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**January 28, 2025**

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## The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Weekly Injury Report: Week 16

By Jason Newland – January 28, 2025

Last week, the Columbus Blue Jackets entered another name onto the injury report.

Cole Sillinger's apparent hand injury caused him to miss a few games. According to reports, Sillinger should be able to play at some point on the four-game road trip the Jackets are about to embark on.

Boone Jenner is skating with the team and, depending on how everything goes, should be able to return after the Four Nations Faceoff Tournament. The Jackets play home games against Chicago and Dallas to end February. Will we see him back in a month?

Right after the game against LA started this past Saturday, Columbus PR put out a statement that forward Sean Monahan would miss an additional six to eight weeks due to a wrist injury. He was apparently trying to fight through the pain and play, but the Jackets have shut him down. This one is a big blow to both him and the Jackets.

This is no word on Yegor Chinakhov's return. All we know is that it's an upper-body injury and have been given nothing from the team other than he's a "few weeks away," but that's been weeks ago.

Erik Gudbranson's timeline seems to be about a month after Jenner's. With 10 games scheduled in April, if he were to come back in late March, that would give him plenty of games to play to get back in shape before either the off-season or playoffs.

### **Injuries**

- **Boone Jenner** (shoulder) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 7; (50 Games)
- **Erik Gudbranson** (upper body) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 16; (47 Games)
- **Yegor Chinakhov** (upper body) is on Injured Reserve (29 Games)
- **Sean Monahan** (upper body); is on Injured Reserve retroactive to Dec. 7 (9 Games)
- **Cole Sillinger** (upper body) could return this week (3 Games)

**TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 205**

**What's Next:** The Blue Jackets have a four-day break and will travel to Vegas next Thursday to play the Golden Knights.

## The Hockey News / Columbus Should Inquire About Blackhawks Forward

By Spencer Lazary – January 28, 2025

The 2025 NHL Trade Deadline is quickly approaching, and the Columbus Blue Jackets are in the thick of the fight for a wild card spot.

Unfortunately, they will need to continue that fight without Sean Monahan. The team announced he will miss an additional six-to-eight weeks with a wrist injury.

As a result, the Blue Jackets will likely look to acquire another forward to help fill the void until Monahan returns.

One name that could be interesting for Columbus is Ryan Donato from the Chicago Blackhawks.

Donato, 28, is a pending UFA on a struggling Blackhawks team. He brings versatility, as he can play both center and wing, while also contributing offensively.

This season, Donato has tallied 14 goals and 14 assists for 28 points in 45 games. Last season, he posted 12 goals and 18 assists for 30 points with Chicago. His career high came in 2021-22 with the Seattle Kraken, when he recorded 31 points in 74 games.

Given that Donato isn't an everyday top-six forward, his asking price likely wouldn't be too high. The Blue Jackets might only need to part with a mid-round draft pick, such as their 2026 third-round pick (via Colorado), to acquire him.

**What's Next:** The Blue Jackets have a four-day break and will travel to Vegas next Thursday to play the Golden Knights.

## The Hockey News / Columbus Linked To Seattle Forward Brandon Tanev

By Jason Newland – January 28, 2025

TheFourthPeriod.com has linked Seattle Forward Brandon Tanev to the Columbus Blue Jackets as a trade target.

Tanev, 33, has played in 521 career games for the Winnipeg Jets, Pittsburgh Penguins, and Seattle Kraken. He has 173 career points.

In the recently updated article, it also has Toronto, Washington, NY Rangers, and Vegas listed as being linked to Tanev as well.

At this stage of his career, it can be assumed that Brandon Tanev would want to go to a Cup-contending team. He is in the final year of his contract and will be UFA. He also has a 10-team modified no-trade clause, which could complicate things.

Tanev seems like a player GM Don Waddell would go after if they were to make a serious run for the playoffs. If the Jackets can get hot and stay in the hunt, he could be perfect for this team. Waddell has the picks to pull this small move off.

**What's Next:** The Blue Jackets have a four-day break and will travel to Vegas next Thursday to play the Golden Knights.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / The Real Deal: 13 Games Into His NHL Career, Denton Mateychuk Is Showing He's Everything The Columbus Blue Jackets Were Hoping For

**By Ed Francis – January 28, 2025**

When the Columbus Blue Jackets opted Denton Mateychuk to the Cleveland Monsters to start the 2024-25 season, it sure felt like it wouldn't be long before he made the jump from the AHL club to the NHL.

Sure enough, it was just over two months before the 20-year-old got the call to Columbus.

The question then quickly turned to whether or not he'd stay in Columbus once he made the jump, or if he'd join now-former defensive prospect David Jiricek (amongst others in franchise history) as a frequent traveler on I-71 between the two cities.

Mateychuk took little time in answering that question.

After his December 23rd debut (a Columbus win over the Montreal Canadiens), head coach Dean Evason said the club "loved his composure", that Mateychuk "didn't look out of his place", and that he "conducted himself very well."

Similar statements have been echoed by Evason (and others) since then, and the trust has been shown with his ice time. Mateychuk is averaging 18:02 per night through the first 13 games of his career, hasn't been benched or demoted, has been trusted in key minutes late in close games, and has played at least 13:56 in every game of his young career.

Moreover, the Blue Jackets have been playing their best hockey of the season with Mateychuk in the lineup. Since making his debut, Columbus is 10-2-1 with Mateychuk in the lineup.

Even the losses have been (mostly) by the skin of their teeth.

In two of the three without the club collecting two points, one was technically a shutout by the Blue Jackets (they lost 1-0 in a shootout), and another was a loss in the final seconds of regulation.

When Mateychuk missed three games with an illness last week, Columbus won just one of three games. That was lowlighted by a 7-4 loss Thursday night to the Carolina Hurricanes.

To sum that up: the Blue Jackets have been really good with Mateychuk in the lineup.

And that isn't a coincidence.

In Mateychuk's last six games, Columbus has allowed two goals or less every time. Part of that has been the stellar play of Elvis Merzlikins as of late — but make no mistake that part of Elvis' great play has been the insertion of Mateychuk in the lineup. Merzlikins (as well as Daniil Tarasov and Jet Greaves) have been highly complimentary of the team's defense as of late, with every blueliner seemingly elevating their game.

Mateychuk has predominantly played with Ivan Provorov on the Blue Jackets' second pairing. In their 187 minutes together in even-strength hockey, the duo has been on the ice for just eight opposition goals. That comes out to an average of 2.56 per 60 minutes.

There has been seven pairs of Columbus defensemen that have skated together for 100+ minutes this season, and the only pairs who have performed better in that area are ones where one of the players is Zach Werenski.

The offense isn't there yet for Mateychuk— and that's okay. It shouldn't be. Defense is the Blue Jackets' only priority right for their rookie; it's really tough (and rare) for a 20-year-old to be a regular NHL defenseman, especially when being asked to contribute offensively.

Even so, Mateychuk has picked up a pair of assists and on January 9th, got his first NHL goal.

As the Blue Jackets continue their playoff push, expect most of the questions to rightly continue centering around defense and goaltending. One can often bail out the other, but they both have to trust each other on a nightly basis as the number of games begins to tick down.

With Mateychuk now firmly locked in to the middle of the Columbus defense, look for that trust to continue to grow.

