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## Columbus Dispatch / Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau widows announce foundation to honor late husbands

**By Brian Hedger – March 20, 2025**

A new charitable foundation is honoring the memory of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, who were killed last August while bicycling together in Salem County, New Jersey.

Meredith Gaudreau, the wife of late Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau, and Madeline Gaudreau, Matthew's widow, have launched the John and Matthew Gaudreau Foundation as co-presidents. Madeline Gaudreau recently gave birth to Matthew's only child, while Meredith Gaudreau is pregnant with her and Johnny's third child.

The stated goal of the JM Foundation is, "to continue giving back to what the boys are passionate about and to ultimately continue to make a positive impact on the world in their honor."

Donations can be made online at [johnandmatty.org](http://johnandmatty.org) or by mail payable to The John and Matthew Gaudreau Foundation, 560 Sylvan Ave., Ste. 3070, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632.

Funds raised will be used to "promote and expand youth hockey opportunities, help hockey families facing tragedies, as well as help families that are, unfortunately, also affected by drunk driving, like ours."

The Gaudreau brothers were bicycling along the side of a two-lane road Aug. 29 last year in South Jersey after attending their younger sister's wedding rehearsal dinner. They were killed by Sean Higgins, who prosecutors say struck the Gaudreaus with his SUV while trying to pass a slower vehicle. According to police, Higgins had a blood-alcohol level of .087, which is above the state's .08 legal limit.

Higgins was jailed and faces six criminal charges that include aggravated manslaughter. Meredith and Madeline Gaudreau filed a civil suit that was settled in late February with Higgins' insurance company, which has agreed to pay a \$500,000 settlement for the widows to split.

They now plan to honor their husbands' memories by helping people through the JM Foundation.

"Every contribution, no matter the size, brings us one step closer to creating a safer and more inclusive community," according to a joint statement from the foundation's co-presidents. "On behalf of our families, we thank you for being part of our important mission and for helping us honor John and Matty's legacies amidst so much heartbreak and tragedy. We hope to make them proud!"

## [BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets hope to build momentum from New Jersey game](#)

**By Jeff Svoboda – March 20, 2025**

If the Blue Jackets rally to make the Stanley Cup Playoffs this season, they'll likely look back at Monday night's game vs. New Jersey as a turning point.

At least that's the way head coach Dean Evason sees it. Columbus didn't leave Nationwide Arena with two points on St. Patrick's Day, but the Blue Jackets found a level – of both play and perhaps desperation – that they will need to reach consistently down the stretch.

The Blue Jackets crashed the net, created opportunities and put 46 shots on goalie Jake Allen – 24 of them in the third period – but only one went into the net in a 2-1 loss to the Devils. But if the Blue Jackets play that style of relentless, aggressive hockey in the remaining 15 games, they'll likely find themselves on the winning end more often than not, Evason said.

"Did we get the result? No," Evason said. "Did we play the right way? Do we believe that this is the turning point? Do we believe this is one that not only the period, the game that turns us around and we're ready to go forward? Yeah, 100 percent."

Perhaps most importantly, what the Blue Jackets heard – the blast of a cannon – in the third period is hopefully a sign that better days are on the way. Columbus had been shut out in the previous two home games for the first time since 2011, and it took until just over six minutes remained in this one until Mathieu Olivier drove the net and put home a loose puck to make it a 2-1 game.

As much as teams try to minimize scoring lulls in the season when they happen – if they keep getting their chances, surely they'll go in, they often say – there's no doubt a weight had seemingly been placed on the shoulders of the CBJ players as the scoreless streak inched upward. It was particularly frustrating because the Blue Jackets have been one of the most consistent goal-scoring teams in the league this year, particularly at home where their 3.81 goals per game entering Monday still led all NHL squads despite the recent funk.

Every goal-scoring slump feels the same – the sure goals that go off the post, the extra pass instead of a shot on net, the frustration that builds – but the hope is seeing Olivier put one in the net lifts that burden.

"You go through ebbs and flows in the year," Olivier said. "Sometimes it goes in like nothing and sometimes you're having a hard time scoring. It's just part of a long season. Unfortunately, our timing of not being able to score as much is a little tough, but obviously we did the right things to score. It's gonna come."

For the Blue Jackets, that goal came in the nick of time from a confidence perspective. Now, the Blue Jackets have to carry that forward, as it will take a similar effort to overturn what has now become a four-game losing streak as well as losses in six of seven.

It's been an ill-timed skid that has left the Blue Jackets three points behind the Eastern Conference's final wild card spot with 15 games to play, so the results must turn around quickly. The good news is that there's plenty of time to make up ground, and Evason said Columbus will take the way they played against the Devils and go forward.

"We went in and just talked about how incredibly positive that game and that period was, and the guys know it. We know it. We're good," Evason said. "I hope ... they feel that it's moving in the right direction,

that the momentum has shifted. Would we like to have been rewarded with two points? Of course. But the way that we played, you can put that in the memory bank.”

The Blue Jackets also have plenty in the memory bank when it comes to battling back from adversity. Whether it’s been during games, through losing streaks or any other situation, this CBJ team has shown the ability to respond positively to whatever has been thrown at it.

“We just have to focus on the positives,” Olivier said. “I know it’s a little cliché to say, but obviously our performance tonight, we gave ourselves the best chance to win and it didn’t work in our favor, but that doesn’t mean we have to change the recipe. Stay the course. It worked for us most of the year. It’s a little bit of a tough stretch right now, but we’re a resilient group. We’ve proven that from the summer all the way to here. It’s not gonna change now.”

After a game where they threw the kitchen sink at the Devils but still couldn’t come out with the win, the only thing the Blue Jackets hope changes going forward is the outcome.

