



## **Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips**

### **June 9-15, 2026**

#### **Blue Jackets News**

- PAGE 2        The Athletic / Five forwards the Blue Jackets could target via trade as NHL offseason heats up
- PAGE 5        The Athletic / Blue Jackets Monday Gathering: Edmonton's messy Babcock situation looms over Columbus' summer
- PAGE 10       The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' GM Don Waddell Talks 2026 NHL Draft, Offseason Progress & More
- PAGE 14       The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Could Address Big Need With a Jordan Kyrrou Trade
- PAGE 16       ESPN / Report: NHL to investigate Babcock's resignation from Columbus

#### **Around the NHL News**

- PAGE 17       The Athletic / NHL free agency 2026: 10 players teams should target this offseason
- PAGE 21       The Athletic / NHL offseason trade board 2.0: Latest on all the top targets as action heats up

## The Athletic / Five forwards the Blue Jackets could target via trade as NHL offseason heats up

**By Aaron Portzline – June 17, 2026**

Like most other NHL clubs, the Columbus Blue Jackets are heading into the biggest stretch of the offseason looking to add a forward near the top of their lineup. The most likely way this happens is via trade.

Why? Well, there aren't many difference makers available via free agency, and the Blue Jackets can't expect to add immediate help with the No. 14 pick at the NHL Draft this month.

So, general manager Don Waddell, who has already swung 14 trades in his two years on the job in Columbus, will need to keep the swap meet going if the Blue Jackets are going to fortify their top two lines.

There have already been scores of conversations toward this goal, Waddell said in an interview on Sunday. He ran into fellow GMs in Switzerland during the IIHF World Championships. He had further chats with his contemporaries at the NHL scouting combine in Buffalo, N.Y.

Many of those potential deals may need to wait until the draft is staged June 26-27, but the end of the Stanley Cup Final on Sunday signaled the official start of the offseason. There were two trades already on Tuesday.

It's time for Waddell to join the party, and we're happy to help. Using colleague Chris Johnston's NHL offseason trade board, we've picked five names that would make sense for the Blue Jackets to acquire via trade.

The names run the gamut from big-contract, high-price acquisitions to high-risk, low-cost options, but they have one thing in common: We've listed players known to play predominantly on the wing.

Yes, centers can often be shifted to the wing, and — like defensemen — an NHL club can never have too many options down the middle.

But there is a premium price tag for centers, and the Blue Jackets feel pretty good about their depth with Adam Fantilli, Charlie Coyle, Sean Monahan, and Isac Lundeström down the middle, plus a collection of other players (Cole Sillinger, Dmitri Voronkov, Luca Del Bel Belluz) who can play the pivot.

The following wingers are listed in order from "dream scenario" to "well, give it a shot!"

### **Matthew Knies, LW, Toronto Maple Leafs**

Full disclosure: It makes zero sense for the Maple Leafs to move a 23-year-old power forward who is trending toward point-a-game production, but Knies' name has been all over the rumor mill for months now, and the Leafs make moves all the time that don't make sense. (Reportedly, they nearly traded him to Montreal at the March trade deadline.) This would be a huge get for the Blue Jackets, as it would change their look up front and add another young talent to their budding group. A Knies-Fantilli-Marchenko line could be dominant for years to come.

Trade considerations: This would cost the Blue Jackets dearly: at least one roster player and a top prospect, and perhaps also this year's No. 14 pick. The roster hole it creates could precipitate other moves, but some players are worth it. Knies, under contract for five more seasons, does not have any no-trade or no-move clauses in his contract until the 2030-31 season, when a modified no-trade kicks in.

#### **Mason McTavish, C/LW, Anaheim Ducks**

This is an extremely talented player coming off a difficult season — he was a healthy scratch late, including in the playoffs — so it could be the right time to strike. McTavish, 23, moved from center to wing at midseason, and that's probably where he'll spend most of his career, as his only real limitation is his skating. McTavish has averaged 19 goals and 45 points in his first four full NHL seasons, but most are waiting for a breakout. He's under contract for five more seasons at \$7 million per season.

Trade considerations: Ducks GM Pat Verbeek may drive the hardest bargain in the NHL, so a deal might not be plausible. But a young player with term would certainly be enticing to Waddell. McTavish has no contract clauses until a modified no-trade gets added for the 2029-30 season. Here's a spot where the Blue Jackets' No. 14 pick could be enticing, as the Ducks do not own a first-round pick.

#### **Jordan Kyrou, LW, St. Louis Blues**

There's a bit of a risk here, as Kyrou carries a big ticket — \$8.13 million per season through 2030-31 — and he's coming off his worst full season yet in the NHL. After averaging 33 goals and 71 points in the previous four seasons, Kyrou dipped to 18-28-46 this season, one of many Blues to crater. There's also the issue of his full no-trade clause. Still, if he returned to form, Kyrou would give the Blue Jackets a much-needed scoring punch, not to mention a much-needed burst of speed in their top six.

Trade considerations: The Jackets' No. 14 pick might not be much of a sweetener for the Blues, who already have three picks — Nos. 11, 15 and 29 — in this year's first round.

#### **Jake DeBrusk, LW/RW, Vancouver Canucks**

The Blue Jackets have already plucked one winger out of Vancouver, adding Conor Garland at the trade deadline in March. But the Canucks are just getting started on clearing out veteran players to facilitate a rebuild. DeBrusk, 29, has been a consistent 20-plus goal-scorer, with a 28-goal season and two 27-goal seasons on his resume. He also has 27 goals in 86 career playoff games. DeBrusk, who can play on both sides of center, has five years remaining on a contract that pays him a very reasonable \$5.5 million per season.

Trade considerations: DeBrusk has a no-move clause through next season, so he's not going to land this summer in a place he doesn't want to be. But given the way things are going in Vancouver, he may be amenable to places he wouldn't have considered previously. The Canucks own two first-round picks — Nos. 3 and 24 — but given their rebuilding plans, the No. 14 could make sense.

#### **Blake Coleman, LW/RW, Calgary Flames**

This would be a short-term fix, as Coleman will turn 35 in November and is entering the final year of a contract that will pay him \$4.9 million. If the Blue Jackets lose captain Boone Jenner and winger Mason Marchment to free agency, Coleman could help patch both of those losses with his leadership and gritty play. Following a solid season in Calgary — his fourth career season with at least 20 goals — he hasn't

yet shown signs of slowing down. He still skates very well and is a dangerous penalty killer, which is something the Blue Jackets could desperately use.

Trade considerations: Coleman has a modified no-trade list, allowing him to pick 10 NHL clubs as possible destinations. You wonder, though, after all the players the Flames have moved off the roster in anticipation of a rebuild, if he might expand that list a bit. It might cost the Blue Jackets only a mid-round draft pick.

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets Monday Gathering: Edmonton's messy Babcock situation looms over Columbus' summer

By Aaron Portzline – June 15, 2026

A collection of notes, insights, ruminations and did-you-knows gathered throughout the week that was for the Columbus Blue Jackets:

### **Item No. 1: What a mess**

It's hard to imagine an NHL club — or, for that matter, any amateur outfit — messing up their coaching search quite like the Edmonton Oilers have this offseason. And now the Blue Jackets get to pay a price for it.

The next few weeks are some of the busiest and most exciting on the league's calendar, with the NHL Draft in two weeks and the start of free agency just one week later. There are contracts to sign, trades to make and buyouts and offer sheets to consider.

With a rising salary cap and abundant money to spend for most clubs, general managers are expecting this summer to mark the return of actual hockey trades, not just bad contract dumps and exchanges of broken parts.

The Blue Jackets, however, will have another storyline looming over their heads: a three-year-old story they've always wished would go away. Instead, Mike Babcock is back in their lives again.

Let's recap the mess the Oilers have created.

