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[IIHF.com / Jet takes Canada to semis](#)

By Andrew Podniek – May 28, 2026

Canada scored in each period and held on to defeat the United States 4-0 to advance to the semi-finals. Goalie Jet Greaves was nothing short of sensational, and Devin Cooley not far behind in the American goal, but Greaves was two shots (and two empty netters) better.

Greaves stopped all 34 shots for his first career shutout with Team Canada.

"I didn't realize the calmness and the poise, and his ability to read the play," John Tavares said of Greaves. "He makes the saves, but it's not always conventional, but that's because we had two or three breakdowns. But he was calm and tonight came up with the big save when we needed it. He was the best player on the ice tonight, for sure."

Last year's gold medalists now go home, while Canada will play a semi-finals game on Saturday against an opponent to be determined later tonight once all quarter-finals games are done and the teams re-seeded.

"I liked our start tonight more than what we've been doing through the course of the tournament," Tavares offered. "It was a much more consistent 60 minutes. We had some chances, especially in the second period, and could have made it 3-0 or 4-0, but their goalie played well. They had a good push for a bit in the third period, but Jet was great."

The Canadians came out flying, getting the puck deep and creating excellent puck movement, but they couldn't beat Cooley, who was rock solid in goal for the Americans. At one point, shots favoured Canada, 7-0, which was an accurate reflection of play to that time.

Canada got the first big break of the game, but it came at a steep price. Evan Bouchard brought the puck in over the line but was hit hard in the head by Ryan Lindgren. Lindgren got a major and game misconduct, but Bouchard was clearly woozy and did not return.

The Americans, however, weathered the storm beautifully, giving up only two good chances. Both were great shots from in close, first by Ryan O'Reilly and then by Tavares, but Cooley was again right there.

The U.S. then got their first power play, and their best chance came off the stick of Oliver Moore, who moved in close and pegged a shot to the top corner. Reaves, however, matched Cooley with a great glove grab of his own.

Canada finally got a goal late in the period on another power play. It looked like the advantage was going all for naught, but then Macklin Celebrini got the puck at the blue line and moved in uncontested. He snapped a perfect shot past the glove of Cooley at 18:31 for a 1-0 Canada lead.

"It was tough to see "Booch" in that spot," Tavares said of the head hit on Bouchard. "We didn't like the hit, but we created some looks on the power play, even if we didn't take the lead. But we got another power play and got the lead with that."

Canada started the second as they had the first, controlling the play, maintaining possession, and spending long stretches in the U.S. zone. But, they couldn't get that second goal, and the Americans knew, even if they were overwhelmed, they were still just one shot away from tying the game.

That changed midway through when Dylan Holloway skated up ice on an odd-man rush. His first shot was blocked by Ryan Ufko in front, but Holloway put the rebound away at 9:48 to make it 2-0.

The Americans had their chances in the second half of the period, and Greaves was sensational. He kicked out the left pad to rob Isaac Howard, and later robbed Ryan Leonard with that same leg. Canada had the puck a lot more, but the U.S. had their fair share of excellent chances.

In the third, Canada had a tentative start and the Americans had their best flurry, but Greaves would not be beat. Midway through, Canada started skating a bit more and getting the puck deep, and when Cooley came to the bench with three minutes remaining, Canada added two more goals.

Connor Brown had an empty netter at 18:01, and Crosby added another at 18:41, his first goal of the tournament.

The Athletic / The Blue Jackets to promote Trent Vogelhuber to Rick Bowness' coaching staff — how might he make an impact?

By Aaron Portzline – May 27, 2026

Trent Vogelhuber came oh-so-close, but never played in the NHL during his seven-year pro career, mostly because of chronic knee injuries, which forced him to retire at only 29 years old.

But Vogelhuber, now 37, has reached the big leagues quickly in his second act.

The Columbus Blue Jackets will announce in the coming days that Vogelhuber, who grew up in the Columbus suburbs, was drafted by the Blue Jackets and has been head coach of their AHL affiliate in Cleveland for the past four seasons, has been hired to join Rick Bowness' staff as an assistant coach, a team source told *The Athletic*.

Vogelhuber went 145-108-35 behind the Monsters' bench, including a 37-26-9 record this season, which ended on Sunday when Cleveland lost to Toronto in the deciding Game 5 of their second-round playoff series. The Monsters made the playoffs in three of his four seasons.

The Blue Jackets created at least two openings on Bowness' staff just after the 2025-26 season ended when they fired assistant coaches Scott Ford and Mike Haviland.

They're expected to hire a veteran assistant coach in addition to Vogelhuber, but may also consider a third coach if the fit is right. Bowness has mentioned wanting to add a skills coach to the staff.

The expectation is that Vogelhuber, who agreed to a multi-year deal, will work extensively with the Blue Jackets' penalty kill, which was his forte as an AHL player. The Jackets finished 28th (76 percent) in the NHL on the kill this past season.

Bowness plans to coach the defense extensively, meaning the next assistant they hire will likely have an NHL history of coaching NHL forwards and power-play systems.

It's unclear how much longer Bowness plans to continue coaching, although he signed a one-year extension with the Blue Jackets one day after the season ended. He and general manager Don Waddell have said they'll meet after the 2026-27 season to determine if Bowness, 71, wants to continue into the future.

For Vogelhuber, it's yet another "first" on his list of Columbus hockey achievements.

He was one of the first players in the city to play at an elite youth level, leaving Dublin, Ohio, to play junior hockey in St. Louis and later in the USHL with Des Moines.

At the 2007 NHL Draft, held in Columbus' Nationwide Arena, the Blue Jackets spent the final pick in the draft — No. 211 overall in the seventh round — on Vogelhuber, making him the first central Ohio player to be drafted and the first to be drafted by the hometown club.

After four seasons at Miami U., Vogelhuber turned pro with the Blue Jackets' AHL affiliate, first in Springfield, Ill., and later in Cleveland. He won a Calder Trophy championship with the Monsters in 2016.

Vogelhuber finished his playing career with two seasons in the Colorado Avalanche organization before he retired in 2018.

Months later, he returned to the Blue Jackets organization as an assistant coach in Cleveland, where he spent four seasons before ascending to head coach in 2022-23.

The current Blue Jackets players who have played in Cleveland under Vogelhuber include Kirill Marchenko, Cole Sillinger, Denton Mateychuk, Kent Johnson, Jet Greaves, and others. The attribute that most players rave about is his communication.

The Hockey Writers / 3 Great Free Agent Fits for the Blue Jackets

By Wesley M. – May 28, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets are entering the 2026-27 season with the fifth-highest salary cap space in the NHL, and with general manager Don Waddell making moves that signify they are in “win-now mode,” this offseason could be crucial for his team as they attempt to make the playoffs for the first time in six seasons.