“We played our (butts) off,” Evason said. “We had so many unbelievable opportunities. We played the right way. We played hard, we played disciplined, we played within the system structurally. We just didn’t get the result, but we’re right where we want to be.

“Obviously, we would love to be 10 points up and in a (playoff) spot, but these kind of things, streaks, you have to believe. It takes some time to get out of it and you have (to have) some breaks, and that has to be our momentum-shifting period to go forward and change things around here.”

## The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Send Down Jet Greaves To AHL Cleveland

**By Spencer Lazary – March 20, 2025**

The Columbus Blue Jackets have announced that they have sent Jet Greaves back down to their AHL affiliate, the Cleveland Monsters.

Greaves was called up on Friday due to Elvis Merzlikins needing personal time off. However, with the Blue Jackets not playing again until Thursday, this move could indicate that Merzlikins will be ready to return. If he isn't, there's a chance Greaves will be recalled before Thursday's game against the Florida Panthers.

Greaves has posted a 2-2-2 record with a 2.83 goals-against average and a .905 save percentage in six games with the Blue Jackets this season.

Last night, he battled hard, stopping 18 of 20 shots, but the team couldn't find the back of the net one more time and fell short.

He will now report to the Monsters, but with no update on Merzlikins' status, a return to the NHL later this week remains a possibility.

## The Hockey News / On This Date in 2002: Remembering Brittanie Cecil

**By Jason Newland – March 20, 2025**

March 16th, 2002, started just like any other day. That night, the Columbus Blue Jackets were playing the Calgary Flames at Nationwide Arena, and I would be there. Little did we know how bad the day would turn out for one family though.

The Jackets would beat the Flames 3-1 that night. Geoff Sanderson scored, Cole Sillinger's dad Mike would score, and Ray Whitney would put on a show, scoring a goal and getting two assists.

The game also had some legends playing. Players like Bob Boughner, Jarome Iginla, Marc Savard, Craig Conroy, and Craig Berube were playing for the Flames. The Jackets had Jody Shelley, Jean-Luc Grand-Pierre, Kevin Dineen, Mike Sillinger, and Rusty Klesla playing. It was the O.G. days of CBJ hockey for sure.

That night I sat in section 219, staring down at the attack twice net for the Flames. Midway through the second period, Norwegian forward Espen Knutsen took a harmless shot that was deflected way up into the stands behind Columbus goalie Ron Rugnutt. That happened a lot, with pucks flying into the stands. You can usually see the ushers walking down to where the puck landed and giving a thumbs-up if everyone is okay.

But on this one, someone was hurt. A few minutes later, you could see what looked to be a teenage girl walking with a coat pressed to her head, and leaving. Usually, that means the puck drew blood and that they were going to get patched up. The game continued, the Jackets won, and fans went home happy.

Little did we know though, that the young girl who was struck, suffered a skull fracture and had been taken by ambulance to Children's Hospital in downtown Columbus. Reports say that she suffered a seizure and was kept for observation. She seemed to be doing fine according to reports, even still holding the puck that hit her while sitting in her hospital bed.

The hospital performed a CT Scan on Brittanie but failed to see that she had a torn vertebral artery, which resulted in severe clotting, causing her brain to swell. On March 18, 2002, young Brittanie Cecil passed away at 5:15 PM after developing a high fever and losing consciousness. She was just 13 years old. She died two days before her 14th birthday.

When the local news and newspapers reported Brittanie's passing, fans in Columbus and around the league were shocked. How could this happen? What could be done to prevent this?

Jackets forward Espen Knutsen said about the incident, "I think about it all the time. It was a terrible accident, and I cannot get it off my mind." Knutsen was given the option of sitting out the next game but chose to play. Reports say that Knutsen was sobbing in the Columbus locker room after he heard of Cecil's passing.

"I'm not sure what being haunted by something really means, but if it means feeling the pain of what happened to that little girl all these years, feeling so bad for her family, wanting to tell them how sorry I am, then I guess that's what this is for me," Knutsen told the Columbus Dispatch in 2010. Former CBJ head coach Dave King said, "That incident ended his career. Espen was a wonderful person, and he had talent. But he was never the same player after that." King also said, "He was beyond consoling, and that was for weeks and weeks."

Knutsen, who had two stellar seasons for the expansion Jackets, scoring 22 goals and totaling 95 points, was never the same. In the next two seasons, he played just 45 games, mainly due to injury. He would retire in 2005 after playing just 211 NHL games.

Flames defenseman Derek Morris said, "You try to say, 'It happens all the time,' but you can't. I don't know how many times pucks get deflected over the glass, but it doesn't make it any better. You can always say, 'It's not my fault,' but you always feel like it is, a little." Morris would go on to play 1107 NHL games over 16 seasons.

In the aftermath of Cecil's death, the NHL implemented certain safety measures to prevent something like this from happening ever again. Gary Bettman ordered that glass be a standardized height in all arenas, and also protective netting be added to prevent high-speed pucks from going into the stands. Nowadays, most fans don't even notice the netting, as it has just become part of the experience.

Cecil's family would set up The Brittanie Nichole Cecil Memorial Scholarship Fund. Per their website - "The Fund will award scholarships to graduating seniors of Hilliard Darby and Twin Valley South High Schools who wish to become the best person they can be."

On this date, March 18th, we remember young Blue Jackets fan Brittanie Cecil, who would be 37 years old on March 20th.

## The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Sign Prospect To A Three-Year Entry Level Contract

**By Jason Newland – March 20, 2025**

The Columbus Blue Jackets have announced the signing of goalie prospect Evan Gardner to a three-year entry level contract which will begin with the 2025-26 season.

