



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The News & Observer

Carolina Hurricanes' overtime magic continues in clutch Game 3 win over Canadiens

By: Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said he expected a tight game between two good teams Monday in the Eastern Conference Final.

How about another overtime game? How tight is that? Staal was right.

The Hurricanes evened the series Saturday on an overtime goal by Nikolaj Ehlers at Lenovo Center. The move to the Bell Centre produced another Monday, when Andrei Svechnikov's shot with 5:54 left in the extra period snuck past Canadiens goalie Jakub Dobes, giving Carolina another 3-2 win.

Canadiens captain Nick Suzuki had an open shot from the slot in the opening minute of the overtime but missed the net. Defenseman Mike Matheson, who scored Montreal's first goal of the game, then found the crossbar with a shot.

Dobes denied defenseman Jalen Chatfield on an open shot with 10:32 left in OT.

So ended a game in which the two teams battled on even terms. The Canes outshot and outchanced the Canadiens, who had one shot in the third period, and one more in OT.

But the Habs got another sparkling game in net from the rookie Dobes, and helped him by blocking shots and getting sticks on pucks. Canes goalie Frederik Andersen didn't get as much work, but made some timely saves.

Dobes allowed goals to Shayne Gostisbehere and Taylor Hall, but that was it in regulation., adding another page to the story that the big rookie from Czechia continues to write this season and in the playoffs.

Game 4 will be played Wednesday at the Bell Centre, and it could again be a tight-checking, hard-working game as the Canes look to take a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven series.

The Habs believed they had taken a 3-2 lead with 12 minutes left in regulation when defenseman Noah Dobson had a shot glance off the stick of Ehlers, who tried to make a sliding stop only to have the puck skid past Andersen.

The huge cheers at the Bell Centre quickly died when the goal was challenged and reviewed: The ruling: Cole Caufield was offside entering the zone. No goal.

Dobes made a tough stop on Aho with 5:47 left in regulation after Aho found some open ice. In the second period, he denied Andrei Svechnikov's hard wrister and a rush chance by Gostisbehere.

Hurricanes were ready for 'electric' atmosphere

Carolina Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho constantly used the word "electric" Monday during interviews at the Bell Centre

In looking to Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Final against the Montreal Canadiens, Aho said he expected an electric building, with an electric atmosphere. With the series tied 1-1, he also realizes it could make for an electric game.

"You've got to embrace it, you've got to enjoy it," Aho said after the Canes' morning skate, "It's going to be an electric crowd, and it's always fun to play in this building.

"I love it. It's a cool building with a lot of history. It can bring emotion for both teams and I love it. I think both teams are going to go at it hard."

The Canes have gone 4-0 in road games in the Stanley Cup playoffs, notching a pair of wins in sweeping the Ottawa Senators, then the Philadelphia Flyers.

Poise is always a key on the road, whether in the regular season or the playoffs. There will be pressure points in every game, times when the other team is pushing and their crowd is loud and everything seems intensified.

What's needed in those moments?

"A little bit of everything," Aho said. "Obviously, there's a time for poise, a time to be disciplined. You want to bring the emotion, want to bring the hard battle and the hard work, as well."

The Habs went into Monday's game with a 2-4 record at home in the playoffs, but Canes captain Jordan Staal said, "That can flip in a moment" during any playoff round.

"It should be a tight game against a good team," Staal said of Game 3.

Habs' Lane Hutson was ready to go

Canadiens defenseman Lane Hutson said Monday morning he was good to go in Game 3.

Hutson took a hard hit from Canes forward Taylor Hall along the boards during the overtime in Game 2, was shaken up and left the game in discomfort. It also left him irked.

"Hockey happens, that's all, I guess," Hutson said Monday morning. "Definitely doesn't feel great, but it is what it is."

Those on the Montreal side believed it was the kind of knee-to-knee hit that could have more seriously injured the dynamic 22-year-old D-man, who has two goals and 12 assists in the playoffs.

"I felt like he could have done a little more in leading more with his shoulder, but whatever," Hutson said. "The game happens so fast. To say he intended to do anything crazy or anything ... I put myself in a bad spot, and he took advantage."

Hall has delivered some huge hits for the Canes in the playoffs. He knocked Ottawa defenseman Jake Sanderson out in the first-round series with a concussion, then collided



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with Flyers defenseman Travis Sanheim, who was flattened and later called it a "pretty dirty play."

Lineup change for Canadiens

The Canadiens made a lineup change for Game 3, inserting center Joe Veleno for Oliver Kapanen. Veleno last played in Game 6 of the second-round series against the Buffalo Sabres.

"We feel like Carolina brings a lot of heaviness and speed and I feel like Joey can give us that," Montreal coach Martin St. Louis said.

Canes surprise Brind'Amour

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour was asked Monday if anything about his team had surprised him this season, taking a few seconds to mull it over before answering.

"Not really, now that I've known this group for so long," he said of a team that won the Metro Division and was the top playoff seed in the Eastern Conference. "But what did surprise me was the other night."

The Canes were sloppy and made a host of mistakes in the 6-2 loss to the Canadiens in Game 1 of the ECF in Raleigh.

"That was a strange kind of game for me. I don't have many of those to fall back onto," Brind'Amour said.

"There's nothing that surprises me about this group. We know what we're going to get, and that's what you want when you're coaching., knowing what you're going to get."



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The Athletic

Do the Hurricanes care that their first line finally broke through? They should

By: Sean Gentille

MONTREAL — Rod Brind'Amour said it first.

With the Carolina Hurricanes freshly, officially closer to the Stanley Cup final than they'd been in two generations of NHL players — and not for a lack of chances — there was still some degree of confusion over who got them there.

Brind'Amour didn't care which of his guys scored in overtime to beat the Montreal Canadiens, 3-2. Didn't care who gave Carolina a 2-1 series lead over the Canadiens, marking the first time since 2006 that the Hurricanes won more than one game in the Eastern Conference finals. Didn't care whether it was Andrei Svechnikov, who took the initial shot, or Sebastian Aho, who provided the netfront traffic and, initially, was credited with the goal.

Aho didn't care, either, saying he'd leave it up to technology to decide whether he tipped the puck past Canadiens goaltender Jakub Dobeš.

"I'll take the win," Aho said, "and move forward."

Svechnikov? He cared. He actively hoped it wasn't him, even though by that point, the goal officially was on his record.

Top Plays from Hurricanes @ Canadiens

In some sense, all three were correct. In some sense, it didn't matter which of the Hurricanes' first-liners found their way on to the scoresheet at such a crucial moment. In some sense, it wouldn't have mattered if it were one of their teammates, either. William Carrier would've deserved it; he's the steam engine powering what's become an impact fourth line. Taylor Hall would've made sense; no Hurricane has been more consistently dangerous with the puck on his stick.

It matters that it was Svechnikov, though. It matters that Aho and Seth Jarvis, who wound up with the primary assist, played pivotal roles in the sequence. It matters that it was them. One of the league's most consistently productive forward groups in the regular season, Aho, Svechnikov and Jarvis had been on the ice together for just one five-on-five goal by the Hurricanes in their first 10 playoff games. They'd added a bit away from each other, but not much.

There have been valid reasons for that, of course. In the first round, Aho, Svechnikov and Jarvis were tasked with shutting down the Ottawa Senators' talented first line, and they handled business, largely playing their minutes to a draw. In the second round against the Philadelphia Flyers, Carolina's second line — Hall, Logan Stankoven and Jackson Blake — continued to feast. That was enough to beat an overmatched, banged-up opponent.

Top League Content

"They've been playing really well. There's no doubt about it," Hall said. "I think in hockey sometimes you need to see a puck go in, you need to get on the board, you need to get a greasy second (assist) sometimes to just feel like you're going. I don't think they need to change a thing. Hopefully that goal helps them feel a little bit more free out there, but we know how valuable they are."

At some point, though, from a productivity standpoint, Carolina's most talented forwards were going to have to enter the chat. Even after factoring in Monday's result, they're scoring nearly two fewer goals per 60 than they did in the regular season. They're generating chances at a similar enough rate, but the pucks aren't crossing the line as frequently. Part of that is bad luck — Carolina's on-ice shooting percentage in their minutes is comically low, under 4 percent — but at this time of the year, waiting for percentages to normalize doesn't get you much. The Hurricanes know this more intimately than most. Just last year, they watched a Florida Panthers team play its own game to a more effective end, losing in five games to the eventual Cup champions because of less goals, less luck and less top-end talent.

Brind'Amour has said as much, and he reiterated that on Monday night. Carolina beat Ottawa and Philadelphia without goals from the big guys. Went 8-0, in fact. At some point, though, sound process from the first line likely wasn't going to be enough. For all the things Carolina has done right this postseason, a lack of scoring from Aho, Jarvis and Svechnikov was creeping closer to real-problem status.

"I think he has played well. I think he's been a factor. (He was) just not scoring," Brind'Amour said. "You're not going to advance if you don't get production on your top guys."

Three Takeaways: Hurricanes take 2-1 series lead win OT win in Montreal

Brind'Amour was talking about Svechnikov. He could've said the same about Aho and Jarvis. It wasn't just the result that was crucial, either. This wasn't a fluke, or a deviation from the process they'd managed throughout the game.

Svechnikov alone had narrowly missed on Dobeš on a 3-on-1 break in the second period, then was tripped by Canadiens defenseman Kaiden Guhle, preventing what would've been a prime chance and setting up another unsuccessful Carolina power play — another problem for another day. He finished the game with 0.61 expected goals according to MoneyPuck, second on the Hurricanes to Hall's 1.04 and more than double the No. 1 Canadien, Zachary Bolduc.

Svechnikov was also the most noticeable player on the ice in overtime, laying a hit on Canadiens star defenseman Lane Hutson shortly before intercepting a puck flung by Hutson (not coincidentally, one would think) to the middle of the ice



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to kickstart the game-deciding sequence. A few moments later, with the puck back on his stick at the top of the circles, he fired a shot at Dobeš and that was that.

It was something his teammates constantly advise him to do, defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere said. Shoot the puck. See what happens. "He's the strongest guy on the ice," Gostisbehere said. "When he's playing the power-forward role, that's when he's his best. We always say just, 'Go be an animal out there.'"

On Tuesday, nobody needed to tell Svechnikov anything.

"It's the most important time of my life right now, and of our life as a team," he said. "You know you've got to get on the scoresheet somehow ... Today we created lots of chances. We could've scored more than one goal, but it's just the way it goes. More goals coming for us."

Doesn't matter from who. As long as it's one of them.



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Svechnikov's OT winner gives Hurricanes 3-2 win in Game 3

By: Cory Lavalette

MONTREAL — The 6-7 craze swept the U.S. earlier this year. The Carolina Hurricanes prefer 3-2.

Andrei Svechnikov's goal at 14:06 of overtime gave the Hurricanes a 3-2 win Monday at Bell Centre to put Carolina ahead two games to one in the Eastern Conference final best-of-seven series. The win improved the Hurricanes to 5-0 in overtime games this postseason, all by a 3-2 score.

"I just really think it's the mentality of the team," Svechnikov said. "We love tight games every time. We love that, and we love staying above them and (not giving) them lots of chances. And I think that's why we won this in overtime."

Svechnikov's winner came following a turnover by Montreal star defenseman Lane Hutson. Hutson threw the puck into the middle of the ice just outside the Canadiens blue line, and Svechnikov stole and entered the Montreal zone.

He split Hutson and Noah Dobson and carried the puck below the red line to the left of Jakub Dobes (35 saves). Svechnikov then curled around the right circle and passed to Seth Jarvis in the opposite circle. Jarvis passed back to Svechnikov at the right point, and he snapped a shot through a Sebastian Aho screen to send the Canadiens to consecutive losses for the first time this postseason.

"I can't tell, I don't think so," Aho said when asked if he got a piece of Svechnikov's shot, which currently stands — after being switched twice — as his second goal of the postseason. "... Honestly, I don't even care. We'll take the win and move forward."

The goal came as the Hurricanes were overwhelming the Canadiens, limiting them to one shot on goal in both the third period and overtime and forcing them into more than a dozen icings.

"That's what we're trying to do, just finish the checks and hopefully they're going to turn the puck over or ice the puck and (we'll) get the offensive faceoff," Svechnikov said.

Hutson, who scored the last goal of regulation at 4:43 of the second period on the power play to tie the game 2-2, took blame for the turnover on the winning goal.

"It would be nice to be up 2-1 (in the series), but we're not because of me," he said.

Despite registering only one shot on goal in overtime, Montreal had two chances early to end it.

Canadiens captain Ryan Suzuki had a breakaway 35 seconds into overtime, but his shot went wide left. Twenty-five seconds later, defenseman Mike Matheson pulled off a

spin-o-rama to create space and beat Frederik Andersen (11 saves) only to see his shot hit the top of the crossbar.

Montreal also appeared to go ahead at nearly 8 minutes into the third period when Dobson's centering attempt hit the stick of a sliding Nikolaj Ehlers and deflected into the Carolina net.

But Brind'Amour challenged for offside, and review showed that Caufield had not maintained possession and control as he crossed the blue line ahead of the puck.

"We obviously went through it with Jordo," Brind'Amour said, referencing the overtime goal that was taken off the board in Game 2 of the first round against Ottawa when Jordan Staal was ruled to have similarly been offside, "which actually helped us be real confident that that was going to be offside."

But Montreal would muster only two shots on goal in the remaining 26:07 of the game and now have a combined 25 shots in the last 137:35 against the Hurricanes.

"We still gave up a couple," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We gave up a breakaway and a couple off the post, so there was definitely chances for that to look different."

To the Canadiens' credit, they kept the game close for the second straight game despite generating limited opportunities.

With Jordan Martinook in the penalty box for an offensive zone slash, Cole Caufield and Hutson carried the puck up the ice. They continued into the Carolina zone, where Caufield dished the puck past Jalen Chatfield to Hutson for an easy tap-in at 4:43 to even the score 2-2.

It was Montreal's first power play goal of the series — and just the second allowed by Carolina in the postseason. But the officials swallowed the whistles much of the rest of the way, calling only one more penalty despite several plays that earned a chorus of boos from the Bell Centre crowd and a too many men situation on Montreal that was let go, frustrating the Hurricanes.

Carolina had to be pleased with another good start.

The Hurricanes' fourth line, which had factored in on three of the team's five goals through the first two games of the series, gave Carolina the first lead for the third straight game.

William Carrier, playing in his hometown, won a puck battle in the corner and centered to Mark Jankowski. Jankowski's bid was blocked, but the puck kicked to Shayne Gostisbehere in the left circle, and he rattled it home for his first goal of the playoffs at 8:24 of the first period.

Gostisbehere said he was "happy" to get his first goal of the playoffs even if his initial reaction to the goal was muted.



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"I had no idea," Gostisbehere said of not knowing he had scored. "I couldn't see anything."

Just as in Game 2, Montreal had a response.

Canadiens third-liners Alex Newhook and Jake Evans outbattled a pair of Hurricanes below the goal line and pushed the puck to Ivan Demidov behind the Carolina net.

Demidov found Matheson at the point, and the Montreal defenseman snapped a shot from the edge of the right circle that beat Andersen's glove into the top corner to tie the game at 15:28 of the opening frame.

The Hurricanes had pushback of their own.

Carolina right wing Jackson Blake threw the puck from the left point into the opposite corner where K'Andre Miller had gotten a step on Montreal winger Josh Anderson. The Hurricanes defenseman collected the puck and centered it,

and Taylor Hall scored on his second whack in the goal mouth for his fourth goal of the playoffs to reestablish Carolina's lead at 2-1 54 seconds after the Canadiens had tied it.

Hutson's goal gave Montreal hope it could reclaim a lead in the series, but his turnover and the opportunism of Carolina's top line had other plans.

"Another win tonight," Aho said. "The wins and losses, that's what matters, right? And we're happy to win tonight, and hopefully you can do it again in a couple days."

Notes: Hall finished with a game-high seven shots, matching a career playoff high. ... Miller led all players with 30:07 of ice time. ... Carrier led all players with seven hits. ... Forwards Jesperi Kotkaniemi and Nicolas Deslauriers, defenseman Mike Reilly and goalie Pyotr Kochetkov were healthy scratches for Carolina.



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Hurricanes top Canadiens on Svechnikov's overtime goal, lead series 2-1

By: Brian Murphy, WRAL News

Carolina won its fifth straight overtime game in this postseason with a 3-2 win over Montreal on Monday night.

The Carolina Hurricanes extended their overtime dominance and now they are two wins away from the Stanley Cup Final.

Andrei Svechnikov scored the game winner in overtime as Carolina defeated Montreal 3-2 in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Final on Monday night in Montreal.

Other WRAL Top Stories

Carolina, which is now 10-1 in the postseason, leads the best-of-seven series 2-1. Game 4 is Wednesday in Montreal.

Sebastian Aho was in front of Montreal goaltender Jakub Dobes when Svechnikov's blast from the point found its way into the net. Aho was originally credited with the goal, but he said after the game he wasn't sure if it hit off him or not.

Carolina improved to 5-0 in overtime in the postseason. It has won all five games 3-2. It was the second straight overtime win in this series.

