



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

The News & Observer

When things get rough on the ice, Hurricanes' Nicolas Deslauriers is ready

By: Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes left wing Nicolas Deslauriers (44) drops the gloves for a fight with Florida Panthers left wing Bokondji Imama (14) in the first period on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2026, at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes left wing Nicolas Deslauriers (44) drops the gloves for a fight with Florida Panthers left wing Bokondji Imama (14) in the first period on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2026, at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett
rwillett@newsobserver.com

Raleigh

Nicolas Deslauriers is the kind of guy you wouldn't mind having a couple of cold beverages with at your favorite sports bar and grill.

He might even buy a few rounds. And by night's end, might be the life of the party.

But put him on skates, put him in a hockey game, send him out on a shift for the Carolina Hurricanes (Shopping Cart IconShop Canes Fan Gear), and his demeanor changes. The game can change.

So it was Tuesday as the Hurricanes opened a new hockey season against the Florida Panthers (Shopping Cart IconShop Panthers Fan Gear) after first raising their 2026 Stanley Cup banner at Lenovo Center.

The two teams were slumbering along late in the first period, a shortened preseason evident in some sketchy, sloppy play, when the Canes winger took the ice.

Deslauriers doesn't always go looking for trouble but he usually finds it. He did Tuesday in Florida's Boko Imama, a big guy who can handle himself and gladly dropped the gloves for some fisticuffs.

There was grabbing and holding and some punches in a pretty even fight, even though Deslauriers was loudly awarded the decision by thousands of Canes fans.

That would be a highlight of the opening game, as the Panthers came away with a 1-0 victory on Gus Forsling's long shot and goal with a few seconds left in overtime. Canes fans will forget most of it – even Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said the game was hard to watch – but not the sight of No. 44 dropping and throwing, willing to do something to juice things up.

Carolina Hurricanes left wing Nicolas Deslauriers (44) drops the gloves for a fight with Florida Panthers left wing Bokondji Imama (14) in the first period on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2026, at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes left wing Nicolas Deslauriers (44) drops the gloves for a fight with Florida Panthers left wing Bokondji

Imama (14) in the first period on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2026, at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett
rwillett@newsobserver.com

In short, Deslauriers is a man who knows his role as a player and is willing to fill it.

"I think that's what has kept me in the league," Deslauriers said in an N&O interview Monday. "I wouldn't say brought me to the league, because I was a defenseman. What kept me in the league was my size, being good on the forecheck, helping in the D zone. And being reliable physically.

"The nitty-gritty of fighting, you kind of develop that throughout your career. It's not fun to do every time, but there's much need of it and that's what kept me here.

"I respect all the fighters in the league. It's not an easy job."

Deslauriers fits roles Canes need

Deslauriers, in his 14th NHL season, is hockey's version of a nuclear deterrent. If things get ugly on the ice or someone steps over the line, No. 44 comes over the boards.

Deslauriers was traded to the Canes by the Philadelphia Flyers last season in time to be a part of the fun ride to the Stanley Cup. During the massive Cup celebration in downtown Raleigh, general manager Eric Tulskey announced Deslauriers had been signed to a two-year contract, and a wild scene turned even wilder when Deslauriers got his hands on the mic for a few words.

"Nic plays a few different roles," Tulskey said this week. "One, when he's on the ice he brings a very physical presence. I know people focus on the fighting and stuff after the whistles. He's also a very physical player between the whistles. He brings a heavy game. He just makes our team harder to play against, all around."

Carolina Hurricanes left wing Nicolas Deslauriers (44) is introduced during pre-game ceremonies in celebration of the 2026 Stanley Cup, on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2026, at Lenovo Center in Raleigh during the, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes left wing Nicolas Deslauriers (44) is introduced during pre-game ceremonies in celebration of the 2026 Stanley Cup, on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2026, at Lenovo Center in Raleigh during the, N.C. Robert Willett
rwillett@newsobserver.com

Deslauriers, 35, smiled broadly this week when asked about his penchant for fighting.

"I think it's funny because the young guys you talk to about it, they kind of pick your brain," he said. "There are techniques, different styles. There are different things about it.

"For me, it's more about picking my time, for momentum swings. I'm not a guy who likes to stage anything. It's more



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

for the team. If something happens to your teammate, you're there to respond."

At 6-foot-1 and about 220 pounds, his response can have quite the impact. In the game Tuesday, he put a huge hit on the Panthers' Lars Eller. He had a few choice words with the Florida bench – all caught on a hot mic during the telecast. He squared off with Imapa.

"It took me a while to develop that role, and it's about knowing how to manage it," Deslauriers said in the interview. "I remember at the start, I was just going to go. But there's a reasoning to it and I think that's why it gets overlooked a bit.

"There can be momentum swings on any shift of the game, and if I can help on that part, I'll try to do my job."

Brind'Amour called it a "pretty easy decision" to have Deslauriers in the lineup for the opener.

"He's the type of player you need for these types of games," he said. "We know what Florida brings. They've got a bigger team, and he's one of the stronger guys on our team. It's a good spot to throw him in there."

Deslauriers was in there for eight shifts and five total minutes – "He did his job," Brind'Amour said.

Deslauriers long road to Canes

Born in LaSalle, Quebec, Deslauriers was a third-round draft pick of the Anaheim Ducks – as a defenseman – in 2009 and made the switch to a winger in 2013.

Traded to the Buffalo Sabres, he made his NHL debut and his rough-and-tumble style began to develop. He later played for the Montreal Canadiens before going back to the Ducks, where he signed a new contract in 2020 and promptly set the franchise record for the fastest hat trick – three in the first 11:49 of a game against Ottawa.

Then it was on to Minnesota and Philly, where he had 136 penalty minutes in 80 games in 2022-23, his first year with the Flyers. In his second season, he had an epic fight with the Rangers' Matt Rempe, getting in 25 punches before dumping the 6-7 Rempe to the ice.

Carolina Hurricanes left wing Nicolas Deslauriers (44) warms up for the preseason game against the Florida Panthers on Tuesday, September 22, 2026 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes left wing Nicolas Deslauriers (44) warms up for the preseason game against the Florida Panthers on Tuesday, September 22, 2026 at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

The Canes picked him up for a conditional seventh-round pick. He played seven games in the regular season and one in the playoffs: Game 4 against Ottawa, where he mixed it up with Brady Tkachuk, now with the Panthers, in a wild melee that had Canes defenseman Sean Walker sucker-punched.

Off the ice, Deslauriers can be soft-spoken. A father of four, he's a family man. Around his teammates, he can be rowdier, and he's easily one of the best liked players on the team, like a fun-loving big brother who has everybody's back.

"He's a tremendous character guy whether it's on the bench, or in the locker room or wherever," Tulsy said. "He helps everybody else stay engaged night after night, helps keep everyone pulling on the rope."

It's hard to say how many games Deslauriers will play this season or the amount of ice time he'll receive. He could often be an extra forward, a healthy scratch in games. But his attitude doesn't figure to change.

Told that Tulsy referred to him as a "character guy," Deslauriers grinned and said, "I hope in a good way."

"I think I found my niche throughout the league of being a good person off the ice," he added. "It's not always easy to be that extra guy. But I think we did a good job last year, the extra guys, to stay ready and being still involved.

"Oftentimes, it's not easy but I think that's what I have developed the last six or seven years. You don't play for yourself. You play for everybody."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026



Banner-Raising Opening Night Brings Record-Breaking Crowd

"It was a cool experience... They deserved to have a moment like that."

By Walt Ruff

RALEIGH, N.C. - Tuesday night at Lenovo Center, the moment superseded the score.

Sure, a win would have been the cherry on top, but the majority of those in attendance at 1400 Edwards Mill Road purchased their tickets to say they were there for the moment.

That moment, of course, was when the team stood on the ice and watched the franchise's second Stanley Cup Championship banner rise to the rafters.

It was a moment not for the players, and not for the staff, but for them.

Rod Brind'Amour reiterated as much post-game when he reminded the media that the fans, who pack the home building on a nightly basis, couldn't be a part of the celebration on June 14 when the team reached the mountaintop at T-Mobile Arena.

There was the parade that brought over 192,000 to downtown Raleigh a week later, of course, but this was the Stanley Cup. Inside Lenovo Center, where the team puts it all on the line, in front of the Caniacs, every time they touch the ice.

"It was great. To me, it was more for the fans. They didn't get to see us celebrate it on home ice, so it was kind of nice to do a little victory lap," Brind'Amour reflected following the contest. "They need to enjoy that stuff. They're a big part of

the success we've had over the years, so I thought that was really cool."

Roaring to Jordan Staal stepping onto the ice with the 34.5-lb. silver trophy and putting a bow on the interactive celebrations with a Storm Surge that included players circling "the mug" at the championship-centered logo, it was a very fitting last hurrah to an incredible summer.

Then, standing with arms wrapped around one another, applause rained down as the new look banner was lifted.

"You have so much emotion, trying to start a game and start a season, and you obviously want to still enjoy those moments," the captain said. "(It was) pretty special. I wish we kind of had more time to give it to everyone and to get the crowd going."

Almost impossible to imagine the crowd more "going", it was revealed to be a standing-room-only mob of 19,250, representing the largest attendance for a regular-season home game at Lenovo Center.

Only two regular-season home games in franchise history have drawn more fans: the team's Stadium Series outdoor game against the Washington Capitals at Carter-Finley Stadium on Feb. 18, 2023 (56,961) and a game at the Greensboro Coliseum against the New York Rangers on Nov. 21, 1997 (19,358).

"It was a cool experience. I think I'll be able to appreciate it more than I do right now, but our fans deserve it," Brandon Bussi offered. "They deserved to have a moment like that."

Here's to doing it again this time next year.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026



Cayden Primeau Placed On Waivers

By: Ryan Henkel

The Carolina Hurricanes have placed goaltender Cayden Primeau on waivers.

The 27-year-old netminder was on the team's initial 23 man roster to open the year, but it seemed to be simply a move to try and avoid the waiver frenzy that the start of the year presents.

Now that the year has started for nearly everyone, the Hurricanes are hoping to pass him through to the AHL and not lose him like they did last year.

"The mechanics of an opening night roster is always a little complicated and Cayden had a great camp and we have a lot of trust in him," said Carolina GM Eric Tulsky. "We see him as an important part of our organizational depth at that position."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

Former Montreal Canadiens Goalie Placed On Waivers By Hurricanes

By: Michael DeRosa

A former Montreal Canadiens goalie is officially available for the taking.

According to Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman, the Carolina Hurricanes have placed former Canadiens goalie Cayden Primeau on waivers.

With Primeau being placed on waivers, any interested teams can claim him. However, if he clears waivers unclaimed, Carolina will then be able to assign him to their AHL affiliate, the Chicago Wolves.

Teams looking for goalie depth could consider taking a chance on Primeau. Yet, it would also be understandable if

he clears waivers, as he has struggled to break out at the NHL level.

Primeau spent most of last season in the AHL with the Wolves. In 39 games with the AHL club, he posted a 21-11-7 record, a .916 save percentage, and a 2.41 goals-against average. He also played in three games for the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2025-26, posting a 2-1-0 record, an .838 save percentage, and a 4.30 goals-against average.

Primeau was selected by the Canadiens in the seventh round of the 2017 NHL Entry Draft, 199th overall. In 55 games over six seasons with Montreal from 2019-20 to 2024-25, he had a 13-24-7 record, an .884 save percentage, and a 3.69 goals-against average.

LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article317434232.html>
<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/banner-raising-opening-night-brings-record-breaking-crowd>
<https://sports.yahoo.com/articles/cayden-primeau-placed-waivers-011601633.html>
<https://sports.yahoo.com/articles/former-montreal-canadiens-goalie-placed-213006750.html>



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

SportScan

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

1401443 Carolina Hurricanes

When things get rough on the ice, Hurricanes' Nicolas Deslauriers is ready

Chip Alexander

9-11 minutes 9/30/2026

Raleigh

Nicolas Deslauriers is the kind of guy you wouldn't mind having a couple of cold beverages with at your favorite sports bar and grill.

He might even buy a few rounds. And by night's end, might be the life of the party.

But put him on skates, put him in a hockey game, send him out on a shift for the Carolina Hurricanes (Shopping Cart IconShop Canes Fan Gear), and his demeanor changes. The game can change.

So it was Tuesday as the Hurricanes opened a new hockey season against the Florida Panthers (Shopping Cart IconShop Panthers Fan Gear) after first raising their 2026 Stanley Cup banner at Lenovo Center.

The two teams were slumbering along late in the first period, a shortened preseason evident in some sketchy, sloppy play, when the Canes winger took the ice.

Deslauriers doesn't always go looking for trouble but he usually finds it. He did Tuesday in Florida's Boko Imama, a big guy who can handle himself and gladly dropped the gloves for some fisticuffs.

There was grabbing and holding and some punches in a pretty even fight, even though Deslauriers was loudly awarded the decision by thousands of Canes fans.

That would be a highlight of the opening game, as the Panthers came away with a 1-0 victory on Gus Forsling's long shot and goal with a few seconds left in overtime. Canes fans will forget most of it – even Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said the game was hard to watch – but not the sight of No. 44 dropping and throwing, willing to do something to juice things up.

Carolina Hurricanes left wing Nicolas Deslauriers (44) drops the gloves for a fight with Florida Panthers left wing Bokondji Imama (14) in the first period on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2026, at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina Hurricanes left wing Nicolas Deslauriers (44) drops the gloves for a fight with Florida Panthers left wing Bokondji Imama (14) in the first period on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2026, at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C. Robert Willett rwillett@newsobserver.com

In short, Deslauriers is a man who knows his role as a player and is willing to fill it.

"I think that's what has kept me in the league," Deslauriers said in an N&O interview Monday. "I wouldn't say brought me to the league, because I was a defenseman. What kept me in the league was my size, being good on the forecheck, helping in the D zone. And being reliable physically.

"The nitty-gritty of fighting, you kind of develop that throughout your career. It's not fun to do every time, but there's much need of it and that's what kept me here.

"I respect all the fighters in the league. It's not an easy job."

Deslauriers fits roles Canes need

Deslauriers, in his 14th NHL season, is hockey's version of a nuclear deterrent. If things get ugly on the ice or someone steps over the line, No. 44 comes over the boards.

Deslauriers was traded to the Canes by the Philadelphia Flyers last season in time to be a part of the fun ride to the Stanley Cup. During the massive Cup celebration in downtown Raleigh, general manager Eric Tulsky announced Deslauriers had been signed to a two-year contract, and a wild scene turned even wilder when Deslauriers got his hands on the mic for a few words.

"Nic plays a few different roles," Tulsky said this week. "One, when he's on the ice he brings a very physical presence. I know people focus on the fighting and stuff after the whistles. He's also a very physical player between the whistles. He brings a heavy game. He just makes our team harder to play against, all around."

Deslauriers, 35, smiled broadly this week when asked about his penchant for fighting.

"I think it's funny because the young guys you talk to about it, they kind of pick your brain," he said. "There are techniques, different styles. There are different things about it.

"For me, it's more about picking my time, for momentum swings. I'm not a guy who likes to stage anything. It's more for the team. If something happens to your teammate, you're there to respond."

At 6-foot-1 and about 220 pounds, his response can have quite the impact. In the game Tuesday, he put a huge hit on the Panthers' Lars Eller. He had a few choice words with the Florida bench – all caught on a hot mic during the telecast. He squared off with Imama.

"It took me a while to develop that role, and it's about knowing how to manage it," Deslauriers said in the interview. "I remember at the start, I was just going to go. But there's a reasoning to it and I think that's why it gets overlooked a bit.

"There can be momentum swings on any shift of the game, and if I can help on that part, I'll try to do my job."

Brind'Amour called it a "pretty easy decision" to have Deslauriers in the lineup for the opener.

"He's the type of player you need for these types of games," he said. "We know what Florida brings. They've got a bigger team, and he's one of the stronger guys on our team. It's a good spot to throw him in there."

Deslauriers was in there for eight shifts and five total minutes – "He did his job," Brind'Amour said.

Deslauriers long road to Canes

Born in LaSalle, Quebec, Deslauriers was a third-round draft pick of the Anaheim Ducks – as a defenseman – in 2009 and made the switch to a winger in 2013.

Traded to the Buffalo Sabres, he made his NHL debut and his rough-and-tumble style began to develop. He later played for the Montreal Canadiens before going back to the Ducks, where he signed a new



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

contract in 2020 and promptly set the franchise record for the fastest hat trick – three in the first 11:49 of a game against Ottawa.

Then it was on to Minnesota and Philly, where he had 136 penalty minutes in 80 games in 2022-23, his first year with the Flyers. In his second season, he had an epic fight with the Rangers' Matt Rempe, getting in 25 punches before dumping the 6-7 Rempe to the ice.

