



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
June 21-23, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets

PAGE 02: The Athletic: Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: 6 potential trade chips, targets and free-agent signings

PAGE 07: Columbus Dispatch: Blue Jackets' Werenski 'hungrier than ever' after honoring Gaudreau with U.S. gold medal

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/Websites

PAGE 10: NHL.com: 2025 NHL Draft: Metropolitan Division needs

PAGE 15: The Athletic: Could the Sabres trade JJ Peterka? 12 teams that should be interested

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: 6 potential trade chips, targets and free-agent signings

By Aaron Portzline – June 22, 2025

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

Item No. 1: Dealin' Don

Since the end of the Stanley Cup Final early last week, business across the NHL has picked up, with a flurry of signings and trades as clubs get ready for next weekend's draft and the start of free agency.

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell has yet to join the party, but it's not for lack of trying. Waddell, who spent part of last week in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., attending a showcase for young Russian players, has been quietly working behind the scenes on moves both big and small.

As colleague Pierre LeBrun reported, the Blue Jackets had talked with the Dallas Stars about Mason Marchment before Marchment was traded to the Seattle Kraken last week.

The Blue Jackets want a top-six forward and a right-shot center, but they also want to reconstruct their blue line with a right-shot (right side) defenseman who can play in the top four. They'd also like to overhaul their goaltending, which has been among the worst in the NHL over the past four seasons.

Yeah, that's all.

Of course, Waddell may not get it all done — that's literally every position on the ice, right? — by the time the league settles into its offseason hibernation around mid-July.

As the silly season kicks into overdrive beginning this week, here are six players (or commodities) the Blue Jackets might trade, six players they could trade for and six players they could be expected to pursue via free agency.

Trade chips

1. No. 14 pick: OK, not a player (technically), but this pick will have a name by Friday evening. Waddell has made it clear he's willing to part with one or both of his first-round picks — he also has No. 20 — but the guess here is he'll need to add a sweetener (perhaps No. 2 on this list) to land an impact player.
2. Yegor Chinakhov, LW: Chinakhov has plenty of talent; the shot, the speed. But he has had trouble staying on the ice, and if there's one thing veteran GMs loathe, it's a player who is frequently injured or is perceived to be unwilling to push through pain.
3. Elvis Merzlikins, G: If we assume there is a market — a team that thinks it can pull Merzlikins' considerable talent back to the surface — the Blue Jackets would have to consider it. Any deal would

likely require the Blue Jackets to pay a portion of his remaining salary (two years, \$5.4 million salary cap hit). Failing a trade, a buyout is possible.

4. No. 20 pick: It's unclear whether this draft is deep enough for anybody to be truly excited about the No. 20 pick, but, hey, you have to listen. Waddell is willing to move one of his first-round picks. He's not against moving both of his first-round picks, either. Friday could be fun.

5. Ivan Provorov, D: If it becomes clear that Provorov is hitting free agency, there will be several teams lined up to sign him, just as teams were lining up to trade for him at the deadline in March. If a club wants dibs, it might trade for Provorov's rights so it can negotiate a deal without interference from another club. We see you, Rangers.

6. Cole Sillinger, C: This one would sting. Sillinger is an important part of the Blue Jackets at a very young age, and there's certainly no desire to trade him. But if the Blue Jackets are in the market for big moves involving significant pieces, they'd have to include impact players, too. Sillinger, who plays behind Adam Fantilli and Sean Monahan, would move the needle for a lot of clubs.

Trade targets

1. JJ Peterka, LW, Buffalo: It seems unconscionable that the Sabres, waiting desperately for their rebuild to gain traction, would move a 23-year-old player who has scored 55 goals the past two seasons. But it doesn't sound like Peterka is longing for upstate New York. Few would be more familiar with the Blue Jackets' roster than former GM Jarmo Kekäläinen, who joined Buffalo's hockey operations department earlier this month.

2. Rasmus Andersson, D, Calgary: The Blue Jackets need a top-four defenseman who can play on the right side. They (desperately) need some grit and nastiness in their top four. Andersson checks both of those boxes. If Dante Fabbro doesn't re-sign with Columbus, Andersson could potentially get a look on the top pair with Zach Werenski. Andersson has one year remaining at \$4.55 million and has a six-team no-trade list, according to PuckPedia.

3. John Gibson, G, Anaheim: The Ducks and Gibson have been rumored to be parting ways for, what, three seasons now? It's never seemed more likely than now, with youngster Lukas Dostal playing his way into the No. 1 job. The market for free-agent goaltenders is thin. A trade might be the safest bet. Gibson has two years remaining at \$6.4 million and a 10-team no-trade list.

