



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

The News & Observer

Inside a Carolina Hurricanes defensive duo's chemistry: Friendship forged in faith

By: Chip Alexander

Coach Rod Brind'Amour sheds some light on how the chemistry between new and veteran team members has been impactful this season By Robert Willett

Raleigh

In hockey, it's important for defensive partners to have good chemistry on the ice, to instinctively have a good feel for each other.

Carolina Hurricanes (Shopping Cart IconShop Canes Fan Gear) defensemen Jaccob Slavin and Jalen Chatfield's bond goes deeper than that: They have a relationship that is professional, but also personal — spiritual.

When Chatfield first came to the Canes in 2021, Slavin was there to listen, help, encourage.

When Chatfield was married, Slavin was his best man. When Chatfield was baptized, Slavin performed the Christian ceremony — in the pool at his Raleigh home.

"With all your teammates you have chemistry," Chatfield said in an exclusive interview. "But to have somebody as close as him since the first day I've come in, and then guide me in that, it's truly a blessing.

"He's known about all my struggles, because I was very open with him and talking to him about stuff. Whether it was my first year or second year, getting scratched or things like that, he's always been there for me and he's been my best friend.

"Just his guidance, and seeing how he is as a father, as a teammate, as a leader, I learned a lot from him and I appreciate every single day. And especially being able to work with him, play with him. It's special, for sure." Chatfield paused and smiled.

"We always joked around about playing together, but I never would have imagined we would play together," he said. "And I think we've been good together."

Defensemen Jalen Chatfield (5) and Jaccob Slavin (74) skate during the Carolina Hurricanes practice on Friday, May 15, 2026 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Defensemen Jalen Chatfield (5) and Jaccob Slavin (74) skate during the Carolina Hurricanes practice on Friday, May 15, 2026 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

Slavin finds complement in Chatfield

Slavin, 32, missed 39 of the first 43 games this season as he dealt with undisclosed lower- and upper-body issues. But he helped Team USA to the gold medal at the Milan Winter Olympics, and has been back at his best as the Canes finished as the top seed in the Eastern Conference and then

swept Ottawa and then Philadelphia in the first two rounds of Stanley Cup playoffs.

Slavin, considered by many NHL observers to be the league's top defensive defenseman, has counted Brett Pesce, Dougie Hamilton and Brent Burns among his defensive partners the past few seasons. In Chatfield, he has another right-handed shooting D-man to complement the pairing, one willing to bump and grind in the D zone while also willing to jump into the offensive play.

"All my previous partners have been really talented offensively and great partners," Slavin said Saturday. "It's not that 'Chatty' doesn't have the offense. It comes back to the mindset of really making sure we really defend well, first, then go from there.

"His speed, his gap control, his skating are probably the best parts of his game, his strengths. It's in-your-face, hard-to-beat. He has developed into a really good defenseman for us."

Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour talks with defenseman Jalen Chatfield (5) during practice on Friday, May 15, 2026 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour talks with defenseman Jalen Chatfield (5) during practice on Friday, May 15, 2026 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

Defense first

Chatfield, like Slavin, is used on the penalty kill, good at it and has had a special playoff moment. His shorthanded goal in Game 3 of the Flyers series was the game-winner in a 4-1 victory and made him one of three Canes defenseman in franchise history to have a "shorty" in the playoffs, joining Brendan Smith (2022) and Mike Commodore (2006).

Chatfield took a pass from Jordan Staal off the rush and beat Flyers goalie Dan Vladar high to the blocker side.

"In the playoffs, every shift, every shot on net matters," Chatfield said. "You never know which bounce is going to be the one. Our PK has been sharp, and it's nice to see that bounce go in for us."

Slavin has averaged a team-high 24:10 in ice time in the eight playoff games, and Chatfield is third at 22:54. The D corps has been solid and with goalie Frederik Andersen sharp and controlling the crease, the Canes have allowed 10 goals. "They're two really good players who take pride in how they play that position, and defending," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Chatty's a world-class player in his own right. With the speed he brings and the way he defends it's real special. You put them together and they're a tough pairing to play against."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

A year ago, Chatfield was knocked out of the playoffs in the second round against the Washington Capitals with a hip injury. He hoped to return, but the Canes bowed out in five games in the Eastern Conference Final against the Florida Panthers (Shopping Cart IconShop Panthers Fan Gear).

Chatfield, a native Michigander, was sidelined with a concussion early this season, but played 72 games and had a plus-15 plus/minus rating that was second-best on the team.

Becoming a Christian man

Slavin, raised in Colorado, has long been known as a man of strong faith, one who has said that neither the game nor any success or accolades given him would ever define him.

Slavin said Chatfield first approached him about coming to the church that Jacob and Kylie Slavin attend in Raleigh. Before long, the two D-men used the team trips and plane rides to talk longer and deeper about religion, the gospel.

Chatfield and his wife, Drew, both were baptized at the Slavins' home.

"The same day. It was a really special moment, something you never forget," Chatfield said.

'We know what we're capable of'

The Hurricanes could go on to win a Stanley Cup this year, which would be unforgettable. They're off to the best possible start in the playoffs and have been able to mix rest and practice after the series sweeps.

They're also ready to get back to it.

"We know what we have to do to win," Chatfield said. "We've stuck to our system and our compete level has been through the roof, and that's something we can't get off of."

"And at the end of the day, we have to keep getting better. We know what we have, and we believe in each other, and we know what we're capable of."

Regardless of how it unfolds, the Slavin-Chatfield bond and his admiration for his D partner will remain strong, Chatfield said.

"It's how great of a guy he is and how much I love him and how he is in the community and how he interacts with his teammates," Chatfield said. "Nobody's perfect, but he's a guy to look up to."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

The Athletic

NHL free-agent targets: One player each team should sign this offseason

By: The Athletic NHL Staff

There are just over six weeks until NHL free agency opens on July 1, and teams will be looking to fill holes on their rosters.

Although the free-agent class is short on big names, there are plenty of quality players eligible to hit the open market — many of whom could land shocking contracts, with NHL teams poised to spend plenty of money in a rising-cap environment.

This week, The Athletic asked its NHL staff to play free agency matchmaker and list one pending UFA each team should target this summer.

Chris Johnston's early NHL free agent big board was used as a starting point, but writers were free to go beyond that list for their picks.

Here's what they said.

Marner stuns Ducks, Avalanche complete epic comeback

Harman Dayal

Anaheim Ducks

Jacob Trouba, RHD (Anaheim Ducks)

It could be either Trouba or John Carlson, as both veterans are pending UFAs. Carlson brings natural puck movement and pure offensive instincts from the blue line. The Ducks also surrendered their 2026 first-round pick to get him, so a two-year extension for the 36-year-old could work. Trouba, 32, is younger and had a renaissance season while serving as a strong partner to rising star Jackson LaCombe. Either way, they should hang onto one of their big-minute righties. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

Rasmus Andersson, RHD (Vegas Golden Knights)

The Bruins need help on defense. They really need help on the right side. They tried to trade for Andersson when he was with the Calgary Flames. If they go the UFA route, they won't have to give up any assets to attack a position of desperate need. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Alex Tuch, RW (Buffalo Sabres)

The Sabres' top priority should be keeping their big-ticket free agent in Buffalo. Tuch has been an important leader for the Sabres and has proven to be a playoff performer. If he's willing to take a reasonable contract (below \$10 million AAV), the Sabres should keep him around. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

No one

The Flames are still rebuilding, so they're probably better off not splashing the cash this summer. Of course, they'll look into adding veterans who can help players along. Or even a short-term, prove-it deal to a player who can help their youth movement along. But no need to overdo it in free agency again this season. — Julian McKenzie

Carolina Hurricanes

Frederik Andersen, G (Carolina Hurricanes)

The Hurricanes already have two NHL goalies — Brandon Bussi and Pyotr Kochetkov — signed for next season, just not the one who has won eight straight games to start the 2026 playoffs. Andersen's postseason performance has thus far silenced his critics, and if he continues to play anywhere close to this level, Carolina will surely want him back in 2026-27. Andersen, who will turn 37 in October, had a \$2.75 million cap hit this season, though there are bonuses he may still trigger this postseason. — Cory Lavalette

Pending UFA defenseman Mario Ferraro has spent his entire career in San Jose. Chris Tanouye / Freestyle Photography / Getty Images

Chicago Blackhawks

Mario Ferraro, LHD (San Jose Sharks)

The Blackhawks could use a veteran defenseman to bring some stability to their young group. They probably have a little more flexibility on the left side than the right, so someone such as Ferraro could make sense. From his defensive play to his toughness to his puck-moving ability, he could fit in well with what Chicago already has. The main question is whether the Blackhawks would be willing to sign him to a long-term deal. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

Jaden Schwartz, LW (Seattle Kraken)

The answer here is probably none of the above, but for the sake of writing something more interesting, Jaden Schwartz would be a fantastic addition to Colorado's already strong bottom six. His offense has dried up a bit, but his motor and pace are still there. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

Alex Tuch, RW (Buffalo Sabres)

The Blue Jackets had two players on CJ's list before Coyle's extension. Now they only have Marchment, but could have another in Boone Jenner. They might keep either or both, but if even one gets away, GM Don Waddell must replace him.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

Tuch, who has scored 30-plus goals in three of the last four seasons, would give the Blue Jackets a "finishing" boost to help Kirill Marchenko and Adam Fantilli carry the offensive load. He could also help create something in Columbus that's long been missing: a legitimate power play. — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

John Carlson, RHD (Anaheim Ducks)

