



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 28, 2026

The News & Observer

Why the Carolina Hurricanes can't avoid the pressure of a deep NHL playoff run

Justin Pelletier

You'll have to learn to pace yourself — Pressure / You're just like everybody else — Pressure

Billy Joel released an anthem to handling adversity three years after the Hartford Whalers joined the NHL, some 16 years before the Carolina Hurricanes existed.

Yet, the words are oddly prophetic as they relate to Tom Dundon's ownership of the Canes, and Rod Brind'Amour's tenure as the team's head coach, which will wrap its eighth season sometime between now and the end of June.

The Hurricanes, of course, hope for the latest possible conclusion to the 2025-26 season, a mid-to-late-June season denouement that would mean a successful run to a second Stanley Cup championship in Raleigh.

That's the first part of the pressure. Getting to that point is not a sprint, but a marathon during which a team has to simultaneously push hard and pace itself under intense pressure to succeed.

Adding to the squeeze the Canes are undoubtedly feeling in their eighth consecutive trip to the NHL postseason is ... that they are entering their eighth consecutive trip to the NHL postseason, with a single win in three Eastern Conference Final trips to show for it.

It's incredible consistency for a franchise that was once mired in the league's longest playoff drought. From 2016 to 2026, though, Carolina has the third-best regular-season record in the NHL, at 450-248-82 with 982 points. The two teams ahead of it, though? Tampa and Boston, both of which have been to a Stanley Cup Final during that stretch, with Tampa winning it all in 2020 and 2021, while losing in the Cup Final in 2022. Boston reached the final in 2019, at the expense of the Canes in the Eastern Conference Final.

But the Canes' regular-season success has not translated to deep runs through the playoffs.

Saturday, as the Canes launched an eighth consecutive NHL playoff campaign under Dundon and Brind'Amour, the opening period of the Canes' 2-0 win over the Ottawa Senators was a microcosm of the past eight years. Carolina dominated play, energized the crowd with several thunderous hits or near-hits, rattling the boards and glass — but had no goals, nor shots on goal, to show for it through nearly 13 minutes.

As the first period came to a close, the nervous tension in the arena was building.

You used to call me paranoid — Pressure / But even you cannot avoid — Pressure

The first few seasons after "the drought," infused with Brind'Amour's energy and suffocating style of play, the Hurricanes took the league by — ahem — storm. They surprised early, and slowly built themselves into a perennial playoff team. Then, a perennial playoff series winner.

But, there's always been something standing in the way of further advancement: An untimely injury or two; A tough call or two; A leaky goal or two; A better team or two.

You can forgive Carolina's most ardent supporters, then, for the touch of paranoia they face now. Sure, the team had another great regular season. Sure, it's the top seed in the Eastern Conference. Sure, it has the second-most wins in the NHL.

But we've all seen variations of these stats in the past eight seasons, only to see losses far earlier in the playoffs than the team's seeding or apparent talent level.

In Game 1 against Ottawa on Saturday, the Canes more closely resembled their regular-season selves. They outshot the Senators, 8-4. They earned two power play chances — and didn't score on either. And they scored a goal on straight-up perseverance, with Logan Stankoven catching Linus Ullmark off guard with a slower-than-usual shot from the right circle while tied up by a defender. Still, it was a tenuous 1-0 advantage.

Nowhere to look but inside / Where we all respond to — Pressure

So where does most of the pressure fall here? The Hurricanes' core players who have been here for six, seven or eight seasons? Management for building the team? Or on the broad shoulders of the head coach and franchise icon, who has been inextricably linked to Raleigh since his arrival more than 25 years ago?

To hear the national — and international — discourse, it mostly falls upon Brind'Amour, fair or otherwise. He's been the constant. His style of play — up-tempo, hard-forechecking, high-volume shooting, defensively accountable — has been at the core of the Canes' mission from the moment he ascended to the position, hand-picked by Dundon and company. It has also been described as a system of play that lends itself to racking up wins in the regular season, but is too hard to maintain through the grind of the playoffs, during which every game is against a top-16-or-better team.

Does he feel that pressure?

"I don't think you ever really get over it," Brind'Amour told NHL.com in March. "Like, you're always like, 'Man!' It fuels you. At the same time, you have to ask things like, 'What were the reasons we didn't get it done? Why are we not getting to that next level?' And then you try to relay it, and to



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figure out, 'OK, how do we improve on that?' And then, I mean, it's just a challenge, right? At least for this group it is."

Brind'Amour continued on to defend his players, too, saying the onus has been on him and management to arrange the roster properly to put the players in the right position to win.

"Look, we obviously haven't reached that final stage where we want," Brind'Amour said in that same interview, "but I've never looked anyone in the eye and go, 'Man, they haven't brought everything they could.' The reality is, we just haven't been good enough. It would be different if we felt that, man, we were better than that team. But again, the reality has been that we're just not quite there yet. And so that's what's fueled us. That's why we're continuing to grab players that we can grab and tweak this and that to finally, you know, get over that last step."

Saturday, two of those "grabbed" players made all the difference. In the third period, Taylor Hall joined Stankoven on the sheet with his first goal of the playoffs, giving the Canes a late-game cushion.

And then the Hurricanes closed out the game in the most Hurricanes way possible: killing a full 6-on-4 power play with the Ottawa goalie pulled after a delay of game penalty with fewer than three minutes to play.

Talk about nervous energy.

One, two, three, four, pressure!



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Hurricanes sign Pyotr Kochetkov to extension, make other roster moves

Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes made some major personnel moves Friday, signing goalie Pyotr Kochetkov to a two-year contract extension and trimming the training camp roster to 28 players.

One personnel decision still remains undetermined: the future of defenseman Alexander Nikishin, a restricted free agent who remains unsigned and has not been at camp.

Kochetkov, who was entering the final year of his contract, agreed on an extension that will pay the Russian \$2.4 million with a \$1.5 million signing bonus for the 2027-28 season, and \$3 million with a \$1 million signing bonus for the 2028-29 season.

"Pyotr is an incredibly talented goalie whose aggressive style fits our team very well," Canes general manager Eric Tulsky said in a statement. "We believe in his ability to win games for this organization and are thrilled he wants to continue helping us pursue championships in Carolina."

The Canes on Friday placed forwards Skyler Brind'Amour, Juha Jaaska and Justin Robidas, and defensemen Aleks Heimosalmi and Pierre-Olivier Joseph on waivers for the purpose of being reassigned to the Chicago Wolves, the Canes' AHL affiliate.

The Hurricanes also have assigned forwards Charlie Cerrato and Viktor Neuchev; defensemen Dominik Badinka, Joel Nystrom and Ronan Seeley, and goaltenders Ruslan Khazheyev and Zach Sawchenko to the Wolves.

Forward Josiah Slavin, the brother of Canes defenseman Jacob Slavin, has been released from his PTO and could sign an AHL contract with Chicago.

The Canes have sent forwards Filip Ekberg (Ottawa 67's/OHL) and Zachary Lansard (Regina Pats/WHL) back to their junior teams.

The roster cutdown has forwards Bradly Nadeau and Felix Unger Sorum, and defensemen Charles Alexis Legault and Noel Fransen remaining with the group — for now. Fransen, a third-round pick in the 2024 draft, signed his entry-level contract with Carolina in May.

Nadeau and Unger Sorum are being considered as the replacement for forward Seth Jarvis while Jarvis rehabs from offseason shoulder surgery. Jarvis has been at camp but

remains in a yellow no-contact jersey and is expected to miss some early-season games.

Nadeau and Unger Sorum scored shootout goals as the Canes topped Florida 3-2 in a preseason game Tuesday. Unger Sorum just beat the final horn with a goal Thursday to complete Carolina's 6-5 comeback victory over Nashville in Greensboro that made Kochetkov the winning goalie.

With Nikishin absent, Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour has been considering several options as a replacement for the D-man. Veteran Mike Reilly has been re-signed, and the Canes signed free agent Juuso Valimaki to a one-year contract.

Legault and Fransen remain possibilities. Legault played 12 games for the Canes last season and might have played more had it not been for a skate-blade cut to his right hand, which sidelined him for a few months.

"Making a tough decision is what you want," Brind'Amour said Friday. "We'll have to make those decisions really soon and figure that out."

In another development Friday, Nikishin has switched his representation and signed with agent Paul Theofanous, whose clients include Kochetkov and Canes goalie Cayden Primeau.

Kochetkov, 27, missed almost all the entire 2025-26 season to have surgery for a lower-body injury, going 6-2-0, with a 2.33 goals-against average and .899 save percentage in nine games with the Hurricanes.

Kochetkov returned late in the season and was available for the playoffs but did not get into a game.

The Canes will play their fourth and final preseason game on the road Saturday against the Predators and will have a veteran lineup for the first time.

"Anyone who hasn't played will be playing," Brind'Amour said.

The Hurricanes open the regular season against the Florida Panthers on Tuesday at the Lenovo Center, and will hold a pregame ceremony to raise their new Stanley Cup championship banner.



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As Hurricanes try to go back-to-back, advice from someone familiar who's done it

Chip Alexander

Since winning the Stanley Cup, Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour has spoken about the motivation and inspiration that goes with it.

The Canes, other than captain Jordan Staal and forward Will Carrier, had not won a Cup and were driven to win last season. That was the motivation. And the experience of doing it, Brind'Amour believes, was so inspiring that the players badly want to do it again.

To which Florida Panthers head coach Paul Maurice can relate.

Maurice, once the Canes coach, guided the Panthers to the franchise's first Stanley Cup title in 2024. After much merrymaking — thousands of fans wildly celebrating at the beach — and the passing around of the Cup for a few months, the Panthers came back and did it again in 2025, going back-to-back.

Stanley Cup hangover? What hangover?

"Oh, not a problem," Maurice said this week in an interview after a preseason game against Carolina. "We came back to the rink and were ready to go. We didn't experience that and other teams have. We never talked about it or gave it any credence.

"I think once you get a taste of that, you're far more likely to believe you can do it again and want it again. I think what you have is a belief all year that you can do it."

The Hurricanes, with Brind'Amour as the team captain, had that belief after winning the Cup in 2006, a first for the franchise. But in a season beset with injuries, the Canes did not qualify for the playoffs in 2006-2007, a massive disappointment.

The Panthers hope to be the first stumbling block for the Hurricanes this season. After missing the playoffs and dealing with their own spate of injuries — captain Aleksander Barkov was out all year — the Panthers come to Raleigh on Tuesday for the opening game of the 2026-27 season.

After twice raising Stanley Cup banners, the Panthers will first watch as the Canes put one up at the Lenovo Center before taking the ice to get things started.

Going back-to-back hasn't been uncommon the past two decades: Pittsburgh did it in 2016 and 2017, and Tampa Bay in 2021 and 2022, before the Panthers' run.

Not that it was a smooth ride for the Panthers in 2025, said Maurice, who coached the Hurricanes to the 2002 Stanley Cup Final and later returned as Canes coach a few years after the Canes had won the Cup in 2006.

"We found it was new ground for us the entire year," Maurice said.