And look for Mateychuk to continue to grow, too.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Blue Jackets making strong push for playoff spot](#)

By Ryan Dixon – January 28, 2025

The last time the Columbus Blue Jackets made the playoffs in an 82-game schedule you knew, right in the moment, the showing was surely a last hurrah for that roster. Six years later, the Jackets are making a strong bid to get back to the post-season and even if that push falls short, it's easy to believe this version of the club is just beginning to rise.

Columbus was a 3-2 overtime winner against the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday night thanks to a three-on-three power move from Kirill Marchenko to end the affair. The first goal of the game was netted by Jackets defenceman Zach Werenski, meaning the two best stories in Columbus bookended the scoring in this huge win.

Marchenko — after establishing himself as a 20-goal guy during his first two years in the league — is busting loose in Year 3. The game-winner against L.A. was his 20th of the year and the 24-year-old Russian winger — who clocks in at six-foot-three and nearly 200 pounds — is leading all Jackets forwards in scoring with 53 points through 50 games.

Werenski, meanwhile, is leading the entire squad in scoring from the back end with 54 points. The 27-year-old averages more ice time per game (26:47) than every player in the NHL as he continues to distance himself from a trying injury history, including playing just 13 contests in 2022-23. Werenski is a strong candidate to win the Bill Masterton Trophy for his perseverance and dedication to hockey; he'll surely be a front-runner for the Norris Trophy, and you can bank on him getting some MVP votes, too.

Of course, the run the Jackets are on requires big-time efforts from more than two players. Just before Christmas, Columbus was basically as close to last place in the Eastern Conference as it was to a playoff spot. Now, the Jackets are slugging it out with a handful of other teams in a fight for the final couple playoff spots in the East thanks to an 11-4-1 record since Dec. 23.

Kent Johnson, the fifth-overall pick in 2021, is finally finding his NHL footing with 10 points in his past 11 contests. Adam Fantilli, the third-overall selection in 2023, is starting to look like a super sophomore with seven goals and 13 points in 12 outings since the calendar flipped to 2025. And yet another young forward, 24-year-old winger Dmitri Voronkov, is scoring at a 36-goal pace with his six-foot-five frame.

Throw Marchenko in there and you've got four guys under the age of 25 who are starting to look like serious NHLers.

The end result is an offence that's scoring 3.30 goals per game under new coach Dean Evason, good for seventh in the league. All that cannon-firing must be a fun development for a franchise that, historically, has never been too explosive. Remember, the Jackets have just three 40-goal seasons in their history (40 and 41 by Rick Nash, 41 by Cam Atkinson) and two 80-point showings, both by Artemi Panarin (87 and 82).

Critically, the toothy offence is now being supported by some better crease play. Elvis Merzlikins — who seemed destined for a one-way ticket out of town at times in the past — has posted a .917 save percentage in his past seven outings.

Of course, Panarin was one of those guys who had one foot out the door in 2019, when Columbus upset the Tampa Bay Lightning in Round 1 of the playoffs before falling to the Boston Bruins in six games. Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky was also a pending UFA and, predictably, blew town with his fellow Russian that

summer. Matt Duchene — acquired in a gutsy go-for-it play that winter by former GM Jarmo Kekalainen at the trade deadline — also departed as a free agent after just 33 games in Central Ohio.

There will be no such exodus this time for a franchise that hasn't seen the post-season since the bubble playoffs five years ago in Toronto.

Of course, hardship doesn't even begin to explain what the Jackets family went through with the late-summer death of Johnny Gaudreau. On the ice, the team also lost captain Boone Jenner before the puck dropped on the regular season to shoulder surgery following an injury in practice. The Jackets are also playing without top centre Sean Monahan right now — and will be for some time — thanks to a wrist injury.

Yet they soldier on.

While there's no firm timetable for his return, Jenner looks as though he'll be back practising with his teammates this week.

That's great news for the Jackets and their fans; which, this year, is basically everybody in hockey.

### **Weekend Takeaways**

- Few hockey weekends begin with a bang the way this one did when Colorado and Carolina shook up the sports world Friday evening with the swap that landed Mikko Rantanen in Raleigh and sent Martin Necas to Denver. The Avs — likely still reeling from the news — lost 3-1 in Boston on Saturday, then battled back 24 hours later for a crazy 5-4 win over the Rangers in Madison Square Garden. Artturi Lehkonen scored in both games for Colorado — including the late winner against the Rangers — and you have to wonder if his development as a goal-scorer made the Avs even a bit more willing to move his fellow Finn, Rantanen.

### **Could Lehkonen be the next Zach Hyman? Sound nuts?**

Hyman didn't have a 30-goal season on the books until his age-30 season when he scored 36 during his second year with the Oilers after starting out with the Leafs. The next campaign, he exploded for 54.

It's hard to predict that kind of leap for anyone, but Lehkonen scored at a 27-goal pace in his first full year with the Avs and a 29-goal clip in Year 2 after coming over in a 2022 trade with Montreal. Now — with 20 goals in 39 contests — the 29-year-old Finn is finding the range at a 42-goal pace.

His bugaboo is staying healthy, as he's not played more than 64 games in a year since coming to Colorado. But Lehkonen is a hard-nosed net-driver with a good shot who plays on an offence-first squad. Maybe he's just tapping his potential as an NHL goal-scorer.

- Taylor Hall was also part of Friday's shocking three-way swap, heading from Chicago to Carolina. The Canes are the seventh team the 2010 first-overall pick has suited up for and assuming the 33-year-old pending UFA wants to keep playing for a few more years, he's got a chance to wind up skating for more teams than any other top selection in NHL history. According to the awesome people at Sportsnet Stats, Hall has joined Roman Hamrlik (1992) and Joe Murphy (1986) as first-overall selections who have skated for seven clubs. The only No. 1 selection who played for more was 1979 draft headliner Rob Ramage, a blue-liner who lined up for eight organizations. Hall is almost certain to ink with No. 8 this off-season and could make it to nine between now and the time the 2018 Hart Trophy winner hangs 'em up.

### **The Week Ahead**

- Andrew Mangiapane — who played over 400 games with the Flames and posted a 35-goal season in 2021-22 — returns to Calgary as a productive member of the high-flying Washington Capitals on Tuesday.



- Paul Maurice is set to coach his 1,900th career game on Wednesday when the Panthers host the Kings. Maurice turns 58 the next day and given how good his team is and how much passion he still has for the job, it feels like a given he'll get the 242 more contests he needs to overtake Scotty Bowman (2,141) for the most games spent behind an NHL bench.
- Rantanen will make his home debut for the Canes on Thursday when they welcome Hall's former club, the Chicago Blackhawks. Meanwhile, Martin Necas will play his first game in Denver as a member of the Avs on Friday versus the St. Louis Blues.
- There's no NHL All-Star Game happening this winter, but the AHL will have its all-star weekend on Saturday and Sunday in Palm Desert, Calif.

