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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets to hold vigil for Johnny Gaudreau, Matthew Gaudreau

By Brian Hedger- September 4, 2024

The Blue Jackets are inviting fans to remember Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, with a candlelight vigil Wednesday night at Nationwide Arena.

The memorial will begin at 7:30 p.m. and be held on the Front St. Plaza outside the east entrance. The Gaudreau brothers were killed while biking last Thursday in a tragic collision on a two-lane road in Oldmans Township, New Jersey, which is near their hometown.

Sean M. Higgins, 43, of Woodstown, New Jersey was arrested and is facing two charges of death by auto after telling a responding officer from the New Jersey State Police he'd consumed "five or six beers," prior to the fatal wreck. Higgins attempted to pass two vehicles, but cut back behind the second vehicle, an SUV, that had moved to the left to safely pass the Gaudreaus.

Higgins, attempting to pass on a narrow stretch of shoulder, struck both brothers from behind with a Jeep Grand Cherokee, causing their deaths at the scene. The tragedy has prompted outpourings of sympathy for the Gaudreaus from across the NHL and hockey world, in general, including a vigil held by fans last Friday at a memorial set up outside the arena.

The Blue Jackets' vigil will include remarks by representatives of the organization along with 13:21 of silence to reflect the brothers' jersey numbers – 13 for Johnny, who starred for Boston College, the Calgary Flames and Blue Jackets, and 21 for Matthew, who played at Boston College and for multiple professional teams.

Columbus Dispatch / DeWine on death of Columbus Blue Jacket Johnny Gaudreau: 'A horrible, horrible tragedy'

By Nathan Hart- September 4, 2024

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine on Tuesday made his first in-person statement about the death of Columbus Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau, who died Thursday alongside his brother after a suspected drunk driver struck them.

"It's just a horrible, horrible tragedy. That's all we can say," the governor said during a press conference Tuesday. "You know, our heart goes out to the family members. The circumstances, when I first heard, it's like, 'Oh, my God.' This is just hard to fathom, for that one family suffers so very much in one moment."

DeWine previously commented on Gaudreau's death via a Friday post on X.

'We love you Johnny Hockey': Fans of Blue Jackets, NHL react to Johnny Gaudreau death

Gaudreau, nicknamed "Johnny Hockey," joined the Blue Jackets in 2022 and was the team's top scorer for the two seasons he played for Ohio's capital city.

Gaudreau's sudden death shocked the sports world, eliciting statements of mourning from legions of fans, sports legends like LeBron James, the Columbus Blue Jackets, the NHL and more.

Gaudreau, 31, and his brother, Matthew, 29, died while cycling in Oldmans Township, New Jersey Thursday night after a suspected drunk driver hit the brothers while attempting to pass them.

The driver of the vehicle, Sean Higgins, 41, of Woodstown, New Jersey, was arrested and faces numerous criminal charges in the incident. Higgins is expected to make his next court appearance Thursday.

The Gaudreau brothers were to appear in their sister's wedding as groomsmen Friday, according to a post on a popular wedding website. Johnny Gaudreau leaves behind his daughter, Noa, his son, Johnny, and his wife, Meredith.

The Athletic / Canadiens' Cole Caufield to wear No. 13 in honor of Johnny Gaudreau

By Arpon Basu- September 4, 2024

Montreal Canadiens forward Cole Caufield will be changing his number from 22 to 13 this season to honor the late Johnny Gaudreau, Caufield announced Tuesday.

Gaudreau and his brother Matthew were killed last Thursday in a traffic crash while riding bicycles in New Jersey, sending the hockey world into a state of mourning. The tragedy especially stuck with Caufield.

As an undersized player, Caufield looked up to Gaudreau as proof that you didn't need to be the biggest guy to thrive in the NHL. When Caufield played for the under-18 team at the United States National Team Development Program in 2018-19, he wore No. 13 and broke the program's single-season goal record previously held by Auston Matthews.

He wrote in an Instagram post Tuesday evening that the reason he wore No. 13 at the USNTDP was because of Gaudreau, who he considered an inspirational hero.

