change up the momentum lost in Game 1, and that was commendable.

"Sabby has a definite role on this team," Cooper said. "He finds his way on the scoresheet, just in different sections of it. The team plays a bit bigger when he's in the lineup. He knows his role, he's exceptional on the bench."

We'll see if Sabourin can be exceptional on the ice in Game 3, or if more adjustments must be made in Montreal.

Sometimes they're necessary even after a win.

They usually must come after a loss in the playoffs, and St. Louis has to be contemplating that as we speak. Even if he (justifiably) liked his team's play through the first two games.

Two of his forwards, who sat for both, also have clear roles with the Canadiens, and both have proven they can help.

Joe Veleno played excellent two-way hockey down the stretch and was one of Montreal's most physical players this season, finishing with the third-most hits on the team despite playing only 61 games. And Brendan Gallagher has played nearly five times as many playoff games as the two players he and Veleno would likely draw in for.

Oliver Kapanen is one, and Kirby Dach is the most likely one.

Even if St. Louis defended Dach's play on Wednesday.

"I find Dacher's bringing physicality," said St. Louis 10 hours after Dach shied away from a hit and needlessly iced the puck before totally misplaying J.J. Moser on the overtime winning goal.

"I'll rewatch the game," St. Louis continued, "but with his intentions the last couple of weeks, he's playing with a lot of combativeness."

It was good to hear him say it, especially in the wake of the player being subjected to so much post-game vitriol that he decided to deactivate his personal Instagram account.

"It's one play," St. Louis added, and even if it was more accurately one sequence, he's justified to feel it didn't cancel out all the good Dach had done since returning from injury two weeks ago.

Beyond those two weeks, the objective viewer would notice that Dach's intentions have been admirable since the start of the season. He's played hard but been unfortunate, suffering injuries — a broken bone near his ankle after blocking a shot with the same foot he blocked a shot with the game before, and an upper-body injury suffered on a heavy, questionable hit — because he put his body on the line to make plays the Canadiens needed.

That's something that won't be acknowledged by people who've already developed a bias against Dach for his shortcomings in the past, which were partially due to some immaturity and mostly due to devastating injuries suffered right as he was gaining some positive momentum.

But St. Louis also can't ignore some of the inconsistencies in Dach's play through the last five games of the regular season, and he can't turn a blind eye to why he wasn't able to execute in those critical moments of Game 2.

If he comes back to Dach and Kapanen in Game 3, it'll be because they — along with Zachary Bolduc — have controlled 83.3 per cent of the expected goals.

Still, that figure must be balanced with usage (only 13:10 at five-on-five through two games) and the reality that those players could potentially play against different opponents in Montreal.

The upside of both Dach and Kapanen must also be weighed against the improbability that they'll deliver at the height of their abilities versus the likelihood that Veleno and Gallagher will.

Because those two players are far more predictable, even if their upside isn't as high.

Veleno can help on the penalty kill, too, where Kapanen was used sparingly in Game 1 before being parked completely in Game 2.

Perhaps St. Louis will see Kapanen as a better option with Ivan Demidov and Alex Newhook than Alex Texier.

We won't know before Thursday. Heck, we likely won't know before warmup of Friday's Game 3.

Ditto for Dach.

Quick hits

- Can't help but wonder if one change St. Louis will make will be moving Jake Evans to centre, even if his line with Anderson and Phillip Danault has been excellent. If Veleno comes in, he can easily slot in on Danault's wing without affecting the efficiency of the line. Control of the matchup also gives St. Louis much more flexibility to spot Evans in with Danault here and there for right-side defensive zone faceoffs.

- Two years ago, Canadiens fans would've traded Anderson for a bag of pucks. After two games of watching him play again in the playoffs, they'll be begging GM Kent Hughes to give him a bag of money. Anderson's contract, which pays him \$5.5 million, expires at the end of next season. But no matter how next season goes for him, his playoff performance is worth whatever he'll get for it.

You think of the 2021 Canadiens Cup run, of the 2025 post-season dust-ups with Tom Wilson, and of Anderson's immediate impact on this series with the Lightning, and you know his value. There aren't as many as 10 other players in the league who play the way he does when it's all on the line. And based on how he's skating, we shouldn't expect him to play any differently after he turns 33 in May of 2027.