4. Noah Dobson, D, NY Islanders: Is this guy seriously available? His name has been kicked about more than you'd expect for a 25-year-old, top-four defenseman who has averaged 11.5 goals and 52.25 points over the last four seasons. The return would have to be substantial, and there would be many bidders.

5. Jason Robertson, LW, Dallas: It's hard to believe the Stars would even take calls on a two-time 40-goal scorer, one-time 100-point producer who turns 26 next month, but they are reportedly listening. One should assume Waddell has Dallas GM Jim Nill on speed dial — wait, is that still a thing? — but the asking price would be monumental.

6. Martin Necas, RW, Colorado: The salary cap has gone up, but it won't provide enough relief for the Avalanche, who have been in cap and injury hell for a while now. Necas has a history with Waddell, of course. They were in Carolina together when Necas emerged as a legit NHL top-six forward.

Free-agent targets

1. Mitch Marner, RW, Toronto: It's also hard to believe the Maple Leafs will let a 100-point scorer walk, but it will likely come to that. If Marner is receptive to the idea of joining the Blue Jackets — and they're a much more inviting situation now than they were a short while ago — expect Waddell to throw massive term and money at Marner. His addition would make the Jackets one of the NHL's most dynamic offensive clubs. They might even discover a power play!

2. Nikolaj Ehlers, LW, Winnipeg: The bigger role he's long wanted with the Jets would be his in Columbus, including a possible run with Monahan and Kirill Marchenko on the top line. He's a 25-goal, 60-point player despite modest minutes. He played 15:47 per game last season, which would have ranked eighth among forwards in Columbus.

3. Jake Allen, G, New Jersey: In a thin market, he's at the top of most lists. If the Jackets part ways with Merzlikins, they'd almost certainly want a veteran player to pair with young Jet Greaves as a new-look tandem. Allen, who turns 35 later this summer, will seek a team that can promise him a shot at being the starter. It might take a three-year deal to land him, though.

4. Aaron Ekblad, D, Florida: The Panthers will try to keep the band together after winning a second straight Stanley Cup title. For a time, it seemed Seth Jones' arrival would make Ekblad expendable, but he had a tremendous postseason and has made it clear he wants to stay. That's the only reason he's No. 4, not No. 1, on this list.

5. Cody Ceci, D, Dallas: This wouldn't set off fireworks in the Arena District, but Ceci can carry big minutes and play a solid role next to an offensive defenseman. If Fabbro doesn't re-sign with the Blue Jackets, this might be more likely.

6. Brock Boeser, RW, Vancouver: The Canucks tried to trade Boeser at the trade deadline, but then publicly complained because the offers for the goal-scoring winger were less than what they wanted. Boeser has termed a return to Vancouver "unlikely," so he'll be one of the big fish on July 1. He's from the suburbs of Minnesota, so maybe the Wild bring him home.

Item No. 2: New rinks

It was a momentous week for the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets, whose efforts to build a new facility and add multiple sheets of ice to the growing central Ohio hockey scene took a big step forward.

Delaware City Council approved plans to build a 125,000 square-foot complex — the Performance Impact Arena and Pavilion — that will include three ice rinks and a 6,000-seat amphitheater, which would host concerts in the summer and be transformed into an outdoor rink for use in the winter.

The facility, with a price tag north of \$50 million, will be built on approximately 14 acres at the southwest corner of the Sawmill Parkway/Ohio Route 42 intersection, about three miles south of Delaware.

Ohio AAA Blue Jackets president Ed Gingher said the amphitheater, which hopes to host 30 concerts per summer, should be completed by May of 2027. For perspective, the downtown Columbus amphitheater, KEMBA Live!, can hold 5,200 for outdoor concerts.

The hockey rinks will likely be ready for use in the fall or winter of 2027. Gingher said the rinks will be available for use by all levels of hockey, including high school teams and tournaments and local adult leagues.

The Ohio AAA Blue Jackets count current NHL players Sean Kuraly, Connor Murphy, Keifer Sherwood and Jack Roslovic among their alums, along with several other pro players and hundreds of players who have earned college scholarships. Sascha Boumedienne would be the program's third first-round NHL draft pick, joining Murphy and Roslovic.

When the Blue Jackets arrived as an expansion team in 2000, there were four ice rinks in Columbus. When this project is completed, the area will have 14 rinks, not including the main ice at Nationwide Arena.

