



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2026

The News & Observer

With Alexander Nikishin unsigned, who could Carolina Hurricanes turn to on 'D'?

By: Chip Alexander

8–10 minutes

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Alexander Nikishin (21) leaves the ice with goalie Frederik Andersen (31) following their 6-1 victory over Montreal, clinching the Eastern Conference Finals, on Friday, May 29, 2026 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Alexander Nikishin (21) leaves the ice with goalie Frederik Andersen (31) following their 6-1 victory over Montreal, clinching the Eastern Conference Finals, on Friday, May 29, 2026 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett
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Morrisville

So what's the deal with Alexander Nikishin?

And if the Carolina Hurricanes (Shopping Cart IconShop Canes Fan Gear) were to trade the defenseman, who would take his place in the lineup?

Those questions continue to swirl with the Canes set to open preseason training camp on the ice Thursday. Nikishin remains an unsigned restricted free agent. Speculation continues about him — will he be traded, or signed to a shorter, bridge deal? Or a holdout when camp begins for the Stanley Cup champions?

Only general manager Eric Tulsky knows for sure. But until something shakes loose, the reality is Nikishin isn't available — yet — to the Canes, and might need to be replaced.

Enter Charles Alexis Legault.

Granted, the Canes have re-signed veteran defenseman Mike Reilly, whose name is on the Stanley Cup. They traded for Juuso Valimaki, who has 271 games of NHL experience. They traded for Pierre-Olivier Joseph, who has played 225. There are several options.

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Charles Alexis Legault (62) skates during the warmups before a game against the Philadelphia Flyers at Lenovo Center.

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Charles Alexis Legault (62) skates during the warmups before a game against the Philadelphia Flyers at Lenovo Center. James Guillory IMAGN IMAGES via Reuters Connect

But don't count out Legault, 23, who is competing for the Canes in the 2026 Prospects Showcase. Legault is wearing the "C" as captain in the three-team event that began Sunday at Lane Arena, hosted by Carolina.

Forward Zach Lansard, a third-round draft pick this year by Carolina, had a third-period goal for the Canes but the Nashville Predators took a 4-1 victory. The Canes play their second game Tuesday against Tampa Bay, which faces Nashville on Monday.

Legault had a big hit in the opening minute Sunday, and later in the first period dropped the gloves for a go with the forward Kalan Lind, getting in some blows.

"Every year you show up, and you want to show you've put in the work and that you worked hard in the summer," Legault said in an N&O interview. "I think the Showcase is a perfect opportunity for that.

"Even if it's a prospect showcase, the way you behave matters all the time and the way you play matters. I'll try my best to have good games that can lead me into (training) camp."

Legault, a right-shot D-man, showcased himself in 12 games for the Hurricanes last season after being called up from the Chicago Wolves of the AHL and making his NHL debut. With defenseman Jacob Slavin out indefinitely and Jalen Chatfield and Shayne Gostisbehere also sidelined, Legault and Joel Nystrom got extended looks from Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour and the staff.

"We've put them in tough situations. They've hung in there," Brind'Amour said at the time.

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Charles Alexis Legault (62) is congratulated after nosh first NHL goal (empty net) against the Buffalo Sabres during the third period at Lenovo Center.

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Charles Alexis Legault (62) is congratulated after nosh first NHL goal (empty net) against the Buffalo Sabres during the third period at Lenovo Center. James Guillory IMAGN IMAGES via Reuters Connect

Asked about Legault, a fifth-round draft pick by Carolina in 2023, Brind'Amour said, "His strengths are he's big and strong and takes up a lot of space."

Brind'Amour already had a good feel for Legault after watching him play with his son, Skyler Brind'Amour, at Quinnipiac and being a part of the 2023 NCAA championship team.

Legault would have played more for the Canes last season had it not been for a nasty cut to his right hand.

In the Nov. 8 home game against Buffalo, Legault had his first career goal — an empty-netter from 160 feet — and an



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assist. Named the game's second star in the 6-3 win, he also had two hits and blocked two shots.

Legault was all smiles after the game, saying his first NHL score didn't come the way he had long dreamed but noted, "A goal is a goal."

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Charles-Alexis Legault (62) during warm up against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Scotiabank Arena.

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Charles-Alexis Legault (62) during warm up against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Scotiabank Arena. John E. Sokolowski IMAGN IMAGES via Reuters Connect

A night later, on Nov. 9, Legault again was in the lineup for the road game in Toronto. At the end of the first period, he knocked down the Maple Leafs' Nick Robertson by the benches. The Leafs' Bobby McMann skated in, gloves were dropped and Legault got a punch in before McMann pulled his arms down toward the ice.

Then, a lot of blood.

Legault had hit Robertson's skate and cut on the back of his right hand. Trainer Doug Bennett quickly wrapped a towel around it, and they headed back to the room for treatment.

"When does it happen that you cut your hand on a skate, right?" Legault said. "I thought it was just a cut and I'd get stitched up and be right back out there. But when I got to the room I couldn't move my finger.

"It was a shocker. It was a weird accident, a freak accident."

Surgery to repair the extensor tendons was needed, and Legault needed two months of recovery before trying to grip a stick again with the right hand — "And gently," he said, smiling.

Once medically cleared, he returned to the Wolves and was a part of their Calder Cup playoff run to the Cup final. He also was called back up by the Canes for four games late in the regular season and had a season-high 22 minutes in the final game, against the New York Islanders.

"I was happy with the end of the year," he said. "Overall, even with the cut, it was something I can build on."

Legault said he spent the summer at home in Canada working on his skating and puck touches. He watched a lot of video. He added a few pounds and said he will report to Canes camp at 6-4 and 222 pounds.

"There were highs and lows last year," he said. "After the injury happened, I went through a little low and asked myself 'What can I do here?' and the answer was 'Keep getting better every day' and that's what I tried to do. Stayed positive.

"I love the process of hockey, showing up at the rink, working to get better. And playing the game. I just love to be able to be physical.

"It's a physical sport and I love that about it. I think I'm a pretty physical guy."



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The Athletic

Every NHL team's biggest burning question heading into training camp

By: The Athletic NHL Staff

16–20 minutes

Will Adam Fantilli sign a contract in time? When will Quinn Hughes sign an extension? What will happen to Connor Hellebuyck?

This week, The Athletic asked its staff for one burning question facing each NHL team heading into training camp, and those were just a few of the enticing storylines we heard about in response.

With camps opening this week and the preseason around the corner, here's what we have our eyes on.

Max Bultman and Sean Gentile

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Anaheim Ducks

When will Cutter Gauthier sign an extension?

The Ducks' leading scorer from last season remains unsigned. Is another of their top restricted free agents bound to withhold his services as camp opens? Gauthier didn't have the leverage of salary arbitration and wasn't eligible for an offer sheet, but the 22-year-old is bound to land a massive deal after a breakout 41-goal season. The sides continue to talk and after the Chris Kreider contract termination, there is \$15.5 million of cap space, per PuckPedia, so those are positive developments. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

Can they develop or acquire a No. 1 center?

The Bruins upgraded at wing by acquiring JJ Peterka. They have proven finishers in David Pastrnak and Morgan Geekie. But Elias Lindholm, who is 31 with back injuries, does not project to be a top-line center. Pavel Zacha is in the last year of his contract. Could Fraser Minten or James Hagens become a No. 1 center? If not, could the Bruins trade for one? — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Who will be the top-line center?

The Sabres ended the season with Tage Thompson on the wing. If that holds, Buffalo's forward depth chart hinges on who Lindy Ruff uses as the top-line center. Josh Norris is a possibility, but Jiří Kulich is returning after missing most of last season with a blood clot issue. And Konsta Helenius asserted himself as a top-six option with his performance in the playoffs and at the World Championship. Losing Alex Tuch means more opportunity for Buffalo's young forwards. — Matt Fairburn

Calgary Flames

Is Šimon Nemec the Flames' true No. 1 defenseman?

The Flames are in rebuild mode and will enter a new season as a likely front-runner in the Landon DuPont sweepstakes next summer. Until then, plenty of eyes will surround the Flames' future on defense. Newcomer Nemec fits exactly in GM Craig Conroy's purview as a talented young player hungry for more opportunity. He gets it in Calgary. The question is how much he'll run with it. — Julian McKenzie

Carolina Hurricanes

Who will fill in for Seth Jarvis?

Jarvis finally had his long-delayed shoulder surgery in late June, and his recovery is expected to take four to six months. That means there's a big opportunity in Carolina's top six. Bradly Nadeau, who scored at a half-a-goal-per-game pace in the AHL the last two seasons, could be in line to earn a roster spot and also play on one of the top two lines. Felix Unger Sörum and Justin Robidas could also have something to say about it, and don't forget about Jesperi Kotkaniemi — can he win a job? — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

Will they take a step forward this season?

Blackhawks general manager Kyle Davidson went about this offseason as if he was trying to build a winning team rather than continuing the rebuild. By aggressively pursuing Bowen Byram to be their No. 1 defenseman, bringing back Patrick Kane, signing promising prospect Roman Kantserov and adding three veterans who fit specific team needs, Davidson made some significant changes. The Blackhawks should be better than their four consecutive bottom-three finishes, but how much better can they be? — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche



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Can Martin Nečas do it again?

In his first full season with Colorado last year, Nečas scored 100 points for the first time in his career and produced as much on a per-60 basis as Mikko Rantanen, the guy he functionally replaced. In that regard, it was mission accomplished. Whether he can make it work away from Nathan MacKinnon, though, remains an open question. — Sean Gentille

Columbus Blue Jackets

Will Adam Fantilli sign a contract in time?

It's been a messy summer for the Blue Jackets — headlined by the Zach Werenski trade kerfuffle — but there's still some business to tend to before camp gets started. Fantilli, the Jackets' 21-year-old No. 1 center, remains a restricted free agent. He won't be coming to training camp without a deal, agent Pat Brisson said. With fewer preseason games (four) and a shorter training camp, any days Fantilli misses will have a bigger impact. — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

Do they have enough depth to keep contending?

There will be time for hand-wringing over Jason Robertson's long-term future in Dallas, but the Stars do have him for now. The question is, do they have enough around him? Tyler Seguin's knee, the Mavrik Bourque salary dump and Jamie Benn's decline have left the Stars looking a little thin up front after years of being the deepest team around. — Mark Lazerus

Dylan Larkin handles the puck without a helmet during warmups before a Red Wings game.

The Red Wings need to figure out how to resolve Dylan Larkin's trade request. David Kirouac / Imagn Images

Detroit Red Wings

Who is the GM?

The answer could be "everything," but let's start at the top. The Red Wings don't have a GM after removing Steve Yzerman from the post in mid-July. They also need to figure out how to resolve Dylan Larkin's trade request, a new contract for Simon Edvinsson and ideally get some clarity on Alex DeBrincat's future, too. But hiring a GM is the key domino for most of that, and also the biggest source of uncertainty right now. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

How will players respond to Mike Babcock?

Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl have endorsed Edmonton's new head coach several times this summer, but we have yet to see how Babcock imprints on the rest of the roster. Many of his former depth players have shared stories of his "verbal attacks," openly labeling him a bully. In any case, Babcock is now tasked with rejuvenating a team that took a massive step backward last season and only shuffled a few pieces during the offseason. — Janson Duench

Florida Panthers

Can they regain their Stanley Cup-contending form?

There's a lot of change in South Florida, from the arrival of Brady Tkachuk to a huge swap in goal with the departure of Sergei Bobrovsky. But the biggest question facing the team is whether a much healthier version can revert back to the juggernaut it was prior to last season's disastrous campaign. Having Aleksander Barkov back obviously helps, but Jacob Markström is an open question in goal, and in a tough division they can't afford to have more significant injuries without any youngsters coming. — James Mirtle

Quinton Byfield raises both arms to the side in celebration after scoring a goal.

The path is now open for Quinton Byfield to become the Kings' No. 1 center. Gary A. Vasquez / Imagn Images

Los Angeles Kings

Is Quinton Byfield up to being their No. 1 center?

With franchise legend Anže Kopitar now enjoying retirement, the time has officially come for Byfield to emerge as the kind of player a franchise can build around. The 24-year-old played more than ever last season but still managed a modest 24 goals and 49 points despite getting regular turns on the power play and penalty kill. The path is open for Byfield to be L.A.'s 1C, and he could have the opportunity to burst through what's become a 55-point ceiling. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

When will Quinn Hughes sign an extension?

There are plenty of on-ice questions, such as who will replace Mats Zuccarello on the top line and how Maxim Shabanov will look. But the biggest storyline now is whether Quinn Hughes will sign an extension — and when. Hughes spoke positively about the Wild during his appearance at the NHL/NHLPA Player Media Tour in Vegas last week, and I still expect something to get done. But Hughes doesn't seem to be in any rush. It'll happen when he's ready, even if that means closer to the start of the season or during the season. — Joe Smith

Montreal Canadiens

Will David Reinbacher make the team?

Reinbacher is entering his fourth season since being selected with the No. 5 pick in the 2023 NHL Draft. Enough time has passed to reasonably expect a player drafted that high to be an NHL regular. Adding Reinbacher's right shot to the blue-line group would allow the Canadiens to move Lane Hutson back to his natural left side, but more importantly, it would allow them to see what they have in a player they used a very valuable draft pick on three years ago. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

Do they have any chance of competing?

It's clear the Preds are thinking more about the future under new GM Chris MacFarland, as they should. But this team still has several high-priced veterans whose individual windows are closing soon. And MacFarland just sent a good, young top-six forward in Luke Evangelista to the New Jersey Devils for picks. The return (a first and second) was good, but those vets couldn't have liked it. — Joseph Rexrode



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New Jersey Devils

How will the goaltending shake out?

The Devils traded Jacob Markström to the Panthers earlier this summer and focused on improving their team in other areas, namely with added forward depth. Jake Allen is the presumed starter heading into camp, with David Rittich and Nico Daws battling for the No. 2 job. Who has the upper hand of those two? Will GM Sunny Mehta look to add another goalie to the mix, either with a waiver claim or another transaction? — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Can Peter DeBoer rebuild their defensive structure?

Shutdown defense was a trademark for the Islanders under Barry Trotz. But since his departure, those strengths have become real weaknesses. The Isles bled scoring chances last year, which eventually weighed on Ilya Sorokin and burned the team down the stretch. So now it's up to DeBoer to help restore structure on Long Island. It's going to be a test of his coaching, which has a strong reputation in regular-season action, considering some of the holes on the team. — Shayna Goldman

New York Rangers

How will the new players fit?

The decision to retool rather than rebuild led to a flurry of offseason moves from GM Chris Drury. He traded for scoring winger Pavel Dorofeyev and defensemen Sean Durzi and Marcus Pettersson, and signed depth forwards Oliver Bjorkstrand, Eeli Tolvanen and Joe Veleno. That undoubtedly raised the floor for a roster that finished worst in the East last season, but New York's ceiling remains in question. The new additions will go a long way toward determining whether Drury chose the right path. — Vincent Z. Mercogliano

Ottawa Senators

Who will be captain this season?

The Senators intend to name a new captain to replace Brady Tkachuk. There are lingering questions over their toughness and offensive production in his absence. They've started that process with the acquisitions of William Eklund and André Burakovsky, and internal growth of their own players. But who gets to lead them all? Ottawa has a handful of options worth considering, including Tim Stützle, Jake Sanderson and Thomas Chabot. — Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

How much will Porter Martone and Matvei Michkov contribute?

They are still arguably the two most important players in the organization — Martone, who burst onto the scene late last season and is a Calder Trophy front-runner, and Michkov, who had an outstanding rookie season before regressing in 2025-26. Whether the Flyers make the playoffs again this season could depend on how much these two are able to generate offense, particularly after the Flyers' lack of offseason activity. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

Is there room for the young guys?

Ville Koivunen just got paid. Rutger McGroarty is a significant prospect. Avery Hayes looked like he belonged last season. But the Penguins are staggeringly deep at forward. Is there any room for these three forwards when the season begins? And if there's not, what does that say about a youth movement that should be underway? — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

Can Yaroslav Askarov rebound and fulfill his immense promise?

The 24-year-old goalie often struggled with inconsistency in an erratic 2025-26 season. For the Sharks to take that next step and become a playoff team, Askarov must iron out his uneven play and become the go-to star many have envisioned. — Eric Stephens

Seattle Kraken

Can a star player emerge internally?

From Artemi Panarin to Jason Robertson, the Kraken's pursuit of a difference-making, needle-moving, market-energizing player has been well documented over the past year. The struggling, still-recent expansion club, however, has been unable to land the sort of franchise player Seattle hasn't identified since entering the league. Can a star emerge internally in Seattle at training camp? Chase Reid is at least a year away, so all eyes will be on Berkly Catton and Jake O'Brien when the Kraken open camp. — Thomas Drance

Max Bultman and Corey Pronman

St. Louis Blues

How will the additions and subtractions change things?

The Blues haven't overhauled their roster, but the changes are significant. Mason McTavish and Connor McMichael have been added to the forward group, and Jordan Kyrou is gone. The team needed a new look, but will the additions help the scoring-challenged offense? On defense, Brandon Carlo brings experience, but how big of a difference can he make? It's a new era with new GM Alexander Steen, and while promising, there are more unknowns than in the past. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

What does Victor Hedman have left in the tank?

The Lightning's strategy throughout this window has revolved around its elite core. But now there are some brewing questions around pivotal parts of it, such as Hedman. Before missing time down the stretch, his 2025-26 season was far from perfect. And while there is help to shoulder his workload — John Carlson will likely run the top power play and J.J. Moser has developed into a real defensive threat — a resurgence from Hedman would still go a long way. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Is this too much newness at once?

The Leafs have a new GM, new head coach, scores of new players (including the No. 1 pick at the draft) as well as staff members in just about every department. All of it collides



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together for the first time in a truncated training camp this fall. Will it be a (relatively) seamless transition? Or will there be some growing pains as all that newness meshes together? — Jonas Siegel

Utah Mammoth

Which top prospects could make a legit impact?

Between Tij Iginla, Dmitri Simashev and Daniil But, the Mammoth have three top-15 picks who are hungry to prove themselves as full-time NHL players. These three have exceptional pedigree and Simashev and But even played some NHL games last season. Step one at camp will be making the team, but the burning question after that is whether any of them could take an unexpectedly big leap and find themselves in a prominent role higher in the lineup by the end of the season. — Harman Dayal

Vancouver Canucks

When will we see Thatcher Demko?

