



**Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
December 16, 2024**

Columbus Blue Jackets

- PAGE 02: The Columbus Dispatch: Carolina Hurricanes hand Columbus Blue Jackets fourth straight loss
- PAGE 04: The Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets reeling after loss to Carolina Hurricanes: 3 takeaways
- PAGE 06: The Columbus Dispatch: Anaheim Ducks sting Columbus Blue Jackets in OT to win matchup of similar teams
- PAGE 08: The Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets fumble away homestand with OT loss to Anaheim Ducks: 3 takeaways
- PAGE 10: The Columbus Dispatch: Why Anaheim Ducks' Jacob Trouba rejected trade to Columbus Blue Jackets
- PAGE 12: The Athletic: Blue Jackets' early power-play opportunity backfires in rough loss to Hurricanes
- PAGE 14: The Athletic: Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Three goalies is messy, but Jet Greaves isn't going away
- PAGE 19: The Athletic: Tepid start, inconsistent energy doom Blue Jackets in overtime — again

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/ Websites

- PAGE 21: The Athletic: Man accused in deaths of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau facing more serious charges: What we know
- PAGE 23: The Athletic: NHL mock trade proposals: One tantalizing target for each team. Could any deals happen?
- PAGE 34: The Athletic: Team Canada World Junior selection camp notebook: Thoughts on all 32 players who participated

The Columbus Dispatch / Carolina Hurricanes hand Columbus Blue Jackets fourth straight loss

By Brian Hedger – December 16, 2024

Another back-to-back finale resulted in a predictable ugly loss for the reeling Blue Jackets on Sunday night at Lenovo Center in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Jordan Martinook led the way with a goal and assist for the Carolina Hurricanes, who downed the Blue Jackets 4-1 by dictating play most of the game. Jordan Staal added two points on two assists for the Hurricanes (19-10-1), whose other three goals were scored by Sebastian Aho, William Carrier and Jesperi Kotkaniemi.

Hurricanes goalie Dustin Tokarski, playing his first NHL game since Feb. 18, 2023, made 27 saves for the goaltending win. Elvis Merzlikins, starting for the first time since taking an ugly loss Tuesday against the Philadelphia Flyers, allowed four goals on 28 shots in another defeat.

Dmitri Voronkov scored the lone goal for the Blue Jackets (12-14-5), who are winless in their past four games (0-2-2) and just 1-5-2 since the end of a six-game point streak.

Carolina led 2-0 after owning the first period against the Blue Jackets in attempted shots, scoring chances and chances from high-danger areas. Interestingly, Aho scored the Hurricanes' first goal at 8:28 of the opening period during a short-handed 2-on-1 rush sparked by Columbus turning the puck over attempting to end the offensive zone on a power play.

Seth Jarvis fed a cross-slot pass, which Aho buried with a snapshot to beat Merzlikins for a 1-0 lead. Carrier made it 2-0 in the period's final minute, backhanding a pass from Staal inside the right post to beat Merzlikins with 52 seconds remaining.

In the second, each team scored once to give the Hurricanes a 3-1 lead. Voronkov scored the first one to pull the Blue Jackets within 2-1 on his eighth goal, set up with a backhand pass from Kirill Marchenko. Martinook, however, reclaimed a two-goal cushion for the Hurricanes 1:24 later by tipping Staal's long-range shot from the blue line into the Jackets' net.

Columbus challenged for goaltender interference, but the goal was upheld after video review and Carolina was given a power play for delay-of-game. Former Blue Jackets forward Jack Roslovic capped it with a power-play goal that would've made it 4-1, but Columbus challenged again for a missed stoppage that should've followed an uncalled hand pass prior to the goal. That one was successful and the goal was wiped out, giving the Blue Jackets a strange lift heading into the second break.

The Hurricanes quickly made it 4-1 in the third period, though. Kotkaniemi used a great screen from Martin Necas at 6:19 to zip a wrist shot past Merzlikins, who never saw it. That pushed Carolina's lead to an insurmountable three-goal margin.

The Blue Jackets, already missing three injured forwards plus defenseman Erik Gudbranson, lost defenseman Jack Johnson to an apparent eye injury after a high stick to the face from Kotkaniemi and lost forward Kevin Labanc in the third after he was struck in the face by the puck.

[The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets reeling after loss to Carolina Hurricanes: 3 takeaways](#)

By Brian Hedger – December 16, 2024

The wheels are coming off the Blue Jackets' season.

It's taken longer than it did the past two years, but the Jackets are starting to resemble those teams again after starting this season looking much improved. Another humbling 4-1 loss Sunday to the Carolina Hurricanes in Raleigh, North Carolina, made the Blue Jackets (12-14-5) winless in four straight games and 1-5-2 in their past eight — all while injury losses pile up.

That may sound familiar to those who have followed the Blue Jackets the past few years, and they're running out of time to change the narrative. The schedule doesn't get any easier this week, as another daunting road matchup awaits Tuesday against the Tampa Bay Lightning followed by a return to Columbus on Thursday against the high-powered New Jersey Devils.

Here are three takeaways from Sunday's loss:

Shortage of forwards stifling Columbus Blue Jackets

Boone Jenner recently began skating through individual workouts during his recovery from shoulder surgery, but the Blue Jackets' captain isn't expected to return to the lineup soon.

Yegor Chinakhov missed his 10th straight game Sunday with an undisclosed upper-body injury and doesn't have an expected return timeline. The Blue Jackets are 3-5-2 without him. Justin Danforth has missed the past three games, all losses, with an undisclosed lower-body injury, and there's no state timetable for his return.

Throw in Mathieu Olivier playing through an undisclosed lower-body injury and center Sean Kuraly appearing to grind through an ailment of some sort and it quickly becomes clear why their once powerful offensive attack has gone silent. That's without mentioning the immense loss from the offseason death of Johnny Gaudreau plus trades that sent Patrik Laine to the Montreal Canadiens and Alexandre Texier to the St. Louis Blues

The Blue Jackets' depth up front was thin to start this season, but it's reaching critical levels of depletion. Carolina was the latest team to dictate pace of play and puck possession against the depleted Blue Jackets, who haven't looked like the team they used to be since routing the Calgary Flames 5-2 on Nov. 29 in Columbus.

That was more than two weeks ago, and they've gone just 2-5-2 since.

It might be time to consider a forward or two from the AHL's Cleveland Monsters, which would require some interesting roster decisions with their current three-goalie mix.

Columbus Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason is a riverboat gambler

Dean Evason is only 31 games into his Blue Jackets coaching career, but we've learned something important about him already.

Don't put him in charge of your money at a casino. Evason is proving to be a bit of a gambler when it comes to coaching challenges, especially while with goaltender interference. That tendency led to starkly opposite outcomes Sunday against the Hurricanes.

Late in the second period, Evason challenged Jordan Martinook's goal for goaltender interference by William Carrier, who did enter the crease on his own just before Jordan Staal's shot from the point and he lightly contacted goalie Elvis Merzlikins. Based on NHL officials' often interpretation of the league's goaltender interference rules this season, it felt like an unwinnable challenge.

Indeed, the goal stood for a 3-1 Hurricanes lead and the Blue Jackets were penalized for a failed challenge. Like clockwork, Carolina made it 4-1 on the ensuing power play with a goal by former Blue Jackets forward Jack Roslovic. It was the second time the Jackets were burned for two quick goals thanks to failed goaltender interference challenges, but Evason's further gambling erased this mistake. After his video coaches spotted a missed hand pass by the Hurricanes off a draw that preceded Roslovic's goal, Evason issued a challenge for that one and won, which negated Roslovic's goal.

Had that challenge failed, the Blue Jackets would've been assessed a four-minute penalty because it would've been their second failed challenge in one game.

Columbus ranks near the bottom of the NHL in penalty-killing, so risking additional short-handed situations doesn't seem like a great idea right now, especially with goaltender interference debates decided by officials looking at their own calls on iPads.

All eyes focused on Columbus Blue Jackets' goalies

Keeping three goalies in the NHL and making one a healthy scratch is a curious decision even when teams aren't hampered by injuries. Doing it with a growing number of players sidelined doesn't seem tenable. The Blue Jackets lost defenseman Jack Johnson (eye) and forward Kevin Labanc (face) to ugly injuries against Carolina, so they may need AHL reinforcements before Tuesday's game in Tampa.

If so, attention will shift to goalies Elvis Merzlikins, Daniil Tarasov and rookie Jet Greaves, whose recall from the Monsters on Wednesday added a third backstop to the locker room. Tarasov has become the odd-man out as a healthy scratch thus far, but he requires exposure to waivers if the Jackets aim to free up a roster spot by assigning him to AHL Cleveland.

Greaves is the only one who doesn't require waivers for AHL assignment, but he's been sharp in both of his NHL starts. It will be interesting to see how Don Waddell, the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager, handles the Blue Jackets' roster if Johnson and/or Labanc are unavailable Tuesday.

[The Columbus Dispatch / Anaheim Ducks sting Columbus Blue Jackets in OT to win matchup of similar teams](#)

By Brian Hedger – December 14, 2024

Comparing the Blue Jackets and Anaheim Ducks on Saturday night at Nationwide Arena was like watching two teams enter a funhouse full of wacky mirrors.

The reflection staring back looked like their own, but not exactly.

The Jackets and Ducks, teams undergoing roster rebuilds, are like mirror images. One's slugging it out in the Eastern Conference, the other's surviving out West. Both have some proud veterans surrounded by a flock of high-end youngsters at varying stages of development.

Each is hanging in there, too, sniffing the tail edge of playoff races in each conference a third of the way into the season. That provided the backdrop for the finale of their two-game season series Saturday night, which added energy to the Ducks' 4-3 comeback OT victory before a crowd of 17,663 in the building.

"Both teams are scraping and clawing to get points, right?" Anaheim coach Greg Cronin said at his team's morning skate. "I think it's going to be like a May playoff game, to be honest with you. You're past a third of the season, and now you've really got to dig and claw to get points to stay in that race."

That's exactly what they did too.

The Blue Jackets (12-14-4) and Ducks (11-14-4) dug, scratched and clawed — at each other and the puck — for 60 minutes before Alex Killorn scored off a breakaway 1:43 into OT to give Anaheim the game's second point with a win. Columbus dropped its second straight game in OT during a winless three-game homestand and fell to 1-4-2 in the Jackets' past seven games.

They're still sitting three points out of the East's second wildcard, though, which the Blue Jackets haven't been able to say this far into a season in three years.

"By no means are we out of it," defenseman Jack Johnson said. "We're right there. I haven't looked lately, but quite frankly, the whole Eastern Conference is right there. I don't think anybody is out of it, and I think that's the way the league wants it. You've got to string together a few to get back to where you want to be."