The Panthers, after winning the Atlantic Division with 110 points in 2023-24, finished third in the division the next year with 98. Forward Matthew Tkachuk, who had tormented the

Canes a few times, was injured during the 4 Nations Face-Off event. There was a lull in March before the playoffs began.

And there was the trip to Finland, and the aftermath of it.

The Panthers traveled to Tampere for a pair of games against the Dallas Stars in early November. They won both, but soon after the return lost six of seven games, falling to 12-9-1 for the season.

"It was a difficult schedule for us," Maurice said. "We came back from Finland and we played 10 of 11 playoff teams. It was more a time-zone thing, a jet-lag thing, that we had to get out of our system. After that, we were all right."

That's something for the Hurricanes to keep in mind this season — they go to Helsinki, Finland in mid-November to play the Seattle Kraken in a pair of games.

Maurice believes his team started to bounce back in November 2024 — against the Hurricanes.

In a home-and-home, back-to-back set to end the month, the Panthers took a 6-3 win in Raleigh and then notched a 6-0 shutout at home.

"We kind of took it out of the garage in those two games," Maurice said. "After that, we were all right. We were a pretty good team and then we had some pockets where we were a very good team."

The Panthers lost five in a row in late March and early April, not that Maurice was worried. Not after adding veteran forward Brad Marchand and defenseman Seth Jones before the NHL trade deadline.

Talk about home-run swings. General manager Bill Zito pulled Marchand out of Boston after 16 years with the Bruins. He brought in Jones in a trade with Chicago.

"A great shot in the arm," Maurice said of the moves.

The Panthers began each playoff series on the road — at Tampa Bay, Toronto, and then Carolina in the Eastern Conference final, which Florida won in five games.

The Stanley Cup final began in Edmonton with an overtime loss. But the Panthers won Game 2 in double overtime -- Marchand with the winning goal -- and the series in six games in defeating and deflating the Oilers for a second straight season.

"We came out of that trade deadline, and we knew we had a chance," Maurice said. "That just fired everybody up. We were so excited."

Come Tuesday, it will be game on: Hurricanes and Panthers, the two most recent Stanley Cup champions. A new season begins.

Or as Brind'Amour put it, it's about trying to "climb the mountain" again.



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Hurricanes are defending champs, Panthers look loaded up for a run as the biggest NHL season begins

Stephen Whyno

The Carolina Hurricanes head into the NHL season as the defending Stanley Cup champion. But they will have a host of challengers led by Colorado, Florida, Dallas, Edmonton and more.

Cruising through the regular season and the playoffs with the most dominant run in the NHL since the late 1980s, the Carolina Hurricanes go into this season as the defending Stanley Cup champion everyone else is looking to knock off.

"It kind of gives you something to chase after," Montreal's 51-goal scorer Cole Caufield said.

There is no shortage of challengers near and far chasing Carolina.

Florida is not far removed from back-to-back titles, gets captain Aleksander Barkov back from injury and loaded up by acquiring Brady Tkachuk to play with brother Matthew. Tampa Bay remains formidable in the East with several young teams on the rise, while Colorado, Dallas, Vegas and Edmonton are still the best in the West.

Those contenders and the rest of the league's 32 teams will each get two extra games before the playoffs begin in April in the first expansion of the regular season in more than three decades. They will combine to play 1,344 games — the most in history — before 16 get the chance pursue hockey's hallowed Cup.

"You're just trying to build momentum," Avalanche captain Gabriel Landeskog said. "You're trying to make your team better every single day. And then at the end of the day, you'll see where you stack up and if you can play your best hockey at the most important time of the year."

Carolina sets the standard

The Hurricanes finally got over the hump in their eighth consecutive postseason appearance, which followed a series of agonizing exits. Their 16-3 postseason record trails only Wayne Gretzky's 16-2 Oilers in 1988 since four rounds of best-of-seven series became the standard in 1987.

Except for goaltender Frederik Andersen, Carolina brings back virtually the same roster and appear to be the class of the Metropolitan Division after running away with it last year. Defenseman Jaccob Slavin does not think being everyone's target is a big adjustment for him and his teammates, who have amassed the most total wins in the league since the start of the 2018-19 season when coach Rod Brind'Amour took over.

"I feel like multiple years in a row, teams know that going to Carolina or when Carolina comes in, it's going to be a hard

night," Slavin said. "Teams always have been giving us their best for years now, and winning the Cup just adds to that."

Florida is back with a vengeance

Before torn ligaments in Barkov's right knee and a series of other high-profile injuries derailed the Panthers last season and caused them to miss the playoffs, they hoisted the Stanley Cup back to back in 2024 and '25 as part of a streak of three trips to the final.

They got extra time off after so much time on the ice took a toll and had the chance to reset. The core of Barkov, Matthew Tkachuk, Sam Reinhart, Sam Bennett, Anton Lundell, Gustav Forsling and Aaron Ekblad remains in place, augmented by Brady Tkachuk, Seth Jones, Brad Marchand and a pair of new goalies, Jacob Markstrom and Akira Schmid.

Florida is the favorite to run it back for a third championship in four years.

"Of course that's our dream, that's our goal, but for us it's always been a day at a time," Barkov said. "We don't think too much ahead. We only live in the moment, try to live in a moment. And that's what it is. Of course we added unreal players, we added real leaders to our team and we're really excited about that."

Western Conference is a gantlet

The best player in the world, Connor McDavid, has now played 11 NHL seasons without winning the Cup, including a gut-wrenching Game 7 loss in the 2024 final against Florida and a six-game Final loss to the Panthers the following year.

This may be one of the last chances for the Oilers to show him they can do it; McDavid signed a two-year extension through 2028 without a raise to give management salary cap space — and a deadline — to figure it out.

Edmonton is turning to Mike Babcock to lead the way, much to the surprise of franchise icon and five-time champion Mark Messier, who questioned the old-school taskmaster coach getting the endorsement of McDavid and other leaders.

"I am absolutely shocked they hired him," Messier, now an ESPN analyst, said on a conference call Wednesday. "I'm absolutely shocked from the stories that I heard from very good, reputable, character people about the way they were treated. It's been no secret. ... I am just horrified about the whole thing, to be honest."

To bring the Cup back to Canada for the first time since 1993, the Oilers almost certainly have to go through the defending Western Conference champion Golden Knights



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and a Central Division power like the Avalanche, Stars or Wild.

Dallas is hoping to bounce back from a first-round exit against Minnesota. Colorado, which won it all in 2022, has one more season before standout defenseman Cale Makar begins the richest contract in league history, while he, Nathan MacKinnon and others are still firmly in their prime.

"Pressure is a privilege, and it has to be embraced," Landeskog said. "It's not to say that you go every single day of the regular season and wake up thinking, 'Oh, it's Cup or

bust.' But I think you're aware of it. You know where your team's at. Everybody knows it."

Nobody knows which team will be the last one standing in June. The puck will drop more times than ever before figuring out hockey's next champion.



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Takeaways From The 2026 Preseason

Walt Ruff

September 27, 2026

RALEIGH, N.C. - Sunrise. Raleigh. Greensboro. Nashville.

Following four games in four different cities in six days, the 2026 preseason has officially come and gone in the blink of an eye.

There wasn't a ton of mystery entering the slate of tune-ups for Carolina, who are methodically set to run back most of their championship-winning roster from just three short months ago, but they were important contests nonetheless.

Sure, who fills Seth Jarvis' void for a month or so is of interest, and who claims the sixth and seventh roles on defense is of note, but both have a variety of options and are in good hands no matter which decision is made.

The reality is that, in both of those cases, it won't be just one player winning each role and staying there permanently either. Things can, and will, change.

But they were competitions after all, and each took steps toward a result over the stretch.

Now, with just one day remaining until we get our answers, let's take a look back at some of the lasting impressions of the week that was.

Rest Is A Weapon...

Meticulously holding most of their expected roster out of game action until Saturday's exhibition finale in Nashville, the Canes showed that there was no need to be concerned about any sort of rust.

Looking like they were picking up right where they left off on June 14 in Las Vegas, the 6-0 victory over the Predators would be hard to nitpick.

The line of Jackson Blake, Taylor Hall, and Logan Stankoven appeared to be right back to being one of the best lines in all of hockey; Nikolaj Ehlers needed just 13 minutes to record multiple points, and Brandon Bussi was a perfect 22-for-22 in his first full outing.

The power play went three-for-four, and the penalty kill was perfect on all four attempts. What else could you want?

Now, it's about doing it for real.

The roster looked healthy and sharp and starts its regular season with the biggest test imaginable, as the 2024 and 2025 Stanley Cup Champions, the Florida Panthers, arrive in Raleigh to kick off the NHL's 2026-27 campaign at Lenovo Center.

The Future Is (Still) Bright...

With most of the expected 18-skater roster on the sidelines for the first trio of bouts, it was a massive opportunity for the organization's youth to show what they can do against some of the league's best.

Beginning the week with a pair of games against a supremely talented Panthers roster, there were many good things to be taken away from their showings. Among them:

Charlie Cerrato is going to play an important role at center for the Chicago Wolves this season. It will be his first full pro season, but he looks very mature and pro-ready.

2026 third-round draft pick Zach Lansard showed flashes of tremendous promise and hung around with the team until after their third preseason game. He should be dominant for Regina (WHL) this season.

Whether they stick with the big club or not, Bradley Nadeau and Felix Unger Sorum both showed that they can hang and are in position to take the next step.

Greensboro Rocks...

The Lenovo Center will continue to be the Loudest House, but for one night, it was really nice to play in front of a home crowd in a different area of the state.

Nearly 14,000 were there in support at First Horizon Coliseum on Thursday, showing that the Canes really do have excellent support statewide.

The evening would have been a success regardless of the scoreboard, but a comeback of epic proportions cemented the night as a highlight that many will remember for a very long time.



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Hurricanes receive Stanley Cup rings with hidden 'Storm Surge' - ESPN

Greg Wyshynski

The Carolina Hurricanes received their Stanley Cup rings at a team function in Raleigh on Sunday and found them loaded with Easter eggs from their championship run last season.

"Every detail reflects the character of this team from the way we played to the people who made this season unforgettable," said Carolina Hurricanes GM Eric Tolsky.

The rings feature 900 individually set stones, with 9.80 carats of white diamonds and 1.40 carats of natural red rubies.

There are 53 points of diamonds that honor their 53 regular-season wins. There are 69 points of rubies around the interior of the ring to commemorate their regular-season and postseason wins combined, as well as 66 rubies around the ring that reference the 66 goals scored in their playoff run.

Each ring features the phrase "Stress Game" on the side, in reference to their relentless brand of hockey. There's also a rope engraved around the ring. The Hurricanes handed out a rope to their player of the game during the season as a symbol of team unity.

There's also plenty of personalization. The bottom of each ring is engraved with the player's own signature. Once the

ring was opened, players discovered a Stanley Cup puck pendant that can be worn as a necklace, personalized with their numbers.