### **Red and White Power Rankings**

- 1. Winnipeg Jets (34-14-3):** The Jets filled the net on the weekend, popping 10 total goals against Utah and Calgary. With three more power-play markers at Canada Life Centre, Winnipeg is cashing an incredible (and league-best) 36.6 per cent of its man advantages on home ice.
- 2. Edmonton Oilers (31-15-3):** Connor McDavid has served his three-game sentence and will draw back into the lineup when the Oilers host the Kraken on Monday night. McDavid needs eight more assists to hit 700 in his career and is probably in a mood to get them soon.
- 3. Toronto Maple Leafs (30-18-2):** The Leafs host the Wild on Wednesday. After that, Toronto will play just two home games before March 13 as the Buds take to the road for 11 of 13 contests.
- 4. Calgary Flames (24-17-7):** With two goals in Saturday's big road win in Minnesota, Andrei Kuzmenko doubled his season output to four tallies. It's incredible to think this player scored 39 times as a first-year NHLer just two seasons ago and found the net at a 40-goal pace in 29 contests with Calgary last year after coming over from Vancouver. Somebody is going to give him a one-year rip as a UFA this summer and hope he fills the net for them.
- 5. Ottawa Senators (26-20-4):** Ottawa — which had been struggling to score — still managed its second straight four-point weekend thanks to 28 saves by Anton Forsberg in Saturday's 2-1 victory over Toronto and 34 stops from Leevi Merilainen during Sunday's 3-1 win against Utah.
- 6. Montreal Canadiens (24-20-5):** If the Canadiens want to keep pace in the Eastern Conference playoff chase, they need to stop spotting their opponents' leads. The Habs have fallen behind in six of their past seven outings, including Saturday's 4-3 OTL to the Devils.
- 7. Vancouver Canucks (21-17-10):** Quinn Hughes' two goals in Saturday's 2-1 win over Washington gives him 14 on the year, which means the only defencemen with more are Werenski (16) and Cale Makar (18). At 1.23 points per game, Hughes is the most productive D-man in the league ahead of Makar (1.10) and Werenski (1.08).

## The Athletic / Weekend NHL rankings: The Mikko Rantanen blockbuster shakes up the league

By Sean McIndoe – January 28, 2025

The word “blockbuster” gets thrown around a little too often in today’s NHL, often for trades unworthy of the term, in the same way that anything might feel like a five-star meal to a starving man. But the deal that dropped on Friday night? That one deserves the title, no questions asked.

There’s a lot to unpack, but the basics are jaw-dropping enough on their own: The Avalanche traded Mikko Rantanen. And the Hurricanes gave up Martin Necas to get him.

Let’s get into it.

### **Bonus five: Thoughts on the biggest trade of the year**

**5. The Hurricanes are taking a huge swing** — And it’s the right move. With no extension in place for Rantanen, there’s an element of risk here, without question. But those contract questions are also the only reason a player with this much talent was available in the first place, so you have to accept the downside to get the deal done. There’s no guarantee the Hurricanes can extend their new star, but you have to like their odds. They have the cap flexibility to get to a higher number than the Avalanche were probably comfortable with, they have a fellow Finn on the first line to sell the situation and a coach that players seem to love playing for, and they have a weird owner who may not mind paying up a literal game-changer.

And yes, if you’ve been reading me over the years, you know what’s next: This is pretty much the exact scenario that can lead to a Shiny New Toy disaster. If Carolina falls into that trap, or Rantanen and his team shove them into it, maybe this doesn’t work after all. But if I had to pick a GM who could think his way around the danger here, Eric Tulsky would be high on the list. And let’s face it: As far as being a difference-maker in this league, Rantanen is a lot closer to a Matthew Tkachuk or Mark Stone than he is to Jonathan Huberdeau or Seth Jones.

The absolute worst-case scenario here would be that Rantanen has no interest in staying in Carolina. By making the trade early, the Hurricanes have at least left themselves with enough time to flip him before the deadline. Far more likely, they’d simply keep him for a playoff run through a very winnable Metropolitan Division. That’s far from ideal, but it’s also not a disaster. And of course, the best case is that they get an extension done, in which case they just landed the best forward that the Hurricanes have had in a decade — and quite possibly ever — at a very reasonable cost.

Be sure to check out Pierre’s one-on-one with Tulsky, which goes into more detail on the GM’s thinking.

**4. The Avalanche side here is fascinating** — They ultimately decided they couldn’t keep Rantanen at a number that made sense for them long-term, given Nathan MacKinnon’s existing deal and Cale Makar’s extension next summer. So they went out and got a very good package that includes a star forward to ostensibly replace the one they gave up, plus enough other future pieces to either restock the cupboard or use as deadline ammo. It all makes sense. (If you missed it, CJ had an in-depth piece on what was happening behind the scenes on the Rantanen front this year.)

But it’s one thing for a move to make sense, and another for it to actually happen. In today’s NHL, we’re used to seeing GMs take the easy way out, following the path of least resistance. This trade is, well, not that. Chris MacFarland has guts, you have to give him that.

None of which means it's the right move, of course. But if we start from the assumption that there really was no way to make a Rantanen extension happen in a way the team was comfortable with, landing a 26-year-old star like Necas isn't a bad consolation prize. And it certainly makes more sense than moving Rantanen for a couple of first-round picks that won't help with a Cup run this spring.

The old cliché about the team that gets the best player winning the trade is just that — an old cliché, and one that's at least occasionally wrong. But it seems clear that, at least in terms of this year's Cup odds, the Avalanche got worse. Let's see what they do with their new picks and cap stability before we pass any final judgments. But early returns over the weekend were mixed, and you can't make a move like this without fundamentally altering the DNA in your room, a concern Arthur digs into here.

**3. It's a letdown from the Blackhawks' side** — Scott has a piece on what Chicago was thinking, and it makes some sense. Still, when you factor in a third-round pick barely being fair compensation for the big chunk of change the Hawks are eating on Rantanen's deal, it feels like they almost gave Taylor Hall away for nothing. When Hall first landed in Chicago two years ago, it seemed like he could be a veteran piece for a rebuilding team that would eventually be flipped for a high pick. His lack of production muted some of those expectations, but you'd still figure he'd be worth ... something. And maybe he still was, but it sure wasn't much.

**2. Is this the biggest midseason trade of the cap era?** — Let's define a midseason trade as one that happens during the season, but not right at the deadline. Is this the biggest midseason blockbuster we've ever seen?

Well, no. As a certified trade ranker, I feel pretty confident that the Joe Thornton deal still holds top spot. After all, that one saw a guy traded amid what would end up being an MVP season, the only time that's ever happened in major North American pro sports. But this one is probably right there with trades like Jack Eichel and Mark Stone, and ahead of Ryan Johansen for Seth Jones.

**1. This is about more than just these two teams** — According to reports, the Hurricanes were also in big on both J.T. Miller and Elias Pettersson, with Necas presumably part of the offer for the latter. It may even have gotten to the "final offers please" portion of the negotiation, with Tulskey ultimately choosing to go with the Colorado deal.

So where does that leave the Canucks now? The market for Miller is still centered on the Rangers, although with their recent hot streak, you have to wonder if that palpable sense of desperation from a month ago has completely dissipated. Pettersson, who knows? It's at least possible the Canucks have landed themselves into the worst of both worlds — where they spend a season with trade rumors spiraling around two top players, with all the distraction and frustration that comes with that, only to find they've maneuvered themselves out of the market on both. Alternatively, maybe the Hurricanes being out means more clarity in Vancouver, and a trade finally comes in the near future.