Shortly after they were bounced from the first round of the playoffs by the Anaheim Ducks, the Oilers sought permission from the Vegas Golden Knights, their Pacific Division rivals, to interview Vegas' former coach, Bruce Cassidy.

They took this step before they fired their coach at the time, Kris Knoblauch, just eight months after signing him to a three-year extension that was supposed to start next season. This, despite Knoblauch leading the Oilers to the Stanley Cup Final in each of the two previous seasons.

Vegas, which lost to Edmonton in the second round of the playoffs just last season, denied the Oilers permission to interview Cassidy, which is their right given the terms of Cassidy's contract.

Well, secrets last about as long as \$20 bills in Vegas. This story got messy. Knoblauch was fired to spare him the twisting in the wind, and Cassidy has since gone on podcasts and other outlets trying to talk his way into early free agency.

The Golden Knights will not relent. Why?

One of the few mistakes Vegas has made in its first decade in the league — the Golden Knights would say as much, too — was allowing coach Peter DeBoer, whom they fired after missing the playoffs in 2021-22, to interview with the Dallas Stars.

The Stars hired DeBoer, and two years later, Dallas knocked out the Golden Knights in the first round of the playoffs. Vegas likely learned a lesson from that, and the Stars are merely a Western Conference rival, not a division foe like Edmonton.

With Cassidy's availability seeming unlikely, the Oilers moved on to another candidate ... one who has been accused by former players of psychological abuse and bullying behavior at all four of his NHL coaching stops.

Do the Oilers only want what they can't have?

The most recent of Babcock's stops was with the Blue Jackets in 2023.

Babcock was accused by players in Columbus of invading their privacy during one-on-one meetings by looking at their cellphone pictures to see what kind of life they were living away from the rink, a story first reported on the "Spittin' Chiclets" podcast.

The NHL was planning to investigate this three years ago but Babcock resigned before they could follow through. The league, like most everybody else in hockey, must have thought Babcock's days as a coaching candidate were done, so they stopped the investigation.

Now, for the Oilers to gain clearance to hire Babcock, the investigation is planned anew. As of Sunday, the Blue Jackets had not heard from the NHL, according to president of hockey operations and general manager Don Waddell.

"I've deferred everything to our lawyer," Waddell told The Athletic. "I wasn't here. I've heard the stories, but I don't know what's true and what isn't."

The two Blue Jackets bosses who made the decision to hire Babcock against the protestations of many in the fan base were then-president of hockey operations John Davidson and general manager Jarmo Kekäläinen.

Davidson is mostly retired and living in Florida, though he does join Blue Jackets broadcasts when full-time analyst Jody Shelley is pulled away for national broadcasts. He remains an alternate governor with the club. Kekäläinen is now the GM in Buffalo.

Whether they are compelled to answer all of the NHL's questions remains to be seen. But it seems as if the Blue Jackets players from the 2023 club would be far more pertinent to what actually happened. They're scattered all over the globe, meaning this could take a while.

Babcock lasted only 78 days on the job in Columbus and never ended up running a practice or a game. He resigned four days before training camp. And yet three years later, the Blue Jackets are still trying to shake free of one of the most embarrassing chapters in the franchise's born-under-a-bad-sign history.

## **Item No. 2: No buyouts**

Now that the Stanley Cup Final has been decided — congratulations to the Carolina Hurricanes — the real offseason can get started. On Wednesday, the NHL's first contract buyout "window" opens.

Don't expect the Blue Jackets to take part, Waddell said.

"Nope," he told The Athletic on Sunday. "No chance."

This question was asked, for a third straight summer, with goaltender Elvis Merzlikins in mind, but it's never been more legitimate than it is now.

Not only is Merzlikins, 32, no longer the Blue Jackets' No. 1 goaltender — that's Jet Greaves — but he's also entering the final year of his deal at \$5.4 million this season. A buyout would be spread over just two seasons.

More than a financial decision, a buyout of Merzlikins' contract would signal a bold move by the Blue Jackets to change a position that has improved with the arrival of Greaves, but needs to be a strength of the club.

It would also fit well with coach Rick Bowness' vow to change the culture in Columbus.

The Blue Jackets aren't averse to buyouts. In fact, two are coming off the books when the new league year begins on July 1.

The six-year buyout of Alexander Wennberg's contract after the 2019-20 season was costing the Blue Jackets \$891,667 through this past season. Adam Boqvist, whose contract was bought out by Waddell shortly after he arrived in 2024, was costing them \$533,333.

### **Item No. 3: Coyle clause**

The NHL's no-move clause was inadvertently invented in Columbus by long-ago GM Doug MacLean. Apparently, a wrinkle to that clause was born here, too, and just in the past few months.

As first reported by The Athletic's Michael Russo, the six-year, \$36 million extension signed by Blue Jackets center Charlie Coyle last month includes a no-move clause in the first four years of the contract. But that no-move clause requires an asterisk.

In the event of NHL expansion, Coyle's contract states, the Blue Jackets would not be required to protect Coyle in advance of an expansion draft, giving them roster flexibility that players with no-move clauses did not provide until now.

Previously, players with no-trade clauses were not automatically protected, as their contract only stipulates that they can't be traded, not that they can't be moved (ex: waived, exposed via expansion, etc.).

Players with no-move clauses were automatically on a club's protected list because their contract stipulated that they couldn't be moved off the roster in any manner.

"I think I started it," Waddell said. "You can negotiate a no-move clause or a no-trade clause with the player, and you can negotiate your own provisions within that.

"I don't see expansion for at least four years. That's my own personal opinion, that's not anything from the league. I don't think he had anything to worry about, it's just flexibility — for both sides, really — in the event it happens."

Expect to see more contracts written that way, even though the NHL has not formally announced its next wave of expansion. In fact, they've already started. Michael McCarron's six-year, \$20 million contract with Minnesota, signed last week, has the same provision.

As for the original no-move clause, the impetus of that happened early in the 2005-06 season, when the Blue Jackets traded with Anaheim for center Sergei Fedorov.

The Blue Jackets had center Todd Marchant in the trade, but Marchant had a no-trade clause with the Blue Jackets and refused to waive it to facilitate the trade. MacLean came up with another plan.

He placed Marchant on waivers, and the Ducks, who were low in the pecking order that season, claimed him, allowing the two clubs to swing the trade even without Marchant's consent. He wasn't traded, right? He was waived.

The transaction, deemed to be beyond the spirit of the existing collective bargaining agreement, enraged the NHL Players' Association and several agents. And so the no-move clause, as opposed to a no-trade clause, was born.

#### **Item No. 4: Snacks**

- The Blue Jackets will hold their annual summer development camp from June 29 to July 2 at Nationwide Arena. The club's top prospects, center Cayden Lindstrom and defenseman Jackson Smith, will both participate, Waddell said, along with many of this year's draft picks. The Jackets have the No. 14 selection in this year's draft. The amateur scouts will meet beginning on Sunday to finalize their master list heading into the June 26-27 draft.
- It's the offseason, so the Blue Jackets can't lord over players' workouts and routines. But they can provide ice in Nationwide Arena, and it's going in early this summer. Waddell said there are a "bunch of guys" coming in ahead of development camp to skate and train together. "The first guy who raised his hand was Jackson Smith," he said.
- With one year remaining on his contract with the Blue Jackets, former coach Dean Evason can afford to be picky, even if it means sitting out this coming season. He's had two offers to coach clubs in Europe, but isn't ready to head overseas, he said. His preference would be a head coaching position, even if that means going back to the AHL instead of taking an NHL head-coaching job. "At this point, I just feel I'm better suited as a head guy," Evason said. "If that means going to the AHL when my deal (with Columbus) is up, then I'm fine with that. I want to work." The Blue Jackets have not been asked for permission by any other NHL club to talk with Evason, Waddell said.
- Evason isn't sitting around waiting for his phone to ring, he said. He's been talking to his contacts around the league, not about his own coaching future, but in an effort to get his former assistants, Scott Ford, Mike Haviland and Steve McCarthy, their next jobs. McCarthy was fired along with Evason on Jan. 12; Ford and Haviland were fired after the season.
- Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski, one week after winning the Norris Trophy, finished seventh in voting for the Hart Trophy (MVP) for a second consecutive season. He received 10 fourth-place votes and 23 fifth-place votes. He also was named to the NHL's first All-Star team for a second straight season. The only other Blue Jackets players to finish in the top 10 for the Hart are goaltenders Sergei Bobrovsky (fifth in 2013, third in 2017) and Steve Mason (fourth in 2009).
- The head coaching vacancies in Edmonton and Toronto have snarled coaching hires all over the league, with some candidates for those positions not wanting to commit to assistant jobs elsewhere until all of the head coaching gigs are filled. Waddell is planning to promote Trent Vogelhuber from AHL

