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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets top Tampa Bay Lightning in wild OT victory: 5 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- November 23, 2024

It was a bad night for goalies, hockey coaches and sports writers trying to keep up with the action in a wild 13-goal game that seesawed back and forth before ending in overtime.

Everybody else probably had a grand time Thursday night at Nationwide Arena, where Zach Werenski's second goal of the game, scored at 1:26 of overtime for his career-high fifth point of the night, lifted the Blue Jackets to a 7-6 victory over the stunned Tampa Bay Lightning.

To the Blue Jackets (8-9-2), who have stunned the Lightning after trailing 3-0 before, it was par for the course. Overcoming a 3-0 deficit to win a game for the sixth time in franchise history and seventh time when trailing by three goals, they established a new franchise high in goals through the first 19 games of a season (66).

"It's different, right?" Werenski said. "I don't mind it, but it's kind of frustrating when you score, and then they score, and it's back-and-forth line that, but tonight was fun because we got the win and that's all that matters."

Here are five takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski (8) celebrates scoring the game winning goal beside Tampa Bay Lightning right wing Nikita Kucherov (86) during overtime of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024. The Blue Jackets won 7-6.

Another Werenski 'Zach Attack' lifts Columbus Blue Jackets to victory

Werenski, 27, is tracking for what could be a special season individually.

Werenski's status as one of the NHL's elite defensemen has been hindered by frustrating injuries, the Blue Jackets' struggles during a rebuild and their relative obscurity outside of Columbus. After setting a career-high and becoming the only defenseman in club history to notch five points in a game (two goals, three assists), he's now co-leading the team in scoring at 6-13-19 and is tied for second among all NHL defensemen in points.

Quinn Hughes (Vancouver Canucks) and Josh Morrissey (Winnipeg Jets) are the other two at that number, and all three are chasing Cale Makar's 8-20-28 for the Colorado Avalanche.

"I've seen a lot of hockey players," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said of Werenski. "I don't think I've seen one like him, honestly. He's amazing, you know? When he wants the puck, goes and gets it. When he wants to defend, he defends ... and he has stepped up in a leadership role. He's really embraced that."

Columbus Blue Jackets center Kent Johnson (91) celebrates scoring a goal during the second period of the NHL hockey game against the Tampa Bay Lightning at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024.

There might have been a couple of plays that seemed a little fast to Kent Johnson after he missed 14 games with a shoulder injury, but he mostly went back to shining for the Blue Jackets.

Skating at right wing on Adam Fantilli's line, Johnson logged 14:58 and played in all situations. He also scored two big goals, one for each specialty team. The first capped a power play in the second period

with a gorgeous one-timer, while his second gave the Blue Jackets a short-lived 6-5 lead while shorthanded in the third.

Columbus Blue Jackets center Kent Johnson (91) celebrates scoring a goal past Tampa Bay Lightning goaltender Jonas Johansson (31) during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024. The Blue Jackets won 7-6 in overtime.

After that one, Johnson excitedly pointed at Werenski for an impressive setup pass off a bouncing puck in the low slot. Johnson's scoring line is now 4-3-7 in five games, and he looked right at home in such a wild, wide open goal bonanza.

"Those are really fun games," Johnson said, smiling. "You feel kind of like you're on the pond a little bit. I knew it'd be fine (returning). It was just hockey, but a real game, you can't emulate it in practice. I definitely needed a game (and) I feel like I can be sharper next game."

Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Justin Danforth (17) flips the puck over Tampa Bay Lightning center Gage Goncalves (93) during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024. The Blue Jackets won 7-6 in overtime.

Columbus Blue Jackets dominate analytics vs. Tampa Bay Lightning

Tampa Bay controlled the first 11-plus minutes of the game, building a 3-0 lead to make the arena feel like a library. After the Blue Jackets heard their alarm clock, however, they dominated the remainder of the game outside of costly mistakes that put goalie Elvis Merzlikins in bad situations that led to goals.

That's the only reason the Lightning forced overtime. Otherwise, they were swarmed by a relentless Blue Jackets attack that is starting to make a habit out of owning the analytics battle.

They outshot the Lightning 43-30 – the fourth time the Jackets have topped 40 shots and 12th time they've finished with an edge in shots – and Natural Stat Trick's tally of scoring chances was even more lopsided. Despite getting just one power play, the Blue Jackets forged a stunning 45-16 edge in total scoring chances and 19-9 margin in high-danger chances.

Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Mathieu Olivier (24) skates past Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman J.J. Moser (90) during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024. The Blue Jackets won 7-6 in overtime.

Scoring chances favored Columbus 20-3 during the Jackets' four-goal second period, including 8-3 in high-danger situations, and they had a 6-0 high-danger edge in the third.

It wasn't an anomaly.

Despite a 3-6-1 record in their past 10 games, the Blue Jackets have finished with a higher percentage of scoring chances in eight of those games – including a higher percentage of high-danger looks in seven of them. If that trend continues and gets paired with improvement in the defensive zone, a winning streak longer than just two or three games could emerge.

"Obviously, the more chances you have at the net, the more that are going to go in the net," Evason. "We can reinforce some positivity in that area, but we worked the 'D' zone (in practice Wednesday) ... and we'll practice 'D' zone again (Friday)."

Columbus Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan (23) scores past Tampa Bay Lightning goaltender Jonas Johansson (31) during the first period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024.

Sean Monahan thriving as Columbus Blue Jackets catalyst

Sean Monahan finished with a goal, three assists and four points against the Lightning to run his season scoring line to 7-12-19 to tie Werenski for the team scoring lead.

After signing with the Blue Jackets as a free agent on July 1, the veteran center has given his new team everything they could've hoped to get from him. Centering the top line all season, he's been a steady contributor in nearly every facet and has played a key role in getting the Jackets' offense cranked up.

His goal Thursday stopped Tampa Bay's dominant start, cutting it to 3-1 at the first intermission, and he assisted on three of the Jackets' four goals scored in the first 6:18 of the second period.

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson (78) defense Tampa Bay Lightning left wing Brandon Hagel (38) during the second period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024.

Columbus Blue Jackets' Damon Severson responds to message

Damon Severson is having an interesting season. He's at 4-5-9 for scoring, but has gone through some turbulence where his contributions jump out for either the right or wrong reasons. Finding a more consistent middleground has been a challenge.

Evason didn't name him specifically after practice Wednesday, but saying that a new defensive look with Severson on the third pairing could possible be "a message," felt like it was referencing his season. It really felt that way with Severson opening Thursday's game still on the right side of the third pairing, but it didn't last long.

Severson played well. He logged a solid 23:30, assisted on Monahan's goal and blocked two shots to earn a promotion back into the top four as Ivan Provorov's partner on the second pairing.

Consistency remains the key.

Columbus Dispatch / Rewind: Columbus Blue Jackets stun Carolina Hurricanes, win third straight in shootout

By Brian Hedger- November 24, 2024

It'd been 988 days since the Blue Jackets last strung three straight wins together, but that dry spell is over after 32 months and one week of waiting. After going 0-11 in opportunities to win three straight games since putting their last one together March 11-16, 2022, the Blue Jackets won their third straight game in front of 16, 013 on Saturday night at Nationwide Arena.

All it took was a 5-4 shootout win over the Carolina Hurricanes that included a 6-on-5 goal by Kirill Marchenko to force overtime, former Blue Jackets goalie Spencer Martin replacing injured starter Pyotr Kochetkov midway through OT plus three straight saves by Elvis Merzlikins in the breakaways competition to deny Martin Necas, Andrei Svechnikov and Sebastian Aho — the Hurricanes' three most dangerous forwards.

"I think we're learning," said center Sean Monahan, who set up Marchenko's tying goal in the third and decided the shootout with a goal to start it. "Slowly, we're finding ways to win games, coming back and then getting one late and finishing it in the shootout. It's a start, so that's a good sign."

Here's a scroll with preview information, in-game updates and analysis:

FINAL: Columbus Blue Jackets 5, Carolina Hurricanes 4

It's madness in Columbus after Merzlikins turns away Aho to end a shootout that was forced by Kirill Marchenko's late goal to tie it at the end of regulation. Merzlikins came up big in OT to get it to the shootout and Sean Monahan's goal in the shootout wins it. Three wins in a row. First time in almost three years for the Blue Jackets.

SHOOTOUT: Columbus Blue Jackets 5, Carolina Hurricanes 4

Sean Monahan gives the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead in the top of the first and Merzlikins stops Necas. In the second, Damon Severson misses wide for the Blue Jackets and Andrei Svechnikov is stopped by Merzlikins with a blocker/pad denial. Adam Fantilli leads off the third frame for the Blue Jackets and Martin just deflects a backhand with his left pad. Sebastian Aho denied by Merzlikins in the bottom of the third and the Blue Jackets win their third straight.

GOAL, OT 2:52: Columbus Blue Jackets 4, Carolina Hurricanes 4

Werenski tries to scoot around the net, Kochetkov slides too far out of his net and gets clipped in the head by his own man, Sean Walker. Kochetkov was down, play stops and former Blue Jackets goalie Spencer Martin replaces him.

END OF REGULATION: Columbus Blue Jackets 4, Carolina Hurricanes 4

Here we go again, second game that goes to OT here for the Blue Jackets after that Marchenko equalizer. Crowd here is amped./

GOAL: Columbus Blue Jackets 4, Carolina Hurricanes 4

Tic-Tac-Toe ... and it's a 6-on-5 tying goal for Marchenko, who one-times the puck past Kochetkov with 1:06 left in regulation. The goal rewarded Kent Johnson and Sean Monahan with assists on two great passes to set up that shot from the left circle.

3rd period, 16:00: Carolina Hurricanes 4, Columbus Blue Jackets 3

A great chance for the Blue Jackets to tie it goes by the wayside when they can't score on a four-minute power play. Kevin Labanc appeared to beat Kochetkov on the glove side, but sent the puck off metal and out.

3rd period, 7:11: Carolina Hurricanes 4, Columbus Blue Jackets 3

The Blue Jackets came out with some extra pep in their step, but it hasn't led to a tying goal. Carolina has fended off the Columbus push thus far, which is why the Hurricanes are so good.

3RD PERIOD START: Carolina Hurricanes 4, Columbus Blue Jackets 3

The puck is back in play here at Nationwide Arena, where the Blue Jackets have 54 seconds left on a power play while looking for an equalizer.

END OF 2ND PERIOD: Carolina Hurricanes 4, Columbus Blue Jackets 3

The Hurricanes' dominance in this game, which they've asserted from the start, finally paid off in the second period, when they outscored the Blue Jackets 3-1 to take a 4-3 lead after 40 minutes. One was a power-play goal on the two man-advantage situations they got in the second period.

GOAL, 2nd period 13:23: Carolina Hurricanes 4, Columbus Blue Jackets 3

A faceoff win for Jesperi Kotkaniemi over Cole Sillinger in the Blue Jackets' zone, left dot, gives the Hurricanes possession. The Jackets can't get the puck out of their end and Kotkaniemi feeds Jackson Blake between the circles for a 'Grade A' chance he buries against Merzlikins for the Hurricanes' first lead of the night.

GOAL, 2nd period 10:39 (PP): Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Carolina Hurricanes 3

A Sean Monahan hooking minor sends him to the penalty box amid a chorus of boos from Blue Jackets fans aimed at the officials. Regardless, Martin Necas gets his second assist of the night with a perfect setup across the slot to Aho for a one-timer past Merzlikins to re-tie it.

GOAL, 2nd period 7:09: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Carolina Hurricanes 2

Just like they did Thursday, the Blue Jackets are counterpunching with one of the Eastern Conference's best teams. Voronkov now puts them back on top with a power-play goal of his own, camping in front of Kochetkov's crease and redirected a beautiful tape-to-tape pass from Kent Johnson standing in the right-wing corner.

The goal extends Voronkov's goal streak to three straight games and the assist gives Johnson points in each of his first two games since returning from a shoulder injury Thursday against Tampa Bay.

GOAL, 2nd period 5:40: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Carolina Hurricanes 2

Give the Hurricanes enough opportunities to score and they're going to score eventually. After multiple defensive breakdowns by the Blue Jackets, Jalen Chatfield tied it for the Hurricanes by flipping the puck just over a sprawling effort by Merzlikins to stop it.

About two minutes earlier, a "Michigan Man" stopped Andrei Svechnikov's attempt to score a "Michigan" lacrosse-style goal from behind the Blue Jackets' net. Werenski spotted Svechnikov pick the puck up and dashed over to the left post to break it up, getting credit for a blocked shot.

2ND PERIOD START: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Carolina Hurricanes 1

Ice hockey is being played again in Columbus. Here we go with the second 20 and the Blue Jackets clinging to a one-goal lead.

END OF 1ST PERIOD: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Carolina Hurricanes 1

The Blue Jackets skate off to the locker room during this first intermission with a one goal lead thanks to strong individual efforts by Fabbro and Marchenko to score the Columbus goals.

Roslovic got the "former Blue Jacket" goal out of the way in the first period, his second straight game with a goal and his 12th of the season in just 20 games. The Hurricanes also have Eric Robinson skating in this one, and he's 13 points on five goals and eight assists in Carolina's first 19 games.

The Hurricanes controlled play throughout the first and have sizable advantages in shots (13-6) and attempts (26-12). The Blue Jackets probably need to figure out how to even those numbers up to win tonight, but it's also hockey and sometimes that's not required.

1st period, 10:34: Columbus Blue Jackets thanks Jack Roslovic with video montage

The game's second TV timeout was used to welcome former Blue Jackets forward and Columbus product Jack Roslovic back to Nationwide Arena for the first time since he was dealt to the New York Rangers at last season's trade deadline.

GOAL, 1st period 10:20: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Carolina Hurricanes 1

Here we go again, perhaps?

Three combined goals now scored in the first half of the first period, including this one by Marchenko to put the Blue Jackets back on top.

Another fantastic individual effort for this one, as Marchenko ripped the puck off the Hurricanes at the right point inside the Blue Jackets' zone and skated it into a breakaway that he capped with a laser inside the left post for his seventh goal of the season. No assist. No help needed.

GOAL, 1st period 6:40: Columbus Blue Jackets 1, Carolina Hurricanes 1

Death, taxes and former Blue Jackets scoring goals against Columbus. It's become kind of a thing for the Blue Jackets this season. That trend combined with Roslovic having 11 goals to his credit in just 19 games coming into this game almost guaranteed he'd score tonight.

Now the question becomes how many?

This one was set up beautifully by Sebastian Aho, who slid Roslovic the puck as his right wing was headed down the slot. The puck zipped off his stick in a flash, beating Merzlikins to the far side inside the left post.

GOAL, 1st period 2:04: Columbus Blue Jackets 1, Carolina Hurricanes 0

Dante Fabbro has been quite a find off the waiver wire thus far for the Blue Jackets, who now lead this game 1-0 early into it after a tremendous individual effort by their newly acquired defenseman from the Nashville Predators.

After getting the puck in the defensive zone, Fabbro made a slick stickhandling move around a forechecking Hurricanes forward to spring himself for a 2-on-1 rush that he also capped with a snipe inside the right post from the slot. The goal is Fabbro's second in just six games since being claimed off waivers. He scored three in 56 games for the Predators last season and none in six games for Nashville prior to being exposed to waivers.

The puck's in play, so strap it down and buckle up for another Metro tilt between the Blue Jackets and Hurricanes here in Columbus.

Feb 29, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets left wing Dmitri Voronkov (10) defends Carolina Hurricanes center Seth Jarvis (24) during the second period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena.

BLUE JACKETS

Forwards

(10) Dmitri Voronkov — (23) Sean Monahan — (86) Kirill Marchenko

(91) Kent Johnson — (19) Adam Fantilli — (62) Kevin Labanc

(59) Yegor Chinakhov — (4) Cole Sillinger — (24) Mathieu Olivier

(27) Zach Aston-Reese — (7) Sean Kuraly — (17) Justin Danforth

Defensemen

(8) Zach Werenski — (15) Dante Fabbro

(9) Ivan Provorov — (78) Damon Severson

(2) Jake Christiansen — (22) Jordan Harris

Goalies

(90) Elvis Merzlikins

(40) Daniil Tarasov

Scratched: LW James van Riemsdyk, D Jack Johnson

Injured: F Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery) and D Erik Gudbranson (shoulder surgery)

Columbus Blue Jackets center Boone Jenner (38) falls to the ice as he takes a face-off against Carolina Hurricanes center Jordan Staal (11) during the second period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Feb. 8, 2021.

HURRICANES

Forwards

(37) Andrei Svechnikov — (20) Sebastian Aho — (96) Jack Roslovic

(50) Eric Robinson — (82) Jesperi Kotkniemi — (88) Martin Necas

(28) William Carrier — (11) Jordan Staal — (48) Jordan Martinook

(27) Tyson Jost — (18) Jack Drury — (53) Jackson Blake

Defensemen

(74) Jaccob Slavin — (8) Brent Burns

(7) Dmitry Orlov — (5) Jalen Chatfield

(4) Shayne Gostisbehere — (26) Sean Walker

Goalies

(52) Pyotr Kochetkov

(41) Spencer Martin

Scratched: D Ty Smith

Injured: G Frederik Andersen (lower body), C Seth Jarvis (upper body), RW Jesper Fast (neck)

Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Kevin Labanc (62) skates during the third period of the NHL hockey game against the Edmonton Oilers at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024. The Blue Jackets won 6-1.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Carolina Hurricanes: storylines, skate report

BLUE JACKETS

The Blue Jackets (8-9-2) have scored 66 goals in their first 19 games, but they've only beaten one team that plays a similar style to the physical, grinding Hurricanes. That was a 2-0 home shutout of the New York Islanders to close out October, and the Jackets were then routed on both ends of a back-to-back to start November by the Winnipeg Jets at home and Washington Capitals on the road.

Columbus will start Elvis Merzlikins in net for the third straight game, giving him a chance to get back on the horse after making just enough saves while allowing six goals in the Blue Jackets' 7-6 overtime win Thursday night at Nationwide Arena. James van Riemsdyk is coming out of the lineup, replaced by Kevin Labanc, and Jordan Harris returns to replace Jack Johnson on the third defense pairing.

Columbus Blue Jackets center Jack Roslovic (96) beats Carolina Hurricanes goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic (39) for the game-winning goal during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Feb. 8, 2021. The Blue Jackets won 3-2.

HURRICANES

The Hurricanes (14-5-0) are in first place of the Metropolitan Division, and have won four of their past six games. They've also got former Blue Jackets forward Jack Roslovic on their top forward line and he scored his 11th goal of the season Thursday in the Hurricanes' 4-2 road loss to the New Jersey Devils — whom they're tied with in points atop the Metro.

Carolina will start Pyotr Kochetkov in net, which is the only change to the Hurricane's lineup coming off the loss Thursday in New Jersey. That sends former Blue Jackets goalie Spencer Martin back to the bench in the backup role. Martin and Roslovic are joined by forward Eric Robinson as a group of former Blue Jackets who've helped this version of the Hurricanes again rise to the top of the Metro.

Apr 16, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves (73) makes a save on a shot from Carolina Hurricanes right wing Stefan Noesen (23) during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Carolina Hurricanes history

All-time record: The Blue Jackets are 27-28-5 in 60 games against the Hurricanes, including 14-14-2 at Nationwide Arena. Carolina took three of the four games to win the series last season, but the Blue Jackets snapped a four-game losing streak to the Hurricanes with a victory over them in the season finale for Columbus.

Last meeting: The Blue Jackets won, 6-3, April 16 last season to close out the season on a winning note. Carolina rested the majority of its regular lineup in that game while preparing for the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Zach Werenski's four points on two goals and two assists led the way for Columbus. It was also Don Waddell's final game as the Hurricanes' president of hockey operations and general manager. Waddell left Raleigh to take the same position with the Blue Jackets in late May.

2024-25 matchups: Nov. 23 in Columbus (7 p.m.); Dec. 15 in Raleigh (5 p.m.); Dec. 31 in Columbus (8 p.m.) and Jan. 23 in Raleigh (7 p.m.)

Columbus Blue Jackets center Kent Johnson (91) celebrates scoring a goal past Tampa Bay Lightning goaltender Jonas Johansson (31) during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024. The Blue Jackets won 7-6 in overtime.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets mature from comeback against Carolina Hurricanes: 5 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- November 25, 2024

Four words landed heaviest in Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason's postgame comments Saturday at Nationwide Arena.

Following his team's ninth win, a thrilling 5-4 comeback against the Carolina Hurricanes that required a shootout, the Blue Jackets pulled even in points percentage (.500) with a 9-9-2 record. It was their second straight victory against an NHL heavyweight — after winning 7-6 against the Tampa Bay Lightning in overtime Thursday — and their first winning streak longer than two consecutive victories since March 11-16, 2022.

That span covers 988 days, 32-plus months and three head coaches. Evason didn't know any of that stuff and probably wouldn't have acknowledged it if he did. What he does know are good hockey teams, which made four monotone words he spoke boom louder than indoor cannon fire.

"That's a really good hockey team that we played tonight," Evason said, "and we are too."

Here are three takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets are growing up fast

Nipping the Hurricanes is no small feat for the Blue Jackets, who struggled against Carolina's pressure for two periods but trailed by only a goal starting the third.

That's when the Blue Jackets pushed back. Their energy surged starting the third, which resulted in Kirill Marchenko's tying 6-on-5 goal with 1:06 left in regulation. It was the sign of a talented young team the rest of the NHL wrote off months ago making big strides in all-important confidence.

Six of their nine wins are against teams holding playoff positions and two others — Tampa Bay and the New York Islanders — are on the cusp in the Eastern Conference. The Blue Jackets are also three points behind the Boston Bruins, who hold the East's second wild card spot after firing coach Jim Montgomery following a home loss to Columbus last Monday.

"I think we (are) growing as a team," Marchenko said. "We can feel how to win games, how we can play and it's, like, our standard. ... I don't want to think, like, 'Yeah, we are good,' and stop working. We need to work hard. Today, we tried to work hard. It's a great team against us, Carolina. They play really hard, too, and I think we win because we're harder and play harder. And that's it. Just go onto the next game and try to do the same thing."

Columbus Blue Jackets forwards Kent Johnson, Kirill Marchenko playing like NHL stars

It's still going to take a while for the rest of the NHL, especially those in media circles, to fully grasp how fortunate the Blue Jackets are to have Marchenko on the top line and Kent Johnson back from his 14-game injury stint.

Along with Sean Monahan, an established NHL top center, the Blue Jackets' top two young forwards played critical roles in the team's past two victories. Johnson scored two goals against the Lightning in his return from injured reserve and added two key assists against the Hurricanes, while Marchenko added two assists against Tampa Bay and two goals against Carolina.