And that's all before we even get to those vague whispers about something even bigger percolating in the background. That led to some fans and media connecting the dots on who that could be, and, well ...

Dude.

I mean, yes, that's a pretty straightforward denial that anything is happening on the Sidney Crosby front, which makes far more sense than the alternative. (And Josh was even more direct.) But just seeing that name in the middle of a whirlwind of rumors was an exclamation point on a wild Friday night. If your favorite team's GM is twiddling his thumbs and telling you it's too hard to make big moves during the season, you may want to ask why other teams seem to be open for big business.

OK, we're almost 1,500 words into this week's column and we haven't even made it to the rankings yet. Sorry, I just love a good trade, not sure what to tell you. We'll do the rest of this in speedrun mode, I promise.

## Road to the Cup

The five teams with the best chances of winning the Stanley Cup.

If you missed the big news, Russo was able to corner Gary Bettman and get confirmation on his retirement plans. The commissioner stuck around to answer questions on a variety of other topics, including the cap and a new CBA.

**5. Vegas Golden Knights (31-15-4, +33 true goals differential\*)** — I'm not willing to drop them all the way out of the top five quite yet, but their recent slump is hard to ignore. They get Dallas tomorrow in a good test.

**4. Carolina Hurricanes (30-16-4, +29)** — Sure, why not. They'd already moved back into the top five on the standings page, and acquiring a talent like Rantanen means we have to get them back into our mix after a seven-week absence.

**3. Winnipeg Jets (34-14-3, +56)** — I'm looking forward to next Saturday's showdown with the Capitals, the first of two meetings on the year between the league's two most pleasant surprises.

**2. Washington Capitals (33-11-5, +55)** — With the Leafs, Panthers and Devils treading water over the last month or so, the Caps are starting to pull away on top of the East. And Pierre had an update on the Logan Thompson negotiations. But yeah, wins and losses and signing good players are nice, but this is going to be remembered as the week of the nacho game.

### Also, this was cool:

**1. Edmonton Oilers (31-15-3, +29)** — It's a new No. 1, our first change at the top since early December and our fifth team to hold the spot overall. Saturday's win temporarily moved the Oilers ahead of Vegas for top spot on the Pacific before the Golden Knights clawed it back with a win over the Panthers, and while the race remains close, it's not hard to see the trend. With Connor McDavid back in the lineup tonight and the potential for some significant additions near the deadline, the Oilers seem to be nicely set up for a second-half run at home ice in the West.

\*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.

**Not ranked: Minnesota Wild** — They came into the weekend looking like a team whose season was going off the rails. They'd lost five of seven, all in regulation, and were even booed off the ice by some of the hometown fans after an uninspiring shutout loss to Utah.

More importantly, they'd dropped behind the Stars for second spot in the Central as the Jets pull away for the division lead. With the Avalanche right behind them, the Wild have gone from inspiring first-half surprise to a team that looks destined to start the playoffs as a road underdog, and maybe even a wild card.

Saturday's effort didn't do much to alter that perception, with a regulation loss in Calgary that led to a confusing but possibly profound sound bite from the coach:

Joe gets into what John Hynes meant in this piece. Beating the Hawks last night helps calm the waters a bit, but just a bit.

This is a team that was 18-4-4 on Dec. 6, riding a five-game win streak. Since then, they've won just 11 of 24 games. Not exactly a freefall, but not great, even when you factor in missing Kirill Kaprizov and Jared Spurgeon for a big chunk of that stretch.

None of this feels like a disaster, at least not the way similar falls in New York, Boston and Vancouver have felt. The Wild are still set up well for the future, especially with cap space freeing up in the offseason once the Ryan Suter and Zach Parise buyouts expire. If anything, this might be a team whose best days are ahead of them but that got out a little bit over their skis in the first half, artificially boosting expectations to an unreasonable place. Compared to a window slamming shut, it's not the worst place to be.

### **The bottom five**

The five teams headed toward dead last and the best lottery odds for James Hagens Matthew Schaefer.

I thought this was a really interesting discussion about ranking and rating young players. The ongoing Lane Hutson debate is front and center, but even if you're tired of that one by now, there's some fascinating bigger-picture stuff about what a prospect writer looks for and especially what the NHL scouts they talk to are looking for.

**5. Anaheim Ducks (20-23-6, -30)** — Trevor Zegras is back and had a two-point night on Saturday. Eric has more on what that could mean, and the big question of whether the return represents another chance to make it work in Anaheim or a showcase for a trade.

**4. Nashville Predators (18-23-7, -25)** — They'd won five in a row, scoring a ton in the process and stirring just a tiny bit of "they might be back" aura. Saturday's loss to the Ducks nips that in the bud, at least for now. This week they've got the Canucks followed by the Sabres, which means they may get to see Elias Pettersson twice.

**3. Buffalo Sabres (18-26-5, -20)** — Elliott Friedman reports that the Sabres are in on Pettersson and may be the favorites. I'm on board — this team needs a shakeup and you don't get many chances to acquire a guy with Pettersson's talent and age combination. Yes, there are risks. If there weren't, he'd never be available. It's been 14 years without the playoffs; time to take a few big swings.

Meanwhile, Matthew's latest mailbag includes the question "Why in the name of all that is good and holy do we still watch and follow this team?" just in case you were wondering how the mood is in Buffalo these days.

**2. Chicago Blackhawks (15-29-5, -42)** — One more thought on the Hall trade: Shayna makes an interesting point here about salary retention.

That's not really a knock against what Chicago did, because it was assumed it would need to retain on Hall in any trade, so doing so for Rantanen instead doesn't really change its circumstances. But it's absolutely an item worth watching across the bottom of the league in the lead-up to deadline day.

**1. San Jose Sharks (14-32-6, -54)** — This is their first time back in the top spot since the end of November, if you're keeping track. Six straight regulation losses will do that, especially when you give up six goals or more in four of them. Also worth noting: The Sharks haven't had a loser point since before the holiday freeze, despite losing 13 of 16 in that span.

**Not ranked: Vancouver Canucks** — We've covered all the big stuff already, so let's go out on a quick bit of trivia. With defenseman Elias Pettersson making his debut on Saturday, the Canucks are now the second team in history to have two guys with the same name in the lineup at the same time. The

previous team: also the Canucks, who had both of the Greg Adams (Adamses? Adamsi?) back in the 1988-89 season. I know you rely on me for this important information.

(Also, shout out in advance to whichever team gives up a ton of picks and prospects to make an Elias Pettersson trade this week only to realize they acquired the wrong one.)

## The Athletic / NHL trade deadline tiers: Buyers, sellers and those in between — plus biggest needs

By The Athletic NHL Staff – January 28, 2025

Almost four months of the NHL season are behind us and there are only 39 days until the trade deadline.

Friday's three-team blockbuster is proof that by now, front offices have had enough time to evaluate their teams. Whether it's for the short- or long-term, all 32 clubs will be looking to improve in trade discussions between now and the March 7 deadline.

This week, The Athletic asked its NHL staff to put teams into three tiers — the buyers, the sellers and those in between — and highlight each franchise's biggest need. Of course, several teams will change tiers and shift their trade priorities in the coming weeks, but it's insightful to see where they stand at this point.