- "I think somebody's got to be the villain, I guess, and we're OK with it," said Cooper after Game 2. Just a thought, but if the Lightning think it's why they won, that could be an advantage for the Canadiens, who dominated the first two periods while the Lightning ran around — and mostly ran straight into the penalty box.

- Counterpoint: As Hagel said, "Everyone in the room knows we're good when we play with emotion," so there's that. Hagel has also said several times that the Lightning are anticipating a long series, and he and the Lightning know a thing or two about what goes into winning a war of attrition.

- Suzuki didn't have an issue with Slafkovsky fighting Hagel in Game 2. It was a calculated — and arguably wise — decision from Slafkovsky, considering Hagel was Tampa's best player by a country mile up until that point.

But Slafkovsky took a heavy punch at the end of that fight, and it was hard not to consider its impact beyond the probable bruising that'll develop.

Was it already felt when Slafkovsky seemingly threw a blind pass for the giveaway that led to Nikita Kucherov's tying goal in the third period because he was trying to avoid a hit? It felt that way, but we'll never know.

The Lightning won't know, either, but they probably felt that way about it. And if they did, it would probably only have them leaning further into the rough stuff.

We thought, for the first time in the series, the Lightning were at their best when they finally got away from that and started playing hockey.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

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Sportsnet.ca / Senators notebook: Kleven's looming return boosts blue line

Alex Adams

OTTAWA — Defence wins championships, and right now the Ottawa Senators' defence is depleted.

But that group could be getting a welcome return soon.

Tyler Kleven skated with the team on Wednesday once again in a full-contact jersey but wearing a full-face shield. Coach Travis Green played the post-season gamesmanship card by declining to say whether Kleven is playing in Game 3 on Thursday against the Carolina Hurricanes (7:30 p.m. ET on Sportsnet and Sportsnet+). But he did say Kleven is getting closer to returning from the jaw injury he suffered when he took a puck to the face against the Buffalo Sabres on April 2.

The Senators declined to make Kleven available to the media.

If he returned for Game 3, it would be a needed boost to a depleted D-corps.

Carolina had the second most points in the regular season and is fully healthy, so the Senators' challenge was going to be a mighty one. But without Kleven, Artem Zub and Nick Jensen — three season regulars on defence who all have missed at least one game in the series with injuries — it's become a mammoth undertaking. And that doesn't factor in Thomas Chabot, who only recently returned from a broken arm which healed bionically in record time.

The Senators now trail the series 0-2 but hope to make that up in the next two games at home.

Kleven burst onto the scene against Toronto in last year's playoffs, throwing thunderous hits, making sneaky good zone exits and imposing his will. He was playing his best hockey of this season right before his injury, too.

Green alluded to the fact that the quartet of Chabot, Jake Sanderson, Jordan Spence and Nikolas Matinpalo each played over 30 minutes on Monday in the double-overtime classic. If the team had their regular D-corps, those minutes could have been divided among more players. If Kleven draws back into the fold, it will relieve the pressure and allow the other defencemen to thrive, not just survive.

An interesting subplot is what Green does with his top four if Kleven returns. Kleven and Spence were magnificent this season with the best expected goals share of any pairing in the league at five-on-five. With Kleven and Zub out, the top two pairs have been Sanderson-Matinpalo and Chabot-Spence.

You'd imagine Green would plop Kleven back with Spence, who has been excellent, but what would that mean for Chabot and Sanderson? Green could put them together to form a loaded top pair, although they only played together for 20 minutes at five-on-five this season. He could also keep Sanderson with Matinpalo, but the duo has been caved in by the Hurricanes so far, outshot six to 21 when they are together at five-on-five in the series.

Regardless, Kleven's return would be a mighty dynamic shift in the series.

When asked whether he would continue to run Chabot, Sanderson and Spence into the ground, Green replied, "We're going to do whatever it takes to win.

"If that means Sanderson and Chabot got to play 30-35 (minutes), then that's what it takes."

