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**February 25, 2025**

**Columbus Blue Jackets**

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## Columbus Dispatch / Headed to the NHL Stadium Series outdoor game at Ohio State? Here's the weather forecast

**By Nathan Hart & Brian Hedger – February 25, 2025**

This story has been updated to correct a forecast.

Hockey fans wary of attending a game outside, where water, ice and lightning can descend from the sky, should have nothing to fear Saturday in the Blue Jackets' first outdoor game experience at Ohio Stadium, according an early forecast from the National Weather Service in Wilmington.

The Blue Jackets will face the Detroit Red Wings in the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series at Ohio Stadium, which is home to Ohio State's national championship football team and more commonly known around Columbus as simply "The Shoe."

While temperatures are expected to get into the 50s this week, the forecast for Saturday's game dips down a bit despite partly sunny skies. Expect high temperatures near 45, according to a seven-day forecast from the NWS.

The NHL's ice rink can be maintained in temperatures up to 70 degrees, so do not expect any melting ice from it being above freezing.

Here is what is in store from the weather for the rest of the week.

### **How does weather impact outdoor NHL games?**

The biggest challenges at most NHL outdoor venues are rain and bright sunshine creating glares off the ice, which the league accounted for with the game's 6 p.m. start time Saturday at Ohio Stadium. Sunset is at 6:24 p.m. that day, which means precipitation is the biggest weather hurdle to monitor.

The Weather Channel's forecast for Saturday varies from the NWS and includes a 16% chance of precipitation during the day and 6% chance of precipitation at night with a temperature range of 42 degrees as a high and 20 degrees as a nighttime low. Accounting for wind conditions with a range of 11-16 miles per hour, conditions could feel like 35 degrees during the day and 20 degrees at night.

The six-day forecast includes a range of 63-69% for cloud cover Saturday, so the biggest weather issue could be wind. During the day, winds are expected to gust up to 16 mph moving West to East, shifting at night to 10 mph moving northwest to southwest.

AccuWeather's forecast is similar with a couple variations, including an "evening" temperature of 28 degrees that feels like 24 degrees, a 14% probability of precipitation, 7 mph winds from the North with gusts up to 17 mph and 87% chance of cloud cover.

The rink runs North-South at Ohio Stadium, just like the football field, so the team that first defends the South end's net may have a slight headwind in the first and third periods.

### **Columbus weather for the week of Feb. 24, 2025**

**Monday:** It will be partly sunny with a high near 52. Wind gusts as high as 28 miles per hour are possible.

**Monday Night:** There is a chance of showers, mainly after 3 a.m. It will be cloudy with a low around 36. The chance of precipitation is 30%. New precipitation amounts of less than a tenth of an inch are possible.

**Tuesday:** There is a chance of showers, mainly before 8 a.m. It will be cloudy, then it will gradually become mostly sunny with a high near 52. The chance of precipitation is 30%. New precipitation amounts of less than a tenth of an inch are possible.

**Tuesday Night:** It will be partly cloudy with a low around 33.

**Wednesday:** There is a slight chance of rain after 1 p.m. It will be partly sunny with a high near 58. The chance of precipitation is 20%.

**Wednesday Night:** Rain is likely. It will be mostly cloudy with a low around 41. The chance of precipitation is 70%. New precipitation amounts between a quarter and half of an inch are possible.

**Thursday:** It will be mostly cloudy with a high near 47.

**Thursday Night:** It will be mostly cloudy with a low around 31.

**Friday:** It will be partly sunny with a high near 46.

**Friday Night:** It will be mostly cloudy with a low around 37.

**Saturday:** It will be partly sunny with a high near 45.

**Saturday Night:** It will be mostly cloudy with a low around 24.

**Sunday:** It will be mostly sunny with a high near 38.

## [BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets share their outdoor game memories](#)

**By Jeff Svoboda – February 25, 2025**

Dean Evason has been lucky enough to stand behind the bench for two outdoor NHL games, including as Minnesota's head coach Jan. 1, 2022, when the Wild hosted St. Louis at Target Field.

In his words, it was "the most awesome miserable experience I've ever had."

Awesome because every NHL outdoor game is exactly that, a celebration of the game as it returns to its natural roots underneath the open sky.

Miserable because, well, we'll let Evason tell you.

"It was frickin' freezing," Evason said with a hearty laugh. "It was amazingly cold."

Indeed, with a game-time temperature of minus-5.7 degrees Fahrenheit, it was the coldest outdoor game of the 42 the NHL has staged since it started to take the game outdoors on Nov. 22, 2003, for the Heritage Classic in Edmonton. (It also didn't help that St. Louis beat the Wild by a 6-4 score on that night.)

The good news for Evason? Forecasts in Columbus for the NHL's 43rd outdoor game – set for Saturday in Ohio Stadium when the Blue Jackets host the NHL Stadium Series vs. Detroit – call for high temps in the mid-40s, cooling off into the 30s once the game faces off at 6 p.m.

It should be a perfect setting for a historic moment for the Blue Jackets and hockey in Columbus, with the first outdoor game in franchise history taking place in one of the most iconic venues in sports. And it's something Evason, having been there before, wants his team and the community to enjoy.

"I'm really looking forward to it," Evason said. "It's exciting. I've been fortunate, I've been through a couple now, and I just really want to embrace it, I want the guys to embrace it. Of course we're not going to forget about the end result is the two points that night, but embrace everything that goes with it and the excitement level and this stadium and being outside and families being there – enjoy all of it, and then when the puck is dropped, play hard."

While Evason has been involved in two previous outdoor NHL games – he was an assistant in Washington for the 2011 Winter Classic in Pittsburgh's Heinz Field – a handful of Blue Jackets players also have been lucky enough to take part as well. Forward James van Riemsdyk is the NHL's dean of outdoor games, as he's skated in a league-record seven previous events, while active players Zach Aston-Reese, Dante Fabbro, Jack Johnson, Sean Kuraly and Ivan Provorov have also done so.

"It's kind of a little bit of luck when you look at it," van Riemsdyk said of his record. "I think I came into the league at the right time when it started to be an every year sort of occurrence. And playing in some markets that seem to get a lot of them, that doesn't hurt your chances to play in a lot, too."

"There's really unique in their own way, but ultimately getting a chance to share it with a lot of the people that helped you along the way in your journey and have time to spend with them, I think that's what makes it fun for me. It always makes it uniquely special."

Indeed, many of the players who have taken part in previous outdoor games have said that while the game itself certainly stands out, what they'll remember most is sharing such a special moment with family and friends. After the Blue Jackets practice at Ohio Stadium for the first time Friday afternoon, they'll have time to invite those close to them on the ice for a skate.

"It's a cool kind of event for everyone, and I know they do a great job with the families," Fabbro said. "It gives them a little peek into what our day-to-day lives are like on a little bit of a bigger stage, but I think everyone's family is super excited to be here and proud to be here. I think it's just another way to give back to them a little bit and get to spend some time with them."

Fabbro is also lucky enough to have scored a goal in an outdoor game, tallying in the 2020 Winter Classic between Nashville and Dallas in front of more than 85,000 fans at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas.

"It was definitely a special moment for sure," Fabbro said. "Honestly, I scored and I blacked out. I didn't know what I was doing, celebrating or whatever. I think looking back on it, I've obviously rewatched it, and getting to see that kind of reaction and stuff like that, you giggle at it and have a good laugh."

Given that he's played in seven previous outdoor games, van Riemsdyk has had his fair share of success as well, notching three goals and three assists. As you might imagine, though, there are other things that stand out.

"First and foremost, I would say the first one was my first year (2010) at Fenway Park – that was one really memorable," van Riemsdyk said. "Then the one in Ann Arbor (2014) was super memorable. I found out I made the Olympic team that day and they announced it after the game. We actually won that game in a shootout, too, which was really cool. The Naval Academy one (in 2018), that one was great. Lake Tahoe (in 2021) you mentioned.

"Jeez, they're really unique in their own way. I'm probably forgetting a couple of them in there, but they're always a lot of fun. They're always something I look forward to playing in."

For Provorov, some of the things he remembers most are the conditions, including playing in the rain in the 2019 Stadium Series vs. Pittsburgh and dealing with blinding sun at the Lake Tahoe game in 2021.

"You'd skate out there for 10 seconds and you'd have so many raindrops on your visor," he said of the Stadium Series game. "You're like 'Holy (cow)!' (In Lake Tahoe), it was like the sunset, so in the first period, you were fine going one way, but then the other way the sun was blinding you the whole way. You couldn't see anything. Eye black didn't help. It's mostly for the lights, so I should have just had sunglasses on."

All of the players who have taken part praised the NHL for the way they tailor the events to the cities involved, and for this one, that will include embracing the Columbus surroundings. Two prominent bands with Central Ohio ties have already been introduced as entertainment – O.A.R. will play the pregame pep rally at St. John Arena on Saturday at 2:30 p.m., while Twenty One Pilots will perform during intermission – and plenty of Ohio State ties are expected as well.

Not only is the century-old Ohio Stadium one of the most historic and easily recognizable venues in sports, it's the home of the reigning College Football Playoff champions in Ohio State. The school's athletic band, students and traditions are expected to play a big part in the show as well.

It's a lot going on, but Kuraly said the events surrounding the game can help the players focus on the task at hand.

"To me, it feels like such a big moment," he said. "I think there's not a risk of not taking it seriously. I think you just have to realize it's just another game. There are some, I guess you could call them distractions, but those distractions all seem to narrow your focus and make it feel like more of a game."

One aspect of this year's game that is unique is that both teams are in the mix for the postseason, which makes the two points on the line extremely important for both. Detroit holds the first wild card spot with Columbus just two points behind, which means that when the puck drops, a lot will be on the line.

As van Riemsdyk said, “You look back on these things way more fondly if you win the game,” and Kuraly noted a victory can be a springboard for a team going forward.

“Weirdly, those games always feel like they carry more than two points for whatever reason,” Kuraly said. “I don’t know if it’s because there’s more eyeballs on it or a little more attention. It’s just one regular season game, but for whatever reason, those games feel like they can carry you through a little bit longer stretch than just one game.”

When it’s all said and done, though, the memories that will be made Saturday will likely last a lifetime.

“I still have all my jerseys from (my previous outdoor games), a bunch of photos and all the equipment I played with in all those games,” Fabbro said. “It’s cool to keep those as memorabilia, and I think 10 or 15 years down the road, you get to look back and see all the stuff you used during these outdoor games and get to have that special moment and memory.”

## The Hockey News / Relive One Of The Most Wholesome Moments In Jackets History

**By Jason Newland – February 25, 2025**

Last night, the Columbus Blue Jackets played the Chicago Blackhawks. The Jackets won 5-1, thanks to solid play from Elvis Merzljikins and Zach Werenski.

But perhaps one of the most wholesome and iconic moments to ever happen in Nationwide Arena took place in the first period.

With Johnny Gaudreau's widow Meredith and their kids Noa and Johnny Jr. in attendance to watch Johnny Sr's team play, arena host Mike Todd spoke during one of the commercial breaks and got the entire arena to sing Happy Birthday to little Johnny Jr. It was Johnny Jr's 1st birthday last night, and he got to celebrate it with 18,800 of his biggest fans.

It was an awesome thing to witness live, and we hope that the entire Gaudreau family knows how much this city loves their family.

Happy 1st Birthday Johnny!

**What's Next:** Columbus Welcomes Dallas into Nationwide Arena on Tuesday.

## The Hockey News / Werenski Extends Home Point Streak To 22 Games

**By Spencer Lazary – February 25, 2025**

Columbus Blue Jackets' defenseman Zach Werenski has extended his point streak to 22 games. In the game last night against the Chicago Blackhawks, he recorded a three-point night including a breakaway goal.

Werenski's streak now places him tied for third all-time in longest home point streaks amongst NHL defensemen. He is tied with Phil Housley (1991-92) for the third-longest streak by a defenseman. Bobby Orr (1974-75) holds the record at 25 games.

Werenski is coming off of being the leading scorer of the 4-Nations Face-Off tournament and returned to the level of play he was playing at before the tournament.

He is now just one point back of Cale Makar (63) for the league leader in points amongst defensemen in the NHL.



## The Hockey News / Joseph LaBate Loses Fight Against Former Blue Jackets' Captain

**By Spencer Lazary – February 25, 2025**

Last night, Columbus Blue Jackets' recent call-up Joseph LaBate dropped the gloves with former Blue Jackets captain Nick Foligno.