His first goal was off a breakaway that he forced with a stick check, giving the Blue Jackets a 2-1 lead in the first period, and the second capped a 6-on-5 play that started with Johnson finding Monahan between the circles for a "Spin-O-Rama" setup to Marchenko in the left circle.

Marchenko, Monahan and defenseman Zach Werenski are all tied for the Blue Jackets' scoring lead with 20 points each — averaging a point per game — while Johnson now has 4-5-9 in just six games. That's a ridiculous 102-point pace over 68 games if he keeps this up through the remainder of the Jackets' schedule.

Dante Fabbro is fitting nicely with the Columbus Blue Jackets

Dante Fabbro is making the most of his opportunity to play a big role with the Blue Jackets, who claimed him off waivers Nov. 10 from the Nashville Predators.

After scoring the game's first goal Saturday night with a tremendous individual effort to create a 2-on-1 rush with Adam Fantilli, Fabbro logged a season-high 25:36 as Zach Werenski's partner on the top defense pairing. Fabbro was asked to name the last time he'd soaked up that much ice time and guessed, incorrectly, that it hadn't happened "since college."

Fabbro's NHL career-high was set at 25:48 with Nashville on Nov. 13, 2021, which means he only missed setting a new high mark by 13 seconds Saturday against the Hurricanes. Regardless, he has seamlessly melded into the Blue Jackets' defensive lineup as a steady right-handed shot who has helped balance all three pairs. Fabbro also has two goals, two assists and four points in six games now, after not contributing anything offensively in six games for the Predators.

Last season, he finished with 3-10-13 in 56 games for Nashville.

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski (8) moves the puck around Tampa Bay Lightning right wing Cam Atkinson (13) during the second period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024.

Zach Werenski merits a spot in Norris Trophy debate

There's a lot of runway left in the season, but Werenski is a point-a-game defenseman with 6-14-20 in 20 games and is leading the NHL in time-on-ice at 26:05 per game — 17 seconds more than Chicago Blackhawks defenseman Seth Jones (25:43), his former defense partner in Columbus.

Among NHL defensemen, Werenski trails only Colorado Avalanche star Cale Makar's 8-22-30 in scoring and remains tied for second in that category with the Winnipeg Jets' Josh Morrissey. Should Werenski score at that rate all season, he should be included at or near the top of ballots for the Norris Trophy — which is awarded annually to the NHL's top defenseman as chosen by the Professional Hockey Writers Association.

Werenski has a steep uphill climb in that competition, since Makar is a prolific offensive player and the Blue Jackets operate in obscurity compared to most NHL markets, but numbers like his to this point are impossible to ignore.

Dmitri Voronkov nets another big goal for the Columbus Blue Jackets

Now that he's shaken off rust from an injury-delayed start, Dmitry Voronkov is becoming quite a weapon as a big forward with good wheels. His goal against the Hurricanes gave the Blue Jackets a 3-2 lead in the second period, capping a power play, and extended his goal streak to three games.

Voronkov is listed at 6 foot 5, 227 pounds, which is roughly 15-20 pounds lighter than he was last season as a rookie, and he's moving around the ice better. Voronkov, however, is no less imposing. He has now

scored four goals in the past five games, has five goals in 11 games since making his season debut and is scoring at a pace that would get him to 33 goals in 62 games.

The Athletic / Don Waddell enjoys fresh start with Blue Jackets but holds good feelings about Hurricanes

By Aaron Portzline- November 23, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Don Waddell surprised many in the Carolina Hurricanes organization last May when he announced, only a day after the Hurricanes were bounced from the second round of the playoffs, that he was resigning as president and general manager.

The rest of the hockey world learned of his decision about a week later, a major shake-up for one of the most consistently competitive franchises in the NHL in recent seasons.

“I’d been there 10 years, six as the president and general manager,” said Waddell, now general manager of the Columbus Blue Jackets. “It was a lot, beyond the day-to-day operation of the hockey club, plus an expansion project (with PNC Arena) and other projects.

“I made the decision way before the end of the season that it was time for me to move on. It was just time to find the next chapter in my life. I was very much a personal feeling. Probably a lot of things went into it, but I just felt it was time.”

As the guy who ran both the business side and on-ice product, Waddell had long-established relationships all over the Hurricanes organization. So it will be a mini-reunion on Saturday when the Blue Jackets host Carolina in Nationwide Arena, and a much bigger get-back-together when the Jackets play in Raleigh, N.C., on Dec. 15.

“Any time you’re with a team for 10 years, you’ve got a lot of friends there, a lot of ties to the organization,” Waddell said. “The coaching staff, the trainers, the players, everybody in the office ... I had a big staff there, and there are a lot of good friends I’ve stayed in touch with.

“They’re a very good team. I think they have, what, three losses? I just want (the Blue Jackets) to play hard and play our best and hopefully we win the game.”

Saturday’s game also marks the return to Columbus of forward Jack Roslovic, who, after 3 1/2 seasons in Columbus, was traded to the New York Rangers at the deadline last season. He signed with Carolina as an unrestricted free agent this summer.

Roslovic, who is second on the Hurricanes with 10 goals in only 18 games, will almost certainly get a first-period “welcome back” video on the scoreboard.

Waddell will have to wait until next month for his greeting in Raleigh, but Saturday is a testament to the status he’s achieved as an NHL executive. He’s now been a president and general manager of three franchises, including the expansion Atlanta Thrashers, who moved to Winnipeg in 2011.

The Hurricanes could never get over the hump to reach the Stanley Cup Final during Waddell’s run, but there were significant successes. What stands out?

“When I went there initially as president (2014), our attendance was among the worst in the league,” Waddell said. “When I left, we were selling out every night.

“When Rod (Brind’Amour) and I took over (the roster) — he as the coach and me as the general manager — we had missed the playoffs in nine straight years. We then made the playoffs six years in a row. From where we started and where it ended up — and they’re still going, obviously — I feel good about that. I think I left them in a good spot.”

On May 16, Carolina lost Game 6 to the New York Rangers, ending their second-round series. The next day, a Friday, Waddell told Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon that he was stepping down, even though he didn't have any future plans in place.

Don Waddell, 66, was hired to run the Blue Jackets in May, and it's already clear he plans on running the organization differently than his predecessors.

"I had no idea, really, what was going on around the league," Waddell said. "We were in playoff mode, just going day by day and pretty focused on what was in front of us.

"I didn't know what Columbus was doing (with their GM search). I had permission on Sunday to talk with other teams, and I found out they were still looking. They asked me to come in and talk to them."

Waddell had developed a two-decade friendship with Blue Jackets president of business operations Mike Priest, who was running the Jackets' GM search. He immediately shot to the top of Priest's list of candidates, and a drawn-out process started moving forward quickly. He was hired on May 29.

Priest and Waddell had been friends for more than two decades after meeting at the NHL board of governors meetings in the early 2000s, when they were both trying to get expansion franchises off the ground in non-traditional hockey markets.

That relationship with Priest was a big draw, Waddell said. So was the Blue Jackets' young talent, especially at forward. But he was also delighted with the way the franchise operates internally.

Under Dundon, the Hurricanes are known to be run more collaboratively than most pro sports franchises. That's probably a nice way of putting it. There's a perception that the office staff can't order paper clips or printer ink without some level of discussion.

"A lot was done by committee," Waddell said. "At the end of the day, though, I can honestly say, there's nothing that I wanted to do ... for the most part ... nothing major ... that we couldn't get done.

"But you had a lot of ... how should I put this? ... there were always a lot of questions about anything you wanted to do."

It's hard to argue with the Hurricanes' results. They've won division titles in three of the last four years, and they currently lead the Metropolitan Division.

But Waddell seems refreshed by the setup in Columbus.

"My day-to-day contact is Mike Priest," he said. "I keep him updated on anything that's going on, and he's been very supportive. Anything we've wanted to do — whether it's picking guys up off waivers, signing guys as free agents — he's been very supportive. I'm a firm believer that ownership has the right to know what's going on before they read about it.

"I'd say this about Carolina and now in Columbus, though. It's not the Don Waddell show. We have a lot of really good hockey people here in this organization who have big roles with us. Big decisions have to be made, and you want people around you whose opinions you trust. I had that there, and I have that here."

Waddell has been watching closely every aspect of the Blue Jackets organization. He has his coach in place after hiring Dean Evason a month into his Columbus tenure. Now, as his first season unfolds, he's watching the roster closely, admiring the young talent and trying to figure out which veterans will be part of the mix going forward.

This may take some time, but that's not because Waddell plans to slow-roll it. To the contrary.

"I like a lot of the young guys," Waddell said. "We hope they continue to grow. It's an important year for them to keep maturing, not only as players but as people. If they do that, we're in pretty good shape for the future.

"Saying that, we're going to have to add some more pieces next summer; we know that. Going into next summer, we're going to have lots of cap space. We're not going to waste it, we're going to spend it wisely. We've already started talking about what areas we need to identify."

Waddell wasn't out of work long, but he believes he's landed well. He's knee-deep in another project, trying to get the Blue Jackets to achieve the same sustained success as the Hurricanes, but perhaps with more postseason success.

"I was really excited by the opportunity here right from the moment I heard from the Blue Jackets, honestly," Waddell said. "And it's been everything I'd hoped and more. The city is great. The fans have been great. The players have played hard almost every night.

"We've been through some stuff, some rough patches (on the ice). But I really love it here. It's been a perfect fit."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Olivier's emergence, Jiricek's future and a big payday coming

By Aaron Portzline- November 25, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — A collection of notes, insights, ruminations and did-you-knows gathered throughout the week that was for the Columbus Blue Jackets:

Item No. 1: Sir Mathieu Olivier

Three Blue Jackets players — Kirill Marchenko, Sean Monahan and Zach Werenski — are playing at a point-a-game pace through 20 games. The Blue Jackets are playing at a .500 clip, far outpacing the dire projections that they would once again be among the dregs of the NHL.

But the most surprising development over the first six weeks of the season has been the emergence and elevation of winger Mathieu Olivier, who has already set a career-high in goals (six) despite ranking among the league leaders in penalty minutes (35) and fighting majors (three).

The only player in the NHL with six even-strength goals and more penalty minutes than Olivier is Utah's Jack McBain.

Former NHL heavyweight John Scott, now host of the "Dropping the Gloves" podcast, called Olivier "the best in his business" and urged NHL commissioner Gary Bettman to create the Bob Probert Award to honor the league's most productive tough guy.

I am now captain of the Mathieu Oliver fan club #cbj pic.twitter.com/m2QNMmpyDM

— John Scott (@johnscott_32) November 19, 2024

The person least surprised by all of this? Olivier.

"You would be right (to say that)," Olivier said. "People can watch me play and think what they want. I knew I could take a step on both sides of the ice and become the big, impact player that I've always wanted to be.

"The Tom Wilson-type objective is something that should be the goal. Am I going to get there eventually, consistently over the years? We'll see. There's a lot of work to do, obviously. I'm not there yet. I'm not saying I'm Tom Wilson at all, but the goal of being a player like him is something to strive for."

Olivier has aspired to be like Wilson, the Washington Capitals' notorious power forward, since joining the Blue Jackets three seasons ago in a trade with Nashville, and there have been brief stretches in each of the last two seasons when you could start to see it.

But two developments over the summer helped Olivier take a big stride in that direction.

First, he spent less time in the gym and more time on the ice, with a focus on puck-handling and puck possession. He also worked on "cognitive training" exercises that he said have made a big difference, though he declined to say exactly what that entailed.

"(It was) mental stuff that, maybe over the years you get a few concussions, and you have some stuff that's out of whack," Olivier said. "It's nothing crazy, but it's really helped."

The second positive for Olivier was the hiring of coach Dean Evason, who came in with two new assistant coaches and a vow that every player had a fresh slate, that previous reputations and roles were next to meaningless in Evason's eyes.

That's Olivier, though his performance early in the season has earned him a promotion to the third line. That's how Olivier, who sat and watched during special teams play for much of his NHL career, has become a staple on the penalty kill.

"I do feel (Evason's confidence)," Olivier said. "It's a new start for everyone on the team. I had some experience with (assistant coach Scott Ford) in the past, but everybody's starting from scratch with these guys.

"I'm glad they see me in that role, that elevated role. My job is to perform to that level now, and keep going."

Olivier's timing couldn't be better. He's can become an unrestricted free agent for the first time after this season and is almost certainly looking at a significant raise from his current \$1.1 million salary.

By the sounds of it, Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell doesn't want Olivier to reach the end of the season without a new contract. Waddell wouldn't go name by name through the list of Blue Jackets who are pending UFAs — there are nine — but he did make it clear that he sees Olivier as a keeper.

In fact, Waddell said, they've already had initial conversations with Olivier's agent, Philippe Lecavalier, toward a new contract.

"They're ready to talk when we are, so we're going to get after here pretty soon," Waddell said.

As for Olivier?

"As a player, you're aware of it, but the challenge is to stay within the day-to-day aspect of it," Olivier said. "Right now, I'm focused on being a Blue Jacket and really making this work here. I want to keep this going, and I want to stay a Blue Jacket.

Item No. 2: Trading Jiricek?

The Blue Jackets sent 20-year-old defenseman David Jiricek to AHL Cleveland last week. It should surprise nobody if the next transaction regarding Jiricek is a trade.

Waddell is not in a hurry to trade Jiricek, but he's listening to offers. As of the middle of last week, a team source told The Athletic that no official offers were on the table for Waddell to consider, but that also can change in a blink. And with so many GMs circling, it can escalate quickly.

So what would the return look like?

It's likely that the Blue Jackets would be looking to trade offers that include similarly-aged players as Jiricek, players who were recent top draft picks and are still in their entry-level deals. They're not interested in players who are in their unrestricted free-agency years.

Two trades over the last 10 months provide a template.

On Jan. 8, 2024, the Philadelphia Flyers traded disgruntled prospect forward Cutter Gauthier (No. 5 overall in 2022) to the Anaheim Ducks for defenseman Jamie Drysdale (No. 6 overall in 2020) and a second-round pick in 2025.

Then, this summer (Aug. 22), forward Rutger McGroarty (No. 14 overall in 2022), who refused to sign with the Winnipeg Jets, was traded to the Pittsburgh Penguins for forward Brayden Yager (No. 14 overall in 2023).

It's important to note that Jiricek has not requested a trade and has not expressed an unwillingness to play for Columbus, as Gauthier and McGroarty did with their teams. He made his season debut with AHL

Cleveland on Saturday, generating one shot on goal and an even rating in the Monsters' 4-1 win over Milwaukee.

Item No. 3: Lindstrom's back

The Blue Jackets revealed last Wednesday that Cayden Lindstrom, the club's No. 4 overall draft pick this past summer, had back surgery to relieve symptoms caused by a herniated disc in his lower back. The procedure is called a lumbar microdiscectomy.

Waddell said doctors expect Lindstrom to make a full recovery and are optimistic that, after a month or so of rest, he can resume skating and training and return to play yet this season.

#CBJ GM Don Waddell with an update on Jackets 1st round pick Cayden Lindstrom who had a procedure on his back yesterday. Lindstrom will have minimal activity for 30 days before resuming his work to get back to playing. He will remain in Columbus during that time. pic.twitter.com/xCBzVVptWX

— Dave Maetzold (@DMAetzMedia) November 20, 2024

Upon hearing this news, hundreds of amateur back surgeons in Columbus and the rest of the hockey world expressed concern that Lindstrom's back would never be 100 percent and/or that the Blue Jackets erred in selecting Lindstrom so high last June.

The Athletic contacted a surgeon in Columbus who performs this procedure to answer some of the basic questions about Lindstrom's surgery. Dr. Elizabeth Yu, an orthopedic surgeon at Ohio State who specializes in treating spinal diseases and disorders, took time out of a busy schedule to have this email exchange:

In layman's terms, what does a microdiscectomy procedure entail, and what ailment does it remedy?

The lower back, or lumbar spine, is composed of the vertebral bone and the discs that are the cushion between the bones. As we age, the discs begin to degenerate and can sometimes herniate and cause pressure on a spinal nerve. This can cause leg pain. A lumbar microdiscectomy is a procedure that removes the herniated portion of the disc to take pressure off the nerve and help alleviate the nerve pain down the leg.

How many of these procedures have you performed? What is the typical success rate, and what is considered a success?

I have been in practice for over 10 years and have done several hundred of these procedures. The success rate is over 90 percent for improvement of the nerve pain down the leg when the advanced imaging correlates with the patient's clinical complaints.

What is the recovery time for this procedure? When is a reasonable amount of time for a patient to be cleared to participate in a physical game such as hockey? And would you have concerns about a patient continuing to play hockey?

My protocol for the recovery timetable for this procedure is six weeks of restricted activity to allow the body to heal from surgery. After this, I encourage patients to participate in physical therapy, and, if they are in a physical sport, to resume training with the goal of returning to the game.

How likely is a microdiscectomy patient to require further back surgery later in life? Do the chances increase that a spinal fusion will be necessary?

There is a risk of re-herniation. It does not necessarily mean the patient needs another surgery. If they are unable to improve with nonoperative treatment options, such as spinal injections, medication and/or

physical therapy, another lumbar microdiscectomy would be recommended. If a patient continues to re-herniate their disc at the same level, a spinal fusion is recommended to stop the recurrence.

How concerned would you be about the overall health of a person's back if this surgery is required at 18 years of age?

Counseling patients on the importance of a healthy back and proper body mechanics is something that is relevant regardless of age.

Item No. 4: Snacks

- With Saturday's come-from-behind 5-4 shootout win over Carolina, the Blue Jackets reached the 20-game mile marker with a .500 points percentage (9-9-2) for the first time since 2021-22. The Jackets were 5-11-4 last season and 7-12-1 in 2022-23. With wins over Boston (5-1 on Monday), Tampa Bay (7-6 in OT on Thursday), and Carolina, the Jackets have won three in a row for the first time since March 11-16, 2022 — a span of 205 games — when they beat Minnesota, Vegas and Ottawa.
 - Don't look now, but goaltender Elvis Merzlikins is starting to put it together again. Merzlikins stopped 32 of 36 shots in Saturday's win, earning a fourth consecutive win for the first time since his first four outings of the 2021-22 season. With wins over Pittsburgh, Boston, Tampa Bay and Carolina, Merzlikins is now 6-5-1 with an .894 save percentage and 3.08 goals-against average.
 - Blue Jackets center Sean Kuraly played in his 500th NHL game on Saturday, quite a milestone for fifth-round pick (No. 133 overall) by San Jose in 2011. As BlueJackets.com reporter Jeff Svoboda noted, Kuraly's former AAA Blue Jackets teammate Jack Roslovic, now playing for the Carolina Hurricanes, is on pace to hit 500 games later this season. Another Columbus kid, Connor Murphy of the Chicago Blackhawks, is two games short of 700 in his career.
- "We've been inspired by the (local) players who have come before us," Kuraly told Svoboda. "There's groups of kids trying to do the same thing I'm doing. I'm certain there will be plenty more to do it and to do it much better. I think (the previous) guys are proud of inspiring someone like me. I think I can be proud of inspiring the next wave."
- Werenski's five-point performance last Thursday vs Tampa Bay — he had two goals, including the OT winner, and three assists in a 7-6 win — marked the first time a Blue Jackets defenseman has totaled five points in a game. The six Columbus forwards to hit five points in a game: Espen Knutsen (0-5-5 vs. Calgary on March 24, 2001), Geoff Sanderson (4-1-5) and Andrew Cassels (1-4-5 at Calgary on March 29, 2003), David Vyborny (1-4-5 vs. Colorado on Feb. 28, 2004), Artemi Panarin (0-5-5 at New Jersey on Dec. 8, 2017), and Johnny Gaudreau (2-3-5 at San Jose on March 14, 2023).
 - The last NHL defenseman to score five points in a game was Tampa Bay's Darren Raddysh, who had 0-5-5 in a 7-0 win over Philadelphia on March 9 of last season.
 - Sunday Gathering trivia question: Only six times in 23-plus seasons has a Blue Jackets defenseman totaled four or more points in a game. Four of those six instances belong to Werenski. Name the other two defensemen to total four or more points in a game for Columbus.
 - Gavin Brindley, the Blue Jackets' second-round pick (No. 34 overall) in 2023, had quite the AHL debut on Saturday for Cleveland. He assisted on goals by Trey Fix-Wolansky and Ole Julian Bjørkvik Holm and had a plus-2 rating in the Monsters' win. Brindley, who made his NHL debut in the Blue Jackets' final games of last season, had been out since suffering a broken finger during training camp.

- AHL Cleveland's Rocco Grimaldi carried an eight-game point streak into Sunday's game vs. Milwaukee. Grimaldi has 5-10-15 during that stretch, claiming to second in the AHL in scoring (6-13-19) despite playing in only 12 games. Grimaldi signed a player tryout contract with Columbus in September.

- Trivia answer: Other than Werenski, the two Blue Jackets defensemen with four-point games are Deron Quint and Seth Jones. Quint had 3-1-4 at Florida on March 9, 2001 (the inaugural season), while Jones totaled 1-3-4 at Vancouver on March 31, 2018.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Werenski, Johnson push CBJ past Lightning](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- November 23, 2024

After CBJ wins, we'll give three takeaways about what stood out or what we'll remember from the Blue Jackets victory.

1. Feel free to use whatever adjective you want to describe that game.

Whether it's insane, bonkers, unreal, or holy whatever you want to say, the two teams played one of those games where it felt like every puck was going to go in at Nationwide Arena on Thursday night.

They happen every once in a while, but not very often. In fact, it was just the fourth 7-6 final in the 24-season history of the Blue Jackets – and in a weird quirk of fate, Columbus has won all of them in overtime.

“Fans, I’m sure, love it,” head coach Dean Evason said after the 13-goal outburst. “Coaches don’t love it that much.”

Well then score one for the fans, because this was wall-to-wall entertainment. Tampa Bay took a 3-0 lead only to see the Blue Jackets erase it, then it was patty cake from there – a 4-3 Lightning lead, a 5-4 CBJ advantage, a 6-5 Jackets lead and then finally Zach Werenski’s winner 1:25 into extra time.

At the start of the second period, there were six goals scored – four for Columbus – in a span of 5:50. Nine times, a goal was scored within two minutes of another goal, and three times Tampa Bay scored within one minute after a CBJ goal.

There will be a lot to correct defensively for the CBJ, of course, but why bother harping on that? It was good, old-fashioned, 1980s-style fun at the downtown barn Thursday night.

“You feel like you’re on the pond a little bit,” Kent Johnson said.