Chabot and Sanderson are used to it, but it's not ideal. Both have routinely played big minutes over their careers.

"I think the guys that do that on the back end, they don't exert a lot of energy to skate fast," said Green about defencemen who eat up big minutes effectively.

"Chabot is really good, (he) can, kind of, float around the rink pretty effortlessly. Kicks it up to high gear, it's almost another notch."

In Game 2, Green primarily played the more offensive and dynamic Lassi Thomson in the offensive zone, while Dennis Gilbert mostly started in the defensive zone.

With Kleven back, the Senators would only have one weak link on the backend, as only one of Thomson or Gilbert would play in a limited role as the sixth defenceman.

The Senators have been neck and neck with Carolina despite their depleted blue line. Kleven drawing back into the lineup makes a comeback in the series a much more attainable task.

Zub update

The fact that Zub has yet to skate since his injury in Game 1 makes his return doubtful for Game 3 and more ominous for this post-season. For what it's worth, Zub was considered a game-time decision for Game 2, and Green didn't rule him out to come back in the series.

Forward line change

In such a tight series, the details matter. The Senators have the last change now that they are on home ice, an advantage they will use to the fullest.

"Both teams like to match, lots of teams do nowadays, not just forwards, but defence pairings as well," said Green.

Ottawa had real trouble trying to shut down the Hurricanes' second and third lines of Taylor Hall-Logan Stankoven-Jackson Blake and Nikolaj Ehlers-Jordan Staal-Jordan Martinook.

In the first two games, Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour used the last change to play Stankoven's line matched up against Shane Pinto's line while Staal's line went up against Tim Stutzle's line.

Expect more Pinto against the Hurricanes' quiet first line in Games 3 and 4, and look for Green to make sure Stutzle's line avoids Staal like the plague.

Interestingly, Green went nuclear against Carolina in Game 2, placing Brady Tkachuk alongside Stutzle and Drake Batherson. Meanwhile, Claude Giroux dropped down to the second line with Dylan Cozens, Warren Foegele went up to Pinto's side, and Nick Cousins joined the fourth line. It was effective as Tkachuk-Stutzle-Batherson had an expected goal share of 64 per cent.

"Might have to work seven or eight shifts to just get a grade-A (chance)," said Batherson about his line.

Carolina is so good defensively that Ottawa might need to load up its three best forwards more often to find a breakthrough, as the Senators have just two goals in as many games.

Meanwhile, midway through Game 2, Foegele joined Pinto and Michael Amadio. The trio was immensely effective, having an 80 per cent shot share. Previously, Cousins was the left-winger on that line and before his



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

demotion, the line had 14 per cent of the expected goals and was negative nine in shot attempts.

The mixing and matching is something Green can afford to do because the Senators had Foegele and Fabian Zetterlund on the fourth line. Both had 20-goal seasons in 2024-25.

It's real depth and it gives Green reasons to flip his lines.

"There's a chance you might start on the third line," Green joked when asked by Graeme Nichols of The Hockey News about the Senators' lineup.

The players are so interchangeable that even reporters could get into the action and get "pucks in deep" conceivably.

We kid, but that's an area Green won't be scared to finagle. If Green needs to change up the forward group, it'll happen.

"All options are on the table," said Green.

"Put any of our forwards on in different lines. We've done that a lot this year.

The team is used to their malleability.

The caveat is that all the statistics for the trios and pairings are based on a small sample size. But in the playoffs, there is little room to wait for regression to the mean. Credit to Green for his in-game adjustments, which will continue as the series moves along.

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Sportsnet.ca / Three ways the Senators can come back from 0-2 series hole

Adam Vingan

This is what the Hurricanes do to their playoff opponents; Carolina has gone up 2-0 in each of its past six first-round series, a new NHL record. (Three of the previous five series, all of which the Hurricanes won, required at least six games.)

The Senators, however, are not deterred by their situation as they head home for Game 3 on Thursday.

"We know we can beat this team," Senators forward Dylan Cozens told reporters.