Winning against teams like the Ducks, their peers, would help. The Blue Jackets didn't do that this season in either meeting, going 0-1-1 against Anaheim and taking just one point out of a possible four. Now they've got another difficult road finale to a back-to-back Sunday at the Carolina Hurricanes, who are third in the Metropolitan Division and one of the NHL's best teams.

This matchup against Anaheim at least went down to the wire, nearly going the Blue Jackets' way after James van Riemsdyk broke a 2-2 tie with 8:35 left to play. His goal nearly stood as the winner, but Anaheim capitalized off a faceoff caused by an icing and tied it on a Jackson Lacombe goal with 2:46 left in regulation.

The evening see-sawed like that from start to finish.

Kirill Marchenko and Cole Sillinger scored the first two goals for the Blue Jackets, while Jet Greaves made 23 saves in his second straight start. John Gibson was one stop better with 39 saves for the Ducks, whose first two goals in regulation were scored by Mason McTavish and Killorn.

Most of the first period was played with end-to-end action without a goal scored, but that changed quickly on a Ducks rush in the latter stages of the frame.

McTavish gave Anaheim a 1-0 lead with 3:27 left by charging to the net for his third goal of the season, which he sent through Greaves' pads before knocking the Jackets' goalie over after the shot. McTavish had a little unrequested assistance becoming a human bowling ball thanks to a shove from Blue Jackets defenseman Ivan Provorov, but officials didn't see it that way.

The goal counted, McTavish was penalized goaltender interference and Marchenko tied it, 1-1, by scoring 36 seconds into the ensuing power play for his 11th goal of the season assisted by Kent Johnson and Zach Werenski. Sillinger made it 2-1 for the Blue Jackets 43 seconds later, scoring on the game's next shift by sliding the puck under Gibson's sprawling save attempt for his fifth goal and first since scoring Dec. 5 in Edmonton.

It remained that score until Killorn tied it, 2-2, with 6:04 left in the second by one-timing a pass from Ryan Strome into the top right corner from the slot — a shot Greaves had no chance to stop after making three great stops earlier in the Anaheim possession.

Columbus appeared to retake the lead with 2:26 left in the second on what would've been a power-play goal for Dmitri Voronkov, but Ducks coach Greg Cronin won a coaching challenge for a missed offside entry by Kirill Marchenko. Replays showed Marchenko held the puck on the blue line just long enough for Voronkov to enter the Anaheim zone a beat too early, negating the goal.

The Blue Jackets nearly scored again during the same power play, but Gibson stopped a rocket from Marchenko with his chest and Werenski sent a wrist shot off the crossbar so hard that it deflected the puck into the stands behind the right-wing wall.

That set the stage for an entertaining finish to a game both teams needed to win. It's been a while since that's been said around Columbus.

"It's never a good thing to lose a point," Sillinger said. "The way our homestand has gone, obviously, hasn't been the way we wanted it to. ... It's frustrating, but we want to be in this position, right? That's why we play hockey. We want to win, we want to have that winning mentality, we know we can do it and we know we have the guys in this locker room."

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets fumble away homestand with OT loss to Anaheim Ducks: 3 takeaways

By Brian Hedger – December 15, 2024

It was a homestand that got away.

After defeating the Winnipeg Jets last Sunday, the Blue Jackets returned from a five-game road trip and stepped straight into a three-game winless streak that included losses to the Philadelphia Flyers, Washington Capitals and Anaheim Ducks — the latter two in overtime, including the Ducks' 4-3 OT win Saturday night at Nationwide Arena.

They're also dealing with an awkward three-goalie situation, after rookie Jet Greaves joined the mix, and next up are daunting road games Sunday against the Carolina Hurricanes and Tuesday at the Tampa Bay Lightning — teams looking to strike back after the Blue Jackets downed them by shootout and overtime in November.

After that, the Jackets will host the New Jersey Devils on Thursday — a team battling for first in the Metropolitan Division — before going into the NHL's holiday break with games Dec. 21 in Philadelphia and Dec. 23 against the Montreal Canadiens.

They're backed into a corner now, still on the cusp of relevancy just three points back of a playoff spot while needing to fight their way off the ropes.

"It's not a will situation," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "We don't doubt our guys try, you know? It's just ... we're making some mistakes that have been uncharacteristic for the majority of the season. The positive part is we know it's in there."

Here are three takeaways:

Development of young NHL centers takes center stage in Columbus Blue Jackets' OT loss to Anaheim Ducks

Top centers don't typically reach free agency in the NHL, almost never get traded and take longer to develop than wingers. It's often a frustrating process for players, coaches and front offices alike, and Saturday brought together four prime examples.

Adam Fantilli and Cole Sillinger centered second and third lines, respectively, for the Blue Jackets. Leo Carlsson and Mason McTavish handled the same roles for the Ducks. None of the four are lighting up the scoresheet regularly yet, but all are going through the same growth process their teams hope will result in producing key lineup fixtures for years to come.

McTavish and Sillinger, the third and 12th overall picks of the 2021 NHL draft respectively, each scored goals Saturday. Carlsson and Fantilli, the second and third overall picks in 2023, didn't record points while doing a bunch of other things that aren't part of a standard NHL box score.

Sillinger also finished -3 after being on the ice for five of the game's seven goals, while McTavish was the only one to top 50% on faceoffs (59%).

"The load mentally playing center in this league is very different than as a wing," Ducks coach Greg Cronin said. "You've got to make sure you're (defensively) responsible coming back into your own zone, you're making sure you're identifying potential targets when there's ... questions of possession, and those guys, they've usually got the puck on their stick. So, the defensive part of it for them can be a hard learning curve."

Overseeing their maturation can be tough for coaches, who are inherently wired to prioritize winning over development.

“We’re not in their head space when they’re young kids,” Cronin said. “They’re looking at the world way differently than we are, right? So, when they feel stress or pressure, they lose a little bit of confidence, and that can be a tough thing to make up. As coaches, you’ve got to be careful in how you manage them and how you correct them when they make mistakes, and that’s a process that takes time.”

Saturday provided us with the latest evidence.

Anaheim Ducks make a splash before playing Columbus Blue Jackets

Pat Verbeek, Anaheim’s general manager, stayed busy Saturday by swinging another trade involving veteran defenseman Cam Fowler — a longtime franchise pillar.

After adding defenseman Jacob Trouba in a trade with the New York Rangers, Verbeek needed to downsize his blue line and sent Fowler to the St. Louis Blues along with a 2027 fourth-round pick for defenseman prospect Jeremie Biakabutuka plus St. Louis’ 2027 second-round pick.

Fowler finished nine games shy of 1,000 games for the Ducks, who drafted him 12th overall in 2010. As for Biakabutuka, he’s indeed related to the Tshimanga “Tim” Biakabutuka — who spoiled Ohio State’s national championship hopes in 1995 at Michigan Stadium by rushing for 313 yards and a touchdown in a 31-23 upset victory over the Buckeyes.

This Biakabutuka is that guy's nephew.

AHL transaction gives Columbus Blue Jackets flexibility with Greaves, Pyyhtia

The Blue Jackets technically loaned Greaves and forward Mikael Pyyhtia to AHL Cleveland on Friday before quickly recalling them to play against the Ducks. There was a clerical reason behind the move, which is why the Blue Jackets didn’t send out a media release about it.

Per the NHL’s collective bargaining agreement with the NHL Players’ Association, a holiday roster freeze will go into effect at 11:59 p.m. Dec. 19 and last through 12:01 p.m. on Dec 28 — limiting most, but not all, transactions.

Players who are recalled from the AHL after Dec. 11 can still be reassigned during the NHL’s roster freeze, and the Blue Jackets wanted to keep that flexibility with Greaves and Pyyhtia. The Cleveland Monsters have a game Dec. 22 against Rochester, which either would be eligible to play if reassigned.

[The Columbus Dispatch / Why Anaheim Ducks' Jacob Trouba rejected trade to Columbus Blue Jackets](#)

By Brian Hedger – December 15, 2024

Jacob Trouba skated his fourth game for the Anaheim Ducks on Saturday in a 4-3 overtime win against the Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena, where he talked earlier in the day about being traded last week by the New York Rangers.

New York's former captain was sent to Southern California for NHL defenseman Urho Vaakanainen and a conditional 2025 fourth-round draft pick. The Ducks are also absorbing Trouba's full remaining contract, which pays him \$8 million for this season and next. Trouba, 30, confirmed multiple reports that he declined to waive his 15-team no-trade clause for any deals involving the Blue Jackets — who would've been interested in negotiating a similar deal with the Rangers.

The Dispatch was told Saturday those discussions didn't get off the ground after Trouba informed the Rangers he would invoke his contractual right of refusal for a deal with Columbus. So, why didn't he want to join the Blue Jackets?

Asked that question Saturday, Trouba said it came down to picking a destination on short notice that he felt was best for himself and his family — which includes his wife and young son. Trouba never spoke with the Blue Jackets, which would've required permission from the Rangers plus a willingness on his part to do it.

“There were multiple teams and things were kind of evolving pretty fluidly,” Trouba said. “I just felt like Anaheim was a place that was a good fit for me, and I thought there was a future here with my wife and what she does and what I do. I thought this was a good fit for everyone.”

Trouba's wife, Dr. Kelly Tyson-Trouba, is completing her final year of a medical residency in osteopathic medicine at a New York hospital. Last summer, Trouba cited that as the reason he wanted to remain in New York amid reports the Rangers had a trade worked out with his hometown Detroit Red Wings.

Whether he actually invoked the no-trade clause to nix that deal has become a point of contention months later, but Trouba did make it clear he didn't want to leave New York. Things devolved from there, as the Rangers continued to pursue trade offers while making it known to Trouba that he'd be placed on NHL waivers if he didn't agree to any trades.

That would've exposed him to 31 teams without 'no-trade' protection, including the Blue Jackets.

It's unlikely Trouba would've lasted long enough on waivers to reach the Blue Jackets' picking slot, but they were mentioned as a leading contender to land him via trade by multiple NHL insiders, including Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman. After getting to know New York and becoming the Rangers' captain, Trouba knew there'd be a public nature to how the trade unfolded.

“It's part of New York,” he said. “It's part of the situation I was in. I don't think it was necessarily the fault of anyone (specifically). It's just kind of the reality of the situation. Obviously, any player would like things to be a little less public than they are, but that's the career we've chosen.”

Asked if there's anything specifically about Columbus or the Blue Jackets that were deal-breakers, Trouba shook his head and started laughing.

