

DALLAS STARS COMMUNICATIONS  
**DAILY NEWS CLIPS**

Monday, Dec. 23, 2024



NHL.com

## Shesterkin stops 41, Rangers edge Stars to end 3-game skid

By Taylor Baird  
Dec. 20, 2024

DALLAS -- Igor Shesterkin made 41 saves, and Vincent Trocheck had a goal and an assist for the New York Rangers in a 3-1 victory against the Dallas Stars at American Airlines Center on Friday.

The Rangers went 7-for-7 on the penalty kill, including a five-minute major in the third period. They also scored a short-handed goal by Reilly Smith at 10:44 of the first period.

"We need to win games. We're not thinking about yesterday at all, we're just moving forward taking it one game at a time. Tonight was a good step in the right direction," Trocheck said. "It's 17 minutes on the [penalty kill] so it's pretty gritty. The PK came up big tonight, and we can get a lot of momentum from our penalty kill when it's playing like it was tonight."

Chris Kreider also scored for the Rangers (16-15-1), who had lost three straight, 11 of 14, and traded forward Kaapo Kakko to the Seattle Kraken on Wednesday.

Of Shesterkin's 41 saves, 21 came with the Rangers on the penalty kill.

"[Shesterkin] was great in net, but the penalty killers were fantastic," Rangers coach Peter Laviolette said. "We had some power plays too, so that stresses a lot of guys as far as the minutes go. Guys were resilient tonight to stay with it. Just a really good win."

Roope Hintz scored and Jake Oettinger made 27 saves for the Stars (19-13-0), who ended their six-game homestand with a 3-3-0 record.

"Our [power play] is letting us down right now and it's got to be better," Stars forward Jamie Benn said. "Every opportunity is a new challenge and we've got to find a way to get it done here. We feel like we're getting looks, they're just not going in."

Hintz gave the Stars a 1-0 lead at 1:46 into the first period on a shot from the slot that beat Shesterkin high-glove.

Smith tied it 1-1 at 10:44 shorthanded after getting a breakaway off a turnover by Stars defenseman Thomas Harley.

"I had a breakaway and [facing] a big goalie. Just tried to beat him low," Smith said. "He's really big so sometimes you don't see a lot of net. So sometimes you just try to power one past him."

"It's one thing if the power play doesn't score, but it can't take momentum from your group. That's what it did tonight," Stars coach Pete DeBoer said. "Took the momentum away from how

we were playing, gave up the short-handed goal, difference in the game and changed the game. It's on us to get that fixed."

Trocheck gave the Rangers a 2-1 lead at 15:20 on a slap shot from the top of the left face-off circle through traffic.

Kreider scored into an empty net at 17:54 for the 3-1 final.

The game came after the Stars failed to score on the five-minute major, which was a result of Matt Rempe elbowing Miro Heiskanen in the head along the glass in the third period.

"I don't even know how many we had, but a lot and we didn't score. That's [why we] lost today," Hintz said. "Had a good penalty kill but then we couldn't score on the power play. We've got to find some ways to get some goals. I think we had some looks, but at the end of the day, that's not good enough when you get that many power plays and you don't score."

Artemi Panarin collected an assist in his return to the Rangers after missing the past two games with an upper-body injury.

NOTES: The game marked the 14th time Shesterkin has made at least 40 saves in a win for the Rangers, which is the third most in team history, behind Gump Worsley (22) and Henrik Lundqvist (21). ... The win was the Rangers' 31st comeback victory dating to last season, which trails only the Colorado Avalanche (35), New Jersey Devils (34) and Stars (33).

NHL.com

## Oettinger in holiday season spirit, gifts young fan stick at practice

By Christopher Detwiler  
Dec. 22, 2024

Santa is going to have a tough time beating this gift.

After Dallas Stars practice on Sunday, goalie Jake Oettinger gave a young fan his stick, then took a photo as a holiday gift for the kid who brought a special sign to the rink.

The sign said, "I want to be like Oettinger" with a hand-drawn Stars logo and "Big fan" written across the top.

The young fan was in disbelief after getting the stick, and even more so after he posed for a photo with Oettinger.

"I get to keep it?" the kid asked Oettinger.

"Yeah that's all you," said the goalie. "Merry Christmas, buddy."

Seems like that fan is already having a holly jolly Christmas thanks to his favorite player.

NHL.com (Dallas Stars)

## Heika's Take: Power play flounders as Stars lose 3-1 to Rangers

By Mike Heika

Dec. 21, 2024

The Stars' power play on home ice has been an issue all year, but on Friday it was especially problematic and highlighted in the worst ways.

Dallas went 0-for-7 (a full 17 minutes) on the man advantage and also allowed a shorthanded goal in a 3-1 loss to the New York Rangers. The defeat ended the longest homestand of the season at 3-3-0 and left a bad feeling as the team sank to 19-13-0, a .596 points percentage that puts them 12th in the league.

"We've got to be better," said Stars coach Pete DeBoer. "You look at where we're at, we're right in the middle of things and we're going to have to work our way out."

The power play was both a blessing and a curse. Dallas finished with 21 shots on goal on the man advantage and had 42 for the game. The Stars dominated with a 42-30 edge in shots on goal, and an 80-47 split in shot attempts.

But with each save, New York goalie Igor Shesterkin seemed to gain confidence and Dallas players seemed to lose it.

"Igor was great in net," said Rangers coach Peter Laviolette. "The penalty kills were fantastic. We had some power plays, too, which stretches a lot of guys, as far as minutes go. The guys were resilient tonight and just stayed with it. Just a really good win."

The game was wild from the start as Stars goalie Jake Oettinger gave up a goal in the first minute, but it was wiped out by an offside call. Dallas captain Jamie Benn then scored, but it also was negated on an offside review. Finally, Stars forward Roope Hintz scored at the 1:46 mark and the Stars seemed to have control of the momentum.

That's when the power play hijinx started. Dallas was in the middle of its first power play when Reilly Smith was able to steal a puck from Thomas Harley at the right point and take off up the left wing. Smith beat Oettinger for his seventh goal of the year and the game was tied at the 10:44 mark of the first period, and the tone in the building shifted. The Stars had really seemed to have control of the game against a Rangers team that entered on a 3-11-0 slide and was struggling to find any sort of positivity.

That Smith goal lit a spark.

"It's one thing if the power play doesn't score, but it can't take momentum from your group, and that's what it did tonight," DeBoer said. "We gave up the shorthanded goal, that was the difference in the game. It changed the game."

The Rangers took a 2-1 lead late in the first period when Vincent Trocheck was able to slip a shot through a crowd and past Oettinger.

From there on out, the power play dominated the news.

Dallas had two man advantages to finish out the first period and three more in the second. Then, they got a five-minute major in the third with the score still 2-1. Rangers forward Matt Rempe was given a major penalty (and a game misconduct) for boarding Miro Heiskanen, who had to leave the game. Heiskanen missed the ensuing power play time, and Shesterkin foiled the Stars at every turn, and that was pretty much it for the game.

