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Columbus Dispatch / Montreal Canadiens eliminate Columbus Blue Jackets by clinching final NHL playoff spot

By Brian Hedger – April 17, 2025

The final twinkling lights of the Blue Jackets' playoff hopes have burned out.

The Montreal Canadiens clinched the final playoff spot in the NHL's Eastern Conference by defeating the watered down Carolina Hurricanes 4-2 on Wednesday night at Bell Centre in Montreal. The Hurricanes, who finished second in the Metropolitan Division and had already qualified for the playoffs, sat seven lineup regulars to guard against injuries prior to the postseason.

The Canadiens, who needed only one point to clinch the East's second wild card and eliminate the Blue Jackets, finished with 91 points. The Blue Jackets (39-33-9) can get to 89 points by winning their season finale against the New York Islanders on Thursday at Nationwide Arena. It's a bitter way for the Jackets' playoff hopes to end after extending their playoff viability with a five-game winning streak while facing elimination in each game.

That included sweeping a home-and-home, back-to-back against the Metro's top team, the Washington Capitals, followed by a 3-0 win Tuesday night in Philadelphia, where rookie Jet Greaves earned the second shutout of his NHL career in the span of four games since replacing injured goalie Elvis Merzlikins as an emergency recall April 10.

"When we were at six games left, we knew we had to win them all," forward Mathieu Olivier said. "We figured just start with one. The rest we couldn't control. The only thing we could control through that stretch was trying to win every single game until the end. We've been handling it one win at a time, one day at a time, and when you take that approach, it's a little easier to be resilient."

Going 81 games into an 82-game season before facing elimination is a testament to how hard the Blue Jackets played while honoring Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, who were killed on Aug. 29 while riding bikes in Salem County, New Jersey.

It's evidence, too, that playoff hockey is closer to happening for the Blue Jackets than anybody thought before the season. Their 14-23-4 road record is the most glaring reason the Jackets fell short, along with a 1-7-1 stretch from March 4-21 after gaining control of the East's first wild card with a thrilling outdoor victory over the Red Wings on March 1 at Ohio Stadium.

"We definitely added some pieces this year that helped this group with what we needed," Olivier said. "I think we still have some work to do, but everyone took a step this year. We can definitely take that into the summer and start to build what we're trying to accomplish here, which is to be a consistently winning hockey team."

Reaching the highest point total possible is now the goal after already reaching the franchise's highest point total since finishing as the East's second wild card with 98 points in 2018-19. Dean Evason, the Jackets' head coach, said recently that his team's motivation to finish the regular season strong wouldn't change based on the outcome of the playoff race.

"The message is that we can't control anything other than when the puck is dropped," Evason said. "You can control how you prepare to play when that puck's dropped, and then when it is, then you get after it. That's what the team has established this year, and we'll continue to do that regardless of where we sit in the standings or (whatever) happens."

Columbus Dispatch / Hurricanes set to rest regulars against Canadiens, dinging Blue Jackets' playoff hopes

By Lori Schmidt – April 17, 2025

The Blue Jackets need the Montreal Canadiens to lose in regulation on April 16 in order to have any hope of reaching the playoffs.

But the Carolina Hurricanes might not be in a position to put up much resistance at the Bell Centre in Canada. With their postseason position secure, Carolina is set to rest many of their regulars.

According to the team's website, Sebastian Aho, Jackson Blake, Jalen Chatfield, Seth Jarvis, Jordan Martinook, Jaccob Slavin, and Jordan Staal did not take part in the club's morning skate, making it likely they will sit out the 7 p.m. game.

That would set the stage for Skyler Brind'Amour and Domenick Fensore to make their NHL debuts, and for 2023 first-round draft pick Brady Nadeau to play in his second NHL game. Nadeau's first NHL appearance came exactly one year ago in Columbus.

Since then, he has been a force at the AHL level, leading Carolina's affiliate, the Chicago Wolves, with 30 goals this season. At 19, he is just the third teenager to record 30 AHL goals in the last 50 seasons.

... But he is still probably not who Blue Jackets fans hope to see on the ice in Montreal with their team's playoff survival on the line.

If the Canadiens do lose in regulation, Columbus would still need a win in regulation in its regular-season finale, April 17th's home game against the New York Islanders, to advance. That would extend the Jackets' current win streak to six straight and give both them and the Habs 89 standings points, with the Blue Jackets moving on by virtue of a tiebreaker (wins in regulation).

How to watch Carolina Hurricanes at Montreal Canadiens

Unfortunately, there aren't many local options to watch the April 16 game, but it will stream on ESPN+.

Columbus Dispatch / With Columbus Blue Jackets' playoff hopes alive, tickets for regular-season finale scarce

By Bill Rabinowitz – April 17, 2025

The Blue Jackets' improbable surge in the NHL playoff race has made tickets for the regular-season finale April 17 a hot commodity.

As of the afternoon of April 16, fewer than 300 tickets remained for the Jackets' game against the New York Islanders at Nationwide Arena, a team spokesperson said.

If Montreal, which holds the second wild-card spot in the standings with 89 points, loses in regulation at home against the Carolina Hurricanes on April 16, a Blue Jackets win in regulation would put them in the playoffs. If Montreal wins or loses in overtime or a shootout, Columbus would be eliminated. If Montreal loses in regulation and Columbus loses or the game goes to overtime, the Canadiens would qualify for the playoffs. The Blue Jackets have 87 points.

Columbus has been on the brink of elimination for a week. But the Jackets have won five straight, riding the hot play of goalie Jet Greaves, while Montreal has lost three in a row, including a shootout loss to the lowly Chicago Blackhawks in its last game.

The Blue Jackets' final home game festivities will include a poster given to the first 5,000 fans entering the arena. The team will also announce its Community MVP Award before the game.

Tickets may be purchased through Ticketmaster.com and BlueJackets.com. As of late morning April 16, the least-expensive ticket on Ticketmaster was \$53. On Stubhub.com, a secondary-market site, the cheapest ticket was \$39.

