



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

The Athletic

NHL contract efficiency rankings 2026: Which teams spend their money most wisely?

By: Dom Luszczyszyn

Every summer I take some time to dig into the NHL's contract landscape. The best of the best, the worst of the worst and then the rest: A deep dive that ranks each team's cap sheet.

That's today's goal: Assessing every player's market value over the remainder of his contract, comparing it to his actual cap hit and then measuring the probability of the deal providing positive value. From that, I put all the pieces together to see which teams are spending their money best.

Over the last two years, the cap landscape has obviously shifted dramatically, leaving a lot of older contracts looking great and a lot of newer contracts looking less so. What that means is that a large majority of the league have more positive value than not on their books, but also that the teams with the most term left on legacy deals hold the most power. It's not enough to get a "fair" deal, and having negative value on the books can put a team way behind.

All of this is ever-changing, of course — that's why it's an annual exercise to see how things shift around the league as players develop and decline. Using the same criteria as the best and worst contracts list, each player is judged based on total surplus value (more term means more time for value to compound, for better or worse) and the likelihood of the deal being good. Both are based on every player's future trajectory over the life of his contract, which uses player comps to determine his likeliest path(s) forward.

How a player ages and how the cap increases are two of the biggest factors for this exercise. The current cap environment is an especially big factor when a 10 percent deal is worth \$10.4 million next year, but could be worth as much as \$15 million in seven or eight years. That means that valuations for younger players will look a lot better than some might expect if it's over a lengthy term. Keep in mind that all the model estimates listed below — whether you agree or not — are based on an estimation of the future, not the past.

With all that being said, here's how every team measures up.

The goal here is to grade contracts empirically, with the same context being applied to each player across the league: how much value does each player bring to the table per year and over the life of the contract. The way that's measured comes from comparing a player's Net Rating and the expected salary that comes with it to a player's current contract.

What players have already done holds no merit; this is about the future value of the deal, with age effects based on player comps taken into account while accounting for expected

salary growth. Contract clauses and bonus structure are important, but not considered with this assessment. Players on LTIR were not considered.

1. Carolina Hurricanes

Last season: 2nd

With seven A-level deals, no team has it better than the Stanley Cup champions. Last year's big bets on young talent look like absolute larceny in a rising cap world with the big term allowing plenty of surplus value to compound. Over one year, the value on Jackson Blake and Logan Stankoven's deals has already appreciated 24 percent.

Seth Jarvis, Sebastian Aho and Jaccob Slavin are the other core pieces on terrific lengthy deals while last year's addition of K'Andre Miller has already aged wonderfully.

Across the board, nearly every bet the Hurricanes have made has panned out well, from UFAs (Nikolaj Ehlers, Sean Walker, Shayne Gostisbehere) to trades (Taylor Hall, Mark Jankowski).

The lone blemish is the Jesperi Kotkaniemi deal, but that feels fairly movable these days given the center market. And even with that, the team still has \$10 million in cap space. That's solid business and it's why the Hurricanes likely aren't done after winning the Cup this summer. They're designed to keep winning for years to come.

2. Montreal Canadiens

Last season: 14th

After a season in which the Canadiens ascended into the league's final four, it should come as no surprise as to where they land given their relative age and long-term deals in place. No team jumped higher than Montreal, up 12 spots. Kent Hughes is building a monster off the back of some incredible cap efficiency for Montreal's core group.

Montreal has four A-plus grades on the books, two more than any other team in the league. Having forwards such as Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield and Juraj Slafkovský at their current levels making less than Jacob Trouba will have that effect. Given their relatively young ages, there isn't much decline expected; with the term on each deal and the cap rising, that leads to some gaudy market value. It wouldn't be a shock to see Ivan Demidov get to that level this time next year either, and the model is a big fan of Jakub Dobes' immediate future, too.

Those contracts, though, don't hold a candle to Lane Hutson's deal, which is without question the best one in hockey. There's a very strong chance Hutson is a top-10



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

defenseman for the entirety of his contract, and the model expects he won't be close to 10th. He's already that good and will only get better, which leads to a modeled value higher than the league max. That he makes less than \$9 million for eight more years is pure robbery, leaving over \$100 million on the table. That shouldn't be that difficult to see after Bowen Byram's eye-popping extension this summer.

Those five deals do a lot of the heavy lifting here. The rest ranges from fine (Noah Dobson, Kaiden Guhle) to outright bad (Phillip Danault, Josh Anderson). The good news is the great deals will be cooking for a while and should allow Montreal to build something truly special. The bad deals? They'll be off the books by next summer, where it wouldn't be a shock to see the Canadiens sitting at the top of this list with plenty of room to add to one of the game's best young cores.

3. Ottawa Senators

Last season: 5th

Even without Brady Tkachuk in the fold, the Senators still land in the top five again this year. It's a shame he didn't stick around for what the Senators were building; they looked to be on the cusp and strong cap efficiency plays a central role in that.

The biggest draw is the bets Ottawa made on its twin budding stars, Tim Stützle and Jake Sanderson. Deals just over \$8 million for each look like nothing now, especially for Sanderson, who emerged as one of the game's best defensemen last season. Add new deals signed for Shane Pinto and analytics darling Jordan Spence and the Senators look great.

On the skater front, there is zero bad money on the books, which leads to an average positive value rate of 75 percent; only the Hurricanes are higher. If the Senators' goaltending ever figures itself out, they'll be cooking.

4. Dallas Stars

Last season: 6th

With Jason Robertson signed, the Stars are set and they're looking excellent across the board. When the two worst deals on the books are a soon-to-be expiring deal for Tyler Seguin (who is still very good!) and an essentially fair deal for Mikko Rantanen, the franchise is living good. Almost everyone is underpaid.

The difference between the Stars and the three teams above them is the lack of big wins. Wyatt Johnston, Roope Hintz, Esa Lindell, Miro Heiskanen and Jake Oettinger are all on fantastic deals — they just don't quite land as hard as the teams above. A long-term extension for Robertson after Jan. 1 could change that, though even that doesn't feel likely to be a big win given his reported asks; his new deal would likely be closer to fair money.

And that's if he stays. If he doesn't, that'll be a tough loss that would be hard to come back from — even with all the other efficient deals on the books.

5. Tampa Bay Lightning

Last season: 1st

Last year's top dog has dropped to fifth, mostly because deals on other teams' books have aged more strongly than Tampa Bay's own.

The one truly bad deal for Tampa Bay is the one that was weirdly signed this summer for Jeffrey Viel. Aside from that, everything looks rosy, led by Brandon Hagel having one of the best deals in hockey.

The big question will be how much surplus value the Lightning can extract from Nikita Kucherov's next contract. He's worth nearly double his current salary at the moment, but age may make things tricky if he's looking to command Kirill Kaprizov money.

6. Colorado Avalanche

Last season: 3rd

Having one of the best players in the world signed for the next five years at Bowen Byram money is a cheat code. That's the main deal that powers Colorado's standing, but it helps to have two recent extensions given out to Martin Necas and Sam Malinski already looking great, too. There's a good chance Cale Makar's deal adds to those wins.

The Avalanche have a lot of great deals spread out, but the Brett Kulak one signed this summer already feels like a miss. He needs a big bounce-back from last season.

7. Buffalo Sabres

Last season: 16th

The Sabres finally made the playoffs and that partly led to a healthy jump into the top 10 in cap efficiency. A breakthrough season from Mattias Samuelsson and continued excellence from Tage Thompson and Rasmus Dahlin helped on that front.

Also helping are a pair of new deals for two emerging core pieces: Zach Benson and Josh Doan. The two spark-plug wingers are going to be a bargain for the next seven years, adding to the team's foundation. If Owen Power can take a real step next season, the Sabres should be rolling.

If there's one nitpick, it's Beck Malenstyn's new contract. Giving term to a fourth liner is rarely ideal. That and a bunch of dead money is what keeps the Sabres out of the top five.

8. Florida Panthers

Last season: 4th

The Panthers are still in the top 10 after a rough year, but don't rank as highly as they once did. Age, injuries and some recent extensions signed that were just fair (Eetu Luostarinen, Niko Mikkola) play a role, but it has more to do with the rest of the league catching up than anything. Florida's average positive value and total surplus are both nearly identical to last season; other teams have just begun to score higher.

Top League Content

A return to form for the team as a whole should help Florida's standing going into next season, but the relative age of everyone means it's not exactly a given. With the rest of the East on the rise, even the two-time champs have something to prove next season.

9. Washington Capitals



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

Last season: 20th

One of the year's biggest contract glow-ups belongs to Jakob Chychrun. I was a vocal proponent of the extension, but the combination of his breakthrough last season and the cap likely going up even further than expected has his deal ageing beautifully. Between him and Logan Thompson, the Capitals have two of the league's best contracts.

After all the moves the Capitals have pulled off over the last few years, they deserve a lot of trust in their process. Almost every deal on the books looks reasonable and that allowed the team to splurge on a luxury deal in Alex Tuch. There was some consternation when he landed on this year's worst contracts list, but that's far from a problem with the Capitals given all the value the team has elsewhere — not to mention three potentially strong ELCs to add further surplus to the books. And given the way things have trended in Washington, it wouldn't be a shock to see Tuch's deal age better than forecasted.

10. Utah Mammoth

Last season: 12th

While I'm really down on MacKenzie Weegar's trajectory at the moment, it's a risk Utah could afford to take — the rest of its books are that clean. That's obviously led by Dylan Guenther's extension, which is one of the league's best, and it wouldn't be a surprise if Logan Cooley's gets to that level next season either.

The Mammoth spent fair money in free agency (Anders Lee) and added a good value deal as well this summer (Vincent Trocheck). They're a team on the rise and their cap structure will be a major part of that. John Marino's recent extension adds to that.

11. New Jersey Devils

Last season: 9th

New GM Sunny Mehta is the exact reason the Devils managed to stay around the top 10 after a disappointing season. He added Anthony Mantha and Evan Rodrigues, he extended Arseny Gritsyuk and Nico Hischier, and he shipped away Šimon Nemec and Jacob Markstrom. All of those moves improved New Jersey's overall pricing and have the Devils well-situated not only to compete this year but also to continue building a potential contender.

12. Edmonton Oilers

Last season: 8th

As usual with the Oilers, the best parts are exactly who you'd expect. Leon Draisaitl is obviously a bargain now at \$14 million for the next seven years and even if Connor McDavid only has two years of term, the Oilers are saving big at the price. Add Evan Bouchard and Zach Hyman to that mix and it's the usual suspects for Edmonton.

There are some other good deals around the edges, but also a plethora of bad decisions that keep the Oilers outside the top 10. Edmonton got rid of Darnell Nurse's deal, which helps, but spending \$20 million on Jason Dickinson, Trent Frederic, Jake Walman and Tristan Jarry is far from savvy. Ryan Shea, at least, was a great bet this summer; he's not far from Nurse's on-ice value at less than half the cost.

(And for those wondering why McDavid's model value is \$200,000 lower than Hutson's, it's entirely due to age and term. McDavid's value on an eight-year deal, even in his 30s, is \$25 million).

13. Vegas Golden Knights

Last season: 7th

Remember when Jack Eichel signed for \$13.5 million for the next eight years less than a year ago? The context around that deal sure has changed and it's now Vegas' best deal up front.

The Golden Knights have a strong history of pricing and that's apparent with a majority of their deals. It's what made it so surprising when they still gave Rasmus Andersson the deal they did this summer, even after a weak showing post-deadline and a particularly rough playoffs. That nullifies a lot of the wins they got with Eichel.

The biggest reason Vegas fell out of the top 10, though, was the fall-off of Adin Hill. He has the worst goalie contract in the league and was a hindrance on Vegas' offseason. The cap is exploding, but bad money can still lead to losing good players.