"I saw Miro's face after...not good," said Benn. "You hate seeing that against our best player. We didn't [make them pay for the penalty]. Our [power play] is letting us down right now."

Heiskanen returned to play. He finished with 24:06 in ice time.

The five-minute penalty was the most frustrating, because Dallas had plenty of chances and could have tied the game. Yet, they continued to struggle with getting the puck into the net at home.

"We didn't score and we had plenty of chances," said Jason Robertson, who assisted on Hintz's goal in the first period. "We didn't score."

When asked why, Robertson said, "I think it was a mixture of everything. We had a lot of minutes, so every detail could have been better."

Stacking that on top of the Toronto defeat on Wednesday, Dallas has lost two in a row and now has to look at fixing some significant problems before playing in Utah on Monday to lead them into a three-day break.

"It's not a good feeling, because I thought we came out ready to play and I thought we were executing," DeBoer said. "Our five-on-five game was good, and then the momentum shifts with the shorthanded goal, and then it's on us to stop the bleeding. I thought we played in some spurts tonight and I thought Jake made a couple of big saves to keep it close. Obviously, Shesterkin played well for them, but we've got to be better."

**NHL.com (Dallas Stars)**

## **Game Day Guide: Stars vs Hockey Club**

By Stars Staff  
Dec. 23, 2024

When: Monday, December 23 at 8:00 PM CT

Where: Delta Center

TV: Victory+

Radio: The Ticket 96.7-FM, 1310-AM

Live Stats: NHL Game Center

Watch Party: Jon's Grille

Five Points 5

The Dallas Stars face the Utah Hockey Club Monday night at Delta Center for the second time this season. Entering Monday's match, the Stars are 19-13-0 while Utah is 16-11-5. The teams face each other two more times this season on Jan. 4 (Dallas) and April 12 (Dallas).

Dallas is 1-0-0 all-time vs. Utah, with a 1-0-0 mark on the road. Although the team relocated from Arizona, the Utah Hockey Club is considered a new franchise.

Forward Matt Duchene leads the Stars in points (13-17—30) in 32 games played this season. Duchene is also the team's leading scorer on the road this year, totaling 16 points (5-11—16) in 14 games.

Forward Jason Robertson enters Monday's matchup having totaled eight points (2-6—8) in his last eight games played dating back to Dec. 4 against the Los Angeles Kings. During that span, the Stars have outscored their opponents 5-3 and outshot them 62-41 when Robertson has been on the ice during 5-on-5 play according to Natural Stat Trick. He is just four assists shy of recording 200 career assists.

Captain Jamie Benn scored the game-winning goal against Utah on Dec. 2 and has tallied seven points (3-4—7) in 11 games against central division opponents this year. During his career, Benn has skated in 350 games against central division opponents, including the Atlanta Thrashers, earning 286 points (109-177—286).

### **Players To Watch**

Stars forward Roope Hintz has tallied three goals over his last three games played, including a season-high two goal (2-0—2) outing on Dec. 16 vs. Washington. Hintz leads Dallas in goals scored (14), while tied for fourth in points (20).

Utah defenseman Mikhail Sergachev enters Monday's game with nine points (2-7—9) in his last 10 games played. Through 32 games this season, Sergachev leads all Utah defensemen in goals (8), assists (16) and points (24). His eight goals are tied for fourth best among NHL defensemen.

#### First Shift

On one hand, the Stars' challenges could get even tougher on Monday night in Utah.

On the other hand, the NHL is a complex riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

On paper, the Stars were supposed to clean up on a recent six-game run at American Airlines Center where they entered as the best home team in the league. But in reality, they went 3-3-0, including losing the final two games. On paper, Dallas is 6-8-0 on the road and playing a Utah Hockey Club that is 6-0-2 in its past eight games and playing its best hockey since moving from Arizona in the summer. In reality, the Stars took a 2-1 win at Delta Center three weeks ago and looked good in the process.

So while coach Pete DeBoer understands the need to break down the details of home vs. road or getting his stale power play moving, he also believes the answer can be a little more straightforward.

"We've just got to go in and win a game," DeBoer said Sunday. "Whether we play at home or on the road, we have to go stop the bleeding."

Even "the bleeding" is a relative term. Dallas played two very fine games against the Maple Leafs and Rangers and lost, in large part because the opposing goalies stopped a ton of shots. Joseph Woll made 36 saves in a 5-3 win for Toronto on Wednesday. Igor Shesterkin came up with 41 saves on Friday in a 3-1 win for the Rangers. The Stars held the Leafs to 19 shots on goal. They had a 42-30 advantage in shots on goal against the Rangers. Analytically speaking, they did a lot of good things. But analytics don't win games, goals do. And right now, the lads in Victory Green are struggling to put the puck in the net.

On Friday, Dallas had 17 minutes of power play time and fired 21 shots on net with the man advantage. That's the third-most in a game in franchise history since the NHL began tracking power play shots in 1987.

"I don't even know how many we had, but a lot and we didn't score," said center Hintz. "I think we had some looks, but still, at the end of the day, that's not good enough when you get that many power plays and you don't score. We have to find a way to generate more goals on the power play."

Again, it doesn't make sense, but the Stars' power play is worse at home, where the team is winning, than it is on the road, where the team is losing. So could Monday bring a strange change in fortune? The Stars on Sunday worked on "compete" drills to find ways to show both urgency and poise at the front of the net.



“Just scoring, just finishing,” DeBoer said of the rationale. “I think our underlying numbers are good, we’re creating enough chances, just finishing here recently has been an issue. Every team goes through those peaks and valleys during a season where everything you shoot goes in or nothing you shoot goes in, you hope throughout a season it balances out.”

Dallas lived on its balance last season. It set a franchise record with eight different players scoring 20 goals or more. But while that allows individuals to quietly go through slumps while still having a high goals per game average (third at 3.59 last season) for the team, it also means the top players haven’t been hardened by the pressure to score with more regularity.

“It seems like everybody has cooled off here in the last week or two,” DeBoer said. “Depth has to carry you at different points in the year. And I like our depth.”

That depth means that just getting a few players hot can fix a lot of problems. Mix in the fact Dallas sits fifth in GAA at 2.59 and you don’t have to get that many more goals to secure a few wins.

“Every opportunity is a new challenge,” said Benn. “We have to find a way to get it done here.”

#### Key Numbers

17

The Stars had 17 minutes of power play time against the Rangers on Friday. That’s the most in the NHL since 2016. Dallas did not score a power play goal and gave up a shorthanded goal during that time.

36

Stars goalie Casey DeSmith made 36 saves in a 2-1 Dallas win the last time the Stars played at Delta Center three weeks ago.

15.5

Utah ranks 30th in hits at 15.5 per game. Dallas ranks 31st at 14.8.

#### He Said It

“I think every game he gets more comfortable. I think you see the things that he brings to the table – physicality, he’s a big body, he’s got a good skill level, he’s got some poise with the puck. There are also little details in the game that he has to work on. [Assistant coach] Alain Nasreddine can spend some time with him and break down subtle little things at the NHL level that he can’t get away with.”

