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Columbus Dispatch / NHL shares how to buy tickets for Blue Jackets outdoor game, unveils Stadium Series logo

By Brian Hedger – September 20, 2024

The NHL announced plans Thursday for its public ticket sales to attend the Blue Jackets' outdoor game March 1 against the Detroit Red Wings at Ohio Stadium.

After offering presale tickets to Blue Jackets full and partial season-ticket holders earlier this summer, the team and league will round off sales to the public at 10 a.m. Oct. 4 through Ticketmaster on a first-come, first-served basis.

Ohio State students also received an email Thursday from the school's athletic department with instructions on purchasing presale tickets to sit in a student section at the game.

"The excitement of that, obviously it's an 'outside the box' sort of thing that goes on throughout the season, so it can give you a little bit extra pep in your step and energy," said new Blue Jackets forward James van Riemsdyk, who has played in the most outdoor games of any NHL player (seven). "It's certainly a great experience to take in, but they're more memorable if you can win the game."

The league also revealed its official logo for the game, which is officially part of the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union Stadium Series. The Blue Jackets' colors – red, white and blue – make up the primary colors for the logo, which includes three nods to OSU.

The main design and wording are encased inside a horseshoe mirroring Ohio Stadium's original shape, the Buckeyes' famed football helmet stripe is used in the logo, and a script "The" is included with "NHL Stadium Series" as an ode to the school's use of "The Ohio State University" as its official name.

The game, which will make the Blue Jackets the NHL's 30th team to play its first outdoor game, will be carried on ESPN's main network with a 6 p.m. start time. It will be the fifth outdoor game for the Red Wings, who are 2-0-2 in their first four.

[Bluejackets.com / What to know about Blue Jackets training camp 2024](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – September 20, 2024

This will certainly be a different training camp for the Blue Jackets, and it starts with the man who will start putting the team through the paces this morning in the OhioHealth Ice Haus.

New head coach Dean Evason comes to Columbus with a winning pedigree, not to mention a critical eye as he steps onto the ice.

And that starts with how he's going to approach getting to know his team in the opening days of camp, presented by OhioHealth.

In two words, it's a clean slate for everyone.

"I've asked the coaching staff to not tell me about the players and their personalities or what happened last year, how they played or how they conducted themselves," Evason said. "I don't care. I don't care what happened last year. I just care about what's going to happen tomorrow and in practice and in moving forward."

Indeed, while Evason acknowledged there are some players he can pencil – or perhaps even pen – into the lineup come the Oct. 10 opener in Minnesota, this year's camp will be an opportunity for the 55 players in camp to show what they bring to the table as the Blue Jackets look to climb out of consecutive last-place finishes in the Eastern Conference.

There are spots up and down the lineup that will need to be filled, and everyone on hand comes in with a chance to do so. For the CBJ players, who will step onto the ice in front of the coach with the seventh-best points percentage among mentors with at least 250 games behind a bench, it's an exciting time to try to get better.

"He's been coaching for pretty much as long as I've been alive, to be honest," defenseman Zach Werenski said about the 25-year coaching lifer. "He was really good in Minnesota. Obviously they struggled a little bit last year, but after conversations with him, the one thing I kind of gathered, it's just black and white. He's gonna tell you how it is. There's no gray areas.

"And I think that makes it a lot easier as a player when you're not thinking too much. You just know what's right, know what's wrong. It allows you to go out there and play, and it kind of frees you up a bit. I'm really excited for it, ready to get camp going."

What's New

The Blue Jackets made some forays into the free agent market and also said goodbye to some notable names from the past few years, but the reality is this isn't a majorly different squad from what the team put on the ice the past two years.

The most notable addition came up front, where NHL veteran Sean Monahan signed a five-year deal to bring a No. 1 center and some consistency to the CBJ offense. Monahan has topped 20 goals in eight of his 11 seasons in the NHL and played in a league-high 83 games last year between Montreal and Winnipeg, posting a 26-33-59 line that's in line with his career averages. He's one of the top faceoff men in the league as well and should be able to hold down a spot in the top six for the Blue Jackets.

Columbus also made a late signing up front this past weekend in James van Riemsdyk, a 15-year veteran of more than 1,000 NHL games. A pro's pro, the man known as JVR is coming off a season in which he

showed he can still be a consistent contributor at the NHL level, totaling 11 goals – six on the power play – and 38 points in 71 games with Boston.

On the blue line, the major addition is Jordan Harris, a 24-year-old who played in 121 games over the past two seasons with Montreal. A Massachusetts native brought in via the Patrik Laine trade with the Habs, Harris is coming into his own and describes himself as a two-way defenseman who is ready to take a step forward with his game after getting his feet wet with Montreal.

Among the other veterans brought in by the front office are center Dylan Gambrell, who has 17-23-40 in 233 games in six NHL seasons; returning defenseman Jack Johnson, a longtime CBJ blueliner who won the Stanley Cup with Colorado in 2022 and still has something in the tank at age 37; and goalie Zach Sawchenko, who made seven NHL appearances in 201-22 with San Jose.

Then there are some young prospects who could force their way into the lineup, a group highlighted by a pair of 20-year-olds in forward Gavin Brindley and defenseman Denton Mateychuk.

The Big Ten Player of the Year a season ago, Brindley was one of the top 10 scorers in both goals and points college hockey last year at Michigan, and the 2023 second-round pick made his CBJ debut at the end of last season.

Mateychuk, meanwhile, was a dominant player with Moose Jaw of the WHL, leading the Warriors to their first league title and showing well in a cameo late last season with AHL Cleveland's playoff squad. The 2022 first-round pick might just be difficult to keep off the ice.

What's Old

While the roster is a bit older with the additions of such players as Monahan, van Riemsdyk and Johnson, it's still a pretty young group.

That being said, veteran leaders like captain Boone Jenner, alternates Zach Werenski, Sean Kuraly and Erik Gudbranson, and such players as Justin Danforth, Mathieu Olivier, Ivan Provorov, Damon Severson and Elvis Merzlikins will comprise the core of the team this upcoming season.

Outside of that group, there's a major chance for the team's young players to take steps forward. Cole Sillinger and Yegor Chinakhov enter their fourth seasons in CBJ colors; Kent Johnson, Kirill Marchenko and David Jiricek are in year three; and Adam Fantilli and Dmitri Voronkov enter their second seasons in the NHL.

All except Marchenko and Voronkov are first-round draft picks, and those two combined for 41 goals a season ago for the Blue Jackets. In other words, those 25-and-under players are in many ways the future of the franchise, and the quicker they continue their transition into consistent players – and potential stars – the more success the Blue Jackets will have.

"There's no doubt we have a lot of guys in their first, second, third, fourth year," Jenner said. "This league is tough to break into at a young age. Sometimes you forget that or sometimes guys lose track of that. I think the strides that they've taken in their short time here already, I think they'll just continue to get better at it. I think they're all gonna be a big part of our team, and they are, so I look forward to that continuing to grow."

What To Watch

The Blue Jackets' biggest question comes on the defensive side of the ice, where Columbus has struggled the past two seasons, giving up the most goals in franchise history in 2022-23 and the second most a year ago. The Blue Jackets have a good mix of veterans and up-and-comers in the defensive corps, but there will need to be major improvements.

And as we mentioned above, the Blue Jackets have made a big investment in youth – and dealt with the growing pains of that the past few seasons. At some point, that decision has to pay dividends, and it should start this season as those players continue to gain experience at the NHL level. The size of those strides Jenner referred to could be the difference between another long season and potential postseason contention.

“We’re looking for the players to take the next step,” general manager Don Waddell said. “We’re not going to race them into that. They’re going to be provided an opportunity, and they have to take advantage of it.”

The common thread between those two potential areas of improvement? Evason, who got the best out of such young scorers as Kirill Kaprizov, Kevin Fiala and Joel Eriksson Ek in Minnesota and who has preached to have a hard-working team with good structure on a night-in, night-out basis.

“When we go into a building or teams come in here, they know that if they don’t work hard, they lose,” Evason said. “Simple as that. Our hockey club will work hard each and every night. We might get beat on skill set or something one night or another, but we can never get outworked.”

In addition, the tragic offseason passing of Johnny Gaudreau leaves not just a tremendous hole in the locker room but one at the top of the lineup as well. That will also mean more opportunity for the youngsters on hand, but the Blue Jackets will have to find their way on and off the ice without the seven-time All-Star.

What’s Happening

Fans are invited to the OhioHealth Ice Haus on Sunday for the team’s annual open practice, with the doors opening at 11:30 a.m. and scrimmages starting at 12:15.

The first 1,000 fans will receive free T-shirts, Tim Hortons will provide coffee and debuts, while the Blue Line will have items available for fans to purchase. In addition, two sessions of the Get Out And Learn program are open for kids ages 5-12 to try hockey for free.

After that, the Blue Jackets will open the preseason Monday at 5 p.m. with a game at Buffalo. The four home preseason games will be held Sept. 25 (St. Louis), Sept. 28 (Buffalo) Sept. 30 (Washington) and Oct. 3 (Pittsburgh). All games will begin at 7 p.m.

In addition, scheduled practices Thursday through Saturday, next Monday and then Oct. 4 and Oct. 7 are slated for the OhioHealth Ice Haus and will be open to the public.

[Bluejackets.com / Fimis making the most of his chance with the Blue Jackets](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – September 20, 2024

As Pano Fimis was piling up points last season – 25 goals and 51 assists in 68 games with Erie of the OHL – it was clear he could play at a high level.

For a once ballyhooed but eventually undrafted prospect, all the 20-year-old believed he needed was a chance to show what he could do for NHL teams.

He finally got that chance this weekend when the Blue Jackets reached out to add him to their prospects tournament roster – but with a few strings attached.

“I wasn’t guaranteed anything,” Fimis said. “I think I was told I was going to play one game in the prospects tournament; I ended up playing three. I wasn’t guaranteed main camp by any means. Just taking it day by day and taking advantage of the opportunity.”

A short week later, Fimis is in Blue Jackets camp, largely on the strength of three goals in three games this past weekend at that Prospects Challenge in Buffalo. Given the opportunity, the 5-11, 183-pound center showed up at the right time, and now he’s getting a look at the highest level.

He almost certainly won’t be one of the 23 players left when the Blue Jackets cut down from 55 at the start of camp – he’ll return to Erie, where he should put up even better numbers on one of the top teams in junior hockey – but his time in Columbus is another opportunity to make a name for himself.

“I want to be able to prove myself and make a statement,” he said after the opening skate of training camp Thursday. “I think it’s been a bit of a rough go just through junior and the whole COVID situation, but there’s honestly no excuses. Your time frame for opportunity is pretty small. I want to be able to make a statement, make sure that I make a name for myself.”

Indeed, there was a time where it felt like Fimis was on track to great things. The No. 2 overall draft pick in the 2020 OHL draft by Niagara, he arrived in Canadian junior hockey with a reputation for tenacious two-way play as well as the ability to put the puck in the net. Fimis was even good enough to earn a spot on Canada’s team for the Under-18 World Championships back in 2022.

But as he referenced, his junior career has seemingly hit snag after snag. Fimis lost his entire first year with Niagara to the pandemic, then even as he put up solid numbers – 44 points in 2021-22, 49 more in a 2022-23 season split between Niagara and Erie – he never quite had a breakout while playing on teams riddled with coaching changes and instability.

Last year in Erie, then, was the springboard he was looking for, and he’s continued it into the early moments of this season. He tallied the opening goal of the Blue Jackets’ second game in Buffalo against Boston, then followed that up with a two-goal performance in the finale vs. Ottawa. The highlight was a shorthanded breakaway goal in the third period vs. the Sens that stood as the winner, as he made a nifty move to stop at the net and roof a shot over goalie David Egorov.

By the time he tapped home an excellent tic-tac-toe finish off a feed from Luca Del Bel Belluz to complete the Prospects Challenge, Fimis had earned his ticket to Columbus for training camp.

“A weekend like the prospects tournament, any chance that you get, you have to take advantage of it,” he said. “I thought I did a pretty good job of that. I didn’t really set any goals going into it. My expectations are always high for myself, though, going into any opportunity that I get. My goal per se was just to be myself, play my game and do what I do that’s gotten me to this point.”

His name might be unique – his full first name is Panayioti, and he’s of Greek heritage – but in many ways his story is typical of any young Canadian. A native of Richmond Hill in the northern suburbs of Toronto, he fell in love with the game as a kid along with his younger brother Andoni, a defenseman currently in the BCHL who is committed to play college hockey at Vermont.

“We go at it a lot,” Fimis said. “He’s the polar opposite of me – he’s a big frame, 6-2, a little bit more lean, skinner guy, but he’s a defenseman. We’re polar opposites. He’s less chatty than I am, but we push each other. It’s great because now he’s figured out what he has to do, too, and we work out together, we go out on the ice together and do all that fun stuff. We definitely battle it out and push each other every day.”

Time will tell where his journey with the Blue Jackets will take him, but Fimis truly believes that with all that’s happened, his NHL dream is still alive. All he’s needed is the chance to show it.

“I don’t mention it often because I don’t really need to talk about it to a lot of people,” he said of his hopes of making it to the highest level. “I think it’s just something that I keep to myself, and it’s always in the back of my head.”

[NHL.com / Blue Jackets have 'clean slate' with new general manager, coach](#)

By Nicholas J. Cotsonika – September 20, 2024

COLUMBUS -- Don Waddell and Dean Evason faced a tragic challenge as the Columbus Blue Jackets took the ice for the first time at training camp Thursday.

Waddell was hired as general manager May 28, Evason as coach July 23. They took over a team that missed the Stanley Cup Playoffs the past four seasons and finished last in the Eastern Conference last season.

Then forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, died Aug. 29 when they were struck by a car while riding bicycles at home in Salem County, New Jersey.

Mourning Johnny is most important. Waddell and Evason have made it clear he will remain a presence -- from his No. 13 jersey in his stall in the locker room, to stickers on the helmets starting in the preseason, to patches on the jerseys starting in the regular season. They have an open-door policy and will get the players the support they need, while encouraging everyone to come to the rink with the joy Johnny did.

"We're going to do it together," Evason said.