14. Pittsburgh Penguins

Last season: 21st

The Penguins had a remarkable turnaround last season thanks to some great bets from Kyle Dubas. That continued this summer with the Kaedan Korczak trade and it's likely the Egor Chinakhov extension lands better than I expect given his performance once he got to Pittsburgh. Now they enter this season with a great cap sheet and a ton of cap space.

The only problem, aside from Ryan Graves continuing to be here, is term. The Penguins are seventh in positive value probability, but are only average in surplus value due to the lack of length on the great deals they do have. The Penguins aren't exactly in a position to be giving out term to anyone anyway, but that detail is what keeps them out of the top 10.

15. Columbus Blue Jackets

Last season: 17th

Before Jet Greaves signed a deal that the model absolutely loves (he's been one of the league's most efficient goalies over the last few seasons), the two best deals on the books belonged to the two players who wanted out this summer. That's not ideal for Columbus. Zach Werenski has since walked back that idea, but Kirill Marchenko's name is still out there in trade rumors. This franchise needs some stability and that may come with a long-term extension from Adam Fantilli even if it's not immediately efficient. His modeled value on a five-year deal is \$10.6 million and it wouldn't be a shock to see him come in above that.

The rest is mostly meh, though it is great to see Ivan Provorov prove the haters (me) wrong with a terrific season in the first year of his deal. He's not all the way up to \$8.5 million of projected value yet, but it was an incredibly encouraging sight to see him actually play at a top-pair level last season. Ditto for Damon Severson.

16. Detroit Red Wings

Last season: 13th



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

Shoutout to the Lucas Raymond and Moritz Seider deals; they're the only reason the Red Wings barely land in the league's top half. A lot of the cap sheet aside from that duo still looks lackluster, however, and it's why the Red Wings' average positive value rate is on the wrong side of 50 percent.

The Red Wings have a lot of cap space, but it's rare that they know how to use it. A lot of their free agency bets from the past have aged poorly and I don't quite see why they traded for Keegan Kolesar, given his contract. The Ben Chiarot extension from earlier this season remains mind-boggling and was immediately one of the league's worst deals. That his game only degraded further from that moment makes things even worse.

17. Minnesota Wild

Last season: 11th

The Wild did what they had to do with Kirill Kaprizov; a \$1.5 million overpay is easy to stomach for a superstar of his caliber. The same can't be said about Michael McCarron's deal. That price is what the market dictates, but I don't believe he's the quality of 4C that warrants — especially not at that term. It's a growing trend of Bill Guerin overspending on the bottom of the lineup. Spending nearly \$14 million on Nico Sturm, Yakov Trenin, Marcus Foligno and McCarron doesn't feel great.

Thankfully, the Wild still have great deals in place for core pieces such as Matt Boldy and Brock Faber. And obviously Quinn Hughes will be a bargain for one more year.

One real tough spot is in net, where a decision will have to be made next year. For now, the Wild are getting \$10 million worth of goaltending for \$8.8 million. The math won't work if Jesper Wallstedt continues to seize the starter's role for the foreseeable future, though.

18. Boston Bruins

Last season: 25th

The Bruins have several problem deals on the books, and with term, too. I'm not sure it was wise to add Will Borgen to that list.

Thankfully, they have David Pastrnak and Jeremy Swayman locked up for a long time. The two are among the best at their positions and making a lot less than they should. It would be great if the Bruins could build more efficiently around them. JJ Peterka was an interesting swing in that direction. Even after a down season, his market value is still roughly in line with his salary. If he can click well with Pastrnak, that could be the win Boston is looking for.

19. Los Angeles Kings

Last season: 18th

The last Ken Holland summer was a dud and he probably gave too much money last fall to Adrian Kempe, who is probably not a \$10 million guy.

The Kings have been a bit better since adding Artemi Panarin on a good contract, getting Mats Zuccarello for a bonus-laden deal and capping it off with an excellent extension on Brandt Clarke. He's making the same money

as Nemec and Pavel Mintyukov while being a significantly better player. That's a major win.

20. Philadelphia Flyers

Last season: 26th

One year makes a pretty big difference. The Flyers' roster responded really well to Rick Tocchet hockey, with much of the roster's value taking a positive step forward. Noah Cates was arguably the biggest beneficiary of that, and the Tyson Foerster extension helped add a fair bit of surplus value.

Still, the Flyers land a bit below average thanks to a string of deals that are close to fair for both sides from Trevor Zegras, Christian Dvorak, Jamie Drysdale and Dan Vladar. There's nothing wrong with that, but in a rising cap world in which other teams are getting massive wins, fair deals aren't quite enough.

21. Winnipeg Jets

Last season: 10th

No team fell more than Winnipeg's 12 spots since last season. The main culprits for that: Extensions for Kyle Connor and Adam Lowry both looking much pricier than their caliber of player warrants.

Given Winnipeg's unique issue of retaining players, locking both up was a win in and of itself. It's just that neither contract looks like it'll age well, with Lowry's especially being a major overpay. That is what the market dictates for a shutdown 3C these days; I'm just not convinced of the 33-year-old's staying power at that level.

In brighter news, Mark Scheifele had a nice return to form while Cole Perfetti signed a reasonable extension on top of that. It's just not enough to keep up with the two-thirds of the league with a better financial outlook.

22. New York Rangers

Last season: 24th

The Rangers are wasting Adam Fox's prime with a sea of fair-money deals. Sure, there aren't a lot of anchors here anymore, but there also aren't many outright wins either. Not with a whole lot of term anyway.

When everyone gets paid fairly, the result is mid. That's where the Rangers expect to be this season. If every other team is getting a deal, the result might get ugly. That's where the Rangers likely end up beyond this season.

23. St. Louis Blues

Last season: 19th

The offer-sheet bros were extended this year, and the Blues got massive wins on both deals. Robert Thomas' deal continues to age well, too, while Colton Parayko's deal is finally on the right side of the ledger.

There's still a little too much that's questionable, though. We'll see what Mason McTavish can do as a Blue, but extensions to Pavel Buchnevich and Cam Fowler have started rough, and I'm iffy on Connor McMichael's new deal. The Ross Johnston signing this summer was also puzzling.

24. Toronto Maple Leafs



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

Last season: 15th

God bless John Tavares' hometown discount and the model's incredible fascination with Darren Raddysh (explained more here before he was signed). If not for that, the Leafs might be even closer to the bottom.

New GM John Chayka spent a lot of money this summer, and while the team got better and they had the right idea to keep terms short, the Leafs left a lot on the table efficiency-wise. Spending nearly \$14 million on Jack Roslovic, Teddy Blueger, Colton Sissons and Brandon Duhaime just doesn't feel sound. And while there's plenty of hope that Sergei Bobrovsky is the next Ed Belfour, the odds aren't in Toronto's favor with the third year really dragging things down.

Compare where the Leafs are to where the league's contenders are and there's a lot of work left to be done. Some of that might be proven on the ice this season away from Craig Berube hockey, but in order to get back to contention, the Leafs are going to have to earn some much bigger wins in the boardroom.

25. Seattle Kraken

Last season: 32nd

Things are still ugly in Seattle, but not as ugly as they were this time last season. There are still four D-level deals on the books with Chandler Stephenson's being the headliner, but there's more good than bad overall. Adding Mackie Samoskevich was savvy and Matty Beniers' deal is ageing nicely. The Kraken have a ton of cap space on top of that and didn't waste it this summer, which is a plus. Still, there's a long way to go here.

26. Nashville Predators

Last season: 30th

The Predators recuperated a decent chunk of value with a few bounce-back seasons from some of their recent big-name signings. Steven Stamkos, Brady Skjei, Nicolas Hague and Juuse Saros all saw their stock improve over the last year, and while none are value deals, they all look better than they did a year ago.

That's not enough to get the Predators too high up the list, but it's a step in the right direction. What would've been really nice: A long-term extension to Luke Evangelista last summer when Nashville had the chance. He's underrated enough that the Predators should get a good deal on him anyway, but they could've saved more if they did it before his breakout last year.

27. Anaheim Ducks

Last season: 28th

The Ducks are suddenly in a bit of a bind after being somewhat blindsided by a Leo Carlsson offer sheet that now ranks as one of the league's worst contracts. They still have Cutter Gauthier left to sign and there's a good chance his deal is going to be a lot more expensive than expected. Pavel Mintyukov's certainly was and now what is usually a major win for most up-and-coming teams — the second contract for star-level RFAs — is a major loss.

That might be OK if the Ducks had a clean cap sheet, but they've had a prior tendency to overspend that is biting them on deals for Alex Killorn and Frank Vatrano. A rich new deal for A.J. Greer adds to that.

Anaheim's exciting young talent might mean everything works out, but without cap efficiency on their side, the team's ceiling could end up more limited.

28. New York Islanders

Last season: 29th

No team has more D-level deals than the Islanders. The worst part is that four of them came on Mathieu Darche's first year on the job. Extending Alexander Romanov immediately backfired, giving up value for both Brayden Schenn and Ondrej Palat was odd given their contracts, and extending Jean-Gabriel Pageau instead of moving him was a misstep.

The good news is the Islanders have arguably the best ELC in hockey in Matthew Schaefer and one of the best goalie deals from Ilya Sorokin. But there are just way too many problem areas that are directly the result of the current man in charge.

29. Calgary Flames

Last season: 23rd

If not for Dustin Wolf's steal of a contract (based mostly on the expectation he'll age very well), Calgary would be in an even rougher spot. That speaks volumes for the 29th-ranked team.

Jonathan Huberdeau's onerous deal obviously causes a lot of damage here, but there's also too much recent money invested into questionable defensemen. Up front, if the best value deal is Morgan Frost for one more season, your team is in trouble.

30. Chicago Blackhawks

Last season: 31st

It's tough to judge the individual merits of a collective this poor, and it's possible that many Blackhawks are individually better than the sum of their parts may indicate. That's certainly true for Connor Bedard, who looked sensational before injury, and while his deal grades out poorly at the moment, I have little doubt he'll find a way to become the \$15 million player he was recently paid to be. As the team grows around him, deal efficiency should start growing, too. Key extensions to Frank Nazar and Spencer Knight look really promising.

Still, there's a pattern here of overspending that is impossible to ignore. Bedard's deal could end up fine, but \$15 million is a lot of money for a budding superstar who has proven significantly less than past superstars who netted nearly 15 percent of the cap on their second deal. We don't need to argue Bowen Byram's controversial deal any further, and the Blackhawks added to that later with Patrick Kane somehow netting \$8 million. It's been a steady routine over the years under Kyle Davidson, and we're now at a point that one of the league's worst teams has only \$8 million left in cap space despite having six players on ELCs. That's less than the defending Stanley Cup champions. Ignore Chicago's dead money on the books and the Blackhawks are still spending



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

as much as Montreal next season; it's not hard to look at both rosters and pick who you'd rather have.

All of that is a bit hard to fathom and leaves the Blackhawks with one of the lowest probabilities of positive contracts in the league. I hope it works out for them, but overpaying players by a few million every time tends to add up. The cap may be rising, but there's still a cap that Chicago seems to ignore with every new deal.

31. Vancouver Canucks

Last season: 22nd

It doesn't matter how much money the Canucks are paying Jamie Oleksiak and Luke Schenn in free agency; this is not going to be a good team regardless. That's the beauty of the tank; the trick is not making a habit of it as Vancouver pivots back toward competing a la Chicago and San Jose.

What does matter is if the Canucks can flip any present value for future value. Jake DeBrusk at fair money feels logical at present time, but for any Elias Pettersson deal, the team would probably be best served rebuilding his on-ice value. Just last year it was closer to \$10.4 million; that's a lot easier to move and get full trade value on.

32. San Jose Sharks

Last season: 27th

Once the Sharks extend their young phenoms, this picture will start looking rosier. Macklin Celebrini is a max-value player on any extension that's five years or longer; there's a good chance he'll have one of the league's best deals whenever he signs. I imagine future deals for Will Smith and Michael Misa will have the same effect.