Cleveland into one of the jobs on Bowness' staff. He's down to "three or four candidates" for the other opening, he said, and he's looking for "a little more experience" in that hire. It'll be Vogelhuber, the yet-to-be-hired assistant, and Jared Boll on Bowness' staff next season.

- Forward James Malatesta, a pending restricted free agent, signed a one-year extension last week. He'll make \$850,000 at the NHL level and \$90,000 with AHL Cleveland. A fifth-round pick (No. 133) in 2021, Malatesta played games in Columbus during both the 2023-24 (11 games) and 2024-25 (two) seasons, but spent all of last season in Cleveland. He'll be a restricted free agent again after next season.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' GM Don Waddell Talks 2026 NHL Draft, Offseason Progress & More

**Mark S. – June 17, 2026**

Don Waddell is no stranger to long days and nights. That is commonplace in the month of June when he and his staff spend the month getting ready for the bulk of the offseason.

With just nine days left until the 2026 NHL Draft in Buffalo, the Blue Jackets still have a lot of business they need to take care of. Not only are they finalizing their master list for the draft itself, they have several contracts they need to make decisions on.

That's not all. The Blue Jackets will be looking for some external help in certain areas of their team. Then after the dust of the draft settles down, they have development camp and the start of free agency to deal with.

Waddell spoke to the Hockey Writers on Tuesday for about 20 minutes to discuss the upcoming draft and give some updates on where things stand in their offseason. The first part of our talk will focus on the draft while part two looks at where things stand on the offseason.

As always, this conversation was cleaned up for clarity and flow.

### **The 2026 NHL Draft**

THW: Don, thanks as always for doing this. For the second year in a row, you have the 14th pick of the draft. You were recently in Buffalo at the Combine. What things were you able to take away from meeting the prospects there and then what are you prioritizing if you decide to ultimately keep the 14th pick?

Waddell: "The big thing is, I got tied up with a lot of agents. I had a lot of meetings, but I sat in, let's say the player 9-20, I sat in those interviews. We had them scheduled to where I could make sure I made it for them. The players today, they're so much more into training and doing the right things. Some big players for sure. Some real strong guys. I haven't looked at all the testing results because I haven't had a chance yet. They're more polished."

"If we keep our pick, we'll got a good player there. When you're picking 14th, you don't know who's going to go (where.) They tell you who's going to go the first five or six but then it's pretty wide open. Most of those players at that point aren't ready to come turn pro yet either."

THW: You have already expressed an openness to trading the 14th pick if the right situation comes up. What would make a trade compelling enough for you in that situation? Where is the balance for you when deciding if a player is good enough to give up that pick?

Waddell: "I think first of all, it's an age thing. I'm not going to trade for an older player. If it's a younger player that's got either a longer contract or we have rights for a number of years, that's something we would look at for sure. But in saying that, it's a good pick. There is a high value on that pick. Guys that I have talked to that are trying to move up in the draft, I know it's a good value pick. I took Jarvis at 13, which he worked out pretty well for Carolina. And he came in right away. We brought him into training

camp. No expectation of him staying and he proved himself that he's ready to play in the NHL. Sometimes you never know."

"You got to be a little but careful about a trade just saying you're going to trade the pick. I'll trade the pick, but it's got to be for the right things."

THW: Would you consider moving up if the right opportunity came about?

Waddell: "Yeah, we always talk about that. Looks like though you'd have to move past nine. The player we have at nine or 10, we might get at 14. It's like that every year. Everybody's got different feelings and different needs. Everybody scouts differently so you just never know."

THW: Does the status of your prospects, whether in college, the CHL or in the AHL, affect the way you'll handle the draft? Are there some guys you feel are ready to make the jump to the NHL as soon as next season?

Waddell: "Not really. Probably our number-one guy is Jackson Smith right now. I think him going back to school this year, I won't be surprised after school if he's ready to jump into the NHL. Watching a lot this year, he's close. He could probably play this year, but going back to school is probably a good thing for him."

"And then, we also got some kids in Cleveland that had great playoffs and a great season so we certainly have to give a look at. Last year, our roster was pretty full. This year, we're trying to keep a spot or two where these guys can compete for it. I don't know if it really changes your draft knowing that a guy is probably a few years away. I think we're pretty open-minded. I'm not going to say just the best player because if we had a left-shot defenseman and a right-shot winger, because we know we're pretty good on the left side."

### **Offseason Agenda**

THW: It's your third full season here now. You have a better idea of what you have. You kept guys together trying for the playoffs. Now that you know what you have, are you more willing to make some bigger moves? And just how much of a gap is there in your mind between where you feel the Blue Jackets are at and becoming an annual playoff contender?

Waddell: "I think first, let's take Kent Johnson. He had 24 goals two years ago. He did start slow last year and never really got it going. It's one thing to hope a guy could score 20 goals, but it's another thing when a guy has already done it. You know he's capable of it. Guys like him, Dmitri Voronkov, we got to get them on track right off the start of the year. If we do that, that's going to really help us. But you need that balance with those young kids and some of the veterans here to show them the way too. I thought Fantilli got better as the season went on and finished very strong."

"Some of these young kids, the experience they got in the last three years, we need them to continue to grow. We signed Charlie Coyle, who we thought was such a big part of our team last year. Right-shot center and plays every game. But after that, you want to be careful with these long-term contracts because Fantilli's going to get a big raise this year. Then you got Marchenko coming up. You got Voronkov, Johnson, Mateychuk. All these guys are going to need new contracts. Cap space goes quickly. Might be \$104 million, but right now going to be \$101 million, something like that, if I sign a \$5 million

guy along with Jet (Greaves) getting a big raise. It's interesting. You see the cap's going up but it goes quickly."

THW: You probably get calls on them. Do you see Johnson and Voronkov still as part of the future in Columbus?

Waddell: "Yeah, for sure. I get calls and like I say, everybody's willing to talk about anybody. But that said, both those guys are going to play in our top-six so I'm not trading them for draft picks or prospects. If something comes along, and not just those guys, but any guy, if you feel like you're making your team better, that's the deals that you got to look at."

THW: You mentioned Coyle already. You also said you'd lean to a right-shot winger over a left-handed defenseman if having to make that choice. Is it fair to say that a top-six or nine winger is something you'd try to prioritize this offseason? Just how important is that position for your team to fill?

Waddell: "If there's a top-nine guy that fits into what we're trying to do here, 100%. My sense is with these free agents that it's not a huge crop that they're all going to get too much term and too much money. But we'll find that out in the next (little while.)"

THW: When it comes to roster construction, what is the balance for you between keeping your own UFAs and RFAs since you know them versus looking for external help?

Waddell: "I think it's something we've talked a lot about here. It's a balancing act because you just want to be careful of the older guys and how much term they get. You got Provorov that's locked up for a while. Monahan for another three years, Coyle and Garland, the age factor is something we're looking at to make sure we don't put ourselves in a spot that three or four years from now, you can't get rid of the guys and you need the cap space. Ownership is willing to spend the money. You just have to spend it wisely."