Gardner is 22-12-4 record with a .911 save percentage and three shutouts in 41 games with the WHL's Saskatoon Blades. He was the #60 overall pick in the 2024 NHL Draft and won Goaltender of the Month for November.

He was also named Goaltender of the Week just yesterday. He led all WHL goalies with a 3-0-0-0 record, a 1.00 goals-against average, a .964 save percentage, and back-to-back shutouts.

The 19-year-old Gardner doesn't turn 20 until January of 2026, so he'll need to return to the CHL for at least one more season.



## The Hockey News / Sean Monahan Back Soon?

**By Jason Newland – March 20, 2025**

Sean Monahan, who was injured back on January 7th against the Pittsburgh Penguins, practiced with the main group today at Nationwide Arena. Does this indicate his return is close?

Before injuring his wrist, he had scored 14 goals, 41 points, was a plus-17, and had 9 power play points.

Getting Monahan back soon will be a huge boost for the struggling Blue Jackets, but will it be too late?

Forward Cole Sillinger and defenseman Erik Gudbranson also practiced today, so that's good news.

Dean Evason told the media after practice that all three "are all possibilities" this week, but would need to check with the trainers to be sure.

Help is on the way, but they need to win games before they come back if they want a chance at the playoffs.

**What's Next:** The Blue Jackets get the Stanley Cup Champion Florida Panthers on Thursday at home.

## The Athletic / NHL 'reevaluating' All-Star Game, what tariffs could mean for HRR and cap, more: GM meetings wrap

**By Chris Johnston and Michael Russo – March 20, 2025**

MANALAPAN, Fla. — The overwhelming success of last month's 4 Nations Face-Off may prove to be a sea-change moment for the NHL.

Gary Bettman acknowledged Wednesday that the popularity of 4 Nations left the league strongly considering making a change for the February 2026 All-Star Weekend, which has already been awarded to the New York Islanders and UBS Arena. Implied in Bettman's answer at the conclusion of the annual March GM meetings is that the traditional all-star format is no longer a viable option. League officials understand it would undoubtedly be viewed as a letdown following the 4 Nations spectacle that shattered everyone's expectations in terms of interest and attention.

"We're reevaluating how we want to do things because I think we've raised the bar about as high as you can for an All-Star Game in any sport," Bettman said in confirming a report from The Athletic's Pierre LeBrun last week. "So we want to make sure whatever we do is up to the standards that we've created."

The Islanders were officially awarded 2026 All-Star Weekend in February 2024. Canceling it or significantly altering the format would be made more complicated by the fact that the team and its season-ticket holders are expecting an event. That's still being worked through now.

The NHL does want to take advantage of the fact that its top players will be flying into the New York area before catching charter flights to the Milan Cortina Olympics in February anyway, so it's extremely likely there will be something happening, even if it doesn't end up including the traditional skills competition and three-on-three tournament.

Neither Bettman nor deputy commissioner Bill Daly would disclose anything specific about options under consideration.

"I don't want to start speculation," Bettman said. "We've promised the Islanders an event, and Islander fans deserve events that we've promised, so we're focused on what we need to do."

Daly said the league needs to make a final decision before the playoffs start next month.

Also, with the possibility of a first-round series between the Avs and Stars, many around the NHL see reason to change the playoff format.

### **Tariffs could affect NHL's bottom line**

With Canada and the U.S. involved in a trade war that has seen both countries enact new tariffs in recent weeks, the NHL is a keenly interested bystander.

Bettman acknowledged that the league's bottom line could be impacted with seven teams taking in Canadian revenues while all 32 clubs pay the majority of their bills in U.S. dollars.

"If the Canadian economy is impacted to the extent that the dollar declines — the Canadian dollar vis-a-vis the U.S. dollar — that will have an impact potentially on our Canadian clubs and (hockey-related revenue)," Bettman said. "We're hoping this is a moment in time and we get through this."

The commissioner made it clear that he was taking no political stance on the issue.

Based on information circulated to NHL teams in January, four of the top 10 clubs in terms of gate receipts (net of taxes) this season are based in Canada.

If there's a significant change to HRR, the league and NHLPA could find themselves needing to revisit the salary-cap figures they released in January, when they forecasted the cap ceiling jumping from \$95.5 million to \$104 million to \$113.5 million over the next three seasons.

"Listen, if we have to make an adjustment, we will," Bettman said. "Our hope and our expectation is we're still on track."

One-and-done decentralized draft?

Bettman made it clear, again, that he is not in favor of the decentralized NHL Draft that will take place June 27 and 28 at the Peacock Theatre in Los Angeles.

The vast majority of teams wanted it — the final vote was 26-6 in favor when conducted last year, according to league sources — and now they're going to get it even though some are having second thoughts. Among the reasons for a change of heart is teams discovering that the money they're saving by not bringing their staff to a centralized location is still being eaten up by having to fly scouts and staff members to their individual war rooms.

The league is inviting roughly 50 prospects for the TV show that will take place at the 5,000-seat theatre at LA Live, with the home clubs being in separate locations.

"This is what the clubs said they wanted," Bettman said. "A number have said, 'Well, maybe we should have the other form.' And we've said, 'Listen, we'll go through this experience and if there's a surge of interest to go back, we'll put it back to the clubs again.'"

"We thought we ended the old framework with a bang doing it in the Sphere (last June). ... But if there's a desire to go back because the clubs miss each other, miss being on the floor together, we'll put it back to a vote again. We can be flexible. This is us executing the will of the clubs."

Steve Mayer, the NHL's president of content and events, made a presentation to the GMs to explain how the technology will work. After a player is drafted, there will be what they're calling a "Hockey House" he walks into to meet his NHL club's staff virtually.

