



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

The News & Observer

A look back at the biggest —and wildest — moments from the 2026 Stanley Cup Final

By: Alli Pardue, Justin Pelletier

The Carolina Hurricanes stormed through the playoffs, going 16-3 to beat the Vegas Golden Knights 4-2 to secure the Canes' second Stanley Cup on the 20th anniversary of the team's first cup. Here's a look back at the games. By Kevin Keister | Robert Willett | Ethan Hyman

The 2026 Stanley Cup Final will be remembered as one of the most entertaining of all time.

North Carolina won't be forgetting it anytime soon, nor will the near-record number of viewers who tuned in on television, or the tens of thousands who witnessed the chaos firsthand.

The Carolina Hurricanes (Shopping Cart IconShop Canes Fan Gear) captured the Cup, defeating the Vegas Golden Knights 4 games to 2. But only in the last two games did the Canes start dominating the Knights — the first four were truly anyone's game.

Packed with quick opening goals, last-minute comebacks, record-breaking scoring runs and a whole host of blink-and-you'll-miss-it moments, this Stanley Cup series kept fans on the edge of their seats.

Here are some of the most memorable — and wildest — moments hockey fans aren't soon to forget from this year's Stanley Cup Final.

Nikolaj Ehlers' quick start in Game 1

In the opening moments of the very first game, Hurricanes forward Nikolaj Ehlers stunned fans with a goal in just 25 seconds. It was the third-fastest goal to start an NHL championship series, and it also made him the second player on record to score on the first shot on goal to open a Stanley Cup Final. It ultimately wasn't enough, and Vegas won Game 1, 5-4.

The Canes' Game 2 comeback

There were just 10 minutes left in Game 2 at home in Raleigh, and Carolina remained scoreless, trailing Vegas 2-0. But then, Canes center Logan Stankoven got the team going with a goal, narrowing the Vegas lead.

And then we had a game.

Canes center Mark Jankowski scored for a 2-2 tie. Jordan Staal scored on the power play for a 3-2 lead. And even after Mark Stone tied it for Vegas late, the Canes went into overtime with the confidence of knowing they were 5-0 in OT games in this year's playoffs.

Ultimately Seth Jarvis' overtime goal gave the Canes a 4-3 victory, and the series was tied at 1-1.

Staunchly devoted tailgaters and fans

Caniac Nation has been waiting 20 years for a Stanley Cup — and its enthusiasm never wavered.

Every home game was sold out, with tickets on the secondary market being sold for thousands of dollars. And it wasn't just the home games. Fans also sold out multiple watch parties at Lenovo Center for the away games, despite struggles getting tickets. No matter where the Canes were playing, Lenovo Center was as loud as ever.

The fans brought the energy. Energetic fans who went "tarps off" in Game 2 were credited by starting forward Seth Jarvis for securing the win for the Canes. And tailgaters didn't let 100-degree heat waves stop them from having fun before games, with some even bringing pools to the parking lot to stay cool.

Some fans went viral for their devotion. Take the Evel Knievel-inspired "CaneEvels" with their large-scale tailgate parties, or the childhood friends of Jarvis, known as "The Good Ol' Canadian Boys," who attended every playoff game — some of whom might even lose their job for it.

Hat trick by Marner, 4 goals by the Canes, and all the insanity of Game 3

Game 3 was, in a word, bonkers.

After a scoreless first period, Knights forward Mitch Marner scored a hat trick in just the second period. Vegas came out of the period leading 4-0. But despite the significant lead, the third period belonged to the Hurricanes, who resiliently fought back, scoring three goals in 39 seconds and then tying the score 4-4.

That took the game into double overtime, with Vegas ultimately earning a 5-4 win off a shot credited to Vegas defender Shea Theodore that awkwardly bounced in off of Canes goaltender Brandon Bussi's foot.

The Vegas Knight Guard remove hats from the ice after a hat-trick by Vegas right wing Mitch Marner (93) to take a 4-0 lead over the Carolina Hurricanes in Game 3 of the Stanley Cup Final, on Saturday, June 6, 2026 at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, NV.

The Vegas Knight Guard remove hats from the ice after a hat-trick by Vegas right wing Mitch Marner (93) to take a 4-0 lead over the Carolina Hurricanes in Game 3 of the Stanley Cup Final, on Saturday, June 6, 2026 at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, NV. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

Andersen out, Bussi in

Speaking of Bussi, the goaltender quickly became one of the NHL's best feel-good stories of the season, going from an undrafted NHL player to a Cup Final starter and champion.

His first career NHL playoff appearance was in the third period of Game 3, relieving Frederik Andersen after he had started the first 16 games. After sitting the bench for two months, Bussi nearly stole the game for the Canes. But while they lost Game 3, they won Games 4-6 — and Bussi started all of them.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Jordan Staal's stomach goal

Game 4 was tied, 3-3, in the third period. And it was team captain and center Jordan Staal who came up big to capture the lead for the Hurricanes — with a goal he made diving forward and landing on his stomach. It was his second goal of the night, and certainly a memorable one.

The Canes won Game 4, 5-3, with Ehlers scoring the last goal on an empty net.

Bussi's Game 6 shutout

In the series-clinching Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Final, Brandon Bussi didn't let a single puck get past him. He managed his first career Stanley Cup Playoff shutout in the game that mattered most. And the Hurricanes beat the Knights, 3-0, to win the Stanley Cup.

Staal becomes oldest MVP

Jordan Staal took plenty of hardware back to Raleigh from Las Vegas.

Along with the coveted Cup, Staal was given the Conn Smythe Trophy after being named the Stanley Cup playoffs MVP. At 37, he is the oldest to ever win it. Staal led all players with six goals in the Final, including scoring at least one in each of the first five games.

But he didn't just lead on the scoreboard. Head coach Rod Brind'Amour frequently praised his captain for his leadership both on and off the ice.

"I've been saying this forever, I don't know where we'd be without him," Brind'Amour said.

A jubilant homecoming

A plane carrying the Carolina Hurricanes team is greeted by a water salute after arriving at Raleigh-Durham International Airport on Monday, June 15, 2026.

A plane carrying the Carolina Hurricanes team is greeted by a water salute after arriving at Raleigh-Durham International Airport on Monday, June 15, 2026. Kaitlin McKeown kmckeown@newsobserver.com

The Carolina Hurricanes' homecoming was nothing short of triumphant.

It started as soon as the plane landed on Monday. Greeted by water spray from two fire trucks and hundreds of fans of all ages, the Carolina Hurricanes stepped onto the tarmac at Raleigh-Durham International Airport as champions, with the Stanley Cup held high.

And then, Raleigh partied. It started when Jordan Martinook, a veteran Carolina Hurricanes player, posted "Caniacs see you at teets at 10 tonight" on his X account. The post called fans to the iconic Glenwood South bar, which is owned by former Canes player Bates Battaglia and his brother, Anthony Battaglia.

Glenwood South, which was filled with revelers Sunday night, became host to an even bigger Canes celebration. Lines formed around the block from its Glenwood South location as players alternated lifting the Stanley Cup to screaming fans.

It was a celebration fit for champions.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

The Athletic

Every NHL team's worst value contract in 2025-26

By: Harman Dayal

In today's NHL, players aren't just judged on their ability; they're graded on value and efficiency — how large is their impact relative to their contract? Let's look at players who didn't live up to their contracts in 2025-26 and how much longer those deals will be on the books.

Here's how we'll conduct this exercise.

- We'll be using Dom Luszczyszyn's player model as a measuring stick. Net Rating provides an all-in-one performance metric that weighs factors such as point production, play-driving, defensive impact, penalties drawn, blocked shots, faceoffs, penalty-kill impact and more. That impact is then translated to a market value — what that player's contributions should be worth — and that market value is compared to their actual cap hit.
- This is solely measuring regular-season impact; no playoff numbers are included.
- A player isn't "bad" if he ends up on one of the inefficient lists. It just means he wasn't quite worth his cap hit in 2025-26, at least from a statistical perspective. There are plenty of high-end NHLers who you'll see throughout the piece, many of whom actually played very well this season.
- We'll only be identifying players who underperformed their cap hit by more than \$1 million.
- No goalies will be analyzed.
- There are blind spots in the model, like any statistical measure — it's not perfect. With that in mind, I used the model to generate an initial list of players for each team, but I occasionally exercised personal discretion to remove a player from the "inefficient" contracts pile or tweak the order if I felt there was an obvious flaw or blind spot in the model's evaluation.
- Players who missed the overwhelming majority of the season weren't included.
- Players who changed teams midseason weren't included either.

These Canes were built different

Shayna Goldman and Max Bultman

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Anaheim Ducks

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Frank Vatrano

-9.1

\$4,571,189

2

Jacob Trouba

-1

\$8,000,000

0 (UFA)

Mason McTavish

-3.3

\$7,000,000

5

Alex Killorn

-2.4

\$6,250,000

1



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Frank Vatrano: Vatrano averaged 26 goals per year in the three seasons spanning 2022 to 2025, including a career-high 37 in 2023-24, but his production fell off a cliff in 2025-26. The 32-year-old slumped to only five goals and four assists in 50 games — he's been passed over on the depth chart by the Ducks' new wave of forward talent and didn't play in a single playoff game.

Ryan Strome was the Ducks' other major underachieving veteran on a significant cap hit, but Anaheim shipped him to Calgary ahead of the trade deadline.

The other contracts on this list aren't that problematic. Sure, Jacob Trouba isn't an \$8 million player, but he played massive top-pair minutes with decent results.

Mason McTavish tumbled down the depth chart and his defensive metrics were woeful, but he's still a talented young player, and if he bounces back to a second-line center level, his \$7 million AAV will look pretty good.

Alex Killorn potted only 15 goals, which is modest relative to his \$6.25 million AAV, but he made up for it with a strong postseason.

Boston Bruins

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Elias Lindholm

0.2

\$7,750,000

5

Hampus Lindholm

0.8

\$6,500,000

4

Tanner Jeannot

-6.8

\$3,400,000

4

Nikita Zadorov

-1.3

\$5,000,000

4

Elias Lindholm: Lindholm is a trustworthy two-way middle-six center, but he's paid to perform like a low-end first-liner (tied for the 25th highest cap hit among centers in 2025-26), which is a lofty bar he hasn't been able to reach. The 31-year-old has fallen short of the 50-point mark in each of his first two years in Boston, and his play-driving metrics declined as well.

Coming off a 2024-25 campaign that was derailed by injuries, Hampus Lindholm is beginning to show his age, as his performance was closer to the level of a \$4.5 million defenseman this past season. Lindholm can still capably handle second-pair minutes, but he can't single-handedly drive a high-end pair by himself the way he could 2-3 years ago.

Tanner Jeannot and Nikita Zadorov are far less concerning. Yeah, both players' cap hits are a bit steep relative to their on-ice impact, but they're still capable performers, and their physicality and meanness are valuable intangibles.

Buffalo Sabres

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Jordan Greenway

-5.6

\$4,000,000

1

Owen Power

1.9



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

	-0.2
\$8,350,000	
	\$10,500,000
5	
Bowen Byram	5
	Yegor Sharangovich
0.5	
	-5.3
\$6,250,000	
	\$5,750,000
1	
Josh Norris	4
	Matt Coronato
5.5	
	-5.5
\$7,950,000	
	\$6,500,000
4	
Jordan Greenway: Greenway is a solid bottom-six winger with an enormous 6-foot-6 frame and legitimate defensive value, but he's constantly hurt and with only one goal and five assists in 40 games this year, he's too limited offensively to live up to his \$4 million cap hit.	6
	Kevin Bahl
Besides that, the Sabres are in a good position. Owen Power landed on this list because an \$8.35 million AAV is commensurate with a low-end No. 1 defenseman (he was the 22nd highest-paid defenseman in the NHL this past season), and he's not quite at that level, but he took promising strides this year, plus with his age and the rising cap, it's reasonable to assume he'll grow into that contract.	-6.9
Bowen Byram had a difficult start to the season, but I'd argue from December onward that he was worth every penny of his \$6.25 million cap hit.	\$5,350,000
Josh Norris is a valuable top-six center — it's simply his injury history that makes his contract seem a bit dicey.	
Calgary Flames	5
Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26	Jonathan Huberdeau: He bounced back in 2024-25 with a 28-goal, 62-point season, but slumped to a measly 25 points in 50 games before suffering a season-ending hip injury. He's a well-liked leader, but this contract is one of the worst in the NHL — he was the 11th highest-paid forward this past season, and he still has five years left on his deal.
Player	The Flames signed Yegor Sharangovich to a long-term extension after his 31-goal campaign in 2023-24, but he's been frustratingly inconsistent since then, as he mustered only 15 goals and 29 points this past season.
	The other contracts are totally fine. Matt Coronato, 23, will grow into his \$6.5 million AAV (he was unlucky with his finishing all season). The model penalized Kevin Bahl for having rough underlying numbers, but that's only natural when you're a big minute-muncher on an overmatched team.
Net Rating	Carolina Hurricanes
Cap Hit	Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26
	Player
Years Left	
Jonathan Huberdeau	