But they'll need to be, given how grim the current picture looks, especially after this offseason. I understand the team's need to beef up the blue line, and I didn't mind the idea of Darnell Nurse for that. Doing that after signing Jacob Trouba, to what is immediately one of the worst deals in the league, is a tough look.

The wins should come once the youngsters get signed, but that's also no longer a given with the way the market has gone this summer. For now, the Sharks have piled up some unfortunately big losses on their cap sheet; hopefully it doesn't cost them.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026



How The Canes Are Spending Their 'Day With The Cup'

By: Peter Dewar & Walt Ruff

RALEIGH, N.C. - For NHL players, this time of year usually means a mix of recovery from the year that was and intense training for the one to come. But this is no usual summer for the Carolina Hurricanes, and, in addition to the above, the 2026 Stanley Cup champs have one of the biggest highlights of their career to look forward to.

After the confetti has been cleaned up, the NHL Draft has run its course and the free agency window has swung open, each Stanley Cup champion gets to spend a day with the trophy at a place of their choosing.

Every player who lifted the Cup on June 14 in Las Vegas will have their moment with hockey's holy grail over the next several weeks. We'll do our best to bring you the highlights along the way — bookmark this story to see where Stanley shows up next.

July 27 | Jesperi Kotkaniemi

Continuing its tour through the Land of the Midnight Sun, "KK" was honored by the club he grew up playing with in the City of Pori.

In addition to taking pictures with fans and signing autographs, he also spent some time with Aleksi Heimosalmi and Juha Jaaska of the Chicago Wolves.

July 24 | Sebastian Aho

Living it up in Oulu, Finland, the drafted-and-developed star was singing and dancing on stage at the Qstock Music Festival.

It wasn't just partying for Aho, though, as he also took the trophy to his parents' house, where he enjoyed his mother's salmon soup from the Cup.

READ MORE

July 23 | Nikolaj Ehlers

Keeping the Cup in Denmark for another day, "Fly" was honored at his hometown Aalborg Town Hall, where he received gifts and met with the city's mayor.

Cruising the prized possession around in a Lamborghini, last summer's offseason acquisition then held an event and signed autographs for several thousand fans at Sparekassen Danmark Arena.

READ MORE

July 22 | Frederik Andersen

Crossing the pond for the first time this tour, the Stanley Cup's jaunt through Europe started with the man who backstopped Carolina to 13 of their 16 playoff wins.

Paraded around Denmark, "Zilla" took the trophy to LEGOLAND Billund Resort. The netminder has paid homage to LEGO, which was founded in his native country, on his masks throughout his career.

July 19 | Tyler Dellow

Back in New Jersey after a day in Connecticut, the 34.5 silver mug was filled with ice cream and other things by the Canes Assistant General Manager.

In addition to its stop at Vanilla Bean Creamery, the day included stops at the Cranford police station, Cranford firehouse, The Cranford Bookstore, and Cranford Tennis & Swim Club before concluding with a six-hour block party.

READ MORE

July 18 | Shayne Gostisbehere

Continuing Lord Stanley's stay on the eastern seaboard, the point-producing defenseman spent his Saturday with the trophy alongside family, friends, and teammates.

Although born in Florida, "Ghost" and his family now make "The Constitution State" their offseason home.

July 17 | Nicolas Deslauriers

The man known as "D-Lo" held his celebration in North Wildwood, N.J., a place that became special to him and his family during his time in nearby Philadelphia. Many residents came out to take photos with the trophy, while the mayor of the town declared it "Nicolas Deslauriers Day."

READ MORE

More than four hours after Nic Deslauriers and the Stanley Cup showed up at Seaport Pier in North Wildwood, there's still a line to get photos. Last check was more than 1,100 people came out today. pic.twitter.com/xY7naYcAXp

— Adam Kimelman (@NHLAdamK) July 17, 2026

July 11 | William Carrier

Now a two-time champion, Carrier elected to take the Cup home to his native Montréal, Québec, where it visited the St. Lawrence River, Carrier's favorite poutine spot (below), and even a neighborhood lemonade stand, as the 31-year-old soaked in the celebrations with friends and family.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026



Grading preseason bold predictions for all 32 NHL teams - ESPN

By: Greg Wyshynski

Before the 2025-26 NHL season, we made bold predictions for all 32 teams. Some focused on the standings and statistical achievement, others on player transactions, and a few zeroed in on the job status of coaches and executives.

How'd we do? Let's take a final tally of these bold predictions and see what went right ... and what went very wrong. Enjoy!

Atlantic Division

Boston Bruins

Bruins will trade Pavel Zacha

The Bruins had a sneaky-good season, one of eight teams to reach the 100-point mark. They were dumped in the first round by the Sabres, but it was a strong first campaign for head coach Marco Sturm. That was especially true offensively, as Boston jumped from 28th to 10th in goals per game. Zacha had 65 points in 78 games.

Hence, the Bruins did not continue their retool/selloff that started at the previous trade deadline, when players such as Brad Marchand, Brandon Carlo and Charlie Coyle were shipping out of Boston. Zacha remains a coveted trade option for other teams, with a dream of a cap hit (\$4.75 million annually) through this season. But he was not, in fact, traded.

Bold prediction record: 0-1

Buffalo Sabres

Rasmus Dahlin is a Norris Trophy finalist

Within this preseason prediction was an NHL Awards prediction: That there was only really one open spot among the Norris Trophy finalists, what with Cale Makar and Quinn Hughes likely owning the other two spots. That didn't account for the MVP-caliber season for Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski, who supplanted Hughes and won the Norris. But he had finished second for the Norris in the previous season. There was still, essentially, one open spot for someone who wasn't Makar or Werenski or Hughes.

And that spot went to Dahlin, his first time as a finalist.

He had 19 goals and 55 assists (74 points) in 77 games, skating to a plus-18. His candidacy went beyond those stats. Obviously, the Sabres breaking their playoff drought put a spotlight on Dahlin's efforts to that end. This was also the season when his net-front physicality became a topic around the league.

He also had a story to tell off the ice: Dahlin revealed before the season that his fiancée, Carolina Matovac, received a heart transplant last summer following a health scare while

on vacation. He returned to Sweden to care for her during the regular season.

Dahlin finished third for the Norris, but his status as an elite defenseman was cemented by the nod.

Bold prediction record: 1-1

Detroit Red Wings

Steve Yzerman fails upward

There were moments last season when it appeared this prediction was toast, as the Red Wings were contending for a playoff spot. But they missed the cut again, as they did in all seven seasons Yzerman was at the helm for the franchise. Yzerman swung and missed on big trades. His deteriorating relationship with captain Dylan Larkin led to the center asking for a trade. The "Yzerplan" failed to build a foundation for Stanley Cup contention.

As of July 15, Yzerman was no longer general manager of the Red Wings. As predicted, he failed upward: Yzerman is "transitioning from his role as executive vice president and GM but will continue serving the organization as senior adviser to governor and CEO Chris Ilitch." Because there was no way the Red Wings were ever going to fire a franchise icon, even if the time had arrived.

Bold prediction record: 2-1

Florida Panthers

Sergei Bobrovsky gets a "Marchand" deal

This prediction was predicated on two theories, neither of which ended up holding water. The first was that Bobrovsky would make a financial sacrifice to remain with the Panthers, pushing for a third Stanley Cup win with Florida. Instead, he priced himself out, with GM Bill Zito opting to trade for Devils goalie Jacob Markstrom instead.

The second was that the 37-year-old goalie would sign a long-term deal like Brad Marchand did in 2025: \$5.25 million average annual value over six years, finishing his contract when he's 43. It turns out the Panthers philosophically don't believe in giving a goalie that kind of deal -- Marchand can eventually play on the fourth line at that AAV, but Bob's either a starter or a backup -- and Toronto eventually signed him to a traditional three-year, \$21 million deal (\$7 million AAV).

This one got past me, like so many pucks in the regular season for Bobrovsky.

Bold prediction record: 2-2

Montreal Canadiens

Kaiden Guhle earns leaguewide appreciation



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

Did the Canadiens receive leaguewide appreciation for their run to the conference finals, setting themselves up as the team of the future in the East? Absolutely. Did Kaiden Guhle also earn that recognition during the Habs' exhilarating season? Not really. He was limited to 39 games due to injury and was solid but unspectacular (19 games, eight assists, even rating in 20:29 per game) in the playoff run.

Respected? Sure. But maybe not the breakout year we predicted.

Bold prediction record: 2-3

Ottawa Senators

Dylan Cozens sets new career highs

The targets for this bold prediction were 31 goals and 68 points, set when Cozens was a 21-year-old center with the Sabres in 2022-23. The goal-scoring target seemed in range, as Cozens started the season with seven goals in 19 games.

Alas, despite playing the full 82 for the Senators, he finished with 28 goals and 31 assists for 59 points -- all under his career bests from that 2022-23 campaign. The numbers don't lie.

Bold prediction record: 2-4

Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning will win the Atlantic Division

When I graded my preseason predictions in November, the Lightning still had an 81.5% chance of finishing first in the Atlantic Division despite a 1-4-2 start and a slew of injuries. They turned their season around, finishing with a .646 points percentage and making the playoff cut.

But with captain Victor Hedman sidelined after March 19, the Lightning couldn't close the deal on the Atlantic, eventually finishing three points behind noted playoff drought enders, the Sabres.

Bold prediction record: 2-5

Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs will retain Nick Robertson

Robertson had been the subject of trade rumors for the better part of a year and a half. They continued after he signed a one-year extension with the Leafs for a very reasonable cap hit (\$1.825 million). But as the trade deadline passed, Robertson remained in Toronto. When Game No. 82 ended, Robertson was wearing a Maple Leaf on his chest, having skated 13:03 in his 78th game of the season. (He was a minus-1.)

On July 1, the rumors became true, as Robertson was traded to the Penguins for a fourth-round pick. But at that point, he was a restricted free agent. While under contract with Toronto, he was never traded by Toronto, and hence this bold prediction was spot-on.

Bold prediction record: 3-5

Metropolitan Division

Carolina Hurricanes

Canes will win the Eastern Conference

Under head coach Rod Brind'Amour, the Hurricanes reached the conference finals three times and saw their runs end in that penultimate round three times. They couldn't score that big goal at a big time. Their goaltending wouldn't make a difference. They just seemed to run out of gas after playing Brind'Amour's demanding style of detail-oriented defense.

That is, until this postseason, when players such as Taylor Hall, Logan Stankoven and Nikolaj Ehlers provided that scoring push they needed; when Frederik Andersen had the best three rounds of his career, before Brandon Bussi took the baton in the Stanley Cup Final; and when they earned historic levels of rest between rounds to outlast teams such as Montreal and Vegas to win the Stanley Cup. Which also means (checks notes) that they had to win the Eastern Conference too.

Bold prediction record: 4-5

Columbus Blue Jackets

Jet Greaves takes over the crease

For the first third of the season, Greaves and Elvis Merzlikins were being used in a tandem by then-coach Dean Evason. They were an effective one, too, but it was becoming clear the Greaves had the glow.

That was never more evident than during the Jackets' mad playoff push at the end of the season under new coach Rick Bowness, who started Greaves in 17 of the team's final 20 games of the season. Greaves ended up starting the majority of the games (55) for the season as well. The crease was his.

Bold prediction record: 5-5

New Jersey Devils

Jack Hughes plays 82 games

How was I supposed to know that the Devils were going to have a team dinner at a Chicago steakhouse wherein Jack Hughes would have what was then called a "freak accident" that involved getting his finger sliced by glass?

The good news: Hughes was healed up enough to score the game-winning overtime goal to win the U.S. its first men's Olympic ice hockey gold medal since 1980 and become an American sports icon in the process. The bad news, for the Devils and this prediction: Hughes played just 61 regular-season games, his lowest total in four seasons.