Bettman will introduce the No. 1 pick in the draft. With the draft being held in Los Angeles, there's an enticing opportunity to have celebrities introduce the subsequent first-round picks, as Celine Dion did Montreal Canadiens' Ivan Demidov last year and Michael Buffer did the Philadelphia Flyers' Jett Luchanko.

### **CBA talks to begin April 1**

The current collective bargaining agreement doesn't expire until Sept. 15, 2026, but Bettman announced that formal negotiations toward a new CBA will begin with the NHL Players' Association during the first week of April.

As evidenced during the 4 Nations Face-Off by Bettman and Daly holding a joint news conference with NHLPA executive director Marty Walsh and assistant executive director Ron Hainsey, the relationship between the two parties is friendlier than ever.

"I don't think on either side there are any kind of fundamental issues," Bettman said. "I'm anticipating based on everything that I'm hearing from Marty that we'll like the discussions."

"I'm hoping we can do this quickly and quietly and painlessly."

So while this won't be a CBA overhaul as the big issues have largely been ironed out years ago with the implementation of a salary cap and ultimately a 50-50 revenue split between owners and players, there will be tweaks.

How long it takes to finalize those isn't clear to those in charge of hammering out the next agreement.

"I won't really know until we sit down to tell you the truth," Daly said. "I mean, look, I have a list that's multiple tens of pages long from the general managers, the assistant general managers, our people internally. There's a lot of things that people want.

"The question is what we're prepared to do, what they're prepared to do, and how we want to move forward. And until we sit down, there's really no way for me to handicap that."

#### **No rule changes, including extended overtime, recommended**

In the games leading up to the championship at the 4 Nations Face-Off, overtimes were to be 10 minutes as opposed to five during NHL regular seasons. One of the more exciting finishes during the tournament came in Canada-Sweden when Mitch Marner ended the game six minutes in on the 12th combined shot between the two teams.

That led to a wave of positive reaction with Connor McDavid pointing out that nobody wanted to see that game go to a shootout.

But during this week's meetings, there wasn't a movement to extend overtime beyond the current five minutes.

The big reason is that more than 74 percent of games past regulation this season have been decided in three-on-three. That's projected to finish as the highest OT-goal rate in NHL history for a third consecutive season. There have only been 56 shootouts in 2024-25, projected to be the lowest total in an 82-game season.

"I'm not a fan of the extended overtime because of ice conditions and the wear and tear on the players who would be playing the additional five minutes, and I worry about that in injuries," Bettman said.

#### **No playoff format change**

Bettman, a long proponent of the current divisional playoff format over the old 1 vs. 8 format said that's also not changing on his watch even though we could see a top Stanley Cup contender go out in the first round this season if the Colorado Avalanche play the Dallas Stars.

"You guys know I'm pretty dug in on this," Bettman said. "I like exactly what we have, and if you look at the races that we're having for the regular season, playoffs have started already. We're in our play-in tournament, and I think it's terrific."

On Monday, the NHL showed the GMs virtually how the standings have changed daily since Jan. 1. In the Eastern Conference, eight teams have held a wild-card spot at some point since Jan. 1 and two points or fewer have separated teams at the playoff line for 97 percent of the season. Fourteen teams have been inside the playoff bracket since U.S. Thanksgiving.

In the West, the playoff line has been three points or fewer for the entire season and 86 percent of the season has occurred with the playoff line at one point or fewer.

On Tuesday night, the St. Louis Blues temporarily leapfrogged the Calgary Flames and Vancouver Canucks to get inside the playoff bubble until the Canucks beat the Winnipeg Jets later that night. The Blues play the Canucks on Thursday with a chance to end a night inside the playoff bubble for the first time since Nov. 6.

"What can be more compelling and exciting and entertaining than that?" Bettman said of the constant fluctuations in the standings. "Best team to win the Cup has got to get through the best teams. Having great matchups in the first round. That's terrific. That's not a problem. That's a great thing."

**Odds and ends**

- The NHL expects Wayne Gretzky to start traveling to Washington Capitals games as soon as Alex Ovechkin gets within four goals of breaking his all-time goals record.
- About 15 league staff, plus an extensive crew of 10 cameras, will be on the ground for each Capitals game at that point, as well.
- The 2025-26 regular season will begin Oct. 7.
- Olympic rosters will be set by Dec. 31, with teams naming an initial six players by June 15. The U.S. and Canadian Olympic management groups were on hand for the GM meetings and both met to discuss roster changes from 4 Nations.

## The Athletic / Hart vs. Lindsay: Settling the split decisions for the NHL's best player awards

By Sean McIndoe – March 20, 2025

With a month left to go in the regular season, some of the award races are more or less settled. Connor Hellebuyck is going to win the Vezina, and will also be a first-team All-Star. Barring an injury, Leon Draisaitl will win the Rocket Richard. Aleksander Barkov seems set to win another Selke, and Spencer Carberry is pulling away in the Jack Adams race.

But other awards are still up in the air, including the big one: the Hart Trophy, for league MVP, as voted on by the writers. That means we can assume that the Ted Lindsay, for most outstanding player as voted on by the NHLPA, is also up for grabs. And that means there's at least a decent chance we get a split, with the players and the writers picking different winners.

I can't decide whether or not I hate when that happens.

On one hand, the writers sometimes get it wrong and I don't mind having the players there to keep us honest. And the criteria for the two awards are just slightly different enough – most valuable vs. most outstanding – that it makes sense for their results to occasionally diverge. On the other hand, the NHL already has too many awards, and having two separate honorees for what's basically "best player" just adds to that.

So today, we're going to fix what may or may not even be a problem by looking back at all the times that the Hart and the Lindsay have diverged, and use the power of hindsight to figure out which side got it right.