“No, not at all,” he said. “It wasn't like I had my pick of the litter. It's just kind of how it unfolded, and this (opportunity) came, and this was the direction we decided to go.”

The Athletic / Blue Jackets' early power-play opportunity backfires in rough loss to Hurricanes

By Aaron Portzline – December 15, 2024

The opportunity was right there for the Columbus Blue Jackets. At 6:36 of the first period, Carolina Hurricanes forward Jasper Kotkaniemi went to the penalty box for four minutes after an inadvertent high stick caught Jackets defenseman Jack Johnson in the face.

It's safe to assume starting fast was atop coach Dean Evason's checklist, especially after noting the Blue Jackets have been guilty of wandering into recent games instead of attacking them.

Here was a chance, on the second night of a back-to-back for Columbus, to get an early goal and ride the boost of confidence it could deliver.

But like so much else in recent weeks, it backfired.

The Hurricanes were the only team to find the net during the Blue Jackets' four-minute power play, scoring a short-handed goal at 8:28 of the first period that set the tone in a long night for the visitors.

Carolina won 4-1 before 18,700 in Lenovo Center, spoiling a return to Raleigh, N.C., for Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell, who spent 10 years with the Hurricanes organization before resigning after last season. He was hired by Columbus in May.

The Blue Jackets are 1-5-2 in their last eight games and 0-5 in the second half of back-to-backs. They've been outscored 25-8 in those "second-half" losses to the Washington Capitals, Anaheim Ducks, Montreal Canadiens, Vancouver Canucks and now Carolina, all on the road.

"Unfortunately, we couldn't find one on the power play," Blue Jackets defenseman Dante Fabbro said. "We played pretty well, but a few structure things happened in the game. It's a fast game. Mistakes happen. The biggest thing is how you respond to situations like that.

"You can't get down on yourself when things go wrong out there. You have to put your foot in the ground and push back."

Blue Jackets center Cole Sillinger was trying to gain the zone on the power play when he essentially skated into a brick wall. Carolina's Seth Jarvis met him at the blue line and stripped him of the puck. Sebastian Aho scored off the rush to make it 1-0. It was only the second short-handed goal the Blue Jackets have allowed this season.

By the end of the period it was 2-0.

“When we got down, it’s tough to come back because they put a lot of pressure on you,” Evason said. “We still had some good looks to score in key areas of the game. It just didn’t go in the net for us.”

The Blue Jackets could only get one puck past Hurricanes goaltender Dustin Tokarski, who was out of work until Carolina called him a month ago and signed him to a contract when starter Frederik Andersen went down with a knee injury.

Tokarski hadn’t started an NHL game since Feb. 18, 2023, when he played for the Pittsburgh Penguins. He hadn’t won a game since Jan. 10, 2023. Both of those numbers were updated Sunday when he became the fifth goaltender to dress for Carolina already this season.

The only Blue Jackets player to score was Dmitri Voronkov, who scored from the slot at 15:52 of the second period off a feed from Kirill Marchenko. That made it 2-1, but the flicker of hope didn’t last long. Only 1:24 later, the Hurricanes restored their two-goal advantage. Jordan Martinook scored on a wrist shot, with the help of a William Carrier screen, to make it 3-1.

This is when the game took a truly bizarre turn.

The Blue Jackets challenged that goal hoping for goaltender interference, but replays showed minimal contact between Carrier and Elvis Merzlikins, certainly nothing that kept Merzlikins from playing the puck. But Evason didn’t see it that way.

“We had it explained to us (by the league) that if the guy (Carrier) goes in there and (Merzlikins) gets bumped and the puck goes in the side that he can’t recover to ...” Evason said. “Like, if Elvis can get square, he makes that save. But he can’t (get square).”

“We’re going to get an explanation. We need clarification, I guess, on every single one of them because it doesn’t, at least to us right now, seem like there’s consistency in that department.”

The Blue Jackets lost the challenge, putting them on the penalty kill. Carolina scored on the ensuing power play, but the Blue Jackets challenged once again, this time believing Hurricanes forward Tyson Jost used an illegal hand pass just after the faceoff.

If Evason had missed on this one, too, the Blue Jackets would have been charged with a double-minor penalty, putting Carolina on the power play for four minutes. But replays showed he was correct, and the score was restored to 3-1.

The Canes scored early in the fourth to cap the scoring.

The Blue Jackets spent most of the game with five defensemen without Johnson after the early high-stick from Kotkaniemi. He returned to the bench late in the first period but stayed in the dressing room after the first intermission.

Jackets forward Kevin Labanc raced off to the dressing room late in the third with blood trickling from his chin or mouth after taking a caromed puck off the face.

It was that kind of night — and that kind of month — for the Blue Jackets.

[The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Three goalies is messy, but Jet Greaves isn’t going away](#)

By Aaron Portzline – December 15, 2024

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

Item No. 1: Three-headed monster

It's always awkward with three goaltenders on the roster. And so it's been since the Blue Jackets recalled Jet Greaves from AHL Cleveland early last week.

Greaves has been the starter and Elvis Merzlikins has been his backup for consecutive overtime losses to Washington (Thursday) and Anaheim (Saturday). Those two occupy two of the extra-wide locker stalls along the back wall of the Blue Jackets dressing room.

Daniil Tarasov, meanwhile, is wedged into a skater's stall on the other side of the room. In more ways than one, Tarasov is the odd man out.

For how long will the Blue Jackets carry three goaltenders? Nobody will say, perhaps because nobody knows. After a rough outing by Merzlikins last Tuesday against Philadelphia, the coaching staff reached two conclusions:

- Merzlikins, who had started 12 of the previous 13 games, was clearly showing signs of fatigue. The 5-3 loss to his Flyers was hardly his fault alone, but there were ugly goals at unfortunate times that contributed largely to the defeat.
- They don't trust Tarasov. The big Russian has made only one start since Nov. 16 — one month tomorrow — and it was a shaky 6-3 loss in Edmonton on Dec. 5.

So Greaves was summoned from Cleveland, the third straight season he's seen action in Columbus. In the past, it's always been for injuries or illness. This time, it's performance-based, and it feels as if Greaves will be allowed to stick if all goes well.

"Day by day, game by game," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said when asked if there was a plan. "We'll evaluate. We (were just) having a discussion in (the coaches' office) after Saturday's loss to Anaheim.

"We don't want to have three goaltenders here. But, as we've talked about before, Jet deserves to be here."

There were strange tremors on Friday when Greaves and forward Mikael Pyryhtiä ended up on the transaction wire and, later, on the Cleveland roster. But those "moves" were made to give the Blue Jackets flexibility in the coming weeks.

The NHL holiday roster freeze begins Thursday and runs through Dec. 28. It prevents NHL players from being traded, waived or demoted to the minor leagues during that time, but there are exceptions.

One of the exceptions is for players who were recalled after Dec. 11. They can be sent to the minors until midnight on Dec. 23. Greaves' recall last week was on Dec. 11, so he needed to be recalled at least a day later in order to rejoin the Monsters through Dec. 23.

It doesn't sound as if Greaves is going anywhere soon. He played well in both of his starts, even the 4-3 loss to Anaheim on Saturday. None of the four goals could be pinned on Greaves, including the OT winner, which was scored off a breakaway.

Greaves has always looked the part in the NHL, even though his record (3-7-2) is underwhelming. After stopping 23 of 27 shots on Saturday, he has a .911 save percentage with Columbus. That's actually better than his AHL save percentage (.905).

This has been his first NHL shot under new GM Don Waddell, who is gathering loads of information throughout this season. The longer Greaves is with the Blue Jackets — or the longer they keep three goalies — the more awkward it will become.

And that's OK.

"Like I always say, I like these tough decisions," Waddell told the Columbus Blue Jackets Radio Network during Saturday's game. "They'll make it for me, eventually.

"Right now, we have three goalies, and we plan on carrying three for the time being. We'll see how each and every game goes."

Item No. 2: Reunited

Zach Werenski can't wait to play in a best-on-best tournament this February when the United States, Canada, Sweden and Finland gather for the 4 Nations Face-Off in Montreal and Boston. He's thrilled to represent the U.S., and it'll be a blast to compete with his several friends on the roster.

But there's something else. Or, someone else.

Former Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella, now the bench boss with the Flyers, will be an assistant coach for the U.S., the first time he will have coached Werenski since he left the Blue Jackets following the 2020-21 season.

"It's gonna be awesome," Werenski said. "I'm excited to see him in a different role than he was here. I think it'll be great.

"Torts and I have a great relationship. I still talk to him consistently through the year. I'm sure I'll see him after the game (vs. Philadelphia last Tuesday), but I'm excited to play for him. Hopefully he's not yelling at me or anything. I'm joking, it'll be good."

Tortorella arrived in Columbus early in the 2015-16 season. Werenski played that season at the University of Michigan but joined AHL Cleveland for the playoffs and had a big impact in the Monsters' Calder Cup run.

With the Blue Jackets out of the playoffs, Tortorella had a chance to watch many of Werenski's games in Cleveland during that run, so he knew what was coming the next season. And he knew how to use him, too.

"I thought it was awesome (playing for him as a rookie)," Werenski said. "He wants you to be the best player you can be. He expected a lot of out of me. He pushed me. I definitely owe a lot to him, just in how I approach the game nowadays.

"I'm a lot different player now than I was when I played for him, just based on age and experience and where I am in my career. I was a young kid playing for him. But the standard he sets and the work he expects, it was great for me at a young age."

Tortorella beamed before Tuesday's game when the topic of Werenski surfaced. Werenski is having the best season of his career — 10-21-31 in 30 games — and coaches enjoy nothing more than seeing one of their former players bloom.

When Tortorella first coached Werenski, he gave him permission to roam the ice and be aggressive offensively, dubbing him a “rover.” It should be noted that almost every team in the league now has one or two blueliners who rove.

“He’s having a hell of a year,” Tortorella said. “When I got him, he still needed to mature. And the biggest thing between Z and I early in his career was just teaching him that he needed to defend a little bit, too. He’s a special player.

“I’m not sure how (coach) Dean (Evason) uses him, and I don’t want to coach him now from here. That’s not my place. But he’s dynamite that way. He’s just a hell of a player. I think he’s brought it to another level (this season). I’m happy for him. Great kid. Loved coaching him.”

Item No. 3: Take 5, Cole Sillinger

1. What part of Columbus is home and why?

I live in downtown Columbus. It’s convenient and our captain (Boone Jenner) owns the unit, and he’s a good landlord. (Laughing) I think he’s giving me a good deal, too, so I can’t complain. He rented it out to Peeker (former Blue Jackets defenseman Andrew Peeke) and once Peeker got traded, I was like, ‘It’s mine now.’ My mom has helped me fill it out. It needed her touch, absolutely.