The fact is, the Stars' focus is to re-sign RFA Jason Robertson, who could command north of \$12 million a season. That doesn't leave much room for a big free-agent splash, and GM Jim Nill already said he wouldn't "blow it up" after a disappointing first-round loss. So the real answer here might be "none of the above." Still, a right-shot defenseman or a top-six winger would be ideal. It almost certainly won't happen, but Thomas Harley alongside Carlson on the second pair could be a lot of fun. — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings

Bobby McMann, LW/RW (Seattle Kraken)

Really, most of the top forwards are names the Red Wings should consider: Tuch, Mason Marchment and even Evgeni Malkin would all help Detroit. I picked McMann, though, because of his power/speed combo on the left wing, which would really suit Dylan Larkin and Lucas Raymond as a running mate. McMann will surely be looking for a big payday, but he'll be below Tuch's stratosphere and probably has more pure offense than Marchment. Any of the above would fit. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

Alex Tuch, RW (Buffalo Sabres)

The Oilers need a veteran goal scorer with size on the wing. Tuch scored 33 goals in 2025-26 and is the best of this type available. Tuch is 30 and should have several seasons of good production ahead of him. If Tuch plays on a line with Connor McDavid or Leon Draisaitl as his center, a 40-goal season would be possible. The team would need to offload a veteran with significant cap to make the money work, but Tuch would be worth the investment. — Allan Mitchell

Florida Panthers

Stuart Skinner, G (Pittsburgh Penguins)

Yes, the Panthers beat him in the Cup Final twice before he got traded to the Penguins. With Florida needing two netminders and an aging Sergei Bobrovsky asking for the moon, going with a cheaper tandem makes a lot of sense. (Just look at the teams in the playoffs right now.) Skinner will likely look better behind Florida's defense. — James Mirtle

Los Angeles Kings

Bobby McMann, LW/RW (Seattle Kraken)

The Kings need centers, and the already limited UFA market further dried up with Coyle re-signing in Columbus. It's hard to see Malkin and Pittsburgh parting ways, but they can still use scoring up front. McMann, 29, will certainly look to cash in on a career-best 29-goal season between Toronto and Seattle. He's a late bloomer who skates with purpose, goes hard to the net and has shown some finishing touch the last

two seasons. If the price isn't exorbitant, he's worth a look. — Eric Stephens

Evgeni Malkin, who turns 40 in July, faces an uncertain future in free agency. Steph Chambers / Getty Images

Minnesota Wild

Evgeni Malkin, C/RW (Pittsburgh Penguins)

If Malkin is willing to leave Pittsburgh and the Wild aren't able to trade for a big-fish center, at least the future Hall of Famer would give them someone with a pulse at their biggest position of need. As we saw in their playoff series against Colorado, with Joel Eriksson Ek out, the Wild's disadvantage up the middle killed them. Plus, Malkin can still score and is Kirill Kaprizov's workout buddy. — Michael Russo

Montreal Canadiens

Jacob Trouba, RHD (Anaheim Ducks)

This pick is more in theory than in practice, because the Canadiens tried hard at the trade deadline to add a physical, right-shot defenseman. With the uncertain status of prospect David Reinbacher and the continued right-left imbalance on their blue line, a player such as Trouba on a short-to-medium-term contract would be helpful. Trouba himself is unlikely to sign with Montreal, but he represents a profile they should be after. — Arpon Basu

How this NHL team can break Canada's 33-cup drought

Harman Dayal

Nashville Predators

Logan Stanley, LHD (Buffalo Sabres)

The Preds (with a GM still to be named later) should tread lightly in free agency, and not just because it's a rough class. It's time for more of a closer look at some of the young guys. But some size and nastiness on the blue line, with a guy who can grow into the next version of the Preds, doesn't sound too bad. — Joseph Rexrode

Viktor Arvidsson could make sense for a few teams if the price is right. Maddie Meyer / Getty Images

New Jersey Devils

Viktor Arvidsson, RW/LW (Boston Bruins)

The Devils need to improve their forward depth, and Arvidsson is the type of player who could fit well. He might command more than New Jersey is willing to offer, but the Devils will likely be looking at forwards to round out their group, and Arvidsson fits the bill. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Viktor Arvidsson, RW/LW (Boston Bruins)

The Islanders shouldn't be big spenders in free agency. The focus should be on developing their own talent and looking for other up-and-comers on the trade market. It wouldn't hurt to boost the team's middle-six depth, and Arvidsson's pace would fit in with the brand of hockey they're trying to play. His two-way game and utility could make sense at the right price. — Shayna Goldman

New York Rangers



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

Mario Ferraro, LHD (San Jose Sharks)

I was tempted to say no one, given the lack of true needle-movers in this year's UFA class, but the Rangers have stated their desire to add on defense, with a gaping hole on the left side of their second pair. Ferraro is an imperfect option because of New York's need for better puck-movers on its back end, which isn't his biggest strength, but he's a tough, dependable defender and a clear upgrade over the in-house candidates. I could also see them going after a forward on a short-term deal. — Vincent Z. Mercogliano

Ottawa Senators

Bobby McMann, LW/RW (Seattle Kraken)

It wouldn't hurt for the Senators to add another goal-scoring winger. And it certainly wouldn't hurt for the Senators to add some speed up the wing. Enter McMann, whose max skating speed of 39.03 ranked in the top 10 this past regular season according to NHL Edge. McMann also nearly hit the 30-goal mark while splitting the year between Toronto and Seattle. — Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

Darren Raddysh, RHD (Tampa Bay Lightning)

The Flyers' power play has been awful for five years running, including a last-place finish during this past regular season. Raddysh had 10 goals and 26 points on the power play this season, and would give the Flyers the big, booming shot that Rick Tocchet is seeking. The Flyers could move Rasmus Ristolainen in the offseason to make room for him, too. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

Mason Marchment, LW (Columbus Blue Jackets)

Kyle Dubas knows Marchment extremely well, and he's a good player who, at 30, is only recently coming into his own. His 6-foot-5 frame is something the Penguins could use. He's averaged better than 20 goals per season in the last three campaigns. This feels like a natural fit. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

Darren Raddysh, RHD (Tampa Bay Lightning)

There is the risk of Raddysh's blow-up 2025-26 season being an anomaly, but he's got a cannon of a shot and showed he can handle top-pairing minutes. He'd have power-play weapons in San Jose, and the Sharks have had some fine right-shot blueliners in their history. — Eric Stephens

Seattle Kraken

Alex Tuch, RW (Buffalo Sabres)

The Kraken, as their pursuit of Artemi Panarin illustrated before the Olympic break, want to add name-brand star power to their stalemate team. Tuch is the biggest name star player likely to be available on July 1, and accordingly, you'd expect the Kraken — depending on the outcome of their external audit — to be among his primary suitors when the market opens. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

No one

The Blues are in the midst of a retool that is setting up nicely with the number of high draft picks who are coming in and performing. Jimmy Snuggerud, Dalibor Dvorsky, Otto Stenberg and Theo Lindstein are in the fold, and Justin Carbonneau and Adam Jiricek are on their way. The club doesn't need to spend now on free agents who don't fit. If anything, it needs to replace a couple of core players via trade, not through a poor free agency class. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

Darren Raddysh, RHD (Tampa Bay Lightning)

Raddysh is a prime overpay candidate, considering his offensive breakout this year and the overall state of free agency. But if any team can come to a reasonable deal, maybe it's the one he clicked so well with this year. Otherwise, it's back to the drawing board to find another offensive option on the back end, and that's going to be a real challenge for a team on a budget, without a ton of trade assets and without a deep prospect pool. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Darren Raddysh, RHD (Tampa Bay Lightning)

Raddysh would be a complicated addition. On the one hand, he would help the Leafs in areas of need on the back end — namely, his ability to move pucks effectively and boost the power play with a big shot and QB presence. The complication is that he's 30 and the Leafs are already flooded with 30-and-over defensemen, but if the Leafs and their new GM John Chayka can't solve their need back there via trade, there's a case to make for the Toronto native. — Jonas Siegel

After Craig Berube, who should coach the Maple Leafs?

Sean Gentile and Sean McIndoe

Utah Mammoth

Bobby McMann, LW/RW (Seattle Kraken)

Utah is pretty set on the back end with the MacKenzie Weegar addition, plus the expected growth of Dmitri Simashev. Up front, though, the Mammoth could use a middle-six forward, especially one who could be an upgrade in the spot that Kailer Yamamoto occupied on Logan Cooley's line. A winger with size, grit and secondary scoring, such as McMann or Marchment, should warrant consideration. — Harman Dayal

Vancouver Canucks

Michael McCarron, C (Minnesota Wild)

The rebuilding Canucks should use July 1 to break the wage scale for players. How do you catch up to 31 other NHL teams, and out-accumulate them over a reasonable five-year time frame, after all, if the cap keeps increasing and very few teams feel much pressure to make difficult decisions on their good players? You become an inflationary force. Short-term, eye-popping money deals to players with safe resale value. McCarron, a 6-foot-6, tough-as-nails, right-handed center, is the perfect target. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

Rasmus Andersson, RHD (Vegas Golden Knights)

The Golden Knights didn't trade Zach Whitecloud, a prospect, a first-round pick and a conditional second-round pick to watch Andersson walk in free agency. The offensively-minded defenseman has been a nice fit in Vegas. When he's aggressively activating in the offensive zone, he can be a game-changer. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

Alex Tuch, RW (Buffalo Sabres)

We'll ignore the most pressing candidate (Alex Ovechkin) and the funniest one (Malkin) in favor of the obvious pick. The market on Tuch will be silly, but he makes even more sense for the Capitals than other teams. They were in on

Nikolaj Ehlers last summer, and Tuch would be a fit in terms of age (30, right in the Tom Wilson/Jakob Chychrun/Pierre-Luc Dubois zone) and role (top-six winger). — Sean Gentille

Winnipeg Jets

Mason Marchment, LW (Columbus Blue Jackets)

Winnipeg would be better if it added a top UFA such as Rasmus Andersson or Darren Raddysh, but top UFAs don't often choose Winnipeg. I've gone further down CJ's list for Marchment because he's a scorer and a shift disturber, and the Jets need help on both fronts. The 6-foot-5 left wing wouldn't fix all that ails Winnipeg, but Marchment could be a stylistically needed boost. — Murat Ates



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026



Conference Final Matchup To Feature '06 Throwback

By: Peter Dewar

Looking back at the Canes' battles with Montreal and Buffalo during their Stanley Cup run

RALEIGH, N.C. - After facing two first-time playoff foes in Rounds 1 and 2, the Carolina Hurricanes' Eastern Conference Final matchup is set to boast a bit of history.