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Net Rating	-7.9
Cap Hit	\$4,600,000
Years Left	4
Jesper Kotkaniemi	Ryan Donato
-3.5	-5.4
\$4,820,000	\$4,000,000
4	3
Jesper Kotkaniemi: The Hurricanes have a nearly flawless cap sheet, with Kotkaniemi the only player who underperformed his contract. Kotkaniemi regressed to just nine points in 42 games and was a healthy scratch in the playoffs.	Ilya Mikheyev
Chicago Blackhawks	-2.2
Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26	\$4,750,000
Player	0 (UFA)
Net Rating	André Burakovsky: Chicago acquired Burakovsky as a cap dump from Seattle to ride shotgun on the first line with Connor Bedard. At first, it seemed like a decent fit, but the bottom completely fell out in the second half as Burakovsky scored just four points in his last 37 games.
Cap Hit	Teuvo Teräväinen's production fell to 35 points in 2025-26, which is the lowest mark since his first full-time NHL season, and his two-way play-driving metrics declined.
Years Left	Alex Vlasic has failed to build on a breakout 2023-24 campaign in which he looked like one of the NHL's premier shutdown defensemen. Vlasic's defensive metrics have collapsed under the burden of carrying a young, inexperienced blue line. He's still an effective player, and his contract isn't too worrying; he's simply being asked to do too much in a tough environment.
Andre Burakovsky	Ryan Donato was a decent bottom-six secondary scorer, chipping in with 30 points in 82 games, but his \$4 million cap hit feels a bit rich. It's a similar story for Ilya Mikheyev. He's a very handy third-line winger, but \$4.75 million is a tad expensive for that role.
-7.5	Colorado Avalanche
\$5,500,000	None: Sam Girard became redundant for the Avs following Sam Malinski's breakout, but the Avalanche offloaded his \$5 million AAV before the deadline. Gabriel Landeskog was on the border of meeting the criteria of "inefficient" value in 2025-26 (35 points in 60 games on a \$7 million cap hit), but he still mostly delivered a capable top-six option in his first year back on top of all the intangibles he brings as the team's captain.
1	Columbus Blue Jackets
Teuvo Teravainen	
-6.7	
\$5,400,000	
1	
Alex Vlasic	



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Dante Fabbro

-7.2

\$4,125,000

3

Sean Monahan

0.0

\$5,500,000

3

Dante Fabbro: If this exercise included goalies, backup goaltender Elvis Merzlikins and his \$5.4 million AAV would easily stand out as the team's worst bang-for-buck contract. Among the skaters, Fabbro stands out as a questionable contract.

Fabbro was a revelation on the top pair with Zach Werenski in 2024-25, which prompted Columbus to sign him to a hefty four-year extension. However, he was quickly demoted from the top pair this year, and his results were alarming: Fabbro's average ice time tumbled from 21:39 to 16:34, he produced only 11 points in 74 games, and the Blue Jackets had a minus-17 goal differential during his five-on-five shifts. Now he profiles as a \$4.125 million third-pair defenseman.

Sean Monahan was outstanding as Columbus' No. 1 center in 2024-25, scoring over a point per game. The 31-year-old veteran center's production collapsed to 36 points in 78 games. He's still an effective middle-six center, but at \$5.5 million, the Blue Jackets will be hoping for a bit more value out of him next season.

Dallas Stars

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Ilya Lyubushkin

-4.3

\$3,250,000

1

Ilya Lyubushkin: Lyubushkin is a serviceable stay-at-home third-pair defender, but \$3.25 million is overpriced for what he brings to the table.

Tyler Seguin didn't meet the games played threshold to make this list because of his torn ACL, but his \$9.85 million AAV contract, which expires in 2027, is a massive sum for a second-line caliber player.

Detroit Red Wings

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Ben Chiarot

-9.8

\$4,750,000

0 (\$3.85M x 3 extension kicking in)

J.T. Compher

-6.7

\$5,100,000

2

Mason Appleton

-7.5



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

\$2,900,000	Jake Walman
1	-6.7
Michael Rasmussen	\$3,400,000
-5.8	0 (\$7M x 7 extension kicking in)
\$3,200,000	Darnell Nurse: You all knew this one was coming. Nurse is an athletic, mistake-prone No. 4/5-caliber defenseman who's unfortunately paid like a bona fide No. 1.
2	Trent Frederic was flat-out one of the NHL's worst full-time forwards in 2025-26. He produced only seven points in 74 games, averaged fourth-line minutes, and the Oilers were outscored 32-18 during his five-on-five shifts. His contract, which astonishingly has seven years remaining, is an albatross.
Ben Chiarot: The Red Wings' front office has failed to surround its talented core with a strong enough supporting cast. They haven't gotten the best bang-for-buck out of quite a few veterans.	Jake Walman was terrific down the stretch and in the playoffs for the Oilers in 2024-25, but his game took an inexplicably giant step back this season. Walman earned only 43.6 percent of scoring chances and the Oilers surrendered 3.56 goals against per 60 with him on the ice, which was one of the worst marks in the league.
Chiarot would be a physical, stay-at-home third-pair defenseman on most quality teams, but he's instead struggled under the weight of second-pair assignments.	Walman was hampered by injuries, so that's part of the story, but in any case Edmonton needs dramatically better results from him moving forward, considering his seven-year, \$49 million extension kicks in next season.
Up front, J.T. Compher, Michael Rasmussen and Mason Appleton didn't chip in with enough secondary offense relative to their cap hits.	Top League Content
Edmonton Oilers	Oh, and all this doesn't even count Tristan Jarry, who is one of the league's most overpaid netminders.
Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26	Florida Panthers
Player	Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26
Net Rating	Player
Cap Hit	Net Rating
Years Left	Cap Hit
Darnell Nurse	Years
-0.8	Aaron Ekblad
\$9,250,000	-0.4
4	\$6,100,000
Trent Frederic	7
-8.2	Sam Bennett
\$3,850,000	
7	



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

5.1

\$8,000,000

7

Carter Verhaeghe

3.7

\$7,000,000

7

Aaron Ekblad: Big-picture, Ekblad's \$6.1 million cap hit is still a team-friendly number. Ekblad's underlying numbers took a significant hit in 2025-26, but I fully expect those two-way metrics to rebound next season once Aleksander Barkov returns to the lineup — Ekblad's pair shares a ton of minutes with the Barkov line. Just chalk this one up as an off year.

Sam Bennett and Carter Verhaeghe are slightly overpaid relative to their regular-season contributions, but it doesn't matter because both are extremely clutch in the playoffs.

The real killer was Sergei Bobrovsky — he slumped to an .877 save percentage despite his \$10 million cap hit.

Los Angeles Kings

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Drew Doughty

5.4

\$11,000,000

1

Cody Ceci

-6.8

\$4,500,000

3

Brian Dumoulin

-3.7

\$4,000,000

2

Kevin Fiala

4.8

\$7,875,000

3

Drew Doughty: Doughty is still a solid top-four contributor, but at 36, it's been a few years since he's even come close to living up to his \$11 million AAV, which pays him to be an elite, Norris-caliber defenseman. The offense in particular is in decline, as he produced only 23 points in 72 games.

Cody Ceci and Brian Dumoulin (to a lesser extent) were head-scratching free-agent signings last summer, and those deals don't look any better a year later. They're bottom-pair quality defensemen paid like true middle-of-the-lineup drivers.

The Kings will be hoping to get slightly more out of Kevin Fiala next year. Fiala scored 35 goals in 2024-25, but he was only on pace to hit 26, in addition to softer two-way play-driving numbers, before he went down with a season-ending injury.

Minnesota Wild

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Jared Spurgeon

2.0

\$7,570,000



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

1

Marcus Foligno

-3.8

\$4,000,000

2

Jake Middleton

-1.3

\$4,350,000

3

Jared Spurgeon: The Wild's books are in pretty good shape, as the inefficient contracts on this list are all slight overpayments rather than true problems.

Spurgeon makes top-pair money at \$7.575 million (30th highest cap hit among defensemen in 2025-26), but at 36, he's now a second-pair caliber player.

Marcus Foligno doesn't drive enough offense to fully live up to his \$4 million cap hit (13 points in 56 games), but this is still a passable deal because of his size/physicality, defensive acumen and leadership.

Jake Middleton endured a down year, especially in the playoffs, where he emerged as a massive second-pair liability when Jonas Brodin went down with an injury.

Montreal Canadiens

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Brendan Gallagher

-4.3

\$6,500,000

1

Josh Anderson

-5.6

\$5,500,000

1

Noah Dobson

3.5

\$9,500,000

7

Brendan Gallagher: He's had a tremendous career in Montreal, but Father Time is catching up to him. The feisty 34-year-old winger scored just seven goals in 73 games at his \$6.5 million cap hit and was a healthy scratch for most of the playoffs.

Patrik Laine didn't play enough games to qualify for this list, otherwise his \$8.7 million cap hit would have surely ranked No. 1.

Josh Anderson is a legitimately valuable player who can chip in with about 15 goals per year on top of his speed and physicality, but \$5.5 million is, of course, a premium to be paying to a bottom-six winger.

Noah Dobson was a strong fit on Montreal's back end and excelled playing in very difficult defensive matchups. This trade was well worth it for the Canadiens. The reason he landed on this list is that he was tied for the sixth-highest cap hit among all NHL defensemen this past season, and his underlying numbers didn't reflect that kind of elite impact; Dobson drove 46.2 percent of scoring chances during his five-on-five minutes. This \$9.5 million AAV will look far better as the cap continues rising and as more top defensemen eventually pass him on the league's pay scale.

Nashville Predators

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Brady Skjei



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

-0.4

\$7,000,000

5

Nicolas Hague

-3.5

\$5,500,000

3

Jonathan Marchessault

-3.8

\$5,500,000

3

Roman Josi

5.4

\$9,059,000

2

Nick Perbix

-8.9

\$2,750,000

1

Erik Haula

-5.8

\$3,150,000

0 (UFA)

Brady Skjei: The Predators have made several moves for veterans over the last couple of years, many of which haven't panned out.

Skjei performed significantly better compared to his first year in Nashville, but his offensive and defensive numbers are still fairly average across the board. He isn't the true needle-mover you expect when you pay a defenseman \$7 million.

Nicolas Hague is a capable player, but \$5.5 million is a lot to pay for a No. 4/5-caliber defenseman.

Jonathan Marchessault potted only 12 goals in 62 games, yet he's being paid like a bona fide second-line scorer.

Roman Josi landed here because his defensive metrics have fallen off hard during the last two years. However, he deserves a pass because he still drives offense at an elite level, he's dealt with injuries/health concerns the last couple of years and he's 36, so it's only understandable that his play is dipping a bit.

Nick Perbix and Erik Haula were OK depth players on slightly overpriced cap hits.

New Jersey Devils

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Luke Hughes

1.7

\$9,000,000

6

Brenden Dillon

-7.4

\$4,000,000

1

Timo Meier

4.7



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

\$8,800,000

0 (\$4.85M x 3)

Ryan Pulock

5

Jonas Siegenthaler

0.9

-6.0

\$6,150,000

\$3,400,000

4

Anthony Duclair

2

Dougie Hamilton

-5.5

5.3

\$3,500,000

\$9,000,000

2

Bo Horvat

2

Luke Hughes: The youngest Hughes brother has plenty of talent, and at 22 he still has plenty of time to take meaningful steps in his game. However, his \$9 million cap hit was the 12th highest mark among all NHL defensemen this season, and the reality is he's not close to being a true No. 1 defender. Hughes scored 35 points in 68 games and his defensive consistency remains a work in progress.

6.3

\$8,500,000

Timo Meier's \$8.8 million AAV pays him to be a high-end first-line winger, but his actual impact (44 points in 74 games) has been second-line caliber for the last few years in New Jersey.

5

Adam Pelech

Dougie Hamilton is still a very effective top-four contributor, but similar to Hughes, he simply isn't a true No. 1.

1.6

New York Islanders

\$5,750,000

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

3

Jean-Gabriel Pageau: This exercise doesn't include players traded midseason; otherwise, Ondrej Palát would have been the runaway No. 1. Palát produced just one goal and four assists in 29 games with the Isles and has another year remaining at a \$6 million AAV.

Net Rating

Cap Hit

The rest of the Islanders' contracts are mostly fine. Dom's model dinged Pageau hard for his poor underlying metrics this year — his expected goal share collapsed from 54.4 percent in 2024-25 to just 45.6 percent this season. New York will surely want better two-way results than that, but Pageau is still a solid third-line center who's elite in the face-off circle, trustworthy defensively and can chip in with 35-40 points in a given year. \$5 million is a tad overpriced for that, yes, but it's not by an egregious margin.