Get more on the Columbus Blue Jackets with our Cannon Fodder podcast.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' Jet Greaves grounds Philadelphia Flyers: 5 takeaways

By Brian Hedger – April 17, 2025

PHILADELPHIA — The team with a puncher's chance of getting into the Stanley Cup Playoffs landed another roundhouse right April 15 at Wells Fargo Center.

Skating in the hometown of fictional boxing legend Rocky Balboa, the ultimate underdog, the Blue Jackets continued their own quest to overcome long odds with a 3-0 shutout of the Philadelphia Flyers in a game they had to win. Facing elimination in the NHL's Eastern Conference race with anything but a win in regulation, the Jackets notched their fifth straight victory to keep their chances afloat.

Jet Greaves, a scorching hot rookie goalie who joined the team April 10 as an emergency recall from the AHL's Cleveland Monsters, notched his second NHL shutout in the past three games and Adam Fantilli's fifth goal in that same span sealed it.

They still need help April 16 in Montreal to get one final shot at controlling their own destiny April 17 against the New York Islanders, but the Blue Jackets avoided the chopping block again.

Here are five takeaways:

Clinching scenarios for Columbus Blue Jackets, Montreal Canadiens

The Canadiens have the easier path to the playoffs despite facing pressure in their regular season finale against the Carolina Hurricanes on Wednesday night at Bell Centre.

Anything but a loss in regulation time will get Montreal into the playoffs and hand the idle Blue Jackets a bitter end to a memorable season. The Jackets need a Carolina win over the Canadiens in regulation to keep their hopes going. Should that happen, they also must combine it with a regulation win over the Islanders on Thursday at Nationwide Arena to clinch a playoff spot based on regulation wins as the NHL's first standings tiebreaker.

"Everybody's pulling in the same direction," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "We've been fortunate to get some wins here. We need to get one more."

Jet Greaves is sizzling hot between the pipes for Columbus Blue Jackets

Fantilli smiled and laughed when asked about Greaves' sizzling performance between the pipes since being recalled April 10 as Elvis Merzlikins' injury replacement.

"He's maybe the hottest guy in the NHL right now," Fantilli said. "He's got one goal against him in the last three games ... and it's Ovi? I mean ... that's pretty good."

While going 4-0-0 to preserve the Blue Jackets' playoff hopes, Greaves has pitched two shutouts and stopped 119 of 122 shots for a .975 save percentage. As Fantilli pointed out, Greaves has allowed just one goal by recently crowned NHL goal king Alex Ovechkin in the past three games (82 shots).

Adam Fantilli adds emotional goal to his impressive second NHL season

The Blue Jackets' final push to stay relevant in the playoff race has coincided with several clutch performers leading the way, including Fantilli. His goal Tuesday against the Flyers was his fifth in the past three games and made it 3-0 to seal the win.

It was also his 30th goal of the season, a milestone that many players never reach. Fantilli also felt added emotion after attending his grandfather's funeral on April 14 in Toronto. Kiril Marchenko got the assist with a shot/pass that deflected off Fantilli into the net.

"Yesterday (April 14), I flew back to Toronto, and I buried my grandfather," Fantilli said. "His favorite team was Philly. That's going to sound like I'm joking when I say that, but I swear his favorite team was Philly, and coming back, I'm pretty sure that was him just giving me a lucky bounce there."

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Dante Fabbro is a waivers gift who keeps on giving

Dante Fabbro has scored some big goals since being claimed off waivers from the Nashville Predators in November, including his eighth of the season Tuesday against the Flyers.

Fabbro's goal made it 1-0 and allowed the Jackets to play with a lead they held to the final horn. That's not a scenario they've had much since defeating the Detroit Red Wings on March 1 at Ohio Stadium, but it's one that often leads to wins.

Fabbro, meanwhile, has unlocked a new level of offensive production since becoming Zach Werenski's partner. The goal extended his career-high in a season to eight, while the point from the goal set a new career-high with 25 points.

"Obviously, I'm playing with great players," Fabbro said. "I'm not putting any damper on anything. I'm just playing some offensive zone stuff and whatnot, and they've given me a lot of leash to go out there and try to be creative. But my biggest asset is my defensive game and how I try to take care of the puck."

Sean Monahan has the Columbus Blue Jackets' power play humming again

It can't be overstated how important center Sean Monahan is to the Blue Jackets' top power play unit as the "bumper" in the middle of their 1-3-1 setup.

Monahan finished with two assists against the Flyers, including one beautiful no-look dish out to Kent Johnson for a power-play goal that made it 2-0 late in the second period.

Since Monahan returned from wrist surgery March 24, the Blue Jackets are clicking at 24% on power plays after scoring six goals on 25 man-advantage opportunities. That ranks 12th highest in the NHL during that timeframe after the Jackets had sunk to last in the league while Monahan was sidelined.

Get more on the Columbus Blue Jackets with our Cannon Fodder podcast

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets' belief shows in win over Flyers](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – April 17, 2025

BLUE JACKETS 3, FLYERS 0

1. The Blue Jackets are getting closer to authoring one of the most incredible stories we've seen in the NHL.

Columbus has been through so much this season – a horrible tragedy before the season started, injuries to multiple top players, and a cold streak down the stretch that threatened to undo all their hard work – but along the way it's become clear this is a special group.

Whether the Blue Jackets' late-season push to make the playoffs is achieved remains to be seen, but you have to tip your cap to what this team is about. It's an easy group to root for, with players talking all season about the tight-knit nature of the locker room and their belief in one another.

Which might explain why the Blue Jackets have been able to push the season to game 82. They've needed to win each of their last five games to keep their postseason hopes alive, and they've done just that. They still need two results to go their way – Carolina must beat Montreal in regulation on Wednesday night and the Jackets have to down the Islanders in regulation in the home finale Thursday – but the Blue Jackets have defied the odds to get to this point.

No team in NHL history has ever erased a five-point deficit in its final three games to make the Stanley Cup Playoffs, but what once seemed impossible now at least is plausible.

"It's coming right down to the wire, so yeah, ever since I got here, there's never been any doubt," said Dante Fabbro, who scored the opening goal against the Flyers. "There's been nothing but belief and resilience, and it's just been a lot of fun to be a part of. It's an unbelievable culture, and everyone wants to win. There's no selfishness whatsoever. It's about winning, and that's the best part."