"I wore #13 at a point in my career because of Johnny and now I will be wearing it again to honor him" Caufield wrote. "He paved the way for smaller players and proved we had a future in this game at the highest level. I will forever be grateful to him for inspiring me and others."

Caufield's NHL debut came on April 26, 2021, and for that milestone game, he lined up for the opening faceoff in Calgary across from Gaudreau. This past spring, Caufield got a chance to be teammates with Gaudreau on Team USA at the IIHF men's world championships.

"Getting to play with your hero is something that most people only dream of. I was lucky enough to be Johnny's teammate this past summer and it didn't take long to realize how great of a person he was," Caufield wrote. "He was the most welcoming, genuine, and funniest guy I have ever met.

"He was someone everyone gravitated towards and I took every chance I could to be around him. Not only was he an amazing hockey player and teammate, but he was down to earth and truly cared about every person he encountered."

[Sportsnet.ca / Flames, Conroy ponder how to honour Gaudreau as memorial continues to grow](#)

By Eric Francis- September 4, 2024

CALGARY — Staring down at one of the thousands of chalk messages fronting the makeshift memorial for Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, a pensive Craig Conroy exhaled deeply.

“Reading these...,” said the Flames GM, pausing for the right words as he navigates his way around an ever-growing tribute on the west side of the Saddledome.

“It’s emotional.

“It’s clear he meant something different to every person.

“It wasn’t just the hockey — he meant more to this city as a person. His family meant so much to the city too.”

“It just shows me what a great city we have here. The people, the love, the passion... so special.”

Special like Johnny.

Five days after the two brothers were killed by a suspected drunk driver while cycling on a rural New Jersey road, fans continue to scribble their sentiments on the rink-side asphalt, while leaving thousands of jerseys, sticks, hats, flowers, photos and purple Gatorade on the steps.

And while messages vary from “score us some goals in heaven Johnny,” to, “drunk driving must stop,” there is one that sits alone, 21 steps above the tributes that speaks for the masses.

In orange chalk it reads, “Retire #13 please!!!”

It only makes sense.

Not just in Calgary, but Columbus as well.

No one would dare wear it in either city again anyway.

Following a long weekend of grieving, the organizations are certainly discussing that likelihood internally.

There’s no question the team that drafted and hosted him the first nine years of his career will want to memorialize the diminutive superstar, ensuring his contributions will never be forgotten.

But it’s far too soon for anyone to expect an imminent announcement like that.

Now isn’t the time, as the focus is squarely on mourning and comprehending a loss of this magnitude.

“Little bit too early,” said Conroy, in agreement.

“I’m just thinking about what comes next for the family, and the funeral.

“But I can see why people are talking about that.”

Johnny Gaudreau leaves lasting legacy in Calgary and around NHL

Although only a handful of Gaudreau’s Flames teammates are still with the organization, players and staff members have been offered grief counselling.

No one is quite sure how to proceed, as the family decides how, when and where to hold the funeral.

“Everybody I know wants to go, but that may not be possible,” said Conroy.

It’s a particularly hard time for Conroy, who signed Gaudreau to his first contract, shared the same agent, and was even tasked with minding his dog, Bailey, at times.

“You try to treat all the players the same, but we had a great connection right from the get-go, right up until he left,” said Conroy.

“But so many felt a connection to him and his family. Everywhere I go in the city everybody has a story about how they ran into him one time.

“Those are hard, but I like hearing them.

“You try to think of the positive stuff, but the whole thing is heartbreaking.”

Most of the sentiments scattered around the Dome focus on sending love to the Gaudreau family as they deal with unspeakable pain.

“We talk about close families, and we all have close families, but I’ve never seen a bond with a family quite like the Gaudreaus,” said Conroy.

“And the way they embraced Calgary when Johnny got here was incredible. I used to feel bad for Jane and Guy having to do so many interviews when they visited, but they loved it.”

The love and respect are mutual, as evidenced by the steady stream of well-wishers who continued to visit the rink-side memorial Tuesday.