As of now, our staff believes there will be 13 buyers and nine sellers, leaving 10 teams that could go either way (or do some buying and selling). Teams are listed alphabetically in their respective tiers.

### **Buyers**

#### **Colorado Avalanche**

##### **Biggest need: Secondary scoring**

Prior to Friday's blockbuster trade that sent star winger Mikko Rantanen to Carolina, Colorado's biggest need was adding a depth defenseman with the little cap space it had to shore up the bottom pairs. Now, things look a lot different. Martin Necas should fit well into the top six and could shine even brighter than he did in Carolina in a more free-flowing offensive system. But with some cap space created by that trade, expect the Avalanche to be more aggressive ahead of the deadline to add more scoring punch. —

**Jesse Granger**

#### **Dallas Stars**

##### **Biggest need: A top-six forward**

The Stars have managed well enough since Tyler Seguin's potentially season-ending hip surgery, but they still have a void to fill. Whether it's someone such as the Islanders' Brock Nelson or the Sharks' Mikael Granlund or something splashier like a J.T. Miller trade, you can expect Dallas to do something to beef up its top nine, if not its top six. The only question is how much they're willing to part with to get it.

— Mark Lazerus

#### **Edmonton Oilers**

##### **Biggest need: A possible No. 4-5 defenseman**

This depends on how well the newest Oiler, John Klingberg, fares when he resumes his NHL career after a double hip resurfacing procedure. The Oilers can probably settle for adding a depth defenseman if Klingberg's play is anywhere close to his top form from a few years ago. They'll likely want a more notable addition if Klingberg isn't up to the task. Aside from the blue line, a top-nine winger and No. 4 center are also potential needs. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

#### **Florida Panthers**

##### **Biggest need: Cheap blue-line depth**

The defending champs don't project to have much cap space on deadline day, so barring a surprise, they'll be shopping the bargain bin. The Panthers can certainly win the Cup for a second straight year, but they need another half-decent option for the third pair. The Adam Boqvist/Uvis Balinskis/Nate Schmidt trifecta might not kill them, but it also isn't quite contender-grade. Time to try something different. — Sean Gentile

### **Los Angeles Kings**

#### **Biggest need: A scoring winger**

The Kings are pointed toward making noise in the playoffs after three straight first-round exits. They've been a bit of a surprise with consistent play all season, but a recent spell has highlighted their need for another scorer. Anze Kopitar, Quinton Byfield and Phillip Danault are three good two-way centers to throw at potential playoff opponents, but star winger Adrian Kempe has covered for some disappointing years from Kevin Fiala and Trevor Moore. Warren Foegele and Alex Laferrriere have given them some secondary scoring and Alex Turcotte has been a nice fit with Kempe and Kopitar on the top line, but they can use another true threat like Marian Gaborik was in 2014. — Eric Stephens

### **Minnesota Wild**

#### **Biggest need: A top-six center/winger**

The Wild were doing a superb job at the start of the season accruing cap space, but then a never-ending stack of injuries began in November that resulted in mass call-ups and eventually stints on long-term injured reserve for Jake Middleton, Jakub Lauko and Kirill Kaprizov in order to afford call-ups. That may severely alter the Wild's deadline plans if they don't have the cap space to make a significant trade. They'll have to get creative: a third-party conduit and/or a partner to eat cap space. But the Wild would love to add another top-six forward to aid the offense. — Michael Russo

### **New Jersey Devils**

#### **Biggest need: Added forward depth**

The Devils put together a strong first half, and Tom Fitzgerald is poised to add at the deadline. He's been consistent about his desire to add at forward, and potentially up the middle. "You can't have enough centers," Fitzgerald told Pierre LeBrun recently. Centers have positional flexibility, and adding a good one to the mix could have a trickle-down effect on the Devils' lineup. Other players could slide into easier-to-manage roles. — Peter Baugh

### **Ottawa Senators**

#### **Biggest need: A right-shot defenseman or scoring winger**

The Senators' needs haven't changed for most of the year. Fortunately, Ottawa has made it work with AHL reinforcements on defense and in attack, using players such as Nikolas Matinpalo and Zack Ostapchuk among others with some mainstays injured. But if the Senators look to keep pace with their fellow conference rivals, a move may need to be made to bolster either their defense or offense. — Julian McKenzie

### **Tampa Bay Lightning**

#### **Biggest need: Depth scoring**

The Lightning's top six is loaded and the defense, once J.J. Moser returns from injury, is pretty balanced. But Tampa Bay's scoring depth was a clear hole going into the season — one that management likely knew was something they needed to address at the deadline. The No. 1 priority should be finding a solid



third-line forward who can give Nick Paul some two-way support so the team isn't as reliant on its stars to carry them. The Lightning should be able to swing that at a lower cost, as long as management learned from the Tanner Jeannot deal. — Shayna Goldman

### **Toronto Maple Leafs**

#### **Biggest need: A third-line center**

The Leafs are putting together an impressive season, but the center situation beyond Auston Matthews and John Tavares has been an issue from the jump. Max Domi has really struggled this season and was recently leapfrogged on the depth chart (amid an injury to Tavares) by Pontus Holmberg, who's had a rough year himself while bouncing in and out of the lineup. GM Brad Treliving would like to add a center who can make an impact at both ends. It won't be easy. Plenty of teams need centers and the Leafs don't have an especially deep pool of tradeable assets. — Jonas Siegel

### **Vegas Golden Knights**

#### **Biggest need: A scoring middle-six winger**

With one of the best records in the league, the Golden Knights will certainly be buyers at the deadline yet again, but may not be as aggressive as we've seen at past deadlines due to a lack of trade assets. Vegas doesn't have a first-round pick for the next two years, but should still be looking to add depth scoring. Jack Eichel is having an excellent season, but some of the depth scoring from players such as Keegan Kolesar and Brett Howden has been less frequent lately. It feels like the Golden Knights are one more scoring option away from a complete lineup. — Jesse Granger

### **Washington Capitals**

#### **Biggest need: Help down the middle**

A contender looking to add a center? Shocking stuff. For the Caps, though, the cliché is also the truth. They're set with Dylan Strome and Pierre-Luc Dubois as their top two options, but behind them, things get fuzzy. Lars Eller, acquired from Pittsburgh to center the third line, has been passable — but just barely. Cap space could be an issue (about \$3.6 million projected on deadline day), but there's enough to make the situation workable. — Sean Gentile

### **Winnipeg Jets**

#### **Biggest need: A second-line center**

There was a great argument for Winnipeg to add a center when the Jets were at full health. Adam Lowry's injury intensifies that need. Vladislav Namestnikov and Rasmus Kupari are capable players but they are not ideal No. 2 and 3 centers for the stretch run. Gabriel Vilardi and Cole Perfetti have played center in the NHL but they give up footspeed and Jets coaches demand pace from their centers. They could sign Jonathan Toews, who they're legitimately interested in, but the three-time Cup champ is coming from a long way back, health-wise, and turns 37 in April. The Jets could try to ride it out with what they have but this is a uniquely good year and they have ample cap space. They're buyers. — Murat Ates