Twenty years after dispatching both the Montreal Canadiens and Buffalo Sabres en route to the 2006 Stanley Cup Final, the Canes will once again have to get past one of those two to reach that round again this year.

Buffalo and Montreal will square off in Game 7 to determine the winner of their second-round series on Monday (7:30 p.m ET; ESPN), three days before the puck drops at Lenovo Center for Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Final on Thursday.

But before the Canes return to action, let's turn the clock back for a look at the last time they saw either potential opponent.

2006 Eastern Conference Quarterfinal | CAR defeats MTL 4-2

Coming in as the No. 2 seed in the Eastern Conference, the Canes had high hopes of a deep playoff run. Just two games into that journey, however, things hit a speed bump as Carolina fell twice on home ice before the series shifted to Montreal.

Pushing back on the road with a pair of one-goal wins — including an OT victory — in the next two games, Carolina evened up the series as it headed back to Raleigh for Game 5. After another tight triumph, the Canes then went back to Bell Centre and closed out the series with a 2-1 overtime win to punch their ticket to the second round.

Coming off the team's first 100-point campaign by a player since relocation, Eric Staal led the Canes in scoring during Round 1 with eight points in six games, while Rod Brind'Amour paced his club with four goals.

Key Moments

Matt Cullen's goal 50 seconds into Game 1 seemed to be a sign of things to come for Carolina. Instead, Montreal rattled off six unanswered goals to stun the Canes and their fans at RBC Center, and set the tone for the early part of the series.

Trailing by three fewer than 15 minutes into Game 2, Carolina turned to rookie netminder Cam Ward for the

remainder of the contest. Ward, who went on to win the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP, made 20 saves on 23 shots as his team roared back to force overtime before ultimately falling in the second extra frame.

With his team in another sudden-death scenario in Game 3, Eric Staal scored his first career playoff goal 3:38 into overtime to help the Canes pick up their first win of the series.

After a back-and-forth 40 minutes in Game 4, Rod Brind'Amour played hero at 5:54 of the third period with his team-leading fourth tally of the postseason to level the series at two wins apiece.

Despite allowing a shutout-spoiling goal with 28 seconds remaining, Cam Ward's star continued to shine in Game 5 with a 30-save effort as his team struck twice on the power play for a 2-1 win and a 3-2 series lead.

Cory Stillman etched his name in Hurricanes history with the series-clinching dagger in Game 6, stepping across the blueline and unleashing a rocket that eluded Canadiens goaltender Cristobal Huet just 79 seconds into overtime.

2006 Eastern Conference Final | CAR defeats BUF 4-3

The battle for the Eastern Conference crown featured the teams with the second- and third-most points in the regular season. The higher of the two by just a pair of points, Carolina held home-ice advantage, which proved crucial as three of its four wins came within the friendly confines of RBC Center.

As was the case against Montreal, Carolina dropped Game 1, but this time responded at home in Game 2 to send the series to Buffalo on level ground. The two clubs traded wins at HSBC Arena to make it a best-of-three from there, and after an overtime win for each side, Carolina claimed the series victory with a 4-2 win in Game 7 — one of only two tilts separated by more than one goal.

Cory Stillman led all NHL skaters in scoring during the Conference Finals, posting 10 points across the seven games. His three goals were tied with Rod Brind'Amour and Justin Williams for the most among Hurricanes skaters in that round. Carolina utilized both of its goaltenders to get past Buffalo, with Cam Ward going 3-3 and Martin Gerber notching a win in his only start.

Key Moments

Ray Whitney's two goals in 6:55 during the second period of Game 2 helped the Canes build a big enough cushion to



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

withstand a late Sabres push, sending the series to Buffalo tied at 1-1.

After pulling Cam Ward in favor of Martin Gerber in Game 3, Canes Head Coach Peter Laviolette then started Gerber in Game 4. The veteran rewarded that faith with a 22-save shutout to even the best-of-seven at two wins apiece.

Cory Stillman's second overtime tally of the playoffs was the difference in Game 5, capping off a two-goal comeback for the Canes to put them ahead in the series for the first time.

Heading back to Buffalo with a chance to advance, a boarding penalty in overtime proved costly for the Canes as Daniel Briere converted on the Sabres' man advantage to force one more face-off in Raleigh.

A three-goal third period helped the Hurricanes overcome a one-goal deficit to take Game 7, with Doug Weight tying things up just 94 seconds in, Rod Brind'Amour burying the eventual game-winner on the power play at 11:22 and Justin Williams potting a final-minute insurance marker.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026



Andersen's puck-handling skills are 'huge asset' for Hurricanes in Stanley Cup Playoffs

By: Tom Gulitti

Goalie's 'underrated' ability complements Carolina's relentless forecheck and puck possession

RALEIGH, N.C. -- When Frederik Andersen was growing up in Denmark, the Carolina Hurricanes goalie saw a video clip of Marty Turco of the Dallas Stars that changed how he played.

"It was like three minutes of him just playing the puck," Andersen said. "He was out everywhere playing it. He was in the corner, up by the hash marks. He was just absolutely touching the puck more than any of the 'D.'"

"That was impressive."

Like others, Andersen adopted the "Turco grip" of turning his catching glove over to hold the stick shaft, providing more control to make accurate passes on the forehand and backhand and helping him make puck-handling a valuable – though sometimes overlooked – facet of his game.

CAR@PHI, Gm 4: Andersen robs Martone with stellar save

While Andersen was putting up eye-popping numbers (8-0, NHL-best 1.12 goals-against average and .950 save percentage) in helping Carolina sweep its way through the first two rounds of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, his puck-handling was an unheralded part of that success. It's something the Montreal Canadiens or Buffalo Sabres, whichever team advances to face the Hurricanes in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Final at Lenovo Center on Thursday, will undoubtedly be aware of because of how well it fits into the way they play.

"His ability to play the puck is a huge asset, especially for a team like Carolina that has speed," ESPN analyst and former NHL goalie Kevin Weekes said. "He helps them exit out of their D-zone quicker, and then they can attack faster. They force you to play at a pace and a tempo that is uncomfortable and it's a lot easier to do that when you're getting out of your D-zone faster, and he certainly helps with that."

The Ottawa Senators and Philadelphia Flyers experienced that in the first two rounds of the playoffs.

Carolina generates relentless pressure with its forecheck and puck possession that results in extended shifts in the offensive zone. When opponents are finally able to get the puck out and try to establish some forecheck pressure of their own, those efforts are often diffused by the combination

of Andersen's puck-handling and the Hurricanes' defensemen quickly skating or passing it out of the defensive zone.

As a result, the Hurricanes have allowed an average of 25.1 shots on goal per game through the first two rounds, which are second fewest in the playoffs behind the Tampa Bay Lightning (22.3), who lost to the Canadiens in seven games in the first round. Despite two games going to overtime, Philadelphia managed just 22.8 shots on goal and 34 shot attempts per game in the four games against Carolina.

"When we play teams that have good puck-handling goaltenders, it's tough for us to get our forecheck going, too," Hurricanes defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere said. "Freddie is very underrated at it. The quicker we can get pucks out of our end and put in their end, the stress is on them. So, it just goes along with what we're trying to do."

Teams put even more emphasis in the playoffs on making simple plays such as dumping the puck in and trying to retrieve it below the goal line. That adds even more value to Andersen's ability to thwart some of those attempts by stopping the puck in the trapezoid behind the net or before it reaches the corners and passing it to one of his teammates to start the breakout.

"Nowadays everybody forechecks," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Everybody is putting pucks in deep way more than they have ever. So, that's a big part of it. If you can get good puck touches all over, it's important.

"That's one of his skill sets, so that certainly helps."

CAR@PHI, Gm 4: Andersen shuts the door on Hathaway in 2nd

Andersen rarely gets much recognition for it, though. He did not receive a vote in the NHL Players' Association's players' poll this season ranking the goalies with the best puck-handling skill. The five goalies who did were Jordan Binnington of the St. Louis Blues, Igor Shesterkin of the New York Rangers, Joey Daccord of the Seattle Kraken, Joel Hofer of the Blues and Jacob Markstrom of the New Jersey Devils.

Weekes speculated that Andersen might have been overlooked because he missed some time with injuries, but it also might be because the 36-year-old isn't as aggressive as some of the goalies on that list. Defenseman K'Andre Miller, who was teammates with Shesterkin for five seasons before



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

the Rangers traded him to the Hurricanes last offseason, said there are "different levels" to the puck-handling goalies.