Bold prediction record: 5-6

New York Islanders

Patrick Roy coaches his last season on Long Island

The Islanders had a new general manager in Mathieu Darche that didn't have anything to do with hiring Roy, who was in the last year of his contract. But they also had Matthew Schaefer, the NHL rookie of the year who changed the franchise's vibes and their fortunes on the ice last season.

For a while, it looked like Schaefer was going to ruin this prediction. But the Islanders shocked the hockey world by firing Roy with four games remaining in the season, coaxing Peter DeBoer back to the Eastern Conference on a multiyear deal. Au revoir, Patrick Roy. Bonjour, correct prediction.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

Bold prediction record: 6-6

New York Rangers

Rangers return to the playoffs

After 21 games last season, Statisticians projected an 84.2% chance the Rangers would make the Stanley Cup playoffs. Goalie Igor Shesterkin was doing what he does. Defenseman Adam Fox was having an outstanding rebound season. Coach Mike Sullivan, in his first year as Rangers bench boss, would figure out the rest.

And then the wheels fell off. Fox missed all but three games in December and January. The Rangers were 29th in the NHL from Dec. 1 to the end of the season, with a .445 points percentage. Instead of sending out playoff ticket info, Rangers GM Chris Drury sent Artemi Panarin to the Kings and a letter to the fans asking for patience for another retool.

Bold prediction record: 6-7

Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers win the Gavin McKenna draft lottery

Look, this was a bold prediction but it was also a glib one.

Please recall how many Penguins fans felt their team would be in the draft lottery, with the chance to draft Penn State's own Gavin McKenna. Instead, what if the team on the other side of the Keystone State won the lottery and drafted McKenna instead. Could you believe such tomfoolery?

Postscript: Neither the Penguins nor the Flyers were even in the draft lottery. The Maple Leafs won, and Gavin McKenna went from "Hockey Valley" to the Centre of the Hockey Universe as Toronto picked him first overall.

Bold prediction record: 6-8

Pittsburgh Penguins

Sidney Crosby plays somewhere in the playoffs this season

Three cheers for clever phrasing.

Originally, this was going to be a prediction about Crosby being traded by the Penguins to a playoff team last season. So I asked Sid about that theory at the NHL Player Media Tour in September. He told me it wasn't anything on his mind because he was optimistic that the Penguins, picked by many to finish last in the division, could return to the playoffs for the first time since 2022.

Which, admittedly, seemed delusional. But it was enough for me to hedge my bold prediction, declaring that he would play in the playoffs "somewhere," including on the off chance that would be in Pittsburgh. Several months later, the Penguins finished second in the Metro Division, putting Sidney Crosby back in the playoffs before the Flyers put him out. At last check, Pittsburgh qualifies as "somewhere."

Bold prediction record: 7-8

Washington Capitals

Ovechkin breaks another Gretzky record

The Russian Machine powered through 82 games last season, adding another 32 goals to his NHL career record tally.

But he needed 43 goals between the regular season and the playoffs last season to break another record held by Hall of Famer Wayne Gretzky, who scored 1,016 combined goals during his career. Gretzky tallied 894 goals in the regular season and another 122 in the playoffs. Ovechkin now has 929 regular-season goals and 77 more in the postseason.

Ovechkin has officially declared he's back with the Capitals next season. The countdown begins to another record by The Great One falling to the Great 8. Just not last season.

Bold prediction record: 7-9

Central Division

Chicago Blackhawks

Frank Nazar doubles his points total

Nazar set career standards as a rookie in 2024-25 with 12 goals and 14 assists for 26 points in 53 games. The notion he could double that output with an increased number of games -- and an increase in responsibilities for the Blackhawks -- seemed like a logical call.

Alas, injuries limited Nazar to playing in 66 games this season. He scored 15 goals, and tallied 26 assists. That adds up to 41 points, putting him 11 shy of the 52 he would've needed to hit this predicted total.

Bold prediction record: 7-10

Colorado Avalanche

Avs win the Western Conference

The Avalanche were easily the best team in the regular season, amassing 121 points while finishing with the league's best offense and defense.

But while it's a nice feeling to hitch one's wagon to a bulldozer, having the league's top record means winning the Presidents' Trophy. The last time a team won that trophy and advanced past the conference finals was 2012-13, when the Blackhawks last lifted the Stanley Cup.

The Avs looked up to the task through two rounds, sweeping the Kings and eliminating the Wild in five games. But their run ended with a thud against the Golden Knights. Vegas swept Colorado in the conference finals, as the Avalanche suffered a series of ill-timed injuries, including ones to Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar.

Bold prediction record: 7-11

Dallas Stars

Matt Duchene regresses

I was fairly confident that the departures of Mikael Granlund and Mason Marchment from Dallas were going to negatively impact Duchene. I was also sure that the 35-year-old center wasn't going to shoot 19.7% again, as he did in scoring 30 goals and amassing 82 points in 82 games in 2024-25.

Instead, he shot 18.0%. Which is still phenomenal and resulted in Duchene scoring 16 goals in 57 games, but overall his point production went down to 45 points. Obviously, the drop in games played due to injuries helped bring down that total. But the prediction was regression, and Duchene's averages were all down season over season:



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

goals and assists per 60 minutes, as well as that shooting percentage.

Bold prediction record: 8-11

Minnesota Wild

Zeev Buium outscores Brock Faber

This prediction was predicated on Buium getting the majority of the power-play time with the Wild this season over Faber. Indeed, that was the case: Buium averaged 3:04 per game on the man advantage, while Faber averaged 1:04.

But Quinn Hughes (3:49) averaged more power-play time per game for Minnesota than both of them, which brings us to the reason this bold prediction misses the mark: Buium was traded by the Wild (11th-best offensive team in the NHL) to the Canucks (31st) in the Hughes trade last December. He had more points (14) in 31 games with Minnesota than he had in 45 games in Vancouver (12). Overall, the rookie defenseman had 26 points on the season.

Faber, meanwhile, set a new career high in points (51 in 80 games) as the primary defensive partner for Quinn Hughes.

Bold prediction record: 8-12

Nashville Predators

Andrew Brunette keeps his job

Brunette signed a four-year deal in 2024 to coach the Predators, which was why a hasty firing after they missed the playoffs in 2024-25 wasn't going to happen. They missed them again last season, although Brunette's team saw an 18-point improvement in the standings.

Someone did take the fall for that lack of success: GM Barry Trotz, who stepped out of the way as the team hired Avalanche GM Chris MacFarland to take over the Predators. Not only did Brunette keep his job through last season, but he also kept his job through that change at the top, as MacFarland said Brunette will be back behind the bench next season.

Bold prediction record: 9-12

St. Louis Blues

Jimmy Snuggerud, Calder Trophy finalist

Snuggerud burst onto the scene in the 2025 postseason with four points in seven playoff games for the Blues. They put him in a position to succeed in his rookie season as he played with Pavel Buchnevich and Robert Thomas and got some power-play time.

But Snuggerud didn't start this past season well, with 11 points in his first 26 games. By the time he closed the season with 27 points in 23 games, the Blues winger had already been lapped by Montreal's Ivan Demidov and Anaheim's Beckett Sennecke in the rookie forward scoring race. Snuggerud was fourth in goals (21) and points (51) among all rookies, although he was somehow a plus-16 on a Blues team with a minus-27 goal differential.

Demidov and Sennecke were Calder finalists along with Matthew Schaefer of the Islanders, who won top rookie honors.

Bold prediction record: 9-13

Utah Mammoth

The Mammoth make the playoff cut

The first-year Utah Hockey Club showed that the franchise was on the right path with 89 points in 2024-25. That included 13 charity points from overtime or shootout losses. If a few more of those were wins, who knows what could have happened in the standings?

Last season, the now-Utah Mammoth went 43-33-6 for 92 points. That was enough to bring the Stanley Cup playoffs to Salt Lake City for the first time, as the Mammoth put a six-game scare into the eventual conference champion Golden Knights before bowing out in the first round.

Bold prediction record: 10-13

Winnipeg Jets

Kyle Connor stays, makes Marner money

Kyle Connor signed an eight-year contract extension on Oct. 8 worth \$96 million, which gives him a \$12 million average annual value through 2033-34.

Mitch Marner signed an eight-year contract extension on June 30 worth \$96 million, which gives him a \$12 million average annual value through 2032-33.

Just a tomahawk dunk from the foul line of a prediction.

Bold prediction record: 11-13

Pacific Division

Anaheim Ducks

Ducks are a final-week elimination

The Ducks sprinted out of the gate last season. New head coach Joel Quenneville unlocked their offense, their balance of veterans and young stars clicked, and Anaheim was sixth in the league in points percentage (.635) as of Dec. 1. The question was whether that success was fleeting or sustainable.

Anaheim's fate wasn't determined until the final week of the season. But on April 13, for the first time in eight seasons, the Ducks clinched a playoff spot rather than suffering their predicted elimination.

Bold prediction record: 11-14

Calgary Flames

Nazem Kadri will be traded

For months, the Flames claimed through their media proxies that they were not looking to trade center Nazem Kadri, who was signed through 2028-29 at a solid cap hit (\$7 million AAV). TSN's Darren Dreger specifically noted that "Flames ownership" wanted to keep him around.

Kadri had a limited no-trade clause. As the trade deadline crept closer, there were rumblings that the Avalanche might be interested in a reunion with Kadri if they could make the money work. Once Calgary agreed to retain 20% of Kadri's contract, it was go time. Nazem Kadri was traded.

Bold prediction record: 12-14

Edmonton Oilers



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

Connor McDavid signs a team-friendly, three-year extension

McDavid ended his contract drama by signing an extension on Oct. 6. Was it team-friendly, as predicted? Yes, as McDavid signed for much less than market value, whatever that would be for the best hockey player on the planet. The Oilers inked him to a deal that carries an AAV of \$12.5 million, which is \$1.5 million less annually than the AAV of teammate Leon Draisaitl's contract.

Was it for three years? No, it was not. McDavid surprised many by taking an even shorter short-term deal with Edmonton, giving the team a three-year window -- the 2025-26 season, plus two more -- in which to finally win a Stanley Cup with McDavid.

So, in the end, partial credit. But the prediction was specific to three years, so I'll take the L here, begrudgingly.

Bold prediction record: 12-15

Los Angeles Kings

Eliminate the Oilers in the first round

When I checked in on this prediction two months into the season, the Oilers were struggling to be in the playoff mix, while the Kings looked like a playoff team again. I joked that I should have predicted "the Kings advance further in the playoffs than the Oilers" on the off chance Edmonton didn't qualify.

In the end, both teams qualified for the Stanley Cup playoffs. For the first time in five seasons, the Kings and Oilers didn't meet in the first round. I was correct that Edmonton didn't make it out of the opening round in the West. But neither did the Kings.

Bold prediction record: 12-16

San Jose Sharks

Macklin Celebrini hits 90 points

When our bold predictions were initially published, this one caused a stir among Sharks fans. Some felt it was a given that Celebrini would continue to level up after scoring 63 points in 70 games as a rookie and finishing third in the Calder Trophy voting. Others thought that 90 points was a bit too lofty an expectation for Celebrini given that he was still just 19 years old and the Sharks were mired in a rebuild.

The final tally for the San Jose star: 45 goals and 115 points in 82 games! Which according to my calculations is more than 90.

Bold prediction record: 13-16

Seattle Kraken

Kraken are the trade deadline's top seller

On March 6, the Seattle Kraken were in the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference with 67 points. GM Jason Botterill had a decision to make. Should he trade some of the team's pending free agents such as Jaden Schwartz, Jordan Eberle, Mason Marchment or Jamie Oleksiak, or seek to deal some of his players with term like Shane Wright?

Or should the Kraken stay the course to make the postseason even if they didn't have realistic designs on winning the Stanley Cup?