Here is how Ottawa can dig itself out of its 0-2 hole:

Make good on scoring chances

No one can say that the Senators have lacked offensive opportunities in this series. Ottawa has generated 3.7 expected goals per 60 minutes through two games, which trails only the Buffalo Sabres (3.81) in the early part of the playoffs. (Carolina finished fifth during the regular season with 2.77 expected goals against per 60 minutes.)

But the Senators have left a staggering 7.5 goals on the table based on their shot quality. Hurricanes goaltender Frederik Andersen deserves some credit for that. He has stopped all 21 inner-slot shots he has faced. Ottawa, however, has also not capitalized on its scoring chances. The team has hit the net on just 49.1 per cent of its chances (28/57). In the regular season, the Senators led the league in chance-on-net rate at 61.2 per cent. (They have missed 17 of their 57 chances against the Hurricanes, and another 12 have been blocked.)

Although Andersen has been sensational, he is also human. Cozens' goal Monday was not a high-danger shot. If the Senators can keep up the pressure on Andersen and not waste Grade-A opportunities, then they can climb back into the series.

"The confidence and the belief is still the highest it could possibly get," said Senators captain Brady Tkachuk, who has scored 1.9 goals below expected after failing to convert any of his team-high eight chances in the series. "We've shown we can hang in there. Of course, we haven't liked both the results, but the confidence and the belief that I have in my teammates and we have each in other is the highest it's ever been."

Carolina's second forward line of Taylor Hall, Logan Stankoven and Jackson Blake has given Ottawa fits. The Hurricanes have outscored the Senators 2-0 and generated 65.1 per cent of the expected goals at five-on-five when that line has been on the ice. (That does not include Stankoven's power-play goal in Game 2, which was assisted by Hall and Blake.)

Senators coach Travis Green has counted on shutdown forwards Michael Amadio and Shane Pinto to neutralize Stankoven's line. After two games, the Hurricanes have outscored the Senators 1-0 and out-chanced them 6-2 in that five-on-five matchup. Shot attempts are 14-7 in favour of Carolina. Green should continue relying on Amadio and Pinto against Stankoven's line with the benefit of last change for the next two games.

Stankoven's first goal of the series came as the result of Senators defenceman Jordan Spence's giveaway from behind his own net. The Hurricanes, who have scored twice within 10 seconds of a Senators turnover in the series, were the top team in the league in that category during the regular season with 114 turnover goals. (Ottawa, for its part, has also scored two turnover goals in the series.)

On Tuesday, Green did not have an update on defenceman Artem Zub, who missed Game 2 after suffering an injury in Game 1. The Senators are also without defenceman Tyler Kleven, who has not played since April 2.

That means top defenceman Jake Sanderson has had even more on his plate. He played 43:06 on Monday, the third-highest single-game total in franchise history behind defencemen Zdeno Chara (44:19) and Wade Redden (44:04). Fellow defenceman Thomas Chabot was not far behind Sanderson on Monday with 40:50 of ice time.

Sanderson has not been on the ice for a goal against at five-on-five in the series and had two assists Monday, but the Senators have generated only 34.6 per cent of the expected goals during his minutes. Perhaps as a result of the heavier workload, Sanderson's turnover rate in all situations has shot up from 10.4 per cent in the regular season to 17.4 per cent in the playoffs. It has been most apparent in the offensive zone, where Sanderson's turnover rate has ballooned to 36.5 per cent, compared to 12.7 per cent in the regular season.

Carolina's relentlessness makes life difficult for defencemen, who do not have much time to make decisions with the puck. Sanderson's performance will have a major influence on the rest of the series.

All stats via Sportlogiq

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1388614 Websites

15 early takes from Round 1 of the Stanley Cup Playoffs

Justin Bourne 9-11 minutes 4/22/2026



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

The first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs is the storm before the calm. In just over a week we'll be down to four series, a couple games a night, and honestly it'll be a little sad for most hockey fans.

But for now, it's the good stuff. There's so much going on I couldn't cover it all in one post, nor could I bring myself to focus on just one thing, so today we'll do an Eastern Conference notebook, and Friday we'll go west.