Years Left

Jean-Gabriel Pageau

-5.7

\$5,000,000

Ryan Pulock and Adam Pelech are steady but aging veterans. They're still decent players, but Pulock in particular hasn't lived up to the full freight of his \$6.15 million AAV in quite some time.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

New York Rangers

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

J.T. Miller

4.7

\$8,000,000

4

Will Borgen

-3.8

\$4,100,000

4

Braden Schneider

-9.0

\$2,200,000

0 (RFA)

J.T. Miller: GM Chris Drury acquired Miller to be an offensive game-breaker and No. 1 center. Miller fell well below those standards; the 33-year-old captain's 53 points in 68 games may not seem terrible on paper, but the real killer is how decisively he lost his matchups. With Miller on the ice at even strength, the Rangers had a minus-24 goal differential.

Overall, the model graded his impact closer to that of a \$6 million player than an \$8 million one, which is concerning because he still has four years left on his deal.

Will Borgen would be a solid No. 4/5 on the right team, but in New York, he looks like an overpaid third-pair defenseman.

Braden Schneider's development, meanwhile, has disappointingly stagnated. The No. 19 pick in 2020 stepped into a bigger role this year, averaging a career-high 20:27 per game, but his two-way results crumbled under heavier

usage. Schneider drove just 43.3 percent of expected goals during his five-on-five shifts this season, which was the worst mark among Rangers defensemen.

Ottawa Senators

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Nick Jensen

-3.2

\$4,050,000

0 (UFA)

Thomas Chabot

4.1

\$8,000,000

2

Fabian Zetterlund

-2.0

\$4,275,000

2

Nick Jensen: Ottawa's cap situation was strong, with no glaringly bad contracts. Jensen looked a step behind at times defensively in his first season back from hip surgery, but his contract expires this summer.

Thomas Chabot is an indispensable second-pair driver for this Senators blue line. He might be a tad overpaid by about \$1 million, but it's certainly not by a consequential amount.

Fabian Zetterlund is a decent middle-six winger, even though his production (33 points in 82 games) is a bit light relative to his \$4.28 million cap hit.

Philadelphia Flyers



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

-1.2

Player

\$6,100,000

Net Rating

2

Cap Hit

Kris Letang: Ryan Graves and Kevin Hayes would have easily topped this inefficient contracts list if they had met the minimum games played threshold. Graves found himself in the AHL at a point this season despite still having three years left at a \$4.5 million cap hit. Hayes was a healthy scratch at many points, but his contract is off the books at the end of this season, and the Penguins received a second-round pick to take his inefficient deal on from the Blues anyway.

Years Left

Sean Couturier

1.2

With those two out of the equation, Letang was the only Penguin who substantially underperformed his contract.

\$7,750,000

The 39-year-old's defensive gaffes are becoming increasingly frequent (especially noticeable in the playoffs), and his offense is respectable (34 points in 74 games), but it doesn't move the needle as prolifically anymore. The model valued Letang closer to \$4 million this year rather than his actual \$6.1 million AAV.

4

Travis Konecny

San Jose Sharks

7

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

\$8,750,000

Net Rating

7

Sean Couturier: Couturier still carries a lot of value as a shutdown center with above-average defensive metrics and excellent faceoff numbers, but his offense has consistently lagged his steep \$7.75 million cap hit since the severe back injuries he suffered near the start of this decade. Couturier scored 36 points in 78 games. Ultimately, he's an effective third-line center making high-end top-six center money.

Cap Hit

Years Left

Barclay Goodrow

Travis Konecny was one of the 20 highest-paid wingers in the league this season, but his performance didn't quite live up to that billing. He dropped from 76 points in 2024-25 to 68 this season and had an underwhelming playoff run, scoring just one goal in 10 games.

-10.8

\$3,641,666

Pittsburgh Penguins

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

1

Player

Dmitry Orlov

Net Rating

-2.5

Cap Hit

\$6,500,000

Years Left

1

Kris Letang

Barclay Goodrow: The Sharks have so much cap space, and the only overpriced deals on their books have so little



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

remaining term, that they're positioned well financially moving forward.

It's debatable whether Goodrow should even be an everyday NHL player at this stage in his career. The gritty 33-year-old forward produced just 12 points in 82 games, but more importantly, the Sharks got dominated most of the time he was on the ice. The Sharks controlled just under 41 percent of shots and were outscored 32-15 during Goodrow's five-on-five shifts.

San Jose used Dmitry Orlov in a top-pair role out of necessity, and the results weren't pretty. He'd still be a helpful player further down the lineup in a more insulated role, but he was clearly overmatched this season having to play at such heavy, hard minutes.

Nick Leddy and his \$4 million AAV would have also ended up on this list if he met the games played threshold, but it's a moot point anyway because his contract expires this summer.

Seattle Kraken

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Chandler Stephenson

-9.6

\$6,250,000

5

Adam Larsson

-7.2

\$5,250,000

3

Ryan Lindgren

-10.4

\$4,500,000

3

Brandon Montour

-0.8

\$7,142,857

5

Vince Dunn

0.0

\$7,350,000

1

Jamie Oleksiak

-5.0

\$4,600,000

0 (UFA)

Eeli Tolvanen

-7.3

\$3,475,000

0 (UFA)

Jaden Schwartz

0.1

\$5,500,000

0 (UFA)

Chandler Stephenson: Seattle has a remarkable number of overpaid middle-class contributors in the \$4.5-7.5 million AAV neighborhood.

Stephenson's 49 points in 80 games don't seem too terrible on the surface, but he's an empty-calorie point producer who



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

drags the team down as a two-way liability. Stephenson's defensive metrics were some of the worst in the league, with Seattle only controlling an alarming 32.1 percent of high-danger chances during his five-on-five shifts. That's the worst mark among all NHL forwards who played at least 600 five-on-five minutes this season.

Adam Larsson, Ryan Lindgren and Jamie Oleksiak were all top-four defensemen in their respective primes, but each has slowed down with age and injuries. Larsson has been a fixture on Seattle's top pair but the results are getting worse: Seattle controlled just 42.7 percent of expected goals in his five-on-five minutes, which is the worst mark of Larsson's career, and 45.8 percent of actual goals.

Vince Dunn and Brandon Montour are in a slightly different boat because they're still impactful players who are much closer to fair value on their contracts. The issue, though, is that neither is an elite offensive driver and their two-way underlying metrics both left room for improvement.

Eeli Tolvanen is in a similar boat as Stephenson, where his raw offensive production looks fine (36 points in 78 games), but the Kraken have gotten crushed from a two-way perspective during his minutes, which severely drags down his overall value.

Jaden Schwartz's offense slowed down considerably after a 26-goal campaign in 2024-25, as he mustered only 11 goals and 15 assists in 50 games this season at a \$5.5 million cap hit.

St. Louis Blues

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Pavel Buchnevich

0

\$8,000,000

5

Cam Fowler

-3.5

\$4,000,000

0 (\$6.1M x 3 extension kicking in)

Pavel Buchnevich: Buchnevich is unfortunately a shadow of the player he was in his prime. It was only a few years ago that the 31-year-old was a top-line stud who could score at around the point-per-game mark and drive excellent two-way results.

This year, Buchnevich's production dipped to 48 points in 81 games. He was also a major drag from a play-driving perspective — Robert Thomas' metrics were significantly better across the board without Buchnevich on his line compared to with him.

Jordan Binnington would have absolutely been on this list if we included goalies; he pitched a woeful .873 save percentage despite carrying a \$6 million cap hit.

Cam Fowler was a top-four game-changer for the Blues in 2024-25 and a major catalyst behind the team making the playoffs. He's still a decent player, but he took a noticeable step back this season. St. Louis surrendered more shots, scoring chances and goals against than they created during Fowler's minutes.

The Blues deserve credit for selling Brayden Schenn for a strong package at the deadline because his all-around impact has been closer to a third-line center level, which makes his \$6.5 million AAV seem a bit inflated.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Victor Hedman

-0.9

\$8,000,000

3

Oliver Bjorkstrand

-3.2

\$5,400,000

0 (UFA)

Brayden Point



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

7.2

\$9,500,000

4

Erik Cernak

-1.0

\$5,200,000

5

Victor Hedman: Hedman's game has gradually been slowing down for a while, but his play took an enormous hit this year in a challenging, injury-plagued campaign. He went from scoring 66 points in 79 games last year to only 17 points in 33 games.

Most tellingly, his average ice time collapsed from 23:05 to 18:52, which included some stretches on the third pair. Hedman earned just 48.6 percent of expected goals at five-on-five, which is the worst mark he's posted since his rookie season all the way back in 2009-10. The Lightning will be crossing their fingers that this was just an off year because of injuries.

At \$5.4 million, Oliver Bjorkstrand was paid to produce like a legitimate top-six winger but his numbers were pedestrian as he scored 32 points in 80 games.

Brayden Point had an off year due to multiple injuries as he went from scoring 42 goals in 77 games in 2024-25 to only 18 in 63 games this season. The model rated Point's impact closer to the \$7.1 million range; Tampa will be hoping he can rebound to his usual elite center form next season.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

Net Rating

Cap Hit

Years Left

Auston Matthews

9.8

\$13,250,000

2

Morgan Rielly

-2.4

\$7,500,000

4

William Nylander

8.9

\$11,500,000

6

Matthew Knies

0.9

\$7,750,000

5

Max Domi

-9.0

\$3,750,000

2

Brandon Carlo

-5.3

\$3,485,000

1

Calle Jarnkrok

-9.2



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

\$2,100,000

Net Rating

0 (UFA)

Jake McCabe

Cap Hit

-1.0

Years Left

JJ Peterka

\$4,513,102

2.4

4

Morgan Rielly: The Leafs had a lot of overpriced contracts this season, but I'd expect a few players on this list to bounce back next year. Nearly every player's underlying metrics tanked in 2025-26 as it became increasingly obvious that Craig Berube's playing style wasn't working, with a detrimental impact on various players' performance.

\$7,700,000

4

Sean Durzi

Rielly has long been a questionable contract regardless of coaching effect, though. The 32-year-old posted some of the worst defensive metrics in the league despite playing fairly sheltered matchups with a high dosage of offensive-zone starts. Combine that with his declining offense (36 points in 78 games) and you get a player that simply isn't living up to his pay grade as the team's highest-paid defenseman.

-0.9

\$6,000,000

Auston Matthews was the second-highest-paid player in the NHL this season, yet his all-around impact was nowhere close to the level of a top-five player. Matthews slumped to 53 points in 60 games and his two-way numbers were the worst of his career as the Leafs controlled only 46 percent of shot attempts with him on the ice.

2

Mikhail Sergachev

William Nylander produced at a 99-point pace so it's hard to be too critical of his game, but his defensive numbers were quite soft and his overall game still left more to be desired considering he was the fourth-highest-paid winger in the NHL this season.

4.4

\$8,500,000

Matthew Knies's offensive production was strong (66 points in 79 games), but he's another player whose play-driving numbers cratered this year, on top of the injuries he battled through. I fully expect a bounce-back and if anything, his \$7.75 million cap hit feels like a bargain for how high his potential is.

5

Brandon Tanev

-9.7

Max Domi is simply an odd fit for the roster — he isn't productive enough to be a top-six contributor and his woeful defensive impact means he doesn't fit the bill of an ideal bottom-six forward either.

\$2,500,000

2

Jack McBain

The Brandon Carlo acquisition has been a train wreck so far, especially with how much the Leafs surrendered to acquire him.

Jake McCabe's two-way numbers slipped this season, but it wouldn't surprise me if they rebound next year under a new coach.

-3.5

Utah Mammoth

\$4,250,000

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

4



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Kevin Stenlund

\$7,250,000

-10.2

6

\$2,000,000

Marcus Pettersson

0 (UFA)

-6.4

JJ Peterka: The Mammoth had more inefficient contracts this season than I expected, though fortunately none of them are true anchors.

\$5,500,000

Peterka disappointed in Year 1 with Utah, as his production dropped from 68 points in 2024-25 to only 47 points. He also went pointless in six playoff games. A \$7.7 million cap hit should mean first-line production, but Peterka's actual value was closer to a low-end second liner.

5

Evander Kane

On the back end, Utah's top pair of Mikhail Sergachev and Sean Durzi didn't fully live up to their cap hits. Sergachev scored 59 points but gave back a lot of that value defensively, as the Mammoth surrendered 2.84 expected goals against per 60 during his five-on-five shifts. Overall, Sergachev played closer to the level of a No. 2 defenseman rather than a true No. 1, which he's paid to be.