Botterill chose the latter. Not only did the Kraken not trade anyone off their roster before the deadline, but they also acquired forward Bobby McMann from the Maple Leafs -- a team that was actually one of the most prominent sellers at the deadline.

So, Seattle was a buyer, not a seller. That confidence was rewarded by the Kraken going 5-14-2 after the trade deadline -- the NHL's worst record in that stretch -- to finish well outside the playoff picture. Whoops.

Bold prediction record: 13-17

Vancouver Canucks

Elias Pettersson cracks 30 goals again

Free of locker room tension with J.T. Miller, many expected this to be a bounce-back season for Pettersson on the Canucks. He ended up with 51 points in 74 games, up from last season's total points (45) but having played 10 more games than in 2024-25.

But he has yet to find his goal-scoring touch again with just 15 goals, the same total he had in 2024-25.

Bold prediction record: 13-18

Vegas Golden Knights

Knights make the conference finals

This prediction was basically claiming that (a) Vegas would survive a first-round loss, which had happened twice in franchise history, and (b) the Golden Knights would emerge from the Pacific quarter of the bracket rather than the Oilers, who made the conference finals in consecutive seasons.

The Knights cleared the first hurdle, but it wasn't easy thanks to the upstart Mammoth. The Ducks (and Connor McDavid's broken ankle) took the Oilers out in the first round. Vegas outlasted Anaheim in six games to punch its ticket and make this bold prediction come to pass.

Bold prediction record: 14-18

So, there you have it: a .438 winning percentage on the NHL bold predictions for the 2025-26 season. With a little more puck luck, I think it could have been a .500 season, but I'm satisfied that so many of my spicy takes became reality. I predict we'll have 32 new ones this September.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026



Hurricanes, Seeley avoid arbitration with one-year deal

By: Sportsnet Staff

The restricted free agent defenceman has agreed to a one-year deal with the defending champions, Carolina announced on Thursday.

Seeley's new deal is worth \$850,000 at the NHL level and \$100,000 in the AHL, with \$160,000 guaranteed for the 2026-27 season.

The 23-year-old made his NHL debut during the 2025-26 campaign, making one regular-season appearance. While he

went point-less, Seeley logged 15:12 of time on ice and two blocks.

Seeley has spent most of his pro career, since being drafted 208th overall in 2020, with the AHL's Chicago Wolves — posting 11 goals and 12 assists through 69 games as an alternate captain. He also chipped in a goal and an assist in 21 playoff appearances and a trip to the Calder Cup Final.

The Yellowknife native has also represented Canada, winning gold at the 2022 world junior championship.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Carolina Offseason Tidbits: Volume 5

By: Bob Wage

It has been a quiet offseason for hockey news lately, except of course for the Carolina Hurricanes players living their best lives celebrating with their day with the Stanley Cup.

Frederik Andersen brought the Cup to Legoland, Nikolaj Ehlers celebrated with his home town, and Sebastian Aho brought it to a concert. Good times my friend, good times.

The Finnish contingent, including "Papa Finn".

Obviously, "Turbo" is not superstitious.

I'm sure you all can look up more pics yourselves. One good place to start is with the "Keeper of the Cup" on Twitter (X). (It will always be Twitter to me).

In other news, Ronan Seeley avoided arbitration and signed with the Canes for one year on a two-way deal. It will

guarantee him a minimum of \$160K for the year. He was the only Hurricane applying for arbitration.

It has been quiet on the Alexander Nikishin front. Adam Gold and Cory Lavalette discuss that a bit here along with the release of Cory's book. I still remember the good old days when Cory and I used to watch the Draft from my living room and would take turns writing articles about the picks on Canes Country.

At least one of us hit the big time!

Somehow I missed the beginning of the chatter regarding that Brind'Amour might retire when Jordan Staal does? I find it hard to believe. Perhaps it is a bit of posturing for the coach to get more money out of Mr. Dundon's hands.

I hope everyone is having a great summer!

LINKS

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7471312/2026/07/29/nhl-contract-efficiency-rankings-2026/>
<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/how-the-can-es-are-spending-their-day-with-the-stanley-cup>
https://www.espn.com/nhl/story/_/id/49424745/nhl-predictions-playoffs-projections-stanley-cup-awards-stats-trades
<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/hurricanes-seeley-avoid-arbitration-with-one-year-deal/>
<https://www.canescountry.com/general/54133/carolina-offseason-tidbits-volume-5>



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

SportScan

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

1397633 Websites

The Athletic / Amazon Prime to broadcast Wednesday night NHL games, playoff series in deal with Rogers

By Julian McKenzie

Amazon is extending its reach into the Canadian hockey broadcasting landscape.

Amazon's streaming service, Prime Video, and Rogers Communications have announced a 12-year agreement to broadcast NHL regular-season games in English and French on Wednesday nights, as well as Stanley Cup playoff games. The agreement will begin on Sept. 30, one day after the start of the 2026-27 regular season.

The deal includes at least 26 national regular-season games and gives Amazon its choice of Stanley Cup playoff series to broadcast in Canada, obtaining select rights to two first-round matchups and one second-round matchup.

According to a Sportsnet spokesperson, Amazon will have its choice of playoff series to broadcast after Sportsnet picks its first three first-round series to air, and its first two in the second round. Once Amazon makes its selections, Sportsnet will carry the remaining series.

"Over the past two years, Prime Video has been a valuable addition to the NHL's media lineup in Canada, joining Rogers in bringing marquee NHL games to Canadian fans," said NHL commissioner Gary Bettman in a statement. "We're excited that Prime Video and Rogers are deepening their relationship through this long-term agreement, reflecting our shared commitment to serving English and French-language hockey fans across Canada with premium NHL content for years to come."

For the last two seasons, Amazon streamed regular-season games on Monday nights as part of their "Prime Monday Night Hockey" shows in conjunction with Rogers. The broadcast featured longtime play-by-play man John Forslund, broadcast hosts Adnan Virk and Andi Pettrillo, and a rotating cast of analysts including ex-NHLers Jody Shelley and Thomas Hickey, and former women's hockey star Blake Bolden. According to Rogers and Amazon's joint statement, more details on broadcast talent and production staff will be announced at a later time.

The new agreement coincides with Sportsnet's 12-year national rights deal with the NHL that will also begin this fall. Sportsnet also announced last month it will not continue its licensing agreement with the CBC and the "Hockey Night in Canada" brand.

Sportsnet will announce its talent teams ahead of the upcoming season.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.29.2026

1397634 Websites

The Athletic / Every NHL team's top-6 center duos, ranked from best to worst

By Harman Dayal

Finding a dominant one-two punch at center is every NHL team's dream. Elite centers are very difficult to acquire via trade or free agency and are valued at a significant premium compared to similarly skilled wingers.

With that in mind, we thought it'd be fun to analyze the state of every NHL team's top-six centers.

A clear-cut ranking from No. 1 to No. 32 is a futile exercise because the margin separating a team with, say, the 10th and 16th best center duo is thin. It makes the most sense to sort them into tiers where the stratification is a bit more distinct. Within each tier, teams are not ranked in any particular order. To conduct this exercise, I leaned on a combination of statistics (point production, play-driving ability, defensive impact and more), context (linemate quality, age) and the eye test.

Teams are sorted into tiers based on their projection for 2026-27 — contract values do not matter, and we're not factoring for future upside beyond this season. We're also weighing the No. 1 center slot more heavily than the No. 2 spot; most teams would take a high-end 1C and a weaker 2C over a weak 1C and an above-average 2C.

Who's the better power play QB: Quinn Hughes or Lane Hutson?

Scott Wheeler, Max Bultman and more

Tier 1: Generational

Edmonton Oilers: Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl

This is a truly unrivaled duo.

McDavid is the undisputed best player in the NHL. He's averaged 131 points over the last five seasons, and the way he can singlehandedly take over a playoff series is one-of-a-kind. McDavid has scored an absurd 134 points in 81 games over his last five playoff runs; the next highest-scoring player besides his running mate, Draisaitl, is Matthew Tkachuk with 81 points in 85 games over his last five playoff runs.

Draisaitl, meanwhile, has scored at a 100-point pace or higher for six consecutive seasons, a feat no active player besides McDavid can claim. He's a top-five center in the NHL in his own right.

They've come up short twice against Florida in the Stanley Cup Final, but it's hard to blame them for that because the organization has failed to surround them with a championship-caliber supporting cast, which makes it easier for the Panthers to key in on them.

Tier 2: Elite

Colorado Avalanche: Nathan MacKinnon and Brock Nelson

MacKinnon was so dominant last season that it was a shock that the Avalanche didn't reach the Stanley Cup Final. He hit 127 points, drove a whopping plus-58 goal differential during his five-on-five shifts and finished top-five in Hart Trophy voting for the fourth year in a row. MacKinnon's combination of game-breaking speed, elite puck skills, man strength and outrageous shot makes him look like a video game character on the ice.

Behind MacKinnon, Nelson is an excellent second-line center. Nelson scored 33 goals and 65 points in the regular season and was recognized as a Selke Trophy finalist. It was a well-deserved honor because he drove a commanding 58 percent of scoring chances and 61 percent of goals despite handling the most five-on-five defensive zone starts of all Avalanche forwards and difficult matchups.

Nelson struggled in the playoffs with only three points in 13 games, but putting that aside, he still projects as an elite 2C for next season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

Florida Panthers: Aleksander Barkov and Sam Bennett

This might be a tad too high for some people's taste, but hear me out. Sure, if we strictly look at point totals and regular-season results, Barkov and Bennett wouldn't quite deserve to rank this high. However, there's so much they do beyond the boxcar stats, and their elite playoff track record has to be a major consideration as well.

Barkov is a top-five center in the NHL based on his all-around impact. He's produced 1.15 points per game since 2021-22 (a 95-points-per-82-games pace), which ranks seventh-best among all centers in that span, but what truly separates him is his status as the best defensive forward on the planet. Barkov is a three-time Selke Trophy winner. He's been on the ice for only 1.64 goals against per 60 at five-on-five since 2023-24, which is by far the best mark among all first-line centers. Barkov also deserves credit for limiting McDavid to only eight five-on-five points across two Cup Final series in 2023 and 2024.

There will be questions about whether Barkov will need time to shake off rust after missing all of last season recovering from ACL and MCL surgery, but his dominant performance leading Finland to gold at the World Championships this summer should reduce those concerns.

Bennett is coming off a 26-goal, 58-point campaign. More importantly, he's a Conn Smythe winner with a proven clutch gene, as he's scored 51 points in 62 games across his last three playoff runs. It's why he got the nod to play for Team Canada at the 4 Nations and Olympics. Bennett is also one of the most physical players in the league. You can argue that he's dirty and gets away with too much, but there's no denying that his antics and gamesmanship are effective nonetheless.

Tier 3: High-end

New Jersey Devils: Jack Hughes and Nico Hischier

The Devils are the only team besides Edmonton that boasts two top-20 NHL centers.

Hughes is an electric game-breaker, scoring 1.22 points per game since 2022-23, which translates to a 100-point pace per 82 games. He's exceptionally dynamic and creative. The problem for Hughes has been durability — he's failed to hit the 65-game mark in three consecutive years and missed the 2025 playoffs. He needs to stay healthy for an entire year and get back to the kind of 99-point campaign he had in 2022-23 when the Devils last looked like a high-end team to re-establish himself as a true franchise player. It'd also help if Hughes could improve the dreadful 34.8 percent faceoff rate he had last season.

Hischier is a 1C-caliber player in his own right. He flirted with the point-per-game mark for three consecutive years between 2022 and 2025, before a "down" year in 2025-26 when he still hit 66 points. On top of that, he's also an elite defensive driver.

If Hughes and Hischier stay healthy and perform at their best, they have a chance to be every bit as good as the duos in the "elite" tier.