Thatcher Demko remains without a timeline to return. Demko, 30, has dealt with a litany of injuries over the past two and a half years. Now entering the first year of a three-year, \$25.5 million contract and reportedly coming off multiple offseason surgeries, the question is: When will we see Demko, and what does that mean for Vancouver? The Canucks have already brought in Chris Driedger on a PTO and own the top waiver priority. Goaltending, as ever, will be a story in Vancouver this season. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

Who will fill Pavel Dorofeyev's shoes?

Trading Dorofeyev, the team's leading scorer the past two seasons, to New York leaves a major hole in Vegas' top six, and several candidates will be vying to fill it. The favorite is Brett Howden, who led the team with 14 goals in the playoffs

after scoring only 12 during the regular season. Braeden Bowman and 2024 first-round pick Trevor Connelly will also be hoping for the opportunity. — Jesse Granger

Alex Ovechkin holds onto his stick horizontally with both hands while looking left during a pause in play in a Capitals game.

Alex Ovechkin is back for a 22nd NHL season. Jamie Sabau / Getty Images

Washington Capitals

How much does Alex Ovechkin have left, and what will his role be?

The NHL's all-time leading goal scorer is back for a 22nd NHL season at age 41 (as of Sept. 17). He's coming off a season in which he somehow scored 32 goals in a career-low 17:27 TOI. Only five of those goals came on the power play. Are the days of Ovi double-shifting on the PP over? Will the Caps' added forward depth spread out the scoring burden? Will coach Spencer Carbery continue to hide Ovechkin in the defensive zone? The roster is better. Can Ovechkin, a career leading man, play a supporting role? — Barry Svrluga

Winnipeg Jets

What will happen to Connor Hellebuyck?

Hellebuyck's private trade request recently turned public as he doubled down on his desire for change. The Jets tried to trade him during the summer, but were never able to get the deal that satisfied Kevin Cheveldayoff. Will this lead to a holdout, as I expect? A last-minute change of heart, as some fans still hope? And when Hellebuyck is traded, whether it takes weeks or months, how does Winnipeg stay competitive without him? — Murat Ates

Murat Ates and Sean McIndoe



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Tulsky enjoys Stanley Cup cake, along with real trophy, during 'Day with Cup'

By: Christopher Detwiler

Hurricanes general manager picks up desserts with trophy during Massachusetts tour

September 14, 2026

Now that's what we'd call a good-looking Cup-cake.

During Eric Tulsky's "Day with the Cup" on Saturday, the Carolina Hurricanes general manager took the Stanley Cup to a local donut shop in Massachusetts, where the bakery had a replica Stanley Cup cake ready for Tulsky's visit.

The shop, Back Door Donuts, made the cake for the championship celebration at Offshore Ale, a Martha's Vineyard sports bar, where Tulsky took the real Cup later in the day.

Tulsky also took the Cup to see the Aquinnah Lighthouse and visited the Mashpee Wampanoag Powwow Committee and Morning Glory Farm, then grabbed some brownies at another local bakery, Soigne.

Pretty sweet day with the Stanley Cup, if you ask us.



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Hurricanes' Brind'Amour prepared to move on without Nikishin

By: Sportsnet Staff

Coming off a championship run doesn't leave much time to dwell on success, at least not for Carolina Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour.

Appearing Monday on The Fan Hockey Show, Brind'Amour addressed the unique challenges of entering a new NHL season as the defending champions with a largely unchanged roster.

"If you have a good team, you don't want to be losing guys," Brind'Amour told hosts Matt Marchese and Mike Futa. "So that's always kind of on the retool."

The team is still dealing with the uncertainty around defenceman Alexander Nikishin's contract situation, as the restricted free agent remains unsigned.

Brind'Amour admits that he can't dwell on Nikishin's status as he tries to get ready for camp.

"Whether they figure that out or not, who knows?" he said. "That's, you know, if he's here, great. If he's not, we're moving on. So we don't have a choice there."

Another wrinkle for the Hurricanes is that forward Seth Jarvis is expected to miss time at the start of the season after

having surgery to repair a torn labrum and rotator cuff in his right shoulder.

While the Hurricanes also saw some departures from their Cup-winning roster, Brind'Amour admitted that having familiar faces back in the fold is a major luxury when it comes to training camp.

"It feels like we were just at this yesterday, and so we just got to figure out how to pick up where we left off," he said. "We don't have as much teaching to do because there aren't new people. So that's a bonus."

However, maintaining the status quo after a deep post-season run brings its own set of hurdles. Among them, as Brind'Amour pointed out, is the shortened summer recovery window for players looking to make individual strides in the off-season.

"The negative part is the preparation part ... from the player's standpoint of getting better in the off-season," Brind'Amour explained. "You're a little behind the eight-ball sometimes with two, three fewer months to kind of get their stuff together, individual-wise. But it is what it is. It's a great problem to have."



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yahoo!sports

Stanley Cup champion officially demands a trade from the Hurricanes

By: Trevor Connors

Stanley Cup champion officially demands a trade from the Hurricanes

Stanley Cup champion officially demands a trade from the Hurricanes

The Carolina Hurricanes are barely two weeks away from the start of the 2026-27 regular season, and while most defending Stanley Cup champions would be basking in the afterglow of a title run, there's some serious turbulence brewing in Raleigh. Several notable restricted free agents around the league remain unsigned as training camps prepare to open, but one situation in particular is raising eyebrows across the hockey world.

Nikishin Wants Out of Carolina

According to NHL insider Pierre LeBrun of The Athletic, defenseman Alexander Nikishin and his representation formally requested a trade away from the Hurricanes following the conclusion of Carolina's championship run this past spring. That request, LeBrun confirmed, remains firmly in place as camp approaches.

The 24-year-old Russian blueliner is still unsigned as a restricted free agent, adding another layer of complexity to an already messy situation. Nikishin put together a solid rookie campaign, registering 33 points including 22 assists across 81 regular season games before chipping in a point over 17 postseason contests as the Canes hoisted the Cup. He finished seventh in Calder Trophy voting, earned a spot on the NHL's all-rookie team alongside Calder winner Matthew Schaefer, and collected a handful of third, fourth, and fifth-place votes in the balloting.

So why does a guy who just won a championship in his first NHL season want to leave? The specifics behind the request haven't been made public, but the trade chatter around Nikishin has been swirling for months. Back in June, insider Frank Seravalli reported that Nikishin was the centerpiece of Carolina's offer to the Winnipeg Jets in pursuit of star goaltender Connor Hellebuyck. Other teams have reportedly been linked to the defenseman as well. What LeBrun's latest reporting clarifies is that these trade discussions may actually be driven by Nikishin's camp rather than the Hurricanes simply trying to flip a valuable young asset.

Nikishin's path to the NHL was a long and winding one. Selected 69th overall by Carolina in the 2020 draft, he spent years developing into one of the top NHL prospects playing

outside North America, eventually captaining SKA St. Petersburg in the KHL from 2023 through 2025 before finally making his way to Raleigh for the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Brind'Amour Ready to Move Forward

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour, never one to sugarcoat things, addressed the situation during an appearance on The Fan Hockey Show. His message was blunt: the team isn't going to wait around.

"Whether they figure that out or not, who knows?" Brind'Amour said of the Nikishin contract standoff. "If he's here, great. If he's not, we're moving on. So we don't have a choice there."

Brind'Amour acknowledged the broader challenge of keeping a championship roster together, noting that roster continuity is a luxury but not something you can take for granted. "If you have a good team, you don't want to be losing guys," he told hosts Matt Marchese and Mike Futa. "So that's always kind of on the retool."

The Hurricanes are already dealing with the absence of forward Seth Jarvis, who is expected to miss time at the start of the season after undergoing surgery to repair a torn labrum and rotator cuff in his right shoulder. On top of that, goaltender Frederik Andersen departed as an unrestricted free agent, signing with the Edmonton Oilers. If Nikishin is ultimately dealt, he would become just the second player from the Cup-winning roster to leave the organization this offseason.

Brind'Amour did find a silver lining in the fact that most of his roster remains intact, which cuts down on the teaching required during training camp. "It feels like we were just at this yesterday, and so we just got to figure out how to pick up where we left off," he said. But he also pointed out the downside of a deep playoff run: players had a significantly shorter offseason to recover and improve individually. "You're a little behind the eight-ball sometimes with two, three fewer months to kind of get their stuff together, individual-wise. But it is what it is. It's a great problem to have."

With camp opening in a matter of days and no resolution in sight, the Nikishin saga could define Carolina's early-season storyline. The Hurricanes will need to decide whether to hold firm on their Cup-winning defenseman or find a trade partner willing to meet their price for one of the most intriguing young blueliners in the league.



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Carolina Hurricanes Young Star Reportedly Firm in Trade Request

By: Nathan Smith

After years of building an amazing culture under Head Coach Rod Brind'Amour, it all paid off for the Carolina Hurricanes in 2026, as the team went through a very tough Eastern Conference en route to the Stanley Cup Finals. There, the team rode a hot goaltender in Brandon Bussi all the way to their first Stanley Cup since 2006 when they took down the Edmonton Oilers, and given the depth and balance of the squad, they aren't one to be taken lightly in 2026/27 either.

Heading into the new regular season, not too much has changed for the team, as the core of the organization remains the same, meaning that even in an East that has gotten tougher in the last six months, this is a team primed for success.

However, they will need to make one major decision soon, as there has been growing frustration from one of the organizations most intriguing young players, and now, a new report has revealed that the time to make a decision on him is now.

Alexander Nikishin Reportedly Asks the Hurricanes for a Trade; Not Backing Off Request

NHL: Stanley Cup Final-Vegas Golden Knights at Carolina Hurricanes

That player would be young defenseman Alexander Nikishin, who was once seen as one of the 'Canes most exciting young players, but last year, it became clear that he was growing frustrated in his limited role. Sure, he was a key piece of a Stanley Cup winning team, as his third pairing minutes with the Hurricanes helped them in a big way, but

given his aspirations heading into free agency, it's clear that he wants a bigger role in Carolina.

Right now, the top-four set up involves the pairings of Jaccob Slavin-Jalen Chatfield and K'Andre Miller-Sean Walker, and given how they all performed in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, Nikishin simply can't be taking a spot from any of them. That's led to plenty of speculation this off-season about Nikishin's future, and now, Pierre LeBrun of The Athletic has confirmed that earlier this summer, he asked the front office for a 'change of scenery', a request he's reportedly not backing off of.

Should the Hurricanes Trade Alexander Nikishin?

At 24-years-old, Nikishin now has 81 games of regular season NHL experience under his belt on top of 17 post-season games, and on the third pairing, he fits what this organization is trying to do perfectly. As of right now though, LeBrun confirms that Nikishin isn't too happy in his role, believing that given what he's shown thus far early in his career, he could be playing a top-four role somewhere else in the league.

One thing that LeBrun didn't mention was the interest levels from Carolina in getting a deal for Nikishin done, but given that he's currently a Restricted Free Agent, something has to give and this situation has to be sorted out in the near future.

Ultimately, depth is one of the Hurricanes' biggest strengths, so keeping Nikishin around would be a good way to bolster their chances of a Stanley Cup title defense, but right now, the player remains firm in wanting a change of scenery at the NHL level.



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SB NATION
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Report: Nikishin Wants “Change of Scenery”

By: Bob Wage

According to Pierre LeBrun of “The Athletic”, Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Alexander Nikishin has requested a change of scenery and that seems to be the issue with re-signing him. The Russian has not backed off that request.

Training camp starts next week and Nikishin, who is a restricted free agent, has still yet to be signed. The Hurricanes have total NHL rights to this player and no one else in the league can sign him or submit an offer sheet, unless the Canes trade those rights.

Nikishin set a record for Carolina rookie defensemen by tallying 33 points last season. He also chipped in with 132

hits and 94 blocked shots, which placed him second on the Carolina blueline in both categories.

He had a team high, (+/-) of plus 18.

During the regular season, he averaged 18:11 of playing time per game, the lowest of the top six defensemen.

During the playoffs, that dropped to 14:50 per game.

The player obviously wants more playing time and a bigger role in Carolina and apparently does not see that happening anytime soon.

We will be watching.

LINKS

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SportScan

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

The Athletic / Every NHL team’s biggest burning question heading into training camp

By The Athletic NHL Staff



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Will Adam Fantilli sign a contract in time? When will Quinn Hughes sign an extension? What will happen to Connor Hellebuyck?

This week, The Athletic asked its staff for one burning question facing each NHL team heading into training camp, and those were just a few of the enticing storylines we heard about in response.

With camps opening this week and the preseason around the corner, here's what we have our eyes on.

How will the Dylan Larkin situation play out in Detroit?

Max Bultman and Sean Gentile

Anaheim Ducks

When will Cutter Gauthier sign an extension?

The Ducks' leading scorer from last season remains unsigned. Is another of their top restricted free agents bound to withhold his services as camp opens? Gauthier didn't have the leverage of salary arbitration and wasn't eligible for an offer sheet, but the 22-year-old is bound to land a massive deal after a breakout 41-goal season. The sides continue to talk and after the Chris Kreider contract termination, there is \$15.5 million of cap space, per PuckPedia, so those are positive developments. — Eric Stephens

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Ducks to place Chris Kreider on waivers to terminate contract: Sources

The move has been mutually agreed on by Kreider and the Ducks. Once approved, it will make the 35-year-old forward a UFA.

Boston Bruins

Can they develop or acquire a No. 1 center?

The Bruins upgraded at wing by acquiring JJ Peterka. They have proven finishers in David Pastrnak and Morgan Geekie. But Elias Lindholm, who is 31 with back injuries, does not project to be a top-line center. Pavel Zacha is in the last year of his contract. Could Fraser Minten or James Hagens become a No. 1 center? If not, could the Bruins trade for one? — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Who will be the top-line center?

The Sabres ended the season with Tage Thompson on the wing. If that holds, Buffalo's forward depth chart hinges on who Lindy Ruff uses as the top-line center. Josh Norris is a possibility, but Jiří Kulich is returning after missing most of last season with a blood clot issue. And Konsta Helenius asserted himself as a top-six option with his performance in the playoffs and at the World Championship. Losing Alex Tuch means more opportunity for Buffalo's young forwards. — Matt Fairburn

Calgary Flames

Is Šimon Nemec the Flames' true No. 1 defenseman?

The Flames are in rebuild mode and will enter a new season as a likely front-runner in the Landon DuPont sweepstakes next summer. Until then, plenty of eyes will surround the Flames' future on defense. Newcomer Nemec fits exactly in GM Craig Conroy's purview as a talented young player hungry for more opportunity. He gets it in Calgary. The question is how much he'll run with it. — Julian McKenzie

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Šimon Nemec on his trade to the Flames, a fresh start and a new type of summer training

Nemec, the No. 2 pick in the 2022 NHL draft, was traded from the Devils to the Flames after his third NHL season.

Carolina Hurricanes

Who will fill in for Seth Jarvis?

Jarvis finally had his long-delayed shoulder surgery in late June, and his recovery is expected to take four to six months. That means there's a big opportunity in Carolina's top six. Bradley Nadeau, who scored at a half-a-goal-per-game pace in the AHL the last two seasons, could be in line to earn a roster spot and also play on one of the top two lines. Felix Unger

Sörum and Justin Robidas could also have something to say about it, and don't forget about Jesperi Kotkaniemi — can he win a job? — Cory Lavelle

Chicago Blackhawks

Will they take a step forward this season?

Blackhawks general manager Kyle Davidson went about this offseason as if he was trying to build a winning team rather than continuing the rebuild. By aggressively pursuing Bowen Byram to be their No. 1 defenseman, bringing back Patrick Kane, signing promising prospect Roman Kantserov and adding three veterans who fit specific team needs, Davidson made some significant changes. The Blackhawks should be better than their four consecutive bottom-three finishes, but how much better can they be? — Scott Powers

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Why the Blackhawks took a big swing on defenseman Bowen Byram

The trade was by far the largest move GM Kyle Davidson has made in his tenure to add a significant player to the Blackhawks' roster.

Colorado Avalanche

Can Martin Nečas do it again?

In his first full season with Colorado last year, Nečas scored 100 points for the first time in his career and produced as much on a per-60 basis as Mikko Rantanen, the guy he functionally replaced. In that regard, it was mission accomplished. Whether he can make it work away from Nathan MacKinnon, though, remains an open question. — Sean Gentile

Columbus Blue Jackets

Will Adam Fantilli sign a contract in time?

It's been a messy summer for the Blue Jackets — headlined by the Zach Werenski trade kerfuffle — but there's still some business to tend to before camp gets started. Fantilli, the Jackets' 21-year-old No. 1 center, remains a restricted free agent. He won't be coming to training camp without a deal, agent Pat Brisson said. With fewer preseason games (four) and a shorter training camp, any days Fantilli misses will have a bigger impact. — Aaron Portzline

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Blue Jackets' Adam Fantilli remains unsigned as camp nears. Is it time to worry?

Columbus general manager Don Waddell has expressed confidence that the team will sign Fantilli before training camp starts.

Dallas Stars

Do they have enough depth to keep contending?

There will be time for hand-wringing over Jason Robertson's long-term future in Dallas, but the Stars do have him for now. The question is, do they have enough around him? Tyler Seguin's knee, the Mavrik Bourque salary dump and Jamie Benn's decline have left the Stars looking a little thin up front after years of being the deepest team around. Robertson and Wyatt Johnston were the only Stars truly producing during that first-round loss to Colorado. They'll need more to make another run. — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings

Who is the GM?

The answer could be "everything," but let's start at the top. The Red Wings don't have a GM after removing Steve Yzerman from the post in mid-July. They also need to figure out how to resolve Dylan Larkin's trade request, a new contract for Simon Edvinsson and ideally get some clarity on Alex DeBrincat's future, too. But hiring a GM is the key domino for most of that, and also the biggest source of uncertainty right now. — Max Bultman

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Red Wings' general manager uncertainty hangs over team as offseason ends



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The Red Wings prospect tournament marks the end of a long summer. So why do things still feel so unsettled in Detroit?

Edmonton Oilers

How will players respond to Mike Babcock?

Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl have endorsed Edmonton's new head coach several times this summer, but we have yet to see how Babcock imprints on the rest of the roster. Many of his former depth players have shared stories of his "verbal attacks," openly labeling him a bully. In any case, Babcock is now tasked with rejuvenating a team that took a massive step backward last season and only shuffled a few pieces during the offseason. — Janson Duench

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

'No one is spared': Tracing Mike Babcock's imperious NHL coaching career

His complicated coaching legacy includes championships, big paydays and charges of mistreatment and mental torment.