It's inside the ring where the details most unique to the Hurricanes are found. Once the pendant is removed, there's an image of Stormy, the team's mascot, surrounded by diamonds and rubies. Inside the top of the ring is a row of diamonds surrounding the North Carolina state flag and the words "Carolina Culture."

Just outside of that row of stones, every player's number is listed in a large circle. It's meant to be a homage to the team's "Storm Surge" postgame victory celebration, when the Hurricanes players get in a circle and lead the fans in a "skol!" clap. Carolina performed one on the Vegas Golden Knights' ice after winning the Stanley Cup there last June.

The rings were created for the team by luxury jeweler Jason of Beverly Hills, in collaboration with Hurricanes' leadership. Jason Arasheben, founder and CEO of Jason of Beverly Hills, said that "every element was intentionally designed to honor the team's culture, defining moments and the collective effort" in bringing the Cup back to Raleigh.



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NHL Rumor Roundup: Latest on Marchenko, Nikishin, Tarasenko

Sportsnet Staff

With season openers around the corner, NHL teams are busy evaluating their rosters.

Several significant names remain in play as action on and off the ice heats up.

Here's a look at some players in the headlines:

With Marchenko giving no signs he intends to stay with the Columbus Blue Jackets when his current contract expires, the team has a decision to make on the Russian winger.

Marchenko, 26, will become a restricted free agent after his three-year, \$11.5-million contract expires following this season.

After the Blue Jackets locked in Adam Fantilli to a long-term deal this week, they have a better idea of their cap situation going forward.

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

"The most fascinating thing that the Blue Jackets have to decide is (do) they say 'hey this is a good player, we keep him, we start the year with him, we go,' or do they say 'we're trying to change our room and our group and if the player doesn't want to be here, we move on,'" Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman said on 32 Thoughts: The Podcast on Friday.

To that end, Friedman said, "teams have been circling around him.

"Montreal, everybody knows about, the Islanders I mentioned a couple pods ago," Friedman said. "Toronto I think has really tried to keep their interest secret, but it's kind of seeped out. I think Winnipeg at one point kind of looked into it.

"I heard Boston made an offer at one point. I had some people say Vegas, I had some other people say they weren't sure it was Vegas. I have to think Seattle is around this. They've really been looking at trying to grab a top-end player and they could make this deal."

Marchenko had 27 goals and 40 assists for 67 points in 76 games last season.

The restricted free agent defenseman is not at camp with the Carolina Hurricanes after notching 11 goals and 22 assists in 81 games in his rookie season last year, helping the team win the Stanley Cup.

"Word came to me late Thursday night that he has permission to talk to some teams," Friedman said.

Friedman wondered aloud if Nikishin could be a part of a multi-team trade.

"Nikishin obviously is their key trade chip. What if they're trying to figure out how to do a direct trade for Nikishin, but that's boring.

"What if it's an attempt to do a three-way or (Connor) Hellebuyck or something else. Because I don't think they've given up their hope to get Hellebuyck."

Hellebuyck, of course, has requested a trade from the Winnipeg Jets.

Nikishin is not believed to be interested in signing with the Jets, Friedman reported.

The 23-year-old defenceman is a restricted free agent after playing his second full season with the Detroit Red Wings last year.

"I've heard that Detroit's preference is a bridge (deal), we'll see," Friedman said.

Edvinsson did take part in a skate with the Red Wings on the first day of training camp.

The veteran forward is an unrestricted free agent after putting up 23 goals and 24 assists in 75 games with the Minnesota Wild last season.

"I've heard the Panthers and him have been kind of eyeing each other," Friedman said. "Makes sense, he's played there, (and Brad) Marchand is hurt for now."

The Panthers acquired Tarasenko from the Ottawa Senators at the 2024 trade deadline, and he went on to win a Stanley Cup with Florida.



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Hurricanes Make Cuts For Opening Night

Bob Wage

One big question regarding the Carolina Hurricanes was, who makes the big club, Bradley Nadeau or Felix Unger Sorum? On Sunday, that question was answered when both players were assigned to Chicago.

Defenseman, Juuso Valimaki was put on waivers for the intent of sending him to Chicago as well.

Seth Jarvis will be put on IR and they will remove him from the roster.

Charles Alexis Legault and Mike Reilly will be vying for the 6th defenseman position. Nic Deslauriers and Jesperi Kotkaniemi will fight for the 12th forward spot. Looks like Eric Robinson will slide into the first line.

The team kept Cayden Primeau rather than subject him to waivers so now they are carrying three goalies for the time being.

What's next? They still have the issue of what to do with Alexander Nikishin.

Eric Tulsky will have a press conference at 10:30 Monday morning. We will see what he has to say.



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Hurricanes Start Season In September To Play 84 Games

Dallin Ballard

Hurricanes Start Season In September To Play 84 Games

The NHL regular season does not start in October anymore. The 2026-27 campaign begins on Tuesday, Sept. 29, marking a shift that catches many fans off guard. This change comes from a new deal that added two extra games to the schedule. According to Yahoo Sports, the league moved the start date to allow teams to play an even number of games against their division rivals. The Carolina Hurricanes will be the first team on the ice for this new era.

Raleigh gets the spotlight on opening night as the defending champions. The Hurricanes will raise their Stanley Cup banner before they face the Florida Panthers. Florida won back-to-back titles in 2024 and 2025, so this is a massive test right out of the gate. The game takes place at the Lenovo Center at 5 p.m. ET on ESPN. The league also scheduled the Vegas Golden Knights to play the Chicago Blackhawks on the same night. Per Yahoo Sports, the full opening slate features five games total, including an ESPN tripleheader.

A Longer Grind for Every Team

Adding two games might seem small, but it changes how the whole season plays out. The schedule grew from 82 games to 84 under the latest collective-bargaining agreement. This extra load means the regular season runs longer than usual. Teams must stay healthy through April to reach the playoffs. The final day of the regular season is set for April 10, when all 32 teams will be in action. That late finish gives the league more time for international games and special events.

By 5 p.m. ET on Monday, Sept. 28, teams must finalize their opening-day rosters. Every squad must stay under the \$104 million salary cap by that deadline. The Columbus Blue Jackets were over the limit on Saturday, but they fixed it by placing veteran Miles Wood on waivers. More players will hit the waiver wire on Sunday as teams trim the fat. On Sunday, the New York Islanders signed Logan Stanley, a defenseman, to a one-year contract to address a shortage. These roster moves happen fast before the first puck drops.

Global Games and Special Dates

The 84-game schedule opens up room for the league to go global. On Oct. 25, the Winnipeg Jets and Montreal Canadiens will face off outdoors in Winnipeg for the Heritage Classic. The Hurricanes take their show on the road to Helsinki, Finland, on Nov. 12 and Nov. 14 to face the Seattle Kraken. Later in the year, the Ottawa Senators and Chicago Blackhawks will play in Dusseldorf, Germany, on Dec. 18 and Dec. 20. The Winter Classic returns on Dec. 31 at the University of Utah's Rice-Eccles Stadium. The Colorado Avalanche will visit the Utah Mammoth for that historic matchup.

All-Star weekend lands in Elmont, New York, on Feb. 5 and Feb. 6 at UBS Arena. The skills competition happens on the 5th, while the main All-Star Game takes place on the 6th. The league plans to use new formats for these events this season. The trade deadline arrives on March 1 at 3 p.m. ET. These dates create a busy calendar that keeps fans glued to the screen. As Walt Ruff noted on Hurricanes.com, the preseason is over and the real work begins now. The team looked sharp in their 6-0 win over Nashville, and they have no time to rest before facing Florida.



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Hurricanes Brace For Seth Jarvis Absence To Start The Season

Dallin Ballard

The defending Stanley Cup champions face a brutal test right out of the gate. The start of the 2026-27 campaign will be missed by Seth Jarvis while he recovers from shoulder surgery. This is a massive blow to a team that just won it all. According to reports, the injury timeline suggests he might not return until November or even December. The Hurricanes cannot afford to lose their top scoring threat for half the season.

Goaltending Reliance

With their star winger sidelined, the pressure shifts heavily to the net. Frederik Andersen is now playing in Edmonton, leaving a gap in the crease. The team must hope that Brandon Bussi and Pyotr Kochetkov stay effective for a full season. RotoWire notes that the goaltender tandem is now the key to their success. If they falter, the offense will have to

work twice as hard to win games. The season hangs on whether these two can step up immediately.

Florida's Gamble

While Carolina deals with injuries, their biggest rival is trying to reload. Sports Illustrated reports that the Florida Panthers are banking on new faces to replace their losses. GM Bill Zito made a bold move to bring in Brady Tkachuk, who put up 59 points last season. If he duplicates that, he'd out-point every returning Panther from last year except Sam Reinhart. The Panthers lost key players like Evan Rodrigues and A.J. Greer via trade. They are counting on a healthy Aleksander Barkov to carry the load again. This rivalry will define the early season standings.



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SportScan

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

1224814 Carolina Hurricanes

As Hurricanes try to go back-to-back, advice from someone familiar who's done it

Chip Alexander6-7 minutes 27/09/2026

Since winning the Stanley Cup, Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour has spoken about the motivation and inspiration that goes with it.

The Canes, other than captain Jordan Staal and forward Will Carrier, had not won a Cup and were driven to win last season. That was the motivation. And the experience of doing it, Brind'Amour believes, was so inspiring that the players badly want to do it again.

To which Florida Panthers head coach Paul Maurice can relate.

Maurice, once the Canes coach, guided the Panthers to the franchise's first Stanley Cup title in 2024. After much merrymaking — thousands of fans wildly celebrating at the beach — and the passing around of the Cup for a few months, the Panthers came back and did it again in 2025, going back-to-back.

Stanley Cup hangover? What hangover?

"Oh, not a problem," Maurice said this week in an interview after a preseason game against Carolina. "We came back to the rink and were ready to go. We didn't experience that and other teams have. We never talked about it or gave it any credence.

"I think once you get a taste of that, you're far more likely to believe you can do it again and want it again. I think what you have is a belief all year that you can do it."

The Hurricanes, with Brind'Amour as the team captain, had that belief after winning the Cup in 2006, a first for the franchise. But in a season beset with injuries, the Canes did not qualify for the playoffs in 2006-2007, a massive disappointment.

The Panthers hope to be the first stumbling block for the Hurricanes this season. After missing the playoffs and dealing with their own spate of injuries — captain Aleksander Barkov was out all year — the Panthers come to Raleigh on Tuesday for the opening game of the 2026-27 season.

After twice raising Stanley Cup banners, the Panthers will first watch as the Canes put one up at the Lenovo Center before taking the ice to get things started.

Going back-to-back hasn't been uncommon the past two decades: Pittsburgh did it in 2016 and 2017, and Tampa Bay in 2021 and 2022, before the Panthers' run.



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Not that it was a smooth ride for the Panthers in 2025, said Maurice, who coached the Hurricanes to the 2002 Stanley Cup Final and later returned as Canes coach a few years after the Canes had won the Cup in 2006.

"We found it was new ground for us the entire year," Maurice said.