It feels insensitive to discuss. But the reality is, the Blue Jackets have not only lost a beloved friend and teammate, but their best player. Johnny led them in scoring in each of the two seasons he played in Columbus and ranked ninth in the NHL in points (742) from 2014-24. There is a hole in their hearts and their lineup that cannot be filled.

Consider the two biggest offseason moves the Blue Jackets made: signing center Sean Monahan to a five-year, \$27.5 million contract (\$5.5 million average annual value) as an unrestricted free agent July 1 and trading forward Patrik Laine to the Montreal Canadiens on Aug. 19.

A main reason Monahan came to Columbus was to play with Johnny, his teammate with the Calgary Flames from 2014-22 and maybe his best friend. He said they were supposed to live about three houses apart. Monahan's stall is next to Johnny's in the locker room.

When the Blue Jackets traded Laine, they traded a forward who had 138 points (64 goals, 74 assists) in 174 games for them from 2021-24. They didn't know they would lose Johnny 10 days later.

Columbus signed forward James van Riemsdyk to a one-year, \$900,000 contract as an unrestricted free agent Sept. 15. The 35-year-old had 38 points (11 goals, 27 assists) in 71 games for the Boston Bruins last season.

"He's very valuable there for us," captain Boone Jenner said. "He's got a thousand games in this league. He's been around for a little while and seen a lot of things, so you add someone like that into the locker room, it's going to help us."

Waddell said the Blue Jackets will look for more help, scouting players on professional tryouts with other teams and looking for whatever opportunities might present themselves. Johnny signed a seven-year, \$68.25 million contract as an unrestricted free agent July 13, 2022. His \$9.75 million average annual value comes off Columbus' salary cap.

"We're going to keep an open mind to it," Waddell said. "Because of the salary cap and where we're at, we have room. If a player becomes available and it has a higher salary, we don't have an issue with that, either, as long as it's a player who fits how Dean wants the guys to play. We're pretty open-minded about it."

Evason must bring together the team on and off the ice, getting the most out of what the Blue Jackets have. Even before the tragedy, he rearranged the locker room. Players used to sit together by position and pick their stalls; now they are mixed together. Each player used to have his photo above his stall; now there are no pictures of individuals.

"I thought it was a great idea -- put some young guys next to some veteran players, get players communicating," Waddell said. "You tend to in the locker room sit next to who your friends are away from the arena, and that's not what we were looking for, and that's not what Dean was looking for. It was a subtle change, but I think it's been a big change, and I've heard players talk about it."

Evason said he wants a team-first mentality, and he has asked returning members of the management and coaching staffs not to tell him about the players. He wants to form his own opinions.

"We are going to create an earned culture," Evason said. "It's a clean slate, right? Don's new. I'm new. I don't care what happened last year, how many goals you scored last year. It'll help you obviously to start, but after that, you're going to earn your ice time, you're going to earn your position, you're going to earn where you play and how much you play, and that'll be dictated by the player."

"We'll define roles for the players. Like, we'll define what we believe their role is, but that doesn't mean that that's their role for the rest of the year. They can change their role. You want more ice time? Then do more. You want to play on the power play? Then show that you're going to set goals up and you're going to score goals. You want to play on the PK? Then show that you're going to block shots, you're going to clear pucks, you're going to win your puck battles."

"It's a clean slate for everybody, young or old. I don't care if you've played one game or a thousand games. Everybody's starting fresh."

[NHL.com / Blue Jackets season preview: Evason takes over, seeks to develop young core](#)

By Adam Kimelman – September 20, 2024

The 2024-25 NHL season starts Oct. 4. With training camps underway, NHL.com is taking a look at the three keys, the inside scoop on roster questions, and the projected lineup for each of the 32 teams. Today, the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Coach: Dean Evason (first season)

Last season: 27-43-12; eighth place in Metropolitan Division, did not qualify for Stanley Cup Playoffs

3 KEYS

1. Moving forward

The Blue Jackets suffered an unimaginable tragedy when forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were killed when they were struck by a car while riding bicycles Aug. 29. It will be important for the veterans, among them forwards Boone Jenner, Sean Monahan and Sean Kuraly, and defensemen Zach Werenski, Damon Severson and Erik Gudbranson, to help manage emotions among the players, especially early in the season. Gaudreau led Columbus in scoring each of the past two seasons playing on the top line. One option to replace him there could be Kent Johnson, who is coming back from a season-ending shoulder injury sustained Feb. 28 that limited him to 42 games. In 2022-23, he was fifth among NHL rookies with 40 points (16 goals, 24 assists) in 79 games.

2. Center depth

With the signing of Monahan to a five-year contract July 1, the Blue Jackets made center one of the team's strengths. The 29-year-old had 59 points (26 goals, 33 assists) in 83 games with the Montreal Canadiens and Winnipeg Jets last season, showing he's healthy and can be productive after three injury-plagued seasons. He'll also allow Adam Fantilli to receive more favorable matchups as he continues to develop in his second NHL season. The 19-year-old had 27 points (12 goals, 15 assists) in 49 games when he sustained a season-ending skate cut to his left calf Jan. 28; at the time, he was third among NHL rookies in goals and fourth in points. Cole Sillinger, who had an NHL career-best 32 points (13 goals, 19 assists) in 77 games last season, and Kuraly will anchor the bottom two lines. Columbus should be even deeper at the position when Cayden Lindstrom, the No. 4 pick of the 2024 NHL Draft, is ready to join the lineup as soon as next season.

3. Better starts

The Blue Jackets have finished last in the Metropolitan Division the past two seasons in part because of how they have struggled early in each of them. They were 8-15-2 after 25 games in 2022-23, and 8-13-4 after 25 games last season. Evason, who coached the Minnesota Wild the past five seasons, usually had his teams start strong, going 16-8-1 (2020-21), 18-6-1 (2021-22) and 13-10-2 (2022-23) in the first 25 games in each of the three seasons prior to last. A better start would go a long way toward building confidence for some of the younger players Columbus is trying to build around.

ROSTER RUNDOWN

Making the cut

Denton Mateychuk could make for some difficult decisions for the Blue Jackets. Columbus will have eight defensemen with NHL experience at training camp, but the 20-year-old is coming off a season that

saw him voted the best defenseman in the Western Hockey League after he had 75 points (17 goals, 58 assists) in 52 games with Moose Jaw. He also was named MVP of the WHL playoffs after he was second among all players with 30 points (11 goals, 19 assists) in 20 games. In addition to his offensive skill, Mateychuk (5-foot-11, 188 pounds) improved in the defensive zone, impressing the Blue Jackets' development staff with his ability to close plays and start the transition. He'll have to push an older player out of a job to start the season in Columbus, but Mateychuk will be given that chance.

Most intriguing addition

Jack Johnson likely won't play every game for the Blue Jackets, but the 37-year-old defenseman, entering his 19th NHL season, can be a beneficial addition with his experience, including a Stanley Cup championship with the Colorado Avalanche in 2022. As Columbus looks to build around a young core that includes Fantilli, forwards Kirill Marchenko and Dmitri Voronkov, defenseman David Jiricek and some intriguing prospects who could see NHL time this season, having a veteran like Johnson to help them navigate life in the NHL could be just as important as anything he does on the ice.

Biggest potential surprise

Gavin Brindley was named Big Ten Player of the Year after the 19-year-old forward led the University of Michigan with 53 points (25 goals, 28 assists) in 40 games as a sophomore. He also helped the United States win the gold medal at the 2024 IIHF World Junior Championship after he was second on the team in goals (six) and points (10) in seven games. Brindley capped his season by signing with the Blue Jackets and making his NHL debut April 16. Could that rise continue into a top-nine forward spot in the NHL this season? He showcased his scoring touch last season, but also has the speed and grit to play in a bottom-six role and is versatile enough to play any forward spot. Brindley most likely will spend some time in the American Hockey League, but it wouldn't be a surprise to see him play a significant role in Columbus at some point this season.

Ready to contribute

Jiricek has split the past two seasons between the Blue Jackets and Cleveland of the AHL, but the 20-year-old should be ready for a full-time role in Columbus this season. He had 10 points (one goal, nine assists) and averaged 14:36 of ice time in 43 NHL games and was minus-4 despite the Blue Jackets finishing minus-63. With his size (6-4, 207), right-handed shot and offensive upside, Jiricek could see time on the power play, either alongside Werenski on the first unit or playing the point on the second.

Fantasy sleeper

Yegor Chinakhov, F (undrafted on average in fantasy) -- He was an NHL EDGE stats standout last season in terms of speed bursts over 20 miles per hour (206; 94th percentile), top skating speed (23.38 mph; 93rd percentile), top shot speed (98.05 mph; 90th percentile), average skating distance per 60 minutes (10.45 miles; 98th percentile) and 90-100 MPH shots (29; 96th percentile), indicating a breakout season could be on the horizon. Chinakhov, who scored 16 goals in 53 games last season (82-game pace: 24), could challenge or surpass Marchenko (led Columbus with 23 goals last season) as the Blue Jackets goal-scoring leader this season. -- Pete Jensen

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets planning on moving Boone Jenner to the wing

By Mark Scheig – September 20, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets have officially kicked off Training Camp. Two groups of players practiced at the Ice Haus Thursday for a little over an hour each.

This marked the first organized on-ice activity for the team since the passing of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau. While emotions are still very high, just being able to get on the ice together to start camp was another important step of pushing forward.

This also marked head coach Dean Evason's first practices with the Blue Jackets since he was hired as Pascal Vincent's replacement. While the team has a lot of work ahead of them as they prepare for the season, there was a small glimpse of what some of the opening-day lineup could look like.

Most notably, captain Boone Jenner skated on a line with Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko. Jenner was on the left side while they were doing drills.

Evason says the roles haven't been defined yet. However he made clear that Jenner going on the wing to start is something they will be doing.

"I think Boone can play anywhere, right?" Evason said. "You guys know that as much as I do. He doesn't care where. It's just he wants to help the hockey club. But right now, we like the look of their line. There's a lot of guys that I'm seeing for the first time up front and close to watch their, to be actually on the ice, watch their speed and skillset. It's exciting. Yeah, Boone's definitely going to start on that left side with Monahan and Marchenko."

Jenner has played at center the last few seasons. With the addition of Monahan and the continued development of both Cole Sillinger and Adam Fantilli, the Blue Jackets now have the option of putting Jenner on the wing.

This move makes sense on a couple of levels.

First, Jenner won't have as much responsibility being on the wing. He can worry about playing his game without having to consider everything a center has to do.

Second and perhaps more importantly is Jenner's health. He has had back issues in the past. Making this move allows him the opportunity to not exert as much on his back.

There certainly can be times that Jenner ends up taking a faceoff or plays center later on. If Monahan is tossed out of the circle, Jenner can go right in and take that draw. Having "two centers" on the top line can work to their advantage.

Longer term, nothing is set in stone as Evason and the Blue Jackets figure out the best places to slot players. At least at the start of camp and perhaps into the preseason, look for Jenner to play the left wing, the position he had when he had his best season in goal scoring.

Jiricek Gets His Prime Opportunity

One of the other big questions coming into this camp was who would occupy the right side on the second defensive pair? On Thursday, it was David Jiricek there playing alongside Ivan Provorov.

Jiricek's journey has been well documented. He was told to get a place in Columbus only to find himself back in Cleveland. Reports started to surface that he was unhappy.

To Jiricek's credit, he became an important contributor for the Monsters during the season and in the playoffs. Now, his goal is to make the NHL roster and stay there once and for all.

Coach Evason says Jiricek will get his chance to prove it. As for what his role will be exactly, that's still ultimately to be determined.

"We haven't defined anything yet," Evason said. "We'll define roles when we get to that point. And then they have an opportunity to change those roles after we define them. If they want to play different positions, then they can. They'll earn that right to do that. But as far as David's concerned, he has as good an opportunity to make our hockey club as anyone."

We'll see as camp goes on if Jiricek plays mostly with Provorov or if that gets switched around. The other notable pairs on Thursday were Zach Werenski with Damon Severson, Jack Johnson with Erik Gudbranson and Denton Mateychuk with Cole Clayton.

Eventually, once the junior players are sent back to their teams, two groups will form. One will be the NHL group and the other the Cleveland group. Players will dictate which group they fall into with movement between each group being possible.

For Jiricek, this camp is showing it will be his best chance to not only make the Blue Jackets but have it become a permanent stay. Expect him to get multiple preseason games.

Fimis Making Most of Opportunity

An underreported story throughout hockey is the after-effects of the pandemic. Now that a few years have passed, a select group of players who were affected by the pandemic had their development either slowed or halted.

This was the case for camp invite Pano Fimis. The former number-two overall pick in the OHL is now thriving with the Erie Otters. His efforts caught the attention of the Blue Jackets. He got an invite to the Buffalo Prospect's Challenge that came with no camp guarantee. He goes out and scores three goals. He gets an invite to main camp.

Fimis credits his coach Stan Butler for helping him get to this point. Butler is Fimis' ninth junior coach. Seriously. Between the issues in Niagara and in Erie before they hired Butler, there was never any consistency from a coaching standpoint. Now he's ready to show what he has.

"Stan's been great to me. He keeps me honest everyday," Fimis said. "That's one of his biggest things is accountability and making sure that everyday, we bring our best whether it's practice, in the gym, on the ice during the game. Because if you get better two days out of four, you're not getting better four days out of four. That's something we talk about throughout the season. That goes unnoticed sometimes but it definitely leads to performance on the ice."

Fimis is expected to return to the Otters after camp where he is set to potentially have a monster year with a lot of talent around him. Until then, he is trying to prove he can be an NHL player.

"I want to be able to prove myself and make a statement. I think it's been a bit of a rough go just through junior and the whole Covid situation. But there's honestly no excuses and your timeframe for opportunity is pretty small. So I want to be able to just make a statement and make sure I make a name for myself and do my thing because you got to be able to play to your capabilities and do what got you here."