“Definitely one of the weirder ones I’ve played,” Werenski said.

“I’ve been in a few like that,” Sean Monahan said after a four-point night.

In the end, it was the Blue Jackets that stuck with it and left with the two points. Hey, if you’re gonna be in a game like that, you might as well win it.

“It was one of those things, it doesn’t happen every day,” Werenski said. “Tonight was fun because we got the win, and that’s all that matters.”

2. Zach Werenski is at another level this season.

There have been some virtuoso performances by the ninth-year defenseman this year, but this one takes the cake. Werenski’s two-goal, three-assist game gave him the first five-point game of his career, and afterward, teammates and coaches were effusive in their praise.

“I’ve seen a lot of hockey players,” Evason said. “I don’t think I’ve seen one like him. Honestly. He’s amazing. He just does it all. When he wants the puck, he goes and gets it. When he wants to defend, he defends.”

Added Johnson: “It’s unbelievable. He’s always been a superstar, but this year he’s elevated even more. I’m excited for him. Hopefully he can keep it going and have a season to really put himself on the map

with the top defensemen in the league. I really believe he is. He should be up for the Norris (Trophy) and play for Team USA. I think he deserves all that stuff.”

Those guys might be a little biased, and we are too, but there’s no lie to be detected. Werenski is now second in the league among defensemen in goals (six) and tied for second in points, and he leads all blueliners in shots on goal (73) and average time on ice (25:46).

With two of the loudest voices in the Blue Jackets locker room out in captain Boone Jenner and fellow alternate captain Erik Gudbranson, Werenski has been serving as the de-facto captain this season. Both on the ice and off of it, he’s raised his level, as at times it feels like he’s putting the team on his back to try to will it to victory.

On Thursday night, he did.

“He’s taken on a way bigger role within our room, on the bench, and away from the rink,” Evason said. “It’s been positive for him. I think he’s really embraced that. I think in the past he’s maybe been a little bit more quiet and reserved, and I think this has pushed him forward. I think it’s helped his game on the ice as well.”

3. Kent Johnson certainly came back with a bang.

Well, make it two big booms.

The uber-talented wing had two goals and three assists in his first 10 periods of action to start the campaign, but on his first shift of his 11th period Oct. 17 vs. Buffalo, Johnson tripped over teammate James van Riemsdyk and landed on his shoulder. It was clear immediately he was in pain, skating to the locker room, and Johnson missed 14 games because of the injury.

It didn’t take him long to welcome himself back on Thursday night. Johnson scored both a shorthanded goal and a power-play goal – making him the eighth player in team history to do so in a game – in an emphatic signal that there was very little rust in his game.

“He’s just such a good hockey player, right?” Evason said. “You come back after that and you don’t turn the puck over, you hang on to it, you have the confidence to make plays. Some guys come back their first time, it’s just like throwing pucks away and they’re jittery and struggle in different areas. And he didn’t.”

Johnson begged to differ a bit, noting he rushed a few passes in the early going before getting up to game speed as the contest went on. That’s a bit of nitpicking, though, and he now has four goals and seven points in five games played this year.

Of all the encouraging signs for the Blue Jackets, having the No. 5 overall pick in the 2021 draft reaching a new level consistently would be near the top of the list.

“He’s a great player,” Monahan said. “He was eager to get back. He put a lot of work in, so credit to his work. He’s a huge part of this team, so it’s real nice to have him back. It’s his pose, his confidence (that stand out). When you’re in this league and you want the puck and you make plays with it, that makes you dangerous every time you’re on the ice, and that’s something he has.”

[BlueJackets.com / Hockey Fights Cancer has an impact on everyone](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- November 23, 2024

Last night, 9-year-old Gabe was like a kid in a candy store, if the candy store was an 18,000-seat sports arena.

As the Blue Jackets celebrated the annual Hockey Fights Cancer Night presented by OhioHealth, Gabe was in his element. He stared with wonder from along the glass as the Blue Jackets players took warmups, was given a puck by Adam Fantilli, danced along to the booming music and then made himself at home exploring the ambulance on hand in the bowels of Nationwide Arena.

And that was even before the game started.

One of the Blue Jackets Foundation's five pediatric cancer heroes for the year, Gabe spent Thursday night acting like a kid, which is a blessing when those days are sometimes few and far between.

Gabe loves science, tacos and the TV show *The Owl House*, but you might soon be able to add hockey to the list. Thursday night's contest vs. the Lightning was his first-ever time attending a game at Nationwide Arena, and suddenly Gabe has visions of being on skates like the athletes he saw on the ice.

"This is the first one," his mother, Melissa, said. "He wants to play (hockey) now. I said, 'Well, you better learn how to skate.'"

The introduction of the cancer heroes is one of the most impactful moments of Hockey Fights Cancer, and the five CBJ heroes had the full VIP experience from taking the ice with the players before the game to being part of a pregame high-five tunnel to watching the 7-6 win from a suite.

Throughout the year, they'll take part in photo shoots with the players, attend special CBJ events and otherwise be able to get their minds off of what they're facing by just being a kid.

"Everybody has made us feel right at home and special," Melissa said. "I get a little choked up because of the reason why we're here. You can't tell (by looking at him). He is really loving it. We appreciate it. He feels really special."

Throughout the night, there were plenty of other ways the Blue Jackets honored those who have gone or are currently going through the cancer fight.

Pediatric cancer survivors Molly Oldham, Lila Urbanic and Aria Tarantine combined to sing a beautiful version of *The Star-Spangled Banner* before the game, while four OhioHealth patients who recently completed treatment were able to ring the bell signifying the end of their treatment on the bench during the second intermission.

The recognitions extended to the night's military salute, presented by Elk+Elk. U.S. Army Private Jason Palmer spent six seasons in the military – including more than a year and a half on active duty – before being honorably discharged.

In June 2012, he was eagerly awaiting the birth of his daughter, Lilyanna, when he went to the hospital for appendicitis. But as doctors looked at the CT scan, they found something even more worrying – a growth on his kidney that turned out to be cancer.

"At the beginning of June, I had my appendix out," Palmer said. "At the end of June, I had my kidney out. At the beginning of July, my daughter Lilyanna was born. It was incredibly tough and rewarding at the

same time. Blessed, is what I'd say. The doctors told my wife that had they not found it when they did – because kidney cancer is the silent killer – I might not have had another year to live.”

The good news is that Palmer is now fully healthy, though he said cancer seems to run in his family. He had a large group of friends in family in attendance last night at Nationwide Arena because they all know the impact the disease can have.

While Palmer is no longer in the Army, he still continues to help his community, serving as a radiology technologist at OhioHealth.

“Serving is what I do, what our family does,” he said. “We come from a military family that has highly served, and my wife is a nurse, so she’s serving. It’s just something that we’ve always done.”

[BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets tie it late, top Hurricanes in shootout](#)

By Craig Merz- November 24, 2024

COLUMBUS -- Kirill Marchenko's second goal of the game tied it with 1:06 remaining in the third period, and the Columbus Blue Jackets defeated the Carolina Hurricanes 5-4 in a shootout at Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

Marchenko tied it 4-4 at 18:54 with Columbus goalie Elvis Merzlikins pulled for the extra attacker.

"It's a great team against us, Carolina, they play really hard too," Marchenko said. "We win because we work harder and play harder. We'll just go onto the next game and try to do the same thing."

Dante Fabbro and Dmitri Voronkov scored, and Kent Johnson had two assists for the Blue Jackets (9-9-2), who have won three in a row and four of five. Merzlikins made 32 saves.

Sean Monahan scored the only goal in the first round, and Merzlikins made three saves in the shootout, including against Sebastian Aho on the final attempt to win it.

"We stuck with it," Monahan said. "I thought we gave a little bit too much up at times, but at the end of the day, we found a way to win. We're learning, and slowly we're finding ways to win games, coming back and getting one late and then finishing overtime or shootouts is a start. So, it's a good sign."

Aho had a goal and an assist, and Martin Necas had two assists for the Hurricanes (14-5-1), who have lost two in a row. Pyotr Kochetkov made 27 saves before being injured at 3:52 of overtime when the knee of Carolina defenseman Sean Walker appeared to hit him in the head. Spencer Martin made one save in relief.

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour did not have an update.

"I don't know where we're at with that," Brind'Amour said. "It didn't look great, but we'll find out, I guess, at some point."

Fabbro gave Columbus a 1-0 lead at 2:04 of the first period. He scored with a wrist shot on the rush after picking up the puck in the defensive zone and skating into the left circle.

"We're starting to see the results that we want to see," Fabbro said. "We've got to continue with it and show up every day and put our best foot forward."

Jack Roslovic tied it 1-1 at 6:41 on a shot from the right circle off a pass by Aho for his team-best 12th goal of the season. He extended his goal streak to three games.

Marchenko put Columbus ahead 2-1 at 10:20 with his first goal of the game, scoring on a breakaway with his wrist shot going in off the left post.

"We started right. Started hard," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "That's a really good hockey team that we played tonight, and we are too. If we work as hard as we did tonight, we give ourselves a chance."

Jalen Chatfield tied it 2-2 at 5:40 of the second period on a shot near the right post.

"We gave them two goals in the first," Necas said. "It's always better playing with the lead than chasing."

Voronkov gave the Blue Jackets a 3-2 lead at 7:10 with a power-goal after Zach Werenski kept the puck in the zone at the right point.

Aho scored 11 seconds into a power play to tie it 3-3 at 10:39, one-timing a cross-ice pass by Necas from the right circle.

Jackson Blake gave the Hurricanes a 4-3 lead at 13:23 with a wrist shot from the slot.

The Hurricanes then killed a double-minor for high-sticking to Aho that began at 11:55 of the third.

“We’ve got to get the job done,” Chatfield said. “I thought we played pretty good. Six-on-five they’ve got the advantage, but we’ve been a pretty good team over the years at that. They got the bounce on that.”

NOTES: Werenski has 10 points (three goals, seven assists) during a five-game point streak. ... Blue Jackets center Sean Kuraly played his 500th NHL game. ... Hurricanes defenseman Dmitry Orlov has an assist in four straight games. ... Necas has 33 points (11 goals, 22 assists) for the most through 20 games in Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers history. He entered the game tied with Eric Staal (14 goals, 17 assists in 2005-06) and Pierre Larouche (15 goals, 16 assists in 1981-82) for the previous record of 31 points.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Make it three in a row](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- November 24, 2024

After CBJ wins, we'll give three takeaways about what stood out or what we'll remember from the Blue Jackets victory.

1. Winning is fun.

That's self-evident, of course, but it sure feels good, doesn't it?

The good vibes are prevalent in the Blue Jackets' locker room, where it was clear that a pair of three-letter words – win and fun – are closely intertwined after another dramatic victory.

"It's a lot of fun," said Sean Monahan, whose shootout goal was the difference. "We have a good group, fun to be around, fun to come to the rink. When you're winning games, that makes it even better."

Added Kirill Marchenko: "When you win three games in a row and you just consistently win, it's a lot of fun. Everybody enjoys this moment. I try to enjoy it, too. I want to do the next step tomorrow and next game and next practice. It's just awesome."

The Blue Jackets have now put together back-to-back thrilling victories against two recent Eastern Conference powers, coming back to beat Tampa Bay 7-6 in overtime on Thursday before another comeback victory against Carolina.

Those two triumphs have moved Columbus back to hockey .500 at 9-9-2 and on the edge of the playoff race. And consider these two facts.

- Columbus has won three straight games for the first time since February 2022. That's right, the Blue Jackets went two full seasons without a three-game winning streak.
- Seven of the Jackets' nine victories thus far have come against teams that made the playoffs last season.

The Blue Jackets are now a quarter of the way through the NHL season, and a lot will happen in the coming months. But right now, it feels good to believe a little bit, doesn't it?

"You can definitely feel a bit of belief coming in the locker room," Dante Fabbro said. "It's a great feeling. Any time you have some belief, it can be dangerous."

2. This Blue Jackets team just doesn't quit.

Thursday vs. Tampa Bay, the Blue Jackets were down 3-0 less than 12 minutes into the game and still battled back to earn the victory.

Against Carolina, the adversity came in a little different fashion. Columbus had three separate one-goal leads and lost them all, with the Hurricanes holding a 4-3 lead from late in the second period all the way until 1:06 to play.

That's when Marchenko scored his second goal of the game to knot the score, sending Nationwide Arena – and the CBJ bench – into hysterics. Taking advantage of a pair of excellent passes from Monahan and Kent Johnson, Marchenko quickly one-timed a shot past goalie Pyotr Kochetkov, then let loose a roar as he skated toward the glass in celebration.

"It's a great feeling," Marchenko said.

And it's one that doesn't come along very often. This marked the first time since March 21, 2023, that the Blue Jackets scored an extra-attacker tally in the final two minutes, then went on to win the game. In fact, over the past five seasons, Columbus pulled that off just four times.

It's yet another sign that this Blue Jackets team is never out of a game.

"Just that never quit attitude," Fabbro said. "We were able to get a huge goal from Marchy at the end and able to win in a shootout. It's just a great feeling. We're starting to see the results that we want to see. We have to continue with that and show up every day and put our best foot forward, but we can definitely continue to grow on that."

3. Fabbro has been a fabulous acquisition.

Sometimes, all it takes is a change of scenery for a player. After spending each of the previous five seasons as a regular in Nashville, the right-shot defenseman fell out of favor with the Predators at the start of the season, sitting as a healthy scratch for much of the opening few weeks.

He then hit waivers two weeks ago, and Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell and his staff made the decision to claim Fabbro. It seems to have been pretty astute, as Fabbro has fit right in on the top pair with Zach Werenski and now has two goals and two assists in six games with the Blue Jackets after notching the opening goal against Carolina.

After Dmitri Voronkov and Werenski combined to dispossess Martin Necas in the Carolina offensive zone, Fabbro grabbed the puck below the hashmarks and just started going. A player noted more for his first pass out of the zone than a swashbuckling nature, Fabbro instead looked like Werenski, curling around Jesperi Kotkaniemi to create a 2-on-1, skating the length of the ice and then firing through the legs of Kuchetkov when he hit the left circle.

"I don't think that's ever happened to me in my entire life before," Fabbro said. "Z had a good stick there and I was able to collect the puck, and I just saw their guy diving in and made a move. It was a full-ice 2-on-1. I saw Mo on the other side, and I think in my mind, I was thinking shoot the whole way.

"I will say I wasn't aiming five hole, but it worked out. Glad that could go in."

Werenski topped 32 minutes while reaching a season high in ice time, and Fabbro racked up the minutes along with his defensive partner. When it was all said and done, Fabbro's ice time of 25:36 was just 12 seconds shy of a career high, and he finished plus-2.

Not bad for a guy that was available to just about everyone a fortnight ago.

"Obviously Don and his group went out and got a guy that could stabilize our back end," head coach Dean Evason said. "Every night, he does the same things. He's a pro. He just goes about his business and eats minutes and is a sound hockey player."

[BlueJackets.com / 500 games is a milestone for Kuraly and Columbus](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- November 24, 2024

There have been plenty of milestones signifying the growth of Central Ohio hockey over the years.

With the Blue Jackets now in season No. 24, the hockey community has exploded in the area, and a location that didn't have the infrastructure to produce high-level players three decades ago now routinely sends players to high-level junior hockey, college hockey and pro hockey.

It's taken an entire community to make it happen, something Sean Kuraly realizes. The Blue Jackets forward and Dublin native spent his youth watching such players as Rick Nash, Jody Shelley and Derek Dorsett – just to name a few who have settled in the Columbus area – on the Nationwide Arena ice.

Now, he's carved out a professional career of his own, one that reached 500 career games last night in the Jackets' 5-4 shootout win over Carolina at the downtown barn. It's a milestone number for Kuraly, but also for a Columbus hockey community that can continue to point to such players as Kuraly as what's possible for those growing up in the area.

Not only is Central Ohio developing skaters who can make it to the NHL, it's producing players who have long careers at the highest level. It's part of a cycle that shows kids in the area what's possible if you put in the work, use the resources available and dedicate yourself to the game.

And as Kuraly notes, the best is likely yet to come.

"You don't think about it that much, but it crossed my mind the other day," he said. "There are groups of kids trying to do the same thing I'm doing. I'm certain there will be plenty more to do it and do it much better. I think (the guys who came before) are proud of inspiring someone like me. I think I can be proud inspiring the next wave."

In many ways, it was fitting that Kuraly didn't just do it at Nationwide Arena, he did it with his longtime friend and teammate Jack Roslovic playing on the other side. The former Blue Jackets forward – who is just 35 games shy of 500 himself – was back in town as a member of the Hurricanes and scored his 12th goal of the season, part of a red-hot start to the season for the Columbus native.

The day before the game, Ohio AAA Blue Jackets president and founder Ed Gingher was at the arena to see his former proteges, a sign of just how strong the community is around the game.

And as Kuraly noted, that on-ice component of things cannot be overlooked. He can remember being in Nationwide Arena as a kid watching the Blue Jackets, with the players on the ice turning from heroes into teammates and friends over the years.

"We've been inspired by the players that have come before us," he said. "We're the first group of kids that had this organization and players like Rick and the guys like Jody and Dorse and (Jared Boll) and all the guys that played here before us. We're the first ones that are benefitting by being inspired by former Blue Jackets, and hopefully we're doing our part to do the same."

Kuraly isn't the first AAA Blue Jackets product to reach 500 games – that would be Connor Murphy, the Chicago defenseman who is the son of former CBJ assistant Gord Murphy – but he's the first to do it in CBJ colors, adding even more of a local connection.

Kuraly grew up around the game as the son of Rick Kuraly, who played four seasons at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and remains the program's all-time leader in goals scored. But growing up in Central

Ohio and playing for the AAA team, he admits he never fully expected to make such a long career in the NHL, something the forward doesn't take for granted.

"I don't think so," Kuraly said. "You don't know if you're going to play one NHL game. To play 500 is pretty cool. It's a challenge. This league, they don't just let you hang around because you've played this many games. It's something that hopefully I can continue to do and continue to hang around and have a positive impact on my team. That's my biggest focus."

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Defeat Hurricanes For First 3-Game Winning Streak Since 2022

By Mark Scheig- November 23, 2024

If the Columbus Blue Jackets hoped to gain their first three-game winning streak in over two seasons, they were going to have to do it against one of the best teams in the NHL. Thanks to some late-game heroics, they did just that.

Kirill Marchenko scored with the goaltender pulled to force overtime. Then Sean Monahan scored the only goal of the shootout to lift the Blue Jackets to an improbable 5-4 win over the Carolina Hurricanes Saturday night.

The big story of this game eventually became the health of Hurricanes' goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets got started just 2:04 into the game thanks to an unlikely hero. Defenseman Dante Fabbro created a 2-on-1 rush and then took the shot to beat Kochetkov. He admitted postgame that he had never scored a goal like that before.

Former Blue Jacket Jack Roslovic then tied the game at one just over four minutes later. That was already his 12th goal of the season. Sebastian Aho had the only helper. Kirill Marchenko scored his first of two on the night midway through the first to make it 2-1.

The Hurricanes then started to take the game over. Despite allowing a Dmitri Voronkov goal, they connected three times in the second period with goals from Aho, Jalen Chatfield and Jackson Blake. Penalty trouble ultimately caught up to the Blue Jackets.

Then things started picking up in the third. Aho clipped Marchenko with a high stick. Although the Hurricanes killed all four minutes, the Blue Jackets got enough momentum to eventually tie the game.

Marchenko's second of the night made it 4-4. He was open in the circle and made no mistake.

Regulation solved nothing. Neither did overtime. But that's when Kochetkov was hit in the head by Sean Walker while trying to defend Zach Werenski. Kochetkov had to leave the game. Spencer Martin came in cold and got the game to a shootout.

Monahan scored the only goal of the shootout while Elvis Merzlikins stopped all three Hurricanes shooters to secure the victory. Postgame, there was no immediate update on Kochetkov's status.

The Blue Jackets' earned their first three-game winning streak since March 11-16, 2022 when they defeated the Wild, Golden Knights and Senators, a span of 988 days or 32 months.

Merzlikins stopped 32/36 to earn the win. Kochetkov stopped 27/31 before leaving the game.

The Blue Jackets next play Wednesday night at home against Montreal. Meanwhile, the Hurricanes will host the Dallas Stars on Monday night.

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Have Quietly Beaten Top NHL Teams This Season

By Spencer Lazary- November 23, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets may find themselves further down in the standings than they would have liked. However, in the first 19 games of the season, they have had some huge wins.

The Blue Jackets record is 8-9-2 through their 19 games. Interestingly enough, five of their eight wins have been against some of the NHL's top teams.

It started with the second game of the season when they beat the Colorado Avalanche 6-4 on Oct. 12. Only 10 days later, on Oct. 22, they beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 6-2.

Although the Edmonton Oilers have struggled this season, they are one of the NHL's top offensive teams. On Oct. 28, the Blue Jackets beat the Oilers 6-1.

After a long stretch of struggles, the Blue Jackets beat the Boston Bruins on Nov. 18, which was the final straw in the Bruins firing Jim Montgomery.

They then followed that up with a huge win last night against the Tampa Bay Lightning, who were at one point leading the game 3-1. However, they showed heart and a willingness to stay in the game and were able to win the game 7-6 in overtime.

Regardless of the Blue Jackets record and where they sit in the standings. These types of wins against top opponents in the NHL are not only character wins; they are also games that teach younger players how to be a pro in the NHL.

The Blue Jackets may be lower in the standings, but they are a team to keep on your radar.

1st Ohio Battery / Kent Johnson Scores Pair Of Special Teams Goals In Return To Lineup As Jackets Hold Off Lightning 7-6

By Will Chase- November 23, 2024

Back in action on Thursday night, Kent Johnson returned with a bang.

Having missed the previous 14 games due to an upper-body injury, Johnson picked right back up where he left off, scoring two goals in Thursday night's crazy, wild 7-6 overtime win over the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The four-year pro started the season red-hot for the Columbus Blue Jackets with five points (two goals, three assists) in four games.

Then during the 6-4 win over the Buffalo Sabres on Oct. 17, Johnson tripped over teammate James van Riemsdyk, landing awkwardly as it was initially feared he caused harm to the same left shoulder that required torn labrum surgery over the offseason.

Fearing the worst case, fortunately, the worst was avoided as Johnson only had to miss the previous 14 games.

Only missing 14 games underscores Johnson's importance to the Blue Jackets' success. It's never ideal to lose a player of Johnson's caliber, let alone one who got off to a sizzling start.

Looking primed to be the Johnson of 2022-23 when he scored 40 points (16 goals, 24 assists), the Jackets can certainly use what they got from Johnson through the club's first four games of the season.