THW: So now your free agents. I'm sure there's a lot you still don't know. We'll frame the question this way. Do you still want all three of Boone Jenner, Mason Marchment and Erik Gudbranson back? Then how confident are you that all three of them could come back if you're able to?

Waddell: "We're still talking to all of them. Last year, we signed Provorov and Fabbro, I think the night before free agency. I never want to say never. They'll know what the market is and if we get the right term and the dollars make sense, I don't mind bringing them all back. But I don't see that happening right now. I just think some guys are going to get more term than what we want to give them and we'll deal with that."

THW: In my mind, Jenner could get term. Marchment could get term. Those are the two I wonder if that's what you mean when you say they might get more term and that's something you have to talk through. Especially with Jenner, someone who's been with the Blue Jackets his whole career. This could still go either way, right?

Waddell: "If he gets the term he wants, I'm happy for him. I'm really happy for him because he deserves it. Players have that right to test the market. He hasn't tested it before so if he decides to test it, then I'm happy for him if he gets what he's looking for. Same with Marchment."

THW: Has Jenner told you directly he's going to test the market?

Waddell: "No, not yet. No. I've talked to the agent but no."

THW: Fantilli, Greaves, Sillinger, those are your big RFAs. They're maybe not as much of a priority as they'll get done in due time. Do you have any kind of update or timeline on them?

Waddell: "Fantilli I think is waiting to see what happens with Connor Bedard, Leo Carlsson, Cutter Gauthier. Nobody wants to go first. Instead of spinning my wheels, I'm focused on other things. They'll get signed eventually for sure. There's no doubt about that but it just doesn't seem to be a high priority right now from their side so we're going to continue to do our business, the things that have to be done now. Number one right now is the draft. We'll keep working on that. In the meantime, take the calls and make the calls I need to make."

THW: The goalie situation. Ivan Fedotov is probably not going to be back...

Waddell: "He's not coming back."

THW: You still have Elvis Merzlikins. I don't think you're considering buyouts. Do you expect Merzlikins to be with your team next season and then do you have a need for another goalie with Fedotov not returning?

Waddell: "Yeah, we do have a need for a third goalie for sure. We're spending a lot of time on that right now seeing what's out there and seeing potentially might be through a trade. We want to make sure we go in here with three guys that are capable of playing that's for sure."

THW: The Dylan Larkin trade request. I know as managers, you want to keep that stuff behind closed doors as much as possible. When that came out, did it surprise you? Is this a trend you could start to see more of moving forward?

Waddell: "Well, it's the NBA model, you know? Players ask to be traded. They got other guys on other teams that recruit them and they ask to be traded. So I'm hoping we don't become the NBA model but certainly that was a little surprise for all of us."

THW: Yes. And the obvious connection because it is Larkin, you obviously have a guy in Zach Werenski. Is that something you are even remotely concerned about specific to this coming year?

Waddell: "No. I mean, you always think about it. I'm hoping we don't have to deal with that situation, that's for sure. I had breakfast with Werenski the day before the Norris was announced and we had a great conversation. That's all I can go by how him and I talk about things going forward."

THW: Leave you with this one. Your scouting staff. How do you feel like your scouting team has done of late? Have you made any kind of adjustments to way things are being handled by them?

Waddell: "We've changed how we're doing things this past year. And I think the scouts adapted well to it. I think our guys do a good job. It's just a matter of we've changed a little bit. I want to be a little but more risk, risk versus reward. After the first couple of rounds, I want to take some chances on some guys that maybe have a higher reward. The fourth line guys they're geared to be, those are easier to find than top-nine guys and top-four D, that's for sure."

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Could Address Big Need With a Jordan Kyrrou Trade

**Wesley M. – June 17, 2026**

The NHL offseason has officially started, and one of the most critical of those offseasons belongs to the Columbus Blue Jackets. They have too many players currently banking on this team to compete, and if they are unable to do so, next summer may bite them quite a bit harder with players trying to force their way out.

There are some guys who aren't exactly on the market but could certainly be available from teams looking to add draft capital or rebuild a prospect pool. One of those teams is the St. Louis Blues, and one of their franchise centerpieces, Jordan Kyrrou, wants to be moved.

There were rumors that he could've been dealt around the trade deadline this past season, as he enters year four of an eight-year extension he signed with the Blues back in September 2022. He probably wants a change of scenery to a place where he can compete, and the Blues could get his \$8 million a year contract off the books as well.

### **Why Is Kyrrou Worth the Shot?**

Kyrrou has all the makings of a star in the NHL. He has breakaway speed, skilled and fast hands, and a dangerous shot, which coincidentally is what the Blue Jackets were missing this season. He also plays a two-way game that would pair extremely well on a line that struggles to defend the ice, but creates scoring opportunities the other way.

He would add more two-way play to a team with Charlie Coyle, who was extremely valuable this season, and made a lot of headway both in Columbus and around the league, even earning some votes for the Selke Trophy. Coyle was so good with the Blue Jackets that he snagged a massive six-year extension to ideally finish his career in Columbus.

Kyrrou would likely slot into a top-six forward role with the Blue Jackets and would be a fun addition to play with someone like Kent Johnson and Sean Monahan, with the skills to elevate his offense even more.

This would give the Blue Jackets a level of two-way forwards all the way down the lineup that they haven't had in quite some time. With better defensive forwards, it would help eliminate so much traffic in the middle of the ice and allow the goaltender to face fewer shots from high-danger chances.

As you look at the offensive reasons why a Kyrrou addition helps, he would bring speed to an offense that needs to get faster. He brings a goal scoring pedigree that the Blue Jackets also don't have enough of, as he had registered three consecutive 30-plus goal seasons prior to this season; the Blue Jackets didn't have a single player reach 30 goals either this season.

After signing a long-term extension, the Blues were banking on Kyrrou being one of the main offensive focal points, but with management looking to rebuild, he will want to play for a contender. Do the Blue Jackets make sense for that?

## **Why Columbus for Kyrrou?**

Kyrrou has already been linked to a variety of teams, including the Blue Jackets. The reasons may be general manager Don Waddell's desire to compete, league-wide belief that Kyrrou wants out, and the Blues' desire for draft capital to replace him. The Blue Jackets are one of the teams with a need to make a push and a top-15 pick in this year's draft.

Historically, the Blue Jackets have not been a great team at drafting top-end talent; however, if they could flip a draft pick for a player with a ton of upside, that could be the perfect situation for them. However, why would Kyrrou want to come to Columbus?

Considering Kyrrou has already played in 28 playoff games, he knows what kind of elite talent needs to be around him to get there. He would join forces with the reigning Norris Trophy winner in Zach Werenski, and would have an elite shooter like Kirill Marchenko, and a rising star center in Adam Fantilli as well. Not to mention Team Canada's future Olympic goaltender, Jet Greaves, in the crease.

There are a ton of pieces on the Blue Jackets' roster to make a legitimate run at the Stanley Cup. The forwards, specifically, were a major reason why they went on the run they did after Rick Bowness was hired.

If they can connect the final few pieces, they could be a serious threat in the same division as the team that just won the Stanley Cup, the Carolina Hurricanes. If Waddell can take a page out of his former team's book and go get the guy who will help his team win now, he should have zero reservations in doing it.

## **What Would the Trade Take?**

The trade would require the Blue Jackets to part ways with the 14th overall pick in the 2026 Draft, but from there, what the Blues would specifically want has not been made formal. The Blues will ask for prospects on entry-level deals, or at least with a manageable contract to add to a rebuilding roster.