Foligno, now the captain of the Chicago Blackhawks, gave LaBate his welcome-to-the-NHL moment in their fight.

LaBate threw a hit on Foligno, which led to the scrap. The Blackhawks captain was knocked down, and when he got back to his feet, he dropped the gloves and landed three lefts before the Blue Jackets forward could even get his gloves off.

The fight was a clear mismatch, as Foligno beat the wheels off him. Unfortunately for LaBate, he wasn't able to land a punch—the only one he threw missed while he was getting hit with right hands.

LaBate may think twice before dropping the gloves with another NHL veteran as tough as "Uncle Nick."

## The Hockey News / Will The Blue Jackets Players Prepare For The Stadium Series Game Any Differently Than A Normal Game?

By Jason Newland – February 25, 2025

The NHL Stadium Series Game between the Columbus Blue Jackets and Detroit Red Wings is coming up this Saturday, and Columbus fans are buzzing about it. There are tailgates planned, pregame parties and pep rallies, concerts, and more. The weather forecast as of now, is calling for a high of 42 with winds at 10 to 20 MPH, and considerable cloudiness. Bundle up!

Fans are getting themselves ready for a long day outside, and have started prepping for it by getting hats, gloves, hand warmers, and everything they can think of to keep themselves warm. The tailgates better have coffee and hot chocolate!

But what about the players? Are there any preparations they have to make to get themselves ready for an outdoor game?

THN Columbus had the pleasure of getting a couple of questions answered by a professional from Hospital for Special Surgery. Mohammad Saad, PT, DPT, Physical Therapist at HSS in New York City was kind enough to answer a few questions we had regarding this topic.

We also spoke to a doctor with HSS last year about Adam Fantilli's skate-cut injury.

**THN Columbus: Is the game prep any different for outdoor games vs. indoor games? i.e., workout routines, diet?**

**Saad:** Hockey players tend to be creatures of habit and each player treats their pregame preparations methodically. Most players arrive at the arena around three hours prior to puck drop to start their pre-game routine. They generally like to stick with what is familiar, regardless of whether they're at home or on the road. For outdoor games, like the stadium series, you can expect players to approach the game similar to how they would prepare for a road game. The team's training staff is always prepared with the necessary equipment for players to complete their pre-game workouts and treatments and the team dietician ensures they have familiar foods that will keep them fueled for the game.

**THN Columbus: If the game isn't as cold as they expect, is the preparation any different for the players?**

**Saad:** Depending on the temperature on the day of the game, preparation may look a little different. Playing in an arena allows for a controlled environment that is ideal for on-ice competition that may be more difficult to maintain outdoors. Usually, the ice is kept around 24 degrees Fahrenheit, and the rink level is a similar temperature. If the outdoor temperature is warmer, this could impact the condition of the ice and require more frequent grooming and resurfacing. As a result, players may need to be more careful with the patches of soft ice that could develop. With warmer weather also comes higher body temperature during competition. As a result, players may need shorter shifts and be more diligent about hydration to avoid cramps and fatigue.

**THN Columbus: What types of injuries are most prominent in these types of games?**

**Saad:** The nature and demands of hockey allow for the possibility of a variety of upper and lower extremity injuries. Some of the most common injuries include ligamentous injuries of the knee, strains of the groin, and lower back, dislocations and soft tissue injuries of the shoulder and elbow, concussions, and facial injuries. When the game transitions to the outdoors, the condition of the ice

would be a variable that would most contribute to a possible increase in injury risk. Melting ice could result in poor footing which could contribute to more stress on the hips and knees when quickly changing direction. Losing the edge of the skate could affect a player's ability to stop before the boards or absorb the impact from another player leading to more upper-body injuries. Ultimately the variable most within a player's control is how well they hydrate if conditions are warmer than expected. Proper hydration can help prevent muscle sprains and strains during the game.

**THN Columbus: Is there anything the players can do to prevent cold weather-related injuries?**

**Saad:** If the weather is especially cold on game day, players can help minimize the risk of injury by ensuring they warm up appropriately prior to hitting the ice. Cold muscles and tendons tend to have less tensile strength which means they aren't able to withstand as much pulling force. As a result, this could put them at a higher risk of becoming strained or tearing. Cold temperatures also slow down the chemical reactions necessary for muscle contraction and force generation. In general, a cold muscle is weaker and more prone to injury. With how frequently hockey players are coming off of the ice between shifts throughout a period and with the longer breaks between periods, it will be crucial for players to stay warm/loose and avoid getting too tight during their time off of the ice.

The Stadium Series Game at Ohio Stadium was announced over a year ago, and we're almost there. The time flew by and fans are ready for it. Hopefully, you are making your own preparations for the pregame and game. It's going to be a long day out in the cold for a lot of fans.

As far as the Blue Jackets and Red Wings, they will be taking all the necessary precautions to stay healthy during the game.

**What's Next?** The Jackets welcome in the Dallas Stars on Tuesday.

## The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Weekly Injury Report: Week 19

**By Spencer Lazary – February 25, 2025**

Now that the NHL has resumed play, it is time for another Columbus Blue Jackets' injury report.

The Blue Jackets were one of the teams that benefited a ton from the 4-Nations Face-Off break. It allowed several players to fully heal and return to the lineup.

They welcomed back both Kirill Marchenko and captain Boone Jenner back to the lineup, which will be a big help down the stretch.

Unfortunately, they also added Kevin Labanc to the IR, who is out for the rest of the season.

### **Now on to the injury report:**

#### **Injuries**

- D Erik Gudbranson (upper body) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 16; (54 Games)
- C Yegor Chinakhov (upper body); is on Injured Reserve retroactive to Nov. 27 (36 Games)
- C Sean Monahan (upper body); is on Injured Reserve retroactive to Jan. 7 (16 Games)
- RW Kevin Labanc (shoulder); is on Injured Reserve on Feb. 21 ( 1 Game)

**TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 245**

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Lindstrom Has Options at the NCAA Level

By William Espy – February 25, 2025

Cayden Lindstrom, the Columbus Blue Jackets' fourth overall pick this past summer, reportedly has an interesting decision ahead of him in the near future.

Lindstrom could be one of the first high-profile prospects to make the jump from the Canadian Hockey League (CHL) to the NCAA ranks. According to Aaron Portzline of *The Athletic*, "several college programs, including Ohio State, have made overtures to Lindstrom about making a move from the [Western Hockey League] to college hockey" (from 'Blue Jackets' Cayden Lindstrom could miss season, but his path to the NHL could be fascinating,' *The Athletic*. Feb 12, 2025).

If Lindstrom were to make the jump to the NCAA, there are quite a few destinations that could make sense for his development.

### **Ohio State Buckeyes**

Given the fact that Lindstrom's going to be headed to Columbus in the relatively near future regardless of where he goes to college, it would be wise for him to consider learning the city before he turns professional. As the only university mentioned by name in Portzline's article, Ohio State University is undoubtedly one of the most logical destinations for Lindstrom. He'd get the opportunity to adapt to the city of Columbus, which would ultimately make the transition to the professional game a little easier.

Lindstrom would be able to have in-person meetings with the Blue Jackets organization more regularly, and the team staff would be able to keep an eye on him. Plus, he'd likely get the opportunity to bond with some of his future teammates on a regular basis. It's not a luxury that many players have been able to experience, but with the new rules surrounding the NCAA and the CHL, Lindstrom could be the first of many players to go down that path.

The Buckeyes are a strong team, currently ranked sixth in the NCAA with a 20-8-2 record in the Big Ten. Historically, though, they haven't been the most successful program. They've only made it to the Frozen Four twice in the team's history, most recently in 2018.

### **Michigan Wolverines**

Now, it would be ironic for a member of the Blue Jackets organization to willingly sign with the University of Michigan after being drafted. However, the Blue Jackets have had quite a bit of talent come through their pipeline in recent years. Current head coach Brandon Naurato took over on an interim basis during the 2022-23 season, before being promoted to the permanent bench boss in Ann Arbor. Naurato coached current Blue Jackets Adam Fantilli and Gavin Brindley in his first season leading the program. That's not his only experience with a member of the Blue Jackets though. In 2021-22, he was an assistant coach when Kent Johnson was a Wolverine.

While another Blue Jacket heading to the widely hated University of Michigan would be disappointing for many in Columbus, it could be one of the smartest moves for Lindstrom's development.

### **Boston College/Boston University**

The arguments for both Boston College and Boston University are similar, so I figured it's more logical to include them together as much as fans of either team would undoubtedly hate the decision to be lumped with their biggest rival. Both are historic programs in one of the most competitive conferences

in the NCAA, Hockey East. Five of the top ten teams in the NCAA are in the Hockey East, with Boston College at the top of the standings and Boston University ranked seventh.

If the goal is to get Lindstrom playing in as many meaningful games as possible at the collegiate level, either school would give him that opportunity on an almost nightly basis. Both programs have five national championships and are consistently producing top prospects, who adjust to the NHL very quickly.

If Lindstrom does in fact make the jump to the NCAA, there are quite a few options for him. As a fourth-overall pick in the NHL, he'll be able to have his pick of the litter. Each school would have their benefits and issues for Lindstrom, but it would be hard for him to make a wrong decision.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Riding Wave of Momentum Heading into Stadium Series

By Mark Scheig – February 25, 2025

Welcome to Stadium Series week. For the Columbus Blue Jackets, they have a lot of things going for them. Momentum is clearly on their side on a few different things.

But in the midst of a heated playoff race, there is a fine line the Blue Jackets have to ride. On one hand, the Stadium Series game with the Detroit Red Wings is Saturday night. With a crowd that could exceed 90,000 fans, it will be a night many will remember for a long time.

Then on the other hand, it's a huge game in the standings. Once the game itself gets started, it's business as usual trying to get a big win.

The Blue Jackets have an opportunity to make a big week even bigger by getting wins. They have a pair of games this week before they get to the big game at Ohio Stadium. If they want to go three-for-three this week, they must turn their momentum into results.

### **4-Nations Bump**

Why do the Blue Jackets have so much momentum? That's because a few things are going their way at the same time. The first thing is Zach Werenski's recent performance at the 4-Nations Faceoff.

An argument could be made that Werenski was the best overall player at the 4-Nations. One model in particular by the Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn showed this.

Werenski was everywhere at the tournament. He led the 4-Nations in scoring with six points all assists. He logged heavy minutes while playing an important role on Team USA.

As we recently wrote about, Werenski finally got his chance on the big stage. He delivered in the same way he's delivered for the Blue Jackets all season.

Although Team USA lost in overtime, the momentum from this performance carried over into Saturday night's game against the Chicago Blackhawks. Werenski recorded a goal and two assists to help the Blue Jackets to an important 5-1 win in front of 18,809 fans at a sold out Nationwide Arena.

Not only was momentum there for Werenski, it's there for the Blue Jackets' fans too. His performance at the 4-Nations has energized the fan base. They were already excited with the Stadium Series coming up. But now that's been dialed up a few notches.

At the national level, Werenski got more well-deserved attention with his play. He's in the thick of the Norris Trophy race while even turning some heads for the Hart Trophy. He'll get another chance on national TV Saturday night to show how important he is to the Blue Jackets.

### **Stadium Series Bump**

Another obvious reason why there is momentum around the Blue Jackets is because of the big game itself. Having an outdoor game in Columbus has been five years in the making. It's even longer if you consider how long the desire has been there.

Think of what the atmosphere is going to look like come Saturday night. Famed Ohio Stadium is going to host an NHL hockey game. As Sean Kuraly put it on Monday, they're playing hockey "on hollowed ground."

To be the center of the hockey universe naturally comes with momentum. The players will have friends and family at the game. There will be that extra incentive to win this game in front of a mostly Blue Jackets' crowd. Energy should not be hard to find.

The Stadium Series is also a chance for Columbus to show itself off. They had that chance before when the NHL All-Star Game was in town. The overwhelming response to that was positive. It should be a similar experience this time as well.

With the expected boost that the Stadium Series will provide, that will create more momentum for fans to tune into Blue Jackets' hockey not only now but in the future. Excitement is off the charts with the fans. They will create one of the better atmospheres for an outdoor game once everyone is settled into their seats. They've waited a long time for this opportunity.