Florida Panthers

Can they regain their Stanley Cup-contending form?

There's a lot of change in South Florida, from the arrival of Brady Tkachuk to a huge swap in goal with the departure of Sergei Bobrovsky. But the biggest question facing the team is whether a much healthier version can revert back to the juggernaut it was prior to last season's disastrous campaign. Having Aleksander Barkov back obviously helps, but Jacob Markström is an open question in goal, and in a tough division they can't afford to have more significant injuries without any youngsters coming. — James Mirtle

Los Angeles Kings

Is Quinton Byfield up to being their No. 1 center?

With franchise legend Anže Kopitar now enjoying retirement, the time has officially come for Byfield to emerge as the kind of player a franchise can build around. The 24-year-old played more than ever last season but still managed a modest 24 goals and 49 points despite getting regular turns on the power play and penalty kill. The path is open for Byfield to be L.A.'s 1C, and he could have the opportunity to burst through what's become a 55-point ceiling. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

When will Quinn Hughes sign an extension?

There are plenty of on-ice questions, such as who will replace Mats Zuccarello on the top line and how Maxim Shabanov will look. But the biggest storyline now is whether Quinn Hughes will sign an extension — and when. Hughes spoke positively about the Wild during his appearance at the NHL/NHLPA Player Media Tour in Vegas last week, and I still expect something to get done. But Hughes doesn't seem to be in any rush. It'll happen when he's ready, even if that means closer to the start of the season or during the season. — Joe Smith

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Quinn Hughes happy with Wild but in no rush to sign extension: 'I want to take my time'

Hughes, whom the Wild acquired from the Canucks for young talent and a draft pick last season, is entering the last year of his contract.

Montreal Canadiens

Will David Reinbacher make the team?

Reinbacher is entering his fourth season since being selected with the No. 5 pick in the 2023 NHL Draft. Enough time has passed to reasonably expect a player drafted that high to be an NHL regular. Adding Reinbacher's right shot to the blue-line group would allow the Canadiens to move Lane Hutson back to his natural left side, but more importantly, it would allow them to see what they have in a player they used a very valuable draft pick on three years ago. — Arpon Basu

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Why the Canadiens have the luxury of rolling the dice on a status quo offseason

The Canadiens offseason has not resulted in any big additions, but the ascending development curve of the team allows them to be patient.

Nashville Predators

Do they have any chance of competing?

It's clear the Preds are thinking more about the future under new GM Chris MacFarland, as they should. But this team still has several high-priced veterans whose individual windows are closing soon. And MacFarland just sent a good, young top-six forward in Luke Evangelista to the New Jersey Devils for picks. The return (a first and second) was good, but those vets couldn't have liked it. — Joseph Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

How will the goaltending shake out?

The Devils traded Jacob Markström to the Panthers earlier this summer and focused on improving their team in other areas, namely with added forward depth. Jake Allen is the presumed starter heading into camp, with David Rittich and Nico Daws battling for the No. 2 job. Who has the upper hand of those two? Will GM Sunny Mehta look to add another goalie to the mix, either with a waiver claim or another transaction? — Peter Baugh

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

New Jersey Devils GM Sunny Mehta, ex-poker pro, hopes small roster bets lead to big payoffs

Mehta won two Stanley Cup titles in the Florida Panthers' front office, in part by helping them nail seemingly minor moves.

New York Islanders

Can Peter DeBoer rebuild their defensive structure?

Shutdown defense was a trademark for the Islanders under Barry Trotz. But since his departure, those strengths have become real weaknesses. The Isles bled scoring chances last year, which eventually weighed on Ilya Sorokin and burned the team down the stretch. So now it's up to DeBoer to help restore structure on Long Island. It's going to be a test of his coaching, which has a strong reputation in regular-season action, considering some of the holes on the team. — Shayna Goldman

New York Rangers

How will the new players fit?

The decision to retool rather than rebuild led to a flurry of offseason moves from GM Chris Drury. He traded for scoring winger Pavel Dorofeyev and defensemen Sean Durzi and Marcus Pettersson, and signed depth forwards Oliver Bjorkstrand, Eeli Tolvanen and Joe Veleno. That undoubtedly raised the floor for a roster that finished worst in the East last season, but New York's ceiling remains in question. The new additions will go a long way toward determining whether Drury chose the right path. — Vincent Z. Mercogliano

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

New York Rangers 2026-27 lineup projection: Where do offseason additions fit in?

With a very different roster heading into the quieter part of the NHL offseason, it's time to update the Rangers' depth chart.

Ottawa Senators

Who will be captain this season?

The Senators intend to name a new captain to replace Brady Tkachuk. There are lingering questions over their toughness and offensive production in his absence. They've started that process with the acquisitions of William Eklund and André Burakovsky, and internal growth of their own players. But who gets to lead them all? Ottawa has a handful of options worth considering, including Tim Stützle, Jake Sanderson and Thomas Chabot. — Julian McKenzie

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

More NHL teams than ever are without a captain. Does wearing the 'C' still matter?



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Ten teams lacked captains as of Tuesday, a believed league record. But leadership isn't always about just one player and one letter.

Philadelphia Flyers

How much will Porter Martone and Matvei Michkov contribute?

They are still arguably the two most important players in the organization — Martone, who burst onto the scene late last season and is a Calder Trophy front-runner, and Michkov, who had an outstanding rookie season before regressing in 2025-26. Whether the Flyers make the playoffs again this season could depend on how much these two are able to generate offense, particularly after the Flyers' lack of offseason activity. — Kevin Kurz

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Flyers coach Rick Tocchet on Porter Martone's potential, regrets over Matvei Michkov, more

Tocchet, who is about to begin his second season at the helm, would like to see his young team grow in 2026-27.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Is there room for the young guys?

Ville Koivunen just got paid. Rutger McGroarty is a significant prospect. Avery Hayes looked like he belonged last season. But the Penguins are staggeringly deep at forward. Is there any room for these three forwards when the season begins? And if there's not, what does that say about a youth movement that should be underway? — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

Can Yaroslav Askarov rebound and fulfill his immense promise?

The 24-year-old goalie often struggled with inconsistency in an erratic 2025-26 season. For the Sharks to take that next step and become a playoff team, Askarov must iron out his uneven play and become the go-to star many have envisioned. — Eric Stephens

Seattle Kraken

Can a star player emerge internally?

From Artemi Panarin to Jason Robertson, the Kraken's pursuit of a difference-making, needle-moving, market-energizing player has been well documented over the past year. The struggling, still-recent expansion club, however, has been unable to land the sort of franchise player Seattle hasn't identified since entering the league. Can a star emerge internally in Seattle at training camp? Chase Reid is at least a year away, so all eyes will be on Berkly Catton and Jake O'Brien when the Kraken open camp. — Thomas Drance

What is the future outlook for Shane Wright

Max Bultman and Corey Pronman

St. Louis Blues

How will the additions and subtractions change things?

The Blues haven't overhauled their roster, but the changes are significant. Mason McTavish and Connor McMichael have been added to the forward group, and Jordan Kyrou is gone. The team needed a new look, but will the additions help the scoring-challenged offense? On defense, Brandon Carlo brings experience, but how big of a difference can he make? It's a new era with new GM Alexander Steen, and while promising, there are more unknowns than in the past. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

What does Victor Hedman have left in the tank?

The Lightning's strategy throughout this window has revolved around its elite core. But now there are some brewing questions around pivotal parts of it, such as Hedman. Before missing time down the stretch, his 2025-26 season was far from perfect. And while there is help to shoulder his workload — John Carlson will likely run the top power play and J.J. Moser has developed into a real defensive threat — a resurgence from Hedman would still go a long way. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Is this too much newness at once?

The Leafs have a new GM, new head coach, scores of new players (including the No. 1 pick at the draft) as well as staff members in just about every department. All of it collides together for the first time in a truncated training camp this fall. Will it be a (relatively) seamless transition? Or will there be some growing pains as all that newness meshes together? — Jonas Siegel

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Inside the Maple Leafs' strategy during a franchise-altering offseason

It's been a summer of change in Toronto. A wide-ranging interview with John Chayka and Mats Sundin reveals the thinking behind the moves.

Utah Mammoth

Which top prospects could make a legit impact?

Between Tij Iginla, Dmitri Simashev and Daniil But, the Mammoth have three top-15 picks who are hungry to prove themselves as full-time NHL players. These three have exceptional pedigree and Simashev and But even played some NHL games last season. Step one at camp will be making the team, but the burning question after that is whether any of them could take an unexpectedly big leap and find themselves in a prominent role higher in the lineup by the end of the season. — Harman Dayal

Vancouver Canucks

When will we see Thatcher Demko?

Thatcher Demko remains without a timeline to return. Demko, 30, has dealt with a litany of injuries over the past two and a half years. Now entering the first year of a three-year, \$25.5 million contract and reportedly coming off multiple offseason surgeries, the question is: When will we see Demko, and what does that mean for Vancouver? The Canucks have already brought in Chris Driedger on a PTO and own the top waiver priority. Goaltending, as ever, will be a story in Vancouver this season. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

Who will fill Pavel Dorofeyev's shoes?

Trading Dorofeyev, the team's leading scorer the past two seasons, to New York leaves a major hole in Vegas' top six, and several candidates will be vying to fill it. The favorite is Brett Howden, who led the team with 14 goals in the playoffs after scoring only 12 during the regular season. Braeden Bowman and 2024 first-round pick Trevor Connelly will also be hoping for the opportunity. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

How much does Alex Ovechkin have left, and what will his role be?

The NHL's all-time leading goal scorer is back for a 22nd NHL season at age 41 (as of Sept. 17). He's coming off a season in which he somehow scored 32 goals in a career-low 17:27 TOI. Only five of those goals came on the power play. Are the days of Ovi double-shifting on the PP over? Will the Caps' added forward depth spread out the scoring burden? Will coach Spencer Carbery continue to hide Ovechkin in the defensive zone? The roster is better. Can Ovechkin, a career leading man, play a supporting role? — Barry Svrluga

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Inside Alex Ovechkin's Capitals return: An offseason whirlwind and the phone call that clinched it

A behind-the-scenes look at how the NHL's all-time leading goal scorer decided to delay retirement for another year — at least.

Winnipeg Jets

What will happen to Connor Hellebuyck?

Hellebuyck's private trade request recently turned public as he doubled down on his desire for change. The Jets tried to trade him during the summer, but were never able to get the deal that satisfied Kevin Cheveldayoff. Will this lead to a holdout, as I expect? A last-minute change of heart, as some fans still hope? And when Hellebuyck is



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traded, whether it takes weeks or months, how does Winnipeg stay competitive without him? — Murat Ates

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The Athletic / NHL rumblings: Latest on Gauthier, Fantilli, Batherson, Nikishin with countdown on to new CBA

By Pierre LeBrun

The new collective bargaining agreement between the NHL and NHL Players' Association kicks in at midnight ET on Tuesday night/Wednesday morning, so the clock is ticking on getting eight-year extensions done before the limit becomes seven for re-signing players.

But just as significant is that the new CBA will limit how front-loaded contracts can be and how signing-bonus money can be structured. That seems to be the part that's creating momentum in negotiations between Cutter Gauthier and the Anaheim Ducks.

The positive news on Monday is that there's been progress and substantive talks on Gauthier, who's a restricted free agent. Nothing is done until it's done, but the sides are determined to get it across the finish line. The sides met over the weekend, and the dialogue was slated to continue Monday.

I'm not 100 percent sure, but I think it will land as a six-year deal if it gets done. I'm also not sure if Gauthier will get Connor Bedard's \$15 million per year, but something in the \$13 million to \$14 million range wouldn't surprise me.

There will be relief, to be sure, for the Ducks if and when this deal gets done. There's been a lot of drama in the wake of the stunning offer sheet Leo Carlsson signed with the Philadelphia Flyers, which was matched by the Ducks, and some deserved criticism of how it was handled by Ducks general manager Pat Verbeek.

But I also think it needs to be said that Verbeek did make offers last fall early in the season to Carlsson and Gauthier. Obviously they didn't lead to extensions, but it's not as if Anaheim had decided not to negotiate ahead of time with those two very important young stars. The agents for the players — Matt Keator for Carlsson and Kurt Overhardt for Gauthier — were clever in deciding to wait. That's for sure.

Here's what else I'm hearing Monday from league sources, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss negotiations that aren't public.

Which next gen superstars jumped the highest in the NHL player tiers?

Fantilli talks 'very slow'

Sticking with young star RFAs, Adam Fantilli remained unsigned Monday ahead of Blue Jackets camp opening this week. The sides continue to talk, which is good, but there's a sizeable gap to overcome. "Very slow" was how one source described things.

That negotiation needs a positive uptick. The slowness certainly hasn't been for a lack of effort from either side this summer. There have been offers and counter-offers, but they're just not there yet.

Colleague Aaron Portzline talked to Jackets GM Don Waddell about it in his Monday piece.

Batherson, Sens still far apart

All eyes in Ottawa are on Drake Batherson, who is entering the last year on his deal with the Senators at a \$4.975 million cap hit. He would become an unrestricted free agent on July 1.

The 33-goal forward is interested in signing an eight-year deal but would also do six or seven years depending on the AAV. So Tuesday night's expiry of the old CBA has some bearing. Another thing to consider is that Batherson doesn't want to negotiate during the season — not uncommon among pending UFAs, who often see it as a distraction once the puck drops.

Having said that, Igor Shesterkin also told the New York Rangers he wasn't interested in negotiating during the season two years ago and ended up signing in December. Either way, these things can change with one phone call. But as of Monday morning, things were still far apart on a Batherson extension.

Nikishin not backing off trade request

Defenseman Alexander Nikishin remains unsigned by the Carolina Hurricanes as camps get set to open.

The 24-year-old RFA requested a change of scenery after the season, and one thing that was made clear to me Monday is that the request remains in place.

Edvinsson, Wings still status quo

Status quo on the Simon Edvinsson front as of Monday. Talks remain on hold until the Detroit Red Wings hire a new GM or head of hockey operations.

The RFA defenseman was still expected to be at training camp this week, signed or not.

Xhekaj talks progressing

Talks have progressed on the Arber Xhekaj contract with the Montreal Canadiens. I would expect a deal to get done for the RFA defenseman as early as Tuesday.

St. Louis' extension and next coaches up

Speaking of the Canadiens, coach Martin St. Louis got his contract extension done and is now signed through 2029-30, removing another name from the list of NHL coaches entering the season on expiring deals.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis signs multiyear contract extension

St. Louis, the fourth-longest-tenured coach in the NHL, guided his young team all the way to the Eastern Conference final in 2026.

That list is now down to the Minnesota Wild's John Hynes, Colorado Avalanche's Jared Bednar, Winnipeg Jets' Scott Arniel, San Jose Sharks' Ryan Warsofsky and Ducks' Joel Quenneville. Rick Bowness did a one-year extension after last season with Columbus, so he'll be up again as well.

I think the Wild will announce a Hynes extension in the not-too-distant future.

Also of note, the Nashville Predators' Andrew Brunette is entering the last year of his current deal, but has an option for 2027-28.

Sakic's Avs role

When the Avalanche announced Joe Sakic was stepping back into his role as GM after the departure of Chris MacFarland to Nashville, nowhere to be found was the word "interim." But I think it's fair to say a lot of people assumed Sakic wasn't in for the long run and a search for a new GM would eventually happen.

But Sakic made it clear to me when we chatted back in June that his foray back into the GM chair wasn't short-term. He wasn't ready to put a timeline on it, but he wasn't just doing it for the time being. He was fully committed.

That got further cemented Monday, with news shared by the likes of Evan Rawal (Denver Gazette) and Corey Masisak (Denver Post) that the appointment was full-time and that a replacement search was not in the offing.

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The Athletic / NHL Bizarro-meter 2026: Which Eastern Conference team had the weirdest offseason?

By Sean McIndoe

After a weekend off to cool down, apply some security patches and reassure it that the whole "Mike Babcock to the Edmonton Oilers" thing was not a joke, the Bizarro-meter is back.

Every year, we like to try to figure out which NHL teams had the weirdest offseason. On Friday, we ran through the Western Conference, featuring a record-smashing offer sheet, a blockbuster that wasn't and some Pacific Division coaching shenanigans. When the dust settled, the top score in the conference went to the Oilers, with an impressive 9.1 out of 10.

Will anyone in the Eastern Conference beat that mark? Let's find out ...

Which next gen superstars jumped the highest in the NHL player tiers?

Metro Division

New York Islanders

The offseason so far: It was mostly quiet, with Matias Maccelli added and a change at backup goalie, neither of which should move their outlook much.

But their strangest story was: Replacing coach Patrick Roy with Pete DeBoer, which wasn't the offseason but came so late in the season that it kind of felt like it. For our purposes, seeing Anders Lee in another uniform will take some adjusting.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 3.7/10. It was mildly surprising to see a new GM in his first full offseason mostly stay the course. But only mildly.

Pittsburgh Penguins

The offseason so far: They shuffled a few depth pieces and kept Evgeni Malkin, although the biggest offseason move was probably Anthony Mantha's departure.

But their strangest story was: Giving a max-length deal to a guy you had definitely heard of.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 3.9/10. We're still waiting on Sidney Crosby's extension, and that deal going sideways would bump up this score significantly. It won't, though.

Carolina Hurricanes

The offseason so far: Champagne. Lots of champagne. John Carlson was technically a Hurricane for like a minute. And they also let Frederik Andersen go to Edmonton, which seems like a cruel way to treat a Stanley Cup hero.

But their strangest story was: Other than letting their egomaniac owner inexcusably deface the Stanley Cup, it was pretty standard stuff.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 4.2/10. Oh, look at us, we don't have to add any players because we're already too good. Show offs.

New Jersey Devils

The offseason so far: It's been busy under new GM Sunny Mehta, with Šimon Nemec and Jacob Markström among those on the way out while Evan Rodrigues and Anthony Mantha are in.

But their strangest story was: Mehta dropping this jacket photo, only because if spending the early '90s wearing an NHL Starter jacket everywhere helps you get hired then I should have had a dozen interviews by now.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 4.5/10. Count me among those who think Mehta is going to cook in New Jersey. For now, it's been a busy but not especially bizarre first few months.

New York Rangers

The offseason so far: They were busy, making a series of moves highlights by trades that added Pavel Dorofeyev and subtracted Vincent Trocheck. Dom Luszczyzyn's model liked their summer a lot, and while they're still not expected to be good, they might be respectable.