### 1. Puck don't lie for Martinook

It was Mark Jankowski whose goal was taken off the board in overtime during Game 2 of the Senators-Hurricanes series, but it was Jordan Martinook who earned it for his team. He got the breakaway (and drew the penalty shot), but what impressed me was that he then had the foresight to help the Canes keep the puck in the offensive zone and then change while they had the delayed penalty, all of which helped lead to the Jankowski goal. Despite all that awesome play, Martinook then missed the penalty shot, and spent the fourth intermission feeling like he let his team down somehow, which was a shame.

So, it was poetic justice when he later scored the winner.

Also while we're here: Jordan Staal was outside. "Possession but not control" is way too subjective a read to take a goal off the board that had been counted on the ice.

So yeah: puck don't lie, etc.

### 2. Ottawa and Carolina is extremely well played and fast

Travis Green and Rod Brind'Amour are similar coaches, and they're standing behind similar teams. Neither one is laden with elite star talent (though they both have some extremely good players), but both are deep and fast and competitive. I can't get over the pace of the games so far, and it's brought to light two thoughts.

One was the question: "Is that feeling backed up by the numbers?" And the answer is yes. NHL Edge tracks speed bursts, and one of the categories is 29-32 m.p.h. bursts. Ottawa is first with 267, Carolina is second with 243, and most teams have played two games by now. There are two faster speed burst categories, but they tend to just highlight teams that have a fast guy or two (Colorado has the most 35 m.p.h.-plus bursts with eight), so I find this category more informative. Everyone is flying out there.

Thought No. 2 came up from a conversation with Mike Kelly: is it just me, or is the disparity between regular-season pace and playoff pace growing larger? Like I can't remember many games, let alone periods or even shifts, that look like this from the regular season. It is fast out there.

Real Kyper and Bourne

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### 3. Ullmark's early-season struggles may have buried a legit Cup shot

The Senators are not done. Carolina held court at home, and if Ottawa can do the same, we'll be all square in a best-of-three. But it's hard to beat a 113-point team in four of five games, so with that in mind, it kills me how good Ottawa is. They might waste that, and they never should've had to play this Carolina team in Round 1.

Yes, Linus Ullmark has been awesome through two games. Maybe their best player, even. But that makes it frustrating, because if he was even average this year, Ottawa would have had an easier first-round draw and

a better chance to go deep in the playoffs. Now that he's found his game, it feels like it might be too late.

### 4. Tkachuk has to settle into the moment

Last Ottawa thought is that they've got lots of guys going. Tim Stutzle is all over it, Drake Batherson, Ridly Greig, these guys should've scored more than they have, but it's like there's a forcefield at the net. However, Brady Tkachuk hasn't been on the ice for a goal for yet, and to me, it's because he's just so damn over-eager. He looks like he's in a fist-fight with the puck out there and it's blowing up on his stick way too often. He needs the opposite of smelling salts pre-game. He needs a chai tea and a fiction novel in the dressing room. He's one of the rare guys you'd like to see calm down, rather than rev up.

### 5. Stankoven's a dawg

The Hurricanes have a lot of dawgs — Martinook is one too — but Logan Stankoven deserves the title in his own way. Three goals through two games, not afraid of the moment, and his line with Taylor Hall and Jackson Blake is relentless. They've got an expected goal rate around 75 per cent at 5-on-5 so far.

### 6. Hagel's a dawg, Slafkovsky's a dawg, Montreal/Tampa Bay is a whole pound

Through two games, Brandon Hagel has three goals and one assist for four points, he's plus-4, he's got nine PIMs including a fight after which he gave the "too small" celebration about a giant of a player, and he leads Tampa's forwards in ice time.

For Montreal, Juraj Slafkovsky's Game 1 hat trick highlighted his dawg status — as have his Olympic performances — and even his willingness to fight Hagel in Game 2 drove the truth home further. These guys aren't done leaving their mark on this series.

### 7. Montreal's top line can do more

Cole Caufield, Nick Suzuki and Slafkovsky haven't scored at 5-on-5 yet, and they scored a ton there in the regular season. There's more to come.