### **Playoff Race Bump**

Outdoor games of the past have had playoff implications as Dean Evason said on Monday. This Saturday will be no different. As of Monday afternoon, the Red Wings hold a two-point lead on the Blue Jackets in the Eastern Conference standings. With two games against each other this week, it could significantly impact how the race shakes out.

The Blue Jackets are treating every game like it's a playoff game given the standings. If the playoffs were to start today, they'd be on the outside looking in. That's all the motivation they need knowing how important this game is.

Aiding in the playoff race bump is the return of some of their injured players. Captain Boone Jenner returned to the lineup on Saturday night. He recorded an assist.

Kirill Marchenko came back on Saturday after suffering a broken jaw just three weeks ago. He returned ahead of schedule. Dante Fabbro returned to taking an elbow to the face. Having their captain, top-line winger and first-pair defenseman come back is a momentum boost. More help could be on the horizon.

Sean Monahan and Erik Gudbranson are skating. While it is unknown what an exact timeframe looks like, they could each be back later in March. Then consider the trade deadline and you have a situation in which the roster would be a huge momentum boost.

### **Need Results Now**

The Blue Jackets have a lot of momentum on their side. However, the only way the momentum matters is if they do something good with it. They have to get results in the form of wins.

The Blue Jackets are one prolonged losing streak away from being out of the playoff race. They know and understand the importance not only for this week but for their remaining 25 games.

The team should be feeling good about themselves given everything that's happening. Now it's up to them to parlay all of the good into something more meaningful. How great a story would it be if the Blue Jackets shocked the world and made the Stanley Cup Playoffs this season?

The Blue Jackets have the momentum. But they want a lot more. It starts this week by taking care of business against the Stars and Red Wings.

Just win. That should be the Blue Jackets' slogan in the midst of the momentum and excitement of what's to come.



## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Redeem Season: Kent Johnson Is The Guy We Thought He Was

**By Will Chase – February 25, 2025**

The Columbus Blue Jackets are boosted by several prolific high-scoring talents.

One of those is winger Kent Johnson.

In parts of four NHL seasons, the 22-year-old is enjoying a career year as he's back and healthy following an injury-shortened season a year ago.

Nearly one calendar year ago, Johnson's turbulent 2023-24 campaign came to an early close after suffering a labrum tear in his left shoulder in the closing seconds of a 4-1 loss to the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

Johnson's season got off to a bumpy start under one-and-done head coach Pascal Vincent as the forward was healthy scratched for their season opener. Then Johnson was sent down to the AHL in early November, where he scored 15 points (five goals, 10 assists) in 10 games before coming back to the NHL in early December.

The statistical numbers for Johnson were off. He didn't quite resemble the guy who scored 40 points (16 goals, 24 assists) a season prior and then the injury sealed his season.

Turn The Page

When the Jackets finally finished an ugly season and made wholesale changes from the front office to the coaching staff, including bringing in veteran head coach Dean Evason, the franchise turned the page and Johnson has as well.

Since training camp, we've heard Evason compliment Johnson and his game in various ways, giving him perhaps the ultimate compliment of being a "rink rat."

I heard prior to coming here what a rink rat he was.— Dean Evason

"What we really liked about him this camp is the pace that he's playing the game at. He's got tremendous stick skills obviously. He's playing the game at a fast pace."

This season, Johnson has displayed the offensive fireworks.

In 43 games, he has 38 points (19 goals, 19 assists), having already set career highs in goals, and is going to blow by his career bests in assists and points. Johnson's 19 goals place him tied for second on the club with Dmitri Voronkov as they trail Kirill Marchenko (21).

He got off to a good start with Saturday's two-goal game in the 5-1 win over the Chicago Blackhawks, which gave him three goals in his last two games. He has 12 points (seven goals, five assists) in 10 of his last 11 games.

After Alex Ovechkin's hat trick in Sunday afternoon's 7-3 win over the Edmonton Oilers, Ovechkin is now second but Johnson is third and still in great company.

Johnson and the Blue Jackets are back at it on Tuesday when they play the Dallas Stars at Nationwide Arena.

## The Athletic / Projecting the 2030 Olympic men's hockey rosters for Canada and the United States

**By Max Bultman and Corey Pronman – February 25, 2025**

It's been an incredible time for international hockey, with the 4 Nations Face-Off surpassing even the loftiest expectations for what the first best-on-best tournament in nine years would bring. Canada's overtime win over the United States in the championship game Thursday night was the exclamation point on a thrilling tournament — and a tremendous way to lead into the 2026 Olympics in Milan next year.

Odds are the rosters for that tournament will look very similar to the ones on display in Montreal and Boston. There will be some tinkering around the fringes, but with less than a year between the events, the cores will remain the same.

Looking ahead one more cycle, though, is a more revealing way to look at the future of both the U.S. and Canadian national teams and how the next wave of stars for both countries could fit in.

So, The Athletic's Max Bultman and Corey Pronman took an early run at projecting the 2030 Olympic rosters for both North American powerhouses.

Because the current U.S. team is so young, there are a lot of familiar faces in this projection.

Jack Eichel, Auston Matthews, Dylan Larkin, Tage Thompson, Charlie McAvoy, Zach Werenski and Matthew Tkachuk will all be into their 30s by then, but not so old that we wouldn't project them in the mix here. Their respective talent and track records give them a strong baseline.

So let's focus on the new names. Logan Cooley has taken a step forward this season in Utah and should continue to rise steadily between now and 2030. By then, he'll be 25 and should be a great fit between two very sound two-way wingers in Matt Boldy and Ryan Leonard.

Leonard takes some projecting, considering he's not even in the NHL yet, but he's a tough, two-way player who can score, kill penalties and play a hard-nosed game. Much of the same is true of Matthew Knies, who is already an important player in Toronto and should only get better in the next five years.

Matty Beniers, meanwhile, hasn't quite gotten back to the offense he found in his Calder Trophy season in 2022-23, but is still trending to be an excellent defensive forward who slots into that bottom line perfectly. He should be a top penalty killer for this group and brings elements any coaching staff would love.

It's fair to wonder if the fourth line could use a pure playmaker, as here it's made up of a lot of north-south, 200-foot players. But the obvious candidates we left off (such as Clayton Keller, Jason Robertson, James Hagens and Will Smith) don't have the same penalty-kill utility and aren't as projectable to tough matchups.

We have Cole Caufield as the 13th forward, but it's entirely possible he could work higher into this lineup. His chemistry with Hughes, dating back to their time at the USA Hockey National Team Development Program, is certainly appealing.

On defense, it's a very similar makeup to the current group, losing only Jaccob Slavin, Noah Hanifin and Adam Fox. Hanifin and Fox are right on that same age-32/33 bubble as some of the top forwards, but the U.S.'s young defense pipeline is promising enough that we gave the nod to Jake Sanderson (who was

the first call-up in this tournament), Luke Hughes and Zeev Buium — with Lane Hutson another potential option.

There are many capable options in goal, and including Connor Hellebuyck here is highly dependent on how he ages. He'll be 36 in early 2030. But Jake Oettinger would be a strong potential starter at age 31, and we'll take the bet on Spencer Knight — who has quietly performed well recently — re-emerging as a top goaltender as he enters his own prime.

Team Canada sees more turnover on its roster than Team USA likely will, with a lot of their important members on the 2025 4 Nations team aging out. Their blue line sees a massive revamp, and there is no returning goaltender.

The top-six forward group is a mixture of stars of today and tomorrow. Prime-aged superstars such as Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon remain important fixtures, but we expect the next generation of Canadian stars to be led by Macklin Celebrini, Connor Bedard and Adam Fantilli.

The third line featured some hard decisions. Dylan Guenther has been fantastic this season, but will he be the best choice in five years? Will Mitch Marner's play fall off? There are close calls and other reasonable candidates could have been picked. Some may argue for Gavin McKenna but this is a tough team to make. McKenna won't even be in the NHL for another 18 months, never mind being one of the top nine forwards in Canada in five years. We debated keeping Brandon Hagel in the mix and he could have subbed out one of the current fourth-liners.

This seems like a young blue line, but it won't be in 2030. We expect Owen Power, Thomas Harley and Noah Dobson will be established long-time major minutes defensemen by that point in their careers. Matthew Schaefer will be on the younger side, but we expect him to be a two-way star in the league by then as well.

The goaltending is a major question mark. Your guess is as good as ours. Canada lacks standout goalies in the NHL currently, and there isn't a no-doubt stud coming up the pipeline either. Some scouts are very high on Joshua Ravensbergen, but he's only 18 and goalies take a while typically to reach the highest echelon of their development.

## The Athletic / Weekend NHL rankings: Closing the book on a memorable 4 Nations Face-Off

By Sean McIndoe – February 25, 2025

We're back, because the NHL regular season is back. Not very much of it, though, with only two days' worth of games to go on for this week's rankings. In other words, don't expect many big changes from a few weeks ago.

Don't expect a ton of deep dives on those games either, because I'll be honest, it was a little tough to get hyped for matchups like Ducks/Bruins and Sharks/Flames after eight days of high-stakes best-on-best. Just a slight downshift in intensity, you might say. So sure, we'll talk NHL where we need to. But we're also going to get in one last round of 4 Nations talk, starting right now.

### **Bonus five: Final thoughts on the 4 Nations Face-off**

**5. Jacob Slavin** — Has anyone ever gone from underrated to so underrated they're overrated to "wait, even though we're all saying he's underrated I think he might somehow still be underrated" in one week? I'm not completely sure, but I do know there was a certain point in this tournament when Slavin broke my brain. I might still be having nightmares years from now.

**4. Elias Pettersson and Adam Fox** — One of the sure things of any short tournament is that a few star players will string together bad games and everyone will freak out, including people who'd be smart enough never to overreact to a bad three-game stretch in the regular season. But when the spotlight is brighter and everything feels more important, suddenly a mild slump becomes much more. And it's almost always nonsense.

Almost. I'm a bit worried about these two guys.

Pettersson is the easy one. He's coming off a bizarre year-long stretch that saw him sign a monster extension, struggle through a brutal postseason, and then look miserable while all the J.T. Miller drama played out. With that scenario finally over, 4 Nations felt like an ideal chance for him to rediscover his game, and maybe even a little bit of joy in playing it. Instead, he was all but invisible. No points, no real chances and barely any ice time. With that NMC looming, I think it's officially time to be concerned here.

As for Fox, you certainly can't say he wasn't noticeable. But that's not always a good thing for a defenseman, and Fox had a tough tournament in which he looked outmatched for stretches. Fox is a Norris winner, but that was in 2021, and it's starting to feel like it's fair to ask whether he's already hit his peak before settling in as a very-good-but-maybe-not-quite-elite player. That question seems to be resonating in New York — check the comments on this piece. It's not like the Rangers can afford much more in the way of bad news this season, so here's hoping Fox's showing was a blip and not a vision of the future.

**3. Brady Tkachuk** — If I'm a Senators fan, I'm very happy about two things. First, that Tkachuk got to play in by far the biggest hockey games of his life, and looked every bit like the sort of difference-maker who can elevate his game in big moments. And second, that the Sens are on their way to a playoff appearance this year, because good luck selling Tkachuk on a state of perpetual rebuild after the week he just had. Fans in Ottawa know the "maybe Brady will want to go play with his brother down south" narratives are coming, and a playoff run would help shut that noise off before it gets a chance to really get going.

**Not ranked: Brad Marchand** — Good tournament, great soundbites, more international gold for the collection, but the entire country is now back to hating you. Enjoy riding out the season and missing the playoffs, you cheap-shotting bum. But uh, stay healthy for 2026, we'll need you buddy jerkface.

**2. These guys who all get one sentence each** — Zach Werenski is an absolute stud. Erik Karlsson is potentially tradeable again. Dylan Larkin and (especially) Lucas Raymond might be even better than we think. Basically every Ranger looked bad, which seems suboptimal. The Charlie McAvoy situation is a mess and you hope he's going to be OK, but you're telling me the dude was already hurt when he sent Connor McDavid into low-earth orbit? Brock Nelson is maybe not the big-game deadline target we thought he might be. Mikko Rantanen didn't scare anyone and I am trying not to worry. Jack Hughes was fine defensively but just barely outscored his brothers, who are both defensemen and also did not play. Drew Doughty, still a stud. Also that one player you like is really good so now you can't say I didn't mention him.