They got that Thursday night.

Rarified Air

Johnson scored a pair of special teams goals — a power-play goal at 1:55 of the second period and a short-handed goal at 10:39 of the third period — to help the Blue Jackets overcome a 3-0 first-period deficit and beat the Lightning 7-6 in overtime.

"It kind of feels like the season opener again," Johnson said before Thursday's game.

Playing on a line with van Riemsdyk and Adam Fantilli on Thursday night, Johnson skated 14:58 with two goals on two shots. He played 49 seconds on the power play and 40 seconds on the penalty kill.

"He's just such a good hockey player," head coach Dean Evason said about Johnson. "You come back after that and you don't turn the puck over. You hang onto it. You have the confidence to make plays.



"He's such a rink rat or whatever you want to call him. He just wants to play hockey. It's not just offensively because he had the puck and he scores a couple goals but all the right things in those other areas as well.

"Was it nice to have him back in our lineup? Absolutely."

Johnson and the Jackets will continue their homestand on Saturday at 7:00 p.m. ET when they battle the Carolina Hurricanes.

1st Ohio Battery / BOOM: Blue Jackets Score Late, Win In Shootout Over Carolina To Secure First Three-Game Winning Streak In Two Seasons

By Ed Francis- November 24, 2024

	1	2	3 (OT) (SO)	F
	1	3	0 (0) (0)	4
	2	1	1 (0) (1)	5

CBJ GOALS:
Fabbro (P1, 2:04)
Marchenko (P1, 10:20)
Voronkov (P2, 7:10)
Marchenko (2) (P3, 18:54)

Kirill Marchenko scored twice, including the game-tying goal with just over a minute left in regulation, and the Columbus Blue Jackets won their third straight game with a 5-4 win over the Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday night.

It's the first three-game winning streak for the Blue Jackets since March of 2022 — a span of 983 days.

The Blue Jackets jumped out to a 2-1 lead through the first period on goals from Dante Fabbro and Marchenko. Both goals were unassisted.

After the Hurricanes would tie it at 2-2, Dmitri Voronkov would connect just 90 seconds later on the power play to regain a lead for Columbus, this time at 3-2. Carolina would score twice more in the second frame to get a 4-3 lead.

It's a lead the Hurricanes would keep until 1:06 left in regulation — and it was one they would not regain.

After a scoreless overtime period, Sean Monahan scored on the first shot of the shootout and Elvis Merzlikins stopped all three Carolina attempts to give Columbus the improbable victory.

Here's how the night went from puck-drop to the final horn at Nationwide Arena:

1st Period:

(2:04 — CBJ Goal): The Blue Jackets strike first, taking a 1-0 lead just two minutes into the game. Martin Necas has just enough trouble holding onto the puck in the high slot, and Fabbro pounces. He puts a good move on Jesperi Kotkaniemi and a 2-on-1 quickly breaks out. Fabbro has a chance to get the puck to Adam Fantilli but rather than make what would've been a risky pass, he snaps it past Carolina netminder Pyotr Kochetkov. The goal was Fabbro's second with Columbus and already his fourth point in just six games since coming over via waivers from the Nashville Predators.

(6:41 — CAR Goal): It's really nice to see Jack Roslovic with 12 goals in just his 20th game with the Hurricanes, but not on this night. To his credit, this was a great play by the former Blue Jacket that started with a good clear from his own end. He finds Sebastian Aho on a good clearing pass and darts up the ice. Aho gets it back to him, and Roslovic gets a shot off just ahead of a closing Mathieu Olivier.

(10:20 — CBJ Goal): Another unassisted goal for the Blue Jackets, who had two assists on all seven of their goals in the Thursday win over Tampa Bay. This time it's Marchenko, who rings one off the post and in on a breakaway. A great individual effort from Marchenko, who ended a season-long five game drought without a goal.

2nd Period:

(5:40 — CAR Goal): All four Blue Jacket skaters (with a fifth coming off the bench) are on the same side of the ice — and it was not the side with Jalen Chatfield on it. He takes a nice look from Dmitry Orlov and the defensive pairing for Carolina helps knot it at 2-2.

(7:10 — CBJ Goal): In his 11th game back, Voronkov gets his fifth goal of the season and his first on the power play. But as it's been the case with a lot of Columbus goals this season — the assists were crucial to the goal. Kent Johnson, who has scored in every game he's played this season (six), finds Voronkov on a smooth pass from the cornerboards. Werenski, who gets the secondary assist, makes a fantastic play at the blue line to keep the puck in the zone and a few seconds later would get the pass to Johnson just before the goal.

(10:39, 13:23 — CAR Goals): The Hurricanes would turn a one-goal deficit into a one-goal lead in a span of less than three minutes. Sebastian Aho ties the game at 10:39 just ten seconds into the power play and starts with Carolina winning the faceoff and going to work immediately. At 13:23, Jackson Blake gives Carolina a 4-3 lead on a sequence that started with a failed clear by the Blue Jackets that left Blake wide open in the slot.

3rd Period, Overtime, And The Shootout:

(18:54 — CBJ Goal): It would have been easy to pack it in after the Blue Jackets came up empty on a four-minute power play just minutes early, but the resolve of this team showed up yet again as Marchenko would tie it at 4-4 with 1:06 left in regulation. Great board play from Kent Johnson started the sequence that led to the goal, with the budding star picking up his second assist of the night on the play.

(Overtime/Shootout): Kochetkov went down with just over two minutes left in overtime, and was replaced by former Blue Jackets goalie Spencer Martin. Both teams exchanged good chances to win, but Monahan's strike was the only of the night in the shootout to give Columbus the win.

CAR	GAME STATS	CBJ
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36	SHOTS	32
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CAR	GAME STATS	CBJ
60%	FACEOFFS	40%
1/4	POWER PLAY	1/5
4/5	PENALTY KILL	3/4
21	HITS	16
20	GIVEAWAYS	23
2	TAKEAWAYS	9
10	BLOCKED SHOTS	19
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
2.90	EXPECTED GOALS	2.84
71	SHOT ATTEMPTS	54
34	SCORING CHANCES	28
12	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	12
DATA VIA: NHL.COM & NATURALSTATTRICK.COM		

Stat Chat:

- The Blue Jackets had a lead after twenty minutes despite being outshot (13-6) and out-chanced (25-12) by more than 2-to-1 margins. The Hurricanes also had six of the nine high-danger chances in the first.

- Carolina is a stingy team — which makes the 9-2 advantage the Blue Jackets had in takeaways even more eye-popping. Both goals in the first period came as a result of takeaways.
- Despite losing the shot attempts battle by a 71-54 margin, the high-danger chances were 12 a piece. Columbus made the most of their opportunities with the puck.

Up Next:

Game three of a four-game homestand is Wednesday night, when the Blue Jackets face the Montreal Canadiens. Columbus will be fresh, coming after three days off, while Montreal will be on the second half of a back-to-back. Puck drop is a little later than usual, with a 7:30 p.m. start time at Nationwide Arena.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things From A Shootout Victory: Fabbro's Quickly-Expanding Role, Johnson Stays Red-Hot, And A Franchise Record Point-A-Game Pace

By Ed Francis- November 25, 2024

For the second time in three nights: That was a wild one.

Two nights after a comeback, overtime win against the Tampa Bay Lightning, the Columbus Blue Jackets faced another top-tier opponent on Saturday night at Nationwide Arena.

The result was the same: a comeback, overtime win — this time with a 5-4 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes.

Here are three things from a game that looked like a loss... until it wasn't:

Fabbro Paying Dividends

Imagine a month ago, hearing that Dante Fabbro be finding a comfort zone with Zach Werenski on the Blue Jackets top defensive pairing.

Well, here we are.

Fabbro got the scoring started for Columbus with an unassisted snipe just 2:04 into the game.

"I don't think that's ever happened to me in my entire life," said Fabbro of the goal. "I just saw their guy diving in and made a move ... I saw (Adam Fantilli) on the other side, but I think in my mind, I was thinking shoot the whole way."

In just his sixth game with Columbus, Fabbro's goal was his second with the team and already his fourth point. This comes just a couple of weeks after being waived by the struggling Nashville Predators, who have won just two of their six games since releasing Fabbro and sit just a point shy of the worst record in the league.

Take these items into consideration:

- The 26-year-old has a +6 plus/minus since joining the team and is yet to have a game where he finished in the negative.
- In the 89 minutes Fabbro and Werenski have shared the ice together in 5-on-5 play, they've outscored the opposition by a 7-4 margin.
- Fabbro's 25:36 on the ice was just a dozen seconds shy of his career high, and his ice time has increased in each of the last five games.

Now consider that skating with Werenski means a significant chunk of Fabbro's time on the ice is coming against the top six forwards of the opposing team.

Head coach Dean Evason summed it up best after the game: "He just goes about his business and eats minutes and is a sound hockey player."

KJ: All The Way Back

Two goals in his first game back Thursday was a pretty good indication that Kent Johnson was back, but he admitted after the game that he still needed to work a little more to get fully back to game-speed.

Mission accomplished.

Johnson was on the ice for 19:38 in the win over the Hurricanes, an increase of nearly five minutes from the 14:58 he saw against the Lightning just two nights earlier. He also had another multi-point night, this time with a pair of assists on goals by Dmitri Voronkov and Kirill Marchenko, to make it nine points in six games.

Specifically, it was the first of those two assists that really is worth a little extra attention. Look at the vision Johnson displays in setting up Voronkov on the power play strike:

Johnson has picked up a point in every game he's played in, and his 5.31 points per 60 minutes trails only Carolina's Martin Necas (5.97) in that category amongst forwards with over 60 minutes of ice time this season.

This season is shaping up to be a breakout one for KJ, who has earned the trust of Evason and is getting opportunities everywhere on the ice that the 22-year-old didn't get under the last regime.

Look out.

Point-A-Game Paces

Marchenko's two-goal night put him at 20 points through 20 games — but he's not the only one on the team with 20 in 20. Both Sean Monahan and Zach Werenski picked up an assist Saturday night, giving both players their 20th point of the season, as well. If that sounds like uncharted territory, that's because it is. This is the first time in franchise history that Columbus has had three 20-point scorers through the club's first 20 games.

The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: Maple Leafs enter top 10, plus first quarter grades for every team

By Dom Luszczyszyn and Sean Gentile- November 23, 2024

Pencils down, folks, it's report card time for every team, courtesy of the Rankings Boys.

Every team gets graded based on their performance over the first quarter of the season. Here at Rankings HQ, though, we grade on a curve — every grade is loosely based on expectations.

If you're a good team playing good, that's cool and all, but that's about what we expected out of you; an average grade is what you deserve. A good team playing great though? That gets an A, as would a terrible team playing just fine. Just fine is great for Columbus, but it's horrible for Edmonton.

That's the gist of it — here are our grades.

1. Winnipeg Jets, 16-3-0

Last week: 1

Sean's ranking: 1

Dom's ranking: 1

Sean grade: A+

Dom grade: A+

There are nits to pick with the Jets — some more prime chances at five-on-five wouldn't hurt, and they're probably not going to shoot 25 percent on the power play for a full season — but it'd be unfair to do any more than mention them in passing, at this point. It's been a remarkable start to the season, and, if we're being honest, a surprising one, too. If they don't get full marks, who does?

2. Carolina Hurricanes, 14-5-0

Last week: 2

Sean's ranking: 2

Dom's ranking: 2

Sean grade: A+

Dom grade: A+

We've spent the entire first quarter (okay, fine, half decade) talking up the Hurricanes so it should come as no shock that they earn high marks for their start. Every new addition has crushed it to degrees no one could've seen coming and the returning players look as strong as ever. They've got depth, they've got oomph. They've got offense, they've got defense. Most of all, they've got their system and this might be the year it finally pays off.

3. Minnesota Wild, 13-3-3

Last week: 5

Sean's ranking: 3

Dom's ranking: 3

Sean grade: A

Dom grade: A

The Wild just keep on winning. They are now 13-3-3 and proud owners of the second-best points percentage in the league. They'd be division favorites if not for the first-place team, also from the Central.

Everything that needed to go right for the Wild this season did, and then some, and they're back to looking like a legit contender. Kirill Kaprizov is on an MVP run and everyone around him has elevated their games appropriately. Color us impressed, the Wild are the real deal.

4. New York Rangers, 12-5-1

Last week: 6

Sean's ranking: 4

Dom's ranking: 5

Sean grade: B+

Dom grade: B

It's hard to be too harsh on a 12-5-1 start. The Rangers are still plugging along and winning games at a high rate, but there is still room for concern. They've struggled this season against playoff opponents, have seen a rapid decline from Mika Zibanejad, and have had some second pair woes too.

A 114-point pace is still a 114-point pace, but the Rangers haven't exactly been given the toughest test so far. How they fare in Q2 and beyond might be more telling to what they can be.

5. Dallas Stars, 12-6-0

Last week: 4

Sean's ranking: 5

Dom's ranking: 4

Sean grade: B

Dom grade: B

The Stars are getting slow starts from Jason Robertson, Roope Hintz and Wyatt Johnson, but the fact that they're still clocking in this high is a testament to how good the rest of the roster has been. Let's start with Matt Duchene, who leads the team in scoring with 21 points. We'd say it's a throwback to his time in Colorado, but 4.62 points/60 is miles ahead of anything Duchene managed in his first 15 (!) seasons.

6. Florida Panthers, 12-7-1

Last week: 3

Sean's ranking: 7

Dom's ranking: 7

Sean grade: A-

Dom grade: A-

Losing to the Blackhawks? That's enough to bump Florida's grade down from "A" to "A-minus." Sorry, but we've got to be tougher critics against the defending champions. The expectations to keep being the best are very high.

So far, though, the Panthers are meeting them. The stars have shone bright and are getting the most out of a makeshift defense corps. Florida has enough sauce to win the Atlantic Division again, and even if the Panthers don't, they'll still be a tough out for any team unlucky to face them.

7. Washington Capitals, 13-5-1

Last week: 10

Sean's ranking: 6

Dom's ranking: 9

Sean grade: A+

Dom grade: A+

There's simply no underselling just how impressive Washington's start to the season has been. If there was a letter grade above "A-plus," the Capitals would've convincingly earned it. Sure, there's an element of puck luck involved with their start and they may cool down at some point — but that doesn't change how well this group has played over the first quarter. The kids have taken big steps, the stars have had resurgent seasons, and the team looks deep both up front and on the back end. The Capitals are the best story in hockey and we're enjoying the ride.

8. New Jersey Devils, 13-7-2

Last week: 9

Sean's ranking: 7

Dom's ranking: 8

Sean grade: B+

Dom grade: B+

A lot of people figured the Devils would get back on the contention path after a surprising down season, and that's exactly what we've seen from them so far. Sheldon Keefe deserves a lot of credit here for the team's defensive improvement; the Devils are in the top 10 for xGA/60 after finishing 20th last season. They looked especially good against Carolina in that regard Thursday night.

9. Toronto Maple Leafs, 12-6-2

Last week: 11

Sean's ranking: 10

Dom's ranking: 6

Sean grade: B+

Dom grade: B+

The Leafs woke up on Thursday in first place in their division (and ahead of their preseason points projection) despite Auston Matthews not playing since Nov. 3. They've now got six players on injured reserve. That alone gets them reeeeeeally close to an "A" — and if they keep it together much longer, we'll have to revisit.

10. Vegas Golden Knights, 12-6-2

Last week: 7

Sean's ranking: 9

Dom's ranking: 10

Sean grade: A

Dom grade: A-

It's business as usual for Vegas who are on pace for 107 points. That gets an A-grade from us thanks to playing at a much stronger pace than we figured given how weak their wingers looked to start the season. That the Golden Knights have survived lately with Mark Stone missing time (something we all assumed would happen at some point), makes it even more impressive. Pavel Dorofeyev, by the way, is on pace for 41 goals. That unexpected leap certainly helps!

11. Tampa Bay Lightning, 10-6-2

Last week: 12

Sean's ranking: 12

Dom's ranking: 11

Sean grade: B

Dom grade: B

The Lightning deserve two grades: one for Andrei Vasilevskiy games (yay!) and one for Jonas Johansson games (boooooo). The difference between the two has been stark, enough to leave the Lightning at a solid B. Tampa Bay is playing at a 100-point pace and is pretty much right in line with expectations so far — no complaints here.

12. Los Angeles Kings, 10-7-3

Last week: 15

Sean's ranking: 11

Dom's ranking: 15

Sean grade: B+

Dom grade: B+

Lockdown defense (1.95 goals against per 60 at five-on-five) and juiced-up offensive production put the Kings solidly ahead of their preseason projections. The fact that they've done almost all of it without Drew Doughty, and while getting substandard goaltending, makes it all even more impressive.

13. Vancouver Canucks, 9-6-3

Last week: 8

Sean's ranking: 13

Dom's ranking: 14

Sean grade: C

Dom grade: C

Outside of the play of Quinn Hughes — remember, he’s an MVP candidate, not just a Norris candidate — not a ton has gone well for the Canucks. Example A: Brock Boeser is still tied for the team lead in goals (11) despite missing six games. Still, they’ve managed to keep their heads above water. And look, off in the distance! That’s Thatcher Demko!

14. Colorado Avalanche, 11-9-0

Last week: 13

Sean’s ranking: 16

Dom’s ranking: 12

Sean grade: C-

Dom grade: C

It’s a bit unfair to grade the Avalanche right now. They’re like the kid who missed a month with mono — of course they’re going to be behind the rest of the class. The Avalanche have played commendable hockey despite all the absences and things are starting to turn around of late now that they’re getting healthier. Still, it’s hard to give anything higher than a C right now. Yes, their circumstances were tough, but the work they’ve handed in so far still leaves a bit to be desired.

15. Edmonton Oilers, 10-9-2

Last week: 14

Sean’s ranking:

Dom’s ranking: 13

Sean grade: D-

Dom grade: D

We’re not mad, we’re just disappointed.

Once again, the Oilers got off to an extremely slow start where Connor McDavid looked a bit off before being sidelined with injury, and Stuart Skinner forgot how to make a save. The “D” stands for “deja vu.”

Will the Oilers be better going forward? Probably. They should still be able to challenge for the Pacific Division title despite their tepid start. But we expected a whole lot better from the team many expected to be the league’s absolute best going into the season. It’s not enough to just show up to the regular season — you have to put in the work. The Oilers are learning that lesson all over again.

16. Calgary Flames, 11-6-3

Last week: 22

Sean’s ranking: 15

Dom’s ranking: 16

Sean grade: A-

Dom grade: A

Raise your hand if you had the Flames fifth in the West after the first quarter with an 11-6-3 record. No one? Not a single soul? We didn’t think so.

Few starts have been more shocking this year than Calgary's and while we wait for the other shoe to drop, the Flames just find a way and keep winning. Blame Dustin Wolf who is showing some serious juice as a full-time starter. His work during an audition last year left a lot to be desired, but he's made up for it quickly this year. He's carrying the Flames.

17. Buffalo Sabres, 9-9-1

Last week: 19

Sean's ranking: 14

Dom's ranking: 17

Sean grade: C+

Dom grade: C

We assume Buffalo tried (and failed) to petition for an immediate end to the regular season on Thursday morning — they'd have been in the playoffs on tiebreakers. We'll use this space to mention Alex Tuch for the first time in a while; he's tied for the team lead in points (18) and scored a couple shorthanded goals along the way. When he, Tage Thompson and JJ Peterka are on the ice together, good things happen.

18. New York Islanders, 7-8-5

Last week: 16

Sean's ranking: 18

Dom's ranking: 18

Sean grade: C-

Dom grade: D+

With five minutes left against Detroit Thursday night, the Islanders were up 1-0. Five minutes later they went home empty-handed with not even a beloved loser point to hold on to. It was yet another missed opportunity for an Islanders team that's been on the wrong side of mid this season. We thought this would be a 95-point team, not an 85-point one — and they're not even on pace for that.

The Islanders are dealing with a lot of injuries so they get a slight pass for that. But this is how you re-pay us for actually believing in you guys?

The good news? The rest of the Eastern playoff hopefuls look just as bad right now, so the Islanders haven't technically lost much ground yet.

Brutal, brutal loss to end the road trip for #Isles.

Sixth time this season they've allowed a tying/go-ahead goal inside of 5 minutes to go in the 3rd.

19. Seattle Kraken, 10-9-1

Last week: 23

Sean's ranking: 19

Dom's ranking: 19

Sean grade: C

Dom grade: C

The Kraken projected as an aggressively mediocre team ahead of the season, and they've delivered on that potential. A middle-of-the-table team, almost across the board. Also, Matty Beniers has three points in his last nine games and 10 overall. Seems like a potential problem!

20. Boston Bruins, 9-9-3

Last week: 20

Sean's ranking: 20

Dom's ranking: 20

Sean grade: F-

Dom grade: F-

The Bruins looked a lot better (on the power play anyway) in their first game under Joe Sacco, but there's a lot of damage that still needs to be undone. It's not like we expected the Bruins to be world beaters by any means, but what they've shown so far has been nothing short of pathetic. It was difficult to watch Jim Montgomery try to coax a weak and flawed roster into looking like a contender and he ultimately paid the price for the sins of Don Sweeney. Maybe Sacco presses the right buttons to get the team back on track — it's not like the rest of the East poses much of a threat — but it'll take a helluva turnaround.

When a team with playoff aspirations has to fire their coach because they're tied for second last in goal differential with the San Jose Sharks, an F-minus is the only fair grade that can be given.

21. Detroit Red Wings, 8-9-2

Last week: 21

Sean's ranking: 21

Dom's ranking: 21

Sean grade: D

Dom grade: C

How you feel about the Red Wings' start depends a lot on how you felt about the Red Wings to start. The Model viewed them as an 81-point team and at 8-9-2 they are pretty much exactly what they were expected to be.

But damn is it still disappointing to see it actually happen in practice. Moritz Seider looks great, Simon Edvinsson might be the real deal, and the goaltending has been actually solid. And yet the team still stinks.

It's possible that Thursday's comeback regulation win over the Islanders can serve as a turning point, but it's still been an ugly, ugly start. The Red Wings just don't look good enough.

22. Ottawa Senators, 8-10-1

Last week: 17

Sean's ranking: 22

Dom's ranking: 22

Sean grade: C

Dom grade: C-

“This year will be different!” Whoops!

To Ottawa’s credit, the team’s underlying numbers are indeed much improved and it is tragically ironic that the team’s major offseason fix is currently the biggest problem. If Linus Ullmark looks like Linus Ullmark more often, the Senators might be fine. But he hasn’t and so here we are. The strong xG might mean they earn a better grade in Q2. For Q1, it’s hard to give a team that was supposed to make some sort of leap much credit for an 8-10-1 start.