The Hart has been around since 1924, but the Lindsay (which was originally known as the Lester B. Pearson before being renamed in 2010) has only been around since 1971. In those 53 seasons when both awards were in play, there have been 18 seasons when they went to different players. But seven of those were in the first ten years, when it was clear that voters on both sides were still getting a feel for things. We'll skip over that decade, if only because I know that when I spend too long on names like Bobby Clarke and Marcel Dionne and Guy Lafleur then you kids out there get distracted without a subway surfer animation playing off to the side.

Instead, we'll start our clock in 1981, leaving us 11 split decisions to figure out. And we'll ease into things with a relatively easy call.

### **1981: Wayne Gretzky vs. Mike Liut**

**Hart:** Wayne Gretzky won his second straight Hart (in just his second NHL season) while also winning his first scoring title and shattering league records for points (164) and assists (109) in a season.

**Pearson:** Mike Liut was a pretty good goalie who won 33 games while backstopping the Blues to a breakout season that saw them finish second overall. He didn't lead the league in any traditional categories, but finished second in wins and eighth in save percentage. He also had one shutout, which you'll just have to trust me was a lot back then.

**And the winner is:** Come on. Liut was very good, but there's no way he was more valuable or more outstanding than a guy who set a new scoring record. This was the second year in a row when the players snubbed Gretzky for the Pearson, although the 1980 award going to Marcel Dionne was perfectly reasonable. This one wasn't. Gretzky and the writers win our first showdown easily.

Now on to a heavyweight showdown.

### **1986: Wayne Gretzky vs. Mario Lemieux**

**Hart:** Gretzky captured his seventh MVP in a row, setting yet another single-season points record in the process with 215. Maybe even more amazingly, he racked up 163 assists – 28 more than even his own next-best season, and 61 more than any other NHL player had ever managed to date.

**Pearson:** In just his second season, Mario Lemieux built on a Calder-winning rookie campaign by racking up 48 goals and 141 points. That was good for second in the scoring race, but context matters: Lemieux's point total was closer to Blackhawks winger Curt Fraser in 75th place than it was to Gretzky's total. He also finished second in Hart voting, but with only four first place votes from the writers, compared to Gretzky's 54.

**And the winner is:** Gretzky again. And yes, there's clearly a theme here, with the players showing a reluctance to recognize Gretzky, or at least a sense of fatigue over him gobbling up all those Harts. You won't find many bigger Mario fans than me, and he'd well and truly deserve to be viewed as Gretzky's peer for years to come. But the players jumped the gun here.

The players gave in and awarded Gretzky his fifth Pearson the following year, but this wouldn't be end of the split votes.

### **1989: Wayne Gretzky vs. Steve Yzerman**

**Hart:** Gretzky again, for the ninth time but first in Los Angeles. After the biggest trade in NHL history had rocked the hockey world the previous summer, Gretzky paid immediate dividends to the tune of 168 points while leading the previously forgettable Kings to contender status and single-handedly transforming the sport's economic landscape.

**Pearson:** The players once again shunned Gretzky for a player with fewer points, although this time the margin was much slimmer. Steve Yzerman finished with 155 points, the most ever by a player not named Wayne or Mario, and scored a career-high 65 goals.

Despite that, he only finished third in the Hart race, making him the only player to win the Pearson or Lindsay without finishing in the top-two of MVP voting. How was that possible? Well, about that.

**And the winner is:** Neither, because Lemieux should have won.

In terms of pure numbers, this was the single greatest season of Lemieux's career. He scored 85 goals, becoming just the second player to ever cross the 80-goal mark. (Only Brett Hull has since joined the club.) He finished the season with 199 points, the fifth most in history, and the most by anyone other than Gretzky. He led the league in goals, assists, points, power-play goals and shorthanded goals. He even threw in 100 PIMs, just for fun.

Yes, Yzerman deserved the recognition that would come with the Pearson, the only individual award he won until a late-career Selke. And sure, Gretzky's impact on the Kings could absolutely be viewed as "valuable" in a way that no normal season ever could. But this was Mario at the absolute height of his powers, and he should have swept the awards. Both the writers and players got this one wrong.

(But if you want to insist on following our own rules and picking one of the two actual award winners, then my pick is Yzerman, although it's razor-close.)

With that, the writers and players settled into a decade of agreement, a streak that didn't end until ...

### **2000: Chris Pronger vs. Jaromir Jagr**

**Hart:** In a massive break from their typical routine, PHWA members gave the Hart to a defenseman for the first time since the Bobby Orr era. At the time we wondered if this signaled a new era of recognizing the value of blueliners; a full quarter-century later, Chris Pronger isn't just the last defenseman to win the award, he's somehow the last to even be a finalist. But it was well-deserved, as Pronger put up a career-best 62 points and won the Norris in a year when no forwards even hit 100 points.

More importantly, he led to Blues to a Presidents' Trophy despite the team's best forwards being guys like Pavol Demitra, Michal Handzuš and an aging Pierre Turgeon. Put it this way: A guy named Ľuboš Bartečko was tied for fifth in scoring on that team. With 39 points.

**Pearson:** The players went the more traditional route, giving the Pearson to Jaromir Jagr after he won the scoring title with 96 points despite missing 19 games.

**And the winner is:** This was peak Jagr; it was his third of four straight Art Ross trophies. But defensemen are embarrassingly underrepresented with both awards, so despite two deserving candidates I'm going to give the nod to Pronger and the writers on this one.

### **2002: Jose Théodore vs. Jarome Iginla**

**Hart:** It's rare for goalies to win the Hart, although Dominik Hašek had done it in back-to-back years in 1997 and 1998 so this didn't feel all that weird. José Théodore led the league with a .931 save percentage, pushing his Canadiens into an unexpected playoff spot despite Yanic Perrault being their only player to hit 50 points.