**1. Jordan Binnington** — I apologize. While I see no need to go digging for specific soundbites, it's possible I may have spent the days before Thursday's final publicly suggesting that Binnington wasn't as good as Connor Hellebuyck, just based on flimsy premises like his numbers, the eye test or the way he kept giving up easy goals every game. This was, of course, incorrect. Binnington was actually giving up those goals on purpose to lull the Americans into a false sense of security before morphing into late-90s Dominik Hasek as soon as overtime arrived.

Brilliant, and I should have seen it coming. If we ever meet, our new national hero gets to throw one water bottle at my head.

### **Road to the Cup**

The five teams with the best chances of winning the Stanley Cup.

RIP to the legendary Mike Lange, one of the most memorable voices in hockey history. Rossi nails the tribute here.

**5. Vegas Golden Knights (34-17-6, +33 true goals differential\*)** — We all realize they're going to LTIR Shea Theodore and then use the cap room to trade for Rantanen, right? Start processing that now, you don't want to take the full brunt of the rage all at once when it happens.

**4. Edmonton Oilers (34-19-4, +24)** — I think we can all agree there's a non-zero chance Leon Draisaitl spent the last two weeks sitting at home and stewing over all the world's other top players having fun without him, and will now go nuclear on the league for the rest of the season.

**3. Dallas Stars (37-18-2, +45)** — Did you enjoy the Thomas Harley coming out party last week? As a guy who maybe got just a little bit ahead of myself when I had him as my long-shot Norris pick, I sure did. Also, based on last night, it's possible Jason Robertson is just a little bit cranky about being left off of Team USA.

**2. Washington Capitals (38-11-8, +68)** — Just a brutal tournament for all the Capitals stars, I didn't notice a single one of them the whole time. But I suppose it's possible that absolutely speed-bagging the Penguins and the Oilers in one weekend will be a small consolation.

**1. Winnipeg Jets (40-14-3, +68)** — It was a weird 4 Nations final to be a Jets fan. Hellebuyck didn't end up stealing gold, but looked fantastic even in defeat. Josh Morrissey got sick and couldn't play. And Kyle Connor was somehow a healthy scratch despite being the leading goal scorer for a team that would finish one goal short. None of that changes my view of the Jets as the team to beat right now.

(Also, Saturday night's shootout win over the Blues means we can now congratulate the Maple Leafs, annual winner of the "last team standing without a shootout" award. The trophy is in the mail.)

\*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.

**Not ranked:** Team Canada — Sorry, let's watch the goal again real quick, just to refresh our memories.

If I were drawing up the defense, I probably wouldn't leave the best player in the world wide open there, but the Americans did just that and then watched him pass the puck to Connor McDavid. (That's right, Mitch Marner is good again. Try to keep up.)

We didn't learn a ton about this team over the tournament, beyond that Sam Bennett is better than you thought and Brandon Hagel has jokes. Instead, 4 Nations was about confirming what we already knew but may have had room to doubt: Sidney Crosby is the greatest best-on-best player of all time, Connor McDavid can indeed win the big one and Nathan MacKinnon is unstoppable when he wants to be, at least for the first 65 minutes of every game.

And sure, the goaltending is still a question mark. It all worked out in the end this time, but maybe you bring Logan Thompson next time, just in case.

This wasn't the 2014 team, rolling through a best-on-best with such ruthless efficiency that today's fans barely even remember that tournament. The gap between Canada and the U.S. has all but disappeared, another key thing we already suspected we knew. And of course, teams like Finland and Sweden and beyond will have a thing or two to say about any future coronations.

Enjoy the win for now, and then get ready to do it all over again in another year. As defending champs. Again.

### **The bottom five**

The five teams headed toward dead last and the best lottery odds for a top pick that could be James Hagens, Matthew Schaefer or someone else.

The league announced that this year's draft will be held in Los Angeles on June 27 and 28. Remember, it's the debut of the decentralized format, where the top prospects will be in attendance but the teams themselves will not. The NHL is promising a "creative approach," and yes, that does fill me with a sense of dread, thanks for asking.

**5. Pittsburgh Penguins (23-27-9, -40)** — Yeah, I'm starting to think they may not make a big second-half run.

**4. Buffalo Sabres (23-27-5, -9)** — Siri, please find me a metaphor for the Sabres season that's a little too on-the-nose. Literally.

Yep, that works. Anyway, happy anniversary to those who celebrate.

**3. Nashville Predators (20-29-7, -40)** — After an ugly 4 Nations, you wonder what the next step will be with Juuse Saros. He's been the NHL's workhorse for years now, and it didn't seem to bother him. But with the season already lost, you wonder if it would make sense for the Predators to ease off down the stretch, if only to set him up for a rebound next year. Given his contract, they'll desperately need one. Getting badly outplayed by Nico Daws probably wasn't the start he was looking for.

**2. Chicago Blackhawks (17-33-7, -48)** — The big news is Seth Jones asking for a trade. It's worth noting that asking is not the same as demanding, and it's hard to envision a scenario where Jones and the five full years left of his \$9.5 million cap hit are dealt during the season, but it's one more sign that patience is running out for the post-tank Hawks to find their way back to playing meaningful hockey.

Also, shout out to Frank Pellico.

**1. San Jose Sharks (15-36-7, -65)** — It's all about the deadline now, and Eric has your trade tiers. The Tyler Toffoli scenario is interesting, but Eric thinks it's unlikely.

**Not ranked:** Team USA — Let's check in on how the Americans are responding after very publicly calling their shot and then falling just short.

**Team USA, stung by 4 Nations loss, draws inspiration from Olympics: 'That's the big one'**

Ah. Yes, of course. I might have thought that the championship game against your longtime rival, held on your home ice, in front of one of the largest audiences to ever watch a hockey game in your country, that you vowed to win on behalf of your president, might be "the big one." But no, it was actually the next tournament that really mattered all along. Good to know.

And sure, the Americans are in great shape to win in Italy next year, and again at the 2028 World Cup. The roster they sent to the 4 Nations was young enough that there's no reason to expect a major overhaul. There will be changes, because there always are, and the talent pool is deep enough that there are very good players who didn't make this roster and will be looking to force their way in next time. The future is bright.

The frustration is that the future has been bright for decades now, and Team USA can't quite get it across the finish line. They came as close as you possibly can last week, ending up one goal away in a tournament where several of their best players weren't available by the end. Would a Quinn Hughes or a Matthew Tkachuk or a Charlie McAvoy have been the difference? Would all three? We'll never know for sure, but it's not exactly hard to imagine.

It's possible, although not guaranteed, that this roster will be healthier and deeper next year. It's also possible they'll get elite goaltending again, although with that position you're never sure. Who knows if they'll have to go through some version of a Russian team. And of course, a year is a long enough time frame for new stars to emerge and change the balance of power. But however it plays out, the Americans will head into next year as strong contenders at the very least, if not the outright favorites.

And they'll be motivated, because apparently the next one is the big one.

## The Athletic / Steve Carell, Justin Bieber headline Los Angeles charity hockey game: 'These guys were ready'

By Eric Stephens – February 25, 2025

LOS ANGELES — Playing in a charity hockey game hosted by the L.A. Kings on Sunday, Justin Bieber took it upon himself to drop the gloves against a former NHL player.

"I can say I got beat up by Justin Bieber," said Jeremy Roenick, a recent inductee into the Hockey Hall of Fame. "That's a great day."

The "fight" they had saw Bieber, a noted hockey enthusiast and proud Toronto Maple Leafs fan, pull Roenick's jersey over the veteran's head in a tussle following a goal by Roenick. It was one of numerous lighthearted moments that came out of an event at Crypto.com Arena to raise money and support recovery efforts for the January wildfires that destroyed neighborhoods throughout suburban Los Angeles, including Pacific Palisades and Altadena.

Skate For LA Strong recognized the first responders who fought the destructive fires, with the Palisades and Eaton blazes claiming 29 lives and burning an estimated 16,200 structures. Those responders and their families were the honored attendees for Sunday's charity games, with four teams comprised of celebrities, firefighters, NHL alumni and other personalities in competition.

It was a motley crew of individuals coming together. Former MLB catcher Joe Mauer, a Minnesota native and resident who gravitated to baseball and basketball instead, played on ponds but went away from organized hockey when the family saw how expensive it was for his older brother to play. "I never thought I had to leave Minnesota to play a hockey game," Mauer joked. "Here we are."

There was no viral moment like at the 2017 NHL All-Star Weekend in Los Angeles, when Bieber was driven into the glass by Chris Pronger, complete with a perfectly captured photo of Bieber being smushed by the legendary defenseman, proudly wearing a devilish smile. But on Sunday, Bieber did get a drop pass from Jeff Carter and attempted a toe-drag move, only to be denied by Billy Blase, a 37-year-old Santa Monica native who played in the U.S. National Team Development Program and for Yale.

Steve Carell, a goalie in college before he gained fame on "The Office," was playing defense — and not all that detailed — on this afternoon for Team Black. Actor Taylor Kitsch showed off his hockey skills from his days of Junior A play in the BCHL by scoring a neat goal for Team Blue. Danny DeVito was one of the guest coaches and cracked off one-liners.

"We're going full bore on these guys," DeVito spoke of his pregame message for Team Blue. "I want to see chiclets." And of an early shift change, the diminutive star of "Taxi," "Batman Returns" and "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia" quipped, "That line wants to lie down."

"Stay at home," Will Ferrell, noted Kings fan and season-ticket holder, barked out to his Team Black players during the game. "Stay at home. I don't know what that means. But stay at home."

Manon Rhéaume, twice a world champion goalie for Canada who once played in two exhibition games for the Tampa Bay Lightning, wanted no part of the net.

"Especially in a game like this," Rhéaume said, smiling. "Nobody can play defense."

Levity and fun were the order of the day.



"I know a lot of people that have lost their homes," said David Boreanaz, Philadelphia Flyers fan and star of "Bones" and "SEAL Team." "In speaking with them, it doesn't stop. The grief doesn't stop, and it stays with them. And this is an opportunity to shed some grief for them, give some healing for them."

Team Red, with actors Vince Vaughn and Cobie Smulders running the bench, was the last team standing as it won both of its games in shutout fashion. Vaughn threw credit Smulders' way in jest, saying the "How I Met Your Mother" star and member of the Marvel Universe was "doing the little things. Day in and day out. You see it on the ice." Smulders and her husband, actor Taran Killam, lost their home in the Palisades.

The competitive element that fueled the former NHL players in their careers quickly bubbled to the surface. Vaughn didn't have to channel Peter La Fleur, his "Dodgeball" character, to provide inspiration for a ragtag group.

"These guys were ready," Vaughn said. "I said, 'Just don't get content. There's one more to go.' And I didn't have to say anything. These guys were off the leash and ready. I felt bad for the other team at some point."

Roenick, with tongue in cheek, chimed in, "We were a well-oiled machine today. There's no question about it."

But there was a serious element that couldn't be ignored. The Kings were the first Los Angeles sports team to be directly impacted as their scheduled Jan. 8 home game against the Calgary Flames was postponed. The Los Angeles Rams had to relocate to State Farm Stadium in Phoenix — the home of the Arizona Cardinals — to play their first-round NFL playoff game. The NBA's Lakers and Clippers also had to move home contests.

The Kings helped lead the way in recovery efforts. Their practice facility in El Segundo became a donation center. Team president Luc Robitaille worked with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman on arranging the charity game. Teams throughout the league made donations through 50-50 ticket sales at their home games.

"I remember talking to Craig Conroy, who's the GM in Calgary," Robitaille said. "No one hesitated. We knew we had to cancel the game and move on. And then we saw how it just seemed to get bigger and bigger for the next few days."

"Those are things that happen and there's things that are much more important. Even though we love our game and it's our job and everything, it was way above anything that we've ever seen."

Jason Northgrave, a firefighter based out of El Segundo, was on the front lines of the Palisades blaze. Hockey is in Northgrave's blood. A native of London, Ont., who counts himself as a lifelong Toronto Maple Leafs fan, he cherished moments such as meeting Rob Blake, the Hall of Fame defenseman and current Kings general manager, or Dion Phaneuf skating with him and his son. He reveled in hearing the "game plan" from coaches Ferrell and Snoop Dogg.

"For me today, growing up a hockey fan and being here getting to play with some guys that I grew up watching, it's amazing," Northgrave said. "And having the celebrities here too to come out and show their love and support means a lot."