Jet Greaves made 29 saves in Philadelphia while earning his second shutout in three games, while Adam Fantilli reached 30 goals on the season with his third-period tally that shut the door. Kent Johnson also scored, while Sean Monahan and Zach Werenski posted two points apiece, with Werenski becoming just the second CBJ player to notch 80 points in a season.

Those were the highlights, but the reality is this was another team effort where everyone did their part. Columbus has outscored its last five opponents by a 22-5 margin, and you don't do that without everyone playing as a team, as head coach Dean Evason noted postgame.

"I think the team is feeding off each other," Evason said. "I think the team is saying, doing the right thing. It's not an individual game, it's a team game, and everybody is pulling in the same direction. They're all on the same page, and we've been fortunate to get some wins here. We need to get one more."

2. Fantilli's milestone marker carried a much more personal meaning.

The 20-year-old center wasn't with the team Monday or for Tuesday's morning skate, having returned home to Canada for his grandfather's funeral. He returned to Philadelphia before the game and got the clinching goal in the third period when Kirill Marchenko's pass kicked off his leg and deflected past goalie Samuel Ersson.

It might have looked like a bit of luck, but to Fantilli, more was at play.

"Yesterday, I flew back to Toronto and I buried my grandfather," he said postgame. "His favorite team was Philly. That's going to sound like I'm joking when I say that, but I swear his favorite team was Philly. Coming back, I'm pretty sure that one was him, just giving me a lucky bounce there."

The goal made him just the ninth player in team history to reach 30 in a season, as well as the second youngest to do so (Rick Nash was 19 when he tied for the NHL lead with 41 in 2003-04). He and teammate Kirill Marchenko (31 goals) are just the second group of CBJ teammates with 30 tallies in the same season, joining Brandon Saad (31) and Boone Jenner (30) in 2015-16.

To get there, Fantilli has been on an absolute heater down the stretch, following up his consecutive two-goal games over the weekend vs. the Caps with his goal against the Flyers. That gives him 23 goals in his last 42 games, good for a tie for eighth in the NHL in that span.

The Blue Jackets believed they had a franchise cornerstone when they selected the University of Michigan product third overall in the 2023 draft. More and more, it's looking like they were right on the money.

3. Greaves' unlikely story just continues to get better.

The Blue Jackets have known for some time that Greaves has the makings of an NHL goalie. He's been a standout in Cleveland over the past four seasons, backstopping the Monsters to within one game of the Calder Cup Final a season ago. He's impressed in each of his NHL stints the past three seasons, and the 24-year-old's calm nature in net and affable personality have made him a favorite of both teammates and fans alike.

But who could have predicted what he's been able to do over the past six days? Recalled on Thursday after an injury to Elvis Merzlikins, Greaves has gone into the net and taken the league by storm, winning all four starts, giving up just three goals in that span and posting his first two NHL shutouts.

He's allowed just one goal in his last three games, and the streak is even more impressive when you consider he blanked Buffalo for the last two periods Thursday as well. In the last 11 periods, Greaves has faced 115 shots on goal and stopped 114 of them, a save percentage of .991 that borders on the absurd.

"He might be the hottest guy in the NHL right now," Fantilli said. "He has one goal against in the last three games, and it's (Alex Ovechkin). That's pretty good. There's not much else you can say."

For his part, Greaves has continued to have the same mind-set that has allowed him to get to this point. He's developed a reputation as one of the hardest and most diligent workers on any team he's on, and he's often pointed to his disciplined mental outlook that's all about living in the moment and not getting too high or too low as his success has built the past two seasons.

He's not the kind of person to let this moment go to his head, but Greaves did admit he is enjoying the ride – though mostly because of what it's doing for the team.

"It's been a lot of fun," Greaves said. "It's always great to be playing important games this time of the year, and I think we're enjoying that, just enjoying every day. ... It's pretty cool. Obviously growing up, you always think about playing those games at the important time of the year and hopefully winning them. Just try to keep that going."

The Hockey News / Gaudreau Brothers: Sean Higgins Trial Update

By Jason Newland – April 17, 2025

Sean Higgins, the man accused of killing Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau while drunk driving, was back in court on Tuesday.

According to reports, the Gaudreau Family was in the courtroom today to hear Higgins and his attorneys argue about whether or not the Gaudreau Brothers contributed to their own deaths because they had been drinking earlier in the night.

The defense claims that because the Gaudreaus BAC was .129, and Higgins was only .087, the manslaughter and vehicular homicide charges should be reduced or tossed out.

Assistant Prosecutor Michael Mestern said, "To say that their BACs may have contributed to the cause of death is a reach, to say the least." Mestern even called it "kind of a red herring."

Defense lawyer Richard Klineburger III says, "I'm not saying it's the cause of death, but I don't know what impact it had, if any."

New Jersey state prosecutors have stated several times that there is no law about riding a bike while intoxicated in their state. Prosecutors also have witness statements saying that the brothers were riding single file, on the shoulder, and not weaving at all.

"There are four witnesses that witnessed the defendant speeding and illegally passing the Bronco on the right when he struck the brothers. The witnesses also saw the brothers riding single file, with the flow of traffic, on the fog line just prior to being struck by the defendant," Assistant Prosecutor Michael Mestern said.

He also said there is "no credible argument" that would make the Gaudreaus BAC levels relevant.

"Mr. Higgins is not demanding to be treated differently than any other but rather is respectfully requesting that the presentation of the charges against him be full, complete and transparent," defense lawyer Matthew Portella said in a motion to get the charges thrown out.

Superior Court Judge Michael Silvanio said Tuesday, "There's no credence in the argument there was contributory negligence on the part of the cyclists."

Judge Silvanio has upheld all charges against Sean Higgins, including manslaughter and vehicular homicide.

THN Columbus will keep you updated on the case.

Up Next: The Jackets are in Philadelphia to play the Flyers on Tuesday.

The Hockey News / Columbus Blue Jackets Eliminated From Playoff Contention

By Spencer Lazary – April 17, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets have been eliminated from playoff contention.

