



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips **April 8, 2025**

Columbus Blue Jackets

- PAGE 02: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets takeaways after Ottawa Senators' shutout: 'We will fight to the end'
- PAGE 04: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets playoff tracker: It's going to take a miracle now
- PAGE 05: The Hockey News: Blue Jackets Drop Third Straight; Shutout For Second Straight Game
- PAGE 06: The Hockey News: Elvis Merzlikins Accused Of Having A "Bad Reputation" With NHL Officials
- PAGE 07: The Hockey News: Blue Jackets Fall Eight Points Behind Canadiens After Terrible Weekend
- PAGE 08: The Hockey News: Report: Blue Jackets Could Be Looking To Overhaul Their Goalies This Summer

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/ Websites

- PAGE 09: The Athletic: Five Canadian forwards making their case for the Olympics after 4 Nations snubs
- PAGE 11: The Athletic: Will anyone ever break Ovechkin's record? Should the NHL expand to Wisconsin? Hellebuyck for Hart? Ask CJ
- PAGE 15: The Athletic: Which NHL teams have clinched playoff berths? Evaluating the first-round matchups as they stand
- PAGE 19: The Athletic: Weekend NHL rankings: Ovechkin breaks the goals record, plus my worst rankings
- PAGE 23: The Athletic: Which of Wayne Gretzky's other NHL records could be broken?
- PAGE 26: ESPN: USA Hockey's world championship problem -- and possible fix
- PAGE 30: Sportsnet.ca: Weekend Takeaways: Hart Trophy still up for grabs in final two weeks of season

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets takeaways after Ottawa Senators' shutout: 'We will fight to the end'

By Brian Hedger – April 8, 2025

The pilot light is out again.

A Blue Jackets team that's close to setting a franchise record for goals in a season has gone stone cold for the second time in a span of about three weeks, all but sinking their hopes of earning a playoff spot in the NHL's Eastern Conference.

After a 5-0 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs on Saturday at Scotiabank Arena, the Jackets followed up with a 4-0 loss to the Ottawa Senators on Sunday at Canadian Tire Centre.

That means the Jackets' last goal came when captain Boone Jenner put them up 3-2 at 7:56 of the second period in a 7-3 loss to the Colorado Avalanche on Thursday at Nationwide Arena.

The ongoing drought has lasted 152:04, topping a 129:31 span without a goal March 11-15 in losses to the New Jersey Devils, Vegas Golden Knights and New York Rangers — the last two in consecutive shutouts.

"(Ottawa) started really well," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "We did not. Did we get to our game? Did we have some (scoring) chances, even early? Yeah, but just, clearly, we're not scoring goals. So, it just gets magnified when we (trail), because you're pressing even harder. And when you're not having success and you're not scoring goals, and you're pressing ... it's not a good recipe."

Here are three takeaways from the loss to Ottawa:

Columbus Blue Jackets lose more ground in playoff race

The Blue Jackets have stagnated again with three straight losses in regulation and the past two without scoring a goal. They're stuck on 77 points after 76 games and now sit 12th in the conference standings.

That's not the worst of it.

While they're only two points behind the New York Rangers for ninth and Detroit Red Wings for 10th, the Blue Jackets now trail the Montreal Canadiens by eight points for the second wild-card, which goes to the eighth-place team.

The Jackets have only six games left, so they're down to 12 possible points if they can finish without a loss. That would get them to 89 points, but Montreal and Ottawa are red hot right now, so that probably wouldn't be enough. The Jackets must reignite their offense, win six straight, hope the Canadiens go ice cold and the Rangers and Red Wings keep floundering.

"We are a team," Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins said. "I'm not going to win games alone. I can't score. I need my boys, and I know and believe that we will score, we will fight to the end, and when we get to the end, we're just going to look at the standings and see ... are we in or are we out?"

Columbus Blue Jackets' inconsistent offense is baffling

The Blue Jackets have now been shut out nine times, including six since edging past the Red Wings on March 1 at Ohio Stadium. They've also set a new franchise record for games with six-plus goals to their credit, doing that 14 times. No matter what happens to close out this season, consistency is one of the areas they need to shore up starting next season.

“It’s tough to explain, the way some games went,” Blue Jackets defenseman Ivan Provorov said. “We score seven, and then we go through stretches where we can’t put one in the net.”

Columbus Blue Jackets go to the bullpen early against Ottawa Senators

The Blue Jackets almost made it a full season without a single in-game goalie switch. Evason even explained recently that he prefers to let goalies work out of slumps or through tough starts, but these are desperate times. The Jackets started the game in a fog against the Senators and goalie Daniil Tarasov paid the price by allowing two goals on six shots in the first 4:26 of the game.

Evason pulled Tarasov after Nicholas Matinpalo’s first NHL goal put the Senators up 2-0, hoping to spark something positive. Merzlikins did his part by allowing just one goal on 23 shots after replacing Tarasov, but the offense couldn’t crack Linus Ullmark in Ottawa’s net.

Pulling Tarasov was Evason’s second goalie change in the past three games, following the removal of Merzlikins from the loss Thursday to the Avalanche.

“We certainly don’t want to do that,” Evason said. “Both those goals (against) were ‘team’ goals. It’s just ... we made a decision to try something. Obviously, it didn’t work.”

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets playoff tracker: It's going to take a miracle now

By Brian Hedger – April 8, 2025

It's now going to take a miraculous series of fortunate events for the Blue Jackets to qualify for the playoffs.

After being swept and shut out by the Toronto Maple Leafs and Ottawa Senators in a road back-to-back set this past weekend, the Jackets are eight points out of the Eastern Conference's second wild card with six games left to play. They've slipped to the lower tier of teams chasing the Montreal Canadiens for the second wild card, which is the East's last ticket into the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

They're saying all the right things, but also coming to grips with reality.

"Finish as strong as we can, that's all we can do," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "You just see what happens. It's tough to look at standings with how it's gone, but our focus just has to be game-by-game, try to get as many points as we can, and at the end of the year we'll see how it shakes out."

MoneyPuck, DraftKings, FanDuel and BetMGM think it will take a miracle for the Jackets to make the postseason. Dropping three straight games, including back-to-back losses without scoring a goal, has almost completely sunk their playoff odds.

Columbus Blue Jackets' odds of qualifying for the playoffs drop again

The Blue Jackets have already exceeded preseason forecasts about their season, but they've now got a steep uphill climb to clinch a playoff spot. There's only 12 points left in their six remaining games, but Montreal is eight points ahead of them.

DraftKings now gives the Blue Jackets +7,000 odds to make the playoffs and no longer offer odds on them missing. A week ago, they were +330 to make it and -425 to miss. BetMGM no longer offers odds for the Blue Jackets to make or miss the playoffs, and DraftKings has it +4,000 for them to make it and -20,000 to miss.

According to MoneyPuck, which uses percentages, the Blue Jackets' chances to qualify for the postseason have plummeted to just 0.3%, which is the lowest among teams that still have any kind of percentage chance to qualify. MoneyPuck also projects the Blue Jackets to finish with 83 points, which the site projected at 85 points a week ago.

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Drop Third Straight; Shutout For Second Straight Game

By Jason Newland – April 8, 2025

Daniil Tarasov gave up two goals in the first 4:26, and that would be it. Tarasov would be pulled in favor of Elvis Merzljikins, marking the second time in three games a Jackets goalie has been yanked from a game.

The Blue Jackets were held scoreless yet again in a shutout loss to the Senators. After going up 3-2 last week in the Avs game, they haven't scored a goal since. They've been outscored 14-0 in that span.

They're not officially eliminated with six games to go, but it's essentially over for the 2024-25 season. With a loss on Tuesday and a Montreal win, they're will be a giant E next to the Blue Jackets' name in the standings, marking the end of an excellent run for Columbus. No one expected them to be playing meaningful games this season, let alone in April.

Player Stats

- Elvis Merzljikins came into the game in relief and made 22 saves.
- Zach Werenski had 8 shots on goal.
- Mathieu Olivier had 7 hits.

Team Stats

- The Jackets weren't awarded a power play in this game.
- The Columbus PK stopped all three Sens power plays.
- Columbus won 63.6% of the faceoffs.

Up Next: The Ottawa Senators come to Nationwide Arena on Tuesday.

The Hockey News / Elvis Merzlikins Accused Of Having A "Bad Reputation" With NHL Officials

By Jason Newland – April 8, 2025

Today on Elliott Friedman's 32 Thoughts podcast, he made some interesting comments about Columbus Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins.

He claimed that Merzlikins has a "Bad Reputation" with NHL officials and teams around the league.

Over this past weekend, Merzlikins was called for tripping in what, at the time, was a controversial call. Friedman said it was the "significance" of the call and not the call itself. He also says it was the "right" call based on Merzlikins history.

Friedman also stated that videos have been circulating around the league about Merzlikins and that he embellishes contact. Friedman said Merzlikins took advantage of Kyle Palmieri of the New York Islanders and also brought up the no-call on Kiefer Sherwood. He says Sherwood didn't go into the crease and that Merzlikins locked up skates with him and initiated the contact.

Friedman says that Merzlikins has a reputation for selling contact and will get those calls going forward.