2. Favorite restaurant in Columbus.

If we’re talking convenient, everyday food, I like True Food (Kitchen) at Easton. Favorite restaurant, I’d probably go with The Guild House. Fun place. Good spot. It’s tough to not put Cento in there. That’s my favorite Italian in the city. That and Lindy’s are a coin toss for me in German Village. I love German Village.

3. How do you spend an off day Sunday?

When I wake up, I’d go for a walk and grab a coffee. Then I’d either come here (Nationwide Arena) or Panacea (Luxury Spa) — let me give them a little shout-out — and go for a sauna, a cold tub and recover. Then I go get my groceries for the week, and then I’d probably park it and watch some football, maybe see what the guys are up to.

4. Favorite CBJ memory.

Probably something off the ice where we’re all together. I feel like guys never forget their rookie dinners. Mine was in Los Angeles my first year. We had a great dinner at some sushi spot. It’s great. You’re breaking the ice with the guys, telling your joke or performing the skit, or whatever they make you do. It’s just all the guys having fun together. It wasn’t just me (as a rookie). (Jake) Bean, Elvis (Merzlikins), Peeke, (Adam) Boqvist ... we divided it, but it was still hefty.

5. Which teammate should have a podcast?

Jack Johnson. He absolutely should have a podcast. College football, politics and hockey. He’s knowledgeable about a lot of things.

Item No. 4: Snacks

- The best sight in Nationwide Arena last week was captain Boone Jenner getting dressed to skate on Tuesday after the active Blue Jackets finished their morning skate. He skated again on Thursday and Saturday with skating coach Lee Harris and strength and conditioning coach Kevin Collins, respectively. Jenner, who had shoulder surgery in October after suffering an injury late in the preseason, is ahead of schedule, per Waddell. That’s good news, of course, but the Blue Jackets have yet to say what his schedule is. Jenner told The Athletic earlier this season that his only goal is to play again this season. It

would be a bonus if he's cleared to play before the March 1 Stadium Series game in Ohio Stadium. Stay tuned.

- Defenseman Jacob Trouba, who declined a little more than a week ago to lift the no-trade clause in his contract to facilitate a trade to the Blue Jackets, was in town with his new club, the Anaheim Ducks, on Saturday. "Multiple teams (were involved) and things were evolving fluidly," Trouba said. "I just felt that Anaheim was a good fit for me. I thought there could be a future there with my wife (Dr. Kelly Tyson-Trouba) and what she does." Asked by The Athletic if there were any "red flags" with the Blue Jackets, Trouba said: "No, not at all. It wasn't like I had my pick of the litter. It's just kind of how things unfolded. The Anaheim thing came up and that was the direction we decided to go."
- The one Blue Jackets player discussed most often when looking ahead to the March 7 NHL trade deadline is defenseman Ivan Provorov, who has had a solid, steady season on Columbus' second pair. It's believed that Provorov, an unrestricted free agent on July 1, could fetch a first-round pick, which would give the Jackets three firsts for next summer's draft. (They already have their own and Minnesota's following the David Jiricek trade.) The emergence of Denton Mateychuk, a first-round pick (No. 12) in 2022 who is currently thriving in the AHL, would make Provorov expendable. Here's Provorov on the topic: "From the day I got (to Columbus), I've enjoyed my time here. I like the city. I love the organization and the boys in the room. For me, I feel great here. But, obviously, a lot of times it's out of your hands. So, I'm just focused on playing and doing the best I can and trying to help the team win."
- Winger Yegor Chinakhov hasn't played since Nov. 27 vs. Montreal, missing the last nine games with a lower-body injury. Today vs. Carolina will be game No. 10. The club has not offered a timeline on Chinakhov's return, but his agent, Shumi Babaev, told The Athletic that Chinakhov hopes to resume skating next week.
- The Wild sent Jiricek to AHL Iowa early last week, 10 days after acquiring him in the trade with Columbus. He did not play with Minnesota before the demotion.
- Sunday Gathering trivia question: There have been 13 instances of Blue Jackets defensemen scoring 10 or more goals in a season; seven of them by Werenski, including this season. Five other defensemen achieved the other six 10-plus goal seasons. How many can you name?
- Werenski's goal on Thursday vs. Washington was the 100th of his career.
- Strange but true: The Blue Jackets are 2-2-4 against the seven clubs beneath them in the standings through Saturday's games: Detroit, San Jose, Anaheim, Buffalo, Montreal, Nashville and Chicago. They're 10-11-1 against the 24 teams ahead of them.
- The Blue Jackets, with back-to-back overtime losses to Washington and Anaheim, slid to 1-5 this season when games are decided at three-on-three. That's on top of a 3-10 overtime record last season. Both losses this weekend came on the first shot of overtime.
- AHL Cleveland's Trey Fix-Wolansky scored his 100th career AHL goal in a 3-2 overtime loss to Lehigh Valley on Saturday. Wolansky's goal, assisted by Luca Del Bel Belluz and newcomer Daemon Hunt at 8:42 of the third period, was a slap shot from high above the circles through traffic. (Great call by Monsters radio voice Tony Brown.)
- Del Bel Belluz has now climbed atop the AHL scoring leaders with 15-14-29 in 25 games. He's been on a burner of late, with 9-9-18 in his last 13 games and points in 12 of those games. The second-round pick (No. 44) in 2022 is pushing for a second call-up to the NHL. You'll recall he came up late last season and scored 3:37 into his NHL debut on April 16, the season finale.

- Luca Pinelli, a fourth-round pick (No. 114) of the Blue Jackets in 2023, was named to Team Canada's roster for the World Junior Championship in Ottawa. Pinelli, 19, has 21-16-37 in 26 games for the Ottawa 67's of the Ontario Hockey League.
- Trivia answer: The five other Blue Jackets defensemen to have 10-plus goal seasons are Seth Jones (16 in 2017-18, 12 in 2016-17), Bryan Berard (12 in 2005-06), Jamie Heward (11 in 2000-01), David Savard (11 in 2014-15), and Adam Boqvist (11 in 2021-22).

The Athletic / Tepid start, inconsistent energy doom Blue Jackets in overtime — again

By Aaron Portzline – December 14, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets can't use fatigue as an excuse. They were off on Friday, their second off day of the week.

They can't use their youth as an excuse — not in this case — because the Anaheim Ducks, who beat them 4-3 in overtime Saturday, are relying on just as many young players as they try to push ahead with their own rebuilding program.

But the Blue Jackets need to figure something out quickly.

The energy and ferocity they played with at the start of this season, especially on their forecheck, has faded dramatically over the last couple of weeks. It was intermittent on Saturday in one of the more frustrating losses this season.

The Ducks scored with 2:46 remaining in regulation to tie it at 3, then won the game at 1:43 of overtime when Alex Killorn scored on a breakaway, his second goal of the game.

Yes, the tying goal was deflected in the slot on its way past Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves. And, yes, the NHL's three-on-three overtime can feel like a coin flip on some nights.

But if the Jackets played the pedal-down pace they showed during their surprising start, they wouldn't be leaving themselves susceptible to such hard-luck losses.

"I wish we knew," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said when asked where his club's pace has gone. "We're doing everything we can to pull it out (of them) because we know it's in there. But you're right. Our start was slow. ... It was there in spurts, and certainly in the third period we had some really good jump, and we had some energy and we got in on it and we forechecked.

"The positive part is we did some really good things in tonight's hockey game. But it hasn't been on that consistent basis that we've seen since the start of the season."

It was the Blue Jackets' sixth loss in seven games, a 1-4-2 tailspin that was interrupted only by a win — go figure — in Winnipeg eight days earlier. Yes, the Blue Jackets are still within sniffing distance of a playoff spot, but that's because the Eastern Conference is roiling in chaotic mediocrity.

If this sort of malaise continues, the rest of the pack is going to pull away quickly.

The Blue Jackets got goals from Kirill Marchenko, Cole Sillinger and James van Riemsdyk, while Greaves stopped 23 of 27 shots. Van Riemsdyk's goal with 8:35 remaining gave Columbus a 3-2 lead in a third period they mostly dominated.

But the Ducks, despite being outshot 17-5 in the third, didn't collapse. And at 17:14 of the third period they caught a break with goaltender John Gibson pulled for an extra attacker.

Jackson LaCombe's slap shot from atop the circles appeared to glance off Jackets defenseman Dante Fabbro before it changed direction and sailed past Greaves. The Blue Jackets froze in place after the goal was scored as if they couldn't believe it.

"It's tough to swallow because we'd like to lock it down at that point," Evason said. "We were in the lane. We just didn't get the job done. Obviously, it's frustrating. It's disappointing. But the puck found its way into the net at the end."

Evason has given the Blue Jackets plenty of off days and kept some practices brief so that minds and legs can be rested to play his taxing style. He's also changed line combinations in an attempt to find more connected play with the puck and more aggressive play without it.

It's worth noting that the Blue Jackets' seven-game slide has coincided with Yegor Chinakhov's absence with an upper-body injury. That's what created the opening for van Riemsdyk on the top line with center Sean Monahan and (most recently) Kent Johnson.

"We've done some good things in spurts, but we have to find more consistency, especially in scenarios when we have a lead in the third period," van Riemsdyk said. "It's finding ways to stick with our plan, really smother teams and really stay with our structure.

"We can definitely do that better."

The Blue Jackets' overtime loss was quite similar to the OT loss they suffered on Thursday against NHL-leading Washington. They held the puck for most of the start of the period — possession is everything at three-on-three — but the moment they lost it, they lost the game.

On Saturday, Killorn skated out of his own zone with the puck and kept a full-length stride between him and Jackets defenseman Ivan Provorov, sailing a wrist shot past Greaves to end it.

"We're generating (in OT), but we're giving up that quality, quality chance," Evason said. "It was that way the other night (vs. Washington) and then tonight with that shot. We can manage the puck a little better in those situations."

The Blue Jackets flew after the game to Raleigh, N.C., where on Sunday they'll play the Carolina Hurricanes. They'll need a fast start, a forecheck and some finish to hang with the Hurricanes.

The Athletic / Man accused in deaths of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau facing more serious charges: What we know

By Hailey Salvian – December 16, 2024

Last week, the man accused of killing NHL star Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, was indicted by a grand jury and is facing more serious charges.

Sean M. Higgins, 44, is now facing two counts of first-degree aggravated manslaughter, as well as two previous counts of second-degree reckless vehicular homicide. The grand jury also indicted Higgins on a charge of tampering with physical evidence (fourth degree) and leaving the scene of a fatal accident (second degree).