But their strangest story was: A James Dolan-run team winning a championship, which didn't really have anything to do with the Rangers but was still super weird.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 5.1/10. Speaking of Dolan, he's found a successor to take over running the team, and in a wild coincidence the very best candidate turned out to be his own son.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Are the New York Rangers a respectable hockey club? This season will show the answer

GM Chris Drury is counting on his moves getting the backsliding Rangers back in the playoff mix. It's a bet he needs to win.

Washington Capitals

The offseason so far: It was a summer of big-name additions, with Jordan Kyrou, Alex Tuch and Boone Jenner all arriving. There were costs and risks associated with each, of course, but it all left the Caps looking like a legit contender in the Metro. As Dom put it in his offseason roundup, they look like "a true beacon of what a proper retool should look like."

But their strangest story was: Alexander Ovechkin's decision over whether to return for another season, which felt like it should have been a huge story even as he was just kind of chill about it.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 5.3/10. None of the individual moves were all that weird, but "Washington Capitals, offseason destination of choice" kind of was.

Philadelphia Flyers

The offseason so far: They didn't make any major changes. Same GM, same coach, and mostly the same roster aside from Joseph Woll and Noel Acciari showing up. But of course, it's not like they didn't try.

But their strangest story was: The Leo Carlsson offer sheet, obviously. Not just the eye-popping dollar amount, but what it said about where the Flyers think they are in the contending cycle.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 7.4/10. I'm awarding a bonus point for Matvei Michkov apparently being in shape.

Columbus Blue Jackets

The offseason so far: They added Valeri Nichushkin but lost Mason Marchment and captain Boone Jenner. But since we're defining the offseason as everything that happens after the final buzzer of a team's last game, we have to start with Rick Bowness absolutely nuking his team after the finale, basically calling them losers and vowing to change the culture if he returned. Don Waddell apparently agreed, as Bowness shed the interim label days later.

But their strangest story was: The Zach Werenski saga, which saw the reigning Norris winner go from reportedly seeking a trade to vetoing a deal with the Stars to apparently deciding to stick around, at least for the start of the season. That was a happy ending of sorts, but combined with leading scorer Kirill Marchenko wanting out, it puts the Blue Jackets in a tough spot heading into what now feels like a make-or-break season.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 8.5/10. Is it weird that the best player they've ever had basically said "build a winner or I'm gone" and then they didn't really make any major moves at all? Because it feels a bit weird.

Atlantic Division

Boston Bruins

The offseason so far: Their only major move was trading for JJ Peterka, which cost them a pair of first-round picks.

But their strangest story was: Settling for adding Will Borgen and Connor Clifton to a blue line that probably needed more of a top-four boost.



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Bizarro-meter ranking: 3.7/10. One of last year's surprises, the Bruins were reportedly looking at some bigger names but couldn't make it happen. That's maybe disappointing, but it's not especially weird.

Tampa Bay Lightning

The offseason so far: The big moves were replacing Darren Raddysh with John Carlson. They also traded Nick Paul.

But their strangest story was: Sending both Paul and Raddysh to the Toronto Maple Leafs, the latter in a sign-and-trade. You normally wouldn't do that with a division rival with whom you're fighting for a playoff spot ... which suggests the Lightning don't view the Leafs that way.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 4.1/10. The Lightning don't tend to make huge changes in the offseason, and this was another largely quiet one.

Buffalo Sabres

The offseason so far: They saw two top contributors leave town in Alex Tuch and Bowen Byram, although they got a decent return for both, especially Byram. Still, it's fair to wonder if one of last year's best stories took a significant step backwards, at least in the short term.

But their strangest story was: The Connor Hellebuyck trade saga, which saw the Sabres reportedly get very close to a deal for the three-time Vezina winner at the draft only for it to fall apart. It still feels like they could land him, maybe any day now. A big chunk of their fan base is banking on it.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 4.6/10. Maybe the best news of the summer is that one of the best players in the league was willing to be dealt to Buffalo. A year ago, that would have been extremely bizarre. After last season, not so much.

Why was Zach Benson No. 124 on the U23 rankings?

Corey Pronman, Scott Wheeler and more

Florida Panthers

The offseason so far: They got Brady Tkachuk, just like we all knew they eventually would, although they had to give up a decent haul to get him. They also parted with Evan Rodrigues and Mackie Samoskevich, and replaced old goalie Sergei Bobrovsky with old goalie Jacob Markström.

But their strangest story was: Giving 36-year-old Radko Gudas a six-year deal that he will definitely play the full length of, because the league would never have approved it otherwise.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 5.2/10. The Panthers generated some big headlines in the offseason, but the biggest was one we'd all expected for years, so it wasn't that bizarre.

Ottawa Senators

The offseason so far: Brady Tkachuk told us he was tired of everyone always saying he'd eventually orchestrate a trade to the Panthers. Then he orchestrated a trade to the Panthers. The Senators at least got a nice package of picks for him, and turned one of them into William Eklund.

But their strangest story was: Daniel Alfredsson, Toronto Maple Leaf.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 5.9/10. It was certainly a newsworthy summer. But as with the Panthers, I can't rank it as being all that bizarre when the main move was one we'd all seen coming forever.

Montreal Canadiens

The offseason so far: Ho hum, they signed another future star to a contract that was miles below market value, in this case Ivan Demidov going max length just hours before Leo Carlsson completely reset the market for young forwards. Is having your entire young core locked in for millions less than other teams pay their guys a good thing? You'd have to be an idiot to think otherwise.

But their strangest story was: Signing Chris Kreider over the weekend, which makes perfect sense from a roster construction point of view as long as you ignore the part where the fan base has hated him for a decade because of this.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 6.1/10. I'm giving them a bonus nudge for that weird post-playoff moment where Patrik Laine admitted he wasn't really

hurt anymore even though he ended the season on LTIR, and everyone kind of just shrugged. But yeah, this is mostly Kreider.

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

Canadiens' signing of Chris Kreider was a good move, even if he's hated in Montreal

Kreider is a hated man in Montreal, but there are several reasons his signing makes a ton of sense for the Canadiens.

Toronto Maple Leafs

The offseason so far: It was one of the league's busiest, featuring a surprising new GM, a surprising new coach, a new top-pair defenseman, multiple goaltending moves, a completely rebuilt bottom six, and a ton of rumors about Morgan Rielly and Matthew Knies that didn't lead anywhere. The whole thing got decidedly mixed reviews, especially on the day they unveiled their new front-office structure at a press conference that went almost completely off the rails.

But their strangest story was: Winning the draft lottery the day after that disastrous introduction. The hockey gods letting something good happen to the Maple Leafs? I'm so confused.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 7.7/10. The Leafs looked like the early bizarro-meter favorites in May, but the lottery win seemed to calm things down and generate some much-needed optimism. There's a foundation being built here, but it still feels like a shaky one.

Detroit Red Wings

The offseason so far: The summer was dominated by the Dylan Larkin saga, as the team's (then) captain decided he wanted out, shooting him to the top of the offseason trade board and making him public enemy number one for the vast majority of Wings fans. That was especially true once we found out he intended to use his no-trade clause to narrow his list of potential destinations down to just a reported three.

The response from around the hockey world was nearly unanimous: Hold the line, Steve Yzerman!

Uh, Steve? You still there, Steve?

But their strangest story was: Ditching Yzerman as GM, which is something a lot of us figured they'd never have the courage to do. (Even if it was framed as a promotion to senior advisor or whatever.)

But what made this situation even weirder is the timing. The move didn't come after the season ended, or even after some sort of multi-week organizational review. Instead, the Wings waited until mid-July to drop the bomb. And they somehow still haven't hired a replacement.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 9.4/10. And after all that, Larkin will report to camp, but will be stripped of the captaincy. Quite the way to cap off the league's weirdest offseason. Congratulations on winning something for the first time in a decade, Wings fans.

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The Athletic / What does it mean to be an NHL rookie camp invitee?

By Fluto Shinzawa

BOSTON — Will Manchuso was bummed. The 18-year-old from Concord, Mass., was ranked No. 104 among North American skaters by NHL Central Scouting for the 2026 NHL Draft. But 32 teams deemed the forward's 32 goals and 27 assists in 24 games for St. Mark's School in 2025-26 as unworthy of draft capital.

The following month, Manchuso was skating when Matt and Ryan Keator, his family advisers, got some news from the Boston Bruins. Manchuso's hometown club wanted him to attend 2026-27 rookie camp.

The Keators accepted the Bruins' offer on Manchuso's behalf. They did not give Manchuso the option to decline.

"Obviously, being from here," Manchuso said with a laugh, "it's a pretty easy decision."

Manchuso is one of eight undrafted and unsigned players the Bruins invited to rookie camp. He and his fellow invitees are guaranteed nothing from the franchise beyond representing the Black and Gold in back-to-back prospect games against the Buffalo Sabres. Whether any of them advance to main camp on Wednesday remains to be seen.

"I don't know about the gear," Manchuso said with a smile when asked if he could leave camp with some swag. "Hopefully a few T-shirts."

But for Manchuso, who will play for the QMJHL's Moncton Wildcats this season, a strong performance in rookie camp is important. Being overlooked in his first draft year is not an experience he wants to repeat in 2027.

"Just make the biggest impact," the left-shot forward said of his camp objective. "Obviously, there are people watching. My goal last year was to get drafted. It's still a continuous goal next year."

Which next gen superstars jumped the highest in the NHL player tiers?

Filling a need

Rookie camp marks the kickoff of each season. It is the first box for top prospects — the Gavin McKennas and Ivar Stenbergs of the league — but also picks later in the draft, to check off on their way to pro hockey. But to complement their big-name, high-end draft picks, teams invite undrafted players to fill out their lineups.

Manchuso arrived at Bruins camp with seven other invitees (Jack Bar, Jordan Duguay, Nolen Geerdes, Jan Larys, Niko Tournas, Jaxsin Vaughan, Thomas Zocco) to ride shotgun with James Hagens, the No. 7 pick in 2025.

These are not well-known names outside amateur scouting departments. Yet they are critical to fielding full rosters for what are often highly competitive games. Fights, while reduced from yesteryear's prospect games, still occur.

"Absolutely," said Vaughan of fighting if needed. "That's part of my role. I'm willing to accept that at whatever level that I play in. If that opportunity presents itself, definitely I can see myself doing that."

Vaughan is a 20-year-old right-shot forward. The Anaheim Ducks invited him to rookie camp in 2024-25. Last season, the 6-foot-2, 218-pounder scored 21 goals and 17 assists with 75 penalty minutes for the Everett Silvertips of the WHL. The Bruins invited Vaughan to their summer development camp. Upon that camp's conclusion, they told Vaughan they wanted him back in September.

"My objective is to soak in as much as I can," said the Kamloops, B.C. native. "Talk to the guys around me. They've been through this kind of thing. If they're not, I'll try to help them out as best as I can. Just make the best of it, do what I can, do what I'm good at and we'll go from there."

On Thursday, Vaughan flew from Seattle to Boston. He is likely to fly back to resume his 2026-27 season with the Silvertips, although the date of his journey has yet to be determined.

"That would be pretty cool," Vaughan said with a smile of making the Bruins. "But I'm expecting to be back in Everett."

After that is unknown. This will be his last WHL season. Vaughan does not know what will happen next year. He could turn pro, perhaps even with the Bruins if they are interested, or he could receive an NCAA offer as a 21-year-old freshman. Ditto for twin brother Corbin Vaughan, who last played defense for the WHL's Prince George Cougars.

"I wouldn't say it's 50-50, but school and pro are definitely on the table," said Jaxsin Vaughan. "We'll see how this year goes for me and for my brother as well. If I'm going to go to school, I'd love to do that with my twin brother. Pretty uncertain right now. We'll see how this year goes and go from there."

A good showing against the Sabres could be one of the boxes Vaughan checks to determine where he plays in 2027-28. That is not the case for Manchuso, who will be a freshman at Dartmouth in 2027-28. In that way, he does not have as much on the line at this camp.

Exciting homecoming

Manchuso played for ex-Bruin Carl Corazzini at St. Mark's for the last two seasons. This would have been his senior year. From one perspective, he would have been fine with that.

"Best time of my life," said Manchuso. "It was so much fun getting to be with your teammates. You have a practice, get off the ice, go to dinner and hang out with them right until you go to bed. You got to know those guys so well. They're some of my best friends for life. The hockey part, Corazzini's the best coach I've had in my life so far."

St. Mark's treated Manchuso well. He enjoyed being a boarding student at the Southborough school and committed to Dartmouth following his sophomore season. But there has been a movement among Massachusetts prep hockey players to leave for the QMJHL. In fact, St. Marks' three leading scorers last year (Caiden Pellegrino, Manchuso and Evan Nee) are playing in the Q this season. Manchuso wanted to push himself against better and older players.

Manchuso, a junior last year, finalized his Moncton decision after the St. Mark's season ended in March. He then transferred to Concord-Carlisle High School, crammed his schoolwork and graduated in June so he could focus on hockey with the Wildcats in 2026-27. On Aug. 17, he reported to Moncton for training camp. He missed the preseason finale and several practices while with the Bruins.

Rookie camp participation, however, was an easy call for Manchuso. After nearly a month away from home, he was happy to see family members who attended practice on Friday at Warrior Ice Arena. On the ice, it didn't take Manchuso long to catch the eye of Providence coach Trent Whitfield, who is overseeing rookie camp games and practices.

"The Manchuso kid's a really good shooter. He can score," Whitfield said after the first practice. "Is he going to be able to get to the hard areas at the net at the next level? This camp, this week, will be a good measuring stick for him. He's obviously got a ton of potential."

Manchuso scored two goals in three preseason games for Moncton before leaving for the Bruins. He projects to be an offensive catalyst for the Wildcats. Making the Bruins as a rookie camp invitee is not something he considers within reason.

"Imagine that!" Manchuso said with a smile. "That would be awesome. Maybe in a couple years from now."

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Sportsnet.ca / Sources: Senators nearing eight-year contract extension with Drake Batherson

Elliott Friedman

With the clock ticking towards Tuesday night's CBA deadline, multiple sources indicate the Ottawa Senators are closing in on an eight-year extension with 33-goal scorer Drake Batherson.

Exact terms are unclear, but it's believed to average somewhere between \$10.5 million and \$11 million per season. It would be the largest contract in franchise history — a major commitment and a relief to the fanbase.

We'll see what tomorrow brings as new contract rules arrive once the calendar flips to Sept. 16 at midnight Eastern Time. Maximum term drops from eight years to seven for a team's own free agents; from seven years to six for a player who signs elsewhere. The largest permissible gap in earnings between two consecutive years of a contract drops from 25 per cent to 20, and the lowest season of any contract can't pay less than 71 per cent of the highest. (The previous margin was 60.)

Two of the biggest unresolved cases for 2026-27 are Adam Fantilli (Columbus) and Cutter Gauthier (Anaheim). There was some optimism in Gauthier's case, less so for Fantilli, but deadlines spur action and one phone call can change everything. Don't be surprised, though, if teams/players who are unsigned for 2027-28 also try to take advantage, knowing they won't be able to do next summer what they can do through Tuesday night.

Tick, tock.

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Sportsnet.ca / Prospect game takeaways: Flames' Mace'o Phillips steals the show

Eric Francis 5-6 minutes 9/15/2026

CALGARY – Absolute specimen.

That's how Flames director of player development, Ray Edwards, described Mace'o Phillips mere hours before the young defenceman used his 6-foot-6, 230-pound frame to steal the show.

Down 1-0, late in the first period of Monday's NextGen prospects game against the Oilers, Phillips adeptly recognized Weston Cameron was being a little too reckless with his 6-foot-4 body, and called on the visitor to fight.

After a few early exchanges, seven straight rights by Phillips buckled the Oiler, prompting 9,000 Dome dwellers to rise in unison.

As a punctuation mark, Phillips immediately skated straight towards the Flames bench for an animated flyby that included a series of fist pumps.

It was a Costco-sized example of why the 19-year-old Minnesotan is one of the organization's most intriguing prospects.

"It was pretty electric tonight, the juices are flowing, and I'm just trying to get a spark for the boys, feeding off the crowd," said Phillips, who made a similar splash a year earlier when he fought Connor Clattenburg.

"That's something that's part of my game, and I just want to do whatever the team needs from me."

On a team that will spend the next few years adding high-end skill that will need to be protected, Phillips is the type of nuclear deterrent who could come in handy, much like three of his idols, Darnell Nurse, Nikita Zadorov and K'Andre Miller.

"There's so many things that he brings to the table that we don't have a ton of, and most guys don't have a ton of – so it's exciting that way," said Edwards, whose club picked the towering prospect in the third round in 2025.

"There aren't a ton of (230-pounders), and while I know Nurse isn't 230 pounds, I see similarities in their game – physicality and the way he skates. Like Darnell, he's a tough defender that is mean."

An unheard-of 187 penalty minutes in 44 games as an 18-year-old rookie with Green Bay in the USHL last season speaks to his rugged nature.

"Yeah, I would say I'm a physically dominant defenceman – I take pride in being hard to play against, and I can contribute offensively at the right times as well," said Phillips, who is known for his polite, cheerful demeanour off the ice.

"I think being mean is important with hockey. You've got to bear down, play hard, and be hard on the ice. I'm kind of the complete opposite off the ice, keeping it light and positive, always happy and stuff. But I think once you step on the ice, you don't have any friends. You're competing to win, and I don't love anything more than winning."

The Flames haven't had that type of snarl on the back end in a long time. Given the roadmap to the NHL Phillips will likely have to take, through junior and perhaps next year in college, it may still be some time before he makes the jump.

Originally slated to play college hockey this year, he opted instead to play junior, where Medicine Hat traded for his rights so he could play close to Calgary, where the Flames development team can help him grow his game.

"He couldn't have gone back to the USHL – he would never last in that league this year, they'd suspend him, and he'd be done," chuckled Edwards.

"He's in the right spot, playing for a great coach in Willie (Desjardins) and his staff, playing lots and getting lots of touches. We don't necessarily

want him fighting all the time, but we've got to help him with that too, with techniques, so he can be a better fighter, because it's going to happen."

It happened Monday, and it electrified the crowd, the bench, and management.

Five other players who stood out in the Flames' 6-1 loss to Edmonton.