He goes on to say that the official might have seen a clip of Merzlikins in the past and made the call to send a message of sorts, and that "he's a guy being looked at."

Is Friedman onto something? Is Merzlikins on a watchlist for goalie contact?

Up Next: The Ottawa Senators visit NWA on Tuesday.

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Fall Eight Points Behind Canadiens After Terrible Weekend

By Spencer Lazary – April 8, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets had one of the worst weekends any team in a wild card race could ask for.

They came into the weekend just four points back of the Montreal Canadiens for the second wild card spot. But after a brutal two-game stretch, the Blue Jackets now find themselves eight points out.

Columbus didn't just lose both games against the Toronto Maple Leafs and Ottawa Senators — they were shut out in both, which all but ended their playoff hopes.

While it's still technically possible for them to make the playoffs, it would now take something close to a miracle. They'd need to win at least five of their remaining six games while hoping the Canadiens and other teams ahead of them in the standings lose nearly all of theirs.

Unfortunately, it looks like the Blue Jackets will fall just short of making the postseason in a year when they overcame so much adversity. It's disappointing given the effort they put in, but this season still marks a major step forward for a young, rebuilding Blue Jackets team.

The Hockey News / Report: Blue Jackets Could Be Looking To Overhaul Their Goalies This Summer

By Spencer Lazary – April 8, 2025

According to Aaron Portzline of The Athletic, the Columbus Blue Jackets could be eyeing a crease overhaul this summer.

Portzline explained that ever since GM Don Waddell took the job in Columbus, there has been some uncertainty surrounding Elvis Merzlikins' future. Due to his contract, moving or buying him out wasn't really feasible — until now. Portzline suggested one potential solution to kick-start the revamp in net.

"It's still highly doubtful that Merzlikins is tradable. But a buyout now would extend four seasons into the future, not six, as it would have if they bought out his contract last summer," Portzline wrote.

According to PuckPedia, a buyout would cost the Blue Jackets \$1.5 million against the cap next season, \$2.8 million in 2026-27, and \$1.63 million for the following two years — a manageable number for the team.

If Columbus did buy out Merzlikins, there are a few potential replacements available in free agency. Portzline mentioned Ilya Samsonov and Frederik Andersen as possible options.

Daniil Tarasov was also mentioned, but given how poorly his season has gone, it looks like Jett Greaves is more likely to take over his spot next year.

The Athletic / Five Canadian forwards making their case for the Olympics after 4 Nations snubs

By Pierre LeBrun – April 8, 2025

Team Canada's braintrust met at the NHL GM meetings in Florida last month to debrief from the 4 Nations Face-Off and begin the look ahead to the Olympics.

Rosters expand from 23 players at 4 Nations to 25 players (14 forwards, eight defensemen, three goalies) for the Olympics, and each country needs to name its first six players by June 15.

For Canada, the first four are no-brainers in Connor McDavid, Sidney Crosby, Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar. I would still include Brayden Point in the first six, as well — just as he was ahead of 4 Nations. But Brad Marchand, the other first-six player for 4 Nations, won't be in contention again at this stage of his career. My pick for the final spot in the first six? Mitch Marner. His play at 4 Nations warrants it, just as his excellent regular season does.

But like all Canadian Olympic hopefuls, the Stanley Cup playoffs are around the corner for Marner — and postseason play will be major criteria for Team Canada Olympic general manager Doug Armstrong and his staff when further adding intel in their roster-shaping.

The IIHF World Championships are huge in that process, as well. Any Canadian hopeful would be wise to accept an invite from Hockey Canada to the spring tournament if he doesn't qualify for the postseason. That's why, barring health issues, Philadelphia Flyers teammates Travis Konecny and Travis Sanheim are good bets to be at the worlds; both would like to keep their best-on-best roster spot intact from 4 Nations.

I would say Sanheim is one of the players who has already risen in management's ranks, thanks to his play at 4 Nations. Konecny didn't do anything to hurt himself, but the competition at forward will be incredibly competitive.

Here are some Canadian forwards who were left off the 4 Nations roster that I believe have improved their Olympic stock the most since 4 Nations:

1. Nick Suzuki, Montreal Canadiens: He's at the heart of the Habs' playoff drive and playing the best hockey of his career when the pressure has been at its highest. He hasn't helped himself with Team Canada by turning down World Championship invites the past few years, but his performance over the past two months will have absolutely raised his stock within Team Canada management's group. As of Monday morning, only MacKinnon, Marner, McDavid and Crosby had more points this season than Suzuki among Canadian forwards.

2. Robert Thomas, St. Louis Blues: Just like his team, Thomas kept his best hockey for the second half of the season. He's got 18 points in his past seven games alone — and an NHL-high 34 points since 4 Nations. (Suzuki is second with 32.) Let's see what the Stanley Cup playoffs might do to further strengthen Thomas' Olympic case. But he's very much in the conversation right now, in my mind. It probably doesn't hurt that Canada's GM, Armstrong, is also the Blues' GM.

3. Wyatt Johnston, Dallas Stars: Johnston didn't hide how disappointed he was not to make the 4 Nations roster when we chatted earlier this season, but in that same conversation, he talked about the bigger carrot in trying to make the Olympic roster. I loved his game last year in the playoffs, and after a slow start this season, which cost him a 4 Nations opportunity, he's back playing at the level most were expecting. A deep run by the Stars with Johnston front and center could propel his Olympic case.

4. Mark Scheifele, Winnipeg Jets: He was probably the biggest snub from the 4 Nations roster based on performance at the time. I don't have him ranked higher for no other reason than it's not been about a second-half surge for Scheifele — because he's been excellent right from the get-go and consistent all season. His stock remains where it was before. The Stanley Cup playoffs on a Jets team that can win it all will be his best opportunity to put himself higher up the list with Team Canada management.

5. Tom Wilson, Washington Capitals: I know this will be a controversial pick. It's funny how many people texted me after the three fights in nine seconds to open the first U.S.-Canada game at 4 Nations saying Team Canada should have taken Wilson. There will not be three fights in nine seconds at the Olympics. In fact, there will not be a single fight. But it will be an Olympic tournament played on NHL-sized ice, not international ice. Wilson is having a career season, and his toolbox is different from most players at this level. Having said that, if we learned anything from what we saw at 4 Nations, our first taste of best-on-best hockey in eight and a half years, it's that the pace was ridiculous. Team Canada management would have to be confident that Wilson could hang at that kind of pace in Italy.

Honorable mentions: Jordan Kyrou, John Tavares, Matt Duchene, Dylan Strome and Pierre-Luc Dubois.

I didn't mention Connor Bedard nor Macklin Celebrini, but for sure both young superstars have a chance to get higher up the Olympic radar, depending on potential World Championship performances for Team Canada this spring and depending on how they start next season in the NHL.

In my books right now, Suzuki and Thomas are the two Canadian forwards that have helped their stock the most since 4 Nations.

[The Athletic / Will anyone ever break Ovechkin's record? Should the NHL expand to Wisconsin? Hellebuyck for Hart? Ask CJ](#)

By Chris Johnston – April 8, 2025

Alex Ovechkin's head-first slide into the history books. A trade deadline period brimming with big deals. The spine-tingling overtime finish to the 4 Nations Face-Off.

What could the 2024-25 NHL season possibly have in store for us next with the Stanley Cup playoffs right around the corner?

Given the run the NHL has been on, it promises to be both memorable and momentous.

When we put the call out for mailbag questions last week, there was a lot of focus on what's immediately on the horizon. There were queries about postseason matchups, free-agent decisions, the coaching carousel, potential rule changes, expansion and the NHL's next, next top goal scorer.

As always, thank you for taking the time to read, engage and respond.

Here we go.

After Alex Ovechkin, does anyone break the goal record in the future, or will he solidify himself as the record holder for goals? — Keiren P.

I'm in the camp that believes every record will eventually fall on a long enough time horizon. Athletes are always pushing to be better, faster and stronger. However, Ovechkin can get comfortable with the crown he's now wearing.

Consider that it took him 20 unusually healthy seasons scoring at a pace of 0.6 goals per game to surpass Wayne Gretzky's total. The only active player currently scoring at a better rate than that is Auston Matthews (0.64 goals per game), but the Toronto Maple Leafs captain has lost nearly the equivalent of a full season to injuries with 71 games missed through his first nine years in the league. Matthews would need to score at the same rate over another 785 regular-season games to reach 900 career NHL goals — the equivalent of more than 9.5 fully healthy seasons. That makes it a feat within the realm of possibility but one that would require him to defy aging curves and any significant performance-related decline well into his 30s.

If Matthews doesn't end up challenging Ovechkin's goal total, the person who eventually does likely hasn't been drafted into the league yet. Which means they wouldn't have even started their own 20-year journey to history yet.

Is there any appetite to change retention rules so teams can retain for part of a contract rather than the entire remaining duration? In this scenario, a team could retain salary at the trade deadline to make the money work for the acquiring team this season but wouldn't be on the hook going forward. — Pat S.

While there may be circumstances where that kind of rule change might spark more trade activity, I don't sense any real desire to fix something that isn't broken. The NHL's retention rules were introduced as part of the 2012-13 collective bargaining agreement and are arguably one of the few things in that document that are completely straightforward. Every team gets three retention spots. A team can retain up to 50 percent on any given player. And when it comes to that retention, the agreed-upon percentage covers all remaining salary and bonuses, plus the player's cap hit. Simple and clean.