Who might that be for the Blue Jackets? The first player that is ready to take a leap to the NHL, but just hasn't quite gotten the proper chance with the Blue Jackets, is Luca Del Bel Belluz. Del Bel Belluz is essentially ready for a breakout, has been great in the American Hockey League (AHL), but has never gotten a real shot with Columbus, and has team-controlled term as a restricted free agent (RFA).

Though Del Bel Belluz wasn't moved at the deadline, that time could come during the summer if a player and a pick are enough to engage conversations with the Blues. If they come back asking for more, how much is Waddell willing to give up for a player of Kyrrou's status?

It seems like Waddell knows his back is against the wall, with his stars wanting to compete, but how can he pull off a trade like this for a player with a full no-move clause? Kyrrou will control the negotiations from start to finish, and the Blue Jackets will have to find a way to convince him that a team with a playoff drought going on six years is ready to compete now.

Kyrrou has total control, but would he have interest in coming to Columbus? He would certainly fix a lot of issues that plagued them down the stretch, and it would give him a fresh start in a new city. Now it is time for Waddell to make his defining offseason move.

## ESPN / Report: NHL to investigate Babcock's resignation from Columbus

**Associated Press – June 15, 2026**

The NHL is beginning an investigation into Mike Babcock's resignation as coach of the Columbus Blue Jackets in September 2023 before he coached a game for them, a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press on Monday.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the investigation is being done privately. All coaching hires are subject to league approval.

The Players' Association requested the investigation last week after word emerged that the Edmonton Oilers were interested in hiring Babcock. The league wanted to wait until after the Stanley Cup Final ended before delving into it, and that happened Sunday with Carolina defeating Vegas for the title.

Babcock resigned from the Blue Jackets less than three months after taking the job. At the time, Babcock's requests for personal photos from players in an attempt to get to know them drew criticism as an invasion of privacy.

The union reviewed the situation, but the NHL dropped its planned investigation of the situation when Babcock stepped down.

Babcock, who turned 63 on April 29, has not coached a game in the league since being fired by Toronto 23 games into the 2019-20 season. He coached Detroit to the Stanley Cup in 2008, reached the final with the Red Wings in '09 and Anaheim in '03, and helped Canada win back-to-back Olympic gold medals in 2010 and '14.

Once considered one of the best in the profession, former players have spoken out about Babcock's old-school tendencies that some say can be considered bullying.

A report surfaced after the Maple Leafs fired Babcock that he had asked a player to share his ranking of teammates from hardest- to least-hardest working and then shared that with the rest of the group. Former Red Wings player Johan Franzen told a Swedish outlet that Babcock was the worst person he had ever met and said at one point he was terrified to go to the rink.

The Oilers are looking for a replacement for Kris Knoblauch after firing him following their first-round playoff exit, despite back-to-back trips to the final before that. They asked Vegas for permission to speak to recently fired coach Bruce Cassidy, but the Golden Knights rejected that request because he remains under contract through next season.

## NHL free agency 2026: 10 players teams should target this offseason

By Dom Luszczyszyn – June 18, 2026

Every year, the biggest mistakes made by NHL teams are made on the first day of free agency. It's the nature of the free market, where bidding wars drive up prices to wild places and the last team standing is usually paying an uncomfortable amount.

Amidst that, there are still great deals to be had for undervalued players at the right place. That's the goal of today's piece: finding 10 players within the UFA landscape who project to provide surplus value relative to what they're expected to be paid.

Here's who I think are the best players to target based on their projected contracts, courtesy of AFP Analytics.

### **Mason Marchment**

For the teams that strike out on Alex Tuch and need a top-six winger, Marchment feels like a great consolation prize at potentially half the price. After struggling with the Kraken, Marchment was an absolute revelation in Columbus with some dazzling numbers at five-on-five (59 percent of expected goals, 69 percent of actual goals) while scoring at a 67-point pace. Marchment has consistently posted north of two five-on-five points per 60 in each of the last three seasons, where his teams have routinely outscored teams heavily.

Marchment probably isn't a driver, but he looks like a difference-making complementary piece that could pair well with a star or influence offense on the second line. He'd be a bargain at his projected price tag of \$5.7 million; I have him closer to \$7.5 million.

### **Viktor Arvidsson**

For most of his career in Nashville, Arvidsson was a 60-point player. In Los Angeles, he was a 60-point player. And last year in Boston, he was a 60-point player. That he only managed 27 points in 67 games in Edmonton, primarily playing with Leon Draisaitl, remains a mystery to this day. It's also the only season aside from his rookie year that Arvidsson's team didn't outscore their opponents with him on the ice. Weird.

Arvidsson is on the older side of things and he's a safe bet to miss some games, but when he's playing, he's a tried and true play-driver who creates a ton of in-zone offense. He bounced back nicely from a disaster in Edmonton and should be a solid 25-25 guy in the top six. That's easily worth an expected \$5 million AAV. He's worth closer to \$6 million.

### **John Carlson**

Few defensemen have been as consistently excellent as Carlson over the last decade; it's remarkable how steady his value has been from age 27 to 36 with little sign of slowing down. In that span, his projected Net Rating has stayed tight between plus-eight and plus-13 with no decline whatsoever over the last four seasons. Last season may have even been his best in that span, with 60 points and some of his best five-on-five numbers in years.

While there's a lot of potential upside with Darren Raddysh, given his meteoric rise last season, it's the volatility of such a seismic shift in value that gives pause. Carlson is the complete opposite of that: you know exactly what you're getting with one of the league's most dependable offensive defensemen.

At some point, he's going to slow down, and that's the main risk with signing him. But he's still a strong bet relative to his projected price tag of \$7 million over the next three years. Accounting for age, he might still be a \$10 million man.

### **The Old Guys Without A Cup**

Keeping on theme with Carlson, the over-35 crowd is usually a strong bet to deliver value. They've already made their money, their contracts can be bonus-laden and they generally have a larger focus on glory anyway. That's especially true if they still haven't won a Stanley Cup yet.

That applies to three players in particular this summer: Brent Burns, Claude Giroux and Jamie Benn.

All three still expect to be roughly average players this season, and while that isn't saying much, it is a bargain at their expected cost. Burns is projected at just \$1 million, Benn at \$1.3 million and Giroux at \$2.5 million. You don't need math to tell you those are good deals for what those players still are, but I have each player being worth at least double those prices. Mats Zuccarello also counts for this group, but the odds of him reaching free agency feel slim.

### **Patrik Laine**

We're officially done with the actual needle-mover guys and into the bargain bin reclamation projects. And we're starting off with a bang with Laine, whose stock has plummeted over the last decade since being drafted second in 2016. He can't stay healthy, he can't play defense and he can't drive play, all of which make him a difficult player to commit to and fit into a lineup. It's hard to place a one-trick pony in a modern top six, and unless the fit is perfect, it's hard to squeeze him into what most coaches want in the bottom six.

But what Laine can do is still a rare commodity, and that's score goals. His shot remains lethal and for a team in desperate need of power-play help, he can work well as a specialist. The motivation to prove himself shouldn't be ignored as a potential factor either. AFP Analytics has Laine at league minimum, but even in his currently very flawed state, his value is still closer to \$3 million on my end. The right team might be able to get even more out of him.

### **Kailer Yamamoto**

Height is a huge barrier for a lot of traditional types. I get it. But in a year where Zach Benson and Logan Stankoven have proved their mettle in a playoff setting, one year after Brad Marchand put up another dominant playoff run, it might be time to give more spark plugs a chance. Yamamoto fits that bill.

The diminutive winger had a fantastic season in Utah's bottom six. He scored 2.09 points per 60 at five-on-five, and he was absolutely dominant at driving play with a 54 percent xG and 58 percent of actual goals. His tracked data is pretty sparkling too, where he's great at transitioning the puck up ice and forechecking in-zone.