Matvei Gridin: As the Flames' leading scorer the last quarter of the season, Gridin was a bit of a surprise inclusion in the rookie camp/game, as he's expected to start the season on the Flames' top line. His line with Tyson Gross and Aydar Suniev was indeed the best Monday, making several great passing plays to give all three prime scoring chances.

Aydar Suniev: The tremendous hands that made the 21-year-old a third-round draft pick in 2023 were on display in tight when he walked in and roofed the Flames' only goal. He had several good scoring chances, getting off good shots every time.

Tyson Gross: Perhaps the frontrunner to join Gridin on the big club opening night, the 23-year-old Calgarian made several great setups, killed penalties and was noticeable all night as their top centre.

Ryder Boulton: The son of former NHL tough guy Eric Boulton clearly comes by his aggressive nature, honestly, finishing every check possible, trying his best to shake things up every shift.

Chase Harrington: The second-rounder is going to be fun to watch for many years, and Monday's performance demonstrated why, as he constantly finished checks, had one great scoring chance, ensured he gave the Oilers goalie a bump on his way by and then offered a backhand to the face of a defender. Involved in everything. Edwards said Harrington is a throwback player who has the ability to drag his team into the fight, à la Matthew Tkachuk.

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Sportsnet.ca / Why Emil Andrae 'couldn't be happier' with trade to Maple Leafs

Luke Fox 5-6 minutes 9/14/2026

MILTON, Ont. — Emil Andrae was on the 18th hole in mid-June when he saw Daniel Briere's name pop up on his phone. Curiosity could wait for a putt.

The shifty defenceman finished his round before ringing his boss back and learning that he (and a third-round pick and goalie Samuel Ersson's rights) had been traded from the Philadelphia Flyers to the Toronto Maple Leafs in exchange for Joseph Woll and Simon Benoit.

"A little shocking at first," Andrae said Monday at his new club's annual Leafs & Legends Charity Golf Classic. "But when I found out it was Toronto, I couldn't be happier."

It was a bit of a stunner for Andrae, getting jolted away from the organization that had spent six years developing 2020's 54th-overall pick. The left-shot Swede had just taken some impressive strides in his second full NHL campaign, posting career highs in games played (61), goals (two), assists (11), plus-minus (plus-15), and hits (68). Plus, he had his first taste of playoff action, as the house-money Flyers upset their rival Pittsburgh Penguins in Round 1.

As emotions attached to Briere's 19th-hole news bomb subsided, though, Andrae understood why Philly put him in play. Puck-moving D-men, regardless of their stature or experience, hold value.

"I had a little bit of a feeling, maybe. There's a lot of young guys coming up there, a lot of prospects that they need to get into the team, into the league," said Andrae, already busy defending Gavin McKenna at Toronto's captain's skates.

"For me, it was a great thing to get moved, too. I love the guys there, and I love the place, and I love to play in that city. But I think a fresh start for me now is going to be perfect. And I couldn't be more excited to be here."

That the 24-year-old grew up a Leafs fan in the coastal town of Vastervik and will now be working with Swedish icons Mats Sundin and Daniel Alfredsson only boosts excitement. So, too, does Andrae's previous relationship with veteran Swedes William Nylander and Oliver Ekman-Larsson.

Nylander took Andrae out for dinner on the eve of the charity golf tournament and extolled the virtues of Toronto.

"We had a good chat about the city, and he's trying to help me get a place, (telling me) where to go and eat and all that stuff," Andrae said. "He loves it here. It's a great city and great hockey market. So, he has a lot of good things to say."

(And, yes, Nylander picked up the bill.)

Since the trade — and subsequent two-year, \$3.1-million bridge deal — Andrae's door for opportunity in Toronto hasn't exactly swung wide open.

After spending all or a portion of each of his four North American seasons in the AHL with Lehigh Valley, Andrae's stated goal is to improve his defensive game and establish himself as an NHL "everyday." But there will be hurdles.

Because fellow lefty Morgan Rielly returns untraded, five no-brainer everydayers will start camp on the Maple Leafs blueline. Andrae will be hard-pressed to steal a lineup spot from Rielly, Ekman-Larsson, Darren Raddysh, Jack McCabe, or Chris Tanev — provided the veterans stay healthy.

That leaves one slot for an undersized third-pairing guy. Re-signed fan favourite Troy Stecher and fellow righty Nick Blankenburg — who scored eight goals last season and joins camp on a PTO — want those shifts as well.

Andrae has youth on his side, plus the built-in optimism that comes with a defenceman who feels he can still improve his small-ice game after learning the sport on the big European ice.

"A smart, competitive player. Helps us break the puck out more efficiently. A good puck mover that can also help join the rush and support offence as well," Leafs GM John Chayka described his return for Woll and Benoit. "We're getting a good young D at an age group that we, candidly, could use some more."

Andrae is listed at 5-foot-9, 194 pounds. "Pretty small," by his own admission.

But like Stecher, Andrae vows to make up a few inches with 200 feet of effort.

"I like to move the puck, move my legs, and I think my vision is probably the biggest strength I have out there," Andrae said.

Chayka had been eyeing Andrae for a while. As the targeted return from Briere, Andrae will be given a legitimate shot to stick. And unless the 28-year-old Blankenburg makes the squad, he'll be six years younger than any other member of Toronto's D corps.

"I've always been questioned if I can play the game against these big players," Andrae said. "You have to use (your body) in a smart way to be a good player in this league, and I have more to improve, but I think I'm on a good path."

And in a fine landing spot, considering the boyhood Leafs fan had no control over the trade.

"It's probably the biggest hockey market in the world," said Andrae before teeing off. "It's going to be a little different from Philly, of course, but I just can't be more happy to be here and have fans that love hockey. And, I mean, you guys, reporters, that love it too. So, it's gonna be fun."

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Sportsnet.ca / Why Emil Andrae 'couldn't be happier' with trade to Maple Leafs

Luke Fox

MILTON, Ont. — Emil Andrae was on the 18th hole in mid-June when he saw Daniel Briere's name pop up on his phone. Curiosity could wait for a putt.

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"A little shocking at first," Andrae said Monday at his new club's annual Leafs & Legends Charity Golf Classic. "But when I found out it was Toronto, I couldn't be happier."

It was a bit of a stunner for Andrae, getting jolted away from the organization that had spent six years developing 2020's 54th-overall pick. The left-shot Swede had just taken some impressive strides in his second full NHL campaign, posting career highs in games played (61), goals (two), assists (11), plus-minus (plus-15), and hits (68). Plus, he had his first taste of playoff action, as the house-money Flyers upset their rival Pittsburgh Penguins in Round 1.

As emotions attached to Briere's 19th-hole news bomb subsided, though, Andrae understood why Philly put him in play. Puck-moving D-men, regardless of their stature or experience, hold value.

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

Hockey fans already know the name, but this is not the blog. From Sportsnet, 32 Thoughts: The Podcast with NHL Insider Elliotte Friedman and Kyle Bukauskas is a weekly deep dive into the biggest news and interviews from the hockey world.

Latest episode

"I had a little bit of a feeling, maybe. There's a lot of young guys coming up there, a lot of prospects that they need to get into the team, into the league," said Andrae, already busy defending Gavin McKenna at Toronto's captain's skates.

"For me, it was a great thing to get moved, too. I love the guys there, and I love the place, and I love to play in that city. But I think a fresh start for me now is going to be perfect. And I couldn't be more excited to be here."

That the 24-year-old grew up a Leafs fan in the coastal town of Västervik and will now be working with Swedish icons Mats Sundin and Daniel Alfredsson only boosts excitement. So, too, does Andrae's previous relationship with veteran Swedes William Nylander and Oliver Ekman-Larsson.

Nylander took Andrae out for dinner on the eve of the charity golf tournament and extolled the virtues of Toronto.

"We had a good chat about the city, and he's trying to help me get a place, (telling me) where to go and eat and all that stuff," Andrae said. "He loves it here. It's a great city and great hockey market. So, he has a lot of good things to say."

(And, yes, Nylander picked up the bill.)

Since the trade — and subsequent two-year, \$3.1-million bridge deal — Andrae's door for opportunity in Toronto hasn't exactly swung wide open.

After spending all or a portion of each of his four North American seasons in the AHL with Lehigh Valley, Andrae's stated goal is to improve his defensive game and establish himself as an NHL "everyday." But there will be hurdles.

Because fellow lefty Morgan Rielly returns untraded, five no-brainer everydayers will start camp on the Maple Leafs blue line. Andrae will be

hard-pressed to steal a lineup spot from Rielly, Ekman-Larsson, Darren Raddysh, Jack McCabe, or Chris Tanev — provided the veterans stay healthy.

That leaves one slot for an undersized third-pairing guy. Re-signed fan favourite Troy Stecher and fellow righty Nick Blankenburg — who scored eight goals last season and joins camp on a PTO — want those shifts as well.

Andrae has youth on his side, plus the built-in optimism that comes with a defenceman who feels he can still improve his small-ice game after learning the sport on the big European ice.

"A smart, competitive player. Helps us break the puck out more efficiently. A good puck mover that can also help join the rush and support offence as well," Leafs GM John Chayka described his return for Woll and Benoit. "We're getting a good young D at an age group that we, candidly, could use some more."

Andrae is listed at 5-foot-9, 194 pounds. "Pretty small," by his own admission.

But like Stecher, Andrae vows to make up a few inches with 200 feet of effort.

"I like to move the puck, move my legs, and I think my vision is probably the biggest strength I have out there," Andrae said.

Chayka had been eyeing Andrae for a while. As the targeted return from Briere, Andrae will be given a legitimate shot to stick. And unless the 28-year-old Blankenburg makes the squad, he'll be six years younger than any other member of Toronto's D corps.

"I've always been questioned if I can play the game against these big players," Andrae said. "You have to use (your body) in a smart way to be a good player in this league, and I have more to improve, but I think I'm on a good path."

And in a fine landing spot, considering the boyhood Leafs fan had no control over the trade.

"It's probably the biggest hockey market in the world," said Andrae before teeing off. "It's going to be a little different from Philly, of course, but I just can't be more happy to be here and have fans that love hockey. And, I mean, you guys, reporters, that love it too. So, it's gonna be fun."

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Sportsnet.ca / Pettersson ready for fresh start as Canucks establish new culture

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — The word of the day Monday for Elias Pettersson was "excited." And not just to play golf in the Vancouver Canucks' annual pre-training camp charity tournament, although that, too, is for the avid golfer.

In his media scrum on the tarmac outside Northview Golf & Country Club in Surrey, the permanently enigmatic centre said eight times in six minutes that he is excited to be back with the Canucks and playing hockey again. Pettersson's excitement-per-minute, even delivered in his stoic manner, was especially impressive since reporters' voices occupied half of his press conference.

If Pettersson plays this National Hockey League season with even half the excitement of his word count on Monday, maybe the \$92.8-million veteran actually can roll back time and be something closer to the first-line star he once was.

But as we've said before, it has been so long since Pettersson was the 102-point offensive virtuoso (in 2022-23) who commanded that franchise-record contract that everyone, including his employers, should stop dreaming wistfully of a return to world-class stardom for the Swede and instead focus on how he can help the Canucks now.

Pettersson is coming off back-to-back 15-goal seasons in which he amassed 96 points over 138 games, production worthy of a solid second-line NHL centre.

These points, of course, were squeezed from him under extreme duress. None of the Canucks still standing (in Vancouver) has been buffeted more than Pettersson by the hurricane of upheaval that engulfed the franchise the last two seasons. With his inflated salary and deflated scoring totals, Pettersson exposed himself to the severe weather, criticism and constant trade speculation.

With the arrival of calm and empathetic general manager Ryan Johnson, backed by Hall-of-Fame Canucks and human beings Henrik and Daniel Sedin as co-presidents, those storms have finally abated as the team rebuilds.

Pettersson should finally find some calm. Maybe that will help the 27-year-old be a better player and better leader in his ninth NHL season.

"R.J. is someone I've known for a long time, and he's always been a good guy for me," Pettersson told reporters in his first media availability since the Canucks' season ended in April. "He's been good, just talking about the future, what he wants to see from me. Yeah, it makes me feel good."

"I play my best when I just feel like myself. He's been good in that regard; he just wants the best from you and wants everyone to be happy. So it's been good."

There was no "excitement" in that answer, but it was probably the most important thing Pettersson said.

He needs to feel like he can be himself — because we've seen that version be a pretty good player. Pettersson stopped being that person pretty much the moment former president Jim Rutherford boxed him into that contract, under threat of trade ahead of the 2024 NHL deadline, which made Pettersson the fifth-highest-paid player in hockey at the time.

"Here's my initial thought on Elias," Johnson said when he was hired in May, "I want to wipe away all the expectations... not just our players, but our staff. We're asking them to come in September the most prepared that they could be, and for our players, that's going to be physically and mentally ready to make a decision. I'm looking forward to talking to him and just letting him know that that's what's important to me out of the gate."

And after telephone conversations with Pettersson, Johnson told Sportsnet in July: "Without going into details, Petey and I have had a very

open dialogue since I've come on board — a real sense of just being honest without judgment. I have a tonne of respect for Petey, his journey, and how he's gotten to this point."

Johnson went on to say that he would be honest with Pettersson, and all his players, while still doing what's best for the organization. Which means Pettersson remains subject to trade, especially if his play this season re-establishes decent market value.

But in the meantime, Johnson, who knows some of the Canucks from his early role in player development in Vancouver, will support and encourage Pettersson and make sure he's comfortable in what the new GM insists will be a safe, inclusive dressing room — the focal point of the organization's foundational plan to build a better culture.

"Just seeing him, he seems like he's in a great mental headspace right now," long-time teammate Brock Boeser said Monday of Pettersson. "He's coming to the rink and working hard. I think that's just a start in the right direction, a step in the right direction and, you know, I'm happy to see how he does this year."

"I mean, I think it goes with everyone: if you feel good and happy... playing hockey gets easier," Pettersson said. "I can see that, understand it (in Brock) and definitely can feel that, too, for myself."

Earlier, Pettersson said: "I just want to get back to myself; I haven't been that the last two years. But it's in the past. I'm coming in with a fresh mind, excited to play hockey again."

It is not in Pettersson's introverted nature to be vocal, but he said he, Boeser and goalie Thatcher Demko have a responsibility as the longest-serving Canucks to lead by example and help establish the team's new standards.

"The Sedins have been here their whole career, and R.J. played here a long time, too," he said. "So they know what us players are going through, and they're just trying to set the best standards and environment for us to succeed. So I'm very excited."

Let's hope so.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens notebook: 'It-factor' keeps Martin St. Louis in Montreal long term

Eric Engels

LAVAL-SUR-LE-LAC, Que. — It was February of 2022 and I was sitting across from Jeff Gorton, asking him about how he and general manager Kent Hughes decided to pluck Martin St. Louis off the dimly lit bench of his son's bantam team to drop him onto the bench under the biggest spotlight in the NHL.

"I just think Marty is just a special person," the executive vice-president of hockey operations of the Montreal Canadiens responded. "You meet a lot of people in this world, and some people you meet, you just know that whatever they do, they're going to be successful, and that's Marty. He's going to help with culture, the team, everything."

I was hoping for something more concrete than you just know... Something about tactics, or philosophy, or encyclopedic knowledge of the game built over a Hall-of-Fame playing career.

But the first thing that came to Gorton was that he had a gut feeling and went with it, and the conviction with which he offered that response was telling.

A lot's changed in the four years since, but that feeling hasn't. It's only been affirmed, so ripping up the final year of St. Louis' deal to give him a new four-year contract was an easy decision for Gorton.

"There's so much there," Gorton said after the deal was announced Monday, "but he just has it."

Is it enough to take the Canadiens from emerging team to Stanley Cup champion?

Gorton and Hughes are betting on it.

"There's nothing that he's shown us that he's incapable of doing," said Hughes before the Canadiens teed off in their annual golf tournament. "We've progressed every year. We made the playoffs when we were at extreme odds to do so two years ago at one point in the year. And then last year he was able to maneuver the team to the conference finals. He hasn't given us any reason to doubt him..."

St. Louis has only inspired belief — and not just in Montreal.

Derek Lalonde observed the coach's exploits from across the ice, as head coach of the Red Wings from 2022-2025, and then as assistant coach in Toronto last year.

Lalonde was compelled to see them from much closer, so he signed as an associate coach in July.

"It's been impressive to watch Marty as a head coach," Lalonde said. "To battle against him, it's just been really impressive to see the growth in the group. And then I was able to talk to Marty late summer. We connected for the first time and I was taken aback (with) the way he talked about his process, his philosophies. I'm not surprised (with) the success he's had with this group; it's pushed it forward. I think a big part of him, he's got a little bit of the natural player-first partnership relationship with the guys but still being in charge, and he definitely has a sense of accountability for the group. He's definitely a modern coach in today's NHL and it's been impressive to watch from afar, and it's been impressive to get to know him in the process as we've started here."

His first two seasons in the NHL were St. Louis' last two, and they were linemates through much of that time. The experience was so impactful for Kreider that the opportunity to fall back under St. Louis' guidance was too good to pass up.

In Kreider's first official comments as a Canadien, made just days after agreeing to terminate his contract with the Anaheim Ducks, he said the chance to play for an emerging, tight-knit group with a pack mentality was compelling. He intimated that Gorton's and Hughes' aggressive pursuit of him as a free agent was flattering.

But the 35-year-old referring to the opportunity to play for St. Louis as "a massive draw" spoke volumes about his decision to join the Canadiens.

"For me, having been lucky enough to play with him, even back then he was almost like a player-coach," Kreider continued. "The intensity, the tenacity, and just the things that he brought to the rink every day — I don't think that I can say that I've learned more from any one individual than in the time I spent playing with him on his line. Super wise, incredibly smart. Even back then, you knew he would be a good coach..."

Gorton, who was GM of the Rangers at the time, knew, and the Canadiens inevitably learned.

On Monday, Canadiens captain Nick Suzuki referred to St. Louis as the best coach he's ever had before linemate Cole Caufield called his contract extension "good news for us, good news for the city, the fans, for everybody."

St. Louis naturally received it with open arms.

"It's for sure flattering," he said. "It's not something I was stuck on. I love what I do, and if they gave me the vote of confidence of 'Marty, you're the man,' I'd have continued. And if I wasn't the guy, it would've been OK. I'm humble enough to know that it's not because you put all your effort into something that you'll succeed. But my heart's been in the right place and I love being the coach of the Canadiens."