The Panthers, after winning the Atlantic Division with 110 points in 2023-24, finished third in the division the next year with 98. Forward Matthew Tkachuk, who had tormented the Canes a few times, was injured during the 4 Nations Face-Off event. There was a lull in March before the playoffs began.

And there was the trip to Finland, and the aftermath of it.

The Panthers traveled to Tampere for a pair of games against the Dallas Stars in early November. They won both, but soon after the return lost six of seven games, falling to 12-9-1 for the season.

"It was a difficult schedule for us," Maurice said. "We came back from Finland and we played 10 of 11 playoff teams. It was more a time-zone thing, a jet-lag thing, that we had to get out of our system. After that, we were all right."

That's something for the Hurricanes to keep in mind this season — they go to Helsinki, Finland in mid-November to play the Seattle Kraken in a pair of games.

Maurice believes his team started to bounce back in November 2024 — against the Hurricanes.

In a home-and-home, back-to-back set to end the month, the Panthers took a 6-3 win in Raleigh and then notched a 6-0 shutout at home.

"We kind of took it out of the garage in those two games," Maurice said. "After that, we were all right. We were a pretty good team and then we had some pockets where we were a very good team."

The Panthers lost five in a row in late March and early April, not that Maurice was worried. Not after adding veteran forward Brad Marchand and defenseman Seth Jones before the NHL trade deadline.

Talk about home-run swings. General manager Bill Zito pulled Marchand out of Boston after 16 years with the Bruins. He brought in Jones in a trade with Chicago.

"A great shot in the arm," Maurice said of the moves.

The Panthers began each playoff series on the road — at Tampa Bay, Toronto, and then Carolina in the Eastern Conference final, which Florida won in five games.

The Stanley Cup final began in Edmonton with an overtime loss. But the Panthers won Game 2 in double overtime — Marchand with the winning goal — and the series in six games in defeating and deflating the Oilers for a second straight season.

"We came out of that trade deadline, and we knew we had a chance," Maurice said. "That just fired everybody up. We were so excited."

Come Tuesday, it will be game on: Hurricanes and Panthers, the two most recent Stanley Cup champions. A new season begins.

Or as Brind'Amour put it, it's about trying to "climb the mountain" again.

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Profile Image of Chip Alexander

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

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The Athletic / NHL waiver tracker: Best players on the wire throughout 2026-27 preseason

By Corey Pronman and Harman Dayal

Sept. 27, 2026

As NHL teams trim their rosters before the regular season, The Athletic's Corey Pronman and Harman Dayal will provide analysis of the top players placed on waivers. Once a player is waived, the rest of the league has 24 hours to put in a claim for him. If a player goes unclaimed, they can be assigned by their team to the minor leagues.

Sunday, Sept. 27

Monday is the deadline for NHL teams to submit their cap-compliant, opening-night rosters.

All players on waivers: Laurent Brossoit (Ducks), Travis Mitchell (Ducks), Henri Jokiharju (Bruins), Juuso Valimäki (Hurricanes), Landon Slaggert (Blackhawks), Dominic Toninato (Blackhawks), Wyatt Aamodt (Avalanche), Adam Beckman (Avalanche), Vinnie Hinostroza (Avalanche), Fabian Lysell (Avalanche), Keaton Middleton (Avalanche), Tristen Nielsen (Avalanche), Colin Blackwell (Stars), Matt Tomkins (Oilers), Nathan Bastian (Panthers), John Beecher (Panthers), Sam Lafferty (Panthers), Alexander Petrovic (Panthers), Cole Reinhardt (Panthers), Kai Schwindt (Panthers), Cole Schwindt (Panthers), Donovan Sebrango (Panthers), Alex Belzile (Canadiens), Brett Berard (Canadiens), Kaapo Kahkonen (Canadiens), Hunter McKown (Canadiens), Sasha Pastujov (Canadiens), Samuel Poulin (Canadiens), Ethan Samson (Canadiens), Maksymilian Szuber (Canadiens), Reilly Walsh (Canadiens), Ilya Lyubushkin (Predators), Nick Perbix (Predators), Vladislav Kolyachonok (Devils), Marc McLaughlin (Devils), David Rittich (Devils), Riley Tuft (Devils), Topias Vilen (Devils), Colin White (Devils), Vítek Vaněček (Islanders), Dylan Garand (Rangers), Taylor Raddysch (Rangers), Sammy Blais (Senators), Samuel Bolduc (Senators), Tyler Boucher (Senators), Xavier Bourgault (Senators), Philippe Daoust (Senators), Christian Kyrro (Senators), Ryan Suzuki (Senators), Philip Tomasino (Senators), Ilya Samsonov (Sharks), Georgii Romanov (Blues), Calle Rosen (Blues), Nicholas Abruzzese (Lightning), Michael Callahan (Lightning), Maxim Groshev (Lightning), Jakov Pelletier (Lightning), Mads Søgaard (Lightning), Ben McCartney (Mammoth), Nikita Tolopilo (Canucks), Ville Heinola (Golden Knights), Alexander Holtz (Golden Knights), Tanner Laczynski (Golden Knights), Jonas Røndbjerg (Golden Knights), Antti Tuomisto (Golden Knights), Louie Belpedio (Capitals), Jonny Brodzinski (Capitals), Spencer Smallman (Capitals), Clay Stevenson (Capitals), Henry Thrun (Jets), Danny Zhilkin (Jets)

Saturday, Sept. 26

Update: Justin Barron was claimed by the St. Louis Blues and Remi Poirier was claimed by the New Jersey Devils. All other players cleared.

Miles Wood, LW, Columbus Blue Jackets

Wood has been a full-time NHL bottom-six winger over the last nine seasons. He has a lot of desirable physical and athletic traits with a heavy 6-foot-2 frame and elite straight-line speed, a combination that he uses to play a disruptive, high-energy style on the forecheck.

With that said, Wood's IQ is a severe limitation of his game, his two-way play-driving numbers have long been very poor and he has a bad tendency to take lots of undisciplined penalties.

Wood raced to eight goals in his first 22 games last season, but his production slowed down toward the end of December, and he suffered an injury on Jan. 1. Injuries have plagued Miles the last couple of years, and he didn't look like himself at all down the stretch, recording zero goals and two assists in 22 games after returning in late January. If he were a league minimum player, a team might bet on a bounce back, but on a \$2.5 million cap hit through 2028-29 it'd be a pretty bold risk to take. — Dayal

Alex Steeves, LW/RW, Boston Bruins

Steeves is a winger with a likable play style who played most of last season with the Bruins and was even part of Team USA at men's worlds. He has legit skill and offensive IQ and can make a lot of difficult plays inside the offensive zone. He works hard at both ends of the ice and doesn't shy away from playing the body. His only true flaw is his skating. He's a below-average skater who struggles with the NHL pace, which has made him more of a tweener. He could conceivably help a team's bottom six, though. — Pronman

Justin Barron, RHD, Nashville Predators

Acquired from Montreal one-for-one in the Alexandre Carrier trade, Barron hasn't taken the step the Predators were hoping for over the last two seasons. However, he may still carry appeal to other teams.

Barron has intriguing physical tools with above-average size at 6-foot-2, decent skating ability and right-handedness. His underlying metrics aren't bad, either; Barron's driven an xG share greater than 50 percent at five-on-five in each of the last two seasons. The problem, though, is that his defensive play is quite inconsistent and he doesn't bring much else to the table in terms of penalty killing, puck-moving or secondary offense.

However, at 24, Barron is still young enough, especially with his pedigree as a first-round pick from 2020, that another team might believe it can unlock slightly more out of him. — Dayal

Other players on waivers: Lukas Reichel (Bruins), Alexander Nylander (Flames), Remi Poirier (Stars), Tobias Björnfort (Panthers), Angus Crookshank (Panthers), Casey Fitzgerald (Panthers), Scott Perunovich (Kings), Taylor Ward (Kings), Mitchell Chaffee (Islanders), Pierre Engvall (Islanders), Liam Foudy (Islanders), Daylan Kuefler (Islanders), Matt Luff (Islanders), Caleb Jones (Penguins), Justin Holl (Capitals)

Friday, Sept. 25

Update: Andreas Englund was claimed by the Detroit Red Wings and William Trudeau was claimed by the Nashville Predators. All other players cleared.

Nathan Gaucher, C, Anaheim Ducks

Gaucher is a big center who plays hard and has been a quality two-way pivot for a while. He has some skill, but lacks offensive sense and overall doesn't make many plays with the puck. He skates fine for his size, but his game can lack pace. His value comes down to the fact that he's a physical center who gives it his best every game and is quite good defensively. He can play tough minutes and kills penalties very well. He projects as a bottom-six forward or a fourth-line center. — Pronman

Pierre-Olivier Joseph, LHD, Carolina Hurricanes

Joseph is an experienced depth defenseman with over 200 games of NHL experience. He's a smooth skater, can play both the left and right sides, is 6-foot-2 and can competently handle sheltered third-pair minutes. Joseph does have some drawbacks: He isn't very physical (he's actually quite lanky), his compete level doesn't stand out and he's only been a part-time penalty killer. Those are traits that teams typically look for in a No. 6 defenseman.

The Canucks were outscored by a wide margin with Joseph on the ice last season, but his underlying metrics were quite good: Vancouver controlled 49 percent of scoring chances during his five-on-five shifts, which is solid considering how woeful the team was.

Overall, Joseph profiles as a run-of-the-mill No. 7/8 defender and would be useful to a team if they're short on veteran blue-line insurance. — Dayal

Justin Robidas, C, Carolina Hurricanes

Robidas was one of the better forwards in the AHL regular season and postseason. He's tiny, but his game is full of speed, skill and energy. He projects as a high-end NHL skater. He's a legit 5-foot-8, which puts him on the bubble for the NHL, and Carolina is too good for him to likely make the team, but he could be an intriguing dice roll for someone else. — Pronman

Brandon Tanev, LW, Utah Mammoth

Tanev has carved out a long career as an energy winger with blazing speed and plus defensive value. His skill set is clearly valued around the



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NHL, as evidenced by the six-year contract that the Penguins signed him to in 2019 and the three-year deal he procured from the Mammoth in the summer of 2025.

However, at 34, it appears Father Time may be catching up to him. Tanev drove just a 45.8 percent xG at five-on-five last season, the Mammoth were outscored 23-8 with him on the ice and he slumped to zero goals and three assists in 56 games. In other words, he didn't perform at an NHL level.

Tanev's excellent track record before last season means that teams could still be interested in betting on a bounce back, but we'll see if his \$2.5 million cap hit scares clubs off.