The recent signing of Charlie Coyle gave the Blue Jackets a big monkey off their back in terms of taking the top player in free agency off the market. However, with obvious holes on the roster, the focus now shifts to Waddell and his ability to put together a team that can make a push in the 2026-27 season.

If the Blue Jackets indeed move on from Boone Jenner or Mason Marchment, that will leave a big hole at the center position and on the wing, and they will need to potentially call on some young guys to step up. Who might play in the middle-six forward group could get sloppy, and who plays fourth line minutes could be a camp battle in Columbus.

Here are three free agents who could be big impact signings for the Blue Jackets and could make the difference to get them over the six-year playoff hump they are trying to cross back over again.

Bobby McMann – Winger

Bobby McMann was a deadline trade from the Toronto Maple Leafs to the Seattle Kraken, where McMann really started to light up the score sheet to the tune of 10 goals in 18 games to end the season. His 29 goals would have finished tops for the Blue Jackets, and he has clearly shown he can bring juice to a stagnant offense.

However, the bigger question becomes where he might fit. With his size, 6-foot-2, 209 pounds, and his blazing speed, he could make sense to move onto one of the wings, allowing him to play with more playmakers in space. However, scoring centers like McMann are hard to come by. The Blue Jackets just don't have much room for a center along the top three lines with those spots currently occupied by Adam Fantilli, Sean Monahan, and the aforementioned Coyle.

I think, with the skill set that is so present for McMann, he can fit into that Marchment role if the Blue Jackets were to let him walk this offseason. He can play in the dirty areas, he can find his shot and help space out an offensive zone, and he can play a more power forward role with Fantilli on his line, potentially.

The contract also doesn't need to break the bank. McMann will be 31 years old by the start of free agency, and so he likely won't be signing for an abnormal amount of money or term. Fans could expect a contract similar to Coyle's with less term and money, most likely in the three to four year range, and \$4-5 million per year.

That type of contract rewards McMann for a nice season, without completely destroying the ability to add another piece to elevate the team amongst the powers of the Eastern Conference elite.

Oliver Bjorkstrand – Right Wing

If the Blue Jackets wanted to go with a hometown pick, a fan favorite from his time before in Columbus could make a reunion for Oliver Bjorkstrand an interesting addition. “The Maestro” had great success with the Blue Jackets prior to leaving and joining the Kraken, before being traded to the Tampa Bay Lightning in the 2024-25 season.

Bjorkstrand found success in Columbus on the score sheet that he struggled to find anywhere else since his departure. His top season with the Blue Jackets was also his final one with them, in 2021-22 where he netted 28 goals, a mark he has failed to reach since leaving and playing elsewhere. A fan base that still adores the player could lead to a potential return for a guy still looking to compete for a Stanley Cup.

Bjorkstrand could come on a discounted rate, coming off his worst statistical season since he became a full-time NHLer in 2017, scoring only 12 goals this season. He is a sniper with a lethal wrist shot, and the Blue Jackets have the premier playmakers to put around him to help him find that shot again.

Ideally, he would play on the second or third line with Kent Johnson or Coyle setting him up with opportunities in space, or in the slot. Bjorkstrand can be a calming presence in the locker room as well, with so many young guys there. Someone who leads by example quietly is something this team doesn't have a ton of.

Bjorkstrand's deal wouldn't need to be a long-term commitment or a high average annual value (AAV), but something along the lines of two years for \$3.5 million AAV could entice both sides to reunite.

Viktor Arvidsson – Right Wing

If the Blue Jackets are not worried about the price tag and just want someone who can play on the power play and score a ton of goals, the answer may be Viktor Arvidsson. Arvidsson's price tag may be a bit higher than the rest, but for a guy with consistent production, it may be worth it for Columbus.

Arvidsson has six 20-plus goal seasons under his belt, with his best season coming in 2018-19 where he had 34 goals in just 58 games for the Nashville Predators. However, he has played for four teams in six years, and he may be looking for some term or some sort of guarantee to wind down his career, as he will be entering the season at 33 years old.

However, if the Blue Jackets can bite the bullet on the price and term for Arvidsson, he may present them with the best chance to “win-now”. He is a guy with playoff experience, and plays in multiple facets of the game, and gives them a more definitive top line answer on the wing opposite of Kirill Marchenko.

The price could look something like three years for \$6 million AAV. It is a price that the Blue Jackets could be willing to pay, considering he can help in more areas than just scoring. He adds another layer to the power play and gives them another threat as a right-shot winger. He is a mix-and-match piece that might attract a big number with how much quieter this free agency looks to be.

Whether the Blue Jackets take a swing at one of these guys or just re-sign their own, they will have a lot to figure out this year in free agency, and there will be a lot of movement. However, if they look to add to their room from the outside, these three guys would be great fits.

[Bluejackets.com / Prospect Report: Recapping the 2025-26 season](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – May 27, 2026

With the Cleveland Monsters' loss in the round of eight of the AHL playoffs, the 2025-26 season is officially over for the prospects in the Blue Jackets' organization.

CBJ draft picks and others signed performed near and far, with many skating for the team's AHL affiliate just up Interstate 71 and others playing across the world in locations like Russia, Finland and Sweden.

The Blue Jackets have graduated a number of their top prospects to the NHL in the past few seasons and traded a few others, but there are still future NHLers that are part of the pipeline and on the way to Columbus.

Here are some standout performances and other notes from the pipeline as we look back at the 2025-26 season.

Three Stars of the Season

F Luca Del Bel Belluz: CBJ fans are certainly familiar with Del Bel Belluz, who has logged 30 NHL games the past three seasons, totaling three goals and 10 points. For the second straight season, Del Bel Belluz was one of the top producers in the AHL, earning All-Star honors with a 22-36-58 line in 55 games. The 2022 second-round pick led the Monsters in scoring on the campaign and was in the top 10 in the AHL before a late-season call-up to Columbus allowed him to get passed in the final weeks. Del Bel Belluz added seven points in nine playoff games, and he's totaled 49 goals and 111 points in 116 games over the past two campaigns in Cleveland. Now 22, Del Bel Belluz has improved his strength and skating in his time with the Monsters and figures to get a look in Columbus this fall.

D Jackson Smith: The 2025 first-round pick continued to build excitement around his potential, as he used his size, athleticism, skating and offensive abilities to make a big impact in his freshman season at Penn State. Chosen 14th overall in the 2025 draft – the same pick the Blue Jackets own in 2026 – Smith arrived in Happy Valley after an excellent season with Tri-City of the WHL and made an impact with the Nittany Lions. The 6-4, left-shot defenseman logged top-pair minutes at Penn State and finished with fourth among NCAA defensemen in goals (11) and tied for first among freshman blueliners in points (26) this season. The only disappointment is he was one of the last cuts from Canada's World Juniors roster, but it's not hard to imagine he'll be part of that this upcoming winter as he heads back to Penn State for a second season. He'll continue to clean up his reads and his game like any young defenseman, but Smith has the tools to be a noticeable player at the NHL level.