The Montreal Canadiens beat the Carolina Hurricanes in a must-win game to close out their season.

The Blue Jackets will face the New York Islanders on Thursday in their final game, which no longer carries any playoff implications. However, they'll still battle hard to keep their winning streak alive and finish the season on a high note.

The Blue Jackets fought hard to stay in the mix, and unfortunately, they fell just one game short. But they'll be back. It was a strong year of growth, and they'll only get better from here.

The Hockey News / Columbus Blue Jackets (87 pts) vs. New York Islanders (82 pts) Game Preview

By Jason Newland – April 17, 2025

The Blue Jackets will play their final regular-season game on Thursday against the New York Islanders.

Unfortunately for the Blue Jackets, this game means very little other than keeping a five game winning streak alive, and going out on a winning note. The Montreal Canadiens beat the "resting" Hurricanes in regulation, which means the Jackets are out. They left it in the hands of other teams to get them in, which is not a recipe for success.

The Blue Jackets still have this game to play, and will do so in front of their faithful fans who will fill the arena to the rafters.

There are still a few things to play for.

1. A six game winning streak.
2. Zach Werenski needs 1 assist to tie the single season assist record, and two to pass Artemi Panarin.
3. Boone Jenner is one goal from 200 in his career.
4. Columbus will have five players who will play 82 games - Kuraly, Provorov, Olivier, and Fantilli. In 23-24 they had just one - Provorov.

Blue Jackets Stats

- Power Play - 19.5% - 22nd in NHL
- Penalty Kill - 76.9% - 22nd in NHL
- Goals For - 261 - 8th - 3.22 GPG - 9th
- Goals Against - 266 - 25th - 3.28 GPG - 25th

Islanders Stats

- Power Play – 14.8% - 31st in NHL
- Penalty Kill – 77.8% - 31st in NHL
- Goals For - 261 – 8th – 2.73 GPG – 27th
- Goals Against – 266 – 25th – 3.10 GPG – 19th

Series History vs. The Islanders

- Columbus is 17-7-5 at home and 26-22-8 in 56 all-time games against the Islanders
- The Jackets are 2-1 vs. NYI this season.

Who To Watch For The Islanders

- Bo Horvat leads the Isles with 29 assists and 57 points.
- Anders Lee leads the team with 29 goals.
- Ilya Sorokin is 30-24-6 with a .907 SV%.

- Marcus Högborg is 2-5-3 with a .887 SV%.

CBJ Player Notes vs. Islanders

- Boone Jenner has 15 points in 31 career games against New York.
- Zach Werenski has 13 points in 23 games.
- Sean Monahan has 16 points in 19 games against the Islanders.

Injuries

- Kevin Labanc (shoulder) is on Injured Reserve as of Feb. 21 and is out for the season (25 Games)
- Elvis Merzljikins (upper body) has missed 4 games.
- Jake Christiansen (upper body) has missed 3 games.

TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 321

How to Watch & Listen: Tonight's game will be on FanDuel Sports Network. Steve Mears will be on the play-by-play. The radio broadcast will be on 97.1 The Fan, with Bob McElligott behind the mic doing the play-by-play.

The Hockey Writers / 3 Takeaways From the Blue Jackets' 3-0 Shutout Win Over the Flyers

By Matthew Buhrmann – April 17, 2025

Hope is still alive in Columbus with Tuesday night's 3-0 shutout win over the Philadelphia Flyers. It is now five straight wins for the Blue Jackets, and now all eyes shift to Wednesday night's Montreal Canadiens vs. Carolina Hurricanes matchup. If the Canadiens lose in regulation, the Blue Jackets can clinch the final playoff spot on Thursday with a regulation win over the New York Islanders.

One of the biggest factors in this win wasn't just the stellar goaltending—it was the defensive structure that made life easier for netminder Jet Greaves. Columbus was locked in defensively, limiting Philadelphia's chances in the high-danger areas for most of the 60 minutes.

"I think the guys are just playing great. They're doing a great job in front of me, making my job pretty simple, so it's been a team effort. Obviously, it's an important time of the year. These games matter a lot, but all the guys are doing a great job," said Jet Greaves post-game.

The Flyers couldn't generate quality looks, largely because the Blue Jackets controlled the neutral zone and clogged up the slot. They forced Philadelphia's shooters to settle for long-range attempts, giving Greaves clean sightlines all night. A textbook defensive game.

This commitment to limiting space translated to momentum on offense. Late in the second period, Emil Andrae took an interference penalty against Zach Aston-Reese. The Blue Jackets wasted no time making them pay—just seconds into the power play, Kent Johnson found the back of the net, extending the lead to 2-0.

Johnson's goal was huge, not just because it added a cushion, but also because Columbus knew they needed a regulation win to stay alive.

Fantilli Joins the 30-Goal Club

Just when you thought Columbus had done enough, Adam Fantilli decided to put an exclamation point on the night. His 30th goal of the season sealed the win and cemented his spot in franchise history once again.

Fantilli joins Kirill Marchenko in the 30-goal club, making this just the second time in franchise history that the Blue Jackets have had two 30-goal scorers in the same season—both under the age of 25.

Even more impressive? Fantilli now stands alongside Rick Nash as the only Blue Jackets player to score 30 goals in his second NHL season. Considering Nash is widely regarded as the best player in franchise history, that's elite company.

Jet Has Reached Lift-Off

This game was won in the first period thanks to Jet Greaves' incredible goaltending performance. He didn't just keep Columbus in the game, but he rather gave them the confidence to play their style, knowing they had a rock-solid presence in the crease. Philadelphia had chances early on, but Greaves completely shut them down, allowing the Blue Jackets to find their legs and take control.

Greaves' stats over the past few games are staggering. He has faced 122 shots in his last four appearances, stopping an incredible 119 of them, good for a .975 save percentage. He's also recorded two shutouts and has allowed just one goal on his last 115 shots faced—and that goal came against none other than the leading all-time NHL goal scorer, Alexander Ovechkin.