## The Athletic / Before the NHL, an all-Black hockey league helped to innovate the modern game

**By Julian McKenzie – February 25, 2025**

Jean-Marie Guerrier was surprised when he first learned about the Colored Hockey League of the Maritimes (CHLM), particularly as a volunteer for Black History Ottawa working to push more stories to educate the culture of Canadians of African descent. Guerrier is not alone in his discovery, as many are unaware of how prominent Black history has featured itself in a predominantly White sport.

But that could change.

This past week, the existence of the CHLM was celebrated through youth hockey clinics, a presentation and a panel on the league's history. The league was acknowledged during the Ottawa Senators' Black History Month celebration game Saturday. And on Monday, a game honoring the CHLM's anniversary will be played at the Canadian Tire Centre in Ottawa, featuring volunteer players representing the Halifax Eureka's and Dartmouth Jubilees, the two squads who played in the league's inaugural game in 1895.

Four Black Nova Scotia-based community leaders once enticed people to join their churches and grow their congregations in a unique way: a church hockey league that would see Black men attend service in the mornings and play the sport afterward. This year marks the 130th anniversary of the CHLM. Hundreds of Black players played for teams across Eastern Canada in provinces such as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island decades before the NHL began play in 1917.

"It helps to get over the perception people have sometimes: that hockey is not for Black people, or Black people don't play hockey or participate in hockey," said Guerrier, the vice president and treasurer of Black History Ottawa.

"With this commemorative game, we have players that are in their 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s who have been playing hockey for a long time, as well as youth who participate. The fact that a lot of people learn about this league, some for the first time, it really inspires them to keep going with their dreams — especially for the youth — of being a hockey player."

The CHLM's existence predates Hockey Hall of Famer Willie O'Ree, who broke the NHL's color barrier in January 1958, and even fellow Hockey Hall of Famer Herb Carnegie, long considered the best Black player who never made the NHL but played on the first all-Black line in professional hockey.

Long after the league's end in the 1930s, its story continues to hold interest. Its innovations and impact are seen in the pro ranks, all the way to the NHL.

The history of the league was documented by Canadian researchers George and Darril Fosty, in the book "Black Ice: The Lost History of the Colored Hockey League of the Maritimes 1895-1925," which was released in 2004. Eighteen years later, the documentary "Black Ice" was based on the book and featured LeBron James, his longtime business partner Maverick Carter and rapper Drake as executive producers. The documentary won a People's Choice Documentary Award at the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival.

In the book, Jubilees goalie Henry Franklyn is noted as the first goaltender to make saves while falling to his knees, a style that has morphed into the butterfly goaltending style that is commonplace today. Additionally, the slap shot, long attributed to Montreal Canadiens legend Bernie "Boom Boom"

Geoffrion, was innovated by Eureka's star Eddie Martin in the late 1800s and used often in the early 1900s.

George Fosty believes Martin's accuracy and power in hockey stemmed from his skills in another sport. Martin spent the warmer months playing baseball, as did many of the league's participants, and similarly swung his hockey stick as he would a baseball bat.

"People made note of this in the newspapers," Fosty said. "There's at least two newspaper accounts of teams complaining about him and the accuracy of his shot. But it makes sense that Martin was a baseball player and he had taken his skill level to hockey and incorporated the style of swinging at the puck in the same way he would have swung at a baseball."

The CHLM faced its share of racism throughout its heyday. White teams and leagues barred Black players from joining theirs. Additionally, Black teams could only play months after White teams and leagues had concluded their seasons, meaning CHLM games were often played in poor ice conditions.

Still, fans of many races attended league contests, and the games were covered by local media. The league was seen as faster and more physical compared to its counterparts.

The CHLM's best teams competed against each other annually for the Colored Hockey Championship, similarly to how White teams battled for the Stanley Cup, known then as the Dominion Hockey Challenge Cup. However, CHLM teams never crossed over and competed for the Cup.

"We don't quite understand why no team ever challenged for the Stanley Cup because there were at least two teams, maybe three, that would have been probably better candidates than some of these other teams that had gone out and sent out letters and requests," Fosty said. "I would think that the Halifax Eureka's, for example, and maybe even the West End Rangers out of Charlottetown would have been better teams than the Dawson Nuggets."

Despite the CHLM's growth, it ended in the 1930s with many of its original players retiring. Real-world factors such as the Great Depression and other economic constraints also played a role in the league coming to a close.

"This league survived racism. It survived the Halifax Explosion, survived World War I. It finally didn't survive the Great Depression," Fosty said. "That was the last straw that broke the camel's back."

The Fosty brothers came across the history of the league while writing another book, "Splendid is the Sun: The 5000-Year History of Hockey." It took them seven years to complete the book, which was released in October 2004. They met with local historians such as Bob Dawson, who helped promote their findings. Dawson is one-third of the first all-Black forward line in Canadian university hockey history as a member of the Saint Mary's University men's hockey team in February 1970.

Despite initial skepticism and criticism from journalists and hockey historians — Fosty says he and his brother were even called "frauds" — the CHLM has now received recognition and commemoration.

"I guess that is due to the work of George, Darril and myself to keep that story alive and to keep it out there, to the point where more and more people have come to accept that history and highlight it vis-à-vis articles, podcasts and so forth," Dawson said.

In 2020, Canada Post released a stamp in honor of the Colored Hockey Championship, featuring teams from the league. The stamp "recognizes the achievements and struggles of pioneering Black Canadian players who overcame adversity, broke down racial barriers and changed how ice hockey is played."

Last October, the Canadian government recognized the league as "an event of national historic significance" through Parks Canada's National Program of Historical Commemoration. Last Monday, a

plaque celebrating the league was unveiled at the Black Culture Centre for Nova Scotia in Halifax. This came after Dawson filed a nomination to the Canadian government, seeking to bring more awareness to the “history and the importance” of the CHLM.

On Monday, Dawson hopes more people continue to discover how intertwined hockey is with Black Canadian culture.

“I strongly believe that it’s more than just a game,” Dawson said. “Blacks are part of that history, and Black hockey history is part of Canadian history.”

## ESPN / NHL trade deadline 2025: Preview, picks in play for 32 teams

By Ryan S. Clark & Kristen Shilton – February 25, 2025

The 2024-25 NHL trade season began early, as the Carolina Hurricanes landed Mikko Rantanen and the New York Rangers secured J.T. Miller. But many big names remain on the board, raising the usual questions as we look ahead to the March 7 deadline:

Who are the contenders that could make a big push? Which teams are caught between either going for a wild-card spot or moving on from players to collect draft capital? And how can the teams that are destined for the lottery use the deadline to gain more draft picks for their rebuilds?

Here's a comprehensive look at what the trade deadline could mean for every team, complete with the players and picks that are expected to be in play, as well as the salary cap restrictions. Plus, we identify the moves we think each team should make.

Stats are collected from sites such as Natural Stat Trick, Hockey Reference and Evolving Hockey. Cap space figures are per PuckPedia as of Feb. 23.

Note: Kristen Shilton provided the guide for the Atlantic and Metropolitan teams, while Ryan S. Clark handled the Central and Pacific clubs.

### **ATLANTIC DIVISION**

#### **Boston Bruins**

**Deadline status: Proceed with caution**

**Cap space: \$5.72 million**

**Players, picks in play: Trent Frederic, Justin Brazeau, Morgan Geekie, Parker Wotherspoon**

The Bruins are in a tough spot. Boston doesn't look like a contender this season but there's no desire to throw in the towel. So, does GM Don Sweeney go fishing for a low-risk rental or two to give Boston a potential boost? Or does he listen to offers for upcoming free agents such as Frederic and Brazeau and simply let the Bruins ride this season out (mostly) as is and see how the chips fall?

Boston's likely best bet is to stand pat and figure out the organization's optimal next direction in the offseason. The Bruins have been battered by injuries -- the hole left by Hampus Lindholm has been particularly tough -- but there's no reason to make any rash moves, either. Sweeney should do his due diligence without the expectation of making the Bruins better or worse.

#### **Buffalo Sabres**

**Deadline status: Motivated dealers**

**Cap space: \$22.73 million**

**Players, picks in play: Bowen Byram, Dylan Cozens, Jordan Greenway, Jack Quinn, Jason Zucker**

Buffalo has let another season slip away, and the best thing GM Kevyn Adams can do to salvage anything from this mess is to be an active trader at the deadline. The Sabres have players of interest to contending clubs -- like Zucker and Greenway -- and young players who haven't panned out for the organization -- hello, Cozens and Quinn! -- that will continue losing value if Adams doesn't act soon.

There's no use in pretending this Sabres' squad can just run it back next season and hope something magically changes. Adams standing pat at the deadline won't benefit Buffalo now or in the future. If the

Sabres are serious about ever seeing the playoffs again, then the road there starts by making hard decisions right now.

### **Detroit Red Wings**

**Deadline status: Optimistic adders**

**Cap space: \$7.84 million**

**Players, picks in play: Amadeus Lombardi, Alex Lyon, Carter Mazur, Jeff Petry, Vladimir Tarasenko**

Detroit has pushed its way into the playoff picture this season, and GM Steve Yzerman would be well-served in helping the team stay there by making a few key additions at the deadline -- namely, another center and a defenseman.

Yzerman could target players on expiring contracts such as Jake Evans, or even guys with some remaining term like Ryan Strome or Connor Murphy. Regardless of which players Yzerman brings on board, his strategy should be to see the Red Wings get better by March 7 and take advantage of their impressive surge.

Detroit has waited a long time to be in this position again, and it would behoove Yzerman to give his players confidence in their ability to stay in the hunt through April.

### **Florida Panthers**

**Deadline status: Cautious adders**

**Cap space: \$2.73 million**

**Players, picks in play: Spencer Knight, Tomas Nosek, Nate Schmidt**

Florida doesn't have much to dangle out there at the deadline. It has no picks in the first three rounds of this upcoming draft, and it won't be looking to move players on the roster either given how well the season's gone. It's exactly for that reason Florida is unlikely to do much at all before March 7.

The Panthers don't have a weakness so obvious it must be addressed by GM Bill Zito. Perhaps an additional defenseman or a depth forward would give the reigning Stanley Cup champions some insurance on what they hope will be another long spring. If nothing materializes to Zito's satisfaction -- that works with his limited resources -- Florida will be no worse off. It's an enviable spot to be in.

### **Montreal Canadiens**

**Deadline status: Set the market**

**Cap space: \$7.55 million**

**Players, picks in play: Joel Armia, Christian Dvorak, Jake Evans, David Savard**

For a brief moment, Montreal looked like it was putting together a special run. But the Canadiens went into the 4 Nations break on a 1-7-1 skid, six points out of a wild-card spot and with little reason to believe GM Kent Hughes shouldn't be trading away whatever assets he can by the deadline.

Montreal has a slew of pending UFAs -- Armia, Evans, Dvorak, et al. -- who could be valuable additions in more competitive lineups, and the potential returns might set the Canadiens up well for future seasons.

Evans is likely to draw the most interest because of his age (28). Given the lack of a long-term deal coming together, Hughes should push hard to find a suitor for Evans now while he's garnering serious attention.

## **Ottawa Senators**

**Deadline status: Breakthrough adders**

**Cap space: \$1.66 million**

**Players, picks in play: Michael Amadio, Anton Forsberg, David Perron**

Ottawa is holding fast to a wild-card spot, and retaining it should put the Senators in the market to add at the deadline. Or at least that's their goal.

The reality? They don't have much to offer. Ottawa has a weak prospect pool, only one first-round pick in the next two drafts, its exciting young core is mostly locked in, and there's little cap space to work with on building around it.

GM Steve Staios will simply have to get creative. Ottawa needs a forward and defenseman, at minimum, to give itself a chance of staying on track in the wide-open Eastern Conference. Brandon Tanev and Ryan Donato both make sense in the Senators' scheme; Ivan Provorov could help boost the blue line. Staios could also prioritize veteran savvy, considering the lack of postseason experience in his current group. David Savard or Carson Soucy might be viable targets from that perspective.