G Sergei Ivanov: We could have gone a couple different directions with the third star, but why not pick a player from each position for this exercise? The 2022 fifth-round pick doesn't boast prototypical size for an NHL goalie these days – he's listed at 6-0 – but Ivanov has drawn comparisons to Jet Greaves for his ability to use reads, quickness and reflexes to play bigger than his size. He's appeared in KHL games each of the past four seasons, totaling a 2.65 GAA and .923 save percentage in 108 games, including a 2.50 GAA and .928 SV% this season in 29 games with SKA St. Petersburg. Goals are harder to come by in the KHL, but Ivanov has shown he can stop pucks in his native country while playing with three different

squads. Now 22, Ivanov is out of contract in the KHL and it remains to be seen where he'll suit up a season from now.

Monsters Make a Run

Playoff hockey returned to Cleveland for the third straight season, and the team's AHL affiliate also captured a postseason series for the third year in a row.

The Monsters finished third in the AHL North and then downed second-place Syracuse in their opening series, but in Game 5 of the division final Sunday, Toronto rallied with a pair of goals in the last five minutes to win the deciding game and move on.

It was a bitter end, but the Monsters again showed a young, prospect-laden team what high-stakes playoff hockey was like, doing so in front of the usual raucous crowds at Rocket Arena. After averaging 11,530 fans per game during the regular season, third all-time in AHL history, the Monsters welcomed more than 10,000 fans for all five home playoff games.

Despite turnover in the leadership ranks from a season ago, head coach Trent Vogelhuber again built a squad that bonded into a formidable unit throughout the year and continues to show why many believe he's a rising star in the coaching ranks.

Some notes from Cleveland's campaign:

- Mikael Pyyhtiä earned praise for his defensive play during the 2024-25 season when he spent 47 games with the Blue Jackets, but he had spurts of being a high scorer in his native Finland and upped his offense this season with the Monsters. The 24-year-old wing blew by his previous AHL career highs in all the major offensive categories, posting a 21-28-49 line in 59 games with 16 multipoint outings, and added three playoff goals as well. He's another player who might get a long look from the Jackets in training camp.
- Maybe the biggest positive for the Blue Jackets to come from the Monsters' playoff run was the defensive performance of the team, as Cleveland goalies posted a 2.41 goals-against average in the nine-game postseason schedule. What makes that notable is that four drafted defensive prospects – Guillaume Richard, Corson Ceulemans, Luca Marrelli and Stanislav Svozil – played big minutes during the postseason. Ceulemans had his best season yet in Cleveland, as the 2021 first-round pick made major strides defensively, while Richard's first pro campaign was impressive as he finished the regular season at plus-20.
- An underrated performer through the season was Jack Williams, a rookie center from Northeastern who was signed by the Blue Jackets last spring. The 24-year-old finished the campaign by playing in all 72 games, posting 15 goals and 38 points as well as four overtime tallies among his six game winners. The four OT goals led the AHL, and Williams seemed to show up when the Monsters needed him most. Vogelhuber raved about his professionalism and consistency late in the campaign, and Williams bears watching as a versatile player who can make an impact at the NHL level.
- The Blue Jackets have seemingly focused on size in the past few drafts, but two smaller players – wings Luca Pinelli and Jordan Dumais – remain intriguing options. A 2023 fourth-round pick, Pinelli had an excellent first season at the AHL level, placing seventh among league rookies with

46 points, including 14 goals. Pinelli made his NHL debut with three games, and his hockey IQ, competitiveness and scoring ability make him a player to watch. Dumais produced at historic levels a few years ago in the QMJHL, and the 2022 third-round pick had a 7-11-18 line while playing in 46 games. Health has been an issue the past few years, but he's still just 22, and Dumais remains someone analysts believe can produce at the pro level as he gains experience.

Around the NCAA

Thanks in part to the rule change that allowed players with CHL experience to jump into college hockey for the first time, 10 players drafted by the Blue Jackets skated in the NCAA this year. We already mentioned the exploits of Smith, but here are a few more notes from around the college ranks.

- We certainly could have included William Whitelaw among the three stars earlier, as the 2023 third-round pick was among the top goal scorers in college hockey throughout the season. After stints at Wisconsin and Michigan, the junior found a home at Western Michigan this past season, posting a 19-15-34 line for the defending national champions in 39 games. His goal total tied for 18th in NCAA hockey, and Whitelaw posted four two-goal games. An 5-9 wing from Minnesota, Whitelaw has scoring ability and plays with a chip on his shoulder.
- Defenseman Tanner Henricks suffered an unfortunate injury at midseason – he missed three months thanks to a hit from his brother, Ty, who plays with Whitelaw at WMU – but he still impressed in 14 games at St. Cloud State. The 6-4 right-shot defenseman, who was taken in the fourth round of the 2025 draft, had three goals and six points and showed good offensive ability for his size as a freshman. He was in the mix for Team USA's World Juniors squad and could be a solid mid-round find by the Blue Jackets.
- Cayden Lindstrom was the fourth overall pick in the 2024 draft and got back to consistent action this year with Michigan State, posting a 3-7-10 line in 31 games with the Spartans as a freshman while tying for second in college hockey with 94 penalty minutes. He certainly wasn't afraid to mix it up, perhaps a good sign for a player who missed most of a year and a half with injury. The good news was Lindstrom got games under his belt, and MSU coach Adam Nightengale compared him to Spartans forward Charlie Stramel, a 2023 first-round pick of the Wild who recovered from injury to become a standout. Stramel had just 20 points his first two seasons of college hockey at Wisconsin, then posted 19 goals and 44 points for the Spartans this year as a senior. It just goes to show that sometimes it takes time to knock the rust off after missing so much development time, and the hope is Lindstrom follows a similar track at MSU.
- It wouldn't be a story about college hockey if the transfer portal wasn't mentioned, and six of those 10 players entered the portal after the season. Four of the transfers have been confirmed by their new teams, with Henricks heading to Minnesota along with former Michigan State goalie Melvin Strahl (2023 fifth-round pick), defenseman Andrew Strathmann (2024 fourth-round pick) transferring from North Dakota to Quinnipiac, and forward James Fisher (2022 seventh-round pick) going from Northeastern to St. Lawrence. Defenseman Malte Vass (2025 third-round pick) is reportedly heading from Boston University to New Hampshire, while forward Jérémy Loranger (2025 seventh-round pick) is reportedly going from Omaha to UConn.

Strength Between the Pipes

The emergence of Greaves in the CBJ net is certainly a good sign for the organization's future, and the Blue Jackets' pipeline between the pipes behind him appears to be strong as well.