The Canes picked him up for a conditional seventh-round pick. He played seven games in the regular season and one in the playoffs: Game 4 against Ottawa, where he mixed it up with Brady Tkachuk, now with the Panthers, in a wild melee that had Canes defenseman Sean Walker sucker-punched.

Off the ice, Deslauriers can be soft-spoken. A father of four, he's a family man. Around his teammates, he can be rowdier, and he's easily one of the best liked players on the team, like a fun-loving big brother who has everybody's back.

"He's a tremendous character guy whether it's on the bench, or in the locker room or wherever," Tulskey said. "He helps everybody else stay engaged night after night, helps keep everyone pulling on the rope."

It's hard to say how many games Deslauriers will play this season or the amount of ice time he'll receive. He could often be an extra forward, a healthy scratch in games. But his attitude doesn't figure to change.

Told that Tulskey referred to him as a "character guy," Deslauriers grinned and said, "I hope in a good way."

"I think I found my niche throughout the league of being a good person off the ice," he added. "It's not always easy to be that extra guy. But I think we did a good job last year, the extra guys, to stay ready and being still involved."

"Ofentimes, it's not easy but I think that's what I have developed the last six or seven years. You don't play for yourself. You play for everybody."

News Observer LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401589 Websites

The Athletic / Madison Square Garden to split Knicks, Rangers into separate publicly traded companies

By Mike Vorkunov

Sept. 30, 2026

The New York Knicks and Rangers will soon be available for purchase separately on the stock market.

MSG Sports, which owns the NBA and NHL teams, announced Wednesday that it will split the two franchises into separate publicly traded companies after its board of directors approved the move this week. The company has explored the move since earlier this year and expects to complete the transaction Oct. 26. The spin-off comes after a year of high-profile success for the Knicks, who won the NBA title in June, and as the Rangers work through a rebuild after missing the playoffs the last two seasons.

MSG Sports, currently a publicly traded company, will become MSG Knickerbockers Corp. It will own the Knicks and Westchester Knicks (their G League team). MSG Rangers Corp. will be comprised of the Rangers, the MSG training facility and the Hartford Wolf Pack (the Rangers' AHL team). James Dolan will be the executive chairman and CEO of both companies.

MSG Sports will spin off the New York Knicks and Rangers into separate publicly traded companies, after its board approved the move. Transaction will be completed on Oct. 26.

MSG Sports will be MSG Knickerbockers Corp. It'll own the Knicks and Westchester Knicks.

Two former top-ranking basketball ops execs will also take seats on the board of directors at the companies. Former Knicks team president and head coach Isiah Thomas will be on the MSG Knickerbockers Corp. board of directors. Thomas is also on The Sphere board, and also on the board of Mat Ishbia's UWM. Former Knicks president Steve Mills will sit on the MSG Rangers Corp board. He had been on the MSG Sports board.

Starting Oct. 27, MSG Knickerbocks Corp. will trade under the stock symbol "MSGK," and MSG Rangers Corp. will trade on the stock market under the symbol "MSGR."

"With our board's approval we are now one step closer to our goal of separating our Knicks and Rangers businesses into two distinct public companies," Dolan said in a statement. "Both teams have storied histories and large and passionate fan bases, and we believe each company will be well-positioned to generate long-term value for shareholders."

Dolan initially split the Knicks and Rangers away from Madison Square Garden, the famed arena, in a 2020 spin-off that put the venue and teams into two different publicly traded companies. In 2021, the Knicks signed a 35-year lease to play at MSG.

The Knicks and Rangers are among the few sports franchises to be part of a publicly traded company. MSG Sports reported \$1.153 billion in revenue and \$59 million in profits for the fiscal year that ended June 30. The Knicks' playoff run was good for business — the franchise pulled in an extra \$66.9 million in playoff revenue compared to the year prior, despite playing nine games at MSG during each postseason.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401590 Websites

The Athletic / Every NHL team wants a strong start, but these are the 10 teams that need one

By Sean McIndoe

Sept. 30, 2026

We're five games into the 1,344-game NHL season. Have you torn up your preseason predictions and completely changed your view of a few teams yet?

You should have. After all, that's your job as a fan, not to mention what makes the first few weeks of a new season so much fun. We watch a team play a handful of games, and then we re-evaluate. And by re-evaluate, I mean we all freak out.

It works that way for every team. But some have even more riding on the first few games this year. The narrative comes for us all, but it spends more time chasing some teams than others, and that stays true no matter how many smart people remind us about small sample sizes.

So let's mark the start of the new season with a look at 10 teams who have the most riding on a strong start to the season. We'll cover all the narratives — the ones the team is facing to open the year, the one they'll hear if they start strong and the one that will haunt them if they don't. And we'll even sneak a peek at their starting schedule, to see if it offers any clues about which side the early-season coin might land on.

In no particular order, here are 10 teams with a lot on the line over the next few weeks.

Is October the best sports month?

Chris Branch

Ottawa Senators

The starting point: Coming off an up-and-down season capped by a quick first-round exit, the Senators should have something to prove. But the bigger story is that Brady Tkachuk, their captain and so-called leader, bailed on the team over the summer to join his brother in Florida, just like everyone always assumed he would. Can they fill that void, both on the ice and in the room?

If they start poorly: Tkachuk was their heart and soul, and they just can't replace him. With him gone, the Sens are doomed to another year of also-ran status. And now you have to wonder who else might have their eye on the door ...

If they start well: Screw Brady and his performative antics; we never really liked that guy anyway. Now that he and his sideshow routine are Florida's problem, the Senators are finally gelling into a true team, not just background characters for Mr. All Eyes On Me and his podcast pals.

Early schedule: It's a relatively easy one, with the 100-point Boston Bruins being the best opponent based on last year's standings and seven out of ten games against teams that missed the playoffs. (The only other two playoff opponents: the Philadelphia Flyers at home and on the road.) And in a nice bit of synergy for today's topic, the tenth game is Tkachuk's Oct. 21 homecoming, which should feel like a decisive cherry on top of one of these two narratives.

Chicago Blackhawks

The starting point: The Hawks continue their slow-but-sure rebuild, adding Bowen Byram in the offseason to carry the load as their blue-line workhorse. But Connor Bedard is injured, again, and will miss the first month or more, putting a damper on any hopes that this could be the year they make a push for the playoffs.

If they start poorly: Great, they'll be out of the race before Bedard so much as returns to the lineup. That means he'll make it to the end of his third season without ever playing a meaningful NHL game. The young core is great, but there's only so much losing you can handle before it starts to wear you down, and the Hawks appear to be intent on pushing those limits. Maybe next year?

If they start well: Hold on, these guys are looking feisty. If they can stay near the bubble until Bedard gets back, look out — they may really be onto something after all.

Early schedule: It's a mixed bag, but features some tough opponents like the Carolina Hurricanes, Dallas Stars, Montreal Canadiens and Florida Panthers over their first ten. Then again, all of those are at home, which means an opportunity to send a message or two to the league about how close this team is to hanging with the big kids.

Vegas Golden Knights

The starting point: Last year was weird. They dropped to just 95 points, and even that total was inflated by 17 loser points. They fired their coach. Then they made the final. Then they fired their coach again, because why not.

If they start poorly: Should have kept Torts. Going from John Tortorella to rookie Ryan Craig looks like a disastrous case of overthinking it by a team that always acts like they're the smartest guys in the room. Also, maybe get a goalie?

If they start well: GM Kelly McCrimmon doesn't miss. He was right to fire Bruce Cassidy when he did, and now it's happening again. Letting Tortorella wear out his welcome would have been the easy move, but now Craig is breathing some new life into a team that could use it.

Early schedule: Practically a gift from the hockey gods. Six of their first 10 opponents missed the playoffs (including presumed weaklings Chicago Blackhawks, Vancouver Canucks and Seattle Kraken in their first four). And three of the teams that did make the playoffs were the Pittsburgh Penguins, Los Angeles Kings and Anaheim Ducks. A road game in Minnesota might be the only time Vegas is an underdog until late October.

Columbus Blue Jackets

The starting point: Like several teams we'll meet on today's list, the Blue Jackets had a star ask out over the summer. But this time there was a twist: Zach Werenski changed his mind, and decided to stay ... as long as the team could win.

If they start poorly: Which of these 10 teams will land Werenski at the deadline? MY COLUMN:

If they start well: Don Waddell and Rick Bowness are vindicated, Blue Jackets fans embrace their underdogs and Kirill Marchenko starts to wonder if he's made a huge mistake. Meanwhile, Werenski happily sticks around ... and maybe even makes a few recruiting calls to his Team USA buddies?

Early schedule: It's a mixed bag, with no obviously easy wins but seven of the first nine games at home. Oh, and Marchenko and the Leafs drop by on Oct. 20, if anyone wants to say hello.

The starting point: They surprised with a playoff run last year, even winning a round. But the offseason was turbulent, featuring an offer sheet and some expensive extensions. Can they put all the drama behind them and keep building on their success?

If they start poorly: There you go. They were over-achievers who lucked into the playoffs with 92 points and barely beat an exhausted team with no goaltending. Then everyone got greedy based on one mediocre year, and they're back to looking up at most of the league. It can really fall apart that quickly.

If they start well: Players don't care about each other's bank accounts; they just worry about what happens on the ice. Contract squabbles make for good summer content for the media, but they don't matter once the season starts. The Ducks are young and good; they'll keep getting better, and now they have all their key pieces locked up for the long term. Hope you got your shots in when you had the chance, because the Ducks are ready to keep climbing up the Pacific.

Early schedule: Hit and miss. It starts with a tough trio of the Vegas Golden Knights, Florida Panthers and Edmonton Oilers, but that's followed by a seven-game stretch where Boston is the only one of last year's playoff teams they face.

The starting point: Their playoff miss last year was a shocker. But maybe it shouldn't have been, since they were missing Aleksander Barkov for the whole season and Matthew Tkachuk for a big chunk of it. Now that



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

Brady Tkachuk is here, you could argue that on paper they're even better than those Cup-winning teams.

If they start poorly: Barkov's great, but this team is now two years older than the one that won it all in 2025, and that team wasn't young. Maybe last year wasn't just an injury or two — maybe we were actually seeing the Panthers' window close in real time, and we just didn't accept it was happening.

If they start well: They're back, just like we all figured. Hope you enjoyed your one year of having a chance, everyone else in the Atlantic Division.

Early schedule: The opponents aren't too tough, with only the Minnesota Wild really standing out after last night's overtime win in Carolina. But the slate is road-heavy, with six of their first seven, 10 of their first 13, and 15 of their first 22 away from home.

The starting point: After a disastrous season, the Leafs made changes to just about everything they could change short of firing Carlton the Bear. They should be better. But they'd need to be a lot better to get back into the playoffs, and any hope of that rests on Auston Matthews (coming off two iffy seasons) and Sergei Bobrovsky (a 38-year-old who was terrible last year).

If they start poorly: Yep, same old Leafs. You can shuffle all the deck chairs you want, but from the top down this franchise still has no idea what they're doing. They might as well trade Matthews now and start over.

If they start well: Huh. OK, maybe let John Chayka cook. You don't have to like the guy, but he took big swings and was obviously more interested in doing the hard work of improving the team than getting easy plaudits from the fan base. It just might be working.

Early schedule: Reasonable. An early road trip through the Golden Knights, Colorado Avalanche and Utah Mammoth will be a test. But those are the only road games, and five of their seven at home are against teams that won the same number of playoff games last year that they did.

The starting point: They followed their Presidents' Trophy win with a mess of a season, then had their best player ask for a trade. With the season underway, Connor Hellebuyck is still sitting at home, and they can't even hope to break even on an eventual trade because nobody with no-trade protection wants to play in Winnipeg.

If they start poorly: Yeah, they're cooked. Time to stop pretending Hellebuyck will land you significant immediate help and accept the inevitable picks-and-prospects deal. Then bite the bullet on starting what will be a tough rebuild, while hoping the market can sustain a team until it's done.

If they start well: Cautious optimism, at least at first. If they can tread water without Hellebuyck — especially if Stuart Skinner is playing well — then that builds some hope, which has been . It also makes it a little easier for Kevin Cheveldayoff to hold firm on his asking price, which could mean a bigger return when the trade eventually does go down.

Early schedule: Pretty rough. Seven of their first 10 opponents made the playoffs, a list that includes matchups with Carolina, Colorado, Minnesota and Dallas. And then it somehow gets even worse, with a six-game stretch that goes Montreal/Florida/Tampa/Florida/Carolina/Montreal.

Edmonton Oilers

The starting point: After two straight trips to the final, the Oilers took a big step back last year, barely making the playoffs and then losing in the opening round. That cost Kris Knoblauch his job, which everyone saw coming. Then they hired a replacement, which nobody did. Mix in some new goaltending and Darnell Nurse's departure, and there are some big question marks on the back end.

If they start poorly: They blew it. With two years left on Connor McDavid's team-friendly contract, they're really going into the season without a proven goalie, nowhere near enough depth and a coach who's more likely to blow the whole thing up than win his first playoff round in over a decade.

If they start well: Well, well, well, it looks like maybe the players who pushed for Mike Babcock's hiring may have known a thing or two more than those of us on the outside looking in. Maybe his act wears thin

eventually, but for now at least, he's exactly what they need. And "now" is all that should matter in Edmonton this year.

Early schedule: You couldn't ask for an easier start than a home-and-home with the Canucks followed by the Kraken. They get some middling western teams next, then host the Wild and Hurricanes to hit the 10-game mark with some "we're for real" momentum.

Detroit Red Wings

The starting point: After missing the playoffs for a tenth straight year, the Red Wings embarked on the league's most bizarre offseason. Dylan Larkin demanded a trade, Steve Yzerman held his ground, and then Yzerman was fired and replaced by ... look, they're working on it. But with Simon Edvinsson still unsigned and Alex DeBrincat needing an extension, the Wings front office looks like a ship without a rudder. And fans around the league are gleefully lining up to kick the team while it's down.

If they start poorly: Blow it up. Blow it all up. This team is hopeless, and the GM should trade everyone over the age of 25. You know, after they get around to finding an actual GM. But yeah, definitely get Larkin out of here for whatever you can, because that's a better option than putting him in the lineup to get torn to shreds by the home crowd.

If they start well: We all remember that this is a young team that had 92 points last year. And we start wondering what kind of Larkin boost they might be about to get — either from a trade, or from the former captain himself returning to the lineup with the mother of all chips on his shoulder.

Early schedule: Not bad. None of their first four opponents won a postseason game last year, and they make it all the way to November before they face playoff teams in back-to-back games. They're also at home for seven of the first eight, which should be good for everything other than Larkin's ego.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401591 Websites

The Athletic / Inside Gavin McKenna's NHL debut: 'It's hard to forget a day like this'

By Joshua Kloke

Sept. 30, 2026

TORONTO – Gavin McKenna awoke from a dream the day before his NHL debut. The Toronto Maple Leafs rookie had dreamt about the upcoming game against the Montreal Canadiens.

"It went good," the 2026 No. 1 draft pick said, still grinning, about how his debut unfolded in the dream. "Hopefully that's the case."

A little over 24 hours later, McKenna learned dreams do not always match reality. In his highly anticipated first NHL game, McKenna showcased promise — but also how much room he has to grow to become an NHL star.

The story of McKenna's Leafs debut is full of ups and downs. Even though landlord and teammate John Tavares — himself once a touted No. 1 pick — had experienced so much of what McKenna was going through, the veteran Leaf tried to keep his advice to a minimum. He wanted to create an air of normality on an otherwise unnatural day.

"A day like today, I actually don't think you say a whole lot," Tavares said. "You're aware how excited (McKenna is), and you talk about it from time to time, but now the day is here, let's just get in the flow."

Even in a highly anticipated game, Tavares wanted McKenna to get back to his roots.

"You realize that in some ways, it's just like when you're a kid," Tavares said. "You just get to go out there and play. Now you're playing in the best league in the world against the best players. It's really special to see the uniforms that you're wearing and you're playing against and what all that means. But you have to get in the flow of it and compete, just like whatever level you were at."

Despite being a rookie, McKenna did not skate in the Leafs' optional morning skate Tuesday. It is traditional for young NHL players to take part in optional morning skates.

"He's got some swag," defenceman Chris Tanev said of McKenna's decision.

McKenna arrived for his first NHL game dripping with that swag. He strutted towards the dressing room wearing a vintage-looking grey pinstripe suit, a black T-shirt and black loafers with a bright chain around his neck. At the base of the chain, on his chest: a maple leaf.