“He might be the hottest guy in the NHL right now. He’s got one goal against him in the last three games, and it’s Ovi? I mean ... that’s pretty good. There’s not much else you can say,” said Adam Fantilli post-game.

Odds Are Still Stacked Against the Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets have fought their way back into playoff contention, but the road ahead remains difficult. Carolina will likely be resting key players over the next two games, meaning we could see some American Hockey League (AHL) Chicago Wolves call-ups in NHL action.

The Canes have been locked into a first-round matchup with the New Jersey Devils for quite a while now, and as such, they’ve been able to rest a variety of players as of late.

The odds are slim for the Blue Jackets, but as this team has proven, they don’t care about the odds.

Regardless of what happens, I’m incredibly proud of this group. They’ve battled through adversity, injuries, and countless setbacks, yet they’ve continued to fight with everything they have. That kind of perseverance says a lot about the culture being built in Columbus.

The Hockey Writers / Canadiens Must Lock In a Playoff Spot Tonight Against the Hurricanes

By William Bourget – April 17, 2025

With one game left in the regular season, the stakes couldn't be higher for the Montreal Canadiens. After a late-season stumble, the Canadiens are clinging to the final playoff spot by one point. That's all that separates them from the postseason, and it all comes down to their final game against the Carolina Hurricanes on Wednesday night.

If the Canadiens earn one point against the Hurricanes, they will clinch the second wild-card berth in the Eastern Conference. If they lose in regulation, the door swings open for the Columbus Blue Jackets, who have caught fire at the right time and could steal that last spot with a win over the New York Islanders on Thursday. Considering how both teams have trended over the last stretch, there's genuine concern in Montreal.

Momentum Moving in Opposite Directions

Montreal has dropped three straight games, looking flat, disorganized, and outmatched at times. Their most recent performances have raised questions about their readiness for the postseason, both mentally and physically. Meanwhile, the Blue Jackets have been a revelation, winning five consecutive games and playing their best hockey of the season when it matters most. While the Canadiens have faltered under pressure, the Blue Jackets have embraced it, thriving in high-stakes matchups and showing the type of swagger that makes them a real threat.

Test of Canadiens Young Core

Wednesday's game is more than a ticket to the postseason. It's a test of character, especially for the Canadiens' young core. Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield, Lane Hutson, and Juraj Slafkovsky have been central to the team's rebuild and progression, but now comes the real proving ground: playing under playoff-type pressure with everything on the line.

The team's youth has been both a strength and a weakness this season. They've brought energy, speed, and optimism to the lineup, but they've also shown inexperience in managing momentum, closing out games, and responding to adversity. That inexperience has been especially costly during this recent skid, where the Habs have often started games well, only to fade as the contest grew tighter.

The group has already let two golden opportunities slip away. The Canadiens dropped back-to-back extra-time games against the Toronto Maple Leafs and Chicago Blackhawks that could have booked their ticket to the playoffs. Those were moments they needed to close, and they didn't. Whether it was missed assignments, untimely penalties, or simply failing to seize momentum when it mattered, the inability to finish has brought them to the brink.

Hurricanes Stand in the Way

The Hurricanes will not be an easy hurdle. While they may already be locked into their berth and will rest some players, they are known for their structured, relentless style of play. They don't give much for free, and their forecheck can overwhelm even the most composed defensive units. For a Habs team that's struggled with defensive zone exits and puck management during their losing streak, it's a dangerous matchup.

But pressure can do strange things. Sometimes, it cracks teams; sometimes, it forges something stronger. This game will reveal which version of the Canadiens will define their season. Will they respond with the desperation and intensity that's been missing? Or will the pressure prove too much for this still-developing squad?

Blue Jackets Lurking

Columbus, on the other hand, will be watching closely. Their recent surge has been impressive. They're playing fast, aggressive hockey, and they're getting timely production from their top players. If the Canadiens fail to deliver against the Hurricanes, the Blue Jackets will enter Thursday's game against the Islanders with everything to gain. The Isles, who are already eliminated and are coasting into the offseason, won't have the same fire or stakes, making this a potentially favourable matchup for Columbus.

Regardless of the outcome, this moment is invaluable for a young team like the Canadiens. These high-stakes situations, where every shift carries weight, every mistake is magnified, and every play could be the difference between elation and heartbreak, are what forge character. It's one thing to grow in the regular-season comfort zone, but it's another to feel the true pressure of must-win hockey. Whether they punch their ticket to the playoffs or fall just short, this experience will stay with them. It teaches composure, accountability, and resilience, intangibles that no amount of talent alone can provide. For a group built around youth, these lessons are not setbacks – they're the building blocks of a future contender.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Jet Fueling Jackets, Fabbro Nets Game-Winner, Superstars In The Making

By Will Chase – April 17, 2025

You can feel the momentum.

Jet Greaves was sensational, making 29 saves for his second career shutout, and the Columbus Blue Jackets defeated the Philadelphia Flyers 3-0 on Tuesday at Wells Fargo Center.

Columbus has won five straight to stay alive in the playoff race. The Montreal Canadiens host the Carolina Hurricanes on Wednesday at Bell Centre. The Blue Jackets need the Canadiens to lose in regulation and then beat the Islanders in regulation on Thursday.

Jet Fueling Jackets

Coming off First Star of the Week honors for his 3-0-0 run last week, Greaves was perfect yet again. The 24-year-old stopped all 29 shots to pick up his second-career shutout. All since Saturday.

For the year, Greaves is 6-2-2 with a 2.00 goals against average and .934 save percentage.

Fabbro Nets Game-Winner

Dante Fabbro continued a career year with his eighth goal at 2:32 of the second period to break the scoreless tie. His 25th point is a new career high, and he's +20 on the year.

Zach Werenski and Sean Monahan each had the first of two assists, as Werenski picked up his 57th and Monahan added his 36th. Werenski is riding a five-game point streak (two goals, four assists). Monahan is also on a five-game point streak (two goals, five assists).

Superstars In The Making

Kent Johnson made it 2-0 with a power-play goal for his 24th at 17:01 of the third period. Monahan's assist was his 37th, and Werenski's assist was his 58th. Johnson is on a five-game point streak (two goals, five assists).