-5.6

\$5,125,000

Brandon Tanev scored zero goals and just three assists in 56 games. More concerning, the Mammoth were outscored by a wide margin during Tanev's even-strength minutes.

0 (UFA)

Jake Debrusk

Jack McBain is a steady, physical bottom-six center with a huge 6-foot-4 frame, but Dom's model felt \$4.25 million was a tad rich relative to his actual on-ice impact in 2025-26.

-0.6

Vancouver Canucks

\$5,500,000

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player

5

Net Rating

Elias Pettersson: Pettersson limped to 51 points in 74 games. He was stuck with inferior wingers on his line, but that alone can't explain the colossal drop-off in his play. Pettersson's \$11.6 million cap hit is commensurate with a superstar, but in reality, he's been a second-line caliber center over the last two years.

Cap Hit

Marcus Pettersson struggled mightily this season as the Canucks controlled only 44.7 percent of expected goals and had a minus-28 goal differential during his five-on-five minutes. However, every Canucks defender except Filip Hronek was drowning in Adam Foote's system, so a large chunk of his issues are likely environment-related rather than his individual ability falling off a cliff.

Years Left

Elias Pettersson

Evander Kane was a disastrous acquisition, scoring only 13 goals despite being fed top-six minutes throughout the entire season.

1.0

\$11,600,000

Brock Boeser and Jake DeBrusk both underperformed their cap hits by modest amounts, largely due to their weak defensive numbers.

6

Brock Boeser

All of this doesn't even factor in how scary Thatcher Demko and Kevin Lankinen's contracts looked this season.

-3.9

Vegas Golden Knights



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26

Player	\$5,750,000
Net Rating	4
Cap Hit	Alex Ovechkin: Washington had far fewer inefficient contracts than you'd expect from a team that missed the playoffs. Ovechkin's production slightly lagged what you'd expect from a \$9 million player, but it's completely reasonable given he's 40.
Years Left	Matt Roy's underlying metrics were a tad soft, as the Caps allowed slightly more shots and expected goals than they generated during his minutes, but he's still a rock-solid second-pair defenseman, even if it's at a slightly inflated \$5.75 million AAV.
Keegan Kolesar	Winnipeg Jets
-10.4	Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26
\$2,500,000	Player
2	Net Rating
Keegan Kolesar: If this exercise included goalies, Adin Hill would have been by far Vegas' worst contract. Hill had a nightmare campaign where he lost the starter's job; he has another five years left at \$6.25 million annually.	Cap Hit
Besides Hill, Vegas had a very clean cap sheet. Kolesar endured an uncharacteristically challenging season — he only produced 17 points and Vegas was outscored by 19 goals with him on the ice at five-on-five — but he's got a long enough track record as a premium fourth-liner that we should expect him to rebound next season.	Years Left
Washington Capitals	Neal Pionk
Most Inefficient Contracts in 2025-26	-1.7
Player	\$7,000,000
Net Rating	5
Cap Hit	Gustav Nyquist
Years Left	-5.7
Alex Ovechkin	\$3,250,000
6.4	0 (UFA)
\$9,500,000	Neal Pionk: Pionk had a down year where he was hampered by injuries. His offensive production fell to only three goals and nine assists in 51 games. Pionk also struggled to drive play, earning only 42.9 percent of high-danger chances at five-on-five.
0 (UFA)	Gustav Nyquist was a black hole offensively, scoring only one goal in 51 games.
Matt Roy	Jonathan Toews would have landed on this inefficient contracts list as well if this exercise had factored bonuses in.
0.6	



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026



2026 NHL draft: Every team's biggest prospect pipeline need - ESPN

By: Rachel Kryshak

Rachel Kryshak is a professional data consultant specializing in data communication and modelling. She's worked in the NHL and consulted for professional teams across North American and Europe. She hosts the Staff & Graph Podcast and discusses sports from a data-driven perspective.

The Stanley Cup has been awarded to the Carolina Hurricanes, and the 2026 NHL draft is about a week away, with the first round on June 26 and the second through seventh rounds on June 27.

Each team is in a different place in its competitive cycle. Some have loaded prospect pipelines enabling them to compete over the next decade, others are heading into rebuilding mode, and a few have barren cupboards towards the end of their contention windows. Whether a team has a glaring need at one or multiple positions, there are only so many draft picks to improve their pipeline.

To understand where each team stands heading into the draft, we look at the most pressing needs for each team and how they can approach filling those holes with specific players.

Atlantic Division

Boston Bruins

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 4th (DET), 4th (TB), 7th

The Bruins have a glaring need for right-handed defensemen, and one has to believe they would have selected Keaton Verhoeff if Toronto's pick had transferred. Alas, the Leafs won the lottery, and the Bruins still need right-handed defenders.

The Bruins have one selection in each of the first three rounds and three selections in the fourth round, which should give them ample opportunity to add right-handed defenders to the organization. Tommy Bleyl, Juho Piiparinen, Giorgos Pantelas and Luke Shairer present good options at each of their selections.

Buffalo Sabres

2026 draft picks: 1st (EDM), 4th, 5th, 6th

The Sabres spent years bolstering their prospect pool, and as a result, they are pretty well-rounded. The left side on defense is a clear weakness in the pipeline, while the right side has two players projected to play regular NHL games. The Sabres also need a left winger with some size who can play top-six minutes.

With only one pick in the first three rounds, the Sabres will have to choose which need to address and should opt for the best player available, as a player is likely to fall to them.

Targeting Adam Novotny, Nikita Klepov, Xavier Villeneuve or Nikita Shcherbakov makes sense for the Sabres in the first round, while continuing to bet on upside in the later rounds to bolster the left side of their pipeline at forward and on defense.

Detroit Red Wings

2026 draft picks: 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 7th (CGY)

After trading their first to St. Louis and missing the playoffs, the Red Wings are in some trouble. The return in a potential Dylan Larkin trade should vastly reshape the prospect pipeline. Whether that happens before or after the draft is yet to be determined.

The Red Wings need to add to left-handed defenders to their organization. From the NHL club down to the prospect pipeline, there is a shortage of high-caliber defensemen on the left side. Using their draft capital and any return for roster players to bolster the left side of the blue line needs to be the top priority for the Red Wings this summer.

Florida Panthers

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd, 2nd (WSH), 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th

The Panthers don't need futures while on the back nine of their Cup contention window. Instead, they need a player who can immediately step into the lineup and play. After a season riddled with injuries to key players, the Panthers will be back in serious Cup contention next season.

There is a 50-50 chance the Panthers trade their first-round pick, but if Alberts Smits falls to them, he is the most NHL-ready defender and will be able to contribute over the next few years on an entry-level contract while the Panthers compete for the Stanley Cup.

Montreal Canadiens

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 4th (WPG), 6th, 7th, 7th (CAR)

Montreal has a relatively loaded prospect pipeline at all positions. That will happen when you draft as often as Montreal did during its turbocharged rebuild. Montreal could use some depth on the left wing, with a lack of prospects projected to play in the NHL in the pipeline.

Depending on how the club views the futures of David Reinbacher and Bryce Pickford, the Canadiens should look to bolster the defensive pipeline too. Defenders who are less offensively driven and considered two-way players with elite mobility and transition play would give the club more depth.

Ottawa Senators

2026 draft picks: 1st, 3rd, 3rd (FLA), 3rd (DAL), 4th (CBJ), 5th, 6th



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

The Senators' most pressing need is at forward, particularly the center ice position, as their top prospects are defenders and goaltenders. Currently, the Senators don't have a single forward prospect projected to play more than 200 games in the NHL. The Sens absolutely need to get some young forwards with skill and upside in their draft.

There are plenty of smaller forwards with high-end potential in this draft class, and the Sens are exactly the type of team that needs to swing on the potential of those prospects. Whether it is centers or wingers, the Sens need prospects who can develop into play drivers in the middle six.

Tampa Bay Lightning

2026 draft picks: 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 5th (SEA), 6th, 7th

The Lightning have not drafted very much through their contention window, and it has left them without a single defenseman projected to play NHL games. For a contending team, the Lightning have quite a few forwards projected to be play valuable NHL roles.

With uncertain futures around the Lightning blue line, they need to start looking ahead to developing the next wave of defenders in the organization. They will have options with their second- and third-round picks to add defensemen to their pipeline and have time to develop them into NHL contributors.

Toronto Maple Leafs

2026 draft picks: 1st, 3rd, 3rd (OTT), 3rd (PHI), 4th, 5th, 5th (COL), 6th

If the Maple Leafs intend to keep Auston Matthews and compete, they need someone who can step into the lineup now. They will get that with Gavin McKenna at No. 1 overall.

Outside of that, the Leafs need defenders, and high-end defenders are rarely available via trade or free agency. The Leafs cannot pass on McKenna, but leveraging current roster players in a trade to acquire another high draft pick to acquire one of the talented defenders in this draft class is a viable option. Ben Danford's play in the AHL playoffs has to be a confidence boost for the organization, but the Leafs need to draft and develop a true difference-maker on the blue line.

Metropolitan Division

Carolina Hurricanes

2026 draft picks: 1st, 4th (SJ), 6th, 6th (TOR)

The Canes have always drafted players with projectable scoring profiles and don't necessarily have a glaring need in their prospect pool, which is frightening for opponents given that they are poised to compete for years to come after winning it all in 2026.

If there is a need, it would be on defense. Dominik Badinka is the only right-handed prospect projected to play NHL games, and they aren't as strong on defense as they are up front. The Canes usually grab the player with a quality scoring profile who slips to them, and that feels like Nikita Klepov at No. 31. If they opt to bolster their defense, Xavier Villeneuve, Nikita Shcherbakov, Tommy Bleyl and Juho Piiparinen are likely options for them at that spot.

Columbus Blue Jackets

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd (STL), 3rd (COL), 4th (TOR), 5th, 6th (PIT), 7th

The Blue Jackets have a clear need on the wing in their prospect pool. Many of their current young wingers are on the smaller side, and some of their centers will likely be wingers at the NHL level, but the Blue Jackets would do well to add a few more.

They will have options at each of their selections to draft wingers with legitimate scoring profiles. If Ethan Belchetz gets to them in the teens, he'd fit perfectly into their pipeline. With their other selections, players such as Ryan Roobroeck, Marcus Nordmark, Jonah Sivertson and Landon Amrhein would be worthwhile.

New Jersey Devils

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd, 4th (WPG), 5th, 6th

The Devils have a plethora of goaltenders and defensemen in the prospect pool that have NHL projections. The Devils now need forwards who are play drivers.

With Sunny Mehta at the top of hockey operations, the Devils are likely to target players with scoring profiles that are indicative of NHL success. Adding play-driving forwards who win puck battles and create offense is paramount to success. The Devils are set for the future on the blue line and need to focus on building out a pipeline of forwards who can make an impact at the NHL level.

New York Islanders

2026 draft picks: 1st, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th

Without a doubt, the Islanders have a glaring need for right-handed defenders, as they don't have a single one in their pipeline projected to play NHL games. Their first-round pick almost surely needs to be used on a right-handed defender.

Ryan Lin is the obvious target, and likely to be available. If the Isles can acquire another top-40 pick, Tommy Bleyl and Juho Piiparinen are also logical targets. Bottom line: That's a spot that needs to be addressed this summer.

New York Rangers

2026 draft picks: 1st, 1st (DAL), 2nd (CAR), 3rd, 3rd (NYI), 3rd (LA), 3rd (BUF), 5th, 6th, 6th (CHI), 7th (VAN)

The Rangers need high-end talent and, specifically, impactful prospects at center. With Gabe Perreault expected to play a full-time NHL role next year, the Rangers have Liam Greentree and Malcolm Spence on the wings. The Rangers don't have a single center in their pipeline projected to play NHL games, and that's a problem.

The Rangers will have the option to select one of the top defenders or Viggo Björck at No. 5 overall but need to stock the pipeline with seven picks in the first three rounds. With four picks in the third round, it may be worth trading up to the middle of the second to improve the probability of getting a player they value that slides.

Philadelphia Flyers

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd, 6th, 7th

With only four selections in the upcoming draft, the Flyers do not have a lot of room to bolster their prospect pipeline, but they have one of the youngest lineups in the NHL. The



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Flyers should be looking to add defenders on the left side, as well as high-end skill.

Given the Flyers' dedication to acquiring players who play coach Rick Tocchet's style, there are a few defensemen who fit the bill in the Flyers' range. Maksim Sokolovskii has Flyer written all over him. Nikita Shcherbakov also fits the mold, but the Flyers could also bolster their left side with Maddox Dagenais or Gleb Pugachyov, who fit the organizational desire to play a physical and in-your-face style.

Pittsburgh Penguins

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd, 2nd (WPG), 3rd, 6th (NSH)

Given the age of their current Hall of Fame centers and the lack of a single NHL center in the pipeline, the Penguins have a glaring need in the middle of the ice. Though Ben Kindel could develop and move to the middle, the Penguins need to add centers to their organization.