"Hearing your name called in player intros, it's all pretty special," McKenna said.

Everything was lining up for McKenna to have a special debut. But he quickly learned how different the NHL is from the NCAA, where he played with Penn State, and the WHL, the league he once dominated with the Medicine Hat Tigers.

McKenna moved with ease through the neutral zone on his first shift. Immediately after hopping over the boards, he threaded passes with linemates as if he'd been playing with them for years. But later in that shift, he mistimed a pass in the middle of the ice, leading to a turnover. There's a case to be made that anticipation around his debut meant he was thinking too quickly with the puck.

As his game wore on, there were moments when he could have put in an extra stride or two to track down loose pucks deep in the offensive zone. The Scotiabank Arena cameras once caught McKenna's eyes widening as he caught his breath in a break between the play. The NHL is fast. McKenna did not always keep up.

His best scoring chance came early in the second period. After Tavares wrapped around the net and tried to stuff the puck past Canadiens goalie Jakub Dobeš, the rebound fell to McKenna. He was a step behind where he should have been and could not force his shot into the net.

McKenna was on the ice in the defensive zone for two Canadiens goals. While not solely to blame for the goals, he, like other Leafs, struggled to get his stick in the right places before a goal-front scramble on the Canadiens' second goal.

Easton Cowan took McKenna's spot on the second line on an offensive-zone draw midway through the second period. McKenna stayed on the third line for a few shifts afterwards. The move was merited: Cowan had jump all night. McKenna looked physically outmatched. It was clear McKenna was playing in the hardest game of his career.

When McKenna returned to the second line late in the period, his short, smart pass to William Nylander led to a clear shot on goal. But opportunities like that to showcase his high-end vision and creativity were rare. He struggled to break through the Canadiens, as did many Leafs. While tension in the crowd built when McKenna had the puck, he did not produce any game-breaking moments.

"You've got to make do with what you've got," McKenna said of the limited time and space.

There were still moments throughout the day and the game that will stick with McKenna forever. Listening to NHL veterans discuss plays on the bench. Hearing the crowd cheer his name. Catching a glimpse of his emotional parents in the crowd.

What will also stick with McKenna: just how much more difficult the NHL is from anything else he has encountered.

Arber Xhekaj got into McKenna's space on an offensive-zone faceoff in the first period, whacking the rookie's stick repeatedly before the draw. The Canadiens intimidator followed McKenna afterwards, trying to land a cross check on him. McKenna might expect this kind of treatment to start his NHL campaign.

"That's part of the journey when you start, especially when you're 18 years old, game to game, how much you're going to learn," Tavares said.

By the end of the night, McKenna's stat line told a lot of his story. He played 15:19, maybe a few minutes less than expected, with just one shot on goal. McKenna himself likely knows he needs to do more offensively and get more involved defensively.

But McKenna's 2:33 of power-play time was tied for sixth among Leafs forwards. His slick puck play might push Leafs coach Jim Hiller to experiment with putting him on the top unit. When McKenna was feeling his game, he looked capable of bolstering rushes with Nylander and Tavares.

"First game, it's tough," Auston Matthews said. "It's a lot of things going through your head. I thought he had some good flashes."

And so when we look back on McKenna's debut, patience must be prominent. He deserves time to become an impact NHL player. And there is a reason four-goal NHL debuts such as Matthews' are enshrined in the annals of league history — they are rare and special. More often, skilled rookies realize how big the gap is between where they were before the NHL and where they find themselves: in the middle of new pace, physicality and urgency.

But what stuck out from his debut was how willing McKenna was to learn from his first game and move forward.

After he came off the ice, he stood in front a large crowd of reporters and cameras. He had wanted to tell a different story, about his dreams coming true. Instead, the teenager did well to acknowledge he had room to grow.

"Not great," McKenna said of his game, noting the turnovers he committed. "I'm glad we're playing again tomorrow so I can bounce back."

After McKenna spoke to the media, friends and family outside the dressing room were waiting to see him. Many wore new Leafs jerseys with his name and number 92 on the back. McKenna might want to look forward to his next game, but his friends wanted to greet him with a smile. He had come so far, from the far north of the Yukon, to an NHL debut. He learned how different dreams are to the life of an NHL player.

It's a life McKenna is just starting to live. But he'll get there.

"It's just the start for (McKenna)," Tavares said. "He's obviously got a lot of runway, a long way to go, a long career."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

The Athletic LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401592 Websites

ESPN / Predictions for every NHL team's finish in 2026-27: Why the Panthers will win the Cup - ESPN

Greg Wyshynski

Sep 30, 2026

As is tradition, I reached out to the general manager of my Stanley Cup champion-in-waiting to let him know what's coming.

Florida Panthers GM Bill Zito's reaction to my pick: "FINALLY!"

I didn't pick the Panthers when they won the Stanley Cup in 2024, because the Edmonton Oilers were supposed to do that. I didn't pick them the following year when Florida won again, because I figured it was the Dallas Stars' turn to win.

So I'm happy someone had the confidence to give the underrated and overlooked Florida Panthers, who have won three conference titles and two Stanley Cups in the last four seasons, their Stanley Cup pick.

I have the Panthers winning hockey's Holy Grail again over the Colorado Avalanche, who channel their frustration from a conference final defeat into a run to the NHL's last round ... only to find the deepest, nastiest and most self-assured team in hockey ready to pounce on another title.

What about the rest of the NHL? Here's my division-by-division breakdown of the projected standings. Playoff teams are bolded. Good luck to all 32 teams. I hope everyone has fun out there.

ATLANTIC DIVISION

The Tampa Bay Lightning amassed 106 points in a season with several key players missing chunks of time, battling through injuries and, in the case of captain Victor Hedman, off-ice matters. Coach Jon Cooper finally won the Jack Adams Award for keeping this rickety ship sailing straight, with assists from Nikita Kucherov (130 points, winning the Hart Trophy) and Andrei Vasilevski (39 wins, capturing the Vezina Trophy).

Given the dominance of their top six and a deeper blue line thanks to the addition of new power-play QB John Carlson, it's hard to imagine the Lightning finishing anywhere but near the top of the Atlantic, as long as Vasilevski holds up his end of the bargain. But then comes the hard part: Getting out of the first round, something they haven't done since winning their second of back-to-back Cups in 2021. If that happens again, is it time for some changes?

The Canadiens were the last Canadian team to win the Stanley Cup in 1993 and are poised to become the next one to lift it. GM Kent Hughes is really putting the pieces in place, what with Nick Suzuki and Cole Caufield locked into the top line; Ivan Demidov powering the second line; and Phillip Danault centering the third line. The addition of Chris Kreider adds some veteran physicality and leadership to a team that already earned an education in its conference finals loss to Carolina.

It still feels like a team that's a year away from breaking through the conference ceiling. That said, its strong young goaltending and dynamic defenseman Lane Hutson -- my personal pick for the Norris Trophy this season -- might make it ahead of schedule. Montreal is a legit Cup threat.

We all know the Panthers have three dominant forward lines and two championship-caliber defensive pairings. What makes this team special is how these star players approach the game. "Humility" isn't often associated with the Florida Panthers, but it's one of the secret ingredients to their success. There have been team meetings over the years in which players are asked about their individual stats and they can't recall them. No one cares who scores the game-winning goal as long as the game is won -- and the Panthers have the utmost confidence that the guy next to them in the locker room can score that goal.

Every person around the NHL that I've spoken to about the Panthers echo the same sentiment: a healthy Aleksander Barkov and a rested roster are scary, but can Jacob Markstrom sufficiently replace Sergei Bobrovsky? To that I'd say the Panthers knew Bob might price himself off the roster and had game-planning out potential replacements. Markstrom

was vetted and eventually acquired from the Devils. They believe he can be what they need -- and that the team in front is great enough to overcome a potential downgrade in goal to win a third Stanley Cup in four seasons.

After the Maple Leafs acquired Blue Jackets leading goal scorer Kirill Marchenko this week, a former NHL front office executive texted me to say, "You may have to upgrade Toronto" in the standings projections.

The trade that sent Matthew Knies to Columbus for Marchenko doesn't just give Auston Matthews his most talented linemate since Mitch Marner -- although Marchenko doesn't have Marner's defensive chops. It's the clearest indication of GM John Chayka's intention for the roster. Both Marchenko and Knies stand at 6-foot-3, but Knies had about 30 pounds on the newest Leaf. Knies is the player you keep on the roster if your team is specifically designed to take on the likes of the Panthers. Marchenko is the player whom you acquire if you're leaning into skill instead of bulk, a direction Leafs fans have been begging this team to take since the Core 4 ruled the Six.

First overall pick Gavin McKenna fits into that as well, but he also serves a more important purpose: a lottery win that gave the Leafs a sense of future and purpose right as it seemed like the franchise was on the precipice of entering its next phase.

Chayka's aggressive reshaping of the rest of the roster had its "throw all the bottom-six forwards at the wall and see what sticks" chaos, but it wasn't without salient improvements such as Darren Raddysh's addition to the blue line. Enough of those bets will pay off, and the Leafs will return to the postseason.

The Buffalo Sabres making the Stanley Cup playoffs in back-to-back seasons might have previously been seen as a sign of the apocalypse, but Buffalo will return to the party as a wild card.

The crushing weight of the playoff drought has been lifted, but the bigger psychological development is a collection of young players getting playoff experience and the confidence that comes with it. Josh Doan, Jack Quinn, Noah Ostlund and especially Zach Benson are all progressing nicely and ready for greater responsibilities. Throw in rookie wild cards such as Konsta Helenius and Jiri Kulich, and the Sabres are as fueled by youthful exuberance as they are by stars such as Tage Thompson and Rasmus Dahlin.

David Pastrnak is going to score 100 points, Jeremy Swayman is going to make a bunch of saves, and Charlie McAvoy is going to move the puck and throw the body. The Boston Bruins have won with a holy hockey trinity before -- Bergeron, Chara and Rask, hallowed be thy names -- but usually with a supporting cast that has fewer question marks than the current incarnation of the Bruins.

It's hard to imagine Pavel Zacha and Morgan Geekie running it back after career years, or the team's prospects such as James Hagens and Fraser Minten leveling up to the point of moving the needle.

I do like the addition of JJ Peterka, whose ill-fitting time in Utah ended after one season. But there's just not enough offense for me to depend on after Pasta.

The Ottawa Senators naming Quebecois Thomas Chabot as their captain was the most obvious thing in the history of obvious things. Jake Sanderson is younger, better, signed for longer and absolutely capable of captaining a team. But he's probably on the Team USA Olympic group chat, and this team plays in Ottawa and just saw previous captain Brady Tkachuk migrate to South Florida.

No matter how fractured things were with Tkachuk after the Olympics, he was one of the Senators' most consistent regular-season performers, with 59 points in 60 games last season. They're not replacing that point production or his snarly intangibles. Getting William Eklund from the Sharks certainly increases the skill level of a team that already has Tim Stutzle and Drake Batherson driving play at the forward spot, but there's not enough pop here to keep up with the rest of the division.

There is, however, an extremely good defensive team under the guidance of coach Travis Green. As Linus Ullmark showed in the playoffs last season, he's still an elite goaltender when locked in. It's not out of the realm of possibility that Ottawa can sneak into the playoffs on the strength of that team defense.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

Detroit is a mess. Captain Dylan Larkin requested a trade ... and as punishment Detroit made him continue to play for the Red Wings with fewer responsibilities, taking away the captaincy. They're grinding 23-year-old defenseman Simon Edvinsson in a contract negotiation. Worst of all, the franchise had to finally admit the "Yzerplan" was a failure, as franchise icon Steve Yzerman left the general manager's office after seven playoff-less seasons.

The Red Wings have a few reasons for hope, such as defenseman Moritz Seider, winger Lucas Raymond and a prospect pool that's filling up but without any franchise-level talents.

In the long term, maybe the plan is hoping the Hughes brothers all want to play close to their Michigan roots when Jack is a free agent in 2030. In the short term, there's speculation about who's leaving next after Larkin is dealt, and does his name rhyme with "Alex DeBrincat?"

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

Nothing is going to detract from the Hurricanes' hard-fought and well-earned Stanley Cup championship, the prize at the end of an absolutely dominant postseason run. This is essentially the same roster that skated the Cup on Vegas ice: a perfect alchemy of the Hurricanes' defensive hallmarks (in players such as Jacob Slavin and Jordan Staal) and the offensive spark plugs that powered their championship engine (Nikolaj Ehlers and Logan Stankoven among them).

However ... don't we all want to see Carolina go through their tormentors from South Florida for another shot at the Stanley Cup? To witness the last two champions in a slobber-knocker, especially now that GM Eric Tulsy has built a roster as good as any that the Panthers have faced? Of course we do, and not just for the Southeast Division nostalgia of it all. And given the strengths of both teams, we might get it.

A caveat about the Canes' season: There seems to be a growing sentiment that the Hurricanes are going to eventually solve their Alexander Nikishin problem -- an unsigned restricted free agent defenseman seeking a change in scenery -- by solving the Winnipeg Jets' Connor Hellebuyck problem, likely through a three-way trade of some sort. With due respect to the newly signed Pyotr Kochetkov and playoff legend Brandon Bussi, putting a multitime Vezina winner in a Rod Brind'Amour system behind that blue line is like putting a wall made of adamantium in front of the Hurricanes' net.

Stop me if you've heard this one before: The New Jersey Devils' success will hinge on the health of star center Jack Hughes and the quality of their goaltending. Rinse, repeat.

They went 34-24-3 with the Olympic hero on the ice last season and 8-13-0 without him. Their goaltending was 21st in the NHL in save percentage, thanks to the .903 that Jake Allen put up in 37 games. Jacob Markstrom was traded to Florida, which means the crease belongs to Allen and Nico Daws -- with Mikhail Yegorov gestating at Boston University.

New GM Sunny Mehta didn't take gargantuan swings in the offseason. (Potential Quinn Hughes trade pending.) Rather, he added some sorely needed scoring depth so the Devils might withstand the absence of Jack Hughes better than they have in previous seasons. Anthony Mantha, Luke Evangelista, Evan Rodrigues and Amadeus Lombardi join a forward pool that also includes Arseny Gritsyuk, who showed flashes of brilliance last season.

The Washington Capitals have a tantalizingly high ceiling this season. Like the Panthers and Hurricanes, every line brings something to the table. I love their mix of established veterans and young impact players such as Ilya Protas and Cole Hutson. I love that they can win a match of skills or one game pummeling one another in the corners. Logan Thompson is now overdue to win the Vezina Trophy, giving them goaltending on which they can build a contender.

What's holding me back from anointing the Capitals as conference champions, because the potential is there? Their Stanley Cup championship was won with John Carlson, Matt Niskanen, Dmitry Orlov and Brooks Orpik logging the most ice time. I don't see that presence or pedigree within their current defense corps. That could change with a deadline deal or two, but that's the only glaring concern on an otherwise stout roster. Alex Ovechkin's last NHL season -- we think? -- is going to be a lengthy one.

The rest of this division you could basically pick out of a hat and have a decent chance of getting the order right. That's not to say the Metro Division's other five teams are beyond my power of prognostication, but that there's so little daylight between them that any of them could be fourth and any of them could be eighth and none of it would be surprising.

Take the Philadelphia Flyers, who ended a five-season playoff drought and won a playoff round last season. There's at least a little fear around the team that there's going to be a step back before there's a leap forward with a young but very talented roster.

Just a little regression from their forward group or goalie Dan Vladar could turn a three-points playoff bubble cushion into a postseason miss.

In fact, one could argue that the Flyers wouldn't have made the playoffs had the Columbus Blue Jackets not epically face-planted with two wins in their last 11 games last season. The biggest question facing Columbus is what, if any, impact the turbulent offseason is going to have on the team. Norris winner Zach Werenski reportedly indicated he wasn't signing another contract with the Blue Jackets, vetoed a trade to the Stars and spent the next two months on a PR campaign to smooth things over with the fanbase.

Kirill Marchenko, their leading goal scorer for three seasons, declared he wanted out and was traded to Toronto for a package centered around Matthew Knies.

Now that the noise has quieted, are the Blue Jackets a playoff team? Potentially, if they look as good as they looked for much of Rick Bowness' time as head coach last season. Adam Fantilli is just getting started and leads a solid trio of centers with Sean Monahan and Charlie Coyle. They're going to have to get goal scoring from veteran wingers such as Valeri Nichushkin, imported from Colorado, and Conor Garland. They obviously also need young forwards Cole Sillinger and Kent Johnson to progress as Fantilli has.

The defense is in good hands with Werenski, Ivan Provorov and the underrated Denton Mateychuk. One assumed Jet Greaves' breakout season in goal wasn't a fluke. Like the Flyers, they're right on the cusp.