Josh Anderson honoured to be named alternate captain

The Canadiens could've gone in multiple directions with this one after Brendan Gallagher's trade to Vancouver left a vacancy in the team's leadership, but choosing Anderson to serve alongside Mike Matheson and underneath Suzuki as alternate captain was a great way to show the player just how valued he is in Montreal.

Because the Canadiens will have a hard time doing that in contract negotiations, especially considering Anderson's potential market value.

Even with declining offensive numbers, and even at age 33 come summer, Anderson's uniqueness as an unrelenting, punishing forechecker could price him out of Montreal. The Canadiens would love to keep him, but likely can't give him as much term or money as a team with far less organizational depth on the wing probably would.

But sending the message to Anderson now — that he's still a big piece of the puzzle — felt wise, if not pertinent. Especially since the honour is so deserved.

"Josh is a guy who plays for the team," said Hughes. "If you knew how much he played hurt, especially the year before last when the trainers told him not to and he didn't want to hear it because he wanted so badly for us to make the playoffs. He's a team guy. He loves being in Montreal and brings strong leadership to our younger players."

They certainly appreciate it as much as management does.

And Anderson cherishes that appreciation.

"Obviously extremely honoured, humbled to be an assistant captain with the Montreal Canadiens," he said. "We've got a lot of good leaders in that locker room that have matured so quickly over the last couple of years..."

Caufield, who scored 51 goals last season, is one. Lane Hutson, who appears to be the most determined Canadiens player to make the difference on every shift, is another.

Either of them would've been great choices to wear an 'A', even if it was in a rotation of sorts.

But the Canadiens chose Anderson, with St. Louis informing him two weeks ago.

The Burlington, Ont., native hopes it's a role he'll occupy beyond this season, though he intimated that possibility has yet to be tabled.

"I don't have to tell you guys how much I love this city, how much I love this team," Anderson said. "I think that the culture that we've been building over the last four, five years since Marty and Gorts and Kent have come has been obviously something pretty special. (The contract situation is) obviously something that's in the back of your head, but you know you're in a good place. This city's just been unbelievable. My daughter was born here, close city to home, and just the people that you



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get to work with over the last six, seven years have been great. I'm a big believer in things will work out. I really do see myself being in Montreal, and I'm sure those conversations will pick up soon."

The four-year, \$16.8-million extension for Bolduc came in under the wire, and Hughes said he had no reservations about it walking the player straight to unrestricted free agency.

"It wasn't something that was a sticking point for us," Hughes added. "I think we're in a league where players, if they don't want to be in a certain place, ask to be traded and have term left on their deals and they're gone. If we signed him for five years, he'd be going to free agency anyways. And I think if you walk a player to arbitration on the door of free agency... is arbitration always going to be the best vehicle for determining a player's value? I would rather let the open market make that determination."

It was another way of saying a two- or three-year deal that would've restricted Bolduc to the Canadiens could've also proven more costly for them in future negotiations than competing with other teams for his services might have.

Regardless, the Trois-Rivières, Que., native was signed to a reasonable contract while salaries for similar players are inflating across the league.

Bolduc's deal left the Canadiens with roughly \$4.3 million in cap space and one last player to sign: Arber Xhekaj.

As for where things stand with the 25-year-old bruiser, Gorton said they're headed in the right direction.

"It's a negotiation, I don't want to talk too much, but I think we have a few days before we get on the ice," said Gorton. "I'm confident that Arber will be there and be part of our group. We're looking forward to that."

Speculation has been rampant that an off-season corrective procedure will prohibit Kaiden Guhle from starting the season on time, with TVA Sports reporting Monday he could be out until November.

Sources we touched base with on the subject last week suggested that the Canadiens weren't concerned about it being anything more than "maybe a delayed start to camp."

Perhaps that's changed, but the organization says there's no update on the subject at this moment.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers training camp preview: Can Babcock push team over the top?

Mark Spector

Are they simply an above-average team that went to two Stanley Cup Finals, tripped up last season, and are now poised to resume their spot as a true Cup contender?

Or, must they reclaim a place among the five or six teams we would say have a legitimate Cup shot, as camps open across the National Hockey League? Have they descended below Carolina, Florida, Colorado etc., to the point that the Oilers should no longer be spoken of in the same breath — despite playing more playoff games over the past five seasons than any other NHL club?

Edmonton still has the core of a team that rolled through the West in the springs of '24 and '25. It is well-rested with two of the best players in the world, the best power play in hockey, a 95-point defenceman and a beefed-up defensive game with depth additions over the summer.

New head coach Mike Babcock arrives with solid ideas on how to improve on the razor-thin shortfalls that stood between Edmonton and two Stanley Cup victories. But will those solid ideas be overcome by Babcock's historic shenanigans?

Will Babcock celebrate New Year's as the Oilers coach? Or on the unemployment line?

While there are fan bases across the NHL that would trade their roster for Edmonton's in a heartbeat, until they see a Stanley Cup parade down Jasper Ave., folks will doubt the Oilers' ability to finish the job. And that is fair.

But we'd predict that a rested, hungry, and still (mostly) in its prime Oilers lineup will reclaim its spot among the elite teams this season. And if a team that's done what this team has done over the past three seasons can't be considered a true Stanley Cup contender, then perhaps the bar should be reset.

Salary cap space: \$1,078,334

GM: Stan Bowman

Head coach: Mike Babcock

Assistant coaches: D.J. Smith, Paul McFarland

Key additions: Frederik Anderson, Devon Levi, Alex Formenton, Mathieu Joseph, Ryan Shea, Shakir Mukhamadullin.

Key subtractions: Darnell Nurse, Adam Henrique, Jack Roslovic, Connor Ingram, Curtis Lazar, Calvin Pickard.

What we'll learn during pre-season

Is the roster set already?

As with any veteran team at this point in their arc of contention, this roster is dominated by players who have spots nailed down.

The bottom six is well stocked with NHL experience, if not particularly sexy, a group from which Babcock will try to form the foundation to hand more responsibility to than previous Oilers coaches. That has been his stated goal.

The bottom six starts with a trusty 3C in Jason Dickinson, a young Josh Samanski at 4C, and a group of wingers like Kapanen, Trent Frederic, the controversial Alex Formenton, Colton Dach, Max Jones, Mathieu Joseph and Eduards Tralmaks, whose skills vary. Whether the injured veteran Mattias Janmarks plays again is up in the air.

Is goaltending still an issue in Edmonton?

Signing Frederik Andersen, then third-stringer Devon Levi, was supposed to give Edmonton a three-goalie system. Then, predictably, Andersen got hurt, and it's up to Tristan Jarry and Levi to carry the ball.

With a limited four-game pre-season, we're not sure how much we'll learn about Jarry's ability to be a No. 1, or the level to which Levi will challenge him. But both of those things need to happen while the Oilers wait for Andersen to return.

Jarry's career fell off a cliff last season upon joining Edmonton, and he knows it.

He's worked all summer long with that in mind, and is looking to show the critics that losing the starting job to Connor Ingram last season was a one-off. Let's see if it was.

The McDavid-Draisaitl carousel keeps spinning.

Listening to McDavid and Draisaitl in the lead-up to the season, there is an implied belief that the line-juggling will lessen this season.

That means we'll either get a huge dose of the "Nuclear Option" in Edmonton, or it will be a strategy dispensed sparingly, when the team needs a boost late in the game.

Preseason may give us a hint on that. Or it may not — let's see what the new coach does.

Bold prediction

The last time the Oilers won their Division in the regular season, their captain wore No. 99, not 97. It was the Smythe Division, not the Pacific.

We predict that, for the first time since the 1986-87 season, Edmonton will win its Division in the regular season.

They're rested, healthy, hungry, and with a new coach whose mandate is to do things differently, they will be far more focused than they were a season ago. Add in the fact that the Pacific will be the worst Division in the NHL again this season, Edmonton has handled Vegas in the regular season for five years now — they're 13-5-1 versus VGK in that span — and we predict a first-place finish for the first time in 40 years.

Dare to dream.

Projected lineup

Podkolzin— McDavid — Draisaitl

Howard — Nugent-Hopkins—Hyman

Frederic - Dickinson - Kapanen

Formenton — Samanski — Dach

Jones — Joseph

Ekholm — Bouchard

Walman — Murphy

Shea — Emberson

Mukhamadullin

Tristan Jarry

Devon Levi

(Injured — Frederik Andersen)

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Sportsnet.ca / Jets training camp preview: Hellebuyck waiting game continues

Ryan Dixon

The Winnipeg Jets will enter training camp with the eyes of the league trained on Manitoba. Unfortunately, that's not because the club is expected to be a force in the NHL this season, but due to the fact that franchise goalie Connor Hellebuyck has made public his desire to play for another team.

At a time when hope bubbles in so many hockey burghs around Canada and the U.S., there's an undeniable black cloud hanging over the Prairies.

All is not lost, however, as Winnipeg looks to bounce back from a disappointing non-playoff showing, one year after finishing atop the standings in 2025-26. Every conversation around the team starts and ends with Hellebuyck, but there's still plenty to talk about in between.

Salary cap space: \$4,481,668

GM: Kevin Cheveldayoff

Head coach: Scott Arniel

Assistant coaches: Marty Johnston, Davis Payne, Dean Chynoweth, Wade Flaherty

Key additions: Mario Ferraro, D; Stuart Skinner, G

Key subtractions: Eric Comrie, G; Jonathan Toews, C; Gustav Nyqvist, W

What we'll learn during pre-season:

1. What the Helle?

The summer started with a feeling the Jets could move an unhappy Hellebuyck, then ended with the goalie putting pressure on the organization by publicly confirming he wanted out. Until the situation is resolved, all we know is everyone — including Hellebuyck, likely — will put on a brave face and try to move forward.

While there's surely a bit of a swimming-duck element to this — calm above the water, furiously paddling underneath — we know GM Kevin Cheveldayoff will not be bullied into anything. Being forced to trade a player is nothing new for Winnipeg's GM and — from Jacob Trouba to Patrik Laine to Pierre-Luc Dubois — he's done pretty darn well when cornered before.

Assuming this ordeal ends in a trade, certainly you'd prefer to make that happen sooner rather than later. We've seen some serious in-season blockbusters the past couple years, though, and it's still better for Cheveldayoff to wait and see who might emerge as a hungry trading partner in coming months rather than settle for a swap he doesn't like right now.

Until he's moved, however, all of Manitoba — and a handful of cities around the league who hope to land him — are on Hellebuyck Watch.

2. Here Viggo?

The Hellebuyck situation has distracted from the fact that Winnipeg's annual training camp discussion point — who's the second-line C? — is once again a pressing one.

The difference this time out, though, is the promise represented by Viggo Björck. The talented Swede was the silver lining of the Jets' lost season, as Winnipeg — somewhat surprisingly — was able to grab him with the eighth-overall pick.

Now the question is, how much can you fairly expect from an 18-year-old kid, no matter how talented?

Björck, as one might anticipate, looked fantastic over the weekend in Gatineau, Que., at the NHL Prospect Challenge. Now he must come to main camp and give management and coaching staff reason to believe

he's ready for a prime role on the club. It's a very high bar to clear and you wonder if, for the good of the player's long-term development, the Jets will really have to be blown away by Björck to justify keeping him on the club.

If Björck winds up going back to Sweden, one assumes captain Adam Lowry or Vladimir Namestnikov will be the 2C behind top-line guy Mark Scheifele. While that's not a perfect solution, it's a reminder that part of what derailed Winnipeg's season last year was beginning the year without Lowry, winger Cole Perfetti — who inked a big extension in July — and top-four defenceman Dylan Samberg thanks to injuries.

All three will be ready to go from the drop of the puck this year and that will make a huge difference for the Jets.

3. What about the happy goalie?

The Jets inked Stuart Skinner as a UFA in July, surely with the idea he could play a huge role for the team given the uncertainty around Hellebuyck. It's hard to imagine the Jets making a Hellebuyck deal that doesn't return a goalie, but how Skinner looks and feels in Year 1 with the club could factor into the calculus. While certainly not a no-doubt No. 1 guy, Skinner has loads of experience from his time playing on a Cup contender in Edmonton. At 27 years old, he's still in a range where you could expect a goalie — especially one with his chops and seasoning — to take a step.

Essentially, the Jets will be watching Skinner to determine if he's a viable 1A guy you could rely on in a tandem with a similarly skilled puckstopper, or whether he's more of a true backup who needs to play behind a lead horse.

Salomonsson, one of the team's prized prospects, underwent off-season shoulder surgery that seemed like it would delay the beginning of his year. As it stands, there's a sense Salomonsson could be ready to play sooner than expected.

After two promising pro seasons in North America — including 32 games with the Jets last year — the 22-year-old Swede appears destined for a role on the right side of the third pair beside newcomer Mario Ferraro. It would be a huge boon for the young man and the club itself if Salomonsson can see even a little action in camp and be ready to go for the opening game of the season on Oct. 2 versus the Boston Bruins

Bold prediction

On the eve of the season, the Jets will bite down and make an inter-division trade with the Utah Mammoth that sends Hellebuyck south and returns goalie Karel Vejmelka and heralded centre prospect Caleb Desnoyers. The tandem of Vejmelka and Skinner works well enough to allow Winnipeg — with its usual top-line production and structured defensive play — to grab the final playoff spot in the underwhelming Western Conference.

Projected lineup

Kyle Connor — Mark Scheifele — Gabe Vilardi

Cole Perfetti — Vladimir Namestnikov — Alex Iaffalo

Nino Niederreiter — Adam Lowry — Brad Lambert

Cole Koepke — Morgan Barron — Isak Rosen

Josh Morrissey — Dylan DeMelo

Dylan Samberg — Neal Pionk

Mario Ferraro — Elias Salomonsson

Hadyn Fleury

Connor Hellebuyck

Stuart Skinner

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Sportsnet.ca / Scouting notebook: Who stood out at Gatineau prospects tournament

Jason Bukala

Some of the top prospects from the Ottawa Senators, Montreal Canadiens, Toronto Maple Leafs and Winnipeg Jets descended on Ottawa over the weekend for the Senators' rookie challenge tournament. It offered an early opportunity to get a glimpse at some of the young players hoping to make an impression before NHL training camps open.

Not all of the teams' biggest names were in attendance. Gavin McKenna of the Maple Leafs was left back in Toronto to get ready for the main camp, while Montreal prospects Alexander Zharovsky (playing in Russia) and Michael Hage (playing in the NCAA) had obligations with the teams they will be playing for this season. That left the spotlight on a group of other highly regarded prospects looking to make their mark.

Over the course of four games, several players stood out from the pack and offered plenty for their respective organizations to be encouraged about heading into training camp.

Here are some of my scouting notes from Gatineau, Que.:

Ottawa Senators

Jaxon Cover

Cover was selected 32nd overall by the Senators in June. The left-shot forward played both wing and centre over the weekend and had a massive impact offensively.

Cover contributed three goals and seven points in two games against Montreal and Toronto, leaving most people in attendance awestruck by his potential upside. What stood out for me, however, was how Cover's overall game appears to be evolving to the point where he can be trusted in a variety of roles.

His defensive detail was sound at even strength, and he showed that he is capable of killing penalties. Cover's offensive element is what Ottawa liked most when it drafted him but the six-foot-one, 181-pound forward is maturing in all facets of his game and looks prepared for a big year with the London Knights in the OHL.

Kasper Haltunen

Haltunen was drafted by the San Jose Sharks (36th overall in 2023) and arrived in Ottawa as part of the trade that sent the Sharks the ninth-overall selection in June's draft and included forward William Eklund. Not much has changed for the hard-shooting Finnish winger.

Haltunen is listed at six-foot-four, 205 pounds, and used his frame to his advantage along the boards and below the goal line to shield away opponents or bump them off pucks. He's a right shot who thrives on the power play by ripping shots on net from the weak-side flank and scored from that very location on the weekend.

I would like to see Haltunen more active at even strength, especially in transition, but there's no denying the fact he can score when he has time and space.

Jackson Parsons

Parsons is an example of a goaltender who took time to develop at the Major Junior level (with the Kitchener Rangers) and appears to be rounding into form nicely for the Senators. Parsons is a left-catching netminder who's listed at six-foot-four, 214 pounds. He takes up a ton of net, and he showed off his lateral quickness and overall crease compete in his start versus Toronto.

His ability to find pucks in traffic, especially when opponents crash the crease on the power play, stood out. Another bonus the Senators get with Parsons is the way he plays the puck. He jumps from his net to outlet plays effectively. Parsons could end up being the Senators' goalie of the future.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Alexander Bilecki

Toronto selected the left-shot, six-foot-two, 175-pound defenceman in the second round (60th overall) in June and the pick could turn out to be a steal. Bilecki is an excellent skater who has the quickness and speed to lead the rush, on the power play, for example, and join off the puck as an extra layer.

His small-area agility was impressive for his first taste of pro hockey and allowed him to front opponents defensively, or escape pressure to outlet pucks effectively. Bilecki, like all young defensive prospects, needs time to iron out some of the finer details before turning pro, but he has a very confident look to his game at this stage of his development.

I'm fully expecting the two-way defenceman to easily eclipse his point production from last year playing for the Kitchener Rangers (nine goals and 29 points) without sacrificing defensive detail.

Tinus Luc Koblar

The Leafs decided to move on from scouting director Mark Leach in the off-season, but his leadership, over the course of two seasons at the helm, led to some crafty selections. Koblar is a glowing example of that as he has a chance to become a third-line NHL forward.

The six-foot-four, 190-pound, left-shot centre used his size and strength to his advantage on the weekend. He extended plays in the trenches and positioned himself responsibly defensively. I value his two-way game and physical presence.

His pace is sound, and he contributes secondary offence as he assisted on two of the Leafs' goals against Winnipeg.

Miroslav Holinka

Holinka was selected by Toronto in the fifth round (151st overall) in 2024. The right-shot forward was somewhat quiet in Saturday's game against Ottawa but had the puck on his stick more often on Sunday against the Jets.

Holinka's pace has steadily improved as he added strength to his frame, and he's now listed at just over six-foot-one, 192 pounds. Holinka produced 37 goals and 43 assists playing for the Edmonton Oil Kings in the WHL last season.

He's an interesting player to monitor at the start of Leafs main camp. Holinka will need time at the AHL level but, when playing alongside Koblar at this event, I'm envisioning a middle-six NHL prospect who handles the puck well and makes plays.

Vinny Borgesi

Borgesi is a former captain at Northeastern (NCAA) and first-year pro who suited up for a brief time with the Toronto Marlies last spring at the conclusion of his college season.