Item No. 3: Snacks

- Every NHL GM needs to know how to juggle. Waddell, for one, has a lot of balls in the air right now, which might explain why talks with Provorov have been so slow. The Jackets are looking for a right-side defenseman who can balance their pairs, and the more likely path is via trade. That's been Waddell's focus for the last few weeks, and if he lands a top-four defenseman, Provorov is likely expendable. If he figures out he can't, you can expect the Provorov talks to get serious quickly. (By now, both sides know where they stand, right?)
- Werenski finished second in Norris Trophy voting, the highest a Blue Jackets defenseman has ever landed. When we spoke with him earlier this week, he acknowledged having mixed feelings. "If you would have told me before the season that I'd finish second in the Norris, I would have been ecstatic," he said. "But when it comes out and you're second, you want to win it. I thought maybe the voting would be a little closer, but there's no denying (Cale Makar's) 30 goals and 90-something points. I totally get why he wins it, right?" Makar earned 176 first-point votes and 1,861 points overall. Werenski earned 13 first-place votes and finished with 1,266 points.
- Werenski said he knew he hadn't won the award before it was announced, however. It seems the NHL's new wrinkle this year — they surprised the award winners and captured it on video — was a big hit among fans, and made for a much more enjoyable awards show. But it did reveal to the other finalists whether or not they'd won. "We were in Europe and all of these surprise videos are coming out," said Werenski, who took a pre-wedding honeymoon with his fiancée. "Nobody surprised me in Europe, right? (laughing) So, I knew two weeks before that I didn't win."

- Random item I stumbled upon this week: Mike Sillinger had a heck of an NHL career, totaling 240-308-548 in 1,049 games. But his claim to fame is playing for 12 different franchises (an NHL record) and being traded nine times (tied for an NHL mark). Now get this: His son, Cole Sillinger, who recently turned 22 years old, has already played more games for the Blue Jackets — 286 — than his father did for any of his 12 clubs.
- It sounds like the Blue Jackets and FanDuel Sports Network are nearing a deal to have the regional sports network continue to air games. There are still some details being worked out, but the framework of a deal is in place. FDSN has already announced it will continue to air Cleveland Cavaliers games next season. One issue regarding the Blue Jackets is finding a studio for use when the club is on the road. In recent seasons, host Brian Giesenschlag and analyst Jean-Luc Grand-Pierre have emanated from a Cincinnati studio during Blue Jackets road games, but that studio is no longer available for use.

Columbus Dispatch / Blue Jackets' Werenski 'hungrier than ever' after honoring Gaudreau with U.S. gold medal

By Brian Hedger – June 23, 2025

The video went viral.

As his U.S. teammates hugged and high-fived May 25 in Stockholm, Sweden, celebrating a gold medal at the men's world championships, Blue Jackets star Zach Werenski exited to retrieve Johnny Gaudreau's USA jersey from the locker room at Avicii Arena.

He'd not only played with Gaudreau in Columbus for two years, but they also shared a locker room for the U.S. at the 2024 men's worlds in Czechia, falling short of winning a medal while losing in the quarterfinal round.

"It's one of those things where the second we won, that was the first thing I thought about ... that he was going to be in the picture," Werenski said. "He's a huge part of it, and I just wanted to make sure he was included in every way. And our team wanted that, not just me. Everyone on the team, everyone in the group, including the coaches and staff. Everyone wanted that."

So, the first U.S. men's world championship gold since 1933 was capped by a celebration that included many photos with Gaudreau's jersey draped underneath the trophy. It's been almost 10 months since Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were killed by a drunk driver Aug. 29, 2024, in Oldmans Township, New Jersey, while biking together following their sister's wedding rehearsal dinner.

It was a tragedy that struck the close-knit world of hockey hard, leaving behind their devastated family plus many gutted teammates, friends and others forced to cope together.

Playing for the Gaudreaus spurred the Blue Jackets to within two points of the Stanley Cup playoffs, provided a stirring backdrop for their outdoor victory over the Detroit Red Wings on March 1 at Ohio Stadium, inspired the U.S. to a silver medal at the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament in February 2025 and, finally, motivated "Team USA" to a world title.

Gaudreau's No. 13 jersey hung inside the U.S. locker room. One of the awards the team handed out after victories was a blue USA winter hat in the style Gaudreau usually wore. Werenski, who arrived a little late during a busy offseason, spent two-plus weeks after the tournament touring Europe with his fiancée – and the gold medal – as a pre-wedding honeymoon.

Looking back now, he feels fate was involved.

"He's a big reason I went this year ... or Meredith is," Werenski said of Gaudreau's widow, Meredith Gaudreau. "She texted my fiancée right when the season ended, out of nowhere, just saying, 'I think 'Z' should go to worlds this year.' And when we asked why, she was just like, 'John never had any regrets going to worlds. He always loved playing for the U.S.A., and it was always a great experience.'"

That included Gaudreau playing for the U.S. in May 2024 after his tough second year in Columbus, adding three goals, eight assists and 11 points in eight games to become the nation's all-time leader in assists and points during world championship competition.

Prior to joining the U.S. in Czechia, Gaudreau had told reporters in Columbus that his goal was to start preparing for the 2024-25 NHL season early, hoping to use the world championships to spark a big rebound year that pushed the Blue Jackets higher in the Eastern Conference.