Other Day 1 Notes

- Jordan Harris believes he can make the Blue Jackets' roster. What does he feel he has to do to accomplish that? "Just be myself honestly and show what I can do. I take a lot of pride in the work I put in this summer in preparing." What did Harris prioritize this offseason? "A little bit of everything. I think getting back to some of my skating details and some of your skill work and focus on little things like making sure you know what you want to do with the puck before you get it, scanning the ice a little better, practicing both sides."
- Adam Fantilli said he had to change a few things he did workout wise while still recovering from his injury. He played in the exhibition game at the Men's Worlds and grew confidence from that even though he didn't play in the tournament. He says he wasn't able to run, sprint and jump the same way while in recovery. It was halfway through the summer when all of that came back for him. He was able to train fully for the last 7-8 weeks of the offseason. He played on a line with James van Riemsdyk and Dmitri Voronkov.
- Day 2 of Training Camp goes Friday. A quick update to the schedule. The original schedule had Group 1 practicing before Group 2 daily. Per the Blue Jackets, they will alternate. Group 2 will go first at 9:15 A.M. followed by Group 1 at 12:15 P.M. With multiple shows at Nationwide Arena, practices will be held at the Ice Haus.

The Hockey News / 26 Days until opening night at Nationwide Arena: The history of jersey #26

By Jason Newland – September 20, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets have had a lot of players don the Union Blue in its history. But only a handful have worn 26.

Let's look at the players that have worn the number.

Who Wore It First?

- **Andrej Nedorost** - Played 28 games as a Blue Jacket from 2001 to 2004. He scored 2 goals and had 5 points. He never played another NHL game after his time in Columbus. Nedorost left for Europe in 2004 and retired there in 2014.

Who Wore It Last?

- **Zac Dalpe** - The former Ohio State Buckeye forward played 25 games for the Jackets and had 4 career points. He is signed to play for the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL for the upcoming season where he is the Captain. He was also the Captain of the Cleveland Monsters from 2019 to 2021.

Who Wore It Best?

- **Derek MacKenzie** - Originally drafted by the Atlanta Thrashers, MacKenzie came to Columbus in 2007. He played 7 seasons with the CBJ and appeared in 279 games. He totaled 31 goals and 69 points in those 279 games. He left for the Florida Panthers in 2014 and played for five seasons, where he was the Captain for two.

Others That Have Worn #26

- **Todd Marchant** - Marchant played 95 games for the CBJ and had 43 points. The veteran of 1195 games was put on waivers by the CBJ after a strange situation unfolded. He refused to waive his no-trade clause that would've included him in the Sergei Fedorov trade. The Jackets ended up trading for Fedorov anyway. Afterward, to circumvent his no-trade clause, they put Marchant on waivers, where he was then picked up by the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim. He went on to play for Anaheim for another five seasons and won a Stanley Cup in 2007.
- **Samuel Pålsson** - Pålsson played in 222 games as a CBJ and had 47 points. He was traded to the Vancouver Canucks in 2012 where he would finish his NHL career. He would play another three seasons in Sweden before retiring.
- **Corey Tropp** - Tropp played 105 games for Columbus and had 18 points. He played only 1 NHL game after leaving Columbus, playing the majority of his time in the AHL. He played in Europe for the last two years of his career.
- **Kyle Quincey** - He played only 20 games as a Blue Jacket and had 3 points. He only played 18 more NHL games after leaving Columbus and would retire after playing a year in Europe.
- **Thomas Vanek** - Vanek was traded to Columbus in 2018 to help with the Jackets' playoff push. He had 15 points in 19 games to finish the regular season. He then had 2 points in 6 playoff games. He left in free agency and finished his career with the Detroit Red Wings.

There are 26 days left until opening night at Nationwide Arena.

FOX 29 Philadelphia / Columbus Blue Jackets will wear jersey patch to honor Johnny, Matthew Gaudreau

By FOX 29 Staff – September 20, 2024

PHILADELPHIA - The Columbus Blue Jackets will wear a jersey patch and sticker on their helmets this upcoming NHL season to honor Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau.

The brothers were killed by a suspected drunk driver while biking on the eve of their sister's wedding on a rural two-lane road in New Jersey.

The jersey patch features the last name "Gaudreau" stretched atop Johnny's number 13 and Matthew's number 21 with two doves in between.

Johnny, 31, was entering his third year with the Blue Jackets, after spending his first eight seasons with the Calgary Flames. Matthew, 29, last played minor league hockey for the Worcester Railers in 2022.

The brothers were laid to rest earlier this month during a funeral service in Media, where Johnny's wife, Meredith, revealed during a eulogy that she is pregnant.

Matthew's wife, Madeline, is also pregnant with the couple's first child and described her husband as "born to be a Dad" during remarks at the funeral mass.

Sean Higgins, the 43-year-old driver charged with killing the brothers, was ordered to be held for trial despite defense arguments that he was a married father and law-abiding citizen before the crash.

The Athletic / NHL player poll: Tax and LTIR tweaks? Expansion cities? League's best captain?

By Michael Russo – September 20, 2024

For the second year in a row, The Athletic covered each of the NHL player media tours, one last month in Prague and the other last week in Las Vegas, in part to conduct a preseason player poll.

We surveyed about three dozen players in attendance to get a sense of leaguewide sentiment about everything from long-term injured reserved and tax advantages to the league's best captain and whether Atlanta or Arizona should get another shot at an NHL team.

Players' answers were anonymous so they could speak freely, although some did agree to go on the record with specific responses.

Here's what they said. Enjoy!

This has become a hot-button topic amongst fans and media, with four of the past five Stanley Cup champions and seven of the past 10 finalists coming from states that don't collect state income taxes.

In a recent poll of fans by The Athletic, 84.6 percent of 14,066 respondents felt that teams in no-state-income-tax states have an advantage. Of that, 42.8 percent felt changes need to be made to even the playing field and 41.5 percent felt it's not a significant enough advantage to warrant complex changes.

The NHL and NHLPA have said that they're monitoring the issue but that it would be a complicated fix and nobody seems too bothered yet. But as NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said last week, "If we have the next 10 years similar to the last five, then maybe it's something that needs to be addressed."

So what do players think?

"It is an advantage," said one player from a Canadian team. "If you make \$6 million in New York City or \$6 million in Florida, I mean, it's different. But there was a time where everybody wanted to go to Chicago, and it's not a great tax city. And same with Pittsburgh."

In other words, there are reasons to want to play in any city in the NHL. It's not all about taxes.

"Look in the past who was winning Stanley Cups: Pittsburgh, Washington, Detroit," another player said. "So I don't think it's a big advantage. Everything equals up. And what do you do if you get traded and stuff like that? It's not an issue in any other league. The NHLPA said there's literally nothing they can do so far."

Added a young Eastern Conference player, "No one was complaining when these teams were doing bad, like 10 years ago with Florida and Tampa. Now they're doing good and now people are pissed off."

Most players agree it would be hard for the league to fix.

"There's no easy solution," said an Eastern Conference player. "It's a complex issue that involves a lot of factors. For me, I just play hockey."

Or as one superstar said, with perfect comedic timing: "I try to stay away from politics."

Call this the Mark Stone/Nikita Kucherov question.

Kucherov famously returned to the Tampa Bay Lightning from long-term injured reserve for Game 1 of the playoffs in 2021, racked up 32 points in 23 games and then celebrated the Stanley Cup wearing an "\$18 million over the cap" T-shirt. That rubbed many the wrong way, including in the league office.

For two reasons, we're going to guess that this rule (or loophole) will be tweaked heading into the 2026-27 CBA negotiations.

First, Daly acknowledged recently that the "majority" of the league's 32 GMs want a tweak. That's new. For a long time, GMs dismissed the issue — probably because they wanted the option if they were ever faced with cap and injury issues heading into the trade deadline.

But maybe the biggest reason to foresee an eventual change is that players appear to want it. In collective bargaining negotiations, that's half the battle.

"That's an easier fix than the (no-state income tax) issue," one player said.

This isn't to say players think the Vegas Golden Knights are inventing Stone's injuries. He underwent back surgery two years ago. He lacerated his spleen last season. But the timing of both allowed Vegas to make necessary adjustments in advance of the trade deadline. In both cases, Stone returned for the playoffs — the first time being the team's Stanley Cup winner.

As another player said, "It's just crazy how people can get medically healthy before Game 1. All of a sudden, you're playing a team that's \$40 million over the cap."

Another player quipped, "If they don't want Vegas to win anymore, they should (change it). Look, I don't think anyone is getting hurt without really getting hurt. At the end of the day, all teams can do the same thing, but just some teams do it better."

Most players want a change.

"I don't believe Vegas, for example, plans to always do that," one player said. "But at least nobody can even say anything about it (if they make a change)."

Another added, "Vegas does their own business every year, and it's tricky, but they have to do something about it."

Others aren't as bothered.

"If the owners are willing to spend the money, there's a hole in the rules," one player said.

The NHL will shut down from Feb. 12 to 20 for the 4 Nations Face-Off.

But why four?

Two big reasons: First and foremost, the NHL is staying consistent with rulings by the International Olympic Committee banning Russia from the 2024 Summer Games in Paris and very likely the 2026 Winter Games in Milan because of its invasion of Ukraine.

The other reason is the league only wants NHL player participation. Smaller nations like Czechia, Switzerland, Slovakia and Germany couldn't field full rosters.

For the most part, NHLers understand that — even those who are disappointed they can't partake.

"I mean, I'm going to take the 11 days break," joked Germany's Leon Draisaitl, who answered the question knowing it would be attributed. "I will take it, but I'd like to be playing in it. But I understand the concept of it.

"Like if you asked (Slovenia's Anze) Kopitar and (Norway's Mats) Zuccarello and all those guys, I bet you they would say, 'Yeah, I would love to be in it and be a part of it and play.' But at the end of the day, it's not for me to make those decisions, unfortunately."

It will be hard for many to accept this as a real best-on-best tournament, though, without the Kucherovs, Kirill Kaprizovs, Artemi Panarins and Alex Ovechkins.

"I understand they want to promote the game, and it's very tough with the whole war going on, but at the end of the day, if it's best-on-best, Russia has to be there," one Swiss-born player said. "Everybody would love to see Canada-Russia, U.S.-Russia. Whenever they play, there's some magic on the ice."

Said another player from a smaller country, "I don't agree. You have time to make a tournament for four teams. Why don't you have time to make a tournament for eight countries? At the same time, they signed for the Olympics. I guess we can take that as a little plus. But it's a hard pill to swallow."

Added a Slovakian player, "You want to represent your country. Like Czech just won the World Championship this summer, and they won't be there."

One Czech player said the league should have "combined Czechoslovakia," while a player from Germany said he wished there was a Team Europe like in the 2016 World Cup of Hockey.

A Swiss player joked that he plans to still watch, "but probably from a beach somewhere."

The one thing we learned here is NHL players loved going to Arizona.

Who wouldn't?

The sun is the perfect in-season elixir and rejuvenator.

"I don't see a lot of guys that hated going to Arizona," one player said. "Not always a lot of fans, but even one of my friends (who played there), he loved it in Arizona — the lifestyle and how it is down there. It is a good spot, but obviously, it's got to be worth it as well."

"Arizona just needs better owners," another player said.

The same could be said for Atlanta. That's why the NHL is entertaining a return to a northern suburb not far from where the Braves play. But there wasn't as much passion about returning to a market that twice previously had NHL teams, perhaps in part because most NHL players now are too young to have played there.

"They've tried Atlanta twice, and it failed twice, and I love Arizona, but it hasn't worked, and I don't think a new stadium is going to change that unfortunately," one player said.

Some don't think the league should return to either. Here's a sampling from four players:

"There's a lot of other cities that would die to have an NHL team."

"There's a reason why it hasn't worked before, so maybe try something new."

"Let's explore another U.S. market or Canada."

"I feel like it's not good when you come back to the same city you just left."

Clayton Keller, who played all of his eight NHL seasons in Arizona before moving with the team to Utah, hopes the market gets another chance.

"It would be hard to not bring a team back there," he said, answering the question knowing it would be attributed. "There's so many great fans there and people around the organization: the Shane Doans, the Ray Whitneys, a lot of guys involved in the hockey community there still to do this day. There's a long list of guys that still live there, their kids play there. It definitely would be amazing if they brought it back one day."

If the NHL were ever to expand to Europe, London and Prague are the favorites.

"If you want to make it realistic, London, because it's a four- or five-hour flight," said a player from a team in the northeast. "It's almost closer than some of the NHL teams. Only thing would be bad is the time change, but it's a closer flight than flying to L.A."

"We played in Prague a few years ago and the atmosphere was cool," said a player, who isn't from Czechia. "You have to stick to proven places."

"Anybody would love to play in Prague," a player who is from Czechia said.

On that note, what about Hawaii? It might have slightly broken the rules of the question, as a "state" and not "city/country" and being outside the "continental" U.S., but you can't blame players for trying. If there ever is expansion into Hawaii, there will be a brawl amongst The Athletic NHL writers fighting for the transfer.

Most players say they don't see the need for the league to blow down or penalize regroups over the red line during overtime, even if the trend of skating the puck or passing the puck outside the zone to reset or execute line changes has become a bore for viewers.

Players did say they understood the sentiment, though.

"I must admit, it became a little bit more boring than it used to when it started because teams are prepared now," one said. "It would make it more interesting. I would do the red-line rule because it's annoying for players to skate without the puck for four minutes there. They keep taking it out. First of all, it's no fun for the fans and not even for the player."

"Let's see some quick hockey," another player said. "That's why we do it, three-on-three, so there's stuff happening."

Added a third: "It would make it more fun. I feel there would be more goals and make the games quicker and end games quicker than shootouts."

One European player surveyed said that he doesn't see the need for a change in the NHL but that in "the Swedish League, they have much bigger issues with that. Bigger ice surface and they're trying to not risk anything."

But most players feel the league shouldn't touch the issue.

"There's plenty of goals in three-on-three, so I don't know if we need to force stuff like that," one said. "If you extend to 10 minutes, that'd probably be problem solved because I know goalies don't like shootouts. But I don't have an issue the way it is right now."

Added another, "It's not like we're waiting behind the net. It's just getting speed and then a new attack is coming. It's still pretty entertaining."

And if the league did change the rule, another noted, "there's going to be probably something else new" to create resets.

One player offered a compromise system: "I think the red line is tight. I think they should make it that you can't go back into your own zone. That could work because I agree the resets have become ridiculous. But red line seems fine. It's passing back to your goalie or skating back into your own zone that is annoying."