With three picks in the first two rounds, the Penguins have opportunity to add projectable centers to the pipeline. Alexander Command, Oliver Suvanto, Ilia Morozov and Brooks Rogowski are logical targets with their first three selections. Grabbing two centers in the first two rounds would be a major win for the Penguins.

Washington Capitals

2026 draft picks: 1st, 1st (ANA), 4th, 5th, 7th

The Capitals desperately need centers in their prospect pipeline, with only Milton Gastrin projected to play NHL games, albeit in a bottom-six role. The Caps have opted for value when selecting in the back half of the first round, meaning their first-rounders may not be centers if top scoring profiles were to be available.

The good news for the Capitals is they have two first-round picks in the late teens, and they are surely hoping Tynan Lawrence or Alexander Command is available to them. If not, there are plenty of centers with middle-six projections available in the 20-40 range. Trading back in the first round to acquire a second-round pick would give the Capitals additional draft capital, while likely having the opportunity to draft a center of similar to value to Command (Oliver Suvanto, Yegor Shilov, Ilia Morozov, Brooks Rogowski).

Central Division

Chicago Blackhawks

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd, 2nd (TOR), 2nd (NYI), 3rd, 4th (OTT), 7th, 7th (FLA)

The Blackhawks need left-handed defenders and a top-six winger, ideally one for Connor Bedard. Luckily for them, they are virtually guaranteed to end up with Ivar Stenberg or Carson Carels with their first pick.

If Stenberg falls to them at No. 4, they should be doing cartwheels. An NHL-ready winger who can slide into the top six and have an immediate impact would be a coup. If not, Carels is an equally exciting prospect who should blossom into a top-pairing defender in the near future.

Regardless, Chicago needs to leverage its draft capital to acquire players who can play immediately, or who can develop into impactful players in the next few years. With four picks in the first two rounds, including three in the top

40, the Blackhawks have more than enough opportunity to bolster their prospect pool with quality prospects at both positions.

Colorado Avalanche

2026 draft picks: 3rd (NSH), 4th, 4th (CAR), 5th (BOS), 5th (PHI), 7th, 7th (NYR), 7th (OTT), 7th (PIT)

The Avalanche own nine picks in the upcoming draft. The problem is, four of them are in the seventh round, and just one of them is in the first three.

There is a gaping hole in the defensive pipeline on the right side. Given that Cale Makar is expected to remain atop the Avalanche right-handed defenseman pyramid until the end of his career, that isn't a massive issue. However, it is never good to have zero prospects at a given position. The Avalanche have found some late-round gems in recent years, so there is reason to believe they can find some right-side D options with one of their picks.

Dallas Stars

2026 draft picks: 2nd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 7th (TOR)

The Stars need high-end talent at every position. After trading away or graduating many of their prospects, the Stars are left with relatively bare cupboards and don't have a single prospect projected to become a top-six forward or top-four defender.

Dallas has just one pick total in the first four rounds of this year's draft, making the acquisition of high-end prospects very difficult. The Stars may be best served using some of their current talent to acquire prospects who will be able to contribute on entry-level contracts, as the franchise continues through its contention window. Regardless of how they acquire the talent, the Stars need to add it at every position.

Minnesota Wild

2026 draft picks: 3rd, 4th, 5th, 5th (SJ), 6th

When you trade away three of your top young players to acquire a Norris Trophy winner, the top of your prospect pool gets depleted quickly.

The Wild are fortunate to have a few prospects with potential to impact the middle of the lineup at forward and defense. Hunter Haight and Charlie Stramel should receive opportunities next season if they aren't traded, and the Wild will need to replenish the pipeline of right-handed players as a result. Both players can play center and the right wing, and the Wild need some right-handed forwards with upside.

Given their lack of draft capital, they will need to swing on upside in the later rounds, targeting players with promising profiles who slip through for one reason or another.

Nashville Predators

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd, 2nd (MIN), 3rd (SEA), 4th, 4th (PIT), 5th, 5th (EDM), 5th (CAR), 6th (UTA), 7th

Under new management with Chris MacFarland taking over as GM, the Predators will need to continue to add to their prospect pool, particularly on defense. Outside of Ryker Lee, they also need a high-end skilled winger. It feels like Ethan



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Belchetz fits that target perfectly, if he's available. If not, Ryan Lin makes sense with a need on the right side.

With 11 picks in the draft, the Preds have room to swing for the fences in the later rounds, which they should be doing. If the Preds opt to target both areas in this draft class, they have an opportunity to add the likes of Marcus Nordmark, Ryan Roobroeck, Luke Schairer, William Hakansson and Jonas Woo to their pipeline.

St. Louis Blues

2026 draft picks: 1st, 1st (DET), 1st (COL), 3rd, 3rd (NJ), 3rd (SJ), 4th, 4th (DAL), 5th, 5th (PIT), 6th, 7th

The Blues need centers badly, and are likely hoping that either Viggo Bjorck or Tynan Lawrence is available at No. 11. If not, they can select whichever defenseman slipped out of the top 10 and then take a projectable middle-six center at No. 15.

Given where the Blues are selecting, there is no reason they shouldn't come away with at least one NHL center. Lawrence and Bjorck represent top-six options, while Alexander Command and Oliver Suvanto are middle-six options.

Utah Mammoth

2026 draft picks: 1st, 3rd, 3rd (CAR), 4th, 5th, 5th (CHI), 7th

The Mammoth have one of the best pipelines in the NHL, thanks to a lot of years in Arizona where they drafted more than any other team. Within that pipeline, there is a lack of a power-play quarterback and some wingers.

At No. 19, they are likely to have one of their highly rated prospects slide to them and can select whomever that may be. It stands to reason that at least two of Adam Novotny, Nikita Klepov, Ryan Lin and Xavier Villeneuve are available there. None of the defenders fits Utah's edict of bigger players on the back end, but would represent the best option for a power-play quarterback within the organization.

Whomever they select at No. 19, the Mammoth can use their middle-round picks to add more wingers and offensive defensemen given the depth at center and big defensive defensemen already in the org.

Winnipeg Jets

2026 draft picks: 1st, 3rd, 4th (BUF or EDM), 5th, 6th, 7th, 7th (BUF)

The Jets have a few needs, with the most pressing being right-handed defensemen. Daxon Rudolph or Keaton Verhoeff should be available for the Jets when they make their first-round selection at No. 8 and would immediately give the Jets a blue-chip prospect who can develop into an impactful top-four defender.

Further down in the draft, the Jets have a need for skilled forwards -- which can be acquired through trade or using remaining draft capital on projectable scoring profiles. If the Jets can land another first-round pick, targeting players such as Nikita Klepov, Elton Hermansson and JP Hurlbert -- who could become top-six contributors -- would provide a significant boost to their prospect pool.

Pacific Division

Anaheim Ducks

2026 draft picks: 2nd, 3rd, 4th (PHI), 5th, 6th, 7th

The Ducks have quite a few defensive prospects projected to play impactful roles in the NHL. But after Beckett Sennecke graduated from the pipeline, the Ducks don't have as much talent depth at forward.

Lacking a first-round pick for the first time since 2017, the Ducks will need to rely on their scouting and development staffs to produce a winger or two who can contribute in a middle-six role. With young centers in the lineup, the Ducks could use a few wingers to fill things out and support their talented centers.

Calgary Flames

2026 draft picks: 1st, 1st (VGK), 2nd, 2nd (NYR), 2nd (UTA), 2nd (OTT), 3rd, 3rd (VAN), 4th, 5th, 6th

Defenseman Zayne Parekh represents the Flames' best chance at a difference-maker in the prospect pool, and they need to add some more high-end talent. Calgary will have an opportunity to add a difference-maker at the center position with the sixth overall pick, and with two first-rounders and four second-rounders, the Flames can and should be swinging on elite talent.

Alternatively, the Flames could also package a few of those picks to move up in the first round. Targeting Viggo Bjorck at No. 6, and continuing to go after players with elite skill sets and competitive profiles -- the Ruck brothers, Ryder Cali, Simas Ignatavicius -- with their early picks could provide the foundation for Calgary's contention window into the 2030s.

Edmonton Oilers

2026 draft picks: 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th

When you trade away Sam O'Reilly, you're left with a gaping hole at center in the prospect pool. Only Isaac Howard and Beau Akey are projected to be regular NHL players within the Oilers system, and that is a real problem.

The Oilers haven't had many picks in the first few rounds over the last few years, so it should be no surprise they lack depth. Having zero centers on the way is concerning, regardless of having superstars Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl on the NHL roster.

With no first-rounder and just their own second- and third-round picks this year, the reality is, they need to choose the best player available at those spots. They need players capable of reading the game at an elite level, with the potential to consistently execute.

Los Angeles Kings

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd, 2nd (CBJ), 3rd (WSH), 4th, 5th, 6th, 6th (COL), 7th

The Kings are loaded in goal, with the best group of netminder prospects in the NHL, but they are very thin on skilled forwards. None of the forwards in the Kings' pipeline project to play above the bottom six, and only three project to hit the 200-game threshold in the NHL. Bottom-six players are vital to winning championships, but elite talent is a necessary ingredient for any serious contender.

The Kings have three picks in the first two rounds and desperately need to add prospects with skill and upside. Targeting players such as Nikita Klepov, Adam Novotny,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Mathis Preston, JP Hurlbert, Ryan Roobroeck and Jaxon Cover with their first three selections would go a long way to adding skill to the top-six group.

San Jose Sharks

2026 draft picks: 1st, 2nd (COL), 4th (FLA), 4th (VGK), 5th (MTL), 6th (PHI or CBJ), 7th

This one is a slam dunk: The Sharks need a top-tier defensive prospect, with the potential to be a No. 1 franchise defender that drives offense and controls the defensive pace of the game.

There are at least two of those defenders in the upcoming draft, and the Sharks are in a unique position picking second overall. They can use their pick to trade for a proven NHL defender of that caliber, or they can draft Carson Carels, Chase Reid or Keaton Verhoeff. Sam Dickinson is an excellent player, but he's going to be better as a No. 2 in San Jose.

Seattle Kraken

2026 draft picks: 1st, 1st (TB), 2nd, 4th, 4th (NYR), 6th, 7th, 7th (NJ)

The Kraken need to continue to add high-end talent to their pool, particularly on the blue line. Many of their early selections have been on forwards -- and consequently, there is no shortage of talented forward prospects in their system - - but they lack a blue-chip defensive prospect.

With three picks in the top 40, the Kraken have an opportunity to significantly bolster their defensive prospect pool with the likes of Daxon Rudolph, Alberts Smits or Malte Gustafsson in the first round, and Nikita Shcherbakov, Brek Liske and Alexander Belecki with picks in the second and fourth rounds.

Vancouver Canucks

2026 draft picks: 1st, 1st (MIN), 2nd, 2nd (SJ), 3rd (CBJ), 4th, 5th, 6th, 6th (WSH), 6th (BOS)

The Canucks' most pressing need is skill. They need it on defense, and they need it at forward. It is not about positional need or desire; the Canucks desperately need to draft players with elite scoring profiles and high upside with every selection.

If Ivar Stenberg gets to three, that is a no-brainer pick. It continues with their other selections in their early rounds. They should target players such as Nikita Klepov, Adam Novotny, Mathis Preston, Ryan Roobroeck, Yegor Shilov, Casey Mutryn, Tommy Bleyl and Xavier Villeneuve.

The Canucks desperately need an influx of skill and upside at every position in their prospect pool as part of the rebuild. It starts with drafting the best players available and extracting value wherever possible.

Vegas Golden Knights

2026 draft picks: 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th

The Golden Knights need to draft players who will hold value around the league because most of their selections are likely to be included in trade packages as opposed to playing for Vegas. To do this, they must draft the most skilled players with high ceilings.

With only one pick in the first four rounds, the Golden Knights will need to swing on elite skill and hope the player develops into a valuable commodity over the next year or two. That will allow Vegas to include them in deals to acquire veterans that will help the team continue to compete for the Stanley Cup.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

“How You Like Me Now?” Hurricanes Still Without a Superstar

By: Bob Wage

One of the biggest criticisms in years past by the hockey experts around the league was that the Carolina Hurricanes did not have a superstar to take them to the next level. They did not have that all-time reliable player they could count on to score a goal or make a big play, when they absolutely needed it. The Canes had a few players who were close, although they were not quite there.

But as it turned out Carolina didn't need a superstar, they just needed a couple more “regular stars” to get the job done.

Still missing a true superstar, who I will define as a player averaging more than a point a game in his career or someone considered one of the best at his position in the league, the Canes added K'Andre Miller and Nikolaj Ehlers to their stable of “regular stars.” Both of these players fit in perfectly and played their best hockey in the heat of the playoffs.