Ryan Johnson, LHD, Buffalo Sabres

Johnson is a high-end skating defenseman who has played a handful of NHL games over the last few years. He has a skill set similar to Dennis Cholowski, whom teams have given second chances to before. He can transport pucks very well and makes a good outlet pass, but he's not overly skilled offensively or hard to play against defensively. — Pronman

Other players on waivers: Sean Farrell (Ducks), James Hamblin (Ducks), Corey Schueneman (Ducks), Jett Woo (Ducks), Brendan Gaunce (Bruins), Brian Halonen (Bruins), Jordan Harris (Bruins), Jiri Patera (Bruins), Billy Sweezey (Bruins), Mason Geertsen (Sabres), Dennis Gilbert (Sabres), Trevor Kuntar (Sabres), Aidan McDonough (Sabres), Carson Meyer (Sabres), Jason Polin (Sabres), Matt Villalta (Sabres), Skyler Brind'Amour (Hurricanes), Aleksii Heimosalmi (Hurricanes), Juha Jaaska (Hurricanes), Corson Ceulemans (Blue Jackets), Colton White (Blue Jackets), Michael Benning (Flames), Andreas Englund (Flames), Dryden Hunt (Flames), Ben Jones (Flames), Rory Kerins (Flames), Jake Livingstone (Flames), Sam Morton (Flames), William Strömberg (Flames), Connor Mackey (Blackhawks), Josh Brown (Oilers), Riley Stillman (Oilers), Eduard Tralmaks (Oilers), Hunter Skinner (Predators), Anton Blidh (Rangers), Marc Del Gaizo (Rangers), Glenn Gawdin (Rangers), William Trudeau (Rangers), Eric Comrie (Sharks), Jimmy Huntington (Sharks), Jack Finley (Blues), Oskar Sundqvist (Blues), Nathan Walker (Blues), Simon Lundmark (Lightning), Olivier Rodrigue (Lightning), Steven Santini (Lightning), Zachary Jones (Mammoth), Joshua Roy (Mammoth), Joshua Dunne (Capitals), Mitchell Gibson (Capitals), Jacob MacDonald (Capitals), Bogdan Trineyev (Capitals), Nikita Chibrikov (Jets), Parker Ford (Jets), Noah Gregor (Jets), Isaak Phillips (Jets)

Thursday, Sept. 24

Update: Leevi Meriläinen was claimed by the Vancouver Canucks. All other players cleared.

Carson Lambos, LHD, Minnesota Wild

Lambos hasn't broken through in the NHL yet, but he's a highly mobile defenseman who plays hard. The offense and sense in his game are questions that have grown in concern over time, but the hope is he can make enough plays with his skating to take a regular shift. A first-round pick by the Wild in 2021, it would not surprise me if a team looked at him as a change-of-scenery type. — Pronman

Steven Lorentz, C, Toronto Maple Leafs

Most of the time when we're discussing waiver targets, we're analyzing bubble players who have split time between the NHL and AHL. That's not the case for Lorentz; he's played 381 NHL games over the last six seasons and hasn't suited up for a single AHL game since 2019-20, when he was 23.

Lorentz is a 6-foot-4 fourth-liner who can line up on the wing or at center and won the Stanley Cup with Florida in 2024. He's limited offensively, but checks hard, brings energy, boasts above-average defensive metrics and kills penalties.

Leevi Meriläinen, G, Ottawa Senators

Meriläinen is coming off a very challenging season in Ottawa, but his talent and potential are legitimately promising. In his age-22 season in 2024-25, Meriläinen posted strong results in the AHL (.913 save percentage in 37 games) and was stellar during his brief cup of coffee in the NHL, delivering a .925 save percentage in 12 games.

That was enough to convince the Senators he was ready for backup duties, but it all came crashing down last season. Meriläinen slumped to

an .860 save percentage in 20 games, which shattered his confidence and nearly cost Ottawa a playoff spot.

With that said, Meriläinen just turned 24 this summer, and the immense promise he showed in 2024-25 can't be forgotten.

Ronan Seeley, LHD, Carolina Hurricanes

Seeley got one NHL game last season and was a good AHL defenseman. He doesn't stand out at either end, but he's a good skater with a high hockey IQ who can contribute two-way value. Given he has average size, there would be a clearer path for him to being an NHL regular if he played a bit harder. — Pronman

Other players on waivers: Viktor Neuchev (Hurricanes), Zachary Sawchenko (Hurricanes), Kyle Burroughs (Stars), Matthew Semanoff (Stars), Martin Chromiak (Kings), Cole Guttman (Kings), Joe Hicketts (Kings), Lane Pederson (Kings), Francesco Pinelli (Kings), Caedan Bankier (Wild), Dylan Gambrell (Wild), Matt Kiersted (Wild), Justin Kirkland (Wild), Tyler Pitlick (Wild), Roman Schmidt (Wild), Mason Shaw (Wild), Matthew Murray (Predators), Philip Kemp (Penguins), Brendan Brisson (Maple Leafs), Vinni Lettieri (Maple Leafs), Philippe Myers (Maple Leafs), Michael Pezzetta (Maple Leafs), Marshall Rifai (Maple Leafs), Henrik Rybinski (Maple Leafs), Ryan Tverberg (Maple Leafs), Matthew Stienburg (Canucks)

Wednesday, Sept. 23

Update: All players cleared.

Jonas Johansson, G, Tampa Bay Lightning

Johansson was Tampa Bay's full-time backup over the last three seasons. The 31-year-old has largely struggled in that timeframe, posting an .889 save percentage and a minus-25 goals saved above expected rating, which ranks fifth-worst among all NHL goalies. It's a bit puzzling that he's lasted this long in the NHL considering those numbers, but he's found big-league work across four different organizations since 2021, so he clearly has some tools teams and goalie evaluators fancy. — Dayal

Spencer Martin, G, New York Rangers

Martin has been a third-string goalie over the last several years. There are certainly times, especially during points of his stint in Vancouver, where he's flashed the kind of NHL play that you might expect from a full-time backup, but he's proven far too inconsistent over his career. Martin can be a competent option to deliver a handful of NHL starts in an emergency injury situation, and he's a likable personality and teammate, which matters with depth goaltenders, but rely on him any longer than that and you're probably going to be in trouble. — Dayal

Ozzy Wiesblatt, RW, Nashville Predators

Wiesblatt is a very good skating winger who plays hard and has a high overall compete level. He has decent hands, but the pure offense in his game is a bit bland, especially for a smaller winger. He projects as a depth option for an organization. — Pronman

Carl Grundstrom, RW, Philadelphia Flyers

Grundstrom is a well-traveled 28-year-old who has shown he can be a decent two-way winger. He's a physical, hard-to-play-against type who moves and handles the puck well enough, although he's not overly instinctive with the puck. He could still be a useful fourth-liner.

Zach Aston-Reese, LW, Philadelphia Flyers

Aston-Reese is a veteran fourth-line forward with over 400 games of NHL experience. He's very limited offensively (he's never hit the 20-point mark in a single season), but he can kill penalties and brings plus defensive value, driving an xG share greater than 50 percent in seven of his 10 NHL seasons. It's worth noting, though, that Aston-Reese's underlying metrics took a hit last season and he's 32 now, so age-related decline may be a concern. In any case, he'd be a serviceable 13th forward if a team is looking for some experienced insurance. — Dayal

Jack Studnicka, C, Philadelphia Flyers

Studnicka is a speedy, hardworking forward who has bounced between the NHL and AHL over the last few seasons. He's a natural center and can play down the middle if necessary, but in my viewings, he's been more comfortable and effective on the wing because he's subpar in the faceoff circle and a bit too skinny and lean. Studnicka can bring pace and



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energy, but he's a tweener role-wise because his offense has never really translated in the NHL (16 points in 126 career games), he isn't a defensive ace and isn't big and heavy enough to provide a physical edge. — Dayal

Ethan Cardwell, RW, San Jose Sharks

Cardwell is a good to very good skater who can burn past opponents. He has some hands and creativity, but his vision is just average, and he's a bit of a tweener as a small, yet not offensively dynamic forward. — Pronman

Other players on waivers: Maxence Guenette (Bruins), Pheonix Copley (Blue Jackets), James Malatesta (Blue Jackets), Owen Sillinger (Blue Jackets), Domenick Fensore (Avalanche), Christian Wolanin (Avalanche), Ronnie Attard (Red Wings), Wilmer Skoog (Red Wings), Cam Dineen (Flyers), Nolan Foote (Flyers), Danila Klimovich (Flyers), Taylor Gauthier (Penguins), Tye Felhaber (Sharks), Libor Hajek (Sharks), Cole McWard (Maple Leafs), Dakota Mermis (Maple Leafs), Cameron Hebig (Mammoth), Montana Onyebuchi (Mammoth), Jaxson Stauber (Mammoth), Cole Clayton (Canucks), Trey Fix-Wolansky (Canucks), Jimmy Schultdt (Canucks), Jeremy Davies (Golden Knights), Jakub Demek (Golden Knights), Joe Fleming (Golden Knights), Adam Ginning (Golden Knights), Jaycob Megna (Golden Knights)

Tuesday, Sept. 22

Update: All players cleared.

Urho Vaakanainen, LHD, New York Rangers

Vaakanainen is a great skating defenseman who is a bit of a vanilla player outside of that one particular trait. The Rangers are his third NHL team, and they added a lot of defensive depth this offseason. On a lesser defense unit, he could still be a useful player. He makes a decent first pass and has OK skill, though he's not a natural puck-mover, and he's not overly hard to play against. — Pronman

Juuso Parssinen, C, New York Rangers

Parssinen is a decent-sized center with good hands who plays hard. His skating is OK for his size; he's not a burner, but he moves fine. The pure sense and offense in his game are never going to excite people, but he could be a useful depth center with size for a team looking to add at that position. — Pronman

Jacob Bryson, LHD, Detroit Red Wings

Bryson is a No. 7/8 defenseman with over 300 games of NHL experience, who suited up for 50 games split between the Sabres and Jets last season. At 5-foot-9, Bryson is one of the smallest defensemen in the league. That's always going to be a major knock on him as teams typically like bigger, heavier depth defensemen, but Bryson's skating compensates for it as he ranked 42nd among all NHL defensemen in speed bursts greater than 20 miles per 60 minutes.

Bryson's underlying results were respectable in ultra-sheltered usage, as the Sabres controlled 50.1 percent of scoring chances and a 50 percent goal share during his five-on-five shifts. However, Lindy Ruff never fully trusted Bryson — he averaged just 10:02 per game. That lack of faith in the third pair is what prompted the club to acquire Logan Stanley and Luke Schenn from the Jets. Bryson could be a serviceable No. 7/8 if a team's desperate for an experienced veteran that can inject some speed on the back end. — Dayal

Ethan Bear, RHD, New York Islanders

At one point in 2022-23, Bear wasn't just a cromulent depth defenseman; he profiled like a legitimate No. 4/5. Bear averaged 18:32 per game for the Canucks that season and won his matchups, with the club generating more shots and goals than they surrendered with him on the ice at five-on-five.

However, Bear suffered a shoulder injury playing for Canada at the worlds that summer, and it's been tough sledding since then. He signed with the Capitals in 2023-24, but his play fell off a cliff. During the last two years, he's been a full-time AHL player.