We already mentioned Ivanov, but a couple of recent draft picks in 2025 first-rounder Pyotr Andreyanov and 2024 second-round pick Evan Gardner posted solid seasons as well. In his postseason rankings of the top 20 drafted goalie prospects, The Athletic's Scott Wheeler ranked Andreyanov fifth and Ivanov 17th.

The Blue Jackets surprised some by taking Andreyanov with the 20th overall pick in last summer's draft, but the team believed his athleticism and ability to think the game despite being listed at 6-1.

Andreyanov was also coming off a season in which he posted a .942 SV% in Russian junior hockey, and he made his debut with CSKA Moskva's minor-league squad this year, playing in 13 games with a 2.13 GAA and .918 SV%. He also had 26 games at the junior level, posting a .919 SV%.

Gardner, meanwhile, made his AHL playoff debut for Cleveland with more than 46 minutes of shutout action after completing a decorated junior career with Saskatoon (WHL). Gardner was 25-16-4-2 this year with a 2.96 GAA and .902 save percentage with the Blades, then backstopped the team to a first-round playoff series win. He's expected to be with Cleveland next season.

Prospect Notes

- Oiva Keskinen appears to be following in the Pyyhtiä track – a couple of standout years in the Finnish Liiga before heading overseas to begin his pro career. The two Finns were productive players in their homeland – Pyyhtiä had a 21-goal season with TPS, while Keskinen had 42 goals and 99 points in three years – with Keskinen winning his second Liiga title with Tappara this season. The 2023 seventh-round pick posted 20-17-37 in 49 games then had a key overtime goal in Tappara's finals win vs. Kookoo, and he appears headed to join the Blue Jackets organization for the upcoming season after signing with the team last May.
- Two players to keep an eye on are college free agents Josh Eernisse and Boston Buckburger, who each signed with the team after completing their seasons. Eernisse spent the end of the year with Cleveland, skating in one game, after posting 11 goals and 19 points in 38 games with Michigan this past year. A big (6-2) forward, he plays a pro-style game. A defenseman, Buckburger won the national title with Denver, posting 10 goals and 29 points in 43 games to place in the top 10 among NCAA defensemen in both categories, and he was plus-94 over three seasons with the Pioneers.
- Charlie Elick reported to Cleveland at the conclusion of his juniors campaign with Tri-City (WHL) and played two games, posting an assist. The big, athletic, physical defenseman was a second-round pick in 2024 and posted 16 goals and 75 points in 259 career games in the WHL, and he figures to begin next season with Cleveland.
- Forward Owen Griffin also reported to the Monsters at the end of the season but did not play, though the 2025 fifth-round pick posted a solid season with Oshawa of the OHL. One year after leading the league in playoff goals with 16, the 5-10 center set career highs with the Generals, notching 25 goals and 67 points in 66 games.

ESPN / NHL free agency rankings: Tiers of players available on July 1

By Greg Wyshynski – May 29, 2026

For those players who will hit the free agent market this summer, it'll be a frenzy. Look at Charlie Coyle. The center re-signed with the Columbus Blue Jackets for six seasons. Before he did, GM Don Waddell said there were upward of 12 teams seeking to trade for his negotiating rights. Twelve teams, for a 34-year-old center that had 58 points last season.

As shallow as the pool is, there are still some impactful players expected to be available -- as well as a collection of players who will land significant offers, but maybe shouldn't.

Here's a look at the 2026 NHL free agent market. The contract terms and average annual contract values are courtesy of PuckPedia. In the case of players whose salaries were retained in transactions, we're listing the full AAV of their contracts. Note that ages are current as of May 29.

Which players are you hoping your team signs this offseason?

Tier 1: The Alex Ovechkin tier

Alex Ovechkin, LW, Washington Capitals

Age: 40 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$9.5 million

The NHL's all-time leading goal scorer, potentially headed to unrestricted free agency? This would obviously be the biggest offseason news in hockey were it not for the fact that Ovechkin turns 41 in September, that he said he would "probably not" play for another NHL team if he didn't return to Washington, and because retirement remains on the table for the Capitals captain.

Listening to Ovechkin's postseason news conference, he didn't sound like a guy ready to hang up his skates. He said he's "pretty sure" the Capitals' season finale wasn't his last game. He talked about how his children want him to keep playing and don't want to leave Washington.

Ovechkin showed he has got something left in the tank, leading Washington in goals (32) and points (64) last season -- and that's with a career-low five power-play goals. The two most important factors in his decision are how his body feels and whether the Capitals continue to improve their roster for playoff contention, after missing the cut this season.

Ovechkin understandably didn't want a lot of fanfare in what might have been his last season after his pursuit of Wayne Gretzky's goal record overshadowed his teammates in 2024-25. But to not have a farewell tour -- or a proper farewell for Capitals fans -- just doesn't seem right for Ovechkin. Signing a one-year deal with Washington would satisfy that -- although Ovechkin joked that he'd immediately sign a two-year extension if offered.

Tier 2: The RRFAs (realistic restricted free agents)

With the UFA market so thin, there's a sense around the NHL that teams are going to have to get creative to improve their teams. Which means it's once again time to revisit the most loudly hyped

mechanism to quickly upgrade a roster that rarely, if ever, gets utilized: The restricted free agent offer sheet.

There have been four in the last decade: The Montreal Canadiens signing Sebastian Aho in 2019, with the Carolina Hurricanes matching and then successfully offer-sheeting Jesperi Kotkaniemi in 2021; and the St. Louis Blues successfully leveraging Edmonton's cap crunch to sign defenseman Phillip Broberg and forward Dylan Holloway in 2024.

Which restricted free agents are realistic targets this summer? According to PuckPedia founder Hart Levine, these players might be acquirable:

Pavel Dorofeyev, F, Vegas Golden Knights

Age: 25 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$1.835 million

Mavrik Bourque, C, Dallas Stars

Age: 24 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$950,000

Arseny Gritsyuk, RW, New Jersey Devils

Age: 25 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$925,000

Mackie Samoskevich, RW, Florida Panthers

Age: 23 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$775,000

Simon Nemec, D, New Jersey Devils

Age: 22 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$918,333

Paul Cotter, F, New Jersey Devils

Age: 26 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$775,000

Levine also believes these players could be "long shot" offer sheet candidates if they can't find the contract they're looking for from their current teams:

Brandt Clarke, D, Los Angeles Kings

Age: 23 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$863,334

Cole Perfetti, C, Winnipeg Jets

Age: 24 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$3.25 million

Bobby Brink, RW, Minnesota Wild

Age: 24 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$1.5 million

Pavel Mintyukov, D, Anaheim Ducks

Age: 22 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$918,333

PuckPedia has all the details on compensation for successful offer sheets, including four first-round picks for any player signed to an AAV north of \$11,939,167. Just something to keep in mind as players like Leo Carlsson and Connor Bedard reach RFA status ...