“That’s what I love about this city,” said Conroy, who saw a similar outpouring of support for Chris Snow and his family a year ago when the assistant GM died of complications from ALS.

“You can’t even put into words what it means.

“We do show our support, what he meant to us, what he did off the ice and how many people he touched in the city.”

In past days, Conroy, Jarome Iginla and Lanny McDonald have shared their love for Johnny, Matthew and the Gaudreaus by sending heartfelt condolences online.

The organization has also paid tribute to the Gaudreaus at Hitmen and Stampeders games.

In due time, the organization will find even more stirring ways to ensure the brothers are honoured, and that the memories and relationship endure.

Trust them to do it the way Johnny Hockey always did — with the perfect touch.

The Hockey News / Fundraiser set up for Matthew Gaudreau's family rises to over half a million dollars

By Jason Newland- September 4, 2024

When it was announced that a suspected drunk driver stole the lives of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, the world was in complete shock.

It came out later in the day that the younger Gaudreau, Matthew, had a pregnant wife. The unborn son of Matthew and Madeline Gaudreau is going to be named Tripp.

Madeline's sister Holland Korbitz set up a GoFundMe on Friday in hopes of raising \$30,000.

In this unimaginably difficult time, we are coming together to support Matthew's wife, Madeline, and their growing baby Tripp, and help alleviate some of the financial burdens they now face. Your support will allow them the time to take off work to grieve and heal as a family.

As of 8:30 on Tuesday morning, the total is at a staggering \$537,565, to which "All donations raised will be transferred directly to Madeline to help pay for funeral expenses and baby Tripp," according to the GoFundMe page.

People from around the hockey world, and even some outside of it have donated to Madeline Gaudreau and Baby Tripp. The generosity of those people will help ease the financial burden and stress of an unexpected death such as this. People from Columbus to Calgary and all points in between are chipping in to help the Gaudreau's.

Madeline is due to deliver Tripp into the world in December per her sister, and although Matthew won't be there to see his son being born, Tripp will have millions upon millions of people who will wrap their arms around him and show him love.

Today / 'Inseparable' hockey brothers killed by alleged drunk driver remembered by coach: 'It hurts us all'

By Scott Stump- September 4, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets are mourning an "unimaginable tragedy" after forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother were killed when, according to police, they were hit by an alleged drunken driver while riding bikes in their New Jersey hometown.

Gaudreau, 31, and his brother, Matthew, 29, were pronounced dead at the scene on the night of Aug. 29 after they were struck by an alleged drunken driver who was trying to pass another vehicle, New Jersey State Police said, according to NBC Philadelphia.

The brothers were planning to attend their sister's wedding on Aug. 30, according to NJ Advance Media.

In a statement on X on Aug. 30, the Blue Jackets shared their condolences.

"The Columbus Blue Jackets are shocked and devastated by this unimaginable tragedy," the team said in a statement. "Johnny was not only a great hockey player, but more significantly a loving husband, father, son, brother and friend. We extend our heartfelt sympathies to his wife, Meredith, his children, Noa and Johnny, his parents, their family and friends on the sudden loss of Johnny and Matthew."

Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau played on the ice together at Boston College under coach Jerry York.

"Matty and Johnny were inseparable brothers," York said. "For this to all come together like this — it's bizarre and it hurts us all."

Police said Sean M. Higgins, 43, of Woodstown, New Jersey, was suspected of being under the influence of alcohol and has been charged with two counts of death by auto, according to an arrest warrant obtained by NBC News.

Investigators said the Gaudreau brothers were riding their bikes on a county road in Oldmans Township at 8:19 p.m. on Aug. 29 when Higgins entered the southbound lanes to pass two vehicles ahead of him, according to the warrant.

Higgins then tried to pass an SUV by re-entering the northbound lanes and struck the Gaudreau brothers, who were pronounced dead at the scene, police said.

In interviews with investigators, Higgins said he had consumed alcoholic beverages before and while he was operating the vehicle, according to the warrant.