"It should be hard this time of year," Aho said on TNT after the game. "There's two really good teams going at it. Just stick with the process and play our game. Trust it'll give us the result we want at the end and that's been the case the last two games."

The game played out like Game 2 with the Hurricanes taking 1-0 and 2-1 leads. The Hurricanes never trailed. Carolina outshot Montreal 12-2 in the third period and overtime, seeming to wear down the home team.

"We had a plan," Carolina's Taylor Hall said. "We stuck with it the whole game. We played a lot in their end. We forced them to defend, ice the puck, and roll our lines over. In the end, it worked out."

For the third straight game, the Hurricanes earned an early lead. Defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere scored with 11:36 left in the first period to open the scoring. Carolina dominated play in the first half of the period before Gostisbehere found the back of the net from the right slot when a shot by Mark Jankowski hit off a skate and popped right to a wide open Gostisbehere.

It was his first goal of the postseason. Jankowski and Eric Robinson had assists.

For the third straight game, the Canadiens answered in the first period. Mike Matheson scored off a slap shot from the top of the left circle that beat Carolina goaltender Frederik Andersen high to the glove side off a pass from Ivan Demidov.

"We had the one mistake, and they made us pay," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said between periods on TNT.

But the Canes took the lead right back less than a minute later. K'Andre Miller found Hall in front of the Montreal net on a backhand pass and Hall banged home his own rebound for a 2-1 edge. Hall, a former No. 1 overall pick and league MVP, has four goals in the postseason. Miller picked up his seventh assist of the playoffs, and Jackson Blake had the other assist, his eight of the postseason on the goal.

Montreal converted on a power play in the second period to tie the game at 2. Carolina had killed off 19 consecutive power plays, but couldn't stop a nifty give-and-go between Cole Caufield and Lane Hutson, who scored the equalizer. Carolina's Jordan Martinook was called for a slash in the offensive zone, one that he and Brind'Amour disagreed with.

A go-ahead goal by Montreal, which deflected off the stick of a sliding Nikolaj Ehlers, was wiped out when the Hurricanes successfully challenged the play for offsides with 12:01 left in the third period.

Andersen, starting his 11th consecutive game, had to make just 11 saves, but several were big stops, including attempts by Juraj Slafkovsky and Caufield back to back late in the second period.

"We're very confident in the group we've got here," Svechnikov told Sportsnet after the game. "Everyone knows what kind of role they've got, and Freddie is playing amazing. We just got to continue doing that and stick with our plans for the games."

It was Brind'Amour's 100th postseason game with the Hurricanes since becoming head coach in 2018-19. Aho and captain Jordan Staal have played in all 100. Carolina is 57-43 in those games.

The Hurricanes earned a 3-2 overtime victory in Game 2 to even the series after a terrible Game 1 performance in Montreal's 6-2 win.



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Recap: Svechnikov Strikes In OT, Canes Win Game 3

By: Walt Ruff & Peter Dewar

Carolina takes 2-1 series lead with second straight overtime victory

MONTREAL - Andrei Svechnikov's second goal of the postseason came 14:06 into overtime to push the Carolina Hurricanes past the Montreal Canadiens 3-2 in Game 3 of the 2026 Eastern Conference Final.

[GAME SUMMARY](#) | [BOX SCORE](#) | [BUY PLAYOFF TICKETS](#) | [PLAYOFF HUB](#)

For the third time in as many games this series, Carolina continued its trend of opening the scoring in the early stages of the contest. After a Mark Jankowski shot was blocked down low, the loose puck hopped right to an unmarked Shayne Gostisbehere for the inaugural marker at 8:24.

A Montreal response with 4:32 remaining in the stanza looked poised to send the two sides back to their respective locker rooms square; however, Carolina answered just 54 seconds later to climb back into the driver's seat. Once more, it was an activating defenseman jumping up in the play serving as a key ingredient, as K'Andre Miller found Taylor Hall at the far post to make it a 2-1 game.

The second lead of the night would last just 4:43 beyond the intermission, though, as an early second-period power play allowed a connection between Cole Caufield and Lane Hutson to reset the score. Play remained tightly contested throughout the middle stanza and into the final frame, but neither side could (legally) find a way to take the lead in regulation time, as a would-be go-ahead goal for Montreal was cancelled out for offside upon review.

Holding their foe to just two shots across the third period and overtime, the Hurricanes built on a few near-misses until Svechnikov finally found twine. After intercepting Hutson's breakout pass at the blue line, Svechnikov went to work down low to maintain possession. A cross-ice feed to Seth Jarvis in the left circle didn't stick to his tape, but Jarvis quickly returned the favor to his linemate up high for a quick-release wrister that whistled through bodies, off Jakub Dobeš, and into the top corner of the net.

Frederik Andersen once again faced a somewhat lighter workload, but his 11 saves on 13 shots featured several high-danger stops amid a tight contest.

Stats & Standouts

Andrei Svechnikov scored his first career playoff overtime goal, becoming the eighth active Hurricane with a postseason OT game-winner for the club on his resume.

Taylor Hall scored his fourth goal of the postseason as well as his team-leading 13th point. His 1.30 points-per-game average trails only Mitch Marner (1.40) among remaining NHLers.

Frederik Andersen backstopped his 10th victory of the playoffs, reaching that benchmark in a single postseason for the second time in his career. His career high is 11 victories, set in 2014-15 with ANA.

Shayne Gostisbehere tallied his first goal of the playoffs and the second by a Hurricanes defenseman.

The Hurricanes became the fourth team in NHL history to win each of their first five or more overtime games in a single postseason. They joined the 2023 Panthers (7 GP), 2003 Mighty Ducks (7 GP) and 2011 Sharks (5 GP).

Tonight was the ninth time in 11 playoff games (and third time this series) that Carolina scored first. They are 8-1 in those contests.

They Said It...

Sebastian Aho following the win...

"I thought that was our best game of the series, for sure. We were creating some offense, but also played really solid without the puck. We just stuck with it and were happy to get that goal there."

Rod Brind'Amour sharing similar thoughts...

"I think we trusted our game. Especially tonight, where it was clear we were going pretty well. We didn't really need to make many adjustments or anything. We just had to keep playing. It doesn't always work out, but tonight it did."

Taylor Hall on tonight being an example of sticking with it...

"They're such an opportunistic team, and they make every scoring chance look like a Grade A, even if it might not be. We had a plan, and we stuck with it the whole game. We played a lot in their end. We forced them to defend, ice the puck, and roll our lines over. In the end, it worked out."

Andrei Svechnikov on what's allowed the team to be so successful in overtime during these playoffs...

"I really think it's just the mentality of our team. We love tight games. Every time. We love them. We love staying above them and not giving them chances. I think that's why we won in overtime."

Rod Brind'Amour after another win for Frederik Andersen, in another low-event game for him...

"This is a tough game to play for him, believe it or not. You know, not getting a lot of action, and when you do, they were



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Grade-A variety. That's the right guy for us in this situation because he is just calm. Whether we're giving up 30 shots a night or whatever it was tonight (13), he's going to be the same. That's kind of what you want to see out of him."

What's Next?

The Canes are scheduled to be off on Tuesday. They'll return to action for Game 4 on Wednesday.

Next Game: Wednesday, May 27 | ECF, Game 4 at Montreal | 8:00 p.m. ET | [How To Watch](#)

Next Home Game: Friday, May 29 | ECF, Game 5 vs. Montreal | 8:00 p.m. ET [How To Watch](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Parking](#)



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Svechnikov's OT goal lifts Hurricanes past Canadiens in Game 3 of East Final

By: Sean Farrell

Forward wins it at 14:06 for Carolina, which takes lead in best-of-7 series

MONTREAL -- Andrei Svechnikov scored at 14:06 of overtime to give the Carolina Hurricanes a 3-2 win against the Montreal Canadiens in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Final at Bell Centre on Monday.

Svechnikov took a pass from Seth Jarvis above the right circle and scored through a screen in front by Sebastian Aho.

The Hurricanes are 5-0 in overtime in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

"I just really think it's the mentality of the team," Svechnikov said. "We love tight games and we love staying above them and we don't give them a lot of chances, and I think that's why we won that in overtime."

Carolina, which also won 3-2 in overtime in Game 2, leads the best-of-7 series 2-1. Game 4 will be here on Wednesday (8 p.m. ET; CBC, TVAS, SN, TNT, truTV, HBO MAX).

"Honestly, I thought we were creating a little bit more offense today and we played a good game, I thought," Aho said. "Obviously, we couldn't score until the very end, and that's all that matters. We play to win these games and that was a big win."

Shayne Gostisbehere and Taylor Hall scored for the Hurricanes, who are the No. 1 seed from the Metropolitan Division and Eastern Conference. Frederik Andersen made 11 saves.

"I think we've got a good group," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We've got good players and they play hard for each other, and I think that shows."

Lane Hutson and Mike Matheson scored for the Canadiens, who are the No. 3 seed from the Atlantic Division. Jakub Dobes made 35 saves.

"We definitely have another level, but they've got a good team and it's two good teams going at it," Hutson said.

The Hurricanes outshot the Canadiens 38-13, including 15-5 in the first period, when they built a 2-1 lead.

Gostisbehere put Carolina ahead 1-0 at 8:24 of the first. Eric Robinson got the puck during a scrum in the right corner and passed out to Mark Jankowski, whose shot was blocked by Kirby Dach and deflected to Gostisbehere, who then scored off the post past the outstretched blocker of Dobes from the left circle.

Matheson tied it 1-1 at 15:28. He took a pass in the high slot from Ivan Demidov, who was behind the net, and roofed a wrist shot over Andersen's glove.

Hall put the Hurricanes back in front 2-1 at 16:22, knocking in his own rebound at the left post after his initial tap-in was stopped by the right pad of Dobes. K'Andre Miller started the play by chipping down from the right point to get to a puck dumped into the corner by Jackson Blake.

Hutson tied it 2-2 with a power-play goal at 4:43 of the second period. He worked a continuous give-and-go with Cole Caufield before finishing past the left pad of Andersen on what turned into a 2-on-1 rush.

"You need everything working against a team like that," Montreal coach Martin St. Louis said. "I don't think you can just rely on the power play. You've got to defend when it's time to defend, which I don't think, especially in that first period, I don't think we did a great job defending. You're at this stage right now, you have to put it all together. Execution is part of that, you know, jam is part of that."

"There's not one thing. We've just got to put it all together. I know we can. We didn't expect this to be easy, and we're OK with that."

Noah Dobson appeared to give Montreal a 3-2 lead at 8:28 of the third period, but Carolina successfully challenged that Caufield was offside prior to the goal.

Nick Suzuki then had a chance to win it on a breakaway 35 seconds into overtime, but he shot wide of the net. Matheson hit the crossbar 25 seconds later.

"We're two shots away from being up 3-0 in the series," Matheson said. "So, I think it would be easy to possibly let yourself listen to the noise, but at the end of the day, we need to get four wins. And we've got a great opportunity to come back here in our building and get a win in Game 4 and see what happens."

NOTES: The Hurricanes are the fourth team in NHL history to win at least their first five overtime games in a single postseason. The 2023 Florida Panthers and the 2003 Mighty Ducks of Anaheim each won their first seven overtime games, and the 2011 San Jose Sharks won their first five overtime games. ... Hutson has 15 (three goals, 12 assists) in 17 playoff games. He is the fourth defenseman in Canadiens history to get at least 15 points in a single postseason, joining Larry Robinson (three times, including 21 in 1978), Chris Chelios (19 in 1989) and J.C. Tremblay (17 in 1971).



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AP ASSOCIATED PRESS

Svechnikov scores in OT as Hurricanes beat Canadiens 3-2 in Game 3 of East final | AP News

By: Associated Press

MONTREAL (AP) — Andrei Svechnikov scored at 14:06 of overtime and the Carolina Hurricanes defeated the Montreal Canadiens 3-2 on Monday night to take a 2-1 lead in the Eastern Conference Final.

Shayne Gostisbehere and Taylor Hall scored in regulation for Carolina. Frederik Andersen made 11 saves.

"You're seeing that the rust is off," said Hall, whose team had 11 days off following the second round of the playoffs. "We're feeling good about playing hockey again."

Mike Matheson and Lane Hutson scored for Montreal, which got 35 stops from Jakub Dobes.

Game 4 in the best-of-seven series is Wednesday at the Bell Centre.

After a back-and-forth overtime, Hutson turned the puck over in the neutral zone. Montreal had time to recover, but Svechnikov took a pass from Seth Jarvis up high and fired a shot through traffic for the winning goal.

"Can't get it back," Hutson said. "I thought we played a pretty good game. I feel like that stuff can happen and usually you can get through the shift. Unfortunately, we didn't."

Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis thought his team could have handled the sequence better in its own zone.

"I didn't love the play, but whatever," he said. "It's what's next, and we didn't do what's next. We didn't get the job done."

After earning a 3-2 overtime victory at home Saturday that looked a lot more like their relentless style following a discombobulated 6-2 loss in Thursday's opener, the Hurricanes came out flying and took the lead at 8:24 of the first period when the puck popped into the slot for Gostisbehere to fire in off the left post past a diving Dobes.

"He's competing back there every night and giving us a chance," Montreal forward Cole Caufield said.

The Canadiens, who topped the Tampa Bay Lightning and Buffalo Sabres in a pair of seven-game matchups to make the conference finals despite a combined 2-4 record at home, tied it at 15:28.

Carolina, the East's top seed coming off sweeps of the Ottawa Senators and Philadelphia Flyers, pushed back less than a minute later when Hall shoveled home his own rebound from in tight past Dobes as the winger was falling to the ice at 16:22.

Montreal, which registered just 12 shots on goal in Game 2, evened things up on a power play at 4:43 of the second period.

"Be nice to be up 2-1, but we're not because of me," Hutson said. "It's frustrating."

Hutson, who became the fourth defenseman in franchise history with at least 15 points in a single postseason, has been a focus for the Hurricanes on the physical side through three games.

"Probably their most important player and if he has the puck, I'm going to try and make some contact and prevent him from getting up the ice," Hall said.

The Canadiens lost two in a row for the first time in these playoffs. They now have to quickly turn the page.

"This whole experience, it's part of our learning," St. Louis said of his young group going up against the battle-tested Hurricanes. "There's always learning and failure. We lost tonight. We'll learn from it. That team over there is a good team, very mature. I don't know if we can match their maturity."

"But we're gonna have to elevate."



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Hurricanes-Canadiens Game 3 takeaways, grades, early look at Game 4 - ESPN

By: Greg Wyshynski

The Carolina Hurricanes took a 2-1 series lead in the Eastern Conference finals over the Montreal Canadiens with a 3-2 overtime win Monday night in Montreal. It marked the first time that the Hurricanes have led a conference finals series in coach Rod Brind'amour's four trips to the NHL's penultimate round.

What happened to the Canadiens in their emotional return to Bell Centre? How have the Hurricanes taken over the series? Who are the players to watch in the next game, and what are the big questions facing the Hurricanes and Canadiens ahead of Game 4 on Wednesday?

Carolina Hurricanes

Grade: A-

Five overtime games in the playoffs and five overtime victories, including back-to-back wins against the Canadiens. When the Hurricanes said it was going to be different in Brind'amour's fourth trip to the conference final, this is what they were talking about.

Think back to the 2023 conference finals when Carolina lost the first two games on its series against the Florida Panthers in overtime -- the first one going four extra sessions. They Hurricanes couldn't find a hero in those games. But in Game 2, Nikolaj Ehlers took the role. In Game 3, it was the Sebastian Aho line, with Andrei Svechnikov -- one of those players who struggled to score in the clutch in previous runs -- netting the winner on a perfect screen from Aho.

Big picture, the Hurricanes are really starting to see the benefit of their 11-day playoff layoff between the second round and the conference finals. They've had a 123-87 shot attempt advantage and 55-33 in scoring chances at 5-on-5 in the past two games. The Canadiens, who played seven games in their two previous series, lacked jump as the overtime progressed.

It was a huge win for the Hurricanes if past history is any indication. Teams with a 2-1 lead in a best-of-seven playoff round have gone on to win the series 69% of the time, and that jumps to 77% in the conference finals or semifinals.

Montreal Canadiens

Grade: C

First off, give credit where it's due to the Canadiens for getting this game to overtime, where one bounce could have flipped the narrative of this series. But they didn't get that bounce for a second straight game, and as a result the series is trending away from them.

Carolina is controlling play at 5-on-5, as Montreal could muster only 13 shots on goal in a game that went to 14:06 of overtime. For the second straight game, the Hurricanes

limited the number of stretch passes the Canadiens could complete to power their offense, and Montreal couldn't find another way to generate more than one 5-on-5 goal.

The Habs' execution was off, from Cole Caufield being offside to nullify Noah Dobson's goal in the third period to the blatant penalty for too many men on the ice that Montreal was extremely fortunate wasn't called.

The Canadiens have find a way to generate more chances. One shot in the third period and one shot in overtime simply can't happen in a game of this magnitude. And when they do get their chances, the Canadiens' top scorers have to start finishing them with more efficiency or their run could end in Raleigh.