-Stars coach Pete DeBoer on the progress of rookie defenseman Lian Bichsel

**Dallas Morning News**

## **Stars still flummoxed by home power play, Dallas falls to New York Rangers**

By The Associated Press  
Dec. 20, 2024

New York's Igor Shesterkin stopped 41 shots, the Stars went 0-for-7 on power play opportunities, and the struggling Rangers beat Dallas 3-1 on Friday night to end a three-game losing streak.

The Rangers also scored on one of their successful penalty kills, Reilly Smith's short-handed goal tying the score midway through the first period. Vincent Trocheck scored the tiebreaking goal and Chris Kreider added an empty-netter late in the third period.

Roope Hintz scored for the Stars, who completed a season-high six-game homestand at 3-3-0. Jake Oettinger stopped 27 shots making his eighth consecutive start.

New York won for the fourth time in 18 games after allowing the first goal.

Eight of Shesterkin's saves came during a five-minute elbowing penalty against Matt Rempe midway through the third period. Rempe was given a major penalty and a game misconduct for his elbow on Stars defender Miro Heiskanen.

Hintz has four goals in the last six games and a team-high 16 this season.

Each team had a goal disallowed during the first 1:15 for offside.

### Takeaways

Rangers: Artemi Panarin, who leads the team in goals and points, returned after missing two games with an upper body injury and assisted on Trocheck's goal. Rempe drew all three Dallas penalties.

Stars: They went in 31st in home power play and dropped to 10.3%. Dallas is 11th in road power play success at 23.9%.

### Key moment

Smith took the puck from Thomas Harley, the lone defender on Dallas' power play, near the Rangers' blue line and broke in to tie the score after the Rangers fell behind early.

### Key stat

A matchup of the second-best penalty kills both home and road delivered no goals in 23 combined power play minutes.

### Up next

Rangers host Carolina on Sunday, and Stars visit Utah on Monday night.

**Dallas Morning News**

## **Rangers forward Matt Rempe suspended 8 games for elbow to Stars defenseman Miro Heiskanen**

By SportsDay Staff  
Dec. 22, 2024

New York Rangers forward Matt Rempe was suspended for eight games by NHL's Department of Player Safety on Sunday for boarding and elbowing Dallas Stars defenseman Miro Heiskanen on Friday night.

Rempe had an in-person hearing via Zoom on Sunday, as opposed to a phone call, which allowed senior vice president of player safety George Parros and his department to suspend Rempe for six or more games.

Midway through the third period of New York's 3-1 win in Dallas, Rempe was given a major penalty and a game misconduct for a high elbow to Heiskanen, who had his back turned to the Rangers forward.

The Stars defenseman would eventually rise to his skates and finish the game.

Rempe, a 6-8 forward, became popular last season in his rookie year with the Rangers for fighting some of the toughest players in the league, but he was ejected twice and also received a four-game ban for an elbow to the head of New Jersey's Jonas Siegenthaler.

## Dallas Morning News

# How to watch Dallas Stars' road game against Utah Hockey Club

By SportsDay Staff

Dec. 23, 2024

The Dallas Stars head on the road Monday to face the Utah Hockey Club. The Stars are looking to get back to winning ways after back-to-back losses and keep pace in the Western Conference standings.

Here's everything you need to know about the matchup.

Dallas Stars vs. Utah Hockey Club

When: Monday, 7:00 p.m.

Where: Delta Center, Salt Lake City

TV/Streaming: Victory+, ESPN+

Radio: 96.7 FM/1310 The Ticket (KTCK-AM)

### Bottom line

The Utah Hockey Club (16-11-6, fifth in the Central Division) hopes to leapfrog the Dallas Stars (19-13, fourth in the Central Division) in the standings with a win on Monday night.

Dallas has gone 6-8 on the road this year. The Stars won the previous meeting between the two teams on Dec. 2 by a score of 2-1.

Utah is 5-5-4 at home this season, which includes a recent 3-2 win over the Vancouver Canucks.

### Top performers

Roope Hintz leads the Stars in goals this season with 14, while Matt Duchene has the most points with 30.

Dylan Guenther has 16 goals and 16 assists for Utah. Vincent Trocheck has scored four goals and added four assists over the last 10 games. Clayton Keller scored a pair of goals in Utah's last game vs. Anaheim.

### Last 10 games

Stars: 5-5-0, averaging 2.5 goals per game.

Utah: 7-1-2, averaging 3.7 goals per game.

### Injuries

Stars: Tyler Seguin on IR (hip).

Utah: None listed.

**DLLS**

## **Logan Stankoven isn't flashy, but he provides the consistency Dallas needs**

By Sean Shapiro  
Dec. 20, 2024

It feels slightly premature to call the race right now, but Dallas Stars forward Logan Stankoven probably isn't going to win the Calder Memorial Trophy as the NHL's top rookie.

Macklin Celebrini, the No. 1 pick for the San Jose Sharks in the 2024 NHL Draft, has been electric as a teenager with 22 points in 23 games, while Matvei Michkov, another teen, has 27 points in 31 games with the Philadelphia Flyers.

Stankoven's 17 points in 29 games, while good, looks completely pedestrian by comparison, especially when you account for the fact that he's nearly four years older than Celebrini.

Things happen, but any individual trophy buzz has and probably will come to an end for Stankoven.

But there is an important point of discussion with Stankoven that I wanted to bring up today in regard to him compared to Michkov, especially after I watched the Flyers rookie play in person earlier this week.

Michkov is a highlight reel waiting to happen, he's supremely flashy and isn't afraid to try the absurd — he's even broken John Tortorella when it comes to lacrosse-style goal attempts — it's why he dazzles in 3-on-3 overtime, and why he'll build out an impressive highlight reel.

But while you're waiting for that impact, and this is what I witnessed watching Michkov on Wednesday, the Flyers rookie can be largely invisible. Even when going out of my way to watch him in person, there were a couple times I had to ask myself, "is Michkov even playing this game?"

There were a couple nice keeps at the blue line, and the Flyers were obviously looking for him late in a 6-on-5, extra attacker situation against the Detroit Red Wings, but aside from that he had little impact.

This brings me back to Stankoven, who's had an inverse type impact for the Stars — never invisible, but rarely on the highlight reel.

Not great for individual accolades, but for the Stars it's probably the more ideal long-term proposition, especially with a team that looks like a Stanley Cup contender primarily because of its overall forward depth.

Through 29 games, when Stankoven is on the ice the Stars have a 411-345 edge in shot attempts and a 195-156 edge in scoring chances according to Natural Stat Trick.

By comparison when Michkov is on the ice for the Flyers, his team is trailing 399-376 in shot attempts and 183-166 in scoring chances.