For what it's worth, this was the closest Hart vote ever. It actually ended in a tie, with Théodore winning based on having more first-place votes.

**Pearson:** The best season of Jarome Iginla's career saw him win the Rocket Richard by double digits, as well as the Art Ross. His Flames missed the playoffs, mainly because their other top players were Craig Conroy, Dean McAmmond and Roman Turek.

**And the winner is:** Iginla. You knew I was going to land there, given how much I liked the guy. The 2002 vote is often framed as a massive whiff by the writers, but it was actually a tougher call than you might think, given how Theodore basically single-handedly led a bad team into the playoffs (and even won a round). You could actually argue that both sides got it right – Iginla was the most outstanding player, even on a non-playoff team, while Theodore was more valuable because he got his team into the postseason. I have to pick one, though, and I'm going with a guy who scored 20 percent more goals than anyone else in the league despite virtually no supporting cast.

### **2003: Peter Forsberg vs. Märkus Naslund**

**Hart:** Peter Forsberg won the scoring title with 106 points and led the league with 77 assists, while also finishing fourth in Selke voting. (By the way, did you know he never won the Selke, and was only a finalist one time? That's weird, for a guy generally viewed as one of the best 200-foot centers of all time.)

**Pearson:** Märkus Naslund finished second in scoring with 104 points, and second in the Rocket Richard race with 48 goals, trailing only Forsberg's teammate Milan Hejduk, who had 50. In a weird twist, Naslund ended up finishing second in Hart voting, despite having just five first-place votes compared to Forsberg's 38 and Martin Brodeur's 14; a lot of voters left Brodeur off their ballot entirely.

**And the winner is:** I'm going with Forsberg. Goals matter, and Naslund had 19 more. But defense matters too, and Forsberg was such a good defensive center that he was the better player. This one's close, though.



### **2006: Joe Thornton vs. Jaromir Jagr**

**Hart:** Joe Thornton became the only player in NHL history to be named MVP while playing for two teams in the same season, going from Boston to San Jose in November and then winning the scoring title with 126 points.

**Pearson:** Jagr had his last truly great season, racking up 54 goals and 123 points. Both of those totals ranked second in the league (with the goals ranking behind only Thornton's linemate, Jonathan Cheechoo).

**And the winner is:** This is another one where you could argue that both sides got it right, with Jagr being the league's best player but Thornton's arrival impacting the Sharks in general and Cheechoo specifically so much that he was more valuable. Both guys were awesome, but if I have to pick one I'll go with Jagr in a coin flip.

### **2010: Henrik Sedin vs. Alex Ovechkin**

**Hart:** Henrik Sedin finished with 112 points, narrowly winning the Art Ross over the duo of Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin, who tied with 109. He also led the league with 83 assists in a year when nobody else cracked 70, but had just 29 goals.

**Lindsay:** The players went with Ovechkin and his 50 goals, which ranked him just behind Crosby and Steven Stamkos, who led the league with 51. It was the third straight Lindsay/Pearson honors for Ovechkin.

**And the winner is:** This was a weird year, with Sedin, Ovechkin and Crosby all finishing close in Hart balloting; goalies Ryan Miller and Ilya Bryzgalov also getting a bunch of first-place votes; and essentially nobody else in the running. I'm glad I didn't have a vote back then, but I do now, and I'll give it to Ovechkin.

### **2011: Corey Perry vs. Daniel Sedin**

**Hart:** In a fun flip from 2010, this time it's the players who side with a Sedin while the writers go with the goal-scorer. Corey Perry led the league with 50 goals; his 98 points ranked third.

**Lindsay:** Daniel Sedin had 104 points to keep the Art Ross in the family. Like Ovechkin the year before, Sedin won the Lindsay while also leading his team to the Presidents' Trophy.

**And the winner is:** Sedin. I've often wondered if Perry would have still won if he'd finished with 49 goals instead of an even 50, but I guess we'll never know. Goals matter, but this isn't 2010 when Ovechkin had 21 more than Henrik. Daniel had 41 goals this year, which given everything else should have been enough.

### **2013: Alex Ovechkin vs. Sidney Crosby**

**The Hart:** In a lockout-shortened season, the writers went with the Rocket Richard winner; Ovechkin's 32 goals were three ahead of Stamkos for the league-lead. It was a very close vote, with John Tavares and Jonathan Toews also getting plenty of support. And in an unusual twist for the "writers only sort by points" crowd, Art Ross winner Martin St. Louis finished ninth.

**The Lindsay:** Apparently tired of voting for Ovechkin every year, the players flipped to Crosby, who had only 15 goals but tied Ovechkin with 56 points.

**And the winner is:** Giving an award to Crosby is never a bad call, but we'll go with Ovechkin. That means the writers got it right, which when it comes to Ovechkin in 2013, makes for a nice change of pace.

### **2018: Taylor Hall vs. Connor McDavid**

**The Hart:** Taylor Hall had a monster year, shattering career-highs with 39 goals and 93 points. More importantly, he led a Devils team that nobody thought would be any good to an unexpected playoff appearance.

**The Lindsay:** One year after winning both the Hart and the Lindsay as a sophomore, Connor McDavid had to settle for just one despite winning the scoring title. The big reason: Unlike Hall, he couldn't get his team into the playoffs, or even to the .500 mark.

**And the winner is:** McDavid, easily. And yes, this all comes down to whether you believe a player can be valuable to a team that doesn't make the playoffs. But while Hall did help the Devils to the postseason, they won just one game there while being easily eliminated by the Lightning. Does that one extra win make a guy who finished sixth in scoring and ninth in goals the MVP? I don't see how it does, so McDavid takes this one.