Players to watch in Game 3

Logan Stankoven

C, Hurricanes

The line of Stankoven, Jackson Blake and Taylor Hall finally broke through against Montreal in Game 3 on Hall's first-period goal. That's great news for the Hurricanes, who rolled to eight straight wins to start the playoffs thanks in part to that potent trio. But though Hall hit the board, Stankoven has only one goal and no assists in his past six games -- and that was after scoring six goals in his first five playoff games. The Hurricanes need to get this line rolling offensively again to win this series and match up against either of the depth-blessed titans of the West.

The good news: They were impactful in Game 3 with 65.7% of the shot attempts and a plus-9 in scoring chances. It's only a matter of time for Stankoven.

Nick Suzuki

C, Canadiens

Once more, with feeling: As Suzuki goes, so go the Canadiens. In their nine playoff wins, he has 13 points. With zero points and a minus-1 in Game 3, Suzuki has only one goal and two assists in their eight playoff losses. He made some specious decisions in the Game 3 loss, such as when he chose to whip a low probability pass to Caufield instead of shooting the puck. Suzuki also had the game on his stick during an overtime breakaway and missed the net.

They really, really need him to be better.

Big questions for Game 4

Is Aho finally cooking?

Aho has been one of the Hurricanes' most consistent playoff performers. Since 2019, he has been at 0.79 points per game or better every postseason -- including three runs in which he was a point-per-game performer. But he entered Game 3 with only three goals and five assists in 10 games,



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easily the lowest offensive output of his playoff career. Whether it's Svechnikov and Seth Jarvis not converting Aho setups or Aho not converting the chances they're creating, something's not working with the top line.

More concerning, Aho has only one power-play point in the postseason, an assist in Game 3 against the Flyers, despite averaging the most power-play time (4:27) of his playoff career. The Hurricanes' futility on the power play (0-for-8 vs. Montreal) has been one of their most glaring deficiencies in this series.

All that established: Aho was all over the ice in Game 3, just missing on a couple of high-danger chances and nearly setting up several goals himself. In overtime, Svechnikov's shot found the net with Aho setting a perfect screen in front of Montreal goalie Jakub Dobes.

Is this the kind of game to launch Aho and his linemates?

Can Dobes be the series savior?

Game 3 marked the first time in the Stanley Cup playoffs that the Canadiens have lost back-to-back games, which means it's the first time Dobes has lost back-to-back games in the playoffs. In fact, it's only the second time he has lost back-to-back games in this calendar year.

It wasn't for a lack of trying: Dobes made 35 saves in Game 3 and was absolutely brilliant in a game that saw Carolina have a 15-4 advantage in high-danger shot attempts. Dobes had 2.66 goals saved above expected against Carolina. The Canadiens have relied on Dobes as their backbone this postseason and he has answered the call every time. It's hard to imagine him giving more than he already has to Montreal, but given Carolina's momentum, its overwhelming offensive pressure and the moment facing his team, he might need to find yet another level.



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Canadiens drop OT thriller to Hurricanes in Game 3, trail series 2-1

By: Canadian Press

MONTREAL — Andrei Svechnikov scored at 14:06 of overtime as the Carolina Hurricanes defeated the Montreal Canadiens 3-2 on Monday to take a 2-1 lead in the Eastern Conference final.

Shayne Gostisbehere and Taylor Hall had the goals in regulation for Carolina. Frederik Andersen made 10 saves.

Mike Matheson and Lane Hutson replied for Montreal, which got 35 stops from the outstanding Jakub Dobes.

The best-of-seven series returns to the Bell Centre for Game 4 on Wednesday.

Svechnikov fired a shot in a back-and-forth OT that found the net with bodies standing in front of the net.

After picking up a 3-2 extra-time victory at home Saturday that looked a lot more like their relentless style following a discombobulated 6-2 loss in Thursday's opener, the Hurricanes came out flying and took the lead at 8:24 of the first period when the puck popped into the slot for Gostisbehere to fire in off the left post past a diving Dobes.

The Canadiens, who topped the Tampa Bay Lightning and Buffalo Sabres in a pair of seven-game matchups to make the conference final despite a combined 2-4 record at home, tied it at 15:28 after a good forecheck from Alex Newhook and Jake Evans led to Ivan Demidov finding Matheson in prime shooting range to beat Andersen upstairs.

Carolina, the East's top seed coming off sweeps of the Ottawa Senators and Philadelphia Flyers, pushed back less than a minute later when Hall shovelled home his own rebound from in tight past Dobes as the winger was falling to the ice at 16:22.

Montreal, which registered just 12 shots in Game 2, evened things up again on a power play thanks to a slick sequence

that saw Cole Caufield and Hutson play catch off the rush before the latter fired into a wide-open net at 4:43 to set off deafening, towel-waving celebrations.

Hutson became the fourth defenceman in franchise history with at least 15 points in a single post-season, joining Larry Robinson (three times), Chris Chelios and J.C. Tremblay.

Dobes made a huge save off the stick of Svechnikov moments later on a 3-on-1 after also denying the Hurricanes forward on a one-timer in the first. The fiery Canadiens netminder followed that up with a stop on Gostisbehere on another odd-man rush with his right pad.

Carolina defenceman Sean Walker then bowled Dobes over for a goaltender interference penalty later in the period, but Montreal centre Jake Evans was assessed a roughing minor to see the teams play 4-on-4.

Canadiens captain Nick Suzuki had a terrific chance on a 2-on-1 before choosing a between-the-legs pass to Caufield that failed to connect, and Noah Dobson flubbed another opportunity with Andersen at his mercy.

Montreal, which last played at home in an ugly 8-3 loss to Buffalo in Game 6 of the second round, appeared to take the lead at 8:28 of the third when Dobson's pass went in off the stick of a sliding Nikolaj Ehlers, but Carolina correctly challenged for offside on Caufield's zone entry 29 seconds earlier.

Dobes foiled Walker a few minutes later on a chance from the slot and held the line on a Sebastian Aho breakaway.

Suzuki missed the net in alone early in OT before Matheson rang a shot off the crossbar moments later after a spin-orama near the blue line.

Dobes shot out his pad to thwart Logan Stankoven at the other end and then stared down Jalen Chatfield.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Deja vu as Hurricanes beat Canadiens, 3-2, in overtime to take 2-1 series lead

By: briandaguanno

The Carolina Hurricanes defeated the Montreal Canadiens, 3-2, in overtime on Monday night at the Bell Centre.

When the Canes needed them most, the top line stepped up. Andrei Svechnikov's shot 14 minutes into overtime gave the Canes their second straight 3-2 overtime win and a 2-1 series lead. Only two wins separate the Canes from a Stanley Cup berth. The road to the Stanley Cup in the East once again runs through Raleigh, with the Hurricanes taking back home ice advantage in the series.

Much of the first half of the first period was controlled by the Hurricanes' relentless forecheck that hardly allowed Montreal any clean breakouts.

Shayne Gostisbehere put the Canes on the board first, finding the back of the net less than 10 minutes into the game on a great pinch in. For the third straight game, Carolina took a 1-0 lead early in the first period.

Carolina's forecheck seemed to let off the gas a bit in the first period. That lull in action allowed the Canadiens to tie the game on a pinch in of their own, as defenseman Mike Matheson found the top corner of the net to tie the game at 1-1.

Just as quick as the Habs tied the game, the Canes took the lead right back. Taylor Hall notched his fourth goal of the playoffs on a tap in up close with a little over three minutes left in the opening period.

Following the first period, the Canes held a 14-5 shot advantage.

In the second period both teams continued to trade offensive chances, a stark change to the series.

After Jordan Martinook took a slashing penalty around five minutes into the period, Carolina's penalty killing streak came to an end on a give-and-go resulting in a Lane Huston goal.

The Canes were able to counter with a 3-on-1, but Canadiens goaltender Jakub Dobes made a save on a shot from Svechnikov to keep the game tied.

Carolina was unable to convert on their second power play of the night, with Seth Jarvis ringing a shot off the post.

For the first time in the series, the game was tied heading into the third period.

After a slow start to third period, it looked like the Canadiens had taken the lead after Noah Dobson banked it in. But after the Hurricanes challenged the play, it was determined Cole Caufield went offside prior to the goal, keeping the game knotted.

The Hurricanes were unable to convert on their third power play of the game, bringing their series total to 0-for-8.

For the second straight game, overtime was needed to break a 2-2 tie.

After a Montreal turnover, the shot from Svechnikov sealed the game for the Canes and gave them their second straight overtime victory. The Hurricanes are now 5-0 during the playoffs in overtime games.

Game 4 is set for Wednesday at 8 PM, with a chance for Carolina to take a demanding 3-1 series lead heading back to Raleigh.



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The Hockey News

'We Feel Like We're Fresher': Andrei Svechnikov, Sebastian Aho, Shayne Gostisbehere, Taylor Hall, Rod Brind'Amour On Yet Another OT Victory

By: Ryan Henkel

Andrei Svechnikov's clutch overtime heroics propelled Carolina to a 2-1 series lead in Montreal, proving the Hurricanes' relentless conditioning and depth can outlast any postseason pressure.

The Carolina Hurricanes have taken a 2-1 series lead in the Eastern Conference with another 3-2 overtime victory on Monday at Centre Bell.

After the game, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour along with Svechnikov, Sebastian Aho, Gostisbehere and Hall spoke with the media in Montreal. Here's what they had to say:

Rod Brind'Amour

On why his group has been so consistent: I don't think you can put it on just one thing. We have a good group, good players and they play hard for each other. That showed.

On the top guys producing: The whole game, I felt pretty good about how we were going. Those guys in particular had a lot of good chances and were around it. You never know, obviously, how it's going to unfold, but we certainly had our opportunities.

On Andrei Svechnikov: Hopefully it jumpstarts him getting on the scoresheet. I think he's played well and been a factor, just not scoring. I mean, you're not going to advance if you don't get production out of your top guys, obviously, so it's great to see that tonight.

On the team's comfortability in overtime: We're really comfortable. We trust our game, especially tonight, where we were clearly going pretty well. We didn't really need to make too many adjustments or anything. Just keep playing. It doesn't always work out, but tonight it did.

On not letting frustration creep in: The guys didn't get frustrated but I think it's because we've been through this before fairly often over a long period of time. Again, it kind of goes back to trusting the game and trusting in how we're playing. It doesn't always work out, but there's no other way to do it. I think guys understand that.

On not allowing many shots: We still gave up a couple, a breakaway and a couple off of the post there, so there was definitely chances for that to look different, but again, it just goes to trusting how we have to play the game and when you have 20 guys doing it that way, it's going to look like that quite often. That's kind of what happened there.

On the offside challenge: All the teams, they're on it. As soon as an entry goes in, they're already buzzing you if it's close, but I give credit to [Video Coach Chris Huffine] because that's a bit of a tricky one because are you dragging it and all that. We obviously went through that with Jordo already, which helped us be real confident that that was going to be

offside. They did a great job there. Obviously that's a huge point in the game.

On if he knows who got the overtime goal: I still don't know and I don't care. As long as somebody got it.

On Frederik Andersen: This is a tough game to play, believe it or not. You're not getting a lot of action and when you do, it's of the grade-A variety. But that's the right guy for us in these situations because he is just a calm presence whether we're giving up 30 shots a night or what it was tonight. He's going to be the same. That's kind of what you've seen out of him.

Andrei Svechnikov

On why the team has had so much success in overtime: I just really think it's the mentality of the team. We love tight games. Every time, we love that. We love staying above them and not giving them lots of chances. I think that's why we won in overtime.

On avoiding getting frustrated in these tight games: I don't think it's really hard. I've been playing eight years in this system and that's what we do every day. I got some experience to help me not get frustrated. We all do. That's why Roddy at intermissions tells us to stick with our game. That's what we did.

On how he's felt about his game: It's the most important time of my life right now, of our life as a team. You have to get on the scoresheet somehow and I think we've been playing good as a line. We're creating a lot and today, we created lots of chances. We could have scored more than one goal, but it's just the way it goes. We know more goals are coming for us.

On if he thinks the team's physicality is getting to Montreal: I don't want to really talk about it, but that's what we try to do. Just finish the checks obviously and hopefully they're going to turn the puck over or ice it and we can get offensive faceoffs and all that stuff. We always try to finish our checks.

Sebastian Aho

On if he could feel his line was close to breaking through: Yeah. Honestly, I thought we were creating a little more offense today and we played a good game, I thought. Obviously didn't score till the very end, but that's what matters. We play to win these games and that was a big one.

On the secret to the team's road success: Good question. I don't know. I think we try to play our game home and away, right? The game is the same. I feel like the environment is a little bit different whether you're home or away, but I feel like the game stays the same.

On how he feels about his game: I thought our line was better today. Like I said, I thought we created definitely enough chances to score a couple of goals, but we just stuck



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with it. That's playoff hockey. You just keep on going and hopefully you break through at the end and that's exactly what happened.

On if he deflected Svechnikov's shot: I couldn't tell. I don't think so. They have good technology in this building, I'm sure, so they'll figure it out. I honestly don't even care. We'll take the win and we'll move forward.

On if he feels the team is back in order now after Game 1: Yeah. I mean that was obviously one game and we lost it and we kind of just went over that game, watched some video and then trashed it after. I mean, you have to have a little bit of a short memory in the playoffs. You don't want to really have things start lingering in your game. I thought we did a pretty good job in Game 2 and we were obviously able to win that game and got another win tonight. The wins and losses, that's what matters. We're happy to win tonight and hopefully we can do it again in a couple of days.

Shayne Gostisbehere

On overtime: Just kept doing the same thing. We play an effective, forechecking game. I think Freddie made a save on the Suzuki breakaway, that was big right at the beginning. It's just kind of what we do. Nothing changes even if it's overtime, third period, first period. Just keep doing what we do.

On staying ahead: It's good to obviously play with the lead and even if we get behind, it's a test as well. Compliment to them. They kept coming back. We put a lot of rubber at the net there and the goalie stood tall. Like I said, just have to keep doing it.

On if he noticed he scored at first: I had no idea. I didn't see anything. Was it obvious? I had no idea. Happy it went in.

On staving off frustration in these kinds of games: It's emotional, for sure. They're coming off two seven-game series, a lot of overtimes. I think that was their seventh or eighth overtime game. It's the playoffs. It's easy to get away from what you're supposed to do and get away from that. For us, it's the same thing. Keep doing the same things over and over and we'll get good results. We know what works and it's just up to us to stick with it.

On building momentum when Montreal is constantly icing the puck: It's putting the stress on them. That's what we always say. It's a hard system for us to play sometimes because you have to be on your toes, you have to be always skating, but you can see that it's pretty effective and it's probably not the best to play against. They're a really highly skilled team too and they make plays and you can see that sometimes. Any chance they're in the D-zone the whole shift, that's probably better for us.

On the top line coming through: It's awesome. Those guys built the foundation of this team and they've carried us this whole season. It's nice to see them obviously get the results that they've been working hard for. Especially Svech. We always tell him to shoot the puck. He's the strongest guy on the ice and when he's playing that power forward role, that's when he's at his best. We always say to just go be an animal out there... smartly. But it's good to see those guys get results because you don't see how much work they put in.

On the team getting back to their game: It's definitely a turning point for us. A little adversity after having two sweeps in the first two rounds. Not a lot of adversity in that sense. So for us, it was a good kick in the teeth and for us to respond was pretty good two games in a row.

Taylor Hall

On Montreal's called back goal: That was an interesting point in the game. In the end, it's offside, so shouldn't have really even turned into a play. It's nice that they got it right and that was a nice break for us. We felt like we had control of the game and you have to make sure that we win those ones and we ended up doing that.

On the system: I think there's a lot to like about our game tonight and you're seeing that the rust is off and we're feeling good about playing hockey again. You're off for 12 days and that first game felt like a million miles an hour and now the game is starting to slow down and you're making reads without having to think about it. It was a good effort from us tonight. A lot of guys contributed and that's how it has to be.

On his physical play: I'm just trying to play hard. I'm not perfect out there. I don't want to hurt anyone. I just want to make their D and their good players feel pressure. Hutson is probably their most important player and if he has the puck, I'm gonna try and make some contact and prevent him from getting up the ice ultimately. It's playoff hockey. You have to find different ways to contribute. I was off the scoresheet the first couple of games, but I felt like the physicality was one way I could help out.

On finding ways to win: Roddy came in and said, 'We've got them where we want them.' It was about stepping on the gas. You don't feel sorry for yourself that the game hasn't finished the way you want to. Sometimes it's going to take that. If you win 3-2 every game, you get 60% of the goals. We'll take it. If we have to go to overtime every game, we're ready for that. We're 5-0 in overtime now. That's a sign that we're going to bend and not break and continue playing our game.

On Jakub Dobes: Just a really good goalie. He's big, he seals the whole bottom half of the net. So if the puck is not exactly where you want it off your stick, sometimes it's hard to get those up. He has let in a five-hole goal, but he's really good and he battles for a big guy like that. He's never too far out of his net because he's so big. But we got three on him tonight, so we'll take that going forward.

On the key to the overtime success: I think we just, in all those games, we feel like we had control. I think for every game, for every overtime, except for the one against Philadelphia, we controlled play. It's just another first period or second period, I guess with the way the benches are. But we don't have to change a lot. We feel like we're fresher and that's gonna help us in the end.