23. Utah HC, 7-9-3

Last week: 18

Sean’s ranking: 23

Dom’s ranking: 23

Sean grade: C+

Dom grade: C-

Things started so well for Utah in its inaugural season but have imploded since. Losing Sean Durzi stung, as did the news of John Marino being out long-term. But even with those losses on the back end, Utah should be better than what they’ve shown over the last month. The team’s offense has felt anemic most nights and Connor Ingram has been a shade of himself between the pipes. There was some hope that Utah could climb to relevancy this season after a big offseason, but instead it’s been more of the same.

24. Columbus Blue Jackets, 8-9-2

Last week: 29

Sean’s ranking: 24

Dom’s ranking: 25

Sean grade: A-

Dom grade: A-

Everyone in the hockey world hoped for nothing but the best for Columbus this season and thankfully that’s exactly what we’re getting. The team is winning games in thrilling ways, they’re seeing breakthroughs from some young players, Zach Werenski looks like a truly elite No. 1 defenseman (he had five points against the Lightning!) and Sean Monahan is channeling his best self to play the best hockey of his career. It’s been a storybook start that has the Blue Jackets hovering around .500, a beautiful sight to see.

25. Anaheim Ducks, 8-8-2

Last week: 30

Sean’s ranking: 26

Dom’s ranking: 24

Sean grade: C-

Dom grade: B-

Credit where credit is due, the Ducks are playing .500 hockey right now which is way better than many could’ve expected. Credit Lukas Dostal’s heroics and a three-game winning streak for that one.

But man does this team still look rough on a nightly basis. We'll give them a pass because a win is a win, but even a record well above expectations isn't enough for high marks when the Ducks are still getting caved in and the young core has seemingly regressed.

26. Philadelphia Flyers, 8-10-2

Last week: 26

Sean's ranking: 25

Dom's ranking: 26

Sean grade: B-

Dom grade: C+

Technically speaking, the Flyers haven't had a great start to the season. They're 8-10-2 and don't look close to the team that clawed its way into the playoff race last season.

In other words — Q1 could not have gone better.

The Flyers look better positioned for a high pick thanks to their weak start which should get their rebuild back on track. On top of that, all the players the team needs to look good are looking great right now. Travis Konecny has been awesome, Travis Sanheim has been a rock, and Matvei Michkov has been as good as advertised. All that and a losing record? Perfect. No notes.

27. St. Louis Blues, 9-11-1

Last week: 24

Sean's ranking: 27

Dom's ranking: 27

Sean grade: D+

Dom grade: C-

For all the hemming and hawing about us not respecting the Blues, here they sit after the first quarter with a 9-11-1 record. They're 24th in the league in points percentage and have the fourth-worst goal differential. We can't even say "We are who we thought they were" because the Blues might actually be worse. Sorry for being correct!

28. Pittsburgh Penguins, 7-10-4

Last week: 27

Sean's ranking: 28

Dom's ranking: 28

Sean grade: F

Dom grade: D

Just when you thought things couldn't sink any lower for the Penguins, they deliver a craptastic start to the season that has left absolutely no doubt about the team's direction. Any hope of a last playoff run with Sid and Co. is essentially over — this team is cooked.

29. Montreal Canadiens, 7-10-2

Last week: 32

Sean's ranking: 29

Dom's ranking: 29

Sean grade: C-

Dom grade: D

Things are starting to pick up a bit lately for the Canadiens, but those expecting the club to take a step this season have been sorely disappointed. There have been a few bright spots (Cole Caufield's goal-scoring being the biggest), but far more sore spots to call Montreal's Q1 performance anything but a failure.

30. San Jose Sharks, 6-11-5

Last week: 31

Sean's ranking: 30

Dom's ranking: 30

Sean grade: D+

Dom grade: C

The Sharks have been feisty and Macklin Celebrini has been worth the price of admission so far. That's a plus, but they're still the Sharks and they're still one of the worst teams in hockey. Even grading on a curve can't save them.

31. Chicago Blackhawks, 7-12-1

Last week: 28

Sean's ranking: 31

Dom's ranking: 31

Sean grade: D-

Dom grade: D+

The only thing that really matters for this Hawks season is getting Connor Bedard to reach the next level. So far the Blackhawks have mostly failed to do that thanks to some puzzling linemate choices. It's nice that the Blackhawks beat Florida Thursday and have been 'in it' in almost every game this season. But the end result is still a team with a whole lot of Ls.

32. Nashville Predators, 6-11-3

Last week: 25

Sean's ranking: 32

Dom's ranking: 32

Sean grade: X

Dom grade: F-

Sure, there were reasons to side-eye the Predators' summer spending spree, but anyone who says they expected them to have a worse points percentage than the Sharks is a liar. Good power play, abysmal everything else. They're not even fun!

The Athletic / Remembering 10 times a season's list of Jack Adams finalists did not hold up well

By Sean McIndoe- November 23, 2024

The firing of Jim Montgomery this week was newsworthy for plenty of reasons, mostly surrounding what it means for the spiraling Bruins. But it was also interesting for awards watchers, who probably recall Montgomery winning the Jack Adams as coach of the year in 2023. It's fair to say the list of that year's finalists has, as the kids say these days, not aged well.

In May 2023, the NHL announced its finalists for the Jack Adams as coach of the year: Jim Montgomery, Dave Hakstol and Lindy Ruff.

Just 18 months later, all three have since been fired.

— Down Goes Brown (@DownGoesBrown) November 19, 2024

Ruff didn't even make it through the 2023-24 season, while Hakstol was gone early in the offseason. Montgomery was the comparative ironman, making it all the way until Tuesday.

Three coaches, the apparent best of the best in 2023, all fired before the end of 2024. We have to ask the question: Is the Jack Adams cursed?

No, because curses aren't real. But it is a weird award, one that's typically voted on as much based on short-term surprise factor as long-term excellence. If the trophy truly went to the best coach in the league every year, we'd expect to see plenty of names listed as multiple-time winners, just like we do for the Hart or the Vezina. With the exceedingly rare Jim Carey-level exception that proves the rule, you seldom see major player awards go to guys who are out of a job entirely within a few years.

But you do see it with the Jack Adams, in part because the broadcasters who vote on it typically lean toward coaches whose teams have exceeded expectations, which is nice but not the same as being the best at the job. Worse, a spot as a Jack Adams finalist combined with a surprisingly strong season often raises expectations, and expectations can be an NHL coach's worst enemy.

So maybe it's not surprising that we see the occasional outlier like that 2023 trio of soon-to-deposed coaches. The problem is it's not much of an outlier at all. So today, let's look through the Jack Adams finalists for every season of the cap era and ask a simple question: How well did the list hold up, in terms of those guys clearing the low bar of simply keeping their jobs?

I've pulled ten years where the answer ranges from "not great" to "big oof," which seems like a lot considering we've only got 19 years to choose from. Let's count down those 10 lists of finalists, from bad to worse.

#10. 2017-18

The finalists: Gerard Gallant (Golden Knights) beat out Bruce Cassidy (Bruins) and Jared Bednar (Avalanche)

But then: Cassidy lasted four more seasons in Boston, while Bednar is still in Colorado. But Gallant, despite bringing an expansion team to the Stanley Cup Final, lasted just another season and a half in Vegas before being given the boot.

How well does it hold up?: Pretty well, especially since – as we'll see in a bit – this sort of thing seems to happen to Gallant a lot.

#9. 2020-21

The finalists: Rod Brind'Amour (Hurricanes) beat out Dean Evason (Wild) and Joel Quenneville (Panthers)

But then: Evason did fine in Minnesota before finding his way to Columbus, while Brind'Amour may be the most respected coach in the entire league right now. But while nobody could have seen it coming at the time, Quenneville only coached seven more games before he was done in Florida, and he hasn't coached since.

Does it hold up?: I think it mostly does because the Quenneville situation needs a gigantic asterisk. But if you're looking for the cap-era record for quickest job loss after being a Jack Adams finalist, seven games is pretty tough to beat. Tough, but as we'll see in a bit, not impossible.

#8. 2013-14

The finalists: Patrick Roy (Avalanche) beat out Mike Babcock (Red Wings) and Jon Cooper (Lightning)

But then: This is admittedly a bit of an odd one, as Babcock was out of Detroit a year later and Roy was out of Colorado in two. But in both cases, it was by choice, with Babcock getting a windfall in Toronto while Roy walked out on the Avalanche.

How well does it hold up?: Not awful, once you look at the circumstances. One thing that doesn't hold up: This is one of only two times that Cooper has even been named a finalist for an award he's never won.

#7. 2007-08

The finalists: Bruce Boudreau (Capitals) beat out Guy Carbonneau (Canadiens) and Mike Babcock (Red Wings)

But then: Boudreau won the award as a rookie based on a partial season, and went on to coach 16 seasons and (maybe) counting, while Babcock was in the middle of his spotless reputation era that lasted another decade or so. But Carbonneau didn't even make it all the way through the next season before the Canadiens fired him, and he never coached in the NHL again.

How well does it hold up?: A classic two-out-of-three-is-kind-of-bad Jack Adams field. Ah well, they'll probably do better next year.

#6. 2008-09

The finalists: Claude Julien (Bruins) beat out Andy Murray (Blues) and Todd McLellan (Sharks)

But then: Julien and McLellan stuck around, but Murray was fired halfway through the following season. He hasn't had an NHL head coaching job since.

How well does it hold up?: Yep, two years in a row that the Jack Adams runner-up was fired during the following season. In case you're wondering, that mini-streak was broken in 2010 by Nashville's Barry Trotz, who made it to 2014.

#5. 2011-12

The finalists: Ken Hitchcock (Blues) beat out John Tortorella (Rangers) and Paul MacLean (Senators)

But then: This is a weird one. Despite a reputation as a guy who wears out his welcome in the room, Hitchcock lasted the longest of this group, coaching in St. Louis until 2016-17. Meanwhile, Tortorella only had one year left in New York before he was off to Vancouver for, uh, one year.

But the really strange one is MacLean. He didn't just keep his job in 2012-13, he went back-to-back as a finalist and won the award. Then he lasted just one more season and change, and despite several stops as an assistant he hasn't had another head-coaching opportunity since. So two Jack Adams finalist spots in his first two years, then just one more full season and thanks for coming out. What a weird job and/or league.

How well does it hold up?: Not well. For what it's worth, the other two finalists in 2013 were Boudreau and Quenneville, which is why I'm not listing it even though the winner wasn't long for the league. I figure this entry captures the MacLean weirdness well enough.

#4. 2014-15

The finalists: Bob Hartley (Flames) beat out Alain Vigneault (Rangers) and Peter Laviolette (Predators)

But then: Vigneault stuck around New York until 2018 and Laviolette lasted until 2020 in Nashville. But Hartley beat them both for the award, then lasted just one more year in Calgary and hasn't had a job in the NHL since. He went on to coach the Latvian national team and is now in the KHL.

How well does it hold up?: Not great, given the winner was out of the league entirely within a year.

#3. 2015-16

The finalists: Barry Trotz (Capitals) beat out Gerard Gallant (Panthers) and Lindy Ruff (Stars)

But then: Trotz guided the Capitals to a Stanley Cup in 2018 and then left on his own terms immediately after. Things didn't go as well for Ruff, who lasted just one more season in Dallas before being shown the door.

But the real star here is Gallant, who'd just led the Panthers to the first 100-point season in franchise history and seemed to be the perfect coach for a team on the rise. Instead, he was just 22 games away from the infamous taxi cab firing that ended up symbolizing the monumental dysfunction of Panthers management and their computer boys, a reputation they probably never recovered from.

How well does it hold up?: For about as long as the waving hand of an abandoned coach trying to hail a cab.

#2. 2022-23

The finalists: Jim Montgomery (Bruins) beat out Lindy Ruff (Devils) and Dave Hakstol (Kraken)

But then: Well, at least they all made it to opening night of the next season, right? That's foreshadowing, by the way.

How well does it hold up?: Terribly. But wait, how is this not number one? Well, about that...

#1. 2021-22

The finalists: Darryl Sutter (Flames) beat out Andrew Brunette (Panthers) and Gerard Gallant (Rangers)

But then: Where to begin. Sutter was fired at the end of the next season. So was Gallant, and congratulations to him on the hat trick of appearances in this article. But both guys at least made it to the next season, which is more than we can say for Brunette. The Panthers replaced him with Paul Maurice just weeks after the finalists were announced, in a move that wasn't technically a firing (since they offered him a chance to stay in the organization) but had the same effect.

Three coaches, three spots as a Jack Adams finalist, and a combined (runs numbers) two whole seasons of sticking around in their jobs.

How well does it hold up?: As the single worst list of Jack Adams finalists of the cap era, at least in hindsight. And that's saying something.

The Athletic / NHL rumblings: The price for Provorov, Landeskog's timeline, the Sens' next move and Jumbo's night

By Pierre LeBrun- November 23, 2024

Ivan Provorov figures to be one of the top rental defenseman targets — if not the top one — on the market at this season's NHL trade deadline, and league sources this week said he is already generating several inquiries from teams.

However, what those teams are being told for now is that the Columbus Blue Jackets are not ready to go down that path. They want to give their roster a bit more time before starting to sell off parts.

But the Jackets are not making the playoffs, and eventually the business of the game will dictate the managing of assets ahead of the March 7 deadline.

They will most likely trade the pending UFA Provorov when the time is right, and the asking price will be a first-round pick. And they may not necessarily wait for March 7 if a team steps up with that first-round pick earlier in the New Year — as the Winnipeg Jets did last season, sending a first-round pick to the Montreal Canadiens for pending unrestricted free agent center Sean Monahan five weeks before the deadline. The Habs, wisely, didn't think any better offer would be coming and moved him ahead of a potential injury for a player who has had a lot of injuries.

The balance is waiting long enough for the market to develop but not too long, especially with a top-four blueliner who plays big minutes like Provorov, who is second on the Jackets at nearly 24 minutes a game.

Will they get that first-round pick?

Last year, pending UFA defensemen Sean Walker and Noah Hanifin did fetch first-round picks before the deadline, but the top blueliner dealt, Chris Tanev, did not.

The Calgary Flames were offered a first-round pick by the Colorado Avalanche for Tanev but only if they took on Ryan Johansen and his remaining contract. The Flames opted instead for a package from the Dallas Stars they felt was more appealing: prospect Artem Grushnikov plus a second and a third. I get that. That same Avalanche package eventually went to Philadelphia in the Walker deal.

I would imagine if a contender in January or February offers up a first-round pick for Provorov, the Jackets won't wait to pull the trigger.

Also of note: while Provorov's average annual value is \$6.75 million, the Kings retained 30 percent in a three-team trade with the Philadelphia Flyers, so he counts \$4.725 million against the cap, making him that much easier to move closer to March 7.

Still no Landeskog timeline

The Avalanche did a pretty good job surviving massive injuries and absences up front to start the season. (By the way, shoutout to head coach Jared Bednar, who never seems to get enough credit.) And now they have most of the band back together.

Forward Ross Colton should be back in three weeks or so, and then the Avs will be in pretty good shape, finally.

But the absence that lingers is their captain.

Gabriel Landeskog hasn't played since raising the Cup on June 26, 2022, as he continues to recover from a type of knee surgery that no NHLer has come back from. The initial recovery time announced by the

club when he had the surgery was 12 to 16 months. It's now been more than 18 months since the surgery was performed on May 10, 2023.

The Avs simply don't know when or if he will be back. They do not have a timeline whatsoever. They hope it's sometime in the second half, but they can't guarantee it. And even if he does return, what kind of player does he come back as? Can he be a star forward again? Does he reshape himself into a trusted third-liner and penalty-killer?

Or, and let's hope this isn't the case, does he come back and it's a Nicklas Backstrom situation where he realizes his body can't play at his own required NHL standard?

One thing that's repeated often within the organization is how much they miss his leadership. He set the tone in that dressing room.

All of which brings us back to the trade deadline. It is a very sensitive discussion to have with a player the team cares so deeply about, but at some point in the New Year, the organization needs to know if Landeskog is going to give it a try before the end of the regular season — or if it's going to be a playoff comeback attempt. His \$7 million cap hit carries obvious salary-cap implications for deadline planning.

And let's be clear, before people start their conspiracy theories, the Avs would much rather have him come back in the regular season to get games under his belt before the playoffs given he hasn't played in two and a half years. It will take a while to get back up to speed.

But again, the plain reality as of this week is that the organization still does not know when he will return.

Senators battling past scars

I shared my thoughts Wednesday night on the Senators on TSN's Jay On SC, and I can't stress enough my belief that the Ottawa Senators are a team still trying to shed scars from seasons past in getting over the hump in the here and now.

The money quote from GM Steve Staios during his quarter-season media availability Wednesday was this:

"What's been addressed with the group is that we're still trying to figure out the mental resolve of the game and how to be better in certain situations in games and how to deal with adversity throughout games. Each game is going to be a little bit different. Fast. Physical. Officiating might not go your way, as evidenced a couple of games ago. How do we deal with that? That's the next challenge for this group."

To be clear, Staios didn't actually go in and address the players directly. The situation is not that dire at all. But that messaging is obviously being communicated by head coach Travis Green.

What's so interesting in Ottawa is that you have a new approach and fresh eyes, from ownership to management to the coach, but they're dealing with a player core and a fan base that both carry baggage from the failures of past seasons and a past regime.

The Senators, the Detroit Red Wings and the Buffalo Sabres are trying to get over the hump, finally, this season in the East. (Montreal is earlier in its process). The reality is that all three teams still show how fragile their psyche can be when adversity hits. That's what Staios is getting at when he talks about mental resolve.

Easier said than done, of course.

And I mean, sure, the most obvious thing to point out is that Ottawa needs more saves, and I have no doubt Linus Ullmark will get better.

The kneejerk reaction would be to make a trade to shake things up. I don't believe that's what Staios is thinking. There's a danger in trying to trade your way out of frustration. For example, and I'm not trying to pick on them, but there are more than a few former Sabres players thriving elsewhere right now. A trade is not always the answer.

The Senators made some moves in the offseason. It's time to let their roster settle. It's time for the players to figure it out from within.

Staios believes this team will get there. I agree with him.

Jumbo Joe

Oh, there won't be a lot of dry eyes in the building Saturday when No. 19 goes up into the rafters in San Jose.

One thing Joe Thornton always hated during his playing career was talking about himself. He will have no choice Saturday.

Thornton was there for his pal Patrick Marleau's jersey retirement in February 2023. Now the two close friends and longtime teammates swap roles.

"I'm looking forward to celebrating Jumbo on Saturday," Marleau said via text. "There will no doubt be tears. He is without a doubt one of the best to ever play the game, and I'm lucky enough to call him one of my best friends."

Thornton had a pure joy for the game that stood out as much as his talent. And immense humility. He was an absolute rink rat who couldn't get enough of being on the ice every single day of his life.

And he was part of a Sharks team that knocked on the door for 15-plus years, even if it fell short of winning a Stanley Cup.

"We had many special years here in San Jose," former Sharks star defenseman Dan Boyle said via text. "Never got to meet our ultimate goal, but when you go through the ups and downs of being a favorite to win year in and year out, you go through a lot. As brothers. As family. And we went through a lot."

"It will be nice to see a lot of old faces (Saturday). I'm sure there will be non-stop laughs. And we're all here to honor Joe and his accomplishments. On the ice, he's a Hall of Famer, but he's also helped a lot of the young guys along the way find their way."

"This is a special franchise. Hopefully our loyal fans show up to cheer the Sharks they might have 'grown up' with and for one night we can all be united and celebrate."

Thornton will enter the Hockey Hall of Fame as a first-ballot guy next year. That's a 100 percent guarantee. He's seventh all-time in assists (1,109), the first half of his career played in the Dead Puck Era.

Zero debate.

But the real Hall of Fame credentials are with the person. You won't meet a lot of hockey players with a bigger heart.

He was an absolute beauty of a player.

The Athletic / William, Alex Nylander ready to add chapter to NHL's long history of brotherly acts

By James Mirtle- November 24, 2024

It last happened way back on May 3, 1987, more than 37 years ago.

Two brothers lining up, side by side, with the Toronto Maple Leafs. Two kids from overseas with big, far-fetched dreams, getting to live them out together on one of hockey's biggest stages.

Sunday night, William Nylander and his younger brother, Alex, will add to that history, joining four other sets of brothers who have played together with the Leafs. It last happened in Game 7 of a second-round series, a matchup that featured Peter and Miroslav Ihnačák on the wrong end of a 3-0 loss.

"Words can't really describe it," William told reporters when asked about getting to play with Alex in the NHL, the first time they'll suit up in a game that counts since one game at the 2016 world juniors. "I think this is what every hockey-playing brother pair probably wishes for as kids: to be able to do that with their brother. So it's certainly really special. It's going to be amazing tomorrow night."

"Such an incredible feeling," Alex added.

The Nylanders were both picked eighth overall, two NHL Drafts apart, but their careers have unfolded very differently in the past decade.

William, 28, has emerged as a star for the Leafs, peaking last season when he finished 10th in NHL scoring with 98 points.

Alex, 26, has bounced around for years, including playing nearly three times as many games in the AHL as the big leagues (344 versus 121).

That's how he started this season with the Toronto Marlies, where he signed an AHL-only contract in the offseason with the goal of taking a step back in order to move forward. It's taken seven Leafs forwards out with injuries and another with a suspension for Alex to get this opportunity, a sign of how unlikely Sunday's brotherly reunion was when the season opened six weeks ago.

The Leafs will be his fifth NHL team in the past six seasons, a journey that has taken him through Buffalo, Rochester, Chicago, Rockford, Wilkes-Barre, Pittsburgh and Columbus.

When he finally signed an NHL contract this weekend, it was for the league minimum (\$775,000) but prorated down to roughly \$589,000 because the contract was signed for a partial season.

"He's got good hands and vision and can score goals," Leafs coach Craig Berube said Saturday, pointing to Alex's eight goals in 14 games with the Marlies this season. "He's earned it."

As for playing the brothers together, that won't be in the cards against the Utah Hockey Club in Alex's Leafs debut.

"Not right away," Berube said. "We'll see what happens. We'll see how it goes."

"I haven't talked to him about that, but maybe he'll watch this interview," William joked with reporters about getting a chance to line up alongside Alex. "And maybe he'll do something."

Adding another layer to the brotherly connection is the fact their father, Michael, played 920 games in the NHL between 1992 and 2009. His boys grew up as hockey vagabonds, moving all over North America during his stints with various franchises.