He also "explicitly stated" his consumption of alcoholic beverages contributed to his "impatience and reckless driving," which resulted in the collision, according to the warrant.

Higgins is a major in the New Jersey Army National Guard and works as a director of financial operations at a drug rehab center, according to his LinkedIn account. (His employer has put him on leave, NBC News reported.)

Higgins appeared in a virtual courtroom on the afternoon of Aug. 30, where a judge said he could face up to 10 years in prison. A detention hearing is scheduled for Sept. 5.

The seven-time NHL All-Star nicknamed "Johnny Hockey" was remembered for the passion he showed for the sport.

"Johnny played the game with great joy, which was felt by everyone that saw him on the ice," the team said in its statement. "He brought a genuine love for hockey with him everywhere he played, from Boston College to the Calgary Flames to Team USA to the Blue Jackets.

"He thrilled fans in a way only Johnny Hockey could. The impact he had on our organization and our sport was profound, but pales in comparison to the indelible impression he made on everyone who knew him. Johnny embraced our community when he arrived two years ago and Columbus welcomed him with open arms. We will miss him terribly and do everything that we can to support his family and each other through this tragedy."

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman also shared a statement on Gaudreau's death.

"While Johnny's infectious spirit for the game and show-stopping skills on the ice earned him the nickname 'Johnny Hockey,' he was more than just a dazzling hockey player; he was a doting father and beloved husband, son, brother and teammate who endeared himself to every person fortunate enough to have crossed his path," Bettman said.

Gaudreau is the second Blue Jackets player to die in an apparent tragic accident in the last three years.

Goalie Matiss Kivlenieks was killed in a fireworks incident in July 2021 when he was struck in the chest by an errant fireworks mortar blast, authorities said.

The Gaudreau brothers grew up in Carneys Point Township and became stars for Boston College. Johnny Gaudreau won the 2014 Hobey Baker Award as the top ice hockey player in college.

He was drafted by the Calgary Flames in 2014 and named to the NHL's All-Rookie Team in 2015. He played nine seasons for Calgary and is fifth all time in points in the franchise's history.

In 2022, he signed a seven-year free agent contract with Columbus. He made the NHL All-Star Game in 2023 and led the team in points this past season.

Matthew also had a five-year playing career as a professional. In 2022, he became the head ice hockey coach at their scholastic alma mater, Gloucester Catholic High School in New Jersey.

10TV / Blue Jackets to host candlelight vigil in remembrance of Johnny, Matthew Gaudreau

By 10TV Staff- September 4, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Columbus Blue Jackets are inviting fans to a candlelight vigil in remembrance of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau.

The vigil will be held on Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. on the Front Street Plaza outside the east entrance to Nationwide Arena.

During the vigil, the Blue Jackets organization will make brief remarks as well as 13:21 of silence, reflecting the number 13 Johnny wore with the Blue Jackets, Calgary Flames and Boston College. The number 21 represents the number Matthew wore at Boston College.

The two brothers were killed by a suspected drunken driver in their home state of New Jersey last week.

Johnny and Matthew were riding bicycles on a road when a man driving an SUV in the same direction attempted to pass two other vehicles and struck them from behind about 8 p.m., according to New Jersey State Police. They were pronounced dead at the scene.

Police said the driver, 43-year-old Sean M. Higgins, was suspected of being under the influence of alcohol and charged with two counts of death by auto, along with reckless driving, possession of an open container and consuming alcohol in a motor vehicle.

Johnny and Matthew died on the eve of their sister Katie's wedding. The two were set to be groomsmen.

Johnny Gaudreau, known as "Johnny Hockey," played 10 full seasons in the league and was set to enter his third with the Columbus Blue Jackets after signing a seven-year, \$68 million deal in 2022. He played his first eight seasons with the Calgary Flames.

[Sportsnet.ca / Outlining unfinished NHL business with training camps on the horizon](#)

By Rory Boylen- September 4, 2024

Though summer doesn't officially end for a couple more weeks, the passing of Labour Day is a defining line for many people. Vacation season comes to an end, school returns for many, and the usual day-to-day routine kicks back in.