Adam Fantilli stayed red-hot with his 30th goal to make it 3-0 and provide the key insurance marker to salt this one away. He's on a three-game point streak with five goals over his last three games and six over his last four games. Kirill Marchenko added his 42nd assist, and Ivan Provorov picked up his 26th.

With three more goals, the Blue Jackets set the franchise record with 261, breaking the 2021-22 mark when they scored 258.

Regular Season Finale

The Blue Jackets return to Nationwide Arena for the regular season finale against the New York Islanders on Thursday, April 17, at 7 p.m. ET.

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: The stakes in play on Wednesday

By ESPN staff – April 17, 2025

With a combination of results on Tuesday, the Minnesota Wild and St. Louis Blues clinched the two wild-card spots in the Western Conference, eliminating the Calgary Flames from postseason contention.

On the other side of the continent, the Columbus Blue Jackets won in regulation against the Philadelphia Flyers, keeping their slim chances intact. Will Wednesday see the clinching of team No. 16 in the playoff field, or will Thursday's games be the determinant?

Carolina Hurricanes at Montreal Canadiens

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

This is the most important game of the night by a considerable margin. With a win of any variety, or a loss in overtime/shootout, the Canadiens clinch the second Eastern wild-card spot. The only thing that keeps the Blue Jackets' hopes intact is a regulation loss for Montreal. It's unclear what type of roster the Habs will face from the Canes, as the latter have been locked into the No. 2 in the Metro for a while now.

Anaheim Ducks at Winnipeg Jets

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Ducks will finish no lower than ninth in the draft lottery order -- they enter this game with 79 points, and the teams lower than them have 82 or more. But a loss here followed by wins Thursday by the Penguins and Sabres could get them as high as seventh. The Jets recently locked up the Presidents' Trophy as the NHL's top regular-season team (and No. 1 seed for as long as they last in the playoffs).

Detroit Red Wings at New Jersey Devils

7:30 p.m. (TNT)

The Wings are currently 12th in the draft lottery order, with 83 points and 29 regulation wins, and can move up as high as 10th (if the Islanders win Thursday, and they lose their next two games). Like the Hurricanes, the Devils have been locked in their playoff position for a while now, and it is Carolina against whom they match up in Round 1.

Dallas Stars at Nashville Predators

8 p.m. (ESPN+)

Two teams at opposite ends of the Central Division, and neither can make a move based on the results of this game; the Stars will open the playoffs in the No. 2 spot in the Central against the No. 3-seeded Colorado Avalanche, while the Predators are locked in the No. 3 position in the draft lottery order.

Vegas Golden Knights at Vancouver Canucks

10 p.m. (TNT)

And here are a pair of Pacific Division teams whose results tonight will not change the standings. The Golden Knights clinched the No. 1 seed in the Pacific Division recently, and the Canucks are locked in as the No. 15 team in the draft lottery order.

Edmonton Oilers at San Jose Sharks

10:30 p.m. (ESPN+)

... and here's another pair of Pacific teams that are already locked in as well. San Jose has been in the No. 1 spot in the draft lottery order for quite some time, a position they clinched recently. Meanwhile, the Oilers will be the No. 3 seed in the Pacific Division bracket, taking on the No. 2-seeded Los Angeles Kings in Round 1.

Sportsnet.ca / Hit or miss? A look at who exceeded expectations and who fell short

By Ally Chesham – April 17, 2025

Wasn't it just October?

Now, somehow, it's already mid-April and the 2024–25 NHL regular season is about to slip into the rearview mirror. Just 13 games remain between Wednesday and Thursday before 16 teams head into the Stanley Cup Playoffs, and the other 16 depart for the off-season.

With a handful of teams already having played Game 82 and the rest sitting at 80 or 81 — and with the short window before the playoffs begin Saturday — it's time to reflect on a season that's just about concluded.

Here, we're taking a look at some of the surprises from the past seven months — the teams and players who exceeded expectations and those who, not to kick anyone while they're down, fell short.

In no particular order, let's dive into this list of 10 breakthrough performances and unexpected disappointments that had a hand in shaping this season.

Hit: Ovechkin breaks goals record

We all knew Alex Ovechkin would eventually break Wayne Gretzky's all-time goals record — but few expected it to happen this season. Just look back at our Sportsnet NHL Insider predictions for the 2024–25 season from October: 17 of 19 insiders didn't think he'd hit the 42 goals needed to reach 895 and surpass Gretzky. At 39 years old, Ovechkin had tallied 15 goals by Nov. 18 and was on pace to make history — until he broke his left fibula that same day. After missing more than a month, he returned on Dec. 28 and defied Father Time and the doubters, scoring four goals in his first five games back, then maintaining a blistering pace to tie Gretzky's mark on April 4 and break it one game later. Ovechkin's pace of 0.67 goals per game this season is his best mark since 2019–20.

Miss: Big swings fall flat for Predators

After finishing the 2023–24 season in the first wild-card spot in the Western Conference, the Nashville Predators bowed out in the opening round of the playoffs, losing in six games to the Vancouver Canucks. Looking to bolster their roster and take another run at the playoffs, they made three significant free-agent signings in the summer: Steven Stamkos (four years, \$32 million), Jonathan Marchessault (five years, \$27.5 million) and Brady Skjei (seven years, \$49 million). However, all three had disappointing debut seasons, one issue among many the team has faced. Stamkos is a team-worst minus-36 and has dropped from 81 points last season to 52. Marchessault has 54 points after posting 69 and Skjei has 33 points after recording 47. During a four-game losing streak in March, head coach Andrew Brunette criticized Nashville's efforts while acknowledging how mentally draining the stretch had been for veteran players specifically. The Predators are set to finish 30th overall.