### **The teams in between**

#### **Buffalo Sabres**

#### **Biggest need: A right-handed top-four defenseman**

The Sabres won't be doing a total fire sale at the trade deadline, but they'll be in the position of a seller. A playoff push is unrealistic. They'll get calls on pending unrestricted free agents Jason Zucker, Jordan

Greenway and Henri Jokiharju. But teams will also likely check the temperature on some of Buffalo's young core pieces because of how the season has gone. I have them as in between because I would expect the Sabres to be open to a hockey trade like the one that sent Casey Mittelstadt to Colorado for Bowen Byram last season. — Matthew Fairburn

### **Calgary Flames**

#### **Biggest need: A young, right-shot center or draft capital**

What do you do if you're the Flames? They still have a chance at making the playoffs this year, which would make them way far ahead of schedule for their rebuild/retool. Even if it means risking a first-round exit and, depending on where they finish, losing out on a first-round pick thanks to that Sean Monahan trade from long ago. The Flames could buy. But depending on if they slide, there's reason for them to sell too. But their most enticing trade piece, Rasmus Andersson, doesn't appear to be for sale. Of course, regardless of position, the Flames continue to search for that elusive right-shot forward between the ages of 18 and 23. The Flames continue to intrigue. — Julian McKenzie

### **Carolina Hurricanes**

#### **Biggest need: Forward depth**

The Hurricanes added two big pieces in trading for Mikko Rantanen and Taylor Hall on Friday, but Carolina could probably use a little more depth in its bottom six. Injuries to William Carrier and Tyson Jost have thinned the Hurricanes, and including Jack Drury in the blockbuster trade takes away one of Carolina's best faceoff men and a valuable penalty killer. The team could also continue to look to improve at second-line center, though it remains hopeful that Jesperi Kotkaniemi can fill the role. — Cory Lavalette

### **Columbus Blue Jackets**

#### **Biggest need: Veteran toughness**

The future certainly appears bright in Columbus, with so many young players taking hold of big roles this season. And the expected return of Boone Jenner and Erik Gudbranson will add some muscle for the stretch drive. But if GM Don Waddell decides to straddle the line between buyer and seller, look for him to add veteran players who can help steer a young club in the throes of a playoff race. If the Blue Jackets trade veteran defenseman Ivan Provorov — he wants a long-term deal and may fetch a first-round pick — they'd like a solid defenseman to help buttress the back end. — Aaron Portzline

### **Detroit Red Wings**

#### **Biggest need: A long-term, top-six forward**

The Red Wings certainly have their share of short-term needs, both on the blue line and up front. But while they've surged under new coach Todd McLellan, any deadline deals Steve Yzerman makes still have to be more about the big picture. They may do some minor selling, depending on where they stand come March, but if they add, it'll need to be for next year and beyond — so think players on the younger side. And while another top-four defenseman would certainly be helpful, the most logical move might be a long-term, top-six forward — either at center or on the wing — to help provide scoring behind Dylan Larkin, Lucas Raymond and Alex DeBrincat going forward. — Max Bultman

### **Montreal Canadiens**

#### **Biggest need: Depth on defense**

The Canadiens are not likely to be buyers at the trade deadline no matter where they find themselves in the standings. The one thing they might buy is keeping their own rentals: Jake Evans, Joel Armia, David Savard and Christian Dvorak. But in the unlikely event the Canadiens do go out shopping, it might be to shore up their defense, especially on the right side. Mike Matheson is a left-shot playing on the right, and Savard's ice time has been steadily dropping of late. There could even be a scenario where the Canadiens trade Savard as a rental and go out and acquire a right-side replacement for him right away. — Arpon Basu

### **New York Rangers**

#### **Biggest need: Long-term improvements over short-term stopgaps**

This isn't the year for the Rangers to go for expensive rentals at the trade deadline. They aren't in position to make Cup-or-bust moves. Chris Drury needs to look out for the team's long-term future. That doesn't mean he can't add. New York has been involved in the J.T. Miller sweepstakes. He's a player with term who can help beyond this year. The Rangers could also look to get back some mid-round draft picks by trading away pending free agents Ryan Lindgren, Reilly Smith and perhaps Jimmy Vesey. — Peter Baugh

### **St. Louis Blues**

#### **Biggest need: A No. 3 center**

At the start of the season, the prevailing thought was that the Blues needed a No. 2 center. They tried Pavel Buchnevich, but he wasn't the answer, so they put Brayden Schenn back in that spot and he's been terrific. But now there's a hole at third-line center, where Oskar Sundqvist is playing. He's a heart-and-soul guy but a step slow after multiple knee injuries, making him more suitable on the wing. If the Blues still think they're a playoff team, they could help themselves by adding a third-line center in the trade market. — Jeremy Rutherford

### **Utah Hockey Club**

#### **Biggest need: Talented young roster players**

Utah would love to make the playoffs in Year 1 in Salt Lake City. But the Hockey Clubbers had only a 22 percent chance of qualifying before Sunday's matchups, and they'll be in tough as a wild-card team in Round 1 in a top-heavy Western Conference. How they play the next six weeks will affect their strategy, however. If they win a lot they likely will hold onto many of their rental players. Lose a lot and it's time to think about the future by dealing some of their seven pending UFAs and reloading for next year. This is a franchise on the rise but chasing the playoffs this year at the expense of improving for the future doesn't make a lot of sense. And some of their veterans will be highly desirable in a thin trade market. — James Mirtle

### **Vancouver Canucks**

#### **Biggest need: Resolve the J.T. Miller trade saga**

The Canucks have J.T. Miller, one of their best players, on the trade block at the moment. And based on their recent form, they're a team that's waiting for the other shoe to drop. By the deadline, and ideally before it, the Canucks will resolve this situation and chart a new path forward. While the club's recent performance might make the following comment seem like a stretch, the truth remains that this is a playoff-caliber side and may even be a playoff-caliber side if it subtracts a core piece, provided that, thereafter, the club competes more consistently. It seems like an expedited move might be best for all involved. — Thomas Drance

## **Sellers**

### **Anaheim Ducks**

#### **Biggest need: Another high-round draft pick**

This should be more of a soft sell for the Ducks rather than a full sell-off as they should be in the mode of stepping out of a lengthy rebuild. But they're also not in the position to truly buy at the deadline. Frank Vatrano was re-signed for three more seasons, but they'll figure to take calls on defenseman Brian Dumoulin. Useful winger Robby Fabbri could attract some interest. John Gibson could be an attraction for a team in a contending window needing to fortify its goaltending, depending on whether the upper-body injury he sustained on Saturday is a long-term concern. They don't have a second-round pick, so securing one or another first-rounder would be ideal. — Eric Stephens

### **Boston Bruins**

#### **Biggest need: A No. 1 center**

The Bruins thought they had signed a No. 1 center in Elias Lindholm. It looks like they were wrong. Lindholm is now centering their third line. Pavel Zacha has chemistry with David Pastrnak on the top line, but he is not a traditional first-line center in terms of offensive presence. It may be unlikely that the Bruins can acquire an offensive pivot at the deadline. — Fluto Shinzawa