In the NHL, Labour Day is an unofficial mark between the end of the off-season and the beginning of a new year. Though training camps are still a couple of weeks away from opening, the final touches will be put on rosters so that when Day 1 opens to the media, much of the house is in order.

We've gotten a more exciting August than usual, too. We've seen a few notable trades, including Patrik Laine going to Montreal and Yaroslav Askarov heading to San Jose, while the Edmonton Oilers had to contend with two offer sheets, allowing both Philip Broberg and Dylan Holloway to leave for St. Louis.

Even with that, there is still a lot of business that wasn't completed in the summer months. Here then, is a reminder of some of the bigger storylines still unresolved.

The Many, Many Unsigned RFAs

The best players still without a contract for 2024-25 is a long list of RFAs, many of whom are top-of-the-lineup, crucial players for their teams.

Jeremy Swayman, Boston's now undisputed No. 1 goalie after the team traded hug-mate Linus Ullmark to Ottawa this summer, is one of the more consequential. Choosing not to go to arbitration this time, the Bruins and Swayman are still grinding away on an extension, though there are questions about how far apart the two sides still are. Without Swayman, Joonas Korpi would be Boston's starter.

Detroit has two very big and important RFAs still unsigned in leading scorer Lucas Raymond and blue line cornerstone Moritz Seider. In Dallas, it's Thomas Harley after he scored 47 points in his 22-year-old season. Cole Perfetti is looking for more ice time and a more defined role in Winnipeg after scoring 19 goals last season, which could be a factor in his ongoing RFA talks, while Dawson Mercer of New Jersey also remains unsigned after his production dipped in Year 3.

And though Nick Robertson's NHL career hasn't been as fruitful as the others named here, the 22-year-old (turning 23 in September) scored 14 goals in 56 games for the Maple Leafs last season and, it seems, would finally have an opportunity to break into a regular lineup spot this season. As outlined by Luke Fox, the Leafs are rather thin on left wing, where Robertson plays, and that means they've been exploring the market to address the position. Without a contract, Robertson's trade request also still stands, and Leafs Nation will be watching to see if there's a resolution (via extension, accepted qualifying offer, or trade) by the opening of training camp.

Waiting For Extensions On Big Pending UFAs

Heading into the 20th season of his career, Sidney Crosby's contract is in its final year. Many might have expected for Crosby to sign by now, given the expectation he'll (probably) remain a Penguin for life, and the fact his contract won't be the same high-end, league-defining deal as Draisaitl's. Still, the Penguins are at an interesting point, striking out of the playoffs two years in a row, having not won a round since 2018, and now under the management of Kyle Dubas. When big contracts last came due for Kris Letang

and Evgeni Malkin they both got extended, so we'd anticipate the same for Crosby. But, what's the hold up?

Of course, we also have to mention Mitch Marner here, though it's not nearly as surprising he doesn't have an extension done with the Leafs yet. His situation looms over a transition season for the Leafs, but one in which the expectations will remain as high as ever. Day 1 of training camp, Marner becomes their biggest story after Auston Matthews and William Nylander were both extended.

Similarly, in Winnipeg, Nikolaj Ehlers is a season away from being able to walk out the door, and a decision will need to be made on whether to trade him, ride with him as his own rental, or give him more ice time and keep the relationship going. In Ottawa, a big price was paid to bring in Linus Ullmark and he'll want to feel out that organization as much as they'll want to make sure he can handle a heavier workload before committing to more term.

Brock Boeser hit 40 goals for the first time last season and now enters a contract year as the Canucks look to build on a second-round appearance. And in Florida, the defending champs have three key players from their run — Aaron Ekblad, Carter Verhaeghe and Sam Bennett — all eligible for extensions.

The Ryan Johansen Situation

In a bit of late summer drama, the Philadelphia Flyers waived centre Ryan Johansen for purposes of terminating his contract, due to "material breach" of the deal.

Philadelphia traded for Johansen at last season's trade deadline, also picking up a 2025 first-round pick and sending Sean Walker back to Colorado. The Flyers put Johansen on waivers right away, but couldn't send him to the AHL due to an injury.