Hit: Hutson leads rookie scoring

There was undoubtedly plenty of hype around rookie defenceman Lane Hutson heading into his maiden NHL season — but how many foresaw him sitting atop the rookie scoring leaderboard and emerging as the frontrunner for the Calder Trophy in a class that includes Macklin Celebrini, Dustin Wolf, Matvei Michkov, Will Smith, Cutter Gauthier and Logan Stankoven? He leads all rookies with 65 points, including 59 assists, and also paces the class in both power-play points (26) and power-play assists (25). His 65th

point pushed him past former Canadien and Hall of Famer Chris Chelios for the most points by a rookie defenceman in franchise history — and he also passed Chelios for the most assists by a rookie defenceman. Montreal has every reason to be excited about what the future holds for the former Boston University product, who could be helping them in the playoffs as early as this season.

Miss: Pettersson's drama-filled season

In March 2024, Elias Pettersson signed an eight-year, \$92.8-million contract extension to become the highest-paid Canuck in franchise history — a deal earned after a 102-point campaign followed by an 89-point season. He didn't quite meet expectations during Vancouver's playoff run that spring, putting up just six points in 13 games. But considering it was his first real post-season experience and he'd been dealing with tendinitis in his knee, concern was minimal at the time. But fast-forward one season into his long-term deal, and Pettersson fell well short of the expectations that come with being a star forward making \$11.6 million annually — the fifth-highest salary in the league. His year was cut short by injuries, including one that sidelined him for Vancouver's final 12 games, and he finished with just 45 points in 64 appearances. To make matters worse, his on-ice struggles were amplified by the off-ice drama with teammate J.T. Miller, who was eventually traded to the New York Rangers.

Hit: Incredible turnaround by Blues

The St. Louis Blues lost 13 of their first 22 games — but that alone wasn't what led to first-time NHL head coach Drew Bannister's firing on Nov. 24, less than a year into the job. The real catalyst came five days earlier, when the Boston Bruins dismissed Jim Montgomery — a coach Blues president and GM Doug Armstrong clearly didn't want to miss out on the chance to hire. With Montgomery now at the helm, the Blues were 25-26-5 heading into the 4 Nations Face-Off break and had dropped six of their last eight, sitting eight points back of the Canucks for the second wild-card spot in the West with single-digit playoff odds. Then came the turnaround. Since the break, St. Louis has gone 19-4-2, a stretch that included a franchise-record 12-game win streak from March 15 to April 5. Similar to their Stanley Cup season in 2018-19, this impressive run and the coaching change won them what many would have described as an unlikely playoff spot.

Miss: Major drop-off for Rangers

Referencing back to our insider predictions from the start of the season, almost half picked the Rangers to win the Metropolitan Division, with a handful even pegging them as potential Stanley Cup finalists. And that wasn't exactly a bold take — New York was coming off a Presidents' Trophy-winning season in 2023-24, setting franchise records with 55 wins and 114 points, then advancing to the Eastern Conference Final, where they fell to the eventual Cup-champion Florida Panthers. They carried that momentum into the early part of this season, starting 12-4-1 over their first 17 games. But things quickly unravelled, as the Rangers dropped 15 of their next 19. They struggled to recover and sank to the bottom half of the standings, being officially eliminated from playoff contention on April 12.

Hit: Wolf's smooth transition to starter

After bouncing between the Calgary Flames and their AHL affiliate last season to cover for injuries to Jacob Markstrom and Dan Vladar, Dustin Wolf posted a 7-7-1 record with a 3.16 goals-against average and a .893 save percentage over 17 appearances (15 starts). But with Markstrom traded to the New Jersey Devils in the off-season, a full-time NHL spot opened up for the 23-year-old netminder to earn. Wolf began 2024-25 by splitting starts with Vladar, but eventually took over the crease thanks to his impressive play — especially key for a team with the third-fewest goals scored league-wide. With a 29-26-8 record, 2.64 GAA and .910 save percentage across 53 starts — a mark that surpassed Mike Vernon's

franchise record for most starts by a rookie goalie — Wolf helped keep the Flames in the playoff mix until the very end, exceeding expectations placed on both the team and its goaltending tandem.

Miss: Swayman's career-worst stats

With an eight-year, \$66-million contract came higher expectations for Jeremy Swayman — especially after it was signed following a public standoff that saw him miss all of training camp and the pre-season. Add in the fact that he entered this season with a clear path to take over the starting job following Linus Ullmark's departure, and the pressure only increased. Swayman was coming off a 2023–24 campaign in which he posted strong regular-season numbers and was even better in the playoffs as the Bruins advanced to the second round. But in 2024–25, his performance took a sharp dip. He recorded a career-worst in wins — despite playing more games than ever — as well as in goals-against average (3.11) and save percentage (.892). While the Bruins have taken a collective step back, Swayman's struggles have been among the most glaring.

Hit: Playoff drought ends for Senators

Seven consecutive seasons without any post-season action couldn't have been easy to endure, but there's finally light at the end of the tunnel for the Ottawa Senators. For the first time since 2017, they're heading back to the playoffs — and are set for a first-round "Battle of Ontario" matchup against the Toronto Maple Leafs. It marks a sharp rise from where they were a year ago, when they finished second-last in the Atlantic Division. At the halfway point of this season, Ottawa sat at 20-18-3 — already eight points ahead of where they stood at that stage in 2023–24. Now, as the regular season comes to a close, they're set to finish with nearly 20 more points than the previous campaign. One of the club's most glaring weaknesses last season was in goal, and acquiring Linus Ullmark in the off-season went a long way toward solidifying that position. The addition of head coach Travis Green also paid dividends, as he established a more structured and accountable system of play.

Miss: Blackhawks stuck in basement

Another year, another early end to the season for the Chicago Blackhawks, who've now missed the playoffs five straight times — a wholly unsurprising result given their ongoing rebuild. And they haven't just been missing by a bit; they've been missing by a lot. After finishing 31st in the league with 52 points last season, they landed in the same spot this year with 61 points. A major leap wasn't necessarily expected this time around, but there was hope — both internally and externally — that the group would at least show some signs of progress. Which is why the season felt all the more disappointing in just how rough it ended up being. Former Blackhawk Seth Jones, who was traded to the Florida Panthers ahead of the deadline, wasn't out of line when he said in February that Chicago hadn't made any improvements all season.