What's more, the retention rules have had the desired effect of making trades easier to facilitate, especially with teams now routinely involving third-party brokers when making deals.

Hypothetically, if an NHL player's car were to be hit by a visiting team's bus, who would take the responsibility for that? — Nicole C.

In this extremely hypothetical situation, I would expect the liability to rest with the bus driver and the company that employs that person since they'd be deemed at fault for the accident. This is why insurance exists!

How big of an implosion will happen in Toronto if the Leafs finally win the division, avoid Tampa and Florida, then lose to Ottawa in the first round? — Matt B.

I'm not sure the circumstances you've outlined would make the reaction any worse than "normal," to be honest. Remember that this is a team that's lost in the first round (or play-in round in 2020) seven of the past eight years. That run included a series with Montreal in 2021 where the Leafs not only squandered a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven but also lost to a team that finished 18 points behind them in a 56-game regular season. The Leafs have dropped five Game 7s since 2018. Plus a Game 5 in a best-of-five.

Basically, there's a portion of the team's fan base that expects it to lose in the playoffs no matter who the opponent is, and do you know what? I can't blame them.

Why does Wisconsin never come up in expansion discussions? It already has the three other major sports and could share the arena with the Bucks. — Jeremy F.

The talk you've heard about potential expansion to other cities is generally a reflection of the desire from a wealthy businessperson to bring an NHL team there. That's certainly the case in Houston and Atlanta — two of the most-discussed cities when this topic is raised. It's also why even less obvious destinations like Cincinnati or Nebraska get mentioned from time to time. They've each had groups make expressions of interest to the league's head office in recent years.

Basically, the only thing stopping Wisconsin from jumping into the group of places generating discussion is the presence of someone willing to put up more than a billion dollars to bring a team there.

What free agents should the Sharks pursue in free agency? — Paul K.

In my view, a rebuilding team with a clean cap sheet should be using free agency to go big-game hunting and to mine value buys. Avoid the mushy middle. While some of the mid-tier players on the market could certainly help the cause when it comes to the San Jose Sharks' performance in 2025-26, they're also likely to get overpaid in a rising-cap environment and may ultimately start muddying the team's cap position when it expects to be more competitive down the road.

Prioritizing the big picture vision is of utmost importance in San Jose on July 1. I'll leave it to you to determine which available free agents in this summer's class fit in those two buckets.

What does a goalie have to do to win the Hart? — Anonymous U.

History tells us that this isn't an easy trophy for a goaltender to win. Carey Price (2014-15), Jose Theodore (2001-02) and Dominik Hasek (1996-97, 1997-98) are the only players from that position to be judged "the most valuable player to his team" in the past 60 years.

In my view, any goalie receiving significant consideration would need to play a meaningful number of games for a team that has success while producing numbers that set him apart from his peers across the league.

As it turns out, Connor Hellebuyck is having just that kind of season for the Winnipeg Jets right now. He might finish this season with the most wins, best save percentage and lowest goals-against average on a team vying for the Presidents' Trophy. Hellebuyck's underlying numbers pop, too. I'm not sure if he'll ultimately win the Hart, but he's going to get a lot of votes. Rightfully so.

Is the NHL season actually going to expand to 84 games? Has the NHL considered that European soccer leagues and the NFL only play once a week? Scarcity could help create more demand, while a less demanding schedule could help improve the product. — William B.

You will get no arguments from anyone associated with the NHL about the potential benefits of creating more places for the athletes to rest. Scheduling is a hot-button topic behind the scenes every year for the league. In fact, a big part of the ongoing discussion around a possible move to an 84-game regular season is scaling back the number of exhibition games played during training camp.

Alas, the appeal of a longer season is as obvious as it probably looks on the surface: More games equals more gate revenue and more product to sell to media partners. Follow the money.

Who are the smartest players you've interacted with in terms of non-hockey intelligence? — James B.

This list shouldn't be viewed as comprehensive because there are literally hundreds of NHL players each season that I don't get the chance to have anything more than a surface-level conversation with, if we even talk at all.

Sidney Crosby jumps to mind because of how inquisitive and perceptive he seems to be. On the rare occasions where I've had a chance to speak with him away from the massive media scrums, he's asked as many questions as he answers.

Jonathan Toews, Steven Stamkos and John Tavares also stand out as being particularly thoughtful on a range of topics, and I've really enjoyed our discussions over the years.

Ron Hainsey could be a difficult interview during his playing days, but it was always because of how well-versed he was on a variety of topics and the fact he wasn't shy about pushing back on a premise. Sharp guy.

Cale Makar has consistently come across as bright and articulate when I've been around him.

Does Patrik Laine have a home in Montreal after 25-26? — Matthew B.

First and foremost, that will be up to Patrik Laine. He's due to be an unrestricted free agent in July 2026. If he's willing to try to find a way to stay with the Montreal Canadiens, possibly on a contract a little more in line with his production, it can't be ruled out.

There are too many unknowns right now to handicap how likely it is with any degree of certainty, though.

Who are the under-the-radar head coaching candidates to break the recycling of ex-coaches this offseason? — Eric S.

The most intriguing name is arguably University of Denver head coach David Carle, who led the U.S. to back-to-back gold medals at World Juniors and has had a pile of NCAA success, too. He's indicated that he'll be selective about his next job.

Boston University coach Jay Pandolfo is another name to watch, given his track record as both a player and assistant coach in the NHL.

Boston Bruins assistant coach Jay Leach is considered a head coach prospect, as is current Ontario Reign head coach Marco Sturm.

Don't rule out the possibility that Philadelphia Flyers interim head coach Brad Shaw eventually lands a full-time gig somewhere. He's been a highly thought-of assistant for years and has a strong track record.

With all of the college player signings happening, do they have to be on a team's playoff roster at the deadline to play this season? — Julie K.

In order to be eligible to appear in the playoffs, a player must be on a team's reserve list at the trade deadline immediately preceding it.

The reserve list includes everyone under contract to an organization, plus the recent draft picks and other players they hold rights to. For example, 2023 first-round pick Ryan Leonard was on the Washington Capitals reserve list at the March 7 trade deadline even though he didn't officially sign an entry-level contract on March 31 after his NCAA season at Boston College was over. Leonard is eligible to appear in the upcoming playoffs as a result.

Has Lane Hutson locked up the Calder with his recent performance? — Dylan M.

He's definitely pulled ahead of the pack, which includes Macklin Celebrini, Dustin Wolf and Matvei Michkov. It's hard to look past the fact Hutson became the 10th rookie defenseman in league history with at least 60 points. For what it's worth, award ballots must be finalized by April 19.

How good are the Blues? — Cj P.

The St. Louis Blues are going to be an absolute handful come the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Teams that perform best in the second half of the NHL season tend to go on long postseason runs, and St. Louis has the league's third-best record since Jan. 1 — tied with Central Division rival Winnipeg and behind only the Dallas Stars at No. 1 and Washington at No. 2.

Nothing is guaranteed, of course, but the Blues are for real.

The Athletic / Which NHL teams have clinched playoff berths? Evaluating the first-round matchups as they stand

By Julian McKenzie – April 8, 2025

With less than two weeks until the start of the NHL playoffs, five teams in each conference had clinched a playoff spot as of Monday morning.

The Toronto Maple Leafs, Tampa Bay Lightning, Florida Panthers, Washington Capitals and Carolina Hurricanes have clinched in the Eastern Conference.

The Winnipeg Jets, Dallas Stars, Colorado Avalanche, Vegas Golden Knights and Los Angeles Kings have clinched in the Western Conference.

Four teams (the Detroit Red Wings, New York Rangers, New York Islanders and Columbus Blue Jackets) are within eight points of the second wild-card spot in the East, currently held by the Montreal Canadiens. The Ottawa Senators are five points ahead of the Canadiens for the first wild-card spot.

Three teams (the Calgary Flames, Vancouver Canucks and Utah Hockey Club) are within nine points of the second and final wild-card spot in the West, currently held by the Minnesota Wild. The St. Louis Blues are two points ahead of the Wild for the first wild-card spot.

The matchups from our check-in last week largely remain the same this week, with a couple of changes, and some teams are threatening to make more. Here is how things would look if the first round started today.

Eastern Conference

Capitals (M1) vs. Canadiens (WC2)

Hurricanes (M2) vs. Devils (M3)

Maple Leafs (A1) vs. Senators (WC1)

Lightning (A2) vs. Panthers (A3)

Other contenders: Rangers (79 pts), Red Wings (79 pts), Islanders (78 pts), Blue Jackets (77 pts)

Capitals (M1) vs. Canadiens (WC2)

Now that Alex Ovechkin's great goal-scoring chase has been completed, the Caps can put all of their focus toward winning the Metropolitan Division, finishing first in the Eastern Conference and chasing the Presidents' Trophy. Depending on how Ovechkin feels, it could either be his last run or perhaps a precursor to a retirement tour next year. Only Ovechkin knows at this point. By the way, the Caps are firmly in the driver's seat for a Metro division title. They could've clinched it on Sunday had they beaten the Islanders. Washington has the largest point lead (11) of all division leaders entering Monday's games.