That appears to be central to the ongoing situation.

However, two weeks after intending to terminate his contract, the Flyers still haven't made such a move, and Johansen remains on the roster. The player's representatives indicated this move will likely be grieved, whenever it comes to pass.

FREE AGENTS/PTOs

Heading into the final stretch before camps open, there are still some helpful UFAs available, many of whom could be signing on with professional tryout contracts in the coming days.

James van Riemsdyk scored 11 goals last season, and Mike Hoffman got to 10 — though neither of these mid-30s wingers are at their peak anymore, they could still be a cheap depth target for a winger hungry team. Max Pacioretty falls into that category as well, though with two Achilles tears and just four goals scored last season, the soon-to-be 36-year-old comes with risk.

On defence, Justin Schultz, Kevin Shattenkirk and Tony DeAngelo are all offensively inclined players who could be attractive in a PTO situation for a competitive team that needs to round out its bottom pair, or add another puck-moving element to the PP2. DeAngelo stands out a little here in that he's only 28, whereas the other two are the typical mid-30s players you find in this situation.

[Sportsnet.ca](https://www.sportsnet.ca) / [Analyzing NHL goalie market after Markstrom, Askarov trades](#)

By Jason Bukala- September 4, 2024

When the Nashville Predators traded Yaroslav Askarov (11th overall pick in 2020) to the San Jose Sharks two weeks ago it was a rare kind of deal in which a blossoming top goalie prospect -- one of the best outside the NHL -- was the centrepiece. The transaction got me thinking about how every NHL organization values drafting, developing, trading for, or signing free agent goalies differently.

Goalies, especially starters, aren't often traded, and so after cherry-picking some examples of how teams have approached the position, I'm honestly no further ahead in identifying consistent league-wide strategies. Some teams aren't shy about drafting goaltenders early in the draft, while others are reluctant to invest too much draft capital. Some teams overpay for goalies in free agency, while others methodically develop netminders in the minors before exposing them to NHL shooters.

It can be one of the harder positions to project, no matter how you get your goalie.

Here are some examples of strategies NHL teams have taken when making decisions regarding arguably the most important position on the roster. I'll also take a look at the Askarov and Jacob Markstrom trades, comparing the situations and returns for each.

Yaroslav Askarov vs. Spencer Knight

When I was the director of scouting in Florida, we selected Spencer Knight in the first round (13th overall) at the 2019 draft. Our staff felt he was the best player available and our GM at the time, Dale Tallon, who loves getting out on the road to scout prospects, agreed.

Knight was coming off a fantastic season at the USNTDP and his athleticism stood out as an elite element of his game. He was big in the net (6-foot-3), and displayed superior focus and competitiveness compared to his peers.

Knight went on to play NCAA hockey at Boston College and before he turned pro after the 2020-21 season, he was widely considered one of the top goalie prospects in the world.

Out of necessity, after Knight exited college to turn pro at the end of his season, the Panthers thrust him into duty at the end of the NHL regular season. Knight impressed the Panthers brass (now led by current GM Bill Zito) by posting a 2.32 GAA and .919 save percentage in four starts. He also saw action in the playoffs versus the Tampa Bay Lightning, appearing in two games and posting a 2.07 GAA and .933 save percentage.

Knight has had to overcome some personal challenges since entering the NHL and so his fast start has been followed up with some growing pains. After two seasons as an NHL backup, he spent all of last season in the AHL with the Charlotte Checkers, but has appeared in 57 regular season NHL games so far in his career, posting a 2.76 GAA and .909 save percentage overall.

Zito and his staff thought so highly of Knight coming out of his entry-level contract that they signed him to an extension which runs through the 2025-26 season and carries a cap hit of \$4.5 million. He will be a restricted free agent at the end of that contract with a qualifying offer set at \$4.5M -- interestingly, Sergei Bobrovsky's contract concludes the very same season.