The Pittsburgh Penguins were an unlikely playoff team last season after they ended up last in the Metro in most projections. Can Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin conjure another postseason party in their sunset years? That depends on three factors:

1. How much second-year coach Dan Muse can tease out of the team's supporting cast, after a masterful job last season.
2. Whether Erik Karlsson, finally in the last year of his contract, has another remarkable season in him after 66 points in 75 games, finishing ninth for the Norris.
3. How quickly rookie goalie Sergei Murashov can ascend to the starter's role and whether his play is good enough to separate the Penguins from the Metro pack.

I think the improvement of the rest of the division keeps the Penguins out. Which is a bummer, because I want all the Sidney Crosby in championship tournament spotlights I can get, as the clock ticks.

Full disclosure: An early draft of these projections had the New York Rangers as a wild-card team, even as they announced a "retool" earlier this season. Retool they have, adding Marcus Pettersson and Sean Durzi to round out a pretty good group on the back end led by the resurgent Adam Fox and solidified by Igor Shesterkin, one of the best goalies on the planet.

They also traded for Vegas winger Pavel Dorofeyev and handed him a seven-year deal worth \$11 million annually against the salary cap. If he pops for another 30-plus goal season, the Rangers' ceiling is a bit higher in the standings. If he doesn't, because neither Jack Eichel or Mitch Marner is on the Rangers, then the climb becomes a bit steep. His two goals over the final nine playoff games last postseason gave me pause.

Dorofeyev isn't the only player whose performance could level this group up. If Gabe Perreault doubles his points, Will Cuyile bounces back from a regression year and Alexis Lafrenière finally answers "When will Alexis Lafrenière become a star?" with "Right now, baby," the Rangers could end up in the postseason. If not, the "retool" continues."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

Someone who doesn't miss the playoffs often is New York Islanders coach Pete DeBoer, who took over with four games left last season. Not counting his cameo appearance last season and when he was fired by the Sharks after 33 games, DeBoer's teams have made the playoffs in nine of 10 seasons.

Alas, those Sharks and Knights and Stars teams were much more talented than this current group on the Island, despite the presence of rookie of the year defenseman and franchise touchstone Matthew Schaefer, as well as goalie Ilya Sorokin. It feels like a franchise stuck between previous iterations of the team and whatever the Islanders will look like in the Schaefer era.

CENTRAL DIVISION

Injuries to Cale Makar and Nathan MacKinnon gave the Colorado Avalanche plausible deniability for losing in the 2026 Western Conference finals, but let's face it: They weren't playing well enough at 5-on-5 to win the Stanley Cup anyway. MacKinnon and Brock Nelson had zero goals in 13 games at events; Martin Necas and Artturi Lehkonen had one each. Over the last two rounds, Mackenzie Blackwood (.890) and Scott Wedgewood (.874) were a faint echo of their regular-season success.

After having the league's best record in the regular season, those diminishing returns must make the Avalanche angry -- and I like the Avalanche when they're angry.

Brent Burns trimmed his beard. That's how you know it's serious.

They were the best offensive (3.63 goals per game) and defensive team (2.40 goals against per game) last season. I don't expect the Lumber Yard (Blackwood and Wedgewood) to lead the league in save percentage again, but I do think Blackwood becoming the de facto starter will help slow that regression to the mean. MacKinnon and Makar drive play like few others can. The supporting cast took a little hit in the offseason, but I love the Jaden Schwartz addition and look forward to a full season of Nazem Kadri back in familiar stomping grounds.

Plus, I have unending faith in newly reestablished GM Joe Sakic to aggressively improve the team if necessary ... provided opposing GMs are dumb enough to pick up the phone.

Only one team had a better regular-season points percentage than the Avalanche over the last three seasons (.673), and that's the Dallas Stars.

They enter the season with Jason Robertson, the 45-goal scorer who sweated out a contentious contract standoff for a one-year deal (\$12 million AAV) that walks him up to unrestricted free agency, and with a healthy Tyler Seguin, who looked incredible last season before (another) injury derailed him.

They enter this season without now Nashville center Mavrik Bourque, a rising star turned cap casualty who had 20 goals last season, and without current Columbus defenseman Zach Werenski, who vetoed a trade to Dallas in the offseason. But the Werenski ordeal is another example of GM Jim Nill trying to take the huge swing when the opportunity presents itself -- like when he acquired Mikko Rantanen, who had 77 points in 64 games last season to help drive the offense.

But the reason the Stars aren't the Avalanche is the scoring depth beyond Robertson, Rantanen and Wyatt Johnston. Dallas was ninth in goals per game (3.33) and 21st in expected goals at 5-on-5 last season. The slow leak of middle-six scoring talent -- Bourque, Logan Stankoven, Mason Marchment and Mikael Granlund, to name a few -- and the decline of players such as Matt Duchene is catching up with the Stars. But they're still the second-best team in the division, because they have discernible center depth, unlike the third-best team in the division.

The Minnesota Wild remain the NHL's most decadent artisan doughnut: gourmet ingredients on the outside and nothing in the middle.

The Wild have a tenacious collection of wingers led by goal-scoring stars Kirill Kaprizov and Matt Boldy; they have a stout blue line, toplined by Norris winner Quinn Hughes and the rock-solid Brock Faber (whenever he returns from injury); and they have one of the best goalie tandems in the NHL with Filip Gustavsson and Jesper "The Wall" Wallstedt. And their No. 1 center is Joel Eriksson EK.

What makes Minnesota so intriguing is the potential variance in its season. If GM Bill Guerin persuades the team from Hockeytown to trade Dylan Larkin, a close friend of fellow Olympian Quinn Hughes, to the

State of Hockey, then that hole at center gets much smaller and the Wild's Stanley Cup odds get much better.

Then again, if it becomes apparent that all this dillydallying by Hughes about a contract extension just means he's going to bolt for his brothers' condo in New Jersey next summer, that could dramatically alter Guerin's plans. Keep him for a Cup run or get something before he skates away? That's why they pay Billy the big bucks.

Speaking of variance: How much higher can the Utah Mammoth climb above their 92 points last season if Dylan Guenther and Logan Cooley reach the next tier of their stardom? Guenther, 23, popped for 40 goals last season. Cooley, 22, might have joined him were it not for an injury that limited him to 54 games, as he scored 24 times.

GM Bill Armstrong did the thing that young contending teams do and imported some veteran leadership this offseason in Swiss Army knife forward Vincent Trocheck from the Rangers and Islanders captain Anders Lee. They form a nice experienced core with returning forwards Clayton Keller and Nick Schmaltz, who were a stabilizing force last season.

We know they can score. The Mammoth's success ultimately comes down to their defense corps -- which will be without promising Maveric Lamoureux for at least four months -- and the goaltending tandem of the tireless Karel Vejmelka and former Red Wings prospect Sebastian Cossa. Unless, of course, the Jets could be convinced to send Connor Hellebuyck to Salt Lake City.

The St. Louis Blues are one of my surprise teams this season. They sucked me in with their last 25 games, posting a .740 points percentage with the best goals-against average (2.16) in the league and a top-10 offense.

That's what happens when you turn your crease over to Joel Hofer, who went 12-2-2 in 16 starts to Jordan Binnington's nine appearances (5-3-1). Hofer had a .933 save percentage in that stretch. I don't think that was an aberration -- he's a goalie on the rise. Binnington, meanwhile, is in the last year of his contract. Maybe he ups his game for his next deal. Maybe he's wearing another uniform by the trade deadline.

I'm also confident that the trio of Dylan Holloway, Robert Thomas and Jimmy Snuggerud fuels this team's playoff journey. They produced 5.7 goals and allowed 1.4 goals against per 60 minutes. That's a preposterous 80.1% goals share at 5-on-5. If they can stay healthy -- a legit concern with Thomas and Holloway -- they have the potential to be the best line in the conference and carry this team offensively. Although it would be nice if players such as Jake Neighbours, Dalibor Dvorsky and the newly acquired Mason McTavish help shoulder that goal-scoring load.

Squint hard enough at the Nashville Predators, and this collection of Barry Trotz acquisitions and Chris MacFarland augmentations looks like a playoff team.

Steven Stamkos and Ryan O'Reilly clicked, leading to Stamkos's 42-goal season. Filip Forsberg had 40 goals of his own, and I'm excited to see how he works with young winger Matthew Wood. They could go a solid three lines deep.

It's the blue line beyond Roman Josi's top pairing, as well as goalie Juuse Saros's frustrating decline, that's like an anchor dragging back their momentum. That said, even if this is coach Andrew Brunette's final season, it should be a fun ride.

It's been a lot less fun these days in Winnipeg. The Jets watched their franchise goalie Connor Hellebuyck peace out with a trade demand, suspending the multiple-time Vezina winner for not reporting to camp. Last season wasn't his greatest, but he's still a goalie with a .927 save percentage and a 1.98 goals-against average at 5-on-5 over his last 180 games. Due respect to Stuart Skinner, but there's no replacing that.

There's apparently also no replacing Nikolaj Ehlers. The winger's departure as a free agent in 2025, combined with several injuries on last year's roster, saw the Jets' offense plummet from 3.35 to 2.79 goals per game. Without the usual Hellebuyck safety net in a down year, that led to a staggering 34-point drop in the standings.

There's still a nice core here with Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Josh Morrissey. They could be better than expected if young players such as Viggo Bjork, Isak Rosen and Brad Lambert level up, and if Cole Perfetti



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

reverses his regression. But no Helly, no playoffs, no matter what comes back the other way in his eventual trade.

How far the Jets slide down the standings will determine whether or not the Chicago Blackhawks finish last in the Central for a fifth straight season.

In a major leap forward for the franchise, there are now multiple reasons to watch Chicago this season beyond the continuing offensive adventures of Connor Bedard. Center Anton Frondell (19) could challenge for the Calder. Center Frank Nazar (22) is maturing nicely into a point-producing pivot. Can defenseman Bowen Byram prove worthy of his six-year deal with an elephantine \$12.5 million cap hit? Will Patrick Kane be something more than a nostalgia play?

The Blackhawks might not win much else this season, but they've recaptured our attention.

I guess I see things differently than Connor McDavid. I thought what has held the Edmonton Oilers back from winning the Stanley Cup are factors like not having a good bottom six, not having six good defensemen, and a cursed goaltending situation that left Edmonton unclear about who would actually start an elimination game in the Final.

Connor obviously felt the problem was the Oilers not having an NHL coaching pariah with an inflated legacy using his sports psychology degree to squeeze another percent of effort out of the best player in the world, all while fighting the urge to invade his players' personal electronic devices.

However this Mike Babcock hiring turns out -- I know it's subtle, but I'm skeptical -- the quintet of McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Zach Hyman, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Evan Bouchard will drive this team to its first division title since 1987, which is a truly wild gap of titles given the team's successful history.

Then the real questions can start being answered, especially the one about their goaltending: Can the three-headed monster of Tristan Jarry, Devon Levi and Stanley Cup champ Frederik Andersen finally give McDavid the championship quality netminding he's lacked in Edmonton?

The Vegas Golden Knights' reign of dominance is now 10 years old, having won six division titles, three conference titles and the Stanley Cup. The coaches during that reign: Gerard Gallant, Pete DeBoer, Bruce Cassidy and John Tortorella. All experienced, all accomplished and three of them with Jack Adams Awards. Tortorella took over the Golden Knights with eight games left in the regular season and led them to the Cup Final. He wanted to come back. But GM Kelly McCrimmon told him that Ryan Craig is his guy.

Boy, is he. Craig played for McCrimmon's beloved Brandon Wheat Kings. He joined the Golden Knights as an assistant coach in their inaugural season before taking over their AHL club for the past three seasons -- missing the playoffs twice, for what it's worth. He's been primed to take over this gig for the entirety of the team's existence, handpicked by his boss to replace a coach who had just led them to within two wins of a championship. (That's nothing to say for how good Mitch Marner played under Tortorella, too.)

The Golden Knights collect stars like they're playing a round of "Mario Party," which is why they're going to finish first or second in the Pacific again. But for the first time in their short history, they don't begin the season with a star behind the bench. No pressure, Ryan Craig. You're just a handpicked guy seeking to meet the highest standard of excellence for any NHL team in the last decade.

Please recall that Sidney Crosby played for the Stanley Cup in his third season. I'm not willing to go quite that far with his heir apparent, but I do have Macklin Celebrini winning the Rocket Richard, the Hart Trophy and Lululemon curator of the year in leading the San Jose Sharks back to the playoffs for the first time since 2019.

He is surrounded by a roster filled with young potential stars such as Will Smith (nearly there), Michael Misa, Sam Dickinson and Ivar Stenberg, their latest stroke of draft lottery luck.

But GM Mike Grier has been slowly building a truculent supporting cast in the punishing Western Conference, from his Kiefer Sherwood pickup last season to adding Jacob Trouba to an improved blue line that also now includes Darnell Nurse. You'd like a little more in goal from Alex Nedeljkovic and especially Yaroslav Askarov, who was an atrocious

minus-19 goals saved above expected last season, and maybe the new vets on the back end help that out.

The Anaheim Ducks lost Trouba from their back end last season. Olen Zellweger is now a Sabre. Radko Gudas is back in Florida. John Carlson, added at the deadline, is in Tampa. None of them were sufficiently replaced on the fifth-worst team in expected goals against (5-on-5) in the league last season.

Granted, GM Pat Verbeek had to deal with his star center Leo Carlsson signing a \$90 million offer sheet from the Flyers, matching it, and then figuring out how much more he had to pay leading scorer Cutter Gauthier ... because of Leo Carlsson signing a \$90 million offer sheet from the Flyers. Maybe he was too busy to build on this team's playoff round victory last season, because this roster looks primed for a dip.

Having the Los Angeles Kings outside of the playoff picture just seems wrong. They've made the postseason cut five straight times. New coach Peter Laviolette has made the playoffs in his first full season at each of his six previous NHL coaching stops. They're going to have a full season of star winger Artemi Panarin skating up with Quinton Byfield and either Adrian Kempe or Kevin Fiala when healthy. Their back end features master Drew Doughty, his apprentice Brandt Clarke and the steady work of veteran goalie Darcy Kuemper.

What they don't have is a replacement for Anze Kopitar, who never received the appreciation for how much he did for the Kings in his sunset years. Will they have to move Kempe in the middle for depth's sake, further exposing a past-their-prime group of wingers? There's always a possibility of a trade for a center, but the Kings will have to take a number before being served one -- nearly every team wants another scoring center.

There's a chance I'm wrong here and the Kings vacuum up points in a weak division to make the playoff cut again. But their scoring depth and lack of overall team speed concerns me, even under a coach that gets results.

The best thing for the Seattle Kraken this season would be to be terrible, but this franchise continues to exhibit a stubborn inability to suck. They've never had a points percentage under .463 since their inaugural season. They haven't selected in the top four since drafting Shane Wright in 2022, a young center currently best known for being potential trade bait. Coach Lane Lambert has a system that squeezes out enough points to keep the bubble in sight.

Seattle's analytically driven front office continues to make the nice move here and there: Securing Bobby McMann from the Leafs, getting Mackie Samoskevich from Florida and finally unlocking Kaapo Kakko's potential. Assuming a bounce-back from Joey Daccord, their goaltending is quite solid. But the Kraken are once again neither good enough for the playoffs nor bad enough to maximize their draft lottery odds. They are the embodiment of hockey purgatory.

You probably won't find a standings projection that doesn't have the Vancouver Canucks and Calgary Flames in the bottom of the Pacific. I'm buying into the vibe shift in Vancouver, with the Sedin twins running hockey operations above beloved former player and now head coach Manny Malhotra. They have two potentially solid scoring lines anchored by Elias Pettersson and Jake DeBrusk as well as Marco Rossi and Brock Boeser.

It'll be fun to see if Zeev Buium, who like Rossi came over in the Quinn Hughes trade, has another level.

The Canucks should be better than 31st in scoring, which is where they were last season. I'm not sure the Flames will be better than last in the league again, and that's fine. GM Craig Conroy is in the middle of a rebuild that he's handling adeptly.

Unless goaltenders Dustin Wolf and Devin Cooley prevent the bottom from falling out, the Flames should be 8th-of-8 in the Pacific.

ESPN LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401593 Websites

ESPN / NHL tonight: What to watch, key stats, betting intel for Wednesday – ESPN

Staff Report

Sep 30, 2026

On this day in 1997, the Maple Leafs named Mats Sundin their captain, the first European-born player to be an NHL captain. He would wear the "C" for 11 seasons for Toronto.

Sundin returned to the Leafs franchise this year, taking on the role of senior executive adviser, hockey operations.