This is partially reflective of the fact the Stars are a better team, and also reflective of Stankoven's body of work adding details and defensive assignments to his game. While Stankoven has gotten slightly more work in offensive situations, he's been utilized in defensive zone draws more frequently, especially after taking over for Tyler Seguin on the line with Matt Duchene and Mason Marchment.

Another thing about Stankoven's game, and this is something an NHL scout pointed out to me recently, is how his offensive game is built more on rebound creation than actual goal scoring.

He has an NHL-level shot, but it's not an elite release that will typically beat NHL-level goalies clean, which is why Stankoven has to focus more on creating that second-chance opportunity for himself or his line mates.

Heading into Friday's game, Stankoven has created 13 rebound scoring chances this season, tied for the most on the Stars with Thomas Harley. It's also what makes Stankoven an ideal player archetype to play with Marchment, who has been playing at high level going to the front of the net.

The point here isn't that Stankoven is a better player than Michkov or should be winning individual accolades over another rookie, but rather despite the drop in Calder Trophy love, the Stars rookie is making strides in areas below the surface, notably areas that matter most in the postseason.

**DLLS**

## **The Dallas Stars are playing with fire in the starter's crease**

By Sam Nestler  
Dec. 20, 2024

Dallas Stars goalie Jake Oettinger is scheduled to start tonight against the New York Rangers.

It will be his eighth consecutive start dating back to Dec. 4 against the Los Angeles Kings.

In that time, Oettinger has been up and down, with strong games against Calgary, St. Louis, and Washington, and struggles against LA, Vegas, Nashville, and Toronto (where he was pulled after two periods).

Casey DeSmith was sick with the flu last week. According to Stars coach Pete DeBoer, that took away at least one planned start for the Dallas backup. But since then, DeSmith has been consistently skating and backed up Oettinger in both games this week.

"I think we've been on pace. But again, you can plan all you want, and then Casey DeSmith get the flu and isn't available for basically a week," DeBoer said Tuesday. "There's probably a start in there somewhere that we would have given him or taken off Jake's plate.

"I think we feel we have a good plan. With the game we play in front of Jake, it's not like we're asking him to stop 50 shots a night. It's not easy, but I think the way we play helps the fact that we can play him a little bit more than we'd like to because we're not given up all that quality and all the shot metrics."

That's all fine. But for a team that consistently stated it wanted to manage Oettinger's games this season (keeping him closer to 52-55 starts), this feels like playing with fire.

Oettinger has started 24 of 31 games this season — 77 percent. At that pace, he will start around 64 regular-season games, the most of his career (61 in 2022-23). Oettinger was also selected to represent Team USA at the 4 Nations Face-Off in February, meaning he will not get the two-week break that many others do.

If Oettinger gets into one or two games there, then starts 20 or 25 in the playoffs (which a deep playoff run would require), he would be sitting somewhere between 85 and 90 starts overall in 2024-25. That's a lot of hockey.

If you look at the majority of recent cup-winning goalies, the numbers are all below that...

Sergei Bobrovsky hit 82 starts last year, Adin Hill 39, Darcy Kuemper 73, Andrei Vasilevskiy 77 and 65 in back-to-back championships, Jordan Binnington 74, Braden Holtby 77, Matt Murray 61 and 60, and the list goes on.



In fact, only one goaltender has won a Stanley Cup with more than 80 total starts in the past 15 years. That was Jonathan Quick in 2011-12 (89).

Those numbers cannot be ignored. And the theme seems the same for Oettinger. We have seen him hit a wall before. Whether that was his play on the ice or going out with an injury in the past two seasons.

When Oettinger played 54 games last season, he was great in the playoffs with a .915 save percentage and a 2.24 goals-against average. The previous year, when he played 61, he finished the postseason with an .895 save percentage and a 3.06 GAA and needed offseason surgery to fix a nagging injury.

Those numbers cannot be ignored.

Dallas let Scott Wedgewood walk and signed DeSmith to a three-year contract this summer. That seemed like a clear sign they wanted a backup who could come in and play 25 to 28 games. DeSmith is on pace for 18 starts. And even without the overall numbers, Oettinger's heavy usage lately is still concerning.

To be clear, this has nothing to do with the result of the game tonight. Oettinger could bounce back from his tough start Wednesday and earn a solid win against New York.

That really isn't the point.

The point is that the 26-year-old will need to rest. Looking at the schedule, he will get some time off with the upcoming holiday break, and a bit more if DeSmith starts in Utah on Monday.

But after that, Dallas plays just about every other night against a bunch of very good teams in January. Then they have a West Coast road trip in early February before the 4 Nations break.

Are three or maybe five days of rest enough to get him through that stretch? What about after the 4 Nations tournament? Outside of one five-day break in March, it is three or four games each week down the stretch. And for this team, a hopeful long playoff run to follow.

The Stars believe they can win a Stanley Cup right now, and all signs point to them going all in to do so this season. If they are going to have any chance of that, they will need the very best from their starting goalie in the playoffs.

Is his current usage the best way to ensure that? Maybe not.

But will it make the difference and result in them getting burned? We will have to wait to find out.

**DLLS**

### **3 thoughts on Dallas Stars 3-1 loss vs New York Rangers**

By Sam Nestler  
Dec. 20, 2024

Yuck.

The Dallas Stars probably deserved to win tonight, but 41 saves from Igor Shesterkin and a few recurring problems doomed them in a 3-1 loss on Friday at American Airlines Center.

What should we talk about?  
Kidding. The power play.

Dallas went 0-7 on the power play tonight. They totaled 17 minutes with the man advantage due to the major penalty on Matt Rempe.

They scored zero goals in that time. Oh, and the Rangers scored once.

That is a real problem. And not a new one. I don't know what the answer is to be honest.

But as I said on the postgame show, one adjustment I would like to see is Dallas getting a big grittier and specifically taking the puck hard to the net from the goal line. I love how Mark Stone does it in Vegas, and it causes chaos around the blue paint. That, plus some more tips and bodies around the net.

Clearly, it is not working this way. So how about making it even uglier and trying to score some greasy ones?

Bouncing back Oetter

I was honestly both very impressed and really happy for Jake Oettinger tonight. No goalie wants to get pulled. And certainly not on your birthday in a big-time game against the top market in the league.

I was surprised Oettinger started again tonight. I think many were.

But the 26-year-old really responded after Wednesday, stopping 27 of 29 (.931 save percentage). They needed it at times, and like he usually does, their starting goaltender gave them a chance to tie tie the game.

They just simply didn't get it done.

It's not just the power play  
I posted a few alarming numbers before the game tonight:

November: 4th with 3.69 goals per game — 3rd in 5v5 scoring – PP: 23rd (17.1%)

December – 22nd with 2.67 goals per game — 22nd in 5v5 goals — PP: 24th (14.8%)  
That is a massive drop-off. And even November was highly skewed by back-to-back seven-goal onslaughts. Tonight's one-goal effort didn't help.

The fact is this team is struggling to score goals. And even more so since the injury to Tyler Seguin. Well, Seguin is not coming back until at least April, so something needs to be done now.