All signs point to the Capitals holding down the top spot in the East to face Montreal, armed with Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield, Juraj Slafkovsky and Calder Trophy favorite Lane Hutson. The Canadiens have won five in a row and could pull away from other wild-card hopefuls, such as the Rangers, Islanders and Blue Jackets.

Remaining schedules:

Capitals (five games): vs. Hurricanes (Thursday), at Blue Jackets (Saturday), vs. Blue Jackets (Sunday), at Islanders (April 15), at Pittsburgh Penguins (April 17)

Canadiens (five games): vs. Red Wings (Tuesday), at Senators (Friday), at Maple Leafs (Saturday), vs. Chicago Blackhawks (April 14), vs. Hurricanes (April 16)

Hurricanes (M2) vs. Devils (M3)

This matchup looks like a lock. The Rangers and Islanders have only fleeting chances at making it as wild-card teams, let alone vaulting themselves into the division's top three. Conversely, the Devils would need the Hurricanes to fall off drastically if they want to jump into second place. But the Devils have the second-easiest strength of schedule remaining, according to Tankathon. They also have a hot Jacob Markstrom in time for playoff action. The Swedish goaltender has won his past four starts. More importantly, the Devils still have to clinch a playoff spot. That could come as early as Tuesday if the Lightning beat the Rangers.

With Washington firmly atop their division, the Canes should remain in second place. Carolina would be fortunate to start its series at home. The Canes are currently the league's best home team, with a 30-8-1 record. Carolina also has a seven-point lead on the third-place Devils with a game in hand and the tiebreaker on regulation wins. There's a reason why the Devils aren't likely to pass them, and that they'd likely start on the road in a series against Carolina.

Remaining schedules:

Hurricanes (six games): at Buffalo Sabres (Tuesday), at Capitals (Thursday), vs. Rangers (Saturday), vs. Maple Leafs (Sunday), at Canadiens (April 16), at Senators (April 17)

Devils (five games): vs. Boston Bruins (Tuesday), vs. Penguins (Friday), vs. Islanders (Sunday), at Bruins (April 15), vs. Red Wings (April 16)

Maple Leafs (A1) vs. Senators (WC1)

It looks like we could have a Battle of Ontario in the first round. Toronto has a four-point lead on Tampa Bay for the Atlantic Division lead, while Ottawa is running away with that first wild-card spot. But it all takes one push and this matchup isn't as probable as it once was. What if Toronto stalls and Tampa Bay or Florida has a late-season surge? The Senators are also just two points behind the banged-up Panthers and have won three straight (but Florida currently holds the tiebreaker). If they beat the Columbus Blue Jackets on Tuesday, they'll clinch a playoff spot.

If we do get the Battle of Ontario, get ready for a lot of nostalgic look-backs to the early 2000s from Down Goes Brown. Daniel Alfredsson laying out Darcy Tucker before scoring. Steve Thomas' electric overtime finish in the 2000 playoffs. Curtis Joseph going ballistic on a referee after trying to fend off a crowded crease and allowing a goal.

Remaining schedules:

Maple Leafs (six games): at Panthers (Tuesday), at Lightning (Wednesday), vs. Canadiens (Saturday), at Hurricanes (April 13), at Sabres (April 15), vs. Red Wings (April 17)

Senators (five games): at Blue Jackets (Tuesday), vs. Canadiens (Friday), vs. Philadelphia Flyers (April 13), vs. Blackhawks (April 15), vs. Hurricanes (April 17)

Lightning (A2) vs. Panthers (A3)

The Lightning have a game in hand on their in-state rivals, but the Panthers are within two points. But as we alluded to earlier, Florida's injury list is quite long for this time of year. At least seven key players missed Sunday's game against the Red Wings, including Sam Reinhart and Aleksander Barkov. Considering Florida has already punched its ticket to the playoffs, the Panthers might use these next few games to heal up.

Of course, some people are going to say the Panthers are doing this so they can play the Leafs in the first round (TNT's Paul Bissonnette did that the other night). I don't think we need to go that far. More importantly, the Lightning-Panthers would be more than fine as an opening-round playoff series pitting two of the best franchises of the decade.

Remaining schedules:

Lightning (six games): at Rangers (Monday), vs. Maple Leafs (Wednesday), vs. Red Wings (Friday), vs. Sabres (April 13), vs. Panthers (April 15), at Rangers (April 17)

Panthers (five games): vs. Maple Leafs (Tuesday), vs. Red Wings (Thursday), vs. Sabres (Saturday), vs. Rangers (April 14), at Lightning (April 15)

Western Conference

Jets (C1) vs. Wild (WC2)

Stars (C2) vs. Avalanche (C3)

Golden Knights (A1) vs. Blues (WC1)

Kings (P2) vs. Oilers (P3)

Jets (C1) vs. Wild (WC2)

Winnipeg and St. Louis play on Monday night. If it wasn't for St. Louis' 12-game win streak, we'd still be talking about it as a first-round matchup in this exercise. But the Blues have jumped the Wild for that first wild-card spot. The Wild have become the hunted in that spot, but their points lead — ahead of teams such as Calgary, Vancouver and Utah — might be insurmountable. Minnesota just earned two massive points against the Stars and has four games left in its season. Those games are all against teams below them in the standings, including the Flames. Tankathon says the Wild have the easiest strength of schedule of all 32 teams.

Meanwhile, Winnipeg has lost two of its past three games, and its hold atop the Central Division isn't guaranteed with the Stars just three points behind. Both teams have five games left. It is not a guarantee that the Jets will remain atop the Western Conference. It may mean having to face off against the Avalanche in the first round, again.

Remaining schedules:

Jets (five games): vs. Blues (Monday), at Stars (Thursday), at Blackhawks (Saturday), vs. Oilers (April 13), vs. Anaheim Ducks (April 16)

Wild (four games): vs. San Jose Sharks (Wednesday), at Flames (Friday), at Canucks (Saturday), vs. Ducks (April 15)

Stars (C2) vs. Avalanche (C3)

Do not count out the Stars for a Central Division title. They have won seven of their past 10 and are just three points behind the Jets for first in the Central with five games to go. Dallas and Winnipeg play on Thursday, and there could be serious divisional implications depending on how both teams handle their early-week games.

The Avs won't catch Winnipeg or Dallas for the Central Division, but they could still end the season as a 100-point team for the fourth consecutive year and pose a big problem for whoever ends up in the Central Division's second seed. If their opponent is the Stars, we anticipate a high-octane, star-driven series.

Remaining schedules:

Stars (five games): vs. Canucks (Tuesday), vs. Jets (Thursday), vs. Utah (Saturday), at Red Wings (April 14), at Nashville Predators (April 16)

Avalanche (four games): vs. Golden Knights (Tuesday), vs. Canucks (Thursday), at Kings (Saturday), at Ducks (April 13)

Golden Knights (A1) vs. Blues (WC1)

Vegas enters the week with a three-point lead atop the Pacific Division with six games to go. The Golden Knights needed that win over Vancouver on Sunday to give them some kind of points cushion with the Kings hot on their trail, and that's after winning seven of their past 10 games. Three of Vegas' five final games will be interdivisional, and there's a matchup against Colorado in that final five. Vegas should be favored to win most, if not all, but it can't afford to slip up too many times if the Kings keep winning.

The Blues have jumped into the first wild-card position thanks to their 12-game win streak, including two wins over the Avalanche. It's not impossible for them to jump a spot, but the Blues are five points behind Colorado for third in the Central. A wild-card spot seems more likely, and upcoming road matchups against Winnipeg and Edmonton threaten to ground St. Louis. At least the Blues have pulled away from the Western Conference have-nots. Dom Luszczyszyn's model gives the Blues a 98 percent chance to make the playoffs.

Remaining schedules:

Golden Knights (five games): at Avalanche (Tuesday), vs. Seattle Kraken (Thursday), vs. Predators (Saturday), at Flames (April 15), at Canucks (April 16)

Blues (four games): at Jets (Monday), at Oilers (Wednesday), at Kraken (Saturday), vs. Utah (April 15)

Kings (P2) vs. Oilers (P3)

We pondered last week if this was the year the Kings would get the better of the Oilers, thanks to their record at home and their defensive play. But after winning eight of their past 10, the Kings still have a chance of winning the Pacific Division. The Kings would have to hope Vegas falters in its final five games while playing well in their final six games. But the Pacific Division crown is very much in play. In any case, the Kings have every reason to feel good about their playoff future.

The Oilers, meanwhile, are still waiting on Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl to get fully healthy ahead of a lengthy playoff run. Draisaitl briefly returned, but he's injured again with a lower-body injury. Not having No. 97 and No. 29 won't help the Golden Knights in their efforts to jump the Kings with six games to go, as Edmonton is four points behind.

Remaining schedules:

Kings (six games): vs. Kraken (Monday), vs. Ducks (Thursday), vs. Avalanche (Saturday), at Oilers (April 14), at Kraken (April 15), vs. Flames (April 17)

Oilers (six games): at Ducks (Monday), vs. Blues (Wednesday), vs. Sharks (Friday), at Jets (April 13), vs. Kings (April 14), at Sharks (April 16)

The Athletic / Weekend NHL rankings: Ovechkin breaks the goals record, plus my worst rankings

By Sean McIndoe – April 8, 2025

First things first: The biggest story in the NHL right now is of course Alex Ovechkin breaking Wayne Gretzky's goals record, and we'll get to that in the Washington section down below.