San Jose Sharks: Macklin Celebrini and Michael Misa

Celebrini was already an MVP-caliber player last season when he exploded for 115 points, which was 56 more than the next highest-scoring Shark. The scary part is he was only 19 last season, meaning there's still plenty of runway for him to improve.

However, part of the reason I rated the Sharks so high is that I'm very bullish on Misa's breakout potential for next season.

Misa, the No. 2 pick from 2025, scored 18 points in his last 35 games (a 42-point pace over 82 games) despite averaging only 13:09 of ice time per game. He flashed high-end skill and scored 1.88 points per 60 at five-on-five last season, which is an above-average top-six rate. Misa is an advanced play-driver for his age too, as the Sharks were break-even in shots and actually generated slightly more high-danger chances than they surrendered during his five-on-five shifts. With increased ice time, age-related growth and his elite potential, Misa could comfortably clear 50 points and perform like a league-average 2C next season.

Couple that with one of the best players on the planet in Celebrini, and you get one of the best center duos in the NHL.

Toronto Maple Leafs: Auston Matthews and John Tavares

At his peak, Matthews is a unicorn as a 60-goal scorer who also plays Selke-caliber defense. But after scoring at a 105-point pace over 82

games from 2021 to 2025, he slumped to only 27 goals and 53 points in 60 games last season.

I'm bullish on the odds of Matthews bouncing back at a franchise 1C level next season — his track record of elite performance is very long, and the coaching change should be a benefit, especially if it means less extreme defensive deployment.

Tavares, meanwhile, isn't nearly as strong of a play-driver as he was during his prime, but his offensive production is elite for a 2C. He scored 71 points last season, and it wasn't just empty-calorie power-play points — 39 of his points came at five-on-five, which ranked 16th best among all centers.

There's some uncertainty with this duo between Matthews' down year and Tavares' age/defensive play, but if the former rebounds, they're going to be a force.

Vegas Golden Knights: Jack Eichel and William Karlsson

Eichel is one of the best 200-foot centers in the NHL. The 29-year-old hit the 90-point mark for a second consecutive season. He has breathtaking control of the flow of nearly every game he plays in because of how smooth and deceptively quick he is as a puck carrier, along with his elite playmaking vision. His long reach and disruptive stick-checking also make him an excellent defensive presence, as he finished top-10 in Selke voting again.

Karlsson was limited to only 14 regular-season games because of injury, which created issues at the 2C spot for Vegas. We saw the likes of Brett Howden and Mitch Marner take turns at 2C because Tomas Hertl isn't a strong enough five-on-five driver to be a full-time 2C.

Karlsson has historically been one of the league's best shutdown centers, so we're giving him the benefit of the doubt with this projection. However, if injuries continue to be an issue or if age-related decline starts to hit, it will weaken Vegas' 2C slot, which would cause this duo to tumble down the rankings.

Dallas Stars: Wyatt Johnston and Roope Hintz

The Stars are blessed with two legitimate 1Cs.

Johnston exploded for a career-high 45 goals (tied for fifth best among all NHLers) and 86 points last season. He's already one of the most deadly power-play weapons in the NHL, and having just turned 23 this offseason, it still feels like he could take another step in his all-around game. Johnston isn't quite dynamic and productive enough at five-on-five to be viewed as an undisputed superstar in the NHL yet — he actually scored the fewest five-on-five goals and points since his rookie year — but he's knocking on the door and is clearly an above-average 1C.

Hintz has put up 0.89 points per game over the last four years, which translates to a 73-points-per-82-games rate. His elite speed and puck-carrying ability are indispensable to the team — the Stars looked lost at five-on-five in the playoffs without him — and his defensive game is high-end and underrated.

Carolina Hurricanes: Sebastian Aho and Logan Stankoven

Aho is well-established as a top-15 center with the consistent ability to score 80 points in addition to strong defensive results, but the real difference compared to years past is the emergence of Stankoven.

Carolina had issues at the 2C in previous years following Vincent Trocheck's departure, but Stankoven has finally filled that critical need. The 23-year-old drove one of the best second lines in the NHL alongside Taylor Hall and Jackson Blake. Stankoven erupted for 11 goals and five assists in 19 playoff games en route to the Stanley Cup, and his impact was greater than his point production all season, shown by his crooked possession and play-driving numbers.

Tier 4: Above-average

Tampa Bay Lightning: Brayden Point and Anthony Cirelli

This duo had the potential to rank in a tier higher than this, but we had to knock them down after Point's worrying down year.

Point looked like a shadow of himself for all of last season, scoring just 18 goals and 32 assists in 63 games, along with only one point in seven playoff games, amid an injury-plagued campaign. However, it's not just



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

about the lack of production; his play looked concerningly ordinary and not nearly as dynamic as it used to be.

The Lightning will be hoping he can bounce back next season with a cleaner bill of health, but for now, we have to view Point more like an average 1C rather than the elite player he used to be.

Cirelli, on the other hand, is elite for a 2C role. He's an excellent defensive stopper, and his offense has ticked up over the last two years.

Ottawa Senators: Tim Stützle and Dylan Cozens

Stützle has scored exactly one point per game over the last two years, which ranks 12th best among centers who've played at least 100 games in that span. He has game-breaking speed and top-notch rush-attacking instincts, and it's been a treat to watch his two-way game mature over the years, including a massive improvement in the faceoff dot. I wouldn't quite consider him a top-10 center, but he's certainly top 15.

Cozens has blossomed into a high-end 2C with a fresh start in Ottawa. He was near a point-per-game producer for the Senators down the stretch in 2024-25, and hit 28 goals and 59 points in his first full season in Canada's capital. Cozens has very desirable traits beyond just his offensive production as a 6-foot-3 right-shot center who excels in the faceoff circle (won over 53 percent of his draws last season).

Utah Mammoth: Logan Cooley and Vincent Trocheck/Nick Schmaltz

It might be a hot take to have Utah this high, but it's because I believe Cooley is in store for a monster breakout season. Cooley looks like a game-breaker every time I watch him play with his lethal speed and skill, especially with the rush chemistry he's built with Dylan Guenther. And considering he just turned 22, he's in the age bracket where many players take the leap into stardom.

Cooley scored 2.3 points per 60 at five-on-five last season, which ranked 14th-best among NHL centers. His overall point totals and momentum were interrupted by a serious leg injury that limited him to only 54 games. Assuming he stays healthy next season, I'm expecting Cooley to break out as a point-per-game star.

Offseason acquisition Trocheck or Schmaltz project to slot in as the 2C. Both represent proficient options for the job. Schmaltz is coming off a terrific 74-point season; there's an argument to be made that he's possibly more effective on the wing, but he played down the middle for most of last season.

Trocheck, meanwhile, racks up points at an excellent rate for a 2C (0.75 per game over the last two years, which translates to a 62-points-per-82-games pace), is elite at faceoffs and it's noteworthy that his offensive production didn't dip at all in the second half even after Artemi Panarin's departure, which proved that he wasn't just riding the coattails of a superstar linemate.

Tier 5: Middle of the pack (Star No. 1 center but a below-average 2C)

Pittsburgh Penguins: Sidney Crosby and Ben Kindel/Tommy Novak

With his 21st consecutive point-per-game or better season, Crosby is showing very few signs of slowing down. Sure, he's no longer a perennial MVP contender, and his defensive metrics have dipped in recent years, but he's still a top-10 center in the league.

Evgeni Malkin spent slightly more time on the wing than at center last season, according to CapWages. Colleague Josh Yohe penciled Malkin, who will turn 40 at the end of July, in as a full-time winger for next season. It's a sensible transition considering his slowing foot speed and defensive play.

However, it does leave the Penguins' 2C spot a bit weak. There's a chance that Ben Kindel, who scored 35 points in his rookie campaign in addition to very impressive two-way metrics, breaks out and fills the role well, but that's a lot to ask out of a 19-year-old sophomore. Novak is the other 2C candidate, but he's closer to a third-line-caliber player.

Montreal Canadiens: Nick Suzuki and Jake Evans/Oliver Kapanen

After scoring 101 points and winning the Selke Trophy, Suzuki has cemented himself as one of the best centers on the planet. However, the gapping hole at 2C is hard to ignore.

Kapanen spent most of the regular season in that role and had a solid rookie campaign with 37 points. But he fell out of favor by the time the

playoffs arrived, as he went pointless in seven postseason games, while averaging a measly 8:20 of ice time.

Evans took over 2C responsibilities later in the playoffs. He punched above his weight class, and there's a lot to like about him as a speedy, hard-working defensive player, but he's eclipsed the 30-point mark only once in his career.

Let's see if top center prospect Michael Hage could be a contender for that role when he presumably signs his entry-level contract in the spring at the conclusion of the NCAA season.

Anaheim Ducks: Leo Carlsson and Mikael Granlund

Carlsson is on the cusp of becoming an elite player. He's a buttery smooth playmaker, boasts a 6-foot-3, 208-pound frame, has added explosive speed and high-level finishing ability to his offensive arsenal, and has high defensive potential, too.

Granlund is a good player, but he's a bit of an empty-calorie point producer. He racks up points (41 points in 58 games last season), but doesn't actually win his even-strength matchups because he's a poor play-driver, especially defensively. The Ducks had a minus-five goal differential during Granlund's five-on-five minutes, which marked the third time in the last four years that he's been on the ice for more goals against than goals for. Tack on some age-related risk with Granlund turning 35 in February, and I rate him as a below-average 2C.

Chicago Blackhawks: Connor Bedard and Anton Frondell

Bedard was third in the NHL in points (44 in 31 games) until suffering a shoulder injury. He wasn't quite the same after the injury, but his play up until that point reaffirmed his superstar potential. Bedard also deserves extra credit for being saddled with some of the worst linemates of any 1C in the NHL — André Burakovsky and Ryan Greene were his most common wingers last season. With that said, another shoulder injury and soft defensive metrics mean there are still a couple of questions surrounding Bedard next season.

Frondell's rookie impact is tough to predict. He showed promising flashes down the stretch with nine points in 12 games, and you can't rule out the possibility of him being a league-average 2C or better right out of the gate. However, it's also true that his underlying numbers were rough in that small sample size: Chicago controlled less than 40 percent of shots and had a minus-60 scoring chance differential during Frondell's five-on-five shifts across those 12 games. I expect him to score a good chunk of points, but like many 19-year-olds, he's probably going to find it difficult to drive play and win his matchups.

St. Louis Blues: Robert Thomas and Mason McTavish

Thomas is one of the most underrated 1Cs in the NHL. He's averaged 1.07 points-per-game (an 88-point pace) over the past three years, is high-end defensively and is strong in the faceoff circle. He's easily a top-15 center in my books.

McTavish, on the other hand, has a lot to prove next season. His pedigree and offensive tools are legit (he's only a year removed from scoring 52 points as a 22-year-old), but he owns some of the worst defensive metrics in the NHL, is a very poor skater and is coming off a disappointing campaign in which he lost the 2C role. McTavish has the potential to take a meaningful step, especially because a contract dispute last fall forced him to miss training camp, which put him behind the eight ball, but for now he's a below-average 2C.

Winnipeg Jets: Mark Scheifele and Viggo Björck/Adam Lowry

Scheifele is coming off a career-best 103-point season, and while his defensive metrics remain a weakness, there's no question that he's a star No. 1 center. Where the conversation gets really fascinating is the 2C role.

Björck is an elite prospect who will eventually solve the Jets' longtime 2C woes, but the question is how quickly he can fill that role. Colleague Murat Ates believes Björck is going to get that chance as soon as next season. I love Björck and his impressive showing at the World Championships proved that he might be NHL-ready out of the gate, but it's unlikely that he's going to be a top-50 NHL center as an 18-year-old rookie, which is the level required to be considered an average 2C or better.

Tier 6: Below-average



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

New York Rangers: Mika Zibanejad and J.T. Miller

Zibanejad authored an excellent bounce-back season with 34 goals and 78 points, but he probably ranks somewhere in the 20s if we rate the best centers in the NHL, which makes him a low-end 1C.