Tier 3: The impact players

These are established players who can play key, immediate roles for a team.

Rasmus Andersson, D, Vegas Golden Knights

Age: 29 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$4.55 million

The worst-kept secret of trade season was that the Knights wanted Andersson and that Vegas was the only place where he was looking to sign an extension. He's the third-leading player in average ice time in the regular season and the playoffs, having slotted in nicely next to Noah Hanifin after Vegas traded Zach Whitecloud to Calgary to acquire Andersson.

In theory, there should be an extension here. In reality, the Golden Knights are facing their annual cap crunch, with \$4.625 million in open space with players like Pavel Dorofeyev needing a new deal. Looming over all of this: Defenseman Alex Pietrangelo still has one more year at \$8.8 million AAV on his contract. He missed the entire 2025-26 season while attempting to rehab a chronic hip injury but hasn't ruled out a return to the NHL.

Should Andersson hit the market, he will be coveted by teams looking to solidify their blue line. That could include the Boston Bruins, who were hoping to trade for him last season.

John Carlson, D, Anaheim Ducks

Age: 36 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$8 million

The Washington Capitals didn't trade Carlson to the Ducks because he was cooked. They traded him because they weren't willing to give him a contract that would cover the years in which the 36-year-old defenseman will likely be cooked.

In the short term, Carlson has plenty left to offer offensively. He had 60 points in 71 games between Washington and Anaheim, including 14 points in 16 games for the Ducks. He had six points in 12 playoff games for the Ducks in the playoffs, all of them assists. He averaged over 24 minutes per game with Anaheim, seeing time with Jackson LaCombe and Pavel Mintyukov.

Carlson's calling card has never been his defense, although he's not a disaster in his own end. He can still quarterback a power play and make things happen with his passing and vision at 5-on-5. Ideally, he's a second pairing defenseman on a good team, and someone will pay him handsomely to fill that role if the Ducks do not.

Mason Marchment, LW, Columbus Blue Jackets

Age: 31 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$4.5 million

It's been a bizarre little run for Marchment over the past year. Dallas traded him to Seattle last June for a third- and a fourth-round pick, out of cap considerations. The fit wasn't right with the Kraken, as he

had just four goals in 29 games, so they flipped him to Columbus for a second- and a fourth-round pick, where the fit was very much right: 15 goals in 39 games, for 32 points overall.

The 6-foot-5 winger plays with an edge and is good for at least 20 goals per season. Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell has indicated he'd like to bring Marchment back. They have significant cap space (over \$32 million) but a chunk of that will be dog-eared for restricted free agents like Adam Fantilli and Jet Greaves.

Alex Tuch, RW, Buffalo Sabres

Age: 30 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$4.75 million

Did failing to tally a point against the Montreal Canadiens in the Sabres' second-round elimination impact Tuch's free agent earning potential? "I guarantee you it doesn't change a single thing as far as how he's viewed across the market," his agent, Scott Bartlett, told ESPN.

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That's because Tuch is the biggest fish in a shallow free agent pool. He has scored 30-plus goals in three of the past four seasons, including 33 goals and 33 assists in 79 games to help Buffalo snap its playoff drought this season. He plays a physical game and scores from the high-danger areas of the attacking zone.

Tuch now has 79 games of playoff experience with Vegas and Buffalo. Though his second round was an absolute dud, he had four goals and three assists in Buffalo's elimination of the Bruins in the first round, including two game winners.

The Sabres and Tuch's camp haven't gotten close on money yet for the pending unrestricted free agent. Buffalo GM Jarmo Kekalainen has expressed a desire to sign him, but after the season, Tuch sounded like a guy excited to see what other opportunities are out there in free agency.

"There's endless amounts of possibilities and options for a guy going into free agency. You don't really know anything until everything's laid out in front of you," Tuch said, adding that he does love playing in Buffalo.

Tier 4: The best bets

These players have shown they're worth the investment.

Viktor Arvidsson, F, Boston Bruins

Age: 33 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$4 million

The veteran winger had a nice bounce-back season for the Bruins with 25 goals and 29 assists in 60 games, skating to a plus-20. He played the majority of the time with center Pavel Zacha, who not coincidentally had his first 30-goal season. Arvidsson is a solid supporting cast player ... when he's playing. We almost had him in the "boom-or-busts" tier because he hasn't played more than 70 games since 2018.

Claude Giroux, RW, Ottawa Senators

Age: 38 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$2 million

The veteran forward has reportedly decided to come back for a 20th NHL season. Whether or not that's in his native Ottawa is the question. Giroux saw his ice time dip to 16:18 on average but his production didn't suffer. He ended up with around the same numbers he had in 2024-25 with 49 points in 82 games. He's a former captain with 105 games of playoff experience. If nothing else, the man can win a faceoff (63.1% last season).

Bobby McMann, F, Seattle Kraken

Age: 29 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$1.5 million

Part of McMann's charm was his cap hit, and that's certainly going to increase. AFP Analytics projects him to sign a \$5.3 million AAV on a four-year deal, and that sounds about right given the market. The investment might be worth it for McMann, a late bloomer who had 10 goals in 18 games after the Kraken acquired him from Toronto. There are some other contract-year offensive explosions of which we're aware. McMann's 29 goals last season isn't one of them, given his speed and how he can get to the net.

Ilya Mikheyev, LW, Chicago Blackhawks

Age: 31 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$4.75 million

According to The Athletic, the Blackhawks offered Mikheyev a contract near the trade deadline in the two- to three-year range with a cap hit similar to the one he has now, but the winger rejected it. He wins puck battles. He's a solid two-way player with offensive upside. Though the Blackhawks would probably like to keep him around as top prospect Roman Kantserov arrives from Russia, there might be another tempting offer out there for Mikheyev.

Connor Murphy, D, Edmonton Oilers

Age: 33 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$4.4 million

Murphy did the seemingly impossible in Edmonton, which was getting people to stop criticizing Darnell Nurse -- or at least not doing it so stridently. Murphy and Nurse had a 78% goals-for percentage at 5-on-5 in six postseason games, thanks in no small part to the large defenseman (6-4) acquired from Chicago. He's not flashy. He makes smart plays to alleviate pressure and get pucks into the sticks of his forwards out of the defensive zone.

Jaden Schwartz, LW, Seattle Kraken

Age: 34 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$5.5 million

This O.K. (original Kraken) player didn't have his best campaign in Seattle analytically but still wound up with around the same 5-on-5 production in 50 games due to injuries that he had in the previous season's 81 games. Does he stay in Seattle or hit the market as a veteran presence on the wing?