Yamamoto should come cheap because of his frame (5-foot-9, 178 pounds) and production, but he offers a lot of efficiency beyond the box score. It may come as some surprise that a smaller forward

grades out so well defensively, but Yamamoto is a tenacious player with one of his top comps being Paul Byron. He's a bargain under \$2 million.

### **Pavol Regenda**

It's never easy betting on a player without much of a sample size. It's hard to discern what's real and what's fake; an undrafted 26-year-old scoring nine goals in 24 games generally screams fake.

But Regenda seems to have the underlying profile in that small sample to suggest there might be some juice here. At five-on-five, he scored 1.1 goals per 60, but also generated 0.92 xG per 60 — both numbers right in line with Macklin Celebrini's output. That's obviously not apples-to-apples; it's just to show how efficient Regenda was when he did play. His on-ice numbers were just as great with a 52.4 percent expected goals rate, second to only Igor Chernyshov among forwards.

It feels like there's something here, and at a likely low cost, it's worth the risk to find out.

Oliver Bjorkstrand looks to the left while skating during a Tampa Bay Lightning game.

Oliver Bjorkstrand still has something to give to a team in the top nine at a good price. Pablo Robles / Imagn Images

### **Oliver Bjorkstrand**

After a very difficult season, Bjorkstrand's stock has plummeted. AFP Analytics has his value down to just \$2.8 million, which isn't all that surprising given he was a healthy scratch at times in the playoffs and is coming off a disappointing 32-point season.

I think he still has some juice left as a third-liner, given his strong body of work in the two years prior. He was a terrific play-driver and a more frequent scorer as well (last year he shot just 3.8 percent at five-on-five). The reason Bjorkstrand should work in a third-line role is his defensive detail in-zone. He's great at retrieving pucks and getting them out, which has led to some solid chance-against numbers in each of the last three seasons.

Bjorkstrand is not exciting as an offensive player, but he still has something to give in the top nine at a good price.

### **Vincent Desharnais**

I'm surprised there isn't a lot more hype for Desharnais out there. He's massive (6-7, 225 pounds), he hits, he blocks shots, he's a right shot and most importantly, he can actually play.

Well, he can actually play defense. Desharnais is a complete liability with the puck; there's no sense lying about that. His production and puck-moving numbers are awful, meaning he needs to be paired with someone who can do that job effectively. But his scoring chance suppression numbers? Those are excellent.

In each of his four seasons, his teams have given up at least 0.15 fewer xGA/60 with him on the ice. Last year, it was a career-best 0.53, which more than made up for his dismal offensive game. The Sharks earned 50.6 percent of expected goals and 50.4 percent of actual goals with Desharnais on the ice; both marks led the team's defensemen. To top it all off, Desharnais was one of San Jose's most-used penalty killers and absolutely crushed his minutes — he has one of the best PK ratings in the league.

While it's true Desharnais doesn't play tough minutes, he seems to have the capability to handle a shutdown role in the right setting. His plus-3.4 Defensive Rating is the best of any defenseman available. AFP Analytics has him at \$2 million; I think he's worth closer to \$3.5 million.

### **Mike Reilly**

No player confounds models on an annual basis more than Reilly. Every year, his on-ice numbers dazzle, and every year, he struggles to get much playing time out of it. C'est la vie.

While I don't think Rielly is anywhere near as good as last year's 60 percent xG (!) would indicate — he plays extremely sheltered minutes — I do think he's capable of third-pair duty. At 6-2, there's no issue with size either. Reilly is projected to cost about a million bucks and should deliver a bit more value above that with his puck-moving ability.

## [The Athletic / NHL offseason trade board 2.0: Latest on all the top targets as action heats up](#)

By Chris Johnston – June 18, 2026

Some eyebrows were raised this week by the fact that Vincent Trocheck has hired veteran agent Pat Brisson of CAA to help guide his career out of limbo.

The Olympic champion and big board mainstay would welcome a move from the New York Rangers and remains committed to finding a new home. While he's largely been focused on landing in the East, there are teams in the West that could be in play because they're not included in his 10-team no-trade list.

Brisson also happens to represent Detroit Red Wings captain Dylan Larkin, the only player ranked ahead of Trocheck on our latest list. Larkin recently requested a trade from Detroit and is waiting to see where that goes. The word around his situation is that it's going to be a process to find him a new home.

However, trade talk is clearly picking up around the league with the Stanley Cup Final in the rear-view mirror and the draft and free agency immediately ahead.

With that in mind, we reboot the big board.

As always, players and assets are listed by how closely they demand watching, based on their potential impact and the current amount of buzz around them.

### 1. Dylan Larkin

Team: Detroit Red Wings

Position: Center

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 34 goals, 67 points, 74 games

Age: 29

Contract: \$8.7 million AAV through 2031; no-trade clause becomes 10-team no-trade list in 2028-29

Larkin is a speedy two-way center who is an ever-present threat to score. He can handle big minutes and tough checking assignments and is known as a competitive player who battles his way to the difficult areas of the ice. While his playoff experience is limited to just five games, Larkin was a strong performer for Team USA at the Milan Olympics and 4 Nations Face-Off. His contract makes him an even more attractive asset because he's locked in at a reasonable rate of \$8.7 million for the next five seasons.

### 2. Vincent Trocheck

Team: New York Rangers

Position: Center

Shoots: Right

2025-26 stats: 16 goals, 53 points, 67 games

Age: 32

Contract: \$5.625 million AAV through 2029; 12-team no-trade list becomes 10-team in 2026-27

The veteran center spent most of the season at or near the top of our trade board and remains there now. After scratching Trocheck for roster management purposes prior to the trade deadline in March, the Rangers opted to hold on to him in anticipation of stronger offers in the summer. Those conversations have since resumed. Trocheck is an appealing target for teams looking to get stronger down the middle as a solid faceoff man and penalty killer who can handle heavy, difficult minutes. He's one of the few impact players at that position who appears to be truly available right now.

### 3. Darnell Nurse

Team: Edmonton Oilers

Position: Defenseman

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 7 goals, 24 points, 82 games

Age: 31

Contract: \$9.25 million AAV through 2030; no-movement clause

Nurse requested a trade after spending the past 12 years in Edmonton. He's a hard-nosed defenseman who blocks shots, logs minutes and plays with edge. The only problem? He's paid like a cornerstone player, not just a really good one, and for an organization operating close to the salary cap in a narrow contention window, there's a significant opportunity cost attached to Nurse's inefficient contract. The player owns a no-movement clause and is working with the team to find a suitable landing spot.

### 4. Morgan Rielly

Team: Toronto Maple Leafs

Position: Defenseman

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 11 goals, 36 points, 78 games

Age: 32

Contract: \$7.5 million AAV through 2030; no-movement clause

The Maple Leafs' longest-tenured player is open to moving on after 14 years with the organization. Rielly had previously been unwilling to consider waiving his no-movement clause, but has since softened on that stance. While Rielly's skating isn't the separator it once was, he possesses strong puck skills and

can help drive a team offensively. He's also a high-character player who should be viewed as a dressing room asset.

#### 5. Matthew Knies

Team: Toronto Maple Leafs

Position: Winger

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 23 goals, 66 points, 79 games

Age: 23

Contract: \$7.75 million AAV through 2031

A young power forward with an ideal blend of size and skill who is signed until his late 20s, Knies is the kind of player NHL teams rarely, if ever, trade. Yet his name continues to circulate loudly in the rumor mill. The Leafs seriously considered moving Knies ahead of the March trade deadline and have picked up some of those discussions even after a recent change in management. The only way they'll pull the trigger is if they receive a haul of assets to reboot a program short on prospects and draft picks.