"I think Freddie is really good in his D-zone, passing pucks to us defensemen, rimming the puck out of the zone, whereas Igor is really good at those long 'Hail Mary' passes, getting the puck up on the glass and things like that," Miller said. "So, there's a little bit of a difference, but I think any time you can have a goalie that helps your breakout and can get the puck out of your D-zone, it's definitely an advantage."

Andersen acknowledged he's a "less is more type of guy," similar to Carey Price, the former Canadiens goalie he also admired when he was younger.

"You can put yourself in really some bad spots if you just chase that part of the game and you can make more headaches for your 'D' than helping out," Andersen said. "So, when it makes sense to do it, obviously help out. Then, if it's those slow rollers that you don't really know if they're coming into the trapezoid area, if you're standing there waiting for it, you're creating a lot of confusion, and you're probably better off just letting the 'D' handle it themselves."

Brind'Amour relishing chance to guide Hurricanes to Stanley Cup

By: Tom Gulitti

'Means a little more' to coach team he captained to championship in 2006

RALEIGH, N.C. -- It's evident in Rod Brind'Amour's postgame speeches the Carolina Hurricanes post on their social media following each win.

Mixed between the goal horns that mute his expletives is the authentic affection Brind'Amour feels for the players he coaches.

"You know it takes everybody and everybody contributing the whole way," Brind'Amour told them after the Hurricanes completed a sweep of the Philadelphia Flyers in the Eastern Conference Second Round on May 9.

"And I just love you guys for that."

The Hurricanes players say what you see in those videos is essentially who Brind'Amour is as a coach.

"It's not far off," Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said. "I think he's probably holding back a little sometimes. We hear a little bit more detail sometimes in our meetings, but for the most part he's pretty genuine. That's just who he is."

The eight-year anniversary of Brind'Amour being named the Hurricanes coach passed quietly on May 8, the day before their 3-2 overtime victory in Game 4 against the Flyers sent them onto the Eastern Conference Final for the fourth time during his tenure (also 2019, 2023, 2025). It's been a long wait since then to find out if they'll play the Montreal Canadiens or Buffalo Sabres and whether that best-of-7 series will start Tuesday or Thursday.

Carolina lost each of its previous three trips to the conference final under Brind'Amour, so it knows from experience the challenge ahead. But taking that next step and winning the Stanley Cup after that would only further cement Brind'Amour's legacy with the Hurricanes, which

Like Price, Andersen uses a slightly shorter staff on his stick to give him more control.

"It maybe doesn't shoot it as high and far as other goalies, but I've put an emphasis on being able to pull it off the boards, set it, get it to a spot quick and then be a little bit more agile with it instead of the hard, long passes that are more flashy," Andersen said. "But what I like is just to be able to help the 'D' out and make those 15-foot passes in the middle, small bypasses and stuff like that."

Andersen views it as "being a good person to your 'D'" and repaying them for the hard work they do in front of him.

Andersen isn't at the level of Martin Brodeur, who was considered, along with Turco and Ron Hextall, among the best puck-handling goalies in NHL history. But Weekes said Andersen's puck-handling complements the Hurricanes' system in a similar way to how Brodeur did with the Devils, who also frustrated opponents with their structure.

"I saw it firsthand," said Weekes, who was teammates with Brodeur for two seasons (2007-09). "So, it's kind of the perfect storm for the 'Canes' and Freddie's ability to handle it."

already includes captaining them to their first Stanley Cup championship in 2006.

The 55-year-old has been part of the fabric of the Hurricanes since the trade that brought him here from the Philadelphia Flyers on Jan. 23, 2000. He retired in 2010 after playing 10 seasons in Carolina, but never left, initially working in player development before becoming an assistant for seven seasons and being promoted to head coach in 2018.

"It's just very, very special to me, and it's home," Brind'Amour said. "I've said it many times, it's very unique to be a coach in this league and do it where you live, and I'm proud of that. I don't just wear this hat and take it off and wear someone else's the next day. That's just not what it is."

"It means a little more to me because I've been here for so long and we have the roots and the history."

Taylor Hall's line, Frederick Andersen are powering Carolina's run

Brind'Amour has been part of 94 of the Hurricanes' 96 Stanley Cup Playoff wins since the franchise moved to Carolina from Hartford in 1997 -- 39 as a player and 55 as their coach. The Hurricanes have qualified for the playoffs and won at least one series in each of his eight seasons. They qualified for the postseason only five times before that, including not at all in the nine seasons prior to him becoming head coach.

While some coaches in other markets reach their expiration date after two or three seasons, Brind'Amour's impact with Carolina has yet to fade. The Hurricanes went 53-22-7 this season to finish first in their division for the fourth time under him.

He already holds the Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers coaching record for playoff wins (55-42) and, with a 378-182-56 record in 616 games, is only six behind Paul Maurice (384-391-46 with 99 ties in 920 games) for most regular-season wins.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

The only NHL coaches with longer tenures with their current teams are Jon Cooper, who just completed his 14th season with the Tampa Bay Lightning, and Jared Bednar, who is in his 10th season with the Colorado Avalanche.

"Nobody understands or embodies the essence of that franchise, the identity of it when it's at its best better than him," said former Hurricanes goalie and current ESPN analyst Kevin Weekes, who was Brind'Amour's teammate for parts of three seasons in Carolina (2001-04). "It's really amazing, and it's earned. He never takes anything for granted.

"He doesn't take the role for granted."

Brind'Amour has often downplayed his role in Carolina's success. During his first playoff series as coach, in the 2019 Eastern Conference First Round against the Washington Capitals, he remarked, "The coaching thing is fun, but I always say it's a little overrated. Your players play."

A hard-nosed center who played 1,484 games during 20 seasons in the NHL with the St. Louis Blues, Flyers and Hurricanes, Brind'Amour has never lost that appreciation for the players. It's one of the things that makes him so relatable.

"It's so easy to play for a guy who has done it," defenseman Sean Walker said. "He was a player. He gets it. He's a champion. He's won. Every day, he has an amazing speech that makes you want to run through a brick wall. He's awesome. Everyone will tell you that."

Staal, a center who played for six seasons for the Pittsburgh Penguins before being traded to Carolina in 2012, remembers well what it was like to play against Brind'Amour.

"Pretty much the way he coaches -- intense and hardworking, and not willing to give you an inch," Staal said. "And he's exactly that in every other aspect of his life."

Brind'Amour has a way of making it clear, though, that he's in the battle with his players -- not against them.

"He's invested," forward Jordan Martinook said. "As much as we're invested in the game, he's right there with us. He was a player, so he knows that, and you see the fire."

The word mentioned most often about Brind'Amour is "genuine." There's no need to read between the lines with him.

"I've always loved and respected Roddy because he's real," said Weekes, who, along with Brind'Amour, helped the Hurricanes reach the 2002 Stanley Cup Final. "For some people, it's about the sizzle, it's about this, it's about that. For him, it's about the steak. It's authentic. In everything he says, there's an authenticity, it's real. There's no playing a role. There isn't jargon.

"He's just a real guy that does real things and treats people really well."

First Shift on the Hurricanes maintaining a perfect 8-0 playoff record

That has helped establish a culture of respect within the locker room that complements the technical and systems work that Brind'Amour and his staff do. The relationships that

stem from that respect help Brind'Amour get complete buy-in from seemingly every player who joins the Hurricanes.

"He is very, very good at having every player want to succeed for him and want to help him succeed, and he wants to help them succeed," Hurricanes general manager Eric Tulsy said. "Every player in the League wants more ice time, wants more opportunity, and we have such a deep team that it's especially challenging for him.

"There are a lot of players on our team who could be playing bigger roles somewhere else, and he does a really good job of managing it and getting people comfortable with playing the role that they're being asked to play on this team and doing it the best they can."

The Hurricanes have had some turnover during Brind'Amour's time as coach, but he hasn't been the lone constant. Staal, Martinook, along with forwards Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov and defenseman Jaccob Slavin, are among five players who remain from the Carolina team that upset Washington, defending Cup champions at the time, in seven games in the first round to begin a run to the 2019 Eastern Conference Final.

They have 11 players who will be in their third conference final with the Hurricanes and 19 who were part of the team that lost to the Florida Panthers in five games in the conference final last season.

"I've had some of these guys for a really long time and watching them come as kids and they change, become fathers, grow as people and as players," said Brind'Amour, who won the Jack Adams Award as the NHL's coach of the year in 2020-21. "But it's the human side. That is what is special about this job for me. It's nice to get them when they are young and mold them a little bit, but it's really the guys in the room that are doing that."

On some teams, the coach's message can grow stale over time. Brind'Amour has avoided that so far, but he acknowledged, "that's probably the toughest thing" about coaching one team for so long.

"We don't deviate too much from the message," he said. "I think that's actually the trick, too. If you believe in what you're throwing out there, then it's pretty easy. At this time of year, it's easy. I think during the regular season it's tough. That's where it gets hard."

The Hurricanes know they still have a lot of work to do. After becoming the first team to start 8-0 in a postseason since the NHL switched the best-of-7 format for all four rounds of its playoffs in 1987, they need eight more victories to win the Stanley Cup, which is the only thing missing from Brind'Amour's coaching resume.

Carolina's players want to do that as much for him as they do for themselves.