Jacob Trouba, D, Anaheim Ducks

Age: 32 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$8 million

The Ducks have only three defensemen under contract for next season. They also have a generation of young defensemen in need of more playing time. Trouba played with Jackson LaCombe in the postseason, and it was the Ducks' best tandem analytically (59.8% expected goals). Trouba himself had his best offensive season since 2022 (35 points) while continuing to hit opponents like Jacob Trouba does. His ask might be too high for the Ducks. Given his intangibles and his age, though, he won't suffer for options.

Mats Zuccarello, F, Minnesota Wild

Age: 38 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$4.125 million

It's hard to imagine that Zuccarello, who turns 39 on Sept. 1, would want to leave Minnesota after seven seasons and his primary gig threading passes for Kirill Kaprizov to convert. But if the Wild and the Norwegian winger can't find a contract that works, Zuccarello would be an asset for many scoring lines around the league.

Tier 5: Best values

Under-the-radar gems, analytics darlings and low-cost difference-makers.

A.J. Greer, LW, Florida Panthers

Age: 29 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$850,000

Greer had one of the quietest offensive glow-ups in the NHL last season, setting new career highs in goals (17), points (32) and average ice time (12:26) in a full season. Which is what happens when one plays with Carter Verhaeghe and Sam Bennett more than the fourth line, as Greer did during the Panthers' injury-filled campaign. Now he has proof of concept that he can hang with the offensive talents while bodychecking opponents into dust.

Erik Haula, C, Nashville Predators

Age: 35 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$1.5 million

The veteran played 81 games for Nashville last season. He's good for between 14 and 18 goals and brings a gritty game down the lineup while also killing penalties. For the right price and term, a useful player.

Marcus Johansson, C, Minnesota Wild

Age: 35 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$800,000

A streaky player had a streaky season, with 12 goals in his first 38 games and just three goals after that. It all added up to a 49-point campaign in 75 games, which will certainly increase his compensation off a bargain contract.

Patrick Kane, RW, Detroit Red Wings

Age: 37 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$3 million

As with Zuccarello and the Wild, it would have to take some change of heart or negotiations going sideways for Kane not to remain with the Red Wings, where he has spent the past three seasons. His "showtime" days are behind him, but Kane can still produce at a respectable clip (57 points in 67 games) for someone with a \$3 million cap number.

Brett Kulak, D, Colorado Avalanche

Age: 32 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$2.75 million

Kulak was traded by the Oilers after two runs to the Stanley Cup Final. The Avalanche acquired him from Pittsburgh and he helped them get to the conference finals. In the right environment, a very solid tandem defenseman who even scored a series-clinching goal this postseason.

Beck Malenstyn, F, Buffalo Sabres

Age: 28 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$1.35 million

Watching Malenstyn in the playoffs for Buffalo was like watching him in his natural habitat. His defensive prowess and big hits are integral ingredients for a successful postseason team. He also had a career-high seven goals in the regular season. That's obviously not much, but there's something about Malenstyn's game that could be intriguing if paired with a couple of more offensively oriented forwards rather than pigeonholing him on the fourth line.

Michael McCarron, C, Minnesota Wild

Age: 31 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$900,000

McCarron isn't exactly a threat to win the Art Ross, but that's never been the point with this tenacious center. He defends well, can kill penalties, wins faceoffs and brings a physicality commensurate with his size (6-6). There's probably a chance McCarron gets overpaid this summer, but at the right AAV he's an absolute asset for a contender.

Tier 6: The boom-or-busts

Players who have the ability to justify the investment -- or whose contracts could eventually become an eyesore on PuckPedia.

Oliver Bjorkstrand, RW, Tampa Bay Lightning

Age: 31 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$5.4 million

Bjorkstrand was a dependable 20-goal scorer and depth forward before this season with the Lightning, where his offensive production plummeted (12 goals in 80 games) along with his ice time (13:38). Does he just need a change of scenery, or was this more than a hiccup?

Mario Ferraro, D, San Jose Sharks

Age: 27 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$3.25 million

Ferraro's rookie season was Joe Thornton's final one with the Sharks, meaning the defenseman arrived just as San Jose stopped contending. Now that the Sharks are in the Macklin Celebrini era, contention is right around the corner ... but does Ferraro fit in their plans?

GM Mike Grier said the now-veteran defenseman will first test the free agent market before the Sharks circle back -- assuming they do. Ferraro had a career-high 23 points last season playing 21:02 per game. It was easily his strongest season in a few years.

Radko Gudas, D, Anaheim Ducks

Age: 36 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$4 million

Gudas had the lowest average ice time of his career for Anaheim (16:11), playing only 56 games because of injuries and a five-game suspension for injuring Auston Matthews. Gudas' leadership and physical intimidation will still win him some suitors, but he's an average-at-best defender and not getting any younger.

Anders Lee, LW, New York Islanders

Age: 35 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$7 million

Lee just wrapped up a seven-year contract by seeing his goal output drop by 10 from last season. The Islanders' captain had 19 goals and 23 assists in 82 games. He turns 36 on July 3. If Lee is willing to bend like a contortionist on money and term, GM Mathieu Darche would likely bring him back to the Islanders. If not, Lee's exceptional skills around the crease in the attacking zone are an asset, even if that production drop is concerning.

Boone Jenner, C, Columbus Blue Jackets

Age: 33 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$3.75 million

Jenner is a tantalizing option in a thin center market. He's a veteran entering his 14th season. He has shown to be good for 20 goals under ideal conditions. He's a relentless player and a team captain. But he's not exactly fleet of foot, and he hasn't played 70 games since 2020. Would it be a shock to see Jenner, the Blue Jackets' all-time leader in games played (808), wearing another uniform? Not when he does things like change agents to Pat Morris, as Jenner did this season.

John Klingberg, D, San Jose Sharks

Age: 33 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$4 million

The siren song of the puck-moving free agent defenseman is hard to ignore. Klingberg just completed his third one-year deal. The Sharks had cap space to fill, so they threw \$4 million at him. Klingberg had his best offensive season since 2021-22 with 27 points. There's a danger of overcommitment here to a player who is too hit or miss and not getting younger.

Patrik Laine, RW, Montreal Canadiens

Age: 28 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$8.7 million

Laine missed a good portion of the season after abdominal surgery but has been an afterthought for coach Martin St. Louis during the playoffs: traveling with the team, practicing, getting nowhere near a game. This tier was built for Laine, who once scored 44 goals in 82 games for Winnipeg.

Because he spends so much time on injured reserve, Laine is eligible for a low-base-salary, incentive-laden contract this summer. Will anyone take a chance on one of the NHL's biggest reclamation projects?

Anthony Mantha, F, Pittsburgh Penguins

Age: 31 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$2.5 million

Mantha is expected to test free agency after thriving in a one-year contract "prove it" season with Pittsburgh, scoring 33 goals and 31 assists. The playoffs were a different story: one assist in six games for a minus-5, to go along with 20 penalty minutes. Mantha doesn't have a playoff goal in 20 postseason games.