#### 6. Mason McTavish

Team: Anaheim Ducks

Position: Center

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 17 goals, 41 points, 75 games

Age: 23

Contract: \$7 million AAV through 2031

This was not the kind of season McTavish or the Ducks had in mind when they agreed to a \$42 million, six-year extension in September. Not only did the 23-year-old find himself an occasional healthy scratch, including during the playoffs, but he saw a decline in his average ice time and offensive production. The puck-handling skills, vision and shot that made McTavish a top draft pick remain, but so do some of the questions about his skating ability. A fresh start is likely coming.

#### 7. Jordan Kyrou

Team: St. Louis Blues

Position: Winger

Shoots: Right

2025-26 stats: 18 goals, 46 points, 72 games

Age: 28

Contract: \$8.125 million AAV through 2031; no-trade clause

Kyrou is a highly skilled winger who possesses an enviable toolkit: blinding speed, high-end vision and creativity to spare. However, he was far from his best this past season. Kyrou's offensive production cratered during a trying season that included a healthy scratch in November. A strong desire for change in St. Louis, plus Kyrou's dip in performance, has renewed the on-again, off-again trade talk that has surrounded his name for at least the past 18 months. Kyrou is signed through 2031 and owns a no-trade clause.

#### 8. Colton Parayko

Team: St. Louis Blues

Position: Defenseman

Shoots: Right

2025-26 stats: 4 goals, 18 points, 77 games

Age: 33

Contract: \$6.5 million AAV through 2030; no-trade clause

Parayko used his no-trade clause to block a potential move to the Buffalo Sabres in March, but that won't keep his name out of discussions this summer. He is a minute-munching defensive defenseman who won a silver medal with Team Canada at the Milan Olympics and plays a premier position as a top-pairing right-shot D. He gets around the ice well for a man of his size at 6-foot-6.

#### 9. Šimon Nemeč

Team: New Jersey Devils

Position: Defenseman

Shoots: Right

2025-26 stats: 11 goals, 26 points, 68 games

Age: 22

Contract: Restricted free agent

The 2022 No. 2 pick is a restricted free agent who will be seeking the kind of payday teammate Luke Hughes got coming out of his entry-level contract (\$63 million over seven years). It's going to be a challenge for the Devils to find that kind of cap space on a blue line that's already loaded with financial commitments. Even though a recent report out of Slovakia about Nemeč requesting a trade was immediately shot down, he remains a big potential chip to play, especially if recently hired Devils GM Sunny Mehta goes shopping for more help up front.

#### 10. San Jose Sharks' No. 2 pick

It's been more than 20 years since an NHL team knowingly traded a top-three draft selection. So, with that important caveat in mind, it's critical to emphasize that it's going to take a massive offer to entice

Sharks general manager Mike Grier to move this pick. However, after making top-four selections each of the past three seasons and building a team on the rise, he's willing to listen. And given the lack of consensus among scouts about how the top of this draft class will unfold, it's possible the Sharks get an offer that will be difficult to refuse.

#### 11. Adin Hill

Team: Vegas Golden Knights

Position: Goaltender

2025-26 stats: 10-9-6, 3.04 GAA, .871 save percentage, 27 games

Age: 30

Contract: \$6.25 million through 2031; 10-team no-trade list

Supplanted by Carter Hart during the Vegas Golden Knights' run to the Stanley Cup Final, Hill could find himself as a cap casualty in the offseason. Big and experienced — Hill earned Conn Smythe Trophy votes when Vegas won the Stanley Cup in 2023 — he would represent an upgrade for several teams on their existing situation in the crease. Moving him would create the flexibility the Golden Knights need to take care of other business. Of note: Hill is owed a \$7 million signing bonus payment as part of his compensation for the 2026-27 season and should have even more value if he's traded after that's already been paid out.

#### 12. Jordan Binnington

Team: St. Louis Blues

Position: Goaltender

2025-26 stats: 13-20-7, 3.33 GAA, .873 save percentage, 41 games

Age: 32

Contract: \$6 million AAV through 2027; 14-team no-trade list becomes 10-team in 2026-27

One year out from potential unrestricted free agency, the Blues face a decision on Binnington. He's coming off a season where his numbers cratered, but his reputation as a big-game goalie was still burnished during a strong performance for Team Canada at the Milan Cortina Olympics. Binnington should hold appeal for teams that can offer him a better playing environment and are looking for an experienced player in the crease to help push them over the top. His competitive nature remains a major asset.

#### 13. Jason Robertson

Team: Dallas Stars

Position: Winger

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 45 goals, 96 points, 82 games

Age: 26

Contract: Restricted free agent

The closer Robertson gets to July 1 without a new contract in place, the more likely a trade becomes. The Stars have been adamant about their desire to sign the prolific scoring winger to a long-term extension, but finding the right number hasn't been easy. Robertson has a case to exceed teammate Mikko Rantanen's \$12 million annual salary, given the 18 percent jump in the salary cap since Rantanen signed his deal, but Dallas doesn't have much room to maneuver with a full cap sheet. The Stars are operating against the clock, too, since Robertson has the ability to elect salary arbitration this summer and could set himself up for a reward that walks him directly to unrestricted free agency.

#### 14. Valeri Nichushkin

Team: Colorado Avalanche

Position: Winger

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 17 goals, 49 points, 72 games

Age: 31

Contract: \$6.125 million through 2030; 12-team no-trade list

A powerful skater with size and skill, Nichushkin saw his offensive production tail off last season. He's on a reasonable contract but may be due for a fresh start as the Avalanche look for ways to refresh their program following a loss in the Western Conference final. Nichushkin's deal was heavily front-loaded, meaning his remaining salary falls below his \$6.125 million cap hit. He does have a 12-team no-trade list.

#### 15. Jake DeBrusk

Team: Vancouver Canucks

Position: Winger

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 23 goals, 42 points, 81 games

Age: 29

Contract: \$5.5 million AAV through 2031; no-movement clause

A player who doesn't fit the mold of the rebuilding efforts underway in Vancouver. DeBrusk is a strong skater with a nose for the net, having potted 28 and 23 goals during two trying seasons for the Canucks. There's a lot of meat left on the bone, but there's also a contract that includes a no-movement clause, which definitely complicates things. DeBrusk is at an age where getting back to a competitive team remains a priority.

#### 16. Blake Coleman

Team: Calgary Flames

Position: Winger

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 20 goals, 35 points, 69 games

Age: 34

Contract: \$4.9 million AAV through 2027; 10-team trade list

Coleman is another player who attracted interest ahead of the trade deadline that could still be moved this summer. The rebuild is on in Calgary — even if they're not officially using the "R" word — after Rasmus Andersson (Vegas Golden Knights), MacKenzie Weegar (Utah Mammoth) and Nazem Kadri (Colorado Avalanche) were dealt in-season, and Coleman has one year left on his existing deal. He's an excellent skater and a defensively sound winger who usually sees the puck headed in the right direction when he's on the ice. Coleman is also a 20-goal scorer who has been dangerous on the penalty kill over the years and ideally slots in on the third line of a top team, as he did for the Tampa Bay Lightning while winning back-to-back Stanley Cup titles in 2020 and 2021.

#### 17. Mason Lohrei

Team: Boston Bruins

Position: Defenseman

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 7 goals, 26 points, 73 games

Age: 25

Contract: \$3.2 million AAV through 2027

Lohrei's name circulated in trade rumors when the Bruins engaged in discussions on Rasmus Andersson last season. He's signed through next year at a reasonable cap number and has one year of team control remaining as a restricted free agent beyond that, making him an attractive asset. Lohrei is incredibly mobile for his size and will chip in with a bit of offense from the back end. He's also made strides defensively.