It's very unlikely that Bear can hold up against NHL competition at this stage in his career, but his name is at least worth a mention because of his pedigree and big-league experience. — Dayal

Dennis Cholowski, LHD, New York Rangers

Cholowski has bounced around a ton, suiting up for four different NHL teams since the 2021-22 season. He's spent more time in the minors than in the NHL over the last few seasons, but he always seems to resurface for big-league duties when injuries strike. Cholowski can skate decently, but he looked overmatched at times when he was in the lineup for New Jersey last season. — Dayal

Other players on waivers: Brandon Halverson (Stars), Cameron Butler (Red Wings), Sheldon Dries (Red Wings), William Lagesson (Red Wings), John Leonard (Red Wings), Dominik Shine (Red Wings), Jake Lucchini (Predators), Henrik Tikkonen (Islanders), Justin Dowling (Rangers), Ludwig Persson (Capitals)

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The Athletic / NHL waiver targets: The 10 biggest names available after final roster cuts

By Corey Pronman and Harman Dayal

Sept. 27, 2026

Monday is the deadline for NHL teams to submit their cap-compliant, opening-night rosters. Teams were forced to make their final cuts Sunday, which resulted in a massive dump of players landing on waivers.

Let's take a look at some of the most intriguing players available on the wire.

Tyler Boucher, RW, Ottawa Senators

Boucher was the No. 10 pick in 2021 and has been up and down as a pro with a litany of injury issues over the years. The talent is good enough: He can skate and has decent hands. The attractive part of his game is that he's a very physical winger who can land crushing hits. His hockey sense and overall scoring touch are quite limited. He might benefit from a change of scenery.

Henri Jokiharju, RHD, Boston Bruins

The Bruins signed Jokiharju, a 27-year-old right-shot defender, to a three-year, \$9 million contract in the summer of 2025. However, he wasn't really a fit under Marco Sturm, suiting up in only 41 games for Boston in 2025-26 and becoming a regular healthy scratch at times. Boston's acquisitions of Will Borgen and Connor Clifton beefed up the team's right-side blue line depth, making Jokiharju expendable.

Who will win the 2026 NHL Rookie of the Year Award?

Jokiharju is an interesting player. He's proven he's NHL-caliber, with almost 500 games of experience, and has never averaged below 17:30 per game in a season, meaning he can handle a greater workload than your typical No. 6/7 defenseman. Jokiharju has a decent first pass, and his underlying metrics are respectable — he had a positive impact on the Bruins' ability to control shots and expected goals, and the club had a plus-four goal differential during his five-on-five shifts last season. That's notable because his minutes and matchups weren't excessively sheltered.

With that said, he's far from a perfect player. He's inconsistent defensively and only a part-time penalty killer, he isn't all that rugged or physical, and he doesn't really chip in with secondary offense. Teams sometimes shy away from defenders who lack those traits.

Jokiharju can capably munch 17-18 minutes per game on the right side with respectable results, but be prepared for some highs and lows and don't expect it to look pretty stylistically. If he were on a cheap contract, he'd be a no-brainer claim for a team given his handedness and experience, but at a \$3 million cap hit, teams will have to think twice.

Fabian Lysell, RW, Colorado Avalanche

Lysell is a dynamic but frustrating winger. He's a clear NHL-level skater and puck handler who can make high-level plays in transition. His east-west game isn't as noteworthy, though, and his effort can wane, with Lysell often sticking to the perimeter. If it ever clicks for him, he has the talent to be a middle-six winger, but he can be a headache for an organization, too.

David Rittich, G, New Jersey Devils

Rittich is a steady veteran journeyman goaltender who has played for six different NHL teams since the 2020-21 season. He's streaky, but when you look at his body of work over the last three seasons, it's actually quite respectable.

Rittich's .894 save percentage in 30 games last season might seem underwhelming, but it's actually decent when you remember the Islanders under Patrick Roy were one of the league's worst defensive teams. The advanced stats back it up, as Rittich saved 6.8 goals above expected. He had a rough ride in 2024-25 (minus-13.7 goals saved

above expected rating) in L.A., but the year before, he rocked a sparkling .921 save percentage in 21 games (he also played 16 AHL games that season).

Rittich profiles as a bit of a tweener — he's probably a below-average No. 2 goaltender, but an overqualified No. 3. He'd make sense to possibly claim if a team is scrambling for some last-minute NHL-proven insurance in net.

Dylan Garand, G, New York Rangers

Garand has been inconsistent as a pro after a sterling junior career. He has the quickness, technique and reads of a legit pro goaltender, but he is on the smaller side, and although he moves well, he isn't the truly premier athlete you would want for a barely 6-foot goalie. I see the argument for a pickup, but he's probably a No. 3 goalie for an NHL team.

Nick Perbix, RHD, Nashville Predators

Perbix is a run-of-the-mill third-pair caliber defenseman. He was a useful player for Tampa Bay and quietly had very good analytics there, but you have to take that with a grain of salt because Jon Cooper's team is extremely structured and organized (forwards come back very deep to provide excellent puck support on breakouts), which creates a defenseman-friendly environment.

Perbix landed a two-year deal at a \$2.75 million AAV in Nashville in 2025. The Preds scaled up Perbix's usage last season — he averaged a career-high 19:01 and handled very difficult matchups — and the results were rough both by the eye test and the numbers.

With the right usage and fit, though, Perbix can definitely be a serviceable third-pair option, and should carry extra appeal as a righty.

Colin Blackwell, C, Dallas Stars

Blackwell is a speedy, pesky fourth-line grinder with legitimate defensive value. He's only 5-foot-8, but he plays way bigger than that, with a gritty motor and a physical edge.

Blackwell is a black hole offensively (only four goals in 70 games and poor offensive play-driving metrics), but his defensive metrics are very solid, and he's a high-quality penalty killer, having averaged over two minutes per game on Dallas' 13th-ranked PK last season. He's worth a look for a team that wants some shorthanded help and fourth-line speed.

Sam Lafferty, C, Florida Panthers

Lafferty has appealing physical traits with a heavy 6-foot-2 frame and blazing-fast speed. He can serve as a fine fourth-line winger to play an uptempo north-south, dump-and-chase style and can play center in an emergency.

Lafferty is very limited, though — his offensive value is almost nil, and he doesn't provide the PK value that another waiver option like Blackwell does.

John Beecher, C, Florida Panthers

Beecher is never going to be known for his point production, but he's a big forward who is a top skater in the league. His puck game is a significant issue, though, and he generates his value through his speed and compete. He could have value as a depth forward for a team.

Henry Thrun, LHD, Winnipeg Jets

Thrun is a high-IQ defenseman with decent size, but he's a below-average skater who can struggle with the NHL pace. His puck play is good enough to be a depth defenseman.

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Sportsnet.ca / Sunday Overreactions: Can Maple Leafs' Morgan Rielly thrive in different role?

Michael Amato

Morgan Rielly is still a member of the Toronto Maple Leafs, despite an off-season where it seemed all but certain he would be moved for a fresh start.

Rumblings around Rielly's departure have been simmering for years, as the blue-liner's game has tailed off in a major way over the past two seasons. Last season, specifically, Rielly was on the ice for an Eastern Conference-leading 92 goals against at even strength, while posting just 36 points at the other end.

Now, however, Rielly returns to a situation that looks vastly different than it did a year ago.

Darren Raddysh was brought in on a big-money deal and will now take the quarterbacking duties on the power play away from Rielly, along with the pressure of that role. Rielly's \$7.5-million cap hit also no longer looks like a massive anchor, as the NHL's financial landscape exploded over the summer. Maybe there's a world where Rielly, with less responsibility and less expectations, could carve out a different role and be an effective Maple Leaf.

Rielly is in for a bounce-back season

We've been down this road before with Rielly. Last year he came to camp in the best shape of his life with a refreshed outlook on the season, but the results weren't there. To be fair to Rielly, though, they weren't there for just about everyone on the Leafs roster and how much of that had to do with Craig Berube's coaching style is a real question we're going to get an answer to very soon.

The way John Chayka has built this roster and the way head coach Jim Hiller figures to deploy it seem to be with the intention to maximize the skillset of the players.

This means Rielly should be tasked with more opportunities to thrive offensively and Hiller has paired him with Raddysh to start. The duo figures to be used in offensive situations and sent over the boards with one of the top two lines to try and spend as much time in the offensive zone as they can. It looked good Wednesday against the Ottawa Senators in Toronto's final pre-season game, where Rielly found the back of the net after a lengthy and dominant shift in the Senators' zone.

It was only one exhibition game, but the Leafs do appear to have found a recipe to get the most out of Rielly.

Overreaction? – No

You could make an argument that two things are true. Rielly's game has slipped over the past couple of seasons but also Berube's system may have hurt him more than any other player.

When Rielly is at his best, he's using his legs and joining the rush with regularity to help drive the offence. However, under Berube the Leafs were dumping the puck in far more frequently than they did in the past, eliminating one of Rielly's biggest strengths.

This has also led to Rielly having the puck on his stick less in the offensive zone and his shot volume dropping. Rielly managed just 141 shots last season and 126 the year before that, his two lowest totals over a full 82-game campaign since he was a rookie. Even though Raddysh was brought in to help the offence from the backend, Rielly is still going to be counted on to find the scoresheet regularly.

Chris Tanev and Jake McCabe won't provide much offensively and Oliver Ekman-Larsson is 35, so at some point he's going to slow down, too. Meanwhile, it seems like Emil Andrae and Nick Blankenburg have been passed by Troy Stecher on the depth chart for the time being. After Raddysh, it's hard to see where the offence is going to come from on the blue line other than Rielly.

Let's also not discount what Raddysh can do for Rielly. Whether or not you agree with the pairing, it's certainly an upgrade from Brandon Carlo or Philippe Myers, who Rielly played with regularly over the past two seasons. Raddysh is a high-IQ player and he should be able to understand how to compensate for Rielly's deficiencies in certain areas. But it's also on Rielly to adjust his game, too. He simply doesn't have the footspeed anymore to play like he used to. He can still move, but he can't get to his top level as frequently as he once did.

For instance, last season Rielly exceeded 22 m.p.h. in skating speed just twice, per NHL EDGE, but when you compare that to his numbers from 2021-22, he did it eight times. Rielly needs to accept he can't take the same risks as he once did and his decision-making needs to change. Perhaps this will be an easier realization for him to get to if he isn't being asked to carry as much responsibility on his shoulders.

It's fair to be skeptical where Rielly is concerned, though none of the issues that have been contributing to his drop in play recently are irreversible.

Missing training camp is going to hurt Hellebuyck this season

No one should be too surprised that Connor Hellebuyck has been away from the Winnipeg Jets as he waits for his trade demand to be met. Hellebuyck clearly wants out and it would be challenging for both him and his teammates to walk into a situation that has reached an unfixable state. With that said, not being at training camp is less than ideal for anyone, but especially a goaltender.

Even though training camp just feels like players are going through the motions sometimes, it does help them get back up to speed for when the real games start and it's hard to catch up if you miss significant time.

Overreaction? – No

We saw what happened to Jeremy Swayman just two seasons ago when he missed camp waiting for his contract issue to get resolved and the results weren't good.