Darren Raddysh, D, Tampa Bay Lightning

Age: 30 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$975,000

If you're at all familiar with the 2026 free agent field, you might have wondered why you didn't see Raddysh's name within the other tiers. It's because he belongs here, perhaps the most out of any free agent.

Raddysh obliterated his career highs with 22 goals and 48 assists for 70 points this past season in Tampa. He did it with an increase in ice time (22:42) and, most importantly, 26 power-play points to tie Pittsburgh's Erik Karlsson for sixth in the NHL.

On paper, he's the best offensive defenseman available this offseason. AFP Analytics predicts a raise to around \$8 million annually against the salary cap on a six-year term. In reality, he has done this for one season.

Maybe Raddysh is a classic late bloomer, with a booming shot and good offensive instincts. Maybe he can produce at a healthy clip with or without Nikita Kucherov on his power play. That's one reason to believe he'll stay with the Lightning on a discounted deal. Where else will he play with that assemblage of talent?

But someone might throw the bag at him. The question is: Should they?

Jack Roslovic, C, Edmonton Oilers

Age: 29 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$1.5 million

After back-to-back 20-goal seasons, Roslovic should pull down over \$4 million AAV on his next contract. We'll note that both of those seasons were while Roslovic was playing on one-year contracts, trying to secure the next one. Something to keep in mind for the teams that believe the 29-year-old has earned his term.

Vladimir Tarasenko, RW, Minnesota Wild

Age: 34 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$4.75 million

Ten years ago, Tarasenko was one of the NHL's most elite goal scorers. Now, he has settled into a depth scoring role quite nicely in Minnesota with 23 goals, while getting some power-play time. At the right

price, he could be worth a contract -- provided what we saw last season is the real Tarasenko, and not that regrettable 11-goal campaign for Detroit two seasons ago.

Tier 7: The goalies

The few, the proud, the available goaltenders.

Frederik Andersen, G, Carolina Hurricanes

Age: 36 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$2.75 million

For years, Andersen had two problems in the postseason: His health and those couple of wobbly games that would encourage coach Rod Brind'amour to make a switch in goal. Midway through the conference finals, Andersen is healthy and rested. There's been no wobble. He's right there in the Conn Smythe conversation.

What does that mean for a goalie whose average annual has crept downward in his last three contracts? Big things, provided he wants to enter that market.

Sergei Bobrovsky, G, Florida Panthers

Age: 37 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$10 million

How much is Playoff Bob worth? That's the question the Panthers and other teams are asking. Playoff Bob was the backbone of three straight trips to the Stanley Cup Final for Florida, including back-to-back championships. But Bobrovsky's regular-season numbers are in decline, including his .877 save percentage and minus-12.2 goals saved above expected. You're signing that Bob, too.

From what I gather, Bobrovsky wants to the best of both worlds for him: Get paid a significant amount of money, above market value for a goalie his age, while remaining with the Panthers, who would have undoubtedly have to make concessions in their lineup to accommodate that contract. Which seems counterproductive.

By the way: I've seen some speculation that Bobrovsky might end up with a Brad Marchand-esque contract: Six years, \$31.5 million, paying him out until he's 43 years old. I'm not convinced that's the way Florida will go. Forwards can play different roles over time. Marchand could be a top-line winger, then middle six, then play 10 minutes per game on the fourth line like Corey Perry while continuing to provide the team his unique intangibles, like chirping opponents and his own teammates.

Bobrovsky on a "Marchand" deal is either a starter with a reasonable cap hit for his age or a backup taking up too much cap space. There's no middle ground. So I have my doubts.

Connor Ingram, G, Edmonton Oilers

Age: 29 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$1,150,500

Ingram was an inspiring story and there were moments when he appeared to offer the Oilers a solution in goal. Whether it's in Edmonton or elsewhere, Ingram can be an effective half of a tandem.

Stuart Skinner, G, Pittsburgh Penguins

Age: 27 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$2.6 million

With the way Arturs Silovs played in the postseason combined with top prospect Sergei Murashov being about ready for the NHL, Skinner is likely to be in another uniform next season.

Could that be an Ottawa Senators jersey? The Ottawa Sun noted that GM Steve Staios was with the Oilers organization in Skinner's early years.

Cam Talbot, G, Detroit Red Wings

Age: 38 | 2025-26 cap hit: \$2.5 million

Talbot turns 39 years old in July. He had an .883 save percentage last season, while going 12-9-6 for Detroit. He had minus-13.1 goals saved above expected. He is, in fact, a free agent.

Tier 8: The spackle

The other free agents available that don't neatly fall into these tiers.

Noel Acciari, C, Pittsburgh Penguins

Jamie Benn, LW, Dallas Stars

Teddy Blueger, C, Vancouver Canucks

Zach Bogosian, D, Minnesota Wild

Michael Bunting, LW, Dallas Stars

Brent Burns, D, Colorado Avalanche

Dylan Coghlan, D, Vegas Golden Knights

Ian Cole, D, Utah Mammoth

Nick Cousins, C, Ottawa Senators

Tony DeAngelo, D, New York Islanders

Vincent Desharnais, D, San Jose Sharks

Nicolas Deslauriers, F, Carolina Hurricanes

Jason Dickinson, C, Edmonton Oilers

Brandon Duhaime, RW, Washington Capitals

Lars Eller, C, Ottawa Senators

Nick Foligno, LW, Minnesota Wild

Luke Glendening, C, Philadelphia Flyers

Adam Henrique, C, Edmonton Oilers

Evander Kane, LW, Vancouver Canucks

Kasperii Kapanen, C, Edmonton Oilers

Alexander Kerfoot, C, Utah Mammoth
Joel Kiviranta, LW, Colorado Avalanche
Andrei Kuzmenko, LW, Los Angeles Kings
Scott Laughton, C, Los Angeles Kings
Jeremy Lauzon, D, Vegas Golden Knights
Curtis Lazar, C, Edmonton Oilers
Ryan Lomberg, LW, Calgary Flames
Tomas Nosek, C, Florida Panthers
Jamie Oleksiak, D, Seattle Kraken
Victor Olofsson, RW, Calgary Flames
Andrew Peeke, D, Boston Bruins
David Perron, LW, Detroit Red Wings
Corey Perry, RW, Tampa Bay Lightning
Jeff Petry, D, Minnesota Wild
Brandon Saad, LW, Vegas Golden Knights
Luke Schenn, D, Buffalo Sabres
Conor Sheary, LW, New York Rangers
Cole Smith, LW, Vegas Golden Knights
Reilly Smith, F, Vegas Golden Knights
Carson Soucy, D, New York Islanders
Logan Stanley, D, Buffalo Sabres
Kevin Stenlund, C, Utah Mammoth
Oskar Sundqvist, C, St. Louis Blues
Eeli Tolvanen, LW, Seattle Kraken
James van Riemsdyk, LW, Detroit Red Wings
Trevor van Riemsdyk, D, Washington Capitals
Jonathan Toews, C, Winnipeg Jets
Kailer Yamamoto, RW, Utah Mammoth

[The Athletic / NHL rumblings: Massive trade attempts coming, top picks available, latest on Matthews, McDavid, more](#)

By Pierre LeBrun – May 27, 2026

What happens when the NHL salary cap jumps in a major way — again — giving teams money to spend in a year with very few Grade A options to splurge on in the July 1 unrestricted free agent market?