A few months later, they were forced to do it without him on the ice. Off the ice, the Gaudreaus provided immense motivation to the Blue Jackets and all U.S. national teams.

"I was busy before worlds, so I had to show up late, but it was something where I kind of felt like it was meant to be in a sense," Werenski said. "He was a big reason I was there, and he's been a big part of USA Hockey for so long. While I was there, Will Smith (San Jose Sharks) and Cole Caufield (Montreal Canadiens) said to me after the tournament, the main reason they wanted to go last year (2024) was because of John, and to play with him. So, I just think the whole thing really was kind of meant to be. You could feel that he was there with us, and it's just a super special moment."

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski (8) defends New York Islanders center Bo Horvat (14) during the first period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on April 17, 2025.

It was also a stark reminder of what winning a championship feels like, something Werenski has only done once in 2016 as a rookie in the Cleveland Monsters' AHL Calder Cup championship.

Since that title, Werenski's only tastes of winning with the Blue Jackets were pulling off a shocking first-round sweep of the Tampa Bay Lightning in 2019 and upsetting the Toronto Maple Leafs in a postseason play-in matchup during the NHL's 2020 COVID-bubble postseason.

"Everyone knew what was at stake (at worlds), and I feel like it was probably a better feeling than any of us could have expected, once we actually won," Werenski said. "I texted some people that I'm really close with afterward, and they all texted back, 'Congrats,' or whatever. Right after that, though, I texted back: 'I love winning, and I need more of it.'"

After watching former teammates Seth Jones and Sergei Bobrovsky hoist the Stanley Cup with the Florida Panthers on June 17, along with Bill Zito, the Blue Jackets' former assistant GM, Werenski is hungrier than ever to win in Columbus. Getting a gold medal stoked his inner fire even more.

"That's what I want," Werenski said. "When you don't win or you don't make the playoffs, or you haven't been around that environment, you almost forget how fun it is. I know it wasn't the Olympics and it's not all the best players there, but that feeling when Tage (Thompson) scored the gold medal goal, I haven't had that feeling since I won the Calder Cup back when I first signed."

It was instant elation, pure joy and exactly what the Blue Jackets' best player needed going into the rest of his summer.

“It’s one of those things where you get reminded quickly how fun winning is, and I think for our group (in Columbus), we have to get back there,” Werenski said. “That’s where my mind’s at right now. I’m going to do whatever it takes to win.”

[NHL.com / 2025 NHL Draft: Metropolitan Division needs](#)

By Mike G. Morreale – June 23, 2025

The 2025 Upper Deck NHL Draft will be held June 27-28 at L.A. Live's Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. The first round will be held June 27 (7 p.m. ET; ESPN, ESPN+, SN, TVAS), with rounds 2-7 on June 28 (Noon ET; NHLN, ESPN+, SN, SN1). NHL.com is counting down to the draft with in-depth profiles on top prospects, podcasts and other features. Today, a look at needs for teams in the Metropolitan Division. Full draft coverage can be found [here](#).

The 2025 NHL Draft provides an opportunity for teams to strengthen positions of need with young talent.

Here are what Metropolitan Division teams could be looking to do at the draft (listed in alphabetical order):

Carolina Hurricanes

Top priority: Best available

First pick: No. 29

The situation: The Hurricanes were eliminated from the Eastern Conference Final by the Florida Panthers in five games and have not advanced past the conference final since winning the Stanley Cup in 2006. Defensemen Brent Burns and Dmitry Orlov can each become an unrestricted free agent July 1. The top three prospects in the pipeline might be defensemen Alexander Nikishin and Scott Morrow, and left wing Bradly Nadeau. Nikishin (2020 NHL Draft, No. 69) had 46 points (17 goals, 29 assists) in 62 games in his second season as captain of SKA St. Petersburg in the Kontinental Hockey League, and did play in four playoff games (one assist) for the Hurricanes. Morrow (2021, No. 40) had 39 points (13 goals, 26 assists) in 52 games with Chicago of the American Hockey League in his first full professional season. The 22-year-old right-handed shot likely will spend another season in the AHL in 2025-26. Nadeau (2023, No. 30), who turned 20 on May 5, was named to the 2025 AHL All-Rookie Team after he had 58 points (32 goals, 26 assists) in 64 games with Chicago, becoming the fifth player in league history to have at least 30 goals before the age of 20. Carolina has made 60 picks the past six years and will continue to load up with talent at all positions with nine picks in this draft.