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### 8. Montreal looks like the better team

Crazy to say, but it feels like the Lightning are hanging on for dear life against a better Montreal team. The Habs look faster (which is backed up by the speed burst data), and even though Tampa Bay has more puck possession time, Montreal has a slight edge in dangerous chances created. That's a tough combo to goaltend against, so we'll see how Andrei Vasilevskiy can hold up against a Habs team that feels like it could break out at any given moment.

Part of this is...

### 9. Tampa needs Hedman more than Montreal misses Dobson

Both teams are missing a critical defenceman, but the Lightning missing Victor Hedman has meant just a bit more Declan Carlisle and Emil Lilleberg than they'd prefer. I'd argue the Habs' "next up" players are more capable (I like Jayden Struble, and Arber Xhekaj serves a clear purpose), so when Hedman is out, the Bolts really feel it. Carlisle and Lilleberg are both below 40 per cent expected goals at 5-on-5.

### 10. Anderson is just built for the playoffs



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

I'm never sure what to think when a guy steps up and plays like Josh Anderson has through the past couple playoff games after you've watched him sleep through so many games in the regular season. Does it make him more valuable that he's able to turn it up when it really matters? Or should you be retroactively annoyed that he doesn't do it more? Either way, he's a post-season force, which is why Scott Sabourin is out there chasing him around (and taking one poorly timed penalty) in the first place.

### 11. Luukkonen and the Sabres lack experience

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen is a very good goalie, and the long dump-in goal he allowed from centre last game is not who he is, obviously. But good lord man, was that atrocious and at the worst possible time. In a game where Buffalo was in tough to begin with, it just sunk them. Be aggressive, or back off and wait for it to bounce, or get behind it like an infilder, you just can't leave it to chance like that.

It puts Buffalo in a tough spot now, choosing who to start next game. They'd have loved for him to just start red hot, and for it to be an obvious "ride the hot hand" thing, but alas. They head back to Boston and Jeremy Swayman looks rock solid at the other end.

### 12. Buffalo is a hockey city

We know they've got great football fans, but it's great to be reminded how awesome Buffalo is for hockey. The fans on rollerblades out there make me particularly happy, and it's just so great to see those who've stuck with them through um, thin and thin, finally get some rewards.

### 13. Tage wraparound in Game 1 was so nasty

I just need to once again remind people how awesome this Tage Thompson goal was:

It's a good sign for Buffalo that in a big moment, their best goal scorer still showed that composure and skill. Success in big moments breeds confidence, which breeds success in big moments.

### 14. Martone: our final 'is a dawg' entry of the day

Porter Martone has made an immediate impact for the Flyers, but the best part of it all is realizing that Team Canada could have another Annoying Skill Guy on their international teams in the future. We've had Brad Marchand for years, Hagel might sort of qualify, but it feels like Martone will happily fill that void for the country in the future.

He's already playing nearly five minutes more per game than Matvei Michkov, which speaks to how much Rick Tocchet has embraced what the rookie brings to the table in a very short amount of time.

And finally...

### 15. Crosby and Co. need a big one

After losing both their home games, the Penguins' aging stars are the first group under "must-win" pressure this post-season. Lose tonight, and Philly could find itself waiting for the winner of Carolina/Ottawa for what could be a week. I just can't see it happening that easily for the Flyers though, can you?

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.23.2026

1388615 Websites

TSN.CA / Cowan brings growing confidence to Calder Cup playoffs

Mark Masters

TORONTO — Easton Cowan is not done yet.

After a strong finish to his rookie season with the Leafs, the 20-year-old winger will be in the Toronto Marlies lineup on Wednesday night when they open up the American Hockey League playoffs.

"We just kind of both decided it was the right move for my development and went along with it," Cowan said of his discussion with Leafs management. "I'm excited to play some hockey."

Cowan spent almost the entire regular season in the NHL with the exception of two games with the Marlies way back in November. How will going back to the AHL help him now?

"Just more touches," said Cowan. "It's good for me."

It will be positive for Cowan and the Leafs organization if the Marlies go on a deep run. The native of Mount Brydges, Ont. already owns an impressive playoff pedigree after leading the London Knights to back-to-back Ontario Hockey League titles and a Memorial Cup championship last year. The playoff stage seems to suit him.