The aggravated manslaughter charges could result in a lengthy prison sentence upon conviction, with a maximum of 30 years on each count. Vehicular homicide carries a maximum of 10 years per count.

The charges allege that Higgins acted recklessly when he was driving his car the night of the Aug. 29 crash in Oldmans Township, N.J. The aggravated manslaughter charges further allege that Higgins acted with extreme indifference to human life, causing the death of both Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau.

The brothers had been bicycling home the night before their sister's wedding, where they were to be groomsmen. Johnny was 31 and Matthew was 29.

"At this time, we are not at liberty to discuss the details of the incident as we are still waiting on additional material evidence," an attorney for Higgins, Richard Klineburger III, said in an email to The Athletic. "It would be unfair to both Mr. Higgins as well as the general public to make a statement until a full evaluation and review has been completed."

A member of the Salem County Prosecutor's Office did not return a request for comment.

According to criminal defense attorney Brett M. Rosen, who is aware of the details of the case that are public but is not affiliated with the case in any manner, the key difference between vehicular homicide and aggravated manslaughter is that prosecutors will need to prove that Higgins' conduct resulted in a "probability, as opposed to a mere possibility, of death."

Rosen, a licensed trial attorney in New York and New Jersey, said the prosecution could have enough evidence to convict Higgins on all counts, should the case go to trial.

"I don't want to say it's an easy time for the prosecutors," Rosen said. "But it's definitely not an uphill battle to prove extreme indifference to human life."

New Jersey State Police said in August that the Gaudreau brothers were riding bicycles on County Route 551 when they were hit by Higgins, who was driving a Jeep Grand Cherokee and attempting to pass a car and an SUV on the two-lane road.

Higgins entered the southbound lane and passed the car (the second of the three vehicles on the road) as the SUV, the lead vehicle, was also moving to the southbound lane to create space for the brothers who were biking on the narrow shoulder, according to a probable cause affidavit filed by police.

At the time, Higgins believed the SUV was trying to block him from passing, so he re-entered the northbound lane to pass the SUV on the right, according to the affidavit. In order to complete the pass, about half of Higgins' vehicle exited the roadway and was traveling on the grass, according to a state brief filed by the Salem County Prosecutor's Office in October. As he was passing the SUV, Higgins struck the Gaudreau brothers, who were pronounced dead on the scene. The crash occurred around 8:30 p.m.

Higgins told police that he consumed five to six beers after finishing work at 3 p.m. and admitted to consuming two beers while driving around for two hours prior to the accident, per the state brief. His blood alcohol level was 0.087 — above the legal limit of 0.08.

According to the brief, Higgins drove 1/10 of a mile down the road before his vehicle became inoperable due to significant damage from the crash. Higgins also admitted that he attempted to hide the beer cans after he struck the brothers.

He has been held in custody at the Salem County Correctional Facility since his arrest Aug. 29. Higgins was denied bail at a Sept. 13 hearing when Superior Court Judge Michael J. Silvanio said the court had “significant concerns” about Higgins’ “road rage-like behavior” and granted the state’s motion to keep him in jail.

Higgins appealed the decision, according to court documents filed by the defense in October, and requested to be released. The appeal argued that the court “abused its discretion” and “ignored” the very low risk score of the public safety assessment — which New Jersey courts utilize instead of a cash bail system, among other considerations — for the defendant and failed to take into consideration “that there are many alternatives, less restrictive than incarceration.”

The court upheld the decision due to the nature of the offense charged, the weight of the evidence against the defendant and the history of characteristics of the defendant.

Higgins is next scheduled to appear in court Jan. 7 for a post-indictment arraignment, according to the New Jersey courts website, which is a formal reading of the charges. New Jersey has speedy trial statutes, which means a trial should begin no more than 180 days — around six months — after Higgins’ indictment, which was officially filed Dec. 11.

According to Rosen, the prosecution could still resolve the case before going to trial with a plea bargain, especially if it wants to shield the Gaudreau family, given the high-profile nature of the case.

“If you’re the prosecutor, you don’t want to bring the victims’ family in there and have to go through the agony and stress of a whole trial,” Rosen said. “So if you can resolve it in a way that the victims’ family is happy and obviously the police are happy ... at the end of the day that’s what the prosecutor’s office is trying to do.”

The Athletic / NHL mock trade proposals: One tantalizing target for each team. Could any deals happen?

The Athletic NHL Staff - December 14, 2024

The NHL trade market has been a busy place over the past few weeks, and the rumor mill is churning.

Once we get through the holiday roster freeze (Dec. 20-27), names of possible trade targets will begin swirling around teams with increased speed leading to the March 7 deadline — whether those names emerge from insight, speculation, common sense or simply because a fan base is curious if a given player would be a good fit on their team.

This week, The Athletic asked its NHL staff to identify one player or pick each team should target in a trade. Some reporters chose big swings capable of drastically altering a franchise’s trajectory, while others took a more realistic approach.

Senior writer James Mirtle looked at all the proposed targets and came up with a reasonable acquisition cost. Each transaction was then assessed with the cost in mind. Does a deal make sense?

Here's what we came up with.

Anaheim Ducks

Target: Mitch Marner, RW (TOR)*

(* Full no-move clause)

Cost: Patience to wait until July 1 and then sign him to a seven-year contract with \$14.5 million AAV

Reality: It's a pipe dream for sure, but Marner would give their forward group a jolt and would be a big fish for general manager Pat Verbeek to land after he struck out on Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault last summer. The Ducks could clear a lot of cap space if they traded Cam Fowler and John Gibson, and moved on from pending free agents Frank Vatrano, Brian Dumoulin, Robby Fabbri and Brock McGinn. Jacob Trouba could be off their books by the 2026 trade deadline. The problem here is making Anaheim attractive enough for Marner, and an overpay is likely necessary. And would Verbeek want the established Marner to set his pay scale, or the much younger Leo Carlsson who could likely be his No. 1 center — for his prime years?

Boston Bruins

Target: Brady Tkachuk, LW (OTT)

Cost: Charlie McAvoy, RHD (BOS)*

(* Full no-move clause)

Reality: The Bruins are desperate for a young, skilled and physical forward. Tkachuk has ties to the area as a former Boston University Terrier. His father, Keith, is also from Melrose, Mass. And Brady plays Bruins hockey. But giving up McAvoy would be too high a price. It would create a problem for which the Bruins have no solution.

Buffalo Sabres

Target: Chris Kreider, LW (NYR)*

(* 15-team no-trade list)

Cost: Mattias Samuelsson, LHD (BUF)

Reality: The Sabres are in dire need of another top-six forward. Kreider's experience and ability to finish plays around the net would be a perfect match for what ails Buffalo's forward group. Kreider would fit comfortably into the Sabres' cap situation, especially if they moved Samuelsson and his \$4.2 million cap hit. The Sabres have a surplus of left-shot defensemen, and Samuelsson has often been injured since signing his extension. This would be a risk worth taking if Kreider were somehow willing to come to Buffalo.

Calgary Flames

Target: Marco Rossi, C (MIN)

Cost: Yegor Sharangovich, C (CGY) and a second-round pick

Reality: The Flames have sought a young forward between the ages of 18 and 23 whom they could keep long-term as they infuse younger talent around their nucleus. Just like Sharangovich, Rossi is a versatile forward who can play wing and center. If the Wild are quick to move on from him, you can expect the

Flames to kick tires. You have to think, with the potential of teams seeking his services, that the asking price will go up. (It also helps that Rossi is playing at a high level while Sharangovich is off to a slow start.) But acquiring Rossi would be an upgrade on the slightly older Sharangovich. The Flames are also unafraid of parting with draft picks to acquire young talent and they have two second-round picks in 2025. If that's what it takes, the Flames should be all over this move.

Carolina Hurricanes

Target: Brock Nelson, C (NYI)*

(* 16-team no-trade list)

Cost: First-round pick

Reality: The Hurricanes have been without a true No. 2 center for years. Last year's Evgeny Kuznetsov experiment failed, but Nelson could be a short-term fix. A pending UFA, Nelson would bring size and scoring to Carolina's top six, and he's not a defensive liability. A first-round pick seems fair, but I'd expect the Hurricanes to get creative — as they did in acquiring Jake Guentzel last year — if they want to pry Nelson off Long Island.

Chicago Blackhawks

Target: Second-round pick

Cost: Alec Martinez, LHD (CHI)

Reality: The Blackhawks will likely be looking to move all of their expiring contracts at the deadline. In signing Martinez to a one-year deal this past offseason, general manager Kyle Davidson was hopeful Martinez would bring stability to the defense, help bring along the young defensemen and then draw trade interest. The Blackhawks would gladly welcome a second-round pick for him.

Colorado Avalanche

Target: Yanni Gourde, C (SEA)*

(* 23-team trade list)

Cost: First-round pick or top prospect

Reality: After completely re-working his goaltending, general manager Chris MacFarland hinted that he likely wasn't done adding. The most likely addition is another middle-six forward, and Gourde checks a lot of boxes. He plays with energy and physicality and has proven he can elevate his game when it counts in the playoffs. A first-round pick or top prospect is a lot to give up, especially considering Colorado already traded its 2025 first-rounder to Philadelphia for Sean Walker. That might price the Avs out of this trade, but if they can find a way to make it work Gourde would be a perfect add.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Target: First-round pick

Cost: A healthy Boone Jenner, C (CBJ)*

(* 8-team no-trade list)

Reality: There's only one way a Blue Jackets general manager should ever consider trading Jenner: if Jenner wants to be traded. Jenner is not only the captain but the heart and soul of a franchise that is finally headed in the right direction and is not far from being consistently competitive. He's also really grown in recent seasons in his ability to lead. Ivan Provorov for a first-rounder? Sure. Not Jenner.

Dallas Stars

Target: Mikael Granlund, C (SJS)

Cost: Two picks (second- and fourth-rounders)

Reality: What better way to replace a 32-year-old center who was a top-10 pick in the 2010 draft than with another 32-year-old center who was a top-10 pick in the 2010 draft? Tyler Seguin's surgery gives the Stars both the need and the cap space to add some firepower to their middle six, and Granlund is having a career year in the final season of his contract. Two picks is a small price to pay. If the Islanders fall out of the playoff picture entirely and are willing to part with Brock Nelson, that's another potential target.