"When he took over, he pretty much set the standard for the organization and ever since, we have been trying to reach our ultimate goal." Aho said. "Obviously, we haven't been able to do that, but everyone is working as hard as they can. He is our leader and you can see the work he puts in for us to succeed and as a player you appreciate that."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

The Hockey News

Hurricanes Once Again Not Worried About Long Layoff

By: Ryan Henkel

Fresh off consecutive sweeps, Carolina embraces a long hiatus. The Canes are prioritizing mental recovery and high-intensity practices to maintain their competitive edge for the Eastern Conference Final.

So far this postseason, the Carolina Hurricanes have spent more time not playing than they have playing.

Through two rounds of the playoffs, the Canes have pulled off back-to-back sweeps over the Ottawa Senators and Philadelphia Flyers.

So that makes eight game days and now over 21 off days and it's still going to be over a week between games by the time they drop the puck at Lenovo Center for Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Final.

The Hurricanes are awaiting the winner between the Montreal Canadiens and the Buffalo Sabres, who will play in Game 6 on Saturday, and really the only thing they've been able to do to fill the time is to practice.

"It's out of our control," said captain Jordan Staal. "What we can control is practicing hard and staying sharp and that's what we're trying to do."

"We're just working on things to keep ourselves sharp," said assistant netminder Frederik Andersen. "That's obviously important and we've been a group that's been pretty good at that. I think Roddy is very focused on what we can do today to get better and so on."

The Hurricanes have done well off of an extended break already these playoffs, coming out hard against the Flyers and again sweeping following a six-day break.

There was never a noticeable lag in their game following the long rest and that Game 1 might have even been one of their best outings of the postseason with a 3-0 victory.

"Obviously we were happy with the way things went last time, so we're gonna try to kind of do similar things and stay consistent with that," Staal said. "It's just really about being a pro. Making sure your body is right, healing those bumps and bruises and just being sharp for that Game 1."

"During that break, we really tried to keep our foot on the gas and stay full throttle," said defenseman K'Andre Miller. "Whether it was coming in for practices or coming in and doing a workout, conditioning, whatever we could do to stay sharp."

Since the Game 4 victory, the team has been alternating between practice days and off days as they try to strike the balance between staying sharp, but also not ramping up too much or too soon.

It was the approach they took between Round 1 and Round 2 and they're hopeful it'll produce similar results heading into Round 3.

"I think what we did worked," said Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour. "It's important for the guys to stay physically sharp, but I think mentally, it's okay to kind of get away from it for a little bit because the playoffs is a grind mentally and physically. So I think the mental rest is actually probably better for us than the actual physical rest."

A lot of people try to bring up how too much rest may be a detriment to a team that isn't staying actively engaged in the battles of playoff hockey night after night, the ol' "rust" argument, but the benefit of rest just simply feels too great to take for granted.

"It's always good to get that rest," Miller said. "Recovery in playoffs... you just don't get that luxury all that often, so anytime you can get away from the rink and put up your legs and get your mind away from the ice and the stick and the puck is nice and it's going to be beneficial in the long run."

The biggest challenge for the team so far though has been not knowing when they're even going to be playing, but at least now with the NHL releasing two potential options, the Hurricanes have some target dates that they can work finally work toward.

"We try to practice hard every day, but that's why we give them some time off," Brind'Amour said. "We definitely have a plan here moving forward, but we are going to start giving them more stuff off ice and getting prepared."

As Brind'Amour put it, the team isn't trying to "reinvent the wheel" with these practices, but they have to make sure they're continuing to build on good habits and hammer down on the small details.

"Obviously we have to get better at everything we're doing, so we're gonna focus on that, but I don't think you really want to deviate too much from what you're doing," Brind'Amour said. "We always say, 'Sharpening the knife.' We have to keep razor sharp on what we do well."

And while the coaching staff has been preparing video on both potential opponents, they're not going to start going over that with the team until they know for sure who they're playing.

The focus instead is on their own team and how they can be better.

"You gotta prepare for both groups, but until we really know who we're playing, we're not going to give too much to our guys about who we're playing," Brind'Amour said. "At the end of the day, it's about getting your team playing at its best and at this time of year, you have to."

The Canes have indeed started to ramp up their practices here as of late, with two straight days of increased competition featuring some short 5v5 scrimmages as well as some 2v2, small-ice games.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

"We're kind of itching to get going, so you have to find ways to create competition," said alternate captain Jordan Martinook.

"They picked it up a little bit here today," Brind'Amour said on Saturday. "It's getting closer, so that's what you want."

While the Hurricanes certainly would have liked to have gotten going already, they're not going to complain about the

bonus recovery time and regardless, they feel like they'll be ready for Game 1 of the ECF whenever that may be.

"We'd love to be playing and get going, but we'll wait as long as we need to," Brind'Amour said.

"When we go back into it next round, we're going to come into with everything we've got and continue to push," Andersen said.

'It's Been A Seamless Fit': Mark Jankowski On Extending With Carolina

By: Ryan Henkel

The veteran center reflects on his two-year extension, crediting Rod Brind'Amour's system and a locker room culture that embraced his versatile skillset.

The Carolina Hurricanes signed center Mark Jankowski to a two-year extension earlier this week.

The journeyman 4C has been a good fit with the Canes so far across one and a half seasons, providing depth and versatility to the lineup.

He spoke with the media on Monday about his extension. Here's what he had to say:

Mark Jankowski

On extending: Super excited. Ever since I've been here, I've felt like it's been a seamless fit. I wanted to stay here and we had been talking, me and my agent and the team, have been talking for a little bit of time. For it to get wrapped up here in the middle of the playoffs was nice to get it done. Super excited to be here for a couple more years.

On what's made Carolina such a good fit for him: A little bit of everything, for sure. Coming in, getting traded midseason last year and then talking with the coaching staff and the players and everything, I just felt like right away, they made it easy for me to fit in. I feel like my game gels well with how Rod and the coaches want to play and how the rest of the team plays. We play such a great system and everyone plays the same way, playing hard, and it's a fun team to be a part of. I think just being able to add my skillset to that team, I think it's just been a real great fit.

On the timing: We had been talking for a little bit throughout the end of the season and into the playoffs a little bit. I think both sides just wanted to get it done. I thought it was a good fit and they think so as well. So we just wanted to get something done here and I'm glad we were able to come to terms. I think both sides are happy. Obviously I'm super excited to be sticking around for another couple years and hopefully another long playoff push this year as well.

On his called back goals: The big thing is that we're winning these games. Obviously it would feel a lot worse if I score, they take it back and then we ended up losing. Both of those games I scored in we ended up winning, so that took away a lot of the hurt, for sure, but you just have to keep doing the same things. You're getting the chances. Those goals will come if you keep playing the right way and we are. So you don't want to take your foot off the gas. The fact that you're getting those chances and getting those looks are good

things. Just have to keep doing the same thing and hopefully the next one counts.

On which opponent he'd like to see in the ECF: I think it doesn't really matter to us. The way we play, we have so much faith in our system that we can go up against anybody. Obviously we're watching the other series to see who we'll play and I'm a hockey fan as well. I love watching playoff hockey, so it's been a good series over there. So we're just gonna focus on ourselves and get back to practice and get back to work. Whoever we play, we'll be ready for.

On if there's anything different about the Hurricanes that makes him such a good fit as opposed to other teams he's been on: Ever since that trade and coming in, I just felt like it was seamless right away. Right from my first day talking to all the guys, everyone was so welcoming and talking to the coaching staff and Rod, it just made me feel welcome right away, which made that transition so easy. I was pretty nervous. It was the first time I had been traded. I've been on different teams, but that was all in the summer and going through training camps and all that stuff, so it was the first time changing teams midseason. So I was pretty nervous and so being able to get in there right away and have those conversations with the coaching staff and the team and all that and the leadership group and all that made that transition so much easier. I think anyone that comes in here and has the right attitude, you'll definitely be able to have success here because everyone just makes it a great spot to be. It's awesome to come to the rink everyday.

On what effect his hot start when coming to Carolina had on him: It definitely was obviously a great start. Getting a couple in that first game right away also took away some nerves for sure too. Just felt, like I said, a seamless transition being able to produce and also just show my whole complete game. I pride myself on being a 200-foot guy, someone that you can rely on in the D-zone and the O-zone as well and have a scoring touch too. So just being able to show off a little bit of all my game in that first little sample size.

On if this deal feels like more security for him: It definitely feels nice, it definitely feels like all my hard work has been rewarded a little bit, but you definitely don't want to get complacent. That's something that I've been through a lot. I've seen a lot and been through a lot of different organizations. I've been up, I've been down and I think that's something that I can always carry with me: never getting complacent. Just have to keep pushing forward, keep working, keep your foot on the gas. It definitely feels nice to get that deal and feel like you've been rewarded a little bit, but not taking anything for granted and not getting complacent, that's for sure.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

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

1391624 Carolina Hurricanes

How 'WAG' jackets won the NHL playoffs: Brackets, cowboy fringe and a dominant McDavid

Peter Baugh

14-17 minutes 17/05/2026

Eight minutes after the surging Philadelphia Flyers clinched a late-season playoff berth with a shootout win over the Carolina Hurricanes in mid-April, standout defenseman Travis Sanheim was on his phone, texting a top-of-mind message to his wife, Alex.

We're in! Let's go! Buy the jackets lol

Every game during the Stanley Cup playoffs, wives and girlfriends of NHL players on the home team suit up in their own version of uniforms. Emblazoned with logos, jersey numbers and other custom-designed flair, these jackets have become flashy, fashionable staples of postseason hockey. This year, versions were worn by partners on all 16 teams in the field, with some commissioning extra clothing items such as windbreakers and jeans. Materials ranged from suede to wool to leather, but all held the goal of showing shared support — and standing out.