Possible fits: Cameron Reid, D, Kitchener (OHL); Ryker Lee, RW, Madison (USHL); Milton Gastrin, C, Modo Jr. (SWE-JR)

Columbus Blue Jackets

Top priority: Depth at all positions

First-round picks: No. 14, No. 20

The situation: The Blue Jackets failed to qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the fifth consecutive season and will look to further surround their young nucleus of players. The organization already is three years into a rebuild and the experience some of the young players gained this season will be valuable in the future, including forwards Adam Fantilli, 20, Kirill Marchenko, 24, and Kent Johnson, 22, and defenseman Denton Mateychuk, 20. The top players in the pipeline are centers Cayden Lindstrom (2024, No. 4), Luca Del Bel Belluz (2022, No. 44) and Gavin Brindley (2023, No. 34) and defenseman Charlie Elick (2024, No. 36). The Blue Jackets have seven picks in the draft, including two in the first round; they have the Minnesota Wild's pick from the trade for defenseman David Jiricek on Nov. 30. They could select the top forward or defenseman on the board with their first choice in the opening round and consider a goalie with their third-round selection.

Possible fits: Carter Bear, LW, Everett (WHL); Victor Eklund, RW, Djurgarden (SWE-2); Braeden Cootes, C, Seattle (WHL)

The NHL Draft Class Podcasts chats with Schaefer, Hagens, more during the scouting combine

New Jersey Devils

Top priority: Depth at forward

First pick: No. 50

The situation: The Devils do not have a first-round pick after trading it, along with defenseman Kevin Bahl, to the Calgary Flames for goalie Jacob Markstrom on June 19, 2024. New Jersey finished third in the Metropolitan Division and lost to the Carolina Hurricanes in the Eastern Conference First Round in five games. The Devils do have two second-round picks, so it'll be interesting to see if they keep them or opt to use one or both as part of a trade to upgrade the roster for next season. They traded forward Erik Hauula to the Nashville Predators for a 2025 fourth-round pick and defenseman Jeremy Hanzel on June 18. Defenseman Simon Nemec (2022, No. 2) discovered his game during the Stanley Cup Playoffs, and defenseman prospect Anton Silayev (2024, No. 10) is under contract in the Kontinental Hockey League through next season. Goalie prospect Mikhail Yegorov (2024, No. 49) is expected to build upon a great first season at Boston University, and forward prospect Lenni Hameenaho (2023, No. 58), who signed a three-year, entry-level contract May 8, will look to earn a roster spot out of training camp. Additionally, right wing Arseni Gritsyuk (2019, No. 129) signed a one-year, entry-level contract May 6 after spending parts of the past five seasons in the KHL. In 2024-25, he had 44 points (17 goals, 27 assists) in 49 games with St. Petersburg.

Possible fits: Eric Nilson, C, Djurgarden Jr. (SWE-JR); Alexander Zharovsky, RW, Ufa Jr. (RUS-JR); Shane Vansaghi, RW, Michigan State (NCAA)

New York Islanders

Top priority: Franchise defenseman

First pick: No. 1

The situation: The Islanders failed to qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time in three seasons and Mathieu Darche replaced Lou Lamoriello as general manager May 23, after the latter did not have his contract renewed as president/GM following seven seasons. Darche had been assistant GM of the Tampa Bay Lightning the previous three seasons, following three seasons as Lightning director of hockey operations. He won the Stanley Cup with them in 2020 and 2021. After going four years without a first-round draft pick from 2020-23, the Islanders selected sniper Cole Eiserman with the No. 20 selection in the 2024 NHL Draft and have four first-round picks during the next three seasons, including the No. 1 pick in the 2025 Upper Deck NHL Draft. The Islanders had a 3.5 percent chance of winning the NHL Draft Lottery and did so May 5. They would pick No. 1 for the fifth time, and the first since selecting center John Tavares in the 2009 NHL Draft. New York has an opportunity to choose Matthew Schaefer of Erie in the Ontario Hockey League, a defenseman who would certainly fill a big void when ready to turn professional. There's also Long Island native James Hagens of Hauppauge, New York, who starred at center for Boston College this season and has been the apple of the eye of many Islanders fans. New York's three top prospects in the system are forwards, Eiserman; center Calum Ritchie, who was acquired from the Colorado Avalanche as part of the trade of center Brock Nelson on March 6; and center Danny Nelson (2023, No. 49). The Islanders have seven picks in the draft, and it'll be interesting to see how Darche opts to use those selections.