The 33-year-old remains an elite power-play weapon, but his five-on-five impact has slipped in recent years. Zibanejad has scored fewer than 2.0 points per 60 at five-on-five for three straight seasons, and the Rangers conceded slightly more shots, chances and goals than they generated during his minutes for a second consecutive season.

Miller struggled mightily in his first full season as a Ranger. He scored only 1.58 points per 60 at five-on-five, which is a third-line rate; his foot speed is slowing; and the team was outscored by 15 goals with him on the ice at five-on-five. His overall point totals look respectable (53 in 68 games) because of his power-play production, and you could certainly do a lot worse than Miller as your 2C, but at 33, it's fair to wonder if he can win his matchups as a top-six center.

Washington Capitals: Dylan Strome and Pierre-Luc Dubois

Strome has found a lovely fit in Washington over the last four years (68 points per season average), but nobody is mistaking him for a top-20 center in the NHL. His defensive metrics are quite weak, and his matchups are far more sheltered than your typical 1C — he only spent 27.5 percent of his minutes against "elite" competition according to PuckIQ, which ranked eighth among Capitals forwards.

Dubois, on the other hand, is at least an above-average 2C. He missed all but 29 games in 2025-26 due to injury, but the year before, he scored 66 points and handled difficult defensive matchups very well.

Detroit Red Wings: Dylan Larkin and Andrew Copp

The Red Wings were already short a top-six center, and that's before Larkin's trade request.

Larkin is an excellent player, but he's never hit the 80-point mark in his career, and his five-on-five scoring is inconsistent — he scored just one five-on-five goal from Jan 1 until the end of last season. He's a slightly-below-league-average 1C.

The bigger hole is at 2C. Copp and J.T. Compher aren't top-six caliber centers, and their younger pivots, such as Marco Kasper and Nate Danielson, are far away from reaching that level, too.

New York Islanders: Bo Horvat and Brayden Schenn

Horvat is a low-end 1C. He's a terrific all-around player with top-notch goal-scoring ability, size, elite faceoffs, and reliable defensive play, but he's produced at a 65-points-per-82-games pace over the last three years, which simply isn't star-caliber.

Mathew Barzal spent a large chunk of last season at 2C, but after the Schenn acquisition, the former shifted back to the wing. Schenn would be best suited as a 3C at this stage of his career rather than as a 2C; he only scored 39 points last season, his play-driving metrics have declined, and he turns 35 in August.

Columbus Blue Jackets: Adam Fantilli and Sean Monahan/Charlie Coyle

Fantilli hasn't taken the leap to stardom yet, as he fell just shy of the 60-point mark last season. And as is the case with a lot of young centers, his defensive metrics need to eventually improve as well. Fantilli's tools and upside are special, though. He took a notable step forward as an offensive play-driver, even though the point totals didn't reflect it because his shooting percentage fell last year. I'd bet on Fantilli to break out this coming season, but there's obviously still a lot of ground for him to make up before he can be considered a league-average or better 1C.

Monahan's offensive numbers crashed to only 36 points last season, with Coyle forced to pick up the slack in top-six duties. Coyle was a very good 2C last year, scoring 58 points and driving excellent defensive results. However, for most of his late 20s and early 30s, he's been an ideal 3C rather than a bona fide 2C. Last year was the exception, but there's a decent chance he could modestly regress in 2026-27.

Buffalo Sabres: Josh Norris and Konsta Helenius/Noah Östlund/Jiri Kulich

The Sabres were the toughest team to rank because there's uncertainty around who their actual top-two centers will be. That starts with Tage

Thompson: He played most of last season at center, but he finished the playoffs on the wing. That isn't the first time that Lindy Ruff has moved Thompson, who is below-average defensively at center and a liability in the faceoff circle, to the wing.

If Thompson was slotted at center, we would have ranked the Sabres top-six duo a lot higher than this, but colleague Matt Fairburn is projecting that Thompson will play on the wing.

Norris is a great player, but he isn't a 1C, and his durability has long been an issue, which could force Thompson back to the middle at some point.

Buffalo's 2C job has a few candidates. Helenius and Östlund both flashed a lot of promise and could be ready for top-six duties. Kulich, who was limited to only 12 games because of a blood clot, is an option as well. One of these three should emerge as a competent 2C, and if not, the underrated Ryan McLeod could always adequately fill that role as well.

If we strictly looked at Norris/Helenius as a duo, the Sabres would arguably deserve to drop a tier, but I'd be surprised if Thompson stays on the wing for the entire season. I had to at least factor him in as a possible part-time 1C option when slotting Buffalo.

Vancouver Canucks: Elias Pettersson and Marco Rossi

Vancouver lacks a true 1C, but it at least has two bona fide top-six caliber centers, which distinguishes it from the teams in the tier below this.

Pettersson's defensive impact is still high-end, and he deserves some slack because he was saddled with inferior wingers — Evander Kane, who may not even get an NHL contract for next season, was stapled to the top line for most of the year — but Pettersson ultimately produced only 51 points. He's skating slower than ever and has lost his dynamic rush-attacking skills.

Rossi is a solid 2C. He isn't every team's cup of tea as a 5-foot-9 center with average speed, but his results are hard to argue against as he scored 60 points in 2024-25 and produced at a 57-points-per-82-games rate last season.

Tier 7: Major weakness

Nashville Predators: Ryan O'Reilly and Matthew Wood/Mavrik Bourque

O'Reilly turned back the clock and recorded 74 points last season in addition to his customarily robust defensive metrics. At 35, though, it's fair to wonder if he can repeat that kind of performance in 2026-27. In any case, he's a fringe 1C at best, who would ideally be a 2C on a contending team.

Nashville's 2C spot will be really fascinating to track. Wood had a successful rookie campaign, scoring 17 goals; he split time between wing and center. One of him or Mavrik Bourque (who has mostly played wing in the NHL but is a natural center) could break out and eventually be a competent 2C. Chances are, though, there will be flashes of promise mixed with some growing pains because of how inexperienced they are as NHL centers.

Minnesota Wild: Joel Eriksson Ek and Danila Yurov

Eriksson Ek is an underrated all-around player, but he would ideally be the 2C on a Cup-contending team rather than a team's best center. The 29-year-old Swede has mostly fluctuated in the 50-to-low-60s point range over the past four years. He's more valuable than his raw point totals would indicate because he's also a top shutdown defensive player, but you'd want your 1C to have more offensive pop.

Making matters worse is that the Wild don't have a true 2C either. Yurov had a decent rookie season, with 27 points in 73 games, and there's some remaining upside considering his two-way IQ, but his quiet playoffs proved that he's got a significant way to go before being a true top-six-caliber center.

Philadelphia Flyers: Trevor Zegras and Christian Dvorak

Zegras broke out with a career-high 67 points last season. I love his creativity and skill, and I believe he still has another level he can reach offensively, but I don't buy that he'll ever be considered a bona fide 1C on a playoff team. For starters, he spent more time on the wing than he did at center last season, according to CapWages. Zegras is dreadful in



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

the faceoff circle (34.1 percent) and his defensive play leaves a lot to be desired.

Dvorak would ideally be a 3C rather than a full-time top-six player. He hit a career-high of 51 points last year, but before that, he had never cracked the 40-point mark in his NHL career.

Boston Bruins: Pavel Zacha and Fraser Minten/Elias Lindholm

The Bruins have lacked a true 1C since Patrice Bergeron's retirement.

Zacha performed impressively last season, hitting the 30-goal mark. And it's noteworthy that he accomplished that feat while barely playing alongside David Pastrnak. With that said, Zacha is clearly a 2C-caliber player rather than a bona fide No. 1. He's never hit the 70-point mark in his career, and he isn't a very robust play-driver. The Bruins controlled only 45 percent of expected goals during his five-on-five shifts last season.

Minten or Lindholm will likely be Boston's other top-six center. Minten enjoyed a solid breakout season with 35 points. He's young enough that he could certainly take another step, but I'm not sure how much untapped offensive upside he truly has. He has always been billed as a reliable, defense-first center, and sure enough, if you look under the hood, he didn't have the best offensive play-driving numbers last season, benefited from a near-15 percent shooting clip and went pointless in six playoff games. I'm not quite ready to anoint him as a top-six-caliber center.

Lindholm, on the other hand, is clearly a 3C-caliber player. He brings a lot of defensive value, but he simply can't drive offense the way he used to, and even the 48 points he scored last season are inflated by all the time he spent playing with Pastrnak.

Los Angeles Kings: Quinton Byfield and Erik Haula

Is this the year Byfield finally breaks out as a true No. 1 center? Byfield has been stuck in the 49-to-55 point range the last three years. With Anze Kopitar gone, it's sink-or-swim time for him as a 1C. Byfield has flashed enough promise that I could see him breaking out next season, but there's a good chance that improvement would only take him to the 65-ish point range, which would still be below league average as a 1C.

Behind Byfield, the Kings are facing some uncertainty. Colleague Eric Stephens floated the idea of Adrian Kempe shifting to center. It may be worth a try, but the odds would be stacked against that working. Kempe hasn't played center since really early in his career, and it didn't go well at the time. We rarely see players successfully make this positional shift this deep into their careers.

Haula, Alex Laferriere (he's a winger but played some center last season) and Scott Laughton would be the Kings' other internal center candidates, which doesn't inspire much confidence.

Seattle Kraken: Matty Beniers and Chandler Stephenson

Beniers is outstanding defensively, but he's averaged 43 points per season over the last three years. His offensive game is very far away from a 1C level — he'd be best suited as a high-end 2C, but the Kraken don't have anyone else who can challenge for the 1C job yet.

Stephenson has been a 50-point player for a while, which sounds good, but he's an empty-calorie point producer who drags the team down as a two-way liability. Stephenson's defensive metrics were some of the worst in the league, with Seattle 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 last season.

Tier 8: Zero top-six caliber centers

Calgary Flames: Morgan Frost and Mikael Backlund

The Flames are patiently rebuilding, and made smart trades to ship out veteran top-six centers Elias Lindholm (they drafted Matvei Gridin with that pick, who looks like a top-six NHL forward, and also got Hunter Brzustewicz) and Nazem Kadri, so their low placement on this list shouldn't be seen as a criticism of management in any way.

With that said, if we strictly look at next season, it's clear that their one-two punch down the middle is the weakest in the NHL by a fair margin. Every team in the tier above at least had one player who'd be considered a top-50 center in the NHL, but the Flames lack that.

Frost took a step forward with 22 goals and 43 points, but he's ultimately a middle-six center, especially when you factor in that his matchups are relatively sheltered. Backlund still handles very tough defensive duties quite proficiently, but at 37 and having cracked the 40-point mark just once in the last three years, he's a third-line-caliber center.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.29.2026

1397635 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Ranking the top five under-25 cores across the NHL

Sonny Sachdeva

If there's one storyline that's defined the 2026 NHL off-season, it's no doubt the chaos that circled Leo Carlsson.

Earlier this month, the young Anaheim Ducks pivot signed a five-year, \$90-million offer sheet tendered by the Philadelphia Flyers — a deal that makes the 21-year-old the highest-paid player in the NHL next season. The Ducks countered by matching Philly's high-stakes gamble, keeping their star centreman in California. And now we await the ripple effects, with Anaheim forced to navigate the rest of its summer business with its cap situation upended.

At first glance, it might've seemed a hefty swing for a player who's yet to crack 70 points in the big-leagues. But the attempt to pry Carlsson out of Anaheim wasn't about what he's done in the league as much as what he's capable of doing over the next decade. The 2023 second-overall pick seems on track to become one of the game's premier centres, and has already led the Ducks back to the post-season, back to relevancy, in his first few NHL campaigns.