The 2017 Washington Capitals were among the first teams, if not the first, with partners sporting jackets for the annual postseason tournament. That year, under the leadership of Lauren Oshie, whose husband, T.J., then played winger for the team, they wore matching denim affixed with patches of their respective partners' numbers and names. Nearly a decade later, the trend is booming in just about every way: from exposure to extravagance to price. In a sense, it has become the NHL's biggest fashion showcase.

"Every year it's just gotten bigger and bigger and bigger," says Gina Gostisbehere, who organized this year's Hurricanes jackets after it became clear her husband, Shayne, and his teammates were bound for the playoffs.

"In the last year alone they have become a phenomenon," says Claire Crouse, whose husband, Lawson, plays on the Mammoth.

There's no spoken competition among partners on different teams; Gostisbehere and Crouse remain friends from their husbands' time together on the Arizona Coyotes and hyped each other up through this year's production process. But no one wants to be left behind, either. "I definitely wanted to make sure ours was up to scale, not just a homemade, DIY jacket," Crouse says.

Danielle Spurgeon, whose husband, Jared, captains the Minnesota Wild, estimates that the league-average playoff jacket costs around \$500, a pricey commitment with its utility largely limited to one year. Spurgeon knows some teams' jackets have neared \$1,000, a drastic change from the not-too-distant past: She remembers wearing long-sleeved T-shirts for the 2014 playoffs that sold for about \$50 each.

So when Flyers goalie Dan Vladař made the final shootout stop against the Hurricanes to send his team to the playoffs, Alex Sanheim knew she needed to get to work. After celebrating at the arena with fellow wives and girlfriends, she huddled with a few of them to mock up ideas.

As the regular season wound down, Sanheim had kept her eye on a black leather jacket. But she didn't want to jinx the Flyers by ordering ahead of time. When the team clinched, she began purchasing the jackets almost immediately. They arrived within a week, after which Sanheim brought them to RushOrderTees, a Philadelphia business equipped for embroidery. The custom additions — Flyers branding on the front, right arm and back, as well as individual players' names on the back and initials on the left arm — were finished in time for Philadelphia's first home playoff game against the Penguins.

Crouse, meanwhile, felt comfortable enough about Utah's playoff chances to start planning in February. She and Victoria Stark, a senior designer for the Mammoth, embarked on the project together, using Salt Lake City businesses for production as a nod of appreciation for the local community's embrace of the team after it relocated from Arizona in 2024.

One night leading up to Utah's first-ever home playoff game, Crouse and the other Mammoth wives and girlfriends gathered for dinner in Park City, a mountain town southeast of Salt Lake City. They shared a private room at a Japanese grill inside a five-star hotel, where Crouse led a toast: to the playoffs, to the history the Mammoth were making and to "how much heavy lifting these women do behind the scenes."

Then, to the room's delight, Stark wheeled in a luggage cart with their black playoff jackets for everyone to wear for the first time.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

The belt loops on the Hurricanes' burgundy jackets are shaped like the team's logo of a tropical storm warning flag. (Courtesy Gina Gostisbehere)

Eleven years ago, when the NHL's now-most dominant player entered the league, its now-most dominant playoff jacket designer saw postseason attire as having a "piecemeal vibe." But as her husband, Connor, went on to make history for the Edmonton Oilers, so too did Lauren Kyle McDavid change the world of hockey fashion.

This year, Kyle McDavid's high-end sportswear company, Sports Club Atelier, designed jackets for seven of the NHL's 16 playoff teams, including all of the ones still alive. She also prepared a sample for the wives and girlfriends of Detroit Red Wings players, before they missed the playoffs with a late-season collapse.

The creative process involves Shay Santos, the company's head designer, talking through ideas with Kyle McDavid and creating mock-ups based on each customer's vision. Gostisbehere sent in a mood board of different styles, textures and embroidery options she liked. Sports Club Atelier included fun details in some 2025-26 postseason products: The Dallas Stars' jackets featured cowboy-inspired fringe on the backs, and the belt loops on the Hurricanes' burgundy jackets are shaped like the team's logo of a tropical storm warning flag.

The opportunity to work on playoff jackets for players' wives and girlfriends — commonly abbreviated as "WAGs" in the wider sports world, though the term has been criticized by some as demeaning — can be a huge break for designers without direct locker room connections. Jordi Lutsky was vacationing in Hawaii in early April 2025 when she received a message from Emma Tkachuk, whose husband, Brady, is captain of the Ottawa Senators. The Tkachuk family had commissioned her before, including to create custom apparel for Emma and Brady's son, Ryder. Now the Senators looked like they were going to make the playoffs, and Emma was wondering if Lutsky could make the jackets.

Ottawa needed a fast turnaround, but Lutsky didn't hesitate to accept the challenge. She cut her trip short, hopping on a flight home to Vancouver the next morning, and got to work. After creating a design, she produced 54 handmade items — jackets for the women, plus smaller ones and hoodies for children — in 18 days. The work cut into her sleep to the point that she started using steroid drops to aid her dry and bloodshot eyes.

"It sounds silly, but if you're designing custom jackets, this is the bigs," says Lutsky, who did the Senators jackets again this year, this time with machines to expedite the embroidery process — and allow for a bit more rest. "It doesn't get bigger than playoff jackets for the NHL if you're a jacket designer."

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

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1391668 Websites

The Athletic / How 'WAG' jackets won the NHL playoffs: Brackets, cowboy fringe and a dominant McDavid

By Peter Baugh

Eight minutes after the surging Philadelphia Flyers clinched a late-season playoff berth with a shootout win over the Carolina Hurricanes in mid-April, standout defenseman Travis Sanheim was on his phone, texting a top-of-mind message to his wife, Alex.

We're in! Let's go! Buy the jackets lol

Every game during the Stanley Cup playoffs, wives and girlfriends of NHL players on the home team suit up in their own version of uniforms. Emblazoned with logos, jersey numbers and other custom-designed flair, these jackets have become flashy, fashionable staples of postseason hockey. This year, versions were worn by partners on all 16 teams in the field, with some commissioning extra clothing items such as windbreakers and jeans. Materials ranged from suede to wool to leather, but all held the goal of showing shared support — and standing out.

The 2017 Washington Capitals were among the first teams, if not the first, with partners sporting jackets for the annual postseason tournament. That year, under the leadership of Lauren Oshie, whose husband, T.J., then played winger for the team, they wore matching denim affixed with patches of their respective partners' numbers and names. Nearly a decade later, the trend is booming in just about every way: from exposure to extravagance to price. In a sense, it has become the NHL's biggest fashion showcase.

"Every year it's just gotten bigger and bigger and bigger," says Gina Gostisbehere, who organized this year's Hurricanes jackets after it became clear her husband, Shayne, and his teammates were bound for the playoffs.

"In the last year alone they have become a phenomenon," says Claire Crouse, whose husband, Lawson, plays on the Mammoth.

There's no spoken competition among partners on different teams; Gostisbehere and Crouse remain friends from their husbands' time together on the Arizona Coyotes and hyped each other up through this year's production process. But no one wants to be left behind, either. "I definitely wanted to make sure ours was up to scale, not just a homemade, DIY jacket," Crouse says.

Danielle Spurgeon, whose husband, Jared, captains the Minnesota Wild, estimates that the league-average playoff jacket costs around \$500, a pricey commitment with its utility largely limited to one year. Spurgeon knows some teams' jackets have neared \$1,000, a drastic change from the not-too-distant past: She remembers wearing long-sleeved T-shirts for the 2014 playoffs that sold for about \$50 each.

So when Flyers goalie Dan Vladar made the final shootout stop against the Hurricanes to send his team to the playoffs, Alex Sanheim knew she needed to get to work. After celebrating at the arena with fellow wives and girlfriends, she huddled with a few of them to mock up ideas.

As the regular season wound down, Sanheim had kept her eye on a black leather jacket. But she didn't want to jinx the Flyers by ordering ahead of time. When the team clinched, she began purchasing the jackets almost immediately. They arrived within a week, after which Sanheim brought them to RushOrderTees, a Philadelphia business equipped for embroidery. The custom additions — Flyers branding on the front, right arm and back, as well as individual players' names on the back and initials on the left arm — were finished in time for Philadelphia's first home playoff game against the Penguins.

Crouse, meanwhile, felt comfortable enough about Utah's playoff chances to start planning in February. She and Victoria Stark, a senior designer for the Mammoth, embarked on the project together, using Salt Lake City businesses for production as a nod of appreciation for the local community's embrace of the team after it relocated from Arizona in 2024.

One night leading up to Utah's first-ever home playoff game, Crouse and the other Mammoth wives and girlfriends gathered for dinner in Park City, a mountain town southeast of Salt Lake City. They shared a private room at a Japanese grill inside a five-star hotel, where Crouse led a toast: to the playoffs, to the history the Mammoth were making and to "how much heavy lifting these women do behind the scenes."

Then, to the room's delight, Stark wheeled in a luggage cart with their black playoff jackets for everyone to wear for the first time.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

The belt loops on the Hurricanes' burgundy jackets are shaped like the team's logo of a tropical storm warning flag. (Courtesy Gina Gostisbehere)

Eleven years ago, when the NHL's now-most dominant player entered the league, its now-most dominant playoff jacket designer saw postseason attire as having a "piecemeal vibe." But as her husband, Connor, went on to make history for the Edmonton Oilers, so too did Lauren Kyle McDavid change the world of hockey fashion.