On the team's road success: Sometimes it's a little bit easier to play on the road. There's not the distractions that there could be at home and if you have a power play at home and you don't get anything out of it, there's just a little bit of anxiety in the building and you're only human, you're gonna feel that. But when you're the road team, you just keep humming. You keep going and the simple plays seem like the best ones and we did a really good job with that tonight.



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Svechnikov Scores!: Hurricanes Take Series Lead On Another Overtime Winner

By: Ryan Henkel

Andrei Svechnikov's overtime heroics and a relentless forecheck stifled Montreal, as Carolina's dominant puck possession and defensive pressure secured a commanding edge in the Eastern Conference Final.

The Carolina Hurricanes have jumped out to a 2-1 series lead in the Eastern Conference Final thanks to a second consecutive overtime win.

Andrei Svechnikov was the Game 3 hero, picking off a Lane Hutson pass and eventually getting open to put a seeing-eye shot through traffic.

Notably too, Carolina once again dominated Montreal for a second straight game, holding them to just 13 shots on goal while piling up 38 shots of their own.

In fact, the Hurricanes held the Canadiens to just a single shot on goal in overtime and, in total, they allowed just three shots in the last 37:43 of the game.

The Canes forechecked the Habs all night long and piled up the chances, doubling them up 92-46 overall, and eventually they just wore Montreal down.

The Canadiens were credited with 15 icings in total, the same amount of shots on goal they had, and they just couldn't find any space and time against the Hurricanes' relentless pressure.

Carolina opened the scoring for the third straight game, with the fourth line once again chipping in.

The line just went to work in the offensive zone and eventually worked a puck out of the corner to Mark Jankowski and his blocked shot found its way to the activating Shayne Gostisbehere for the opening score.

Montreal would respond a bit later as Mike Matheson was left unchecked and he ripped a shot bar and in past Frederik Andersen.

However, the Hurricanes bounced right back as another defenseman jumped into the play with K'Andre Miller finding a loose puck below the dots and feeding it in front to Taylor Hall for his first goal of the series.

The Habs would tie it back up in the second period as Cole Caufield and Lane Hutson executed a pretty give-and-go on the power play, but that would be the last time Carolina would give one up.

Again, the game was closer than it should have been, as the Canes piled up chances, but credit to the Habs. They blocked 33 shots on the night, but that's a trend a team can't really afford to keep up.

Playwire House Ad

Eventually that wears a team down and that's what we may be starting to see as Carolina continues to outpossess and outpace Montreal by more and more drastic numbers.

Perhaps the biggest thing going for the Canes now though is the fact that the top line looked dangerous.

The Hurricanes have been looking for more offense out of the top trio of Sebastian Aho, Andrei Svechnikov and Seth Jarvis and this was by far their best game of the postseason.

The three combined for a 70% expected goals for percentage and obviously came together for the overtime winner.

If the three can continue playing like they have, it's going to be huge for Carolina.

LINKS

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<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7308626/2026/05/26/hurricanes-win-game-3-canadiens-first-line/>

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SportScan

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

1392266 Carolina Hurricanes

Carolina Hurricanes' overtime magic continues in clutch Game 3 win over Canadiens

Chip Alexander 10-12 minutes 25/05/2026

Carolina Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said he expected a tight game between two good teams Monday in the Eastern Conference Final.

How about another overtime game? How tight is that? Staal was right.

The Hurricanes evened the series Saturday on an overtime goal by Nikolaj Ehlers at Lenovo Center. The move to the Bell Centre produced another Monday, when Andrei Svechnikov's shot with 5:54 left in the extra period snuck past Canadiens goalie Jakub Dobes, giving Carolina another 3-2 win.

Canadiens captain Nick Suzuki had an open shot from the slot in the opening minute of the overtime but missed the net. Defenseman Mike Matheson, who scored Montreal's first goal of the game, then found the crossbar with a shot.

Dobes denied defenseman Jalen Chatfield on an open shot with 10:32 left in OT.

So ended a game in which the two teams battled on even terms. The Canes outshot and outchanced the Canadiens, who had one shot in the third period, and one more in OT.

But the Habs got another sparkling game in net from the rookie Dobes, and helped him by blocking shots and getting sticks on pucks. Canes goalie Frederik Andersen didn't get as much work, but made some timely saves.

Dobes allowed goals to Shayne Gostisbehere and Taylor Hall, but that was it in regulation., adding another page to the story that the big rookie from Czechia continues to write this season and in the playoffs.

Game 4 will be played Wednesday at the Bell Centre, and it could again be a tight-checking, hard-working game as the Canes look to take a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven series.

The Habs believed they had taken a 3-2 lead with 12 minutes left in regulation when defenseman Noah Dobson had a shot glance off the stick of Ehlers, who tried to make a sliding stop only to have the puck skid past Andersen.

The huge cheers at the Bell Centre quickly died when the goal was challenged and reviewed: The ruling: Cole Caufield was offside entering the zone. No goal.

Dobes made a tough stop on Aho with 5:47 left in regulation after Aho found some open ice. In the second period, he denied Andrei Svechnikov's hard wrister and a rush chance by Gostisbehere.

Hurricanes were ready for 'electric' atmosphere

Carolina Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho constantly used the word "electric" Monday during interviews at the Bell Centre

In looking to Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Final against the Montreal Canadiens, Aho said he expected an electric building, with an electric atmosphere. With the series tied 1-1, he also realizes it could make for an electric game.

"You've got to embrace it, you've got to enjoy it," Aho said after the Canes' morning skate, "It's going to be an electric crowd, and it's always fun to play in this building.

"I love it. It's a cool building with a lot of history. It can bring emotion for both teams and I love it. I think both teams are going to go at it hard."

The Canes have gone 4-0 in road games in the Stanley Cup playoffs, notching a pair of wins in sweeping the Ottawa Senators, then the Philadelphia Flyers.

Poise is always a key on the road, whether in the regular season or the playoffs. There will be pressure points in every game, times when the other team is pushing and their crowd is loud and everything seems intensified.

What's needed in those moments?

"A little bit of everything," Aho said. "Obviously, there's a time for poise, a time to be disciplined. You want to bring the emotion, want to bring the hard battle and the hard work, as well."

The Habs went into Monday's game with a 2-4 record at home in the playoffs, but Canes captain Jordan Staal said, "That can flip in a moment" during any playoff round.

"It should be a tight game against a good team," Staal said of Game 3.

Habs' Lane Hutson was ready to go

Canadiens defenseman Lane Hutson said Monday morning he was good to go in Game 3.

Hutson took a hard hit from Canes forward Taylor Hall along the boards during the overtime in Game 2, was shaken up and left the game in discomfort. It also left him irked.

"Hockey happens, that's all, I guess," Hutson said Monday morning. "Definitely doesn't feel great, but it is what it is."

Those on the Montreal side believed it was the kind of knee-to-knee hit that could have more seriously injured the dynamic 22-year-old D-man, who has two goals and 12 assists in the playoffs.

"I felt like he could have done a little more in leading more with his shoulder, but whatever," Hutson said. "The game happens so fast. To say he intended to do anything crazy or anything ... I put myself in a bad spot, and he took advantage."

Hall has delivered some huge hits for the Canes in the playoffs. He knocked Ottawa defenseman Jake Sanderson out in the first-round series with a concussion, then collided with Flyers defenseman Travis Sanheim, who was flattened and later called it a "pretty dirty play."



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Lineup change for Canadiens

The Canadiens made a lineup change for Game 3, inserting center Joe Veleno for Oliver Kapanen. Veleno last played in Game 6 of the second-round series against the Buffalo Sabres.

"We feel like Carolina brings a lot of heaviness and speed and I feel like Joey can give us that," Montreal coach Martin St. Louis said.

Canes surprise Brind'Amour

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour was asked Monday if anything about his team had surprised him this season, taking a few seconds to mull it over before answering.

"Not really, now that I've known this group for so long," he said of a team that won the Metro Division and was the top playoff seed in the Eastern Conference. "But what did surprise me was the other night."

The Canes were sloppy and made a host of mistakes in the 6-2 loss to the Canadiens in Game 1 of the ECF in Raleigh.

"That was a strange kind of game for me. I don't have many of those to fall back onto," Brind'Amour said.

"There's nothing that surprises me about this group. We know what we're going to get, and that's what you want when you're coaching, knowing what you're going to get."

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1392267 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes head to Montreal with clean slate: 'We can trash that first game'

Chip Alexander 7-9 minutes 25/05/2026

The Carolina Hurricanes locker room was a happy place late Saturday night.

Owner Tom Dundon was there, chatting up players. General Manager Eric Tulsy was there. Several of the players' young kids frolicked about while the team went through its post-game workout.

The laughs and smiles that come with winning in the Stanley Cup playoffs replaced the somber faces and hard stares of Thursday night. The playoffs can be like that, when a loss can seem so crushing and a victory so satisfying and soothing.

Two games, different results. That's how the Eastern Conference Final has begun for the Hurricanes and Montreal Canadiens, with the best-of-seven series now moving to Montreal and the Bell Centre for the next two games.

Both teams can take some satisfaction in how they handled the first two games. The Canadiens came to the Lenovo Center and earned a split on the road. The Canes, while miffed about their play in a 6-2 loss in Game 1, played well Saturday and came away with a 3-2 overtime victory on a Nikolaj Ehlers goal to avoid an 0-2 start.

"They're going to be happy with getting the win here, and we're happy that at least we can start the series over," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said after the game. "Nothing has really been accomplished other than we can trash that first game, and now we can really start the series."

That sets up what should be an interesting Game 3 on Monday, in what should be a rocking Bell Centre.

The Habs, 7-3 on the road in the playoffs, have been 2-4 at home in their series wins over Tampa Bay and Buffalo. The Canes won both of their road games in each of the four-game sweeps against the Ottawa Senators and Philadelphia Flyers.

"You're not playing now if you can't play on the road," Brind'Amour said Sunday. "You game can't fluctuate so dramatically or you won't be playing now."

The Canes' four road wins came in loud buildings as they ignored the noise, stuck to business, stuck to their game and made the winning plays. The Flyers series ended on Jackson Blake's overtime goal in Game 4 at Xfinity Mobile Arena in Philly.

That was on May 9. Blake, after the game, was presented "The Rope" by captain Jordan Staal as the outstanding player in the win. It hung in Blake's locker stall at Lenovo Center for two weeks until Saturday night, when he gladly handed off the team award to Ehlers.

Ehlers was the overtime hero Saturday. His second goal of the game came on a perfectly placed shot from the top of the slot that beat Habs goalie Jakub Dobes on the blocker side, causing bedlam at Lenovo and leaving the Canes in a much better frame of mind.

"We believe in our team," center Mark Jankowski said after the game. "We believe in what we can bring. When we play our game and we play our best, we can compete with anyone. So to have a little bit of adversity, lose the first game the way we did, I didn't think we played anywhere near the standard that we have for ourselves."

More adversity came in the third period when Josh Anderson's second goal tied the score 2-2 for Montreal with a little more than seven minutes left in regulation.

"But we pushed back hard after that, and in overtime," Jankowski said. "That shows the commitment in our group to stick to the process and play our game."

The postgame banter was mostly about the OT and Ehlers, the much improved defensive effort after the many lapses in Game 1 and the physicality shown in Game 2 -- Jordan Staal had 10 of Carolina's 44 hits.

"You want to make it a long series for the other team, and taking chunks out of them every game is very important," Staal said Sunday.

Brind'Amour, in his press conference, was asked about another hit: Montreal's Alexandre Texier on Canes defenseman K'Andre Miller.

With the second period ending, Texier caught Miller with his stick blade in the midsection/groin area, leaving Miller doubled over in pain.

"Clearly that's a spear," Brind'Amour said. "There's not a person that can tell you that it wasn't."

The referees reviewed the play but ruled it a minor penalty for slashing, much to the displeasure of Brind'Amour, the Canes players and Canes fans watching the replay on the big board.

"It looked to me like the intent was pretty clear," Miller said Sunday. "I don't know. It was a pretty wild play. I didn't think it was all that clean, and I was pretty surprised it was only two minutes."

On the Canadiens side of the arena, the team packed up quickly after the game for the trip back to Montreal. The Habs played Game 7 against the Sabres in Buffalo, winning in overtime, then two in Raleigh to open the ECF. They'll finally be back on home ice Monday.

The Habs will have the last change at home on setting the matchups. Brind'Amour successfully used Staal's line on Montreal's top line centered by captain Nick Suzuki in Game 2, but Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis could change that in Game 3.

"We competed. It's a close game. It's a fine line between winning and losing," St. Louis said after Saturday's loss. "We were in a battle, now we



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go back home. Our fans have watched us play three games on the road now and I'm sure they'll be ready for us to get back home."

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1392268 Carolina Hurricanes

Category 5: Hurricanes, Canadiens look to take control in Game 3

May 25, 2026 Cory Lavalette

MONTREAL — The Hurricanes will look to stay perfect on the road this postseason and take a lead in the Eastern Conference final when they play the Canadiens on Monday at Bell Centre.

Carolina bounced back from a dismal Game 1 to win Game 2 in overtime Saturday in Raleigh and hopes to take advantage of a Montreal squad that has struggled at home so far in the playoffs.

1. The Hurricanes' penalty kill is at peak performance. Carolina has killed 23 of 24 penalties this postseason, a 95.5% clip that is just shy, at the moment, of one of the best of this century.

Among teams since 2000 with at least 10 playoff games in one postseason, only the 2003-04 Red Wings, at 96% having killed 48 of 50 in 12 games, are better.

"I think that (our) PK going against our power play in practice every day, I think obviously both are making each other better, iron sharpening iron, if you will," defenseman K'Andre Miller said Sunday.

Montreal coach Martin St. Louis said after Monday's morning skate that he's "not too concerned" about his power play, pointing to the fact that the Canadiens have had four chances so far in the series.

"I feel like, in a sense, Buffalo tried to bring a lot of pressure, and we were able to break it," St. Louis said of facing the Sabres' penalty kill. "We just haven't had enough time to see if we can break (Carolina's penalty kill). ... I'm confident that we can. We've just got to have more opportunities."

2. Hurricanes right wing Jackson Blake had 34 blocked shots in the regular season, four times tying a career high with two in a game. He had matched that 11 minutes into Saturday's Game 2 win over the Canadiens and finished with five — two more than he had combined in the first nine games of the playoffs.

"In the playoffs, you've got to put your body on the line, regardless of what it is," Blake said after the morning skate. "And you do that in the regular season too, but playoffs, I mean, it's like (snaps fingers) everything matters like that."

It's that time of year. Players who don't normally body check start delivering hits, and players like Blake not known for their shot-blocking prowess are eating five shots in what felt like a must-win game.

"I just know if blocking shots is what I need to do to help us win, that's what I'm going to do," Blake said. "If the puck's coming at me, I'm going to try to block it."

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said come playoff time, "Everybody's doing that."

"Both teams, you do whatever you've got to do to win the game," he said. "And that's part of it, and I like seeing that, obviously."

3. Much has been made of the Canadiens' record away from Bell Centre. Montreal entered the series 6-2 on the road and also earned a split in Raleigh to open the Eastern Conference final.

That's very impressive, especially considering two of those wins came in Game 7s.

But the Habs' series with Carolina has shifted north of the border, and the Hurricanes are road warrior in their own right — a perfect 4-0.

Carolina has scored more than three goals just twice so far this postseason, but both games were on the road — the series-ending Game 4 win in Ottawa and the 4-1 win in Game 3 in Philadelphia.

The Bell Centre, however, is a different animal.

"I mean, obviously Lenovo's been absolutely bumping," Blake said of Carolina's home arena, "so it's definitely been loud. ... I'm sure it's going to be really loud here too tonight, and we're excited for that. I think it's a great opportunity to play in this rink for the culture they have and everything that's gone on in this rink. It doesn't really make a huge difference out there, but you definitely notice the noise."

4. Home ice will give Montreal coach Martin St. Louis last change, and chances are the Canadiens will try to get the top line of Nick Suzuki centering Cole Caufield and Juraj Slafkovsky away from Jordan Staal and Carolina's best checking line.

Montreal's top line was limited to three shots on goal and six combined shot attempts at 5-on-5 in Game 2 — mostly head to head against the line of Staal, Jordan Martinook and Nikolaj Ehlers — after totaling six points in the series opener.

"It was a team effort against that line," Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said Sunday. "(They're) obviously three really good players that are able to create offense easily, but I thought our D corps was really good, our line was solid in regard to just —and our whole group, really —trying to play in their end as much as we can and limit their shots and their chances."

That's one wrinkle Carolina is able to use that many teams can't: Even if St. Louis tries to get the Suzuki line away from the Staal line, chances are Brind'Amour can still get his shutdown pairing of Jaccob Slavin and Jalen Chatfield out against them.

After Monday's morning skate, Slafkovsky wouldn't reveal how the Canadiens will adjust after totaling 12 shots on goal in Game 2.

"But I think we have the recipe for that, for sure," he said. "I think with the amount of skill that this team has, I think it should be easy for us. It's just up to us if we can translate it to the game at night."

Further down the lineup, center Logan Stankoven said the matchups won't alter the mission.