Is that getting a jump start on a trade? Is it calling up some reinforcements that score goals? Not sure. But it needs to be something.

The team, and all of you fans, should be very disappointed with a 3-3-0 six-game homestand. Opportunity missed.

Before I go, I just wanted to link this video of the dirty Rempe hit, but not for the hit itself. I want you to enjoy Miro Heiskanen hanging around on the ice despite being hurt just so he can say a few words to the big Rangers forward...

Respect.

Good night, folks. See you in Euless tomorrow?

## Stars Thoughts

### Game 32 AfterThoughts: Building Nomentum

By Robert Tiffin

Dec. 21, 2024

The Stars more or less bookended their season-long six-game homestand with lifeless losses against the worst team in the NHL (Nashville) and a team that just traded its captain and a former second-overall forward in a frantic effort to put some life into the team (New York). Those games aren't easy, because this is the NHL, but they also shouldn't have been insurmountable climbs.

Not for this team, certainly. The Stars came into the year looking like one of the deepest teams in the NHL, and they still should be. But the moment adversity hit this team last month, they started to look about as deep as the plot of *Land Before Time 12* (in which Littlefoot learns to be brave at the dentist).

Look, it's easy to bury a team after a going 0-for-7 on the job while the flu ravages the team's health, and I don't want to do that. Because you could see how frustrated the Stars were in this game. You could see how each Igor Shesterkin glove save just demoralized them a little more, and you could see how the power play was, as DeBoer said, sapping momentum from the group. It's all obvious enough to any moderately empathetic human being: it hurts them way more than it hurts you.

But the thing is, that's not good enough. It's not enough to try, when you're paid to score, and when you're playing a team that has looked about as checked out as any club in the league over the last month.

It's not enough to point to past power play success when you continue to look mediocre. You can't ask fans to just keep the faith when the issues everyone wants to complain about continue to be the issues. You have to fix it, by hook or by crook. They have the players to do it, but the players aren't doing it often enough. So far, at least.

The Stars have allowed the second-fewest goals in the NHL, by the way. That's fantastic! They've been elite in terms of goal-prevention, but all they have to show for it is a sub-.600 points percentage and a mere one-point lead over Utah, who are out of the playoffs right now. They've asked Jake Oettinger to play eight straight games, and some of that was out of necessity, as Casey DeSmith had the nasty virus for a couple of games. But the fact of the matter is the team has gone 3-5-0 in those contests while averaging less than 2.5 goals per game.

You can't ask Jake Oettinger to keep your season afloat indefinitely just because the power play has to do a vision quest until some later point in time. It's not fair to him, and it goes against the exact philosophy the team preached from years past about keeping Oettinger fresh for the most important games later in the year. The message is clear: right now, they view these games as the most important games they have, because Oettinger has been the only weapon that has consistently shown the ability to win games for them. But even he can't score power play goals.

In December, you can't ask Miro Heiskanen to absorb 30 minutes the game after Esa Lindell plays over 30 minutes, and then have your power play lay an egg after a goon called up from the AHL takes a run at Heiskanen's numbers and leaves him bleeding on the ice. You just can't ask fans to be okay with the lack of a meaningful response (despite Roope Hintz's standing up for his teammate in the moment, of course). No matter how solid your 5-on-5 scoring is, or how many chances your power play is creating, you have to do something to instill confidence in your fanbase when you're underperforming. Because how the fans feel right now, watching this team fail to capitalize on chance after chance while more imbalanced teams have cruised to a better start while keeping players fresher, is frustrated.

It's not fair to let one playoff series color your view of an entire season, but that's kind of the name of the game in the NHL, folks. The power play disappeared against Edmonton, with the Stars giving up shorthanded goals, too. This game was a microcosm of that series, where the Stars probably deserved more, but they didn't get it. I think folks are getting a little tired of seeing microcosms this year.

It would be one thing if Dallas were just biding their time, knowing Jim Nill had a huge deal coming in two months. They don't need to blow the doors off the league in November. It's fine to just keep pace and save your kick for the final bell. But they're suddenly on the edge of the playoff bubble after a rough two or three weeks. That's the harsh reality of this league, these days.

And even if you are desperate to stay ahead of the pack, running your best players into the ground in December, both in terms of minutes and usage, is not what a patient, confident team does. So, if nothing else, you can rest assured that the coaching staff is not any more apathetic than you are: DeSmith played really well in the third period on Wednesday, but they went back to Oettinger for this game, yet again. And Oettinger, to be fair, was really good, having to make a couple of outstanding saves just to keep this one in theoretical reach. They wanted this game, and they decided to once again lean on their top guys to get it. And their top guys ended up letting them down. So, if you want to blame Oettinger for giving up two goals, I would invite you to look at essentially the entire period the Stars got to play with one more skater than New York, and ask you why it's Oettinger's fault he gave up two goals while his team scored just one.

Jason Robertson and Wyatt Johnston had more power play time than Lian Bichsel or Evgenii Dadonov had total ice time. You cannot ask for a better opportunity to show you can help your team win than that, and neither of two of the Stars' best young forwards over the last 2+ years could find a way to make the play they needed. They've done it so many times in the past, but when the Stars needed that one extra goal tonight, they couldn't get it. Nobody in that room feels good about that, I promise you.

Matt Duchene and Jamie Benn likewise couldn't find a way to learn on their veteran know-how in order to muster something more from their group. Leadership doesn't just mean answering for a loss or sticking up for a teammate. It means finding ways to get results in important times. Tonight was such a time, until it wasn't.

Watching that five-minute power play felt like doomscrolling your Twitter feed the night before you have to take a final exam you haven't studied for. You know you won't feel better afterwards, but you're just looking for something, anything, to make you forget about your anxiety. But each tick of the clock just brings the despair closer to home because yes, it is this bad, and no, it does not look like anyone will be able to stop it. But you'll keep watching,

because what else are you going to do, go to sleep? That sounds like something a healthy person would do, ppsH.

What you can say, at least, is that the last ten games have been an enormous compliment to Tyler Seguin. Far from being the sort of player Peter Chiarelli thought Boston couldn't handle, Seguin has apparently become the cornerstone of this entire team, causing them to stumble in perfect unison the moment he had to leave. I'm not sure he takes any solace in this. (I am sure that he doesn't.)

Now, let's calm down for a moment, because it's only been nine games since Seguin left, and the Stars have gone 4-5-0 in those games. That's far, far from season-ending, and now would be a great time for all of us to remember where Edmonton was at this time last year, or where St. Louis was at this time six years ago, and so on. There are plenty of examples to draw from if you're looking for consolation, so I'll not take those from you. There is ample hope, plenty of reasons not to be drawn offside by a tepid offensive stretch that defies the underlying numbers. The Stars are capable of creating scoring chances, and they have players who have historically been able to capitalize on those. Either they all spent Thanksgiving staring at a solar eclipse, or else there will be some positive regression. It would be foolish not to believe that, as Hintz's scoring exemplifies. The players you know are still in there.