This year, Kyle McDavid's high-end sportswear company, Sports Club Atelier, designed jackets for seven of the NHL's 16 playoff teams, including all of the ones still alive. She also prepared a sample for the wives and girlfriends of Detroit Red Wings players, before they missed the playoffs with a late-season collapse.

The creative process involves Shay Santos, the company's head designer, talking through ideas with Kyle McDavid and creating mock-ups based on each customer's vision. Gostisbehere sent in a mood board of different styles, textures and embroidery options she liked. Sports Club Atelier included fun details in some 2025-26 postseason products: The Dallas Stars' jackets featured cowboy-inspired fringe on the backs, and the belt loops on the Hurricanes' burgundy jackets are shaped like the team's logo of a tropical storm warning flag.

The opportunity to work on playoff jackets for players' wives and girlfriends — commonly abbreviated as "WAGs" in the wider sports world, though the term has been criticized by some as demeaning — can be a huge break for designers without direct locker room connections. Jordi Lutsky was vacationing in Hawaii in early April 2025 when she received a message from Emma Tkachuk, whose husband, Brady, is captain of the Ottawa Senators. The Tkachuk family had commissioned her before, including to create custom apparel for Emma and Brady's son, Ryder. Now the Senators looked like they were going to make the playoffs, and Emma was wondering if Lutsky could make the jackets.

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1391669 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Sunday Overreactions: Wild need clarity from Hughes as soon as possible

Michael Amato

Landing Quinn Hughes was nothing short of a home run for Bill Guerin.

Hughes helped the Minnesota Wild down the Dallas Stars in round one, an obstacle they hadn't been able to overcome in more than a decade. The Wild defenceman instantly vaulted the team up the pecking order of the NHL. He made them more dynamic and harder to match up against. There was real belief the Wild could go on a Cup run.

That wasn't in the cards, though. The Central division is a gauntlet and even though Minnesota put up a fight, the Colorado Avalanche were inevitable. There's no shame in losing to the juggernaut Avs, but now the attention in Minnesota is going to shift from on the ice to off of it. That means Wild fans will be holding their breath on a Quinn Hughes contract extension.

Hughes gave Guerin no assurances he would stay long-term when he was acquired from the Vancouver Canucks, but there was more optimism Friday. The Wild blueliner acknowledged he would be open to extending in Minnesota, something he could do as early as July 1. The 26-year-old is a year away from free agency and could still opt to enter the season without an extension or ultimately test the market next summer.

That could mean some difficult decisions looming. I'm sure Guerin would rather still be watching his team play than starting to ponder what path to take with one of his star players, but perhaps the most important part of any general manager's job is making hard decisions. Considering everything the Wild gave up to get him, it would be catastrophic to lose Hughes for nothing.

There is still a chance this could all be very easy for Guerin. Hughes may have enjoyed his time in Minnesota so much that he's ready and willing to commit to the team long term come July. If Hughes extends with the Wild — and factoring in all the other young talent the team boasts — Minnesota would be a Cup contender for years to come.

That would be an ideal scenario for Guerin, but it's possible Hughes isn't ready to ink a new deal just yet. He noted this week he'd be comfortable starting the season without an extension. It's no secret the Hughes brothers want to play together and if that desire still holds true, it's hard to see that happening in Minnesota. Both Jack and Luke Hughes are signed to long-term deals in New Jersey and Quinn could theoretically join them in a year. Newly hired Devils general manager Sunny Mehta is probably already salivating at the opportunity to make that happen.

That said, Hughes could sign a shorter-term extension for three years that would align with Jack's contract, making them unrestricted free agents at the same time and allowing them to pick their next team together. If you listened to Hughes talk at the Wild's end-of-season media availability, it sure didn't sound like he was planning to walk out the door. But until pen is put to paper, nothing is done until it's done.

Without a commitment from Hughes, Guerin would probably have little choice but to at least explore the trade market. Moving Hughes, who has no trade protection, this summer would fetch a much greater return than if he tried to do so midseason as a true rental. Sure, Guerin could be so bold as to just keep Hughes all year and push all his chips in the middle and go all in on a Cup pursuit next season. That would be hard to justify for the future of the franchise, though. If you know Hughes is likely leaving, the responsible thing would be to look at packages you could bring back to bolster your team, as opposed to risk watching him walk out the door for nothing.

Overreaction? – No

It would be a last resort for Guerin, but a Hughes trade could end up being critical for the team going forward if he isn't willing to stay. We saw the Carolina Hurricanes make that difficult choice with Mikko Rantanen last season. Rantanen's time was very short in Carolina, playing just 13 games with the team after a midseason trade from Colorado. Once the Canes realized he wouldn't be re-signing, they flipped him for Logan Stankoven and a pair of first-round picks. They valued the trade return more than rolling the dice on one playoff run with Rantanen and I'd say that worked out pretty well.

We've also seen a disastrous recent example of losing an elite player for essentially nothing. The Toronto Maple Leafs watched Mitch Marner exit last summer and plummeted all the way to the bottom five this year. I don't think it would hurt the Wild as much if Hughes left, but much like Marner, those players are nearly impossible to replace.



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 18, 2026

Minnesota also has some other holes on its roster that need addressing this summer. A lack of centre depth really stood out against the Avalanche, so they'll likely need to add in that department. Maybe they can look at moving Filip Gustavsson to bring in a centre, now that Jesper Wallstedt has emerged as a quality number one, but goalie trades don't always bring back the best returns. If Hughes is non-committal, he would easily net the most in a swap that could help the Wild now and in the future.

At the end of the day, the best situation for all parties would be to continue the relationship. The Wild will have a much better chance at competing with the Stars and Avalanche if Hughes is still around and he was a perfect fit for this team. Minnesota has a handful of high-quality forwards who know how to finish that Hughes can get the puck to, and they will only build on that chemistry going forward.

Guerin wasn't afraid to give Kirill Kaprizov a massive payday and he may have to do the same to make sure Hughes sticks around. Whatever it takes.

It's been a rocky postseason for Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen. He's had a handful of inconsistent outings and that brutal goal he allowed from centre against the Boston Bruins was tough to watch. That's why, after a rough outing against the Montreal Canadiens in Game 5 on Thursday night, it wasn't a surprise to see Alex Lyon start in a must-win affair on Saturday. Lyon quickly gave up three goals on four shots, though, and Luukkonen was pressed into action early on. He stopped all 17 shots he faced in relief and it was clear he gave the Sabres a lot of confidence as soon as he entered the crease. There should be no doubt that it's Luukkonen's net in Game 7.

Overreaction? – No

Lyon has done an admirable job coming to the Sabres' rescue during these playoffs, but the moment looked too big for him Saturday night. He was overwhelmed early and Buffalo ended up in a hole that it nearly couldn't dig itself out of. The stage is only going to be bigger in Game 7 and Luukkonen is Buffalo's number one goalie, so they should give him the crease and hope he can build off Saturday's strong performance. Jakub Dobeš has been excellent after a loss in this postseason and the Sabres will likely need a great effort from Luukkonen to counteract that if they hope to move on to the Eastern Conference Final. Buffalo has tried to ride the hot hand in net all postseason and right now that's Luukkonen.

Kris Knoblauch deserves most of the blame for Oilers' shortcomings this season

Once the news got out that the Edmonton Oilers requested permission to speak to Bruce Cassidy, the writing was on the wall for Kris Knoblauch. The Oilers made the inevitable official on Thursday when Knoblauch was let go, as the head coach took the fall for Edmonton bowing out of the first round. It was a major step back for the Oilers, who went to back-to-back Cup finals and had huge expectations coming into 2025-26. Knoblauch failed to get the Oilers playing with any consistency this season and they squandered a very friendly path in the postseason through the mediocre Pacific division. It was clear Knoblauch should've been able to get more out of this roster and Edmonton's disappointing season rests mostly on his shoulders.

Overreaction? – Yes

Oilers management needs to accept the bulk of the blame here. Stan Bowman failed to fix the goaltending despite trading for Tristan Jarry and the Oilers ended up having to turn to Connor Ingram when Jarry couldn't handle the job. Their numbers between the pipes in the playoffs were worse than their previous two postseasons.

Edmonton also showed its lack of depth this spring, too. Not keeping Dylan Holloway and Philip Broberg was a massive mistake and the Oilers failed to replace other key contributors as well. Losing Connor Brown, Corey Perry and Viktor Arvidsson really stung, as players like Trent

Frederic failed to make an impact. The Oilers signed Frederic to a long-term deal and he managed just four goals in 74 games this season.

If the Oilers don't find a way to surround Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Evan Bouchard with more talent and fix the goaltending, don't expect the new head coach to get better results than Knoblauch.

Maple Leafs should focus on a young up-and-coming coach for their next hire

John Chayka wasted little time making his first big move as the general manager of the Toronto Maple Leafs when he fired Craig Berube on Wednesday. The Leafs will now begin the search for a new head coach and there is no shortage of good candidates available. One of the biggest names out there is Bruce Cassidy, who has taken two different teams to the finals and owns a Stanley Cup ring from only a few years ago. That said, if the Leafs are retooling or possibly eventually rebuilding, would it make more sense to lock in on some younger options that may be a first-time coach? We've seen the likes of Spencer Carbery and Dan Muse jump in recently and have decent success with the Washington Capitals and Pittsburgh Penguins, respectively. Given Berube was an older veteran coach, the Leafs could look to move away from that to re-energize the organization.