For Philly, the goal was clear: add one final piece to the young core it has been slowly, steadily building over the past half-decade. For Anaheim, the focus was holding on to the one it has built, at all costs. So, with Carlsson sticking around in the West, how do the two compare? And zooming out further, how do they stack up against the other young, promising cores throughout the rest of the league?

We took a step back and took stock of the big-league landscape to get a sense of who leads the way on that front. To keep things simple, we focused on the most promising groups of players 25 or younger — not the best cores overall, not the best prospects in the system, but the best young stars contributing right now.

Here's how it all shook out:

F: Cole Caufield (25), Juraj Slafkovsky (22), Ivan Demidov (20)

D: Lane Hutson (22), Kaiden Guhle (24)

G: Jakub Dobes (25), Jacob Fowler (21)

A quick refresher on the 2026 post-season should make clear why Montreal holds the throne here. A run to the conference final, which saw the Canadiens take down the Tampa Bay Lightning and Buffalo Sabres before losing to the eventual Cup champs, made clear the potential of this still-young Habs team.

Putting aside the fact that Selke winner and Olympian Nick Suzuki is only 26 years old himself, and essentially part of this group, the rest of the Canadiens' youth movement is in full flight, with promising talent dotted throughout the lineup. Up front, there's Cole Caufield, Juraj Slafkovsky and Ivan Demidov — three elite, dynamic wingers, each bringing a different offensive approach to the Habs' attack. Behind them, there's rearguard Lane Hutson, already among the most prolific blue-line talents in the league and a lock to win a Norris at some point down the line, as well as Kaiden Guhle, the Habs' 16th-overall pick back in 2020, who's still building toward his best. And backstopping that group, the club houses not one but two quality young netminders — Jakub Dobes and Jacob Fowler — to hold things down in the cage.

Throw in the up-and-coming talents that aren't even on the squad yet — 20-year-old forward Michael Hage, who's showing promise in the NCAA, and 21-year-old defenceman David Reinbacher, who continues to develop in the AHL — and the future is only getting brighter in Montreal.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

F: Macklin Celebrini (20), Will Smith (21), Michael Misa (19), Ivar Stenberg (18)

D: Sam Dickinson (20)

G: Yaroslav Askarov (24)

The last three years have seen the Sharks advance in leaps and bounds as they've built out one of the most promising young squads in the game. And their exceptional 2026 draft only added more fuel to that fire.

Leading the group is Macklin Celebrini, who took the league by storm in his second NHL season, amassing 45 goals and 115 points and earning Hart Trophy votes along the way. But as dominant as Celebrini figures to be moving forward, it's as much the talented group around him that makes the Sharks such an interesting organization to watch over the next decade.

Up front, the club's attack is filled out by Celebrini's uber-skilled linemate Will Smith, along with 2025 second-overall pick Michael Misa, who made headlines when he joined the select group granted exceptional status to play in the OHL as a 15-year-old. Now, Ivar Stenberg, tabbed with the No. 2 pick in this past draft, figures to add even more firepower to the Sharks' offence. Throw in 23-year-old Collin Graf, too, who broke through with the Sharks this past season and should remain a key secondary contributor.

Like Montreal, the Sharks' young talent isn't concentrated in the forward corps alone. San Jose's 2024 No. 11 pick, Sam Dickinson, has become a key piece on the back end, as has netminder Yaroslav Askarov. And the Sharks beefed up their future defence even further at the draft last month, tabbing promising blue-liners Keaton Verhoeff (18) and Ryan Lin (18) in the first round.

3. Anaheim Ducks

F: Leo Carlsson (21), Cutter Gauthier (22), Beckett Sennecke (20)

D: Jackson LaCombe (25), Pavel Mintyukov (22)

All the ink spilled over Carlsson's situation should serve as a sign of how bright the future looks for him and the Ducks. The club still seems a step behind Montreal (which already appears on the cusp of contending) and San Jose (led by the next face of the league), but Anaheim's young stars proved this past season they're ready to make some playoff noise, too.

Beyond Carlsson, Anaheim's offence also boasts 40-goal sniper Cutter Gauthier and creative winger Beckett Sennecke. Behind them, Jackson LaCombe has emerged as one of the league's most promising blue-line stars, while Pavel Mintyukov has shown plenty of growth through three seasons in California.

Oddly, this Ducks core is thinner than it might've been if not for the franchise's tumultuous run of negotiations with its young stars over the past decade. Three other promising top-10 picks have been ousted from the organization in recent seasons, with Trevor Zegras (25) and Jamie Drysdale (24) traded to Philly, and Mason McTavish (23) recently moved to St. Louis.

Still, there's plenty of youth left to carry the Ducks forward, and recent first-round additions Roger McQueen (19) and Nikita Klepov (18) will bolster the group even further down the line.

F: Tim Stutzle (24), William Eklund (23), Dylan Cozens (25), Shane Pinto (25), Ridly Greig (23)

D: Jake Sanderson (24), Jordan Spence (24)

It's been a rollercoaster off-season for the Senators as they navigate life after Brady Tkachuk. But while the departure of their former captain throws a wrench into the club's long-term plans, the rest of the talent in place — and a draft-week trade that added more juice — leaves the franchise in good hands.

Key for the Sens is the club's strength down the middle. At the head of that pack is Tim Stutzle, undoubtedly the gem of the Sens' offence. Behind him are standout Dylan Cozens, acquired from Buffalo in 2025, and Shane Pinto, who's become a reliable secondary contributor over the past half-decade.

Joining them up front in 2026-27 will be talented winger William Eklund, San Jose's seventh-overall pick in 2021 — the dynamic Swede was traded to Ottawa last month as part of a swap that saw the Sens send

the ninth-overall pick to the Sharks (which they used to select Verhoeff). Young agitator Ridly Greig continues to grow his game on the wing in Ottawa, too.

Still, forward corps aside, the most intriguing Sens star of them all may just be Jake Sanderson, the all-world blue-liner who's earned Norris votes in each of the past two seasons. Add in the potential of young defender Carter Yakemchuk (20), the club's seventh-overall pick in 2024, and the Tkachuk-less Sens have plenty to continue building around.

5. Philadelphia Flyers

F: Trevor Zegras (25), Porter Martone (19), Matvei Michkov (21), Tyson Foerster (24)

D: Jamie Drysdale (24), Cam York (25)

Philly might've struck out on snagging Carlsson, but the Flyers proved during the 2026 post-season that they're already a squad to watch in the East. A second-round shellacking at the hands of the eventual champs dampened things some, but Philadelphia's emotional Round 1 win over the rival Pittsburgh Penguins — the Flyers' first playoff series win in a half-decade — put the rest of the Metro on notice.

Leading the way up front is Trevor Zegras, who looked right at home in Flyers colours following the June 2025 trade sent him from California to Pennsylvania. Tyson Foerster, drafted 23rd overall by the Flyers in 2020, has grown into a solid contributor. There's also Matvei Michkov, added with the seventh-overall pick in 2023, who's shown his promise already and has the potential to become even more dominant over the next decade.

And then there's 2025 sixth-overall pick Porter Martone, who hit Philly like a franchise-altering comet late last season, and figures to be a foundational piece up front for years to come.

On the back end, blue-line partners Jamie Drysdale and Cam York showed their level during the 2026 post-season — each averaging more than 22 minutes per night, and authoring crucial offensive moments — making clear the future of the Flyers' blue line is in good hands, too.

Honourable mentions:

Chicago Blackhawks: Connor Bedard (21), Frank Nazar (22), Anton Frondell (19), Bowen Byram (25), Artyom Levshunov (20)

Carolina Hurricanes: Seth Jarvis (24), Logan Stankoven (23), Jackson Blake (22), Alexander Nikishin (24)

Minnesota Wild: Matt Boldy (25), Danila Yurov (22), Bobby Brink (25), Brock Faber (23), Jesper Wallstedt (23)

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 07.29.2026

1397636 Websites

TSN.CA / Team Canada plans to unleash aggression on the road to World Junior redemption

Mark Masters

WINDSOR — It may be a mid-summer exhibition event, but Team Canada is determined to rack up wins at the World Junior Summer Showcase.

"It's our main focus," said University of North Dakota centre Cole Reschny, who is a Calgary Flames prospect. "Obviously we weren't happy with last year's summer camp and then last year's result at the World Juniors so it's a whole different mindset here this year. We're here to win."

Canada will play Sweden on Wednesday night at the WFCU Centre, which is home to the Windsor Spitfires, before facing Finland and the United States on Thursday and Saturday.

Canada suffered lopsided losses to Finland and Sweden last summer before ending the annual four-nation affair with a win against the United States.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2026

At the 2026 World Juniors, Canada lost to Czechia in the semifinals before beating Finland to claim the bronze medal.

"This isn't just a summer camp where we're getting to know guys," said Reschny, who is one of eight returning Canadian players in Windsor. "We're coming in and we're getting to know each other but, at the same time, we're competing and we're battling."

Canada lost in the quarter-finals at the 2024 and 2025 World Juniors, which means it's been three years since the country last competed in the gold-medal game. It's only the second time Canada has experienced a drought this long since the Program of Excellence was established by Hockey Canada in 1982. The country also went three years without a championship game appearance from 2012 to 2014.

For Canadian players and executives, enough is enough. Things have to change and it starts now.

"Last year we weren't real thrilled with the way everything played out [at the summer camp]," said general manager Alan Millar. "Part of that was not really on anybody, but I think we had eight or nine players not available because of injury."

Eight players who were invited to the summer camp were unable to attend last year, including six players who eventually made the team in December.

Last year's summer roster featured 42 players and the camp started with an intra-squad game. The returning players, including 2025 first-overall pick Matthew Schaefer, were sent home before the final two games so management could focus on the players they did not know as well.

"It just didn't feel like a competitive camp," Millar recalled. "It didn't feel that it was taken as seriously as it needed to be and I think a lot of that was because a lot of our top players weren't there."

There is no intra-squad game this year in Windsor and every returnee is staying for every game.

There were only 32 players invited to the summer camp this year and the total actually fell to 31 after defenceman Xavier Villeneuve (hip) was a late scratch.

"Within our programs we're trying to focus on more preparation over more player evaluations and more selection," Millar said. "We feel we spend a lot of time trying to figure out who the seventh, eighth defenceman is and the 13th, 14th forward when we should be spending time on special teams and our team game and the players who are going to help us win a tournament. So, that was part of the changes and we've had a few changes since the past year because we need to be better."

Canada is looking to set the tone immediately against Sweden, the defending champions, on Wednesday night.

"We're going to go back to the old Canadian style where we're mean to play against," said Kitchener Rangers defenceman Cameron Reid, who is among the three Canadian returnees on defence. "We want to be a team that other teams are afraid to play against or don't want to play against."

"We just got to get back [to] Canadian hockey and the Canadian way," said defenceman Carson Carels, who went sixth overall to the Flames in June and is heading to North Dakota this fall. "I think just that hard-hitting and run-the-other-team-out-of-the-building [approach] ... We gotta bring that and that's the culture the coaches want."

Carels, who played for the Prince George Cougars last season, likes to throw his weight around and felt a surge of excitement when head coach Misha Donskov unveiled plans for the team's identity early in camp.

"In the meeting my legs couldn't stop shaking just hearing that," he said. "I was just really ready to get out there. Obviously we got a few days here to prep, but just hearing that in the meeting you want to go and play those games and kind of strike that fear already in summer and send a message now and [not] wait till Boxing Day."

The returning players, who suffered a heartbreaking loss to Czechia in the semifinals, are eager to unleash some aggression on the road to redemption.

"You're not really over it until you get another opportunity," said Reschny.

"Definitely very frustrating losing in the semifinals," said Soo Greyhounds forward Brady Martin, who produced eight points in six games in Minnesota. "But it's a good lesson for me and a couple of the guys here. It's time to turn it around and go win a gold medal."

TSN.CA LOADED: 07.29.2026