### **Chicago Blackhawks**

#### **Biggest need: Create more NHL roster spots**

The Blackhawks cleared one roster spot by trading Taylor Hall on Friday. GM Kyle Davidson will likely still want to open up a spot or two more. The Blackhawks are expected to have at least three prospects — Ryan Greene, Oliver Moore and Sam Rinzler — sign after their college seasons and jump to the NHL immediately while burning the first year of their contracts. Davidson will want to ensure ice time for them with roster openings, and the easiest way to do that is to trade away expiring contracts. Ryan Donato is probably the most likely to be dealt next. — Scott Powers

### **Nashville Predators**

#### **Biggest need: More draft picks**

Preds GM Barry Trotz isn't likely to trade any foundational pieces away, because the team is playing better and it's crucial that this core group gets better together and figures a way to produce competent hockey in the early stages of next season. But Gustav Nyquist and Colton Sissons are probably not untouchable if the Preds remain well outside the playoff picture. Even if they start making serious noise, don't expect him to do any player renting. — Joe Rexrode

### **New York Islanders**

#### **Biggest need: Recoup future assets**

Until recently, the Islanders hadn't been above .500 since the second week of November, which should tell you all you need to know about their deadline plans. Since Lou Lamoriello is in charge, however, the Islanders don't appear ready to sell. When they are ready, pending UFAs Brock Nelson and Kyle Palmieri plus J-G Pageau and whoever else a team is willing to take should be out the door to replenish a barren prospect pool. — Arthur Staple

### **Philadelphia Flyers**

#### **Biggest need: A center**

That the Flyers need a center has been evident for some time. Whether they attempt to deal for one before the deadline or wait until the offseason (or later) is difficult to predict. As for the deadline overall, the Flyers don't have any pending unrestricted free agents, so it could be fairly quiet. The players they do have who have been mentioned in trade speculation — Rasmus Ristolainen and Scott Laughton — both have term left on their deals so they aren't locks to be moved, either, particularly if the team gets back into the playoff race. Still, the Flyers selling off a piece or two remains the likeliest outcome. — Kevin Kurz

### **Pittsburgh Penguins**

#### **Biggest need: Young talent/assets**

The Penguins, while still somewhat competitive, are very much in sell mode. Kyle Dubas wants draft picks, prospects and young NHL players and the majority of the Penguins are available for the right price. This is proof that you can indeed initiate a rebuild with a handful of Hall of Famers on a roster. It's happening in Pittsburgh right now. — Josh Yohe

### **San Jose Sharks**

#### **Biggest need: More draft picks**

San Jose's direction hasn't changed. The prospect pool is looking much more fruitful these days and it never hurts to continue stocking the shelves. While the Sharks have their own first-round selection and could have a good shot at winning a second straight draft lottery, the Sharks have only six picks in total and could add to this year's haul by dealing more veterans on expiring contracts. Mikael Granlund is their most attractive asset. Others who could be in play are defensemen Cody Ceci and Jan Rutta (who was placed on injured reserve Sunday), along with forwards Luke Kunin and Nico Sturm (who is also on injured reserve). — Eric Stephens

### **Seattle Kraken**

#### **Biggest need: More future value**

The Kaapo Kakko success story provides a template for a Kraken team that has to focus on mining as much future value — in both young players and picks — as possible between now and the NHL trade deadline. Since acquiring Kakko for Will Borgen and some picks, Kakko has been on a tear. To the point of changing the complexion of what we might expect from this still relatively young Kraken forward group in the future. Seattle still has a couple of valuable rental pieces to sell — Brandon Tanev and Yannick Gourde — and should do so with an eye toward recreating the success it's had with Kakko, in terms of bringing young upside into the organization ahead of the deadline. — Thomas Drance

## [Sportsnet.ca / Possible replacements for Canada's 4 Nations Face-Off team](#)

By Ally Chesham – January 28, 2025

After a year of anticipation, the NHL's 'best-on-best' international tournament, the 4 Nations Face-Off, is finally just weeks away.

Taking place Feb. 12-20 in Montreal and Boston, and serving as both a replacement for this year's All-Star Game and a preview of the 2026 Winter Olympics, the 4 Nations Face-Off will feature Canada, the U.S., Sweden and Finland.

Each federation revealed their official rosters back in December, consisting of 13 forwards, seven defencemen and three goaltenders. Unfortunately, as of this writing, it seems unlikely that any team's originally submitted 23-player roster will remain intact from top to bottom by the time the tournament begins.

American defenceman Charlie McAvoy is on injured reserve with an upper-body injury and currently has no timeline for his return. Meanwhile, Finnish forward Erik Haula, also on injured reserve with an ankle injury, has resumed skating but remains without a timetable to return.

Then there's the Swedish roster, which has been hit particularly hard by the injury bug. Forward William Karlsson (lower body), defenceman Jonas Brodin (lower body), and goaltenders Jacob Markstrom (MCL sprain) and Linus Ullmark (back) are all currently sidelined.

While Ullmark is likely to return in time — and Karlsson and Brodin have a chance as well — Markstrom will almost certainly miss the tournament, with a recovery timeline of four to six weeks announced Friday. Set to be Sweden's starting netminder, his absence is a significant blow to their championship hopes.

Everything seemed on track for Canada to have its full roster healthy and available for the tournament — until defenceman Alex Pietrangelo unexpectedly withdrew on Sunday, citing the need to "tend to an ailment and prepare for the remainder of the regular season."

Now, team management is tasked with pulling a replacement for Pietrangelo from their back pocket. Hopefully, it will be the only change needed, but with two weeks until the tournament, more injuries could ultimately arise. Injury replacements — who will likely have to cancel booked vacations to sunny destinations — can be named right up until the opening day of play.

**As a reminder, this is how Canada's roster currently looks:**

### **Forwards**

**Sam Bennett (Florida Panthers)**

**Anthony Cirelli (Tampa Bay Lightning)**

**Sidney Crosby (Pittsburgh Penguins)**

**Brandon Hagel (Tampa Bay Lightning)**

**Seth Jarvis (Carolina Hurricanes)**

**Travis Konecny (Philadelphia Flyers)**

**Nathan MacKinnon (Colorado Avalanche)**

**Brad Marchand (Boston Bruins)**

**Mitch Marner (Toronto Maple Leafs)**

**Connor McDavid (Edmonton Oilers)**

**Brayden Point (Tampa Bay Lightning)**

**Sam Reinhart (Florida Panthers)**

**Mark Stone (Vegas Golden Knights)**

**Defence**

**Cale Makar (Colorado Avalanche)**

**Josh Morrissey (Winnipeg Jets)**

**Colton Parayko (St. Louis Blues)**

**Alex Pietrangelo (Vegas Golden Knights)**

**Travis Sanheim (Philadelphia Flyers)**

**Shea Theodore (Vegas Golden Knights)**

**Devon Toews (Colorado Avalanche)**

**Goaltenders**

**Jordan Binnington (St. Louis Blues)**

**Adin Hill (Vegas Golden Knights)**

**Sam Montembeault (Montreal Canadiens)**

So, who are some players that could step into Canada's 4 Nations Face-Off team if needed? Here's a selection of forwards, defencemen and goaltenders we'd hope would be considered.