But I also don't think it's fair to tell the fans to calm down, or not to worry. Clearly DeBoer was worried after Thomas Harley let that puck miss his stick for the shorthanded goal by Reilly Smith, as Heiskanen began staying out for both power play sets for most of the 3rd-6th power play opportunities. Maybe Harley isn't quite 100% yet (and who knows who else is ailing), and that was a mercy as much as anything. But the concern isn't localized within one person, is the point. And Harley had a chance to redeem himself on the five-minute major, but it just wasn't his night.

And sure, it's also worth keeping in mind that the power play was then asked to go from relying on Heiskanen to quarterback all two minutes to having to do five minutes without him at all. It's perfectly understandable that the power play might not look its best when asked to do things without Heiskanen. Again, there were challenges and excuses aplenty, as there always are. No one is saying the Stars have it easy. Indeed, it's been very, very tough in a lot of ways big and small this year.

But you know what? Fans don't care. Fans simply know that going 0-for-7 on the power play is embarrassing. They know that losing in regulation to Chicago (is that still the low point of the season, do we think?), losing a stinker at home to Nashville, meekly submitting to what's left of the Rangers, and having "one of those games" against Anaheim are concerning things, when grouped together. They know that when a goon hits your guy, you have to make the other team pay, somehow. You just have to. But they didn't, or they couldn't, and I don't know which one of those options is worse.

Again, for the folks in the back: There are very real reasons why the Stars are not able to play their best hockey right now, but there are far more reasons why they can't afford to play their worst hockey, either. Especially when they have one more player than the other team.

So, what do you do?

You can bench players from the power play, which sort of happened with Bourque getting in the mix in favor of Dadonov tonight, if that moves the needle for you. But I don't see how giving

slumping players like Logan Stankoven or Jason Robertson fewer opportunities is likely to help them gain more confidence. And by the way, Bourque could've had a hat trick tonight with the chances he was getting and making, but he didn't. And the way the team is right now, it's a shame. But he simply has to score if he really wants to keep getting those opportunities this season, given how badly the Stars need goals. And he, like almost everyone else, couldn't manage it.

I do wonder if you at least consider swapping Logan Stankoven and Colin Blackwell on the job once in a while (but certainly only for a couple of games—not permanently), if only to get Stankoven out of whatever scoring funk he's found himself in. And goodness knows Blackwell would attack that opportunity with all of the percents. But this is just moving the names around, not something coaches really want to do. Stankoven has to be that sort of guy for you, given what you know about him. He's just too good not to be good.

I don't like even appearing to blame one or two players for games like this, anymore than I like blaming a goalie when the entire team gives up too many chances. Coaches talk all the time about needing to see emotion and drive from their players, and the Stars' inability to mount big pushes and to score big goals when trailing is now both a collective problem and an undeniable trend, with 50 games left to go. So whether it's just a statistical anomaly, a tactical error, or a functional hiccup, Stars fans can't keep watching their team end things with a whimper after being asked to GET LOUD for seven power plays without result.

Fans want to see something happen in games like this, or to hear about something happening after games like this. Catharsis is an insatiable beast when the team is struggling, and it demands stories of coaches screaming, throwing things, or bag-skating the team (which is both outmoded in general and the last thing this particular group needs, given the health situation). Fans are tired of breaking their remote controls, of walking through surly crowds back to their cars in order to get home at midnight when they have work the next day. They want to feel hope, and the Stars have invariably turned third-period deficits into defeat this year. Fans deserve better than that, eventually. Maybe the Stars are just setting us all up for an amazing next 50 games.

The good news is, this team isn't Buffalo. Things are not that bad, because Jake Oettinger and the top-three defensemen have been that good, this year. But the standard in Dallas has been set admirably high, and that means a points percentage in the .500s is not, and should not, be okay. The Stars have set a high standard for themselves, and now is the time for them to show fans that they care about failing to live up to it. Their track record suggests that won't be a problem, but no one wants to hear about the past. The future needs to be now.

(Wow, that would look great on a t-shirt, right?)

## Stars Stack

# Into The Weeds: Three generic ways Dallas can improve the power play

By David Castillo  
Dec. 23, 2024

Stars fans took no prisoners on Friday night versus the Rangers. What began as a hopeful night with Thomas Harley drawing back in and a potential end to the flu bug going around, ended with Steve Spott, Pete DeBoer, and the Dallas power play participants—still ranked 25th—getting dropped into a digital Hunger Games of criticism and anger. It was hard not to sympathize with fans, in part because it was such a disagreeable night in general. Worst of all, Dallas' power play failed in response to one of the most absurdly illegal hits you'll see all year when Matt Rempe elevated his 6'7 frame in order to elbow Miro Heiskanen in the head.<sup>1</sup>

Before we begin, it's important to keep things in perspective. Spott and DeBoer are famously close. Unless Dallas decides to fire the entire coaching staff, Spott is going nowhere. In addition, you won't find examples of assistant coaches being fired in the middle of a season. The most recent cases, Todd Reirden in Pittsburgh and Darby Hendrickson in Minnesota, occurred at the end of lost seasons. The Stars season is hardly lost. Although it's obviously slipping, Dallas is, after all, currently out of a playoff spot. Sure it's misleading due to points percentage and goal differentials, but there's nothing misleading about the power play problem.

The other aspect of maintaining perspective is this: what would a coaching change fix, right now? We'll get into the nuts and bolts of this question, but for now, it's important to emphasize that the Stars don't just have a power play problem. They have a scoring problem. Dallas is 15th in goals-for at even strength, one spot below the abyss that is the Buffalo Sabres. In their stretch without Tyler Seguin since December 1st, they've scored 12 even-strength goals, 27th in the league.

This is not to make excuses. On the contrary, Seguin was ninth in team scoring last season; tenth in scoring on the power play — hardly a pillar of offense, at least historically. As fantastic as he was playing this year, he's not Nikita Kucherov. So even though Seguin's loss is having a tangible effect on Dallas, they have zero reason to crater so badly.

One thing I intend to avoid is discussing blame. This is on coaching and the players. Coaches exist to craft the systems, and the strategies. If players aren't executing, it's on coaches to figure out how to get them to execute. For example, if Miro Heiskanen is taking too many low danger point shots, then it's on Heiskanen to stop taking them, just as it's on the coaching staff to stop him from taking too many low danger point shots. I understand the impulse to blame Spott. Not only is it a valid impulse, it's something of a looming cloud if postseason history is any indication. However, DeBoer is not a passenger here. And neither are the players.

If everything is bad, then what exactly can be done? I'd like to propose three things in no particular order. I'm probably more optimistic than most. Not only they do have the past to reference, but there is a foundation in my view.