Borgesi is a right-shot defenceman who's listed at five-foot-eight, 174 pounds, obviously undersized compared to most NHL defenders. However, he's quick, agile and extremely aggressive in directing pucks on net.

Borgesi seemed to have the puck on his stick every shift on the weekend. He quarterbacked one of the Leafs power-play units and was generally effective moving pucks. I will be monitoring closely how Borgesi defends against NHL-calibre opponents, and how he handles size and weight around his net and along the boards, but there's no question in mind that he will compete, battle and work to impact the game offensively.

Patriks Plümins

Plümins is a six-foot-three, 214-pound left-catching goaltender who the Leafs selected in the fourth round (114th overall) in June. Plümins is a butterfly-athletic netminder who can, at times, get a bit too active in his crease but also has the foot speed and quickness to recover and make stops moving laterally.

An example of his ability came via a save on a two-on-none against Winnipeg on Sunday. He has the size to front shooters in tight and take away the net and, while I would like to see better rebound control at



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times, he's very competitive and has a baseline of skill that requires some coaching but could land him in the NHL in time.

Winnipeg Jets

Viggo Bjorck

Bjorck was one of my top prospects for the draft in June, and the Jets were fortunate to have him land on their lap with the eighth-overall selection. He's a dynamic, quick-strike centre who has elite vision and playmaking ability.

Bjorck contributed in a variety of ways on the weekend. He scored a wraparound goal on Saturday versus Montreal and had the most dynamic assist of any of the games on Sunday when he passed a puck through his legs to a streaking Davis Burnside, who finished the play from the high flank/slot.

When Bjorck isn't producing offence, he's always in the right position defensively and works to contribute in all three zones. He's an infectious personality and a prospect who I believe will break camp with the NHL roster this fall.

Samuel Hrenak

Hrenak is a six-foot-three, 190-pound left-catching goaltender who the Jets selected in the third round (71st overall) at the most recent draft in Buffalo. He wasn't tested a great deal in his start versus Montreal on Saturday night, but I would argue it's more difficult for a netminder to stay focused when his opponent goes long stretches of the game without directing pucks on net.

Hrenak was tasked with coming up with timely saves, including some in-tight sequences that forced him to move side-to-side quickly and utilize his long legs to make saves. Hrenak followed the play very well, squared up to find pucks in traffic and used his stature as an advantage. The Jets could have a No. 1 NHL netminder in Hrenak, but goalies generally take longer to develop. I'm not expecting Hrenak to arrive at the pro level for at least two more seasons, but I'm excited to closely monitor his trajectory.

Brayden Yager

Yager is now listed at six feet, 180 pounds. He's added 10 pounds of strength to his frame over the course of the last year and it was noticeable when it comes to his skating and ability to absorb more contact from opponents without getting knocked off the puck.

The Jets acquired the former Pittsburgh Penguins prospect in a trade that sent the signing rights to former Jets prospect Rutger McGroarty the other way, and he's inching closer to NHL-ready than McGroarty at this stage of their development.

Yager had some synergy skating alongside Bjork this weekend. They fed off each other and their combined high-end offensive hockey sense could land the two prospects in the Jets' top-six sooner rather than later.

Alfons Freij

Freij has to be watched very closely to be appreciated. The six-foot-one, 197-pound left-shot defenceman was drafted in the second round (37th overall) by the Jets in 2024. He's an outstanding skater who has the skill to contribute secondary offence and, if needed, quarterback a power-play unit as a distributor.

Freij took time to adjust to the professional game in Sweden last year, but following an outstanding world junior championship — where he was deployed in all situations and contributed seven assists in seven games — he found his confidence and produced the majority of his offence (six goals, 11 points) during the second half of the season with Timrå.

Freij projects as a second-pairing, two-way NHL defenceman. He is generally a stick-on-puck defender, but he possesses enough strength to engage physically and battle for possession. He manages the game very well and can either complement a risk-taking partner or take charge of his pairing if he skates alongside a more defensive blueliner.

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

Hockey fans already know the name, but this is not the blog. From Sportsnet, 32 Thoughts: The Podcast with NHL Insider Elliott Friedman

and Kyle Bukauskas is a weekly deep dive into the biggest news and interviews from the hockey world.

Latest episode

Jacob Julien

Julien was sneaky good for the Jets this weekend. The fifth-round (146th overall) selection in 2023 is listed at six-foot-four and 181 pounds, and is capable of playing centre or wing. He seemed to be around the play every shift and engaged on and off the puck.

He tipped a shot home on the power play versus Toronto on Sunday and used his size and agility to front shooters on the penalty-kill. Julien has bottom-six NHL upside with better-than-average skill for a prospect who could slot into a secondary role in time.

Montreal Canadiens

Tyler Thorpe

Thorpe is flat-out hard to play against. He's a power forward who's listed at six-foot-five, 220 pounds. The right-shot winger has enough skill to contribute depth offence but it's his physical presence that keeps opponents on their toes.

Thorpe contributed four goals and 12 assists in the AHL playing for Laval last season. It was his first season of pro hockey after graduating from the Vancouver Giants (WHL).

Montreal selected Thorpe in the fifth round (130th overall) in 2024. His skating and overall agility have improved as he finished his checks with authority, and he's more than willing to drop the gloves when required. I didn't have to look for Thorpe. I knew when he was on the ice for the Habs, which speaks to his competitiveness and overall engagement.

Aleksander Legkov

For the first time in my career, I'm writing about a player who graduated from the Federal Prospects Hockey League. Legkov was one of the more noticeable forwards for Montreal. Legkov was the rookie of the year in the FPHL last year, and he's signed to a two-way (AHL/ECHL) contract with the Canadiens.

The six-foot-one, 190-pound left-shot forward produced 38 goals and 55 assists last season. I'm not sure where things will go from here for Legkov, but he looks like he could be an AHL free agent to monitor for a potential NHL deal if he continues on his current trajectory offensively.

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Sportsnet.ca / Senators training camp preview: What does post-Tkachuk era look like?

David Morassutti

Stepping onto the ice for training camp, the Ottawa Senators aren't just looking to punch another playoff ticket — they are out to prove that they can transition from a post-season regular into a legitimate championship threat.

For the past five seasons, the Senators have been focused on building around Brady Tkachuk, but now the focus shifts toward moving in a new direction following his trade to the Florida Panthers.

General manager Steve Staios wasted no time trying to fill the void left by Tkachuk, acquiring William Eklund from the San Jose Sharks. There is no question the Senators will be hoping to avoid having Tkachuk's departure be a big talking point throughout camp but it will be tough to avoid it at the start.

That's not the only lingering situation the team is looking to resolve. The team will also try to get Batherson's contract extension out of the way, and if either side wants to make it an eight-year deal, they'll need to get that done before the new CBA kicks in on Wednesday.

Salary cap space: \$4.196 million

GM: Steve Staios

Head coach: Travis Green

Assistant coaches: Nolan Baumgartner, Ben Sexton, Mike Yeo

Unsigned players: None

Key additions: William Eklund, Andre Burakovsky, Samuel Ersson, Sammy Blais

Key subtractions: Brady Tkachuk, Daniel Alfredsson

What we'll learn during pre-season:

1. Who becomes the next captain?

This will be the biggest question surrounding the Senators from the moment players arrive at camp.

Replacing Tkachuk as captain is about more than deciding who gets to wear the 'C.' Tkachuk was the emotional leader of the room and one of the players who set the tone for Ottawa. The Senators now have to decide which player can provide that leadership while also representing the direction of the franchise.

Tim Stützle, Jake Sanderson and Thomas Chabot have emerged as the most obvious candidates, with Claude Giroux also providing an experienced alternative. Stützle is the team's franchise centre and offensive engine, Sanderson is the backbone of the blue line and Chabot is one of the longest-tenured Senators.

Whichever path management chooses, the player inheriting the 'C' will need to set the tone not only off the ice but on the ice to start the season.

2. Can Eklund become a legitimate top-line player?

The Senators made a big bet trading the 2026 ninth-overall pick to San Jose for Eklund as they looked to replace Tkachuk's spot in the lineup. They targeted the 23-year-old coming off back-to-back 50-point seasons in San Jose, but the team certainly hopes that he can reach another level.

Going from a productive piece on a rebuilding team to a driver of offence on a club with playoff expectations is going to present its challenges. Eklund will need to prove that he is capable of handling that heightened responsibility and cement himself as a true top-line threat.

One area Eklund will thrive in is that the Senators are among the top teams in offensive-zone time percentage, ranking second last season.

Eklund was in the 93rd percentile among forwards in offensive-zone time percentage (45.9), according to NHL Edge stats.

If he can channel that zone time and the Senators' ability to generate high-danger scoring chances into more scoring opportunities, he could see his points total climb.

3. Is Yakemchuk ready to stay in the NHL?

While there will be eyes on the new additions during camp, many will be looking to see if Carter Yakemchuk can stick around when the final cuts are made.

The 20-year-old didn't earn a spot out of camp last season but he still got his first taste of NHL action, playing in four regular-season games and one in the playoffs. His offensive ability and puck-moving skills are his calling card, but head coach Travis Green will need to see if he can be trusted defensively against NHL competition on a consistent basis.

Having a full season in the AHL allowed Yakemchuk to get used to playing professional hockey while also working on developing a more complete game and playing top-pairing minutes.

The Senators' top four on the blue line is set with Sanderson, Chabot, Artem Zub and Jordan Spence. That means it'll be up to Yakemchuk to cement a spot on the team's third pairing, where he likely goes up against Nikolas Matinpalo for playing time.

4. Can Ullmark and Ersson give Ottawa reliable goaltending?

It was a bumpy second season for Linus Ullmark, whose struggles became a big storyline as he stepped away from the team to deal with mental-health issues.

Ullmark re-established himself as the No. 1, but Ottawa needs the backup position to become less of a concern.

The Senators acquired Ersson from the Leafs after he had a less-than-stellar 2025-26 season in Philadelphia, posting a 3.12 goals-against average and a .870 save percentage.

All the Senators need from Ersson is to provide reliability behind Ullmark. He has proved that he can play 40-plus games at the NHL level and has a respectable 65-50-17 record in 143 career appearances, but they need to avoid a repeat of last season where they used five different goalies.

Bold prediction

Sanderson makes a big run for the Norris Trophy

The competition for the Norris Trophy is among the toughest in the NHL when it comes to individual awards, and Sanderson has been knocking on the door as a player who could win it one day.

Many traits of Sanderson's game make him a strong candidate for the Norris. The 24-year-old led all defencemen in max skating speed (24.37 m.p.h.) last season, ranked second among defencemen in 22-plus m.p.h. speed bursts (31) and was third at his position in 20-plus m.p.h. bursts (204), according to NHL Edge stats.

He has also shown that he can handle the responsibility of being a workhorse on the blue line, playing the third most shifts per game among defencemen, and was ninth in time on ice per game, at 24:50.

What would help Sanderson's case is if he can improve his offensive numbers, as he's had back-to-back 50-plus-point seasons, but he'll need to see a big increase in production, as recent history suggests that 80-plus points is likely the bar to reach.

Projected lines

William Eklund — Tim Stützle — Drake Batherson

Ridley Greig — Dylan Cozens — Claude Giroux

Warren Foegele — Shane Pinto — Andre Burakovsky

Fabian Zetterlund — Nick Cousins — Michael Amadio

Jake Sanderson — Artem Zub

Thomas Chabot — Jordan Spence

Tyler Kleven — Carter Yakemchuk



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Linus Ullmark

Samuel Ersson

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Sportsnet.ca / Most interesting contract on every team in the Pacific Division

Ally Chesham

Discussing people's salaries isn't typically considered good etiquette, but in the world of professional sports, those kinds of rules fly right out the window.

And money actually seems to be a big point of discussion in the National Hockey League, with the salary cap increasing to a record \$104 million for the upcoming 2026-27 season — an \$8.5 million increase from the previous year — and projected to rise to \$113.5 million for 2027-28.

The ripple effects of these significant salary-cap increases have already created waves this off-season, with three of the largest average annual value contracts in NHL history being signed, including Cale Makar's recent extension, which is also the highest total value contract in league history.

So, given the topicality of all things money-related, we're taking a look at the most interesting contract on all 32 teams — whether that's because it's a bargain, bust, blockbuster or something else entirely. Maybe it's still to be determined!

Today, we get started with the Pacific Division. All contract details come from PuckPedia.

This one's interesting because it doesn't exist. Coming off his three-year, entry-level contract with a \$950,000 cap hit, Cutter Gauthier is without a deal. The 22-year-old winger has been holding out from the Anaheim Ducks after two of his teammates, centre Leo Carlsson and defenceman Pavel Mintyukov, signed lucrative contracts this off-season. If you recall the Carlsson offer-sheet situation with the Philadelphia Flyers, he re-signed in July for five years at an average annual value of \$18 million after the Ducks matched. Two days later, Mintyukov signed a five-year deal with a \$7.2-million AAV.

Given those paydays, starting with Carlsson and the number the Ducks had no control over, it most definitely raised Gauthier's asking price. In 159 NHL games with Anaheim, Gauthier has 114 points. Last season, he recorded a team-high 41 goals and 69 points in 76 games. The Ducks are working with somewhat limited salary-cap space, but the termination of veteran Chris Kreider's contract increased their availability from just over \$9 million to more than \$15.5 million.

Training camps open this week. Will Gauthier have a deal in time? He has shown stubbornness before. When the Flyers drafted him fifth overall in 2022, he eventually told the team he didn't want to play for them, forcing Philadelphia to trade him in 2024 while he was still at Boston College.

Signed last September as an extension, Dustin Wolf's seven-year, \$52.5-million contract with the Calgary Flames kicks in this season. It's one of the largest deals in Flames history by total value and among the franchise's biggest by cap hit. Despite Wolf's somewhat limited NHL experience at the time, general manager Craig Conroy bet heavily on him as Calgary's starting goaltender after his rookie season in 2024-25, when he posted a 2.64 goals-against average and a .910 save percentage, finishing second in Calder Trophy voting.

The 25-year-old's numbers took a step back last season, as he posted his first-ever losing record as a pro, but much of that can be attributed to the team in front of him, with the Flames finishing seventh in the Pacific Division and missing the playoffs. His new contract will likely look very good if Wolf continues on the trajectory established early in his career, especially with his \$7.5-million cap hit locked in through 2032-33.

Also kicking in this season is Connor McDavid's two-year, \$25-million contract with the Edmonton Oilers, which he signed last October. The \$12.5-million cap hit is the same as his previous deal: an eight-year, \$100-million contract he signed in the 2017 off-season. Obviously well below what the widely considered best player in the world could have demanded, McDavid is only the ninth-highest-paid player in the NHL by

average annual value and isn't even the highest-paid player on his own team, with Leon Draisaitl holding that title with his eight-year, \$112-million contract.

Had he asked for significantly more money, general manager Stan Bowman would've happily opened up the team wallet for him. Instead, the captain gave the Oilers front office a better opportunity to build a championship contender around him following back-to-back Stanley Cup Final appearances.

Having McDavid on their roster for two more seasons has put the Oilers firmly into "win-now" mode, with one year of potential contention shaved off that window last season when Edmonton was eliminated in the first round of the playoffs. McDavid will be eligible to sign an extension next summer, and there are concerns it could be Stanley Cup-or-bust to convince him to stay in Edmonton.

In June, as a pending restricted free agent with his entry-level deal set to expire, Brandt Clarke signed a five-year, \$37-million extension with the Los Angeles Kings. He had been eligible to re-sign for nearly a year at that point but chose to wait, and it paid off as he recorded career-best marks in goals, assists, points, power-play points, blocked shots and time on ice per game in 2025-26. He became the first blue-liner in Kings history age 23 or younger since Drew Doughty in 2010-11 to record a 40-point season.

Had Clarke waited further into the off-season to get his new deal done, he potentially could have commanded a higher price based on some of the other contracts signed by young stars this summer, or the Kings could have risked him receiving an offer sheet. It's to be determined how high Clarke's ceiling really is, but he's proven to be a reliable defenceman, and the Kings did well to remove any uncertainty surrounding his immediate future. It's worth noting, too, that the deal includes only a modified no-trade clause for the final season, should L.A.'s hopes for him not pan out.

For a period of time this summer, Macklin Celebrini was the NHL's highest-paid player on a per-season basis, thanks to the five-year, \$94-million contract extension the San Jose Sharks signed him to at the end of July. His \$18.8 million cap hit surpassed Leo Carlsson's \$18 million but was later upstaged by Cale Makar's \$20.4 million. Celebrini signed the deal ahead of the final year of his entry-level contract, keeping him from becoming a restricted free agent next summer.

The agreement follows Celebrini setting the Sharks' single-season points record with 115 in 82 games in 2025-26. The 20-year-old was also fourth in the NHL in points, tied for fourth in goals and seventh in assists. He very well could have asked for a number closer to or even slightly above Makar's, with the maximum at \$20.8 million, but instead opted for a more team-friendly deal, which he's expressed was a priority so that San Jose can continue to "build the way we want to build."

The No. 1 pick in the 2024 draft has shown all signs of being a generational player, and the Sharks did well to lock him down sooner rather than later. Regarding the term, San Jose would likely have preferred to have him inked for the maximum of eight years, but will gladly take the five he's committed to for now.

Playing just 18 games for Seattle last season after being traded by the Toronto Maple Leafs, Bobby McMann decided to forgo free agency and signed his first long-term contract with the Kraken. Coming in at six years and worth \$34.5 million, McMann's new deal carries a significantly longer term and higher average annual value than the two previous deals he signed in the NHL with the Maple Leafs, and the raise was definitely warranted.

He became extension-eligible while still with Toronto, but despite mutual interest, a deal did not get done, and McMann was ultimately traded at the deadline. He recorded career highs in games played, goals, assists, points and ice time last season and made an immediate offensive impact on the Kraken, with 10 goals and four assists in his limited showing. McMann was an NHL late bloomer, though he's already 30, so it will be interesting to see whether the Kraken will get full value out of the deal.

While the Vancouver Canucks recently awarded 20-year-old defenceman Zeev Buium an eight-year, \$75.04-million extension, the most intriguing and discussed contract in Vancouver still remains Elias Pettersson's. With two years of his eight-year, \$92.8-million contract having already come and gone, it wouldn't be controversial by any means to say that Pettersson has not lived up to the expectations that a deal of that magnitude carries, and he'll "be the first to say it."