Speaking of goalies, one ranted humorously that the only thing he doesn't like about three-on-three is the stat-keeping: "If goalies give up a goal, it shouldn't count in your stats. Three-on-three, you see one or two shots. You end up over a 90 save percentage in a 60-minute game, and in a minute-and-a-half, you give up a goal, you're at 88."

Most players surveyed think the NHL should join other North American and European pro sports leagues that make officials available to the media in some capacity (only if necessary) to explain a call.

“One hundred percent,” one player said, drawing a laugh. “Please.”

But it was also extremely clear NHLers have great respect for referees and linesmen. Many prefaced their answers with how hard the job is for NHL officials.

“There’s gonna be mistakes,” one player said. “As players, we make mistakes, but if a ref makes a mistake, everybody sees it more than what we do. So it’s a tough job for them. They’re trying their best.”

“Refs are people, too,” another player said. “I wouldn’t want to be a ref. You don’t get any praise, you only get s— thrown at you. But I do think it’d be a good thing because sometimes they’re just following the rule book, so they can just explain it so fans can understand it. Maybe they’d get less unjustified critique.”

While some players said refs’ jobs are “hard enough as it is,” others think it’s unfair reporters have to ask coaches and players how a referee explained a call rather than the referee explaining it themselves.

“So many situations are unexplainable, so they can explain it,” one player said.

Joked another, “We have to speak to reporters, so why shouldn’t they?”

Added a third: “Ask three or four questions. I feel like it would change a lot of the way they officiate because they know they have to answer questions after games.”

Regardless, this isn’t changing anytime soon.

Daly said on-ice officials will continue to be off limits to reporters, but, “I think to the extent there needs to be a comment made, it should be made by the league. I think there should be accountability, but I think ultimately the accountability rests on the league level.”

This was a two-horse race that ended in a dead heat between a couple of future first-ballot Hall of Famers.

Clearly Sidney Crosby and Connor McDavid are considered the class of the NHL not only by fans but also by their brethren.

That’s how you combine for seven Ted Lindsay trophies.

“They’re two generational players,” one player said. “It’d be interesting to see what they’re like on the leadership side.”

One player who picked reigning the Stanley Cup champion captain Aleksander Barkov and put his name on it?

Nashville Predators goalie Juuse Saros: “I’ve played with Barkov since I was 10 years old, so it’d be cool to play with him.”

Again, a two-horse race between the coaching Floridians, Jon Cooper and Paul Maurice.

On Cooper, as one player said, “All he does is win ... every year.”

Maurice was a popular choice because of his sense of humor.

“Seems like a pretty cool coach just seeing his interviews and stuff,” one player said.

“Love his quotes,” added another.

Maurice on Game 6: "It's gonna be an absolute barnburner in there. There'll be 18,000 cameras on the morning skate just to see how many sips of water bottle Brad Marchand takes. There's going to be some high-end investigative journalism. Guys go home & get a nap bc you've got some..."

— Michael Russo (@RussoHockey) May 15, 2024

The funniest response here?

"This may sound weird, but Torts," said one Western Conference defenseman. "I'd like to try Torts."

The Athletic / The NHL's 10 best breakout candidates: Connor Bedard, Juraj Slafkovský, Logan Cooley and more

By Harman Dayal – September 20, 2024

Every NHL season marks an opportunity for new stars to shine.

The goal today is to scan around the league in search of hockey's next breakout players. "Breaking out" can mean something different for every player. This could be a highly touted youngster who takes a big step like Alexis Lafrenière or Lucas Raymond did last season. Other times, it's an unheralded third-pair defender or bottom-six forward like Dakota Joshua who effectively steps into a larger role.

We're looking for notable year-over-year growth, whether that's in the point totals or a player's overall role, responsibility and importance to the team.

How do we identify these candidates? These are some of the most important attributes I look for:

- Age-related growth potential (most players peak in their mid-20s, so if you're younger than that, you've got a natural tailwind).
- A bigger role/increased ice time.
- New opportunities to play with upgraded linemate(s).

I'm going to exclude anyone eligible for the Calder Trophy from this exercise to make it more interesting. Shane Wright isn't Calder-eligible and would technically qualify for this list, but I'm going to exclude him as well since he played fewer than 10 NHL games last season. We also won't include players who either already took a big step or were on last season's breakout candidates list (e.g.: Raymond, Wyatt Johnston, JJ Peterka, Lafrenière, Quinton Byfield). We're also only focusing on forwards and defenders here — no goalies.

Without further ado, let's get into our top 10 list.

Logan Cooley, Utah Hockey Club

Cooley's growth from Game 1 of the regular season to Game 82 was remarkable to watch.

The 2022 No. 3 pick endured growing pains early on, scoring one goal at five-on-five in his first 41 games while also getting crushed from a two-way perspective. By the end of the year, he looked like one of the most promising young players in the NHL. Cooley piled up 11 goals and 16 points in his last 22 games, but more important than the numbers, he looked infinitely more comfortable and dangerous.

Here are some clips from a couple of late-season games against Vancouver that illustrate his elite potential. In the first clip, watch how he leverages his electric skating ability to beat the defender on the outside and drive the net for a Grade-A rush scoring chance:

Cooley will also benefit from a full season of playing on a line with Guenther. Guenther was called up from the AHL in January and the two forged strong chemistry in the second half of the season, controlling 54.6 percent of five-on-five scoring chances. Tack on the likelihood Cooley's ice time will bump up compared to the 15:49 he averaged as a rookie and he should leap well beyond the 20 goals and 44 points he scored in 2023-24.

Leo Carlsson, Anaheim Ducks

Between injuries and load management, we never saw a fully unleashed version of Carlsson in his rookie campaign. He showed tons of potential, though, and should be primed for a huge step this season.

With a large 6-foot-3 frame, buttery smooth puckhandling and elite playmaking vision, Carlsson already looks like an impactful offensive creator and play-driver. He looked more dangerous offensively than his point totals would indicate (29 points in 55 games) and his two-way game was more polished than you'd expect from a 19-year-old. The Ducks narrowly outshot and out-chanced opponents during Carlsson's five-on-five minutes, which is wildly impressive given how poor the team was and that his deployment wasn't sheltered. He deserved better finishing luck too — Anaheim scored on just 7.1 percent of five-on-five shots during his shifts.

Carlsson checks every box you look for in a breakout candidate: He's supremely skilled, will play a huge role on the first line and top power-play unit, posted strong underlying results last season and his production should have a natural tailwind from improved finishing luck too.

Jack Quinn, Buffalo Sabres

Injuries limited Quinn to just 27 games and robbed him of the opportunity to make serious noise around the league as a sophomore. Heading into year three, the 22-year-old right winger looks poised for a monster breakout.

For starters, Quinn produced five-on-five points at the fifth-best rate of all NHL forwards who logged 300 minutes last season.

Quinn is a cerebral, high-IQ attacker in the offensive zone. He has the high-end puck skills and patience to make poised plays in dangerous offensive spots where defenders are applying pressure. He has a knack for slipping away from defenders and getting open on the inside and a filthy shot from mid-range. Quinn isn't a dynamic skater or puck carrier, but if he's paired with a speedy, play-driving left winger (which the Sabres have options for), it backs off defenders and creates extra space for him to make plays.

Increased usage alone could unlock a significant production increase for Quinn. He ranked ninth among Sabres forwards in five-on-five ice-time per game last season and seventh in average power-play time. With Jeff Skinner gone, he could be one of a few contenders to spend more time on the first unit power-play. Quinn has all the talent to be a top-of-the-lineup stud — all he needs is a clean bill of health and a bigger role to shine in 2024-25.

Adam Fantilli, Columbus Blue Jackets

Fantilli looked like the Blue Jackets' most dynamic forward in some games last season.

The 2023 No. 3 pick has a big, powerful frame, plus skating ability (ranked in the top 10 percent of all NHL forwards for speed bursts above 20 miles per hour), excellent puck skills and a relentless motor. It's a rare combination of athletic tools that already make him an effective play-driver. He generated five-on-five shots at the most prolific rate of all Blue Jackets forwards and produced 2.04 points per hour, which is an upper-echelon top-six-caliber clip. Despite that, he ranked only sixth among Blue Jackets forwards in five-on-five ice time per game.

There's a clear opportunity for him to take on a bigger role at even strength as well as on the first unit power play this season. Increased PP1 usage in particular could unlock higher production because he scored just three points on the man advantage last season. Fantilli was limited to 27 points in 49 games as a rookie because of injuries. He has the all-around skill set and prime lineup opportunity to potentially double his point totals in year two.

Simon Edvinsson, Detroit Red Wings

Edvinsson looked NHL-ready during his nine-game cameo with the Red Wings in 2022-23. He should have played a prominent role on Detroit's blue line last season, but the club's logjam on left defense — with Jake Walman, Ben Chiarot and Olli Määttä — meant he was limited to 16 NHL games, as he spent the majority of the year developing in the AHL. Walman's departure this summer has created an opportunity for the 2021 No. 6 pick to slide into a top-four role.

Edvinsson is a towering 6-foot-6, skates well and plays a competitive, physical game. He closes gaps remarkably quickly as a one-on-one defender, leveraging his size, reach and mobility to assertively kill plays.

He provides value with the puck too. He has soft hands for a big man, decent vision and uses his long stick to keep pucks in the offensive zone that would otherwise squirt out.

Edvinsson has the talent and opportunity to flourish as a valuable top-four defender this year, just don't expect him to pile up big point totals.

Matty Beniers, Seattle Kraken

Beniers suffered through a sophomore slump last season, mustering 37 points in 77 games. There are several reasons to believe he can break through offensively in 2024-25.

Firstly, his underlying numbers suggest he was snakebitten as a finisher and deserved better bounces. The Kraken scored on 7.1 percent of their five-on-five shots with Beniers on the ice, which was one of the lowest marks in the NHL. When a skilled player's on-ice shooting percentage falls off a cliff, they usually bounce back the following year. Beniers' individual shooting percentage was nearly cut in half to just 7.9 percent at five-on-five too. There were certainly times he scuffled offensively, but his two-way play remained stellar which is a promising sign.

Second, Beniers is still the Kraken's de facto No. 1 center and will continue riding on the top power-play unit. It can't be overstated how big of a role opportunity has in driving a player's production.

Third, there are tons of top-six forwards like Beniers who excelled in their rookie campaign, struggled as a sophomore and then erupted in year three. Lucas Raymond is a prime example — he scored 45 points in 2022-23 and then broke through with 72 points last year. Beniers is a very different player than Raymond stylistically but the latter's trajectory is a common development curve for blue-chip young players. Crossing the 60-point mark on top of driving impressive two-way results is a realistic progression we could see from Beniers.

Connor Bedard, Chicago Blackhawks

We'll keep this section short and sweet because I don't think it requires a lengthy explanation.

Bedard is a once-in-a-decade type of talent. He's an elite shooter, a tremendous puckhandler and a gifted passer. He's an above-average skater and has the elite hockey sense to make creative, highlight-reel plays that others just don't see. Bedard lived up to the hype in year one and yet there's room for him to score a lot more than the 22 goals and 61 points he produced in 68 games last season.

Chicago's upgraded pool of wingers should offer a major boost for him. Few, if any, top-line centers had less help than Bedard last year — Philipp Kurashev, Nick Foligno and Ryan Donato are the three forwards who shared the most five-on-five minutes with him, according to Natural Stat Trick. Teuvo Teräväinen and Tyler Bertuzzi could be options to play with Bedard, with either representing a significant upgrade.

Bedard could easily hit 80-plus points with natural age-related growth and improved talent around him.

Pavel Dorofeyev, Vegas Golden Knights

The Golden Knights lost several top-nine wingers this offseason. Jonathan Marchessault's departure created the most headlines, but Chandler Stephenson, Michael Amadio and Anthony Mantha moved on as well and have left behind roster holes. Dorofeyev is well-positioned to seize a full-time top-nine opportunity next to one of Vegas' premium centers.

Dorofeyev scored 13 goals and 24 points in 47 games last season despite averaging 13:17 per game. The 23-year-old sharpshooting left winger was a shot and scoring chance-generating machine in this limited sample — he ranked among the club's best forwards for producing shots, expected goals and points per 60 minutes.

Dorofeyev needs to work on his play without the puck to fully earn Bruce Cassidy's trust. He'll have a bit more margin for error though, because he'll likely be lining up next to either Tomáš Hertl or William Karlsson, who have the high-end two-way chops to cover defensively. If he can overcome that, Dorofeyev will be perfectly positioned to break out as a quality middle-six winger because of his offensive talent and his club's glaring need for secondary scoring options.

Juraj Slafkovský, Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens GM Kent Hughes got ahead of the curve and re-signed Slafkovský to an eight-year, \$60.8 million (\$7.6 million AAV) extension this summer despite the player having a full year left on his entry-level contract. It's a savvy bet that should age well because he's only scratching the surface of his potential.

Slafkovský scored a respectable 20 goals and 50 points last season but context is key. He didn't produce much in the first two months of the year, then was given an opportunity on the top line in December alongside Nick Suzuki and Cole Caufield and never looked back. He scored 35 points in 41 games during the second half, which is a 70-point pace. Just look at the month-by-month progression of his point production.

Slafkovský's always boasted powerful athletic tools and scoring ability, but seeing the improvement in his playmaking was really impressive. The 20-year-old left winger has underrated vision and flashed skilled east-west passing ability. Here's an example of a gorgeous saucer pass on the power-play that led to a goal.

If Slafkovský can pick up where he left off in the second half, he should comfortably produce in the 60-70-point range.

Brandt Clarke, Los Angeles Kings

There was a time when the Kings were overflowing with excess quality right-handed defensemen. In 2022-23, they had Drew Doughty, Matt Roy, Sean Durzi and Sean Walker all on the right side. That outlook has quickly changed — Durzi, Walker and most recently Roy have all departed which has left a clear top-four opportunity on the right side. It's time for Clarke, who was drafted No. 8 in 2021, to push for that opportunity.