Overreaction? – Yes

While I do think it could be a great idea to bring in a younger coach with fresh ideas, it shouldn't be the be-all and end-all of the search. The likes of Manny Malhotra and David Carle, for example, would be great options and coaches the Leafs should certainly be looking into; they also shouldn't dismiss a more veteran option if they're the best fit. Cassidy's teams have always played with great defensive structure, something the Leafs desperately need, but he's also a thoughtful and insightful guy who's open to new ideas. Someone like Jay Woodcroft, who coached parts of three seasons with the Edmonton Oilers and is a current Anaheim Ducks assistant, is also a more experienced name who deserves consideration.

The reality is that a first-time coach very well may be the best option for the Leafs, but focusing on a specific type of bench boss right now would be premature. Cast a wide net and talk to a bunch of options and pick the one that's the best fit, no matter their age or past experience.

Cross another UFA off the list. The Columbus Blue Jackets inked Charlie Coyle to a six-year, \$36M extension earlier this week, giving the veteran a big payday for a strong season. Coyle finished with 58 points in 2025-26, the second-best statistical season of his career at age 34. There was a good chance Coyle would've been the top free agent centre available if he hit the market on July 1st, but instead, he'll likely finish his career as a Blue Jacket. On the surface, it's not a bad number for Coyle, especially with the cap going up, but this deal will take him to the age of 40. It's very possible this contract is going to age poorly and won't be ideal for the Blue Jackets on the back end of the deal.

Overreaction? – No

From an offensive perspective, it's going to be hard for Coyle to keep up this pace throughout the course of this pact. This past campaign was only the second time Coyle reached the 20-goal mark and only the third time he hit 50 points. To expect that Coyle is going to continue to be as productive as he was this year well into his thirties is a big ask. What the Blue Jackets have to hope for is that Coyle continues to be a strong defensive presence, but even that will be challenging if his skating drops off over the next few seasons.

The cap is likely going to continue to rise, which could make Coyle's deal more palatable, though it's still going to be a tough one to offload in a few years if things aren't working out. Columbus will be crossing its fingers they get the most out of Coyle over the next few seasons and has a handful of playoff runs while he's still in top form.

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Sportsnet.ca / What should be on the Maple Leafs' off-season shopping list?

Justin Bourne

As the Toronto Maple Leafs work on the hiring of their next head coach, an important question needs to be answered: what is it, exactly, that they want to do next season? Is it suddenly right back to "all in," where they could hire some shorter-burn coach who pushes them for every point they can get? Is that Bruce Cassidy, is that Peter Laviolette?

Probably not, right? They're obviously excellent coaches, but barring an unforeseen and nearly impossible summer, they're just not going to have the roster for "Cup contender."

Should they go get someone in the vein of Martin St. Louis, someone unproven as a head coach in the league who can grow with the group into contender status?

That doesn't quite feel right either, does it? You've still got Auston Matthews (as far as we know) who'll be 30 when the puck drops on next season, and William Nylander who's right there too. The un-young John Tavares is under contract for some years to come, and the entire D-corps can be filed under V for Veteran.

All that means you're trying to be competitive next season and hoping for a bigger build into the following season. Ideally, you're better than expected at the trade deadline, and you can add more then, and who knows from there.

But also ideally, the clouds will become cotton candy. But maybe, just in case, you should prepare as if that's not the most likely outcome. You're going to have to think a bit more long-term at the same time.

So, we're talking about a tweener here. Someone who's able to help them next year, but grow with them and stick around for a while. The Leafs aren't looking for a fling, they're looking for a marriage.

To be able to accomplish the whole "sticking around for a while" thing, you're looking at getting a couple things right.

One is playing style. You have to have a coach who's able to better produce puck possession. If you're going to bring in Gavin McKenna or Ivar Stenberg, both of whom are talented wingers, you can't be having them purely dumping in the puck and trying to win it back — that won't produce wins or development.

But I'm also not sure you need a guy who's too progressive in that regard, because I've been watching the playoffs. Rod the Bod in Carolina, his teams knows when to play direct. I doubt John Tortorella is against straight-line hockey in the third period of a close game. The good teams in these big games pick their spots well, so again, you've got to middle it.

And so, I like the idea of someone who's coached in the league, but hasn't had 25 years doing it over five teams. I like the name Jay Woodcroft as I've mentioned, I like that Jeff Halpern has been with Jon Cooper for years in Tampa Bay, I like that Manny Malhotra has been on NHL benches for years and won a Calder Cup.

It's not time for "old and proven" (they are not ready for their own version of John Tortorella), or someone too new (I don't think someone who's never been on an NHL bench is equipped for the complicated years ahead).

So get the playing style right, the experience level right, and ideally, someone who can get accountability right. Ol' Willy deserves some extra rope, sure, but there must be a limit.

The off-season ahead

It feels like John Chayka and Mats Sundin are either under the direction, opinion, or both, that Matthews and Nylander are to be a part of the solution here. And so with that in mind, I think it's likely they'll be consulted on the next coaching hire, at least to pick their brains.

Now that the Leafs have the first-overall pick, if they get a coach Matthews likes, I'll assume he's going to be back for next season. With that assumption in mind, let's look at some needs.

Centres

There are already rumours about the Leafs poking around on players out there, and one of the names is Vincent Trocheck. To me, that checks a ton of boxes, depending on how concerned you are about his age (32). Over the past four seasons, he's averaged over 78 games per season, over 22 goals and over 63 points.

He plays a competitive game and makes just over \$5.6 million until 2029. Now, because of that upside he wouldn't come cheap, but given his cost certainty, could that be worth a real package? (I don't think it's worth getting derailed on return here, but the Leafs do have full complement of picks the next two seasons.)

If it isn't Trocheck, it has to come from somewhere else. The Leafs traded Scott Laughton and Nick Roy, two very capable (and badly misused) depth centers.

In retrospect (and quite honestly in real time), Craig Berube having Laughton, Roy, Pontus Holmberg, and David Kampf at his centre disposal, and finding none of them usable, is truly baffling. These were honest, straight-line defensive depth centres, yet they kept running Matthews out there in the D-zone against elite competition.

Wingers

I'm assuming the Leafs are going to pick McKenna or Stenberg, so they'll have a new one in the fold immediately, for which I'm sure they're thanking the heavens. It was desperate times there on the top line with Matthews, and an injection of elite talent was badly needed. I recognize a guy like McKenna may not be a huge point-getter in Year 1, but he's got that next-level savant vision.

The next piece here is that they just can't trade Matthew Knies. The suggestions that Brad Treliving was going to trade this guy never made sense to me. Maybe they wanted him to play tougher or something, but there's just so few humans like Knies in the league. He's strong as a bull, skates like the wind, and shoots it at an elite level, all while having great passing touch. He's only going to get more confident and projecting him for 30 goals and 70-plus points is completely reasonable (if he's healthy, he should be a point-per-game player). He's still just 23. They're trying to win next year.

Trading him now is the Blackhawks trading Brandon Hagel because their timelines didn't line up, yet that Hagel guy is still just 27 and an absolute elite-level dawg. Meanwhile, Chicago's rumoured to be willing to trade their fourth-overall pick for a guy who can help today. Funny how that played out. Who knows what they'd have to attach to that pick to turn it into Hagel, who makes just \$6.5 million with many years of cost certainty ahead.

But I digress. So the Leafs draft a top winger, they keep Knies, Nylander exists, Easton Cowan is going to be better. Wing is just not a huge off-season priority compared to what's below. When they add, I'd like to see them add speed there, and ideally speed with size (for archetype I'm thinking Miles Wood, Ilya Mikheyev, Warren Foegele, that kind of depth).

Defence



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At this point it's become consensus that Morgan Rielly needs a fresh start somewhere else, and there are rumours that he even agrees. With this, they've still got some really solid defenders.

The return of Chris Tanev is a free addition who should make a noticeable difference. Jake McCabe was very good last year, Oliver Ekman-Larsson still has game, and I believe Brandon Carlo — with a full off-season to heal and a new coach — has the most “latent upside,” to steal a phrase from John Chayka.

But priority 1A and 1B are two new defencemen, and ideally, we're talking about one top-pair guy, and another guy who can skate and make plays. Darren Raddysh is the most-commonly heard name out there for the Leafs, and I'm not opposed to that. I don't think that name should limit them from aiming higher, though that's impossible to do through unrestricted free agency.

I'd like to see them acquire one via trade, since free agency doesn't hold much. There are guys who have warts, guys who want out of their present situation, guys who are overpaid (which isn't terrible in this new cap world), there's just guys who will become available. But if you surround the four defenders I mentioned above with a couple guys who can skate and move it, the team will instantly look better.

Think less Phillippe Myers, less Simon Benoit, and more breakout passes. This isn't a huge ask, or unmanageable.

Goalie

The only thing that changes here is if you have to trade a guy, and Dennis Hildeby or Artur Akhtyamov end up becoming the back-up. Otherwise Anthony Stolarz and Joseph Woll have shown they can be among the league's better tandems. Even good teams aren't perfect everywhere, and their inability to stay healthy is one of the dice you probably have to roll.

In all, Chayka has his work cut out for him. My co-host Nick Kypreos says he hears the new Leafs GM is eager to start making those changes (and interested in making many changes in general) with the draft combine and draft approaching in the next month.

The one thing I like in particular is that this regime already seems more proactive than the previous one. And one thing I learned from training in the summer as a player, is that you can't figure it all out in August after the cottage. The hard work starts early, and big gains only come when you start right away.

Well, the Leafs have already started making changes. Let's see what the gains look like in September.

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