ESPN LOADED: 10.01.2026

The temperature of some NHL rivalries can rise and fall when one rival racks up a string of wins year after year over the other.

Other NHL rivalries remain razor-hot regardless of the standings, and that's the case with the Battle of Pennsylvania between the Pittsburgh Penguins and Philadelphia Flyers.

Both clubs were part of the NHL's 1967 expansion, and have been geographic rivals since. The intensity ratcheted up in the salary cap era, as the two teams met four times in the Stanley Cup playoffs from 2008 to 2018, and again in the first round of the 2026 postseason. Overall, the Flyers hold a 5-3 playoff series edge over the Pens.

The two teams meet for their season-opening matchup Wednesday, the highlight of a three-game slate on the NHL schedule:

Pittsburgh Penguins at Philadelphia Flyers

7:30 ET (TNT) | PHI -142, O/U: 5.5

In addition to all of the history between the franchises, both have a player that made Rachel Kryshak's preseason Calder Trophy watch list. Philly's Porter Martone exploded onto the scene this past postseason, and looks like a cornerstone component of their top six for years to come. Meanwhile, Pittsburgh has possibly the best young goaltender in hockey on the roster in Sergei Murashov, who finished with a .919 save percentage in 38 starts for AHL Wilkes-Barre/Scranton last season.

New York Islanders at Toronto Maple Leafs

7:30 ET (ESPN+) | TOR -120, O/U: 5.5

This game includes a showdown between the past two No. 1 picks: Matthew Schaefer, who won the Calder Trophy as the league's top rookie last season for the Isles, and Gavin McKenna, who joins fellow top picks Auston Matthews and John Tavares on the Maple Leafs.

Los Angeles Kings at Colorado Avalanche

10 ET (TNT) | COL -192, O/U: 6.5

Wednesday's nightcap is another playoff rematch, with the Kings looking to exact some revenge after the Avalanche swept them out of the postseason this past spring. This is Game 1 of the post-Anze Kopitar era for L.A., as the future Hall of Famer concluded his career last season.

Jump ahead:

Here's what you need to know:

Greg Wyshynski predicts the future for all 32 teams with his full standings predictions.

Emily Kaplan runs down all the big storylines across the NHL for opening week.

The ESPN family of reporters, analysts and broadcasters made their picks for division winners, the Stanley Cup and all the major awards.

Ryan S. Clark and Kristen Shilton went deep with all the intel you need on all 32 teams.

Wild defenseman Brock Faber had surgery on his fractured skull, with his return TBD.

The Maple Leafs and Blue Jackets swapped Kirill Marchenko for Matthew Knies (with four other players involved).

The Hurricanes and the Avalanche are co-favorites to win the Cup, according to the sportsbooks.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401594 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Steady Stolarz leads new-look Maple Leafs to first victory

Sonny Sachdeva

TORONTO — It's been nearly 11 months since Anthony Stolarz led the Toronto Maple Leafs to a win under the Scotiabank Arena lights. Nearly a year since the netminder got the blue-and-white faithful on their feet and heard his name chanted from the stands.

The last time he was in the cage with the Maple Leaf on his chest, the 32-year-old saw his outing end after just two-and-a-half minutes, a groin injury forcing him out of the lineup and into a summer of difficult rehab. This after a tumultuous 2025-26 campaign made no easier by the uneven play of the group in front of him.

Wednesday night, with his Maple Leafs looking for redemption in the second half of a season-opening back-to-back, the netminder stepped back into the cage, led Toronto to its first victory of the season, and reminded fans how valuable a contributor he can be.

"It was good," he said from the Maple Leafs' locker room after the dust settled on a 2-1 win over the visiting New York Islanders. "First win of the season — it's a great feeling. Something for our team to grow on, expand on, and continue to go forward. Obviously you want to win the first one last night, but to come out the way we did, respond the way we did, was extremely encouraging."

The six-foot-six netminding behemoth played no small part in Toronto claiming that first victory. While the Maple Leafs came up with a cleaner performance than they did Tuesday night against Montreal — stringing together some more offence, limiting the self-inflicted errors in their own zone — the Islanders still managed a decent collection of dangerous chances on the home side.

It was in the latter half of the tilt, especially, that Stolarz found his rhythm.

His squad had built up a 2-0 lead — Colton Sissons potting his first goal as a Maple Leaf, and Easton Cowan doubling the lead on the power play — when the Islanders started to make a push. The visitors started collecting chances, found their way to the power play and kept the pressure on. But the veteran in the cage stood his ground. Midway through the second period, as he sprawled out to hold the Isles at bay on the heels of a man-advantage, the Scotiabank Arena crowd made their appreciation known, raining chants of 'STO-LY! STO-LY!' down on the ice.

Early in the third came another moment of quality, when New York's Anthony Duclair cut across the crease, tried to wait Stolarz out and flip the puck over him, only to see the netminder contort himself and thwart the winger with a raised pad — a move he later dubbed a "half scorpion."

"He just kept dragging it, and dragging it — you know, you're just trying to do whatever it takes to make that save," Stolarz said of the play late Wednesday.

It's no doubt a positive sign for the Maple Leafs as they look to return to their former place near the top of the Atlantic Division this season. The campaign in the rearview was as much a dip for Stolarz as it was for the club as a whole — the goaltender put up a league-leading .926 save percentage one year prior, only to see it slip to .893 last season.

When the disappointing year had finally come to a close — with his Maple Leafs missing out on a return to the post-season — Stolarz admitted the pressure of being the club's No. 1 option had been difficult to bear.

"From a physical standpoint, I felt fine. I think it was more or less just putting too much pressure on myself and trying to be perfect," he said as the club closed out their season last April. "Obviously it was the first time in my career where I had the ball in my court and was able to run with it. I was trying to be this perfect goalie and kind of strayed away from what made me successful."

A summer to clear his head — and rediscover his game — did wonders.

"Just forget about last season," he said Wednesday of his mindset this summer. "Just go out there and rehab. I had to first and foremost get healthy. I put a lot of work in there, tried to put on a lot of muscle just to keep my body strong. Once I got the okay to go back and skate, I was just working on simplifying my game, just staying patient. I worked on some hand-eye and movements around the crease, just trying to be as calm and collected as possible."

Wednesday night brought the first test since, and Stolarz no doubt passed with ease. Key to the equation, it seems, has been the arrival of Sergei Bobrovsky. The two-time Vezina Trophy winner paired with Stolarz during their Florida Panthers days, the duo winning the Stanley Cup together in 2024.

And while the arrival of the Russian phenom has allowed Stolarz to slide back into a more natural role as the club's No. 2 — unlike the past two seasons, in which he and Joseph Woll went toe to toe for the top job in the cage — the relationship between the two former Cats has been just as crucial.

"It's hard for me, because I don't know the players that well, but I mean, whatever he's done, it's been outstanding," head coach Jim Hiller said of Stolarz after Wednesday's win. "You know, I was just talking to Bob about him. They have a good relationship — Bob was just so happy, he thought he played remarkable. Maybe that has some effect on the guy too, just the comfort level with the two of them."

The decision by the new Maple Leafs brass to keep Stolarz in town — the club chose instead to trade Woll to Philadelphia in June — helped, too.

"It's a vote of confidence for me," Stolarz said. "You know, you look at the turnover, and they wanted to keep me around. For me, it's exciting. I want to be here, I want to play here. You want to win hockey games. And just seeing all the fresh faces, the personalities and the work ethic, the pedigree of all these players that we brought in, it's high calibre. We think we can do something special in this room."

There's a long road to navigate before then. The first win of the new campaign sets these Maple Leafs on the right path. There's still chemistry to find, a system to learn, an identity to hone. But after reigniting some doubt among the fanbase Tuesday, Wednesday's blue-collar victory comes as a sign of progress for the group.

"It's great to see that type of a win," Hiller said of the night. "You like to see the easy ones, trust me, when you're standing behind the bench. But you appreciate the hardness — the blocked shots, the desperation at the end. Those always feel pretty good too."

For Stolarz, and the half of the locker room that was here for the disappointing rollercoaster that was 2025-26, it's the true start of a new chapter. One win on the board, much still to prove, and another chance to keep building around the corner.

"It's a new season," Stolarz said Wednesday. "There's a lot of fresh blood. Whatever happened last season happened — we're not worried about that. We're just focused on this year. Just to be able to get the first one out of the way, in front of our home fans, is nice."

"It's a good stepping stone for us. We've just got to continue to build on it, and just get ready for Saturday."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401595 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 'Some young juice': What makes Maple Leafs' Cowan driven to win

Luke Fox

TORONTO — It is late June.

Easton Cowan has just finished hoisting the Calder Cup over his head and taking the AHL championship trophy for a half lap. His smile is lighting up Coca-Cola Coliseum. He's soaking in sweat and in the moment.

Sort of.

Even wrapping the final game of his first pro campaign with a victory, Cowan can't help but think of what's next.

"Obviously it feels good," the 21-year-old says. "I mean, winning is winning, no matter what league it is. It's super special and fun, especially in this city.

"So, you want to keep winning in Toronto down the road. And right now, enjoy this. But that's where my goals are at.

"This is the place you want to win, for sure."

Whereas Cowan's current Toronto Maple Leafs teammates (Bo Groulx excepted) had their 2025-26 seasons end in disappointment, the Marlies' run gave him a second wind.

A driver and leader down on the farm, the kid they call "Cowboy" scored eight goals and added 10 assists in the Marlies' brilliant 22-game playoff run. He was leaned on in elimination games, defensively and offensively. Chipped in on both special teams. Threw his body and mind into the fight.

"For Cowboy, even from the first game he came down with us, to the last game, his leadership grew immensely," AHL assistant coach Mark Giordano said.

Fast-forward to late September, and the everyday Maple Leaf with the shortest summer and smallest paycheques (Cowan's \$900,000 entry-level cap hit has already been exceeded by buddy Gavin McKenna's) leads Toronto in points (three), plus/minus (plus-2), and game-winners (one).

Sure, it's early.

But farm boys rise with the sun.

The buzzing Cowan was the most noticeable Leaf on the sheet in Wednesday's 2-1 victory over the visiting New York Islanders, helping set up linemate Colton Scissons' opening goal with a dog-on-bone forecheck, then knocking in the game-winner by driving net-front and converting a rebound off Ilya Sorokin's pad.

Moreover, he and fellow third-liners Scissons and Nick Paul checked New York's top line, led by Bo Horvat, and helped kill all four Leafs penalties.

What a difference a year makes.

Cowan's conviction in Season 2 is palpable. Those extra hours chasing a Calder Cup and reacquainting the former London Knight with a winning environment worked wonders.

"It did a lot. I mean, anytime you're playing pro in the playoffs helps a lot. So, a lot of confidence heading into this year, and just want to keep it going," Cowan said.

"Our line was clicking. As soon as you get all four lines going, I mean, it's fun to play. Everyone's laughing, having fun, which is good. And we're all working hard. So, great team win."

Cowan points to a tattoo of a series of Roman numerals tattooed on the inside of his left forearm. They represent June 1, 2025, the date his Knights captured the Memorial Cup.

Winning matters to the kid.

So, when Cowan was done sipping from the Calder, the pesky winger dedicated his summer to the details, becoming more proficient at puck battles, swifter at plucking rims off walls, and packing on muscle to make sure he's as strong as possible at his ideal weight of 190 pounds.

Jim Hiller had heard tales of Cowan's great confidence and relentless motor. But what caught the new Leafs coach's eye was the second-youngest Leaf's determination. How early he shows up to the rink to stretch, eat properly, and grind away in the gym.

"Mentally, he really wants it," Hiller said. "There's some players in the league that I think he could trend towards. I'm not going to tell you who they are.

"It's early, and I just kind of have that in my mind. I don't know where he's going to go. He's an exciting young player."

OK, we'll name one: Brandon Hagel.

That's a high bar, to be sure, but the forwards are of similar build and temperament. And Cowan is taking meaningful steps as a two-way menace that can complement top-six players and check hard with the role players.

Hiller crowned Cowan the most noticeable skater after one day of camp and has already bumped him up to John Tavares and William Nylander's line for stretches in both games this season.

The difference from his rookie season?

"It's night and day," raves goalie Anthony Stolarz. "I mean, he's playing with a lot of confidence, and the defensive aspect of his game is improved as well. He's getting some PK time out there, and I think that's just the maturity and just growing as a player.

"The best thing for him was going down to the American League and getting a taste of that playoff action and being able to play his game and dominate. He carried that confidence into the summer, and he's playing a huge role on this team so far."

Adds Sissons: "He was feeling it tonight. Just a dynamic player. He has the puck on his stick a lot and makes a lot of good plays. So, really blessed to be playing with him right now."

Hiller envisions Cowan-Paul-Scissons as something more than a traditional checking unit, as a trio that can also make plays and prolong cycles and chip in on offence, too.

"Those three players can score goals," Hiller noted. "Easton can really be the straw that stirs the drink from an offensive perspective and keep the other team's best line honest."

More responsibility?

Bring it on. The Cowboy is riding on a high, and he's finding momentum not just from his past but from his current teammates and a coach who seems to have a defined role in mind.

"I think just this room. I mean, the vibes are great. Everyone's positive and welcoming me and Gav, too, as a young guy. Everyone's been great to us," Cowan said.

"Some young juice and some veterans, it goes a long way. So, it's been good, and we just want to keep it going, keep having fun."

Just how much fun can this guy, who has already won at junior and the AHL, have?

"Sky's the limit with that kid," Sissons said. "He's got all the potential in the world."

Fox's Fast Five

• Matthew Schaefer, 2026's unanimous Calder champ, is now wearing an 'A' for the Islanders. He only turned 19 this month.

"I didn't take that decision lightly, but he earned it," coach Peter DeBoer told reporters.

"What a privilege to coach a player like that. You know, he's even better live and in person than he is on tape, and I watched a lot of tape of him last year while we were scouting for the Canadian Olympic team. But to actually stand behind the bench those last four games last year with him



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

out there, he's a real difference-making player. There's very few of them in the world, and he's one of them."

DeBoer revealed that Schaefer was "really close" to making that silver-medal squad as an 18-year-old.

"He was in our discussions right up until the last day. And, in hindsight, if we turned back the clock, (Josh) Morrissey got hurt the first game, he probably could have helped us."

- Stolarz (.963) was superb in his season debut and first real game action in 175 days, many of which were spent rehabbing.

Remember, Toronto traded away two of its top three goalies over the off-season.

"It's a vote of confidence to me," he said. "You look at the turnover, and they want to keep me around. And for me, it's exciting. I want to be here. I want to play here. And you want to win hockey games."

- Newly anointed Islanders captain Horvat watched the overhauled Maple Leafs play Montreal Tuesday. His take: "A lot of high-end skill. Their transition game is really good."

- The Leafs did not honour Matias Maccelli, who was not tendered a qualifying offer following 2025-26, with a Jumbotron acknowledgment.

Maccelli settled for a pay cut in free agency, signing a one-year, \$2.25-million deal with the Isles. He's starting the season on New York's second line and first power-play unit, but Mathew Barzal is injured.

Perhaps the bar for return-game pomp is rising?

- McKenna Watch!

Tough night territorially for the second line. While McKenna looked more relaxed and made sharp passes — plenty of crisp, cross-seam pucks as the PP2 facilitator — his line, with Nylander and Tavares, was outshot 10-1 and out-attempted 19-3.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401596 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Five young NHL players poised for breakouts

Adam Vingan

Every NHL season, relatively unknown players shed that label and announce themselves as breakout stars.

Here are five young players who are well-positioned to have big years:

Juuse Saros has owned the Predators' crease for the past five seasons, starting a league-high 311 of Nashville's 410 games (75.9 per cent). But Saros' stranglehold on the starting job could loosen this season.

Predators coach Andrew Brunette called on Annunen to start several critical games last season as the team made a late playoff push, and the 26-year-old dazzled. Annunen saved a whopping 20.3 goals above expected (2.06 per 60 minutes) over his final 10 starts — third most after the Olympic break behind St. Louis' Joel Hofer (21.7) and Montreal's Jakub Dobes (20.5). He ranked second in goals-against average (1.83) and save percentage (.938) among the 42 goaltenders who started at least 10 games following the Olympic break.

This could be a make-or-break season for Saros, who has declined from his peak over the past few years. All expectations are that Annunen will have an opportunity to close the gap between them.

Norris Trophy winner Zach Werenski commands the headlines in Columbus, but the Blue Jackets have another defenceman who deserves some attention. Mateychuk, 22, shared the ice with Werenski for more than 350 minutes at five-on-five last season, and Columbus generated 52.8 per cent of the expected goals (xGF%). Werenski and Mateychuk are expected to start the season as the team's top pair.