Clarke is a remarkably gifted offensive blueliner. He's capable of creatively dancing around defenders and creating space for himself with his silky smooth puckhandling, which pairs nicely with his excellent passing vision and a hard, accurate shot from the point. He torched the AHL with 46 points in 50 games as a 20-year-old. Clarke had some ups and downs in his 16 NHL games last year, but he also displayed exciting potential and should be equipped to handle a much larger role this season.

There's certainly a chance Jordan Spence snags the second pair role next to Vladislav Gavrikov instead of Clarke. But that shouldn't change too much because one would expect L.A.'s second and third pairs to play relatively similar minutes. Clarke will get ample opportunity to display his elite offensive chops and be a legit difference maker.

Honorable mentions: Simon Nemeč (Devils), Zach Benson (Sabres), Kent Johnson (Blue Jackets), Philip Broberg (Blues), Lukas Reichel (Blackhawks), William Eklund (Sharks), Olen Zellweger (Ducks), Jamie Drysdale (Flyers)

The Athletic / 25 must-watch people in the NHL for 2024-25: Ovechkin's record chase, McDavid's Cup push and more

By Chris Johnston – September 20, 2024

We are emerging from a summer that saw \$1.12 billion committed to NHL free agents on July 1 alone and featured almost as many significant trades consummated amid the quiet of August as we did during the expected frenzy of draft week.

There were offer sheets and a mammoth nine-figure contract extension signed. Eight new head coaches were hired across the league and four new general managers were installed. The Arizona Coyotes were sold and relocated to Utah.

After such a tumultuous offseason, it only stands to reason that the 2024-25 campaign is set to begin amid a flood of storylines and intrigue.

With that in mind, here are the 25 players, coaches and execs I'll be watching closest in 2024-25. Who are you watching? This is a subjective list, so share your own most-compelling persons in the comments.

1. Alex Ovechkin, F, Washington Capitals

If Ovechkin manages to chase down Wayne Gretzky's once-untouchable goals record, it would create the rare NHL storyline that resonates in the wider sporting landscape. He enters the year 41 goals shy of matching Gretzky's mark of 894 in the regular season. What adds a little extra spice is that it's far from a foregone conclusion he'll get there, even though that's a total Ovechkin typically would have reached by the trade deadline. The Washington Capitals captain just celebrated his 39th birthday and endured the worst goal-scoring stretch of his career through the middle part of last season — at least introducing the idea that Father Time may be gaining on him. This also won't be your typical record chase for non-sport reasons: because of Ovechkin's implied support for Russian president Vladimir Putin, who has remained featured in his Instagram profile photo throughout that country's invasion of Ukraine.

Read: The Athletic's preseason NHL player poll.

2. Connor McDavid, F, Edmonton Oilers

Coming off a rare playoff MVP performance despite playing for a team that fell short of winning the Stanley Cup, the NHL's best player is going to be a man on a mission. McDavid knows without a doubt that his Edmonton Oilers are a top-tier championship contender, and every day of the upcoming campaign will be approached with that goal in mind. Along the way, he also stands to have some significant moments with his first-ever Team Canada experience looming at the Four Nations tournament in February and the prestigious 1,000-point milestone likely to come much sooner than that, as he's just 18 points away. To top it off, McDavid will have a big contractual decision to make next summer when he becomes eligible to sign an extension in Edmonton. In short: If this NHL season were scripted as a movie, McDavid would be cast as its main character.

3. Mitch Marner, F, Toronto Maple Leafs

What could be more compelling than a superstar in the prime of his career who may be careening toward walking away from his childhood team? Did I mention that the team is the Toronto Maple Leafs? Marner will be under a considerable microscope while playing out the final year of his contract with the possibility of unrestricted free agency looming in July 2025. As a legacy player for a legacy franchise — the 27-year-old is two points shy of passing Ron Ellis for seventh on the Leafs' all-time scoring list — the

stakes are high for everyone involved here. Marner will have plenty of opportunity to reinforce his value as an elite offensive player both with the Maple Leafs and Team Canada since he's expected to draw an invite to the Four Nations event.

4. Steven Stamkos, F, Nashville Predators

The heart and soul of the Tampa Bay Lightning now calls Nashville home after failing to arrive at a contract both he and the Bolts could live with ahead of free agency. It's only natural to expect that it's left a chip on the shoulder of a proud athlete who has spoken eloquently about how tough it was to leave Tampa. With the Predators, Stamkos joins a team that took additional big swings on free agents Brady Skjei and Jonathan Marchessault after a surprisingly competitive campaign, and he'll be counted on to produce following three straight point-per-game seasons on the other side of his 30th birthday. There was calculated risk taken by all sides as part of the series of decisions that brought Stamkos to Nashville. We'll start to measure the repercussions once the puck drops.

5. Igor Shesterkin, G, New York Rangers

Not only is he the backbone of a Rangers team with legitimate Stanley Cup aspirations, but Shesterkin is also looking to put an exclamation point on his case for becoming the NHL's next highest-paid goaltender. It's fair to say there's a lot riding on this contract year. And while there's no way to predict how any player might handle the uncertainty brought on by those circumstances, the fact that Shesterkin is the No. 1 goaltender playing on one of the sport's main stages could add an extra dash of drama if the Rangers don't move to extend him during the season. He has been everything the team could hope for and more, especially at playoff time. His career .928 save percentage in the postseason is hard to look past.

6. Sidney Crosby, F, Pittsburgh Penguins

Had he not signed a two-year extension in Pittsburgh just before training camp, Crosby would likely have topped this list. Even with his playing future settled — for the time being, anyway — it remains a year when he'll knock down more personal milestones (1,600 points and 600 goals are comfortably in reach) and return to best-on-best competition with Team Canada, while trying to uphold his typical golden standard at an age where few have done it before. Incredibly, Crosby has a chance to become the first player in NHL history with 20 point-per-game seasons if he can extend his run of those. The fortunes of his Penguins also bear watching because Crosby talked about his desire to win after signing the contract that will take him to age 40. A third straight season outside of the playoffs simply isn't an outcome the Pittsburgh captain is going to be able to stomach.

7. Mikko Rantanen, F, Colorado Avalanche

We may be talking about the "Rantanen Sweepstakes" by the time this season is finished. The big Finnish winger is currently positioned to headline the league's 2025 UFA class after coming through a summer where he didn't sign an extension in Colorado despite coming off consecutive 100-point campaigns. Rantanen has been a big driver of the Avalanche's success, consistently putting up strong playoff numbers, and will start to garner significant national attention if an extension doesn't materialize before the regular season starts. In a rising-cap environment, he could command a new deal in the range of the \$12.6 million being paid to teammate Nathan MacKinnon.

8. Leon Draisaitl, F, Edmonton Oilers

Set to become the NHL's highest-paid player when his shiny new extension kicks in next season, Draisaitl has more incentive than ever to help create the circumstances that guarantee McDavid remains in Edmonton for the long term. He is now under contract for nine more seasons with the Oilers and

planted a flag in the ground by passing up the chance to pursue free agency in 2025. Arguably the best way for Draisaitl to help entice McDavid to stick around is to continue performing at a world-class level in order to give the Oilers another serious run at the Stanley Cup. With his new deal will come even higher personal expectations, though, and his team is in Cup-or-bust mode.

9. Jeremy Swayman, G, Boston Bruins

Still unsigned by the Boston Bruins heading into training camp, Swayman was treated to a second straight summer where business had to be balanced with his preparation after being taken to salary arbitration by the team in 2023. Whenever the finishing touches are eventually put on what's expected to be a long-term deal for the goaltender, Swayman will shoulder more of the load than he ever has before in the Bruins crease. Beloved tandem-mate Linus Ullmark was dealt to the Ottawa Senators during the offseason, and that cleared the way for the 25-year-old to see more action for a perennial Stanley Cup contender. He should also find himself in the mix for a spot with Team USA at the Four Nations tournament, although the country is blessed with an embarrassment of riches at the position so the competition will be tough.

10. Connor Bedard, F, Chicago Blackhawks

A 22-goal, 61-point rookie campaign was enough to earn Bedard the Calder Trophy, but he's made no secret of the fact that he's expecting much more from himself in Year 2. He won't be lacking motivation. Bedard's first tour around the NHL was made immeasurably more difficult by playing for a team that was out of its depth most nights, and the Blackhawks have since added several established veterans to help steady the ship. Plus, the 19-year-old had another full summer of training under his belt and will no doubt want to do everything he can to try and garner consideration for Canada's Four Nations entry. Add it all together and everything points to a big Bedard bounce incoming.

11. Craig Berube, coach, Toronto Maple Leafs

The man known as "Chief" arrives in Toronto with a Stanley Cup on his resume and a reputation as a straight-talking, no-nonsense coach. He'll also bring a fresh set of eyes to a challenge predecessor Sheldon Keefe couldn't find the solution for: how best to deploy a top-heavy forward group while accounting for other roster deficiencies and setting the team up for a long playoff run. Berube has been around the NHL for a long time, including a brief stint in Toronto during his playing days, but will not have found himself in the fishbowl to the degree he will this season. He's taken on a difficult task, perhaps even an impossible one, but he'll be expected to deliver answers every day and can expect to have those answers to be endlessly dissected and disseminated.

12. Aleksander Barkov, F, Florida Panthers

Count this as a problem every player in the league would love to have: Barkov is coming off an impossibly short summer after becoming the first Finnish-born player ever to lead his team to the Stanley Cup. The challenge facing the Florida Panthers captain is to help ensure his team experiences no lag or hangover, which will be tough after seeing Brandon Montour, Oliver Ekman-Larsson and others exit via free agency, and because many of the holdovers are actually returning from consecutive 100-plus-game runs to the championship series.

13. Tomas Hertl, F, Vegas Golden Knights

The veteran forward was out injured when he was traded for the first time in his NHL career, landing in Vegas at the March deadline, which basically comes with a free pass for his brief cameo with the Golden Knights afterward. Hertl wasn't overly productive in that stretch, but there were plenty of mitigating factors at play. Those will be removed by the time his first full season in Vegas gets underway next

month, and the team will need a strong return on the investment it made in him because that deadline deal was followed by letting Jonathan Marchessault and Chandler Stephenson, among others, walk out the door in free agency. The core of the roster is forever shifting in Vegas, but the high ambition remains. Hertl needs to be a heartbeat player for that program to push forward.

14. Trevor Zegras, F, Anaheim Ducks

Still only 23, it feels like the talented winger's time in Anaheim is at an inflection point. After an injury-plagued season where his name circulated widely in trade conversations, Zegras will either re-establish himself as an important part of a rebuilding roster in the months ahead or risk having those trade rumors turn into reality. The good news is that Zegras seems to be in good health and isn't showing any signs of having lost his swagger. Now sporting a full-on mullet, he's going to be hard to miss no matter which way things break for him this year.

15. Eric Tulsky, general manager, Carolina Hurricanes

There had never been an NHL general manager whose prior career achievements include earning a PhD in Chemistry and owning 27 U.S. patents until the Hurricanes promoted Tulsky to replace Don Waddell in June. While Tulsky may not be a true outsider — he had already built up considerable influence on decision-making during 10 years working inside the club's front office — it stands to reason that he'll bring a unique approach to the new job. For example, it's no coincidence that Carolina became the first NHL team in years to lower a player's cap hit using deferred compensation with extensions signed by Seth Jarvis and Jacob Slavin this summer. Tulsky takes over the GM duties with Carolina at a crossroads. One of the NHL's most successful regular-season teams over the past several years, the Hurricanes parted ways with multiple key players during the offseason.

16. Elias Pettersson, F, Vancouver Canucks

Not only is the Vancouver Canucks forward coming off a sluggish finish to last season, but a contract extension that has him carrying the league's fifth-highest cap hit at \$11.6 million is just beginning. The collision of those two factors will create expectations right from the drop of the puck this season. How Pettersson responds could go a long way to determining if the Canucks can take another leap forward after last year's breakthrough run to Game 7 of the second round. While his 34-goal, 89-point campaign obviously played a role in the team's success, it should be considered a baseline that Pettersson needs to clear this season.

17. Linus Ullmark, G, Ottawa Senators

The Ottawa Senators are desperately in need of a playoff chase, if not a playoff spot, and Ullmark is expected to be a big part of making that happen. He arrived in a trade from Boston in June to considerable fanfare. There is much to like about the Swedish goaltender, from his game to his upbeat attitude and personality, but his acquisition represents a big swing from the Senators. For starters, Ullmark is entering the final season of his contract and could conceivably parlay a strong season into a big payday somewhere else next summer. Conversely, if he fails to meet expectations, Ottawa doesn't appear to be equipped with a reliable Plan B to pick up the slack.

18. Andrei Vasilevskiy, G, Tampa Bay Lightning

The Lightning have been a top-tier contender for so long that it's only natural to assume they'll continue to be one every year. What kind of season they get from Vasilevskiy will likely determine if that's actually true. A workhorse throughout their Cup years, the former Vezina and Conn Smythe winner was sidelined to begin last season after back surgery and never returned to previous form. His .900 save percentage was by far the lowest of his NHL career. Vasilevskiy is coming off a healthy summer of

training and may simply revert to his former self, but if he's unable to get there, that may ultimately have more say than any offseason roster changes about whether the Lightning can still be as formidable as they once were.

19. Mikhail Sergachev, D, Utah HC

The signature move of Utah HC's summer was the surprising draft day trade for Sergachev, who has yearned for the responsibilities of a No. 1 defenseman and will finally get them in the NHL's newest market. How effectively he can handle those minutes should be a major factor in what the on-ice product looks like this year in Salt Lake City. Sergachev is obviously a known quantity around the NHL after enjoying plenty of success in Tampa, where he largely played behind Victor Hedman on the left side of the team's blue line and suffered a gruesome broken leg last year. That is a big part of what he'll be contending with as part of the adjustment to a new city, team and conference — Sergachev dressed for just 36 games including the playoffs last season.

20. Jessica Campbell, assistant coach, Seattle Kraken

A trailblazer as the first full-time female assistant coach in NHL history after being promoted by the Seattle Kraken to a role on Dan Bylsma's staff over the summer, Campbell is expected to perform a role similar to what she did with the AHL's Coachella Valley Firebirds the past two seasons. Only with more eyeballs on her. Campbell will be tasked with helping some of the Kraken's younger players with their development while also having a hand in running the power play alongside fellow assistant Bob Woods. In doing so she'll be carving a path that others will eventually follow.