Possible fits: Matthew Schaefer, D, Erie (OHL); James Hagens, C, Boston College (NCAA); Michael Misa, C, Saginaw (OHL)

New York Rangers

Top priority: Depth at forward, defense

First pick: No. 12

The situation: The Rangers failed to qualify for the playoffs for the first time since 2020-21. It was a stunning turn of events after winning the Presidents' Trophy as the team with the most points in the regular season in 2023-24. Peter Laviolette was fired April 19 and Mike Sullivan was named the 38th coach in franchise history May 2, four days after he parted ways with the Pittsburgh Penguins. Chris Drury signed a multiyear contract to remain general manager April 23. Forward Chris Kreider and a 2025 fourth-round pick were traded to the Anaheim Ducks for forward prospect Carey Terrance and a 2025 third-round pick June 12. Left wing Will Cuyll (2020, No. 60) followed a 21-point rookie season with 45 points (20 goals, 25 assists) in 82 games and earned a spot in the top-nine forward group. Forwards Brennan Othmann (2021, No. 16), Brett Berard (2020, No. 134) and Gabe Perreault (2023, No. 23) each figure to be part of the future, perhaps with increased roles as early as next season. New York also has goalie Igor Shesterkin, who they signed to an eight-year, \$92 million contract (\$11.5 million average annual value) on Dec. 7, the day after they traded defenseman Jacob Trouba to the Ducks. The Rangers have nine picks in the draft.

Possible fits: Roger McQueen, C, Brandon (WHL); Brady Martin, C, Sault Ste. Marie (OHL); Jackson Smith, D, Tri-City (WHL)

Philadelphia Flyers

Top priority: Center, defensemen depth

First-round picks: No. 6, No. 22, No. 31

The situation: The Flyers finished 15 points behind the Montreal Canadiens for the second wild card into the playoffs from the Eastern Conference, missing the postseason for the fifth consecutive season to match the longest streak in franchise history (1990-94). John Tortorella was fired as coach March 27 after three seasons and Rick Tocchet was hired May 14. Philadelphia's power play (15.0 percent) ranked 30th in the NHL after finishing last the previous two seasons. The goaltending was average at best with Samuel Ersson (3.14 goals-against average, .883 save percentage) getting the bulk of the games (47) in front of backups Ivan Fedotov (3.15, .880) and Aleksei Kolosov (3.59, .867). Rookie forward Matvei Michkov (2023, No. 7) will be a key part of the rebuilding effort after leading all first-year players with 26 goals and finishing tied for second with 63 points in 80 games. Defenseman Emil Andrae (2020, No. 54) was a pleasant surprise, with seven points (one goal, six assists), 46 hits and 50 blocked shots in 42 games. There's a good stable of prospects with goalie Carson Bjarnason (2023, No. 51), defensemen Oliver Bonk (2023, No. 22) and Spencer Gill (2024, No. 59), and forwards Jett Luchanko (2024, No. 13), Denver Barkey (2023, No. 95) and Alex Bump (2022, No. 133). The Flyers have 11 picks, including three in the first round and four in the second.

Possible fits: Jake O'Brien, C, Brantford (OHL); Brady Martin, C, Sault Ste. Marie (OHL); Malcolm Spence, LW, Erie (OHL)

Pittsburgh Penguins

Top priority: Depth at all positions

First pick: No. 11

The situation: Pittsburgh has not qualified for the playoffs the past three seasons after doing so in each of the previous 16 (2007-22) and winning the Stanley Cup in 2009, 2016 and 2017. The Penguins and coach Mike Sullivan parted ways April 28 after 10 seasons (409-255-89), and Dan Muse, an assistant coach with the Rangers the past two seasons, was hired as the 23rd coach in franchise history June 4. Forward prospects Rutger McGroarty (traded from Winnipeg Jets, August 2024) and Ville Koivunen (traded from Carolina Hurricanes, March 2024), defenseman prospect Harrison Brunicke (2024, No. 44) and goalie prospect Sergei Murashov (2022, No. 118) offer a lot of promise. McGroarty and Koivunen each were recalled from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League on March 28. McGroarty had three points (one goal, two assists) in eight games, and Koivunen had seven assists in eight games. Murashov went 12-3-0 with a 2.64 GAA and .913 save percentage in 16 AHL games. Brunicke had two assists in 10 AHL games after he had 30 points (five goals, 25 assists) in 41 games with Kamloops of the Western Hockey League. The Penguins have 30 picks in the next three drafts, including 10 this year.

Possible fits: Logan Hensler, D, Wisconsin (NCAA); Lynden Lakovic, LW, Moose Jaw (WHL); Victor Eklund, RW, Djurgarden (SWE-2)

Washington Capitals

Top priority: Best available

First pick: No. 27

The situation: The Capitals lost to the Hurricanes in five games in the second round of the playoffs, in large part because of a lack of scoring depth and poor special teams. Coach Spencer Carbery was awarded the Jack Adams Award as NHL coach of the year after leading Washington (51-22-9) to its first 50-win season since 2016-17. The Capitals made 36 picks the past six years, and this season saw forward prospects Ryan Leonard (2023, No. 8) and Ivan Miroshnichenko (2022, No. 20) earn NHL playing time. Leonard scored one goal in nine regular-season games and played eight playoff games. Miroshnichenko had four points (one goal, three assists) in 18 regular-season games. Defenseman Cole Hutson (2024, No. 43) and forwards Andrew Cristall (2023, No. 40) and Terik Parascak (2024, No. 17) are solid blue-chip prospects in the pipeline. The Capitals have five picks, all in the first five rounds.