Miller, who was acquired via trade from the New York Rangers, had signed an eight year contract with an average annual cap hit of \$7.5 million. He is locked up until 2032-33.

The defenseman led the team in the playoffs averaging just over 24 minutes a game. He added 9 assists, 29 blocked shots, and had a plus +12 rating, good for second best on the team.

Ehlers, who was signed during the free agency period for \$8.5 million a year, certainly scored his share of timely goals and chipped in with several nifty assists as well. He finished with 8 goals and 10 assists with a plus +9 rating.

The rest of the Pack are not “superstars” either, but they ain't too shabby.

Who would have picked Jackson Blake to lead the team in postseason scoring? (7G 13A). He is signed until 2033-34 at \$5.1 million a year. The winger was supposed to be suffering from his sophomore slump this year but scored a career high in goals (22) instead.

Perhaps a former “superstar”, Taylor Hall, was playing like a man possessed at times in these playoffs. He was a hitting machine with 24 hits, some of them crushing. Oh yes, he also had 7 goals and 12 assists, good for second on the team. He is locked up for two more years at \$3.166 million a year.

Next up is Logan Stankoven, part of the return for the true superstar, Mikko Rantanen, who signed up for \$12 million a year at Dallas. Stankoven, who has been a winner wherever he's played, was like a pitbull on the ice, doggedly fighting for

the puck. This “pitbull” also has some skill and contributed a team high 11 goals along with 5 assists. Stankoven is signed for \$6 million a year until 2033-34.

The closest player to a superstar on Carolina would be Sebastian Aho, who is nearly a point-a-game scorer. Aho was a bit inconsistent on offense this postseason, but held his own defensively. The other team's best players were not scoring either. Aho is under contract until 2030-31 at \$9.75 million a year.

Another player on the fringe of being a superstar is Andrei Svechnikov. The Russian winger can do it all, hit, shoot, play defense, whatever you ask of him. He had 6 goals and 11 points and was third on the team with 74 hits this postseason. Svechnikov is signed through 2028-29 at \$7.75 million a year.

What about the Captain, Jordan Staal? Certainly no superstar and he was not even nominated for the Selke, which would be a no-brainer. Staal played arguably the best hockey of his career starting off with a fight with Ottawa Captain, Brady Tkachuk, and ending up by dominating the Stanley Cup Final along with winning the Conn Smythe. He had the second highest hit total on the team, 86 and had an amazing 56.6% faceoff winning percentage. Who cares about the Selke? The Captain is currently signed for one more season at \$2.975 million.

Seth Jarvis, who had a team high 32 goals in just 71 games in the regular season had 4 goals and 7 assists in the playoffs. Jarvis is signed at \$7.421 million a year until 2031-32.

Jordan Martinook is not a big scorer but is known to be a heart and soul guy. He was moved to the first line with Aho and Svechnikov late in the Final and did well. He is signed for one more season at \$3.125 million.

The fourth line did what they were supposed to do. They played defense, created chaos, and even chipped in with a few points. Eric Robinson led the way in that category with 3 goals and 5 assists. Mark Jankowski won 50% of his faceoffs and William Carrier did what William Carrier does best....hit people. He had a total of 91 hits while playing just 10 minutes a game. That comes to a 28.68 hits per 60 minutes average, almost double second place Staal.

Robinson is signed through 2028-29 at \$1.7 million, Jankowski through 2027-28 at \$1.85 million and Carrier is through 2029-30 at \$2.150 million.

Jacob Slavin at times did not look perfect. He might even have had a bad game or two, but he was back to being the “human eraser” in the Final. He was second averaging 23:30



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

a game on the ice and he was tied for the team lead with Chatfield with 34 blocked shots. Slavin is signed until 2032-33 for \$6.4 million per.

Speaking of Chatfield, again he was tied for the team lead with 34 blocked shots. Chatfield is signed for one more year at \$3.075 million.

Miller's partner, Sean Walker upped his game in these playoffs, especially his physicality. He was fourth on the team with 68 hits, one of them knocked William Karlsson out of the final series. He had 29 blocked shots and averaged 22:30 minutes of ice time per game. He is signed through 2028-29 at \$3.625 million per.

Shayne Gostisbehere helped to ramp up the powerplay in the Final. He finished with 12 points in his 19 games and also had a +2. Gostisbehere has one more year on his contract for \$3.2 million.

Alexander Nikishin finished up the postseason looking a bit tentative. He still had 25 hits in his 17 games played. Nikishin needs a contract before playing again next season.

Frederik Andersen did the heavy lifting during these playoffs and was sterling for the most part. Word is that he hurt his knee during game two of the Final. Brind'Amour waited until Vegas had scored four goals on him in game three before taking him out. He also needs a contract before playing next year although Pyotr Kochetkov should be ready to play.

When Andersen got hurt, Brandon Bussi was called in and had a superb postseason. He finished up with a 1.60 GAA and a save percentage of .931. Bussi is signed for the next three years at \$1.9 million per.

Once again, there are no superstars listed above. There are no players paid more than \$10 million per year. But there is a team of "regular stars" who gelled together and who dominated this postseason with an overall record of 16-3. Maybe the Hurricanes don't need a superstar.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026



Why Jordan Staal Chose Frederik Andersen For The First Stanley Cup Handoff

By: Ryan Henkel

Acknowledging the veteran's tireless grind and pivotal playoff performance, the Hurricanes captain honored his netminder's resilience with the ultimate gesture of respect on hockey's grandest stage.

More Videos

As Jordan Staal took his lap with the Stanley Cup, all that was on his mind was savoring that moment.

But when he came back to the group, he had a decision to make: Who will next have the opportunity to lift Lord Stanley?

Many thought that perhaps linemate and best buddy Jordan Martinook would get the honor or perhaps one of Sebastian Aho or Jaccob Slavin, the other two longest serving Hurricanes.

But in that moment, the Canes captain made a different decision, opting to instead hand the Cup to goaltender Frederik Andersen.

"He's obviously been grinding the longest," Staal said on Andersen, the second oldest player on the team. "I think he got us going here in the playoffs and it was unfortunate for him to be out of the lineup. I'm sure he wanted to keep it going and couldn't. I just figured he'd be a great start. Just proud of the way he played for us. He gave us some great rest early in the playoffs and a chance to keep moving forward."

Andersen had been the Hurricanes' guy this year, starting in 16 of the Canes' 19 playoff games and picking up 13 wins in that span.

The Danish veteran even battled through immense grief after the passing of close friend, mentor and agent Claude Lemieux, still finding a way to help his team advance to their first Stanley Cup since 2006.

But in the end, Andersen was forced out of the lineup due to injury.

However, even if he wasn't the one to get the team over the finish line, he's still been integral piece of the team for years and deserved the acknowledgement he got.

"A guy that's grinded it out for a long time," said Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour. "Happy for him. Everyone knows he was such a big part of getting us here."

"He deserves it probably more than anybody," Seth Jarvis told Sportsnet. "That guy has grinded his absolute nuts off to be in this position and get us here. So to see him lift the Cup after everything he's been through... I can't say enough good things about him and I couldn't be happier for him."

For Andersen, the honor came as a bit of a surprise to him as he had no idea Staal was going to start with him.

"I was shocked," Andersen said. "I was a deer in the headlights. Yeah, I was not really ready for that, but it was a very cool moment. I think I obviously waited for that a long time and have been dreaming of it for a long time. So yeah, that felt good."

That moment had been a long time coming for the 13-year pro who had dealt with a lot from injuries to heartbreak both on and off the ice, and he made sure to truly savor it.

"I've always heard people say it's heavier than you think, but it didn't feel too bad," Andersen said. "It wasn't too bad. So, yeah, I mean, yeah. It felt good. It felt right."

LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article316152587.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7363768/2026/06/18/nhl-worst-value-contract-2025-26/>

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<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/players/why-jordan-staal-chose-frederik-andersen-for-the-first-stanley-cup-handoff>



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

SportScan

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

1394245 Carolina Hurricanes

The Carolina Hurricanes held their victory dinner at a Raleigh hot spot

Drew Jackson5-6 minutes 17/06/2026

The Carolina Hurricanes held a victory dinner at a popular Raleigh restaurant Tuesday night — and you know they brought a special guest.

Since landing in Raleigh Monday, the Stanley Cup-winning Carolina Hurricanes have been celebrating all over the Triangle, bringing their new hardware along for the historic ride.

The Stanley Cup has appeared in sports bars, fine dining restaurants and neighborhood shopping centers. On Tuesday, most of the players on the Canes roster and their families had dinner at Brodeto, the acclaimed Raleigh Iron Works restaurant.

Canes victory dinner at Brodeto

Chef and owner Scott Crawford said he and his culinary director, Conor Delaney, served the Canes a special family-style meal of Brodeto favorites. Along with the Stanley Cup, Jordan Staal also brought his Conn Smyth trophy as the most valuable player in the playoffs.

"They really interact as a family, so that's the kind of meal we prepared for them," Crawford told The News & Observer in an interview, referring to the Canes players.

"They brought their families, there were kids here," Crawford said. "I think everyone agrees this is just a surreal moment in time for everyone. You have to imagine how long and hard they've worked for this. It was an emotional night to see them celebrating something they've worked so hard and so long for."

Crawford said he got the word Tuesday morning that a Canes dinner might be in the works, sparked apparently from Brodeto fan and Carolina winger Jordan Martinook. Brodeto closed to the public Tuesday and pulled the dinner together in a few hours.

"I have to give a shout out, we're so grateful to the guests who were gracious enough to move their reservations to a different restaurant or a different night," Crawford said. "We had to make it happen on short notice and really appreciated that. We felt like it was the right thing to do for the team, the community and the city to make that happen."

While the restaurant was closed, a crowd gathered around Brodeto, and Crawford said players would periodically take the Stanley Cup outside and meet fans.

When he was offered a chance to hoist the Cup himself, Crawford couldn't believe it.

"It was exactly like you would think," he said. "I knew as it was happening, this is a once-in-a-lifetime moment and did not take that for granted. ... It was just a special night we'll remember forever."

'We're 100% a hockey bar'

The first Raleigh spot to greet the cup was Glenwood Avenue bar Teets, owned by former Canes player Bates Battaglia. The Cup also spent hours in North Hills outside the Italian restaurant Vivace.

Then Tuesday afternoon it made an unexpected stop for beers at Rudino's Sports Corner on Edwards Mills Road. Owner Mark Rudd, who has had Canes season tickets since the team played in Greensboro, said he had just left the restaurant a couple of hours earlier.

"They just dropped in," Rudd said. "I got a text from a buddy and called one of my managers and said, 'I hope you got a picture.' It was such a thrill for our customers and staff."

In 2006, Rudd's kids were just a few years old as they went to watch parties and playoff games. Now, with this new championship, Rudd said a new generation of Canes fans has caught the spark, something he's felt in his bars.

"We're 100% a hockey bar, 100% a sports bar," Rudd said. "We have signed sticks on the wall, Canes memorabilia. ...The younger generation kind of put their arms around this one. I was there in '06, but this one is for a different generation. But I had tears in my eyes (Sunday night)."

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Profile Image of Drew Jackson

The News & Observer

919-829-4707

Drew Jackson writes about restaurants and dining for The News & Observer and The Herald-Sun, covering the food scene in the Triangle and North Carolina.

News Observer LOADED: 06.18.2026

1394246 Carolina Hurricanes

Triple-digit temps expected in Triangle this week. Will it impact the parade?

Anna Roman4-5 minutes 17/06/2026

Temperatures could reach triple digits in the Triangle, the second time in a week.

Parts of the Triangle, including in Raleigh and Durham, could see a forecasted high of 100 degrees with a heat index of 105 degrees on Thursday, June 18, according to the National Weather Service.

"We are going to see temperatures topping out in the upper 90s to near 100, and it looks like the humidity won't be too bad, but once you get a



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

certain point with these temperatures, especially if you're out in the sunlight, it can bring about some heat illnesses," said Gail Hartfield, meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Last week, temperatures broke records by reaching 103 degrees at the Raleigh-Durham International Airport on Friday, June 12.

What's the weather forecast for the Carolina Hurricanes parade?

The parade and celebration for the Carolina Hurricanes after winning the Stanley Cup is set for 11 a.m. Saturday, June 20, in downtown Raleigh. Details about the rally, parade route and parking can be found online at newsobserver.com.

The temperatures are forecasted to be in the low-to-mid 80s with near-normal temperatures and dry weather on Saturday, Hartfield said.

"On Saturday it's not going to be that bad, but invariably you always have somebody who's been out in the heat too long, especially if they're maybe enjoying an adult beverage, they might succumb to heat illnesses," she said. "So we are advising people to take it easy out there and enjoy yourself, but it looks like it'll be a fairly nice day."