"I think whatever line we're matched up against, I don't think we need to change our game," he said. "I think, yeah, we can do a bit better job of maybe getting pucks out of our zone, but I think it's just about trying to play in the O zone and create good offensive zone shifts, and then set up the next line for success."

5. Oliver Kapanen's failed dump-in in overtime helped trigger Nikolaj Ehlers' game-winning goal, and he was skating with the extras after Montreal's morning skate.

Kapanen had 22 goals and 37 points as a rookie this season, but he will sit in favor of Joe Veleno in Game 3.

"We feel like Carolina brings a lot of heaviness and speed, and we feel like Joey can give us that," St. Louis said Monday morning.

Like Kapanen, Veleno has one assist this postseason, though in six games, but he was far less productive in the regular season. The former Red Wings first round pick had five points in 61 games, averaging fewer than one shot on goal per contest.

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1392269 Carolina Hurricanes

Canadiens vs. Hurricanes Game 3: Key takeaways from Carolina's overtime win

Arpon Basu, James Mirtle, Sean Gentille 8-11 minutes 26/05/2026

MONTREAL — One game after they forced a reset of the Eastern Conference finals, the Carolina Hurricanes have taken control, beating the Montreal Canadiens 3-2 on an overtime goal from Andrei Svechnikov and taking a 2-1 series lead on Monday night.

Carolina, once again, dramatically outshot the Canadiens and held two separate leads, 1-0 on a first-period goal by Shayne Gostisbehere and 2-1 after Taylor Hall scored his fourth goal of the playoffs 3 minutes, 38 seconds before the first intermission.

Both times, Montreal answered, first with a goal from the top of the circles by defenseman Mike Matheson, then again on a remarkable power-play give-and-go between Cole Caufield and Lane Hutson; the goal was Hutson's first point of the series and the first on the power play by either team.

Jakub Dobeš was peppered once again, making 35 saves on 38 shots for the Canadiens and, at times, looking like he'd be the difference for Montreal. Carolina's Frederik Andersen was a bit shakier, stopping 11 of the 13 shots he faced, but he did enough to make the result stand up for the Hurricanes, who held Montreal to just two shots on goal after the second period.

Svechnikov's game-winner came at 14:06 of overtime on a shot through traffic that beat Dobeš and initially appeared to bounce off linemate Sebastian Aho.

"Still don't know, and I don't care," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Somebody got it ... It was Svech? Is that right? Good for him."

Svechnikov started the sequence in Montreal's end by picking off a centering pass by Lane Hutson, circling the zone and finding Seth Jarvis, who sent the puck back to Svechnikov at the top of the circles. With the goal, Carolina improved to 5-0 on the road and 5-0 in overtime in the postseason. The Hurricanes are the fourth team in NHL history to win their first five overtime games in a single postseason.

The Canadiens looked to take a 3-2 lead at 8:28 of the third period when a Noah Dobson pass to a wide-open Juraj Slafkovský on the doorstep was tipped between Andersen's legs by a diving Nikolaj Ehlers, the overtime hero from Game 2. Brind'Amour immediately challenged for offside on the entry, and replays showed Caufield had entered the zone a fraction of a second before securing the puck at 7:59 of the third, 29 seconds before the goal was scored.

In the Eastern Conference final for the third time in four seasons and seeking their first Stanley Cup final appearance since 2006, Carolina will have an opportunity to take a 3-1 series lead in Wednesday's Game 4 at the Bell Centre. The Canadiens, meanwhile, will look to stay alive.

Hurricanes like to live dangerously

The Hurricanes controlled overtime beyond the shot clock, totaling four high-danger chances to Montreal's none. Nothing about the result was surprising — Carolina tends to dominate puck possession in close games before ultimately winning them. They've now done so consecutively against Montreal, as Game 2 was also a 3-2 Carolina overtime victory. It's a risky way to live — the Hurricanes, in some ways, are two fluky bounces away from being down 3-0, despite all that shot volume — but they're more than OK with it.

"(Brind'Amour) came in (after the third period) and said, 'We got them where we want them,'" Hurricanes winger Taylor Hall said. "It's about stepping on the gas. You don't feel sorry for yourself that the game hasn't finished the way you want to. Sometimes it's going to take that.

"In all those (overtime games), we feel like we've had control, and I think for every overtime except (a Game 2 win over Philadelphia in the second round), we controlled play. We don't have to change a lot. We feel like we're fresher and that's gonna help us in the end." — Gentille

Carolina's core fourth line

The Hurricanes' fourth line of Mark Jankowski, William Carrier and Eric Robinson gave them 14 productive, puck-controlling minutes across the first two games, and that carried over to Monday night, particularly in the first period. In a sequence that started with about 11:40 remaining, Carrier won a battle in the corner to Dobeš' right and pushed the puck back to Jankowski, who flicked it toward Shayne Gostisbehere for a shot from the slot that put Carolina up 1-0.

As has often been the case, Carrier's dirty-work contribution stood out. Robinson referred to him as "a horse" after Game 2, and Jankowski said he was "made for" playoff hockey.

The goal was the third the Hurricanes scored with all three forwards on the ice vs. zero allowed — a number that doesn't account for Nikolaj Ehlers' overtime winner in Game 2, which came off a setup by Jankowski. Carolina continues to need more from its skill players, but major contributions from the bottom of the lineup have provided a nice bit of insulation. — Gentille

Canadiens' recipe missing an ingredient

Slafkovský was asked Monday morning how his team can generate more shots against the aggressively swarming Hurricanes, and he did not seem overly concerned.

He was addressing the media after a team meeting, and suggested that the meeting had just addressed this very problem, without getting into specifics. He noted the Canadiens had enough skill to generate more shots. He said the Canadiens had a recipe for that.

Through two periods at least, the recipe was missing a key ingredient: shots.

Through 40 minutes of Game 2 in Carolina, the Canadiens had five shots on goal.

Through 40 minutes of Game 3 on home ice, the Canadiens had 11. They added one more in the third period to finish with 12 in regulation time, the exact same total they had in Game 2.

"We should be having more volume. We'll work on that," Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis said.

One interesting thing St. Louis mentioned on the day between Games 2 and 3 is how the biggest mental challenge in facing the Hurricanes is accepting the fact your team will be outshot simply because of how the Hurricanes play. There is almost no way around it. The challenge is not to get overly caught up in that shot disparity.

It is a reality the Canadiens will simply need to get accustomed to in this series. — Basu

Hutson tallies on the PP to end drought

With the Canadiens trailing and getting beat up on the shot clock, it took some individual magic from their top players to record the series' first power-play goal — by either team — early in the second.

After Carolina PP1 mainstay Jordan Martinook went off for slashing the stick out of Lane Hutson's hand in front of the net, it was Hutson who delivered, finishing off a pretty play that started in their own end. With Cole Caufield managing the entry and catching the Hurricanes off-guard,



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it opened space for Hutson to slip in untouched behind the defender for a tap-in to tie things at two.

It was his first point of the series and extended his NHL lead to 10 points on the man advantage this postseason. Hutson, 22, is just the fourth defenseman in Canadiens history to hit the 15-point mark in a single postseason.

"That was probably our best second period in a long time," St. Louis said. "We played fast. We scored a big PP goal. We defended better. I felt like probably for a good period we put it all together."

Dobson said Monday morning that with how aggressively the Hurricanes defend their blue line, Montreal would need to find different ways to enter. Having Caufield manage the entry was clearly one of those ways to change things up.

With five-on-five play so lopsided so far in the series, the power play is going to be vital for Montreal (and Hutson) to create offense — as they did earlier in the postseason.

"He's an electric player," Martinook said of Hutson. "We obviously worry about him when he's on the ice and you definitely try to stay as close to him as possible because he can make you look silly." — Mirtle and Basu

St. Louis gets Suzuki away from Staal

One of the big developments in Game 2 of the series was Hurricanes coach Rob Brind'Amour assigning captain Jordan Staal to face Canadiens captain Nick Suzuki at five-on-five. Staal's line with Martinook and Ehlers was very effective at it.

After the game, when asked about it, St. Louis said he didn't get too caught up in trying to get Suzuki's line with Caufield and Slafkovsky away from that matchup.

He certainly did in Game 3.

Controlling the matchups with last change, St. Louis deployed Suzuki primarily against Sebastian Aho, which was Suzuki's primary matchup in Game 1 when his line produced two five-on-five goals.

Going back to that matchup was not quite as impactful in Game 3, but it showed a willingness from St. Louis to help his top line get away from a matchup that was not favorable, something he did far less of when Suzuki was facing Anthony Cirelli against the Tampa Bay Lightning in Round 1. — Basu

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1392270 Carolina Hurricanes

NHL conference finals: 3 lessons to learn from each team (plus what to avoid)

Sean McIndoe 12-15 minutes 25/05/2026

We're five weeks into the playoffs. Do you know who your favorite team will be copying?

If not, you will soon. This is the time of year where we're constantly reminded that the NHL is a copycat league, one where the teams that have success establish the blueprint for everyone else. This year, that's the Montreal Canadiens, Carolina Hurricanes, Colorado Avalanche and Vegas Golden Knights.

But while the copying might be inevitable, the lessons the other 28 teams learn from the four winners are still to be determined. That's where we come in. Every now and then, we try to nudge all those copycats towards

answers that make the league more fun, not less. After all, the NHL is an entertainment product. And while winning is more entertaining than losing, we'd rather see teams do that by being fun.

So today, we're going to look at all four conference finalists and try to highlight three lessons from each that we wouldn't mind seeing everyone else copy. And we'll also find one lesson we really hope doesn't catch on.

Vegas Golden Knights

Fun lesson 1: Always be big-game hunting

We all know the deal by now, because it's become the Vegas trademark. Somewhere in the league, a star player becomes available. We all makes jokes about the Golden Knights landing them, which are funny because the team actually has no cap space and/or assets to actually make it happen. Then the star player ends up in Vegas anyway, and we all wonder why our teams can't do that.

Does it get annoying after a while? If you're a fan of another team, sure. But the league would be a lot more fun if every team took the Vegas approach, instead of the patient, low-risk, long-term view most seem to favor.

Fun lesson 2: Go ahead and change coaches at the last minute

I went back and forth on including this one. Is seeing a team switch coaches so late in the season actually fun, or was it just weird? Either way, the fact that the Islanders followed suit might suggest we should get used to this move, which had never really been in anyone's playbook that wasn't Lou Lamoriello.

Fun lesson 3: The draft isn't everything

The draft is fun. That's especially true if your team has some picks to work with, and maybe a track record of hitting on them. But if they don't, the draft — or at least the talk about how it's the only way to build — can be a bummer.

The Knights are a reminder it doesn't have to be that way. In their eight drafts, you could argue they've one really knocked one pick out of the park, and that guy never played a game for them. The rest of their history is a whole bunch of whiffs, mixed in with a few dribblers and some occasional solid contact.

Is that the way to build a contender? Not for most teams, but it's nice to remember there's more than one path.

And one lesson to avoid: Be jerks

That might be a little bit over-the-top, and I'll grant you there's a fine line between wishing more teams took the win-at-all-costs approach while scolding them for how they go about it.

But whether it's potentially tampering with UFAs or the controversial signing of Carter Hart or refusing to meet their media obligations or whatever's going on with Bruce Cassidy, at some point you start to wonder if there isn't a line somewhere. Would you feel differently if it was your team? Probably, because all fans are hypocrites that way, at least to an extent. But man, this is becoming a tough team to root for.

Colorado Avalanche

Fun lesson 1: Goaltending isn't unsolvable

It's the most important position in hockey, and also the most unpredictable. And as a fan, it's tempting to conclude that if you don't have one of the two or three truly elite guys, you're just left hoping whoever you do have is going to get hot at the right time. And since those two or three elite guys are never available, everyone else has to just resign themselves to being at the mercy of the random number generator in their crease.



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Then you have the Avalanche. A season ago, they had lousy goaltending. That was bad. So they went out and made a pair of trades and got better goaltending.

It sounds simple. It is simple. But it's worth remembering the next time some GM somewhere shrugs and tells you goaltending is too hard to fix. Smart teams can do it, and do it successfully. (We think.)

Fun lesson 2: The regular season can still matter

Every hockey fan knows the feeling that can hang over the NHL's regular season, where we spend six months analyzing every game while wondering if any of it will actually matter. Some years, it feels like the only point to the season is dividing the league into two halves: the playoff teams and the playoff misses. Beyond that, once you get to the playoffs it's all chaos. Fun chaos, sure, but also the kind that makes November feel kind of pointless.

This year's Avalanche are a reminder that it doesn't always turn out that way. In a year where three Central teams were fighting for top spot in the conference, the Avs pulled away from the pack. Their reward: starting the playoffs with the equivalent of a first-round bye, followed by a meeting with a good but tired Minnesota Wild team where the extra rest could have been a deciding factor.

That's how it's supposed to work. And sometimes it does. Remember that next winter when you're wondering how much the dog days actually matter.

Fun lesson 3: Second stints are fun

Sports fans love a good reunion story. I remember growing up as a Blue Jays fan, looking forward to the annual Tony Fernandez acquisition that signaled the season was getting serious. Most teams around the sports world have their guy who fits that storyline.

And sure, sometimes — maybe even most of the time — these kinds of moves don't work, because a beloved player is too old or the dynamic has shifted. But when it does work, retreads become a fun combination of nostalgia for the past and excitement for the future.

In a year where our other conference finalists largely sat out the deadline, the Avs went out and brought back Nazem Kadri. He's been good-but-not-great so far, but there's still time for him to join the list of second-stint success stories.

And one lesson to avoid: Keep the same coach for a decade

OK, technically Jared Bednar still has a few months before he hits the ten-year mark. But he's the second-longest-serving coach in the league, behind only Jon Cooper. And he highlights an interesting dynamic in this year's final four, which features three of the four longest-serving coaches in the league, plus one who showed up at the very last minute.

The occasional forever-coach can be fun — if they can earn it with sustained success. Bednar (and Cooper) can check that box. But most coaches can't, which is why keeping the same one for too long can be riskier than biting the bullet and making a change that needs to be made.

Montreal Canadiens

Fun lesson 1: Rebuilds aren't forever

They don't even have to be the traditional five-year project, at least in the way so many modern GMs mean it where we're told we have to wait that long to see any progress whatsoever. Instead, the Habs have pulled off what Mirtle argues may be one of the best short-term rebuilds we've seen. It's hard to argue.

That doesn't mean it's easy. But it does mean fans shouldn't be expected to tune out for a half-decade or more just because rebuilds have to take forever. They clearly don't.

Fun lesson 2: Picks can be ammo

This lesson is related to the last, but deserves its own mention. With most rebuilds, we end up seeing teams stockpile picks as part of the teardown phase. But those same teams are often reluctant to do anything with those picks other than use them, and then wait years for the players they draft to have an impact (if they ever do).

That can work, but it's not always an especially exciting process to watch play out. And the Habs are a reminder that just because you have a bunch of picks doesn't mean you have to use them. Instead, Montreal has been willing move picks for more immediate help, like Noah Dobson, Kirby Dach and Game 7 hero Alex Newhook.

All of those players were young enough that the Canadiens were still making the moves with an eye towards the future. But yes, there are options other than sitting back and waiting (and waiting and waiting) for a cupboard full of picks to pay off. Timing matters, and sometimes moving those picks — even firsts — can make sense for a rebuilding team.

Fun lesson 3: You don't just have to keep hiring the same dozen coaches

As a fan, I don't mind seeing guys like John Tortorella and Rick Bowness make their way around the league, because there's something to be said for the veteran coach who becomes one of the league's recurring characters. But at some point, you have to welcome some new blood. And seeing a team go off the board can be fun ... when it works.

It's worked in Montreal, where Martin St. Louis went from coaching his kids to the NHL. I'll admit that when the move was announced, I wasn't sold. I was wrong. If anything, I don't think we're appreciating the job St. Louis has done enough. And it's entirely possible the Canadiens wouldn't be where they are today if they'd just hired Michel Therrien or Claude Julien for the seventh time.

And one lesson to avoid: Skip the trade deadline

In the cap era, trade deadline day has often felt like it was on life support as a league full of GMs struggled to pull off major midseason moves. It didn't help when we saw teams like the 2018 Washington Capitals and 2019 St. Louis Blues all but sit out the deadline and still win, so it was a relief to see deadline deals like Artturi Lehkonen to Colorado and Brad Marchand to Florida pay off in recent years.

This year, we may be in rough shape. Of the four teams left, only Colorado did much of anything at this year's deadline. That's bad news for deadline fans hoping to keep some of that recent momentum, and good news for timid GMs who want their fan bases to think taking it easy is the right strategy.

Carolina Hurricanes

Fun lesson 1: Big swings can pay off, even if you miss

In today's risk-averse NHL, it often feels like the first question any team asks when there's an opportunity to do anything interesting is "But what if it doesn't work?"

This year's Hurricanes are providing a fun answer to that question: OK, so what if it doesn't?

They took a big swing last year when they acquired Mikko Rantanen, with the intent of making him a long-term piece. He didn't want that. It didn't work. So they pivoted, sent him to Dallas, and are watching Logan Stankoven have the sort of playoff breakout fans dream about.