But first, there are only two editions of the Weekend Rankings left before we run out of regular-season runway. Next week is the season finale, which is always fun, because it's when we ditch the top five for a top 16 (or more), check in on the Gold Plan standings and make some oddly specific predictions.

This week is not so fun, at least not for me. Some of you seem to enjoy it. It's time for our annual look back at the very worst top-five and bottom-five picks I made throughout the season.

Look, I never said I was perfect. I also never said I wasn't, and it's possible that all of these "bad picks" were really just made ironically, or to see if you were paying attention, or as occasional intentional mistakes I made in tribute to watching too much Astro Boy as a kid. But whatever went wrong, these picks have not aged well, and I have to take my medicine.

Bonus Five: My worst five rankings of the year

5. The Blue Jackets in the bottom — I certainly wasn't alone in starting the season with low expectations for Columbus. I do wish I'd given them credit a bit earlier than I did — I had them in the bottom three for each of the season's first three weeks — but I was trying not to overreact to a solid start. I can defend this one, and I made it up to Blue Jackets fans down the road. But I certainly can't claim I was ahead of the curve.

4. Avoiding the Rangers' reality — Like the Blue Jackets, I can defend my first-week misfire on the Rangers, who were the defending Presidents' Trophy winners when I debuted them in the five-spot. But after a 5-0-1 start, I was pretty much all in, having them as high as second by the end of October and still in the top five by mid-November, even though some of the warning lights on the dashboard were already blinking. Once I finally dropped them, they never returned. But in hindsight, it took me too long to cut bait.

3. The Wild's stint in the top five — The Wild debuted in the top five in early December and stayed there for three weeks. The standings agreed with me, with Minnesota peaking at an 18-4-4 record on Dec. 6 that had them sitting alone in first place. But as I so often point out, these rankings aren't supposed to just mirror the standings, they're meant as long-term projections. And the long term was not kind to the Wild. Should I have seen that coming? Ideally, sure.

2. Too slow on the Capitals — Despite having one of the league's better records pretty much since the season started, it took me until the second week of December to finally move the Caps into the top five. They were actually the 11th and (so far) final team to crack that list, showing up after teams like the Rangers, Wild and Devils had already come and gone.

1. The Habs — I can defend having them debut in the bottom five, since expectations weren't high. And I can maybe even defend having them all the way down at the two-spot in mid-November, not long after their record dropped to an ugly 4-9-2. But then I got stubborn, keeping them on the bottom list until the end of December. And worst of all, I put them back on the list heading into the 4 Nations break — which is to say, right before they became the league's hottest team. All told, the Habs made 12 appearances in

the bottom five, which is more than the Flyers and just a couple less than the Sabres and Predators. It could end up being a record for a playoff team.

Great, now that I've done my penance and convinced you I'm bad at this whole thing, let's move on to this week's rankings ...

Road to the Cup

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

Something that's maybe fun only to me: These are the long-term rankings, while the Friday edition is more about what's happening right now. But as we get to the end of the season, we get closer to the point when the long term isn't all that long and starts to feel a lot like right now. In theory, that means the two different approaches to the rankings should start to converge. And sure enough, as a few of you pointed out, last week's Friday top five was an exact match for ours for the first time all year. The system works! At least for one week.

5. Carolina Hurricanes (46-26-4, +42 true goals differential*) — I don't love two straight losses to the Wings and Bruins, but at this point, it's fair to mention the Hurricanes have essentially nothing left to play for down the stretch. They're in Washington on Thursday, in a game that won't matter much as far as the standings go but will feel like a Round 2 preview.

4. Vegas Golden Knights (47-22-8, +54) — The Kings aren't giving them much breathing room — more on them in a bit — but they're still the favorite to take the division. That will set them up with a first-round matchup with the Blues, who may never lose again. Wait, I'm talking myself out of this ranking, let's move on.

3. Dallas Stars (50-22-5, +66) — They picked up a point against the Wild, but couldn't get the win in a shootout. So that leaves them three points back of the Jets with both teams sitting at 77 games. They're also both at 41 regulation wins, but the Jets have an edge in ROW, which is the next tiebreaker.

2. Winnipeg Jets (52-21-4, +81) — By the way, the Jets and Stars face each other in Dallas on Thursday. Depending on how the week starts off, that could be the game that decides who wins the division, and more importantly, who dodges the Avalanche in Round 1. For now, I can't put either team in the top spot until we know who's going to claim the Central's top seed.

1. Washington Capitals (49-19-9, +68) — Ovechkin is the big story of the weekend, not just in hockey but all of sports. Here's the Joe Beninati call of the record-breaker:

A sight we've seen 894 times before this and each and every single time has been in a Capitals sweater.

What else? Oh right, the Caps lost, dropping them out of first place. I'm guessing Washington fans will be OK with that.

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

Not ranked: Los Angeles Kings and Edmonton Oilers — We're going to keep things relatively simple in the "not ranked" sections this week. I have a few questions I want your feedback on. And right now, this one might be the most interesting.

If the Kings have home ice in a Round 1 rematch, are you picking them over the Oilers?

That "if" is important, because I'm willing to bet most of us are taking Edmonton if it rallies to take back home ice. That's only fair, given the Oilers have beaten this Kings team three years in a row. A healthy Oilers certainly aren't unbeatable, but they'd be the favorites in that series, and rightly so.

But for the sake of argument, let's assume the Golden Knights hold onto the top spot in the division, forcing another Edmonton/Los Angeles matchup. Flip home ice to the Kings, who'd hold it if the season ended right now, and maybe your outlook changes. But how much?

You probably know the numbers by now, but just in case: The Kings are 29-4-4 at home, which is not just one of the best marks in the league but is getting into the territory of the best in the cap era. On the road, they're well under .500. Without getting too hyperbolic, they're almost two different teams depending on where they play.

We got a preview on Saturday, when the Oilers visited the Kings and dropped a 3-0 decision. Granted, that was an Edmonton lineup missing Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, among others, so we won't quite call it a playoff preview. Still, a win is a win, and the Kings claimed yet another one.

So let's give the Kings home ice to start the series and in a potential deciding Game 7 against McDavid and friends. Do you pick them now?

I know I'm not picking the Kings if they start on the road. I'm not completely sure I'll have the nerve to pick them at home, but I'll definitely have to think about it. I'm betting I'm not alone, but I want to know where you're at on this series.

The bottom five

The five teams headed toward dead last and the best lottery odds for a top pick that could be James Hagens, Matthew Schaefer or someone else.

We're not quite into "lock" territory yet, but it sure feels like Lane Hutson has pulled away as the Calder favorite over the last week or two, right?

(Yes, Habs fans, I know, he had already mathematically clinched the trophy the first day he put on skates, but give the rest of us a chance to catch up.)

5. Boston Bruins (31-38-9, -53) — I honestly can't believe it's come to this, but here we are. At this point, this section is less about predicting the future and more about just reading the standings, and the Bruins are sitting 29th after yesterday's loss to the Sabres, meaning I'm actually being slightly generous here. This entire team is more checked out than a tattered copy of "Harry Potter" at the elementary school library.

4. Philadelphia Flyers (31-37-9, -49) — We've reached the point in a miserable season at which the boss weighs in. My favorite quote: "I'd say expectation No. 2 (is) that the goalies will continue to improve, or we'll find a solution there, without getting into specifics." Can't argue with him there — the Flyers' goaltending this year has definitely been number two.

3. Nashville Predators (27-42-8, -61) — Last summer I wrote about the 10 different types of NHL offseasons, and at this point, I think it's fair to say the Predators nailed the last one.

2. Chicago Blackhawks (22-45-10, -67) — I don't often recommend wading into an online comments section, but the reaction from Hawks fans to this profile of Nick Foligno was interesting. As Laz points out, there's a healthy dose of cynicism in the market. Or maybe it's not so healthy. Either way, it's hard to blame the fans for having their doubts after how the season played out.

Also, Friday night was a lot of fun.

1. San Jose Sharks (20-46-10, -91) — With nothing to directly play for, the Sharks' role for the rest of the season is pretty clear: Western wild-card spoiler. Four of their six remaining games are against the Wild, Canucks and Flames (twice). If we're going to get any kind of a late race for the final spot, the Sharks will play a key role in making it happen.

Not ranked: Anaheim Ducks — They're this week's other team that I need some help figuring out.

The good news: They're coming off back-to-back seasons that saw them fail to hit 60 points, a mark they reached by early March this time around. They still have a shot at finishing fake .500, which isn't that hard in this league but is a checkpoint you have to hit on your way to playoff contention. They arguably had one young player break through this year, and Lukas Dostal plays the most important position so he's probably the guy you'd pick. Add it all up, and while they didn't exactly get to play a ton of meaningful hockey down the stretch, at least they were vaguely in the race up until a few weeks ago.

That's all good. But is it good enough?