21. Gabriel Landeskog, F, Colorado Avalanche

More than 800 days have passed since Landeskog dressed in a game for the Avalanche — which just happens to be the night he accepted the Stanley Cup from NHL commissioner Gary Bettman after the team's championship victory in 2022. Since then, his career has been in serious jeopardy because of a right knee injury that ultimately required Landeskog to undergo cartilage transplant surgery. He's been on a seemingly endless cycle of rehab ever since. However, there is now dawn on the horizon with Landeskog fully expected to return at some point this season — albeit with no guarantee his knee can withstand the demands of the sport at his highest level and understandable questions about how well he'll perform after such a long layoff.

22. Patrik Laine, F, Montreal Canadiens

When he's playing free and having fun, there are few more entertaining players on the planet than Laine. Unfortunately, it's been a while since he's enjoyed that kind of form after going through a stretch in Columbus where he was frequently injured, experienced the death of his father and ultimately entered the NHL/NHLPA Player Assistance Program. An August trade to Montreal seems to have renewed Laine's spirits, which at least creates the possibility of an inspired second act to his career. He's a showman at heart and will quickly be embraced by a passionate fan base if he can start filling the net for the bleu, blanc et rouge. There are certainly a lot of people in Laine's corner pulling for him.

23. Pierre-Luc Dubois, F, Washington Capitals

If PLD were a stock, investors would be accustomed to volatility. On one hand, he's a 6-foot-4 center who plays a 200-foot game and is still just 26 years old. On the other, he's a No. 3 draft pick already on his fourth NHL team and embarking on a "fresh start" for the second time in as many seasons. He landed in Washington from Los Angeles in an offseason trade that carries high risk-reward potential for the Capitals because Dubois is still under contract for seven more seasons at an \$8.5 million cap hit. If he plays well there, perhaps seeing time alongside Ovechkin, he may finally find the traction his career has

been lacking. If another change of address doesn't pan out, he'll be running short on future opportunities.

24. Macklin Celebrini, F, San Jose Sharks

There is no mystery about where the No. 1 pick in June's draft will spend the season since the San Jose Sharks have already committed to giving him a spot on the NHL roster, not to mention accommodations at Joe Thornton's house. Celebrini is one of the main reasons the Sharks future is suddenly looking bright after a couple years wandering around the wilderness near the bottom of the standings. They may not actually be much more competitive as a team this season, but with the first No. 1 pick in franchise history in uniform, there should at least be a surge of renewed local interest. No pressure, kid.

25. Marty Walsh, executive director, NHL Players' Association

Not only is this a season where Walsh is set to deliver on his mandate of returning best-on-best international competition with the Four Nations tournament, but it's also a season where he'll start preparing membership for the next round of collective bargaining talks. Walsh has so far shown an ability to work amicably with NHL leadership since his hiring in 2023 and that'll be put to the test once the sides start formally engaging in CBA discussions with the current deal set to expire in September 2026. His extensive political background will certainly help him navigate those waters, but it's no small task.

[The Athletic / The 2024-25 NHL prospects viewing guide: How to watch CHL, NCAA, SHL, KHL, Liiga and more](#)

By Scott Wheeler – September 20, 2024

A new hockey season is here and you want to spend more time watching your NHL team's prospects but you don't know where to start. I get it. There is a web of leagues outside the NHL and sprawled across North America and Europe, and it can be hard to keep tabs on the various professional, junior, college and even high school ranks.

Well, don't worry, because you're probably asking yourself the same questions a lot of other fans are: How can I watch? Where are the teams streamed? Which prospects of note are playing in each league? That's where this piece comes in — bookmark it now and thank me later. Consider this your primer for all of the leagues outside the NHL for the 2024-25 season.

Below, I'll walk you through how to watch — and who to watch in — all of the following leagues:

AHL and ECHL

CHL (OHL, QMJHL, WHL)

USHL and NTDP

Tier II junior (BCHL, AJHL, OJHL, etc.)

NCAA (Big Ten, Hockey East, NCHC, CCHA, ECAC, Atlantic Hockey)

High school hockey (Canada and U.S.)

Russian hockey (KHL, VHL, MHL)

Swedish hockey (SHL, HockeyAllsvenskan, HockeyEttan, J20)

Finnish hockey (Liiga, Mestis, U20)

Czech hockey (Tipsport Extraliga, U20)

Slovak hockey (Tipos Extraliga, U20)

German hockey (DEL, DEL2, U20)

Swiss hockey (National League, Swiss League, U20)

Here are the answers to all of your questions, including key dates and events/tournaments on the prospects calendar, and everything you need to know to keep up with the world of prospects for the 2024-25 hockey season.

The 2024-25 prospects calendar

Aug. 5-10: Hlinka Gretzky Cup (Edmonton)

Sept. 5-Feb. 18: Champions Hockey League

Sept. 13-14: Rookie Series (Allentown, Penn.) feat. the Rangers and Flyers

Sept. 13-15: Tom Kurvers Prospect Showcase (Maryland Heights, Mo.) feat. the Wild, Blues and Blackhawks

Sept. 13-16: Prospects Challenge (Buffalo) feat. the Sabres, Bruins, Blue Jackets, Devils, Senators and Penguins

Sept. 13-16: Rookie Showcase (Bellevue, Tenn.) feat. the Predators, Panthers, Lightning and Hurricanes

Sept. 13-16: Rookie Faceoff (El Segundo, Calif.) feat. the Golden Knights, Sharks, Kings, Avalanche, Ducks, Kraken and Utah

Sept. 13-16: Young Stars Classic (Penticton, B.C.) feat. the Canucks, Jets, Flames and Oilers

Sept. 14-15: NHL Prospect Tournament (Traverse City, Mich.) feat. the Red Wings and Stars

Sept. 14-15: Prospect Showdown (Montreal) feat. the Maple Leafs and Canadiens

Sept. 18-22: USHL Fall Classic (Cranberry Township, Penn.)

Nov. 1-9: World Under-17 Hockey Challenge (Sarnia, Ont.)

NEW: Nov. 25-27: CHL / USA Prospects Challenge (London and Oshawa, Ont.)

Dec. 9-15: World Junior A Challenge (Camrose, Alta.)

Dec. 26-Jan. 5: World Juniors (Ottawa)

Jan. 16: Chipotle All-American Game (Plymouth, Mich.)

Feb. 3: Beanpot (Boston)

Apr. 10-12: Frozen Four (St. Louis)

Apr. 23-May 3: U18 World Championship (Frisco and Allen, Tex.)

May 22-June 1: Memorial Cup (Rimouski, Que.)

AHL and ECHL

Where to WATCH:

AHL and ECHL: FloHockey

What you need to know:

As there often is, there's a little affiliation housekeeping people should be aware of for this season in the AHL.

Utah HC will continue the Coyotes' prior affiliation with the Tucson Roadrunners for now. Utah has also signed a one-year affiliation agreement with the ECHL's Allen Americans.

After the Carolina Hurricanes went without an AHL affiliate last year and the Chicago Wolves operated as a rare unaffiliated team, the two have re-entered a three-year partnership beginning in the 2024-25 season. Former Rogle head coach Cam Abbott has been hired as the Wolves' head coach.

Abbott's not the only new head coach behind an AHL bench, either. Derek Laxdall, who coached the Oshawa Generals last year, has been named as Dan Bylsma's replacement in Coachella Valley after Bylsma got the Kraken gig. Manny Malhotra has been named head coach in Abbotsford, returning to the Canucks organization. Grant Potulny, head coach at Northern Michigan for the last seven seasons, has been hired as Hartford's head coach in the Rangers organization. After being fired by the Blue Jackets, the Canadiens hired Pascal Vincent as their head coach in Laval. Michael Leone, formerly of Green Bay in the USHL, is replacing Seth Appert behind the bench in Rochester after Appert was promoted to Lindy

Ruff's bench in Buffalo. And another USHL coach out of Dubuque, Kirk MacDonald, takes over in Wilkes-Barre for the Penguins.

As always, the AHL's class of prospects to watch will be made up of 20-year-old CHL graduates, recently-turned-pro college players and top European prospects ready to give North America a go.

That outgoing CHL group includes CHL Player of the Year Jagger Firkus, who will join a Coachella Valley team that is becoming a bit of a dynasty; his Moose Jaw teammate and WHL Playoffs MVP and WHL Top Defenseman Denton Mateychuk, who impressed in his game action with Cleveland in the AHL playoffs last season; 2023 QMJHL MVP Jordan Dumais, who will join Mateychuk in Cleveland; Red Wings top-10 pick Nate Danielson; OHL leading scorer David Goyette, who will join Firkus in Coachella Valley; the Flames' Samuel Honzek and Hunter Brzustewicz after his breakout in Kitchener; Utah's Maveric Lamoureux; the Lightning's newly acquired Conor Geekie (if he doesn't make the NHL team); and the Oilers' newly acquired Matt Savoie.

Out of the NCAA, first-rounders Bradly Nadeau and Frank Nazar could spend some time in the AHL if they don't stick with the Canes and Blackhawks respectively, Sean Behrens will stay in Colorado with a move from the University of Denver to Loveland with the Eagles, and the Preds' Ryan Ufko will look to build on a strong first impression in Milwaukee last spring, among others.

Former Djurgårdens teammates Noah Östlund (Rochester), Liam Öhgren (Iowa) and Jonathan Lekkerimäki (Abbotsford) are arriving in the AHL together, and they'll be part of another European wave featuring David Reinbacher and Adam Engström (Laval), Filip Bystedt (San Jose), Elias Salomonsson (Manitoba), and Elias Pettersson (Abbotsford), among others.

I'm also looking forward to (hopefully) seeing a healthy Chaz Lucius in Manitoba and a healthy Tristan Luneau in San Diego. After playing last season in USports, I'm interested to see how Artyom Duda looks in the AHL with Tuscon as well.

CHL (OHL, WHL, QMJHL)

Where to WATCH: CHL TV and TSN+

What you need to know:

This is going to be a season to remember in the CHL, not because it's a particularly exciting 2025 draft crop but because of what's coming after.

And it all starts in the WHL, where the story is 2026 sensation Gavin McKenna, fresh off 103 points in 66 combined regular season and playoff games as a rookie and another 28 points in 14 combined games at U18 worlds and the Hlinka Gretzky Cup, and 2027's Landon DuPont, the WHL's second exceptional status player and first-ever exceptional status defenseman. McKenna's Medicine Hat Tigers, who also have Blue Jackets No. 4 pick Cayden Lindstrom, Flames second-rounder Andrew Basha, Wild second-rounder Ryder Ritchie, and now imports Veeti Vaisanen (Utah) and Miilopekka Muhonen (Stars), should have title aspirations. DuPont's Everett Silvertips, who won 45 games last season, aren't your typical bottom-feeder after drafting first overall, either, because they acquired that pick from the Kamloops Blazers in the Olen Zellweger blockbuster.

The WHL has a really strong group of 2005s entering their final year of junior, led by Brayden Yager (Jets), Riley Heidt (Wild), Andrew Cristall (Capitals), Tanner Molendyk (Predators) and Luca Cagnoni (Sharks), as well as top 2024 picks Tij Iginla (Utah), Carter Yakemchuk (Senators), and Berkly Catton (Kraken). Once Yager, Heidt, Cristall, Iginla and Catton return to the WHL after training camp or potentially an early-season NHL audition, it should make for a good scoring race out west. I would

expect a player like Yager to be dealt as the reigning WHL champion Moose Jaw Warriors enter a rebuild, as well.

The WHL's 2025 NHL draft class is led by Roger McQueen (Brandon), Cole Reschny (Victoria), Blake Fiddler (Edmonton), Jackson Smith (Tri-City), Cameron Schmidt (Vancouver) and goaltender Joshua Ravensbergen (Prince George).

Keep an eye on imports Miroslav Holinka (Maple Leafs/Edmonton), Kasper Pikkariainen (Devils/Red Deer), and Vít Záhajský (2025/Kamloops) in the Dub, as well as incoming rookies like Daxon Rudolph (2026/Prince Albert), Jaxon Jacobson (2027/Brandon), Ryan Lin (2026/Vancouver), Mathis Preston (2026/Spokane) and the Ruck twins, Liam and Markus (2026/Medicine Hat).

In the OHL, the Erie Otters will be the team to watch from a draft perspective because of potential top-10 picks Matthew Schaefer (the top D in the class at the moment) and Malcolm Spence, but the Mississauga Brampton (!) Steelheads aren't far behind thanks to potential top-five pick Porter Martone and high-end goalie prospect Jack Ivankovic. They've also acquired Kraken top prospect Carson Rehkopf to pair with holdovers like the Flames' Luke Misa. Oh, and the OHL's own exceptional status player, Saginaw's Michael Misa, is the latter's brother.

Interestingly enough, we could have an OHL final rematch. The London Knights — potentially returning Easton Cowan, Oliver Bonk, Denver Barkey, Kasper Halttunen, Sam Dickinson and Sam O'Reilly — have also added import Jesse Nurmi. The Oshawa Generals, despite losing import Rasmus Kumpulainen back to Finland, are bringing back a core that includes Calum Ritchie (who should be one of the best players in the league), Beckett Sennecke (ditto), Ben Danford and Luca Marrelli.

The Barrie Colts and Saginaw Spirit are compelling as well. The Colts have Beau Akey (Oilers) returning from an injury-riddled season, top 2025 prospect Kashawn Aitcheson poised to impress, should see 2024 holdovers Riley Patterson (Canucks) and Cole Beaduoine (Utah) take a step, have added import first-rounder Emil Hemming (Stars) and have already traded for D Tristan Bertucci (Stars), with more to come. The Spirit are trying to reload around Misa and Flames first-rounder Zayne Parekh (the reigning CHL D of the Year) with import Igor Chernyshov (Sharks).

Can Jett Luchanko (Flyers/Guelph), Nick Lardis (Blackhawks/Brantford), Colby Barlow (Jets/Owen Sound), Anthony Romani (Canucks/North Bay), Luca Pinelli (Blue Jackets/Ottawa) and Andrew Gibson (Predators/Soo) play their way onto the Canadian world junior team, and Quentin Musty (Sharks/Sudbury) onto the American?