Smart teams have a Plan B. And that allows them to go after a Plan A while other teams are talking themselves out of doing anything at all.

Fun lesson 2: Sometimes, an aging former star can rediscover their spark

It's always a fun story when it plays out in the sports world. But we don't see it often in hockey these days, especially once we all decided a player's prime ends around 25 and it's all downhill from there.



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So it's kind of cool to see Taylor Hall emerge as a major story in this year's playoffs, almost a decade after his MVP season and well past the point where he'd seemingly flipped to the journeyman's script. Now the next time your favorite team brings in a known name on the wrong side of 30, you'll at least be able to pretend it could work, instead of immediately assuming their knees will turn to sawdust after three shifts.

Fun lesson 3: Giving the job to the ex-player can work

NHL teams love to bring back a former star, whether it's as coach or GM or presidents or whatever else. Whether it's Mats Sundin or Steve Yzerman or Rick Tocchet or Danny Briere or Craig Conroy or the Sedin twins or whoever else, we see it all the time.

And it's not hard to be cynical about that kind of move, because there's a pretty transparent PR element to each hire. You remember this guy, teams often seem to be saying. You had a poster of him in your bedroom when you were a kid.

Usually, it doesn't work. Sometimes it fails spectacularly. And when that happens, we can all say "I told you so."

But the twist here is that it's more fun when it does work. And there may not be a better example than Carolina's Rod Brind'Amour, quite possibly the best coach in the league for the last half-decade. And even if he's the exception that proves the rule, even in Carolina, it's more fun for fans when we can pretend these hires have a chance.

And one lesson to avoid: Have a cheap owner

OK, "cheap" is a bit of a loaded word, especially in a league where the cap floor is \$70 million. But it's fair to say Tom Dundon has a reputation for being frugal, as NBA fans are finding out. For the most part, it's hard to argue with the success he'd had in Carolina, which isn't exactly the league's biggest market, even as the team spends well under the ceiling.

If it works in Carolina, great. Just hope your team's owner doesn't start pointing at the Hurricanes as justification for pinching pennies.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.26.2026

1392271 Carolina Hurricanes

How the Hurricanes are using speed, skill and physicality to change the narrative

Cory Lavalette 6-7 minutes 25/05/2026

RALEIGH, N.C. — On the surface, the Carolina Hurricanes' Game 2 win over the Montreal Canadiens looked very familiar.

Carolina got out to an early lead, limited Montreal's opportunities and cycled four lines, exhibiting a better example of "Hurricanes hockey" than the team showed in Thursday's dreadful Game 1.

The Canadiens, true to their reputation, were unflappable and opportunistic, waiting for a chance to pounce in a game they were being grossly outplayed. That came with 7:09 left in regulation when Josh Anderson evened the score at 2-2 with his second goal of the night, forcing overtime.

The narratives were stacked against the Hurricanes. Their Eastern Conference final struggles date back to 2009. Their reputation as a team that won't push back when the going gets tough, either physically or mentally. Their all-for-one, one-for-all mentality that eschews individual skill and creativity, limiting dynamic, game-changing plays.

And all those things give people feelings about the Hurricanes — ones that pundits, the team's fans, opposing observers and perhaps even some in the Carolina organization think are justified, given the evidence.

Nikolaj Ehlers' game-winning goal, a dazzling display of speed and opportunism, was different.

Frankly, so is a lot about these Hurricanes.

You don't have to search far to find someone calling the Hurricanes "boring." The team's critics check off the same boxes when making their argument — "there's no superstar" or "they just dump and chase" show up frequently.

Ehlers silenced those narratives in two plays Saturday.

His second-period goal, a twisting, turning, partially stumbling play with a spinning shot, is exactly the type of dynamism Carolina expected when it signed the player teammates call Fly to a lucrative six-year contract last summer.

Is Ehlers a superstar? Perhaps not. Is he capable of superstar plays? Clearly.

Then early in overtime, Ehlers turned his nose up at the idea that the Hurricanes are only a forechecking team.

He took a one-touch pass from Mark Jankowski in the neutral zone and cruised into the Montreal zone, not hesitating to shoot even though Canadiens goalie Jakub Dobeš had ventured far out of his crease to limit Ehlers' shooting angle.

It didn't matter. Ehlers leaned heavily on his stick, using all its flex, and snapped the shot past Dobeš' blocker side to send the series to Montreal even at a game apiece.

No dump. No chase. All skill.

"You could see it right from as soon as he got here, Day 1," Jankowski said after the win. "I mean, he's a special player. He's so fast, he's so skilled. Easiest assist of my life on that one: just poke it to him in the neutral zone, let him do the rest. It's awesome to be able to watch someone like that."

Sportlogiq's Mike Kelly has been quick to point out that since adding Ehlers, Carolina has become the NHL's most dynamic rush team, leading the league in goals scored in that manner.

"It just makes you that much tougher to play against," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said of Ehlers' speed and skill. "We don't have to change our game, but we added a piece in there. And now, all of a sudden, I think we're more explosive. ... It's tight, and we needed that goal. He's got the ability to do it himself. That's what happened. Obviously, that's pretty important."

The Hurricanes have also flipped the conversation on whether they're willing and able to meet the physicality of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Two summers ago, Carolina added William Carrier, one of the NHL's more rugged north-south players. Carrier ranks in the top 20 in the league in hits per game since 2020-21, and he's continued that with the Hurricanes. He is fifth in hits this postseason with 55, and his 32.35 hits per 60 are the most of any everyday player remaining in the playoffs.

But it's not just Carrier this season.

Taylor Hall has made enemies in two provinces and Pennsylvania with big hits that critics called dirty. His hits in consecutive Game 3s on Jake Sanderson and Travis Sanheim sparked the vitriol of Ottawa Senators and Philadelphia Flyers fans, and his finish on Lane Hutson in Game 2 left Montreal's star defenseman limping after he tried to avoid the check and absorbed it with his leg. Hall received only one penalty on the three plays, which all left the defensemen banged up.



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What has perhaps been most impressive is that the Hurricanes are being physical even though they're usually the team with a decided edge in possession. Carolina leads the playoffs in offensive-zone time possession at 46.7 percent, according to NHL EDGE, yet leads the four remaining playoff teams in hits per 60 at 34.91.

In Game 2 against the Canadiens, Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal matched a career playoff high with 10 hits. That fueled Carolina's eye-popping edge: The Hurricanes outhit Montreal 46-16 in the game despite having the puck much of the night.

Staal said Carolina has made a concerted effort to up its physicality this postseason.

"It's something we talked about," Staal said Sunday. "You want to make it a long series for the other team, and taking chunks out of them every game is important. I think the guys have done a much better job this playoff on staying physical on the other team."

Brind'Amour doesn't take much stock in numbers — he just wants his team to play to its identity, which he says includes being physical.

"That's part of our makeup," the coach said Sunday. "We've got to finish checks — that's Will Carrier's game. I think him and (Staal) had, what, 11 last night? (It was 15.) That's a big bulk of that process. Those are all little things that — they add up. But if that's part of our identity, then we need to do it."

It's an identity not many casual observers have yet assigned to Carolina. But with each rush goal, each big hit and every win that gets them closer to the Stanley Cup final, the Hurricanes have a chance to change the narrative.

"We believe in our team," Jankowski said. "We believe in what we can bring. And when we play our game and we play our best, we can compete with anyone."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.26.2026

1392329 Websites

The Athletic / Scouts and execs project 2026 NHL Draft's top 10: Who goes after Gavin McKenna?

Corey Pronman5-6 minutes 25/05/2026

As we inch closer to the 2026 NHL Draft, I surveyed six NHL scouts and executives to get a better sense of how the top of the board might actually unfold. I didn't ask them for their personal player rankings; instead, I asked them to put on their general manager hats and project how they see the top-10 picks shaking out.

Here's the consensus pick at each spot based on the lists they provided to The Athletic. A table showing the full panel results is located at the bottom of the story.

1. Toronto Maple Leafs: Gavin McKenna, LW, Penn State (NCAA)

While predicting McKenna to go first feels like a foregone conclusion, the industry isn't completely sold that he's the undisputed best player in the class. Of the evaluators I polled, three of the six didn't have McKenna at No. 1 on their personal list, and more than one didn't have him in their top two, even if every single one of them projects Toronto to take him. One evaluator preferred Ivar Stenberg, one had Caleb Malhotra and one said he was split between defensemen Chase Reid and Alberts Smits. The rationale for a lot of the voters is simply that McKenna fits at No. 1 as a player, and with his pedigree, it would be highly controversial for Toronto not to take him.

2. San Jose Sharks: Chase Reid, D, Sault Ste. Marie (OHL)

Every evaluator gave Reid to the Sharks. The rationale here was straightforward: he fits the profile as the best defenseman in the draft and has the premium potential to run a first power-play unit. Beyond his pure talent, the scouts pointed to the Sharks' desperate need for a high-end defenseman in their rebuild, especially given the tight, close group of prospects available in this tier of the draft. Like McKenna, not everyone had Reid as a top-two prospect in the draft on their personal list, but most had him either in that range or very close to it.

3. Vancouver Canucks: Caleb Malhotra, C, Brantford (OHL)

Almost every evaluator projected Malhotra to the Canucks, except for one scout who opted for North Dakota defenseman Keaton Verhoeff. Said one league source: "They are basically starting from scratch, and I would start that rebuild with a top-two-line center who projects to play a lot of important minutes."

4. Chicago Blackhawks: Ivar Stenberg, LW, Frölunda (SHL)

It has been a bit controversial in public mock drafts to project Stenberg to Chicago, but that is exactly how most NHL evaluators see the draft going — even if some (but not all) of them personally have Stenberg rated higher than No. 4 on their own boards. The slip for Stenberg here is less about his elite talent and more about positional premiums at the top of the draft. "Defense and centers always end up going higher than people expect," said one source, explaining why teams might prioritize those positions over a winger.

5. New York Rangers: Keaton Verhoeff, D, North Dakota (NCAA)

The Rangers' selection had a ton of variety. In fact, they got one vote for five different players from the evaluators surveyed. We ultimately land on Verhoeff here, a big, two-way defenseman toolkit who fits the mold of what the Rangers have tended to covet.

6. Calgary Flames: Carson Carels, D, Prince George (WHL)

Almost everyone expects Calgary to take a two-way defenseman at this spot, and Carels may not even last this long. As one evaluator noted when comparing Carels and Verhoeff to the Latvian-born Alberts Smits: "There's certainly pressure there to take Canadians if it's close."

7. Seattle Kraken: Alberts Smits, D, Jukurit (Liiga)

Seattle unanimously had a defenseman projected to them by the panel. This is in part due to the sheer strength of this part of the draft being on the blue line, but it also perfectly aligns with Seattle's glaring need for premium defensemen in their prospect pipeline. Smits brings a massive, physical presence that NHL front offices salivate over.

8. Winnipeg Jets: Daxon Rudolph, D, Prince Albert (WHL)

Continuing the run on defensemen is Rudolph to Winnipeg at No. 8. Some evaluators wondered if the Jets could break the run and go center here, with one source thinking Boston University's Tynan Lawrence would make a lot of sense for them. We end up giving them Rudolph, the highly intelligent right-shot defenseman with NHL size who has absolutely lit up the WHL this season.

9. Florida Panthers: Malte Gustafsson, D, HV71 (SHL)

This was another incredibly close vote for the No. 9 spot with Florida. The slight lean went to the fast-rising Gustafsson, who helped his case to go in the top 10 following his sterling U18 World Championships. There was also a lot of support at this pick for forward Wyatt Cullen; evaluators noted he belongs here purely on value, and highlighted the Panthers' need for some high-end offensive skill in their pipeline.

10. Nashville Predators: Tynan Lawrence, C, Boston University (NCAA)

The top 10 ends with Lawrence to Nashville. Drafting him after selecting Brady Martin recently would be slightly redundant for the Predators'



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pipeline, but Lawrence provides more speed than Martin. Evaluators view Lawrence as more of a pure center, and while he's not as physical, his high-end skating makes him an ideal fit to round out the top 10.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.26.2026

1392330 Websites

ESPN / Hurricanes-Canadiens Game 3 takeaways, grades, early look at Game 4 - ESPN

Greg Wyshynski

The Carolina Hurricanes took a 2-1 series lead in the Eastern Conference finals over the Montreal Canadiens with a 3-2 overtime win Monday night in Montreal. It marked the first time that the Hurricanes have led a conference finals series in coach Rod Brind'amour's four trips to the NHL's penultimate round.

What happened to the Canadiens in their emotional return to Bell Centre? How have the Hurricanes taken over the series? Who are the players to watch in the next game, and what are the big questions facing the Hurricanes and Canadiens ahead of Game 4 on Wednesday?

Carolina Hurricanes

Grade: A-

Five overtime games in the playoffs and five overtime victories, including back-to-back wins against the Canadiens. When the Hurricanes said it was going to be different in Brind'amour's fourth trip to the conference final, this is what they were talking about.

Think back to the 2023 conference finals when Carolina lost the first two games on its series against the Florida Panthers in overtime -- the first one going four extra sessions. They Hurricanes couldn't find a hero in those games. But in Game 2, Nikolaj Ehlers took the role. In Game 3, it was the Sebastian Aho line, with Andrei Svechnikov -- one of those players who struggled to score in the clutch in previous runs -- netting the winner on a perfect screen from Aho.

Big picture, the Hurricanes are really starting to see the benefit of their 11-day playoff layoff between the second round and the conference finals. They've had a 123-87 shot attempt advantage and 55-33 in scoring chances at 5-on-5 in the past two games. The Canadiens, who played seven games in their two previous series, lacked jump as the overtime progressed.

It was a huge win for the Hurricanes if past history is any indication. Teams with a 2-1 lead in a best-of-seven playoff round have gone on to win the series 69% of the time, and that jumps to 77% in the conference finals or semifinals.

Montreal Canadiens

Grade: C

First off, give credit where it's due to the Canadiens for getting this game to overtime, where one bounce could have flipped the narrative of this series. But they didn't get that bounce for a second straight game, and as a result the series is trending away from them.

Carolina is controlling play at 5-on-5, as Montreal could muster only 13 shots on goal in a game that went to 14:06 of overtime. For the second straight game, the Hurricanes limited the number of stretch passes the Canadiens could complete to power their offense, and Montreal couldn't find another way to generate more than one 5-on-5 goal.

The Habs' execution was off, from Cole Caufield being offside to nullify Noah Dobson's goal in the third period to the blatant penalty for too many men on the ice that Montreal was extremely fortunate wasn't called.

The Canadiens have found a way to generate more chances. One shot in the third period and one shot in overtime simply can't happen in a game of this magnitude. And when they do get their chances, the Canadiens' top scorers have to start finishing them with more efficiency or their run could end in Raleigh.

Players to watch in Game 3

Logan Stankoven

C, Hurricanes

The line of Stankoven, Jackson Blake and Taylor Hall finally broke through against Montreal in Game 3 on Hall's first-period goal. That's great news for the Hurricanes, who rolled to eight straight wins to start the playoffs thanks in part to that potent trio. But though Hall hit the board, Stankoven has only one goal and no assists in his past six games -- and that was after scoring six goals in his first five playoff games. The Hurricanes need to get this line rolling offensively again to win this series and match up against either of the depth-blessed titans of the West.

The good news: They were impactful in Game 3 with 65.7% of the shot attempts and a plus-9 in scoring chances. It's only a matter of time for Stankoven.

Nick Suzuki

C, Canadiens

Once more, with feeling: As Suzuki goes, so go the Canadiens. In their nine playoff wins, he has 13 points. With zero points and a minus-1 in Game 3, Suzuki has only one goal and two assists in their eight playoff losses. He made some specious decisions in the Game 3 loss, such as when he chose to whip a low probability pass to Caufield instead of shooting the puck. Suzuki also had the game on his stick during an overtime breakaway and missed the net.

They really, really need him to be better.

Big questions for Game 4

Is Aho finally cooking?

Aho has been one of the Hurricanes' most consistent playoff performers. Since 2019, he has been at 0.79 points per game or better every postseason -- including three runs in which he was a point-per-game performer. But he entered Game 3 with only three goals and five assists in 10 games, easily the lowest offensive output of his playoff career. Whether it's Svechnikov and Seth Jarvis not converting Aho setups or Aho not converting the chances they're creating, something's not working with the top line.

More concerning, Aho has only one power-play point in the postseason, an assist in Game 3 against the Flyers, despite averaging the most power-play time (4:27) of his playoff career. The Hurricanes' futility on the power play (0-for-8 vs. Montreal) has been one of their most glaring deficiencies in this series.

All that established: Aho was all over the ice in Game 3, just missing on a couple of high-danger chances and nearly setting up several goals himself. In overtime, Svechnikov's shot found the net with Aho setting a perfect screen in front of Montreal goalie Jakub Dobes.

Is this the kind of game to launch Aho and his linemates?

Can Dobes be the series savior?

Game 3 marked the first time in the Stanley Cup playoffs that the Canadiens have lost back-to-back games, which means it's the first time



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Dobes has lost back-to-back games in the playoffs. In fact, it's only the second time he has lost back-to-back games in this calendar year.