#### 18. Dougie Hamilton

Team: New Jersey Devils

Position: Defenseman

Shoots: Right

2025-26 stats: 12 goals, 39 points, 77 games

Age: 33

Contract: \$9 million AAV through 2028; 10-team trade list

Hamilton's game is viewed favorably by the new regime in New Jersey, but that hasn't completely quieted the trade talk. He's a mobile right-shot defenseman who logged more than 21 minutes per night last season. Hamilton's offensive prowess isn't what it once was, but the puck still tends to be moving in the right direction when he's on the ice. As a bonus, the actual dollars owing on Hamilton's contract are less than the cap hit attached to the deal.

#### 19. Shane Wright

Team: Seattle Kraken

Position: Center

Shoots: Right

2025-26 stats: 12 goals, 27 points, 74 games

Age: 22

Contract: \$886,666 AAV through 2027

It's still not clear what Wright's high-water mark will look like as an NHL player, but there's reason to believe he might help bring Seattle back the kind of scoring boost it's looking for in a trade. For starters, he's still got one year remaining on his entry-level contract and presumably levels of growth still to come in his game. And even coming off a dip in his offensive production — going from 44 points to 27 points — he profiles as an intriguing two-way center, which is a commodity in demand right now.

#### 20. Tomáš Hertl

Team: Vegas Golden Knights

Position: Center

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 24 goals, 58 points, 82 games

Age: 32

Contract: \$8.1375 million AAV through 2030; 3-team trade list becomes 15-team trade list in 2028

Hertl is another potential salary cap casualty in Vegas. However, he'll have a huge say in whatever happens because of a three-team approved trade list. The veteran center is coming off an up-and-down season that saw him endure a 29-game goalless drought before rediscovering his touch in the later rounds of the playoffs. Hertl is a big man who protects the puck well and can create havoc around the net. His cap hit (\$6.75 million) is lower than his AAV because the San Jose Sharks retained salary when they traded him to the Golden Knights.

#### 21. Bryan Rust

Team: Pittsburgh Penguins

Position: Winger

Shoots: Right

2025-26 stats: 29 goals, 65 points, 72 games

Age: 34

Contract: \$5.125 million AAV through 2028

Rust's name has circulated again with the Penguins focused on getting younger and looking to build off a return to the playoffs. His speed, forechecking prowess and two-way ability have allowed his game to age gracefully, and the 34-year-old is playing on a cap-friendly contract. The fact that Rust scored 60 goals across the past two seasons should be appealing to rival teams.

## 22. Robert Thomas

Team: St. Louis Blues

Position: Center

Shoots: Right

2025-26 stats: 25 goals, 64 points, 64 games

Age: 26

Contract: \$8.125 million AAV through 2031; no-trade clause

While the Blues seem less inclined to pursue a Thomas deal than they were at the trade deadline, it hasn't stopped other teams from trying. It would take a monster offer to pry him free. Centers signed to positive-value contracts for several more years don't come available too often — especially those with multiple 80-point seasons on their resumes. Thomas is at an age where he should still have strong years ahead of him and possesses strong puck skills and vision. Plus, he can handle the challenge of facing tough competition every night.

## 23. Elias Pettersson

Team: Vancouver Canucks

Position: Center

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 15 goals, 51 points, 74 games

Age: 27

Contract: \$11.6 million AAV through 2032; no-movement clause

The Canucks are still charting their direction under a revamped front office, but there can only be so much patience with Pettersson. While new GM Ryan Johnson has spoken about wanting to "wipe away all expectations," the fact remains that the Swede is a long way off the performer he was when Vancouver signed him to a \$92.8 million, eight-year extension in March 2024. And the Canucks are in

the early stages of a rebuild. Pettersson has a massive amount of salary owing and a no-movement clause in his contract, but it wouldn't surprise anyone if a fresh start was in order here.

#### 24. Devon Levi

Team: Buffalo Sabres

Position: Goaltender

2025-26 stats: Played in AHL

Age: 24

Contract: \$812,500 AAV through 2027

The Sabres used three goaltenders last season, and Levi wasn't one of them. He's been surpassed in the organization after making 23 NHL appearances in 2023-24. A 2020 seventh-round pick who had a stellar NCAA career at Northeastern, Levi is still viewed favorably by other NHL teams. While on the smaller side for a top-level goaltender, he compensates with agility and athleticism.

#### 25. Sebastian Cossa

Team: Detroit Red Wings

Position: Goaltender

2025-26 stats: Played in AHL

Age: 23

Contract: Restricted free agent

The top goaltender selected in the 2021 NHL Draft found himself struggling to get playing time at the end of the AHL season behind Grand Rapids teammate Michal Postava. With Trey Augustine, another top goaltending prospect, also in the pipeline and Cossa no longer exempt from waivers starting next year, the most prudent play for Detroit may be to deal him for other assets this summer. Cossa is a big, athletic goaltender who spent three seasons with the WHL's Edmonton Oil Kings and is viewed as a potential trade target for the Oilers.

#### 26. Chicago Blackhawks' No. 4 pick

Similar to the scenario with the Sharks at No. 2, the prospect-rich Blackhawks are open to the possibility of moving off a valuable pick if they can get something back that improves them in the present. Given the expected unpredictability at the top of this class, it may not be a deal that comes together until draft night, when it becomes apparent which top prospect will still be on the board at No. 4.

There is a chance Stenberg will fall to the Blackhawks at No. 4, but if they want to ensure they pick him, they might need to trade up.

#### 27. Ryan Hartman

Team: Minnesota Wild

Position: Center

Shoots: Right

2025-26 stats: 23 goals, 43 points, 76 games

Age: 31

Contract: \$4 million AAV through 2027; 15-team no-trade list becomes 10-team in 2026-27

The Wild are going to need to get creative to strengthen themselves down the middle, and it could mean parting with one of their existing centers. Hartman is a potential UFA in 2027 and should bring back value in a trade. He's versatile, affordable, can handle top-six deployment and got his game back on the right side of the line last season after previously drawing attention from NHL disciplinarian George Parros. There's a two-way element to his game as he can be trusted defensively.

28. Jesperi Kotkaniemi

Team: Carolina Hurricanes

Position: Center

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 2 goals, 9 points, 42 games

Age: 25

Contract: \$4.82 million AAV through 2030; modified no-trade list

Kotkaniemi has fallen right off the map in Carolina, where he was a healthy scratch throughout the team's entire run to the Stanley Cup. That followed a regular season in which a player once prized for his 200-foot game saw a big dip in his ability to drive play. Kotkaniemi's typically inconsistent offensive numbers trended hard in the wrong direction, too. Still, he's a reclamation project worth considering due to his age and ability to play a premier position. He still has four seasons remaining on his contract at a reasonable cap number if he can recapture his previous form.

29. Nico Hischier

Team: New Jersey Devils

Position: Center

Shoots: Left

2025-26 stats: 28 goals, 66 points, 82 games

Age: 27

Contract: \$7.25 million through 2027; 10-team no-trade list

The Devils seem to be making progress on a Hischier extension that would take effect in 2027, so the odds of him being moved are diminishing. Hischier is an elite center known for his strong two-way play and still has productive years ahead of him. A good skater who is strong in the faceoff dot, he's a player

capable of making an impact on the game in a number of different ways. The fact that he wears the captain's "C" in New Jersey speaks to his off-ice leadership qualities as well.

30. Connor Hellebuyck

Team: Winnipeg Jets

Position: Goaltender

2025-26 stats: 23-23-11, 2.86 GAA, .895 save percentage, 57 games

Age: 33

Contract: \$8.5 million through 2031; no-movement clause becomes 10-team no-trade list in 2027-28

An emotional end-of-season news conference saw Hellebuyck reveal that his belief in the Jets' ability to compete for a Stanley Cup had been "challenged" — and it prompted other teams to start making inquiries on one of the league's best goaltenders. There's currently no indication it has gone any further than that. Still, the mere possibility of a Hellebuyck trade, unlikely as it may be, warrants his inclusion here. He's a three-time Vezina Trophy winner with size, durability and elite puck-tracking ability. The total package in the crease.