"I feel like that's when I play my best hockey," Cowan said.

Cowan, who stands 6-foot, 190 pounds, showed no signs of wearing down late into his first season of professional hockey.

He picked up nine points in the final 13 games with the Leafs while averaging 18 minutes and 26 seconds of ice time during that stretch since March 21. Cowan impressed coach Craig Berube and teammates by jumping in to defend teammates whenever the situation called for it.

"I feel like, honestly, all year I've gotten better," Cowan said of his development. "So, I'll try to keep that going here and finish the year off strong."

The Marlies finished fourth in the North Division and will play the fifth-place Rochester Americans, Buffalo's affiliate, in a best-of-three series that opens at Coca-Cola Coliseum on Wednesday. If the Marlies advance, they will face the top-seeded Laval Rocket, Montreal's farm team, in a best-of-five division semifinal.

Cowan sounds like he's all in even if, as he said after the Leafs final game, he's already proven he belongs in the NHL.

"We all appreciate it," said Marlies goalie Dennis Hildeby. "We all know what kind of player he is and he comes down here with a great attitude and works hard and he's only going to be lifting the team."

Cowan is a much different player now than the one who was briefly demoted to the AHL early in the year.

"Just confidence," observed Marlies coach John Gruden. "You can see he's matured. He's definitely a confident young man."

Cowan produced 11 goals and 18 assists in 66 games with the Leafs. He picked up his first career AHL goal over the weekend while playing the final two Marlies regular-season games.

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Cowan finished the NHL season on the Leafs top line playing beside William Nylander. On Wednesday night, he'll slot in on a line with Alex Nylander.

"I texted [William] the other day saying, 'We got chem,'" Cowan said with a smile. "He's like, 'Ah, it's easy to play with a Nylander,' and all that. Pretty funny, yeah."

"He went from one Nylander to another," Alex said with a grin. "That is funny. I've been watching almost all the games I could this year and they've been playing great together. Me and my brother play kind of similar, so it's going to be good."

"That's part of the reason we wanted to do it," noted Gruden. "They'll be excited. But maybe they're missing a couple zeroes at the end of their check."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

William signed the richest contract in Leafs franchise history (\$92-million over eight years) in January of 2024.

Cowan is in the first year of his three-year entry-level deal with the Leafs worth \$873,500 a season, while Alex is on an AHL deal with the Marlies. They may not make as much as William, but both are sounding motivated.

Cowan is looking to build momentum ahead of a "huge summer" of development while Alex is hoping to earn another NHL opportunity.

"I've been grinding the whole year," Alex said. "I know [a promotion] didn't come but I'm patient and I know when the time comes, the opportunity comes, I'll be ready. I just got to keep working on my game and be hungry for that opportunity. I know I can play in the NHL and that's my goal so I'm not going to stop till it's time. I'm going to keep going."

Alex last played in the NHL early last season when the Leafs faced a flurry of injuries and upgraded his contract. The 28-year-old signed another one-year AHL deal with the organization in the summer.

After producing 44 points in 64 games with the Marlies last season, Alex bumped his scoring up to 53 points in 65 games this season.

"He's playing the best hockey he's played for the two years I've had him," said Gruden. "He's playing the best 200-foot game of his two years I've been with him. He still has aspirations to play in the National Hockey League and in order to do that you have to work on things you're not so good at. I think he's done a real good job of understanding that and bettering himself in that area."

Alex finished the regular season plus-five after being minus-12 in his first season with the Marlies.

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One reason Alex signed an AHL deal in Toronto was that it provided the opportunity to live with William. And despite his brief 95-second media session on locker clean-out day, William was in no hurry to get out of town.

"He's still around and he's going to be watching our games so obviously that's a lot of fun," Alex said. "It's unfortunate for him that he's not in the playoffs but he gets to see me play so that's going to be a lot of fun."

It's a role reversal for the brothers as Alex has been the one in the support situation during most of William's nine playoff runs in Toronto.

"He's been dialed through the playoffs in past years and I've learned from that," Alex noted. "He just keeps going with what he's been doing through the regular season [but] you know the level steps up a notch in the playoffs and the games are high-paced and stuff like that, so I'll be ready for it."