Identify the weak links and stack the top unit

Last season, Dallas treated Joe Pavelski like the player he no longer was. While I see fans lament the loss of Pavelski, he was also a big part of Dallas' offensive struggles once the top line slowed to a crawl and became below league average in shot quality differential. This season, we're seeing the same thing with Jamie Benn. Below you'll see player rates for shots on net, unblocked shots, shot attempts, and individual shot quality on the man advantage. The color coding is to indicate above (green) and below (red) the league average, with gradations representing different levels of good and bad. Critically, the average numbers have been adjusted for the defenders, so the stats for Heiskanen and Thomas Harley are compared to the defenseman's average on the power play.

Here's the top unit.

Right away, let's discuss the three most obvious.

Benn is a massive drag on the top unit, shooting well below league average in every category. There's no reason for him to be on the top unit (okay, there is, but more on that in a moment).

Heiskanen: likewise. A case could be made that his high rate of shot attempts is actually a bad thing, since he's not an elite offensive player.

Hintz, Robertson, and Johnston are Good, Actually.

Things are not so simple, of course. If you're wondering why Benn is on the top unit, it's because he's Dallas' best faceoff man. Currently a +9 on power play faceoffs, only Matt Duchene comes close, at +4. I don't want to get caught up in the faceoff debate, which we've already had. But since this is "into the weeds" I'll say this. Consider these two players:

Player A, who is good at faceoffs, but deficient in offense.

Player B, who is bad at faceoffs, but proficient in offense.

Who would you rather have? While this is not a trick question, I think the answer is obvious: on the power play, Player B every day of the week and twice on Domingo. The power play is entirely about offense. Choosing Player A is tantamount to letting someone fight fire in a burning building just because they're in great physical condition. Sure, physical condition is important, but not as important as having an Emergency Medical Technician certification. If Benn's offense isn't certified, then faceoff prowess should be irrelevant. One of the best faceoff players in the league on the PP is Jean-Gabriel Pageau. He's playing on the Islander's top unit. Their rank? Dead last. Conversely, Carolina and Winnipeg are bottom 10 teams in PP faceoff win percentage. They are, however, top 10 in PP scoring. Even if you're a Faceoffs Matter proponent, you have to admit it doesn't matter for Benn on Dallas' top unit.

Getting back to the above data, what I find interesting is that Johnston and Robertson are doing quite well in terms of getting shots off, and generating shot quality. However, most fans would likely disagree with that. As for the second unit, here's something interesting: despite leading

the team in PP production, Duchene has been extremely lackluster as a chance generator on his own.

In other words, if Dallas wants to improve the power play, I'd argue they need to start by stacking the top unit. There's no sense in splitting hairs when you need only a few good strands. And that begins with eliminating the "weakest" players. Again, this is just a preliminary suggestion. Rather than argue over one or the other, I'm suggesting starting from the ground up, for example, a top unit without Benn and Heiskanen. Going solely by the data, that leaves Dallas with the following.

Arguing for Nils Lundkvist over Harley (a fine suggestion), or playing Mavrik Bourque somewhere on this unit (I agree!) is a separate article. The point here is that Dallas needs to start with a workable base. It's hard to see how that happens with Benn and Heiskanen on the top unit; not unless something in their games drastically changes, or if the coaching staff stumbles onto a combination that can better integrate Benn and Heiskanen; or rather, a combination that they can mesh with. Heiskanen may still have value as a top unit PP blueliner, but it's clearly not on the current unit as constructed.

A digression: Dallas' power play heatmaps

The numbers alone do not an argument make. Shot rates are all well and good, but on the power play, it's also about roles. Special teams live and die by their formations, and rotations. Your typical power play has the following:

A point man

A threat on the right dot

A threat from the left dot

A primary net-front presence

A secondary net-front presence

With that in mind, who's playing what role, here?

This is easily the most damning evidence against Dallas' power play. Who is the quarterback on this unit? What is Benn's role, specifically, and why are there two point "threats" on a unit that runs a 1-3-1? Is there a right flank on this power play? Because their controller isn't just disconnected—somebody cut the chord. The second unit is hardly any better.

The question of roles is crucial. And it's the single biggest reason why Dallas is struggling to do much of anything. If nobody's following their assignments, then no mission can be accomplished.

Steal from the Vegas playbook

The old lesson about stealing instead of borrowing, etc. One of the best power play teams in the league is Vegas. Anchored by Jack Eichel (right dot), Tomáš Hertl (secondary net-front), Shea

Theodore (point), Mark Stone (primary net front, or bumper), and Pavel Dorofeyev (left dot), they have one of the most adaptable units in the entire league. Jack Han wrote about them extensively early on when it seemed like they had the formula for PP excellence.

I recommend reading it in full. If I hadn't told you their roles, would you even need me to tell you by looking only at their heat maps?

This is what a power play unit should look like. There's a clear, and precise presence for each role. Notice how there's no overlap between roles like there is on Dallas' two units. There's also no critical area of the ice that goes unaccounted for. Stone and Hertl cover the front of the net without bumping into each other, Dorofeyev is a one-timer option on the left dot, Eichel generates from the top of the right dots, and Theodore threatens from the point on two levels instead of just one.

I clipped most of Dallas' chances on the Rempe major, and it's bizarre how rushed the Stars are when it comes to generating shots. Because they're willing to shoot without being in formation, they end up chasing their own chances with players out of position. It also affects how the team generates rebounds.

The Stars are 7th in low danger chances on the PP. Going back to Han's analysis of Vegas, part of net-front effectiveness is not just having someone to stand there and screen the goalie waiting for tips (Pavelski at his best wasn't static). It's also rotation between the two. Dallas' obsession with taking low danger shots for the high danger rebound isn't working precisely because there's no rotation down low. It's one of the odd contradictions in Dallas' power play. They're actually getting the rebounds. In fact, they're one of the better rebound-generating teams.

But the lack of inside rotation — to borrow Han's terminology — ala Vegas means the rebound quality is low. There is where I think moving Benn and Heiskanen to the second unit could pay dividends. While Heiskanen does have some offensive strengths, I don't believe walking the blueline or blasting shots from the point is one of them. In my goofy opinion, it would actually make more sense for Heiskanen to play the left flank/quarterback position since he's most dangerous wiring wrists at midrange along the right dot. Or at least that's the case at even strength and has been his entire career.

Of course, Vegas has a special player in Eichel to play the quarterback role, so that allows them to do a lot more. If the Stars can solve this piece, it'll go a long way. Again borrowing from Han, Vegas' ability to move into a spread formation (two players at the point, or a 3-2) before switching back to the classic 1-3-1 allows them to outmaneuver aggressive penalty killing, which is what has hurt the Stars as much as their own lackluster play. Their lack of answers to aggressive penalty killing was a critical piece of their downfall versus Edmonton. That they still don't have an answer for that is a major deal, and demands answers.

Don't be clever

Lastly, Lian Bichsel doesn't need to play the bumper role. Sam Steel and Oskar Bäck don't need to be on the top unit. Esa Lindell doesn't need to run the point. This is not a criticism of these players, nor is it to plea to stifle creative, outside-the-box thinking. In fact, as possibilities,

these are entirely valid. However, a good power play should be built by good engineering; not reactionary planning. Putting fourth liners on the power play as a solution is the same as being unable to identify the problem. I realize Steel has played great recently, but if were a serious PP consideration, then he should have been from the start rather than while the Stars are on the precipice.