Detroit Red Wings

Target: Trevor Zegras, C (ANA)

Cost: Nate Danielson, C (DET)

Reality: The Red Wings could use more offensive punch, and Zegras — even with his flaws as a player — has that. His production has been down the last couple of seasons (and he's now injured), but for a longer-view acquisition, he still would bring the kind of creativity and playmaking Detroit needs. He's different from the kind of forwards Steve Yzerman has drafted with the Red Wings, but that's sort of the point. He may not have those 200-foot elements Detroit covets, but he can break open a shift with his vision and passing. In this case, though, the cost isn't worth it. Danielson is younger, cost-controlled, and still a skilled playmaker in his own right (even if not at Zegras' level), while also bringing a more complete game. Zegras is a worthy target for the Red Wings, but not at this price.

Edmonton Oilers

Target: Marcus Pettersson, LHD (PIT)*

(*Eight-team no-trade list)

Cost: First-round pick

Reality: Darnell Nurse's improvement and Brett Kulak's effectiveness on the right side means the Oilers might be more inclined to make a bigger swing up front. Here's banking that an Evander Kane return keeps their focus on the blue line. Oilers general manager Stan Bowman told The Athletic last month that the price point for a defenseman could be more important in their decision-making than handedness. A first-rounder is a steep cost for a pending UFA, especially since the Oilers have their 2025 pick tied up in a trade with Philadelphia. The Oilers would likely need the Penguins to retain some of Pettersson's \$4,025,175 cap hit. But he'd be a good fit on the ice and is good buddies with winger Viktor Arvidsson.

Florida Panthers

Target: Tyson Barrie, RHD (CGY)

Cost: Third-round pick

Reality: Florida could use another option on its blue line, and general manager Bill Zito has said as much. That's easier said than done, though, given the defending champs' long- and short-term cap obligations and generally dry prospect pool. Barrie is a right shot who can help on the power play and would carry a minimum cost (\$1.25 million AAV). The Panthers could use all of that, given that neither Adam Boqvist nor Uvis Balinskis has looked like much of an answer, and third-round picks don't matter much for a win-now team.

Los Angeles Kings

Target: Joel Farabee, LW (PHI)

Cost: First-round pick

Reality: This one is tricky. The Kings have played above expectations and they're clearly out to win now, but it's hard to buy into them being a true contender after a third straight first-round exit last spring. And while they kept their first-round pick for 2024, they mortgaged prior first-round choices for Kevin Fiala and Vladislav Gavrikov. Farabee, 24, has had a rough start for Philadelphia this year but he averages 19 goals every 82 games in his career and has the capability for more at a reasonable \$5 million price point. While Trevor Moore is the latest in a cycle of left wings to play on the top line with Anze Kopitar, the defensively stout Kings could use another scoring winger to strengthen themselves against top-flight competition. But it's going to take quite a package to get an affordable young forward who still has three years left on his contract after this season. Could a lottery-protected 2026 first-rounder and Alex Turcotte start the conversation?

Minnesota Wild

Target: Brock Nelson, C (NYI)*

(*16-team no-trade list)

Cost: First-round pick

Reality: It's likely that the Wild plan to target Nelson, although they'll first need to get back out of LTIR so they can accrue the cap space. They also already traded their 2025 first-round pick for David Jiricek, which means they'll have to trade a future first-rounder or get creative with a top prospect and second-round pick. Nelson, whose game Wild (and Team USA) general manager Bill Guerin respects so much that he put him on the U.S. 4 Nations Face-Off roster, is somebody who can play up and down the lineup, at wing or center, kill penalties, win draws and play on the power play.

Montreal Canadiens

Target: David Spacek, RHD (MIN/AHL)

Cost: Joel Armia, RW (MTL)

Reality: This is less so about Spacek specifically than what he represents: a young, right-shot defenseman belonging to a contending team who is not necessarily a blue-chip prospect but is close to being NHL-ready. There are several around the league. And if the cost for landing one of them is Armia, the Canadiens would surely do it, and they would be far more willing to do something like this than trading Armia for a draft pick or two.

Nashville Predators

Target: Trevor Zegras, C (ANA)

Cost: Joakim Kemell, RW (NSH) and a second-round pick

Reality: The Preds shouldn't do this, in part because this season is rapidly turning to toast anyway, and because Kemell is a big part of this franchise's future — which at this point looks like a lot of pain in the near term with aging, fading stars collecting large checks. The Zegras idea is rooted in the Preds' never-ending search for more oomph down the middle. Though Zegras has played on the wing a lot this season, he has the tools. But this team looks unsalvageable.

New Jersey Devils

Target: Nick Bjugstad, C (UTA)

Cost: Two picks (second- and fifth-rounders)

Reality: General manager Tom Fitzgerald told The Athletic's Pierre LeBrun he's looking to add forward depth, and Bjugstad could make sense. He can play center or wing and had 22 goals for Arizona in 2023-24. The Devils will likely have three 2025 second-round picks (they will lose one if Jake Allen plays more than 40 games and they make the playoffs), so Fitzgerald has some assets to play with when looking to add depth, be it for someone like Bjugstad, another bottom-six forward or someone in the top nine.

New York Islanders

Target: Shane Pinto, C (OTT)

Cost: Alexander Romanov, LHD (NYI)

Reality: The Islanders could certainly use some scoring up front and to get younger. Pinto, a Long Island native, would help on both fronts. There's zero chance they'd trade Romanov, though. He's been a top-pair defenseman for the Islanders for the last year-plus.

New York Rangers

Target: Marcus Pettersson, LHD (PIT)*

(*Eight-team no-trade list)

Cost: First-round pick

Reality: With Jacob Trouba gone, the Rangers will want to upgrade a defensive group that's currently playing a rookie Victor Mancini, a struggling Ryan Lindgren and a player in Zac Jones who has zero games of playoff experience — and had to call up Connor Mackey on Friday to sub in for K'Andre Miller, though that appears to be a short-term situation. Pettersson would fill a top-four need, though general manager Chris Drury would have to decide if a first-round pick is too much to part with for a rental.

Ottawa Senators

Target: Rasmus Andersson, RHD (CGY)*

(*Six-team no-trade list)

Cost: Shane Pinto, C (OTT) and a second-round pick

Reality: Pending his no-trade list, Andersson would be a fantastic fit in Ottawa. He's a top-pairing defenseman who can munch minutes and play every situation you need while being effective at both ends of the ice. You could pair him with Jake Sanderson up top or play him alongside Thomas Chabot if need be. Yes, it would mean moving on from a key player to acquire him. Also, the Senators are already facing the loss of a first-round pick either in 2025 or 2026. So, the Senators are going to lose out on some draft capital at the top of their next two drafts if they do this. Moving on from Pinto affects the team's center depth, but the blow could be stomached by acquiring an established defenseman entering his prime. For the Senators, who are trying to elevate themselves to contender status, Andersson's acquisition would be a culture shock. Possibly for the better.

Philadelphia Flyers

Target: Shane Pinto, C (OTT)

Cost: Tyson Foerster, RW (PHI)

Reality: Although the Flyers are in need of a center, particularly someone who might work well with Matvei Michkov, giving up a promising young winger in Foerster is probably too much. Foerster is one of the few Flyers forwards with size, and his two-way play has made him a favorite of coach John Tortorella, even if Foerster got off to a slow start this season. A more palatable deal might look like Joel Farabee and a draft pick, as the Flyers have three first-round and three second-round picks going into the 2025 draft.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Target: Marco Rossi, C (MIN)

Cost: Bryan Rust, RW (PIT)*

(*Full no-move clause)

Reality: Evgeni Malkin has only one season remaining on his contract. Even if he opts to play beyond it, he'd likely only go an additional season — allowing him and Sidney Crosby to potentially take a combined bow in 2027. But that's a big if, and it's not unreasonable to envision Malkin moving to wing on Crosby's line in his final days with the Penguins, presuming they can find a young, skilled center to supplant him. Rossi is exactly the type of young center around whom Kyle Dubas' (don't call it a) rebuild could be fast-tracked. The Penguins embrace skill and scoring more than any franchise, and Rossi would bring both along with an infusion of youth. Bryan Rust has a full no-movement clause through this season and his wife is from the Pittsburgh area. He doesn't want to leave, but he hates losing — and perhaps a reunion with Wild general manager Bill Guerin, who oversaw Rust's development with the Penguins, would entice him. He would bring a Cup veteran's presence and versatility to Minnesota, and the Penguins would get a prized building block at a pivotal point for the franchise. Seems like a win-win.

San Jose Sharks

Target: Nikolaj Ehlers, LW/RW (WPG)*

(*Ten-team no-trade list)

Cost: Patience to wait until July 1 and then sign him to a seven-year contract with \$8 million AAV

Reality: Fast-tracking the rebuild isn't the wisest move on the surface but landing Ehlers as a free agent — a situation in which no assets are lost — would show the team wants to win in the coming years. It's a big financial commitment but they can comfortably put Macklin Celebrini atop their pay scale with the cap continuing to rise. Salaries such as Mikael Granlund, Cody Ceci, Luke Kunin, Nico Sturm and Jan Rutta could be off their books, and they'll be finished with paying Marc-Edouard Vlasic after next season. Ehlers would give San Jose another proven top-six winger with speed and skill. The question is giving \$8 million for that long to someone good for 25 to 29 goals and 60-plus points but who never seems to put up more despite his offensive talent. — Stephens

Seattle Kraken

Target: Hunter Shepard, G (WSH)

Cost: Second-round pick

Reality: The Kraken need to stabilize their backup goaltending if they're going to catch up in the Pacific Division playoff race. To this point, honestly, the Kraken are probably, talent-wise, a playoff-caliber team — with one glaring exception. In games that Philipp Grubauer has started, they're 3-8-0 and he's put up an .881 save percentage in those games. Seattle needs an affordable reinforcement in net, and its American League netminders lack the pedigree and track record to replace Grubauer. A player such as Shepard — an elite AHL netminder, with some NHL experience in need of a real shot — would seem to

fit the bill. A second-round pick is too rich, especially given that Shepard's contract is expiring and the Capitals have already extended his platoon mate in Hershey. He's the sort of piece the Kraken need, but they can't pay a second-rounder for a player who would project to appear in 15 to 20 games for them over the balance of the season.