## **Tampa Bay Lightning**

**Deadline status: Bold adders**

**Cap space: \$3.97 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2026 first-round pick, Nick Perbix, Conor Sheary**

The Lightning have been perennial deadline adders because they believe -- with good reason -- that they can make a Cup run any season. And GM Julien BriseBois should feel particularly emboldened considering his team's play has improved of late. What the Lightning needs most is forward help; particularly in the bottom six. The team is too top-heavy; the stars are performing to standard, but they're not getting a ton of consistent support elsewhere.

Alex Tuch's name keeps bubbling up around Tampa Bay because he'd be an ideal fit -- he has got the speed, skill and versatility (plus some edge) and a reasonable \$4.75 million cap hit. Kyle Palmieri is another option BriseBois should pursue. The Lightning could pursue Jake Evans if they target a center.

Coach Jon Cooper gets the pieces to fit and creates chemistry even in the shortest spans (i.e. at the 4 Nations Face-Off). BriseBois can do the shopping; chef Cooper will make the most of Tampa Bay's ingredients.

## **Toronto Maple Leafs**

**Deadline status: Now or never**

**Cap space: \$2.20 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2026 first-round pick, Easton Cowan, Fraser Minten, Nick Robertson**

Toronto has to be done tinkering. It hasn't worked, not when the stakes are highest (i.e., in the playoffs), and the Leafs are running out of time to see their vaunted core carry them to the Cup. Toronto's main problem is it doesn't have much to offer outside of its top prospects such as Cowan and Minten. But if GM Brad Treliving wants to add a true difference-maker (and he should), those players represent the going rate.

The Leafs must acquire a reliable third-line center who won't get run over in the postseason. Ryan O'Reilly -- who was brought in as a deadline addition in 2023 -- or Brayden Schenn would qualify. And Jake Evans has been tied to the Leafs for a reason, too.

Toronto would benefit from adding another defenseman, but it would need to be a short-term veteran (like Carson Soucy) so Treliving can put the majority of his assets into adding the right forward.

## **METROPOLITAN DIVISION**

### **Carolina Hurricanes**

**Deadline status:** Waiting it out

**Cap space:** \$499,000

**Players, picks in play:** 2025 first-round pick, 2026 first-round pick, Alexander Nikishin

Carolina got a jump on the league when it acquired Mikko Rantanen from Colorado in January. Rantanen hasn't found his stride with the Hurricanes -- with just one goal and two points in six games -- but these things can take time. Hence why Carolina brought in Rantanen well before March 7.

The Hurricanes also added Taylor Hall for some veteran forward help, and if Carolina were to do anything else before the deadline it should be in the same vein. GM Eric Tulsky should look to a skater like Jake Evans to ensure the Hurricanes are stout down the middle. Depending on the ask on another winger -- such as Mathieu Olivier or another low-risk player on an expiring contract -- it could give Carolina the boost it needs to maximize an already impressive collection of offensive talent.

### **Columbus Blue Jackets**

**Deadline status:** Conservative adders

**Cap space:** \$68.06 million

**Players, picks in play:** 2025 first-round pick, Mathieu Olivier, Ivan Provorov

Columbus was fortunate to have plucked Dante Fabbro off waivers from Nashville as a pre-deadline addition who has worked out nicely so far. But don't expect GM Don Waddell to stop there. The Blue Jackets have exceeded expectations -- even without Boone Jenner in the lineup most of the season and missed time for Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko -- and Waddell will make an effort to reward his group with some depth acquisitions to give it a shot to compete until the end.

Ryan Donato or Nick Robertson would be interesting options to fill bottom-six roles, and Scott Laughton would be a versatile player for Columbus to slot somewhere, too. The real question is whether Waddell has confidence that when Jenner and Monahan are both available, the pair can play up to their usual standard. If not, he'll want to take advantage of the trade market to keep Columbus from slipping out of the playoff bubble.

### **New Jersey Devils**

**Deadline status:** Add, add, add

**Cap space:** \$1.30 million

**Players, picks in play:** 2025 second-round pick, 2026 first-round pick, Anton Silayev

New Jersey is another squad that needs to build down the middle. Erik Haula has been a strong stopgap as the Devils' third-line center, but it wouldn't hurt to upgrade there. Trent Frederic would benefit from a change of scenery, and he could slide around the Devils' middle six depending on injuries or other



trade acquisitions. And there's always the potential for a reunion in New Jersey with former Devil Kyle Palmieri.

The Devils have enough talent on defense to feel good about their blue-line status now and in the future. If GM Tom Fitzgerald really wants to push his chips in, then scoring depth and perhaps adding another goaltender -- given Jacob Markstrom's injury status -- should be the priority. And the sooner, the better, too -- New Jersey appears primed for a playoff run, and bringing in those new players to get acclimated will be huge for the Devils' chances.

#### **New York Islanders**

**Deadline status: Rejuvenating adders**

**Cap space: \$2.73 million**

**Players, picks in play: Brock Nelson, Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Kyle Palmieri**

Given that the Islanders have a shot at the postseason, it's only right for GM Lou Lamoriello to tweak his roster enough that they stay in that mix. Nelson and Palmieri could both be traded to potentially return what the Islanders are lacking -- and that's a bona fide scoring threat.

Would the former Leafs GM consider a reunion with Toronto's Nick Robertson, who, given the right opportunity and appropriate ice time, might provide that extra punch up front? Nothing should be off the table when it comes to adding a young forward in that vein.

This team also has the worst power play in the league, so any skater the Islanders bring in should have some experience on special teams. Lamoriello should also capitalize on the interest in his veteran forwards even if it's just acquiring future assets -- New York went four consecutive seasons without a first-round draft pick. Time to start making up for that drought.

#### **New York Rangers**

**Deadline status: Shopping cart is out**

**Cap space: \$11.99 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2026 first-round pick, Will Borgen, Zac Jones, Ryan Lindgren, K'Andre Miller**

The Rangers followed the Hurricanes' lead and got into their trade business early -- Jacob Trouba, Filip Chytil, Kaapo Kakko and Victor Mancini are out; J.T. Miller and Borgen are in. But the Rangers shouldn't stop there. Although this team spiraled early this season, it has rebounded to be in the playoff hunt again, and GM Chris Drury's addition of Miller showed his belief in New York staying within reach of a wild-card spot.

Miller and Lindgren haven't been consistent difference-makers on the blue line, and swapping them for new options will take pressure off Adam Fox to do it all on the Rangers' back end. Mario Ferraro might be of assistance there, or if Drury wanted to take on a pending RFA like Bowen Byram, it could be an audition for how the two sides might match up in a longer-term relationship.

But the Rangers' focus has to be on the here and now. Filling in the blanks with some second- and third-line scoring is going to provide insurance New York needs given the roller-coaster seasons that most of their forwards have endured. Drury can't be too conservative if New York is going to have a successful stretch drive.

#### **Philadelphia Flyers**

**Deadline status: Selling sunset (on the season)**

**Cap space: \$6.55 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2025 first-round pick, Scott Laughton, Rasmus Ristolainen**

It's highly unlikely that the Flyers make the postseason. Therefore, GM Danny Briere should be accepting serious inquiries. Briere already flipped Morgan Frost and Joel Farabee to Calgary for Andrei Kuzmenko, a prospect and picks.

Whatever Briere targets in return for Philadelphia's other players must be with a similar eye on the next steps in the team's rebuild -- namely bolstering the organization's goalie depth and stocking the cupboards with some exciting prospects for future middle-six and blue-line roles. Sounds simple enough, right?

To be clear, it's not all doom and gloom for the Flyers. Matvei Michkov has provided a fine boost in his rookie campaign, and there are intriguing players in the franchise's pipeline. But the returns for Laughton and Ristolainen could help set up Philadelphia for even more success down the road given what genuine interest there is out there for their services. Briere should keep his phone close.

### **Pittsburgh Penguins**

**Deadline status: Soft dealers**

**Cap space: \$8.47 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2025 first-round pick, Anthony Beauvillier, Matt Grzelcyk, Matt Nieto, Rickard Rakell**

Pittsburgh is likely too far out of the playoff picture to merit GM Kyle Dubas bringing on depth skaters to help boost the Penguins' chances of making it. Yes, Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin & Co. would probably prefer that to throwing in the towel, but it's important to be realistic.

Pittsburgh's focus can begin turning toward the future, and that means putting Rakell out there for teams with current postseason aspirations and prospects they can send back to a Penguins group in need of fresh young faces. Dubas has prioritized prospects in the past who are closer to NHL-ready than not, and that strategy has come with mixed results. Looking at the quality of these skaters' long-term potential is critical.

Pittsburgh has avoided the "R" word for a while, but this offseason could tell a different tale. Dubas has some assets to toss out there now to expedite whatever process is going to turn Pittsburgh back into a perennial contender -- whether it's called a rebuild, a retool, a reload or something else.

### **Washington Capitals**

**Deadline status: Better be adding**

**Cap space: \$3.65 million**

**Players, picks in play: Alexander Alexeyev, Hendrix Lapierre, Sonny Milano**

The Capitals have been this season's surprising success story, and not just because Alex Ovechkin is closing in on Wayne Gretzky's goal-scoring record. It only makes sense for GM Chris Patrick to capitalize on that by adding some depth to the lineup.

They could use some help in their bottom six at center and on the wing. Veterans like Yanni Gourde, Scott Laughton and Brandon Tanev could all be intriguing short-term options to complement Washington's younger core, which has done well this season but still doesn't have the kind of experience those more seasoned skaters bring to the ice and the dressing room.

But it's crucial for the Capitals not to disrupt the chemistry they've worked hard to cultivate and that has continuously paid off for them. We're not talking drastic, swing-for-the-fences trades here. It's about Washington feeling confident that it has enough personnel to carry it through what could be a long spring.

## **CENTRAL DIVISION**

### **Chicago Blackhawks**

**Deadline status:** Continue adding to the farm system

**Cap space:** \$18.21 million

**Players, picks in play:** F Ryan Donato, D Seth Jones, F Pat Maroon, D Alec Martinez, F Craig Smith

With Seth Jones telling the Chicago Sun-Times that he's talking to the club about a potential trade, it presents an opportunity for the Blackhawks to add more draft capital. The key word here being: potential.

Jones has three years remaining on his deal worth \$9.5 million annually. Having such a sizable salary cap hit makes moving on from Jones a challenge.

How do the interested teams go about clearing the space to make a deal happen -- while also ensuring they present the sort of package that pleases the Blackhawks? As for the Blackhawks, a Jones trade would likely include salary retention, meaning they would have all three retention spots filled for this season (they'll get Jake McCabe and Mikko Rantanen off their books in the offseason).

### **Colorado Avalanche**

**Deadline status:** Strengthen the second line

**Cap space:** \$4.76 million

**Players, picks in play:** two 2025 second-round picks, 2026 first-round pick, 2027 first-round pick

Anything or nearly anyone could be in play with the Avalanche. Just ask Mikko Rantanen.

But more directly, adding more second-line help appears to be the area of greatest need. Since they won the Stanley Cup in 2022, they've struggled to create a consistent second line. It's possible they might have that once Valeri Nichushkin returns from injury and he's paired with Jonathan Drouin and Casey Mittelstadt, who has been inconsistent during his first full season in Denver.

Or they could seek to add reinforcements elsewhere, with the idea that it could be the difference between securing a Central Division spot or a wild-card entry.

### **Dallas Stars**

**Deadline status:** Maybe add more? Maybe hold firm?

**Cap space:** \$4.60 million

**Players, picks in play:** 2026 first-round pick, 2027 first-round pick

The Stars are in a championship window and have been for the past few years. But they are in one of the more nuanced situations ahead of the deadline.

They've built much of the current core through the draft, which is why they're hesitant to trade draft capital. But they already moved on from their 2025 first-round pick and a conditional 2025 third-round pick to get Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci.

That trade reinforces that they could be willing to part with draft capital for the right player or players. Is that something they could do when it comes to filling the void left by Miro Heiskanen's injury? He's expected to return by the playoffs, which presents one of two options: Do the Stars try to add more help? Or will prospect Lian Bichsel show the coaching staff and front office that he can be trusted with an extended run on the big club?

### **Minnesota Wild**

**Deadline status: Add scoring help around the edges**

**Cap space: \$8.23 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2025 second-round pick, 2026 first-round pick, 2026 second-round pick**

The challenge facing the Wild is finding legitimate scoring options on team-friendly terms. Their collective goal prevention is why they're challenging for a playoff spot. Their collective inability to consistently score goals, however, could be what gets them eliminated in the first round.