Bonus Hit: 4 Nations Face-Off success

Replacing the All-Star Game we've grown accustomed to and doubling as a preview of the NHL's return to the Olympics next winter, the buy-in from all four countries involved in the one-week 4 Nations Face-Off exceeded expectations. And then there was the element that no one could've predicted: rising political tensions between the U.S. and Canada adding another layer to an already heated rivalry. The championship game drew 16.1 million viewers across North America, including 9.3 million in the U.S. and 6.3 million in Canada, making it the second-most-watched hockey game of the past decade. The tournament's unforeseen success has prompted commissioner Gary Bettman to say it has "raised the bar" and has the NHL re-evaluating next year's All-Star Game format.

[Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing \(and predicting\) the four Western Conference playoff matchups](#)

By Justin Bourne – April 17, 2025

I'll save you much preamble, as you're familiar with what's going on. Here's which teams in the Western Conference I think have advantages and disadvantages as we head into Round 1 of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

COLORADO at DALLAS

Season series: Colorado went 2-1, while the Stars grabbed three points, losing the final meeting in March in overtime.

The breakdown: Let's talk about two very good teams. Or at least what I think are two very good teams, as the Dallas Stars are in the midst of a six-game losing streak heading into their Wednesday-night matchup with the Nashville Predators. But, they had won seven in a row before this significant skid, so we're gonna lean on, "You're never as good as you think when it's going well, or as bad as you think when you're struggling."

Both teams score at a rate inside the league's top six, while the Stars have done a bit better job keeping pucks out of their net. Most of that can be attributed to the fact that the Stars have the second-best combined team save percentage this season (.907), while the Avs are 18th (at .891).

By expected goals for and against, the Avs look a bit better, though it's worth noting both teams are in a cluster of teams that the numbers really like. (The others: Vegas, Tampa Bay, Edmonton, Carolina and, on the very outer fringes of that group, Washington.)

I'll be keeping an eye on who can get saves, as the Avs goalies have improved from what they opened the season with and the Stars goalies are scuffling.

Also, keep another eye on who can get healthy, as the Stars have been waiting on Miro Heiskanen, Tyler Seguin — who is apparently close to playing — and they have a few players who are "day to day." The Avs will be returning Gabriel Landeskog (!!) and are waiting on Josh Manson.

My pick: Colorado in 6

Massive roster overhaul under-sells some of their season-long numbers, Dallas is scuffling right now and if they don't get goaltending, they're gonna have a tough time.

EDMONTON at LOS ANGELES

Season series: The Kings went 3-0-1, but that doesn't exactly tell the tale of the tape. In their last matchup, the Oilers couldn't play the core of their team, so we should void that one.

The breakdown: This is a fun series because we've got a stylistic contrast. The Kings are one of the top defensive teams in the NHL, finishing second in goals against per game, while the Oilers were 16th. It doesn't hurt L.A. that Darcy Kuemper may end up a Vezina finalist after his superb season.

And while they're similar in actual offensive output on the season, the Oilers create way, way more by expected goals. When they're healthy, and those top two guys of theirs are available, Edmonton is an absolute handful to defend.

One place of concern for the Kings is the power play. If this is going to be a physical series, and they can't score power-play goals (28th in the regular season), it should free up the Oilers to be a bit nastier. If they get Evander Kane and/or Trent Frederic back at some point, that would be a big help.

This injury thing, though, it's a very real problem for Edmonton. I think they're the better team by a good distance when healthy, but if guys are rushing back trying to play through being at like 80 per cent, particularly if they've had time off, it's tough to see them being able to be at their best.

My pick: Edmonton in 6

In the end, one of my fundamental hockey beliefs is that elite difference-makers are what pulls teams through tight moments. Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl are absolute forces of post-season nature, and I just can't bet against them, I can't. Scores should be close and nobody can turn a game in a moment like those guys.

ST. LOUIS at WINNIPEG

Season series: Jets won 3-1, while the Blues took three points out of the four games. The first three games were all road victories, while the sole home win came in their final meeting on April 7, when the Jets ended the Blues' 12-game win streak.

The breakdown: Honestly, the Jets deserved better than drawing the Blues to open the playoffs, as St. Louis was outright bad until it added new coach Jim Montgomery, and it's been a wagon for about two months now. But the Jets have the advantage of, y'know, being the better team, so there's that.

If you sort the NHL team stats columns for goals for per game, goals against, power play and penalty kill, there's not a single one where the Jets aren't a minimum of 10 spots higher in the rankings. That holds for "team save percentage," where the Jets sit first and the Blues 13th.

The ol' graph of "expected goals for and against" shows the Jets are a bit better offensively, while they're comparable defensively.

The Blues and Jets have one thing in common: you look at both rosters and it's hard to find a true soft spot, as they're both solid throughout. The Jets losing Nik Ehlers to a freak linesman collision is a massive bummer, but they're deep enough that they should be able to survive his absence a couple games.

My pick: Jets in 6

If both teams are "solid throughout," I like the Jets a bit better in every conceivable spot. I like their top end scorers more. I like the grit of their grittier bottom six more. Like their goalie more. Defence too.

VEGAS at MINNESOTA

Season series: The Golden Knights mopped up the Wild, with three regulation victories, outscoring them 12-4 along the way. In their last matchup, March 25 in Minnesota, Jack Eichel scored three.

The breakdown: Every team loves having the psychological advantage of "nobody believed in us," so I'm here to be the public face of that stance for the Minnesota Wild. They've officially got nothing to lose!

By pretty much every way I can figure it, nobody has a more optimistic playoff road ahead than Vegas. The Golden Knights' underlying numbers are sparkling, with top-end expected goals for and against numbers. They're top-five in goals for per game, goals against, and power play, with only their penalty kill raising any red flags (and the Wild are 20th in power-play percentage).

They get good goaltending and are mostly healthy, having had plenty of rest leading in to Round 1.

Yes, the Wild will have Kirill "the Thrill" Kaprizov back. And yes, they defend well, and they have received exceptional goaltending from Filip Gustavsson. They're no pushover. But.

My pick: Vegas in 5

The Knights are too stacked for an upset here. That the Wild keep games close means they'll probably win at least one, but in the end, Vegas will pull through.