William was born in Calgary in 1996 when Michael was a 23-year-old Flames prospect on the rise. Alex came two years later, only months before the family was uprooted by a midseason trade to the Tampa Bay Lightning, which was followed by a move to the Chicago Blackhawks shortly thereafter.

They learned to play in elite minor hockey programs in Chicago, Connecticut, Washington, D.C., and, finally, back in Sweden, where Michael was able to play briefly professionally with his boys.

It's no wonder their typically stoic old man was emotional when learning Alex had signed to play with William with the Leafs.

"Very few times he gets emotional," Alex said. "You don't really see that from him. It was just awesome. It was a special moment for me and my family."

"Two sons playing on the same team in the NHL ... only a couple fathers get to experience (that)," William added.

Incredibly, throughout the 107-year history of the league, 47 brothers have played at least one game together for an NHL team. Ten have won a championship together.

In addition to the Ihnačáks in the 1980s, the Leafs had siblings Don and Nick Metz together for four Stanley Cup wins in the 1940s, as well as Art and Busher Jackson in the 1930s, and Barry and Brian Cullen in the 1950s.

The Metzses played the longest together, with 120 regular-season and 28 playoff games alongside each other in the Leafs lineup.

Brothers with the Buds

Don Metz

212

Nick Metz

594

148

Barry Cullen

166

Brian Cullen

238

140

Art Jackson

131

Busher Jackson

488

87

Miroslav Ihnačák

56

Peter Ihnačák
445
43
William Nylander
677
Alex Nylander
0
TBD
Gord Hannigan
170
Ray Hannigan
3
0
Pat Hannigan
1
Joe Sacco
60
David Sacco
4
0
Ken Yaremchuk
59
Gary Yaremchuk
34
0
Blake Wesley
27
Glen Wesley
12
0
Chris McRae
14
Basil McRae

4

0

Chuck Blair

1

Dusty Blair

2

0

Some of the most memorable brotherly duos in NHL history include the Sedin twins, who were drafted together and went into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2022 after more than 1,300 games with the Vancouver Canucks.

Maurice and Henri Richard played together with the Montreal Canadiens, winning the Stanley Cup all five seasons they were together between 1955 and 1960. Frank and Peter Mahovlich played together with the Detroit Red Wings and Habs over six seasons, including Cup wins in Montreal in 1971 and 1973.

Pavel and Valeri Bure played together with the 2001-02 Florida Panthers. Neal Broten pulled off a unique double-double feat, playing with brother Aaron with the Minnesota North Stars and later with brother Paul with the Dallas Stars.

The three Plager brothers — Barclay, Bob, Bill — played together with the St. Louis Blues between 1968 and 1972. The Stastnys — Marian, Peter, Anton — became the second trio of brothers together in the early 1980s with the Quebec Nordiques.

The Sutter brothers, meanwhile, set all kinds of records when six of them made the NHL, including one game in which four squared off when Duane and Brent (New York Islanders) defeated Rich and Ron (Philadelphia Flyers) in the 1980s.

And, perhaps most famously, Mark and Marty Howe played together with their father, Gordie, with the Hartford Whalers in 1979-80.

The odds will be against the Nylanders having the kind of longevity many of those brother groups did, however. Once the Leafs start to get healthy, they'll be short spots to keep the four Marlies players — Fraser Minten, Nikita Grebenkin, Alex Steeves and Alex Nylander — they have on the roster.

Alex Nylander's new NHL contract will also mean he'll have to clear waivers to return to the AHL, which could mean another relocation in a long line of them for the family.

For now, however, they are going to celebrate Sunday's big moment — with Dad in the building, cheering them on — and let the future sort itself out down the line. If anyone knows how hard hockey journeys are to predict, it's the Nylanders.

So you make the most of these moments when you can.

"It's going to be amazing. ... I'm really excited," Alex said.

The Athletic / NHL at the quarter mark: One stat that sums up each team's 2024-25 season so far

By The Athletic NHL Staff- November 24, 2024

Surprising save percentages, star-level offensive performances and surging special teams.

As the 2024-25 NHL season passed its quarter mark this week, The Athletic asked its NHL staff for a stat to sum up each team's season so far.

What's the defining data point for your favorite team? Here are all 32 answers.

Anaheim Ducks

.915 team save percentage: On average as of Thursday, the Ducks allow the most shots on goal (34.1) in the league. Their special teams are not good, particularly a penalty kill that ranks 31st. They don't score enough to cover for breakdowns or mistakes. One reason they still struggle to drive possession is their 42.3 percent win rate in the faceoff circle puts them at league bottom. But they're 8-8-2 with just 54 goals allowed because of terrific goaltending. Anaheim's .915 save percentage ranked eighth in the NHL. Lukas Dostal is among the league leaders with a .924. Dostal has also made 14 more saves than expected for the shots he faces. John Gibson has returned from missing several weeks for recovery from appendicitis and has won his first three starts while posting a solid .906. If the Ducks build on their better play as of late, they could make a move up the standings due to some strong netminding. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

11.9 percent power play: The Bruins have the worst power play in the league. This is not just problematic in terms of team success. That David Pastrnak, Brad Marchand, Charlie McAvoy, Elias Lindholm and Pavel Zacha have not scored enough on the power play has bled into their five-on-five play. This was a big reason Jim Montgomery lost his job. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Two combined five-on-five goals from Dylan Cozens and Jack Quinn: Cozens and Quinn were supposed to provide Buffalo's lineup with the secondary scoring necessary to make this team a contender. Instead through Thursday, they have combined for two five-on-five goals, and Cozens has both of them. Together, they have combined for 12 total points. And the Sabres have just 44 percent of the expected goals when these two are on the ice together at five-on-five. Getting them going again is key to Buffalo's making a push in the standings. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

.917 team save percentage: The Flames' goaltending is a huge reason they've remained competitive early in the season. Dustin Wolf, in particular, has earned the right to start more games and has vaulted himself into the Calder Trophy discussion. In a year that's supposed to be one of transition and rebuilding for the Flames, Calgary can say its faith in Wolf is paying off. — Julian McKenzie

Carolina Hurricanes

Martin Necas' 31 points: The story of the Hurricanes' season through 19 games is Necas' 31 points. The 25-year-old winger, who was the subject of trade rumors this summer before signing a two-year contract extension as an RFA, ranks third in the league in scoring and is tied for first in power-play points. His hot

start has masked Sebastian Aho's early-season scoring woes: Aho has five goals and only one at five-on-five. — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

Outscored 26-16 in the third period: The Blackhawks have just a minus-3 goal differential in the first two periods of games this season. The third, though, has been a challenge for them. Nine of those 16 third-period goals have been empty-netters, but that also tells the story of their season so far. They've been in nearly every game, but they haven't consistently been able to find ways to win them in the third period. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

Nathan MacKinnon's 27 assists: Things haven't exactly gone the Avalanche's way early in this season. Colorado has missed several key players, and the goaltending has struggled tremendously. Despite all of that, the Avalanche are still sitting in a playoff spot — largely thanks to the heroics of MacKinnon. He leads the NHL with 27 assists, tied with Kirill Kaprizov for the league lead with 34 points. MacKinnon is following up his Hart Trophy season with an even more impressive encore. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

Six goals or more in six games: It will be a successful season in Columbus if its plethora of young forwards establish themselves as impact players in the NHL. So far, so good. Though wildly inconsistent, the Blue Jackets have had stretches when their offensive dynamism has shown through. Six times in 19 games, the Blue Jackets have scored six or more goals in a game. Keep in mind most of that has been done without injured Kent Johnson and Boone Jenner in the lineup. — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

2.33 goals-against per game: No team in the NHL has been stingier than the Dallas Stars, who are giving up the least goals per game in the league — a marked improvement from last year's 2.83 GA per game. Much of that can be traced to Jake Oettinger, who is fifth in the league in GSAs at 9.76 (Casey DeSmith has been excellent, too). The question is, can they keep it up? Dallas is middle of the pack in terms of expected goals against, but it has some wiggle room, considering it's the third-highest-scoring team in the league, as well, trailing only Colorado and Toronto. — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings

2.53 goals per game: The Red Wings have struggled mightily to score this season, dropping from a top-10 scoring team last season to the bottom 10. This 2.53 figure is nearly a full goal lower than their 2023-24 pace, at 3.35. Even more jarring is that's all despite a power play clicking to the tune of 30.2 percent, a top-five unit in the league. There's nuance in why the drop-off has been so significant, including roster changes, an increased emphasis on defensive responsibility, and just plain old struggles to generate and maintain zone time, but the result has been a team that simply hasn't scored enough — a big reason Detroit has found itself underperforming so far in the standings. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

2.76 goals per game: The Oilers led the NHL in offense at 3.96 goals per game two seasons ago. They were fourth last season at 3.56. Their scoring rate has plummeted through their first 21 games. It's the most unexpected thing about this team and arguably the biggest reason they're a mediocre 10-9-2. Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid are the only two forwards producing. They've accounted for 24 of the 58 goals the Oilers have scored. No other forward, including now-injured 54-goal scorer Zach Hyman, has more than four. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Florida Panthers

Sam Reinhart's 28.85 shooting percentage: Reinhart's incredible 2023-24 wasn't a fluke — he'd been a good player for a long time. Still, expecting him to improve on 57 goals would've been unreasonable, and yet here he is, tied for the league lead with 15 and on pace for 62. His shooting percentage has somehow increased from 24.26 to 28.85, and his status as one of the league's pre-eminent snipers has been secured. — Sean Gentile

Los Angeles Kings

A 2-5-0 record against over .500 teams: The Kings have collected points over the first quarter of a schedule that's been road-heavy with 12 of their first 18 games away from Crypto.com Arena, but it's also been rather light on facing top-tier competition. And they haven't fared too well when running up against better teams. Wins over Vegas and Minnesota — their best two victories — are the only ones they have in seven games against squads that have a points percentage better than .500. Though a 10-7-3 mark in their first 20 is certainly passable, their lack of notching many triumphs against quality clubs speaks to a team that's still a couple of sizable steps away from being among the elite. Upcoming home games versus Winnipeg, Dallas and Minnesota will serve to help measure whether they're an adequate bunch or something more. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

26 five-on-five goals in 19 games: The Wild are one of the best defensive teams in the NHL, and it's a huge part of the reason they have the second-most points (29) in the NHL. They are allowing a league-low 1.37 five-on-five goals per game. According to MoneyPuck, the Wild have given up the second-fewest expected five-on-five goals (31.25), a league-low expected five-on-five goals against per 60 minutes (1.64) and a league-low 26 five-on-five high-danger shots against. Filip Gustavsson told The Athletic this week the trust between goaltenders and the skaters is off the charts right now. — Michael Russo

Montreal Canadiens

2.07 expected goals against per 60 at five-on-five: That is the Canadiens' expected goals against per 60 minutes of five-on-five ice time in eight games in November. In 11 games in October, that number was at 3.79, easily the worst in the league. Had the Canadiens continued playing such porous defense, they would be so far out of the picture by now that any hope of being relevant in December — let alone February or March — would already be long gone. But shoring up their defensive game this month has led to their goaltenders' playing better and the team's being more competitive in general, to the point where the Canadiens remain on the cusp of relevancy. It's a significant step forward from how bad the first three weeks of the season went for them. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

League-worst minus-17.94 goals for above expected: This team has a top-10 power play, the best penalty kill in the league and an elite goaltender in Juuse Saros with a .917 save percentage. And it's a bad team, the most disappointing team in the league. Nashville is a five-on-five disaster. Still, it's 13th in five-on-five expected goals for, which isn't great but also isn't disastrous. The inability to convert, for a team with this much proven talent, is truly confounding. — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

Seven forwards with double-digit points: The Devils bolstered their depth during their busy offseason, adding Paul Cotter and Stefan Noesen via trade and signing. Both are among the team's forwards with double-digit points, and Noesen is up to 10 goals. The fact New Jersey is getting that level of production

from across the lineup is an encouraging sign, especially with high-skill players like Jack Hughes and Jesper Bratt contributing big points. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Seven tying or go-ahead goals allowed in the final five minutes: The Islanders have done enough to hold a few late leads this season. And somehow, seven times in six games out of the 20 they've played this season, they've blown it late. Thursday night was the rare double, allowing a tying goal and then a go-ahead goal in the last five minutes of regulation. Call it bad luck, call it a lack of confidence, call it whatever you want — they've done it so often this season and last season that it's mind-boggling. — Arthur Staple

New York Rangers

11-0 with Will Cuyllé, Filip Chytil and Kaapo Kakko together: The Cuyllé-Chytil-Kakko line has been excellent, and the group has remained effective with Jonny Brodzinski filling in for Chytil, who is day to day with an upper-body injury. With Cuyllé-Chytil-Kakko on the ice at five-on-five, the Rangers are not only outscoring opponents but also out-chancing them (69-56), outshooting them (80-61) and controlling the expected goal share (65.29 percent), per Natural Stat Trick. That line's success has been vital in New York's hot start. It lengthens the lineup dramatically. — Peter Baugh

Ottawa Senators

Linus Ullmark's .887 save percentage: It's hard to boil down the Senators' season in one stat. Despite hovering around the .500 mark, they still need to shed the inconsistencies and deficiencies that have plagued them from years past. Goaltending is at the top of that list. And though Anton Forsberg hasn't been perfect himself, more blame will be thrown at starting goaltender Ullmark. The Sens need him to be better consistently. — Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

An .887 team save percentage: No. 1 Sam Ersson has been decent, with a 2.70 goals-against average and a .902 save percentage in 11 games. But he's missed some time lately due to injury, so the Flyers have had to rely on Ivan Fedotov and Aleksei Kolosov. Though both of them have been a tad better lately, the numbers are still brutal. They've combined for a 3-8-0 record (Fedotov has all three wins), with a 3.69 goals-against average and .875 save percentage. It's not a stretch to suggest that if the Flyers had simply signed a veteran, NHL-worthy backup in the offseason, they'd have at least 4 or 5 more points in the standings. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

Five games lost in which they've held a 2-0 lead: Blame the leaky goaltending. Blame the horrendous defensive work. Blame the coaching. Blame the forwards for rarely expanding those 2-0 leads. The Penguins' inability to win games in which they have a multiple-goal lead has been brutal to watch this season. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

Six goals scored at six-on-five: No team has scored more with a sixth attacker than the Sharks, who also have tallied twice when operating on a six-on-four power play with the goalie pulled. The latest occurred Thursday when Alex Wennberg scored with 8.8 seconds left to force overtime in an eventual shootout loss to St. Louis. It's reflective of a team that still has to come back from deficits, but the proficiency also speaks to a Sharks club that is much more competitive than last season and has picked up points when it ordinarily shouldn't. This might not last, and protecting late leads is a preferable option to goalie pull

situations, but there's a resiliency with these Sharks that's a good thing to have when rebuilding. — Eric Stephens

Seattle Kraken

Philipp Grubauer's 1-6-0 record: The Kraken's playoff chances amid a crowd of Pacific Division hopefuls are being materially harmed by the performance of their expensive backup netminder Grubauer. In Grubauer's seven starts, the Kraken have won just one game. In Joey Daccord's 13 starts, the Kraken have won nine games. Sometimes a goaltender's win-loss record doesn't tell the full story, but in this case, it's straightforward. Daccord has managed a .923 save percentage while stopping 8.2 goals saved above average, according to Natural Stat Trick. Grubauer, in contrast, is sporting a .881 save percentage and has permitted over 3.3 goals saved below average. Seattle needs more saves when Daccord gets a game off, or it could sink the Kraken's season. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

Trailing by two goals 11 times: The Blues have played 21 games this season and have trailed by two goals or more in 11 of them. They've rallied to win a couple of those, but simply put, they have been chasing games entirely too much. The offense is ranked 29th in the NHL (2.43 goals per game) through Thursday and has scored two goals or fewer in 12 of the 21 games. They have no players with more than six goals. So they're getting behind because of the lack of offense, and they don't have the firepower to catch up. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

1.67 goals against per 60: The Lightning seriously missed Ryan McDonagh. Tampa Bay has had the most challenging schedule to open the season, and McDonagh has shouldered one of the toughest workloads in the league as a result. Despite that burden, the Lightning have only given up 2.45 expected goals per 60 in his minutes, with even better results to match (1.67 goals against per 60). McDonagh's return has revitalized Erik Cernak's defensive game, giving the team a reliable shutdown second pair again. And that's made life a lot easier for Victor Hedman, who is averaging the sixth-best Game Score in the league through 18 games at 1.86. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

2.5 goals against per game: Last season, the Leafs ranked 21st in the NHL in goals against, yielding more than three goals per game. This season, they've leaped into the top 10, just outside the top five, in fact. Through 20 games, they've allowed a mere 2.5 goals a night. That's due to a few things. One, the goaltending has been much improved. Anthony Stolarz, in particular, has impressed. Two, offseason additions like Chris Tanev have made a huge impact, not just at even strength but also on a penalty kill that's made great strides from last season. And three, first-year head coach Craig Berube has this group playing a simpler, safer overall game. That's hurt the offense, but it's helped the defense. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Hockey Club

33 goals in their last 16 games: After the team was shut out for a fifth time (!) Thursday against the Bruins, Utah's offensive drop-off is reaching new lows. After scoring 16 goals in their first three games — all wins — to open the season, the Hockey Clubbers are dead last in the NHL offensively since that point. Their power play has just seven goals on the season, tied for last in the NHL, and is down to 12.7 percent on the year. They also have the worst record in the league since starting 3-0, with just four wins in their last 16 games. Fourth-liner Jack McBain leads all Utah forwards in scoring over this ghastly stretch with just four goals. It's ugly. — James Mirtle

Vancouver Canucks

Minus-2 goal differential: The Canucks have had a rocky start to the season, but not an unsuccessful one. Despite prolonged absences from a Vezina finalist goaltender (Thatcher Demko), an X-factor middle-six forward (Dakota Joshua) and a 40-goal scoring winger (Brock Boeser), the club is in third place in the Pacific Division by point percentage through 18 games. That said, this isn't a club that's run nearly as pure as it did last season. That's best captured by the Canucks' goal differential, which is narrowly in the red — minus-1 through 18 games — and stands in sharp contrast with what this club accomplished 12 months ago (when it held a league-best plus-30 goal differential through 18 games). What this tells us is that Vancouver's margin in games has disappeared. We haven't seen the 8-1 or 10-1 blowouts the Canucks managed in various games early last season. To this point, for a variety of reasons with player health and less fortunate percentages chief among them, the Canucks haven't had that sort of juice in the early going this season. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

30.8 percent power play: As successful as the Golden Knights have been from their inception, they've never had a strong power play. They've always won despite their struggles with a man advantage. This season, the power play is an asset for Vegas, ranked second in the NHL. Everything runs through Jack Eichel, who is off to the best offensive start of his career. Tomas Hertl is an excellent finisher in front of the net, and Pavel Dorofeyev has elevated his game on that unit. It's the best the power play has ever looked. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

Plus-24 goal differential at five-on-five: Plenty was made, here and elsewhere, about the Caps' abysmal overall goal differential last season — and there was no way around it. Minus-37 is a number you see from bottom-feeders, not playoff teams. Credit where it's due, but something needed to change, and it has, in a big, big way. At five-on-five specifically, the Caps are leading the league with a plus-24 differential. Before Alex Ovechkin's injury, he and linemates Dylan Strome and Aliaksei Protas were winning their minutes 16-5. — Sean Gentile

Winnipeg Jets

14-12 when the top line has been on the ice at five-on-five: That's the scoreline (as of Thursday) when Winnipeg's top line of Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele and Gabriel Vilardi has been on the ice together at five-on-five this season. The fact Winnipeg is winning those minutes after a rough start on that front — and after that same line was outscored last season while getting outshot 120-88 — vindicates Scott Arniel's belief in them and their own commitment to puck management and defense. Connor, Scheifele and Vilardi's offensive gifts were always meant to impress and they've given themselves and their team a lot to be excited about so far. — Murat Ates

ESPN / NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, each team's thankful item

By Arda Ocal- November 23, 2024

Reactions

As we approach the end of the second calendar month in the 2024-25 NHL season, we also march toward "Thanksgiving playoff cutoff" season. So get your postseason team takes ready, because now's the time to sling them. North of 75% of teams in the last 10 seasons that were in a playoff position by (American) Thanksgiving stayed in one by the end of that season.

That's very good news for teams like the Carolina Hurricanes, Washington Capitals and Minnesota Wild, who many wrote off at the start of the season as teams on the outside looking in for the 2025 Stanley Cup playoffs.

However, the mythical Thanksgiving marker has no bearing on our ESPN NHL Power Rankings, which are once again led by the Winnipeg Jets. But in addition to an updated set of rankings, we are identifying the one item for which every team is thankful this season, whether it's particular players, trends or a piece of hockey equipment.

How we rank: A panel of ESPN hockey commentators, analysts, reporters and editors sends in a 1-32 poll based on the games through Wednesday, which generates our master list.

Note: Previous ranking for each team refers to the previous edition,

Published Nov. 15. Points percentages are through Thursday's games.

1. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 84.21%

Thankful for: A counterpunch. A lot of attention has been put on the team's greatest start in NHL history, and rightfully so. But this week, Winnipeg suffered a 5-0 loss to the Panthers. The fans chanted "overrated" to the Jets as the reigning Stanley Cup champs trounced them. But two days later, the Jets got revenge in the heavyweight home-and-home series, going up 3-0 before doubling up the Cats to win 6-3. A big response against a team that is battling for tops in the opposite conference.

Next seven days: @ PIT (Nov. 22), @ NSH (Nov. 23), @ MIN (Nov. 25), @ LA (Nov. 27)

2. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 73.68%

Thankful for: A 13-game point streak for Martin Necas. OK, yes, the Canes have a lot to be thankful for. Second in the Metro Division, proving all those preseason prognostications wrong, but I wanted to throw some flowers to Necas. With a lot of the spotlight elsewhere around the league, Necas quietly put together an awesome 13-game point streak, amassing 27 points. He has gone pointless in only three games.

What a roller-coaster ride for Necas -- from almost being traded to signing a two-year bridge deal to leaping out of the gate.

Next seven days: @ CBJ (Nov. 23), vs. DAL (Nov. 25), vs. NYR (Nov. 27)

3. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 76.32%

Thankful for: The protective cup. Sure, I could have chosen the Wild's amazing start, Filip Gustavsson cruising (including a goalie goal) but Marcus Foligno gave us some absolutely wild information about Mats Zuccarello in an appearance on a Minnesota radio station. Zuccarello has been out of the lineup after taking a puck to the groin, rupturing a testicle.