That covers our 11 cases, and by my count we end up in a dead heat at 5-5-1. But if you want to use 1989 as the tie-breaker, that means the players take this over the writers in a 6-5 final. At least until this year, when we see which of the two voting blocs realizes that Hellebuyck is the league's top player and which is blinded by the guy with the most points.

## Sportsnet.ca / Sportsnet's 2025 NHL Draft Rankings: March Edition

**By Sam Cosentino – March 20, 2025**

Time is ticking on the 2025 NHL draft class. Regular seasons are coming to a close, playoffs are coming up, and the U18 international tournament is on the horizon. Scouting staffs are going into overdrive getting in the last viewings before they have to make their final lists in preparation for the 2025 NHL Draft.

A general assessment of this draft class sees some level of certainty amongst the top 10-15 players who will be taken in the first round. There will be some variation in the order of that group amongst prognosticators, but the names should all look the same. Where this draft class gets interesting, and where predicting order of selection gets more blurry, is in the second half of Round 1.

Once we approach the midway point of the opening round, the number of players who could get picked opens up greatly. This trend isn't uncommon, but it usually starts later than the midway point. Some say that proves this is a mediocre draft class, and while that may prove to be true, a wide-open segment that starts earlier allows more teams to lean towards drafting for need as opposed to the best player available. When that happens, there's less pressure to push the player forward, leaving more room and time for a patient developmental plan.

While some may be down on the depth of skaters this draft class has to offer, the goaltending situation looks bright. There are a number of options who are playing in Europe this year, while a host of others have dotted the North American landscape. Because of his size, I still believe WHL Prince George netminder Josh Ravensbergen will be the first netminder off the board, but it wouldn't surprise me to see as many as three goalies go in the opening round. Surely, some of that will depend on how many teams have multiple picks, and which teams have those picks.

There are a number of interesting questions in regards to this draft class. After Matthew Schaefer, who will be the next defenceman off the board? Despite being injured for most of the season, will Schaefer indeed go first overall?

Speaking of injury, will Roger McQueen have enough time to prove he is medically fit to earn a position back inside the top five of this draft class?

Sticking with the injury theme, where will Carter Bear end up? He was on a steep trajectory moving inside the top 10 when his season came to a close thanks to an Achilles injury. I believe he'll maintain a top 10 position, but there is a cautionary tale with that injury. Thinking back to the 2019 draft, Vegas picked Peyton Krebs 17th overall after sustaining a similar injury. In-season, Krebs was thought to be a top 10 prospect, slid back at the draft, and has struggled to find his stride almost 300 games into his NHL career.

And how will the smaller, gifted forwards be handled by NHL teams? Who emerges from the pack? Where do they get picked?

What about the CHL/NCAA situation? How, if at all, will that dynamic impact the draft?

Will the signing period for CHL players remain at two years or will the time period extend to four years, as it is with players picked out of the NCAA? Will NHL teams have this information before the draft in Los Angeles?

Will the NCAA bend on whether or not signed players can participate in NCAA hockey, or will all professionally signed players have to remain in their respective junior leagues or the AHL?

At this point there seems to be more questions than answers. In the meantime, here are my March draft rankings.

**No. 1: Matthew Schaefer, D, 6-foot-2, 183 pounds, Erie Otters (OHL)**

Continues to rehab and will be re-evaluated in early April. He probably doesn't have to play another game this season to maintain this spot, but there will be interest in seeing him if Erie is able to extend its playoff fortunes.

**No. 2: Michael Misa, C, 6-foot-1, 184 pounds, Saginaw Spirit (OHL)**

Has definitely lived up to the Exceptional Player Status reputation. As of writing, he's tied for the CHL lead with 126 points, and second in the CHL with 59 goals. He's having a season for the ages with a little time left to hit the 60-goal milestone.

**No. 3: Caleb Desnoyers, C, 6-foot-2, 178 pounds, Moncton Wildcats (QMJHL)**

Continues to impress with his professional approach to the game. He's the type of player a coach can trust in any situation.

**No. 4: James Hagens, C, 5-foot-11, 177 pounds, Boston College (NCAA)**

Playing NCAA hockey this season has proven that he can still excel against bigger, stronger competition. He needed that to show scouts he belongs amongst the top of this draft class.

**No. 5: Anton Frondell, C, 6-foot-1, 198 pounds, Djurgardens (Allsvenskan)**

An amazing progression this season based on dealing with injuries dating back to the summer. You could argue he's had the best second half of any player on this list.

**No. 6: Porter Martone, RW, 6-foot-3, 208 pounds, Brampton Steelheads (OHL)**

In his draft minus-one season, Martone made his mark as a shooter and a scorer. While he continues to do that, his playmaking has improved and now presents a more balanced dual-threat game with a nice dose of toughness.

**No. 7: Roger McQueen, C, 6-foot-5, 197 pounds, Brandon Wheat Kings (WHL)**

Doing his best to make up for lost time with eight points in his six games back from injury. The NHL Combine will ultimately determine his fate.

**No. 8: Victor Eklund, LW, 5-foot-11, 161 pounds, Djurgardens (Allsvenskan)**

Perpetual motion is the best way to describe his play. If he's not lurking around the offensive zone, he's finding a way to track pucks.

**No. 9: Radim Mrtko, D, 6-foot-6, 207 pounds, Seattle Thunderbirds (WHL)**

Has cooled off from his point per game start after arriving in North America. A first-round match-up with league leading Everett will be a great test and measuring stick for scouts.

**No. 10: Jake O'Brien, C, 6-foot-2, 172 pounds, Brantford Bulldogs (OHL)**

Once he adds weight and strength, he will be able to hold on to pucks longer, fight off defenders and create even more havoc for opponents than he does now.