Mateychuk's production last season — 13 goals and 31 points in 75 games — is made even more impressive by the fact that he recorded just three points on the power play. His 12 goals and 27 points at five-on-five ranked tied for fifth and tied for 28th among defencemen, respectively.

There could be some regression coming for Mateychuk, whose 7.1 goals scored above expected at five-on-five led all defencemen last season. But the Blue Jackets are expecting big things from Mateychuk as he enters his third season.

"He's one of the young guys I keep (saying) we need more from," Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness told reporters. "If you want more from him, you've got to give him the opportunity. He didn't see any power-play time last season. He will see power-play time."

The time has come for the Sharks to take the next step. New captain (and soon-to-be \$94-million man) Macklin Celebrini will lead the charge, but the rest of San Jose's young core must do its part. That includes the 19-year-old Misa, who will anchor the Sharks' second line behind Celebrini.

Misa, who had 21 points in 45 games as a rookie, is tenacious on pucks. He was 20th in loose-puck recoveries and 25th in puck-battle wins per 20 minutes out of 411 forwards who played at least 40 games.

When Misa is on the attack, he does not hang around the outskirts of the offensive zone. Eight of his nine goals last season came from the inner slot, where he took 36 per cent of his total shot attempts — well above the league average of 25.9 per cent for forwards.

After three up-and-down seasons in New Jersey, it was clear that Nemec needed a change of scenery. No longer in Luke Hughes' and Dougie Hamilton's shadows, the No. 2 overall pick in the 2022 draft is expected to receive top billing on the Flames' back end. Nemec is slated to skate on Calgary's top pair alongside Kevin Bahl.

Nemec, 22, has displayed his offensive talent throughout his young career. Last season, he finished 25th and 32nd, respectively, in controlled entries and offence-generating plays per 20 minutes out of 201 qualified defencemen (minimum 40 games played).

It stands to reason that Nemec, who ranked 97th in average ice time among qualified defencemen, will see a spike in his point total (career-

high 26 points last season) with more playing time. A role on the Flames' No. 1 power-play unit would certainly help Nemec in that regard, but he and fellow defenceman Zayne Parekh are competing for that spot.

Nemec's primary focus, however, is on becoming a more well-rounded player. The Devils lost the territorial battle (47.7 xGF%) and were outscored 63-47 during Nemec's minutes at five-on-five last season.

"I don't really measure (success) with the points because we know that Calgary's going to be in the rebuild," Nemec told The Athletic. "I just want to play my game and be more consistent and just improve my defensive game more. I think I can do that and they can help me."

The 22-year-old Snuggerud earned a spot on the league's All-Rookie team last season by finishing strong; his 11 goals and 27 points in 25 post-Olympic games led all first-year players. Snuggerud's emergence played a role in the Blues' second-half surge toward a playoff spot (17-5-3) that fell just short.

"I was so impressed with his mindset — the way he plays the game and the way he was able to jump into the NHL the way he did," Blues general manager Alexander Steen told The Athletic. "It takes a really special (player) to have that ability to just jump in and play his game like that."

St. Louis will put Snuggerud in position to exceed the 51 points he recorded last season. He will play alongside Dylan Holloway and Robert Thomas on the Blues' top line, which dominated the opposition down the stretch last season. The Blues outscored opponents 22-6 and generated 62 per cent of the expected goals at five-on-five after the Olympic break. Only Montreal's top line — Cole Caufield, Nick Suzuki and Juraj Slafkovsky — matched the goal production of Holloway, Thomas and Snuggerud over that span.

Snuggerud, who will also man the net-front on the Blues' No. 1 power-play unit, can let it rip. His 65 one-timer attempts were tied for 52nd at the forward position and led to nine of his 21 goals.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401597 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How Flames analyst Kevin Sawyer sparked the nastiest night in Saddledome history

Eric Francis

CALGARY — The Ugly Duckling.

That's what the front-page headline screamed under Kevin Sawyer's mugshot the morning after one of the strangest, nastiest and most memorable nights ever staged inside the Saddledome.

Sawyer was public enemy No. 1 after he and his Anaheim Mighty Ducks had spent the previous evening helping turn an ordinary Calgary Flames loss into an NHL demolition derby still talked about today.

Twenty-five years later, there's a delightful twist to the story.

He's back in town.

Only now he's wearing a headset.

Sawyer will debut Thursday as Sportsnet's rink-side colour commentator on Flames broadcasts (9 p.m. ET / 7 p.m. MT), and while plenty of Calgary viewers may be wondering who he is, they're about to find out he has a rather intimate history with this franchise.

He later came an autograph away from becoming a Flame himself.

But first came that night.

Sawyer was in his first full NHL season after five years in the minors. He was undrafted, 208 pounds, and knew precisely what his job was.

"I was a fourth-line mucker, grinder, fighter," the 52-year-old native of Christina Lake, B.C., said. "Chip and chase, get on the body, and piss people off."

So when Flames tough guy Craig Berube ran goalie J.S. Giguere behind the net with just over four minutes left, and then swatted away Niclas Hävelid, Sawyer knew he had to respond.

"I'm thinking immediately to myself, 'OK, I have to do something just as stupid, or I'm going to the minors,'" said Sawyer, who racked up an unfathomable 398 penalty minutes in 60 IHL games three years earlier.

Sawyer jumped over the boards and tried to fight Bob Boughner.

Denied.

So Sawyer went back to the bench and told linemates Dan Bylsma and Denny Lambert: "Boys, no matter where you're at, get the puck on net."

Two shifts later, Jarome Iginla was hooking him near centre ice when Sawyer lifted the puck toward the Calgary net, where Mike Vernon was tending goal.

"I remember thinking to myself, 'I actually hit the net — that's a shot on net,'" he laughed.

He kept skating straight at Vernon and bowled the prone netminder over.

"The truth is, I never really hit him that hard," he insisted. "It was more of a push."

No matter.

Sawyer immediately spun around with gloves off and fists clenched, ready for an ensuing attack, which came from Robyn Regehr.

Then the gloves started flying everywhere.

Sawyer versus Regehr.

Lambert versus Iginla.

Suddenly the Saddledome had become a boxing gym with hockey boards.

That was only the beginning.

Shift after shift, the game descended into line brawls. By the end, Craig Conroy vividly remembers the lone Flames player left on the bench was Jukka Hentunen.

"That was the wildest game I played in the Saddledome, I'll tell you that," Berube said from his home in Philadelphia. "And I had a front-row seat to watch it all."

The numbers remain ridiculous.

A total of 279 penalty minutes were handed out in the final 85 seconds.

The Flames' 190 penalty minutes in the third period was an NHL record, since broken by the 2004 Flyers.

Sawyer was suspended five games. Berube got three. Scott Nichol and Flames coach Greg Gilbert both sat for two, while the Flames were fined \$25,000.

Sawyer forfeited \$10,954 in salary: "I lost a mid-sized sedan," he joked.

And somehow, the night got even better.

Late in the game, with players disappearing into penalty boxes and dressing rooms at a feverish pace, Dave Lowry realized that if he got a stoppage in play in the final 14 seconds he could spring Berube from the box for one last fight. So, with no one around him he turned at centre ice and blatantly flipped the puck into the upper deck. The crowd went wild as Berube lined up against Jeff Friesen.

"I actually got a call from (league disciplinarian) Colin Campbell because they were thinking of suspending me," said a winking Lowry, now an assistant with the Flames.

"I just said, 'Hey, listen, I was just trying to turn and get it off the glass and it got caught in my curve.'"

Sawyer remembers watching in the dressing room with more than half his teammates, like they were witnessing the Super Bowl.

"Uh-oh, here we go."

Berube went after Jeff Friesen, but Friesen wanted absolutely no part of it and promptly turtles.

"Coli called and said he had to suspend me because I kept things going," chuckled Berube. "I said, 'Alright, Coli, no problem.'"

Sawyer recalls the post-game euphoria as being the ultimate team-builder, prompting the lads to finish the night at Cowboys nightclub.

However, highlights from the game were being shown in the bar non-stop, as patrons quickly caught on who they were.

"We started getting some looks from some big ol' cowboys, so I'm like, 'We better get the hell out of here,'" laughed Sawyer, whose short career included fights with all the heavyweights like Bob Probert, Tie Domi, Stu Grimson and Tony Twist.

"We left."

Following mixed reaction to the chaos he helped fuel, Sawyer's agent, Jeff Solomon, told him it had been "the best thing you could have done for your career."

He was right, as two summers later Darryl Sutter offered Sawyer a two-year, one-way contract with the Flames.

"I was that close to being a Flame," said Sawyer, who had to decline, as a concussion suffered in a fight while standing up for Paul Kariya ended his career in 2003.

All told, he had three goals and 403 penalty minutes in 110 NHL games, to go with his whopper of a story.

He eventually moved into coaching, then broadcasting, spending nine years with TSN in Winnipeg before moving to Calgary this summer.

The irony is almost too perfect.

Sawyer knows that night has become part of his own mythology.

"Clips of that night go around the internet every once in a while and if it wasn't for that night I don't think my kids would know that I played in the NHL," smiled the father of two.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

Now they — and a whole new generation of Flames fans — are going to know him for something else.

Starting Thursday, when the Flames host Seattle, The Ugly Duckling will get a chance to make his mark from between the benches — across from the penalty box with which he was so familiar.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401598 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Ranking all 32 NHL centre-ice logos for 2026-27 season

David Morassutti

There aren't many things hockey fans are more willing to do than literally watch paint dry.

Every off-season, ice crews work hard to get the surface ready for the grind of a full season, with hours of work that end with the blank white canvas turned into something that captivates every fan as they enter the arena.

For the majority of teams, the centre-ice logo allows for some creativity. Others try to keep it simple.

We've even seen a junior hockey team do away with the traditional paint in recent years as the OHL's Guelph Storm use an LED projection technology to transform their centre-ice surface.

With an animated projection screen below the ice surface, Guelph is showing just how much innovation is possible when teams start treating the ice as more than simply a playing surface.

In the NHL, however, most teams continue to lean heavily into decades of history and iconic logos, while others have embraced more modern designs, special-event graphics and increasingly creative presentations.

For the 2026-27 NHL season, there are also some notable changes around the league. We've gone through the designs for every team and ranked the centre-ice logos based on visual impact, creativity and identity.

1. Vegas Golden Knights

It's hard to believe, but the Golden Knights are celebrating a decade as an NHL franchise.

As it prepares for its 10th season, Vegas has seen a big transformation from the original "Golden Misfits" to a perennial contender in the league.

It's no surprise, then, that the franchise is going with a centre-ice logo that leans into the Vegas theme in more ways than one.

Rather than simply having the team's standard shield, the design features a roulette wheel, the Golden Knights helmet crest, a sword, and a nod to 10 years in the league with the roman-numeral 'X.'

It will certainly stand out every time it comes into view and you can bet that's what Vegas intended.

2. Carolina Hurricanes

The Carolina Hurricanes are taking full advantage of being the reigning Stanley Cup champion with their design.

Coming off their latest championship, the Hurricanes unveiled a centre-ice design featuring the team's logo surrounded by a coloured overhead view of the Stanley Cup bowl. It's a fitting way to keep the celebration going long after the championship parade is over.

Carolina also added a distinctly local touch to the design as hurricane-warning flags are worked into the red line.

For the defending champions, there's no better way to start the season than with a daily reminder of exactly what they accomplished.

3. Toronto Maple Leafs

The Maple Leafs are taking a trip down memory lane, 100 years to be exact, with their design.

Instead of using their more familiar modern mark, Toronto brought back a classic Maple Leafs logo as part of the franchise's celebration of an important anniversary. This season marks 100 years since the club adopted the Maple Leafs nickname, moving on from the St. Patricks name it used from 1919 to 1927.

The throwback logo gives centre ice a noticeably different look, but it's also a fitting visual as the franchise begins another chapter, with Mats Sundin and John Chayka in charge.

For a team with such a deep visual history, going back to an old logo is a nice ode to the past.

4. Montreal Canadiens

The Canadiens are giving centre ice another makeover.

Last season, Montreal replaced the oversized Canadiens logo that had occupied centre ice since 2018 with a full-colour, 3D-inspired design that filled the entire face-off circle in Canadiens red. While some liked the bold look, others thought it made it tougher to see where the puck was on the ice.

This time around, they decided to go with a white background, while adding a three-dimensional effect that makes the Canadiens' crest appear to rise off the surface. The bright red of the logo immediately jumps out.

The blue outlining around the lettering also helps sharpen the overall look, creating a centre-ice logo that feels both familiar and noticeably different from what Canadiens fans have seen in recent seasons.

Credit Montreal for trying something different last season, but this is a nice refresh for a team that has high hopes.

5. San Jose Sharks

The Sharks continue to lean into the teal rebrand after celebrating their 35th anniversary last season.

It's nice to see San Jose try something new with their traditional logo. It's easy to forget when they tried the fin logo, which was a nice touch, but not worthy of replacing the traditional Sharks logo, which is a trademark that should remain a staple at centre ice.

What also make this design worthy of its ranking are the intricate designs along the red line with the 'SJ' Shark alternating red and white.

The fade in the colour on the centre-ice paint also avoids having the colour be too strong, and the white touches on the shark make it stand out nicely.

6. Calgary Flames

The Flames will be in a new home next season, meaning they will spend at least the next 84 games saying goodbye to the Saddledome.

To mark the occasion, Calgary unveiled a special design that pays tribute to the building and the generations of fans who have filled it.

The logo features a unique upper border that mirrors the distinctive slope of the Saddledome's roof, while the years the Flames have called the building home are incorporated into the design.

It's a subtle touch, but an effective one. The design doesn't just feature the Flames logo — it makes the building itself part of the logo.

The Flames begin their farewell campaign at home against the Seattle Kraken on Thursday before closing out the regular season against the Vancouver Canucks on April 10.

7. Seattle Kraken

The Kraken unveiled this logo last season and really haven't had a reason to change.

The deep blue and red colour combination gives the logo a completely different appearance from many of the league's more traditional designs.

Instead of the lighter logo that is used on the primary jersey, Seattle is embracing the way this darker theme really stands out.

The Kraken crest also has enough detail to remain interesting.

8. Los Angeles Kings

The Kings have gone with a centre-ice design that leans heavily into their modern black-and-silver identity for their 60th season. In 2024, they went back to the core identity from the 90s era, and it's front and centre in this anniversary season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

The design puts "60" front and centre in black, with the franchise's original crown logo worked into the bottom of the numbers. Above it sits "Los Angeles," while "Est. 1967" anchors the bottom of the crest.

The crown is particularly fitting for the anniversary celebration. As the Kings explained when unveiling the logo, their crown has changed throughout the decades but has remained an important part of the team's identity.

The Kings will officially begin their 60th-anniversary celebrations on Tuesday, when they host the Florida Panthers in their first home game of the season.

9. Nashville Predators

The Predators' centre-ice design makes excellent use of one of the most distinctive colour palettes in the NHL.

The combination of yellow and navy makes it stand out, but what makes it worth it is the way it includes 'Smashville' below the logo. The improvement is not having the 'H' cut out like it was in the past.

The surrounding elements add some additional visual interest without completely taking over the centre circle.

10. Florida Panthers

The Panthers are changing things up at centre ice, moving away from the shield-style presentation used previously.

Now, the team did have to move away from the Stanley Cup design after failing to make the playoffs, but they did a nice job of not just reverting back to the old logo.

The new design produces a more colourful centre ice and the new logo immediately stands out against the surface with the Panther as a more dominant feature.

11. Boston Bruins

Sometimes the best centre-ice designs are the ones that don't need to do much. The Bruins' spoked-B is one of those logos. The black and gold combination provides tremendous contrast against the ice, while the familiar design is instantly recognizable from virtually anywhere inside the building.

12. Buffalo Sabres

Buffalo doesn't need a reason to shy away from what works. The crossed sabres and classic blue-and-gold colours provide a distinctly old-school feel.

13. Utah Mammoth

Utah made small tweaks to its centre-ice design, allowing the Mammoth logo to be the focus.

14. Detroit Red Wings

The Red Wings made the right decision to bring back 'Hockeytown' to centre. The only knock is that Detroit's iconic Winged Wheel should stand on its own with the 'Hockeytown' branding not overlapping.

15. Chicago Blackhawks

The Blackhawks logo is iconic and one of the NHL's most recognizable, and it returns as the focal point of the team's centre-ice design after changing things for their centennial season.

16. New York Rangers

Like the Blackhawks, the Rangers always keep their roots as a key element in their centre-ice logo, and after celebrating their 100th season, the team returns to the norm.