Possible fits: Milton Gastrin, C, Modo Jr. (SWE-JR); Blake Fiddler, D, Edmonton (WHL); William Horcoff, C, Michigan (NCAA)

The Athletic / Could the Sabres trade JJ Peterka? 12 teams that should be interested

By Matthew Fairburn and Shayna Goldman – June 23, 2025

When JJ Peterka's name first popped up in trade rumors around the NHL trade deadline, Buffalo Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams was quick to pour cold water on the idea. He said he views Peterka as part of Buffalo's core. And why wouldn't he? The 23-year-old was in the middle of a breakout 68-point season.

The Sabres traded up to take Peterka 34th in the 2020 NHL Draft, and he developed into a top-of-the-lineup winger. In 2023-24, his ability to generate scoring chances and convert on them was a standout. In 2024-25, he kicked his passing up a notch. Not only did Peterka emerge with a team-high rate of high-danger passes, but he was also a standout across the league. That's not the type of player teams are eager to trade — especially when considering the Sabres' winger depth around him.

But one other thing Adams said at the deadline was that the Sabres "need to make sure we're also explaining to him how we're going to make the team better." Peterka is a restricted free agent. And though the Sabres have four more years of team control before he becomes an unrestricted free agent, it's become clear he's open to a change of scenery.

Evolving Hockey projects a two-year extension, worth \$5 million a year. That would give Peterka a chance to see the Sabres' direction over the next couple of seasons before committing. However, management might want more certainty as the team continues to build a roster ready to turn the corner back into the playoff picture. A longer-term extension in the six- or seven-year range, according to Evolving Hockey, is projected to carry an AAV of around \$6.8 million. A contract of that magnitude is likely to deliver positive value with Peterka's projected market value in mind, according to the model from The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn.

But there is some risk associated with a long-term deal, with Peterka's top comps at 23 years old. If he ages like Nazem Kadri, Nathan Horton, Derick Brassard or Jordan Kyrrou, the Sabres have nothing to worry about. But Cody Hodgson and Alex Galchenyuk are cautionary tales of how players of a similar caliber can trend in the wrong direction from here.

If Peterka is not interested in signing long-term, the Sabres would be wise to at least listen to trade offers. In a weak free-agent class, teams looking for scoring wingers aren't going to have a lot of options. That could make Peterka a commodity on the trade market. It could also make him an offer-sheet target, but the Sabres have the cap space to match most deals. Management could take a more proactive approach here to ensure an NHL-caliber return versus more draft capital.

Peterka's offensive talents are obvious, but he hasn't yet developed into a consistent two-way player. Could moving Peterka help the Sabres address other needs on their roster?

Here are some teams that could or should be interested in Peterka:

Toronto Maple Leafs

With Mitch Marner likely gone, the Leafs are going to be looking for top-six help on the wing. They have the money to take on Peterka's next contract, but the question is whether they have the trade assets to make a deal work.

The biggest asset the Leafs would have is right-shot defenseman Brandon Carlo. Buffalo badly needs that type of player to pair with Owen Power. The 6-foot-5 Carlo is 28 and has two years left on a contract with a manageable cap hit of just over \$3 million. Toronto would have to sweeten the deal around Carlo to make a Peterka deal work, but the team doesn't have a lot of options.

Utah Mammoth

The Mammoth showed a willingness to be aggressive under new ownership last summer. After they were in the bottom half of the league in five-on-five scoring last season, adding another top-six winger wouldn't hurt. Utah also has some intriguing players that could make a deal work. The Mammoth have a surplus of right-shot defensemen; someone such as Michael Kesselring would be an ideal fit for what the Sabres need. Utah also has some forwards and prospects who could help even out a deal, such as Matias Maccelli, who would be the playmaking presence the Sabres are missing.

New York Rangers

The Rangers need to elevate their forward group to return to the playoff picture. Moving out Chris Kreider's contract bought some salary flexibility to make those changes. With that cap space, it makes a lot of sense for the Rangers to target Peterka — the team is craving more top-six talent on the wings and could use the infusion of youth from the 23-year-old.

The Sabres could try to pry Will Cuyllé out of New York in return, or even Braden Schneider, but it's hard to see the Rangers parting with either. Instead, someone like K'Andre Miller might be more plausible (especially if the Sabres trade Bowen Byram or buy out/move Mattias Samuelsson).