**No. 11: Carter Bear, LW, 6-feet, 179 pounds, Everett Silvertips (WHL)**

Injury has ruled him out of the rest of the season, but he has made an indelible mark on the scouting community with his electric pace of play, high-compete and well above average production.

**No. 12: Logan Hensler, D, 6-foot-2, 192 pounds, Wisconsin (NCAA)**

Reminds me of Brandon Carlo in a slightly smaller package. He's long, rangy, has good, quick feet and is adept at making a good first pass.

**No. 13: Jackson Smith, D, 6-foot-3, 195 pounds, Tri-City Americans (WHL)**

An excellent skater who exhibits agility in all directions. He is most effective when playing in the opponent's face and transitioning pucks.

**No. 14: Justin Carboneau, RW, 6-foot-1, 191 pounds, Blainville-Boisbriand Armada (QMJHL)**

He's not likely to take a shooting percentage of 14 to the next level, but it won't be because he's not shooting the puck. He leads the Q in shot attempts and shots on goal and is the league's second-best point-getter.

**No. 15: Jack Nesbitt, C, 6-foot-4, 185 pounds, Windsor Spitfires (OHL)**

Is all-in for playing a "big-man's game," which means staking claim to the net front and making opponents aware of his presence on the forecheck.

**No. 16: Brady Martin, C, 6-feet, 178 pounds, Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds (OHL)**

An above-average player in all areas, but not elite in any of them. This is why he remains a sleeper and someone who has potential to upset the top 10.

**No. 17: Ben Kindel, C, 5-foot-10, 176 pounds, Calgary Hitmen (WHL)**

Has a great sense for the game and is capable of adapting his play to fit what a particular situation requires. He's benefitted greatly from the tutelage of Paul McFarland and is just two points away from a 100-point season.

**No. 18: Ivan Ryabkin, C, 5-foot-11, 201 pounds, Muskegon Lumberjacks (USHL)**

One of the most interesting players this draft class has to offer. He's a dynamic offensive player who can hold his own. Some leeway must be given considering he came to North America part-way through this season.

**No. 19: Cameron Reid, D, 6-feet, 193 pounds, Kitchener Rangers (OHL)**

His elite skating ability, edge-work and agility make him an effective player all over the ice. He is deceptive along the blue line, can get pucks to the net and this will allow him to be an effective PP player at the next level.

**No. 20: Kashawn Aitcheson, D, 6-foot-2, 196 pounds, Barrie Colts (OHL)**

Has points in 10 of his past 11 games, and is now up to 25 goals. Those numbers can't be taken lightly. Add in the old-school nastiness and you have a unique combination.

**No. 21: Malcolm Spence, LW, 6-foot-1, 203 pounds, Erie Otters (OHL)**

Remarkably consistent in his play and production. Spence can make plays, he can score and he is responsible on the defensive side. A projected middle six player with some special teams upside.

**No. 22: Cole Reschny, C, 5-foot-11, 183 pounds, Victoria Royals (WHL)**

Is similar to Ben Kindel in stature and style of play. He brings a ton of energy, has some vinegar to his game and produces top-line offence.

**No. 23: Braeden Cootes, C, 5-foot-11, 183 pounds, Seattle Thunderbirds (WHL)**

This player falls into a group after the middle of the first round. A team will love his energy, his passion and the details in his game. He won't be a burner offensively, but he's the type of player teams need and win with.

**No. 24: Sascha Boumedienne, D, 6-foot-1, 175 pounds, Boston University (NCAA)**

Has enjoyed a steady path forward as the youngest player in college hockey. There's been a slight uptick in offensive production recently. He will be fun to track the rest of the way as his confidence has seemingly grown.

**No. 25: Jack Murtagh, LW, 6-foot-1, 200 pounds, USNTDP**

When he's not doing the dirty work on the forecheck or along the wall, you will find him hanging around the net front. He is strong enough and skilled enough to hold position to tip pucks or to find loose pucks.

**No. 26: William Moore, C, 6-foot-2, 175 pounds, USNTDP**

An elite offensive brain, Moore is great at deceiving defenders, getting to open ice and creating plays. At this level he can do all of these things on demand. Projecting him to be the same player when the intensity, physicality and difficulty is ramped-up is the big question scouts need to figure out.

**No. 27: Lynden Lakovic, LW, 6-foot-4, 190 pounds, Moose Jaw Warriors (WHL)**

Scouts will gravitate to his personality, they will like his size and his skill, but will wonder if there's enough jam to make those things work when he's in a league where he doesn't quite have the same size advantage he currently enjoys.

**No. 28: Joshua Ravensbergen, G, 6-foot-5, 190 pounds, Prince George Cougars (WHL)**

Has been on a very successful run since February, having allowed more than three goals just once in a 14-game stretch.

**No. 29: Cole McKinney, C, 6-feet, 200 pounds, USNTDP**

Has a solid two-way game, with a lean to the offensive side. Since missing a few games in the middle of January, he has produced 11 goals and 10 assists in his past 13 games.

**No. 30: Bill Zonnon, C, 6-foot-2, 185 pounds, Rouyn-Noranda Huskies (QMJHL)**

This prospect has massive growth potential. There's plenty of room to fill out his physical profile and there's refinement to be had in his skill set.

**No. 31: Cullen Potter, C, 5-foot-10, 172 pounds, Arizona State (NCAA)**

There is a dynamism to his game that is based on elite skating and edge-work. He can dazzle opponents, especially off the rush, and he's helping put ASU on the map.

**No. 32: Eric Nilson, C, 5-foot-11, 156 pounds, Djurgardens (SWE J20)**

He will need to pack on the pounds and add strength, but he's got an excellent hockey brain and uses all of his tools to be an effective point producer while still being able to handle his defensive responsibilities.