17. Edmonton Oilers

The Oilers are sticking with a design that should look very familiar to fans, with the classic crest remaining the focal point. There aren't any major changes to the presentation, making Edmonton one of the teams opting for consistency rather than a major makeover.

18. Pittsburgh Penguins

As part of their 60th season, the Penguins will be painting a commemorative logo at centre ice, but it feels like the number overtakes the moniker itself.

19. Vancouver Canucks

The Canucks' centre-ice design is clean and recognizable, with the orca logo providing plenty of colour and personality without becoming overly complicated. It lands at No. 19 because, while the design works well, it doesn't have the same historical impact or visual creativity as some of the higher-ranked logos.

20. New York Islanders

The Islanders' circular logo is practically tailor-made for centre ice.

The blue, orange and white combination gives the design plenty of colour, while the round shape fits naturally into the circle.

21. Winnipeg Jets

Winnipeg's centre-ice design is clean and recognizable, with the blue-and-red logo giving it plenty of contrast against the ice. It would be nice if the team could get the traditional Jets logo, like the one from the 2019 Heritage Classic, as it would be near the top of this list.

22. Philadelphia Flyers

The Flyers are the NHL's lone team to feature the traditional double-logo centre-ice design, with two smaller crests sitting on either side of the red line instead of one oversized logo being split down the middle. It's a nice throwback touch, but it lacks punch.

23. Washington Capitals

The Capitals' centre-ice logo is certainly recognizable, but it lacks some of the visual punch you get from many of the designs higher on this list. The relatively long, horizontal wordmark doesn't fill the centre circle in quite the same commanding way as a bold crest or oversized logo, leaving the overall presentation feeling a little flatter and less dynamic.

24. New Jersey Devils

The Devils haven't really had a reason to change the look of their centre-ice logo, but it certainly lacks unique ways to make it stand out from the others.

25. Minnesota Wild

The Wild have one of the more detailed logos in the NHL, and the combination of green, red and cream gives it plenty of character at centre ice. But like many others, it doesn't provide enough to stand out, especially with the amount of blank white ice around it.

26. Ottawa Senators

The Senators bring plenty of personality to centre ice with a large Roman centurion logo giving it a strong connection to the franchise's identity. It doesn't quite have the visual impact or creativity of some of the other designs, making it a solid but relatively understated presentation.

27. Anaheim Ducks

The Ducks made the right choice to go back to a refurbished logo, but with an orange theme. Despite the logo being a fan favourite, the centre-ice design doesn't quite jump off the page and could use some more orange in the background.

28. St. Louis Blues

The Blues' musical-note logo remains an iconic look, but it would have been nice to include some parts of St. Louis' history in the design.

29. Tampa Bay Lightning

The Lightning's design is simple, clean, and unmistakably Tampa Bay, with the blue-and-white logo standing out against the ice. The team decided not to add any complexity. It would have been nice to add some lettering or other colours, considering past designs from the team had more to offer on the ice.

30. Dallas Stars



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

The Stars' design provides the outline of the state of Texas, which is a better look than just the logo, but some fans would still prefer the more traditional design.

31. Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets take a relatively conservative approach. There's nothing particularly wrong with the presentation. It simply doesn't have the same visual punch or creativity as some of the other centre-ice designs around the league.

32. Colorado Avalanche

The Avalanche's centre-ice logo is clean and recognizable, with the burgundy, blue and white combination. The design feels fairly conventional and lacks big-time appeal in comparison to other teams.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401599 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 10 thoughts on Maple Leafs after opening night: New guys and Toronto (and its fans) learned a lot about who they are this season as the Canadiens won 3-2 on Tuesday.

Justin Bourne

TORONTO — Was the outcome of the Toronto Maple Leafs' opening game unforeseeable? It was not (in fact, I called it down to the score on Real Kyper & Bourne).

Montreal is a great team with Stanley Cup aspirations, and the Maple Leafs are a completely fresh compilation of individuals, save for a handful.

But the Maple Leafs put forth a good effort, Jakub Dobes played well, and Toronto (and its fans) learned a lot about who they are this season as the Canadiens won 3-2 on Tuesday.

The good news is, after a year of getting filled in by every underlying metric, the Leafs started off by taking the play to Montreal, spending more time in the offensive zone than their opponent, and giving themselves a fair shot.

So, here are 10 thoughts on their Night 1 performance.

1. Kirill Marchenko was as elite as advertised, and he's got instant chemistry with Auston Matthews

Marchenko got in at 1 a.m. ET the night before his Maple Leafs debut, wasn't familiar with anything from linemates to systems, and was excellent. He pushed the pace, created chances, ripped one-timers, and looked like the player Leafs fans hoped they were getting. A great start.

More than that, though, he and Matthews seemed eager to look for one another, and more so than most games last season, the top line found themselves circling the o-zone, passing pucks through seams and creating chances. Although they didn't break through, they played in a way that would be fruitful over an 84-game season. Their line earned 75 per cent of the expected goals at five-on-five, and shots were 11-3 when they were out there.

Since it won't be its own thought, I'll add: Matthews looked fast and dangerous, which should be encouraging.

McKenna played 15:19, and over those minutes against one of the best teams in the league, he looked ... fine. He made some great small-area plays, he made some passes teammates didn't expect to get, and at times he looked pressed by the speed and pressure of the game, resulting in a couple of turnovers.

I liked this little quick slip to Darren Raddysh:

The important thing for McKenna will be not to rush him, while at the same time putting him in spots to succeed, which means using his skills. For that reason I think you keep him on Lines 2 and 3, but when there are times when you need offence, it'll be OK to give him those looks. At four-on-four, he should be an option. Down a goal, I think it'd be OK at times to swap him in alongside Matthews as we get into the year.

But for now, I think he's best left with an ice time total like Game 1 (15:19) while you let him find his way in the NHL. He's a quick study, as shown in both college and pre-season, and he'll get there.

3. Darren Raddysh had a tough debut

I just Googled the name of that children's book "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day," as it was on my mind when I started this section. Man, that was a tough one from Raddysh.

The good news is "played bad" and "is bad" are separate things, and everything we know about Raddysh is that he "is good," which has previously included an ability to break the puck out. But in Game 1, I'm not sure he made a pass that came within a foot of a teammate's stick. Official turnover numbers be damned (he was assigned only a "team-leading" four), he could not make a pass and that resulted in extra time in the Leafs zone.

I liked that he jumped into the rush after this Marchenko dash, but it's all I got for positives:

Raddysh and Morgan Rielly didn't show any chemistry as a pair, and are probably eager to get to Wednesday night's game so they can flush that one.

Quick additional Rielly thought: He could make his life so much easier by just making the first easy pass that presents itself. Twice he had Marchenko open low with speed and didn't find him:

It's a double swing set on this one below, but I still think you can just hit the front guy and move on with things.

Let's stay on the topic of defence for a second before we turn to brighter subjects, of which there were several...

4. The Maple Leafs actively need a defenceman

If you go into the season healthy, and Troy Stecher is in your starting six, you're probably not super deep. If Stecher is in, and Raddysh is your best defenceman (or is it maybe Jake McCabe?), you're in trouble. To be clear, I think Stecher is an NHL calibre defenceman, but he's probably the type that's a No. 7 on a good team.

McCabe missed some time in the first period, which meant Stecher was above 19 minutes, and the Leafs were outshot 16-7 when he was out there.

Now, I like the middle of the Leafs blue line just fine, provided they were slotted behind a true top defenceman. Oliver Ekman-Larsson is good, Chris Tanev looked good, McCabe, Raddysh, they can all play. But if you look around the league, about half the teams have an absolute No. 1 guy: Cale Makar, Quinn Hughes, Zach Werenski, Moritz Seider, Rasmus Dahlin, Miro Heiskanen, Evan Bouchard, and on and on. If you don't have that type of guy, you have to be a rock-solid six. So, again, if Stecher is in there, you're not solid enough.

One thing we know for sure is that the Leafs' front office is aware of this (there was actually some buzz on Tuesday that the Leafs aren't done making trades), and will likely be active trying to find a solution. But until they can chase down a top guy (not easy to do, obviously), they'd do well to find even another middle-pair guy.

5. Don't take for granted that William Nylander is a superstar

Over the past four years, Nylander had goal totals of 40, 40, and 45 while pacing for almost 40 again last season. One of those years he hit 98 points and he was on a better pace last season. And it's funny how he kind of gets brushed over on a team that has so many compelling players, but Game 1 was an absolute display by the strong Swede. He was the most dangerous player on the ice every time he touched the puck, and his give-and-go with Easton Cowan was a reminder of the poise and patience that he has to go with his raw tools.

More on that other name here ...

6. Cowan is going to be important on this team

When the Maple Leafs traded Matthews Knies, the left side of their forward group got awfully thin (again). Whether Cowan is ready or not, he's probably their best left winger, so he needs more ice time after playing 15:58 against the Canadiens. He had a good rookie year, then a meaningful run to the Calder Cup after it, and now he's the right mix of what the top six lacks — dogged fearlessness, hockey IQ and playmaking.

Will he be better in two years? For sure. But they need him now, and I'd bet his role will be elevated sooner rather than later.

His save percentage fell below .900 with a seeing-eye wrister through traffic on the third goal, but it's tough to fault the veteran goalie for any of the pucks that went by him, and he made his share of tough saves. Bobrovsky doesn't have to be a world-beater, but he's also going to need better breakout passes from his defencemen so he doesn't have to sustain those prolonged periods under siege.

8. Jack Roslovic is going to frustrate people

Roslovic is, to my eye, exactly what people assumed he would be. He's fast, he can make plays and he can create a little bit out there, which is hard to do in the NHL. But he's also not a top-line forward on a good team, and he was on the hook for some absolute rally-killing turnovers



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

when Marchenko and Matthews would get it cooking. I know Cowan can't skate like him, but he's got a better sense for who he is as a player (and less pressure to "make something happen" out there), and so for my money, Cowan would be a better fit getting the top-line minutes.

The other option ...

9. The Maple Leafs' power play is going to take some time to sort out

I'm still not sure how the Maple Leafs' power play will eventually shake out, but truth is I don't love Matthews getting flank touches, and never have. It's not a huge strength of his game. I think of Nikita Kucherov as the all-time great in that spot; you just never know what he's going to do when he gets the puck. The Maple Leafs have a ton of options, but with Raddysh there as a right-shot threat, you can't run it off Nylander's side (which is a shame, given he's better at it). And so, off Matthews it shall be.

Truth is, McKenna is probably, eventually, the guy in that flank spot. He can freeze and hold people, get Raddysh some bomb-looks, and get it to the dangerous spots on the inside. Could Matthews play low and net front with Marchenko in the bumper? Is that seen as a "demotion" and something they'd be hesitant to do?

Regardless, they surely don't want to move Matthews and put McKenna on PP1 yet — they definitely don't, actually — so I think we'll see some months of them working through different looks as they try out things. They'll have some success based on their raw talent, but the team probably won't unlock its potential on the man advantage until McKenna eventually works his way on to that unit.

All that aside, it was a little rough on Night 1, and it's possible Matthews would benefit from a better game by Raddysh as we get into things here.

10. The extras

Brandon Duhaime was fast and actively physical, good start. Teddy Blueger was a non-factor, and tough to see how he'll ever be anything but "good penalty-kill guy who doesn't hurt you at five-on-five." John Tavares was exactly who you thought he was. Same with Colton Sissons.

And, finally, among the "extras" here, Nick Paul is just an adult out there (compliment). He may not impress you with flash and dash, but he just does the right things. There was a play in the third where the Montreal defence was broken down, Paul had it, and there were seams he could've tried to force pucks through. But they were all risky, so he held, and held, and eventually when a teammate jumped on the ice, he gave it to them and the Maple Leafs stayed on offence.

He's just a good, solid player. Nice forecheck and set-up here:

He's smart, reliable, and can probably spot in just about anywhere you need him in the lineup. If he stays healthy, the Maple Leafs will lean on him.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401600 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Sloppy Oilers deliver 'unacceptable' performance in Babcock's debut

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — Organized? Structured? Hard to play against?

Those were the slogans that accompanied Mike Babcock to Edmonton. In his first game behind the Oilers' bench, however, Babcock's team displayed exactly zero of those attributes in a thrilling 6-5 overtime loss to the Vancouver Canucks on Tuesday.

"We turned the puck over. We stayed out too long on the ice. We made poor decisions," began Babcock after a game that required a late, three-goal comeback just to secure a single point for Edmonton. "I mean, we gave up six tonight. I think we gave up five in exhibition (in four games).

"If we want to work, we want to do things right, we're going to have a lot of success. If we want to play like that, we're going to be chasing the game. To be honest with you, I feel fortunate we got a point."

That point came on the back of Evan Bouchard's five-point night. He had a hat trick and two helpers, becoming the first NHL defenceman with a season-opening hat trick since Mark Howe of the Hartford Whalers, way back in 1980.

Amazingly, the three goals came sans the Bouch Bomb, three wristers that all found their way past Canucks goalie Kevin Lankinen.

"It was one of those nights," Bouchard said. "But without those guys in front none of them were going in. (Zach Hyman) was battling, (Vasily Podkolzin) is always battling in front. Without those guys they wouldn't have went in."

Speaking of going in, let's talk about Tristan Jarry's game.

The returning Edmonton goalie who was supposed to give the Oilers a bounce-back season laid an egg in the opener. There was almost zero big saves, and simply no feeling that his team could get away with a mistake that wouldn't end up in the back of its net.

Jarry let in a soft, soft goal that broke a 2-2 tie just 70 seconds into the critical third period, and before you knew it the score was 5-2 Canucks. Though he faced some very high quality scoring chances, Jarry didn't give his team a big save until overtime.

Between the goaltending and the defensive play, this Oilers team looked no different than the last seven or eight editions. Loose, with lousy netminding.

It's no recipe for success.

"I need one or two of those," Jarry admitted post-game. "You never want to get scored on. Obviously the goalie has the biggest outcome of the game and when he has those slips or those downs in a game, it makes for a (bad) game."

What did Babcock think of his new goalie?

"It's pretty clear," said Babcock. "Let's move on."

Babcock understandably did not want to get too personal after Game 1 of an 84-game campaign. So he spoke about his team play instead.

"The hard part is we have to play way better. That was ridiculous," spat the coach. "You can't have a guy with five points and lose the hockey game. It just doesn't make any sense."

Podkolzin scored twice against the club that drafted him 10th overall, the second one a rocket that forced overtime with just 42.5 seconds left in the third period.

There was a time when the Oilers were thrilled with a game like this, but that time has passed. This season was supposed to be about defensive responsibility, limiting chances, and responsible play.

Then the 32nd-place team walks into your barn on Opening Night and scores six on you.

Yikes!

"We can talk about these guys and talent, but we have to do things right as a group," said a disgusted head coach. "Tonight, while it looked like we were trending in the right direction ... the great thing about the National Hockey League is if you don't do it right, you feel bad when you leave the rink."

Folks in Edmonton have watched a version of this game for years. This was Babcock's first screening.

Did he know what he was getting into when he took the gig?

"Not for one second did I think this was going to be easy," he promised. "Tonight was an indication we have serious work to do. Playing like that, getting away from the way we have to play, is unacceptable for us. We have to set a better standard for ourselves."

Call it a base line.

This is what the Oilers are today, a loose team that talks a good game about responsible play. But when it doesn't go their way quickly enough, they devolve into a run 'n' gun, firewagon group that entertains on a Saturday night in October, but can't get it done in June.

Let's see where it goes, and how fast it changes, if at all.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401601 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Defiant Dobes seals Canadiens' season-opening win over Maple Leafs

Eric Engels

TORONTO — It was with a fraction of a second remaining in the first win of this Montreal Canadiens season that Jakub Dobes yanked John Tavares' stick from his hands and goaded the Toronto Maple Leafs forward into pushing him.

The puck was out of sight, the game was all but over, but not for the feisty goaltender who made it clear from the start he would battle to the last whistle — and beyond if he had to.

That last gesture was a clear message to Tavares. A rather unnecessary one in the eyes of just about anyone other than Dobes.

The thing is, though, this is what he thrives on.

"We all know he's a competitor," said winning goal-scorer Alexandre Carrier, though that doesn't fully sum up what Dobes is.

He is a defiant competitor, a guy blocking every puck like he's batting away every barb of criticism that's ever stung him.

If you were keeping count Tuesday, Dobes blocked 26 pucks — including three from Auston Matthews, three of five from William Nylander, four from Kirill Marchenko, and yes, four from Tavares — in this season-opening 3-2 win at Scotiabank Arena.

Then he came out after the game and said, "I feel pretty good, I saw that a lot of people have a lot of opinions about me..."

About that...