In a lot of ways, this is also unfair to the players. Many have little experience on the man advantage, so asking them to suddenly forge chemistries in formations they don't recognize is unproductive. There's also this: figuring out chemistries takes time. A new group needs to be given a window to make a difference; not merely a couple of shifts in which they're judged only by whether or not the PP scores. The power play should be viewed as a long term issue. Don't tinker with the PP units as a method of trying to score goals. Sure, that goes without saying, but tinker with them as a method for establishing a well-oiled machine going into the playoffs.

This will probably be the most disagreeable point for certain fans. But players like Robertson, Hintz, and Heiskanen are here to stay. The organization should be behind them (not that they've indicated they aren't), and continue to demand that they lead the way, even when struggling<sup>2</sup>. Robertson and Hintz in particular are top 30 players in points per 60 since 2020 (not counting this season). I don't believe for a second that they're replacement level forwards all of a sudden.

None of this is to say that there can't be a critical change here and there. Bourque, for example, was a phenomenal PP quarterback in the AHL and in juniors. With the PP slumping this card, there's no reason not to take his playmaking skills out for a spin. Sure, it's "added responsibility." But why is it always assumed that prospects want less instead of more, as if we can only assume they're some degree of unprepared rather than eager? This negative framing is exactly what gets me sports mad re: "the NHL is not a development league."

At this point, it's clear that the Stars are in dire need of help. However, it's critical that they start with an internal solution, less they use Seguin's LTIR money on a power play specialist they might not necessarily need<sup>3</sup>. Again, this brings us back to the real problem: Dallas doesn't need power play help. They need scoring help. But maybe, just maybe, they can find a way to help themselves. No offense to Pavelski. But he wasn't near as good as this PP is bad. Life finds a way. At least when given the opportunity. This team needs to create those opportunities before it becomes more than just an obstacle.

1

This earned him an eight-game suspension. Which wasn't near enough.

2

Yes, this undercuts the argument to get Heiskanen off the top unit, but Heiskanen not being on the top unit does not undercut his primary role: as the team's top three-zone defender.

3

There's also this. If you believe Dallas' power play issues stem from coaching, then what good does a power play specialist truly do?

**ESPN**

## **Rangers' Rempe suspended 8 games for hit on Stars' Heiskanen**

By Greg Wyshynski  
Dec. 22, 2024

New York Rangers forward Matt Rempe was suspended Sunday for eight games for a hit on Dallas Stars defenseman Miro Heiskanen "that violated multiple NHL rules," according to the NHL Department of Player Safety.

Rempe is considered a repeat offender under the terms of the collective bargaining agreement. He was suspended four games last season for elbowing New Jersey Devils defenseman Jonas Siegenthaler in March. Based on his average annual salary, he will forfeit \$80,000, which goes to the Players' Emergency Assistance Fund.

Rempe can appeal the suspension to NHL commissioner Gary Bettman. Since the suspension is over six games, he is also eligible to an appeal to a neutral arbitrator.

He did not play in the Rangers' 3-1 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes on Sunday afternoon.

At 7:13 of the third period Friday night in the Rangers' win over Dallas, Heiskanen played the puck with his back to Rempe. The Rangers forward skated in, raised his arm and drove Heiskanen's head into the glass, causing the Dallas defenseman to fall to the ice and the players to come together in a skirmish.

Rempe was given a major penalty and a game misconduct for elbowing. Heiskanen finished the game for Dallas.

The NHL said Sunday that Rempe violated both boarding and elbowing rules on the play.

In the time leading up to the hit, "Rempe sees nothing but Heiskanen's back" as he approaches, NHL Player Safety said, putting the responsibility on Rempe to change his approach.

"Rempe explodes upwards into a hard check into a defenseless Heiskanen while at the same time extending his elbow and forearm up and into the back of Heiskanen's neck, driving Heiskanen dangerously into the boards and glass," the department said in its ruling.

In determining the length of Rempe's suspension, NHL Player Safety cited the collective bargaining agreement, which states that "players who repeatedly violate league playing rules shall be more severely punished for each new violation."

Rempe has played only 23 combined regular-season and playoff games since his four-game suspension last season for elbowing. That incident occurred in Rempe's first game for the Rangers since Nov. 25, having been recently recalled from AHL Hartford. He earned 17 penalty minutes in 5:32 of ice time, registering one shot on goal and zero points.

Rempe became a sensation in 17 regular-season and 11 playoff games last season for the Rangers thanks to his size (6-foot-9), big hits and energetic fights. He earned 71 penalty minutes in 17 games but also the adoration of Rangers fans, who chanted his name at home games despite his averaging 5 minutes, 38 seconds.

Though he put in work during the offseason to earn more playing time in the NHL, Rempe has appeared in only five games this season, averaging 6:15.

Rangers coach Peter Laviolette was pleased with Rempe's game against Dallas before the hit on Heiskanen.

"I thought he had a big impact in the game. Would like to stay away from the five-minute major, but he's doing his best to hit bodies and make a difference in the game. Our guys rallied around that," Laviolette said.

**Breakaway on Sports Illustrated**

## **Former Stars Defenseman Looking for NHL Return**

By Nick Horvat

Dec. 22, 2024

The last time long-time Dallas Stars defenseman John Klingberg played in an NHL game was over a full year ago with the Toronto Maple Leafs. A hip surgery took Klingberg out of the Maple Leafs lineup for the remainder of the 2023-24 season, and he hasn't signed a new contract since.

Still a free agent, Klingberg is reportedly looking for another chance in the NHL. According to Elliotte Friedman on Sportsnet Saturday Headlines, Klingberg will soon begin skating with a junior team in hopes of returning to the NHL.

"It has been more than 400 days since John Klingberg played in the National Hockey League," Friedman said. "Sometime just after Christmas, he's going to resume skating with a junior team."

Friedman states that Klingberg has been working with the same group that helped superstar veteran Patrick Kane fully recover from a similar hip surgery and continue his NHL career.

"He's skating with the same people that brought Patrick Kane back," Friedman said. "And he does want to resume his career."

Klingberg is just 32 years old and has plenty of NHL experience with 633 career games played. Split between the Stars, Maple Leafs, Anaheim Ducks, and Minnesota Wild, Klingberg has 81 goals and 331 assists for 412 career points.

One of the better puck-moving defensemen when he was at his peak, Klingberg believes he can still cut it at the highest level.

"He's looking to potentially join a team after Christmas, probably closer to the end of January."

If Klingberg can prove he's fully recovered from his hip surgery and still has the ability to be a useful piece on a blue line, there should be plenty of teams willing to take a chance. He is a right-shot defender who might still have top-notch passing skills and will likely play for cheap this season.

It's been over a year since Klingberg laced his skates at the NHL level, but there is hope he still has enough left in the tank to continue his career.