William led the Leafs with 15 points in 13 playoff games last year during the longest run of his career.

William missed time due to injury this season, but still led the Leafs in scoring with 79 points in 65 games. Still, it wasn't nearly enough to get the team back to the playoffs.

"It was tough sometimes and I was there for him and trying to help him this year to keep going," Alex said.

There's been no moping, though, since the season ended.

"He's excited now to get going and he's really excited for next year and getting back in the playoffs for next year," Alex assured.

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Hildeby is 1-3 in his AHL playoff career with a sub .900 save percentage over the past two seasons.

"Still not that much experience in it," the 24-year-old Swede said of playoff hockey. "But from what I've seen from past years, I mean, it's just competing, just staying present and just more focused on detail in your game, and just take it step by step."

Hildeby's season is a tale of two leagues. He led the Leafs with a .914 save percentage in 20 games (14 starts) but posted just an .898 save percentage in 23 games with the Marlies.

"Up and down," he said. "I took steps in my development and wanted to do more, but it is what it is. As long as it's going in the right direction, it's a good step."

Hildeby is now planning to show he can be the goalie to carry a team on a long playoff run this spring.

"Playoffs, that's what you play for all year and that's when it matters," he said. "It's definitely a good time to step up."

The goal is to be a full-time NHL player next season when he will no longer be waiver exempt.

"That's the mindset," Hildeby said. "That's what I've been working for down here. Definitely my mindset. We'll see what happens."

Hildeby is not the undisputed No. 1 on the Marlies as Artur Akhtyamov actually posted a better save percentage (.904 in 37 games) in the AHL.

"You got a coin? I got just flip it real quick," Gruden said when asked about his goaltending plan. "We are very fortunate to have two outstanding goaltenders. We're more concerned, as a staff, to make sure we're playing the right way in front of whoever's in net. If it's Dennis or Arty, we're confident either way."

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With the Leafs out of it, several Marlies players got a look in the NHL down the stretch. Outside of Cowan, no one played more than Jacob Quillan, who suited up in 23 games.

"Biggest takeaway? I still got a lot of work to do to make that league and a lot of parts of my game that can get better," the 24-year-old forward said. "But I learned a lot and hopefully can take it down here and help the team."

Quillan only registered one goal and two assists in the NHL, but two of the points, including his first career goal, came in the final two games.

Jacob Quillan on first NHL goal:

"It was pretty cool. I kind of blacked out a little bit. I got a little nervous that it was going to get called kicking, but just kind of put my hands up in the air. I don't know, it felt good."@TSN\_Sports <https://t.co/p7YjtsG8J>

— Mark Masters (@markmasters) April 14, 2026

Where does he need to improve?

"Probably just my skill, honestly, and making plays at that level," Quillan said.

Making plays with the Marlies is not an issue. He racked up 36 points in 40 games this season. Quillan scored twice and added an assist in two games over the weekend as he returned to the AHL level.

"Sometimes it takes a couple weeks to get over the 'Oh, I got sent down' thing, but not the way he plays," Gruden gushed. "He plays with a lot of pace. The way he just gets out there and gets after it. Obviously, we haven't seen any slowdown from him. There's no hangover whatsoever."

Quillan scored the overtime winner in the NCAA championship game with Quinnipiac University in 2023. He's eager to hunt for another title this spring with the Marlies.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 23, 2026

"It's what you live for," the Nova Scotia native said. "It's the hockey that matters."

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Marlies lines at Tuesday's practice:

Groulx - Shaw - Lettieri

Cowan - Tverberg - Nylander

Quillan - Haymes - Valis

Pezzetta - Pare - Johnstone

Rifai - Thrun

Mermis - Villeneuve

Chadwick - Benning

Hildeby

Akhtyamov

Marlies power-play units at Tuesday's practice:

QB: Villeneuve

Flanks: Cowan, Shaw

Bumper: Lettieri

Net front: Groulx

QB: Chadwick

Flanks: Haymes, Nylander

Bumper: Tverberg

Net front: Quillan

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