It wasn't for a lack of trying: Dobes made 35 saves in Game 3 and was absolutely brilliant in a game that saw Carolina have a 15-4 advantage in high-danger shot attempts. Dobes had 2.66 goals saved above expected against Carolina. The Canadiens have relied on Dobes as their backbone this postseason and he has answered the call every time. It's hard to imagine him giving more than he already has to Montreal, but given Carolina's momentum, its overwhelming offensive pressure and the moment facing his team, he might need to find yet another level.

ESPN LOADED: 05.26.2026

1392331 Websites

ESPN / Generations of Canadiens fans loving this playoff run: 'Every win is magical' - ESPN

Chuck Culpepper

MONTREAL -- Consider some of Earth's utmost cases of a civic euphoria spawned from the peerless force of sports. Daydream of Paris on the night of Sunday, July 12, 1998, just after the happy shock of France 3, Brazil 0. Think of Philadelphia on Feb. 4, 2018 (Super Bowl LII), or the gigantic Mumbai on April 2, 2011 (Cricket World Cup), or, best yet, Johannesburg on June 24, 1995, and a stadium boasting both a Rugby World Cup final and Nelson Mandela.

Now, wander into Montreal in May 2026 and find a monthlong rival to all of the above, a great city gone greater, as if its bloodstream long filled with little Canadiens logos has imported a fresh dose of electricity. Hear one of the world's great sounds on a Monday night as it whooshes outward and upward from an arena where 21,000 people have gone for a Game 7 watch party and know an overtime goal has occurred even before the broadcast you're watching has finished its several-second delay. Hear one of the world's great non-sounds while hopscoching through 12 bars in four neighborhoods during a Game 1 on a Thursday night: that of pubs packed with people so immersed that the only sound is the low hum of the play-by-play coming from all the screens.

Feel Montreal as the place-to-be on Earth right now, as its magic feelings include something it seldom got to feel while it won a peerless 24 Stanley Cups including an absurd 18 of the 41 between 1953 and 1993: surprise. Watch it exhibit love for an irresistible youngest team in the league that supposedly had this kind of push earmarked for later in its multiseason agenda. Instead, this team has pushed all the way to a giddy Game 3 in the Eastern Conference finals, tied 1-1 entering Monday night's home contest against Carolina. And this team has won Game 7s in the opposing arenas of Tampa and Buffalo, in two wild series where the home teams spent Games 4 through 7 going a combined 0-8. See the Habs flags rippling from the car windows, the "Go Habs Go" on the electronic signs of city buses, and, good grief, the giant banner newly ringing the air traffic control tower at the airport. (Get a window seat!) Stand at a single corner on a Saturday evening amid jerseys marked HUTSON, SUZUKI, CAUFIELD, GALLAGHER, SLAFKOVSKY, PRICE (throwback!), another HUTSON, another SUZUKI.

Pass a hotel with a wedding during Game 2, the valet parking marked for "Sara and Charles" -- congratulations! -- and overhear one valet say to another, "It's 1-1 right now." Hear the podcaster and writer Brendan Kelly, the author of "Habs Nation: A People's History of the Montreal Canadiens," as he says, "You know what? The thing is, I've been saying" -- to pushback from some wrinkled sorts -- "I really think there's more excitement than there ever has been about a Habs playoff run." And know the whole goose-bumpy moment rings with one of the most

enduring, endearing aspects of sports, how fandom is passed down family trees from generation to generation, and how in sports, when you were born mandates what you have seen.

WHEN WERE YOU BORN? If you're a Montrealer and the answer is 1988 or later, you probably don't remember even one Cup, which calls to mind another thing coursing through that bloodstream alongside the merriment and the beer: the hint of the end of a drought now yawning at 33 springs. Those 33 include 13 playoffs missed altogether and 10 first-series exits, with only four conference finals (including this one) and one Stanley Cup Final (but amid the oddities of the COVID-19 season of 2021). Yet even as you've beheld zero Cups, you seem to know the meaning of the history of a team felt as deeply as deeply felt gets, and you know it probably better than any young fans anywhere know any history that precedes their births. "It was much bigger than the sport," Montrealer Nicholas Bergeron, 35, said of way back in the middle of the last century when French Canadians, so outnumbered on a continent, got tired of being bossed and belittled by the Anglos. "Even though this was 50, 60, 70 years ago, these things are still felt. People know about this. The lore was passed down. It's more than hockey history at this point. ... That knowledge has been hammered for years. I think everybody knows that everybody knows the history." He gathered it mostly from his late grandfather, Jacques Laurin, a non-loquacious man who coached Nicholas through the atom, peewee, bantam and midget levels until Nicholas grew up to say of him, "I think he would be delighted with these young players."

Lukas Drouin, born in 1988, with "zero" memories of the 1993 Cup, used to hear from his father about 1955, about how the league's suspension of Maurice "Rocket" Richard for the remainder of a season helped birth a riot, a movement and a dynasty. Among Drouin's early vivid memories are Game 6 with his father in Bell Centre in late April 2002 against Boston in the first round, the wizardly save from goalie Jose Theodore. "It felt like something magical was happening," Drouin said. Now he sat yet again next to his father, Mark, 68, on a Saturday night in Girouard Park in the neighborhood Notre-Dame-de-Grace in the West End, watching a Game 2 overtime loss to Carolina on a huge screen among about 600 like-minded souls who sighed at the end. "And that's what I think everybody's so addicted about now: It feels like it's magical," Lukas Drouin said, "like every win is magical, and it's giving so much energy to the people and the fans."

Melissa Delisle, born in 1999, grew up with a father she called a "huge, huge, huge, huge, huge, huge" hockey person, huge enough that after 1993 he painted his car roof like the ice, with blue lines and faceoff circles and such. She remembers herself as "the only girl playing hockey in the school in the lunchtime," and she tells of the history project she wrote to close secondary school -- about hockey, of course -- and she feels the history flaring again even if technically she can't feel the history at all. She wishes she could see it in her late father's eyes even as in a very real way she can see it in her late father's eyes. "It's happening in every street, every restaurant, cafe, bar, everything, every living room across Montreal and Quebec," she said, soon adding, "Even my grandmother, she called me and she was like, 'Meli, I need a flag to put on my car.'"

Fifty-one years after the writer Mordecai Richler (1931-2001) authored a famous Esquire essay with a sub-headline that called the Canadiens "a spiritual necessity," and long since Mayor Jean Drapeau so famously would say, "The Canadiens' parade will follow the usual route," Sunil Peetush said this: "It truly is a religion. There's a lot to it: There's the political aspect, there's a religious aspect [long intertwined with the Catholic Church], there's the language aspect." It's telltale that Peetush can say such things, for he represents another large strand of the great May 2026: the fan by way of immigration -- or, in his case, the superfan.

Born in Montreal in 1978 to parents who had skipped from India to West Berlin to Canada by 1969, Peetush grasped his first chunk of magic at age 8 in 1986, when a friend and that friend's father took him to that



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particular Cup parade (and usual route). He has gone on to grasp volumes more in knowledge and the whoa amount of memorabilia he keeps in his "HabsCave," with its 500-plus Patrick Roy autographs on various surfaces, its real seats from the old Forum, its astounding collection of sticks, its occasional visits from actual Canadiens. Now all of that passion starts its trip down the generations. With his 13-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son, he said, "I am constantly talking about the history of the team." Lately, as the Czech goalie Jakub Dobes has surged across two seasons from unknown to beloved, came this exchange:

Children: "Did we have Jakub Dobes at our house last year?"

Dad: "Yeah, he was here, spent the afternoon."

"I THINK WHAT'S EXTRAORDINARY HERE," said Kelly, the "Habs Nation" author, "and the buzz is so off-the-charts, is that an entire generation" is getting a turn. Of his 25-year-old son and the son's friends, Kelly said, "They are losing their minds."

They're losing them for a franchise whose legends not only dominated the game but furthered it, as the great sportswriter and Montrealer Michael Farber notes: Jacques Plante with his goalie mask, to Ken Dryden with his thinking, to Patrick Roy with his butterfly technique, to Doug Harvey with his defense, Rocket Richard with his offense, Jean Beliveau from center, Bernie "Boom Boom" Geoffrion with his snap shot. Yet they're also losing it for an infectious team with, as Melissa Delisle puts it, "heart, with grit and kind of a brotherhood you can actually feel." A fanbase long repelled by the word "rebuilding" is loving even the rebuilding itself, as when Peetush says of the team architects, executive vice president Jeff Gorton and general manager Kent Hughes, "They've let us in on their path, their process. They've been honest with us." From a 20th century rich in legends who hailed from Quebec and ratified the competitive value of that biographical detail, through an era of debate about the necessity of having Quebecois players as their number ebbed and the sport itself grew more international, here's a beloved roster with nine nationalities -- and six players born in Quebec.

"One of the reasons this particular team is so well-liked," Farber said, "is the hockey has been dreadfully dull for a while. There's been so much soporific hockey. This team has such skill. A 50-goal scorer [Cole Caufield] for the first time in forever [since Stephane Richer in 1989], a 100-point scorer [Nick Suzuki] for the first time in forever [since Mats Naslund in 1986]. It's exciting hockey, and Montreal fancies itself as a city with flair and style."

And so, says the New Jersey native who became a Montrealer in 1979, Farber: "I don't think I've ever seen this: How many of them are now on commercials, and most of them on French commercials. Suddenly they're everywhere, and before, you just didn't see that. They are all over because they are likable pitchers."

It feels not only like something is great, but that it might stay great. Said Drouin, the one born in 1988, "I'm reading a lot of pieces saying that people from my age never saw greatness from the Habs, and this is like the first, maybe, core [of players] that's promising something great. It's special because our generation, we never had something -- like I read another piece that's saying all the greats that we watched, like [Saku] Koivu, [Alex] Kovalev, [Mike] Cammalleri, [Max] Pacioretty" -- or the beloved P.K. Subban -- "they didn't have those stats like this year: 51 goals, 100 points. The future is bright. And it's so exciting. I'm so excited for the future, and it's really cool to see how this group is growing."

SO BY ALL MEANS, rate Montreal in May 2026 among the notable sports euphorias of the eras, which is not even to mention that it had an F1 race tossed into town this past Sunday, so that every once in a while you'd come across a city block with an F1 car with the fascinated gathered round. See the vivid streams of red attire moving across the green Place du Canada park downtown. Hear the horns honking for hours after a Game 7 overtime whew. Watch the people gush out of their TV-watching party in the arena, so many of the faces unvisited by any

aging process, waiting for street-crossing lights while singing, "Ole, Ole, Ole." Hear the real hope as when Nicholas Bergeron says, "If the Habs win [the Cup], I don't think there's going to be any people in houses."

Note the doorman at the central Peel Pub before a Game 1 against Carolina saying, "You have a reservation? Fully packed." See the McLean's Pub beers of Wembanyama height. Stand outside Ye Olde Orchard Pub and hear the reaction to an opening goal ripple up the sidewalk of Rue de la Montagne. Talk outside Ziggy's Pub to Schubi Joseph, who immigrated from Dominica as a child in 1975 and who wears a vintage jacket he received from a man who got it from a grandmother who said to give it to the first person who complimented it. "I'm the last guy you see [in the parade photo of 1993], little head, that's me," Joseph said.

Go to McKibbin's Irish Pub and hear the mild groan after a goal that narrows a lead from 4-1 to 4-2. Head up to the Le Plateau-Mont-Royal neighborhood and to Barfly, with the Jean Beliveau photo presiding from the left corner inside, and listen to the mild screaming over Carolina threats on the Montreal net. Proceed to the neighborhood bar La Remise on hushed streets and hear the applause at the end of a 6-2 win in a Game 1. Go to Bruno Sport Bar with the aftermath in progress, "Sandstorm!" blasting out through the door, fans in jerseys all over the sidewalk gabbing and then coach Martin St. Louis' postgame news conference audible out there with, "I think we played to our identity tonight."

For a Game 2, hear a woman on the street who doesn't give her name say she prays to Guy Lafleur and add, "This is a chance for us to be together." Make it to the shiny Time Out Market with its humongous screen in the Eaton mall with the 1977 Gilles Villeneuve Ferrari hanging out just down the escalator. Feel happy to inhabit a sporting planet. And then, sweeping across town from the excellent Chez Miller with its Christmas tree lights and its brick walls in The Village to the 600 strong in Girouard Park, listen to Drouin say of his Montreal, "I think for passion and just living life, it's the best city in the world."

Other cities might quibble on some days, but surely not today.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens searching for answers after consecutive losses to Hurricanes

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — Two nights after becoming just the second team in NHL history to have as few as 12 shots in a Stanley Cup Playoffs game that extended beyond regulation time, the Montreal Canadiens generated just 13 and ended up with the same result.

It was a 3-2 overtime loss to the Carolina Hurricanes, who hadn't beaten them all season before responding to Montreal's Game 1 win with a 3-2 overtime win on Saturday.

In both games, the Canadiens were one shot away from winning. In both games, they couldn't find a way to have that shot hit the net, let alone put it in, hence their first consecutive losses in 71 days.

The Canadiens had chances. Heck, they had three of them in overtime before Andrei Svechnikov launched the point shot that tipped off Juraj Slafkovsky 74:04 into the game.

But Nick Suzuki missed the net on a breakaway 35 seconds into the extra period. Mike Matheson shot his into the crossbar 25 seconds later.



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And Alex Newhook's shot through a screen hit Hurricanes goaltender Frederik Andersen's toe and didn't originally count as a shot on net until it was reviewed and added long after Svechnikov ended the game.

Lane Hutson, who got caught between two decisions and made the wrong one on that play, blamed himself twice for the loss, which was sealed shortly after his turnover near his own blue line.

But the Canadiens had a chance to recover from Hutson's gaffe and didn't. And their own mismanagement of the puck near the offensive blue line was the biggest reason they found themselves in overtime to begin with.

"I think we're missing too many chances to get in on the forecheck and go get the puck back," said Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis. "They're a team that is hard to put good pucks in on because they're really on top of you. But you have to find a way. I found that, at the blue line, we didn't read situations well enough. We should've put more pucks deep and gotten in on the forecheck, and there's a balance between possessing on the other side of the blue line and getting it past them and going to get it."

The Canadiens never quite found that balance, with SportLogiq tracking their zone-entry success rate at just 40 per cent.

When the Canadiens got in, St. Louis said he felt they made better plays in possession than they did in Game 2.

But they didn't make enough of them.

"We can still do a better job of holding onto pucks in the offensive zone," said Mike Matheson, "and generating more time in the O-zone."

The task has felt monumental over the last two games.

The Hurricanes, who were disconnected and gave the Canadiens far too much space in a 6-2 Game 1 loss, have rebounded with the same pristine execution that netted them eight consecutive wins before the Eastern Conference Final. They smothered the Ottawa Senators and Philadelphia Flyers, and now they've spent the better part of two games suffocating the Canadiens.

"They've been on top of the league for the last couple of years and you know there's a reason why they've consistently been in this position (The Hurricanes are in their third conference final since 2023)," said Cole Caufield. "You can ask every team; they're a tough team to play and they've been doing it for a while. So, I guess they're all really on the same page and we've just got to find ways to break them down."

On this night, the Canadiens broke themselves down too much.

Giving up 38 shots to the volume-shooting Hurricanes was one thing. Giving them 11 from nine feet or less was a recipe to lose by more than one goal, which assuredly would've happened had Jakub Dobes not conjured miraculous saves.

He made two on Taylor Hall and Logan Stankoven in succession before Svechnikov shot one off Slafkovsky as the Slovak was passing right through his Czech netminder's crease.

"(Dobes has) been great all playoffs. Not surprised," said Hutson. "He battled so hard. It sucks that I blew it for him, but it is what it is."

Taking the blame was a noble gesture from the 22-year-old, but, as St. Louis said afterwards, the outcome of this game wasn't on him.

"I didn't love the play (from Hutson), but whatever," said St. Louis. "It's what's next, and we didn't do what's next. We didn't get the job done."

He was talking about the winning goal, but he just as easily could've been referring to the decisions that led to the Canadiens getting less than 23 minutes of offensive-zone time to take some pressure off themselves and apply it on the Hurricanes.

It's a Herculean lift against a team that has fired on all cylinders for all but one game of these playoffs.

And while the Hurricanes were undoubtedly rusty after an 11-day break between the second round and the third before playing that one game, the Canadiens showed in that one game to what extent they can make that heavy lift.

They pushed in spurts of Games 2 and 3 but wobbled too much to win, even if they were one shot away in each game.

"We definitely have another level," said Hutson.

He and Matheson, who each scored Monday, need to find it. As do the rest of their teammates come Wednesday's Game 4, which will present the Canadiens a chance to even the series 2-2 and improve their playoff home record to 3-5.

It will take everyone playing their best, and much more.

"You need everything working against a team like that," said St. Louis. "You're at this stage right now, you've got to put it all together. Execution's part of that. Jam is part of that. It's not one thing. We've just got to put it all together."

"I know we can. We didn't expect this to be easy, and we're OK with that."

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1392333 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Golden Knights' Marner bulldozing narratives with do-it-all playoffs

Eric Francis

LAS VEGAS – If the Conn Smythe Trophy were handed out today, the engraver wouldn't need to squint, hesitate, or double-check the spelling.