**Forwards**

**Mark Scheifele (Winnipeg Jets):** Included on everyone's list of snubs from Canada's roster, Scheifele is on pace for career-high goal and point totals this season. Averaging more than a point per game, he has 54 points (27 goals, 27 assists) in 50 games. His 54 points rank second on the Jets, behind only Kyle Connor, and the team is currently the NHL's second-best — a feat he's certainly contributed to. It'd be hard for anyone to argue he wasn't deserving of a spot in the first place, but he was likely left off the roster due to Canada's already significant depth at centre and the criticisms that exist surrounding his defensive play.

**Robert Thomas (St. Louis Blues):** Around the time Canada's management was scouting the league for the country's top roster choices, Thomas was sidelined with a fractured right ankle, missing 12 games from late October to mid-November. Coming off career highs in goals (26), assists (60), and points (86) last season, the 25-year-old has still managed a respectable 36 points (12 goals, 24 assists) in 38 games so far this season. The roster was announced on Dec. 4, and from Dec. 3 to Jan. 9, Thomas recorded 23 points — the 10th-most in the league during that stretch. However, he's been on a quieter streak recently, with just one goal and two assists in his last seven games.

**Connor Bedard (Chicago Blackhawks):** Last year's Calder Trophy winner likely would've been a roster shoo-in had he started this season resembling the player who earned Rookie of the Year honours. However, in his first 26 games, Bedard posted just 19 points (five goals, 14 assists). After being left off Canada's squad, Bedard told TNT he understood the decision, saying, "You kind of sleep in the bed you

make, and I obviously haven't been too happy with the start of the year." The 2022 first-overall pick also said he would use the snub as motivation, and it seems to be working — he's now up to 43 points (13 goals, 30 assists) in 49 games.

**Zach Hyman (Edmonton Oilers):** Between his slow start offensively and an injury that briefly sidelined him, Hyman found himself left off Canada's roster. Clearly, recency bias played a role in the decision, as the right winger has demonstrated he can compete with the league's best forwards, posting 83 and 77 points in the past two seasons and scoring 54 goals in 2023-24. Ahead of the final roster decisions, Hyman had managed just three goals and eight points in 20 games. However, he caught fire after the announcement, scoring 10 goals in the nine games immediately following. Since then, he's raised his season total to 29 points (17 goals, 12 assists) in 44 games.

**Tom Wilson (Washington Capitals):** With several smaller players on Canada's roster — Brayden Point, Anthony Cirelli, Mitch Marner, Seth Jarvis, and Brad Marchand — it wouldn't hurt to add a big body like Wilson, who knows how to make his presence felt. Standing six-foot-four and weighing 220 pounds, Wilson brings more than just size; he adds skill, too. The 30-year-old has 35 points (20 goals, 15 assists) this season and plays a key role on the league-leading Capitals' penalty kill, which ranks second in the NHL at 84.8 per cent. While Canada already has Sam Bennett, who plays a similar physical style, Wilson could step in if Bennett were unavailable or if additional grit and physicality were wanted.

**Nick Suzuki (Montreal Canadiens):** When Canada's roster was announced, Suzuki was scoring at a point-per-game pace, with 26 points in 25 games. After being left off the team, the Canadiens captain said he would use the snub "as fuel" moving forward. Fast forward to today, and Suzuki has maintained his impressive pace, now sitting at 50 points in 49 games. Known for his strong 200-foot game and two-way ability, he regularly matches up against the league's top players and contributes on both special teams. "That kid knows exactly how good he is, and anybody who watches him knows how good he is, too. ... He's taken that snub personally," Sportsnet's Eric Engels recently said on the Spittin' Chiclets podcast.

## Defence

**Drew Doughty (Los Angeles Kings):** For this replacement to happen, Doughty first needs to get healthy himself. Fortunately, it seems he's close, as he's been practicing in a full-contact capacity and is travelling with the Kings on their current road trip. The 35-year-old has missed the entire 2024-25 season so far due to a fractured ankle suffered in the pre-season. Had he been healthy, there's no doubt he would've been included on Canada's roster. Back in November, Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman reported in a 32 Thoughts blog that Team Canada had been closely monitoring Doughty's recovery timeline and asking for information since the moment he was hurt.

**MacKenzie Weegar (Calgary Flames):** According to Daily Faceoff's Frank Seravalli, Weegar was among the "very last players cut" from the Canadian roster. "You're a bit bummed not to make the team, but at the same time, you're honoured to still be in the mix. There's a bunch of defencemen who could be on that team. It's a pretty stacked lineup, and I'm proud to say I was in the mix for that," Weegar said back on Dec. 5. Asked if Canada could keep his number should they need another D-man, Weegar replied, "Of course, they can keep my number. I'll be staring at my phone if there's an injury or whatnot, so of course, I'd love to still play for the team. That's a no-brainer."

**Evan Bouchard (Edmonton Oilers):** After an 82-point regular season, the fourth-most by a defenceman in the league in 2023-24, Bouchard recorded the second-most points in the playoffs among all skaters (32), trailing only teammate Connor McDavid (42). He's having another decent year, though his scoring is slightly down, with 37 points (eight goals, 29 assists) in 49 games — the fourth-most by a Canadian defenceman. Still among the best offensive defencemen in the league, with his high-end passing and playmaking, Bouchard has the ability to quarterback a top power play. However, Cale Makar is currently



filling that role on Canada's roster. It's understandable, then, why management opted for other defence-first blueliners over Bouchard, who undeniably has his moments as a defensive liability.

**Chris Tanev (Toronto Maple Leafs):** This one might seem a bit random, as his name hasn't been widely mentioned in relation to this tournament, but if Canada wants to add a shut-down, stay-at-home defender to their squad, Tanev should be the guy. Often overlooked or underrated because of his steady, no-nonsense style, the 35-year-old is reliable, dependable, and is having a strong first year in Toronto. Goaltending is undoubtedly the weakest part of Canada's roster, and having Tanev, who has blocked 132 shots this season (third-most in the league), would provide extra insurance in front of the net. Just ask Jake Oettinger, Tanev's former teammate, who described him as "a goalie's dream."

### **Goaltenders**

**Logan Thompson (Washington Capitals):** During an appearance on The FAN Hockey Show on Wednesday, Thompson revealed that Team Canada brass never contacted him during their selection process. "If there was to be an injury, I know I probably won't get that call, and that's OK," the 27-year-old added. Well, they would be remiss not to consider him. Thompson has the third-most wins this season (22), trailing only Connor Hellebuyck (30) and Oettinger (24). And, among goaltenders with at least eight games played, he boasts the second-best goals-against average (2.09) and third-best save percentage (.925) in the league. Recently, Thompson recorded back-to-back shutouts on Jan. 14 and 16 and posted a career-long shutout streak of 198:22 from Jan. 11 to Jan. 18, the third longest in franchise history.

**Marc-Andre Fleury (Minnesota Wild):** Since this is the future Hall of Famer's final NHL season, it would be a fitting sendoff to see Fleury included one last time in an exhibition event like this. The most seasoned netminder in the league with 1,042 career games, the 40-year-old has posted a 2.76 goals-against average and .904 save percentage across 17 appearances this season. While he's no longer at the peak of his game, realistically, any goalie stepping in as a replacement likely wouldn't see any playing time. But with three Stanley Cups, a Vezina Trophy and over two decades of experience, would anyone really feel uneasy if Fleury stepped into the crease?