"We thought he was going lose one nut, but it actually survived and he's got them both still," Foligno said on 93X. "Poor guy got hit where the sun don't shine and it ruptured his testicle. He can't even lift anything." Foligno added that Zuccarello's cup had a "massive dent in it." This is yet another reminder that hockey players are incredibly tough.

Next seven days: @ CGY (Nov. 23), vs. WPG (Nov. 25), @ BUF (Nov. 27)

4. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 71.05%

Thankful for: It's only "week to week." Alex Ovechkin is off to the best season of his illustrious career -- 15 goals in 18 games. He is 26 goals away from catching Wayne Gretzky for the career goal-scoring record. In his last game against Utah, he tied Jaromir Jagr for the record for most goals scored on in NHL history, with 178 -- then, a collision with Jack McBain left Ovi on the ice, favoring his leg, and he didn't return to the game.

He is currently "week to week," with the estimate being that he will return in four to six. The way the Great 8 has started this season and how incredibly motivated he looked to catch 99 this season, hockey fans are all thankful that he is not projected to be out for a much longer time.

We are now in that record-chasing zone where every Ovi game is an event, countdown graphics on screen at all times, think pieces popping up everywhere about his career and tallies. The Caps, Washington fans and hockey fans in general are thankful for the blistering start and hopeful for a quick return.

Next seven days: vs. NJ (Nov. 23), @ FLA (Nov. 25), @ TB (Nov. 27)

5. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 62.50%

Thankful for: No Stanley Cup hangover. The Cats picked up this season where they left off as one of the best teams in hockey. Where some teams might experience a lag, the Cats kept their foot on the gas, starting the season 12-6-1. Coming off his 57-goal career season, Sam Reinhart is fourth in the league with 30 points, and tied for the league lead in goals, with 15; his current goals pace would land him at 62 by season's end.

Next seven days: vs. COL (Nov. 23), vs. WSH (Nov. 25), vs. TOR (Nov. 27)

6. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 69.44%

Thankful for: The best goalie tandem in the league. The Rangers could be thankful for a lot of things, including good news about Filip Chytil's injury, and having one of the best lines in hockey skating as their third line (the only line in the NHL coming into this week that had not allowed a goal while on the ice with more than 100 minutes played). But in one of the most important positions in sports, the Rangers are getting stellar performances from backup Jonathan Quick (four starts, four wins, .970 save percentage). Franchise netminder Igor Shesterkin is at a .914 save percentage, with a 8-5-1 record.

Shesterkin, I'm sure, is also thankful for the possible giant leap in the NHL's salary cap coming next season, as he eyes a contract extension.

Next seven days: @ EDM (Nov. 23), vs. STL (Nov. 25), @ CAR (Nov. 27)

7. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 63.64%

Thankful for: A new nickname? Be honest; who reading this right now has ever called Martin Brodeur "Satan's Wallpaper," let alone ever heard of that nickname? It became a hot topic when it showed up as a clue on Jeopardy! earlier this month. Brodeur himself didn't know about it. One of the contestants, the eventual winner, got the clue right (an educated guess?) "Satan's Wallpaper," though, has appeared in the wild a couple of times -- in a 2009 Bleacher Report article, and in Rolling Stone in 2016.

Maybe the nickname can apply to this Devils team, which is cruising with a 12-7-2 record, going 8-4 on the road. Nico Hischier has 10 goals, 10 assists and is a plus-10.

Next seven days: @ WSH (Nov. 23), vs. NSH (Nov. 25), vs. STL (Nov. 27)

8. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 66.67%

Thankful for: Jason Robertson getting on the board. The California native dipped 29 points from a whopping 109 (and 46 goals) in 2022-23 to 80 last season. That's still a terrific number. But Robertson had been struggling to find the back of the net lately, going nine games without a tally, finally getting off the schneid Wednesday against San Jose in a three-point effort. His linemates Wyatt Johnston and Roope Hintz also tallied. The second line of Matt Duchene, Tyler Seguin and Mason Marchment is doing the lion's share of the production, so it is good to see Robertson potentially start heating up.

Next seven days: @ TB (Nov. 23), @ CAR (Nov. 25), @ CHI (Nov. 27)

9. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 65.00%

Thankful for: An Auston Matthews-less hot streak. The Leafs lost their star scorer, who has been out with an upper-body injury since Nov. 5. He's out of the lineup and out of the country, receiving treatment in Germany. Without No. 34 in the lineup, the Leafs have been red hot, going 5-1 including wins over the Capitals, Golden Knights and Oilers.

Next seven days: vs. UTA (Nov. 24), @ FLA (Nov. 27)

10. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 65.00%

Thankful for: A strong start. Vegas is still the top team in the Pacific, with a 12-6-2 record. And a big part of that is that October was even better than November, in part because Mark Stone was in the lineup and the top line was playing at an elite level. Stone, who has dealt with his share of injuries in his career, was day-to-day with a lower-body injury since Nov. 8 and was placed on IR this week.

The Knights have lost three of their past six games, with all three losses by three goals (including their first shutout loss of the season Wednesday to the Leafs).

Next seven days: @ MTL (Nov. 23), @ PHI (Nov. 25), @ COL (Nov. 27)

11. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 57.50%

Thankful for: More time at home. The Kings started the season with seven straight games on the road, and didn't have their home opener until Oct. 24. The team was able to spend a lot more time at home in November, with a couple quicker road trips and California rival stops. As they say, there's no place like home, and the Kings have lost just once in regulation so far at Crypto.com Arena this season. The team has another two-week stretch on the road in mid December, so it'll be vital to bank some home wins around that.

Next seven days: vs. SEA (Nov. 23), @ SJ (Nov. 25), vs. WPG (Nov. 27)

12. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 14

Points percentage: 61.11%

Thankful for: Point in warmups. The Bolts were without the services of one of their best players, Brayden Point, for four games due to a lower-body injury. The top-line center returned on Tuesday against Pittsburgh and scored two goals, including the overtime winner, as Tampa Bay defeated Pittsburgh 3-2. Point has 10 goals in 13 games as Tampa Bay now sits third in the Atlantic Division with a 10-6-2 record.

Next seven days: vs. DAL (Nov. 23), vs. COL (Nov. 25), vs. WSH (Nov. 27)

13. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 10

Points percentage: 58.33%

Thankful for: Elias Pettersson and ... Elias Pettersson. I could focus on how Elias Pettersson has found his old game lately, with points in five of his last six games, but we almost had a situation where two players named Elias Pettersson suited up for the same team; the Canucks' franchise center, along with the 2022 third-rounder who plays defense. Just imagine how fun that would have been for play-by-play announcer John Shorthouse -- sort of like when both Sebastian Aho are playing against each other.

Next seven days: @ OTT (Nov. 23), @ BOS (Nov. 26), @ PIT (Nov. 27)

14. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 52.38%

Thankful for: A bounce back. For the second straight autumn, the Oilers stumbled out of the gate to begin the regular season. But the Oilers seem to be trending back into the right direction, going 6-3-1 in their past 10 games. Connor McDavid has 14 points in his past six. Of the past 12 games, Leon Draisaitl has had multiple points in eight of them. Edmonton is fourth in the Pacific, but it doesn't feel like the doom and gloom from the first couple of weeks in October.

Next seven days: vs. NYR (Nov. 23)

15. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 62.50%

Thankful for: Hungry like the Wolf. The Flames parted ways with starting goalie Jacob Markstrom in June. Dustin Wolf, who played 17 games last season, has earned more starts this season and has been gaining acclaim. With a 8-2-1 record and .926 save percentage, the 23-year-old has forced his way into the discussion for the Calder Trophy as NHL rookie of the year; he would be the first goalie in well over a decade to earn that honor.

Next seven days: vs. MIN (Nov. 23), @ OTT (Nov. 25), @ DET (Nov. 27)

16. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 55.00%

Thankful for: The superstars. Cale Makar led the league in scoring early in the season. He's still in the top 10, tied at 28 points with teammate Mikko Rantanen. Nathan MacKinnon leads the way, with 34 points (and a league-topping 27 assists). That level of production is necessary for the Avs to stay competitive, as goaltending has been a concern. Both Alexandar Georgiev and Justus Annunen are below .890 in save percentage.

The Avs currently have a minus-6 goal differential, and they haven't ended a season in the red since 2016-17 (also the last time they didn't make the playoffs).

Next seven days: @ FLA (Nov. 23), @ TB (Nov. 25), vs. VGK (Nov. 27)

17. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 52.50%

Thankful for: Home sweet home. The Kraken are 6-4-1 at Climate Pledge Arena and 3-5-0 away from it. Most recently, Seattle has won four of its past five games at home, coming off of a brutal road trip that started with a bang, an 8-2 trouncing of Montreal, but was followed up with four straight losses to Toronto, Ottawa, Boston and Colorado. If this team wants to make a serious run at a playoff spot, they'll need to stack wins in all places.

Next seven days: @ LA (Nov. 23), @ ANA (Nov. 25), vs. ANA (Nov. 27)

18. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 47.50%

Thankful for: Pierre Engvall's demotion to promotion. Engvall spent 15 games in the AHL with the Toronto Marlies before spending the next four entire seasons in the NHL. However, Engvall lost his spot in Islanders training camp, and was sent to the AHL's Bridgeport Islanders for a stint. He has come alive in his most recent stretch, with goals in three consecutive games. With Engvall's \$3 million per year deal not expiring until 2029-30, seeing the big winger productive is a great thing for Isles fans.

Next seven days: vs. STL (Nov. 23), vs. DET (Nov. 25), vs. BOS (Nov. 27)

19. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 44.74%

Thankful for: A new arena (?). As someone who lived in the Ottawa area for a short period, I can say that the prospect of an arena in the downtown core is exciting -- the current suburb locale isn't exactly ideal. Commissioner Gary Bettman is in Ottawa this week, taking several meetings including with Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe, and touring LeBreton Flats, the site for the proposed new arena that was agreed to by the club and the National Capital Commission last September.

Hopefully there is more to be thankful for in Canada's capital city soon.

Next seven days: vs. VAN (Nov. 23), vs. CGY (Nov. 25), @ SJ (Nov. 27)

20. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 50.00%

Thankful for: Accountability. The Bruins fired coach Jim Montgomery after just over two seasons. He leaves behind the third-best points percentage (.715 with a 120-41-23 record) in franchise history, but won just one playoff round. The team's stars, including David Pastrnak, were reflective post-dismissal and put the onus on themselves.

"We weren't getting the job done, and because we weren't getting it done, we lost a great coach and a great human being," Pastrnak said. Captain Brad Marchand added, "This is a reflection of our play and it was avoidable. And I think that's the tough part about this, is that if we would have done our job in here, he'd still be around."

Next seven days: @ DET (Nov. 23), vs. VAN (Nov. 26), @ NYI (Nov. 27)

21. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 50.00%

Thankful for: Maturity. The Sabres aren't playing their best hockey at the moment, and Tage Thompson let it be known. Speaking with Field Level Media, Thompson said "It's all about consistency right now. We know when we commit to playing the right way we're good, and right now I think it's just us being a little immature, just thinking we're better than we are, instead of relying on what's gotten us results."

The Sabres are 8-9-1 overall, and 5-5 in their last 10. But the number that keeps haunting the club is 13, which is how many years that great city hasn't seen playoff hockey.

Next seven days: @ ANA (Nov. 22), @ SJ (Nov. 23), vs. MIN (Nov. 27)

22. Utah Hockey Club

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 44.74%

Thankful for: Passionate fans. On Nov. 15, Utah HC jerseys were on sale for the first time at the team store, and fans reportedly lined up around the block to pick up their threads. Not only did they set a Delta Center retail sales record, but it ended up becoming the second highest NHL single game merchandise sales total ever. Only Game 5 in Vegas during the 2023 Stanley Cup Final was higher, and that was a Cup-clinching game. You love to see it.

Next seven days: @ PIT (Nov. 23), @ TOR (Nov. 24), @ MTL (Nov. 26)

23. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 50.00%

Thankful for: Thanksgiving. The Ducks are probably the team most thankful for that "if you're in a playoff spot by Thanksgiving, you're in great shape" stat we always talk about this time of the year. The Ducks are only three points out of a postseason slot with three games before Turkey Day on the docket, including a home-and-home with Seattle, who are ahead of them by one point. It's possible they are in a wild-card spot by Nov. 28, and get sprinkled some of that magical playoff hope pixie dust.

Next seven days: vs. BUF (Nov. 22), vs. SEA (Nov. 25), @ SEA (Nov. 27)

24. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 45.00%

Thankful for: Translators. Matvei Michkov had a lot of buzz coming into the NHL this season, and with Macklin Celebrini missing some time due to injury, the Flyers forward gained some early Calder Trophy momentum. Michkov has 15 points in 18 games, despite sitting a couple of games. Part of coach John Tortorella's plan is to have weekly meetings with the 19-year-old winger where they hear each other out -- which is where the translators come into the picture.

Michkov recently became the youngest Flyers player to score an overtime game winner, and has been every bit as good as that preseason buzz would have us believe.

Next seven days: vs. CHI (Nov. 23), vs. VGK (Nov. 25), @ NSH (Nov. 27)

25. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 45.24%

Thankful for: Robert Thomas' return. The Blues center missed 12 games due to a fractured right ankle and surprisingly returned to the lineup on Tuesday, notching an assist in the Blues 4-2 loss to the Wild. Thomas said he felt good on the ice: "I invested a lot in myself, and I'm pretty happy with the result and getting back so soon. I'm excited to be back in the lineup and look forward to getting in the trenches with the guys."

The original reported absence was six weeks, but Thomas, who was injured on Oct 22 while blocking a shot against Winnipeg, skated with the team on Nov. 13 and played his first game back a week later.

Next seven days: @ NYI (Nov. 23), @ NYR (Nov. 25), @ NJ (Nov. 27)

26. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 47.37%

Thankful for: Getting out of California. The Wings had a dreadful west coast swing, losing three straight games to the California teams: 6-4 to Anaheim, following by 4-1 to the Kings then 5-4 in overtime to the Sharks, witnessing Macklin Celebrini's first career overtime goal.

All of those would have been valuable points to snag given that the Red Wings want to make the leap back into the playoffs this season, but Detroit instead returns home with a 7-9-2 record, second to last in the Atlantic. Their first game back home was successful, a 2-1 win over the Islanders.

Next seven days: vs. BOS (Nov. 23), @ NYI (Nov. 25), vs. CGY (Nov. 27)

27. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 47.37%

Thankful for: Playing spoiler. The Blue Jackets find themselves in familiar territory, hovering around the bottom of the Metro division. The Stadium Series game on March 1 will be terrific without a doubt, Ohio Stadium will be jumping, and that will be a highlight for every hockey fan.

But aside from that, it appears that they'll be focused on spoiling things for playoff hopefuls; most recently, it was a 5-1 drubbing of the Bruins in Boston -- a game which ultimately became Jim Montgomery's final one as Bruins coach -- and a 7-6 win over the Lightning.

Next seven days: vs. CAR (Nov. 23), vs. MTL (Nov. 27)

28. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 42.86%

Thankful for: Dismissing trolls. One of the hockey memes that has made the rounds on social media is Sidney Crosby photoshopped in a Colorado Avalanche jersey. Could it actually happen?

Despite Pens GM Kyle Dubas reportedly saying "everyone is available [for trade] but Crosby," what if Sid links up with his Cole Harbor buddy Nate MacKinnon and they chase a Cup together? Has a nice "last dance" kind of feel for Sid, doesn't it?

But despite the Penguins looking in dire straits at the moment and possibly in some form of sell mode -- Lars Eller was traded to Washington last week -- seeing Crosby in any other sweater remains only in the realm of fantasy.

Next seven days: vs. WPG (Nov. 22), vs. UTA (Nov. 23), vs. VAN (Nov. 27)

29. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 42.11%

Thankful for: A Laine sighting. Montreal's big offseason acquisition, Patrik Laine, skated with the team on Wednesday for the first time since suffering a left knee sprain. Though coach Martin St. Louis doesn't have a timetable for Laine's return to the lineup, Habs players noted that it was encouraging to see the former 40-goal scorer back on the ice.

Next seven days: vs. VGK (Nov. 23), vs. UTA (Nov. 26), @ CBJ (Nov. 27)

30. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 37.50%

Thankful for: The long-term Predators. The Preds had the busiest offseason of any team in the NHL, picking up three league veterans in Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault and Brady Skjei. Their start with the Preds hasn't been ideal. A bright spot for the team has been two guys that have consistently been good for Nashville for over a decade: Filip Forsberg, who leads the team in scoring with eight goals and 15 points, and Roman Josi, who is right behind him with 14. Marchessault and Stamkos both sit at 10 points in 20 games, well below their respective career averages.

Next seven days: vs. WPG (Nov. 23), @ NJ (Nov. 25), vs. PHI (Nov. 27)

31. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 38.64%

Thankful for: Return of the Mack(lin). That first career overtime goal had to feel extra special for Macklin Celebrini, who was pointless in four games leading up to that game against Detroit. The No. 1 overall pick returned to the Sharks' lineup on Nov. 5, after being injured in his first NHL game on Oct. 10 and sitting out for nearly a month.

He's had five points in nine games since his return, and he's also been preventing goalie goals, to which one particular victim, Igor Shesterkin of the Rangers, joked about the 18-year-old "[he should] be in school."

Next seven days: vs. BUF (Nov. 23), vs. LA (Nov. 25), vs. OTT (Nov. 27)

32. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 37.50%

Thankful for: Creative photo shoots. A lot has been made about Connor Bedard's frustration. "Losing is not fun, so we've obviously got to figure it out. We're not just going to be happy that we stayed in a game. We're all NHL players. That's not the goal, you know? It's frustrating."

One moment of levity came from Chicago Magazine. For their feature article on the 19-year-old, they spoofed a scene from "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," where Cameron Frye (played by Alan Ruck) is looking at Georges Seurat's "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte," in a Gordie Howe sweater. Bedard is doing the same, in his own jersey.

[Sportsnet.ca / Biggest surprises and disappointments from the NHL's first quarter](#)

By Rory Boylen- November 24, 2024

As a busy slate of games gets going on Saturday, we'll officially hit the one-quarter mark of the NHL season.

Twenty games is an important benchmark because it's not "too early" anymore. Early streaks or slumps have had time to snap and, while things will still certainly change in the weeks and months ahead, it's far enough along now for us to get a feel for who's going to exceed expectations and who will underperform.

With that in mind, we take a glance at some of the surprises and disappointments so far.

Surprise: Dylan Strome and the Washington Capitals

Making the playoffs by the skin of their teeth last season, and somehow with an atrocious minus-37 goal differential, the Capitals didn't inspire the most confidence coming into this season. Their summer additions were: Pierre-Luc Dubois, cast off from Los Angeles one year into an eight-year contract; Jakob Chychrun in a trade for Nick Jensen; Logan Thompson in a swap for picks; Matt Roy via free agency, who was injured and didn't start playing regularly until November; and Andrew Mangiapane in a trade for a second-round pick after he fell out of favour in Calgary.

But was that enough to lift them back up the standings?

So far, the answer has been a resounding "yes" as the Capitals hit the quarter mark 13-5-1, second in the Eastern Conference by points percentage (.711), and third in the league with a plus-27 goal differential.

And while some of the newcomers have been key to this surprise (Thompson is wiggling his way into the Team Canada goaltending conversation), a carryover trio from last season has driven a lot of this success.

Washington's top line has been centre Dylan Strome between Alex Ovechkin and Aliaksei Protas, who have been on the ice together for a league-leading 16 goals and plus-11 differential, according to MoneyPuck. Ovechkin rightly has earned most of the attention as he creeps towards Wayne Gretzky's goal record and roared out of the gate with 15 goals in 18 games before a knee injury, but Strome is deserving of some attention here, too.

Strome has assisted on 12 of Ovechkin's 15 snipes, with five of them primary helpers. He's the team scoring leader with 28 points through 19 games, tied for seventh-best in the league. He's also tied for third with Nathan McKinnon at 21 even-strength points and is already over halfway to his career best in assists.

If there is something to watch for from Washington in the second quarter it is these key stats: Their power play is 25th in the league (15.8 per cent) and they have the highest five-on-five PDO going, with a 14.42 team shooting percentage that is over three points better than the No. 2 ranked team in the league.

They'll also move through the next stage without Ovechkin, who will miss the next four-to-six weeks.

Disappointment: Montreal taking even longer than expected to put it all together

With Ottawa, Detroit and Buffalo all under pressure to push up and into the playoffs this season, the Canadiens could be excused to have another year of building to that point. But even granting them that

grace, the expectation was that they'd be better than last in the East and on the cusp of being at the bottom of the league overall.

The time to be content with great draft-lottery odds should be over for this team. Injuries to Patrik Laine and David Reinbacher took some wind out of their sails, but poor organization and defensive play have them well off any improved pace. At the quarter mark, Montreal's .421 points percentage lags behind the .463 mark they finished at last season.

One of nine NHL teams allowing more than 30 shots against per game, the Habs are third-worst at protecting their goaltenders from high danger looks. As explored by Andrew Brewer, the defensive system the young roster is being charged with executing is probably playing a large role in that and, if they want to see in-season improvement from here, they might have to think about changing that approach.

Having young and exciting players is great (hey, Ivan Demidov is not far off from the NHL either) but promise guarantees nothing over the long-term. Piling up losses, year over year, risks ingraining a losing culture and that can be the most challenging thing to dig out of, no matter what the depth chart and pipeline looks like on paper.

The Buffalo Sabres have had promise, in one way or another, for years and haven't made the playoffs in nearly a decade and a half. If the Canadiens stay on the path of no improvement, they risk following the Sabres' lead.

Surprise: Kirill Marchenko and the Columbus Blue Jackets

A pretty good start in October for Columbus gave way to an awful road trip in early November, through which they picked up one point in five games. But they arrive at the quarter mark with two wins in a row, having beaten the Boston Bruins on Tuesday and the Tampa Bay Lightning on Thursday in a wild 7-6 OT game.

Playoff-bound this team is unlikely to be, but there is positivity under the surface. In the thick of the wild card at this point, and with just a minus-3 goal differential, the Jackets have a top-10 offence overall, but when you take out their struggling power play, Columbus is a top-five offensive team at five-on-five.

A big part of that is the play of Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko, both delivering above expectations so far. The former leads the team at a point-per-game pace, the latter a 24-year-old player having a breakout campaign and just about halfway to last season's 42-point total.

According to MoneyPuck, of all lines around the league with at least 100 minutes played together, the Monahan-Marchenko-Yegor Chinakov trio has scored nine times and allowed three, making for an on-ice goals percentage of 75 that ranks fifth-best in the league -- tied with Tampa Bay's top line.