Conversely, Askarov had been developing in the Nashville Predators' organization the past couple seasons and his numbers have been solid at the AHL level with the Milwaukee Admirals. Askarov played

92 games for Milwaukee and posted a 2.54 GAA and .911 save percentage, but unlike Knight, his NHL opportunities haven't been forthcoming.

Askarov wants to play in the NHL, so he asked for a trade out of Nashville and now finds himself in San Jose. I envision Askarov stopping pucks for the Sharks this season, but it's going to be challenging. The Sharks are rebuilding and it will take time for their core group of prospects to mature.

Knight and Askarov have something in common. Both were considered the top goalies in their draft class and future No. 1s at the NHL level. They also both had entrenched starters ahead of them on the depth chart when they arrived as pros, with Nashville choosing to extend Juuse Saros for eight years this past summer and Florida signing Sergei Bobrovsky as a UFA while Knight was entering his freshman season of college.

But when looking at their compensation, the comparison between the two goes off the rails.

After San Jose acquired Askarov they immediately signed him to a contract extension that kicks in at the beginning of the 2025-26 season with a \$2 million cap hit. Askarov will remain on his entry-level contract this season (\$925,000).

Both Askarov and Knight can still be sent to the minors without going through waivers, but Askarov's contract pays him \$80,000 in the minors, whereas Knight's would pay him his full \$4.5 million.

It's interesting to see how strategically different both goalies with bright futures have been handled.

When to walk away from a first-round goalie

At the 2015 draft, the Washington Capitals selected Ilya Samsonov 22nd overall.

By the time Samsonov had completed his fourth pro season in Washington's organization the team had lost trust in his trajectory to be their starting goalie of the future and, as an RFA, he wasn't even given a qualifying offer by the team. He instead became a UFA and signed in Toronto. He had flashes with the Leafs but, in the end, couldn't hold the job there either.

This summer Samsonov, now 27, signed a one-year, \$1.8 million contract with the Vegas Golden Knights, where he'll play behind Adin Hill. The Capitals, after Samsonov, addressed the position with veterans in other ways. First, they signed Darcy Kuemper as a free agent then, after trading him to Los Angeles for Pierre-Luc Dubois two years into the five-year contract, acquired Logan Thompson from Vegas for two third-round picks.

Risk vs. Reward

When Jack Campbell arrived in Toronto via trade from the LA Kings, he was reunited with Leafs GM Kyle Dubas who had previously acquired Campbell from the Windsor Spitfires to suit up with the OHL's Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds.

Campbell was generally solid in the regular season with the Leafs and his goals-against average and save percentage landed in the top half of the NHL overall. But by the time he had played even half a season's worth of regular-season NHL games, he was already 30 years old.

When the Edmonton Oilers signed him as a free agent, Campbell had only played 135 NHL games and hadn't won a playoff round. The contract didn't work out, the team bought out the remaining two years of it, and now he'll count against their cap through 2027-28.

Jack Campbell's buyout penalty, per PuckPedia.

Another example of risk not adding up to a reward happened in Ottawa last season when the Senators signed Joonas Korpisalo to a five-year contract carrying an AAV of \$4 million. Korpisalo wasn't the answer and was dealt to the Boston Bruins for Linus Ullmark this off-season.

The Senators are better off with Ullmark between the posts, but the trickle-down effect of signing Korpisalo in the first place has been costly for Ottawa. The Sens retained \$1 million per year of Korpisalo's contract (through 2027-28) and gave the Bruins a first-round pick at the most recently completed draft (Dean Letourneau, 25th overall) as well as depth forward Mark Kastelic.

Edmonton and Ottawa thought they were solving their starting goalie problem with these signings, but both turned into examples of how short-term success for veteran goalies don't necessarily mean they can handle that workload over the long term.

Markstrom trade vs. Askarov trade

As rare as trades are for starting goalies, two were made this summer. Prior to the Sharks picking up Askarov -- who, again, projects to play right away -- the New Jersey Devils acquired Markstrom from Calgary before the draft in June. The Flames got defenceman Kevin Bahl and a 2025 first-round pick in return for Markstrom, who has two years with a cap hit of \$6 million remaining on his contract. He also had a no-movement clause in that contract, so had to approve a move to New Jersey.