PLUS: Watch out for 2026's Ryan Roobroeck (entering his second season in Niagara), Alessandro Di Iorio (Sarnia) and Ethan Belchetz (Windsor), as well as imports Ilya Protas (Capitals/Windsor), Ruslan Karimov (2025/Sarnia), and potentially Filip Ekberg (2025/Ottawa, with rumblings he's coming).

After a tough season for the Q from a talent perspective last season, they've got a bounce-back 2025 draft class, led by forwards Caleb Desnoyers (Moncton), Émile Guité (Chicoutimi), Justin Carbonneau (Blainville-Boisbriand) and Bill Zonnon (Rouyn-Noranda) plus defensemen Alex Huang (Chicoutimi) and Owen Conrad (Charlottetown). Flames first-rounder Matvei Gridin is also coming to the QMJHL and it is expected Val-d'Or, who surprised some when they took him atop the CHL Import Draft despite not having a commitment, will trade him to Shawinigan at season's opening.

The Wildcats might be one of the most interesting teams in the CHL this season. Not only do they have Desnoyers, they've landed legendary USports coach Gardiner MacDougall, who recently led the Sea Dogs to an impromptu Memorial Cup and Team Canada to U18 worlds gold, as their head coach and his up-and-coming son Taylor as their new GM. Add in veterans Étienne Morin (Flames), Dylan MacKinnon

(Predators) and Markus Vidicek (undrafted), as well as imports Juraj Pekarčik (Blues) and Loke Johansson (Bruins): can MacDougall just keep winning?

I'm looking forward to seeing if Alexis Bernier (Kraken), who really took a step in the second half of last season, can improve further, as well as whether longtime Quebec top prospects Ethan Gauthier (Lightning), Maxim Massé (Ducks) and Tomas Lavoie (Utah) can stamp the notoriety they had coming up.

And a year after scoring 69 goals, how many can Justin Poirier (Hurricanes) score?

I've also heard great things about Pierre Dagenais' son Maddox, who was selected No. 1 in the Q draft.

NCAA

Where to WATCH:

Atlantic Hockey, CCHA and Alaska: FloHockey

Big Ten: BTN+ and Peacock (Notre Dame only)

Hockey East, ECAC and Long Island University: ESPN+

NCHC: NCHC TV

Alaska Anchorage: YouTube

Many of the schools playing in the above leagues also have their games broadcast locally (as well as nationally) across CBSN, Fox Sports, NESN, Bally Sports, Altitude, ESPNU and more stations. Stretch Internet also offers many of the U.S.-restricted feeds to international customers, while TSN+ picks up some NCAA games for Canadian viewers.

What you need to know:

Boston College — led by sophomores Ryan Leonard (Capitals), Gabe Perreault (Rangers) and Jacob Fowler (Canadiens), and followed by a freshman class that includes James Hagens (2025), Dean Letourneau (Bruins), Will Skahan (Utah), and Teddy Stiga (Predators) — will again be one of the teams to watch in men's college hockey this season.

At Boston University, Cole Hutson (Capitals) replaces Lane on the Terriers blue line and I'm fascinated to see how his freshman year matches up against his older brother's. Their back end, which already features Canucks first-rounder Tom Willander, also adds freshman Sascha Boumedienne (2025).

After winning a national title and posting a 50-point freshman season, I'm also excited to see how Zeev Buium (Wild) follows it up at Denver and with Team USA at the world juniors before inevitably turning pro next spring. I expect him to be in the Hobey Baker conversation at season's end.

I'll also be keeping a close eye on the Golden Gophers, who are returning Jimmy Snuggerud (Blues) and Oliver Moore (Blackhawks), landed first-rounder Matthew Wood (Predators) in the transfer portal, and are welcoming a freshman class that includes NTDP captain Brodie Ziemer (Sabres) and Javon Moore (Senators).

I'll be watching Charlie Stramel (Wild) closely after his move to Michigan State to play for Adam Nightingale. Can he get back on track, like MSU transfer Isaac Howard (Lightning) did last year? I'll be tracking Shane Vansaghi (2025) with the Spartans this year as well.

I've got high hopes for two of my favourites, freshman Michael Hage (Canadiens/Michigan) and sophomore Aydar Suniev (Flames/UMass), too.

Arizona State is making the move from independent to the NCHC with 2025 NHL Draft prospect Cullen Potter, an elite skater who left the NTDP early to jump into the NCAA, and a transfer portal group that includes Cruz Lucius (Penguins), Noah Beck (Blues), and fifth-year Artem Shlaine (Devils).

And after a breakout performance for Matthew Schaefer (2025) at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup, can Wisconsin freshman Logan Hensler challenge him as the top D in the class and maybe earn a spot on the American world junior team?

USHL and NTDP

Where to WATCH:

USHL: FloHockey

NTDP: USA Hockey TV

While FloHockey owns the streaming rights to the USHL, USA Hockey runs its own streaming services for the the NTDP and its various tournaments/showcases (Chipotle All-American Game, World Junior Summer Showcase, Five Nations, etc.).

What you need to know:

This U18 team at the NTDP has been talked about as a bit of a down year, partly because 2006s James Hagens and Logan Hensler are a birth year in front. But part of it is not having a premium guy at this point (which includes losing Cullen Potter to the NCAA, though he's not viewed as a premium guy either). Forward William Moore and right-shot D Charlie Trethewey have top-10 potential but each have clear areas they need to develop this season to get there. LJ Mooney might be the best player there currently, but he's tiny. I think Conrad Fondrk could challenge Moore and Trethewey. Some in the NHL like Cole McKinney but I'm not sold on his offence. I think Donato Bracco and Jack Murtagh could surprise some people based off what I saw last year. But there's no A-plus guy there and there might not be an A-grade either.

There's more excitement about the incoming U17 team/2008s, led by Shattuck's Mikey Berchild, Texas product JP Hurlbert and dual citizen Dayne Beuker, who passed up being a top prospect in the WHL to join the NTDP and was still a first-round pick to Lethbridge after he was the MVP of Saskatchewan's U18 AAA level last season as a 15-year-old.

In the USHL, Czech star Adam Benák arrives in Youngstown, Ohio with a lot of fanfare and Des Moines' Benjamin Kevan, an Arizona State commit, starts his second season in the first-round conversation for 2025. Some are hoping Canadian Zachary Morin, who disappointed with Youngstown last year relative to his status as a prospect, can take a step as well. Defensemen Matthew Grimes (Sioux Falls/Minnesota) and Jacob Rombach (Lincoln/Minnesota) also played well at Hlinka and will be followed closely for 2025. Landon Nycz (Waterloo/UMass), a 2026 D, also had a respectable first season in the USHL last year.

The Chicago Steel continue to pull big names from Canada as well. The latest, top 2026 prospect Adam Valentini (Michigan), a potential No. 1 pick into the OHL, will be joined by D Callum Croskery (BC), another top 2008 from Ontario. Cedar Rapids also did well to land Canadian Thomas Vandenberg, who recently committed to Providence and could have been a first-rounder in the OHL.

I've also heard good things about 2026's Tynan Lawrence (BU), who is joining Muskegon via Shattuck. There's some talk about Russian 2008 forward Ilya Morozov, who is joining the Tri-City Storm, as well.

As always, there's a little drafted content in the USHL as well. The two I'll probably be watching the most keenly are Vegas' Lucas Van Vliet (Dubuque/Michigan State) and Boston's Jonathan Morello (Dubuque/Clarkson).

Dubuque's Dryden Allen, who played in the OJHL last year and is committed to Michigan State, is another potential 2025 pick. I don't know anything about Belarusian Yaroslav Bryzgalov, joining Des Moines, but he and 2026 Latvian Rudolfs Berzkalns (Muskegon/BC) will be listed by NHL Central Scouting.

Tier II junior

Where to WATCH:

CJHL (AJHL, OJHL, etc.) and BCHL: FloHockey

NAHL: NATV

What you need to know:

This is a historic season in Canada's tier II junior landscape as the BCHL begins its first full campaign as an independent league after breaking off from the CJHL and Hockey Canada.

The Penticton Vees will have the only two drafted prospects in the league, with 2024 Habs sixth-rounder Ben Merrill making the move from St. Sebastian's for a season before heading off to Harvard in 2025-26 and 2022 Sharks third-rounder Michael Fisher leaving Northeastern after a tough freshman year to try to rebuild his confidence.

The player to watch in the league this season, though, might be Manny Malhotra's son Caleb, a 2026 prospect and BU commit who will play for Chilliwack. The Kingston Frontenacs used the No. 8 pick in the OHL draft on Malhotra before he settled on the college route. He'll be joined in Chilliwack by his Vaughan Kings U16 AAA teammate Ben Bowen, a second-rounder of the Barrie Colts. Another Kings teammate, Zachary Nyman (who played for Canada at last year's Youth Olympics and was named to the OHL Cup All-Star team after winning the GTHL title and losing in the provincial final) is also going the college route and will play in Penticton en route to Michigan.

Noah Kosick, another Michigan commit and 2026 prospect, will play in Sherwood Park. There are a slew of other players committed to solid NCAA programs and trying to put themselves in the draft conversation with Sherwood Park as well: Luke Norcross (Western Michigan), Poul Andersen (Maine), Cameron Caron (Northeastern) and Jude Bray (Penn State).

There's some 2027 NHL draft flair entering the league as well, with Eli McKamey, a second-rounder of Victoria in the WHL, electing to play for Penticton.

Sherwood Park's Kale Dach (Penn State) and Chilliwack's Savin Virk (Michigan State) are potential draft picks for 2025 as well.

I've also heard good things about GOJHL rookie of the year Liam Beamish (Salmon Arm/Penn State) and Chilliwack goalie Owen Bresson, and saw a little of 2026 prospect Matthew Manza (Chilliwack/Ohio State) and 2025 prospect Evan Malkhassian (Brooks/Harvard) in the OJHL, where Manza was point-per-game last season.

Russian hockey (KHL, VHL, MHL)

Where to WATCH:

KHL: The KHL signed a streaming rights deal with ESPN+ (U.S. only) and Portable.tv (U.S. and Canada) in 2021, but both have been abandoned since the war in Ukraine. Games can be streamed through the KHL's website and app.

The second-tier VHL and junior-level MHL both broadcast games on YouTube

What you need to know:

The hockey season is already underway in the KHL and the two players to watch in Russia this season are undoubtedly Habs star prospect Ivan Demidov (and here's hoping he'll start to play more with SKA than he has early on) and 2025 potential top-five pick Ivan Ryabkin (Dynamo Moscow). But first-rounders Anton Silayev (Devils/Torpedo), Danila Yurov (Wild/Magnitogorsk), Dmitri Simashev (Utah/Yaroslavl), Daniil But (Utah/Yaroslavl), Yegor Surin (Predators/Yaroslavl) and Mikhail Gulyayev (Avalanche/Omsk) aren't far behind.

This will be Alexander Nikishin's (Hurricanes/SKA) last season in the KHL as well, as one of the top prospects in the sport is finally expected to come over to North America. Same goes for SKA teammate Arseni Gritsyuk (Devils).

Ryabkin isn't the only 2025 draft prospect in Russia this season, either. There's particular excitement about goaltenders Pyotr Andreyanov (CSKA) and Semyon Frolov (Togliatti) and towering 6-foot-6, 240-pound D Artyom Vilchinsky (SKA).

They'll be followed in 2026 by forwards Arseni Ilyin (SKA) and Viktor Fyodorov (Nizhny Novgorod).

Swedish hockey (SHL, HockeyAllsvenskan, HockeyEttan, J20)

Where to WATCH:

SHL and HockeyAllsvenskan: TV4 Play (formerly C More) and MTV Katsomo

HockeyEttan

J20: SvenskHockey.tv

What you need to know:

This is a bounce-back year for Swedes at the draft led by potential top-five pick Anton Frondell and potential first-rounders Jakob Ihs-Wozniak, Milton Gästrin, Viktor Klingsell, Victor Eklund and Karl Annborn, as well as others like U18 worlds standout Viggo Nordlund.

Though there were no first-rounders out of Sweden in 2024, I've got reasonably high expectations for Lucas Pettersson (Ducks/Modo) to stick in the SHL and Alfons Freij (Jets/Björklöven) and Linus Eriksson (Panthers/Djurgårdens) to perform in HockeyAllsvenskan. I expect Leo Sahlin Wallenius (Sharks/Nybro) could be a part of the Swedish world junior team as an 18-year-old as well. Jack Berglund (Flyers/Färjestad) looked good at the recent World Junior Summer Showcase and if his skating can hold up, could be an SHLer as well. I think Canes third-rounder Noel Fransén (Färjestad) and fifth-rounder Oskar Vuollet (Skellefteå) could surprise some people as well.

After winning an SHL championship with Skellefteå, can Red Wings first-rounder Axel Sandin-Pellikka take another step toward North America? And don't forget about his fellow 2023 first-rounders Otto Stenberg (Blues) and David Edstrom (Predators), as well as last season's breakout Swede Felix Unger Sörum (Hurricanes). Brynäs were promoted from HockeyAllsvenskan to the SHL last year, which will be a good challenge for Blues first-rounder Theo Lindstein. I've also got a soft spot for Mattias Hävelid (Sharks).

There's a really compelling group of non-Swedes playing in Sweden this year as well. Slovakia's Luka Radivojevič (Örebro) is a top prospect for 2025 and I have a soft spot for Alex Čiernik (Flyers). Czech Vladimir Dravecký (Rögle) is a top prospect for 2026. Norwegians Michael Brandsegg-Nygård (Red Wings), Stian Solberg (Ducks) and Noah Steen (Lightning) will all play in the SHL. Finn Oliver Kapanen (Canadiens) has made the move from Liiga to join Timrå. Czech Dominik Badinka (Hurricanes) will make the full-time jump with Malmö. And Dane Oscar Fisker Mølgaard (Kraken) will look for another positive season with HV71.

There's real buzz around 2026's Ivar Stenberg (Frölunda) and Viggo Björck (Djurgårdens), too.