The downside is that, aside from Dostal, I'm not sure any of the team's many young building blocks had the sort of season that raises their ceiling. Leo Carlsson has 20 goals and looks good, Cutter Gauthier held his own as a rookie, Mason MacTavish will hit 50 points for the first time, and various young blueliners looked the part of NHL pieces. But did anyone take a major step forward? Maybe Jackson LaCombe — more on him here — but that's probably it. The pipeline is still very good, but as far as the guys at the NHL level, results have been mixed.

Meanwhile, Troy Terry leads this team in scoring without cracking 60 points. Trevor Zegras continues to regress, even as the team kicks the can down the road on any kind of trade. John Gibson played well, but not well enough that they could move him for futures. And that fake .500 record is likely going to mean they pick well outside the top five.

In other words, it feels like this is one of those rebuilding teams whose ceiling is starting to come into focus. And if so, I'm not sure it's as high as Ducks fans would want it to be.

But that's just me, an Eastern sportswriter who goes to bed early and might be missing some of the nuance here. So I'll throw it open to Ducks fans: Where are you at after an (almost) full season of mediocrity? Was that the step forward this team needed, and is your long-term optimism still where you'd like it to be? Let me know in the comments, because I know which way I'm starting to lean and it will be easier to talk me out of it now.

The Athletic / Which of Wayne Gretzky's other NHL records could be broken?

By Jesse Granger – April 8, 2025

Alex Ovechkin finally did it.

On Sunday afternoon on Long Island, the Washington Capitals star broke Wayne Gretzky's record to become the NHL's all-time leading goal scorer with 895.

It was a record that once felt out of reach, like most of Gretzky's career marks. Perusing through the career stats of "The Great One" can be dizzying. The numbers are often outlandish compared to his peers, with seemingly no realistic chance of anyone matching them.

It's what makes Ovechkin's accomplishment so impressive. It also begs the question: Are any of Gretzky's other significant NHL records in danger of being broken?

He owns well over 50. Some are relatively obscure — most assists in a road game — and won't be discussed here. And most are well out of reach from today's players, especially in an era with far fewer goals than when Gretzky played. We decided to put some of his more interesting records into tiers based on how likely someone is to break them, starting with the most likely to be passed.

Likely to be broken at some point

Most goals, including playoffs: 1,016

Ovechkin is currently at 967, and needs 50 more goals to break this record. It feels attainable if he returns for at least another season, especially if the Capitals go on a deep playoff run this year. Ovechkin already has two postseasons with double-digit goals (11 in 2008-09 and 15 when he won the Cup and Conn Smythe in 2017-18). If he has another run close to that, followed by a strong 2025-26, it's reachable.

Most points in a single postseason: 47

Gretzky's 17-goal, 30-assist run in 1984-85 is the most impressive postseason in league history, but it's not completely out of reach for today's scorers. Connor McDavid just posted 42 points in last year's run to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final. Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point registered 34 and 33, respectively, as teammates in 2021.

It's highly unlikely anyone will top Gretzky's 47-point mark in the 18 games it took him to do it, but if an elite scorer goes on a deep run with multiple lengthy series, this record is within reach.

Most points in a single Stanley Cup Final series: 13

McDavid nearly reached this mark a season ago, with 11 points (three goals, eight assists) in seven games against the Florida Panthers. That was tied for the seventh-highest Cup Final point total of all time.

The year before, Mark Stone had nine points against Florida in only five Cup Final games, aided by a hat trick in the Cup-clinching Game 5. While it won't be easy, this record is certainly attainable.

Breakable, but unlikely

Most career playoff goals: 122

Ovechkin is the active leader, but he has only scored 72 career playoff goals. He is primed to add to that this season, with the Capitals inching toward locking up home-ice advantage in the East, but Ovechkin's

career high for goals in a single playoff run is only 15 and as well as he's fended off Father Time to this point, he doesn't have that many runs left.

Crosby is right behind Ovechkin with 71 career playoff goals despite not playing a playoff game in three years (and counting). The player with the best chance of chasing Gretzky down may be Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon, who has scored 48 in 12 seasons. MacKinnon is only 29, and has averaged 0.55 goals per game in the postseason (compared to Gretzky's 0.59). It would require quite a few deep runs by the Avalanche, but it's not impossible.

Most Art Ross Trophy wins: 10

Gretzky won seven-straight Art Ross trophies as the league's points leader from 1980 to 1987. Those alone would make him the all-time leader, but he added three more over his next seven seasons.

The active leader is McDavid, with five Art Ross trophies in his 10 NHL seasons. He's two behind where Gretzky was at this point in his career, but this feels like a record that could be broken at some point.

Most goals in a single season: 92

When Auston Matthews scored 69 last season, it was the first time someone came within 25 goals of Gretzky's single-season record in nearly three decades. Even Matthews' amazing season fell well short, but the current landscape in scoring suggests this record isn't unbreakable.

The league-wide save percentage has dropped for 10 consecutive years, plummeting from .915 in 2015-16 to the current average of only .900. That's still quite far from the .873 league average in 1981-82 (the year Gretzky set the record), but we're leaving the door open for this one.

Most Hart Trophy wins: 9

McDavid and Ovechkin lead all active players with three Hart trophies each. With the amount of talent and parity in the NHL these days, it feels unlikely anyone will ever approach Gretzky's number.

Unbreakable

Most career assists: 1,963

This number is so ridiculous that it's difficult to comprehend. Ron Francis sits in second place with 1,249. The active leader in assists is Sidney Crosby, but he is still 903 behind Gretzky. Crosby's career high for a single season is 84 assists, in his second NHL season. He would need to replicate that 11 more seasons to catch Gretzky.

Most career assists, including playoffs: 2,223

Read above. The already Grand Canyon-sized chasm between Gretzky and the rest of the hockey world is even wider here.

Most assists in a single season: 163

When it comes to the most assists in a single season, Gretzky doesn't just hold the top spot. He holds the top seven spots, and 11 of the top 12. Only two other players — Mario Lemieux in 1988-89 and Bobby Orr in 1970-71 — have registered more than 100 assists in a season. Gretzky did it 11 times.

McDavid and Kucherov are the only active players to reach triple digits. Both registered exactly 100 assists last season, but that is a long way from Gretzky's mark.

Most career points: 2,857

This record is even less attainable than the career assists records. Jaromir Jagr is second behind Gretzky, by nearly 1,000 points. Crosby (1,682) and Ovechkin (1,619) aren't even 60 percent of the way there.

To put it in perspective, McDavid has 1,072 points in his 10th NHL season, so he would need to hit the 100-point mark every year for the next 17 years, and then have an 86-point season after that, to pass Gretzky.

Most points in a single season: 215

Gretzky is the only player to reach 200 points in a season, and he did it four times. McDavid's miraculous 153-point season in 2022-23 was the only time a player has cracked the top-20 on this all-time leaderboard since 1996, so this record feels pretty secure. McDavid's 1.87 points per game that season pale in comparison to Gretzky's 2.69 in 1985-86.

Most career short-handed goals: 73

The active leader in career short-handed goals is Brad Marchand, but he has only 36 in 16 seasons. Marchand, who turns 37 next month, is running out of years, so who is the next most likely chaser?

Considering age and career shorties, Carolina's Sebastian Aho is probably the answer. The 27-year-old has scored 20 short-handed goals in nine NHL seasons. The problem, is when comparing his pace to Gretzky's, the Great One had already scored 55 shorties by the time he was 27.

Longest consecutive point-scoring streak: 51 games

No one has come close to Gretzky's record since Lemieux's 46-game point streak in 1989-90, but we've had a few lengthy streaks in recent years.

Patrick Kane's 26-game streak in 2015-16 is the 11th-longest all time, and the longest since 1993. Mitch Marner scored in 23 consecutive games just a couple years ago for the Maple Leafs. That's the closest anyone has come to Gretzky's mark in the last three decades.

Most career hat tricks: 50

It's a bit surprising how far behind this number Ovechkin is, considering he's catching Gretzky in most of the other goal-related records. Ovechkin's 32 career hat tricks are by far the most by any active player, but he won't catch Gretzky.

The next-closest active player is Boston Bruins forward David Pastrnak, who has 19 hat tricks in 11 NHL seasons. If Ovechkin couldn't approach Gretzky's mark, it seems unlikely anyone will.

ESPN / USA Hockey's world championship problem -- and possible fix

By Ryan S. Clark – April 8, 2025

Less than an hour after the United States lost to Canada in overtime of the 4 Nations Face-Off championship game, Detroit Red Wings captain Dylan Larkin was asked about the growth of American hockey and what lies ahead.

"You know what I think it does? I think we've had a tough time with USA Hockey getting guys to play in the World Championships," said Larkin, a five-time World Championships participant. "I think guys are at home watching this, and I hope they are wanting a piece of this.

"They gotta go to the World Championships and prove themselves and play for their country. We gotta start winning that tournament. I think that's where Canada, those guys go and they play."

Larkin's words have since sparked a discussion about one of the largest challenges facing the nation's governing body for the sport as it tries to become the world's strongest men's hockey power. Getting there means having an investment that goes beyond marquee events such as the 4 Nations Face-Off or the Olympics, and it all starts with how players regard participation in the IIHF World Championships.

The leadership team at USA Hockey have heard or read about what Larkin said, as have his peers in the NHL. But a gap persists in getting all of those peers to buy in.