The Devils were desperate to upgrade their goaltending this off-season, after using five different goalies in 2023-24. Outside of Kaapo Kahkonen, who only played six games, the other four netminders (Vitek Vanecek, Nico Daws, Akira Schmid and Jake Allen) combined for a goals-against average of 3.15 and save percentage of .895. As a result, the Devils dropped back from being a 112-point team on the rise, to one that missed the playoffs. Markstrom's stat line wasn't outstanding last year, but his 2.78 GAA and .905 save percentage are certainly an upgrade for the Devils, who should improve as a team in front of him this season.

What's interesting to me is looking at the return Calgary received in the trade compared to what the Predators got for Askarov.

Bahl, 24, is a mostly defensive defenceman. He's a big body (6-foot-6, 230 pounds) who played all 82 games last season. He plays with a physical presence and gets in the lane to block shots.

I'm assuming New Jersey will be much improved this year, so the 2025 first-round pick the Flames received will likely land in the bottom third of the first-round. It's top 10 protected anyway, so if the Devils do struggle that much again, it will convert to a 2026 first-rounder.

Which brings me back to the San Jose/Nashville transaction involving Askarov.

Askarov was the centrepiece of the deal, and a potential No. 1 NHL puck stopper who the Sharks can build around -- but his NHL experience is limited. San Jose sent back a package that includes Vegas' 2025 first-rounder and prospect David Edstrom, a first-round pick himself (32nd overall) from 2023. So, did Nashville get more in their trade for Askarov than Calgary did for Markstrom -- and should they have?

I actually believe both goalies offer the same kind of value to the teams that acquired them, but for different reasons:

- Askarov fits the rebuild model in San Jose, while Markstrom fits the "win now" mode the Devils believe they are entering as an organization.
- Markstrom should give the Devils a better chance to win more games right away.
- Askarov will endure more losing than he has ever had to deal with in San Jose, but he immediately becomes their goalie of the future and part of their process.

Which brings me to my conclusion when comparing these trades:

- Edstrom is a potential top six centre and the Predators improved their forward depth by acquiring the 6-foot-3, 190-pound forward. Edstrom, at worst, will provide secondary scoring. He can be deployed in all situations.
- The pick Nashville acquired has some stipulations, but the most likely outcome is that they'll be picking somewhere in the 20s with Vegas' selection in 2025. I'm projecting Vegas to finish with a record similar to New Jersey's.
- Calgary ends up with a serviceable bottom pairing, shut-down, defender in Bahl and a 2025 first-round pick that is likely to land in the 20s. It's also important to remember Markstrom will turn 35 years old halfway through this season.
- In my opinion, San Jose paid more for Askarov than New Jersey paid for Markstrom. But this speaks to a couple things: the value these teams placed on a veteran goalie compared to a potential young -- albeit still developing -- starting goalie with a bright future, and the timeline the two buyers see themselves on.

Markstrom in San Jose wouldn't have made a lot of sense. And if you're New Jersey, would a more expensive package for a promising, yet unproven in the NHL, Askarov have guaranteed enough of a forward push in the short-term?

Closing thoughts

As I said at the outset of my analysis, predicting the strategies NHL clubs will take for goalies is a difficult task.

When possible, teams will prefer to value homegrown prospects and veterans between the pipes (Thatcher Demko in Vancouver, Ilya Sorokin with the New York Islanders), but sometimes team have to turn over their goaltending more frequently (Vegas Golden Knights from Marc Andre Fleury Robin Lehner, to Logan Thompson, Adin Hill).

But one thing remains consistent: When an NHL club is fortunate to have an elite No. 1 goalie, they hold on to them as long as they possibly can. The likes of Andrei Vasilevskiy (TB), Igor Shesterkin (NYR) and Connor Hellebuyck (WPG) are worth their weight in gold.

Outside of being lucky to draft someone like that, teams can often whiff on the free agent market or, on a rare occasion, dip into an ill-defined trade market.