Potential storms and Tropical Storm Arthur

A cold front will move in Thursday evening, cutting off the heat, and bringing the potential for isolated storms in the Triangle.

"Most of the strongest storms are going to be to our north, across Virginia," she said. "That's where the greatest threat is going to be, but we could definitely see a few strong storms in our area. The main threat is going to be damaging straight-line winds of 60 miles per hour or greater."

Those isolated storms aren't related to Tropical Storm Arthur off the Gulf of Mexico that will bring life-threatening flooding to parts of Texas before weakening, moving northeast.

"From that point on it is just going to be a rainmaker," Hartfield said. "It's going to be a nasty rainmaker for southeast Texas, Louisiana and into Mississippi. I don't want to downplay that for them, because it will be a significant rain for them. For us, it looks like it's going to mostly be skirting by our south. It may clip southeastern North Carolina, so if you're at the beach in the south, southeast coast of North Carolina, it may be a little bit wet, but overall, the rainfall will be south of the Triangle. That's too bad because we are in a drought, and we could use the rainfall at this point."

Profile Image of Anna Roman

The News & Observer

919-829-4807

Anna Roman is a service journalism reporter for the News & Observer. She has previously covered city government, crime and business for newspapers across North Carolina and received many North Carolina Press Association awards, including first place for investigative reporting.

News Observer LOADED: 06.18.2026

1394247 Carolina Hurricanes

List: Here's where the Stanley Cup has appeared in Raleigh so far this week

Drew Jackson3-4 minutes 17/06/2026

The Stanley Cup is not a trophy case trophy. It is out in these streets.

And since arriving home Monday, June 15, the Stanley Cup has been out and about in Raleigh's streets, showing up at raucous bars and fine dining restaurants.

You may have heard, the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Vegas Golden Knights to capture the franchise's first Stanley Cup in 20 years. The Stanley Cup, a literal silver cup built on a pedestal of history, is a famously portable trophy and so far the Canes players have made it very accessible for the Triangle fanbase.

This story will be updated with more Cup stops.

@newsobserver

The newly minted Stanley Cup champions, the Carolina Hurricanes, dropped by Teets Monday night, a bar on Glenwood South co-owned by former Canes player Bates Battaglia, hours after they landed back in North Carolina. Social media video showed a line around the block as players alternated lifting the Stanley Cup to screaming fans. 📺 Travis Long

🎧 original sound - The News & Observer

Teets, 425 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh.

Owned by former Carolina Hurricanes player Bates Battaglia, Teets was the first stop of the Stanley Cup. Players dropped in Monday night at this popular Glenwood South bar, hoisting the Cup high in the air and offering sips from its ancient bowl.

Rudino's Pizza and Grinders Sports Corner, 3101 Edwards Mill Road., Raleigh.

This casual sports bar hosted the Cup and many of the Canes stars Tuesday afternoon, according to a social media post.

Vivace, 4209 Lassiter Mill Road, Suite115, Raleigh.

The Cup made an appearance in North Hills Tuesday, drawing a long line of fans eager to snap a photo with the championship chalice.

Brodetto, 2201 Iron Works Drive, Suite 137, Raleigh.

This Scott Crawford restaurant hosted a team dinner Tuesday night in Raleigh Iron Works. The players and their families, the Stanley Cup and Jordan Staal's Conn Smythe trophy were all in attendance.

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Profile Image of Drew Jackson

The News & Observer

919-829-4707

Drew Jackson writes about restaurants and dining for The News & Observer and The Herald-Sun, covering the food scene in the Triangle and North Carolina.

News Observer LOADED: 06.18.2026

1394248 Carolina Hurricanes

What's next for Carolina Hurricanes goalie Frederik Andersen?

Chip Alexander7-9 minutes 17/06/2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Jordan Staal was the first to lift the Stanley Cup, the Carolina Hurricanes captain letting out a few howling screams Sunday night at T-Mobile Arena.

Staal then skated toward his joyous teammates for the first handoff and gave the coveted trophy to ... Frederik Andersen?

"I was surprised," Andersen would say. "I was taken aback, a deer in the headlights for a bit there."

It could have been Sebastian Aho or Jaccob Slavin or Jordan Martinook, who have joined Staal in being the Canes' leadership group the past eight years in the quest for the Cup. But Staal picked out Andersen, who was not in the lineup or on the bench for Game 6 of the Cup Final against the Vegas Golden Knights, but joined the postgame celebration after the 3-0 clinching victory.

Why Freddie?

"Obviously he's been grinding the longest and I think he got us going in the playoffs," Staal said.

At 36, Andersen started the first 16 playoff games and won 13 as the Canes marched their way into their first Stanley Cup Final since 2006. Slavin called him an "absolute brick wall" and the veteran's focus was super intense. He was dialed in.

Things changed for Andersen on May 28. That was the day it was learned that Andersen's longtime agent and close friend, Claude Lemieux, had died, taking his own life.

Lemieux, a four-time Stanley Cup champion, had been the honored torchbearer into Montreal's Bell Centre before Game 3 of the Eastern Conference final. Andersen was beaming that day, happy that Lemieux had his big moment, even if Andersen was in net for the Canes and his friend and agent was revving up the sellout crowd.

Only Andersen knows how Lemieux's death affected him. He said Sunday he "tweaked" his knee in Game 2 of the Cup Final against Vegas. The Canes won that one in overtime, but Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour made a change in Game 3, the first in Las Vegas, after the Golden Knights took a 4-0 lead after two periods.

It was Brandon Bussi time.

It would stay that way until the end of Game 6, when the Canes closed out the shutout win, the gloves and helmets came flying off and the on-ice party began at T-Mobile Arena. Bussi took a tough loss in Game 3 after an unfortunate bounce in the second overtime, but was rock-solid in starting and winning the next three games as the Canes claimed the Cup.

Bussi quickly became the focus of the Cup Final. His enticing story of going from waiver-wire claim to Stanley Cup champion this season was featured by all the sports media as the "Bus" squeezed everything out of his opportunity to shine, to star.

Andersen, meanwhile, was left in the shadows, all but disappearing from sight, at least publicly, until going on the ice Sunday to celebrate. Pyotr Kochetkov, not Andersen, was Bussi's backup the last three games of the Cup Final.

"I had a lot of ups and downs, through this series, the playoffs and the years where we were a part of different emotional swings," Andersen said. "The way we've been supporting each other throughout that has meant the world, to me especially but also to everyone who experienced their ups and downs. We've always been there for everyone."

Andersen was emotional after the Canes finished off the conference final in Game 5 against Montreal in Lenovo Center. And again Sunday, in some postgame interviews after the Canes won the Cup against Vegas.

Asked about Lemieux by Sportsnet's Elliotte Freidman, Andersen said, "It's tough to really describe how much he meant to me and how cool it is to have my name on that trophy with him."

Andersen had nothing but praise for Bussi, who won 31 games for the Canes in the regular season, then was Andersen's backup for the first 16 playoff games.

"It's really hard to find words for how good he was," Andersen said. "The way he came in like that, having sat probably two months, coming in and playing with that calmness and assertiveness right away, that's really hard to do. That's something I was impressed by and won't forget for a long time."

The question now for Andersen is what's next?

Andersen has played 13 NHL seasons, the last five with the Hurricanes. He has a Stanley Cup. He competed for Denmark in the Milan Olympics — fulfilling another lifelong dream — along with Canes teammate Nikolaj Ehlers.

Andersen, who has 324 career regular-season wins, has been sidelined at times with knee issues. He had to cope with a serious blood clotting issue in the 2023-24 season.

Andersen is due to become an unrestricted free agent. Only general manager Eric Tulsky knows what the team's future plans are with their goalies — Bussi was signed to a three-year contract in February and Kochetkov has a year left on his contract.

In his 35 regular-season games this season, Andersen had career-worst in goals-against average (3.05) and save percentage (.874), even though Tulsky said his goalie played better than his numbers. He had a 1.89 GAA and .910 percentage in his 16 playoff games.

During the playoffs a year ago, Andersen and Tulsky agreed on a one-year, \$2.75 million contract for 2025-26 that was packed with incentives. That could again be an option as Tulsky clearly appreciates — and has said so in interviews — Andersen's resiliency and his contributions to the Hurricanes.

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Profile Image of Chip Alexander

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

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1394249 Carolina Hurricanes

Are the 2025-26 Hurricanes the best team with no future Hall of Famers in NHL history?

Sean McIndoe12-15 minutes 17/06/2026

This week is always a weird time on the NHL calendar. The Stanley Cup Final has just ended, and everyone is trying to catch their breath before the offseason truly gets going. The draft, trade rumors and UFA boards are all happening against the backdrop of Cup parties and parades.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

But we're also just days away from the announcement of this year's Hockey Hall of Fame class, which comes Monday. That timing always struck me as a bit odd, since what should be a huge announcement ends up being overshadowed by everything else happening. If you're a history nerd like me, the HHOFF is catnip — perfect for debates and speculation and analysis. But most years, that's a hard pivot to make after the final has just ended.

But maybe not this year, because the Venn diagram between "just crowned the new champions" and "Hall of Fame debates" produces an interesting sliver of overlap, in the form of a question: Did the Carolina Hurricanes just win the Stanley Cup without a single future Hall of Famer on the roster?

I think they might have. And if so, that's an incredibly rare feat. In fact, it's so rare that it leads to a bigger question: Among teams without any future HHOFFers, could the Hurricanes be the best team ever?

These Canes were built different

Shayna Goldman and Max Bultman

Who holds the current crown for best team without a HHOFF player?

It's surprisingly difficult to find a truly great team without any Hall of Famers. I tried a few years ago, and the list of candidates was slim. Remember, we're not saying the team has to be built around HHOFFers, or even that they have to play key roles. We just want at least one on the roster. Plenty of teams have had just one, often a veteran near the end of their career playing a leadership role. But none? That's rare.

When I dove in a few years ago, two teams emerged as my best candidates: the 2018-19 St. Louis Blues and the 2006-07 Buffalo Sabres. The Blues, of course, won the Stanley Cup that year after sitting dead last in the league in January and finishing with 99 points. The Sabres were a 113-point powerhouse that won the Presidents' Trophy before falling in the conference final.

Both solid options, and both without a single Hall of Famer ... yet.

That Sabres team had Ryan Miller in goal, and while he's been eligible for a few years without getting the call, he has a strong case. It wouldn't be a shock to see him there someday, maybe as early as Monday. And if that happens, the Sabres are out. As for the Blues, while there's still time for someone such as Robert Thomas or even Jordan Binnington to make a push, it seems like the main spoiler candidate is Alex Pietrangelo. He's a three-time second-team All-Star and a two-time Cup winner facing an uncertain future. Has he done enough to earn consideration? Probably, but that may not be enough to get him over the finish line.

That's really the whole list as far as truly elite teams. The 2023 Golden Knights are the only other Cup winner without a player who's either already in the Hall or a slam dunk, according to HHOFF maven Paul Pidutti of Adjusted Hockey. If Pietrangelo gets in, he'll take both the Blues and Knights off the list. Jack Eichel is probably on pace to get there, too, and the Knights also had Jonathan Quick as their backup.

Add it all up, and the Hurricanes might have this wrapped up. With all due respect to the Blues and Sabres, this year's Hurricanes were better than both. They tied the Sabres with 113 points, but they actually won the Cup. And they did it in dominant fashion, going 16-3 over one of the best postseason runs of all time. I'm sure there are some fans in Buffalo or St. Louis who might want to nitpick at Carolina's credentials, but it's a tough case to make after what we just watched.

So sure, I think the Hurricanes are the easy winner here. But that's if and only if they actually don't have any Hall of Famers.

Do they? The short answer, of course, is that we don't know yet. But HHOFF season is the time for speculation, debate, and projection. So let's dive in.

The case for a Hurricane in the Hall of Fame

Like pretty much every other successful team, the Hurricanes are mostly made up of good players who won't come close to the Hall of Fame. That's fine — the Hall is meant for the best of the best, and unless you're the 2002 Red Wings or late-'70s Habs, the vast majority of your roster isn't in that conversation. The Hurricanes are no exception.

But they do have a handful of candidates, and they fall into three categories.

The old guys

For our purposes, this is the most interesting group because their Hall of Fame cases are mostly finished products. We don't need to do a ton of speculation here; we just have to look at the resumes and see if any of them are Hall-worthy.

Three names stand out here.

Frederik Andersen: Great guy. Great story. Not a Hall of Famer. If he'd stayed hot (and healthy) through the final and won the Conn Smythe, maybe that at least cracks the door open. But after he had to yield the net to Brandon Bussi, it's not happening unless he goes full Jacques Plante well into his 40s.