He'd simply carve Mitch Marner - yes, that Mitch Marner - into the silver and call it a night.

Imagine telling a Leafs fan that two years ago. They'd have laughed, cried or thrown a waffle.

But here we are, watching a player once branded as a shrinking violet in springtime suddenly bulldoze the narrative.

And it's happening on the biggest, meanest, most unforgiving stage in the sport: the Stanley Cup Playoffs - the tournament that exposes pretenders, humbles stars and eats reputations for breakfast.

Yet Marner is dining on the pressure.

He leads the post-season in scoring and plus-minus. He kills penalties like he's auditioning for a Selke reel. He's excelled at both centre and wing. He's one shorthanded assist shy of tying Wayne Gretzky's single-spring record of five. He's turned Brett Howden into the NHL's leading playoff goal scorer with 10. He's assisted on two of Howden's three game-winners and has two game-winning goals of his own.

He's doing everything short of driving the Zamboni.

And he's doing it while wearing Vegas gold, not Toronto blue — a detail that continues to send Leafs Nation into emotional convulsions.

Because this isn't just dominance. It's vindication.

For years, Marner was the poster boy for Toronto's playoff failures. A brilliant regular-season talent who, critics insisted, melted under the spotlight. Too soft. Too deferential. Too perimeter. Too... Toronto.



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But the signs of the transformation were already there. He proved it at the 4 Nations. He proved it at the Olympics. And now he's proving it again in the world's most gruelling tournament.

John Tortorella saw it firsthand on the international stage as an American coach, and now as his playoff leader.

"He's one of the best competitors I've coached, as far as just how he goes about it," said Tortorella of the Toronto native with 21 points in 15 games.

"What people don't understand about him is the little things that he does that people don't see. He does it every day. His practice habits are good. I said it last week, the best compliment I can give him is he's a hockey player. He loves playing hockey. He's a very important part to us here."

His teammates in Vegas are seeing the same thing.

Shea Theodore, who has played with Marner at the Olympics, 4 Nations, and now here, didn't hesitate either:

"He's an unbelievable player," he said.

"I think you see what he does with the puck, you see what he does without the puck. He's played in a lot of big games. I think everything I've seen, he's made some really big-time plays, and he's a leader on this team for sure. And it's fun to watch."

It's been a spectacle in a city full of 'em.

And for those out east still clinging to the "he only feasted on patsies in the early rounds" narrative, Marner has spent this Colorado series personally shredding that excuse.

He has led all Vegas forwards in ice time in all three games, had an assist in Game 1, fired 10 shot attempts and played more PK minutes than any forward in Game 2, and in Game 3 had two assists, including deft setups on the first two goals of the team's epic comeback.

He's not just showing up. He's dictating outcomes.

Vegas netminder Carter Hart would certainly garner some Conn Smythe consideration if the vote were held now, as would Jakub Dobeš or maybe even Frederik Andersen.

But assuming the Knights continue their torrid run and complete their improbable turnaround under ol' Torts, Toronto fans may face the most painful scenario imaginable: watching the hometown kid they ran out of town hoist the Cup and the Conn Smythe.

Every move he's made to propel the revitalized Golden Knights to the brink of a monumental upset over Colorado has caused his Hogtown critics endless angst, including his post-game comments Sunday.

"We have an older group as well, that just stays patient and stays calm," said Marner, explaining how they've offered five comeback wins.

"We don't turn on each other, we don't get mad at each other. We know everyone is trying to do their best out there every single shift."

That wasn't a shot.

It was the truth.

But don't tell his detractors that, as they'd rather interpret it as being a shot at the leadership and culture of his former club.

Maybe it was both.

Either way, his play has done well to put him five wins away from changing a narrative that's dogged him for years.

A debate that could very well see an engraver or two get the last word.

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Sportsnet.ca / One big off-season question facing each NHL team eliminated in Round 2

Rory Boylen

The off-season is creeping closer with each passing day, though the Montreal Canadiens, Carolina Hurricanes, Vegas Golden Knights and (barely) Colorado Avalanche still play on toward the Stanley Cup.

But for the 28 other teams, summer planning is well under way as they all look to change or reshape their rosters to come back stronger, knowing that the free agent market is not a deep one to pull talent from in 2026.

So, as we've done with the 16 non-playoff teams, and then the eight franchises eliminated in Round 1, today we take a look at one big off-season question that's facing the four NHL teams that were eliminated in the second round of the playoffs.

Anaheim Ducks: How will Cutter Gauthier's and Leo Carlsson's next contracts trickle down to the rest of the roster?

After a big year of development for the Ducks and their first playoff series win since 2017, GM Pat Verbeek now has a ton of contract extensions to sort through.

On the UFA front there is Jacob Trouba, Radko Gudas and John Carlson, three important veterans and the biggest, most expensive question marks. Up front, Jeffrey Viel who had a good showing in the playoffs and made a case to stick around, will come much cheaper if the Ducks decide to keep him.

But for such a young team, the RFAs are the ones to watch here and these decisions will have ramifications on the roster for years. Defencemen Olen Zellweger and Pavel Mintyukov are coming off their entry-level deals. Either could end up as a tradable asset if an extension becomes an issue and if Verbeek can help the roster elsewhere.

The biggest question about the Ducks this summer, however, is how will the negotiations go with their top goal scorer, Cutter Gauthier, and their top centre, Leo Carlsson.

Both of these players are coming off their entry-level contracts and neither is eligible for arbitration. Only Carlsson would be eligible to receive an offer sheet.

Verbeek is known to take a hard line in contract negotiations with some of his younger players and we've seen several (though not all) negotiations drag out. Mason McTavish, for example, didn't sign his extension until Sept. 27 of last year, so he missed the start of training camp and went on to have the lowest offensive output of his young career.

Now, Carlsson and Gauthier may be different. As the 1C, Carlsson's place in this organization is vitally important, and Gauthier scored 41 goals this season. The two early-20s stars were first and second on the Ducks in regular-season scoring and in playoff scoring.

McTavish's \$7-million AAV extension came after a 22-goal, 52-point campaign, which both Carlsson and Gauthier eclipsed. Currently, \$7 million is the high mark for any Ducks forward, while Jackson LaCombe will start on a \$9-million contract next season. That's notable because he was set to be an RFA as well, but Verbeek got that business done well in advance.

Will Carlsson and Gauthier get their deals extended in short order, or will it drag into the summer? Will they become the two highest-paid players on this team with long-term deals, or will they arrive at some other conclusion?



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After such a great season in which the organization took a big step forward, it would be risky to have either of these players start late at training camp and risk a slow start when the regular season gets going earlier, in September 2026.

There will be two big priorities in Minnesota this summer as GM Bill Guerin looks to bring back an improved team and build on one of the Wild's best seasons yet.

One of those priorities will be to find a No. 1 centre, which is nothing new in these parts. That's been a hole in this lineup for years, and when Joel Eriksson Ek missed the entire Round 2 series against Colorado with injury, it further exposed what they lack down the middle.

That's a big piece of business to figure out, and it could result in another blockbuster trade, should the opportunity arise. But according to Guerin — and to no one's surprise — the top priority this summer is to extend defenceman Quinn Hughes, who the GM made a heck of a gamble to acquire via trade in December.

"These are things that take time," Guerin said. "I think everybody needs time right now to decompress. That's Priority 1."

For Hughes' part, he said all the right things to The Athletic at the end of the season:

"I can say that I really like it here," Hughes said. "I love the team. I love the city and the fans. Just being in that locker room, it's a special group. Would definitely be open to re-signing here with the guys that we have in the room and just the people we have in the room. A lot of trust with Billy, as well, and love (coach John Hynes) and (associate coach Jack Capuano) and the coaching staff."

"I just think it's a great spot, great situation for myself."

Next season will be Hughes' last on his current contract, after which he'd have the option of testing free agency. And there is plenty of speculation that he'd like to play with brothers Luke and Jack, who are signed with New Jersey through the 2031-32 and 2029-30 seasons, respectively. If Quinn did decide to stay in Minnesota, he could sign an extension with them no earlier than this July 1.

But, whether it's re-signing in Minnesota or looking to New Jersey, a huge question around Quinn is what the value of his next contract will be. As one of the top defencemen in the world, he will be in position to set the market at the high end of the position. Currently, the highest-paid defenceman in terms of AAV is Erik Karlsson, whose full value is \$11.5 million. That deal was signed in 2019 and, when it began, accounted for 14.11 per cent of the salary cap.

Quinn makes \$7.85 million against the cap and shouldn't have problems surpassing Karlsson's \$11.5 million if he so chooses, given the salary cap will be at \$113.5 million when his next deal begins. If Quinn wanted to match Karlsson's cap hit percentage, we're talking about a \$16 million AAV.

There is also a possibility that, instead of going for maximum term, Hughes could sign something shorter with the Wild to perhaps line him up for free agency again in a couple years, when brother Jack's deal is up as well. The Wild, surely, would take that.

Interestingly, there may be another wrinkle to this negotiation. Colorado's Cale Makar is on the exact same timeline as Hughes, in that he's also heading into the final year of his contract and can extend on July 1. There is less uncertainty about him staying with the Avalanche, but Colorado's highest-paid player is Nathan MacKinnon at \$12.604 million, and next season Martin Necas will start a deal paying \$11.5 million. How much higher will Makar push that?

Whoever signs first between those two star defencemen will set the tone for the other one, and the clock on both starts ticking this summer.

After a 33-goal, 66-point regular season, Alex Tuch had already set himself up to be the most sought-after free agent on a pretty thin market. His contributions in the first round of the playoffs only helped that outlook, and though he was kept without a point in Round 2, Tuch is still the most important piece of Buffalo's puzzle to figure out this summer.

"I don't know how the talks are going to proceed. I don't know what they are going to say. I don't know the future. But my main priority is my family," Tuch said.

When negotiations between the two sides initially started this season, the Sabres' offer — under then-GM Kevyn Adams — was in the \$8-million range. But given the cap inflation, team needs and scarcity on the open market, we can reasonably presume Tuch will sign somewhere for \$10 million or more.

At that rate, Tuch would become Buffalo's highest-paid forward, but the Sabres have to carefully manage this and it will be Jarmo Kekalainen's first big challenge since taking over as GM. Peyton Krebs, Michael Kesselring and rising star Zach Benson are all RFAs. The Sabres are in line to have just under \$13 million in cap space this off-season, so you can see how a Tuch extension could tighten their wiggle room and perhaps force other roster changes.

Losing Tuch for nothing would be a blow to a team that just finished its most positive season in a decade and a half, and now looking to maintain that momentum into next season and avoid being a one-and-done storyline.

The seventh-overall pick in 2023, Matvei Michkov arrived in the NHL last season with lots of promise, and he delivered with a solid rookie campaign, posting 26 goals and 63 points. The Flyers missed the playoffs, but it was a good introduction at 20 years old.

But in Year 2, things didn't go quite as smoothly for the player. Under new coach Rick Tocchet, the Flyers as a whole took a step forward, getting into the playoffs and winning a round, but Michkov took more of a backseat role. He arrived at training camp in less-than-ideal physical condition after dealing with an off-season injury and his ice time dipped as the season went on. His average ice time was 14:50 this regular season, nearly a two-minute decline from his rookie season. In the playoffs, Michkov averaged only 11:50 of ice time per game, lost his role in the top six to newcomer Porter Martone, and was scratched twice, including in the must-win Game 4 against Carolina.

Naturally, his offensive totals took a dip in his sophomore season, and in the playoffs, Michkov managed just one assist in eight games. With one season left on his entry-level contract before becoming an RFA, Michkov is eligible to re-sign as early as this summer but now he has a little more proving to do. And it will start with a stronger off-season, which will at least partly be spent in Philadelphia.

"We just gotta let this kid breathe because he's made a lot of strides," Tocchet said after the Flyers were swept by Carolina. "We have to understand he's 21 years old. He wants it and we have the tools to help him."

There are questions now about his skating, and it was cited as one of the reasons he was scratched in the playoffs. This may lead to some outside questions about his future with the Flyers organization, or under Tocchet, and under these conditions, off-season trade rumours are bound to arise. But GM Daniel Briere tried to put those ideas to rest.

"He knows he needs to improve off the ice in his training. That's not a secret, he's admitted that himself," Briere said. "The big thing for Matvei is adapting. I think he's a very smart young man. He will adapt and learn from what happened this year."

"Matvei is a great talent. Matvei, we see him being part of the picture for years to come. That hasn't changed."

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TSN.CA / Three reasons the Golden Knights are a game from the Stanley Cup Final

Travis Yost

In one respect, it's a surprise the Vegas Golden Knights are one game away from another Stanley Cup Final appearance. We are talking about a 95-point team that was on the ropes against the Utah Mammoth during large stretches of the opening round.

And yet, this is Vegas. The Golden Knights are as reliable as the sun rising and setting come playoff time. The success this franchise has found since the expansion draft a decade ago is without parallel, and even in a relative down year for the team (which including firing their head coach with two weeks left in the season), Vegas has found another gear. They remain several steps ahead of the rest of the National Hockey League, and with one more win will take the head of the Presidents' Trophy-winning Colorado Avalanche.

So, what's driving their surge out of the Western Conference this year? I think it boils down to three specific components, with an honourable mention nod to interim head coach John Tortorella — like it or not, he appears to have been a great hire to lead this seasoned and experienced roster.

1. An indomitable penalty kill

The sole reason Vegas was able to survive the Pacific Division pillow fight this year was through their special teams' play. The power play ranked third in the NHL (9.6 goals per-60 minutes); their penalty kill was eighth (6.9 goals conceded per 60 minutes). Given the personnel you can find on this roster, it's not a surprise they outperformed on both sides of the aisle.

But this playoff run has been defined by the penalty kill and its ability to erase just about every mistake that the team has made through the first three rounds. In 15 games, Vegas has been outscored 5-4 (-1) on the penalty kill, a staggering accomplishment. In the NHL's modern era, where scoring is prolific and power plays can single-handedly win a series, a penalty kill capable of playing to break-even level is as lethal a weapon as you can find.

Compared to their peers (table below shows all teams who reached the second round of play), there is no comparison:

Yost1 Yost

There's no question Carter Hart has been an upgrade in net over previous starter Adin Hill (more on this later), but I think you have to recognize the resources Tortorella has at his disposal here.

Brayden McNabb, Rasmus Andersson, Noah Hanifin, and Shea Theodore give him two distinct and skilled defensive penalty-kill units capable of slowing down any opposing attack. Put defensive stalwarts like Jack Eichel, Mitch Marner, and Nic Dowd in front of those defencemen, and you have the recipe for creating shutdown units.

To be just one goal underwater on the penalty kill this deep into the playoffs is a remarkable accomplishment and a big reason Vegas is sitting pretty heading into Game 4 of the Western Conference Final.

2: Magic Mitch Marner

Marner is scorching hot. It is surely a torturous watch for Maple Leafs fans, who wanted to see the playmaking winger chase a Stanley Cup with the team that drafted him back in 2015. Instead, their nightmare

scenario is playing out — Marner is thriving in the postseason on a second line with Brett Howden and William Karlsson, and as it stands today is the odds-on favourite for Conn Smythe honours.

He's a big piece of the penalty kill, his line is outscoring teams 10-to-7 (+3) at even strength, and he's leading the entire playoff field in scoring. And it's not just empty-calorie secondary assists — his seven goals and 11 primary assists alone would lead all other players!

Yost2 Yost

One of the interesting wrinkles about how Vegas is deploying their lineup is their three stars — Mark Stone, Eichel and Marner — are playing on distinct lines. Vegas carries one of the deepest forward groups in the league and against a team like Colorado, that's a must, or your team is at the risk of being skated out of the arena.

From a matchup perspective, it's been Eichel's line going head-to-head with Nathan MacKinnon, which has left the Marner line to deal with defensive stalwarts in Artturi Lehkonen, Gabriel Landeskog, and Brock Nelson.

Eichel taking on the MacKinnon minutes puts a burden on Marner and company to win their minutes further down the lineup. So far, so very good there.

3. A major goaltending rebound

Two things can be true at the same time: Hart has been a sizable upgrade over Hill in net, but the defensive play in front of Hart has dramatically improved since the regular season as well.

Hart is stopping just over 89 per cent of shots (and right near league averages), but this Vegas team doesn't need the reincarnation of Dominik Hasek or Martin Brodeur manning their net. They just can't be sunk by horrific play.

Consider what this postseason has looked like relative to the prior six months. Simply regressing their save percentage — a function of both goaltending and the defensive play in front of said goaltending — back towards league average has turned Vegas into a monster:

Yost3 Yost

As someone who has been perennially bullish on the Golden Knights, I've been reticent to pick against them in years prior. But the leakiness of this team during the regular season convinced me the Mammoth had a genuine chance to upset them in the first round. Given what we have seen from Anaheim and Colorado in the second and third rounds against Vegas, I think my thesis that Utah was a dangerous opponent for any team was correct.

But Hart, at least for now, appears to have fixed the Vegas goaltending problem — something I didn't foresee happening. Now we are talking about a loaded team with very few discernible holes on its roster.

And with one more victory, the Golden Knights will return to the Stanley Cup Final for a third time in nine seasons. Simply remarkable.

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