Vancouver Canucks

The Canucks want to change the look of their forward group, and there's a chance they will lose Brock Boeser in free agency. That puts them on the radar for a player such as Peterka, who would give them a proven scorer for their top six. What makes them a tricky trade fit is figuring out what would come the other way.

The Canucks are open to moving the 15th pick in the draft, but the Sabres don't need more futures. Conor Garland is appealing, but the Canucks might need to give up more than that to get a young player such as Peterka entering his prime.

Tampa Bay Lightning

If the Lightning want to make it past the first round, management needs to keep building up the supporting cast around the elite core. Between Oliver Bjorkstrand and Yanni Gourde last deadline, Tampa Bay added middle-six talent. But the team could still use another top-nine forward to round out

three skilled lines. Someone younger is even more enticing since the Lightning don't have a lot of up-and-comers after depleting their draft pool and prospect pipeline over the years.

The problem is that Tampa Bay doesn't have many trade assets; the team is already without its next three first-rounders. Instead, management would have to move out a roster player (to clear cap in the process). Someone such as Erik Cernak could be on the Sabres' radar if he is willing to waive his no-trade clause.

Calgary Flames

The Flames were 30th in the NHL in five-on-five scoring last season. Their lineup needs more offensive pop, and Peterka would give them plenty of that. At 23, he also fits Calgary's rebuilding timeline. The Flames have players who would interest the Sabres: right-handed defensemen Rasmus Andersson and MacKenzie Weegar and veteran winger Blake Coleman all fit what Buffalo needs. The Flames also have two first-round picks, so they have more than enough assets to pull off a Peterka trade.

New York Islanders

It's a new era in Islanders hockey with Mathieu Darche leading the way. The question is how bold the general manager will be in his first summer with the team. If the Islanders start retooling on the fly, then a 23-year-old top-six winger is the ideal target. Unlike this year's free-agent class, Peterka should still be in his prime as this team remodels back into a playoff fixture.

If Buffalo wants more veteran center depth, maybe Jean-Gabriel Pageau could be a part of the return. But the Sabres should be swinging big by kicking the tires on RFA defenders Alexander Romanov or Noah Dobson.

Pittsburgh Penguins

The Sabres and Penguins are logical trade partners. Pittsburgh needs to get younger, and Buffalo needs to round out its roster with the right veterans to finally get back to the playoffs. Bryan Rust is the most appealing player the Penguins have to offer, but it would take more than Rust to even out a trade for Peterka. Even though Rust is 33, he just set career highs with 31 goals and 34 assists last season. His contract is reasonable, and his veteran leadership would be huge for Buffalo's locker room.

Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets' playoff push was one of the most exciting storylines in 2025. Now Columbus has to find a way to build on it. Though the team has the cap space to go on a free-agent shopping spree, management might want to target players in their mid-20s who can play a longer-term role in the window of contention. Some of the defensive gaps in Peterka's game could be exposed in Columbus, but his offensive ability would help address an underwhelming power play. The Blue Jackets have a lot of draft capital to move, but a roster player such as Cole Sillinger is more in line with what the Sabres are looking for.

St. Louis Blues

If the Blues are looking to get younger without losing too much scoring, Peterka would make sense as a trade target for them. The Blues would have some interesting pieces to offer, but no-trade clauses could make a deal trickier to navigate. Kyrrou and Colton Parayko would be appealing trade chips but only if they were willing to come to Buffalo. The same goes for Pavel Buchnevich and Brayden Schenn. Jake Neighbours would also add the two-way game and net-front play that Buffalo could use more of in its forward group, and he doesn't have trade protection.

New Jersey Devils

Though injuries were the leading cause behind the Devils' demise, the team still had some weaknesses when 100 percent healthy. New Jersey over-relied on the power play for scoring and needed more even-strength production behind it. The winger depth could also use more support behind Jesper Bratt. With Peterka in the fold, someone such as Timo Meier could play the right side more often. That would shift Ondrej Palat (if he isn't moved this summer) into a more fitting depth role.

Two players stand out as potential returns for the Sabres: Dawson Mercer, whose game has stagnated over the last couple of seasons, and Simon Nemec. Both have experience playing under Lindy Ruff, and that familiarity could help ease the transition.

Ottawa Senators

A Dylan Cozens for Josh Norris trade surprised at the deadline. Could these two teams swing another deal this summer? The Senators finally turned the corner and returned to the postseason but still have a lot of work to do to get back to contender status. As much as Ottawa has built up its defensive structure over the last year, the team doesn't generate enough offense. The Senators have a lot of top-nine forwards, but not enough true top-six-caliber wingers.

In exchange for Peterka, the Sabres could try to trade for Shane Pinto, who doesn't have a path to the top six in Ottawa, or a right-handed defenseman such as Artem Zub.