Trades, trades, trades.

Based on conversations with multiple NHL front offices and agents over the past week, it sounds like teams are calling around to gauge the temperature on all kinds of names. Not just the obvious ones.

There's a storm brewing with the potential for massive trades. At the very least, there will be massive attempts.

McKenna vs. Stenberg: Who's No. 1?

Corey Pronman, Scott Wheeler and more

One player who fits that criteria is 23-year-old forward Mason McTavish, which is a little obvious after he was scratched for two playoff games. I have zero evidence to suggest the Anaheim Ducks are the ones picking up the phone and calling teams about him. But I know for a fact that several teams have inquired about him. He's coming off a season in which he regressed after a contract stalemate delayed his start.

Still, the third pick from the 2021 draft is an appealing target, especially since he's signed to a contract for another five years at a \$7 million cap hit. Some teams view him as an ideal reset candidate. All the more reason Anaheim wouldn't move him unless a team steps up in a major way.

What's major, you ask? Well, if Auston Matthews watches the Toronto Maple Leafs' offseason play out over the next five or six weeks and decides he's not sure they are still a contender and says he's open to a move, I would venture to guess Anaheim would be on his list of seven or eight potential desired landing spots. And the Ducks would have the pieces to make it work in a larger package.

All things being equal, I think it's more likely No. 34 stays in Toronto for at least another season, but it's just an example for the kind of scenario that the Ducks could potentially see come their way.

Also worth noting, with young stars Leo Carlsson and Cutter Gauthier due for big raises this summer, one can see why the Ducks might at least listen on McTavish as they put all the pieces of the puzzle together in the bigger picture.

Top picks available?

Will any of the top five picks in the draft be on the move?

Not that the Maple Leafs are intent on moving the No. 1 pick, but new general manager John Chayka also isn't hanging up the phone if and when teams call. Why would he? If a team steps up in a

meaningful way with the kind of package that helps the Leafs get back in contention, Chayka will at least listen, according to league sources.

I do think it's unlikely he moves it, though.

The San Jose Sharks, meanwhile, are far enough along in their rebuild that GM Mike Grier is absolutely open to moving the No. 2 pick, depending on the offers, per league sources.

Same goes with Chicago Blackhawks GM Kyle Davidson and the No. 4 pick. Chicago views the pick as a heck of an asset, given the talent available in the top five, so it would be need to be a darn good NHL player to move it, but the Blackhawks are open to it, per league sources.

We'll see if any team makes San Jose or Chicago blink.

Preds after MacFarland?

There's no question in my mind that the Nashville Predators have been waiting for the Colorado Avalanche season to end to reach out and see if they can chat with GM Chris MacFarland.

It might be a long shot, but the Preds have cast a wide net in this drawn-out process and have said all along they're in no rush, so why not take a shot at one of the game's top GMs, even if the answer ends up being no? You don't know until you ask.

Captains on the move?

It's not exactly clear yet how things will play out for pending UFAs Anders Lee and Boone Jenner, who are both captains.

Let's start with Lee, who turns 36 on July 3, coming off a contract paying him \$7 million per year. After a 29-goal season in 2024-25, he scored 19 this past season. But there are obviously more elements to his game.

My understanding is that New York Islanders GM Mathieu Darche has indicated to Lee's agent, Neil Sheehy, that the team does have interest in re-signing Lee but that it needs to make a few other moves before it can go down that road.

Lee is also interested in staying on Long Island, but the sides would need to find common ground on salary and term, and I don't think that's a slam dunk given his age.

As for Jenner, 32, he recently changed representation and is now with Pat Morris of Newport Sports, as our Columbus Blue Jackets beat writer, Aaron Portzline, reported last week. The second-longest-serving captain in franchise history, Jenner is interested in re-signing with Columbus, but the first go-around in terms of contract talks saw both sides pretty far apart when it came to term.

Having said that, GM Don Waddell is comfortable negotiating at the 11th hour, as he did with Ivan Provorov a year ago, so I still wouldn't be ready to say Jenner is definitely going to market. Some things still need to play out there.

Carlson's value

Ducks defenseman John Carlson, 36, will be an intriguing name to watch over the next month or so.

The Ducks have spoken with Carlson's camp, led by veteran agent Rick Curran, and communicated a desire to start negotiations on a new contract. Carlson is open to having those talks but needs a bit more time to mull over what he wants to do as July 1 approaches.

Carlson had been in talks with the Washington Capitals before they moved him at the trade deadline in March about a two-year extension worth \$9 million per season.

I doubt very much Carlson signs for less than two years and \$9 million per year, regardless of whether that's in Anaheim or on the open market. And my sense is there are four or five teams in the East hoping Carlson hits the July 1 market.

Nemec trade request?

For what it's worth, I checked into reports that New Jersey Devils defenseman Šimon Nemec has asked for a trade, and everyone involved refuted it.

That's not to say Nemec's definitely staying put. He's a restricted free agent and needs a new contract.

Market for Perry

Corey Perry turned 41 on May 16, but he told me last month during the Tampa Bay Lightning's series against the Montreal Canadiens that he isn't ready to quit yet.

"I still want to continue to play," Perry said.

Just to make sure that wasn't adrenaline talking and he hadn't changed his mind with time to reflect, I checked with his agent, Pat Morris, this week, and he confirmed that Perry absolutely still intends to play if there's a fit somewhere that makes sense for him. He had 17 goals this past season between the Los Angeles Kings and the Lightning, so it does appear there's juice left there.

It doesn't sound like a return to Tampa Bay is in the cards, though.

Matthews and McDavid

And finally, let's circle back on Auston Matthews and Connor McDavid.

The reality as of now is that it's a holding pattern on both fronts. Matthews and McDavid are most likely staying put for at least another season, but neither can yet commit 100 percent to that. For starters, both of their teams still need to hire a new head coach. That's going to be a factor.

Matthews and his agent, Judd Moldaver, who also represents McDavid, had a Zoom call with Chayka and Leafs senior executive adviser of hockey operations Mats Sundin about 10 days ago, and it went well by all accounts. But Matthews and Moldaver still need to see how the Leafs' offseason moves play out before they can say that they're for sure committed for next season.

The same goes for McDavid. The Oilers' moves over the next five or six weeks are important to monitor before McDavid and Moldaver sign off for next season.