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At the time of its signing, in March 2024, the contract carried the fifth-highest salary-cap hit in the NHL, and it seemed appropriate given the strong year he was having, especially after he posted a career-best 102 points in 80 games the previous season. But when the Canucks advanced to the second round of the playoffs, Pettersson recorded just one goal and five assists in 13 games, marking the beginning of his struggles. The next season, he recorded 45 points in 64 games, and this past season, he put up 51 points in 74 games, with just 15 goals in both.

Pettersson's deal carries a full no-movement clause for the remaining six years, so although there have been conversations about a trade, any move will be at his discretion. That's not to mention that the Canucks could have to retain some of his salary in order to get something done. As a rebuilding team, would it be worth it at that point?

Four goaltenders played for the Vegas Golden Knights last season, and of them, Adin Hill was the highest-paid. However, he also posted the worst stats. In 27 games, Hill had a 3.04 goals-against average, which ranked 39th in the league, and an .871 save percentage, which ranked 58th. The crease was handed over entirely to Carter Hart for the team's 22 playoff games. Hart is on a two-year, \$4-million contract signed last October.

If Hart looks to be going for the No. 1 spot this season, Hill's cap hit will be sizable for a backup. Akira Schmid appeared in the most regular-season games for Vegas in 2025-26, but the Golden Knights traded him to the Florida Panthers in June. The fourth goaltender who played for Vegas last season was Carl Lindblom, who appeared in eight games. He signed a three-year contract extension in June, with an average annual value of \$900,000.

When Hill signed his contract in March 2025, he was in the midst of one of his best seasons. In 2024-25, he played a career-high 50 games, recorded career highs with 32 wins and four shutouts, and posted a 2.47 goals-against average and a .906 save percentage. He also played a major role in the Golden Knights' 2023 Stanley Cup win, starting the final 14 games of that post-season.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens make easy bet on Kreider's experience, offensive upside

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — A \$2.15-million, one-year contract for a six-foot-three, 232-pound, 35-year-old winger who has over 1000 games of NHL experience and is still producing at a reasonable rate is hardly a gamble.

You could even say the Montreal Canadiens stole Chris Kreider after the remainder of the player's six-year, \$45.5-million contract with the Anaheim Ducks was ripped up on Thursday.

There was one year left on it, with \$4 million owed to Kreider, and he turned away from it — and from bigger-money deals, according to his agent, Matt Keator — to come to Montreal for what will be a maximum of \$5.4 million if he achieves bonuses for games played and goals scored.

We're not yet sure how many games Kreider will have to play, nor how many goals he'll have to score to max out, but potting 22 goals over 75 games last season landed him in a Canadiens jersey.

The rest, from what we were told, was about fit and comfort for both the player and the team.

SIGNING DETAILS

PuckPedia

Length

1 years

Value

\$2,150,000

AAV

\$5,400,000

Expiry

2026-2027

Status

UFA

September 12, 2026

Yes, the connection between Kreider and former New York Rangers general manager and current Canadiens president of hockey operations Jeff Gorton certainly helped. As did the one between him and former-Rangers-teammate-turned-Canadiens-coach Martin St. Louis. And with beloved former Rangers athletic therapist Jim Ramsay and former team services maven Alex Case now in Montreal, Kreider will feel that much more at home.

Perhaps not as much as the Bofford, Mass., native might have felt had he chosen to don the spoked B of the Boston Bruins...

But we digress...

The Canadiens were looking for more offensive punch and felt confident Kreider could bring some of it. They were hoping for more speed and size on the wing and believed Kreider could bring some of it. They were angling for special-teams depth and were convinced Kreider could bring some of it.

They'll hardly pay him anything if he fails to, and they'll be happy to pay him the maximum he can earn if he succeeds, making this an easy decision.

If management was concerned about how Canadiens fans would receive Kreider, they probably got over it, thinking the player's willingness to regularly crash the net would win them over.

Oh sure, up until Saturday morning, Kreider was still public enemy No. 1 in Montreal for going skates-first into Carey Price during Game 1 of the 2014 Eastern Conference Final. But if Kreider hadn't fully shed that status by the time his contract with the Canadiens was announced on Saturday afternoon, we're betting he will as soon as he barrels his way to the crease and scores his first goal at the Bell Centre.

That Kreider is still good enough to have it assisted on by any of Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield, Juraj Slakovsky or Ivan Demidov is a big part of the draw here; he's been a top-six forward since stepping into the league in 2013, and there's little doubt he can still be one in Montreal.

If not for the Ducks needing to free up cap space to give 41-goal scorer Cutter Gauthier the enormous extension he's about to get, Kreider would likely still be one in Anaheim. He was a fixture on the top line last season, but he became a far less permanent one on the summer day linemate Leo Carlsson signed Philadelphia's bank-breaking offer sheet, which the Ducks inevitably decided to match.

Still, Kreider's departure leaves a hole in Anaheim — and not just at five-on-five, where the bulk of his 25 points were produced alongside Carlsson and Troy Terry.

He also averaged over three minutes per game on the power play, and he even chipped in 30 seconds per game on the penalty kill.

Even if those ice-time allotments flip in Montreal — the Canadiens could use more help on the penalty kill than on the power play — Kreider will be just as relevant here as he was in Anaheim. Especially when you factor in his experience.

The Canadiens, who were the youngest participant in last year's playoffs, need it. Especially with former elder statesman Brendan Gallagher now in Vancouver.

Kreider arrives two years older than any of his Canadiens teammates, and with at least 226 more games played in the league (regular season and playoffs combined) than any of them. That's worth close to \$2.15 million on its own.

His friendly deal also leaves the team with \$7.63 million of cap space, which is a healthy amount to not only sign Zachary Bolduc and/or Arber Xhekaj but also make other changes between now and the start of the season.

We believe general manager Kent Hughes is currently working very hard to make sure Kreider isn't the last one.

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TSN.CA / Sense of optimism alive and well as Maple Leafs get set to open training camp after trying season

Mark Masters

After a summer of change, the Maple Leafs are set to open training camp this week.

"We begin with honesty," wrote MLSE president and CEO Keith Pelley in a message sent to season-seat holders on Monday. "Last season did not meet the standard expected by anyone within our organization or our fans. Disappointment must lead to accountability, and accountability to action. That has been our focus this offseason."

Pelley trumpeted all the turnover that has been overseen by new general manager John Chayka and senior executive advisor Mats Sundin.

"As training camp begins, there is renewed energy throughout the club," Pelley wrote.

"The work begins now. We understand that confidence must be earned and we believe there is every reason to look forward to what comes next."

Pelley highlighted the addition of 10 new players and specifically named goalie Sergei Bobrovsky, defenceman Darren Raddysh and winger Gavin McKenna.

"We understand that offseason changes do not guarantee success," Pelley said in his message. "Expectations must ultimately be met on the ice. This team will have to earn your confidence through its preparation, competitiveness and resilience but we believe in the direction of this club, the people leading it and the players who will proudly wear the Blue and White."

Bobrovsky and Raddysh met the media on Monday at the team's annual charity golf event in Milton, Ont.

Bobrovsky is a two time Stanley Cup champion and two time Vezina Trophy winner, who is destined for the Hall of Fame. But he also posted the worst save percentage of his career last season (.877 in 52 games) as the Florida Panthers missed the playoffs.

Bobrovsky, who signed a three-year, \$21-million deal with Toronto, believes a longer offseason will serve him well as he prepares to open the next chapter in his career.

"It felt so long, but it's also a good opportunity to build the summer training, you know, off ice, to put [in] the good cardio block [and] physical block to get to be a little stronger," said Bobrovsky, who will turn 38 on Sunday. "I try to use that time for those things."

Bobrovsky and the Panthers made the Stanley Cup Final in three straight seasons from 2022-23 to 2024-25, which limited the ability to do much offseason work.

"There was basically just recovery and back to play," Bobrovsky recalled. "So [this] summer I [had a] good summer training, especially off ice."

Bobrovsky has been training in Toronto for "almost a month already."

The Russian is being aided by a familiar face in Andy O'Brien, who was hired as Toronto's new vice-president of sports performance this summer. O'Brien previously worked as a high-performance consultant with the Panthers.

"He's a big pro," Bobrovsky noted. "It's great to have him here. He helped a lot to build the process, especially off ice, in Florida, and he's going to do a great job here as well. It's a great addition to this club, and he's going to make this club even more competitive."

"His biologic age is younger than his chronologic age"

This morning on #FirstUp, newly hired Maple Leafs VP of Sport Performance Andy O'Brien broke down the dedication Sergei Bobrovsky

has to staying in shape, as well as other players he's looking forward to working with. pic.twitter.com/pkN5GWeqLy

— First Up (@FirstUp1050) August 5, 2026

Leafs captain Auston Matthews joked that he was more confident that his foursome would post the lowest score on Monday after learning that Raddysh, known for his golf game as well as his booming slapshot, was part of his group.

The Leafs acquired Raddysh via a sign-and-trade with the Tampa Bay Lightning before the 70-point man could hit free agency.

Raddysh likes the vibes around the Leafs so far.

"A lot of new faces," the 30-year-old Toronto native said. "Everyone's happy. Everyone's smiling, chirping each other, doing the stuff us hockey players do."

After signing an eight-year, \$68-million deal, Raddysh is fulfilling a childhood dream by playing for his hometown team.

"I'm not sure it's sunk in yet," he said. "I think once I play that first game and, you know, get on the ice, I think it'll sink in a little bit. But for now, you know, just trying to enjoy this and enjoy being in Toronto and just trying to do my thing here."

When Raddysh takes the ice at Scotiabank Arena for the season opener on Sept. 29, he will see plenty of supporters in the stands.

"A lot of ticket requests," he said with a smile when asked about the response from friends and family to his move back home. "I've had to dial back on that a little bit but, yeah, it's been good."

McKenna did not talk to reporters on Monday, but remained a hot topic in the scrums.

"Skilled, young player," Raddysh observed. "He's got a lot of talent. I'm excited to see what he can do in the NHL. It's exciting having a guy like him in your team."

McKenna is the third player drafted first overall by the Leafs in franchise history following in the footsteps of Matthews (2016) and Wendel Clark (1985).

"I think it's always easier to start here than it is to come here at 26 and run into all you guys (media) for the first time every day," Clark said. "He's got a great group of veterans on the team that are going to look after him ... He'll just ask questions, and the guys will look after him."

McKenna will be living with 2009 first overall pick John Tavares. Clark pointed out that Sundin is also a former first overall pick (1989), who can help mentor McKenna.

"I always say, for the rookies there's no pressure here," Clark stressed. "They finally made it to where they dreamed of playing. It's a different pressure than [Morgan] Rielly and Auston have because they're here and understand what they're going through. But he's just coming in. Every day is a new day. Even a bad day is a fun day."

Managing expectations, Clark noted, is very important.

"The big thing is he's not here to change anything," the former Leafs captain, who now serves as a community representative for the team, said. "He's here just to be a hockey player first and grow into himself. He's a young guy. He's 18 years old. We were all that, and we don't expect any one young guy to come in and change the world."

Clark did not have a chance to speak with McKenna during the offseason, but if the Penn State product asks for advice, what will he say?

"Just have fun ... All the best players that I've ever played with on any team any year, whether it be the Sundins, Sakics, Yzermans, Lecavaliers, all are kids that started by just having fun playing. Because if they're having fun, their game is really good. Nobody had more fun playing than Wayne Gretzky, and he's your best player ever kind of thing. So, if they can continue to have fun, you'll see the progression in it. We don't want them not having fun. So don't get pushed down by what is happening with the team, because you're just one guy. You're not all of a



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sudden going to turn everything around overnight. It's a team game, and we have to do that as a team."

Defenceman Emil Andrae met the Toronto media on Monday for the first time since being traded to the Leafs by the Philadelphia Flyers back on June 16.

"I was actually at the golf course when I found out," Andrae recalled. "The GM of the Flyers [Danny Briere], he called me on the last hole, and I finished the last hole, and then I called him back. So I got the news there and obviously a little shocking first, but when I found out it was Toronto, I couldn't be more happier. So, yeah, I'm excited."

Andrae grew up cheering for the Leafs, who have a long history of featuring prominent Swedish players.

"It's probably the biggest hockey market in the world and I'm excited to be here," the 24-year-old from Vastervik, Sweden said. "It's going to be a little different from Philly, of course, but I just can't be more happy to be here and, you know, have fans that love hockey and, I mean, you guys, reporters, that love it too, so it's going to be fun."

Andrae got a crash course on life in Toronto from longtime Leaf William Nylander, who took his countryman to dinner on Sunday night.

"We had a good chat about the city," Andrae said. "He's trying to help me to get a place and [telling me] where to go and eat and all that stuff, so, yeah, he loves it here. It's a great city and a great town and a great hockey market, so he has a lot of good things to say."

Andrae is also excited about the opportunity on the ice. He's spent most of the last two seasons bouncing between the American Hockey League and the NHL.

"I want to be acclimated to the league and be an everyday, and that's my goal when I get here," he said.

So, what kind of player are the Leafs getting?

"I'm a pretty mobile defenceman," Andrae said. "Can play the game 200 feet and I like to move the puck, move my legs and I think my vision is probably the biggest strength that I have out there. I'm pretty small (5-foot-9), so I'm pretty competitive out there."

After an injury-hampered season, forward Nick Paul switched up his summer workout routine.

"A little bit more cardio and just getting my hips active," the 31-year-old forward said. "Getting my base right and then building on top of the base, building muscle and strength on top of the base. It's been good. Ever since I got traded here just been skating a lot as well. We've been having some good skates out there yeah just be ready to go."

The Mississauga, Ont., native was acquired from the Lightning in a trade that saw goalie Dennis Hildeby go the other way along with a 2027 fourth-round pick, and a 2028 third-round pick.

"I think it sunk in when we finally moved here and hopped on the ice with the Toronto gear," Paul said of the NHL homecoming. "I've been seeing family a bunch. They've been helping me move in a little bit."

Although Paul acknowledges he doesn't know many of his new teammates outside of Raddysh.

"I think the biggest thing is just going around, just get out of your shell a little bit, talk to everyone," he said. "There's a lot of different personalities when it comes to a makeup of a hockey team and just kind of feeling those out. It's been great so far. Obviously the skates, hanging out. We had a little fantasy draft. A couple things here and there where the guys and everyone are getting together so it definitely makes it a lot easier when you're hanging out with everyone."

Paul is happy to report that his fantasy football team, which he co-owns with goalie Anthony Stolarz, is off to a hot start.

Raddysh and Paul, meanwhile, have been bonding with Bobrovsky by reliving the fierce rivalry between the Lightning and Panthers.

"The Battle of Florida was definitely fun," Paul said with a grin. "I asked him about that a little bit."

"Yeah, we exchanged a couple of words," Bobrovsky said. "For sure, the fighting match is not the hockey match. Yeah, they are great guys. You know, they came from also a good culture. You know, great guys, and they are going to make this team stronger for sure."

The Leafs officially announced that they have signed defenceman Nick Blankenburg to a professional trout.

Training camp opens with media day on Wednesday. The first on-ice sessions will be held on Thursday at the Ford Performance Centre.

The Leafs will open their preseason schedule on Saturday with split-squad games against the Canadiens at the Bell Centre and Scotiabank Arena.

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TSN.CA / It's an exciting time to be a Canadiens fan

Travis Yost

Three seasons ago, the rebuilding Montreal Canadiens finished dead last in the Atlantic Division. Now it feels like they're one move away from challenging the Carolina Hurricanes for the Eastern Conference throne.

Where do you start with the roster-building successes of this organization? It's a long list.

The timing of the Canadiens' rebuild in and of itself was flawless – the franchise was able to find, develop, and extend critical parts of their young (and super talented) core right before the league's salary cap exploded, creating a heap of team-friendly contracts.

Noah Dobson, Lane Hutsun, Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield, Juraj Slafkovsky, Ivan Demidov, and goaltender Jakub Dobes are all signed through at least the 2029-30 season, with an average cap hit of \$7.9 million. This core, mind you, delivered a 106-point campaign just a season ago.

And it goes beyond the top of the lineup. The Canadiens have surely found their head coach – Martin St. Louis was extended on a four-year deal Monday. Winning teams with respected coaches can also have a magnetic effect around the league. They were able to nab veteran winger Chris Kreider – who is as automatic a 20-plus goal scorer as you can find – on a discount signing after the Anaheim Ducks bought him out.

And this is a team with plenty of cap room to upgrade. The contracts of Phillip Danault, Josh Anderson, Alex Carrier, Kirby Dach and Sam Montembeault all expire at the end of this season, creating \$21.5 million in cap space to lean into for 2027-28 and beyond.

As for this season: I think the one move Montreal is still thinking through is an upgrade at the second centre position. A name like Detroit's Dylan Larkin immediately intrigues, but his no-trade clause certainly complicates things. To that end, I think Montreal's focus is likely around two other pivots on expiring deals: Columbus' Kirill Marchenko, and Nashville's Ryan O'Reilly

Both would look amazing in the lineup behind Suzuki, and for different reasons.

The 26-year-old Marchenko has established himself as a quality top-six offensive weapon with 141 points over the past two seasons. O'Reilly is the classic veteran rental (and a meaningful upgrade on the defensive side, I would note).

Compared to their forward peers, both grade exceptionally well. Consider their production over the past few seasons – we'll use the all-encompassing Goals Above Replacement measure to grade them against their peers:

Yost1 Yost

Given the track records, both are anticipated to be hot commodities on the trade market, and both bring interesting trade wrinkles with them.

The Blue Jackets would love to keep Marchenko in the fold long term and he's a restricted free agent at the end of this deal, but there is a strong likelihood of his next deal being in the eight-figure per year territory and there are already reports Marchenko is looking elsewhere. To that end, Montreal may be able to entice both him and the Blue Jackets to work out a sign-and-trade type of deal.

O'Reilly, meanwhile, is in the twilight of his career and likely wants one more bid at the Stanley Cup. The 35-year-old simply is not going to get that opportunity in Nashville this season. The Predators depth chart looks like a team eyeballing the draft lottery, and the Predators could package O'Reilly to a contender and start leaning into a more aggressive rebuild posture in doing so.

If Montreal is less interested in a long-term financial commitment to a second-line centre a la Marchenko, O'Reilly becomes a perfect rental

option, buying Montreal another season of developing internal options or scouring the rest of the market next summer.

At any rate, it's an exciting time to be a Canadiens fan. I would keep an eye on GM Kent Hughes and company. My bet is they're not done adding, and I think either of these additions could be a difference maker for Montreal in an ultra-competitive Atlantic Division.