St. Louis Blues

Target: Trent Frederic, LW (BOS)

Cost: First-round pick

Reality: Fans will wonder why I didn't choose Toronto's Mitch Marner or another goal-scorer. The Blues don't have the salary-cap room, and I believe they should wait to add that player when they're a contender. I chose Frederic not because he's a St. Louis native, but because he could bring much-needed toughness and also because Jim Montgomery, his coach in Boston, might be able to help him rediscover his offense. I would not pay a first-round pick, though, because the Blues could simply try to sign the pending unrestricted free agent next summer.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Target: Yanni Gourde, C (SEA)*

(*23-team trade list)

Cost: First-round pick or top prospect

Reality: The Lightning have a dangerous top-six but need more bottom-six support alongside Nick Paul and Conor Geekie. Teams with championship aspirations need four reliable lines — like Tampa Bay had in 2020 and 2021. A reunion with Gourde would help; he brings a disruptive style that thrives in the playoffs, secondary scoring and two-way play. Maybe the market will raise the price to a first-rounder, but the Lightning could try to push the price down to a second-rounder (even with salary retention). The Lightning don't have many prospects, but have a 2026 first-rounder and two 2025 second-rounders at their disposal. — Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Target: Yanni Gourde, C (SEA)*

(*23-team trade list)

Cost: First-round pick or Ben Danford, RHD (TOR/OHL)

Reality: Gourde looks like the third-line center the Leafs need right now. He's highly competitive, he's quick, he can take on difficult matchups, he can kill penalties and he can deliver some offense from lower in the lineup. He was an integral part of the Lightning during back-to-back Stanley Cup runs. Is he worth a first-round pick? I'm not so sure. But given the dearth of potentially available centers and the many teams that need one, maybe he will net one for Seattle (if the team decides to trade him at all). Should the Leafs be the team to do it? I'd be more inclined to deal Danford than the first-round pick, given that his ceiling might be that of a third-pairing defenseman in the NHL. The Leafs don't own a first-rounder in 2025 either, so it would have to be a 2026 pick. Or maybe the Leafs can sell the Kraken on the package that New York paid for Alex Wennberg last spring, second- and fifth-round picks? Cost will obviously have to be a consideration, but Gourde is the type of player the Leafs should be (and will be) prioritizing ahead of the deadline.

Utah Hockey Club

Target: A top prospect: Nick Bjugstad, C (UTA) or Karel Vejmelka, G (UTA)

Reality: Two years ago, when Utah HC were the Arizona Coyotes, they made a brilliant trade at the deadline: Bjugstad to the Oilers for a third-round pick and a then-relatively unknown prospect, Michael Kesselring. He has since blossomed into a big, mobile top-four defenseman for Utah, with 15 points in 29 games so far this season. General manager Bill Armstrong has a solid bounty to use to extract more picks and prospects from buying teams this year. In addition to Bjugstad and Vejmelka, who has been one of the best goalies of the league of late, the Hockey Clubbers also have Alex Kerfoot, Michael Carcone, Ian Cole, Olli Maatta and Robert Bortuzzo on expiring deals.

Vancouver Canucks

Target: Will Borgen, RHD (SEA)

Cost: Second-round pick

Reality: The Canucks need additional help on defense — that's been apparent all season — but it's a need that's about to be magnified over the medium term by Filip Hronek's eight-week absence. Vancouver was going to need to bolster the right side of its back end anyway, but the Hronek situation ups the stakes. This front office is exceptionally aggressive about making in-season trades historically and has specifically moved proactively to boost its blue line in times of need — the club dealt for Nikita Zadorov in late November of 2023, for example, after Carson Soucy was injured. Among the pending unrestricted free-agent defenders, Borgen stands out. He's relatively affordable cap-wise, he's still relatively young (and would represent a potential long-term fit from a Vancouver perspective) and he's a credible top-four option with enough offensive juice to potentially work as a fill-in caddy for Quinn Hughes on Vancouver's top pair. He checks all the boxes. The Canucks seem to be pretty reticent about dealing significant futures or good young players for rental-type defenders, but a second-round pick for a player such as Borgen, who is young enough that the club might be willing to outbid other suitors for his services, would be a no-brainer. If the Kraken, who organizationally still have designs on competing for a playoff spot, decide to sell between now and the deadline, this would be a perfect fit at a reasonable enough price for the Canucks. — Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

Target: Gustav Nyquist, C (NSH) — Jesse Granger

Cost: Two picks (second- and third-rounders)

Reality: Without a first-round pick for the next two years, the Golden Knights won't be making the same type of splashy additions they did before last year's deadline. Nyquist feels like the type of mid-level player Vegas likes to add to its middle-six. He's a crafty playmaker with the puck, and while he hasn't been as productive this season, he's coming off a 75-point season. The Golden Knights have their second-round pick and two extra third-rounders, so the price is right.

Washington Capitals

Target: Nils Högländer, LW (VAN)

Cost: Martin Fehervary, LHD (WSH) or Trevor van Riemsdyk, RHD (WSH)

Reality: As good as the Caps have been, they could use a bit more pop in their middle six. Högländer has some history as a play-driver, the ability to pop in 15 goals or so (last season's hot streak aside), and at 23, could stick in the lineup for a few years. The question is whether it'd be worth sending back the defenseman that Vancouver requires; van Riemsdyk might make sense, as fellow right-shot Dylan McIlrath has given Washington some decent low-impact minutes.

Winnipeg Jets

Target: MacKenzie Weegar, RHD (CGY)*

(*Full no-trade clause)

Cost: Brad Lambert, C (WPG) (or equivalent)

Reality: I targeted Weegar because I see him as an ideal top-pairing complement for Josh Morrissey. Weegar is tough, he's a strong penalty-killer, he wins battles in front of his net and he's a right-handed defenseman who plays first-pairing competition and beats it. He's not a rental, either. Weegar's \$6.25 million contract runs through the end of 2030-31, implying a top four of Morrissey, Weegar, Dylan Samberg and Elias Salomonsson. Brad Lambert is a reasonable ask from Mirtle, and I believe the Jets could afford it, even with the long-term aging risk, but I imagine Winnipeg would prefer to keep Lambert well into the future.

[The Athletic / Team Canada World Junior selection camp notebook: Thoughts on all 32 players who participated](#)

By Scott Wheeler – December 14, 2024

After four days of practices, two red-white scrimmages and two games against a team of USports All-Stars, Team Canada has named its roster for the 2025 World Juniors in Ottawa.

After taking in the camp, here are my complete notes on all 32 players who participated.

The cuts

D Cameron Allen (Washington Capitals): Allen really struggled. He looks strong and sturdy but still very, very hectic at this level. Sloppy turnovers in the neutral zone and defensive zone. Passes that aren't tape-to-tape. Bobbles. Shifts hemmed in. He was better at skating pucks up ice than moving them but he really fought it from an execution standpoint in both games. When they were caught out there against USports, he was normally on the ice. I think people make too much of a fuss about guys who don't get invited to camp and the actual gaps between them, but he was the one player that had me thinking "And they couldn't have had Carter Yakemchuk here?"

F Denver Barkey (Philadelphia Flyers): Barkey was one of the standouts of the red-white scrimmages for me and got Team Red on the board in the first session and the second one (one of which was short-handed). In a setting that I felt was pretty low pace/low energy, he was playing with intention and giddy up, he was going to the net, he was tracking pucks. I know he was disappointed not to make last year's team after an excellent camp in which he did everything he could and was still one of the final cuts, so this must've been doubly hard. He didn't stand out in the second USports game (he had an assist in the first one and played with good hustle) and that might've done it.

F Andrew Cristall (Washington Capitals): I thought Cristall played with good jump throughout and was owed more on the scoresheet, particularly in the second game (he had a secondary assist on the 5-2 goal against USports but it was his effort play and low-to-high pass to Beckett Sennecke that made the play, and he had several chances of his own and others he set up that just didn't go in after a very productive summer showcase in August). He made some nifty passes to the inside. He made some effort plays defensively. He finished his checks and won inside positioning in some battles. Canada's depth at left wing is strong and he's a top-six or power-play guy only in this setting, but he would have been on my team.

F Riley Heidt (Minnesota Wild): There were signs in the summer that they weren't in love with Heidt at the summer showcase and then he turned the puck over in the defensive zone on USports' 1-0 goal in the first game and was relatively quiet the rest of the way and that was that. He had a couple of looks, including a real good one on a two-on-one from Sennecke that he just didn't capitalize on.

D Zayne Parekh (Calgary Flames): I thought Parekh really struggled in battles with the bigger, heavier USports players in front of the net/in the corners, and he turned some pucks over. He needed to be one of the top D in camp to make the team after being a late invite and he just wasn't at his best. His outlets were clean throughout camp, he scored Red's second goal in the second scrimmage.

F Beckett Sennecke (Anaheim Ducks): Sennecke was a late add to camp and Hockey Canada staff talked about wanting to see him play good defense and carve out a niche. They know he's got elite skill and a unique size-talent package, but they obviously had questions about his play away from the puck. I thought his red-white scrimmage was a bit of a mixed bag as well. He set up Berkly Catton in a nice give-and-go for the first goal of camp and made some plays but he also turned over a couple of pucks in bad spots, one of which led to a goal. I liked his work rate in the first USports game and he was rewarded: jumping on a turnover to feed Carson Rehkopf backdoor for Canada's first goal. He made some plays off the rush. He was one of the only guys creating against USports in the first game and had two assists in it.

But he also lost some battles and while he made some plays in the second game he probably needed to be a standout again to force their hands. I liked his camp, though.

G Scott Ratzlaff (Buffalo Sabres): Ratzlaff had the worst numbers coming in and despite being a returnee was going to have to earn a job. Then he fought it a little in the first USports game and gave up a couple of goals he would have liked back (one blocker side and another after misplaying the puck). He stopped all 14 shots he faced in the second game but after going 10/14 in the first game his .857 save percentage was the lowest of the bunch (he technically gave up five goals in the first game, too, because he surrendered the overtime goal as well). He made some nice scrambled saves in the second game but it was probably decided at that point, especially when Jack Ivankovic also played really well on the final day of camp (and can come back the next two years).

F Matthew Wood (Nashville Predators): Wood has been a very productive college player across three seasons (not just for his age but leading his teams), was a top scorer for Canada at U18 worlds, and even had some nice moments after starting as kind of a 12th/13th forward on last year's World Junior team. He's got a pretty unique profile with his combination of shooting, skill, length, power-play value and ability to play both wings. But his lack of pace was really noticeable this week and I think put him in the small group of returnees who weren't locks coming in. I thought he looked slow in camp, and he doesn't play super sturdy or hard either (even when he tries to). He nearly handcuffed Ratzlaff off the rush in the first game and then scored the game-winning 2-1 goal on the power play in the second game but he was also just OK otherwise and the goal was too little too late. You could see on his face postgame that he knew, too.

The roster

Note: Carolina Hurricanes first-rounder and Chicago Wolves forward Bradley Nadeau did not participate in camp and will now join the team for pre-tournament play.