Disappointment: Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault and the Nashville Predators

Though Steven Stamkos has had a better November than October, he's still scored in only four of 10 games. Jonathan Marchessault has actually slowed to just a single marker in the second month.

Odds may indicate things will turn around, after all Nashville has a league-low 4.88 shooting percentage at five-on-five, which would be the worst mark of any team in the cap era if it ended up that way. The 2014-15 Arizona Coyotes (5.7), 2013-14 Buffalo Sabres (5.8) and 2011-12 Los Angeles Kings (6.0 and Stanley Cup winners) are the three worst 82-game team shooting percentages over that time.

How likely are the Predators to get going on offence? Consider they average the ninth-most shots per game and 12th-most high danger chances. They are still rather low in expected goals per 60, sitting 18th

in the league, but also have the league's worst actual vs. expected goals differential -- an astounding minus 1.1 per 60 minutes.

The next worst team by that measure? The Detroit Red Wings at minus-.54 and Boston Bruins at minus-.47. Nashville is way behind and overdue for something to drop.

Surprise: Dustin Wolf and the Calgary Flames hanging around

After being one of the bigger sellers last season, the Flames didn't seem well positioned to do anything but play for a higher draft pick in 2024-25. And yet, after a quarter of the way into the season, they're the second-best team in the Pacific Division and hit Game 20 on a three-game winning streak.

Any talk that defenceman Rasmus Andersson could be traded a year before his contract expires has dissipated, and he leads the team in scoring. Right behind him? Jonathan Huberdeau, though his 11 points in 20 games isn't pacing better than he finished his first two years with the team.

The Flames are a top 10 team in shots for per game but still get outshot, on average. They aren't an offensively illustrious team, 22nd in goals per game and 26th in power-play efficiency. What they are getting, though, is some very high-end netminding from rookie Dustin Wolf.

The 23-year-old has played 11 games and is 11th among all netminders in Goals Saved Above Expected so far. His .926 save percentage and 2.33 GAA is outperforming Dan Vladar and Wolf is helping to elevate the Flames and patch some issues.

Without a clear-cut rookie scorer separating from the pack, Wolf is making an early intriguing case for the Calder Trophy. Though, as outlined by Adam Vingan this week, Wolf may have to handle a heavier workload over the remaining three-quarters to have a shot.

Disappointment: Stuart Skinner possibly playing his way off of Team Canada

Heading into this NHL season the three most likely netminders for Team Canada at the 4 Nations Face-Off probably were Jordan Binnington (Stanley Cup winner), Adin Hill (Stanley Cup winner) and Stuart Skinner (Stanley Cup finalist). Now all of that is up in the air -- none of those goalies has a Goals Saved Above Average in the positive.

The one struggling the most, however, has been Skinner, who came within a whisker of winning a Cup last season. It was thought he could carry that momentum into this year and be a possible answer for Canada's lack of depth at the position, but he might be playing his way off that roster now.

To be sure, Skinner isn't all to blame for Edmonton's early-season stumbling again. The Oilers are 20th in five-on-five offence and their formerly high-flying power play is 22nd. They are fourth-best in shots against per game however, and fifth-best in limiting high danger chances at five-on-five.

Edmonton is 10th in expected goals against at even strength, but 20th in actual goals against. That's where the goaltending comes in, and where Skinner is seemingly allowing that one squeaky goal a night.

Taking a look at the Canadian goaltending landscape, a number of other netminders are coming out of the woodwork and making a case. Detroit's Cam Talbot has the best save percentage (.920) of any Canadian, with Washington's Logan Thompson (.914) right behind. Both are top 10 league wide in GSAE. There's even some question if Joey Daccord could be considered, given his father was born in Montreal.

The Central Division isn't being led by the teams most assumed would be there through the first quarter of the season -- heck, no one pencilled in the Winnipeg Jets and Minnesota Wild to be first and second in the entire league at the quarter mark.

After a quiet off-season in Winnipeg followed a meek playoff exit against Colorado, many people were skeptical of the Jets coming into this season. But from the drop of the puck in October, the Jets came out with the best 15-game start of any team in NHL history, shooting out with a 14-1-0 record.

They are giving early shades of the 2022-23 Boston Bruins, who not many saw coming as a record-setting Presidents' Trophy-winning team. Through 20 games the Jets already have a plus-37 goal differential, nine better than the No. 2 Carolina Hurricanes.

While Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele and Nikolaj Ehlers are all better than point-per-game players and earning plenty of attention, it should be noted the Jets also have one of the best third lines going. Mason Appleton, Nino Niederreiter and Adam Lowry (a possible consideration in a checking role for Team Canada) have played nearly 200 minutes together and have been on the ice for 12 goals for and just three against -- 80 per cent in their favour. Of 43 lines that have spent at least 100 minutes together so far this season, that ranks third-best.

And we shouldn't acknowledge one Central surprise without also giving props to the other. The Minnesota Wild have lost a few more games in extra time than the Jets, but they share the league lead in regulation losses with just three so far.

Long caught in the league's middle, the Wild had more closely been aligned with the St. Louis Blues in this division — whom we should give an honourable mention as one of the league's first quarter disappointments. But while the Blues regress, the Wild are rising up and becoming one of the more intriguing long-term teams to watch in the league as the salary cap rises.

Disappointment: What happened to the Boston Bruins?

These aren't the Patrice Bergeron-led Bruins anymore — but that was also the case last season and they still finished tied with the sixth-best regular season record in the league.

In fact, it seemed as though Boston may have positioned itself better in 2024-25 by adding Elias Lindholm to centre and helping fill depth they've struggled to replace at the position. Even Nikita Zadorov on the back end was a mean addition made to ensure Boston remained tough to play against.

But while neither of those pickups have neatly fit so far, to be fair, nothing has clicked. Jeremy Swayman remains a step behind after he missed training camp over a contract negotiation, which in retrospect, the team let get out of hand and it happened after they put themselves in a tough position by trading out Linus Ullmark before getting Swayman signed).

David Pastrnak was benched, Brad Marchand had a couple of noticeable disputes in-game with the head coach, and uncharacteristically bad losses to Toronto (4-0), Dallas (7-2) and Columbus (5-1) defined the Bruins' first quarter. The final one of those losses was the last straw for head coach Jim Montgomery, who was fired even after being one of the more successful bench bosses over the past couple of seasons.

The Bruins are a .500 team by points percentage at the quarter mark, tied with Anaheim and behind the Buffalo Sabres. Their minus-20 goal differential is third-worst in the league, ahead of only San Jose and Pittsburgh. It's unusual company for Boston to be in and, if things don't get better fast, attention will turn to how to improve or turnover the roster through trades — or even to the man calling the shots in the front office.

[Sportsnet.ca / Quick Shifts: Who's on the All-Healthy-Scratch Team?](#)

By Luke Fox- November 24, 2024

A quick mix of the things we gleaned from the week of hockey, serious and less so, and rolling four lines deep. Fewer big hits, more big outrage.

1. It's not even December, and we're already unveiling our 2024-25 All-Healthy Scratch Team — two full lines, two defence pairs, and two goaltenders who have been forced to sit and watch teammates play in games they had hoped to dress for.

As you can see by the names on our squad, a benching can foreshadow a trade, embarrass a star, drag out an improved performance, hint at a deeper issue, or simply offer a chance for a player's mental or physical reset.

What all healthy scratches do, though, is spark conversation and strike nerves.

Kevin Fiala, LW: The Wild star vows to never use his iPad as his alarm clock again. Sleep in, miss a meeting, take a seat. Los Angeles's team rules apply to 30-goal guys, too.

Morgan Frost, C: Isn't Frost, 25, supposed to be a building block of the Flyers' core? Well, after just one goal, a dash-10 ranking, and an iffy relationship with the coach, we're not so certain.

Matvei Michkov, RW: "It's just part of the process," according to John Tortorella. If the Philly phenom is to win the Calder, it won't be with 82 games played.

Taylor Hall, LW: The one-time Hart Trophy winner said he was "surprised" by his sudden benching, and coach Luke Richardson admitted, perhaps, more communication was in order. Counterpoint: Two goals in 16 games? For a team craving offence? Maybe a wakeup call shouldn't be so surprising.

Morgan Geekie, C: A 26-year-old centre scratched multiple times from a roster lacking centre depth has the hockey world wondering if Boston may use Geekie as a trade chip.

Daniel Sprong, RW: The analytics darling didn't last long as an ill fit in Vancouver and, post-scratch, has returned to Seattle, where he peaked with 21 goals in 2022-23.

Mattias Samuelsson, D: The Sabres lefty signed a \$30-million contract while still unproven. His early-season scratch didn't come as a "complete shock." He's taking it as "just a kick in the butt."

Jake Walman, D: You'd think the lowly Sharks would need every minute they can get from a capable blueliner like Walman. Ever had to pay for a massage when you skip the appointment?

Timothy Liljegren, D: In Toronto, the writing was on the press box wall — where Liljegren's back was pressed during all but one Maple Leafs game in the Craig Berube era. Since getting dealt to San Jose, the righty is skating more than 19 minutes a night and getting power-play time.

Vincent Desharnais, D: The big Oiler-turned-Canuck got sat down early by Rick Tocchet and took it as a challenge. "If you care, you obviously get frustrated with it. I think I can play every game," Desharnais said, undeterred. "I've been in this position too many times to lose focus.

Tristan Jarry, G: Tough look for a supposed No. 1 goalie raking in \$5.375 million annually through 2027-28. A solid AHL reset gives hope that the Surrey, B.C., native can turn his .863 NHL save percentage around.

Ville Husso, G: Steve Yzerman's intended goalie of the present (and future) has posted a hideous .811 save percentage in his two Red Wings starts and has now spent more time in Grand Rapids.

Honourable mentions: Shane Wright, Michael Bunting, Max Pacioretty, Bobby McMann, David Jiricek, Ty Emberson, Rutger McGroarty, Jesse Puljujarvi, Jeff Petry, Justin Holl, Matthew Poitras.

2. Jack Eichel knows a thing or two about seeking a second opinion.

"If Auston felt that going to Germany was his best chance of getting back as soon as possible and feeling as good as possible and helping their team, then I'm sure that's why he's over there," the Golden Knights' top centre said.

"He's a smart guy. He's got a lot of great resources. I'm pretty sure he knows what he's doing. He's a competitor, and he wants to be back out here playing, and he's going to do whatever he can to get back on the ice."

Eichel, you'll recall, was the first NHLer to push for artificial disk replacement on his neck, a surgery his former employer, the Buffalo Sabres, did not want him to undergo. The conflict between player and team ultimately resulted in Eichel's trade to Vegas.

"I can't say whether that opened anyone's eyes or influenced other people," Eichel said. "I did what I felt I needed to do."

Matthews was accompanied to Munich by Leafs medical director Dr. Noah Forman. But the star player is driving the decisions on his treatment here, with the club onboard.

"You have to express what you feel comfortable with and what you feel is the best treatment, whatever that might be," Eichel went on. "I feel like guys are more open and, you know what, teams are more open to it, too. I think that's an important part as well. I think teams are communicating well with players and giving them the chance to see the people they want to see. It goes both ways. It's good that he's been able to get the treatment he needs or wants."

How does Cooper expect his relationship with the divisional menace to change when they work together at the 4 Nations Face-Off?

"OK, I'll give you a little story," Cooper says.

A smile creeps as the coach thinks back to the 2018 NHL All-Star Game at Amalie Arena.

"My mother, who unfortunately recently passed, she was a huge Brad Marchand fan. And all she wanted to do was meet him," Cooper shares.

"So, when we went back into the big (reception) room or wherever we were, I had to seek out Brad for my mom — and he couldn't have been more of a gentleman. He took the best pictures with her. He was fired up because he was taller than her, so that was good for him.

"But ever since that day, what Brad did and how he went out of his way to make my mom's night, I can't thank him enough. And now that we both share that Mr. TNT award, we're attached at the hip."

(In 2023, Marchand won the inaugural Mr. TNT trophy, presented to the player or coach who brings the most personality to the broadcast. Cooper captured the honour in '24.)

4. So, Gary Bettman says the NHL and the Players' Association haven't formally discussed jacking the salary cap beyond the max five per cent, to \$92.5 million.

But Elliotte Friedman's report of the upper limit potentially touching as high as \$97 million this summer should have agents licking their chops and preaching patience to clients on expiring deals.

Elite members of the RFA and UFA class of 2025 would be wise to wait and let this play out.

The trend of players negotiating raises based on percentage of the cap is about to butt heads with general managers who try to install their internal salary ceilings.

Should Mikko Rantanen make more than Nathan MacKinnon in Colorado?

How big should Mitch Marner's slice of the piece be compared to Matthews' slice?

Luke Hughes can't make more than brother Jack, can he?

Surely the Rangers' Igor Shesterkin will become even more emboldened to push for a higher AAV than Artemi Panarin, won't he?

And what about still-relevant veterans like Marchand, John Tavares, and Claude Giroux? Yeah, they're keen to stay put, but maybe at less of a haircut than initially anticipated.

The players' argument — and it's a fair one — will be that the previous ceiling-setter's contract was signed before this significant spike in inflation.

Yesterday's price is not today's price.

5. Quote of the Week.

"It just feels like the same crap all over again." — Marcus Pettersson, following the Pittsburgh Penguins' eighth blown multi-goal lead in 21 games

6. We now present a brief oral history behind the photo of Arizona native Matthew Knies and St. Louis native Joseph Woll sporting Chiefs jerseys in Buffalo Sunday, when the Bills ended Kansas City's perfect season.

Woll: "Good times. We had to throw some Chiefs jerseys on because we were unable to get Bills sideline passes. The Chiefs were the only ones that gave us passes. So, if we're going on their sideline, we have to support them, right? But I'm a free agent. I used to be a Rams fan, and I never became a Chiefs fan after the Rams left. Honestly, if there were two teams I'd cheer for, it probably be these two. I don't have really preference over teams. I just cheer for players on my fantasy team. Stollie is No. 1 in our league. I took him down this week. That was a big win."

Knies: "I'm not a fantasy football freak like some of these guys, but I watch it here and there. I like the Cardinals a lot. You probably saw the picture of us in Kansas City jerseys. But we weren't allowed to go on the sidelines for the Bills because they said that they're too close with the Sabres or something. [Well, the Pegulas own both teams. —ed.] I don't know. Woller had the tickets figured out, and the Chiefs said we could go on their sideline and wear their jersey. So, might as well take this opportunity, and then it kinda blew up."

Woll: "It was awesome. We had great seats. Crazy in there. (Highmark Stadium) is kind of in the middle of nowhere, but it gets so packed. Cool atmosphere with people tailgating. I didn't realize, but people stand the whole game. Like, we stood the whole game. I was tired. We were joking that we needed treatment Monday. You feel worse than after playing a (hockey) game right now. On my feet for four hours, and then you shove yourself in a car for two."

Knies: "Since I've been here for a year and a half, I might as well root for the Bills, but I'm more of a Cardinals fan, so doesn't really matter to me who wins."

Conor Timmins, also in attendance but proudly sporting Buffalo blue: "I told them they couldn't sit with me if they were wearing those jerseys.... We got to cheer for the Bills here. Being this close geographically, you have to cheer for the Bills."

7. Vegas head coach Bruce Cassidy texted Jim Montgomery in wake of the latter's firing from the Bruins.

All Cassidy did after Boston spurned him is go win a Stanley Cup. Montgomery is a heckuva coach who leaves a flawed Bruins roster with a Jack Adams Award and a .715 points percentage. Whether it's in St. Louis or Montreal or somewhere else, he'll be back.

"Well, I've been there, I know that (feeling)," Cassidy said in Toronto Wednesday, the morning after his replacement got replaced. "We're all friends. Listen, we sign up for a certain amount of credit and blame.

"He's got a young family. That's the part that's always tough, I think, is on the kids. That's where I feel sympathy for him and his family. His kids — that's difficult on them.

"He did a great job there. He will land back on his feet. He has a great résumé. I don't know where it will be. We all end up somewhere because someone got let go. That part we know and we're aware of and we deal with just fine. It's the family part that is always difficult."

Cassidy spoke of how his children, like him, grew attached to New England and were reluctant to pack up. Now, they love Vegas.

"They're resilient. They get to see some life experiences. Try telling a 12-year-old girl that she's moving across the country, right? And that's what Jim's got to do with his kids at some point, I assume," Cassidy said.

"Hey, if you could make them look into the future and see that they're going to form new friendships and experiences (that'd be great). It's just tough on them at that age."

Down the hall, Leafs coach Craig Berube was also affected by the firing of Montgomery, who worked as a Blues assistant under Berube and did a superb job with the PK as he paid his dues before his next head job.

"It's upsetting. I know Monty personally. We brought Monty into St. Louis to work with us for a couple years, and he was fantastic," Berube said.

"I feel for coaches. It's a tough business, it really is. This one's more personal for me."

8. As Alex Ovechkin puts his all-time goal chase on pause to heal his fractured fibula, it's worth noting the work Capitals head coach Spencer Carbery invested over the off-season to help his captain topple Wayne Gretzky.

Recognizing Ovechkin's powerful shot hasn't wavered much, even at age 39, and that he would always get his cookies on the power-play flank, Carbery drilled down on ways to increase Ovechkin's even-strength strikes.

"Because the hardest thing to do in the National Hockey League, I believe, is score five-on-five," Carbery says. "Whether you're Auston Matthews or Alex Ovechkin, it's hard."

First step: Find the optimal centreman.

With Nicklas Backstrom sidelined indefinitely and Evgeny Kuznetsov long gone, Carbery examined the analytics and discovered that even though Ovechkin and Dylan Strome hadn't produced a ton of actual goals together, their expected goals suggested a dam about to burst.

Strome, who often golfs with Backstrom, did his part by chatting with Ovechkin's all-time setup man about how to work with a unicorn.

Then Strome assisted on 12 of his winger's league-leading 15 goals.

“So, part of that is the linemates, but also part of it is him moving his feet, reading the play quickly, and getting to a good F3 spot if he's going to shoot it from the slot,” Carbery says.

But the most important element Carbery has worked with Ovechkin is his positioning for goals that don't involve No. 8's trademark one-timer. Convincing the distance shooter to drive the net, get to the paint more for tips and rebounds.

“Because if he hangs out right there for all of his five-on-five minutes, it's really hard to score five-on-five from the faceoff circle,” Carbery goes on, excited by the topic.

“If you want to score goals, you got to get to the inside. And he's done a nice job, as he's gotten on his career, of mixing some of those goals in. He's not going to score 20 there. But can he get eight or nine or 10?”

Carbery's favourite clip to show Ovechkin is this one, from Washington's regular-season finale in April — a game the Caps needed to win to make the playoffs:

“He didn't even know it hit him,” Carbery says, proudly. “He just drove the net, stopped there, and next thing you know, puck's in and it's off his hand. And we're up 1-0 in Game 82, the most important game of the year.”

9. In 25 games for KHL St. Petersburg, Kuznetsov has already scored more goals (nine) than he did in his 63-game final NHL season (eight), split between Washington and Carolina.

None prettier than this slice of ingenuity:

10. In light of J.T. Miller's personal leave from the Canucks being connected to burnout, it's interesting that player-turned-agent Drew Shore wrote the following post on that very topic this week.

Shore's conclusion: “You have to find a way to fall in love with the daily grind, or else long-term success is impossible. This applies to sports and everything else in life.”

Worth a read...

11. Amid a discouraging start for both he and the Anaheim Ducks, Trevor Zegras had his best game of the season, putting up two assists and finishing a plus-2 in a win over the rebuilding Blackhawks.

For a gifted talent who was pushed early as a face not only of the franchise but of the league, Zegras has underwhelmed since signing his \$17.25-million bridge deal after a testy contract standoff.

Leading up to that deal, he scored 23 goals in 2021-22 and again in 2022-23.

Last season Zegras battled injury and found the back of the net just six times in 31 games.

This season, the 23-year-old has scored but twice, finds himself on the second power-play unit, and is on pace for nine goals over 82 games.

Now the top-line playmaker has reportedly come out saying he hates the wing and wants to play centre.

Big yikes.

The Ducks aren't going anywhere, but one must wonder if Zegras will be.

The forward's contract runs through June of 2026, at which point he'll have arbitration rights. Catch is, he's hardly performing like a \$5.75-million player.

12. If Jaden Schwartz finds himself on the next All-Healthy Scratch Team, you'll know why.

TSN.CA / Core 4 U-24: Hughes, Bedard and Celebrini headline five benchmark categories to the game

By Steve Dryden- November 23, 2024

Jack Hughes doesn't need No. 1 status in the 2024-25 TSN Core 4 U-24 individual rankings to fortify his swagger.

The 23-year-old New Jersey centre already has it in abundance.

Hughes plays the game with a level of flair, confidence and brashness that is equal or superior to virtually any player in the league – regardless of age.

The sixth-year NHLer leads our annual ranking of NHL players and affiliated prospects 23 or younger as of season's start. The list represents a blend of current performance level and projected development.

As part of the annual exercise, TSN identifies U-24 players who earn 5-Star designation – call it excellence to the extreme – in five benchmark categories: smarts, skating, stickhandling, scoring and swagger.

Not surprisingly, Hughes is prominent among the 5-Star players, as are U-24 No. 2 Connor Bedard, 19, and No. 3 Macklin Celebrini, 18.

Here are this year's far-flung honorees, spanning the NHL, AHL, KHL, CHL and NCAA:

Smarts: (1) Bedard, C, Chicago (2) Celebrini, C, San Jose (3) Jack Hughes (4) Dustin Wolf, G, Calgary (5) Lane Hutson, LD, Montreal

Skating: (1) Tim Stutzle, C, Ottawa (2) Kaiden Guhle, LD, Montreal (3) Zeev Buium, LD, Denver U/Minnesota Wild (4) Simon Edvinsson, LD, Detroit (5) Jett Luchanko, Guelph/Philadelphia.

Stickhandling: (1) J. Hughes (2) Bedard (3) Ivan Demidov, RW, St. Petersburg SKA/Montreal (4) Logan Cooley, C, Utah (5) Leo Carlsson, C, Anaheim

Scoring: (1) Cole Caufield, LW, Montreal (2) Bedard (3) Dylan Guenther, RW, Utah (4) Cutter Gauthier, LW, Anaheim (5) Cole Eiserman, LW, Boston U/Islanders

Swagger: (1) J. Hughes (2) Celebrini (3) Yaroslav Askarov, G, San Jose (4) Matvei Michkov, RW, Philadelphia (5) Sam Dickinson, LD, London/San Jose