Finnish hockey (Liiga, Mestis, U20)

Where to WATCH:

Liiga: TV4 Play and MTV Katsomo

Mestis: MTV Katsomo

U20: Leijonat TV

What you need to know:

This is a down year for Finnish hockey in terms of the draft and it really showed at the Hlinka Cup, where they were the worst Finnish team I've seen at an international event. Defenseman Lasse Boelius is a potential second-rounder who has some believers over there and is expected to play in Liiga this season. Defenseman Jesper Kotajärvi had a strong season at the U20 level last season and played better at U17s than he did at Hlinka. But there are very good odds they don't have a player drafted in the first round and early indications for 2026 aren't much stronger, though I've heard good things about Viljo Kähkönen (HIFK).

Liiga is starting to have a tougher time competing with the top flights in Sweden and Switzerland for players financially, leading to a downturn in NHL talent sticking around. Aron Kiviharju (Wild/HIFK) will be a must-follow this year for me but there's not a lot else that gets me excited. I'm interested to see how Rasmus Kumpulainen's decision to leave Oshawa in the OHL to play for his hometown team Pelicans goes given his skating and lack of pace. D Arttu Kärki (Golden Knights/Tappara), Kasper Kulonummi (Predators/Kiekko-Espoo), Otto Salin (Kings/TPS), Sebastian Soini (Wild/Ilves) and Jesse Pulkkinen (Islanders/JYP) are semi-interesting. So is forward Lenni Hämeenaho (Devils/Ässät). But we're not talking about high-end prospects here.

Some of the most interesting prospects playing in Finland this year might not actually be Finns but 2025's Tomáš Poletín, of Czechia, and Jan Chovan, of Slovakia.

Czech hockey (Tipsport Extraliga/ELH, U20)

Where to WATCH: FanSeat

What you need to know:

There's actually a lot to sink your teeth into out of Czechia and Slovakia in the 2007 and 2008 age groups. Radim Mrtka (Třinec) is one of the top D prospects for 2025 and can really move for 6-foot-6, which has everyone's attention. Adam Novotný (Mountfield) is a top prospect for 2026. I think Tomáš Galvas, one of the top undrafted prospects from 2024, has a chance to get picked as a re-entry with a strong season for Liberec and a standout performance at world juniors.

Slovak hockey (Tipos Extraliga, U20)

Where to WATCH: YouTube

What you need to know:

The three players to watch in Slovakia this season are probably Tomáš Poběžal (Nitra), who looks like a legit 2025 prospect to me and a potential second-rounder, and Tobias Tomík and Adam Goljer (both with Trencin and of interest in that order), who look like legit 2026 prospects.

They've got their usual cast of unsigned NHL draft picks as well. Montreal's Miguël Tourigny is back in the league after a season in the ECHL with Trois-Rivieres didn't earn him an NHL deal, for example.

Top 2026 prospects Adam Nemeč (Sudbury) and Tomas Chrenko (Kitchener) also have options because they were CHL Import Draft selections.

German hockey (DEL, DEL2, U20)**Where to WATCH:**

DEL: Magenta Sport

DEL2: SportDeutschland.tv

What you need to know:

There are two drafted prospects playing in Germany this year. Red Wings 2023 fifth-rounder Kevin Bicker will play his second season in the DEL with Frankfurt and Capitals 2021 fifth-rounder Håkon Hånelt will do the same in Cologne (his rights are expected to expire with the Caps).

The best German prospect in this year's draft, D Carlos Händel, who impressed at Hlinka, isn't actually going to be playing in Germany but in Sweden for Malmö. Neither is D Max Bleicher, who is going to Owen Sound in the OHL. But twins Gustavs and Rihards Griva (Gustavs is the better prospect) will be with Mannheim, and forward David Lewandowski (a projected pick) will try to stick with Düsseldorf in the DEL.

I was also told to keep an eye on 2027 prospect Max Penkin, who just turned 15 this summer.

Swiss hockey (National League, Swiss League, U20)**Where to WATCH:**

NL: NL TV Pass, FanSeat, TV4 Play and MTV Katsomo

SL: SL TV

What you need to know:

The 14-team NL is a strong league, with several teams that spend real money on non-NHL talent, and there always seems to be a small group of drafted and draft-eligible prospects of some note.

Rodwin Dionicio won a Memorial Cup in Saginaw last year and was one of the top offensive defencemen in the OHL. He's signed by the Ducks but will play this season with EHC Biel-Bienne before giving the AHL a go. Capitals 2024 second-rounder Leon Muggli is back with Zug for a second season. Austrian Vinzenz Rohrer (Canadiens) returns to ZSC. Blackhawks third-rounder Jiří Felcman has made the SCL Tigers in the NL. Canucks 2024 seventh-rounder Basile Sansonnens will try to stick with Lausanne. Rangers 2024 overaged sixth-rounder Rico Gredig enters his second season with Davos.

There isn't a top domestic product for 2025 but it sounds like goalie Elijah Neuenschwander will be scouted and forward Florian Schenk will play with the Saint John Sea Dogs in the Q.

There are also guys like Simon Knak, Valentin Nussbaumer, Benjamin Baumgartner, and Manix Landry who were drafted but went unsigned and are now making a living in Switzerland.

High school hockey (Canada and U.S.)

Schools to watch (and where):

High school hockey is the trickiest to watch and follow because the best schools are spread out across two countries, multiple states and provinces, and several different loops.

You can access many (but not all) of the Minnesota high school hockey circuit's games through NSPN.TV and MNHockey.TV.

But a lot of the big prep schools do their own thing. St. Andrew's College (SAC), which is increasingly producing an NHL prospect or two annually, broadcasts its games on YouTube and the school's website. It started the Prep Hockey Conference with six of the top private school programs in North America in 2021 in order to play a more competitive schedule.

The Canadian Sport School Hockey League (CSSHL) broadcasts its games through FloHockey.

There are other worthwhile prep school programs — many of whom broadcast their own games — scattered across the United States, led by Minnesota's Shattuck-St. Mary's School (a prospect factory streaming its games on its website) and including New Hampshire's Kimball Union Academy; Massachusetts' Cushing Academy, St. Mark's School, St. Sebastian's School, Dexter School and Thayer Academy; Connecticut's Salisbury School, South Kent School and Avon Old Farms; Indiana's Culver Academies; Rhode Island's Mount St. Charles Academy; and New York's Northwood School. The NFHS Network can also be a handy resource for streaming high school hockey games in the U.S.

What you need to know:

SAC's Aiden Lane (a Harvard commit) impressed last year and is on the 2025 NHL Draft radar, especially if he can improve his skating. Shattuck's Ryker Lee (Michigan State) and Alexander Donovan (Denver) are projected draft picks in 2025. SAC's Kieren Dervin (Penn State), St. Sebastian's School's Teddy Mutryn (BC), Bishop Kearney's Chase Jette (Wisconsin) and Avon Old Farms' Michael Munroe (Maine) are also worth following. Shakopee High's Cooper Simpson played well in Minnesota's high school circuit and in the USHL last season, and was a member of Team USA's Hlinka team with Donovan, Jette, Mutryn, and co. Eden Prairie's Mason Moe also played well at Hlinka.

[ESPN / Full projections for the NHL's 4 Nations Faceoff rosters](#)

By Rachel Doerrie – September 20, 2024

Reactions

After hockey fans went many years without best-on-best international competition, the NHL's 4 Nations Face-off will see the best players from Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States compete in Montreal and Boston from Feb. 12-20.

Each nation has named six players to its roster, with the rest to be named closer to the tournament. All four teams have a plethora of talent, so for the first time in nearly a decade, fans will get to see the best players in the world compete against each other on the international stage.

Sidney Crosby, Nathan MacKinnon and Connor McDavid skating for Canada. Auston Matthews, Jack Eichel and the Tkachuk brothers for Team USA. The stacked blue line for Sweden, and two-way center depth for Finland

Before the NHL season gets rolling, here is our projection of what each of the four rosters will look like:

United States

The national team development program has done a fantastic job of developing American superstars. The reigning Rocket Richard, Norris and Vezina Trophy winners and the best goaltending depth in the tournament is a good start. The Americans are well set up at every position to have success, while the other three teams have weaknesses in one position.

It really doesn't matter which centers play the wing, but Matthews, Eichel and Dylan Larkin make the most sense to be permanent fixtures in the middle for the all-around game. The luxury of a 40-goal man (Brock Boeser) as a spare -- should any of the American forwards falter -- is quite something. The forwards are likely to come down to who is in the best form when it comes to decision time, as the U.S. could take any of Clayton Keller, Cole Caufield or Vincent Trocheck. The gap between those on the team and those who just missed is razor thin, and it is easy to see a scenario where any number of those players make the team due to performance or injury.

The defensemen were relatively easy to select, with the Norris Trophy winners expected to lead the power play. Charlie McAvoy and Jaccob Slavin bring proven shutdown ability, which will be key in this tournament. Brock Faber was brilliant in his rookie season and should make the team if that performance continues into his sophomore year. Zach Werenski may or may not be healthy, potentially opening the door for Noah Hanifin or John Carlson to get in the lineup.

The toughest decision was in goal, where the Americans are loaded. To put it in perspective, one of Jake Oettinger, Thatcher Demko or Jeremy Swayman will be left off the team. Any one of those goaltenders would be better than any current Canadian option -- the depth is tremendous. Demko is there now, but mystery surrounding his injury may see him lose his spot to Oettinger or Swayman if he doesn't get healthy and perform well. Regardless of which three the Americans choose, all three are capable of stealing games, including reigning Vezina winner Connor Hellebuyck.

Canada

Canada is loaded up front with the three generational players in Crosby, McDavid and Connor Bedard. Bedard is not a lock in the eyes of Hockey Canada, but he should be on the team if he gets off to a strong start.

The toughest choice up front was Nick Suzuki over Mark Stone, with Steven Stamkos as the extra. Stone's injuries are a factor, and he will get significant consideration if healthy. Suzuki brings a valuable two-way game, can play multiple roles and should fit nicely in Canada's bottom six. Stamkos is the spare, but no one should be surprised if he takes a spot in the bottom six to boost the power play. Other players who likely will be considered up front are Travis Konecny and Wyatt Johnston.

Things get complicated on the blue line, with Canada having quite a few elite defensemen on the right side. Cale Makar and Devon Toews make sense as a natural top pairing. Noah Dobson had a fantastic 2023-24 season, is better defensively and has flown under the radar. Shea Theodore and Josh Morrissey make sense on the left side, with Owen Power and Morgan Rielly likely to get consideration.

Evan Bouchard is the most interesting debate, given his ascension to stardom last season. Having four members of the electric Oilers power play must be enticing, but Makar is likely to run the top unit. If Canada doesn't see Bouchard running a power play, they may look to the likes of Alex Pietrangelo or Aaron Ekblad for their defensive game, with Bouchard as the spare. Shaping the defense will certainly be the toughest for Canada's brain trust, given the plethora of talent available.

The goaltending is ... not great. While Canada has an overabundance of talent in the skater category, they lack in goaltending. Jordan Binnington, Stuart Skinner and Adin Hill have demonstrated they are capable of winning high-pressure games. However, all three have had moments or long stretches of games where they cannot be trusted. Canada can ill afford to choose pedigree over which goaltender is playing the best given who they will face in this event. If Tristan Jarry and Joel Hofer play well to start the season, Canada will have no choice but to consider them here, as having a goalie in form is vital.

Sweden

Sweden has some interesting decisions to make all over their lineup. Elias Pettersson, Joel Eriksson Ek and Mikael Backlund represent strong two-way play with scoring prowess. If Gabriel Landeskog returns without setback, it is easy to see how Sweden would consider bringing him to the tournament. Rickard Rakell will get consideration if he plays well to start the season, and could take a spot from Gustav Nyquist, Lucas Raymond or Leo Carlsson.

Sweden has the option to go young or give veterans one last kick at international competition; a mix of both is likely the best route.

About that blue line: Victor Hedman, Gustav Forsling, Erik Karlsson and Rasmus Dahlin is some kind of top four. The Swedish defensemen are a who's who of Norris Trophy conversations over the past decade. Behind that group, Mattias Ekholm has been consistently steady, and Hampus Lindholm plays a key shutdown role on a great team. Their inclusion frees up Karlsson and Dahlin from penalty killing, and should allow them to thrive offensively. Jonas Brodin will be in the mix too, with Rasmus Andersson and Adam Larsson likely to get consideration for bottom-pair roles. Sweden's depth on the blue line will be a major strength.

If Jacob Markstrom plays the way he's capable of in New Jersey, he is likely to back up Linus Ullmark. Both goalies have been in the Vezina conversation in recent seasons, with Ullmark playing more consistently over the past few seasons. Jesper Wallstedt goes in favor of Samuel Ersson, given that Sweden views him as a key piece of their international landscape in the future. If Ersson vastly outplays Wallstedt in the early season, he may get the nod, but it is unlikely either sees action in the tournament if Ullmark and Markstrom are healthy.

Finland

Finland's strength is up front, where its center depth includes Aleksander Barkov, Sebastian Aho, Roope Hintz and Anton Lundell. Other nations have more scoring depth, but Finland has three centers who are elite two-way players, while Lundell is developing into a two-way stud.

Outside of Mikko Rantanen, Finland lacks elite scoring talent on the wings. If Patrik Laine can find his form in Montreal, he's likely to play higher in the lineup and score. Eeli Tolvanen and Joel Armia are on the bubble up front, if players like Laine or Mattias Maccelli don't have good starts to the season. Expect Finland to play a tight checking game and rely on their elite two-way players to win low-scoring games. This is a country that has had significant success in recent international tournaments, so they shouldn't be overlooked despite that relative lack of pop.

On the blue line, Finland is led by Miro Heiskanen -- the only true star on the back end. He will log major minutes, play in all situations and quarterback the power play. Olli Maatta and Juuso Valimaki could trade places depending on their performance. Expect Esa Lindell, Rasmus Ristolainen and Niko Mikkola to be key penalty killers and bring a physical element to the defensive zone.

Juuse Saros will be a huge part of Finland's ability to contend in this tournament, and is a shoo-in to be the starter. Saros will likely be backed up by Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen or Kaapo Kahkonen, but is likely to remain Finland's starter for the entire tournament.