They're around league average in goals per game, but their plus-4 goal differential was the second lowest among the Western Conference teams in a playoff spot at the start of the 4 Nations.

What complicates everything is the combined \$14.743 million cap hit from the Zach Parise and Ryan Suter buyouts. That drops to \$1.6 million in the offseason. But until then, it leaves the Wild needing to get creative in order to get more scoring power in the lineup. Once Kirill Kaprizov comes off LTIR, his \$9 million cap hit must be taken into account.

### **Nashville Predators**

**Deadline status: Figure out the strongest path for the future**

**Cap space: \$23.56 million**

**Players, picks in play: F Gustav Nyquist**

**Are they in a rebuild, a retool or somewhere in the middle?**

The Predators are in a bizarre position. Two years ago, the franchise moved on from key players like Matt Duchene and Ryan Johansen, only to emerge as a playoff team the following season. After adding major free agents in Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault and Brady Skjei this offseason, they now have eight players with deals that have more than three years left, with six of them earning more than \$5 million annually.

It leaves Gus Nyquist as the only pending UFA who could be moved. The Predators have quite a bit to consider before and after the trade deadline.

### **St. Louis Blues**

**Deadline status: Strike if the right deal is there**

**Cap space: \$4.69 million**

**Players, picks in play: F Radek Faksa**

The Blues were eight points out of the final Western Conference wild-card spot heading into the 4 Nations break; can they get back in the mix?

They could move on from their first-round picks over the next three years should they want to use that draft capital to make a trade. But they lost a 2025 second-round pick along with a 2025 third-round pick

due to the Philip Broberg and Dylan Holloway offer sheets. It's not that the Blues can't use draft picks to facilitate a deal. But it's tougher to justify for a team for which a playoff berth seems remote.

#### **Utah Hockey Club**

**Deadline status: Use that cap space**

**Cap space: \$21.06 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2026 second-round pick, 2026 third-round pick**

They have a healthy amount of cap space and owners who have made it clear they're willing to spend. And while the team has a full war chest of draft picks, is it worth parting with first-rounders to make additions for a wild-card race, when picks later in the draft could suffice?

What could help GM Bill Armstrong answer those questions is if the UHC can cut its pre-4 Nations wild-card gap from six points to a margin that suggests a serious push for the playoffs is possible. If so, the Utah Hockey Club could make the inaugural campaign of hockey in Utah a memorable one.

#### **Winnipeg Jets**

**Deadline status: Be aggressive but strategic**

**Cap space: \$8.69 million**

**Players, picks in play: F Nikolaj Ehlers, 2025 first-round pick, 2026 first-round pick**

Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff has made it clear at the past few trade deadlines that he's not afraid to make moves to bolster his team's chances. The expectation is he'll take the same approach this season, considering the Jets have emerged as the biggest (positive) surprise in the Western Conference.

What makes this particular deadline a critical one is that the Jets have five pending UFAs and four pending RFAs. It's a group that includes Ehlers, who presents the front office with a dilemma. Do the Jets use the deadline to move Ehlers and get a player with cost certainty? Or do they hold on to him for the playoffs, with the idea they could trade his rights for something before free agency if the sides can't reach a deal?

#### **PACIFIC DIVISION**

##### **Anaheim Ducks**

**Deadline status: Keep ears open for advantageous deals**

**Cap space: \$60.86 million**

**Players, picks in play: D Brian Dumoulin, F Robby Fabbri**

Even though the Ducks are in a rebuild, this season was about making some form of progress. They've done that, considering they had 54 points through 54 games having not finished with more than 60 points in each of the past two seasons.

But they also entered the 4 Nations nine points out of the final wild-card spot. It's within the same margin as the Blues, Flames and Utah Hockey Club. And the Ducks have quite a bit of cap space should they want to utilize that advantage.

While it's clear the Ducks are making progress, is it the sort of progress that turns into a playoff appearance this season -- or do they keep building for future seasons?

##### **Calgary Flames**

**Deadline status: Make the necessary moves to stay in playoff contention**

**Cap space: \$63.67 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2025 first-round pick via FLA, 2025 first-round pick via NJD, 2025 second-round pick, 2026 first-round pick via VGK**

It's clear the Flames need scoring help. In fact, they need quite a bit of it considering they entered the 4 Nations averaging 2.64 goals per game, which ranked 30th out of the NHL's 32 teams. They have four first-round draft picks between the 2025 and 2026 cycles, and the necessary cap space to facilitate a deal.

What's unclear, however, is if the Flames are the proverbial chicken or the egg. They returned from 4 Nations just three points out of the final wild-card spot, while on a three-game losing streak. The front office could decide that this simply might not be the year. Remember, this is a team that traded away Noah Hanifin, Jacob Markstrom, Elias Lindholm, Nikita Zadorov, Chris Tanev and Tyler Toffoli last season -- maybe the retool needs a little more time.

### **Edmonton Oilers**

**Deadline status: Find creative ways to strengthen their lineup**

**Cap space: \$5.16 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2025 second-round pick, 2026 first-round pick, 2026 second-round pick**

The Oilers are a top-four team in goals per game and a top-eight team in goal prevention; in other words, this is one of the NHL's more well-rounded teams.

But given their current cap restrictions, are the defending Western Conference champions in a position to bolster their roster to make another run? If they are able to add any help, they're going to have to find a way to maximize their current space. The Oilers could use their draft capital to swing a deal for help -- if they can get other teams to retain salary to make it work. Or they could be faced with having to move on from someone on their roster in order to create the flexibility needed.

### **Los Angeles Kings**

**Deadline status: Make the move that gets them beyond the first round**

**Cap space: \$3.50 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2025 first-round pick, 2026 first-round pick, 2026 second-round pick**

The Kings rank in the bottom third in goals per game, while being near league average in scoring chances and high-danger scoring chances. They also need to add scoring depth.

While the Kings have more than a dozen players who have scored more than 10 points, six skaters -- Adrian Kempe, Kevin Fiala, Alex Laferriere, Warren Foegele, Anze Kopitar and Quinton Byfield -- have accounted for 75% of their goals this season. Adding more depth would help a team that's trying to get out of the first round for the first time in more than a decade.

### **San Jose Sharks**

**Deadline status: Add for the future**

**Cap space: \$25.54 million**

**Players, picks in play: D Jan Rutta, F Luke Kunin, F Nico Sturm**

Make no mistake, the Sharks' focus is on building for the future. They've made a recent habit of having more than four pending UFAs on the roster in the event there's a chance to attain draft capital via trade.

That happened already this season when they traded Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci to the Stars, which saw them add a second first-round pick for this year's draft.

One note: The Sharks already have all three of their salary retention slots filled -- but all three of their remaining pending UFAs listed above carry manageable cap hits that are less than \$3 million annually. Now it's just finding the right suitor for them.

### **Seattle Kraken**

**Deadline status: Start planning for next season**

**Cap space: \$4.27 million**

**Players, picks in play: F Yannick Gourde, F Brandon Tanev**

The Kraken are staring at missing the playoffs for a consecutive season and for the third time in their four-year history. What does the future look like, and what current players will be part of that future?

Gourde and Tanev are attractive to contending teams as two-way players who provide depth (and a Stanley Cup pedigree, in Gourde's case). The Kraken should do their best to get a return for them, with a chance to add more prospects or draft capital given all the questions they'll have to answer this coming offseason.

### **Vancouver Canucks**

**Deadline status: Add scoring for the playoff push**

**Cap space: \$8.97 million**

**Players, picks in play: D Carson Soucy, 2025 first-round pick, 2025 second-round pick, 2026 first-round pick**

The Canucks' primary mission before March 7 is to find another forward who can help fill the scoring void created by the J.T. Miller trade.

Moving on from Miller brought Filip Chytil to Vancouver. But is Chytil enough to make up for Miller's production, given he had three straight seasons of more than 80 points? Chytil had three points in his first four games, which was a promising start. But the deadline could still provide the Canucks with a window to add another impact forward in their attempt to return to the playoffs.

### **Vegas Golden Knights**

**Deadline status: Continue to add to a roster that's in a championship window**

**Cap space: \$1.88 million**

**Players, picks in play: 2025 second-round pick, 2026 second-round pick, 2027 first-round pick**

The Golden Knights have continually proved they are willing to tinker with the roster to keep the championship contention window open as wide as possible. Don't expect this trade season to be any different.

Keep in mind that they don't have their first-round pick for the next two seasons. That hypothetically leaves them trying to figure out how they can add while balancing draft capital and their cap situation. But do not expect them to go quietly into the night, particularly as they remain among the top teams in the West.

## Sportsnet.ca / NHL Playoff Push: Trade deadline buyers, sellers and teams in between

By Rory Boylen – February 25, 2025

The NHL returned from its 4 Nations Face-Off break over the weekend and very quickly the talk of the hockey world has shifted from a dreamy best-on-best event, to dreams of a busy upcoming trade deadline.

We're less than two weeks away from the March 7 trade deadline and there's still much to be decided. Sure, we know who some of the buyers will be. Toronto and Florida are in a battle to control the Atlantic, while Washington and New Jersey will look to improve their odds. You can never count Vegas out from doing something big, while Edmonton eyes a return to the Stanley Cup Final and Winnipeg looks to separate as the West's best team.

We know some of the sellers, too. Chicago has some players available, including a top-four defenceman who's asked out. St. Louis has become a surprising team to watch as a seller as well, while Buffalo — disappointingly at the bottom of the East — has tough decisions to make.

And then there are a bunch of teams in between it all, having to decide whether to buy, sell or do some combination of both.

This is the focus of today's playoff push, as we'll begin our look at the stretch run of the regular season.

### **BUYERS TO WATCH**

**Toronto Maple Leafs:** It's no secret that the Maple Leafs will do something by the trade deadline, and that their primary need is another centre. Ideally, that's a 2C who could challenge John Tavares, though a more realistic target could be a 3C with some scoring punch to his game (like Brock Nelson).

But the Maple Leafs aren't swimming in accumulated cap space or LTIR room as some other teams are, and so there's an interesting case to be made that they should consider trading someone such as Max Domi to accommodate a more splashy move.

As pressure builds for this Core Four to finally find playoff success, the backdrop this year is that both Tavares and Mitch Marner have expiring contracts, which means the Leafs will have some very important players to discuss the futures for in the next couple weeks, and after the dust settles on March 7. The general feeling is they'll stick it out with both and neither has appeared on Nick Kypreos' trade board. Another bad playoff showing for the team, however, and who knows what direction management will take.

This trade deadline is as much about setting Toronto up for post-season success as it is ensuring there is an obvious case to make for pushing ahead with the same core past this season.

**Washington Capitals:** The best team in the East by 12 points — and one of just two NHL teams that had no representation at the 4 Nations Face-Off — Washington returned from the break by outscoring Pittsburgh and Edmonton 15-6 in two weekend wins.

This is a team as all-in as you could want to be, and with a couple of big injuries to players who won't be returning, the Capitals have \$16.68 million in LTIR space, meaning they could do all sorts of things at the deadline.

They've already re-acquired Lars Eller this season and, perhaps, those are the kinds of depth moves Washington makes to bolster itself down the lineup and prepare for injuries. After all, so much changed



with this team last summer and all of the off-season additions have clicked so well that there may not be a need to go overly big by March 7.

But if they want to, the Caps could make the league's best team even more dangerous.

**Florida Panthers:** We have to mention the defending champs in here because of how quickly their cap outlook could change. The Panthers were shaping up to have roughly \$3.5 million in cap space at the deadline, but now comes news that Matthew Tkachuk's injury could be long term.

However, what's not clear yet is how long term that will be. Head coach Paul Maurice said Tkachuk will be "playing for us this year" but does that mean he'll return in the regular season or playoffs? If Tkachuk is put on LTIR and the team knows he'll miss the rest of the regular season, they'll have that much more cap space to do business with by March 7.

And we know how aggressive GM Bill Zito has been.

Meantime, Sam Bennett and Aaron Ekblad are still without contract extensions, on track to hit free agency in July.

## **SELLERS TO WATCH**

**Pittsburgh Penguins:** While there were some missteps early in Kyle Dubas' tenure as Penguins GM (like signing Tristan Jarry, now in the minors), this is probably the toughest front office gig in the NHL because of the forced balancing act. Aching for a rebuild, the Penguins just can't step too far back as long as Sidney Crosby is around, and he's under contract with the team for another two years.