Swayman ended up with the worst statistical season of his career, sporting an .892 save percentage and a goals-against average over three. The Boston Bruins goaltender was also only 25 at the time, where Hellebuyck is 33 and has played a ton of hockey over the past five seasons.

It's easy to see Hellebuyck struggling to catch up to a moving train if he ends up missing all of camp and possibly the first few weeks of the regular season.

The absence likely isn't helping Hellebuyck's trade value, either. He had a down season a year ago and underwent knee surgery in November, so seeing him flourishing on the ice would probably be more enticing for an acquiring team.

Stenberg will finish with more points than McKenna this season

As far as first impressions go, it's hard to make a better one than Ivar Stenberg has. The San Jose Sharks forward scored a hat trick Thursday night and added an assist, as the second-overall pick made a huge statement.

It's only natural that Stenberg will be compared to Gavin McKenna after they went first and second in this year's draft, and while McKenna has looked dazzling at times, he hasn't found the scoresheet as often as Stenberg.

Some even felt heading in to the draft that Stenberg was more pro ready than McKenna and deserved consideration to be the top pick. It's only the pre-season, but you can see a world where Stenberg finishes with more points than McKenna.

Overreaction? – Yes

McKenna still out-produces Stenberg over a full 84-game season, for a few reasons.

First, that Sharks 10-0 victory where Stenberg lit it up came against an Anaheim Ducks team playing with only two or three players that figure to see NHL action this season.

Second, Stenberg may be a better all-around player than McKenna at this point, but he's not as gifted offensively. McKenna's high-end skill should translate better in Year 1 to produce points.



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Finally, McKenna has a better chance to play with elite offensive talent all season, whereas it's more likely that Stenberg plays apart from Macklin Celebrini regularly to try and give the Sharks more balance.

The odds of the Leafs bumping McKenna out of the top six are low, meaning he should be playing with some combination of William Nylander, John Tavares or Auston Matthews all year long.

McKenna and Stenberg will likely be compared for most of their careers, but right now it's safer to say McKenna will win the points battle in their rookie campaigns.

Fantilli benefitted the most from Carlsson's offer sheet

Players across the NHL owe Philadelphia Flyers general manager Daniel Briere a debt of gratitude.

After his offer sheet to Ducks forward Leo Carlsson, a number of players cashed in this summer in a far greater way than they would have been able to in the old market.

The Columbus Blue Jackets agreed to terms with Fantilli on Thursday to the tune of \$13.75 million per year. Players inked deals worth more than Fantilli's this summer, though you could argue he got the biggest raise in relation to what his value would've been before the Carlsson offer sheet.

Overreaction? - No

If we look at some of the other aforementioned names that signed big deals this summer, they definitely got extra cash because of the offer sheet, but nowhere near as much as Fantilli.

Makar is one of the best five players in the world, so even without Carlsson's new deal he still could have asked for more than someone like Kirill Kaprizov, which would've taken him north of \$17 million already.

Celebrini is coming off a 115-point season and likely could've commanded at least \$15 million, but instead he got \$18.8 million. Maybe Bedard is at \$12 million or \$13 million before the offer sheet instead of the \$15 million he received? Meanwhile, Gauthier just posted a 41-goal, 69-point season and he still got less than Fantilli.

Fantilli, though, is only coming off a 59-point campaign, which is his best as a pro. He's also only exceeded 30 goals once in his career, too. It's hard to imagine Fantilli getting more than \$7 million or maybe \$8 million per year in the old financial world. Instead, his salary likely almost doubled thanks to Carlsson.

It took a while for the deal with the Blue Jackets to come together, but patience really paid off for Fantilli.



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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers cap perfect pre-season with another shutdown effort

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — The pre-season began with criticism surrounding the hiring of Mike Babcock and the addition of Alex Formenton. What became clear was, if you're going to work for the Edmonton Oilers this season, you'd better have a thick skin.

Four games later, they look like a team whose game may do their talking for them.

The Oilers' defensive game appeared regular-season ready, as Edmonton completed a perfect pre-season in a cakewalk — a 4-1 win over the rebuilding Calgary Flames. They allowed just five goals in four pre-season games — three at even strength.

Now, let's see if they can carry that defensive game into the regular season, starting with a Tuesday-Thursday home and home against the Vancouver Canucks.

"Of course it gets harder," said Kasperii Kapanen, one of the better players on the ice Saturday with a goal and an assist. "We have talented guys that can make plays and score goals. We're not worried about that. But us letting in four or five, six goals a game, that's not a winning mentality."

The goaltending would best be described as so far so good, with both Tristan Jarry and Devon Levi enjoying pre-seasons that just aren't going to get much better than what they showed us.

And the guys who are supposed to produce look ready to do so, as Connor McDavid (2-2-4), Evan Bouchard (0-5-5) each helped fill the net in their two pre-season outings. The power play went one-for-one Saturday, with Zach Hyman scoring from his office on Edmonton's only attempt.

All in all, a tidy pre-season. Now, let's get 'er going for real.

Jacked Michaels

Raise your hand if you thought Owen Michaels would still be hanging around this close to Opening Night. OK, Mrs. Michaels, you can put your hand down now.

Edmonton signed the centreman as an undrafted free agent out of Western Michigan last April, and he's surprised everyone this fall. As Edmonton's only right-shot centreman, Babcock gave him ample opportunity in the faceoff circle against Calgary, where he won nine of his 13 draws.

"He wasn't even on the radar at all," said Babcock. "Then he just keeps showing up in all the good clips, and then suddenly he wins these face-offs. He tracks (back defensively), he's in the right spot..."

"Then after he got going good, I started looking at his career. Scoring-wise, he's never been the guy who led the league in scoring. But he's the captain of the team that wins the (NCAA) national championship. Well, he must know how to play..."

With 3C Jason Dickinson hurt, there's a spot open for a centre. Being the only righty only helps Michaels' cause.

"Things have been going well, and you know I've been improving every day," began the Detroit native, who knows that nobody in Oilers nation thought we'd be talking about him this close to Opening Night. "I've always believed in myself. Everyone has opinions, and they're fair to do so. I just control what I can control."

Whether he sticks or not, the fact that a 24-year-old is this close to being an NHL player bodes well for the veteran Oilers. Usually when a team has been in its championship window as long as the Oilers have, trading away first-round picks at every Trade Deadline, the cupboards can get pretty bare, pretty fast.

So give GM Stan Bowman some credit for acquiring some youth that actually has a chance to contribute.

The injured Matt Savoie (22) is a Top 6 winger. Ike Howard (22) will also start the year in the Top 9, perhaps on the second line with Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Hyman. Colton Dach (23) looks to be the fourth-line centre coming out of camp, while 24-year-olds Josh Samanski and Shakir Mukhamadullin are both knocking on the door.

Connor Clattenburg (21) was sent to Bakersfield this fall, but he looks very much like a future depth piece in Edmonton. And don't forget about goalie Devon Levi — he's just 24 years old.

Dress Rehearsal

Edmonton iced very close to its Opening Night lineup, minus the injured guys and starter Tristan Jarry:

Here is how the Flames lined up. Like the Oilers, Calgary had almost an identical set-up to the one that will open the season on Thursday at home to Seattle.

We expect Jarry to be the Oilers' Opening Night starter, but Levi couldn't have done any more to impress this training camp.

He stopped 23 of 24 shots Saturday, beaten only on a backdoor power play one-timer by Matt Coronato. He feels like he belongs here, much more than he did as a younger goalie trying to break into the Buffalo Sabres' rotation.

"I feel more ready for sure. Just a little bit older, a little bit mature, a little bit more time to work on my game, on the ice, off the ice," said Levi, who we expect to get the Thursday start in Vancouver, or at worst, Game 3 against Seattle. "I just feel like a more well-rounded individual coming into this year, and we've got a great team too. So it's nice to be here."

A huge part of the goaltending woes in Edmonton have been due to the play of the team in front of the goalie. When the team was tight, Stuart Skinner looked great. When they were loose, Skinner took too much of the blame.

That's a major goal under Babcock, to give up less.

"I feel like the games we played really well in, (they were) super solid defensively," Levi said. "I'm just getting used to the systems, getting used to seeing kind of how the game opens up. And I have to say, there wasn't much."

"It was a pretty readable game tonight from the boys."

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' comeback win reinforces positivity built during pre-season

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER – Three hours and 58 minutes into their pre-season schedule, the Vancouver Canucks took their first lead on Saturday. Two minutes later, they had their first win – and the pre-season was over.

The National Hockey League's 84-game regular season has been described as a marathon. But the new pre-season is an absolute sprint.

In a span of 10 days, from the opening of training camp in Penticton until Saturday's 4-3 win against the Seattle Kraken at Rogers Arena, rookie Canucks coach Manny Malhotra and his new staff implemented a playing system and the ideals surrounding it, incorporated a bunch of new players, played four pre-season games, added a goalie and set the trajectory for the most ambitious rebuild in franchise history.

Imagine how much else the Canucks might learn in the 10 days that start Tuesday, when they open the regular season in Edmonton against the Oilers, before returning for a three-game homestand and then embarking on a six-game eastern road trip that includes games against the winners of the last three Stanley Cups.

"I think the guys have really picked up on the concepts," Malhotra said after his team ended its pre-season at 1-3, scoring as many goals on Saturday as it did in the first three exhibition games. "Tonight was a great example of that — kind of a great way to cap off camp is that they put it all together.

"The process of it, defensively, we closed plays out quickly... our breakouts from last game to tonight were again night and day cleaner. And then offensively, again, some really good rotations, but our willingness to get to the inside and create havoc around the net. Just putting all the pieces of camp together for us, we saw the visuals tonight. So it was a good way to cap off camp."

Longest-tenured Canuck Brock Boeser shot the puck off Jake DeBrusk's butt on the power play with 1:38 remaining as Vancouver rallied from an early two-goal deficit.

"It nicked Jake's butt," Boeser confirmed.

Hard to miss?

"Yeah, it's a big one."

Even for an exhibition win against a team they'll likely be battling at the bottom of the Pacific Division this season, there were a lot of smiles in the Canucks dressing room post-game as players found something tangible on which to anchor the positivity that was a theme of their pre-season.

Zeev Buium, the \$75-million future of their defence, scored the tying goal on a power-play feed from Linus Karlsson at 11:05 of the third period.

Rookie hopeful Jonathan Lekkerimäki, in his best of three pre-season games, set up Elias Pettersson for a nice goal in the second period as the 22-year-old skated on the top line.

The power play finished 3-for-4 and got its winning advantage when Seattle's Ryan Winterton initiated a fight with defenceman Elias Pettersson (Junior) after the Canuck had demolished Shane Wright with an open-ice hit. Pettersson also won the fight.

Positivity.

"I think it definitely lifts the morale and kind of shows that we're trending in the right direction," veteran goalie Kevin Lankinen said. "It's been an upward trajectory at camp. It's not going to be complete right now, but we're working and trending in the right direction, which is important.

"We have a good chemistry, a good group of guys here. Of course, every season is another challenge. It's going to be a roller-coaster like any

other year. But the most important thing is we're pulling the same rope. Everybody's on board, and we're having fun doing it."