ESPN spoke to 10 sources, including players and management, about why it has been a struggle for USA Hockey to get more top-level NHL players to participate at the World Championships. And while this year's edition presents a potential path toward a player making a case for the Olympics roster next February, there are those who feel that shouldn't be the only motivation to play for Team USA.

"We have to rebuild our culture that the tournament is important and it should be more important than it is for our players," said Minnesota Wild general manager Bill Guerin, who was Team USA's GM for the 4 Nations Face-Off and will also manage the 2026 Olympic team. "The excuses that I hear for guys not going over, they're not good enough. We need guys to go over. We want to try to start winning more often than we do, and we need our best players to consider going over.

"I know there's real-life situations. I know there's injuries. I know there's contracts. But some of the excuses I've heard? Quite honestly, they're not good enough."

THE AMERICAN HOCKEY landscape has changed dramatically since the days when Guerin and John Vanbiesbrouck, USA Hockey's assistant executive director for hockey operations, were in the NHL.

Neither of them were born when the U.S. won its second World Championship along with its first Olympic gold medal in 1960. Guerin was 10 and Vanbiesbrouck 16 when the "Miracle On Ice" team, made up of amateur players, beat the Soviet Union before winning America's second hockey gold at the 1980 Olympics.

Initially, the annual World Championships tournament was limited to amateur players as well, but the IIHF allowed professionals to participate starting in 1977. The IIHF's decision came in the wake of the Canada Cup, a six-team tournament featuring pro players that was held five times between 1976 and 1991.

Eventually, the Canada Cup was replaced by the World Cup of Hockey in 1996. The NHL then allowed its players to participate in the Olympics starting in 1998.

This created opportunities for players such as Guerin and Vanbiesbrouck to represent the U.S. throughout their professional careers. It also presented a contrast in terms of how rosters were constructed.

For example, Vanbiesbrouck represented the U.S. at the World Championships four times and was on two Canada Cup teams. He made the roster for both tournaments in 1991. The U.S. roster for the World Championships that year had 10 players younger than 23, while the Canada Cup team had only four.

While Guerin never played at the Worlds, he represented the U.S. at three Olympics and twice at the World Cup of Hockey. Guerin was part of the gold-medal-winning team at the 1996 World Cup of Hockey, and the silver-medal winning team at the 2002 Olympics. Team USA's median age when Guerin played was 30.

"Our expectations have changed," Vanbiesbrouck said. "Whenever somebody wears the jersey, there's a certain expectation. There's an element of national pride to wear a jersey, to honor the flag and honor those people who came before you. It's a great element in our game."

One item that helped with elevating those expectations was the creation of the United States National Team Development Program in 1996. The NTDP became an incubator for the nation's premier U18 and U17 male players.

Prior to the NTDP, the U.S. had medaled only twice -- with a pair of bronze-place finishes -- at the IIHF U20 World Junior Championships. The NTDP has since played an instrumental role in the U.S. establishing itself as a WJC powerhouse. Team USA has captured seven gold medals since 2010 and won its second consecutive gold earlier this year.

Between the NTDP producing 98 first-round picks and the success at the World Juniors, it created the hypothesis that USA Hockey should be able to easily recruit players to represent the nation. That much was evident after the 4 Nations Face-Off, and it's part of why the U.S. is considered to be one of the front-runners for gold at the 2026 Olympics.

"A lot of guys went through the NTDP and even coming here for two weeks, it was the closest group I've been around," Columbus Blue Jackets and Team USA defenseman Zach Werenski said after the 4 Nations Face-Off. "It was awesome being here for two weeks and it was so much fun being around these guys. Everyone bought in. I think that's a testament to what USA Hockey is doing from younger ages on right now."

"We expect to win. We expect to be in gold medal games and to be in these positions against Canada and the best teams."

Players like Larkin and Werenski have a different experience compared to those who came before them. Fewer international opportunities existed, because the NHL didn't allow players to participate in the Olympics in 2018 or 2022, while there have been only two World Cups (2004, 2016) since the first one in 1996.

It left the World Championships as the primary consistent option that could come close to replicating those best-on-best tournaments. But even as the demand for international hockey grows, there remains a disconnect when it comes to U.S. players and the World Championships.

The timing of the World Championships could be a factor. This year's tournament runs from May 9 through May 25, which is simultaneous to the second round and conference finals of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

This limits the player pool to those whose teams didn't qualify for the playoffs, or who were eliminated in the first round.

"It's the time of year when everyone's really looking for a break, and to go for a month, give it your all and sacrifice? It's a lot for players," Vanbiesbrouck said. "Most of the guys in the NHL are family guys, which we can all appreciate. Another is with the hip injuries that are happening today, they need a whole summer to recuperate and there's so many significant injuries now that take such a long time that we understand. But I think that's a big factor."

THE WINNIPEG JETS duo of Connor Hellebuyck and Nikolaj Ehlers represent just how much differently the World Championships are viewed in the United States compared to the rest of the world.

Hellebuyck grew up in Commerce Township, Mich., which is a 45-minute drive from the NTDP's headquarters. He grew up watching the Detroit Red Wings and went to games. He watched American-born players such as fellow goalie Jimmy Howard, who he idolized.

But he first learned about the tournament as a 21-year-old who had just finished his first AHL season in 2015, when he received a call from USA Hockey asking him to join the team for the World Championships.

"When USA Hockey called, it was cool. It was a cool experience," Hellebuyck said. "The more I did it, the more I started to realize it is for the experience and it's for the young guy trying to get better. It's not for the veteran unless he wants to travel, unless he wants to see the world or he wants to play a little more hockey."

American-born players like Hellebuyck often grow up associating hockey in May with the Stanley Cup playoffs. Major League Baseball, the NBA Finals and the PGA Championship, among many other sporting events, are also going on at that time. Having that many options plays into the lack of visibility.

Compare that to Ehlers. He grew up in Aalborg, Denmark where there was a pro hockey team, but nothing like the NHL. As a nation, Denmark has around 5,000 registered hockey players. But it hosted the World Championships for the first time in 2018, and had the eighth-highest total attendance in tournament history. Denmark will co-host this year's tournament in May with Sweden.

In Europe, the World Championships have become a tentpole event within the European sporting landscape in nations such as Czechia, Finland, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, home of the IIHF's headquarters. Last year's tournament in Czechia set a new tournament total attendance record of 797,727 fans. Five of the 10 most attended tournaments have come since 2010, none of which were in North America.

The U.S has hosted the tournament three times -- with the most recent coming in 1962, when it was hosted in Colorado Springs and Denver. Canada, which has won the tournament a record 28 times, has hosted the World Championships just once, back in 2008.

Vanbiesbrouck said there haven't been any discussions throughout his time with USA Hockey about trying to host the event, adding that he would like to challenge the status quo and "be able to say that we could do this."

Ehlers, who played in his first Worlds in 2016, said the tournament has such a reverence in Europe that fans will travel to support their respective homelands. But for nations such as Denmark, Ehlers said the Worlds provide them a chance to show they do belong.

"To be able to have had the amount of NHL players that we've had over years and the way that we've gone at The Olympics, they reached the quarterfinals at the last Olympics," said Ehlers, who is one of 17

Danes to play in the NHL. "We've beaten Canada and Sweden and teams like that. We go out there to try to prove we are not a small hockey country even though we are in the big picture."

Or as Guerin said: "Because it matters to them. It's important and it needs to be important for us."

SO WHAT CAN USA Hockey do to get more NHL players to play at the Worlds?

Guerin said that the organization has developed a program allowing players to bring their family members and/or friends to Europe for the tournament. Vanbiesbrouck added that it's something they've evolved after observing what Canada had with its program.

Utah Hockey Club coach Andre Tourigny -- Canada's coach for the past two cycles -- said Hockey Canada created a family environment. He said bringing families over for the tournament means there's a chance for them to share what it means to be in a different part of the world. But when it's time to play, those individual families then create their own community despite being thousands of miles away from home.

"Admittedly, USA Hockey has had to do a better job of getting the people and bringing them over with a certain standard and they've done that," Guerin said. "The last little while they've stepped up to the plate and made it a better experience for the players, their wives and their families. It can just be a great opportunity to play for your country. Hopefully, we start to see more guys feel the importance of that tournament."

Wild forward Matt Boldy said that Guerin and others within USA Hockey have done a strong job of emphasizing why the World Championships matter, and how they used it in their process for creating Team USA's 4 Nations Face-Off roster.

Boldy said he viewed going to the World Championships as a chance to show how he could be counted upon playing in a different system in international play. Especially when he saw other nations bring more of their best players to the tournament.

A two-time World Championship team member, Boldy got a chance to learn from Johnny Gaudreau and Brock Nelson, two players he grew up watching. While Boldy learned from them on the ice, he also got a chance to know them as people, which he said helped when it came to establishing a dynamic with teammates.

"I think the more that we can get our USA guys there playing together, comfortable with each other ... it just makes things easier so in tournaments like the 4 Nations, it makes that transition smoother," Boldy said. "It's a big tournament. Every country wants to win it including the U.S. If we can get our biggest guys there and everyone kind of spends that extra time together, it could mean a lot."