His presence also makes it harder (or impossible) to trade Rickard Rakell or Bryan Rust, productive linemates for No. 87.

So, while they should be sellers, the Penguins may not be able to do a lot of fun stuff for us to watch by the deadline. Still, after Erik Karlsson put together a strong tournament at the 4 Nations, perhaps interest could be renewed in some places if Pittsburgh was willing to use its last salary retention slot to ease the burden of his \$10-million cap hit through 2026-27. That would be a flashy move the Penguins could make. Though, we should note, it may be more attractive for some teams to pull off in the summer, after Karlsson gets a \$5-million signing bonus on July 1.

**Buffalo Sabres:** The Sabres went into the break winning four of their last five and then returned with a massive 8-2 win over the Rangers on home ice. Even so, a strong finish would once again likely be too little, too late for the last-place Sabres, who are still 11 points out of a playoff spot.

It's a time to tread carefully. The Sabres have many names in the rumour mill, including 24-year-old centre Dylan Cozens signed for the long-term, and 23-year-old defenceman Bowen Byram, who will be an RFA this summer. Defenceman Mattias Samuelsson (24) is signed at a great rate through 2030, just as the cap is set to spike.

It remains to be seen how hot GM Kevyn Adams' seat truly is as his fifth season on the job looks likely to finish with Buffalo's 14th consecutive playoff miss, but these are critical pieces of a young core the Sabres have to decide what to do with.

Is Buffalo's disappointing season because the core has failed, because the front office hasn't done well enough to surround them with productive veterans, or some combination? In time, all three of the players we mentioned could be on highly valued contracts when the salary cap spikes into the \$100-million-plus. That's the best-case scenario.

The worst-case scenario would be for Buffalo to dial back on another rebuild and watch more ex-players go on to have success elsewhere, as we've seen with Sam Reinhart, Ryan O'Rielly, Brandon Montour and

others. These big decisions could wait for the summer, or Buffalo could be a fascinating mover to watch at the deadline.

## TEAMS IN BETWEEN

**Carolina Hurricanes:** The Hurricanes are an odd team this trade deadline. They aren't a seller in the traditional sense. Carolina has been a top 10 team in the league all season, sits second in the Metro, is battling for second in the conference and has advanced past the first round six years in a row. The Canes will look to add to this team and to take a run at getting over the hump — for all that playoff success, they haven't won a game in the third round since 2006.

And they have already made the biggest trade this season in acquiring Mikko Rantanen from Colorado. It cost them Martin Necas, Jack Drury and a second-round pick, but they also managed to pick up Taylor Hall for a little scoring depth. The fit so far hasn't been perfect, though — Rantanen has one goal and three points in seven games, while Hall has just one assist.

According to Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman, the Hurricanes have made a nine-digit contract offer to pending UFA Rantanen. That means the offer could be worth about a \$12.5 million AAV at least, on a maximum-term contract.

With the trade deadline less than two weeks away, the Hurricanes are facing a dilemma. If Rantanen is undecided by March 7, will they look to flip him again? And what would that return look like? Necas is scoring at a nearly 90-point pace this season and has kept chugging in Colorado.

The "good" news is that since Chicago already retained half of Rantanen's AAV, Carolina could retain another half and knock his rate down to \$2.31 million. That would make him attainable to any team and open up the market for the Hurricanes.

Of course, anyone acquiring Rantanen has eyes on winning and without the guarantee it could keep him, or much time to negotiate, Carolina's challenge would be finding a return that doesn't end up with the team taking a step back from where it was originally. Or, the Canes could decide to push on with Rantanen, even if he doesn't sign and they view him as a rental.

Carolina is a buyer, for sure, but this prickly situation ultimately has it as an interesting team between a rock and a hard place.

**Boston Bruins:** The Bruins returned from the 4 Nations break with bad news. Defenceman Hampus Lindholm is unlikely to return this season because of a knee injury, while fellow blueliner Charlie McAvoy (injured at 4 Nations) has no timeline to return after a shoulder injury that led to an infection.

Meantime, the Bruins lost in overtime to Anaheim at home in their first game back and sit one point out of a wild-card berth in the Eastern Conference and 13th in goal differential (minus-26).

The Bruins were floundering when they fired Jim Montgomery and made Joe Sacco the interim boss, but then the rumour mill cooled for a time when Boston responded with an 11-4-1 record after the coaching change into the holiday break. Since Christmas, however, the B's are 8-11-3 — tied for 27th in the NHL over two months.

"Historically, we've been pretty aggressive when our team's in a position. I think we'll take a much more cautious approach as we approach the deadline," Bruins GM Don Sweeney said Sunday. "May plant a seed for the draft and beyond."

Boston plays Toronto, the Islanders, Pittsburgh, Minnesota, Nashville and Carolina before the trade deadline, but is running out of time to put a hot streak together that makes it more of a buyer. In fact, it may be too late for that. If it's clear the Bruins will be a seller, the pertinent question is what becomes of

Brad Marchand, the 36-year-old whose role diminished with Team Canada, and is a pending UFA. He's said only that his desire is to remain a Bruin for life, but there's still no contract extension in place.

"We've been in negotiations with Brad and communicating with him through the year," Sweeney said. "We'll have to have a conversation now that the 4 Nations is over, sit down with Brad and his representatives and have a clearer path in the next two weeks as to what his final outcome will be."

## **BUYERS TO WATCH**

**Winnipeg Jets:** When you think of what's coming in the economic landscape in the league, it's fair to wonder if this is the year Winnipeg really should be aggressive in a big way and truly go all-in on a Stanley Cup run.

For the league's smallest market in its smallest arena, it's fair to wonder how much the Jets will be able to keep up with the highest-spending teams when the salary cap lands at around \$113.5 million in three years.

For now, the Jets are the second-best team in the league and No. 1 in the Western Conference. They have two of the league's top 12 scorers, the runaway favourite for the Vezina Trophy, one of the top shutdown lines in the game with Adam Lowry back, and the league's best power play.

But they have needs. The Jets could stand to add another defenceman, or two, to help keep the quality looks at the net down a bit better. And they also have a need for another centre — whether Lowry is the second or third pivot, the Jets need someone else to play key minutes down the middle and have some offensive jam to their game.

And they have cap space to make a move. If the roster is left untouched until March 7, the Jets are tracking to have \$12.4 million in deadline-day space, per PuckPedia, meaning they have flexibility to do lots of things. The incentive to make moves is already there, given their place in the standings, but knowing the economic realities of what's to come should drive the Jets even more to make a splash.

**Dallas Stars:** GM Jim Nill has already made a pretty solid move, bringing in Mikael Granlund from San Jose to add to a dangerously deep group of forwards.

But injuries have hit this team hard. Tyler Seguin is out for the rest of the regular season, at least, while Miro Heiskanen was injured just before the 4 Nations and is labelled as month-to-month with a knee injury. Two substantial losses.

At the moment, Dallas has \$12.2 million in LTIR space, though it may yet have to be prepared for Heiskanen to return before the playoffs.

Either way, for as deep as Dallas' forwards are, we saw in last year's playoffs that its blue line depth was tested when Chris Tanev went down. The Stars would be wise to look at other blueliners to help their cause in 2025 and should have space to do something fairly substantial. On Monday's 32 Thoughts podcast, Elliotte Friedman floated the Stars as a potential destination for Erik Karlsson.

## **SELLERS TO WATCH**

**St. Louis Blues:** Five points out of a playoff spot, the Blues would miss for a third year in a row if they can't claw their way back. A return win, 3-1 over Colorado, was a good place to start.

Still, it was shocking to see several Blues names appear on Kypreos' latest trade board, including Jordan Kyrou, Pavel Buchnevich, Brayden Schenn and Justin Faulk. The Blues have been looking to trade a defenceman for some time, but four of them have no-trade clauses.

What's funny is that, after signing 23-year-olds Dylan Holloway and Philip Broberg to offer sheets last summer, GM Doug Armstrong has already been a buyer on this year's trade market when he acquired 33-year-old blueliner Cam Fowler, who has another year left on his contract.

But, after next season, Armstrong is preparing to step aside from the GM's chair and make way for Alexander Steen, currently working and learning under Armstrong. If this keeps tracking toward a tough uphill climb to the playoffs by March 7, Armstrong may pull the chute on parts of this core. If enough of them go, St. Louis could be something of a kingmaker.

"As we say every year, the players will tell us what we're going to do," Armstrong said Sunday. "Right now, we have a massive uphill battle. I think we really dropped the ball coming out of Christmas. (Coach Jim Montgomery) had done a nice job getting the guys in a good spot and then we didn't take advantage of a really positive schedule in January. Now, everyone has to live with the white noise around us until mid-March, but we've created that for ourselves."

**Chicago Blackhawks:** A seller through and through, the Blackhawks aren't going to be able to keep doing this forever and keep Connor Bedard happy. At some point, NHL players will need to be retained, or else a lot of pressure will be put on graduating prospects very quickly. Take one look at Buffalo to see the risk that entails.

At first glance, it didn't seem like the Hawks had a whole lot of super-intriguing players to move. Hall was sent to Carolina, but that was for a mid-round pick and he never settled into Chicago. Pending UFA Ryan Donato is having a terrific career season, but turns 29 in April and seems a good bet to get moved.

Those were thought to be the most notable names who could be had out of Chicago this season, until Seth Jones' name appeared on Kypreos' trade board in January. The defenceman has since confirmed that he's working with the Blackhawks to facilitate a trade to a contending team, even if it means Chicago has to use its final retention slot to absorb some of his \$9.5-million cap hit.

Jones is 30 and signed through the 2029-30 season, so his timeline doesn't appear to line up with Chicago's. And while retaining some money for another five years is a big ask for the Blackhawks, it could also elevate Jones' trade value and make him able to pull back some good assets to Chicago. Jones isn't a No. 1 defenceman, but if he could be had for, say, \$6 million to \$7 million against the cap with the upper limit about to shoot up, he's suddenly a very intriguing second-pair defenceman.

## TEAMS IN BETWEEN

**Utah Hockey Club:** Utah's 2-1 regulation win over Vancouver on Sunday was huge because it pulled it back to within four points of the Canucks for the second wild-card spot in the West. The Hockey Club has work to do and has played more games than either Vancouver or Calgary in front of them, but with more home games upcoming to Chicago, Minnesota and New Jersey this week, a nice little run could leave the front office asking some big questions.

**One thing seems clear:** Utah will turn into a big-time buyer very soon. It has a deep-pocketed owner eager to put his hockey team on the map and almost too many future assets. It has made 42 picks in the past four drafts, has six picks in 2025 and then another 10 in 2026. With 90 reserve slots and 50 contracts ever allowed at one time, Utah may have to soon turn some of those assets into NHL players through trades.

But will that happen during this season? Utah has oodles of cap space, projected to be about \$27 million on March 7, meaning it could do almost anything it wanted on deadline day. The question, though, is if it's really in position to buy now, or if it would be too far out of the playoffs and instead look to do big

business in the summer. Meantime, it has some players (Alexander Kerfoot, Matias Maccelli, Nick Bjugstad) who could be traded by March 7.

As the defence has gotten healthy and the gap to a playoff spot closes, the front office might be thinking long and hard about pushing some chips in.

**Vancouver Canucks:** Already straddling the line of buyer and seller with their trading of J.T. Miller and acquisition of Marcus Pettersson, the Canucks are still facing questions about Elias Pettersson, whose no-movement clause will kick in this summer on his eight-year, \$11.6-million AAV contract.

A weak showing at the 4 Nations did nothing to inspire confidence he'll finish this season stronger, and the fact he was a game-time decision before playing both Saturday and Sunday has folks in Vancouver wondering how impactful he'll be in a playoff push. It would seem a long shot that the Canucks would trade Pettersson now after already moving Miller, especially as long as they hold on to a playoff spot. But they failed to pick up a point in two weekend games, so their hold on that place is tenuous.

Meantime, pending UFA Brock Boeser seems all but assured of moving before the deadline, while Carson Soucy's name has also come up recently.

The Canucks aren't a seller in the sense they'll be looking to spiral into a rebuild — after all, they have to have eyes on re-signing Quinn Hughes when his deal expires in 2027. But it's wild how one of the best stories of last season, and a team that came within one win of eliminating the Edmonton Oilers in Round 2, has descended into such panic and mayhem.