Jordan Staal: The Conn Smythe at least makes it interesting. The compelling narrative is certainly there — the second overall pick who wins an early Cup as a kid in Pittsburgh, then waits 17 long years to get another, this time as the grizzled captain. He has a ton of Selke votes to point to. But that's about it as far as the honors go, and he's 20 years into his career without hitting the 800-point mark. The weird Guy Carbonneau induction means pretty much every defensive center can make a Hall case, but Staal's isn't a strong one.

Taylor Hall: This might be the most interesting name on the list. Hall has a Hart Trophy, and the list of players to win that and not make the Hall is extremely short. But so far, that was the only year among his 16 seasons that he so much as got an MVP vote, and he's been well into the veteran journeyman stage of his career for a while now. It was extremely cool to see him emerge as a crucial piece for this year's Hurricanes run, and if he'd won the Conn Smythe, it would have made the debate at least mildly spicy. As it stands, though, he looks like an offensive player who won't come close to cracking 1,000 points. I don't see him getting in.

OK, so the veterans don't offer a ton of HHOFF hope. What about the younger stars?

The guys in their prime

These are the players who are already well-established NHL stars, but still have enough runway that their careers could go in a variety of directions.

Judging the Hall chances of a player in their late 20s can be tricky; it's not rare for a star at this age to look like a slam dunk, then turn out not to be. That said, I'm not sure any of Carolina's top names even fall into that category. Let's take a look.

Sebastian Aho: He's the team's biggest star and leading scorer. He's also about to turn 29, and has yet to have a 40-goal or 90-point season. He came in 10th in Hart voting in 2019, which remains his best finish. His seventh-place finish in postseason All-Star voting in 2021 is the only time he's ever received votes at the ultra-competitive center spot. He's good defensively, but this year was his first in the top 10 in Selke voting. And while winning a Cup will help his resume, he didn't have a great postseason.

Aho's always been a better player than his offensive numbers would indicate, and his Hockey-Reference similarity scores through 10 seasons include some HHOFF names, including Mats Sundin and Peter Šťastný. At his current pace, he could threaten the 1,000-point mark four years from now. But right now, he's trending more toward being an Eric Staal type of candidate — not out of the discussion, but unlikely to kick down the door.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Nikolaj Ehlers: He looked like a Hall candidate at times in this playoff run, without question. But he's 30 years old and just finished his 11th season with a career-high 71 points, and has never received an award vote for anything other than the Lady Byng. He'd need a very strong second act to get into contention.

Andrei Svechnikov: It feels weird to include him with the veterans, but he's 26 and just finished his eighth season; he's far from a finished product, but it's getting late for any kind of major leap. His numbers were up across the board this year, although that really only got him back to his previous 2022 level. His seventh-place Calder finish was his only award love, and his postseason was only so-so. His list of similar players is a weird one, including HHOFer Clark Gillies but also guys such as Scott Gomez and Craig Janney, and even Alex Frolov. There's no guarantee he even hits the 500-point milestone next year, so he's got lots of ground left to cover.

Jacob Slavin: I saved the toughest for last. Slavin is almost certainly the Hurricanes' most important player, and probably their best. He's also a defensive defenseman, which is a tough category for Hall voters. Some guys have made it, most notably Rod Langway and Kevin Lowe. But Langway won a pair of Norris Trophies, while Slavin's only top-five finish came in 2020. And Lowe got in on the strength of his six Cup rings. I'd love to see a HHOF where guys such as Slavin got recognized, but I'm not sure that's the Hall we have right now. And of course, he has to stay healthy, something he didn't do this year.

Bottom line, I'd guess Aho has the best shot, while Slavin should but might not. It wouldn't be a shock if both guys got in someday, and for our purposes, we only need one. But at the very least, it's fair to say none of the Hurricanes' current stars are on any kind of a sure-thing track.

So that's the vets. But won't somebody please think of the children youngsters?

The youngsters

We're primarily looking at Seth Jarvis, Logan Stankoven and Jackson Blake here. I suppose we could slip Bussi in there too, even though he's about to turn 28, because goalie aging curves can be weird.

It's really too early to do any kind of deep-dive Hall analysis on any of these players. Blake just finished his second season, and Stankoven his third. Neither has scored more than 22 goals in a year, so they're not on any kind of Hall track yet, but there's time. And while Bussi would need to follow a very unusual career path to get into the picture, after the year he just had, you can't rule anything out.

Jarvis is the furthest along, both in terms of his career and building a Hall resume. He's played five seasons, and his selection to Team Canada's entry in the 4 Nations Face-Off speaks to how highly he's thought of around the league. If we find ourselves 20 years in the future and Jarvis is a Hall of Famer, I don't think anyone would be shocked. That said, he just turned 24 and his production has plateaued; his offensive numbers are basically identical in each of the last three seasons, and they're hardly Hall-worthy. He's had a handful of Selke and Byng votes, but isn't anywhere near any kind of "best at his position" conversation. And his similar players include names such as Jeff Skinner, Alexei Yashin and Marián Gáborik, all reminders to varying degrees that a strong start to a career is no guarantee of continued success.

I don't see any locks here, and depending on how strict your criteria may be, there may not even be any favorites. But at the very least, there are absolutely some guys who are realistically in play.

What about Brind'Amour?

Rod Brind'Amour isn't in the Hall of Fame as a player despite two Selke wins and almost 1,200 career points, a fact you're no doubt already aware of if you've ever talked to a Hurricanes fan for more than three minutes. In the past, I've made the case that he wouldn't get my vote, but

that he also wouldn't be an indefensible pick. I could see him getting in someday. And it's even possible some day might be Monday.

Either way, Brind'Amour doesn't really factor in here because he's not on the roster. (If you're wondering, the 2006 team he captained to the Cup had Mark Recchi, so they're not contenders for today's crown.) He could get in as a player or even as a builder for his work behind the bench. In theory, those are two completely separate categories and his coaching success won't help his playing case, but with the secretive HHOF committee, you never know.

But sure, it's possible we might end up looking back on the 2026 Hurricanes as a team without any Hall of Famers on the ice, but with one behind the bench. And maybe even in the front office too, as Eric Tulsky continues to serve as the face of hockey's analytics era.

That's for down the road, though, and we've already spent most of his piece getting ahead of ourselves. For now, let's close with a poll.

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1394250 Carolina Hurricanes

Rod the Bod deserves the nod: A Hockey Hall of Fame case for the Canes coach

James Mirtle 7-9 minutes 17/06/2026

Rod Brind'Amour's story is unlike anyone else's in NHL history.

A high pick, No. 9 in 1988, he debuts at 18 years old and immediately makes an impact as a hard-nosed, two-way center on some pretty good teams in St. Louis and Philadelphia. But it's what happened more than a decade later that set Brind'Amour on his path to becoming an incredible folk figure in the league's modern era.

In January 2000, Brind'Amour was dealt in a midseason blockbuster from the Flyers, moving along with goalie prospect Jean-Marc Pelletier and a draft pick to the Carolina Hurricanes for Keith Primeau.

At the time, the Hurricanes appeared to still be the old, hapless, recently relocated Hartford Whalers. They were struggling in the standings and the stands, with only 12,000 fans a game coming out to the recently opened rink in Raleigh, N.C. Within two years, however, Brind'Amour had helped lead them to the franchise's first Stanley Cup Final. Three seasons later, with a 35-year-old Brind'Amour as their grizzled, chiseled captain, they won it all.

Rod Brind'Amour is the Canes' one true superstar

Max Bultman and Shayna Goldman

Brind'Amour also twice earned the Selke Trophy as the league's top defensive forward, in back-to-back seasons late in his career before he retired in 2010. A year later, he stepped behind the Hurricanes bench as an assistant coach. By 2018, he was their head coach, and the legend continued to grow.

Now the Hurricanes are on top of the NHL again, 20 years later, with Brind'Amour once more front and center hoisting the Stanley Cup.

The last time someone steered the same NHL franchise to championships as both a captain and a coach was Toe Blake, the Montreal Canadiens legend, in 1956. It's not a path anyone walks in the modern game, and certainly not with the type of unbroken, all-in commitment Brind'Amour has shown to the same franchise for nearly 30 years.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 18, 2026

Which brings us to his case for the Hockey Hall of Fame, a topic perhaps being debated by its selection committee right now in advance of Monday's announcement of the class of 2026. Based on the above introduction, Brind'Amour might feel like a no-brainer inductee. But his situation is actually fairly complicated, in part because of how the Hall of Fame elects candidates.

Brind'Amour has been eligible for the Hall since 2013, three years after he retired from playing, but his absence hasn't really been considered a big snub, especially with others out there waiting their turn — like Alexander Mogilny, who was finally inducted last year. In fact, most of the statistical analysis you'll see on Brind'Amour's candidacy as a player actually serves to explain why he shouldn't get in: see here and here.

Brind'Amour played in only one NHL All-Star Game, received Hart Trophy votes in only one season (2005-06, finishing 10th), and hit the 80-point mark just four times. Despite playing 1,484 games, which sits 29th all-time, he's 66th in goals (452) and 57th in points (1,184), behind players like Pat Verbeek, Bernie Nicholls and Theo Fleury, among others, who aren't getting in.

Paul Pidutti's excellent HHOF rankings site has Brind'Amour way down in a tie for 27th among eligible forwards, behind a long list that includes John LeClair, Keith Tkachuk, Patrik Elias, Henrik Zetterberg, Ryan Getzlaf and Rick Nash, to name several significantly ahead of him. From a box-score perspective, Brind'Amour's case ranks similarly to that of Rick Tocchet, Bill Guerin and Ray Whitney, who are all unlikely to be inducted given other sure-thing candidates about to retire around the league.

At Brind'Amour's single-season peak, according to Pidutti, he graded out as only the NHL's 32nd best forward. This low position is likely hindered by a reliance on offensive statistics that puts less value on Brind'Amour's defensive abilities. And if you believe in the power of being a complier — the value of longevity and amassing numbers over a long period of time — the case improves to where Brind'Amour-the-player falls in a group of Patrick Marleau types who may eventually get in.

What makes Brind'Amour so unusual, however, is his impressive coaching resume. The Hurricanes have made the playoffs every single season since he took over as head coach, and his career points percentage (.659) outranks that of every head coach with more than 208 games behind the bench, ahead of even Scotty Bowman's (.657).

Winning this year's Stanley Cup bolstered his credentials, too, though after only eight years behind an NHL bench he ranks 49th in coaching wins, well behind more tenured names — like Lindy Ruff, Paul Maurice, Joel Quenneville and Barry Trotz — in line for quick post-career Hall inductions.

And this is where Brind'Amour's overall candidacy becomes complicated. The HHOF process is set up to induct people only as players, builders or officials, and those are meant to be entirely separate categories. Which means the quality of one's playing career isn't supposed to affect their ability to be inducted for success as a coach or executive, and vice versa.

These Canes were built different

Shayna Goldman and Max Bultman

Typically this hasn't created issues for the HHOF committee because there haven't really been other Brind'Amours. Blake won the Hart Trophy and was a shoo-in for induction as a player when he went in in 1966. Larry Robinson, who won a Cup as the New Jersey Devils' coach in 2000, did so after already entering the Hall for his merits as a world-class defenseman. Colorado Avalanche executive Joe Sakic followed a similar path, while others who enjoyed long on-ice careers and went on to win Cups as coaches like Quenneville and Randy Carlyle didn't have nearly as strong of HHOF cases as players as Brind'Amour does.

As a result, there hasn't ever been a serious push to elect so-called hybrid candidates who straddle the line as both players and builders. Typically, deserving candidates are sure things in one bucket or another. Brind'Amour, however, has built what's typically been considered a borderline case in both worlds.

Whether or not the Hockey Hall of Fame ever reworks how it elects candidates, the best result here would be for it to acknowledge that Brind'Amour is worthy of induction based on three things: how close he has been to getting in as a player, especially considered his two-way credentials; his immense coaching success in terms of wins per game and playoff performance; and his story in bringing two Stanley Cup titles to Carolina, 20 years apart.

"I was initially against Brind'Amour's candidacy as the Hall's bylaws are clear on separating on-ice and off-ice careers," Pidutti said, explaining how his opinion on the matter has evolved. "But as time has gone on, I now think that misses the big picture. Such a unique and successful hockey life should be celebrated.

"The easiest solution is to allow the builder category to factor a playing career into the candidate's case. It's ultimately the same person, and the Hall of Fame was created to celebrate people. Rod's hybrid hockey life should be forcing the Hall's hand to forge a path for a combined Hall of Fame career."

I agree. However it happens, as a player or a builder, or both, probably doesn't matter. What does is that someone like Brind'Amour, who helped lift a struggling team up to the pinnacle of the sport — twice now — enters the Hall, where the sport's greatest stories belong.

And the fact he's found a way to do it as both a player and a coach (or builder) should only improve his candidacy, too — not diminish it.

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