D Beau Akey (Edmonton Oilers): Akey looked good in the four-on-four and three-on-three portions of the scrimmage, scoring and really showcasing his skating. It was notable that he got to sit the first USports games because it felt coming into camp like the biggest competitions were going to be for the second and third spots on the right side after Oliver Bonk, especially after Harrison Brunicke fractured his wrist and wasn't quite going to be cleared for contact in time. He wasn't a standout in camp by any stretch but he played well enough and he'll be their third righty after Bonk and Andrew Gibson.

F Cole Beaudoin (Utah Hockey Club): Beaudoin was injured blocking a shot in the first practice of camp and after trying to continue had to leave. He went to the hospital for X-rays but they came back negative and while he missed the red-white scrimmages the swelling camp down in time for him to return for the two USports games. He was noticeable on the forecheck, and the cycle, and for his physicality in both games as well, setting the tone. His heaviness and motor will be valuable as Canada's likely fourth-line centre.

G Carson Bjarnason (Philadelphia Flyers): Bjarnason was 6/8 in Game 1 against USports and 12/13 in Game 2 but one of the goals in the first game came after his teammate high-sticked him and the other was on a jam play off a Heidt turnover. 18/21 (.857). He made a couple of nice stretch saves, played well in the second game in particular, and has a strong body of work this season with Brandon. He might end up being the starter.

D Oliver Bonk (Philadelphia Flyers): Bonk was a lock and was fine without being a standout. He's this team's top righty and could play in all situations with his unique ability to play the bumper on the power play. He had a couple of big blocks and took a big hit and didn't get hurt, which is all Hockey Canada was probably hoping for.

F Mathieu Cataford (Vegas Golden Knights): Cataford began the camp in a non-contact yellow jersey after getting injured in his last game with Rimouski against Chicoutimi. He looked like he was all right skating by himself and it was by all accounts a minor injury (sounds like he just tweaked his knee) but he sat the red-white scrimmages. I liked him against USports, though. He's a strong kid and skater who works, can carry pucks or chase them, will track back and can play all three positions. They like him as an up-and-down-the-lineup guy. He's also excellent in the faceoff circle and can chip in on draws even if they play him on the wing.

F Berkly Catton (Seattle Kraken): Catton made a number of plays in the red-white scrimmage and the first game against USports (he made the play that set up Porter Martone's game-tying 2-2 goal and was the only player who scored in the shootout), and it was no surprise that he was scratched for the last game. His blend of speed and skill have made him a standout with this age group for Hockey Canada and he should be an important part of this team's top six even as an 18-year-old. He got to the guts of the ice and also made plays out wide. He supported play well off the puck defensively, which has been a focus of his this year.

F Easton Cowan (Toronto Maple Leafs): Cowan was held out of the red-white scrimmages and the USports games as a precaution after taking a hard hit in his last game with London against Oshawa. He looked like himself to my eye in his skills sessions though and I think the expectation is that he'll participate in the pre-tournament schedule over the next 10 days. Cowan's going to be a key piece for this team.

D Sam Dickinson (San Jose Sharks): Dickinson's camp was just fine but he was solid in the first game (there were some bad passes/shifts hemmed in in the second game but I thought he got better as it went on). He defended the rush well and showed his skating a couple of times. His blend of size, skating, man-to-man defending and the season he's having put him on the team.

F Ethan Gauthier (Tampa Bay Lightning): Gauthier played hard, finished his checks, scored off the rush to give Canada its first lead against USports 3-2 and was excellent on the forecheck all camp. He has an identity, he plays to it and he's the right kind of bottom-sixer for an event like this.

G Carter George (Los Angeles Kings): George seemed to be getting frozen in drills on the first day a little and then when the puck dropped on the two USports games I thought he was really good. He stopped 17/18 across his two half games and the only goal he gave up was high-glove on a breakaway in three-on-three overtime. He was impressive in the shootouts too. He'd be my starter.

F Tanner Howe (Pittsburgh Penguins): I thought Howe was really good in the red-white scrimmages, playing with energy when others weren't. He was then in the scratches group for the first USports game, which is always a positive sign (the guys who sit are normally the locks or those with an inside track). Hockey Canada has always had time for Howe. They also hinted all week that they were disappointed by the competitiveness of last year's team, which lost in the quarterfinal. There aren't many players in these age groups more competitive than Howe and they clearly feel he can help them with their identity and play up and down their lineup. He made a nice little play off the wall to Yager on the 1-0 goal in his USports game, too.

G Jack Ivankovic (2025 NHL Draft): Ivankovic faced the most shots across the two games and finished 27/29 (9/10 in the first game and 18/19 in the second) for a .931 save percentage. When he puts that Canada jersey on he always seems to deliver. He got beat on a backdoor play to Brampton Steelheads teammate Carson Rehkopf for the lone goal he gave up in the first game and then misplayed a puck and gave it to USports on the only goal he gave up on Friday. I thought he was excellent on Friday otherwise and made several big saves down low. I think he's probably the third goalie at the moment but he's got two more years of eligibility still.

F Jett Luchanko (Philadelphia Flyers): I actually thought Luchanko was unnoticeable in both the red-white scrimmages and the first game against USports before Hockey Canada gave him the day off for the second game. Hockey Canada likes his skating, two-way conscience and reliability down the middle and his NHL experience was always going to put him on this year's team. He was good for them at U18 Worlds in the spring, too.

F Porter Martone (2025 NHL Draft): Martone scored the 2-0 goal for Team White in the first red-white scrimmage, broke up some plays against USports with a good stick/keeping his feet moving off the puck, and scored the 2-2 goal against USports in the first game going to the net. He was a front-runner to make the team coming in and that was all Canada needed to see. They view him as a guy who can play on any of their four lines and he's got a proven Hockey Canada track record as a player and leader.

F Gavin McKenna (2026 NHL Draft): When Connor Bedard made Team Canada in his 16-year-old season he wasn't a lock coming in and had to score a hat trick against USports to secure his spot. It never felt like McKenna was in the same situation this week. They played him on their first line in the first USports game and sat him for the second. Through the scrimmages and the one game he played, he was one of the only Canadian forwards who was noticeable in transition and on multiple shifts where they couldn't clear the zone and just did it himself with his skating. He also made some plays off of the perimeter, entered through the middle third, and showed a really good stick defensively, taking back and lifting a lot of pucks. He's going to be a top-six winger for this team as a double underager.

F Luca Pinelli (Columbus Blue Jackets): Pinelli had a good camp. He supported play. He made a couple of plays. He scored a three-on-three goal with a nice mid-net shot. He worked. He had good energy and kept his feet moving. He set up Matthew Wood on the power play to give Canada the 2-1 lead in the third period of the second game. He doesn't have pedigree or cachet of most of the rest of the roster but Pinelli's an effective energy player with skill in this setting.

F Carson Rehkopf (Seattle Kraken): I got the sense from talking to a couple of people pre-camp that Rehkopf wasn't necessarily a lock to make this team as a returnee. But I thought he was one of the three or four standouts of the red-white scrimmages (he scored a goal in both of them and in the shootout) and then he had a hat trick and four points in the first game against USports. His speed, his NHL release, his routes, his rush game and his ability to get open for his linemates stood out. He also supported play well and finished his checks, both of which I know Hockey Canada was looking for. I'll be interested to see where they use him in the tournament because he has traditionally played wing for Hockey Canada but he has played a lot of center with Kitchener and Brampton the last two seasons and Canada's center group is on the smaller side (he played the first USports game at center and the second at left wing). If he can continue to show them that he can play without the puck and support his linemates well then I could see them using him down the middle. His ability to play all three forward positions and do damage on the power play with his shot has obvious value.

D Andrew Gibson (Nashville Predators): Gibson looks like a man in this setting and gives the Canadian blue line and coaching staff a defender they feel they can really rely on to play. He looked solid and steady through the scrimmages and the first USports game and they gave him the day off for the final game. His skill level and execution with the puck aren't as crisp as the high-end first-round types but he's a really strong skater, he knows who he is, he defends well, he makes a good first pass and he can play with those guys.

D Tanner Molendyk (Nashville Predators): Molendyk nearly made the Predators out of camp and was the lock of all locks to make this team. He's expected to be Canada's No. 1 D in the tournament and didn't play in either of the USports games. Despite missing the start of selection camp last year due to a lower-body injury, he was going to be a top-four D on that team as an 18-year-old before breaking his

wrist in pre-tournament play. He's an elite skater and one of the best players in the CHL who can influence the game in all areas (in-zone defence, getting back to pucks, breakouts, entries, lock-up rush defence, offensive zone creation, etc.) and all three zones with his mobility.

D Sawyer Mynio (Vancouver Canucks): Mynio got caught out of position a number of times, including on a couple of goals, in the scrimmages and then the first USports game, but the feeling was that they really liked him and he was on the team. I thought he should have had to play the second game, especially considering the strength of their left-shot D, but I understand why they like him. He plays hard, he's smart on both sides of the puck and he's a strong skater. He should be able to complement his partner well at this level and kill penalties for them.

D Caden Price (Seattle Kraken): I didn't have a ton of notes on Price, which is unusual for him but is probably the way he needed to show them he could play to make this team. He had good gaps in neutral ice and moved pucks. He was fine. I think he's their No. 8 defenseman at the moment.

F Calum Ritchie (Colorado Avalanche): I thought Ritchie looked good in the practice sessions and the red-white scrimmages, and it was no surprise when he was one of the forward scratches for the first USports game given his NHL time this season and his play in the OHL (where I think he's the league's best forward). He wasn't a standout but his well-rounded skill, two-way reliability, scorer's wrist and good stick are all major assets at this level. He's going to be a top-of-the-lineup player for this team. Like Rehkopf, I'll be interested to see whether they use him as a center or a winger. Hockey Canada has always used him on the wing but he's a natural center, he's reliable defensively, he's got size and he's good in the faceoff circle.

D Matthew Schaefer (2025 NHL Draft): Schaefer's transition ability is frankly incredible and it was impressive to see it on display as much at this level (the highest level of competition he has played to date in his career) as at previous ones within his age group. His skating is unbelievable and he really got on his horse in the red-white scrimmages in particular to carry pucks and join the rush. He covers so much territory and is never in a bad spot on the ice because of his ability to flow and gallop back. It's hard for draft-eligible players to make Team Canada at the World Juniors. It's even harder for draft-eligible D. It's something else altogether when you get to sit one of the USports games because you're a lock. He's nearly eligible for 2026, too. It looks like he might run one of Canada's power plays as well.

F Brayden Yager (Winnipeg Jets): Yager only played in one of the two USports games but he scored in the second red-white scrimmage and in the USports game he played. The latter was a nasty wrist off the post and in flight to open the scoring. He won battles, played with good tempo and showed good puck control, too. He'll be a top-six center for this team.