Building that togetherness, what general manager Ryan Johnson describes as the "environment," has been a paramount priority for the Canucks' new regime after the team collapsed amid internal dysfunction over the last two years.

"I think we have even more energy," Buium said when asked about the vibes that permeated the pre-season. "Knowing that the regular season is now just around the corner, I think we're all just really excited to get going, and everybody just wants to play and, you know, compete for each other."

What roster decisions?

Although they won't officially announce their regular-season roster until Monday, the Canucks may already have their 23-player lineup.

Newly-claimed goalie Leevi Meriläinen needs to replace Nikita Tolopilo as Lankinen's backup, as goalie Thatcher Demko (hips) and centre Filip Chytil (shoulder) start the season on injured reserve. But there were only three extra skaters on Saturday — centre Aatu Raty and defencemen Guillaume Brisebois and Victor Mancini — and the Canucks could carry all three.

In theory, this could already be the Canucks' team.

"In theory, yeah," Malhotra said.

Of course, the team could still use its hard-earned (by finishing 32nd last season) right to choose first on the waiver wire and add another player by Monday. They do have some in-house flexibility with Lekkerimäki and Mancini not subject to waivers and easily assignable to the American Hockey League.

The team will, however, have to waive Tolopilo. But if he is claimed, the Canucks could sign journeyman goalie Chris Driedger, who participated in camp on a tryout, for their minor-league team.

Perfect pairings

After a lot of conjecture about their defence pairings and some blue-line switches during the pre-season, the Canucks may have found their top six by matching their three first- or second-year defencemen with three veterans.

On Saturday, Buium played with Filip Hronek, Tom Willander partnered Jamie Oleksiak and Pettersson Junior was matched with Luke Schenn.

"We were just discussing it; all three pairs tonight worked well together," Malhotra told reporters. "It's difficult in such a small window to try to find that chemistry, but they did a good job of it. They responded well to each other, they worked well off each other. Even if you look at the bench and the way they're communicating on the bench... a lot of really good instances where they're just communicating the game and talking about what they need to do. And I think that carried over on to the ice. So it was a good mix of veterans and young guys (and) they worked well together."

Malhotra on centre Elias Pettersson, who had another strong game: "His confidence is back. He's playing like himself. He's trying to be an impactful player, and not just offensively and fancy plays or high-skill plays. Again, he's showing those things we're asking for: he had a great forecheck in the third, tenacious on the puck, solid out (of the defensive zone). He's doing the right things. He's trying to lead by example. I think his confidence is coming from doing those little things right, having the puck on his stick more, and then executing with his linemates."

The other Pettersson on fighting Winterton: "If you land those big hits, then you have to stand up for yourself. And that's what I'm going to do."

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Montembeault among best pre-season surprises

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — Sounds that were unimaginable just months ago: Massive cheers at the Bell Centre for Chris Kreider.

Of course, you knew they'd ring out at full volume as soon as the former New York Rangers villain scored his first goal with the Montreal Canadiens. And they did after Kreider parked himself outside Samuel Ersson's crease and shovelled home a Nick Suzuki pass to open the scoring in a 4-2 win over the Ottawa Senators to close out the pre-season.

Less predictable was how Canadiens fans would react to Samuel Montembeault's first appearance in front of them this fall, and not just because he was coming off a catastrophic winter.

Let's just say the 29-year-old didn't arrive at training camp as the fan favourite to win a job in the crease. Especially not with ready-for-primetime Jacob Fowler looking to cement his place in Montreal before potentially pushing playoff hero Jakub Dobes out of the starter's chair.

If Montembeault got a predictably warm reception as soon as he hit the ice for warmups, what he got shortly after relieving Fowler halfway through Saturday's game was something not even he could have dreamt of.

It was only last February when boos were raining down on Montembeault after his eighth straight loss at the Bell Centre. But in this game, the cheers erupted for him as soon as he made his first sequence of saves, including three of them in succession as the Canadiens scrambled on the penalty kill right after he entered the net. The fans kept getting louder and louder until Montembeault left the ice having stopped all 14 shots in regulation and four of five he faced in the pre-planned shootout that wrapped the evening.

Talk about soul-soothing.

"To have that love was really nice," Montembeault said.

He didn't have to mention how it sure beat the hate he received for his bewildering 2025-26 season, which came just one year after he posted the fifth-best goals-saved-above-expected average in the NHL in 2024-25.

It would be a stretch to say Montembeault has completely won Canadiens fans back over by stopping 34 of 35 shots through three half-games of pre-season hockey, but it is still reasonable to say he's won a job back.

And Montembeault's mentality might keep him in it — and keep Fowler baking in Laval — for longer than anyone would've thought before this campaign started less than two weeks ago.

He's not taking anything for granted.

"It's was a new start, everything started back at zero," Montembeault said. "Even had a good pre-season, but once it starts back up Tuesday it's all zeroes again. So, put that behind me."

Maybe keep the cheers ringing in your ears, though, Sam.

That wasn't the only surprise of this training camp.

How about Luke Mittelstadt? A seventh-round pick in 2023 who had a cup of coffee in the American Hockey League last season and seemingly guzzled down a pot of it before this training camp?

The 23-year-old was buzzing. He played so well with each passing day that he earned over 20 minutes of ice time at the Bell Centre in the final game.

Considering how Mittelstadt handled those minutes, we'll predict he'll play some more of them in this building at some point over the next 84 games.

At the other end of the spectrum, 33-year-old veteran Phillip Danault surprised us a bit in the pre-season as well. Considering he didn't have a goal before being traded back to Montreal 30 games into his season with the Los Angeles Kings, seeing him score three in exhibition was somewhat jarring.

More jarring is the speed at which he's been moving since camp started.

Last time Danault came into a contract season in Montreal — in 2021 — it got off on the wrong foot. The context was markedly different, but there was still something to learn from it.

"I think just put it aside and play free," Danault said after scoring another beauty against the Senators.

Whatever methodology he's employing this time around appears to be paying dividends.

Florian Xhekaj's approach to training camp will pay off, too, sooner than later.

He did the opposite of surprise us this time around, turning his limited professional experience into a springboard towards the NHL by just being himself — a rough-and-tumble, relentless forechecker who's willing to take on anyone and everyone.

"He certainly doesn't have an identity crisis," said head coach Martin St. Louis. "He knows what he is and what he can bring, and he brought it very consistently throughout this camp."

Was it enough to push an established, contracted NHLer out of the crowded picture in Montreal? We say yes, though it may take a bit more time than two days to make that happen.

If he makes the team, good for Xhekaj.

But even if he doesn't, the countdown is already on for his time officially starting in Montreal.

The countdown to the regular season is on, too, thank goodness.

Just two more sleeps and off we go.

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Sportsnet.ca / Why Senators can be optimistic, even without Brady Tkachuk

Adam Vingan

The post-Brady Tkachuk era has begun in Ottawa, where the Senators are moving on without their captain of the past five seasons. Though disappointing, Tkachuk's departure for the rival Florida Panthers is not going to derail the Senators' mission of reaching the playoffs for the third consecutive year.

"I think we've progressed the last two seasons, for a lot of reasons." Senators coach Travis Green told reporters. "Our players have improved. We've still got a relatively young group. I looked at our board the other day with the age of our players. I think they've all become better hockey players. And, quite honestly, I expect them to be better again. I think, almost to a man, that group can improve still."

Tkachuk's in-your-face presence will be missed. But the Senators, who open the season Saturday against the Toronto Maple Leafs, should be able to function without it.

Here's how:

Eklund steps up

William Eklund, acquired from the San Jose Sharks two days after the Senators dealt Tkachuk, is not a one-for-one replacement for Ottawa's ex-captain in the top six. Eklund has never topped 17 goals in his young career, but there is reason to believe that he could break out in that department this season.

His expected goal total, which accounts for the danger of the shots a player takes, was 22.7 last season compared to the 15 he actually scored. That suggests a correction could be coming for Eklund, who scored nine of his goals last season from the inner slot. (Only 11 NHL skaters had a wider negative gap between expected and actual goals than Eklund last season.)

Eklund, who turns 24 in October, has the tools to be an effective power forward, even if he does not reach the heights of Tkachuk. Last season, Eklund finished tied for 18th at the forward position in offensive rebound recoveries and tied for 43rd in offensive-zone puck-battle wins.

Green has placed Eklund alongside Dylan Cozens and former Sharks teammate Fabian Zetterlund, forming a potential second line for the Senators. They hooked up on a goal during Ottawa's pre-season opener against the Montreal Canadiens when Eklund drove to the net and slammed home a pass from Cozens.

"He's so good at holding onto the puck and making plays and just getting open and getting to those gritty areas," Cozens told reporters.

An offensive breakthrough from Eklund would help fill Tkachuk's void. Ottawa takes a by-committee approach to offence: nine forwards — eight of whom are still on the team — recorded at least 30 points last season, led by Tim Stutzle's 83.

Defence remains elite

Ottawa's calling card last season was its defence, which led the league in expected goals against per game in all situations (2.67) and trailed only the Tampa Bay Lightning in that category at five-on-five (1.82).

Jake Sanderson remains the workhorse on the blue line, and having just turned 24, he should only improve. Sanderson, who averaged nearly 25 minutes of ice time per game last season, took on the toughest matchups and still helped the Senators generate an impressive 56.4 per cent of the expected goals (xGF%) at five-on-five. Ottawa won his minutes on the scoreboard as well (52-40).

"Really, he checks all the boxes from a coach's standpoint," Green told reporters. "His skill level is extremely high. His work ethic is extremely high. He's really committed to the game, to his teammates. ... He's a joy to coach."

Sanderson's defence partner, Artem Zub, is expected to miss the start of the season, but Ottawa's defensive depth is the strength of the team. This summer, the Senators rewarded Jordan Spence with a four-year contract after he stepped up in the wake of defensive injuries last season. When Spence played next to Sanderson in 2025-26, the Senators tilted the ice in a major way at even strength (63.2 xGF% in 147:34 of ice time).

Up front, Shane Pinto is earning a reputation as one of the league's best shutdown centres, as evidenced by his sixth-place finish (and eight first-place votes) in the Selke Trophy race last season. But no player will have a greater influence on the outcome of the Senators' season than Linus Ullmark, who endured a rollercoaster year that included a leave of absence to address his mental health.

Over 21 starts following his return, Ullmark went 14-4-3 and saved 11.8 goals above expected (GSAE), which ranked 14th in the league from Jan. 31 through the end of the regular season. That carried over into the playoffs, where Ullmark posted an 8.1 GSAE in four first-round games against the eventual Stanley Cup-champion Carolina Hurricanes.

If the Senators can maintain their elite defensive play and receive the top-notch goaltending that Ullmark provided late last season, they should avoid a major step back without Tkachuk.

"It's really nice not having to start the season here at camp being a minus," Ullmark told reporters about his mindset. "It's nice to be even and (able to) work through the positives and not have to feel like you have to catch up on things, so that's a big step up from last season."

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