In the lead-up to Tuesday's game there was understandably some buzz around the hockey world about whether Dobes could follow up the outstanding finish to his rookie season with a stable start to his sophomore year.

Coupled with all the positive noise around Samuel Montembeault's resurgence through pre-season and some totally misplaced scrutiny of his last practice before the Canadiens took off for Toronto, the 25-year-old was obviously irked before the puck even dropped.

After it did, and after Dobes allowed the first of the two Nylander shots that got by him, he played like his middle finger was holding his glove up for the rest of the night.

Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis called Dobes "excellent," though "reassuring" would've worked just as well.

No goaltender was better from trade deadline through three rounds of the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs. He topped all of them in goals saved above expected, winning 10 of his last 14 regular-season games before winning nine more in the post-season and setting the bar almost impossibly high to clear.

But, as Carrier said after Tuesday's game, "You could feel he was in control, focused, and he took off on the same foot he left off on last season."

The Canadiens forced Dobes to do that, and he responded as they'd hoped he would.

"He made some really big saves for us, especially early on," said St. Louis. "I felt like we weren't playing fast enough, and he bought us some time to get going."

No doubt.

Then, in front of friends and family from his nearby hometown of Burlington, Ont., Josh Anderson did what he always does against the Leafs. His 17th regular-season goal in the 42nd game of his career versus Toronto tied things up 1-1.

The Canadiens tilted the ice over the next 15 minutes spread over the second half of the first period and first third of the second period and Zachary Bolduc capped that sequence by finishing a nice play from Mike Matheson to put them up 2-1.

Carrier's goal at 13:12 of the third period would've put this game out of reach if not for a phenomenal play by Nylander to pull the Leafs back within a goal with 4:14 to play.

But Dobes had the last laugh — though not the last push — when he charged out of his crease to make a great stop on Matthews to seal the win.

All of Dobes' best ones looked like that.

When asked how he's found this perfect balance between patience and aggression, he quipped, "I was playing with it during the pre-season, but had a really good practice... Monday? Yeah, Monday..."

Again, defiance.

You could say Dobes needn't get wrapped up in whatever's being said about him off the ice or whatever's happening in front of him on it, but to suggest it's distracting him would be inaccurate. We have enough of a sample — especially after watching some of his antics in the playoffs — to know it's quite the opposite.

"Well, you could see it at the end (with Tavares), said Carrier. "I think it's part of his mindset, his attitude; he wants to be that guy. And I personally love it."

The Canadiens should because it seems to bring out the best in Dobes.

It certainly did on this night, when the Canadiens were far from their best and needed him at his feistiest.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401602 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Marchenko shows glimpses of promise in whirlwind Maple Leafs debut

Sonny Sachdeva

TORONTO — Thirty hours before he took the ice under the Scotiabank Arena lights Tuesday night, before his Toronto Maple Leafs opened their new campaign with a roller-coaster test against the rival Montreal Canadiens, Kirill Marchenko was still a member of the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The 26-year-old had waded through a full training camp over the past two weeks with the American club, had suited up for pre-season tilts draped in Columbus colours. Then came a down-to-the-wire blockbuster trade Monday night, a seven-piece deal that sent Marchenko east, a light-night flight to Ontario.

Even head coach Jim Hiller, as late as Tuesday morning, wasn't sure if his new winger would be in the lineup when the Leafs opened their 2026-27 campaign, Marchenko's arrival so fresh, he hadn't yet logged a single minute on the ice with his new teammates. But come puck drop, there was No. 86, bathed in blue, starting the new season in a new city, with new linemates, and a new crest on his chest.

Forty-eight seconds later, he had his first point as a Leaf.

"I thought he did really well today," William Nylander said from the Maple Leafs' locker room post-game, the winger's dazzling opening goal having gifted Marchenko his first assist with his new club. "You know, that's always tough, coming to a complete new team — I mean, he didn't even skate, gear's brand new, everything. He did a great job."

For all the chaos and upending that came in the hours before Tuesday night's affair — packing up his life in Columbus, making the trek to Toronto and getting dropped straight into the action — the Russian phenom made the promise of his impact immensely clear in his first outing.

Skating alongside Auston Matthews and Jack Roslovic, occupying the top-line spot formerly held by Matthew Knies, who was traded to the Blue Jackets in the deal that brought Marchenko to Toronto, the winger's ability with the puck on his stick was clear from the jump.

It was clear late in the first period, when Marchenko dashed down the left wing, cut inside, and whipped a dangerous wrister at netminder Jakub Dobes. Clear, too, in the opening minutes of the second, when Roslovic set Marchenko up for a blistering one-timer, and again early in the third, when the former Blue Jacket charged through the slot and stitched together a silky toe drag, creating a moment of promise out of nothing.

"We talked to him a little bit, gave him a little bit of an understanding of our systems and structure," Hiller said late Tuesday of the coaching staff's approach to preparing their new star for his debut. "He's had quite a day, so we tried not to overload him. But I think you all saw some of the things he can do. Him and Auston, and I thought Rosy played really well with them, too — that whole line was dangerous."

For the man himself, this one was simply about holding on for dear life, about showing what he could in this short-notice foray, before he truly settles in.

"It's crazy," he said after the Maple Leafs fell 3-2 to the Canadiens in their season-opener. "We packed, we moved, with my wife, to here. Two busy days, really busy. But I'm happy it's done now, and I'm happy to be here."

The winger finished the night with four shots and 20 minutes of ice to his name, stringing together some quality offensive sequences and getting the fans on their feet with some physicality, too. He assured it was only the start.

"We had good chances, but not what I want to see from myself," he said Tuesday, after remarking in awe at the number of reporters crowded into the club's locker room to speak to him post-game. "I can play better. I can play better for sure."

It's an adjustment for the rest of the locker room, too. Monday's deal no doubt added some high-octane skill to the blue-and-white's attack, but it also removed a young star in Knies, who'd established himself as a key piece of this core over the past couple of seasons.

"It's mixed emotions for sure," John Tavares said from his stall after the dust had settled on Tuesday's loss. "I think the world of Kniesy — he's obviously very close to the group in here, and a heck of a player. He's got a great future ahead of him. You know, it's a little bit shocking in a way, just because of the impact he's made since coming in."

"But you add a talent like Kirill — I think you saw tonight some of the flashes of what he can do, how he'll impact the game, what his skill set is. You know, a really, really gifted hockey player, with a lot of things that I think are going to be very helpful for us. So, it's mixed emotions, but we're real excited to have Kirill and what he's going to bring to the team."

If there's one thing that was made abundantly clear by the newest Leaf after his first game was in the books, it's that the excitement is mutual.

"It's unbelievable for me," Marchenko said of joining this team, of landing on its top line. "It's a good opportunity for me to show how I can play, how I can help these guys. And they really help me. Because my partners right now, it's Auston Matthews, it's Jack Roslovic — it's obviously one of the best centres in the league. I was nervous. But I'm so excited."

There's no shortage of wrinkles still to be ironed out. That much was clear in a 3-2 loss that saw the Maple Leafs start well, then wobble, and gift Montreal far too many chances courtesy of some shaky play in their own zone. But there were signs too, between the missteps, of a group that has the capacity to surprise this season. It's that potential that prompted Marchenko to put pen to paper on a six-year, \$75-million deal that kicks in next season.

"Four years with CBJ, it's unbelievable for me," the winger said Tuesday. "I grew up as a player. But now I think I can do another step here, with the guys here in this locker room. It's just a good opportunity for me, a good opportunity to win games, win the Cup, win something."

"I think everybody wants to win here. It's the Toronto Maple Leafs — it's one of the biggest teams in the world, and in the NHL. I'm so happy to be here."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.01.2026



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

1401603 Websites

TSN.CA / 'We're all human': Leafs will be patient as Raddysh works through 'extra pressure'

Mark Masters

The New York Islanders skated at Scotiabank Arena on Wednesday. The Maple Leafs held a team meeting.

New Leafs defenceman Darren Raddysh was on the ice for all three Canadiens goals and committed a game-high five giveaways during Tuesday's 3-2 season-opening loss. The 30-year-old from Toronto is still adjusting to a new team, new partner and the new higher expectations that come with signing an eight-year, \$68-million deal with his hometown team.

"We're all human, so you have a little extra pressure, because of all the things you mentioned, no matter what," acknowledged head coach Jim Hiller. "So you can say, 'Just relax and go out there and play,' but I think he'll have to work his way through that. I think getting the first one out of the way probably will help him."

Raddysh and the Leafs get a second chance at a first win on Wednesday night when the New York Islanders visit Scotiabank Arena. It will be only the third game that Raddysh has played with partner Morgan Rielly, who missed the first pre-season game during this year's shortened training camp.

"Well, it'll take time," Hiller said of the top-pair chemistry. "There's no question. And we've talked about this, lots of new guys, we're trying to get this thing together as quick as we can, but we all know it's going to take a little bit of time. We just want to shrink that time. So I just can't put a date on that, but everybody will get better together."

"It's all a process," Rielly said. "It's challenging to come into a new place and a new team, a new system, new coach, and play well the first night ... I think it kind of comes down to execution and, as we go along here, I think we'll get more comfortable and that will improve."

Raddysh is coming off a breakthrough 22-goal, 70-point season with the Tampa Bay Lightning. Rielly, meanwhile, is trying to get on track after a couple down years in Toronto.

Raddysh and Rielly are both at their best when on the attack. So, what's it like striking a balance?

"It's not hard," Rielly stressed. "I think it's just based on opportunity, just based on where the puck is. I think we're both able to kind of recognize the right spots to go. I don't think we both want to go at the same time, but it's not hard. It's just based off game flow."

Raddysh, who possesses a booming point shot, has supplanted Rielly as the quarterback on Toronto's top power play unit. The Leafs failed to convert on three chances during Tuesday's opener.

"We just didn't move it quick enough," said Hiller. "If there was one area of the game, you know, that we probably had the opportunity to at least get tied or get ahead, it would have been the power play. We need to be more dangerous than we were."

The Leafs actually outshot the Canadiens 28-24 in Tuesday's game.

"I think defensively we played a pretty strong game," Hiller noted. "I think the majority of their chances came off some break-out turnovers from us, so that's not a defensive breakdown. That's more of an offensive breakdown with the puck on your stick. So that's something we have to clean up because we gave a couple freebies that way."

Peter DeBoer, who is starting his first full season as Islanders coach, empathized with Hiller as he watched the Leafs debut.

"Listen, we're similar," DeBoer said. "What can't be overstated either is new coaching staff, new systems, you know, with a shortened training camp, we're dealing with it on our end too. We were talking about it this morning, it's really hard to implement everything you want to put in. I think the teams with new coaching staffs are paying the bill a little bit

early here for that, but we're all in the same boat and we gotta make it work."

Training camps were shortened to just 13 days this fall with veteran players limited to two pre-season games.

DeBoer did get a head start by coaching the Islanders in the final four games of the regular season last year. That gave the players a sense of his philosophy.

"I feel much further ahead than, you know, as an example, Jimmy would over

Wednesday's game will feature the first overall picks in the last two NHL drafts with Gavin McKenna facing off with Matthew Schaefer.

McKenna did not hit the scoresheet on Tuesday and was on the ice for two of Montreal's goals.

"Not my best," the 18-year-old left winger said. "But, yeah, glad we're playing again [Wednesday]."

"Well, I mean, it wasn't my best either," said linemate John Tavares. "It wasn't the cleanest of hockey games. There wasn't a whole lot of plays being made. It was choppy at times. It seemed like on both sides the puck wasn't super friendly."

McKenna has proven to be a quick study during his rise up the ranks. Hiller pointed out the Whitehorse native made a big jump from the team's first pre-season game to the second.

"It's up another level again," Hiller noted. "You just keep, you know, taking the test and he'll be back. So I thought he was all right, but he'll probably want to be better."

Easton Cowan moved up to McKenna's spot on the second line for a couple shifts on Tuesday and assisted on the second goal by William Nylander. He was also included in the 6-on-5 group late in the third period.

"He's had a really good camp," Hiller said. "I wasn't here, but what everybody tells me from last year to this year, he's had a great summer. I've just been really impressed with him in my time here ... You do well and you should get rewarded, and so we thought he had a pretty good game, and we wanted to reward him for that."

Cowan finished his rookie NHL season with 29 points in 66 games before helping the Toronto Marlies win the Calder Cup.

"Yeah, obviously I feel a bit better," Cowan said prior to Tuesday's game. "You know, bigger, stronger, and I feel more confident for sure. So just excited to get out there and play some hockey."

Schaefer watched McKenna's debut and offered some advice for how his former World Junior teammate can navigate things moving forward.

"Don't be too hard on yourself," the defenceman stressed. "I know obviously we have a lot of expectations for ourselves ... Just enjoy it as you go. You're playing in the best league in the world. You're going to learn so many things. Don't take it for granted. Just keep working hard and keep being yourself."

Schaefer is mature beyond his 19 years and will be serving as an alternate captain for the Islanders this year.

"Some people are leaders because of what they've accomplished, this kid is just a natural leader," said Islanders general manager Mathieu Darche. "Even last night, I was here in the press box for the Leafs-Habs game and everybody is talking to me about Matthew Schaefer and I tell them, 'The great thing is he's actually a better kid than he is a player.' His work ethic, his enthusiasm that he brings, you see when he's in the lineup there's a different level of energy, so he's earned that."

"What a privilege to coach a player like that," gushed DeBoer. "You know, he's even better live and in person than he is on tape and I watched a lot of tape of him last year while we were scouting for the Canadian Olympic team. But to actually stand behind the bench those last four games last year with him out there, he's a real difference-making player. There's very few of them in the world and he's one of them."

DeBoer was an assistant coach on Canada's silver-medal winning team in Milan. Schaefer was among the final cuts.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 1, 2026

"You know what, he was really close," DeBoer recalled. "I mean, he was in our discussions right up until the last day and, in hindsight, if we turned back the clock, [Josh] Morrissey got hurt the first game, he probably could have helped us."

The Islanders will be leaning on Schaefer to slow down Toronto's top line, which was dangerous on Tuesday night with Kirill Marchenko joining Auston Matthews and Jack Roslovic.

"He's a big boy," Matthews said of Marchenko after the game. "He can make plays, shoots it. I thought for what he had to kind of endure the last 24 hours as far as getting traded, flying here last night, getting here, new everything, getting a visa, all that stuff, I mean, you know, I thought we had some really good opportunities and some good looks, some good chances."

Marchenko landed four shots on net and picked up an assist on the opening goal by Nylander.

"Once he gets settled in and the more time you're going to get together, you know, the chemistry's going to build more and more," Matthews said. "But, I mean, all in all, we started really well."

"Unbelievable for me," Marchenko said. "I don't know what I can say. They pass me puck. I have like four, five shots and I have good looks. It's just so easy to play with these guys. I try my best for these guys."

Marchenko, who debuted with his new team without even one practice under his belt, admitted to dealing with nerves and he wasn't satisfied with his performance.

"Actually, I have good chances, but it's not what I want to see from myself," the 26-year-old Russian said. "I can play better. I can play better, for sure."

Marchenko, who is in the final year of his current contract, signed a six-year extension with the Leafs following Monday's trade. Why was he looking to move on from Columbus?

"I just don't answer this question, sorry," he said. "I keep that private for me a little bit. It's still four years with CBJ, it's unbelievable for me and I grow up like a player. But now I think I can do another step here, honestly, with these guys here in this locker room."

Marchenko grew as a player in Columbus, but the Jackets never reached the playoffs in his tenure in the Ohio capital. The Leafs, meanwhile, have made the playoffs in nine of 10 seasons with Matthews. "Just good opportunity for me and good opportunity to win the games, win the Cups, win something here and I think everybody want to win here," Marchenko said. "And it's Toronto Maple Leafs, it's one of the biggest teams in the NHL and the world."

Hiller confirmed forward Bo Groulx will draw in up front on Wednesday night, but the coach opted not to reveal who will be a scratch. Gritty winger Zack MacEwen logged a team low five minutes and 25 seconds on Tuesday.

Anthony Stolarz will get the start in net for Toronto. Ilya Sorokin is expected to get the start for the Islanders.

The Islanders will be missing centre Mathew Barzal, who is dealing with a knee inflammation.

"We felt the last week he's had really, really good progress," Darche said. "We hope that maybe by the weekend or early next week, at the latest, he gets back on the ice. We'll see how things progress this week, but he's had a really good week last week and he's with us on the trip, so hopefully he's back on the ice soon. And Mat Barzal is not a guy that needs three weeks to get ready. Maybe when I played, with my poor skating, I needed more time, but a guy like Mat Barzal, like, you give him a few practices and he'll be good to go."