Guerin and Vanbiesbrouck said that they have heard from the agents of American players who missed out on the 4 Nations Face-Off about wanting to be involved in the Olympics. Vanbiesbrouck said that the 4 Nations event also made older players realize that the 2026 Olympics might be their final opportunity to play for Team USA.

"It's one of those things where if you want to be in one of those tournaments and participate, then, be a part of it," Guerin said. "Don't be a part of it when you want to be a part of it. A lot of the guys we've had have gone to the World Championships and done that. If you want to have a better shot of something like the 4 Nations and the Olympics, help us in other areas. We need it. It's not just trying to win the 4 Nations or The Olympics."

"The World Championships go on every year and we want to try to win it. That's the bottom line."

Sportsnet.ca / Weekend Takeaways: Hart Trophy still up for grabs in final two weeks of season

By Ryan Dixon – April 8, 2025

With about 10 days to go in the NHL season, we're experiencing the rare Hart Trophy race where it feels like a half-dozen guys still have a shot at being named MVP. And, really, that number might even be seven players if a certain, recently crowned all-time goal-scoring king didn't miss a month with a broken leg.

Setting Alex Ovechkin — already a three-time Hart winner — aside for now, the six players who still have a chance at this thing are the Colorado duo of Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar, injured Leon Draisaitl in Edmonton, Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov, the Vegas Golden Knights' Jack Eichel and our heavily padded entry, Connor Hellebuyck of the Jets.

While none of those players had much of a weekend to speak of, each of them has a well-established case for the Hart, with the opportunity to put a fine point on it with a big push over the finish line. And just as every player is bringing a little something different to the table, a Hart win would shape the way we talk about each guy in distinct ways.

Start at the top of the scoring charts, with MacKinnon. He finally got his due last year with his first Hart win, and if the 29-year-old were to claim back-to-back MVPs, he'd be in a truly rarified tier of superstar, especially among players who've skated in the past 35 years. Put it this way, here's a short list of studs who never won the Hart in consecutive years: Mario Lemieux, Sidney Crosby, Connor McDavid and literally everybody else playing right now save Ovechkin.

Sticking with the Avs, Makar has already accomplished something no other defenceman has done for more than 15 years — net 30 goals in a season — and an MVP win by him would be the first by a blue-liner since Chris Pronger claimed the award 25 years ago. In a league that contains mega-talents like Quinn Hughes, Adam Fox and Victor Hedman on the back end, a Hart Trophy victory would give Makar an unimpeachable claim to being the best defenceman in the world right now.

Hellebuyck's Vezina Trophy 12 months ago — with another likely to follow this season — has already cemented his reputation as the best puckstopper on Earth. However, if he can claim a league MVP, it would put Hellebuyck on that Carey Price level from 2015, where he's not only being talked about as the best goalie in the game but one of the best players, period.

That should be the way we always talk about Kucherov, but sometimes it still feels like the Bolts scoring whiz — and defending Art Ross winner — gets a short shrift. Maybe some of that is still rooted in the fact he was the 58th-overall pick in 2011 as opposed to a high lottery selection or because — while his team has had incredible success — he still toils in a non-traditional hockey market. Perhaps it's because he's exclusively a winger and that's the one position in hockey that gets less shine than the other three in terms of perceived value to the club. Whatever the case, if Kucherov wins a second career Hart one year after finishing runner-up to MacKinnon, we need to pass a law requiring his name to come up in the early stages of any conversation about the world's premier players.

Speaking of which, that somewhat nebulous designation still sits with a guy who — when he's not injured — wears No. 97 for the Oilers. In all likelihood, there's nothing Draisaitl — currently out with what's being called a short-term, lower-body ailment — could do to change the outside perspective that he's Robin to Connor McDavid's Batman in Northern Alberta. Still, a second career Hart in the same year

he's going to win his first Rocket Richard Trophy no matter how many more games he does or doesn't play would certainly help remind people that it's really an all-time two-man show in Edmonton.

That leaves Eichel, who probably has the fringiest case of the six guys we've touched on, especially since he's gone a bit cold with zero points in his past four outings. Still, we're talking about a two-way, top-line centre who sits sixth in league scoring. Eichel's real coming-out party was, of course, leading the 2023 Stanley Cup Playoffs in scoring en route to winning the title in Vegas. A 2025 Hart Trophy, though, would further validate this guy's high-end ability after years and years where it felt like — specifically during the Buffalo tenure of his career — the conversation around Eichel seemed to focus on what was going wrong as opposed to what was going right.

That brings us to a guy who most definitely did have himself a big weekend. With two goals on Friday and the historic one to get to 895 on Sunday, Ovechkin is up to 42 tallies in 61 outings this year. That projects to a 57-goal showing in 82 games, which means without a five-week absence due to a broken leg sustained in November, this guy could have taken a rip at a 60-goal season at age thirty-freakin'-nine!

That certainly would have been good enough to garner some Hart consideration. As it stands, there are six other guys who — with very little time to go — still have their helmet in the MVP ring.

Weekend Takeaways

- There's no getting away from a team that's won 12 straight games and no getting around the fact that Robert Thomas is one of the most dangerous offensive players in hockey right now. The St. Louis Blues beat Colorado 5-4 on Saturday to establish a new franchise mark of a dozen consecutive Ws. Thomas had a four-point showing that night and is up to an incredible 19 points in his past eight games. Since March 15, when the Blues' winning run began, Thomas leads the NHL with 23 points in 12 outings.
- While Thomas's production is an example of a great player on a winning team going off, it's hard to know exactly what to make of Morgan Geekie's offensive showing with the scuffling Boston Bruins. The Bruins' lone win in their past 12 games occurred Saturday versus Carolina, where Geekie was in on every single Boston goal during a 5-1 trouncing of the Hurricanes. While that 1-4-5 outburst was something, it's far from a one-off for Geekie. The 26-year-old — who nearly doubled his previous best to set a new career high of 17 goals last season — has seven goals and 16 points in his past 10 outings and sits one tally away from hitting the 30-goal mark. With so many bodies having gone out the door in Boston, Geekie is seeing lots of ice time on the top line and is doing a fantastic job of resume-building ahead of becoming a restricted free agent this summer on a re-tooling team.

The Week Ahead

- The Red Wings had two big wins on the weekend and, realistically, require a 60-minute victory in Montreal on Tuesday to remain relevant in the Eastern Conference playoff picture.
- The Leafs are in Tampa Bay on Wednesday and any kind of Toronto win would likely serve as the knockout blow in terms of the Buds claiming top spot in the Atlantic over the Bolts.
- Chicago visits Boston on Thursday, meaning a Hawks squad that drafted first overall in 2023 will be facing a team that suddenly has to be dreaming of some lottery luck in 2025. At the moment, the B's have the best lottery odds of any team in the East — meaning, of course, they're the worst outfit in the conference — and have the fourth-best chance league-wide of getting that top pick. The last time Boston called the first name in the draft, it was Joe Thornton who strolled up to the stage nearly 30 years ago in 1997.

- The Frozen Four is set to go off Thursday in St. Louis, with the final set for Saturday night. Your participants are Western Michigan, Boston University, Penn State and the defending national champs, Denver.
- If Calgary can win games in San Jose and Anaheim earlier in the week, then Friday's home game versus the Wild just might mean something in the Western Conference wild-card standings.
- The 2025 Women's World Championship begins on Wednesday in Czechia, with Canada and Team USA slated to wage a round-robin battle on Sunday at 1 p.m. ET.

Red and White Power Rankings

- 1. Winnipeg Jets (52-21-4)** The Jets' next win will be their 53rd of the campaign and establish a new franchise record. Winnipeg won 52 both last season and in 2017-18. The Jets 1.0 never won more than 43 games but played in an era where games finished in ties.
- 2. Toronto Maple Leafs (47-25-4)** After blanking the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday, Anthony Stolarz has the best save percentage (.924) of any goalie in the league who's played at least 50 games since the start of last season.
- 3. Edmonton Oilers (44-27-5)** Even if it was only for about seven minutes, it was good to see deadline pickup Trent Frederic get his first action as an Oiler during a 3-0 loss in L.A. on Saturday. Now he's got a handful of games to get himself up to speed ahead of the playoffs.
- 4. Ottawa Senators (42-29-6)** The suddenly stingy Sens posted back-to-back shutout wins on the weekend over Florida and Columbus. Ottawa has allowed one or fewer goals in regulation time in four of its past five contests.
- 5. Montreal Canadiens (38-30-9)** The Canadiens didn't have much in the tank on Sunday night in the second half of back-to-back games, but they managed to scrape up a massive pair of points in Nashville with a 2-1 victory. The goals came on great shots by their two best shooters, Cole Caufield and Patrik Laine. The latter has 20 goals in just 47 contests this year, while Caufield has 36 now and stands an outside shot at hitting the 40-goal barrier with five games to go.
- 6. Calgary Flames (36-27-13)** It could make for a tantalizing end to the season for Flames fans if the club brings in highly touted defence prospect Zayne Parekh now that his major junior season is over. Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman believes that's the plan.
- 7. Vancouver Canucks (35-28-13)** Barring an absolute miracle finish, this year will mark the eighth time in the past 10 82-game seasons that Vancouver will finish outside the playoffs.